



## NJDOE News

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### **Granville Charter School Given 45 Days to Correct Deficiencies; D.O.E. Leads Efforts to Ensure Smooth Transition for Students and Their Families**

Representatives of the New Jersey Department of Education have met with students, parents and staff of the Granville Charter School to respond to questions regarding the school's future. The D.O.E. called the meeting in the interest of providing the school community with factual information about the school's current status and to discuss concerns about the Trenton-based school's ability to continue operations after June 30, when the current school year expires.

In a meeting held on March 2 by the Department of Education with the Granville Charter School's Parent Teacher Organization, officials discussed a meeting held on February 18 with the school's board of trustees. At that meeting, the trustees were apprised of the state's significant concern about the school's fiscal health, as well as concerns about declining enrollment and its impact on school programs. In addition, the trustees were informed that they would have 45 days to significantly address the concerns raised, or to prepare to relinquish control of the school at the conclusion of the current school year. The 45-day period concludes on April 5.

The Department of Education has presented the Granville Charter School Board of Trustees with three options to consider:

- The trustees can voluntarily relinquish control of the school's charter.
- The trustees can develop a comprehensive plan to address a myriad of programmatic and financial deficiencies that meets state approval.
- If the trustees do not adequately address the concerns, Commissioner of Education William L. Librera will revoke the charter.

If the trustees decide to relinquish control, Trenton Public Schools Superintendent James Lytle has pledged his support to continue operations of the school at its current site, keeping the school's current enrollment and staff intact to the greatest extent possible. In addition, Dr. Lytle has indicated that he would recommend members of the Granville Charter School's Board of Trustees to serve as members of the school's leadership team.

"The business of running a charter school is a complex and difficult endeavor," Commissioner Librera said. "William Granville and the co-founders of the Granville Charter School have dedicated their time and resources to reach out to all students in Trenton to give them maximum opportunities and choices for success. We appreciate the concerns voiced about the future of the school, but it will be an uphill battle to continue operations at the school as it now exists."

"We are sensitive to the strong bonds that have connected parents and staff to the Granville Charter School, as well as the need for them to receive timely and accurate information," said Richard Ten Eyck, assistant commissioner for the Department of Education's Division of Educational Programs and Assessment. "By establishing a 45-day period that expires in early April, we believe we are providing all parties concerned with adequate time to plan for the new school year. We can't allow a situation like last summer to recur, when the charter school lost its building in June, and families and staff were left wondering where the children were going in September."

In 1998, the school was first approved as the Granville Charter School, serving 500 students in grades K-5. The Granville Charter Middle School, serving 400 students in grades 6-8, was approved in 1999. In 2000, the Granville Charter High School opened its doors to serve 500 students in grades 9-12. The three separate schools consolidated into the Granville Charter School in 2001, serving 1,400 students in grades K-12.

Granville began its operations in a collaborative arrangement with Edison Schools. This was a pioneering relationship which sought to bring together founders of the charter with a private education management firm. Troubles coordinating the working and financial relationship resulted in the termination of the arrangement.

Ongoing contractual obligations added significantly to Granville Charter School's financial struggles.

In June 2003, Granville Charter School lost the lease of one of its two sites (363 West State Street) from Edison Schools. As a result, the Department of Education approved plans for the school to scale back its operations to a K-9 school serving a maximum of 600 students at its remaining site at 50 North Clinton Avenue. Plans to restore additional grade levels after the current school year were contingent on the school demonstrating adequate fiscal and programmatic capacity.

Since September 2003, the Department of Education has had ongoing communication with the school that has included both scheduled and unscheduled visits to the school by D.O.E. staff. These visits have resulted in requests for the school to address concerns regarding attendance and recordkeeping procedures, student health and safety, student discipline, classroom management, governance, staff certification, student assessment, and delivery of instruction.

Meanwhile, enrollment at Granville Charter School has gradually declined (from 575 to 530) in the current school year. The school's fiscal operations were also cause for concern. The Department of Education had sought documentation from the school since November 2003 in order to assess its fiscal status. The department received the school's 2002-03 audit information on February 2. The documentation indicates that the school is operating at a deficit. According to the 2002-03 audit, the school has a general fund balance deficit of at least \$400,000 as well as at least \$1 million in additional financial obligations that must be paid.

While an instructional spending percentage of approximately 60 percent is required for all public schools, Granville's instructional percentage for 2003-04 is below 40 percent.

"Every charter school begins with innovative and promising ideas shared by founding members who successfully complete a detailed application," Commissioner Librera said. "We have never doubted the interest expressed by Granville Charter School's founding members to provide their students with a solid education, as they have struggled to carry out their mission."

Charter schools are public schools operated under a charter granted by the Commissioner of Education. Each charter school is independent of the district board of education and is managed by a board of trustees. They have the flexibility to experiment with innovative strategies and techniques in order to improve student achievement.

Charter schools are held accountable for student performance and for meeting objectives delineated in their charters. Founded by parents, teachers, and/or community leaders, charter schools offer a viable model for building public schools that encourage parental involvement in determining the educational needs of children.

New Jersey currently has 48 operating charter schools that enroll approximately 14,000 students. An additional five charter schools are scheduled to open in September 2004 and one school is scheduled to open in September 2005.