November 9, 2021

Dear Independence School Local I Community,

Baltimore City Public Schools is committed to providing a wide range of high-quality school options for all students. The district’s charter, transformation, and other schools with external operators contribute significantly to that commitment. These schools expand the options available to students and families and help ensure our students have access to an education that meets their needs and supports their growth.

City Schools is equally committed to ensuring that all of its schools support students’ academic success. The district does this, in part, by reviewing schools regularly in a range of areas. In the case of schools with external operators, the review process (called renewal) considers academic performance and school climate, as well as financial management and governance. The renewal process occurs every three or five years, depending on each school’s contract or charter, and is an assessment of the school’s performance over time. Based on the unique challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic and the move to virtual learning last school year, the process was modified for schools going through renewal in 2021-22, focusing on the school and its operator’s ability to comply with critical federal, state and district requirements around providing students with appropriate learning opportunities, climate and safety, as well as ensuring the financial health of the school.

Tonight, based on the results of the renewal process and the recommendation of the Charter and Operator-led Advisory Board, I am recommending to the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners that the contract with Baltimore Teacher Network, your school’s operator, be renewed for a three-year period.

While the renewal review for Independence School Local I High resulted in a recommendation to renew the contract based on this year’s modified rubric, there are several serious concerns with the school’s performance that merit close consideration by the Board in its review of the recommendation. Specifically, the school has continued to be unable to implement consistent practices to improve academic programming, which has led to low student outcomes. For almost every area reviewed, the school earned developing or not effective ratings. The school does not have effective programming in place to prepare students for college and career and does not have practices in place that lead to the majority of students graduating on time; for each year considered in the review the 4-year cohort graduation rate is below the district average with a steep decline in the graduation rate for the class of 2020 where only 40% of students graduated. For more information on the findings of the renewal review, and to see your school’s full renewal report and school effectiveness review report, please visit www.baltimorecityschools.org/Charter-Schools.
The Board will hold a public work session on all renewal recommendations on Thursday, December 9, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. This is an additional opportunity for the operator to make its case for renewal to the Board.

You can provide written feedback to the Board from now through 5:00 p.m. on Friday, January 7, 2022. Written comments must include full identification of the sender and should be directed to the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners, 200 E. North Ave., Room 406, Baltimore, Maryland 21202, or sent by email to portfoliorecommendations@bcps.k12.md.us.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 public health emergency, all Board meetings are being held remotely. Please check the Board calendar or BoardDocs on the City Schools website for call-in information to observe the meetings which can be found here: https://www.baltimorecityschools.org/board-meetings.

The ultimate decision to renew your school rests with the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners. After consideration of all of the factors, requirements of Board policy IHBJ and IHBJ-RA, and other information learned through the process including public feedback, the Board will vote on this recommendation at its meeting on Tuesday, January 11, 2022.

Thank you for supporting our schools and students. We look forward to working in partnership with all our families and school communities to create a district of high-quality school programs that meet the needs of every student in Baltimore.

Sincerely,

Dr. Sonja Brookins Santelises
Chief Executive Officer