

In the City Council, November 1, 2018

Upon the recommendation of Councilor Dennis Bidwell, Councilor Gina-Louise Sciarra and Councilor Jim Nash

R-18.197
A Resolution
Opposing a Renewed Application for Expansion
of the Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School

Whereas, the Hadley-based Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School (PVCICS) failed in February, 2016 to obtain a charter amendment from the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (MBESE) that would have permitted it to increase its maximum enrollment; and

Whereas, PVCICS reapplied for such an expansion of enrollment in 2017, and was again turned down by the MBESE; and

Whereas, the PVCICS has gone back to the Board a third time seeking authorization to expand its maximum enrollment, this time a 63% expansion from 584 to 952 K-12 students; and

Whereas, the Northampton School Committee is expected to reaffirm its opposition to the expansion of PVCICS at its November 5, 2018 meeting; and

Whereas, the Northampton City Council, in September, 2016, voted unanimously to approve a resolution "Opposing Lifting the Cap on Commonwealth Charter Schools", with a major factor in that decision being the millions of dollars being diverted annually from Northampton Public Schools to nearby Commonwealth charter schools enrolling Northampton students; and

Whereas, in FY2018-19 it is projected that almost \$2.7 million, net of reimbursements, is being diverted from the Northampton Public Schools to eight nearby Commonwealth charter schools enrolling 198 students from Northampton; and

Whereas, in FY2018-19 51 Northampton students are attending PVCICS, accounting for over \$690,000 of the funds diverted from Northampton's Public Schools to charter schools; and

Whereas the impact on the budget of the Northampton Public Schools of charter school funding is substantial, representing almost 5% of the system's operating budget, funds that could otherwise be spent on priorities such as preschool expansion, instrumental music in the elementary schools, and increasing staff salaries; and

Whereas the flawed funding program for reimbursing school districts for their payments to charter remains unchanged, and is underfunded, meaning that anytime a new charter school seat in the region is taken by a Northampton student even more dollars will be drained from the budget of the Northampton Public Schools; and

Whereas, only 5.9% of students attending PVCICS during the 2017-2018 school year were students with disabilities, compared to Northampton Public Schools with 21.4%, and a statewide average of 17.7%, indicating a persistent pattern at PVCICS of failure to provide equal access to students with disabilities; and

Whereas, only 16% of students attending PVCICS during the 2017-2018 school year were economically disadvantaged, compared to Northampton Public Schools with 26.2%, and a statewide average of 32%, indicating a persistent pattern at PVCICS of underserving economically disadvantaged students in the communities it serves; and

Whereas PVCICS is even further away from meeting its enrollment targets for the above-mentioned subgroups than it was two years ago, when its expansion request was denied, due, in part to concerns about its ability to recruit and retain a student population reflective of the communities it serves; and

Whereas the inequities of the charter school funding system create unnecessary tension and disunity in communities across the Commonwealth, often along social and economic lines, while pitting communities against each other in the struggle for dwindling state education dollars and pitting parents against each other around their often difficult and very personal educational decisions; and

Whereas, the voters of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, in November, 2016 voted 62%-38% to oppose a Ballot measure that would have lifted the cap on Commonwealth charter schools, which would have paved the way for creation of new charter schools; and

Whereas, the voters of Northampton voted 72%-28% to oppose that ballot measure, with all of Hampshire County voting 74% -26% to oppose the lifting of the charter school cap; and

Whereas, a broad range of organizations including the New England Chapter of the NAACP, Jobs With Justice, Massachusetts AFL-CIO, Citizens for Public Schools, Massachusetts Teachers Association, American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts, and Northampton Save Our Schools are all in opposition to expanding the number of charter school seats in the Commonwealth;

Now Therefore Be It Resolved that the Northampton City Council joins with the Northampton School Committee and Mayor David Narkewicz in calling on the Commonwealth's Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to reject the proposed expansion of enrollment at the Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School; and

Be It Further Resolved that the City Council President is authorized to submit a letter to the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, and to speak with the Board Chair, expressing this body's strong opposition to expansion of the PVCICS, as well as this body's opposition to the addition of any new charter school seats until the charter school funding formula is fundamentally reformed; and

Be it Further Resolved that Northampton's representatives in the State Legislature are encouraged to redouble their efforts to achieve fundamental reforms leading to more equitable and expanded funding of the Commonwealth's public schools.