



GENERATION 27 CHARTER SCHOOL PROPOSALS

The Texas State Teachers Association offers the following comments to the State Board of Education, Committee of the Full Board, regarding agenda item #2: Consideration of the Commissioner of Education's Generation 27 Open-Enrollment Charter School Proposals

The Texas State Teachers Association (TSTA) opposes the continued approval and expansion of all charter schools and therefore would ask for a blanket veto of each of the five charters under consideration: Heritage Classical, Spelligent, Academy of Visual and Performing Arts; Patterns High School; and ONE Collegiate. The rapid growth of the charter school sector is causing great harm to our existing public schools, and there is little evidence that communities want or need these schools.

In particular, TSTA has key concerns about Spelligent San Antonio, Heritage Classical, and Patterns High School.

KEY CONCERNS ABOUT SPELLIGENT SAN ANTONIO

1. Low turnout at public meetings – little indication of strong parent support. Spelligent conducted three in-person public meetings but only had attendance of 20 people total. (PDF page 82). Spelligent also includes a Facebook interview on the Charter Moms Chats regularly schedule program as a meeting – but listeners to the program do not indicate a commitment to enroll.

2. Spelligent leadership managed two San Antonio schools that are both rated F, and 2021 STARR scores are over 40 points below the state average. The proposed Superintendent of Spelligent (Ms. De la Garza) and one Board member (Mr. Fraser) were key leaders of Relay Lab Schools during the time Relay assumed control of Storm Elementary and Ogden Academy as an 1882 partner in the spring of 2018 after serving as coaches and trainers starting in 2017. The first year Relay was in charge, Storm's ratings dropped from Met Standard in 2018 to an **F** 2019. Ogden made no progress from its Improvement Required rating in 2018 and was rated **F** in 2019. After another two years under Relay (still under Spelligent leadership in 2021), both Storm and Ogden received scores of 19% and 23% on the 2021 STAAR test for All Subjects/All Grades (at or approaches grade level) that were 48 and 44 points below the state average of 67%. Scores for special education students, who Spelligent proposes to target, were even lower at 6% and 8%. Some scores by grade were even lower, such as 4th grade science and 9% for 4th grade math. See chart below.

3. Spelligent has no direct experience with its two key program models: International Baccalaureate (IB) and dual language. The Superintendent stated in the TEA interview that she has no experience implementing either program but has visited other programs and read about them. Veterans of the IB program note that the one-day summer professional development (PD) for IB planned before school

opens is far below the PD they received, and the half-day of PD for dual language will not adequately prepare teachers. It is not clear from the application how many hours of PD will be provided specifically for each program subsequent to the summer training.

4. Spelligent has not yet completed the design of its “Learner Profile,” one of its signature programs.

Spelligent is still in design mode for the “Learner Profile” which Spelligent says will provide information to inform student performance. It will include background information on each student as well as their social emotional learning skills, self-regulation skills, cognition, and academic skills. However, Spelligent noted that the pilot Profile “did not work as we hoped it would.” As a result, neither the SBOE, parents, or the public has an opportunity to review the Profile. Concerns have been raised about the information that would be included in the Profile, for example: how “background information” and “self-regulation” are defined; how Spelligent will ensure the information collected is not biased; who will have access to the information; and whether it becomes part of the permanent student record.

5. Concerns were raised at the TEA interviews about Spelligent’s lack of experience and capacity in fiscal management.

TEA staff raised questions about Spelligent’s capacity to handle fiscal management given that it will be the responsibility of the Superintendent who has no finance background and whose time will be focused on other major responsibilities. Although Spelligent responded that is looking for a Board member with a finance background, TEA staff noted that fiscal management requires more time than a Board member can commit. Spelligent also noted that it would hire a Director of Operations and a PEIMS Coordinator, but TEA staff again noted these positions have other job responsibilities and do not have sufficient training in finance.

KEY CONCERNS ABOUT HERITAGE CLASSICAL

1. Classical schools in Texas have a history of low performance for economically disadvantaged

students: Heritage proposes to serve 69% economically disadvantaged students. However, only three of 22 classical charter schools in Texas serve a majority of economically disadvantaged students. Two of these three schools were low performing: Founder’s Classical Dallas was rated Improvement Required in 2018 and closed, and Founder’s Classical Mesquite was rated D in 2019. The other 19 classical schools serve low percentages of economically disadvantaged students and even fewer English Learners.

2. Heritage Classical leadership has little experience successfully serving economically disadvantaged

students and English Learners: Heritage states that BCSI is “placing great confidence” in Heritage to adapt the classical education approach to meet the needs of English Learners and SPED students (PDF page 14). While Heritage proposes to serve 69% economically disadvantaged students and 37% English Learners, the Heritage Superintendent most recently served at a classical school with only 25% economically students and less than 1% English Learners. The leadership’s previous schools with higher percentages of economically disadvantaged students and English Learners were both low performing: Founder’s Classical Dallas was rated Improvement Required and voluntarily closed, and Founder’s Classical Mesquite is rated D.

3. Most BCSI affiliated campuses serve few economically disadvantaged students or English Learners:

Heritage is partnering with BCSI and will be able to access its curriculum, professional development, and consulting. However, the existing BCSI classical schools serve a very different student population from the student population Heritage proposes.

- Although Heritage Classical proposes to serve 69% economically disadvantaged students, only one of the BCSI-affiliated campuses across the country serves a majority of economically disadvantaged students. Most serve 25% or fewer.
- Two-thirds of BCSI schools serve 1% or fewer English Learners, while Heritage plans to serve 39%.
- Only two of the BCSI schools serve a majority of students of color – some serve 10% or less. Yet, Heritage proposes to serve 73% African American or Hispanic students.

4. Even Heritage’s “model” campuses do not serve a majority low-income student population and even fewer English Learners: Heritage states in the application that its education model will be “similar” to four out-of-state classical schools that serve “low-income, high minority students”. In fact, data shows that three of these schools do NOT serve a majority of low-income students (Nashville, Washington DC, and Jacksonville). They serve only 31%, 38%, and 25% economically disadvantaged students. In addition, these three schools serve less than 5% English Learners, which is far fewer than the Heritage plan to serve 37% EL.

This difference in student populations is important because the design of the Heritage model should be based on schools that reflect the budget, curriculum, teacher training, and support services needed to serve high needs, low-income students and English Learners.

5. Heritage will not provide transportation for all students, limiting access and opportunity for the students it proposes to serve: Despite their own internal poll showing that 56% of students interested in attending Heritage require transportation in order to attend, Heritage will not provide regular and reliable bus transportation for all students, even though additional state funds are available for this purpose.

Heritage will purchase a mini-bus each year that will serve only 20% of its students by year 5 (about 200). Instead, Heritage proposes a mix of unproven options such as bus passes, carpools, and contracting transportation out to a bus service that each pose significant challenges to ensuring reliable transportation for most students (PDF page 94). A METRO schedule shows that it would likely take about 45 minutes for a student to arrive at the school facility for a student that lives only 3 miles away (depending on the school location), which could be a challenge and safety issue for 10 to 11- year-olds traveling by themselves. Failure to provide adequate transportation for all students will likely limit enrollment for their targeted student population of economically disadvantaged students whose families are less likely to have the means to transport their students to school every day.

6. Heritage should clarify its policies regarding “students with special needs”: The application states that “students with special needs” will be accommodated through finger painting, clay projects,

collages, and emotional drawing,” but does not describe how “students with special needs” will be able to access art in the least restrictive environment where other students can access drawing, painting, and sculpture (PDF page 24).

7. The Board Chair of Heritage and a family member contributed \$252,000 to influence the election of SBOE members: The chair of the Heritage Classical Board and another family member contributed \$252,000 to the Texans for Educational Freedom political action committee (PAC) in the 2022 primary election. The PAC supported only candidates for the State Board of Education in the primary, contributing over \$500,000 to influence just four SBOE races (*Texas Ethics Commission*). At the same time the contributions were made, *Heritage had a pending charter application* that would come before the SBOE for a final deciding vote. Texas law frowns on such attempts to influence a governing body and imposes restrictions on campaign contributions to SBOE from those selling bonds or materials, on legislators near and during session, and on judges, for example.

8. Heritage will result in an estimated annual revenue loss of \$9.6 million to Houston school districts: When Heritage is at maximum enrollment of 1,056 students, it will result in an annual revenue loss of an estimated \$9.6 million to Houston area school districts. Houston ISD lost 43,534 students to charter schools in 2020-2021 (22% of enrollment) with estimated revenue loss of \$370 million. Aldine ISD lost 4,410 students (14%), with an estimated revenue loss of almost \$43 million.

KEY CONCERNS ABOUT PATTERNS HIGH SCHOOL

1. Patterns will result in an estimated annual revenue loss \$5 million to central Texas school districts:

In its first year, Patterns would enroll up to 125 students and would grow to 500 students by year 4. Adding a 500-student campus could further drain funding away from local public school districts in the boundaries, squeezing our public schools with fewer resources to educate students, due to the difficulty of making cuts that match revenue loss. Revenue loss of **\$10,403 per student** (about \$5 million annually), calculated using Del Valle ISD’s allotments from Summary of Finances, could harm thousands of students in Central Texas school districts.

2. Patterns CEO Cassian Choucair was twice unsuccessful as charter applicant “Curie Academy” in 2020 and 2021.

3. Patterns is inaccurate in its application. Patterns states its “innovative approach” is T-STEM and incorrectly states, “There is currently only 1 T-STEM designated high school near Patterns proposed location (Austin ISD - Akins Early College High School).” (PDF page 12)

- **Note:** [TEA’s website](#) shows campuses offering T-STEM, P-TECH, and/or Early College High School (ECHS) models.
 - **Harmony School of Excellence of Austin offers T-STEM within a very few miles of the proposed Patterns location.**
 - **Manor New Technology High School offers T-STEM.**

- **Cedars Academy Next Generation High School offers T-STEM.** (Note: This charter submitted a letter of support for Patterns; Choucair is on the board of Cedars.)
- In addition, Del Valle High School offers P-TECH and ECHS; Bastrop ISD's Cedar Creek High School offers P-TECH; Elgin High School offers P-TECH and ECHS; several Austin ISD campuses offer T-STEM, P-TECH, and ECHS; and several other Harmony schools offer T-STEM.

4. Patterns projects an unrealistic special education enrollment with no clear plan to serve this population. Patterns projects 20% special education (PDF page 389), all in mainstream placement: "Patterns students in special education with mainstream placement: 20%." The application does not include specific outreach to accomplish the goal of 20 percent enrollment of special education students.

5. Patters will not provide transportation to its students. Patterns projects 90% of its students will be economically disadvantaged (PDF page 389). However, its transportation plan (PDF page 94) consists of "collaborating with families to create cooperative family transportation plans and use of Capital Metro transportation."

- **Note:** [Capital Metro](#) does not run bus routes to Del Valle. There is a Park & Ride into the Austin from Elgin/Manor, but that's about it.

We respectfully request that you consider the key concerns of these and urge you to vote to veto the Generation 27 charter school proposals. Our public schools and public school teachers need more respect, more local control, and more funding. The continued expansion of charter schools will result in less for everyone.