**QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS:**
THE BRILLANTE ACADEMY CHARTER APPLICATION IN HIDALGO COUNTY
September 5, 2020

**Overview: Brillante Academy**, affiliated with New York’s Brilla charter chain, has submitted a charter application to TEA to open a new charter school in Hidalgo County, with one campus serving grades PK-5 and enrollment of 530 students at capacity. The districts most affected are McAllen ISD, Mission CISD, and Sharyland, Edinburg, Donna, Hidalgo, LaJoya, and Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISDs. This is Brillante’s first try to open a charter school in Texas. Brilla Public Charter Schools in New York currently operate five schools, two of which opened this year, with plans to open three more in New York by 2025.
 **Revenue loss for public school districts:** At a minimum, Hidalgo County public school districts will lose an estimate of up to **$5,168,931** in revenue annually once Brillante is at maximum enrollment capacity. Over the first ten years, Hidalgo County districts would lose an estimate of up to **$42,424,246** in revenue (*based on average estimated per student revenue loss*).
 **Fiscal cost to the state:** Because of the charter funding advantage giving charter schools a larger entitlement than most districts, Brillante will cost the state an additional **$1,241,935**in its first five years and **$3,177,890** in its first ten years over the cost of enrollment of the same students in McAllen ISD . **State tax dollars sent to an out-of-state CMO:**  Brillante will pay the New York-based Seton Education Partners, a Catholic education focused charter management organization (CMO), 8% of all state funds it receives, for a total of $1.4 million over the next five years. In addition, the application states an intent to enter a $700 per student facility lease with its CMO. The CMO derives revenue from rental income and from $40/month tuition for its faith formation program. Also, it needs to be clear that the CMO cannot dictate to the Texas charter board. The application states that the Brillante Superintendent is chosen and hired by the CMO, and the authority by the Texas board is uncertain.

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Brillante is not needed in the area.** All Hidalgo County school districts are rated A or B, and McAllen ISD, where Brillante would locate, is one of the Top 10 highest rated school districts in Texas, with an A rating (93). It has no low-performing campuses, and the proposed charter location would be 0.2-1.9 miles from three existing McAllen ISD elementary campuses. Twenty-three other charter schools are located within eight miles of the charter’s proposed location. A New York charter chain is not needed in the area.

**Brillante would offer religious education during the school day.** The charter application describes the targeted area for this charter by the location of three Catholic churches – not the geographic or neighborhood boundaries. The CMO, New York-based Seton Education Partners, was formed when Catholic schools in New York were closed. According to its website: “Seton Education Partners is a national effort to strategically infuse creativity, innovation, entrepreneurship, talented leadership, and public dollars to find a new way forward for urban Catholic education.”

According to the application, students would be provided Seton Education Partners’ 40-minute “El Camino Faith Formation” in the classroom, during the morning of the school day (page 408). Students who don’t choose the faith formation class would be required to go to a “Community Space” for “Character Formation.” During the TEA interview, Brillante said tuition would be charged for the El Camino faith formation program.

**Brillante would duplicate services.** Brillante proposes the “innovations” of a dual language program. McAllen and PSJA ISDs already provide dual language.

**Brillante was not specific on TEKS alignment.** During the TEA interview, Brillante was asked how it would crosswalk their New York curriculum to match Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills. Brillante was not specific in their answer.

**Classical campuses are not successful.** Three of the four classical campuses in Texas serving more than 50 percent economically disadvantaged students have been rated D or F in the last two years. One has closed, two are rated D, and one is rated B.

Application: <http://castro.tea.state.tx.us/charter_apps/content/downloads/Nocdn/25-4.pdf>