**QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS:**  
THE HERITAGE CLASSICAL CHARTER APPLICATION IN HARRIS COUNTY  
September 5, 2020

**Overview: Heritage Classical Academy** was chosen by the Michigan-based Hillsdale College’s Barney Charter School Initiative (BCSI) for a partnership to submit a charter application to TEA to open a new charter school in Harris County (Texas) with one campus. Affected school districts are Houston ISD and Aldine ISD, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD, Klein ISD, Spring ISD, and Spring Branch ISD. This is Heritage’s first try to open a charter school in Texas. BCSI is affiliated with other classical schools in Texas and other states.

**Revenue loss for public school districts:** At a minimum, Harris County public school districts will lose an estimated **$8,472,449** per year annually once Heritage is at maximum enrollment capacity. Over the first ten years, Harris County districts would lose an estimated **$58,842,324** in revenue (*based on average estimated per student revenue loss*).

**Fiscal cost to the state:** Because the Charter Funding Advantage gives a charter school an entitlement level that is $1,732 per student in average daily attendace higher than Houston ISD, Heritage will cost the state an additional **$3,114,742** in its first five years and **$11,127,842** in its first ten years over the cost of enrollment of the same students in Houston ISD.

**Affiliation with an out-of-state entity:** Heritage states that BCSI, at Hillsdale College in Michigan, will provide board and teacher training and curriculum and instruction development for free.

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**Would not represent area student demographics.** Although Heritage says it will be “diverse by design,” its application indicates it would enroll substantially fewer African American students and students who face challenges such as poverty.

* Houston ISD enrolls 23.3 percent African American students and 80 percent economically disadvantaged students
* Heritage intends to locate in an area where nearby HISD schools have even higher enrollment of African American students, at 45-63 percent.
* Heritage plans to serve only 14 percent African American students and 50 percent economically disadvantaged students.
* Heritage’s percent of economically disadvantaged students would be lower than the state average of 60 percent.

“To achieve this diversity given its proposed location,” the application states, Heritage will have a student recruiting program with outreach to “low income communities whose residents may not be familiar with a classical education to ensure that we reach our target of 50%”; “middle income White, and Asian communities, some of whom may be attending private schools with a curriculum similar to a classical education school, to fill slots in those groups;” and “African- American and Hispanic communities for racial diversity composition.”

**Does not promote educational equity.** Although Heritage says it will be “diverse,” it fails to provide the means and access for all students to attend or succeed.

* The charter does not offer or budget for transportation for students who are economically disadvantaged.
* The charter budgets an amount that is insufficient for required transportation for special education students.
* Regarding special education, Heritage anticipates “most of our SPED needs will be speech and language” as the disabilities to be served and only budgets for one special education teacher at elementary for the first five years even as enrollments rise. There is zero budgeted for “therapists and counselors” in the Financial Workbook.
* For English Learners, Heritage says it will have a bilingual/ESL teacher per grade level, but on its staffing chart is shows only 0.5-1 FTE for the elementary campus the first five years. There is no discussion of curriculum to be used for English learners.
* There is zero budgeted for a nurse or social worker the first three years. There is a healthy budget for marketing and student recruitment and for administrative costs.
* Heritage’s admission policy allows exclusion of any student who has had a discipline issue; this disproportionately affects students of color and students in special education.

**Curriculum is culturally insensitive.** The school’s curriculum and its connections with Hillsdale College and BCSI are issues. During the TEA interview, TEA staff and SBOE members brought up instances of teaching Brer Rabbit and the Tar Baby with “slave dialect” in first grade and using material with “racist undertones” with “incendiary content about African Americans.” Heritage’s response to the concerns also raised the question whether Heritage actually understood and appreciated the concerns raised about this reference.

The charter intends to use the Common Core aligned Core Knowledge materials, which are not aligned to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills and have not been reviewed by Texas educators nor the SBOE. There are questions about how Heritage’s proposed curriculum would work with a proposed 30 percent English learner population.

**Area charter campuses and classical campuses are not successful.** Within the zip codes targeted by Heritage, there already is a saturation of 17 elementary or middle school charter campuses that are rated D or F. Near the area, four classical campuses already are open or are about to open. Of the BCSI classical campuses that have operated in Texas, one already has closed; all of the BCSI campuses with more than 25 percent economically disadvantaged students have been rated D or F in the last two years; and all of them serve less than the state average for students with disabilities.

Application: <http://castro.tea.state.tx.us/charter_apps/content/downloads/Nocdn/25-12.pdf>