



NJDOE News

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Department of Education Revokes Charter of Simon Bolivar Charter School in Newark

Noting that the Simon Bolivar Charter School has failed to resolve numerous fiscal and programmatic problems, the Department of Education has revoked the charter of the Newark school.

Since opening in September 1999, the Simon Bolivar Charter School had served 125 students in 9th grade. The school has been unable to secure appropriate permanent facilities, and has accumulated a significant budget deficit. The Department has directed that the school cease operations immediately and transfer student records to the Newark Public School District.

"We gave the Simon Bolivar Charter School every opportunity to correct its many problems," stated Commissioner of Education David C. Hespe. Noting that the school had been on 90 day probation ending August 15 and been given a two week extension through August 31 to rectify its facility and financial problems, Hespe said he could not allow the school to open "when it clearly was not viable nor fiscally solvent. We wanted to avoid a situation in which the school opened, but then failed and closed shortly thereafter. The failure of the school appeared inevitable in view of the significant deficit and the lack of a school facility."

The commissioner emphasized that the Department of Education has been keeping the Newark School System apprised of problems at the school. "Our highest priority is to ensure that the 230 students who were expected to enroll in the Simon Bolivar Charter School whose school has now closed can begin the new school year on time," said Hespe. "We have begun working with the charter school officials and Newark School District to place them in the appropriate Newark school."

Eight charter schools serving approximately 1,300 students in Newark will operate in the 2000-01 school year. The Department has already approved another Newark charter school, the Lady Liberty Academy, which will serve up to 300 students beginning in September 2001.

Simon Bolivar is the second charter school to be closed by the state, as the REACH Charter School in Egg Harbor Township had its charter revoked back on April 19, 2000 due to insolvency.

"We gave this school every chance to resolve its problems, and we were impressed by the grassroots efforts to keep it viable," said Hespe. "In the end, however, we determined that the school could not surmount its programmatic and growing fiscal difficulties. While we deeply regret having to take this action so close to the start of the school year, we believe this transition will avoid the turmoil that would come from transferring 230 students after the school year is under way."

Hespe stressed that it was his department's rigorous oversight of charter schools that gives parents confidence in the educational quality and fiscal soundness of these innovative efforts.

"Today's action has to be considered in a broader context," the commissioner said. "Next week, 54 charter schools will open their doors to some 12,000 students from over 190 communities in New Jersey. Public demand for charter schools is stronger than ever, as over 80 percent of the schools have waiting lists and the attendance rate last year was over 95 percent."