



**Millburn Township Schools**  
**434 MILLBURN AVE., MILLBURN, NJ 07041**  
**www.millburn.org**

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James A. Crisfield, Ed.D.  
*Superintendent of Schools*  
(973) 376-3600 (X151)  
james.crisfield@millburn.org

New Jersey Department of Education  
ATTN: Mr. Christopher Cerf, Acting Commissioner  
P.O. Box 500  
Trenton, NJ 08625-0500

May 26, 2011

Dear Commissioner Cerf,

Per the instructions in your 4/27/11 letter to Michael Birnberg, President of the Millburn Board of Education, and on behalf of Mr. Birnberg and the other members of the Millburn Board of Education, I hereby respectfully submit the following comments concerning the applications that have been filed for two charter schools that, if approved, will draw students from Millburn Township.

The two charter schools in question are the proposed Hanyu International Academy Charter School and the proposed Hua Mei Charter School. Both are proposed to be K-5 mandarin language immersion schools, and both propose to draw students from Millburn, Livingston, South-Orange Maplewood and West Orange (Hua Mei proposes to draw students from Union Township as well). The two applications are (somewhat mysteriously) identical in looks, content and intent, so for the purposes of this letter, they will be treated interchangeably.

My colleagues in Livingston and South-Orange Maplewood have submitted extensive comments of their own, detailing very real and valid concerns with the applications from both the educational and technical perspectives. The Mayor of Millburn Township has also submitted comments in opposition to these charter schools. Rather than revisit the various arguments they put forth against these two charter schools, whether it be the fact that schools like these are not needed in a place like Millburn (where the public schools are thriving) or that they appear to violate the spirit, as well as the letter, of the charter school law on the books now, I would like to instead focus on two other areas:

1. We simply cannot afford these schools. In response to the struggling economy, the very restrictive 2% budget cap and the drastic reduction in state aid, the budget we put forth this past April was nothing like what the residents of Millburn have seen in the past. Specifically, we

- a. Cut over 18 staff positions (and our enrollment is flat!).
- b. Eliminated courtesy and hazardous busing (and we have virtually no sidewalks in town).
- c. Absorbed yet another year of double-digit health insurance premium increases (once again crowding out line items that directly affect teaching and learning).
- d. Managed to allocate a mere \$536K to care for and preserve our seven schools buildings (nowhere near the sustainable long-term level of capital needed to preserve the community's massive investment in its school facilities).

If even just one of these charter schools is allowed to begin operations, the financial impact on our budget, which as demonstrated above is already under significant strain, would be devastating. If Millburn provides just one quarter of the schools' projected enrollment in 2012-13, that would result in 50 Millburn students attending the charters. These students would naturally come from all five of our elementary schools, so we wouldn't be able to reduce costs (i.e., reduce salaries or benefits) in any meaningful way (since it would simply result in class sizes here of 23 or 22 instead of 25), yet we would have to allocate approximately \$700K, right off the top of our budget, to these charters. To put that figure in perspective, we struggled this year to find just \$536K to preserve our facilities! It is impossible to overstate the ruinous effect of a \$700K leak from the budget barrel, every year (and most likely more than that amount in the out years, as the applications show the charter schools' enrollment will be expanding each year). In time, such an indiscriminate budget hit, year in and year out, would reduce this high performing district to something else, which I am quite sure none of us want to see happen.

2. The overwhelming majority of Millburn residents are not in favor of these charter schools. As evidenced by the "Save our Public Schools over Charters" online petition and the "Millburn Parents Against Charter Schools" resolution (copies of both enclosed), residents are extremely concerned about the effect these charter schools would have on their existing public schools. In fact, there has been no single issue in anybody's recent memory that has brought the community together in such a united front. The Millburn schools cannot be labeled as "failing" by any objective measure—not even close, actually—and the aggressive and passionate support residents have for their schools shows that the community is behind its schools 100%. Generating unprecedented levels of community consensus, these charters are viewed as a threat to the continued delivery of excellence the community has come to expect from (and demand of) its schools.

For all of the above stated reasons, the Millburn Township Board of Education respectfully requests that these two charter school applications be denied. They are not needed, not wanted, and if approved, would wreak financial havoc on what is generally considered by the community and voters to be a great school system.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to submit these comments.

James A. Crisfield, Ed.D.  
Superintendent

enclosures (“Save our Public Schools over Charters” petition and “Millburn Parents Against Charter Schools” resolution)

cc: Senators Kean and Codey  
Assemblywomen Munoz and Jasey  
Assemblymen Bramnick and McKeon  
Sandra Haimoff, Mayor, Millburn Township  
Larry Feinsod, Ed.D., Executive Superintendent of Schools, Essex County  
Superintendents of Livingston, South-Orange Maplewood, West Orange  
and Union