

June 17, 2011

Dr. Arlene Ackerman
Superintendent of Schools
Philadelphia School District
Philadelphia, PA 19130

Dr. Amy Gutmann
Office of the President
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Dear Superintendent Ackerman and President Gutmann:

Since its founding, the Penn Alexander School has not only provided a great elementary education to hundreds of children in our neighborhood, it has also been a powerful force for neighborhood renewal. We are grateful that the partnership between the School District and Penn will continue for another 10 years, as announced this week.

As a result of this partnership, the neighborhood has been enlivened by hundreds of new families who have made a personal commitment to support the highest ideals of urban education. In the process, Penn Alexander has become a much-publicized national model for how a diverse and high-achieving public elementary school can be created and sustained.

Unfortunately, this remarkable achievement is suddenly in danger. In recent weeks, parents attracted to the neighborhood have learned that a cap on enrollment at Penn Alexander means they can no longer count on their youngsters being able to attend the very school that drew them to West Philadelphia. At the same time, families that were looking to move to the neighborhood for the school and continue the neighborhood renaissance have begun making decisions not to move here.

Parents are rightly fearful that the enrollment limit will have serious negative consequences for their own children and the entire neighborhood. They have turned to our association for help.

Accordingly, the Board of Directors of the Spruce Hill Community Association, at its meeting Tuesday, June 14, unanimously adopted the following resolution:

“Any child living in the catchment area has the right to attend Penn Alexander and should have that right guaranteed from first grade through eighth grade.”

Inevitably, this position raises questions about available classroom space. However, space should be found. Families have made commitments to this neighborhood based on the belief that their children could some day attend a first-rate elementary school.

Our association was deeply involved in the founding of Penn Alexander. We have continued to support it. We look forward to being part of a discussion on how the enrollment issue can be resolved without jeopardizing the progress we have made as a revitalized community, with Penn Alexander as its crown jewel.

Very truly yours,

Mark Wagenfeld, SHCA President

Brett Feldman, Chair, Task Force on PAS Enrollment Issues

CC:

Mayor Michael Nutter

Robert L. Archie Jr., Esq., Chair, School Reform Commission

Councilwoman Jannie Blackwell

State Rep. James Roebuck

Ms. Sheila Sydnor, Penn Alexander Principal