



Monday, April 14, 2025

Attn: Washington County University Campus Task Force

Scott Henke, Joel Ongert, John Torinus, Adam Williquette, Jamie Wolski, Elisha Doerr

Dear Washington County University Campus Task Force,

We are writing with urgency and deep concern regarding the proposal under consideration from ACCEL Schools to operate three independent charter schools on the site of the former UW-Milwaukee at Washington County campus.

ACCEL is a for-profit charter management company based in Ohio. Its business model prioritizes expansion and profit — often at the expense of educational quality. Schools managed by ACCEL have a troubling record of academic failure, fiscal mismanagement, and misconduct; with numerous lawsuits and alarming news coverage to match.

As residents and taxpayers of Washington County, we are alarmed that the University Campus Task Force would entertain a proposal from an out-of-state company seeking to profit from our community. Independent charter schools, such as those proposed by ACCEL Schools, are taxpayer-funded yet **lack transparency and accountability to the taxpayer**. And as a for-profit business, the primary objective of ACCEL Schools is, and always will be, to make money — not to provide a high-quality education for our children. If allowed to operate in Washington County, ACCEL Schools would receive an estimated **7 million dollars per year in taxpayer funding** to spend as they wish, without input or oversight from the people of Washington County.

As community members and parents of children who attend Washington County's public schools, we are extremely concerned about the consequences of opening a for-profit charter school in our community. When a charter school opens, state tax dollars — which would normally be allocated to the local public school on a per pupil basis — are diverted to the new charter school. Despite this public funding, research shows that [charter schools educate fewer students with disabilities, suspend students with disabilities and students of color at higher rates](#), and [employ teachers with far fewer years of experience](#) than their public school counterparts. In Wisconsin, [kindergarten students are over seven times more likely to be suspended](#) while attending a charter school versus a traditional public school. Charter school students with learning disabilities or social-emotional challenges [frequently find themselves pressured to leave by school administrators](#) if their needs are deemed too great, a practice called “counseling out”. These students typically re-enroll in their local public schools, which are required by

law to educate all students; however, the public school must then do so without the state tax dollars that were initially allocated for that student.

We are concerned that the introduction of a for-profit charter school in our community would initiate an educational “race to the bottom” in Washington County. Redirecting funding away from traditional public schools could force municipalities to turn to referendums in order to make up for funding shortfalls and would undermine the efficacy and impact of referendums that have recently passed.

From an academic perspective, **we are disturbed by ACCEL Schools’ track record of poor performance** and documented lack of concern for the welfare of their students.

- According to Ohio’s 2019 State Report Card, **18 of ACCEL’s 33 schools located in the state received a performance rating of “F.”**
- 12 schools received a performance rating of “D” and 3 schools received a “C” rating.
- Not a single school managed by ACCEL Schools received an A or B rating.

These numbers speak for themselves. Entrusting ACCEL Schools with the education of hundreds of Washington County’s children would be irresponsible and reckless. A simple Google search returns a seemingly endless list of the ways in which ACCEL Schools would harm students and families in Washington County — [children locked in classrooms as a means of behavior management](#), [poor academic outcomes](#), [failure to provide basic educational materials](#), [financial mismanagement](#), [misrepresentation of student progress](#), [complicated corporate structures designed to bilk the taxpayer](#), [EPA violations for failing to address dangerous levels of lead and asbestos in their buildings](#), and the list goes on and on. Additional research supporting our concerns about ACCEL Schools can be found [here](#).

Washington County is already home to excellent schools, the vast majority earning scores of “meets,” “exceeds,” or “significantly exceeds expectations” on the most recent DPI report card. Families move to Washington County from all over Wisconsin to enjoy the excellent quality of life found here — specifically seeking to enroll their children in our high-performing public school districts. Opening a charter school in Washington County will reduce public school funding and chip away at the high educational standards that currently exist in our local schools. The mere presence of a for-profit charter school, like ACCEL, **would seriously undermine public confidence in our public schools, threatening property values and weakening our tax base.**

For parents who desire school choice, Washington County is home to a great number of excellent faith-based private schools, which families of all income levels can access using Wisconsin’s school voucher program. The introduction of a for-profit charter school in our community would not enrich the educational options here in Washington County; in fact, it would do the opposite. A charter school would take precious resources from our existing public and parochial schools. In addition to diverting funds away from our traditional public schools, the introduction of a for-profit charter school would also **threaten our local faith-based private schools who rely on voucher funding.**

We understand the county’s desire to find a lasting solution for the UWM-WC campus that does not overburden taxpayers. And while we appreciate the Task Force’s commitment to responsible fiscal stewardship, **a solution must not come at the expense of our children.**

We ask that all consideration of the proposal presented by ACCEL Schools be placed on hold by the Task Force until a more thorough and public examination of all stakeholders' concerns has taken place. Furthermore, we strongly encourage the Task Force to explore other options for development beyond the approval of a for-profit charter school.

Allowing the public school superintendents of Washington County to utilize the former UWM-WC campus to expand their districts' course offerings would create new educational opportunities for our children and would bolster Washington County's reputation as one of Wisconsin's best places to raise a family. **Redevelopment and repurposing efforts such as those planned for the former campuses of UW-Oshkosh Fond du Lac and UW-Milwaukee Waukesha also have serious merit and should be examined.** Possibilities such as rezoning the campus for residential or mixed use would bring jobs to Washington County and could help address the current shortage of affordable middle-income housing. Options such as creating a community sports complex, a performing arts center, and office spaces would offer valuable opportunities for business and community engagement, enriching the quality of life for residents of all ages and enhancing Washington County's profile as a desirable place to live, work, study, play, and grow.

We sincerely thank the Task Force for their thoughtful consideration of our requests and we look forward to engaging in an open and public dialogue about the future of the UWM-WC Campus.

About the signatories:

This petition has been created, signed, and circulated by the administrators of the following groups: West Bend Parents for Excellent Public Schools, Slinger Parents Supporting Education, Germantown Parents for Public Education, and Hartford Area Parents for Public Education. We are grassroots, nonpartisan, community advocacy groups made up of parents, educators, and residents who are committed to championing high-quality, inclusive, and well-funded public education in their local districts.

Together, we seek to give a voice to the many families and community members across Washington County who are deeply invested in the success of their local schools. We are united in our belief that decisions about public education and public assets must be transparent, community-driven, and always in the best interest of our students.

In addition to the administrators of the aforementioned groups, this petition has been signed by concerned community members from across Washington County.

Respectfully,

West Bend Parents for Excellent Public Schools
Slinger Parents Supporting Education
Germantown Parents for Public Education
Hartford Area Parents for Public Education