

## **‘Trojan horses’ undermine schools**

Rev. Trey Hammond and Tina Garcia / Co-Chairs, Albuquerque Interfaith

In the legend of the Trojan horse, Greeks capture Troy not by siege, but by stealth, under the cover of darkness, when raiders hidden in the hollow horse bring its downfall.

This is an apt metaphor for how public education in New Mexico is being privatized. With roughly \$8,000 allocated annually for each student attending public schools, there is a big economic incentive for education businesses to figure out how to access these public funds. What better way than to create a national network of charter schools, with a governing board apart from a traditional school district’s jurisdiction, and exact significant management and program use fees? These are exactly the kinds of Trojan horses popping up across the country at a dizzying pace.

The first Trojan horse is already on the ground here in New Mexico. The New Mexico Virtual Academy is a charter high school that is essentially a franchise of K-12 Inc., a huge out-of-state, for-profit corporation. K-12 Inc. enrolls over 99,000 students annually in online schools nationally. Because it is 100 percent online, students have little, if any, face-to-face interaction with teachers or other students.

K-12 Inc.’s original application was denied by the state but granted by the Farmington school district. Only a handful of their approximately 300 students live in Farmington; almost all the rest are from Bernalillo County. As much as \$2 million annually will be siphoned off from Albuquerque schools, ones with real classrooms and teachers, and funneled into a virtual school chartered half way across the state. Fifteen percent of the income per student is paid directly as fees to the parent company K-12 Inc. for management, administrative and curriculum fees. The school’s preliminary budget shows about one million dollars flowing to the Virginia company. A sweet deal for K-12 Inc. but not for our children, our public schools or New Mexico taxpayers.

Recently, Education Secretary-designate Hanna Skandera paved the way for another Trojan horse. New Mexico Connections Academy, another virtual charter school, is effectively a franchise of another large out-of-state for-profit corporation, Connections Academy LLC. Its charter application was denied by the Public Education Commission, the elected body that authorizes new state charters. Skandera overturned its decision. The academy is slated to start with 500 students and grow to 2,000 from kindergarten to 12th grade.

To prevent this stealth privatization, Albuquerque Interfaith has worked with Rep. Mimi Stewart, D-Albuquerque, and Sen. Tim Keller, D-Albuquerque, to craft legislation to prevent charters being set up as profit centers for out of state companies.

Legitimate charter schools provide a useful function in public education when they are locally grown and governed, well-managed and serve a particular need. And there is a place for online learning to augment classroom education. But we oppose charter schools that are pale imitations of institutions of learning and serve as franchises to siphon off education tax dollars for profit.

We urge citizens committed to public schools to contact their representatives with their concerns about privatization and advocate for the passage of HB 460. No more Trojan horses in our classrooms.

Albuquerque Interfaith is a non-partisan, broad-based organization including congregations, schools, unions and nonprofits working together to build better communities.

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## **Suggested Reading:**

- [Virtual School Questioned](#)
  - [Bill bans firms from running public schools](#)
  - [Outsiders Pushing Charter Schools](#)
  - [2 Santa Fe Charter Schools Rejected](#)
  - [APS To Oppose New Charter Schools](#)
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