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For-profit management company skirts Ohio's charter school closure law Documents show closed Toledo school re-opened with new name, same staff

The Leona Group, a Phoenix-based for-profit charter school management company, has evaded Ohio law by opening a new school to replace a school closed by the state at the end of the 2009-10 school year for poor academic performance.

Paul Laurence Dunbar Academy, a K-8 school located at 3248 Warsaw St. in Toledo and operated by the Leona Group, appeared on the state's closure list and was required to close by June 2010. But by July 2, 2010, the Leona Group had taken steps to open a new school, Northpointe Academy, at the same address with the same phone number and much of the same staff. Leona operates nine schools in Ohio, according to its web site. (www.leonagroup.com)

"Until Ohio overhauls charter school law and creates an effective oversight system, this kind of abuse will not be resolved," said Piet van Lier, Policy Matters researcher. A September Policy Matters report, available at www.policymattersohio.org/AuthorizedAbuse, documented other evidence that charter management companies in Ohio are operating with little oversight.

"At their best, charter schools can provide options for students seeking a good education and serve as a proving ground for innovative education models," said van Lier. "This example, of weak oversight and inappropriate behavior by a for-profit management firm, shows how some charters fail miserably to meet that standard."

Accompanying this press release are two PDF files containing staff lists for Dunbar and Northpointe, both downloaded from the Leona Group web site. The Dunbar staff list was downloaded in July 2010; the Northpointe list was downloaded in February 2011.

These staff lists show that Andre Fox served as Dunbar principal and continues to serve in that capacity at Northpointe, according to the staff lists; all but four of the teaching staff listed for Northpointe also appeared on the Dunbar list from last year.

As of February 1, 2011, Northpointe Academy enrolled more than 270 students and had collected more than \$2 million in state money for the 2010-11 school year, according to state records. The Toledo-based Ohio Council of Community Schools was Dunbar's sponsor and serves as Northpointe's sponsor as well. In Ohio, charter school sponsors are responsible for authorizing new schools and monitoring them once they are open.

Beginning in 2008, Ohio law required charter schools to meet certain academic standards on their state report cards or face closure. While this law was a positive step toward improving accountability for Ohio's charter schools, the case of Dunbar/Northpointe shows that oversight of these publicly funded, privately operated schools remains inadequate.