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June 29, 2018

Marlene H. Dortch
Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20554

Re: **Ex Parte Communication**
        CC Docket No. 02-6

Dear Ms. Dortch:

On June 26, 2018, Mashea Ashton, Founder and CEO, and Nima Farshchi, Director of Operations of Digital Pioneers Academy Public Charter School ("DPA"), and the undersigned counsel met separately with D'wana Terry, Kate Dumouchel, Mark Nadel, James Bachtell and Arielle Roth of the Wireline Competition Bureau; and with Nirali Patel, special counsel to Chairman Pai, regarding DPA's Emergency Request for Waiver in the above-referenced matter filed on June 15, 2018. In our meetings, we discussed the merits of DPA's waiver petition, and distributed the attached additional documents.

Please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned if you have any questions regarding this submission.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/

James M. Smith
Counsel for Digital Pioneers Academy
Public Charter School

cc (by email): Ms. Nirali Patel
               Ms. D'wana Terry
               Ms. Kate Dumouchel
               Mr. Mark Nadel
               Mr. James Bachtell
               Ms. Arielle Roth

Digital Pioneers Academy E-Rate Waiver Petition

Our Story

- Digital Pioneers Academy is a brand-new public charter middle school opening in D.C. in Fall 2018. We are the first computer science focused middle school in D.C. (Charter or Public). We are serving 125 6th graders east of the Anacostia River, growing to 375 6th-8th graders by 2020.
- Computer Science is creating needed high paying jobs for our community. There are many such jobs available in the D.C. region that pay on average over $100,000.
- Our mission is to develop the next generation of innovators. Our innovators will help shape the digital economy, not only be consumers in it. We will ensure all of our students and parents feel known, loved, and respected while going through our rigorous college preparation program.

Our Situation

- We initially had a facility that provided all of our internet needs, obviating the need E-rate support and a Form 470, but the lease with the facility fell through after the Form 470 filing date.
- We were fortunate to have a relationship with East Washington Heights Baptist Church. We signed our lease with them on March 18, 2018, but they do not have the internet capabilities we need for a computer science middle school, creating an immediate, unexpected need for E-rate supported facilities.
- DPA immediately filed Form 470, then filed its Form 471s (Request of Funding) on April 20th (28 days after Form 470 filing) (Category 2) and May 2nd (Category 1). Despite our timing predicament, we followed USAC guidance to the letter: "Answers to Common Application Filing Window Questions-- What if I miss the March 22 deadline? *Be sure to wait at least 28 days after you certified your FCC Form 470* before you choose a service provider and, if applicable, sign a contract. Then complete and certify your FCC Form 471. After your form has been certified, you will receive an out-of-window message. *You can then request a waiver of the window filing requirement from the FCC.*" (USAC S&L Program NewsBrief, 3/16/18).
- Both of these Form 471 filings generated automatic messages from USAC that due to filing after the March 22nd deadline they were rejected, and that an FCC waiver was necessary to obtain funding for FY 2018.

Our Circumstances Warrant a Waiver of the Filing Window

- Extraordinary circumstances beyond our control ("Unexpected events may cause unanticipated delays").
- Within a reasonable period ("Rigid adherence to filing procedures does not further the purposes of section 254(h) of the Act or serve the public interest").
- "Denial of funding in these cases would inflict undue hardship on the applicants"—and our students
- First E-rate funding request.
- Statutory intent: "open new worlds of knowledge, learning and education to all Americans—rich and poor, rural and urban."

Executive Summary

Mission and Vision

Digital Pioneers Academy (DPA) will be a rigorous, engaging college preparatory middle and high school (6th-12th grade) preparing students from Ward 7 and Ward 8 in Washington, DC with the education necessary to be innovators in the digital economy and to be active citizens in our technology-driven world. DPA will combine best practices from successful schools across the country and utilize an innovative and computer science education model to create a personalized academic experience.

The mission of Digital Pioneers Academy is to develop the next generation of innovators. We prepare students from underserved communities to meet or exceed the highest academic standards, while cultivating the strength of character necessary to both graduate from four-year colleges and thrive in 21st century careers.

Empowering Washington, DC Ward 7

Currently there are 11,006 open computing jobs in DC (4.7 times the average demand rate) with an average salary for computing occupations of $100,757. In stark contrast, the unemployment rate in southeast Washington DC, Ward 7 is close to 13% - almost three times the national average and fewer than one in 20 residents in southeast Washington, DC hold a bachelor's degree. The average academic proficiency for the zoned middle school in Ward 7 is 8% in English and 3% in Mathematics, while at the middle school in the most affluent community in Ward 3, the proficiency levels are 50% in Mathematics and 63% in English. Students in Ward 7 can achieve high academic proficiency levels if given the opportunity. DPA will directly address the achievement and opportunity gaps by preparing students with the knowledge, character, and habits necessary to graduate from four-year colleges and universities and thrive in 21st Century careers.

Disrupting the Achievement and Opportunity Gaps

The challenges facing students East of the Anacostia River are twofold. Often times, school is unengaging with a lack of rigor. That is combined with a sense from students that attending school does not correlate to a viable, high wage job. In order to close these gaps, DPA will develop the next generation of innovators. Research indicates that the five "discovery skills" that distinguish most creative executives are questioning, observing, networking, experimenting, and associating. These skills make up the "Innovators DNA" (Christensen, Gregersen, & Dyer). DPA will cultivate these skills by providing students a rigorous computer science course and reinforcing these skills across the curriculum. These skills can be broadly applied to future careers. Just as importantly, the demand and starting average salaries for positions in the innovation economy will serve as motivation for students and their families.

Why Computer Science?

Computers and software have changed everything. Computer Science is about problem solving, persevering, collaborating, creating, communicating effectively, and connecting. Students will gain computational thinking skills, which embody a more robust way to think about problems. If you are facing a big, ambiguous project at home or at work, computational thinking and problem solving processes can help you break this problem into smaller chunks.

Recognizing what's important and what needs to be solved first are critical thinking skills that are valuable in any context. Problem solving process can be applied to any field of study. Computer Science also teaches students how to create digital artifacts and how those artifacts impact the world around them by looking at issues such as privacy and security. Computer science teaches how to create new technologies instead of just being consumers of technology.

Computer Science is not about teaching students to code. Coding is an important tool for computer science but, like arithmetic, it is a tool for doing mathematics, just as words are a tool for English. Coding is a building block, and DPA will help students master this foundational skill and go beyond that to build their full computational thinking toolkit.

Every industry is desperately trying to hire computer programmers. Careers now and in 2030 will require a workforce that is:

- data driven and leverages technology to bring new ideas into the marketplace;
- understands not only how to use technology, but how to create and manipulate it; and
- diverse and knows how to work together to solve the world's biggest problems.

Simply put, our students will need to be innovators and creators. And to do this they need opportunities to learn computer science.

DPA will be the first middle school in Washington, DC that offers a rigorous personalized computer science course as part of the core curriculum. In 5 years, we will double the number of students who pass the AP Computer Science exam in DC.

Digital Pioneers Academy's 3 Pillars
<u>A rigorous core curriculum that includes a personalized computer science course.</u> At DPA, computer science and programming are not elective courses. Every child will take a rigorous computer science course starting in the 6th grade. Think of this model as a language immersion school, except here, our second language is not French or Spanish, it is computational thinking. From grades 6th through 12th grade our pedagogy and content model will cultivate computational thinking skills and focus on computer science projects that require cross-disciplinary skills and habits of mind to successfully master. Students will work through computer science projects at their own pace and take assessments on demand. They will work with teachers to develop set short-term and long-term goals and connect these projects back to their daily actions. In addition, each core course (ELA, Math, Science, & Social Studies) will align to Common Core State Standards and advance cognitive and social-emotional competencies, such as problem solving, perseverance, conflict resolution and making responsible decisions. We believe that a school oriented around this approach will prepare students for success in the 21st century.

<u>An emphasis on great teaching.</u> Research tells us the number one predictor of student achievement isn't race. It isn't socio-economic status. It's teacher quality. The most effective strategy in supporting all students to be college and career ready is quality teaching in bigger doses. DPA's hires teachers who believe all students can achieve at high levels, who have demonstrable experience raising the achievement for urban students, and who have developed authentic relationships with students and families. We create school conditions

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where great teaching can thrive. Professional development will provide training and support in best practices of effective teaching.

A positive, respectful, and loving school culture. In order to create a school community in which every student and adult feels known, loved, and respected, it is essential that every member of our community live the DPA values: *Integrity, Results, Optimism, Excellence, Empathy,* & *Innovation.* Research shows that students excel in environments with strong data systems, high behavioral expectations for students, extended learning time, and school leadership with an unrelenting focus on results.

DPA's Guiding Principles Upon graduation:

- Students will develop into innovators who possess the skills to problem solve, persevere, collaborate, create, communicate, and connect as they work to solve the increasingly complex problems of society.

- Students are prepared for, accepted into, and complete four-year colleges.

- Students will demonstrate mastery of 2+ programming languages and pass the AP Computer Science Principles exam.

- Students will expand their social-emotional skills and mindsets to develop strong habits of success.

- Students will have a long-term plan rooted in their values and interests and will identify credible next steps towards achieving their hopes and dreams.

Key Updates

- Digital Pioneers Academy was unanimously approved by the DC Public Charter School Board on May 22, 2017. DPA is scheduled to open Fall 2018 in Ward 7.

- Mashea Ashton has recruited a founding group of over 25 people, all of whom have a deep commitment to Digital Pioneers Academy as an effective means for preparing all students for success in four-year college and universities and thriving in 21st century careers. The founding group of the DPA brings decades of experience operating highly successful middle and high schools in Washington DC and around the country.

- DPA has established a unique cross-sector partnership Anne Beers elementary school. The partnership has allowed Mashea Ashton to spend at least two days a week, working with students, teachers, and parents during and after-school to test the DPA model assumptions during the 2016-17 school year. The long-term goal is for DPA to develop an after-school computer science and coding program for students at Beers.

- DPA's Founder has raised $1,000,000 to date from CityBridge Education, Education Forward DC, Charter School Growth Fund and New Schools Venture Fund to support a strong foundation for a new innovative middle school for students East of the Anacostia River..