



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pedro Espada Jr.

Rally in Support of Timely Legislation That Would Increase Cap on Charter Schools and Pave Way for Federal Funds

PEDRO ESPADA, JR. January 8, 2010

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With the application deadline approaching for the state to qualify for up to \$700 million in Federal “Race to the Top” funds, New York State Senate Majority Leader Pedro Espada, Jr. was joined by children, parents, teachers and advocates at a rally today to call attention to the urgency for the Senate to pass legislation next week that would increase the cap on charter schools. Increasing the cap on charters would bolster the state’s chances of receiving competitive Federal grant funding.

Senate Majority Leader Espada is sponsoring proposed legislation with Senate President Pro Tempore Malcolm A. Smith that would increase the cap on charter schools. The Senate must pass this bill next Monday or Tuesday when it convenes for session to have legislation in place when the state makes application for the Race to the Top Federal grants. The application deadline for these funds is January 19th.

“As a cash-strapped state in the throes of an economic crisis, with 40% of our budget set aside for education, it would be irresponsible for us as elected officials to turn our backs on this unprecedented opportunity created by President Obama,” Sen. Espada said during the

afternoon rally at Bronx Community Charter School in the Fordham section of the Bronx. “Increasing the cap on charter schools, from 200 to 400, would place the state in a competitive position for obtaining its share of Race to the Top funds, which would benefit children not just in public charter schools, but in all public schools. It will also clear, in a very significant way, the long waiting list of parents and children seeking charter school enrollment.”

Approximately 40,000 students applied last year for 8,500 seats in New York City charter schools.

“The Senate is committed to putting New York in the best position possible to win the Race to the Top,” said Senate President Pro Tempore Smith. “Especially during difficult economic times, we must use every tool at our disposal to bring in federal funding and deliver upon the promise of a quality education. Charter schools have an extraordinary track record of success, and to continue that record we must also commit to greater accountability and transparency whenever public dollars are being spent. I thank Senator Espada for his leadership on this issue and his commitment to a sound education for our children.”

Sen. Espada, a former public school teacher on the elementary and high school levels, said charters help close the achievement gap, improve the high school graduation rate, and assure greater educational opportunity, which he called fundamental to the success of children as productive citizens and future leaders.

“For too many decades, lack of options and creativity has set up our children for failure. We have a unique opportunity to double the number of charter schools, and double the number of children – especially Hispanic and African American children – who would have the option of attending charters,” Sen. Espada said. “This would alleviate class size issues and overcrowding and help our children succeed.”

Sen. Espada said research data derived from studies performed by think tanks, such as the Center for Research on Education Outcomes, supports an increase in the charter school cap. “Studies show that Hispanic and African American students, and those in low-income families, perform significantly better academically, particularly in math and reading, in charter school environments,” he said, noting that parents and charter advocates agree.

“President Obama wants parents to have more educational options for their children,” said Kristina Catalan, a co-chair of the Community Council of Bronx Community Charter School, a charter elementary school with 150 students in kindergarten through second grade. “Bronx children attending our school, now in its second year, have experienced tremendous academic benefits from having access to this option.”

Added Sasha Wilson, co-director of Bronx Community Charter School, “The longer children remain on charter waiting lists, the longer they are being denied the high quality education that charters offer. Legislation that increases the cap on charter schools will open the door to a better education to children throughout the state.”

Advocates stress that the legislature must pass charter school reforms in a matter of days if the state has any chance of securing \$700 million in desperately needed Race to the Top dollars.

“This would also answer the call of tens of thousands of school children from the Bronx to Buffalo whose parents have chosen charters, but have been shut out by a law that places an artificial cap on good schools,” said James Merriman, CEO of the New York City Charter School Center.

“Numerous studies have shown that charter schools serve the neediest students in the neediest communities of our state. President Obama has called for serious reforms in

education, including the expansion of charter schools. The State Legislature can take action that will answer the President's call," said Bill Phillips, President of the New York State Charter Schools Association.

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