



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Velmanette Montgomery

Senator Montgomery's Charter School Letter

VELMANETTE MONTGOMERY February 5, 2010

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Dear 18th Senate District Neighbor:

Thank you for sharing your views with me regarding the delivery and funding of quality education. I am committed to helping our children achieve positive educational outcomes and working to secure the necessary federal and state resources to accomplish these goals.

With this goal in mind, my colleagues in the Senate and Assembly advanced a charter school bill that sought to place our state in the best possible position to win a **maximum \$700 million federal education financing award** by submitting a timely and complete *Race to The Top* (RTTT) application.

I am pleased to report that New York met the application deadline, which qualifies us to compete for these very vital federal dollars. If the application is successful, the funding award will be used, in part, to reduce the achievement gap that currently exists in schools as well as to develop and retain strong teachers and principals, factors that are necessary to building a strong foundation for successful schools. The recipients of the funding award will be announced in **April 2010**.

New York's eligibility for this competitive grant would have been enhanced had the Legislature been able to pass meaningful charter school reform legislation. **Unfortunately, this action was stymied due to strong opposition from the Governor, Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Klein.**

The Governor proposed his own version of charter school reform, which the Legislature thought lacked a number of important elements. In comparing the two bills, there are three key points that were not included in the Governor's bill: **transparency and accountability, oversight** and **equal access** to charter schools by all students.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SENATE/ASSEMBLY

CHARTER SCHOOL REFORM BILL

The Senate bill provides greater transparency and accountability by:

- Prohibiting for-profit operators;

- Requiring oversight of the charter lottery process by the State Education Department that would have also been subject to the open meetings law;
- Requiring the submission of an annual report on the ongoing efforts to recruit and retain high-need students;
- Mandating the posting of annual report findings on the charter school's website, transmitted to local newspaper and made available to the public at board meetings;
- Making board meetings public and held at the location of the charter school; and
- Requiring charter school board members, officers and employees to comply with codes of ethics and conflict of interest prohibitions, a requirement that is currently followed by public schools.

The Senate bill requires more oversight by:

- Subjecting charter schools to audits by the Comptroller at his discretion; and
- Implementing a new *Request for Proposal* (RFP) process for authorizing new charters. Under this new approval process, the Board of Regents and the SUNY Board of Trustees would work collaboratively to issue the RFP.

The Senate bill provides equal access to education opportunities by:

- Requiring a common application for students applying to charter schools, available in languages other than English and reflective of communities' diverse cultural and ethnic composition;

- Providing a mechanism for parental input in deciding the placement of charter schools in existing public school buildings; and
- Equalizing the health and safety standards for public schools as well as charter schools.

I will keep you apprised as negotiations continue on charter school reform and report to you on the outcome of New York's RTT application for federal education funding.

In the meantime, I look forward to receiving your communications on education matters that are important to you and your family.

Sincerely,

Velmanette Montgomery

18th Senate District