



New York Charter Schools Association Testimony on the Fiscal Year 2022 Executive Budget

Submitted to the New York State Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Elementary Education

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Chairwoman Mayer, Chairman Benedetto and distinguished members of the Senate and Assembly, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Yomika Bennett. I am the Executive Director of the New York Charter Schools Association (NYCSA), an advocacy organization that represents the interests of public charter schools across New York State including their students, families and staff.

The Association's mission is to support and expand high quality public charter schools in New York State. Ultimately, the work we do is in the service of children and families. As the advocacy group for charter schools across New York, representing charter schools large and small, upstate and downstate, independent and network-managed, we understand the urgency and need to support all public schools in a context of collaboration – never more so than during these past difficult months. Today marks the 334th day of the COVID-19 pandemic's grip on New York State. During this time, schools across the state have worked tirelessly to support students' families by providing meals, drop-in child care resources, access to technology and more. In addition, in many cases, charter schools offered in-person instruction.

As we look ahead to the next school year, post-COVID-19 recovery is the primary focus. Supporting students' return to schools safely and ready to engage with their friends, peers and teachers will be a priority. Equity in resources to help achieve successful recovery for all students regardless of race or zip code will also be priority. We trust that charter school families can count on your support to help ensure equity and a successful recovery for students when – we all hope – they return to their classrooms next fall.

EDUCATIONAL FUNDING

The New York Charter Schools Association supports Governor Cuomo's proposal to increase education funding by \$2.1 billion. While we would prefer state aid to be held at least to last year's level and that federal aid awarded last year be provided in addition to state aid, rather than to offset a decrease, we understand the fiscal realities. To that end, we support the call for additional federal funding to address the unique damage that has occurred to the New York economy as a result of the pandemic. We are leading an effort, #FundNYSchools, to underscore the necessity of federal aid and to help ensure New York's fair share of funding. We request that as you negotiate the final terms of the budget funding parity is maintained for all public schools, upstate and downstate, district and charter. A public school student deserves an equitable level of resources regardless of which type of public school attended or where the school is located. Additionally, it is time to consider whether the district-charter pass through funding mechanism for charter schools should be eliminated and charter schools should receive direct funding from the State. The current funding scheme sets up an "us vs them" paradigm between school districts and charter schools. A collaborative study of the potential for streamlined funding should be initiated.

CHARTER SCHOOL FACILITY FUNDING

We are reviewing the potential impacts of the proposal in the Executive Budget to eliminate reimbursement to the City of New York for rental assistance. We do support efforts to facilitate access to more classroom spaces, which is the intent of the proposal. To that end, we urge attention to the need for upstate charter schools to receive equitable access to facility funding. These charter schools are required to pay for their facilities from per pupil operating aid. As a result, upstate charter schools are forced to use money that should go toward instruction and programming for facilities instead. Even though charter schools are public schools, they must ask for charity from foundations and philanthropists to help fund school facility costs. While charter schools should be commended for being able to do more with less, it is unfair to deny facility funding to support students in upstate schools. Lack of facility funding also means charter schools too often cannot secure sufficient space for the schools to grow as needed. This unfairly makes nomads of charter school students when their schools have to move around a city. The anxiety and upheaval students, their families and communities face are caused by the current shortsighted facility funding model. We urge you to address this problem and provide equitable and predictable facility funding for charter schools statewide.

AUTHORIZATION TO RE-ISSUE CHARTERS

We support the Governor's proposal to authorize the re-issuance of charters. This fair proposal will allow educators to found good schools and provide diversity and innovation in education for the benefit of children in the state. With almost 53,000 students on waiting lists to enroll in charters across the state, and a continued commitment to quality and choice, the state's charter authorizers should be encouraged to close schools that are under-performing without eliminating the opportunity for new charters to ever serve students and families again. In addition, we know that Black and Brown students are likely to be more successful in school when educators look like them, understand and respect their culture, and foster culturally responsive and academically rigorous educational spaces. Similarly, attention to fostering anti-racist, culturally responsive workplaces can help attract and retain educators of color. Public charter schools offer the unique and powerful opportunity for people of color to start schools and change the trajectory of education for many Black, Brown and other students of color in New York State. We urge you to facilitate and encourage the establishment of new public charter schools founded by people of color throughout the state.



The Truth About Charter Schools in NYS

The Facts*: 317 schools. 160,00+ students. 90% Black and Latina/Latino/Hispanic. 76% economically disadvantaged. 15% students with disabilities.

The Results*: 34 days of additional learning in reading. 63 additional days of learning in math. “For Black and Hispanic students, the analysis indicated significant academic advantage from charter school enrollment.” “Hispanic charter school students perform at the same level as their white district school peers representing no annual learning gap.” “Charters serve ~6% of public school children but: 21% of US DOE Blue Ribbon Schools in NYS were charter schools.”

Innovative, Specialized and Student Focused School Options: college prep, culturally responsive, dual-language, arts, STEM, over-age/under-accredited, autism, dyslexia and more

Autonomous and Accountable: public; non-profit; small independent and network schools; fair, open enrollment, lottery-based; subject to federal and state fiscal and academic reporting requirements; subject to the open meetings law; re-authorization review required every five years; poor performing schools subject to closure;

* Source: *Every Student Succeeds Act Financial Transparency Requirement: Impact on Charter Schools* New York State Education Department, October 25, 2019
