

The Honorable Tom Wolf
Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
508 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

August 1, 2019

Dear Governor Wolf;

On behalf of the Pennsylvania Coalition of Public Charter Schools (PCPCS), the state's largest and most active organization advocating for both brick-and-mortar and cyber charter schools, and our members, I am writing to you with grave concerns regarding the comments that you made on July 16 about charter schools during a press conference at the Capitol celebrating the increases in education funding included in the 2019-20 budget.

In your remarks, you [expressed concerns regarding cyber charter schools and their accountability, as well as the financial drain that they put on school districts and their academic performance.](#) You also mentioned that you would like to address these concerns related to cyber charter schools, which you referred to as the ["the growing cost of privatization of education in our public schools."](#) Additionally, the [official press release](#) from your press conference claimed that are working to help "school districts struggling with the problem of increasing amounts of school funding siphoned by private cyber and charter schools."

To begin with, I am shocked that you and your staff are unaware that none of Pennsylvania's charter schools (brick-and-mortar or cyber) are private or for-profit institutions...in fact, state law requires that all charter schools in Pennsylvania be nonprofit, public entities. These schools are tuition free, publicly funded, non-sectarian schools that do not discriminate in enrollment practices, are accountable to state and federal regulations as well as they families they serve, and governed by trustees who are public officials. I would have thought that a Governor who has championed public education like you have over the past 4+ years would know better. I believe that you would have a much better understanding of how charter schools operate in Pennsylvania if you took the time to visit a few of them.

In terms of your comments/attacks on cyber charter schools, I again question your knowledge of or preconceived notions about this valuable educational option. Cyber charter schools are schools of choice in Pennsylvania whose demand has continued to increase dramatically over the past few years. Parents actively choose to leave their assigned district schools because they do not meet their children's needs, or have failed their child either academically or from a relationship standpoint. Today, more than 35,000 Pennsylvania students are enrolled in a cyber charter school and their families have chosen this type of school for those reasons. Parents who choose the cyber charter option are not only focused on test scores, but are also looking to enable their children to learn in a flexible environment where they are encouraged, feel safe, and can learn at their own pace and in their own way. There are many families choosing the cyber charter option because their child has difficulties functioning in a traditional school

environment. In many cases, if students did not have a cyber charter school option, they would likely drop out of the traditional public school system and would be excluded from the education process altogether. Pennsylvania cyber charter schools provide a student-focused education model and, focus on serving students that are at risk or in need of an alternative method of education. It is also important to note that the families choosing charter schools in Pennsylvania are taxpayers who pay their fair share so that their children can have access to a quality public education. We know that one-size does not fit all, so why is this strategy being forced on parents and students by policymakers in Harrisburg?

Furthermore, cyber charter schools are a great value and actually save school districts money! For every student who attends a cyber charter school, school districts have additional money to support the students that remain within their buildings. On average, charter schools (brick-and-mortar and cyber) receive just 72 percent of the amount that districts spend. School districts keep the remaining 28 percent that they can use for payments on debt, adult education programs, pre-K programs, transportation costs, and building and ground maintenance. So to say that charters are a [“financial drain”](#) or that there is a problem with [“school funding siphoned”](#) by charters is disingenuous and, frankly, an insult to the thousands of families (your constituents) who have chosen these schools for their children and whose children deserve public dollars to support their education.

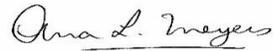
PCPCS certainly believes that cyber charter schools are a positive option for many families. We understand that for many others they may be perfectly satisfied with their neighborhood school. The bottom line is simple: it should be up to the parents (who know their children best) to decide where their child attends school, and these parents deserve to have charter schools as an option. As a lifelong resident of York County, I am sure you are well aware that many families in Pennsylvania do not have the financial means to find a home in the boundaries of a good school district or pay for a private education. A perfect example can be found in your home county where an arbitrary line divides friends and neighbors between the worst district in the county (York City SD) and one of the best (York Suburban SD). The students in York Suburban will most certainly have advantages over their peers in York City based solely on their address, which is why school choice is critical for so many.

Finally, I would like to point out the hypocrisy of your statements about the need to hold charter schools accountable for both their academic performance and their use of taxpayer dollars, when across the state we have many school districts failing both financially and academically (again we don't have to look any further than the York City SD in your home county). Even though some of these districts are under state control, they are still failing their students (York City's students have some of the lowest performance results in the state) and abusing taxpayer resources (I am sure you have seen the reports of dysfunction that have occurred in the Harrisburg SD). If your administration is serious about holding all public schools accountable, then it is time for the focus to be placed on the school districts that you have direct jurisdiction over, which are currently failing thousands of students and taxpayers.

I cordially invite you and your staff to go on a tour of both brick-and-mortar and cyber charter schools with me. I can suggest several schools throughout the state that I know you will be impressed with or could set up a tour of any charter school of your preference.

I look forward to working with you and your administration to ensure that all students receive the quality education that they deserve. Please feel free to contact me with any questions/concerns and/or to set up a tour of charter schools in the commonwealth at (267)884-6335, or at a.meyers@pacharters.org.

Sincerely,



Ana Meyers
Executive Director

- cc. The Honorable Pedro Rivera, Pennsylvania Secretary of Education
- The Honorable Joseph Scarnati, Senate President Pro Tempore
- The Honorable Jake Corman, Senate Majority Leader
- The Honorable Jay Costa, Senate Minority Leader
- The Honorable Patrick Browne, Majority Chairman, Senate Appropriations Committee
- The Honorable Vincent Hughes, Minority Chairman, Senate Appropriations Committee
- The Honorable Wayne Langerholc, Majority Chairman, Senate Education Committee
- The Honorable Andrew Dinniman, Minority Chairman, Senate Education Committee
- The Honorable Mike Turzai, Speaker of the House
- The Honorable Bryan Cutler, House Majority Leader
- The Honorable Frank Dermody, House Minority Leader
- The Honorable Stan Saylor, Majority Chairman, House Appropriations Committee
- The Honorable Matthew Bradford, Minority Chairman, House Appropriations Committee
- The Honorable Curt Sonney, Majority Chairman, House Education Committee
- The Honorable James Roebuck, Minority Chairman, House Education Committee