

## **Governor Wolf's Attack on PA's Public Charter Schools – Talking Points**

Tell Governor Wolf that you **OPPOSE** his attack on charter schools and the students they serve by sending him an email at:

<https://pacharters.salsalabs.org/responsetowolfscharterproposal/index.html>

### **On the proposal:**

- There are aspects of the Governor's proposal that the charter school community agrees with (but we are cautious because the devil is in the details of how this proposal will be rolled out):
  - Ensuring that every public school is held to the same accountability and transparency standards. House Bill 355 (sponsored by Rep. Reese), is supported by the Pennsylvania Coalition of Public Charter Schools (PCPCS) because it would ensure that charter schools and their leaders are held to the same transparency standards as traditional public schools.
  - PCPCS supports a fair and balanced charter school funding commission (similar to what is being proposed by Senator Browne) as the only way to accurately examine the issues faced by both districts and charter schools.
  - Better cyber charter school authorizing on the part of the PA Department of Education – it is rare that PDE acts in a timely manner on any cyber charter school renewals or approvals.
  - A uniform charter school application
- It is outrageous that the Governor will be instructing PDE to institute a “fee for services” for the work that they do to implement the Charter School Law. It is irresponsible for him to require schools to spend taxpayer dollars, earmarked for educating children, to navigate the red tape that politicians and bureaucrats have created. And we question the legality of the Governor “recouping taxpayer costs” spent by PDE on “reviewing applications, processing millions of payments, and legal and administrative support.”
  - How much are they charging districts for the services PDE provides?
  - How much are they charging each teacher and administrator for the processing of their professional development hours and certification?
  - How much will the districts in financial recovery – and have taxpayer-funded receivers – be required to repay the state?
- We question the legality of the Governor's direction to place a moratorium on the creation of new cyber charter schools and cap cyber charter school enrollment. As well as, using executive action to allow school districts to limit student enrollment at brick-and-mortar charter schools

## **On the manner in which the Governor's proposal was crafted and presented:**

- The charter school community was shocked to learn of the Governor's proposal and press conference.
- There was no effort on the part of the Governor to engage PCPCS or any charter schools in the crafting of a proposal that will have drastic effects on the 180 charter schools and the 135,000+ students they educate.
- It is quite telling that the Governor would choose to hold a press conference at the Allentown School District which:
  - Has consistently ranked at the bottom among PA's schools based on student performance;
  - Has significant financial issues (they were bailed out last year in the budget with a no-strings-attached infusion of cash without having to enter financial watch/recover);
  - Has been hostile towards the charter schools they authorize; and
  - [Recently made news](#) because they passed a budget that depends on charter schools voluntarily reducing their tuition rate by 10% (note: they already withhold 32% in deductions)
- If the Governor was truly committed to addressing the issues facing school districts and charter schools, he would have engaged PCPCS and the General Assembly in the last 5 years.
  - Just this past June, 4 charter reform bills were moving through the PA House (House Bills 355, 356, 357 and 358) but the Governor did not actively engage in the negotiations. Instead of using executive actions and drafting new legislation (and creating a public spectacle), the Governor should have collaborated with ALL stakeholders to amend these bills in a way that works for everyone.
- **The Governor, lawmakers and administrators who spoke at the press conference focused on "equity" in how districts and charters are treated and funded. We agree that there is a serious equity issue but unlike the speakers, we believe the system disproportionately benefits school districts.**
  - Charter students get less money for education than traditional-school students. That's "separate and unequal." Let's try to keep this simple: The governor wants to take money away from charter-school families, who already receive less. What's fair about that? Based on PDE's FY18 data, the average revenue per-student at a traditional public school was \$17,531 and \$14,878 at a public charter school. **Charter schools currently receive less – not the same and certainly not more - per-pupil funding than district-operated schools. We are doing more with less already!**
    - Charter schools educate 7.384% of all students in the Commonwealth and receive 6.34% of the revenue.
    - What school districts actually spend on debt service (6.2% of total expenses) is higher than what they pay charter schools (6.04% of total expenses).
    - Traditional school districts spend an average of \$16,434 for each student enrolled. The average payment (Regular and Special Education) for a

traditional school district to a public charter school is \$13,241 per student.

- The average traditional school district's student population is 33.0% economically disadvantaged (ED) but this percentage is 49.7% for cyber charter schools and 66.6% for brick-and-mortar charter schools.
  - School districts spend on average 12.4% of their total expenditures on PSERS and retirement spending compared to the 6.04% they spend on charter schools.
  - State law allows school districts to pocket, on average, 28 percent of a student's per-pupil allotment to cover the "stranded costs" that districts may have when a student chooses a charter school.
  - For example, the Allentown School District, where the Governor held his press conference, gets to keep 32 percent of each charter student's per-pupil allotment which rightfully should flow to the charter to support their education.
- Therefore, if a school district is "losing money to charters" it means that students are unhappy with the education they received at their zoned school district and have chosen to receive a public education at a charter school.

### **On the Governor's hypocrisy:**

- Wolf has been touted as the "education governor" but he only cares about the traditional public education entities for political reasons.
- Governor Wolf has never stepped foot in a charter school during his time as Governor despite numerous invitations over the past 5 years.
- Governor Wolf's proposal only addresses the need for increased accountability for charter schools but what about district schools? There are far more failing (academically and financially) district schools but they aren't held accountable...in fact, Wolf pushes for increased funding for these schools each year.
- Wolf wants to increase state oversight over charter schools but look at what has occurred at the school districts under state control as part of the financial watch/recover. Students in the York City SD are performing the same (or in some instances worse) than before the state takeover. The Harrisburg SD is in the news daily due to their mismanagement...all under the watchful eye of the Wolf Administration.
- Wolf's proposal would disproportionately negatively affect low-income students of color who make up a large portion of charter school enrollment and charter school waitlists.
  - By capping charter school enrollment and growth, Governor Wolf is dooming these children to failing school districts because they do not have the financial means to access a private education.
- Wolf's proposal strips parents of their right to access public school choice

**On the misinformation (and outright lies) presented by the Governor:**

- All charter schools in PA are public schools! Though the governor has [referred to charters as private schools](#) in the past, PA's charter schools are required by law to be public entities.
- Charter school leaders and boards are subject to the same laws and regulations that apply to school district administrators and school boards.
- Private management companies are paid vendors and private companies that provide back-end services to charter schools. Unlike school districts, charters do not have the financial means to hire and maintain bloated front offices to handle the business side of running a school. Also, it is not unusual or inappropriate for a school to pay a private company for services – school districts do this all the time and are not vilified for it.
- Charter schools are not a “cost” and the students they educate are not a burden. This seems to be the sentiment held by many school district leaders which is both inaccurate and disrespectful to the charter families who pay federal, state and local taxes that fund our public education system.