



## **PCPCS 2022 Legislative Agenda to Complete the 2021-2022 PA General Assembly's Legislative Session**

The 2021-2022 Legislative Session for Pennsylvania's General Assembly continues as 2022 promises to be a key year and another critical juncture in the lives of thousands of K-12 students throughout the Commonwealth. For the schoolchildren enrolled in our public education system, it is critical that scholastic options regularly reflect opportunities that best suit their needs, especially now that our children are going through a fifth semester where COVID-19 has impacted their academic well-being.

The COVID-19 pandemic has now touched 3 different school years, starting with the closures of schools in March 2020. With this long-term impact on the daily experiences of our children also comes a need for long-term perspective on policy initiatives that will reverse the impact of COVID-19 on the academic, social, emotional, and mental health of our charter school community across Pennsylvania. Considering that our community is disproportionately constituted of students and educators from underserved communities, we must ensure that we are taking a thoughtful, visionary approach to how policies can empower Pennsylvania families and educators. It is with this perspective that the Pennsylvania Coalition of Public Charter Schools advances its daily work, consistent with our vision: *"To serve as a catalyst for educational excellence through opportunity, innovation, and unity."*

We advance a highlight of policy and legislative goals. It is our hope that current legislators and our governor as well as prospective legislators and gubernatorial candidates are listening to the will of Pennsylvania parents and their schoolchildren as they continue to seek and engage new options for K-12 education. It is our goal to promote and successfully implement our work throughout public education in Pennsylvania by *"...establishing working relationships with other education reform organizations, professional organizations and government agencies seeking to improve the quantity and quality of educational choices for parents."*

**Streamlining and standardizing public charter school oversight that creates fairness and consistency for charter school operators, and support for charter authorizers. This includes:**

1. Establishing regional, independent authorizers for PA's public brick-and-mortar charter schools that incorporates local control, and unbiased community, business and higher education representatives.
2. Establishing a standard charter school application and rubric for evaluation for approval and renewal of charters, thus prohibiting authorizers from demanding additional items that are atypical, unnecessary and overly burdensome.
3. Codifying a standard renewal and amendment process for charter schools that holds all stakeholders in the process accountable to a timeline of milestones for when charter

authorizers (local school districts and the PA Department of Education) must engage the charter schools, review their materials, and make decisions on their charters.

4. Establishing a new process of nominating and confirming members of the Charter Appeal Board (CAB) that grants equal input from both the majority and minority parties in both the PA House and PA Senate along with the governor, thus ensuring a balanced, effective and efficient governance in the appeals process.
5. Establishing an annual report available to all Pennsylvania families on school choice options aside from local district schools, including a list of viable public charter school options within a 10-mile radius of each Pennsylvania child that is of K-12 age.

**Ensuring fairness and equity for ALL of PA's public school students. This includes:**

1. Fighting against funding cuts for all public school students, both in school districts and charter schools.
2. Ensuring that every student receives the full amount of their per-pupil allocations based on the formulas established in state law by establishing a direct pay system for public charter schools from the PA Department of Education to the schools that students actually attend.
3. Re-prioritizing nearly \$950 million of the \$1.7 billion left over from COVID relief to
  - Provide all Pennsylvania students with the social, academic, emotional, and mental resources (e.g., counselors, school psychologists, and tutors) that will help them heal from the effects of the pandemic and prepare to do the necessary catch-up work to close the pandemic learning gaps we are witnessing across the Commonwealth;
  - Provide all Pennsylvania educators the social, emotional, and mental resources necessary to help them heal from the effects of the pandemic;
  - Fund a 2-year Teacher Appreciation Tax Credit to reflect the extra strain teachers have had with COVID, with a tiered system that benefits the lowest-paid teachers the most with the credit being capped at \$75k/annual salary per educator;
  - Fund the closing of the gap between what students at public district schools receive and what public charter school students receive, as public charter school students receive thousands less annually despite disproportionately being from underserved and lower-income communities;
  - Ensure that all K-12 public schools are afforded all of the COVID-19 equipment and resources necessary to support continued in-person instruction for charter schools and district schools, as students accustomed to in-person instruction thrive best when this academic option is not interrupted.

4. Prioritizing the \$500 million of new ESSER funding to ensure that parents are empowered with the best scholastic fits for their children, which will

- Prioritize new and struggling schools as recipients of funding to ensure that they can continue their founding missions to serve at-risk Pennsylvania schoolchildren, including special provisions for public charter schools that disproportionately served underserved communities and are currently operating on their initial charter;
- Create new gateways for aspiring teachers to enter the education workplace and find support in their endeavors to earn teaching certifications;
- Foster innovations that will prompt more improvements across school types within Pennsylvania schools and online opportunities across like-minded state lines;
- Supply ESSER funding across all school types with a formula that prioritizes giving to schools that disproportionately service disenfranchised communities (e.g., district, charter, and non-public);
- Ensure that school districts are prohibited from deducing federally-funded expenses from public charter school funding;
- Provide continued social services including academic, mental and emotional health supports for school communities to continue to combat the invisible impacts that COVID-19 has wrought on Pennsylvania schools.

5. Lifting any imposed enrollment caps on public charter schools in the effort to expand academic options for parents throughout Pennsylvania and exhaust wait lists for all charter schools by the 2025-2026 school year.

6. Establishing a standard enrollment application for public charter school students.

7. Fixing a discriminatory flaw in the PA School Code that does not allow public charter school students to take part in dual enrollment programs. All public school students – district and charter – must equally have a range of academic opportunities to further their education, both in K-12 and beyond.

8. Fixing a flaw in the PA School Code by providing facilities funding for charter schools as roughly 1 in 10 public school students in Pennsylvania attended a charter school in 2020-2021.

9. Providing additional financial training for school boards and charter boards on how to spend generational resource opportunities by way of statewide and federal COVID funding to ensure that those dollars are leveraged to do the most good for students first and foremost.

**Strengthening accountability and rewarding innovation across PA's public education system. This includes:**

1. Extending charter agreements for multi-termed public charter schools from 5-year renewal agreements to 10-year renewal agreements so they can focus on the education of schoolchildren, not the bureaucracy of education.
2. Increasing accountability for charter school management organizations and codifying accountability measures that PA's public charter schools have already self-imposed.
3. Reversing the trend of teachers leaving the education world by providing smoother pathways to the classroom for entry level teachers and PA certification by experienced teachers and those moving into the Commonwealth.
4. Ensuring the virtual education offerings available to PA's public education students are evaluated based on the same high standards. This can be achieved by calling on the PA Department of Education to collect and make publicly available the student achievement and financial data for virtual schools operating within school districts, like they report PA's cyber charter school data.
5. Advancing initiatives that allow for learning experiences within all public schools to be more readily accessible to public school students regardless of their enrolled school.
6. Leveraging the experience and expertise of PA's public charter schools to improve education for ALL students by allowing for public charter schools to be vendors.
7. Requiring the same standards and trainings for school board and charter board leaders, including on conflicts-of-interest, ethics, code of conduct, public financing, etc.