

April 25, 2017

Dear Members of the New Jersey State Legislature,

Every public school child has the right to an education, one that is sufficiently and equitably funded and serves his or her needs. For too many years, New Jersey has been unable to fully fund the 2008 School Funding Reform Act (SFRA). According to the New Jersey Association of School Administrators, this underinvestment is estimated to be approximately \$10 billion since SFRA was enacted.¹ In the current fiscal year, 379 districts are receiving less state aid than required under the formula.² Underfunding has been detrimental to the ability of many schools to properly meet the educational needs of their students. This financial pressure is compounded in districts and schools experiencing exponential enrollment growth.

The attention and recognition of the unacceptable status quo of school funding is merited and overdue. New Jersey's families do not have the time or luxury to wait for the right political moment to tackle this historical problem. There is an urgent need to act now to make progress towards fully funding the formula and we urge you to seize the opportunity to do so in this budget cycle. This will likely require phasing-in new funding and some additional adjustments or offsets to reflect the reality that all districts are not funded fairly or equitably, but we should be having that conversation.

The convoluted state of school funding distribution can be fixed and the momentum exists to do just that. Divisive rhetoric that seeks to scapegoat public charter school communities for the complex funding problems we face is nothing more than a frivolous distraction that paints an inaccurate picture of the funding landscape. Blaming the current school funding inequities on charter school communities representing less than 3 percent of all public schools in the State only takes us further away from what *should* be the ultimate goal: adequate funding for every public school child in New Jersey.

Public charter schools serve more than 46,000 students, with more than 20,000 students on waiting lists. They are an integral part of the public school system and they are part of the public school solution for tens of thousands of families across New Jersey. Public charter schools are serving their communities and doing so with extraordinary success. In fact, Stanford University's Center for Research on Education Outcomes, ranked Newark's charter sector second in the nation out of 41 urban districts in both reading and math achievement impact.³ To single out public charter schools and advocate for the financial damage of a public school option that is working for families is wrong. A statewide school funding solution should not be to the detriment of 46,000 children.

To see organizations—that purportedly represent public school families—blame public school communities for what is a statewide policy problem is not only disheartening, but also unproductive.

¹ <http://newton.innersync.com/superintendent/documents/3FundingFairnessJCPS1-17-17.pptx>

² <http://www.philly.com/philly/education/NJ-school-districts-worry-about-losing-out-in-latest-Trenton-funding-fight.html>

³ <https://urbancharters.stanford.edu/download/Urban%20Charter%20School%20Study%20Report%20on%2041%20Regions.pdf>

Instead of pitting families and schools against one another, public school parents, communities, policymakers and education leaders must work together to ensure that every child has sufficient resources to learn, grow and thrive in school and in life.

Sincerely,

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