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State Charter Association Agrees with Governor Murphy That We Must Support All Great Schools Including High-Performing Charter Schools

Association calls on NJDOE to Reverse Recent Decisions that Remove Low-Income Students of Color Out of High-Quality Schools and Approve Pending Expansion Requests for High-Performing Schools

NEW JERSEY - Yesterday, at Governor Murphy's press conference, in response to a reporter question, the Governor noted that he supports "high-quality top performing school[s]" regardless of the school type - charter, district, magnet, or private. As Governor Murphy correctly stated, "we want to educate kids the very best way possible in America and that's what we are committed to."

The New Jersey Public Charter Schools Association (NJPCSA), on behalf of the tens of thousands of students and families they represent, and in keeping with the Governor's comments from yesterday, is urging the Acting Commissioner Angelica Allen-McMillan, Ed.D., and the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) to reverse recent public charter school expansion denials of high performing schools and to immediately approve the remaining pending expansion plan requests for high-performing charter schools.

Last week, the Acting Commissioner renewed twenty-three public charter schools which will allow 10,000 students to remain at schools that are meeting rigorous academic and financial accountability benchmarks and providing students with the education that they deserve.

However, at the same time, the Commissioner issued a set of decisions on charter school expansions that do not align with the Governor's commitment to support high performing charter school decisions and to evaluate expansion and renewal decisions based on their merits. Several Tier 1 charter schools, the top NJDOE designation for evaluating charter performance, were denied the opportunity to serve more students. These decisions will displace hundreds of low-income families of color from attending high-performing schools across New Jersey: from Trenton to Paterson, Newark, and beyond.

"We appreciate and agree with the Governor's commitment to supporting high performing public schools of all types. Excellent public charter schools strengthen New Jersey's public-school system. Unfortunately, the Commissioner of Education's decisions do not align with this goal based on a comprehensive performance-based review. The decisions by DOE are deeply harmful to our most vulnerable communities and must be reversed to ensure students can stay in the schools where they are excelling academically and feel supported by their teachers and friends," said **Harry Lee, President of NJPCSA.**

TJ Best, NJPCSA's Director of Government Affairs, added, "In places like Paterson, Newark, Trenton, and New Brunswick, high-performing charter schools that stepped up for families during the pandemic and kept their classrooms open are being denied modest expansion requests that are needed to ensure families stay in these life-changing schools. We urge the NJDOE to allow

academic outcomes to drive decisions so that students are not ripped away from their school communities that they've been a part of and thriving in for years."

"Throughout the pandemic, our school has done a remarkable job of providing not only for my child's academic needs, but also supporting her emotional well-being," said **Danielle Burgess, a parent of a ninth grader at Achievers Early College Prep in Trenton.** "The DOE's decision to cut off the school in ninth grade is devastating and doesn't make sense. We implore them to reconsider so that my daughter can continue her academic progress in the school that she loves."

Status on New Jersey's 2022 Annual Charter School Review

As part of its annual review, NJDOE has made a series of decisions regarding the future of thousands of New Jersey families. Some of the highest performing charter schools in the state were among the denied schools. These decisions will upend the continuity of education students in our urban communities desperately need.

- In Newark, the NJDOE decided to take away Tier 1 designated Philip's Academy Charter School's high school program next year. They were set to admit students into their ninth grade for the first time this coming September. Now, there are 42 eighth graders across Newark, East Orange, and Irvington that will not have a Philip's Academy high school to attend. In fact, the school's Newark residents will have about one week to scramble and jump into the common enrollment system to find an alternative while East Orange and Irvington residents have even fewer school options.
- In Trenton, Paul Robeson Charter School, a Tier 1 charter school, was recognized by NJDOE in 2020 as a Lighthouse District which awards schools for their academic gains and innovative practices. Yet last week it was denied by the Commissioner the ability to serve additional Trenton students in Grades K-2.
- Also in Trenton, Achievers Early College Prep Charter School, an early college high school that is outperforming Trenton district and has demonstrated strong academic growth over the last two years was approved to serve Grades 6-9 but not the remaining grades through high school, effectively cutting off opportunities for their students and putting the school on the path to failure. Ninety students currently in ninth grade will be displaced due to this reckless decision.
- Community Charter School of Paterson, which consistently outperforms the local school district and has deep roots in the city, was also denied expansion into high school. The decision will displace 100 students who no longer have an opportunity to attend the school that is providing excellent educational opportunities.

There are several charter school expansion decisions that are still pending by NJDOE. Three of these charter school amendment applications currently under review are Tier 1 charter schools.

- In Newark, there is simply no rational explanation for why North Star Academy, one of the highest performing charter schools in the country, would be denied a modest expansion given the clear demand from families. Last year, North Star Academy Charter School was inexplicably denied an expansion request and significantly scaled back its request to NJDOE for this cycle.
- In New Brunswick and Franklin, Central Jersey College Prep won the Blue Ribbon Award in 2016 and is listed as one of the best high schools in the country according to US News for five years in a row. Despite the clear educational benefits the school provides, and the 1,500

students waiting to attend, NJDOE denied the school's modest expansion request two years in a row. Central Jersey College Prep decided to significantly scale back its request to NJDOE for this cycle.

- In Plainfield, Barack Obama Charter School, a Tier 1 charter school, was recently recognized by the NJDOE as a Lighthouse District for demonstrating measurable progress towards equitable outcomes in increasing post-secondary enrollment, diversity in the teacher workforce, course enrollment, and disciplinary outcomes. They are seeking to add a middle school to serve more students in Plainfield.

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About Public Charter Schools

Charter schools are tuition-free public schools run by non-profit organizations open to all students regardless of zip code, race/ethnicity or ability level. Charter schools operate with more flexibility than traditional public schools in exchange for increased accountability and high financial, academic and managerial standards by an authorizer. A "charter" is a contract with an authorizer detailing the school's mission, program, performance goals and methods of assessments. In New Jersey, the New Jersey Department of Education serves as the sole authorizer and oversees all public charter schools in the state.

About New Jersey Public Charter Schools Association

The New Jersey Public Charter Schools Association (NJPCSA) is the non-profit membership association that represents the state's charter school community and, by extension, charter school students and their parents. There are currently 87 charter schools in New Jersey serving approximately 60,000 students. We are committed to advancing quality public education for New Jersey's children through the cultivation of excellent public charter schools.