

Statement from Harry Lee, President & CEO, New Jersey Public Charter Schools Association on Acting Commissioner of Education's Decision to Close Newark's University Heights Charter School with Two Weeks Left in School

NEW JERSEY – "On June 1, the families of nearly 700 students learned that their school, University Heights Charter School (UCHS), a pre-K-8 public charter school in Newark, will close in two weeks. As a result of this unjustifiably late notification by the Acting Commissioner of Education, families are left in a lurch and are frantically scrambling to find an alternative school for their children for the summer and fall. Since 2006, UCHS has served the Newark community with support from Bethany Baptist Church, one of the city's largest and oldest Black churches. UCHS was set to deliver a robust summer enrichment program starting on July 6. Due to this closure decision, parents are left to fend for themselves with very little time. The lack of care, compassion, and planning for such a high-stakes decision that impacts so many low-income families is unconscionable.

Public charter schools are the most accountable public schools in New Jersey and must meet rigorous academic and financial benchmarks in order to operate in New Jersey and we support this high level of accountability. However, the Murphy Administration's decision making on public charter schools has both hurt and disrespected Black and Latino parents in Newark and throughout New Jersey. Four months ago, the Acting Commissioner of Education denied modest expansion requests of some of the highest performing charter schools not only in New Jersey but in the country. If those seats were granted, and this closure decision announced earlier, these families could have enrolled in high performing public charter schools in Newark for next school year. Instead, this last-minute closure will create chaos for UCHS families as they scramble to find a school for next year.

The charter community stands ready to work with the affected families to try to find placements in charter schools for these students. We implore the Murphy Administration to work with the charter sector in Newark - some of the best charter schools ever created - to serve more students so that Newark parents can exercise their right for self-determination for their children."

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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.