

New Jersey Public Charter Schools Association Legislative Priorities

JANUARY 2022

Our goal at the New Jersey Public Charter Schools Association (NJPCSA) is to advocate in collaboration with our public charter school supporters for the right policy conditions that allow for greater educational opportunities for all children. We do this to ensure public school students and public charter schools are treated fairly with equitable access to resources.

EQUITABLE FACILITIES FUNDING FOR PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL STUDENTS AND SCHOOLS

Every child in New Jersey deserves to go to a school in a safe, clean and welcoming school building, particularly students in high-need districts.

PROBLEM

Nearly **60,000** public school students are being denied fair access to facilities. Public charter schools, which educate one in five students in low-income districts, are shut out of state funding for school facilities due to antiquated state laws and regulations.

Since 2001, the State has provided **\$13 billion** to districts for school construction – public charter schools received an allocation of **\$5 million**.

Charter schools, on average, spend **\$1,500** per student for school buildings – money that would otherwise be spent on teachers or students in the classroom

High performing public charter schools can only be renewed for a **five-year term**, limiting their ability to access capital for facilities.

The pandemic has created a **financial crisis** for public schools as student enrollment fluctuates and schools upgrade their facilities to ensure safe and healthy schools.

SOLUTION

Remove the existing provision in the **Charter Law** which prohibits charter schools from using State dollars (per pupil dollars) to construct a facility.

Permit the State to grant up to **10-year renewals** to high performing charter schools so that they can gain access to capital for facilities projects.

Allow for a **right of first refusal** for charter schools to acquire or lease at no cost an underutilized public school facility or property.

Allow charter schools to **access state facility funding programs** that are available to all other public schools, particularly in our highest need communities.

FAIR PER PUPIL FUNDING FOR PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL STUDENTS AND SCHOOLS

Every child in New Jersey deserves to go to a school that is funded equitably so that public school students are treated the same regardless of school model (public charter or traditional district school) their families chose.

PROBLEM

On average, public charter schools across the state receive **\$4,600 less per student** compared to traditional district schools. There is wide variation based on district with some public charter schools getting 50% of district funding while others receive closer to 90%.

SOLUTION

Revise the **School Funding Reform Act (SFRA)** so that public charter school students receive the same funding as traditional public school students, including access to adjustment aid.

FLEXIBILITY FOR PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS TO BE CREATIVE IN MEETING STUDENT NEEDS

Charter school leaders and educators should be empowered to be creative in meeting student needs with operational autonomy and freedom from overly burdensome regulation.

Public charter schools have the opportunity to use their autonomy to find creative solutions in areas such as curriculum, governance, leadership and operations. While highlighting and sharing best practices already happening in charter schools, we must continue to advocate for more autonomy so that charter schools can pursue the innovative ideas to best meet the unique needs of all learners.

PROBLEM

State charter school law and regulations **restrict the ability of charter schools** to be flexible and creative to meet student, family and community needs.

New Jersey makes it extremely difficult to become a public school educator while the pandemic has **exacerbated the staffing crisis** in our schools.

SOLUTION

Create additional **pathways for certification** in all teaching areas and increase the diversity in our teacher workforce.

Remove **unnecessary residency requirements** to become an principal, teacher or paraprofessional in New Jersey.