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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Public Charter School Parents, Students and Staff Call on Murphy Administration to Reverse Decisions Following High-Performing Charter School Expansion Denials

TRENTON, NJ - Feb. 23, 2022 - In response to the recent expansion denials of top-performing public charter schools, including one of the best charter schools in the nation, parents, students and staff from New Jersey's public charter schools alongside the New Jersey Public Charter Schools Association (NJPCSA) hosted a press conference Feb. 23, at Achievers Early College Prep Charter School, one of the schools denied expansion, to express their concerns over these decisions. Participants representing the impacted schools had one message to Governor Murphy: #letmychildlearn at the school they love and we trust as parents to help them achieve their dreams.

"Governor Murphy has said he is committed to supporting high-performing and high-quality charter schools in New Jersey, but his administration's denials do not reflect these ideals," said **Harry Lee, President of NJPCSA**. "This year, 77% of seats requested by high quality, top performing charter schools based on NJDOE's own designation for top charter school performance were denied. Public Charter schools are an important asset in the public education system and we hope that his administration rectifies this situation for hundreds of students and families."

"The charter schools denied expansion were important resources for their respective communities during the outbreak of COVID-19," said **TJ Best, Government Affairs Director of NJPCSA**. "These schools mostly educate Black and Latino students and give parents more options for their child's education. We urge the Department of Education to listen to our families and students and allow them to make the best decision for their children's educational careers."

Earlier this month, Governor Murphy and Acting Department of Education Commissioner Angelica Allen-McMillan, Ed.D. denied the expansion to seven high-performing public charter schools in Paterson, Newark and Trenton- mostly educating students of color and from low-income families. Many of these schools operated grade spans that these expansions would have allowed the students to remain at the school throughout their educational careers. With these denials, parents and students are worried, having to find other schools to attend and students will have to adjust to a new school environment midway through their education and during an ongoing pandemic.

"My two sons are in different charter schools in different counties since my oldest was unable to continue his charter school education at his previous school. I drive nearly three hours every day transporting my son to a charter school so I can feel comfortable

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with my child's education," **said Ana Simonelli, a parent of a Hudson Arts and Science Charter student.** "Like all parents, I am just trying to look out for the best interests of my children. The mental anguish the school transition caused my son was heartbreaking to watch as a parent. I hope the governor will grant all charter schools expansion plans to prevent further harm on students. The state should be there to help, not be a roadblock. We parents have made sacrifices and we will not stop fighting for our children."

"My child was supposed to be one of the first high school graduates of Achievers," **said Sonia Gonzalez, a parent of an Achievers Early College Prep Charter School student.** "My daughter now has to get accustomed to a new high school for the rest of her high school career. Her learning will be extremely disrupted by this denial. I urge Governor Murphy and Acting Education Commissioner Allen-McMillan to rethink these decisions with the children in mind."

A new statewide campaign (www.letmychildlearn) was launched at the press conference to provide families with the ability to share their perspective with the Governor directly while also ensuring that New Jersey leaders and lawmakers learn more about the important role that public charter schools play in the public education system through a statewide digital ad campaign.

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.

Every child in the state of New Jersey should have the opportunity to attend a high-quality public school that best meets their needs and helps them reach their full potential. Denying high performing charter schools to expand not only disrupts the education of a child but hinders the opportunity to give children of all races an option to receive excellent educational opportunities at no cost.

"Governor Murphy is taking me away from my high school," **said Mya Harrison, a ninth-grade student at Achievers Early College Prep Charter School.** "Achievers is my home and I am no longer able to finish my academic career here. Now, I need to find a new high school to attend. How is this fair to me?"

The faculty, parents and students who participated in the press conference are hoping today's press conference opens up a discussion with Governor Murphy and Acting Education Commissioner Allen-McMillan to reverse the denials made. If the administration's decision still stands, the charter schools are planning a rally for early March to coincide with the Governor's budget presentation to the state legislature.

"We are fully committed to having Governor Murphy and his administration listen to our students' and families' frustration," **said Efe Odeleye, Co-Founder and Co-Director of Achievers Early College Prep Charter School.** "Our charter school specifically was approved in 2017 with the plans in mind to educate all high school students. These

denials can literally alter these kids' lifepaths. They deserve better and they deserve to be heard."

NJPCA 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 nearly 60,000 students. The recent expansion denials put education in jeopardy for hundreds of students. For more information about this campaign, visit www.letmychildlearn.org.

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 nearly 60,000 students. We are committed to advancing quality public education for New Jersey's children through the cultivation of excellent public charter schools. The Association seeks to influence legislative and policy environments, leverage collective advocacy, and provide resources to support our members in developing and operating high quality, public charter schools.

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