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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NJPCSA Hosts 'Charters Change Lives' Gala to Honor Excellence in New Jersey's Public Charter Schools

Mercer County Commissioner Samuel Frisby and Acting Education Commissioner Kevin Dehmer participated as speakers

TRENTON, NJ - April 19, 2024 - The New Jersey Public Charter Schools Association (NJPCSA) hosted its annual gala on Thursday, April 18th, at the Hyatt Regency in New Brunswick, NJ. The gala featured Acting Commissioner of Education Kevin Dehmer and Mercer County Commissioner Samuel Frisby. Assemblywoman Dawn Fantasia (Morris, Sussex and Warren Counties) and Assemblyman Avi Schnall (Monmouth and Ocean Counties) also attended the event. Over 250 educators, supporters, and advocates gathered to celebrate the transformative work of public charter schools, which currently serve over 62,000 students across 85 schools in New Jersey.

The event, themed 'Charters Change Lives,' followed a professional development session titled 'Charter School Authorization: Current Trends on Renewal and More' which provided teachers, board members, and public charter school supporters with the latest insights for navigating public charter school operations and renewals.

"Last night we came together to celebrate New Jersey's public charter schools and the work they are doing to reshape futures and change lives," **stated Harry Lee, President and CEO of NJPCSA.** "Even in the face of significant challenges, our schools are exceeding expectations and we couldn't be more proud. Our commitment to all of New Jersey's students remains strong and we will continue to ensure that every child has access to a high-quality education regardless of zip code, income, or ability level."

The event's keynote speaker, Mercer County Commissioner Samuel Frisby, discussed the ongoing achievements of public charter schools and the need for sustained governmental support.

"Public charter schools consistently deliver excellent educational opportunities to students and families," **stated Samuel Frisby, Mercer County Commissioner.** "To maintain and expand access to high-quality education, we need sustained commitment from everyone - supporters, educators, and entire communities. Crucially, we must back

these efforts with support from elected officials at every level of government, particularly in securing the necessary facilities funding that enables these schools to effectively serve our communities.”

Earlier this month, the New Jersey Department of Education published its annual [School Performance Report](#), revealing that public charter schools are leading the way in student growth, comprising half of the top ten districts in mathematics and showing strong performance in English language arts. Additionally, 21 public charter schools are ranked in the top 15% statewide. These findings highlight the crucial role that public charter schools play in enhancing educational opportunities, particularly for Black and Latino students who are significantly [outperforming their peers](#) in key academic areas.

"Public charter schools are an integral part of the educational landscape in New Jersey," **said Acting Commissioner of Education Kevin Dehmer.** "We salute the hard work and dedication of educators, students, and families involved in New Jersey's charter schools and the Department of Education looks forward to continuing to support high quality charter schools in the Garden State."

During the gala, Ketty Wilcox of Roseville Community Charter School in Newark, and Maria Cruz of LEAP Academy University Charter School in Camden, were honored as the 2024 Charter Advocates of the Year. iLearn Schools was celebrated as the 2024 Charter School Champion of the Year.

"Receiving this award deepens my gratitude for how much public charter schools have transformed our lives," **shared parent advocate and award winner Ketty Wilcox.** "Before we came to Roseville Community Charter School, my sons, who have special needs, were simply not thriving. Now, thanks to the support and opportunities the school provides, my entire family is flourishing. This is why I'm so committed to this cause."

"I've always believed deeply in the power of public charter schools because I've seen with my own eyes the incredible difference they make for families in our city," **shared LEAP's Director of Parent Engagement and award winner Maria Cruz.** "In Camden, where I've been part of this transformative journey, the success stories of our students speak volumes. Public charter schools truly change lives, and I'm a witness to that every day."

"Our public charter schools thrive because of the advocacy and tireless efforts of leaders like Ketty Wilcox and Maria Cruz," **stated Danielle West, School Leader of Queen City Academy Charter School and NJPCSA Board President.** "We celebrate their accomplishments, and our progress would not be possible without their commitment to educational advocacy."



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For more information about New Jersey's public charter schools, please visit www.njcharters.org.

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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 the 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 public charter school community and, by extension, charter school students and their parents. There are currently 85 public charter schools in New Jersey serving more than 62,000 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.