



ED, CharterRegs

From: Jim Smith <jim.smith@bearcreekschool.com>
Sent: Thursday, September 23, 2021 2:39 PM
To: ED, CharterRegs
Subject: [External] Opposition to Proposed Charter School Regulations

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Two whom it may concern,

As the founder of our local public charter school and the current Chief Executive Officer, I feel the obligation to speak out in opposition to the proposed regulations impacting Pennsylvania's public charter schools, and more importantly, impacting Pennsylvania's children. These regulations do very little to provide the meaningful reform that is required to the current Pennsylvania Charter School Law. There are vocal advocates in support of public charter schools, and there are vocal advocates against public charter schools. Quite often those who oppose public charter schools are individuals or organizations that have a vested interest in maintaining the historical monopoly in public education. Ironically both groups have one thing in common – the desire to see the existing law updated. Unfortunately, there has been no effort by Governor Wolf to bring all the constituencies with a vested interest in public education together, to find common ground and compromise, to implement meaningful reform. Instead, the Governor and his allies consistently promote the false narrative that there is no accountability for charter schools. Complete bunk. Another inaccurate argument is that charter school tuition is a school district's largest expense and is bankrupting the traditional public school system. If one looks closely at a school district's budget, it is very clear that salary and benefits – including massive contributions to the Public School Employees Retirement System, is the largest financial burden for public school districts.

Public charter schools provide options to families which would not otherwise have options in public education, particularly those who are economically disadvantaged or a minority. Parents support public education through a variety of taxes. Parents should have choices as to how those tax dollars are spent, including the option to send their child to a public charter school. Public charter schools have the ultimate accountability measure. If a public charter school was failing and not meeting the needs of students, parents would withdraw their children. Without students, the charter school could not operate. Ironically the Governor's fervor for more charter school regulation and calls for slashing charter school funding comes at a time where demand for public charter schools is at an all-time high. Parents are clamoring to enroll their children in public charter schools. Charter school enrollment grew substantially during the 2020-2021 school year. Bear Creek Community Charter School is operating at full capacity and has a wait list of almost 400 children.

Although they seem completely logical at face value, the proposed regulations will only make it more difficult for successful charter schools to operate, and make it more difficult for new charter schools to open. They will allow school districts to be more heavy-handed in decisions related to charter school operations, and only add to a perverse system where your competition decides if you can operate or not, and whether you can continue to operate. Charter school success requires independence, and these regulation only further hamper a charter schools ability to operate independently. This will be detrimental to students and detrimental to Pennsylvania's families by costing charter schools money and limiting options for families.

The Bear Creek Community Charter School's Board of Trustees and Leadership Team oppose these proposed regulations.

Jim Smith

Chief Executive Officer

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