



ED, CharterRegs

From: Emily Hanes <noreply@citizenwindow.io>
Sent: Wednesday, October 6, 2021 11:05 AM
To: ED, CharterRegs
Subject: [External] LEAVE CHARTER SCHOOLS IN PEACE

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Dear Secretary Ortega and the Pennsylvania Department of Education,

As a member of the public charter school community, I am submitting these comments in opposition to the proposed Regulation #6-349: Charter Schools and Cyber Charter Schools.

I graduated only because of the options charter schools afforded me, as a high schooler with a ton of undiagnosed chronic and life threatening health issues, whose mother had just DIED.

Had I not been afforded the option for a cyber charter school, I, without a doubt, would have failed out of 10th grade, attempted to repeat, then ultimately dropped out of school, and been another statistical black eye on the PA education system.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education is a taxpayer-funded agency whose stated mission is “to ensure that every learner has access to a world-class education system that academically prepares children and adults to succeed as productive citizens.” This proposed regulation does not support your agency’s mission and is harmful toward the 150,000-plus public charter school students, parents and educators in the state.

The majority of Pennsylvania’s charter school students are underserved. Whether it’s a failing school, lack of resources or their emotional and learning needs were simply not being met in the school district, charter schools are serving a population that chose another option. You cannot treat these students, parents and educators as second-class citizens.

My charter school works hard to ensure students have the tools to succeed. It conducts yearly audits and abides by the same reporting standards as district schools, but this regulation would increase the requirements for charter schools only.

This regulation is punitive toward charter schools and would burden them with additional challenges and requirements to maintain operations or grow to serve their student populations. For example, new schools or schools that wish to renew or expand would be required to go through an application process that lacks objective standards and a consistent process.

As you know, the authorizer charged with approving these ambiguous applications is the school district, when a majority of school districts have publicly opposed charter schools and are actively fighting to shut them down. This is essentially the status quo anti-charter process that’s been used for years, with no positive reform. Our students end up paying the price for these political games.

Meanwhile, there is no application requirement for district schools to open, renew or expand their campuses.

The pandemic made clear that families need more choices for education, not fewer. One size does not fit all was made clear when more than 22,000 students enrolled in charter schools last year.

Throughout the pandemic, charter schools have shared resources and collaborated within the educational community to ensure students have continuity of education and the tools for a quality education. They should be collaborated with as leaders in the education community, not targeted with overreaching regulations.

Any potential reforms to charter schools should be reviewed and voted on by the Legislature. At a minimum, we need more time to read and understand the impacts of this regulation to comment. Thirty days is not enough. The comment period should be extended, and regulators should take the time to hear directly from Pennsylvania's families and students with statewide listening sessions.

Every child and parent in Pennsylvania deserves the right to choose the public education option best for them. It is clear anti-charter special interest groups are driving this proposed regulation. Stop playing politics with our children's futures.

Sincerely,
Emily Hanes
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