

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA BOARD OF EDUCATION

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Honorable Noe Ortega
Secretary
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of Education
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

Division of Charter Schools
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of Education
333 Market Street
5th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

October 18, 2021

Dear Secretary Ortega and the Pennsylvania Department of Education Division of Charter Schools:

On behalf of the Board of Education of the School District of Philadelphia (School District), I am submitting comments to the Pennsylvania Department of Education (the Department) on its proposed regulations of charter schools and cyber charter schools. I applaud you for taking this important and significant step. The Department has crafted a strong set of proposed regulations that will bring greater transparency and accountability to the charter school and cyber charter school sectors.

I know we all share the belief that a high-performing, well-managed school, whether district-run or charter-run, is a good investment for students and taxpayers. The School District is the largest school district in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and serves more than 202,000 students, including more than 75,000 students enrolled in charter schools. Combined, the School District and the Philadelphia brick and mortar charter sector provide students with access to a broad range of programs including military programs, vocational programs, dual enrollment programs, inquiry-based learning, alternative education, and more.

The Board is committed to maintaining high quality schools for students in Philadelphia, both district schools and charter schools. As a district, we continue to make steady gains in student academic performance. We have doubled the number of high performing schools and cut in half the number of low performing schools. Our four year graduation rate is increasing, and we have more students earning industry credentials and enrolling in Advance Placement and dual enrollment classes than ever before.

But we know we have more work to do. Earlier this year, the Board released a five-year plan intended to set clear expectations for what our students must know and be able to do including guidelines designed to rigorously monitor our progress toward achieving our goals. The Board is laser focused on goals related to student achievement in reading, math and college and career readiness. Additionally, the Board established a series of guardrails, the nonnegotiable conditions that must exist in every school: ensuring that our schools are welcoming and supportive, that our curriculum is enriched by co-curricular experiences such as art and music, that we are partnering with and welcoming families into our schools, and that we are taking concrete actions to identify and address systemic racism in our system.

But Pennsylvania's Charter School Law has made it challenging to focus on high quality schools. These proposed regulations would provide much needed clarity and would reinforce expectations for local authorizers, charter schools, and cyber charter schools trying to navigate an outdated and ineffective charter school law. However, I recognize that to truly improve educational opportunities for children in Pennsylvania, these regulations need to be accompanied by meaningful legislative reform that is focused on quality and provides both authorizers and charter schools with clear expectations and certainty at every point in the authorizing process.

As the Administration and the General Assembly work through these pressing issues over the coming months, the School District of Philadelphia stands ready to be a constructive partner in creating meaningful change and opportunity for our youngest residents.

Sincerely,



Joyce S. Wilkerson
Board President
School District of Philadelphia

CC:

Members of the Board of Education of the School District of Philadelphia
Dr. William R. Hite, Jr., Superintendent
Honorable Tom Wolf, Governor of Pennsylvania
Honorable Scott Martin, Chair, Senate Education Committee, Pennsylvania State Senate
Honorable Curtis Sonney, Chair, House Education Committee, Pennsylvania House of Representatives
Honorable Lindsey Williams, Minority Chair, Senate Education Committee, Pennsylvania State Senate
Honorable Mark Longetti, Democratic Chair, House Education Committee, Pennsylvania House of Representatives
Honorable Christine Tartaglione, Chair, Southeast Delegation, Pennsylvania State Senate
Honorable Jason Dawkins, Chair, Philadelphia Delegation, Pennsylvania House of Representatives

Enclosures