



ED, CharterRegs

From: Sokolowski, Robert J. <RSOKOLOWSKI@wcasd.k12.pa.us>
Sent: Monday, October 18, 2021 2:05 PM
To: ED, CharterRegs
Subject: [External] Proposed Regulation #6-349: Charter Schools and Cyber Charter Schools

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Dear Chairman Bedwick and IRRC Members:

I am submitting the following comments in support of the Proposed Regulation #6-349: Charter Schools and Cyber Charter Schools. The proposed regulations for charter schools apply commonsense and reasonable accountability measures that are already required of traditional public schools. The proposed regulations are no more burdensome on a charter school than they are on the commonwealth's traditional public schools that already abide by these or similar regulations.

Meaningful charter school reform is critical for public school students and their families throughout Pennsylvania, both those in traditional public schools and those in charter and cyber charter schools. Parents of all students need to have confidence that schools are acting in the best interest of their children. Taxpayers are now spending an estimated \$3 billion on mandatory charter school tuition payments. In Chester County, where my district is located, taxpayers spend over \$86 million dollars a year to support low performing charter and cyber charter schools. The \$86 million dollars sent annually to charter schools has little to no outside oversight to ensure that taxpayer dollars are being spent wisely, ethically or for the betterment of our public education system.

At a minimum, charter schools should be subject to the same level of accountability and transparency demanded of traditional public schools; traditional public schools should be billed fairly; and charter schools should be compensated correctly. The proposed regulations, while not addressing much-needed financial reform, is a step in the right direction.

Specifically, the proposed regulations provide the very minimum of accountability and oversight measures that any entity receiving annually over \$3 billion dollars in taxpayer money should have to adhere to, including:

1. **Charter school applications requirement:** Establishing requirements for applications to open a charter school, allowing school districts authorizing brick and mortar charter schools and PDE authorizing cyber charter schools to hold the schools to high academic, fiscal, and administrative standards; ensures charter schools will equitably serve all students; and provides consistent application expectations.
2. **Non-discriminatory enrollment policies:** Requiring charter schools to post their non-discrimination enrollment policy on their website and in the student application so families and taxpayers know how admission preferences are considered and weighted.
3. **Boards of Trustees ethics standards:** Clarifying that charter school trustees are subject to the state's Public Official and Employee Ethics Act, addresses conflicts of interest, and sets penalties for violations. The same requirements already apply to school districts.
4. **Financial and auditing standards:** Requiring charter schools to use common accounting principles and auditing standards as school districts already do. This will make reviewing annual reports and financial records easier for school districts and PDE.
5. **Redirection process clarification:** Outlining the process to reconcile disputes over school district payments to charter schools for student tuition.
6. **Charter school employee health care benefits parity:** Ensuring charter school staff have adequate health care. The charter school law requires charter schools provide the same health care benefits as the authorizing school district. The regulation clarifies that when a charter school serves more than one school district, the school district in which the charter school's administrative office is located is the district of comparison.

While there is still much work that will need to be completed legislatively to provide true, meaningful charter and cyber charter school reform, the proposed regulations ensure that at a minimum, we begin the process of holding charter and cyber charter schools to the same standards as our traditional public schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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