

TESTIMONY ON THE FY 2027 EXECUTIVE BUDGET

Submitted to the New York State Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Elementary & Secondary Education

My name is Anna Hall and I serve as the CEO of the New York Charter Schools Association. NYCSEA is the statewide nonprofit organization representing public charter schools across New York State, including more than 350 schools serving almost 200,000 students from Buffalo to Brooklyn. These schools educate some of the state's most vulnerable students, and they are an integral part of New York's public education system.

Public charter schools serve a student population that closely mirrors the students Foundation Aid is designed to prioritize. The vast majority of charter schools serve predominantly low-income students of color. Many experience homelessness and are English Language Learners. These are precisely the students for whom additional educational resources are most critical, and whose success depends on stable, equitable, and predictable funding- as the ongoing discussions about Foundation Aid have served to highlight.

We want to begin by recognizing and appreciating Governor Hochul's continued commitment to public education. The Executive Budget reflects meaningful investments across the education continuum, and we acknowledge the Governor's effort to fund both traditional district schools and public charter schools through their respective formulas.

It is important to recognize that New York charter schools and their district counterparts currently operate under two distinct and fundamentally different education funding formulas, and comparisons between them can be misleading without proper context.

Charter schools are funded through a spending-based formula, which is tied directly to district per-pupil expenditures and is intended to reflect both state and local spending on district students. Foundation Aid, by contrast, is a student-need and local-resource based formula that attempts, albeit imperfectly, to account for the additional resources required to educate high-needs students as well as a community's ability to contribute locally.

In some cases, charter students receive less than the Foundation Aid amount generated on their behalf.

For example, in the 2025-26 school year, charter students in Buffalo and Rochester did not receive funding equivalent to Foundation Aid levels, and preliminary analysis suggests that Rochester charter students may continue to experience this gap even under the proposed FY 2026 formula amounts. This creates a persistent equity issue for students who, by every metric, align with the populations Foundation Aid seeks to support.

We also recognize that the current funding structure creates real tension between charter schools and local school districts. District leaders often perceive charter schools as a fiscal burden, particularly because they have limited control over charter authorization and operations. That tension is real, and it deserves acknowledgment.

At the same time, families are choosing charter schools in growing numbers because they are seeking high-quality public education options for their children. As enrollment grows, the need to reconcile these funding and governance challenges becomes more urgent.

What cannot happen is allowing charter school funding to stagnate or to move backwards.

Charter schools educate public school students. Their demographics reflect high-need populations. These students generate Foundation Aid for their home districts, yet the schools they attend often receive fewer resources. While districts may provide certain in-kind services such as transportation or special education supports, those services do not close the gap between district per-pupil spending and charter school funding.

Allowing the gap between district and charter resources to widen undermines equity and destabilizes schools that are serving students with the greatest needs.

We recognize that comprehensive reform of education funding formulas is complex and takes time. The experience of revisiting Foundation Aid demonstrates that thoughtful reform requires deliberation, data, and collaboration.

For the FY 2027 budget, our request is straightforward and responsible.

We respectfully urge the Legislature to maintain the charter school funding formula as proposed. The formula is functioning as intended by reflecting increases in district spending, and sustaining it will prevent further erosion of equity between district and charter students.

We are open to participating in future conversations about how to improve and modernize charter school funding. But in this budget cycle, stability is essential. Sustaining the formula ensures that charter students do not fall further behind and that the state's commitment to educational equity remains intact.

Public charter schools have been part of New York's education landscape for more than 25 years. They serve hundreds of thousands of students across the state, most of whom come from historically underserved communities. Families choose these schools because they offer opportunity, quality, and hope for a better future.

We applaud the Governor for her proposed expansion of early childhood education. Currently, charter schools in New York City and Buffalo offer Pre-K programs, and many other charter schools across the state are ready, willing and able to support the expansion of high-quality Pre-K offerings. At a time when one of the constraints to ensuring that every child has access to the best early education is the availability of programs themselves, it is critical that all providers are supported to enter and participate in transparent and predictable processes to apply for and receive approval to operate these programs. All too often in the current state charter schools are stymied in their ability



to operate Pre-K programs by RFP processes that are administered at the discretion of local school districts which has had the impact of deprioritizing charter schools as Pre-K operators.

Prior expansions of funding for early childhood programming have attempted to address these issues; we encourage the Governor and the Legislature to ensure that any expansion of funding is accompanied by policies that ensure that the process for allocating funding and the permissions to operate these programs is even-handed and supports the broadest possible expansion of high quality early education. We are confident that charter schools can be part of the array of early education programming that supports children and their families, as they do in the K-12 grades as well.

We thank the Governor and the Legislature for their continued support of public education and for the opportunity to share our perspective today. I am happy to answer any questions.