



PRESS RELEASE

CONTACT: Amy Kobeta, Public Citizens for Children and Youth
347-607-1058 mobile, amyk@pccy.org

New Pennsylvania Charter Performance Center Leads the Way to Improve Charter Education Policy

PHILADELPHIA (January 13, 2021) – In Pennsylvania, charter school enrollment has almost doubled over the past ten years, nearing 200,000 students. Charter school performance, however, has not followed the same upward trajectory. With skeptics and proponents on both sides of the charter school debate and our children’s education at stake, PCCY has launched the **Pennsylvania Charter Performance Center**, a new project dedicated to producing unbiased, accurate, and timely information to advance sound state-level charter school policy.

“Charter school education is a polarizing topic where both sides argue with much conviction, but typically very little data,” said ML Wernecke, Director of the Pennsylvania Charter Performance Center. “Absent unbiased, accessible information, there can be no accountability to boost charter school performance or close poorly performing operators.”

Across the Commonwealth, more than three quarters of 3rd through 8th grade charter students failed their Math test, and 56% failed English Language Arts, based on the state’s official student testing. More than half of charter school 11th graders failed the Algebra Keystone Exam; 45% failed Literature. And, under the state’s accountability system, all of Pennsylvania’s 14 cyber charters need improvement.

Low-income and at-risk students are more likely to enroll in charters than other students. Only 16% of district schools but 58% of brick-and-mortar charters operate in high poverty areas. This raises significant equity issues about who attends charter schools and how are they doing.

For its inaugural event today, the Center hosted Doug Harris, author of *Charter School City* and founding director of the Education Research Alliance for New Orleans at Tulane University. His extensive research showed that since New Orleans moved to near total charter school education after Hurricane Katrina, students performed better over time, but it was not a panacea. Success relied on a complex balance of access, accountability, transparency, engagement, choice, funding, and government oversight.

(more)

“Pennsylvania’s charter law is in desperate need of revisions,” said Veronica Brooks-Uy, Interim Vice President of Policy at the National Association of Charter School Authorizers. “By improving the law, the state will be able to build stronger, more consistent practices that lead to better public schools for students and families.

More information on the Center can be found at <https://www.pccy.org/issues/education/pa-charter-performance-center/> and on Twitter at @pa_center.

The Pennsylvania Charter Performance Center is a new project of Public Citizens for Children and Youth and is made possible by a generous donation from the Ivywood Foundation.

ML Wernecke, the Center Director, works closely with the Advisory Board (listed below) to improve the quality of charter education, especially for at-risk students, by producing unbiased, accurate and timely information that will build momentum for the adoption of sound state-level charter school policy.

Pennsylvania Charter Performance Center Advisory Board

- Veronica Brooks-Uy, Interim VP of Policy, National Association of Charter School Authorizers
- Esther Bush, President and CEO, Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh
- Sarah Cohodes, Associate Professor of Economics and Education at Teachers College, Columbia University
- Sharif El-Mekki, Director, Center for Black Educator Development
- Erica Frankenberg, Professor of Education, Penn State College of Education
- Ed Fuller, Director of the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy Analysis, Penn State University
- Brian Gill, Senior Fellow and Director of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory, Mathematica
- Christina Grant, Chief of Charter Schools and Innovation, School District of Philadelphia
- Alyssa Hopkins, School Development Manager, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
- TerryAnn Hudson-Mitchell, charter school parent
- David Lapp, Director of Policy Research, Research for Action
- Colin Miller, Vice President, Government Affairs, California Charter School Association
- Susie Miller Carello, Executive Director, SUNY Charter Schools Institute
- Kathy Schultz, Dean of the School of Education, University of Colorado - Boulder
- Rogers Smith, Christopher H. Browne Distinguished Professor of Political Science, University of Pennsylvania
- Heather Wilkes, charter school parent