2018-19 YEAR IN REVIEW

Building Collective Strength Together

2019 HIGHLIGHTS

- Membership Increase to 89%
- 2 New Charter Schools
- 38 Legislator Meetings

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Dear Friends and Advocates,

Congratulations on the completion of another successful school year! I hope that you have the opportunity to take a well-deserved break to recharge before you do it all over again. THANK YOU for your tireless work on behalf of the 52,000 students and families in New Jersey’s public charter schools.

During NJCSA’s strategic planning process, a key principle that emerged was Building Collective Strength Together. While NJCSA has been busy meeting and building relationships with the Legislature, we’ve been able to connect many of our schools with enhanced advocacy opportunities including meetings in legislative district office visits, school tours, engaging through social media, and speaking opportunities in legislative hearings and at state board meetings. Thank you to those who have taken these opportunities to make your voices heard and advocate for your kids, families, and communities. It makes a world of difference.

Together, we’ve accomplished so much in the 2018-19 school year. We’ve put together this newsletter to remind you of the great work that has been done, the progress we made, and where we need to go next year and beyond. NJCSA is well-positioned to take our advocacy efforts to the next level in the 2019-20 school year and we thank you for your continued partnership. Together, we will continue to tell the story of how public charter schools are changing lives and advocate on behalf of our students and families.

Sincerely,

Harry Lee
President and CEO
HIGH-QUALITY CHARTER SECTOR

Charte Schools Continue to Outperform State Averages

While public schools across the state showed improvements on statewide assessments, Black, Hispanic, and low-income charter school students continued to outperform their statewide peers on the state test. 2018 state assessment results prove that charter schools are providing high-quality public school choices across 40 cities throughout New Jersey!

“In our urban communities, tens of thousands of families are choosing charter schools because they are providing life-changing educational options that simply didn’t exist before the first charter schools opened in these communities more than 20 years ago. High-performing public charter schools must be given the opportunity to add seats and serve the 35,000 students and families on charter school wait lists.”

- Harry Lee, NJCSA CEO

89% MEMBERSHIP

In the 2018-19 school year, 78 of the 88 charter schools (89%) in New Jersey joined as dues-paying members of the New Jersey Charter Schools Association. This is one of the highest membership rates in the country!
Newark Charters Eliminate Achievement Gap

In 2018, for the first time, Newark charter students eliminated the achievement gap and outperformed the state average in both English language arts (ELA) and mathematics on the state assessment. Nearly 20,000 students attend public charter schools in Newark. Incredible accomplishment and kudos to our charter schools in Newark!

“Eliminating the achievement gap is a persistent obstacle for schools throughout the nation. Newark charters show what is possible in public education. By focusing on what really matters in education - ensuring every child has a great teacher and challenging students with rigorous standards and curriculum - we can create a brighter future for all of our children.”

- Harry Lee, NJCSA CEO

2 New Charter Schools

NJCSA worked hard in advocating for the opening of two new charter schools for the 2018-19 school year. Congratulations to Achievers Early College Prep Charter School (Trenton) and Middlesex County STEM Charter School (Perth Amboy) for successfully completing your first year of operation!

Growth of High-Quality Charter Schools

In 2019, NJCSA advocated on behalf of all 11 charter schools up for renewal. All 11 charter schools were granted renewal, including 6 expansion requests. In addition, 5 schools were granted authorization to add more seats through the amendment process. More than 1500 seats were added in cities like Newark, Camden, Vineland, Paterson, Plainfield, Jersey City and New Brunswick!

Renews

Murphy Administration Grants Renewals To Five High-Performing Urban Charter Schools

NJ Left Behind, 1/4/2019
The New Jersey Department of Education conducted a “comprehensive review” of New Jersey’s public charter schools, including a review of the laws that govern how charter schools operate in the state. During this process, charter school families and teachers demonstrated overwhelming support for their schools.

More than 1,100 public charter school parents, teachers, and supporters turned out to charter review events in Newark, Paterson, Trenton, Jersey City, Atlantic City, Camden, and Plainfield. Commissioner Lamont Repollet attended many of these events and also toured 11 charter schools throughout the state and saw firsthand how charter schools are changing lives. On social media, more than 1 million New Jersey residents were reached with stories about how charter schools are changing lives. THANK YOU for turning out to make your voices heard!

December Press Conference

In partnership with NJCSA, dozens of public charter school families held a press conference at the State Board of Education on December 5 to call on NJDOE and the Legislature to support their schools as the state’s charter review process came to a close. Parents delivered thousands of postcards in support of public charter schools to the Commissioner of Education. At the press conference, the New Jersey Charter Schools Association released a report identifying concrete steps the state should take to improve operating conditions for charter schools.

“Parents are standing strong, and we have a clear message for our leaders: we love our public charter schools and our children deserve to be treated fairly, just like other public school students.”

- Ashley Campbell, Parent residing in Paterson
December Press Conference

Recommendations in the report include:

- **Fair Funding for Charter Schools and District Schools**
  - Currently, charter schools only receive about 73 cents on the dollar in local and state aid compared to traditional public schools.
  - Revise the School Funding Reform Act (SFRA) so that public charter school students receive the same funding as traditional public school students.
  - Provide transition aid for districts with large/growing charter sectors to ensure that the district can better plan for the change in funding.
  - Revise the school funding formula to include facilities funding for charter schools.

- **Increase Charter School Access to Under-Utilized School Buildings**
  - Allow for a right of first refusal for charter schools to acquire or lease at no cost an under-utilized public school facility or property.

- **Increase Charter School Autonomy**
  - At least 25 states, including Pennsylvania, New York, Washington D.C., and Massachusetts, exempt charter schools from many education statutes and regulations. New Jersey should also provide charter schools with flexibility from public school laws and regulations except those pertaining to the state accountability program, civil rights, student health, life and safety, criminal background checks, special education, conflict of interest and public record and generally-accepted accounting principles. At the very least, allow charter schools flexibilities afforded to Renaissance Schools through the Urban Hope Act.
  - Reward high performing charter schools. Amend the current law to allow charter schools to undergo the first renewal after five years, rather than four, and allow for all future renewals to be up to 10 years based on performance.

Press Conference Earned Media:

- Charter school advocates press for greater state support - Politico Pro NJ, 12/6
- NJ Charter School Advocates Call For Changes in Funding, Autonomy - TAPinto Plainfield, Newark, Camden, New Brunswick, 12/6
- Advocates call for state education department to end review and expand charters - NJTV News Online, 12/6
- OP-ED: LET’S HELP CHARTER SCHOOLS CONTINUE TO THRIVE - NJ Spotlight, 12/6
NJCSA Testifying in Trenton

State Board Testimony
On January 2, NJCSA testified in front of the State Board of Education to highlight the positive impact that public charter schools are having across the state. The testimony included information on the strong support of charter school families and educators that participated in the DOE’s review process and the need to focus on what is best for kids – not adult special interests.

Joint Committee on the Public Schools
On May 14, NJCSA testified at the Joint Committee on Public Schools on the topic of “Assessment” in our public schools. NJCSA highlighted how charter schools in NJ are a proof point on what is possible in public education. Read more here!

40+ Charter Schools Participate in Charter Awareness Week

During the week of April 8, charter school leaders, teachers, parents, and other advocates met with legislators from across the state to dispel charter school myths and provide the facts about the tremendous positive impact of charter schools in NJ. In Trenton, 17 charter school parents showed up to the Assembly Budget Hearing where Commissioner Lamont Repollet testified. President and CEO Harry Lee also met with the members in Governor Murphy’s policy office to discuss the current educational landscape and what can be done to improve the state’s policy environment for charter schools.

More than 40 schools participated during the week by sharing NJCSA’s posts, posting on their own, attending legislator meetings, attending the budget hearing, and tagging our elected officials. Thank you for your partnership!
NJCSA Calls for Reforms to NJ’s Broken Charter School Facilities Law

The Bergen Record published an op-ed from NJCSA calling for reforms to NJ's Charter School Law to ensure that public charter school families have access to safe and secure school buildings. When meeting and speaking with many legislators across the state about the facilities articles, NJCSA has pointed out that the Record was highly inaccurate, grossly unfair and reflected a basic misrepresentation of facts and practices. Thank you for your support of public charter schools in New Jersey as we fight for fair funding and treatment of our students and families!

Legislator Meetings

In January 2019, NJCSA hired Kay LiCausi and Hoboken Strategy Group as our contract lobbyist. Kay and her team have worked tirelessly to get meetings with legislators and other key stakeholders.

38 Legislator Meetings

Since the start of the year, NJCSA has met with 28 different legislators in 38 separate meetings to bust myths about charter schools and discuss the impact that charter schools are making in NJ!
Weighing in on Bills

NJCSA supported the following education bills this past year:

A3775 / S692 (Jasey / Caputo / Holley / Ruiz / Sarlo) - Prohibits the DOE from regulating the maximum salary amount a school district may pay its superintendent of schools.

A4446 (Schaer / Downey / Benson) - Requires school districts to provide instruction on mental health as part of health education curriculum.

A4592 (McKeon / Mukherji / Downey) - Requires health curriculum for public school students in grades kindergarten through 12 to include instruction on mental health.

A4657 / S3065 (Armato / Benson / Ruiz / Singleton) - Establishes youth apprenticeship pilot program in Department of Education.

S491 (Vitale / Ruiz) - Requires public and nonpublic secondary schools to annually conduct written or verbal substance use screening on all students using a particular screening program.

S2442 (Diegnan) - Provides that student-athlete who sustains concussion must return to regular school activities prior to return to competition; requires school districts to implement five-step return-to-competition process.

S2443 (Diegnan) - Requires school districts which participate in Statewide interscholastic sports programs to adopt New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association heat and humidity practice policy.

S2494 (Diegnan / Cunningham) - Requires certain schools to establish emergency action plans for responding to serious or potentially life-threatening sports-related injuries.

S3645 (Ruiz / Singleton) - Requires school districts to provide feminine hygiene products in certain public schools and requires State to pay costs.

SJR112 / AJR180 (Singleton / Corrado / DeAngelo / McKnight / Murphy) - Designates February in each year as "Career and Technical Education Month" in New Jersey.
NJCSA released the following reports this past year:

**Charter Schools in NJ: A Landscape Report - December**
NJCSA's comprehensive report on the successes of charter schools in NJ with policy recommendations and next steps.

**2018 Salary Report - November**
NJCSA's 2018 Salary Report provides a one-stop shop for education salary data specifically arranged to be actionable for charter school leaders. The report aggregates annual salaries for nearly 120,000 full-time district and school staff statewide.

**State of the Sector Part II - October**
Part 2 of NJCSA's 20-year charter report expands on the analysis from Part 1 and updates it with data from the 2016-17 school year.

**Charter School Fact Sheets - Spring**
NJCSA produced a series of fact sheets for focusing on the largest charter districts by enrollment, topics such as accountability and funding, and statewide performance as a sector.

**SchooLens Updates**
NJCSA's flagship online data analysis tool was updated with multiple datasets from releases in 2018. Please contact Brian (bdiamante@njcharters.org) for more information on an annual subscription available to NJCSA members.
Annual Conference

In 2019, we had a successful Annual Conference in Newark. More than 500 teachers, administrators, board members, students, parents, exhibitors and parents attended this event to learn from their colleagues and become better practitioners and advocates for charter schools in NJ!

Conference Earned Media:

As state reviews charter regulations, advocates tout schools’ successes - Politico Pro NJ 10/11

Former Councilman Returns to Newark as Fighter for Charter Schools - TAPinto, 10/18

Charter Advocates Gather in Newark Amid New Reality - TAPinto Newark, 10/10

Board Institute

The New Jersey Charter Schools Association hosted a successful Charter School Board Institute with more than 40 participants attending on April 14th at the New Jersey Law Center in New Brunswick. Presenters included Rick Pressler (NJCSA), Harry Lee (NJCSA), Misha Simmonds (Newark CS Fund), Dominique Lee (BRICK), and Tom Johnston (Johnston Law Firm LLC). All materials from the Institute are available upon request to our member schools!
NEW STRATEGIC DIRECTION

In the Spring of 2019, NJCSA engaged with Jed Wallace, former President of the California Charter Schools Association, to make strategic recommendations for the organization. A strength of New Jersey charter schools is that there are many different kinds of schools: urban schools, suburban schools, large organizations, independents, etc. Another key strength is the fact that such a high percentage of charter schools are members of NJCSA. Given these factors, NJ has the opportunity to have a larger, more unified voice on behalf of New Jersey's charter schools. In 2019 and beyond, let's continue to build collective strength together!

VISION:
THAT EVERY CHILD IN THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY HAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO ATTEND A HIGH-QUALITY PUBLIC SCHOOL THAT BEST MEETS HIS OR HER NEEDS.

MISSION:
TO ADVANCE QUALITY PUBLIC EDUCATION FOR NEW JERSEY’S CHILDREN THROUGH EXCELLENT PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS.

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