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Public Charter and Renaissance School Survey Demonstrates \$900 Million Needed for Critical School Construction

Essential Student Safety and Building Upgrades Needed

Today, the New Jersey Charter Schools Association (NJCSA) and JerseyCAN released a report titled, [*Include All Public Schools In Facilities Funding: \\$900 million needed to address public charter and renaissance school facilities concerns*](#). The report included a survey that found that public charter and renaissance schools are in need of \$900 million in construction, renovation, or capital improvement funds over the next decade to provide safe and secure school buildings for students.

The survey indicated that the biggest facilities challenges faced by public charter and renaissance schools are overcrowding, the need for building safety improvements, and the need for maintenance repairs and upgrades. The ability to find a suitable building to serve as a school facility proved to be an issue for many survey respondents.

The analysis comes amid a statewide discussion over how the state will fund new school construction now that the State's Schools Development Authority (SDA) has run out of funding for new projects. The survey points to school construction needs that are in addition to, and not competing with, the needs of district schools in the cities where public charter and renaissance schools are located.

"All public school students deserve to go to school in safe and healthy learning environments. New Jersey is one of the few states in the country that does not provide facilities funding to public charter schools," said Harry Lee, NJCSA President. "Every public school should have access to State funding for safe, secure and modern learning environments."

Lee noted that over \$15 billion has been spent by the State on school construction and renovation, much of it in urban former Abbott districts but public charter schools have received zero dollars despite the fact that nearly 20% of former Abbott District students attend a public charter school. This lack of state funding has forced all charter schools to use operating dollars to find a school building and perform critical safety upgrades, money that could be better spent in the classroom.

JerseyCAN's Executive Director Patricia Morgan added, "There is an unmet need for school construction funding across the State, largely in our cities and this includes real needs for public charter and renaissance schools. Currently, public charter and renaissance schools are serving nearly one in five students in the poorest communities across New Jersey. These schools are a vital part of the education fabric in our urban areas, and as such, their facilities needs have to be addressed."

School leader Freya Lund of Paul Robeson Charter School in Trenton noted that the school makes the most out of their space but that additional upgrades are necessary. "NJDOE recently recognized Paul Robeson Charter School as a Lighthouse District meaning that we have some of the most impressive student achievement gains in the state. We were able to accomplish this despite renting a 100-year-old building that needs significant

upgrades. We don't have a library, a suitable place for recess or our sports program and need additional small group learning spaces throughout the building. We hope to someday provide our students with a modern facility that can fully accommodate all that our program can offer."

Additional findings from the survey include:

- 82% of public charter schools indicate that their education programs currently suffer due to the lack of any type of facilities funding.
- When asked how schools would invest savings from any new facilities funding, 70% responded that they would hire, or increase pay for teachers.
- Public charter and renaissance schools estimate initiating more than 200 new construction or substantial renovation projects over the next 10 years to provide safe and secure school environments for their students.
- \$942 million will be required to fund public charter and renaissance school construction, renovation, and capital improvement needs in the next decade with \$687 million estimated for new construction and \$255 million estimated for renovation, maintenance, and capital improvements.

"All my kids in public schools, whether they attend a district school or a charter school, should receive state support to attend school in a safe building," added parent Ja'Da Ransom who has a child attending both a traditional school and a charter school. "Let's invest in all our public schools so that no child's learning environment suffers based on the school they attend."

Under current regulations "a charter school may use State and local funds for the rehabilitation or expansion of a facility," N.J.A.C. § 6A:11-4.15(a). The regulations define "rehabilitation" as "consisting of the reconstruction, remodeling, alteration, modernization, or repair of a school facility to keep the school facility functional for its original purpose or for new purposes and that does not increase the gross square footage of the school facility." N.J.A.C. § 6A:26:-1.2.

However, public charter schools do not receive facilities funding and cannot construct a new facility with State and local funds. Renaissance schools, which are also public schools, face similar restrictions. Public charter and renaissance school advocates call on the Legislature to change the law to allow these public schools to receive State facilities funding to construct new facilities to meet the demand to provide modern, safe learning environments for their students.

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About New Jersey Charter Schools Association

The New Jersey Charter Schools Association (NJCSA) is a statewide association representing the state's charter sector. New Jersey is home to 88 charter schools, serving more than 54,500 children. NJCSA was formed in 1999 and today is charged with advancing a quality public education for New Jersey's children through quality public charter schools. Our vision is 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. For more information, visit www.njcharters.org.

About JerseyCAN

JerseyCAN advocates for all students across the state to have access to excellent schools. To achieve these goals and realize our bold vision for New Jersey students, JerseyCAN weaves together research and policy, communications and mobilization, policy advocacy and coalition building. We seek to galvanize everyday New Jerseyans around a powerful message for change and to positively impact the educational opportunities our students receive. www.jerseycan.org