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Governor Christie Announces Reforms For Operation And Expansion Of Charter Schools

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Trenton, NJ – Governor Chris Christie today announced a series of reforms to New Jersey’s public school system born from input received through meetings with charter school leaders last fall. These changes will ensure students from every community have access to the best possible education, by allowing charter schools more flexibility to operate and expand.

Governor Christie announced the reforms at the 8th annual New Jersey Charter Schools Conference at Bally’s Atlantic City.

“We received valuable input from charter school leaders and parents on the need to facilitate charter school operations and expansions across the state, and my administration is addressing the issues holding charter schools back from fully realizing our mission – to bring hope and opportunity to all students who are trapped in failed educational environments,” said Governor Christie. “Our commitment to ensure the success of charter schools in New Jersey has never been stronger, and these reforms will heighten the benefits of innovative, accountable learning environments for children, their parents and our communities.”

Among the reforms announced today:

The state will allow single-gender charter schools that meet appropriate criteria and single-purpose charter schools for educationally disadvantaged students, such as a school serving over-age, under-credited students who, because of life circumstances, are unable to graduate in four years. One example is the LEAD Charter School in Newark, which provides a high school diploma, social and emotional supports and post-secondary preparation and transition planning for people ages 16 to 20 seeking alternative and career and technical educational services.

Applicants of the Charter School Certificate of Eligibility for Business Administrator will be allowed to hold a CPA license in lieu of a master’s degree and course credit requirements. This permits qualified financial experts and business managers who have CPA licenses to be considered in the hiring process. In addition, charter schools would be able to apply to the New Jersey Department of Education (DOE) to develop their own certification standards for applicants who are excellent teaching candidates but who might not meet all of the certification criteria.

The reforms will give much more administrative flexibility to charter schools. Charter renewal will be expedited for high-performing, Tier 1, schools that are not on probation for fiscal or organizational reasons. Charter schools that do not meet fiscal management/compliance standards or present concerns regarding their fiscal viability will remain subject to deeper review. Weighted lotteries will be expanded by adding language explicitly allowing weighted lotteries for educationally disadvantaged students. Redundancies will be reduced by removing the requirement that charters send corrective action plans to the Executive County Superintendent as they already are submitted to the DOE Charter Office. The funding monitoring requirement will be relaxed since it has become unnecessary because of the new charter performance system. DOE will continue to monitor if charter schools are adequately allocating funds to impact what is happening in the classroom. And, cash fund procedures, which are difficult to navigate, will be updated and simplified.

Finding viable facilities for charter schools is a challenge in certain districts. New rules have been proposed requiring all State-operated districts to offer leases to charter schools for any available, unused facilities in the district. Additionally, districts will be required to report to DOE, on a rolling basis, any closed, unused or unoccupied school facility available for lease that would be posted online in order to facilitate cooperation between districts and charter

schools. Satellite campus regulations will be redefined to allow charter schools in all districts to take advantage of available facilities that might be situated further from their main school, now only currently allowed in Abbott (or SDA) districts. The requirement that charter leases cannot exceed the length of the charter -- a barrier to obtaining financing -- will be removed. Charter schools are still subject to having a clause in their leases that require a provision which terminates contracts upon the denial, revocation, non-renewal, or surrender of the charter. Lastly, new regulations will clarify renovations, expansion and reconstruction exemptions from the Charter School Act's restriction on construction with State of local funds.

Since the beginning of his administration, Governor Christie has demonstrated a commitment to investing in innovative, successful charter schools that outperform and exceed expectations at every level.

Thirty-nine of New Jersey's 89 charter schools have opened in the past six years, and next year, the number of authorized charter school seats will increase by 10% to more than 50,000. In February 2016, the DOE approved the expansion of 16 charter schools, renewed the charters of 19 schools, and approved 3 new schools to open in the 2017-2018 school year.

In districts such as Newark and Camden, charter schools are educating almost one-third of their public school populations. There are an additional 6,500 Newark students on a waiting list to get a charter school seat and about 2,000 Camden students on a waiting list, demonstrating how critical it is that more charter school opportunities are provided for these students and across the state.

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