

Dear NYS Senators and NYS Assembly Members.

Thank you for this opportunity.

First, I would like to speak about education funding, and I'm sure by now, you've already heard many reasons explaining why funding should be increased, and I agree with the fact that we need more funding for education, but as a charter parent I'm more concerned about funding equity.

Both of my children attend charter schools. My daughter's schools receive a significantly lesser amount than what was originally allocated., So, I don't want to address all the reasons why we should raise the fund for education, I just want to ask why?

Why are we sending the message that children are worth different amounts or why are we boxing children in a one size fits all type of education, when we know there is no one size fits all in education.

The only three reasons I would like you to consider when having the conversation about education funding equity are simple:

All children deserve it.
All children are worth it.
And it's only fair.

I chose to enroll my children in charter schools because I am the expert of my children and understood that charter school curriculums had more to offer my children, than just academics. Charter schools are making a difference in our inner-city communities, giving our children the opportunity to receive the type of education that few parents can pay for. Charter education provides the tools that our children need to be successful in life, and we don't have to move out of our district or apply year after year for urban - suburban programs or go into debt to pay for private education.

In my case, I struggled for years with a child that was being evaluated based on her intelligence and not on her needs. This may sound ungrateful but its not. I am blessed to have a child with her ability to learn, but having a child with social emotional challenges is not easy, not receiving the support she needs can be catastrophic. For eight years I fought with my district for my daughter's needs to be met and for eight years my cry fell on deaf ears.

For two years I decided to keep my children home and made myself responsible for their education, until my daughter was BLESSED to receive an offer from Young Women's College Prep Charter School (YWCP) in Rochester. She started there on a Monday and by the end of the week, her amazing teacher called me and shared what she observed during her first week of school!. She called to share an update and also reassured me of the plan she had in place to support my daughter and I moving forward. This teacher was the best advocate for my child at our last CSE meeting. This educator not only made sure she spoke up for my daughter's strengths but also made sure the appropriate plan was put into action to support her needs before we left that CSE meeting. The support my daughter receives from this school is immeasurable. YWCP makes sure there are no students left behind, these teachers give their all for these young ladies and their families. They really take care of the whole girl, socially, emotionally, physically and academically. They really go the extra mile for them.

My daughter's ability to learn, could get her very far in life, but her social emotional challenges can cause her to stumble and fall. Failing is not an option at YWCP, they really give their all to these young ladies. The fact that my daughter is in an environment in which she is surrounded by trusting and caring adults that not only think about her academics but make sure that all her needs are met, it's important, not only for my child but also for her peers.

YWCP continued to support students through remote learning during the covid crisis. Only when they were confident in the trust and support of their students, faculty and families, they began to bring the young ladies with IEPs in the building because they recognized the importance of in person instruction. Teachers are risking their lives (literally) to be able to educate and support my child, the least that i can do is advocate for them and for every child they feel is worth risking themselves for. If they believe in our children this much, why wouldn't the rest of us care?

It still amazes me how they do so much with so little resources. Imagine what Charters Schools could do if they were fully funded. Let's show our children that they deserve it, and they are worth it. It's just fair!

Very truly yours

Maria S Cruz