

February 8, 2023
2023 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing
Elementary and Secondary Education
Albany, New York

Dear Chair and Members,

We are told that access to the American dream begins with education. That education should be accessible, attainable and equitable for all! When I became a parent, my son's health and education were my primary concerns. I found a school that would not only nurture his mind but him as a whole child. A place that offers time and locations for children that may be having a hard time effectively working through their issues. Learning is hard without connection. If there are spaces that can make learning easier, why don't we support them?

The cookie cutter form of education that most of us endured can be and has been improved upon. We know that children are different. They have different abilities and retain information differently and taking an innovative approach is necessary.

I chose Elmwood Village Charter School because all of the classrooms, Kindergarten to sixth grade, have 2 if not 3 teachers, with no more than 26 kids in the room. Where else could he get such personal interaction for free? The staff consists of occupational, behavioral and speech Therapists and counselors. All of these people are very important to me as the parent of a neurodivergent child. Having access to these services in house without having to be on a district waiting list and deal with an overworked professional is imperative to the education of many children. Our children deserve a FULL, EQUITABLE education.

As great as his education has been, it is being hindered by politics and false narratives. The biggest one being that charter schools are stealing from district children. Charter school students in Buffalo are now receiving less from the district than they were pre-pandemic but they continue to do more. They provide devices for the students so they can have remote instruction when we have snow days, which are frequent in Western New York.

During the pandemic there was no delay in learning. They left school on Friday and the Google classroom was up and running on Monday. They finished out the school year doing mostly asynchronous learning and in September had a full schedule of synchronous and asynchronous learning that was engaging and informative to students and parents who now had a front row seat in the classroom.

Charter schools feel as if they are told you aren't responsible enough to handle all of the funds allocated for each student, but you should be able to educate each child with what we give you. If a charter school doesn't do this properly, they are closed, but what happens to district schools who fail while receiving more money? Where is their accountability?

Many want to limit the number of educational choices but what are they doing better to improve district schools for our students and community? They want to receive the funds and count us as students but we don't have access to all of the services. There is a different educational path for everyone, some college, others careers and many trades. The BOCES programs offer an early insight into these options but are not available to charter school students. We are not allowed to participate in the energy consortium, which saves NYS taxpayers money spent on utilities to heat and cool our buildings, buildings that we also don't receive funding to maintain. Making sure our children are educated in safe environments that are maintained properly is also a priority!

There is a HUGE transportation issue in WNY which affects all students. Students that take the bus to charter schools are in school 30 minutes BEFORE the day starts. How much valuable rest are these kids missing out on because they are at the bus stop before the sun comes up. District school students are often on bus stops long after their scheduled pick up time, meaning they miss breakfast and valuable instruction time. How much family time are they missing out on because they are left at school waiting for a bus? How much instruction time are they missing at the end of the day because they're sitting in the gym/classroom waiting for the afternoon bus that may not come for an hour after school is over?

After school activities and field trips are limited because we don't have enough school bus drivers to transport students. This problem is detrimental to the Buffalo Public School students, the same district that controls the purse strings to local charter schools. If charter schools are in session and the district schools are not, that is an extra cost to our schools for transportation. Another example of why funding should be sent to the charter schools directly to negotiate their own contracts for bussing and other services.

Diversity in education not only refers to students and staff but the types of schools and programs offered. As the parent of a neurodiverse child, I know he would benefit from access to coding and engineering focused programs. Music, art, gym and recess are all important to education. Band, chorus, sports and clubs that enhance the school experience should be available to all students.

I am urging this body to allow charter schools to receive ALL of the per pupil funding so they are able to properly transport, feed and enhance the lives of our students. Parents deserve to have options in the types of schools that educate their children. Because education is limited to the district of your home address there should be equitable options in all zip codes, not just those with a higher tax bracket. EQUITABLE funding is needed to level the playing field for all children in New York State!

Sincerely,

NaKia S. Franklin
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