

To: New York State Senators and Assembly Members,

I am Jason Montanez, and my family has been living in Buffalo, NY for over 20 years. My son Jabari attended West Buffalo Charter School since its creation and recently graduated from West Buffalo Charter School and moved on to Canisius High School, a prestigious all-boys Catholic School. My daughter Juliet has also chosen to follow in his footsteps and is now attending West Buffalo Charter School as a kindergartener.

When we first started looking for schools for our son we started to look at the diversity of the staff. How big was the school? Was the school associated with Buffalo hearing and speech because my son had a hard time talking in his early years. What was the technology like in those schools? We worried whether our son would have been left behind educationally because of a digital divide. But the most important thing was how was the leadership of the school? Was the staff and the leadership all in sync?

After seeing 5 or 6 charter schools in the area, we decided to enter the lottery for West Buffalo Charter School, where we were ultimately selected. We did not want our son going into Buffalo Public Schools because at the time they were known for being really really bad. We firmly believe that the people who have the greatest influence on our children's lives besides family are teachers. I feel as a parent we owe it to our children to put them into the best school possible and to get them the best education possible. Ultimately, our children are supposed to surpass us in all aspects of life and be better than us. I believe that is a sign of good parenting. West Buffalo Charter School was a brand spanking new school with the latest technology and they were small enough that we knew that the teachers wouldn't get overwhelmed with class size. They were originally 1st-5th grade and then eventually expanded to K-8th.

What fascinated us the most about the school was its staff and most particularly its leadership. The principal Mrs. Andrea Todoro, has the staff believing in the school mission and everyone is supportive and embraces the learning environment aimed at educating the whole child while instilling a foundation of language acquisition and literacy proficiency. West Buffalo Charter School provides a community atmosphere for its students and their families ultimately leading to a greater support network for our children.

We are from a multi-racial family and it was important for us to select a school with a diverse staff and a rigorous curriculum. West Buffalo Charter School has offered our family this and much more. When my son was in 5th grade, the school referred him

to Buff Prep. This after school program has classes every Tuesday and Thursday night and is all day on Saturday. This program also runs Monday through Friday for 5 weeks when my son is not attending West Buffalo Charter School during summer break. This combination of what he learned in his charter school combined with the supplemental learning from Buffalo Prep helped my son be way ahead academically. He got multiple scholarship offers from numerous catholic high schools in the area and eventually chose Canisius High School as the destination for future learning. We firmly believe this is all because of the excellent education he had at West Buffalo Charter School and his dedication to learn more and his motivation by his teachers to make sure he succeeds.

Some critics may ask why are you taking kids away from perfectly adequate schools and putting them in charter schools? My answer to that is because our kids deserve more than an adequate education. Some critics also want to limit the amount of charter schools believing in the false narrative that charter schools take away from public schools either financially or from the pool of students. Finding the right school for your child is about choice. My answer for the critics is, would you ever buy a house that doesn't fit your needs which is in an area that you are uncomfortable and unfamiliar with? I doubt it, because buying a house is a huge investment. Our schools are our investment in our children.

As you make decisions regarding the NYS budget please consider providing equitable funding to all types of schools. The money doesn't belong to the entity, it belongs to the child that is receiving the education and it should be provided to the child regardless of the type of educational institution they attend. We have to support each individual child, they are our future and as adults we have to invest in them fairly and equitably.

In addition there should also be no limit to the existence of any type of school. Why would you put a cap on anything that would benefit anyone, especially our children? The charter school cap is missing from the budget this year but we can not afford to withhold great education options for our children just because of the type of school it happens to be. The only type of schools we should want to remove are schools that are not educating our children. We need more of what is working for our children, not less.

The budget should reflect the support that all children deserve and need. Our children will be sitting in your seats in the future. They are our greatest investment and it starts with their education. Funding for charter schools should be on par with that of public schools. Charter schools offer longer school days and a longer academic year and that extra instructional time is the key for most of their success rates. Our children need the extra funding to help their needs and for their continued success.