

June 8, 2022

Secretary Miguel Cardona
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202-5970

Dear Secretary Cardona,

We are mayors from across the country, honored to serve diverse cities and communities. We are writing to stridently oppose the Department of Education's ("the Department") Notice of Proposed Priorities, Requirements, Definitions, and Selection Criteria ("the proposed rules") for the Charter Schools Program ("CSP"). The proposed rules would privilege the judgment and prerogatives of distant bureaucrats over the interests and needs of our diverse school communities. Further, their proposal ignores the plain demands of these communities for stronger public schools that meet their students' unique needs.

Our families, educators and local leaders have spent the past two-plus years doing the impossible: providing quality education to our students despite a global pandemic. We are far from out of the woods. Our recovery is not assured. Students already furthest from opportunity continue to face persistent challenges as the pandemic moves into its third year. Just as interrupted learning disproportionately impacted low-income students and students of color, the recovery from that interrupted learning is similarly disparate, existing achievement and opportunity gaps are widening.¹

Which is why we were alarmed to see the Department's proposed rules that would constrain the ability of local educators and leaders to create and grow the kinds of schools our families want and need. Public charter schools have been instrumental in educational improvement in our respective cities over the past several decades. These schools are now as vital as ever as we address pandemic-induced interrupted learning and the social fallout for students.

Public charter schools are essential levers in achieving education equity, educating millions of students in 44 states, the District of Columbia, Guam and Puerto Rico. As the proposed rules themselves state, public charter schools are driving better student outcomes, especially for students furthest from opportunity:

*"Educator- and community-centered charter schools can provide opportunities to meet the needs of all students, particularly underserved students[...] a better learning environment for students that leads to increased student achievement and college and career readiness."*²

¹<https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/education/our-insights/covid-19-and-education-an-emerging-k-shaped-recovery>

² 34 CFR Chapter II [Docket ID ED-2022-OESE-0006] Proposed Priorities, Requirements, Definitions, and Selection Criteria— Expanding Opportunity Through Quality Charter Schools Program (CSP)—Grants to State Entities (SE Grants); Grants to Charter Management Organizations for the Replication and Expansion of HighQuality Charter Schools (CMO Grants); and Grants to Charter School Developers for the Opening of New Charter Schools and for the Replication and Expansion of HighQuality Charter Schools (Developer Grants), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2022-03-14/pdf/2022-05463.pdf>

As such, families have flocked to these schools amidst the pandemic. Public charter enrollment grew by nearly a quarter of a million students during the 2020-2021 school year.³ That is growth the equivalent of the enrollment of the nation's 7th largest school district.⁴ CSP funding has been essential to the successful launch and expansion of high-quality public charter schools. Nearly half of charter schools across the country, in cities and states like ours, depend on CSP funds to build and grow learning environments that meet the specific needs of learners of all kinds.

At a time when educators, local leaders and families are exhausted and still reeling from the toll of the pandemic, it defies reason that the Department would create new burdensome procedures, placing new hurdles in the way of educational recovery. Pitting technical institutional interests against those of the students and families that face greater barriers to success than ever before is wrong. It also flies in the face of the Department's broader strategy, indeed history, of providing resources, support and flexibility to school communities working to close educational disparities.

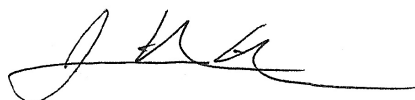
The Department should be empowering local educators, leaders and families in creating more schools that deliver the learning environments children need today and in an increasingly demanding and complex future. Instead, the proposed rules would do exactly the opposite, constraining these schools and educators at a time when more families need and are demanding the flexibility and tailored support that public charter schools offer.

We urge you to rescind the proposed rules and stand with our diverse communities as we work to build stronger tomorrows for all of our students.

Sincerely,



Mayor Rivera
Central Falls, RI



Mayor Bibb
Cleveland, OH



Mayor Parker
Fort Worth, TX



Mayor Hogsett
Indianapolis, IN

³<https://www.publiccharters.org/our-work/publications/voting-their-feet-state-level-analysis-public-charter-school-and-district>

⁴https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_215.30.asp



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