



PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION | Catherine Truitt, *Superintendent of Public Instruction*

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

Dear Secretary Cardona:

I am writing to respectfully request a pause in the implementation of the proposed rule changes for grants under the Charter Schools Program (CSP) issued by the U.S. Department of Education. Having witnessed the incredible impact, the CSP grant has had in North Carolina, I fear the proposed rules would limit access to charter schools nationwide and undermine the core principles of the CSP to expand opportunities for all students, especially underserved students, to attend charter schools and meet challenging state standards, and increase the number of high-quality charter schools.

Generally, the proposed rules threaten to deny charter schools access critical start-up funding through the CSP by placing outsized influence on traditional public school districts and undermining the decisions of state and local authorizing bodies. This is glaringly present in the Administration's requirements regarding "community impact".

One such rule change would require applicants to provide evidence that "the number of charter schools proposed to be opened, replicated, or expanded under the grant does not exceed the number of public schools needed to accommodate the demand in the community." This new requirement would limit the very definition of parental choice, boiling a complex, nuanced, and personal family decision that accounts for school performance, special programs, proximity, cultural affirmation, and many other factors, to one simply based on over-crowding. Demand for charter schools is about much more than simply too few seats at traditional public schools.

Another proposed rule change is the priority given to applicants who can provide a letter of support or MOU to "partner" with local traditional public schools and districts. This new rule, if implemented, would give local districts, who might be unfavorable to charter schools, even greater influence to hamper a charter's ability to launch successfully by blocking much needed start-up funding through the CSP. We agree that collaboration between charter schools and traditional public schools is critical to raising achievement for all students, but a charter school's good faith effort to partner with their local district should not be punished by a district unwilling to cooperate.

In North Carolina, local districts already have the statutory right to submit local "impact statements" to voice their concerns of proposed charter schools. State and local authorizers are best positioned to assess community impact through a rigorous authorizing process, and a charter school's access to critical funding sources should not be impeded by unresponsive and uncooperative local districts.

If implemented, the proposed rules would have a detrimental effect on the expansion of high-quality charter schools in North Carolina. North Carolina was awarded its first ever CSP grant under the State Entities

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program in 2018. Since then, 61 schools have been awarded subgrants to expand access for educationally disadvantaged students. Our subgrantees operate charter schools designed with specific missions to support targeted demographics, many of them representing students who may not have been served well by traditional public schools. With the requirements of the proposed rules in place, many of our subgrantees would never have had access to the funding and other resources we're able to provide, not for a lack of commitment to the goals of the CSP, but for burdensome requirements outside their control and designed to disadvantage choice in our state.

The CSP is critical to the support of high-quality school choice options around the country, and we would welcome the opportunity to collaborate on strategies to strengthen its impact. I urge you to pause consideration of this proposed rule and provide more time for public comment and stakeholder input before making any changes to the CSP requirements.

Thank you for your consideration and attention to this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me at (984) 236-2200 or Catherine.Truitt@dpi.nc.gov if I can be of any assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Truitt', with a wavy line extending to the right.

Catherine Truitt
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

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