

# The Christie Reform Agenda: Education is the Civil Rights Issue of Today

*Challenging the system to grow high-quality charter schools, spur innovation and create public school choice*

“First of all its about more charter schools in New Jersey...a robust public interdistrict choice program...the Education Opportunity Scholarship bill...that will permit, over the course of time, thousands and thousands of children to pursue educational choice...A single mom in Newark, working two jobs to keep a roof over her child's head, should have no less of an ability to make that choice than my wife and I had to make that choice for our children. Her child's life is no less precious than ours. Her child's future is no less promising than ours. And the great things that her child will do with his or hers education, will mean just as much to the great state of New Jersey as what our children will do with their education.”

- Governor Chris Christie, Remarks to the American Federation of Children National Policy Summit Dinner in Washington, D.C. 5/3/10

## **Giving All Children the Same Hope and Opportunity that Comes from a Top-Notch Education**

The need for improved school choice could not be more urgent. New Jersey public education continues to grapple with the serious challenges of failing schools, a wide achievement gap and a lack of choice – and hope – for families.

Today, 104,000 students are trapped in 205 chronically failing schools in New Jersey. In 2009, forty percent of New Jersey's African-American and 32 percent of Hispanic students were unable to meet basic standards on a national test. Likewise, New Jersey's education system has failed to prepare vast numbers of students with the critical skills required to be competitive in college or the workforce. In 2009, nearly 30 percent of all 8th graders statewide lacked basic math skills.

Generations of families, throughout the state and in urban communities, have been promised meaningful change and given hope that their children would receive the educational opportunities deserve. Yet, decade after decade, these promises have failed to materialize and the hope for a better future has been stolen from generations of New Jersey families.

To change these unacceptable results, Governor Christie's Reform Agenda removes hurdles and roadblocks to expanding and growing high-quality charter schools, empowers parents with greater choice and provides flexibility for charter school to adopt innovative and creative teaching methods that meet the needs of the community.

## **Fulfilling New Jersey's Obligation to Children and Parents: Providing an Alternative to Failing Schools**

In order to change the status quo, parents must be given options. It is unacceptable for children to be trapped in failing schools without any hope. Despite some of the highest levels of education spending in the entire nation, New Jersey's public schools continue to confront a critical achievement gap that shortchanges our children. The achievement gap between wealthy and low-income 8th graders in math is nearly the same today as it was 19 years ago; the gap between at-risk 4th graders and those not at-risk has remained nearly unchanged over the past 13 years.

The Christie Reform Plan removes barriers to growing and expanding successful charter schools already in New Jersey, opens the doors to world-class charter school operators and increases the ability to innovate in the classroom.

**Overhauling New Jersey's Charter School Laws to Encourage Growth and Expansion.** Sweeping changes to New Jersey's charter school laws are needed to remove barriers and roadblocks to growth. Today, the laws and rules governing charter schools act as a deterrent to growth instead of fostering expansion. It is time to aggressively encourage some of the nation's most-respected and successful charter school operators, such as Mastery, Achievement First and Green Dot, to

### **Charter Schools in New Jersey**

**73 charter schools** are operating in New Jersey, serving **26,000 students**.

Over **11,000 students** are on charter school waiting lists.

New Jersey charter schools serve roughly **1.4% of the K-12 student population** in the state.

Cities with the largest number of at-risk children have large concentrations of charter schools.

- Camden City Public Schools has the densest concentration: 17.5 % of Camden students attend charter schools.
- Trenton has the second highest market share with 14.6% of students enrolled in charter schools.
- In Newark, 10.2% of students attend charter schools.

*Source: NJDOE*

come to New Jersey while making it possible to implement the same model of innovation and results in other new and existing charter schools.

### ***Growing and Expanding High-Quality Charter Schools***

- Developing a list of qualified charter management organizations for designation as “preferred providers” to streamline partnerships, expansion and replication of the best charter schools.
- Removing barriers to private and parochial schools converting to charter status by eliminating the one-year delay and grandfathering currently enrolled students automatically;
- Removing hurdles for public schools to convert to charter status by changing the rules related to parent, community or staff support required for conversion, as was recently done in California; and,
- Assisting the growth of charter schools by expanding the universe of potential affected students to enroll by shifting from a designated number of districts to a mile-radius pool of students, no matter the number of eligible districts.
- Establishing a rolling application period for charter applicants.

### ***Increasing Charter School Authorizing Capacity Through The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE)***

- Approving new and high-quality charter school authorizers, while continuing to operate as a charter school authorizer itself.
- Expanding the pool of potential authorizers to all public entities, including school districts.
- Basing authorizer selection on a demonstrated commitment and capacity to grow high-quality charter schools.

### ***Implementing Best Practices for Charter School Management***

- Creating performance contracts for charter schools.

### ***Spurring Charter School Innovation and Creativity***

- Allowing single-sex charter schools.
- Allowing charters with a special education focus.
- Encouraging cyber and virtual charter schools.

### ***Encouraging Greater Cooperation Between School Districts and Charter Schools***

- Enable closing of failing schools and converting them to charter schools.
- Providing for facilities assistance and sharing of space. The NJDOE will develop a program to encourage coordination and space sharing between charters and their local school districts.

#### **Charter School Performance**

70% of New Jersey’s charter high schools had a higher 2009 graduation rate than their local district average.

#### **Grades 3-8 Assessments in '08-'09 Outperform Traditional Public Schools**

71% of charter schools outperformed their local district on Language Arts.

61% of charter schools outperformed their local district on Math.

#### **High School Assessments in '08-'09 Outperform Traditional Public Schools**

60% of charter schools outperformed their local district on Language Arts

66% of charter schools outperformed their local district on Math

*Source: NJ Charter Schools Association*

## **Taking Immediate Steps Right Now to Improve Education for New Jersey's Children**

**Providing Rapid Relief for Children in Failing Schools.** Every child deserves a high-quality education, but too often, low-income and lower middle-income children are trapped in failing schools. The Governor will sign the Opportunity Scholarship Act that is currently moving through the Legislature. As written, the Opportunity Scholarship Act will help between 2,500 and 3,800 children leave their chronically failing public schools in the first year; up to 7,600 in the second year, and as many as 19,000 when the program is at full capacity.

- Introduced in March 2010 with bi-partisan sponsorship, the Opportunity Scholarship Act will establish a five-year pilot corporate tax credit scholarship program to fund scholarships for low-income students trapped in the state's lowest performing public schools. The scholarships will enable students to attend out-of-district public schools, or non-public schools anywhere in the state, that choose to participate in the program.
- At least 75 percent of the scholarships will be awarded to current public school students who may choose to attend a better public or private school.

There is no time to waste as children continue to wait for a solution. The legislature must take immediate action on this bill.

**Giving Children Hope By Making the Interdistrict Public School Choice Program Permanent.** Full implementation of the Interdistrict School Choice program that Governor Christie signed into law earlier this month will enable hundreds of families to send their children to high quality public schools in nearby neighborhoods.

- The new law makes the Interdistrict School Choice program permanent.
- Schools decide whether they want to participate in the program.
- Preference for enrollment may be given to siblings of students who are enrolled in a designated school to keep families together.