Halt Growth in Direct State Support of Charter Schools

A fundamental position of the Council is that whatever the state hopes to gain through charter schools should not come at the expense of traditional district schools which educate over 80% of the state’s students.

The original charter school funding structure enforced an adversarial relationship between district and charter schools, with each tax dollar going into charter schools coming out of district schools as tuition based on district approved operating expenses. Districts seldom, if ever, realize full offsetting savings from charter school enrollments and some have had to maintain additional capacity to educate students moving from charter schools to district schools.

Now the expanding commitment of direct state funding for charter schools threatens to undermine the state’s capacity to appropriately support district schools.

Since the enactment of the charter school supplemental tuition formula and charter school facilities funding for New York City in 2014, the growth of direct state support of charter schools has been rapid.

While the supplemental tuition, typically $1,000 per student, is paid by the sending district, the state reimburses the total cost of supplemental tuition the following year. In the proposed budget, the state would allocate $161 million to cover this tuition cost for charter schools, up $10 million from the prior year.

Additionally, the budget would provide $50 million for charter school rent costs and the appropriation necessary to cover these costs has grown rapidly and will likely continue to do so, with an increase of $18.5 million proposed for the coming year. As has become customary, the Executive also proposes nearly $25 million in direct support of charter schools in the City.

Added together, these this sum is approaching a quarter of a billion. Absent a change in law, this total will top $250 million next year.

The state also partially reimburses school districts outside of New York City for growth in charter enrollment, with a formula that phases down over a few years.

The amount of state aid being spent to support charter schools is reducing the available resources for public schools. In effect every school district in the state is now subsidizing the costs of charter schools with the cost being socialized.

*The Council opposes continued growth in charter schools and associated state funding.*