

## Christie Administration Announces \$14.5 Million Federal Grant to Support Ongoing Efforts to Expand High-Quality Charter Schools

Funding Award furthers Administration's Commitment to Increasing Choice for Students Who Need It Most

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Trenton, NJ - New Jersey is one of three states to be awarded a grant today by the US Department of Education to support the expansion and replication of high-quality charter schools in New Jersey, the Christie Administration announced today. The State will receive nearly \$14.5 million through the federal Charter Schools Program to strengthen the quality of charter school options in New Jersey.

The award recognizes the aggressive work done by the Christie Administration to strengthen accountability for charter schools in the state and therefore improve the quality of options for students. Under the leadership of Governor Christie and Acting Commissioner Chris Cerf, the Department of Education has greatly expanded and improved its Office of Charter Schools - strengthening the charter application process, the rigor and transparency of performance contracts with charter schools, and putting a focus on oversight and accountability for authorized charters.

"We have and will continue to support the expansion of high-quality charter schools as one way to ensure that all students have great educational options available to them," said Governor Christie. "Every student in New Jersey deserves a choice of where they attend school, not only to ensure that no child is assigned to a failing school, but also so that families can select a school that gives their child the best opportunity for success."

The Department of Education will use the award for three activities. First, the Department will subgrant to new charter schools in their first three years to support start up efforts as the new schools grow to scale. Second, the Department will subgrant to existing, high-quality charter schools looking to expand, reinforcing the Department's commitment to replicating and expanding proven models. Lastly, the Department will support the sharing of best practices between charters and district schools to make sure that all public school students benefit from innovative and successful practices.

"According to data over the past several years, charter schools on average across the state are outperforming other district options for students in high-need communities. However, we must also be honest that just as some district schools are failing students, some charter schools in New Jersey are also not performing at the level their students deserve," said Acting Commissioner Cerf. "In exchange for greater autonomy to innovate and meet the specific needs of their students, charters have been held to strict account for the results they achieve in the classroom for students. We will not accept failure for our state's children and will continue to hold all of our schools, both district and charter, accountable for their results."

Under the Christie Administration, the Department of Education has strengthened charter operations by:

- Working with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers, the nation's leading support
  organization for authorizers, to ensure that its charter school policies and practices are as strong as possible;
- Expanding the Office of Charter Schools to 10 employees, to ensure staffing levels meet school oversight and monitoring needs and to address the understaffing issues under the Corzine Administration when the office had a low of only 5 employees;
- Developing new charter agreements with all new approved applicants and successful renewal schools to set forth common terms and conditions for operating charter schools in New Jersey and containing schoolspecific accountability plans for achievement; and
- Following a careful and stringent three-stage review and approval process for new charter school applicants to evaluate the quality of the proposed educational program, the capacity of the founding team to implement that program, and the need for the proposed school in the community.

The federal Charter Schools Grant provides financial support to new charter schools that do not receive their first state aid payments until often several months until after they begin operations and that often face financial difficulties as they are forced to cover fixed overhead costs while increasing enrollment (and therefore increasing state aid) each year.

The Department of Education applied for the Charter Schools Program in 2011. From that application round, two states were awarded grants for Fiscal Year 2011. New Jersey ranked fourth overall in their application, and so was one of three states to receive funding in Fiscal Year 2012. New Jersey last won a Charter Schools Program

## grant in 2006.

This is the third significant federal grant or award New Jersey has received in the past three months. In December, New Jersey was awarded \$38 million as part of the national Race to the Top 3 competition, and 372 districts and charter schools have signed up to participate in the state's reform agenda through that award. In February, New Jersey was one of the first 10 states to receive flexibility of certain provisions of No Child Left Behind through the development of a new school accountability system, the implementation of high academic standards, and a comprehensive strategy to strengthen teacher evaluations throughout the state.