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## Tell Harrisburg to fix Pennsylvania's broken charter school law: Apply the student-based special education funding formula to charter schools

Pennsylvania's broken charter school law mandates that school districts send **more than \$100 million/year to charter schools in overpayments for services for students with disabilities.**

Under current state law, **charter schools are NOT required to spend special education dollars on providing services to students with disabilities;** many charter schools use special education funding to pay for other things.

- Local taxpayers fund about 70% of special education costs as a result of inadequate state funding for services for students with disabilities.
- Because charter schools divert funding away from local public schools, they reduce the resources available for educating the majority of the children in the school district. To make up for these lost funds, school districts are forced to either raise property taxes or cut vital programs that students need in order to succeed in the 21st century.
- It is unfair for charter schools to be getting more funding than they actually use for special education, while local school districts are raising taxes and cutting programs and services for students.

**Lawmakers must fix the unfair charter school law and end this overpayment of special education funding.** Fairness dictates that the student-based special education funding formula that allocates money to school districts should also apply to charter schools. Special education funding to charter schools should match the actual cost of services for students and ensure that children with the most significant disabilities get the services they need.

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[CLICK HERE TO SIGN THE PETITION](#) telling lawmakers and Gov. Wolf to fairly apply the student-based special education funding formula to charter schools. Then share this petition with friends and neighbors.

[CALL YOUR STATE LEGISLATORS!](#) You can find your lawmakers and their contact information here.

For more information, please visit [www.educationvoterspa.org](http://www.educationvoterspa.org).

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# FAQs about Special Education Funding and Charter Schools

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## 1. How does special education funding for school districts work?

Since the enactment of a new funding formula in the 2014-15 school year, school districts receive new state special education funding based on the number of students with a disability in each of three cost categories. The categories are based on the needs of the student and the level of resources provided by the district.

## 2. Is special education funding for charter schools allocated in the same way?

No.

## 3. Why not?

Unfortunately, despite the recommendation of the bipartisan Special Education Funding Commission, the General Assembly did not apply the student-based special education funding formula to either brick-and-mortar or cyber charter schools. State lawmakers failed to finish the work of the Special Education Funding Commission, continuing an unfair funding system that forces school districts pay charter schools far more than the charter schools spend on services for children with disabilities.

## 4. So how is special education funding for charter schools done?

Poorly and unfairly. Charter school tuition rates are based on the average special education expenditure of the student's home district and range from \$13,852 per student per year to \$47,025 per student per year. Tuition rates do not take into account the level of disability of the student enrolled in the charter school or provide funding based on the three cost categories that are used in allocating state special education funding to school districts. **Charters are overpaid for the cost of educating students with mild disabilities and underpaid for the higher cost of services for students with more severe disabilities.**

## 5. But I thought charter schools didn't enroll students with disabilities. What's the story?

Charter schools are public schools and have a legal obligation under state and federal laws to educate students with disabilities. However, charter schools in Pennsylvania educate a small number of students who need intensive and costlier support.

The current funding system creates an incentive for charter schools to “over-identify” students with disabilities that require lower-cost support. Schools often collect an excess of \$10,000 or more per student than they spend providing services. Charters can then reallocate this excess special education funding and use it to pay for other things.

At the same time, there is a financial disincentive for a charter to enroll a student with a disability that requires more intensive intervention – because the home district's average expenditure may very likely not cover the charter's cost to provide the needed services.

The result is that students with slightly greater needs are typically dissuaded or “counseled away” from charter schools, limiting their public education options, possibly in violation of state and federal laws.

The effect is devastating for our local school districts. They provide services for students with greater needs – at a greater cost – driving their average expenditure higher each year, while charter schools enroll students with fewer needs – and lower costs – reaping an increasing windfall. Students with the most significant disabilities end up concentrated in district schools, with dwindling resources to provide needed services.

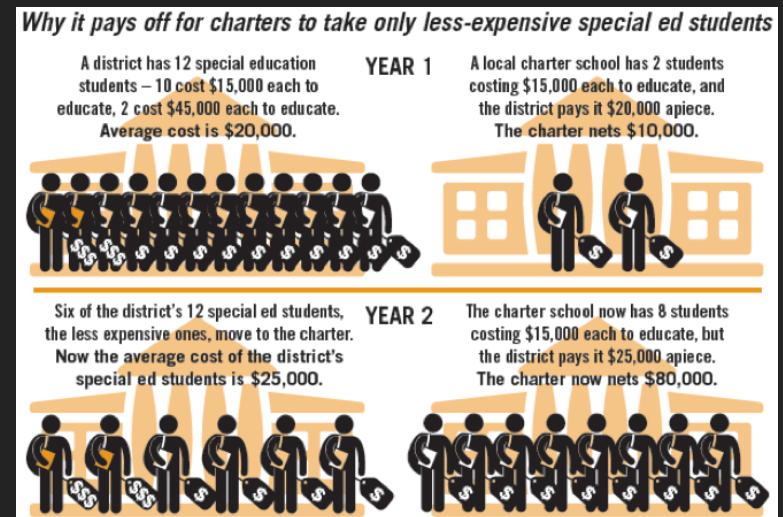
## 6. What can I do help end the unfair funding of education for students with disabilities?

Spread the word and contact your lawmakers so that they understand that their constituents expect them to do the right for children with disabilities and fix this unfair funding system.

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Graphic from *The Notebook* (10/20/2014)