

## **Written Testimony of Philadelphia Charters for Excellence (PCE)**

Senate Education Committee Hearing – Teacher Shortages

Tuesday, February 28, 2023

Chairman Argall, Chairwoman Williams and members of the Senate Education Committee,

Thank you for taking the time to consider my written statement before you today on this important topic. My name is Amy Hollister and I am the Director of Community Development for Philadelphia Charters for Excellence (PCE). PCE is a membership organization that works to connect, convene and catalyze collective action on behalf of Philadelphia’s 83 brick-and-mortar public charter schools, and the families they serve.

PCE was founded in 2011 as a grassroots organization and has since grown into the central advocate for public policy and legislation that affects Philadelphia’s brick-and-mortar charter schools. It is our aim to put forth policy recommendations that can be shared with our local, state and federal officials as they work to create fair and equitable policies to improve the lives of the 65,000 public charter school students that we represent.

As part of our work to support, connect and inform our charter sector, PCE has been collaborating with many of the other groups and coalitions so diligently working to rebuild our teacher pipeline and retain our current workforce. Last year, PCE partnered with the Philadelphia Mayor’s Office of Education to connect our members with school-based employment initiatives and participated in their workforce data collection project. In addition, PCE serves as an active member of the Pennsylvania Educators Diversity Consortium (PEDC) and the newly developed Philadelphia Citywide Talent Coalition. We view teacher shortages as an issue that must be addressed for all students, regardless of their school type, and are therefore committed to working collectively across the education sector.

While public charter schools are their own local education agencies (LEAs) and differ greatly in size and educational focus, PCE’s collective school community is suffering from a lack of qualified teaching professionals, an increase in the number of educators leaving the profession and even a lack of substitute teachers to fill the gaps in their classrooms. Our leaders are fearful that their once stable school communities will be dramatically disrupted by the increasingly competitive teachers’ market.

Long before the education community was recognizing the shortages in the teacher pipeline and organizing to combat this issue, many innovative public charter schools were considering their own communities as sources for future teachers and employees. “Grow Your Own” models have been seen throughout many PCE schools over the years. It is rare to visit charter schools in Philadelphia and not be introduced to employees who were former students or teacher’s aides who are receiving support to further their credentials and become teachers. Below are two examples of the innovative practices that PCE members are taking to address teacher shortages:

- Wissahickon Charter School opened in 2002 and serves students in grades K-8. For over a decade Wissahickon has been running an apprentice teacher program to keep their school staffed and motivated. This program was developed as an incentive to combat high turnover. The school's CEO, Kristi Littel, tapped in to support staff who were looking to enter into the classroom as lead teachers but lacked the specific credentials required. While partnered with a lead certified teacher, they were able to get the hands-on training they needed while working on their external credentials.
- Universal Family of Schools oversees five brick-and-mortar charter schools in Philadelphia which serve students in grades K-12. Dr. Penny Nixon, CEO of Universal's schools, is partnering with LaSalle University to create a certification cohort for her uncertified classroom assistants with funding from Philadelphia Works. At this time 17 of Dr. Nixon's current employees are on the path to solidifying their educational requirements and being eligible to sit for certification exams.

PCE's members are excited to continue to build on these models as they have more access to funds/grants targeted to address this problem and access to dual enrollment programs that help prepare their students for a career in education. Philadelphia's public charter school community is asking the General Assembly to continue prioritizing financial, credential and workplace supports to address the issue of teacher shortages. PCE is also asking that all opportunities for support (in the form of programs and grants) provided by the General Assembly and the PA Department of Education be open to all public schools - - both district and charter.

In closing, I want to thank you again for holding a hearing on this important topic and for providing PCE with an opportunity to offer written testimony. If you have any questions about the information provided in our testimony or would like to connect with one of our member schools, please feel free to contact me at [amy@philadelphiacharters.org](mailto:amy@philadelphiacharters.org).

Amy Hollister  
Director of Community Development  
Philadelphia Charters for Excellence

### **About Philadelphia Charters for Excellence (PCE)**

Founded in 2011, Philadelphia Charters for Excellence (PCE), is a 501c3 non-profit organization that works to connect, convene and catalyze collective action for Philadelphia's 85 public brick-and-mortar charter schools, which currently educate approximately 65,000 public school students. Today, PCE serves as the central voice and umbrella advocacy organization, including policy development, advocacy initiatives and public-private sector engagement, and serves as the focal point for resources and collaborative knowledge sharing for Philadelphia's public brick-and-mortar charter school sector.