

“Can I get an amen?” says Dr. Roy

The Bethlehem Gadfly Charter Schools, Education, Serious Issues August 14, 2019

(25th in a series on Education and Charter Schools)

This article, though targeted at Allentown’s charter school controversies, reflects the Governor’s response to problems we’ve followed here on Gadfly from discussions with our BASD boss Dr. Roy.

Jacqueline Palochko, “Gov. Tom Wolf calls for charter school changes that could ease Allentown schools deficit.” Morning Call, August 14, 2019.

Gov. Tom Wolf called Tuesday for changes in the special education and cybercharter funding formulas that, if adopted by a reluctant Legislature, would save Allentown and other financially strapped school districts millions.

Calling the charter school law “flawed” and “outdated,” Wolf told reporters in Allentown he also is instructing the state Department of Education to develop new regulations that would allow districts to limit student enrollment at charters that do not provide a “high-quality” education, and to boost oversight over charter school management companies.

Democrat Wolf’s call for changes in reimbursement formulas dictating how much public school districts must pay charter and cyberschools for students would save districts like Allentown, now facing a \$6 million deficit, millions.

But passage in the Republican-controlled state Legislature, which created the charter school system, is far from guaranteed.

Ana Meyers, the executive director of the Pennsylvania Coalition of Public Charter Schools, called Wolf's proposals "blatant attacks on charter schools." Meyers also claimed that Wolf could be abusing his authority through executive order and regulatory action.

At Harrison-Morton Middle School, Wolf said he wants a "level playing field" for all charter and public schools.

Besides proposing a legislative change in the areas of special education funding and cyber charter tuition payments, Wolf is also asking the state Department of Education to develop regulations to:

Allow districts to limit student enrollment at charters that do not provide a high-quality, equitable education to students.

Require transparent charter school admission and enrollment policies that do not discriminate based on intellectual or athletic ability, race, gender or disability.

Ramp up oversight of charter school management companies.

Establish a clear process that requires charters to accurately document their costs and prevent charters from over-charging districts for educational services.

Bethlehem Area Superintendent Joseph Roy, a vocal critic of charters, began his comments with: "Can I get an amen?" Roy called charter school and traditional public school funding a "separate and unequal system."

For a related story, see:

Sarah M. Wojcik, “Innovative Arts Academy pledges curriculum overhaul, benchmarks for academic improvement.” Morning Call, August 14, 2019.