

# BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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**For immediate release:**  
**September 11, 2015**

## **City Schools Continues Collaboration with Stakeholders on Charter School Funding** *Legal action will not affect work on formula to provide increased charter school autonomy, continued commensurate funding for all students*

(Baltimore, MD)—Baltimore City Public Schools was informed yesterday of legal action filed by five charter school operators who together represent eight of the district’s 34 charter schools. (An additional school named in the legal action is a traditional neighborhood school that will convert to charter operation in the 2016-17 school year.) In a [joint statement](#) released last night, Board of School Commissioners Chair Marnell A. Cooper and City Schools CEO Gregory E. Thornton expressed disappointment in the charter operators’ action in light of the district’s efforts to collaborate with stakeholders to refine a formula that continues commensurate funding for all students while increasing charter schools’ autonomy over budget resources.

“City Schools is committed to providing a high-quality education for all our students, each one of whom is unique,” said Dr. Thornton. “They include pre-k children, students learning English, advanced learners and learners who need extra support, students pursuing complex career training, and students with disabilities across a spectrum of need. Our job is to make sure that every one of those students gets what he or she needs for success—whether in a traditional or a charter school.”

The schools participating in the legal action serve approximately 3,700 of the 13,700 students currently enrolled in the district’s charter schools, and just under 5 percent of the district’s 85,000 students.

“Charter schools increase the district’s ability to provide options for all of Baltimore’s families, and they are engines of innovation for the district,” said Mr. Cooper. “Through our support, almost three-quarters of Maryland’s charter schools are right here in Baltimore. We need to make sure we fund these schools in a way that facilitates their success and provides a predictable revenue stream so they can plan. At the same time, that funding methodology can’t be at the expense of the 70,000+ students in our traditional schools. It also can’t ignore our obligations and legal requirements in areas including early learning, compensatory education for children from low-income households, and special education for students with disabilities.”

At the September 8 public meeting of the Board of School Commissioners, City Schools reiterated its longstanding commitment to establishing a funding formula that is sustainable and ensures equitable opportunities for all students across the district, while at the same time being responsive to charter operators’ desire for increased dollars over which they have budgetary autonomy. Like the current formula, a refined approach proposed to the Board continues to distribute cash to charter schools based on the number of students they serve, but it links dollars received from the state to the purposes for which

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they are provided. Under the state’s adequacy formula, this includes funds received to provide compensatory education and to deliver instruction for those identified as English language learners; under the proposed approach, these designated funds would follow students regardless of the school they attend. With respect to funds designated for special education, City Schools will continue to work with partners to develop a mechanism to provide more resources in the form of cash to schools interested in managing their own special education programs while still enabling the district to meet its obligation to provide a free, appropriate education for all students with disabilities up to age 21.

Details of the proposed approach, including examples with dollar figures based on the district’s 2015-16 budget, are included in [a memo presented to the Board and public](#) at the September 8 meeting.

The approach was developed in direct response to charter operators’ requests and in collaboration with both operators and other stakeholders, beginning with the creation of the Charter Sustainability Work Group in October 2013. The work group—which includes representatives from the Coalition of Baltimore Public Charter Schools, the New and Charter School Advisory Board, Advocates for Children and Youth, the American Civil Liberties Union, and principals from “traditional” schools—analyzed the methodology of the current funding formula and the rationale behind every revenue source and expense, reviewed the legal context in related areas (e.g., the requirement to provide pre-k to low-income children, maintenance of effort in special education funding), and discussed other potential funding methodologies. The work group also identified which administrative services (e.g., payroll, student record management) needed to be delivered centrally for all schools, and reviewed an analysis of costs associated with those services.

After extensive efforts on the part of the work group, agreement was not reached. An ad hoc committee was established to continue work to refine a formula to address charter operators’ concerns while also ensuring commensurate funding for all students and schools. The outcome of these efforts is the [proposed formula presented on September 8](#).

“I am excited about the potential of this proposed approach,” said Joe Manko, principal of Liberty Elementary School and a member of the Charter Sustainability Work Group. “It will result in the budget flexibility charter schools have asked for, and it honors the principle of equity by making sure that dollars designated for some of our most vulnerable students follow those kids throughout their education. What’s most exciting to me, though, is that this is a model that could be applied not only to charter schools but to traditional schools with a track record of successful innovation.”

“We are continuing to meet with stakeholders to gather their feedback about the proposed approach and their ideas for other models,” said Dr. Thornton. “It is unfortunate that this legal action means that a handful of charter operators may choose not to participate in those conversations.”

A public forum on charter school funding will be held on Saturday, September 26, beginning at 9:00 a.m. at Mergenthaler Vocational-Technical High School. This will be followed by additional opportunities for feedback from stakeholder groups and the public. Comments on the proposed new approach can be submitted by email to [publicforums@bcps.k12.md.us](mailto:publicforums@bcps.k12.md.us).