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GOFERR Legislative Advisory Board
Impact of Covid-19 on New Hampshire Public Charter Schools to
August 26, 2020

Testimony of Matt Southerton
New Hampshire Alliance for Public Charter Schools

Good afternoon,

My name is Matt Southerton and I am the President of the New Hampshire Alliance for Public Charter Schools. I would like to thank you for this opportunity to provide input from our New Hampshire charter schools regarding costs related to Covid-19 and to thank you all for your work helping the people of our state to recover from this pandemic. I would also like to thank the Governor for his leadership during this crisis and affording all of our public schools the flexibility they need to respond during this unprecedented crisis.

CHARTER SCHOOL POPULATION SIZE

New Hampshire brick and mortar charter schools serve approximately 3,900 students and their families or about 2.2% of the public-school population.

The Virtual Learning Academy Charter School (VLACS), processes approximately 18,000 course enrollment requests annually. These are most often students that attend their traditional public school but have chosen to take one of more classes online through VLACS.

FISCAL IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CHARTER SCHOOLS

Like other public schools, charter schools are suffering under the weight of unexpected costs related to Covid-19. The costs are so significant that they are placing the schools in a dire budget situation. Cost categories include but are not limited to the need for additional staff, PPE, increased cleaning, HVAC system upgrades, portable air filtration units, IT upgrades to facilitate remote learning & portable technology for students (Chromebooks etc.).

Our initial survey of NH charter schools found respondents reporting between a 5-10% increase in operating costs over and above their approved budgets due to Covid-19 related expenses.

The following example highlights what one school has faced when responding to Covid-19. In this example the school's major Covid-19 related expenses total \$105,500 however the school only received \$16,000 in educational CARES Act funds.

- *Increased from part time to a full-time nurse: \$12,500*
- *Increased cleaning costs: \$28,000*
- *Floating teacher to support fully remote students and cover absences: \$45,000 committed, anticipate needing a second at \$45,000*
- *HVAC systems upgrades: \$18,000*
- *POD storage rental as we have nowhere to store unused classroom furniture while in Hybrid: \$2,000 (for 3 months)*

The fiscal impact of Covid-19 is further exacerbated by the lack of funds from the local level. (i.e. in New Hampshire the local portion of education funding does not follow the child to the charter)

1. According to the NH Department of Education, approximately 62% of the funding for the cost of public education in 2018/19 was drawn from local taxation¹;
2. In New Hampshire, all public schools (including charter schools) receive Base Adequacy Aid of approximately \$3,708 per pupil², plus any applicable Differentiated Aid;
3. In New Hampshire, state & federal funding for the costs associated with special education goes directly to the student's resident district, not the charter school;
4. In New Hampshire, state-authorized charter schools do not receive local tax dollars, i.e. the local portion of funding to provide a public education does not follow the child;
5. In 2006 the State Legislature attempted to address the equity gap created by the lack of local funding for state-authorized charter schools.
6. As a result of the 2006 change to state law, state-authorized charter schools currently receive an Additional Grant³ of approximately \$3,479 per pupil directly from the state.
7. Locally-authorized charter schools are funded by their local district, these public schools receive Base Adequacy Aid directly from the state and the remaining of "not less than 80 percent of that district's average cost per pupil"⁴ by the student's resident school district.

¹ <https://www.education.nh.gov/sites/g/files/ehbemt326/files/inline-documents/state-summary18-19.pdf>

² https://www.education.nh.gov/sites/g/files/ehbemt326/files/inline-documents/2020-04/ad_ed_aid_fy2021.pdf

³ RSA 194-B:11 I. (b)(1)(A)

⁴ RSA 194-b:11 I. (a)

Funding Comparison Public Schools in New Hampshire			
According to the NH Department of Education, the State Average Cost Per Pupil to educate a child in New Hampshire in 2019 was \$16,346.45. ⁵			
State Aid Per Pupil Grades K-12	Traditional Public Schools	State Authorized Charter Schools	Locally Authorized Charter Schools
Base Adequacy Aid	\$3,708.78	\$3,708.78	3,708.78
Additional Grant	\$0	\$3,479.22	\$0
Local Tax Dollars Per Pupil Grades K-12	This amount varies Average: \$10,134.80 State Average Cost Per Pupil in 2019 was \$16,346.45, approximately 62% of funding comes from Local Taxation. ⁶	\$0 State-authorized charter schools do not receive local tax dollars.	This amount varies <i>("not less than 80 percent of that district's average cost per pupil"⁷ to educate a student after subtracting state adequacy aid.)</i>
Differentiated Aid	per eligible student	per eligible student	per eligible student
FRL	1,854.38	1,854.38	1,854.38
ELL	725.63	725.63	725.63
SPED	1,995.21	NA	NA
3rd Graders Not Proficient in Reading	725.63	725.63	725.63

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REQUEST

New Hampshire public charter schools & school districts need your help.

1. We request a temporary increase in State and/or Federal Government support for public schools during this emergency.
2. We request that the Joint Legislative Fiscal Committee accept the Federal CSP Grant (\$46M). This would allow NH school districts & charter schools to use those funds to assist them in responding to the pandemic by:
 - a. Providing critically needed funds necessary to expand their current programs through the purchase of new technology & developing their remote learning capabilities independently of VLACS.
 - b. Enabling VLACS to expand its technical infrastructure to help meet the demand of those school districts & charter schools that do not have the size or technical capacity required to adequately provide remote instruction for their students.

⁵ <https://www.education.nh.gov/sites/g/files/ehbemt326/files/inline-documents/cost-state-average18-19.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.education.nh.gov/sites/g/files/ehbemt326/files/inline-documents/state-summary18-19.pdf>

Thank you again for this opportunity to provide input today.

Respectfully,

Matt Southerton

Matt Southerton

President

STATEMENTS SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF CHARTER NH SCHOOLS

Submitted on behalf of the Virtual Learning Academy Charter School,

Throughout the state of New Hampshire, thousands of families and hundreds of schools are reaching out to the Virtual Learning Academy Charter School (VLACS) for assistance during the pandemic. VLACS is an open enrollment school, which means that students can enroll at any time. In under two months (July 1 to August 18), the school has processed over 18,000 course enrollment requests, a cumulative total that is typically reached eight months into the year. This number would be much higher, but the school has temporarily closed many of its courses while new instructors are hired and trained. However, the number of new hires is limited since the school must operate within its approved budget.

The governor, legislature, and Department of Education have always provided adequate financial support to VLACS. However, during this state of emergency, the school is rapidly approaching the limitations of its current budget and may be forced to significantly limit the number of new enrollments it accepts for the remainder of the year. Many experts predict that we are in a long-term fight against the COVID-19 virus. While VLACS is not the only option available to meet the needs of the state's youth during this crisis, it is certainly a valuable partner.

<https://vlacs.org>

Submitted on behalf of the Founders Academy Charter School,

The Founders Academy, like all New Hampshire Public Charter Schools, is committed to creating a positive educational experience for all students who choose our school and our mission. Sometimes it's easy to forget that Charter Schools have limited public funding and no taxing authority. As a result, the budget is tight with little room to accommodate a global crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic certainly presents additional financial challenges as we budget items for remote learning and safety while in school.

The new expenses include an extensive upgrade to our existing technology for remote learners to attend classes in real time, provide Chromebooks to our student population without access to a computer, purchasing microphones and webcams for teachers, facemasks for each individual in the building, sanitizing and disinfecting materials and equipment, hands free sanitizing stations, pallets of hand sanitizer, gowns, thermometers and a variety of building needs including signs and regular deep cleaning of our facility. These expenses are a substantial burden for Founders Academy, and are comparable to the salaries of 4-5 teachers.

The State of New Hampshire has indicated each school may create their own guidelines for reopening during the Covid-19 pandemic. We are committed to providing a clean, safe and positive environment for our community, and therefore we will incur the necessary expenses, to the extent we can. We won't be able to do everything we want or hope to do to protect our students and faculty, however, we will undertake a broad spectrum of safety measures. Founders Academy is planning to enroll approximately 400 students for the 2020-2021 academic year. We have an estimated cost of \$225,000 to prepare for the return of our students. We have spent approximately \$58,000 in unanticipated COVID related expenses. We have received \$17,000 from the State of New Hampshire from the CARES Act and ESSER funding.

<http://thefoundersacademy.org>

Submitted on behalf of the Kreiva Academy Charter School,

At Kreiva we are feeling the impacts of this virus in multiple ways. We have substantial Corona related costs incurred and projected (\$85,600). The \$17,000 awarded for ESSER funding related to the CARES ACT only covers about 20%. See below:

- Facilities: \$36,300
- Basic Individual HEPA Air Filtration Units for rooms- \$15,000
- Portable AC Units- \$3500
- Demo and Remodeling of room to make additional space- \$2,500
- Enhanced Cleaning Monthly Cleaning Cost Increase- \$600 per month x 9 months= \$5,300
- Touchless Sanitizers- \$10,000
- Remote Technology: \$48,800
- Tech Infrastructure improvements to meet the demands of all virtual instruction- \$5,000

- Chromebooks- 50-60 Chromebooks, licensing to ensure all students have access to remote learning- \$24,500
- Software and Learning Platforms and licenses- \$5,000
- Headsets with microphone- \$800
- Teacher Computers- \$10,000
- Classroom Digital Projectors- \$3,500
- PD/Planning: \$5000
- Stipends for staff for working through the summer to plan and develop curriculum for both in person and virtual learning \$3,000

Corona related increases in operating costs are placing our school in a dire budget situation for this coming school year. We are doing everything we can to adjust our budget to this environment under corona

Unfortunately, if we do not see increases in enrollment, decreases in operating costs and/or some form of assistance by State or Federal Government, our only option to remain open will be to furlough staff, substantially cut staff salaries and limit supports and resources for our students.

<https://www.kreiva.org>

Submitted on behalf of Strong Foundations Charter School,

First, I have appreciated the involvement and assistance of the NHDOE by Commissioner Edelblut, Charter School Administrator Jane Waterhouse, Administrator for the School Safety and Facility Management Amy Clark and State Director of Special Education Rebecca Fredette. The NHDOE has included charter schools in the weekly information briefings during this pandemic. It has helped tremendously to be included.

Like all public schools, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a tremendous impact on us fiscally. We have had to hire more help than was budgeted in our payroll for unanticipated situations such as absences or refusal to work in school. We have added over \$12,000 to additional custodial services during the day. We had to relocate our nurse's station in order to create an isolation room, install 3 additional sinks for handwashing, and purchase 4 camp sinks for portable hand washing stations. We purchased air purifiers and are trying to find the money to purchase clear Lexan sneeze guards for our tables because our rooms are not large, and we can't spread out to 6 feet apart in some of our rooms that have tables. Those sneeze guards will cost about \$20,000. We will need to make about 200 homemade sneeze guards for the 200 desks in our building.

At a time that we are extremely busy, we also have to find ways to do all the communication and professional development with our staff, parents, the state, and our boards. It is a time we have to get through with sheer force.

We estimate that it will cost about \$100,000 to respond to the pandemic in order to keep our students and staff safe. That is a large estimated overage in our budget, but we are overcomers in the charter world.

<https://www.strongfoundationsnh.org>

Submitted on behalf of the Academy for Science & Design,

The Academy for Science and Design's Reopening Task Force quickly came to the conclusion that it was not feasible within ASD's budget to afford the appropriate health and safety measures needed to bring our students back for in-person learning this Fall, most notably the need for additional staffing, air quality improvements, additional cleaning and sanitization, and the replacement of a vast majority of our classroom tables used for collaborative learning and problem-solving to individual student desks. Due to the limited funding that Charters already struggle with in normal circumstances, ASD is aware that in order to ensure future sustainability, the school will have to make difficult decisions to protect the future of the school in the long-term-- there is not a way to raise additional funds through increased local taxes, for example.

Our current focus is to bolster our Remote Learning capabilities and to ensure that our struggling families are provided with the technology needed so that all of our students have equal access and opportunities for learning in our program. To date, we have spent approximately \$20,000 to do so. We have made a number of enhancements to the facility, to support bringing in a very limited number of students when we can. These enhancements include installing plexiglass in the Front Desk/lobby, purchase of ten air purifiers for testing (we would need a total of 50 in order to accommodate the entire building), hand sanitizing stations for classrooms, signage to support social distancing/hygiene, and the purchase of 2000 cloth masks. At this point, we are uncertain what the additional staffing costs would be to support in-person student needs for the 7 instructors who will not be able to return to the classroom due to risk factors associated with COVID-19, as well as uncertain about how we could replace furnishings in over 30 classrooms in order to separate the students, as well as whether the classroom air purifiers would be a sufficient means of providing safe air for our students and educators to breathe (our outdated HVAC system will not support any of the recommended filtrations systems). Initial estimates by our Task Force called CHART (Committee Helping ASD Redesign & Transition) have surpassed \$125,000+.

ASD has applied for all available grants and accessed all free PPE/hand sanitizer that we are made aware of, but do not find much relief. ASD received only \$5,600 in CARES grant dollars. Prior to the pandemic, ASD relied on raising approximately \$150,000 annually through donations to stay within our annual budget. In 2019-2020, we have raised approximately \$30,000 less than last year and we expect that with the financial hardship and uncertainty many of our families are facing in 2020-2021 we will see a greater decline in donations, which we will need

to account for. At this point, we are left to focus on the best teaching and learning that we can support in essentially a remote environment with limited on-site experiences for our students. In a school so heavily-reliant on lab-based, hands-on coursework, this is a tough blow for us, but our creativity and resilience will lead our school community through this.

<http://www.asdnh.org>