

**Statement Regarding Collegium Charter School and Avon Grove Charter School
School Board Meeting
September 28, 2021**

I want to start by being abundantly clear that the Coatesville Area School District supports a parent's right to choose whatever school they want for their child. We do, however, join with public school districts, educators, and education associations across Pennsylvania that believe PA Charter School funding is unfair, inequitable, and outdated -- and in dire need of reform. We have made our position on the clear many times in the past. Coatesville is one of many school districts faced with serious challenges in the area of charter school funding. We continue to join with school districts across the Commonwealth that are urging our legislators to change this antiquated and inequitable funding system.

As we have previously reported, in 2019, after the close of the 2018-19 school year, and after Coatesville had already paid Collegium *in full* for the year, Collegium felt it was owed more money, and asked the Department of Education to redirect about \$3.3 million from Coatesville's state subsidy and pay it to Collegium. Under the terms of the Charter School Law, the Department of Education had no choice but to comply with Collegium's request. This significant withholding of the District's subsidy (and other withholdings made for similar reasons requested by charter schools other than Collegium) presented a dramatic financial blow to the district, causing serious cash flow problems and impacted the District's ability to maintain operations at expected levels. Although the dispute between the District and Collegium was ultimately settled, the District believed and continues to believe that Collegium's withholding request was improper as a matter of law.

And now Collegium has made another request for millions of dollars that the District believes is contrary to law and improper. Collegium is now contending it is owed over \$3.7 million above and beyond what it has already received from the District for the 2020-2021 school year. (For the 2020-2021 school year, Collegium was paid approximately \$3.6 million per month to educate students who reside in the District.) Avon Grove Charter School has also made a request—for about \$800,000—and it is based on the same grounds upon which Collegium relies. We expect other similar requests may be made by other charter schools that enroll residents of the District.

The District's payment of the funds these schools seek—about \$4.5 million at present—would present a potentially catastrophic situation for the District. The District's ability to pay its bills (including payroll) would be put in jeopardy. The District budgeted for its anticipated charter school expenses for the 2020-2021 school year, and it neither budgeted for, nor had any reason to budget for, an additional \$4.5 million to Collegium and Avon Grove.

The District is firm in its belief that the charter schools' legal position is clearly contrary to law, the District will take the necessary steps to protect its interests and the interests of the residents of the District. While are hopeful that a resolution will be reached, the District will be steadfast in protecting its rights and interests.

Thank you,

Rob Fisher, School Board President
Coatesville Area School District