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New Report Uncovers Systemic Failure by California Charter Schools to Meet Local Control Obligations

SAN FRANCISCO—A new report by Public Advocates Inc. uncovers a massive failure on the part of California charter schools to be transparent about how they spend millions of taxpayer dollars to benefit high need students, as required by state law. The report also reveals disturbing trends about the availability of public documents and the ability of parents to exercise their legal rights to participate in charter school spending decisions as promised by California’s Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) law. The report, which is the first systematic analysis of charter school Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs) found critical financial and engagement information missing, unavailable, or incomplete at a shocking number of charter schools.

For example, not a single school analyzed for this report properly documented how it was increasing or improving services for high need students, services for which those charter schools received \$48.6 million this past year. Even more concerning, two-thirds of that amount was completely unaccounted for. Statewide, charters receive over \$900 million annually to increase or improve services for high need students.

“Charter schools are part of California’s public education system. They receive \$3.4 billion in public dollars every year and they need to be held accountable for how they spend those funds, just like every other school,” said Senior Staff Attorney Rigel Spencer Massaro.

Public Advocates looked for LCAPs at 70 schools and systematically examined 43 schools in Oakland, Sacramento, Richmond, Los Angeles, and San Jose which had published LCAPs for the 2017-2018 school year. The report found that:

- One-third of all charter schools examined had no LCAP online. These public documents were still missing after email requests to the school, its authorizer, and the County Office of Education
- More than two-thirds of the state funds generated by high need students—over \$30 million—were unaccounted for; of the \$48.6 million these schools received specifically for high need students in 2017-2018, there was only documentation for \$15.8 million in planned spending
- Only 21% clearly measured how they engaged parents in school decision-making, and only 37% described how community engagement impacted their planning process
- 91% of charter schools examined serving 15% or more English learners did not post their LCAPs in a language other than English

- Of the 12 Charter Management Organizations examined in the report and that manage 123 charter schools in multiple cities, 100% adopt LCAPs at a single meeting in a single location, with minimal public comment

Assemblymember Patrick O'Donnell, chair of the Assembly Education Committee, commented, "Public Advocates' newly released report, Keeping the Promise of LCFF in Charter Schools, raises concerns about transparency and accountability in charter schools. The fact that Public Advocates could not get copies of some charter schools' LCAPs despite multiple requests is beyond troubling. Parents and local communities cannot ensure that student achievement and needs are addressed if the LCAPs are not easily available. The State Legislature should close a loophole requiring traditional public schools, but not charter schools, to post LCAPs on a school's website."

Community engagement and transparency are pillars of California's groundbreaking Local Control Funding Formula law and every parent has a right to know and participate in how their school is spending money.

Abadesa Rolon, a charter school parent in Richmond commented, "We need our charter schools to complete their LCAPs so parents can understand the goals, actions, progress and funding that support student success. I understand how my school is spending S&C funds, but that's because I've asked a lot of questions. Other parents don't know, because this information isn't in our school's LCAP."

The report calls for expert oversight and improved support over charter school LCAPs, especially when it comes to transparency for funds designated to improve services for high need students. The report also recommends legislation that would hold charter schools to similar standards of transparency and engagement as public schools.

Click [here](#) for a copy of the report

Click [here](#) for a list of the charter schools investigated for this report