



AVON GROVE CHARTER SCHOOL

INSPIRE PASSION FOR LIFELONG LEARNING ONE STUDENT AT A TIME

January 5, 2020

Correcting Misinformation in the Coatesville Area School District

AGCS official response to CASD Facebook Live Post

Dear Avon Grove Charter School Parents,

This letter is intended for the Coatesville Avon Grove Charter School families and the Coatesville Community to correct misinformation from the Coatesville Area School District.

On December 17, 2019, a Coatesville School District Budget Presentation was posted on social media by Dr. Richard F. Dunlap, Jr. This presentation acknowledged the financial crisis facing the Coatesville Area School District and the important role that charter schools like Avon Grove Charter School are playing in ensuring that Coatesville's children are safe and well-educated. Unfortunately, certain claims made by Dr. Dunlap regarding charter schools' right to funding, and the District's obligations in that regard, are false.

By way of background, charter schools are public schools paid for with taxpayer dollars; students pay no tuition. Unlike the District, however, charter schools cannot set their own tax rates and are, therefore, forced to operate based on the funding they receive under the Charter School Law. That statutory funding system requires the District to pay over to charter schools, for each student living in the District and educated by the charter school, the District's per-pupil budgeted expenditure that includes certain costs that are deducted and broken down into a formula. To that end, the District calculates its budget, subtracts out the cost of land acquisition, building construction, maintenance, transportation, debt service and certain other costs, and then divides the resulting number by the number of students enrolled in the District; the charter school that educates those students receives that reduced per-capita figure for each student it enrolls from the District.

Although charter schools are funded without consideration for the cost of land and buildings, maintenance, transportation, and debt service, we, of course, do incur all of those costs. As a result, charter schools are required to stretch their budgets twice as far as the District. In spite of that, as Dr. Dunlap frankly admits, Coatesville students continue to turn to charter schools like AGCS in greater numbers. We take our responsibility to those families seriously and are enormously proud of the success that we have helped our students achieve.

Dr. Dunlap specifically complained that two schools, Avon Grove Charter School and Collegium Charter School, sent the District a "revised" reconciliation that resulted in payments to Avon Grove Charter and Collegium of approximately \$4MM above the amount budgeted by the District. He called this a "money grab" and announced that the Coatesville Area School District had filed a lawsuit against Avon Grove Charter, Collegium, and the Pennsylvania District of Education. This claim is disingenuous at best.

As noted above, charter schools receive funding based on the District's budgeted per-pupil expenditures. For the 2017-2018 school year, the budgeting year at issue, the District under-



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budgeted its actual expenditures by twenty-percent, and went on to spend millions of dollars in off-budget expenses. This was not the result of a sudden emergency but, instead, appears to have been either a deliberate attempt to de-fund charter schools or extreme negligence in its budgeting practice; regardless of the District's actual motivation, de-funding the charter schools was certainly the effect of its actions.

This conduct is against the law. Section 6-609 of the Public School Code prohibits school districts from exceeding their budgets. Particularly given the recent history with Coatesville District employees' off-budget expenditures, financial transparency is critical for the Coatesville Area School District. It is just as critical for the charter schools that rely on those budgeted funds that the District make and stick to accurate budgets. The Department of Education apparently agrees and has properly allocated those funds to Avon Grove Charter School and Collegium Charter School.

On December 18, 2019, the District filed an emergency petition in the Commonwealth Court seeking to prohibit the transfer of funds from the Department of Education to Avon Grove Charter and Collegium. On December 23, 2019, the Commonwealth Court denied the District's Petition, and sided with the Charter Schools and the Department of Education. In short, the District broke the law by under-budgeting and overspending, intentionally short-changing the charter schools that educate its students, was caught, and neither the Pennsylvania Department of Education nor the Commonwealth Court has taken the Coatesville District's side.

It should be a matter of public concern that the District failed to acknowledge these facts when announcing a lawsuit it had filed against two local charter schools. It should be a matter of further concern that, although the District publicly announced the lawsuit, by video, just days after it was filed, it has failed to in any way acknowledge that its claims were promptly denied. Not having received the acknowledgement or apology that we expected from the Coatesville District, Avon Grove Charter is forced to make the outcome public itself.

We will soon begin a new budgeting cycle with a newly elected Coatesville School Board. It is my hope that, rather than re-hashing this dispute a third time, the Coatesville Board will see fit to accurately budget for the 2020-21 school year, which will both provide Coatesville residents with the information they need, and fully resolve this issue. If not, however, I can only reiterate that Avon Grove Charter School has legal, professional, and moral obligations to its students. We take those obligations seriously, and we will not be deterred from fulfilling them by the Coatesville Area School District.

Knowledge and transparency is power! Please educate yourself on the facts before writing your legislators. Dr. Dunlap refers to Charter Schools as having extra funding to build fancy new facilities. The Avon Grove Charter School Board, Administration, teachers, parents and students work hard and make sacrifices every day to have funding for 21st century learning. We chose to spend the money we get on our students and their learning environment. Coatesville School District has every right to make the same decisions for the students they serve. It is a shame that politics are playing a part in the education of our children. Please support Avon Grove Charter School. Be the voice of all of our hard work and accomplishments.



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Please contact your fellow legislators, call or write your legislators:

Senator Andrew Dinniman
One North Church Street
West Chester, PA 19380
610-692-2112

Representative Dan Williams
496 E Lincoln Hwy
Thorndale, PA 19372
484-200-8256

Governor Tom Wolf
Office of the Governor
508 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120
717-787-2500

Avon Grove Charter School students and Coatesville Area School District students deserve equal funding. The adults making the decisions for schools have an obligation to spend the Coatesville District tax dollars appropriately. Please show your support for Avon Grove Charter School and attend the **January 14th** Special Coatesville School Board Meeting, **6:00 PM**, at the **Coatesville Area High School Auditorium, 1445 Lincoln Hwy, Coatesville, PA 19320**.

Dr. Dunlap will also be holding focus groups on January 15th and January 16th at 6:00PM at the district administrative building.

As always we appreciate your commitment to Avon Grove Charter School.

Regards,

Kristen Bishop
Head of School
Avon Grove Charter School