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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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HOUSE RESOLUTION

No. 263 Session of  
2019

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INTRODUCED BY ROEBUCK, HILL-EVANS, ISAACSON, MADDEN, McCARTER,  
MILLARD, HOHENSTEIN, FREEMAN, ULLMAN, FRANKEL, RABB,  
SCHLOSSBERG, SHUSTERMAN, LONGIETTI, HARKINS, CALTAGIRONE,  
READSHAW, CIRESI, NEILSON AND DeLUCA, MAY 1, 2019

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REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, MAY 1, 2019

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A RESOLUTION

1 Urging the State Board of Education to conduct a study and issue  
2 a report outlining the best academic and financial practices  
3 of high-performing charter schools and the unsuccessful  
4 academic and financial practices of low-performing charter  
5 schools.

6 WHEREAS, The Pennsylvania Charter School Law (Act 22 of 1997)  
7 became law more than 20 years ago, making Pennsylvania the 27th  
8 state to enact a charter school law; and

9 WHEREAS, Publicly funded charter schools are independent  
10 public schools that are typically governed by a group or  
11 organization under a legislative contract with the authorizing  
12 entity, usually a school district; and

13 WHEREAS, The Cyber Charter School Law (Act 88 of 2002) was  
14 enacted in response to the creation of cyber charter schools,  
15 schools that provide educational programs through technology  
16 online and are able to enroll students from school districts  
17 across this Commonwealth; and

18 WHEREAS, The Department of Education authorizes cyber charter

1 schools; and

2 WHEREAS, During the 2017-2018 school year, 155 charter  
3 schools, 15 cyber charter schools and 10 regional charter  
4 schools operated in this Commonwealth, enrolling 267,333  
5 students out of a total public school student population of  
6 1,766,592, equivalent to 15% of Pennsylvania students; and

7 WHEREAS, In 2016, a new charter school oversight body was  
8 created through the Department of Education and tasked with  
9 ensuring compliance with charter school laws and processes and  
10 that data submitted by charter schools to the Department of  
11 Education is accurate and timely; and

12 WHEREAS, The Charter School Law began as an educational  
13 experiment and was crafted to exempt charter schools from many  
14 of this Commonwealth's statutory and regulatory requirements in  
15 exchange for higher performance outcomes and innovation in  
16 teaching and learning; and

17 WHEREAS, At the heart of the Charter School Law is the idea  
18 that charter schools would serve as laboratories of innovation  
19 on behalf of all Pennsylvania schools; and

20 WHEREAS, Charter schools are intended to provide innovative  
21 and unique educational opportunities for students beyond what is  
22 currently available; and

23 WHEREAS, Charter schools are expected to offer students an  
24 alternative means of achieving academic proficiency; and

25 WHEREAS, The educational programs offered by a charter school  
26 should emphasize the development and broad dissemination of best  
27 practices, in the context of ensuring the flexibility and  
28 innovative atmospheres that are inherent in charter schools; and

29 WHEREAS, A number of charter schools in this Commonwealth are  
30 high-performing charter schools; and

1       WHEREAS, However, many more charter schools struggle  
2 academically and financially, resulting in poor student learning  
3 gains and closures due to fraud, waste and mismanagement; and

4       WHEREAS, Numerous studies have shown that the learning gains  
5 for students in charter schools in this Commonwealth are not  
6 significantly different from charter schools' traditional public  
7 school counterparts; and

8       WHEREAS, In the years since the Pennsylvania Charter School  
9 Law was enacted, no legislative or other measures have been made  
10 to bridge the gap between the concept of the charter school  
11 experiment in 1997 and the reality of charter school education  
12 in 2019; and

13       WHEREAS, After 22 years of experimenting, it is time for the  
14 General Assembly to examine and reevaluate the direction of  
15 charter school education in this Commonwealth; and

16       WHEREAS, Given the rising enrollments in charter schools, the  
17 substantial funding levels associated with charter schools and  
18 the mix of State policy proposals being considered, it is  
19 imperative that the General Assembly take action; therefore be  
20 it

21       RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives urge the State  
22 Board of Education to conduct a comprehensive study outlining  
23 the best academic and financial practices of high-performing  
24 charter schools currently operating in this Commonwealth and the  
25 unsuccessful academic and financial practices of low-performing  
26 charter schools currently or previously operating in this  
27 Commonwealth; and be it further

28       RESOLVED, That for purposes of the study, a high-performing  
29 charter school include, at a minimum, a charter school that  
30 achieved an SPP score of 80 or higher in any year, and a low-

1 performing charter school include a charter school that obtained  
2 an SPP score of 60 or lower in any year or has closed due to  
3 fraud, waste or mismanagement; and be it further

4 RESOLVED, That the study include a detailed assessment of  
5 high-performing charter schools that have a proven success  
6 record of providing improved opportunities to teachers, parents,  
7 students and community members for establishing and maintaining  
8 schools that operate independently from existing school district  
9 structure; and be it further

10 RESOLVED, That the detailed assessment of high-performing  
11 charter schools include how the schools accomplished the  
12 following:

13 (1) improved student learning, including student growth  
14 measures;

15 (2) increased learning opportunities for all students,  
16 including students with disabilities;

17 (3) the use of different and innovative teaching  
18 methods;

19 (4) new professional opportunities for teachers;

20 (5) expanded choices that improve the types of  
21 educational opportunities that are available within the  
22 public school system; and

23 (6) met or exceeded measurable academic standards;

24 and be it further

25 RESOLVED, That the study include a detailed assessment of  
26 low-performing charter schools that continue to operate or have  
27 closed and the lessons that can be learned from the schools'  
28 academic or financial failures, including any fraud, waste and  
29 mismanagement that occurred; and be it further

30 RESOLVED, That consideration be given to an examination of

1 the factors associated with high-performing and low-performing  
2 charter schools, such as:

3 (1) the demographics of the students that the schools  
4 educate;

5 (2) the schools' records of operating with integrity and  
6 any conflicts of interest; and

7 (3) governance structure and local creation and  
8 oversight;

9 and be it further

10 RESOLVED, That the State Board of Education, based on the  
11 comprehensive assessment of high-performing and low-performing  
12 charter schools conducted, identify and review policies,  
13 regulations or legislative changes needed to improve the  
14 academic and learning success of charter school students; and be  
15 it further

16 RESOLVED, That the State Board of Education, no later than 12  
17 months from the adoption of this resolution, issue a report of  
18 its findings and recommendations to the General Assembly.