2023 ANNUAL REPORT

www.ctcharters.org | info@ctcharters.org

Connecticut Charter Schools Association™

A Note from the **ASSOCIATION**

With a new school year set to begin, the Connecticut Charter Schools Association welcomes students across the state back to school for another exciting year of progress and purpose!

In the next year, CTCSA plans to find new ways to support our schools, ensure continued investment in equitable education opportunities, and help Connecticut's public charter school sector continue to grow and thrive.

In hopes of building upon the progress earned over the past year, and learning from opportunities that still remain, this report provides a look back at what our public charter school community accomplished in 2022-23.

None of it could be done without your continued support. We thank you for standing up for Connecticut's students.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Our Mission & Vision 4

Advocacy 5

Growing Connecticut's Charter Community 7

Member Support 9

Communications 10

Organization & Engagement 12

Looking Ahead 14

Contact Information 15

Our **MISSION:**

The Connecticut Charter Schools Association is a nonprofit membership organization that serves as a unified voice for CT's 21 public charter schools, representing their interests at the federal, state and local levels.

Our **VISION:**

A growing, more effective public charter school sector will significantly increase student outcomes throughout the state. We envision a future where every child in Connecticut has the opportunity to attend a great public charter school where he or she can unlock their full potential.

ADVOCACY

EDUCATION JUSTICE NOW!

Three years ago, CTCSA set out to change the way public school students are funded, including public charter school students. Given the scope and scale of the challenge that laid before us, this massive overhaul required groundbreaking collaboration and specific expertise on a wide variety of educational issues. That's why we joined a coalition of four of the state's leading education-focused organizations – and the resulting achievements brought about one of the most significant changes for Connecticut students in the state's history.

United under a common purpose and each offering a broad range of skill sets, CTCSA joined with School + State Finance Project, ConnCAN, FaithActs, and E4E to form the Education Justice Now Coalition. Three years later, our tireless advocacy has come to fruition.

For too long, a broken education funding system has perpetuated a Connecticut where zip code and school type are the driving factors in a student's education. A Connecticut where some students have what they need to succeed, while others lack essential resources, services, and opportunities. And, a Connecticut where disparities fall along lines of race and socio-economic circumstances due to a $550 million racial funding gap in education.

Education Justice Now set out to change that. Our goal was to transform the education narrative in our state, using each partner organization's area of expertise, influence, and geographical focus. What resulted in 2023 was a $150 million additional investment into educating the students of Connecticut, marking the largest K-12 funding increase in a decade – and the second-largest increase ever.

CTCSA elevated the voices representing more than 11,000 public charter school students across 21 schools to highlight glaring inequities they face. Throughout a rapidly changing political landscape in a year when Connecticut's governor had sought to flat-fund education, we worked with our coalition to organize public demonstrations at the Capitol, engage legislators and constituents, and put key elected officials on the record to address funding inequity across the state.

Together, we drafted policy and advocated for House Bill 5003, An Act Concerning Education Funding in Connecticut, which

continued | page 6

EDUCATION JUSTICE NOW! | continued

included provisions aimed at leveling the playing field for Connecticut students and expanding opportunities for Black, brown, and low-income students. Thanks to our collaborative efforts and a robust community of public charter school supporters like you, the bill earned 68 cosponsors and activated more than 180 organizations, legislators, leaders, and individuals in support. Hundreds of parents, students, teachers, administrators, and community members publicly testified in favor of the bill.

This legislation and our coalition's advocacy efforts helped bring about the $150 million in new education funding just in time for schools to make up for funding lost when COVID-19 relief comes to an end. The acceleration of the state's education cost-sharing grant will bring more funding to districts more quickly and bring critical help to areas of highest need.

These concrete gains on behalf of Connecticut's most vulnerable students have altered the legislative landscape and set the stage for many more years of compounding progress, bringing Connecticut's students closer to the equitable education system they deserve.

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

Our legislative agenda was guided by a directive to support all Connecticut public school students. We called on our elected officials to equitably invest in all our public school students and expand high-quality public school options for families.

Through the ongoing work and support of CTCSA and its charter champions, we are proud to say that public charter schools saw their largest-ever funding increase–$15 million in the charter school line item–in the recently passed biennial state budget. Charter schools are on track to receive an increase in funding for the sixth consecutive year.

In addition, the budget accelerates scheduled school funding in an effort to level the educational playing field for communities serving the students of highest need and promises fully phased-in weighted funding by the 2026-27 school year--when per-pupil funding is set to be on par with host districts. The charter bonding line item was also increased by $10 million in the approved budget.

This additional funding is an incremental, but critical step toward creating an equitable education system that works for every student in our state. However, with the state facing a racial education funding gap of more than $550 million, there is still much more work to be done. CTCSA will continue to fight for equitable investments in public charter schools including equal access to grants made available to other public schools and facilities funding for public charter schools.

The biennial state budget also funds the opening of new public charter schools in Connecticut for the first time in nearly a decade. State leaders approved funding for Norwalk Charter School of Excellence in Norwalk and the Edmonds Cofield Preparatory Academy for Young Men in New Haven. These new public charter schools will be a critical resource to families looking for educational options that are tailored to their child's needs.

However, funding for proposed schools in Middletown and Danbury was excluded from the state budget. Looking ahead, CTCSA is committed to ensuring that the voices of these two cities, as well as the voices of all Black, brown, and low-income communities, are heard as we continue to work tirelessly to ensure all families have access to equitable educational opportunities.

GROWING CONNECTICUT'S CHARTER COMMUNITY

2
New Charter Schools Funded

243
New students to be served in first year

SUPPORTING NEW AND EXISTING SCHOOLS

Throughout the past year, CTCSA continued to work to ensure that every Connecticut student can access a high-quality, public charter school education. This included supporting existing schools looking to grow in order to serve more children as well as working with new schools looking to apply for charters and secure funding.

From soliciting and cultivating applicants to supporting schools through their charter drafting process, CTCSA was there to provide guidance. As a result, we were thrilled to see six schools submit a Request for Proposal to the CT State Department of Education, of which four schools are in the approval pipeline. In addition, two of the four new schools were awarded funding.

continued | page 8

The Association worked tirelessly with community advocates, parents and school officials to help ensure the approval and funding of two new public charter schools in Connecticut. The upcoming opening of Norwalk Charter School for Excellence and the Edmonds Cofield Preparatory School for Young Men in New Haven will pave the way for hundreds of new students to get the opportunity at an education that is better designed for their needs.

GSCT
Great Schools for Connecticut

GREAT SCHOOLS FOR CONNECTICUT

In September 2022, the Northeast Charter Schools Network (NECSN) was awarded $24.5 million for the Great Schools for Connecticut (GSCT) Project by the U.S. Department of Education under the FY 2022 Charter Schools Program (CSP) State Entities Grants Program. The CSP State Entity program provides financial assistance to State entities to support charter schools that serve elementary and secondary school students in a given state.

This is the first time these funds have been made available in Connecticut.

NECSN serves as the network organization supporting the Connecticut Charter Schools Association (CTCSA) and as such, CTCSA plans to award CSP subgrants to public charter school developers in Connecticut to provide financial support and technical assistance for the initial implementation of expanding, replicating, or opening new charter schools.

The GSCT project will pursue **three main objectives:**

- Increasing the number of high-quality public school seats for educationally disadvantaged students in Connecticut;
- Working in partnership with the authorizer to strengthen the caliber of the state's charter school operation and authorization; and
- Heightening collaboration and resource sharing between and among schools with different governance structures.

We are excited to announce that the grant competition is set to kick off in early September with awards announced in late November.

MEMBER SUPPORT

SCHOOL SUPPORT PROGRAMMING

An integral part of CTCSA's work with members is to provide real-time school support throughout the year on various topics related to public charter schools. These include supports such as:

- Quarterly leader meetings to provide updates from throughout the sector, share best practices and resources and to foster engagement and collaboration among school leaders
- Weekly email newsletter to provide important news, school highlights, sector resources and pertinent media coverage
- School policy working group to bring together the best thinking from the public charter school community
- Board training and support to lift up our school leaders so that they can best serve their students, families and schools

As we look ahead to 2023-24, CTCSA aims to provide core support around human capital analysis, communications work, facilities analysis and more.

STAFF GROWTH

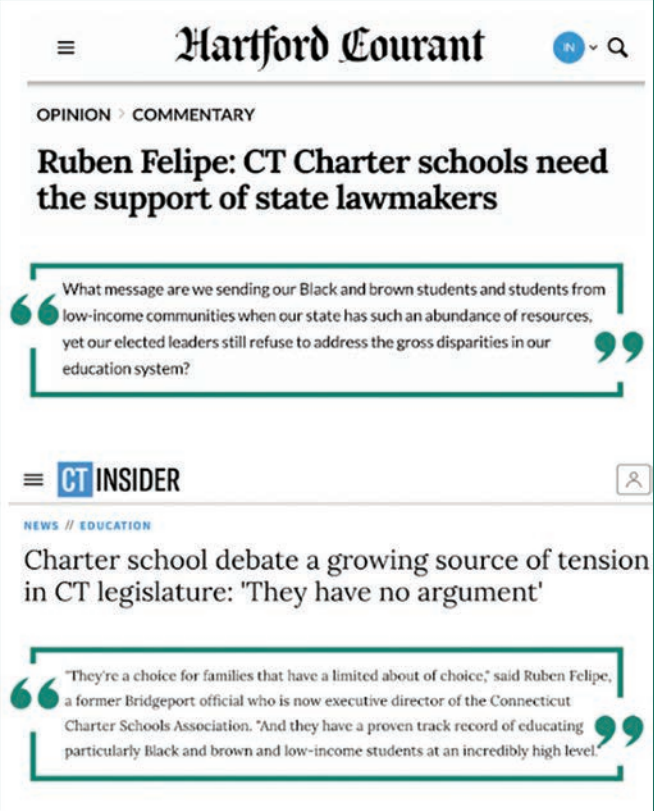
The last school year brought some much-needed growth to the CTCSA team as we welcomed six new staff positions dedicated to the mission and goals of our organization. These roles included two new community engagement managers, to better support our member schools and school leaders; a CSP project specialist, to oversee and implement the new Great Schools for Connecticut program; a senior director of growth and support, to lead and oversee the Connecticut Charter Schools Association's efforts to expand the number of charter schools in the State of Connecticut, bringing additional high-quality schools to students in underserved communities; a team coordinator, to support the organization's efforts to expand, support, and advocate for charter schools throughout Connecticut; and a communications manager, to help amplify the stories of our member schools and public charter school community.

We are excited to be able to provide this increased support for our member schools and we celebrate and honor veteran team members who are embracing new challenges.

PIE NETWORK

This winter, the Connecticut Charter Schools Association (CTCSA) was invited to join the PIE Network. The PIE Network connects, strengthens, and catalyzes the work of education advocates across communities, states, and ideologies to transform education so every student, in every community can achieve a future without limits. CTCSA joins the ranks of more than 150 local, state and national organizations in 34 states and D.C.

COMMUNICATIONS



Hartford Courant

OPINION › COMMENTARY

Ruben Felipe: CT Charter schools need the support of state lawmakers

> What message are we sending our Black and brown students and students from low-income communities when our state has such an abundance of resources, yet our elected leaders still refuse to address the gross disparities in our education system?

CT INSIDER

NEWS // EDUCATION

Charter school debate a growing source of tension in CT legislature: 'They have no argument'

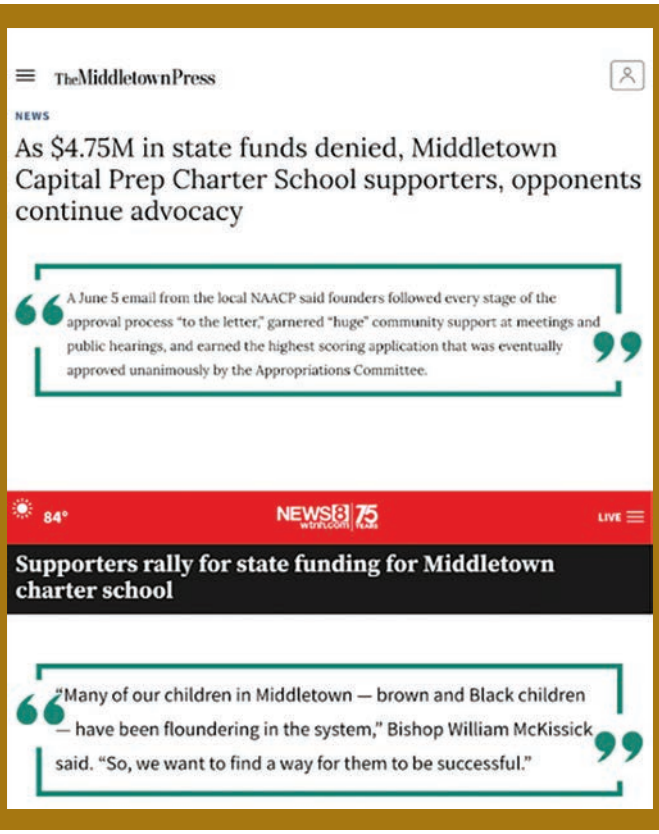
> "They're a choice for families that have a limited about of choice," said Ruben Felipe, a former Bridgeport official who is now executive director of the Connecticut Charter Schools Association. "And they have a proven track record of educating particularly Black and brown and low-income students at an incredibly high level."

TELLING THE STORIES OF PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

The Association has devoted new resources to expanding communications staff and finding unique ways to share the story of Connecticut's public charter schools through earned media placements, ensuring their voices are a part of the conversation.

HELPING OUR PARTNERS SPREAD THE MESSAGE

We collaborate with our partner organizations and assist them in securing media coverage, drafting public statements and crafting the message to help ensure that it reaches those in power at the most critical moments for our schools and communities.



TheMiddletownPress

NEWS

As $4.75M in state funds denied, Middletown Capital Prep Charter School supporters, opponents continue advocacy

> A June 5 email from the local NAACP said founders followed every stage of the approval process "to the letter," garnered "huge" community support at meetings and public hearings, and earned the highest scoring application that was eventually approved unanimously by the Appropriations Committee.

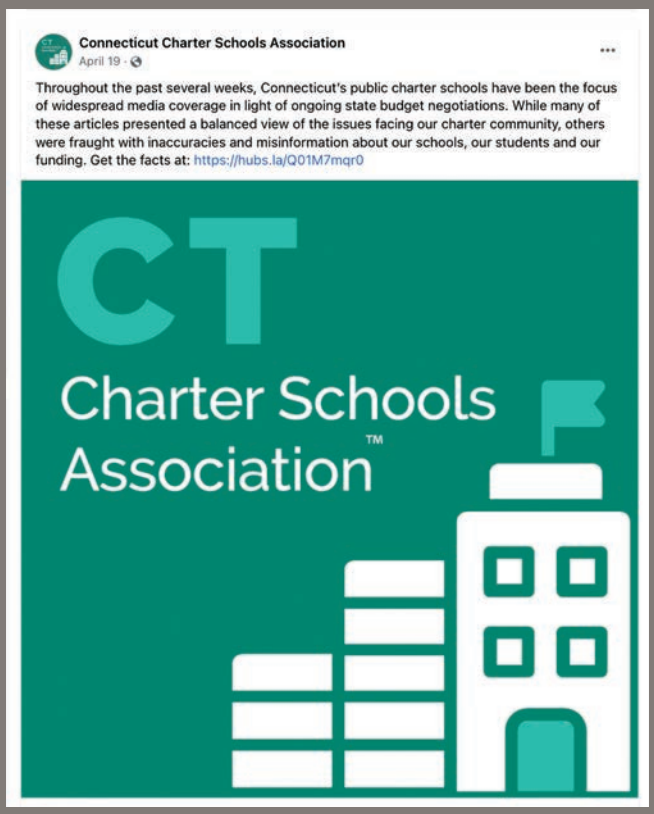
84° NEWS8 75 LIVE

Supporters rally for state funding for Middletown charter school

> "Many of our children in Middletown — brown and Black children — have been floundering in the system," Bishop William McKissick said. "So, we want to find a way for them to be successful."

COMBATING PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL MISINFORMATION

CTCSA and partners throughout the public charter school space were able to combat a flurry of charter misinformation as our sector endured some of the strongest, most strident charter opposition exhibited since before the COVID-19 pandemic began. From inaccuracies about public charter school funding to the populations we serve, the Association used owned, earned and paid media to set the record straight.



ORGANIZING & ENGAGEMENT

CONNECTING DECISION MAKERS AND STAKEHOLDERS WITH OUR PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

Actions to engage legislators:

13 public official visits to charter schools organized by CTCSA

123 elected officials engaged on our legislative policy priorities

6 school events where CTCSA facilitated legislators to attend

Building and engaging the charter community:

44 members of the public charter community CTCSA supported in testifying at legislative hearings

129 one-on-one meetings conducted between CTCSA and parents, family members, school staff and community members

5,769 emails, letters, and phone calls to elected officials

STUDENT VISITS

As part of our commitment to supporting students and providing opportunities for growth and engagement with schools, CTCSA was so excited to facilitate several student trips to local centers of government this spring through our Students Shaping CT program.

Amid one of the busiest times of the year at the State Capitol, a select group of students from **The Bridge Academy** got a chance to see their state legislature in action during a visit to Hartford. The 7th to 12th graders were engrossed in Connecticut history during their tour of the Capitol Building, learning the stories behind the New Genius of Connecticut statue, the Chickamauga Tree, and more. The students then traveled up the stairs of the Capitol to be recognized in both chambers of the legislature. Their local representatives introduced the students to the chambers, greeted with applause from legislators in both houses.

Two dozen 7th and 8th graders from **Odyssey Community School** earned a special trip to the State Capitol in Hartford this spring in recognition of their living up to school values of courage, integrity, respect, curiosity, leadership, and excellence. Students were given tours of both the State Senate and House of Representatives. There they were introduced in the chambers and met with their legislators from Manchester, who led a conversation about how they got involved in government service and how the discussions held in their respective chambers can affect everyone.

It was a day to remember for 7th and 8th graders at **Brass City Charter School**, when they traveled to the State Capitol this spring to tour the grounds, meet with legislators, and sit in on active legislative sessions. The trip was organized by CTCSA during National Charter Schools Week and focused on learning how their government works and how they can get involved. Students were joined by their local representatives for an informative conversation about their role in the legislative process, before going on a guided tour of the Capitol and even getting a visit from Gov. Ned Lamont along the way.

LOOKING AHEAD

As evidenced by the pages of this report, CTCSA, along with public charter school parents, school staff, community supporters, students, and alumni, have done important things this past year. We have worked together to raise the voices of those most in need of support in our communities and have moved the needle towards equity for all. And while we have much to celebrate, our work is far from over.

Looking ahead to 2023-24, CTCSA will continue to advocate on behalf of the more than 11,000 public charter school students throughout our state. We will fight for more seats and more schools, to ensure that all parents can make the very best decision possible for their child's education. We will fight for fair and equitable funding and for the same opportunities as all other public schools in our state. And we will continue to provide the support our member schools need and deserve to serve their future leaders.

But we cannot do this work alone. And so we call on you to help us amplify the voices of the next generation and walk with us down the path of progress for Connecticut's public charter schools.

Our success is possible not only because of what we do but also because of who we are as a community. We are stronger together. Thank you for being in the fight.

Our success is possible not only because of what we do but also because of who we are as a community.

We are stronger together. Thank you for being in the fight.

CONTACT INFORMATION

MEET THE TEAM

Ruben Felipe, *Executive Director*

Laura Callachan, *Director, School Support & Policy*

Melissa Franco, *Team Coordinator*

Cassandra Gallion, *Director of Policy & Research*

Joe Glauber, *Communications Manager*

Katherine Maron, *Senior Director of Growth and Support*

Faiza Mawjee, *CSP Project Specialist*

Kara Neidhardt, *Chief of Staff*

Claudia Phillips, *Senior Community Engagement Manager*

Jahneel Small, *Community Engagement Manager*

Tanya Swale, *Community Engagement Manager*

STAY IN TOUCH

Connecticut Charter Schools Association
470 James Street, Suite 14
New Haven, CT 06513
203.772.8111
www.ctcharters.org
info@ctcharters.org

Facebook Twitter Instagram LinkedIn YouTube

Connecticut Charter Schools Association™

www.ctcharters.org | info@ctcharters.org

Facebook Twitter Instagram LinkedIn YouTube