

SCHOOL DISTRICT ADVOCATES FOR CHARTER SCHOOL FUNDING REFORM
Superintendent Notes that Charter School Tuition Costs Norwin More than \$1 Million a Year

NORTH HUNTINGDON, Pa. — Norwin School District leaders are urging lawmakers to make the state’s charter school funding system more fair and balanced.

Charter school payments are calculated in a manner that requires districts to send more money to charter schools than is needed to operate their programs. This places a significant financial burden on Norwin School District resources and taxpayers.

Superintendent Dr. Jeff Taylor, in a presentation at the Norwin Board of Education’s February Legislative meeting, noted that the School District’s annual required payments to charter schools cost more than \$1 million.

For that amount of money, Norwin School District could hire an additional 10 teachers, which would greatly improve educational quality for Norwin’s 5,289 students who are enrolled in grades K-12.

The Board of Education [approved a resolution](#) urging the Pennsylvania General Assembly to revise the existing charter school funding system for regular and special education. The resolution has been mailed to several Pennsylvania elected officials, including the Speaker of the House, President Pro Tempore of the Senate, the House and Senate Majority and Minority Leaders, the House and Senate Education Committee Chairs, and Governor Wolf. In addition, the resolution was shared with Norwin’s state legislators State Senator Kim Ward and State Representative George Dunbar.

Norwin School District, like the average Pennsylvania school district, spends millions of dollars in taxpayer money annually in mandatory payments to brick-and-mortar and cyber charter schools. This constitutes a major budgetary burden for local taxpayers. For example, Norwin School District's charter tuition costs totaled:

- \$1,132,445 in the 2018-2019 school year. This equates to about 2.8 mills of real estate taxes.
- \$1,280,799 in the 2019-2020 school year. This equates to about 3.2 mills of real estate taxes.

Dr. Taylor noted that many charter schools underperform academically, according to The Future Ready PA Index (futurereadypa.org). In reviewing the academic performance results of Pennsylvania Cyber Charter School, for example, Dr. Taylor noted that only 42.5 percent of its students scored in the proficient or advanced range on the state English Language Arts/Literature exam. That is below the state average of 62.1 percent, and below the Norwin High School result of 84.9 percent proficient or advanced for the same exam.

“Pennsylvania cyber charter schools are guilty of educational malpractice,” Dr. Taylor said. “They require significant financial resources from taxpayers, yet create substandard academic outcomes for children.”

Charter school costs are one of several major budgetary hurdles Norwin School District will face as it looks to approve a budget for the 2020-2021 school year in June. Other budgetary challenges will include increases in mandated pension costs, special education costs, and capital project needs.



“Norwin School District pays more than \$1 million per year for required charter school tuition. For that amount of money, we could hire an additional 10 teachers.”

— Dr. Jeff Taylor,
Norwin Superintendent

Budgeting for Fiscal Integrity: The 2020-2021 School District Budget

As required by law, school districts must pass a budget by June 30 each year. This requires a lot of planning and even some estimation since the deadline coincides with the state budget deadline – school districts do not yet know their allocation from the state when they pass a budget.

Dr. Jeff Taylor, Superintendent, said Norwin School District's [budgeting process](#) will align finances to District goals, such as providing a safe and secure environment, a world-class education where graduates are college and career ready, an environment that supports growth, and fiscal integrity.

Mr. Brian Carlton, Norwin Board President, said the School District is committed to preparing a responsible 2020-2021 budget that balances the educational and safety needs of students with those of Norwin residents who financially support the District. “Our goal is to keep any tax increase as low as possible, while maintaining a safe environment and quality education,” Mr. Carlton said.

District administrators have been working throughout winter and early spring to build the 2020-2021 education budget. During the month of February, Dr. Taylor led budget review meetings with building principals and department supervisors. “Our administrative team is committed to exploring cost-saving measures and strategies without jeopardizing the needs of our students,” Dr. Taylor said.

A public presentation about the budget is scheduled for the school board workshop meeting in April. Later that month, the Board is scheduled to adopt a proposed final budget, which will be made available to the public for at least 30 days. In June, the Board of Education will adopt the 2020-2021 Final Budget.