

Testimony of Erin Boyle Acosta, Parent and Co-President of the Parent Teacher Organization at Growing Up Green Charter School, to the New NY Education Reform Commission

October 16, 2012

Chairman Parsons and Distinguished Commission Members:

I appreciate the opportunity to share my testimony on the Structure of New York's Public Education System. I am a resident of Astoria, Queens, and a parent of a student at Growing Up Green Charter School in Long Island City, Queens, where I also serve as Co-President of a vibrant and active Parent Teacher Organization. Our school's mission is to empower children to be conscious, contributing members of their community through a rigorous curriculum and an engaging green culture, and since my son and daughter enrolled I have seen that promise being fulfilled for them.

Growing Up Green is a public charter school, a *public* school. Like all charter schools, our learning community is non-profit, tuition-free, non-sectarian, and accountable to public academic standards. We take pride in being a truly community-oriented school, with a diverse body of students drawn from families where 25 different languages are spoken.

But I came here today to offer my view about our public education structures in a very literal sense. Because while Growing Up Green is a public school, we do not receive a penny of public support for the school building that houses our school. Our school happens to be located in a former Catholic school building, leased from the Diocese of Brooklyn. The rent we pay for this space is not covered by outside donors, nor have we asked to co-locate in a district school building. Instead, we stretch our share of what New York City spends to *operate* a school—our money for teachers and supplies, in other words—and extend it to also pay the rent.

Our school makes it work, in fact I'm proud of how our leaders and teachers can adjust. Yet the New York City Independent Budget Office has found that charter schools like ours receive over \$2,300 less than traditional public schools, *per student*. At our small school that adds up to hundreds of thousands of dollars, every year, that is not available to hire additional teachers, expand professional develop, or invest in classroom technology. Yet we are, by law, a public school, and children like mine are public school students.

I know our state is in a difficult economic time, and I know school funding is a complicated topic. But I also know that some things are simple. Schools need school buildings. Public schools need public funding. And it is simply not fair—not equitable—to ask certain public schools to forego teacher salaries in order to pay the rent.

As you consider your recommendations for the structure of public education, including state funding, I ask you to consider the experience of public schools like Growing Up Green, and do something to make this right.

Thank you.