

Good Afternoon and thank you for allowing me to address the committee

My name is Rose Mary Grant and I am the Head of School at Highlander Charter School. Before holding my current position, I taught special education at St. Andrew's School and Barrington High School and also served as the Director of Special Education at St. Andrew's School. Having a masters in special education and being certified as a director of special education places me in a unique position to discuss special education as it relates to public schools; traditional and charter alike.

First and most importantly, special education has been underfunded since the inception of IDEA in 1975.

IDEA is not "fully funded." In the legislation, Congress set a maximum target for the federal contribution to special education spending equal to 40 percent of the estimated excess cost of educating children with disabilities. Thus, if the program were "fully funded," the states would receive their maximum grants, calculated at 40 percent of the national average per pupil expenditure (APPE) times the number of children with disabilities served in the school year 2004-2005, adjusted for population changes.⁴ Under the act, the count of children with disabilities cannot exceed 12 percent of the state's total school population.

For FY 2014, IDEA federal funding covered 16 percent of the estimated excess cost of educating children with disabilities, less than in FY 2008 when federal funding covered 17 percent of the cost and well below FY 2009 when additional funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act covered 33 percent of the cost. IDEA Part B "full funding" for FY 2014 would have amounted to approximately \$28.65 billion, or roughly \$17.17 billion more than was actually appropriated. The shortfall in IDEA funding has been assumed by the states and local school districts.

There is no disagreement that public schools are not provided adequate funds to offset the excess cost of educating students with special needs. In addition to funding the cost of the average student services for a handicapped student, if the cost to educate a student exceeds the total core instruction amount plus the student success factor, multiplied by five (\$62,279 in FY 14), a district may put in for high cost special education student funding, however, the request must be made for the following calendar year and only addresses the amount over \$62,279. Even then, the amount received depends on the total amount available. Charters currently do not receive any of those funds and traditional districts are very limited as to what they receive. In fact, the range is from \$2,000 to \$335,000 for a total of \$1,000,000 statewide. It is evident that this is a drop in the bucket when an out of district placement, including transportation can cost upwards of \$100,000 per student. Even if districts pay the first \$62,279, that million dollars can cover only 26 out of district placements.

IDEA part B funds school age children 3-22 and part C cover birth to age 3. All public schools get a per pupil rate based on the number of students with special needs in the district. Highlander receives IDEA funds for children from Pre-K to 11th grade who

qualify for special education services. This includes students with autism, physical disabilities, speech and hearing disabilities, learning disabilities, mental health diagnoses, occupational therapy needs and intellectual impairment. Highlander does not have students over the age of 18 at this point, but expect to in the near future as our high school reaches a point where we have a graduating class. As other public schools, we receive money for preschool and will continue to receive IDEA dollars and the per pupil cost if students stay on until the age of 22.

Like all public schools, Highlander is required to meet the needs of the students pulled in the lottery and like other public schools, we do not know what those needs will be until students show up in the fall. In order to meet those needs, Highlander employs the following fulltime: school psychologist, social worker, occupational therapist, 5 resource teachers, 2 one to one special education aides and 2 behavior specialists. Highlander also employs a speech language therapist 3/5th time and 5 OG/Wilson reading tutors. In the past two years, Highlander has had 4 students in out of district special education settings. Out of district cost average \$60,000 per year per child, not counting transportation.

Certainly, traditional public school districts are larger, so the special education population is larger. Although this adds increased costs, it also creates an economy of scale that public charter schools are unable to reach. The state average percentage of students with special education services for districts is 17%. Traditional Districts range from 7% to 25% and Charters range from 7% to 21%. Highlander's is 16.5% with 15% at the elementary school and 19% at the middle high school.

The state average special education cost as percentage of total expenditures is 22.4 % with traditional districts ranging from 11.8% to 28%. Charters range from .8% to 16% for 2014. For fiscal year 2015 Highlander's Special Ed Costs were \$1,100,801.17, which is 18% of our budget. Special Ed Costs Estimated for FY 16 are \$1,575,661.09, which is 20% of the current year's budget.

In closing, it is clear that there needs to be further discussion on the funding of special education, both at the Federal and the State level. It does not mean, however, that charter public schools are not faced with the same dilemma of how to manage continuously rising special education costs.