



May 23, 2022

Dear legislator,

Education Voters of PA has obtained emails, reimbursement forms, and screen shots from a Commonwealth Charter Academy Facebook page that reveal during the 2021-2022 school year, CCA, Pennsylvania's largest cyber charter school with an enrollment of nearly 20,000 students, is using tax dollars to:

- Send every family [a cash payment of \\$150](#) (March 25, 2022)
- Provide a [\\$250 "community class" cash reimbursement](#) for each student enrolled
- Provide a [\\$200 "personal field trip" cash reimbursement](#) for each student enrolled

Facebook posts in a CCA parent page show families discussing spending tax dollars provided by CCA to:

- Purchase meals and games Dave and Busters arcade
- Attend a Motley Crue concert
- Take a trip to Austria
- Buy Eagles tickets
- Take family vacations to Universal Studios and Disney
- Pay for scuba, ski, and horseback riding lessons

CCA is also using school field trips to market to families. On its website, CCA boasts that students are allowed to attend [one paid field trip per month](#) as part of more than 700 organized trips with the school for both individual and [social](#) field trips to locations including "Sky Zone in Lancaster County, where students can jump on trampolines and the Blue Mountain Resort's Summit Ariel Park, where students will have access to four different ropes courses and have a chance to go ziplining or go through the obstacle course." Other field trips offered by CCA include, "laser tag, rock climbing, bowling, and kayaking."

These paid school field trips are ***in addition to*** the field trips and community classes families receive an annual \$450/student cash reimbursement for.

An [email dated May 13, 2022, from CCA to parents](#) details that for the 2022-2023 school year CCA will:

- [Provide families up to \\$240/month](#) for participation in group field trips by paying for students and two caretakers to attend two paid field trips per month (increased from \$40/month per family in 2021-2022)
- Provide families with \$75/month cash payments as part of their Instructional Technology Subsidy (increased from \$50/month in 2021-2022)
- Provide a \$300/student "community class" cash reimbursement for each student enrolled (increased from \$250 in 2021-2022)

It is unacceptable that while school districts are starving and property tax increases are squeezing home and business owners, cyber charter schools are so awash in excess funding that they are using property tax dollars to pay for students' private activities and trips and giving cash payments to families.

Because the legislature hasn't required audits or reined in these excessive expenditures for so long, state lawmakers need to approve the full proposed \$1.75 billion increase in state funding for public schools this year to give school districts and taxpayers immediate relief. Moving forward they need to enact long-term fixes to these problems.

We are calling on Auditor General Timothy DeFoor to immediately open an audit of CCA to investigate these eye-popping abuses of tax dollars and answer the following questions:

- How much total money has CCA sent to families as cash payments over the past two years, including those sent on March 23rd, 2022? Were any/all cash payments made with federal dollars or using funding from tuition payments made to CCA by school districts?
- How much tax money is CCA spending annually on field trips, including both the CCA-sponsored field trips and the reimbursed field personal field trips for families and community classes for students?
- What exactly are “community class” and “personal field trip” cash reimbursements paying for?
- What other trips/activities, exactly, has CCA provided reimbursements for over the past two years?

CCA has not been audited by the state in nearly a decade and with an annual reported expenditure of \$313 million for 2020-2021, with no state oversight and as evidenced by social media posts and emails sent to families, the opportunities for waste, fraud, and abuse of tax dollars are extraordinary.

We have to question the Auditor General’s motives for closing the AG’s Bureau of School Audits and ignoring the vast opportunities for waste in the cyber charter sector at the same time his office [announced fund balance audits of 14 districts](#).

Why is a cyber charter school spending public dollars on Motley Crue concerts off limits, but school district fund balances are a priority for the Auditor General’s office?

If the Auditor General does not immediately open up an audit of CCA, we most strongly urge the General Assembly to enact legislation requiring the Auditor General’s office to conduct audits of CCA and other cyber charters both to learn how these schools are spending tax dollars and to help guard against the waste, fraud, and abuse of tax money by these schools. The order of the audits should be based on the size of the budgets of each cyber charter.

And we call on state lawmakers to immediately bring up a vote on House Bill 272, which would reform charter school funding to more closely match tuition payments to charter and cyber charter schools with their actual costs to end the state mandate that forces districts to send cyber charters funding in excess of what it costs them to educate students.

NOTE: Students in school districts should and do take educational field trips. PTOs, PTAs, and booster clubs fundraise year-round for many school district students to enjoy these educational opportunities.

It is reasonable that some amount of tax money would be spent providing educational field trips to cyber charter school students. It is not reasonable to even imagine a scenario where school districts use tax dollars to subsidize students’ private horseback riding, scuba diving, and ski lessons. School districts are not subsidizing family vacations to Disney, paying for their professional football tickets, or a day out to the Dave and Busters Arcade. And school districts are most certainly not providing \$150 cash payments to every family in their district.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or if you would like additional information.

Susan Spicka, Executive Director, Education Voters of PA

Ssspicka@educationvoterspa.org

(717) 331-4033