



Q & A: CHESTER UPLAND IN FINANCIAL RECOVERY

Current as of June 8, 2020

What does it mean that the Chester Upland School District is in financial recovery status under receivership? Chester Upland was placed in receivership under the state's School District Financial Recovery Act in 2012. Since then, almost all of the decision-making power of the locally elected Chester Upland school board was transferred to a Receiver appointed by a judge in the Delaware County Court of Common Pleas. In the last year alone, the district has had three different court-appointed Receivers. Currently, Dr. Juan Baughn is the Receiver.

Why is the Chester Upland School District in financial recovery? Many factors led to the financial challenges in Chester Upland, including a limited ability to raise local revenue and heavy reliance on state funding. In addition, charter school funding has been a major contributor to the district's financial difficulties; according to the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials (PASBO), in the most recent year for which data are available (2017-18), about 44 percent of the district's annual budget transfers directly to charter schools. Payments to charter schools make it very difficult for the district to operate effectively because the charter school funding formula does not take account of the actual costs of educating a student in district schools and charter schools.

What is the plan to solve the financial problems in the Chester Upland School District? In December 2019, the Receiver submitted a proposed financial recovery plan (the plan) to the Delaware County Court of Common Pleas. [The plan is available on the district's website](#). It includes descriptions of many good programs in district schools and makes dozens of recommendations spanning almost every aspect of the district's operations. The plan indicates that the district is considering the financial implications of outsourcing some district services and entering into agreements for outside management of schools or converting some district schools to charter schools.

On May 14, the court issued an order approving the plan and authorizing the Receiver to move forward with RFP processes. However, any recommendation to enter an agreement for management of district schools or to convert district schools to charter schools must comply with the requirements of the Financial Recovery Act and must be approved by the court as an amendment to the plan.

Will district employees lose their jobs if work is privatized or schools are converted to charters? It is likely that district employees will be furloughed if the district outsources district services or converts district schools to charter schools.



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When will the Receiver determine whether the district will contract with outside management, outsource services, and/or convert schools to charter schools? The Receiver recently assumed his role at the end of May. At this point, it is not clear which financial recovery strategies he intends to pursue, and there is no timeline for any such changes.

Will a charter school conversion improve student achievement? There is no evidence that laying off staff or turning district schools into charter schools will improve student achievement. Researchers tell us that even one school move, either by physically changing buildings or by substantially changing the character of a school within the same building, can decrease student achievement scores and graduation rates.¹

Will a charter school conversion save money? The Financial Recovery Act only allows district schools to be converted to charter schools if it saves money. A thorough accounting of district finances is necessary to demonstrate whether proposals to convert district schools to charter schools will result in cost savings.

Will school district programs continue if schools become charters? Not necessarily. Unless the Receiver explicitly requires certain programs to be continued as a condition of being granted a charter, no charter school operator would be required to continue any specific curricular or extra-curricular programs currently provided by the school district.

When will the elected school board regain control of the school district? There is no specific target date to return authority to the local school board. Although the plan says that the ultimate goal of placing the district into receivership is to return authority over the district to the local school board, there is no timeline or clear path detailed in the plan to make that happen.

How can I have my say about the future of public schools in Chester Upland? Members of the community can make their voices heard by contacting their school board members and attending public meetings when they are announced. Check www.psea.org/savechesteruplandschools for more information and dates for public meetings.

¹ See, for example, Spencer, K.L. 2017. An Examination of Student Mobility in U.S. Public Schools. University of Pennsylvania: Publicly Accessible Penn Dissertations, 2591. <https://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/2591>