NORTH CAROLINA
COALITION FOR
CHARTER SCHOOLS

January 6, 2022

Union County Board of Education
Professional Development Center
721 Brewer Drive
Monroe, NC 28112

Re: December 2021 Consent Agenda Item—Student Assignment and Administrative Guidelines (Policy 4-13)

Dear Chairperson Merrell, Vice Chair Heintel, and Members of the Union County Board of Education:

I write to urge you to reverse your recent student assignment decision, approved under consent agenda at the December 2021 meeting. This decision—which restricts application to Special Program School lotteries to just those students who are currently enrolled in Union County Public Schools—unfairly excludes all other county students from consideration. These Special Program Schools, which include Early College, Central Academy of Technology and Arts (CATA), CATA's International Baccalaureate program, and Marvin Ridge High School's International Baccalaureate program, are quite popular with county residents. Yet, private, home school, and charter school students—all of whom are Union County residents—are no longer permitted to apply to these lotteries for next year, based on your new policy.

This policy is unfair and inequitable. It is also ill-timed. Adopted in the middle of the academic year, it leaves families with little recourse or opportunity to adjust their plans for next year.

First, and most fundamentally, this policy is unfair, as it discriminates against students who are Union County residents but whose parents have chosen to enroll them in schools other than district schools. To be clear, the previous assignment policy *already* gave students who were currently enrolled in district schools priority, by providing them with an opportunity to accept or decline offered seats in Special Program Schools before allowing other students who reside in the county to be considered. The new policy removes even this opportunity, prohibiting students who are not currently enrolled in district schools from even applying to lotteries at these schools altogether. Thus, by excluding public charter school students from applying for Special Program School lotteries, the Board's policy has created a new inequity *among public school students*. Effectively, the policy denies some public school students (those in public charter schools) the right to apply to lotteries for Special Program Schools while providing other public school students (those in Union County Public Schools) full consideration for admission to these public schools. This is an untenable proposition, and it will foster new inequity among public school students in Union County.

Second, both the adoption and implementation of this new policy are problematic in terms of timing. Families chose schools for 2021-22 with the reasonable expectation that the assignment policy in effect at the beginning of the year would continue during the rest of the year and through the application period. Now, students and families must consider enrolling in a new district school in the middle of the academic year, in order to maintain eligibility for a Special Program School lottery.

In light of these concerns, the Coalition urges you to rescind this new assignment policy at your January 2022 meeting, and to revert back to the policy that was in place at the beginning of the 2021-22 academic year. If the Board believes that the new student assignment policy is in the best long-term interests of Union County students, we ask that you at least delay implementation of your decision until the 2022-23 application cycle. Doing so will ensure families are given fair warning and that there is an opportunity for full public comment and discussion among all stakeholders. While we understand this policy was discussed in a committee meeting, it is clear that families had no idea such a consequential change was under consideration for next school year. In fact, families are just now understanding the full impacts of the policy, as the Coalition has been made aware this week.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Please feel free to contact me at 704.231.9767 if I can be of any assistance.

Sincerely,

Lindalyn Kakadelis

Lindalyn Kakadelis
Executive Director
North Carolina Coalition for Charter Schools

cc: Superintendent Andrew Houlihan, Union County Public Schools
Chairman Dennis Rape, Board of County Commissioners, Union County
Vice Chairman David Williams, Board of County Commissioners, Union County
Richard Helms, Board of County Commissioners, Union County
Stony Rushing, Board of County Commissioners, Union County
Jerry Simpson, Board of County Commissioners, Union County
State Superintendent Catherine Truitt, N.C. Department of Public Instruction
Dave Machado, Director of the Office of Charter Schools
N.C. Representative David Willis
N.C. Representative Dean Arp
N.C. Representative Mark Brody
N.C. Senator Todd Johnson
N.C. Senator Paul Newton