



New York: Hedge-fund Billionaires Contribute Millions to Charter-friendly Governor

In March of 2014, while speaking in front of the State Capitol, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo was photographed standing behind a bright yellow sign emblazoned with the rally cry “[#charterswork](#).” This iconic photo symbolized how beholden the Governor was to some of his biggest campaign donors. Cuomo had clearly benefitted from the strong and consistent funding by both the Democrat and Republican pro-charter, Wall Street financial sector that joined with pro-charter school PACs to support Andrew Cuomo’s 2014 campaign.

In the months following that rally, Cuomo would face a surprisingly strong Democratic primary challenge from a political unknown--Fordham law professor, Zephyr Teachout. Teachout would receive over one-third of the votes cast, the most ever received in a primary by a non-incumbent in New York’s history. That is because her campaign highlighted Cuomo’s weaknesses, one of which was his hostility towards public schools and their teachers. [Public school advocates resented his overt support for charters and disdain for public schools](#), which he repeatedly referred to as “monopolies.” In the end Cuomo defeated Teachout, but only after outspending her [40 to 1](#).

Since his first gubernatorial campaign in 2010, Andrew Cuomo received generous contributions in exchange for his support of charter schools. It is on these charter boards, which are often quite large, where many of New York’s wealthy elite sit. When Cuomo sought money from the hedge fund community, it was made clear that he needed to support their pro-charter agenda. Joe Williams, then Executive

Director of DFER, arranged a power breakfast for Cuomo with big money supporters of the cause.

In exchange for Cuomo’s support of charters, charter board members became extraordinarily generous to the Cuomo campaign. One donor was the [Great Public Schools PAC, started by the controversial Success Academy Charter School \(SA\)](#) leader, Eva Moskowitz. But Success Academy’s influence did not end with its leader’s PAC. Members of the Success Academy’s Board of Directors made direct contributions to the Cuomo campaign as well. Success Academy Chairman, Daniel Loeb, the founder and chief executive of Third Rock Capital, has given to pro-charter school lobbying groups and PACs. He and his wife also contributed close to \$100,000 directly to Cuomo’s campaign.

Other SA Board members or their spouses who contributed sizeable sums either directly to Andrew Cuomo, or to a PAC that supported Cuomo, include those connected to the hedge-fund industry: Bruce Kovner, Joel Greenblatt and his wife Julia, and Bryan Binder. Other SA board donors are Daniel Nir and his wife Jill Braufman, Andrew and Dana Stone, Kent Yalowitz, Catherine Shinker, Jarret Posner and Suleman Lunat. SA Board Member and Gotham Capital Manager John Petry, who gave \$60,000 to Cuomo’s campaign, [explained the contributions with this statement](#): “It’s really impressive how he [Cuomo] has thrown himself into education [reform] policy.”

Out-of-state SA board members also poured money into the New York Governor’s campaign. Connecticut resident Steven

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Galbraith gave \$35,000, and California residents John and Regina Scully added \$100,000 to Cuomo's coffers with \$50,000 in contributions given just a month before the 2014 election. Greg Sawers of New Jersey contributed \$10,000, and Samuel Cole, also of New Jersey, contributed \$42,500 to Andrew Cuomo. South Carolina resident and financier Charles Strauch contributed \$15,000 as well.

Success Academy supporters who contributed to Cuomo go beyond board members. For example, John Paulson contributed \$8.5 million dollars directly to Success Academy Network and also \$41,000 to Cuomo. [Eli Broad's Foundation has invested nearly \\$14,000,000 dollars in Success Academy](#), and Broad personally contributed \$60,800 to Andrew Cuomo.

Cuomo also received financial support from members of the Board of Directors of other charter schools, including Harlem Children's Zone. Wall Streeter Joseph DiMenna contributed \$50,000; Hedge funder Brian Higgins and his wife Tania contributed \$50,000; and Home Depot founder, Kenneth Langone, contributed \$75,000. Langone even agreed to head up a group of Republicans to support Cuomo's re-election specifically because of his pro-charter position, adding that: "Every time I am with the governor, I talk to him about charter schools. He gets it."

The Board of Directors of the KIPP charter chain directly and indirectly supported Cuomo as well: Washington, D.C. resident Katherine Bradley gave \$25,000 to Moskowitz's PAC, which in turn contributed to Cuomo, and Philippe Dauman, former CEO of Viacom, gave \$85,000 directly to Cuomo as did Whitney Tilson (\$12,000).

Michael Steinhardt, who opened the first Hebrew Academy Charter School in 2009, contributed \$75,000. Achievement First Charter Chain's board also contributed to Cuomo. Contributors included Connecticut residents William Berkely and Jonathan Sackler as well as John Ceriale, husband of [past Board member Melissa Ceriale](#).

Those whose businesses depend on charter schools also gave to the Governor's re-election. Connecticut resident Brian Olson, whose construction company (Civic Builders) builds charter schools, contributed \$45,000. Winston Fisher is a past board member of Civic Builders, and its 2016 Gala Honoree. He and his family contributed \$192,500 directly to Cuomo. William Ackman of Pershing Square contributed \$76,000 to Andrew Cuomo's two campaigns. [Ackman's Pershing Square Foundation joined the Turner-Agassi's fund](#) (a for-profit), which is building charter schools en masse around the country.

McKenna, Long and Aldridge, a Georgia based law firm with a thriving practice in charter school law, had a PAC with the same name which contributed \$62,698.46 to Cuomo until the firm was swallowed up by Dentons, a multinational firm which [started the Legacy Charter School chain](#). Dentons contributed \$1,000 to Cuomo.

Other "school reform" organizations that move beyond the charter sphere were also generous to a Governor who declared in 2012 that he alone was the lobbyist for students. StudentsFirstNY, an off-shoot of the national organization, was founded in 2012 by Joel Klein, Michelle Rhee, and hedge funders Daniel Loeb and Paul Tudor Jones. [Cuomo's](#)

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2015 State of the State speech mirrored, sometimes verbatim, the StudentsFirstNY's website's Mission and Priorities section.

The StudentsFirstNY Board of Directors contributed to the Cuomo campaign. Prominent attorney David Boies and his law firm gave \$125,000 to Cuomo and Joel Klein gave \$10,000.

StudentsFirstNY shares an address (345 7th Ave Suite 501 NYC) with several other pro-charter organizations: Families for Excellent Schools, Families for Excellent Schools Advocacy, New Yorkers for a Balanced Albany, and New Yorkers for Putting Students First. The New Yorkers for a Balanced Albany PAC was also established after the 2014 election.

New Yorkers for Putting Students First PAC contributed \$50,000 directly to Cuomo. Additionally, New Yorkers for Putting Students First contributed to the Independent Democratic Conference (IDC), a group of Senate "Independent" Democrats who vote with the Republicans on education reform. Families for Excellent Schools co-founder Bryan Lawrence contributed \$20,000 directly to Cuomo as well as to the PACs that support Cuomo.

Ravenel Boykin Curry IV of Eagle Capital Management, who is a supporter of charter schools, co-founder of DFER, and member of the Board of Directors of Education Reform Now

Advocacy, contributed \$121,600 directly to Cuomo; \$60,800 before the 2014 election, and then again after the election was over. The most generous billionaire education reformer, however, was Connecticut's Paul Tudor Jones, whose family contributed \$400,000 to Cuomo directly and indirectly through PACs. Jones, a billionaire who made his fortune shorting the stock market right before the 2008 crash, believes it is his mission to save education, and by doing so, cure poverty.

All of the efforts and contributions made by charter advocates paid off. In the final two months of the election Andrew Cuomo outspent his Republican gubernatorial opponent, Rob Astorino, five to one. Cuomo was re-elected by a 13% margin. Post-election, Andrew Cuomo Inc. was left with about \$9,000,000 million dollars for his next campaign.

With an eye toward his 2018 reelection, Cuomo raised over \$5.1 million in the first half of 2017. Both in and out-of-state charter friendly PACs and individuals, such as Moskowitz's Great Public Schools PAC, Ravenel Curry, Jim Walton and Carrie Walton Penner, are among Cuomo's largest 2017 contributors. ■

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Table 1: In-State Contributors to Andrew Cuomo 2018, Inc.¹ and PACs that contributed to Andrew Cuomo 2018, Inc.

DIRECT CONTRIBUTIONS TO ANDREW CUOMO	DATE	AMOUNT
New Yorkers for Putting Students First (and New Yorkers for Putting Students First Independent Committee)	11/25/2013	\$25,000.00
	12/10/2012	\$25,000.00
Coalition for Public Charter Schools PAC	12/10/2012	\$10,000.00
Democrats for Education Reform – New York State	05/05/2014	\$5,000.00
	12/10/2012	\$10,000.00
	01/13/2014	\$10,000.00
	12/27/2012	\$10,000.00
	07/13/2012	\$1,000.00
Great Public Schools Political Action Committee	01/07/2014	\$4,000.00
	11/16/2011	\$15,000.00
	04/10/2012	\$15,000.00
	12/20/2011	\$10,000.00
Charter P.A.C.	05/24/2011	\$ 25,000.00
	11/03/2011	\$1,500.00

CONTRIBUTORS WITH SUCCESS ACADEMY TIES	DATE	AMOUNT
Daniel Loeb – Success Academy Board President/Chairman of Third Point LLC	09/04/2014	\$41,000.00
	11/07/2011	\$4,367.00
	08/09/2011	\$15,000.00
Margaret Loeb – wife of Daniel Loeb	09/23/2014	\$19,000.00
	11/25/2013	\$10,000.00
Bruce Kovner – spouse of Success Academy Board member Suzie Kovner/Caxton Associates	05/29/2014	\$5,000.00
	11/25/2013	\$40,000.00
Joel Greenblatt – Success Academy board member/Gotham Management	12/10/2012	\$25,000.00
	05/24/2011	\$15,000.00

¹Previously called Andrew Cuomo 2014.

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Table 1 continued: In-State Contributors to Andrew Cuomo 2018, Inc. and PACs that contributed to Andrew Cuomo 2018, Inc.

CONTRIBUTORS WITH SUCCESS ACADEMY TIES	DATE	AMOUNT
Julia Greenblatt – wife of Joel Greenblatt	11/13/2013	\$25,000.00
Daniel Nir – former Success Academy board member/spouse of Jill Braufman/Gracie Capital	11/25/2013	\$10,000.00
	12/10/2012	\$25,000.00
	09/23/2014	\$25,000.00
Jill Braufman – former Success Academy board member/spouse of Daniel Nir	11/16/2011	\$50,000.00
	08/29/2013	\$7,500.00
Bryan Binder – Success Academy board member/Castleline Holdings	01/10/2014	\$10,000.00
	12/10/2012	\$5,000.00
	12/10/2012	\$5,000.00
Kent Yalowitz – Success Academy board member	09/23/2014	\$5,000.00
Catherine Shainker – Success Academy board member	10/06/2014	\$1,000.00
	10/06/2014	\$1,000.00
Andrew Stone – Success Academy board member	10/20/2014	\$10,000.00
	12/10/2012	\$25,000.00
	11/16/2011	\$25,000.00
Dana Stone – spouse of Andrew Stone	11/25/2013	\$25,000.00
Jarret Posner – Success Academy board member	08/29/2014	\$2,500.00
Kelly Posner – sister of Jarret Posner	01/11/2013	\$20,000.00
Suleman Lunat – Success Academy board member	09/23/2014	\$1,000.00
John Petry – Success Academy board member	12/10/2012	\$10,000.00
	05/24/2011	\$15,000.00
	11/14/2013	\$10,000.00
	09/23/2014	\$25,000.00

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Table 1 continued: In-State Contributors to Andrew Cuomo 2018, Inc. and PACs that contributed to Andrew Cuomo 2018, Inc.

CONTRIBUTORS WITH STUDENTS-FIRST TIES	DATE	AMOUNT
Joel Klein - StudentsFirst NY founder/ former NYC Schools Chancellor	12/27/2012	\$10,000.00
David Boies - StudentsFirst board member	06/26/2014	\$25,000.00
	06/07/2011	\$25,000.00
	03/19/2013	\$25,000.00
Boies, Schiller and Flexner - David Boies/Chairman	12/27/2013	\$25,000.00
	12/27/2012	\$25,000.00
Roger Hertog - former StudentsFirst board member	05/22/2013	\$30,000.00

CONTRIBUTORS WITH HARLEM CHILDREN'S ZONE TIES	DATE	AMOUNT
Stanley Druckenmiller - Harlem Children's Zone trustee	03/04/2014	\$60,800.00
Joseph DiMenna - Harlem Children's Zone board member	02/08/2012	\$50,000.00
Tania Higgins - wife of Brian Higgins/Harlem Children's Zone board member	02/16/2011	\$25,000.00
	08/30/2013	\$10,000.00
Ken Langone - Harlem Children's Zone chairman emeritus/Home Depot founder	03/19/2013	\$50,000.00

CONTRIBUTORS WITH KIPP TIES	DATE	AMOUNT
Whitney Tilson - KIPP board member/ DFER co-founder	01/07/2014	\$1,000.00
	06/07/2011	\$1,000.00
	12/27/2012	\$10,000.00
Philippe Dauman - KIPP board member	07/04/2014	\$60,000.00
Larry Robbins - former KIPP board chair	07/09/2014	\$5,800.00
	12/10/2012	\$25,000.00
	05/24/2011	\$5,000.00
	01/07/2014	\$25,000.00

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Table 1 continued: In-State Contributors to Andrew Cuomo 2018, Inc. and PACs that contributed to Andrew Cuomo 2018, Inc.

CONTRIBUTORS WITH OTHER CHARTER TIES	DATE	AMOUNT
Ravenel Boykin Curry IV	11/16/2011	\$5,000.00
	05/31/2011	\$30,000.00
	12/10/2012	\$23,800.00
	06/23/2011	\$2,000.00
Michael Steinhardt - Hebrew Charter School Center founder	05/29/2014	\$40,000.00
Sara Steinhardt Berman - daughter of Michael Steinhardt/Hebrew Charter School Center board chair	05/29/2014	\$40,000.00
David Steinhardt - son of Michael Steinhardt	05/29/2014	\$20,000.00
Bryan Lawrence - Girls Prep Charter School founder/Families for Excellent Education co-founder	11/16/2011	\$10,000.00
Winston Fisher - Civics Builders (builds charter schools) former board member	08/06/2013	\$22,500.00
	07/24/2014	\$12,000.00
	12/27/2012	\$25,000.00
Jessica Fisher - spouse of Winston Fisher	07/24/2014	\$13,000.00
Steve Fisher - Fisher Brothers partner with Winston Fisher	08/06/2013	\$22,500.00
	06/17/2014	\$25,000.00
Kenneth Fisher - Fisher Brothers partner with Winston Fisher	12/27/2012	\$25,000.00
	04/19/2011	\$5,000.00
	06/17/2014	\$25,000.00
William Ackman - Turner-Agassi charter school builders partner	05/22/2013	\$50,000.00

Source: New York State Board of Elections

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Table 2: Out-of-State Contributors to Andrew Cuomo 2018, Inc. and PACs that contributed to Andrew Cuomo 2018, Inc.

CONTRIBUTORS WITH SUCCESS ACADEMY TIES	DATE	AMOUNT
Samuel Cole - Success Academy board member	09/23/2014	\$12,500.00
Steven Galbraith - Success Academy board member	09/24/2014	\$35,000.00
John Scully - Success Academy board member	08/29/2014	\$50,000.00
Charles Strauch - Success Academy board member	12/27/2013 11/17/2011	\$5,000.00 \$10,000.00

CONTRIBUTORS WITH ACHIEVEMENT FIRST TIES	DATE	AMOUNT
Jonathan Sackler	07/18/2011 12/10/2012 11/25/2013 09/24/2014	\$1,000.00 \$10,000.00 \$15,000.00 \$20,000.00
John Ceriale - husband of past Achievement First board member, Melissa Ceriale	05/30/2014	\$25,000.00

CONTRIBUTORS WITH OTHER CHARTER TIES	DATE	AMOUNT
Sonia Jones - wife of Paul Tudor Jones/ StudentsFirstNY director	03/19/2013	\$25,000.00
Katherine Bradley - KIPP board member	12/10/2012	\$5,000.00
Charles Ledley - Education Reform Now/DFER board member	12/27/2012	\$10,000.00
Brian Olson - Civic Builders Founder (charter school construction company)	11/25/2013 06/15/2011 12/10/2012	\$25,000.00 \$10,000.00 \$10,000.00

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Table 2 continued: Out-of-State Contributors to Andrew Cuomo 2018, Inc. and PACs that contributed to Andrew Cuomo 2018, Inc.

CONTRIBUTORS WITH OTHER CHARTER TIES	DATE	AMOUNT
J.C .Huizenga - National Heritage Academies (for-profit charter) founder	03/25/2014	\$15,000.00
	12/10/2012	\$25,000.00
Anthony Davis - Achievement First board member	05/24/2011	\$25,000.00

Source: New York State Board of Elections

Table 3: In-State Contributors to New Yorkers for Putting Students First

NEW YORKERS FOR PUTTING STUDENTS FIRST (and New Yorkers for Putting Students First Independent Committee)	DATE	AMOUNT
Daniel Loeb	08/02/2013	\$140,000.00
	07/10/2012	\$75,000.00

Source: New York State Board of Elections

Table 4: Out-of-State Contributors to New Yorkers for Putting Students First

NEW YORKERS FOR PUTTING STUDENTS FIRST (and New Yorkers for Putting Students First Independent Committee)	DATE	AMOUNT
Paul Tudor Jones and Sonia Jones	07/15/2013	\$125,000.00
	08/13/2013	\$125,000.00
	08/11/2012	\$75,000.00

Source: New York State Board of Elections

Table 5: In-State Contributors to Coalition for Public Charter School PAC

CONTRIBUTIONS TO COALITION FOR PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS PAC	DATE	AMOUNT
Bruce Kovner	06/24/2013	\$50,000.00
	05/15/2012	\$10,000.00
Michael Steinhardt	01/23/2013	\$25,000.00

Source: New York State Board of Elections

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Table 6: Out-of-State Contributors to Coalition for Public Charter School PAC

CONTRIBUTIONS TO COALITION FOR PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS PAC	DATE	AMOUNT
Paul Tudor Jones	09/11/2012	\$50,000.00
Jonathan Sackler	02/07/2013	\$15,000.00

Source: New York State Board of Elections

Table 7: In-State Contributors to Great Public Schools Action Committee

CONTRIBUTIONS TO GREAT PUBLIC SCHOOLS POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE	DATE	AMOUNT
Joel Greenblatt	01/07/2014	\$75,000.00
Roger Hertog	11/18/2014	\$25,000.00

Source: New York State Board of Elections

Table 8: Out-of-State Contributors to Great Public Schools Action Committee

CONTRIBUTIONS TO GREAT PUBLIC SCHOOLS POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE	DATE	AMOUNT
Katherine Bradley	03/22/2012	\$25,000.00

Source: New York State Board of Elections

Table 9: In-State Contributors to Charter PAC

CONTRIBUTIONS TO CHARTER PAC	DATE	AMOUNT
Roger Hertog	09/20/2011	\$25,000.00
Bruce Kovner	09/08/2011	\$25,000.00

Source: New York State Board of Elections

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Table 10: In-State Contributors to Democrats for Education Reform NYS

CONTRIBUTIONS TO DEMOCRATS FOR EDUCATION REFORM - NEW YORK STATE	DATE	AMOUNT
Joel Greenblatt	12/31/2013	\$20,000.00
Anthony Davis	01/30/2014	\$50,000.00
Suzy Davis - wife of Anthony Davis	02/10/2014	\$50,000.00
Ravenel Curry IV	12/31/2013 07/31/2014	\$50,000.00 \$75,000.00
Elizabeth Curry - mother of Ravenel Curry IV	12/13/2013	\$50,000.00
John Petry	12/13/2013	\$50,000.00

Source: New York State Board of Elections

Table 11: Top Five In-State Contributors to Cuomo and PACs that Supported Cuomo

CONTRIBUTOR	TOTAL AMOUNT
Daniel Loeb and family	\$304,367.00
Ravenel Boykin Curry IV and family	\$235,800.00
Winston Fisher and family	\$175,000.00
Joel Greenblatt and family	\$160,000.00
Bruce Kovner	\$130,000.00

Table 12: Top Five Out-of-State Contributors to Cuomo and PACs that Supported Cuomo

CONTRIBUTOR	TOTAL AMOUNT
Paul Tudor Jones and family	\$400,000.00
Jonathan Sackler	\$61,000.00
John Scully	\$50,000.00
Brian Olson	\$45,000.00
Steven Galbraith	\$35,000.00