

A married couple pockets \$600,000 in compensation for leading a Newark NJ charter school of 569 students.

The couple serving as superintendent and financial officer of a Newark, N.J. [charter school of 569 students](#) actually reside in Florida. The charter school industry is rife with shady deals.

ECOT is the posterchild for much of Ohio's charter industry. Fortunately, half of the charters issued in Ohio have closed or never opened due to fiscal issues, low enrollment, academic issues, or scandal; even so, many of the charters still operating are highly suspect.

Married N.J. school leaders making nearly \$600K actually live in Florida

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Maria L. Varisco-Rogers Charter School at 233 Woodside Ave. on Thursday, Aug 22, 2024, in Newark, NJ. Ed Murray | For NJ Advance Media

- [Matthew Stanmyre | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com](#)

A wife-and-husband team making nearly \$600,000 in combined total compensation running a small, publicly funded charter school in Newark do not appear to live full-time in New Jersey and actually reside in Florida, an NJ Advance Media investigation has found.

The arrangement is believed to violate the New Jersey First Act, which requires public employees to live in-state, including public school teachers and administrators.

Florida residents return, clean up after Hurricane Milton
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Teresa Segarra, [the superintendent of Maria L. Varisco-Rogers Charter School](#), and her husband, Jose Segarra, the school business administrator, live in Coral Gables, Florida, according to housing and voting records and two sources familiar with the inner workings of the institution. The sources asked to remain anonymous for fear of retribution.

The Segarras, who are among the highest-paid educators in New Jersey, only make a few in-person visits to the school during the year, one source said.

NJ Advance Media has made repeated attempts to reach Teresa Segarra, beginning in June. She did not respond to multiple phone messages and emails over the summer seeking comment on [the charter school and its seemingly exorbitant salaries](#).

In the past two weeks, as details of the Segarra's apparent living arrangement emerged, NJ Advance Media attempted to reach both Teresa and Jose Segarra by phone and email. None of those messages were returned.

On Tuesday afternoon, an attorney representing the school contacted NJ Advance Media. NJ Advance Media presented the findings of its investigation to the attorney and again requested comment, but as of Thursday evening received no response.

With a salary of \$301,600, Teresa Segarra, 79, is the state's fourth-highest paid superintendent, outearning the leaders of nearly 600 other school districts, [according to the state's salary database](#). She made an additional \$22,036 for the fiscal year ending June 2023, [tax filings show](#), pushing her total compensation to \$323,636.

Jose Segarra, 79, earns \$257,802 as the school's business administrator, records show. Despite serving in a lesser capacity, he makes more than all but 22 superintendents in New Jersey, according to the state's database.

Maria L. Varisco-Rogers Charter School, [a kindergarten through eighth grade institution](#) in Newark's North Ward, has 570 total students. About 93% of its students are [economically disadvantaged](#).

Like most publicly funded charter schools in New Jersey, the school's revenue is derived from taxpayer funds, [state financial reports show](#).

Under [the New Jersey First Act](#), all public employees are required to live in-state, including public school teachers and administrators. The law has stirred controversy in recent years due to teacher shortages, and the fact that many school employees seek to live in neighboring states like New York or Pennsylvania. Lawmakers have [tried to change it](#) without success. Current legislation is pending to repeal the act, but [it remains the law](#).

Workers can file for exemptions with the state, but few are granted. A review of the state's [Employee Residency Review Committee rulings](#) did not show exemptions granted to the Segarras.

According to public records, Teresa and Jose Segarra are registered to vote in Florida. Teresa Segarra has voted regularly in Florida since 2016, and Jose Segarra since 2014, records show. The federal government defines voting residence as "the address that you consider your permanent home."

The Segarras also are registered to vote in New Jersey. According to an unofficial New Jersey voter database, however, Teresa and Jose Segarra last voted in the state in 2012.

It's unclear when the Segarras began working at Maria L. Varisco-Rogers. But Teresa Segarra has appeared in the state salary database [connected to the school](#) since at least the 2016-17 school year.

Marc H. Zitomer, a school district attorney representing dozens of districts and charter schools across the state, spoke generally about the New Jersey First law, saying the state defines a principal residence with three components, including where the person spends most of their non-working time, the place that's the center of the person's domestic life and where the person's legal address and legal residence for voting is.

"If a person is a legal voter in the state of Florida, to me that raises red flags that the person does not satisfy the requirements of the New Jersey First statute — that their principal address is not in New Jersey," Zitomer said.

"In my opinion, if the person's legal residence for voting is in the state of Florida, it's basically a prime indicator under the law that New Jersey is not their principal residence," Zitomer added.

The couple's current primary address is a home in Coral Gables, Florida, purchased in 2022, housing records show. Prior to that, the Segarras owned a condo in Sunny Isles Beach, Florida, from 2020 to 2022, and a home in Melbourne, Florida, from 2012 to 2020, according to housing records.

The Segarras also have owned a home in Livingston, New Jersey, purchased in 2000 and sold in June, housing records show.

Additionally, Jose Segarra was cited for three traffic violations between 2021 and 2022, according to police records, and all three citations listed the Coral Gables property as his home address. The vehicle he was driving also had Florida license plates, records show.

One ticket was issued on a Saturday in May of 2022, and another was issued on a Thursday at 1:07 p.m. in early December of 2022, when school is believed to have been in session.

Publicly funded charter schools in New Jersey recently have come under scrutiny from lawmakers after [a series of NJ Advance Media investigations](#) uncovered some charter school leaders have been [earning salaries that far outpace](#) top officials in public districts. The reports also uncovered [allegations of nepotism and financial and ethical improprieties](#) in some charter schools.

Four New Jersey senators [have called on the state Department of Education](#) to open a formal inquiry into the state's charter school sector. And two senior state senators — Vin Gopal, D-Monmouth, and Paul Sarlo, D-Bergen — have announced plans [to initiate legislative hearings](#) and a review of the state's charter school policies and regulations.

“Charter schools receive public tax dollars, and as a result must be held accountable for how they are spending taxpayer dollars in the same way we make sure that public schools are,” Gopal said. “Our committee will be responding in the weeks ahead.”

NJ Advance Media research editor Vinessa Erminio contributed to this report.

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