

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE Texas SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

March 31, 2009



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PARENTS CHOOSING CHILDREN LEARNING

AT the Austin CEO Foundation

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My name is Connie Sadowski and I represent the Education Options Resource Center at the Austin CEO Foundation. I am here to speak in favor of SB 1830 and SB 308 relating to the number of charters the SBOE may grant for open enrollment charter schools.

The Foundation believes when parents have choices in education that children find within themselves newfound motivation to excel in their studies.

I frequently receive calls from parents looking for options for their children who are floundering in their current school environment. The current waiting list of 17,000 primarily minority students is troublesome to me because these are bright kids who are just not one-size-fits all. This committee has the opportunity to help these kids in a great big way this session.

Please remove the cap on charter schools and give all kids a choice education.

Parents should be given more opportunities to choose their child's schools whether they are looking for college prep school, dropout recovery program, extended hours or shortened hours, occupational training or just a chance to get away from a school with neighborhood kids that are holding them back from a good education.

Lifting the cap will give parents a choice and encourage parental involvement but perhaps most important students will have a new found interest and enthusiasm in getting a great education and becoming productive adults in the workforce, go on to technical school and many minority students will be enrolling in college.

Please remove the cap on charters. Thank you.

TEXAS CHARTER SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

FACT SHEET: WHAT IS A CHARTER SCHOOL?

“Despite making up only two percent of the nation’s public schools, charter schools made a statistically impressive showing on U.S. News & World Report’s list of America’s Best High Schools... Nearly 1,600 schools earned a place on the list. Of these, charters make up 15 percent of the top 20 schools and 4 percent of all schools on the list.” (PRNewswire, 12/5/07)

- Texas charter schools are free public schools - open to all students - operating under the watchful eye of the TEA.
- Charter schools were authorized by the Texas legislature in 1995 to provide an alternative to traditional public schools. To date, there have been 209 charters awarded in Texas - the current cap is 215. (TEA)
- The purpose of charter schools are to:
 - (1) Improve student learning
 - (2) Increase the choice of learning opportunities within the public school system
 - (3) Create professional opportunities that will attract new teachers to the public school system
 - (4) Establish a new form of accountability for public schools
 - (5) Encourage different and innovative learning methods
- Texas charter schools provide a tailored learning environment, some requiring more homework, classroom hours and parental involvement than traditional schools and others allowing flexibility to care for family or maintain employment.
- Charter schools have had great success in graduating low-income and minority students and helping them prepare for success in post-secondary life. In Texas, 81% of students in charter schools are minority, compared to 60% in traditional public schools. (Texas Education Agency, “Snapshot 2007 Summary Tables” <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/snapshot/2007/state.html>)
- Enrollment at Texas charter schools has increased from 2,498 students in the 1996-97 school year to 113,760 students in 2007-08. Last year there were well over 16,000 students on waiting lists for charter schools. (Texas Public Policy Foundation, August 2008 Bulletin “Calculating the demand for charter schools” http://www.texaspolicy.com/publications.php?report_year=2008)
- Traditional public schools facing charter competition exhibit higher increases in test scores and passing rates than those facing no charter competition. (Drs. Timothy J. Gronberg and Dennis W. Jansen, “Texas Charter Schools: An Assessment in 2005”)
- Charter schools receive state funds based on the average daily attendance (ADA) of students (same as traditional public schools); however, they do not receive funds from local tax revenue and do not have access to state facilities allotments. On average, Texas charter schools receive \$1500 less per student than traditional public schools. (Paul Colbert, “Apples to Apples: Comparing Funding of Texas Charter Schools to Traditional School Districts in Texas,” Resource Center for Charter Schools, Feb. 2007)

January 21, 2009

Charter Schools Offer Hope to Dropouts

By Brooke Dollens Terry

Charter schools can be a solution to the horrific dropout crisis afflicting both Texas and America.

A student drops out of an American high school every 26 seconds, according to America's Promise Alliance. In Texas, researchers at the Intercultural Development Research Association find that one out of every three school students fails to graduate. Last year, 185 Texas high schools were labeled "dropout factories" by John Hopkins University researchers.

Lawmakers outraged at the staggering number of dropouts are looking for solutions. They should consider charter schools as a proven way to address the dropout crisis.

Charter schools are public schools funded with public dollars with more freedom to innovate. Texas' first charter schools opened their doors in 1996; today, more than 110,000 students attend a charter school.

Charter schools serve a large percentage of poor and minority students, many of whom are behind their peers academically. Last year, 80 percent of Texas students in charter schools were minorities, compared to 60 percent in traditional public schools.

To best meet the individual needs of their students, there are a range of charter school models. Some charter schools, to help their students catch up, offer a longer school day, Saturday classes, and mandatory summer school.

Another charter school model has a math and science preparation emphasis, with multiple math and science Advanced Placement and dual credit offerings and involvement with math and science competitions. Other charter school models offer a second chance to former dropouts, teenage parents, homeless youth, and juvenile offenders, providing these students with tremendous flexibility, one-on-one academic tutoring, and job skills training.

Consider the remarkable success story of Noah, who I met on a recent tour of American YouthWorks charter school in Austin. Noah first got into trouble with the law at age 12. By the age of 14, he had served three years at the Texas Youth Commission. He is the father to three children under the age of six.

The ability to attend a charter school gave him the opportunity for a fresh start. Noah, now 21, is working towards his GED, learning valuable job skills, and earning money through the school's construction program. He plans to enroll in a local community college's automotive program.

The media likes to fixate on the few bad apples among charter schools, giving the impression that all charter schools are mediocre at best and fraudulent at worst. But there are many shining examples of

