

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Allen Weeks, executive director of Austin Voices for Education and Youth.

Charge 5 directs you to study the performance and accountability of charter schools, including best practices of high-performing charters.

But research shows that the practices of charters most often described as high-performing are either not sustainable financially or practically if brought to scale, or that their high performance is the result of effectively weeding out students who would bring down average scores – neither of which can be legally replicated in our public schools.

First, the vast majority of charter schools effectively pre-select students through a required application process. A few charters have been found to actually select students based on incoming higher test scores. But even an action as simple as asking students to enter a lottery effectively sifts out families who place a higher priority on education from those who do not. So charter schools begin with a generally more committed family population than do regular public schools.

Second, charters are able to rid themselves of students and families who fail to meet specified commitments – again, not a legal option for our public schools. A 2008 Columbia University study on KIPP cautions: QUOTE “...it is not realistic to think that the KIPP model is a panacea for distressed systems. It is possible that only a small proportion of students and families will be able to meet the demands KIPP imposes on them; even those enthused when they begin the KIPP regimen tend to leave in high numbers.” UNQUOTE

Third, as TEA data shows, Texas charters provide far fewer teachers for students with special needs, such as English language learners or those with learning or developmental disabilities. According to TEA's 2011 snapshot, Texas charter schools hired only one third as many special ed teachers as public campuses and only half as many bilingual teachers.

Finally, charters rely on a much higher teacher turnover rate – almost three times that of public schools - and have over twice as many inexperienced teachers, those with five years or less in the classroom.

The 2008 Columbia University study on KIPP states:

QUOTE “There are significant unanswered questions about how expansion might affect outcomes, especially in relation to the difficulty of sustaining gains dependent upon KIPP's heavy demands on teachers and school leaders.” UNQUOTE

The study further cautions policymakers to “temper their interest in the operation with wariness and realistic expectations” noting that taxpayers may not be inclined to support an extended schedule like the KIPP model, which will bring significant additional expense if replicated widely.

At this juncture, Texas faces multiple lawsuits for failure legally and adequately fund our current education system and parents statewide are rebelling against an expensive wasteful standardized testing regime that is out of control by any reasonable measure.

With all due respect, I would strongly urge you to address these critical issues first before you consider taking the lid off an unproven charter system that does not provide equal services or access to all students. Thank you.

TEA Snapshot available at:

<http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/snapshot/2011/state.html>

