

# Texas Classroom Teachers Association

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**Testimony to the Senate Education Committee  
Regarding Senate Interim Charges #5 and #6  
By  
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There is a cap of 215 on the number of charters that can be granted by the State Board of Education (SBOE), but there is no limit to the number of charter schools that can be approved under a granted charter. An unlimited number of charters can be granted to institutions of higher education, including junior or community colleges. Currently there are more than 400 charter schools across the state. Open-enrollment charters meeting certain conditions (i.e., high performing) may automatically expand without the requirement for approval from the Texas Education Agency (TEA).

Texas is ranked third in the nation in charter school enrollment. We have over 22,000 charter school students.

A couple of items of distinction between charter schools and traditional public schools:

- Charter schools can expel a student at any time for a violation of their code of conduct, unlike traditional public schools. The code of conduct is individually created by each charter.
- While traditional public schools must take everyone, charter schools can deny enrollment to students with a criminal record.
- Although employees of charter schools are public employees, they are not entitled to all of the same legal protections as employees of independent school districts, such as contracts, sick leave and class-size limits.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

### *ALTERNATIVE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM*

Based on 2011 data charter school exemplary ratings continue to rise (their last rankings were an impressive improvement); however, we don't get an accurate reflection of how charters are comparing to their traditional public school peers. According to this same data 32% of charter schools (compared to roughly 3% of traditional public schools) were under the Alternative Accountability System. This is a lower standard accountability system that obscures the real numbers we need to see what is truly working.

### *LATEST ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT*

- 8.5% of charter operators received an exemplary rating, compared to 4.4% of traditional districts
- 4.9% of traditional public school districts were rated unacceptable, compared to 17.6% of charter school districts
- 11.2% of charter campuses were rated academically unacceptable, compared to 5.9% of traditional public schools.

The latest and final Texas Center for Educational Research report on charters found significantly lower academic achievement of students in state-created open enrollment charter schools vs. similar students in the traditional public schools.

## **RESEARCH**

The Texas Tribune interviewed Michael Marder, a professor at the University of Texas department of physics and co-director of the university's UTeach program. Mr. Marder recently did a great deal of research on public education statistics and the role of poverty in educational outcomes, which he states plays the largest role in student learning.

In the interview Mr. Marder was asked if charter schools are the answer. His response, "No, secondary charter schools in Texas led to much lower levels of student performance than comparable public schools, and across the nation secondary charter schools at best keep up with comparable public schools."

He goes on to state that out of 140 secondary charter schools, there are five charter operators that serve low income students and perform well, including YES Prep, KIPP, IDEA and Harmony. Thirty schools were comparable, but over 100 were dramatically worse.

## **NATIONAL LEVEL**

The largest charter school study to date, done by CREDO, showed that charter schools had 17% percent of their students doing better than their traditional public school peers, 37% did worse, and 46% showed no statistical difference. These numbers mean a student has a one-in-five chance of testing better after entering a charter school, but the chances nearly double that the student will perform worse.

## **ARGUMENT: CHARTERS DO MORE WITH LESS MONEY**

It is virtually impossible to discern the amount of money a charter school in Texas is getting per student, because while there are financial audits all public schools must comply with, these audits are often not helpful in providing the real per-pupil spending amount. Many of the often-touted charter schools receive generous grants. The study "What Makes KIPP Work?" published in March of 2011 states that, "Combining public and private sources of revenue, KIPP received, on average, \$18,491 per pupil in 2007-08. This is \$6,500 more per pupil than what the local school districts received in revenues." The report also states that KIPP serves a significantly lower special education population (6%, compared to 12%) and English language learners (11%, compared to 19%) than the local districts. The study found that 15% of students left KIPP each year during grades 6 through 8. KIPP population is mostly middle school students.

## **VOUCHERS AND RELATED ISSUES**

We remain opposed to private school vouchers, tax credits or similar approaches and prefer to offer choice through intra-district transfers, magnet schools, high quality charter schools and other currently available options within the public school system.