

April 7, 2015

To the Honorable Members of the Appropriations Committee:

As a public school educator and tax-paying citizen, I ask that you not allocate any funds for the proliferation of new charter schools during this severe budgetary crisis.

I watched with fascination on CT-N the testimony by citizens at the Education Public Hearing and was impressed by some of the astute questioning by legislators as they sought input on the Moratorium question. I can only hope that legislators can see through the empty and deceptive, though well-rehearsed, rhetoric of the charter school lobby. Unfortunately, the charter promises do not hold up and their drawbacks far out-weigh their broken promises.

In this tight fiscal climate, it is more important for the legislature to allocate funds to

- adequately fund local school districts at their ECS funding levels in order to empower all neighborhood schools in educating their students,
- discontinue allowing SDE to pick "winners and losers" through a lottery system that pre-selects applicants through a complicated admission process,
- require all public schools to follow educational guidelines of best practice in both instructional delivery and disciplinary conduct.

The on-going controversy surrounding the private versus public separation inherent in the structure of charter schools is not in the best interest of students or their families. Across the country, students and parents are left searching for new programs or returning to their under-funded neighborhood schools when their charter school fails to meet its financial obligations.

Certainly no one can fault a parent for seeking what they hope will be best for their children, but the high attrition rate belies any pretense of success: it is mostly "smoke and mirrors" shaped and promulgated by a savvy group of charter school advocates and lobbyists who have lost their way. As they seek to further monetize the privatization agenda, Jennifer Alexander of ConnCAN, Jeffrey Villar of CCER, Dacia Toll of Achievement First (and in the background, the influential edu-entrepreneur and philanthropist Jonathan Sackler) have cloaked their privatization message as one of civil rights and parental choice while, behind scenes, they continue the nefarious practice of "rigged" lotteries guaranteed to carefully select enrollment and the suspension/expulsion of students who don't readily accept questionably abusive, "no-excuses" conduct expectations that would never be allowed in a traditional public school. As a result, many students leave charters, only to return to their under-funded community public school.

To allow scarce financial revenues to be siphoned off for exorbitant administrative infrastructure salaries, unnecessary real estate holdings, an unskilled teaching force, and - in many cases - an overly-punitive code of conduct is unconscionable. The opportunities for graft and corruption are just too great in the quasi-public, quasi-private world of corporate-backed charter schools.

I ask you again - especially the Democrats in the majority to challenge the status quo, break free of the misguided Democrat in the Governor's Office, and do what is right for all the students in our state - fix and fully fund the ECS formula and allocate the necessary financial resources to all public schools in the identified low-performing districts. After all, the underlying issues of poverty, segregation, and language barriers are at the root of our wide education disparities.

Thank you for your consideration on this extremely important issue. It cannot be emphasized enough that the time is now for a significant course correction in public education, but it will require your leadership against the entrenched interests of failed policies.

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