

**Education Committee**  
**February 23, 2015**  
**Governor's Senate Bill 943 – Oppose**

Representative Fleischmann, Senator Slossberg and members of the Education Committee:

My name is Bill Buhler and I speak to this committee after 35 years of work as a Pupil Service Specialist, working with low achieving high school students from Hartford, New Haven, Bridgeport and Waterbury. Governor's Bill 943 does not go far enough to resolve a key charter school issue so I cannot support it.

That issue is the charters "open choice" enrollment policy. By default "open choice" filters out special education students and students with non-English speaking parents. This gives the charters a relatively homogeneous population of the more capable students. The host school is left with a high concentration of bilingual and special education students who typically need more support.

Even if charters had the same proportion of bilingual and special ed. students school, parent self-selection alone differentiates them in a significant way from the students of parents who did not apply.

After working with high school kids from urban areas, I have little doubt that poverty is the root cause of their low achievement, not so-called "failing schools." The kids I've seen come from single parent families where English may not be the primary language. Many have special education needs, and they live in areas of high unemployment where gangs and crime are prevalent. Their families have more immediate concerns than education..

Schools working with these low achieving students can't be expected to offset all the negative influences in those neighborhoods, and if charter schools pull out the more capable students it makes the job of the regular school that much harder.

So while there are many charter school issues, I think the main one is their enrollment policy. In all ways, charters should face the same challenges that exist in the host schools. Whether it is racial composition or the proportion of bilingual and special education students, charters should not have less diversity. Their "open choice" enrollment policy should be scrapped in favor of a targeted approach which will achieve this goal.

OLR Research Report, "Comparison of Charter, Magnet and Innovation Schools," Judith Lohman, Assistant Director, 1/6/11

Public Accountability for Charter Schools; Standards and Policy Recommendations for Effective Oversight, Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, 2014

Pro-charter school group to spend "multi-million dollars" on Connecticut Ads, Jennifer Swift, New Haven Register, 12/8/14

Connections in charter world a curious weave, online article by Wendy Lecker, Hearst Connecticut Media Group, 8/25/14

Wait What, various Blogs by Jonathan Pelto, former gubernatorial candidate

Connecticut State Department of Education Biennial Report on the Operation of Charter Schools in Connecticut, 2014

The Truth About Charter Schools, online publication by American Federation of Teachers, undated.

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