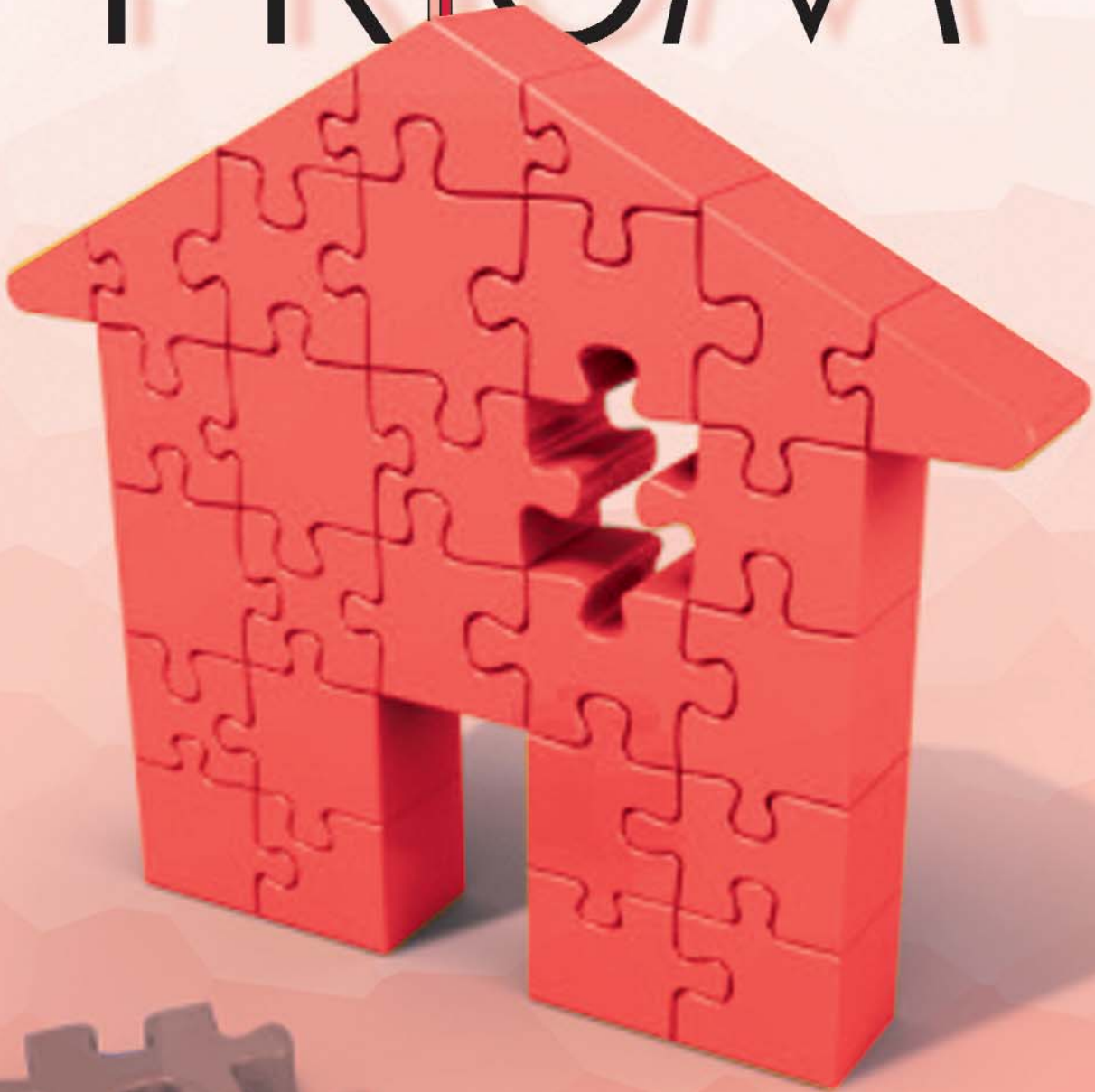


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BACK TO THE FUTURE

BY KENNETH A. DELAY

It is high time for the charter community and the larger public education community to improve relationships so that the promise of charter schools may flourish.

Our debate about charter schools is wandering about lost in nostalgic visions of an America that no longer exists. That is unfortunate. Charter schools are one of the great innovations in public education in the last 50 years. We ought to be thinking about how they might profitably shape the next 50 years. Instead, we batter one another senseless with competing visions of a bygone public education system.

The proponents of charter schools harken to the older

For the most part, the parents on those boards really did decide what values and what curriculum their schools taught, even sometimes values and curriculum that today would be considered unsavory. In short, in those days we were all charter schools. If you are a charter school proponent, that was the golden age.

The golden age for charter school opponents rests somewhat less comfortably 30 years later, in 1970, give or take a year or two. The 30 years between 1940 and 1970 were remarkable years of change by any measurement. The 2,000 school districts in Colorado had been consolidated into fewer than 200. The first Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) had just been signed into law by President Johnson four years earlier, bringing money and promise for millions of

assignment, and school district budgets, all were substantially within the control of the local school district and its governing school board. Except for the private schools, there was no competition within the boundaries of a public school district, and very little competition between public school districts.

Nostalgia, of course, often tells us more about what we want to remember than what was. The tall hill we sledded down as children turns out to be not much more than a knoll when we revisit it as an adult. So, as we debate the future of charter schools and their role in public education, we might start with a clear-eyed revisit to these two competing visions of public education.

America in 1940 was very different than the America we see today. We had just begun to climb

... the debate ... about how better to serve diverse populations, and how to be more responsive to parental and community values, has been enriched, if not revolutionized, by ... charter schools.

America. Before World War II, Colorado had more than 2,000 school districts. With few exceptions, most notably Denver and Colorado Springs, every school in Colorado had its own school board. Those boards were comprised mostly of parents with kids in the schools, and some were elementary-only or secondary-only schools. There were no federal laws regulating those schools, and hardly any state laws.

students not well served by our public schools.

School districts hummed busily everywhere as the baby boomers filled classrooms and built new schools. A professional educator teaching in every classroom, once the standard to which schools aspired, had become the norm. And the school district ruled. Decisions about curriculum and textbooks, student discipline, school

from the depths of the great depression, which at times had left as much as one-third of the workforce unemployed. The majority of our young men and women did not receive a high school diploma. The 18 million men examined by the Selective Service in World War II had an average age of 26, but only four in 10 of the Caucasian enlistees and two in 10 of the Black enlistees, had a high school diploma. The

statistically average G.I. in the Second World War had completed only one year of high school. America's industry and its armed forces were then constructed to employ large numbers of unskilled workers. America in the 1940s did not expect all or even most students to graduate from high school.

By 1970, the scare of Sputnik (the Russians beat us to outer space), a roaring economy and a rapidly rising middle class that increasingly aspired to professional or skilled worker status, had dramatically transformed our expectations for our public schools. A high school diploma mattered in ways that it had not 30 or 40 years earlier.

Moreover, the increasing push to address issues of equity in our public services had begun to dramatically change the balance of regulation and decisionmaking between the local district and the state and federal governments. National values of equality, especially access to our public schools, were causing national and state governments to assert, sometimes roughly and with scant regard to local sensibilities, control over everything from funding to admissions. The deep social unrest afflicting our urban centers spilled over into our urban schools, often in destructive ways.

In short, the good old days, be they the 1940s or the 1970s, were not all they are now cracked up to be. The idyllic 1940 was not idyllic at all for many of our citizens, and in all events the bar for the public school system was set much lower



then than it is today. And those wonderful systems of 1970, professionalism and efficiencies notwithstanding, had done little more than ratchet up the capabilities of the 1940 system to serve more students for more years.

If we set aside nostalgia for the moment, and think about why changes are made in any institution, perhaps a better way to characterize the difference between 1940 and 1970 is to acknowledge that the system of public education evolved from 1940 to 1970 in order to address needs which our economy, our culture and our society placed on public education. Similarly, we now reach for a new model, not to return to some idyllic past, but to meet expectations and needs we have today for public education. We might learn from the past, but we must build a public education system for today and for tomorrow.

We reach for a system of public education to meet the needs of

America and a global economy during the next 50 years. We ought to reach for that system, however, with a sense of the value of what we are and have been. Too many advocates of education "reform", including many in the charter community, seek to co-opt or radicalize the desires and initiatives for necessary change in public education into a broad effort to scuttle all of public education, at least as we now know it. I believe that part of the answer to these more extreme critics of public education is the same one Governor Romer gave more than a decade ago when he supported the first charter school legislation in Colorado: charter schools, properly designed and used, are a great way for public education to reform itself.

We already see evidence of the power of this innovation in the changes sweeping through our public education systems. In the Denver Public Schools, the notion

that every school in the system should be held accountable for student achievement can be linked to a habit of holding accountable each of the district's charter schools. The ongoing efforts of the Douglas County Schools to rid itself of unnecessary and restrictive regulations can be traced in part to the notion introduced by charter schools that schools can better carry out their mission if set free from burdensome regulation. More broadly, the debate within our public schools about how better to serve diverse populations, and how to be more responsive to parental and community values, has been enriched, if not revolutionized, by the introduction of charter schools.

Of course, there are reasons to criticize charter schools as well. As one long-time district chief financial

public education to our citizens.

Moreover, the notion of efficiency encompasses much more than dollars spent. Our public school systems are tremendous repositories of knowledge, experience and passion for educating our young people. The expertise and the systems for meeting the needs of diverse student groups and building programs for meeting those needs reside mostly in our existing public school systems. Some of the most remarkable work in this state to close the learning gap has occurred not in charter schools but in public school systems like Pueblo and Fountain-Ft. Carson. We simply cannot conceivably go forward without our public school districts educating most of our students.

But efficiency, even broadly defined, is not a sufficient answer

Much of the promise of charter schools is not being realized today. Many local school districts and local school boards hold to the view that charter schools are more trouble than value. Most charter advocates, including the Charter School League, appear to believe that good policy requires only more charter schools. The State Board of Education, which is in a unique position to mediate these two sides, has largely abdicated that responsibility. As near as outside observers can tell, the State Board's position is that the only bad charter school is one with a bad business plan. Every other charter school, regardless of community needs or dynamic, is good. Conflicting positions all, and no one, not local school districts, the State Board, or charter schools, are talking.

Almost never discussed is how charter schools might become a powerful tool for local school boards to innovate, drive change, learn and more effectively respond to community needs.

officer suggests, if it is efficiency that we seek, few policy decisions are more wrong-headed than charter schools. Charter schools are an inefficient use of our resources. He is certainly right in this critique. Indeed it is largely because of those efficiencies that we originally decided in the 1950s and 1960s to consolidate those 2,000 school systems into fewer than 200.

Of course, efficiencies have never been the reason we have public education. Efficiencies, however, matter. They matter especially to the taxpayers who pay for our public schools. And they ought to matter to the policymakers who make decisions about how to best structure our systems for delivering

to those who advocate more charter schools and more choice. Public school systems, like all systems, tend to favor the average over the particular. In Denver we have a charter school for science and technology and Cole Middle School converted to a Kipp Academy, particular needs not met by the existing system. Systems also stubbornly resist ideas and programs which have not been tried and proved, a tough standard for a program to meet if it can nowhere be tried. Moreover, our public school systems really have been slow to understand and respond to a sharp rise in demand for choice in education as in other walks of American life.

It is long past the time that conversation should begin. Charter schools are no longer an untried innovation that should be supported, as then-Senator Owens said to the State Board at the first charter appeal, just to send a message. And with somewhere around five percent of the kids in Colorado being educated in charter schools, many of which are doing an outstanding job for kids and filling a need not previously met, it is long past time for local school boards to grasp this powerful new tool with both hands, and with vigor and enthusiasm.

Most importantly, the State Board should begin a public conversation about how charter

schools can help shape the future of public education. Competition should be a part of that conversation. Efficiency, broadly defined, should also be a part of that conversation. Ideas which are now largely discussed only in some local communities, such as how a charter school might fill an unmet need or assist district efforts to serve a specific group of students, should also be a part of that conversation.

Almost never discussed is how charter schools might become a powerful tool for local school boards to innovate, drive change, learn and more effectively respond to community needs. This discussion will occur only if the State Board leads it. Local school boards will join that discussion only if they trust a reliable partnership can be built with the State Board. Charter schools will join that discussion only if they believe it is serious and necessary.

Charter schools in Colorado have only been around a dozen years. They were begun with great fanfare and promise. The promise that charter schools might drive innovation and change in public education has at best only been partially fulfilled. The charter community and the larger public education community stand apart as two separate, often hostile, institutions. It is time, past time, for all of us to revisit the assumptions on which that relationship has been built during the last dozen years. And to change it. █



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A brief history of Colorado's charter schools

In November 1992, Colorado voters faced a choice between two competing visions of schooling for the state's children. One initiative on the state ballot that fall called for vouchers that could be used to pay for private school tuition. Another called for a major sales tax increase for the state's public schools.

When the votes were counted, Coloradans had rejected both initiatives. To state leaders, the message seemed clear: Citizens were not ready to give up on public schools in the Centennial State, nor were they satisfied with the status quo. Democrats and Republicans in the Legislature and the state's Democratic governor, Roy Romer, recognized that citizens expected bold action to improve public education in the coming legislative session.

Bold action was just what Coloradans got. The stage was set for a bipartisan compromise in late spring of 1993 on a then-novel school reform model: the creation of independent public charter schools that would be granted significant freedom from state and local regulation in exchange for improved student performance. If the new independent schools did not live up to their end of the bargain, they would be closed and replaced with others. At the time, only two other states had passed charter laws and a handful of charter schools existed in the nation.

The Connect School, Colorado's first charter, opened in downtown Pueblo in the fall of 1993 with about 70 students in grades 6 through 8. Twelve years later, the middle school is still going strong, with its students among the highest scorers in their school district on Colorado's state student assessments in 2004.

By the 2004–2005 school year, Colorado had 108 charter schools, accounting for about 6 percent of all public schools in the state. They served more than 36,000 children, or about 5 percent of the state's public school students. Unlike the national averages for charter schools, Colorado's serve smaller percentages of minority and low-income students than traditional public schools, but those gaps are narrowing.

On the whole, Colorado's charters outperform non-charter public schools at the elementary and middle school levels, but underperform at the high school level. Over time, charters have raised student test scores at all levels, including high school, as well as or slightly better than non-charters. These results partially reflect the fact that in the lower grades, charters typically enroll more advantaged children than non-charter schools, while in upper grades the reverse is true. Still, it is worth noting that several Colorado charter schools outperform non-charter schools with similar student populations.

Looking ahead, Colorado charter schools face several challenges if they are to become a more powerful force for positive change in public education. First, they must continue their progress in serving at-risk students. They also must meet increasingly tough federal and state mandates to improve student achievement. Finally, the charter community must strengthen its political support if it is to withstand continued efforts to weaken the state's charter school law.

During the past decade, Colorado has created a viable but relatively small charter movement. Efforts to reach out to at-risk populations, combined with the recent creation of an independent state-level charter school authorizer, promise to make the movement larger and stronger.

The challenge now is to expand the movement without sacrificing its commitment to create high-quality public school options that raise the achievement levels of all students. █

From "Executive Summary", Peaks & Valleys, Colorado's Charter School Landscape, by Todd Ziebarth, Progressive Policy Institute, 600 Pennsylvania Ave. SE, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20003, 202-547-0001, www.ppionline.org.

APPLES TO APPLES: CHARTER SCHOOL PERFORMANCE IN COLORADO

BY ANDREW BRODSKY, ALEX MEDLER AND VAN SCHOALES
FOR THE COLORADO CHILDREN'S CAMPAIGN

The charter school movement has been going strong in Colorado for more than a decade. In fact, the state now has more than 110 charter schools serving about 5 percent of the state's public school students. Parents, policymakers and the general public all deserve to know how well these and all public schools are doing.

EVALUATING CHARTER SCHOOLS

Many researchers have asked how charter schools as a group compare to district schools (non-charters) as a group. We found that charters tend to vary more from each other than they do from district schools making it more difficult to make broad comparisons between charter and district schools. Chartering provides an opportunity to create a school with a particular purpose under a performance contract with the authorizing school district. The founders of each charter school use these opportunities differently, and enjoy different degrees of success.

The variation within charter schools raises a series of new questions about school performance and the accountability systems currently used to measure them. How should we evaluate charter schools and district schools that are created specifically to serve children who have failed in traditional settings, such as dropouts, incarcerated youth or the homeless?

How well do charters perform compared to district schools when serving similar student populations? What's the right mix of performance indicators for school accountability that include both student and school growth on student achievement as well as the absolute performance scores?

To answer these questions, we combined information on the mission and enrollment of Colorado charters with student performance data from the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP). After excluding charter and district schools serving special populations, we compared charters and district schools with similar percentages of black and Hispanic students.

ANALYSIS

Our analysis included four steps:

1. Exclusion of Special Schools and Alternative Schools

In total, 79 schools were removed from our analysis of all Colorado schools, including 19 charter schools and 60 district schools. These schools serve special populations of young people that are struggling in, or have already left, traditional schools. Because these schools serve such unique populations, forms of analysis outside the scope of this article are more appropriate for evaluating their quality.

2. Creating a Measure of Student Performance

The CSAP is arguably the state's

"gold standard" for student performance. We created an aggregate measure of student performance using the percent of students scoring at or above proficient on each test at each grade level offered in a school. After separating schools according to whether they serve elementary grades (K-5), middle grades (6-8), or high school (9-12), we averaged CSAP proficiency percentages among reading, writing and mathematics for each school, and then averaged scores for these three subjects to create a single summary statistic. This approach produces two statistics for individual schools that serve grades in more than one group. This measure reflects the average percentage of the schools' students performing at or above proficient on all CSAP exams given at the school in 2005.

3. Controlling for Student Characteristics

We used the percentage of students in each school that were black or Hispanic as a measure of student background. This measure is preferable to the use of Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL) because many charter schools do not offer lunch programs and often under-report FRPL. To create comparable groups of schools, we first divided charter and district schools into those serving elementary, middle and high school. Then we sorted the schools within each grade span according to their percentage

of black and Hispanic students. Finally, we divided the schools into four groups with approximately the same number of schools in each group. Each group contains schools with similar proportions of minority and white students.

4. Identifying School Approach

We asked staff at the Colorado League of Charter Schools to identify whether charter schools were using an articulated external school model such as Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound (ELOB), Core Knowledge, Montessori or other articulated models, or whether they were using a unique “home grown” approach.

FINDINGS

Based on this analysis, we found that charter schools performed equal to or better than district schools with similar percentages of black and Hispanic students. In most comparisons of subgroups based on grade and ethnicity, the difference in scores between charter and district schools was not statistically significant. However, our results suggest that charters are at least keeping pace with their peers. The pattern among charter schools, of higher average scores

combined with the extreme variation, underscores the importance of asking how different types of charter schools perform.

Figure A (below) presents average 2005 CSAP proficiency percentages for charter and non-charter schools in elementary, middle, and high school.

Charter schools seem to outperform district schools in elementary schools with higher percentages of black and Hispanic students, perform about the same or slightly better in the middle grades, and perform about the same at the high school level. A notable exception is among low-minority high schools, where the effects of Core Knowledge schools are particularly strong.

Effects of Core Knowledge Schools and Other Models

Schools using a Core Knowledge approach have been a major part of Colorado’s charter school movement since its inception. Of the 114 charter schools in our data set, 45 are Core Knowledge schools. These schools tend to have a low percentage of black and Hispanic students, although there are charters in all four groups of schools using the Core Knowledge

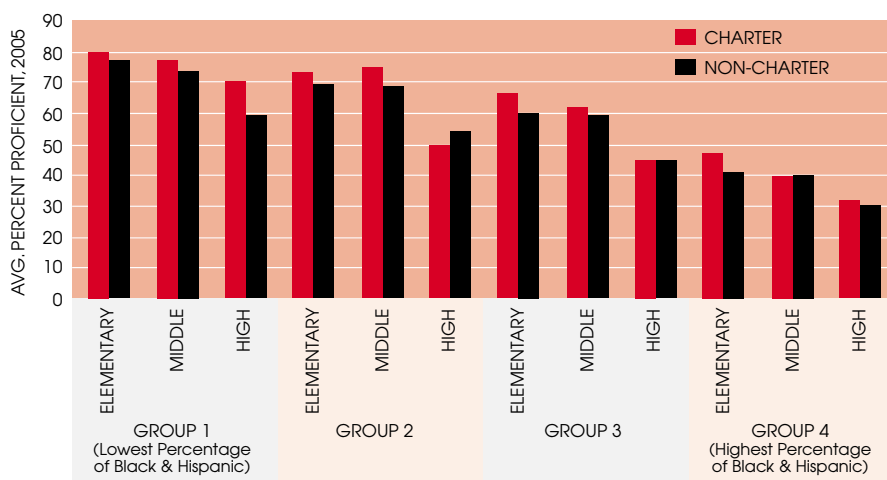
approach. In fact, a separate regression analysis found that Core Knowledge charters perform significantly better than other charter and district schools even after controlling for the percent of black and Hispanic students.

Figure B (next page) displays the performance of all public schools in Colorado, excepting the alternative charter and district schools. The vertical axis (from top to bottom), shows an average of 2005 CSAP scores. The horizontal axis (from left to right), shows the percentage of black and Hispanic students served by the school.

The scatter plot reveals several interesting findings. First, non-Core Knowledge charters (represented by black dots) display a very wide variation and many over-perform or under-perform what would be expected based on their demographic makeup (indicated by the black line). The distance between the black dots and the black line indicates the extent to which these schools are either extremely high- or low-performing schools. The smaller gray dots (district schools) tend to cluster much closer to the black line—indicating less variation and more performance that is predicted by these schools’ ethnic make-up. The charter schools, which account for roughly seven percent of public schools in this analysis, make up close to half of the extreme outliers.

Second, the Core Knowledge charters (represented by red dots) are clustered to the left side, indicating that they tend to serve populations with a low percentage of black and Hispanic students. Finally, Core Knowledge charters perform significantly above what would be expected based on their student population. The population of these schools raises several

Figure A



issues. In addition to the number of white students, are there other differences in their student populations that affect the test scores? And, are there aspects of their admissions practices, design or operations that decrease the enrollment of students who would score lower on these tests? These questions deserve closer study, but it is worth noting that there are many district schools serving similar student populations.

There are other models in Colorado charter schools that are not used as often, but which also appear promising. Among school models used by at least two different schools, we also saw strong performance among Montessori and Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound after controlling for the schools' ethnic mix.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These findings lead us to recommend the following:

1. Charter school founders and school districts should explore the use of effective models that appear replicable, like Core Knowledge; as well as other models that offer promise, like ELOB or Montessori when creating new charter schools.

Charter schools using these external models deserve further study. These results are also supported by the Brookings Institute and others that show that some

research-based school designs have greater impact on increasing school achievement. It would be helpful to know more precisely what these schools are doing that allows them to score so high. We should also explore the applicability of such models to schools with greater diversity and encourage charter schools with effective models to be opened in communities with significant ethnic diversity.

2. The state should increase the accountability for low-performing charter schools, just like low-performing district schools, while developing more thorough and robust systems for tracking individual student achievement over time.

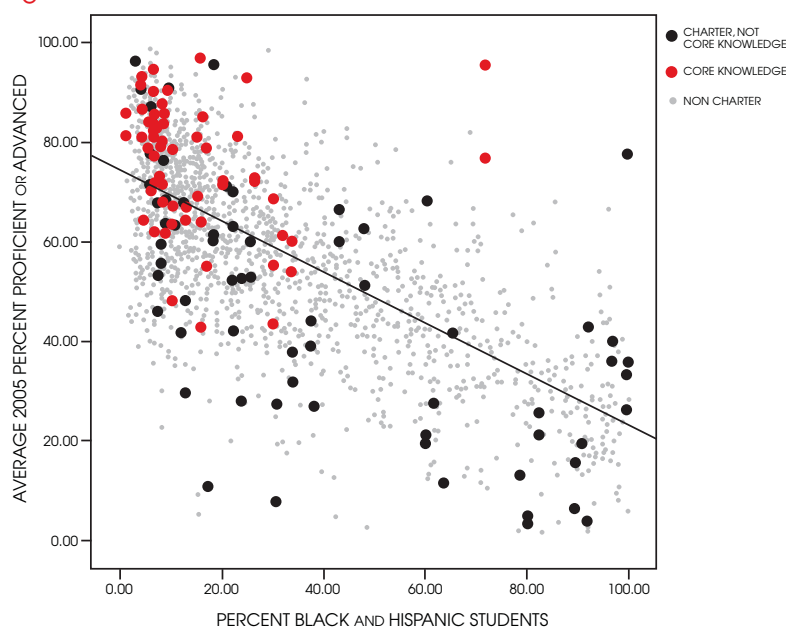
Authorizers (school districts and

the state) need to know if a school with low scores has a special mission or a population for which they are adding value, despite low scores. When authorizers determine that a school is just not performing, it should be redesigned or closed.

3. District leaders and state-level policymakers should examine and evaluate their high-performing charters.

We should seek to understand what makes these schools successful. We should ask if there are more students in our communities that could benefit from similar offerings. And if so, how could we create more schools using these models? ▮

Figure B



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COLORADO'S CHARTER SCHOOLS AND THE CHOICE/EQUITY BALANCE

BY DR. KENNETH R. HOWE

Has the choice side of the charter school scales received too much weight relative to the equity side? This author thinks so.

The number of Colorado charter schools has grown from one in 1993, the year the legislature passed the Charter Schools Act, to 110 in 2004–05. Over this time, Colorado's education policy has become increasingly generous to charter schools. Significant changes in policy include removing the original cap of 60; increasing the per pupil funding local school districts are required to pass through (from 80 to 100 percent); and requiring local districts to share virtually all forms of funding with charter schools, including capital construction and Amendment 23 dollars. The implementation of the Charter School Institute in 2004 provides its member schools with complete autonomy from local school districts.

Little was known about how charter schools would perform when they were introduced into Colorado's public education system, so the idea of providing them with time to prove themselves made sense. But this appears to have been taken too far. Policymaking has paid little or no heed to the cautionary findings that have been steadily accumulating about charter schools that should raise questions about their further expansion under increasingly charitable rules. A frank appraisal of Colorado's charter schools is now overdue.

HIGH-INCOME GROUP (Low-income % below state median)				LOW-INCOME GROUP (Low-income % above state median)			
	Met Std.	Did Not Meet Std.	Total		Met Std.	Did Not Meet Std.	Total
Trad. Pub. Schools	697 (99%)	6 (1%)	703 (92%)	Trad. Pub. Schools	734 (97%)	19 (3%)	743 (97%)
Charter Schools	59 (97%)	2 (3%)	61 (8%)	Charter Schools	17 (74%)	6 (26%)	23 (3%)
Total	756 (99%)	8 (1%)	764 (100%)	Total	741 (97%)	25 (3%)	766 (100%)

Table 1 Analysis of School Type Performance, Controlling for Proportions of Low-Income Students, 2001–02⁵

THE QUESTIONS

We cannot dispute the fact that fine charter schools exist in Colorado. But a balanced appraisal of charter schools as an educational reform requires knowing more than this. It requires knowing the effects of charter schools collectively. This article looks at effects in three key areas: (1) achievement, both overall and in terms of reducing the achievement gap; (2) proportions of ethnic-racial minority, low-income, and special education students enrolled; and (3) impact on other public schools.

THE EVIDENCE

1. Do charter schools produce higher achievement, both overall and in terms of reducing the achievement gap?

The most recent annual CDE evaluation¹ (for academic year 2001–02) reported that charter schools outperformed other public schools in reading, writing, and

mathematics in grades 3–8, and performed worse in these subjects in grades 9–10. Charter schools outperformed other public schools in grade 8 science. But these findings are biased because they failed to take into account the proportions of low-income, minority, and special education students. Additional analyses by CDE that matched “ethnically and economically comparable groups” produced equivocal and inconclusive results.²

A 2004 U.S. Department of Education-sponsored evaluation of charter schools provides the best comparison to date of achievement in Colorado's charters versus other public schools.³ Conducted by SRI International, the study used meeting the state standard (i.e., being rated above “unsatisfactory”) as the criterion of comparison. As shown in Table 1 (left), the SRI study found no significant differences between charter and other public schools in the high-income group

(schools where the percentage of low-income students was below the median for Colorado schools), but traditional public schools were significantly better⁴ in the low-income group (schools where the percentage of low-income students was above the median for Colorado schools).

A parallel analysis was performed with respect to minority enrollments; and the results were also parallel. There were no significant differences between charter and traditional public schools in the low minority enrollment group, but traditional public schools were significantly better in the high minority enrollment group.⁶

In an additional analysis, SRI controlled for the proportions of minority and low-income students simultaneously (as well as school size). The general conclusion of this analysis was that “being a charter school was associated with not meeting the standard, controlling for low-income, minority students and student enrollment.”⁷

In summary, the evidence indicates that Colorado’s charter schools do not produce higher student achievement compared to traditional public schools for any groups. In the case of low-income and minority students, charter schools produce lower achievement. Colorado’s charter schools are thus more likely increasing the achievement gap than decreasing it.

2. Do charter schools serve a proportion of minority, low-income and special education students that is comparable to traditional public schools?

Overall, Colorado’s charter schools enroll substantially fewer low-income (19 percent versus 33 percent); minority (23 percent versus 32 percent); and special education students (6.4 percent

	CHARTER ENROLLMENT PERCENTAGES	
	greater than district by at least 10%	less than district by at least 10%
Low Income	22%	68%
Minority	25%	61%

Table 2 Low-income and Minority Enrollments in Charter Schools Compared to Districts in Which Located⁸

versus 10 percent) than its traditional public schools. How this translates into income and racial/ethnic stratification attributable to charter schools within local Colorado districts is illustrated in Table 2 (above) by the disproportionately small number of charter schools serving at least 10 percent more of their district’s average of minority and low-income students compared to those serving 10 percent less.

3. What impact do charter schools have on other public schools?

The pattern of under enrolling minority, low-income and special education students exhibited by Colorado’s charter schools is one kind of adverse impact they have on Colorado’s other public schools. As charter schools “skim” higher-income students (who, for complicated reasons, typically score higher on achievement tests) and also “crop” special education, low-income and minority students, they increase the burden on the other public schools to educate the students they leave behind. At the same time, they gain an advantage in their ability to produce higher mean CSAP scores and higher SAR ratings.

An additional adverse impact of Colorado’s charter schools is financial. One study commissioned by six Colorado school districts concluded that charter schools accounted for a per-pupil reduction of funding for students in other public schools ranging from \$85 (or \$1,720 for a class of 22) to \$405 (or \$8,910 for a class of 22).⁹ According

to a U.S. Department of Education-commissioned study, “Nearly half of district leaders perceived that charter schools had negatively affected their budgets and explained this impact by pointing to the reduced revenue from students who had transferred from district schools to charter schools.”¹⁰

The study goes on to point out that the financial impact that charter schools have on other public schools depends on the context. In rapidly-growing districts, charter schools may actually provide temporary help by providing the needed additional seats with no financial harm whatsoever to the district. On the other hand, it goes without saying that transferring per pupil funding from traditional public schools to charter schools will harm the former where district enrollment is stagnant or shrinking. Under these circumstances, it is impossible for school districts to make reductions in fixed-costs—buildings, classrooms, utilities, teachers, buses, etc.—proportional to the loss in per pupil revenues. And these are the circumstances in which many Colorado school districts find themselves.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Good charter school policy must effectively balance two values: choice and equity. Colorado’s charter schools are not producing better student achievement than its traditional public schools, and the available evidence suggests they

Colorado's charter schools are more likely increasing the achievement gap than decreasing it.

are producing lower achievement for low-income and minority students. The fact that charter schools contribute to increased stratification in terms of income, race/ethnicity, and special education, overall, combined with the fact that they may reduce the resources available for students in other public schools, indicates that the choice side of the scales has received too much weight relative to the equity side.

The steady chipping away at various dimensions of local districts' authority over charter schools, culminating in the creation of the Charter School Institute, has created the imbalance. This direction of policymaking runs counter to the general research finding that the particular sets of circumstances local districts face—their size, demographics, rate and direction of enrollment change, and so forth—are important in determining the effects that charter schools can be expected to produce. Rules regarding charter school authorization are important as well. Particularly relevant to the wisdom (or lack thereof) of the creation of the Charter School Institute is the recent finding by the U.S. Department of Education that charter schools authorized by public school districts produce better student achievement than those authorized by other entities.¹¹

Several types of actions can help Colorado's charter school policy achieve a better balance. First, on the basis of available evi-

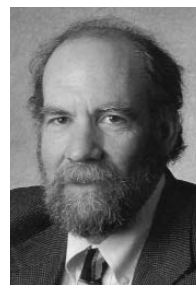
dence indicating that Colorado's charter schools are, overall, producing negative effects for local districts, more authority over charter schools should be given (or returned) to local districts. Districts should be given explicit authority to deny applications for new charters where granting them (1) harms the district overall (e.g., financially or by exacerbating stratification), or (2) fails to provide an educational option that differs significantly from those already provided. Also, where enrollment patterns warrant, districts should be given explicit authority to devise policies that require existing charter schools to bring their school enrollment demographics into reasonable alignment with the student enrollment demographics of other schools in the district.

Second, to help ensure that future policy revision is better grounded in the evidence than it has been in the past, a comprehensive and rigorous evaluation of Colorado's charter schools is required, whether under the auspices of CDE or under some new arrangement. The evaluation should strive for considerably more methodological rigor than that exemplified in the annual CDE evaluations. Such a standard of rigor includes, but is not limited to, scrupulously and effectively controlling for student characteristics in comparisons between charter and other public schools. The design and results of the evaluation should be reviewed by a committee that includes

recognized experts in educational research and evaluation and should be made available to a larger group of experts for comment.

Finally, Charter School Institute schools should be rigorously evaluated (perhaps as part of the more comprehensive evaluation) and held accountable for achieving positive outcomes as well as avoiding negative ones, including for the local districts in which they are located. A restrictive cap should be placed on the number of Institute schools that can be created until their ability to produce desired results and avoid negative ones can be demonstrated. Particular attention should be paid to the demographics of their enrollments. ■

For footnotes, please see www.casb.org/pages/publications/prism/spring-2006.



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THE SEARCH FOR BALANCED FUNDING SOLUTIONS

BY AMY BERK ANDERSON, PH.D.

Charter schools, school districts and the legislature have struggled to find the right balance for funding charter schools since the passage of the Charter School Act in 1993.

Distributing fiscal resources in a way that has the least negative impact on both the school district and charter school is a significant issue nationwide. We must create ways to allocate resources in order to reduce animosity and improve cooperation so that both charter schools and school districts can work together to promote and protect public education. Finding the right balance for funding charter schools has been an issue that charter schools, school districts and the legislature have struggled with since the passage of the Charter School Act in 1993. Our experiences in Colorado provide some instructive examples of the funding challenges faced by districts and charter schools across the U.S.

While preparing this article, I spoke with school board members, charter school leaders and school district employees in Colorado. A summary of the issues raised in these discussions follows.

KEY CHARTER SCHOOL FUNDING ISSUES

Enrollment levels can produce a disincentive to charter new schools

When a new charter school opens in a school district, and district students opt to attend the charter school, funding for those students follows them to the charter school. The financial impact on districts varies based on district size and whether enrollment is increasing, stable or decreasing.

In areas of increasing enrollment, districts may realize financial benefits by chartering schools. Because districts are not required to provide facilities for charter schools, chartering can allow a district to reduce overcrowding in certain neighborhoods without the added expense of building new facilities for those students. Moreover, private and federal grant monies for charter school planning and start-up can help fund the creation of new charter schools.

In areas of stable or decreasing enrollment, however, budgets tend to be tighter. Opening a new charter school and spreading the existing resources thinner (assuming the charter is not bringing in new students

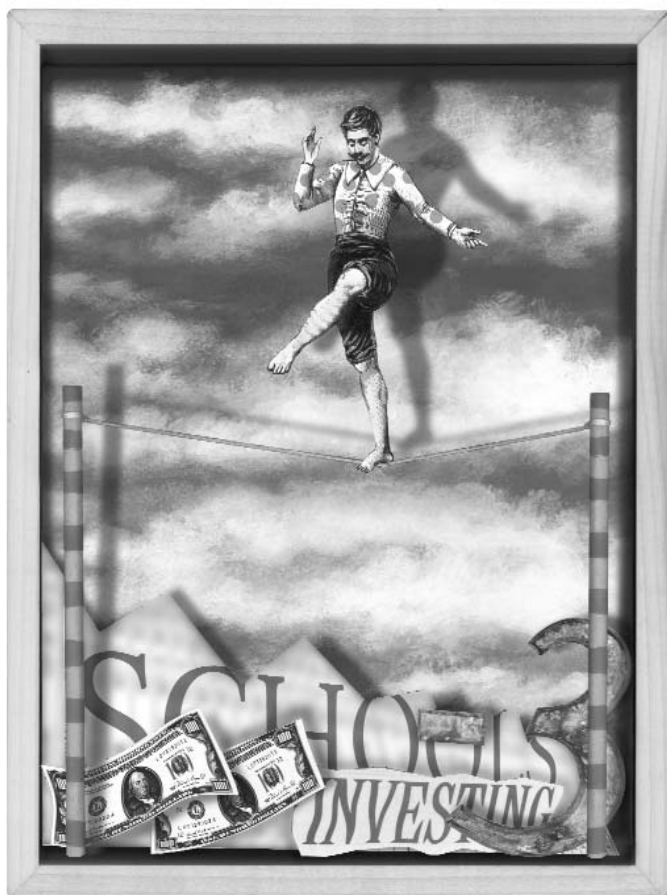
to the district) can prove to be a financial drain that is difficult, and in some cases impossible, for districts to manage. In such cases, some school districts may need extra time and resources to plan for and adjust to the changes in their budget precipitated by the opening of a new charter school.

Oversight costs can have a negative financial impact on both districts and charter schools

The system of funding charter school oversight in Colorado impacts districts differently based on the size of the district and the number of charter schools operating within given districts. School districts with large numbers of charter school students, such as Denver and Jefferson County, have more resources to support charter school oversight expenses than those districts with fewer students attending charter schools. These larger districts receive approximately 3 percent of the per pupil operating revenue per charter school student, allowing them to dedicate personnel and other resources to charter school oversight. Charter schools located in these larger districts receive nearly full funding (approximately 97 percent per pupil) to cover their operating expenses.

In smaller districts, or places with fewer charter schools, less revenue for charter school administrative oversight flows in to the district (due to fewer students attending charter schools). The responsibility for charter school oversight in these districts typically goes to individuals who have other responsibilities within the district. This can make it difficult, at least initially, to fulfill the districts' duties as authorizers, given limited means to pay for such activities and multiple demands on their time to accomplish varied charter and non-charter-related tasks.

Very small school districts (less than 500 students) receive more funds (up to 15 percent per pupil) for charter school oversight than their larger district counterparts. While this may help very small districts recoup some expenses, the charter schools themselves can end up on the losing side. Charter schools located



in these small districts therefore often have fewer resources per pupil than their charter school peers in larger districts (85 percent of per pupil operating revenue as compared to those in larger districts receiving up to 97 percent).

The provision of special education services is an ongoing struggle

School districts are legally responsible for ensuring that the needs of special education students are met. In most cases, charter schools do not receive special education funding but are instead required to contract with their authorizing district for special education services.

Both districts and charter schools raise concerns with this system. For example, districts can face additional expenses when charged with providing special education services to charter school students located in multiple sites, spanning large geographic areas. As one district financial director put it,

“When a new charter opens in a remote area, we are obligated to serve special education students in that school; however, it may be located a great distance from our other schools. The money we receive to

educate those children is insufficient to cover the expenses of traveling to the site, much less serving the educational needs of the children once there.”

Some charter schools want to keep the situation as is—let the district provide special education on their behalf. However, others would prefer to receive the funding and provide the services on their own. In doing so, they argue, they could better integrate special education with regular education—hire special education teachers who share their overall school philosophy and provide services when and as needed, instead of relying on district personnel schedules. A shift to a charter-provider model of special education could save districts the extra resources required to service charter schools and allow them to concentrate more on the rest of their schools’ special education needs.

Charter schools are typically on their own when it comes to facilities

On average, charter schools spend approximately 15 percent of their operating budgets on facilities-related costs. To alleviate this burden, the Colorado legislature allocated \$5 million for a capital construction fund to support facility costs for charter schools located in non-district-owned facilities—schools that are required to pay rent or mortgages for their facilities out of their general operating budgets. The amount of funding per school varies based on the number of schools that qualify. Therefore, as the number of charter schools increases, the amount each school receives from this fund on a per-pupil basis, decreases (assuming the legislature continues to allocate funds annually at the same level). Given current estimates, charter schools that qualify today are expected to receive approximately \$200/student.

If space is available in a school district facility, a charter school may not be charged for that space; however, it is responsible for paying for some general facilities operations and maintenance expenses. In some cases, districts have built facilities for charter school use, and in districts of decreasing enrollment, charter schools have been able to use district facilities. School districts are required to invite charter schools to discuss their capital construction needs prior to submitting a request to the voters for facilities funding. However, it is at the districts’ discretion to include or exclude such requests from charter schools as part of their ultimate bond requests. The Educational and Cultural Facility Authority (ECFA) may issue bonds on behalf of charter schools, but rates

What if districts relinquished some responsibility for other operational, and often costly, activities to approved external entities?

tend to be higher than most charter schools can afford to pay out of their general operating budgets.

SOME CREATIVE WAYS TO ADDRESS CURRENT CHARTER SCHOOL FUNDING ISSUES

Provide impact-aid to districts with stable or declining enrollment

One of the biggest challenges for districts in areas of stable or decreasing enrollment is figuring out how to reallocate resources, given enrollment shifts precipitated by a new charter school opening up in their district. Massachusetts and Illinois policymakers have recognized that it can take districts a few years to adjust their budgets to these shifts in enrollment. These states, therefore, provide additional funding for a period of three years to affected districts. Colorado could consider providing this type of impact aid to financially struggling districts. For example, districts could continue to receive 50 percent of the per pupil revenue for students attending charter schools in year one, 30 percent in year two and 10 percent in year three. The expectation would be that by year four, districts would have had sufficient time to adjust their budgets accordingly.

Support the creation of charter school cooperatives and back-office support organizations

In an ideal situation, charter schools are embraced by the district as one of a portfolio of school options for parents to choose from. Yet, charter school and district leaders interviewed for this article noted that charter schools are still viewed as separate entities in most cases. As such, district personnel often struggle with how to best serve both types of schools. School boards, as authorizers of charter schools, are required to approve and renew charters and monitor their charter schools in order to ensure compliance with education laws and the terms of charter agreements. The money that districts withhold from charters for administrative costs can fund such activities. However, what if districts relinquished some responsibility for other operational, and often costly, activities to approved external entities? For example, in Washington, D.C., special education co-ops provide special education

services to charter schools. And in New York City, with support from the mayor's office, a new center was developed to provide back-office services, bundled services, advocacy, networking and general support to charters. Supporting the creation of such support entities would benefit charter schools (especially those that are not working with private management organizations) and it would save districts significant time and effort.

Plan strategically for charter school growth

Denver Public Schools (DPS) has moved to a system of strategic charter school growth. When deciding whether to approve or solicit applications to start a new charter, DPS determines where it makes most sense to introduce a new school option. For example, when the district was presented with the option of a new charter school in Green Valley Ranch, they decided to grant the charter. They knew the school needed to be built—families were moving in—and the district was able to save itself the time and effort to create the school by allowing the group starting the charter to do the up-front legwork and manage the ongoing operations of the school.

One Denver School Board member shared that they look at areas of the city where there are fewer school options and approve charters in places serving those communities rather than in places where a lot of choice presently exists. By having a strategic plan for starting new schools (charter and non-charter alike), a district can create options in a way that is most cost effective for the district and that best serves the needs of the community.

Develop strategies for supporting charter schools with facilities financing

In other states, charter school authorizers have found ways to help charter schools finance their facilities. This could be a role that districts in Colorado assume as part of their efforts to charter schools strategically. Or, if new charter support organizations are formed, such entities could focus on providing tools and resources to help support charter schools with their facility needs. In addition to providing

vacant space for charter use and including charter schools in financial requests to voters, some approaches that authorizers have implemented elsewhere include citywide charter school loan pools (as done in Chicago) and loan guarantees or assurances to lenders (as has been implemented in New York and Michigan).

CONCLUSION

Charter and non-charters can and ought to co-exist. The key to making this happen is finding ways to bring school districts and charter schools together to create a portfolio of school options (charter and non-charter) that best serve the needs of the community. In order for this to happen, the state has an obligation to ensure that its funding system does not negatively impact districts or charter schools.

Colorado's system of funding charter schools does have some negative repercussions that can be improved. More important, using creative solutions, charter school, community, and district leaders can be inspired to jointly create better systems for providing public school options that are not only cost efficient but grounded in and responsive to the needs of the communities they serve. ▮



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SHARING THE BALLOT WITH A CHARTER SCHOOL

BY TODD SNIDOW

Charter schools in Colorado have traditionally financed their facilities with lease purchase obligations or revenues bonds secured from per pupil operating revenues (PPOR). Charter schools have also sought to be included in their respective school district's bond issue on the ballot. Given the potential impact of this request on the electorate's perception of the entire bond package, this is no small decision for a school district.

There are three approaches that Colorado school districts have used to address a charter's request to be included on the ballot:

- a single ballot question (lumping the charter's capital improvements in with the district's improvements),
- two ballot questions (one for the district and the other for the charter school), and
- a pro-rata sharing agreement tied to a mill levy override.

Some school districts have decided to pursue one ballot question that addresses capital improvements for both the school district and the charter school(s). For school districts with limited voter support for charter schools, lumping the charter school's capital improvements into the entire package has sometimes backfired at the polls. The issue of using public money to improve a facility owned in part by the charter school is problematic for many school attorneys, as land and other improvements are often pledged as collateral to bondholders of the charter school debt. If the charter school fails to make its bond payment at any point in the future, the public school-financed portion can be negatively affected. This is an issue that has arisen during previous campaigns and one which can generate negative press for a district's bond issue.

A second option is to allow the charter school to be included on the ballot, but as a separate question. Permitted by CRS 22-30.5-404, the charter school is allowed to ask voters

for a dedicated mill levy of up to one mill for a maximum of 10 years. While this strategy can certainly result in significant revenue for a charter school in a district with a sizable assessed value, these separate questions are often defeated at the polls. In the mind of the electorate, the improvements are often seen as benefiting only a small percentage of the district's students.

A third option, which has been successfully pursued by a number of Colorado school districts, is for the district to work out an agreement that guarantees a pro-rata sharing of additional dollars that are provided by the passage of a mill levy override. Using this approach, districts are able to craft ballot language that does not raise charter-related red flags for the electorate (which is not the case for the two options described previously). The only barrier to this approach would be if the district was not planning to pursue a mill levy override, or if the required increase in the override amount exceeded the electorate's tax tolerance.

While charters have established a large presence in Colorado over the last decade, the relationships with the sponsoring school districts have been mixed. The electorate's attitude toward charter schools also varies from one school district to the next. If a school district is approached by one of its charter schools for capital needs, the request must be carefully evaluated and analyzed for both its potential impact on the district's financial operations and the likelihood of election success. ▮



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ARE CHARTER SCHOOLS FRIEND OR FOE?

BY DR. BRIEN HODGES

A school district charter liaison wrestles with the question

While having lunch with a colleague, I shared with him my frustration in trying to understand the mindset of charter school proponents. As Douglas County's district administrative liaison to the charter schools, it is my job to advocate for and assist with the numerous issues charter schools face daily. However, despite the job description, there is a maelstrom brewing inside me. Are charter schools friend or foe?

My colleague did not have to contemplate his response. He asked, "Are you familiar with the term 'white flight'?" When I responded, "no," my colleague promptly, and with great conviction, began to give me a history lesson.

He explained that following World War II, whites began moving out of the inner cities to suburban communities because they believed they would find better homes, better roads and better schools. As a result, many cities today are witnessing the divergence between the "haves and the have-nots."

"So what does this have to do with charter schools being friend or foe?" I queried. He explained: "I equate it to an analogous term, 'bright-flight', or the 'fleeing' of those from neighborhood, suburban, non-private schools to charters. "I am not saying that charter school proponents in Douglas County are racists, but what I am saying is that charter school proponents in Douglas County are idealists, and in some cases, elitists. Most believe their students are gifted, twice exceptional or in some way deserving



of an education better than the one they would receive if they attended the neighborhood school.

These proponents want their sons and daughters to have the luxuries of a private school such as small class sizes, uniforms, dress codes, specific curriculum or programmatic offerings—as well as to believe that their children will not be subject to teaching, thinking or exposure to ideas in which they do not have a say—all without the private school tuition. Simply put, when parents choose charter schooling, the district is forced into a competitive role, and competitors (good ones) are rarely friends."

Teri Aplin, director of Parker Core Knowledge Charter School said, "Charter schools are like boutiques. Neighborhood schools are like Target or Mervyn's. They provide a good product and a lot of it. However, they are very big, and

the customers often get lost in the crowd. But a boutique is specialized; it has a unique niche in the market. Charter schools have rigorous curriculum that is not experimental. Many of these schools are chartered on the basis of a curriculum that is not offered in the neighborhood schools. Our class sizes are smaller, our teachers know our students, and as for the uniforms, they minimize the economic differences between our students, so when they walk in the door, they are ready to learn."

There is no doubt that Skinner's comments are as much for marketing as they are for exemplifying Parker Core Knowledge's ongoing success. But Skinner's comments reiterate my colleague's position that we are in direct competition with charter schools.

And the competition often occurs around money.

Unlike some Colorado school districts, Douglas County has always given each of its charter schools (currently six with a seventh slated to open Fall 2006) 100 percent of the per pupil revenue (PPR), currently \$5,939.34 per student.

But according to the charter school principals, 100 percent PPR is still not enough.

All charter schools are required by the district to purchase services like special education. Special education services alone cost each charter \$571.00 per pupil for the 05–06 school year. Phil Onofrio, Douglas County School's director of finance says, "It is more or less an insurance policy for the charter. Even though the special education population in some of our charter schools is very low, if any one of them had to go to arbitration over a special education issue or had some high-need students, the school could be bankrupt quickly and the district, as the local authority, is ultimately held liable. The charter schools should be thanking us, but all we hear is that it costs too much."

Facilities funding can also be a divisive issue.

Regarding an upcoming bond election, Gary Stueven, principal of Platte River Academy Charter School said, "Money will always pull people apart. Right now we are still 'partners.' I caution the district to position itself to gain the favor of the charter electorate so that we are not seen as two separate groups."

Stueven, a former administrator in Jefferson County said, "Jeffco made it work. Despite the law, they were able to include their charter schools in the biggest bond they ever passed. Jeffco sent a clear message that said, "charter schools count too."

Chris Stutler, chief financial

The Colorado League of Charter Schools is one place to get more information about charter schools. Their organization was established to serve as a support mechanism to existing and new charter schools.

Visit their website:
www.coloradoleague.org

Another resource is the Colorado Department of Education website:
www.cde.state.co.us/index_charter.htm

officer for the district has a different take: "Charter schools knew when they signed their charter that there were no bond dollars from the state and that local districts were not obligated to include them in any bonding process."

Because each charter is "on its own" with regard to building facilities, paying mortgage and operational costs, salaries usually suffer. Like other charter schools across the state, those in Douglas County pay their teachers less than teachers on the district's salary schedule.

Despite the rivalry over students, test scores, and essentially dollars, charter schools are not always viewed as an enemy. Assistant Superintendent of Learning Services Annette Fante said, "Charter schools in Douglas County have been somewhat of a Godsend. If we did not have our six charter schools, we would not have any place to put those kids. Charter schools have provided our community with educational options and seats in our still growing district."

"As good as our current charter schools are, we need to get ahead of the charter school movement in Douglas County," said Douglas County Superintendent Jim Christensen. "Our goal is to offer our parents the educational options they want, in facilities that are owned and operated by the district. By doing so, the district

is hoping to draw some of the students currently attending charter schools (and other entities) back to district schools, providing them 'boutique' style education in a district school."

Are charter schools, friend or foe? You, as a board member, should form your own opinion. However, I would caution you, as with any research, it is imperative that you and your fellow board members do not "judge a book by its cover." In fact, as a board, I believe you not only need to do some in-depth investigation into charter schools around the state, but take a broader look at districts similar to yours on a national level. Investigate from all angles: test scores, financing, issues and concerns. Talk to the parents, talk to the teachers, talk to your superintendent, and if you haven't already, discuss charter schools and take a position as a board.

For me and for Douglas County the verdict is still out. Obviously, we would rather be friends. But as with any friendship, it takes time, nurturing and a whole lot of trust. It is now a matter of when and how are we going to approach this challenge and whether our answers will be all that much different from those that have gone before us on this multi-faceted challenge. Oh, for a crystal ball. ■



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serving as the Charter School Administrative Liaison, Dr. Hodges is in charge of "options" programming.

CHARTER SCHOOLS: GOING EAST TO FIND THE NEW WEST

BY JANE W. URSCHEL, PH.D.

CHARTER SCHOOLS AS FRONTIER SCHOOLS

When we think of the old American frontier, we think of the westward expansion. In fact, the last regions settled in America were not those of the Pacific shore. Although large numbers of settlers went to that coast, many did not find quite the frontier they had been seeking. So they turned back eastward again, recrossed the mountains and settled in country that was still "open." These people literally found themselves "going east to find the West."

Charter schools may well represent a longing by some parents to seek a new frontier for educating their children. For more than a decade, these pioneer parents have turned back to look into the face of the public school system built by our nation as it marched westward. In doing so, they have not only declared that the frontier is not closed, but they have claimed a larger share of dominion over their stake in that common good called public education.

The charter school story is a new and vital part of the larger story of American education. To understand this point, we need to think in terms of the meaning of frontier in our history. We should recall how settlements became communities and why those communities built schools. "A good school was a village's proudest symbol of its public-spiritedness, a symbol used to gain a competitive advantage over other villages in attracting new settlers." (Mathews, p. 23) These early schools were ordained by the social units of family, church and community. In the same vein, charter schools were created by the collective efforts of citizens.

Over time, America's early public schools have been through decades of school reform and struggles between

the social units of society and governmental authorities. While the ideal was to weave the school deeply into the social fabric of the community, the reality of decades of political acts has been to little by little subject the schools to the control of many layers of government, turning them into "creatures of the state." As one Colorado superintendent put it, "It's not the three Rs anymore, it's the three Ls: legislation, litigation and labor agreements."

CHARTER SCHOOLS: CREATURES OF THE "STATE"

Although some people do not consider charter schools to be public schools, nonetheless, they are schools funded by taxpayer dollars. They also receive waivers from many state laws and local rules and regulations. While incurring strong skepticism on the part of local boards of education, charter schools enjoy strong bipartisan support from a growing number of state legislators and two governors since 1993, making these schools, in the truest sense, "creatures of the state."

The frustration of many school boards rises as they view the charter school landscape in Colorado. They feel responsible for all of their students and the schools they attend, yet they also feel isolated from charter schools.

COMMUNITY IS NOT WHAT IT ONCE WAS

Recent interviews with school board members from across Colorado reveal a belief that "community" is not what it used to be, and charter schools are just one reason why the definition and meaning of community have changed.

In previous research that resulted in my doctoral dissertation (2000), I speculated on the future of local

control, saying, "There could be a new form of local control with autonomy shifting from school districts to individual schools ultimately accountable to the state." Today in my work at CASB, I have become even more concerned about the estrangement between schools and their communities. My recent research confirmed this disconnect.

Last year, at the request of the Kettering Foundation, I conducted a study to explore whether or not school board members saw a distinction between the terms "school boards" and "boards of education." The specific question was: "How have citizen boards of education evolved into modern school boards?" And, "Who do they think they are?"

School governance evolved in Colorado from one board, one school (the "common school") to a board of education responsible for a system of schools and on to today's struggle among three layers of governance: local boards of education, state legislatures and the federal government.

While Colorado board members unabashedly call themselves "school boards," they can just as quickly tell you why the context of their work fits under the term "board of education." Board members make the case for the use of both terms to define their mission and how they represent the vision of their communities.

One member put it this way:

"We're actually kind of split personalities. In some ways we are boards of education, because we have to follow all of the state mandates and because we have authority over the budget and curriculum. But, we're also school boards, because we're also involved in our community . . . reflecting their values in our decisions."

An urban board member describes his epiphany that districts are no longer community organizations:

"It has gotten to the point that the community really feels disengaged from public school systems . . . In [my district], we're a half-billion dollar business . . . It's not just the one-room schoolhouse from days gone by. It's that big gray building [on the corner] that people think about. Now it has gotten to be so large that it is just another employer, and I think that makes a big difference in how people view it. It's not just a community organization. I think that's a problem."

In the judgment of the board members who participated in this dialogue, the nature of public and community is changing. The very foundations of our geographic communities quake from the effects of choice, charters, churches, consumers, commuters, curriculum and the tragedy of Columbine.

Board members say the public's affiliations often go with the school more than the neighborhood today. "Sometimes the community is the school and not the neighborhood," one said. Community is one of the reasons for the advent of charter schools. Charter schools have fostered community.

Whether we label them social entrepreneurs, free-marketeers, elitists or trend setters, charter schools are the modern equivalent of the nation's frontier schools. Charters have become their own brand of community schools.

Whatever we may think of these frontier schools that dot our landscape, charters have done something we should all do in public education. The institution of public education needs to take the journey east to find the "new" West, the new frontier where we can build a nimble system, one that is flexible and adaptable and worthy to serve the purposes of public education in the 21st Century.

An old saw states: "Everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die." Everybody wants education reform, higher test scores, and more literate and numerate students, but nobody wants to give up their primacy in school affairs. The public education system, of which I am a staunch defender, does not want to give up its turf. The "old homestead" symbolizes comfort and the familiar. We grew up in it; we were nurtured and sheltered by it. It prepared us for "the good life." We recognize, accept and even protect its flaws, because it is familiar, and therefore, safe.

I suggest the present system will not take our children to the next frontier. We must reconstruct the local role around the central principle of adding value to student performance in schools. Schools can do better, but we cannot do it alone. We have to build communities that enhance the development of children and enable the learning of everyone who works with them.

We must go east to find the "new" West and build a system that can transport our children to the new frontiers of the 21st century. My challenge to boards of education: Reclaim the vital sense of public and community that requires interaction among citizens. Pursue the common good which Thomas Jefferson believed people could achieve if they rose above their particular interests. In my view, there are no better pioneers to forge the path and begin the process of "going back upon themselves" than a locally elected board of education. ■



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THE LUXURY OF CHOICE: ABSORBING THE IMPACT OF CHARTER SCHOOLS

BY JENNIFER WAYMAN REEVE, APR

When the Moffat County Re-No.1 school board approved a charter school application in 2002, the members thought they were providing a choice for families in an isolated part of the school district. Little did they know that in 2005–06, more than half the charter school students would come from out of state.

They also didn't count on the number of hours that school district staff in the district of only 2,400 students would have to spend providing support to the school.

Before the charter decision, the school, located in Dinosaur, was one of only two rural one-room schoolhouses in Colorado. Dinosaur, in the extreme northwest corner of the state, borders both Wyoming and Utah. The school is 90 miles from the Moffat County School District office in Craig, but only 17 miles from the Rangely Re-4 School District.

While it once served some 80 students, K–8, by the 2001–2002 school year enrollment was down to 15, said Superintendent Pete Bergmann.

"It was overstaffed because enrollment had dropped and it was costing us about \$150,000 a year to maintain," he said. It was also difficult to provide special education and to find highly qualified teachers for the school, he noted.

For all of these reasons, the board at the time decided to close the school and provide transportation to the Rangely district.

"At the time we closed the school, 50 percent of the K–8 kids

and all of the high school students from Dinosaur were already going to Rangely," Bergmann said.

Despite this, the board later complied with a core group of parents who wanted to keep their neighborhood school, and with the rationale of providing choice, approved the charter application, he said.

What started with the best of intentions ended up becoming overwhelming for district staff. Because the charter school was staffed primarily by people with limited experience running a school, Bergmann said, school district staff has spent untold hours providing oversight and expertise.

"We ended up in a management role of the charter school 90 miles away—the very thing we were trying to get away from," he said. "In retrospect, it would have been easier to keep the original school."

On top of this, student achievement at the charter school is significantly below that of the rest of the district, he said, noting that the school was deemed "low" by the state.

The cost of the charter school has been more than financial, Bergmann noted. "It has kept us from focusing on the mission of the whole district." These costs would be more palatable, he said, if the school was serving the students of Dinosaur as the primary customer.

In fact, for a number of reasons including the costs, the school district has been supportive of the charter school's application to be

managed by the Charter School Institute, the state chartering authority.

"Truly the board and I wanted to see the charter school work when it was approved because we couldn't make it work as a traditional school," Bergmann said. "The only positive is what the board that approved the charter hung its hat on—Dinosaur kids and parents still have a school of choice."

In another Moffat school district in an entirely different part of the state—tiny Moffat Consolidated No. 2 in the San Luis Valley—the evolution of a charter school reflects deep cultural divisions, and the community has paid the price, according to Marta Shoman, board president.

Charter schools became law in 1993—a time when the school district received a large migration of urban expatriates in a very rural culture, she said. The newcomers from places like Boulder, Denver and Santa Fe, weren't happy with the Moffat school's very traditional curriculum. And, the Moffat school was far away from Crestone, the part of the school district where they lived.

So, they applied and after several denials by the school board, ultimately got, their own K–12 charter school. Since then, the district supports two K–12 schools with a total population of only 200 and a total high school population of less than 60.

While the advent of the charter school forced the Moffat school to

reorganize, the division of the district into two schools has diluted the high school curriculum, Shoman said. In order to fund the charter school, the breadth of classes at the high school has been cut away. Home economics and business classes have been eliminated, art and music programs have been reduced to half time, and the thought of advanced or accelerated classes is out of the question. "We just don't have the resources we need to provide the education kids need for the 21st Century," she said.

"It seems so wasteful, and it breaks my heart," Shoman said. "Running two schools in such a small community goes against common sense, but it's allowed because it's the law. Community members want what they want. Choice in public education is an overarching community value here."

The two Moffat school district stories point to a question with no easy answers. How do declining or stable-enrollment school districts—particularly those that are very small—provide choice without jeopardizing the education of students in the home districts?

It's a question Sen. Sue Windels (D-Arveda) has been pondering for some time. Last fall, she invited declining- and stable-enrollment districts with charter schools to send her comments about how they are affected, and she also invited them to a meeting to discuss the issues.

"They confirmed what I already knew," she said. "When you have a district with declining enrollment and you open a new school, you take students from neighboring schools and you take their PPR. It affects staffing and class sizes. Districts have struggled with the impact because their over-

head stays the same but they have less PPR."

"Districts [that she queried] said that for declining enrollment districts, the charter school law was one of the worst public policies adopted because it created an entirely new school system," she added.

According to Windels' summary of district comments, the impact of charter schools includes increased administrative time, significant legal costs, segregation or "cherry picking", higher class sizes, reduction of support services such as transportation and maintenance, and reduced funding for programs such as accelerated courses, gifted and talented and ESL.

These effects are not unique to small districts.

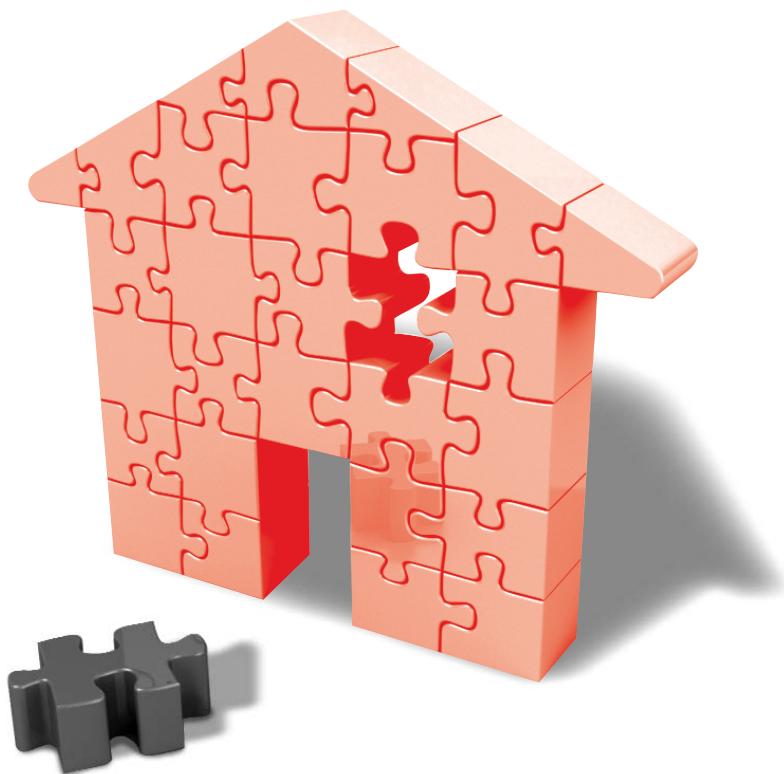
The Boulder Valley School District (BVSD), student FTE population 26,739, has been affected as well. According to Robert Hammond, chief operations officer for the district, charter school enrollment has grown from

zero during the 1995–96 fiscal year to 1,910 students today, representing 7.2 percent of the district's total student population. This, combined with a decline in the non-charter student population of almost .5 percent over the last four years, has had a "significant adverse effect."

While many large districts also have large schools, Boulder Valley Schools is made up of many small schools, Hammond said, making the loss of students difficult to absorb.

To account for population shifts to charter schools, the effect of the district's open enrollment program and declining enrollment BVSD has had to scale-back class size reductions at some high-needs schools; make cuts to special education, talented and gifted programs, ESL, technology support and instructional support; and eliminate more than 40 central office and support positions.

Further, the district closed and consolidated three schools—a cost



"We believe that the local board of education must have the right to reasonably limit the number of charter schools . . . ,"

Robert Hammond, Boulder Valley Schools

to the district that has gone well beyond financial.

The closure of these schools has been "difficult and divisive," Hammond said. "Even today, 2-½ years later, the school closures have left lingering scars in the community," he said.

In addition, charter schools in BVSD have contributed to income, ethnicity and language stratification in the district, he said.

Despite the impact, the BVSD is not opposed to choice. "Far from it," said Hammond, who pointed out that 40 percent of the district's student population open enrolls between all schools in the district, including neighborhood schools.

"We know people want choice and we want to work with our charters," he said. "Where we have great concern is adding new charters in a district of declining enrollment." The district currently has one new charter under consideration for the 2006–07 school year.

"We believe we are at the maximum level of being able to absorb the impact of charter schools," he said. "Based upon past experience and current trends, for every charter school that opens, it is possible that another school's enrollment may be significantly impacted. Also, if charter enrollments go any higher, it will place significant financial burden on us, and I'm concerned about what it will do to the educational model for our district."

"The existing charters should worry, too," he added, because more charter schools will begin to erode their programs as well.

Shoman of the Moffat Consolidated School District agrees. "It just seems to me that the quality of an education system goes downhill when you introduce the luxury of choice."

While districts all over the state are grappling with the issues school choice presents, there are few concrete solutions.

BVSD officials thought they had a handle on the situation when its board limited the number of charters, as was allowed at the time under the law. But the legislature changed that, and the district's prior limitation became an issue in whether the district was granted exclusive chartering authority by the state. The state Charter School Institute has power to open charter schools without the consent of the local school board in districts that do not have exclusive chartering authority.

The Boulder Valley Schools repealed its limitation and ultimately received exclusive chartering authority only to have it now challenged in court by the League of Charter Schools, Hammond noted.

"We believe that the local board of education must have the right to reasonably limit the number of charter schools and/or the number of students enrolled in the charters to avoid adverse fiscal and stratification effects," Hammond said.

Other solutions BVSD proposed to Sen. Windels include allowing school districts to trigger the enrollment averaging formula for funding purposes based on the percentage of decline of its non-charter school population and

an independent study of charter schools to determine whether changes in the law are warranted.

Windels, who is sympathetic to districts' struggles, indicated that despite her best efforts, legislative solutions are a long shot. She said that whenever she tries to propose legislation to remedy the situation, "the 'R' side gets the memo not to support it and I lose the votes of the Denver Dems so it's hard to make any impact."

However, she said, one proposal she has not yet tried, and will write into the School Finance Act this legislative session, is to have the state fund charter school students like it does Colorado Preschool Program slots or like Charter School Institute schools.

"If we value choice, we should give school districts state incentive money to start up charter schools. For declining enrollment districts, we have to help them even more," Windels said.

She also suggested that CASB and charter school groups meet to come to some agreements about how to address the issue of how to offer choice in declining-enrollment districts.

"If we really are about what's best for all kids, we should be offering choice in a collaborative manner," Windels said. ■



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MAKING A CASE FOR THE CHARTER SCHOOL INSTITUTE

BY RANDY DEHOFF

The Charter School Institute was created as an alternative, statewide chartering authority in response to the perceived growing hostility to charter schools in several districts, and the direct challenge to the State Board of Education's authority in charter school appeals by the Steamboat Springs district.

Given that genesis, it is perhaps understandable that the creation of the Institute was not welcomed by most local school districts. They viewed it as a direct challenge to their local authority. They feared that the State Board of Education, which had the authority to grant Exclusive Chartering Authority (ECA) to local districts, would deny that authority at every opportunity.

They feared that the Institute, in an effort to quickly establish itself financially, would approve weak applications in order to get more students. Finally,

any particular educational approach or philosophy; and they would not be a dumping ground for troubled district charter schools.

Throughout the application cycle, the Institute attempted to maintain regular communications with the affected districts and communities. That was particularly important in the case of Ross Montessori School (RMS) in Carbondale. When letters from the district and a few community members raised concerns about the potential impact of a new charter school on the demographics of the local elementary school and racial divisions in the larger community, I, as the new Executive Director of the Institute, scheduled a visit to gain a better understanding of the history and dynamics among the community of Carbondale, the local school district and the charter applicants.

The RMS situation application reveals an opportunity for the Institute and local districts, as independent agencies working together, to craft solutions to controversial problems that would be devastating to a community if they had to be solved by the district alone.

they feared that the Institute would exhibit a "damn the torpedoes" attitude and authorize charter schools wherever they could, without regard to local circumstances.

The Institute's first year of operation should begin to allay those fears. Only four districts that requested ECA from the State Board were denied. The Institute received charter applications from only two of those districts, both of which were denied. Out of 12 applications to open Institute charter schools in 2005, only two were approved: a 240-student Core Knowledge school in Colorado Springs and a 120-student Montessori school in Carbondale.

An application from an existing charter school to transfer to the Institute (from a district that retained ECA) was denied due to unresolved governance and financial questions. The Institute's actions in the spring of 2004 sent several signals: the Institute would not approve weak charter applications simply to get their enrollment numbers up; they were committed to high academic achievement and accountability rather than

I met with the district superintendent and the principal of Carbondale Elementary School, several parents opposed to the charter school, the charter organizers and several supportive community members, and finally, the mayor of Carbondale. The information gained in those meetings weighed heavily in the consideration of the application, and resulted in some specific goals regarding the demographics of the students at RMS, outreach to the Hispanic community and academic accountability.

The decision to approve the RMS application and to open an Institute charter school in Carbondale certainly did not please everyone. A few individuals continue to protest both the decision and the school. A larger segment of the community has embraced the school and committed countless hours to ensuring its success. The vast majority of the community has, in the words of the mayor, "accepted the decision and moved on to other issues facing the community."

The RMS situation reveals an opportunity for the Institute and local districts, as independent agencies

working together, to craft solutions to controversial problems that would be devastating to a community if they had to be solved by the district alone.

In this case, RMS was merely the newest ingredient in a long-simmering mixture of changing community demographics, persistent low academic achievement in the local schools, and a history of parents transferring their children out of the local schools to public schools in neighboring towns, another local charter school, private schools or home school.

Approving or denying the RMS application would not, by itself, solve or aggravate these problems. Either decision would please some in the community and anger others. If there was a solution that could satisfy everyone, there would have been no controversy. But there was controversy, and it was summed up by two parents. One was willing for her child to be a “sacrificial lamb to preserve the diversity of the local public schools,” while the other was more concerned with her child learning to read, write and do math. The first parent was committed to sending her child to the local public school. The second parent was committed to sending her child anywhere but the local public school.

A local district cannot win in such a situation. Any decision will alienate one constituency or another, both of whom are committed to the community, each in their own way. But introducing a second decision maker onto the scene provides at least the opportunity for a win-win solution. In this case, the district could maintain its commitment to improving the local public schools while the

BRIEF HISTORY OF CSI

The Colorado Charter School Institute was created by the legislature in 2004 (HB04-1362). It is governed by a nine-member board; seven members appointed by the Governor and two appointed by the Commissioner of Education. There are currently five Republicans and four Democrats on the board. All members have extensive experience with charter schools as legislators, local school board members, charter school board members or founders, educators, or researchers.

Institute charter schools receive a minimum of 95 percent of the PPR of the district in which they are located. The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) retains 2 percent of PPR for administrative support provided to the Institute, and the Institute retains 3 percent of PPR to fund its operations. The initial funding, and any funding beyond the 3 percent of PPR necessary to operate the Institute must come from grants and donations. To date, the Institute has received grants from the Daniels Fund, the Walton Foundation and a Federal Innovations in Education grant.

The Institute is restricted to opening charter schools in districts that do not have Exclusive Chartering Authority (ECA). Districts retaining ECA may, by resolution, permit new or existing charter schools in the district to apply to the Institute. Districts request ECA by submitting a written resolution to the State Board of Education. Districts under 3,000 students qualify automatically, as do districts that meet certain other criteria regarding the percentage of students in district charter schools. The remaining districts must show they have “provided fair and equitable treatment of its charter schools during the four years prior” to requesting ECA. The legislation goes on to define that standard, including several mandatory and optional criteria.

Institute could provide a public school choice in the community for parents who would otherwise abandon the local public schools for other educational options.

To be fair, not all districts have viewed the Institute with fear and trepidation. Several districts, for a variety of reasons, did not ask for ECA. Other districts that have ECA have allowed existing district charter schools to apply to transfer to become Institute charter schools. There are two obvious reasons for such a transfer of authority.

The first reason occurs when a district and a charter school have been in persistent conflict. The Institute has approved two applications that fall into this category: Cesar Chavez Academy in Pueblo 60, and Pinnacle Charter School in Adams 12. The conflict may be over finances, accountability, governance or any other issue. Regardless of the issue, dealing with the conflict is a drain on both the district and the charter school. Transferring authorization to the Institute can eliminate that burden on both the local district and the charter school, allowing both to improve their performance.

The second reason is the case of a small, isolated charter school in a rural district, as illustrated by the agreement of the Moffat County School District to allow the Dinosaur Community Charter School to apply to transfer to the Institute. Like many small, rural charter schools, this charter school was authorized to preserve a local public school in a community that was too small to justify a school under district administration. In such circumstances, there is little doubt that the charter school absorbs a disproportionate amount of district time, attention

and resources because of its small size and distance from the district headquarters. Transferring to the Institute helps the district by eliminating that administrative burden, and potentially helps the charter school by holding them accountable to an authorizer whose sole focus is charter schools under its jurisdiction.

The Institute is also exploring the possibilities of partnering with local districts to operate specialized charter schools with a particular curricular focus or schools targeted to at-risk students from multiple districts.

For example, for years the Denver School for the Arts drew students from throughout the metro area. As Denver residents sought greater access to what was in fact a Denver public school, out-of-district enrollment was restricted, and today it is nearly impossible to enroll at DSA unless the student is a resident of the district. There is a now desperate need for a second high-quality school for the arts that can serve all metropolitan districts. If it made sense logistically and educationally to locate such a school in Denver, it might also make sense for Denver Public Schools to allow the Institute to charter that school. That way the district does not assume the administrative and accountability responsibility, and the associated costs, for a school that draws most of its students from outside the district. That same out-of-district population would mean that the financial impact on DPS from the transfer of district students to an Institute charter school would be minimal.

As the Institute becomes established by building a firmer financial foundation, building a small but essential staff, and gradually expanding the number and variety

of charter schools it authorizes, the possibilities for partnerships with local districts will also grow. Those potential partnerships include the transferring the authorization of existing charter schools from local district to the Institute and working with growing districts that may not have the ability to respond internally to the demands of that growth.

The Charter School Institute does not have the authority, on its own, to authorize charter schools throughout the state. Whether it should or should not have that authority, is a political question for the legislature to decide. But it does have the authority to partner with local school districts to preserve and support public schools in a local community by expanding the public education options available to that community. What form that partnership may take in the coming years is anyone's guess, but hopefully this brief history of the Charter School Institute has provided some models to build upon, and the inspiration for creative thinkers in local districts to develop new models that will strengthen public education wherever and however it is provided. ▮



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LAWSUIT FILED BY SCHOOL DISTRICTS

In early 2005, Boulder Valley School District and Adams School District No. 50 filed lawsuits against the Colorado State Board of Education and the State of Colorado, challenging the legality of the State Charter School Institute Act ("Act"). These two lawsuits were subsequently consolidated into one case that is currently pending in Denver District Court.

Among other claims, the lawsuit asserts that the Act violates the state constitution's requirement of a "thorough and uniform" system of public schools because one set of schools is democratically accountable to the citizens of the school district, whereas another set of schools within that same community is

exempt from local voter oversight. Unlike other public schools, state institute charter schools do not have to answer to the local community and its desires regarding public education. Rather, this decision is vested in the board of the State Charter School Institute (the "Institute Board"). The Institute Board, unlike the local school board, is immune from the local democratic process yet is empowered to make decisions that have a direct impact on the public schools within a community.

The lawsuit also asserts that the Act violates the "local control" provision of the state constitution, which vests local school boards with the authority to

determine what public schools will be created and funded within a school district. Unlike any other public school within a school district (including public charter schools authorized by the school district's board of education), a local school board and its citizens have no democratic recourse against a decision by the Institute Board to establish an institute charter school within the district. As a result, the Act violates the constitutional authority of the school board to control instruction in the public schools and leaves the community powerless to redress any harms inflicted upon the community by an institute charter school. ▮

CHARTER SCHOOLS AND THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION: WHO HOLDS THE TRUMP CARD?

BY REESE MILLER

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Ken Delay, my former law partner and now CASB Executive Director, asked for an article addressing the role of the State Board of Education in deciding charter school appeals. The intent was that the article be objective; however, as I progressed, the notorious Legal Leprechaun periodically appeared, bouncing around the keyboard. Ken Delay and I are not responsible for the Leprechaun's impertinent interjections.

The questions hovering around the current charter school appeal process are whether the process results in fair and substantively sound decisions and whether the process ensures that the declared purposes and objectives of the statute are served.

LEPRECHAUN: THE COMPLAINING I HEAR FROM LOSERS OF APPEALS IS THAT THE DECISIONS OF THE STATE BOARD ARE NOT SOUND AND NOT FAIR. I NEVER HEAR ANYONE TALK ABOUT WHETHER THE PURPOSES AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STATUTE ARE SERVED; I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT THOSE ARE!

BACKGROUND

In 1993, the Colorado legislature provided for creation of charter schools. The statute says:

A charter school shall be a public school of the school district that approves its charter application . . . The charter school shall be accountable to the school district's local board of education for purposes of ensuring compliance with applicable laws and charter provisions and requirements of §15 of Article IX of the state constitution. CRS 22-30.5-104(2)(b).

Section 15 of Article IX of the Colorado Constitution provides, in part:

. . . directors [of local boards of education] shall have control of instruction in the public schools of their respective districts.

At first blush, it appears that charter schools exist when determined appropriate by the local

board of education and operate within parameters established by the local board. Nevertheless, beyond that first blush it becomes apparent that the State Board of Education, not the local board, actually controls charter schools in Colorado. The State Board, on appeal, has the ultimate authority to override the local board of education in three crucial areas:

1. Whether or not a charter school is approved is ultimately within the sole discretion of the State Board. CRS 22-30.5-108 and 22-30.5-107.5.
2. A determination of which statutes and rules will govern a charter school is ultimately within the sole discretion of the State Board. CRS 22-30.5-104(6)(b), 22-30.5-105(3) and 22-30.5-108.
3. The determination of whether a charter school shall be subject to directions of the local board relative to any governing issue is ultimately within the sole discretion of the State Board. CRS 22-30.5-108 and 22-30.5-107.5.

CRS 22-30.5-108 and 22-30.5-107.5 provide that any appeal of a denial of a charter school application or any dispute arising between a charter school and its chartering school district concerning governing policy provisions rest within the discretion of the State Board. In

both cases, the decision of the State Board is "final and not subject to appeal."

LEPRECHAUN: WELL, THAT SOUNDS OKAY; THE BUCK HAS TO STOP SOMEWHERE. I'M SURE THE STATE BOARD WOULDN'T MAKE AN ARBITRARY DECISION.

The Colorado Supreme Court has decided two cases that clarify the extent of State Board's authority. Both cases leave the State Board almost unlimited discretionary authority.

In *Board of Education v. Booth*, 984 P.2d 639 (1999), the Colorado Supreme Court held that the statutory appeal provision authorizing the State Board to decide an appeal from a decision of a local board denying a charter school application was constitutionally valid. The court held that it represented a proper balance of authority between the State Board and the local board. The Supreme Court went on to hold that it is legally proper for the State Board to substitute its judgment for that of the local board. The sole standard for the appeal decision is the unilateral view of the State Board as to ". . . the best interests of the pupils, school district, or community."

LEPRECHAUN: WHAT DO YOU MEAN "SUBSTITUTE ITS JUDGMENT"? THAT DOES NOT SEEM LIKE "BALANCING." ALSO, AREN'T THINGS LIKE BEST INTEREST OF PUPILS, SCHOOL DISTRICT, OR COMMUNITY UNIQUELY WITHIN THE EXPERTISE OF A LOCALLY ELECTED BOARD OF EDUCATION?



... it becomes apparent that the State Board of Education, not the local board of education, actually controls charter schools in Colorado.

playing the trump card presents legal and educational concerns.

LEPRECHAUN: YOU BET. WHAT IF THE STATE BOARD AT SOME POINT BECOMES ANTI-CHARTER SCHOOL (THE MEMBERSHIP AND POLITICS CHANGE YOU KNOW)? IF THAT HAPPENS, THE MANNER IN WHICH THE TRUMP CARD CAN BE PLAYED WOULD BECOME A MAJOR CONCERN TO CHARTER SCHOOL PROPONENTS.

In *Academy Charter Schools v. Adams County School District No. 12*, 32 P.3d 456 (2001), the Colorado Supreme Court determined that while disputes regarding “service” provisions of a charter school contract (e.g., agreements for accounting or transportation services) should be resolved through the courts, “governing” provisions (e.g., provisions relating to curriculum, employment, budget and waivers) are resolved through appeal to the State Board. The Supreme Court held that the State Board “. . . has final, unappealable, authority.”

Thus, through the appeal process the State Board of Education holds the trump card.

LEPRECHAUN: WHAT HAPPENED TO THAT LOCAL CONTROL OF INSTRUCTION STUFF? OH WELL, I BET THE STATE BOARD DECIDES THE APPEALS BASED ON THE FACTUAL RECORD DEVELOPED AT THE LOCAL LEVEL.

Whether there should be a trump card and, if so, who should hold the trump card, is a political question. The Colorado legislature has determined that there should be such a trump card and that the State Board should hold it. How the Board handles the process in

The appeal process of the State Board is as follows:

With regard to a denial of approval of a charter school, the statute provides the charter school applicant may initiate an appeal to the State Board of Education. Each party may submit limited documentation for review by the State Board. Additionally, each party is allowed 30 minutes for oral presentations at the hearing before the State Board. There is no procedure providing for submission of verified data or sworn testimony. At the conclusion of the oral presentations, the State Board, by motion and vote, decides the appeal. That decision is based only on the standard—as unilaterally applied by the State Board of Education—of the “best interests of the pupils, school district or community.”

Note that these appeals are not typical due process procedures where a decision must be made based on fact finding. Rather, a decision is made based on the individual inclinations of State Board members. The Board does not justify its conclusion through

specific findings based on verifiable information and does not provide any deference to the findings or position of the local board. In short, the final decision-making process is a legislative process and not a judicial or quasi-judicial process.

Data from the Colorado Department of Education indicates that through 2005, there have been 125 appeals to the State Board. The data indicates that of the appeals heard, the State Board ruled in favor of the local board 45 times and in favor of the charter school 43 times. The remaining appeals were dismissed based on procedural matters or because the parties settled the issues in dispute.

CONCERNS WHETHER THE DECISIONS ARE SOUND AND FAIR

The data does not reveal the reasons for the decisions of the State Board. An anecdotal review suggests that the decisions do not rest on any comprehensive findings of fact or conclusions of law. This is not to suggest that the State Board is acting outside the law. On the contrary, the statute and the court decisions do not require any deference to local expertise, judgment or knowledge. The statistical data suggests that the current State Board has been evenhanded in its appeal decisions. Nevertheless, if the philosophical outlook of the members of the State Board were to swing one way or the other, decisions on appeals could favor

CHARTER SCHOOLS FACTS & FIGURES 2004–05

COLORADO CHARTER SCHOOL FIGURES

- Student enrollment:
36,872 students.
- Number of charter schools: 107.
- 6.2 percent of all Colorado
Public Schools;
- 4.9 percent of total public
school enrollment;
- Equivalent enrollment of the fifth
largest school district in the state;
- 49.5 percent increase in enrollment
since the 2001–02 Charter
School Study; and
- 1.7 percent increase from
the fall 2003.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CHARTER SCHOOL STUDENTS

Racial/Ethnic Students

- 11,888 racial/ethnic minority
students were enrolled in a
charter school;
- 32.2 percent of the total charter
school enrollment;
- Increased from 27 percent in the
fall of 2001

Student Eligibility for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch

- 20.3 percent of charter students
were eligible
- Range: 0 to 100 percent

Students with Disabilities

- Charter schools served 2,510
students with disabilities.
- 6.8 percent of total enrollment

See more Charter School Facts and
Figures on page 34.

Source: The State of Charter Schools in
Colorado: 2004-05, The Characteristics,
Status, and Performance Record of
Colorado Charter Schools published by
the Colorado Department of Education,
January 2006, www.cde.state.co.us.

one side. Appeal decisions made on a purely political or philosophical basis are easy prey to unfairness and unsoundness. The mischief in such favoritism will go unchecked as long as appeal decisions are not required to rest on a meaningful analysis of factual data.

CONCERNS WHETHER PURPOSES OF THE LEGISLATION ARE SERVED

The Colorado Legislature set out diverse purposes and objectives which the Charter Schools Act was intended to serve. These include improvement of learning, emphasis on low-achieving students, development of longitudinal analysis of student progress, creation of an atmosphere where research and development in developing learning opportunities is actively pursued, etc. See CRS 22-30.5-102.

LEPRECHAUN: I LOOKED AT THAT STATUTE; THAT'S A LOT OF GOOD STUFF, BUT I'M NOT AWARE OF CHARTER SCHOOLS MAKING A DENT IN IT.

A concern caused by the current appeals process is that the purposes and objectives identified in the Charter Schools Act may not be honestly served when decisions are based on political and philosophical factors. Indeed, under the current system the State Board has no means to access all relevant data pertaining to any appeal, nor does it have the means to compel the parties to provide reliable and accurate data.

LEPRECHAUN: WELL I GUESS THE STATE BOARD IS SOMEHOW EXPECTED TO NOT ONLY ACT IN AN EVENHANDED MANNER, BUT TO ALSO BE INHERENTLY WISE ENOUGH TO KNOW WHAT IS APPROPRIATE IN EVERY SCHOOL DISTRICT WHETHER OR NOT IT IS PROVIDED FULL AND ACCURATE DATA.

Might not the purposes and objectives set out in the Charter Schools Act be better served with a statutory procedure that mandates findings and conclusions based on tested factual information and the purposes and objectives set out in the statute? That sort of a process is found in many Colorado statutes; no new trails would need to be blazed.

LEPRECHAUN: SEEMS LIKE WE MIGHT HAVE A BETTER CHANCE OF GETTING A MORE SOUND AND FAIR RESULT FOR EACH PARTY AND A BETTER CHANCE OF ACHIEVING THE PURPOSES AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STATUTE. I WONDER HOW WE GET THINGS CHANGED.

CONCLUSION

In light of the current statute and the court decisions, revisions in the appeal process would likely require amendments to the statute. A result would be more work for the parties to an appeal and more work for the State Board. Another result would be decisions that are substantively sound, that are fair to the parties and that serve the objectives of the statute.

LEPRECHAUN: IN SOMETHING AS IMPORTANT AS CREATING AND OPERATING A SCHOOL, FAIRER AND BETTER WOULD SEEM TO JUSTIFY SOME EXTRA WORK. I'M GOING TO CALL JANE URSCHEL, CASB'S LEGISLATIVE GURU. 🍷



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PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT AND THE RESURGENCE OF COLORADO SCHOOL BOARDS

BY RICHARD J. WENNING AND MARGARET Y. LIN

Interest in school “portfolio management” has heated up in recent years, stoked by the charter school movement as well as the decades-long failure of other reform efforts to improve outcomes for low-income and minority students. As the dustbin of reform initiatives has filled, the federal and state governments have intervened at the expense of the role of local school boards. Yet despite the growth in state and federal mandates that challenge local control, school boards still retain authority for making the toughest and most important decisions of all—deciding which schools should exist and which should not.

This authority lies at the heart of the role of school boards as **portfolio managers**. In this role, school boards are public stewards responsible for selecting, contracting with and overseeing a diverse **portfolio** of high-performing schools that meet community needs as well as state and federal expectations. This article argues that school portfolio management is a necessary new model for the role and work of school boards, as well as a key “disruptive innovation” that can fuel their resurgence and importance in public education.¹

WHAT DOES PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT LOOK LIKE FOR SCHOOL BOARDS?

Just as financial investment managers must constantly seek and maintain high performance in their portfolios, educational portfolio managers are responsible for

selecting and overseeing a community’s public schooling investments and for ensuring the strength and quality of that portfolio. As portfolio managers, school boards **authorize** and oversee schools that may be proposed and operated by a range of entities and individuals, from educators to community groups to school networks. In addition, the schools selected for a portfolio operate under performance-based accountability contracts in exchange for broad operating autonomy.

The portfolio manager’s authorization and oversight responsibilities include:

- strategically catalyzing and selecting high-quality new schools;
- executing sound accountability contracts with all schools;
- overseeing the performance of the entire portfolio;
- taking corrective action to improve the performance of particular schools, where warranted; and
- closing or restructuring weak schools (including possibly reopening them as new schools).

As described by a leading education thinker, Paul Hill, school boards that embrace the portfolio manager role would:

“. . . [oversee] performance agreements, some with individual schools and some with groups of schools. To do their jobs, district leaders would need employees or contractors to administer tests, assess school progress, identify schools in trouble, and suggest corrective action. District leaders would also act as venture capitalists,

encouraging the creation of different types of schools, both to fill unmet needs and to ensure that all existing schools experience the pressure of competition.”²

School Board Resurgence

Embracing portfolio management can spur a resurgence for school boards by strengthening their authority to both **catalyze** and **control** educational quality under their purview. Strategic school authorizing enables school boards to stimulate a supply of new schools that meet community needs. Likewise, performance contracting—and the sanction of closure for poor performance—empowers school boards to ensure the quality and accountability of schools in their portfolio.

Adapting school boards to portfolio management requires strong vision, structural and cultural changes, and political will. Failing to embrace this new role, however, would further erode the authority and importance of school boards and perpetuate the longstanding supply-side weaknesses of the current system.

Bold Change Needed to Achieve Dramatic Improvement

Despite decades of reform efforts, our public education system continues to fail in its basic responsibility to prepare all students, regardless of background, for life in a competitive global economy. Far too many poor, immigrant, and minority students still languish at low levels of educational achieve-

ment, and far too few graduate even from high school—let alone obtain the postsecondary education needed to earn a stable living in today’s economy. In Colorado, for example, newly available longitudinal growth data show a near-zero likelihood that students performing at the “Unsatisfactory” level in middle school will reach proficiency in high school,³ and high school graduation rates and postsecondary preparation levels for African-American and Latino students continue to be shamefully low.⁴

Resistance to Change

Achieving dramatic improvement will require a bold new strategy—fundamentally restructuring the school board’s role. Therein lies the challenge. “. . . [O]ur current public school system is a lot like a building designed to withstand an earthquake.”⁵ The system’s formidable resistance to change and its perpetual attention to adult and institutional interests stand as structural and cultural barriers to “. . . new educational approaches that allow for various types of schools that have the freedom to innovate to meet students’ unique needs.”⁶

This ingrained resistance to change is fortified by at least six key constraints:

- Constraints on curriculum and instruction, which limit what can be taught and how;
- Constraints on student assignment, which restrict parents’ and students’ ability to choose their schools;
- Constraints on the use of funds, which limit building leaders’ control over resources;
- Constraints on teacher assignment, which limit building leaders’ ability to hire the best teachers for

specific educational programs and student populations;

- Constraints on teacher and principal licensing, which limit entrants into the profession and fall short of ensuring appropriate preparation; and
- Constraints on investments, which result in inadequate usage of and funding for school facilities.

While many district reform efforts have dabbled with loosening these constraints, regulations about

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funding, use of time, teacher assignment and work rules have generally remained in place.⁸ Only state charter school laws have removed most of these constraints,⁹ thereby fueling the resistance and opposition to the charter school movement by those vested in the current system.

“Disruptive Innovation” Needed

“Disruptive innovation” is necessary to free our public school system from its stifling limitations and create quality educational opportunities for all students.¹⁰ Charter schools and new public entities designed to authorize them,

such as Colorado’s State Charter School Institute—which exemplify a form of portfolio management—hold the promise of serving as disruptive innovations that can bring about strong improvement. Unfortunately, though state charter school laws have unshackled key constraints on innovation, local school boards have largely failed to seize the opportunity these laws present to them.

With some notable exceptions, school districts in Colorado and across the country have largely marginalized charter schools by authorizing them only reluctantly—failing to view chartering as a strategic opportunity to meet district needs.¹¹ Nationwide, the majority of local school boards that have authorized charter schools have chartered only one school, while other types of authorizing agencies have chartered more actively.¹² Meanwhile, school-authorization functions within districts tend to be marginalized or fragmented, inadequately staffed and lacking strategic direction.¹³

The time for foot-dragging is over. With the reform toolbox nearly empty, it is time for school boards to embrace portfolio management as a “power tool” for educational improvement.

HOW DOES SCHOOL PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT WORK?

Portfolio management requires school boards and district bureaucracies to adopt new structures, responsibilities, attitudes and incentives—all aligned with authorizing and overseeing schools rather than operating them. They must focus on cultivating a high-quality portfolio of schools that meet community needs. A portfolio management model should have eight key features:¹⁵

- Public funding and public oversight;
- Concentration of resources near the students, with funding based on enrollment;
- Strategic use of community and philanthropic resources to expand capacity and funding;
- Incentives for educators to adopt effective teaching practices and abandon ineffective ones, including rewards for high performance;
- Increased freedom for school-level leaders to make and implement decisions about effective educational practices;
- Openness to promising ideas, people and organizations, creating alternative avenues for the entry of new teachers, administrators and school providers;
- Free movement of dollars, students and educators through enrollment-based funding, school choice and removal of constraints on teacher assignment; and
- An environment of support for both new and existing schools, including government and philanthropic investments in building the capacity of schools and educators to implement a variety of quality education models with fidelity.¹⁶

Authorizer Responsibilities

Adopting a portfolio management model requires that school boards and districts refocus and restructure their work around the responsibilities of authorizing quality schools. These fundamental responsibilities include:¹⁷

- Clearly identifying the community's educational needs;
- Developing a new-schools strategy to meet those needs;
- Developing rigorous, performance-focused standards and processes for approving, overseeing and evaluating schools to ensure

accountability while preserving school autonomy;

- Cultivating a supply of capable school founders, leadership teams and effective school models through broad and diverse recruitment;
- Soliciting strong new school proposals by issuing Requests For Proposals;
- Approving only schools that are likely to be high-quality;
- Aiding schools with facility acquisition and financing;
- Establishing school performance contracts that define success clearly, rigorously and astutely;
- Overseeing, evaluating, and if necessary, intervening in schools, with constant focus on student and school performance; and
- Renewing only those schools within the portfolio that have earned renewal by fulfilling their performance contracts.

CONCLUSION

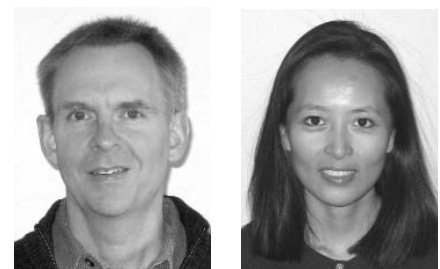
School portfolio management, leveraged by the charter school movement, represents a compelling new model for the role of school boards and the functions of school districts. Embracing, rather than attempting to contain, this "disruptive innovation" can spur a resurgence for school boards through the key roles of school authorization and performance contracting. At the same time, a portfolio-management approach frees school systems from the prevailing obstacles to innovation, thus giving schools the autonomy and performance-focused environment needed to excel.

Adapting school boards to the portfolio management role requires strong vision, will, and key structural and cultural changes. However, numerous conditions in Colorado make this state fertile ground for successful cultivation of this new

role for school boards: a strong charter school law that removes key barriers to improvement, school choice through open enrollment, robust philanthropic support for new school development, and a growing consensus on how to measure student and school performance intelligently through analyzing student longitudinal growth.

Like it or not, school boards are already portfolio managers responsible for the quality of the schools in their districts. The choice confronting boards now is: Will they continue to manage their portfolios passively, marginalizing their authorization responsibilities and allowing institutional interests to constrain the quality of schools in their system? Or will they seize the opportunity to "power up" educational improvement—by becoming active authorizers focused on developing and sustaining a diverse portfolio of high-performing schools? The choice is simply whether to resist or lead the future of public education. ▮

For footnotes, please see www.casb.org/pages/publications/prism/spring-2006.



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SHARED HOPE: A CHARTER SCHOOL AND A LOCAL DISTRICT FORM A TRUSTING RELATIONSHIP

BY MARK HYATT

At an educational leadership conference a couple of summers ago, I remember our keynote speaker, Barbara Stoker saying: “No mountains can be climbed, no hearts won, no victories found without risk.” The founding parents of The Classical Academy (TCA), the incredible charter school where I work, took a risk when they trusted me to help lead them into the next chapter of their school’s journey. My only adult experience with K–12 education was as a parent.

Academy School District 20 and TCA have also taken the risk to build a trusting relationship based on the shared hope we have for student success. Here is our story.

After almost 29 years of active duty Air Force service, I interview with a core group of parents who labor tirelessly to build the best educational environment they can imagine. They pour research, sacrifice and dedication into the heart-felt desire to help their children become analytical thinkers, people of virtuous character and passionate about learning. Like kindred spirits, we form a bond of shared hope. They take the risk and name me director of TCA.

I meet more of The Classical Academy community and see parents, teachers and staff thriving like a productive family or team. Like in any family, I learn about two things that are essential to keeping on course—history and relationships with the “extended family” or district.

The history of TCA as a charter



school begins as the charter movement sweeps the country early in the 1990s. Though many are dubious about the idea of letting a bunch of amateurs take charge of the most important industry in our nation, Colorado passes charter school legislation that enables K–12 education to compete with itself.

In our state, chartering of schools is mostly done in a very deliberate way. As a result, many children in Colorado benefit.

As the charter movement itself is controversial, I learn that the school’s relationship with the district is not without stress and strain. Like family members divided over settling the estate of a deceased relative, TCA and the district are at odds when I join in the journey. In fact, they are about to enter arbitration over a nasty mill levy override dispute. There is little trust between the two parties. Worse yet, tens of thousands of taxpayers’ dollars are on their way out

of the classrooms to fund this fight.

This situation makes it an interesting time to meet the “other part of the family”; the district school board and their superintendent. I am relieved when someone describes the superintendent as “the smartest person in the field of education finance throughout Colorado.” I know this kind of expertise is a welcome change for his district so I am encouraged. We meet for the first time and get fresh dialogue going.

Our district superintendent is aware of the threat many charter schools present to school districts. TCA and most charter schools operate without teachers’ union influence, without contracts, without the requirement for credentialing of its teachers, without NEA or CEA support, and without lanes and steps in our pay charts. Yet he also sees that TCA is sincere about offering quality education to its students. I know the threat to

charter schools posed by limited resources, but also realize that we are fortunate to work with one of the best districts in the state.

We ask one another what we need. I discover that the superintendent cares a great deal about students' progress in and out of the classroom. As we take the risk and find a hope to share, my journey broadens.

As our dialogue continues and improves, TCA and the district make concessions and agreements that are mutually beneficial to our students and everybody wins.

At the same time we make sure our boards understand each other and trust grows.

We decide to do our very best to make TCA and the district become a model of cooperation and collaboration for our community, state and nation.

Now TCA charter school is proud to be part of one of the very best districts in our state—Academy School District Twenty. We describe ourselves as just another choice on a menu of wonderful schools D-20 offers its more than 20,000 students. To me, charter schools are educational laboratories dedicated to trying new ways of improving student achievement. The relationship between D-20 and TCA is cooperative, and we are dedicated to remaining a "learning community."

A good relationship between the charter school and the district is key to the success of both entities. To me, success in any venture depends on teamwork. And teamwork depends on best individual performances, trust and relationships. If we commit ourselves to working together as communities, we can create the relationships we need for every child to succeed.

In Colorado, we are fortunate

to have dedicated school boards and school administrators who care about all children, whether they are in mainstream or charter public schools.

Trust is the miracle ingredient that makes the difference for these leaders. When we trust each other, we encourage the relationships we need to serve children best. When charter schools and their district leaders know and trust each other, we cooperate and communicate to reach outcomes that benefit the whole community.

It seems that many relationships between charter schools and their districts are adversarial. In the case of TCA and D-20, we try to avoid acrimony by having regular

**Trust is the miracle
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communication. Good dialogue leads to good action. We cultivate a culture of candor and collaboration. TCA almost always has a representative at district board meetings and on many occasions the district sends a liaison to our board meetings or school events. We are invited to each others' professional development series and leadership team meetings. Furthermore, our boards have teambuilding and lunch together. I speak at D-20 events as needed and teach a citizenship class in D-20 schools. TCA has run D-20's annual character education symposium for Colorado school leaders for the past three years.

The ultimate in a trusting

charter/district relationship is participating in the evaluation of each other's leader. For the past two years, I have been asked by the district board to make inputs into their superintendent's annual performance feedback. My board of directors now asks our district's superintendent how I'm doing at my job and solicits feedback on my annual performance report. They are particularly interested in my attitude toward the district. Very powerful stuff!

In conclusion, the commitment made by the D-20 and TCA school boards and administrators helps make all 27 schools in D-20 better. The superintendent and I are committed to the long-term success of all D-20 schools and our relationship with each other. As the leader of just one of the 120 charter schools in Colorado, it's rewarding to contribute to the remarkable educational landscape and bring innovation and free-market influence to America's greatest and most important public good—public education.

As educational leaders, we need to wake up everyday with passion for educating all of our nation's children. American society will be different 100 years from now because of how we handle our relationships with fellow educators today. Shared hope for the future of the next generation can kindle the courage to take the risks necessary to make a difference. **I**



Mark Hyatt (Hyattm@d20.co.edu) is President of The Classical Academy—a Colorado public charter school with more than 3,000 students, staff and faculty.

CHARTER SCHOOLS FACTS & FIGURES 2004-05

CHARTER SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

Size

- Average enrollment: 344 students.
- 39 percent of Colorado's charter schools enroll less than 200 students: down from 42 percent in the fall of 2001 and 52 percent in the fall of 2000.
- Range: 5 to 2,366 students

Grade Level Configuration

73 percent of charter schools operating in 2004-05 fell out of traditional grade level configuration. These charter schools offered a program that served students continuously from elementary through middle school, or from middle school through secondary school, or throughout their public school experience. Of these schools:

- 14 percent (15 schools) served the elementary grades. Eight of those schools offered Pre-K, while the remaining seven schools served Kindergarten through the elementary grades;
- 40.2 percent (43 schools) served elementary and middle school grades. Thirty-eight of those schools offered Kindergarten and the remaining five schools offered Pre-K;
- 4.7 percent (5 schools) served the middle school grades;
- 8.4 percent (9 schools) served the middle and high school grades;
- 15.9 percent (17 schools) served the high school grades;
- 11.2 percent (12 schools) served elementary, middle and high school grade levels.
- 5.6 percent (6 schools) could not be categorized into any of the above.

Authorizing Districts

Of the state's 181 school districts:

- 24.7 percent have authorized charter schools; and
- 11 have authorized three or more charter schools.

Creation Status of Charter Schools

- 87 percent of charter schools were newly created schools.
- 8.6 percent of the charter schools were public school conversions.
- 4.3 percent of charter schools were formerly private schools.

Mandatory Conversion

Cole Middle School is the only school in Colorado to have undergone mandatory conversion. Denver Public Schools and KIPP entered into a contract for the operation though 2009.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

77.5 percent of Colorado charter schools used a comprehensive national reform model as the foundation of their educational program. Of these schools:

- 53 percent used a comprehensive national reform model or 41 percent of the total cohort of schools operating in 2004-05 used Core Knowledge;
- 6 percent used reform model or 4 percent of the total cohort of schools operating in 2004-05 used Montessori;
- 10.8 percent used a comprehensive national reform model or 8.4 percent of the total cohort of schools operating in 2004-05 used Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound;
- 4 percent used a reform model or 3 percent of the total cohort of schools operating in 2004-05 were affiliated with The Edison Project;
- Twenty-four charter schools implemented "homegrown" curricula, meaning the curriculum was developed by people within the school, often using a variety of curricula to fit their student population needs;
- Five charter schools operating in 2004-05 were implementing college prep curricula;
- Five implemented place based curricula; and

- Additional programs operating in Colorado charter schools: White Hat, KIPP, K-12, Mosaica, Small School, and William Glasser's Quality School Network.

Assessment Tools

Of the responding charters:

- 44.2 percent administered norm-referenced tests.
- 50.5 percent administered criterion-referenced tests.
- 72.6 percent administered performance assessments.
- 27.3 percent administered some other type of assessment

GOVERNING BOARD COMPOSITION

98 charter schools provided information about the composition of their governing boards during that year. Of these schools:

- 24 percent (23 schools) had a governing board comprised of parents, school staff (teachers and administrators, or teachers or administrators) and community members;
- 33 percent (32 schools) had a board comprised of parents and community members;
- 16 percent (16 schools) had a board comprised of parents only;
- 11 percent (11 schools) had a board comprised of parents and school staff (teachers and administrators or teachers or administrators);
- 8 percent (8 schools) had a board comprised of community members only;
- 2 percent (2 schools) had a governing board comprised of administrators or administrators and teachers
- 6 percent (6 schools) had a governing board comprised of community members and school staff.

Source: The State of Charter Schools in Colorado: 2004-05, The Characteristics, Status, and Performance Record of Colorado Charter Schools published by the Colorado Department of Education, January 2006, www.cde.state.co.us.

VIEWPOINT

MAINTAINING A POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH CHARTER SCHOOLS



*Timothy White, Board Member
Douglas County Schools*

The district/charter school interaction requires a relationship of mutual respect and problem solving. This mutual respect is developed by a board of education that fully and honestly accepts that charter schools cost a district more to operate than most conventional neighborhood schools. Despite that fact, the board is committed to working with the charter organizers for the students' benefit. Most dilemmas that occur during the approval process disappear if everyone is committed to answering the question "What is the best solution for the students?"

To that end, the board has been careful in the approval process and supportive once the charters are approved. The state law requires that charters be funded at least 95 percent of PPR. Our district funds charters at 100 percent of PPR. We provided a portion of the 2003 budget election proceeds to charter schools. Each of the charter schools that has been in the district for more than three years has built its own school facility, which contributes to operational stability.

The district intervened when one charter school faced operational uncertainty, and because the school met an important need, we jointly changed the governance structure to ensure the continuance of the program. We are looking at funding options to pay for charter schools so they can enjoy the district's credit rating, thus reducing their borrowing costs.



*Marta Shoman, Board Member
Moffat Consolidated No. 2*

My board has learned that it is imperative to reach out to your charter school with the intention of having two-way communications between both entities' leadership teams, even if it means that the district seems to be doing all the work.

Our board and superintendent and the governing council of our charter school get together four times a year for a meal. These get-togethers, despite our diverse makeup, put a familiar face to everyone and

that makes a difference. To deepen the understanding of each other's roles, we send a board member to the charter school's monthly meetings and vice versa.

The largest benefit of a relationship with the charter is that the leadership groups are demonstrating to the wider community that they are offering many choices to the community within a limited budget framework.

This choice is responsive to the different "communities" in Saguache County. Our land-based, traditional ranching and farming families have lived in Moffat School District for a long time. The charter school started in the mid-90s when urban/suburban families moved in. Their varying views created a wedge. Having these two kinds of communities and schools in the district allows families to reflect on cultural differences and build tolerance and understanding.

Simply, our community is too small not to get along.



*Canon City RE-1
School Board: L to R:
Garnet Wilcox, Ken
Cline, Charlene Seaney,
Honey Moschetti, and
John Evans*

As with any positive relationship, mutual respect and trust provide the foundation for success. Building that foundation takes a lot of planning, work and patience.

Don't allow distrust to prevent success. Both the school district and charter school want exemplary educational opportunities for children. Use this common goal to create a relationship that benefits both entities. Stay connected through frequent visits and shared programs. Don't allow or create the impression of superiority from either group and celebrate your successes as a unified group when possible.

Charter schools should fully understand the district's responsibility to be financially sound, to adhere to federal and state guidelines, and to assure that student performance meets or exceeds established parameters.

The school district should welcome the opportunities that charter schools offer the students and provide oversight that promotes, not hinders, success.

The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing . . . kids.

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It's why we're so passionate about assisting our clients in defining their needs, determining what the electorate will support, winning at the polls, and delivering the lowest possible borrowing costs.

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