

Texas Classroom Teachers Association

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Texas Classroom Teachers Association Opposes SB 308 and SB 1830

TCTA's main opposition to both SB 308 & SB 1830 is the elimination of the cap on the number of charter schools that can be authorized, and the elimination, in SB 1830, of the oversight and approval of charter expansions by the SBOE.

The rationale is simple: Texas already operates one of the nation's largest charter school programs, the results of which have, at best, been mixed compared to traditional public schools. The performance of charter schools as a group simply does not merit lifting the cap on the number that can be operating. (Texas ranks fourth in number of students and fifth in number of charter schools in the United States.) While there are charter schools that are succeeding, charter schools continue, as a group, to underperform their traditional campus counterparts. Eliminating the cap and allowing for additional schools with no assurance of improved quality and no additional resources to monitor is a bad idea.

TEXAS CHARTER SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

Charter schools were created to allow schools freedom and flexibility and to serve as "laboratories of innovation," presumably to develop effective new methodologies that could be shared. The Center for Education Reform report, titled, "Accountability Lies at the Heart of Charter School Success" states that charters "must set and meet rigorous academic goals and actually meet or exceed their state's proficiency standards." Charters in the state of Texas have not met this standard as evidenced in the following:

- Just this year, nine out of the sixteen entities statewide that received a rating below the Accredited level were charter schools. The accreditation status of seventeen entities (of which thirteen were charters) was left pending because of ongoing investigations.
- In the 2008 Accountability Ratings, 10.6% of charter school districts were considered academically unacceptable compared with 1.1% of traditional public schools.
- The last Texas Charter School Evaluation by the Texas Center for Education Research included the following:
 - Students at open-enrollment charter schools had lower Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) passing rates in **all** tested areas compared to traditional district schools statewide; and
 - Compared to traditional public high schools, open-enrollment charter schools have lower graduation rates, lower percentages of students who complete the Recommended High School Program, and lower advanced course completion rates.

(OVER)

It is important to note that 33% of all Texas charter schools (compared to 3% of traditional public schools) are classified as alternative education campuses due to their level of at-risk students. These campuses are only required to show “Required Improvement” measures showing growth or improvement by comparing prior-year performance to current-year performance. Charters should be subject to the same accountability system, as well as the same sanctions and rewards that traditional public schools are subject to in order to fully measure their place and value in the Texas public school system.

RAND REPORT

A recent report, *How Charter School Affect Student Outcomes*, produced by the Rand Corporation states that charters are, “producing few of the problems – but also almost none of the benefits” and that charter school students are not outperforming public school peers. Their suggestions for improvement include that, “...lawmakers should consider the study an opportunity to work to improve the lowest-performing charters, an opportunity to boost the achievement of charter schools overall. The study urges better authorization of charters and more careful subsequent reviews.” This suggestion flies in the face of lifting the cap without any measures to ensure quality.

The RAND report makes a series of notable conclusions about Texas charters:
(Excerpted from “Quorum Report.” 3/23/09)

- **The report, however, singles out Texas, in particular, for unexpectedly low performance of its charters:** “The only site in which charter schools deviate significantly, in both reading and math, from average performance of traditional public schools, is Texas, where students who enter charter schools appear to be falling behind their own trajectories in traditional public schools.”
- First-year performance for charter schools is especially tough. According to the RAND analysis, Texas charter schools often start off with a “substantially negative” performance in the first year. **And although Texas charter schools tend to improve in the second and third year of operation, those gains simply make the achievement “less negative;”**
- In 5 of the 7 locales studied in the report, charter middle schools appeared to have results no better and no worse than most peer traditional public schools. **In Texas, however, charter middle schools appeared to be falling short of peer public schools in both math and reading performance.** Scores were compared to the schools from which the charter students exited;
- “Among the seven states included in the achievement analysis, **Texas has been scored highest on a measure of flexibility of its charter law (Shober, Manna and Witte, 2006). One might speculate that greater flexibility permitted the creation of a larger number of low-performing charter schools.**
- In general, there is no evidence that local charter schools have had a negative impact on nearby traditional public schools. **On the other hand, there’s also little evidence, as supporters had predicted, that local charters have produced a positive competitive impact on traditional public schools.** Texas is the only place reviewed in this study where charter schools appeared to have some competitive impact on traditional schools, and researchers labeled the impact as small.