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NEW SURVEY REVEALS PUBLIC INFORMATION GAP ON CHARTER SCHOOLS *Public Awareness Not Keeping Pace with Charter School Growth*

Washington, D.C. – The nation’s charter schools have increased by 15 percent this year to serve nearly a million students nationwide, but a new national survey reveals that most Americans know very little about these schools. In fact, only one in five Americans correctly identifies charter schools as public schools. But the survey also reveals that when people are educated on charter schools, they support the concept by significant margins – and across all political affiliations, incomes and race.

“People all across this country are looking for new public schools that are held accountable for student results and have the freedom to put teaching and learning before bureaucracy,” said Jeanne Allen, president, The Center for Education Reform. “But there is an information gap out there. Too many parents, lawmakers and community leaders still hold age-old misperceptions about charters. We must fill that gap if charter schools are going to continue to flourish.”

Lack of Knowledge of Charter Schools

- Nearly one third (31 percent) of Americans could not even hazard a guess when asked the open question: “What is a charter school?”
- Only one-in five respondents (20%) correctly identified charter schools as “public” schools when asked to pick from a list that also included private (38%), magnet schools (16%), and religious or parochial (5%). A full 17% owned up to not knowing how to classify charters, declining to even offer a guess.

Overwhelming Support for the Charter School Concept

- **Overall, more than three-quarters (78 percent) of Americans support the concept of charters schools;** specifically “new public schools – called charter schools – that would be held accountable for student results and would be required to meet the same academic standards/testing requirements as other public schools but not cost tax payers additional money.”
- **Political affiliation has little impact on support for charters.** Research reveals tri-partisan support for the charter school concept: 87 percent among Republicans, 74 percent among Democrats and 70 percent among Independents.

- **The Hispanic community is the segment of the population most likely to support charter schools.** Hispanics in this country are far more likely to attend failing schools than their Caucasian counterparts. In turn, the survey reveals that Hispanics support charter school alternatives at a rate of 89 percent.
- **Low-income families (making less than \$30,000 per year) also support charter schools at a rate significantly higher than the rest of the population.** Support for charter schools among this population exceeds 82 percent.
- **Not-Yet-Moms, those women of varying ages expecting to have children within the next 5 years, are more supportive of charter schools than current parents.** An 85 percent level of support among these parents of tomorrow bodes well for the continued growth of charters.
- **Residents in the Southeast are more likely to support charter schools than the rest of the country.** For example, Georgians are almost 10 points more likely than the nation overall to support charter schools.

Filling the Information Gap

As part of National Charter Schools Week, CER is providing parents, lawmakers and community leaders with valuable resources to help address the information gap:

- (1) **“New Charter Schools”** – An up-to-date list of the new charter schools serving communities across the country, including the latest numbers for the upcoming 2005-2006 school year.
- (2) **“The Simple Guide to Charter School Laws”** – a quick reference guide for lawmakers, the media and educators on the strength and weaknesses of the nation’s 41 charter schools laws.
- (3) **“Charter Schools through an Economist’s Lens”** – A review of the latest charter school studies that employ economic research methods.
- (4) **“Charter Schools Still Making Waves”** – A March 2005 report highlighting the “ripple” of improvements charter schools are bringing to their communities.
- (5) **“Testing the Constitutionality of Charter Schools: A Guide for Legislators”** – A detailed analysis of opponents’ unsuccessful attempts to defeat charter schools in the nation’s courts.

For more information or a full copy of the resources listed above, visit CER’s special National Charter School Week section at www.edreform.com or call (202) 822-9000.

About the Survey

The Center for Education Reform (CER) commissioned Washington, D.C.-based The Polling Company (www.pollingcompany.com) to conduct the survey in January 2005. The project included a national survey of 800 adults in the United States and three statewide surveys of 700 adults in California, 500 adults in Georgia, and 500 adults in Missouri. The margin of error for the national survey is +/-3.5% at a 95% confidence level.

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