

TO: Jeanne Allen, Founder & President  
**Center for Education Reform (CER)**  
State Representative Amy Edmonds (R-Cheyenne)  
**Wyoming Association of Public Charter Schools**

FROM: Kellyanne Conway, President & CEO  
**the polling company™, inc.**

DATE: November 9, 2007

RE: Cheyenne, Wyoming Focus Group Results & Analysis

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## **I. Introduction & Methodology**

**the polling company™, inc.** is pleased to present to the **Center for Education Reform (CER)** and the **Wyoming Association of Public Charter Schools** this report and analysis following one focus group of registered voters in Cheyenne, Wyoming. The focus group was conducted on October 29, 2007 and lasted two hours.

Participants were residents of the greater Cheyenne metropolitan area. They varied in terms of age, political party and ideology, education level, household income, and marital and family status (see page two for full participant profiles).

The focus group was designed to assess the interest in and knowledge of issues related to school choice and charter schools in Wyoming among local residents of the Cheyenne area. The secondary goal was to learn how the public view of charter schools might change moving forward as a communications and education campaign take shape. A key element of the discussion included testing messages, visual elements of an outreach campaign, and overall attitudes toward charter schools and education in Wyoming. This was the second of two focus groups in Wyoming, the first was held in Jackson. A statewide poll of voters testing the viability of loosening Charter approval laws is also planned in the near future.

An original discussion guide was crafted by **the polling company™, inc.** and approved by representatives of CER prior to execution of the group. The guide was also reviewed by State Representative Amy Edmonds (R-Cheyenne), who leads the Wyoming Association of Public Charter Schools, an organization which aims to increase acceptance and availability of charter schools in the state. The guide is attached to this report as Appendix A.

Kellyanne Conway, President & CEO of **the polling company™, inc.** directed the discussion in Wyoming and was assisted in its planning and execution by Shelley West, Project Director and Danielle King, Operations Manager.

## II. Participant Profiles

### Elaine

Caucasian Female  
Aged 55-64  
Strong Republican/Very Conservative  
High School  
Employed Full-Time  
Married  
Household Income: \$80-100K

### Cindy

Caucasian Female  
Aged 45-54  
Not-So-Strong Republican/Very Conservative  
Post Graduate  
Retired  
Married  
Household Income: \$100K+

### Nicole

Caucasian Female  
Aged 18-34  
Strong Republican/Very Conservative  
High School Graduate  
Stay-At-Home  
Married  
Parent of Three Children in Public School  
Household Income: \$35-45K

### Jewel

Caucasian Female  
Aged 65+  
Not-So-Strong Republican/Somewhat Liberal  
Some College  
Retired  
Widowed  
Household Income: \$35-45K

### Pamela

Caucasian Female  
Aged 45-54  
Not-So-Strong Republican/Moderate  
Post Graduate  
Employed Part Time  
Married  
Parent of Two Children in Public School  
Household Income: \$45-60K

### Jessica

Caucasian Female  
Aged 18-34  
Not-So-Strong Republican/Moderate  
Some College  
Stay-At-Home  
Married  
Parent of Two Children in Public School  
Household Income: \$45-\$60K

### Chris

Caucasian Male  
Aged 65+  
Not-So-Strong Republican/Somewhat  
Conservative  
High School  
Retired  
Divorced  
Household Income: \$35-45K

### Anthony

Caucasian Male  
Aged 18-34  
Strong Democrat/Somewhat Liberal  
Some College  
Retired  
Divorced  
Household Income: Less than \$35K

### Frank

Caucasian Male  
Aged 45-54  
Strong Democrat/Very Liberal  
High School  
Retired  
Married  
Household Income: Less than \$35K

### Richard

Caucasian Male  
Aged 55-64  
Strong Democrat/Somewhat Conservative  
College Graduate  
Retired  
Married  
Household Income: Less than \$35K

**Terry**

Caucasian Male  
Aged 45-54  
Strong Republican/Somewhat Conservative  
High School  
Student  
Single  
Household Income: Less than \$35K

**Dave**

Caucasian Male  
Aged 55-64  
Not-So-Strong Democrat/Moderate  
College Graduate  
Employed Part Time  
Married  
Household Income: Less than \$45-60K

### III. ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

#### “D” is for Dire

The moderator opened the discussion by asking participants to share their hypothetical “to-do” lists if given the chance to take charge of the United States for a day. In response, participants offered a range of responses, from improving the nation’s healthcare system or end the war in Iraq, while one participant said she would change the whole constitution and another would increase education about HIV. When asked what they would do if they were to tend to matters closer to home and have executive authority to govern Wyoming for a day, a number of the men and women guessed that they would put more money into Wyoming’s education system, and strive to keep college graduates working in the state. Updates to the state’s infrastructure (roads) were heard as well. A number of these concerns, both federal and state, echoed sentiments shared in the earlier Jackson focus group.

The majority of respondents (12 out of 14) felt that too little money was being spent on the school system in Wyoming. Most were confused about where their tax dollars are going and how it is being spent. Eight out of the twelve people who stated that too little money was being allocated also felt that money was being spent in the wrong ways. No one had any concrete examples of the wasteful and even fraudulent expenditures, but there was a fair amount of head nodding when one participant said, *“We are getting PTA fundraisers brought home every night and what are we raising money for?”*

The moderator then asked participants to rank the nation’s economy and education, the nation’s moral values, and the Wyoming public education system on a scale of one to ten, with one being “extremely bad” and ten being “extremely good.” The “chalkboard” to the right shows the participants’ ratings. When asked to rank the nation’s moral values, one

PARTICIPANT RATINGS		
	MEAN	MEDIAN
NATION'S EDUCATION SYSTEM	4	4
NATION'S ECONOMY	3.6	3
WYOMING'S PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM	4.7	5
NATION'S MORAL VALUES	3	3

participant offered a poor rating and an accompanying comment that combined a lack of morals with a lack of spending restraint: *“People are living like the economy is well but so much is on credit. People borrow so much money and then the country is in so much debt. The bottom is going to fall out sometime; so, I think the morals are bad.”*

The participants in Cheyenne gave the public school system slightly higher ratings than participants in Jackson, WY (4.7 vs. 3.7). Were that converted to a grade, it would approximate a “D.” Additionally, one participant said, *“We need to push more with math and science in our schools and also our own history. Most of our kids in high school can’t pass what we ask immigrants to pass for the naturalization test. That speaks very poorly upon our educational system.”*

Also, the average score for the nation’s economy dropped considerably from the attitudes expressed in Jackson a month earlier, from 5.2 in Jackson to 3.6 in Cheyenne.

## Who takes the Lead: Parents or Teachers?

To begin honing in on the main topic of public education in Wyoming, participants were asked to share their biggest concerns about it across the state and closer to home in Cheyenne. With answers ranging from a lack of parental involvement to unaccredited schools, discussants voiced a variety of concerns that were, in many ways, related to one another. For example, worries about poor teacher performance could be linked to extensive homework assignments that some participants found harmful to their children, or overcrowded classrooms, or teachers instructing both developmentally disabled and “regularly abled” children simultaneously, thereby holding back the latter from advancing more quickly.

*“There are a few of our schools that aren’t even accredited and students can’t pass the minimum skills test and lost the accreditation. It is a full spectrum problem. It starts with the parents at home making sure kids are doing their work but also recruiting quality teachers.” -Anthony*

*“I agree that it starts with the parents but I go to the parent advisory committees but when they come up with the proficiency levels that they have for example, some children who are disabled, those scores are being put in with everyone else’s. You can’t even look at those scores and make a good judgment because of the way they have all of the little rules.” -Pam*

*“I help my children with their work, but I wonder what they are doing everyday because they have 4 hours of homework. So are these teachers actually teaching them or are they sending them home to pick up their slack. I don’t have time to do that and I don’t think it’s fair for them to be in school 18 hours. They don’t have a life, and sometimes I do say well I guess you should have done it at school. My kids are in 3rd and 5th grade.” -Jessica*

Some participants said parents need to be more fully engaged in their child’s education, and the moderator probed further to see how much of a role other caregivers should have. **Participants were forceful in their belief that mom and dad should be the central players in the education system, but at the same time they expressed a certain level of dissatisfaction with teachers, their unions, and pay. Also, parents felt they were unable to hold the school board accountable.**

*“I think the parents need to get more involved in their kids and education. I don’t think the teachers should have to pay for school supplies out of their pocket.” -Richard*

*“We need to teach the children to want to learn and to do the best you can...and if you teach your children at a young age to want to learn and keep that in them all the way into college, they are going to do well no matter what.” - Terry*

***“I have the worst attitudes with teachers in the schools because they are unionized. They complain about their pay constantly and if you take how many***

***hours they work in a year and add in the homework, they are making more than they think. I don't think that their pay is insufficient.***” -Pam

One participant suggested a professional school board, consisting of qualified, trained education professionals. The general consensus about school boards is summed up below in a comment by one man who received vigorous head-nodding as he spoke.

*“[School boards are] ‘wishy washy.’ Mediocre because they have to re-elect people to the school board that have no business being on the board because they have no idea what to do. All they see is that they have this big wad of cash and their favorite project is the one they vote for.”* -David

### **“A System that Does Not Reward Excellence is Unlikely to Inspire It”<sup>1</sup>**

The above quote, said by Louis Gerstner, Jr., chairman of the Teaching Commission, is one argument for merit-based pay. When the discussion turned to teacher compensation, the majority of participants agreed with this sentiment. Participants felt that teacher performance should be tied to pay in some way, but many wondered how to deal with special education, gifted, and advanced placement (AP) students, as this could obviously skew overall class performance and subsequently, teacher pay one way or another. Additionally, only one participant felt confident to impart his knowledge about *how* teachers in Wyoming are paid.

*“It should be based on the child’s level and base it on their progress. A teacher should not be judged on how well they do on a test, but it has to be measured on a child’s ability.”* -Elaine

*“I think they should be paid on experience and education. I really like to see that a situation that the parents have more input into who their child has as an instructor. If they gave us the option to request certain teachers, I think they will see a trend on who is a good teacher and who’s not.”* -Pam

***“First and foremost, it should be performance. You should measure by periodic reviews, how she is teaching, and how well her students do on a test. Do they comprehend at all? How well they comprehend the knowledge that is being taught.”*** –  
Anthony

When the moderator put forth the idea of enhanced compensation for teachers based on student performance, half of the participants supported the idea. Some were cautious not because they expressly opposed the idea, but because of the obstacles they saw in the way of implementing merit pay, namely, class size and student ability levels.

*“The capability of the child should be the difference between the performance of the teacher. If the teacher has low level learning kids, they can not be compared with another class who has exceptional or gifted children.”* -Chris

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<sup>1</sup>Holland, Robert. “Gerstner Commission Endorses Teacher Merit Pay.” *School Reform News*, 1 April 2004.

*“I think the special-ed teachers are doing the hard job and I think they should get paid on how well the kids test and how they progress because some teachers don’t care. Make it so that the pay is being based on how well they progress” -Richard*

### **”School Choice” Embraced; Some Wary of Religious Institutions**

Before disclosing the term “school choice” to participants, the moderator asked the group to share their feelings about allowing parents to select the school their children attend without geographical restrictions and additional costs. Five of the 14 participants supported allowing parents this option, but many did not voice a strong opinion one way or the other. Some discussants brought up some reservations, such as additional taxpayer costs and separation of church and state, if the selected school in question was a religious institution. When asked if it was better to assign children to one public school based solely on where they live or allowing the parent to choose from a variety of schools, discussants’ answers ran the gamut.

*“I would disagree if it is going to a private school but this would hurt the public school system. There is less money going to the public schools and how can they improve if you are taking the money out of it.” -Richard*

*“I would agree because they have to do their job in the area. If they are not advancing and you want to send them somewhere else, then they should be here. [But] I tried to do that and you have to get a form filled out by your local school and they have to approve if you can go there. I think that is unfair.” -Jessica*

*“Most private schools are church oriented and you won’t have the separation.” -David*

*“My only concern is that right now we are in walking distance and I don’t expect for other taxpayers will pay to have my children sent somewhere else.” -Pam*

The moderator then provided a definition of “school choice,” as recounted below. Interestingly, as in the earlier focus group discussion in Jackson, no participants challenged the source or the accuracy of this definition.

*Moderator: School choice is a broad term that can refer to a number of educational opportunities and programs. In this case, I am speaking about allowing parents to use their own tax dollars to send their children to a school other than the public school assigned to them based on where they live. This may be a public school in a different district or a private religious school. Based on this definition, overall do you think school choice is a positive or negative thing? Why?*

Six participants voiced support for school choice.

*“I like the idea of parent’s having a choice in which school they want to send their child to. I don’t think the taxpayers should foot the transportation.” -Cindy*

*“I would agree because they have to do their job in the area. If they are not advancing and you want to send them somewhere else, then they should be there.” – Jessica*



*“We are talking about church supported private schools but the Catholic schools don’t take Special Ed kids. That is my problem.” -Elaine*

Other participants, however, still did not endorse the concept.

*“I would disagree if it is going to a private school because this would hurt the public school system. There is less money going to the public schools and how can they improve if you are taking the money out of it.” - Richard*

### **Charter Schools Met with Varying Level of Knowledge and Enthusiasm**

Ten of the fourteen participants indicated they have heard of charter schools, but were unsure about what type of school it is. Only two participants viewed the schools in a positive light, and three negatively. The majority, nine respondents, were neutral. Half of the discussants believed charter schools were public, and the remainder said they were private. No one thought that charters were magnet or religious in nature.

Over the years, **the polling company™, inc.** has done numerous surveys for the **Center for Education Reform** across the nation and in several states. In each survey, respondents were asked to characterize charter schools as “public,” “private,” “magnet,” or “religious.” Although no qualitative conclusions can be drawn from this discussion, the Cheyenne discussion yielded a higher awareness of charter schools as “regular” schools that are neither magnet nor religious. Previous work has indicated awareness levels to be in the mid-20 percent range.

HOW WOULD YOU CLASSIFY CHARTER SCHOOLS? (MULTIPLE RESPONSES ACCEPTED)	
CHEYENNE, WY FOCUS GROUP, OCTOBER 2007	
PUBLIC	7 OUT OF 14
PRIVATE	7 OUT OF 14
MAGNET	0 OUT OF 14
RELIGIOUS	0 OUT OF 14

The moderator clearly defined charter schools for the group (see below), and asked for comments regarding that type of school.

*Moderator: “Charter schools are public schools formed by communities of parents, teachers, and other concerned individuals and open by choice. They are held accountable for student results but free from most burdensome rules and regulations other public schools must follow except for health, safety, discrimination, and standardized testing requirements. Charter schools are funded by public tax dollars but do not cost taxpayers any additional money over what they already pay. The tax dollars that previously went to the public school the child was attending ‘follow’ the child to the new school.”*

After clarifying what a charter school is and is not, participants seemed to see the institutions in a more positive light.

*“I think that it sounds good. You get a choice of teachers, instructors, and how it’s run.” –Richard*



*“And they’re concerned with people and the community.” – Jessica*

*“I think that it should not be a discriminatory school like some of the more religious private schools that don’t have to make accommodations for [all] students.” –Anthony*

However, even after learning more about charter schools, some participants were still wary of charter schools in Cheyenne. Their comments revealed their sensitivities and skepticism.

*I don’t think that there is enough community involvement and parent involvement to have a charter school.” –Pam*

*“I don’t think that we...have enough education about charter schools to know if we want that or not. If they don’t put this info out, then we don’t know.” –David*

*“I think it would be better to improve the public schools than to split the money up. If you turned the public into a charter school, then you will have to have more teachers. I would like to see the money and interest going to improving public schools.” -Elaine*

### **Will Charter Schools Make the Grade?**

The moderator presented the participants with several facts about charter schools on an easel and asked them to indicate whether each point made participants feel more positively towards charter schools or was a compelling message in favor of charters. Each participant was invited to vote for a maximum of the three statements that they deemed most persuasive to them or “people like them.”

CHARTER SCHOOLS...	
12	ARE ON A PERFORMANCE CONTRACT
11	EMPHASIZE AND OFTEN REQUIRE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT
6	ARE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
4	EMPHASIZE INNOVATIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING METHODS
4	DO NOT COST TAXPAYERS ANY ADDITIONAL MONEY—THE TAX DOLLARS THEY ALREADY PAY SIMPLY FOLLOW THE STUDENT FROM THE TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOL TO THE CHARTER SCHOOL
3	ARE REQUIRED TO MEET THE SAME STANDARDIZED TESTING AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENT REQUIREMENTS AS OTHER SCHOOLS IN THE DISTRICT
1	EMPHASIZE ACCOUNTABILITY—FROM STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND PARENTS

**Interestingly, no participants in Cheyenne said tying teacher pay to performance made them feel any more positive about charter schools. This is likely due to the reservations participants expressed earlier, since there is no clear and easy way to**

## link teacher pay and student performance.

For participants in Cheyenne, the most positive fact about charter schools is their commitment to excellence via the performance contract, a factor which had little impact in Jackson. A performance contract is essentially the ‘charter’ that establishes the new school. It typically details “the school's mission, program, goals, students served, methods of assessment, and ways to measure success.”<sup>2</sup> All but one Cheyenne participant said the performance contract made them feel more positively toward charter schools. It is possible that knowing there are quantifiable ways to measure the success of the school and methods by which to modify, improve or terminate the charter, helped ease some concerns about charters as “uncharted territory” for these focus group participants.

Once again, parental involvement revealed itself to be a “hot topic” for these Cheyenne participants, who had earlier opined a direct nexus between a hands-on mom and dad and a successfully educated child. Eleven discussants in this group liked that charter schools emphasize and typically require parental involvement. This sentiment was also shared by 6 participants in Jackson.

Participants in Cheyenne were more likely to applaud the “public” nature of a charter school than those in Jackson (six and two, respectively). Conversely, fewer parents in Cheyenne found innovative teaching techniques a positive aspect of charter schools (four and six respectively).

The moderator then explained the current law regarding the formation of charters in Wyoming. Most of the reactions to this objective explanation were negative, sensing that the State had passed an impossible standard.

*Moderator: Currently in Wyoming charter school applications must be approved by local school boards. Applications denied by the local school board may be appealed to the State Board of Education. In order to get a charter up and running, it must be approved by 10% of the teachers in a given school district or 50% of teachers in a particular school AND 10% of parents in a school district or 50% of parents in a school. When a parent decides to enroll a student in a charter school, 95% of the funding that the school district would have given to the regular public school to educate that student follows him or her and goes to the charter school. Did anyone know this was the law?*

*“The way that is written, it would be extremely difficult to put that together because one taking ten percent of the teachers or...if you have 100 parents who wanted to do that, they would have to find new teachers to do it as to not to take from the public schools.” - Anthony*

*“I [would] just as soon give up on the idea of charter schools. I would send them to a public school because that is where it is best suited for activities such as football,*

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.uscharterschools.org/pub/uscs\\_docs/o/faq.html#21](http://www.uscharterschools.org/pub/uscs_docs/o/faq.html#21)

*basketball, soccer and it gives them a more rounded education. A charter school may not be able to give this opportunity to a child.” -Chris*

When asked what they thought about giving local school boards the power to accept or reject charter schools, most agreed that other policies or ideas should be considered.

*“If you put the right people [on the school board], you can get anything.” – David*

*“The legislature should vote. You have in the state legislature an education committee; have them be the authorizing authority. Not this school district, but keep it on a state level. If the parents say there are 100 families and they are willing to abide by the state requirements and hire qualified teachers, then they have certain requirements that need to be met and it has nothing to do with how many teachers approve of the charter school. It is based on the parents and hiring the teachers to accomplish their mission.” -Anthony*

All participants agreed that it would be beneficial to see how other states handle approving or rejecting charter school applications and incorporate the best practices into any proposed change on Wyoming charters.

## **Evaluation of Media and Materials**

In the final section of the discussion, participants were asked to assess the visual elements of a possible outreach and communications campaign, including advertisements, fact sheets, and a logo “close-to-home.” The materials are attached as Appendix B.



### **Charter Schools: Confusing the public.**

Participants were first asked to look at an advertisement stating that Charter schools are the new public school, as seen above. This piece received mixed reviews, due in part to the image of a young Black male student. Statewide, there are 515,004 residents in Wyoming according to the 2006 population estimates, and just 4,867 are African-American. This led many participants in Cheyenne and Jackson to question the relevance to Wyoming.

*“I like it but we don’t have a large African-American population, so people would say we don’t have this problem. More than one child should be in the picture to be more effective.” - Pam*

*“I think it should be more than one child.” – Elaine*

Whereas some appreciate this piece for its straightforward and succinct messaging, others claimed that it raised more questions than it answered.

*“I like the message because it sounds better to me than all the stipulations they put out in the school requirements. It sounds like they are going to work more with the community.”*  
- Nicole

*“It still doesn’t give enough information. It says the ‘new public school’. Before this, I never heard of a charter school and if someone just saw it, they still might think it’s a private school. If this is a billboard, how many people are going to remember that driving down the road?”* – Anthony

It seems that the lack of familiarity with the general concept and specific operation and curricula of charter schools in Wyoming necessitates messaging that covers the basics as well as includes specifics.

### **Messages Must Be Relevant to Wyoming**

The next advertisement -- featured at right -- was not well-received in the group, as many thought a web address should be included, that it was not specific toward Wyoming, and included too *much* information.

*“I think this is targeted to a more metropolitan area.”* - Pam

*“It would not have caught my eye as much. If it would have come home with my child, I would have read it. I do read the School Chronicle. The 1<sup>st</sup> [AA Child] draws my eye quicker than the 2nd.”* - Nicole

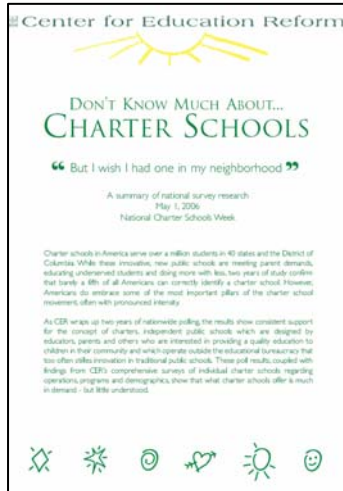
*“This is based on America. If you are targeting Wyoming, make it for Wyoming.”* - Jessica

*“A lot of people won’t call especially with Internet right now. People won’t call because they don’t want their name or phone number on a calling list.”* - Anthony



## If you build it, will Wyoming come?

The third piece that participants were asked to review was the large brochure, featured below. While it generally received positive feedback and would encourage communication among parents, participants again asked for materials targeted specifically to Wyoming.



*“I would discuss with my husband and the people I know at my child’s school.” -Nicole*

*“I would ask again is this for Cheyenne.” -Pam*

*“I think this is a home schooling type of situation. It should be a larger scale than just academics. It should be socialization, not that I am against academics, but I think the children need a rounder balance.” -Chris*

*“CER looks like a Washington[-based], national entity. If they put the logo on there and make it more specific to WY with stats and statistics, it would work that way.” - Anthony*

Any materials developed for this market should be “brought home” either through imaging, color scheme, or messaging in order to make parents, teachers, and residents of Cheyenne feel like you are talking to them in a personal way and with customized information.

**Localize the Logo?**

Much like the group in Jackson, the Cheyenne participants rendered a split decision on the proposed logo for the Wyoming Association of Public Charter Schools, albeit for very different reasons.



The table below compares and contrasts statements regarding the slogan and graphics of the proposed logo.

	<i>JACKSON, WY</i>	<i>CHEYENNE, WY</i>
<i>SLUGAN</i>	<i>"I LIKE THAT THEY PUT THE 'NO PLACE LIKE...' WHICH IS THE WY."</i>	<i>"NO PLACE ON EARTH" ~ DEROGATORY BECAUSE IT REFERS TO SOMEPLACE NOT ON EARTH. THERE WAS A DISCUSSION TO REMOVE IT FROM THE WEBSITE DUE TO COMIC'S COMMENTS. IT WAS COMICAL AND DEROGATORY IN THE SAME WAY."</i>
<i>GRAPHICS</i>	<i>"I DON'T THINK IT SHOULD HAVE THE TETONS IN IT." "I DON'T LIKE THE GRAPHICS AND WOULD ARRANGE IT DIFFERENTLY."</i>	<i>"I DON'T LIKE THE GRAPHIC AT THE TOP. I DON'T ASSOCIATE THAT WITH EDUCATION." "IT IS MORE ASSOCIATED WITH WYOMING."</i>

None of the participants in Cheyenne recognized that the graphic was an image of Wyoming’s Teton Mountains – they questioned whether it was a mountain range or a graph of some sort.

Participants also discussed the importance of a Wyoming-focus on all materials, and they felt the pieces they looked at were more concentrated on a national and/or Washington, D.C. market. The Cheyenne group appreciated the logo’s attempt to “localize,” but felt it did not have enough focus on education.



## Changing the Future of Education.



The final media piece, a brochure titled “*Great Schools are Made, Not Born,*” presented to the participants also received mostly positive reactions, although Cheyenne residents want materials developed specifically for Wyoming. One participant said, “*I realize that these aren’t developed for Wyoming but maybe the color scheme could change.*” This brochure is optimistic, it highlights the word “choice,” and it does not use what participants in Jackson previously labeled as “scare tactics.” The folks in Cheyenne liked this piece better than the larger CER brochure for two reasons: the conciseness and ease of reading.

*“I like 1-2-3.” –Pam*

*“It is more clear and concise than the bigger one.” -Anthony*

One of the more outspoken participants, Pam, also suggested posing a question to the brochure readers, since in her opinion, education has never changed. “*Education has been around and has never changed and I think in order to get it changed there has to be something that says ‘why not try to change.’*”



## IV. Conclusions & Strategic Recommendations

***Position Charter Schools as a Springboard for Change and an Agent for Improved PUBLIC schools:*** Charter schools are better and different public schools, since they require more involvement from parents, students and staff. Focus group participants feel that this increased interaction will likely improve student performance. One participant said, “*They [Charter schools] might raise the standard for public schooling. The school board will look and see how well the kids are doing at the school and maybe we can learn from that.*” Utilize examples from around the country that show charter schools have had a positive impact on the educational systems as a whole in their respective cities/districts, replete with facts and figures, names and faces. Seeing is the first step toward believing. Absent examples of success elsewhere, Wyoming residents may be reluctant to “hurt” conventional public schools or to become involved in changing the oppressive state law that makes it practically impossible to start a charter.

***Emphasize the Benefits that Charter Schools Can Bring to Wyoming:*** While nearly 91% of Wyoming residents have a high school diploma, only about 22% have bachelor’s degrees.<sup>3</sup> Charter schools can be sold to the broader public as vehicles that will help to increase the amount of pupils attending and earning college degrees with their commitment to excellence via the performance contract. Additionally, in a recent article in the *Washington Post*, “helicopter parents” have children who do better in college and report they are more satisfied than their counterparts with less involved parents.<sup>4</sup> While “helicopter parents” may have a negative connotation, parental involvement in academics is not an annoyance, but an essential building block. This sentiment was echoed by Cheyenne’s focus group participants.

***Competition Breeds Success:*** Higher education is a business, and a competitive one at that, and there is no reason that early and secondary education should be denied the same opportunity to outperform and prevail between conventional public schools and the new and different brand of charters. A study of several districts nationwide with booming charter schools found, “many superintendents and principals are responding even to muffled competition by making changes designed to produce more appealing and effective schools... the likelihood of such change was enhanced by competition from charter schools.<sup>5</sup>” Wyoming’s graduation rate is 81.5%,<sup>6</sup> and while that’s certainly not the lowest in the nation, there is still room for improvement. Charter schools, if positioned correctly, could be the competitive catalyst to move that number closer to 100%.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://eadv.state.wy.us/Wy\\_facts/facts07.pdf](http://eadv.state.wy.us/Wy_facts/facts07.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Matthews, Jay. “New Study Gives Hovering College Parents Extra Credit,” *The Washington Post*. 5 November 2007, pg. A01.

<sup>5</sup> Teske, Paul, et al. “Does Charter School Competition Improve Traditional Public Schools?” *Civic Report*. 10 June 2000. ([http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr\\_10.htm](http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_10.htm))

<sup>6</sup> [http://eadv.state.wy.us/Wy\\_facts/facts07.pdf](http://eadv.state.wy.us/Wy_facts/facts07.pdf)

*Combine the findings from Jackson and Cheyenne to develop a comprehensive marketing campaign for Wyoming:* Participants in both locations – Jackson and Cheyenne, WY – had similar views toward charter schools. As parents, certain aspects intrigue them; such as the commitment to excellence, use of innovative teaching methods, and that the schools are public. As such, **the polling company™, inc.** feels that the recommendations provided for Jackson are also applicable to the comments and expectations voiced by those in Cheyenne. The recommendations are summarized in the table below.

## JACKSON, WY RECOMMENDATIONS

EMPHASIZE THAT CHARTER SCHOOLS PROMOTE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND USE INNOVATIVE TEACHING METHODS.

INFORM THE PUBLIC ABOUT THE CURRENT CHARTER SCHOOL LAW AND BARRIERS THAT EXIST FOR PARENTS WHO WISH TO IMPROVE THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION.

RECLAIM THE SCHOOL BOARD AND GET PARENTS MORE INVOLVED.

EMPHASIZE PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY... AND OPPORTUNITY TO NOT ONLY GET INVOLVED WITH THEIR CHILD'S EDUCATION, BUT WITH SCHOOL POLICY, IDEALS AND MISSION.

CREATE POSITIVE MESSAGING THAT USE REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES OF CHARTER SCHOOL SUCCESSSES.

UTILIZE STORIES OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE IN THE CURRENT EDUCATION SYSTEM.