

Center for Education Reform



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URGENT MESSAGE

TO: All New Jersey Lawmakers
FROM: Jeanne Allen
RE: Charter Schools seriously restricted under pending open-enrollment bill

In 1995, the New Jersey general assembly passed the state's nationally-acclaimed charter school bill on a vote of 66-4. The NJ senate followed suit with a vote of 27-3. In the beginning of 1996, Governor Christine Todd Whitman heralded the passage of the charter school bill in her State of the State address, proclaiming it a major victory for her administration.

Yet just three years later, some of the very members who cast a vote in favor of charter schools are in retreat, and the Whitman Administration appears to be leading the charge.

Charter schools have already been reviewed in depth in 49 major national, state and regional reports. The U.S. Department of Education, federal laboratories and state universities have found significant academic progress and at-risk children thriving in charter schools. Teachers are the most active SUPPORTERS of charter schools. Their unions—which most of them leave upon joining charters—are not.

New Jersey's own charter schools have been studied by Columbia University Teacher's College scholars to much acclaim.

The public school choice bill would cap the number of children who can choose to leave their district school for another public charter school to a mere seven percent of all students in their district. Included in the count are nearly 5,000 children in 30 charter schools. Realistically, given the backdoor restrictions on enrollment, this bill will limit those able to open a charter to wealthy organizations and boutique schools. Restricting free access to charters will put an end to their growth, and knowing they can't grow, few will endeavor to start them, which is bad news for children.

Whether you want charter schools or not, such a fundamental change in charter law shouldn't be made in the body of a 25-page bill that is not germane to the issue.

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