TURNING STRUGGLES INTO OPPORTUNITIES

Like anything worthwhile, charters bring their share of struggles: Charter schools have a harder time than most schools trying to keep up with the demands of their students, their teachers, and the politicians. Money is often short, facilities are hard to find (or build!) and transportation can be difficult. There aren't as many administrators in charter schools as in public schools so the work load is often very heavy dealing with paperwork, money issues, and more.

How some people are trying to weaken charters from without: Struggles come from the outside, too. There are many people who do not support charters who actually work to make things difficult. For example, some want to impose more regulations. That means that the charter staff would have to fill out more paperwork, which takes time away from focusing on teaching children. Others would like the school board or the state to have more control. Some would even like to take away money (when in reality, there should be more money for successful schools!)

Should I worry? You should be concerned because if anyone succeeds in making the charter school law different than it is now, in a way that hurts your school, it will be harder for the school leaders to do their job. It may be that they cannot serve as many children, or they have to cut programs, or that they have to spend more time on less important things. You need to know what's happening statewide. That's why your association is important.

How you can help charter schools: The good news is that you can affect what happens to your law and your schools if you become active. States that succeed are states where charter school leaders — and their parents — do things to advance and protect their laws:

- Talking to legislators — Don't assume that even the most education reform-friendly legislators know everything that's happening to and for charter schools, or that they even read what you send them! Nothing replaces personal contact.

- <u>Teaching the newspapers and television reporters</u> about what makes charters good — While the media do a good job of covering hot news, they often do not consider that there may be incredibly compelling stories of educating children that are happening daily in your schools. You have to communicate with the media, invite them to your events, and work to inform them, too.

- <u>Talking to business people and other community leaders</u> so that they will support the idea — Reformers often overlook the importance of these individuals and entities. While we may want to ask a business to help, oftentimes the very people who our community patronizes have never step foot in a charter school. They need to know more about your school and why you do what you do.

- <u>Trying to put out information to educate people</u> about what charters need the most — Does your school have a newsletter? Does it go to all the entities mentioned previously? Do you tell your parents to tell their friends about their school? Communication is important to advancing your school and the movement in general.

How can parents help? Parents are very important to the people who make decisions in your state. Why do people running for the legislature or Mayor or school board run ads? They do it because they want people like your parents to know them, and they want their vote and the vote of people they talk to. If they want your vote and the votes of your parents, then they have to care about what you want. Parents are a critical part of effective advocacy.

Be aware of what is happening: Stay informed, read what you get from resource groups, and communicate what you know to your staff and your parents. What is the new accountability law all about? What changes are being discussed in the legislature? Who are the friendly media? Which schools are struggling? How can you help them?

For additional information contact:

The Center for Education Reform
1001 Connecticut Ave., NW
Suite, 204
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: (202) 822-9000
Fax: (202) 822-5077
www.edreform.com