

the
CENTER FOR EDUCATION REFORM



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Contact: Michelle Tigani
(202) 750-0016
michelle@edreform.com

HILLARY CLINTON'S COMMENTS ON CHARTER SCHOOLS

Washington, D.C. – The following statement was issued by Jeanne Allen, Founder & President-Emeritus, The Center for Education Reform, concerning Hillary Clinton's misstatements about charter schools:

When a promising presidential candidate violates the basics of truth telling, it's time for a reset. For 2016 Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, it's time to tell the truth about charter schools. Myths perpetrated by teachers unions and big bureaucracies seem to have trumped her reality.

On Sunday, November 8, while she campaigned in South Carolina, Secretary Clinton said that while she has supported charter schools for "many years now," they "don't take the hardest-to-teach kids, or, if they do, they don't keep them." This statement is not only inaccurate; it libels and defames a movement that has worked tirelessly to educate children who need the greatest help

Here are the facts: The vast majority of charter schools in the United States serve children who were not succeeding in their traditional public schools. The vast majority of charter schools serve children who live in poverty, or close to poverty. The vast majority of charter schools transform the lives of the kids they serve at a fraction of the cost of traditional public schools. And the vast majority of charter schools not only have to fight to educate children, they have to fight the daily attacks from bureaucrats and special interests who place paychecks and adult jobs over the futures of disadvantaged kids.

There was a time when Mrs. Clinton spoke well of charters. In 1996, she wrote in her book *It Takes A Village* that she "[found] their argument persuasive," at least—and was in favor, and would have purportedly been in favor of pro-charter policies her husband, the former President Clinton put forward, including legislation he said would put the nation "well on [Its] way to creating 3,000 charter schools by the year 2000." More recently, Bill Clinton keynoted the National Charter Schools Conference, applauding and recognizing the innovation that came of age while he was president. He has also spoken eloquently of public charter schools as the keynote speaker at a conference planned by KIPP, one of America's most respected networks of charter schools.

But just this weekend, out of one side of her mouth she ridiculed these innovative reforms, and then out of the other, she told "News One Now" host Roland Martin that she likes the "idea of charter schools." The National Education Association, the 3-million member teachers union whose endorsement she recently secured, also supports the "idea," as long as charters remain part of traditional school district bureaucracies and abide union rules and regulations which stifle freedom and flexibility for teachers and parents, thus neutering the entire concept of charter schools.

I wonder whether or not Mrs. Clinton no longer believes in charter schools because as a candidate in 2008, she lost NEA backing for the Democratic nomination to Barack Obama and along with it the union's immense PAC and activism engine.

Regardless of the reason, it is a sad day for our great nation when America's former top diplomat—rather than championing, as an example of American exceptionalism, the thousands of charter school teachers and the community leaders who have sacrificed so much to help improve the lives of kids — uses her national media platform and political campaign to denigrate these heroes, all under the literal banner of 'fighting for us'.

In short: Hillary Clinton is wrong and she has embarrassed herself by making these outrageous statements. As a partisan, she might want to consider that countless, courageous Democrats have helped enact charter school laws. Democrats are also represented heavily in the ranks of those who have founded charters, who started them, who run them and who teach in them day in and day out. The charter movement is more ideologically and socioeconomically diverse than the traditional public system, by choice, not by zip code.

I encourage Mrs. Clinton to visit a charter school this week, and next, and the week after that. I encourage her to meet with the parents of charter students, who view these schools as saviors for their children. I encourage her to meet with charter school leaders the next time she is South Carolina or New Hampshire and learn about their success in ensuring that their students learn, rather than allowing them to graduate lacking basic skills.

One would think Mrs. Clinton would understand the power of charter schools having allegedly been a citizen (and a Senator) of New York. Indeed evidence of success in charter schools serving the least advantaged among us can be found right down the block from her New York City campaign headquarters. These schools and the more than 6,000 others serving more than 2.8 million children nationwide have demonstrated to America that not only can poor children learn, they can outperform rich kids in tony suburbs if they are given the right tools and attention. What's more is that charter schools have reinvigorated cities where once the advantaged fled, and which are now, like Washington, DC, economic and gentrified engines of community engagement.

Perhaps it's our fault as advocates. Many of us may have just assumed that all influential and intellectually rigorous political leaders would read and understand the facts rather than rely on bad data or bad advice. Clearly it is time to re-inform the national education reform conversation and not take for granted, in a crucial political year, that our candidates know the real story. The recent fad of discussing the tiny sliver of charters in America with lagging performance is not even close to being the whole story of school choice in America today.

Instead, let's talk about the work that the vast majority of charter schools — great, entrepreneurial centers of learning and innovation — do every single day. We can start that transition by encouraging candidates for America's highest office to tell the truth.

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