

the
CENTER FOR EDUCATION REFORM



CER

IN THE NEWS

2016
YEAR IN
REVIEW

Throughout 2016, The Center for Education Reform has been engaged in a restart and refocus of its core mission and vision. Melding the power of innovation not present when we first helped start the modern EdReform movement, with the importance of opportunity as the lever by which all may participate in the American Dream, we recast our purpose, values and programs and launched powerful efforts to restore sanity to education reform and expand the reach of all our collective efforts. Here are just a few highlights.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR A NEW OPPORTUNITY AGENDA IN KENTUCKY

In 2007, the Center was the first national organization to answer the call from Kentucky lawmakers to help them forge a path for charter schools and greater opportunity for students across the state. Some 7 years later, we joined forces with a new governor, his cabinet and legislative leaders to map out a strategy for broad success, that would ensure opportunity for students young and old, and throughout the state—rural, urban and suburban. Our comprehensive approach combined with visits to D.C. charter schools recently created a foundation for success. On election day, the House became choice-friendly and the Bluegrass State will now have significant momentum as we coach and aide then to a new day for students and families.



Charters can put Kentucky in education's Super Bowl

JEANNE ALLEN
CONTRIBUTOR



Super Bowl 50 teams have endured a season-long struggle to reach their ultimate goal. Like these gridiron warriors, advocates of school choice in Kentucky have struggled and persisted in their efforts to enact a charter school law. For the sake of the children, we hope they win.

Why has it been so hard to deliver this common-sense choice for Kentucky's kids? Even while nearly 2.9 million children are served by more than 6,700 charter schools across the country, it seems that myths and misconceptions have kept Kentucky one of only seven states still denying its most needy students access to the choice of a public charter school. Unfounded arguments often deter lawmakers from taking the bold step of reforming their public school system, a monopoly that challenges its teachers, staffs and students.

Charter schools serve a diverse array of students for whom the traditional neighborhood school may not work for a whole host of reasons. A majority of charter school students are non-white, and almost two-thirds of charter schools serve a population with family incomes so low that more than 60 percent qualify for the federal free and reduced-price meals program. This is choice at work, not creaming as some suggest.

Once empowered with choices, families show their preference for schools that fit *their* needs best by switching to a charter school that simply offers them a better opportunity to learn.

There is a myth that charter schools somehow take resources away from local public schools. Charter schools make education funding more equitable for all, sending money to the schools where students are, not where the district dictates its placement. However, despite money following children, in most states charter schools get only a portion of the operational funding and little facilities support so they are forced to do more with less.

Kentucky has a rich history of wanting to improve how it serves students. As it considers charter legislation it could break the mold by ensuring 100% educational equity for all students.

Oftentimes the debate over charter schools comes down to "we vs. them." The reality is that as long as we do better for kids we are all playing on the same team. And charter schools really do perform better.

A meta analysis of four research studies shows that black students in charter schools score better than their district peers in both English and math. Research also has shown that charters have a positive "ripple effect," improving performance at neighboring public schools. A Harvard University study found in Arizona that district schools neighboring charter schools scored increases in math achievement more than three times that of schools with no charter schools in their communities.

Yes some have had their share of struggle, like all schools. They can open and close based on their experience and achievement, a great advance for those who believe that education should serve kids and not the other way around.

Charter schools allow innovations in teaching and learning and are free from most regulations that prevent traditional schools from making more progress, which while steady in Kentucky, is too slow for generations of students who have not been well served, for whatever reason, by the one-size-fits-all system.

Only 28 percent of Kentucky's 8th-grade students score proficient in math on the latest national assessment. Only 36 percent were proficient in reading. Fewer than 33 percent of Kentucky residents finish high school and go on to earn a two- or four-year higher education degree.

Strong economies require strong schools, and just like strong football teams require strong players, Kentucky should get in the game and join the Super Bowl of charters. Charter schools can help lure new investment and philanthropy to the state, and provide a better environment for youth to learn, prosper, and stay in the state. While football offers creative analogies, the future of our children is not a game and losing cannot be an option.

Charter schools are independent public schools that are held accountable for student results. Kentucky needs those schools to help them get over the educational goal line all kids need to succeed.

Jeanne Allen is founder and president emeritus of the Center for Education Reform in Washington, D.C.

Just one year ago the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program was once again on life support, with a president who threatened to veto any major extensions or expansions and a U.S. Congress largely unaware of why this program was created some 10 years earlier. Having learned that no one was organizing parents any longer, CER stepped up and partnered with Democracy Builders of NYC to launch *Opportunity DC*. Our local leadership cultivated more than 2,800 new parent advocates who have visited with more than 50 members of Congress and their teams. We've been reminded again in the process that parents are valuable assets in the battle for better schools, and that grassroots efforts matter. More people today are engaged across the city than just a year ago and CER is resolved to expand this program not only to DC but throughout the US, thanks to choice-friendly new actors coming to town this January. That includes not just the president-elect and his team but our old friend State Rep. Dwight Evans of PA, a Democratic congressman elect from Philadelphia.

WHERE DOES HILLARY CLINTON STAND ON EDUCATION REFORM?



By John Cassidy March 7, 2016

One of the most intriguing moments in Sunday night's Democratic debate came when CNN's Anderson Cooper asked Hillary Clinton, "Do you think unions protect bad teachers?" In the Democratic Party, few subjects are as incendiary as education. On one side of the issue are the reformers, such as Andrew Cuomo, the governor of New York, who support charter schools, regular testing, and changing labor contracts to make it easier to fire underperforming teachers. On the other side are the defenders of public schools, such as Bill de Blasio, the mayor of New York City, who are seeking to impose limits on the charter movement, modify testing requirements, and stand up for teachers.

Coming from someone they had long regarded as a political ally, these comments enraged many people in the charter movement. "That is absolutely false," Jeanne Allen, the founder of the Center for Education Reform, told the Washington Post. "She sounds like an aloof, elite candidate from a bygone era, before ed reform was a reality."



Hillary Clinton expressed support for education reform in the eighties and nineties but appears to have backed away from some of those positions.

Photograph By T. J. Kirkpatrick / Bloomberg Via Getty

THE
NEW
YORKER

Here's where Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump stand on education



Abby Jackson ✉

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"Trump's proposal to apparently gut nearly 30 percent of the federal education budget and turn it into private school vouchers would decimate public schools across America and deprive our most vulnerable students of the education they deserve," Clinton wrote.

Opponents of voucher programs argue that they siphon essential funding from already meager public-school budgets to other schools and at their worst are unconstitutional, as they can use taxpayer-funded vouchers to benefit religious schools.

Supporters argue that vouchers help disadvantaged students.

"Voucher programs largely help low-income middle-class kids — these are the kids that most need access" to quality education, [Michelle Tigani, the communications director at the Center for Education Reform, previously told Business Insider.](#)

Voucher policies typically have income restrictions that vary by state to ensure education funds truly end up with the families most in need. In Indiana, where Trump's running mate, Mike Pence, championed numerous school choice policies, the [2016-2017 income limit for a family of four](#) to receive the largest voucher amount was \$44,955.

Where there is politics you can expect policy to be impacted. That's why CER takes every election seriously, starting months before to research and evaluate the candidates most likely to impact or deter education reform, and developing materials to guide the public in how best to ensure the proliferation of great opportunities for children. Our [EdLecture Center](#) was afire with op-eds, candidate viewpoints and vital information used by thousands. Our Voters Guide provided educational resources about how each Governor might act on our broader opportunity agenda—school choice, charter schools and teacher quality. U.S. Senators were evaluated against their prior or potential actions as well. These data point to a more informed public, and we know from our own polling over the years that the more information the public has about education reform the more likely they are to support it! In the end, the record for education reform was mixed—only 35 governors earned an A or a B when it comes to school choice and charter schools. WE have a lot of work to do!

Donald Trump's Convention of Chaos

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "Pence's Record on Education in Indiana Is One of Turmoil and Mixed Results" (news article, July 20):

In a toxic and unpredictable election cycle, Gov. Mike Pence's record on education is exactly what we need: a reminder that education is the essential lever to expand opportunity for all Americans.

People on both the left and the right are taking issue with Mr. Pence's record on education. But the reality is that he pushed forward advances in charter schools and vouchers, testing and pre-school, all the while battling a state superintendent backed by the unions.

As a nonpartisan organization, the Center for Education Reform does not endorse candidates, but will always recognize and applaud those who advance sound education policies. Mr. Pence is a true pioneer of educational opportunity, with a record that shows he has what it takes to champion policies that move the needle on education opportunity for all.

JEANNE ALLEN

Founder and Chief Executive
The Center for Education Reform
Washington

The
New York
Times

IBD

With U.S. Education In Crisis, It's Time For Serious Reforms

JEANNE ALLEN

The latest report by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is an urgent reminder of the crisis in U.S. education, with just 37% of all 12th graders making the grade in reading and 25% in math. And the achievement gap is growing among minority kids.

White and Asian students score as many as 40 percentage points higher than black, Hispanic and other minority students. The number of 12th grade students failing to demonstrate even basic levels of math and reading achievement increased from the last time the test was administered in 2013.

NAEP data, combined with information on college readiness, presents a clear picture on the need to improve and expand access to innovative learning opportunities. Despite the U.S. graduation rate being at an all-time high of 81%, graduation rates clearly have little relevance to achievement, with 12th grade 2015 math and reading results revealing that less than half of graduating seniors are prepared for college coursework.

While 42% of 12th graders report being accepted to four-year colleges at the time of the NAEP assessment, research reveals that 20% of first-time students at four-year colleges require remedial coursework. At the community college level, approximately 60% of students enroll in at least one remedial course.

While the dropout rate has slowed, this data doesn't even account for those who don't make it to 12th grade. Eighty percent of the U.S. prison population is made up of high school dropouts. We must think creatively about how to create unique learning opportunities for students we have yet to reach.

Amid these grim statistics, we can find hope in the fact that more and more entrepreneurs and policymakers are doing extraordinary things and breaking the mold to foster innovative learning opportunities that lead to better outcomes and results for our nation's children.

Twenty-five years ago, policymakers on both sides of the aisle in Minnesota came together to craft a novel policy, a charter school law, to allow for a new type of public school to solve the persistent issue of underachieving schools and a growing dropout problem.

Today, there are more than 6,800 charter schools educating more than 3 million students. These schools were the first among public schools to show that innovations in teaching and learning can lead to student achievement, with results that outpace most comparable conventional schools — and they accomplished this feat despite adverse funding conditions.

As lawmakers enact more laws that provide children access to greater opportunities to achieve upward mobility, there is also unprecedented application of technological, teaching and system innovations being tested and applied.

Pence accomplished what Trump wants for national education: Vouchers and charters

By Emma Brown and Perry Stein November 11

"Donald Trump and I both believe that every parent in America should be able to choose where their children go to school, regardless of their income and regardless of their area code, and public, private and parochial and faith-based schools on the list," Pence said in September, according to the [Salt Lake Tribune](#).

The Obama administration and many Democrats have been staunch supporters of charter schools, and equally staunch opponents of vouchers, viewing them as a drain on public schools that serve the majority of the nation's children. Advocates for vouchers now see an opening for change.

"It's an extraordinary opportunity for far-reaching education reform," said Jeanne Allen, founder and chief executive of the Center for Education Reform, a pro-charter, pro-voucher advocacy group.

The Washington Post

WSJ



What can you say about a comedian that skewers charter schools and immediately has 8 million viewers thinking that this critical education effort is about failure and profit? Well, in true CER style we decided talking wasn't enough. With the amazing support of our dear friends Janine and Jeff Yass, we launched the "Hey John Oliver, Back Off My Charter School!" Video Contest and asked charter school leaders, students and parents to tell us why their school was better for them than the schools to which they were assigned. The result was nothing short of extraordinary. Stories of triumph, differentiation and choice were told repeatedly, and on November 14 we revealed the winner as well as several runners up. The winner, Natomas Charter School, turns out to have been one of the first in the nation that showed the power of grassroots activist come live. The students were clear in their message:

"John, the world realizes that education is an archaic model that needs updating—that's why we have charter schools. We experiment, challenge and create—we pioneer change in hopes that other traditional schools will follow suit."

Please find a way to our You Tube channel and view this and other videos. The impact wasn't just the hundreds of submissions, but the tens of thousands of media impressions we could generate for charter schools across the country. Count on us to be the movement's staunchest—and most creative—advocate.

Editorial: Charter schools, John Oliver and the NAACP



By Editorial Board

SEPTEMBER 9, 2016, 11:35 AM

Last month comedian John Oliver unleashed a caustic — and funny — broadside on charter schools in America. He spotlighted the worst of the worst charters, the ones that fail students, escape rigorous oversight and cost taxpayers. If you want to know how any of that is funny, well, just watch the video.

The pro-charter Center for Education Reform, however, wasn't amused. The attack was "a very unfair, unfortunate, unbalanced, unwarranted and generally unhinged tirade against charter schools," it harrumphed in a statement.

But then the group cleverly responded with a video contest, "Hey John Oliver, Back off My Charter School!" The center offers a \$100,000 prize to the chosen school of the winner who "shows John Oliver why making fun of charter schools is no laughing matter ... and why we need more opportunity, not less."

What a great opportunity for the winner, whoever she or he will be, to dispense with defensiveness and respond in kind to Oliver's tirade: with facts and with a dollop of humor, we hope.

What's not amusing, though, is the NAACP's updated stance on charters. In July, NAACP delegates passed a resolution calling for a moratorium on charter schools, pending an October vote of its national board. The NAACP justified its wrong-headed move by asserting that charters have aggravated school segregation, eroded local control of schools, wasted public funds, and disproportionately disciplined minority students. The NAACP is joined by The Movement for Black Lives, an alliance of more than 50 advocacy groups, in declaring charters the wrong antidote to failing schools.

But they're missing the point. As with all public schools — and remember, charters are public schools — there are good ones and bad ones. Charters have freedom to innovate in educating children *and* a limited-time contract to produce results. If they fail, they should close. And district leaders should make sure that happens.

Charter debate heats up

Those concerned about race and equality should champion charters

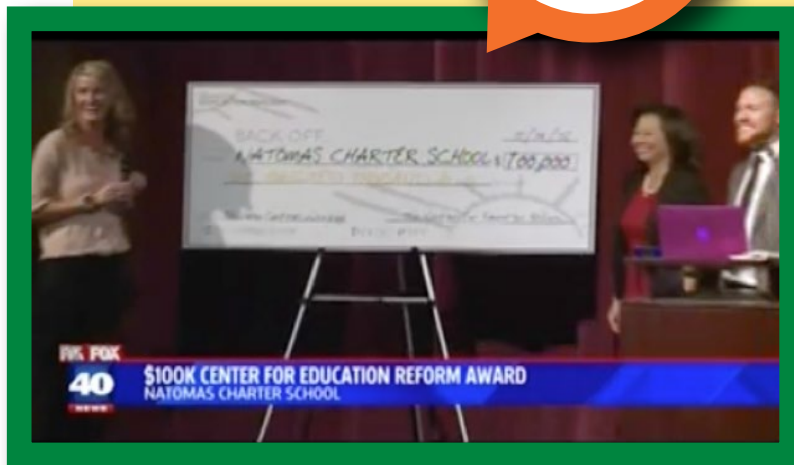
RE “RACIAL aspects tinge charter debate” (Page A1, March 28): Massachusetts charter schools are not only among the highest performing in the nation, but they serve a student population that’s 58 percent black and Latino, while state-wide that figure is 27 percent.

That should make people who are concerned about race and equality want to support charter school expansion, as a gateway to improved opportunity. Yet you report that the New England Area Council of the NAACP opposes permitting more charter schools, even while the African-American community votes with its feet in overwhelmingly choosing them for their kids.

It’s precisely because the traditional civil rights groups oppose structural change to traditional public schooling that new organizations such as the Black Alliance for Educational Options were born. Meanwhile, African-American lawmakers and celebrities have advocated for charters and started their own, from former NBA star Jalen Rose, who started one in Detroit, to singer John Legend supporting Harlem Village Academies and writing a song in honor of the school’s first graduating class. It was black Democratic representatives who brought expansive charter school laws to states including Florida, Tennessee, and Pennsylvania.

If there is to be any focus on race and charter schools in Massachusetts, it should be because charter schools are helping to serve children historically underserved by our nation’s education system, and putting power in the hands of parents who otherwise do not have access to a better education option for their children.

JEANNE ALLEN, founder and CEO
Center for Education Reform, Washington, D.C.



FOX SACRAMENTO: LOCAL CHARTER SCHOOL RESPONDS TO TV HOST’S CRITICISM

Charters facing tougher scrutiny by L.A. Unified

Critics say ‘side issues’ appear to trump merit in assessing schools.

By HOWARD BLUME

Jeanne Allen, head of the pro-charter Center for Education Reform, based in Washington, D.C., said that school districts should not be forced to oversee charters — and that charters should not be forced to submit to local districts.



But Jeanne Allen, founder and president emeritus of the Center for Education Reform, a pro-charter school group, says many of the incidents documented in the report were relatively minor bookkeeping lapses that anti-charter school forces have trumped up to embarrass operators.

“There are only a handful of incidents where there was actual fraud,” she said.