

League of Women Voters of Greater Peoria
Summary of interviews in Charter School Position Revision/Review
September, 2014

In all 6 people were interviewed: 1 local School Board Member, 2 superintendents (our area and comparable in the region), 1 former board member of Quest, 1 ROE, 1 charter school Principal.

1. Do the advantages of charters largely outweigh the disadvantages?
 - Yes, the advantages of charters outweigh disadvantages because they provide different opportunities for students.
 - No. There is no conclusive evidence that they are advantageous over traditional schools. They are no more effective than typical schools.
 - Yes, less bureaucracy, greater flexibility with time, schedule and don't deal with unions.
 - Yes. Focused on mission and effort. Parents have buy-in. Usually smaller than traditional schools and students get more attention, support and resources.
 - Yes, parental choice.
 - It isn't choice, it's cherry picking. Institutions have different rules. Can't compare apples to oranges. Disadvantages: charter schools select a group of students who have parental involvement, leaving traditional school with even less help. Advantage: charter schools are allowed to be more innovative with flexible school, staff, activities and year. Are charter schools more innovative than other schools?
 - From what I know, they are because not bound by same mandates.
 - Many traditional schools are as innovative as the most innovative charter. So much depends on the school culture.
 - Some are, but much depends on the individual school.
 - Not necessarily. They come into existence to make a difference. 99% of the charters written are innovative ideas.
 - Not necessarily. In larger districts perhaps and in Math/Science specialization.

2. The argument "parental choice" was used to "sell" charter schools. Is that still a valid argument since Failure to Meet Adequate Yearly Progress allows some "choice"?
 - Not sure about 'parental choice' – it is a chance for a choice for special populations.
 - 2 different things: tax dollars are needed to support Public School systems. AYP failed accountability system. We have both Title I and non-Title schools. When parents took the advantage of children going to 'choice', but their child was no longer able to get extra services they were upset. Charter schools should not be given dollars unless they are held accountable to same standards of other schools.
 - Quest is not really a 'choice', but a chance for a 'choice'. Lottery for admitting at every The lottery is not a solution – picking from good apples/should have lottery that every student's name goes in hat whether signed up or not. Not a true mixture of students. Not representative of the population.

- Lottery for every grade. Do not admit high school students.
 - Believe it is. Parents applying feel that their child is not being challenged in home school, not receiving the help they need and the environment is not the proper match for their situation.
 - Yes, they have a waiver.
3. What criteria should be used in determining accountability of charter schools? What criteria might be used in revoking a charter? (looking for such criteria as meeting academic standards, sound fiscal management, follow State and Federal Laws, expulsions in line with district, non-discriminatory practices, at least 80% of teachers with appropriate degrees.
- Student achievement, goal achievement (do they do what they say they are going to do?). Revoking based on the above.
 - Same as public schools, fiscal responsibility, follow the law, no discrimination in student selection, student achievement.
 - Student achievement, fiscal responsibility, meet contract goals.
 - Accountability includes student achievement, financial responsibility and overall compliant at local, state and federal levels.
 - Financial oversight, teacher evaluation, special education, academic structure, lottery process, financials, certification.
4. How frequently should charter school accountability be evaluated in regard to charter renewal?
- Should be evaluated yearly on accountability and 5 years max for contract. Should present to the Board of Education yearly.
 - Unsure
 - 5 years is about right. Quest does a quarterly report.
 - It takes 3-5 years for a program to be stable and achieve its goals.
 - 3-5 years.
 - Fine as is.
5. The authority for approving new and renewing charters should reside in what body?
- The local school board as it is their ultimate responsibility.
 - Local Board of Education – not State governing body.
 - Local board with oversight from Charter School Commission
 - Although other states have different systems, the local board should be approval agency, with State Commission having oversight or processing appeals if necessary.
 - Local school board.
 - Do NOT like charter school commission/it can override local school board.

6. Should local voters be able through referendum to establish a proposed charter school? Or override a decision by the Charter Commission which reverses the decision of a local school board?
 - No to referendum. There is value in both local board and the Commission (no definitive answer for reversing.)
 - If equal footing as mentioned previously.
 - No
 - No
 - No, only local school board

7. In regard to transparency what information should be disclosed in the operation (administration) of a charter school? Looking for sources of revenue, salaries and benefits, identity of property owner, admission processes, conflicts of interest of board.
 - All that public school has to disclose.
 - Everything that public schools are required to release to the public.
 - Same as public schools.
 - It is public dollars and a public school so all activity should be transparent.
 - Everything a local school district must do; although not salaries and benefits.

8. Do you think that it should be allowable that management of a charter school be subcontracted to a for-profit corporation? Possible follow up: Should it be prohibited?
 - Yes, if that's what it takes, should be a 3rd party. That's why I backed Edison Schools.
 - If using tax dollars they should not be subcontracted to for-profit company.
 - No; not-for-profit. Yes, should be prohibited.
 - No; money or profit should not be the bottom line. NFP okay so long as interested in goals of education.
 - Not a problem.
 - No.

9. What is a fair division of funding between traditional public schools and charter schools in the same district?
 - 85%
 - Charter school should get nothing.
 - 100%
 - Law allows 75-125%. Believe that charter should get 100% as they have the same expenses as public schools. How do you explain to parents that charter only gets 85%, therefore have to do more with less?
 - 85%
 - Schools are still operating at 2009 funding levels. Charter schools get 85%. Should not be increased.

10. What is your opinion regarding the use of virtual education through computers off-site and students do not need to attend a bricks and mortar school? Would you think differently depending upon the age of the students?

- Necessary evil; things have changed over time. Should be a mix of virtual and classroom.
- No; classroom with students; yes about age level. Problem – equal access to internet is not a reality.
- For some students it is a viable alternative. Example high school at Wildlife Prairie. As much as possible should be in school with enhancement from online.
- Although believes interactive with children and teacher in the classroom, times are changing. There are probably instances where a student can't do well in a group setting. We have some programs in place that include virtual education. Illinois has Virtual High School – only 2000 students statewide. Virtual should be used to supplement offerings that school does not have enough enrollment to employ a teacher. The offerings might include foreign languages, for example.
- If there is a need, but not advanced placement or students who are behind. State mandated testing should be required.
- Only if built into school day. Against a proposed Lake County virtual high school – it's a money maker. There is currently a moratorium on virtual schools in Illinois. Virtual schools need to partner with bricks and mortar schools to provide a mix of options.