

## **Charter Public Schools Not To Blame for Tax Increase** **By Stephen C. Bronack, Ph.D.**

Charter schools are often depicted by traditional school leaders as unreasonable threats to public education that represent private interests at taxpayers' expense. The community is led to believe that charter public schools are sure to bring awful financial and educational effects.

Unfortunately, what has been reported in the papers recently is simply not consistent with what we know to be true.

Charter public schools have been around in Pennsylvania since 1997. There is still a lot to know about charter public schools – and how they will really affect public education. That's a fact. What is a myth, however, is that the creation of a charter public school leaves local school districts with no other choice than to make local property owners foot the bill. If local communities are expected to accept a tax hike due to the creation of a charter public school, then there are other important myths about charter public schools that should also be dispelled:

### **Myth: Charter Schools take money away from Public Schools.**

**Fact:** Charter public schools **are** public schools, not private and not parochial. They drain not a single penny from public schools.

### **Myth: Charter Schools take money that should go to local public districts instead.**

**Fact:** Funds for public education are allocated for *students*, not school districts. If a student attends the local school to which he or she is assigned, the per-pupil expenditure (PPE) should go to that school district. If a student attends a charter public school, then that money should go to the charter public school. In reality, even if a student moves from a traditional public school to a charter public school, only around 80% of that student's allocated funds are made available to the charter school – the other 20% is retained by the district from which that student came. The myth that charter schools will provide an unfair financial drain on local school districts is simply false. After all, charter public schools are relieved from some administrative constraints so they may provide more efficient models for public education.

### **Myth: Taxes are the only way available to offset costs of students moving to charter public schools.**

**Fact:** There are many other sources of temporary financial assistance that are specifically designed to help local school districts transition students from traditional to charter public schools. When the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania established the Charter School Law, it also established transitional monies to help the very school districts students leave when attending charter public schools. Additionally, the Commonwealth established a grant program for school districts who document real budgetary impacts due to students attending charter public schools – school districts need only apply. When it comes to transitioning students from traditional to charter public schools, there exists a full range of financial options for local school districts to examine. If a tax increase is imposed on a local community, it likely reflects a conscious choice by local school leaders that is neither forced nor necessary.

### **Myth: Charter public schools negatively impact students in traditional public schools.**

**Fact:** Charter public schools are not responsible for any cuts in local school district programs. They are not responsible for any increase in class size – and certainly not for any proposed tax hikes for the community. Local school districts that refuse to make budget adjustments when students leave the district are doing so by choice.

Charter public schools **are** responsible for providing innovative, new models for public education. In fact, there are several examples in other states of traditional public schools modifying their approach to mirror those taken by charter public schools – and increased student achievement resulting. It seems more likely that what we learn from charter public schools will **positively** impact students enrolled in traditional public schools.

For those who care about public education and public schools, it is disappointing when local school officials fail to represent the full range of options for educating our community's children, and what the real costs and benefits are likely to be. What is good for the community is what is good for our children. And what is good for our children is a public school system whose mission includes seeking innovative ways of providing the best educational environments possible for our students. As educators, parents, and community members, we must also demand that those to whom we entrust the safekeeping of this system honor this mission – and provide the community with honest, straightforward information so we can make informed choices and decisions about how we best support public education.

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