

CHARTER SCHOOLS

By Sergio G. Flores

At the June 22, 2009 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools Conference, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan made a [speech](#) that included the following remarks:

We also need to work together to help people better understand charters. Many people equate charters with privatization and part of the problem is that charter schools overtly separate themselves from the surrounding district. This is why opponents often say that charters take money away from public schools, but that's misleading. Charters are public schools, serving our kids with our money. Instead of standing apart – charters should be partnering with districts – sharing lessons – and sharing credit. Charters are supposed to be laboratories of innovation that we can all learn from.

And charters are not inherently anti-union. Albert Shanker, the legendary head of the American Federation of Teachers, was an early advocate. Many charters today are unionized. What distinguishes great charters is not the absence of a labor agreement, but the presence of an education strategy built around common sense ideas: more time on task, aligned curricula, high parent involvement, and great teachers.

These and other supporting statements from his speech, and the “we” pronoun which Arne Duncan used to address the audience, provide a suitable context to introduce a primer on charter schools.

Particularly significant is the fact that just a few days before Arne Duncan’s speech, a Stanford University report gave charter schools, once more, a failing grade. In its findings, the [CREDO](#) report states that “Our national pooled analysis reveals, on the whole, a slightly negative picture of average charter school performance nationwide. On average, charter school students can expect to see their academic growth be somewhat lower than their traditional public school peers, though the absolute differences are small.” For charter schools’ supporters, these conclusions are not surprising or new because earlier research had arrived to similar conclusions.

This begs the question that is the main point of this piece: If charter schools have such a chronic status of failure, how come the federal government continues to support them? After all, any reasonable person knowing only the charter schools’ poor record that dates back to the early nineties would conclude that the US Department of Education would be at the least critical of them, and consequently would be more supportive of the public education system. However, contrary to logic, the US DoE has continued to promote and support the proliferation of charter schools with tax-payers money at the expense of public schools. At this point in time, the DoE has increased charter schools funding by 52 million dollars, and Arne Duncan has told the ten states that have no charter schools and the 26 states with a cap on the number on charter schools, that if they don’t support them, they may not be receiving all the money from the [stimulus federal money](#).

WHAT IS A CHARTER SCHOOL?

The first charter schools opened in 1991 in Minnesota and in California in 1992. Since then the number increased slowly for a few years. By 1996 there were 271 charter schools in ten states, which prompted NEA president Keith Geiger to announce that NEA would spend 1.5 million to create five charter schools in as many cities¹. From the late 1990’s and chiefly due to the

unprecedented economic support the US Department of Education provided under the Bush Administration, several charter schools appeared in various states. Today, nearly [4,600 charter schools](#) serve more than 1.4 million children in forty states plus the District of Columbia². In California alone, there are 750 charter schools serving over 276,000 charter school students.

The US Charter School.org website defines charter schools as “innovative public schools that provide choices for families and have greater accountability for results,” and the California Charter School Association defines them as “schools that are responsive to students needs and are held accountable for improved student achievement.” Since neither definition provides enough elements for analysis or evaluation, a more complete one is needed. For The Public Schools Review, charter schools are in a niche. . .

between private and public schools, funded with public money (except for their facilities) they are an alternative to regular public schools systems. A private group of people can submit and get approved a charter to run their own school. Charter schools receive waivers from public school districts in exchange for promising better academic results. Charters are usually given for 3-5 years, where an eye is kept on academic performance. If academic performance lags behind comparable public schools, then the “charter” is pulled and the school is closed³.

By establishing this definition we set some essential elements for the purpose of evaluating charter schools according to their principles, structure, goals, and results.

Despite a variety of serious problems, charter schools have multiplied in the last ten years. For one, this has happened despite evidence showing they have not lived up to its proponents expectations, namely coming up with pedagogical innovations, helping closing the achievement gap between whites and minorities or disadvantaged children, or performing significantly and consistently better than similar public schools⁴. Also, this abnormality has occurred regardless of several cases of corruption and mismanagement in the USA, and particularly in California⁵. Moreover, charter schools have received political support notwithstanding legislators knowing⁶ about their failing record⁷.

This unwarranted rapid proliferation of charter schools constitutes an interesting and important social phenomenon that deserves public scrutiny⁸. In California, the state with more charter schools, this tendency draws particular interest for its social, economic, and political effects⁹. Indeed, charter schools have impacted the lives of students, teachers and families, and the finances and politics of districts and communities in general. In large urban communities like Los Angeles and Oakland, the charter schools movement has created continuous problems¹⁰. These cities have seen their public school districts forced to allow numerous charter schools, and bearing with new political, administrative, financial¹¹, and logistic problems.

In theory, a charter schools were supposed to provide options and better results with simplified and more efficient models of schools. In reality charter schools have become an added confusing factor that has neither helped nor solved the problems affecting public schools. As the record shows, from 1991 to 2003 the number of charter schools ballooned to 2,600, serving more than 700,000 students in 36 states and Washington DC. A study using national data and conducted by a UC Berkley and Stanford Universities found out that forty-eight percent of charter school teachers lacked a teacher certificate, and worked with a twenty percent more students than

regular public schools¹². After twelve years of failure, any reasonable person would have predicted that the federal government would have ended or at least a diminished the number of charter schools in the US. However, the charter movement got a resolute, unprecedented support by the Bush administration. This federal government action begs the question of why politicians, public in general, teachers, and teachers associations have not questioned the propagation of charter schools.

In order to advance an explanation for the multiplication of charter schools, it is necessary to observe the political and economic contexts. From the political perspective, a powerful conservative movement had been vilifying public education for decades allegedly for considering it both a socialist program, and a failure in serving its student population. Criticism of public schools had existed since the system was created, but it wasn't until 1978 that conservative groups lead by Howard Jarvis in California passed Prop 13, that a patent damage was done. Prop 13 reduced funding for education, created a recession, and caused the loss of 600,000 jobs¹³.

Later, at a national level, during Ronald Reagan's presidency the government became a most harsh critic of public education, and politicians and anti-public education groups teamed up. A devastating blow to public education came with the publication of "A Nation at Risk" in 1983. Public schools started losing public support and became politicians' favorite topic for local and national campaign promises, and a frequent scapegoat for the unrelated social problems. At this point in time started what George Lakoff denominate "privateering." Lakoff defines it as:

. . . a special case of privatization in which capacity of government to carry out critical moral missions is systematically destroyed for within the government itself, while public funds are used to provide capital for private corporations to take over those critical functions of government and charge the public a great deal for doing so, while avoiding accountability. (p.133)¹⁴

From the economic standpoint, public education money had always been too big a temptation to pass it up by conservatives opposing providing social services through government. For a long time, charter schools supporters had spent millions of dollars on public relations, lobbying politicians, and giving donations to charter schools with a calculated motive. Already in November 2000, The CATO institute published "Edupreneurs," where the author Carrie Lips states that Merrill Lynch estimated that the 10% of the \$740 billion education market would increased by 13% annually.¹⁵ From the business point of view, this projection reinforce conservatives' plan of preying on public schools, investing on charter schools, and promoting vouchers. It would take only a few more years when then President Bush's administration engaged in privateering in education with its landmark NCLB.

As important as it is the massive investment in this campaign for conservatives, their ability to framing and controlling the issue of schools have provided a decisive advantage in advancing their goal of privatization. The ideological effect has been so effective that [Anti-public education billionaires and corporations](#)' frame has become the official narrative of public education, its problems, and its acceptable solutions without resistance. The pervasive outcomes of framing have been the reaffirmation of the dreadful image of public schools – as in "failing schools", "ineffective teachers", closing schools, consumers, competition, etc; the isolation or

demonization of its defenders, and the promotion of charter schools and vouchers while ironically elevating “privateers and privateering enablers” to the category of saviors or champions of civil rights and social justice¹⁶.

The national teachers associations, AFT and NEA, have not challenged the charter schools’ narrative packed with distortions, misinformation, and omissions for different reasons. For one, teacher associations have a democratic system that considers a myriad of issues --educational, economic, logistic, organizational, and political. The issues of privatization or charter schools are only two among several issues of national relevance. Besides, their significance varies from state to state. Thus, TA’s deal with charter schools in an ongoing neutral basis, locally, and always in a reactive manner.

Another reason TA’s have to not oppose privatization or charter schools is due to their policies. Since associations have to take a formal position on issues, their resolutions have precedent and limit the scope of action of associations. For instance, once NEA¹⁷ accepted teachers from charter schools, it developed a resolution to accept their existence. Therefore, it cannot oppose the conversion or creation of charter schools.

A most important reason for Teacher Associations’ cautious positions about charter schools is the tremendous power of the so called reformers which have run an ongoing and well funded campaign many years¹⁸. News, editorials, and reports in favor of or defending privatization and charter schools appear commonly. This happens with the help of a series of Think tanks that produce and disseminate pro-privatization ideas. Influential conservative think tanks such as the [Heritage Foundation](#), [The Manhattan Institute](#), [The American Enterprise Institute](#), or the [CATO](#) institute, to name a few, have a combined funding of over a hundred million dollars a year. An excellent example of the power of conservative media happened in 2004 when the AFT published a report that concludes that charter schools had failed to improve student achievement. In the following days of its publication on the NY Times, Nina Rees (Deputy S of E), John Boehner (R. Ohio), The Wall Street Journal, an open letter in the Times signed by 30 leading researchers, and the [Heartland Institute](#) criticizing the methodology used by the researchers, dismissing or minimizing the results, accusing the AFT of being hostile to charter schools, and even mentioning NEA which had nothing to do with the report.¹⁹ The outcome of this massive effort is a pervasive frame where public opinion is more susceptible to sympathize with charter schools. This condition in particular makes practically impossible for AFT or NEA to take a stance against the proliferation of charter schools.

A straightforward observation on the issue of charter schools is that the absence of meaningful debate and unbiased information are astounding²⁰. A random search the main stream media news shows the nearly total support for charter schools. Frequently politicians and billionaires, chambers of commerce and EMO’s, editorialists and right wing think tanks supply partial information in a supporting or apologetic tone; even the federal government has pledged its support for charter schools²¹. Indeed, it seems as if there was an undivided community support for charter schools. To promote debate on this issue would take a massive effort from TAs. It would require them to engage in a non-precedent campaign to produce and disseminate factual information among their members first, provide a large number of them talking points and

training in presenting them, and organize open debates and forums all over the country. This campaign would require an unfeasible level of spending and commitment.

With the powerful conservative machine dominating the mainstream media, it is understandable to see dissenting opinions scarcely scattered in the printed media and practically inexistent on the airwaves. Professors of education, independent experts on relevant educational issues such as testing or educational policy, and investigative reporters who write critically about charter schools present their ideas mainly in academic reports and a small number of internet outlets²². The opinion and work of reputable organizations and distinguished pro-public education personalities like [EPPRU](#), [Think Twice](#), [Gerald Bracey](#), [Alfie Khon](#), [Susan Ohanian](#), [Jamie MacKenzie](#), [Jonathan Kozol](#), or [Noam Chomsky](#) have remained largely unnoticed by the mainstream media, and astonishingly by teachers', administrators', parent-teachers' and board members' associations. With this disproportion of information supply, it is comprehensible the public's meager reaction against the proliferation of charter schools.

A question that nobody asks is what motivates billionaires like [The Walton Family](#), [Eli Broad](#), [Bill Gates](#), [Steve Barr](#) from [Green Dot](#), and others, and the federal government to invest in charter schools? Personal satisfaction through so called philanthropy, or profits would seem acceptable answers. But neither is the reason. In normal circumstances, successful businesses multiply rapidly like fast-food and coffee franchises have done in the recent past. However, with charter schools that is not the case; they haven't delivered acceptable profits or solve problems. The factual record does not warrant the support these billionaires give to charter schools.²³ What makes this support even more apparently unexplainable is that these results are neither new nor surprising. Already in 2002, in a report titled "Potential of For-Profit Schools for Educational Reform," Henry M. Levin concluded that:

What we have learned is that contrary to the facile claims of their investment promoters, privatizing of operations of public schools is not a business that is easily convertible to profitability. Whatever the flaws of existing public school management and its poor performance in many urban areas, it does not appear that privatization, alone, is an effective answer. For-profit EMO's have generally not been profitable, nor is there evidence of breakthroughs in educational results. And, there is virtually no evidence that the quest for larger and larger numbers of schools will solve the dilemma through economies of scale.²⁴

In short, record shows that charter schools are unsuccessful and a bad economic investment, which leaves the question unanswered.

On another subject, what has become common and predictably are the [fraud cases](#) in relation with charter school finances and records, as it happened in Texas²⁵, Philadelphia²⁶, and California²⁷. Since charter schools do not follow the same protocol public schools do, the lack of a dependable accountability system provides opportunities for [cheating](#) in a variety of ways. If nothing else would matter, this anomaly should motivate public educators and every citizen to request investigations and take preventive measures. However, there is a powerful emotional resistance to even bring out the subject of corruption to the general public. At the NEA-RA in

2009, the majority of the almost 8,000 delegates –the overwhelming majority voted down a proposal to gather and distribute information about charter schools (NBI 23)²⁸.

Why should we all learn about charter schools?

More important than all the frauds committed by some dishonest scoundrels is the state of our public school system due to the fuzzy concept of choice²⁹ brought by NCLB. The present and future of our public schools is at stake. Now that the federal government uses tax money to create and promote charter schools, citizens should be given prompt and unbiased information to evaluate the service provided by these new schools and the way their finances are conducted. This issue gets more serious each year for the increase in fund for charter schools provided by the federal government. Just in 2008, President Bush included in the education budget \$211,031,000 to fund the Public Charter Schools Program (CSP), the State Facilities Incentive Grants Program, and the Credit Enhancement for Charter School Facilities Program³⁰. While the idea of school choice seems appealing to most Americans, providing unsatisfactory choice does not constitute a valid reason to divert much needed public funds from our public school system. What justifies funding this expensive failing experiment?

While independent studies draw unsympathetic conclusions of charter schools in general, in the public arena opinions and policies decisively favor them. Two major reasons for such contradiction are: One, public debate on charter schools is practically non-existent due to lack of reliable and expedite information, which had left parents, educators, and policy makers confused³¹. An excellent example is what happened in the case of the San Diego's Press School. Since its foundation in 1999 this school had received praise for its scores, mission and rigor. But by 2007 the streak of praises stopped abruptly because its students' performance in independent tests did not match the rhetoric. As the news reported, it was evident that "most of those honors and reviews were based on deceptive, if not entirely meaningless, statistics." One cannot but wonder how many fraudulent charter schools like this one have gone undetected. Rather than given charter schools an undeservedly automatic vote of confidence, we should be judging them based on real time and with relevant information.

Two, that the narrative of charter schools stories has been framed, funded, and successfully promoted by their conservative supporters and advocates³². Thus, talking about charter schools failure³³, vouchers, and reform in general is limited to issues they select; and bringing up other issues such as incongruence of goals and programs, working rights, or questioning their own existence and services, are ignored, dismissed, or rejected. A recent example comes from the Wall Street Journal opinion piece by Professor Green, a fellow at the Manhattan Institute, who implies that unions are the reason public schools are mediocre. Professor Green writes at the end of his piece that

Vouchers made the world safe for charters by drawing union fire. But now that the unions have the voucher threat under control, charters are in trouble. It's time for reformers to increase pressure on politicians bending to the will of the unions and close the new education gap -- the one between what Mr. Obama and Mr. Duncan say about education and what they do.³⁴

Resolutely supporting and defending charter schools³⁵ are a number of federal, state, and local officials, newspaper reporters, conservative think tanks, and billionaires --President Obama, S. of

E, Arne Duncan, Bill Gates, The Walton Family³⁶, [Chester E. Finn, Jr.](#) the Heritage Foundation, Eli Broad, or the California's Superintendent of public education Jack O'Connell. This condition makes practically impossible for any dissenter to find a receptive public forum. No intellectual or politician with a healthy instinct of survival would consider challenging the opinion and power of these men. It would require economic independence, academic integrity, and remarkable courage to point out the evident charter schools' failures and problems. Thus, millions of private donors' dollars have been used to shape the public opinion according to a conservative agenda that wants to dismantle our public education system³⁷.

To make it even harder for public education supporters, for the first time in history the federal government is using public money to team up with conservative organizations such as the WFF³⁸ to support magnify and propagandize successes while justifying, minimizing, or concealing failures. According to the Department of Education, in the past eight years, the federal government has funded charter schools with more than 1.5 billion of tax dollars³⁹.

A charter school program that has benefitted from this partnership handsomely is the KIPP organization. On one hand, KIPP has been funded generously⁴⁰, and on the other, important political figures such as former president Bush, president Obama, Arne Duncan, and Washington Post reporter Jay Mathews have [uncritically](#) promoted the story of KIPP as a successful model with extraordinary results⁴¹. This extraordinary support and promotion makes anyone believe that the KIPP program really produce amazing results. However, research shows differently; an independent study of KIPP schools reveals that its proclaimed success is not warranted⁴². The study from the Great Lake Center explains that

Although KIPP may yield useful information, policymakers and others should temper their interest in the operation with wariness and realistic expectations. There are significant unanswered questions about how expansion might affect outcomes, especially in relation to the difficulty of sustaining gains dependent upon KIPP's heavy demands on teachers and school leaders. Moreover, it is not realistic to think that the KIPP model is a panacea for distressed systems. It is possible that only a small proportion of students and families will be able to meet the demands KIPP imposes on them; even those enthused when they begin the KIPP regimen tend to leave in high numbers.

This incongruence does not come as a surprise: In the case of KIPP schools, as in the case of charter schools as a whole, their good reputation has not been supported by independent research, or even the news.

WHY DO WE HAVE CHARTER SCHOOLS?

In theory, what we now call charter schools must have become successful rapidly, but they haven't; their overall record has been less than lustrous⁴³. Indeed, their failure should be studied from the pedagogical point of view so educators can learn something from this expensive experiment, but evidence indicates that the same social and economic reasons affecting public schools performance seem to affect charter schools as indicated in a recent study by Finnigan and O'Day who concluded that:

The root of low performance rarely is located in the school alone. Instead, many school problems are related to larger, systemic issues and policies at the district and state levels. Low-performing schools in both Chicago and California were dealing with decades of

problems that were beyond the schools control. For example, these schools typically faced greater turnover in staff and on average had less experienced school personnel than higher performing schools (Allen, 2005). As Mintrop (2004) describes, these are challenging work environments. Successfully turning around low-performing schools requires an examination of both the problems relating to the internal functioning of the school organization, as well as systemic factors (policies and practices within and outside of the school system) contributing to low school performance.

Simply put, charter schools won't succeed where public schools haven't. If policy makers based their decisions on research, the charter school experiment would be reexamined instead of supported.

Moreover, charter schools not only have failed to solve the public education problems; they have come with a baggage of new problems⁴⁴. Charter schools despite their inherent troubles have created a series of financial and political dilemmas in their localities.

Either from the pragmatic or purely academic point of view, with the information available, a reasonable person cannot make sense of the phenomenon of charter schools in the US or California. If charter schools services are compared and contrasted with those offered by public schools, their results are not statistically better and in many cases worse⁴⁵. Charter schools have not lived up to their main objective of becoming experimental schools from where innovative ideas would emerge.

A simple observation of charter schools classrooms reveals that most of them operate in the same way public school classrooms do. In addition, unlike public schools, many charter schools have received generous donations from sponsors⁴⁶. Charter schools in Los Angeles have received in the past decade a total of 56 million dollars.⁴⁷ Thus, it is not accurate to state that charter schools operate at lower cost than public schools. In fact, this is even deceitful and sets up the probable situation of charter schools demanding more public funds in the future should the donors stop funding them.

In short, charter schools have not been and don't seem to be the solution to the problems with the alleged unsatisfactory reading and math scores from public schools⁴⁸. Indeed they have come to complicate more the mission of offering a quality education for all the students, and in the process demoralizing public educators and dividing communities. Charter schools have not been laboratories of innovation, or the loyal competition to public schools, or even the choice for parents⁴⁹. A crucial point is that charter schools have offered those parents who are heavily invested in their children's education a legit opportunity to desert from their local public schools. In doing so, these parents' enthusiasm and dedication to their children's' education is subtracted from those public schools, and concentrated into the charter schools. Consequently, charter schools comprise populations of highly motivated parents and students.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CHARTER SCHOOLS

In the early 1970's Ray Budde, a former teacher and administrator came up with the idea a charter school. He was interested in organizational theory, and in 1974 offered the Society for General Systems Research some ideas for the reorganization of school districts⁵⁰. In 1988 his paper "*Education by Charter: Restructuring School Districts*" got published."⁵¹ His suggestions

were directed at existing districts and schools. Basically, Budde's proposals called for more direct participation by teachers in the organization and decision making process of a school by eliminating administrative layers in the system. In charter schools the board of education would have a direct line with teachers⁵².

Then in 1988, with the support and modification of AFT president Albert Shanker, the idea caught attention. Shanker introduced the idea of giving teachers the opportunity to start a new school inside another school. In Shanker's vision:

... small groups of teachers and parents would submit research-based proposals outlining plans to educate kids in innovative ways. A panel consisting of the local school board and teachers' union officials would review proposals. Once given a "charter," a term first used by the Massachusetts educator Ray Budde, a school would be left alone for a period of five to 10 years. Schools would be freed from certain collective bargaining provisions; for example, class-size limitations might be waived to merge two classes and allow team-teaching.⁵³

Neither Budde's nor Shanker's ideas were implemented at that time. A few years later, in 1991 Minnesota passed the first charter school law, one year later California, and by 1993 six more states approved charter school laws. The idea was basically to give school districts or states freedom from regulations in exchange for raising achievement. This new concept of charter school explicitly demanded freedom from the school board authority.

Contrary to what Arne Duncan means when invoking the name of Albert Shanker in his speech, the former AFT president warned about the negative effects of what we now call charter schools. On one hand, Shanker explains, the current version of charter schools is mostly the vision of small groups of people – a fad that will eventually self destruct. On the other hand, if many charter schools each doing its own thing was to dominate the education landscape, it would be "a recipe for chaos." In this respect, Albert Shanker accurately predicted and warned that:

With a system of charter schools, commonalities would disappear. Some schools might base their program of study on community service and internship while others might use local museums and libraries and computer labs as their classrooms. We would see schools centered around gender or ethnic studies – there would undoubtedly be Afrocentric charters, for example – but there would also be charters with traditional, book centered curriculums. What would happen when a student transferred from one to another?⁵⁴

In short, Mr. Shanker concluded that the charter schools would be a disastrous idea in both instances. If failing to multiply, charter schools would appear and disappear for lacking substance. If succeeding in spreading, charter schools would be a disconnected and disorganized multitude of schools, which would make impossible to provide a predictable service to students moving from schools.

CALLING THEM CHARTER SCHOOLS IS DECEITFUL

If we observe carefully, what we call a charter schools is fundamentally different from the

charter schools' original definition. First of all, originally intended exclusively as independent laboratories for educational purposes, today's charter schools are promoted mainly as option or competition against public schools. Neither Budde nor Shanker envisioned charter schools competing or replacing public schools; they were supposed to be models from which to learn⁵⁵.

Secondly, because the charter schools' main goal was to improve public education, the ideal experiment demanded competence in both the pedagogical and administrative areas. That meant having expert teachers and a sound plan in order to apply for a charter school. These days there are no such minimum requirements. Indeed, federal and state laws allow non-educators to teach at charter schools. Consequently, there is an attrition problem that makes staffing of a charter school with qualified teachers an added problem⁵⁶.

Thirdly, what does it mean that charter schools are free from the constraints that public schools have? Originally, it meant to be the prerequisite for educators to do experiments, in the same way scientists control variables. This was a necessary condition to carry on new ideas and to feel protected while doing these trial and error experiments. Accordingly, the number of charter schools was supposed to be small and successful, but that has not happened, as a UCLA study concludes: "We have learned that, for several reasons, the autonomy-for accountability tradeoff is not happening the way policy makers hoped."⁵⁷ These were supposed to be the experimental sites from where top educators would work and make innovations. Currently, this condition of freedom from constraints has a different subtext: an administrative one. It is a more about [running a business](#) than a school, and as such their proponents want freedom to set their own standards, hiring and firing policies, and admissions and requirements, among others.

Finally, while the original charter schools were to be managed by professional educators, now corporations and individuals with no experience in the education field can create and operate them. According to the current laws, any person or corporation [can open charter schools](#) by following an application process. This essential difference makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile the ideals of the original charter school creators with the goals and means of the new group of managers of charter schools.

The term "charter school" has changed⁵⁸. Originally, it carried a clear pragmatic and educational connotation: a school ran efficiently by teachers and parents with a strong component on accountability stemmed by this partnership school-parent and without unnecessary administrative layers. They were conceived as laboratories for innovators and reformers to work freely and test their ideas. That concept implied a component of freedom to experiment with the hope of innovation and optimal results. Absent from its original definition and intention was political intentions based on arbitrary competitions. Incongruent with its original definition, the current rhetoric places charter schools as the solution to the failure of public school or a magic solution to societal problems such as poverty and isolation. On this issue, studies have concluded that charter schools are not, and in all probability will not be the solution.

ARE CHARTER SCHOOL BUSINESSES?

Making things worse from the educational point of view, charter schools have been promoted as

business. Since school districts are prohibited to make profits educational management organizations (EMO) entered the public school domain. EMOs usually are for-profit firms that seek to earn profits from their provision of administrative and educational services to schools. Is this a good thing? On this issue David Plank wrote in 2000:

Among other things, charter schools open the door to private-sector firms seeking profits from the educational services they provide. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but state policymakers must ensure that the profits of educational management organizations are made the old-fashioned way and not simply by taking advantage of flaws in policy to exploit schools and children for the benefit of adults.

Making profits was introduced in the charter school issue some time ago without objection. Rather than protesting or even debating how this new factor would impact education, the public schools' stakeholders went along with this idea. Then, savvy entrepreneurs took this unprecedented opportunity provided by the federal government and have received public funding since then. Let's remember that EMO's and entrepreneurs have a huge motivation: a piece of the public education budget which is about three quarter of a billion dollars. Without real dissenting, encouraged by the government and with economic incentives in the millions, the charter school business has grown extraordinarily in the past few years.

The numbers of companies managing charter schools has increased, but are EMOs' effective in helping improve education? [The Edison Company](#) and [the Green Dot Company](#) are some examples of EMOs that have been in business for some time. But right now, research does not say much about the effectiveness of EMO's⁵⁹. In the past years, [corruption and fraud in charter schools](#) had occurred frequently. In this issue, citizens need public debates to know what is happening. In addition, charter schools have national and state organizations with capacity for organization and lobbying that works efficiently to advance their issues. Is this mixture of money and power benefiting America's education?

In conclusion, the new charter schools show a number of important contrasts with the original concept that lead to conclude that they are not the same thing. It is important to consider this distinction in the current discourse about public education, its ailments, its present, and its future. Moreover, this primer exposes the incongruence between the rhetoric used to promote and defend charter schools. These advocates still state or evoke the principles of the original idea, while it is clear that the charter schools of today have inherent conditions that partially or totally purge those ideals. On one hand charter school are promoted as bastions of innovation and accountability, while on the other, reports shows that charter schools have not produced innovation nor can be considered model of efficiency. Indeed, charter schools have come up to complicate even more the already difficult endeavor of offering quality public education.

IMPORTANT ISSUES

Are Charter Schools Supposed to Increase Student Achievement?

The proponents say charter schools will increase student achievement, but they haven't. The original intention of creating alternative schools was to succeed where public schools were allegedly failing. But, some charter schools are not regular schools; some have special

curriculums or subjects that cannot be evaluated with just scores. However, similar schools could be compared. Here is where standardized tests were supposed to be useful as a means to measure progress and demonstrate charter schools success. However, in the states where comparative studies have been done, charter schools have not got better results than public schools, as it was reported in 2004.⁶⁰

What Kind of Accountability Do Charter Schools Have?

What happens when charter schools fail to increase achievement? In theory, they are closed; in reality, advocates and supporters have managed to keep that rule from being enforced. More charter schools have been closed due to corruption, financial problems, or incompetence. In some cases charter schools are accountable to the founder, in other to parents, and some to the students. This circumstance of having to respond to different constituencies, make it difficult to establish a standard accountability. The application of accountability seems to be compromised in some cases because of ineffective systems.

What Innovation Has Come Out of Charter Schools In the Past Twenty Years?

Another original intent of Charters was to become beacons of innovation. Thousands of charter schools, dozens of companies with particular ideologies, and millions of dollars in donations later, not a single new idea, method, technique, or approach has come up from any charter school. It is true that choosing one program over other may seem different enough to be considered a new approach –like longer days, or longer school year. However, this difference does not constitute an educational breakthrough or discovery.

In this respect, how could any reasonable person differentiate charter from public schools? Both can adopt, reject, or implement programs, methods, or techniques. Strictly speaking about the pedagogical aspect, both charter and public schools have shown the same creativity in the past twenty years.

What Choice Does Charter Schools Offer?

An intrinsically emotional aspect of the charter school phenomenon is the idea of choice. Strangely, the idea of choice has never been properly posed and discussed. It would be useful to study its economic, social, or pedagogical advantages or disadvantages. The idea of choice was successfully induced both as traditional American value and as a fundamental pragmatic principle of the free market economy. Thus, for parents, the act of sending kids to schools was equated with choosing to buy or rent goods or services. To this day, no serious studies had demonstrated the overall benefit of this approach.

The concept of choice can be interpreted in at least two different ways, but both of them are conditioned to the viability of that choice. One interpretation refers to the simple act of deciding between two or more school where to send our children. This idea of choice implies that those alternatives offer similar programs. Moreover, the issues of time and transportation become factors to consider. Choice may be among different programs, visions, or philosophies. A school may offer some characteristic that parents may find important or desirable. The requirements imposed by the schools play a decisive factor. Schools can ask parents to commit to volunteer, cooperate, and help students to achieve certain goals. Thus, choice between public and charter schools is not as simple as one can initially assume as a UCLA study concluded⁶¹.

The underlying problems for this idea of choice have to do with the effect on local communities. Traditionally, a public school has been an important point for the development of ties to the community. In this respect, the apparition of a charter school with the promise of improvement achievement may come as a wedge to divide the local communities. Rather than concentrate the community's efforts in improving the local public school, a charter school dilutes it. Moreover, whether the charter school lasts three years or stays longer, the divisionism materializes both in the rivalry among charter and public, and among students, parents, and other people in the community.

Charter schools are supposed to be working under a partnership where accountability is based solidly on a decision making process that includes teachers and parents. Little is known about the occurrence of this partnership. Gerald Bracey explains that while some charter school programs seem flexible, within the school they are so rigid that some teachers have chosen not to return the next year for that reason⁶². Moreover, although more research needs to be done in this respect, it is clear that flexibility of programs and professional decisions does not seem to be a characteristic of most charter schools.

Has The Concept of Competition Been Fair or Successful?

Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, public education has endured an increasingly systematic bashing. When public school critics noted that inconsequential criticism did not succeed in influencing policy makers, national and international results were used as excuses to impose urgent interventions. Consequently, rather than reform considering input from the ones in the education field, politicians, billionaires and not-educators decided frame the debate and set the course⁶³.

Among the new ideas brought by the public education bashers, the most important was imported from the free-market theory: competition. The analogy assumes that public schools, which are in their words a "monopoly" are factories and students are their products. The introduction of charter schools and vouchers would force public schools to work more efficiently and deliver a better product. An extra element to the competition was a range of penalties for public schools that culminate with closing of schools and firing of staffs. With the plan set up by NCLB, both charter and public schools were forced into a baffling competition where powerful interests have conspired in favor charter schools⁶⁴. Now, the competition is for survival by achieving arbitrarily and unrealistic goals each year.

Since charter schools are not everywhere, the competition between charter and public schools is constrained to a limited number of settings. In this context it is possible to test the premise that competition foster better results. So what has happened? In 2000, in a study that included observations from some states, Gerald Bracey concluded that the "promise of competition has not yet been met."⁶⁵ In 2007 a report about schools in Texas conducted by the University of Houston concluded that "comparisons indicate that, for the most part, competition schools show no greater improvement on these outcomes than schools that did not experience competition. Where differences do appear, they are quite small,"⁶⁶ In addition, the Rand Corporation published a study that included eight states and in their findings they stated that: "There is also

little evidence of a positive competitive impact on nearby TPSs. Only in one location do we find any evidence of a statistically significant effect on TPSs of competitive pressure exerted by charter schools: In Texas, the estimate of competitive effects in one of two specifications is positive but small.”⁶⁷ The predicted improvements due to competition have not happened.

Problems

The original concept of charter schools required the commitment of teachers, parents, and districts. Their problems included more educational issues, such as getting competent teachers and proposing an extraordinary program, than any other kind. Strangely enough, these two issues are not among the top priorities these days. Today’s charter schools deal mostly with issues related to [financing](#) and [politics](#).

Due to the factors of competition and profits, charter schools bring a political component. We now see supporters of charter schools campaigning and lobbying for more money and legislative support, as well as billionaires and right wing personalities pushing for free-market rules to be applied to public schools. Thus, many charter school proponents have become respected and powerful public figures that influence policy makers. The result is a political environment where education policy has been mostly determined by politics influenced by well funded pro-charter school people than by educators.

Prior to NCLB charter schools were less⁶⁸ and simpler --questions relevant to funding, equipment, or qualified staff were easier to answer. Now, some charters resemble public schools, and some function almost like private schools --they are autonomous, anyone can start and run it independently from any supervision. However, since charter schools are considered public schools because are funded with public money, now advocates lobby politicians trying to get favorable laws and more public money. Thus, in the past years, charter school supporters have successfully worked with legislators in several states⁶⁹. Proponents want more charter schools, more money for them, and access to public school buildings, among other things.

With the competition and the political components in the mix, the actual opening of a charter school brings a new array of concerns or issues to the public school in the neighborhood. First, it is said that charter schools purposely “skim” better students away from public schools. Although studies have not confirm this problem, research shows that charter schools attract on average parents who are more invested in their children education. In Chicago, the main criticism to charter schools is that they “cater to kids who shine in state tests.”⁷⁰

Second, charter schools apply unfair or arbitrary policies for rejecting or dismissing students. KIPP schools have been known to use this practice. This makes it questionable the charter school status of public. Can these policies be challenged, or changed by teachers or parents? A public school has a PTA, a school site council, and some other organizations that provide voice and vote to parents and teachers on several issues. Moreover, a public school is inclusive in nature.

Third, unlike public schools, charter schools select students. It is true that these schools don’t discriminate because of ethnicity or class, but it is undeniable that these schools admit only those

parents who have self-evident investment in their children's education. Those students, whose parents don't show commitment to their education, are not accepted or dismissed late on. Public school doesn't do it for it is discriminatory. They accept anyone because it is public and right.

Fourth, when comparing charter and public schools, the arguments show incongruence and falsehoods. Charter schools are praised for their flexibility and autonomy while public schools are denied these conditions. On one hand charter schools are championed by their supporters arguing that these schools are beacons of creativity, a heaven for students trapped in failing public schools. Although this is not true for all charter schools, this is a major selling point. On the other hand, public schools are criticized by their rigidity and lack of ingenuity. If it is true that these are qualities that we all would want in a school, why not giving public schools the same freedom?

Fifth, charter schools funding is fuzzy, and mismanagement is difficult to detect⁷¹. Since NCLB determined that the federal government would give financial support to charter schools, funding has been a contended issue. Charter schools receive money per student, some grants, and other support. The rules and specifics about these funds are not clear, and in many occasions charter school administrators have been accused of fraud⁷². On top of that charter schools receive generous donations from billionaires and supporters, but that money is not counted as operational money. Therefore, charter schools give the false appearance that their running a school at a lower cost than it is in reality.

Sixth, charter schools have increased inequalities and segregation. In California, researchers found that "its choice programs aimed at equalizing actually increased the disparities. Even in this situation, parents with the most resources took the most advantage of the situation for their children."⁷³ This is a dangerous element in our society. This can create two levels of education, one for elites and one for the rest. The parents with money will eventually try to ensure that their children go to a school with similar students and socio-economic status.

Seventh, charter schools would hinder the process of integration in our societies. Traditionally, schools have been the center of the communities, a place where every neighbor would have to come and meet each other, and where common good is balanced with personal interests. With charter schools, schools would stop being the center of the community and promoter of common purposes and ideas. Right now, in New York and Florida parents groups have proposed charter schools with religious tones.

Eight, charter schools do not address the concerns of parents any better than public schools. Public schools provide the standard of education that a community establish as desirable. Whatever details or special services can be address through the public system more efficiently than with the use of charter schools. The public nature of the schools gives voice and vote to everyone in the community which is important for their solution. Charter schools cannot do it for they have rigid structure that does not allow for external input as well as the public schools.

Ninth, charter schools spend funds on marketing a product. The idea of competition for the consumers has added an expense on selling, advertising, and promoting themselves. These expenses are necessary to attract pupils, which is something that public schools don't do. Rather

than spending money on books and salaries for teachers, managers of charter schools do it on commercials and public relations.

Tenth, charter schools could mean the end of a neighborhood school. With the current competition and penalties imposed by NCLB, charter schools are becoming a substitute for public schools. This is not a small matter and deserves a most serious study. Since this is an ongoing process of destruction, doing nothing equates with agreeing with the destruction of public schools. We have to realize this outcome will bring irreversible consequences.

Since NCLB supports economically and politically charter schools, both the federal and the state governments (with few exceptions) encourage their proliferation all over the United States, no one has seriously questioned their validity as a component of a plan to solve the problems of public education. With the most recent report indicating that only 17 % of students in charter schools do better and 37% doing significantly below than public school students why is Arne Duncan supporting rather than getting rid of them? This complacent or complicit attitude from board members, administrators, teachers and teachers' associations ought to change for the good of education.

Finally, it is important is to determine the mission and goals of public education. In the process we have to evaluate private, public and charter schools on their merits and their context. We must remind ourselves, the citizens, that it is the public education stakeholders' duty to provide help and support to the most troubled communities with quality public schools as well as with other social and economic services. Schools are institutions that provide an important but specific service; they are not the solution to economic or social problems. Clearing this misconception will help educators and public to deal with the issue of improving education.

¹ The NEA and Charter Schools: Gift Horse Or Trojan Horse. *By Jeanne Allen. May 1, 1996*
http://www.edreform.com/Resources/Editorials/?The_NEA_and_Charter_Schools_Gift_Horse_Or_Trojan_Horse&year=1996

² The Charter Connection [Online] // The Center for Education Reform. - March 31, 2009. - www.edreform.com.

³ What is a Charter School [Online] // Public School Review. - Public School Review LLC. - March 29, 2009.

⁴ When analyzing charter school academic performance relative to resources and student characteristics, the authors find little difference in academic performance between highly independent March 2007 | Schools, Resources, and Efficiency | 5 charters and regular public schools http://irepp.stanford.edu/documents/GDF/SUMMARIES/Perez_Parrish.pdf

⁵ At this website there is a collection of news on charter schools' corruption.
<http://serflo1.com/charter%20schools%20corruption.html>

⁶ California's decade-old experiment with charter schools is entering a new stage, as lawmakers angered by a series of revelations about flawed schools are calling for tighter restrictions of the publicly funded schools. Since the state's first charter school was approved in 1993, the system has expanded to include 130,000 students in 360 schools across the state. Mixed with that batch, however, is a list of more than 50 charters that failed, including many that made headlines because they acted in ways that were questionable, if not illegal.
<http://www.berkeleydailyplanet.com/issue/2002-06-24/article/12912?headline=Legislature-reacts-to-charter-school-problems>

⁷ A Closer Look at Charter Schools Using Hierarchical Linear Modeling [Online] // National Center for Education Statistics. - April 1, 2009. - <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pubs/studies/2006460.asp>.

⁸ Operational Schools By Year Opened [Online] // The Center for Educational Research. - March 31, 2009. - http://www.edreform.com/charter_directory/data1.cfm?CFID=3853032&CFTOKEN=44663510.

⁹ Operators of California's biggest charter school system pocketed much of the \$139 million the state gave them, spending a fortune on fat salaries for family members, side businesses and overpriced textbooks, according to a state audit issued Thursday. http://lizditz.typepad.com/i_speak_of_dreams/2005/04/waste_fraud_and.html

¹⁰ The California Charter Schools Association [reports today](#) that California leads the nation in the number of new charter school openings — 89 brand new schools, for a total of 686 statewide.

Oakland came in second only to Los Angeles in the number of new schools. Six new public, independently run charters opened in the city this fall. <http://www.ibabuzz.com/education/2007/10/31/oaklands-charter-school-boom-continues/>

¹¹ The Oakland school board has sued State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell, saying he violated state law and financial common sense when he gave city charter schools \$450,000 out of the district's bank account. <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/03/16/MN0F16G9PL.DTL>

¹² This survey of charter school educators was conducted during the 1999-2000 school year. Fully 86 percent of all known charter schools participated, yielding a sample of 870 schools, along with 2,847 participating teachers. http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2003/04/08_charter.shtml

¹³ Proposition 13 was a political earthquake whose jolt was felt not just in Sacramento but all across the nation, including Washington, D.C. Jarvis's initiative to cut California's notoriously high property taxes by 30 percent and then cap the rate of increase in the future was the prelude to the Reagan income tax cuts in 1981. It also incited a nationwide tax revolt at the state and local levels. Within five years of Proposition 13's passage, nearly half the states strapped a similar straitjacket on politicians' tax-raising capabilities. Almost all of those tax limitation measures remain the law of the land today. http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=5682

¹⁴ The Political Mind. George Lakoff. Penguin Books.

¹⁵ Edupreneurs by Carrie Lips. <http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa386.pdf>

¹⁶ The whopping fine fell on All Children Matter, a Michigan-based organization that the commission said illegally funneled \$870,000 in campaign contributions through its Virginia political-action committee to its PAC in Ohio in 2006. David Brennan of Akron, Ohio's biggest charter-school operator, has donated \$200,000 to the group. http://dispatch.com/live/content/local_news/stories/2008/04/04/PAC_Money.ART_ART_04-04-08_A1_579R1JU.html?sid=101

¹⁷ NEA's position on charter schools is necessarily general. State laws and regulations vary widely, and NEA state affiliates have positions that are appropriate to the situation in their states. <https://hems.nea.org/charter/>

¹⁸ The last time charter schools were on the ballot, billionaire Paul Allen bankrolled a campaign that topped \$3 million. This year, Microsoft co-founder and Chairman Bill Gates is donating significant dollars. Gates yesterday announced a \$300,000 personal contribution to the campaign to approve Referendum 55, which seeks to uphold the charter-school law passed by the Legislature last spring.

http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2002031753_charter10m.html

¹⁹ AFT Attack on Charter Schools Meets Swift Response from Reformers. The Heartland Institute. 10/01/04. http://www.heartland.org/publications/school%20reform/article/15698/AFT_Attack_on_Charter_Schools_Meets_Swift_Response_from_Reformers.html

²⁰ Therefore, we call for a national study that incorporates longitudinal student-level data along with information on instructional and educational designs of schools to examine the impact charter schools have under differing charter laws, environments, and instructional and educational designs. Such a study would shed light on effective policies and practices for using charter schools as a mechanism for school improvement. http://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/2006/RAND_OP157.pdf

²¹ http://www.uscharterschools.org/pub/uscs_docs/fs/index.htm

²² NEA does not even promote a useful section on its website titled "setting the record straight." It contains a long list of pro-public school websites that contains a broad range of education issues that its members could access easily. How many NEA members know about it? <http://sites.nea.org/topics/defend.html>

²³ After adjusting for student characteristics, charter school mean scores in reading and mathematics were

lower, on average, than those for public noncharter schools. The size of these differences was smaller in reading than in mathematics. <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/studies/2006460.pdf>

²⁴ Occasional Paper No. 47 National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education Teachers College, Columbia University POTENTIAL OF FOR-PROFIT SCHOOLS FOR EDUCATIONAL REFORM* Henry M. Levin June 2002

²⁵ Texas has 206 charter schools, and 93 of them are in hot water for bilking the state out of millions of dollars by over counting their enrollment. At \$5,400 a pop, a few imaginary students here and few not over there, and before you know it, you've enough for a new Suburban with longhorns on the front.

<http://schoolsmatter.blogspot.com/2008/04/charter-schools-mismanagement-fraud.html>

²⁶ The *Philadelphia Inquirer* announced that the charter was deeply mired in scandal. The paper reported federal and school district allegations of fiscal mismanagement, nepotism, and conflicts of interest against the school's top management. It also revealed that the CEO and his handpicked successor, a former policeman with only a high school diploma, were being paid more than most area superintendents. The school's chief financial officer was said to be awaiting trial on charges of conspiracy and altering records.

<http://www.newfoundations.com/Clabaugh/CuttingEdge/Charters.html>

²⁷ C. Steven Cox ran what was the state's largest charter school network, enrolling thousands of students at dozens of campuses, but investigators say he routinely looted millions from the public schools to enrich his friends and family, leading to the schools' collapse last summer, according to a state audit.

http://www.sacunion.com/pages/state_capitol/articles/4020/

²⁸ RA actions made it clear that delegates have serious misgivings about misuse of charter schools: they passed some NBIs dealing with charter schools and defeated others. Some state affiliates are organizing charter school employees; others (including Ohio) have rejected that idea; but the debate makes it clear that the term "charter school" has such various meanings in different states that it is difficult to use the same term to describe them all.

<http://neoea.blogspot.com/>

²⁹ "School choice" is the public code word for the political movement to privatize public education in the U.S., but the movement's real agenda is made clear by its ideological vanguard. [The Cato Institute](#), a Washington-based libertarian think tank, explicitly advocates privatization in its school choice policy statement.

³⁰ FY2009 Funding for Federal Public Charter School Programs <http://www.publiccharters.org/node/522>

³¹ This study from 2006 states that there has been a lack of relevant information due to the low level of the discourse. http://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/2006/RAND_OP157.pdf

³² Why do conservatives appear to be so much better at framing? Because they've put billions of dollars into it. Over the last 30 years their think tanks have made a heavy investment in ideas and in language. In 1970, [Supreme Court Justice] Lewis Powell wrote a fateful memo to the National Chamber of Commerce saying that all of our best students are becoming anti-business because of the Vietnam War, and that we needed to do something about it. Powell's agenda included getting wealthy conservatives to set up professorships, setting up institutes on and off campus where intellectuals would write books from a conservative business perspective, and setting up think tanks. He outlined the whole thing in 1970. They set up the Heritage Foundation in 1973, and the Manhattan Institute after that. [There are many others, including the American Enterprise Institute and the Hoover Institute at Stanford, which date from the 1940s.] And now, as the *New York Times Magazine* quoted Paul Weyrich, who started the Heritage Foundation, they have 1,500 conservative radio talk show hosts. They have a huge, very good operation, and they understand their own moral system. They understand what unites conservatives, and they understand how to talk about it, and they are constantly updating their research on how best to express their ideas. George Lakoff. <http://www.uoregon.edu/~lporras/Framing%20the%20issues%20ACKOFF.doc>

³³ The new report attracted immediate criticism from groups representing charter schools. Dan Gerstein, a spokesman for the Charter School Leadership Council, an umbrella group, said it "sheds no light on the actual performance of charter schools or the value they add to student learning" because it did not include measurements of the evolution of student achievement over several years at charters. "In this respect it probably clouds the picture rather than clarifies it," Mr. Gerstein said.

³⁴ The title of the piece is *The Union War on Charter Schools* and subtitled *As New York shows, they want to kill any education choice*. http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123985052084823887.html?mod=googlenews_wsj

³⁵ After AFT researchers published in the NYT a piece concluding that charter schools were doing poorly, conservative charter supporters reacted swiftly and with condemnation—of the newspaper and of the study. The usual medium of protest, the letter to the editor, was ignored. Before Tuesday gave way to Wednesday, Andrew Rotherham, who writes the Weblog (www.eduwonk.com) for the Progressive Policy Institute (a centrist Democratic think tank), had penned “Live by the Sword, Die by the *Times*.” On Wednesday, the *Wall Street Journal* carried an op-ed from William Howell, Paul Peterson, and Martin West of Harvard, “Dog Eats AFT Homework.”¹⁰⁸ The tone of ridicule that op-ed struck appeared in other places. For instance, the editors of the *Chicago Tribune* called the findings “as new as a lava lamp, as revelatory as an old sock and as significant as a belch.” Also on Wednesday, a second *Times* article was largely devoted to a defense of charter schools by Secretary of Education, Rod Paige. <http://epicpolicy.org/files/EPSSL-0505-113-EPRU.pdf>

³⁶ The Walton Family Foundation has given in excess of \$700 million to private scholarships, and the Charter school movement. The Walton’s even go the furthest as the primary funder of the total privatization of public education through voucher education. <http://www.thelittleeducationreport.com/Obamaandbill.html>

³⁷ In the last decade, conservative philanthropists have given hundreds of millions of dollars to establish their own agendas. The most recent announcement, January’s grant of a paltry \$23 million by Broad, was typical of this modern philanthropy. Instead of truly aiding public education, Broad chose to subsidize several privately operated charter school conglomerates in the Los Angeles area. Principal beneficiaries of his largess were the highly-regimented KIPP schools and the misnamed *Aspire Public Schools*. The only thing public about either system is that they are supported by California taxpayers. Broad’s grant is but a fraction of the amount given to these schools by the state. <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/web/la-oe-w-shaffer12feb12,0,3463267.story>

³⁸ The WFF provides more than \$1 million to each of the following so-called school reform/choice groups: the American Education Reform Council, the Center for Education Reform, Children’s Scholarship Fund, Colorado League of Charter Schools, and the Florida School Choice Fund. The Children’s Educational Opportunity Foundation of America (also known as Children’s First America) received \$10.3 million in 2003 and \$8.3 million in 2002. <http://www.zcommunications.org/zmag/viewArticle/13615>

³⁹ For the first time in history, tax money originally destined to public schools has been taken away and awarded to private corporations. Each year, an average of 200, 000, 000 have been allocated to support charter schools. <http://www.ed.gov/programs/charter/funding.html>

⁴⁰ The Gap co-founder is bringing that expertise to bear as chairman of the KIPP Foundation, a national charter school network based in San Francisco. Under Fisher’s leadership -- and with his money, almost \$40 million to date from Fisher and his wife, Doris -- Knowledge Is Power Program has grown from two to 46 schools nationally since the Fishers became involved in 2000. Five of those charter schools are in the Bay Area: two in San Francisco and one each in Oakland, San Lorenzo and San Jose.

⁴¹ Fewer than half the 5th graders who entered three new middle schools in fall 2003 are still enrolled this academic year, when they would generally be finishing 8th grade, according to a KIPP analysis. At one of the schools, in Oakland, California, only about a quarter of the students from that 5th grade class have remained. National attrition data on the San Francisco-based network of 52 mostly charter middle schools are unavailable. http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=EJ767462&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=EJ767462

⁴² What Do We Know About the Outcomes of KIPP Schools? [Online] // The Great Lakes Center for Education Research & Practice. - November 2008. - April 1, 2009. http://209.85.173.132/search?q=cache:wPVvt-X1LIQJ:www.greatlakescenter.org/docs/Policy_Briefs/Henig_Kipp.pdf+KIPP+STUDIES+FAIL&cd=7&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us.

⁴³ Independent charters and regular public schools perform at similar academic levels as measured by the English language arts assessment of the California Standards Test (CST) once adjusted for student background characteristics, but lower on the math CST. http://irepp.stanford.edu/documents/GDF/SUMMARIES/Perez_Parrish.pdf

⁴⁴ Charter schools bring with themselves a long list of problems: educational, financial, social, and political <http://www.edweek.org/rc/issues/charter-schools/>

⁴⁵ The study, released last month, under the title Failed Promises: Assessing Charter School Performance, reveals that black students enrolled in the Twin Cities' charter schools perform at much lower levels than black students in the cities' traditional public schools. This is attributed, in part at least, to the fact that urban charter schools tend to have disproportionately high rates of minority enrollment. The study goes on to state that charter schools are "deepening the problems of black students." <http://www.rrstar.com/opinions/columnists/x1102489843/Study-Charter-schools-not-the-answer>

⁴⁶ The WFF provides more than \$1 million to each of the following so-called school reform/choice groups: the [American Education Reform Council](#), the [Center for Education Reform](#), [Children's Scholarship Fund](#), [Colorado League of Charter Schools](#), and the [Florida School Choice Fund](#). The [Children's Educational Opportunity Foundation of America](#) (also known as Children's First America) received \$10.3 million in 2003 and \$8.3 in 2002. <http://mediatransparency.org/story.php?storyID=88>

⁴⁷ Arts and education philanthropist Eli Broad today will announce his largest investment to date in Los Angeles charter schools, \$23.3 million to jump-start at least 17 new campuses run by two major charter-school organizations. <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/jan/17/local/me-broad17>

⁴⁸ We find support for the conclusion that, in most locations, charter schools do not do well in their first year of operation but subsequently improve (though sometimes this improvement is sufficient only to produce a result that is somewhat less negative than in the first year of operation). Finally, we find that charter schools in most locales have marginally greater variation in performance than TPSs, as measured by the achievement-impact estimate for each school. <http://schoolsmatter.blogspot.com/2009/05/most-recent-research-on-charter-school.html>

⁴⁹ A new study commissioned by Education International reveals that a growing trend towards privatization of public education is often camouflaged by the language of "educational reform," or introduced stealthily as "modernization."

<http://www.montesquieu-instituut.nl/9353000/1/j9vvhfxcd6p0lcl/vhvvay896xtl?ctx=vhr1i6t9ekvo>

⁵⁰ Ray Budde and the Origins of the 'Charter Concept' By Ted Kolderie July 1, 2005. The Center for Education Reform. <http://www.edreform.com/index.cfm?fuseAction=document&documentID=2093>

⁵¹ Current Issues in Educational Policy and the Law. Kevin Grant Welner, Wendy C. Chi . 2008 .University of Boulder Colorado.. Information Age Publishing .Inc. Charlotte North Carolina.(p.136)

⁵² **Charter Schools.** Gerald Bracey. **Center for Education Research, Analysis, and Innovation** .School of Education University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee .October 12, 2000. <http://eps1.asu.edu/epru/documents/cera1-00-26.htm>

⁵³ The Charter School Idea Turns 20. A History of Evolution and Role Reversals. Education Week. Richard D. Kahlenberg . http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2008/03/26/29kahlenberg_ep.h27.html

⁵⁴ From Where We Stand, by Albert Shanker. <http://source.nysut.org/weblink7/DocView.aspx?id=966>

⁵⁵ Where We Stand. Albert Shanker. <http://source.nysut.org/weblink7/DocView.aspx?id=967>

⁵⁶ Our state evaluations, however, revealed that attrition rates were persistently around or above 20 percent, which appears higher than might be expected. More alarmingly, for relatively new teachers, the attrition rate was close to 40 percent annually, markedly distant from any "functional" rate. In fact, high attrition rates are likely to be one of the most critical obstacles charter schools face. High attrition forces schools to regularly provide pre- and in-service training for new hires and makes it harder for them to build a positive and stable school climate. In addition, high attrition rates are likely to undermine the legitimacy of the schools in the eyes of consumers—namely, parents. <http://epicpolicy.org/files/EP1-0705-234-EPRU.pdf>

⁵⁷ BEYOND THE RHETORIC OF CHARTER SCHOOL REFORM: A Study of Ten California School Districts <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/docs/charter.pdf>

⁵⁸ <http://dpi.wi.gov/lbstat/defini.html>

⁵⁹ The results for EMO operated schools are mixed. Large-EMOs do not appear to under- or over-enroll low-income and minority students whereas small-EMO operated charter schools enroll significantly lower percentages of minority students. <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v12n26/>

⁶⁰ The Department of Education's national assessment of educational progress sampled the reading and math scores of 6,000 fourth graders at 167 charter schools and found only 25 percent of the charter school students were proficient in both reading and math compared to 30 percent of public school students who were proficient in reading and 32 percent in math. http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/education/july-dec04/charter_8-18.html

⁶¹ We found that charter schools are both the chosen and the chooser. Charter schools have more control than most other public schools in California over who is recruited and who can attend. We learned that charter schools make use of various strategies for choosing parents and students – e.g. targeted recruitment and requirements such as parent or student contracts that dictate what families must give to the school. <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/docs/charter.pdf>

⁶² **Schools**. Gerald Bracey. **Center for Education Research, Analysis, and Innovation**. School of Education University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. October 12, 2000. <http://eps1.asu.edu/epru/documents/cerai-00-26.htm>

⁶³ Charters claim that their schools score far better than traditional public schools serving similar students. That's not true. The students at Locke or any of the other at-risk high schools in LAUSD are not "similar students" when compared to those who have left the public schools and moved to the charters. What Broad, Green Dot and the others do not reveal is the scores of those charter students when they were in regular public schools. It's our belief that those students were already outscoring their fellow students in the traditional schools before they moved into charters. Low-scoring students do not enroll in Broad's charters. His charters have skimmed off the education-oriented kids who otherwise would be raising test scores for traditional public schools. <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/web/la-oew-shaffer12feb12,0,3463267.story>

⁶⁴ As part of the 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading and mathematics assessment, charter schools were sampled as a separate group. By fall of 2003, the U. S. Department of Education had posted the regular NAEP assessment results, but had not moved to report the charter school data. By summer, 2004, no analysis was yet forthcoming. Researchers at the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) located the raw data on the NAEP site and analyzed them. Overall, the public schools outperformed the charters. Children eligible for free and reduced price lunches in public schools scored higher, as did children in public schools in central cities. When analyzed by ethnicity, there were no differences between charter and public schools, but the achievement gap in charters was as large as in regular public schools. <http://epicpolicy.org/files/EPSL-0505-113-EPRU.pdf>

⁶⁵ City-wide Systems of Charter Schools: Proceed With Caution Executive Summary <http://74.125.155.132/search?q=cache:T6lZBCYhhecJ:eps1.asu.edu/epru/documents/EPSL-0403-115-EPRU.doc+Gerald+Bracey+the+promises+of+charter+schools+have+not+yet+been+met&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us>

⁶⁶ Brandon, Amy. and Weiher, Gregory. "The Impact of Competition: Charter Schools and Public Schools in Texas" *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Palmer House Hotel, Chicago, IL, Apr 12, 2007* <Not Available>. 2009-04-05 http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p198562_index.html

⁶⁷ Charter Schools in Eight States Effects on Achievement, Attainment, Integration, and Competition Ron Zimmer, Brian Gill, Kevin Booker, Stephane Lavertu, Tim R. Sass, John Witte Published 2009 by the RAND Corporation http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG869.pdf (p84)

⁶⁸ An additional 421 charter schools opened in 1999, bringing the total to 1,484 charter schools in operation in 31 states and the District of Columbia as of September 1999. Including multiple branches of a school operating under the same charter, the total number of charter school sites operating was 1,605 as of September 1999. <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/charter4thyear/es.html>

⁶⁹ Since the Center began its flagship effort in 1996 to evaluate each state's charter law to guide policymakers in their deliberations, we have identified the changing and most important components of charter laws, and the ones most likely to yield the intended result of those laws—healthy, vibrant public school choices for children. http://www.edreform.com/_upload/ranking_chart.pdf

⁷⁰ Chicago Charter Schools Face Criticism. http://chicagoist.com/2008/12/18/chicago_charter_schools_face_criticism.php

⁷¹ How much is profit is somewhat unclear, since charter schools typically refuse to divulge details of their management contracts. A new state law requires that some details be made public through audits but the state's position has been that the information is a private matter, even though the money - about \$450 million in total state aid this year - comes from the public. <http://schoolsmatter.blogspot.com/2006/07/ohio-charter-school-corruption.html>

⁷² According to evidence presented at the trial in Minneapolis, the Pierces diverted money from the now-defunct Right Step Academy, using it for Caribbean cruises, clothes, and furniture. The Pierces, both 46, also used academy funds to buy charter schools in North Carolina and Arizona.

<http://mediatransparency.org/aroundthewebblurb.php?aroundTheWebBlurbID=310>

⁷³ <http://bctf.ca/publications/ResearchReports.aspx?id=5610>