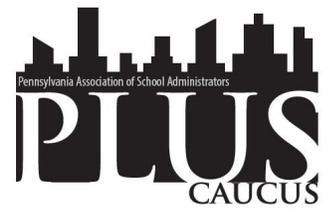




A CONVERSATION WITH CARING CYBER CHARTER SCHOOL PARENTS

BY STEPHEN RODRIGUEZ, CAUCUS PRESIDENT



I'd like to share a personal experience with you and point out a few lessons I learned.

About a week ago, I had an opportunity to speak with parents who have been sending their children to cyber charter school for many years. They are wonderful people who are family-oriented and great advocates for their children. They were former homeschoolers and highly engaged with their five children's education. These children are active in sports, the arts, get straight A's and take advanced courses. Any one of them could be used as a poster child for what is right and good about cyber charter school.

Yes, you read that correctly folks; you don't have to reread it.

I digress. The purpose of the conversation was that mom had concerns with the curriculum being taught to one child. She outlined some of those concerns and how the teacher was implementing the curriculum. It was a valid concern. I gave her the typical advice. Reach out to the teacher and share your concerns, reach out to the principal if that doesn't work. All educational environments that are healthy will seek out feedback and be responsive to your issues.

We quickly moved past that and into this mother's desire to run for school board. She wanted to devote some time to make things better for her younger children. She asked me how to do that, and when I informed her that cyber charter school boards are not elected but rather appointed, both mom and dad were aghast. She then asked about the public school in the municipality for which she lived (not in my district). When I told her that the two were completely unrelated and the public school has zero influence or accountability powers over their cyber charter school, again they were aghast!

Then, the questions came at a rapid pace. Our cyber charter school tells us they get less money than public schools and public schools lie all the time to protect unions; is that right? We thought that cyber charter school requirements were the same as a public school. What do you mean cyber charter schools hire private companies? How is it legal for them to make a profit off taxpayer dollars?

School choice: You are against school choice, aren't you? I thought all public educators were against school choice, right? What is Future Ready Index? What is school performance profile? What is the Fair Funding Formula? Why would a cyber charter school have less than 100% of teachers certified?

Taxpayer dollars pay for those radio commercials? Those billboards? Those Internet ads, T-shirts, school bags, and TV spots? Cyber charters can keep the money they don't use? They get pandemic relief money? That's not ok!

This wonderful couple walked away with a very different and better informed view of the complicated state of education. What are the chances they won't share this new-found knowledge with others? Slim.



Lessons Learned:

- ◆ Most parents, most citizens are far less informed than we realize.
- ◆ Many people are not informed by newspaper articles or school board meetings.
- ◆ Dialogue takes time; it's inefficient, but it is equally long-lasting and effective at informing parents and citizens.
- ◆ This conversation did not happen in my office or at a basketball game. It's also not the first time I've had such conversations with parents. As a devout Christian, people from totally different points of view from mine on education will engage me because of that commonality.
- ◆ We all have such commonalities. Use them!

CHARTERS DON'T PLAY BY THE SAME RULES

- Exempt from special education funding formula
- Exempt from teacher evaluation requirements
- Have fewer certified teachers
- Run by private boards of directors



CHARTER SCHOOLS PERFORM POORLY

Charter students perform worse than district students on state assessments. All 14 cyber charter schools are on the worst performing school list.

