

Donohue, Lucas

Good morning Chairs Chang-Diaz and Peisch, members of the Committee,

My name is Lucas Donohue, I am a 5th grade teacher in Watertown and a doctoral student in education leadership at Endicott College. For the better part of 5 years, I was a teacher at Mystic Valley Regional Charter School in Malden and Dorchester Collegiate Academy in Boston. I am here to tell you that children are not an experiment and their education should be our primary focus. We should keep the cap on Commonwealth charter schools and pass Senate bill 326 establishing a moratorium on new charter schools.

At Mystic Valley, children were treated as an experiment and there was an inherent conflict of interest in their education. Students were kept back based on academic pretexts when letting them continue would cause issues for the school. In general teachers were not consulted on the academic soundness of these decisions. This meant that students, like three that I had, were 14 years old in the sixth grade. They could drive to school in 8th grade. Have you ever been to a middle school with a student parking section? The students retained had one thing in common, all were Haitian, and many spoke Haitian Creole as a first language. Yet they were not given the language support they needed to succeed. As a result, students were retained until their parents took them out and brought them back to the public schools. This served the charter schools well. English Language Learners and students who had difficulty learning did not show up on the state tests, a convenience that should not be understated as the charter is renewed based on state test scores. The school had a conflict of interest and the educational needs of their students was secondary.

The teacher's charter teachers I worked with were dedicated, talented, and bright. Unfortunately, many of them, about 40% per year, left to pursue other interests. They were experimenting with teaching as a profession. Few had the professional training required in public schools. Teaching in the charters is difficult, made more so by the lack of training of teachers and the demanding conditions. Teachers often say that they could make far more money in other fields, like food service. Every year, often in the middle of the year teachers left en masse. I needed a scorecard updated constantly just to keep the names of my colleagues straight. This was detrimental to students who could not make connections with their teachers, and because too many students spent every year with a new teacher, most who had never done the job before.

My first year of teaching in a public school was very difficult. The bar was high and my experience in charters was not particularly helpful. However, through mentorship, collaboration,

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effective supervision, and meaningful professional development public schools provided me with the support to refine my teaching. They encouraged experimentation with my teaching style, and provided the conditions for my teaching to improve with care

The curriculum students are taught in charter schools is devoid of a depth of learning common in public schools. At one school students were taught using a system derived from behaviorist BF Skinner, called Direct Instruction. Students were taught through rote memorization and primers that would have been familiar to Daniel Webster and his compatriots. At another school teachers had no curriculum, so they made it up from thin air. This meant that teachers, with little or no experience were creating lessons with no guidance or professional input. In essence, the students were an experiment that failed to provide a rich learning experience for all students and has especially failed the neediest and most vulnerable.

Let's take a look at the quality of Massachusetts public schools. Using PISA scores, Forbes magazine projected that if Massachusetts was a country, its schools would rank 9th in the world. We would be tied with Japan in math, just behind Switzerland, and 4th in reading, tied with Hong Kong and just behind Finland. Massachusetts public schools provides some of the best education in the world. What problem are we trying to solve with charters and is it really working?

I have become increasingly frustrated by the promotion of a system that I believe is inherently unjust. My critique is structural, whole groups of students are disadvantaged through the education policies and practices employed with little guidance or oversight. It has been promoted as a way to increase the educational opportunity for the neediest students. My experience tells of an experiment that benefits some while isolating and disenfranchising others. As a public school teacher I am not suggesting that we close all charter schools, but we certainly do not need any more and those that exist need close analysis to determine if they are effective.

At the same time, I am suggesting that we unleash the power of our public schools with more resources and flexibility. The public school teachers I have met are dedicated, professional, hardworking, and believe in the power of education. They have made education both their career and their profession. They are passionate about caring for students by attending to their academic, social, and emotional well-being. The students of the Commonwealth deserve quality, consistency, and professionalism. They do not need to be the results of an experiment. Let's provide the resources so

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that educators in all of our public schools can do what they have demonstrated they are best at; providing a rich, meaningful, and high quality education to all students in the Commonwealth.