

My name is Craig Kelley. I am a City Councilor in Cambridge, Massachusetts, a proud public school parent and a supporter of S326, the Moratorium on Charter Schools, and an opponent of any attempts to eliminate or raise the current caps on charter schools, including the Governor's bill HD4191 and H444/S327.

Charter Schools were designed to be places where innovation in education could be tried and, if the results were promising, the innovations could be extended into regular school districts. That ideal has not materialized.

For a stats project while at Harvard Kennedy School last year, I reviewed DESE enrollment numbers for the Community Charter School of Cambridge, Prospect Hill Academy (PHA), Cambridge Rindge and Latin School (CRLS) and the state for cohorts as they went from 9th to 12th grade. The results were very disturbing to anyone who believes that effective public education is a core element of the American Dream. CCSC sheds a staggering 59% of its students between 9th and 12th grades. Prospect Hill Academy sheds a less staggering, but still bothersome, 22% of its students and Cambridge Rindge and Latin School only 10% while the state average is 15%.

These statistics reflect demonstrate that Charter Schools winnow out their more challenging students in a variety of ways, sending them back to the donating district. In the words of one CCSC staff member, "We don't expel students, but we make them understand this is not the school for them."

Ladies and Gentlemen, that discrimination is not public education. True public schools take all comers. My kids, your kids, everyone's kids. Kids with severe difficulties and kids who are a dream to teach. They don't pre-select with targeted advertising and they don't help students "understand" that they don't belong there. Public schools have plenty of warts, but, warts and all, they reflect the soul of modern America and the hopes of future America. As long as Charters can pick and choose who actually attends them, as long as Charter Schools continue to represent a narrowly selected band of students, they have little to teach any of us about how to educate the American public.

It would be ironic if, here in Boston, the birthplace of public schools in America, you were to take action that helped end public schools as we know them. Please support S326, the Moratorium on Charter Schools, and oppose all attempts to eliminate or raise the current caps on charter schools. Public education is too important to throw away so casually.