

**Testimony Concerning Senate Bill S.326
A Moratorium on Commonwealth Charter Schools.
Joint Committee on Education. October 13, 2015**

I'm here today in an effort to convince you to sign on as a sponsor of, and to advance out of committee, bill S.326, calling for an investigation of, and a moratorium on, Commonwealth Charter Schools in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

I'm constantly hearing the phrase, "Boston has the highest performing charter school sector in the country". If you only look at test scores that appears to be true, but if you dig deeper and look at how the test scores are obtained, you'll see something not very pleasant, something that is horribly wrong. The charter high schools in Boston push out an average of 13.5% of a cohort a year. That works out to 40.5% every three years, and guess what? As a result - their test scores and grads to college stats soar.

A really interesting consequence of this attrition is that if you look at the number of students that entered high school as freshman in Boston Public Schools - that end up actually graduating and going on to college, and compare that to an aggregate of the six Commonwealth Charter high schools in Boston, BPS beats the charters, 51% to 46%. In BPS, 51% percent make it through high school and go on to college - 46% make it through the Boston charter high schools and go on to college. Even if you take out the three BPS exam schools the percentages are almost identical. BPS 44%, charter schools 46%.

I'd like to remind you that Boston is performing in the bottom 10% of school districts in Massachusetts. BPS also has a 24% higher ELL population then the Boston charter schools, yet somehow BPS is beating the "Highest Performing Charter School Sector in the Country" in the percentage of students that make it through high school and go on to college, and that's the goal, right, to become college and career ready?

Something is seriously wrong here.

The attrition rates I started out talking about - don't show up on the DESE web site. That's because DESE only counts the children that leave over the summer. The exact statement on their web site is:

This report provides the percentage of attrition by grade from the end of one school year to the beginning of the next for students enrolled in public schools, including charter schools, in the state. The information is as of October 1 of the school year selected.

The fact that there is a huge attrition discrepancy between tracking a cohort through year to year - and what the DESE web site states, is a good indicator that the students are not leaving over the summer to go off to an exam school , but that students are leaving during the school year, when their leaving is not being reported by DESE.

A perfect example is Brooke Charter School in Mattapan, where Governor Baker announced his "Lift the Cap" bill last week. A Boston Globe editorial that also came out last week, about Brooke, opened by saying

"One of the best schools in this city - and perhaps the whole state - sits on the edge of Mattapan"

and then went in to say,

“Others suggest that charter schools get good results because they kick out the bad apples. But Brooke has one of the lowest attrition rates in the city.”

After reading this I took a look at the attrition at Brook. It turns out that the class that graduated 8th grade in 2015 started out in 5th grade with 47 students, and ended up with only 24 students remaining to enter 8th grade. That's an attrition rate of 49%. One half of the class disappeared, and they did not go off to exam school - because that attrition, students leaving over the summer, would have shown up in the DESE attrition statistics.

One way the charter schools get the students that they don't want to keep, to leave, is by suspending them, over and over, until the students and parents decide they simply can't go on like this. A good example of this practice is Roxbury Preparatory charter school, a school our new US Secretary of Education, John King, co-founded. Roxbury Prep isn't the worst in suspending students in the Boston charter sector - but John King is the one that set the standard on how to achieve what, at first glance, appears to be a great school.

The average suspension rate for students in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts over the last twelve years is 5.9%. John King's Roxbury Prep's suspension rate average over the last twelve years is not twice that, it's not even five times that, it's nearly ten times that, at 54.2%.

The average attrition rate at Roxbury Prep, for nine cohorts, starting with the cohort that graduated in 2006 and ending with the cohort that graduated in 2014, is perfectly on track with the Boston charter high school's yearly attrition average of 13.5% - and comes in at 13.3% - per year.

My family made the choice to send my daughter to a BPS school. I'm not sure any of what's going on with charter schools in Massachusetts would have come onto my radar if it weren't directly effecting my daughter and her schools funding.

Boston Public Schools is now sending \$122 million a year to charter schools. That averages out to \$953,000 for each and every one of the 128 BPS schools. The loss of 6 to 12 children from daughters small school to charter schools each year results in a loss of funding of around \$132,000 for BPS. The students we never get, that ones that went to charter schools in the first place, probably adds up to about twice that. This impacts our school to the degree that, in order to keep instructors in the classroom, all parts of our schools budget that can be slashed, have been. It's to the point where our teachers have posted on Donors Choose – asking for pencils.

I'm here today to ask you to stop what's happening here. I'm here today to ask you to let any bill that proposes to lift the cap on the number of charter schools in Massachusetts - die on the vine. I'm asking you to sponsor and advance bill S.326, calling for an investigation of, and a moratorium on, Commonwealth Charter Schools in Massachusetts.

I'm hoping that what's going on here can be exposed, and that the people that are responsible for this fraud will be punished.

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