

## **Are Charter Schools the Solution or Do We Need a Community-based Movement to Transform Urban Public Schools?**

My name is Mary Jo Hetzel, I live in Jamaica Plain, and am here to **support S326, the Moratorium on Charter Schools, and oppose raising the current caps on charter schools, including the Governor's bill HD4191 and H444/S327.**

As a life-long educator and active member of a wide variety of activist organizations over the years, I have been a critic of public urban education and have sought to transform it for the better. The question we're faced with today is whether a rapid expansion of charter schools is the solution to our problems, or will that make matters much worse. The answer to this question is based, in part, on what our vision of good education is, and upon what principles education should be based. The following questions may help us to find our way forward:

**\* Are charter schools equitable? Do they accept, serve, and retain all students equally?**

No, charter schools accept far fewer English Language students, students with special needs and those whose behavior is more difficult to deal with than do the public schools, and those who are accepted are much more likely to be pushed out, counseled out, suspended or expelled in order to make the charter school appear more successful on mandated state exams.

**\* Are charter schools democratic and accountable to those they serve and to the larger community?**

No, charter schools are not governed by a local school board in any way accountable to those they serve, nor are they required to have school site councils or parent councils, nor do they regularly and transparently provide accurate data for public scrutiny. Oversight of charter schools has proven to be nearly impossible due to lack of capacity at the state board of education level. Students, parents and local community have no significant voice in charter school policy or practice, and they are generally expected to conform to strict contractual regimens established by charter school administration.

**\* Do charter schools offer higher quality education of a holistic, creative and innovative nature that is widely shared with the existing public school system as expected as part of their charter status?**

No, there is little evidence of charter schools offering a more holistic, creative curriculum, or advancing major improvements in teaching quality, or in sharing any new breakthroughs with the existing public school system. This is due to charter school emphasis on drilling for state exams, and in their desire to outscore their perceived public school competitors. Charter schools tend to follow a business model of education rather than a more student or community-centered model, in which success is achieving high scores on state exams rather than cultivating student gifts to meet individual and community needs. Teachers, themselves, are often exploited, and their calling disrespected in forced compliance to scripted exam preparation.

**\* Do charter schools enhance or deplete the resources available to the existing public schools?**

Charter schools severely deplete the resources available to the existing public schools since the latter are not adequately reimbursed for the loss of funds as students leave, while costs do not decrease. Charter schools receive a disproportionate share of public funding, while serving those students with the least challenging needs. Charter schools regularly dump

students that they don't wish to serve back into the existing public school system, a system that is now starved for resources.

- \* **Do charter schools have an overall record of fiscal integrity and sound financial responsibility?** No, the history of charter schools is one of immense corruption, conflicts of interest, and misuse of public funds for private gain, in part as a result of lack of state monitoring capacity. Key motivations for the establishment of charter schools is to expand the business of education and reap the profitable rewards, whether in the form of private management organizations, high salaries awarded key administrators, perks for charter school board members, lucrative real estate deals involving school buildings, consultant contracts, school supply contracts of various kinds, and ultimately the establishment of for-profit corporate charter school chains that take over entire urban districts.
  
- \* **Finally, do charter schools help bring us together as a people in working toward the good of the whole, or do they exacerbate the competitive struggle for survival, the desire for private advantage and private gain over the common public good?** The charter school movement is a key part of the privatization agenda of the corporate business sector, which seeks to destroy all public services in favor of private, profitable enterprise. In this way, community dissatisfaction with aspects of any existing public system can be exploited for private advantage. After political officials and their business allies disinvest in public services, such as urban public education, which then inevitably fail, it is not surprising that desperate communities are naturally attracted to any alternatives that seem to offer something better. Yet, the real motivation of business-oriented charter schools is to financially exploit urban communities in the name of saving them, and fleece the taxpayer in the process.

The real work remains undone, that of re-envisioning and transforming urban public schools in ways that actually meet the needs of those they serve. The only way this can be done is by the community coming together to envision the kinds of education we want and need and building a powerful movement to bring that into being. Neither the urban public schools as they now exist, nor charter schools can meet our needs as a people. It is up to us to determine what we truly need and want and begin to positively create it. Please join us or let us join you. If you want to be part of this community-based process, contact Sandra McIntosh at [Sandra2.McIntosh@gmail.com](mailto:Sandra2.McIntosh@gmail.com) or Mary Jo Hetzel at [mjindigo66@gmail.com](mailto:mjindigo66@gmail.com), both of the Coalition for Equal, Quality Education.