



PRESS RELEASE

CHARTER LEADERS DISMISS AFT REPORT *Data deliberately skewed for AFT Gain*

(Washington, D.C. 7/16/02) Today the leaders of six leading national education organizations that support charter schools dismissed a new American Federation of Teachers report for tired and dated misrepresentation of charter school performance. Citing empirical research and state and federal data, these leaders highlighted the teacher union's bias against charter schools and how that bias colors all that they say and do in this area. This is particularly important in light of the release by the federal government of the names of 8,652 failing schools nationwide.

"An AFT study on charter schools has about as much credibility as a Philip Morris study on smoking," says Lawrence Patrick, president of the Black Alliance for Educational Options.

Other groups citing the report's inaccuracies, including the Center for Education Reform, the Education Leaders Council, the National Association of Charter School Authorizers, the Charter Friends National Network and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, noted that the AFT's claim to have started the charter school movement is not valid. While the late Albert Shanker made a speech urging the creation of new and more independent public schools, at no time did he or his union recommend the essence of the charter school concept, which includes freeing those schools from existing collective bargaining agreements and conventional school boards—in return for superior educational performance.

The AFT's current position on charter schools states that the union supports charter schools *only* when they are covered by union contracts and operated by school districts. That would rule out some 85 percent of charter schools presently operating in the United States. Moreover, the AFT feigns support for charters but often works against charter laws in states and communities.

There is also no valid nationwide comparison of charter school achievement to public school achievement on which the AFT bases its claims. Rather, there are some limited and often incomplete state and local results. The AFT's claims of a weak, ten-year charter school track record are groundless. For example, Florida is cited for a lack of achievement data; however, the facts are that up until this test cycle of the FCAT all schools had to have a minimum number of students in each grade and be tested for at least two school years for their results to be considered valid. The claim that there is a lack of data seems to ignore the other factors that play into state testing.

(more)

Dozens of studies and reports have been issued reviewing the effects of charter schools on students, teachers, communities, public education and achievement in general. All but five of those studies (over the past seven years) have found positive gains from charter schools. Among the gains that charter schools have achieved:

* Academic achievement: A California State University study determined that charter schools are more effective in improving academic achievement for low-income and at-risk students; in Chicago, charter schools performed better than traditional public schools on 80 percent of student performance measures; in Arizona, a statewide study of 60,000 youngsters found charter pupils outperforming traditional public school students.

* Balanced and in some cases over-representation of disadvantaged minority and special-needs students among charter school enrollments—the antithesis of "creaming." Overall, charter schools enrolled a larger percentage of students of color than all public schools in the states with open charter schools. In 1998-99 (most recent year data available) charter schools were more likely than all public schools to serve black students (almost 24 percent versus 17 percent) and Hispanic students (21 percent versus 18 percent).

* Academic accountability both through intensive review of school performance by their authorizers and through the parents who must annually renew their commitment to a school.

* Parent and teacher satisfaction has been widely reported in charter schools and surpasses that found on similar surveys of parents and teachers in traditional public schools.

The charter school movement today spans 38 states plus the District of Columbia, and is represented by nearly 2,400 schools and more than 1.3 million children, parents, teachers and board members. Approximately 120 charter schools have closed, mainly for financial reasons relating to lack of facilities, proper funding and, in fewer instances, accountability. The closures represent roughly 5 percent of all charter schools that have opened—a number that is evidence of the serious accountability to which these schools are already subject at a time when enhancing school accountability is a clear national priority.

Comments from individual groups are available by calling:

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