

MEASURING THE RELIABILITY OF THE *DETROIT FREE PRESS*

## MICHIGAN SPENDS

# \$13 BILLION

## ON K-12 PUBLIC EDUCATION PER YEAR IN STATE TAXPAYER MONEY, WITH NO ACCOUNTABILITY FOR RESULTS

ON JUNE 22, 2014, the *Detroit Free Press* ran its first article of a weeklong “investigative series” on charter schools that gave Michigan residents an unreliable, inaccurate picture of the state of charter schools in the Great Lakes State. Running under the headline “State of Charter Schools: How Michigan Spends \$1 Billion But Fails to Hold Schools Accountable,” the series was far from a balanced and honest analysis of charter schools.

What’s even more troubling is the fact that the *Detroit Free Press* has unapologetically and unethically used the so-called investigative series to engage in state politics, operating more as a PAC than a news organization that takes journalistic integrity and impartiality seriously. On September 9, 2014, the *Free Press* reprinted the series and mailed a copy to every legislator in the state to make sure it was in their mailbox the day opponents introduced legislation to bring an end to charters.

Because of the media’s power to influence policy, and the power of good policies to create environments where charter schools can thrive, The *Media Bullpen*®,<sup>1</sup> a news arm of *The Center for Education Reform*<sup>2</sup> created to bring accountability to education reporting, felt it necessary to take a deeper look at this series of news articles. What follows is an in-depth analysis of the series addressing these critical realities NOT reported by the *Free Press*:

- Michigan spends **\$13 billion** on K-12 public education per year in state taxpayer money, with no accountability for results. In fact, not one traditional public school has ever been closed for academic reasons.<sup>3</sup>
- Michigan’s charter schools are held accountable. Twenty-two percent of charters ever opened have been closed, far out-pacing the national charter school closure rate of **15 percent**. Authorizers in Michigan take accountability very seriously.<sup>4</sup>
- According to the *Michigan Department of Education*, charter schools performed an average of **four percentage points better** than the average traditional public school.<sup>5</sup>
- Michigan’s **charter school law has very strict transparency provisions** that require charter schools to publicly report their charter contract; board members’ terms, policies, meeting minutes and agendas; budgets approved by the board; copies of bills paid to vendors or service providers; quarterly financials; personnel and salaries; copies of management contracts; etc., etc.
- The charter school sector in Michigan is strong and **meeting the demand of parent choice**. State law allows for a diversity of providers, educational approach and increased instructional time.<sup>6</sup>
- Charter schools in Michigan are **prohibited from hiring** anyone to work in the school that has a **potential conflict of interest or relationship with a board member** of the school. Traditional public schools in Michigan do not have to follow this provision and operate under a much-lesser standard.<sup>7</sup>

It is important that both lawmakers and the public can separate fact from fiction, especially when they can no longer rely on a major news outlet with great influence across the state to present the facts in an unbiased and objective report.

# MEDIA BULLPEN<sup>®</sup> SCORES OF DETROIT FREE PRESS ARTICLES

The *Media Bullpen*<sup>®</sup> scored the six articles encompassing the main themes that ran in the *Detroit Free Press* series starting June 22, 2014, and discovered that those six articles taken as a whole are only approximately ten percent accurate\*

 <p><b>POP FLY</b> <u>Michigan spends \$1 billion but fails to hold schools accountable</u><sup>9</sup></p>	 <p><b>POP FLY</b> <u>When bad schools go on and on...</u><sup>12</sup></p>
 <p><b>STRIKE OUT</b> <u>Other states stricter than Michigan on charters, some ban for-profits</u><sup>10</sup></p>	 <p><b>STRIKE OUT</b> <u>Tangled web at two charter schools shows shortcomings of state law</u><sup>13</sup></p>
 <p><b>STRIKE OUT</b> <u>In Detroit, quality schools still elusive</u><sup>11</sup></p>	 <p><b>SINGLE</b> <u>Concerns over charter school performance persist as more open in state</u><sup>14</sup></p>
<p>*Accuracy ratings calculated based on a strikeout zero percent, a pop fly equaling twenty percent, a single equaling forty percent, a second equaling sixty percent, a third equaling eighty percent, and a home run equaling one hundred percent.</p>	

## ABOUT THIS REPORT:

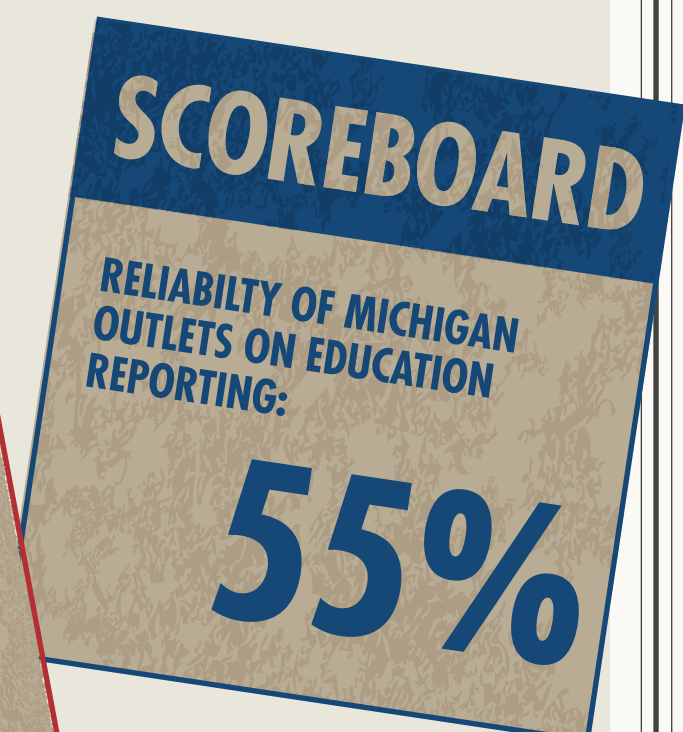
Since 2011, Michigan media has only been **55 percent reliable**<sup>8</sup> when reporting on education issues. The *Media Bullpen*<sup>®</sup> evaluated all 42 articles that ran over an 8-day period (June 22-29, 2014) in the *Detroit Free Press* and did its own investigation into the six major themes of the series as a whole. **The accuracy rating comes out to a mere ten percent.** The lower the reliability percentage, the higher the instances are of the reporting failing to adhere to the highest of journalistic standards. A low score means media coverage fails to tell both sides of the story, takes facts or statements out of context, and leaves out critical information necessary to give readers a complete and accurate understanding of the topic at hand.

To leave inaccuracies unaddressed would be a disservice to the over **140,000 students in Michigan charter schools**, the 2.5 million students in charter schools nationwide, and the countless number of educators,

administrators, and authorizers who work to ensure charter schools function optimally to meet the needs of every single student that walks through their doors.

While analysis of individual articles in the series is available online at The *Media Bullpen*<sup>®</sup>, this special report examines the most egregious statements from all articles in the *Detroit Free Press*

series regarding achievement, authorizers and accountability, approvals, education service providers (ESPs), funding, and student demographics, in order to set the record straight and restore public perception on charter schools.



*“There are standards for journalism as well,” said Dan Quisenberry, president of the Michigan Association of Public School Academies (MAPSA). “And that includes looking in a fair and balanced way, comprehensively, with all the information that was provided. Jennifer Dixon decided to put that standard aside.”*

*Charter School Advocate Rips Detroit Free Press Investigation*

*By Jake Neher, Michigan Public Radio Network  
June 27, 2014*



## ON ACHIEVEMENT:

*“A Free Press analysis of elementary and middle-school test score data found that the proficiency rate for charter schools in the city — and those in surrounding suburbs that educate a large percentage of Detroit students — is 44% in reading, 18% in math. That almost mirrors Detroit Public Schools, where reading proficiency is 40%, math 14%.” (Detroit Free Press, “In Detroit, quality schools still elusive,” June 28, 2014)*

Rather than say charter students demonstrate greater proficiency in math and reading than their district counterparts, the language chosen here is, “almost mirrors.” Of course, this type of nuance is necessary to comport with the narrative that successful charter schools in Detroit are in fact “elusive,” as the article’s headline would suggest.

*“Charter schools are giving new hope to parents and children in some of the toughest neighborhoods, and there’s still much more to do. Both public charter schools and district schools must keep working to ensure that every school delivers the high-quality education students deserve and parents expect.”*

**Feedback: Charter Schools Get Results For Michigan’s Students**

*By Nina Rees, President and CEO, National Alliance for Public Charter Schools  
Detroit Free Press, July 17, 2014*

*“How are our students performing? We utilize testing multiple times a year to track individual student achievement and progress. Our test scores consistently outperform the composite measure of our students’ home districts. In only our second year of existence, Grand Valley State University rated us the seventh-highest performing charter school in the state (out of nearly 300 schools). To provide an experience not offered at most other schools, our school board invested \$20,000 last year to equip every eighth-grader with their own Chromebook to help us enrich curriculum for our students. Next fall, we hope to expand similar opportunities in sixth and seventh grades. Our school board believes that it is not enough to just achieve at the same levels as the students’ previous district, but to exceed those standards. Parent and staff surveys at the end of the year consistently indicate a high degree of satisfaction with the school.”*

**Feedback: Charter School Touts Its Accountability, Use Of Tax Dollars**

*By Keith Ledbetter, Kim Gaedeke, Bill Hayes, Melissa Laing, Adil Iqbal  
South Canton Scholars Charter Academy School Board  
Detroit Free Press, July 10, 2014*

In the 2014 Michigan Department of Education’s “Beating the Odds”<sup>15</sup> report, which considers the academic performance of all public school buildings in Michigan relative to schools with similar student populations, Michigan charter schools performed an average of **four percentage points better** than the average traditional public school.

Similarly, a May 2013 study conducted by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO)<sup>16</sup> shows that in Detroit during the course of a school year, charter students **gained an additional three months of learning** in math and reading when compared to their traditional school peers.

Although the CREDO study was mentioned elsewhere in *Detroit Free Press* reporting, it’s only possibly represented in this particular article by the vague phrasing, “One research study last year found the average Detroit student attending charters is showing slightly more academic growth than students in Detroit Public Schools.”

This is either a huge oversight or a deliberate omission intended to negatively portray charter performance as much as possible. Given the headline’s assertion that quality charter schools in Detroit are elusive, it’s most likely the latter.



## TIMELINE OF FREE PRESS ACTIONS:

**JANUARY 2013 –**  
MAPSA President interviewed by the Free Press

**SEPTEMBER 2013 –**  
Gubernatorial candidate Mark Schauer issues editorial on charter schools published in Free Press

**JUNE 22-29, 2014 –**  
Free Press runs an unprecedented 8-day, 42 article series on charter schools

**FALL 2012 –**  
Free Press starts investigating charter schools by combing through files at the Michigan Department of Education

**JANUARY-AUGUST 2013 –**  
Free Press interviewed several charter authorizers, schools and elected officials

**SEPTEMBER 2013 –**  
Potential Gubernatorial candidate and state board president John Austin issues an editorial on charter schools published in the Free Press

## ON AUTHORIZERS & ACCOUNTABILITY:

*“The lack of state standards in Michigan means it’s up to each authorizer to decide which schools stay open — and state law gives no guidance on how authorizers should evaluate schools.”* (Detroit Free Press, “[When bad schools go on and on...](#)” June 27, 2014)

First, not only do Michigan charter schools have to abide by the same rules and regulations as traditional public schools, but **charter schools actually have MORE oversight** and evaluation than traditional schools do because of contracts with their authorizers. Michigan charter contracts are **required to use academic performance measures to hold schools accountable** for their academic performance -- no such requirement applies to traditional schools. Additionally, charter schools are prohibited from selectively enrolling students, and all Michigan charters must accept all students to the limit of their facility. Many of the most heralded traditional public schools in Michigan, including the top ranked Grand Rapids Public Schools City High and Middle School, are selective enrollment schools that enroll students based on test scores.

Second, Michigan law states decisions surrounding charter contract renewals must include, “increases in academic achievement for all groups of pupils as measured by assessments and other objective criteria as the most important factor in the decision of whether or not to renew the contract.” Additionally, a charter may be revoked for other reasons, including legal troubles, failure to act as good fiscal stewards, or other rationale based on promises made in a specific charter’s contract.

Apart from what’s legally required, charter authorizers such as [Central Michigan University](#)<sup>17</sup> and [Grand Valley State University](#)<sup>18</sup> employ the practice of providing [annual reports](#)<sup>19</sup> to charter board members on a school’s academic, operational, and financial performance. Purposefully or not, this practice never made it to print for this specific discussion.

The article is part of the section entitled, “Authorizers Allow Poor Performance to Go On and On.” However, the focus is solely on university authorizing with no discussion of other authoriza-

tion routes such as state commissions and local districts. One must wonder why authorizers within the traditional K-12 educational system are not also put under a microscope and evaluated as university authorizers are here. Detroit Public Schools authorizes 12 charter schools.

Lastly, university authorizer CMU has closed 15 schools over the past 10 years that failed to deliver the quality education they promised to students. As the title of this piece, “When bad schools go on and on...”, suggests the exploration of why inferior schools exist, it would be logical to compare the number of traditional district schools allowed to stay open despite the fact that they aren’t delivering quality educational results for students. Sadly, readers are left in the dark.

Michigan’s charter authorizers have **closed a total of 67 schools** since the charter law’s inception. Schools have closed for a variety of reasons, most compellingly, low academic performance and poor fiscal stewardship. In addition to closing ineffective schools, Michigan authorizers work to improve schools as 70 current charter schools are undergoing mandated intervention to improve services to students. Neither the Michigan Department of Education nor a Michigan school district has closed a traditional public school on the grounds of poor academic performance.

To put this data into perspective, Michigan’s charter school closure rate is 22 percent. The national charter closure rate is 15 percent. Of the closures in Michigan, about half were closed for mismanagement or academics. The *Free Press* assertion that Michigan’s charter schools are not accountable is actually quite false, and in fact the data prove that most authorizers in Michigan take accountability very seriously at a rate that outpaces most other states.



*“Charter schools are held by their authorizers to a contract of specified years, usually not more than five years, which may not be renewed if academic and other requirements are not met. No traditional public school district holds its schools to such levels of accountability and consequences. The result of such policies is that about 50 charter schools have been closed in the 20 years of their existence, representing real consequences to academic or financial failure”*

*Guest Column: Charter Schools Misunderstood, Have Much To Offer Michigan Families*

*By Richard Zeile,  
Michigan Board of Education member  
Detroit Free Press, July 6, 2014*

*“Our standards call for enforcement of state laws, including compliance with the more than 60 transparency requirements that were passed into law in December 2011, which went into effect in 2012. They set standards for reauthorization, school closure, approval of contracts, financial oversight and much more.”*

*Guest Column: Michigan Charter Schools Succeeding Just Fine, Thanks*

*By Jared Burkhart, Executive Director,  
Michigan Council of Charter School Authorizers  
Detroit Free Press, July 13, 2014*



## ON APPROVALS:

*“In Michigan, anyone and everyone can apply to open a charter school. There are no state guidelines for screening applicants.” (Detroit Free Press, “Michigan spends \$1B on charter schools, but fails to hold them accountable,” June 22, 2014)*

Charter authorizers are not required to issue a charter contract to any one entity, and do in fact have state guidance for screening applicants. **Michigan statute explicitly directs authorizers** to review applications for resources available to schools, educational goals, applicant’s track record, and whether there is evident need for a schooling option in a given community.

In fact, there’s **even more criteria for authorizers considering new schools**: authorizers must also factor in the number of students on charter waitlists in proximity to the proposed

*“Traditional schools spend \$11 billion annually and have a graduation rate ranging from 70% to 79%, according to a 2006 Gates Foundation report. Does that mean that \$2 billion to \$3 billion is wasted each year?”*

*Free Press Series Was Too Hard On Charter Schools*

*By Chuck Fellows, President of FlexTech High School (Brighton) Board of Directors  
Detroit Free Press, July 3, 2014*

*“A large percentage of students enter our schools significantly behind academically. However, our analysis of MEAP results consistently shows that students who remain in a CMU charter school for at least three years outperform their home district and, on average, surpass the statewide average.*

*Our student graduation rate is now more than 81%, which exceeds the statewide average of all public schools and exceeds the graduation rates in Detroit, Flint, Lansing and Grand Rapids by as much as 30%.*

*CMU continues to support parents of the 31,000 students who have chosen a CMU-authorized charter public school for their child and stands behind their right of access to a quality education.”*

*Feedback: Choice Is The Most Important Aspect Of Charters*

*By Cindy Schumacher, Executive Director, Governor John Engler Center for Charter Schools at Central Michigan University  
Detroit Free Press, July 13, 2014*

school, local student population, and academic performance of the local district.

The flipside of this is applicants must take into account all of the above parameters if they are to be seriously considered by an authorizer, and even then may not be granted a charter to start a school. Michigan authorizers are actually national leaders in their effort to use community data including blight, population density, crime, and public transportation in their review of proposed school sites. In 2010, the Michigan Council of Charter School Authorizers<sup>20</sup> launched a web-based geographic information system (GIS) that integrates school and community data into a single, public website, to improve public accessibility and use of this critical data.

Since 2010, 117 new charter schools have opened in Michigan while 26 were closed, a net annual gain of 23 schools. In Detroit, 15 charter schools have opened in the last five years amid 10 closures, a net gain of one school opening per year.

Over the past decade, Central Michigan University has received 259 charter applications, 22 of which (or eight percent) actually became operational. On average, fellow university authorizer Grand Valley State University has awarded charters to six percent of applicants annually over the last five years.

These numbers hardly support the notion that “anyone and everyone” can apply to open a charter school or that authorizers do not adhere to standards when approving schools.

## TIMELINE OF FREE PRESS ACTIONS:



**JULY 16, 2014 –**  
Free Press starts negotiating MAPSA OpEd stating what they will, or will not print

**SEPTEMBER 9, 2014 –**  
A special reprint of the charter school series appears, excluding any opposing OpEds as already published by Free Press

**SEPTEMBER 17-18, 2014 –**  
Legislators receive the special reprint section in the mail

**JULY 2, 2014 –**  
MAPSA submits Opinion Editorial from president Dan Quisenberry

**AUGUST 9, 2014 –**  
Free Press publishes very edited MAPSA OpEd<sup>40</sup>

**SEPTEMBER 16, 2014 –**  
The post mark date on the envelope that delivered the special insert to legislators



## ON EDUCATIONAL SERVICE PROVIDERS:

*“Many states have tougher charter laws than Michigan and half a dozen states — from Washington to New York — prohibit full-service, for-profit companies from running their schools.”*

*(Detroit Free Press, “Other states stricter than Michigan on charters; Some ban for-profits,” June 22, 2014)*

In this statement, the reporter broadly equates “tougher charter laws” with the prohibition of for-profit management organizations partnering with charter schools. Laws that govern charter schools contain too many components to be evaluated on a single metric such as whether ‘for-profit’ organizations are permitted to have a role in charter schools.

Additionally, the phrase “running their schools” misidentifies the partnerships that charter school leaders establish with these management organizations as a means to improve school conditions. **By Michigan law, these partnerships are voluntary,** Michigan’s nonprofit governing boards are free to contract with for-profit and nonprofit organizations as they see fit. Just as traditional school district boards voluntarily contract with transportation, food service, janitorial, tutoring, and office supply businesses, Michigan charter school boards voluntarily contract for a variety of services. The only difference is that Michigan charter schools can contract for instructional services and traditional school boards are prohibited from doing so. Charter schools are required to submit management contracts to their authorizer for more oversight.

Perhaps the most glaring error of the series is the assertion that charter school boards are wrought with insider dealings while **ignoring the higher standard for conflicts in state law for charters.** Michigan law requires all school board members who have an

Category	Amount
<b>Revenues:</b>	
1. Local Taxes	\$18,440,000
2. State Grants	\$6,400,000
3. Local Grants	\$400,000
4. Other State/Local/Non-Profit/Donations	\$1,200,000
<b>Total Available for Operations</b>	<b>\$26,440,000</b>
5. 2013-14 Operating Fund Balance	\$2,000,000
<b>Total Available to Appropriation</b>	<b>\$28,440,000</b>
<b>Expenditures:</b>	
1. Instruction	\$17,000,000
2. Support Services	\$7,000,000
3. Administration	\$1,000,000
4. Operations and Maintenance	\$1,000,000
5. Other Contract Support	\$1,000,000
<b>Total Appropriation</b>	<b>\$27,000,000</b>

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4. Operations and Maintenance	\$1,000,000
5. Other Contract Support	\$1,000,000
<b>Total Appropriation</b>	<b>\$27,000,000</b>

Image of a traditional public school budget and a charter school budget

inherent conflict, i.e. familial relationship or financial interest, to recuse themselves from voting on an issue where the conflict is present. Michigan’s charter school law goes a step beyond that to prohibit board members from serving if they have the same conflict. There are countless examples of school board members who have family members working in the traditional public school they oversee, however such practice is prohibited in charter schools.

Michigan’s charter school law is very detailed and regulatory when it comes to how educational service providers (ESP) can operate in the state. Authorizers are required to review the agreement between a charter school and ESP, and can disapprove it. While other states have some statutory provisions in place regarding the relationship between ESPs and charter schools, they are nowhere near as regulated as in Michigan. In fact, the regulatory statutes have been a deterrent to some of the nation’s most successful charter networks (both for-profit and nonprofit) to open up schools in Michigan.

In setting up these partnerships, a charter board is **required by law to make public contracts with management organizations**, a copy of the school’s budget, board meeting minutes, and all other board-approved service contracts. And after all that, these provisions make

up less than half of the documents and materials a charter school board must make public.

Similar to the above statement, the rest of the article focuses on the policymaking side of considerations related to for-profit entities. The article claims that charter budgets provide less transparency than public school budgets; however, statute mandates equal treatment.

Any mention of results, school-level conditions, and the everyday work of students and teachers is lacking.

Both in this statement and throughout the article, there is no mention of an alternate view to defend the role of management organizations in charter schools. Like other parts of the *Free Press* series, the article remains one-sided from start to finish.

**The truth is Michigan’s charter school law is one of the strongest in the nation** earning an ‘A’ and ranking 4th on The Center for Education Reform’s annual *Charter School Laws Across the States*.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools recent report on the *Health of the Public Charter School Movement*<sup>22</sup> found Michigan’s charter school sector to be the 3rd healthiest of the 25 states and Washington, D.C. they evaluated in this inaugural analysis.

*“Your recent articles about charter schools seem to have missed the mark. As a charter school board member, I am proud of the work that our administrators, teachers and board members do. Our community, parents and teachers are supportive of our charter school. Overall, our school provides excellent opportunities to more students who would otherwise have few options. Charter school oversight and quality standards in Michigan are rigorous, and the state law expanding charter opportunities requires that increased academic achievement for all pupils must be the most important factor in charter renewal. Ultimately, schools that fail to deliver a better quality educational environment than traditional public schools will be closed.*

*Before jumping to conclusions about all charter schools, I hope your readers will speak to parents and teachers that are participating in the public charter school experience and understand and appreciate all of the positive aspects of charter public schools in Michigan.”*

**Feedback: Letter to the Editor: Charter School Defenders, Readers Sound Off On Series**

**By Sherry Haueter, Board Member, Great Lakes Charter Academy, Detroit Free Press, July 6, 2014**



# ABOUT BULLPEN SCORES



## HOME RUN

Great: "This is awesome! Yes, s/he gets it!"

Clear and accurate, nothing missing; any quotes stats are accurate and used in the correct way, portrayed in the correct light. Gives insight into an issue.



## TRIPLE

Really Good: Nodding your head.

All the facts are cited and used correctly. Well-written and presented.



## DOUBLE

Good: "It's good. I might have said it a different way or talked about \_\_\_."

Primarily right—a solid or really good effort. May need slight clarification or a small piece of additional info but their main conclusions are good.



## SINGLE

So-so: "Meh. OK." On the fence.

Cited some facts correctly but got some other things wrong or taken out of context or had major omissions. Got more than one thing right but several things wrong.



## POP FLY

Not good: "Got a piece of it but way off base..."

Primarily incorrect. One or two issues have been identified but more wrong than right. Misses critical information; leaves out important details; and/or takes facts/statements out of context. The conclusions are invalid.



## STRIKE OUT

No: "Wrong! No!" —or— "Eh, not so much."

Are you kidding me? Completely wrong. Anything in here that is right is taken in the wrong context. The conclusions are invalid.

## ON FUNDING:

*"Charter schools in general spend more on administration and less in the classroom than traditional districts."*

(*Detroit Free Press*, "Michigan spends \$1B on charter schools but fails to hold them accountable," June 22, 2014)

While the article itself acknowledges charter schools in Michigan do not receive funding for facilities, it leaves out the fact that it is a **required accounting practice for charter schools to label facility lease costs as administrative**. Moreover, money designated for administration may also include items dealing with curriculum, course content, and other items that actually DO directly affect the classroom.

In fact, a recent study by the University of Arkansas found that Michigan's charter schools received 19.2 percent less funding than district schools: \$9,485 vs. \$11,743 per pupil, respectively, a difference of \$2,258 per pupil.

Charter schools in Michigan **educate 7.2 percent of the state's public school students but receive 5.9 percent of total revenue**.

A higher percentage of Michigan charter schools (86.6%) qualify for Title I school-wide status than their district peers (78.1%), and charters have a higher percentage of students enrolled who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch (70% vs. 44.5%); statewide Federal funding for districts and charters only differs by \$52 per pupil, however.<sup>23</sup>

Again, Michigan spends \$13 billion on K-12 public education per year in state taxpayer money, with no accountability for results. In fact, not one traditional public school has been closed for academic reasons.

Twenty-two percent of Michigan's charters ever opened have been closed, far out-pacing the national charter closure rate of 15 percent. Authorizers in Michigan take accountability and the public's trust very seriously.

As opposed to digging deeper and laying out these facts, the statement is left to stand on its own, presenting an either-or proposition that prompts the dubious conclusion that charter schools are not devoting funds towards the classroom and the students they serve.



## TIMELINE OF FREE PRESS ACTIONS:

### SEPTEMBER 18, 2014 –

A charter school operator gets a call asking if they want to advertise with the Free Press because they will be rerunning the charter series (although it already was reprinted)

### OCTOBER 1, 2014 –

State Senator Hoon-Yung Hopgood (D-Taylor) introduces legislation to regulate how charter schools contract with vendors for services

### SEPTEMBER 18, 2014 –

House Democrats hold a press conference to introduce a bill that would impose a moratorium on charter schools, attempting to effectively end charter schools

### SEPT 21, 2014 –

New editorial calls on lawmakers to act, ending with "Will you act? Will you put children first?" (note: this was already in the reprint on September 9, 2014)

### OCTOBER 12, 2014 –

Free Press issues its endorsements for Michigan House and Senate.

## ON STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS:

***“In some urban areas, charter schools take in fewer special education children than traditional public schools.”***

*(Detroit Free Press, “Concerns over charter school performance persist as more open in state,” June 26, 2014)*

The sole purpose of this statement is to imply that charter schools have a disinterest towards students with special needs. While the lack of specificity in the descriptor “some urban areas” allows the claim to be broader than perhaps it should be, the reality is that the percentage of special education students in Michigan charter schools is actually comparable to traditional districts. However, it is not until further down in the article that readers are made aware of this fact.

Additionally, charter schools nationwide as a whole serve a greater special needs population than traditional district schools. According to the 2014 *Survey of America’s Charter Schools*, 13.6 percent of charter students are special needs compared to 12.9 percent in traditional public schools.<sup>24</sup>

Not only do charter schools serve more students with special needs, a September 2014 report from *Education Week*<sup>25</sup> indicates charter schools with missions devoted to special education students are on the rise in response to

***“My learning-disabled son graduated from a charter school in Michigan and got far more time, attention and adaptation to his learning style than he ever got in public schools. His grades went up significantly after transferring. His school had a higher proportion of special-needs kids than the public schools and outperformed the public school competition.***

***Michigan voters intended to allow competition and specialization and to choose children’s needs over institutional needs. It works. Public schools and teacher unions have had their chance. They’ve failed our teachers, students and taxpayers. It’s time to end the monopoly and let the free market fix the problem. State vouchers to any qualifying schools. Let the innovative and effective win and the ineffective go away.”***

***Feedback: Letter to the Editor, The Great Debate Over Charter Schools In Michigan***

***By Marc Miller  
Detroit Free Press, June 29, 2014***

parental demand for these options. For example, Rising Stars Academy in Macomb County, Michigan is a charter school that uses the culinary arts to teach life skills and employability skills to special-needs students.

When taken as a whole, the *Free Press* article from which the statement originates includes no discussion on trends or specific examples of charter schools that either serve special education students or have special education as part of their mission.

An alternate view from a charter proponent dismissing the claim that charter schools don’t educate a sizable swath of students with special needs is included, but not until the reader is

inundated with criticisms from the other side.

## CONCLUSION:

For the past two decades, charter schools in Michigan have comprised a significant presence in the state public education system, and warrant credible media coverage. To let one biased series of articles overshadow the realities about charter schools is unjust. For lawmakers and communities, the issue is too important, and for kids, the stakes are too high.



## RESOURCES:

- 1 The Media Bullpen, ([www.mediabullpen.com](http://www.mediabullpen.com)).
- 2 The Center for Education Reform, ([www.edreform.com](http://www.edreform.com)).
- 3 “Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the State’s Finances,” Michigan State Budget Office, (<http://www.michigan.gov/budget/0,4538,7-157-40794-139074--F,00.html>).
- 4 Alison Consoletti, “The State of Charter Schools: What We Know – And What We Do Not – About Performance And Accountability,” The Center for Education Reform, December 26, 2011, (<https://www.edreform.com/2011/12/charter-school-closure-report/>).
- 5 Michigan Department of Education, “Reward Schools,” ([http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-22709\\_62255--00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-22709_62255--00.html)).
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