



Charter Innovation



The Issue

One major possible way of increasing the efficiency of the education system is through expansion of the charter system. Charters provide the choice and competition needed to drive improvements to better meet consumer demand. However, charter schools are greatly restricted from growing naturally. This is true primarily due to resistance from traditional school leaders and system stakeholders. These groups fear change and have a vested interest in the status quo. Texas should remove the restrictions inhibiting educational innovation and act in the best interest of the students and taxpayers.

At a minimum, Texas should allow greater student participation in the charters and authorize two new categories of charters as follows.

Professional Charter Academies

In every other profession (law, medicine, accounting, engineering, etc.), professionals are afforded the opportunity to control their professional activities and reap the rewards of their individual talents through management of their own professional enterprise. A lawyer can begin his own firm, a doctor, his own practice. However, because of the way the legislature has structured and funded education in the past, most educators do not have that same opportunity.

The average elementary school class size is 18 students; in high schools, the average class size is 27. We spend about \$215,000 on each elementary school class and about \$325,000 on each high school class. Yet teachers are only paid a fraction of that, averaging \$48,110.

At the same expenditure levels, a small group of teachers could rent a house or other suitable facility, cover all expenses and still potentially double their take home pay. Under the professional charter plan, experienced educators would be able to start their own schools and receive state funding like other charter holders. Then, great teachers would be fairly rewarded for their efforts and talents.

Educators with five years of experience and proficient appraisals would be entitled to be issued a professional charter. No students would be assigned to their schools; however, any Texas student would be eligible to attend. The state would reimburse the professional charter holder at the end of the school year.

Universal Charter Schools

Allowing universal charter schools would expand upon Texas' tradition of successful charter schools, permitting any student, regardless of income, school, or geography to attend a charter school of their choice. This would give parents and students increased choice, and give charter schools more freedom, for example, to operate in public or private buildings, or through virtual education online.

Universal charter schools would be freed of state restrictions except for basic education requirements, and health and safety requirements.

This would provide schools with the flexibility needed to meet the requirements of a diverse student population. Greatly expanded choice will also allow parents to find the schools most capable of fulfilling their child's individual needs. Accountability will be increased because, as with our university system, schools would compete for students by meeting their needs. Overall, universal charter schools would provide the ultimate in choice for the students of Texas.

The Facts

- Education is still primarily delivered through an assembly line institutional system designed over a century ago.
- Many school administrators oppose expansion of student and teacher choice due to self-interest.
- Educators are professionals who are not given the same opportunities as other professionals.
- Many great teachers leave the profession with frustration.
- According to NEA polls, teachers are not feeling trusted or respected by their administrators.
- Restricting supply side change has protected the status quo at the expense of Texas students, taxpayers, and teachers.
- Artificial restrictions on the number of Open Enrollment Charter Schools prohibit many students from exercising their freedom of educational opportunity. Over 100,000 children are on charter school waiting lists.

Recommendations

- Amend the charter school laws to allow teachers to form Professional Charter Academies, giving them the respect that they have requested.
- Implement Universal Charters so that every Texas student has the option to select a better school.
- Remove the artificial cap limiting the number of Open Enrollment Charter Schools and otherwise allow for supply side change.
- Lower the restrictions on charters to allow market forces to shape standards.

Resources

What Keeps Texas Schools from Being as Efficient as They Could Be? by Dr. Paul Hill (July 2012).

Expert Witness Report by Allan Parker Jr. (July 2012).

“Would School Choice Change the Teaching Profession?” by Caroline Hoxby, *Journal of Human Resources* (Fall 2002).

