



SERVING THE ENTIRE CHARTER SCHOOL SECTOR

MAY 8, 2017



KENTUCKY CELEBRATES NATIONAL CHARTER SCHOOLS WEEK

Prior to the recent passage of House Bill 520, National Charter School Week felt like a party Kentucky wasn't invited to attend! But now the Blue Grass State takes its rightful place among the 44 other states (and D.C.) that recognize the importance of providing choice in education and allowing families to decide what type of learning environment best meets their children's needs.

By an official presidential proclamation, May 1-5, 2017 was declared National Charter School Week, celebrated by more than six million attendees at more than 20,000 events held across the U.S.

According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS), there are currently more than 6,800 charter schools across the country educating nearly three million children. The organization annually collects supply and demand data and reports that more than one million students are on charter school waitlists.

So, why are these schools so wildly popular? The answer is quite simple: because the one-size-fits-all approach simply doesn't work when it comes to education.

The decision to withdraw a child from his or her traditional public school to enroll in a public charter school isn't an easy one. But not all students thrive in the traditional public school sector and many find the perfect fit at a charter school.

Charter schools foster innovation, and while many provide students with a broad, general education, others emphasize curriculum such as science, math and the arts, while some target student populations with special needs, like dropout recovery schools.

Regardless of charter schools with unique focus, all charters strive to prepare students for college, career and success in life. And while they have the freedom to be highly innovative, charter schools must hire highly qualified teachers, administer mandatory state student assessments, and comply with all laws and rules related to student health and safety.

Kentucky's legislature should be applauded for passing legislation that will benefit many of our state's K-12 students. For the vast majority, traditional public schools will continue to be the best educational opportunity. But for others, the creation of public charter schools will literally change their lives and better prepare them for the future.

House Bill 520 acknowledges the importance of quality oversight and tasks Kentucky's State Board of Education with establishing rules and regulations to be used in evaluating authorizer performance.

Traditional public school districts will play a critically important role – as will Lexington and Louisville Mayors offices – as designated charter school authorizers responsible for providing quality oversight to ensure full compliance with state and federal laws.

Those concerned about accountability and transparency should be reassured that Kentucky charter schools will be held accountable for student academic performance and the same financial reporting requirements and public audits as traditional public schools.

Kentucky is now positioning itself to successfully create, monitor and maintain our state's first charter schools. Kentucky students will soon have the opportunity to benefit from a well thought out approach to charter schools based on both the good and bad experiences in other states.

Change can be somewhat difficult, and welcoming charter schools to the Blue Grass will likely be no exception. But we can all take great pride in knowing that the opportunity to attend a charter school will literally change the lives of some Kentucky students.

It's now time to roll up our sleeves and begin the challenging work of improving public education with a successful network of Kentucky public charter schools!

This article is published by Yvonne Adkins of Adkins & Company, a Kentucky-based consulting group whose mission is to position charter schools for success by providing boards, operators and authorizers with access to high quality services and expertise.

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