



POLICY BRIEF

Citizens' Guide to Initiative 1240 *To Allow Public Charter Schools in Washington*

by Liv Finne
Director, WPC's Center for Education

September 2012



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Key Findings

1. Initiative 1240 would allow up to 40 public charter schools to open in Washington over five years.
2. Charter schools are public schools; they are tuition free and open to all students.
3. Charter schools can offer specialized programs for at-risk youth, foster children or students with special needs.
4. Charter schools must be nonprofit; they could not be operated by a for-profit company or by a religious organization.
5. Charter schools have been part of public education for 20 years.
6. In the 41 states that have them, charter schools are popular with parents, lawmakers and the public.
7. If passed, Initiative 1240 would give Washington the best charter school law in the country.

Introduction

Initiative 1240 would allow 40 public charter schools to open over five years, eight schools each year.¹ Washington currently has 2,345 public schools. Nationally, about two million children attend nearly 5,600 charter schools in 41 states and the District of Columbia.

A charter school is a community-based public school that operates independently of central district management and administrative rules. Charter schools are tuition free and open to all students. Charter schools must comply with the same civil rights, nondiscrimination and public safety laws that apply to all schools.

This Citizens' Guide provides an overview of schools, summarizes Initiative 1240's main provisions, reviews the academic success of charter schools in other states, and reviews the main arguments made against charter schools. Based on these findings, this study concludes that allowing a limited number of charter schools within public education would improve learning outcomes, reduce the dropout rate and open new learning opportunities for children, especially in communities that are underserved by the current education system.

Overview of Charter Schools

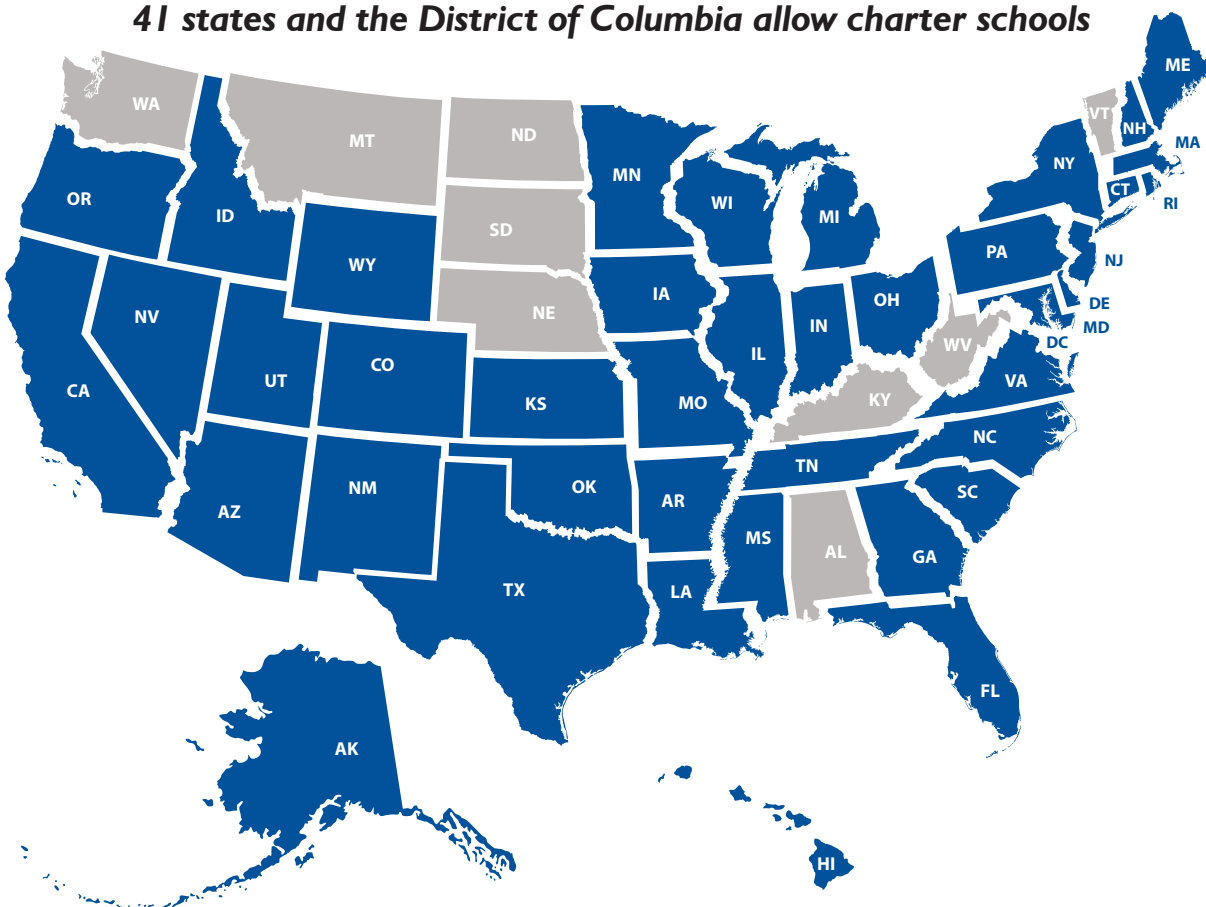
The nation's first charter public school law was enacted in Minnesota in 1991. Since then, the idea has spread rapidly with 41 states and the District of Columbia passing charter public school legislation. Across the nation, over two million children now attend 5,611 charter public schools. In most states opening a charter school is noncontroversial, and the number grows significantly every year. In the 2011–12 school year, 352 new charter schools opened, a 6.6% increase over the previous year.²

Charter schools are generally smaller than conventional public schools. On average, a charter school enrolls 372 students, about 22% fewer than other public schools. This allows charter schools to provide more personal attention

¹ Initiative Measure No. 1240, "An act relating to public charter schools," filed May 31, 2012, at sos.wa.gov/_assets/elections/initiatives/FinalText_274.pdf.

² "The Public Charter Schools Dashboard, National Schools Overview," National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, at www.dashboard.publiccharters.org/dashboard/schools/page/overview/year/2012.

41 states and the District of Columbia allow charter schools



to students, and promotes a feeling of safety and security within the school.³ Charter schools also create special programs and themes to meet the needs of a variety of students: Special education students, teen parents, English language learners, and gifted and talented students.

Charter schools are popular. An estimated 600,000 students are on waiting lists across the country, enough to fill more than 2,000 additional schools.⁴ Nonetheless, the number of students attending charter public schools is small in proportion to the total: Only 5% of all public school children in the U.S. attend a charter school.⁵ Even in states where they have existed for years, charter schools represent only a fraction of all public schools.

Charter schools tend to concentrate in areas where traditional public schools have failed to serve the community. Most charter school students are from minority (52%), at-risk (50%) or low-income (54%) families. 40% of charter schools serve student populations that are over 60% minority, at risk or low income. Many urban charter schools, such as those in Washington, D.C.; New York; Boston; and Detroit serve student populations made up entirely of at-risk, low-income or minority families.⁶

³ "Annual Survey of America's Charter Schools," Center for Education Reform, January 2010, 3, at www.edreform.com/2012/01/annual-survey-of-americas-charter-schools-2010/.

⁴ "Caps on Charter Schools," National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, at www.publiccharters.org/node/45.

⁵ "Enrollment off in big districts, forcing layoffs, Steady 5-Year Decline, The Poor Economy and Charter Schools are Among Reasons," by Motoko Rich, *The New York Times*, July 24, 2012.

⁶ "Annual Survey of America's Charter Schools," Center for Education Reform, January 2010, 12, at www.edreform.com/2012/01/annual-survey-of-americas-charter-schools-2010/.

Past Charter School Proposals

Charter school proposals in Washington state failed in 1996 and 2000.⁷ A bipartisan charter school law passed in 2004 when lawmakers passed HB 2295. Gov. Gary Locke, a Democrat, signed the bill on March 18th that year.⁸

The bill was strongly opposed by the teachers union, the Washington Education Association (WEA). The WEA launched a repeal effort in the form of Referendum 55. The Referendum passed and HB 2295 was repealed before going into effect.⁹ As a result, Washington's ban on charter schools remained in place.

In 2012, Democrats Rep. Eric Pettigrew (Seattle) and Sen. Rodney Tom (Bellevue) and Republicans Rep. Glenn Anderson (Fall City) and Sen. Steve Litzow (Mercer Island) sponsored a bill that would allow 50 charter schools to open over five years.¹⁰ The bill was opposed by the legislative leadership in the House and the Senate and was killed in committee.¹¹

Charter school proponents then filed Initiative 1240, and gathered enough signatures to qualify for the November 2012 ballot.

Description of Initiative 1240

Enrollment

Initiative 1240 would allow up to 40 public charter schools to open over a five-year period, with no more than eight allowed in any one year.¹²

Charter schools would be tuition-free and open to all students living within the state, without regard to residency.¹³ Priority would be given to charter schools that serve at-risk students or those attending low-performing public schools.¹⁴

Charter school attendance would be voluntary. If the number of families applying exceeds a school's capacity, students would be selected by lottery.¹⁵ Preference would be given to the siblings of students who are already enrolled.¹⁶

Initiative 1240 would allow up to 40 public charter schools to open over a five-year period, with no more than eight allowed in any one year.

⁷ Initiative 177, "The Charter Schools Initiative," 1996; and Initiative 729, "The Charter Schools Act," 2000, Elections and Voting, Initiative and Referendum History and Statistics, Office of the Secretary of State, Olympia, Wash., at www.sos.wa.gov/elections/initiatives/statistics.aspx.

⁸ "Authorizing Charter Schools," Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill 2995, Washington State Legislature, 2004 Session, passed March 10, 2004, signed by Governor Locke March 18, 2004, at apps.leg.wa.gov/documents/billdocs/2003-04/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Law%202004/2295-S2.SL.pdf.

⁹ Results for Referendum 55, November 4, 2004, "History of Referendum Measures through 2009," Elections and Voting, Washington Secretary of State, at www.sos.wa.gov/elections/initiatives/statistics_referendummeasures.aspx.

¹⁰ HB 2428, "An Act Relating to establishing alternative forms of governance for certain public schools," introduced January 13, 2012, at www.apps.leg.wa.gov/billinfo/summary.aspx?bill=2428. The companion bill in the Senate was SB 6202.

¹¹ "After Uproar, Teacher Evaluation Bill Springs Back to Life," by Erik Smith, *Washington State Wire*, February 8, 2012, at washingtonstatewire.com/blog/after-uproar-teacher-evaluation-bill-springs-back-to-life/.

¹² Initiative 1240, section 215, "Number of Charter Schools."

¹³ Initiative 1240, section 205, "Admission and Enrollment of Students."

¹⁴ Initiative 1240, section 214, "Charter Applications, Decision Process."

¹⁵ Initiative 1240, section 205, "Admission and Enrollment of Students."

¹⁶ Ibid.

Like all public schools, charter schools would be prohibited from engaging in religious practices in their educational programs, admissions, employment policies or operations, and they would be prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, sex, disability or other protected category.¹⁷

Initiative 1240 would allow charter schools to offer specialized learning environments for particular groups of students, such as at-risk youth, students with special needs, foster youth, students with disabilities, or students who pose such severe behavior problems they warrant a specific educational program.

Funding

Under Initiative 1240, charter school students would be entitled to the same state and federal funding that students in conventional public schools receive.

If an existing public school converts to a charter school, it would continue to receive the same share of local levy funding. It could not be required to pay rent to the local school district. The charter school would be responsible for cleaning and routine building maintenance, including painting and landscaping, but not for major capital repairs, new buildings or safety upgrades. These would be funded by the district on the same basis as other public schools.

A new public school that opens as a charter school would not receive current local levy funding. Such a school would receive a share of funding from local levies that voters approve after the school opened. The school would be responsible for routine cleaning and building maintenance. Charter schools could apply to the state for school construction and renovation funding on the same basis as other public schools.

Cap on Central Administration Costs

Initiative 1240 would limit the administrative fee charged by the charter administrator (authorizer) to no more than 4% of the charter school's annual funding.¹⁸ This means that under Initiative 1240 charter schools would receive 96% of public funding, as compared to conventional schools, which often receive less than 80% of public funding.

Regulations

Charter schools would be required to follow all local, state and federal regulations regarding health, public safety, parental rights, student and employee rights, and nondiscrimination on the same basis as other public schools.¹⁹ Their academic programs must provide students with a basic education as defined by state law, and they must implement student testing requirements. A charter school in Washington could not be operated by a for-profit company or by a religious organization.²⁰

Charter schools would be prohibited from engaging in religious practices in their educational programs, admissions, employment policies or operations, and they would be prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, sex, disability or other protected category.

¹⁷ Initiative 1240, section 204, "Applicability of State Laws."

¹⁸ Initiative 1240, section 211, "Authorizers - Funding."

¹⁹ Initiative 1240, section 204, "Applicability of State Laws."

²⁰ Initiative 1240, section 203, "Charter School Boards – Powers" and Section 204, "Applicability of State Laws."

Charter school leaders would have flexibility in scheduling, hiring, budgeting, educational programming and community relations.

Charter schools that fail to improve student learning can have their management replaced.

Other than these exceptions, charter schools would operate independently of central district administration. Charter school leaders would have flexibility in scheduling, hiring, budgeting, educational programming and community relations. A charter school could offer increased instructional hours and be open to students on evenings and weekends, regardless of district-wide rules.

Performance and Accountability

Under Initiative 1240, charter schools would be required to show that they are successfully educating students. School principals and teachers would be accountable to their chartering organization, either the local school district or the State Charter School Commission.

Charter school management would operate under a five-year contract. Each year, charter schools would be required to report on progress toward meeting agreed targets for student academic growth. If a charter school fails to meet its targets, the authorizing agency can cancel or revoke the contract and install a different management team.

Charter schools that consistently fail in their educating mission would lose their charter and be forced to close. The school's students would be eligible to attend other public schools in their area.

Under Initiative 1240, the State Board of Education would review applications by school districts to create charter schools and would oversee their performance and effectiveness. The State Board of Education would also submit annual reports to the governor, legislature and public about the learning achievement of charter school students. After five years, the Board of Education would send a report to the legislature on whether or not additional charter schools should be allowed.

Teachers and Union Membership

Charter school would be required to hire teachers that hold a state-approved teaching certificate, and could occasionally hire uncertified instructors of "unusual competence" on the same basis as conventional public schools.²¹

Charter school faculty would not be required to join the local teachers' union as a condition of employment. Their monthly salaries would not be subject to mandatory dues deductions under the district-wide collective bargaining agreement. Mandatory dues average about \$900 per year. Charter schools teachers would be eligible to form their own union, however, and to negotiate directly with school management.

Academic Achievement in Charter Schools

Several large-scale studies show charter schools routinely perform better in educating hard-to-teach students than conventional public schools. Researchers Caroline Hoxby of Stanford, Sonali Murarka of the University of Pennsylvania and Jenny Kang of the National Bureau of Economic Research found that charter school students scored considerably higher on standardized math and

²¹ Revised Code of Washington 28A.150.203 (7).

“Charter Schools in Boston are making real progress in breaking the persistent connection between poverty and poor [academic] results.”

reading tests than children who had applied to a charter school but, because of space limitations, were required to attend a conventional public school.²² Students attending charter schools scored 31 points higher in math and 23 points higher in English than similar students who attended other public schools.²³

In Massachusetts, state officials report that: “Charter Schools — at both the middle and high school levels — have a very positive impact on student achievement. The results in math achievement for middle-school students are nothing short of remarkable.”²⁴ They further note that charter schools are “popular with families” and that parents say these schools “create the kinds of learning environments that benefit students.” The state study concludes, “Charter Schools in Boston are making real progress in breaking the persistent connection between poverty and poor [academic] results.”²⁵

A study by the RAND Corporation conducted in eight states found that charters do not selectively accept the best students in a given area, and they do not leave conventional public schools with lower-achieving students:

“We find no systematic evidence to support the fear that charter schools are skimming off the highest-achieving students. The prior test scores of students transferring into charter schools were near or below local (districtwide or statewide) averages in every geographic location included in the study.”²⁶

RAND researchers also found that opening a charter school does not drain resources away from other public schools in the area:

“There is no evidence in any of the locations that charter schools are negatively affecting the achievement of students in nearby TPSs [Traditional Public Schools].”²⁷

After debunking two of the most persistent myths about charter public schools, RAND researchers found that charters can have significant positive effects on student learning. Students who attended a charter middle school and went on to a charter high school were seven to 15 percentage points more likely to graduate than those who attended a traditional public high school. In addition, students who attended a charter high school were eight to 10 percentage points more likely to go on to college.

²² “How New York City’s Charters Affect Achievement,” Caroline M. Hoxby, Sonali Murarka, Jenny Kang, principal investigators, The New York City Charter Schools Evaluation Project, September 2009, at www.nber.org/~schools/charterschoolseval/how_NYC_charter_schools_affect_achievement_sept2009.pdf.

²³ “The Charter Barter,” by Dana Goldstein, The American Prospect, October 13, 2009, at www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=the_charter_barter.

²⁴ “Informing the Debate, Comparing Boston’s Charter, Pilot and Traditional Schools,” by Atila Abdulkadiroglu (Duke University) et al., The Boston Foundation, January 2009, at www.tbf.org/uploadedFiles/tbforg/Utility_Navigation/Multimedia_Library/Reports/InformingTheDebate_Final.pdf.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ “Charter Schools in Eight States, Effects on Achievement, Attainment, Integration, and Competition,” by Ron Zimmer, Brian Gill, Kevin Booker, Stephanie Lavertu, Tim R. Sass, and John Witte, The RAND Corporation, Spring 2009, page xii, at www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG869.pdf.

Examining the Arguments against Initiative 1240

Opponents of Initiative 1240 make several arguments against charter schools. This section presents these arguments along with a response to each one.

Claim: Charter schools drain money from public schools

Opponents of Initiative 1240 say charters schools divert money from public school budgets, leaving fewer resources to educate children.

Response: Charter schools are public schools; they do not take funding away from the public education system. Students attending a charter school would be entitled to the same funding they would receive if they attended a conventional public school.

Some central administrators may oppose losing the power to assign students, and the funding that goes with them, to certain schools, but the decision to attend a charter school would be made by parents, not administrators. The level of per-student education funding would remain the same.

Further, Initiative 1240 would increase funding at existing public schools that convert to charter schools. The converted school would serve the same students but, under Initiative 1240's limit on central administrative costs, the school would be guaranteed to receive 96% of the public education funding to which its students are entitled. In contrast, local public schools on average receive only about 80% of per-student funding, with central administrators retaining 20%.

Claim: Charter schools would privatize public education

Opponents of Initiative 1240 say charter schools “would be a big step toward privatization and deunionization of Washington’s public schools allowing charter companies to profit off our children,”²⁸ and “Initiative 1240 would divert millions of dollars from our existing local public schools into a new, experimental system of privately run charter schools.”²⁹

Response: Charter schools are public entities, not private schools. Their teachers are public employees, receiving publicly funded salaries, benefits and pensions. Under Initiative 1240 charter schools would be created and regulated under state law, and they would receive money from the same local, state and federal sources as conventional public schools.

Under Initiative 1240 for-profit companies would be barred from opening or managing a charter school. Only nonprofit organizations could apply to open a charter school or convert an existing public school, and only nonprofit organizations would be eligible to participate in the management of the school.

A charter school would be allowed to hire for-profit contractors to provide building maintenance or other services, as is done routinely at

²⁸ “WFSE/AFSCME adds its opposition to charter schools initiative,” AFSCME Federation Hotline, July 5, 2012, at www.wfse.org/mobile/index.cfm?zone=/unionactive/view_article.cfm&HomeID=250318.

²⁹ “Is it time for charters?” *PubliCola*, July 17, 2012, at www.publicola.com/2012/07/17/is-it-time-for-charters/.

Charter schools are public schools; they do not take funding away from the public education system.

The CREDO study made no effort to account for differences in the laws authorizing and overseeing charter schools in 15 states and the District of Columbia.

conventional public schools. This is not the same as privatizing public education. When a public school hires a contractor for roof repair, for example, the company is not being allowed to “profit off our children.”

Claim: Charter schools allow private companies to profit from children

Opponents of Initiative 1240 say the measure would allow “charter companies to profit off our children.”³⁰

Response: Under Initiative 1240, no “charter company” or any other for-profit entity would be permitted to open or operate a charter school. Administrators of a charter school would be allowed to hire private contractors to provide limited services, such as maintenance and repair, on the same basis as administrators at other public schools.

Claim: Charter schools “cream off” the best students

Response: Charter schools are open to all students; administrators are not permitted to discriminate among students. Over-subscribed admissions are decided by lottery. Charter schools often open in urban neighborhoods where parents have become dissatisfied with how the system is serving their children. Lottery data show that charter school students generally reflect the population of the surrounding neighborhood.

Numerous studies using rigorous research methods show students at charter schools often perform as well as or better than their peers in conventional schools, and that this is accomplished without “creaming” the best students from other public schools.³¹

Claim: Charter schools do not perform better than conventional public schools

Opponents of charter schools often cite the findings of a study released in 2009 by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University. The study concluded 17% of charter schools deliver a superior education for their students, about half provide an education not substantially different from conventional public schools, and 37% of charter public schools deliver results substantially worse than conventional public schools.

Response: This objection contradicts the previous one. If charters “cream off” the best students, how can students at charter schools perform worse than students at conventional schools?

The CREDO study has been criticized for the weakness of its data and methodology.³² Stanford researchers only looked at charter schools in 15 selected states and the District of Columbia, considerably less than half of the 41 states that have charter schools. Furthermore, the laws authorizing charter schools vary widely across states, yet the CREDO study made no effort to account for these important differences.

³⁰ WFSE/AFSCME adds its opposition to charter schools initiative,” Federation Hotline, Washington Federation of State Employees/AFSCME, Council 28, July 5, 2012.

³¹ “Guide to Major Charter School Studies,” by Liv Finne, Washington Policy Center, July 2012, accessible at: www.washingtonpolicy.org/publications/brief/guide-major-charter-school-studies.

³² See “Guide to Major Charter School Studies,” by Liv Finne, Washington Policy Center, July 2012, pages 2–3, accessible at: www.washingtonpolicy.org/publications/brief/guide-major-charter-school-studies.

The data included charter schools open less than one year, and students who had attended a charter school for less than one year. In both cases the research period was not long enough to provide meaningful conclusions.³³

Claim: Charter schools reduce public involvement in public education

Opponents of Initiative 1240 say charter schools would reduce public involvement in public education because they operate independently of central administrators and elected school boards.

Response: Initiative 1240 makes no changes in the way school boards are elected or the way conventional public schools are administered. Charter schools would be part of the public education system. Charter schools would be authorized by locally elected school boards or by a state commission appointed by elected representatives.

Conventional public schools that convert to charters would continue to receive the same share of local levy funding as before. Newly founded charter schools would receive a share of levy funding after the next election. In both cases charter school families would have a strong interest in the outcome of public votes on local school levies.

Initiative 1240 would likely *increase* public involvement in public education because charter schools are community based and attendance is voluntary. Families attending a local charter school have chosen to be involved with the school; their children have not been assigned there by central district administrators. As with all public school families, their children’s future would depend on the quality of the local public school. Charter school families would have a strong interest in seeing that public education is adequately funded and academically successful.

Claim: Supporting charter schools is immoral

Opponents of Initiative 1240 say there is “a legal and moral obligation to fully fund basic education for our existing public schools,” implying that supporting a different kind of public school, like a charter school, is immoral.³⁴

Response: The parents of the two million children who attend charter schools in other states are not doing anything immoral. They are choosing a form of public education that works best for them. Initiative 1240 seeks to make that option available in Washington.

Article IX, section 1 of the Washington constitution says, “It is the paramount duty of the state to make ample provision for the education of all children living within its borders.” The constitution does not mandate how this duty must be fulfilled; the means are left to the legislature or, in the case of a ballot initiative, to the people.

Initiative 1240 would likely increase public involvement in public education because charter schools are community based and attendance is voluntary.

³³ “Let the Charters Bloom,” Paul E. Peterson, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, July 2, 2010, at www.hoover.org/publications/hoover-digest/article/35686.

³⁴ “I’m voting ‘no’ on Initiative 1240 because our kids can’t afford it,” by Rep. Marcie Maxwell, PublicCola Think Tank, “Is It Time for Charters?” July 17, 2012, at www.publiccola.com/2012/07/17/is-it-time-for-charters/.

Initiative 1240 would help the state meet its moral duty by providing children access to the good public education they were promised, but are not receiving now.

In the McCleary decision the state Supreme Court ruled, “This court defers to the Legislature’s chosen means of discharging its article IX, section 1 duty.” The court did not rule that only money spent on existing public schools meets the state’s legal and moral duty.

In addition, the courts have recognized that the education of 80,000 children attending private schools and being home schooled meets the constitutional requirement, even though these children are not attending public schools and receive no public money.

Washington taxpayers provide nearly \$9 billion per year to fund public education. Allowing a limited number of charter schools within the existing system of over 2,300 public schools would not violate the state’s legal or moral obligations.

Charter schools have been successful at educating poor and minority children who otherwise would have been assigned to a failing urban school. Initiative 1240 would help the state meet its moral duty by providing children access to the good public education they were promised, but are not receiving now.

Claim: Charter schools are racist.

Opponents of Initiative 1240 say their opposition is based partly on “concerns over segregation and the failure to meet the needs of students of color.”³⁵

Response: Under Initiative 1240, students at a charter school would receive the same civil rights and anti-discrimination protections as children attending any public school. In any case, racial discrimination in public education is illegal under federal law, and cannot be changed by a state initiative.

In practice, charter schools do not engage in racial discrimination. Research shows the racial makeup of charter schools generally reflects the demographic patterns of the surrounding neighborhood.³⁶ Charter school attendance is voluntary. Administrators could not adopt a racist admissions policy even if they wanted to, as opponents seem to imply.

In other states, community-based groups often open charter schools to serve poor and minority students, primarily because of the failure of conventional urban schools to educate children. Charter schools are successfully educating low-income and minority students in New York; Washington, D.C.; Boston; Chicago; Baltimore; Houston; Los Angeles; and New Orleans, among others. Charter schools are equally open to all students with a single exception: Admission preference is given to siblings of children already attending the school, regardless of their race.

³⁵ “I’m voting ‘no’ on Initiative 1240 because our kids can’t afford it,” by Rep. Marcie Maxwell; “Is It Time for Charters?” July 17, 2012, at www.publicola.com/2012/07/17/is-it-time-for-charters/.

³⁶ “The state of charter schools 2000: Fourth-year report,” by Nelson, B., Berman, P., Ericson, J., Kamprath, N., Perry, R., Silverman, D., & Solomon, D. (2000). Office of Educational Research and Improvement, at <http://www2.ed.gov/PDFDocs/4yrrpt.pdf>.

Conclusion

Charter schools have been a successful part of public education in other states for 20 years. In all that time no state has repealed its charter school law, and millions of graduates have gone on to lead successful, productive lives.

The key to the success of charter schools is local control. Principals at charter schools manage their budgets, teaching staff and educational programs with minimal central bureaucratic interference. Administrators are held accountable for student performance, both to parents and to their charter authorizer. Charter schools are reviewed annually and those that fail to educate students can be placed under new management.

In the 41 states that have them, charter schools are popular with parents, lawmakers and the public. Long waiting lists indicate parents in many communities believe charter schools offer a better education and better life prospects for their children. Across the country, opening a charter school has become routine and noncontroversial; it is seen simply as one way to provide children with a good public education.

It is the “paramount duty” of the state to provide for the education of all children residing within its borders. Charter schools can play a role in fulfilling this duty, especially for low-income and minority students who are often underserved by conventional public schools.

If passed, Initiative 1240 would give Washington the best charter school law in the country. Allowing a limited number of high-quality, nonprofit charter schools would give Washington children, especially those living in communities with low-performing schools, fair access to this proven form of public education.

In the 41 states that have them, charter schools are popular with parents, lawmakers and the public. Long waiting lists indicate parents in many communities believe charter schools offer a better education and better life prospects for their children.

About the Author

Liv Finne is Director of the Center for Education at Washington Policy Center. She is the author of numerous studies on education reform, including “Washington Policy Center’s Education Reform Plan: Eight Practical Ways to Reverse the Decline of Public Schools,” “An Option for Learning: An Assessment of Student Achievement in Charter Public Schools,” “An Overview of Public School Funding in Washington,” “Early Learning Proposals in Washington State,” and “Reviewing the Research on Universal Preschool and All-Day Kindergarten.” Liv holds a law degree from Boston University School of Law and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Wellesley College. She retired from civil litigation practice to raise two children and work as the business partner for Finne Architects, a small business she owns with her husband.



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