

Are charter schools “more accountable” than public schools?

No. Charter schools that fail to perform as expected are rarely held accountable. In theory, if a charter school does not meet its stated goals or if academic results are below stated expectations, the charter sponsor can revoke its charter or refuse to renew it, and families will withdraw their children from the school. This theory doesn’t work in reality.

This is why

Charters are rarely closed for academic reasons. Charters that don’t meet academic expectations are often given reprieves or remain on a probationary status for years. Those that eventually do close for academic reasons often poorly serve students for many years before shutting down.

Charter schools are a bad strategy for improving the whole public education system. In states that have large numbers of charter schools, those schools are often the worst academically performing schools in the state.

Charter schools get little to no oversight from authorities. Rules have lots of loopholes; staff and resources committed to oversight are often inadequate.

Charter schools can waste taxpayer money and get away with it. Unlike truly public schools that have to account for prospective and past spending in public budgets, charter spending of tax monies is often a black hole.

Charter schools can hide their operations from public view. Because charter schools are governed by non-elected, appointed boards, their leadership is often made up of people who frequently have personal or financial ties to the school’s vendors, its management company, or property lease holders.

Who oversees the schools? Charter school advocates often serve on government oversight boards where they have been known to hide or cover up data that may create unfavorable perceptions of the charter industry.

Look at the facts

Since **Ohio** adopted its A-F report card system for grading schools in 2012-2013, the state’s charter schools have **received more F grades** than all other grades combined.

After two decades of charter-school expansion in **Michigan**, the state’s overall performance on national assessments, known as “The Nation’s Report Card,” has fallen from middle of the pack to nearly bottom for fourth- and eighth-grade math and fourth-grade reading. The state’s charter schools **scored worse** on that test than their traditional public-school counterparts.

In **Florida**, where millions are wasted every year on charter schools that eventually close, 21 of those that remain open **scored a grade of D or below** on state assessments. Those that do well do so largely because they have student populations that exclude economically disadvantaged students.

A comparison of charter schools to public schools in **Louisiana** found on eighth-grade reading and math tests, charter-school students **perform worse than**



NPE TOOLKIT: School Privatization Explained

public schools by enormous margins – 2 to 3 standard deviations.

Neither the federal government nor the states have created a place taxpayers can go to see **how much in taxes are going to each charter school** and how the charters are spending the money, including what happens to real estate purchased with the public’s money.

An audit carried out by the US Department of Education Office of Inspector General looked at **33 charter schools** in six states and **found 22 examples** where charter school management operations were likely wasting public money. In **Pennsylvania**, a charter management organization CEO, who had authority to write and issue checks without charter school board approval, wrote checks to himself from the charter school’s accounts totaling about \$11 million.

At another **Pennsylvania** charter, a charter management company, that also owned a vendor that supplied services to the school, **received \$485,000 in payments** from the school without charter school board approval. In **Florida**, a charter and its management company **shared the same board** and entered into an expensive lease agreement for

the school building, expanded the facility, extended the lease, and increased the rental payments to the management company.

An investigation of charter schools in **North Carolina** found the **schools often enter into complicated contracts** with management firms, in which almost all of the public funds given to the school are then paid to the management organization or vendors and real estate companies associated with the management firm. This makes it almost impossible to audit real expenses. Typical budget reports consist of vague line items that give little idea what money is actually being spent on.

When a **North Carolina** state agency reported that charter schools in the state had **student populations that were whiter and more affluent** than student bodies at public schools, the state Charter Advisory Board, which has many board members with charter school ties, edited out that section of the report.

In **New Jersey**, reporters working on a series of articles on waste and lack of accountability in real estate transactions by charter schools frequently had requests for information stymied and were **refused in-person tours of the schools**.

| WHAT PRIVATIZERS BELIEVE | WHAT WE BELIEVE |
|---|--|
| Charter schools are more accountable to parents and the public. | Charter schools hide critical information about their schools from parents and the public. |
| Expanding charter schools increases education opportunities. | Expanding charter schools leads to more opportunities for taxpayers to get ripped off. |
| Charter schools are independently run schools. | Charter schools are all too often dependent on the wrong people: those who have something financially to gain from the school. |

Bottom Line

Charter schools continue to proliferate even though there is increasing evidence the public’s money is not being well spent. Rather than more ‘A’ rated schools, communities are getting more low-performing schools that have more opportunities to hide how taxpayer dollars are being spent. The flood of poor performing charters and the cost to taxpayers will only get worse until we get to the bottom of why this is happening and insist on transparency.