

Charter Schools: A Capital Funding Alternative for Public Schools

It may well be time to look to other sources of capital and program funds for public education.

Margaret Thatcher once said, "No one would remember the Good Samaritan if he'd only had good intentions; he had money as well." Some time ago the federal government ran out of the dollars from the Good Samaritan taxpayer and resorted to borrowing as a way to support the ever increasing demand to pay for a staggering variety of programs including education.

The Good Samaritan taxpayers of Delaware are burdened with an increasing bill for government programs and borrowing; and a state government more dependent on Washington who borrows nearly 45% of the money it spends or re-distributes.

Charter schools are an alternative source for education -- if school districts and DEDOE will take advantage of them.

Here is one example in one school district.

The growth in enrollment in the Indian River School District is creating a requirement for more classrooms, teachers and other programs.

On Tuesday, January 29th voters will vote on two referendums to raise \$6 million (the locally funded portion for the additional classrooms, new teaching positions, programs and other expenses). The total cost is over \$12 million with the balance paid by taxpayers throughout Delaware.

Before approving more funds voters should ask the Indian River School District to consider charter schools as an alternative; an alternative that if feasible will eliminate the need for \$12 million in new public money from local and state sources.

Charter schools are a reasonable and viable option.

- Charters like traditional schools are part of the public schools system. DEDOE and school districts have for nearly twenty years had the authority to authorize charter schools.
- Charters do not discriminate or select the highest performing pupils. Admission is determined by lottery if the school is oversubscribed. If not oversubscribed then selection is based on first-come-first-serve basis.
- Charters are some of the highest performing schools in Delaware, and have also had some well-publicized failures. Last year the state updated and strengthened charter school accountability and performance framework to assure academic success, organizational strength and financial viability.

- Charters are a source of innovation that benefits all public schools. The autonomy and flexibility built-in the environment promotes excellence, experimentation and innovation.
- And, as public/private partnerships charter schools are responsible for raising their own capital and operating within a per pupil cost which is about 90% of the operating cost of traditional schools. Given \$12,366 average operating revenue per pupil in Indian River School District, charter schools would save that district \$1,237 per pupil.

On January 29 the vote is not for or against more classrooms or teachers. Sussex County is fortunate to have solid growth in an economy that is marginally expanding. Some of the County's growth is due to potential for good schools and low taxes.

The question is how to fund expansion of the public school system:

Approving the referendum will support the traditional method and the School District will move forward.

Not approving will ask the School District to evaluate alternatives such as Charter Schools before moving forward.

It is your choice. We all have a responsibility to assure our children the opportunity for a good education which all agree is the foundation of success in life. Your vote is part of fulfilling your responsibility.

If you live in the Indian River School District, please vote. If you do not, you should find your school district's next school board meeting and ask whether they will consider establishing charter schools.

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