



America's Charter Schools Unfairly Maligned by Education Reform Opponents

Chairman of the House Education and the Workforce
Washington, D.C.
August 20, 2004
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Dear Colleague: *The New York Times* this week published a series of articles suggesting America's charter schools are "lagging behind" traditional public schools when it comes to educating disadvantaged and minority students. But the Times got it wrong, and charter school supporters are speaking out. "Since most children attending charter schools are from poor areas, [AFT] researchers looked at low-income students in both settings and still found those in charters doing significantly worse," the *New York Times* reported in a story this week about a new American Federation of Teachers (AFT) "analysis" of national test data. (Schemo, "Education Secretary Defends Charter Schools," *New York Times*, August 18, 2004) But the AFT report the Times was referring to says this: "Compared to their peers in regular public schools, black and Hispanic charter school students scored lower both in math and reading in grade 4, but the differences were not statistically significant. The achievement gaps between white and black students and between white and Hispanic students were about the same in charter schools as in regular public schools." (Page 4 of the AFT report; emphasis added) When the data is adjusted to take into account that charter schools serve much higher numbers of minority students than the typical U.S. public school, there is no statistically significant difference between the scores of the two types of schools. Criticism of this unfair attack on America's charter schools has come from sources across the ideological spectrum this week. Among those who have joined me in speaking out:

- U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige • National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)
- Commissioner Robert Lerner • Thomas B. Fordham Foundation • Progressive Policy Institute (Democratic think-tank) • Mickey Kaus (Democratic columnist) • Hoover Institution's Koret Task Force on K-12 Education • *Chicago Tribune* • *Seattle Times* • *New York Post* • *Delaware News-Journal* • U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions Committee Chairman Judd Gregg (R-NH) • Former Congressman Floyd Flake (D-NY) • Education Leaders Council • Center for Education Reform • National Association of Charter School Authorizers

The scores merely reinforce what we already know: disadvantaged minority students in America -- regardless of the kind of schools they attend - are far behind their peers academically. What differentiates charter schools from traditional public schools is that charter schools are welcoming these students, and can ultimately be held accountable later if they aren't giving them the best education possible. Lobbying organizations such as the AFT and the National Education Association (NEA) are spending millions to fight President Bush's efforts to make traditional public schools subject to similar accountability. The problem isn't that charter schools are "lagging behind;" the problem is that minority children in America are lagging behind. The achievement gap in American education must be closed, and it won't be closed without strong support for our nation's innovative charter schools. Sincerely, John Boehner (R-OH) Chairman Committee on Education & the Workforce U.S. House of Representatives

