

Twenty Years of Charter Schools in Pennsylvania Means Thousands of Lives Changed

By Ana Meyers

Exactly twenty years ago Governor Tom Ridge changed lives when he signed the Pennsylvania Law for Charter Schools creating the opportunity for public charter schools to serve students in the Keystone State. Today more than 130,000 students are enrolled in one of the 183 public charter schools located throughout Pennsylvania.

Charter schools offer a rich tapestry of options for families in search of the right fit for their child's education. Whether parents are interested in smaller class sizes, more customized learning, or a specified curriculum, charter schools provide an important option in the education landscape.

Across the state – from Pittsburgh to Scranton, Erie to Philadelphia – tens of thousands of parents are choosing charter schools as their preferred model of education. When given a choice in education, parental satisfaction increases, academic outcomes improve, and opportunities for customized learning expand. Public charter schools provide a pathway for education excellence.

Public charter schools are open to all students and do not charge tuition. Much like traditional public schools, charter schools are held to high academic and financial standards. At the core of the charter school model is the belief that schools should be held accountable – to parents, students, and taxpayers. This accountability allows school leaders more opportunity to encourage innovation in the classroom, as a way to meet the education needs of the students.

While the majority of families in our state continue to choose their neighborhood public school, for some families, that simply is not the best option for their child. Public charter schools offer an important alternative for students who may need a different approach to their education. It's essential to understand that every child learns differently and one size does not fit all when it comes to education.

The great debate in education should focus not on one preferred model over another – whether traditional public, public charter, private, or home school. Instead, we should identify the model that works best for each child.

Public charter schools play an important role in the matrix of options available to parents in Pennsylvania and we should promote the opportunities for parents to choose the best education setting for their child. For those families who are

interested in exploring another education option for their child, a public charter school may be the right fit.

As we celebrate the great strides we've made in education choice over the last twenty years, we continue to push for equality in our public school system. Charter schools are public schools that deserve to be funded equitably and recognized as an important option for families in Pennsylvania. Now more than ever we must be the voice of students who deserve the very best education possible.

Ana Meyers is the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Coalition of Public Charter Schools. This week marks twenty years since the PA Charter Law was passed.