

## **A New Wave of Charter Schools Offers Hope to Pittsburgh Families**

By Ana Meyers and Ron Sofo

Throughout the Keystone State, thousands of families are benefiting from the educational opportunities provided by public charter schools. As public schools, charters are tuition free, non-sectarian, and serve students from a diverse array of backgrounds. These schools offer students an additional option outside of their neighborhood-zoned school. For many students, they are a lifeline of hope.

While parents in Pittsburgh are working to find the right education environment for their children, there are some folks who want to see the expansion **of effective charter schools** prevented altogether. **These special interest groups are driven to protect the system, the traditional way of doing things, and their own pocketbooks rather than providing quality educational options for all students.**

Public charter schools serve a disproportionate number of low-income, minority students who otherwise are limited to their neighborhood school. We know that these communities are in desperate need of additional education options. We also know that in many of these communities, there are charter schools that are already **positively** changing lives.

For example, City Charter High School in Pittsburgh has about 600 students, **54** percent minority, **68** percent economic disadvantage with a **91.7 percent cohort graduation rate as calculated by the state for the class of 2016 compared to the overall Pittsburgh Public School District's 79 percent cohort graduation rate.**

The Pennsylvania Coalition of Public Charter Schools represents both cyber and brick-and-mortar charter schools throughout the state. We have seen first-hand the impact that these schools have on the lives of children and the benefits provided to charter families. With the current discussions regarding additional charter schools coming to Pittsburgh, we believe this is something to be celebrated.

When parents are given additional education options, they simply have a choice **to find the best “fit” for their children.** They are no longer beholden to a government-mandated school and they are no longer limited by a lack of financial means. And, as the data shows, their academic outcomes increase. **Effective** public charter schools are another option, an additional choice that allows families to determine if their child's academic and personal success would be better served in a new environment.

As the debate continues over expanding the number of charter schools in Pittsburgh, we encourage readers to explore the data behind the existing charters in the state. These schools are outperforming their counterparts, student success is soaring, and parent satisfaction levels are increasing. We certainly believe that charters are a positive option for many families. And, we understand that for many others they may be perfectly satisfied with their neighborhood school. The bottom line, however, is simple: it should be up to the parents to decide where their child attends school and these parents deserve to have public charter schools as an option.

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