

# A literature review of the charter school system

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The charter school system is a high controversial educational move towards business-run schools. Their influence is already palpable as increasingly, more and more schools, nationally, are becoming privately owned. These schools, invariably, deviate from the government-instated curriculum by adding their own impetus to various topics – for example, the Edison group, who currently own 100 schools across America, place more importance on subjects such as Maths and Science. However, it is this aspect of charter schools that attracts a large amount of criticism: their autonomy enables them to implement a curriculum which is centric to one or two subjects. This immediately raises concerns over how fully the students will be educated in other areas.

However, charter school teachers seem proud of their schools' autonomous status: " According to educators in these three charter schools, autonomy over instructional materials and strategies was one of the central reasons why they engaged in charter school reform." (Wells, 2002, p 67). Arguably, from the teachers' point of view, the freedom to educate without limits or restrictions is a wonderful concept. However, this autonomy is a heavy responsibility and the question remains whether private businesses are the correct people to handle that. It is explained by courts that, " From how charter schools come into being, to who attends and who can teach, to how they are governed and structured, to funding, accountability and evaluation – the Legislature has plotted all aspects of their existence." (Berends, 2009, p 140). However, one thing that the court fails to claim control of is the curriculum of charter schools; arguably, this is the most important aspect of any school and the lack of centralized control (other than the private

business) is a concern: no for-profit business acts in the interest of anyone except itself and as such, there is an implication that its choice of curriculum could be influenced by a desire to meet its own ends.

Many have also argued that charter school are having a definably negatively effect on public schools: “ Because district residents were purportedly unwilling to increase taxes to make up for the projected loss of revenue [as a result of charter schools], the school board maintained that it would have to reduce services and staff...” (Berends, 2009, p 140). The issue here is the financial impact that charter schools have on public schools: because of their increased resources (due to fiscal injections from businesses), parents are increasingly swayed towards sending their children to charter schools, meaning that public schools are emptier and therefore, bring in less government revenue per child. However, “ the costs charters face are similar to school districts in some instances” (Murphy & Shiffman, 2002, p 57) and so the argument could be made that whilst charter schools “ have different relationships with revenue sources” (Murphy & Shiffman, 2002, p 57), public schools need to focus less on what they don’t have and more on what they do have and that, arguably, if they have less students then they require less staff an resources anyway.

One of the more positive aspects of charter schools is their ability to allow low-income families to provide their children with an above-par education: “ Low-income families are more likely than high-income families to take advantage of choices within the public system” (Hassel, 1999, p 34). Therefore, charter schools present these families with the opportunity to put

their children through schools which provide an, arguably, higher standard of education. Ron Zimmer and the Rand Education Institute agree, stating that charter schools provide students and their parents with “ expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities” within the public school system, as well as offering extra professional opportunities to teachers (Zimmer & Rand Education, 2003, p 2-3).

## References

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