



**House Education Committee  
Interested Party Testimony on HB 2  
March 9, 2015**

**Presented by Ohio Association of Public School Employees, Ohio Parent Teacher Association, League of Women Voters, Ohio Federation of Teachers and American Association of University Women of Ohio**

Chairman Hayes, Vice Chair Brenner and Ranking Member Fedor, I am Darold Johnson, Legislative Director for the Ohio Federation of Teachers, and this testimony is supported by the Ohio Association of Public School Employees, the Ohio Parent Teacher Association, the League of Women Voters of Ohio, the Ohio Federation of Teachers and the American Association of University Women.

Each of these organizations participate in a coalition that has been monitoring charter school performance in Ohio for more than 14 years; however, the concept of charter schools began even earlier.

American Federation of Teachers President Albert Shanker first proposed the concept of charter schools in a 1988 speech to the National Press Club. His idea for charter schools was modeled after a concept he observed in German schools. He wanted charters to be a new kind of public school, a school within a school that would allow teachers to experiment with innovative approaches to educating students. Publicly funded but independently managed, these schools would be given a charter to try their fresh approaches for a set period of time and be renewed only if they succeeded. According to Richard Kahlenberg's biography of Shanker, *Tough Liberal*, charters were to be educational laboratories where teachers would be empowered to draw on their expertise to create breakthrough strategies which could be applied broadly to public schools. As the state affiliate of the AFT, OFT is very proud of Shanker's inventive new approach to education.

Before his death in 1997, Shanker, according to Kahlenberg, watched with growing dismay as opportunists morphed his idea into something quite different. Shanker was disturbed that the market-driven charter school rationale led some states to allow private, for-profit corporations to enter the charter school business. For-profit companies, he warned, would inevitably put shareholder interests before educating children.

But Shanker wasn't willing to throw in the towel entirely. In a 1996 AFT Executive Council meeting, he suggested it was time to separate the wheat from the chaff. He suggested that AFT put out a careful analysis of types of charter schools to highlight successes and failures of the various

charter school models. Such an analysis “could have a tremendous impact on influencing good legislation and getting rid of lousy legislation.”

Ten years after Shanker originally proposed the charter idea, the charter school movement started in Ohio. It has grown from a pilot to impact almost every district in the state. Unfortunately, the concept has been co-opted, and, instead of being incubators for innovation that could be spread across the system, charters have become a competing force that has produced far more failure and financial waste for taxpayers and children in this state. According to Ohio Department of Education report card data, too many charter schools fail to meet the academic needs of children in Ohio.

ODE’s 2012-2013 Annual Report on Ohio Community Schools shows that almost six in 10 charter schools earned a C or below on Ohio’s measure of student growth and nearly nine in 10 charter schools produced student performance at a C or below.

We appreciate the recognition of this fact by Representatives Dovilla and Roegner. HB 2 is a first and long needed step toward separating the wheat from the chaff.

It’s time for Ohio to take the steps necessary to shed the label of being the “wild, wild west of charter schools” and instead become a model for ensuring quality in the system. One of the first and most needed steps toward this goal is increasing transparency and accountability. We offer the following amendments that will both increase public accountability and give parents more information so that they can make well-informed choices. These amendments are based on recommendations suggested by the Columbus Dispatch, the Fordham Bellwether Report, and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University.

Description	Rationale
<p>Clarify that property purchased with public funds is public property</p> <p>NOTE: In a recent hearing in the House Finance Committee, State Superintendent Dr. Ross said that property purchased with public dollars (such as a building and other expenses) is public and not private.</p>	<p>The State Supreme Court ruled that staff should see how money is being spent. Now the General Assembly should establish this provision in law</p>
<p>Prohibit for-profit management companies from operating, especially as they expand online opportunities.</p>	<p>Six states prohibit for-profits charter schools. These state are: TN, MS, NM, MA, NY, RI.</p>
<p>Require background checks for sponsors and operators.</p>	<p>Several charter operators have criminal records. In Columbus, Talented Tenth school operator was convicted recently on robbery charges. He had prior convictions.</p>
<p>Make surety bonds for low performing charters equal to the estimated amount they would receive from the state.</p>	<p>In 2015, charters will need a \$50K surety bond. The bond should be higher for poor performers to ensure that the state can recover its investment.</p>
<p>Clarify that Cleveland and other public school districts have the ability to approve charters operating in their district.</p>	<p>Ohio should prevent sponsor shopping. Charters in Cleveland went to ODE for sponsorship after CMSD refused to sponsor them. Bad performers must be held accountable and prohibited from jumping from one sponsor to another when</p>

	facing scrutiny.
Require that members of charter school governing boards file full financial disclosure reports and identify any potential conflicts of interest, relationships with management companies, or other business dealings with the school, its management company, or other charter schools. * <b>Need to add education management organizations (not in HB 2)</b>	Accountability - One of the biggest voids in HB 2 and Ohio charter school laws are provisions about management companies. Ohio needs to hold management companies accountable also.
Require open meetings for all board meetings, and post minutes on website.	Accountability – This would allow parents and the public to get more information about school operations just like traditional public schools.
Require online access to minutes from charter school governing board meetings, the school’s policies, information about staff, instructional strategies, curriculum, school rules and behavior codes, school budgets, and information about management companies or other large contracts.*	Accountability - This would allow parents and the public to get more information about school operations just like traditional public schools.
Require complete contracts for management services to be <b>electronically posted on the schools’ websites within 10 days of execution</b> . The posting should include detailed information about the services to be provided by the management company and all financial commitments and compensation, as well as all fees and bonuses to be provided to the management company. *	Accountability
Require full public financial disclosure by charter management organizations of their expenditures and profits related to the operation of each school they serve. *	Accountability

Source: \*2014 Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University /The Bellwether Report

Each of these organizations has long advocated for high quality charter schools. High quality charter schools can be a pathway to new innovation as long as they remain associated with public schools and their operations are open to full disclosure.

Thank you for your time and attention. This concludes our testimony and I welcome any questions.