

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF FLORIDA
FINAL REPORT

STATEWIDE STUDY ON SCHOOL CHOICE AND CONSENSUS REPORT ON CHARTER SCHOOLS

BY

Florida League of Women Voters Education Team

April 20, 2014

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....1

Method.....1

League Principles for School Choice.....2

League Positions on School Choice.....2

Consensus Results.....3

Appendix I: LWV Statewide Charter School Study Highlights.....8

Appendix II: Fact Sheet: Statewide Study on School Choice.....10

Appendix III: Glossary.....14

Appendix IV: Consensus Packet.....17

 Thoughts on Educational Reform.....17

 Introduction to the Consensus Questions.....18

 The Charter School Agenda.....18

 The Essential Guide to Charter Schools Lawmaking: Model Legislation for States..19

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF FLORIDA

STATEWIDE STUDY ON SCHOOL CHOICE: CONSENSUS REPORT ON CHARTER SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

The Florida League of Women Voters' study on school choice was initiated to better understand the oversight of public moneys that are allocated to charter schools and other private educational institutions. How these public/private educational programs align with the constitutional requirement for a uniform, high quality school system of free public schools as stated in the Florida Constitution was also a concern. The League recognizes first and foremost it is a paramount duty of the state to provide for education. Charter schools, while privately owned and managed, are under contract to public school districts, funded by the public and accountable to the public.

This report includes the study methodology and the League's principles and positions on school choice that were derived from the conclusions. This information will be used to revise the League's Study and Action manual for issue advocacy. The appendices include consensus materials, highlights of individual studies, a study fact sheet, and a glossary.

METHOD

At the Annual Convention in 2013, the Alachua County League proposed that the Florida League of Women Voters conduct a statewide study of school choice. Eighteen leagues representing 28 counties elected to conduct local studies of their districts' charter schools. These studies centered around three broad questions:

- Who do charter schools serve?
- Are charter school academic programs different from public schools?
- How are charters owned and managed?
- What types of school facilities do charter schools use?

Data for the study included 2011-12 individual school audits, school grades, school size, racial and socio-economic demographic information, and individual teacher/administrator salaries. Local leagues designed and conducted their studies. They gathered additional data from school visits, meetings with district officials and other studies. Study results were submitted to the state-wide chair person, and 18 consensus statements were written to reflect issues drawn from the studies. Each local league then conducted a consensus meeting to consider these statements. Consensus was reached on 17 of the 18 statements. It was not reached on the statement about the use of religious facilities to house charters. Following the adoption of the study by the League Board of Directors, education principles and League positions were written.

LEAGUE PRINCIPLES FOR SCHOOL CHOICE

Florida's constitution provides for a uniform, efficient, safe, secure, and high quality school system as the paramount duty of the state. The League of Women Voters supports the following principles to help ensure that public education can fulfill its duty to Florida's children. The implementation of the law should adhere to these basic principles:

- A uniform system should include the same requirements for educational content, certification, instructional hours and assessment for any school, public or private, that receives public money. Student admissions and dismissal policies should be uniformly applied to public and charter schools.
- Public moneys should not be allocated, directly or indirectly, to private schools or for private school scholarships.
- An efficient system must require that all students have access to appropriate educational opportunities within the public school system. Direct or indirect funding for public/private partnerships, if allowed, should complement district educational programs, not duplicate them.
- Local school districts must have management oversight responsibility of any school within its district, public or private, that receives public money. Districts must report a school's failure to comply with state regulations and/or contract agreements. They ensure that all criteria for staffing and administration, fiscal management including illegal assessment of fees, policy and procedural transparency, and procurement and facilities are met with no conflict of interest among the governing board or staff, the same as any public agency. The district should also have the primary authority not only to require corrective action but also to dissolve contracts when warranted.
- A charter school must be organized by, and be operated by, a non-profit organization by Florida law. The implementation of this law must be stringently applied.
- Every student should have access to a free, high quality education regardless of race, family income or geographical location. Less expensive alternative schools that do not require the same standards for curriculum and instruction should not be allowed. Provision must be made for appropriate high quality services to meet the diverse needs of children. Accountability requirements should be the same for all schools funded with public money.

LEAGUE POSITIONS ON SCHOOLS CHOICE

The following positions are based on the League principles and the consensus statements.

Oversight: The locally elected school board is constitutionally established to provide oversight

and direction to the educational systems in each district. Every school board must have the authority as well as the responsibility to require fiscal, management and procedural accountability to enforce the terms and conditions of the charter contracts. The requirement of local school districts to authorize and oversee a parallel educational organization must be adequately funded. Districts' authority to enforce charter provisions must be strengthened.

Charter School Purpose: The purpose of charter schools is to serve unmet needs with a primary focus on low income families, reading, and innovative instructional methods. Local needs are best identified by the local school district as part of its strategic plan. To avoid inefficiency through duplicative programs or to avoid insufficient funding for either program to be successful, charter schools should serve as a complement to, not a competitor of, traditional public schools.

Charter School Management: Since charter schools are called public schools, management structures and requirements should be similar. Traditional public schools have Parent Advisory Councils, and charters have boards that must be independent of the school administration and the management company. A charter school should have **at least** one community resident answerable to the parents and community and not be governed by an entity with no ties or accountability to the community it serves. Charter schools and boards should be supervised by district staff with enforcement powers to ensure that they conform to state regulations. These regulations must include curriculum, fiscal responsibilities, admissions and dismissal procedures, and adherence to building codes.

Both traditional and charter public schools require flexibility to develop schedules and curricula. The quality and stability of an experienced instructional staff is equally important. Teachers and administrators of ALL public schools, including charters, should meet certification and qualification levels commensurate with their duties and roles. Charter schools must have appropriately certified full or part time instructors on staff before applying for Exceptional Student Services funding. The community is best served if the compensation for public and charter instructional personnel is within a district's maximum and minimum guidelines.

Transparency and Accountability: Traditional and charter public schools must report teacher turnover and student mobility rates in addition to end of year student grade retention. Charter public schools must report financial information in a format that is adequate for comparison with other public schools, particularly regarding facilities ownership and management contracts. All schools, regardless of size, must report state student assessment test scores and other accepted indicators of student achievement levels.

Conflict of Interest: Administrators and governing board members of all public schools, including charters, must not directly supervise or determine compensation for family members. Members of the charter schools' governing board **MUST NOT** have any financial interest in the

charter school or be employees of the management company. Legislators serving on education or

appropriation committees must recuse themselves on votes related to charter school finance if they have any financial interest in one or more charter schools.

Charter School Facilities and Funding: As a recipient of public education funds, charter schools should meet the procurement standards applicable to other public institutions as stated in statute and rule regarding competitive bids, purchasing of services, equipment, supplies and sites. Records of all transaction and procedures should meet all public records laws for full disclosure. Charter schools that acquire their facilities using public funds must assure that the facility reverts to public ownership at termination of the charter. If the facility is subject to a mortgage, the mortgage must disclose and protect the public's interest in the facility. A conversion of an existing public school to a public charter school should only be authorized by the local governing school board retaining full public ownership of the facility and the assets associated with the school. A public charter school may be housed in a religious institution so long as secular identity is maintained and the student body reflects broad racial/ethnic/religious and economic diversity.

CONSENSUS RESULTS

A consensus packet with reference materials was provided to local leagues and is included in Appendix IV.

Florida's constitution provides for a uniform, high quality school system as the paramount duty of the state. The purpose and management of charter schools are subject to study and debate. A lawsuit has been filed in Florida that alleges that the current educational system is neither uniform nor high quality. The League supports the Florida constitution. Discuss these statements and reach consensus on whether or not they will improve charter school management and make Florida's educational system more closely aligned with the Florida constitution.

Seventeen local leagues completed local studies of their district's charter schools. A few of the local leagues did not write formal reports of their studies, but all provided formal reports of the consensus meeting. The individual study reports are linked to an interactive Florida map of local leagues which can be found on the state league's website. The consensus meetings were held to consider statements that reflected the issues and recommendations drawn from the studies. This report summarizes the results of these meetings. One league studied its one and only charter and did not report consensus. Another completed the portion of the consensus statements that related to its study. An N/A designation was used when there was no response for a statement. Comments for each topic area were summarized by the chairperson of the study.

Purpose of Charter Schools

1. Districts must identify unmet student and community educational needs as part of their strategic plans and submit priorities for alternative and/or charter schools to the

4

Florida Department of Education.

RESULTS: YES: 14 NO: 2 NA: 1

2. Only charter schools that offer identifiable innovative teaching/learning methods or meet specific unmet needs should be authorized.

RESULTS: YES: 15 NO: 1 NA: 1

COMMENTS: While support was very strong, concern about ability/willingness of districts to define/make unmet need assessments, and how to define innovation were expressed.

Management and Accountability

1. Traditional public and charter schools procedures must allow flexible schedules and curricula.

RESULTS: YES: 15 NO: 1 NA: 1

2. Charter and traditional schools may have flexibility in salary and benefit compensation packages, but they must adhere to a minimum and maximum salary range that reflects district salary guidelines.

RESULTS: YES: 16 NO: 0 NA: 1

3. A charter school governing board must have a minimum of one local representative, not the administrator, who resides in the community and is answerable to the school parents and community.

RESULTS: YES: 16 NO: 0 NA: 1

4. Charter school admissions and dismissal policies and procedures should be supervised by district staff to ensure they conform to state guidelines.

RESULTS: YES: 15 NO: 1 NA: 1

5. Those charter schools that educate students requiring ESE services must hire appropriately certified full or part time instructors before applying for additional funding for the services.

RESULTS: YES: 16 NO: 0 NA: 1

COMMENTS: Studies show significant problems, but there was some concern that flexibility and practicality are at odds. There was strong support for a majority of local members on boards. Concern was expressed about costs to district of charter

school oversight. Do districts have any meaningful responsibility for correcting charters' rule infractions?

Transparency and Accountability

1. All public schools, including charter schools, must report teacher and student retention.

RESULTS: YES: 15 NO: 0 NA: 2

5

2. The charter school audit template must be adequate for comparison and analysis and identify facilities ownership and management contractors.

RESULTS: YES: 15 NO: 0 NA: 2

3. Teachers and administrators, including principals, must meet certifications and qualifications at the same level as all other public school instructors or administrators.

RESULTS: YES: 14 NO: 1 NA: 2

4. All schools, even small ones, receiving state funds must report state assessment test scores, and receive some indicator of student achievement levels.

RESULTS: YES: 14 NO: 1 NA: 2

COMMENTS: Provision for experts in field and business backgrounds as administrators should be allowed. Need to clarify terminology e.g. retention.

Conflict of Interest

1. Administrators and board members of all public schools, including charters, must **not** supervise or determine compensation for family members.

RESULTS: YES: 15 NO: 0 NA: 2

2. Members of charter school governing boards must **not** have financial interests in the charter school.

RESULTS: YES: 15 NO: 0 NA: 2

3. Legislators serving on education or appropriation committees must recuse themselves on votes related to charter school finance if they have financial interests in charter schools.

RESULTS: YES: 14 NO: 1 NA: 2

COMMENTS: Strong agreement and concern that this could be more inclusive.

Facilities and Funding

1. As a recipient of public education funds, charter schools must be required to meet the same procurement requirements as other public institutions, including competitive bids for leasing, acquisition of sites and purchasing of supplies, equipment and facilities. Records should meet all public records laws for full disclosure.

RESULTS: YES: 15 NO: 0 NA: 2

2. Charter schools that acquire their facility using public funds must assure that the facility reverts to public ownership at the termination of the charter. If a facility is

6

subject to a mortgage to be paid using public funds, the mortgage must disclose and protect the public's interest in the facility.

RESULTS: YES: 15 NO: 0 NA: 2

3. A conversion of an existing public school to a charter should only be authorized by the local governing school board retaining full public ownership of the facility and assets associated with the school.

RESULTS: YES: 15 NO: 0 NA: 2

4. A charter school may be housed in a religious institution in order to broaden the availability of facilities for use by charter schools so long as secular identity is maintained and the student body reflects broad racial/ethnic and economic diversity.

RESULTS: YES: 10 NO: 5 NA: 2

COMMENTS: The terms need to be clarified e.g. facilities, secular. Clarify how facilities would revert to district and prorated reimbursement to State if buildings sold.

APPENDIX I

LWV STATEWIDE CHARTER SCHOOL STUDY HIGHLIGHTS

Individual study highlights were submitted by local leagues and compiled into the categories listed below.

Charter Teacher Turnover. Alachua charter school teacher turnover is high, perhaps because salaries are low. In 2011-12, 25% of charter teachers earned less than \$32,400, the starting salary for the district's beginning teachers, and 75% earned less than \$38,000. Most received no health coverage or retirement benefits. Three of the 16 charters had 100% new faculty and staff and 3 others had over 60% new hires. Half of the charters received either no school grade or a D/F.

Maintain Local Control. Volusia has 8 charters. The most striking result of our study were the 8 closed, failed charter schools like Boston Ave. It had applied for a charter several times and was denied locally. It opened based on a second appeal to the State. Seminole has concerns about not knowing the location of the approved charter schools that have not yet acquired property. The district cannot plan for the impact of these charters on public schools. In Brevard, There were 9 appeals to DOE (Department of Education) after each school was not accepted. Brevard County won 8 of the 9 appeals. The Charter School Compliance System gives a compliance score, which flags potential problems that can signal a need for additional review. Additionally there is an annual financial report by an outside auditor and all significant findings are followed up.

For Profit Management. Last year Orange County had 31 charter schools; ten were managed by for-profit companies; one by a for-profit franchise. One company held four board meetings in other counties that covered 20 of their charter schools at one meeting. Their charter school in Orange County received a school grade of F, and their applications to open three more were denied by OCPs, but the company has appealed to the State. There has never been enough money for the schools, and now, not only do we have an expensive parallel school system, but

it includes many management companies turning a profit. In Hillsborough, the three schools opened since 2011 are owned by Charter Schools USA and enroll more than **20%** (2,799) of all charter students: Winthrop – 1,254; Henderson Hammock – 895; and Woodmont – 650. At Woodmont, **44%** of total revenue was spent on instruction in 2011, and **42%** was spent on management fees and leases. By contrast, Hillsborough County Public Schools spend at least **86%** of revenue on instruction. Woodmont has an (F) for 2013 and a (D) for 2012. Six elementary schools are within one mile of Woodmont – all have higher FCAT scores than Woodmont.

Innovation. The Academy of Environmental Science is an example of a charter public management model that can and does work. All the state funding stays in the district and the

8

teachers get all benefits. The facilities are owned by the city, but the school has curriculum etc. control over the program. Within this district are several other types of schools within a school but not charter. One is to train for medical skills and art. They also have IB. Over 40 % are economically disadvantaged in our community. Presently, the Gates Education Fund is studying the Citrus District as an example of a rural district.

Serve Unmet Needs. In Dade, elementary and K-8 Charter schools in low-income neighborhoods are starting with an advantaged population not indicative of the cities' populations. City-wide Kindergarten Readiness examination shows that on average 67% of kindergarteners have school readiness skills while charter school preparedness scores average around 76%. This difference brings into question admission procedures. Many schools are filled with students not representative of their communities. Big business charter companies with multiple locations (Mater Academy, Somerset Academy, Doral Academy, etc.) and more funding own over half of the charter schools in Miami-Dade. Of the big chain charter schools (58), 38 are in low-income cities. Of the 38 only 15 provide access and opportunity, meaning 39% of the big charter company schools supposed to provide access to the poor are not.

Resegregation. Duval public schools have about 38% white and 42% African-American students divided nearly equally between girls and boys. But our study of 20 charter schools reveals a return to segregation by race and gender, although by choice. Three of the 20 charter schools we studied are 95% African-American, one is 83%, one is 78%, 2 are 60-64%, and two 52-54%. One of the 20 is for girls only. Two of the new charters are also gender specific, and their founders (local) spent most of their interview emphasizing that their main goal is a school for African American boys. The all-male charter school for African-Americans is called Valor; for girls, Virtue.

Selective Admissions/Dismissals. Of our 9 charters that received an "A" school grade, only 1 had demographics that came close to the district in % of free/reduced lunch students or % of minorities. The 2 charter schools that received a "C" from the state had student percentages that were the same as the district. Of the 4 charters with mostly higher income/non-minority

students, 3 had no plans to increase their diversity. These 3 charters also dismiss for low grades, poor FCAT scores, or retention at grade level. One charter that started keeping students who were retained, or had poor scores, dropped from an “A” to a “C” on the state grading scale.

Poor Financial Management. In Escambia County all but one of the charter schools that closed did so because they could not manage the money. The most successful charter schools were Pensacola Beach and Byrnsville that the community demanded for geographical reasons. They were public schools about to be closed, and the community did not want their elementary school children to be bussed to get to the nearest school.

APPENDIX II

FACT SHEET: STATEWIDE STUDY ON SCHOOL CHOICE

I. Private School Florida Tax Credit (FTC) Scholarships

- In 2012-13, there were 51,075 FTC vouchers awarded state-wide at \$4,335 each. Corporations received tax rebates by contributing to the Step Up for Children Foundation which distributes the scholarships to students who qualify for the Free and Reduced Lunch program. Total dollars disbursed was \$206,974,102.
http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/Information/CTC/files/Fast_Facts_FTC.pdf
- McKay scholarships are funded directly from tax dollars to students with disabilities who have an IEP or a 504 plan. These scholarships may be awarded to public or private schools. Private schools received 26,611 McKay scholarships. IEP Scholarships averaged \$7,019 each and 504 plan scholarships averaged \$3977. Total money disbursed in 2012-13 was \$168,890,916.
https://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/Information/McKay/files/Fast_Facts_McKay.pdf
- Private schools are not required to take the FCAT and do not receive school grades; their curriculum, accreditation, teacher certification, and evaluation standards are less stringent than the public school requirements.
https://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/Information/Private_Schools/choosing_a_private_school.asp

- Most students receiving FTC and McKay scholarships attend private, religious schools: 73% of FTC students attended religious schools, and 64% of McKay students do. (same sources)

II. Charter Schools

Demographics

- There are 574 charters which is 14.5% of Florida public schools. Charters enroll 203,000 students.
http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/Information/Charter_Schools/
<http://dashboard.publiccharters.org/dashboard/schools/page/overview/state/FL/year/2013>
- Charter school demographics: 37% Hispanic; 35% White; 23% African American; 5% Other. 51% Free and Reduced Lunch; 9% ESE.
- Public School demographics: 30% Hispanic; 41% White; 23% African American; 6% Other. 59% Free and Reduced Lunch; 19% ESE.
 (Source: Fla.DOE.)
- Charters have more racial imbalance than public schools: In 2011, 1/8 charters are 90% single race; 1/12 public schools are 90% single race; In Miami 25 charters have 90% Hispanic above the 65% Hispanic percentage in Miami schools.
http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/2011-05-01/news/fl-charter-schools-segregation-20110501_1_charter-schools-florida-charters-marie-turchiaro.

10

Management

- Charter schools are under contract to local school boards. They are funded at the same per student level as public schools plus (in 2013) the \$91 million state PECO tax dollars to support maintenance and payments for privately owned buildings. Most districts, however, do not allocate local referendum funds to charters. Charters cannot do bond issues. <http://www.fldoe.org/fefp/pdf/fefpdist.pdf>. Public school districts with 2.5% growth received \$6 million in PECO, others received none.
<http://www.fldoe.org/fefp/pdf/fefpdist.pdf>
- Charter schools are managed by the charter holder or by either non-profit or for-profit educational management companies.
- Three for-profit management companies control 27% of Florida's charter schools. Management fees of about \$450s per student are usual. In addition to lease or debt service payments that are often at least 20% of the total school budget:

- The three largest for profit management companies in Florida are: Academica: 91schools, Charter USA: 44, Imagine: 14. They account for 27% of charters. (Source: websites). Source: Auditor General
http://www.myflorida.com/audgen/pages/chschools_efile%20a-h.htm.
- If a charter closes, the facility remains with the private owner. (Fla.DOE)
- Florida Auditor General Summary Findings of Charter Schools: 1) 15 audits were not submitted in 2011-12; 27 audits were more than 45 days late, and 4 were received after the March 2013 deadline. 2) Audits disclosed instances of noncompliance with certain requirements, primarily related to the reports, letters, and financial statement note disclosures. 3) Comprehensive review of a sample... disclosed apparent noncompliance primarily related to the presentation of financial statements and note disclosures, budgetary comparison schedules and schedule of expenditures required for Federal Single Audits.
- <http://www.myflorida.com/audgen/pages/summaries/2013-187.pdf>

11

- Charters are big business: <http://www.miamiherald.com/2011/09/19/v-fullstory/2541051/florida-charter-schools-big-money.html#ixzz1gVm5fARf>

Achievement

- Charter schools participate in the FCAT and school grade programs. There is no consistent difference in achievement for charters and public school students. (Source: CREDO: <http://credo.stanford.edu/research-reports.html>)
- One percent of public schools had an F school grade on FCAT , and 6% of charters did in the 2011 school grades report

Charter Closures

- Nationally charters close for the following reasons: financial 41.7 %; mismanagement 24% and academic 18% (Center for Educational Reform 2011)
- Statewide closure rate of charters is 20% percent. Charters are 50% of all F rated schools in 2011 (source: <http://jacksonville.com/opinion/blog/479262/jeff-reece/2011-07-28/edujax-half-floridas-failing-schools-are-charters>)

Conflict of Interest Concerns

- Senator John Legg Chair of Senate Education Committee is co-founder and business administrator of Daysprings Academy in Port Richey.
- Senator Kelli Stargel from Orange County is on board of McKeel Academies. She is on the Education Committee and sponsored the Parent Trigger Bill.
- <http://www.theledger.com/article/20130429/EDIT02/130429282>

- House Budget Chairman Seth McKeel is on the board of McKeel Academy Schools in Polk County.
- Anne Corcoran, wife of future House Speaker Richard Corcoran has a charter school in Pasco County. <http://www.tampabay.com/news/education/k12/pascos-classical-prep-charter-school-delays-opening-for-a-year/1276912>. Richard Corcoran is Chair of the House Appropriations Committee.
- Senator Anitere Flores of Miami is president of an Academica managed charter school in Doral.
- Florida Representative Erik Fresen is Chair of the House Education subcommittee on appropriations. Representative Fresen's sister is the Vice President of Academica and is married to the president. <http://www.tampabay.com/blogs/the-buzz-florida-politics/content/ethics-commission-clears-miami-rep-erik-fresen-alleged-voting-conflict>. http://www.miamiherald.com/2011/12/14/2545708_p2/company-cultivates-links-to-lawmakers.html
- George Levesque, Florida House lawyer cleared Erik Fresen of conflict of interest concerns over charter schools. He is the husband of Patricia Levesque, former Jeb Bush Deputy Chief of Staff and currently Executive Director of the Foundation for Excellence in

12

Education which promotes school choice.

<http://www.truthabouteducation.org/1/archives/01-2010/1.html>.

- Representative Manny Diaz is Dean of Doral Academy, an Academica managed school. He is the leader for the new statewide contract bill in the Florida House. Doral College was cited by the Florida Auditor General for a \$400,000 loan from Doral Charter High School. Conflict of Interest and procurement for Charters with federal grants: http://floridacharterschools.org/schools/taps/conflictinterest_att.pdf

APPENDIX III

GLOSSARY

Charter Schools are public schools that are independently owned and operated under contract to public school districts. They are authorized by local school districts but are free to select their curriculum and instructional model. Charter schools are governed by a nonprofit board that is free to subcontract any of its services to other for profit or not for profit entities. To date all Alachua County charters are run as not for profit schools but this is not true in many other parts of the state.

Conversion Charter Schools are traditional public schools that have been converted to charter schools. The school must have operated for at least two years as a traditional public school (including a school-within-a-school) in a school district before conversion. Application for a conversion may be made by a parent, teacher, principal, district school board or school advisory council, but must be approved by a majority of the teachers and a majority of the parents. A majority of the parents must participate in the vote.

Florida Virtual School (FLVS) In 1997, the legislature created FLVS as an additional school district with the exclusive responsibility of providing online education for all children in Florida. It is available to part time or full time students in public or private schools or who are home schooled.

Virtual School provides educational opportunities to take courses full time or part time in grades K-12 online. In Florida all teachers must hold Florida Teaching certificates and the curriculum must meet state standards. If students participate in a virtual school full time through their local public school they participate in state assessments and receive school grades.

Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) is the program set up in 1973 which uses a formula to allocate funding to local school districts. <http://www.fldoe.org/fefp/offrfefp.asp>

Full Time Equivalent (FTE) A student who takes a full time course assignment is a one FTE student. If they enroll part time they receive a proportional FTE. An example is a half time student. This student would be 0.5 FTE.

Weighted FTE is used in the funding formula for calculating a district's funding allocation. It is calculated by multiplying the total District student FTE by a program cost factor.

Program Cost Factor assures that each program receives an equitable share of funds in relation to its relative cost per student. Some of these costs include: declining enrollment, virtual education, transportation, reading programs, exceptional education and English as a second language.

Florida Tax Credit (FTC) Scholarships are funded by private corporations that deposit tax money

14

owed to the state directly to a nonprofit (Step Up For Children) that then distributes it to needy applicants to attend a private school.

504 Plans are developed by school teams and parents to support the educational needs of a K-12 student with a disability that "substantially limits one or more major life activity" such as: learning, speaking, listening, reading, writing, concentrating, caring for oneself, etc.

Individual Education Plan (IEP) -Each public school child who receives special education and related services must have an [Individualized Education Program \(IEP\)](#). Each IEP must be designed for one student and must be a truly individualized document.

McKay Scholarship Program is designed to offer parents of disabled children the opportunity to have their child attend a private school that meets their educational needs. Students with a learning disability must have a 504 plan. Children with physical disabilities must have an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Both groups must be enrolled the previous year in the public school. Students from military families may also be eligible but may be exempt from the local school enrollment requirement. <http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/information/mckay/>

Title 1 is a federally funded program designed to help schools that serve low income families with reading and math skills. Schools must have more than 56% of the students eligible for free or reduced price meals. Funds are allocated on a per qualifying child basis. Federal law requires

that a district not use Title 1 funds to offset expenses to a Title 1 school that would normally be paid by other sources if Title 1 funds were not available.

Exceptional Student Education (ESE) is designed for children who have special learning needs. They are called exceptional students. Exceptional students include children who are gifted and children who have disabilities. Children who are considered gifted are those children with superior intellectual development and who are capable of high performance. The purpose of exceptional student education is to help each child with an exceptionality to progress in public school and prepare for life after school. ESE services include specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of the exceptional student. There is no charge for these special services.

Education Management Organizations (EMOs) are for-profit or non-profit organizations that manage public schools. In contrast to traditional vendors that are contracted to provide specific services (e.g., professional development, payroll, food services) to districts and schools, EMOs are contracted by districts to manage and run individual schools, both traditional as well as charter schools, or clusters of schools. EMOs that manage networks of charter schools are referred to as charter management organizations (CMOs). The parameters of an EMO's management responsibility are spelled out in a performance contract between the district and an EMO.

Florida State Facilities Requirements are a comprehensive set of guidelines related to the safety

of state owned educational facilities. It includes such items as hurricane safety, asbestos removal etc. Charter schools, except conversion charters, are exempt from these requirements but must meet Florida building and minimum fire safety codes.

Some Thoughts on Educational Reform

Information is coming at us from every direction and in many forms. Traditional ways of organizing information are splintering e.g. newspapers, television, and books are becoming blogs, chats, YouTube, and urls from everywhere. The information industry is changing rapidly. Companies are trying to bundle hand held devices, computers, telephones, and televisions to control markets while consumers are asking for choice in programming and how it is delivered. The tension is real and extends into the educational sector of our economy.

Traditional education is also becoming unraveled. Textbooks are online and some are even replaced by more narrowly focused articles and or repositories of exercises to facilitate learning. There is an information overload, and traditional classrooms are not equipped to help children sort through and evaluate what they must know. Ordinary jobs for ordinary people are

disappearing. We read that the new jobs require critical thinking, but what new jobs are these, and how do we train students for them?

Higher education is responding by encapsulating the best lectures, through MOOCs or 'star faculty' online courses. In addition, students have a plethora of research studies and articles to absorb. But, the real learning occurs when students interact with the content and each other in a setting where they are forced to confront their own and others' views in ways that expand their perspectives. They need meaningful interaction with excellent facilitators. Who are these facilitators? How are they credentialed? What career paths do they have that will attract highly qualified people? Currently, most faculty lecture 6-9 hours a week and are expected to do research and other service the remaining time. This will change; the lectures will be online. Meaningful discussion doesn't happen in a room holding 500 students, and small groups are expensive. Who will the 'new' faculty be?

K-12 education faces these same questions. Information will not just come from teachers and textbooks. Students will get more information online, but how? Where will the costly technology come from? Who monitors the process? Who facilitates the integration of knowledge? How accountable is online learning?

Are current practices flexible enough to break apart individual classrooms to provide more economical large scale information dissemination in media centers, computer labs, or at home? Are teachers trained to integrate this information from different sources and areas of knowledge, and help students learn how to make sense of it all?

We are living through a time of change where old institutions may be inadequate and new ones

17

have not been well conceptualized. We are experimenting with our children's futures. Yes, schools must change in form and function. These changes will not save money, but they may very well rearrange how it is spent. As we break apart our old institutions, we have to manage this change so that resources are not dissipated through opportunistic schemes, and talent is not lost from declining opportunities.

Introduction to the Consensus Questions

Florida's school choice program provides alternatives to traditional public schools. The League's study of charter schools, however, reveals a conundrum when proposals for improving education are evaluated. Parents like choice, but both parents and the wider public at large are also tax payers; they must be informed about the tradeoffs among different educational preferences. The consensus questions derived from the League's study reflect at least three of the underlying tensions among competing approaches to school reform.

- State vs. private funding of education.
- State vs. district control of school policy and practices

- Regulation vs. flexibility to create change.

Over the past ten years, school funding in Florida has declined; the State now is ranked 44th in per student funding, and the source of funds has shifted primarily from state revenue to local property taxes. School districts must make decisions about how and which programs to support, and those decisions may not meet everyone's desires.

The legislature has a constitutional mandate to provide high quality schools, and its recognition that educational standards must increase results in both direct and indirect pressure to promote change. As a result, school districts are focused on implementing new educational standards like Common Core, the revision of state testing programs designed to make student achievement (especially among low performing students) a high priority, and the incorporation of expensive technology to improve resources for teaching and learning. At the same time, districts need to attract and keep high quality teachers.

These educational needs are expensive, but state resources are limited. Many legislators believe that expanding the use of private funds for charter schools may energize education. This policy has reduced regulations for charter schools and diverted needed funds from traditional schools. Charter schools themselves have had to shift funds from instructional needs to make loan and lease payments to private companies. It is not surprising that students in both systems struggle.

The League's consensus questions focus on ways to correct financial and management problems. The way forward may be to give more flexibility to public schools as do the newly authorized public school innovation centers. A change within the public school system may be more efficient and

18

effective than creating competing systems that vie for the same resources. This is the major issue on which the League needs to reach consensus.

Your task is to evaluate these recommendations and reach consensus on the need to require closer scrutiny of charter school procedures. These recommendations will reduce some of the flexibility that proponents of charter schools believe is necessary to carry out educational reform. The following two pages describe the Florida legislative intent for charter schools and a model for needed flexibility that advocates for charter schools encourage.

The Charter School Agenda

This section provides the Florida legislative intent for charter schools, and a summary of the recently published model for improving laws to facilitate charter school advancement. The Florida legislative intent for charter schools is found in the 2011 Florida Statutes 1002.33

(a) Principles:

1. Meet high standards of student achievement while providing parents flexibility to choose among diverse educational opportunities within the public school system.
2. Promote enhanced academic success and financial efficiency by aligning responsibility with accountability.
3. Provide parents with sufficient information on whether their child is reading at grade level and whether their child gains at least a year's worth of learning for every year spent in the charter school.

(b) Charter schools shall fulfill the following purposes:

1. Improve student learning and academic achievement.
2. Increase learning opportunities for all students, with special focus on low-performing students and reading.
3. Encourage the use of innovative learning methods.
4. Require the measurement of learning outcomes.

(c) Charter schools may fulfill the following purposes:

1. Create innovative measurement tools.
2. Provide rigorous competition within the public school district to stimulate continual improvement in all public schools.

19

3. Expand the capacity of the public school system.
4. Mitigate the educational impact created by the development of new residential dwelling units.
5. Create new professional opportunities for teachers, including ownership of the learning program at the school site.

The Essential Guide to Charter Schools Lawmaking: Model Legislation for States

By Alison Consoletti, Vice President for Research, Center for Educational Reform. 2012.

This document describes the components of charter school laws that will allow for “the creation of high quality and a significant quantity of charter schools.” It divides these laws into four main categories:

Independent and Multiple Authorizers: Does the state permit entities other than traditional school boards to create and manage charter schools...? “Independent authorizers are better able to hold charter schools accountable because they have full control over how they evaluate charter

schools and they have their own staff, management team and funding streams.

“States that do not have multiple authorizers create hostile environments for charters because school boards often view charters as competition and reject applications not based on merit, but on politics.

Number of Schools Allowed: “Any type of limit on what type of charter schools can open and where or limiting the number of students who can attend them is unnecessary and an arbitrary restraint.”

Operations: The more detailed the law, the more effective the authorizer will be. “...high quality charter schools tend to have more independence from conventional educational bureaucracies.

Equity: “Fiscal equity requires that not only the amounts of money allocated for each charter school identical to what is provided for all other public school students, but also that charter schools receive monies from identical streams of income.”

“More state need to specify that charter schools will receive per pupil facilities assistance on par with public schools.”

“Charter school operators know the best way to spend funds, and charter law should reflect this need.”