

Anti Academies Alliance



www.antiacademies.org.uk

“A good
local school
for every
child”

American Charter Schools Keeping the promise?

The Tories want to privatise our education system. To claim that this would work they look to the examples of Swedish Free Schools and American Charter Schools. This Briefing is a summary of “Keeping the promise? The debate over charter schools” published in 2008 by Rethinking Schools, an American educational campaign group www.rethinkingschools.com. In America they use the term 'public schools' where we talk about state schools.

What are Charter Schools?

Charter schools first started in the 1990s. Their philosophy was:

- Freedom from bureaucratic rules and union contracts to foster innovation
- The lessons from their success would be used to improve public education overall

The founders of charter schools believed they would improve the education system for all children however

“One cannot deny that the charter school concept, as a movement, has been hijacked by individuals, groups, and corporations who are guided by free-market principles, often with a hostility to unions, and who do not necessarily embrace core values of equity, access, public purpose, and public ownership.”

There are now very real concerns about the accountability of for-profit schools, they are often far less innovative than promised and do not collaborate with other schools.

There are more than 4,000 charter schools enrolling more than 1 million students in 40 states.

Profits and Privatisation: the Ohio experience

There are 313 charter schools in Ohio, enrolling more than 75,000 students and receiving \$600 million annually in state and federal funding.

Over half the state's charter money goes to for-profit companies.

47 of Ohio's charter schools were shut down, 13% of those that had opened, between 1997 and 2006 because they were of such low quality.

Comparing public schools with charter schools show some stark problems.

Public school students averaged 19.3 points higher than charter school students from similar economic backgrounds.

African-American students from public schools consistently performed better than those at charter schools, with better performance in every one of 21 tests.

White Hat Management, named after its founder David Brennan's liking of his white cowboy hat, made \$4.16 million in profits in 2004-05. This is despite the fact that only 2 of its 31 schools made the federal benchmark of 'Adequate Yearly Progress'.

“The federal Internal Revenue Service (IRS), meanwhile, has questioned the contracts between White Hat Management and its various schools. It has raised concerns about whether

Patrons: Lord Roy Hattersley, Tony Benn, Fiona Millar, Professor Gus John, Michael Rosen, Alan Gibbons, Joan Sallis OBE
National Trade Union Affiliates: TUC, NUT, NASUWT, ATL, UCU, UNISON, UNITE, FBU, MU, PCS

• PO Box 14412, Birmingham, B11 9DZ • office@antiacademies.org.uk • 07528 201 697

Anti Academies Alliance

contract with White Hat are 'one-sided' and designed for the benefit of White Hat, noting that elements of the contract were 'completely arbitrary' and 'not in the best interests' of the schools."

For schools that issued report cards in 2007, two thirds of public schools made Adequate Yearly Progress, compared to just one third of charter schools.

As the chart shows, 69% of charter schools were categorised as 'not rated', 'academic emergency' or 'academic watch'. This compares to 19% of public schools.

Also only 8% of charter schools were categorised as 'excellent' or 'effective' compared to 63% of public schools.

There are also cases of charter schools operating fraudulently.

"The operator of the Cleveland Academy of Math, Science and Technology bilked the state out of \$1.3 million for running the appealing sounding charter school. The academy routinely billed the state for 681 students but never had more than 128 kids, according to federal charges."

The Ohio Attorney General is now suing 4 charter schools. For one of them there are 600 pages of evidence of "abject academic failure, gross financial mismanagement, ethical lapses, and what amounts to consumer fraud."

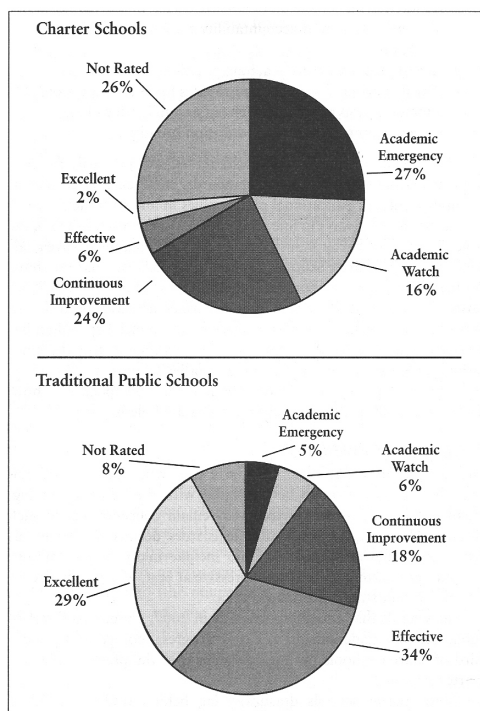


Figure A: Ohio School Performance Report Cards
Source: Ohio Department of Education, 2006-07 report cards

How the market is failing the children of New Orleans

Hurricane Katrina shattered the New Orleans public school system in August 2005. It destroyed over half the district's buildings and staff and students were dispersed across the country.

For some this was a golden opportunity;

Paul Hill from the Center on Reinventing Public Education wrote "In the case of post hurricane New Orleans, American school planners will be as close as they have ever come to a 'green field' opportunity."

US education secretary Margaret Spellings immediately waived restrictions on charter schools. These included the requirement to consult staff and parents when converting a public school into a charter school.

In February 2006 all 7,500 teachers, custodians, cafeteria workers and other unionised workers were sacked.

While \$2,000 per student was available for the opening of charter schools, none was available for opening public schools.

By the spring of 2006 only 25 schools had opened in New Orleans. 18 (72%) were charter schools. By 2007 53 schools had opened, of which 58% were charter schools, the highest percentage in the US.

"The New Orleans charter schools are free to hire teachers through individual annual contracts. There is no salary schedule and no collective bargaining. Many of the charter schools opt to forgo experienced teachers in favour of young and enthusiastic college graduates with no classroom experience."

"Students continue to flood back into the Big Easy, many with physical and psychological needs that make it critical that the city's public education system serve them with fairness and purpose.

Can the market do that? The evidence so far clearly says no."

"I'm a real estate developer; I don't know the first thing about running a school."
James M Huger,
Chairman of Lafayette Academy, New Orleans