



August 17, 2004

### **Charter School Leadership Council Responds to Misleading New York Times article**

Howard Fuller, chair of the Charter School Leadership Council, released the following statement:

"The article in today's New York Times reporting on charter school NAEP scores tells only half of the story and paints a misleading picture of the academic success of the nation's 3,000 charter schools. Readers should bear in mind the adage, "consider the source": the data used by the Times was provided by a national teachers union long opposed to charter schools.

"Nationwide, charters serve a higher percentage of disadvantaged students than the traditional public school system. Because most charters are a response to the chronically failing public schools in low-income, urban areas, they typically serve a community's lowest income students and those who are farthest behind academically. NAEP results indicating that students in charter schools have below-average reading and math scores tell us what we already know: that these students were poorly served by their previous schools and enter charter schools at a clear disadvantage.

"What's crucial, however—but given short shrift by the Times—is that students make remarkable gains once they enter charter schools.

"Several studies have shown that charters produce stronger gains in student achievement than traditional public schools. So while the average student enters a charter school significantly below grade level—causing the school's scores to lag—she makes up more ground and has the opportunity to catch up and excel by attending a charter school. Measuring this, the "value-added" of schools over time, demonstrates effectiveness, whereas a single "snap shot" of current test scores serves to hide actual school impacts.

"Unforgivably, the Times article also fails to mention that when the data are controlled for race, the test scores of charters and traditional public schools are equivalent.

"In addition to failing to account for the remarkable gains made by charter students and the influence of important factors like race, the results reported by the Times fail to recognize why hundreds of thousands of parents have chosen charters over their neighborhood schools and countless more are on charter school waiting lists hoping to get in. These parents know that charters are providing their children with a better education and greater opportunities than the low-performing public schools to which they were previously assigned.

"Across the nation, charter schools are improving the academic achievement of boys and girls who were systematically left behind by traditional public schools. Today, nearly every corner of this country has a remarkable charter success story that demonstrates that high student expectations and accountability for results have enabled a local charter school to miraculously reverse a student's slumping grades, a family's frustrations, or a community's decline. No wonder parents express great satisfaction with their child's charter school and elected officials from both sides of the aisle, including Democrat's Bill Clinton, Joe Lieberman, and John Kerry, strongly support charters.

"While the vast majority of charter schools have provided disadvantaged children with superior education opportunities, in some instances, an individual charter school will not perform up to expectations. The strength of this movement is that low-performing charter schools have been and will be closed—fairly but swiftly. Unfortunately, we know that other low-performing public schools often go on forever.

"Today's Times article should serve as a reminder that while countless children have significant educational needs, the true measure of a school's success is how well it addresses those needs and enables all students to excel academically.

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