

“IN THE ARENA”

**3rd District Legislative Report
By State Representative Nate Walker**

February 10, 2017

Missouri House Bill 634 is a bad idea for public education...

The Missouri House of Representative is currently considering House Bill 634 which would expand unaccountable, privately run charter schools to open in any school district in the state, regardless of whether or not another school is needed in your local community. This is the beginning of an extremely bad idea which would begin the process of taking public education dollars and diverting them to private charter schools.

In preparation for this weeks *IN THE ARENA* Legislative Report, I want to thank area school administrators, school board members, teachers and constituents from throughout the 3rd District for their input, as well as the Missouri Association of School Administrators and various other public education advocate groups for helping me better understand the consequences related to House Bill 634. As I do monthly during Session, I meet with all of the school superintendents from the 3rd District from schools located in Adair, Sullivan, Putnam and Mercer County. Frequently our group is joined by school administrators from other North Missouri counties. We visit informally; however, our discussions are always very serious and they are focused on ways to improve public education.

For us in rural North Missouri we are proud of our local school districts. Our local communities understand the importance of public education. We have locally elected School Boards, who hire professional and competent school administrators, teachers and other school staff to ensure for an excellent quality of public education in our communities.

Charter schools now are classified as public schools and funded by Missouri tax payers. However, they operate more like private schools as they are governed by an unelected, non-profit board so local communities and school districts have no power to oversee them. Charter schools receive the equivalent of all federal, state, and local dollars that a school district would receive for every student that is enrolled. This is accomplished by withholding the total amount per student from the local school district in which the charter school is operating.

Even if a number of students leave from different classrooms across a school district to attend a charter school, the cost of operating a community's entire school district is essentially unchanged. School districts are left with less money to cover the same operating expenses, such as maintenance, utilities and transportation costs. To put it another way, if one student leaves a classroom to attend a charter school, the district doesn't save money because that school can't lay off 1/25th of a teacher.

Some may say, aren't more options a good thing? Right now, local communities do not have a say in whether a charter school can open in their school district, therefore, taxpayers are not allowed to determine if the school is even needed in the community. As more charter schools open, costs increase across the community in the form of staff, utility bills, insurance premiums, and other operating costs. This is money that is best spent in classrooms and services for students.

Unlike traditional public schools, charter schools are not regulated by the State Board of Education. In fact, the State Board of Education is not allowed to accredit or close failing charter schools. Instead, charter schools are regulated by their sponsoring entity. In Missouri, the entities that sponsor charter schools are typically colleges, universities and the Missouri Charter School Commission.

While charter schools are not accredited by the state, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education do calculate an annual performance report for every charter school in the state. According to 2016 data, of the 39 charter school operating in the state of Missouri, 11 would be deemed provisionally accredited and six would be deemed unaccredited. Four did not receive a score because they are considered too new. In total, less than half (46%) of charter schools are meeting the minimum requirements to be accredited. This at best is alarming.

Neither local taxpayers, nor the state of Missouri are allowed to institute accountability standards for charter schools. Instead, accountability is determined by the charter school's sponsor. In some cases, charter schools remain open despite poor academic performance or financial mismanagement. Sponsors can receive up to \$125,000 per year for every charter school they govern.

A select few charter schools do better than traditional public schools; however there are a number of things to consider in those limited instances. Many high performing charter schools accept a large number of students in the early grades, as students leave a charter school for one reason or another, charter schools are allowed to leave those seats open. In many communities where charter schools institute this practice, student mobility is high and this acts as a way for the charter school to avoid the challenges that come along with student mobility.

When a sponsor does decide that a charter school needs to close for academic performance, students will be forced to find other educational opportunities, most likely with the local traditional public school. The local school district is then responsible for bringing students that were enrolled in the charter school back up to grade level which usually requires the district to provide additional support services for the students.

While it is absolutely a good thing for a charter school that is not meeting the academic needs of its students to be closed, the state of Missouri and taxpayers have spent over \$620 million on failed charter schools since 1999. When the charter school fails, it ultimately requires additional resources be spent to bring the students that had attended the school back up to grade-level.

Many states are attempting to institute reasonable accountability measures on charter schools. Recently, the NAACP adopted a policy to oppose expansion of charter schools until charters were held accountable. Also, the state of Massachusetts is widely hailed as one of the best education systems in the country. In November of 2016, voters of the state were asked if charter schools should be expanded. Voters of that state overwhelmingly rejected the idea with more than 60% of voters opposing the expansion of charter schools. In my opinion from reaching out to area educators and all my constituents throughout rural North Missouri we do NOT need or want Charter Schools. House Bill 634 is bad for Missouri Public Schools; I will oppose this legislation and work hard to defeat it. The Missouri General Assembly needs to reject this latest legislation related to Charter Schools found in House Bill 634.

To get updated information on all legislation, to see how I voted, to access the Journal of the House, to find out what the current status of all legislation and/or committee structure and membership, please access my House website at: <http://www.house.mo.gov/member.aspx?year=2017&district=003>

It is an honor to serve as your 3rd District State Representative. Feel free to contact me at any time should you need my assistance and/or if you have something to share with me. My official email address is: nate.walker@house.mo.gov my legislative office number is (573) 751-3647.

Working together, we can make a difference.

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COURAGE IN THE ARENA - *"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; because there is not effort without error and shortcomings; but who does actually strive to do the deed; who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotion, who spends himself in a worthy cause, who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement and who at the worst,*

if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly. So that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat." ~ Theodore Roosevelt