

NYC Papers are Unanimously Pro-Charter

The New York Times

Thinking Sensibly About Charter Schools

October 15, 2013

Mayor Michael Bloomberg has been a full-throated supporter of charter

schools, of which there are about 180 in New York City. The debate over how the next mayor should handle charters has been part of the campaign from the very beginning.

Earlier this month, charter school advocates rallied in Manhattan to protest the more skeptical views of the Democratic mayoral nominee, Bill de Blasio. He says that charter schools can be improved, which is true. He has also argued, much to the delight of the teachers' union, that the Bloomberg administration has shortchanged traditional public schools and "favored" charters, which receive public funds and free space in public school buildings even though they operate independently of the school system.

And he says, again rightly, that some charter schools serve too few English-language learners and others who might need special education courses or are difficult to teach. But here he is at risk of oversimplifying: The problem of assigning students with special needs to stronger schools afflicts the entire system. It is a mistake to single out charter schools,

Continued on back

DAILY NEWS

It's about the kids, Bill

The new mayor has to help, not hurt, charter schools

December 8, 2013

The mayor-elect is on the cusp of tapping a new chancellor to lead New York City's largest-in-the-nation, 1.1 million student public education system. One bellwether of the new educa-

tor-in-chief's determination to stand with the kids will be his or her approach to charter schools.

Bill de Blasio's rhetoric on this score has been deeply disheartening. He must be as flexible and results-oriented in selecting a chancellor as he was in naming Bill Bratton police commissioner after campaigning so vigorously against the NYPD's stop, question, frisk program.

New York's 183 charter schools educate 70,000 kids who live in that second, poorer, oft-forgotten city de Blasio talks so much about. Open to all by lottery, they predominantly operate outside the teachers union contract. That freedom, plus a motivated corps of educators, plus a drive to innovate, has produced stunning results.

On the tough new Common Core exams administered last year, students at Success Charter Network, which operates 20 schools, soared. An amazing 82% passed the state math exam; 58% passed the English exam. All passed in science.

By comparison, on average citywide — in schools that serve rich, poor, and in between — an abysmal 26% of students

Continued on back

NEW YORK POST

Parents know best

May 23, 2012

The votes are in — and it's a landslide win for charter schools, and for students. A record number of students last month applied for the far-too-few open seats available by lottery at local charter schools.

According to figures from the New York City Charter School Center, 67,500 students submitted 133,080 applications.

Which is as big an endorsement as you can get for charter schools — even as they've come under renewed fire from the edu-cartel and the teachers unions.

But there are only 14,600 slots available at those same schools — leaving as many as 52,900 families on very long waiting lists.

Indeed, you could fill Yankee Stadium with the overflow — literally.

Which speaks to the desperate need for more charter schools.

Fact is, charter students tend to outperform those in their neighborhood district schools. That's why parents love them — and why the teachers unions hate 'em.

But there's a strong move on in Albany circles to kill charters altogether.

The new head of the SUNY panel that approves new charters has already promised not to "let charters . . . dominate our committee agenda."

Continued on back

The New York Times

many of which are high-performing, for shortcomings that are common across the board.

By contrast, the Republican nominee, Joseph Lhota, seems to see charter schools as the answer, or at least an important one, to New York's educational needs. "The only problem with New York City charter schools," he says, "is that there are not enough of them." He has called for doubling the number of charter schools, which currently educate about 70,000 of the city's 1.1 million students. About 50,000 children, he says, want seats but can't get them. He has accused Mr. de Blasio of plotting to "annihilate" charter schools, thus shortchanging the poor and minority children who make up an overwhelming majority of charter students.

In all the bombast it is worth making two points. First, there's little question that New York has one of the nation's most successful charter school systems. A study published earlier this year shows that the typical New York City charter student learned more reading and math in a year than his or her public school peers.

The second point is that the next mayor can improve the system, in part by shutting down poorly performing schools, awarding new charters only to groups with proven track records, and smoothing relations between charters and traditional schools by making sure "co-locations" take place only in buildings big enough to house both.

The teachers' union is never going to fall in love with charter schools because a vast majority of them are not unionized, and they have real financial advantages because their work force is younger and more transient and their payrolls, pensions and medical costs are lower. Many charters plow these savings back into education — hiring social workers, lengthening the school day, or staffing classrooms with more than one teacher as a way of helping disadvantaged children. Whoever is mayor should encourage this practice. Mr. de Blasio says he would charge rents based on each school's ability to pay and insists that this would not hurt programs or cause layoffs. But it could penalize high-performing schools that have demonstrably helped poor children.

Mr. de Blasio is on firmer ground when he says that charter schools, which choose their students by lottery, need to do a better job of recruiting and retaining special education students, English-language learners and others who tend to be underrepresented in the charter school population. If charter schools hope to expand — some already enroll 15 percent or more of the students in their districts — they will need to behave more like traditional schools in their admissions policies. That means making room for "over-the-counter" students, among them transients and the poor, who show up at the schoolhouse door in the middle of the year.

Traditional public schools must do a better job of this, too. A new study from the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University found that tens of thousands of new immigrants, special needs students and poor students are disproportionately assigned to struggling New York high schools that have little chance of helping them. The city has already begun to open school seats for these children — but clearly more needs to be done.

DAILY NEWS

got over the bar in English, and just 30% in math.

The average charter school had an 11-percent-age-point advantage over its peer schools on the English tests — and a 3.7-point advantage in math.

Charter school performance varies, just like anything. But the best — which happen to be those with the biggest targets on their backs — are outstanding. And almost all stand out as islands of innovation and give parents and children precious alternatives. No surprise: They are forced to turn away thousands of applicants.

Still, there's intense opposition to charters. Fomented largely by the teachers union, pols have falsely characterized them as draining resources from traditional schools. De Blasio has bought into this fictional us-against-them narrative.

He says he wants to charge charters rent when they use space in school buildings. Other public schools pay zip — proving this is a purely punitive move that will force charters to serve fewer kids.

He wants to freeze charter colocations, whereby charters share space with district schools — again singling out charters for a practice that's long been common among many district schools.

When you've got a good thing going, you should help it to grow and flourish. Many candidates for New York City schools chancellor will understand that. Some will not.

De Blasio must choose wisely, and begin to back off his anti-charter school brinksmanship.

NEW YORK POST

And Harlem Assemblyman Keith Wright — just tapped yesterday by Gov. Cuomo to co-chair the Democratic State Committee — last month introduced legislation that would effectively block the opening of new charter schools.

His bill would give community-education councils the power to veto co-location of charters and traditional public schools.

Because charters don't receive public funds to build or rent facilities, that would be a fatal blow.

But the corrupt unions and their morally compromised allies are fighting a losing battle for the popular vote.

The numbers tell the story: Charters work, and parents know it.