



Informational Alert

October 13, 2011

Parent Groups Advocating for Public Education in Pennsylvania

This week Governor Corbett outlined his agenda for education reform in Pennsylvania, calling, as expected, a push for vouchers, expansion of charter school and the Educational Improvement Tax Credits (EITC) programs, and a revision to the current system for evaluation of educators. The governor made his announcement at the Lincoln Charter School in York and some of our public school parents were there! Below is one of the many newspaper articles that ran that day:

[Four parts to Corbett's education reform](#)

At the event, one parent advocate from Cumberland County, Susan Spicka, stood with about 15 other parents protesting school vouchers. She cited PSBA's Public Opinion Poll and was quoted as saying, "65 percent of Pennsylvanians do not support using public money to pay private school tuition and only 11 percent of Pennsylvanians strongly support a voucher program." Spicka added, "One of our main questions to Governor Corbett is, if the majority of Pennsylvanians don't support vouchers, I don't know why he does."

Susan Spicka and her group, *Education Matters in the Cumberland Valley*, are examples of how public education parents' voices can make a difference! In the coming weeks, we will be attending meetings of various parent advocacy groups created throughout the state. If you would like to learn more about how to create a parent advocacy group in your district so your parents can [contact their legislators](#) about public education issues, contact Karen Devine at karen.devine@psba.org. The parent advocates we know are excited about *standing up for public education* and are eager to help parents across the state make a difference!

While the plan announced by Corbett did not include specific details, legislation is expected to be introduced soon. This week, you received your first *informational alert* about [taxpayer-funded tuition vouchers](#). Today our focus is on the governor's suggested expansion of the Charter School Law, and while we do not oppose charter schools in the state, we have concerns with the funding and accountability. Current proposals in Harrisburg would expand the law even further without addressing our concerns. To learn more about the issue of charter and cyber charter schools in PA, [click here](#).

Charter School Expansion Issues:

*Local taxpayer dollars are taken from school district subsidies to fund charter schools, yet current proposals would permit the expansion of charter schools without any involvement from the local community, silencing the voices of school boards and local taxpayers! Some level of local control is essential to ensure that charter schools are accountable and responsive to taxpayers in their local communities since they provide the ever-increasing funds to support these charter schools.

*The *cyber* charter school funding formula under current law must be addressed. School districts are overpaying cyber charter schools because the existing funding formula is based on the cost to educate a student in the school district, not in a cyber charter school. Cyber charter school operators can educate students at a significantly lower cost than traditional “brick and mortar” charter schools and school districts, due to the reduced expenses for such elements as personnel, facilities, utilities, text books, transportation and other supplies. Therefore, any charter reform proposal must include a modification of the funding formula, ensuring that valuable resources can remain in traditional public school classrooms and that taxpayers are not overpaying for the services cyber charter schools provide.

*Research shows that many charter schools perform worse than traditional public schools. The Center for Research on Educational Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University issued a report in April 2011 showing that, compared to the educational gains the charter students would have had in their traditional public schools, students in Pennsylvania charter schools, on average, make smaller learning gains. Until we can provide for significant remediation of these issues and ensure that these alternatives to traditional public schools are performing well academically, we should not expand the role of charter schools.

PSBA will provide more details on the governor’s plan as soon as they are available.