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The Realities & Challenges of
Charter School Reform


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Today's roadmap

- A little history
- Where we've come
- An overarching theme
- Key issues & questions, policy & practical
- Parting thoughts
- District workshops

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A little history

- 1983: *A Nation at Risk*
- 1988: Ray Budde, *Education by Charter: Restructuring School Districts*
 - Districts charter teams of teachers
- 1988: Al Shanker, AFT
- 1991: Minnesota passes first charter law
- Other states follow: By 2003, most have
- Federal role: NCLB and funding

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Rationales

- Innovation, freedom and flexibility
 - Laboratory for traditional schools
- Choice as way to raise achievement
- Competition as a way to force change
- Accountability (schools can be closed)
- Options for educators
- Parent and community involvement

REMEMBER THESE

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Where we've come

- 39 states and D.C. have charter laws
- 4,900 charter schools nationwide
- Serving 1.5 million students
 - About 3% of all public school students
 - AZ: 9%, DC: 36%, New Orleans: 60%
- Educational mgmt. organizations (EMOs):
 - For-profit: 16% of charter schools
 - Non-profit: 13% of charter schools

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Tipping Point or Turning Point?

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Tipping Point – Obama administration

- Budget: Plan to double funding over 4 years
- American Recovery & Reinvestment Act
 - Report on # authorized, operating, closed, why
- Race to the Top
 - Emphasis on lifting charter school caps
 - 40 of 500 (12.5%) of points for applications
- Title I School Improvement Grants
- Blueprint for Reform (for ESEA / NCLB)

Tipping Point - Congress

All Students Achieving through Reform (All STAR) Act

- Already heard in House Committee on Education and Labor
- Charter advocates strongly support
- Scale up “proven models” (EMOs)
- Priority funding for states with alternative authorizers, appeals, charters as LEAs

Tipping Point - States

- Race to the Top incentives
 - Several state lifted caps on schools or on enrollment, others considered
 - Some charter school laws proposed in states with none
- National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS) model law
 - Then ratings of state laws against model

Turning Point

- The Competition Model
 - Economic and market framework
 - Disincentives for collaborative relations
 - Ignore impact on school district as a whole
 - Done *to* school districts
- The Civic Vision
 - Civic and democratic framework
 - Incentives for collaborative relations
 - The *point* is impact on district as a whole
 - Done *by and for* school districts

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Turning Point

Diane Ravitch

*The Death and Life of the
Great American School System*

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Issues and Questions

- Policy
- Practical
- Political
- Public relations

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Are charters public schools?

- Defined in state law as public schools
- Private entity with own board
- Recent Ninth Circuit ruling:
 - Not necessarily! So can they *choose* when?
- Open meeting & open records law, various reporting requirements?
- Ethics law for public officials, employees?
- If these are not in state law, can authorizer stipulate in the charter?

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Achievement

- NSBA Center for Public Education report
- Comparisons to non-charter schools
- Short answer: Mixed, not much different
 - Stay tuned: Accountability
- Every study a stir: Few agnostics
- Competition Model: The key question
- Civic Vision: The wrong question
- **Rationale: Choice and freedom**
 - **Competition Model v. Civic Vision**

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Achievement

- Some charters achieving better results for children typically at risk:
 - KIPP schools?
 - High expectations + intensity + wrap-around support for meeting needs of children
 - But look *very closely* at student characteristics, recruitment, admissions practices, discipline policies, parent requirements, etc.

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Exacerbating stratification

- Tension between two goals
 1. Choice
 2. Leaving no child left behind
- Charters are more segregated
 - UCLA Civil Rights Project
- Charters operated by EMOs are, too
 - Education and the Public Interest Center (EPIC), Univ. of Colorado
- CPE report: Location of schools matters

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Exacerbating stratification

- Buckley & Schneider (2008): D.C. charters
 - *Relatively* less high-need populations
- Front-end selectivity:
 - Recruiting, admissions procedures
 - Self-selection (motivation, “college-prep school”)
- Back-end selectivity – *Watch this one*
 - “Charter drop-outs” (effort or discipline?)
 - Q: Emphasis on drop-outs in federal law?
- Many charter schools have with mission
 - Q: Separate but equal, or effective targeting?

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Public confidence booster?

- Flip side: Potential for attracting middle class parents back to public system?
 - Targeted schools and programs
 - Sense of ownership, involvement
 - Simply causing parents to take a second look?
- Magnet program issues
- Bottom line on all this: District authorizer
- **Rationale: Educator & parent empowerment**
 - **Competition Model vs. Civic Vision**

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Charter school accountability

- Consensus for greater accountability
- Performance contract in addition to charter
- Big emphasis on closures
 - Disruption to children? Costs? Morale?
 - **Rationale: Accountability**
 - **Competition Model v. Civic Vision**
- Obama administration theme, fed rules
- NAPCS model act, All-STAR Act
- Incremental progress: *Relation to districts?*


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Relationship of charters to districts

- Competition model:
 - Charters: Unfair system, esp. as to funding
 - But charter policy frequently schizophrenic – in many ways presupposes key district role
 - Districts: Charter flexibility = unequal competition (unfair, doesn't prove much)
- Civic vision:
 - Charters: We're relegated to second fiddle
 - Districts: Authorize charters to succeed
 - Districts: Charter flexibility *helps*


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Relationship of charters to district

- Which is LEA and for which purposes?
 - Ambiguity a big issue nationally
 - Competition Model: Issues when non-district authorizer but district still on the hook
 - Civic Vision: District authorizer helps charters
- Districts have not noticeably improved where charter schools introduced
- **Rationale: Laboratories, competition**
 - **Competition Model v. Civic Vision**
 - **“Share our brilliance” vs. outsourcing**


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Authorizer effectiveness

- Gospel: School boards are bad authorizers
 - See CER chart in handout
- Competition Model: McDonald's & Burger King
- Civic Vision: District authorizing is the key
- NAEP: District-authorized charters do best?
- CREDO study: Multiple authorizers negative?
- Need more research – and will this change?
- Authorizer capacity & support are key:
 - NACSA to Congress, message to states?

Alternative authorizers

- Competition Model: Schools we authorized good, so we're succeeding
 - No accountability for district-wide impact
- Civic model: Only the school district combines:
 1. Sole focus on K-12 education
 2. Obligation to entire community
 - Experience of authorizing can yield governance benefits to district?

Authorizers on appeal

- Appeals of local authorizer decisions?
- All-STAR: Priority for states with appeal
- Appeal authority
 - Criteria?
 - Even-handed?
- Effect of appeal: Who is authorizer?
 - “Shotgun marriage”?
 - Complete divorce?

Scalability

- Competition Model: “Stifled” unless ever more
 - But HR model viable? Younger, lower-paid, intensely hard-working leaders & teachers?
 - Parallel school systems financially viable?
- Civic Vision: What *kind* of scalability?
 - Scale = District-wide impact
 - Charter numbers may plateau but have *greater* systemic impact
 - HR model: Maybe OK for achievement gaps?
 - Charters for district improvement less parallel

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Funding

- Parallel systems
 - Multiple authorizers + no caps + pass-on costs
- What state, local funding follows child?
 - All-STAR Act: Competition model
 - Costs don't decline student by student
- What costs stay with district?
 - Retirement, health, transportation, extracurriculars, special education?
- District services to local charters

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Labor relations

- District authorizing a sensitive issue
- Collective bargaining in charter schools?
 - State law?
 - Charter teachers can organize
 - Unions operating a few charters
 - Green Dot schools (EMO): unionized teachers
- Use charters as negotiating leverage?

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Other potential for districts

- Leverage new and greater resources
 - Federal, state, private funding
 - Warning: Some private supporters adhere to Competition Model, not Civic Vision
 - Greater range of human capital
- Conversion charters
 - New federal emphasis on turnarounds
 - Tom Loveless, recent Brookings Institution report focuses specifically on these schools

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Policy “disconnect”

- Charter law: Spotlight on state mandates
- “More flexibility for more accountability”?
 - But in NCLB world, at least debatable
- Must state reevaluate each rule imposed on traditional schools but not charters?
 1. Abolish requirement for districts
 2. Impose requirement on charters
 3. *Justify any disparity*

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Civic Vision: More ideas


- Authorizer Request for Proposal (RFP)
 - Charter, contracts address district-wide goals
 - *E.g.*, types and locations of schools, “laboratory” function, enrollment, etc.
- “Incubator charter school”
 - Is it sometimes just easier to start new?
- Shift current alternative authorizers to role of augmenting school district capacity

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Other political considerations


- Overlooked potential allies:
 - Small and rural districts
 - “Not our issue”?
 - But 14% of charter students rural
 - Online schools (can help or hurt them)
 - Using charter conversions to avoid closures
 - Can help or hurt them
 - Now concerned about federal funding shift
- Private schools

- National Assn of Charter School Authorizers


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Resources

- Resources listed in handout
- For electronic copy and/or slides:
 1. Write what you want on back of card
 2. E-mail: teh@pattersonbuchanan.com
- Electronic copy of article:
 - www.pattersonbuchanan.com/articles
- Center for Public Education report:
 - www.centerforpubliceducation.org


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Recap: “So what?”

1. District chartering
 - Receptive to charters as tool for district?
 - Insist on proposals that serve district-wide goals
 - Local solutions to national / state shortcomings?
 - High quality support and oversight
2. Engagement with policymakers / public
 - Vigilance and advocacy as to Civic Vision
 - If state rules prevent #1 approach, point it out
 - Call them on mixed message about regulation


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Some parting thoughts



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Some parting thoughts

- District workshops
- More questions from CPE, p. 23 of handout
- **Nothing magical about charter schools**
- But why such interest?
 - Long waiting lists in many places
- Even if some of it is unfair, it's still reality

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Some parting thoughts

- Why does competition model hold sway?
- Some charter advocates, esp. influential ones
- Concern: Boards closed-minded, even where need for dramatic action is clear
 - Also an argument for appeal to state
- If state law / policy are done right (a big if), and if local authorizing is done right, chartering can work for districts
 - *Only* if districts & advocates engage these issues

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Some parting thoughts

- Who conveys greatest urgency about:
 1. Raising academic achievement overall?
 2. Closing achievement gaps?
- Who is leading, willing to take risks?
- What do public, opinion-shapers, policy-makers see of school officials on the things that matter most, these two goals?
- How do we argue local self-determination is good for children on these two goals?

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Unique position of school boards

Independent and disinterested

Civic Vision – Essence of school boards
(and a more effective message?)

Advocacy for all children

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