

The Athens Messenger

Charter school problems persist

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Gov. John Kasich said recently, “We are going to fix the lack of regulation of charter schools.” That is a good idea for a lot of reasons, but I suspect it will not be easy to do for two reasons. One is that legislators get campaign contributions from charter schools. The other is that many legislators seem unaware of the problems with charter schools.

The most recent problem to surface is attendance. The state auditor’s office went to 30 charter schools to check attendance. State Auditor David Yost said the results left him “speechless” and added that what they found was “quite a morass.”

They found all 95 pupils supposedly enrolled in one school were not there. At six other schools they found between 34 percent and 85 percent of the pupils missing. These schools were receiving funding for these missing pupils.

Charter schools were supposed to provide opportunity for pupils to go to a better school than their local public school.

An analysis by the Ohio Education Association and Innovation Ohio a year ago shows that is not happening.

Twenty-five pupils from Athens County went to charter schools. Twenty-one went to a school that has a lower evaluation by the Ohio Department of Education than the school in the pupils’ home districts, and four went to a school with a rating as same as the school in their home district. None went to a school that was rated higher.

The Columbus schools had a D rating from the state, so one might expect that pupils from Columbus might find a charter school that was better than the Columbus schools, but only 37 percent did.

Another case in point is the 19 Gulen schools owned by a Turkish exile, who is a moderate Islamic cleric. Of those 19 schools got a F rating, and there have been enough complaints about them that the Department of Education said last summer they would investigate them, but so far no results have been announced.

The Gulen schools also are an example of another problem. They entertain members of the legislature and provide all-expense paid trips to Turkey for some. Other charter school groups contribute to legislators’ campaigns. David Brennan, who owns the 31 White Hat schools, has given \$4 million in contributions to legislators in the last decade.

This is an obvious conflict of interest. An organization getting public money voted to it by the legislature ought not to be allowed to make campaign contributions to legislators. Apparently we need a law that says so, but I wonder if the legislature will do it.

We also need some standards. At present, if you want to start a charter school, you just say so. There are no qualifications. Your education, your experience, your available funds are irrelevant.

Funding of charter schools also is a problem. When a pupil goes to a charter school, his or her home district has to pay the charter school about \$6,500. That is more than most districts get from the state, so part of that \$6,500 is local tax money voted on by the citizens for their local schools. If the legislature wants to have charter schools, it should provide the funding.

There is work to be done by the legislature on charter schools, but no evidence that it is under way.

There are at least two pieces of legislation on charter schools before the legislature, but the issues discussed in this column are not addressed.

Original Article: http://www.athensmessenger.com/blogs/guido_stempel_iii/charter-school-problems-persist/article_435aodea-84c8-5fee-962e-6f093fe27d8c.html