

## New website compares public schools with charter schools



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Two organizations that are staunch opponents of charter schools have teamed up to roll out a website, [knowyourcharter.com](http://knowyourcharter.com), that offers side-by-side comparisons between traditional public school districts and the charter schools that draw students from them.

Innovation Ohio and the Ohio Education Association, the state's largest teachers' union, are adamant the website, which went live at midnight Tuesday, is not about politics, but information. Among data available for parents and stakeholders to view are grades from the 2013-14 state report cards released last month by the Ohio Department of Education, financial data on per-pupil spending from state funding, and state dollars diverted from public schools to charter schools.

On the website, once a school district is entered into the search bar, all nearby charter and private schools — both with physical buildings and online presence only — are listed.

Dale Butland of Innovation Ohio said nothing about the website has been politicized.

"It is a public service in our view to put this information out there and make it accessible to the public," he said. "It is readily available from the Ohio Department of Education, but to access it you literally have to filter through 18 different spreadsheets for comparison and analysis."

Local superintendents long have spoken out against charter schools, particularly how the for-profit but publicly funded institutions funnel state tax dollars away from public education.

"In my experience, there is far too little public understanding of how charter schools actually work, how they perform or how they are funded," said Greg Ring, superintendent of the Lorain County Educational Service Center. "But without this knowledge, 'school choice' is a hollow and largely meaningless concept. By pulling back the curtain and presenting relevant information in an easy-to-use format, KnowYour Charter.com is providing an incredibly valuable public service."

Ring, whose career includes a stint as a former principal in Amherst and as a past superintendent for Firelands Schools, was among superintendents to advocate for more local control of education at a summit in May at Lorain County Community College. At that time, he said parents need more information in order to feel comfortable with the decisions they make.

At that summit, charter schools were described as not living up to their intended purpose, which was to give parents an alternative to failing schools in their communities.

“Parents deserve more than just a slick television ad from a profiting charter school in making the decision on where their children should attend school,” Butland said. “More than 50 percent of the students that leave traditional public schools for charter schools attend schools that score academically worse than the public schools they left, but parents don’t always know those facts.” Butland said 90 percent of the data used to build the website came directly from the Department of Education, with limited information from the charter schools.

“With nearly 400 charter schools operating in Ohio, with fewer accountability standards than exist for traditional public schools, we believe it is important that parents, educators, taxpayers and policymakers have the tools they need to see the comparative performance of charters, as well as the costs they impose on local school districts,” said Becky Higgins, president of the Ohio Education Association.

As previously reported, Lorain County community schools fared similarly to public schools in terms of academic achievement.

Of the 11 community schools in Lorain County, only one did not have a D or F grade for at least one performance indicator. However, unlike public schools that are subject to state takeover for continuous failing grades, the state does not have authority over community schools themselves; it only can go after the sponsors.

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