

## **Are charter schools being held responsible?**

The League of Women Voters hosted a panel Monday night on charter school accountability.

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### **Hannah Sparling**

This year, Cincinnati Public Schools lost about 8,000 students to charter schools. That meant \$56.7 million in state funding was transferred from CPS to the charters for those students, and the district spent millions of additional dollars on transportation, busing the students to and from their new schools.

Next year, it will be the same story with a different batch of students, said Superintendent Mary Ronan.

"Even though we have about 8,000 children in the charters, it's a different 8,000 every year," she said.

Thus the obvious question: Are those 8,000 students getting a better education than they would have at CPS?

Ronan was part of a four-person panel Monday night, discussing charters schools and accountability. In front of a packed room at the Clifton Recreation Center, Ronan and co-panelists Steve Dyer of Innovation Ohio; Aaron Churchill of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, a charter-school sponsor; and Ohio Sen. Bill Seitz debated the pros and cons of charter schools. The forum -- dubbed "Charter Schools: Are They Accountable?" -- was sponsored by the League of Women Voters.

Ohio is poised for charter reform – there are bills in the House and Senate – and one point was clear among panelists: Some charters are failing miserably.

"Yes, there are a lot of (charter schools) that need closed down, and I'd be full-throated in favor of that," Seitz said. "To close them all down would be a mistake."

Ohio charter schools will get about \$1 billion in taxpayer money next year.

They serve about 123,000 students – compared to about 1.8 million in traditional public schools – and there are roughly 400 charter schools throughout the state.

CPS has several charter schools of its own – as sort of, if you can't beat 'em, join 'em approach, Ronan said. However, the district loses students each year to schools that aren't prepared to educate them, she said.

"We know our parents value choice," she said, "but we're concerned – it needs to be a quality choice."

In their infancy, charter schools were pitched as the free-market answer to failing urban public schools, Dyer said.

"Are they better?" he asked. "Generally, no. ... This is no longer just an urban issue. This is a matter of statewide concern."

**Original Article:**

<http://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/education/2015/04/20/charter-school-accountable/26105757/>