

Diane Ravitch's blog

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Charters in Ohio: Succeeding or Failing?

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Maureen Reedy wrote an [opinion piece](#) criticizing charters in Ohio.

The Thomas B. Fordham Institute, which sponsors charters in Ohio, published [a blog post criticizing](#) Maureen Reedy for her negative views about charters and defended the record of charters in that state.

Stephen Dyer, a former state legislator who works for Innovation Ohio, a think tank, wrote a response to the Fordham critique. Since I don't have a link, I am reprinting it here:

The Fordham Foundation, always quick to point out how much they want Charter Schools to be held accountable, once again defended the indefensible [recently](#), namely trying to explain away Ohio's horrific Charter School performance.

After 15 years and more than \$6 billion spent on Ohio's Charter School program, 3 out of 4 will rate F on the state's new report card grading system.

Fordham, took to task two recent news stories – one a straight news story, the other an opinion piece – to show how alleged “canards” about Ohio's Charter School system impede healthy discussion of Charter Schools in this state.

Let me first say that I am not opposed to the idea of Charter Schools, namely the idea of having small incubators of innovation and creativity that work with local school districts to upscale techniques and learning environments that can better help children succeed, regardless of school type.

Unfortunately, that's not how Ohio's Charter School system works. And the folks at Fordham know this. Yet they continue to manipulate data to make facts seem less likely truths.

Let's begin with Fordham's first “canard” – that children go from higher performing school districts to lower performing Charters. The facts are pretty overwhelming that they do, contrary to Fordham's assertion. According to [data](#) from the Ohio Department of Education, 40% of the money transferred from Districts to Charters that are rated by the state go from

districts that perform better on both the state's report card rating and performance index score (which is the state's benchmark proficiency test index).

Meanwhile, there are more than 100 of the 300+ Charters in this state that take kids exclusively from districts that perform better on either or both of those measures. And only 23 of the 300+ Charters in this state rate above the state average performance index score.

The news story Fordham cites examined the same data I just mentioned from the 2011-2012 school year. However, Fordham examined different data from different years to somehow "prove" the newspaper was wrong or misleading or something. And, of course, Fordham did not explain why every public school child in Ohio receives 6.5% less state revenue than the state says they need to succeed because the state sends so much of its money to the [Charters](#). Is that system fair to the 90% of public school children who don't attend a Charter School? Is it fair that the state provides about \$7,100 for every Charter School child, and barely more than \$3000 for every non-Charter child after Charters get their cut?

Fordham's second canard is even more easily dismissed. The column to which the Fordham article referred was examining school performance index score [data](#) from 2011 that looked at districts and charters (charters are considered separate school districts under Ohio law). In fact, the bottom 113 districts in this state on its benchmark proficiency test index are Charters, according to that spreadsheet.

Fordham's third "canard" – that Charters are run by big, bad operators who rob taxpayers and dupe parents is also not exactly a canard. In far too many cases, it's the truth. The fact that there is even a discussion about Charter Schools in Ohio costing in the same ballpark as public schools, even though they pay teachers 40% of what they get paid in the public schools, don't have to bus kids and are exempt from about 270 sections of state law, is amazing.

In fact, a recent analysis from the Ohio Department of Education found that brick and mortar Charters [spend](#) \$54 more per pupil than their traditional public school counterparts.

Ohio's e-schools get so many taxpayer dollars that they could afford to provide 15:1 student-teacher ratios, \$2000 laptops for every child and still clear about 40% [profit](#). K-12, Inc., the largest online operator in the country, has said in SEC filings that the largess of the Ohio taxpayer subsidizes its work nationwide.

Perhaps it's difficult to kill these "canards", as Fordham puts it, not because they're stubborn, but because they're true.

We in Ohio need Fordham to stand stronger for Charter School accountability. Fordham has been among the better conservative organizations on this issue, but they frequently fall into these traps of defending the indefensible just out of habit, I think.

They have also tried out a few canards of their own. Here are how they play out (and how they play out with other Charter School advocates around Ohio).

1) Charter performance should only be compared with the performance in Ohio's big 8 Urban districts (Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo and Youngstown).

Unfortunately for Fordham and others, according to the latest [funding report](#) from the Ohio Department of Education, about half of all the kids going to Charters, and half the money, comes from non-Big 8 districts. So Fordham and others are trying to say something like this: "We'll take money and kids from anywhere, but only compare us with the most struggling districts, which only provide about half our population and state revenue."

2) Only compare Charters at the building level, not the district level.

As I mentioned earlier, in Ohio, Charter Schools are treated as districts under the law. They should, therefore, be compared with districts.

3) Anyone who questions Charter Schools has an agenda, while Charter School proponents, some of whom have made hundreds of millions of dollars off the taxpayers of Ohio for running some of the worst schools in the state, are only looking out for the kids.

Whether it is I, or Maureen Reedy (a former Ohio Teacher of the Year who lost a bid for the Ohio House last fall), Fordham frequently will cite the fact that critics of Charters have lost races, or are otherwise worthy of distrust because of who they are (Reedy is labeled as "jilted"). As if the deliverer of the message materially impacts the facts in the message. This is a far-too-common tactic of ideologues to try to dismiss opponents, not their arguments.

Fordham should let their arguments stand on their own.

The reason Fordham and others try to limit any performance comparisons is because the comparisons are so absolutely dismal for Ohio's Charter Schools, if they are done as they should. Are there Charter Schools in Ohio doing great things? Absolutely. And they should be applauded, even rewarded. I count these school officials among Ohio's finest.

But too often, Ohio's Charter Schools are able to take more and more money from local school districts, forcing local taxpayers to raise their property taxes, or eliminate programs, all while providing mostly inferior educational opportunities for our kids.

We need Fordham to take the first step on the road to recovery – to admit Ohio has a major Charter School problem. We're spending nearly \$1 billion a year on Charters, three-fourths of which will receive Fs on the new report card. That is a problem, regardless of who says it. And the sad part is that Fordham should be the ones saying it loudest.

Original post: <http://dianeravitch.net/2013/04/15/charters-in-ohio-succeeding-or-failing/>