



## **Think Tank Praises Charter Quality Proposals But Sees Room for Improvement**

February 17, 2015

Innovation Ohio offered measured praise Tuesday for legislative and executive recommendations on charter school quality, saying new proposals represent progress but could be stronger and should be expanded to address how charters are funded.

Stephen Dyer, education policy fellow for the think tank, offered an analysis of provisions in HB2 (Dovilla-Roegner) and HB64 (R. Smith) for the Ohio Charter School Accountability Project, a joint effort of Innovation Ohio and the Ohio Education Association.

While he found merit in the new proposals, Dyer laid out three guiding principles for charter school reform not currently found in the legislation: a faster process for closing failing charters; subjecting charters to all the same public records laws and financial transparency requirements as other public entities; and devising a method of funding charters that doesn't "penalize" traditional schools.

"It's been a long 16 years to get where we are today," Dyer said. "The political challenge cannot be ignored."

Dyer said HB2 provisions preventing low-rated charters from switching to a new sponsor without approval from the Ohio Department of Education are likely the legislation's best feature, while cautioning that it will depend on a "rigorous" review standard from the department.

He also praised the ban on sponsors selling services to their schools, which he said is long overdue, and on accounting and rating of charter school operators.

Other provisions are promising but could use some work, Dyer said. A requirement for school fiscal officers to work for the schools rather than operators might leave some wiggle room for operator ties with allowance for the fiscal officer to be an independent contractor, he said. And while a requirement for charter school contracts to spell out property lease terms is an improvement in terms of transparency, Dyer said, it should be strengthened to include a policy statement that the public, not operators, own assets of the schools.

Dyer was skeptical of Gov. John Kasich's push in HB64, the budget proposal, to employ sponsors as stronger enforcers, saying Ohio has an underwhelming history of sponsors cracking down on failing schools.

Dyer also said he's not sure the new "poor" rating for the Sponsor Performance Review System - which brings with it a revocation of authorizing authority -- will reach far enough into the ranks of sponsors to make a large difference. "The larger the sponsor, the more you're able to absorb the failing schools," he said.

Nonetheless, Dyer said he doesn't see any deal-breaking provisions in HB2, saying it would represent an improvement if it passed as-written.

"A lot of our victory is in the discussion," said Dyer, commenting on a "sea change" that has brought charter school reform to the fore.

Dyer also urged lawmakers to change the method of funding charters via deductions from local aid, saying it's much of the reason for the "adversarial" relationship between charters and traditional district schools.

**Original Article: (subscription required):**

<http://www.hannah.com/DesktopDefaultPublic.aspx?type=hns&id=198857>