

## Featured Editorial

### Charter reform

December 29, 2014

*EDITOR'S NOTE: An earlier version of this editorial stated that under Ohio law, members of charter schools' governing boards are allowed to work for management companies that serve the schools. In fact, no member of a charter school's governing board may work for the school's management company for one year after serving on the board.*

You know public charter schools in Ohio are in trouble when progressive and conservative advocates alike are demanding reform.

Separate new reports by the progressive think tank Innovation Ohio and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, a right-of-center education policy group, affirm what's been clear for a long time: Many charter schools in Ohio are spending millions in taxpayer dollars with shoddy results and little oversight.

Unless state lawmakers overcome their conflicts of interest and hold all charters to the same standards as other public schools, Ohioans will see more of the same. Gov. John Kasich may need to spur the General Assembly to act.

Like traditional public schools, charters get almost all their funding from taxpayer dollars, but without a comparable degree of public oversight. Charters are overseen by their own governing boards, with inadequate regulation by the Ohio Department of Education, even as they divert money from traditional schools.

State aid to charter schools has increased by 27 percent during Mr. Kasich's tenure, while funding for traditional schools has been slashed. According to Innovation Ohio, Toledo Public Schools lost more than \$73 million in state aid to charters in the 2012-2013 school year, not including money lost from local taxes.

In some states, charter schools outperform traditional schools. But in Ohio, a recent Stanford University report concludes, the average charter student falls significantly behind students in traditional schools in reading and math.

Black and Hispanic students in Ohio charter schools performed significantly worse than their counterparts in traditional public schools, which suggests that the schools are failing the minority communities they purport to serve. The report shows modest gains for low-income students in charter schools.

Charter schools offer themselves as part of the solution to America's education gap by offering more choice to parents. But the free-market model of education reform hasn't worked as promised. In too many cases, charter schools in low-income communities perform worse than traditional public schools that serve the same neighborhoods and promote themselves deceptively to parents.

If charter schools are to compete fairly with traditional schools, they must be subject to the same basic standards of transparency and accountability. The Fordham Institute recommends reforms such as better screening of school sponsors, greater transparency for existing sponsors, and measures to preventing conflicts of interest. Under current Ohio law, for example, members of charters' governing boards are allowed to receive financial compensation for their work, which can incentivize the boards to select a particular management company

The problems with charter schools are obvious, but Ohio lawmakers seem unlikely to take up comprehensive reform legislation anytime soon, both because charter school law is notoriously complex and because many statehouse politicians collect generous campaign contributions from charter-school operators.

Charter reform is a cause that Republicans and Democrats alike can get behind, with equal emphasis on equality of opportunity and fiscal responsibility. All Ohioans who care about the state's economic future can find common cause in the movement for greater charter school accountability – and demand that their lawmakers join that movement.

**Original article:**

<http://www.toledoblade.com/Featured-Editorial-Home/2014/12/29/Charter-reform.html>