



The FOUNTAIN PEN

Funding Belongs to Students

Recently, some school district board members and officers have written opinion pieces in local newspapers against a provision in Senate Bill 2 from the last legislative session. The provision allows charter school students the same access to locally raised education tax dollars that traditional public school students currently have. They believe it is unfair to use taxes levied by the school district to educate students in schools that are not operated by the district.

They are wrong. All public school students should be treated equally in Utah, with equal funding from the same sources, no matter which model of public school they attend.

Local education funding already follows students who attend public schools in another district. When a Jordan student attends a Granite school, Granite sends a bill to Jordan, which sends that student's share of local dollars to the district that is providing the service of educating the student.

The charter funding provision in SB2 is applying that same existing, effective, and fair principle to charter schools, calculated in the same way that districts do it already.

The Districts' position is one based on an accounting gimmick. If charter students have no access to the local taxes that their parents pay, then they will take more out of the state coffers, and the state will have less to spend on students overall.

Whether taxpayers use local property tax or state income tax to fund education, the bottom line doesn't change. With no real difference either way, the direct cost should be in the same place as the direct benefits.

Obviously, charter parents benefit from attending charters, as their children get the education they have chosen. All students in the surrounding schools benefit also.

With 700 students at Providence Hall in Her-

riman, fewer students are in surrounding Jordan District schools. Students in those schools benefit by having smaller classes, and district taxpayers benefit from lower taxes.

If the 5,000 charter students in Jordan District were back in Jordan Schools, then the district would have to build that many more schools, hire that many more teachers, buy that many more buses, and raise taxes to pay for it all—or stretch their current tax dollars further with crowded classrooms and fewer services.

While all families and taxpayers "benefit" from having a well educated population, taxpayers in Ogden receive no direct benefit from having 5,000 students in Jordan District charter schools. But Jordan District taxpayers and students do.

Having some district money follow those students to another public school is fair. Taking money from taxpayers in Ogden to reduce class sizes in Herriman isn't.

Districts plan budgets and levy taxes for a specific purpose—to educate the students that reside in their district. While the levies are not tied specifically to population on a student-by-student basis, their budget plans do take into account projected student population and growth.

When Providence Hall opened this year, it lessened the burden on the Jordan School District because 700 students who were projected to attend district schools (and were included in the budget plans when the taxes were levied) now are not a burden for the district. Jordan bears absolutely no cost for those students, but still collects taxes based on the projection that they would.

Instead, Providence Hall is bearing the cost by providing the service for which the taxes were levied—again, to educate students. If we agree that the public should bear the cost

to provide a free public education to children, then that cost should be born equally by taxpayers no matter what model of public school the child attends.

And if Districts do not bear their projected costs when levying taxes, the taxes should be either refunded or used for their intended purpose—to educate children of the taxpayers who pay them.

Why did charter schools fight so hard for students to have access to local dollars? And why do districts fight so hard against it? (The education establishment spent more of their political capital fighting this bill last year than almost any other.) The answer is simple: the growth of charter schools.

The status quo has charters getting less money overall, but costing the state more, since the cost to replace local education dollars comes from statewide income and sales tax. That difference in cost to the state leads to caps and restrictions on charter school growth.

With access to local education tax dollars, the choice of any family to attend a charter school would make no financial difference, and therefore the arbitrary restrictions on charter growth could be removed. Even though there are thousands of children on charter school waiting lists, the pace of charter growth is arbitrarily stunted. Allowing charter students access to local tax dollars can change that.

All public schools are charged with the same responsibility of providing a quality education to the students we educate. We ought to be on the same team. The money raised to educate the children isn't ours; it's theirs, and it should follow them to the public school they attend.



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Principals are key in keeping teachers

Part one of a series of four. The time to work on teacher retention is now.

You invested a lot of time and plenty of money in finding and hiring your faculty. How tragic would it be if that investment was wasted with high turnover? School leaders can save themselves a lot of repetitive effort and retain their quality teachers by developing the kind of work environment and opportunities that keep excellent teachers from looking for greener pastures.

There are four key factors that will help you retain your best teachers. School leaders need to create a quality work environment by **providing leadership**, motivating employees to succeed, helping teachers improve in their job, and allowing opportunities for growth.

You'll notice that salaries are not among those factors. A high salary may be enough to entice teachers to come to your school, but won't be enough to keep them there. On the other hand, a quality environment with good leadership and growth opportunities motivates teachers to stay, even if they might make a little more somewhere else.

The Role of School Leaders

The task of creating a positive and quality work environment falls to the school director or principal. Boards play an important role at the beginning by creating the organizational structure that will allow good leaders to lead.

Principals are employees, too who also need the right environment to be motivated and successful.

Research consistently shows that one of the strongest incentives for teachers to remain in any school is the quality of the principal. Boards should recognize this and choose good leaders, and then empower them to be the kind of principal that teachers want to work for.

Principals exist to help teachers be successful in the classroom. The principal's responsibility is to ensure that all students learn and achieve, and he or she does so without teaching them.

Instead, the principal chooses good teachers and then provides them with all the tools they

need to teach, trains them in what and how to teach, and then removes barriers that stand in the teachers' way.

If teachers don't have the resources they need, if they don't have the knowledge and training in what the principal expects, or if outside factors continually interfere with their classrooms, they won't stay at your school.

Nothing is more frustrating to any employee than to be expected to complete an assignment without the tools necessary to do it. When developing a budget for supplies, consider what makes the teachers more effective.

How would a sound enhancement system make the job of your P.E. teacher easier—and make her more effective? Would a portable computer allow your faculty to get more done off campus?

Even something as simple as having enough *working* dry erase markers can ease frustrations and help your teachers feel content and prepared at work.

Principals also need to remove obstacles that interfere with teaching. One of the most common obstacles is an overbearing parent. Running interference for teachers with helicopter moms will build loyalty towards you and to the school.

Students can also be obstacles if they consistently misbehave. Strong and regular discipline that changes behavior or removes such students from class (or the school, if necessary) will make your teachers more effective and happier.

Another common impediment to teacher success is bad policy. Some of that may exist at the school level, and others come from a higher level.

Remember that policy exists for three reasons: to make it easier to get things done, to ensure fairness and equitability, and to follow or comply with law. If policy isn't doing all three of those things, it should be changed or removed.

Policy from higher levels can't be changed by a school principal, of course, but you can find effective ways to work within (around?) such policy. Show your faculty that you understand how bad rules impact them and a good faith effort to make situations better. They will understand what is out of your control.

A caution here: don't ever play your faculty against your board. A surefire way to ruin a school's work environment is to sow conflict amongst its leadership. Saying things like, "I don't like this policy, but the board is making me do it" has the potential to destroy a school.

By ensuring that your teachers have the tools and resources they need, and that common obstacles are taken out of their way, you will engender their loyalty.

Then you can spend more of your summer recovering and preparing, and less trying to fill last minute teaching vacancies.

CHARTER SOLUTIONS is a professional business services firm that helps charter schools put more education dollars into education. We reduce the cost of school finances, human resources, facilities management, and legal compliance. Our business experts relieve school administration of the burden that comes with bureaucracy and compliance, so they can spend more time with students and teachers. To see how we can help your school put more education dollars into education, call 801-548-0144

