



Written by [Thomas Sowell](#) on October 30, 2020

Black Education Matters

Most Americans would probably be shocked and angry if they knew all the dirty tricks used to sabotage charter schools that are successfully educating low-income minority children.

This is not “systemic racism.” It is plain old selfishness on the part of traditional public school officials and teachers unions protecting their own vested interests.

Most of us might see charter schools that succeed where traditional public schools have failed as welcome news, especially in minority communities where there is so much bad news.

But, when there are a million public school students on waiting lists to get into charter schools nationwide, that amounts to many billions of dollars a year that traditional public schools would lose, if all those students could actually transfer. That would represent a lot of jobs lost in traditional public schools. It would also represent a lot of union dues lost, because most charter school teachers do not belong to a union. The success of many charter schools is definitely unwelcome news to both traditional public school officials and teachers unions.

The law gives parents the right to transfer their children from traditional public schools to charter schools. But how many can actually exercise that right depends on how much capacity the charter schools have. All across the country, traditional public school officials and teachers unions do all they can to keep charter schools from expanding their capacity.

In many states, there is simply a law putting an arbitrary numerical limit on how many charter schools will be permitted. It doesn't matter whether the charter schools are good, bad or indifferent. Or whether the traditional public schools are good, bad or indifferent.

In other words, this is not about the quality of education for students. It is about protecting traditional public schools from a mass exodus of the students they have failed to educate.

A numerical limit to the number of charter schools is not enough by itself. After all, existing charter schools could expand their capacity. But, for that, they would need more classrooms — and classrooms and school buildings are controlled by existing public school officials.

Even in cities where many school buildings have been completely vacant for years, charter schools have been prevented from using those buildings, by various tricks.

Some of these buildings have been sold, with explicit provisos in the deeds that they cannot subsequently be used again as schools, but only for residential or other purposes.

Some school officials have openly admitted that they are trying to keep those buildings from falling into the hands of charter schools. In Milwaukee, this was spelled out officially. In Detroit, a school board member said, “there is no way we should be sustaining our competition.”





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Similar policies have been followed in Chicago, Washington, Cleveland, Indianapolis, and elsewhere. Some vacant school buildings have simply been demolished, making sure they cannot be used by charter schools.

These are just some of the tactics used against charter schools by traditional public school authorities, who constantly declare their devotion to the students. But actions speak much louder than words.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio has denounced and obstructed charter schools repeatedly. Yet, when he ran for mayor in 2013, a poll showed that 96% of black voters favored him.

This is what can happen when the vast majority of black votes automatically go to one party. Under these conditions, neither party has much incentive to serve black interests.

This year, Joe Biden told a black man that, if he didn't vote for him, he wasn't black. How is that for taking the black vote for granted? Both Vice President Biden and Senator Kamala Harris have declared their support for teachers unions.

Teachers unions supply millions of votes and millions of dollars to politicians, mostly Democrats. They don't do that automatically, but require politicians to do something in return.

Unless black voters take the same attitude, their interests — and the future of their children — will be sacrificed for the political support of teachers unions.

This year the Republicans are making an effort to get more black votes. Record high average incomes for blacks and record low unemployment rates for blacks are part of this administration's record. But support for charter schools, including awarding more than \$9 million to the Success Academy schools in Harlem and other minority communities may be even more important for the future.

Everything depends on how well Republicans inform black voters and how receptive those voters are to breaking their old voting habits.

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