



Charter Schools and Their Enemies

Dr. Thomas Sowell has just published  "Charter Schools and Their Enemies." He presents actual test scores of students in traditional public schools and charter schools on the New York State Education Department's annual English Language Arts test and its Mathematics Test. Sowell gives the results of student tests in charter schools such as KIPP, Success Academy, Explore Schools, Uncommon Schools, Achievement First as well as the traditional New York City public schools. On the English Language Arts test, a majority of charter school students, most of whom were black or Hispanic, tested proficient or above. Their achievement ratio was nearly 5 to 1. On the Mathematics test 68% of charter schools' 161 grade levels had a majority of students testing proficient. In the traditional public schools, 177 grade levels, just 10% had a majority of their student testing proficient.

In April 2019, The Wall Street Journal reported that 57% of black and 54% of Hispanic charter school students passed the statewide ELA compared to 52% of white students statewide. On the state math test, 59% of black students and 57% of Hispanics at city charter schools passed as opposed to 54% of white students statewide.

Sowell says: "In a realm where educational failure has long been the norm — schools in low income minority neighborhoods — this is success, a remarkable success. What is equally remarkable is how unwelcome this success has been in many places. What has been especially remarkable is that it has been the most educationally successful charter schools that seem to have drawn the most hostility, both in words and in deeds." The most common form of that hostility are simple legal limits set on the number of charter schools permitted without regard to whether charter schools are producing good or bad educational outcomes.

The education establishment, having the nation's most powerful labor union, has the ears of political leaders. They see a huge loss potential if more parents are able to opt out of poorly achieving public schools. For example, in New York City there are more than 50,000 students on waiting lists for admission to charter schools. The per-pupil expenditure tops \$20,000 a year. If all the students on the waiting list were able to be admitted to charter schools, that would translate into a billion-dollar loss by the traditional public schools. A substantial decline in traditional public school attendance would mean fewer teachers employed. That would mean declining union dues since most charter school teachers are not union members. Charter schools' rate of growth since the 1990s has been significant. From 2001 to



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2016, enrollment at traditional public schools rose 1% while enrollment in public charter schools rose 571%.

Sowell points out that not all charter schools are successful. Failing charter schools can have their charters revoked, cutting off access to public funds. That is in stark contrast to failing and corrupt traditional public schools that continue to dine at the public trough. Successful charter schools are the real threat to traditional unionized public schools. No charter school in Sowell's study has been more successful than Success Academy charter schools in Harlem, Bedford-Stuyvesant and the South Bronx — and none has been more viciously attacked in words and in deeds. New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio explicitly campaigned against charter schools saying: "I am angry about the privatizers. I am sick and tired of these efforts to privatize a precious thing we need — public education.

In another venue, Sowell said: "We keep hearing that 'black lives matter,' but they seem to matter only when that helps politicians to get votes, or when that slogan helps demagogues demonize the police. The other 99% of black lives destroyed by people who are not police do not seem to attract nearly as much attention in the media."

At a 2016 meeting, the NAACP's board of directors ratified a resolution that called for a moratorium on charter schools. Among the NAACP's reasons for this were that it wanted charter schools to refrain from "expelling students that public schools have a duty to educate" and "cease to perpetuate de facto segregation of the highest performing children from those whose aspirations may be high but whose talents are not yet as obvious." That is a vision suggesting that no black children receive decent educations until all black children receive decent educations. Black people cannot afford to entertain such a vision and other attacks on educational success.

Walter E. Williams is a professor of economics at George Mason University. To find out more about Walter E. Williams and read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate webpage at www.creators.com.

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