

May 15, 2007

Congressman George Miller, Chair
Committee on Education and Labor
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515



Dear Congressman Miller:

Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE) is a parent-run advocacy group based in Chicago whose mission is to work for a high-quality public education for every child. We are concerned that traditional public schools, which represent the vast majority of our public schools, are being given short shrift as a result of a well-funded effort to discredit them and replace them with charter and other alternatively-managed schools.

PURE does not oppose the concept of charter schools. However, we agree with educator Deborah Meier who recently stated that charters “can be used in ways that undermine the schooling of the least advantaged, as well as undermine the larger public mission of the common school.” The often over-hyped promotion of these alternative school structures is being used to justify closure and dismantling of struggling neighborhood schools which might have succeeded if they had been given adequate resources and support. CPS’s school closing program has already had a serious disruptive effect on our children and communities.

For example, last week, the principal of Chicago’s Dodge Renaissance Academy testified before your committee. This school was apparently selected for special attention because it had the largest test gains of any school in Illinois in 2006. The impression may have been left that this school and other charters and privatized schools are somehow the answer to the failures of traditional public schools.

It’s important to know that the Dodge Renaissance Academy provides three instructors in every classroom, an expensive luxury made possible only by generous private funding that is not available to traditional schools. In addition, the Chicago Public Schools’ own data show that only 12 students who attended Dodge in 2002 (the year CPS closed the school) were still enrolled at the restructured Dodge in 2005. The new school is essentially serving a completely different student body. It simply does not operate on a level playing field with other schools, and its results should be considered in that context.

The federal government reports that students in traditional public schools are doing at least as well and in some cases better in reading and math than similar students in charter schools, and as well or better than comparable children in private schools. We urge you to prioritize support for our traditional public schools as you work toward reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Yours truly,

Julie Woestehoff
Executive Director

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