



June 22, 2011

House Education and the Workforce Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative,

On behalf of the American Association of School Administrators, representing more than 13,000 school system leaders across the nation, we submit our concerns and reservations related to H.R. 2218, the *Empowering Parents Through Quality Charter Schools Act*, scheduled for markup today in front of the full House Education and the Workforce Committee.

AASA supports public school choice and charter schools that operate under the governance of local public school boards. We believe that there should be a level playing field, including non-discriminatory and unconditional enrollment for all children. Further, the same regulations and accountability should apply to all schools receiving public funding. The manner in which charter schools are financed must be addressed so that their creation does not have an adverse effect on the quality of existing public schools. As such, AASA has concerns and reservations about HR 2218 (detailed below) that preclude our support at this time, and we urge the committee to improve the legislative language prior to consideration on the House floor:

- Federal regulations believed to be obstacles to successful operation of charter schools are also likely obstacles to traditional public schools. As such, waivers from the regulations granted to charter schools should be extended to similarly situated public schools.
- Given that the average age of a school building in the US is well over 50 years old, AASA questions why the bill extends federal support to fund construction/renovation costs for charter schools in a manner/at a level not provided to traditional public schools.
- All states should have an equal chance of receiving the funds. AASA is concerned that the bill, as currently written, gives an advantage to states that received Race to the Top funds, given the priority for removing caps.
- AASA has a strong commitment to the belief that public dollars should go to public schools, and we question the multiple references to the state entity ensuring equitable financing for non-traditional schools that may be for-profit.
- AASA is concerned that the bill does not specifically require charters to be held to the same level of academic performance using the same measures that the state requires for traditional public schools (accountability). Consistent accountability requirements will help avoid varying levels of accountability within the public education system. We urge the Committee to continue to enhance language that focuses on both charter school and authorizer accountability.

- Traditional public schools have an obligation to educate all children, regardless of ability. We support the language that requires charter schools to comply with IDEA and ESEA requirements designed to protect student rights for these traditionally underserved students. AASA seeks clarification as to how it will be ‘ensured’ that charter schools meet the educational needs of all students, including English Language Learners and those with learning disabilities.

The \$300 million dollars proposed for investment in charter schools represent a sizeable funding source in a very tight funding climate, and as such, AASA strongly urges the committee to engage in analysis and evaluation of the proposal with both colleagues and practitioners. Charter schools are not a silver bullet for resolving the many challenges facing public education and the research on charter school effectiveness demonstrates, at best, a mixed record of success. Research from the Center for Research on Education Outcomes found that less than one-fifth (17 percent) of charter schools (representing more than 70 percent of the nation’s charter school students) were more effective than the traditional public school the students would have attended. Further, nearly half (46 percent) of the students demonstrated no discernable difference and more than one-third (37 percent) of the students performed worse than if they had remained in their traditional public school. More succinctly, this research found that a full 83 percent of charter schools are no more effective than their neighborhood traditional public school.

AASA believes that public school choice and public charter schools have a role to play in helping improve the overall achievement of the nation’s public education system. While our concerns and reservations with HR 2218 prevent us from supporting the legislation at this time, we look forward to working with members of the committee in advance of action on the House floor to make sure all public schools—including charter schools—are held to high standards of educational quality, accountability, and accessibility for all students.

If you have any questions, please email Noelle Ellerson ([nellerson@aasa.org](mailto:nellerson@aasa.org)).

Sincerely,



Noelle Ellerson  
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