

Testimony by Peter C. Groff
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Education Committee
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To Chairman Aurand and members of the committee good morning.

My name is Peter Groff. I'm a visiting fellow at Johns Hopkins School of Education in Baltimore, MD, a former President of the Colorado Senate and the former CEO of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, which is headquartered in Washington, DC.

I'm honored to be here to share with you my thoughts on the positive impact that Charter Schools are having on public education.

Charter schools have seen tremendous growth recently.

With the addition of Maine last year 42 states and the District of Columbia now have a charter school laws and those schools are serving over two million students in 5,600 charter schools across the country. During last year's legislative sessions 18 states rewrote and strengthened their charter schools laws.

High quality charter schools are flourishing not only in inner cities but in suburban and rural areas as well. In fact, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, 16% of charter schools are located in rural areas.

Charters have expanded in states that have a history or a reputation of strong K-12 education like Massachusetts, Georgia or New York.

Kansas constantly and consistently ranks amongst the top in the United States for K-12 education. In fact just last week Education Week's Quality Counts 2012 scored Kansas relatively high.

Kansas received B- 's in chances for success and for standards, assessments and accountability. However, in that same report the state received a D+ in the area of K-12 achievement and an F in college readiness.

We know that 25% of Kansans are not graduating from high school and that number is over 40% for African American and Latino students. Those drop out numbers "will cost the state of Kansas almost \$2.6 billion in lost wages" over the lives of those who drop out according to the Alliance for Excellent Education.

So it doesn't seem as counter intuitive as it might feel from a policy standpoint to strengthen your charter statute and expand the roll of charter schools here in Kansas.

But because of a history of outstanding schools I know Kansas's schools can be better and stronger.

One way to make Kansas's schools better and stronger is to improve your charter school law and expand the number of high quality charter schools in your state.

High quality charter schools are benefitting students across the country. Charter schools are closing achievement gaps between students of color and white students, increasing achievement all of students and better preparing students for college and a career.

Charter schools are accomplishing those successes because they are able to increase time on task, offer more tutoring, enjoy complete control of hiring high quality teachers and school leaders and firing staff that is ineffective and by instilling high expectations and building a no excuse culture.

High quality charter schools have become win win situation for students and public schools and districts.

For students and parents charter schools offer myriad options within the public school space.

They allow students to find the right fit academically and socially and helps ensure that all kids have an opportunity to succeed.

Charter schools ease the pressure on traditional public schools by reducing class size, creating new and innovative curriculums and school settings and offering the best return on investment in public education today.

Charter schools are the best return on investment in public education today because the sector is ensuring that schools keep their promise, that with full autonomy the schools will be transparent and accountable and most importantly, will increase academic success of the students they serve. When that promise is broken, schools close because they are not working in the best interest of children. This past year 150 charter schools closed for a variety of reasons and that is something that doesn't happen with traditional public schools.

That increasing accountability, surging parental demand and growing achievement numbers, fueled those 18 states to revisit and strengthen their charter school laws.

According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools' 2011 Model Law rankings Kansas can improve your statute by:

1. Expanding your authorizing options – right now Kansas has only a single authorizer;

2. Ensuring authorizer accountability – strengthen state chartering program so there is better oversight of schools and the authorizing process;
3. Providing adequate authorizer funding – such as guaranteed funding from authorizing fees so they are not subject to legislative appropriations;
4. Increasing operational autonomy – Removal of barriers that infringe on classroom innovation and full ability to hire and fire staff;
5. Ensuring equitable operational and categorical funding – Fair resources for operation of schools and transportation and access to all categorical funding; and
6. Providing equitable access to capital funding and facilities – Assisting schools with space or funds to secure space.

In the past two and half years, as the head of National Alliance for Public Charter Schools and as an appointee in the Obama Administration I have traveled well over 100,000 miles across the country and have see charter schools in every region of America.

I have seen how high quality charters schools have eliminated the achievement gap and drastically reduced the drop out rate for students of color in inner cities.

I have seen how high quality charters schools have expanded the offerings for suburban students and used technology in a variety of innovative ways to better prepare and equip rural students.

I have seen how high quality charters schools have made schools districts stronger and better when they have accepted and supported charter schools.

Finally I have seen how high quality charters schools have helped kids in every corner of this country and allowed students the opportunity to find the best academic fit and succeed.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to your questions.