NFHS Policy Debate Study Report and Topic Proposal: Education Reform

Submitted By:

Jennifer L. LeSieur
Introduction

Think of education in the U.S today and what comes to mind? Overcrowded, crumbling classrooms, teachers challenged beyond their capacity, rigorous standards, testing and expectations. Teachers’ pay tied to test arbitrary scores, the need for uniform standards and local control. Unions under attack stressed out students, rising costs and discrimination. These issues consume an enormous amount of energy and lead to frustrations that are endemic to American education. Library shelves and the worldwide web are filled with advice advocating change.

Schools need to compete on a global scale. The United States students are not highly ranked compared to their global competitors. Which, if any, reforms can work with support from the federal government? How do states, districts and schools prioritize what should to be done first? How do individual educators select from the numerous national standards to help every student to be successful? How do we encourage a rigorous education while still instilling a sense of fun and joy of learning?

A single debate topic is unable to address all reforms already under consideration. However, by critically looking at trends in public education, options can be evaluated and compared to current educational direction.

One popular way to address educational concerns is to create a local charter school. If reading test scores are low, a reading intensive charter school might be the answer. In another community, artistic high school students might be performing poorly in math and/or science. Creating an art magnet charter school can give students a way to succeed. Some states and districts have created online or virtual schools. Others have turned to management companies to privately run their public schools and still others in a pursuit of higher education, have created middle-colleges.

For purposes of this paper, these options (charter schools with an emphasis on online/virtual, for profit and middle-college programs) are referenced as alternative schools. Many alternative schools show promise when implemented locally, but that success may not translate when applied on a larger scale.

Timeliness and Interest

American students have not progressed much since the 1970’s even though there has been a steady increase in federal direction of public schools with over 100 federal education programs, (Common Core National Standards and Tests). Between No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and the Common Core, American students are still performing poorly internationally and graduation rates have not improved. However, the budget has tripled during this time period. Moreover:

Achievement gaps between children from low-income families and their more affluent peers, and between white and minority children, remain stubbornly persistent. While many of these problems stem from a lack of educational choice
and a monopolistic public education system, the growth in federal intervention, programs, and spending has only exacerbated them (Common Core National Standards and Tests).

The last educational debate topic was in 1999-2000. Resolved: That the federal government should establish an education policy to significantly increase academic achievement in secondary schools in the United States. This former topic focused solely on secondary schools and is more than 16 years old. The current proposed topics encompasses education K-12. Additionally, it gives students choice in topic areas. However, by limiting the topic to charter, online/virtual, for profit, and/or middle-college schools, the affirmative burden is manageable but still allow for a variety of complex and interesting cases. This topic is relevant and fair. Within each topic area many other educational issues can be discussed, such as, standards, testing, special education, English Language Development, electives, funding, racism, discrimination, constitutionality, school repair, etc.

Existing Programs

Charter schools offer an institutional hybrid. Like traditional public schools, charter schools are free and must not discriminate against students because of their race, gender, or disability...charter schools are independently run, and some are operated by for profit private companies (Public vs. private vs. charter schools). According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools:

Charter schools, created more than 20 years ago to improve our nation’s public school system and close the achievement gap, are unique public schools that have the freedom to be more innovative while being held accountable for improving student achievement...There are more than 6,700 charter schools across 42 states and the District of Columbia educating nearly 3 million children (Facts about Charter Schools).

Research seems to indicate that charter, for profit and middle-college programs have mixed results. In general about one-third are high performing, one-third are average and one-third are failing miserably. According to Diane Ravitch in Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America’s Public Schools:

Charter schools will revolutionize American education by their freedom to innovate and produce dramatically better results. (The) reality, charter schools run from excellent to awful and are, on average, no more innovative or successful than public schools (Ravitch 156).

Since the first charter school opened in 1992, charter school numbers are booming while charter school results are mixed. In one low economic area the local charter school may be boosting academic scores. While students of color and otherwise
disadvantaged students may be excelling at that school, just a few miles away, a similar school with similar demographics maybe floundering.

What emerges is a simple fact: charter schools are not all created equal. But the not-so-simple truth about charters is that compared with traditional schools, they are both more likely to outperform and more likely to underperform their predicted outcomes (Lloyd).

After 24 years of tremendous growth, governments, parents, teachers, watchdog groups and investigative reporters have taken a serious look at the success and failure of charter schools. Countless books, articles and studies have been conducted. Students may therefore access a rich depth of research while the mixed bag of results around charter, online, for profit and middle-college programs will create a balanced, debatable topic with ample ground for both the affirmative and negative teams.

**Range and Scope**

**Cases for doing more to encourage Charter, Online, For-Profit and Middle-Colleges**

**Charter Schools are Closing the Gap by Fairly Meeting Students Needs:** Lindsey Burke from the Heritage Foundation argues for the need for choice:

> Across the country, education choice options have been proliferating rapidly, including vouchers, tuition tax credits, special needs scholarships, and education savings accounts. Educational choice is a revolution because it funds children instead of physical school buildings and allows dollars to follow children to any school—or education option—that meets their unique learning needs. Choice empowers parents to direct their child’s share of education funding, giving them options beyond an assigned government school.

Choice pressures public schools with a much-needed competitive atmosphere, which works toward improving educational outcomes for students who take advantage of choice options as well as students who choose to attend their local public schools...Choice Helps Kids. Seventeen states and Washington, D.C., now have private school choice programs—and more states are considering implementing choice options. Education choice represents the type of innovation and freedom that will provide long-overdue reform to the K–12 education system, and holds the potential to truly raise educational outcomes for every child across the country (Burke).

Charter schools seem like a magical fix for failing schools. Many of them succeed and meet national standards. Further, they are able to address specific issues and approach them in a unique ways. They are able to hire lower-cost non-union staff resulting in more flexibility and efficiency. They can target specific student needs and talents. They can also experiment with their teaching methods. This can results in
atypical success. There are many instances where charter schools are out performing contemporary schools and students are flourishing.

There are several factors that make charter schools successful. They have the freedom to try new teaching methods while still drawing upon the tried and true ones. Charter schools fundamentally believe that all students are able to learn and thrive. Students in low and underserved communities can excel when given the opportunity. “Additionally, charter schools bring programs to disadvantaged neighborhoods that not only serve children, but the whole community, providing parents with education of parenting, nutrition and more” (Facts about Charter Schools).

Out of the 16 academic studies completed on charter schools the Center for Research on Educational Outcomes at Stanford University found that, “charter schools do a better job teaching low income students, minority students, and students who are still learning English than traditional schools” (Facts about Charter Schools). Some of the ways charter schools are more successful include extended learning time, high expectations, structure and discipline, teacher incentives, parent contracts and multi-age programs. Evidence may show that at the elementary grades schools enroll less special education students. However, upon further research, the middle and high school levels, “charter schools enroll students with special needs at rates almost identical to district schools’. It would be hard to argue that there is any systematic discrimination or exclusion occurring in these schools” (Lake and Medler).

**Charter Schools Better Prepare Students for Life Beyond School:** Studies report that charter schools graduate more students than traditional schools, prepare them for life beyond school and result in more students go on to college:

...recent data collected by Mathematica Policy Research reveals that charter schools seem to be doing a better job of graduating students and preparing them for life after high school...the graduation rate at charter schools is between 7-11 percent higher than public schools in the same area. Even for at-risk students, who may not have the financial, social, or family resources that other students enjoy, graduation is more likely at a charter school. Furthermore, students who graduate from charter schools are 10-11 percent more likely to enroll in college. Better still, charter school graduates are more likely to complete at least two years of study at a two or four-year college than their public-school peers (Chen).

Evidence supports that charter schools are more likely to be successful and that poor performing school are outliers. Students have a better chance of succeeding at a charter school. Over all, there are more outperforming charter schools than underperforming ones. (Charters are four times more likely than non-charters to over-perform their prediction, while only twice as likely to be underperformers). Given that the low performing schools tend to be smaller than the high performing schools, the positive effect is amplified-with 2.5 times as many student served in the top performing 5% than the lowest performing 5% (Lloyd).
Non-Renewal of Failing Charter Schools Assures Accountability: Poor performing charter schools are not renewed. California alone has, “identified 30 charter school it will not endorse for renewal” (Lloyd). Secretary of Education Arne Duncan urges states without charter laws or with enrollment caps to revise their policies or risk their eligibility for certain stimulus funds (7 essential about charter schools).

Charter Schools Encourage Teacher’s Involvement: Teachers who want to make a difference in education should have the choice to move to a charter school, teachers start many charter schools. Some of the benefits of teaching at a charter school include:

An empowering environment where staff has more choice in what they do and how the school is ran. They have a sense of autonomy and the ability to deeply connect to their students and parents. This can lead to staff members feeling empowered. Charter schools generally don’t have unions. Employees keep more of their paycheck and there are lots of job opportunities as charter schools are growing nationwide (Pros and Cons of Teaching at a Charter School).

Online Schools are a Type of Charter School That May Move Education into the 21st century: Online schools sometimes called virtual charter schools provide students with online courses of study taught by licensed teachers. Public virtual schools are similar to traditional "bricks and mortar" schools in many ways, including academic services and accountability requirements. These schools have the same rigorous standards of traditional public schools.

Teachers are responsible for overseeing and managing student learning, and ensuring that students are meeting all academic progress and accountability requirements. All students must participate in state assessment tests. Any eligible student may enroll, regardless of income, race, academic ability, special needs, etc. Special education needs, IEPs, and other related services are identified and met by school's special education staff. Schools are subject to audits, and state reporting is mandatory.

Online/Virtual Schools Offer Choice: Virtual schools allow students to attend classes when it’s best for them. Early riser can start early, or students can work or volunteer during the day and take classes when needed. Students cut down on wasted time during the day. All students must meet attendance requirements. The schools are subject to federal AYP goals under No Child Left Behind. The schools use an established curriculum that consists of thousands of lessons. Students are allowed to play sports and do activities at the local high school or they pick other endeavors for socialization. They don’t have to deal with bullies and they learn how to budget their time.

According to Excel High School's website students can work at a pace that is best for them. They can take time when they need it and move ahead when they understand concepts. You can take a longer period of time, or graduate much sooner--
it all depends on the manner in which you pace yourself. (Why Online High School Can Be Better Than Classrooms).

For Profit Schools Focus on Results: Evidence shows that for-profit schools have a better track record than charter schools run independently. “Schools in Charter Management Organizations - like KIPP, Aspire, Alliance - have a better track record of excellence than charter that have no CMO affiliation” (Lloyd). According to the Huffpost Education, “Local school districts from Memphis to Philadelphia to Dallas...have hired private consultants to advise them on improving education” (Privatizing Public Schools: Big Firms Eyeing Profits From U.S. K-12 Market). Diane Ravitch, a professor at New York University, notes:

... bipartisan education reform movement that places an enormous emphasis on standardized test scores, labels poor performers as “failing” schools and relentlessly pushes local districts to transform low-ranked schools by firing the staff and turning the building over to private management (Privatizing Public Schools: Big Firms Eyeing Profits From U.S. K-12 Market).

According to Western Michigan University:

Education management organizations emerged in the early 1990s in the context of widespread interest in market-based school reform proposals. Wall Street analysts coined the term education management organizations as an analogue to health maintenance organizations. Proponents of education management organizations claim that they bring a much needed dose of entrepreneurial spirit and a competitive ethos to public education (Study Group on Education Management Organizations).

Middle-College Programs May be a Good Choice to Encourage Education: Middle-college is a unique opportunity of alternative education that allows students to take courses meeting high school graduation requirements while earning college credits at the same time. There are many positive factors such as: the opportunity for students to experience college life at an earlier age, get a head start on college, learn skills that help them become college ready and even save a lot of money. Middle-college programs are a great way for students who are not entirely happy with their current high school, want to try something new, want to be more challenged or want to have more college prep classes. Middle-colleges are usually smaller than traditional high schools. Student love the benefits. A student states:

For me, Middle College was a way to get your high school requirements while still taking interesting college classes...I wanted to go to a school with more mature peers, different classroom styles and a lack of pointless school traditions and schools spirit (Tran & Liang).

Students are able to start college early while gaining credits towards an associate degree. Greatschools.org state, “Early college high schools are an innovative way for high school students to earn both a high school degree and a two-year
associates degree...in the time it takes to go to high school - saving the student both time and money” (Tynan-Wood).

College is expensive. Some students won't even apply due to a lack of funds or the fear of long-term debt. Middle-college often pays for tuition, books and fees, which save money for the student. Cost is often a big obstacle-keeping student’s from attending college. According to Portland Community College:

The Middle College covers the cost of PCC tuition, books, and fees thus removing one of the most significant barriers to entry into higher education - price. The program also helps students to navigate the sometimes-intimidating college admission and enrollment process (Middle College Programs: Goals and Benefits).

Many Middle-college programs house fewer students and these students are able to get more individual attention. Teachers are able to teach specific skills and work individually with each student. The academic and social success of Middle-college students is undergirded by a wide array of support services...These services range from individual case management, tutoring, specialized college success classes, and orientation to college campus life, and individual mentorship…(Middle College Programs: Goals and Benefits).

Balance

The Case Against Charter Schools, For-Profit and Middle College Programs

Charter Schools Detract From Education: The ideas behind the development of charter schools started in the 1950s. The credit for the charter school movement goes to former American Federation of Teachers, President Albert Shanker. Shanker called for reform to public schools in the late 1980s. His ideas inspired states to pass legislation permitting the establishment of charter schools. Minnesota took the lead in 1991, creating the nation’s first legislated charter school, which opened the following year (Chen).

These programs take money from the regular classroom and evidence suggests that more harm than good happens. Craig Ford in his article, Why Charter Schools are a Bad Idea: Guest Opinion. The Center for Popular Democracy states in his 2015 article:

So after about two decades of experimenting with charter schools, the test results have proven that charter schools are not likely to give our children a better quality education. In fact, there's a pretty high chance that our children will get a lower quality education at a charter school than they would at the school they are already attending (Ford).
The rate of failure is higher for online charter schools, “...a report on Pennsylvania’s charter schools recently released by a state legislator found that only one in six of the state’s charter schools is "high-performing" and it notes that none of the online charters is “high-performing” (Strauss).

Researchers at Stanford University conducted two studies on charter schools, in which they reviewed test scores from charter schools in 26 states. The results they found undermine the argument that charter schools outperform existing public schools (Ford).

In all, only 25 percent of charter schools performed better than traditional public schools in reading, while only 29 percent performed better in math. More troubling is that 19 percent of charters performed worse in reading, while 31 percent performed "significantly worse" in math. The rest performed at the same level as the existing public schools" (Ford).

Charter Schools use Public Money Discriminatorily: Charters are public schools, funded by taxpayers and widely promoted as open to all. But Reuters has found that across the United States, charters aggressively screen student applicants, assessing their academic records, parental support, disciplinary history, motivation, special needs and even their citizenship, sometimes in violation of state and federal law (Simon).

Charter schools are performing similarly to their public school counterparts or much worse in many cases, while not serving the same number of special education students. In some cases refusing to admit students with special needs via various tactics, sometimes in direct disregard for state and federal law. These charter schools also serve significantly fewer special education students than traditional students. Only two of these 28 high performing charter schools have a special education student population greater than the 15% average of traditional public schools. Further, as noted in the 2013 Special Education Funding Commission report, charter school enroll significantly less special education students with severe disabilities than traditional public schools" (Strauss).

“Requirements that applicants document any disabilities or special needs. The U.S. Department of Education considers this practice illegal on the college level but has not addressed the issues for k-12 schools” (Simon). Since the law is unclear, charter schools are free to discriminate which not only skews the data on their success, but takes vital funds from their regular education classrooms. Meaning they need to do more with less. This problem is further explained in the article, Charters Should Be Expected to Serve All Kinds of Students by Gary Miron:

Charter schools nationally serve far fewer students with disabilities—8 to 10 percent of their students on average—than district schools, which serve 13.1 percent. Some state funding formulas encourage charter schools to enroll students with disabilities, while in other states there are clear financial disincentives. In a few states, expenses for special education delivered by
charter schools are paid by the local districts, or the services are delivered by
special education teachers employed by the district. As a result, enrollment
figures vary widely from state to state. On average, however, the disabled
students charter schools enroll tend to have disabilities that are less severe and
less costly to remediate than those of students in district schools (Miron).

Miron explains that charter schools rarely actively recruit students with disabilities
and their families, and schools that focus on students with disabilities are the exception.
Additionally, Miron explains that in a study by the U.S. Department of Education, with a
report published in 2000 found that charter schools are:

…systematically counseling out students with disabilities rather than making
accommodations and providing the required services and supports;
administrators at one-fourth of the charter schools in the study reported having
advised parents that the school was not a good fit for their disabled children
(Miron).

Other ways that charter schools weed out undesirable students is to make it
difficult for students to apply. Often they use illegal tactics. Some application besides
being lengthy, and written only in English, also demand students present Social Security
cards and birth certificates, which is illegal (Strauss). In Philadelphia it was determined
that, "25 charter schools (studied)...found (that) 18 imposed, significant barriers,
including a requirement from one school that students produce a character reference
from a religious or community leader” (How charter schools choose desirable students).

Another way charter schools rid themselves of the difficult students is by
expelling them at a high rate. Emma Brown from the Washington Post, claims:

The District’s public charter schools have expelled students at a far higher rate
than the city’s traditional public schools in recent years, according to school
data...D.C. charter schools expelled 676 students in the past three years, while
the city’s traditional public schools expelled 24 (How charter schools choose
desirable students).

Schools may be difficult to apply to and therefore eliminate “undesirable”
students. There are several cases where application are only in English, they are
extensive and the focus in what the parents can do for the school rather than what the
school can do for the students. Students may be asked to submit a 15-page typed
research paper, an original short story, or a handwritten essay on the historical figure
they would most like to meet. There are interviews. Exams. And pages of questions for
parents to answer, including: How do you intend to help this school if we admit your son
or daughter?” (Simon). In another case the charter school, “...made its application
available to prospective families only one day per year, in hard copy form only, at a
suburban country club not accessible by public transportation” (Strauss). Charter
schools are so popular they can be very difficult to get into and they may use a lottery to
fill their slots.
**Charter Schools Mistreat Teachers:** Teachers and staff members need protection from the lax rules and policies at charter schools. In the article, Pros and Cons of Teaching at a Charter School, they mention several harms that teachers face at a charter school. For instance, they are often overworked. Without a union, teachers often work 60-80 a week and this can be even greater if the charter is new and still developing curriculum. The management often changes and can be very unpredictable. Management varies from school to school and often the curriculum can be substandard. In addition, teachers get a smaller paycheck.

Without unions most charter school teachers are paid less, sometimes 10-15%. They may not have health care or retirement benefits.

Teachers can be required to put in many more hours than traditional teaching jobs sometimes up to 80 hours a week, but without union dues they may receive more in their paychecks. However, you may get paid less than a unionized job but it might be an easier way to get in the door (Pros and Cons of Teaching at a Charter School).

**Charter Schools May Provide Unstable Education:** GreatKids in their article 7 essentials about charter schools discusses the need to stabilize funding and permanent housing for charter schools. Some states such as Alaska, Colorado, Minnesota and New Jersey get less money per student than regular schools because the state withholds administrative fees. Some programs resort to writing grants and doing their own fundraising. There is a limited amount of federal funding to help begin new schools. Charter schools often pay for their own facilities if they are not provided free space from its district. This means that schools are housed in unusual or in non-traditional settings and often have to move, “charter schools often end up moving multiple times due to the difficulty of finding a permanent home” (7 essentials about charter schools).

**Online/Virtual Schools May Harm Students:** Families or students choose online/virtual schools thinking it is a flexible option. However, students fail to take into consideration the lack of teacher-peer interaction. While being away from peers may be a benefit for some students, it's a detriment for others. High school can be a period of important social and emotional development that's dependent upon peer interaction. Plus, many young people enjoy activities like student clubs, sporting events and the prom, none of which are offered through online high schools (Online High School Vs. Traditional High School Diplomas: Pros & Cons).

Students need to have strong time-management skills, dedication and independence in order to be successful. In some cases colleges or employers won’t see an online diploma as legitimate. “Some non-accredited online high school programs grant diplomas that won't be accepted by colleges or employers” (Online High School Vs. Traditional High School Diplomas: Pros & Cons). One reason for concern is that there is a high rate of cheating that occurs with online classes, “40% of kids admit to cheating” (Think Twice Before Cheating in Online Courses).
For Profit Schools May Defraud Taxpayers: Many for-profit schools abuse and waste taxpayer’s money. “Another report conducted by Integrity In Education found that, just in Pennsylvania, charter operators had fraudulently misused more than $30 million (Ford)! The reason charter schools are hotbeds for fraud and waste is because the for-profit companies that provide education services, such as financial and operation management, managing the facilities and even designing the curriculum, are not held accountable” (Ford).

Charter schools also have a very real problem with fraud, waste and abuse of tax dollars. The Center for Popular Democracy and Integrity In Education, both non-profit organizations, released a report that found more than $100 million in fraud, waste and abuse by fraudulent charter operators in just 15 of the 42 states that have charter schools (Ford).

Investigative reporters have also found that education service providers are typically non-compliant with request for information required by law under the Freedom of Information act. The Washington Post reported that, during their own investigation of charter schools, 70 percent of Education Management Organizations refused to respond to the request for a copy of their contract with Charter Operators, while another 10 percent claimed they were not legally required to publicly provide a copy of their contract” (Ford). Diane Ravitch in her book, Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America’s Public Schools, retells a story of how privatization of schools has gone too far:

(In) Baltimore...There, a private for-profit firm called Education Alternatives Inc. was given, a contract to run nine struggling schools. These were not charter schools; they were privately managed schools operating under contract to the district and subject to the rules of the district. The company cleaned up the schools, brought in computers, and retrained teachers. But the company and the city quarreled over finances, and scores did not go up...it fired unionized paraprofessionals, who earned $10 an hour (in 1991 dollars) with benefits, and replaced them with college graduates who were paid $7 an hour without benefits...The management’s decisions would be based on reducing costs...not improving education (Ravitch 157).

Middle-College May Backfire: At first glance middle-college programs appear to be a solid way for students to learn college preparatory skills, earn college credit and save money. The goal is for students to graduate from high school with their associate’s degree, ready then to move onto a 4-year university. A middle college at Eastern Kentucky University summarizes what a typical middle college looks like:

Middle College at Eastern Kentucky University (MC@EKU) is a unique University/District partnership between Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) and Madison County Schools that enables students from Madison Central and Madison Southern High Schools to obtain a rigorous high school education while concurrently earning up to 30 college credits. MC@EKU is an innovative
pathway to college and career readiness that integrates high school, college, and career training on a 4-year university campus.

However, the allure of middle college programs looses its luster when its rigorous standards are examined. According to Eastern Kentucky Middle College, most middle colleges require students to earn grades of a C or more. Students who don’t meet these grades are required to reimburse the school for the cost of the course. This can be a costly lesson for students who are not quite prepared for the middle college experience. A longer lasting impact happens when students who are not prepared and earn a C grade or lower, these grades go on their permanent college record. This can impact their chances for additional college acceptance and scholarship potential. After all, not all 16 years old are ready for the rigors of college but might do outstanding work a year of two later.

Conclusion

Ideas regarding education reform will never be in short supply. Countless teachers will be spending their summer learning the newest and best ideas in public education. Some teachers may be training for a new job at a charter school, while some parents might getting ready for their child to switch to a charter school. Either way this fall brings lots of new opportunities and experiences in education. The possibilities to use public money to try something new, exciting and more effective will always be debated in our country. Let’s give NFHS students the opportunity to discuss an issue that impacts their everyday lives.

Definitions

Charter School

No Child Left Behind, Charter Schools Program Title V, Part B Non-Regulatory Guidance, United States Department of Education, July, 2004

“The Charter Schools Program CSP was authorized in October 1994, under Title X, Part C of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended, 20 U.S.C. 8061-8067. The program was amended in October 1998 by the Charter School Expansion Act of 1998 and in January 2001 by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The program, which provides support for the planning, program design, and initial implementation of charter schools, is intended to enhance parent and student choices among public schools and give more students the opportunity to learn to challenging standards. Enhancement of parent and student choices will result in higher student achievement, however, only if sufficiently diverse and high-quality choices, and genuine opportunities to take advantage of those choices, are available to all students. Every student should have an equal opportunity to attend a charter school" (1).
Charter schools are established according to individual State charter school laws. The enactment of State charter school laws is solely a State prerogative, and the definition of a “charter school” under State law is a matter of State policy. However, in order to receive CSP funds, a charter school must meet the definition in Section 5210(1) of ESEA, which is as follows:

“The term 'charter school' means a public school that:

1. In accordance with a specific State statute authorizing the granting of charters to schools, is exempt from significant State or local rules that inhibit the flexible operation and management of public schools, but not from any rules relating to the other requirements of this paragraph [the paragraph that sets forth the Federal definition];
2. Is created by a developer as a public school, or is adapted by a developer from an existing public school, and is operated under public supervision and direction;
3. Operates in pursuit of a specific set of educational objectives determined by the school's developer and agreed to by the authorized public chartering agency;
4. Provides a program of elementary or secondary education, or both;
5. Is nonsectarian in its programs, admissions policies, employment practices, and all other operations, and is not affiliated with a sectarian school or religious institution;
6. Does not charge tuition;
8. Is a school to which parents choose to send their children, and that admits students on the basis of a lottery, if more students apply for admission than can be accommodated;
9. Agrees to comply with the same Federal and State audit requirements as do other elementary schools and secondary schools in the State, unless such requirements are specifically waived for the purpose of this program [the PSCP];
10. Meets all applicable Federal, State, and local health and safety requirements;
11. Operates in accordance with State law; and
12. Has a written performance contract with the authorized public chartering agency in the State that includes a description of how student performance will be measured in charter schools pursuant to State assessments that are required of other schools and pursuant to any other assessments mutually agreeable to the authorized public chartering agency and the charter school” (6-7).

The National Education Association tends to favor the definition that charter schools don’t necessarily have to follow the same rules as public schools. NEA says that, “Charter schools are privately managed, taxpayer-funded schools exempted from some
rules applicable to all other taxpayer-funded schools” (NEA). This definition allows for some interesting ground and a variety of interpretations.

“Charter school is a school that is established by a charter, is run by teachers, parents, etc., and uses tax money but does not have to be run according to the rules of a city or state” (Merriam-Webster).

“Charter School: a tax-supported school established by a charter between a granting body (as a school board) and an outside group (as of teachers and parents) which operates the school without most local and state educational regulations so as to achieve set goals” (Merriam-Webster).

**United States Department of Education**

According to the Department of Education website their mission is to, "foster educational excellence, and to ensure equal access to educational opportunity for all" (Department of Education).

The Department of Education is further defined by Business Dictionary as, “A department within the federal government in charge of the administration of all federal programs, standards, and aid relating to education and the student population in the United States (Business Dictionary).

The Farlex Financial Dictionary defines the Department of Education as, “a cabinet level body of the U.S. federal government responsible for establishing and implementing policies related to federal funding and other assistance for education. It also is charged with enforcing civil rights as they relate to education. The department was established in 1980 (Farlex Financial Dictionary).

**The United States Federal Government**

US Legal claims the United States Federal Government, “is established by the US Constitution. The Federal Government shares sovereignty over the United States with the individual governments of the States of US. The Federal government has three branches: i) the legislature, which is the US Congress, ii) Executive, comprised of the President and Vice president of the US and iii) Judiciary. The US Constitution prescribes a system of separation of powers and ‘checks and balances’ for the smooth functioning of all the three branches of the Federal Government. The US Constitution limits the powers of the Federal Government to the powers assigned to it; all powers not expressly assigned to the Federal Government are reserved to the States or to the people” (US Legal).

Oxford defines the Federal Government as, “(in the US) the system of government as defined in the Constitution which is based on the separation of powers among three branches: the executive, the legislative and the judicial. This
system provides a series of checks and balances because each branch is able to limit the power of the others (Oxford Learner's Dictionary).

**Should**

Oxford Dictionaries defines *should* as, “Used to indicate obligation, duty, or correctness, typically when criticizing someone’s actions...Indicating a desirable or expected state” (Oxford Dictionary).

Merriam-Webster sheds further light by defining *should* as, “—used in auxiliary function to express obligation, propriety, or expediency” (Merriam-Webster).

Education is a key ingredient to the success of our country. Achieving a, “desirable or expected state” makes logical sense. In addition, the definition “... express obligation...or expediency”

**Substantially**

*Substantial* is defined as, “Of real worth and importance; of considerable value; valuable. Belonging to substance; actually existing; real; not seeming or imaginary; not illusive; solid; true; veritable” (West's Encyclopedia of American Law).

*Substantial*, “Of considerable importance, size, or worth” (Oxford University Press).

*Substantial*, “Large in amount, size, or number. Strongly made” (Merriam-Webster).

Substantially determines how much reform is needed. The various definitions will ensure a fun year of topicality arguments that are worth discussing.

**Online or Virtual Schools**

Dr. Sabri Bebawi defines *online schools* as, “a course of study must offer two-way communication between teacher and learner and fall under the oversight of an educational institution” (eHow).

“Online learning is a method of delivering educational information via the internet instead of in a physical classroom. There are many different applications for online learning, ranging in scope from simple downloadable content (like iTunes U) through to structured programmes that include assessment and award (Study2u).

*Virtual school* refers to an institution that is not "brick and mortar" bound. All student services and courses are conducted through Internet technology. The virtual school differs from the traditional school through the physical medium that links administrators, teachers, and students (Technology Source).

**For Profit/Education Management Firms**
Western Michigan University defines education management organization as:

…an organization or firm that manages at least one school that receives public funds and operates the public schools it manages under the same admissions rules as regular public schools. Education management organizations can be for-profit or nonprofit organizations. They can manage traditional public schools or charter schools (Study Group on Education Management Organizations).

For profit schools only make-up 13% of all charter schools, however, as charter schools grow having a managing firm run the business end seems like a viable option and the growing trend.

**Middle College Schools**

Is a collaboration between a high school district and a community college for high school students. Some are only open to juniors and seniors, others are open for any grade for high school students. These programs vary tremendously. Some pay for all of the expenses including books and fees, others give students a set amount. Most programs are similar to Sonora High School in California who works directly with Columbia College. Students take both high school and college classes. They say,

This program is designed for students who wish to pursue a higher education while completing their high school graduation requirements. Juniors and seniors can be admitted into the program through an application process. They are required to take two classes on the Sonora High School campus and then are free to take classes at Columbia College. Students work very closely with the Middle College Coordinator, Columbia College counselor, and Sonora High counselor to make sure that they are taking classes applicable to high school graduation and their post high schools goals (Sonora High School).

**Educational Standards**

Education standards vary by state. The Department of Education has determined that each state has the right to define their own standards but they encourage state to have rigorous standards that challenge students. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) supports State efforts to establish challenging standards, develop aligned assessments, and build accountability systems for districts and schools that are based on educational results. In particular, ESEA includes explicit requirements to ensure that students served by Title I are given the same opportunity to achieve to high standards and are held to the same high expectations as all other students in each State (Department of Education).

While each state has the choice to follow their own standards within the parameters set by the DOE, many state have chosen to follow the Common Core. Nine states have opted out after starting with the Common Core: Alabama (Smarter
Balanced & PARCC), Alaska (Smarter Balanced), Florida (PARCC), Georgia (PARCC), Indiana (PARCC), Kansas (Smarter Balanced), Oklahoma (PARCC), Pennsylvania (Smarter Balanced & PARCC), and Utah (Smarter Balanced), Four more states are debating opting out: Iowa (Smarter Balanced), Kentucky (PARCC), Michigan (Smarter Balanced) and North Carolina (Smarter Balanced). Four states never joined including: Minnesota, Nebraska, Texas and Virginia. This equates to 26% of schools not following the Common Core. 34% if the four other states opt out.

**Proposed Resolutions**

Resolved: The United States federal government should significantly increase educational standards in one or more of the following areas: charter, online, for profit and/or middle college schools.

Resolved: The United States Department of Education should act to, “foster educational excellence, and to ensure equal access to educational opportunity for all.”

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its funding and/or development of charter schools.

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially limit the number of alternative educational choices while strengthening public education.

Resolved: The United States federal government should provide incentives for implementation of choice schools.

Resolved: The United States federal government should significantly increase educational funding in one or more of the following areas: charter schools, for profit schools and/or middle college schools.

Resolved: The United States federal government should establish performance standards for one or more of the following types of schools: charter schools, for profit schools and/or middle college schools.

**Works Cited**


<http://www.novaclassical.org/about/mission>.


"Special Report: Class Struggle - How charter schools get students they want." 


Tran, Annie, and Yillin Liang. "Students Pick Middle College Over Regular High School."


**Additional Bibliography of Education Issues Charter Schools and Schools of Choice, ESSA, State Reports, Testing, and Virtual Schooling provided by Representative Susan McLain of Oregon office.**

**Charter Schools and Schools of Choice:**


Greenblatt, Alan. "Making the Grade: Has School Choice Been All It Set out to Be?" Governing the State and Localities May 2016: 46-50. Print.


"Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools." PDK International. Gallup. Web. 05 May 2016.

Saiger, Aaron J. "What We Disagree About When We Disagree About School Choice." (2014).


**ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act):**


Fine, Susan. "New Law, Old Problem: Why ESSA Leaves Teachers with an Ongoing Testing Dilemma." Chalkbeat:


**Virtual Schools:**

http://library.state.or.us/repository/2011/201112201050412/index.pdf


Testing:


Kane, Michael D. "Ballot Question to End Common Core in Massachusetts Will Move Forward." MASS Live. Advance Digital, 02 Sept. 2015. Web. 03 May 2016.


"Questions to Ask When Designing a Test." Northwest Evaluation Association. 2014


Virtual Schooling:


