



Facts, Research Support Parents Across America's ESEA position

1) Charter schools, vouchers, and other “choice” programs don't provide a better education – *why expand them?*

- **The majority of charter schools do not match their surrounding public schools in quality.** The largest study of charter school quality, conducted at Stanford University in 2009, found that 37 percent of US charter schools have worse student outcomes than traditional public schools, less than 50 percent are on a par with them, and only 17 percent provide a superior education for their students.¹
- **Voucher students did no better** than a matched set of non-voucher public school students in a study² of the longest-running voucher program, in Milwaukee, WI.
- **Online instruction for students in grades K-12 has little or no research backing,** according to a recent study, which stated that policymakers lack scientific evidence of the effectiveness of online classes.³

A recent review of media articles about charter schools in just the past year⁴ found that:

- **Charter schools are increasing segregation and excluding children with the greatest need** (research studies from NYU, Rutgers, Western Michigan University, media reports from Orlando, L.A., New Orleans). Catalyst-Chicago found that “Charter schools (had) a higher rate of expulsion than traditional schools.... In 85% of charter school cases, students were expelled for less serious offenses that are not eligible for expulsion under (district) rules.”
- **Too many charter schools have come under state and federal investigation** (in such places as Texas, Philadelphia, and Dallas).
- **Too many charter schools have the same or worse academic performance;** they are not consistently of “higher quality” (recent findings in Chicago, Pennsylvania, St. Louis, Florida, New Jersey, New York City, and New Mexico).

*

PAA opposes efforts to privatize public education through the expansion of charters, vouchers or other privately-run programs at the expense of regular public schools. These programs are popular with business groups but are generally not as successful as traditional public schools.

2) High-stakes testing doesn't raise academic achievement and harms children and their education – *why increase such testing?*

- **Test-based incentive programs have not raised student achievement in the United States** to the level achieved in the highest-performing countries (and) incentives/sanctions *can give a false view* of exactly how well students are doing. The National Research Council, perhaps the most prestigious, non-partisan source of information in the nation, just released a study about the effects of high-stakes testing.⁵ According to Valerie Strauss, on her Washington Post Answer Sheet blog, the study found that “the report, together with a number of other studies⁶ released in the past year, effectively serve as **a warning to policymakers** in states that are moving to implement laws, with support from the Obama administration, to make teacher and principal evaluation largely dependent on increases in students’ standardized test scores.”⁷ (*emphasis added*)
- **Using test scores to evaluate teachers is also not a valid use of standardized tests**, according to a June, 2011, the National Academies of Science synthesis of 10 years of research on 15 American test-based incentive programs,⁸ finding they demonstrated few good results and a lot of negative unintended consequences.
- **Value-added results**, which have recently been touted as a better way to use standardized test scores, are actually no more accurate than year-to-year comparisons of different groups of students. A 2010 study⁹ by New York University economist Sean Corcoran concluded that
the promise that value-added systems can provide such a precise, meaningful, and comprehensive picture is not supported by the data.... Annual value-added estimates are highly variable from year to year, and, in practice, many teachers cannot be statistically distinguished from the majority of their peers.
- **The President and Arne Duncan are promising “better tests,”** but even experts involved in creating the new assessments for the common core curriculum are concerned that the new tests will not be able to do everything they are being set up to do.¹⁰

*

PAA opposes excessive reliance on standardized exams which narrows the curriculum, promotes teaching to the test and leads to unfair and unreliable evaluations of students, teachers and schools.

3) Closing schools and/or turning them around doesn't work and can harm children. *Why continue this disruptive practice?*

- The National Education Policy Center released a review¹¹ of the four strategies mandated under NCLB for schools that have failed to make adequate yearly progress for a number of years. NCEP found that “there is little or no evidence to suggest that any of these options delivers the promised improvements in academic achievement” and recommended that policymakers:

- Refrain from relying on restructuring sanctions (takeovers, private management, charters, and reconstitutions) to effect school improvement. They have produced negative by-products without yielding systemic positive effects.
- Refrain from supporting the expansion of charter schools. Evidence indicates that, on average, they do not improve test scores or spawn the promised innovative practices. Furthermore, they may increase socioeconomic or ethnic segregation.
- Eight in ten Chicago Public Schools students displaced by school closings were transferred to schools ranking in the bottom half of system schools on standardized tests. Because most displaced students transferred from one low-performing school to another, the move did not, on average, significantly affect student achievement.¹² As a result of school closings and student transfers, teachers, administrators, and parents in a set of receiving schools reported: a) lack of necessary resources, staff, and professional support; b) disruptive and demoralizing climate; c) negative effects on teaching and learning; d) problems with safety and discipline; e) schools were “set up for failure” due to a history of declining resources and lack of district support.¹³

*

PAA opposes school closings and turnarounds that involve firing most of a school's staff. This strategy wreaks havoc on families and communities, unfairly costs dedicated, usually experienced staff and teachers their livelihood, and too often fails to deliver on promises to create better opportunities for children. We believe in improving the schools we have, rather than shutting them down.

4) Ignoring poverty and promoting the "No Excuses" myth doesn't work: Why are our elected officials so determined to pretend that resources don't matter?

The 2004, Economic Policy Institute and Teachers College Press published “**Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic, and Educational Reform to Close the Black-White Achievement Gap.**”¹⁴ The book presented the following information:

- A summary of numerous studies linking school achievement to health care quality, nutrition, childrearing styles, housing stability, parental economic security, and more.
- A look at erroneous and misleading data that underlie commonplace claims that some schools "beat the demographic odds and therefore any school can close the achievement gap if only it adopted proper practices."
- An analysis of how the over-emphasis of standardized tests in federal law obscures the true achievement gap and makes narrowing it more difficult.
- Estimates of the cost of reforms that could help narrow the achievement gap, such as including early childhood, after-school, and summer programs into a broader definition of schooling.

*

PAA believes that the nation's educational "crisis" is made worse by the widening gap between rich and poor. Along with investing in our schools, we should also be investing in families.

PAA supports:

Proven Reforms: We support the expansion of sensible, research-based reforms such as pre-K programs,¹⁵ full-day Kindergarten, small classes,¹⁶ parent involvement,¹⁷ strong, experienced teachers,¹⁸ a well-rounded curriculum and evaluation systems that go beyond test scores.¹⁹

Sufficient and Equitable Funding: Resources do matter, especially when invested in programs that have been proven to work.

Diversity: We support creating diverse, inclusive schools and classrooms whenever possible.

Meaningful Parent Involvement: Parents must have a significant voice in policies at the school, district, state and national levels. We are not just “consumers” or “customers” but knowledgeable, necessary partners in any effective reform effort.

*

*Unlike the strategies in the Obama administration's Blueprint for Education Reform, **Parents Across America's ESEA position paper promotes programs that are supported by facts and research.***

We don't want our children to be experimented on, and we don't want their schools or school districts to be forced into strategies that don't work and that may even harm children.

Parents Across America (PAA) is a grassroots organization that connects parents and activists from across the U.S. to share ideas and work together on improving our nation's public schools. We advocate for proven, progressive measures such as reducing class size and increasing parent involvement, and oppose high-stakes testing and corporate-style efforts to privatize our schools.

PAA is committed to bringing the voice of public school parents – and common sense – to local, state, and national education debates.

Visit our web site, www.parentsacrossamerica.org.

- 1 http://credo.stanford.edu/reports/MULTIPLE_CHOICE_CREDO.pdf
- 2 than a matched set of non-voucher public school students.
- 3 Barbara Means, Sept. 2010
- 4 <http://parentsacrossamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/CharterSchoolFacts2010-11.pdf>
- 5 http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=12521
- 6 <http://voices.washingtonpost.com/answer-sheet/diane-ravitch/ravitch-why-teachers-should-ne.html>
- 7 http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/report-test-based-incentives-dont-produce-real-student-achievement/2011/05/28/AG39wXDH_blog.html
- 8 <http://www8.nationalacademies.org/onpinews/newsitem.aspx?RecordID=12521>
- 9 <http://www.annenberginstitute.org/products/Corcoran.php>
- 10 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/julie-woestehoff/obama-duncan-standardized-tests_b_848263.html
- 11 Mathis, W. (2009). NCLB's Ultimate Restructuring Alternatives: Do they Improve the Quality of Education? Boulder and Tempe: Education and the Pu
- 12 When Schools Close. Consortium on Chicago School Research, Oct. 2009
- 13 <http://www.uic.edu/educ/ceje/papers.html>
- 14 http://www.epi.org/publications/entry/books_class_and_schools/
- 15 <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/icd/CLS>
- 16 <http://parentsacrossamerica.org/what-we-believe/why-class-size-matters>
- 17 <http://parentsacrossamerica.org/parents-rights/>
- 18 http://parentsacrossamerica.org/?page_id=557&preview=true
- 19 <http://fairtest.org/fact-sheet-better-way-evaluate-schools-pdf>