



Real Parent Choice: a “Choice Week” position paper

January 27, 2015

Polls and surveys show that the **first choice of most parents is to send their child to a high-quality neighborhood school** with adequate resources. Parents know by now that students in charter schools and voucher programs have not shown better academic progress than students in traditional schools. Parents do not want to have to shop around for a good school; consumerism is not the kind of “empowerment” that parents want.

PAA does support the kind of empowerment which involves parents authentically at the ground level and in district-, state-, and nationwide policy discussions about the best strategies for strengthening and supporting schools. These strategies might include smaller classes, more parent involvement, community schools, or other reforms that have been proven to work and are aligned with the individual needs of the school and its students.

The best model for the kind of meaningful, effective parent empowerment that parents actually want is the Chicago **local school council (LSC)**. You can read more about LSCs and PAA's endorsement of this system at <http://tinyurl.com/nyvvydx>. We also invite you to join a Feb. 9 webinar on LSCs sponsored by Education Week and featuring PAA's executive director: <http://tinyurl.com/kg6q2am>

PAA's position on charter schools and voucher programs: 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. Over the years, PAA has shared our concerns that:

- Overall, students in charter schools and voucher programs have not shown better academic progress than students in traditional schools.
- Charter school and voucher “choice” too often lies with the charter or private school and not the families, according to growing reports of their selective enrollment, skimming and push-out practices.
- Some franchises like Kipp and Chicago's Noble Network use degrading discipline measures and expel students at many times the district rate.
- Charter schools historically enroll fewer students with disabilities or English language learners.

PAA's recommendations:

- We believe in improving the schools we have, rather than shutting schools down in order to expand charter schools.
- All charter schools should have neighborhood boundaries and accept all children from within those boundaries whose parents choose to enroll their child at the charter school. Charter school enrollment processes should be consistent with and as simple as those of neighborhood public schools.
- Charter schools should not require fees, charge financial penalties, or otherwise create a financial barrier for students to be in school.
- Charter schools and all other schools receiving public funds must be equally transparent and accountable to the public.

PAA is a national network of parent activists working together to improve public schools.

For more about PAA and our position on ESEA reauthorization please see

<http://parentsacrossamerica.org/paa-reforming-esea/>