

Shelley Potter

Testimony on Charter Schools - SB 127

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Good day. My name is Shelley Potter. I am president of the San Antonio Alliance of Teachers and Support Personnel. We represent employees in the San Antonio Independent School District. Our school district has taken advantage of the state law that allows local districts to create in-district charter schools. Our district currently has thirteen in-district charter schools with three more coming online next school year. Our union has worked with the district to promote in-district charters as an avenue for unleashing educators' creativity.

An in-district charter school is a district school that has a charter, that is, a written contract between the school and the school board. The approach affords the schools the opportunity for innovative instructional programs and school restructuring as spelled out in the charter and also provides for local autonomy and decision making and exemption from instructional and academic rules and policies as spelled out in the charter.

Last school year, in collaboration with our district, we sponsored a two-day in-district charter schools conference for teams from schools interested in exploring the possibility of becoming an in-district charter and the potential positive outcomes. The response from schools was excellent with fifteen schools sending teams to the conference. The teams examined proven programs, practices, and strategies to stimulate their thinking about a focus for an internal charter school, and learned about the process for becoming an internal charter.

Our in-district charter schools provide a wide variety of areas of focus and methods of instruction, including Core Knowledge, dual language, environmental studies, performing and visual arts, science and health, learning styles, scientific inquiry, and public service and leadership. Three of the schools are exemplary and six are recognized, and the trend in all of the schools' ratings is upward.

Additionally, twelve of the thirteen schools are, first and foremost, neighborhood schools. As an urban, central city school district, it is very important to us to strengthen our neighborhoods by preserving and strengthening the neighborhood schools that are so vital to the fabric of our community. Our in-district charter schools that are neighborhood schools not only provide top-notch educational programs but also foster the sense of community and neighborhood pride. In addition to serving the neighborhood, they also attract students from other parts of the city.

If you are interested in adding more quality charter schools, I encourage you to do that through the creation of more in-district charter schools that specifically address the needs of the community rather than by removing the cap on charter schools.