

# Let's think about our charter schools (1)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Charter Schools, Education, Gadfly's posts, Serious Issues January 13, 2019

*(1st in a series on Education)*

Jacqueline Palochko, "WATCHDOG: Lehigh Valley arts charter high school looking to receive state money for lease." *Morning Call*, December 22, 2018.

The Lehigh Valley Charter High School for the Arts will take advantage of a loophole that allows charter schools to collect lease reimbursements from the state while paying rent to foundations that support them. Under state law, charter schools can apply for partial reimbursement of leasing costs as long as the school does not own the building it's in.

Carol Burris, "Can charter schools be reformed? Should they be?" *Washington Post*, December 16, 2018.

The bottom line is this. It is foolish to fund a parallel system of privately managed schools at the expense of the nation's public schools.

These two recent articles reminded Gadfly that he's wanted to think more about the fiscal AND educational impact of charter schools in Bethlehem.

On this subject, one rarely sees the name of our superintendent Joseph Roy's name without "a vocal critic of charter schools" pinned to it. *(I've invited Dr. Roy to follow Gadfly, but as far as I can tell, he hasn't taken me up on that. But school board president Michael Faccinnetto has published on the subject of charter schools and does follow. Can somebody nudge Dr. Roy? Tell him this is where the elite meet!)*

The fiscal impact seems to dominate the news. Last year Dr. Roy pointed to charter schools as the reason for our 2.5% tax increase.

In the above “Watchdog” article, Dr. Roy says, “As the auditor general found, this [Lehigh Valley Arts] charter worked around existing laws to avoid the public bidding rules public schools must follow. Now, this taxpayer-funded, privately run school is using another loophole to get their hands on more tax dollars for paying themselves rent.”

Gadfly – whose own memories are stirred when CM Reynolds talks of his “beloved Thomas Jefferson” – would like to know more about charter schools and proposes to explore the subject over the course of several posts.

The local coverage of the above WAPO article referenced an earlier 2017 WAPO article based directly on Bethlehem. Wow! What did WAPO have to say about us? Let’s start our exploration right there.

Carol Burris, “A disturbing look at how charter schools are hurting a traditional school district.” *Washington Post*, January 9, 2017.

It has not been easy supporting the [Bethlehem] public schools, however, given the financial challenges of the city. In addition, the district suffered a financial crisis in 2008 and then reeled under massive cuts in state aid in the 2011-12 school year. But the worst hit of all has come from the continuing and increasing siphoning of district dollars to charter schools – a whopping \$25 million this year alone.

The news always seems bad. Say it isn’t so.

Since you may need a subscription to access this article, Gadfly has copied it here: [charter 3](#).

Read, and we’ll come back in a day or two to begin our conversation.