

Charter Schools: Accentuating the positive (3)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Charter Schools, Education, Gadfly's posts, Serious Issues January 23, 2019
(3rd in a series on Education)

Yesterday Gadfly posted a notice about the Education Summit tonight. Charter schools are among the topics for discussion. But I see there are about a dozen people on the panel, and no one identified seems to be from a charter school. Therefore I'm neither sure how much time can be given to charter schools nor what balance there will be.

Gadfly likes balance in the discovery stage.

So let's accentuate the positive.

Some charter schools are or have been a complete mess, right? Out of the corner of my mind, I have been following the saga in Catasauqua, and, in fact, there is an article on the front page of this morning's print edition of the *Call* about it:

Steve Esack, "Catasauqua schools must be reimbursed for defunct charter school's pension obligations, court rules." Morning Call, January 22, 2019.

But the only charter school in Bethlehem that I, frankly, can place is Lehigh Valley Charter High School for the Arts, 321 E. 3rd St. (I have a hard time thinking of schools without playgrounds!) What and where are the others? But I guess it doesn't matter, for, as I understand it, charter schools are not bound by the kinds of boundaries public schools are.

Lehigh Valley Charter High School for the Arts

In 2018 Charter Arts ranked 46th in Pennsylvania and was the highest-ranking school in the Lehigh Valley in the [U.S. News & World Report](#) ranking.

In 2018 the ["U.S. Department of Education awarded the \[Charter Arts\] as a Blue Ribbon School, which recognizes the state's highest performing schools"](#) – one of only 20 charter schools nationally so recognized.

[National Blue Ribbon Schools Program](#)

[2018 National Blue Ribbon Schools: Charter Schools](#)

That's pretty hot stuff.

From the Charter Arts web site:

“The Lehigh Valley Charter High School for the Arts provides a unique environment that fosters a creative academic approach to learning and a development of talent in the arts. Built upon passion, discipline and a commitment to excellence, this integrative educational experience inspires all students to believe in themselves and what they can accomplish.”

Mario Acerra is President of the Board of Directors, Dianne LaBelle is executive director and CEO, and Carise Comstock is the Principal.

“The sponsoring districts for Charter Arts are the Bethlehem Area School District and the Northampton Area School District. These two districts renew the *charter* every five years. Northampton Area School District renewed the Charter Arts *charter* in June 2012, and the Bethlehem Area School District renewed the Charter Arts *charter* in June 2013.”

“Charter schools receive public funds from the sending school district of a child who chooses to attend. A charter school receives 75% of the funding for that student. The student's sending/home school district utilizes a funding formula developed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (form 363) and can deduct more than 20 categories of expenditures from their budget that are not passed on to charter schools.”

[The Performer](#) (in effect, the school newspaper)

According to the *Morning Call*: Begun in 2003, “The Lehigh Valley Charter High School for the Arts enrolls more than 600 students. Academically, it's one of the best in the area: 94 percent of students passed the English Keystone exam last year, while 73 percent passed algebra and 85 percent passed biology. The school has a 99 percent graduation rate.”

Ok, I'll report on anything pertinent tonight, and we'll continue to go deeper into the controversy.