

# **“BASD Proud Parents” touts programs and provides resources on the charter school issue**

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*(27th in a series on Education and Charter Schools)*

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Gadfly thought the chatter on charter schools was dying down. But his clipping file seems always full. Remember that for us in Bethlehem, the charter school concern is budgetary. There seem to be no academic or administrative problems such as plague many districts. In fact, Gadfly — grandfather of dancers and actors — hopes to have a pleasant visit at our Charter Arts school in the near future.

*Jacqueline Palochko, “Lehigh Valley charter schools tell Allentown School District to ‘live within its means’; reject tuition pay cut.” Morning Call, August 21, 2019.*

*“Sounding Board: Should state reform charter school law?” Morning Call, August 21, 2019.*

*Your View by state senator: Charter school costs have created a ‘crisis in education’.*

Gadfly:

Hard to believe that another school year is nearly underway! There's a lot to look forward to in Bethlehem Area School District (BASD) schools this year: the ongoing implementation of the district's nationally recognized literacy program, Reading by Grade 3 (RBG3); the start of BASD Empower, which will provide all 8<sup>th</sup> through 10<sup>th</sup> graders with a Chrome Book for use at school and at home this year (and which will extend to all middle and high school students next year); and expanded access to the arts for all elementary and middle school students thanks to support from the Kennedy Center's Any Given Child program.

These exemplary programs are just some of the many things our group, BASD Proud Parents, loves to tout. Not only do we aim to "shine a light on the innumerable ways our schools are working for our children and our communities," though. Our mission is also "to educate parents and our community about issues that impact our public schools and to empower parents, students and neighbors to make our voices heard."

Along these lines, we've spent a lot of time on charter schools. We hosted a screening of *Backpack Full of Cash* and public discussion about the film last spring, and we've met with state legislators about how the current methods for funding charters short-change public school students and over-burden taxpayers, how the current system for monitoring charter schools (particularly cyber charters) is woefully inadequate, and how little say the public has in charters' budgetary and programmatic decisions. We were thrilled to hear that Governor Wolf is committed to tackling these issues, and that local legislators, including Senator Pat Browne, agree that we are at a "crisis point," with the Commonwealth's 22-year-old charter law threatening "significant detrimental effects on all of our students' progress in school."

If you would like to learn more about charter schools – what they are, how they are funded, what their funding means for local school districts and local taxpayers (given that Lehigh Valley taxpayers now spend more

than \$100 million on charter schools annually) – please take advantage of the resources BASD Proud Parents has compiled. (They're available on our website: <https://basdproudparents.org/>.) Please reach out with comments or questions. Please help us plan more community events to keep this conversation going. And please help us support our elected officials as they grapple with drafting the reforms designed to most benefit students and community members.

Karen

*The link to BASD Proud Parents — Gadfly loves such community organizations — can always be found on the Gadfly sidebar if you ever need it.*