

Catching up on the Charter School issue (20)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Charter Schools, Education, Serious Issues May 31, 2019

(20th in a series on Education and Charter Schools)

Last time Gadfly weighed in on charter schools was two months ago, reporting on a great meeting with Dr. Roy.

Where o' where did those last two months go? Let him try to catch up a bit here.

First, let's remember what triggered this information gathering: concern about the size of the charter school line in the BASD budget and thus the impact on our taxes. As reported several posts back in this thread: "Approximately 2100 BASD students attend charter schools (12 different ones but 50% at one particular charter school), about 13% of the total student population, at a cost of 29 million in charter tuition this year, which is roughly 10% of the budget."

The BASD budget

Theresa O'Brien, "District in the black; no tax hike likely." Bethlehem Press, May 21, 2019.

The good news. The tentative 2019-20 BASD budget "includes no increase in the tax millage for the first time in several years, and uses only \$1.6 million from the general fund balance to make up a shortfall."

Board member Dean Donaher commended those involved in the process for bringing in a zero-tax-increase budget without losing any programs and while "maintaining momentum" on strategic initiatives of achieving

grade-level reading proficiency, delivering personalized learning and growth, and meeting students' social and emotional needs.

Well, relative good news. If the charter school chunk were less, then there would be more money in the system for education needs and maybe no need to draw from the general fund balance. But at least looks like no tax increase. And, if I remember correctly, Dr. Roy said charter school attendance was leveling off.

Lehigh Valley Academy

Lehigh Valley Academy is the charter school to keep an eye on. 50% of the BASD students going to charter schools go to LVA. Several posts back in this series, Gadfly profiled LVA.

Jacqueline Palochko, "Lehigh Valley Academy now looking in Bethlehem Township to put its \$50 million school." Morning Call, May 30, 2019.

Also as reported earlier, LVA is planning on a new building at substantial cost. This morning's paper indicates that the proposed site of that building has now changed from what Gadfly reported earlier. LVA rents now, and owning its own building would be more economical. LVA will have to seek permission from both the Bethlehem Area and Saucon Valley school boards to change locations because it is a regional charter school.

Other charter schools

There seem to be no especial administrative or educational quality issues with the three Bethlehem charter schools — the kind that characterize many school districts and charter schools. But there are enough such issues in the Lehigh Valley to keep us continually conscious of a nagging

bad side to charter schools. These are the kinds of things we don't want happening here.

Innovative Arts, Catasauqua:

Sarah Wojcik, "Innovative Arts Academy Charter School makes argument to stay open while Catasauqua blasts school's poor academic scores." Morning Call, May 22, 2019.

Catasauqua administrators painted the Innovative Arts Academy Charter School as a school that's habitually failing students academically. Charter school administrators sought to portray the school as one where students in need of extra attention found solace and purpose while staff contended with a demographic of economically disadvantaged students with unexpected challenges.

Allentown School District:

Jacqueline Palochko, "Allentown school board to try again to borrow \$10 million to avert financial crisis." Morning Call, May 1, 2019.

A week after a deadlocked school board left the Allentown School District in budgetary limbo, a new attempt will be made Tuesday to borrow \$10 million to avert a financial mess. . . . costs weighing on the district are charter school tuition."

Ok, there's a catch-up on some of the factual context. Gadfly will return shortly to catch up on some more substantive issues suggested by followers Dr. Roy, Karen Beck Pooley, and BASD Proud Parents.

High-five to all concerned for tending the budget nicely!