

# Charter schools: “The system must be changed”

The Bethlehem Gadfly Charter Schools, Education, Serious Issues, Uncategorized August 20, 2019

*(26th in a series on Education and Charter Schools)*

Another good article in the string of thought-provoking pieces on charter schools, which we have been following because of their impact not only on the quality of education for our kids but also the budget strain from what seems to be an unfair system.

Pressure on legislators is needed.

See that great community organization [BASD Proud Parents](#) on this issue too.

*Paul Muschick, “Why we should blow up Pennsylvania charter school system and start over.” Morning Call, August 18, 2019.*

The proposal from Gov. Tom Wolf on Tuesday to overhaul the state’s charter school system is aggressive, welcome and long overdue.

The current system is unsustainable. School districts are paying too much money — \$1.8 billion statewide last year — and those figures are only going to increase. Allentown’s costs have doubled to \$60 million, 20% of its budget, in just five years.

And that money is going to charter schools that are public schools in name only, in many ways.

They don’t have the same level of accountability and transparency as school districts. It’s hard to consider them truly public if they aren’t held

to the same standards, such as publicly bidding major expenses, releasing details of every dollar spent and answering to a local, publicly elected school board.

Wolf's heart is in the right place. But I fear this may be just another example of him banging his head against the Republican wall in the Legislature, similar to his attempts to levy a severance tax on natural gas mining.

His administration can impose some changes on charter schools. But the biggest need — changing funding formulas — requires legislative action. And Republicans are the party of school choice.

Democratic Auditor General Eugene DePasquale has been calling for changes to the charter school law for years and the Legislature hasn't listened. Let's see if the governor has any more pull.

Those discussions should start with revising the faulty thinking of a student's per capita funding "following them" from their school district to a charter school.

It doesn't always cost charter schools, especially cyber charters, that much to educate the same student. And districts don't see an accompanying dollar-for-dollar reduction in their costs.

Unless an entire classroom of students at the same grade level moves to a charter, a district can't cut the expenses, including the teacher's salary, that go with that classroom. State officials need to come up with a better formula.

Cyber charters especially make out under that formula now. They collect the same tuition rate as traditional charter schools but have substantially lower costs. Taxpayers are overpaying more than \$250 million annually,

according to a February study by Education Voters of Pennsylvania, a project of the left-leaning Keystone Research Center.

I have a few suggestions in addition to Wolf's recommendations:

- \* Reimburse districts for some charter tuition costs.
- \* Don't require school districts to pay tuition for private school students or home-schooled students who move to charter schools.

There is a place for charter schools. But if they are going to be publicly funded, they must operate under the same rules as traditional public schools, and be funded realistically.

The system must be changed to make that happen.