

Dr. Roy responds on charter schools (7)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Charter Schools, Education, Gadfly's posts, Serious Issues January 29, 2019

(7th in a series on Education)

High-five to Dr. Roy for immediately responding to Gadfly's charter school questions with this mini-tutorial. Let's take some time to absorb and then discuss.

1) What is the cost per student – regular and special education – you used for charter school payments this year? (here and below, or for the last year you have figures)

Regular Ed per student = \$12,099.34 — Special Education per student = \$25,760.00. Please note that the issue here is that the special education charter tuition is calculated on an AVERAGE of BASD's special education costs — which include very involved, high-need students. Charter schools do not accept students with multiple physical handicaps or significant disabilities. Special Education students at charters tend to need limited supports for learning or speech therapy, for example. As a result, charter reap a windfall because the tuition they receive from BASD far exceeds their actual cost of educating the special education student. Note that on one of the slides attached titled Charter School Subsidy [see link below] we make the point that when the charter law was originally passed in 1997, it included a reimbursement from the state to district recognizing that district overhead costs remain when a student goes to a charter. In 2011, Gov. Corbett cut that subsidy, and it has never been reinstated. If the reimbursement were in place at the old rate of 25%-30%, BASD would receive \$7 million per year in reimbursement. It is not an exaggeration to say that without charter, BASD would have had no reason to raise property taxes over the past number of years.

[charter slides 19-20 for budget](#)

2) How many students from BASD are attending charter schools this year?

2099, although this number fluctuates weekly by a few.

3) What percentage of BASD students are attending charter schools?

13%. Important to note that as one of the largest districts with a concentrated population, we have one of the largest charter populations in the state. In fact, roughly 75% of all charter students statewide come from only 20 school districts (out of 500). So the cost of charters is borne disproportionately by a handful of mostly urban districts.

4) How much of the BASD budget – dollar amount and percentage – is going to charter schools this year?

We expect to spend \$29 million in charter tuition this year, which is roughly 10% of our budget. Please note that 14% – 15% of each homeowner's property tax bill goes solely to paying for charter schools!!

5) What charter schools are BASD students attending this year? Both name and number.

[headcount on oct 1 2018 – charter by grade](#)

6) Is there a limit to the number of students that can attend charter schools? For instance, is the only limit the number of charter schools and their capacity? Theoretically, could charter schools drain the district of students?

Interesting question. If a charter school and the district agree to a limit on students, then, yes, there can be a limit. Unfortunately, a charter can reject a limit and go to the state's charter appeals board and receive a generic charter to continue to operate. This happened recently with the LV Regional Academy Charter School refused to agree to a generous cap on students and appealed to the state board. Conversely, the LV Dual Language Charter agreed to a limit. Another angle on this is when Allentown approves a charter and puts limits on only the number of Allentown students. The charter school then recruits heavily in Bethlehem. So we pay the price and have absolutely no oversight authority for a school approved by Allentown. Could charters drain the district? It won't happen here. But in places like York and Chester Upland School District and to a degree Philadelphia that is what has happened — putting the district into a death spiral financially.

7) Is there anything else about this issue that you think we should know?

Interestingly, the vast majority of elementary school charter students return to the district for middle school and high school because charters cannot compete with us for the range of courses, music, arts and athletic programs we offer. Also interesting to note that the vast majority of students in charters started in charters in kindergarten. Most kids who start with us, stay with us — with very satisfied parents. PA has enabled two publicly funded education systems at great additional cost — our traditional public schools and the privately run but publicly financed charter schools. It's an enormous waste of money. BASD estimates that if all 2,000 charter students returned to us, we would spend about \$6 million in additional teacher salaries but SAVE \$24 million per YEAR overall. We can easily absorb those students into our existing 22 schools.

This is the cost of school choice the proponents of choice simply deny.