

HCS HB 634 -- CHARTER SCHOOLS

SPONSOR: Roeber

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Elementary and Secondary Education by a vote of 9 to 4. Voted "Do Pass" by the Committee on Rules - Administrative Oversight by a vote of 8 to 4.

This bill allows charter schools to be operated by any charter county or county of the first classification in the state. When a charter school is allowed to operate under this provision and the local school district is accredited, the person, group, or organization seeking to establish the charter school shall submit the proposed charter to the local school board before or at the same time that the charter school submits its proposed charter to any other sponsor. This bill allows the local school board 45 days to consider the proposed charter and accept or decline the sponsorship. If the local school board declines to sponsor the charter school or does not respond within the specified time, any other authorized sponsor may enter into a sponsorship agreement. This bill allows the establishment of a charter school without submitting a proposed charter when it is located in a school district that is provisionally accredited or unaccredited by the State Board of Education.

The bill requires charter schools to enroll resident pupils, nonresident pupils who are residents of a provisionally accredited or unaccredited district when such district is located in a charter county or first class county or a county adjacent to such counties, and nonresident pupils who are residents of Missouri and have at least one parent employed by the charter school.

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that charter school expansion will provide additional opportunities for charter schools to meet their students' needs. Charter schools are independent, tuition free, public schools. A lot of other states don't place caps on the locations in which charter schools can operate. Charter schools can help underserved populations. This will give all Missouri parents a choice to do what is best for their kids. Charter schools compete with public schools and as such make each other better. If schools aren't providing a good service to their patrons why should they be allowed to stay open? Less than 3% of students in our state attend charter schools. We must ask ourselves why parents in St. Louis and Kansas City are entitled to school choice but the rest are not. This bill removes this inequity and builds a level playing field for all players.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Roeber; Missouri

Century Foundation; Missouri Education Reform Council; Missouri Chamber of Commerce; Foundation For Excellence In Education; Douglas Thaman, Missouri Charter Public School Association; Amy Trapp; Tony Kline, University Academy; Ghadeer M Garcia; Alicia Herald; and Robbyn Wahby, Missouri Charter Public School Commission.

OPPONENTS: Those who oppose the bill say that it is not fair to compare charter schools to public schools. Charter schools don't take the same kids that public schools take. If someone drops out of a charter school they aren't replaced. Thus, the charter school ends up with the cream of the crop. What is it that these charter schools have that public schools don't? If your child has severe handicaps they aren't going to a charter school, homeless children aren't going, and children getting out of juvenile detention aren't going to charter schools. The only kids left in public school are the kids that get culled out of the charter schools. Charter schools also only require 80% certified teachers while public schools are required to have 100%.

We have a system for charter schools in Missouri that has some significant problems. We need to fix those problems before expanding. There would be some charter schools listed as provisionally accredited or unaccredited if the state gave charter schools APR scores like they do for traditional public schools, which doesn't occur. A lot have closed their doors due to performance issues. Some say this is a positive thing but it is really evidence of a broken system. Do we want to expand a system with such a high failure rate? The charter school boards are run by people that are not elected and not required to live within the boundaries of the area.

Accountability is a big issue with charter schools. There are some that do very well. It's just that there are a high percentage that do not do well. There have been cases of fraud and mismanagement. A lot of charter schools would be rated unaccredited or provisionally accredited if DESE rated them as such.

Left in isolation, charter schools can fracture the public school district and the community. The best way to meet the needs of the students is through those locally elected school boards.

If you are going to expand charters across the state it should be done in a manner that does something for school districts and their children. DESE supervises the sponsors of charter schools but not the actual schools. DESE is limited in their supervision of the school and cannot direct the schools to do anything. One of the big differences between the two school types is accountability.

Testifying against the bill were School Administrators Coalition; Missouri State Teachers Association; Missouri National Education Association; Gerald R. Lee; Carl Peterson; Sharon Nibbelink, #58 Center School District; Dr. Davis Benson, Lee's Summit R7; and Jim Kreider, Missouri Retired Teachers Assoc.

OTHERS: Others testifying on the bill say there are some high performing charter schools, some are middle of the road, and some much worse in Kansas City. More a concern with the expansion of charter schools than their existence. High performing charter schools have open seats and don't fill them. Public schools don't have that choice. Some of the charter schools coach kids out of the public school system. Sometimes the charter schools are just like traditional public schools which creates an over saturation of the market. The number of kids in the Kansas City public school system has remained about the same since 2010. Charter schools, in Kansas City, have a lower percentage of students with an I.E.P. (individualized education program). Let us play by the same rules as charter schools for the bottom third. That should level the playing field. Kansas City public schools have a 41% mobility rate and are 97% free and reduced. KC charter schools are around 19% free and reduced.

Testifying on the bill were Kansas City Public Schools Administration and Michael McShane.