



Are charter schools good for Canton?

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COLUMBUS Charter schools aren't draining public education resources, according to a recent report about Ohio's urban districts released by a charter schools group.

"School districts in Ohio's eight major metropolitan areas have far more resources to educate students today than they did 12 years ago," said a report released by the Ohio Alliance For Public Charter Schools.

Canton City Schools is one of those eight districts. The report also looked at schools in Akron, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo and Youngstown.

The report was panned as "a group of numbers strung together" by Bill Wendling, executive director of the Ohio 8, an alliance of superintendents and teachers' union presidents from the state's eight urban districts.

"I'm not sure what they're trying to prove," he said.

Canton Superintendent Michele Evans-Gardell also criticized the report, calling the data it uses suspect.

She said the state's system of accountability of charter students was "tremendously flawed" as recently as 2005.

"This study clearly discredits complaints from traditional education bureaucracy and their supporters that vital revenues are being funneled from struggling traditional schools into choice schools," said Bill Sims, president and chief executive officer of the charter alliance.

"In fact the opposite is true — school districts have fatter budgets today than ever before, even when adjusted for inflation."

Using data from the Ohio Department of Education, the report said enrollment for Canton schools declined from 12,518 in the 1994-95 school year to 10,473 last year (16.3 percent), but total district spending over that span increased 48.1 percent. Per pupil spending, adjusted for inflation, rose from \$5,900 to \$8,517 or 44.4 percent, according to the report.

The report — "Shattering the Myth" — said if charters closed and students returned to their original public schools, the annual cost to the state would be \$300 million for the eight urban districts alone.



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Wendling said that argument "wouldn't stand up to a thorough examination. They are trying to draw a conclusion from financial turmoil that doesn't seem to recognize how students move in and out of districts."

Wendling said the report "does not recognize how much more of an investment we have made in the (urban) districts, for example in all-day kindergarten and class-size reduction. It fails to report the context for the numbers."

Wendling pointed to the coalition's own report late last year that showed urban districts making "dramatic improvements in investment strategies. We see students doing dramatically better on achievement and graduation tests. There's a narrowing between urban and state results. We don't see a comparable report coming out of charters."

Sims said the alliance, which formed in February 2007, commissioned the report because "we feel obliged to respond to misinformation." He said that with the tightening of the state budget "the decisions that are going to be made about funding public community and traditional schools is at a critical moment. We wanted to make very clear what the real impact of community schools has been."

He said the report counteracts "the notion that charter schools drain money from traditional public schools."

Wendling questioned the study's time frame, saying it affects the data's reliability.

The report covers 13 years, from 1994 through 2007, but charter schools didn't open in Ohio until 2000.

Sims said the report uses the earlier years to track enrollment and per pupil spending before charter schools opened.

"That sort of clarifies and verifies what the impact has been," Sims said.

The alliance released an earlier report that said Ohio's charter schools outperform traditional schools in "yearly student academic growth."

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READ THE REPORT

To download a PDF of the Ohio Alliance For Public Charter Schools' report, visit www.oapcs.org/ and click on the picture below the title, "Shattering the Myth..."



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