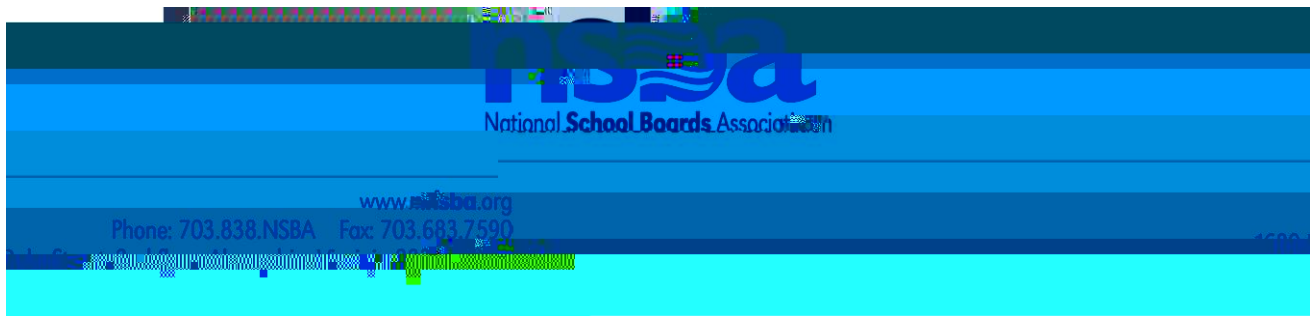




NSBA Comments on Proposed Quality Charter Program Provisions

Via Online Submission August 27, 2018:

www.regulations.gov

Re: Proposed Priorities, Requirements, Definitions, and Selection Criteria –

choice in itself will produce better outcomes. While many schools of choice do an exemplary job, the results aren't universally better than those produced by traditional public schools."²

Second, federal assistance should support local programs that promote improved student achievement, especially where there are achievement gaps. NSBA members report, and national studies enforce, that with some notably high-performing exceptions, charter school scores in math and reading tend to be about the same or lower than that of the traditional public school their students would have otherwise attended. While urban charter schools appear to be the exception (see chart attached as Appendix A), the Department's priorities expressed here include significant focus on rural communities, where the charter model faces significant challenges.

Third, when a significant number of charter schools are added in a state or community, students are drawn out of neighboring traditional public schools, which, in some cases, are already seeing declining enrollment and are receiving less funding from the state. Students siphoned off from these schools often take their state funding along. (One exception is Georgia, where the state funding scheme is designed to hold public schools harmless if enrollment drops during a school year.) By taking staff and expertise, these schools also create a gap in knowledge of, and capacity for, supporting effective innovation in the futureId public schools harmless /F3 12C31c5.08 4 478.03 TmQ EMC /P 4MCID 4BDC q05ng

located in city districts (McFarland et al., 2017).¹³ CREDO researchers show that charter schools work well in urban areas, but overall produce mixed results.¹⁴

As indicated above, NSBA strongly urges the Department to refrain from awarding grants to organizations providing full-time online schools, even in rural areas, until schools can put a sufficient infrastructure in place to monitor and teach students effectively online. Full-time online schools – whether part of a network or independent – showed what CREDO researchers call “extremely negative results.”¹⁵

The expansion of charter schools would exacerbate disparities in rural areas, including attracting and retaining effective school teachers and leaders, and placing a greater burden on transportation services. A voluntary right of transfer for staff, for example, would be disproportionately disruptive to rural and less-populated school systems. A STEM-oriented charter school might draw highly qualified math and science teachers away from existing high schools to the detriment of many more students than the number served by the charter school.

Some states, Kentucky for example, are in a transition period away from No Child Left Behind-era accountability measures and academic standards, as well as high school graduation requirements, and into Every Student Succeeds Act initiatives provided in state plans. With all these factors in flux, even without major expansions to programs that draw funding away from traditional public schools, those schools are strained with the new requirements and low funding levels. It simply is not a good time to expand programs that potentially draw more funding away from traditional public schools. In some states with very small school populations in rural areas, if even one student leaves a traditional public school for a charter, the traditional school drops below a key threshold for state funding.

NSBA urges the Department to consider research and experiences in tribal communities that indicate there may be disadvantages to employing a charter model for Native students. As noted by a 2016 research paper published by Harvard graduate students, charter school priorities may conflict with the cultural norms of indigenous communities, including a narrow focus on standardized testing, which “turns attentions away from the most critical elements of culturally-responsive education (Cockrell, 1992).”¹⁶ The testing focus unfairly highlights Native student weaknesses “without fully capturing their true strengths (Commission on Civil Rights, 2003). Recruiting indigenous teachers and administrators

¹³ Lavalley, CPE, Out of the loop, 2018,

<http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/system/files/Rural%20School%20Full%20Report.pdf>. “[O]ne thing about school choice is clear: on a purely practical level, it’s a metropolitan-centric strategy.”

¹⁴ CREDO, Urban Charter School Study: Report on 41 Regions, 2015

<https://urbancharters.stanford.edu/download/Urban%20Charter%20School%20Study%20Report%20on%2041%20Regions.pdf>.

¹⁵ Woodworth, et. al., CREDO, Online Charter School Study, 2015

<https://credo.stanford.edu/pdfs/OnlineCharterStudyFinal2015.pdf>.

¹⁶ Eve L. Ewing and Meaghan E. Ferrick, “For This Place, for These People: An Exploration of Best Practices Among Charter Schools Serving Native Students,” <https://leg.mt.gov/content/Committees/Interim/2015-2016/State-Tribal-Relations/Meetings/July-2016/charter-school-case-study.pdf>.

for indigenous charter schools may also be impeded by a relatively small population of Native college graduates qualified to serve as teachers (Demmert & Towner, 2003). Further contributing to hiring challenges may be the difficulty of recruiting non-Native teachers with a culturally-responsive orientation (DeVoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008).”¹⁷

NSBA member Arizona School Boards Association supported a bill in its state legislature in 2017 to provide teachers for charter schools in Native American communities with alternative certifications. It is crucial that the Department consider the unique needs of tribal communities and, as it awards grants, to consider charter organizations’ meaningful ties to those communities and indigenous nations.

Expansion of federal support for charter schools and charter school management organizations could negatively affect public school districts and local communities, segregate student populations racially and socio-economically, divert resources away from traditional public schools, and exacerbate disparities in rural areas. Federal resources should be assigned wisely, where they are most needed. NSBA urges the Department of Education ensure the proposed regulation is measured and constrained to prevent these consequences that flow from further charter school expansion, particularly where they are not authorized by local school districts.

Sincerely,



Thomas J. Gentzel
Executive Director & CEO

¹⁷ Id.

