

May 12, 2009

Dear Editor,

Earlier this month, we marked National Charter Schools Week and I'd like to take a moment to reflect on the impact of these ground-breaking institutions.

Charter schools are independent public schools governed by a board of directors and given increased flexibility to adapt and innovate.

Charter schools are a relatively new approach to public education. The first charter school in the U.S. was created in Minnesota in 1992. Since then, 39 other states and the District of Columbia have passed legislation creating them.

The growth of charter schools over the last 17 years has been amazing. According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS), more than 1.4 million children are being educated in over 4,600 charter schools across the country. The NAPCS says there are over 365,000 children currently on charter school waiting lists nationally.

Delaware was on the front of the charter school curve. We enacted legislation providing for their creation in 1995, with the first charter opening its doors the following year. Today, there are 18 charter schools operating in the First State.

There are a lot of misperceptions about how charter schools are funded in Delaware. They receive the same "per unit" funding as regular public schools, but they are not eligible for capital funds, used to build and maintain facilities.

Any student residing in Delaware may apply to any Delaware charter school for admittance, providing the school offers instruction in the grade for which the student is eligible. As public schools, charters are prohibited from charging tuition.

Each Delaware charter school offers a unique educational component not offered at their traditional counterparts. As noted by the Delaware Charter Schools Network, "some [charter] schools, like Thomas Edison Charter School and Campus Community Charter School, have a unique approach to teaching. Others, like Charter School of Wilmington and Kuumba Academy, have special focuses of interests. Sussex Academy of Arts and Sciences utilizes 'Expeditionary Learning,' which gives students relevant and real life experiences that build upon classroom learning."

This is not to say charter schools are perfect. There have been failures and some schools have closed. However, the overall execution of the concept has been effective, not only in diversifying the educational opportunities available in Delaware, but providing different niche academic environments that have given students more chances to thrive.

The Delaware Charter Schools Network has a comprehensive list of the state's charter schools posted on their webpage at: [www.decharternetwork.org](http://www.decharternetwork.org). For regulatory questions, call the Charter School Office at the Delaware Department of Education (DOE) at 302-735-4020.

Sincerely,

State Rep. Deborah Hudson