

**Written Testimony Submitted by
Wisconsin Education Association Council
Wisconsin Legislative Council-Special Committee on Charter Schools
October 17, 2006**

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today. I will be making comments on behalf of WEAC in four areas:

1. WEAC's position on charter schools; (based on WEAC and NEA resolutions)
2. Opposition to expansion of independent 2r charter school authority to additional institutions/ organizations;
3. Funding of independent 2r charter schools;
4. Use of value-added measures to hold charter schools (or any other schools) accountable.

1. WEAC's Position on Charter Schools

It is WEAC's position that the existing charter school law is working reasonably well. Any recommended changes in the current law should be the result of solid evidence showing that these changes are likely to have positive effects.

The Wisconsin Education Association Council has always supported innovation in education. Furthermore, WEAC believes that district-sponsored charter schools are allowed to be innovative.

WEAC believes:

- Charter school employees should be full partners in the design, implementation, and governance of charter schools.
- Charter school employees should be employees of the school district and, therefore, eligible to participate in the Wisconsin Retirement System and should be unionized.
- Only local school boards should have the power to create charter schools. Other municipalities, colleges or universities, and private or for-profit entities should not.
- Charter school funding should not disproportionately divert resources from traditional public schools.
- Charter school programs must be qualitatively different from what is available in mainstream public schools.
- Charter schools should not be used to select easy-to-educate students or to eliminate or reduce the number of special education students in the charter school.
- Wisconsin's charter school law should not be expanded.

Stan Johnson, President
Dan Burkhalter, Executive Director

2. Expansion of Independent 2r Chartering Organizations/Institutions

WEAC opposes expanding the number of organizations or institutions (colleges, universities, local governments, etc.) that have the authority to create charter schools. If you address the issue of expansion, you should explore whether any valid and reliable research exists showing that independent 2r charter schools are more effective than charter schools authorized by local school districts.

If research on this issue has not been done (and I don't believe it has), it is our recommendation that there be a study by an independent authority to determine if there are significant differences in the quality of education provided among the various chartering authorities in Wisconsin.

Keep in mind that locally-elected school boards were created for the explicit purpose of governing local schools. They have the institutional experience and knowledge required to operate public schools. In contrast, county and city government and universities were never designed to run public schools. Why would we want to duplicate what we already have in place by increasing the number of independent chartering authorities, none of which have any demonstrated track record of having operated a school? In addition, there doesn't appear to be any demand on the part of colleges/ universities or municipalities to operate charter schools.

3. Funding of Independent 2r Charter Schools:

WEAC also believes that the legislature needs to change the way that funding is provided for independent 2r charter schools. Currently, these schools are paid for by reducing state aid to Wisconsin's school districts. During the 2005-06 school year more than \$35 million was transferred from existing public schools to independent 2r charter schools. (Districts do have the authority to raise local property taxes without a referendum in order to make up the reduction). The state legislature should create a separate revenue stream to fund independent charter schools.

This reduction in state aid is occurring during a time in which districts statewide are making significant reductions in programs and services in order to comply with the revenue limits. This is especially true for districts that are declining in enrollment (about 58% of districts last year).

Since 1994, WASDA and WEAC have surveyed school superintendents to collect data on the effects of the revenue controls on the programs and services offered by school districts. Initially, districts tended to make cuts in areas related to facilities maintenance and improvement. This past school year superintendents reported cuts in the following selected areas:

Delayed building maintenance or improvement project--76%	Delayed hiring of new staff—63%
Spent less for improvements of buildings and grounds—82%	Reduced programs for students who are at risk—53%
Offered fewer staff development opportunities for teachers—72%	Reduced programs for gifted and talented students—61%
Laid off teachers—70%	Increased class sizes—70%
Laid off teacher aides or other support staff—66%	Increased student fees—65%
Reduced counseling or similar services—56%	

Last year it was shown that districts with declining enrollment were far more likely to eliminate classes or entire courses in selected areas (those not tested by the Wisconsin Knowledge & Concepts Examinations) than districts with stable or increasing enrollments. More than one-third of declining enrollment districts eliminated classes/courses in technology/vocational education and family and consumer education. About one-fourth did the same for music, foreign language, business, and art. When asked about future cuts in these content areas, superintendents predicted further elimination of classes/courses in the content areas listed above.

Few districts are in the position to sacrifice additional funding to support more 2r independent charter schools.

4. The Use of Value-Added Measurement (VAM) to Evaluate Charter Schools (accountability)

It's our understanding that this committee has been asked to look at value added measurement as a way to hold charter schools accountable. For this reason, I wish to make a few comments.

Value-added assessment is a method of analyzing and reporting student test results based on improvement (growth) in standardized test scores over two or more points in time. This procedure contrasts with more traditional approaches, which analyze and report test results at a single moment in time. Both methods use standardized achievement tests, but value-added measurement compares each student's latest test score with the same student's past test score to determine growth or improvement.

Value-added assessment further raises the stakes associated with standardized achievement testing. Schools are asked to provide a range of services, yet increasingly we judge a school's total educational program by one or two pieces of information, typically the results from the latest standardized achievement tests that are mainly composed of multiple choice items with a handful of constructed response items (short answer questions) added to the mix. Assessment experts typically label these types of tests as inauthentic. When policymakers attempt to use these same tests to measure teacher or school effectiveness, the stakes associated with the annual testing ritual will be increased significantly. Research shows that high stakes tests can have serious negative effects on students, teachers, administrators, parents, and public education itself.

The effects include creating a "culture of testing," narrowing of the curriculum to content that is tested and eliminating subjects that are not tested. The same results will occur in charter schools. Finally, keep in mind that standardized achievement tests, a very traditional measure of accountability, appear to be inappropriate measures of student learning for charter schools serving at-risk students—students who have not experienced success in a traditional school.

Among experts in educational measurement, there are significant differences of opinion about the methodology and practicality of value-added assessment. However, even if these issues were to be resolved, we would be left with a high-stakes accountability system, based on standardized achievement test data that may be used to evaluate educators, schools, and entire programs.

If you choose to have discussions about value-added measurement, it is our recommendation that you contact Robert Meyer at the Wisconsin Center for Education Research.

Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to speak. If you have questions, I'll attempt to answer them.

Russ Allen, PhD
Research and Professional Development Consultant WEAC
800-362-8034 allenr@weac.org

For More Information:

If you have any comments or questions regarding this statement, please contact Michael Walsh, WEAC Government Relations Specialist, by phone at 800-362-8034 or by e-mail at walshm@weac.org.