

Nov 13

Charter School Reform Bills

NAEP scores released; Is it 36% or 78%.... or both?

Symposium Date!

And the winner is...

News from Around the State and Nation

Charter School Reform Bills

There are currently two charter school reform bills making their way around the news and the legislature. House bill 618 cleared the House on September 30th, and Senate bill 1085 may be up for a vote in the Senate soon. HB 618 does have some support by pro-public school groups like PASBO and PSBA, although it is opposed by the Education Law Center. SB 1085, on the other hand, seems to be drawing near universal disapproval from many school groups, and PSBA has a “take action” campaign currently running in opposition.

The following provisions of SB 1085 are of concern to public schools:

Eliminates the pension double dip from the state contribution. Currently charters receive pension payments from the resident school district and the state. SB 1085 eliminates the state payment, but not the school district payment.

Permits institutions of higher education to authorize new charters, even though the universities have little financial stake or accountability to the public for the charter school’s performance. This is instead of authorization at the local level, and could result in increased taxes locally without local control.

Requires payment for students who enroll in charter school kindergarten at age 4, or below the minimum age of enrollment for the resident district. The resident district would be required to pay the tuition to the charter school, a new expense for public schools.

The main differences between SB 1085 and HB 618 are:

HB 618 allows districts to deduct 100% of their PSERS costs to cybers for two years, and SB 1085 does not.

SB 1085 permits institutions of higher education to authorize new charters and HB 618 does not.

Other provisions of both SB 1085 and HB 618 that are of concern to public schools:

Doubles the length of a charter from five to ten years.

Permits charter schools to unilaterally amend the terms of their charter, at any time, for any reason.

Strengthens the charter school exemption from property taxes

Allows for the merger of multiple charter school organizations

Bans enrollment caps on charter schools

Provisions of both SB 1085 and HB 618 that are steps in the right direction for charter school reform:

Creates a funding commission

Strengthens ethics act requirements for charter school employees and board members

Requires annual audit and public disclosure

Increases reporting requirements for truancy

Includes educator evaluation requirement

Requires 5 non-related members on charter boards, one of whom must be a parent of a child in the school

We will share any updates we receive on the status of SB 1085. Below is a series of links that may be of use on the current charter school reform bills:

http://www.phillyburbs.com/00redesign/news/charter-school-reform-bill-heads-to-pa-senate/article_43050f0a-9b81-5dba-877b-eb02c57e7ac2.html

<http://watchdog.org/107870/house-passes-cuts-to-cyber-charter-schools-charter-accountability/>

https://www.psba.org/issues-advocacy/issues-research/cyber-charter-schools/2013bills/update_101613.asp

http://www.elc-pa.org/ELC_CharterSchoolReformAnalysis.6.5.13.pdf

In addition, in my research I found the information that charter schools are sharing with their communities to be of concern. It is always helpful in PR to be aware of how “the other side” is portraying a situation, and the charters seem to be saying public schools are receiving too much funding, which is not how public schools would sum up the situation.

<http://cyberschoolpa.blogspot.com/2013/09/pa-house-bill-618.html>

NAEP scores released; Is it 36% or 78%.... or both?

The NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) scores were released recently, and with them another round of bad PR for public schools. Even when scores are at their highest levels in 4 decades, the media manages to portray these scores in a negative light. (See articles included in news section below.) What is important to understand with NAEP scores, and is noticeably absent in media coverage, is an explanation of what NAEP test rankings actually mean.

Rankings on the NAEP exam are defined as follows:

An advanced ranking represents “superior level of academic performance,” or an A+.

A proficient ranking is defined as “solid academic performance... a very high level of academic achievement. Students reaching this level have demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter, including subject matter knowledge, application of such knowledge in real-world situations, and analytical skills appropriate to the subject matter.” Proficient can also be labeled as solid A work.

A basic rating is “partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at each grade,” or a score of B or C.

A below basic rating “is for students who have a weak grasp of the knowledge and skills being assessed,” or a D or below.

Most of the newspaper coverage for the NAEP scores seems to focus on the term “proficient,” which relates to our current fixation with NCLB. Proficient on NAEP does not have the same meaning, however, as proficient for the state testing of NCLB. A “basic” rating on a NAEP exam is actually a decent score, equivalent to a B or a C grade. Note that most of the media articles report the scores in this way: *Only 36% of 8th graders were proficient or better in math and only 36% were proficient or better in reading.* This description leaves out all the students who scored “basic” as if a basic score were a poor score. It is not. The 36% only counts advanced and proficient scores. In other words, it only counts A’s!

It would actually be easier for the public to understand a description like this: 78% of 8th graders scored a C or better in reading, and 74% scored a C or better in math. In this second description, we include advanced, proficient and basic NAEP scores, because a basic NAEP score is a solid score, well above a passing grade. We are talking about the SAME scores with both descriptions, and the choice in emphasis makes a tremendous difference in perception.

This is a powerful example of data manipulation, and both test score examples are technically correct. This same sort of manipulation happens on many topics every day, proving we have to be careful researchers at work and at home. I'm creating an infographic on the topic of the NAEP scores and hope to share in the next issue of e-Comm.

Mark your calendars for the 2014 PenSPRA Symposium

The PenSPRA board has set the date and location for the 2014 PenSPRA Symposium. It will be held at the Bedford Springs Resort in Bedford Springs on Tuesday, April 1. Workshop details and a registration link will be available in January.

One lucky winner!

Aaron Thomas of the Cornell School District is the lucky winner of the free mobile app from Parentlink! PenSPRA offered a chance to win a mobile app for your district during the membership drive. Thanks to Parentlink for their support. Memberships are up 25% over last year at this time.

News From Around the State and Nation

Leaders from Philly suburbs write letter opposing Keystones; IRRC meeting 11/21

http://articles.philly.com/2013-11-09/news/43858373_1_keystone-tests-language-arts-test-supporters#ykU1M8TLHc5WCfmm.99

NAEP scores from the Inquirer

http://www.philly.com/philly/education/20131107_ap_83ee87b2160e4c23a356e867db25854a.html#MrMEJDMizV674dzc.99

NAEP scores from Ed Week

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2013/11/07/12naep.h33.html?tkn=UTMFjaTwCU06T3nPPHRL2e6kjpahU0s%2Bv7Nr&cmp=ENL-EU-NEWS1>

NAEP scores from the Huffington Post

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/07/national-test-scores_n_4229264.html

Apps for the classroom

www.edutopia.org/blog/iphone-apps-for-classroom-monica-burns?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=blog-teacher-apps-image