

The United

Voice



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United Voice: Going Paperless?



UTW sent delegates to the summer meetings for both the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association. The UTW members pictured above were attending the NEA RA in New Orleans. The AFT Convention was in Seattle.

The United Voice: Paper or Digital?

Many organizations have moved away from paper newsletters, choosing to put them online and/or email them. We have had the same discussions. There are merits to keeping the paper newsletter such as the United Voice. Some studies indicate that many people still like to hold the newsletter in their hands.

There are good points about too much paper and going green that make us wonder whether we should make the Voice purely digital.

So, we have decided to try the digital only format during the months of October and November. Then we will assess the feedback we receive and decide whether we continue printing the Voice, or go digital.

Remember, the Voice is already available on our web site, and that will continue no matter what decision is made.

~

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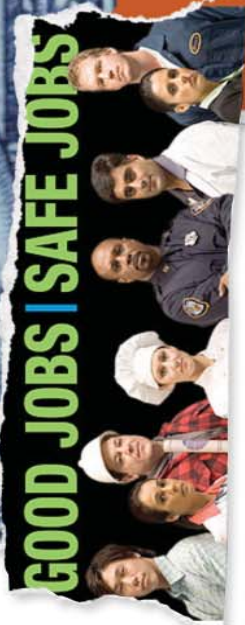
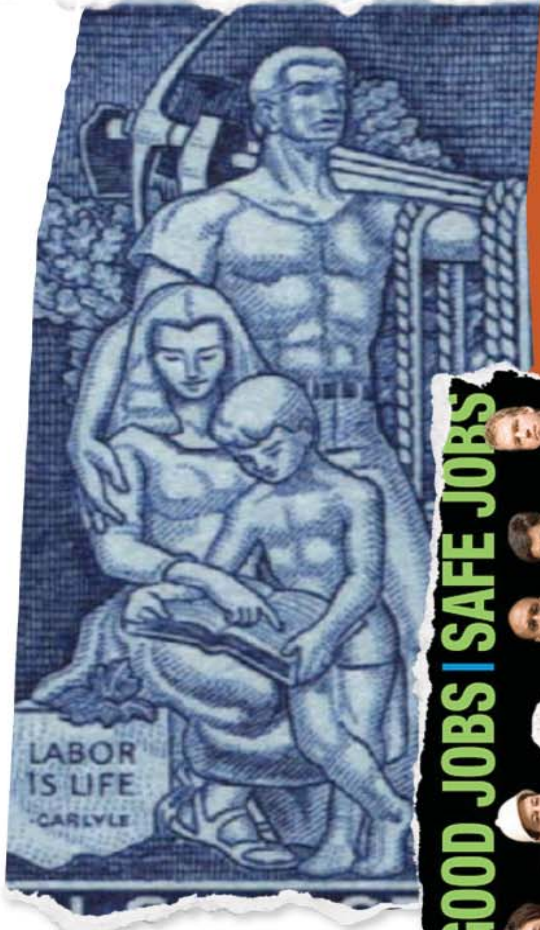
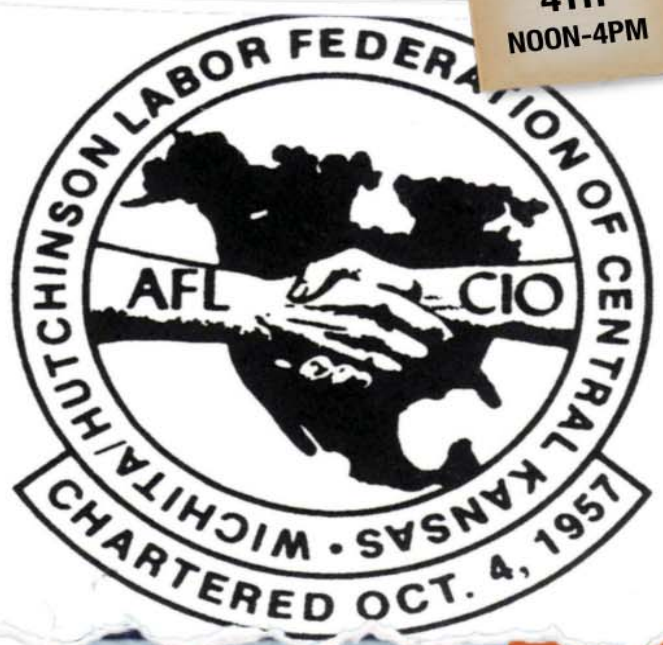
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You Are Invited!

A Look at Chicago's Charter Schools

By Sarah Karp

Published: August 13, 2010

Even as the Obama administration promotes charter schools as a way to help raise the academic performance of the nation's students, half of Chicago's charter schools have been running deficits in recent years, an analysis of financial and budget documents shows, calling into question their financial viability.



José Moré/Chicago News Cooperative
Charter teachers may do more than teach. Ryan Beaudoin, an 11th-grade teacher at Perspectives Calumet, painted his room.

The Chicago Public Schools released a bare-bones budget that included a cut of about 6 percent in per-pupil financing for charter schools — to \$5,771 from \$6,117 per pupil for elementary school students and to \$7,213 from \$7,647 per pupil for high school students. The cuts are a result of shrinking tax revenue and lagging support from the strapped state government. The city's 71 charter schools, which enrolled 33,000 students last year and expect to enroll another 10,000 in the 2010-11 school year, stand to lose \$15 million under the cuts.

It is difficult to compare the cuts with those that are being made at traditional schools because those schools do not receive money on a per-pupil basis, but district officials said they tried to make the amount of cuts comparable to those being made at traditional schools.

As a result, charters will become more dependent on private donors to provide the extras — more counselors, smaller classes, longer school days and up-to-date technology — that charter operators say set their schools apart from traditional public schools. But even though Chicago's charter schools brought in \$21 million in private money from foundations, corporations and wealthy individuals in 2007 — the

last year for which complete information is available — half have run an average of \$700,000 in deficits in recent years, with some of the shortfalls reaching \$4 million, according to an analysis of Chicago Public Schools data by Catalyst Chicago, an independent magazine on urban education.

The data showed that two-thirds of the schools could not cover core expenses, like salaries, facilities and overhead, without private money. A third needed private money to fill more than 20 percent of their budgets. A recent study by Ball State University found that Chicago's charter schools depend far more on private financing than those in other big cities, including Boston, Miami and New York.

Robert Runcie, chief administrative officer for Chicago Public Schools, said the district needed to take a "serious look" at the fiscal health of charters and was developing a system for stricter oversight. Four Chicago charters have been shut down since the 1990s largely because of financial problems.

Charter schools, which receive public money but are run by private for-profit and nonprofit organizations, were established to foster innovative educational practices by freeing the school from state and local regulations, for example, the requirement that all teachers be state-certified.

Chicago Public Schools officials and national education experts say that charters, to be considered fiscally sound, should be able to cover all their general operating costs with public money. If charters raise private cash, it should be just for additional programs, said Greg Richmond, president of the National Association of Charter School Authorizers.

Advocates of charter schools say inequitable public financing is the root of the problem. Charters are forced to rely on private money because they receive less public money than traditional schools, said Larry Maloney of the Aspire Educational Consulting Company in Washington, D.C., one of the authors of the Ball State study. "The question is, are we intentionally setting up charter schools to fail?" he said.

Opponents of charters blame the financial problems of the schools on the expense of extra bureaucracies. In addition to principals and assistant principals, the schools often have executive directors

and financial officers on staff, all of which cost extra money.

“I think the charter school system was always built on a house of cards, and once the economy took a dive, it would crumble,” said Jackson Potter, staff coordinator for the Chicago Teachers Union and co-chairman of the Caucus of Rank and File Educators, which now leads the union.

Union leaders have vigorously fought charter schools, which they consider privatization of public schools and a way for school districts to abandon their responsibility to children. Charter schools also have mostly nonunion teachers, although teachers at two charters in Chicago have recently formed unions.

President Obama and Education Secretary Arne Duncan, a former Chicago schools chief, view charter schools as a way to spur innovation in public school systems that they say are too resistant to change. States that do not allow charters or restrict their replication jeopardize their chance to receive federal financing, Mr. Duncan said last year. “We want real autonomy for charters,” he said.

Mr. Duncan has also pressed charter operators to take over failing schools under the so-called “turnaround” strategy, which involves replacing the entire staff of existing schools.

Charter schools are a centerpiece of Chicago’s Renaissance 2010 strategy, which was started in 2004 by Mayor Richard M. Daley and Mr. Duncan, who was then the chief executive of Chicago Public Schools. The program’s goal is to close failing schools and replace them with new ones, including charters.

The initiative has been controversial from the start, and charter finances are not the only concern. New schools have been spread unevenly across the city, and half of the 25 neighborhoods considered most in need of better schools have yet to get them.

In addition, teacher turnover at charters is high: Catalyst Chicago’s analysis of charter teacher lists found that half of teachers left from 2008 to 2010, a rate comparable to that in many of the most troubled district-run schools.

Charter school operators say teacher turnover can be good if it means that bad teachers are being fired. But education experts say that high turnover is often a result of poor working conditions, and charter teachers typically work longer hours for less pay than teachers in traditional schools. Experts also say high turnover causes an unstable learning environment.

Educators have said the real test of charters is whether

they are driving improvement in public schools. The Catalyst Chicago analysis showed that most charter schools in the city outperform traditional schools in their neighborhoods, but only eight have reached the higher state average for student achievement.

A host of national studies have found that charter-school performance is mixed and, on the whole, no better than that of traditional public schools. Charter operators say that there are other measures besides test scores. This year, a handful of the charter high schools called attention to the fact that almost all their students got into colleges.

Around the Calumet campus of Perspectives Charter School on Chicago’s South Side are posters and murals with the motto “College For Certain.” To reach that goal, Perspectives has college counselors dedicated to taking students on college tours and helping them navigate the journey from poor South Side neighborhood to leafy college campus. In May, the school celebrated its first graduation, with 70 percent of the class having been accepted to at least one college, the school reported.

But the 6 percent cut in Chicago Public Schools spending on charter schools is going to make it increasingly difficult to fulfill the promise of college, said Rhonda Hopps, chief executive of Perspectives, which operates five schools. The proposed cuts would mean \$710,000 less, based on current enrollment, to hire the additional college counselors Perspectives had planned to add. Ms. Hopps said she would try to find volunteers to fill the gap.

“I am worried about the direction of the cuts,” said Ms. Hopps, who joined Perspectives last spring as the school’s first chief executive. Her major task, she said, is to raise money.

Beth Purvis, the executive director of Chicago International Charter Schools, the city’s largest charter operator with 13 schools, said her board of directors believed that “public education should occur with public money.”

Leaning on outside sources might work in the short term, while charters are still the toast of the philanthropic community, Mrs. Purvis said, but the strategy may not work in the long run.

“We don’t want to just be in a community for 15 to 20 years,” she said. “We want to be in a community for 50 to 100 years.”



The Political Corner

Randy Mousley – UTW Vice President

This past summer brought to the forefront one of the most contentious primary election seasons I can ever remember in Kansas. The sheer quantity and intensity of mud-slinging bordered on nauseating. It seemed the entire concept of civil discourse and actually debating issues has been abandoned. That being said, one may wonder why I see the need to begin the discussion about politics so early in this school year.

The truth of the matter is that our profession is part of the public sector that requires government funding to meet its core mission, educating all students. As distasteful as it is at times, our professional organization must be politically active to advocate for what is in the best interests of students and teachers. If we stand by and do nothing, we leave the fates of our students and ourselves in the hands of others. Believe it or not, there are well financed groups who would like nothing short of destroying public education for a variety of reasons.

This past legislative session in Topeka brought forward a number of attacks on public education. One was the attempt to lengthen the time licensed teachers spend on probationary status from three to five years. Compelling testimony was given by Wichita teachers and professional staff in opposition to this bill while still in committee. Along party lines, the bill moved out of committee. On the House floor, our friends from both sides of the aisle came to their senses and defeated this measure. Why did some legislators want to pass this bill? The only logical conclusion is that they want to have two more years to deny teachers of full due process rights so an administrator could let them go without a reason. To me, that reeks of bullying.

Then there was the whole issue of the state budget. Education funding comprises approximately 50% of that state budget. With tax revenues down for the year, there was a movement by the House Leadership to alter the school funding formula to transfer a

significant portion of funding stream to local units of government. This would have meant that local BOE's would have had to increase local property tax rates to compensate for the loss of state funding. Fortunately, the coalition of Moderate Republicans and Democrats worked together to move a more realistic budget through that would not require districts to cut a significant number of teaching positions that would directly affect the learning environment of students throughout the state. A sales tax increase was deemed necessary to get the state through these difficult economic times. The truth is that this sales tax would not have been necessary had the Legislature taken the time to re-evaluate the ongoing special interests tax breaks and exemptions they currently allow privileged groups.

As a result of the votes certain legislators made in regard to the budget and the resulting sales tax increase, many have been targeted by special interests groups. Nine of the ten legislators who voted for the best interests of our schools survived their well funded primary challenges. KNEA and UTW played a major role in providing support in these targeted races. As we move toward the general election this November the political scene will undoubtedly heat up even more. It is in the best interests of our students, and teachers, that we continue to support candidates who will support our schools.

In the next month or so, UTW will encourage everyone to register to vote if you have not done so. We will also send advance voting applications to all buildings soon thereafter. The UTW Committee on Political Education will distribute a voter's guide indicating candidates recommended by our state and national organizations based on their positions and voting records on education related issues. Working together, we can make a difference in the electoral process. If you have any questions about what you can do, please feel free to contact me.

The UTW Committee On Political Education meets on the 4th Monday of every month. Contact Randy Mousley at rmousley@utw-ks.org.

Speak Out!

To those employees returning, a 'warm' welcome back, and a just as 'warm' welcome to those new to the Wichita School System. It has been a hot beginning to the year, and I hope that cool days are in our future. I wish for you not only cooler temperatures but also cooler and calmer work days as the year unfolds.

Last school year ended with much uncertainty as a school was closed, programs or positions were eliminated, elementary job-shares were removed, and funding from the Legislature was slow in being passed. A State budget finally squeaked out of the Capitol with a one cent sales tax to create a workable budget that would not make further cuts to education and social programs. The friends and supporters of public education in the Legislature need to be thanked over and over for doing the right thing for the students of Kansas. Your actions in contacting these Legislators need to be commended, also, for without you the outcome would have meant more job losses to local school districts. What is in the future for school funding is yet to be seen with a new Governor taking over in January and the economy slowly trying to improve- who knows?

This year, many new happenings are taking place throughout the district. The new AIM-SWeb is replacing DIBELS, Jerry Johns, MAP, and Gates/McGintie in the collection of data. All teachers will be completing a Professional Growth Plan for the new evaluation model, and probationary teachers will participate in the full evaluation process. Elementary teachers will

be utilizing the Wichita Reading Model. Many teachers have been assigned new grade levels. New assignments of elementary principals and assistants have taken place. Mr. Allison is in his second year of leadership for the district. Buildings and additions are being constructed with some already occupied. The great athletic im-

provements are excitingly being brought into use. Negotiations will be taking place this Spring. (I know this isn't a new happening, but it has been two years!) I hope all these happenings and changes bring you and the district the outcomes we all work very hard to achieve. I have no doubt that each of you will do your extreme best to make this another productive and successful year. I honor you for your professionalism and character.



Larry Landwehr, UTW President

The mission of UTW is to promote quality public schools, strengthen the teaching profession, improve the well-being of our members, and protect the negotiated agreement. The goal of the officers and staff of UTW is to work with all stakeholders in the district and state to further this mission. You, as a member, are a vital part in this endeavor. You are UTW, and your membership is greatly valued. You are the strength of the union and the voice for Wichita teachers. You are appreciated for belonging to your professional organization. Have a great year within your school and in your other life!

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