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Paper Slams Privately Run Charters, Rocketship Model, for Wisconsin Schools

By [Katie Ash](#) on April 28, 2014 7:22 PM | [No comments](#)

School reform efforts, especially [blended learning charter schools like Rocketship Education](#), could negatively impact low-income students in Wisconsin and across the country, says Gordon Lafer in [a paper for the Washington-based Economic Policy Institute](#).

Lafer, a political economist and associate professor at the University of Oregon's Labor Education and Research Center, examined school reform efforts in Wisconsin as legislators there consider sweeping school reform policies that could allow for the widespread expansion of charter schools like Rocketship.

[Lafer characterized Rocketship Education, whose first Milwaukee-based charter school is wrapping up its first year, as a "low-budget operation that relies on young and inexperienced teachers rather than more veteran and expensive faculty."](#) In the paper, he says that [Rocketship uses a narrow curriculum that does not allow for deep exploration of subjects outside of math and reading and that the company, which operates a network of blended learning charter schools, experiences high levels of turnover—nearly a third of teachers left after the 2012-13 school year.](#)

Moreover, in recent years, achievement levels in the schools, which boasted high test scores in the network's first years of operation, [have begun to drop](#).

(Efforts to reach out to Rocketship for a response to the paper were unsuccessful.)

At the Wisconsin statehouse, Senate Bill 286, which stalled this year in the legislature but could resurface again in the next session, called for a new system of grading schools that would require regular public schools that receive an F grade three years in a row to be turned into privately operated charters, while allowing charter schools to be free from such rules for eight years.

"The bill is stacked in such a manner that guarantees the widespread closure of Milwaukee public schools and the expansion of privately run charters," said Lafer in the report.

In fact, Lafer argues, what does work to provide children with a high-quality education is small class sizes, experienced teachers, diverse opportunities for learning, a broad curriculum, and professionally staffed libraries.

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