

Thirty-seven percent of Ohio charters that received federal funds closed or never opened

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by *Brian Washington*

When investigators with the Ohio State Auditor paid a surprise visit to a charter school in Madison County, they were the ones in for a surprise.

The London Academy, based on its enrollment, has received about \$150,000 in federal funding. As of last year, at

least on paper, the school had enrolled 270 students. But when investigators showed up at the school in November, they only found 10.

That's just one of the issues detailed in a new report entitled *Belly Up: A Review of Federal Charter School Grants* that has pro-public education advocates questioning the federal government's role in funding charter schools. But unfortunately, there's more.

According to the report's analysis, **out of the 292 charters schools in Ohio that received federal funding from the Charter School Program (CSP), 108 have closed or never opened. We're talking \$30 million of taxpayer money down the drain.**

"Think about it. Thirty-seven percent of the charter schools in Ohio that were given federal funds closed or never opened," said Scott DiMauro, a veteran public school educator who spent the last 17-years teaching in Worthington. "And there's no evidence that any of the money—taxpayer dollars—was ever recovered."

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OEA Vice President Scott DiMauro (far right) joins other pro-public education activists at news conference about new charter schools report.

DiMauro is also vice president of the Ohio Education Association (OEA), which represents more than 121,000 educators statewide. He spoke yesterday at a news conference where the report was shared with the press. The Ohio Charter School Accountability Project compiled the report. OEA is a sponsor.

“When we launched the Ohio Charter School Accountability Project and our website, [Know Your Charter.com](http://KnowYourCharter.com) in the fall of 2014, we did so because for too long the sorry performance of many of Ohio’s charter schools had been neglected,” said DiMauro.

The people who know about the sad track record of so many of Ohio’s charter schools were understandably stunned last fall when the U.S. Department of Education announced that it was giving \$71 million to Ohio to expand its charter schools.

The \$71-million grant has since been put on hold. However, the report illustrates that it’s time the federal government got its act together. Some of the findings include the following:

- Charters that received federal dollars and a grade from the state’s report card during the 2014-15 school year had a median Performance Index score that was lower than all but 15 of Ohio’s 613 school districts;
- Four schools in Ohio linked to a charter chain connected to an exiled Muslim cleric in Pennsylvania have been dogged by FBI raids and allegations involving test-tampering, the use of racial slurs by

teachers, and sexual misconduct in the classroom. The schools got a total of \$7.6 million in CSP grants;

- One of the most powerful and influential charter school operators in Ohio received \$1.4 in CSP grants, despite its schools being routinely ranked among the lowest performing. Several have been shut down for academic or contract problems and were among those accused by state investigators of padding attendance records;
- Since CSP began, 21-years ago, the state has had just one assessment, which pointed out flaws that were ignored by federal grant makers; and
- At the time of that one assessment, when the earlier mentioned flaws were raised, Paolo DeMaria, the state's recently appointed Superintendent of Public Instruction, was then serving as Associate Superintendent of Finance and School Options.

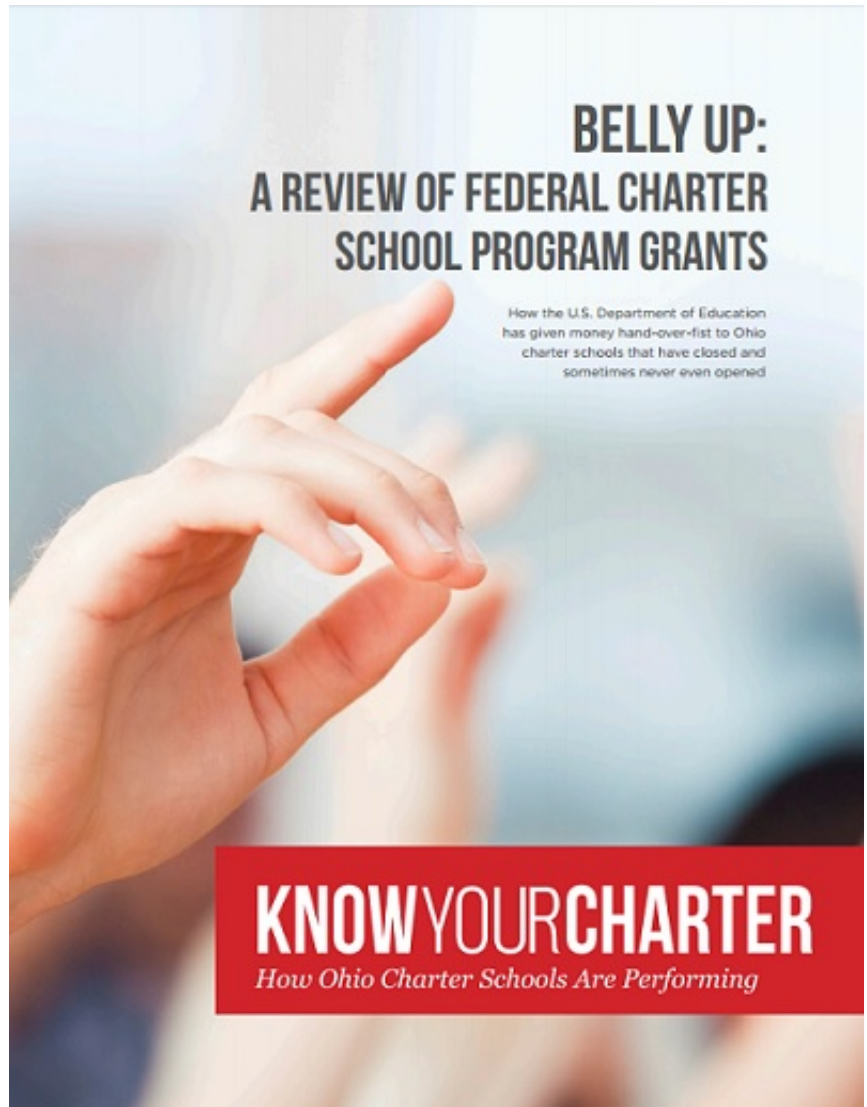
"Ohio is beginning to take important steps to hold charter school sponsors more accountable and to provide greater oversight of charter school operators," said DiMauro. "It's time now for the federal government to clean up its act and do the same."

"For too long, the U.S. Department of Education, in awarding charter school grants under both Republican and Democratic administrations, has turned a blind eye to the shameful performance of so many charter schools in Ohio."

For one thing, DiMauro wants more transparency in the decision-making process connected to the awarding of federal grants for charters. He says the public should know who is reviewing the applications.

"It's up to our leaders at both the federal and state levels to do what's necessary to protect the interest of taxpayers and, especially, education opportunities for our students," said DiMauro.

"Steps must be taken to ensure taxpayer dollars. If a school never opens, there ought to be a way to recoup the public funds that have been doled out."



[Click here to look at the full report.](#)