

Sadly, but predictably, those advocating for the privatization of public education through charter schools have resorted to the rhetorical tactics of name-calling, diversion and attacking their opponents rather than their arguments. For example, in their opinion article, Hal Heiner and Wayne Lewis responded to the evidence shared by public school advocates by calling this information “blatant lies,” and by offering additional flawed arguments. In order for the public to make informed decisions, I will address these claims and share specific sources of information to verify the information being shared.

Heiner and Lewis claim, “with the passage of charter-school legislation, not one dollar would be moved to a charter school by the Kentucky General Assembly.” However, they acknowledge under the legislation they support, funding, “...follows the children that attend charter schools.” So there is no question public schools would lose funding for every student attending a charter school.

A Western Michigan University study of Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) charter schools found, contrary to Heiner and Lewis’s assertions, “...that KIPP schools are considerably better funded on a per-pupil basis than their surrounding school districts. The KIPP schools received, on average, \$18,500 per pupil in 2007-08, about \$6,500 more per student than the average for other schools in the same districts.” ([http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/04/06/27kipp\\_ep-2.h30.html](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/04/06/27kipp_ep-2.h30.html)). Similarly, the state of New Mexico found that it was spending 26% more per student for charter schools (<http://www.stateline.org/live/details/story?contentId=618440>).

Heiner and Lewis attempt to sidestep concerns that charter schools are re-segregating public education, by saying, “no child is assigned to attend a charter school.” However, a report authored by Julie F. Mead of the University of Wisconsin and Preston C. Green III of Penn State University found 43% of black students in charter schools attend schools that are 99% minority, whereas, less than 15% of black students in traditional public schools attend such highly-segregated schools (<http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/chartering-equity>). Information like this led the NAACP to release an official statement stating that, “charter schools have become a school model that is used to segregate students.”

Another claim offered by Heiner and Lewis is that the threat of school closure will hold charter schools accountable. But a report on charter schools in *TIME* magazine recently found that, “Nationally, charter schools with low scores are only slightly more likely to close than traditional schools with low scores... Fewer than 200 of the 6,700 charters that have opened since 1992 were closed down for academic reasons; the majority were shuttered due to financial or mismanagement problems.” (<http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,2105733,00.html>) And the *New York Times* recently pointed out that the percentage of charters being closed has decreased each of the past three years, in spite of increasing evidence of poor performance.

Heiner and Lewis assert that charter schools can perform better because they will not have to collectively bargain with their teachers. However, the highest performing nation in the world, Finland, is almost 100% unionized, as are the other nations at the top of international rankings. A study by Nelson, Rosen, and Powell found, “in states with high levels of teacher unionization, student scores on standardized tests are higher than in states with low levels of teacher participation in collective

bargaining or meet-and-confer activities. There are many possible explanations for the higher scores obtained in states with unionized schools. Through negotiations, unionized teachers have more leverage than non-union educators over conditions that impact school performance such as class size, academic resources, teacher training, academic and social support services. In addition, higher wages and benefits, as well as negotiated grievance procedures obtained through unionization, create a work environment that encourages teacher stability and commitment, essential characteristics of an effective school.” ([http://ww.wisconsinsfuture.org/publications\\_pdfs/education/unions.pdf](http://ww.wisconsinsfuture.org/publications_pdfs/education/unions.pdf))

Heiner and Lewis went on to play the union card even more brazenly, suggesting that KEA and JCTA, which are comprised entirely of public school educators, are acting purely out of self-interest in expressing concerns about charter schools. But charter advocates have very definite self-interests as well. David Sirota recently summarized these contrasting interests in a piece on Salon.com in this way (<http://www.salon.com/2011/09/12/reformmoney/>):

*“Teachers unions’ self-interest means advocating for better teacher salaries and job security — an agenda item that would, among other things, allow the teaching profession (as in other nations) to financially compete for society’s “best and brightest” and in the process help kids. The unions’ self-interest also means advocating for decent workplace facilities, which undeniably benefits not only the teacher, but also students. And it means pressing for curricular latitude that doesn’t force educators to teach to a standardized test, a notion that would help actually educate students to think critically, rather than train them to be test-taking robots.*

*Corporate education “reformers” self-interest, by contrast, means advocating for policies that help private corporations profit off of public schools, diverting public attention from an anti-poverty economic agenda, and busting unions that prevent total oligarchical control of America’s political system. In short, it’s about the profit, stupid.*

*Neither side’s self-interest is perfectly aligned with the goal of bettering our education system. But one side is clearly far more aligned with that goal than the other.”*

“So why are JCTA and KEA leaders worried?” ask Heiner and Lewis. We are worried because Stanford University found that there is an 83% likelihood that charter schools will perform worse or no better than the traditional public schools they replace. We are worried that students in public schools will be harmed if we open an entire new set of schools statewide and divert funding to this new system of schools. We are worried about the prospect of students being taught in charter schools by individuals that would not even qualify to be a substitute teacher in a regular public school. We are worried by the fact that the same funders that are paying for expensive campaigns promoting charter schools also give money to organizations that oppose essentially every public program designed to support poor and minority children. In short, we are worried that charter schools will undermine our public schools in which we, as educators, have dedicated our lives to making a positive difference for all the children of our Commonwealth.