

Check Against Delivery

**Presentation at CCSA 19th Annual Conference
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Hello. Thank you so much for being here. It is phenomenal to have so many people again attending the CCSA conference in numbers demonstrating that our movement continues to grow and strengthen.

We have the great fortune of being able to live through one of the most important transformations ever to have happened in public education, a pivotal period when it is becoming broadly recognized that charter schools are unleashing a full reinvention of our public education system.

In just two years, we have seen that the percentage of Californians who report themselves as knowing something or a lot about charter schools growing from approximately 47% to 68%. These are the kinds of results that make the professional pollsters scratch their heads. How can this be? Public opinion just doesn't shift this rapidly ...

But then we remind them. We have grown. We now have 412,000 students attending California's 982 charter schools. That's 7% of statewide enrollment. We have opened 303 new charter schools in the last three years. Last year we added approximately 43,000 students to charter schools, a number roughly equal to the size of the entire Oakland Unified School District. Gone are the days when a typical Californian had several degrees of separation between himself and a charter school story. These days, almost everyone has a family member or friend with a student having a positive experience in a charter school.

And those positive experiences are translating into high levels of public support for charter schools. When asked in a poll to give letter grades to different aspects of public education, 61% of Californians gave charter schools an A or B, whereas only 31% gave traditional public schools such grades.

Part of the charter school success story is the fact that our schools are doing the common sense things that parents and communities want, like keeping class sizes small or keeping the arts a vital part of the curriculum. We are also known to be the primary source of innovation within our public education system, incorporating new technologies and creating whole new school models better serving California's diverse communities.

Another part of the charter school success story is the growing awareness that charter schools are simply generating higher levels of learning than traditional public schools. Using our Similar Students Measure that we developed in collaboration with our Member Council, we find that 23% of charter schools students are attending a school performing in the top 10% of all schools in the state. Think of that. Almost one fourth, attending a school performing in the top tenth. And the numbers for charter schools serving high percentages of low income students are even more impressive. 35% of students attending such charter schools are attending schools performing in the top 10%.

And we're also showing that charter schools now have the heft to make a profound difference across entire school districts. In Oakland Unified, for example, where approximately a fifth of all

students attend a charter school, 48% of charter school students are attending a school performing in the top 10%. Almost half in the top tenth. 39% in the top 5%. And in the bottom 5%? Less than 1%.

These are the kinds of results that are capturing the imagination of Californians. It is resulting in people from all walks of life hearing the call of the charter school movement. Individuals committing themselves to making a more profound difference in the lives of students.

This is why we say that You are the Charter School Movement. Because of the inspired individual contributions to charter schools that, when aggregated and made manifest in an event such as this one, become recognizable as a seismic, transformation of our public education system.

We all know stories of individuals from all walks of life turning to our movement.

- Liza Bercovici at Gabriella Charter school, converting a deeply personal loss it into a profoundly moving effort to establish a new public charter school that inspires us all.
- Maria Flores Rodriguez from Camino Nuevo, Jose Castellanos Charter School, organizing a team of fellow parents to gather over 750 support cards in a two week period resulting in Camino Nuevo being provided a new facility allowing the organization to serve another 650 students.
- John Scully, after years of supporting Making Waves to become a shining star charter school organization, making a \$1M contribution to establish CCSA Advocates, our new 501c4 organization, enabling our movement to get more involved politically, helping us make waves on behalf of charter schools in whole new ways.
- Think of AJ Duffy, the former head of United Teachers Los Angeles, answering the call after years of resisting charter schools now working in partnership with Caprice Young to establish a new charter school in Los Angeles.

I mean, folks, if even AJ Duffy and Caprice Young are hearing the same call, it must be ringing pretty loud, don't you think?

These people, like all of us in this room, are the charter school movement. We are the Hamiltons, the Jeffersons and the Madisons of this generation, defining the new system that will reinvent public education.

This is the level of responsibility that has been placed upon us. And so it is incumbent upon us to ever remember the fundamental principles that gave birth to our movement nearly 20 years ago and unite us still to this very day.

I remember hearing my first calling. This occurred back before I was teaching. I was in the Big Brothers Program in Los Angeles. And my eight year old little brother was in an awful school, and there was absolutely no other option available in their neighborhood. And so his grandparents who lived in Compton agreed to have Matthew come live with them so he could go to a private school near their home. And my task each Sunday afternoon was to pick Matthew up at his mother's house, to play with him for the afternoon and then drive him to his grandparents' house. And every time we would get into the car to head to Compton, he would

start crying because he just didn't understand why he couldn't live with his mother. Those are the kinds of tears you just don't forget.

And then, when Matthew finished 8th grade, it came time again to find a place for him to go to school. And so we tried the area schools. And if I told you about the simply unacceptable things we found there, you would understand why his family knew it had to do something different. And so Matthew's uncle, who lived in El Paso, agreed to take Matthew in so he could attend the new high school in his neighborhood. And four years later my wife and I were there at Matthew's graduation. We remember seeing one of the most amazing rainbows of our lives, the arch framing perfectly the arch that the graduates walked through to come onto the field for the ceremony. Matthew found his rainbow. He was able to graduate from high school with a decent education. But he had to go to El Paso to get it, he had to live separate from his own mother from the age of eight years old in order to get it. It has left an absolutely visceral awareness in me.

Parents should have the right to choose where their kids go to school.

It's one of the fundamental principles we believe to be deeply embedded in the call of the charter school movement. And if Matthew had grown up in South Central 15 years later where we now have some of the most successful schools in the charter school movement, his life would have been profoundly different.

Parents should have a right to choose where their kids go to school.

Years later, I was working at Hooper Avenue. I had partnered with a group of teachers to create a school within the school. People kept telling us that we needed to make it a charter, that the district was going to wipe our hard work off the map. And I said no. I didn't want to do a charter. If we just did good work then people would recognize it and leave us alone.

The gist of our idea had been that transiency – both student and teacher transiency, which was running between 30 to 40% annually – was what was holding the school back. We eliminated teacher transiency by all of us agreeing to move to B Track – the least desirable track. That way the teachers with more seniority couldn't bump us out. And to take care of student transiency, we got the area superintendent to give us a special waiver allowing families that moved to keep attending Hooper Avenue because we realized that almost everyone who moved only went a few miles away and would be happy to drive their kids back. And so, student transiency and teacher transiency plummeted. What do you think happened to test scores? It really wasn't rocket science.

But then in my 6th year of teaching, the area superintendent changed and many of our families suddenly got a letter telling them that they could no longer come to Hooper Avenue but had to go to their schools of residence. The word came on the last day of school. And I spent that afternoon on the yard with parents – many of whom I had visited in their homes many times – telling me that I should have been more careful in what I said because I had set a false expectation. And I went home that day and I said to Amy, that was it. I would never again put myself in a professional setting where I couldn't live up to my own promises. It left another absolutely visceral awareness in me.

Educators should be empowered to make decisions that make sense for students and families.

It's another fundamental message embedded in the calling that we all hear, a principle that underlies all that we do in charter schools.

And finally, a third story. A few years later I was the authorizer at San Diego Unified School District. And we had worked to close an underperforming charter school. It was not just the lowest performing charter school but the lowest performing of any public school in the district. And after it was closed, staff from the district went to the school facility and found that a poster had been left inside the window of the front door. It said the name of the charter school. "Rest in Peace. If you have questions, contact Jed Wallace." But the way the fonts had been done, from a distance, it looked like "Rest in Peace, Jed Wallace." And the staff knowing how closing the school had taken years off my life, took a picture. And I have that picture on my desk to this very day.

And afterward, we went to the leadership of the district and said we had another charter school that also should have been closed. But the answer was no. That there were too many other difficult challenges and closing down another charter school couldn't be made a priority even though we knew students' needs were not being met.

And so, for me, that has become another visceral reminder of something fundamental to our movement.

Educators given great levels of freedom to serve students should be held to very high levels of accountability.

And, as many here know, this is something that the Association, in close collaboration with our Member Council and our members more broadly, has been pushing on. And it's been encouraging to see the level of support that we have received, though it's clear not everyone loves what we are doing.

But we're going to keep pushing because we believe, at its heart, that our movement is ultimately about demonstrating that the new schools we are creating are able to create higher levels of learning than what was available previously, and when our schools show aspects of poor performance reminiscent of the problems that gave birth to our movement in the first place, we, unlike the system that came before us which evolved into something that does a better job of protecting adult interest than student interest, can act decisively to hold our own accountable.

Stories like these are ones I hear charter people tell all the time as a means of getting the leverage on ourselves to push through the formidable obstacles that lay before us. And we know that we need that kind of leverage because while we in this room have certainly heard the call of the charter school movement, it is clear that many of California's policy makers still haven't.

Don't get me wrong. There are clearly some who have. Our Governor Jerry Brown is certainly one, a leader who has become a champion of charter schools and has taken many hard stands for us including several he has taken in this year's budget. And the State Board of Education, which has been very strong for charter schools. And Senator Bob Huff who we honor this year and many, many others.

But in the aggregate, the hard truth is that, in spite of all the growth, in spite of all the results, in spite of all public polling showing that Californians want more charter schools, many of our policy makers just don't get it. Think of it, last spring, just a few blocks from here, a bill passed

the Assembly floor on a 45-29 vote to put a cap on charter schools. Only two Democrats voted against that bill. We were able later, thank goodness to repel it, but what more evidence do we need than that?

Unfortunately, other evidence abounds:

- Take Capitol Collegiate Academy here in Sacramento. I was there during the school's first week seeing the school's 60 kindergarteners, 30% of whom have special needs, and knowing that none will generate the thousand dollars per pupil in class-size reduction funding that is going to traditional public schools. You just can't believe that California would actually do this – structurally underfund a school serving such a high need population, and yet, the Legislative Analyst Office just confirmed in its recent charter school funding equity report that, while 95% of kids in grades K-3 in the traditional system are receiving class-size reduction funding, only 49% of charter school students are receiving this money. This is on top of the nearly \$400 per pupil the LAO said that all charter schools are underfunded in this state, which doesn't even begin to take into account that most charter schools have to pay for their own facilities.
- Or take the Public School Choice schools in Los Angeles. You know how our detractors have this tick that charter schools owe their success to skimming students and if we were ever required to serve the exact same demographic of students as a traditional school our results would be far worse? Well in Los Angeles under the PSC program, three operators – Aspire, Camino Nuevo and Synergy – all accepted an attendance boundary, serving inarguably the exact same students as district schools, and all opened their new schools with higher than 800 APIs, the exact same results they have generated with their previous schools. And none of the new district schools that opened under the PSC had even remotely as good an opening. And what did Los Angeles do in response? Expand the program as you would assume they would if these decisions were based on results? No, of course, not. They decided to sunset the program altogether.
- Or take Desert Sands, one of our many strong operators of Independent Study programs, on top of having to deal with the ridiculous 740 funding determination process that all IS schools contend with, not being able to receive funding for the services they provide to credit recovery students over the summer without going through a laborious waiver for every school in their portfolio.
- Or take Environmental Charter School in Hawthorne and Summit Prep in Redwood City, two of our most successful schools struggling to get new charters approved in spite of their phenomenal track records. For Environmental, a recent charter denial occurred in literally the same month that President Obama had announced the school to be a finalist – one of five such schools in the country – for him to deliver the commencement address. And Summit, which was profiled in *Waiting For Superman* as a school that hundreds of parents are desperate to get their kids into, had a new charter denied in the very month the movie opened. Recently, Summit's leadership told me that they now budget \$50K in legal fees anytime they start working on a new petition because that is what it costs to go through the agonizing process of getting a charter approved in the State of California. Meanwhile, other states are reaching out to these very same organizations practically begging them to come, guaranteeing them multiple site charters, fully equity in funding and access to facilities. I mean, why is it policy makers can hear the call of the California charter school movement in New Orleans and

Nashville and Newark, but the call isn't being heard in the very communities where these great organizations were born?

So if we are going to keep our movement on track, we are going to have to have even more people responding to the call of the charter school movement in a new way. And that is the way of building our collective advocacy strength.

Fortunately, there is so much progress being made, so many examples of individuals responding to the call already, providing inspiration to us all.

1. Think of Jackie Eliot at PUC showing us all how we can encourage charter school parents and other supporters to participate in grassroots demonstrations, pledging to bring large numbers of parents to the Schools we Can Believe in Rally in Los Angeles, and challenging others to follow suit, setting in motion a process that ultimately resulted in 6,000 people showing up on February 4th at the largest gathering of charter folk ever to have assembled in California. The next opportunity to answer the call being this afternoon at 3:45 pm when we gather at the Capitol building to rally for charter school funding equity.
2. Second, think of Cameron Curry at Classical Academies, getting his parents to sign up for the Families that Can website, setting up phone banks, and forwarding on Capitol Update Action Alerts to parents to register their opposition to hostile bills last spring. Imagine what we could do if everyone in this room helped us make sure that we had the hundreds of thousands of charter school parents across this state signed up at Families That Can and prepared to respond whenever an Action Alert is released by our Government Affairs team.
3. Third, think of Rick Piercy at the Academy for Academic Excellence, proactively engaging legislators, developing relationships in advance through school visits and regular meetings in district offices, being ever willing to come to testify in committees here in Sacramento when issues of importance come before the legislature, as he did last spring, being on hand on a day an important issue was before committee, talking with legislators before the vote, explaining the issue at hand – all which contributed to us securing the outcome that we needed. Imagine what we could do if every person in this room committed to proactively reach out to their local legislators, scheduled a school visit, followed up regularly and was at the ready to testify whenever an issue of importance came up within the capitol.
4. Fourth, think of Margaret Fortune at Hardy Brown Charter School, in her afterhours time, taking a leadership role to support a slate of local candidates supportive of charter schools, encouraging other charter school supporters in their afterhours time to do the same, making political contributions, ultimately helping to elect a new officials who will ensure fairer treatment for charter schools for years to come. Imagine what we could do if every person in this room made a major commitment to support charter friendly candidates in elections across this state. The next opportunity being the chance to attend the Charter Schools PAC fundraiser which is happening today at 5:30 pm at Tequila Museo Mayahuel at 1200 K Street.
5. Fifth, think of Brian Johnson and Carlyn Obringer and others now running for office themselves, providing inspiration to us all. Imagine if every person in this room took on

the challenge at their level of commitment, ensuring that our movement's political strength continues to grow, recognizing that we will know that we have gotten there when within the halls of power in California, the voice of the charter school movement is not only being heard, but is being spoken.

I'll end today with a story from my family history. One that puts in historical perspective the opportunity before us.

As many of you have heard me say, I come from a family of educators. Both my mother and father spent 33 years in the public education system. And both of them know that they made a profound difference in many kids' lives but they both would also say that the system they worked within fundamentally limited their ability to have the kind of impact that they would have liked to have had.

When I was in high school, my father started getting calls in the middle of the night from a person who was convinced that her son was not getting the education that he deserved in high school. And she was convinced for some reason that my father, who was her son's elementary school principal, had enough influence to change what was happening. And so she would call night after night, hour after hour. And the authorities and the superintendent and other school officials asked my father if he would keep answering because they were worried how this person might do something worse if she didn't have this way of venting. And they promised him that they would do something about it. But somehow that never happened. And so my father spent hour after hour, night after night picking up that phone. Answering that call. And being hung up upon over and over again. It actually went on, periodically, for years.

And it is my sense that this is a kind of metaphor for what has happened historically to educators and other civically minded people in our society. They hear the call to do more on behalf of students over and over. And for generations, people have responded but they have been hung up upon over and over. The system was not set up to let people rise to their own potential level of impact.

Now that we have the charter school movement, we see that something new has emerged. The call is coming. And people are picking it up and they are finding something alive and vibrant on the other line. And a conversation ensues, one that draws us further and further into this remarkable movement. And we find that our lives are changed because we have seen how this movement has enabled us to make a profoundly more positive impact on the lives of kids than we ever otherwise could have made.

Our role at the Association is to make sure that the conversation you are having with the charter school movement is as rewarding as possible. To make sure that your connection to the movement is crystal clear. To make sure that something vital and exciting is on the other end. If the call you are answering is one to help grow and operate successful charter schools, our job is to help make sure that you have the support you need – the funding, the facilities, and the freedom you need to maximize your likelihood for success.

And if the call you are answering is to play a greater role in advocacy or politics on behalf of this movement, we are here to make sure that you are clearly connected to the resources that the movement affords. To give you the support you will need to win in the venues where the policy fights central to our success play out.

We here at the Association take such inspiration from what you are doing. Each time we come into contact with our members, we are filled with new determination to do everything we can to help keep this movement of ours on its remarkable trajectory. To try to keep from being left in your dust when you're on stride, to be pushing at your back when you encounter resistance, to be linked arm in arm when we should forge on side by side and every once in a while pulling from the front when we know you need a shield.

Ultimately, we know that the success of our movement will come down to the success of individuals who understand that they, that you, that we are the charter school movement. We know that the only way this movement becomes the transformational thing we all want is if you, I mean you, each of you in this very room, picks up the call, continues the conversation, deepens the commitment.

Ultimately, we at the Association are here for the charter school movement. At its heart that means that we are here for you.

Thank you.