

June 10, 2015

Dear members of the City of Milwaukee Common Council:

I am writing on behalf of Schools That Can Milwaukee to register our opposition to the proposed moratorium on new city-granted school charters.

At Schools That Can Milwaukee (STCM), we work to ensure every child in our city has access to an excellent education so they can flourish as citizens. For many kids growing up in Milwaukee, educational opportunities are essentially pre-determined based on race, family income, and ZIP code. These inequalities limit life choices, professional options, and income growth, while weakening families and neighborhoods. A growing number of schools in Milwaukee are waging a successful battle against these statistics and closing the achievement gap for their students.

However, our community still has a long way to go. We need to employ every available tool to improve the education options available to Milwaukee children. High-quality charter schools are one of these tools. Having multiple charter authorizers helps avoid bottlenecks in the school creation process. It also ensures excellent new schools aren't held up by adult politics.

That said, there is neither anything magical nor anything evil about the charter school model. Every school governance model – traditional districts, charter schools, and private schools – comes with inherent strengths and challenges. As a community, we need to move beyond partisan squabbling over school governance and take on a singular focus on quality.

So far, the city's work as a charter school authorizer has had a mixed but mostly positive record. Last year, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction awarded 7 of the city's 10 charter schools a state report card grade of "Meets Expectations" or better, a distinction earned by only 25% of all Milwaukee schools. Taken as a group, the 10 city-chartered schools boast faster standardized test score growth in reading and math than the state-wide average.

That said, there is room for improvement at city-chartered schools. Children in our city deserve – and need – better than "Meets Expectations." That is why we directly support three schools chartered by the city: Milwaukee Collegiate Academy, Kings Academy, and Rocketship Southside Community Prep. We provide intensive professional development and on-the-job school leadership coaching from a team that includes veteran principals, teacher coaches, and even a retired public school district superintendent. There is a lot of work left to do. Each of these schools is in a different stage of improvement and partnership with us, but we have seen meaningful progress.

The proposed moratorium would do nothing to increase the number of high-quality school options available to Milwaukee families, nor would it improve the quality of existing

schools. That is why I urge the members of the Common Council to address our city's education issues by joining us in taking meaningful steps toward expanding the schools that are working, helping the others improve, and providing options for talented and entrepreneurial educators hoping to provide more Milwaukee children with the opportunity to attend a high-quality school.

Instead of the proposed ordinance, the city should strengthen its charter authorization policies by adopting best practices from the National Charter School Authorizer Association (NACSA). Instead of a moratorium on new city charters, we need to maintain a high bar for new charter applications to ensure only excellent charter proposals are approved. We also need strong oversight that ensures struggling charter schools are taking meaningful steps toward improvement. When those steps don't happen, we need authorizers to revoke the charters of chronically failing schools. And we need to end the practice of "authorizer hopping" some schools have used to avoid meaningful oversight and accountability. Each of these actions would improve schools in our community. Ending city charter authorization will not.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue. If you have further questions about anything contained in this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



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