

## Give students the choice to attend charter schools where kids perform well

By Collin Hitt

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In protest of Chicago's failing school system, Sen. James Meeks (D-Chicago) is staging a field trip of sorts. He's urging kids from his legislative district to skip the first day of school, board buses, travel to Winnetka, and attempt to enroll in New Trier High School.

One can understand why Meeks would want better educational options for Chicago kids. But on his way to Winnetka, the senator might want to take a look out the window where there are already many Chicago public schools—charter schools—that are performing on par with top-notch suburban and downstate schools. One such school, Chicago International Charter School, graduates its students 86 percent of the time—comparing quite favorably with public schools Downstate and suburban Chicago, which have an average graduation rate of 84 percent. Overall, charter public schools in Chicago graduate 77 percent of their students, compared with a citywide average of 51 percent.

Why aren't there more charter schools in Chicago? Because state law caps the number of charters in the city at 30. Today, approximately 13,000 Chicago public school children are on a waiting list to get into charters—schools that have offered a proven formula for success. To give inner-city kids the opportunities they deserve, the charter-school cap should be lifted.

Meeks has argued for years that a massive tax hike is necessary to balance the scales, enabling schools in his district to spend as much per pupil as New Trier does. Unfortunately, he looks past the fact that there are charter public schools within his district that are already getting great results. And they're not breaking the bank to do so. Chicago charter schools receive less money per pupil than the average public school in Chicago, yet charters routinely outperform typical public schools and many suburban schools.

Charters are successful because they're free from burdensome state regulations and union demands. Thus they can innovate—and excel. Charter schools cannot discriminate against students; they must take all comers, up to their capacity. This has proven a recipe for success in Chicago.

Meeks should demand that more of these schools open in his district. Last spring,

however, Meeks refused to vote on legislation that would have raised the Chicago charter school cap to 100. Moreover, while in Springfield last week, he filed legislation that would force suburban schools to accept any student who applies, regardless of whether the student lives within the district.

The way to improve Chicago's public school system is to allow parents to abandon failing schools and choose better ones. Chicago has already launched a small fleet of high-quality charter schools. There's no reason to believe that fleet can't become an armada under the current funding system. But there's only one way to know—eliminate the cap on Chicago's charter schools. If Meeks is serious about improving schools in the city, he should support this reform.

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### Charter high schools on the South Side

Architecture, Construction and Engineering Technical Charter School, 5410 S. State St.	8131 S. May St.  Perspectives Charter School-Calumet High School of  Technology, 8131 S. May St.
Chicago International- Longwood, 1309 W. 95th St.	Perspectives Charter School
Chicago International- Ralph Ellison, 1817 W. 80th St.	Illinois Institute of Technology Math and Science Academy, 3663 S. Wabash Ave.
DuSable Leadership Academy, 4934 S. Wabash Ave.	Perspectives Charter School-South Loop, 1930 S. Archer Ave.
Noble Street-Comer Campus, 7200 S. Ingleside Ave.	University of Chicago- Woodlawn, 6420 S. University Ave.
Noble Street-University at Chicago College Prep, 1231 S. Damen Ave.	Urban Prep Charter Academy for Young Men, 6201 S. Stewart Ave.
North Lawndale College Prep, 1615 S. Christiana Ave.	Young Women's Leadership Charter School, 2641 S. Calumet Ave.
Perspectives Charter School- Calumet High School,	Youth Connection Charter School, 10 W. 35th St.

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