

**“WHOSE SIDE ARE YOU ON?”
EXAMINING WHY TRADITIONAL
PUBLIC SCHOOLS, TEACHER
UNIONS AND CHARTER SCHOOL
ADVOCATES CLASH AND HOW
THEY CAN STOP FIGHTING EACH
OTHER AND FIGHT TOGETHER
TO IMPROVE PUBLIC
EDUCATION**

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INTRODUCTION

Race to the Top is a competitive grant program that challenges states to reform their public education system. Through five criteria:

- Great Teacher and Leaders (138 total points)
- State Success Factors (125 Total Points)
- Standard and assessments (70 points)
- General Selection Criteria (55 total points)
- Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools (50 total points).

- A campaign to move public charter schools to the front of the reform agenda.
- “Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charters and other innovative schools”(40 points)
- The Race to the Top helped reopened the charter school debate nationally.

LITERATURE REVIEW



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the contributing factors that block meaningful dialogue between traditional public schools and charter schools?
- In what ways can traditional public schools and charter schools support and collaborate with each other?
- What can each group learn from one another?

METHODS

Three interviews:

- Aaron Brown, principal of Greater Achievement Charter High School
- Dave Austin, a teacher at Greater Achievement High School
- Katie Smith, a unionized teacher at Broadview Public High School*

■ *The names of people and of schools are pseudonyms

FINDINGS: GENERALIZATION HURTS

- “One of the things that I want to impress upon you in your study is that nuance is really the answer to a lot of these questions. There’s no monolithic charter school, they’re no monolithic district public school.” (Aaron Brown)
- “And so when we speak I think those sweeping generalizations it make it difficult to actually capture how complex and complicated the issue is how different schools are from one another.” (Aaron Brown)
- “It just been set up in this very simple binary, traditional public schools and charter schools. The charter school as not are the incubator (support) but being the competition.” (Dave Austin)



- “People love the narrative. They love the narrative that charter schools are going to save the American educational system.”(Dave Austin)
- “It’s hurting it because I think it is completely dishonest to the work that everyone should be involved in. When you have this simple binary it detracts from the actual program.”(Dave Austin)

WAITING FOR... THE TRUTH



- “I think public school teachers feel like they are beaten up in the media everyday and we are angry. There is a set up right now and it is so contentious between the two that if you say the word charter school in a union meeting or a big meeting of public school teachers and its visceral and people feel like they have been punched in the stomach.” (Katie Smith)

- “Teachers feel like here I am working 70 hours a week, with the toughest kids in the city and I can’t remove my kids, I got 20-25 % special ed, 30% English language learner, great kids, everyone is different in my class, and then I go watch that movie and I’m working 70 hours a week and I don’t see my own children and they telling me that... you know it hurts even though its not intentional. I think that is unhealthy though.” (Katie Smith)

FINDINGS: PERCEPTIONS OF COMPETITION LEADS TO RESISTANCE

- “It’s about any tension you see. It’s about money. I think traditional public schools are scared of their livelihood and they are also scared about the demise of something that been so central and important to American education and that’s real I get that” -Dave Austin
- “I think that the unions see it as a threat. At this point charter schools become a threat because it has been turned into competition. And when it becomes like that it becomes more of a fight than helping each other.” -Katie Smith
- “...Has not been lets learn for you, its been how can we protect ourselves from you.”-Katie Smith

FINDINGS: DIFFERENT DEMOGRAPHICS

- “I think that charters disproportionately attract *parents* that are interested in a different kind of education for their kid.”(Aaron Brown)
- “I don’t think that charters have that much of a different population of *kid* then the traditional public school in Boston. Aside from lower numbers in English language learner, and slightly lower numbers in special education, the numbers are pretty on par across the entire system. And so with that the students are largely the same.”(Aaron Brown)

- “And also to be fair the most active parents and the most active students if they perceive charter schools as being a better education, which is what the narrative is in the media by in large, then what’s going to happen to the traditional public school down the block? People aren’t going to want to go and the people who are going to want to go are people for whatever reason doesn’t have access to material or proactivity. And so that’s problematic, it is a creaming of the top in that respect even though it is not actively acted upon by the charter school.” (Dave Austin)

- “I want to say a couple of things; we want to be careful of comparing apples to apples. I want to acknowledge that I am sort of ignorant when we are comparing apples to apples and when we are not. I can’t say if one charter school and a traditional public school are both apples or is one like a Macintosh and one is a Honey Crisp.” (Katie Smith)

FINDING: LESSONS CAN BE LEARNED...FROM EACH OTHER

- “When I was at the teacher plus meeting, when the idea of collaboration came up, the director put it as what can public schools learn from charters, she didn’t mean it that way but one of the teachers took offense to that. *The idea that charters school teaching the public schools is never going to fly unless it is considered mutual.*” (Katie Smith)

CONCLUSION: WAITING FORDIALOGUE

■ Findings

■ Barriers:

- Harmful generalizations through public discourse
- Competition leads to resistance
- Teaching different students

■ Collaboration

- Improving professional development
- Adequate instruction for ALL types of kids
- Increasing student's achievement

THE ONE THING THAT THEY HAVE IN
COMMON, HAPPENS TO BE THE MOST
IMPORTANT...

