CPI Policy Statement

Charter Schools and Public Education

Prepared by the Contemporary Policy Institute

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Executive Summary

This policy document outlines the Contemporary Policy Institute's (CPI) stance on charter schools in relation to the public education system. It synthesizes CPI's position on how charter expansion, governance structures, funding mechanisms, and community involvement intersect to impact educational equity and democratic accountability.

Background and Context

Charter schools were originally conceived as innovative, flexible public institutions operating under the umbrella of the broader public education system. In their current form, however, many charter schools operate independently and with limited accountability. This divergence from the original intent has introduced significant policy challenges, including resource diversion, resegregation, and weakened public oversight.

Key Concerns and Findings

1. Social and Financial Implications

CPI believes that the current trajectory of charter school expansion promotes socioeconomic and racial resegregation, increasing the fragmentation of educational communities. Moreover, as motivated families gravitate toward charter schools, traditional public schools are left underfunded and serve higher-need populations without commensurate support.

2. Governance and Accountability

Charter schools often lack accountability to elected public bodies, instead being overseen by private boards of directors. CPI calls for a return to full public oversight and insists that all public education funding be subject to the same transparency, accountability, and conflict-of-interest laws as traditional public schools, as required by the California Senate Bill 126 (SB 126), effective January 1, 2020.

3. Demographic Disparities

Disparities persist in both academic outcomes and demographic representation. CPI advocates for policies that reintegrate charter schools into the public system to promote inclusion and equity.

4. Community Schools Movement

In 2021, state leaders established The California Community School Partnership Program (CCSP) and, subsequently, allocated $4.1 billion to address barriers to learning. Community schools should be supported as inclusive hubs of education and local empowerment. Integrating academics with health and social services, youth development, and community engagement, these schools address students' academic

needs but also challenges, such as food insecurity, trauma, and lack of access to healthcare.

Unlike many charter schools, which are often managed by distant boards or private operators, community schools are accountable to local communities through open oversight, transparent budgeting, and active parent-teacher-community partnerships. As state-funded schools, charter schools should be required to partner with families and local organizations per the CCSP to improve student outcomes.

CPI Policy Recommendations

1. Charter schools should be reintegrated into the public school system to ensure equity and accountability.
2. All public schools, including charters, must be governed by publicly elected or appointed officials.
3. In California, when a local education agency denies a charter school application, appeals to the County Board of Education should only be allowed where procedural error or bias is clearly demonstrated.

Community and Advocacy Strategy

CPI champions community engagement through support of grassroots mobilization, advocacy for community schools, and parent involvement. Transparency, equity, and innovation within public frameworks form the core of its mobilization efforts.

Vision Going Forward

CPI envisions a public education system where innovation thrives within a unified, accountable structure. Charter schools can play a role as model schools under the governance of local public authorities. Public funding must only support schools with equitable access, transparent governance, and inclusive outcomes.