CONTEMPORARY POLICY INSTITUTE

Policy Statement: Charter Schools and Public Education

CPI supports the establishment of Public Charter Schools that adhere to the following principles:

1. Charter schools should be integrated into the public school system to ensure equity and accountability.
2. All public schools, including charters, must be directly 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.
4. Charters should be approved only when their educational offerings do not duplicate existing public school curricula.
5. Charters must follow all applicable laws and policies, including a strict prohibition on religious instruction or orientation.

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

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 California law.

3. Demographic Disparities
Disparities persist in both academic outcomes and underrepresentation of socioeconomic and racial groups. CPI advocates for policies that reintegrate charter schools into the public system to promote inclusion and equity.

4. Community Schools
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 (like Community Schools), should be required to partner with families and local organizations per the CCSP to improve student outcomes.

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.

CPI Vision for Public Education

CPI envisions and actively supports 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 compliance with all applicable laws.

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