



BUCKEYE

# Charter Brief™

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## Before We Begin...

Over the years opponents as well as school-reform zealots have successfully lobbied changes that have stymied innovation, shifted power, increased unnecessary mandates moving charter schools closer to the district model and sponsors closer to mini ODE's. Now is the time to seize the opportunity and give relief to a stifled charter school law in Ohio which ranks 18 of 41 nationally; that's a "C". Including these changes in the upcoming budget will strengthen education for families throughout Ohio.

## 2011: A Look Ahead!

*Excitement tinged with a little apprehension?* **Excitement** with and for the incoming Governor, John Kasich, and his new administration; **apprehension** due to conditioning from past experiences impacting Ohio's charter school movement, especially significant changes contained in the budget bills.

### **We look ahead to:**

- A new year;
- New legislative session;
- New Republican Governor;
- New Republican majority in the Ohio House;
- New Speaker of the House, Bill Batchelder;
- New Governor's first budget to be released in March;
- Limited funding available for that budget.

As Ohio's next budget is being developed, many Ohioans brace for likely budget cuts. We see opportunity for the charter movement; opportunity that won't cost the state additional dollars. Important policy possibilities include:

- **Give families choice without zip code limitations**-allow charter schools to be located throughout the state, not just in low-performing districts;
- **Provide charter schools (as originally intended) opportunities for innovation** without the hatchet of closure looming above;
- **Stop any policy intended to "level the playing field"** between district and charters unless charters are fully funded. Ohio charters operate at 53% of district funding according to Center for Education Reform recent report;
- **Remove ALL caps**. Why is "50" the magic number for sponsors? Why limit choice for families with caps on the number of charter schools allowed in Ohio?
- **Remove the "operator" provision**. Allow an education reformer, a group of teachers, business leaders, etc. to open a charter school in Ohio. The sponsor can decide if the proposed school is designed for success.
- **Remove the provision that allows the sponsor to fire and appoint new school board**. Empower the Board to manage its contracts and/or renegotiate them.
- **Remove the provision that holds sponsors responsible for an "unauditable" charter school**. Ohio law requires each charter school to have a licensed treasurer. Make the treasurer responsible and liable.
- **Lift the moratorium on e-schools** and allow "blended" charter schools-combination of brick and mortar with virtual curriculum.

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- **Exempt all facilities used as schools from Ohio property tax**-no exceptions.
- **Ensure that charter schools are included** in the "fix" of calamity days. Charter school families get the same amount of snow, floods, power outages, etc. Why should they not have the same number of calamity days?
- **There could be many more**-facility funding, transportation, removing the mystery around value added calculations, changing the closure law which results in test scores for a small number of students forcing closure, etc.

## Around the Country

**Albany:** Brighter Choice Foundation supports 11 charter schools for inner-city children, k-4. They have merit pay, longer school days, year-round school, uniforms, high academic and behavioral expectations as well as extensive use of data. Boys and girls are in separate classrooms for learning and together for all other activities. A "Learning Guarantee" is offered. They describe themselves as "more than a school...a mission". Utilizing the new **3 Rs** of **R**elationship, **R**eadings and writing across all disciplines, **R**esults. Brighter Choice charter schools do get results as they rank #1 in many academic areas on state assessments compared to all public schools in Albany.

**California** law allows a "parent trigger". If 51% of parents sign a petition, they can force drastic change on a chronically failing district school. It will be closed or new administration will be put in place or the school will be taken over by a charter operator. Watch for other states to draft and pass similar legislation as parents are tired of "Waiting for Superman"! (If you haven't seen it, don't miss it!)

**Chicago:** Urban Prep, charter schools for the urban at risk male, employs Urban Prep Mentors. They spend their days tutoring, teaching a humanities-based life skills course; their nights and weekends mentoring. Their "package" includes a stipend + rent

+ health insurance + unlimited public transit pass. Students' school day is 8:30a.m. to 4p.m.; dress code – black blazers, red ties. Excerpts from their creed "...we are college bound...we never fail because we never give up...we believe in ourselves. We believe in each other. We believe in Urban Prep." 100% of the seniors have been admitted to 4-year college or university.

**Ohio:** Charter School Growth Fund (which is based in Colorado and provides dollars to innovative and high-performing charter schools) approved up to \$2 million for Breakthrough Schools in Cleveland to open four additional facilities. Breakthrough's plan is to open these schools in Cleveland public school buildings for nominal or no rent. Breakthrough Schools is currently composed of Citizen's Academy, The Intergenerational School, Entrepreneurship Preparatory and Village Preparatory charter schools in the Cleveland area.

**Various States:** Oprah Winfrey's Angel Foundation gave \$1 million grant to each of the following charter school programs-Aspire Schools in California, Denver School of Science & Technology; LEARN Charter School Network in Chicago, Mastery Charter Schools in Philadelphia, Sci Academy/New Orleans Charter Science and Math Academy, YES Prep Schools in Houston.

## Buckeye Charter School Boards, Inc. Update

Referred to as "BCSB" this is the only statewide association developed by and for charter school Board members and it's growing! New members in Youngstown, Toledo, Columbus have recently joined. Many from around the state took part in the first statewide meeting and training session for board members November 10<sup>th</sup> in Columbus. Congratulations to the BCSB Executive Committee for taking a whole day, Nov. 18, for strategic planning.

Information on this group is available from Mr. Don Penson, Chair of BCSB Executive Committee. Don can be reached via e-mail at [info@buckeyecharterboards.org](mailto:info@buckeyecharterboards.org)

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*Perz, former Ohio legislator, studied the national charter movement, introduced legislation allowing for Ohio's charter schools, revised it many times till finally in 1997 after 3 years of intense focus-success! She has stayed involved in the charter movement in various capacities. She knows original intent, current law and implementation challenges for stakeholders.*

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