

Congressional hearing focuses on charter schools

Republicans and Democrats in Congress may differ in their overall support of charter schools, but a recent somewhat tense hearing revealed a universal belief that greater accountability and better authorizing of charter schools should be a high priority.

In his testimony before the House Education and Workforce Committee, National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) President Greg Richmond noted that charter schools are one way, but not the only way, to give more kids access to great schools. More importantly, he said, students who have traditionally been underserved are benefiting, with studies showing that Black, Hispanic, low-income and special education students attending charter schools all show positive gains in math and reading compared to their peers at traditional schools.



He stressed several key points about which there are misperceptions:

- ◆ Charter schools administer the same standardized tests as all other public schools;
- ◆ They must comply with all federal laws on special education and non-discrimination;
- ◆ They must conduct annual audits of their finances;
- ◆ In most states, they are subject to the same public information and transparency laws as any other public body;
- ◆ They can lose their charter if they perform poorly;
- ◆ And perhaps the most important form of accountability, a charter school can only exist if parents choose to send their children to it.

He told lawmakers that where there are significant problems with charter school accountability, the root of the problem is usually poor authorizing.

“The problem is that we don’t have good authorizing everywhere,” Richmond said. “We have a Goldilocks situation: Some authorizers are doing too much, some are doing too little, and some are getting it just right.”

“Almost every issue that’s brought up here today on accountability, discrimination, financial transparency, goes back to how are these schools being approved in the first place and how are they being overseen ... It goes back to those authorizing bodies,” he said.