



## **ACTION ALERT**

### **Support Accountability For Public Education**

HB119

[Take Action!](#)

*Please contact your representative in the Ohio House today and urge him/her to support accountability for public education by backing two provisions in HB119 (Dolan): a two year moratorium on opening new charter schools, known in Ohio as community schools, and the elimination of the Educational Choice Scholarship voucher program.*

#### **BACKGROUND**

The Ohio House Finance and Appropriations Committee, chaired by Representative Dolan, will be wrapping up testimony this week on HB 119, the biennial budget bill for FY08-09. Included in the budget as introduced by Governor Strickland, are two changes in law that will help strengthen Ohio's public education system: a moratorium on the opening of new charter schools and the elimination of the Educational Choice Scholarship Program.

These provisions have galvanized parents who support these programs, and as a result, many supporters of community schools and vouchers have testified before the House Primary and Secondary Subcommittee. It is important for the members of the Ohio House to hear from constituents who support an accountable public education system, in which all schools that receive state funds are accountable to an elected board of education, and comply with the same state standards as traditional public schools.

#### **LEAGUE POSITIONS**

Three key elements of our Primary and Secondary Education position are the basis for action. LWVO supports:

- The use of state education standards as a method of "requiring a general education of high quality."
- Compliance with the same state standards by all chartered schools.
- A funding system for public elementary and secondary education that is accountable and responsive to the taxpayers. LWVO believes that public funds should be used only for public schools.

The League opposes the use of public funds to pay for students to attend private schools. The League does not support or oppose community schools, but believes that public funds should be used only for public schools, where decisions regarding education policies and finances are made by elected boards of education that are accountable to the public. The League also believes that to ensure quality, all schools that receive state funds should comply with the same standards, such as Operating Standards for Ohio's Schools (Chapter

3301-35 Ohio Administrative Code), Ohio's education accountability system, and Teacher Licensure Standards.

Community schools and voucher programs are promoted here in Ohio as options for parents to choose for the education of their children.

But, these programs follow different and less comprehensive standards than traditional public schools, and so parents may not have a good choice to make. If the state determines that parents should have options for educating their children, then the options should be held to the same standards for quality and accountability to the public, and accurate information for parents should be available to use to make decisions. Currently this is not happening.

#### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Educational Choice Scholarship Program was enacted in HB 66 (the 2006-2007 budget bill) and serves 2,880 students from 99 traditional schools. 279 nonpublic schools are participating in the program. However, the program was expanded last session in HB79 to make eligible 100,000 students in 213 schools, although the state will only fund up to 14,000 students.

Students are eligible if they are assigned to a public school that has been in academic emergency or watch for two of the previous three years. The program costs \$13.2 million in FY06-07.

The program requires the nonpublic schools to give state achievement tests to students who are receiving the voucher. However, the schools are not required to participate in the state's accountability system for schools, and therefore do not receive a Local Report Card. The schools can also set admissions criteria, so that not all students who apply will be accepted. Community schools were established through HB215 in 1997 as a pilot program, but have subsequently been expanded through changes in law. Currently there are 309 schools and 69 sponsors in 33 counties. Enrollment is more than 76,000 students.

Community schools have been plagued with problems involving academic performance, finances, record keeping, management, and illegal activities. According to ODE records, in the 2005-2006 school year, nearly half of charter schools were in either academic watch or academic emergency and three-quarters of charter schools operated by for-profit education management organizations were designated as under performing. Twenty of the 30 charter schools rated as academically excellent received their designation based on a single Local Report Card standard (i.e., attendance).