

The Center for Education Reform

Fiscal Equity Plan

The Center for Education Reform's fiscal equity campaign is an effort to organize and file concurrent lawsuits in Connecticut, Georgia and Missouri that challenge how these states fund charter schools so as to ensure these schools receive every dollar they are entitled to. The campaign will show that the capricious manner in which funding for charter schools is provided for in law and distributed through state action is compromising the education of children across the state and suggests malicious intent to hinder charter schools.

Charter schools serve a disproportionately large number of children in need. Charter schools are most likely to fail in states without strong laws to protect them and without strong funding mechanisms to support them equitably. Most states do not provide equitable funding streams to public charter schools. Language in statutes concerning charter school operating funds is often deliberately vague. We have found this language is often loosely interpreted or purposefully misused by those responsible for allocating funds to charter schools.

This campaign will accomplish three important measures to provide fair and equal funding for charter schools everywhere:

- Focus national attention on the basic inequity of charter funding this unfair practice.
- Seek a legal remedy to this fiscal abuse.
- Inspire positive legislative activity to rectify the problem in law.

**"No Child Deserves Less.
Voice Your Support For Full and Equal Charter School Funding."**

Introduction

The blatant disregard for equitable charter school funding, coupled with the inaction of strong, well-crafted advocacy is the primary reason why the fiscal health of charter schools of charter schools is suffering in Connecticut, Georgia and Missouri.

We must and will create equity for children, without which we will never address the educational deficiencies that plague too many communities. We will administer forceful, research-based advocacy programs that communicate and instill that goal in policymakers and the public, without whom any progress can be made.

CER is capable of succeeding in both of these arenas at the scale that is necessary for success. Our experience provides us with a roadmap for how best to bring about attention to inequity because we have proven to be up to the challenge of enhancing information and defeating ignorance on these issues.

Project Outline

The successful execution our Fiscal Equity Campaign will be based on four strategic components:

1. Legal:

A multi-state lawsuit that will result in equitable funding changes to charter laws in Connecticut, Georgia and Missouri.

2. Communications:

A major communications and marketing campaign that will produce awareness of the plight of inequity that charter schools face.

3. Legislative:

A legislative campaign that will establish positive relationships with charter school supporters and spur the introduction of bills to positively rectify the funding inequity problem through law.

4. Grassroots:

New grassroots groups and parent networks will be developed in Connecticut, Georgia and Missouri for legal and legislative strategies.

1. Legal

A multi-state lawsuit that will result in equitable funding changes to charter laws in Connecticut, Georgia and Missouri.

The law firm of Gibson, Dunn and Crutcher, LLP was founded in 1890 and has earned a worldwide reputation for providing high-quality, innovative legal services while connecting itself to servicing disadvantaged communities throughout the United States with its renowned Pro Bono Program. Over the past three months, CER has partnered with Gibson, Dunn in a largely pro-bono effort to take on legal inequities in public charter school policy that result in lower funding, isolation and the erosion of opportunities for children who need them most.

The Center for Education Reform has designed a plan to initiate lawsuits seeking a legal remedy to the plight of inequity in Connecticut, Georgia and Missouri. These lawsuits will be filed by local counsel (working in concert with Gibson, Dunn and Crutcher LLP) in each of these states and will be led by plaintiffs that are made up of affected charter school parents and students. It is our belief that this legal effort will play a significant role in causing lawmakers to begin to account for their ill treatment of public charter schools.

Action Points

- **Identification of plaintiffs**
 - Working with schools and local organizations, CER will identify potential plaintiffs to be the face of the litigation efforts. Each state effort will be made up of at least five and no more than ten plaintiffs. Composition of plaintiff pool should mirror demographic composition of charter schools within each state where a lawsuit is being filed.
 - CER will coordinate meetings between plaintiffs and counsel at the local and national level in order to provide them with a realistic picture of what being part of these lawsuits will entail. Questions and concerns will be addressed and a walk-through of the timeline of the lawsuits will be presented to plaintiffs and their families.
- **Creation of strategies and support for other groups to be involved**
 - Solicit partnerships with other organizations that will file Amicus Curiae briefs
 - Hold conferences on inequity in charter schools within states where lawsuits will be filed as well as other venues where the practice exists
 - Partner with other organizations in non-lawsuit states that are interested in replicating fiscal equity campaign efforts within their state
- **Research and analysis**

- CER will research previous equitable funding lawsuits to identify successful strategies employing these arguments in new suits.
- CER is polling individual school and specific areas in Connecticut, Georgia and Missouri to identify examples of major funding discrepancies.

What Legal Success Looks Like:

A successful legal challenge to inequity will be gauged by several factors: a court's successful consideration of the merits of the case; a response by legislative bodies to amend their laws rather than face continued legal challenges; an attempt by other legislatures to avoid litigation by crafting sound laws up front.

2. Communications:

A major communications and marketing campaign that will produce awareness of the plight of inequity that charter schools face.

A successful legal effort requires that the strategy be promoted and the public engaged. A lawsuit cannot bring about outrage if no one knows it is being undertaken. It will not impact laws if no one cares.

Communication that sticks is an essential ingredient for success. The Center for Education Reform has conducted research and numerous public opinion polls in various states to ensure that knowledge and support for public charter schools continues to grow. These efforts have shown us that there is significant room for *knowledge and support for charter schools to improve.*

Fiscal Equity lawsuits in Connecticut, Georgia and Missouri will require a specific and dedicated communications plan to leverage support across the many audiences we will be targeting

Action Points

- **Top Level Media**
 - Develop major story on a TV news magazine show (i.e. 60 Minutes) to illustrate inequities in public charter schools. Show will air just after lawsuits are launched. The Center for Education Reform has contacts within national media that are prepared to showcase these stories. Utilization of regional and state TV networks will also be utilized for programming in order to reach audiences in specific areas throughout Connecticut, Georgia and Missouri.
 - CER will engage directly with editorial boards of the major news dailies within Connecticut (Hartford Courant, New Haven Register Connecticut Post), Georgia (Atlanta Journal Constitution, Savannah Morning News and Missouri (Jefferson City News Tribune, Kansas City Star and St. Louis Post Dispatch). We will bring plaintiffs to meet with each board so that they can share their stories on how charter schools have improved their lives and how inequity prevents those successes from being greater and more inclusive of others.
 - Opinion pieces composed by CER and other like-minded organizations would also be submitted to all major newspapers in Connecticut, Georgia and Missouri with the intent of having them placed within newspapers in the week following the filing of lawsuits.
 - Engage with news desk of weekly newspapers and radio stations to promote message of fiscal inequity and lawsuits throughout the state.

- Plan and execute press conferences related to lawsuit kickoff in each state (Connecticut, Georgia and Missouri. Work with grassroots strategy to formalize necessary logistics.
- **Web Marketing**
 - Create and maintain web site (i.e. www.GAchartersdeservemore.com) that will be dedicated to providing information on each state's specific efforts. Web site will provide narrative of the charter landscape within that state and will provide answers to FAQ's that visitors may have. Sites will each have a referral feature within them so that supporters can "Tell a Friend."
 - Create blog to be housed within each website to link to news coverage of state efforts and to solicit feedback from supporters and parents across the state and country.
 - Partner with other organizations in non-lawsuit states that are interested in replicating fiscal equity campaign efforts within their state
- **On the Ground Communications**
 - CER will identify and place ads with campaign message on Billboards, buses and bus shelters.
 - Establish hotline to answer calls from interested individuals who will become supporters, potential plaintiffs or volunteers for Fiscal Equity Campaign efforts.
 - Produce creative materials (palm cards, flyers, to be distributed in neighborhood businesses such as grocery stores and beauty shops
 - Place ads in community newspapers, church bulletins
- **Community Outreach**
 - CER will create meeting schedule to be implemented by grassroots operatives in the field. Meetings will disseminate information to groups and solicit new supporters.
 - Cull and develop human-interest stories from efforts. Screen meeting participants to identify potential plaintiffs.
 - Establish relationships with local businesses to promote fiscal equity campaign efforts.
 - CER will provide media training and develop talking points for plaintiff people.

What Communications Success Looks Like:

A successful communications strategy will be measured by the growth of knowledge in the public's awareness of charter schools and understanding of equity. Success will also be measured in media reach and successful development of major news programs, opinion editorials and news articles. Creation of strong relationships with respected businesses will also be an indication of a success in this communications strategy.

3.Legislative:

A legislative campaign that will establish positive relationships with charter school supporters and spur the introduction of bills to positively rectify the funding inequity problem through law.

Of the many lessons we have learned within the charter movement, one in particular resonates when viewed from the perspective of harsh reality. Charter school laws matter and strong laws produce strong results. There's no other way to frame this argument. Successful passage of a strong law that specifically delineates fiscal equity for charter schools is paramount in the ability for that school to succeed without worrying whether or not its monies will be manipulated in any way.

A successful legislative effort requires significant education be provided to state legislators and their staff on the do's and don'ts of laws and how the don'ts eventually morph themselves into items that require legal action to be remedied.

Action Points

- **Personalized Briefings and Education Opportunities**
 - CER has identified charter friendly legislators in each of the states where lawsuits will be filed. We will approach these legislators with our efforts and ask them to assist us in identifying other like-minded colleagues of theirs in order to bulk up our network of support.
 - We will meet with and brief all sympathetic legislators and their staff on issues of funding discrepancies and provide them with toolkits of the issues involved and how the schools in question are being affected.
 - Legislators that are supportive of these efforts will be incorporated into our communications plan and will be encouraged to speak out in favor of fiscal equity in Opinion pieces, letters to the Editor and radio and television interviews. These legislators will also be utilized within the kickoff rallies and press conferences in each state.
 - National, state and local leaders in support of fiscal equity in charter schools will be brought together in order to meet with legislators on both sides of the issue.
 - States with model charter school laws will host legislators from Connecticut, Georgia and Missouri in order to demonstrate how their strong laws have led to increased success for charter schools within their state
- **Affected Constituent Meetings**
 - We will schedule and participate in meetings between constituents (plaintiffs) and legislators so that lawmakers will be able to hear

firsthand from plaintiffs and other affected parties on the predicament of inequity. Legislators need to see and hear from the faces and mouths of those who elect them. Law makers must experience and empathize with the plight of parents who want more for their children, with the struggle of schools who are trying to do it all with not enough funds and with the success stories of students who are thriving within these schools despite the obstacles. Establishing these connections will tie legislators into our issues in a holistic manner.

- **Letter-writing & meeting campaign for constituents**
 - A letter writing campaign targeted to specific pro and anti-charter legislators will be implemented. Language will be drafted and shared with supporters and charter school parents and staff.
 - Charter operators and parents will communicate with lawmakers and make repeated visits throughout the year at home and in Capitol offices to legislators so as to rectify the wrongs caused by fiscal inequity.
- **Model Legislation and Corrective Measures in Law**
 - CER will provide model legislation to willing advocates that includes ironclad provisions to ensure equal funding for charter schools. We will meet directly with legislators to provide them with our research analyses and policy recommendations that will strengthen their charter school law.
 - CER will help build support for corrective bills that are introduced within each state's legislative session and will organize testimony from interested stakeholders and supporters before the committees that will be debating each bill.

What Legislative Success Looks Like:

A successful legislative strategy will be measured by increased communication with lawmakers, well-attended briefings, bills introduced and laws passed in each of the states where lawsuits have been filed

4.Grassroots:

New grassroots groups and parent networks will be developed in Connecticut, Georgia and Missouri for legal and legislative strategies.

A successful grassroots strategy is one that is made up of a network of interested parties. They may not all have the same interests in mind but are joined together in a common goal that transcends any differences that may exist. Parents are the best and biggest hope for charter school progress, for their defense and for their expansion. It is necessary to unleash the energy of these parents on the public and policy makers. Non-connected citizens also play a role in these efforts. In every major policy or legal battle that has ever been successful, it is often an organic group of citizens that develops and pushes forward the demand.

Action Points

- **Identification and management of local grassroots coordinators**
 - CER will identify and manage local coordinators of grassroots effort. These leaders will organize meetings of residents in target school zones and identify leaders (potential plaintiffs) for the effort from these gatherings.
 - Coordinator will identify, engage and partner with other established organizations on the ground in order to multiply scope of efforts.
- **Successful utilization of Parents as Grassroots Advocates**
 - At least ten and no more than twenty parent training sessions will be conducted at charter schools in cooperation with state and community charter school groups. Though parent lists are and should be guarded by each school, grassroots coordinator will meet with each school to explain focus of efforts and how they are meant to enhance the success of the school.
 - For parents of children in charter schools, we will contact designated school administrators to distribute the parent information sessions invitation to each parent, both via backpack through their kids as well as through regular mail.
 - We will also utilize the parents of children on waiting lists for local charter school by mailing invitations to them for these sessions and explaining the importance of helping to advocate for more choices for their children.
 - Follow up each successful meeting with a mailing to participants that includes their very own grassroots toolkit: containing strategies on letter-writing, calls to legislative offices and directing them to each state effort's website to "Tell a Friend".
- **Building relationships with community**
 - Identify interested non-charter citizens and add them to our efforts.
 - Conduct small group parent training; organize community dinners and workshops designed around pre-existing, well-respected

- venues that have influence on parents (such as day care centers, churches and other social venues).
- Work within communications strategy to identify most effective means for advertising meetings and overall campaign message within each targeted community.
- Formalize relationships with local newspapers and churches in order to utilize their distribution as a target audience.
- Execute distribution of campaign materials and messaging to local businesses, churches, grocery stores and other community organization.
- **Organization of rallies**
 - Local grassroots coordinators will work within communications strategy in order to identify location of rallies and press conference for lawsuit kickoff event.
 - Obtain permits/permission for these events from proper authorities. Develop alternative locations as back-ups.
 - Create logistics and transportation plan for each rally venue and execute trial runs at each site.
 - Draft rally captains to be charged with managing rally participants on day of rally. Each group of 25 or 50 participants would be tasked to a rally captain who would structure proper chants and messaging at appropriate times. Rally captains would be supervised and prepared for this event by a Rally Coordinator
 - Distribute posters, lawn signs and placards to rally participants

What Grassroots Success Looks Like:

A successful grassroots strategy will be measured by a better-educated state or region, demonstrated support for charter schools, increased pressure on policy makers to respond favorably to charter schools in policy and practice and the ability for state based groups to stay focused on the goals of fiscal equity for charter schools.

Project Timeline

November:

- Finalize research to demonstrate clear evidence of major funding discrepancies for charter schools in Connecticut, Georgia and Missouri.
- Launch Grassroots Action Plan. Identify and hire local grassroots coordinators in each state.
- Partner with established local associations and grassroots organizations to mobilize campaign message.
- Conduct meetings at individual charter schools to share relevant findings, develop public support and identify case studies of funding discrepancy.
- Interview and identify parents and students to serve as potential plaintiffs.
- Select participants to be the face of the lawsuit in each state.
- Partner with established local associations and grassroots organizations to mobilize campaign message.

December:

- Formalize Communications (media and marketing) plan.
- Conduct media training and provide talking points to all three groups of plaintiffs on a central locale.
- Scout potential locations for press conferences and rallies. Formalize logistics plan for rally.

January/February:

- File lawsuits
- Execute State House Rallies and Press Conferences
- Initiate legislative activity to rectify the problem in law.
- Conduct meetings between affected constituents and legislators in each state
- Launch state specific websites related to lawsuits