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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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MICHIGAN COMMISSION DOES HATCHET-JOB ON CHARTER SCHOOLS *Conclusions Appease Education Establishment, Charter Opponents*

(Washington, D.C. 4/11/02) A review of Michigan charter schools by a politically-appointed body charged with conducting a “complete and objective review of all aspects” of charter schools in Michigan offers misleading and inconsistent conclusions, observers say.

The report of the Commission on Charter Schools in Michigan offers recommendations on how to restrict charter school freedom, while admitting that few conclusions can be made about the effectiveness of charter schools given the overall absence of data.

The Commission failed to provide data about the achievement of charter schools, the reason for their high attendance rates, or their impact on traditional schools, despite the fact that such information is available. The Commission extended its job to “identifying ways to improve and support Michigan’s public educational system,” a different and broader task than what they were assigned to do.

Commission members included the president of the state’s largest school employees union, the Michigan Education Association, as well as an associate professor of educational policy from Wayne State University, which while authorized to do so, has only chartered one lab school.

CER president Jeanne Allen characterized the report as “deliberately misleading and inconsistent.” “As is the case with many political commissions, the group ignored the facts. It neglected the growth in state test scores in many charter schools, or why parents — who are taxpayers and deserved their attention — choose them. And they chose to ignore the evidence in Michigan that charter schools have spurred public school districts to improve.”

The Commission's major recommendations — and a full analysis of how they are flawed is available at <http://www.edreform.com>. Following are highlights:

- 1) The Commission based their conclusions only on hearings, and did not conduct site visits, evaluations or in-depth research into charter schools to provide them with objective information.
- 2) Only charter schools would be required to conduct annual testing in grades 3-8 next year. There seems to be no concern about traditional public schools in Michigan, where cities such as Detroit are stuck at a 29% graduation rate.
- 3) The Commission makes unsubstantiated claims about how much funding charter schools need to do their job, and without evidence says that charters do not serve the same number of special education students that traditional schools do.
- 4) The Commission believes that the solution to what it views as lax accountability in charter schools is to add a layer of control to state government oversight, as if there is a correlation between big government and good schools.
- 5) The Commission says that the state should require that authorizers hold charter boards accountable for meeting standards and yearly progress. That relationship already exists.
- 6) It is recommended that school officials be permitted to review and comment upon decisions to put charter schools in and around their districts. Since school districts are traditionally hostile to charter schools, this is clearly an effort to retain power.
- 7) The report recommends that people involved with charter schools be expected to endure stringent conflict of interest requirements that are not currently applied to any public schools. The Commission itself was comprised of individuals who have conflicts — the head of the Michigan Education Association, for example.
- 8) Private business involvement in charter schools took a beating in this report, with the Commission concluding that any private company that manages charter schools should disclose a level of information that is not sought from any other sector of private business that works within public education.
- 9) The report recommends that a new “special purpose” charter be created that would accommodate 50% or more of troubled and at-risk students, ignoring the fact that charter schools already serve a near equal (and sometimes disproportionate) share of at-risk children.
- 10) The Commission ignored the wide array of research into what makes quality charter schools, and ignored lessons from other states, concluding without research that charter schools have reason to be restricted.

For more information on the commission report, charter school views and CER's analysis, go to http://www.edreform.com/charter_schools/micommission.htm and for more on Michigan charter schools, go to <http://www.charterschools.org>.

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