

To: Cheryl Hillen  
From: Kara Kerwin  
Date: March 19, 2009  
Re: Wyoming 2008 Efforts Wrap-up

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The Center for Education Reform has long looked at Wyoming as a state to watch and help cultivate its charter school movement.

To date, none of the three charters that exist in Wyoming are members of the Association. However, it can be argued that these schools aren't very representative of charter school principles.

In early 2007, a young first-term legislator became extremely interested in the charter school issue. **Representative Amy Edmonds** teamed up with Steve and took the helm of the Association, while also contemplating legislation that would vastly improve their state's law. Again, CER was asked to get involved.

In October 2007 CER commissioned **Kellyanne Conway and the Polling Company** to host a focus group in Jackson and again in early November in Cheyenne. Throughout November, December and January I worked with Amy Edmonds on preparing legislation, a statewide survey instrument and Jeanne and I participated on several conference calls with her board at the Association.

On February 14, 2008 (Valentine's Day), we launched the poll/focus group results in a press conference at the state house in Cheyenne while Amy Edmonds introduced HB 152 – which would create an independent charter school authorizer in Wyoming. We knew it was a long shot, as it was a 20-day budget session, but Amy and her legislative allies had really done their homework in the legislature. I attended the event, went office to office with the handful of parents Amy had partnered with, worked the media by calling several local radio and television shows, and we decided to “drop in” on the *Wyoming Tribune Eagle* with our press release.

We created a great buzz and the press conference was well-attended (for Wyoming). We had approximately 15-20 parents, at least 5 legislators that stayed for the entirety of our announcement with a few staffers and additional legislators stopping by as they crossed the rotunda, and more than five reporters, including state-house television (who told us they couldn't fit us into their schedule). Overall, the local group was impressed and energetic.

I sat with the parents and watched as the House voted to introduce the bill. In Wyoming, you need 2/3 majority for introduction in a special budget session. We lost by one vote (a legislator changed his vote at the last minute, and one of our allies left early because she “had a headache”). Going into the legislative session, we were well aware this would be the likely case, but the bill did much better than we could have believed in a tight budget session. Representative Edmonds vowed to keep at it.

By April 2008, CER and Representative Edmonds came to a partnership agreement to support the association in its efforts to raise public awareness across the state about charters and the need for better options. **The original plan we agreed to is attached.**

CER commissioned a temporary logo for the association and provided content and feedback for the association's website.

I developed a brochure on behalf of the association, we collected lists of legislators, parents and the media and decided on 5-7 target communities throughout the state to hold community meetings. This took a while for Amy to get started as her board was not as hands-on as they said they would be in terms of hosting events, etc.

CER brought Representative Edmonds to Washington, DC in early June as a panelist in our *Lessons from the States Leaders Forum*. We worked both nationally and in the state of Wyoming to educate individuals about Wyoming's restrictive charter school law and what it takes to improve it.

In July, to coincide with Jeanne and my trip to the Alliance for School Choice Retreat in Jackson, we pushed ahead to plan two community luncheons, one in Jackson and one in Cheyenne. Jeanne was the featured speaker to approximately 30 local community leaders, parents, minimal press and a handful of legislators in both cities. CER's message was well-received by both groups.

Later in September, CER worked with Amy to schedule additional events. She pulled together another luncheon in Cheyenne and CER flew out our friend Dr. Yvonne Chan from California to address the group and share her story.

After this event, it was clear that Representative Edmonds became extremely tied up in her reelection bid for November.