



**WYOMING ASSOCIATION
OF PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS**

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Wyomingites want fundamental change in state's charter school law

New opinion studies released today show overwhelming public support for expanded public education options

Cheyenne, Wy. (February 14, 2008) – A new study released today by the Wyoming Association of Public Charter Schools and The Center for Education Reform, a Washington-based school choice advocacy group, shows that a majority of Wyomingites are demanding fundamental change to state laws, creating more and better education opportunities for students and families.

"Wyomingites overwhelmingly support the idea of greater choice in public education," said Jordan Aslor, chairman of the Wyoming Association of Public Charter Schools. "A strong charter school law will help create innovative, accountable education solutions for families across the state."

The study consisted of polling and focus groups with Wyoming voters. The results were presented today at a news conference at the state Capitol.

"Wyoming families want and deserve greater opportunity for high-quality public education," said State Representative Amy Edmonds (R-District 12). "Their voice for choice demands the state act immediately. This week, I've introduced legislation that help provide Wyoming families greater opportunities to choose public schools that fit their children's particular needs."

Major findings of the study include:

- 76 percent of people surveyed support allowing communities to create public charter schools.
- 68 percent feel that parents should be allowed to choose from a number of public schools rather than assigning children to one public school based solely on where they live.
- 59 percent of those surveyed feel that more than one group (beyond local school boards) should have the authority to create charter schools.
- Wyomingites strongly support one of the key principles of charter schools - parental involvement - and feel that local school boards should engage and not exclude parents across the state.
- Many citizens in Wyoming are critical of the current public education system. If given a grade, residents in both Cheyenne and Jackson ranked their schools a "D." If given options, parents overwhelmingly supported choosing schools without geographical restrictions and added costs.

By authorizing more charter schools, families currently stuck in failing schools with no other options will have a chance to improve their children's educational future.

Under current state law, only local school boards have the authority to approve the creation of charter schools. Because charter schools are funded with public dollars that would otherwise go to regular public schools, charter proponents advocate state laws that provide for an independent authorizing authority. Rep. Edmonds has introduced legislation (HB 152) that would create an independent authorizing entity in the state of Wyoming.

Eighty percent of the nation's 4,150 charter schools exist in states with multiple authorizers. Currently, 17 states have multiple chartering authorities. States that allow only local school boards to authorize charter schools are home to the least amount of charter schools and thus, the fewest public education options.

States with "school board-only" laws limit the nature and scope of charter schools, and often limit their innovation and funding. School boards have also proven to be lax on accountability. An audit of California's school districts found that they were not properly monitoring both the conventional public schools and charter schools.

Other states have created alternate authorizers including:

- The Florida Schools of Excellence Commission (2006).
- Charter School Institute of Colorado (2004)
- New York, through the State University of New York (1998).
- Arizona State Board for Charter Schools

The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices recognizes that multiple authorizers are a key component of strong charter school legislation.

The poll's results show that the idea of independent charter school authorizers receives strong tri-partisan support among Georgia voters, with more than 70 percent of Republicans, Democrats and Independents agreeing that other groups should have the authority to approve the creation of charter schools. More than 80 percent of both Blacks and Hispanics were more likely to favor authorizers other than school boards.

The poll was commissioned by the Wyoming Association of Public Charter Schools and The Center for Education Reform and conducted by The Polling Company Inc. of Washington D.C. Random telephone interviews were conducted with 404 registered voters throughout the state of Wyoming from February 4 – 6, 2008. Maximum sampling error is +/- 4.9 percent.

Focus groups were commissioned by the Wyoming Association of Public Charter Schools and The Center for Education Reform and conducted by The Polling Company Inc. of Washington D.C. in Cheyenne and Jackson, Wy. Participants varied in terms of age, political party and ideology, education level, household income, and marital and family status.

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