

To Juice Fong (in response to
<http://fongalong.com/2014/01/30/supporting-school-choice-and-taking-down-charter-critiques/>):

Take down of charter critiques!? The problem with your “take down” is that you’ve mis-characterized most of the criticism of charters to such an extent that your “take down” is left grasping at straws (yes, I’m implying you’re at least partially making a straw man argument).

Regarding critique #1 (XYZ charter school stinks, and therefore all charter schools stink.):

Who makes this argument? Most critics acknowledge that there are some good charters and many average charters.

Regarding critique #2 (Charter schools drain the district of its public funds.):

Your counter argument is that the money follows the student. Try this thought experiment: how about we have one school for every student. The money follows the student so every school shouldn’t complain they don’t have enough to provide a full education. Yes, this is an extreme example, but underscores the problem with diluting public funds across many schools.

This is compounded if charters are not taking their fair share of students that are more costly to teach (special ed, ELL, free lunch). Refer to <http://schoolfinance101.wordpress.com/2013/02/16/from-portfolios-to-parasites-the-unfortunate-path-of-u-s-charter-school-policy/> for a fuller critique (I look forward to your take down of this link).

Regarding critique #3 (privatization):

Your argument is basically that charters are public because they take public funds, have some public oversight (usually an authorizing agency), and usually take all students in a jurisdiction. Then how come charters sometimes claim they’re private (refer to http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/living-in-dialogue/2013/10/charter_defenders_insist_they_.html). More to the point, there are many ways that charters are not really public (though these vary by state). Refer to <http://schoolfinance101.wordpress.com/2012/05/02/charter-schools-are-public-private-neither-both/> for a fuller breakdown.

As a parent, the critical distinction is that charters are typically owned and run by private interests – NOT teachers, communities, or the public. Yes, there is typically some oversight though often not enough. And, yes, sometimes regular public schools don’t give these stakeholders enough power either, but that’s not a justification for making it worse. (And, yes I acknowledge that a few charters have more teacher/community input, but such exceptions prove the rule).

Regarding critique #4 (Charter schools are union busters.):

I addressed this to some extent in my other comment (which is still awaiting your moderation), but I'll add a couple more comments. You say that lack of unions allows charters to "establish its own contract with teachers..." Think for a sec what this means. It basically means that management gets to set the contract and teachers can, individually, take it or go find a job somewhere else (unless they're a TFA recruit, in which case they have to take it). Your personal anecdote aside, teachers in charter typically make less and often report worse working conditions. But, in any case, how is giving all the power to management ensuring better working conditions?

Moreover, despite your claim that "union-busting" is an "invalid argument" I don't actually see anywhere where you actually describe this critique, much less take it down. Charters – in general – are clearly backed by those wishing to bust unions. They rarely say words like "busting" explicitly but all the efforts to remove seniority protections, test-based accountability, ability to collectively bargain are attempts at weakening unions. And, charters which are overwhelmingly non-union are a similar effort. Sure, charter proponents have other goals as well and many may believe that union busting is just a necessary side-effect, but that doesn't negate that charter expansion is in significant part aimed at busting unions. Own it if you're going to do it.