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## **Editorial: Charters are important segment of schools mix**

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No Washington parent wants to send their child to a “common” school, especially as that term was defined more than 100 years ago, when high schools were excluded.

Today, K-12 education encompasses a variety of alternatives no one envisioned in 1909, the starting point for much of Tuesday’s oral arguments before the state Supreme Court. Opponents of charter schools are asking the court to find they do not conform to what was once considered a common, or conventional, school, and therefore are not eligible for state funding.

But the way Washington pays for schools has changed as much as education has, and the justices took up much of the time for arguments with questions about what constitutes a common school. They also asked whether supplementing property tax revenues specifically set aside for education with general funds necessarily restricts all the commingled money to supporting only common schools.

For the Spokane School District, those issues may be academic. If, as opponents say, common schools are those controlled by voters, then the district’s unique status as the only one in Washington that has the power to establish charter schools negates that argument: District voters elect the board, and so control decision-making.

Charter schools proponents go further, asserting that because the state provides most of the money for education, then it is the state voters who control. And the majority of those voters, albeit a small one, approved the 2012 initiative that authorized the creation of 40 charter schools in Washington.

While the justices will weigh these and other aspects of the case, the controlling factor in the debate over charter schools should be the best interests of the children. The Washington Education Association and its partners in the court challenge say directing state dollars to charter schools dilutes the resources available for educating all students.

Charter proponents, this newspaper among them, consider funds that allow educators to create alternative learning centers for students not thriving in traditional classroom as money well-spent, for everyone.

For example, mandated reductions in classroom size translate into a need for more classrooms. The cost will run into the tens of millions of dollars. Charter schools have to find their own home. Spokane's first charter school – Pride Prep – will be located in office space once occupied by Social Security workers.

And without the economies of scale enjoyed by regular schools, charter academies will have to innovate, or fall by the wayside if their students do not meet the same performance benchmarks as other students.

In its McCleary decision, the court ordered the state to fulfill its constitutional duty to provide ample funding for education. When the justices render their opinion on charter schools, they should endorse ample opportunities for all kinds of learning.