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Guest commentary

Court correct that charter schools be directly accountable to public

By Ken White

[Cindy Omlin's Nov. 29th letter](#) in support of public charter schools commits four sins of omission.

It argues that the Washington state Supreme Court ruling against public charter schools ignores Washington state citizens, disregards the promise of opportunity and choice for teachers and students, and favors “entrenched stakeholders concerned with maintaining their power and the status quo.”

First, Omlin, director of Northwest Professional Educators, omits telling readers that her organization wants teachers to forgo unions and relinquish rights to collective bargaining. It represents corporate-style school reform that is stymied by teacher unions. It advocates a top-down approach that creates arbitrary power and cuts off the voice of teachers, overlooking mutual respect and partnership between teachers and administrators.

Second, Omlin does not admit to how the Supreme Court ruling actually takes citizen interests into account. The court ruled that under present law, public charter schools are not “common schools” and cannot be funded by common school funds. They are not publicly governed, not locally controlled and not under the authority of elected school boards — all elements of citizen oversight of public funds. Charter schools are part of the rising tide of education privatization that wants to survive on the public's dime, benefit from public funds but not be accountable to the public.

Third, Omlin ignores a Stanford study that shows how charter school students at the end of the school year are eight days ahead of public school kids in reading, and show 29 percent more learning gains in math. Positive results at first glance except that 40 percent of charter school students perform the same as public schools students in math and 31 percent perform significantly weaker. In other words, 71 percent of charter school students are at the same level as public school students or worse. Charter schools are clearly not the opportunity they claim to be, and the choice to invest public funds in them at the expense of public schools is a poor one.

Finally, Omlin avoids being specific about who are “entrenched stakeholders.” Well, they are a first-grade teacher, a school librarian, a school counselor — people who serve the community on an average salary of \$55,000. Of course, public school teachers are entrenched in power and status when compared to charter school teachers who have an average salary of \$41,592. But neither compare to the real entrenched stakeholders as reported by the New York Daily News. Charter school executives like Eva Moskowitz of Success Charter Network gets a salary of \$316,570 and David Levin, KIPP co-founder and superintendent, follows close behind with \$296,750.

Public charter schools drain funds from public schools. Perhaps we should follow the money.

Ken White is a resident of Marysville.

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