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Daley defends charter schools here as a success

August 19, 2004

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Mayor Daley on Wednesday scoffed at criticism being leveled nationally at the performances of charter schools, saying here they've been a "great success."

Indeed, a quick Chicago Sun-Times analysis of preliminary state test scores indicated most Chicago charter elementary schools are outperforming city averages. However, most of the city's charter high schools are underperforming regular public schools, whose scores have long embarrassed the system.

At a news conference at McCormick Place, Daley said criticism of charters is likely borne of "bureaucracy fighting new concepts." Charters get public money but are exempted from many rules governing public schools so they can experiment.

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"We need new concepts in education," Daley said. He said old approaches aren't working, as has been seen in some public schools.

Daley was reacting to a study of U.S. Education Department data released this week showing charter school students are scoring about 5 percent lower than their public school counterparts. The data were collected through random surveys of charter schools, none of them in Illinois.

The mayor said he is pleased with the progress of Chicago's charters, which will comprise a third of the 100 new schools he plans to create in the next six years under his Renaissance 2010 initiative.

Daley's contention is backed up by a Chicago Board of Education study that concluded that Chicago's charters showed "strong academic performance" during the 2002-03 school year, and had outperformed neighborhood schools of their students on 72 percent of a battery of indicators -- most of them academic.

Using a single gauge, and more current -- but preliminary -- test scores, the Sun-Times found that seven of 12 elementary charters beat citywide averages on all state tests taken this year, while only 2 of 6 high school charters did so. However, most of the city's charters are small schools, where small changes in student population or test results can cause large score changes from year to year.

One critic, Julie Woestehoff of Parents United for Responsible Education, said it's "simply not true" that Chicago's charters are a "great success."

"The yardstick they are using for charter schools is just not the same, and they are taking a pass on charter schools," Woestehoff said. "What they are doing is misleading parents into trusting a school because they label it a charter school."

Daley also continued his criticism of requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind act, which has 22 Chicago public schools facing state takeover, staff firings or conversion to charters unless scores dramatically improve.

"The state's never going to take them over," Daley said. "If the federal government takes them over, they'll be collapsing."

He said Democrats and Republicans who backed the bill share the blame for burdening schools with "more and more bureaucracy" while doing nothing to help.

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THE CHARTER DIFFERENCE		
(*Percentage of 2004 state tests meeting or exceeding state standards)		
Chicago charter elementary schools	ISAT composite % ME*	Difference from Chicago average
Chicago average	45.5	
ACT HS	40.1	-5.4
CHICAGO INTERNATIONAL		
	56.1	10.6
GV PASSAGES	62.5	17
KIPP ASCEND	55	9.5
LEARN	53.8	8.3
LOCKE	60.2	14.7
NORTH KENWOOD/OAKLAND		
	61.3	15.8
PAZ	61.3	15.8
PERSPECTIVES HS	45.2	-0.3
SHABAZZ	43.2	-2.3
TRIUMPHANT	34.9	-10.6
YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP HS		
	40.8	-4.7
Beating Chicago average: 7 of 12 schools, or 58%		

Chicago charter high schools PSAE composite Difference from

Chicago charter elementary schools	PSAE composite % ME*	Difference from Chicago average
Chicago average	32.1	
ACT HS	12.6	-19.5
CHICAGO INTERNATIONAL	34.4	2.3
NOBLE STREET	50.7	18.6
NORTH LAWDALE	17.1	-15
PERSPECTIVES HIGH SCHOOL	18	-14.1
YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP HS	13.3	-18.8

Beating Chicago average: 2 of 6 schools, or 33 percent

NOTE: *Based on preliminary 2004 results of the Illinois Standards Achievement Tests and Prairie State Achievement Exams; a Chicago Board of Education 2002-2003 study of Chicago charters used more indicators and showed more positive results.*

SOURCE: *Chicago Board of Education*