



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
OF ILLINOIS**

332 S. Michigan Ave, #525, Chicago, IL 60604
312.939.5935
www.lwvil.org

July 24, 2014

RE: 2013-2015 LWVIL Charter School Position
Update Study

Dear League Member,

Thank you for your role in helping the League of Women Voters of Illinois update our charter school position.

The **Yes/No Matrix** corresponds to the **Consensus Questions**. Information in the YES column supports responding YES to the issue statement and information in the NO column supports a response of NO. The information in each cell below is intended to be a brief snapshot. Please note that superscript numbers in the cells correspond to references at the end of the matrix. Members are urged to examine the references for more in-depth understanding.

Frequently, we cite an example of a problem which has occurred and are NOT suggesting that all charter schools are guilty of the behavior. Rather, the point is that certain questionable practices have been allowed to occur, suggesting there may be a need for a position and legislation tightening accountability, transparency, or funding regulations.

This matrix and all other study materials can be found on the LWVIL website: <http://www.lwvil.org/charter-schools.html>. Over the next several weeks, the website will also provide additional resources, including a PowerPoint, lists of possible speakers, and dates of webinars.

Do not hesitate to contact us with any questions you might have through charterstudy@lwvil.org.

Sincerely,
Jean Pierce & Ann Courter
Charter School Position Update Committee Co-Chairs

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF ILLINOIS
2013-2015 CHARTER SCHOOL POSITION UPDATE STUDY

YES/NO MATRIX

	YES	NO
1. Reasons to revoke or not renew a charter		
1A Accountability for performance standards	a. Under-performing public schools have been closed or turned over to other managers; This should happen to charters, as well	a. A charter school that targets a certain population should not be held to the same academic standards - for instance, a charter school created as an alternative school focused on behavior problems should not be expected to have high performing students.
	b. Additional Concept Schools have been approved despite low performance of current ones ¹	
1B Accountability for fiscal management	a. School board members promise to faithfully protect taxpayers' assets ² But school boards are not the only authorizers of charter schools	a.(May not be needed – unless the legislature repeals law). In spring of 2014, HB3232 passed both chambers of the General Assembly which would require each charter to submit an annual audit and a quarterly financial statement.
	b. In Pennsylvania, charters are receiving \$350 M for special education students but only spending \$156 M on them ³	b. White Hat Management Company in Ohio insisted they should not need to provide a full accounting of how funds were spent, citing their status as a private corporation. ⁴
	c. State audits suggest that some Ohio charter schools spend more than \$400 in public money per student to attract them away from public schools, and now public school districts are retaliating by spending their own money in an effort to keep the kids. ⁵	c. In March, 2014, a judge in Manhattan ruled that the State Comptroller may not audit charter schools because they are "not units of the state." As private contractors, they audit themselves. ⁶
1C Accountability for following laws	In Summer, 2014, the Chicago Teacher's Union requested the Chicago Board of Education to revoke current charters of Concept schools and to prevent future openings until the conclusion of an FBI investigation. ⁷	

	YES	NO
1D Accountability for exceeding expulsion or attrition rates	a. In Chicago: charters expelled 61 of every 10,000 students while the district-run schools expelled just 5 of every 10,000 students. Last school year, approximately 75 percent of all suspensions were handed to African-Americans, a group that makes up about 41 percent of Chicago Public School’s student body. ⁸	a. (May not be needed unless legislature repeals the bill). SB2793, which passed both houses in spring, 2014, requires every school to provide data on the issuance of out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and removals to alternative settings. It must also list this data by race, ethnicity, gender, age, grade level, etc.
	b. The class that entered Noble Street High School in 2009 began with 148 students, had 127 in fall of the sophomore year, 116 in fall of their junior year and 103 in the fall of their senior year. That is an attrition rate of 31%. ⁹	b. Noble St. administrators said that 80% of the class beginning in 2010 has remained. They contend that Noble Street must be more rigorous than other schools, but they also believe that they try to make it more fun, and they insist that a whole crew of people from the school tries to dissuade anyone from leaving –begging them to stay. ¹⁰
1E Accountability for discrimination	a.Traditional public schools in Illinois have higher percentages of extremely low income and of students with severe special education diagnoses than do charter schools ¹¹	a.(May not be needed unless legislature repeals the bill) HB4527 was signed into law in 2014. It prevents charter schools from discriminating against students with severe Special Education diagnoses and against English Language Learners.
		b.The orientation of charter schools in Illinois varies widely, and such orientation may drive the student population ¹²

	YES	NO
<p>1F Accountability for employing fewer than 90% teachers who are fully certified</p>	<p>a. 26 charter schools reporting the data for 2012/2013 had less than 90% of their staff with teaching certificates., while 22 charter schools in Illinois had 90% or greater certified.¹³</p>	<p>a. Current charter school code in Illinois: At least 75% of the individuals employed in instructional positions by a charter school that is operating in a city having a population exceeding 500,000 and that was established before April 16, 2003 shall hold teaching certificates issued under Article 21 of this Code.</p>
	<p>b. Teach for America (TFA) recruits college graduates, gives them about a month of intensive training, and places them in low-income schools . Heilig and Jez's 2010 and 2014 analysis of peer-reviewed studies found that TFA corps members performed less well than credentialed beginning teachers. Districts pay \$33,000 to recruit and train teach TFA teacher, compared to \$8000 in training for credentialed teachers. 80% TFA teachers leave teaching after 3 years.¹⁴</p>	<p>b. Charter schools report that the flexibility to hire individuals who do not hold teaching licenses for certain instructional positions has enabled them to recruit and retain instructors in areas of high need, such as math, science, fine arts and foreign language.¹⁵</p>
		<p>c. According to the National Council on Teacher Quality Teacher Prep Review, “less than 10% of all rated programs earned 3 stars or more.” This study included 1,200 programs across the country.¹⁶</p>
<p>1G Accountability for interfering with union organizing</p>	<p>Concept School’s Chicago Math & Science Academy spent over \$113,000 of taxpayers’ money in legal fees to fight the formation of a union which 67% of their teachers had endorsed.¹⁷</p>	<p>Charter schools should not be held accountable for interfering with union organizing since they are considered private institutions according to labor law. Private schools are not required to tolerate unions¹⁸</p>
		<p>Teachers at some charter schools have unionized.</p>
<p>1H Accountability for separation of church and state</p>	<p>a. Records show extensive ties between Concept and organizations affiliated with the influential Turkish Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen.¹⁹</p>	
	<p>b. In Indianapolis, the archdiocese obtained a charter from the city mayor’s office so that they could reopen their private schools as charters²⁰</p>	

	YES	NO
1 I-J Accountability for attendance and truancy	This may particularly be a problem for virtual charter schools. It is said that students connect to the virtual charter’s website but then do not remain at their computers for the rest of the day.	Virtual charter teachers can verify test results by talking to students during regular weekly phone calls and live lessons, ensuring they’ve mastered the skills and knowledge as demonstrated on their tests. ²¹
2. Existing charters should be evaluated	Every 5 years	Every 10 years
	This is the current state law	35 Charter schools (out of more than 56 responding to a survey) supported this change in the law – no reason was given ²²
3. Who should approve and renew charters?		
3A Elected school boards	Outside of Chicago, taxpayers elect school board members who are responsible for protecting the district’s assets	Charter advocates say that school districts outside of Chicago are not likely to approve of charters
3B School Boards appointed by a mayor	This is true in Chicago	Be careful of conflicts of interest - Penny Pritzker, whose Pritzker/Traubert foundation has awarded millions of dollars to Noble Street Schools, was appointed to the Chicago School Board 2011-2013. ²³ The web page of Pritzker Noble school recognizes “the generosity of our naming donors, Penny Pritzker and her husband Bryan Traubert. Penny and Bryan have supported the Pritzker campus, and indeed, the entire Noble Network, in many ways.” ²⁴
3C Illinois State Board of Ed (ISBE) appointed by the governor	ISBE approved Prairie Crossing in Grayslake and Southland in Richton Park Currently, both schools are evaluated by the State Commission	District 50 charges that \$3M of state aid is diverted annually from the district to Prairie Crossing school, and this has caused a reduction of 70 staff members and a lack of resources for technology and curriculum. The charter school could be expanded without the district’s approval. ²⁵

	YES	NO
3D State Charter School Commission – nominated by governor & appointed by ISBE	a. The Commission has a very rigorous process for reviewing applications and renewals. ²⁶	a. A Charter Commission member voted to approve 2 Concept Schools in Chicago despite the fact that he is president of the board of a Concept school in Peoria ²⁷
	b. Greg Richmond, chair of the Charter School Commission in Illinois, insists that he tries not to let doctrinaire considerations swamp good sense. ²⁸	b. Richmond has ties to the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) which is funded by wealthy corporations and is said to have an agenda of privatizing public education ²⁹
4. Local voters should		
4A Establish a charter school	This is currently the law – 5% of the voters can ask to put the question on the ballot	
4B Override a decision by the charter Commission reversing the local school board’s decision	This would give taxpayers the ultimate decision	
5. Charter schools should be subject to		
5A Transparency of potential conflicts of interest of governing board members	Board members of UNO charter schools had ties to numerous contractors, plumbers, electricians, security firms, and consultants paid by millions of taxpayer dollars ³⁰	Will transparency make a difference? Even after the UNO story broke, the Chicago Public Schools voted unanimously to extend UNO’s charter for 5 more years. ³¹
5B Transparency of sources of revenue	In Florida, two charter schools received loans disguised as gifts from their management companies to avoid scrutiny and make the schools appear financially stable. ³²	

	YES	NO
5C Transparency of salaries & benefits	Some charter schools which are privately owned have a history of paying teachers very little, while administrators get huge salaries (e.g. K-12 Inc. The salaries of 8 executives of K-12, which gets 86% of its revenue from taxpayers, went from \$10 million to over \$21 million in one year.) ³³	Charter schools rely heavily upon the ability to set independent employee compensation rates and/or to provide bonuses. At Noble Street schools, each campus principal has the authority to establish the bonus practices that will result in the highest student learning at his or her campus ³⁴
5D Transparency of owners of property & buildings	One charter school in Miami paid over \$700,000 in rent for their building in 2010, about 25% of the school's entire budget. Records showed that the real estate company from which they were renting their building was run by the head of the management company that was running the charter school. ³⁵	
5E Transparency of admission processes	An audit conducted by Public Citizens for Children and Youth found that 10 out of 16 charter schools seeking renewal in Philadelphia in 2013 were found to have significant barriers to enrollment, such as the application not being available online or being only in English. ³⁶	(May not be needed unless legislature repeals the bill) HB3232, which passed both chambers in 2014, provides that each charter school must videotape its admissions lottery and allow a representative of the school district (or of the State Board of Education,) to observe the lottery.
6. Charter Schools and Public Funding		
6A Subcontracting most of the management to a for-profit organization should be prohibited	The League of Women Voters of Illinois opposes the presence of private, for-profit companies in the governance of public education. ³⁷	Current school code in Illinois states that charters must be held by non-profits, but they are free to hire a for-profit organization to run the school – such as K-12 Inc. and Charter Schools USA.
6B When a student transfers, funding should be prorated and transferred in a timely fashion	Gates (CTU spokesperson): students who do not meet standards of their charter school end up in neighborhood schools, but money the school received for their enrollment did not travel with them. ³⁸ since attendance figures were only figured two times a year.	(May not be needed – unless the legislature repeals law) In spring of 2014, HB4591 was signed into law. It requires that a charter school that dismisses a student must pay back to the public school district a prorated portion of the last quarterly tuition payment for that child.

	Yes	No
6C All property, equipment, and materials purchased by a school with public dollars should be returned to the local district if the school closes	In Florida, the Life Skills Center of Miami-Dade County paid 97% of its income to a management company. When the governing board of two affiliated schools tried to get rid of their managers, the company refused to release the school money it held. ³⁹	
7. Adequate and Equitable Funding		
7. Charters should receive adequate and equitable funding without harming traditional public schools	a. School districts pay \$33,000 to recruit and train each Teach for America (TFA) teacher, compared to \$8000 in training for credentialed teachers. 80% of TFA teachers leave teaching after 3 years. ⁴⁰	a. Charter Schools in Chicago receive roughly 25% less funding per pupil than Chicago Public Schools receives for its public schools. Out of this lower funding amount, in addition to the typical costs of providing education (such as teacher salaries, books and supplies) charters must cover all of the costs of running a school such as facilities rental and maintenance, security, buses, counselors, etc. ⁴³
	b. The Chicago school board claimed that closing over 50 traditional public schools would save \$560 million on construction and \$43 million on operating expenses over the next ten years. But studies by the Pew Charitable Trust and Washington, D.C. auditor have found school closings don't end up saving much money. ⁴¹ In fact, closing the schools in Chicago cost over \$263 million. ⁴²	
	c. Districts that lose students to charter schools often maintain the same overhead costs, but have fewer per-pupil funds to pay for these fixed costs. ⁴⁴	

	YES	NO
	d. From a separate appropriation, ISBE is required to make grants to charter schools to pay start-up costs of acquiring educational materials and supplies, textbooks, and other equipment needed during their initial term and must annually establish the time and manner of application for these grants, which must not exceed \$250 per student enrolled in the charter school. ⁴⁵	
8. Virtual Education		
8A Virtual Charter education is not generally appropriate for elementary students	<p>Individuals associated with K-12 Inc. have stated that virtual education for elementary students is essentially home schooling, since elementary students must be highly supervised by an adult in their home.⁴⁶</p> <p>“We have an honor code that all our kids sign saying they’re going to do their own work,” says Jerry Wilks (an Oregon Virtual School Principal)...The learning coach (is) usually one or both parents.⁴⁷</p> <p>In Florida, The average student/teacher ratio for elementary virtual schools is 52:1⁴⁸</p>	
8B Virtual education funding should be based on actual costs	A Fordham study estimates the average per pupil cost for a fully virtual education as \$6,400, with a range between \$5,100 and \$7,700. Staff costs are the largest driver of cost and content acquisition is the largest area of variability between schools. For comparison, the study identifies an average cost for a traditional brick and mortar school of \$10,000 excluding central administrative costs, based on all public-school types (elementary, middle, and high school) across the US ⁴⁹	

	YES	NO
9. Gauging LWVIL membership support of 2001 Charter School position		
9A Advantages of Charters outweigh disadvantages	<p>a.The CREDO report out of Stanford University found possible benefits for Latinos and low-income students in Illinois.⁵⁰</p> <p>b.For both, charters and traditional publics, there is a wide range in test scores.⁵²</p>	<p>a.80 percent of students in Illinois charters perform no better or even worse in reading than students in traditional public schools. For math, the figure is 63%. Nearly 41 percent of Illinois charter schools have below-average learning growth and below-average achievement in reading, and the same is true for nearly 37 percent of the charter schools in math.⁵¹</p>
9B Charters promote innovation and Charters have a mandate to share innovations in teaching methods, curricula and standards of assessment for all stakeholders	<p>a. The more innovative charters are “the small mom-and-pop”, stand-alone charters that are usually run by mission-driven teachers and their community supporters. Schools like Namaste, the Academy for Global Citizenship, Polaris, Alaine Locke, The Montessori School of Englewood and others represent new approaches to education, fueled by the end goal than merely raising test scores. Yet it is these schools that CPS tends to treat as after-thoughts, second-class citizens in its charter school portfolio because they are not committed to “going to scale”⁵³</p>	<p>a.The vast majority of charter students attend schools that are part of the large charter management organizations (CMOs). Make no mistake: Some of these CMOs include admirable schools and staff who perform well above the level of the schools they replaced, which had been badly serving poor children of color for decades. But for the most part, they are not the lights of innovation that early charter advocates promised.⁵⁴</p> <p>b.If anything, some charter schools are serving as showcases for methods which have been demonstrated to be effective in traditional public schools, such as learner-centered education. This is not to say that no innovations have come from the focus on charters. Since charter schools depend strongly on attracting students, innovations from the movement have addressed ways of advertising and managing schools and personnel.⁵⁵</p>
	<p>It was originally intended that there would be sharing of innovations. However, interviews revealed a lack of communication and very little sharing of innovations on the part of either charters or traditional public schools.</p>	

	YES	NO
9C Charters promote choice	Charter schools provide a choice to parents and students who aren't satisfied with the educational opportunities of public schools, but aren't interested in or can't afford to attend a private school	<p>While disadvantaged families do have some additional choices, limited access to transportation or to special education services prevents many of them from having the same range of options available to other families.</p> <p>Studies identifying characteristics of families who choose charters find that they tend to be highly involved in their children's education, providing resources for learning at home and enrolling their children in preschool. Social networks serve as a primary source of information about schools. Interestingly, the strongest trend has been for minorities to self-segregate into "back-to-basic" charter schools⁵⁵</p>

¹ <http://www.suntimes.com/news/watchdogs/24480273-452/cps-says-no-to-charter-schools-but-michael-madigan-says-yes.html#.U7mo9zYo6Uk>

² Illinois school code: (105 ILCS 5/10-16.5)

³ <http://thenotebook.org/blog/147324/special-education-funding-formula-changes-recommended>

⁴ Annenberg Institute for **School** Reform at Brown University (June, 2014). Standards and Recommendations for Public Accountability in Charter Schools

⁵ <http://www.ohio.com/news/local/charter-school-operators-use-key-words-to-entice-families-away-from-public-schools-1.491420>

⁶ <http://dianeravitch.net/2014/03/14/nyc-judge-rules-that-state-may-not-audit-evas-charters/>

⁷ <http://www.ctunet.com/blog/ctu-to-petition-board-of-education-to-reject-concept-charter-school-expansion-in-chicago>

⁸ *Chicago Tribune, February 26, 2014: CPS: Expulsion Rates Higher at Charter Schools*

⁹ http://www.cps.edu/Performance/Documents/Datafiles/membership_20th_day_2009.xls, (note: this web page is no longer accessible)

¹⁰ *Interview by LWVIL charter committee with Principal of Noble Street High School*

- ¹¹ Illinois Interactive Report Card data, <http://illinoisreportcard.com/>
To receive the Charter Committee's analysis of income and special education data, email:
charterstudy@lwvil.org
- ¹² ISBE Charter School Biennial Report January, 2014
<http://www.isbe.state.il.us/charter/default.htm?col5=open#CollapsiblePanel5>
- ¹³ ISBE Charter School Biennial Report, January, 2014
<http://www.isbe.state.il.us/charter/default.htm?col5=open#CollapsiblePanel5>
- ¹⁴ Heilig, J.V. & Jez, S.J. (2010). Teach For America: A Review of the Evidence. Boulder and Tempe: Education and the Public Interest Center & Education Policy Research Unit. Retrieved [7/2/2014] from
<http://epicpolicy.org/publication/teach-for-america>
Vasquez Heilig, J. & Jez, S.J. (2014). Teach For America: A Return to the Evidence. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center. Retrieved from <http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/teach-for-america-return> .
- ¹⁵ ISBE Charter School Biennial Report, January, 2014
<http://www.isbe.state.il.us/charter/default.htm?col5=open#CollapsiblePanel5>
- ¹⁶ <http://www.catalyst-chicago.org/news/2014/03/03/65755/dont-put-down-teachers-who-choose-charters>
- ¹⁷ <http://www.charterschoolwatchdog.com/40000-is-not-enough.html>
- ¹⁸ http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2013-01-21/opinion/ct-edit-charters-0121-jm-20130121_1_charter-school-teachers-quality-charters-charters-show
- ¹⁹ <http://www.suntimes.com/news/metro/24562205-418/concept-schools-linked-to-turkish-cleric.html>
- ²⁰ <http://www.edchoice.org/Research/Reports/Sector-Switchers--Why-Catholic-Schools-Convert-to-Charter-and-What-Happens-Next.aspx>
- ²¹ <http://www.metro-parent.com/education/2010/06/how-do-virtual-public-schools-operate/>
- ²² ISBE Charter School Biennial Report, January, 2014
<http://www.isbe.state.il.us/charter/default.htm?col5=open#CollapsiblePanel5>
- ²³ http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2013-03-14/business/chi-penny-pritzker-resigns-from-the-school-board-20130314_1_penny-pritzker-three-sentence-resignation-letter-school-board
- ²⁴ <http://pritzkercollegeprep.noblenetwork.org/about/history-and-campus-overview>
- ²⁵ <http://www.isbe.state.il.us/SCSC/pdf/csftf-final-report.pdf>
- ²⁶ Interview with Commission Executive Director Jeanne Nowakowski by LWVIL Charter Committee
- ²⁷ <http://www.suntimes.com/news/watchdogs/24480273-452/cps-says-no-to-charter-schools-but-michael-madigan-says-yes.html>

²⁸ Interview with Commission Chair Greg Richmond by LWVIL Charter Committee

²⁹ http://www.alec.org/docs/Jan2012_InsideALEC

³⁰ <http://www.chicagomag.com/Chicago-Magazine/February-2014/uno-juan-rangel/>

³¹ <http://www.chicagomag.com/Chicago-Magazine/February-2014/uno-juan-rangel/>

³² Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University (June, 2014). Standards and Recommendations for Public Accountability in Charter Schools

³³ Center for Media and Democracy. November 19, 2013. *America's Highest Paid Government Workers*.
<http://www.wect.com/story/25654403/charter-school-chair-wont-comment-on-records-request>

³⁴ ISBE Charter School Biennial Report, January, 2014
<http://www.isbe.state.il.us/charter/default.htm?col5=open#CollapsiblePanel5>

³⁵ Annenberg Institute for **School** Reform at Brown University (June, 2014). Standards and Recommendations for Public Accountability in Charter Schools

³⁶ Annenberg Institute for **School** Reform at Brown University (June, 2014). Standards and Recommendations for Public Accountability in Charter Schools

³⁷ *LWVIL: Where We Stand 2013-2015 Program*

³⁸ <http://news.medill.northwestern.edu/chicago/news.aspx?id=215903>

³⁹ Annenberg Institute for **School** Reform at Brown University (June, 2014). Standards and Recommendations for Public Accountability in Charter Schools

⁴⁰ Vasquez Heilig, J. & Jez, S.J. (2014). Teach For America: A Return to the Evidence. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center. Retrieved from <http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/teach-for-america-return>

⁴¹ <http://www.labornotes.org/2013/03/chicago-school-closings-spark-wildfire-protest>

⁴² <http://politics.suntimes.com/article/springfield/legislative-task-force-cps-closings-cost-taxpayers-hurt-kids/wed-06252014-402am>

⁴³ <http://perspectivescs.org/FAQRetrieve.aspx?ID=35916>

⁴⁴ http://www.academia.edu/3089005/Fact_sheets_from_the_collective_Chicagoland_Reserchers_and_Advocates_for_Transformative_Education

⁴⁵ <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/01/13/13/11313.pdf>

⁴⁶ Interviews conducted by the LWVIL Charter Committee with the Principal of Cambridge Lakes School and with a representative of K-12 Inc. at the Illinois Network of Charter School Conference, December, 2013.

⁴⁷ <http://www.metro-parent.com/education/2010/06/how-do-virtual-public-schools-operate/>

⁴⁸ <http://www.connectionsacademy.com/florida-virtual-school/disclosures.aspx>

⁴⁹ <http://www.isbe.net/SCSC/pdf/vsag-final-report.pdf>

⁵⁰ <http://credo.stanford.edu/documents/IL2013FinalReport.pdf>

⁵¹ <http://credo.stanford.edu/documents/IL2013FinalReport.pdf>

⁵² <http://politics.suntimes.com/article/chicago/push-charter-schools-little-difference-test-scores/mon-04072014-422am#bmb=1>

⁵³ www.catalyst-chicago.org/news/2014/04/01/65834/cps-fails-nurture-true-vision-charters

⁵⁴ www.catalyst-chicago.org/news/2014/04/01/65834/cps-fails-nurture-true-vision-charters

⁵⁵ Lubienski, C. A. & Weitzel, P.C. (2010) *Expectations, Evidence, and Implications*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Publishing Group

⁵⁶ Lubienski, C. A. & Weitzel, P.C. (2010) *Expectations, Evidence, and Implications*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Publishing Group