

Effective Advocacy Requires Ongoing Effort

Every two years, the state budget – and its impact on Ohio’s charter, or community, schools – serves as a compelling call to action for parents, students, teachers, administrators, sponsors and other supporters committed to defending school choice.

Because the biennial budget bill drives school funding, the stakes are particularly high. Last year, the debate and negotiations between the Republican-controlled Senate and the Democrat-controlled House were especially difficult. The very existence of Ohio’s charter schools was at stake, with grossly inadequate funding levels proposed by Gov. Ted Strickland and supported by the House majority.

Thanks to the Senate, charter school funding was restored. But legislative initiatives aimed squarely at charter schools, as well as those impacting Ohio’s primary and secondary education system (including charters) are introduced throughout each two-year General Assembly.

Take, for instance, H.B. 268 introduced last summer. The legislation would temporarily reduce the per pupil base-cost payments to community schools in academic watch or emergency by about \$700. The funds would then be reallocated to the proposed newly created Auxiliary Services and Administrative Cost Supplement Fund for disbursement to chartered nonpublic schools. Testimony in support of the bill has been offered by various proponents before the House Education Committee during three separate hearings. Although it is unlikely that the legislation will be passed by both the House and the Senate, it is important that charter school supporters voice their opposition to the bill – and remind policy-makers that other academic measures, such as value-added, should always be considered in concert with academic ratings – if additional hearings are held.

More than 50 education bills have been introduced since the 128th General Assembly convened in January 2009, and more are likely to be introduced before the current legislative session concludes at the end of 2010. These bills address a variety of education issues, including school transportation, athletics, nutrition, violence, energy, governance, ethics, pregnancy prevention, GEDs, online learning, parent teacher conferences and more.

It’s important that charter school advocates participate in education policy debates, not only because we bring a unique perspective to the discussion, but because charter schools educate nearly 90,000 Ohio students. Testifying at legislative hearings also serves to better position charter supporters as legitimate stakeholders in all education policy discussions.

Charter School Specialists is pleased to expand its services to the many schools sponsored by St. Aloysius Orphanage to include coordination of advocacy efforts. Parents, students, teachers, administrators, board members and other charter stakeholders can contact CSS’s vice president of governmental relations, Catherine West, for additional information on ways to engage in our advocacy efforts. She can be reached by phone at 614-837-8945, ext. 19, or via email at cwest@charterschoolspec.com.