
FROM THE PUBLISHER

Budget woes endanger E-Prep progress

Ohio's budget woes are threatening what has been arguably one of Cleveland's great success stories in public education, a sparkling charter school in the Tyler Village complex known as Entrepreneurship Preparatory School. That same axe is hanging over several other high-achieving charter schools and their combined 1,500 students.

Not surprisingly, the Democrat-controlled Ohio House wants to cut even deeper into state aid that goes to charter schools. I use the term "not surprisingly" because of the powerful state teachers' union and its lobbyists in Columbus.

Charter schools have long been a political football: Conservative Republicans see them as a chance to provide competition to less-than-inspired urban schools. Democrats see them as a further siphoning of a dwindling pot of money to support public education. And to make matters worse, some charter schools have been abysmally ineffective and outright frauds.

The problem is that none of that matters to the students who are tasting academic success for the first time in their lives at Citizens Academy, E-Prep, The Inter-Generational School and Horizon Science Academy, which are examples of the charter school done right.

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At E-Prep, all students who were willing to wear the uniforms, respect the discipline, attend for longer hours and more weeks than their neighborhood friends (and had family support) were accepted. Three years later, members of the founding sixth-grade class will graduate from middle school at a special ceremony at John Hay High School on Friday. All have been accepted into college-prep high schools for this fall.

And now E-Prep is planning to add a kindergarten class, and then follow that a year later with another kindergarten class as well as first grade, etc., until a full K-through-8 school is up and running.

That is, of course, unless state lawmakers allow their political connections to tear away at this wonderful institution

and its peers in Cleveland.

Budget cuts the size of which the governor and General Assembly face are excruciating, and are made more complicated by all the special interests nibbling away at the edges. But this is no time to withdraw from those charter schools that are really making a difference in urban education. These schools, even in a normal year, already receive less state funds than the public schools because they receive no property tax revenue.

A House budget version wanted state funds going only to those charter schools that are sponsored by a public school district. E-Prep is; most aren't. It's not hard to imagine what would happen to the others.

Everyone talks in lofty terms about the future of older cities like Cleveland relying on improving the education of their children. Then along comes a group of people doing just that, and they get a target painted on their back because they don't make enough political contributions.

It's shameful and you should let your elected representatives in Columbus know it. ■