



Letters to the Editor: Waiting for Superman

November 16, 2010

The following are in response to Charlie Curnow's November 9 article, [Waiting for Superman: The Fate of Teachers' Unions](#). In addition, one reader brought to our attention a [critique](#) of the Stanford [study](#) cited in the article. "The results of a new national charter school study are being oversimplified by charter school opponents," this critique argued. "Careful analysis and reflection of the facts show a different story."

Dear Editor,

Charlie Curnow's article was interesting, but weak for the following two primary reasons:

1. "So if charter schools won't save the American education system, what will?" The author never establishes this point. He notes that some charters appear to have surprising performance, others do not.

Charters are still relatively new – as anyone in an innovative industry knows, the early versions of *anything* new are often imperfect. The goal is to focus on the successful charters, so that their successes may be duplicated and their mistakes avoided.

Charters represent one of the best new avenues in American education.

2. "Don't blame the unions." Why not? Again, the author provides no substantial evidence that teachers' unions are beneficial to learning.

In a long quote, he writes, "The more important incentives for teachers, according to McKinsey, are non-financial: high expectations, a shared sense of purpose, and a collective belief in their ability to make a difference in the educations of the students they serve. Also essential are regular check-ups to bring specific methodological weaknesses to light and the constant sharing of specific best practices, spread through their demonstration in actual classrooms."

Readers should ask if teachers' unions fulfill any of these functions.

The author fails to both defend the status quo and to establish any serious fault with more promising approaches to education.

A suggestion: rather than telling us to be scared of charters, traditional public schools and their unions should simply show themselves to be superior. Turn out better-educated, bet-



ter-prepared students. After all, *that* is the goal – the best education we can give our children.

Scott A.

The writer is with a small RIA firm in Northern California

Dear Editor,

Great article. As usual, people see only what they want to see. Conservatives dislike unions because they force businesses to act somewhat reasonably toward their workers.

In Ohio, teachers and most public employees have paid double into their pension plans compared to what we in the Social Security system pay. In addition, most public school teachers work much harder and are better educated than the average corporate executive, yet are paid far less. Giving up this much in salary and payments to pension plans, of course they should have better benefits and pensions.

Also, many of the charter and private schools against which public schools are compared have unfair advantages. They can generally pick their students. If they are disruptive or lazy, they can remove them from school. They rarely have disabled students who the public schools must service, at their own local expense by state- and federal-unfunded mandate. Yet, as this article pointed out, the public schools still perform as well as charter and private schools.

Are there some bad teachers? Sure. Public schools need to add peer reviews and training to help them improve. Public schools also need to be careful before they give tenure, which shouldn't just be automatic after a certain number of years of experience.

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