

Noah Hanson

From: Michael J. Rehberg <mike@rehbergs.net>
Sent: Monday, March 10, 2014 11:53 AM
To: Sen. Berta Gardner
Cc: Michael J Rehberg; Noah Hanson
Subject: RE: How Winterberry Charter makes it work, and changes that can help us succeed

Hello Senator,

Thanks, we've had a look at SB 185.

- The 10% state-funded differential could offset some facility costs, which will be helpful.
- The charter school startup grant won't help existing charters who are seeking new space or have other needs, but it would benefit establishment of new charters. I believe our school received a startup grant on establishment in 2005.
- The neighborhood school conversion provision probably won't help existing charters sited in existing facilities on long-term lease, but it does create a novel method to establish charters to a motivated group of neighbors and teachers. If that's what neighborhoods think can help their schools thrive, that could be a way to make it happen.

Below I've copied some discussion I made about this to Rep Tuck's staff about the similar house bill that explains it better:

As expressed during my public testimony at the caucus meeting Saturday, it will be important as the charter support bills move forward to be sure existing charter schools like ours are similarly given some pathway toward either expanding their existing facilities under their current long-term leases (via substantially increased annual facilities budgets) or, ultimately, a pathway to either school district or nonprofit ownership of their current existing buildings (via either access to grants, bonds with state reimbursement or access to [loans, say through AIDEA or AHFC, which cover 100%] of facility purchase/construction costs).

It is any Anchorage charter's dream to have a facility provided and maintained by the District free of charge, as proposed by your bill.

Unfortunately I doubt any existing Anchorage charter school can find a neighborhood school sufficiently empty to move their entire student body into, without displacing the current neighborhood students. Winterberry is one of the smallest charter schools and I doubt there are 230 empty desks available for us in any existing school.

What your charter school bill does offer, and it's a novel and interesting idea, is the opportunity for neighborhoods to organize themselves to establish their own place-based charter schools. That's a new model for charters in Anchorage, and I think it could offer a lot to a motivated set of neighbors and teachers. But I have trouble seeing it working for the charters already trying hard to succeed.

I'm glad to have your feedback.

Best,

Mike Rehberg

-----Original Message-----

From: Michael J Rehberg [mailto:mike@rehbergs.net]

Sent: Monday, March 03, 2014 7:57 AM

To: Sen. Berta Gardner

Subject: How Winterberry Charter makes it work, and changes that can help us succeed

Dear Senator Gardner,

I am writing again as treasurer of Winterberry Charter School in Anchorage. Thank you for making charters a big part of the conversation this year.

Our Anchorage charter school is entirely dependent on BSA formula funding.

Annually the first 25-30% of these funds are consumed by our commercial lease, utilities, maintenance, school district overhead and property tax.

We receive straight BSA formula funding. We do not receive facilities, Federal impact aid, recent state energy aid, or state transportation aid.

We've increased our class sizes to 28 to compensate, we run a fine program with a very lean staff in a basic facility, but this year our flexibility is gone and we face cuts. We have few tricks left up our sleeve.

The formula is our lifeblood as a charter, and we are counting on returning it to where it would have been with continued steady increase since 2011.

While increasing BSA would help us survive as we are now, changes to charter school law would help make us sustainable into the future.

Ensuring logical federal and state funds pass through to charters would be a very helpful first step. Further, facilities costs eat our lunch. A mechanism for capital construction, operations or purchase of our existing facility will help. A differential on top of BSA to account for lease and utilities would help. Property tax relief would help. Even the simple ability to secure zero-down state loans for purchase or construction would benefit our school.

Thank you for your consideration, and we hope this year's conversation continues on ways to support our state's parent-founded charters this year.

I'm happy to discuss or answer questions by email or on my cell at 632-6376.

Best regards,

Mike Rehberg
Treasurer, Winterberry Charter School APC