

July 6, 2016

To the Editor,

I am happy that Ms. Weekes Tullock's daughters have found academic success at their charter school as detailed in her June 28 article in the Dorchester Reporter. Many young people educated in BPS district schools as well as private and parochial schools across the city are also celebrating their academic successes and look forward to higher education opportunities.

However, Ms. Weekes Tullock's article, while describing her children's experiences, falls significantly short in terms of presenting a complete and accurate picture regarding charter schools and the November charter school expansion ballot question. Let me explain.

+ Her reference to the alleged charter school waiting list of 34,000 has been repeatedly debunked by Suzanne Bump, our state auditor. Ms. Bump has stated that the charter school waiting list data is unreliable and has significant problems in terms of applicants being double counted and maintained on 'waiting lists' for years.

+ Ms. Weekes Tullock works for Families for Excellent Schools (FES), an organization that purports to be a local grassroots effort but is actually funded by millions from hedge fund investors, the Walton Family Foundation, the Broad Foundation and whose agenda in terms of public education is questionable, with an unrelenting focus on privatization and "market-based "reforms." Pro charter school organizations have recently engaged the same advertising agency that ran the 'Swift Boat' ads against John Kerry to flood the airwaves prior to the November election with \$6.5 million worth of pro charter ads.

+ Consistently, data shows that charter schools do not serve the same student populations as district schools. The

percentage of students with disabilities, especially significant disabilities, as well as the percentage of ESL students does not compare to the demographics of the sending schools.

+ The attrition rates at many charter schools are stunning. On average, in Boston charter high schools, only 40% of an entering Gr 9 class graduates from Gr 12. Are we to consider a school that loses 60 % of its students before graduation a success? What happens to the 60 % of students who started but left the school? Why do they leave? Is it due to the unbelievable suspension rates at some charter school where 30–55% of students are suspended, often for minor infractions? Or are they ‘counseled out’ as many former charter students and families report? Where do these children go next? They return to their district schools, which are now measurably poorer due to the huge losses to district budgets caused by mandated payments to charter schools.

+ Required charter school reimbursements negatively affect local school budgets. Charter school reimbursements drain approximately \$400 million statewide from local school districts. In Boston, the BPS lost \$119 million last year alone from their already insufficient budget. The ballot question language would allow charter schools to be placed in communities regardless of the expressed will of the local community. Dozens of school committees across the state have taken positions against raising the cap on charters due to the financial impact on their local school budgets and recently, the Massachusetts Municipal Association voted unanimously to oppose the charter school ballot initiative due to the negative impact on local budgets as well as the significant lack of fiscal accountability and transparency required for charter schools.

+ Charter Schools attract significant philanthropic support that is not usually available to district schools. Likewise, investors receive generous tax credits for supporting charter schools. This additional funding allows these schools to adding programming and staff, and upgrade facilities. This is

wonderful for the children who attend these schools but shouldn't we as a society be about ensuring that **all** children have access to well resourced schools?

Continuing to grow the charter school movement without ensuring equity on all fronts contributes significantly to the further development of a two tiered 'public ' education system. We already have gross inequities in terms of what is offered educationally across the various communities in this state, do we really want to continue this stratification by expanding charter schools and depleting the budgets of our local school districts – the schools who welcome and educate any and all children?

Please vote NO to lifting the cap on charter schools in November.

Sincerely,  
Betsy Drinan