



## **The Positive “Ripple Effect” of Charter Schools: Albany School District’s Response to the Policies and Practices of Charter Schools in the City**

October 2007

### **Lengthening the District’s School Year to Compete with Charter Schools**

- Excerpt from a 2007 news story about lengthening the school day as part of a new teachers union contract, the first-ever extension of class time since charter schools emerged in the city (“Longer School Day Part of Teacher Pact,” Albany Times Union, June 22, 2007):

“The school day will get a little longer in the Albany schools next year under a contract with teachers approved Thursday. In the middle and high schools, there will be 30 more minutes of classroom time each day. In the elementary schools, students will be taught for an extra 15 minutes each day.”

- Excerpt from an Albany City School Board Meeting Discussion: March 17, 2005:

*Board Member Bill Barnett:*

“[T]his country is the nation with the fewest school days of most civilized nations in the world. I’m very aware our ‘competition’ that has developed in this area [charter schools] all make sure they boast, I think, 200 days or 220. ...I think that it’s high time for this district and the Board to have an in-depth discussion around the implications and the associated cost of increasing the number of instruction days.”

*Board Member Scott Wexler:*

“Those kinds of decisions about time on task, that are more about the comfort and convenience of the employees, rather than the core mission of the district, are the kinds of issues that I hope we will discuss when we have this discussion. We cannot compete with charter schools with 200 days while our...calendar committee [has] not instructional discussion [but] an employee benefit discussion. Our employees apparently need to understand our desire to have more time on task so we can be more successful.”

### **Improve Parental Outreach to Match Effort of Charter Schools**

- Excerpt from minutes of the Albany City School Board Meeting: January 20, 2005:

“[Board Member Bill] Barnette noted he recently had an opportunity to talk with a group of parents who had made the decision to move their child[ren] to one of the charter schools, and he learned a great deal. Mr. Barnette proposed that the district give some thought to initiating an exit interview data-gathering process in order to listen to what parents have to say about why they made a decision to transfer their child to a charter school.”

*Note: No such process has yet been established by the District.*

- Excerpt from minutes of the Albany City School Board Meeting: November 18, 2004:

“[Board Member Bill] Barnette noted that with the marketing efforts of the charter schools, the District needs to look at what can be said to parents that makes them want to say they want to send their child to district schools.”

### **Use Creative Curricula To Help District Compete with Charter Schools**

- The school district enacted an International Baccalaureate program at Albany High School to begin in Fall 2005, the same time as the opening of Albany Preparatory Charter School, an IB prep middle school.
- Excerpt from minutes of the Albany City School Board Meeting: October 21, 2004:  
“[Board Member Ed] Brown asked [District magnet school enrollment consultant Joseph] White what his recommendation would be, based on his experience and the demographics of the district [for closing the achievement gap and “raising the ceiling for all children”]. Mr. White advised he would like to see really interesting theme programs provided by staff who are passionate about the program. This would allow the district to compete with charter schools.”

### **New Charter Schools Help Alleviate Districts Construction Costs**

- Excerpt from minutes of the Albany City School Board Meeting: September 23, 2004:  
“[Superintendent Dr. Eva Joseph noted that] without the charter schools, the district would have the dilemma of needing more money...to bring Hackett and Livingston up to a comparable level with Kelton Court. With the charter schools, indications show reduced enrollment and that the district needs [only] two middle schools. The district can seek to take advantage of the dollars that would be available by eliminating one of the existing middle schools.”  
*Note: Hackett and Livingston are the District’s two long-existing middle schools. Kelton Court is the district’s newest middle school, opened in September 2005.*

### **Improve Performance to Compete with Charter Schools**

- Excerpt from minutes of the Albany City School Board Meeting: July 6, 2004 - portions of a discussion surrounding a school board resolution calling for a moratorium of any new charter schools in Albany:  
“[Board Member Ed] Brown advised that the Board needs to understand that parents are trying to get a better education for their children. The Board’s ultimate responsibility is to make sure that the district is the one providing that...Ultimately, [Mr. Brown] thinks that the district should look at the charter schools as a challenge for the District to make sure that the District improves in every way. The district cannot be complacent with its performance...[it] needs to accept the challenge of improving the situation so that the perceptions would be that there is no need for charter schools.”

### **Under Current Constraints, District’s Can’t Offer Successful Charter Programs**

- Excerpt from a letter by former Albany City Schools Superintendent Michael Johnson, March 19, 2004:

As Superintendent of the City School District of Albany, I would like to respond to the application for a charter school in the City of Albany at the behest of KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program).

I cannot challenge KIPP’s educational approach or methodologies, as this program has been successful in raising the student achievement since its inception in 1995. KIPP’s Five Pillars or

core operating principles are admirable, but well beyond the capacity of our district given our mandated required services, contractual obligations and an ever-increasing budget to provide basic services. If we were able to require longer school days, 2-3 hours of homework nightly and a strong parental commitment, we too would ensure the success of students.

- Excerpt from minutes of the Albany City School Board Meeting: October 20, 2005:

“Mr. Barnette requested that the Board consider scheduling a discussion/presentation regarding the things that public schools are not permitted to do as opposed to [public] charter schools, i.e. [*sic*] additional school days, longer school days, administrators teaching classes, and increased flexibility...Included in the discussion would be the barriers the District faces in competing with these issues under the Commissioner’s regulations.”

## **Adopt Innovations at Charter Schools to Encourage Culture Improvements**

### SCHOOL UNIFORMS

- Albany Times Union, October 4, 2007. “What is blue and worn all over?” by Tim O’Brien, about the first ever adoption of school uniforms by an Albany district school, Philip J. Schuyler Achievement Academy:

“Mary Williams, a fifth-grader at Philip J. Schuyler Achievement Academy, says the student in her public school don’t fight like they used to.... This year, at the parents’ insistence, the school adopted a voluntary uniform. While parochial and charter schools can require uniform dress, state law bars public schools from mandating it, so Principal Dorinda Davis was stunned when students showed up at the start of the school year [in uniform]. “The first day it was 80 or 85 percent,” she said. Some parents, spotting the sea of blue, vowed to get similar attire for their children within a week... Parents and guardians say the uniforms are making a big difference.”

- Excerpt from minutes of the Albany City School Board Meeting: October 20, 2005:

“[Board Member Patricia] Fahy advised the Academic Committee has discussed voluntary school uniforms...Board Members indicated their interest in gathering input from the community relative to the issue of school uniforms.”

- From a WNYT – Channel 13 (NBC affiliate) news story on November 19, 2005, about responses to the recent “lockdown” of Albany High School after a multi-student fight in which nine people were arrested by city police:

“One idea, according to a district spokeswoman, would be to have a uniform standard of dress. Students would wear khakis and polo shirts, like some students at local charter schools.”

## **Address Racial Learning Gap to Stem Concerns of Parents Considering Charters**

- Excerpt from Schenectady Gazette on-line: April 7, 2006:

“The Albany City School District will hire an urban schools consulting firm to train teachers in hopes of improving education, Superintendent Eva Joseph said Friday [April 7]. Consultants from the National Urban Alliance will study the district’s current teaching

methods and resource allocation before beginning training seminars for district teachers.... The school district has seen incidents of violence at Albany High School and Philip Livingston middle school this school year. The district also is battling low test scores among elementary and middle school students and facing a student drain due to charter schools.”

- Excerpt from Albany Times Union article: April 8, 2006:

“Superintendent Eva Joseph unveiled a plan [April 7] to close the education gap for tudents of color, who’ve lagged for years behind their white counterparts in city schools. The plan would erase in-school segregation and create a new, heterogeneous mind-set of achievement from prekindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade, she said... Ultimately, the [group chosen to provide specialized teacher training] is expected to boost test scores and graduation rates. Consultants who visit classrooms will help teachers understand urban culture and deal with subtle prejudices that poor, black kids can’t learn.