

# *Work Session Worries*

## **LD 1438 – An Act to Permit Charter Schools in Maine**

**Expressed by Education Committee Members May 20, 2009**

***Worry One: When Federal introductory planning grants (up to \$150,000/school/year for 3 years) run out, these schools will be a big, new expense for state and town taxpayers.***

### **Wrong. In fact:**

1. Public charter schools would be somewhat cheaper for state taxpayers and maybe for town taxpayers too.
2. Under the draft bill, public charter schools would receive the same EPS (Essential Programs & Services) allocation per student from the state and the student's town as they pay for the other public-school students from that town.
3. The state would save because public charter schools are responsible for their own buildings and teachers' pensions.
4. Towns that supplement the required EPS support with "additional local" money for their district schools should do so for public charter schools on equity grounds, but the draft bill does not require them to do so.

***Worry Two: These public charter schools will take money away from existing public schools.***

1. Existing public schools will get the same amount of money per student whether there are public charter schools in the vicinity that affect them or not.
2. If some of their would-be students chose public charter schools instead, they would have to adjust, just as they do regularly when families move away, home school their children, or send them to parochial or private schools.
3. These are possible re-allocation problems and would be small enough to be manageable. The draft legislation protects districts from major shocks.

***Worry Three: Nationwide, public charter schools are mainly urban. In Maine, a largely rural state with many small schools, creating a bunch of new schools would lead to closing old ones.***

1. Most of the USA is now urban. Most public charter schools and most public district schools are urban.
2. There are plenty of rural public charter schools. They are often used by small, rural communities to keep their public schools open and avoid long busing. Idaho, the state most like Maine, has examples.

3. Rural superintendents can band together, as they did in northern New Hampshire to charter a joint alternative-education program.
4. In other states, many rural charter schools will give public schools a new organizational form that encourages innovation; the result isn't two competing small public school houses side by side.
5. With modern distance-learning, small public schools, both charter and non-charter, have ways to offer broad learning choices while keeping costs down.

***Worry Four: These public charter schools may lower the standards in public education.***

On the contrary:

1. They are subject to the same learning standards as existing public schools.
2. They are subject to more accountability than other public schools.

In addition to the reporting requirements and controls all public schools now face, public charter schools would have to comply with all the contracting and reporting requirements in the draft bill plus one more – the approval of parents who must choose them if they are to have students.

In other states, public charter schools have improved public-education quality by finding innovative paths to the agreed educational goals, and by their demonstration effect on other public schools. Like traditional public schools, public charter schools don't all succeed. If public charter schools don't however, there is a mechanism for weeding the failures out.