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## **Celebrating National Charter Schools Week in Maine**

President Obama has proclaimed May 2-8 “National Charter Schools Week”, and has asked Congress to increase next year’s funding for the federal Charter Schools Grant Program to \$310 million. Since 1993, a bi-partisan Congress has appropriated over \$2.8 billion for the Charter Schools Program, available only to the 40 states that allow public chartered schools.

In his proclamation President Obama says, “Ideas developed and tested by charter schools have unlocked potential in students of every background and are driving reform throughout many school districts.” The President highlights the twin goals of chartered public schools – to enable students from all backgrounds and income levels to achieve in school, and to drive broad improvements in traditional school districts.

Maine does have reason to celebrate National Charter School Week this year. Nationally, 5,000 public chartered schools are showing us powerful new approaches to enhance student learning, especially among traditionally disadvantaged groups, and at a reasonable, sustainable cost.

Charter schools have a lot to teach us in Maine. We should celebrate their pioneering, entrepreneurial spirit – representing choice, freedom, accountability, and competition - isn’t that what we celebrate each July 4th?

Charter schools are demonstrating that a “no excuses” approach to teaching, learning, and administration works well. They are showing us that we do not have to tolerate bullying in schools, schools with high numbers of dropouts, or schools whose graduates still need remedial courses in college (and often drop out there), or schools whose graduates need remedial training when they enter the workforce.

Maine Legislators have had several opportunities to enact legislation to begin a pilot program for charter schools in Maine. But they have consistently bowed to pressure from the leaders of Maine’s professional teacher, principal, superintendent, and school board associations. These leaders have persistently led us nowhere, defended the unacceptable status quo, and resisted any meaningful innovation in education including charter school legislation.

These leaders’ inaction is reflected in Maine’s embarrassingly weak application for \$75 million in the “Race to the Top” education grant competition.

As the Maine Coalition for Excellence in Education states in its new “Call to Action” for school reform, “Education is Job #1”. Most candidates for governor seem to understand Maine’s critical need improve our public education system for economic reasons - to better prepare our children for college and careers.

Many local schools cannot meet the needs of all of their students - 3,800 students dropped out of Maine schools last year. Those students “drained” more than \$30 million away from their schools in state per-pupil allocations. Then other state agencies pick up the tab for the increased rate of problems those students experience later such as substance abuse, welfare, and juvenile crime.

Our next Governor needs to be serious about educational reform, light years beyond any minor changes acceptable to the traditional opponents of charter schools and other successful models of educational innovation.

Maybe next year Maine will be able to celebrate National Charter Schools Week with an expanded spectrum of public education options available to all of our children.

FMI, please visit [www.mainecharterschools.org](http://www.mainecharterschools.org), [www.uscharterschools.org](http://www.uscharterschools.org), and [www.publiccharters.org](http://www.publiccharters.org).