HOOSIER ACADEMY @ MUNCIE
COMBINING CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION WITH ONLINE LEARNING
PAGE 6

Documenting Indiana’s Charter Schools
VOL. 6 NO. 2 SPRING 2009

Please route this magazine to others interested in education.

Routing Request
Charter school advocates, operators and board members are innovative and entrepreneurial people. It is exciting to be around charter schools to see what they do differently from traditional schools. How is it that charter schools, with half the money as traditional public schools, produce such great results?

To find out, plan on attending the 2009 Indiana Charter School Conference on April 28 and 29 at the Indianapolis Convention Center. This is your one chance a year to get together with school board members from charter schools throughout the state, plus principals, and key experts in the field to find out what they are doing differently to improve public education.

This year’s conference features State Superintendent Tony Bennett as the keynote lunch speaker. As a former school district superintendent, Dr. Bennett plans to bring (and already has brought) a great deal of innovation to the state’s Department of Education. What did he do when he was a school superintendent? What innovations can we learn from him? Quite a bit.

Indianapolis Mayor Greg Ballard is the featured breakfast speaker. His administration has focused on creating a sustainable city. Charter schools are part of his plan. What are schools doing to sustain themselves and to ensure that they are indeed a part of the fabric of this community for years to come? Come find out.

The conference will feature several panels on board governance, building an effective budget, and strategic planning, as well as panels for the school leader on marketing, hiring, special education, and school law.

A key feature of the conference is the college bound activities at charter schools. Several charter high schools go beyond the idea of simply prepping kids for college and actually enroll students into college courses while they are still in high school. Come see how these schools are doing it, learn their challenges, and learn their results.

Marian College President Dan Elsener and Ivy Tech Indianapolis Chancellor Hank Dunn will lead a panel discussion focused on the opportunities for partnerships between higher education and charter schools.

Lastly, we are pleased to feature the authors of the two recent studies on the effectiveness of charter schools, Mary Jo Ratterman of the University of Indianapolis and Jonathan Plucker of Indiana University. This will be the first time these two experts have shared their findings with the same audience.

Teasley is president and CEO of GEO Foundation and can be reached at Kevin.Teasley@geofoundation.org.

ARE YOU A CSSC MEMBER?

Sign up for membership with the Charter School Service Center and receive a free copy of The Seven Outs. The author, Brian Carpenter, explains how to make strategic planning easy for charter schools. CSSC members receive discounts on events, special insurance programs and expert help with professional services.

VISIT WWW. INCSSC. ORG FOR DETAILS
Charters provide needed choice

BY TONY BENNETT

When I became the State Superintendent of Public Instruction earlier this year, I brought with me a fundamental truth I’ve learned after nearly 25 years as an educator: The stresses of society and the fast-paced change of technology have outstripped our ability to meet the needs of every student through traditional public education. At the same time, I feel it is our duty as educators to make sure every student is challenged and prepared according to their own unique needs.

That leaves a large question looming for us in education: How do we deliver on that duty in the face of our apparent inability to do so completely? Simply put, we need competitive partners who are willing to break the molds of traditional education as they provide more learning opportunities for our children. This may take place within the public school system, through models such as New Tech or vocational education, or it may require a commitment to working with our private and parochial schools to ensure our students’ needs are met. In some instances, it may require something else altogether, something like charter schools.

Often times in traditional public education, we are fearful of what more charter schools might mean to our own institutions. But those fears miss two important points. First, a little competition could go a long way to improving schools and the academic achievement of students. Innovation, improved quality, and lower costs of doing business are the usual results of competition in the economic sphere, and evidence suggests education would improve in much the same way.

The second point that is missed in those fears is that any talk about educational institutions is almost always inherently about the adults who work in education, not about the children who benefit from it. No matter the avenue, our focus should always be on finding educational models that deliver high quality learning opportunities for Hoosier students—especially when those students might otherwise fall through the cracks. In this regard, then, charters aren’t our competitors as much as they are our partners as we seek to fulfill our duty to meet the needs of all children.

And so I go back to the phrase “competitive partners.” As we’ve watched charter schools in Indiana develop over the past several years, we can see that they’ve been just that. In some cases, charter schools have helped educate children that probably wouldn’t do as well in traditional public schools, such as children with substance abuse issues or children with learning disabilities. In other cases, we’ve seen innovation from charters, such as virtual education, that has spurred our traditional schools to examine their own methods and explore new ones.

If we really hope to reform and improve public education in Indiana, we must realize that we cannot longer do it alone. We must embrace the basic tenet that gave rise to charter schools in the first place: Our children have different needs, and they should have more choices about where and how they are educated according to those needs.

Tony Bennett serves as the superintendent of public instruction for the Indiana Department of Education. For more information, go to www.doe.in.gov.

Charter schools garner attention in 2009 legislative session

BY JONATHON K. CIANI

Four bills affecting charter schools are currently under consideration, including a measure to place a moratorium on new schools

Four education-related bills that impact charter schools are making their way through the Indiana General Assembly. Here’s a rundown of the bills and status as of the printing of this magazine:

SENATE BILL 0126

A bill up for passage in the State Senate would make it mandatory for all schools—public, private, and charter—to offer financial responsibility courses to their students. These courses are designed to be grade appropriate, and to be offered throughout a student’s school experience, from grade school through high school.

Sen. Brent Waltz (R-Greenwood) sees the need for this bill when he looks at the current state of education in Indiana. Most students, he said, only receive one or two economics-related classes in their junior or senior year of high school. The question arises: What about kids who do not make it that far in high school?

Waltz offers this bill as an answer. According to the Senator, financial responsibility courses will teach students skills appropriate with their age level. Third graders, for example, will practice the simple math of balancing a check book; middle school students will work with credit card problems and issues of debt; and, those in high school will focus on taxes and mortgages. The idea behind the bill is to prepare Indiana students at all ages, and to arm them with basic skills needed to make it in the real world of finances.

SENATE BILL 0224

The content of Senate Bill 0224 speaks to the growing presence of technology in education. Sponsored by Sen. Teresa Lubbers (R-Indianapolis), the bill spells out virtual education requirements in high schools across the state. Specifically, it requires every student to complete at least one course through virtual learning before graduation.

Some charter schools rely on virtual education to some degree. Placing an emphasis on this type of
Legislative update continued...

learning not only helps students acquire basic technology skills, but helps everyone to consider the wide applicability of technology and to see how it can be connected to any field of study. According to the Indiana Department of Education’s website, practice with technology helps students become “communicators in a global village.” As charter educators work toward the goal of equipping students to participate in the world, experience with technology seems to be a logical part of the process.

Given these positive points, and the 34 to 15 majority with which it passed the Senate, the bill seems to have few objectors.

A survey conducted by Indiana University’s Center for Evaluation and Education Policy last year, however, adds a small voice of dissent. In the survey, 74 percent of respondents claim to be against virtual charter schools, while only 24 percent support them. But another question asked by the survey sheds a slightly different light on public opinion: Would you favor online classes as a supplement to general education? In this instance, 66 percent of respondents expressed support, while only 32 percent voiced opposition.

SENATE BILL 0227

The House committee on Education has been discussing this important bill which proposes to increase funding to Indiana charter schools. Specifically, the wording of this bill provides charter schools in the Indianapolis area with access to the Indianapolis Bond Bank. Currently, only charter schools expressly established by the mayor’s office have access to these funds. Also, charter schools would be in position to buy vacant and unused school buildings from corporations that no longer need them. This new access to funding would put charter schools on a more level playing field as traditional public schools, and for the first time enable charters to receive funding for technology, preschool education, and capital projects.

The last possibility, that of capital building projects, proves to be the most exciting piece of this loaded bill. One of the main challenges presented to charter schools is the funding of capital projects. According to the CEEP study, most charter schools and their organizers possess severely limited financial viability due to the amount of debt they must carry. Since providing the basic resources of education becomes a struggle for some charters, capital development gets shoved into the corner. Like all schools, charters at times feel the need to expand and improve their buildings and other capital resources. Without the passage of this bill, charters will receive funding for their most basic needs only and be unable to fund new building projects with government money. The possibilities for expansion offered by this bill would allow charters across the state to build special education centers and technologically enhanced classrooms, both of which would work toward the ultimate goal of helping students achieve their maximum potential. This new funding source would also enable charters to implement the program described by the technology bill currently being debated in the Statehouse. With more access to funding, charters could tap into the same resource pool from which traditional public schools draw, while still maintaining their unique mission and focus.

Given the plethora of benefits offered by the passage of Senate Bill 0227, charter supporters are urged to email their state senators and representatives to express their wishes.

Given the bill’s sizeable 41-9 victory in the Senate, its passage in the House seems likely.

HOUSE BILL 1723

Out of all the charter school related bills currently up for debate at the Statehouse, none has drawn as much attention as this bill introduced by Rep. Vernon Smith (D-Gary). The basic wording of the bill restricts authorizers from granting new charters in cities with a population of 90,000 to 105,000. Essentially, the bill proposes to place a moratorium on the creation of new charter schools, and also to limit the growth of existing institutions in applicable geographic areas. According to the bill, charters would not be allowed to add new grade levels and their funding would become static, freezing all possibility of expansion.

Commentators on this debate have pointed out that the key issue at stake is the effectiveness of charter schools. Smith’s position is that charter students do not perform better than their traditional public school counterparts in terms of grades or ISTEP results. In making these claims, Smith draws heavily upon the findings of the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy’s recent “Study of Effectiveness and Efficiency of Charter Schools in Indiana.” The study found that charter students do not out-perform traditional public school students, stating in an executive summary that “There is no practical difference between students in charter schools and traditional public schools.” This conclusion seems to be drawn on a purely statistical basis and one that does not account for the holistic function of charter schools nor improvement scores. Charters usually draw students whose parents have found that other schools are not the best path to their success in education. Also, charters approach the learning process with a handicap in terms of funding, and therefore have fewer resources at their disposal to aid in the educational process. The fact then that these institutions have been able to ensure students keep pace with traditional public schools should stand out as an accomplishment, not a demerit.

While this debate continues in the Statehouse and in educational think tanks, concerned parents and supporters of charter schools are asked to be ready to fight the passage of this bill with a concentrated effort. So far, the bill has narrowly passed the House by a 52-46 vote. According to the same survey that has provided data some use to criticize charter schools, parents who have chosen these institutions are “highly satisfied” with the charters their children attend. Given this enthusiasm, it seems reasonable that parents and supporters will rally to the cause. This hot issue continues to burn as the bill sits in committee in the State Senate as of this writing.
The new frontier in educational equity

BY CHARLIE SCHLEGEL

I was not necessarily looking for something to write about when I walked into Mr. Watson’s fifth grade class recently. He had invited me to stop in and see the culmination of nearly a month’s worth of meticulous research by his students. I listened as students offered carefully-prepared, awkwardly-presented profiles of great figures from the Age of Exploration, 500 years ago.

The nervousness each speaker felt was obvious, yet the information was interesting. Miguela offered fascinating facts from Vasco De Gama’s first trips to India (interspersed with awkward pauses when she lost her place in her notes). Playfully dressed in matching black berets, Desmond and Jonathan shared, in character, stories from the life of Ferdinand Magellan, the first explorer to sail around the world.

However, it was Daniel’s presentation that really stood out. Standing proudly in a white sailor’s hat, a black jacket and high-collared, dress shirt (probably borrowed from his grandmother’s closet), Daniel profiled the explorations of Ponce De Leon. Reaching beyond the ordinary facts and figures, he drew interesting parallels between De Leon’s ventures to new lands and his own journey as a student in his first year at our relatively-new, fairly challenging charter school.

“I leave it to a 10 year-old to lend such insight into the state of education reform in the 21st century. I certainly never considered there to be a connection between my experience in charter schools and the romantic adventures of Ponce De Leon, but I left Mr. Watson’s class a little prouder that day. Daniel made it clear that we are all pioneers – adventurous, courageous, audacious explorers. Ponce De Leon sought the “fountain of youth.” We seek quality education for urban children.

In fact, every year thousands of students, like Daniel, venture outside the familiarity of their neighborhood schools. They search with their parents for a safe and appropriately-challenging place to grow – places painfully scarce in most cities today. Similarly, a growing body of teachers and principals also are opting out, looking beyond the familiar terrain of conventional salary schedules and district-wide curricula in search of exciting, if uncertain, opportunities to work in innovative, mission-driven places like charter schools.

Of course, I don’t want to overstate the similarity. I doubt Vasco de Gama ever spent time supervising detention or cleaning up bathroom graffiti. Nonetheless, I think Daniel was on to something. In fact, I believe that schools as a whole and especially urban schools where the challenges are often greatest - are actually on the edge of a new frontier.

Today, many charter schools and a handful of urban districts are building their entire organizations around a surprisingly novel idea: student learning. In this new world, high quality schooling is determined not by the number of days students spend at their desk or the classes they pass. Rather, quality is measured by what they learn at each stage in their education. This simple but basic change carries broad implications for our work in schools.

For instance, a focus on student learning pushes us to establish new standards in quality. It is not some evolutionary law that enables children to read proficiently by second grade; it is a consequence of exemplary teaching, strong home support, early intervention and a shared culture that truly values literacy.

A new focus on learning will require a new level of flexibility. We cannot expect students with entirely different profiles or learning styles to learn equally well over the same amount of time within a single classroom. You would only need to see how long it takes me to learn a dance step to realize that we all bring different skill sets to each learning challenge. In time, I may achieve mastery on the dance floor, yet it will require more time, more effort and more creative instruction for me than for most of my peers. The same applies for students learning multiplication.

Finally, building a critical mass of urban schools focused on learning forces us to develop entirely new models of school. The support that teachers offer to students must become more individualized and tailored to the specific needs of each learner. Leaders must devise more sophisticated and timely tools to figure out what students know and then to define strategic methods of intervention to help all children develop the knowledge and skills essential to succeed at each level.

My point is that leaders of learning-focused urban schools – drawing inspiration from Daniel – need to push ahead boldly no matter how rough the seas. Five hundred years ago, explorers set sail for a world not yet known to them. Along the way, they developed maps to help others follow their path. They found courageous backers willing to finance their explorations even while they could make no promises that their search would produce rich rewards. Most of all they combined hope, vision, and vigorous commitment to seek a goal that lay beyond the horizon.

As explorers on the edge of this learning-focused educational frontier, we may not yet be able to see exactly where we are going but we have some maps (and models) to guide us, and we’ll try to steer a steady course. As we travel together, it’s reassuring to know we have students like Daniel, Miguela and Desmond with us. I think they can see beyond the horizon better than we can.

Schlegel is the principal of Challenge Foundation Academy.

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HOOSIER ACADEMY

Combining classroom instruction with online learning

BY AMANDA JUNK

As a member of Ball State University’s charter school authorizing board for the past six years, Lynn Black has seen and heard a lot of charter school presentations. One thing that was evident to him was that many of them were very traditional in their design.

“The purpose behind charter schools is creating reform models for public education,” he said. “Those schools in those charters were trying some new things but still were very similar to what you would find in any other place.”

Hoosier Academy in Muncie, which opened its doors to students on Sept. 2, 2008, takes this concept of reform to a new level. By participating in a hybrid school model, direct teacher classroom instruction is combined with online learning, making the Muncie school and the other Hoosier Academy in Indianapolis, the only blended charter school district in the state.

STILL LEARNING TO FLY

From its start, the school has had to overcome its own set of challenges. Hoosier Academy was approved to be a virtual learning center two years ago with instructional support done entirely over the Internet. After Ball State University’s Office of Charter Schools granted its approval, state legislation went through that disallowed virtual schools, even though several hundred parents had already signed up for the school. The legislation was later rewritten to allow for virtual schools that weren’t state-funded.

Interest to expand the Muncie Learning Center, as it’s called, to 9th grade exists, but whether or not it’ll happen won’t be known until after the current state legislative session has closed, Black said. For now, most parents are considering taking their 8th graders to local high schools, some back to the home school environment and some to the Learning Center in Indianapolis — its charter allows the school to add a grade each year for next two years.

“With the funding as it is, we have to do more with less,” Black said. “The money we receive from the state for our students also has to go toward our lease, the materials that we purchase and personnel. In renovating schools [in Indianapolis and in Muncie] it’s still far less than a traditional public school.”

Black was hired for the job about six months before the school opened and had the majority of teachers hired and in training by early August. The Muncie school, which shares a building with St. Lawrence Elementary School, underwent cosmetic changes for the entire month prior to the school’s opening to students, so administrative planning and scheduling had to be arranged elsewhere — all was done in a span of six months.

“Every day, every week is a challenge because everything is new,” Black said. “There are no other schools like ours. The way we’re designed, there wasn’t anybody we could go to. We had no template, no plan to follow.”

Black asks teachers three questions each week, much in keeping with what he says the school wants its students to do:

“What’s going well? What’s not going well? How do we need to improve? This demonstrates what we want our kids to do: continuously improve.

“The expression I’ve been using from the very beginning is, ‘We’ve been building the plane while we’re flying it,’ because we’re continuing to make corrections in flight in what we do and how we do it,” Black said.

USE OF TECHNOLOGY

To bridge the gap between at-home lessons and instruction at the Learning Center, Black said innovative use of technology is critical. Curriculum is based on the K12 model, and families are provided a computer, monitor, printer and Internet stipend as well as paper resources to encourage successful learning. Even with this technology, classrooms are still traditional.

Melissa DeWitt, a seventh and eighth grade teacher at the school, uses a SmartBoard to teach her class. In one lesson about cells, she had students read what was on the screen, then underlined key words from the slides. When something didn’t make sense to students, she reverted back to a white board to draw a diagram to emphasize key points and processes.

At home through Elluminate, an online conferencing system, DeWitt and other teachers at the Academy communicate with students using headphones to simulate the classroom learning environment during online office hours on days when they’re not at the Learning Center.

“It really is a partnership between the at-home and the center because everything builds on the previous day’s work,” DeWitt said.

Hoosier Academies’ teachers also interact with students and parents regularly through e-mails, online synchronous discussions,
scheduled virtual and in-person school activities, and during off-site hours through online collaboration tools.

Laura Carnes, a fourth and fifth grade teacher, has a classroom of 22 students—and just as many co-teachers in the form of at-home learning coaches. Carnes said she has a better line of communication with parents and students (she also supports fifth grade students in Indianapolis via the Internet) because of technology, referencing “K-mail,” a server-based e-mail that serves as a dedicated line of communication for school and school events. The school’s partner, K12, allows for a shared grade book and curriculum for parents and teachers on its website.

Carnes also plans periodic field trips for her Muncie and Indianapolis “virtual” students, such as a trip to the Eiteljorg Museum. While she said the cutting-edge technology and tools have been mostly helpful in establishing academic relationships, she sometimes worries that she doesn’t have as personal a relationship with her students because she only sees them two days a week.

“You miss out on some of the relationships on some of the aspects of their lives. …Time is very precious in the Learning Center so we don’t have time for class parties, but we’re doing something meaningful, so that’s worth it.”

DeWitt said she is actually much closer academically and personally to students than she was in traditional classroom. Instead of seeing 110 middle school children a day, she sees only 27.

“I know their strengths and weaknesses much better, and they feel more comfortable calling if they need help because we’re not so distant,” DeWitt said. “We’re accessible at any time.”

OVERCOMING COMMON MISPERCEPTIONS

Black says now his challenge for the school is to help other people understand the hybrid school model—“that it can work, that it does work. I’ve seen it work.”

The two schools serve 459 students; some families travel 60 to 90 minutes one-way to attend one of the Learning Centers, according to marketing material provided by the school. Students attending the Indianapolis Learning Center come from 18 counties and 54 school districts across Central Indiana. Students attending the Muncie Learning Center are drawn from nine counties and 19 school districts across Northeast Indiana.

Part of what makes the model work is strong parental involvement. Parents are encouraged to attend “Hoosier Huddles,” support groups and information sessions about the school prior to enrolling students, where they learn about legislative and logistical issues involved with charter schools. The Learning Center also tries to place parents who live in the same region on similar tracks for carpooling and added support.

A common misperception about the school is that a majority of families are home schooled prior to attending, which Black says is not the case. The school is attractive to families that want a flexible schedule and whose lifestyle calls for them to be on the road with their children or who are highly engaged in club activities.

State legislation for charter schools stipulates that more than 50 percent of the curriculum be taught face to face in the classroom. But in today’s fast-paced society, Black says, learning can and should happen anywhere. Hoosier Academies requires first through eighth grade families to spend a minimum of nine hours per week on off-site instruction; families are currently averaging 15 to 17 hours per week.

“What we’re trying to present to our kids [at the Learning Center] is learning takes place everywhere at all times of the day, not just Monday through Friday but Saturday and Sunday as well,” Black said. “Learning shouldn’t take time off; you just have to be open to those learning opportunities.”
Award-winning artwork by seven students from Irvington Community School is on display at the Indiana State Museum. The display, which lasts to May 10, follows about 6 weeks when the artwork was on display in the Oval Promenade Gallery in the Hilbert Circle Theatre (home of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra).

The Irvington students were among 100 selected as finalists in the Symphony in Color competition, which is open to elementary-age students throughout Indiana.

The seven students represented the greatest number of honors for a single school, which gave Irvington Community top prize, the Maestro Award from the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra at an Awards Tea in early March.

More than 35,000 elementary-age students submit artwork each year; each school is allowed to submit up to seven works, which means all seven Irvington students who submitted work were named as finalists. Of the seven, four received blue ribbons.

The students who won blue ribbons are: Brendan Clark (1st grade), Jayde Tyler (2nd grade), Eva Watson (4th grade), and Alyssa Meyer (6th grade). The three other entries were created by Piper Kelly, 3rd grade; Alex Urbanek, 4th grade; and Zoe Browne, 5th grade.

Rural Community helped by parents, community volunteers

Like most charter schools, Rural Community Academy in Graysville depends on the generosity of parents and community volunteers in a number of ways. So it’s an impressive feat that with only 334 households in Rural Community Academy’s community, the school has no shortage of helpers.

Four such helpers organize and run the school’s annual holiday program: Tanna Jo Weszely, Connie Wampler, and Randy and Tyler Nichols. The holiday program in December was a medley of nearly 25 song and dance numbers performed by all 150 students and 19 staff members of the school. A number of other community members build the set and perform other show-related functions.

But community involvement goes beyond individuals helping with the school’s holiday and Veteran’s Day programs. Businesses in the area help also.

“There are a lot of non-profit organizations who are there to support kids—the local pharmacy on smoking, the Kiwanis on grade improvement, the Elks on drugs,” said Susie Pierce, the school’s principal. “A class can adopt a platoon for patriotic purposes, or call the American Legion to do a flag disposal ceremony for the entire school.”

There are also profit organizations such as Walmart that will donate things such as a stuffed frog to take with a Walmart distribution trucker who can write to the class and talk about where he has been; the kids can follow his trip on a map.

The local Dairy Queen donates ice cream cones or more to kids for getting straight A’s.

“We are lucky that our community supports and participates in ‘their’ school,” Pierce said. “It is only when it is in your own backyard that people act, whether it be a chemical plant next to a residential urban area or a city dump 1/2 mile down the road. In our case, the passion for the community school that has stood for 100 years was a great motivator and no one wanted to see an old school building sit and fall down around itself.”
The most successful students

The list below, compiled by Wayne Artis and Kathy Sturdevant, both with Pikes Peak Community College in Colorado, is good food for thought as high school students prepare to move on to college.

MY MOST SUCCESSFUL STUDENTS

- attend class consistently
- are attentive in class and participate actively in discussion.
- take enough of an interest that they bring in additional resources such as news and magazine articles without my solicitation.
- read ahead in the textbook.
- seek additional information even if not required.
- follow the syllabus from week to week.
- have goals, focus, and self-discipline.
- ask for as much feedback from me as they can get.
- make friends and form study groups.
- take such thorough and clear notes that other students want to borrow them or that the student can tell the teacher where we left off last time.
- do not behave in a juvenile manner is class (whispering, “goofing off,” being a “smart aleck,” sleeping).
- do not behave in an inappropriate manner (cursing, threatening, arguing, making personal remarks, etc.) toward the instructor

Marion charter school to expand by one grade level

Dr. Robert H. Faulkner Academy plans to add another grade next school year. The Marion charter school opened a year ago as a K-5 school and plans to add a sixth grade this fall.

The school has about 160 students; another grade could add up to 22 more, with most sixth graders coming from the school’s fifth grade class.

The decision to add a grade came after parents of fifth graders asked the school to expand so their children could remain at Faulkner Academy. Jeremy Tucker is the school leader.

or other students.
- never cheat, copy, or plagiarize.
- pride themselves on their writing, always seeking to improve every aspect of it.
- take longer than anyone else to write essay exams, staying and writing as long as the instructor allows.
- stay after class or otherwise have enough individual exchanges with the instructor that I easily learn who they are early in the semester.
- sooner or later use my phone numbers to converse with me and/or visit my office.
- turn in rough drafts of papers to receive early feedback.
- behave almost as nervous over-achievers, asking me many questions (especially before tests) and worrying a lot about every detail.
- study for tests for hours, especially by outlining and recopying information from their notes.
- study, read, and write about 2-3 hours for every hour of class time.
- pour enthusiasm into the subject.
- are usually students with plans to go on for at least a four-year degree, and usually with at least tentative career plans.
- usually share what they are learning with family members when they go home.
- find quiet times and places to study away from family.
- always study by writing things down, not by just rereading, watching videos, or listening to tapes, because the act of writing assists memory.
- follow the instructor’s guidelines carefully.
- are willing to come forward when infractions are serious.
- apply for scholarships and awards, asking for letters of recommendation.
- question those who say or do inappropriate things and then are willing to come forward when infractions are serious.
- seriously fill out evaluation forms on instructors, writing comments.
- take part in or attend selected student activities on campus (but do not usually have the time to do many).
- seriously consider how to balance jobs, class load, and private life, carefully cutting back to preserve quality.
- judge their school achievements by what they have learned, not just grades they have earned.
- have a sense of humor.
- stretch their vocabularies for self-improvement.
- often ask for more time to write a paper or take a test if they know the teacher is flexible, but will knock themselves out to meet deadlines when necessary.
- are generous and kind toward other students and the instructor.
- often panic before a big test.
- see the relationship between their own daily lives and the subject they are studying.
- register early for classes.
- rarely drop or withdraw, but when they do, make the decision promptly and carefully, and take care of their own paperwork.
- rarely take incompletes, but then finish the courses and still earn high grades.
- carefully plan their schedules over the years, using the college catalog.
- take some classes just because the subject fascinates them.
- do not hesitate to seek additional help, such as a lab or center on campus, if they need it.
- consult their faculty frequently.
- often consider or plan to teach themselves someday.
- recognize their own responsibility for how well they do in a class.
- enjoy learning.
Reinventing the nature of intelligence

BY JIM ELLSBERRY

What charter school educators believe about the nature of intelligence drives the mission and shapes the vision as to how those schools are administered and organized for instruction.

For more than a century, beginning with Alfred Binet’s work in France in 1904, the two basic underlying principles of intelligence have not changed:

- Intelligence (IQ) is a function of the human brain and therefore a unitary whole
- IQ is a fixed quality – as one’s skin color or physique – unchangeable.

Educators and researchers have continued to question and debate these traits over the ensuing decades. Are they really fixed? What is the source of intelligence? Is it genetically determined? Or can it be modified as a result of one’s environmental influences such as diet, family support, quality of schools, neighborhood, etc.? That debate has come to be known as nature v. nurture.

In 1994, Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray authored a book The Bell Curve, in which they reported three findings based on the evidence of their research:

- Intelligence may be defined as an inherited trait that is not readily influenced by educational and/or social interventions.
- Cognitive ability (intelligence) is unequally distributed among races.
- There is a strong tendency for those with similar intellectual capacities to marry one another.

It was, perhaps, the “politically incorrect-ness” of the book that may have sparked a re-examination of the nature of intelligence. Several respected authors have put forth their own beliefs about the nature of intelligence.

- Daniel Goleman’s book, Emotional Intelligence, uses research from the field of neuroscience that clearly established that humans are of “two minds,” the rational and the emotional. He builds the case that EQ (emotional intelligence) is just as essential to one’s success as IQ (intellect).
- David Perkins authored a book, Outsmarting IQ: the Emerging Science of Learnable Intelligence, in which he points out evidence that knowledge is the key to successful achievement. Given appropriate opportunities and experiences one can “know one’s way around.” Simply put, that means that people raised in an environment of scholarship have book smarts. Those raised in an urban environment, perhaps in the absence of formal education, develop street smarts. Suffice to say that one thrown into the environment of the other is likely to struggle to cope.

As I stated earlier, what we personally believe about the nature of intelligence drives our decisions about how we administer schools and shapes our vision for planning instruction. Therefore, it is imperative for every educator to understand the dichotomy between the century old scientifically supported theory that intelligence is fixed and its distribution is predictably reflected by the bell-shaped curve, to theories that suggest that schooling, a supportive environment, equal opportunity, etc., have the power to alter one’s genetic intelligence.

In a time where schools have been mandated to leave no child behind, we are asked to ensure that no one is below average. Students’ scores on achievement tests will be distributed along a continuum from highest to lowest; those scores will generally adhere to the shape of the bell curve. We may establish a point of “minimum competency,” separating the “competent from the incompetent.” If one establishes a point so low that everyone can pass, what does it prove?

We are in need of principals and teachers who understand the ongoing debate between nature and nurture. Our prisons are full of people who could pass ISTEP, not just those who didn’t. How we go about the process of educating our children and teenagers depends in large measure on what we believe about the nature of intelligence . . . or how we choose to define it. What do you believe?

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The Wabash Raft Trip

Energetic, overjoyed, excited. This was the way I felt before we started down the river. How did I feel after we set out on the water? ULTRA-Energetic, ULTRA-Overjoyed, ULTRA-Excited. These are just some of the adjectives I could use to describe what I saw and what I experienced on the Wabash raft trip. As we drifted down the Wabash, the signs of pollution were horrendous; there was a bus that was one fourth of the way submerged in the Wabash as it was, and at its high point the river would almost cover one half of the bus. If that’s not pollution I don’t know what is. The bus in the water does have an up side, because it was probably placed there to prevent bank erosion, but it is now a form of pollution.

I saw much plant and animal life, and observed a lot of foliage. I was able to observe many trees, and identify them, because, prior to the raft trip my class did a project of collecting leaves, and identifying the trees that that leaf came from, so I was ready for this part of the trip. Another point of high standing with me was the animal life. The most abundant animal I saw was fish. Well, mostly I saw Asian Carp—they were everywhere. They themselves are pollution. Introduced in the 1970s, these pesky fish have spread widely because when they are fingerlings, they are mistaken for a common bait fish. Asian Carp are very adaptive, mate very often, and use up the resources of the native fish. In addition to being a nuisance, they also pose a threat to the average fisherman. Certain specifics of Asian Carp, such as the Silver Carp, are known for their leaping ability, and can jump up into the boats and injure, or even kill the fisherman, by hitting him in the head. These peculiar fish are known to leap from the vibration of an outboard motor, or a small electric charge sent through the water. We experienced one instance where a school of Silver Carp got caught up in a branch that had fallen in the water. Then about 15 or 16 fish started jumping all over the place trying to get out of their branchy prison.

After we got to the sandbar we had lunch and then the learning began. The first station my group went to was Senator Waterman’s. At his station we learned about the French fur traders, and how the weeping heart on a tomahawk meant that they were a friendly trader. At the second station we discussed the water table. At the third station we tested water. We then rowed to Hutsonville and helped put the rafts into the trailer. All in all, I had a fun day.
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