



Ember: 02:31 And the irony is that they're using the same myths that have been around since 1991. The same myths have been repeated and repeated. The number one myth that is out there, that I hear back all the time is that, somehow, charter schools are private schools. And of course, they're not, they are public schools. They've always been public schools. And this polling has showed that one-third of America believes that chartered schools are private schools. Well, that for sure is going to increase the negatives because a lot of America doesn't support private vouchers. So that's been a real issue.

Ted: 03:10 Well, that's again why some of us like to talk about chartering being a part of public education, get the focus off 'charter schools'. This is part of public education. Back to what this fellow said about we may be going to change the church but preserve the faith. So keep the focus on are they open to everybody, are they free to everybody, are they equitable?

Ember: 03:53 No tuition is charged.

Ted: All of that thing. All that kind of thing.

Ember: First come, first serve.

Ted: If you present these essential principles of public education that charter schools follow, it's different but significantly different than saying are they private schools.

Ember: 04:12 And before the Trump administration, when Kappan polled the public about the favorability of chartering, they found that, for five years prior to 2016, two-thirds of America supported public school chartering. And I ask you, what else does two-thirds of America support? Not very much. So it was one of those things that crossed bipartisan lines. And when you have legislation in Congress, it's one of those few things where the Republicans and Democrats can come together. That doesn't surprise me at all because that's exactly what happened back in 1991 when we passed the first bill in Minnesota. And that coalition that came together became really the moderates of both parties, the Democrats and the Republicans coming together.

And it's very interesting because we had a Democratic legislature at the time with a Democratic speaker of the House. And in the most important vote, the closest vote, there was a real question whether this was going to pass. And it only passed by three votes. And in that most important vote, in that three vote margin, the reason it passed is because the minority Republicans provided the difference. In fact, 56 percent of the minority Republicans provided votes for chartering. Only 42 percent of the Democratic majority voted for it. And yet, the speaker of the House let that go on.

Now you see, that doesn't happen in politics today. Now, there's some sort of an unwritten rule that if a majority of your own caucus doesn't support it, you can't have something supported by bipartisan legislators as an alternative. That doesn't happen. And that's why I wonder, if we might not see chartering come through today in the same way that we saw it come through in '91, we don't have a political system that allows that kind of middle-of-the-road, centrist kind of initiatives.

Ted: 06:14 We've got to change the way people think. It's a hard thing to do, but if I can throw a little something into the—I mean, what would I do if I were able to fly around the country and talk to people more, I would—

Ember: We need advice, Ted.

Ted: 06:37 I would suggest that the advocates of chartering move beyond the case that relates to schools, the argument that these are good schools and they're open and little kids learn well, and we're going to try to do with these schools what the districts don't do with their schools. And that these are schools that can be closed if they don't score well, which is good but not enough, I would say. I would move up to the larger problem, which I think state leadership is concerned about and the public is concerned about. And that is, is this whole system making progress?

Chartering is good as it is and as it's grown fast, it's in 44 of the states plus D.C. It's 3 million kids and 7,000 schools, I think. But the American education system is much bigger than that. And so the opportunity, I think, is for the

advocates of chartering to say, we're here to help the American public school system in its larger dimensions succeed with being able to change and improve as fast as it now needs to and as fast as the developments in learning and educational technology now make possible. The district sector by itself can't do this. It just doesn't have internally what it takes to challenge a lot of its own givens. It is not change-oriented. It is not, as we were saying earlier, a self-improving system.

There has to be a successful innovative charter sector pushing the districts all the time with ideas and also with pressure from student enrollment and the financing changes that go along with student enrollment. But I'd take the high ground and say, "We're here to help the district sector succeed." And if that case sells, that makes the case that the district sector then needs to support the charter sector. A lot of times, arguments are won by changing the terms of the discussion. And that's what I think is essential for the advocates of chartering now, to change the terms of the discussion, to make it have to do with the success of the public education system as a whole, and show that the charter sector is essential for that.

The other thing—I think you could give me your own reaction to this -- I think it's possible, too, for the teachers to support this. We've got a kind of a stalemate now in which the school boards say to teachers that, "We don't give you professional autonomy, and in return you don't-give-us accountability." That's where things stand now. School boards don't want to give the autonomy, but they want to hold the teachers accountable.

The teachers say, "Look, if you folks up there are going to make the decisions about what's taught and how it's taught, you'd be accountable." Well, no. The school boards are not going to be accountable for student learning. They say: You're the teachers. You're the ones that have to be held accountable. This is unproductive. This is an unsuccessful discussion.

But the potential is there for a deal in which you turn this around and you say, "We will give you real professional

authority in the school to decide how individual students learn.” And everything we've learned from the experiments in the charter sector, what’s been tried in the charter sector in Minnesota so far, is that if teachers can control what matters for student and school success, they're happy to accept accountability for student and school success.

So we have a situation where conventional school reform on the one hand, which is after accountability, and teachers and unions on the other hand are after professional authority, each can get what it wants by giving the other what it wants. Now, who can broker that deal? I'd take the discussion up to this level and get it beyond where it's been for 10 years now, which is the standard advocacy within the present framework of trying to justify charter schools even though they raise all these questions about taking the district’s money and all of this kind of thing, all the myths that you’re describing.

Ember: 11:55 So you're saying that the legislature can give the school boards more or the option to try something new; is that what you're saying?

Ted: 12:06 Yes. What I'm currently thinking about and actually talking about with a group of experienced, utterly credible professionally and politically people who've been in Minnesota Public Education a long time, is to have the legislature try something, which I think we could describe, which would increase the prospect that the school district would be more open to innovation than it is. I was talking earlier about innovation being different, and people who advocate differences are usually a minority. People who are regarded as outliers; maybe not the most popular people in the district. It's very difficult for them to prevail in the framework of a public corporation that really responds to majorities. So in the same way that the legislature with chartering created this opportunity for difference within the larger public education system, the legislature has now got to find a way to create the opportunity for innovation within the school district. And I've got an idea about this. But I don't want to go into it unless you want to hear it.

Ember: 13:42 But I think that's something that we should go into at some point here, because I think that we've talked about how the system is what is the matter here. It's not the teachers, it's not the educators, it's the system. Well, the system, yes, at the school district level, the superintendent level, their hands are tied on a lot of things. But the school board is also, they're hands are tied in a structure, too, that doesn't work very well.

Ted: 14:12 Well, I like Walter McClure's notion that organizations, institutions tend to behave the way they're structured and rewarded to behave. If you don't like the way they're behaving, you probably ought to think about changing the way they're structured and rewarded.

Right now, the legislature has the institution of the school board structured in such a way as to be maximum negative to any kind of significant change. Talk to someone like Tom Nelson, a teacher himself, chair of the Senate Education Finance Committee and commissioner of education, superintendent in a whole series of big suburban East Metro districts. The thing here he'll tell you about is what he found—what he describes as a remorseless pressure for sameness. It's just the imperative on school boards. Creating differences is just trouble. It causes talk. It causes conflict. Why do they get to do it and we don't? They're making us look bad. They can do it over there; why can't we do it over here? It goes on forever. It's just so much easier to keep everything the same. All the schools being treated the same, all the parents and families being treated the same.

John Goodlad wrote in his book in 1985: The cards are stacked against innovation. Okay. How do you redo the deck so that it is stacked to encourage innovation? Well, that actually connects with some things that are going on in the charter sector today that I know the Walton Foundation, for example, is very interested. Think about David Osborne's work, which is really carrying on the kind of thing Paul Hill did with this idea of an all-contract district—originally a proposal to the Education Commission of the States. A charter-like district, but still with an elected board.

It's the idea of the board getting out of running the schools and getting the board into an essentially authorizing concept with respect to the schools. It's what Randy Quinn in Colorado saw; that if we had contract arrangements with schools, each one would be independent. It could do what it wanted without creating this precedent. There wouldn't be this imperative for sameness at the board level. We could do different things for different parts of our district and different families with different kids and different interests. Why don't we do that?

I've read David's book. And he was here on his book tour, 24 cities, and they're working on it; they have hopes for a number of cities. And Paul Hill is trying this portfolio notion with a number of cities, but it's going slowly. My argument essentially is that if the people in chartering would just assert they're happy with the idea that when authority is delegated to the schools the authority ends up with the teachers, I think you could bring the teachers and the unions around in support of that.

This is again back to Louise and the Guild and that sort of thing here in Minnesota. The difficulty comes when it's not clear -- as I think it is not, in either Hill's or Osborne's plan at the moment -- that the schools would be teacher-powered schools. A simple change of that sort, I think, would change the dynamics of this whole discussion.

Ember:

18:24

And the legislature has a role in this because they could help to create policy that gives school boards permission for that, gives more support, if you will, to the teacher-powered concept. I know that you've tried various things, but we need to do more to encourage that. And that leads me to something that I'd like to just talk about, and that is the need for more legislators who are interested in the whole idea of system change and redesign.

You were saying there's tremendous pressure in school boards for sameness. Well, oh, my gosh, look at a legislature. That pressure for sameness is there even 10 times more. And the reason is that you have all the special interest groups that don't want to see change. They're invested in what has already been legislated.

Ted: 19:13 Just the same. There are two dimensions, sameness now through time and sameness across the board at any given time. Okay.

Ember: 19:20 Correct. Very good. And the point being that we have to change that by electing legislators who are there to really govern and to think through the differences in the questions. They have to ask different questions. They have to think about the “how”, which is what you’d do in your book. And we have to have legislators who I call “policy entrepreneurs.” Right now, we have legislators who are ideologues or committed to an ideology first before they’re committed to trying to work out solutions across party lines. The chartering legislation and other major legislation comes about because people are contributing their ideas.

But right now, legislators, I think, many of them, are reduced to basically irrelevance. Their vote hardly counts because it's all being done by people who manage the big bills or the leaders, and they're not being asked to contribute their expertise in this way. So I think there's a legislative system that is also contributing to this.

Ted: 20:24 Well, that's a problem. It used to be more possible each year, more likely, more common than it has been in recent years for individual legislators to carry bills, which you did. But it does raise the question of whether you could get a governor to be the instigator, author, proponent of what Graba likes to call radical change. Chartering was a radical change. It was outside the givens at that time. It was not predictable from what had gone before. Now, you had different experience with the governor at the time chartering went through than you had at the time open enrollment went through, with Perpich.

But how about -- is it conceivable to think about -- getting a governor interested in the next dimension of policy change, accepting there’ll also be a financial element.

Ember: 21:30 I think that's important. But remember, chartering came from the legislature, and it came from those people outside the legislature. And that's really where I think it needs to start. So policy entrepreneurs can be people

outside the legislature but who are influential with them. And they can run for office. They can run for governor and run for legislature. And until we get some of those folks in there, I think it's going to be difficult to make a significant change. The other thing we need to do is to get more legislators who really are more centrist because that's where many of these solutions come from.

I do think though that there's a need just in the public for more civility. I think there's also a need in the public for people to simply look for what I call the "next right answer." Right now, in the public and at the legislature, your answer is right and my answer is wrong. There is just no middle ground. But if you look at it in the way of looking for the next right answer, it doesn't mean the previous answer was wrong. And it allows you to unlock that creativity and find what that next right answer looks like.

We don't see that anymore. And that's the only way chartering and other new ideas like this are going to happen. But right now, we're in a right versus wrong, party versus party (mode). That is not going to help innovation occur. And all we can do right now is to try to get policy entrepreneurs elected and to educate the current policymakers to understand where some of these ideas like chartering came from, because they simply are suffering from myths.

Ted: 23:15 What if we had some number of, as you maybe said earlier, entirely credible, professionally and politically credible people with irreproachable experience in the Minnesota K-12 system, who would stand up and say, "It is not what it needs to be. It has to change." I know it's hard. I'll never forget the day in the governor's discussion group when, all of a sudden, the person who was, at that time, the president of the state superintendents association interrupted the discussion and said, "Don't talk about change." And all around the table, there was this silence. Finally, somebody said, "For heaven's sake, why not?" And he said, "To talk about change implies that what went before was not okay."

Ember: Right. Right.

Ted: But a skillful governor building off of this kind of judgment expressed publicly by absolutely credible group of people in mainline K-12, I think, could be important. I mean, Perpich advanced open enrollment because the Business Partnership, for heaven's sake, a business group, had broken the trail by making open enrollment, inter-district enrollment, a part of its program.

Ember: 24:47 Somebody from outside the political system. Yes.

Ted: Right. Right. So if we take these people who are now retired and in a position to say what they couldn't say when they were working in the system, for the system, my hope would be that we could begin to get some interest and movement in the legislature.

Ember: 25:10 Well, and not only that but take some of the retired legislators. Take Speaker Vanasek, who is the one who allowed chartering to pass even though his party wasn't in majority supporting it. Take some of these legislators that maybe have changed their mind since.

Ted: Take Becky Kelso and Mindy Greiling and—

Ember: But some of the union supporters, too. And then we bring it together, and we come together. We need another type of Citizens League, similar to what exists but really made up of the wisdom of those who have served before and know what it's like to govern and govern effectively.

Ted: 25:53 I've had two commissioners, sitting commissioners, who are still around, say to me in private meetings, "I don't know why we don't blow the system up and start over." Now, that's not a practical "how" for change. But it is possible to find people who've been up at that level as well as people who've been working inside districts who would be willing to say that something major needs to happen.

Ember: 26:21 But as chartering illustrates, especially when we first passed it, you don't blow up the system. When I was the author as a Democrat, I was not trying to say that there was an indictment of our public school system. I was a product of the public schools. I loved my teachers, and I

was supported by them. No, it wasn't. It was more that there are issues, there are student needs that aren't being met, there are students that are falling between the cracks. We need to be able to individualize, to customize some learning opportunities to meet the needs of various students.

Ted:

26:58

But we have to be careful what we mean by 'the system'. There's the operating system out there, which is the superintendents, the boards and the teachers and the unions and all of that. But there's a system in the other sense, which is the rules of the game, which those in operating roles don't make, which the legislature has made.

I got a wonderful book I got once called From Six-on-Six to Full Court Press. I came out of Iowa State. It's the history of Iowa girls basketball. My mother played basketball. She lived the first tier of counties north of Iowa. In those days, the court was divided into three parts, and there were two players on each team in each third of the court. There were running centers and jumping centers, and she was a running center. And you could only dribble twice. Guards were not allowed to shoot. I mean, it was the whole set of rules, you see, that produced a very uninteresting game.

You change the rules of the game, you change the way the game is played. But it's the legislators who have to change the rules of the game. I must have gone to the NewSchools Venture Fund for about 12 consecutive years when we were talking about how to spread innovation, entrepreneurship, using chartering. I am pretty sure there was never a state legislator on the program in all that time. The Venture Fund was just oblivious to system-change in that sense. I would do much more with state policy people.

I wish the Education Commission of the States were doing more. It was created to do this kind of thing. I had a little discussion with the strategy director of ECS a couple of weeks ago, and I realized all of a sudden that when he talks about 'strategy' he's not talking about strategy for the improvement of public education. He's just talking

about strategy for ECS, which it seems is to provide states all kinds of precise detailed technical help.

Ember: 29:16 What I'd like to see an organization do is train policymakers how to think in a way where they can either redesign a system or think about how it connects with continuous improvement. But legislators aren't taught really either one of those things. And I like what you have created in your book and in your thinking over time this notion between redesign and continuous improvement. And it is usable in other areas, not just chartering. And that's what I think is so interesting to legislators.

Because if you take a look at what Governor Vilsack did in Iowa once the chartering thing came out, he then applied that concept of chartering to state agencies. What's that concept? That concept is about trading regulation for results. In other words, you are my Commissioner of Human Services in Iowa, and I say you're going to get this much money and you're going to have the ability to do what you want to do with that to get the results. And if you get X results, you'll get a bonus or some sort of incentive. So you get the freedom to be better in your agency.

Ted: 30:30 That's exactly the general principle. That's what we're trying to bring into the education system.

Ember: That's what chartering is.

Ted: I mean, that's what Osborne's book, whatever, early '90s, early '80s, whenever it was—

Ember: Reinventing Government.

Ted: —Reinventing Government was all about.

Ember: 30:45 But taking it bigger, and that's why these policymakers don't understand what they're missing by not seeing what's behind the chartering and the redesign and the system redesign and chartering. So Governor Vilsack then gave his commissioners this authority, and they were getting results. They were getting results, sometimes, with less money. Sometimes, he'd give them less money and

they got more results because they wanted the freedom of that. Well, that we can do in just about anything.

Here in Minnesota, when I was an executive with Lutheran Social Service, we did the same thing. We created a program for people with disabilities where we said, "We wanted to give the family a certain amount of money to spend the way they thought best. And we were talking with the Department of Human Services to get a waiver for us to do that. Again, trading regulation for results, giving them the freedom for they can give us not only results but new ideas that the system can then take and run with and that government can use.

If we don't have those ideas coming from the citizens, we're not going to get them certainly from a legislature that's pressured for sameness.

Ted: 31:50 Would you think that the kind of thing we're starting, you and Jim Goenner starting, with the development of the charter library, with these conversations recorded here and comparable tapings and oral histories, so to speak, in Colorado, in California, in Michigan, Pennsylvania, other states, is a central part of making the case? By explaining the original concepts, the importance of innovation, the openness of the system to the creation of various kinds of schools, the idea of the authorizer, essentially a contract model as opposed alongside the bureau model. As all of this gets explained, as these interviews accumulate and then get made available to political scientists and to education policy people and maybe get fed into ECS and other legislative organizations, that can be important.

Ember: 33:00 And to new policymakers because there is a churn of policymakers all the time, new governors and also new candidates for teaching, so that they really understand the why of chartering and all of the opportunities for teachers that you have talked about for teachers to take the lead. All of that is part of why we're doing the library. I am very excited to be part of this library project. Because if we don't preserve the history, we are never going to be able to inform the future of chartering and all that it can bring to the education sector.

Ted: 33:34 Beyond the history, it's the essential ideas about strategy extracted from it and presented as lessons. I mean, I think the library is important because chartering is important. If the chartering were a trivial sort of thing and not a fundamental system change, the library wouldn't be very important. But because the charter idea is so central to the strategy that states have got to follow for their improvement of the system as a whole, the importance of the library rises along with that.

Ember: 34:18 It really does. And unfortunately, as people move on, and we've had all these governors and others involved in it, if we don't capture their histories now, we will never get them. And so that's our project right now, to get yours and other pioneers so that we can safeguard this for future generations.

Ted: 34:36 I think you should get out to California pretty soon, talk to Gary Hart certainly and probably Sue Burr, who's currently still on the state board, and Eric Premack, and go to Colorado and talk to Barbara O'Brien.

Ember: 34:50 And we will do that. One of the other things, I think, comes out of the chartering, sort of, the redesigned piece of it is, I remember in the history of it when we're passing the charter bill at the state legislature that a superintendent came from North Branch, you probably remember the—

Ted: Jim Walker.

Ember: Jim Walker. And he got everyone's attention when he actually said, "Yeah, our system is pretty bureaucratic." Here is a school superintendent saying this is about bureaucracy. And what he was saying is that the reason he was supporting the charter concept is because it is transparent. It breaks through the bureaucracy. You can really see where the money is going. You can see what is happening, and it's not as hidden. And he said, basically, that what you can do in a system that's not transparent is simply just point fingers and there's never any real evidence as to where the problem is. The transparency is important.

Ted: 35:53 Sure. The lack of transparency is an essential characteristic of the district arrangement. State law required the school boards to sit in a situation in which, at the same time, they were promising to get the voters and the public the best possible education for the students, but at the same time were operating the only learning business in town. That was the traditional arrangement prior to chartering. I said this once to Anne Bryant when she was the executive of the National School Boards Association. I said, "It's an act of self-dealing, arguably corrupt."

The charter arrangement separates that; the Osborne and Paul Hill concepts separate that. So you have one (group of) people whose job is to get the best possible collection of learning opportunities for the students of the area, and a separate group of people whose obligation is to deliver that best possible learning. That's what brings it out, as you say, transparently.

Ember: 37:10 Well, and one of the best stories about transparency, I think, is when—if you recall an individual came before the Minneapolis School Board and said, "Show me the money." He was African American. He came from an African American part of the district. And his concern was that the school district, Minneapolis School District, was spending money in other areas, not in his area. And he said, "Show me the money." And of course, that was exactly what was happening. And they found that the money, that the full per pupil unit amount was not going to the students in his area but was being used to feed for other programs that the superintendent wanted.

Well, that's where the lack of transparency came. And then you and others of the legislature passed legislation or worked on it. So now, that sort of information is available. Well, my point being, that goes right to the issue with chartering. The number one problem I hear or myth I hear about is that the money somehow is taken from the district and goes to a charter school; that it comes from the district. Well, the bottom line is (the money) follows a student. It goes with the student to the charter school, right? What the superintendent has lost is the ability to put that money where the superintendent wants it to be. He's lost control of putting it to where his priorities might

be. So what chartering does is take the money for the student, send it to the (charter) school, put a little lock on the door so the superintendent cannot get at it. That's what the superintendents are really saying is the issue here, when they say that it takes money from the district. They're basically funding phantom students. And we all know that doesn't make sense.

Ted: 38:57 Right. I was in Northfield once years ago when Becky Kelso ran into that argument when she was chair of the committee, and she said, "Let's get real here." She was hearing the argument that when my revenues go down, my costs don't go down proportionately. And I still have a building and I still have the heat and light and all that sort of expense, and I can't close the whole building. Becky said, "Well, it works the other way, too. When you get a couple more students, your costs don't go up proportionately, but we send you the full per pupil cost. We don't send you the incremental cost. We send you the full per pupil cost, and I never hear you complain about that." You need a legislator, you see, who understands the system well enough and can deal in those terms. She said, "I mean, you're talking about a five percent change in revenues or a three percent change in revenues. You're a manager. You can't handle a three percent change in revenues? Something's wrong here. Do we need to get somebody who can handle a three percent change?" She was very effective.

Ember: 40:13 That makes a lot of sense, but she was a school board member so she knew that as well from that experience. Just aligned with that is the other myth that I hear a lot, and that is a lot of people think somehow charter schools get more money per pupil. I don't know why, but maybe they think they get philanthropic dollars or something beyond the district schools. But on average, the National Alliance shows us that, on average, charter schools receive about 70 percent of the funding of district schools. And that's because they don't get the property tax revenue, and they wind up taking the debt payments out of the operating dollars.

Now in Minnesota, we fix that a little bit by having lease aid, which has been very helpful, but not every state has that.

- Ted: 40:53 We have a closer match between the financing of the district schools and the financing of schools in the chartered sector.
- Ember: 41:02 But we still unfortunately see charter schools doing more with less. And part of that, when we started it, the reason for that was thinking that if we did have control of the dollars that we'd be able to find ways to save money but not 30 percent. So there are definitely savings involved but not enough.
- Ted: 41:20 I think that defense and that argument for the chartered sector . . . that one's doing pretty well. Those numbers are hard to dispute. So the opponents move over to other kinds of questions that don't have—
- Ember: 41:34 But one that they move over to a lot is this notion of management companies. And we should address that as well. There are some other states particularly that have a number of either nonprofit or for-profit management companies that manage charter schools. And I just want to deal with the myth, first of all, that there are no for-profit charter schools. All charter schools by definition are run by a nonprofit board of directors with fiduciary duties. They can choose to hire a management company if they feel that management company has the expertise to deliver the results they want for their students.
- But in the end, the board hires and fires that management company and it's like hiring a for-profit vendor for food or for IT or whatever. So I want to just clarify that myth because we hear it a lot. On the other hand, we do know that one of the unexpected things that have occurred in chartering is that there had been more of these networks. Only about 60 percent, I think, of chartered schools of today are independent schools, which is what we originally saw here in Minnesota.
- Ted: 42:47 I think, sometimes about Diarmaid MacCulloch's History of the Reformation. It was the breakup of the Catholic

Church. And with chartering there was a kind of reformation of the church of public education. A new sector appeared. But in the religious reformation, Protestantism itself split into a number of different sects, right? There were Lutherans and Anglicans and Calvinists and others. We've had the same kind of thing in chartering. The charter sector consists now of several different 'sects' each with somewhat different beliefs. There's the group that met in New York late last year or last winter that was very committed to independent community-based freestanding charter schools. And there are others that are very committed to having CMOs, charter management organizations that each has some considerable number of schools. It's somewhat like a private sector district. There are people who are interested in innovation. There are people who are not interested in innovation, who simply want to do conventional school better.

We have an important discussion going on, one that's a long ways from being settled, about what the outcomes ought to be. We have this very narrow concept of outcomes as how well a student knows how to read and count. Both are important. But the question is, is that all that's important? Most people would say, that's not all. But if you're going to have something more, you have to be able to define it and be able to measure it. Engagement is a very interesting topic. One of the most recent survey polls done for The Kappan by Gallup or somebody else a year or two ago was about asking the American public what you want from the schools. What the American public wants overwhelmingly is to see and feel that the students are engaged in their learning.

Ember:

Social emotional learning was part of it, yes.

Ted:

Yeah. And when they asked further, how do you think schools ought to be held accountable, what do you think they ought to be held accountable for, the public quite logically answers: They ought to be held accountable for getting the students engaged. There are ways to measure whether students are engaged, and where that's done, the numbers are very depressing. They start fairly high in middle elementary school, and they decline steadily on

through high school, by which time you have maybe a quarter of the students nationally who report themselves as heavily engaged in learning.

That's a measure we could use a lot more. It's one of the most, I think, most telling questions that you could ask and maybe this can form part of the advocacy. Ask people in the district sector whether motivation matters. If motivation matters for effort and if effort matters for learning, then motivation matters for learning. Ask them: What is it your district does to maximize student motivation?

Ember: 46:28 It's an important question. But we in the legislature could also provide incentives for that, too. And we should think about how we would do that.

Ted: 46:37 That's back to what the state can do now to make the districts more inclined to do different and to show them that the application of the charter idea, I would say, to their own district, and enlarging the role of teachers in the school, is the best way to go about that. So this discussion about defending chartering to me is that this leads to the need for the charter sector to be much more assertive about it being the route to the improvement of American public education generally.

Ember: 47:33 And that it cannot just be dependent on a comparison of test scores between district schools and charter schools. That's always been the—

Ted: That goes nowhere. As I said before, it's basically nonsense.

Ember: But I think in this piece, you should also just repeat why, because that is probably the other myth is that somehow charter schools don't perform as well as district schools.

Ted: 47:56 You have to go back to the original fundamental that the people organizing a school are encouraged, are free, to setup whatever kind of school they want. The charter school is not pedagogically a kind of school; students are going to learn from the kind of learning program that the organizers put into the school. So you have to start by

understanding what this school is as a school. What does it have its students reading, seeing, hearing, and doing? And you can then relate student performance to those things.

But to try to relate learning to what the school is organizationally is no more significant than to try to relate student performance to what the school is physically, whether it faces east or south.

Ember: 48:45 And yet, that's what the media focuses on, that's what policymakers focus on. And you do see things where in US News and World Report and the list of the top high schools in the country, a greater proportion of them are charter public schools than district. You do see evidence of research studies. But the bottom line is we're asking the wrong question, and policymakers need to understand that. So how do you measure success? You measure success in other ways, right? By what?

Ted: 49:15 Well, that's the point. It works much better to be positive than to be negative. Telling people they're doing the wrong thing doesn't help them get to the right thing. You have to bring along other measures, like studies of whether students are in fact engaged or not. John Goodlad died a year or so ago. One of the last books he wrote had a very interesting section saying that in most areas of life, the judgment is satisfaction. It's not quantitative. If you're going to stay where you live in your neighborhood, if you're going to stay in your church, if you're going to stay with this doctor, if you're going to stay with this lawyer, if you're going to continue to be married to the same spouse or whatever, whatever, whatever, these are judgments and they rest on satisfaction essentially. But it's possible, he argued, to develop quantitative measures of satisfaction.

So again, for the people who advocate and defend chartering one of the most important things -- that's been on the agenda for some time that has never really been done -- is to develop these alternative measures of student achievement and school success. That is a high priority thing to do. That will do more to validate a lot of the charter schools that we know candidly do just well enough to get by on the tests, because they have other

things they regard as equally important. Things they want their young people to come out knowing, skills and characteristics they want their young people to have when they come out.

I have a friend who teaches in a district school in the southwestern suburbs, who works with adolescent boys. He just said candidly, "My goal is to get them to be good people."

Ember: 51:34 I think the best thing for advocacy is just to tell a couple of the stories of things that we've seen. I've had the privilege now of going around to 36 states and actually other countries as well. And one story I remember in New Mexico at a conference, an eighth grader was doing a beautiful flamenco dance. And I was standing next to a mom, and she was crying. And I said, "Why are you crying?" And she said, "That's my child out there and she's doing so well." And I said, "She's a beautiful dancer. She's just confident and elegant." And I said, "So why are you crying?" She said, "Because four months ago before she came to this charter school, she could hardly stand up in front of the class. She would run out of the room because she could not perform and be in front of them. And somehow she's gotten this confidence with this charter school. And look what she's doing now."

So there needs to be those opportunities for every child to grow and to meet their individual needs.

Ted: 52:34 Well, we said that charter school is not a kind of school, and that's true pedagogically. We may be able to group them by types but, individually, they can be what they want to be. But one of the things that's proved now is they are smaller. And for years and years, you can see it visibly around here, the idea has been for schools, particularly high schools, to get larger. I mean, I remember going to see Dave Metzger when he was superintendent of South St. Paul. And he said to me, "When I came to this district, it had nine schools. When I leave, it will have three."

And it's all done in terms of working toward the lowest operating cost per student. I mean, this enlargement of the scale of school is not something driven by the interests

of the students. This is why we have 3,000-student/three-grade schools around here in the suburbs. The chartered schools are a couple of hundred.

I was talking to Louise Sundin recently, who was describing the attitudes in Minneapolis currently. And she said, "There's a certain feeling that if we could just get rid of the competition, everything would be all right. We'd have all our money again and we'd have all our kids again." Her response to me and probably to them, too, was, "These parents aren't leaving the district to go to chartered schools because they're chartered schools. They're going because these schools are smaller. The students get more attention. There's a closer relationship between the faculty and the people in the school. And—"

Ember:

And they're more engaged.

Ted:

54:26

And they're more engaged. And if you were to get rid of all that and didn't do those same kinds of things in the district schools, what the hell do you think would happen? People will continue to leave. And if there's no charter sector there, I continue to think they're going to leave. There will be an industry that appears very quickly that will simply offer learning that bypasses school. It's not hard to do. I mean, all you have to say are three things. Are there other ways for students to learn? Are there ways to assess and validate what the students have learned? And, will those validations be accepted by the organizations that the students want to get into? The answer is yes, yes, and yes.

And this could grow substantially. Don't underestimate the public's desire to have their kids better educated, and to have choices. Choices are freedom and choices are power, and people want that. And that desire is going to be there, and they will exercise that. If public education wants to survive -- this would be my bottom line advocacy point -- if people generally want public education to survive, they need to have the legislature construct a system that offers those choices and is continually in search of different and better ways for young people to learn.

56:00

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