



CALIFORNIA FEDERATION of TEACHERS

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AFL-CIO

March 27, 1992

Senator Gary Hart
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Senator Hart:

The California Federation of Teachers is enthusiastic about the prospects for positive change in our schools as proposed in your charter schools bill, SB 1448. However, some aspects of the bill do concern us.

One question regards autonomy: how separate does a school need to be from a district to allow teachers to exercise control over its educational program? Many experimental programs in which the teachers control the instructional process exist within school districts now, for example, at the Kohl Open School within the Stockton City Schools. A school can develop its unique governance structure and its own curriculum while the teachers and staff remain under contract to the district. While it is true that many districts do exercise inordinate bureaucratic control, perhaps many of your educational objectives could be realized by instituting a system of waivers similar to those in AB 1274 grants.

The charter schools bill outlines a great number of tasks for the school staff to do. Not only are they to create a new school with new programs and program configurations, but also work out a new contract and a new collective bargaining arrangement.

Another question we have regards the charter itself, its renewability and its revokability. SB 1448 states that a charter may be revoked for failure to meet the educational objectives set forth in the charter, and does not include an appeal process for schools whose charters are revoked. While we agree that educational objectives are of paramount importance, such a stiff penalty might lead proposers of charter schools to set objectives at the lowest level to avoid possible revocation of the charter. Also, the fate of teachers, pupils, and staff in case of a revoked school charter is unclear.

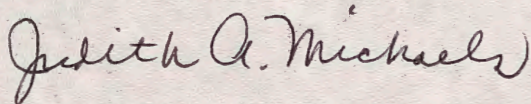
At our recent QUEST conference, a concern was voiced about a school granted a charter in which half the teachers would not want to participate. Perhaps the number of teachers requesting to become the faculty of a charter school should be higher than 50%.

SB 1448 seeks to provide flexibility, but for whom? Tenure and seniority as they exist in districts provide teachers with the freedom they need to experiment. Without the current protections in the law the question of who decides who teaches in a public school is an open one. For example, a small group at a school might take a dislike to an individual, for whatever reasons, and be able to destroy the career of a worthy teacher. SB 1448's proposal to exempt schools from state law also concerns us because of the credential elements. While our current system of credentialing teachers is far from perfect, the system does ensure that the students of California have teachers that meet certain specified guidelines.

Schools need to be more responsive to parents, but this proposal may result in them being less responsive, since parents might be given a choice simply to go elsewhere if they voice concerns.

We would be happy to discuss with you possible amendments to the Charter Schools bill, amendments that would increase educational achievement by students, while preserving faculty and classified employee rights. However, if changes are not made, we would have to oppose the bill.

Sincerely,



Judith A. Michaels
Legislative Director

cc: Senate Education Committee