

Transcript of Interview with Jeb Bush

as interviewed by Ember Reichgott Junge

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SPEAKERS

Ember Reichgott Junge, John Ellis (Jeb) Bush

Ember Reichgott Junge 00:08

Hello, and welcome to this taping of living history for the National Charter Schools Founders Library. This oral history is being recorded during National Charter Schools Week in May 2021. Our guest today will be Governor Jeb Bush.

This is a special year for chartering because it is the 30th anniversary of the signing of the first charter school law, which occurred on June 4 of 1991. My name is Ember Reichgott Junge and I'm the author of the first charter school law in Minnesota and the nation.

A number of years ago, I sent all my documents over to the Minnesota Historical Society for safekeeping. What I didn't realize at the time is that if anybody ever wanted to read those documents, they had to physically go over to the library, take a little mini forklift and go up to the 16th shelf of a warehouse to find them. They weren't digitized, no one could really get to them and so my colleague, Jim Goenner of the National Charter Schools Institute in Michigan, had a vision. And that vision was to create the National Charter Schools Founders Library, where we could preserve these important documents of living history among our pioneers' documents and speeches and oral histories.

The reason? Well, we wanted to preserve the history so we can inform the future of chartering. We launched our brand-new website this month at www.charterlibrary.org and we hope you'll check it out. We have original and factual documents of over 20 charter school pioneers. So far, we've focused on the four pioneering states and they were in order Minnesota, California, Colorado and Michigan, but we're just getting started and if you want to add your state to the library, we would love that. If you have some chartering pioneers that you would like to have their oral histories recorded, let us know because our library is your library.

Today, we add a fifth state and that is Florida. This year is the 25th anniversary of Florida's charter school law passed in 1996. My guest today has been a strong supporter of chartering in Florida, not

only as governor, but as founder of a charter public school. He is former Governor Jeb Bush, who served two terms as governor from 1999 to 2007 and who has since been leading in the education sector through his two foundations, the Foundation for Florida's Future and Foundation for Excellence in Education. Welcome, Governor Bush.

John Ellis (Jeb) Bush 02:49

Ember, it is a joy to be with you and thank you for all the great work that you're doing to preserve the history of chartering because it will inform what the future looks like for sure.

Ember Reichgott Junge 03:00

Well, thank you for that. And you're a part of that history, a big part and so I just want to kind of start there. 25 years of chartering in Florida, big deal, in your view, why chartering, why is it important?

John Ellis (Jeb) Bush 03:13

Well, I've always thought that charter schools are public. You know, for some reason, the way pundits- and when you politicize this, that charter schools are not public schools, but they are they're independent public schools. If you ask a parent, how, what kind of school would they want their kids to go to? They normally say it should be a neighborhood school, where parents are actively involved, where school-based management decisions are made at the school, not at the district level. And in fact, that's exactly what charter schools are. They're independent public schools that have discrete missions. It's a contract, if you will, between parents and the school and it should be what all public schools look like, in my mind. And I've never understood why people feel threatened by this because that is the essence of what public education should look like. So, we started on our journey in after seeing what you did in Minnesota and a handful of other states. It was something that the Foundation for Florida's Future, which I set up in 1995 what it really wanted to emulate for Florida, and we began that journey in 95. Interestingly, Jonathan Hage came down as a young whippersnapper, if you will, from Washington, D.C. He worked at the Heritage Foundation, I think, and his job at the Foundation was to create kind of a "everything that has been said about charter schools". I mean, he had this notebook, back then nothing was digitized, and he became I think...he probably knew more about what was going on in the country in charter schools than anybody early to mid-20s. And that was the basis of using that research to propose the law 95. It didn't pass, but in 96 it did.

Ember Reichgott Junge 05:14

Were you involved in the passage of that law? Because you were only involved in the foundation at that time, you weren't governor quite yet...

John Ellis (Jeb) Bush 05:21

No, I ran for governor in 94 and this was an element of my campaign. My interest in education started long before that. This was the number one priority of our foundation. In 1996, the legislature was, became really interested as we, I guess, we call it lobbying, I don't know what. We were trying to push this idea and it was embraced by the leadership of both the House and the Senate. And the first charter law passed. The governor signed it for which I'm really grateful. He was not an active proponent, but he certainly wasn't an opponent either. It was a different time, too. I mean there was more bipartisanship, I think, in 1996, than there is 25 years later. So, it was a novel idea and supported by the governor and

then we had always thought that if this law did pass that we wanted to set up one of the first charter schools, and I had a friendship with T. Willard Fair, who should be part of your effort as well, because he's certainly a pioneer. He was the youngest executive director of Urban League, when he started as the head of the Urban League of greater Miami in the 1960s. And now he's the oldest executive director of the Urban League still going strong. And he and I developed a friendship and we jointly said we should try to create one of these first charter schools, which we did called the Liberty City Charter School.

Ember Reichgott Junge 07:02

You've now just launched a whole lot of great pathways to go down. The first one is, and I love what you just said, that the law was bipartisan when it passed in 1996. Governor Lawton Chiles was a Democrat at the time, and I believe you had a Republican legislature at the time. That was very critical for Minnesota as well, very much bipartisan, it would not have passed if we hadn't had people from both parties combined to pass that. What did you see in the politics in the passage of this in Florida? Was it like that, very bipartisan, or how did you deal with the opponents of it at that time?

John Ellis (Jeb) Bush 07:44

You know, I don't remember what the vote total was. It was a new idea, so I don't think there was as much partisanship, certainly no hyper partisanship, which kind of defines our politics today. The opponents kind of used the same arguments that are used today, that this was taking money away from public schools, the standard stuff, but in fact, these are public schools. So, the legislature was Republican, that year was Republican. They had an interesting makeup of the Senate that was a coalition of Democrats and Republicans created the majority and so they split it, which I don't think could ever happen again. So, it was there was broad support in the Senate, from both parties. And in the House, there was support as well. And as I said, the governor was not, it wasn't on his agenda, but he certainly wasn't opposed to it, because he could have vetoed it and he didn't.

Ember Reichgott Junge 08:52

I think this is an important point because we lose it, over the years, that chartering has been so bipartisan from the start, and in many of the states that started had Democratic authors, some Republican authors, and the same with the governors. So thank you for chiming in on that. And then once it's started once the law passed in 96, I believe your charter school was one of the first or wasn't actually the first that I opened up in Florida?

John Ellis (Jeb) Bush 09:19

There were four that were set up the first year. One was a charter school at Seaside, that idyllic place on the most beautiful beaches in the United States in the in the panhandle. Another was set up by R.B. Holmes, a pastor at Bethel AME Church in Tallahassee. There was one in downtown Fort Lauderdale and the Liberty City Charter School in Miami, so a very interesting group of very different kinds of missions serving different kinds of students. But it's an interesting subject, because talking about ideas, and then passing a law, okay, that's that takes some work but setting up a charter school? Man oh, man, that was hard. There was no budget. There were no resources. The school district was hostile, to be honest with you, they didn't like this idea. They were compelled to do it by law, but they were not happy about it. I was kind of hope- I was naive enough to think, well, this is a novel thing, maybe, you

know, maybe the Dade County School Board will embrace this and adopt as one of their, you know, a model of innovation. And it didn't work out that way, so it was a struggle. To be honest with you, it was hard work; we had to find our own real estate, we had to find our own technology. We had to recruit the teachers, we had to recruit the parents, we had to recruit the students. It was actually a really rewarding experience, but it was a lot of hard work.

Ember Reichgott Junge 11:05

I'm the founding board chair of a charter school and I know exactly what you're talking about. It is hard work and these parents and teachers who have come together to do this really deserve a great deal of credit.

John Ellis (Jeb) Bush

Yeah, we recruited every Saturday morning. We would go to a different community center in the urban core part of Miami. It's called Liberty City and we would recruit parents and listen to them. And, you know, we wanted them to help shape what the philosophy of the school was.

Ember Reichgott Junge

What was your vision for the school? What was your philosophy? I've often said, when you've seen one charter school, you've seen one charter school; they're all different.

John Ellis (Jeb) Bush 11:44

They are. I wanted- my vision was to be able to be embedded in a community that was underserved. To do this in partnership with, as I said, my really good friend and great leader, T. Willard Fair, where parents were actively involved. It just seemed to me that my experience with public schools back then, the system itself kind of pushed parents away, you know, they're busybodies, they kind of got in the way, which is wrong, parents can play a really constructive role. We've just gone through this pandemic, parents, you know, we're the first teachers for a whole year of many of the students across this country. They have a greater sensitivity to this now. And back then, you know, we thought it was important, particularly, these were predominantly low-income students, that parents have a voice. It created some conflicts, because the needs of the parents were a little different than what the school district kind of demanded that public schools do. I don't know in Minnesota, if you had this, but we were given a pupil progression plan. It was like a book about this thick, if you can see it, of all sorts of mandated procedures for a public school to operate. It was mind numbing, incredibly bureaucratic. And two of the elements of this were kind of troubling for our for our parents. One was corporal punishment, believe it or not, they wanted teachers to be able to discipline their kids. I didn't, I was more ambivalent than the parents were on that. And the other was that, again, it just seemed so strange that this was part of the mandated requirements, but that there had to be sex education starting in first grade. I mean, these were this was a K-3 school to start with, it went to K-5, which I found absurd and so did the parents. They thought maybe that should be the duty of the parents. So we went in actually, we're probably the only school in Dade County history to say, at that time, we want to modify the pupil progression plan to exclude those two things. And there was a concession made on the sexual health issue and I had to go back to the parents and say that the school won't open if we have corporal punishment, so we compromised. Now, of course, there's no corporal punishment anywhere in Dade County Schools, and there has been modifications for all schools related to parents being primary in the

responsibility of teaching their children about sex. So, we made a contribution that ended up becoming, I think, beneficial for the fourth largest school district in the country with 350,000 students by just having that conversation. It was a little weird, though, to do it in a public setting. I don't know. It's not my expertise. But we recruited our students.

Can I tell you one story? You'll be able to appreciate this having been through the arduous task of setting up a school. We had a preschool building that we leased and four or five of us on a Saturday, school was opening on Monday, and we were cleaning the linoleum floor for the cafeteria and just kind of getting everything as best as it could look for these precious kids. And I'm walking out the door at five o'clock after working six or seven hours there with my colleagues and there was no flagpole outside. And I'm thinking, this school is going to have a flag, and we're going to raise it and the kids are going to say the Pledge of Allegiance. And so, I didn't know how to set cement. I learned along with a couple of my friends. We actually bought a flagpole and we set the cement, and thankfully, it settled on Sunday and Monday, when we open for business, it was a big deal. We had TV cameras there because it was the first charter school in Florida that opened. I'll never forget this little third grader raised the flag up in his uniform. And all the kids outside with their parents there. We all said the Pledge of Allegiance and they're wasn't a dry eye in the house. It was beautiful and it's the best memory I have of that school, just the unity of spirit that existed and the pride the parents had, to be so dramatically engaged in something to show their love for their kids was fantastic.

Ember Reichgott Junge 16:38

And that's the key, is that the parents get to make that choice for their students. Not all students fit in the current traditional schools. And I love the fact that parents are engaged in charter schools everywhere. They paint the walls, they can help to construct it sometimes. I mean, they do everything to help their kids and make it the school that they want. I love the fact that you were able to make some changes in regulations for other districts. And that's really one of the primary motivators of the chartering sector, and that is to impact the larger sector with innovation, kind of as an R and D sector, if you will. What can we try in the charter sector that can be extended to the larger public school sector? And I believe we've seen that in Florida and other states. Talk about that innovation, that opportunity to try something new and different and still be a public school.

John Ellis (Jeb) Bush 17:44

Yeah, so we have 340,000 students now; we started maybe with 1,000 or less in the first year, and now there's 342,000 students going to hundreds of charter schools. And let me be clear, not every charter school is innovative. Some of them probably need to shut down occasionally and that's the other benefit of a charter school is that if it's not performing, it can be replaced and it should be. And I saw, let me just kind of pause on the negative side of that and make that point. But the amount of innovation that has taken place across the country, and certainly in Florida is impressive, to say the least. And the learnings that you have through trial and error. You know, these are typically the leaders of these schools are passionate, they are completely on fire to make sure students learn, and they're learning as they go. That's the experience I have with charter schools is it's a constant, the best schools are dynamic, they're constantly learning. The pandemic has brought that out pretty impressively, I think, in some districts where schools, the traditional public schools, didn't even open until recently, charters were open the whole time. And they made sure that their students were, if they were out two months

during March in April, when everything was shut down, they knew where their kids, whether their kids were online, and if they didn't, they have systems in place that immediately connected with them. That kind of student-centered engagement during the pandemic was found more often than not in the charter schools. As you said, any of these innovations can be replicated across the entire system and that's the beauty of the charter sector is that there was a bias towards action and in that action came all sorts of lessons learned that then can be applied across the board and you see how that works. We have a charter management organization here in Florida called Academica that works in a variety of different states now. They actually saw an increase in their attendance and their proficiency rates, even though the accountability system was paused for the last year and a half in Florida, they maintained their system of accountability and their proficiency systems went up, because they had invested in remote live instruction. I actually participated as a guest speaker during this time and it was incredible. I mean, the kids were all totally engaged, they weren't bored. They had done a lot of work to be able to make sure that the remote experience was as good as the, you know, I guess you can't get completely as good as a classroom experience but because they were preparing for storms, you know, we have hurricanes here. They had this expertise, and they applied it immediately, to great success. And there's great examples across the country, where charters were more nimble and more innovative because they don't have the luxury of mediocrity. They have to excel, they have to be better, or parents won't necessarily send their kids there, right?

Ember Reichgott Junge

Or they can be closed, right? Which district schools are not under that same kind of accountability...

John Ellis (Jeb) Bush

The best case for charters, in my mind, is where the school districts watch the innovations, learn from them, embrace the ones that really work across the entire system, and reward it and celebrate that success. Those are the school districts you want to see more of. That's the true – when you passed this law, that was your thought, right? That your idea was to allow these to be laboratories of innovation, and then when something good came out of it, apply it across the entire system. It doesn't work that way, in every place in our country, and if it did, I think all schools would be a lot better.

Ember Reichgott Jung 22:17

You're precisely right. That was one of the motivations for chartering and that it does have an impact on the larger public schools and should, and that was seen during COVID, you're right, in that regard, because charter schools were taking the lead on a lot of innovative ways to engage their students during COVID. So hopefully, that will be a basis for the future for all public schools. But I do want to ask you then, there's one element of your law that surprised me, and that is that you don't have alternative authorizers. Only school districts can authorize your charter public schools, whereas in Minnesota and others, you might have a state board, you might have other independent boards that can authorize and therefore give that element, if you will, of a different pathway and less, shall we say, concern by the school district about some of the ramifications?

John Ellis (Jeb) Bush 23:14

Yeah, the initial law didn't have that. There were efforts to change that. They passed and they were ruled unconstitutional from the state constitution. So the workaround, I mean, there are a couple of

things that have happened during this 25-year journey. One is that universities can have lab schools. And so they're, in an effect, a version of charters and now this last session, the legislature and the governor will sign this into law, allow for community colleges and universities to be authorizing entities. And apparently, that fulfills the constitutional concerns. We'll see if there's a lawsuit. There might be, but people are confident that there's a solution here. The second thing that happens is that the state board of education can receive appeals and it does. While the state board can't authorize, which would be the ideal situation, remanding these back to school districts has put pressure on the school districts to not blindly oppose charters because they don't like them. There could be legitimate reasons why charters aren't authorized, but just to say, I don't like charter schools, that should not be the reason so the pressure brought to bear by the State Board has been helpful. In places like Tallahassee, Leon County, there's a great charter school that was rejected twice and then the state board kept remanding it back and eventually it was signed up and it's an incredibly popular school. But you're absolutely right, the ideal situation would be to have a variety of different authorizers and so you end up not having that kind of hostile- there's all sorts of roadblocks that school districts that don't want charters that they can do and so this does kind of - it's a liberating deal and hopefully the universities will embrace this and community colleges will as well, so that we can move to this dual authorizing mode.

Ember Reichgott Junge 25:36

This is a big step forward for your charter school community because I think the most robust charter school sectors are in those areas that have alternate authorizers and we have found higher education institutions to do a great job. There are many great authorizers and in fact, in Michigan, Jim Goenner of the National Charter Schools Institute was one of those higher education authorizers and set the pathway for them. So, there's also opportunities for the state board for appeal. We did that Minnesota two years after we passed our first law, because when we only had school districts as the authorizers, the first seven of nine applicants were denied by the gatekeeper, so we absolutely needed to have that appeal process and then eventually to have the alternate authorizers

John Ellis (Jeb) Bush 26:24

Several years ago, the Florida Legislature led by the Speaker of the House, who's now the Commissioner of Education, passed a law called the Schools of Hope law, that appropriated, I think \$250 million to be able to provide capital outlay dollars and startup dollars for high performing charter management organizations to come, it was defined in the law, but the idea was to recruit the KIPPs and the IDEAs and others, of course, to come to the state, and the law allows for them to expand at a very fast pace without school district approval. And so that is still work in progress in the sense that the scaling is just beginning right now. But KIPP is committed to Miami, and they're in their second year, I think, IDEA is coming to Tampa and perhaps to surrounding areas. And other high-performing management organizations that are well regarded around the country are looking at Orlando and Jacksonville. So, I'm excited about that, because ultimately, if you're a public school person, whether it's traditional or charter, doesn't matter to me, and you have lights out results and particularly among low income kids, where they're achieving way above their peers and in surrounding schools, like-kind kids doing significantly better, why would you want to replicate that as fast as you can? And the hope, the aspiration of the law is that that's exactly what will happen.

Ember Reichgott Junge 28:08

I agree, although we have had some states that maybe expanded too quickly, and then caused some problems, or there were some accountability issues. What would you say maybe are some of the big lessons that you've learned in Florida that really needs to still be worked on or approved for your successful chartering?

John Ellis (Jeb) Bush 28:28

Well, the startup monies which we get from different buckets, but from Washington alone, who knows, maybe this year since we talk in trillions now instead of billions, maybe there'll be monies for charters, I kind of doubt it. But how you organize a school shouldn't be as hard. And if you start a school and you're financially strained from the get go, that's really a struggle. Capital outlay dollars is a real challenge and so we advocate at the Foundation for Excellence in Education, states embrace stable, consistent capital dollars for the public schools that are charters. They're still public schools, they should have access to the to the capital outlay dollars that traditional public schools get. Because if you're behind financially, it creates real strains, and you need to have charter schools be well run financially, or it's going to be hard for them to be successful academically. I think that's one of the lessons for sure. I think it's always important to be to remember that these charters are contractual obligations to do something different with high expectations for student achievement. And if it's just another school, without a really focused effort to try to do something different to achieve a better result, I think the lesson there is that we can't let that erode. You know, we have, as I said, we have hundreds and hundreds of charter schools now. And 10%, maybe 12% of our students in the public system are going to charters. About 50% of Miami Dade County parents can choose where their kid goes to school, maybe 60% now. I think it's important that these choices parents are making informed choices and that there's an expectation, when you sign up for a kid going to a charter school, that you know what you're going to get, and that there's an accountability system beyond the traditional one; in our state, we grade schools, A through F; charters are graded that way, too. But beyond that there is an implicit accountability system by the leadership of the charter school and their board.

Ember Reichgott Junge 30:59

And that is so important, particularly the board members as sometimes they don't recognize the important role that they have to make sure that that school is successful. And it is an independent nonprofit board and a lot of people don't recognize that either. But I want to just go back to what you were saying about the federal level and the startup funding and the facilities funding. The startup funding was started in 1994 by our senator, US Senator Dave Durenberger. He created that over the years 94, and then beyond, and then the facilities funding came in the late 90s. But President George W. Bush was, in fact, in office when these funds grew a great deal at the federal level. And I'm wondering if you might have had an influence on that?

John Ellis (Jeb) Bush 31:48

I think my much older brother probably thought that charters were important. They expanded dramatically when he was governor in Texas and there's some amazing charter schools in Texas. When you hear the story of the IDEA system, it's incredible. I mean, the graduation rates are almost universal. This is a school that started, one school in the valley, which is the low-income part of the

state, it's expanded dramatically in the state and now they're expanding nationwide. And that was totally embraced by then Governor Bush and I think he came to D.C., I imagine I probably lobbied for this, but I don't think he needed much, I think he was totally on board already. And, you know, No Child Left Behind, while it didn't directly relate to the funding for charters, bringing more accountability into schools in general, I think has helped the charter sector quite a bit. Because, you know, if you don't measure, you don't really care. And if you measure in a transparent way what's working and what isn't and that's kind of the essence of what charters are about.

Ember Reichgott Junge

Chartering has really had an impact for Black and Brown students, particularly, and I'm looking at the data here, and I think about 69% of the students in Florida are of color. Talk about that, and the impact of that.

John Ellis (Jeb) Bush 33:13

Well, we're a majority minority student population, not dissimilar to California and Texas. We're what America will look like 10 years, 15 years from now and if you leave people behind, at that age, you'll pay the price later. I'm pleased that the majority of the students that go to charter schools in Florida, not dissimilar to the traditional schools are our minority students. It basically mirrors what the what the, maybe a little bit more in the charter sector than traditional public schools in terms of representation. And that's the way it should be. In the schools that I'm aware of are also really focused on recruiting minority teachers, as well, which is really important. And, you know, if you're data driven in the bigger charter organizations, I think, have really embraced data to be able to inform what the education strategies ought to be - teacher development in a non-traditional way, but really focusing on developing teachers for the unique populations that charter serves is really important. And I think the path forward has to include a lot more of that.

Ember Reichgott Junge 34:39

I just read from one of your foundations, Excel in Education, this point that a black charter school student is 35 times more likely to have a black teacher in a charter school than in a district school. I mean, that was very interesting to me. So apparently, there's a lot more teachers of color in chartering, which is really important.

John Ellis (Jeb) Bush 35:02

It is, it is... We're in this era of equity and social justice. There's a lot of rhetoric, certainly a lot of talking about it. If you're, if one's interested in action, this is a place where, I think as a nation, we really should focus, which is, how do we assure that the color of one's skin or one's ethnicity or one's income doesn't determine academic outcomes? Because academic outcomes determine the first steps of a successful life as an adult. I mean, it's so clear, this is not an opinion. It's just fact. And those learning gaps can start very early. And if you have low expectations for one group, it's a form of racism that should be obliterated.

Ember Reichgott Junge 35:54

Absolutely. Now, when you retired from the governor's office in 2007, and I believe you are term limited,

you then put a lot of time and effort into this whole area in your foundations, and both a national foundation and a Florida foundation. Talk about that, talk about what you've been doing now, in recent years in your education reform work, because that's where I got to know you best and some of the things that you've been doing in the recent years.

John Ellis (Jeb) Bush 36:25

Yeah, so the Foundation for Florida's Future is a state policy group. The Foundation for Excellence in Education is a 501(c)3 and (c)4 component and we work with the Foundation for Florida's Future-like organizations around the country. We partner with state-based policy organizations that are focused on a variety of different education reform issues and we focus on a few things. One, we focus on how do you create the optimum accountability system, so that every kid counts. We focus a lot on the success we had in early childhood literacy. Florida has voluntary, universal pre-K, so every four-year-old gets a half a day school paid for by the state and from that platform, from that base, we have developed and we also have probably the hardest edge, ending social promotion, third grade policy. So that pre-K to three-year area is hugely important. There's a whole strategy that we advocate. Mississippi actually has embraced the what we call the Florida model, and modified it to make it relevant to Mississippi, and they've had huge gains in on the fourth grade NAEP test, because they've embraced this. We focus on parental choice, we focus on early childhood literacy, robust accountability. And now recently, we work on how do we create pathways for college and or career readiness? You know, the aspiration in our country ought to be, how do we make sure that the 25% of juniors that are capable of taking college-level work have access to it? And a large group of students that don't have access to career-oriented work begin to have access to it, because it's not to say they won't go to college, but the aspiration should be that someone that graduates from high school in the United States of America, the greatest country in the earth, should already have taken college level credit if they're capable of doing it and have had access to a nationally recognized certification of some kind that connotes that they're capable of taking on an entry level job that will yield a higher wage at the end of the journey than the median in their communities. That's possible, that's doable, but it requires a totally different mindset and so we spent a lot of time on that. And that deals with creating these pathways that don't gear people towards an end result, but give them options along the way. I mean, I don't know about you, but every 17 and 18-year-old I know, they're going to change their mind next week. You don't want to create a path, a narrow pathway that ends into a brick wall where they have to kind of reverse and go back. You want to create optionality for every kid. So, opening up the high school system is now one of our higher, higher priorities. And charters, again, can play and have played a really constructive role. The ones that focus on this career orientation are thriving right now.

Ember Reichgott Junge 39:50

Yes, I've seen those health career charters and others. We even have a charter in Minnesota that was created by a local union for labor, for laborers, for apprentices and such. So there's a need in all of these different sectors.

John Ellis (Jeb) Bush 40:06

Absolutely. It's embedded in our accountability system in Florida rewards for students passing, taking courses in passing them that have a career orientation. And Florida high school students went from something like 3%, taking that kind of course to 36%, because it was aligned with our accountability.

And, you know, look, teachers love it. Because it's not just the same old, same old. Students are going to learn more if they're embracing things that they're passionate about. So I think it's something that's going to happen across the country, there's real interest, there's a real- I deal with a lot of governors and leaders in the legislatures across, we work in about 40 states. And there's a real interest. This is a one back to the bipartisanship, idea. This intersection is a place where it's Switzerland, in the hyper partisan world. It's a place where Democrats and Republicans work hand in glove.

Ember Reichgott Junge 41:11

I am hoping that will be the case, we're seeing more bitter partisanship across the country. And I love that there are areas where we can work together, that has always been my hope that both the district sector and charter schools can work together and find solutions and help each other. But we are in a different time and I want to address that. What can we do to try to reduce the partisanship around chartering in the next 25 years?

John Ellis (Jeb) Bush 41:43

Wow, you know, I think, basically, the challenge is that everybody has their own set of facts. I mean, there's actually been some pretty good research on this, where if you aggregate the information that you have and believe it to be true, and it validates what you believe, it makes you more righteous about your beliefs, but it also has a pretty damning effect on what you think of the other person who has a different view. Ultimately, that means the person that has a different view ends up being the enemy. So, the solution is to reweave the web of civility, number one, that's important, and that requires patience for people to not always yell at someone when they think they're wrong. Make sure that you're the curator of the information you acquire; there are no more editors anymore, I mean, you go on the internet, and you can basically get anything. You have to be curious enough to make sure that what you believe to be the set of facts is actually accurate. To get to the point where we all have the same set of facts, we may have a different agreement, you know, there could be totally different views on the same set of facts, but we'll never form consensus unless we get to that first step. And in the charter experience, you know, advocates of charters, sometimes may, as part of the advocacy, may be prone to exaggeration and they may not accept the fact that not every charter school is perfect and not every traditional school is imperfect, and vice versa. So, let's get the facts straight first. And when that happens, I think it will be easier to forge consensus across the board. And the final thing I'd say is parents are really important in all this. Without parents, without parental engagement, our education system is not going to work. One of the interesting phenomena, I'm a student of history, and I've read a lot about pandemics and about these big, disruptive things that have happened in our society. We don't march, you know, one step forward, left, right, left, right, we're a dynamic place more so now maybe because of technology. But in a crisis, like what we've gone through in the last year, historically, there have been major breakthroughs in all sorts of aspects of our society in our lives. And we're on the verge of that happening. Drug Discovery. In a lot of other areas, the use of broadband for work for healthcare, and certainly for education. These experiences are going to accelerate these really potentially positive trends. And so, one of those insights that have happened during the pandemic is that parents are actually really important. And they now know more, they're informed consumers of their children's education because they actually were delivering it. And they're going to have higher

expectations of what schools are doing when schools reopen. And I think that's going to be phenomenal for more innovation or public education system. It's time.

Ember Reichgott Junge 45:06

That's right. I mean, that was part of your origins was allowing parents and others to bring ideas into the system, right? And so, you know, I've always said, you want to allow, as a policymaker, you want to allow citizens to take the lead. And that's what we're doing with chartering in the public education sector where they can bring their ideas in a new and different place to see if they work, and hopefully improve them. Well, you have been just a great guest today. I want to leave with one last question for you. And that is, as we look forward for the next 25 years to chartering, where do you think we go with that? What do we need to do? What would be your advice to the chartering pioneers of today? Who are just getting started? How can we improve this sector? How can we improve what we deliver as people interested in chartering?

John Ellis (Jeb) Bush 46:03

Well, I think the key is, we've already talked about it, the key is to keep the innovative spirit in the DNA of charters. As anything scales, and certainly from when you passed the law in 1991 until today, it's dramatically different in terms of the size and scope. In some states, it's a significant percentage of all students. Stasis can kick in, you can get stuck and it's natural for any organization. And I think, for something as important as public education, you want to have the innovative spirit be at the forefront each and every day; total transparency about what the aspirations are, always has to be at the core of what a charter school looks like and then have the ability to be dynamic and innovative across the board, and share those learnings with everybody. There's no trademark on this; this is not intellectual property that you hoard. The great successes should be shared. And over time, I think the erosion of them and us begins to happen at an accelerated pace, if you do share these success stories, and hope that others will embrace it as well. So, my hope is that kind of core of what you, the pioneers of charters, what you aspire to, when you started, becomes constantly in the forefront of what the next generation of pioneers are doing.

Ember Reichgott Junge 47:42

And we hope that we can capture some of that innovation in the National Charter Schools Founders Library, and you said earlier about facts and how important that is in our civil discourse of today. And that is a primary reason for this library is to record this factual history from people like you, living pioneers, so that it's available, even as the issues and the myths surround us in the future, we have this here. And we're lucky that our history is only 30 years old, so that the pioneers are still here to tell about it. So, Governor Bush, you have been wonderful to share your time today. We appreciate your leadership, not only as governor, but ongoing in your foundations and I do hope that we'll have a chance to meet someday so that we can talk more about how we can improve the sector and keep this work going. Thank you very much.

John Ellis (Jeb) Bush

Thank you, Senator.

Ember Reichgott Junge 48:37

It has been my pleasure. Thank you. This has been the taping for the National Charter Schools Founders Library. Again, you can find that at www.charterlibrary.org. That is where this video history will live and you'll find other histories as we progress.

In June, we'll be talking to the leaders of the D.C. charter sector, and we've got their 25th anniversary as well for Washington, D.C. charter schools. So again, thank you, Governor Bush, and we welcome everyone to come visit our library at www.charterlibrary.org. Thank you.