

# The Washington Post

AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

## *The Charter School Challenge*

**T**HE CHARTER school movement is posing stiff competition to the regular D.C. public schools. City-funded, independently run public charter schools are attracting students, winning parental support and forcing overdue reforms in D.C. public education. Those changes account for our strong support of charter schools. But as the D.C. Board of Education's actions this week will attest, a successful charter school movement is no guarantee that each chartered school will be a winner.

The board's vote to begin the process of shutting down three poorly performing public charter schools has caused understandable concern among charter school advocacy groups. The decision comes less than four weeks before the start of a new school year. Hundreds of children now find themselves in a quandary. Parents must scramble to find schools by opening day. The board's timing could have been better. That said, school board members have taken the correct action, if, in fact, the three schools in question are as bad as they say.

Monitors sent out by the board found Richard Milburn Public Charter Alternative High School's two campuses lacking in textbooks and instructional supplies, and with student absentee rates ranging as high as nearly 100 percent on the date of one visit. The monitors

also discovered staff had little control over student behavior. Three-year-old World Public Charter School and two-year-old New Vistas Preparatory Public Charter School had similar deficiencies: lack of educational curriculum and materials, poor classroom management, administrative confusion and financial irregularities.

Officials of the three schools may request hearings to challenge the board's actions, which is their right. And they should appeal if they believe the board's concerns are inaccurate or overblown. But the school board's first obligation is to the students at those schools. To look the other way in the face of monitoring reports citing chronic and unremediated problems would have been irresponsible. Superintendent Paul Vance is moving energetically to reshape the regular schools—reassigning principals and teachers and discharging unqualified staff. The Board of Education can do no less for the 17 public charter schools it oversees. School board member Laura Gardner said that to look past the troubled charter schools would have sent the message "that we don't care." She's correct. Now the board must show its continuing concern by making the affected students' transition to another public charter school or regular public school as uncomplicated as possible.