

Remarks of Gov. Bill Owens  
Charter Schools Bill Signing  
June 3, 2004

It's great to be here at Wyatt-Edison, one of Colorado's many charter-school success stories. A decade ago, we started building an education system that would deliver quality education to every student in our state.

When I was a state legislator, I was proud to sponsor bills that introduced statewide public-school choice, created charter schools, and helped home-schooling take root. We as a state have dedicated ourselves to reforming a broken system, and we've come a long way.

As a result, today thousands of Colorado children and their families have a brighter future. Parents have learned to demand that schools be accountable to them. Thanks to our reforms, Education Secretary Rod Paige has called Colorado's school system "the envy of the nation."

The bills I am signing into law today strengthen and extend the progress we've made over the years. We're here because of the staying power of freedom. Because choice works.

That's why school-choice opponents fought so hard and so long to stop us. Because they knew that once you give people a little freedom, they will demand more. Charter-school waiting lists are now 20,000 Coloradans long.

We didn't establish charter schools so that a lucky few could attend them. We established them so that every child and every family would have the opportunity to seek out educational alternatives.

Together, House Bills 1141 and 1362 strengthen Colorado's Charter Schools Law, which has proven so successful. There is a growing demand for charter schools in Colorado - particularly among minority and disadvantaged students, who need education choice the most.

Today's bills establish a State Charter School Institute that will serve as an alternative charter authority for districts that have taken a "just say no" attitude to charter schools. The Institute will also serve as a resource to districts that have authorized charter schools.

Previously, parents, teachers, and others who wished to start a school would have to apply to the local school district for an okay. Although many districts willingly recognized the value of charter schools, others did not.

The State Charter School Institute will provide an alternate route for folks who have been denied by their local school district. It will also take on some of the responsibility of overseeing charter schools.

House Bill 1141 also raises accountability for charter schools and their authorizing school districts. With these two bills, we are improving the quality of Colorado's charter schools.

I'd like to thank the sponsors of House Bill 1141, Representative Keith King and Senator John Andrews, and of House Bill 1362, Representative Terrance Carroll and Senator Peter Groff.

The third bill I am signing today is also part of our mission to make schools more focused on students and accountable to parents. House Bill 1433 will allow parents and schools to track how individual students are doing on CSAP tests.

When Governor Romer began the journey toward school accountability ten years ago, we could not track a student along his or her career. The only comparison we could make was between this year's scores and last year's scores.

Now, because we can track individual students, we can also analyze their academic growth across grades and schools from kindergarten through high school. This is an important diagnostic tool for parents and teachers alike.

I heard a good analogy that explains why this new system is so valuable: It is like looking at a motion picture rather than a still photo. The School Accountability Reports were designed to inform parents about their children's schools. Now, we are providing parents an even better picture of how their students, and their schools, are performing.

We've been trying to get this passed for years. I'd like to recognize Representative Keith King and Senator Dan Grossman for their leadership on this bill.

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