



Jim Broadway

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Charters *not* instruments of resegregation

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

A recent report by the Associated Press told a truthful story about the evolution of charter schools over the last couple of decades, but then the headline writers took over. They sometimes can't resist the sensational, even when it is misleading. [A TV news example](#): "US charter schools put growing numbers in racial isolation"

How bad does that sound? From that, you'd think charters were invented as a place where the minority kids go so us white folks' kids wouldn't have to learn with kids not of our race or religion. But, don't you know, that's what private schools are for. No, however they began, charters play a far more honorable role.

Oh, it is true that in Illinois, as in the nation, charter schools are clustered mostly in urban environments and enroll mostly minority race children and those from the least affluent families (overlapping constituencies), so there is segregation, lots of it, going on. But it is not like that of pre-[Brown v. Board of Education](#) years.

As the [Illinois Network of Charter Schools](#) (INCS) reports, 92% of students enrolled at the 143 charter campuses in Illinois are racial minority children, and 87% of the 64,000 charter students in Illinois are from low-income families. INCS has also grown to become a powerful lobbying force at the state Capitol.

There are two conspicuous objections to the charter movement, in my view. One is the authority of the State Charter School Commission to overturn an adverse charter application decision made by an elected school board. The recent decision against School District U-46 is an egregious example.

What are the merits of the case? Even in [the Commission's final report](#), the school board seems to score points. But in the final analysis, the only merit applicable is this: Did the entity that's accountable by the voters of the district make the final decision? In this case, and in any ISCS charter authorization, the answer is "no."

The ISCS got that authority in a bill that was hastily passed in 2011, a bill that veered out of the normal legislative process in an ill-conceived quest for a "Race to the Top" (or was it the bottom?) grant from the Obama Administration. Efforts to reverse that mistake have since stalled in the House.

The INCS lobbying program, as noted, is strong. "INCS had a goal for the charter community to make 2,500 connections with our state legislators," the INCS web site boasts, "and we reached our goal. Thank you to all of those who contributed countless hours and conversations to improving education outcomes for all children."

What is the other "conspicuous" objection? It is, conceptually, like objecting to someone's lack of patriotism. We tend not to like it when, in a time of our nation's stress, someone acts in his own interests to the detriment of the population as a whole. That, unfortunately, is what many parents do.

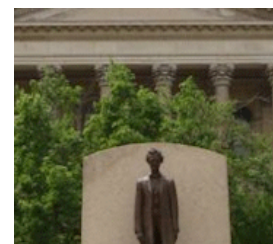
Parents who take their children out of the public schools - by getting them into special purpose charter schools, by getting vouchers or otherwise gaining access to private schools, or even by home-schooling them - such parents are by definition "engaged" with their children's educations. Sure, that's a good thing.

But in all those circumstances, it is a good thing that is being taken out of the only school system that is bound, by law, to educate any child that wanders through its doors. As educators have told me repeatedly, a student's biggest educational asset is her parents' engagement - and that's the school's biggest asset too.

Each [time such a student is peeled out](#) of a public school, the school loses the participation of the parent, the other kids lose the influence of a peer whose parents truly care about their school, the peeled-out student loses contact with those who lack his advantages and, in the end, society in general loses something.

Is this an effort to "shame" such parents? Yes. Yes, it is. And shame on the policymakers too. Charters are just one of the ways they try to offset the impact of poverty on the cheap. To actually address the causes of poverty and the disgraceful effects it imposes on society, well, that would cost more and be more work.

Extreme credulity can be too funny for words. A writer for a conservative organization, [Ethics and Public Policy Center](#) senior fellow [Henry Olsen](#), apparently was astonished at the way the tax "reform" bill that's churning through Congress so faintly resembles tax promises made last year by candidate Donald Trump.



As NPR describes it:

"Olsen expected the tax plan to include some of Trump's populist campaign promises — that the rich would pay more, the forgotten working class would pay less, and special interest loopholes like the carried-interest provision for hedge-fund managers would be gone.

"But the tax bill ended up instead being traditionally Republican in its focus on cutting taxes for the well-to-do but barely touching the working class and not helping the middle class to a significant degree. 'That's not what Trump promised,' Olsen said. 'And it's not what Trump's voters thought they were getting.'"

Aw! Olsen seems disappointed that Trump - a man who has made fortunes by misleading other businesses into unwise contracts, and even then reneging on them - would make promises and then not keep them. What a shock.

Speaking of politics, some clarification is in order regarding the ISNS endorsement of Chris Kennedy, the Democratic candidate for governor. The fact is, there are other Democrats who will be on the March 20 primary election ballot who would also have been individuals I could have proudly endorsed.

I'm particularly fond of [Sen. Daniel Biss](#). He's brilliant and probably the candidate who most closely matches my progressive (now that "liberal" has become a bad word) proclivities. Madison County ROE Superintendent [Bob Daiber](#) is a friend, an eloquent advocate for education who understands public service well.

When I endorsed Kennedy, I noted my disappointment with [J.B. Pritzker](#), the candidate of such deep pockets he is the likely nominee, for supporting former governor (now prison inmate) Rod Blagojevich for governor back when there was so much better a choice in Chicago CPS CEO Paul Vallas. But no total objection was implied.

Kennedy grew up in a family culture of solid public service. If Biss is nominated I would be overjoyed and proud of Illinois Democrats. If Pritzker buys the nomination, and there are no surprises, I would happily endorse him in a November contest against incumbent [Gov. Bruce Rauner](#) - or Trump-like [Rep. Jeanne Ives](#). Daiber's primary challenge seems impossible, but if he scores a miracle victory he would be our endorsed candidate in the fall.

For public education advocates, for everyone concerned with Illinois' future, 2018 will be a captivating political year. Rauner's ineptitude would rule him out of he were not so wealthy, but I believe Ives may well capture the GOP nomination. If that happens, Illinois may reclaim its old title as "microcosm of the nation."

More about my mortality: Some day, we don't know when, I'll cease publishing. On that day ISNS with either die too, or begin to be published by an individual or organization that will pay nothing for the privilege but will have been mentored, by me, so that ISNS will not lose its voice. (This [side-conversation is continued here](#).)

Is this the last issue of ISNS for 2017? Yes, it probably is. If any "news" breaks in the next couple of weeks, I'll file a report. But that is doubtful. In the meantime, I'll be preparing some features for next year and doing some holiday-time traveling. Best wishes to all of you for a great holiday season. - Jim

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