Four Legitimate Anti-School Choice Talking Points & How to Address Them

Raymond J. Ankrum, Sr., Superintendent
3685 Middle Country Rd.
Calverton, NY 11933

Abstract

Currently, there is much animus between traditional public-school pundits and advocates of school choice. School choice includes charter schools. Those that advocate against charter schools have some sound talking points. This article serves as advise on how to address the major concerns of those that are anti-charter schools.

Point One: There is a shortage of African-American school leaders that run charter schools in urban areas. The lack of PoC in leadership positions is indefensible. Some folks are doing some great work around supporting leaders of color. One group that comes to mind is the National Charter Collaborative. This group’s very existence is to help charter schools’ leaders of color navigate in this space. I have not taken advantage of the NCC offerings.

Extending on Point One: A Charter School Rooney Rule:
The Rooney Rule requires that an NFL team with a head-coaching vacancy must interview one or more minority candidates for the position. Given the NFL’s woeful history of considering and hiring minority candidates to fill head-coaching slots until the implementation of the Rooney Rule, the question asked was whether Pittsburgh would have even considered Mike Tomlin as a candidate for the Steeler head job without the Rooney Rule (Proxmire, 2008).

Moreover, what about a Rooney Rule in public education? Meaning-- really, organic, purposeful conversations centered on school leadership in areas that serve high poverty families of color. Urban school districts would benefit greatly from having more minority male candidates as teachers, leaders, superintendents.
What if for every principal and school superintendent vacancy, urban school districts had to (in good faith) interview a qualified minority candidate? The action alone would mean the world to minority families that have lost faith in the system.

Point Two: Some charter schools are ill-equipped to deal with the psychological trauma experienced by its student body. No charter school is perfect, and yes, some schools are tone deaf when it comes down to measuring the needs of students beyond academic needs. Mental Health has been making headlines as of recent. It is particularly important for schools to equip themselves to handle all of the needs of the students beyond just their academic needs. Charter schools should employ multiple Social Workers. If budget cuts are on the horizon, the last cuts are the school counselors. Often they are the first to be cut.

Point Three: Charter School staffs do not reflect the student body of the students they serve. Charter schools are doing a better job with trying to recruit for diversity, but “trying to do, and doing” are not the same thing. Charter Schools need to commit to diversifying, and then become relentless about doing it. Diversifying is no easy task, but given the importance of the work we do, one can see the importance of hiring a diverse staff.

Point Four: Charter Schools have high teacher turnover. As a charter school leader, one thinks about teacher turnover a lot. Leaders want teachers to be in a good mental space. Having a healthy work-life balance helps this tremendously. For example, when we see teachers working late, we send them home. There has to be some time dedicated to not thinking about work, in order to re-energize and center oneself on the difficult work that a teacher does. Beyond teacher exit surveys, “WE,” need to do a better job at taking the pulse of teachers, and ensuring they remain happy in our schools. Students thrive off of consistency. Having a consistent face for students and families is meaningful.

Works Cited: