

Share schools' best practices

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The Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana report illustrates pointedly that it is time for public and charter schools to learn from one another. It asserts that best practices can be shared and used by everyone for the benefit of all students, even though there may be hurdles to overcome along the way.

That's the hard but not impossible part: getting past the stereotypes, jealousies and excuses and getting on to substantive student achievement.

PAR addresses the issue in "[Charter Schools in Louisiana: What Lessons Do They Have to Offer the Education Community?](#)" Its goal: identifying best practices among charter schools to determine which ones could be used in traditional public schools and new charter schools as they seek to break the cycle of poor student performance.

PAR's data reveal five categories into which best practices can be grouped:

- Establishing a learning environment, including best practices in clearly defined academic and behavioral expectations, an incentive system to encourage good conduct, unity-building events, parental involvement initiatives and a calm and encouraging environment;
- Data-driven instruction, including clearly defined academic structures, mandatory tracking and analysis of data from assessments, and intervention plans;
- Student enrichment, including extended school days and academic years, Saturday and summer programs, non-academic activities and field trips;
- Teacher support and development, including classroom observations, feedback from administrators and peers, regularly scheduled periods for planning, department/grade level and faculty meetings, and professional development; and,
- Policy-focused governing boards, including clearly defined processes for evaluating a school leader, succession planning, formal board training, selection of new members and diversity of skills among board members.

At first blush, naysayers would be prone to state that most, if not all, of these areas are being addressed. But a deeper examination could reveal the differences between tactics that work and those that don't.

That's why we stand behind the PAR study's three recommendations. First, the state Education Department should create an advisory council in this area. Second, it should maintain a Web site with a wide range of information about charter schools. Third, state law should require charter schools to have Web sites complete with specific directory, registration, admission, staff and board information as well as agendas in advance of all board meetings. The advisory council would be able to conduct an ongoing analysis of best practices and should seek ways to power through the bureaucracy to

implement them. The Web sites would give much-needed transparency to the activities of Louisiana's charter schools.

The jury is still out on the two charter schools just opened this academic year in Caddo as it is on many of the 92 charter schools in Louisiana. But early results on some of the longer-term schools show promise via increasing test scores and their related best practices.

No one's saying charter schools have all the answers, nor is anyone denying the natural tension with the public system. But when something's working in any school — be it public, charter, takeover or private — let's share that information with others, be open to new ideas, seek different policies and give our teachers the resources necessary to succeed in their individual environments.

Let us, then, learn from one another.