

News Release

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Board of State School Directors' Association Opposes Lack of Local Oversight in I-1240

Olympia - The Washington State School Directors' Association Board of Directors has voted to oppose an initiative to authorize the creation of charter schools in the state.

The unanimous vote Sunday followed a lengthy discussion of Initiative 1240 and its lack of oversight by locally-elected officials.

"Under this initiative, public education dollars would be placed under private management, without the public accountability that our communities and taxpayers expect and deserve," said Mary Fertakis, the board's president. "Our membership has repeatedly said that public education funding should be overseen by school officials elected in their local communities. Our vote reaffirms that position."

Fertakis said the board did not take a position against charter schools. Rather, it opposed charter schools without the direct oversight of locally-elected boards. She also emphasized the board and association continue to strongly support innovation in Washington's schools and school districts.

"There has never been more innovation in our public school classrooms," Fertakis said. "Across the state, we are creating successful alternative schools, finding ways to help students graduate, supporting on-line learning and expanding efforts to help each student be ready for college or a career. We recognize the need for this innovation and that we must continue to do more."

The statewide initiative does not require that a charter school be overseen by an elected school board. Charter schools could be authorized by a local school board or by a new, state commission. The governor, president of the senate and speaker of the house would each appoint three of the nine members on the commission.

By law, the state commission would be composed of charter school supporters. It would not be chosen by voters. In addition, it is unclear how often the unelected boards of charter schools would meet and how they would accept public comment.

"Allowing a new state agency to authorize a charter school is very troubling to us and should be to everyone who supports accountability," Fertakis said. "We believe that the leaders of our schools must be accountable to parents and other stakeholders in our communities. They should have regular public meetings where residents can express their opinions to those they elected. And when voters don't think their schools are on the right track, they should have the right to elect new district leaders."

Fertakis pointed out that Washington has a long tradition of safeguards to ensure residents have a strong say in how local education dollars are spent.

“Voters make decisions on levies, bonds and the people who oversee our schools,” she said. “They recognize that having a say in how money is spent is one of the strongest levers for accountability, as well as change. Elected school directors are public stewards of that money. If that control is moved to private hands, the public loses an important protection.”

WSSDA has a long-standing position that supports alternative, non-traditional and innovative schools operated under locally elected school boards. The recent vote by the WSSDA Board of Directors opposing I-1240 is consistent with this position.