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Intelligence Squared U.S.

Charter Schools Are Overrated

For the Motion: Gary Miron, Julian Vasquez Heilig
Against the Motion: Jeanne Allen, Gerard Robinson
Moderator: John Donovan

AUDIENCE RESULTS	
Before the debate:	After the debate:
33% FOR	54% FOR
31% AGAINST	40% AGAINST
36% UNDECIDED	06% UNDECIDED

Start Time: (00:00:00)

[applause]

There is nothing in the Constitution that talks explicitly about a right to education. But don't we all believe that such a right exists, that education at its best is a great door opener? It's an opportunity maker. The stakes are enormously high. And that perhaps is why questions about how to educate our children tend to set off some of the most emotional arguments we encounter in the public forum. Consider debates about school segregation, the pledge of allegiance, evolution, teachers' unions. And the one we are going to be looking at in this debate, charter schools. Those experiments first launched only 25 years ago, that let schools run themselves independently while still spending taxpayer money with the dream that such schools would innovate their way to new educational breakthroughs, benefiting especially underserved children, and proving what works and what does not work.

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And the outcome of that experiment, "Has the dream paid off?" Well, that sounds like the makings of a debate. So, let's have it. Yes or no to this statement, "Charter Schools are Overrated," a debate from Intelligence Squared U.S. I'm John Donovan, and I stand between two

teams of two -- experts in this topic who will argue for and against the motion. As always, our debate goes in three rounds and then our audience here at the Kauffman Music Center in New York City votes to choose the winner. And only one side wins. And if all goes well, civil discourse will win as well. Let's have you vote right now as you come in off the street, to tell us where you stand on this motion, "Charter Schools are Overrated." Go to those keypads at your seats. If you agree with this motion, push number one. And if you disagree with it, push number two. And, if you're undecided, push number three. Our motion is this, "Charter Schools are Overrated." We have one team of two experts arguing in favor of the motion. Let's meet them first. Let's welcome, ladies and gentlemen, Gary Miron.

00:02:00

[applause]

And, hi, Gary. You are a professor in the college of education at the Western Michigan University. You evaluate charter schools for state education agencies around the country. And you have said, I'm quoting here now, that the charter school idea is one that you like. Now, I'm not quoting you, I'm paraphrasing. But you are fairly critical of how it has actually played out over the last 25 years. So, given that, would you consider sending your own kids to a charter school?

Gary Miron:

I guess I considered that, as a parent, I always have to look out for my children's best interest. As an evaluator, as a professor and academic, I have to look out for the best interests of all kids. So, my wife and I, when it came time, we shopped around and we ended up enrolling our children in a Magnet School.

John Donovan:

Okay. And can you tell us, please, Gary, who your partner is?

Gary Miron:

Julian Vasquez Heilig. He's a professor and he is very tech savvy, and he knows charter schools inside and out.

John Donovan:

If he's tech savvy, that is fantastic. Welcome, Julian, to Intelligence Squared U.S.

00:03:02

[applause]

And, yes, Julian, you are a professor at Sacramento State in Education Leadership and Policy. You are a founding board member of the Network for Public Education. We want to run this by you. The NAACP recently took a stance, calling for a moratorium on new charter

schools. And there have been a lot of public hearings about that. You testified at one of them. And both sides are heard in those debates, but did you have the sense, being there, that any minds were changed at the one you attended?

Julian Vasquez Heilig:

That's a great question. This is the third resolution that the NAACP passed on charter schools in the last several years. And I think that this has elicited the most discussion, this most recent resolution. So, I hope that democracy moves forward, that this conversation moves forward. Maybe some minds will be changed.

John Donovan:

All right, thanks very much. And, again, the team arguing for the motion, "Charter Schools are Overrated."

[applause]

And we have a team arguing against the motion.

00:04:00

First, let's welcome, please, Jeanne Allen.

[applause]

And, Jeanne, you are CEO of the Center for Education Reform. Its mission is to expand educational opportunities for children through innovation, freedom, and flexibility. You started the center back in 1993, a while back now. But what was the inspiration behind it?

Jeanne Allen:

Thanks, John. Well, it was 10 years after a nation at risk. We were still very much a nation at risk at that point and I was in Washington, D.C. and was tired of the polarization. Sound familiar? On education issues. And I decided there were a whole bunch of people -- in fact, millions of parents and teachers around the country, that desperately wanted something different. And I wanted to pull all sides together and help them get it.

John Donovan:

Thanks very much, Jeanne. And tell us who your partner is.

Jeanne Allen:

Gerard Robinson, a scholar, a friend, and amazing advocate.

John Donovan:

Gerard, welcome to Intelligence Squared U.S.

[applause]

00:05:00

Gerard Robinson, you are also a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, and you've got some experience here. You are a former commissioner of education for the state of Florida. You were a Secretary of Education for the commonwealth of Virginia. You're conservative. Your wife, who worked in the Department of Education under Clinton, is not a conservative. Now, charter school -- that doesn't always break down along party lines, those questions. So, are -- is there bipartisanship in your house on this question?

Gerard Robinson:

There is bipartisanship. My wife is a Democrat. She supports charters because she supports democracy. I'm a Republican. I support charters because I wanted to advance the Republic, and it also shows that God has a sense of humor.

[laughter]

John Donovan:

The team arguing against the motion, "Charter Schools are Overrated."

[applause]

We go in three rounds. The first round, opening statements by each debater in turn. They are six minutes each. And here to make the first opening statement in support of the motion, please welcome to the lectern Gary Miron.

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You can make your way to the lectern, Gary. He's a professor in evaluation, measurement, and research in the College of Education at Western Michigan University. Ladies and gentlemen, Gary Miron.

[applause]

Gary Miron:

Thank you. I'm very pleased to be here. This is a great venue. I love the format for this debate, and the topic today is really critical, so I'm especially pleased to be here. As John noted earlier, I actually -- I like charter schools. I like the idea. It's a good idea. When I look at legislation -- most of it passed in the 1990s -- we see common goals, common publicly-established objectives for charter schools. They've -- the legislation says they're going to be small, locally-run. They're going to be innovative and highly accountable. Charter schools -- and the legislation notes that they're going to be mission-driven. They're going to create new professional opportunities for teachers. After all, Albert Shanker, the president of the AFT at the time, was a visionary founder. He came up with the idea of charter schools.

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So, it was supposed to create opportunities for teachers. So, that was wonderful too. Charter schools were going to be public schools, a new form of public schools -- a compromise from private vouchers. And of course, charter schools were going to lift the public-school system by competition and by example. So, this new form of public schools was going to help the overall system. So, I mean, I -- maybe I should sit on the other side of the stage. I'm very impressed with the idea. My problem comes, however, with what has happened in the last 25 years. I've done a lot of evaluations, and public schools today are overrated in large part because they are not fulfilling those publicly-established goals. If we look at school size, charter schools are very big. They're growing every year in size. We have some charter schools that are over 10,000 students. One school in Ohio has more than 14,000 students. They're not locally-run, today. Many of them used to be locally run, but today, increasingly, they are started by outside private companies and that -- their proportion of the charter school market grows with every year.

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I want to talk -- jump over a couple points here, but in terms of innovation, charter schools are not -- I mean, some are innovative, but the systematic research has shown that charter schools, on the whole, have innovations that, in terms of nature and scale and scope are not different from traditional public schools. So, on the whole, they're not innovative -- although there are innovative public schools and charter schools, and they should be commended. But another objective was that they were going to -- that they're going to create new professional opportunities for teachers, and that has not happened, unfortunately. Very high teacher attrition rates. One study had 40 percent of the new teachers coming into charter schools were living each year. That was a six-day study we did. When we looked at the reasons, it was teacher salaries, working conditions, and the teachers' perception that their schools were not able to fulfill their mission objectives or follow those missions. Those are the main predictors for why teachers are leaving.

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The biggest thing that we often see debated is student achievement. Charter schools were not supposed to perform similarly. They were supposed to outperform traditional public schools. Why would we create another public school -- parallel school system that performs similarly? They were supposed to perform better. The evidence -- you know, if we look at the body of evidence, there's over 80 rigorous studies of charter schools. Some are positive, some are negative -- in favor of charter schools. I've done nine of those studies. Two favored charter schools -- I remember Jeanne Allen and the Center for Education Reform praised us for our quality research. And a couple weeks later, we released our study on Pennsylvania. We were heavily criticized by the same organization because of our findings, but we call them as we see them. But, overall, across those 80 studies we see that there's really no difference in

performance. A lot of talk has been made about -- conveyed about this CREDO study out of Stanford. CREDO is a research center inside the Hoover Institution at Stanford. They've produced a number of studies, the comparison groups and the methods are criticized on both sides of this stage today they've been criticized and I have concerns about that.

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I guess the biggest concerns I have is when they try to equate these very small effect sizes sometimes favoring district schools, sometimes favoring charter schools, but they equate those to days of instruction and this is something our new secretary of education is being -- is doing right now and that's ludicrous. The biggest study that -- out there right now has been done by Mathematica. It was commissioned by the Bush administration. We don't see charter school advocates citing the study, largely because it's a most rigorous study to date taking students from waiting lists. These are the popular schools that volunteered and had large waiting lists. They were not normal charter schools. After tracking the students over multiple years, they found no significant differences between the two groups. On the whole, charter schools perform similarly. One other thing about charter schools is they were supposed to be public schools and this is something I do a lot of research on. Right now, we're working in the 15th edition of education management organization profiles.

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Today, we're looking at half -- close to half the nation's public charter school students are enrolled in privately operated charter schools. In my own state of Michigan, 90 percent of our charter schools are owned and operated by private entities. Some are nonprofit in nature. Some are for -- most are -- 80 percent are for profit. This is not -- this was not anticipated -- not anticipated at all. We're seeing charter schools today being bought and sold. How can you buy and sell a public school? This is something that's really happening, that's reform. So, this is one of my biggest concerns. I'm going to touch on some of these issues because I want to follow up on these publicly established schools and it's kind of one of the themes I have and Julian is going to talk about some of the key principles that are critical for the debate, but just to sum things up. Charter schools have not lived up to the ideal and they're not pursuing this publicly establish objectives. I believe that the reform idea has been really taken from us by private interests pursuing ideological and profit motives.

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I want my charter school reform back. It feels like somebody has stolen that from us. This is the reason I'm sitting on this side of the stage tonight, and this is why -- one of the reasons why I'm particularly sad to say that charter schools are overrated.

John Donovan:

Thank you, Gary Miron.

[applause]

And that is our motion, "Charter Schools are Overrated." Our next debater will speak against the motion, Gerard Robinson. He is a -- you can make your way to the lectern, a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, former commissioner of education for the state of Florida. Ladies and gentlemen, Gerard Robinson.

[applause]

Gerard Robinson:

Thank you, John. Thank you, Gary. It's good to be back in New York. In 1995, I was in New York working full time with a small nonprofit organization to help create a charter school. Now, put into context the state of New York did not have a charter school law at the time.

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The state of New Jersey, where I had a chance to do work, did not have one, but what I had in mind is something that I took from California in 1993. California was the second state in the nation to have a charter law behind Minnesota. Those two states had one thing in common, they allowed school teachers to create public schools because school teachers themselves said, "We've got to find a unique way of freeing ourselves so that we can have schools to teach kids to raise achievement and to experiment." When we talk about charter schools, we forget the fact that it was created and pushed by teachers. After you move from California, then you had, you know, of course, Georgia and Massachusetts and other states. Then they allowed parents and nonprofits and others to create charter schools, but it was a parent-led movement. It was also bipartisan. Take a look at the founding in Minnesota. It was Republicans and Democrats and white liberals from certain parts of Minneapolis-St. Paul, urban black Democrats who came together and said, "Listen, we tried desegregation.

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We need to make a lot of moves there, but for a set of reasons it's not working for all kids." But they also realized that public school choice isn't about a public-school monopoly. It's about having a public purpose for multiple kids, and they said, "If we can empower teachers to create charters, then we should do so." Same thing in California. I speak to you about charter schools as a charter school founder. I was also a charter school authorizer. I can tell you that America's got some great charter schools and we have horrible charter schools. We have charter schools that should have never been opened. If they're bad charter schools, that is an accountability and an authorization problem, not a charter problem. If we have for-profit companies involved in charter schools and they're involved in malfeasance, that's financial malfeasance, that's not a problem with for-profit companies.

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That's a problem with what I call for-pimping. And for-pimping isn't for-profit. We have people in the charter school movement who are in this movement to make money. Guess what, before you have charter schools, you have people in the public-school system then and now making money. I got into this movement because I wanted to make sure that we advanced the Republic. 1787 in this city, we decided to sign the Northwest Ordinance and is something we don't talk about often. And it's said that religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary for good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged. Schools and the means of education. Schools are important and they take place in buildings. But the means of education is ubiquitous. It can take place in a building. And we have charter schools that are on the top floor of one school, bottom floor of another school. We have charter schools that have an entire school building.

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We have charter schools that are hybrid. Some classes are taking place in the school building. Some are taking place online. We have charter schools that are also totally virtual, the means of education. If you expect 50 million public school children in the United States who are in traditional public schools to get a great education, we should support. If we support the three million kids who are in 6,900 charter schools, we should support it. Find a social movement in the last 25 years where ordinary people have been given public money to do extraordinary things. It's happening through the charter school movement. In this last presidential debate, charter schools of course was part of the discussion. And there's a question about whether or not charter schools are going to destroy public education. 25 years later, we have charter schools in this city and charter schools are thriving, some well, some not so well. But I want to leave you with this. If you don't like public charter schools, then you must not like public school choice because if you like public school choice, you've got to like Magnet Schools.

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And Magnet Schools, in fact, preceded charter schools. If you like public school choice, then of course you have to like the specialty schools here in New York City where you actually have to take tests to get in where, in fact, you don't have to take tests to get into charter schools, where you have specialty schools that are for the gifted. Well, what about those who we found left behind? Charter schools are 25 years old. It's a step in the right direction to try to right the wrongs that we've had for centuries. It's March. This year, the U.S. Department of Education will turn 150 years old. It was a group of formally enslaved Africans who walked off slave plantations in the south who helped to create the concept of a free universal public education. In the north, you had something somewhat similar. As we celebrate 150 years of what the Department of Education can do and the role it has played in advancing public school choice, let us make sure that we include charter schools as part of the conversation.

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It's not going to solve all the problems, but it's also not the biggest problem. It's not going to serve all of our children, but all of our children are already not served by public schools. But what it will do is keep schools and the means of education moving ahead. And, as long as we do that, it will make the Republic stronger, will make democracy better, but more importantly, we will guarantee that our children will have a better future than we will because, if you look at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development data, Germany and the United States are one of the two industrialized nations whose children may not do as well as we have. To let that happen would be to turn our back on the Constitution and the work we've done. Thank you.

[applause]

John Donovan:

Thank you, Gerard Robinson. And a reminder of what's going on, we are halfway through the opening round of this Intelligence Squared U.S. Debate. I'm John Donovan.

00:19:00

We have four debaters, two teams of two, fighting it out over this motion, "Charter Schools are Overrated." You have heard the first two opening statements. And now, onto the third, here to debate for the motion, Julian Vasquez Heilig. He's a professor of educational leadership and policy studies at California State University in Sacramento. Ladies and gentlemen, here is Julian Vasquez Heilig.

[applause]

Julian Vasquez Heilig:

So, I think I'll know if my remarks are a success if these two young men in the front row don't yawn during my six minutes. So, I'm going to be watching you two.

[laughter]

So, first, I would like to thank and honor my family and the educators in my career, my life, for this opportunity. Gary began our debate by arguing that charter schools have evolved and departed from their original intent. I'd like to build upon this principal argument. Let me begin by telling you a little bit about my approach -- that will complement Gary's prior remarks.

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First, I will discuss the success and problem in the American education system. Then, I will discuss what evidence should be considered to embrace the motion under debate -- that charters are overrated. There are now thousands of charter schools across the United States. While some are awful, and many are average, some of them are great. So, you're not going to hear us say tonight that every charter school is a problem, just as you're not going to

hear Jeanne and Gerard say that every charter is perfect. You won't hear us say that every charter is imperfect. Even so, you will hear us say that charters are overrated, and ask you to embrace the idea that charter schools are in need of reform. I'd like to first begin with the problem. The system of public education in the United States includes some places that are excellent, and some that are struggling. Overall, the United States performs about the middle of the pack. However, there are some states that are knocking it out of the park.

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For example, in math and science, there are only four countries in the world that perform better than Massachusetts. New York, New Jersey -- there's only five countries in the world that perform better than those two states. The NAEP test, which is the so-called pulse of the nation's achievement, has shown that the children of today are smarter than they've ever been before. In fact, our graduation rates are now higher than they've ever been. Our public education system deserves some credit for making this happen.

[applause]

We've made real progress. The key problem in our country is the inequality -- the inequality between states, between districts, within schools, and within districts. Jeanne and Gerard have been very eloquent on this point over the years. Inequality as the status quo for poor children really is the shame of our nation.

[applause]

00:22:00

This is probably an area where we agree. Some have suggested that charters resolve these inequities that persist in our society, and that charters, as President Trump said yesterday, are civil rights. Donald Trump and his Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, have said that choice equals civil rights. Gerard, as Trump's presidential transition team on education, has made this point. Jeanne has also defended the Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, for her approach to for-profit charters in Michigan as a civil rights remedy. In contrast, as noted recently by the civil rights organizations -- the NAACP, the Journey for Justice, and the Movement for Black Lives -- charter schools are far from a civil rights remedy. And let me make that case. Overall, their results mirror -- and in many cases, underperform -- traditional schools, the public schools that Jeanne and Gerard have consistently denounced as failing. In fact, in some important ways, by using approaches that limit or deny access to some of our most vulnerable students, many charter schools undermine the civil rights causes.

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In fact, it's the opposite of democracy. So, next, I'll take up the proposition that charters are a slam dunk for student achievement, and Gary spoke to this briefly. There are many wild claims

out there about charter school performance. Many of them are rooted in what CREDO does. In fact, CREDO studies are not peer reviewed. And if you look very carefully at them, if you point to the most recent studies, you found that, well, African Americans perform eight thousandths of a standard deviation. Latinos, five hundredths of a standard deviation. What does that mean? These numbers are larger than zero, but you need a microscope to see them. Contrast that outcome with policy such as pre-K and class size reduction, which are far more unequivocal measures for student success.

[applause]

They have 400 to 1000 percent more statistical impact than charters.

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Thus, the performance of charter schools is overrated. And again, these are the best possible national results for charter supporters to point to. Our friends have previously discussed the right to have high-quality schools. We exist. We agree. In California, for example, however, the ACLU found that one-fifth of all schools had discriminatory policies, some requiring parent hours. If you could not volunteer those parent hours, then you can make a volunteer payment to that school. And so, what happens is charters can do the choosing if we don't hold them accountable. In essence, if charters are allowed to implement exclusionary policies they do the choosing instead of families. Furthermore, the charter industry often points to wait lists, but examinations of those wait lists show that they're unreliable and there's many duplications. In fact, I have been called from a charter wait list that I joined six or seven years ago, even recently.

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For these reasons, you should vote to support the notion that, "Charter Schools are Overrated." By supporting this motion, you aren't saying that parents shouldn't have a choice or that charters should be closed immediately or that there aren't any charter schools that are excellent. In fact, Gerard himself has said that he does not, "Believe charter schools are perfect or above reproach." So, I submit to you voting that charter schools are currently overrated will simply demonstrate that you are aware that charter schools are an education reform that needs more work. Thank you.

[applause]

John Donovan:

Thank you, Julian Vasquez Heilig. And the motion again, "Charter Schools are Overrated." And here is our final opening round debater speaking against the motion, Jeanne Allen, founder and CEO of the Center for Education Reform. Ladies and gentlemen, Jeanne Allen.

[applause]

Jeanne Allen:

Thank you. Thank you, John. Are charter schools overrated?

00:26:00

Are the arts overrated? Is project-based learning overrated? Is efficiency overrated? How about student achievement? Individual student achievement? What if I told you the average cost effectiveness advantage of charter schools was as much as 19 percentage points in reading and 17 percentage points in math on that very NAEP report that my colleague just referred to. And that based on that increase in NAEP scores in a charter school definitively on an objective test we can actually save a thousand dollars per student that could go into that kind of pre-K health care mental health and teacher support and educate more kids at the same time? Are those results overrated?

[applause]

I love quaint statements about how everything is great. I heard it all the time. Just today on the train I heard someone say but I like public schools. I like charter schools, but I had to move across the border from D.C. into Maryland to get a good school for my kids.

00:27:01

Really? Well, is your choice not overrated? But charter schools are overrated? Let me ask you another question, is civil rights overrated? Wyatt T. Walker, Martin Luther King's aide-de-camp, helped to start New York City's first charter school. It's the Sisulu-Walker charter school. Year after year after year, Sisulu-Walker charter school demonstrates growth above and beyond what any comparable kids attend in the area year after year have always beat that growth. Is fixing what's broken and expanding what works overrated? Wyatt T. Walker said if Martin Luther King, Jr., were alive today he would support charter schools. Should we sacrifice the millions of lives that went ahead of us to make sure that children who were most in need who need the equity that my partner talked about earlier don't get that equity simply because we have this nostalgic version of that school that we all experienced?

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We often forget that efficiencies in the schools we attended, we get older, or those our kids attended. Classes too big, too small, nerds, people who didn't seem to care about us, people who cared too much, Bueller?

[laughter]

Our talents are overlooked, underutilized, mismatched. I'm not good in science. I'm not good in history. Why do I have to be in a big class? Why do I have to be in a small class? Not enough music. Too little indoors. Books that make no sense. Testing, testing, testing. Discrimination.

Are parents overrated? Think about it. Three million students in charter schools today. Twenty-six years now we're entering with charter schools. That means something like 20 million choices have been made since 1991 alone. Grandparents, foster parents, black, white, brown, liberal, conservative, nothing, poor, all of their opinions, all of their ideas overrated?

00:29:04

Parents vote with their feet. They're surveyed year after year and their support surpasses 80 percent and yet, those students in the schools where those kids came from are on waiting lists because they want to follow, too. Why? It's not because we need to actually count on these average, huge studies like we're hearing about. There's actually no such thing as a study that will tell you that all charter schools do this way or all charter schools do that way. In fact, states like New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts don't have better test scores or assessments than every other state. They have higher income parents, better educated. And when we've put those better educated, higher income families and their -- students of those families in a dataset for researchers to look at, they get all combined and squashed with all the poor black, brown, Latino, and working class folks that actually ends up lifting them.

00:30:07

But when you disaggregate that data, something we've been able to do for the last 12 years, you see a much different picture. You don't see growth with those upper middle class, those more advantaged kids, those working poor. You don't see them, regardless of color, getting better and better. You actually see the proficiency of the best performing students in America going down. And, yet, at the same time, unless you have a choice to get out of a failing school system, like that in Philadelphia, which graduates in four years' three percent of African-American males, while Boys Latin Charter School graduates in four years -- I'm sorry, college graduation, 50 percent of males, unless you pull them out, those kids don't stand a chance. Our system is broken, not our people. Is learning overrated?

00:31:00

No, no, and no. Students go to charter schools not because it's one amorphous big thing or institution, but for the very purpose and reason that they started to begin with. It started with diversity, not doing better, choices over diverse learning environments because all of our kids learn differently, require differently.

Gary, if you actually really believe that you were part of the charter school reform movement, I'm sorry, but I never saw you at our meetings, okay? And if you really believe that it's gone away, then you must not have been paying attention to the purpose of charter schools. It was for individual parent options because we know our kids better than anyone else.

[applause]

And it was for educators to provide those options. And that is why charter schools are not only overrated, they are a majority better than any other institution we've had. They've lifted all votes, made all public schools better, and you are absolutely wrong.

00:32:04

Vote, "No," they are not overrated.

[applause]

John Donovan:

Thank you, Jeanne Allen. And that concludes Round One of this Intelligence Squared U.S. Debate where our motion is, "Charter Schools are Overrated." Now, we move on to Round Two. And, in Round Two -- I want to say one thing because, Jeanne, you came a little bit close to it. Our -- the spirit of our discourse here discourages personal attacks. And it certainly adds a little bit of zest, but it puts Gary in the position -- Gary in the position, now, of having to respond to that. And then we end up talking about Gary's record and your record as opposed to the issue, so --

Jeanne Allen:

I apologize.

John Donovan:

No, you don't -- I -- all right, thank you. Thank you for that.

[applause]

So, we want to -- I want you to -- I want you to let it go, okay?

[laughter]

Can we all do that? All right, thank you.

00:33:00

Now, we move on to Round Two. And, in Round Two, the debaters address one another directly and they take questions from me and from you, our live audience, here in New York City at the Kauffman Music Center. The motion is, "Charter Schools are Overrated." We heard the team arguing for this motion, Gary Miron, and Julian Vasquez Heilig saying that they were a good idea, charter schools were a good idea, but that they have gone off the rails dramatically. That they have not lived up to their main purpose, which was to innovate, to give teachers the chance to teach in ways that they actually wanted. That would be energizing for them. That, in the end, they find that too many schools are being taken over by private interests, that

inequality in certain communities is actually echoed in the schools themselves, that, in that sense, that they undermine human rights. The team arguing against the motion, and, in that sense, supporting charter schools by saying that they're not overrated, they concede, by the way, as their opponents do, that there are good charter schools and bad charter schools, but that they say that the purpose of charter schools -- their main purpose was to give parents options.

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And, on that score, they absolutely have lived up to their main goal. They cite the fact that parents are voting with their feet by taking their kids in increasing numbers into charter schools with -- citing 80 percent support in polls that indicate the parents are getting what they want out of it. So, they're citing the virtue of choice and the virtue of a parent-led movement that they say is also bipartisan. So, we're going to peel some of this apart. I think it's going to be a little bit challenging for all of us on the issues of school performance, because the studies are -- both sides are saying the studies are all over the place -- but we do want to look at those and discuss those to some degree, as we can, and as much as we can understand them. But before we get to the data, I want to take to the side arguing for the motion -- your opponents' main argument that the schools were founded -- first of all, they say that their main purpose was to give parents a choice and they say that parents are getting to exercise that choice.

00:35:00

Therefore, there was success on those -- that ground. So, yeah, it is a fact that more and more people are going to -- choosing to go to to charter schools than they were 25 years ago. Every year it's more and more. What does that say, that parents are asking for charter schools? I'll take it to you first, Julian.

Julian Vasquez Heilig:

Okay. Well, in New Orleans, the only choice is charter schools. Because there, they've decided that in the recovery school district, that there's going to be all charters. And so, yeah, so if you look at the numbers, you're going to see that the number of students attending charter schools is more. But if you look at the data -- and we wrote a policy brief on this. I went to folks in New Orleans, in Louisiana. I said, "Give me the data on what you're seeing there." And New Orleans and Louisiana writ large, are last and nearly last in every single education outcome. And they've had 10 years and got everything they wanted -- charter schools, Teach for America, vouchers. You name it, they got it there. And New Orleans and Louisiana are last or near last in all the education outcomes.

00:36:00

So, just because something is growing, doesn't necessarily mean it's good --

John Donovan:

But --

Julian Vasquez Heilig:

Unless it's my muscles working out. That's it.

John Donovan:

But I still -- I'm still left with the question about other places, that -- in a large sense, that there seems to be a dash for charter schools, where they can be opened, and there are waiting lists, et cetera -- all of which seems to suggest that there is a big demand nationally. And then I'll let you answer that, Gary, and then we'll go to the other side.

Gary Miron:

John, the demand -- yeah, there's a demand and their numbers are growing. Today, there's close to three million students in charter schools in our country. But when we look at student attrition data, like, especially in the virtual charter schools, there's phenomenal attrition. And these companies just -- instead of improving the quality of the schools, they pour more money into recruiting and convincing families to come in. There's high attrition rates. In terms of waiting lists -- just, I've done nine evaluations, statewide evaluations of charter schools. These waiting lists, they're not audited. That's -- there's no valid measure. And often, these -- the lists aren't --

John Donovan:

So are you saying --

Gary Miron:

The lists don't actually exist.

John Donovan:

Are you saying that the demand is somewhat whipped up by manipulation of the public attitudes and that the waiting lists are perhaps false?

00:37:06

Gary Miron:

They're unsubstantiated claims.

John Donovan:

And the first part, about the -- I think -- I just wanted to --

Gary Miron:

First thing --

John Donovan:

-- the demand is somewhat --

Gary Miron:

There's a high demand for them, but there's a high rate of children exiting charter schools.

Jeanne Allen:

Actually, they're not --

John Donovan:

Okay. Take it back Jeanne --

Jeanne Allen:

-- they're actually not unsubstantiated. You actually have to produce data at every school, to show who you have chosen from so that you can be held accountable publicly. What is unsubstantiated, unfortunately, is state data. State education departments are famous for not knowing how to actually collect data, so that when you get it, it's highly inaccurate -- which is one of the problems -- which is why we have ineffective school systems, because unfortunately state education departments have been in charge. But I just really want to correct a couple things too. First of all, the charter schools that started in New Orleans started after Katrina. There were no schools. There were no boards. There were no people. And the first schools that could open up, were schools that were independent, charter public schools.

00:38:00

They said, "We will help set them up," and they were set up because charter operators from across the country said they were willing to set up schools, sight unseen, without a promise of money to get those kids into school. KIPP went to Houston, put the kids in cots. They wake up in the morning, they teach them. There's a whole different story there. And what disturbs me is the discussion and the debate, with all due respect, is about lacking context and data. We heard that half the charter school -- half the kids in the country go to charter schools that are for-profit. That's completely false. There's data to prove that.

Gary Miron:

Who said that? I don't know --

Julian Vasquez Heilig:

Well, whose data?

Jeanne Allen:

Gary said that.

Gary Miron:

We put out a report. We're on our 15th edition. We document --

Jeanne Allen:
Gary, it's totally --

Gary Miron:
-- the list of all the schools.

Jeanne Allen:
-- it's -- your definition of for-profit is wrong and the way you define data is wrong. We heard -- there's a charter school --

Gary Miron:
[laughter]

Jeanne Allen:
-- it is. They're completely -- [laughter] -- I can show you --

John Donovan:
Well, let me --

Jeanne Allen:
-- I can make those [inaudible] -- but he also --

John Donovan:
Jeanne, let me --

Jeanne Allen:
-- and he also said that there are charter schools --

John Donovan:
Jeanne, let me stop you for a second and --

Jeanne Allen:
-- that have 10,000 kids, and that's not true. Charters often have a hundred schools.

00:39:00

Contracts are not schools. And that's the difference. So, you're --

John Donovan:
All right.

Jeanne Allen:
You're misleading.

John Donovan:
Gary? What is your response?

Gary Miron:
Well, I mean, charter school size -- I mean -- charter schools -- a single charter school in Ohio, 14,000 -- more than 14,000 students. They've had more than 18,000 students at one point in time. I mean, this is --

Jeanne Allen:
What kind of school is that?

Gary Miron:
-- publicly-available data. It's a --

Jeanne Allen:
Are they in a room?

00:45:00
Gary Miron:
-- virtual school.

Jeanne Allen:
Okay. So, not in a room. School, to people --

Gary Miron:
They -- it's online virtual school.

Jeanne Allen:
Yeah. Yeah. So, they have people all over the state.

Gary Miron:
It's very profitable.

[applause]

John Donovan:
Gerard.

Gerard Robinson:
Approximately 50 percent of the charter schools in the country are actually managed by for-profit companies. They're called EMOs, education management organizations. There are states

where the majority or near majority are in fact operated by for-profit companies. But let's remember, before you had charter school laws, public schools like New York City and like New Orleans are already contracted with for-profit companies. The buses that your kids ride on, likely for profit.

00:40:01

Public schools that for a host of reasons can't serve all special needs students will contract out those services.

Gary Miron:
You can't buy and sell schools.

John Donovan:
Let him get it out.

Gerard Robinson:
Will contract those services. You've had the private sector involved in public education for many years and there's a role for that because there are times where the public sector cannot or chooses not to provide that service.

Julian Vasquez Heilig:
I mean, is there a trend towards privatization and private control of education? Yes. We agree. And that's where this conversation started, when they decided that they were going to privatize buses, that they were going to privatize food services. Now, they've decided that they want to privatize our schools, the entire deal. So, I think that that's -- yes, I agree with you. There is a slow roll towards privatization and private control of our schools.

Jeanne Allen:
I don't think he said that. I don't think he said that. That's -- again, it's a distortion. What Gerard said is only 15 percent, it could be more and who cares what the tax status of a company is if our kids are learning. Let's think about this.

[applause]

Julian Vasquez Heilig:
Well, here's why --

Jeanne Allen:
And those thousands of kids that used to have to wait online, and still do, to get into the Success Academy schools because New York City couldn't figure it out after \$20,000 per child.

00:41:10

John Donovan:
Julian. Julian.

Julian Vasquez Heilig:

So, we're at a watershed moment for education. We have a secretary of education, Betsy DeVos, who believes in the private control and privatization of education. In Michigan, as Gary talked about, more than 80 percent of those schools and if you look at the CREDO studies, even if you don't believe them, let's just set aside all the problems, they have a negative impact on students in that state and there's a negative impact -- I'll say it again, of charter schools on students in the state of Michigan. They have the lowest transparency and accountability standards in that state also. So, the question is, do we want to see Betsy DeVos' vision for the entire United States? The New York Times reported on this and said that in Detroit, there's no good choice.

Jeanne Allen:
You know, in 1991 -- I'm sorry.

Gerard Robinson:
If there's a slow roll to privatization it's -- let's take a look at your teacher pensions.

00:42:00

Most of you who are teachers and principals will retire with a good pension because your investments are, in fact, invested in for-profit or profit-making adventures. Just take a look at that. If you're against privatization on the school side I'm not sure how you're against privatization when you're going to retire for better market.

Jeanne Allen:

So, I'd also like to give some context to Detroit and other places and go back to data and states, because there's something a lot of people don't quite realize when you talk about context. There is no one set of data or stats that tell us where every single person and every single student was and is after a certain amount of time. What you have to do is you actually have to pull that data out, analyze it, and make sure that you're accounting for every single variable. Where does the state get its data from? School districts or authorizers of charters. When school districts report data, some of it is two years behind.

00:43:00

Some of it's just hand coded and inaccurate.

John Donovan:
So, Jeanne --

Jeanne Allen:

These are not -- well, my point is --

John Donovan:

Yeah.

Jeanne Allen:

My point is, data is not the issue. We have studies. We can talk about the studies. We've got studies that show 15 percent learning gains in Washington, D.C. --

John Donovan:

So, what is the issue? What is the issue?

Jeanne Allen:

The issue is whether or not these schools are working for students through a variety of the same kinds of multiple measures that educators are clamoring for today.

John Donovan:

Okay. Let me let Gary respond directly to that.

Gary Miron:

Yeah. There's data. Data's all over the place. You can see different things. You can torture it. It'll confess to a lot of things.

[applause]

We -- I think the big issue tonight and I think it's a little bit of an unfortunate matchup is that we have two academics on this side and we have two people representing advocacy groups. Your job descriptions require --

John Donovan:

You're coming close to the personal attack now.

[laughter]

Gary Miron:

Oh, okay. But let me talk about -- just -- I've looked at the data. I have to look at all the data, I've done these comprehensive evaluations.

00:44:01

Jeanne Allen:

Yeah, so do we, every day.

Gary Miron:

I've visited more than 700 charter schools in my state evaluations. We've collected the data and it -- we don't -- we produce the reports and you selectively consume them.

Jeanne Allen:
Well, and that's --

[laughter]

-- but you know, but you know, and your pedigree aside, the data is not the issue and that's what I want to go to. Detroit was falling apart in 1991. I was in Detroit in 1991. Detroit's issues have nothing to do with the fact that charter schools showed up. Detroit was an issue because, like Baltimore now, like so many cities -- Chicago right now, we have not yet allowed families, educators, and students to have schools that are personally tailored to their needs. We have bureaucracies control the rules. We have states that control the rules. We have union contracts that tie the hands of the greatest educators and make them want to leave.

00:45:00

[applause]

And that's why they go and star these charter schools. So, Detroit kids were actually benefited from charter schools, and those that didn't want to stay around, left.

John Donovan:
Julian?

Julian Vasquez Heilig:

So, you know, really, I'm not sitting here saying that we should do nothing to help Latino and African-American kids. A professor at Cal State came to us in the University of Michigan showed that, depending on which side of Eight Mile you lived on was what kind of school you were going to get. And the thing is that, that's on purpose. Unfortunately, our society has decided that poor children are going to get a lesser education. And it's the inequality that's built into the system and, when you have a friend that -- you're having a conversation with a friend, and they want -- they don't want to talk about what you want to talk about. What do they do? They change the subject. And that's really what's happening here, is that we're talking about charter schools when we should be talking about the inequality. And what we should also be talking about is how charter schools exacerbate the inequality that we see in schools.

00:46:00

[applause]

John Donovan:

Okay, I want to take -- that, in fact, was the point that I wanted to move on to. Gerard, I'd like you to respond. And you heard Julian touch on this in his opening comment as well, the argument that charter schools echo and, in some cases, enhance the inequality.

Gerard Robinson:

So, two points, one, I don't have a Ph.D. like those guys, but I am literate. And I can actually decipher data. When I lived in Florida and both Virginia, I had an opportunity to work with PhDs, had to go through their data. Now we look at charter schools that are private and public. So, that's part one. Part two, you can't boil the ocean to cook an egg. If the argument is going to be that inequality we must fix first before we challenge or attack charter schools, you're in for a very long ride. What I think we should do --

[applause]

-- what I think we should do is use the conjunction, "and." While we're fixing our public-school systems to address inequality, let's also use charter schools to do the same thing.

John Donovan:

Julian?

00:47:00

[applause]

Julian Vasquez Heilig:

And I actually agree with that statement, but let me add to it, "And we must fix charter schools, make sure they're transparent, make sure they're accountable until such a time they are overrated."

[applause]

Jeanne Allen:

So, I guess one of the things I have to say --

John Donovan:

What about that? Actually, that dropped nicely.

Jeanne Allen:

I am absolutely going to answer that.

John Donovan:

Okay.

[laughter]

Jeanne Allen:

I don't believe that there are some bad charter schools, some good charter schools, and some average. That's a quote that came from the New York Times in 2009 after the first CREDO study and people have used it and repeated it like it was conventional wisdom. And it's hogwash. 90 percent of the charter schools in the country are working for kids. The 10 percent that don't are already on the watch list or in order of being closed. So, we're not -- we don't need to fix charter schools any more than we have to fix academics. We have to allow the options that are making those equitable opportunities help kids. You're worried about equity? Let's talk about equity.

John Donovan:

Wait, wait, wait, wait. I just want to break in because I --

00:48:00

Jeanne Allen:

Yeah? Yes?

John Donovan:

-- don't -- I think he made a point that, to my ear, you didn't exactly address. And the point was, there are good and bad, but until it's all much better, I -- in the performance of charter schools across the board, they are therefore overrated.

Jeanne Allen:

The charter schools are not overrated because they are serving parents and students' needs by choice. What we should be doing --

John Donovan:

Why is choice the game changer? Why is choice the key?

Jeanne Allen:

You mandate -- what's -- what would we like better? You open your door and you are zoned to your traditional public school because of your zip code? There's nothing more inequitable than that. Versus, you allow a parent to make a decision among institutions that are not only highly transparent, charter schools are micromanaged to death in ways that you cannot find in traditional school. Okay?

John Donovan:

Okay, before you get onto that, I want to take the point that you dropped nicely, that choice is a virtue in itself, but the reason you just laid out, and I want to let Gary Miron respond to that.

Gerard Robinson:

Can you paraphrase that again? There were so many points to take.

00:49:00

Jeanne Allen:

I wasn't really a virtue itself. The point is, you're allowed -- you're leading to help your students get an education that you feel best helps them. And that institution is not just for choice.

John Donovan:

No, but you're --

Jeanne Allen:

It's a publicly accountable choice.

John Donovan:

-- you said charter schools are not overrated -- charter schools are not overrated --

Jeanne Allen:

Right, right.

John Donovan:

-- because they embody choice.

Jeanne Allen:

No. Charter schools are not overrated because parents are permitted, as opposed to being zoned to schools that we already know are failing, to make a choice for their students.

John Donovan:

Okay. Okay.

Jeanne Allen:

Well, in a publicly-accountable institution. You can't just cut it off there.

John Donovan:

Okay. Gary.

Gary Miron:

There's many forms of school choice. Magnet schools. There's, within districts, school choice intradistrict school choice programs that -- with -- that maintain the governing structure -- means that the public is still going to have more transparency and control. My big concern with the charter school choice option is that it's become a vehicle for privatization, less transparency, and it's been a vehicle that's accelerated segregation by race, class --

Jeanne Allen:

Are those magnet schools working?

Jeanne Allen:

Are those magnet schools working?

Gary Miron:
They are.

Jeanne Allen:
Yeah, how do we know that?

00:50:00

Gary Miron:
The studies -- are working better. They're working better.

Jeanne Allen:
Really? That's because they're choosing the kids to go there.

Gary Miron:
They can -- they can use quotas --

Jeanne Allen:
They're selecting -- [applause] --

Gary Miron:
-- so they can provide voluntary --

Jeanne Allen:
-- like --

Gary Miron:
-- integration by race --

John Donovan:
Gerard.

Gary Miron:
-- and class.

John Donovan:
Gerard.

Gerard Robinson:
If you look at the transparency, take a look at the state of California. Julian is a professor at Sac -- well, Sacramento State. I took a look at their numbers. 2016 -2017, 35 charter schools in that state closed and identified exactly why they closed. In the fiscal year, right now, there's

nearly seven that have closed. You go to a Department of Education, and they say, "We're going to close a school, either driven by the authorizer or a number of factors." Those schools close. They tell you why. Academic malfeasance or financial. How many public schools have you seen close because students didn't do as well? If they closed, it would under-enrollment

[applause]

John Donovan:
Julian.

Julian Vasquez Heilig:

Well, I'm glad you brought up the California -- I want to make two points about this. I mean, first, you want to ask the communities of color about what they think about charter schools opening and closing in the middle of the school, at the -- you know, whenever it's decided that they want to close and fold up shop?

00:51:10

I think -- it's -- that's something we really have to struggle with, which is that -- is that the best thing for us? Yes, it's -- 711s open and close, but as the center of a community, do we really want charter schools open and closing?

John Donovan:
How typical is that over the overall charter school experience?

Julian Vasquez Heilig:

There's -- I think, 2,300 charter schools have closed the last 10 years.

John Donovan:
Versus --

Julian Vasquez Heilig:

Don't quote me on that number, but I think it's about that.

John Donovan:

Okay. We -- and we won't hold you to it. But versus how many have continued to operate and open in the meantime?

Julian Vasquez Heilig:

Well, I think there's more than 7,000, 8,000 charter schools now.

Gary Miron:
6,700, about.

John Donovan:

Okay. So, why do you use that statistic to suggest that they're overrated?

Julian Vasquez Heilig:

Well the idea --

John Donovan:

Isn't the point of these schools to be experimental in one sense -- and if the experiment fails, then they shut down. That's the deal.

Julian Vasquez Heilig:

So, the idea is that --

John Donovan:

Not --

Julian Vasquez Heilig:

-- this is a market-based approach.

[applause]

Vote with your feet, right? Now, the idea is that we can just willy-nilly open and close schools. But these schools -- we're talking about families.

00:52:02

We're talking about communities. And so, the question is -- are there -- and that's not really the point here today. But there are other alternatives. I don't think any of us are against parents being able to choose, and I'll speak to that in my closing remarks. But there's one other thing that I want to talk about with transparency and accountability. Do you think it's reasonable for us to know what the teacher attrition rate is in charter schools in California? Do you think it's reasonable for us to know what the discipline rates are in California? Well, the California charter school lobby does not want us to know that information about the schools that we're paying for. And to me, that's transparency and accountability.

[applause]

John Donovan:

Gerard.

[applause]

Gerard Robinson:

We talk about charter schools as if a 25-year sentence, there's been no growth. Take 2017. When you submit your application to a charter school authorizer, most of them are local school boards. Some are state, some are universities. Some of them now include in the application, "In case you have to close, what is your contingency plan?"

00:53:03

I agree with you. We don't want to throw students out in the snow -- I guess we're in New York; there's snow -- versus California, southern California. Those things are tough. But we've actually matured in how we think about how to use laws and processes. So, there's things in place; we're still learning across the process. But remember, this is 25 year -- this is a 25-year learning curve. We're still on a learning curve with traditional schools too.

John Donovan:

Gary Miron, would you support a -- do you -- can you imagine a functioning charter school model and system that's existing in all states and that you're all in favor of?

Gary Miron:

I think -- let's go back to the legislative intent. It's beautiful. I like the idea. Small, innovative, locally run, not run by for-profit or non-profit corporations outside the state. We have some of our charter schools being run outside of our country, where the headquarters are for those companies.

John Donovan:

What's an example of that?

Gary Miron:

Here in Manhattan.

00:54:00

Kunskapsskolan School. It's -- the corporate headquarters is in Sweden. Sabia [spelled phonetically] -- or Sabis, another school with headquarters in the Middle East.

John Donovan:

Okay. Is that problematic to this side?

Jeanne Allen:

It's not true. It's not true. These people start -- they're international people, if -- we're going to talk about immigration now? If people from all over the world create opportunities for kids. Sabis actually is a leader in the Middle East, and it actually runs -- ran private schools here. It was invited to open up a charter school in Springfield in the early part of the Massachusetts charter school, and it does an amazing job for students. They actually have a U.S.

headquarters. But that's not even -- so this is really interesting, right? So, we've now heard that there's this -- it's privatized. Let's go back to the original Ted Kolderie, who is the original author of the Massachusetts -- Minnesota charter school law, who is the -- we call him the godfather. He talks about --

John Donovan:
In a good way?

Jeanne Allen:
-- diversity -- yes. In a good way.

[laughter]

John Donovan:
Not in that --

Jeanne Allen:
You've got that part of my people. Okay? It is about -- it was not just locally controlled.

00:55:00

It was educators entering into contracts -- that's charters, to create opportunities for students to be -- have their needs best addressed with parents making choices under a high standard run by and publicly accountable to states and taxpayers. Now, how do we know that that happens day in and day out in Washington, D.C., New York City, yes Michigan, Arizona. Because where we have studies like the one Bob Rosenkranz mentioned upon opening apples to apples randomized control trial studies we know what works. So, that -- those studies plus financial transparency --

John Donovan:
Okay.

Jeanne Allen:
-- but I just want to say one more thing. Those are the states that we don't have nationwide and those are not the studies that my -- the opponents of charters on the right of us are talking about.

John Donovan:
Julian.

Julian Vasquez Heilig:
It was difficult for me to follow that, but --

[laughter]

-- I -- yes, please.

Jeanne Allen:

I can repeat it. Would you like me to repeat it?

Gary Miron:

Let's look at the body of research. I've spent a lot of time with my doctorate students looking at the body of research.

00:56:01

The smaller studies -- case studies, tend to be more favorable towards charter schools. The larger scale studies tend to have mixed findings or negative findings. The studies that are funded by federal or state education agencies tend to be negative. The studies that are funded by the advocacy groups, they tend to be positive. I mean, it's a lot of research out there, but when we look at the research, we have to look at the scope of all the research and overall, charter schools are overrated.

John Donovan:

All right. I want to go to audience questions. I'll come right down here to the front in the third row and second from -- second in from the aisle.

Male Speaker:

Hi, I'm Phil. I'm unaffiliated.

[laughter]

John Donovan:

Don't be scared.

Male Speaker:

My question is for this side against the motion and it's -- so out of the 7,000-ish experiments that have come out the various charter schools apart from I guess adding more capitalism, what specific results from those experiments or techniques could be ported over to public education to improve that and add to that?

John Donovan:

What a great question. What are some of the innovations that have come out of the --

[applause]

-- sure.

00:57:04

Who would like to take that? Gerard or Jeanne?

Jeanne Allen:

I will say just three to go quickly. There have been tremendous innovations in experiential and project-based learning that those schools have taken from the earliest days and --

John Donovan:

Could you compact that a little bit? What is that?

Jeanne Allen:

It means you actually change the way the classroom is structured because you don't have to account for a certain amount of seat time in the class and you have freedom from curriculums so you can say in the case of New Country Day school in Minnesota you're going to go in the water for half of the day. You're going to explore what's there. You're going to come back. You're going to put it in beakers. You're going to look at it under microscopes, that kind of experiential learning. Much more started in charter schools ported over. Some of the first non-public Montessori's were charter schools and they were copied by districts. The way teachers are paid or retained and rewarded was very much performance-based pay, was not on the table folks, until charter schools came along.

00:58:00

John Donovan:

The other side can answer if you'd like to.

Julian Vasquez Heilig:

So, just allow me to question the premise, which is that if I work for Banana Republic and I walk into Zara, do I expect Zara to roll out the red carpet for me? And so, charters are based on competition. They're competing with each other and with public schools. So, the very idea that somehow the original vision of Al Schanker and others that we are going to share and be innovative runs contrary to the current conversation about how charters should function as competitors and as a market.

Gerard Robinson:

And yet when we talked about specialty in public schools in New York City, do we say they're competing with the public schools? Do we say the same thing about magnet schools? About theme-based schools? About science schools? Public schools are diverse because we don't educate all our kids the same way. So, for me the schools that are a means for education should ever be encouraged, and charter schools are a part of that.

[applause]

00:59:00

John Donovan:
In the very last row.

Female Speaker:
Hi, my name is Pamela, and I am a teacher with the New York City Department of Education. Magnet Schools, when they accept children, they accept them from every level when people apply. Charter schools have been known to not take ESL children, bilingual children, special needs children, special-ed children. So, of course, when you look at the statistics --

John Donovan:
I need you to get to a question.

Female Speaker:
Okay. So, my question is, when you look at all of this, how do you stand behind the fact that charter schools are not discriminatory?

John Donovan:
Thank you. Question to this side again.

[applause]

Gerard?

Gerard Robinson:
The Department of Education has identified that nearly 10 percent of the students in charter schools are in fact students with special needs, about nine for traditional schools. English learners, about eight percent, maybe nine or 10. So there are some differences there. So, to say that they don't is absolutely untrue. I opened a school and, in fact, I know they're in there.

01:00:02

Jeanne Allen:
And I've seen that data, too.

[applause]

Gerard Robinson:
Number two, May of last year, the Department of Justice, along with Education, released a report where they took a look at magnet schools. We currently have -- magnet schools and

desegregation schools. We have to remember that, in fact, magnet schools do not take all schools -- students. Some of them have tests to get in which discriminates against students. Some of them have racial quota still because they were created in 1970s in part to bring white families into schools in order to desegregate. So, we've got the pros and cons on both sides. But to make a blanket statement like that is simply untrue.

Julian Vasquez Heilig:
So --

John Donovan:
Julian.

[applause]

Julian Vasquez Heilig:
So, I just published a piece in the Stanford Law and Policy Review about this very issue. Actually, if you look at statewide data, oftentimes if you eyeball it, traditional public schools and charter schools -- they often look fairly similar in the percentages. So, what we did was is we used geospatial analysis as the data for the entire state of Texas and drilled down.

01:01:00

And what we found out was that -- just exactly what you said, audience member, that special ed kids, ELL kids -- they were less likely, statistically, to be enrolled in charter schools. So, check that piece out, Stanford Law and Policy Review.

[applause]

John Donovan:
Down on the right here.

Female Speaker:
Hi. My name is Lindsey. My question, I guess, is for both sides of the argument. And that is, as you look at the growth and proliferation of charter schools, what effect do you think that's had on public schools? And it's like traditional public schools in this country?

John Donovan:
Thank you. I'll take it first to the side arguing for the motion, Gary Miron.

Gary Miron:
We've studied that in many of our state evaluations. One of the first things that we see is a loss of money in part because districts start to advertise and market their schools more in response to charter schools. Overall, when we see in some urban areas like Detroit, which is recognized

by many academics as a poster child for failed school reform, we see devastating impacts -- negative impacts on -- for the district schools.

01:02:00

They are losing a lot of students and money, and they have fixed cost with infrastructure, for example. But also, what they're finding is many students are coming back after the head counts. And most states are still using a headcount, a fourth-Friday head count as a way to allocate funding. And many students are coming back after that having a devastating impact, financially on the districts. The districts also end up having more concentration -- concentrated populations with the students with severe and moderate -- severe and moderate disabilities, and also, children with disciplinary problems because many of these kids are suspended and suspended and suspended and pushed out of the charter schools and back. The district schools have to take students at any time of the year. Charter schools often don't take them in the middle of the year because they don't have to. And why would they do that? They're disruptive to bring in a new student and the money often doesn't follow the students. So, it has a very negative impact on district schools, an impact we don't see resulting from Magnet schools.

John Donovan:
Jeanne Allen.

Jeanne Allen:
Well, the money does follow, and most states pay their charter schools monthly. So, if they were really those money grubbers you're talking about, they'd be taking them, but that's really not the issue.

01:03:01

It's a great question. Look, these are all really critical issues. We don't have all the answers. But we do know, on this particular area, with the amazing job the charter schools have had in actually transforming the way our traditional public schools do business, not because the people inside, like our friend in the New York City Department of Education was sitting around, they weren't doing a great job by themselves, but because what you had seen is the ability to help unlock and unleash the potential for students to learn and educators to get involved in that learning. In Washington, D.C., 47 percent of the kids in charter schools -- that has had a dramatic impact on increased achievement through every single kind of school in D.C. Economic climate has gone up. Communities are safer. You see that in Boston, Massachusetts. You see it in Phoenix, Arizona. There is no question that the small -- comparably small set of charter of schools, over 26 years, has jumped -- re-jumped exactly as intended to do -- traditional public education, such that people started coming back and private school enrollment started going down.

01:04:06

That is good news, particularly when it affects --

John Donovan:
Okay.

Jeanne Allen:
-- student achievement too.

John Donovan:
Gary, do you -- I saw you shaking your head, but do you have something new to say on that particular point? We have a question that comes in Twitter from somebody named Matt Barnum, who I'm told is a writer on education policy. He asks this question -- what do we on the panel make of studies showing that virtual charters lead to huge drops in test scores. Gary, first of all, define virtual charter for us.

Gary Miron:
Virtual -- they basically take all their instruction online. And the message is correct, and I've done a lot of research on this. And even the charter school establishment has joined us in our research to really point out that these charter schools are really out of line. The performance of these schools is outrageous. The student attrition rates are out of hand. K-12 Incorporated, the largest operator, they themselves say that two-thirds of the students don't last two years.

01:05:03

So, it's -- I believe in virtual schools, and I believe in these blended learning schools, and they're going to be the future. I'm very concerned about the model -- the corporate model that's being used right now, with incredibly high student to teacher ratios, when they really should be using all their cost advantages to have lower student to teacher ratios. These students are really -- they often -- young kids -- don't have the metacognitive skills to self-regulate. They need adults. And these schools are funded in a way that they could support those students.

John Donovan:
Gerard, do you dispute that or do you agree with that?

Gerard Robinson:
There are definitely some students in virtual charter schools that are doing well, and there are some -- in fact, Richmond Public Schools recently actually created a contract with K-12 Education, headquartered in Virginia, because they're going to provide services that the public school itself could not do. So, there's some good -- but Richmond thinks it's going to work for them.

John Donovan:
Okay.

Julian Vasquez Heilig:
And K-12 Inc. in California --

Jeanne Allen:
Well --

Julian Vasquez Heilig:
-- has more dropouts than graduates. And would you -- wouldn't you start a virtual charter school if you could write yourself a \$10 million check as CEO?

01:06:05

Jeanne Allen:
Do you know -- you know what's interesting? It's -- when we talk about the stuff in the abstract, it just sounds so easy to just kill it, right? It just sounds so awful. Do you know what it takes for a kid who has been bullied to wake up every day and go to school? Do you know who goes to online and virtual charter schools? For some kids, they're exceptional. They cannot get the education they need in those schools. For some kids, they are so behind and so besought by what happens -- you know, for us to sit here and condemn someone in an online charter school because a couple of very narrow reports -- and oh, by the way, there happens to be a company behind it -- is just -- is so --

Julian Vasquez Heilig:
Let me -- we're -- I don't think we're --

Jeanne Allen:
-- reprehensible --

Julian Vasquez Heilig:
-- disputing virtual education --

Jeanne Allen:
-- on so many levels.

Julian Vasquez Heilig:
Many districts provide --

Jeanne Allen:
I didn't respond to you when you were talking --

Julian Vasquez Heilig:
-- virtual education. What we're disputing is --

Jeanne Allen:
[inaudible] --

Julian Vasquez Heilig:
-- for-profit --

John Donovan:
Yeah, let them respond.

Julian Vasquez Heilig:
-- corporations --

Jeanne Allen:
You're --

John Donovan:
Jeanne, let them respond.

Julian Vasquez Heilig:
-- [inaudible]. That's all right.

John Donovan:
I'm sorry. Wait, wait. Everybody's talking at the same time.

Jeanne Allen:
He interrupted me. He interrupted me.

John Donovan:
I know. But you had -- you had been going for -- I -- [laughter] -- no, no.

01:07:02

I -- that's not meant at all as a diss. We just want to have a sense of everybody have a fair amount of time.

Jeanne Allen:
But I want to finish my sentence.

John Donovan:
Okay.

Gary Miron:
We don't condemn those children. And I think there's a place for virtual -- full-time virtual schools for a small portion of the children at some part of their career. What we do condemn is

that they're being put in these schools, sold on these fantastic claims on Nickelodeon Network, on the Vampire Network, where they advertise heavily --

Jeanne Allen:

You can't --

Gary Miron:

-- and they're put into classes --

Jeanne Allen:

-- make things up, Gary.

Gary Miron:

-- they're put into classrooms with 120 students.

John Donovan:

Go ahead.

Gary Miron:

That's not right.

John Donovan:

Gary --

Jeanne Allen:

[inaudible] --

Gerard Robinson:

Having actually worked with real superintendents who actually contract, not only with K-12, but non-profit organizations who provide online learning, these are people who dedicated their career to helping advance public education, and they see for-profit and non-profit virtual providers as part of the solution. We're not interested in vampires. We're interested in geniuses.

John Donovan:

Sir -- let's ask the question.

Male Speaker:

My question is to the side against the motion.

01:08:00

Does the charter school model require that public schools still exist? I guess, in other words, if public schools cease to exist, how would charter schools account for the very worse students or students of parents who can't or won't look out for their best interest?

John Donovan:
Can you tell me your name?

Male Speaker:
Nathan.

[applause]

Gerard Robinson:
Every state constitution has an education clause. The education clause says that you must provide a public free universal education to children before they're emancipated. It could be age 18 or 16. I don't see public education going away. There are 50 million kids in there today. Three million students are in charter schools. I don't see it going away because there's always going to be a need for public education. I don't think it's got to be a one size fits all public education. If there's anything to go away, hopefully it's the mindset that there's only one way to deliver public education.

[applause]

John Donovan:
Gary or Julian. Gary.

01:09:00

Gary Miron:
It's an interesting question. I think I want to take it a little bit to the side, but when we look at these companies, many of them are -- look like that fantastic record KIPP schools and Success Academy is here in New York City. We should look at why aren't these -- these are such great ideas why aren't these schools, and many of them have considered KIPP has tried, but to take over districts. We've had Detroit public schools and other districts have put out requests for proposals inviting these miracle companies to come and serve public school students in their schools where they have the same enrollment policies and the same [unintelligible] where they have to take all kids that are there, even those that come in the middle of the school year. KIPP schools tried it in Colorado. After two years, they failed and they'll never open another district school. They're only going to do charter schools because the model allows them to have selective entry and exits processes and benefit from that.

John Donovan:
Well, what about this claim of selective entry?

Jeanne Allen:
Yeah, that's not how charter schools work and that's not why they choose to have a charter school.

01:10:00

They choose to have a charter school because they can apply their model in a charter free from rules and regulations that require you to use particular products, teach at certain times. Do you know that most union contracts forbid a teacher from actually taking on additional responsibility? So, the reason they won't do a district school is because districts require you to follow their rules. The district system is broken. It -- the idea that there can be one --

[applause]

-- management company, you want to talk about a company, it's a company, a management organization that is full of individuals who have been unfortunately having to follow rules and regulations over time that many of them have had nothing to do with and when they do well, it's because they will fully admit they creatively non-complied.

Julian Vasquez Heilig:

So, when Albert Shanker first envisioned charter schools, the idea was that they would be more democratic. They'd be teacher run. They would be community run. Well, five or six years later he became disenchanted with the idea of charter schools because what had happened was, is nonprofit and for-profit corporations had come in to run the schools.

01:11:10

Charter schools, if they don't have public accountability -- direct public accountability, are antidemocratic. So, saying that publicly elected school boards and districts and unions, which are also democratic organizations are an old idea -- I don't think democracy is an old idea. In fact, I think we need excessive democracy when it comes to our thinking about education reform. We need to avoid education reform that is top down and concentrates power in the hands of just a few people.

Jeanne Allen:

I agree with you.

Julian Vasquez Heilig:

We need to focus on community-based solutions.

John Donovan:

I have a question for Gary.

[applause]

Gary, this claim of -- your claim of selective entry, now the understanding is the laws always say

that the schools can't select and if there's a waiting list there's a lottery and the lottery is totally blind. Why are you making this claim of selective entry? How is that supposed to work?

Gary Miron:

Well, there's many ways that charter schools can select -- legally they cannot.

01:12:02

Charter schools are supposed to be open to all, but we see the way in which -- manner in which they market themselves. We see it in the way sometimes they have long admissions processes where students have to write essays or do campus visits or they have to go to events at golf clubs. There's a number of things that they can do.

John Donovan:

What do you mean they have to go to an event at a golf club?

Gary Miron:

Well, that's one of the examples that came up at a recent study where they were supposed to come to some meeting.

John Donovan:

You mean the information meeting was held at a golf course?

Gary Miron:

Yeah.

John Donovan:

Or at a golf club.

Gary Miron:

Correct. So, there's a number of things that can happen. These requirements for volunteering, which some families cannot do. In some states, there -- charter schools are not required to do transportation and they don't provide transportation because it invites more single parent families and also low income families.

John Donovan:

Okay so -- I wanted to see what you were talking about.

[applause]

Jeanne Allen:

Real quickly about democracy. There's nothing more democratic than parents actually being participating directly in the education of their children.

[applause]

01:13:00

And I think one of the really interesting things -- there's a group that actually trains charter board -- their charter board training on a regular basis. And they make the point that it's so great to have a board that actually doesn't have to run for office which is political. So, a charter board is -- it's a nonprofit. Charter schools are nonprofit. If any of you know or been part of or run nonprofits, you are accountable for all the data, paperwork. You're accounted for legally for following laws. And you sign your name. You review the tax returns. It's natural --

John Donovan:

Okay, I want to break in because I'm trying to explore this point that your opponent's making about selective --

Jeanne Allen:

Okay. All right, I will come back to that.

John Donovan:

-- entry through subtle sort of nuance --

Jeanne Allen:

Sure, sure.

John Donovan:

Gerard, do you want to take it?

Gerard Robinson:

Well, one part is if you decide that you want to participate in inter-district choice and you decide to go outside of your zone school, there's some states that don't provide transportation, so it's both public and charter. Are there charter schools that have rigged the system to select the kids they want? Absolutely. But let's also talk about the public schools.

01:14:00

USA Today identified that between 2010 and 2014, 83 public school systems actually counseled out some of their worst disserved students in order to raise their scores and do something else. There're also public schools who coach kids out and who coach kids in. It's not a charter or public school problem. It's just a problem with adults behaving inappropriately with young people.

[applause]

John Donovan:

All right. Let's take a question down here, on the isle.

Male Speaker:

Hi, I'm Bradley. With the recent developments in charter schools for the argument against the resolution, do you believe that charter schools are a vehicle for school vouchers in the future?

Gary Miron:

Ooh, good one.

John Donovan:

Actually, it's really not relevant to the question of whether they're overrated. It's a great question and we may do a debate on it at some point, but I'm going to pass in the interest of time and stay on topic. But thank you for the question. In the very back there?

Male Speaker:

Hi, I'm Chris. I'm a teacher at Blaire Academy Boarding School, New Jersey.

01:15:00

What's the role of for-profit schools, particularly in charter schools?

Jeanne Allen:

What's the role of what?

Male Speaker:

For-profit schools?

John Donovan:

What do you mean by that?

Male Speaker:

Schools that operate to make a profit.

John Donovan:

But what do you mean when you say, "What's the role?" I know --

Male Speaker:

So, there are for-profit schools that operate charters.

John Donovan:

Right.

Male Speaker:

It -- what do you think about that?

John Donovan:

I think we've kind of been bouncing around that topic. So, I'm going to move on as well. Thanks. And on the right there, at the isle, with the paper up. That's a great way to get my attention. Hold up the card. I go to shiny objects.

Female Speaker:

Do you have any studies that you're content to cite that talk about the number of teachers or students that switch between types of schools, that go from a charter to a public or vice versa and any studies or data about students who go from charter -- who go from charter schools to public schools for summer school?

Gerard Robinson:

For the first question, I don't know much of those. The only one that comes to mind is the University of Arkansas, either Jay Greene or -- most likely Jay Greene or Pat Wolfe who's done some of that study.

01:16:04

Second one, no.

John Donovan:

All right, I want to let the other side take that question as well.

Gary Miron:

Yeah, in terms of teacher attrition, we know that some of the states are tracking that. In Delaware, they saw that many of the students -- I'm sorry, many of the teachers were actually moving in to traditional public schools. But also, they tracked the number of teachers leaving the profession. But the attrition rates were between 20 and 30 percent annually in charter schools across the six-state study that we did. But for new teachers, it was 40 percent. When it gets to students, it's harder to track that. Some state auditors have been going in, especially with these virtual charter schools. In Colorado, the state auditor found that in one of the large virtual schools operated by K-12, 50 percent of the students had turned over and gone back to traditional public schools or homeschooling within the school year, and that's between September and June when most students, actually, if they're going to change schools, do it between school years. So, there's quite a bit of student attrition, but only some state audit reports have focused on virtual schools.

01:17:00

I'm not familiar with other studies.

John Donovan:

Okay, let's let Jeanne comment on that.

Jeanne Allen:

If it's of interest, even if we had that data, which that data really is not valid. It does not exist in any comprehensive way to make sense of, I want to just remind people that we need to have -- we need to focus on students. If teachers are leaving schools rapidly, if they're leaving every other day and students are there and they're learning, and there are adults who are validating that learning and publicly accountable, why are we talking about whether or not a teacher's coming and going, even if it were the case?

[applause]

John Donovan:

Sir, down in the third row. And if you can stand up. And the mic is coming down the aisle behind you. And if you could tell us your name.

Male Speaker:

My name is Brian. I was actually a charter school teacher in Newark, New Jersey. I now teach in a public school in Morristown, New Jersey.

[applause]

My question is, what is the data in terms of schools' focus on college and career readiness? To what degree are charter school students compared to public schools attending college and completing college?

01:18:04

John Donovan:

Thanks for that question. Let me take it first to this side. I -- Gerard or Jeanne would like to take it?

Jeanne Allen:

Public schools versus --

John Donovan:

Jeanne --

Jeanne Allen:

-- traditional public schools versus charters. They are just beginning to report out, because we've got a generation of charter school students. Once again, I go back to -- you've got to look at city by city. You can't even look at state by state. And so, the graduation rates for Philadelphia, for example, public charters schools surpass those of the Philadelphia school system -- in terms of race and income levels. We have the same data in Washington, D.C. So, I would argue that in order to get that answer, you need to look at schools. You need to look at

the city, and then you need to look at the state. And the state data is going to be, I think, still a long ways away, because of the same reasons we've been talking about.

John Donovan:

And a response from the other side, if you'd like to? Any --

Julian Vasquez Heilig:

That data is not valid. Just kidding.

[laughter]

So, we published a piece in --

[applause]

01:19:00

-- we published a piece in the Berkeley Review of Education. We looked at all the data for the state of Texas. Texas has lots of data. And so, what we found -- a lot of charter chains will tell you, "100 percent of our kids go to college." You've probably heard this, right? So, we took a look at a very prominent charter scheme -- chain -- I won't put them on blast here. We have mentioned it today -- [laughter] -- and only 60 percent of their kids, their African American kids, lasted to the senior year.

But they still say that 100 percent of black kids go to college. But that really is a 100 percent of 60 percent, which, in my stats class, is not 100 percent.

[applause]

John Donovan:

And that concludes Round 2 of this Intelligence Squared U.S. debate, where our motion is, "Charter Schools are Overrated."

[applause]

And now, we move on to Round 3. And in Round 3, the debaters each make a closing statement in turn. They will be two minutes each. And here making his closing statement in support of the motion, Charter Schools are Overrated, Gary Miron, a professor at Western Michigan University.

01:20:04

Gary Miron:

Thanks, John. I had two different closings. I don't know which to take. I thought I'd wait and see how the debate went, but I think I'll take this one here.

[laughter]

Charter schools are overrated for the reasons that we said, that they're not living up to their publicly-established goals. But they're -- they are achieving two other key outcomes. One is that they're accelerating re-segregation by race and ethnicity, by economic class, by special education status, by ability, by English-language status. And even -- as we look at the research - - even by religious groupings, because -- that's surprising to me, but we have a lot of religious-oriented charter schools. They're not supposed to teach religion during the day, but we have Islamic schools. We have Christian schools. We have a couple networks of Hebrew schools. So, we're really segregating -- our schools are accelerating segregation that already exists, unfortunately. But right now, in my own lifetime, this is a critical time -- probably more than ever -- we need a public-school system to reduce social tensions.

01:21:03

We need children to be more integrated, more exposed to children with different backgrounds.

When they're exposed to children with different backgrounds, they're going to be less likely to be biased towards them, and they're going to be less likely to believe claims by leaders demonizing minorities or religious groups. So, I think right now, public education is really important, and we cannot afford to accelerate segregation further. This is a market-oriented reform. It's going to result in winners and losers. And our urban schools -- our children in poverty, they need a solution. We cannot afford winners and losers. We need a solution that lifts all schools and lifts all kids. And right now, the evidence is suggesting that charter schools are having a negative impact on the districts in which they're located. And the outcomes, as we see, they're -- they largely perform similarly, at best. We're dividing limited resources across two struggling often failing school system in our urban areas.

01:22:00

We need a better solution to lift our urban schools and address the issues of poverty.

John Donovan:

Thank you, Gary Miron.

[applause]

The motion, again, Charter Schools are Overrated. And here making his closing statement against the motion, Gerard Robinson, a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

Gerard Robinson:

So, charter schools aren't overrated. What's overrated are the scare tactics used to try to make people believe that we're destroying children's lives. If you want to listen to --

[applause]

-- Gary, and Julian, and great researchers. I would also add that you should look at Caroline Hoxby . You should look at Jay Green and Pat Wolf, Mike McShane and also Nat Malkus, who's at my institution. Read from the light -- right and from the left means that we will find sense in the middle. Ultimately when I talk to parents, and I've done this since 1993, they're not interested in the right wing or the left wing. What they're interested in are schools that work, and what we need to make sure that we do is to provide that for them. For the charter schools that aren't working well, we should close them. For those of you who are authorizers, you already know all the metrics.

01:23:01

You know a bad charter school when you see one. Never let it open. For those of you who believe in public choice, that is the American way, giving people an opportunity to choose magnet, charter, virtual, and otherwise. The reality is 25 years from now we'll have this same conversation. Some of us in this room won't be here. I may be one of the ones that are not here, but what I can say is that when I had an opportunity to stay on the right side of history I did so. Because charter schools are advancing the idea of what it means to be a republic and what it means to support democracy. I will be glad to say for my three daughters, and at some point, grandchildren, that when I had an opportunity to be unpopular I decided to be unpopular because I took a chance on something called charter schools, an idea for regular people to take public money and do extraordinary things. For profit isn't for pimping. Private institutions are a part of our segment -- or actually part of our nation.

01:24:01

I will close with this. It's easy to theorize about what you would do with other people's children when you're sitting in the lap of luxury. Having actually lived with people who are concerned about their future, charter schools are an approach and for that reason they're not overrated.

[applause]

And that is the motion, "Charter Schools are Overrated," and here making his closing statement in support of the motion Julian Vasquez Heilig, a professor at Sacramento State.

Julian Vasquez Heilig:

Unfortunately, in most forms, the conversations about charter schools are often reduced to simple sloganeering. So, thank you to our opponents, the moderator, and our audience for such an engaging conversation. So, I have a confession to make. I'm a former charter school educator. Parent, board member, donor, and volunteer. I first became involved with charter schools when I volunteered at a Minnesota charter in the 1990s sooner after they were first began.

01:25:05

Fast forward to the mid-2000s, I worked as a 21st Century Learning Program instructor in a bay area charter school, essentially a teacher's aide. I've also donated to charter schools. In fact, they still send me fundraising letters. I also serve on the board and was a parent on a Texas charter school, but I am a scholar. We are convinced by evidence. It's our sacred duty to society. So, my perspective on charter schools changed when I began to research them and engage with data beyond those with which I had had direct and personal experience. So, I submit to you that we allow ourselves the space in our national discussion and in this debate tonight to change our mind about charter schools. We have talked this evening about many points in the debate about charter schools, but there's one major point of agreement, poor students in the United States have less opportunity for high quality education than those in wealthy areas.

01:26:06

So, we must not do nothing, because African Americans and Latinos and other poor students continue to be underserved on purpose. But the motion tonight is about whether charter schools as an education reform are overrated. Considering the evidence that I believe we presented to you tonight, I proffer the audience should embrace the motion and vote that charters are a reform that needs reform, thank you.

[applause]

John Donovan:

Thank you, Julian Vasquez Heilig. Once again, the motion is, "Charter Schools are Overrated." And here to make her closing statement against the motion, Jeanne Allen, CEO of the Center for Education Reform.

Jeanne Allen:

I think controversy in the spirit of doing what's right for our kids is never a bad thing and so I thank Gary and Julian. I vehemently disagree with your position, but I respect your passion, your integrity, and your commitment and I will work every day of my life to change your minds.

01:27:08

[laughter]

I wake up every day and all we have done is spend time in and around education trying to understand and evaluate what works. I don't have a busy teaching load, although I do have a Master's from the University of Pennsylvania. I employ scholars. We have colleagues around the country that we are constantly working with. These issues we are talking about is what we

are obsessed with 24/7, much to the chagrin of my family. Across the country, people like myself, thousands that are literally part of an effort to understand and push for whatever it takes to get kids in the best schools that meet their needs. And if data works, great. And if those schools work, fine. But we cannot stop thinking that we have the answer until everyone is educated.

01:28:04

I don't know the charter environment that you've heard my colleagues over here talk about. I've never seen this charter environment they've described. There's bad apples everywhere, sure, but there's not this environment of craziness and irresponsibility as if it's some outrageous thing happening. A charter environment I've seen has Native American kids learning for the first time in their lives in Arizona. It has dropouts that went back to school by the droves in Minnesota, it has students who couldn't make it in a traditional school, learning online. And, yes, it has suburban moms in places like Colorado who have been going to private schools because the public schools would not help them. These and millions of other data points is what makes up the charter movement. There is so much more to be done. And that's why they are not overrated.

[applause]

John Donvan:

Thank you, Jeanne Allen. And that concludes Round Three of this Intelligence Squared U.S. Debate where the motion is, "Charter Schools are Overrated."

01:29:03

And now it's time to learn which side you feel has argued the best. We're going to ask you again to go to the keypads at your seat. And, as you did before, please vote on the motion. Now, one thing I want to explain is the way we declare a victory in our debates, it's the difference between the two votes. Whoever goes up the most in percentage points from the first vote to the second vote will be declared our winner. Once again, push number one, if you support the motion, you're with this team.

Number two, if you're with this team, you're against the motion. Number three, if you remain or became undecided. I so appreciated what Jeanne said at the end of the debate. Because, normally, what I do is talk about how the debate went in terms of meeting our goals of trying to raise the level of public discourse. And the thing that you said, Jeanne, was, "I'm going to argue with you, but I'm going to try to change your mind." That's what debate is about. It's about persuasion. It's about proving points, not just making assertions. It's about having respect, the kind of respect for your opponents that you just demonstrated. All four of you did that tonight and I congratulate you for the spirit in which you did this.

01:30:00

[applause]

I also want to share that, eight and a half years ago, I was sitting in my office at ABC News and I got a phone call from a former colleague named Dana Wolfe who used to be a producer at ABC. And she asked me if I would be interested in moderating a debate at something called Intelligence Squared U.S. That was the best phone call I think I ever got. And the decision to come over and start doing these debates was one of the best decisions I've ever made. I'm so pleased and proud to be associated with this kind of enterprise. And the thing that we just saw tonight. The reason I'm talking about all of this is because Dana Wolfe is leaving us after producing 133 debates. And we just want to acknowledge that by embarrassing the hell out of her and bringing her up to the stage.

Come on up, Dana Wolfe.

[applause]

01:31:00

So -- wait, whoa, whoa. Bob Rosenkranz has something for you. And I just want to say that it's a little bit miraculous. Dana was given a directive back in 2006, "Make something almost out of nothing. Here's a little bit of money. Figure it out." None of this existed. The ideas of how we structure it, the motions, our culture, our look -- it just didn't exist. And it all came into being because of Dana, who came in those 133 debates ago. And they've -- well, actually, I have three questions. You can either say something or I'm going to ask you three short questions to get you off the stage.

[laughter]

Choose.

01:32:00

Dana Wolfe:
Answer --

John Donovan:
Answer the questions. Come up to the microphone. Question Number 1, did you ever imagine that it would come to this?

Dana Wolfe:
To 133? No. Not in my wildest dreams.

John Donovan:

Question Number 2 -- again, thanks to you, we started traveling around the country. We do most of our debates in New York, but we've been in Chicago. We've been in Boston. We've been in Philadelphia. We've been in Aspen. We've been in Los Angeles. Which audience is the best audience?

[laughter]

Dana Wolfe:
This New York audience!

[applause]

John Donovan:
Question Number 3, who's the best debate moderator that -- [laughter] --

Dana Wolfe:
That would be John Donovan.

[applause]

John Donovan:
You didn't have to say that. Dana, thank you from all of us -- all of the people behind the curtain who you brought in created an amazing -- an amazingly small and efficient team, an amazing team, and I am so pleased that you got me associated with this.

01:33:00

Bob is as well. So, thank you. Dana Wolfe.

[applause]

I want to say one more thing. We do this as a philanthropy. I know that you paid to get in here and bought your tickets, but the ticket prices do not cover nearly the cost of what we do. And when we produce these debates, I've talked about the podcasts and the radio broadcasts -- we put that out to the world for free. And in fact, we not only have hundreds, and hundreds, and hundreds of thousands of listeners to our podcasts, but we're now involved with many, many schools, who make us part of their curriculum. I've been traveling around the country in association with my book, and I keep running into people who say they're big fans of Intelligence Squared and they know about it because it's in their classroom. And we're exceedingly proud of that. But we need your support. And we appreciate it. And tonight we've -- I'm announcing that there's a real way now to donate to us, and that is to use your phone and text the word "Debate."

01:34:00

It's really simple. Text the word "debate" and you'll get a link to donate online. And you text the word "Debate" to the code 797-979. And you know what that means. It doesn't mean anything, but -- [laughter] -- but it's easy to remember. So, we would appreciate it. I would love to see some activity happening in the seats even now, of fumbling for your phones. Text "debate" to 797-979. All right. So, we're going to wait for the results of the vote to come out. I think we're ready. Yeah.

[laughter]

"La La Land," yes!

[applause]

Okay. All right. So, I want to remind you, again, it's the difference between the first vote and the second vote that makes the difference.

01:35:00

And the other thing I want to remind you of is that in a certain sense, the vote is not the most important thing. It's very audience-dependent. Different crowds would vote different ways. But this is how this crowd voted tonight. In the first vote -- on the motion, "Charter Schools are Overrated," in the first vote, 33 percent agreed with the motion. 31 percent disagreed, and 36 percent were undecided. A three-way split, almost. Those are the first results. Let's look at the second results. In the second result, the team arguing for the motion, "Charter Schools are Overrated," they went from 33 up to 54 percent --

[applause]

That means they picked up 21 percentage points, which is now the number to beat. The team voting -- arguing against the motion, their first vote was 31 percent. Their second vote, they went up to 40 percent, but that's 9 percent, not enough to win. The team arguing for the motion, "Charter Schools are Overrated," our winners. Congratulations to them.

[applause]

Thank you from me, John Donovan, and Intelligence Squared U.S. We'll see you next time.

01:36:02

[end of transcript]