



**The School District  
of Greenville County**  
*Board of Trustees*

January 25, 2011

The Honorable Eric J. Bikas  
South Carolina House of Representatives  
323C Mossie Smith Road  
Easley, South Carolina 29642

Dear Representative Bikas:

We, the members of the Greenville County Schools Board of Trustees, wish to express our opposition to House Bill 3241 regarding Charter Schools and the South Carolina Public Charter School District. As currently drafted, H. 3241 will cut funding for our schools by more than \$1 million based on student attendance information provided to us by the Public Charter School District. This additional cut comes at a time when our district has already sustained cuts of more than \$56 million over the past two years and is facing further cuts in both federal and state revenue in the coming year.

As you know, the Greenville County School Board of Trustees has been a leading supporter of public school choice and the charter movement for many years. We strongly believe that offering parents choices within the public school system to meet the individual needs of their children is vital to a thriving public school system. Our commitment to this concept is evident by the more than 11,440 students currently participating in one of our district's choice or charter school programs.

Passage of H. 3241 will adversely affect the students, teachers and taxpayers in our school district in the following ways:

**Cuts funds to our schools and locally sponsored charters.** Again, we estimate based on this year's attendance numbers, a vote in favor of this legislation is a vote to cut our schools by more than \$1 million which equates to 16 teaching positions. Our schools and students should not be penalized because the South Carolina Legislature has failed to adequately fund the South Carolina Public Charter School District which it created. Simply passing the funding buck to local school districts does not solve the State Public Charter School District's funding problem – it simply expands funding problems to all 85 local school districts. This funding shell game has not worked in the past and will not work today.

**Allows our taxpayers to be taxed without representation and subjected to an open checkbook with no accountability to the voters.** The local dollars this legislation seeks to transfer to the state are raised through the adoption of local property taxes by the elected school Board of Trustees. This bill transfers those dollars to a state district which has no accountability to these taxpayers who pay the property taxes. In addition, with no

caps on the number of students who can attend the South Carolina Public Charter School District it will be impossible for districts to accurately budget. It also creates an open checkbook from which the State Public Charter School District can access funds without any local taxpayer control.

**Allows the State Charter School District to retain 2% of state and local appropriations from sponsored charter schools to cover the costs for overseeing its charter schools but prohibits local districts from retaining the same funds.** There is no doubt that oversight of charter schools costs money. From the time a charter application is submitted and throughout the Charter Schools' existence, staff must be involved in oversight and assistance. This is of particular importance in the area of special education, for which the district has significant liability. Allowing the State Charter School District to retain these funds while prohibiting local district sponsors is nonsensical and appears punitive in nature. Both the State Charter School District and the local school district should be treated equally and both entities should be allowed to retain funds for oversight.

**Reduces opportunities for students and creates inequities among students who attend traditional schools and those who attend charter schools.** The proposed legislation would allow charter school students to participate in extracurricular activities at his/her resident school even though that school receives no funding for that student. Clearly, this diminishes the funding available to the students at the school. In addition, those students who are enrolled in the school are at risk of losing their opportunity to participate in the extracurricular activities offered by the school if they can be bumped by a charter school student.

Playing sports at a school or participating in school extra-curricular activities is an extension of the school's program. It builds school spirit and strengthens the school community. Rather than allowing charter school students to participate in other schools' programs, the legislature should encourage charter schools to create their own programs where interest exists in order to increase opportunities for students.

We support the South Carolina Legislature's efforts to expand public choice throughout our State. We also understand that this legislation offers many technical and administrative changes which will be beneficial to our charter schools as well as the State Public Charter School District. However, we must balance our responsibility to the 69,802 students we serve in our traditional schools with our responsibility to the approximately 2,854 from Greenville County who are served by our charter schools or the State Public Charter School District. One group should not be penalized for the other to succeed. With that in mind, unless the above issues are addressed, we urge you to vote against H. 3241.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call upon me.

Sincerely,

  
Roger D. Meek  
Chairman