



2014 GENERAL LEGISLATIVE SESSION REPORT & SCORECARD

Wednesday, April 9, 2014

A Message from the Utah Charter Network President of the Board – Julie Adamic

Back in 2001, Kim Frank (UCN's Executive Director*) and I determined to open a "charter school" in Pleasant Grove. With only 185 students, a refurbished/surplus trailer purchased from the Alpine School District, and an inordinate amount of determination and elbow grease, we opened the doors to the John Hancock Charter School in Fall of 2002. We were excited and somewhat naïve as we started down the path. We knew it would be difficult; however, that never stopped us. For months and years following our inaugural year we pressed forward, working and mentoring other charter school parents and governing boards, helping them bring to fruition their goals and dreams.

In 2002, there were 1,526 charter school students in Utah. This Fall's projected enrollment for charter schools throughout the state is 66,578. In 2002, total public education enrollment was approximately 475,000. This Fall's enrollment projection is 622,813. What that means is: charter schools have gone from representing less than 1% (actually, 3/10ths of 1%) in 2002, to representing almost 11% (10.7%) this coming Fall. Wow! Can we say that?! Wow!

There's still a lot to be done. UCN and its member schools represent the best-of-the-best when it comes to high-quality education in Utah. Our member schools have raised the bar, not just for charters, but for all students throughout Utah's education system. You are leading the way and state lawmakers recognize that.

The attached report and scorecard from the 2014 General Session of the Utah State Legislature will give you a brief glimpse into what UCN has been doing for you on the Hill this year. Several of UCN's Board members came to the Hill this year to assist in "watch dogging" a number of measures FOR and AGAINST the well being of charter schools. We made a huge impact on potentially damaging policy proposals designed to hinder charters' autonomy and responsible growth. We also identified charter policy beneficial for the growth, autonomy, and transparency of taxpayer funded public schools.

There were nearly 170 education bill files opened by state lawmakers this year. Of those, one hundred and nine (109) were numbered (some considered and some not). UCN tracked 58 viable bill proposals throughout the 45-day general session. Some bills contained minor proposals and "fixes." This year's UCN SCORECARD includes 15 high-priority bills related to the well-being of our member charter schools.

This was a great year on the Hill. There is more bi-partisan support for charter school's on the Hill than ever before. I felt that UCN was able to provide a great deal of input and education to lawmakers throughout this very intense forty-five (45) day process.

If you have any comments or questions about the content of this report, feel free to contact Kim Frank at (801) 722-89111 or email her at kim@utahcharternetwork.com.

Sincerely,

Julie Adamic
UCN Board President

* Kim Frank is the only wholly dedicated charter school lobbyist on Utah's Capitol Hill. She focuses exclusively on charter school policy, advocacy, and budget issues. Kim's institutional knowledge and experience, for over a dozen years, has earned her the respect of lawmakers and legislative leadership.

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"SOMETIMES NO LEGISLATION IS THE BEST LEGISLATION." Heading into the 2014 General Legislative Session this year, UCN created several initiatives to propose to the state legislature. However, as Kim Frank, and other UCN Board members began working with legislators and legislative staff (OLRGC), it became apparent that many of the proposals requiring formal statutory "implementation" or "fixes" would not require processing through normal lawmaking channels. Instead, three major projects were re-directed to a more efficient approach. Here are those proposals:

SCHOOL BUSING FUNDING

Frequently major funding initiatives, like school busing compensation for charter schools, take time for legislators to develop and consider. Such was the proposal posed by Kim Frank to legislative leadership and executive appropriations chairs this year. In a series of discussions and work-sessions, Kim was able to receive a commitment from budget drafters, that school busing would be "on the docket" during the 2014 Interim and queued up for consideration next session. Meetings between Kim, UCN board members, and executive appropriations leadership, netted some very positive discussions about who would be eligible for busing/student transportation funding and how that money might be placed into the on-going coffers of the state charter school budget. UCN pledges to continue to work toward equity funding for charter school busing needs.

SALES TAX ON BUILDING MATERIALS

The intent of UCN at the beginning of the Session was to open a bill file for the express purpose of providing rebates to charter schools that build their own buildings (as not-for-profit entities) and pay sales tax on capital facilities materials acquisition. Discussions with legislative general counsel and analysts (OLRGC) brought to light that charter schools (LEAs) pay sales tax on materials purchased for charter facilities; however, district schools (LEAs) are exempted from paying sales tax on materials. UCN made inquiries with the State Office of Education's accounting and building department staff, as well as the Utah State Tax Commission. Preliminary discussion with the State Tax Commission have provided an assurance that the collection of sales tax for charter school building materials was an oversight, and should be corrected. Meetings are scheduled during the Interim, between Kim Frank and the Utah State Tax Commission, to provide input on this issue and to assist in the clarification on this potentially huge cost-saving measure.

RE-DIRECTING MENTORING FUNDS TO PROVIDE OUTSOURCED CHARTER SCHOOL SUPPORT SERVICES

During the 2012 General Legislative Session, the state legislature earmarked \$200,000 for a new statewide mentoring program. This on-going funding, secured by Kim Frank, was intended to pay for a stipend and travel expenses for individuals who would provide temporary services to charter schools looking for help from charter school "experts." Rulemaking authority was given to the State Charter School Board (SCSB) to provide the structure for this mentoring program. Unfortunately, the program created by the SCSB was structured contrary to the original intent and purpose of this funding. UCN has worked closely with members of the SCSB and legislative staff (OLRGC) to redirect the funding for this under-utilized mentoring program to an individual or entity that will provide professional, outsourced services to struggling charter schools.