

"Instead of the human cuts, look at the property cuts," Palmer said. "The school district has 264 schools, and have millions tied up in [obsolete] buildings."

Palmer has pitched his idea that the district should spin off its most dangerous and unproductive schools into independent, community-based charter schools. Doing that, Palmer said, would lead to better neighborhood ownership of the education neighborhood kids receive, and will also free up much-needed dollars for the district.

"The district needs a whole change in attitude," Palmer said. "Charters could help the public schools. They are trying to save the bureaucracy and structure [of the school district], but you cannot keep cutting personnel, because you will end up cutting the culture of safety."

Sidebar

Dr. Walter D. Palmer speaking at Parents United For Better Schools press conference.

Sidebar

Veronica Joyner talks to reporters at Parents United For Better Schools press conference. - ABDUL R SULAYMAN/PHILADELPHIA TRIBUNE CHIEF PHOTOGRAPHER

Veronica Joyner and Dr. Walter D. Palmer read statements to reporters during the Parents United For Better Schools press conference.

---

**May 1, 2012**  
**Philadelphia Tribune**  
"An all-out assault"  
Damon Williams

**Headnote**

**Charter school leaders vow to fight plans attacking per-pupil funding or forcing adoption of an enrollment cap**

**Barely a week has passed since the School Reform Commission publicized its controversial, "Blueprint for Transforming Philadelphia's Public Schools," and charter school leaders are**

letting it be known they will fight any plan that attacks per-pupil funding or forces charter schools to adopt an enrollment cap.

Specifically, charter school educators are taking umbrage with the SRC's plan to slash \$149 million from charter school funding, which represents a whopping seven percent drop in per-pupil funding. The plan also calls for a three-year freeze on per-pupil payments, and finally, the enforcement of a mutually agreed upon growth schedule. SRC officials believe it can balance its budget in five years if these and other cuts are implemented.

"In my view, the [budget] issue should not be balanced on the backs of charter schools. The reality is, I don't go along with that, and it's not acceptable," said state Representative Dwight Evans, who was among the leaders of the charter school movement nearly two decades ago, when he introduced legislation supporting the charter model. "First, let's be clear, this is supposed to be about kids and parents, and there's nothing in the law that gives the SRC the legal ability to [arbitrarily reduce payments]. There is nothing in the act, one way or the other, for the district to do this."

Evans was referring to the Act 22 Charter School Legislation of 1997, and most charter proponents point to subsection 17-1723 (d), which states that, "enrollment of students in a charter school or cyber charter school shall not be subject to a cap or otherwise limited to any past or future action of a board of school directors ... or any other authority, unless agreed to by the charter school or cyber charter school as part of a written charter."

"We fought 15 years to get that law passed; 15 years we fought for the parents to have options, and we won't let the school district mess with the kids," Evans said, crediting longtime educator and attorney Dr. **Walter D. Palmer** as being an early leading protagonist of the cause. "The school district has its own ineptness, but we will not let them do this. "Politically, they must not think of bringing this through Harrisburg, because I wouldn't support it," Evans said.

**Palmer**, at the forefront of the charter issue for almost three decades and who served as major supporter of the mid-'90s legislation, recently took the school district to court over the district's attempts to cap enrollment at his successful **Walter D. Palmer Leadership Learning Partners Charter School**. According to **Palmer**, the school district has unfairly targeted the

charter school system while ignoring both the achievements and gains made by the charters - and the district's own mismanagement of resources and funds.

"The district has been repressive to charter schools for at least ten years," Palmer said, placing much of the blame of the perceived public school - charter school friction at the feet of former superintendent Arlene Ackerman and former SRC chairman Robert Archie. "All of this is really an all-out assault on the charter school movement, but [the SRC] cannot circumvent the court."

Palmer has defied the SRC's cap measure by continuing to accept students, and billing the state directly. Twice, Palmer said, the courts have agreed with him, and ruled the district must reimburse Leadership Learning more than \$1.3 million in outstanding per-pupil payments. The district is currently exhausting its appeals in that matter and Palmer expects a ruling sometime next month.

Palmer recently testified in a city council hearing helmed by City Councilwoman Jannie Blackwell, who is also the chair of council's education committee. There, Palmer made a series of suggestions to the SRC that he believes would help correct the problem.

"I suggested one of the things they do is completely dismantle renaissance schools, which are not charters. They are failed public schools that are reconstituted by the district and controlled by the district, but they then ask a charter school operator to come in and operate them; they are not charter schools," Palmer said. "Then, I suggested they take those schools and turn them into promise academies. I also said they need to consolidate the mothballed schools; you have William Penn High School on Broad Street that's sitting empty, and costs a fortune to maintain."

Some of the plans Palmer and other educators suggested - some going back years, if not decades - have finally made their way into the SRC's reorganization blueprint, such as downsizing the central office; decentralizing certain services and generally trying to trim operations. But the decision to make these cuts came years after continual warnings.

Palmer said the school district really doesn't have an excuse; the charter school legislation has been in place since 1997, and instead of working in conjunction with charter schools, it seems to him the district is bent on destroying them.

"Stop trying to bash charter schools," Palmer said. "What we are experiencing now is a white hostile takeover of Black education in America. Folks have realized there are millions and millions to be made [in corporate education] right in the heart of the Black community, and this is happening in urban Black districts with Black folks on their watch."

The issue of capped enrollment is very real; and doesn't just affect Philadelphia and its stable of charter schools, as the Chester Upland Charter School recently won the right to uncapped enrollment. Basically, if a charter school is allowed uncapped enrollment, it can then theoretically build other schools to house the added enrollment, provided they meet staffing, safety and academic guidelines.

"They've gotten to a point where the school district is bankrupt; why should charters have to pay for the school district's inability to manage its budget?" said Dr. Veronica Joyner, founder and chief administrative officer of the Mathematics, Civics and Sciences Charter School of Philadelphia. "And now [die SRC] is giving us less. Are they expecting the charters to fail, since they are taking money away instead of rewarding us?"

Like Palmer's school, MCSCS has made Adequate Yearly Progress in consecutive years, and both its financial and academic records are strong. Joyner, like Palmer, is worried about the possibility of working with fewer funds.

"I am totally concerned about that," said Joyner, who also serves as president and founder of Parents United for Better Schools, Inc. "The school district already takes almost 30 percent of the allotment given to us by the state. Now they want us to contribute more money when it's not our failure. Charters are doing good, and there should be more support, not less."

Joyner said she has a waiting list 7,000-plus students' strong, which points to die academic prowess of her school. She believes that charters are a unique educational necessity that warrants saving.

"We're talking about a school district that has failed," Joyner said. "That budget didn't just creep up on them like that - it's been creeping up on them for years, and I am appalled no one saw that and did anything about it. We are already operating on much less than the public schools do. Now they are going to cut us, and expect us to do a better job with less."

**"This is not fair to charter school operators, or the families we serve," Joyner continued. "Because we are expected to do a better job than public schools - and we've shown that we are capable of doing that - we should have more support."**

**Instead of aiming at charter schools, Joyner said, more attention should be paid to the district's hierarchy and its plans for a new leader, since direction will no doubt come from on high. Joyner has been in education for more than 40 years, and senses a recurring pattern by the SRC.**

**"The district usually goes outside of Philadelphia to find a superintendent, and that has always been its first failure," Joyner said. "My concern is we keep getting people who, on paper, can do these things, but come in and leave the district in a worse state. There are people right here in Philadelphia who can lead the district. I question [the SRC's] motives."**

#### **Sidebar**

**School Reform Commission member Wendell E. Pritchett, left, speaks with SRC Chairman Pedro Ramos during recent public announcement of reorganizational blueprint.**

**Dr. Veronica Joyner, founder and CEO of Mathematics, Civics and Sciences Charter School of Philadelphia, in the lobby of her school. - TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO**

---

**May 8, 2012**

**Philadelphia Tribune**

**"Blacks suffer from affirmative inaction"**

**Linn Washington**

**Too many things in today's world just make too little sense.**

**Where's the consumer safety sense in selling snack crackers as a rye-based offering when those crackers contain more wheat than rye?**

**Many people buy rye as a way of avoiding their allergies to wheat.**