

100 percent graduation rate for its first high school senior class last year - a rate much higher than the graduation rate average for Philly public schools.

Philly's cash strapped public school district, elevating nonsense over common sense again, recently hired another large law firm to appeal another appellate court siding with the Palmer School's efforts to get the District to comply with state laws covering charter schools.

Needless to say the money for that appeal is better spent preserving programming for school students and/or retaining District jobs for city residents rather than dumping dollars into the pockets of high-priced lawyers ... lawyers who mostly live outside Philadelphia and lawyers with children that attend adequately resourced private or suburban schools.

A recent Philadelphia Tribune editorial criticized the nonsense lurking in the "unnecessary" new restrictions slapped on food stamp recipients imposing limits on assets they can maintain, like barring persons 60-and-under from having assets exceeding \$5,500.

Federal officials say food stamp fraud is not a problem in Pennsylvania, but Gov. Tom "The Terrible" Corbett sees a problem and proposes a drastic solution similar to his supporting restrictive Voter ID legislation to attack virtually non-existent voter fraud.

The man responsible for implementing Corbett's food stamp restrictions is his Welfare Department secretary, Gary Alexander.

Alexander caused a stir in the state's Capitol over opening a consulting company in Rhode Island to purchase rental property. Alexander, who will enforce asset limits on desperately needy food stamp recipients, wants extra income from rental properties because his \$139,931 salary for running the state's largest agency isn't enough according to media reports.

The nonsense of depriving the needy while greasing the greedy highlights ills destroying America's extolled democracy.

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Philadelphia Tribune
"Supporting change"
Damon Williams

Headnote

State Reps. Roebuck and Fleck sponsor bill for charter school accountability

A sense of statewide bipartisanship - driven by a mutual disappointment in the education funding cuts included in Gov. Tom Corbett's proposed budget, and fueled by constituent outrage throughout the commonwealth - has led Democratic state Rep. James Roebuck to support Republican state Rep. Mike Fleck's introduction of House Bill 2364, known as the Charter and Cyber Charter School Funding and Accountability bill.

Roebuck, the House Education Committee Democratic Chairman, is cosponsor of the bill, which has four broad points that, if taken one way, would reform charter school finances and ostensibly prop up the sagging financial infrastructure of public schools statewide.

Taken another way, these measures could be seen as an all-out assault on the charter school system, unfairly punishing it for the failings of public schools.

According to documentation provided by Roebuck's office, HB 2364 would limit unassigned funding balances for charter schools, bringing them more in line with traditional reserve limits held by public school districts; remove the so-called "double dip" in pension funding; limit the amount of special education funding charter and cyber schools receive, and require all charters throughout the state to undergo year-end audits conducted by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

"At a time when public schools are still coping with last year's state education funding cuts and local property taxpayers want to avoid another round of trickledown tax hikes, it's only fair to taxpayers for all schools to play by the same rules," Roebuck said in a statement released by his office. "These reforms should be in effect starting with the 2012-2013 school year. We can provide this relief immediately to school districts and their taxpayers. These reforms would provide at least \$45.8 million in savings for the coming school year, and probably much more beyond that."

Roebuck claims the auditor general in 2010 reported that charters had \$108 million in reserve funds, while nearly half of all charters held reserves far above the public school's mandated cap of 12 percent of annual budget; he also claims the school districts throughout the state have paid charters a total of \$795 million while being reimbursed only \$227 million from the state.

Pennsylvania School Boards Association Executive Director Thomas J. Gentzel said the new bill, if signed into law, would add a greater degree of accountability and oversight to charter school management.

"Charter and cyber charter funding formulas must be reflective of actual instructional expenses, predictable and based on logic," Gentzel said through a statement released by the PSBA. "HB 2364 provides much needed charter school accountability to protect taxpayers and school entities from escalating costs."

The Fleck- Roebuck bill makes no mention of how much money, if any, of these recouped funds will go to the School District of Philadelphia; with a \$218 projected budgeting deficit for the next school year, it would seem Philadelphia alone would absorb much of those funds.

According to the School Reform Commission's fiveyear "Blueprint for Transforming Philadelphia's Public Schools," the district already planned on trimming \$149 million from the \$839 million projected charter school budget. It also plans on reducing per-pupil payment by 7 percent for the coming year.

"In addition to the direct fiscal reforms, I am pleased the bill retains local control of charter school approval," said Roebuck. "Unlike competing legislation, that would strip away that local authority and place it in the hands of bureaucrats in Harrisburg."

With all the cuts to charter funding already in place, career educator and charter school pioneer Dr. **Walter D. Palmer** is dismayed both by HB 2364 - and Roebuck's support of it.

"I am very disappointed that Roebuck has taken this position. I met with him two weeks ago to lobby for more support of charter schools, and on top of that, he attended a meeting with the Pennsylvania Coalition of Charter Schools," **Palmer** said. "What happens is - and it's not just Roebuck, but school unions, teachers and other folks who want to maintain the status quo end up undermining [charter] schools.

"Charter schools are a reality, and are not going away."

Palmer said he will most likely support Corbett's educational reform policies; the irony of such a stance isn't lost on **Palmer**.

"Isn't it ironic that a Republican governor and the Republican-controlled House are champions of school choice? We're not captive to any political party, and you make allies on both sides of the

aisle," said Palmer, noting that he would challenge the legality of HB 2346 should it be signed into law. "I am totally opposed to the Fleck bill, and I hope the Philadelphia Democratic delegation gets on board and comes to the realization that charters and here, and here to do a good job."

Sidebar

Charter school pioneer Dr. Walter D. Palmer outside School District of Philadelphia during press conference in March to announce his stance on public education funding. PHOTOS BY ABDUL R. SULAYMN/TRIBUNE CHIEF PHOTOGRAPHER

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"Poll finds support for school reform"

Damon Williams

An educational survey, along with a new report on national high school graduation figures, is bound to have an effect on how residents throughout the commonwealth look at public education - both its funding and academic achievements.

The poll, conducted by Public Opinion Strategies on request by StudentsFirst - a nationwide non-partisan, non-profit education reform thinktank founded in 2010 by former Washington, D.C., Education Chancellor Michelle Rhee - netted interesting results from its more than 800 calls to residents statewide.

Overall, the survey found that Pennsylvanians supported reform to teacher evaluations by a large margin, with 72 percent of the callers supporting it, while only 15 percent of the callers opposed; those polled also opposed the general "last in, first out" method of targeted layoffs (34 percent supported the notion, while 23 percent opposed it). Public Opinion Strategies also found that Pennsylvanians supported teacher effectiveness as a barometer over simple seniority, by a 62 percent to 32 percent margin.

More than half of the respondents - 53 percent - support public charter schools, while 23 percent were opposed to the charter school system. Interestingly, charter school support increased to 66 percent when callers were properly informed of the nuances of the charter school system.