
January 14, 2015
Magazine
Reads”
OTTERBEIN

Philadelphia
“Wednesday’s City
by HOLLY

Local Reads: “In the final days of Corbett, budget chief Zogby reflects on his quest for school reforms”

Charles Zogby has been Pennsylvania’s budget secretary during a time of utter financial chaos for Philadelphia’s schools. Whether it’s largely his and his boss Gov. Corbett’s fault, or the result of the loss of federal stimulus dollars, has been the subject of furious and seemingly never-ending debate.

NewsWorks’ Kevin McCorry profiles the man behind the checkbook as he prepares to leave Harrisburg to make way for Gov.-elect Wolf’s new team. A few fascinating details emerge: Zogby has a framed quote in his office that reads, “Nothing stimulates the imagination like a budget cut.” His biggest regrets are failing to end teacher seniority and mandate that teachers be paid based on student performance. And Zogby offers a theory for why charter schools have produced mixed results that, unexpectedly, is sure to upset some charter supporters:

Zogby blames the uneven results of the charter sector as a whole on poor oversight at the local level – calling for an independent, statewide authorizer and overseer.

“Having had a hand writing the original law, having helped write the cyber law, you’re never going to see me defend poor performing charter schools. I think we ought to shutter them,” he says. “If you’re not performing, you remediate. If you’re unable to remediate, you go out of business. Cause we’ll find another operator that can take your place.”

On this point he says charter proponents should be more vocal.

“One of the beefs that I’ve had with [The Pennsylvania Coalition of Public Charter Schools], frankly, is they jump to the defense of a charter school, right, no matter the performance of that school. Look at what the SRC did to close **Walter Palmer**. That was the right decision to make, and yet a lot of charter advocates, just because it says ‘charter,’ like we somehow can’t close that school.”

Another interesting tidbit: Zogby has several pictures hanging in his office of him and former Gov. Ridge, who he worked for as a policy director, but *none* of him and Corbett.

January 16, 2015
Philadelphia Tribune
“Shuttered Palmer school still owes ex-employees”
By Wilford Shamlin III.

The School District of Philadelphia has little chance of recovering more than one million dollars in court-ordered refunds from the **Walter D. Palmer** Learning Partners Charter School following its Dec. 31 closure, a district spokesman said this week.

"If an organization has no funds, you can't get any money from them," said Fernando Gallard, the district's chief of communications. "The chances are poor for getting any sort of money from them."

Former employees, who lost health care benefits in November, have been left in the dark about when they would receive their last paycheck. Some of them turned out at school district offices this week looking for answers.

There were few.

Gallard referred questions for further comment to the school's namesake founder, saying the partnership charged with operating the school was responsible for separation costs relating to layoffs and other outstanding obligations.

Palmer did not immediately respond to request for comment on Tuesday.

Previously he told KYW Radio, "We intend to meet every obligation that we can."

Palmer plans to sell assets to pay off its financial obligations but complicating matters is the fact that schools at 910 N. Sixth Street and 5560 Harbison Ave., were housed in buildings that are owned by a business partnership.

More than 250 former **Palmer** charter school students have transferred to new schools, and district officials say they remain ready to help any other families transition to new schools, according to Gallard.

The **Palmer** charter school is described on its website as a Title I school, a federal funding category, that provides instruction and activities for students considered most likely to drop out or failing to achieve proficiency in standardized tests in reading, writing and math.

Veronica Joyner, chief administrator of the Mathematics, Civics and Sciences Charter School, applauded **Palmer** for undertaking the opening and running of a charter school but said her counterpart ran into trouble when he admitted more students than allowed in the charter.

She believed he could have stayed afloat if he limited enrollment to 675 students. She said Palmer and the district shared responsibility for not working to document and improve performance issues after realizing student test scores missed key targets.

"If people were overseeing step by step, this never would have happened," Joyner said. "Students are the ones who are suffering the consequences."

Sidebar

The School District of Philadelphia has little chance of recovering more than one million dollars in court-ordered refunds from the Walter D. Palmer Learning Partners Charter School following its Dec. 31 closure, a district spokesman said this week. - PHOTO: ABDUL SULAYMAN