



## Senate Bill 8 Would Create Tax-Dollar Windfall for Charter Schools

Charter schools would get tens of millions of dollars more for serving the same number of children

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

- Senate Bill 8 would take tens of millions of dollars from school districts and give that money to charter schools—even if the number of charter school students does not increase. Traditional schools would be forced to cut staff and programs, while charter schools would see a windfall of taxpayer dollars.
- The bill would give charter schools funds for programs they don't even provide, including Head Start and More At Four, as well as millions in capital improvement money.
- By creating a special commission to approve new charter schools, Senate Bill 8 would significantly diminish local control of public education and hand it over to an unelected state body.

SENATE BILL 8 WOULD TAKE TENS OF MILLIONS of dollars from school districts by giving charter schools money for numerous services they do not provide, including Head Start, More At Four, and Junior ROTC. In addition, charter schools would get money from districts' free- and reduced-lunch and child-nutrition programs, whether or not they actually participate in those programs. Essentially, Senate Bill 8 would take money from programs that serve the state's most disadvantaged students, and it would give that money to schools that often exclude those children.

The charter schools would get a dramatic increase in funding even if they added no more students. Traditional schools would have to teach the same number of students they have now with considerably less money.

### Millions Taken from Traditional Schools

Under Senate Bill 8, charter schools would be able to take funds from numerous sources away from traditional schools. Senate Bill 8 would make available to charter schools money from the following programs:

- Programs charter schools do not provide, such as Head Start and More At Four.** These programs promote school readiness in children from low

income and disadvantaged families. Charter schools generally do not serve children who are not at least kindergarten age, so providing charters with these funds will only undermine these programs and do nothing to benefit the children these programs target.

- **Free- and reduced-lunch and child-nutrition programs, regardless of whether the charter schools offer these programs.** Many charter schools do not provide these programs, resulting in the exclusion of low-income students and increased racial segregation. To provide charter schools these funds while still allowing them to discriminate against these students is unconscionable.
- **Funds from donors, even if the donors have specified those funds for a certain use and have earmarked them only for traditional schools.**
- **Funds for capital improvements and the construction of new schools, including money that comes from construction bonds approved by voters.** The loss of these funds will significantly undermine the ability of districts with aging schools or with growing populations to provide adequate facilities for their students.

### **One Example: Durham Public Schools**

In preparation for the coming budget year, Durham Public Schools' financial staff crunched the numbers to find out what the passage of Senate Bill 8 would mean for the district's funds. Under the current charter school legislation, Durham Public Schools (DPS) would pay approximately \$9.5 million to charter schools next school year. If Senate Bill 8 passes, that number would jump to almost \$20 million—an amount that would necessitate drastic cuts in the district's traditional schools. **And that assumes the charter schools serve the same percentage of the district's students they serve now.**

Like many school districts right now, DPS already faces budget shortages resulting from reductions in state and federal funding. Sapping another \$10 million from the district would force program and staff cuts, while charter schools would see a windfall of taxpayer dollars.

If local districts have to make these types of financial sacrifices for charter schools, it only seems fair that they should have some say in the charter approval process and that charters only get money for services they actually provide. Instead, Senate Bill 8 would create a "Charter School Commission" that would operate outside any kind of oversight or accountability to taxpayers. While most legislators would agree that local control of public schools is important, this bill would take all control over the creation of charter schools out of hands of local officials and give it to an unelected state commission—while simultaneously undermining the financial structure of traditional schools, which are under local control.

The only reason to create such a commission is to push charter expansion at the fastest possible pace, regardless of the impact on traditional schools or North Carolina's children.

There is too much at stake to rush forward to an explosion of charter schools at the expense of these fundamental democratic principles. Lifting the cap is one thing, but taking the decisions out of the hands of officials that are most clearly accountable to the students and families who attend North Carolina's schools just does not add up. And cutting the financial legs out from under traditional schools—during one of the most difficult budget times in decades—is simply irresponsible.