

MacRo Report Blog

State Charter School Law Ranked Seventh Worst

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The creation of great new public charter schools in Maryland requires just one simple thing, according to Jeanne Allen, president of the Center for Education Reform, an advocacy organization.

"It's a law that is very clear and open to actually allowing people to step forward to get those schools," Allen said Tuesday.

Maryland is far from having what CER officials consider an adequate charter school law, she said. According to the center's 2011 annual ranking and score card of charter school laws released in January 2011, Maryland's law ranks 35th of 41 laws on the books.

As reasons for the poor rating, the report cited limitations with district-only authorizing, union requirements, school board control of charters and lack of funding for charters.

Mississippi claimed the worst ranking, while Washington D.C. was deemed to have the best charter law.

Allen will visit Frederick tonight to discuss Maryland's charter law, what she believes is lacking and what needs to be done to improve the law. The event at the C. Burr Artz Library will be hosted by FrederickEducationReform.com.

Tom Neumark, a founder of FrederickEducationReform.com, said his organization wanted to inform the public and elected officials about the rankings and how the law could be changed.

According to Allen, fixing the law won't be easy.

The state law would need to be totally rewritten for Maryland to have a quality charter school law, she said.

She suggested starting with adding an independent authorizer to form charter schools rather than school boards because school boards don't know what it's like to operate a charter school.

"They're not set up to review, approve and even consider what a new school looks like," she said. "They're not in the new schools business."

Allen said the Maryland legislature has shown no "appetite" during this session to understand the issue, let alone challenge charter school opponents.

Regarding Frederick County's charter schools, Allen said it is a tragedy that the school board is doing little to help Frederick Classical Charter School "see the light of day" and open this fall.

The charter school situation in Frederick is similar to others across the country, she said, where the state or local school board authorizes charter schools.
