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The Platte Institute strongly believes in the importance of citizens participating in the public dialogue on issues important to Nebraska. Writing a letter to the editor is an outstanding

# PLATTE CHAT

## Time is Now for Charter Schools in Nebraska

The Platte Institute today releases its latest study, "Race to the Top – Can We Compete: Nebraska's Charter School Initiative."

Authored by Vicki E. Murray, Ph.D., the study outlines the compelling need for Nebraska to adopt legislation allowing for charter schools.

Below is the executive summary from the study. You may download the entire 52-page study by following [THIS LINK](#).

*By Vicki E. Murray, Ph.D.*

Today, 40 states including the District of Columbia allow public charter schools. That number will likely increase since states' eligibility for \$4.35 billion in federal Race to the Top Funds depends in part on ensuring conditions for high-performing charter schools.

way to partake in the discussion and have your voice heard by thousands of people. To make the process easier, the Platte Institute has assembled a list of links which allow you to submit a letter to the editor to nearly all Nebraska newspapers. Simply [CLICK HERE](#) for a listing of the newspapers and follow the appropriate link to submit your letter.

States without charter laws are at a competitive disadvantage for those funds, including Nebraska whose Race-to-the-Top share is as much as \$75 million. State officials deny the need for public charter schools in spite of mounting evidence that the current system is not serving students well. Regardless of grade level or socio-economic background, alarming numbers of Nebraska students are not proficient in the basics or prepared for college.

On average, only around one-third (35.8 percent) of Nebraska's 4th and 8th graders score proficient in reading and math according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the Nation's Report Card. Just 45 percent of 4th and 8th graders, who are not poor, score proficient in those subjects, dropping to around 20 percent of poor 4th and 8th graders, to just fewer than 16 percent of Hispanic 4th and 8th graders, and plummeting to 11 percent of Black 4th and 8th graders who score proficient.

Likewise, alarming proportions of Nebraska students do not score college ready on the American College Test (ACT) across student sub-groups—even though more Nebraska students than ever before report taking core academic courses. Specifically, only 29 percent of White students met ACT benchmarks in English, reading, math, and science, compared

to 12 percent of His-panic students and just 7 percent of black students.

In spite of Nebraska's 90 percent high school graduation rate, only 66.7 percent of graduates enter college within one year. More alarming is that less than half of all Nebraska college freshmen (49.1 percent) complete college degrees. The college graduation rate for White students is 50.7 percent compared to just 32.5 percent for Hispanic students and 32.4 percent for Black students.

Nationwide charter schools enroll a disproportionate number of minority and low-income students who would likely drop out absent a public charter-school lifeline. Charter schools not only improve achievement of the students they enroll but that of students in surrounding traditional public schools as well.

Given those results, it is not surprising that a majority of Nebraskans favor public charter schools. Yet state officials prefer to proceed with consolidation, controversial learning communities, and magnet schools instead. Education reform, however, is not a zero-sum game, and pursuing reforms within the current system must not preclude reforms beyond the system if policy makers in Nebraska hope to prepare students for a 21st Century world.

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