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## Charter schools should be free to teach **Parents better suited to determine if schools are meeting kids needs**

Texas Education Agency announced that several charter schools around the state have been ordered closed but a leading expert is calling on the state to not rush to judgment on charter school achievement.

"No one should ever tolerate illegal behavior - whether in public, charter or private schools," began Chris Patterson, director of Education Policy Research for the Texas Public Policy Foundation. "But charter schools should not be shut down simply because they are not meeting criteria set by bureaucrats in Austin."

Mrs. Patterson said numerous studies demonstrate that the effectiveness of charter and private schools cannot be measured until students have attended that school for at least two years. There are approximately 700 charter schools operating in Texas.

"Very often, these schools are getting the lowest performing students from the

public schools - kids who are one, two or three grade levels behind. It is unrealistic to expect any school, anywhere, to bring their entire student body up to grade level in a short period of time."

The Texas Learning Index is an official standard used by the TEA to measure school effectiveness. Unfortunately, the TKI, which shows if students are making academic progress from year to year, is not considered when charter schools are shut down. Research shows that the TLI for at-risk students in charter schools exceeds their peers in public schools across the state.

"At-risk students in charter schools are making significantly greater strides in achievement than their peers in public schools," Patterson said, noting the comprehensive study, "Navigating Newly Chartered Waters", by the head of Texas A&M

University's Department of Economics, Dr. Dennis Jansen, and his colleague Dr. Timothy Gronberg.

"While schools must be held accountable for student achievement, Patterson said that parents should be the deciding factor in whether their child is improving.

"It is interesting that the TEA doesn't hold public schools to the same level of accountability as charter schools," Patterson said.

"While we know from numerous measures there are a large number of public schools that have consistently failed to teach children or even provide a safe learning environment, that commits acts of fiscal waste and fraud, there are no recent calls for their closure." TPPF last year issued a report citing such examples, Evidence of Malfeasance and Statutory Violations in Texas Public Schools and is available at [www.tppf.org](http://www.tppf.org).