



An Interview with Brooke Dollens Terry : The Supply and DEMAND for Charter Schools

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An Interview with Brooke Dollens Terry : The Supply and DEMAND for Charter Schools

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Brooke Dollens Terry is an education policy analyst at the Texas Public Policy Foundation. She joined the Foundation in October 2006 and works on the following education issues: accountability and assessments; career and technical education; college readiness and remediation; school spending and transparency; and teacher certification, quality, and compensation. Before joining the Foundation, she worked at the Texas Workforce Commission in government relations and as a policy analyst for Commissioner Diane Rath. At the Workforce Commission, Brooke researched and analyzed child care, welfare, foster care, food stamps, and a host of other workforce policy issues.

Prior to working in state government, Brooke worked in Washington D.C. for U.S. Senator Phil Gramm for two and a half years analyzing federal legislation and policy in the areas of banking, housing, education, welfare, judiciary, and social issues. Upon Senator Gramm's retirement, Brooke worked for U.S. Senators John Cornyn and Richard Lugar as a legislative assistant.

Brooke also spent several months observing Texas public schools firsthand as a substitute in a range of positions and schools including working as a long-term substitute in a 5th grade elementary school classroom and in a high school classroom teaching American history and government. During college, Brooke interned in U.S. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison's press office in Washington D.C., and in then-Governor George W. Bush's criminal justice division in Austin. Brooke graduated cum laude from Baylor University with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science. During her time at Baylor University, Brooke was actively involved with Baylor Ambassadors, student government, and Pi Beta Phi.

Brooke is a fifth generation Texan. She grew up in Houston and graduated from Cypress-Creek high school. Brooke and her husband Thomas reside in Austin and are members of Grace Covenant Church.

In this interview she responds to questions about the issue of supply and demand in terms of charter schools.

1) Brooke, in a recent public policy paper, you seem to indicate that the demand for charter schools is going to increase fairly substantially in the future. What led you to this conclusion?

Last year, nearly 17,000 students were on a waiting list to attend a public charter school in Texas. We expect that number to increase as the last five charters will most likely be handed out by the state this fall and Texas will hit the legislative cap limiting the number of open-enrollment charters to 215.

2) I understand that there are different types of "charter schools". Could you tell us about these different types and which do you see as increasing over the next say ten years?

There are four different types of public charters in Texas: open-enrollment, district, university, and home-rule. The majority of Texas students in a charter school attend an open-enrollment charter school. We expect the demand for open-enrollment charter schools and district charter schools to continue to grow.

3) I understand that some of these charter schools have different kinds of missions- what are some of them?

Some charter schools are college preparatory schools with a focus on rigorous academics and preparing student for college. Other charters focus on serving students with specific challenges – such as drug offenders, pregnant students, teenage parents, or students in the foster care system – and help them to finish school and get a diploma.

4) Right now, when the demand exceeds the ability of the school to serve, a lottery system is implemented. In your mind, is this a good thing or a bad thing? Or does it send a certain message to the educational establishment?

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Dr. Shaughnessy is currently Professor in Educational Studies and is a Consulting Editor for Gifted Education International and Educational Psychology Review. In addition, he writes for [www.EdNews.org](#) and the International Journal of Theory and Research in Education. He has taught students with mental retardation, learning disabilities and gifted. He is on the Governor's Traumatic Brain Injury Advisory Council and the Gifted Education Advisory Board in New Mexico. He is also a school psychologist and conducts in-services and workshops on various topics.

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I think open-enrollment and the resulting lottery system is good policy because it gives each applicant an equal chance for admission.

5) What are some of the challenges that charter schools face?

Charters schools were created with idea that they would have less regulation and lots of room to innovate, and hopefully these come up with innovative strategies to help students whose needs are not being met in a traditional public school. Since the original charter school legislation in 1995, new regulations have been tacked on almost every legislative session. Other challenges include a lack of public awareness about charters, the legislative cap limiting more charter schools from opening, barriers to replication and expansion, and less funding than traditional public schools.

6) Are charter schools required to administer the TAKS test (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills)?

Yes. Charter schools are public schools. They must administer the same tests as traditional public schools, such as the TAKS test.

7) What are some of the recommendations that you have suggested to Texas legislators regarding charter schools?

We recommend that the Texas Legislature eliminate the cap on open-enrollment charter schools, reduce unnecessary regulations on charter schools, and remove barriers to the replication and expansion of successful charter schools.

8) What important question have I neglected to ask?

In Texas, 81 percent of students that attend a charter school are minorities, and 60 percent are low-income.

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