

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

## Charter Success in L.A. School choice in South Central.

With economic issues sucking up so much political oxygen this year, K-12 education hasn't received the attention it deserves from either Presidential candidate. The good news is that school reformers at the local level continue to push forward.

This month the Inner City Education Foundation (ICEF), a charter school network in Los Angeles, announced plans to expand the number of public charter schools in the city's South Central section, which includes some of the most crime-ridden neighborhoods in the country. Over the next four years, the number of ICEF charters will grow to 35 from 13. Eventually, the schools will enroll one in four students in the community, including more than half of the high school students.

The demand for more educational choice in predominantly minority South Los Angeles is pronounced. The waitlist for existing ICEF schools has at times exceeded 6,000 kids. And no wonder. Like KIPP, Green Dot and other charter school networks that aren't constrained by union rules on staffing and curriculum, ICEF has an excellent track record, particularly

with black and Hispanic students. In reading and math tests, ICEF charters regularly outperform surrounding traditional public schools as well as other Los Angeles public schools.

ICEF has been operating since 1994, and its flagship school has now graduated two classes, with 100% of the students accepted to college. By contrast, a state study released in July reported that one in three students in the L.A. public school system -- including 42% of black students -- quits before graduating, a number that has grown by 80% in the past five years.

Despite this success, powerful unions like the California Teachers Association and its political backers continue to oppose school choice for disadvantaged families. Last year, Democratic state lawmakers, led by Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez, tried to force Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to sign a bill that would have made opening a new charter school in the state next to impossible. Mr. Nunez backed down after loud protests from parents in poorer neighborhoods.

School reformers in New York, Ohio, Florida, Connecticut, Utah and Arizona have faced similar challenges of late. Last year in Texas, where 81% of charter school students are minorities (versus 60% in traditional public schools), nearly 17,000 students had to be placed on charter waiting lists. Texas is currently bumping up against an arbitrary cap on the number of charters that can open in the state. Unless the cap is lifted by state lawmakers, thousands of low-income Texas children will remain stuck in ineffective schools.

Back in California, ICEF says that its ultimate goal is to produce 2,000 college graduates each year, in hopes that the graduates eventually will return to these underserved communities and help create a sustainable middle class. Given that fewer than 10% of high-school freshmen in South Los Angeles currently go on to receive a college diploma, this is a huge challenge. Resistance from charter school opponents won't make it any easier.