

Steve Dyers' March 5, 10th Period--\$293 million of Ohio taxpayer dollars going to "Dropout Recovery" Charter Schools that can meet the state minimum requirement of 8% of its students graduating in 4 years.

If Ohioans were aware of the egregious nature of the Dropout Recovery Charter School and the results of such, rebellion would break out from the Lake to the River. This pricey policy for this boondoggle is shameless.

Steve Dyer has been exposing the dreadful, wasteful, tax-guzzling charter industry for years. When will the Governor's State Department of Education, members of the Ohio House of Representatives and Senate, and the Governor hold the Ohio charter school industry accountable?

State Law: Ohio's "Dropout Recovery" Charter Schools don't actually need to have any "dropouts". What they do need, though, is less accountability.

What started as a David Brennan scam in the early 2000s has graduated to full-on taxpayer theft under current law.

[Stephen Dyer](#)

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For many years, Ohio has had Charter Schools that are supposed to serve high school dropouts. These are called "Dropout Recovery" Charter Schools. And their performance has always been among the worst in the entire [country](#).

That's because these schools were never meant to help kids. They were designed to make the state's largest Republican donor rich.

For years, these schools were dominated by David [Brennan's](#) Life Skills Academies — schools that would graduate maybe a couple kids a year, but roll in the cash, which Brennan would then return to legislators and governors in the form of political campaign contributions.

Accountability was so lax at these schools that the Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow, which closed amid the largest taxpayer ripoff in state [history](#), tried to be designated a "Dropout Recovery" Charter School to avoid [scrutiny](#) — even though the school created *more* dropouts than any school in the country.

Brennan's been dead about 10 years. But, if anything, these schools have become even *more* scandalous.

Here's something to noodle over: So-called "Dropout Recovery" schools don't have to include a single "dropout" in the way we think of dropouts — kids who stopped going to school and need to come back.

Here's how the state [defines](#) who may attend "Dropout Recovery" Charter Schools:

"(1) Any community school that operates a drug recovery program in cooperation with a court; or

(2) Any community school in which the majority of students are enrolled in a dropout prevention and recovery program operated by the school that meets the following criteria:

(a) The program serves only students not younger than sixteen years of age and not older than twenty-one years of age;

(b) The program enrolls students who, at the time of their initial enrollment, either, or both, are at least one grade level behind their cohort age groups or experience crises that significantly interfere with their academic progress such that they are prevented from continuing their traditional programs."

That, my friends, is it.

You'll notice the definition doesn't include those students you and I would consider a "dropout" [student](#) — "... individuals who do not complete the necessary requirements to graduate from secondary school."

Nope.

Here's how the state explains it in their 2-page (!) "guidance" to prospective "Dropout Recovery" Charter Schools:

"The academic impacts of such crises are, at times, difficult to measure. Students may experience a drop in grades, a loss of interest in schoolwork, and higher rates of absenteeism. They might also struggle with completing assignments, participating in class, and keeping up with their peers. These symptoms may lead the student to explore enrollment in one of Ohio's dropout prevention and recovery schools."

So the kids at "Dropout Recovery" Charter Schools can be — and this is important — ***still in school!***

Not dropped out at all.

And, according to state [law](#), if *only a majority of kids* in your Charter School meet this definition, then you get to, for example, graduate 8 in 100 kids in four years.

Just look at the graduation "standards" for these schools — the only standard that should apply since they are literally called "Dropout Recovery" Charter Schools.

[Image](#)

Wait. It gets worse. Here are the standards for these schools when it comes to graduating kids in anywhere from 4 to **8 years!**

[Image](#)

I don't know what's sadder. The standards themselves, or the fact that the Ohio Department of Education put these slides in a [PowerPoint](#) actually created by its "Office of Accountability."

Remember: Only a majority of students in these schools need to be in "crisis", NOT FULL-ON DROPOUTS! So nearly 1/2 of all the kids in these schools can, um, ... NEITHER BE IN CRISIS NOR DROPPED OUT OF SCHOOL!

Yet despite that, the state says you can graduate 8 out of 100 kids in 4 years at a "Dropout Recovery" Charter School and keep chugging along. Or you can graduate less than 4 in 10 and be designated "exceeds standards."

Just so you know, the lowest 4-year graduation rate of any Ohio Public School [District](#) is 68.6 percent. The *average* rate is 95.2 percent.

And here's the even more maddening thing. We taxpayers are paying these "schools" \$293 million this year. For 22,461 students — only 11,231 of whom need to be "in crisis" with ***none actually dropped out***, mind you.

That means we taxpayers are spending \$13,041 per student at schools who only have to graduate 8 in 100 students in 4 years because a majority of their students may be a year behind in reading¹. Only 7 of the state's 80 "Dropout Recovery" Charter Schools receive less state revenue per pupil than the district in which they're located — about \$1,620 less on average. Meanwhile, the 73 "Dropout Recovery" Charter Schools that receive *more* than the district in which they're located receive \$6,306 more on average.

The state is spending \$5,724 per pupil in Ohio's public school districts, which are graduating more than 9 in 10 students in 4 years.

[Image](#)

But, hey, at least these “Dropout” schools are grossly inefficient.

They spend about 30 percent of their money on administrators — more than double the rate of what school districts spend.

They also only spend 3.4 percent of their money on pupil support — the wraparound services crucial to rescuing kids from their crises, which I thought was the whole point of these schools’ existence. Yet Canton Harbor High School, for example, spends just \$38 of its \$8,943 per pupil expenditure on pupil support.

The average school district (including many districts with few if any students in “crisis”) spends 5 percent — nearly double the rate of “Dropout Recovery” Charter Schools. Only about 17 percent of Ohio school districts spend a smaller percentage of their funding on Pupil Support than the *average* “Dropout Recovery” Charter School.

Instructional spending is the same result. The average “Dropout Recovery” Charter School spends 53 percent on instruction while the average school district spends 59 percent, despite the fact that some of the “Dropout Recovery” Charter Schools are online and don’t have to worry about paying for buses.

Look, I think dropout rates are a problem. I think we need to do all we can to help these kids succeed.

But, folks, Ohio’s Dropout Recovery Charter Schools?

Ain’t it.

Just as kind of an experiment, I decided to apply the state’s “Dropout Recovery” student definition to Ohio’s public school districts. And since the state doesn’t report publicly what percentage of each “Dropout Recovery” Charter School’s enrollment are students in crisis vs. those who are not, I decided to look at Ohio’s public school districts whose chronic absentee rates are greater than 50 percent. Under the state’s guidance, chronic absenteeism is considered a sign of crisis.

Here are the nine districts that would qualify, along with their per pupil state funding and their 4-year graduation rates:

[Image](#)

Only 2 districts — East Cleveland and Youngstown — receive more state funding per pupil than the average “Dropout Recovery” Charter School (about 1/2 of all “Dropout Recovery” Charter Schools receive more than Youngstown, by the way). And all of these districts far exceed the so-called 36 percent 4-year graduation “exceeds standard” rating.

Here’s an idea: These nine school districts should petition the state to be designated as a “Dropout Recovery” school, get significantly more state money, be classified as exceeding state standards on their graduation rates and not have to worry about the myriad other standards regular schools need to follow.

Sounds like a plan, doesn’t it?

I kid.

Here’s another, serious idea: Let’s close down these so-called “Dropout Recovery” Charter Schools, take the \$293 million we currently send them and instead create programs that actually address High School dropouts.

Yeah.

That sounds better.

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I know this probably isn't the case, but the fact it *could* be is infuriating.