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4700 charter schools closed in 24 years

The attached newsletter from Shawgi Tell should be required reading for all public officials.

In Ohio, twice as many charter schools had state approval to operate as now exist. In the process of closing, these charter schools heaped harm on students.

For the most part, the charter school experiment in Ohio is a colossal failure. Since this industry involves the education of children, it is exceedingly disheartening that state officials in Ohio and throughout the country refuse to intervene on behalf of charter school students. Many charter school parents seem oblivious as to the harmful effects of the charter school industry.

Many for-profit charter school operators are getting rich on the backs of charter school students. The bottom line of many, if not most, for-profit charter operators is the bottom line. They are in business to get rich.

4,700 Charter Schools Closed In 24 Years

by Shawgi Tell / September 22nd, 2026

Charter schools have been around for roughly 35 years. The first charter school in the country, City Academy High School, opened in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1992.

Data from the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools shows that 4,690 charter schools closed between 1998 and 2022; that is, nearly 4,700 charter schools have closed in 24 years. The real number of closures is likely higher. The same source says about 8,100 charter schools are operating today.

The Network for Public Education (NPE) points out that “more than one in four charter schools close by the five-year mark. By year 10, the failure rate jumps to nearly four in 10; five years later, almost 50 percent have closed. We now have five cohorts at the 20-year mark with an average failure rate of 55 percent.”

The NPE goes on to say that “Over the years, charter closures have broken their promises to more than one million children whose parents believed they had enrolled their children in a better, stable alternative to their local public school. In the marketplace model of schooling, when it comes to charter schools, it is buyer-beware. And in far too many cases, these schools were doomed to fail from the very beginning.”

The top four reasons charter schools fail and close every week include poor academic performance, low enrollment, financial malfeasance, and mismanagement. Low enrollment takes the cake. This matters because we are often told that many charter schools have waiting lists. In reality, many charter schools do not meet enrollment quotas and requirements.

So, why are there so many charter school closures, especially if charter schools are supposedly superior to traditional public schools? Why are poor academic performance, low enrollment, financial malfeasance, and mismanagement so ubiquitous in the charter school sector?

It is worth recalling that charter school proponents see education as a business, a marketable product, a commercial transaction, a commodity. It is no accident that both non-profit and for-profit charter schools engage in profiteering. In this setup, students and parents are reduced to self-interested, fend-for-yourself consumers, while failure and success are viewed through a narrow, business-centric lens.

Charter school advocates do not see education as an integral part of history and society’s social fabric, let alone as a human right and social responsibility. Education is not viewed as a fundamental pillar of society organized to uplift all humans and advance society.

Instead, education is seen as a “free market” phenomenon, a commercial enterprise, where the survival-of-the-fittest ethos prevails. Such an arrangement extinguishes a public sense of collective identity, purpose, and responsibility.

Charter school proponents believe that, like a failing business, failing charter schools should be closed and replaced by “more successful” charter schools. Closing a school and abandoning parents, students, teachers, and principals is seen as natural, normal, and healthy. According to this commodity logic, if a school “fails,” it should be shut down. “This is how education should be,” say charter school promoters. This is supposedly “the natural course of things.”

But no one ever mentions the disastrous effects of charter school closures on parents, students, teachers, principals, and the community. Charter school advocates are consistently silent on this point. From a “free market” perspective, this destruction and chaos are “supposed to happen.” There are always “winners” and “losers” in the market. The so-called “invisible hand” of the “free market” reigns supreme in this taken-for-granted outlook.

Education in a modern society is a public good, not a commodity based on market dynamics and profit-seeking. The marketization of education narrows its scope and lowers its quality. It treats education as an article of trade and deprives it of its deeper social and cultural meaning.

Because of the nature, structure, and function of charter schools, greater emphasis is placed on cost considerations versus the holistic well-being of teachers and students. This is what “efficiency” and the “business model” warrant.

The inherently chaotic, anarchic, and violent nature of the “free market” naturally produces thousands of charter school failures and closures that obliterate the integrity, purpose, expectations, and rights of parents, students, teachers, and principals every week. Shuttering a school and subjecting everyone to the turmoil of the “free market” is not accountability; it is destructive and irresponsible.

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