

## It's the Book, Not the Cover: A New Label, like Charter, is not Enough

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A bizarre *Education Week* article ("Rebranding Public Schools" by Jack Schneider, 2/27/13, p. 32) reminded me of how much has been made of school labels like charter, public, and private; too much symbolism triumphing over substance. Like my second blog, Schneider argues that we need to take advantage of the popularity of chartered public schools. However, I argued for a substantive response, especially price decontrol via shared financing, so that charter law could be the transformation catalyst we need; the basis for the entrepreneurially driven, dynamic menu of schooling options as diverse as our schoolchildren. Schneider argues for a symbolic response; increasing public support for the current system by "rebranding" traditional public schools with the charter label.

Schneider must not be aware that it is already happening in the ['weak' charter law states](#), which are the vast majority. The key element of weak charter laws is school district control of chartering and 'chartered' school budgets, though many 'weak charter' states add other debilitating restrictions. The high-performing chartered public schools are the ones that operate differently than their traditional public school counterparts. So, [there are](#) huge productive opportunities to operate differently remain, especially through price decontrol.

The New Orleans, post-Katrina charter re-brand, and hoped for makeover, may turn out to be a case in point of charter/choice symbolism over substance. The New Orleans public school system is over 80% charter, which has led to a lot of hype and hope, but the jury is still out on actual, noteworthy improvement in academics. If additional time and further analysis sustains the current appearance of weak gains and persistent widespread school 'failure', it may be because many of the new chartered public schools are former traditional public school

campuses. Especially since Louisiana is a borderline weak charter state, bestowing charter status on former traditional public schools may not be enough to notably boost performance, especially the systemic, entrepreneurially driven specialization school systems need to avoid the one-size-does-not-fit-all reason why even highly functional traditional schooling efforts are poor learning environments for a large share of their students.

This is also a [parent trigger issue](#). Unless parents are pulling the makeover trigger or charter conversion trigger on an utterly dysfunctional school, affixing the charter label to a former traditional public school (TPS) campus will not address the ubiquitous, one-size-does-not-fit-all TPS problem.