

Op Ed:

## California needs more charter schools

**Alan Bonsteel, San Francisco Chronicle,**  
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The California Department of Education issued a news release Monday touting 10 years of uninterrupted progress on the Academic Performance Index. By contrast, on the test that researchers use to evaluate real performance, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, California students' scores have been flat during that same time.

Why the big difference? The main test on which the API is based, the STAR, has never been secure, and teachers can teach to the exact questions on it, or even hand out the correct answers in test sessions that are not proctored by outside authorities. By contrast, the NAEP is a secure test, and because it carries no financial incentives, there is no motivation to game the system.

Through a lucky coincidence, the Education Department released the phony API scores on the same day that the latest issue of Time magazine hit the newsstands with a cover story on the new film "Waiting for Superman." This gripping three-handkerchief drama is about the lives of five minority families and their quest to escape violence-ridden public schools and enroll their children in charter schools, the public schools of choice that are the one shining light in our otherwise broken public education system. Davis Guggenheim, who helped Al Gore win a Nobel Prize by directing "An Inconvenient Truth," is watching this, his latest film, rapidly turning into the symbol of the high school graduation movement that Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech was to a previous civil rights movement.

In the same section of Time magazine as the film review, an opinion poll documented that 67 percent of Americans correctly identified our public schools as being "in crisis."

The speed of the consensus forming around school choice is breathtaking. About six months ago, for example, the New York Times made a startling U-turn and began singing the praises of charter schools. In June, the Times ran a cover story on Locke High School in Los Angeles, once decried as the state's worst and most violent, and now completely turned around only two years after being taken over by Green Dot charter schools. The new Locke Charter School boasts a safe campus, dramatically reduced dropout rates and Superman status in the hearts of the families it serves.

In a few short weeks, we vote in nationwide elections. We must make sure that at every debate, in every radio talk show and at every service club appearance, every candidate will be asked if we can count on him or her to support the right of all families to a quality school that they have freely chosen. The crusade for school choice is, indeed, the civil rights movement of our generation, and the most crucial battle of our time.

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