

Dear Vice President Biden,

Charter schools are a critical component of Utah's public education system, and I'm disappointed to see they are not included as a critical part of the Democratic Party platform. Nearly 80,000 students – 12% of the statewide total – attend 134 charter schools across the state. Some of these families live in rural communities like Roosevelt, Moab or Cedar City. Other charter school families live in Utah's urban/suburban core from Ogden to Provo.

It is not a partisan issue. It's simply an issue of doing what's right for families and offering them a public school option that fits the needs of their children. Some Utah charter school families vote Democrat. Others vote Republican. Many choose not to affiliate with a given party; they prefer to evaluate each candidate's positions, demeanor and character. Some of these families speak Spanish at home. Many Utah charter school students struggle with learning disabilities. All of these families have found their place with friends, families and community members in one of our charter schools. We invite all our neighbors to find their place in Utah's rich array of public education choices.

Utah's public education choices include attending school in a family's boundary school, in a different district school or in a charter school. None of us claim to know what is best for our neighbor's child, but we are all thrilled that we can find our place, the school and teacher and community that best meets our needs. Our children and their families are depending upon elected officials to ensure their public school options remain intact, with charter schools as a vibrant part of the public education ecosystem. When charter schools are missing from the platform's list of multiple public school options that provide opportunities for students, it sends a strong signal about their relative worth to the Democratic party.

Frankly, there are many reasons to support charter schools. However, the most powerful reason is because it empowers **all** families – rich or poor, white or black or brown, born in this country or first generation immigrants – to know their children all have access to a high-quality public school that meets their needs. Many families find the right fit in the community when they choose a neighborhood to live in. Other families live where their modest financial circumstances permit. Especially for those families, the option of attending a charter school is and should be a ticket for their children and grandchildren to pursue the American dream.

Your "Unity Platform" suggests that whether a charter school receives federal funding could depend on whether the school district within whose boundaries the charter school lies believes that school should receive those federal dollars. For many years, Utah's school districts and charter schools have tried to lay aside the petty squabbles involved in funding. We have embraced and enjoyed the benefits of a system that offers equitable funding to all parts of our public education system. It would be a great disservice to Utah's families to put a finger on the equitable funding scale we've worked so hard and so long to create.

Your "Unity Platform" also suggests charter schools should have to meet a different set of standards than the rest of Utah public schools. Accountability is in our blood. Every person who

opens or runs a charter school knows that failure could and should lead to the school's closure. As we like to sometimes say, closing a charter school is a feature, not a bug.

Given that existential accountability, we cannot understand why your "Unity Platform" would call for charter schools to face additional scrutiny and accountability. We hope you will reconsider these planks in your platform.

Sincerely,

M. Royce Van Tassell
Executive Director
UAPCS