

April 10, 2015

Dear City of Cape Coral Municipal Charter Community,

I have recently completed a trip to Tallahassee as part of a group of forty community members representing various interests. During this trip I was able to stress to many of our local legislators our on-going issue regarding the ability for Lee County Schools to decide at their "discretion" whether or not to share Capital Outlay dollars (money that pays for the debt service on school buildings). I was very encouraged by HB 7037 which contains a provision that would mandate up to at least 40% of the Capital Outlay monies be shared with charter schools. Keep in mind, that this is not a new tax and Lee County Schools is already collecting this money. We are simply asking for these monies to travel with the students so that it is distributed equitably.

I have written an op-ed or "opposite the editorial page" that will be printed in this upcoming Sunday's Ft. Myers News Press. (The op-ed can be found below.) The Ft. Myers News Press editorial board posted on the following link:

<http://www.news-press.com/story/opinion/2015/04/09/public-schools-charter-money-share-districts-florida/25530479/>

How can you help? First, we need to make sure that the community understands that we are a Municipal Charter System and that we are unique and different than other charter systems. Second, if you have Facebook, please follow the link located in the article or go to:

https://www.facebook.com/TheNewsPress?_rdr

Please reference the April 8th 5:06 p.m. entry and post a positive comment in regards to how our system deserves our fair share. I have reviewed some of the comments currently posted and find many do not understand that we are not a box front store cookie cutter type of charter system. I also think it is important to note that we have four A+ rated schools, been in operation 10 years, and have over 3,000 students with a large waiting list. If you do not have Facebook then I would simply ask you to e-mail the Fort Myers News press using the e-mail icon on the left and top of the page by visiting:

<http://www.news-press.com/story/opinion/2015/04/09/public-schools-charter-money-share-districts-florida/25530479/>

www.CapeCharterSchools.org

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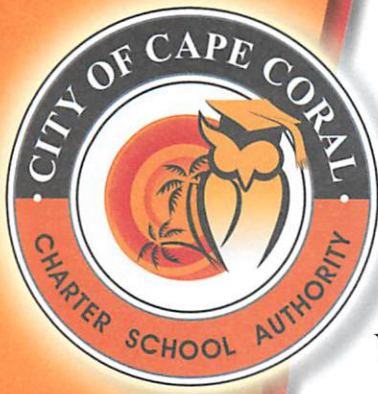
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You can also e-mail codonnell@news-press.com to share your thoughts.

I would request that you do not contact Lee County School Board Members. My goal is to merely educate the community on this topic and bring awareness about our amazing system. With this being said, please feel free to verbally share with anyone that may have a misunderstanding about our amazing system.

Your support in this matter is greatly appreciated,

A handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Nelson Stephenson".

Nelson Stephenson
Superintendent

(OP-ED Begins)

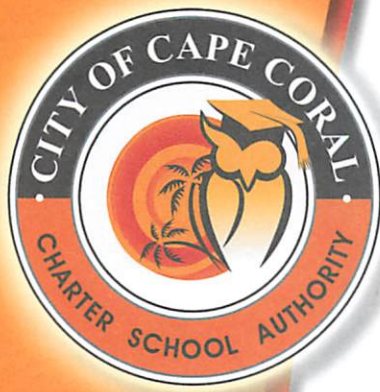
The City of Cape Coral Municipal Charter schools have well over 3,000 students in Cape Coral attending our schools on a daily basis. We operate four schools ranging from grades VPK-12 that provide a rigorous curriculum, an inspiring faculty, extremely successful athletic and arts programs, highly engaged families that provide volunteer service, and a supportive community. All of our four tuition free schools are A+ rated and all of our schools are deemed high performing by the Commissioner of Education. We have been in existence over 10 years and our growth has been phenomenal. With a very large waiting list of students, our schools have become a valuable, growing choice for our residents who seek an alternative to traditional public schools for their children.

Here is the issue: A tax of 1.5 mills is levied on all Florida residents for the purposes of capital expenses for public schools. Capital outlay monies are typically used to pay debt service on buildings, facilities maintenance, and new construction. As our successful system is growing we are facing a need to both increase our facilities student capacity and to provide on-going maintenance of our current facilities. Presently, local school districts have the discretion to share capital money with charter schools (F.S. 1011.71). Keeping in mind that ALL Florida residents pay this tax and that the local school district has decided to not share these monies with our system means that the monies paid by parents does not follow their children. We believe that funds our parents pay should follow their children.

As a non-profit, municipal system, we follow the same state guidelines for testing, class sizes, teacher certification, and accountability as our local school district.

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What rationale could be used to argue that although we are held to the same level of accountability, we should be hampered by not having our fair share of capital money?

In our efforts to ensure financial equity we are more encouraged than ever by HB 7037 which contains a provision that would allow our system to qualify for a portion of our fair share of the local property taxes based on our student population. Presently, our local school districts have the option to share these dollars. Our school district has consistently decided NOT to 'share' the capital money our parents pay into the system. We aren't asking for more than what our parents put into the system. We are not burdening the system, in fact we are relieving them of this responsibility for over 3,000 students. This money is raised by local families and is not an increase in taxes. In fact we would oppose any additional tax millage levy to provide capital needs of our schools. It is merely a requirement of the local school districts to share funds that are already being paid by local families.

Local school districts will most likely oppose this bill using the argument that it will be taking money away from students. This is simply not true and it is merely a requirement that at least a portion of the monies paid by local families will follow the student. Currently none of the capital outlay millage dollars currently being taxed and paid by our parents are returned to our school system. Our 3,000+ students certainly deserve to have the same facilities and opportunities that all Lee County students do.

We are a government sponsored charter school system with no affiliations to outside management companies. The City of Cape Coral Municipal Charter Schools has the courage and foresight to create schools and seek the best possible education for our constituent-students. Our parent/guardian taxpayers of these successful schools, rightfully seek the capital millage that they pay in property taxes, to follow their students so that their school of choice receives funding to maintain and improve those schools, which they paid for and which they choose. Raise taxes? No. Share what is ours fairly? Yes!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nelson Stephenson".

Nelson Stephenson M. Ed. M.P.A.
Superintendent
City of Cape Coral Municipal Charter Schools

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