

Augusta Update

Augusta/Richmond County to Open Two New Charter Schools

Innovative Education Management President, Randy Gaschler, visited with the Butler High School PTA (BHSPTSA) this past February. Discussing the benefits of parents taking positive action in reclaiming their children's education, Gaschler presented numerous strategies from his book, *Parent-Driven Schools*.

Gaschler's presentation ignited prompt action on the part of BHSPTSA leadership, as they presented a set of 15 questions to their School Board a week later, ranging from questions about facilities, to why parents were not invited to be more involved in the design of their student's education.

Unfortunately, the Board did not officially address the BHSPTSA's query until May (four months later). When the Board did not answer their questions promptly, the group then sent the list of questions to their State representatives and to State Department of Education officials.

In late May it was announced that two new charter schools would be opened in the Augusta/Richmond County school districts (an elementary and a middle school). While this legislation did not address the situation at Butler High School, it does open the door to future possibilities. The bill signed into law by Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue allows entire school districts to convert to charter school systems.

"Charter systems will allow local communities to have greater control, greater flexibility in deciding how to design their schools." The Governor said. "We're looking for innovation. We're looking for creativity."

Which is exactly what Randy Gaschler and Innovative Education Management proposes to parents and to school districts such as Butler High School.

While the proposal only allows five out of 100 school districts in Georgia to participate, according to Lisa Winebrenner, BHSPTSA President, it is a good start in a right direction. However, she believes there is still more work to be done. "I applauded our Board for their support in the audit trail (to the questions posed to them by the PTSA). But I am disappointed that they did not provide to us more information to questions we have the right to know...especially to our questions about the unacceptable return-on-investment school administrators provide."

The opening of the two new charters is a definite sign of progress, however, and provides momentum to the BHSPTSA drive for more accountability and more change with respect to improved conditions for local students to become lifelong learners.