



Charter Schools: *Catalysts for the next economy*

Earlier this year, President Obama made a rather startling pick when he tabbed Pittsburgh as the site for the G-20 world economic summit. The White House press corps tittered at the selection, but President Obama had good reason for choosing the summit host. Pittsburgh, a White House official explained, “is now renewed, giving birth to renewed industries that are creating the jobs of the future.” Thanks in large part to the city’s universities and its medical and technology sectors, Pittsburgh’s economic fortunes have improved since the collapse of Big Steel.

The appearance of world leaders in Pittsburgh this week will be a rewarding turn for the region, but it is also a reminder of our country’s critical need to compete in the world economy. It’s no secret that there is one area where the U.S. simply must do better in this regard: K-12 education.

“Our children will be competing with kids from around the world for the jobs of the future,” U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan told a gathering of superintendents last month. “Our only path to long-term economic security and higher productivity is to dramatically improve both the depth and breadth of education in this country.”

Charter schools are critical catalysts of this necessary transformation. President Obama has called for lifting caps on the number of charter schools and removing obstacles that prevent strong charter schools from serving more children.

The president won’t have to look far when he visits town this week to see exactly those kinds of

charter schools. The Pittsburgh region has several charter schools garnering national attention for the high-quality education they provide.

Downtown Pittsburgh’s City Charter High School, up the street from where the G-20 summit is being held, and Propel McKeesport were both recently identified as among the country’s *top performing charter schools by New Leaders for New Schools*, in a national review of student test data.

City Charter High was also one of just nine Allegheny County schools to be named in *US News & World Report’s “Best High Schools”*—and the only one with a significant percentage of minority and economically disadvantaged students. A TV crew from ABC’s *Good Morning America* came to the school last fall to highlight the school’s success.

Across the river, Manchester Academic Charter School is the only Allegheny county school in the last three years to receive the *US Department of Education’s Blue Ribbon designation*. 99% of its students are African-American.

Innovative schools like these are where the seeds for the next economy will be sown. We need more like them if we want to secure our region’s future. A vibrant charter school sector, like the one emerging in the Pittsburgh area, has a critical role in making this happen. It should be nurtured and encouraged to grow.

This series is brought to you by a consortium of Allegheny County charter schools.



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