



CHARTER SCHOOLS WITH A “CHRISTIAN NATIONALIST SPIN”



In Texas, a charter school uses creationist science texts; the section that covers the origin of life states, “In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth.”

At a charter school in North Carolina, students recite a daily oath that requires them, among other things, to avoid “overreliance” on “rational argument.”

At another—in Arizona—students in an eighth-grade history class were asked to list the positive aspects of slavery.

And in Colorado, one charter chain advertised a preference for hiring unlicensed teachers, and permitted employees to carry guns at work, in direct violation of the policy of the school district that authorized the school.

These are just a few examples cited in a [new report](#) about an expanding group of “classical” charter schools that embrace Christian Nationalism—defined in the report as viewing Christianity as a cultural and tribal identity that began with the founding of the nation and as imbued with a resentment that the world won’t stop changing. The report is titled, *A Sharp Turn Right: A New Breed of Charter Schools Delivers the Conservative Agenda*.

Charter schools receive public funds but are not required to abide by the same rules as regular public schools.

Charters that advertise themselves as “classical” or “traditional” tend to emphasize “early

and mid-20th century values, pedagogy, and curriculum,” write the report’s authors, journalist [Karen Francisco](#) and NEPC Fellow [Carol Burris](#), executive director of the [Network for Public Education](#), which published the study.

Francisco and Burris used keyword and name searches to identify 273 existing charter schools that “offer a classical curriculum and/or have websites designed to attract white conservative families.” Nearly half (47 percent) have opened since the inauguration of former President Donald Trump in 2017. The authors also identified 66 new schools scheduled to open in the next year.

Demographically, these schools look very different from the charter school population as a whole. While 29 percent of charter school students nationwide are white, more than half the students at the “right-wing” charters identified in the report are white. Just 17 percent of the right-wing charter school students qualify for the federal free or reduced-price meal program for lower-income families as compared to 48 percent of all charter school students.

The charter schools flagged in the report typically describe their curricula as “classical,” “back-to-basics,” or a combination of the two. Common instructional approaches include adopting curricula that stresses rote memorization; avoiding history lessons that portray the experiences of non-white, Christian populations, or portray the United States in a less than flattering light; and restricting required reading to books written by white men.

Christianity is a major focus—sometimes including Bible study, teacher-led prayers, and the singing of hymns.

The schools’ operational models also set them apart. For-profit companies run 29 percent of these schools—a rate nearly twice as high as is found in the overall charter sector.

Moreover, Francisco and Burris cite multiple examples of fraudulent practices engaged in by these right-wing charter schools, including self-dealing involving founders renting their own properties to charters at inflated rates, a “pay-to-play” model in which donations to a nonprofit charter school operator gave for-profit businesses an opportunity to sell their wares to the schools, and a scheme to create a hollow (fake) charter school whose only function was to funnel public funds into private religious schools.

“Charter schools took a sharp turn right and now serve a purpose never imagined by their early proponents,” Francisco and Burris write. “The only question that remains is whether moderate, progressive, and liberal-minded voters and politicians recognize where the run-away charter movement is headed.”

NEPC Resources on Charter Schools

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