

North Georgia Mom: Why I'm Supporting Amendment One

By Martha Zoller

On Nov. 6, Georgians will go to the polls to answer the second most important question after choosing a President. They will answer the question, "Shall the Constitution of Georgia be amended to allow state or local approval of public charter schools upon the request of local communities?"

As a lifelong conservative and supporter of public education, I'm voting yes and I hope you will, too.

I'm a graduate of Georgia public schools; I'm married to a doctor who is a product of Georgia public schools. All four of our children have attended Georgia public schools and colleges because I believe in them. We are involved parents who volunteered, mentored and expected a great deal from our children and their teachers and administrators.

In counties like ours in North Georgia, many parents already have choices in their school district thanks to public school boards. However, that's not true throughout the state. Many children are trapped in "dropout factories" with no options and school boards and administrations that are not open to more choices through the creation of public charter schools. Education should be about the children, not protecting the structure that educates them.

During my campaign for Congress, I was able to reconnect with retired teachers who taught my children who now live around North Georgia. I even ran into my own high school Chemistry and Physics teacher. Each was worried about the state of education in Georgia.

Because of our state's ranking in educating all students – a graduation rate of 67 percent, dead last among the 14 Southeastern states -- I have also been a long time supporter of school choice. The effort to bring more charter schools in Georgia can only help in our struggle to bring Georgia out of the bottom of educational rankings.

Amendment One is a divisive issue and that has generated too much misinformation. I've vacillated back and forth myself throughout this process. I've considered all the options and done research for myself and come to the conclusion, Amendment One is the best next step for Georgia education.

The old model of spending more money per pupil isn't working, and I just won't accept there are children who can't learn. What I know from my own experience as a mom, is that every child learns differently and if a parent has choices for their child's education, the parent and the child will be happier. Happy parents and children make successful students.

The need for this amendment was created when the Georgia Supreme Court threw out the law that created a longstanding state commission that helped create charter schools. In fact, Atlanta Public Schools, the home of one of the biggest cheating scandals in state history, was among the school districts that brought the lawsuit. Like too many other school systems, it didn't want competition and placed the status quo above what's best for students.

Unlike traditional public schools, public charter schools are held more accountable for their work with teaching children. If they don't produce results, the "charter" or contract with parents or others in the community who founded the school is revoked.

Opponents argue that not all charter schools are successful. That's true, but traditional public schools that fail students continue to operate for decades without any consequences.

Money is always a sore subject for some, but if approved, this amendment will not take a single dollar away from traditional public schools. Most important it creates the purest sense of local control – handing control of newly-created public charter schools over to parent-controlled boards instead of local school boards. T

I call that parent empowerment.

What separates us today in Georgia is education and opportunity. Adding to the options that all Georgia's children can participate in will level the playing field all Georgia's children. I'm voting "yes" on Amendment One and I hope that you will, too.

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