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NAACP fights hope for kids

By Ingrid Jacques



Cornell Brooks, president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), addresses the media, as Stephen Green, right, National Director of the Youth and College Division of the NAACP, and Roanoke's NAACP chapter president Brenda Hale, second from left, and vice president Gloria Randolph-King, listen outside of Roanoke General District Court Thursday, Sept. 8, 2016, in Roanoke, Va., after Brooks and Green faced trespassing charges for taking part in a six hour sit-in last month at U.S. Rep Bob Goodlatte's Roanoke office. (Heather Rousseau/The Roanoke Times via AP)
(Photo: Heather Rousseau / AP)

What's more important: Giving poor, minority children a shot at a good education, or ensuring the traditional public schools keep their education monopoly?

That's what the school choice debate boils down to, and ironically, the nation's leading civil rights organization for black equality and equity has weighed in on the side of the status quo.

Last weekend, the NAACP's board of directors called for a moratorium on new charter schools. This is the latest in a string of actions the group has taken to block innovative school choice programs around the country. The NAACP is much more interested in pleasing teachers unions (which donate generously to the organization) than it is about making sure black and disadvantaged children have a true opportunity to attend a decent school.

By taking this stance, the NAACP is siding with unions, which see students as dollar signs and ultimately treat them as property they don't want to share — regardless of what's in the best interest of the child.

Charter schools aren't perfect. But plenty of research shows that they have offered children a better education than they would have received in their neighborhood public school. This is

true in Detroit, where the charter school sector has flourished as Detroit Public Schools has failed financially and academically.

Given the choice, many parents are opting for what they see as a better environment for their children. Roughly 30 percent of students who attend charters are black, meaning more than 700,000 black children are in these schools nationwide.

In states that offer robust choice programs in the form of tax credits, vouchers and education savings accounts, minority families also flock to private schools. The NAACP has joined unions to fight these opportunities, too. This year, in its suit against the successful Florida tax credit scholarship program (benefiting more than 20,000 black students), the NAACP garnered criticism from other black groups, including a large coalition of African-American ministers in Florida. Martin Luther King III, the son of the civil rights icon, also voiced his support of the tax credits.

"We see no principled reason to fight an education program that is targeted exclusively at low-income children and has a 14-year track record of helping black students succeed," the pastors wrote.

The same argument holds for charter schools. A report last year from Stanford University's Center for Research on Education Outcomes examined the performance of urban charter schools and found the majority, including ones in Detroit, were outpacing their traditional counterparts.

Howard Fuller, founder of the Black Alliance for Educational Options and former superintendent of Milwaukee Public Schools, says it best. "For generations the NAACP has been at the forefront of the fight for political, educational, social and economic equality for black Americans," he observes. "But when we have tens of thousands of black families choosing charter schools, a moratorium to take that choice away is a step in the wrong direction. In many communities, these families would not have access to effective schools without charter schools."

The NAACP board has lost touch with its core mission when it comes to education. Members should start listening less to unions and more to parents.