

CHARTER SCHOOLS IN AMERICA

Posted on January 8, 2012 by Keghart



Category: [Opinions](#)



Gabriel Injejkian, translated by Vahe H. Apelian, 12 January 2012



*The original Armenian article was published in Asbarez' New Year special issue on Dec. 31, 2011. Gabriel Injejkian has read and approved this translation. For details on Ararat Charter School click [here](#). **Ed.***

What are Charter Schools and why do I think that they provide a golden opportunity to teach Armenian to the Armenian American students?

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What are Charter Schools and why do I think that they provide a golden opportunity to teach Armenian to the Armenian American students?

The laws governing Charter Schools in California were enacted in 1991. They came into effect because many public schools were not living up to the educational standards expected of them as evidenced by the poor academic performance in national achievement tests. Charter Schools come about in two ways. An existing public school may be converted to a Charter School; or an individual or an organization may start a Charter School.

The Charter Schools are semi-independent public schools. These schools are expected to outperform the public schools within their designated area as evidenced by the higher academic performance of their students in national achievement tests. If they succeed in their mission, their permit is renewed every five years. If they do not succeed, their permit is revoked.

Charter Schools must offer the students the state's mandated curriculum. Besides the mandated curriculum they may offer students additional subjects such as foreign languages, longer school days or academic year. Charter Schools are not permitted to teach religion. They do not have the right to refuse a student. In the event the number of students applying is more than the seats available, then the students will be chosen by lottery.

The state funds Charter Schools at the same rate as the public schools according to the number of the students enrolled. Charter Schools are not permitted to require parents to pay tuition. However, parents are permitted to make donations for the betterment of the school.

Why do I think that Charter Schools present a golden opportunity to teach Armenian language and culture to a much larger number of Armenian American students?

There was no Armenian School in the United States until 1964 when thanks to the overwhelming encouragement and support by the Armenians in Lebanon "Ferrahian" school was started in Encino, California with 12 students. During the following 25 years, 25 Armenian schools were established, enrolling around 6000 students.

The Armenian community in Los Angeles more than doubled during the last two decades during which time the only new Armenian School that was founded is the AGBU Vatche and Tamar Manoukian High School in Pasadena in 2006. However, in spite of more than doubling of the Armenian Americans, the number of the students attending Armenian schools has noticeably declined.

Presently there are approximately 60,000 Armenian American students in California. Less than ten percent (10%) attend regular private and one day Armenian schools. One of the most important causes for this sad state is definitely the cost of the tuition.

Times have changed. There was a time when the American public schools advocated the students from immigrant parents to shed away their culture and accept and adapt to the American culture. Nowadays the prevailing mentality is that we need to retain our ethnic language and culture to enrich the American culture.

The first Charter School in California to teach Armenian is the Ararat Charter School. It is situated in Van Nuys. The School was established two years ago by a group of self-appointed pioneer educators. It started with 120 students from kindergarten to third grade. This year the number of the students increased to 257 and we added a fourth grade. To accommodate the growing number of students we established three more kindergarten classes as well. We had 140 applicants for the 66 available seats. To our great regret we had to turn down those who were not lucky enough to have their names drawn in the lottery.

Ararat Charter School is the only Charter School in Los Angeles that teaches Armenian and Spanish languages and cultures to every student starting with kindergarten. Ninety-Five percent (95%) of its students are ethnic Armenians. The only Armenian School in Michigan, Alex and Marie Manougian High School in Southfield, was chartered in 1995 and also teaches Armenian language as an inherent part of its curriculum.

Let us preserve and improve the excellent private Armenian schools we have established over the past decades. Let us also have more of these semi-independent Charter Schools as well.

Honestly, I hope that it will not take additional decades for our community leaders to start establishing Charter Schools to teach Armenian language and culture to the ninety percent (90%) of the ethnic Armenian students who do not or more importantly cannot afford to attend the private

For further details you may contact me at 818-885-5232. I will gladly respond to your questions.

