

## Bill Cosby supports charter school movement at national conference

Written by Harry Colbert, Jr.  
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Educators from around the country descended upon Minneapolis this past week to celebrate 20 years of charter schools in the United States.

Pictured: Deborah Kenny, founder of Harlem Villages Academies talks with Dr. Bill Cosby about improving education through charter schools.

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS) held its four-day conference in the city with aims on improving education and learning strategies for the nation's children.

The group chose Minneapolis to host its 20th anniversary, in part due to the fact that in 1991 Minnesota was the first state to pass public charter school legislation and a year later the nation's first charter school, City Academy High School, was formed in St. Paul.

"We are excited to have this chance to reflect on the rapid growth and major success of the public charter school movement two decades after the first public charter opened its doors," said Nina Rees, president and CEO of the NAPCS. "Public charter schools are now entrusted with providing the education for over two million students, and we are looking to a future in which every family has access to quality public school options for their children."

Famed actor and activist, Dr. Bill Cosby said education funding is at a perilous low and the poorer communities are hurting most.

"When (children) see the building that says 'education' is boarded-up, but the building looks

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strong, it tells the children education is not important; and therefore they are not important,” said Cosby. “Nothing works better than people getting together to fight for something. Education is no different.”

Cosby said a reason the charter school movement is successful is in large part due to the educators.

“Teachers do not become teachers because they want to work for 10 years and retire rich,” said Cosby. “They teach because they care. They are obsessed.”

Cosby pointed to educator Deborah Kenny as an example of someone obsessed with educating children. Kenny is the founder of Harlem Village Academies in New York. She was recently honored as New York’s top educator.

Kenny said the success of her charter school is because of the collaborative nature between administration and teachers.

“The way you get the most out of teachers is by giving them a stake; a sense of ownership,” said Kenny. “It is the people on the front line who know the issues best and are best equipped to solve these issues.”

Cosby cited an example of why many non-charter public schools are failing.

“(Kenny’s) school is on the fourth floor of a building that houses a regular public school on the first three floors,” said Cosby. “Now this woman has been honored by the state; CNN has profiled this woman and her students for all the good they are doing, and Deborah, how many teachers, how many administrators have come up to see what you are doing?”

“Zero,” replied Kenny.

“When will educators wake up,” asked Cosby.

During the conference, the NAPCS inducted area educator Eric Mahmoud, founder of Seed Academy, Best Academy, Sister Academy and Harvest Preparatory School. Best and Harvest have been recognized as being two of the top schools in the state in closing the achievement gap for African-American students.

According to the NAPCS, there are 5,600 charter schools operating in 41 states throughout the U.S., servicing nearly two million students.