The Sto-Rox School District recently rejected a charter school proposal. This prompted a teachers' union official to declare victory and state that the district "has a school board, superintendent, administration and teachers who care very deeply about the success of students." This of course is a predictable comment by teacher unions as they succeed once again in preventing any meaningful school choice-something they have been overwhelmingly successful in doing for years. Nonetheless, the union official's comment begs the question; if they really cared about their students' success, wouldn't they want them to attain high levels of achievement?

A quick look at the performance by Sto-Rox students on the state's PSSA exams does not show academic excellence-far from it. In 2010, the percentage of students in the District scoring at the proficient level or better in math was 51.3 while in reading it was 42.1. Keep in mind this is all eligible students taking the test in the District. Scores were better for those in the elementary school (65.8 in math and 50.8 in reading) than those in the high school (39.2 and 36) or middle school (46.6 and 39.1). Thus, as is true in many districts, Sto-Rox's overall scores were buoyed by the younger students whose scores offset the abysmal scores by 11th graders.

The high schoolers are a year away from leaving school and entering college or the work force. What kind of preparation for life after school do they have in light of these unconscionably poor

scores? Not a very good one that's for sure. Are the teachers who are so concerned about the students' success following up with the graduates to see how things are going five years after graduation? That would demonstrate really deep concern for their students' success.

Jump ahead to 2012. PSSA scores have gotten worse. In the overall student population, the percent of students scoring proficient or more in math fell to 49.9 and 39.2 in reading. Statewide, 75.7 percent of students scored at the proficient or advanced level in math and 71.9 percent in reading. Clearly, Sto-Rox's results fall woefully short of the statewide averages.

And this cannot be blamed on a lack of spending. For the 2010-2011 school year (the most recent data available) the Sto-Rox district spent $23.4 million educating 1,428 students-a per pupil spending level of roughly $16,400. Meanwhile, the statewide average per pupil amount was nine percent lower at just over $14,900. And as we demonstrated in last week's *Policy Brief*
(among many others) there is no clear correlation between expenditures and performance on PSSA exams.

Apparently, given the poor score and the worsening student scores over the last couple of years, there is a huge disconnect between the statement that teachers and the administration care deeply about their students' success and their willingness to find some way of helping them achieve success.

What we are hearing from the union official is merely self-serving rhetoric. How can anyone who is truly concerned about student performance in the public school education system as

currently constituted and operated possibly believe that the results we see in places like Sto-Rox are the best we can hope for and there is no need to change anything? Especially if that change gives students and their parents a real choice of schools to attend other than the public monopoly schools.