

Dear Belle Isle Voter,

It has recently come to my attention that some residents of Belle Isle are unclear on my position towards Cornerstone Charter Academy. So I wanted to take a moment to make sure residents have all the facts.

Having a local school in our community benefits families with Cornerstone students as well as those without. The benefits to families with Cornerstone students are clear. A school within our community is easily accessible to parents and students. It also gives parents the peace of mind that their children are safe and nearby.

Besides safety and convenience, a small charter school like Cornerstone brings the benefit of flexibility to respond to the particular interests and needs of our unique community. I appreciate that Cornerstone requires parent involvement and volunteer hours to ensure that the parents are active participants in their children's education progress.

In addition, Cornerstone brings tangible benefits to the many Belle Isle homeowners who do not have children attending the school. A good school within our community attracts younger home buyers and increases property values throughout our city. I'm sure this economic benefit is something we can all appreciate.

I personally have a vested interest in Cornerstone Charter Academy, both as a homeowner and as a grandparent whose grandson may one day attend Cornerstone. I want to ensure the success of our charter school as well as the financial well-being of our city. To that end, here are my thoughts on some of the ways we could improve Cornerstone:

I am opposed to micromanagement of schools by government officials. The proper role of a school board is to set school policy and hire a school administrator who will run the school on a day-to-day basis. I have been told that we have an excellent administrator at Cornerstone. It is now time for our city government to step back and allow her to do her job instead of attempting to micromanage the school from City Hall.

Furthermore, I do not support the idea of our city paying over a half-million dollars per year to a for-profit company to manage Cornerstone Charter Academy when our school's administration is more than capable of handling this task. I believe that spending taxpayer money intended for the education of Cornerstone students to instead benefit a corporation like Academica is a misuse of your tax dollars.

I also echo the sentiments of many Belle Isle residents who take issue with the methods our city government used to procure the school facilities and establish the school. Just as with the Belle Isle Fire Department, many residents felt betrayed by the way our elected city officials pushed this huge financial commitment through without any effort to give residents advance notice that our city was even considering the purchase of a charter school. Openness inspires citizen confidence, and I believe that a little extra effort to notify the public when important issues are coming up before the Council is a vital step towards establishing real transparency in Belle Isle.

But regardless how you feel about the way our charter school was procured and established, it is vital that residents of Belle Isle continue to support Cornerstone. Our city is committed to Cornerstone and we cannot afford for it to fail. While our city officials are fond of stating that the City of Belle Isle is not directly responsible for the \$9.6 million dollar debt we incurred to purchase the school facilities, the fact is that failure of the charter school could financially devastate Belle Isle.

Do you still have questions for me about Cornerstone Charter Academy or anything else? Please give me a call at (205) 253-8841 or write me at sue@sueforbelleisle.com.

Yours Truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sue Nielsen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sue Nielsen

Candidate for City Council