



Gov. Rick Scott visited North Broward Academy of Excellence, a charter school, in September 2010. (Photo courtesy of Rick Scott.)

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As public school students and educators throughout Florida prepared to return to schools that have fewer teachers, larger classes and smaller budgets, a for-profit charter school company, Charter Schools USA, paid for 2,000 employees to attend a pep rally. The rally included controversial charter schools proponent Michelle Rhee and Gov. Rick Scott — the man who pushed for \$1.35 billion in cuts for public schools and increased funding for charter and virtual schools.

Charter schools are privately run, often for profit, but publicly funded.

Addressing the conspicuous display of spending at such a lean time for public education, Scott said, “Leave it to the local educators to decide how to best spend their money.”

As the *Orlando Sentinel* pointed out, Scott was *not* referring to local *public* schools, but rather his “baby” — charter schools.

Even more striking — given that one of the strongest criticisms against charter schools is that they are largely unaccountable — was the company’s decision not to reveal what the rally cost.

“Any of the extra events that Charter Schools USA puts on come out of their own budget,” said spokesman Colleen Reynolds. “It does not affect the schools at all.”

Charter Schools USA makes its money by charging a management fee to run the schools. That money is a percentage of the \$150 million in tax money that the state pays the company to run its 25 Florida schools. At just one school in Osceola County, Charter Schools USA picked up \$822,182 in administrative fees this year.

And the tax money seems to be increasing for charter schools even as it decreases for public schools.