

For Embargoed Release

July 10, 2006

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INDIANAPOLIS CHARTER SCHOOL INITIATIVE WINS GOVERNMENT INNOVATIONS AWARD

UNIQUE PROGRAM RUN BY MAYOR'S OFFICE TO RECEIVE \$100K PRIZE

WASHINGTON, DC — For its commitment to accountability and its outstanding success record, Mayor Bart Peterson's Charter Schools Initiative in Indianapolis, Indiana has won an Innovations in American Government Award. The award, which carries a prize of \$100,000, is sponsored by the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government and is administered in partnership with the Council for Excellence in Government.

City mayors often get the blame when schools fail to live up to citizens' standards. In 2001, Indianapolis Mayor, Bart Peterson, decided to exploit that dynamic for a Charter Schools Initiative that holds him personally accountable and gives him unprecedented authority. The result is one of the most successful, high-performing charter school sectors in the nation.

The Indianapolis Charter Schools Initiative brings unique accountability to charter school authorizing by running the chartering process straight out of the Mayor's Office. As a result, the Mayor's Office has developed a state of the art chartering operation. This includes a rigorous application process for new charter schools to ensure that only applicants with a sound plan and the capacity to execute it get charters. The Mayor's Office developed a comprehensive accountability plan to monitor charter schools' results and report them widely to parents and the public. Schools are required to test students in the fall and spring to ensure they are performing. Expert site teams visit the schools regularly to evaluate their effectiveness and to provide them useful feedback. The views of parents and teachers are regularly sought through surveys and focus groups. All of this has attracted to Indianapolis some of the strongest national charter school operators, including KIPP, The Big Picture Company, Lighthouse Academies, National Heritage Academies, and Expeditionary Learning. According to Mayor Peterson, "It's all about leadership."

"By placing the mayor's office squarely on the point, this innovation combines high level support with highly visible accountability in order to produce public school success," said Stephen Goldsmith, Director of the Innovations in American Government Award at Harvard's Ash Institute. Goldsmith himself is a former Mayor of Indianapolis who, like Peterson, won an Innovations Award during his tenure. "It's a great use of the Mayor's role as elected leader, city ambassador, and lobbyist and it's all to the obvious benefit of students."

The education benefit is measurable: there's been a 25% increase in the number of students passing state education exams from the Mayor's charter schools over a two year period; other Indianapolis schools show only a 1% increase in that number. Patricia McGinnis, President and CEO of the Council for Excellence in Government, said, "The improvement in education comes from this program's real innovation, which is assigning responsibility *and* accountability in the Mayor's Office. They've made buck-passing impossible."

The Mayor's Charter Schools Initiative is one of seven programs receiving this year's Innovations in American Government Awards. Each winner takes a unique approach to meeting community needs and achieving real results. Because each of these programs is a model for government's capacity to do good, and do it well, the \$100,000 prize specifically supports dissemination to other jurisdictions.

The Innovations in American Government Awards honor city, county, state, tribal and federal government initiatives that are truly creative, measurably effective, meet a significant need, and have the potential to be transferred to other jurisdictions. The 2006 award winners, selected from an initial pool of 1,000 applicants, include two federal, two state, one county, and two municipal programs. The efforts improve conservation, healthcare, housing, education, social services, and law enforcement. The winners will be formally announced this evening at dinner event in Washington, DC.

The Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation (www.ashinstitute.harvard.edu) at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government fosters excellence in government around the world in order to generate and strengthen democracy. Through its awards program, research, publications, curriculum support, and global network, the Institute champions critical milestones in creative and effective governance and democratic practice.

The Council for Excellence in Government (www.excelgov.org) is a national, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization whose mission is to improve government performance by strengthening results-oriented management and creative leadership in the public sector, and to build understanding by focusing public discussion on government's role and responsibilities.

The Mayor's Charter School Initiative's May 25, 2006 presentation to the National Selection Committee, chaired by David Gergen, at Harvard's Kennedy School can be seen at the Ash Institute's website: <http://www.ashinstitute.harvard.edu/Ash/news.htm>. For more information on the Innovations in American Government program and this year's winners, visit www.ashinstitute.harvard.edu or www.excelgov.org.