

Charter school leader joins Milken venture

By George B. Sánchez, Staff Writer

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After years of fighting the education establishment to expand rights for charter schools, the head of the California Charter Schools Association announced her abrupt departure Wednesday to join an international education company.

Educators across **Los Angeles** were surprised by the announcement from Caprice Young, who said she couldn't pass up the opportunity to create global education programs with Knowledge Universe.

The Santa Monica-based company was founded by financier-turned-philanthropist Michael Milken and his brother Lowell.

Over the past five years, Young led efforts to expand the rights for charters and gain more funding and campus space for schools that many school districts and unions viewed with skepticism.

Young, a former Los Angeles Unified School District board president, helped grow the movement by more than 300 schools, with a current enrollment of 250,000 students statewide.

Some colleagues were not shocked, however, noting that Young's ambition drove her to create a cohesive advocacy organization for charters that changed the educational landscape.

"Her successor will have a lot of challenges, but she has created a real infrastructure," said Nelson Smith, president of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.

"The organization itself is a support for schools. This is what charter support organizations should do."

He credited Young with making charters an essential part of discussions about education policy in California.

Young said she was approached a few weeks ago by Knowledge Universe. She accepted a position as vice president of business development and alliances last Thursday.

At Knowledge Universe, Young will make an annual salary higher than the \$200,000 she earned at the charter group, but she said it was the prospect of going international that attracted her to the post.

"It's such a really amazing opportunity to create a vision for kids globally," Young said.

Neither Young nor her colleagues are worried about the future of the charter association.

"I have fewer concerns than I did five years ago," she said. "It's not a pilot anymore. It's a part of

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mainstream education that deserves support and recognition."

In the five years Young was president, charter schools and their political clout grew.

On behalf of the charter community, Young was a key insider in negotiations over the LAUSD's proposed \$7billion education bond measure going to voters in November.

While the measure offered \$450 million to charters, Young and the association have been reluctant to lend their support, but are still talking with district officials on issues such as property ownership of new campus sites.

LAUSD Senior Deputy Superintendent Ray Cortines credited Young with not only improving relations between district officials and the charter community, but prompting the district to improve its own programs.

"She has forced the system to be more competitive instead of griping and carping," he said.

Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa praised Young's contribution to education in Los Angeles, starting with her tenure on the school board.

"From Day One in the LAUSD boardroom, Caprice has understood the need to reinvigorate our public school system with small, independent community schools," Villaraigosa said in a written statement.

"She leaves a legacy as one of the pioneers of an independent school movement that will fundamentally transform this district."

Ben Austin, executive director of the Los Angeles Parents Union, praised Young for her advocacy and understanding of education reform, the charter movement and school district bureaucracy.

"I think the critical perspective Caprice brings to the table is not just leveraging change for charters, but system change within the district," Austin said.

Rick Piercy, chairman of the charter association board, said a search committee for a new president has been formed. The seven-person group will meet Wednesday to go over the job description and discuss a national search.

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Los Angeles Times

<http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-young21-2008aug21,0,4020586.story>

From the Los Angeles Times

Caprice Young leaving California charter schools group

After building the state's group for five years, she will become a vice president at a Michael Milken education firm.

By Howard Blume

Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

August 21, 2008

Caprice Young, who developed the state's charter schools association into a powerful advocacy and support group, is leaving for an education-related firm. Under the five-year stewardship of Young, urban charters serving low-income and minority students exploded in number.

This fall, about 150 charters will operate in the Los Angeles Unified School District -- more than in any school system in the nation.

Charters are independently operated public schools that are free from some regulations governing traditional schools.

As president, Young leveraged the California Charter Schools Assn. into "a major player in state education policy" and also "a forceful voice for quality, not just in California but around the country," said Nelson Smith, president of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. "She redefined what these organizations are about."

In fact, the size of the [California association's](#) budget and staff dwarfs that of Smith's national alliance.

Young altered the focus of what had been a libertarian-leaning, suburban-oriented and loosely coordinated group of education entrepreneurs. She pushed to start charters in neighborhoods where schools had been low-achieving for generations.

"This is a huge loss for charter schools," said former Mayor Richard Riordan, who once employed Young as an assistant deputy mayor and later helped fund her election to one term on the L.A. Unified Board of Education. "Charter schools give children of poverty in the inner city a chance to succeed in life and go on to college.

"Caprice made people aware of how well charter schools are doing, and she opened up the door for all schools to challenge and help each other."

Some academics and union leaders say charters frequently attract more motivated students, which, they say, explains why some post better results than traditional schools. That contention has been difficult to prove or disprove.

Young's charter innovations included beginning a quality certification program and setting up more than \$40 million in revolving loan funds to help start-ups and pay for facilities. Her association also organized management training and trimmed schools' insurance costs by pooling resources and organizing training sessions.

"The new charters are starting with much more momentum and higher quality than many used to have at the beginning," said Young, 42.

Young accepted the charter job after a union-backed effort defeated her school board reelection bid in 2003. With the association, the strategically combative Young brokered favorable terms in the state budget and filed lawsuits against school systems that didn't provide classrooms for charters. On Wednesday, she reiterated her vow to oppose L.A. Unified's November school bond election unless district leaders cut charters a better deal.

About half of Young's \$12-million budget comes from private philanthropy; the rest is from dues and fees for services.

One donor has been the Milken Family Foundation. Michael Milken owns [Knowledge Universe](#), where Young will become a vice president. Her role in the Santa Monica offices of the international firm will include developing primary and secondary schools here and abroad. The firm operates early childhood centers, provides online learning to schools and teacher training, among other ventures.

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