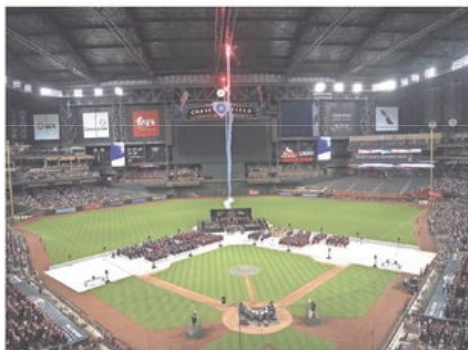


Valley & State



Fireworks begin during Arizona State University's undergraduate commencement ceremony at Chase Field on Monday night. PHOTOS BY HANCK BERTHOE/REPUBLIC



Founders of charter cash in on N.Y. condo

Owning a charter school operation might be as close as it gets to owning a professional-sports franchise. Better, even. Taxpayers give them money to build up their business and make themselves even more wealthy without raising a fuss. Pro football, basketball, baseball and hockey owners must be wildly jealous. Look at the folks who founded BASIS Charter Schools, Michael and Olga Block. These are public schools. They're funded with tax dollars. You're money.

In fact, as The Arizona Republic's Craig Hartz pointed out in his May 7 article on [azcentral.com](#), BASIS receives more in taxes per pupil funding than traditional public schools. At the same time, BASIS asks parents to "donate" at least \$1,000 per child each year, which it says is used to improve facilities pay-ment of a de facto tuition that is way, way cheaper than private school (because taxpayers are funding the rest.) Essentially, BASIS Charter Schools, a tax-exempt non-profit corporation, gets to operate like a private company while using the public's money. And the founders — among others affiliated with the operation — have done very well.

As Hartz so succinctly pointed out: As Scottsdale parents were reeling yet another solicitation for donations to pay teachers, the Blocks made a \$24 million down payment on an \$24 million condominium in New York City, property records show.

Their Manhattan home is in a 40-story building with "breathtaking panoramic" of the city, an infinity pool, and an indoor/outdoor theater, according to a sales brochure. It is located near two private BASIS schools controlled by the Blocks. Tuition at these schools is more than \$30,000 a year.

Arizona property records show the Blocks also own homes in Tucson and Scottsdale, where BASIS and BASISed are headquartered. Perhaps you remain one of those individuals who believe charter schools

HIGHER DEGREES

Hundreds of students from both the University of Arizona and Arizona State University celebrated graduation on Monday in downtown Phoenix.

More than 80 students graduated from the downtown branch of the University of Arizona's College of Medicine during the day Monday, after parading through downtown with a bagpipe band. The downtown arm of the school opened in 2007, when Arizona was in the midst of a doctor shortage, the university said. The school has conferred degrees to more than 430 students since then.

On Monday evening, a group of the more than 15,000 students graduating from ASU this month celebrated their commencement at Chase Field. ASU's graduation events began Saturday and continue through May 12.



Tiana Blank smiles as she leads students to their University of Arizona College of Medicine's graduation ceremony in Phoenix.



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