



THE ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT • 2009

Charter Schools

An Overview

As our nation endures the challenges of an economic crisis and struggles to remain competitive, the cries for accountability across all public sectors are deafening. We are at a crossroads in the American experience where we can either tackle the priorities that will most directly affect our future or simply give in to the status quo and let history repeat itself. There is no greater investment in rebuilding our nation than fixing our public schools. To do so, lawmakers must boldly embrace education reform. Today.

Lawmakers should look no further than the 4,600 charter schools serving 1.4 million students to see these five pillars of reform at work. Charter schools are innovative *public* schools designed by educators, parents or civic leaders open and attended by *choice*, free from most rules and regulations governing conventional public schools...and succeeding.

Performance-based accountability is the hallmark of charter schools. Unlike conventional public schools that remain open year after year despite their inability to manage a school or raise student achievement, charter schools close if they fail to perform according to their charter. And while opponents claim that charter schools are not being held accountable or that only “responsible” charters should remain open, the data on closed charter schools across the states proves that the performance-based accountability inherent in the charter school concept is working—especially in states with strong and clear charter laws.

This report is the first time the Center for Education Reform has provided a state-by-state analysis of closed charter schools. Previous reports provided only a national overview of the data. Through this in-depth look at each state’s closed charter schools it is evident that strong state laws ensure accountability. We found that those states with multiple and independent authorizers provided stronger, more objective oversight to ensure the successful charter schools remained open and those that failed to perform were closed. The research shows that accountability is lost in states with weak charter laws and poor processes to vet schools and collect student assessment data.

The state-by-state pages within the report offer a clear picture of the states whose charter schools are making the grade and those where there is room for improvement. Knowing where charter schools are achieving and the reasons why 12 percent of the nation’s charter schools have closed is important to understanding what makes a school successful. Success starts with creating strong policy environments in states that provide educators with the flexibility to innovate while holding them accountable for student results.