



Today

CHARTER SCHOOLS

Quality Educational Options that Improve All Schools



JUNE 2011

Charter schools are innovative public schools designed by educators, parents or civic leaders that are open by choice, accountable for results and free from most unnecessary rules and regulations governing conventional public schools. Today, over 5,400 charter schools serve more than 1.7 million children across the country. For the 2010-11 school year, 465 new charter schools opened — an increase of nine percent over the previous year.

STUDENT SUCCESS

In an “apples-to-apples” comparison between charter schools and their closest traditional public schools with similar demographics, researcher Dr. Caroline Hoxby, currently at Stanford University, found that in New York City by the time a charter school student has reached the end of eighth grade, s/he will be scoring about 30 points higher in math than if s/he had been lotteried-out and remained in a conventional public school.

In **Colorado**, 85 percent of charter elementary schools made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), compared to 73 percent of conventional elementary schools. Eighty-one percent of charter middle schools also made AYP, compared to only 49 percent of conventional middle schools.

In **New Orleans**, the number of fourth grade students who met or exceeded grade level in English rose from 44 percent in 2005 to 59 percent in 2009. Eight graders who met or exceeded grade level increased from 26 percent to 42 percent of students.

Eighty-one percent of all charter schools in **Georgia** made AYP compared to 79 percent of traditional public schools.

At SUNY-authorized schools in **New York**, charter students are performing better than their non-charter peers. Eighty percent of students in grades three through eight scored at or above proficiency in ELA in SUNY schools, compared with 77 percent of all public school students. In math, 92 percent of students scored at or above proficiency compared with 86 percent of all public school students.

ALL SCHOOLS DO BETTER

Research has shown that charter schools have a “ripple effect” on other schools. Pressure brought to bear on traditional schools causes them to do more and do it better. A few examples:

In Thomas County, **Georgia**, where in an effort to raise its graduation rate from below 70 percent, the district opened the Bishop Hall Charter School. By the end of the school's first year, the county's overall graduation rate increased to 80 percent, and rose to 90 percent in the second year.

Indianapolis Superintendent Eugene White, after calling for a moratorium on charters, said, “Charter schools have been a pain and now they are motivated... We will no longer feel sorry for our situation or make excuses for being urban and poor. We will now find new ways to create better educational options and opportunities.”

In **San Diego**, the popularity of charter schools spanning grades K-8 prompted the district to expand seven conventional elementary schools up to grade eight in an effort to compete.

IMPORTANT FACTS ABOUT CHARTER SCHOOL LAWS



Forty states and the District of Columbia have enacted charter school laws. Of those, only 12 are considered “strong” laws where schools and children can flourish. Not all charter school legislation is created equal, and the strength of a state's charter law is often a predictor of charter success. Weak charter school laws constrict operations, impose burdens, stifle creativity and require charters to rely heavily on existing education rules and bureaucracies, which discourage applicants.

1 AUTHORIZERS MATTER

An authorizer is an entity or body approved by a state legislature to bring into existence charter schools. Authorizers set up processes and approve charter schools and are accountable for managing and monitoring schools' progress in complying with all applicable laws.

The term “multiple” or “independent” authorizers is used to describe a component in law that permits authorizing by entities such as universities, new independent state agencies, nonprofit organizations and/or mayors. In addition, state boards that approve charter schools on appeal may also become an authorizer.

Local school boards are often unable or unwilling to have fair and impartial processes to vet charter schools, and many that do approve charter schools create friction between the schooling entities. Alternative authorizers are needed to ensure charter school quality and growth.

16 states have independent or multiple chartering authorities (*Georgia's semi-independent Charter Schools Commission was recently ruled unconstitutional by the state Supreme Court. It is unclear what will happen next.*)

Arizona	Minnesota	Oklahoma
Colorado	Missouri	Pennsylvania
District of Columbia	Nevada	South Carolina
Idaho	New York	Utah
Indiana	Ohio	Wisconsin (<i>only in Milwaukee</i>)
Michigan		

2 CHARTER LAWS ARE CONSTITUTIONAL

Lawmakers in every state have grappled with this issue. Case law now exists attesting to the constitutionality of charter schools across the nation, even those where school board control is paramount. While interpretations may vary, courts have consistently ruled that wherever a state legislature is tasked with the authority to establish and fund public education, it may create systems for the establishment of other public schools without violating the Constitution. These same cases and legal analyses have also confirmed that states are obligated to provide charter schools the same funding pools that conventional public schools receive (i.e. federal, state and local). State legislators or state attorneys who argue otherwise are often hiding their opposition to charter schools behind a constitutional cloud, when in reality their disagreements are based on politics or policy, not the intent or direction of the law.

Charter schools' constitutionality has been upheld by courts in more than a dozen states, including California, Colorado, Michigan, New Jersey and Ohio.

CHARTER SCHOOLS WORK WHEN LAWS ENSURE:

- 1) Innovative, independent authorizers
- 2) Equitable funding streams like other public schools
- 3) Accountability for results
- 4) Flexibility from unnecessary bureaucracy
- 5) Control over revenues and spending
- 6) Freedom in employee and union contracts
- 7) Opportunity for growth

3 EQUITY IS PARAMOUNT

All state charter laws mandate a funding formula, which in most cases require both local and state funds to be paid to charters. Despite language that requires states or local districts to fund charters in ways that are “commensurate” or “proportional”, charters rarely receive what is intended and when they do, it's often because the law fixes charter funding at disproportionately low levels.

Laws must be clear - charter schools are PUBLIC schools. Their students should be funded like all other public school students with identical funding amounts and funding streams. Charters thrive in states that fund them equitably; they are challenged when they are not.



Students from D.C.'s Friendship Public Charter School - Chamberlain Campus

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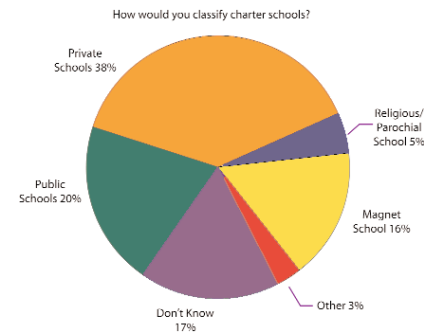
Q WHY CHARTER SCHOOLS?

A PERFORMANCE-BASED ACCOUNTABILITY.

Actions have consequences. This is one of life's basic lessons. Accountability is the hallmark of charter schools. Charters are open by choice, so parents have the option — not the requirement — to choose them. Charters are held accountable to the public for the same testing and performance standards as every other public school in their state. That makes charters work harder, because the consequence of failing to perform is inevitable closure, contrary to failing conventional public schools. Since the first school opened in 1992, about 13 percent of all charter schools that ever opened have closed, showing the power of this performance-based accountability.

Q WHO SUPPORTS CHARTER SCHOOLS? A TO KNOW THEM IS TO LOVE THEM.

Support for charter schools grows with knowledge. But Americans suffer from information “underload” when it comes to charter schools, according to a national poll conducted by The Center for Education Reform. Only 20 percent of those interviewed across the country could properly identify a charter school as a public school. However, once explained, nearly 80 percent embraced the concept.



- ③ The biggest support came from Not-yet-Moms, Southerners and South Central Dwellers.
- ③ Hispanics, blacks, single moms and parents of children currently enrolled in conventional public schools were also on board.
- ③ Charter schools enjoy “tri-partisan” support, according to the same poll. Republicans (87 percent), Democrats (74 percent) - especially women Democrats (77 percent), and Independents (70 percent) would all “green-light” community efforts to create these new public schools.

SERVING STUDENTS MOST IN NEED, DESPITE FEWER RESOURCES

Contrary to the claim that charters “cherry pick” students, charter schools serve a disproportionately disadvantaged student population. According to CER's 2010 Annual Survey of



America's Charter Schools, half of charter school students fall into categories defined as at-risk (50 percent), minority (52 percent) or low-income (54 percent) — qualifying for free and reduced lunch. However, 39 percent of all responding charter schools said they do not participate in the federal free and reduced lunch program for a variety of reasons, but especially to avoid the red tape.

On average, charter schools receive between 20 and 30 percent fewer dollars per student than conventional public schools, and as a result, proficiently maximize resources. In addition, most charter schools do not receive funding to cover facility costs, unlike conventional public schools.