



CHARTER SCHOOLS: ^{Today}
CHANGING THE FACE OF AMERICAN EDUCATION

THE Center for Education Reform



STORIES
of
INSPIRATION, STRUGGLE & SUCCESS

2007

Center for Education Reform



2007 STORIES *of* INSPIRATION, STRUGGLE & SUCCESS

By Joe Williams

February 2007

The Center for Education Reform (CER) creates opportunities for and challenges obstacles to better education for America's communities.

Founded in 1993 to translate ideas into action, CER combines education policy with grassroots advocacy to work deep within the nation's communities to foster positive and bold education reforms.

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ISBN 978-0-9646028-2-3

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INTRODUCTION

Since its inception, The Center for Education Reform (CER) has tracked the progress of America's charter schools, their trials and tribulations, and their impact on the entirety of the public education system. As we pronounced in 2000 in a book on the subject, charter schools are indeed changing the face of American education. While much has changed since then, with an explosion in six years from fewer than 1,700 to more than 4,000 schools operating today, the story of these schools continues to chronicle a message of inspiration, struggle, and success.

Such stories are detailed in this report, by award-winning author and journalist Joe Williams. It is a window into the impact charter schools are having in district-wide education strategies. Stories about the "Ripple Effect" illuminate how school choice and competition can inspire education leaders to focus their energies on improving outcomes for children.

Power and money also play a big role in the charter school story. These nearly "deadly sins" lurk behind the obstacles which state and local bureaucracies and teachers unions cause that distort the education mission with efforts to protect jobs and the status quo rather than functioning primarily to improve outcomes for children. The growth and popularity of charter schools pose a threat to powerful political interests that respond with tactics to thwart the very success our nation increasingly demands of its public school system.

Somehow, despite opposition and challenges from many quarters, charter schools find the recipe for success. These are the stories of determined educators, often working with the children traditional public schools have seemingly given up on, who inspire their students to achieve an academic success some never knew was possible. We hope the lessons learned from successes lead full circle to more ripples that improve public education for all.

Consider the larger picture as you read the individual charter school stories; see where patterns exist, pockets of hope, as well as entrenched barriers. This is the true story of charter schools today – a part of a nationwide school reform transformation that seeks to inspire and deliver on the promise of a quality education, through choice and competition, to every student.



Jeanne Allen
President

The Center for Education Reform

THE RIPPLE EFFECT OF CHARTER SCHOOLS: A LOOK AT THEIR IMPACT ON PUBLIC EDUCATION

Do public charter schools help create conditions that can improve public education as a whole? Skeptics once argued that with 80,000 public schools nationwide, the creation of several hundred charter schools would be little more than a passing fancy – another fad that would come and go with little impact.

It is harder than ever to dispute that charter schools are having an impact. The ripple created by charter schools is impacting traditional schools, changing the attitudes of entire districts and benefiting public education as a whole. Charter schools have raised the bar, and traditional public school systems are taking notice.

The ripple is causing public schools to model themselves after successful charter schools and spurring district superintendents to launch major advertising campaigns to try to prove to parents that their schools are worthy of students' continued attendance. In addition to coming to realize that charter schools can be an important tool in their own reform tool kits, school leaders are asking why charter schools in their communities are achieving levels of success with the same kids who attend their struggling district schools.

Because one of the missions of the charter school movement is to bring about better public schools in general, the impact of charters on traditional schools is being watched closely. So far, we have seen that wherever a large number of charters are clustered, traditional schools begin to behave differently in order to keep up.

“The Ripple Effect” can be summed up best by the following comments from the *Christian Science Monitor*:

Once upon a time, most people just assumed their kids would head for the public school down the street. But today, many parents think long and hard and review a growing roster of choices before they make that decision.

As a result, public schools in some areas are finding that they can't just sit back and greet the kids as they walk through the door. Some schools are discovering that unless they're out there working hard to bring families in – and offering the kinds of options these families want – they'll be seeing fewer and fewer of them.

From enabling dedicated and gifted teachers to launch their own schools, to changing the perspectives of traditional public school administrators, to spurring districts and municipalities to operate their own public charter schools, charters in many states are accelerating system-wide school improvement.

ARIZONA

✧ In 2006, Challenge Charter School's principal, Mr. Greg Miller, was inducted into Arizona's LEADS Circle of Honor, recognition given to the top one percent of principals in the state. Mr. Miller will be celebrating this honor by spending the next two years serving as a model for other educators.

CALIFORNIA

✧ The second charter school to open in California, San Carlos Charter Learning Center in San Carlos, has become a model of success as its test scores have put it in the top 10 percent of schools in the state. Its teaching techniques have been adopted not only by schools across the country but by the very public schools that once fought against its opening.

✧ Publicly embarrassed by two failing San Diego Unified School District schools that opted to convert to independent charter schools as part of No Child Left Behind-prompted restructuring, the San Diego Education Association in 2006 agreed to change its teachers' contract to allow principals in low-performing schools to select the most qualified teachers to participate in turn-around efforts. Parents and teachers at Gompers Charter Middle School and Keiller Leadership Academy Charter School had said previously they would have remained in district schools if only the union had allowed them this kind of flexibility in the first place.

GEORGIA

✧ The ripple is clear 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. Inspired by the charter school model, the school offers students small group instruction as well as individualized attention. 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.

ILLINOIS

✧ In the fall of 2006, 14 new Chicago Public Schools opened their doors to students. Half of the schools replicated existing charter schools, including several launched by charismatic leaders like Michael Milkie, a former public school math teacher who founded the Noble Street Charter School with his wife, also a teacher, in 1999. Milkie’s two new public schools are modeled after Noble Street. Another two teachers started Perspectives Charter School, which opened its second campus at the site of an old city high school. The teachers, both from the Chicago Public Schools, dreamed of a new type of school where they could highlight character education, use the city as a classroom and truly prepare kids for college. Both Noble Street and Perspectives, the original models for more new schools, have produced results with low-income, minority students. Noble Street ranks among the city’s top-scoring non-selective high schools. Both schools send the majority of their graduates to college.

INDIANA

✧ Indianapolis Superintendent Eugene White, who in 2006 called for a moratorium on new charter schools that would compete with his public schools, described how powerful external pressure can be. “Charter schools have been a pain and now they are a motivation,” White said. “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.”

*“Charter schools have been a pain and
now they are a motivation.”*

— Indianapolis Superintendent Eugene White

✧ In 2006 Indianapolis Mayor Bart Peterson’s Charter Schools Initiative was one of seven winners of the Innovations in American Government Award given out by the Ash Institute at Harvard University. The mayor has authorized 13 charter schools since 2001.

KANSAS

✧ When the Parsons Unified School District decided it wanted to create a new health careers program for students, school officials decided that creating a district-sponsored charter school was the way to go. Housed as a separate school within Parson's High School, the school's plans call for offering more intense math and science courses, and would allow for time in the school schedule to build in job-shadowing and other programs within the health field. "A charter will give us flexibility on where we hold classes, and it will not be as constrictive as far as time," said Superintendent Deborah Perbeck.

MASSACHUSETTS

✧ The Massachusetts Department of Education compared MCAS scores between charter schools and their counterpart sending districts (CSD) and found that in both language arts and mathematics, at least 30 percent of charter schools have performed significantly higher than their CSD since 2001. According to Jeff Wulfson, associate commissioner of the state Department of Education, "there's been a lot of resistance to people learning from charter schools. This report shows that there are a significant number of high-performing charter schools, and therefore, we should be trying to learn what they're doing."

MICHIGAN

✧ Michigan lawmakers approved a bill in May 2006 that requires every student in the state to take part in some kind of online instruction before he or she graduates. The support for online learning in Michigan is evident in the growth of the Michigan Virtual University's Charter High School program, whose enrollment went from 100 in 1999 to 5,959 during the 2004-5 school year.

MISSISSIPPI

- ✧ Frustrated with lackluster academic results in Coahoma County's public schools in Mississippi, members of the Clarksdale Municipal School Board and other civic leaders traveled to Arkansas to visit two public charter schools being operated by KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program). Led by the Delta Regional Authority and Coahoma County Industrial Foundation, the visitors looked not only at the successes KIPP has achieved academically, but how the charter schools have worked with other agencies to improve the economic outlook of the region.

NEW YORK

- ✧ When the Child Development Center of the Hamptons in Long Island opened its doors in 2001, it found a relatively captive audience of children with disabilities. East End children with special needs frequently had no choice but to endure bus rides of more than an hour to regional school facilities. Enrollment at the charter school generally took care of itself. But as local school districts began to lose students – and thus, revenue – they began to change their offerings. By the fall of 2006, center officials said that expanded services for disabled students in local public schools had increased to the point that the charter school asked permission from the state to change its charter contract to include fewer students than when the school first opened.
- ✧ After taking office in 2005, Buffalo School Superintendent James A. Williams announced his intention to borrow ideas from charter schools in an effort to improve student achievement in this New York school district. Such changes include uniforms, extended school days with extensive after-school tutoring, and hiring teachers through an interview process as opposed to seniority-based hiring. A year later, after holding up Buffalo's Westminster Community Charter School as a model for academic success, Williams asked his Board of Education to start asking why the school is so successful. "Those students are coming from the same neighborhoods our students are coming from," Williams said. "If they can do it there, we can do it."

"If they can do it there, we can do it."

— Buffalo School Superintendent James A. Williams

OHIO

- ✦ Public school systems are starting to pay attention. In July 2005, district and teachers unions in Ohio initiated a phone survey to investigate why public schools were losing students to district charter schools. The results were used to develop a marketing campaign to sway parents and kids toward non-charter schools. Canton and Cincinnati districts also sought to determine the draw towards charter schools, discovering that children mainly attend charter schools because of issues relating to academic achievement, transportation and after-school programs. These basic issues were never previously the subjects of customer-type questionnaires.
- ✦ Years after White Hat Management’s Life Skills Centers (charter schools) began reaching out to dropouts and other older students who were struggling to earn a diploma from traditional high schools, the Cleveland Public Schools in 2006 announced plans to focus on adult residents who lack a high school diploma. Craig Cotner, Cleveland city district’s chief academic officer, developed a “flexible and personalized” high school degree program in hopes of attracting the multitude of adults in Ohio who do not have their diploma—the same kids that Life Skills had been attracting. Likewise, the Westerville School District, near Columbus, created an alternative school program called “Educational Options for Success,” housed in trailers at Westerfield North High School and designed to win back struggling at-risk students who either had already left for Life Skills Centers or who would have otherwise been heading to the charter school.
- ✦ By converting to a charter school in Ohio’s Upper Arlington School District in 2006, the Wickliffe Informal Alternative Elementary School became Wickliffe Progressive Community School and widened its innovative course offerings for students. The district also morphed portions of the high school into two charter schools, the high-level International Baccalaureate program and Upper Arlington Community High School. As the *Columbus Dispatch* noted about these successful programs, “suburban districts are starting to embrace the [charter school] option as a way to diversify.” Consultants in the nearby Albany-Plain District were planning an arts-based charter school. The Columbus School District opened a charter school for students who fell behind and were working with KIPP to bring a high-performing charter school to the district by 2008.

WASHINGTON, DC

- ✦ In response to losing 10,000 students to charter schools over a five-year period, Superintendent Clifford B. Janey announced a \$2.3 billion modernization plan to increase student achievement and attract parents back to the school system. This plan will focus on school renovations, increasing advanced placement classes and providing specialty classes in an attempt to retain its current students. He later, however, called for a moratorium on new charter schools in an attempt to slow the bleeding.

WISCONSIN

- ✦ Manitowoc Public School District will open an alternative charter high school within the public school district in the fall of 2007. Superintendent Mark Swanson said he needed an innovative solution to help struggling Lincoln High School students, who were at risk for dropping out. Many of these students were lost in the traditional structure of public high school. Swanson took inspiration from the charter school format which, freed from many state law restrictions, allows educators to be innovative and creative in their approach to teaching.



THE OBSTACLES AND OPPOSITION TO CHARTER SCHOOLS

If public charter schools are having such a positive impact on public education, why are so many public education officials, groups, and labor unions standing in their way? The laws of physics tell us that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. School reform is no exception to this rule.

Since the first charter law was passed in 1991 and the first charter school opened a year later, charter schools have faced more than their share of roadblocks and pitfalls on the way toward delivering excellent education. The obstacles faced by charter schools can be divided into two broad categories: political opposition and operational hurdles.

Political opposition generally occurs on three fronts: the teachers' unions, state boards and bureaucracies, and local boards and district offices. Operational hurdles include those barriers often encountered when a charter school attempts to open, operate, and grow as a business organization, such as facilities; financing; governance; staffing troubles; and the residue of political battles, such as generating the positive public relations and community outreach needed to establish and maintain enrollment and parent involvement.

Political Opposition

The trends in state and national studies suggest that today's charter schools continue to encounter various types of political obstacles. At the beginning of the public charter school movement, charters mainly faced facility and operational concerns. Now, reports of political opposition are flooding the nation's charter support centers. Charter schools from coast to coast have even been forced to seek relief in the courts to obtain funding that is guaranteed to them as public schools under state laws.

Education reformers across the political spectrum are embracing charter schools. Nevertheless, the concept behind charter schools—accountable but freely operating public schools driven by an education mission—may seem threatening to those who have a vested interest in the current district system of public education. As autonomous public schools of choice, charter schools operate outside the conventional fiscal, operational, and personnel policies that have shaped schools for more than a generation. This new way of operating puts the power players of the traditional school system in a

competitive environment in which the regulations and unwritten rules of school administration no longer provide protection against critical scrutiny and public pressure for better results. Thus, the establishment of charter schools, which often involves scrapping the traditional power organizations of public education, is often perceived as a threat to the status quo.

The Power Players

The local school boards, the state boards of education and the teachers' unions have a powerful advantage over ambitious reformers. As the old kids on the block, they have written the regulations and cast the conditions for their own survival. They can navigate the maze of rules and paperwork that supports the current system, as well as exploit loopholes created by any weak or vague parts—often inserted at their insistence—of charter school laws. By insisting on compliance with otherwise seldom-enforced regulations or magnifying legislative anomalies, the powers that be can—and do—diminish, delay and even kill charter efforts.

ARIZONA

✧ Although charter schools are considered public schools, some charters have arrangements with for-profit companies, which is permissible under Arizona law. But these schools with business relationships are not eligible for federal funds, a federal appeals court ruled in September 2006. More than \$3.6 million dollars in federal funding has been withheld from state charter schools while the case was pending.

ARKANSAS

✧ Haas Hall Academy Charter School in Farmington nearly had to close its doors after the Arkansas Board of Education refused to permit its move to Fayetteville. Board members did not want a charter school in Fayetteville because they felt it would pull students away from one of the best schools in the state.

CALIFORNIA

✧ Dehesa Charter School, a non-classroom-based school that provides personalized learning through various approaches, couldn't get anyone in

Riverside County to even look at their charter petition, even though a majority of their students reside there. They stayed part of a different county, however, after an unsuccessful attempt with Riverside.

- ✧ Charter schools in California received a tremendous boost from the state judiciary in 2005 when the Fifth District Court reaffirmed that, under the terms of Proposition 39, the Kern County School District must provide facilities for hundreds of charter school children similar to those provided to public school children. Many charter schools nationwide spend enormous amounts of money simply fighting for funding to which they are legally entitled. But the message still didn't make it to all school districts. Two other San Diego-area charter schools, Fanno Academy and KIPP Adelante Preparatory Academy, were forced to file a lawsuit in 2005 to obtain classroom space from the local school district.
- ✧ Students at Pacific Collegiate Charter School in Santa Cruz were kicked out of the North County's swimming and track leagues in 2006 because the leaders of some of the area's traditional public schools were upset that charter schools compete with them for students and state funding. This charter school, one of the highest performing public schools in the state, has been controversial with the surrounding school districts since it began accepting students in 1999.

CONNECTICUT

- ✧ Operating in New Haven, one of the worst school districts in the state, the Amistad Academy has had to institute a lottery system to decide which of 500 applicants will get one of 70 available slots. So successful has the school been since opening in 1999 that in 2005 it opened three more schools in inner-city New York neighborhoods, with two more schools to follow in 2006. Unfortunately, due to a cap on the number of charter schools allowed in Connecticut, Amistad is unable to open any new charter schools there at this time despite both its extensive waiting list and its stellar track record of academic success.
- ✧ Since 2005, charter school advocates have worked to lift the state's enrollment cap, which limits the number of students charters can serve. The state also funds the charters it approves at almost 30 percent less than other public schools.

FLORIDA

- ✧ In 2005, the opening of Our Children’s Academy in Lake Wales was jeopardized by a dispute over whether the school was technically just a preschool or a school that also served kindergartners and first graders. The local school board argued that, being solely a preschool, Our Children’s Academy was not entitled to federal start-up money. School administrators, however, disagreed and sued the school board to obtain these important funds.
- ✧ More than a dozen school districts in late 2006 signed on to join a lawsuit planned by the Florida School Boards Association challenging the legality of the Florida Schools of Excellence Commission. The commission, created by the Legislature with seven members appointed by the state Board of Education, is allowed to authorize charter schools, even if local districts don’t want them in their space. In the past, school boards had the direct authority to reject or approve applications for charter schools in their districts.

GEORGIA

- ✧ The Charter Conservatory for Liberal Arts & Technology (CCAT) in Statesboro receives only \$3,000 per pupil per year, less than half of the \$6,900 received by students in the local school district. The school reported that finding adequate funding has been its biggest challenge. Grant application and fund solicitation often take administrators’ time away from the more important task of educating students.

HAWAII

- ✧ The State Board of Education in 2006 slashed the proposed \$62 million budget for charter schools by more than \$10 million, denying charters in Hawaii much-needed funding for facilities.

IDAHO

- ✧ State law caps the number of new charter schools that may be created in Idaho to no more than 6 per year for the entire state. Lawmakers have been considering plans to increase the cap to 12 charter schools per year.

INDIANA

✧ West Side (Gary) High School's ninth grade basketball team walked off the court and refused to play the team from Thea Bowman Leadership Academy in the championship of a 2006 Thanksgiving weekend tournament because coach John Boyd doesn't like charter schools. "Why would a Gary school play a charter school that takes kids from the Gary school district?" Boyd said following his team's forfeit. "What community is going to support a school that takes kids, and essentially takes money, from our schools? It's crazy. They want to be friends with us, but they're taking money from us and teaching jobs from us. I can't understand that. Maybe I'm wrong, but my program is not playing charter schools." Bowman, in its fourth year, is the largest charter school in Gary, with 572 students.

"Why would a Gary school play a charter school that takes kids from the Gary school district?"

— West Side (Gary) High School basketball coach John Boyd

MARYLAND

✧ In 2005, Anne Arundel County prevented a new charter school from opening by instituting a new requirement that schools be located on a minimum of three acres of land. The school had already begun renovations on a former church it intended to use as its facility before the law was passed. Traditional public schools were exempted from this ordinance, suggesting that the law may have been passed to force area charter schools out of existence.

✧ After more than a year of work to obtain a charter, the Potomac Charter School in 2006 had to wait months for the contract to be signed by the state, which delayed the signing of a lease with the school's landlord until June 8. Twelve-weeks worth of school construction needed to be completed in a fraction of the time. And then came another curveball. Despite the fact that the school board signed off on the architect's designs in February, founder Deborah Driver was told on July 12 that the school needed to increase its bathrooms from 9 to 19. Driver cut the school's kitchen in half - and probably her own pocketbook - and added the bathrooms. The school opened to the joy of its students three days late.

MASSACHUSETTS

- ❄️ State officials in 2006 changed the way it calculated student aid for schools and districts in ways that disproportionately hurt independent, public middle schools. The change, to cite one example, forced McAuliffe Regional Charter Public School in Framingham to cut \$200,000 from its operating budget. The school even had to lay off one of its founders in order to adjust its spending to accommodate the change. Like many underfunded charter schools, McAuliffe officials planned to raise private funds to avoid such pitfalls in the future and to maintain its high level of academic services for its students.
- ❄️ Advanced Math and Science Academy Charter School was forced to defend itself in a lawsuit initiated by 16 surrounding districts claiming that AMSA was “illegally recruiting” students from those districts by handing out fliers. Interestingly, the districts involved in the lawsuit contained only poorly performing public schools.

MICHIGAN

- ❄️ In early 2006, the Lansing School Board put a local elementary school building up for sale but refused to sell it to the Mid-Michigan Leadership Academy, a charter school already occupying the building. The previous year, the school paid \$460,000 in rent for the building and sought purchase in order to lower its operating costs.

MISSOURI

- ❄️ In 2005, Thurgood Marshall Academy was almost forced to close its doors after the University of Missouri at St. Louis declined to continue as its sponsor. Lindenwood Academy in St. Charles, a local private school, initiated discussions about taking over sponsorship but Missouri state law does not permit a private school to sponsor a charter.
- ❄️ Kansas City charter schools were prevented from receiving \$6 million in funding to which they are entitled under state law because the Kansas City Board of Education chose to sue the state rather than pay this money. According to a decision by the Board of Fund Commissioners, the Kansas City Board of Education owed each school about \$800 per student in wrongfully withheld funding. Every time a public body or court

solves the issue in favor of the city's charters, the Kansas City school board challenges it, distracting the school leaders from their core focus.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

✧ The Franklin City School Board in 2005 voted not only to slash funding for the Franklin Career Academy Charter School from \$82,000 to \$1, it also took the unusual step of refusing to allow the charter school's students to march in a community Class Day parade solely because the school was not part of the local school district.

NEW JERSEY

✧ Due to excessive regulations about how to spend start-up grant money, the TLC Charter School in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, an innovative school plan that was designed to help bridge the education divide between minority and white students, was forced to shut down before it even opened. Prior to closing the school, founder Harriet Beckman noted that excessive charter school regulations in New Jersey allowed her to purchase needed furniture but not the necessary storage or insurance for it. She was permitted to rent a school building but not to pay an architect to convert it into usable classroom space.

NEW YORK

✧ National Heritage Academy's Southside Academy Charter School in Syracuse, which has been in existence since 2002, was granted permission by the state Supreme Court Appellate Division to build a new school facility—a decision that overturned previous rulings against the charter school. After being turned down by the city planning commission and losing its case before a local judge, Southside Academy was finally allowed to start building, but the setback in terms of planning time and construction was harmful to the natural growth of the school. Once the school got the green light to proceed, city officials began discussing the possibility of swapping land with the school, so that it would be located in a more hospitable neighborhood. Ironically, the land the city was offering was the same land that the school originally attempted to purchase back in 2002 – only to have the sale vetoed by the city.

- ✧ When Imagine Schools, which runs 50 strong charter schools nationwide, attempted to open a new school in the Bronx, it was told that New York State had reached its cap of 100 charters. In addition to the state legislature’s refusal to lift the cap, eight unused charters (from charter schools that were closed) were not made available to new schools by the state. Because of this cap, some 4,000 New York City children were forced to remain on waiting lists for spots in charter schools.

NORTH CAROLINA

- ✧ Unlike conventional public schools, charter schools in the Tar Heel state do not receive money from the state lottery. Access to lottery money could provide an additional \$100 for each student enrolled in a North Carolina charter school. State charter schools, unlike conventional public schools, also receive no money for construction of school buildings or for providing transportation.

OHIO

- ✧ Concerned about losing students and funding to community schools (as charter schools are called in Ohio), Warren City Schools took out a full-page ad in the local newspaper asking parents to look closely before deciding on a community school.
- ✧ Ohio’s education establishment – including the state’s PTA, American Federation of Teachers, and school boards association—filed suit in 2001 challenging the constitutionality of the 1997 charter school law on ten different counts, despite the fact that similar lawsuits in at least a dozen other states had found charter schools constitutional extensions of state authority. In 2006, the Ohio Supreme Court affirmed charter schools as legal, but court cases like this only serve to worry parents and make observers skeptical.

OREGON

- ✧ Two charter schools, the Armadillo Technical Institute and the Trillium Charter School, were forced to use funding from parents, teachers, and private donors to finance permanent school buildings. Four of the founders of the Armadillo Technical Institute put up their homes as collateral and still needed the parents of a student to co-sign on the loans.

Unlike conventional public schools, which are able to fund capital costs such as school buildings through tax money, charter schools do not receive funding for this and must be creative and budget-conscious when looking for school housing.

- ✧ The public debate over plans to open the Estacada Academy of Educational Excellence charter school got so acrimonious in 2006 that local school board members were quoted in official meeting minutes calling the school's supporters “basically nuts.” Oregon state law requires charter schools to have a contract with the local school board with which they will compete. The Estacada School Board twice rejected the school's charter application, claiming it lacked community support, financial stability, and a clear instructional plan.

PENNSYLVANIA

- ✧ Although Career Connections Charter School has successfully operated a high school for eight years in Lawrenceville, PA, plans to open a new middle school have been repeatedly blocked by the Pittsburgh school district. After turning down the initial application in February of 2006, the school board failed to vote on a revised application. The charter school took its application to the State Charter School Appeal Board, which voted to approve the middle school. In response, the school district asked the Appeal Board to reconsider and put off providing the charter. Despite this, the middle school opened its doors to 76 students on September 7, 2006. On September 27, the school board voted unanimously to close the school down immediately, thereby disregarding the approval obtained by the Charter School Appeal Board. The Career Connections Middle School has voted to stay open despite its battles with the district, which began making telephone calls to parents and sending letters warning they would be cited for truancy if their students did not re-enroll in district schools.
- ✧ In early 2006, Pennsylvania cyber charter schools faced a challenge when the Pennsylvania School Boards Association sought a moratorium on “cyber schools,” a move clearly intended to harm charter schools in the state. The School Boards Association claims that cyber schools cost too much to operate.

SOUTH CAROLINA

- ✧ Midland Valley Preparatory School, a charter school in the Aiken area, spent \$24,000 in legal fees in 2004 battling for funding from the local school district.

TENNESSEE

- ✧ After creating a strong application to create an academically rigorous charter school in Nashville, the founders of the LEAD Academy saw their application rejected by the Metro Board of Education in November 2006. The board had approved only three charter school applications since the Tennessee charter school law was passed in 2002.

VIRGINIA

- ✧ Despite changes made to the state's charter school law in 2002 and 2004, which were designed to help build a stronger movement, charter schools in the state have had little growth. Currently, three are in operation – all serving at-risk students. In 2006, the Loudoun School Board unanimously rejected the county's first charter school application, saying it failed to provide anything superior to what the school system already offers. “There is no gap in any of our Loudoun County schools that this application will fill,” said school board member J. Warren Guerin. Virginia law requires a charter school to fill an unmet need in a community.

WASHINGTON, DC

- ✧ Clifford B. Janey, Washington D.C. School Superintendent, called for a “moratorium on new charter schools in the district.” Citing that “the independently run, publicly funded facilities are draining students and cash from traditional school[s],” Janey failed to acknowledge the 25 percent of D.C. public school children already successfully placed in charter schools.

A SAMPLING OF CHARTER SCHOOL SUCCESS: ACHIEVEMENT AGAINST ALL ODDS

Student achievement, high attendance and retention rates, parent and student satisfaction, lower dropout rates, higher reading scores and more can define school success. When parents prepare to choose a school for their children, these are the biggest factors they tend to consider in making their decision.

Public charter schools have demonstrated success in all these areas. Some can be evaluated at this stage on the satisfaction criteria alone. Others, however, go beyond and offer evidence that attendance is higher, achievement strides have been made, and waiting lists are growing in response.

Evidence of achievement on tests that matter the most – state tests – are rampant. For example:

- ✧ In Ohio, researchers found charter schools' year-to-year improvement on the Ohio Performance Text exceeded those made by conventional public school students, despite spending less money per pupil and having less-experienced teachers.
- ✧ In Texas, academic gains for elementary and middle school students who have remained in charter schools for several years are significantly higher than their matched counterparts in conventional schools.
- ✧ In Massachusetts, at least 30 percent of the charter schools performed significantly higher than their school district counterparts in the state's most recent tests of English Language Arts and Mathematics.
- ✧ In Colorado, charter school students generally made larger gains in reading, writing, and science than students in conventional public schools.

These are just a selection of the successes charters are making across states. To understand how this is occurring, the following examples are evidence of the effectiveness of charter schools in raising academic achievement. Although scores of other examples of success emerge each year, these are just a sampling of the dramatic instances in which charter schools have produced academic success.

As the federal No Child Left Behind law has highlighted the urgent need for a significant overhaul of the types of successful school options offered to

children and their families, public charter schools have undoubtedly emerged as a tool to infuse quality-schooling options into communities where they are badly needed.

ARIZONA

- ✧ Kevin Bertram, a 13-year-old student attending Valley Academy Charter School in Phoenix, won the 2005 Arizona National Geographic Bee. Valley Academy educates over 600 students in kindergarten through eighth grade and is well known for having one of the strongest language arts programs in the state.
- ✧ The BASIS Charter School Inc.'s high school in Tucson was named the third best high school in America by *Newsweek* magazine in May 2006. Its middle school in Scottsdale was the only school in Arizona whose students' median scores were above the 90th percentile on the Stanford 9 Math Test in 2003—in all grades. BASIS has also received accreditation from the American Association of Liberal Education, which extends its accreditation to only a few top-performing charter schools nationwide.
- ✧ Students in all grades at Presidio School in Tucson scored above the state average on the 2005 AIMS tests, and the school now has a long waiting list. Originally housed in a converted mortuary, the school now occupies a more polished building five times as large.
- ✧ In July 2006, the Challenge Charter School in Glendale reported that scores for their students on the statewide AIMS test exceeded 33 percent of the state average in all categories at each grade level. For sixth graders, 100 percent of the school's students met or exceeded state standards.

ARKANSAS

- ✧ A fifth of the senior class for 2006-07 at Farmington's Haas Hall Academy qualified as National Merit Scholars based on their PSAT scores. Of the school's 2006 graduates, 100 percent are currently enrolled in college. The school advertised itself as a private school experience in a public school setting, and boasts of having attracted many families back to public education from private schools.

CALIFORNIA

- ✧ Students at KIPP Heartwood Academy in San Jose dramatically outscored students at some of the highest achieving schools in the region on the state's 2005 STAR tests. A full 69 percent of KIPP students achieved proficient or advanced scores in language arts, while an impressive 93 percent achieved proficient or advanced scores in math. These scores were twice as high as those of the local school district.
- ✧ The Academy for Academic Excellence charter school in Apple Valley is so popular with parents and students it has more than 2,500 students on its waiting list. The school, which raised more than \$2.3 million in public grants in 2005, spends \$7,000 per student—a full \$2,000 more than is allocated to the school based on daily attendance.
- ✧ A back-to-basics curriculum and a zero-tolerance discipline policy have helped the American Indian Charter School in Oakland become one of the city's highest performing middle schools. At American Indian, where the majority of students are non-white, 70 percent of students achieved proficiency on state tests of language arts and math.
- ✧ Oakland's Lighthouse Community Charter School, where 80 percent of students qualify for free lunch, increased its Academic Performance Index (API) for sixth and seventh graders by 25 points in 2005, from 612 to 637.
- ✧ Founded as a school that would cater to the needs of creative students—needs not necessarily met in traditional California public schools—Natomas Charter School's Performing and Fine Arts Academy in Sacramento was named a Creative Ticket National School of Distinction by the John F. Kennedy Performing Arts Center for the 2003-2004 school year. Just five schools nationwide received this honor.
- ✧ Downtown College Prep charter school in San Jose sent 93 percent of its graduating seniors on to four-year colleges in 2005, far more than local public schools. The school aims to prepare underachieving students to become the first members of their families to attend and thrive in a college setting.
- ✧ The Oakland School for the Arts, considered by far the best school in the city, received a 10 out of 10 rating from the state, using 2005 test scores. Most other Oakland public schools received only a 1 out of 10 rating.

- ✧ View Park Preparatory Accelerated Elementary, Middle, and High School Charter Schools have each earned the California API scores that rank them number one in their respective categories and, in 2005, boasted the highest test scores of all schools in the South Central section of Los Angeles, a neighborhood notorious for gang violence and poorly performing public schools.
- ✧ The Joe Serna Jr. Charter School in Lodi, which operates an innovative English/Spanish dual immersion program, saw its scores on the state’s API jump from 653 to 718 in 2006. School officials credited the school’s focus on individual students for the improvement.
- ✧ According to an analysis by the California Charter School Association, 1 in 4 California charters schools scored at least 50 points higher than they had previously on state exams, compared to only 1 in 10 non-charter public schools in the state using the same criteria.

COLORADO

- ✧ Despite teaching a student population where 90 percent of students qualify for free and reduced-price lunch, and where 25 percent receive special education services, Paradox Valley Charter School was rated “excellent” on the 2006 Colorado School Report Card. School leaders credit the quality of the staff and the innovative curriculum for its ability to beat the odds.
- ✧ Ridgeview Academy Charter School in Denver showed marked improvement in its ninth- and tenth-grade students’ scores on the 2005 Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) reading and writing tests. Since the school opened in 2001, freshman reading scores have increased by 35 percent, and tenth-grade writing scores have increased 44 percent. In addition, Ridgeview’s 2005 junior class ranked an impressive fifth in the city on its ACT scores.

CONNECTICUT

- ✧ ConnCan, a nonprofit education group aimed at closing the achievement gap between Connecticut’s poor, minority students and their wealthy, white peers, released a report in September of 2006 that assembled “top 10” lists of state schools based on various criteria. Although public

charter schools account for only 1.2 percent of all public schools in the state, these schools represent 25 percent of the schools on the list.

- ✧ In its first year of operation (the 2004-2005 school year), Elm City College Preparatory School saw the proportion of its kindergarten and first graders who scored proficient on state tests of reading rise from 26 percent to 96 percent.

DELAWARE

- ✧ In 2005, Chor Hang Lam, a student at the Charter School of Wilmington, was named a finalist for the U.S. Physics Team and also received a Network of Educators in Science and Technology Outstanding Achievement Award.

FLORIDA

- ✧ Broward Community Charter Schools increased the number of African-American students reading at or above grade level by 12 percent from 2000-2005. During the same time period, traditional public schools raised their scores by only 8 percent.
- ✧ Bonita Springs Charter School in Bonita Springs was the most improved school in its district in 2005, rising from a C to an A rating. Interestingly, students gave credit to the school's hard-working yet confident teachers, who felt secure enough about the quality of their instruction they allowed students to relax before state assessment tests.

GEORGIA

- ✧ Despite operating on a budget one-third less than that of local public schools, students at Tech High School in Atlanta saw their average scores in reading improve one full grade level between the first and second semester of 2005. The school emphasizes both discipline and attention to the individual student, boasting both uniforms and individual learning plans for students.

- ✧ In 2005, Fulton Science Academy in Alpharetta received first place in reading and social studies on the CRCT tests, a series of regional achievement tests in the South.

HAWAII

- ✧ Students who were behind in conventional Hawaii public schools consistently leaped ahead by multiple grades in their reading abilities at Kanu o Ka' Aina New Century Public Charter School, a school driven by a “pedagogy of Aloha” approach to education based on Hawaiian traditions. The school maintains a waiting list of students despite operating out of what the *Honolulu Advertiser* described in 2005 as “meager, unconventional conditions.”

ILLINOIS

- ✧ State test scores at Fort Bowman Academy Charter School in Cahokia increased for five straight years, a record unmatched by area public schools.
- ✧ Chicago charter public schools are outpacing neighboring traditional public schools on a wide variety of benchmarks. Using 2004-05 test results, all charter schools outperformed their neighborhood public schools on Illinois Standard Achievement Tests, as well as the Prairie State Achievement Exam. In addition, all eight charter high schools in the Windy City had higher graduation rates than their public school neighbors.

INDIANA

- ✧ Student progress in Indianapolis charter schools gained ground in 74 percent of the grades and subjects evaluated by Mayor Bart Peterson in his 2006 Accountability Report on Mayor-Sponsored Charter Schools.

IOWA

- ✦ Fifth graders at the Lincoln Academy of Integrated Arts, in Davenport, outperformed their district's averages on standardized math and science exams in 2005-06. For reading, 91.8 percent of Lincoln students were proficient, compared with 85.2 percent of Davenport students. For math, 87.8 percent of Lincoln students were proficient, compared with 76.8 percent for the district. The school, in collaboration with parents, art partners, and the larger community, aims to engage its students in a challenging and rich academic and arts environment. Nearly 80 percent of Lincoln's students qualify for free or reduced price lunch.

KANSAS

- ✦ Elkhart Cyber School, based in Elkhart, Kansas, became one of the first charter schools in the nation to offer innovative, online, educational opportunities for kids in kindergarten through 12th grade. Students complete coursework both on-line and off-line and communicate with their teachers and fellow classmates via chat rooms, discussion boards, and email, all from the comfort of home. The goal of ECS is to provide students with a solid education through an alternative delivery method. Time and place take on new meaning when students have the flexibility to complete assignments at any time of day and from any location. While the delivery method may be flexible, the curriculum is solidly aligned with the rigorous Kansas State Standards and is facilitated by Kansas certified instructors. Students completing the program earn a Kansas diploma.

LOUISIANA

- ✦ Despite serving an extremely poor student population—94 percent of its students qualify for free lunch—the Children's Charter School in Baton Rouge regularly scores above parish, state, and national averages on yearly standardized tests. In 2005, Children's was one of only eight schools statewide to receive recognition as a Title I Distinguished School.

MARYLAND

- ✧ A state appellate court ruled in September 2006 that Baltimore charter schools have a right to more funding than the city school board provides them. The case originated in a feud over funding levels set in Maryland's 2003 charter school law. The law dictates that charter schools should receive a sum "commensurate with the amount disbursed to other public schools" in the jurisdiction. The school board was offering \$8,000 per student, while spending \$10,000 on each of its own students.

MASSACHUSETTS

- ✧ Every student at Boston's MATCH Charter Public HS who took the MCAS tests in the spring of 2005 and 2006 received a passing score. The high-achieving charter school also has a 100 percent acceptance rate to college for graduating students and a remarkably low daily absenteeism rate of only 3 percent. Even more importantly, parents have given the school a 9 (out of 10) on satisfaction surveys. In 2005 and again in 2006, the proportion of MATCH students achieving an "advanced" score on the MCAS math test was a remarkable 70 percent, scores that ranked the school in math in the top 10 out of all 350 Massachusetts high schools; none of those same students had scored advanced in 8th grade before entering MATCH. The school credits its philosophy of long hours, discipline, and strong student-teacher and tutor relationships for the improvement.
- ✧ The Boston Collegiate Charter School announced in 2006 that 100 percent of its seniors were accepted to college and passed the tenth grade English and math MCAS exams on the first try. The seniors also received \$387,000 in merit scholarships. The school's focus on college has made it so popular that it currently has a wait list of over 800 students.
- ✧ Eighth graders at Roxbury Preparatory Charter School outperformed every school district in Massachusetts in the 2006 math exam, ending up ranked second among 458 schools in the state. The previous year, despite having 73 percent of its mostly Latino and African-American students qualify for free lunch, Roxbury outscored 414 of the state's middle schools on the test. More than 71 percent of the school's sixth graders scored advanced or proficient on the math test, the highest percentage of any predominantly black school in Massachusetts and the second highest percentage in Boston.

MICHIGAN

- ✧ The Black River Charter School in Holland was accredited by the American Academy for Liberal Education in 2006. The organization recognizes only a handful of top charter schools nationally. Black River is one of the few charter schools that have succeeded in obtaining state, regional, and national accreditation. In 2004, 46 percent of the school's students scored a 3 or higher on Advanced Placement examinations, as compared with 13 percent of students nationally.
- ✧ In 2005, International Academy in Flint became the first charter public school ever to receive special recognition from the National Community Education Association.

MINNESOTA

- ✧ A back-to-basics curriculum at Ascension School, a Minneapolis-area charter school, has resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of students passing the state's basic math standards in 2006. The year before the adoption of this high-quality curriculum, only one in five Ascension students met the state's math standards; one year later, only one in five failed.

MISSOURI

- ✧ University Academy Charter Public School in Kansas City sent 100 percent of its graduates on to college in 2005.
- ✧ Charter schools in St. Louis, at first considered merely lifeboats that could be used by poor families with no access to better public school choices in their neighborhoods, have become so successful that many middle-income students are enrolling in them as well – leading to the kind of economic diversity in school settings that tends not to happen when the quality of education is poor. According to the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, “new students are flocking to St. Louis Charter Schools by the busload.”

NEVADA

✧ Most charter schools in western Nevada County have witnessed sharp increases in enrollment, despite declining enrollment in traditional public schools in recent years. “What charter schools have offered in Nevada County are more choices, in terms of a Montessori school, a Waldorf school, an arts school, an expeditionary learning school, and a strong home-study program,” said Terry McAteer, Nevada County superintendent of schools. “They are competing for that choice niche in the market place.” The Forest Charter School, for example, which stresses community partnerships and individualized learning, has seen its enrollment triple since it opened in 2002.

NEW JERSEY

✧ Camden Academy Charter High School, which graduated its first class of 92 students in 2005, scored second in the city on state standardized tests the same year. In a city where only half of all students graduate at all, Camden Academy has had several graduates enroll in Ivy League and other highly selective colleges.

✧ Students at TEAM Academy Charter School in Newark rose from the 31st percentile to the 91st percentile in math on state standardized tests over the course of the 2004-2005 school year.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

✧ In its first year serving students, the North Country Alternative Charter School passed out new diplomas to 21 students, many of whom had dropped out of traditional public schools in the past. Seven of those students not only took advantage of the second chance the charter school offered, they ended up enrolling in college after they received their diplomas.

NEW MEXICO

✧ In 2003 South Valley Charter High School in Albuquerque, serving 200 students in grades nine through twelve, was selected as one of only four schools nationally to receive a Schools for the New Millennium grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The following year, the school saw all 22 seniors in its first graduating class enroll in college.

NEW YORK

- ✧ South Buffalo Charter School received the prestigious Pathfinder Award in 2005, an award given by the Business Council of New York State to schools showing the greatest improvement on math and English tests. South Buffalo students' English test scores improved by 44 percent, while math scores improved 32 percent, between 2003 and 2004.
- ✧ International Charter School in Schenectady achieved the highest scores in its school district on state math and English tests, with 100 percent of its students passing the math test in 2005.
- ✧ In 2005, the Charter School for Applied Technologies in Buffalo showed the most dramatic improvement of any local school in fourth grade math. In 2001, only one-third of the school's students scored at an acceptable level on the state's math test; in 2005, 84 percent did. In general, Buffalo-area charter schools significantly outperformed area public schools on four key assessment tests in 2005. To cite just one example, 49 percent of charter school fourth graders in Buffalo tested as "proficient" in English, versus 39 percent of public school students.
- ✧ In its first year of operations in 2005, Buffalo Academy of Science Charter School received two bronze medals in the regional science Olympiads for sixth through ninth graders.
- ✧ KIPP Academy in the South Bronx posted a 71.4 percent pass rate on fourth and eighth grade reading tests in 2005 – more than double the pass rate of New York City public schools as a whole.
- ✧ In January of 2005 the New York City-based Wildcat Academy Charter School earned a 90 percent passing rate on the Math A Regents test; 87 percent on the ELA Regents; 79 percent on the U.S. History Regents; 79 percent on Global Studies; and 85 percent on the Living Environment Regents exams. The charter school serves 450 students in grades eight through twelve, all of whom have failed in their previous high schools. More than 80 percent of the school's graduates were accepted to college.

NORTH CAROLINA

- ✧ Raleigh Charter High School was named an Honor School of Excellence by the state, based on 2005 student performance on standardized tests. On the state's ABC's end-of-course exams, 92 percent of students received passing grades – well above the statewide average of 87 percent passing. The charter school is backed by a nonprofit corporation established in the summer of 1998 by parents of 8th graders at The Magellan Charter School who wanted their children to continue receiving the kind of high quality education to which they had become accustomed.

OHIO

- ✧ Two Cleveland-area charter schools were among 21 public schools that were honored with the 2006 “Promise Awards” by Ohio Superintendent Susan Rave Zelman. The Intergenerational School and Westpark Community Middle School were among those schools Zelman recognized for having a student population that is at least 40 percent economically disadvantaged and has at least a 75 percent pass rate on either the Ohio Achievement Test or the Ohio Graduation Test.

OKLAHOMA

- ✧ Kelley Fleming, a student at Tulsa's Dove Science Academy, took fourth place in the prestigious 2006 Intel International Science and Engineering Fair, the world's largest pre-college celebration of science learning. The annual contest brings together 1,500 top students from 40 countries.
- ✧ Student test scores at the Tulsa School of Arts and Sciences in the subjects of English, Biology, and History were the second highest of any school in the Tulsa area for 2006. The 2007 graduating class includes four National Merit Semifinalists. TSAS provides a college preparatory curriculum, which integrates liberal arts with science and mathematics.

OREGON

- ✧ Mitch Charter School in Tualatin and Three Rivers Charter School in West Linn have received high marks for consistently performing well on state tests. The schools have outperformed local charter and district schools in their respective communities.

PENNSYLVANIA

- ✧ No Child Left Behind 2006 progress targets in Philadelphia were met thanks to several charter overachievers. Looking at Philadelphia District schools without charter schools, there was no progress made that year under NCLB. However, when the district's 53 charter schools were added to the equation, the percentage of schools making “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) jumped from 48.7 percent to 52 percent.
- ✧ The Community Academy of Philadelphia in 2006 celebrated the victory of its chess team, made up of middle and elementary school students, in the Philadelphia Scholastic Chess League.
- ✧ After first suffering through attacks and opposition from the American Civil Liberties Union and the Women’s Law Project, plans for the Southwest Philadelphia Academy for Boys were approved by Philadelphia school officials. The innovative, college-prep charter school for boys will open in the fall of 2007.

RHODE ISLAND

- ✧ The Blackstone Academy in Pawtucket, which serves 140 students in grades eight through twelve, was able to overcome an obstacle faced by many charter schools – providing facilities. The school secured a vacant building and built the school for \$700,000, less than 3 percent of its annual operating budget.

SOUTH CAROLINA

- ✧ Greenville Technical Charter High School had the highest percentage of passing students in the Greenville County School District on the 2005 HSAP (High School Assessment Program) test. Nearly 100 percent of the school’s graduates go on to college, and many earn college credits while still enrolled at GTCH.

TENNESSEE

- ✧ In 2005, Smithson-Craighead Academy in Nashville experienced a dramatic improvement in scores on state standardized tests in all areas, including a 28 percent jump in reading scores, a 24 percent jump in math, a 20 percent jump in social studies, and a 19.7 percent jump in science.

TEXAS

- ✧ Newcomer Charter School, a new school designed specifically for immigrants who, according to the Houston Independent School district, are more likely to drop out of school, graduated its first class in 2006. The school hopes to expand and respond to the needs of the district's 12,000 immigrant students.
- ✧ Students at KIPP 3D Academy in Houston performed above the 90th percentile nationally in math in 2005. Sophomores at KIPP registered a two-grade increase in overall reading assessments.

UTAH

- ✧ City Academy, one of the oldest charter schools in the state, celebrated its grand opening in the fall of 2006 in its third and final school building – a location in downtown Salt Lake City that it someday hopes to own. The grades 7-12 school offers small class sizes and an emphasis on service learning. In addition to contributing to the revival of the downtown area, school officials hope the new location will allow students to attend arts and theater events, access a state-of-the-art library facility, and become more involved with the city's social and political scene.

WASHINGTON, DC

- ✧ In 2005, D.C. Preparatory Charter School was one of only four schools in the district to receive the first Vanguard Awards for Excellence, which comes with a \$15,000 grant.
- ✧ Shadwick Jenkins, a third-grade teacher at Friendship-Edison Charter School, beat out thousands of other teachers from the District and around the country to win recognition as an American Star of Teaching in 2005.

- ✦ In 2005, KIPP D.C., which has 320 students, achieved the highest math scores in the city.
- ✦ The Capital City Charter School received a “High Performing School Incentive Award” for 2006 from Mayor Anthony Williams. The school was also honored with the D.C. Public Charter School Board Chair’s Award for Outstanding Performance in 2005.
- ✦ In the fall of 2005, the Thurgood Marshall Academy Public High School re-opened its doors, this time to a newly renovated building in the South East section of the city. The \$14.5 million dollar project restored an old school building 30 years after it had closed its doors as a school.
- ✦ Roots Public Charter School teacher Rasheki Kuykendall was surprised at her school in 2006 when Lowell Milken, of the Milken Family Foundation, showed up with a \$25,000 check honoring her selection as a winner of a Milken National Educator Award. Kuykendall uses games, relays and other exciting activities that energize her students and help dramatically improve achievement.

WISCONSIN

- ✦ At Verona Area Core Knowledge Charter School in Verona, 92 percent of all fourth graders scored in the proficient/advanced range in reading, as did 87 percent of the school’s eighth graders.



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