

# EXPLOSIVE GROWTH IN CHARTER SCHOOLS

*A Guide for Charter School Activists  
Provided by The Center for Education Reform*

November, 2005

According to a new report released by the Center for Education Reform, charter schools are experiencing explosive growth, with 13 percent more in just one short year. Charters now comprise four percent of all public schools in America. This dramatic increase can be directly tied to increasing evidence that charter school achievement is growing, particular in states with stronger laws.

This is big news and activists on the front lines of reform need to be armed with the data to support your school, your cause and your continued efforts to improve both. Last year, much-touted 2003 NAEP data was mis-interpreted as demonstrating charters lag behind conventional public schools. That data represented only a sample of charter school students' reading and math scores at one snapshot in time. We argued then that to make any judgment, there needed to be trend data. That is now possible with the release of 2005 NAEP data, and the overall trend is positive. Most compelling is that data from two of the most populous charter states show achievement gains that far outpace conventional public gains.

CER is once again pleased to provide you with a number of resources to help you make the case for why charter schools are the most compelling public education reform to date.

In this online package, you will find the following resources:

- Talking points and key messages for the media, your parents, and your community constituents.
- All of the latest data on charter schools nationally, state-by-state and in certain regions.
- Research fact sheets including analysis of charter school numbers, achievement stats and polling data.

# GETTING THE ACHIEVEMENT MESSAGE OUT

## STAYING ON MESSAGE

Growing a movement is not easy. Most people in a given state not only do not know what a charter school is, but if they do they assume it serves a limited group of people. In reality, the numbers demonstrate the achievement of establishing this new reform. With a four percent market share now of all public schools and more than a million children served, there is no question that not only are charter schools here to stay, but the laws governing them must be made strong and broad to ensure that the public is well served by these new innovative public schools.

There are other indications of achievement as well that are qualitative in scope. Given the continued attention in the media to last year's misleading American Federation of Teachers report, and confusion in interpreting test scores, it's important that you understand and articulate the strength of charter school data. Charter success is here!

Using the rule of three, CER recommends sticking to three, simple messages about the latest growth figures:

1. Double-digit increases in charter growth happen because people are demanding quality options.
2. The jury is *not* still out – charter achievement positives far outweigh the negatives. In the most popular charter states, charter schools outpace their conventional public school peers. Stronger laws matter, too.
3. While most charters are succeeding, some are troubled. It's not that a charter school itself is better than a conventional public school but the concept of charter foster higher quality education when the conditions are right.

## EDUCATING THE MEDIA

The following tips are standard and appeared in previous CER guides. Because more reporters are covering charter schools than ever before, the most important time you can spend is in making sure that reporters in your community know that there is a whole host of new data and research available on charter schools.

- Give reporters you have worked with a quick call and let them know that CER has released an important new report about charter school data; provide them with a fact sheet for their charter school file.

*Remember, it's okay if the reporter doesn't write a story right away – it's important that he or she have the information for future stories.*

- Has your local newspaper featured negative articles on charter schools? Use the latest NAEP data (and state data) as a reason to visit your local **editorial board**.

Find out who your editorial editor is, or who is in charge of arranging regular editorial board meetings, and request a time for you to come in and talk about this timely topic – remind them that the newspaper has been running news articles on the issue. Bring along a parent, a local lawmaker or a teacher who can help strengthen your case.

- Draft an **opinion-editorial** that outlines the new data. Include local numbers and anecdotal stories and even data from last year's Harvard University report that found charters scoring higher than the nearest, comparable neighborhood public school. **Remember!** – no matter how great a story you have to tell – keep it under 650 words!
- Write a **letter-to-the-editor** to your local paper with your three key messages – remember to include local statistics from the latest charter data. Keep the letter under 150 words.
- **Invite reporters to your school** to see first hand the kind of success outlined in numerous reports. Ensure satisfied parents are there to share their experiences.
- Having trouble identifying the right media? Need a second-look at your opinion-editorial? We're here to help. Call CER at (202) 822-9000.

## INFORMING PARENTS

Parents continue to be your most important asset, and are frequently not informed about the challenges swirling around them. Sometimes media coverage on charter schools leaves parents overwhelmed or confused. There are a number of ways to reassure your parents.

- Make the explosive growth in charter schools is an agenda item at a regularly scheduled parent meeting – be sure to provide simple fact sheets that outline how your school is doing. If you can, give them a national snapshot as well. It will help them put their local school in context.
- Send a letter to parents outlining key national data on charter schools and including key local achievement data. Address directly any local negative news coverage, and then set the record straight.
- Include a short article on what research says about charters in other regular correspondences with parents, such as school newsletters.

## ENGAGING LAWMAKERS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

As you well know, our lawmakers read the newspaper, too. They often know very little about what's happening outside their borders, which can make them feel like charter schools are only a small issue. It's important that they know that charter schools are growing and the data is strong!

- Write a letter to your local city council members, mayor and state legislator informing them of new, and exciting data on charter school growth and achievement. Include local statistics as well as anecdotal stories that support the message that charters are doing a great job serving kids in their community.
- Make sure that your allies in the state legislator or city council have a fact sheet on charter school data, so that they can strengthen future testimony with credible research.
- And remember, thank these lawmakers for all they've done to provide an environment in which charters can succeed, and encourage them to take the next step (removing restrictive caps, allowing alternative authorizers, or providing equal funding, to name a few).

## Questions?

CER's research, media, and policy experts are available to offer advice or answer any questions you have. Call us at (202) 822-9000. We're here to help you get the message out.

# CHARTER SCHOOLS BY THE NUMBERS

- Research Fact Sheet -  
*Part I*

## BACKGROUND

The latest, most comprehensive national data on charter schools was released this week by the Center for Education Reform, and paints a picture of a robust, large and growing movement. Since 1992, this movement has grown from one, to 3,625 operating charter schools; new, innovative public schools that are free from most conventional school rules, open by choice and held accountable for results.

## KEY FINDINGS

- New schools: In the 2005-2006 school year, 424 new charter schools were opened, a full 13 percent increase since last year. (The previous school year saw an increase of 15 percent)
- The increase comes despite caps being reached prior or during this last school year in at least seven states.
- The total numbers of charter schools, 3,625, serve approximately 1,076,964 students in 41 states.
- Already for the 2006-2007 school year, 90 additional schools are approved to open.
- The largest numbers of students in charter schools are in grades K-8 (52 percent). Fully 83 percent of charter schools serve children in first grade, an increase of 27 points in two years.
- Fifty-two percent of charters nationwide are elementary, 21 percent are high school, and 27 percent are a combination.
- States with the strongest charter laws show the greatest consistent increases in the number of operating charter schools and student enrollment. (Arizona, California, Delaware, DC, Florida and Texas). Most of those states also show commensurate achievement gains.
- California leads the states with highest enrolment numbers at 219,480 and 81 charters opened this year. If counted as a state, DC leads the nation with market share of public schools at 26 percent.
- Eleven percent of charter schools ever opened have been closed.
- Three and one half percent of schools approved never open.

*Source: The Center for Education Reform [www.edreform.com](http://www.edreform.com)*

# AMERICANS NEED AN EDUCATION ON CHARTER SCHOOLS

## *Support Grows with Knowledge*

- Research Fact Sheet -  
*Part II*

### BACKGROUND

Undertaking the most comprehensive assessment of public opinion to date, the Center for Education Reform, in collaboration with the polling company, inc, surveyed 800 adults nationally and a representative sample of adults in six different states that geographically are representative of charter schools. The research revealed that Americans overwhelmingly support charter schools once they know what they are, but the concept is mis-understood by most Americans.

The fact that charter school growth has exploded in the face of only one in five Americans being able to correctly identify what a charter school is means that once educated, the potential for charter school growth will surpass all existing expectations.

### KEY FINDINGS

- Only twenty percent of Americans correctly identify a charter school as a public school. Seventeen percent will not even venture a guess.
- A higher level of education about charter schools exists in New York (29%) and California (29%), while only 22 percent of Missouri residents can correctly identify a charter school as a public school.
- Support grows with knowledge; 78 percent support charters schools that “are required to meet the same academic and testing standards as other conventional public schools, costing taxpayers no additional money.”
- Support is most prevalent among southerners and south central dwellers. Support is highest in Georgia, at 87 percent and comes in second in California, at 81 percent.
- Charters enjoy tri-partisan support; Republicans (87%), Democrats (74%), especially Democratic women (77%), and Independents (70%) would all green light community efforts to create these “new public schools.”
- Nationally, the greatest supporters of charter schools are not-yet-moms, woman between the ages of 28 and 45 who are not yet but fully intend to be mothers within the next one to five years. Single mothers, black and Hispanic communities and young adults, ages 18-34 are also more intensely supportive.
- Americans respond best to certain words that describe reforms such as accountability, standards and innovation.
- One of the main tenets of charters, performance pay, is supported by 59 percent with support strongest among minority adults in California.

*Source: The Center for Education Reform [www.edreform.com](http://www.edreform.com)*

# CHARTER SCHOOLS GET HIGH MARKS

*Students Learning More, Faster*

- Research Fact Sheet -  
Part III

## BACKGROUND

This new round-up of academic achievement from around the country shows that charter schools are having their intended effect – raising students' test scores to levels beyond those found in conventional public schools. Both proponents and critics of charter schools have eagerly anticipated definitive data that show benefits of this important education reform.

## KEY FINDINGS

In national assessments of public school students, charter schools showed more improvement in both reading and math between the 2003 and 2005 tests. In reading, charter schools improved four points while conventional public schools remained stagnant. This caused an increase in the percentage of charter students achieving proficiency while those students in conventional schools showed no change since 2003. Charter schools typically attract a higher proportion of at-risk children. At the 8<sup>th</sup> grade level a full 60 percent of students in charter schools are minorities, showing that charter students come from backgrounds that have traditionally been under-served. While the present difference in scores is statistically insignificant, it will become all the more significant because charter schools are showing more improvement over time while conventional public schools continue to show little or no such change.

- In New York City, where a restrictive cap limits the number of charters that can open statewide, charter students outperformed their counterparts in the third, fifth, sixth, and seventh grades. Sixty-two percent of charter students achieved proficiency in reading compared to 55 percent of conventional public schools. In math, the difference is even larger; 61 percent of charter students reached proficiency compared to only half of all conventional public school students.
- Charter students in the District of Columbia now account for 26 percent of all public school students, the highest in the nation. The 65 charter schools are also scoring higher in reading and math. Fifty-four percent of DC charter students are proficient in math, a full 10 percent higher than conventional schools. In reading 45 percent of charter students are proficient compared to 39 percent of students in conventional public schools. Recent federal data show that DC charter schools made larger gains since the 2003 test.
- The pioneer in chartering, Minnesota, still managed to grow its numbers by 13 percent since 2004. The amount of charter schools failing to meet federal standards *decreased* by 29 percent meanwhile the number of all public schools that failed to meet the same standards *increased* by 2 percent since last year.
- Showing its affinity to high academic standards and the ability to choose a school that's best, Utah charter school enrollment nearly doubled in less than a year's time with nearly 12,000 students in the state's high-performing schools.
- Charter schools in California gained more ground based on the Academic Performance Index (API) than conventional public schools (28 points vs. 20 points). Charters also outperformed conventional schools at the middle- and high-school levels.

- While charter schools only make up 3 percent of all Massachusetts public schools their showing on the recent MCAS far exceeds their market share. A full 13 percent of the top-performing schools on the state math tests are charters.
- While the final numbers are still being tabulated in Arizona, the findings of one major study suggest a continued pattern of success. Fourth grade students attending charter schools are 9.6 percent more likely to be proficient in reading and 10.3 percent more likely to be proficient in mathematics than their conventional school counterparts (based on state AIMS tests).
- The findings of one major study indicate the high levels of achievement by Colorado's charter schools. Fourth grade students attending charter schools are 12.3 percent more likely to be proficient in reading and 13.5percent more likely to be proficient in mathematics than their conventional school counterparts. Disaggregated results on Colorado's state test, the CSAP, are still unavailable.

*Source: The Center for Education Reform [www.edreform.com](http://www.edreform.com)*