

the CENTER FOR EDUCATION REFORM



CHARTER SCHOOLS QUALITY EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS THAT IMPROVE ALL SCHOOLS

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 that govern conventional public schools. Today, over 6,200 charter schools serve over two million children across the country. For the 2012-2013 year, 514 new charter schools opened -- an increase of nearly ten 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 of 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.

Washington, DC charter high schools graduated 77 percent of their 2012 senior class. DC graduation rates reveal “a widening gap between the city’s public charter schools and traditional public high schools in the ability to graduate students on time,” according to The Washington Post. Nearly eight in ten seniors graduate from DC public charter schools, whereas the graduation rate for the District’s traditional public schools is 61 percent.

In 2012, students in **Central Michigan University’s** (CMU) charter schools outperformed their peers in district schools on all 18 Michigan state tests. More



than 90 percent of CMU’s individual schools meet or outperform their local schools, some by as much as 34 percent. CMU students are nearly twice as likely to be poor or minorities, and their schools receive \$1,329 less per student than comparable public schools.

At SUNY-authorized charters in **New York**, eighty percent of students in grades three through eight scored at or above proficiency in English Language Arts, compared to 77 percent of all public school students. In math, 92 percent of students scored at or above proficiency compared to 86 percent of all public school students.

ALL SCHOOLS DO BETTER

Research shows 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. Below are a few examples:

In 2013, at least three school districts in **Pennsylvania** have created online learning options in order to attract students who left to attend virtual charter schools.

Building on the work of Harvard economist Roland Fryer, a pilot group of public schools in Houston and Denver adopted five best practices from charter schools: increased teacher feedback, data-driven instruction, high-dosage tutoring, increased time on task, and a relentless focus on high academic expectations. The change worked! Students performed as though they had had as much as an extra three and a half months of time in the classroom.

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.



IMPORTANT FACTS ABOUT CHARTER SCHOOL LAWS

Forty-two states and the **District of Columbia** have enacted charter school laws. Of those, only 13 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 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.

INDEPENDENT AUTHORIZERS MATTER

An authorizer is an entity approved by a state legislature to bring charter schools into existence. Authorizers set up processes to approve charter schools and hold them accountable by managing and monitoring schools’ progress in academics and in complying with all applicable laws.

The terms “multiple” or “independent” authorizers are used to describe a component in a law that permits authorizing by entities such as universities, independent charter school boards, nonprofit organizations and/or mayors. Permitting the creation of independent authorizers is one of the most important components of a strong charter law.

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. States with multiple and truly independent authorizers, not commissions tied to the state departments of education, produce more and better opportunities for students.

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; charters are challenged where they are not.

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 revenue and spending*
- 6) *Freedom in employee and union contracts*
- 7) *Opportunity for growth*

17 STATES HAVE INDEPENDENT AND MULTIPLE CHARTERING AUTHORITIES:

Arizona	Missouri
District of Columbia	Nevada
Colorado	New York
Georgia	Ohio
Idaho	Oklahoma
Indiana	South Carolina
Louisiana	Utah
Maine	Washington*
Michigan	Wisconsin (only in Milwaukee)
Minnesota	

* No schools have been approved.

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.

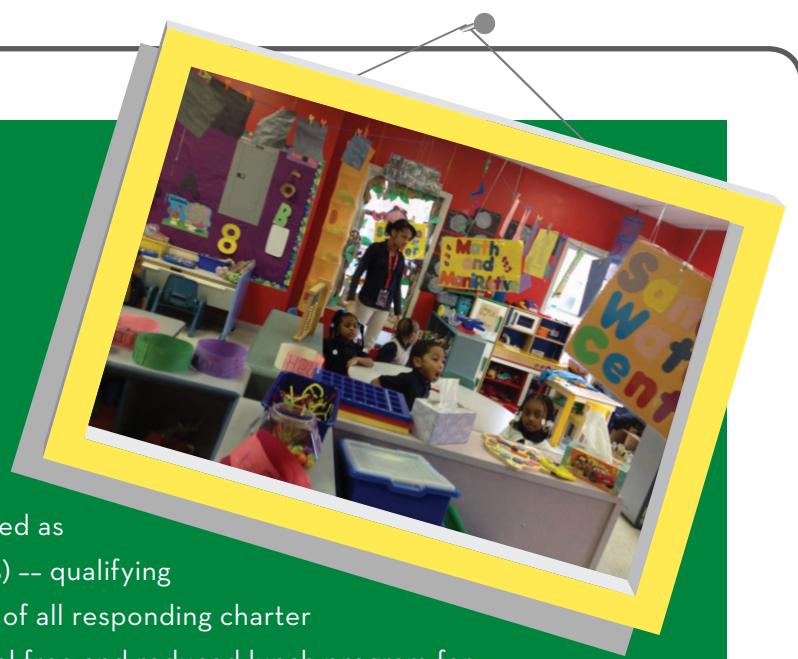
Charter schools’ constitutionality has been upheld by courts in more than a dozen states, including **California, Colorado, Michigan, New Jersey and Ohio.**



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 2011 Annual Survey of America’s Charter Schools, half of charter school students fall into categories defined as at-risk (50%), minority (53%) or low-income (60%) -- qualifying for free and reduced lunch. However, 31 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.



WHO SUPPORTS CHARTER SCHOOLS? 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 surveyed across the country could properly identify a charter school as a public school. However, once explained, nearly 80 percent embraced the concept.

The biggest support came from Not-yet-Moms, Southerners and South Central Dwellers. Hispanics, African-Americans, single moms and parents of children currently enrolled in conventional public schools were also on board.

Charter schools enjoy “tri-partisan” support, according to the same poll. Republicans (87%), Democrats (74%) - especially women Democrats (77%), and Independents (70%) would all “green-light” community efforts to create these new public schools.

WHY CHARTER SCHOOLS? 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 freedom -- 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 15 percent of all charter schools that ever opened have closed, showing the power of this performance-based accountability.

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