

CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL FACTS

DID YOU KNOW . . .

Massachusetts charter schools are public schools.

By law, charter schools are open to all children, free of charge. They cannot—and do not select their students. If more children want to enroll in a school than it has space for, a random lottery determines who gets in.

Charter schools operate independently of local school districts, but they are not “privately run.” They are managed by public boards of trustees, abide by all the same laws and rules that district schools do, and are overseen by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

It’s about options and opportunities.

Charter schools are founded by parents and community leaders who believe that district schools are not meeting children’s educational needs. Parents want new options and opportunities for their kids: the first Massachusetts charter school opened in 1995, and since then, statewide enrollment has steadily risen to more than 29,000 (a little more than 3% of total statewide enrollment). And nearly 45,000 students are on wait lists.

Charter and district schools are collaborators.

Across the state, charter and district schools and their teachers and administrators have started dozens of collaborative programs. The most comprehensive was created in 2011 by the Boston Compact. It is paving the way for a new era of cooperation and collaboration that will benefit all Boston schoolchildren.

Charter public schools serve more disadvantaged students.

Concentrated in urban areas, charters serve a far higher percentage of African American, Latino and low-income children than the state’s district schools. And while district schools serve more children who either cannot speak English or struggle with it, charters’ recent efforts to attract immigrant families are changing that. Three new charter schools focus on teaching English-language learners and others have opened in neighborhoods with high immigrant populations.

Massachusetts charter public schools are closing the achievement gap.



Nationwide, there’s a persistent achievement gap between rich and poor kids. But Massachusetts charter public schools are proving that children from poor

urban communities can achieve at the same high level as those from affluent suburbs. In Boston, Lawrence, and other urban areas, charters that serve predominantly poor and minority children are ranked among the highest in the state on MCAS. A 2008 Harvard/MIT study for the Boston Foundation found that Boston charters erased half the achievement gap in a single year.

How do they do it? For starters, charter schools typically provide hundreds more hours in the classroom each year than district schools, through longer school days and years. They also strive to establish a culture of excellence and then offer both teachers and students the supports they need to succeed.



Charter public schools are doing more with less.

Unlike district schools, which receive state subsidies of up to 80% of the total cost of their buildings, charter public schools finance their own facilities. According to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), charters receive about 25% less funding than districts.



Charter schools are public schools. There are nearly 6,000 charter schools across the country providing free education to over two million children.



Public school funding stays public.

It's true that when children switch to charters, the funds earmarked for their education moves with them. But remember, charter public schools are public. Since the districts are no longer educating these students, they no longer keep the funding. However, the state provides districts with additional local aid when students opt to attend charters. Districts get more than double their money back over a six-year period, giving them time to adjust their budgets for the loss of enrollment.

Our charter public schools are the most scrutinized in the nation.



Massachusetts charter public schools have freedoms (in structure, mission, and academic program) that district schools don't. But in exchange, they are heavily scrutinized. The state's application and

oversight practices have been rated the toughest—and best—in the nation. Charters are evaluated annually and must renew every five years. If they do not meet certain standards, they can be shut down. Several have been. Charter finances are also subject to independent review.



WHAT IS A CHARTER SCHOOL?



Charter schools are founded by parents and community leaders who believe there are educational needs that are not being met by district schools, and who believe that parents deserve more educational options for their children.

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