

SPEAK OUT! LET'S LIFT THE CAP!



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HELP MOVE THE MOVEMENT!

Our state's first charter public school opened in 1995, and since then, enrollment has risen steadily. Today, 69 charters provide high-quality, free education alternatives to nearly 30,000 children across Massachusetts. That's roughly 3 percent of school-age children.

If parents like you had their way, that figure would be more than double: 45,000-plus kids are on wait lists. Maybe your child used to be one of them. Massachusetts is one of 26 states, along with Washington, DC, that have a cap on charter schools.* That is, they restrict the number of charter schools and/or the number of students a single school can enroll.



THE MCPSA IS HERE TO HELP

We can help you plan a legislator's visit or otherwise support you in your advocacy. Feel free to contact Julia Mejia, Parent Organizer, at 917-202-8064 jemjia@masscharterschools.org

LET'S KEEP IN TOUCH!

The MCPSA's growing network of parents and other charter school supporters needs you.

Join our email list. To stay up-to-date on pertinent legislation, Lobby Days, and what's happening in the movement in general, sign up for emails at our website, www.masscharterschools.org. At the home page, click on "Get Involved."

Give us a call
Julia Mejia, Parent Organizer #917-202-8064
jemjia@masscharterschools.org

Remember, 45,000 kids need your help. We need to abolish the cap on charter schools in Massachusetts, and it's parents like you who are going to make it happen. Be a mover in our movement!



* According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

TIPS FOR CONTACTING YOUR LEGISLATOR

Letters / Email

- For the correct district or Capitol addresses, go to www.mahouse.gov.
- Address the legislator as “Honorable Representative” or “Honorable Senator.”
- Be sure to mention that you are a constituent.
- If you are asking the legislator to support your position on a piece of legislation, identify the bill number, support your argument with specific facts, and include personal statements. “I feel strongly about this because ...”
- Keep your message brief and clear (one page if written). “This is how charter schools have affected my family ...”
- Include your name, street and email addresses, and phone number.

By phone

- Your legislator’s phone number can be found www.mahouse.gov.
- Ask to speak to the legislator, and if he or she is not available, ask for the chief of staff or education aide.
- Mention the subject of your call right away (e.g. support for your child’s education and/or support for charter schools).
- Be brief and clear about your concerns.
- Thank whomever you’re speaking with for taking your call.

At an event or at the Statehouse

You may be asked by your school leader and the MCPSA to meet with your legislator to speak on behalf of charter schools. Perhaps at our annual Lobby Day at the Statehouse or during a school visit or other event.

- As with a phone call, be brief and clear.
- Be ready to tell your legislator your story: How has your charter school made a difference in the lives of your child and your family?
- Be prepared to answer questions about your charter school.
- Once again, resist any urge to gripe. These meetings are rare opportunities to share the positive impact of your charter school with someone in a position to take direct action on lifting the cap.



Tell your charter school story

As a charter school parent, you can play a big role in getting the cap lifted in Massachusetts. Chances are, you and your child have a story to tell about how a charter school has made a difference in your lives. It’s a story that your neighbors and legislators need to hear. Start telling it. Your voice can make a difference.

Start with your friends and neighbors

The key to lifting the cap is building a network of charter school advocates. All of us have a “circle of influence,” be it small or large. Tell everyone in yours why they need to support charter schools. Just tell your story.

Call them individually. Write each of them a letter or an email. Tell them all at once on Facebook. Write an editorial for your local newspaper. Or host a house party, preferably one that involves cookies. Be sure to encourage everyone to write or call their legislator (you can hand out copies of the tip sheet at the end of this booklet).

Meet with your state legislator

Writing or calling your legislator (other elected officials too) is good. Even better is meeting with him or her to tell your story in person, perhaps by joining us for our annual Lobby Day at the Statehouse. Better still is getting your legislator into your charter school for a visit. Seeing is believing.

You can invite your legislator to any school event that highlights its success or its place in the community: a ribbon cutting, a student project day, a luncheon, an annual meeting, a community event, a school tour. After that first visit, try to get your legislator into your school at least once a year.

A school leader, a parent, or a board member will need to contact the legislator’s office to schedule a visit. You may have to call several times: *don’t give up*.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR A VISIT

1. Prepare a one-page info sheet for the legislator.

Include such highlights as:

- Collaborations with the school district
- Awards and recognition that your school or your students have received
- Relationships with local businesses and the community
- Successes—anything that you and your school community are proud of

2. Get to know the legislator. That is, do your research:

- Know their party affiliation
- Know their committee and subcommittee memberships
- Know their constituency—How does your school affect it?

3. Create a streamlined agenda. It might look something like this:

- 9:00 a.m.** The legislator is greeted by the school leader and the board chair and then led on a school tour by a fabulously well-prepared student.
- 9:15 a.m.** The legislator then has a chance to speak with a group of handpicked parents about the school's successes and challenges.
- 9:40 a.m.** Photo op (a local newspaper is on hand): legislator with students.

Realistically, you may have as little as 20 minutes. That's right. An hour if you're lucky. Be prepared to be flexible, and use the time wisely. Showcase the students, the teachers, and the learning.



And remember, this visit is an opportunity to showcase your school—not to gripe or to attack your legislator for his or her maddening voting record. Be strong for the kids!

FOLLOWING UP

1. Thank your legislator.

Your school leader and board members should send a brief, handwritten thank-you note to the legislator. As many parents as possible should send one as well. For example:



Dear Rep. Smith,

Thank you for visiting my child's charter school, (your school name here), last week. My child, Jenny, is in the third grade and was very excited to have an elected official at her school. Thank you for your support. We look forward to seeing you at the school again soon. We can't help showing it off!

Sincerely,
John Doe
Address

2. Send a press release to your local media.

Describe the visit and enclose pictures. It's a good idea to get the legislator's permission before sending in a picture. Some things to include in your press release:

- Who visited and when
- The full name of your school
- How many parents or community members attended
- An identified quote or two from school leaders, parents, or students
- Some facts about your school: founding date, enrollment...
- Who to contact for more information about the visit or the school
- Correctly spelled names of anyone in the pictures, and who they are

We'd love to see a copy. Send it to **Julia Mejia: Boston Parent Organizer** jmejia@masscharterschools.org