



## **JUST THE FACTS: PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS IN MASSACHUSETTS**

In Massachusetts, tens of thousands of children are stranded on public charter school waitlists – the vast majority of whom are enrolled in the lowest performing school districts in the state. As the debate continues over whether to lift enrollment caps on public charter schools, and give these students fair access to a quality public education, it's important to know the facts.

### **PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Nothing about charter schools is private. Charter schools *are* public schools.

- Charters are open to all students and admission is determined by random lottery; there are no entrance exams or admission requirements.
- Charter teachers are public school teachers; Boards of Trustees are public boards.
- Charters operate independently of local districts, but are overseen by the state.
- Charters must abide by all the laws and regulations that traditional district schools abide by. They are subject to open meeting laws and their finances are public.

### **WAITLISTS**

Demand for charter schools has been strong since they first opened in 1995. Because parents had to enter enrollment lotteries for each school, their children's names often appeared on multiple wait lists. The state implemented new rules in 2013 eliminating all duplicates and most names that had been on lists for more than one year.

- More than [32,000 children](#) are still on waiting lists statewide, 12,000 in Boston.

Questions raised by the state Auditor are being addressed. The Auditor reviewed lists as they existed in 2012 – before new rules were implemented.

### **ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE**

Public charter schools have consistently outperformed district schools all across the state. Independent studies show that they are closing the achievement gap between low-income, African American and Latino children and affluent, white children.

- A higher percentage of students in charter schools scored proficient or advanced in all subjects at every grade level compared with their district peers. ([2014 MCAS](#))
- Many urban charters, with a high percentage of African American, Latino and low-income students, ranked first in the state, outperforming affluent suburban districts. ([2014 MCAS](#))
- A higher percentage of African American, Latino and low-income students enrolled in charters are proficient in all subjects compared to their peers in district schools. The data showed charters have virtually closed the achievement gap. ([2014 MCAS](#))

Two studies by Stanford University's Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) in [2013](#) and [2015](#) showed that Commonwealth charter schools are accelerating the pace of learning at a rate not seen anywhere else in the country.

- Boston charters provided a typical student with more than twelve months of additional learning per year in reading and thirteen months of additional learning per year in math.
- Children in all Massachusetts charter schools gained the equivalent of 36 more days of learning per year in reading and 65 more days of learning per year in math.
- The academic performance of Latino students enrolled in charters was close to or above the performance of White students statewide; the gap was significantly narrowed among African American children in charters and white students.
- The study compared charter students with district students from the same demographic backgrounds, and charters against the district schools the students formerly attended.

Boston charter high school graduates who enroll in college complete college at a higher rate (50.6%) than BPS non-exam school graduates (35%) according to a [study](#) by the Boston Opportunity Agenda.

- 9<sup>th</sup> graders who attend Boston charters are nearly four times as likely to go on to complete college than BPS 9<sup>th</sup> graders (35% vs. 9%).
- Nearly half (44%) of all high school graduates from BPS's non-exam schools needed remedial courses in college compared to 10% of Boston charter graduates.

### **IMPACT ON DISTRICT SCHOOL BUDGETS**

Charters receive funding only when parents choose to enroll their children and only the amount the district would normally spend to educate each student. If districts are no longer educating the children, should they keep the funds? Districts also receive additional state aid to reimburse them for lost funds.

- Charter schools account for 4% of public school enrollment and 4% of public education spending.
- Charter schools *are* public schools, so there is no loss of funding for public education when money is allocated to charter public schools.
- Districts are reimbursed by the state for six years after any increase in funds allocated to charters, ultimately receiving 225% of their money back – the nation's most generous reimbursement.
- While district schools receive state subsidies for their facilities, charters are not eligible for school building assistance.
- The Massachusetts Legislature has funded district reimbursement at 96% or better [in 9 of the last 12 years](#). Only in years when every area of the budget experienced deep cuts was it shortchanged. To date, districts have received nearly \$700 million in reimbursements.
- No locally generated revenues, such as property taxes, are transferred to charters; all charter funding is taken from a community's state aid, which leads some to incorrectly argue that charters are taking an unfair share of Ch. 70 school dollars. The state could change the law to have charters receive their funds from both local and state sources, but it would not affect the overall amount of funds being reallocated to charters.

## Impact in Boston

- The Boston Municipal Research Bureau concluded in a recent study that because the City of Boston shares 35% of its total revenue every year with the school department, charter expansion has had no effect on the district's budget.
- Over the past five years, district spending has risen 12% to \$1 billion, while per pupil spending has increased from \$14,466 to \$16,918. Boston spends more per pupil than any other urban district in the country, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- Charters receive less per pupil than the district spends. While BPS spends \$16,918 per student (FY 2015 General Fund Budget), charters receive only \$14,937 per student. When you factor in state reimbursements, the net cost to the city for each charter student is \$12,422.

## SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

New reports by the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology released in January disprove claims that charter schools do not serve students with the same level of need, finding that charters are not only attracting the same students the district serves, but are educating them at a higher level.

## Enrollment

State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [data](#) for 2014/15 shows a steady increase in the enrollment of children with special needs (SPED) and a dramatic increase in enrollment of English Language Learners (ELL) in public charter schools.

- Statewide, SPED enrollment in charters is only slightly lower than the state average - 14% to 16.3% - and ELL enrollment is higher - 9.4% to 8.5%.
- In Boston charters, SPED enrollment is 15.9%, compared to 19% in Boston district schools (BPS).
- In mostly urban Gateway city charters, SPED enrollment is 13%, compared to 17.4% in Gateway city district schools.
- ELL enrollment among all Boston charters increased from 3.2% in 2010/11 to 13.8% in 2014/15.
- ELL enrollment among "new" students enrolling for the first time in Boston charters in 2014/15 was 22.6%, approaching the district ELL enrollment of 29.8%.
- In Gateway cities, the percent of ELL students enrolled at charter schools has increased from 7.7% in 2011/12 to 12.1% in 2014/15.
- Gateway charter school ELL enrollment among "new" students enrolling for the first time in 2014/15 was 16.0%, approaching the district ELL enrollment of 19.9%.

A recent [MIT study](#) ("*Special Education and English Language Learner Students in Boston Charter Schools: Impact and Classification*") concluded: "Students across the pre-lottery levels of special education classroom inclusion and English language proficiency are, for the most part, similarly represented in charter lotteries and BPS (Boston Public Schools)."



## Academic Performance

Children with special needs and English-language learners perform significantly better in charter schools than they do in traditional public schools.

- The [MIT study](#) concluded: “Those with the most severe needs, special education students who spent the majority of their time in substantially separate classrooms and ELLs with beginning English proficiency at the time of the lottery, perform significantly better in charters than traditional public schools.” The MIT researchers went on to say: “Even the most disadvantaged special needs students benefit from charter attendance...Special education and ELL students experience large academic gains in charters similar to the gains of non-special needs students.”
- A substantially higher percentage of special needs children attending public charters achieved proficiency in English and math compared to special needs children in sending district schools: 16.4 percentage points more in English, 10.1 percentage points more in math, according to [2014 MCAS data](#).
- A substantially higher percentage of English Language Learners attending public charters achieved proficiency in English and math compared to special needs children in sending district schools: 12.8 percentage points more in English, 12.1 percentage points more in math, according to [2014 MCAS data](#).

## ATTRITION RATES

The attrition rate in Boston and in Gateway City charters “has remained lower” than the attrition rates of district schools in those communities, according to 2014/15 DESE [data](#).

- The attrition rate at Boston charters (9.3%) is significantly lower than in BPS (14.2%).
- In Gateway Cities, charter attrition rates (6.2%) are lower than Gateway districts (11.4%).
- From 2012-2014, an average of just [82 students](#) left charters and returned to Boston Public Schools, according to BPS numbers – one-tenth of one percent of BPS total enrollment.

## SUSPENSION RATES

There is no evidence to support the claim that charter suspension rates lead to higher attrition or dropout rates. Parents overwhelmingly support high standards that create a classroom environment that is favorable to learning.

- While Boston charters have higher out-of-school-suspension rates than BPS schools (12.6% vs. 4.8%), Boston charter [attrition rates](#) are much lower than BPS (9.3% vs. 14.2%), according to 2014/15 DESE data. Boston charters’ [stability rate](#), which measures students who stay with the same school all year, is higher in Boston charters than BPS (92.2% vs. 86.5%), countering claims that children leave in droves prior to testing season, according to 2014/15 DESE data.
- Boston charter high schools have lower [dropout rates](#) than BPS high schools (4.1% vs. 11.9%), according to 2014/15 DESE data.

**For more information, contact: Massachusetts Charter Public School Association, 617-523-0881**