

To: Dom Slowey  
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April 1, 2016

From: Steve Koczela  
President, The MassINC Polling Group

Re: Overview of 2016 Boston public school parents poll on charter schools

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*These results are based on a survey of a representative sample of parents in the City of Boston. Some comparisons are made to a previous MCPSA poll from 2014, which also surveyed Boston parents. Both surveys were sponsored by the Massachusetts Charter Public School Association.*

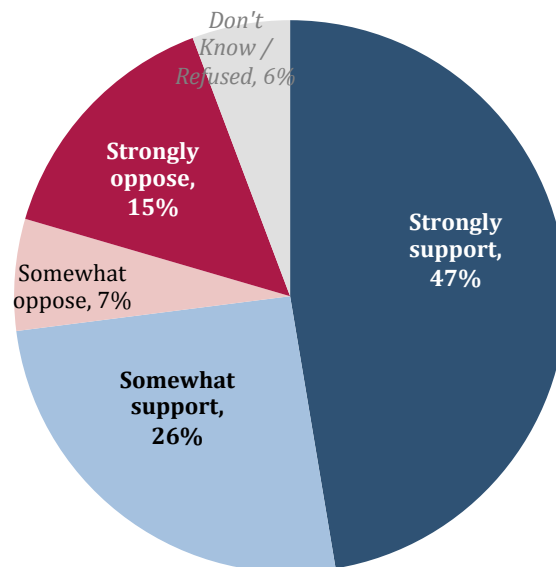
**Boston parents strongly support the charter ballot question and expanding charters in the city.**

By better than a 3-to-1 margin (73-21), Boston parents support the proposed ballot question to expand charter schools in the Commonwealth (Figure 1). This echoes strong support for charter schools from a similar MCPSA poll conducted in 2014. We cannot make a direct comparison on the ballot question results to the 2014 survey, since the ballot question did not exist at that time. But on a similar question, whether parents think the limit should be increased in Boston or not, support for charters edged up slightly, from 62 percent in 2014 to 68 percent today.

In the 2014 survey, there was only scattered opposition to charters among parents, and that pattern holds today. Even among those who say they would choose a BPS district school for their child over a charter school, 62 percent support the ballot question. This support among non-charter parents is encouraging, given that most parents would not directly benefit from a cap lift. Most have not entered their children in the charter lottery and would favor a public school over a charter for their own children. Nonetheless, they support the ballot question.

Similarly, there is broad support across demographic groups for creating a common application process for both district and charter schools. Nearly three-quarters (74 percent) of parents overall

**Figure 1: Support or oppose proposed MA ballot question to raise cap on charter schools?**



*Question text: There may be a question on the ballot this November that would allow up to 12 new charter schools to be created each year across Massachusetts, even in districts that have reached existing enrollment caps. Would you support or oppose this measure?*

want such a common application, including 69 percent of parents who would prefer to send their children to a regular BPS district school.

These figures represent encouraging data points for a potential ballot campaign, should the issue come before the voters this fall. But it should be noted that this is not a likely voter poll, and it should not be seen as a predictor of support levels among Boston likely voters in November.

**Support for charters is strongest among minority parents, those with lower income and education levels**

Minority parents, and Hispanic parents in particular, are much more likely to support expanding charter schools than white parents (Figure 2). There is also a relationship between charter support and socio-economic factors. Voters with lower levels of income and educational attainment are more likely to support charter schools. Support decreases as education and income levels increase, but charters enjoy strong support among the minority and low-income parents, who comprise a majority of parents in Boston schools.

**Opinion on charter funding.**

Despite the recent public debates about school budgets and charter funding, there is little sign of outrage among BPS parents. Only 31 percent of parents think that charters are a major cause of the budget problems facing the Boston Public Schools, compared to nearly half (48 percent) who do not think so. A majority (54 percent) of parents think that the current charter funding arrangement is fair, and 60 percent agree with the current practice of public schools continuing to receive funding for students who have left for a charter school. If there is public pressure for a change in how charters are funded, as has been proposed in the Senate legislation, it does not appear to be coming from Boston parents.

<b>Figure 2: Nonwhite, lower income and education parents most supportive of ballot question</b>	
% Support for the ballot question, by demographic group	
Hispanic	86%
Age 18 to 29	86%
High School or less	84%
Black, not Hispanic	81%
\$50 to 100k	79%
Less than \$50k	79%
Male	79%
Some college, no degree	76%
H-Pk Mpan Rox M Hill	76%
Age 30 to 44	74%
Overall	73%
Dot SBos EBos Ctown	73%
ABFen BBay S End BHill Dntown	72%
WRox Roz JP	70%
Female	68%
Age 45 to 59	66%
College grad (BA/BS)	62%
More than \$100k	58%
Adv degree	44%
White, not Hispanic	42%

**Appendix A:  
Selected Results from Massachusetts Charter Public School Association Poll**

Which of the following best describes the school your child(ren) attend?

One of the district Public Schools in Boston	79%
A public school, but outside Boston	5%
A public charter school	13%
A private school	11%
Home school	<1%
Don't Know / Refused	1%
<i>Multiple responses allowed, adds up to more than 100%</i>	

Would you say your opinions about the public schools are **READ OPTIONS** by city officials? *Order rotated top to bottom, bottom to top.*

Highly valued	27%
Valued somewhat	43%
Not valued	25%
Don't Know / Refused	5%

In your view, how willing are Boston Public Schools officials to make changes in response to concerns raised by parents? *Order rotated top to bottom, bottom to top.*

Very willing	28%
Somewhat willing	53%
Not willing	17%
Don't Know / Refused	2%

If you had to choose between sending your child to **READ FIRST** or **READ NEXT** where would you send your child? *Order rotated.*

A Boston public school	48%
A charter school in Boston	41%
Neither / depends (not read)	8%
Don't Know / Refused	2%

There may be a question on the ballot this November that would allow up to 12 new charter schools to be created each year across Massachusetts, even in districts that have reached existing enrollment caps. Would you support or oppose this measure? And would you strongly (support/oppose) it or just somewhat?

Strongly support	47%
Somewhat support	26%
Somewhat oppose	7%
Strongly oppose	15%
Don't Know / Refused	6%

There is currently a Massachusetts law that caps how many students can attend Boston charter schools. Charter schools in Boston have reached the cap on enrollment in the city and cannot open any new schools. Should the limit on the number of students who can attend charter schools in Boston be kept in place as it is today OR should the limit be raised so more students from Boston can attend charter schools?

Limit should be kept in place	27%
Increased, so more students can attend	68%
Decreased (not read)	<1%
Don't Know / Refused	4%

Public schools in Massachusetts receive state funding based on the number of students they teach. If a public school district student enrolls in a charter school, the funds are transferred to the charter school. Districts then receive partial reimbursements from the state for several years for the funds lost to charter schools. Do you think this is a fair way to fund charter schools, or not?

Yes	54%
No	41%
Don't Know / Refused	6%

As I just mentioned, district schools are reimbursed for funds that go to charter schools as a result of students transferring to charter schools. Do you think that public schools should continue to receive funding for students who have left to enroll in charter schools?

Yes	60%
No	36%
Don't Know / Refused	4%

Do you think charter schools are one of the major causes of the Boston Public School district's budget problems, or not?

Yes they are	31%
No they are not	48%
Combination / Depends (not read)	11%
Don't Know / Refused	10%

Currently, there are two separate systems that parents use to apply to Boston district or charter schools. The Mayor has proposed combining these systems to create one unified process for parents to apply to both types of schools with one application. Do you support or oppose this proposal? And would you strongly (support/oppose) it or just somewhat?

Strongly support	38%
Somewhat support	36%
Somewhat oppose	10%
Strongly oppose	11%
Don't Know / Refused	6%

## Demographics

### Race

White, not Hispanic	23%
Black, not Hispanic	33%
Hispanic	30%
Other	13%
Don't Know / Refused	<1%

### Age

18 to 29	11%
30 to 44	49%
45 to 59	36%
60+	4%

### Gender

Male	43%
Female	57%

### Education

High School or less	43%
Some college, no degree	26%
College graduate (BA/BS)	18%
Advanced degree	12%
Don't Know / Refused	<1%

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### About the Poll

These results are based on a survey of 403 parents of school-aged children living in the city of Boston, MA. The poll was conducted March 12-17, 2016. Live telephone interviews were conducted via both landline and cell phone using a combination of random digit dial (RDD) and listed sample. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is +/- 4.9 percent with a 95 percent level of confidence. The poll was sponsored by the Massachusetts Charter Public School Association.