

## EDUCATION WEEK

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### CHARTERS & CHOICE

## Texas Waiting Lists Tied to Cap Issue

When charter advocates argue against state caps limiting the number of charter schools, they often point to long waiting lists as evidence of a pressing public demand.

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Such is the case with [a new analysis](#) by the Texas Public Policy Foundation. The free-market think tank finds that at least 16,810 students were on waiting lists at Texas charters, as of last school year.

"In Texas and nationwide, the demand to attend a charter school far outweighs the supply," says the August report. "The Texas legislature has unnecessarily prevented charters from operating in a free market and should eliminate the cap."

The waiting-list figure, based on a survey of schools, includes data from about half the state's "open enrollment" charter schools, which serve a majority of Texas charter students, plus most of the state's 19 university-operated charter campuses. Open-enrollment charters are considered independent school districts and can have multiple campuses, the report says.

Because just half the schools—169, serving some 49,000 students—responded to the survey, the actual waiting-list total could be much higher, said Brooke Dollens Terry, a policy analyst for the think tank.

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Texas law sets a limit of 215 open-enrollment charters. The state has 210 now, and analysts say the last five slots may well be filled this fall.

Nationwide, about 365,000 students were on charter waiting lists as of last school year, according to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. Twenty-six states and the District of Columbia have legislative caps, said Todd M. Ziebarth, a senior policy analyst for the Washington-based advocacy group. Of those, he said, 12 have reached the cap.

Rita C. Haeker, the president of the Texas State Teachers Association, an affiliate of the National Education Association, said her union opposes lifting the cap.

The open-enrollment charters have failed to "significantly outperform" regular public schools, she said in a statement, citing state test data.



**By Erik W. Robelen**