



Texas Charter School Waiting List Approaches 17,000

Each student has their own story

by Brooke Dollens Terry

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FOR TOO LONG, children in poor neighborhoods have been assigned to failing schools and have missed the educational opportunities offered to wealthier children. Public charter schools offer students and parents a chance to choose a different public school in their area. Unfortunately, education policies at the state level are prohibiting many Texas students from attending public charter schools. Last year nearly 17,000 students were on a waiting list to attend a public charter school.

area charter school last year was turned away because there were not enough seats.

EACH STUDENT ATTENDING A CHARTER SCHOOL HAS THEIR OWN STORY.

Danisha Porche is a junior at KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program) Houston high school, which is a public charter school. She evacuated with her family from New Orleans to Houston due to hurricane Katrina. Danisha says,

“KIPP has changed my life, because where I come from college is not an option, dream or reality. Since I started school at KIPP, after hurricane Katrina, I have had the privilege to visit many colleges and I now know that I will go to college and become a pediatrician. Being in the KIPP family is a blessing.”

Irene Foster is a KIPP parent with a remarkable success story. Her eldest daughter was born in Mexico and they both immigrated here when her daughter was five years old. Irene’s

This large waiting list demonstrates a tremendous parental and student demand for educational options besides their government-assigned public school. Houston’s regional waiting list was the largest, with 7,415 students waiting to get into a charter school last year. One out of every four students who wanted to enroll in a Houston-



Danisha Porche, a junior at KIPP high school, came to KIPP after evacuating with her family from New Orleans to Houston due to hurricane Katrina.

CHARTER SCHOOL ENROLLMENT BREAKDOWN FOR 2007-2008 SCHOOL YEAR

Type of Charter	Enrollment
Open Enrollment	89,156
District	23,275
University	1,329
Home-Rule	0
Total	113,760

Source: Texas Education Agency

daughter attended KIPP Academy Middle School in Houston several years ago and went on to graduate from college and is now teaching school at a KIPP charter school in New York City. Irene explains, “KIPP has helped me educate my daughters not only in the academics, but in behavior. My oldest daughter, Yazmin, grew up without a father, and I was always afraid she would misbehave out of rage to me, but KIPP helped our family stay together and reinforce family values. She has now graduated from college, joined Teach For America, and is teaching at KIPP Academy New York. I am very proud of her desire to give back.”

THE STORIES OF PARENTS AND STUDENTS ON WAITING LISTS SHOW WHY CHARTER SCHOOLS ARE IN SUCH HIGH DEMAND.

Kymerly Bosheee’s kindergartener Kyle is ahead for her age, so Kymerly researched several public schools in the Austin area and even interviewed three charter school principals to ensure she found the school most likely to challenge her daughter. Ms. Bosheee picked both the Harmony Science Academy and NYOS charter school in Austin for Kyle, but both schools were full, so she had to put her daughter on their waiting lists. Ms. Bosheee found that “charter schools really cater to the child and not to the system.” As demonstrated in this example, an abundance of public charter schools in an area gives parents the opportunity to shop around and pick which public school best meets their child’s needs.

Only 20 percent of Americans can correctly identify a charter school as a public school.

Surprisingly, most Americans are unfamiliar with charter schools. In fact, only 20 percent of Americans can correctly identify a charter school as a public school, according to a Center for Education Reform national poll. Charter schools are public schools

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CHARTER SCHOOL REGIONAL ENROLLMENT DATA FOR 2007-2008 SCHOOL YEAR			
Area	Total Regional Public Enrollment	Charter Enrollment	Waiting List
Austin	345,154	4,789	623
Corpus Christi	105,512	1,310	159
Dallas/Fort Worth	1,220,797	30,123	5,896
El Paso	173,735	2,434	53
Houston	1,031,462	24,591	7,415
Rio Grande Valley	383,460	6,126	2,110
Statewide Total			16,810

Source: Author’s Calculations and Texas Education Agency Regional Enrollment Report



Photo: Lupita Montes, Kipp, Houston



Photo: Lupita Montes, Kipp, Houston



Photo: Terry Berkenhoff, NYOS, Austin

Top: Kipp Shine Prep in Houston; Middle: Kipp Academy Middle School in Houston; Bottom: NYOS Magnolia McCullough Elementary in Austin.

Texas Charter Schools: Waiting List *continued*

funded with public funds that are subject to less government regulation and have the freedom to innovate. Charter schools cannot charge tuition, teach religion, discriminate, or cherry pick students.

Nationwide, charter schools tend to serve students who are academically behind their peers, with many focusing on hard-to-serve students and students at risk of dropping out. As a result, charter schools serve a higher percentage of minority and low-income students than traditional public schools. In Texas, 81 percent of students in charter schools are minorities, compared to 60 percent in traditional public schools.

Demand is growing in Texas to attend a charter school, as demonstrated by the nearly 17,000 students on a waiting list. Unfortunately, the Texas Legislature has capped the number of open-enrollment charters at 215 and the State Board of Education just issued the remaining charters at their November 2008 meeting.

Hopefully, Texas lawmakers and policymakers will come to their senses and lift the legislative cap on open-enrollment charter schools and remove barriers that prevent successful charters from opening new schools. Texas' message to successful charter schools here and in other states should be simple—"Texas is wide open for business." ★

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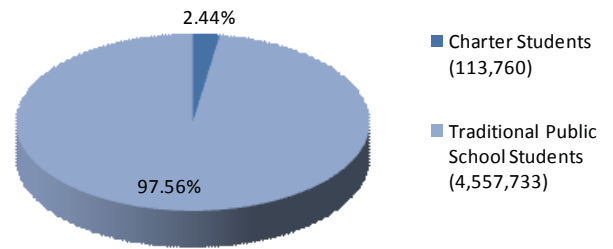
Resources

Calculating the Demand for Charter Schools by Brooke Terry and Michael Alexander, Texas Public Policy Foundation (Aug. 2008) <http://www.texaspolicy.com/pdf/2008-08-PP14-charter-bt.pdf>.

Charter School Reform: Past, Present, and Future by Jamie Story, Texas Public Policy Foundation (Sept. 2007) <http://www.texaspolicy.com/pdf/2007-09-PP22-charter-js.pdf>.

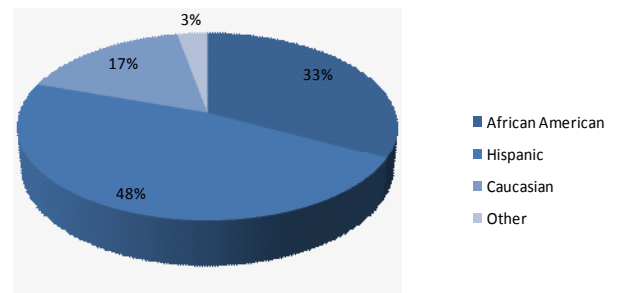
Texas Roundup: Charter Schooling in the Lone Star State by Nelson Smith, Progressive Policy Institute (Feb. 2005) http://www.ppi-online.org/ppi_ci.cfm?knlgAreaID=110&subsecID=134&contentID=253173.

Charter Schools Have a 2 Percent Market Share in Texas



Source: Texas Education Agency

More Than 80 Percent of Texas Charter School Students Are Minorities



Source: Texas Education Agency

About the Author

Brooke Dollens Terry is an education policy analyst within the Texas Public Policy Foundation's Center for Education Policy. Before joining the Foundation, she worked at the Texas Workforce Commission in government relations and as a policy analyst for Commissioner Diane Rath. At the Workforce Commission, Brooke researched and analyzed child care, welfare, foster care, food stamps, and a host of other workforce policy issues.

Prior to working in state government, Brooke worked in Washington D.C. for U.S. Senator Phil Gramm for two and a half years analyzing federal legislation and policy in the areas of banking, housing, education, welfare, judiciary, and social issues. Upon Senator Gramm's retirement, Brooke worked for U.S. Senators John Cornyn and Richard Lugar as a legislative assistant.

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