

# Texas Poised to Expand Number of Charter Schools

By Thomas Cheplick

With more than 17,000 students statewide currently on waiting lists trying to get into charter schools, two bills pending in the Texas state Senate are ready to deal with the demand.

Senate Bill 308 would lift the state charter school cap, currently set at 215, and allow an unlimited number of charter schools to open statewide. Senate Bill 1830 increases state funding for charter schools and allows them to rent space on public school grounds.

An ardent supporter of charter schools, Senate Education Committee Chairwoman Florence Shapiro (R-Plano) thinks both bills are praiseworthy.

"Charter schools are unique in meeting the needs of at-risk students since they can provide flexible learning environments regarding class size and length," Shapiro said.

## More Options

Brooke Terry, lead education researcher at the Texas Public Policy Foundation, a think tank based in Austin, is excited about the bills, both sponsored by state Sen. Dan Patrick (R-Houston).

"Both are very good bills," Terry said.

Texas Sen. Dan Patrick of Houston (right) has sponsored two bills that will expand the number of, and amount of funding for, charter schools in the state. "Both are very good bills," says Brooke Terry, lead education researcher at the Texas Public Policy Foundation.



"They will provide more options for students in Texas. We have 90,000 charter school students out of 4.6 million public school students. It's clear we need to ramp up and get more charter schools open to meet this incredible demand."

At press time both bills had been heard by the Senate education committee, but votes had not been scheduled, Shapiro said.

## Overall Improvements

SB 308 in particular must pass, Terry said, if the demand is to be met.

"We really do need this cap lifted or dramatically increased," Terry said. "Opponents are arguing there is too much paperwork involved with lifting the cap

on charter schools, but we just want 'a moving cap' like they have in California, which allows 100 new charter schools to open per year. We think the waiting list demonstrates clear demand for more charter schools, and I think that is a good reason to lift the cap."

Bob Schoolfield, president of Let's Choose Schools, a Texas-based school choice advocacy organization, approves of all aspects of SB 308 and SB 1830 and thinks they will pass. Two of the top 100 public schools nationwide are Texas charter schools—IDEA Public Schools in the Rio Grande Valley and YES Prep Public Schools in Houston. Opening more charter schools in Texas would serve all students statewide, he said.

"The percentage of Texas charter schools that rate exemplary is more than twice the percentage of exemplary traditional public schools," Schoolfield said. "The percentage of charter schools missing the federal adequate yearly progress targets is 25 percent less than the percentage of traditional public schools missing the targets. Charter schools have 35 percent more minority students than traditional public schools. So the claim that charter schools cream off the best students from traditional public schools is simply not true."

Thomas Cheplick ([thomascheplick@yahoo.com](mailto:thomascheplick@yahoo.com)) writes from Cambridge, Massachusetts.

## INTERNET INFO

Texas Senate Bill 308: [www.legis.state.tx.us/billlookup/text.aspx?LegSess=81R&Bill=SB308](http://www.legis.state.tx.us/billlookup/text.aspx?LegSess=81R&Bill=SB308)

Texas Senate Bill 1830: [www.legis.state.tx.us/billlookup/Text.aspx?LegSess=81R&Bill=SB1830](http://www.legis.state.tx.us/billlookup/Text.aspx?LegSess=81R&Bill=SB1830)

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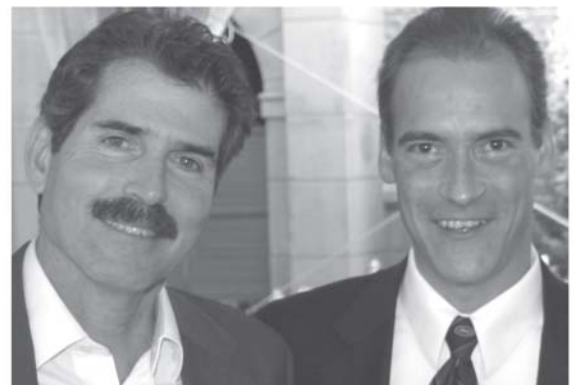
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