

Encouraging Charter Innovation

The Issue

High-performing charter schools—those that improve student results—are in demand by parents and students across Texas. In fact, roughly 140,000 requests from Texas students for seats at charter schools are on waiting lists. These students are hoping to be chosen in the next lottery to get one of the limited spots at a nearby charter school.

There are many reasons a Texas family might choose a charter school. One far too common reason is that their child was arbitrarily assigned to a failing traditional school, simply based on their ZIP code. In fact, according to Texas's A-F accountability ratings, more than half a million children are in D- and F-rated school districts and campuses, where student growth is limited. In such cases, a nearby charter is often the only option to help ensure a child's success. With 55% of Texas third graders reading below grade level, Texas leaders should support the expansion of robust, high-performing charter schools to provide immediate alternatives to these students and others like them.

Texas families are also choosing charter schools because charters better meet their student's unique needs, by providing, for example, more individualized student attention, a safer school environment, smaller school settings, character development, college classes, STEM options, flexible schedules, and an atmosphere that works better for the student's education attainment.

Charter schools work alongside traditional public schools in order to create the best public education for every Texas student. They also offer education alternatives for parents and students, creating a healthy competitive effect that encourages both charter and traditional schools to improve student outcomes. Research indicates that the presence of charter schools near traditional schools causes the performance of those traditional schools to increase, creating benefits both for the students who choose to attend charter schools and for the students who choose to attend their default district schools.

Traditional public-school officials should not feel threatened by charter schools, though some do and some even work to inhibit the expansion of charter schools. It has been reported in multiple districts that some school officials have sought intervention by their cities to block the establishment or expansion of charter schools. Charter schools, as public schools authorized by the state, should not be subject to local city bans or discriminatory practices.

Some have argued that charter schools have an unfair advantage because they have less state regulation. However, HB 1842 (2015) allowed nearly all public-school districts to adopt the same regulations as charters by becoming a "District of Innovation."

Another way charter schools work with traditional public schools is through the use of Texas Partnerships, created by the passage of SB 1882 (2017). Texas Partnerships are formed when

districts partner with a charter school provider to manage an innovative school model or help turn around a failing campus in their district.

While traditional urban public schools argue that charters may receive more maintenance and operations money per student, TEA calculations indicate that, on average, charters receive approximately \$640 less in total funding per pupil than traditional public schools. Further, this argument ignores the fact that traditional public schools have substantial advantages over charters; traditional schools have existed within the community for many years and often garner enormous community support, have existing facilities, and wield taxing authority.

Texas must focus on doing what is best for students and teachers rather than what is demanded by stakeholders who primarily want to defend the status quo instead of focusing on improving student results. We should remove restrictions inhibiting student achievement and act in the best interest of the students, teachers, and taxpayers by ensuring quality charter schools can open, operate, and freely expand in Texas.

The Facts

- Hundreds of thousands of Texas students are trapped in low-performing D- and F-rated traditional public schools, often with no other alternative. Charter schools could provide the only option for these students to succeed.
- Over 140,000 students are on charter school waiting lists.
- High-performing Texas charter schools often outperform traditional public-school districts in student results and achievement. Charters also place needed and significant pressure on traditional public schools to improve student results.
- Traditional public schools can adopt the same regulations as charter schools and have many other advantages; yet parents are actively choosing charter schools because of their student results.
- Restricting charter expansion protects the status quo at the expense of Texas students, taxpayers, and teachers.
- Artificial legal restrictions on the number of charter schools prevent many students from exercising their freedom of educational opportunity.

Recommendations

- Remove the statutory cap on charter schools contained in Texas Education Code 12.101.
- Ensure parity in local government treatment of charter schools.

Resources

[*Time to Change Course: Reclaiming the Potential of Texas Charter Schools*](#) by Adam Jones and Amanda List, ExcelinEd and Texas Public Policy Foundation (June 2018).

[*Testimony on Senate Bill 968*](#) by Emily Sass, Texas Public Policy Foundation (April 16, 2019).

[*25 Years of Texas Public Charter Schools*](#) by The Texas Public Charter Schools Association (2020).

[*Texas Public Charter Schools Prepare Special Education Students to Achieve Ambitious Goals*](#) by Timothy Mattison and Michelle Aguilar (2019).

[*Urban Charter School Study Report on 41 US Regions*](#), Center for Research on Education Outcomes (2015).

[*National Charter School Study*](#), Center for Research on Education Outcomes (2013).

[*What Keeps Texas Schools from Being as Efficient as They Could Be?*](#) by Paul Hill (July 2012).

[*Allan E. Parker's Expert Report for School Finance Trial*](#) by Kent Grusendorf and Michael Barba, Texas Public Policy Foundation (Jan. 2015).

[*Would School Choice Change the Teaching Profession?*](#) by Caroline Hoxby, National Bureau of Economic Research (Aug. 2000).

[*How School Choice Affects the Achievement of Public School Students*](#) by Caroline Hoxby (2002).

