

September 1, 2020

The State Board of Education
1701 North Congress Avenue
Austin, TX 78701

Cc: The Honorable Greg Abbott, Governor of Texas
Office of the Governor
1100 San Jacinto Blvd
Austin, TX 78701

Cc: Mike Morath, Commissioner of Education
Texas Education Agency
1701 N. Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas, 78701

Re: Approval of Generation Twenty-Five Charters

Dear Chairman Ellis and Members,

Thank you for your commitment to providing a robust and competitive education landscape for Texas students. Please find below our comments regarding the approval of new charter schools in Texas.

We wish to express our strong support for the Texas Commissioner of Education's approval of eight new Generation Twenty-Five charter schools, to begin operation in the 2021-22 school year. Not only is the power and signature of the Governor vested in the Commissioner, but **new charter school applicants undergo a rigorous and intensive vetting process before being granted such a charter.**

First, [an application](#) for a new charter school must be reviewed for full completion. If any section is missing, incomplete, or inaccurate, the application is automatically declined. Second, applications are reviewed by external experts, and this phase eliminates eighty-five percent of all applications. Third, applications are subject to an internal TEA review to determine compliance with statewide guidelines and standards. Fourth, applicants are interviewed, with questions generally being formulated around comments made on both the internal and external reviews. Only after all of these stages are passed will the Commissioner approve an application. This process serves to ensure that new charters will provide a quality education for Texas students.

The [results](#) speak for themselves. For the 2018-2019 school year, 827 charter schools received an accountability rating from the TEA. Of these, 487, or roughly 59%, were given an accountability rating of "A" or "B." Per TEA data, [two thirds](#) of the top-rated school districts in the state are charter districts, despite serving only 6% of students. Of those 6%, 95% attend a well-ranked campus. Moreover, African-American charter students outperform their ISD counterparts in every subject and grade level tested. And

English Language Learners in charter schools demonstrate mastery of English Language Arts at twice the rate of ISDs, and experience twice the growth rate in meeting grade level.

Texas families choose 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. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has uprooted existing institutional structures and put millions of Texans into precarious financial positions, Texas families are struggling, and need as much flexibility and opportunity as possible so that they may secure an education that best suits their children. Notably, the establishment of new charter schools by no means discourages or negatively impacts the pursuit of a traditional public education in any way. Charter schools also serve to expand innovation and competition. Research has found that charter schools tend to perform more efficiently than their traditional counterparts and that increased choices in a region encourage more efficient district behavior. Caroline Hoxby of Stanford University has [found](#) that charter schools in proximity to traditional schools increased the academic performance of students within traditional schools. Sarah Cordes [found](#) that students in traditional New York City schools experienced increases in academic achievement when charter schools entered the neighborhood. Those increases were most pronounced when traditional schools and charter schools were co-located in the same building.

These trends have also been found in Texas. According to the [Texas Public Charter Schools Association](#), between 2012 and 2019, as charter school enrollment tripled, the average ISD saw their achievement grow by 4% to 8%, depending on grade level and subject. Moreover, “over the past three years, the number of ISDs where at least 95% of fifth graders met state math standards doubled. That compares to a 63% increase among ISDs without charters in their attendance zones.” While student achievement across Texas schools is improving, it is clear that the inclusion of charter schools helps accelerate that process.

By welcoming the growth and introduction of new charter operators and structures in Texas, the state will be encouraging efficient, innovative new actors while simultaneously encouraging efficiency and achievement in traditional public schools. We ask, for the good of Texas students, that you allow these approvals to go forward unimpeded.

Thank you for your service to Texas and, most importantly, Texas students.

Respectfully,

