



Charter Schools Institute State University of New York

Charter Schools: A New Choice in Public Education

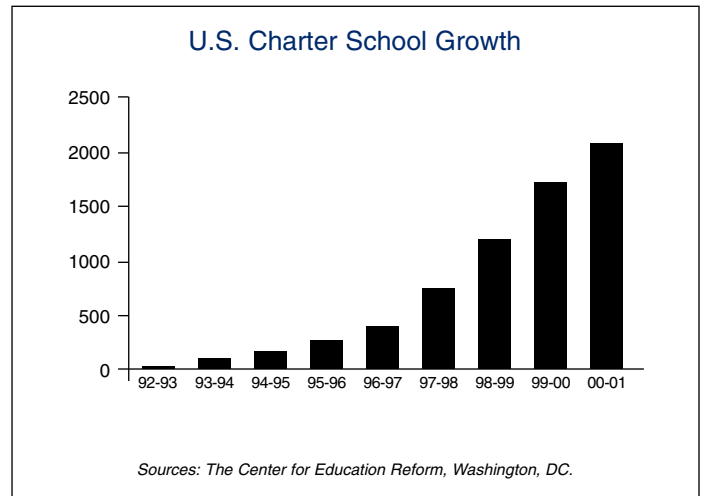
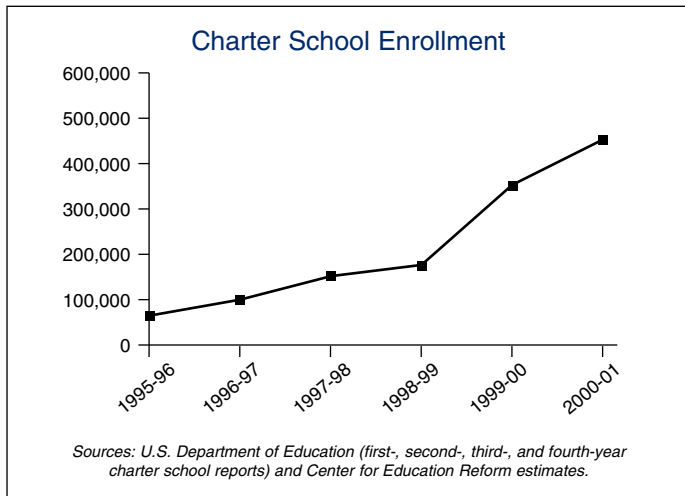
In December 1998, Governor George Pataki signed the New York State Charter Schools Act, aligning the Empire State with a national drive to improve public education by creating choice and competition. In a short time, public charter schools have been established across the state, in areas where at-risk children most desperately need the advantages of a better education.

With greater operational flexibility and increased accountability, public charter schools boldly pursue better ways to teach the children in the communities they serve, and inspire school districts to improve their own programs in the face of new competition for students.

What are public charter schools accomplishing in New York?

- With a 210 day school year, and a school day that runs from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Bronx Preparatory Charter School offers a rigorous core curriculum as well as such enrichment programs as a top-notch school orchestra and a partnership with the Bronx Museum of Art.
- The King Center Charter School in Buffalo uses multi-age classrooms and has established partnerships with the three State University campuses in the area – the University of Buffalo, Buffalo State College, and the College at Fredonia – as well as Houghton College.
- Eugenio Maria de Hostos Charter School in Rochester developed a dual language curriculum (English and Spanish), and partners with the Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum for enrichment. The music program is provided by the Hochstein School of Music.
- The Harbor Science and Arts Charter School is partnered with Boys Harbor, an established community youth organization, to offer outstanding after-school and summer programs. The project-based curriculum uses Central Park as a science resource.

Here in New York, the first five public charter schools opened in September 1999. Just two years later, 32 charter schools opened their doors to 9,000 students in Harlem, South Bronx, Buffalo, Rochester and other urban areas across the state.



Public charter schools are increasing – in 1991, there were none. In the 2000-01 school year, there were more than 2,000 public charter schools in 37 states and Washington D.C. educating about 500,000 students.

What are public charter schools in New York?

- They are independent public schools of choice created by parents, educators, and community leaders that operate under a five-year license, or charter. They are not private schools and do not use vouchers.
- Public charter schools are open to all students – tuition free – and are designed to improve learning, particularly for students at risk of academic failure.
- They must meet all health and safety, and civil rights standards but are freed from bureaucratic rules that inhibit creativity and innovation. They use this flexibility to better meet the needs of students and parents.
- In return for this independence and flexibility, public charter schools must set measurable goals for student achievement – and attain them – or face the loss of their charter.
- They are funded by public tax dollars on a per pupil basis. Public charter schools must attract students to receive funding.

Who can approve charter schools?

Charter school initiatives are most successful in states with multiple chartering entities. New York State provides three routes to apply for a charter:

- The State University Board of Trustees (up to 50 new schools).
 - The Board of Regents (up to 50 new schools).
 - Local boards of education, whose charter schools are subject to approval by the Regents. They can charter schools only within their districts' boundaries.
 - An unlimited number of public schools can convert to charter schools, with approval of the Regents.
-

THE CHARTER SCHOOLS INSTITUTE

The State University Board of Trustees Charter Schools Committee, Co-Chaired by Secretary of State and Board Vice Chairman Randy A. Daniels, and Trustee Edward F. Cox, considers all charter school applications and initiatives before making recommendations for action by the full Board. The Charter Schools Institute was created by the University Trustees to assist them in fulfilling their responsibilities under the Charter Schools Act.

In a short time the Institute has become recognized as a national leader in the charter school movement. Its staff members possess extensive experience in charter schools and all aspects of public education, including curriculum, school operations, accountability, fiscal oversight and program development.

The University Trustees have authorized the Charter Schools Institute to fulfill the following duties:

- Receive and review public charter school applications.
- Notify school districts and non-public schools of the status of applications in their areas.
- Draft proposed charters with applicants and submit charters approved by the University Trustees to the Board of Regents.
- Assist public charter schools in the preparation of accountability plans.
- Perform regular site visits to operating public charter schools.
- Work with public charter schools to ensure compliance with all legal requirements.
- Receive annual reports and audited financial statements.
- Investigate complaints with respect to public charter schools and, when necessary, establish grounds for the termination of a charter.
- Conduct research and disseminate information regarding public charter schools.

Focus on Accountability

Public charter schools are held to a level of accountability unmatched in public education. The Institute works closely with each charter school to develop a required accountability plan that contains clear, measurable performance goals. The charter school must then demonstrate progress toward its goals, the evidence from which will be used in making its case for charter renewal at the end of the five-year charter term.

“Charter schools are the single greatest improvement in education in State history.”

– Governor George E. Pataki

A MODEL FOR THE NATION

Are public charter schools in New York on the right track?

- The U.S. Department of Education found that states like New York are more successful at holding charter schools accountable for achieving their objectives because they create a special office affiliated with a university.*
- The same federal study noted that written accountability standards based on performance are essential to charter school success. The Charter Schools Institute emphasizes such performance-based standards.
- Another Department of Education study** confirmed that charter schools are powerful agents of change in public education. It found school districts that faced genuine competition for students more often reported implementing new educational programs, or made other changes similar to what was offered at local charter schools.

Converting for results

The Charter Schools Act permits an unlimited number of public schools to convert to charter schools, with the approval of parents, the local board of education, and the Board of Regents. Several public schools in New York City have already done so, and thanks to the success of public charter schools in Buffalo and Rochester, those cities’ educational leaders are considering the conversion of many of their own schools to charter school status. The Institute stands ready to assist districts considering conversions to public charter schools.

Changing the dialogue in public education

In its publication, *Facing the Challenge of Charter Schools*, the New York State School Boards Association offers potent proof that public charter schools are making a difference. The Association urges school districts to:

- View themselves as competing for students, even if no charter schools are on the horizon.
- Treat students, parents, taxpayers and other stakeholders as customers who expect good value for their dollar.
- Analyze how they serve at-risk students.

And the *Buffalo News* reported on the impact of public charter schools in that city: “[Charter schools] are shaking up the educational establishment and adding urgency to the Buffalo Public Schools’ sweeping reform effort.”***

It is clear that after only a few years, public charter schools are beginning to change the landscape of public education in New York.

* A Study of Charter School Accountability

** Challenge and Opportunity: The Impact of Charter Schools on School Districts

*** Buffalo News, August 30, 2001