

2019-20

LEGISLATOR'S GUIDE to the Issues



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, each year, 140,000 Texas students are on “waiting lists” hoping to be chosen in a lottery to get one of the limited spots at a nearby charter school.

Texas families choose charter schools for many reasons. One of the most fundamental reasons is that their student has been arbitrarily assigned to a failing traditional school simply based on their ZIP code. In fact, according to Texas’ new A-F School District Academic Accountability System, thousands of Texas children are in D- and F-rated school districts, where learning is not taking place. In such cases, a nearby charter is often the only option to help ensure a child’s success. With 58% of Texas third-graders reading below grade level, Texas leaders need to support the expansion of robust, high-performing charter schools to provide immediate alternatives to students trapped in D- and F-rated districts.

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

Research by many economists indicates that competition from charter schools improves traditional public education and that high-performing charter schools often have better student outcomes than their peers in traditional public schools. As a result, traditional school officials often feel threatened by charter schools and work to inhibit charter expansion at the expense of students. For example, in an effort to prevent charter expansion, traditional public school districts often argue that charter schools have less state regulation, giving charters an unfair advantage. However, HB 1842 (2015) allows nearly all public school districts to adopt the same regulations as charters by becoming a “District of Innovation.”

In addition, traditional urban public schools argue that charters may receive more maintenance and operations money per student. However, according to TEA, on average charters receive \$600 less in total funding 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.

Texans must insist on doing what is best for students and teachers rather than what is demanded by those stakeholders who primarily want to defend the status quo instead of focusing on improving student results at each of their campuses. We should remove all restrictions inhibiting student achievement and act in the

best interest of the students, teachers, and taxpayers by ensuring high-performing charter schools can rapidly expand in Texas.

The Facts

- Thousands of Texas students are trapped in low-performing D- and F-rated traditional public schools, 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.
- The typical new charter school application runs hundreds of pages and can cost thousands of dollars which inhibits new charter schools from serving Texas students.

Recommendations

- Remove the statutory cap on charter schools contained in Texas Education Code 12.101.
- Streamline the charter application process to encourage innovation while ensuring quality.

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).

[*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).