

The Truth About Public Charter School Success

In 1995, the Texas Legislature—with bipartisan support—created the framework for a new kind of public school: the public charter school. Public charters receive extra freedom and flexibility so they can innovate in ways that serve the exact needs of local families. In exchange, charter schools are held to even higher standards than ISDs for academic performance, financial management, and transparency.

The success of public charters in Texas has fueled a politicized debate that takes the focus off students. Here are five common myths about public charter schools—and the truth that busts them:

MYTH: Charter schools aren't "real" public schools

FACT: Charter schools are public schools by law and in practice. Public charter schools are just that—public. They are authorized by the state, open to any student who wants to enroll, and do not charge tuition. Families apply for seats at charters using short, simple applications. If there are more applicants than available seats at a charter school, then the school holds a random lottery to determine admission.

Charter students must take the same state tests and meet the same graduation requirements as ISDs. Charter schools comply with the same open government laws. Charter schools are measured by the same A-F standards. But, charters in Texas are held to even higher standards when it comes to performance. For example: Unlike traditional ISDs, any charter that receives a failing grade from TEA for three years must close—no exceptions.

MYTH: Charter schools don't perform any better academically than traditional ISDs

FACT: Charter schools clearly outperform ISDs when comparing similar students. Although public charters enroll about 7% of all public school students, they make up 67% of the state's A-rated districts. For traditionally disadvantaged students—who make up the vast majority of charter students—the difference couldn't be clearer. Black students at charters, for example, outperform their peers across all subjects and in every grade.

More charter students attend college overall (58% vs. 54%) and the difference is especially stark for low-income students (60% vs. 44%), students with special needs (43% vs. 23%), and English learners (48% vs. 28%).

MYTH: Charter schools get more funding than ISDs

FACT: On average, charter schools receive \$700 less funding per student from taxpayers. The average public charter receives 94 cents on the dollar compared to the average ISD school. This happens because public charters do not receive any local revenue streams—especially property taxes—and have no taxing authority. Charters do receive slightly more per student from the state—because it's their only funding. When you add together the state and local funding that ISDs receive, it's about \$700 more per student than the total funding charters receive.

MYTH: Charter schools "cherry pick" their students and avoid those with disadvantages

FACT: Charter schools serve higher rates of historically disadvantaged students. Texas public charters serve a larger share of low-income, Black, and Hispanic students compared to ISDs. They also enroll a comparable percentage of students with disabilities and significantly more English learners (27% vs. 19%). Charter schools cannot select their students, who are admitted using blind lotteries. Starting in 2020, all families apply for admission to charters using a common application created by the state, which includes only the most basic identifying information for students.

MYTH: Charter schools harm traditional ISDs

FACT: Charter growth is driving faster improvement at ALL schools. Despite criticism from some political opponents, it's clear that public charters are complements to ISDs. They help drive improvement by districts and make education better for everyone. Here's just one example: over the past three years, 82% of ISDs with charters in their boundaries boosted 5th grade reading scores—compared to 67% of ISDs without charters. Charters are creating a win-win for Texas students.

The Faces of Public Charter Success



First in his family to attend college—on a full ride to Stanford

GEORGE ROJANO felt “lost in the system” at his traditional public middle school—overwhelmed, failing classes, and disconnected from those around him. Then he found Austin Achieve. At his public charter school, George felt re-invigorated by teachers given the flexibility to innovate, smaller class sizes, and help with finding and nurturing his interests. He felt like “a person, not a number.”

Austin Achieve guided George through every step of the college admissions process, including ACT prep and financial planning. Now, he’s not only a first-generation college student, but receiving a full scholarship to Stanford University. And he hopes to return to his community and give back once he’s done.



Unlocking the American Dream

WALTER BRIOSO’s family escaped civil war in El Salvador and came to the US when he was in middle school. After several years in Houston ISD, Walter entered YES Prep as a 10th grader. He spoke very little English and was a poor reader.

An outside consultant for special education services told Walter he wasn’t college material. But Walter and his public charter school only worked harder. It took him an extra year of high school, but Walter graduated YES Prep and attended Midwestern State in Longview.



A Launching Pad for a Great Scientist

When **NETANYA SCHLAMOWITZ** enrolled at Legacy Preparatory in Plano as a seventh grader, she left behind a large traditional district setting and started receiving one-on-one attention from caring teachers who guided her to achieve goal after goal.

Netanya started taking advanced classes in middle school. Then, in high school at Legacy, she progressed to dual-credit courses at Collin College. A course called Medical Microbiology made Netanya realize “that my goal in life was to do research in antibiotic resistance.” Today, the future MD attends Johns Hopkins on a full scholarship.



The Fast Track to Great Careers

ASHTON EDMINSTER enrolled at iSchool Virtual Academy, a ResponsiveEd school, because she already had a growing career as a musician. The flexibility of a public online program allowed her to grow her online presence and successfully graduate from high school. Now enrolled in the prestigious Berklee School of Music, Edminster continues to grow as a student and grow her online following as a singer/songwriter. The first song she released has been streamed over 4 million times.



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