

Charter School Myths & Realities

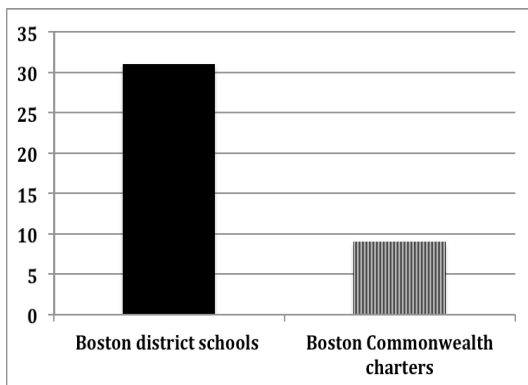
Myth: Commonwealth charters propel low-income students to levels of achievement far above those of urban district schools and on a par with students in high-achieving suburban schools.

Reality: Many Commonwealth charters report impressive test results because they have pushed out students with lower test scores. These charters shed a high proportion of their students, sometimes half or even more. Some charter students run afoul of severe conduct codes. Students are disciplined for minor infractions like laughing on the school bus or having a shirt untucked, putting them on a path to suspension. As a result, charter schools are disproportionately represented among schools that suspend a major portion of their students. They are led by Roxbury Preparatory Charter School in Boston, which suspended 60% of its students in the most recent year reported by the state. Other students leave charter schools after the school tells them they must repeat the grade because they aren't scoring high enough on tests. Research shows that grade retention does not lead to higher student achievement.

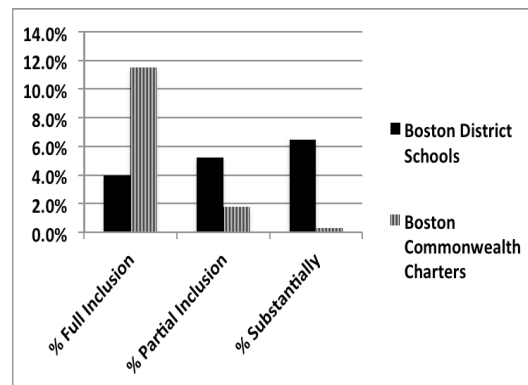
Myth: Charter schools educate the same types of students as district schools.

Reality: Boston Commonwealth charter schools enroll a lower percentage of students with special needs and English language learners than Boston district schools. Any efforts to close or narrow the state's "achievement gaps" must address the needs of these students, but charters have not demonstrated success because they don't include them.

Percentage of English language learners



Percentage of special education students in full inclusion, partial inclusion and separate placements, Boston district schools and Boston Commonwealth charters



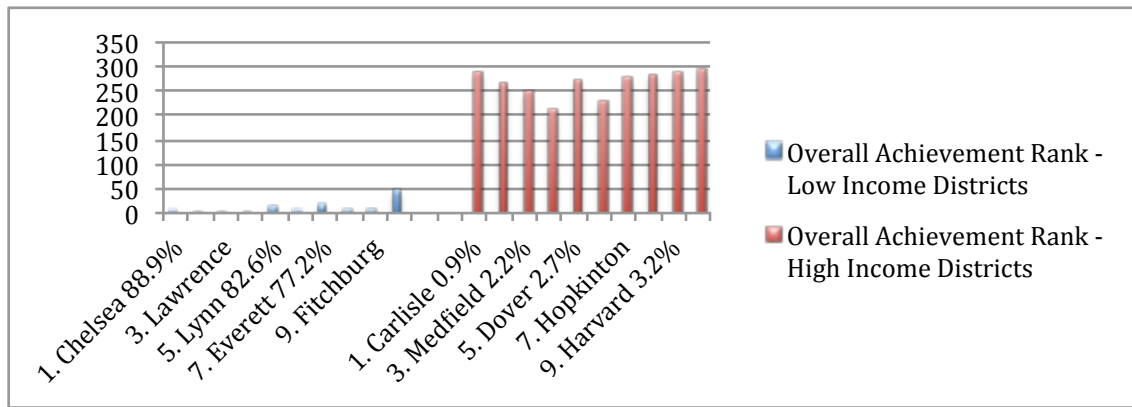
- *There are wide ranges of academic and language abilities among students classified as students with disabilities and English language learners. When charters do include students in these subgroups, they tend to exclude those with the most significant special needs or the most limited English language ability.*
- *A highly publicized 2013 study of charter schools by Stanford University's CREDO group found that among ELLs, "those enrolled in charter schools have significantly lower learning gains in reading than their TPS [typical public school] counterparts."*

Myth: The 2010 Achievement Gap law addressed the under-enrollment of SWDs and ELLs by requiring new charters to be granted *only* to providers with a track record of successfully educating these student subgroups.

Reality: Commissioner Chester and the MA Board of Elementary and Secondary Education granted charters to applicants who had not shown they could work successfully with these student subgroups. Advocates for ELL students complained to Chester that the new charters violated the law. He never responded.

Myth: The state has determined the best way to identify schools that are failing their students, the “worst of the worst.” Closing these and shifting resources to charters is the best way to improve educational opportunity for students.

Reality: The state’s complex formula for identifying districts eligible for more charter schools (the “lowest 10%”) puts low-income communities at the bottom. It is derived from absolute MCAS scores, which correlate very closely with income. This chart shows how the formula ranks districts with the highest percentage of low-income students, compared to those with the lowest percentage of low-income students.

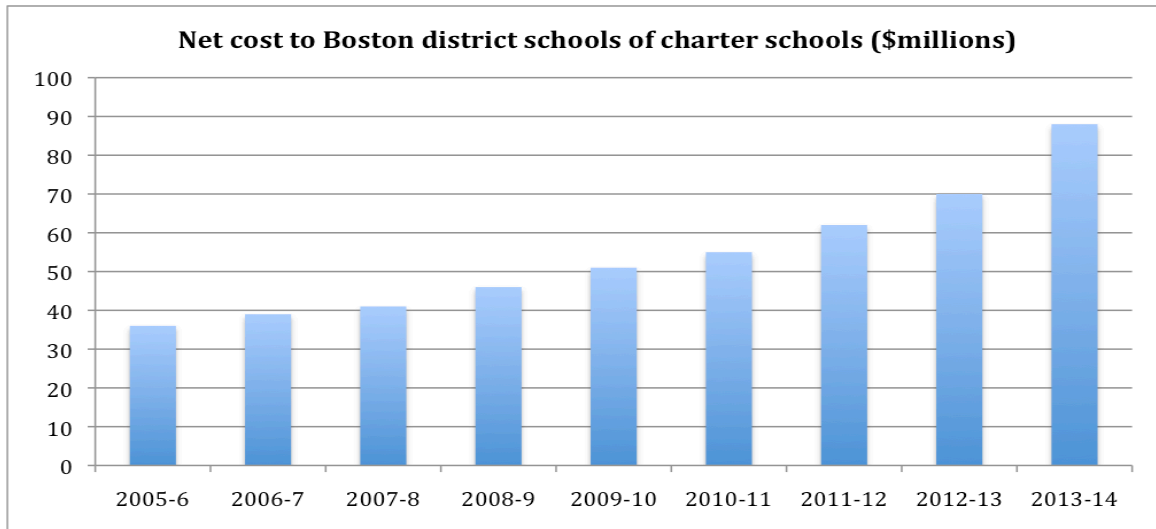


Source: MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2014

If the state instead used growth scores that attempt to measure how much students learn in school, the list of districts in the lowest 10% would be very different – and would not include Boston.

Myth: The state’s charter school funding formula is fair to district schools.

Reality: As Boston district schools increasingly become the schools of last resort for the district’s most needy students, they are losing more and more essential funds to new charter schools.



Source: MA DESE, 2013

The school district budget cuts forced by such spending on charter schools result in district schools closing, disrupting the education of thousands of students. These students need more stability in their lives, not endless churn.

Myth: The best way to use our limited education resources is to lift the cap and add new charter schools.

Reality: Money spent on new charter schools would be better spent on proven interventions like high-quality early education for all.