

# CHARTER SCHOOLS AND OUR COMMUNITIES

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Are charter schools accountable to our communities?

- Because students who attend charters come from all over the city, the schools are not accountable to any particular neighborhood or community.
- Each charter is an independent private entity with its own Board of Trustees, many of whom do not live near the school. The Public Charter School Board, which is supposed to monitor finances and performance, was created by the US Congress and its members are chosen from a list approved by the US Department of Education.

Do charter schools respect our communities?

Charters have successfully bypassed the concerns of people in the District and gone straight to Congress. They are not answerable to the Superintendent of schools, the City, the Mayor, or even the students and parents they serve. They not only ignore democracy: They undermine it.

Do charter schools contribute to segregation, displacement, and gentrification?

*Segregation:* A study by the Project for Civil Rights at Harvard University shows that charter schools contribute to segregation by race and class. Charters can purposefully attract a certain type of student through targeted recruitment and niche marketing. Being a parent of a charter student generally requires far more resources (for transportation, system navigation, student fees and parent volunteering), which further discriminates against lower-income families. Also, if students do not fit in with the school's mission for disciplinary, academic, or social reasons, they can be dismissed midyear or asked not to return the next year. With this kind of subjective student selection, charter schools are clearly achieving a separate and unequal education based on race and class.

*Privatization:* Charters are an important step towards systematic privatization in which corporations and wealthy individuals make decisions for everyone else about how students are educated, what communities need, and what happens to available space. Because charters operate outside DCPS and the city government, their ownership of a school building takes the building out of the public domain and makes it private property. Even if the Charter fails, the private owners keep the building and land, rather than returning it to public ownership. Once this transition is made, the public has no access or decision-making power. They are cut out of the picture.

*Gentrification:* As segregators and privatizers, unaccountable to the people or the democratic process, charter schools are fundamental to the process of gentrification. How better to drive poor people of color out than to undercut access to public education, to sell off public property as "surplus" and hand it off to gentrifiers? This is not only racist and greedy, it shows an utter lack of respect for the people of Washington DC.

Are all charter schools bad?

Individual charter schools may provide a wonderful educational experience for students who attend them, and may perform well and have high retention rates. However, all charter schools are part of a system that threatens equality and justice in public education and the local community. Unless a charter school actively works to protect the community in which it is located and the DC public school system, it is a part of the problem.