

# Charter Schools vs. Public Schools

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What are charter schools, and how are they different from DC public schools?

- Charter schools don't charge tuition and are funded by tax dollars. Unlike public schools, however, charters are privately owned and operated and governed by self-appointed boards of trustees.
- Charter schools are not neighborhood schools. To attend a charter school, the student must fill out an application and compete for a seat through a citywide lottery process.
- Charters come in all shapes and sizes and range in quality from excellent to horrendous. But no matter how well intentioned or successful, charter schools are part of a national conservative agenda to take public education out of citizens' hands and put it in the hands of powerful individuals and corporations.

Who created charter schools in DC?

- Charters were imposed on DC by Congress through the School Reform Act of 1995 in spite of widespread popular opposition and resistance from the DC Board of Education. Congress has amended the charter law several times to make funding and public facilities more readily available to the charters at the expense of DCPS.

How well are charter schools doing?

- Last year, only eight of the 31 DC public charters subject to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Studies by the University of Illinois and the Department of Education show that public schools out-perform charters. Even charter advocates agree that low quality remains a problem in DC charter schools.
- Many charters have low retention rates. Students who enroll in a charter school and don't fit in can be expelled or encouraged to leave. The churning enrollment between charters and DCPS contributes to high truancy and dropout rates and leaves many of our most vulnerable young people on the streets, without an education or hope for the future.

## How are charter schools hurting public schools?

- *Enrollment:* Charter schools draw students away from public schools, leading to under-enrollment and the loss of teachers, programs, and funding.
- *Funding Inequality:*
  - DCPS and charter students receive the same “uniform” per pupil funding payment, but charters also receive a per capita facilities allowance of nearly \$2400 per student that IS NOT TIED TO ACTUAL RENT PAYMENTS and OFTEN RESULTS IN A SUBSTANTIAL WINDFALL.
  - Congress allocates \$13 million each to charters and DCPS, but because DCPS serves nearly 60,000 students to the charters 17,000, this results in substantially greater payment to each charter student.
  - Charters get a lot of private funding. The conservative Walton Family Foundation (Wal-Mart) is the largest private funder of charter schools nationally.
  - Charters have received more than \$100 million in DC revenue bonds since 2001, a funding stream unavailable to DCPS.
- *Broken promises:* Charter schools were intended to improve the regular public school system by serving as “laboratories for innovation.” Instead, they use their resources to compete with, rather than help, public schools.
- *Selling off public schools:*

The deplorable conditions of our public school buildings (due to years of underfunding and neglect) have led to declining enrollment, forcing DCPS to return valuable properties to the city, where they have been sold off for a fraction of their real value to private developers and charter schools. Because of a law enacted by the US Congress last year, DCPS must make all surplus property available to charters at a 25% discount. Charter advocates and members of Congress have actually pushed for operating public schools to be closed so charters can take over the buildings. The property then becomes privately owned by the charter school, even though it was paid for with public dollars.