

A second charter school authorizer in New Jersey

Meeting the demand for high-quality school options

New Jersey charter schools are getting results for kids

Currently, New Jersey's 87 charter schools serve more than 29,000 students.¹ On average, these students gained an additional two months of learning per year in reading and three months in math when compared to their district school counterparts. In Newark, these academic gains were even greater. Charter students there gained an additional 7.5 months per year in reading and nine in math compared to traditional public school students in Newark.² New Jersey charter schools have made significant academic gains despite serving many of the most at-risk students in the state. In 2013, 70 percent of charter school students were eligible for free or reduced price lunch.³

Demand for charter schools is high

While charter schools only make up 3.5 percent of the available public school options, they are in high demand across the state.⁴ At this time, there are more than 20,000 students waiting to attend charter schools in New Jersey.⁵ In Newark, there are approximately 10,000 students on charter school wait lists. And in Newark's South Ward, nearly 40 percent of families applied for charter seats.⁶ A second charter authorizer is necessary for New Jersey to meet the demand for high-quality charter schools.

Why is one charter authorizer not enough?

A charter authorizer is responsible for approving the creation of charter schools and then holding charter schools accountable for their performance.⁷ This responsibility includes monitoring the academic performance of students and ensuring that there are no operational or financial problems. Authorizers are also responsible for closing poorly

¹ "New Jersey Public Schools Fact Sheet," New Jersey State Department of Education, accessed February 11, 2014, <http://www.state.nj.us/education/data/fact.htm>; "The Public Charter Schools Dashboard: Total Number of Students," National Alliance for Public Charter schools, accessed February 2, 2014, <http://dashboard.publiccharters.org/dashboard/schools/page/overview/state/NJ/year/2013>.

² "Study Finds New Jersey Charter Public Schools Significantly Outperform Their District School Peers," Center for Research on Education Outcomes, accessed February 2, 2014, <http://credo.stanford.edu/pdfs/NewJerseyPressReleaseFINAL.pdf>.

³ "The Public Charter Schools Dashboard: Students Eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch," National Alliance for Public Charter schools, accessed February 2, 2014, <http://dashboard.publiccharters.org/dashboard/students/page/lunch/state/NJ/year/2013>.

⁴ "The Public Charter Schools Dashboard: Total Number of Schools," National Alliance for Public Charter schools, accessed February 2, 2014, <http://dashboard.publiccharters.org/dashboard/schools/page/lunch/state/NJ/year/2013>.

⁵ "An Analysis of the Charter School Facility Landscape in New Jersey," New Jersey Charter Association, accessed October 16, 2013, http://njcharters.org/docs/report_facilitiesanalysis_201301.pdf.

⁶ "New Jersey State Board of Education Meeting Agenda," New Jersey State Department of Education, accessed January 29, 2014, <http://www.state.nj.us/cgi-bin/education/sboe/sboe.pl?y=2014&m=January&t=public>.

⁷ "Charter School Authorizers," Michigan Association of Public School Academies, accessed November 5, 2013, <http://charterschools.org/olc/charter-school-authorization>.

performing schools. New Jersey is one of only seven states with just one statewide charter authorizer, the New Jersey State Department of Education.⁸

The National Association of Charter School Authorizers strongly recommends that each state have more than one authorizer.⁹ Multiple authorizers can serve to strengthen the charter school sector because they create a system of checks and balances in charter approval, oversight and renewal decisions.¹⁰

Without a second authorizer, the pace and nature of charter school authorizing depends on the capacity of the department and the education agenda of the administration in power at any given time. In 2007, there were only six more charter schools operating in New Jersey than were open in 2001. However, from 2008 to 2013, the charter sector rapidly expanded, with 25 more schools operating by 2013, bringing the total number of charter schools across the state to 87.¹¹ Despite the efforts to grow the charter sector, even at these higher growth rates, the NJDOE will not be able to meet the demand for high-quality charter schools. An additional authorizer will help ensure that only high-quality charters continue to grow to meet this demand, even if a future governor or their administration does not support charter schools. In addition, another authorizer will add capacity in terms of the oversight that authorizers must perform to ensure that all charters in New Jersey are delivering a high-quality education for their students.

JerseyCAN’s recommendation: Establish a statewide charter board as a second charter authorizer.

A state department of education has many responsibilities: school accountability, data collection, fiscal management and serving as an engine of innovation for school districts to draw ideas and best practices from. A charter board, on the other hand, would be able to operate as a specialist in charter issues. The board can provide the expertise, capacity and scale necessary to ensure high-quality authorizing. A charter board will also guarantee that charter schools have access to more than one charter authorizer. Research indicates that among authorizer types, state charter boards are most likely to create policies that promote the replication of strong charter schools.¹² Establishing a statewide charter board, in addition to the NJDOE, is the best match for New Jersey’s needs.

⁸ Policy Recommendation: Statewide Alternative Authorizers,” National Association of Charter School Authorizers, January 29, 2014, http://www.qualitycharters.org/assets/files/images/stories/pdfs/policy/Statewide_Authorizers_Updated%20111313.pdf.

⁹ Policy Recommendation: Statewide Alternative Authorizers,” National Association of Charter School Authorizers, January 29, 2014, http://www.qualitycharters.org/assets/files/images/stories/pdfs/policy/Statewide_Authorizers_Updated%20111313.pdf.

¹⁰ “Multiple Charter Authorizing Options,” National Association of Charter School Authorizers, accessed February 3, 2014, http://www.qualitycharters.org/assets/files/images/stories/Multiple_Authorizers.pdf.

¹¹ “The Public Charter Schools Dashboard: Total Number of Schools,” National Alliance for Public Charter schools, accessed February 2, 2014, <http://dashboard.publiccharters.org/dashboard/schools/page/lunch/state/NJ/year/2013>.

¹² “The State of Charter Authorizing 2012,” National Association of Charter School Authorizers, accessed November 5, 2013, http://www.pageturnpro.com/Publications/201304/3251/50124/pdf/130106249146911240_FactsReport2012%20FINAL%20pdf%204-15-13.pdf.