

The Truth About Public Charter School Success

In 1995, the Texas Legislature—with bipartisan support—created a new kind of public school: the public charter school. Public charter schools are tuition-free and open to all students. They're held to the same or even higher standards than ISDs for academic performance, financial management, and transparency.

Their success 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: Public charter schools aren't held accountable to the public.

FACT: Public charter schools are public in every way. They follow a nearly identical set of regulations as ISDs, including all federal and state laws related to non-discrimination, special education, bilingual services, and public information. They also take the same STAAR tests, meet the same graduation requirements, and receive the same A-F grades as ISDs.

Public charter schools are held to even higher standards for performance. That includes a "three strikes" rule that requires any public charter school with a failing grade for three straight years to close — no appeals allowed. In addition to state oversight, public charter schools are ultimately accountable to families, who have the final say over where their children are educated.

MYTH: Public charter schools don't perform any better academically than traditional ISDs.

FACT: It's clear that public charter schools raise student achievement. Many more public charter school graduates are prepared for college and career than the statewide average (78% vs. 67%). Public charter schools also boost literacy for historically disadvantaged students, including higher STAAR reading performance among Black and Hispanic students, low-income children, and English Language Learners.

MYTH: Public charter schools receive more funding than ISDs.

FACT: On average, public charter schools receive \$966 less per student in overall taxpayer funding. Unlike ISDs, public charters do not have local taxing authority and receive no property tax funds. So, while public charter schools do receive more per student from the state budget, that's because it's their only source of non-federal funding. Public charter schools receive less total funding when you add together state and local dollars.

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

FACT: Families pick their public charter school, not vice versa. The enrollment process starts with a short, simple form created by TEA. If there are more interested families than available seats, admission is determined by a blind lottery. By law, public charter schools cannot discriminate on the basis of sex, national origin, ethnicity, religion, or disability.

Many of the state's highest-need students turn to public charter schools, which enroll higher rates of Black, Hispanic, and low-income students than ISDs. Public charter schools also serve a higher rate of English learners (30% vs. 21%) and only a slightly lower rate of students with disabilities.

MYTH: Public charter schools harm traditional ISDs.

FACT: The presence of public charter schools helps drive improvement at ALL schools. From 2016 to 2019, for example, 99% of ISDs with public charter schools within their boundaries boosted students' overall STAAR scores in ELA/Reading — compared to 92% of ISDs without public charter schools. Public charter schools complement ISDs and help improve our public education system for all students.