



A Vision for Boston: Questions for the 2009 Mayoral Candidates

DAY 5: CHARTER SCHOOLS

President Obama and Governor Patrick favor expanding charter public schools, and three mayoral candidates have come out for expanding some form of them in Boston. What is your position on charter schools and their possible expansion? Do you believe charter school funding should be modified?



Michael F. Flaherty Jr.

I was the first mayoral candidate to formally advocate for more charter schools. But just like Education Secretary, Arne Duncan, has said: "I'm not a fan of charters. I'm a fan of good charters." Our state's Commonwealth charter schools are seen as one of the best in the country. That's why I support lifting the state's cap on charter schools so we can replicate the successes we've seen at schools like MATCH and welcome in national programs like KIPP. We don't need to reinvent the wheel and create a new breed of charters. We need to capitalize on the strengths of our existing charter system and make it even stronger so that charter schools enroll and graduate more students - especially those with learning barriers, such as our ELL and SPED students. By expanding a system with proven success such as the Commonwealth charter schools, we better position ourselves to secure federal dollars for education reform.

At the same time, we need to turn around our failing BPS schools by decentralizing BPS and shifting to a school-based management system where principals have more charter-like autonomies and teachers and parents are more empowered and involved in budgeting and programming decisions.

Thomas M. Menino

I've proposed a new model for charter schools: in-district charter schools. These schools will be designed to turn around the lowest performing schools and improve achievement among the most vulnerable students, without draining funds from the school district.

We cannot settle for incremental changes at schools with persistently low performance. We need the flexibility to make swift, dramatic changes in these schools to reinvent them into schools of excellence. I am confident that with these in-district charters that are without the constraints of the collective bargaining agreement, the Superintendent could assemble talented teams of administrators and teachers to take ownership of these schools and be held accountable for their results.

Unlike the current charter funding structure, the funds for in-district charters will remain within the district. State-governed Commonwealth charter schools have not provided systemic solutions to the challenges facing public school districts today, in part because they do not serve a fair proportion of students with disabilities and English Language learners. To raise the cap on Commonwealth charter schools without addressing these inequities could drain resources from the district schools that need them most.