



A Vision for Boston: Questions for the 2009 At-Large City Council Candidates

CHARTER SCHOOLS

What role should Commonwealth charter schools play in serving students and parents in Boston? Should the existing cap on Commonwealth charters be lifted in Boston? If you support a charter school-style structure other than Commonwealth charters, what is its advantage over the current system? Do you think the current funding mechanism for Commonwealth charter schools should be modified and if so, how?



Felix Arroyo

I oppose lifting the cap on new charter schools at least until the State of Massachusetts makes needed changes to the funding formula. The current formula defines the charter school tuition payment as an "average cost per student" from the sending district. In an urban community such as Boston, this "average cost" is not an appropriate method as, compared to the district schools, charter schools in Boston continue to serve a lower percentage of non-regular education students - i.e. students in bilingual, vocational and special education. Reportedly, the combined impact of growing enrollment in existing charter schools, the opening of new charter schools and funding formula inequities will result in lost revenue for Boston's schools of more than \$50 million annually. With the City of Boston's public schools facing considerable budget difficulties, it is imperative that the state continue the moratorium on new charter school approvals and the growth of existing charter schools at least until this fiscal issue is resolved.

John Connolly

As a former middle school teacher and as Chair of the City Council's Committee on Education, there is nothing I care more about, and nothing I work harder for, than improving our City's schools every day. Too often, the public is presented with the politics of "either or" when it comes to pilot schools, charter schools, and Boston Public Schools (BPS). The key is to offer a range of options, support successful schools, and replicate success. I support the expansion of pilot and charter schools as a means of ensuring that students and parents are provided with a range of educational options.

I would encourage any skeptic to visit schools like Roxbury Preparatory Charter School, Patrick Lyndon School, Another Course to College, or Codman Academy and see students not only closing the achievement gap, but also excelling beyond expectation and conventional wisdom.

While I would welcome much needed changes to our funding mechanism for public education, I would only support those changes that would not disadvantage one type of school over another and would recognize our traditional, pilot, and charter schools as partners in public education. We need to be focused on promoting and replicating all schools that succeed.

Tomas Gonzalez

Charter Schools give parents a valuable choice when selecting schools for their children, and having choices is good. However, if Boston is going to be a thriving and vibrant city we need to give people incentives to live here and to raise a family. The difficulty of navigating our current school system encourages families to leave the city. Charter Schools are a good option, but they don't solve the systemic problems that exist within BPS. Rather than focus on caps, we need to improve all of Boston's schools for all of Boston's children.

Tito Jackson

Commonwealth charter schools currently play a very helpful role by providing parents with additional choices for educating their children, by providing students with a variety of learning environments, and by providing Boston with a diversity of ideas about the way to best educate our students. However, the very flexibility that leads charter schools to develop innovative educational solutions has in some cases lead to understandable concerns on the part of parents of children who are not always well served by charter schools, including parents of English Language Learners, special education students, and students who are admitted to charter schools but are not retained through graduation.

Providing a first-class education for all students in Boston requires a city government that establishes a framework in which Boston Public Schools, in-district charter schools, and Commonwealth charter schools can be equitably compared by parents seeking to find the best option for their children. As an At-Large City Councilor, I would support reforms of the current funding mechanisms that would hold each of these types of schools accountable for providing equitable educational opportunities for every student in Boston.

Andrew Kenneally

I think Charters are a distraction from the real issue, which is the lack of resources in the schools. When you talk to teachers who do not have blackboards and learn that we have over \$200 million in deferred maintenance, which tells me there is a lack of resources.

At this time, I am more in favor of increasing parental involvement in the schools by allowing parents to send their child to the school closest to their home, which will allow us to take the over \$70 million dollars spent on school transportation and return it to the classroom.

Ayanna Pressley

I was fortunate enough to have a mother who cared deeply about my education, and fought hard to ensure I got the best education possible. Today I see the long wait lists for a number of our city's charter schools, and those wait lists only exist because there are so many parents who take personal pride and responsibility for their children's education. It is the job of a City Councilor to support those parents who have decided this is what's best for their children. I also believe that charters create opportunities for innovation and serve as incubators for new ideas that can be brought over to the district schools. With those ideas in mind, I do support lifting the existing cap.

But I have concerns. There are a few Charter schools that send struggling students back to the district schools, resulting in higher test score averages and better graduation rates for those schools. Many Charters have fewer Special Ed and ESL students, who cost significantly more to educate. I do think the funding mechanism needs to take that into further account, to create better equity in our school system.