

June 2009

## Charter Schools Endorsed by Mayoral Candidates

*Existing caps prevent more seats for Boston students despite demand*

Three mayoral candidates last week expressed support for expansion of charter school opportunities for Boston students. Charter schools have helped increase the options available for quality, innovative public education, but high demand combined with caps on expansion have created a long waitlist for Boston students. The following are basic facts on charter schools.

Fourteen Commonwealth charter schools operate in Boston independent of the Boston Public Schools (BPS) and union contract rules. The schools are approved and regulated by the state. Commonwealth charter schools are funded through a formula that calculates the cost of educating each student by program and grade level in the BPS.

State education aid follows the student which means that Boston's Chapter 70 state aid is assessed based on the number of Boston students attending Commonwealth charter schools and that aid is allocated to those schools. The state reimburses the sending district for its tuition loss over a three-year period on a declining scale. The net aid loss to Boston in FY09 is shown in the table below.

Charter School Assessment, FY09 In millions	
Charter School Tuition	\$66.3
Charter School Reimbursement	\$19.2
Net Impact	(\$47.1)

There are also two Horace Mann charter schools in Boston that have been approved by the School

Committee and Boston Teachers Union. These in-district charter schools are funded through the BPS budget, but receive many of the autonomies enjoyed by Commonwealth charter schools.

Commonwealth charter schools are highly sought by Boston students, with most students attending charter schools located in Boston. Current projections for next year's charter school enrollment shows:

- 5,264 Boston students are enrolled, which is equivalent to 9.4% of total BPS enrollment
- 8,577 Boston students are on waitlists

Any expansion of Commonwealth charter schools is limited by a state law that imposes three caps.

1. A limit of 72 Commonwealth charter schools operating statewide – now at 55.
2. Commonwealth charters can only make up 4% of statewide enrollment – now at 2.6%.
3. School districts cannot spend more than 9% of their net school spending (NSS) on Commonwealth charter tuition.

The state is not authorizing any new Commonwealth charter schools in Boston. Because FY10 spending cuts in the BPS lowered per-pupil tuitions, Boston is projected to spend 7.5% of its NSS on charter school tuition, a decrease from the 8% projected in FY09. However, this number is artificially low and will increase as the budget stabilizes.

The charter school NSS cap in high demand school districts should allow for expansion and the current funding formula should be reassessed.