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The Status of Charter Schools in Boston

Demand exceeds available seats; price to BPS is high

Charter schools have helped invigorate public education with creative alternatives for instruction and governance and as incentives for public schools improvement. Presently, Boston has reached its limit of charter schools while 7,277 students are on the waiting list.

Students living in Boston now have an option of 16 charter schools in the City of two types: Commonwealth and Horace Mann schools.

- Commonwealth charter schools (14) operate independently of local school regulations and union contract rules. They are regulated by the state Board of Education and receive their public funding from the sending district's state aid for education (Ch 70) based on a per pupil tuition.
- Horace Mann charter schools (2) must be approved by the local school board and teachers' union, are funded through the district's school budget, but otherwise have similar benefits of charter schools.

A larger number of students are on the waiting list for Commonwealth charters in Boston than are enrolled for the 2008-2009 school year.

- 5,254 students enrolled
- 7,277 students on waiting list

State education aid follows the student which means that Boston's Ch. 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 tuition loss to Boston for each student is phased out over a three-year period through a declining receipt of a state reimbursement. The net aid loss to Boston in FY08 is shown in the table.

Charter School Assessment, FY08 In millions	
Charter School Tuition	\$58.5
Charter School Reimbursement	\$14.6
Net Impact	(\$43.8)

The number of Commonwealth charter schools is limited by state law by three separate caps.

- Maximum of 72 Commonwealth charter school statewide - 54 operate now
- Cap of 4% of statewide public school enrollment - currently at 2.6%
- School Districts cannot spend more than 9% of their net school spending (NSS) on Commonwealth charter tuition.

With the opening of a new charter school in Dorchester in the fall of 2009, Boston is just below its district cap to a point that the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) is no longer accepting applications for Commonwealth charters that include Boston in its sending regions. ESE estimates that Boston will spend 8% of its NSS toward charter school tuition, leaving approximately 111 open seats.

Charter schools should continue to be an educational option for Boston parents and students. A reassessment of the charter school cap in Boston and the current funding formula should be considered along with how the cap would be impacted by the Governor's proposal for Readiness Schools.