



Chicago Students Prove They Can Compete... If Given A Chance

Urban charter school graduation rates rival the best in the state

The Problem

What would you do if your children could be on a championship-level team...but they weren't allowed to try out? Every day, Chicago kids prove they can compete. All they need is the opportunity. Tragically, thousands of children are not given a chance to "try out" for better schools. They are locked into continually failing schools with low graduation rates, largely because Illinois lawmakers will not remove the arbitrary cap placed on the number of charter schools in the state.

A report from the Illinois Policy Institute looks at high school graduation rates in Illinois. During 2004-2005, the most recent school year for which district-level data was available, it shows:

- Chicago's high school graduation rate is just 51.0 percent.
- Outside of Chicago, the high school graduation rate is 83.3 percent, higher than any other state in *Education Week's* widely read graduation rate rankings.
- Overall, Illinois' public high school graduation rate is 76.7 percent, ranking 13th nationally.
- Illinois would have led the nation in *Education Week's* 2008 rankings of state graduation rates if Chicago students had performed at the same level as students from the rest of the state – something they are doing in many of Chicago's charter schools.

There is a clear problem with education in Illinois. However, there is also a working, proven solution, and it should be expanded.

Our Solution

Charter public schools significantly increase their students' chances of graduating high school. **Charter schools in Chicago graduate students more than 75 percent of the time, compared to the overall CPS average of 51 percent.** The city's largest charter school, Chicago International Charter School, graduates 90.4 percent of its

students, which is slightly better than students in the suburbs and downstate Illinois, who graduate at a rate of 83.3 percent. Charter schools, in short, are doing their job – while much of the Chicago Public School system is not.

Unfortunately, current law caps the number of charter schools in Chicago at 30 and statewide at 60, preventing more than 13,000 wait-listed children from receiving the quality education they deserve. We encourage the legislature to do the following:

- Lift the cap on charter schools in Chicago and statewide.
- Reform the charter school authorization process to allow more innovative schools in Illinois (see our brief on charter schools for more information).
- Reject the yearly call to increase education funding without addressing reform. More spending does not equate to improved performance, as charter schools demonstrate. (In the last 21 years, total spending on education has tripled from \$7.1 billion to \$24.6 billion, yet Chicago's high school dropout crisis has persisted.)

Why This Works

Every child should be able to try out for the best team available, not just the teams with failing coaches and losing records. By lifting the cap on charter schools, lawmakers can open a pathway to success that is currently blocked.

A high school dropout has an equal chance of serving time in prison as earning \$30,000 per year. This is unacceptable. Charter schools throughout Chicago's south and west side, such as Urban Prep Academy, Chicago International Charter School, and Perspectives Charter School are proving that quality education and success is possible in Chicago's urban neighborhoods. Right now, more than 13,000 children are in line for a better education, but bureaucrats and lawmakers in Springfield stand in the way.

It is time to lift the cap on charter schools so that all Illinois children have the opportunity for an excellent education. Every child should be able to try out for a winning team. We can make that happen in our state.

Learn more at illinoispolicyinstitute.org.