



## Charter Schools Are Right for Nebraska

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Nebraska has a strong tradition of parent-controlled education. It is home to the 1923 Supreme Court ruling in *Meyer vs. State of Nebraska*, affirming the right of parents to control their children's education. However, Nebraska is one of the few states without a charter school system, something which would greatly improve the ability of parents to continue to guide this aspect of their children's lives.

Public charter schools combine the accountability and oversight of traditional public schools with the flexibility of private schools. A charter school system would give parents the ability to have more influence not only in where their children go to school, but also what and how they are learning.

Charter schools give educators the flexibility to teach the curriculum they deem to be the most effective. This ability has given rise to a wide variety of schools that focus on "back to basics," career technical training, college preparatory studies, and the "STEM" fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics).

This educational autonomy also brings with it accountability. Public charter schools are held accountable for meeting the terms of their performance contracts, which detail each charter school's mission, program, goals, students served, financial plan, and assessment methods. If a charter school fails to perform up to these standards, it will close. Charter school parents applaud the benefits of new teaching methods, greater accountability and innovative programs that lead to not only benefiting their children, but also the community.

In 2013, the Platte Institute published a policy study titled *Comparing Public and Private Schools in Omaha*. The report included results from a 2009 survey showing that approximately 90% of Nebraskans attend public schools, but that only one in five parents surveyed would send their children to public schools given other alternatives. In this study we found that like the rest of the state of Nebraska, Omaha voters across political parties support school choice options and policies that help parents access those options.

Research published since 2010 show positive results for students who attend public charter schools compared with traditional public schools. Three national studies and ten studies from major regions across the country found positive academic performance results for students in

public charter schools compared to their traditional public school peers. These recent studies suggest a strong upward trend in the effect of public charter schools on student performance. Since 2010, just one study that used longitudinal student-level data found neutral or negative results looking at public charter schools—from data collected in the state of Utah. Here are just three of the cases where charter schools have improved student outcomes:

- According to the Florida Department of Education report released in March 2013 showed that public charter school students outperform their traditional public school counterparts in math, science and reading on state assessments;
- The Center for Research on Education Outcomes at Stanford University report released in February 2013 found that the typical student in a New York City public charter school gains more learning in a year than his or her peer in a district public school, amounting to about one more month of learning in reading and five more months of learning in math. Student performance in Harlem public charter schools was also considered. The results for the typical student in a Harlem public charter school—approximately 25 percent of the city’s charter students—were even more pronounced in math;
- That same organization released a report on research from the state of New Jersey. The November 2012 report found that students in New Jersey public charter public schools made larger learning gains on average in both reading and math than their peers attending traditional district schools. Studying five years of data, from 2007–2011, and six tested grades (3–8), this report found that New Jersey charter school students on average gain an additional two months of learning per year in reading and an additional three months of learning per year in math compared to their peers in district public schools. In fact, charter students in Newark gain an additional seven and a half months in reading per year and nine months per year in math compared to their traditional public school counterparts.

There are hundreds of other examples that illustrate the same conclusion: charter schools are making strides that outperform the status quo. We are in the enviable position of being able to glean a number of best practices from charter school experiences across the country, and we recommend the following:

1. A transparent charter application and decision making process;
2. Performance based charter contracts;
3. Comprehensive public charter school monitoring and data collection process; and
4. A clear process for revocation;

It’s time to do what is best for Nebraska families. Policymakers should give parents the power to choose the best educational opportunities for their children by allowing charter schools to operate in Omaha.