



It's about great public schools.



# NEW YORK CITY CHARTER SCHOOL CENTER

## The First 5 Years

July 2010

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New York City's record of charter school achievement is one of the best in the country. Numerous studies have confirmed that a majority of the City's charter schools are consistently outperforming their district counterparts and have made significant gains in narrowing the achievement gap with schools in the more affluent suburbs. Equally inspiring is the fact that charter 'market penetration' in many communities has reached a tipping point, and has begun to put real pressure on the traditional school system to improve its approaches and outcomes. New York City's (NYC) charter school sector now serves as a national model.

While credit for these successes goes first to the schools themselves, they have been able to make these important gains with support from a number of city organizations, including the New York City Charter School Center (Charter Center). Launched in 2004 as a public-private collaboration between the NYC Department of Education (DOE) and several of the City's leading philanthropists, the Charter Center was established to nurture the nascent charter sector. Over the years, the Charter Center's work to grow the charter movement, ensure high quality schools, provide key supports and build a favorable policy environment has both strengthened charter schools and allowed them to focus on their core work of providing an exceptional education to New York City's children.

The New York City Charter School Center is committed to a future in which all of New York's students have access to a first-rate public education, so that, no matter their background, they can participate in society on fair terms. The Charter Center works for that future by supporting charter schools at every stage. We help new charter schools get started, support existing schools, and build community support, so that highly effective schools can flourish. These schools, in turn, show us what is possible in public education.

## NEW YORK CITY'S CHARTER SECTOR: A NATIONAL MODEL

With a record of performance that a leading researcher calls “too good to ignore,”<sup>1</sup> NYC’s charter schools not only show that poor and minority children can achieve at very high levels, but the City’s sector, as a whole, now serves as a role model for the rest of the country.

Student-learning results in NYC’s charter schools are among the best of any charter community in the nation. Recent, independent studies, including Stanford University professor and noted economist Caroline Hoxby’s *The New York City Charter Schools Evaluation Project (2009)*, and the Center for Research on Education Outcomes’ *Charter School Performance in New York City (2010)*, provide incontrovertible evidence that NYC’s charter schools are consistently outperforming their district counterparts, and suggest that over time they can close most of the so-called “Scarsdale gap” between wealthy suburbs and urban schools in student test performance.

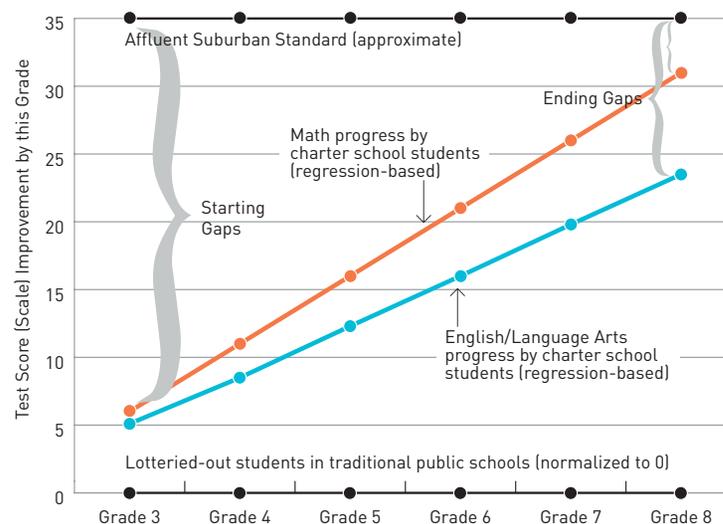
NYC charter school students have outpaced their district peers both in Math and English Language Arts for five years in a row, scoring proficient at higher rates on the respective state exams.<sup>2</sup> In 2009-10, this advantage extended to every single grade level of both subjects in Central Brooklyn, Harlem, and the South Bronx. Charter schools are achieving these results with the City’s most vulnerable students – Hoxby’s multi-year study of charter schools with admission lotteries found that 61 percent of the charter students were African-American versus 34 percent in traditional district schools, and they came from neighborhoods where household incomes were 37 percent lower. And it’s not just established charter management organizations (CMOs) that have achieved this level of success. NYC enjoys a diverse charter school portfolio – dozens of independent and/or community-based charter schools have developed high performing student achievement models that rival those of KIPP, Uncommon Schools and Achievement First.

*“The rest of the nation can learn from New York’s combination of careful school design, strong implementation and vigorous oversight – a balanced approach that has proven it can produce high-quality education options in any setting.”*

Margaret E. Raymond, director of the Center for Research on Education Outcomes

### Closing the Gaps, Year by Year

Estimate-based progress of New York City charter school student vs. students who applied for charter schools but were not selected via random lottery: 2000-01 to 2007-08



**Source:** Hoxby, Caroline M., Sonali Murarka, and Jenny Kang. “The New York City Charter Schools Evaluation Project: How New York City’s Charter Schools Affect Achievement.” National Bureau of Economic Research, September 2009.

**Note:** “Regression-based” indicates that lines reflect smoothed trends. Based on students with data for all grades.

<sup>1</sup> Raymond, Margaret E. “These Schools Work.” *New York Post*, April 21, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix for NYC Charter Sector: Facts and Figures.

Equally exciting is the fact that the pipeline shows no sign of slowing down. In 2003, five years after New York's charter law passed, there were only 24 charter schools in NYC, representing less than one percent of the City's school system. Before the end of 2010, there will be 125 charter schools in NYC (two-thirds of the State's 177 total) serving more than 38,000 students, with another 43,000 children on waiting lists. As of May 2010, there were 52 City applications queued up with New York's three authorizers, while another 36 potential planning groups participated in the Charter Center's recent orientation seminars. While overall market penetration is currently at 3.4 percent, some communities are serving much larger proportions of students in charter schools. In Harlem, for example, 20 percent of students attend public charter schools. In May 2010, as part of the State's federal Race to the Top application, the cap on the number of charter schools allowed statewide was raised for a second time, allowing an additional 114 charters to open in NYC (260 additional in the state) in the coming years. The cap lift, coupled with Mayor Michael Bloomberg's pledge to open 100 new schools before he leaves office, ensures that the movement will continue to scale up.

Lastly, as important as these charter sector achievements are in their own right, they have provided the underpinnings for the larger reform efforts of the district and an important national example of how fundamental change can be achieved. Rather than seeing chartering as "oppositional" reform that seeks to improve education outside of and in opposition to existing public schools, Chancellor Joel Klein has adopted many of the tools and best practices developed by the City's charters to create better schools system-wide. Over the years, the Chancellor has worked to infuse the innovation, autonomy, choice and accountability – once the exclusive purview of charters – into the larger school system. Individual schools and principals have been empowered to make key decisions about what will best help their students. Even within the confines of the United Federation of Teachers' (UFT) contract, traditional public school principals are better able to define their staffing, develop their own programs and budgets, and select the partners and supports that best suit their needs.<sup>3</sup> This enhanced flexibility, and the accountability it requires, has already contributed to the district's increased achievement.

Politicians, funders, educators, and reformers from around the country are looking to NYC for its experience and expertise to lead the movement nationwide.

## LAUNCHING THE NEW YORK CITY CHARTER SCHOOL CENTER: CONTEXT & BACKGROUND

### ***First Five Years of New York's Charter Movement***

New York City's charter sector was not always so vibrant. The City's charter movement got off to a slow and rocky start: of the 27 charter schools that managed to open in NYC in the first five years after New York's charter law passed (1998), three had already failed or closed and many of the remaining 24 were of poor or average quality. Charter school operators—both potential and existing—faced a myriad of challenges that often pre-empted or derailed their educational plans. The operational challenges associated with running these complex organizations were undermining the academic results of the established schools and calling into question the ultimate viability of the movement. The pipeline had also dried up; the burdensome application process, the lack of resources for planning and the high cost of facilities deterred many potential school leaders and groups from applying for charters. The movement was at a standstill.

Many of the City's leading philanthropists, who had been supporting individual charter schools, realized that their funding was not having the impact they had intended. Together, they convened<sup>4</sup> to address many of the challenges facing charters and to develop a more thoughtful and comprehensive approach to support the movement. The initial blueprint for the New York City Charter School Center was born out of these early discussions.

### ***A "Critical Element" of Mayor Bloomberg's Education Reform Strategy***

In December 2003, the DOE presented the *Charter School Initiative*, a critical element of Mayor Bloomberg's systemic school reform plan. Known as *ChildrenFirst*, the Mayor's trail-blazing agenda intended to put children ahead of the special interest politics and bureaucratic inertia that had previously hindered quality learning. Charter school expansion was central to this vision.

Schools Chancellor Klein deemed the *Charter School Initiative* one of the DOE's "principal research and development programs for public education." He cited the potential of charters' regulatory freedom, their accountability for results, and the market-based competition that they introduce into public education.

<sup>3</sup> *New York City Department of Education. "ChildrenFirst, 2008-2009 School Year."*

<sup>4</sup> *Foundations and Public Schools: Enabling Best Practices, Pocantico Conference Center. December 2002.*

If successful, Klein believed charter schools would provide an effective model of autonomous and empowered public schools that would serve to inform other local and national education policies. Specifically, the *Initiative* had three primary goals:

1. Create 50 excellent new charter schools by 2008.
2. Create the New York City Center for Charter School Excellence (now the New York City Charter School Center).
3. Make New York City charter-friendly.

The DOE's commitment to the *Charter School Initiative* was substantial in both political and financial terms, and called for:

- Making public school facilities available to new charter schools.
- Allocating capital dollars specifically for charter school development in the City's 2005-2009 Capital Plan.
- Extending DOE start-up grants (up to \$400,000) to include all new charter schools in New York City.
- Doubling charter schools' special education funding to establish parity with the larger school system.
- Providing charter schools with full access to - and functionality within - the DOE's student information and procurement systems and Intranet.

### ***Philanthropy is Central to Charter School Success***

The philanthropic community's commitment to ensuring charters had the supports they needed to succeed was equally substantial. The New York City Charter School Center (Charter Center) was launched with \$41 million from four NYC-based funders: \$15 million each from the Robertson and Robin Hood Foundations, \$10 million from The Pumpkin Foundation and \$1 million from The Clark Foundation, intended to be spent over a five-year period.

While very much a public-private collaboration, the Charter Center was organizationally constituted as an independent nonprofit that would work to revive the movement by stimulating the supply of excellent charter schools in New York City. By creating an intermediary and providing it with a guaranteed revenue stream, philanthropists would be able to ensure that the Charter Center had the flexibility and longevity to operate with an entrepreneurial philosophy and

*"New York City charter schools exist and have succeeded because of the foresight and leadership of the philanthropic community. The Charter School Initiative builds on the groundwork of support, planning and thought that the philanthropic community has committed to charter schools."*

Joel Klein, Schools Chancellor, *Charter School Initiative*

independent voice, regardless of the City's evolving priorities or politics. This would also allow the Charter Center to serve as a pressure point for advocacy and a vehicle for translating successful charter practices back to the system in New York and ultimately beyond.

To this day, the Charter Center's founding funders hold a third of the seats on the Board of Trustees, while Chancellor Klein, one of his designees, and representatives from the charter community round out the organization's governing body. This unique collaboration combines the interests and viewpoints necessary to ensure that the Charter Center remains at the forefront of the movement.

## **THE CHARTER CENTER'S WORK & IMPACT**

The Charter Center was established to support Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Klein's precedent-setting work by stimulating the supply of high quality charter schools and supporting ongoing student excellence in all public NYC charter schools, impacting the effectiveness of public education. In order to achieve this, the Charter Center would essentially function as a new model of school district for charter schools, while taking on a significant advocacy role and serving as a grant-making entity. While the organization's priorities and work would evolve over the years in response to changing conditions and lessons learned, these four overarching objectives have remained:

1. Growing the charter school movement
2. Ensuring quality
3. Providing key supports; and
4. Building a charter-friendly policy environment

The section that follows summarizes some of the Charter Center's major contributions to NYC's charter sector. The Appendices include a more detailed account of the Center's specific actions and results.

### **Growing NYC's Charter Sector**

From the early days of the charter movement, it has been clear that success must be demonstrated beyond the achievements of a handful of schools. In New York City, the Charter Center has been the primary driver of growth, offering programs and supports that alleviate and, when possible, eliminate the most significant barriers to charter expansion.

#### ***Expanding the Pool of Human Capital***

In the early years, in order to revive the pipeline of quality applicants, the Charter Center concentrated much of its resources on expanding the human capital pool. Through partnerships with Building Excellent Schools, New Leaders for New Schools, and Teach for America, the Charter Center helped launch six charter schools and placed 23 leaders in schools and more than 120 teachers in charter classrooms. As one of the first charter support organizations in the country to partner with these leadership organizations, the Charter Center was, in several cases, instrumental in defining and launching their charter training programs.

As the pipeline began to swell, the Charter Center adapted its programming to address the human capital needs of existing schools. In 2007, we launched the Emerging Leader Fellowship Program (ELF), a rigorous one-year program that trains current charter school educators for leadership positions within their schools. The program is designed to help retain effective educators and create a leadership pipeline as schools expand and replicate. Nearly all of ELF's 24 alumnae have been promoted to leadership positions and one has even gone on to create a new charter school. The Charter Center's Principal Support Network, launched in 2008, helps to curb the high principal turnover rate by providing leaders with the tools and tactics they need to more effectively address challenges that arise in their schools.

#### ***Providing Start-Up Funds***

To this day, charter school start-up teams struggle to secure the funds necessary to cover the many expenses associated with launching a new school. While there are some federal and state start-up monies available, these funds are often difficult to access and/or are limited and competitive. The Charter Center

### **EASING THE FACILITIES BURDEN**

Whether they locate in public facilities, rent private spaces, or build their own structures, finding a place to open is one of the biggest challenges for NYC charter schools. To date, the Charter Center has:

- Saved charter schools, on average, \$800,000 annually by defeating the district's attempts to charge rent for shared space.
- Helped build four new, state-of-the-art charter school facilities, housing 2,100 students, through a partnership with Civic Builders.
- Incubated one-third of NYC's charter schools, saving start-up teams \$25,000 a year.
- Navigated 39 charter schools through the complex facilities planning and management processes.
- Facilitated productive shared-space environments for 14 charter and district schools through Education Campus grants.
- Persuaded NY's Education Department to allow charter schools to access, for the first time, its allocation of nearly \$180 million in tax-advantaged Qualified School Construction Bonds. These bonds will help charters lower their cost of financing school buildings.

was one of the first nonprofit organizations in New York City (and still one of only a handful) to provide planning and implementation grants to high-capacity start-up teams. These grants, which fill the gap until per-pupil revenues come in, are vital to ensuring early staff and Board development and have been one of our most valuable tools to spur growth and quality. Since its inception, the Charter Center has provided start up grants totaling \$4.5 million to 83 of NYC's 125 charter schools. In addition to these direct contributions, the Charter Center has saved new school teams tens of thousands of dollars in fees by funding one-on-one consultations with industry experts and by providing incubation office space. Lastly, the Charter Center has worked to expand the funding base for charter schools by educating other foundations about the sector, identifying

and working to increase public dollars, and assisting the schools themselves with grant writing and growing their fundraising capabilities.

### **Supporting Facilities Solutions**

Securing facilities, especially in NYC, is one of the most daunting challenges charter schools face. By opening up public school facilities to charters—typically by co-locating them with district schools—the DOE established a groundbreaking solution to the facilities dilemma. This solution, though, has not been without its difficulties. Over the years, the Charter Center has worked to ensure that the challenges that arise from co-location can be resolved productively: we defined shared space agreements in order to lock in charter placements; provided grants to facilitate productive shared space arrangements between charter and district schools; and rallied hundreds of charter parents to testify at contentious site hearings in order to defend charter co-locations. This intensive focus has helped to secure public facility placements for more than two-thirds of NYC’s charter schools. And for those schools that did not receive shared space from the DOE, the Charter Center offered real estate consultancy and facilities planning services as well as capital funding.

### **Ensuring High Quality Schools**

While increasing the number of charter schools has been an important goal of the Charter Center, the growth of high-quality schools is paramount. The Charter Center founders recognized that if the charter movement was to hold real promise as a mechanism for public school reform in the City and elsewhere, student performance must be at the forefront.

### **Early Remediation Programs**

In its early years, when there were only a few dozen charters in operation, the Charter Center worked with and invested intensely in schools that it identified as having the potential to move from “good to great.” The organization acted as critical friend, developing a Quality School Rubric, conducting school reviews, establishing baseline assessments and providing intervention and follow-up supports (including grants and one-on-one consultations with leading service providers) to address potentially fatal shortcomings. Twelve schools benefitted from this intensive focus. Within the schools, the Charter Center promoted data-driven instruction and developed interim student assessment models to support the schools’ aggressive student achievement goals.

## **LEADING THE WAY**

High-performing schools begin with strong leaders, and the Charter Center has invested heavily in leadership development for the sector. To date, we have:

- **Placed 23 school leaders in NYC charter schools through a partnership with New Leaders for New Schools.**
- **Sponsored 6 Fellows from Building Excellent Schools who each went on to launch a NYC charter school. These schools now serve over 1,800 students.**
- **Established a Principal Support Network that provides intensive professional development to charter school leaders in order to strengthen their capacities and curb turnover. Since 2008, 26 NYC charter leaders have graduated from the program.**
- **Trained three cohorts - 24 individuals - of highly-skilled teachers to assume secondary leadership positions within their schools through the Emerging Leader Fellowship program, bolstering the capacity of schools to grow while retaining talented staff and maintaining school culture.**
- **Encouraged quality governance by placing 43 individuals from the private sector on 32 charter school Boards, through the Charter Center’s partnership with Volunteer Consulting Group.**

### **New School Development**

In time, though, it became clear that arbitrating quality was costly, difficult to scale, and had a debilitating effect on our efforts to build an effective advocacy community. Within two years, these programs evolved from remediation to infusing quality from the school’s inception. The Charter Center’s signature program, the New School Development Program, was formally launched in 2008, and has grown to include more than 60 trainings, working groups and one-on-one consultations, throughout the course of a year, that encourage thoughtful school design and provide schools with the financial, legal and administrative skills required for success. The Charter Center’s work in this area has been cited as

one of the top three reasons NYC’s charter schools are succeeding.<sup>5</sup> In guiding new schools through the start-up maze and helping them establish effective management and financial systems, “charter schools in NYC are less likely to encounter operational pitfalls and can thus focus more on teaching and learning.”<sup>6</sup> To date, 43 charter schools have participated in the program. By making the program free and open to all NYC charter starters, the Charter Center is working to encourage quality sector-wide rather than only helping those schools that can afford to pay for it.

### **Vocal Proponent of Quality**

In addition to its new school programming, the Charter Center has played a vocal and proactive role in promoting charter school quality and accountability at all levels. We have focused both schools and the media on student performance by making the release of charter test scores an annual, citywide event and by garnering media coverage for individual school successes. At the same time, we have called for (and in one case, facilitated) the closing of poorly performing charters and have dissuaded more than a dozen low-capacity planning teams from submitting applications.

### **Rigorous Analysis of the Sector**

Most importantly, recognizing the necessity of self-reflection, the Charter Center initiated several independent studies and evaluations of the sector, scrutinizing the authorizers and schools, alike. The New York City Authorizing Project, commissioned by the Charter Center, evaluated and made recommendations to strengthen the practices of New York’s three authorizing entities: the DOE, the New York State Education Department, and the State University of New York (SUNY). Today, SUNY is recognized by the Obama administration as one of the country’s most rigorous and responsible authorizers. The Charter Center also had the foresight to catalyze and coordinate a multi-year study of NYC’s charter school performance. Stanford University economist Caroline Hoxby’s resulting research, *The New York City Charter Schools Evaluation Project*, gives irrefutable evidence to the success of charter schools in New York City, and independent and authoritative validation of the important role charter schools play in broader education reform efforts.

<sup>5</sup> *Center for Research on Education Outcomes. “Charter School Performance in New York City.” Stanford University, 2010.*

<sup>6</sup> *Raymond, Margaret E. “L.A. could learn a lot about charter schools from the Big Apple.” Los Angeles Times, February 1, 2010.*

## **Providing Charter School Supports**

As autonomous organizations overseen by Boards of Directors rather than school districts, charter schools do not receive the same supports afforded traditional public schools. While the DOE is certainly “charter-friendly,” the Charter Center was established to fill the support void, providing schools with the tools, guidance and connections they need to ensure their sustainability and success.

### **Charter 411**

As its name suggests, the Charter Center serves as the sector’s primary resource for information and problem-solving. We function as the charter community’s “411,” fielding hundreds of calls each month from charter leaders, staff and parents in need of assistance. We also serve as the collective brain for the sector, helping schools move quickly up the learning curve and avoid reinventing the wheel; the Charter Center’s comprehensive business manuals (covering topics such as operations, governance, grant-seeking and facilities development), financial toolkits and exemplar library utilize best practices from high-performing charters and the industry’s most respected service providers.

### **Growing the Marketplace**

With very few businesses servicing charters, the Charter Center assumed responsibility for seeding the charter marketplace—both by establishing its own direct services and facilitating professional collaborations among the schools themselves. The Charter Center’s direct services, which are utilized by 85 percent of the charter community, include teacher certification evaluations, state test scoring and educator fingerprinting. To date, the Charter Center has put more than 3,100 teachers on the road to certification, ensuring that charter leaders can hire the very best teachers regardless of their certification status, while our fingerprinting and scoring services have provided third-party objectivity.

In order to increase the capacity of charters to serve their special needs populations, the Charter Center established Special Education Cooperatives in three boroughs and launched, in 2009, the country’s first Charter School English Language Learners (ELL) Consortium. These groups serve as important forms of quality control as schools can share what works and what doesn’t, gain access to public funding, trade vendors, and engage in professional development. In its first few months, the ELL Consortium accessed \$98,000 in federal funds (that were unattainable for individual schools) for professional development and classroom materials.

### **Solutions for the Sector**

Our industry-wide vantage point has enabled the Charter Center to offer programs or tackle issues that neither the DOE nor individual schools could (or would). These efforts include, but are not limited to, conducting compensation surveys, holding job fairs, and hosting an education speaker series. The Charter Center has also addressed numerous issues that affect the sector as a whole; we prodded the State Education Department to apply for and receive an additional \$6.4 million in federal Charter School Program funds for start-up charters and convened NYC's charter leaders to develop the sector's response to New York State's Race to the Top application.

### **Collaborating with the DOE**

Finally, the Charter Center's continued and close collaborations with the DOE have ensured that charters remain at the forefront of the City's agenda. The Charter Center has helped frame the Mayor's charter platform and policies and our team meets weekly with the Office of New Schools (which oversees the City's charter portfolio), to coordinate new school development, facilities placements and service distribution. We also collaborate on events and programming; notably, the co-sponsored *School Leadership Learning Workshop Series* brought together more than 1,300 teachers and school and regional leadership from charters and district schools alike to reflect on learning and share best practices. Besides collaborating with the DOE, the Charter Center also addressed systemic challenges and fended off bureaucratic creep. We were able to secure charter access to the DOE's teacher and talent pool and, as mentioned previously, we worked with the schools to defeat the district's attempt to charge rent for charters in shared space.

### **Creating a Favorable Policy Environment**

From the beginning, New York's charter schools have struggled to solidify their position within the state's education system. Caps on growth, unequal funding, budget freezes, and numerous attempts to scale back expansion continue to threaten the charter movement. As the primary voice for NYC's charter schools, the Charter Center represents and advocates on behalf of charters to protect and enhance charter school autonomy, eliminate bureaucratic hurdles, ensure equitable operating funding and remove the facilities barrier to charter school expansion.

## **GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING**

**There are no greater advocates for students than their parents. In 2009, the Charter Center expanded its grassroots advocacy work in order to leverage their voices in the fight for better public schools.**

- **The Charter Center provided advocacy training to more than 1,800 parents at 81 charter schools and helped establish parent associations at 10 new charter schools.**
- **In one year, the Charter Center grew Charter Advocacy Day in Albany from 750 participants to more than 3,000 (the largest rally of parents ever in Albany), drawing support from the Governor and other key legislators.**
- **The Charter Center's growing advocacy network helped secure co-locations for 13 charter schools in 2010 by partnering with Harlem charter leaders to turn out more than 1,600 parents to the Panel for Educational Policy's site hearing.**

### **Education and Outreach**

In our start-up years, when the movement was still relatively new, the Charter Center's advocacy work was educational rather than confrontational. Our efforts focused on informing parents and communities about the existence and benefits of charter schools. We placed advertisements in major media outlets, produced the City's first comprehensive charter school guide and information pamphlets, developed communications templates to empower charters, and partnered with organizations, such as the Hispanic Federation, to increase enrollment of underrepresented populations. Over time, as their numbers grew, the messaging sought to "normalize" charter schools with the general population. The Charter Center's public information campaign, supported by an outside media consultant, utilizes press conferences, events, earned media, etc. to highlight new school openings, test score results, industry studies and parental demand.

### Action Advocacy

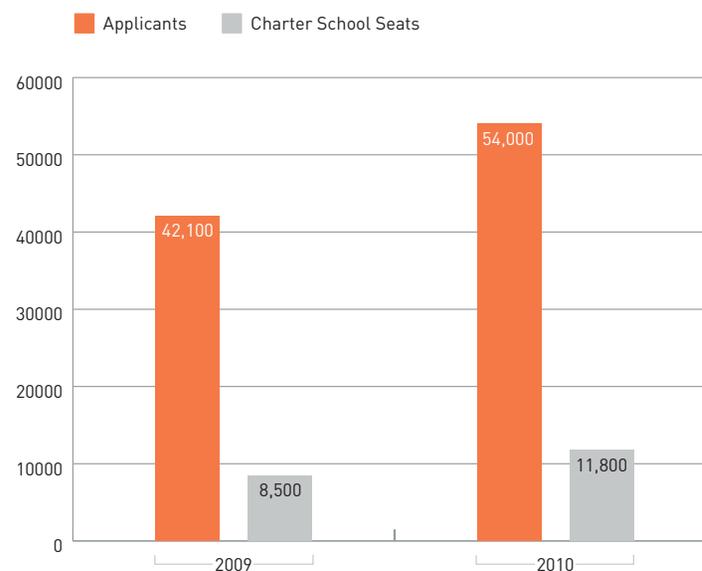
In 2006, as New York State reached its first cap on the number of charters allowed to operate, the Charter Center expanded its advocacy efforts. In the past three and a half years, we have more than doubled our advocacy and communications budget, grown our staff from one to five people and become a leading voice in the charter debate. As NYC's charter expert, the Charter Center regularly produces and distributes data, policy briefings and key messaging to educate elected officials, charter leaders and parents, arming them with the evidence they need to vocally and visibly support the movement. The Charter Center coordinates with other leading charter proponents (such as the DOE, the New York Charter Schools Association and Democrats for Education Reform) to develop annual charter policy action plans, craft charter-friendly legislation and pursue issue-specific campaigns (e.g. securing cap lifts, reversing funding freezes, and renewing mayoral control). Through its blog, op-ed articles and advocacy action alerts, the Charter Center frames the charter discussion and combats misinformation spread by charter opponents. When necessary, the Charter Center has even pursued legal action to defend autonomy; in 2008, we initiated and helped win a lawsuit to stop illegal auditing of charter schools by the State Comptroller, preventing predatory encroachment and saving the schools thousands of hours annually.

In the fall of 2009, the Charter Center expanded its grassroots advocacy work by formally establishing the Charter Parent Advocacy Network (CPAN), the sector's first organized parent group. The CPAN team helps charter schools establish their own parent organizations, provides trainings and tools for better school outreach, and coordinates parent mobilization for key events, including rallies, co-location hearings and Charter Advocacy Day in Albany. Already, the Charter Center has established Parent Advocacy Councils in all five boroughs and has conducted parent engagement trainings with more than 1,800 charter parents.

### A Successful Endeavor

The Charter Center's founders were intent on fostering a charter-friendly environment in NYC by providing the supports necessary to empower schools to open and flourish. While credit for the success of the City's charter sector goes first to the schools themselves, the Charter Center's work to grow the movement, ensure quality, provide key resources, solve industry-wide challenges, and build

### Supply and Demand for Charter School Seats: Admissions Lotteries 2009 and 2010 (estimated)



Source: Charter Center estimate based on school surveys.

a favorable policy environment has, as one founding Board member explained, "cleared the brush," so that the schools could remain focused on their core work of providing exceptional educations for NYC's children.

Today, the Charter Center serves as an indispensable hub of knowledge, energy and support for NYC's charter community. In the last year alone, more than 6,000 people walked through the Charter Center's doors to meet, learn and act on behalf of charter schools. The organization is the cornerstone of the City's charter support infrastructure and our coordinated, citywide approach to servicing a diverse group of charter schools now serves as a model for cities across the country.

## UNDERSTANDING THE CITYWIDE STRATEGY

The Charter Center’s integrated, localized approach to stimulating the growth and quality of the City’s charter sector, while collaborating closely with local government and philanthropic partners, was the first of its kind in the country and distinguishes the organization from state charter associations and other service providers. Referred to as a “citywide strategy,” this new paradigm allows funders—in NYC and beyond—to have significant impact on the charter movement.

Specifically, the Charter Center’s citywide strategy is defined by a unique confluence of stakeholders and resources:

- The City’s administration is not just “open” to change, but has actively sought to take control of and reshape the education system through new school development and implementation of effective school strategies on the broader, district level;
- Some of the country’s earliest and most generous charter supporters recognized the potential of a public/private collaboration and assumed active roles in developing the sector;
- And, of course, talented and motivated entrepreneurs committed themselves to providing high quality educations to NYC’s underserved children.

These factors—coupled with the extensive relationships the Charter Center has developed with the City’s charter leaders, communities, politicians and media—ensure that the programming of the citywide strategy is responsive and productive. The Charter Center has been able to catalyze, coordinate and convene the sector in a way that no other entity can.

The citywide strategy is also marked by its focus on quality and the larger education reform vision. Free from the constraints of dues-paying constituents, the Charter Center can work inclusively, helping a greater number of schools move along the quality continuum. By facilitating the success of NYC’s charter school movement—a movement that has demonstrably achieved academic excellence and narrowed achievement gaps—the Charter Center has translated back to the broader system the best practices and tools that will continue to serve NYC and other urban centers.

*“Our network opens schools in 20 states and Washington, DC. There is no better place to open a charter school than in New York City, and the New York City Charter School Center is one of the reasons why. That’s been the case over the last five years; the Charter Center’s work will be even more important in the next five.”*

Richard Barth, CEO, KIPP Foundation

The Charter Center’s citywide strategy has fundamentally changed the charter support organization genre, establishing an unmistakable trend for philanthropists seeking to scale a quality movement. In the past several years, the funding community has supported the launch of similar organizations in four other cities: New Orleans, Newark, Washington D.C. and Nashville (New Schools for New Orleans, Newark Charter School Fund, the D.C. Schools Fund and the tentatively titled Center for Charter Schools in Tennessee, respectively). Each of these cities has taken their own approach to addressing the needs of their charter sector—which underscores the strength of the strategy.

## LOOKING AHEAD

There has never been a more exciting time for education reform generally and the charter movement in particular. President Obama’s economic stimulus packages have spurred great attention and interest in education reform; the Race to the Top grant program has leveraged charter-friendly legislation across the country and the federal Invest in Innovation Fund will catalyze the cross-pollination of best educational practices and ideas. New York City’s charter sector success, in particular, has demonstrated the efficacy of this charter “experiment” and provided the movement with a shining example of what’s possible in public schooling.

Ironically, it is precisely these circumstances that have made the charter sector a political threat and has placed the future of New York City’s charter schools in jeopardy. Charters are a threat to the education status quo, particularly teachers unions, which have stepped up their efforts to stymie charter growth. The unions also maintain the loyalty of many of New York’s local and state legislators who regularly criticize and vote against charters. While the Bloomberg Administration has staunchly supported charter schools, many of its policies and procedures

have yet to be codified and could be lost several years from now once a new mayor takes office (2014) or mayoral control expires (2016). If charter opponents have their way, New York will one day serve as the central front for rolling back the charter movement.

It will require a significant amount of work and investment to ensure that this does not happen. The Charter Center will drive the work by building a bigger and stronger coalition of charter supporters and by growing its own internal capacity for advocacy. It will take charge of the charter discussion by putting charter opponents on the defensive, expanding its grassroots parent organizing, facilitating sector-wide collaborations, and cultivating new partnerships with other leading community and child advocacy organizations.

At the same time, the Charter Center will continue to provide direct support to NYC's charter schools, supplying them with the resources and guidance they need to continue to grow and succeed. Our programming will evolve and become more sophisticated as the sector itself matures: we will develop programming that supports and encourages the next wave of great charter management organizations; we will utilize various technologies, including webinars and online courses and learning communities, to encourage a virtuous cycle among charters and expand our outreach; we will explore partnerships with local universities and other accredited organizations to enhance our programming; and, we will seek out ways in which to better connect and collaborate with traditional district schools. Finally, the Charter Center will also address the movement's critics by helping charters accept responsibility for creating a more level playing field; our work will support schools' efforts to enroll and retain even more challenging populations of students and will seek out ways in which charters can share more of the district's responsibilities.

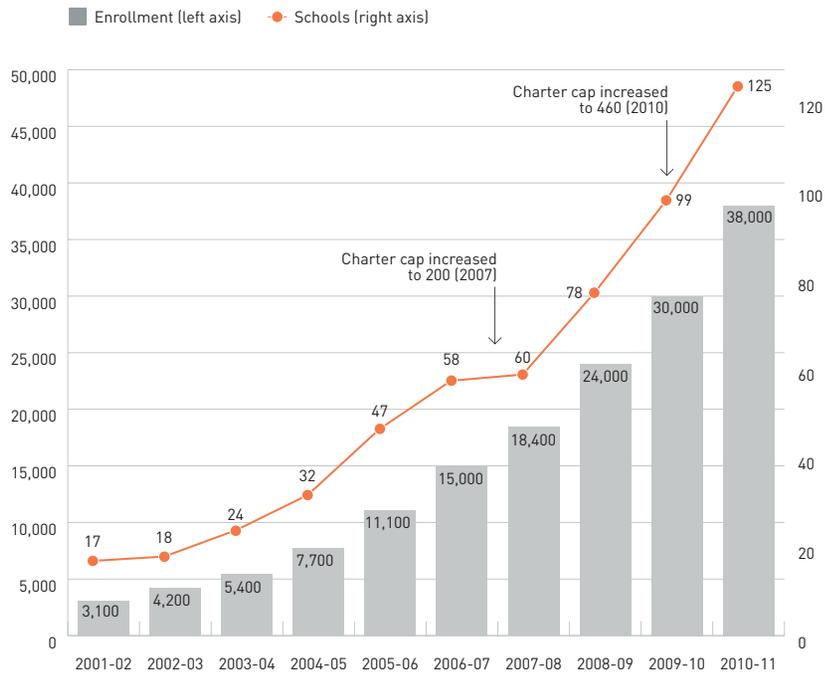
Throughout, the Charter Center will remain focused on school choice, quality and accountability. We will push for growth and provide programming and supports that promote excellence, and will not shy away from weeding out practices that engender mediocrity, whether it is by a poorly performing authorizer or school. We will fight against laws that restrict innovation or autonomy, while at the same time championing policies that hold schools accountable for their students' success.

The New York City Charter School Center is committed to a future in which all of New York's students have access to a first-rate public education, so that, no matter their background, they can participate in society on fair terms.

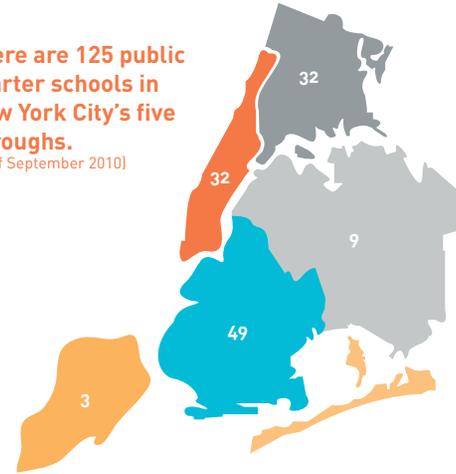
## APPENDICES

### NYC's Charter Sector: Facts & Figures

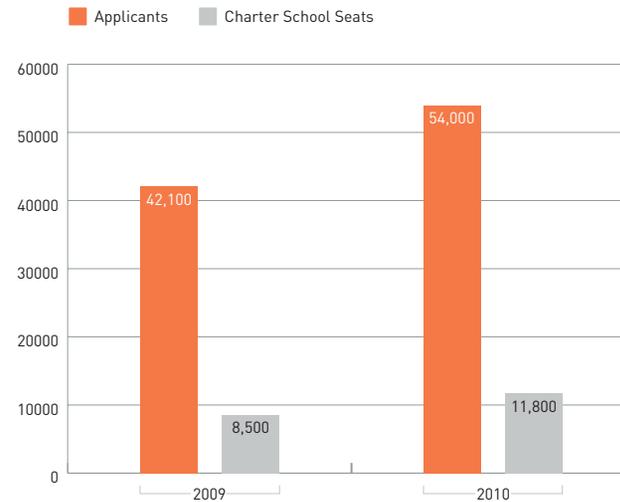
#### Charter School Growth in New York City, 2001-2010



There are 125 public charter schools in New York City's five boroughs. (as of September 2010)

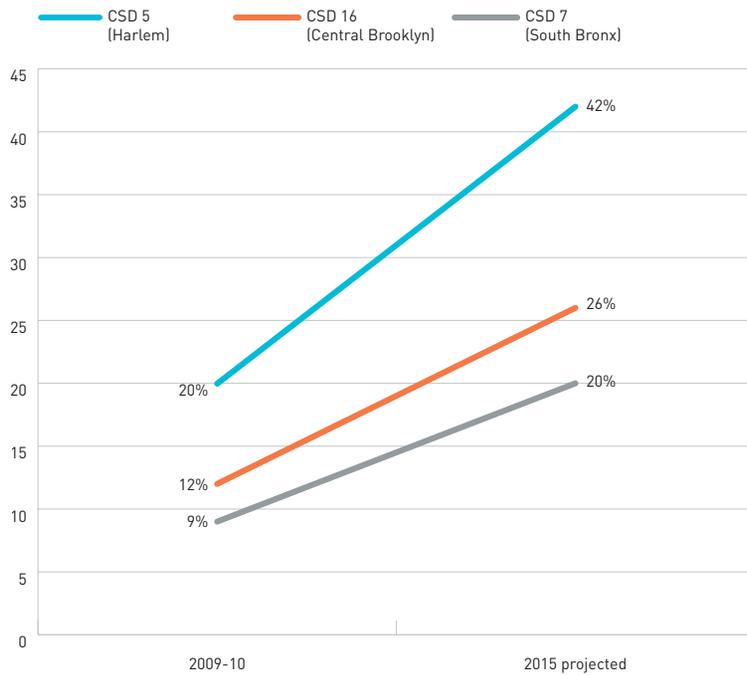


#### Supply and Demand for Charter School Seats: Admissions Lotteries 2009 and 2010 (estimated)

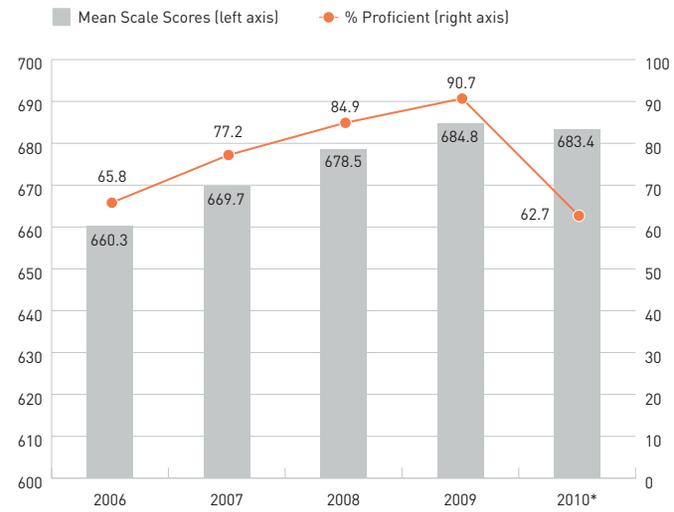


Source: Charter Center estimate based on school surveys.

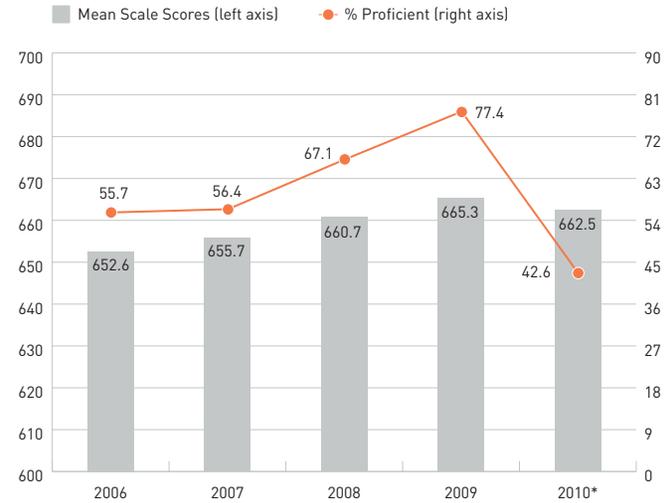
### Charter School Share of Total Public School Enrollment: Key Neighborhoods



### Mean Scores and Levels: Math Performance on State Tests (Grades 3-8)



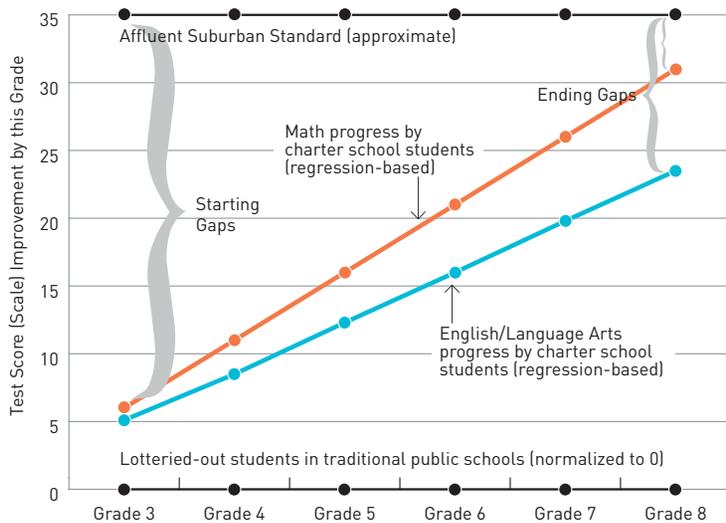
### Mean Scores and Levels: English Language Arts Performance on State Tests (Grades 3-8)



\* Starting in 2010, NYSED changed the scale score required to meet each of the proficiency levels, increasing the number of questions students needed to answer correctly to meet proficiency.

### Closing the Gaps, Year by Year

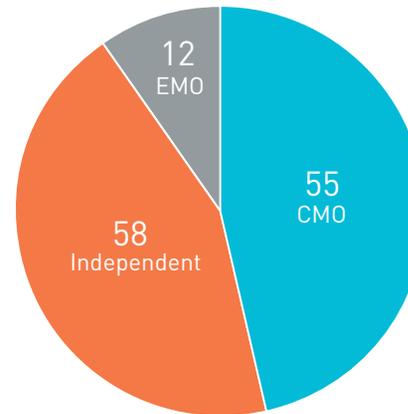
Estimate-based progress of New York City charter school student vs. students who applied for charter schools but were not selected via random lottery: 2000-01 to 2007-08



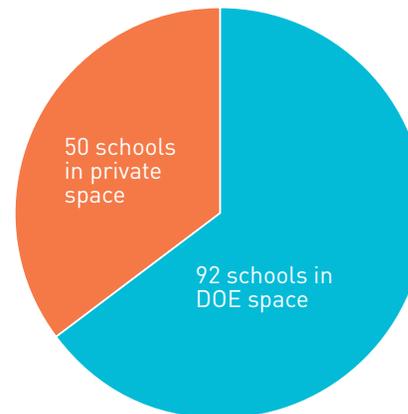
**Source:** Hoxby, Caroline M., Sonali Murarka, and Jenny Kang. "The New York City Charter Schools Evaluation Project: How New York City's Charter Schools Affect Achievement." National Bureau of Economic Research, September 2009.

**Note:** "Regression-based" indicates that lines reflect smoothed trends. Based on students with data for all grades.

### Charter Schools by Network Status (2010-11)



### NYC Charter School Facilities by Type 2010



Note: Several charter schools operate in more than one facility.

## The NYC Charter School Center in Action 2005-2010

**START-UP SUPPORT:**  
The Charter Center guides start-up teams through the authorization and school-opening processes to ensure their strength and viability from the beginning.

- Since 2005, the Charter Center has provided new school training supports. In 2008, the Charter Center formally established the New School Development Program. We've engaged more than 45 planning teams in this process, providing over 60 free workshops and trainings in charter application writing, curriculum development, governance planning and operations and management.
- Since 2005, we've provided incubation office space to 40 start-up teams, giving them direct access to Charter Center professionals and saving them approximately \$25,000 in rent and other start-up expenses.
- Since 2004, we've awarded 110 planning and implementation grants totaling \$4.5 million to 83 new charter schools so they had the resources to hire staff and prepare for opening their doors.

**FACILITIES SOLUTIONS:**  
The Charter Center has sought to address one of the biggest challenges facing new charter schools—securing space.

- In 2010, we persuaded the State Education Department to allow charter schools to access its allocation of nearly \$180 million in tax-advantaged Qualified School Construction Bonds to lower the cost of financing school buildings.
- In 2008, we defeated the DOE's attempt to charge schools rent for shared space, saving schools \$800,000 per year, on average.
- From 2004-2008, we partnered with Civic Builders, a nonprofit charter school developer, to create four state-of-the-art charter school facilities for more than 2,100 students.
- Since 2005, we've lead 39 teams through the complex facilities planning and management process.
- Between 2005 and 2006, we awarded 14 Education Campus grants to charter and district schools to help them create productive, shared-space environments.

**SECTOR-WIDE SOLUTIONS:**  
The Charter Center has spearheaded industry-wide solutions to common charter school issues and lead efforts to promote a strong charter school sector.

- In 2010, we developed a comprehensive analysis of the new Charter School Law, providing assistance, workshops and legal opinions to schools to help them successfully implement the new regulations.
- In 2010, we organized charter leaders to develop the sector's response to NYS's Race to the Top (RTTT) application; as a result charter schools are now an intrinsic part of the proposed RTTT activities, giving NYS a better shot at \$700 million in federal funds.
- In 2009, we launched the Lunch and Learn speaker series to keep schools on top of leading education reform issues. Hundreds of charter school leaders, administrators, and teachers have attended events with key industry leaders, including NYS Education Commissioner David Steiner and Pedro Noguera, Executive Director of the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education.

- In 2008, we began providing fingerprinting services for new charter hires, to address a void in the marketplace.
- In 2007, we sued the Comptroller to stop predatory, costly auditing of charter school educational plans, and won.
- In 2005, we created a state test scoring consortium to fill another void in the marketplace. Today, nearly every NYC charter school participates in the consortium which has reliably scored tens of thousands of tests.
- From 2005-2007, the Charter Center provided Best Practice Grants, totaling \$409,000, to 30 charter schools in order to stimulate and support varied methods of developing, validating and sharing best practices, and collaborations among the charter network. These initiatives were also documented in the Charter Center's Best Practice Library.
- In 2005, we incubated Charter School Business Management, Inc, now the industry's leading provider of these services.

**LEADERSHIP:**  
**The Charter Center has built leadership capacity within schools and curbed high turnover rates through several innovative programs.**

- In 2008, we launched the Principal Support Network to help increase the capacity of principals to lead effectively. To date, 26 charter school leaders have received intensive professional development and management training, skills they've brought back to their schools.
- In 2007, we created the Emerging Leader Fellowship program for charter school teachers to create a leadership pipeline for expansion and replication efforts. To date, we've trained 24 high-potential teachers—21 of whom now hold secondary leadership positions in their schools.
- From 2005 to 2009, we partnered with Volunteer Consulting Group to help connect schools with potential board members. As a result, we placed 43 private sector individuals on 32 charter school boards.

**HUMAN CAPITAL:**  
**The Charter Center has increased the ability of schools to hire highly-effective educators, a cornerstone of great schooling.**

- From 2004 to 2009, we partnered with Building Excellent Schools and New Leaders for New Schools to create six new charter schools and place 23 school leaders in new charters.
- In 2005, we launched Teach for America's charter school training program, and funded more than 120 TFA fellow placements in NYC charter schools.
- In 2005, we created the teacher certification review program which, to date, has enabled charter leaders to hire more than 3,100 teachers of their choice by putting those educators on the path to certification.
- From 2006-2009, the Charter Center funded the placement of 27 Education Pioneers Fellows in as many schools to help build the capacity of existing schools.
- In 2006, the Charter Center held the sector's first jobs fair and launched a charter school recruiting website. Approximately 150 teachers and 40 additional staff were placed in NYC's charters that year.

**UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS:**  
The Charter Center has taken the lead in helping schools enroll, retain and serve English Language Learners and children with disabilities.

- In 2009, we launched the nation's first English Language Learners Consortium with 17 schools. To date, the consortium has accessed more than \$98,000 in federal funds (that were unattainable on an individual basis) to support professional development and build capacity.
- In 2008, we created Special Education Cooperatives to increase schools' abilities to serve this population. More than two-thirds of NYC's charter schools now participate.
- Since 2005, the Charter Center's Special Education Consultant has assisted 90 charter schools in establishing or building out their special education programs.
- From 2005-2006, the Charter Center partnered with the Hispanic Federation on a public education, outreach and referral campaign to expand the Latino communities' knowledge of and participation in charter schools.

**RIGOROUS ANALYSIS:**  
The Charter Center catalyzed necessary evaluation and research to promote quality and the sector's potential.

- In 2006, we coordinated Stanford University economist Caroline Hoxby's multi-year performance study of NYC's charters. The landmark study provided irrefutable evidence of charter school quality and performance in NYC. The report famously discussed the closing of the Harlem-Scarsdale achievement gap.
- In 2005, we commissioned the New York City Authorizing Project to evaluate the practices of New York's three authorizers and recommend steps to strengthen them.
- Between 2004 and 2007, we worked with 12 struggling schools to improve their academic programs by conducting internal reviews and providing follow-up supports and consultations.

**ADVOCACY & ORGANIZING:**  
The Charter Center promotes the quality and strength of the sector by engaging stakeholders including parents, media, and public officials.

- Our extensive public information and influence campaigns - including newspaper and radio advertisements, lawmaker meetings, message primers, and Public Engagement Toolkits, were instrumental in helping to secure both of New York's charter cap lifts (2007 and 2010).
- In 2010, we organized a unionized charter school campaign to protest the United Federation of Teachers' calls for a charter funding freeze, securing several op-eds and rallies with the schools' staff. The UFT did not actively campaign for a continuation of the funding freeze or protest its demise in the 2010 budget.
- In 2010, we grew Advocacy Day in Albany from 750 participants to more than 3,000 (the largest rally of parents ever in Albany), drawing support from the Governor and other key legislators.
- In 2010, we turned out more than 1,600 parents to co-location hearings, helping to secure 13 shared-space arrangements.
- Between 2009 and 2010, we produced more than 30 data documents and briefings for school leaders, public officials, and the public at large to promote a cap lift, fight a state funding freeze and advance other sector-wide initiatives.

- Twenty-seven of NYC's most vocal charter schools are serving on the Charter Center's Charter School Leaders Advocacy and Equity Committee which sets charter policy priorities and coordinates mobilization efforts for advocacy events.
- Between 2009 and 2010, we provided advocacy training to more than 1,800 parents at 81 charter schools and helped establish parent associations at 10 new charter schools.
- Between 2008 and 2010, we placed more than 17 op-eds and secured more than 170 positive news stories for charter schools.
- We continually focus both schools and the media on student performance by making the release of test scores an annual, citywide event and conducting and distributing a detailed analysis of the results.
- The Charter Center developed the sector's first Charter School Parent Advocacy Guide, in 2006. In 2010, we launched the first comprehensive parent advocacy website for NYC parents.
- In 2005, we produced and distributed one million copies of a multilingual *Guide to NYC Charter Schools* as an insert in all four of the City's major daily newspapers in order to educate the public about the charter option. In 2010, we persuaded the DOE to take over the publication and distribution of the guide.

**FUNDING FOR THE SECTOR:  
The Charter Center fights for  
equitable funding and guides schools  
to available funding sources  
and grants.**

- In 2010, we brought two-thirds of NYC's charter leaders to City Hall to meet with Deputy Mayor Walcott about the charter school funding freeze. As a result, Mayor Bloomberg wrote a letter to legislative leaders asking them to equitably fund charters. The 2010 budget does not include a continued freeze.
- In 2009, we persuaded the State Education Department (SED) to apply for an additional \$6.4 million in federal Charter School Program (CSP) funds. In 2010, we convinced SED to change the way it disperses its CSP funds so that this year, eight NYC charters received funds—six more than in previous years. This increases total funding to this year's start-up schools by more than \$3 million and paves the way for additional federal CSP funds to flow to NYS.
- Since 2006, the Charter Center has assisted 47 schools in developing applications for CSP, State Stimulus, and city discretionary funds. Participating schools secured approximately \$4.5 million in public grants.
- In 2007, we created a Fundraising Consortium, which established or built-out the fundraising infrastructure of 34 charter schools.

## Reflections

### ***Ensuring Quality***

Just as the charter movement is dynamic and evolving, so too must be the city-wide strategy. In the early years, the Charter Center's staff grappled with just how much to prescribe, versus suggest, best practices, particularly in regard to school review work. We needed to balance our mission to improve school quality with the inherent autonomy of charter schools to set their own practices. Over time, we found that best practice sharing, exemplars and mentoring among schools are easily facilitated by the Charter Center and appreciated and utilized by the schools. These tools are just a few steps toward infusing quality, though. We are continuously examining our approach towards supporting a high-achieving movement. Going forward, we anticipate working even more closely with the State's three authorizers (who hold the real authority for monitoring quality) and will find more opportunities, through both programming and advocacy, to promote successful charter practices.

### ***Achieving Sustainability***

In order to address the needs of our many constituents, the Charter Center originally sought out and paid for numerous, external consultants to help define our programming. The services these consultants provided were invaluable in enabling the Charter Center to begin to quickly address the many challenges facing the sector. The costly nature of the work, however, often meant that only a limited number of schools could benefit from these services and the expenses, which escalated with each new program launched, were ultimately unsustainable. Over time, the Charter Center began to pull supports in-house, utilizing the materials we had developed and collected over the years and hiring staff members who were industry experts to administer the programs. In doing this, the Charter Center was better able to monitor content, stay closely connected to the schools and service the growing sector. While we will continue to provide valuable and free services to charters (alleviating rather than increasing their burdens), we must confront our own sustainability, as well as the sector's. We must continue to find ways in which we can affect large segments of the sector with limited funding and we must focus on ways to empower charters to help themselves. The Charter Center has already made strides in this direction. By

establishing Special Education Cooperatives and the English Language Learners Consortium, for example, we eliminated some of the hand-holding and created replicable and scalable opportunities for charters and district schools alike to enhance their work. The Charter Center will continue to nurture this kind of independence by seeding the charter support marketplace, developing mutually beneficial collaborations with other leading charter supporters and securing public supports, such as a state facilities funding allocation.

### ***Perpetuating Reform***

Lastly, if charter schools are truly going to challenge the system, we must focus on the perpetuation of reform, rather than just the replication of charters. While Chancellor Klein has worked to define the traditional school system by the tenets of the charter movement - innovation, autonomy and accountability - there is still much work to be done. Having proven that they are capable of achieving exceptional results outside of the traditional system, charter schools must make sure they are a true model and address the common and sometimes valid criticisms that they are not enrolling and retaining a comparable share of special education students and English Language Learners. Ultimately, it is vital for charter schools to work more closely with their district counterparts and begin to redefine their narrow operating parameters. The Charter Center must take the lead in studying, facilitating and advocating for the expansion and inclusiveness of the charter school model.