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MYTH

Charter schools are public schools.

TRUTH

“Public” means open to all members of a community.

Charter schools conduct lotteries to select students, and they do not accept any student who wishes to register during the school year (as public schools do). While the lottery process is allegedly blind, evidence shows many charter schools “counsel out” students who present behavioral challenges or need services such as counseling, ESL, small class sizes, occupational or physical therapy. East New York Preparatory Charter School discharged 48% of their students just before state exams in 2010. KIPP, Harlem Success Academy, and Harlem Children’s Zone (all NYC charter school chains) have been found guilty of the same practice. Public schools do not get rid of students in need. Furthermore, Charter schools currently educate less than 3% of New York City’s children, yet the mayor and chancellor grant them more attention and autonomy. The great genius of our public school system is that it is inclusive—regardless of your family’s situation, you are guaranteed access to a free education.

Charter schools are “education corporations” according to the NY State Charter Act of 1998.

The law exempts charters from state and local laws, rules, regulations, and policies typically applied to public and private schools. Should the education of our children be outsourced to private corporations free of regulation and oversight? Our nation’s current financial crisis is due, in part, to corporate free rein.

Charter schools are not governed democratically, often limiting the input and voice of parents, students and teachers.

To grow up as functional members of our democracy, children need to be witness to and participate in the democratic process. Significant documentation exists about the authoritarian practices charter schools use when it comes to discipline, conduct and even instruction. Harlem Success Academies’ kindergarteners are put through a two-week “boot camp,” to learn how to walk, sit and eat in silence. KIPP schools have been accused of micro-managing students and even resorting to public humiliation as a form of punishment. Meredith Kolonder, of the Daily News, recently reported on the abusive discipline practices at Achievement First Charter School in Crown Heights, asserting that 20 percent of the children are in detention on any given day.

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MYTH

Charter schools hire better teachers.

TRUTH

Charter schools have surprising staff turnover rates.

According to New York State Data from 2008 to 2010, charter schools’ average teacher attrition rate was 25 percent, while district schools’ was 14 percent. Higher turnover rates create destabilized and chaotic school environments. Many charter school employees are overworked, underpaid, and denied the right to be part of a union.

Many charter school administrators and principals are new and inexperienced.

Success Academies, a network of 10 charter schools in Harlem, the Bronx, and Brooklyn is run by former city-council member Eva Moskowitz, a woman with no background in teaching who pays herself OVER \$300,000 a year. Overpaid CEO’s have contributed to the recent downfall of our economy — do we really expect a different result if we take this approach with education?

THE TRUTH About Charter Schools in New York City



GEM

Grassroots Education Movement
NEW YORK CITY

Our vision for public school reform does not include privatization. We support quality public neighborhood schools with smaller class sizes, equitable funding, union protections, local school councils, and neighborhood enrollment that protects and includes all children. We support a moratorium on charters, turnarounds, consolidations, phase-outs, school closings and any other form of school privatization.

Public schools and educators should be empowered to work with communities to develop curriculum that is grounded in the lives of the young people they teach. Each school’s curriculum should reflect the culture, needs and lived experience of its students, critically support student identities, embrace and recognize the value of students’ home languages, and invite students to engage in solving societal problems.

The Grassroots Education Movement (GEM) believes in a bottom-up, participatory and highly democratic process to engage schools and communities in school improvement. JOIN US!

gemnyc.org



ACCESS TO A HIGH QUALITY PUBLIC EDUCATION IS NOT SOMETHING THAT SHOULD BE WON IN A LOTTERY — IT IS A MOST BASIC HUMAN AND CIVIL RIGHT.

Yet, in May of 2011, the New York State Legislature voted to raise the charter school cap, allowing 460 charter schools to be open in New York State — 200 of them in the 5 boroughs of New York City. **136 ARE ALREADY OPEN.**

But, what do these charter schools really represent?

Are they the innovation and reform we need in education as our president and his education secretary so frequently proclaim?

Are charter schools improving education?

Or are they destabilizing, threatening and hindering the public education of our children, while at the same time dividing our communities?

Read on to discover the truth.

Then, please join our fight to improve and preserve public education for all.

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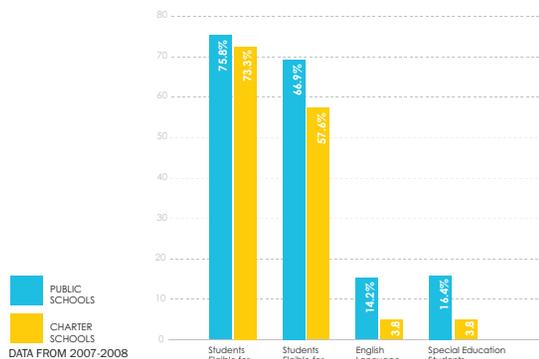
MYTH

Charter schools serve the same student populations as public schools.

TRUTH

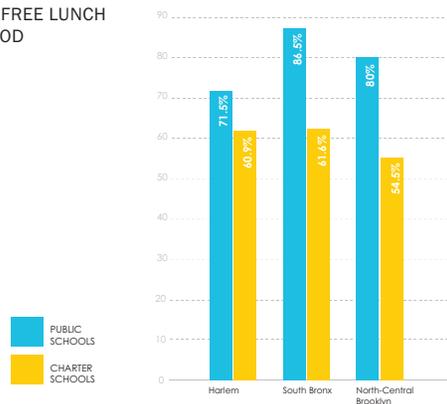
Charter schools serve far fewer English language learners, special needs students, and those who qualify for free lunch than do public schools.

Data from the New York State Report Cards and the Department of Education itself is quite telling:



The majority of charter schools are located in the city's poorest neighborhoods (in Harlem, the South Bronx, and parts of Brooklyn), where free lunch averages for public schools are much higher. Charter schools are NOT educating the same types of students as public schools.

PERCENTAGE OF FREE LUNCH BY NEIGHBORHOOD



Most charter schools in New York City are concentrated in black and Latino neighborhoods.

This is not coincidence. Education of our black and Latino youth is being outsourced to unregulated, private corporations. Experienced educators, not corporate managers, are best equipped to understand and address the needs of ALL OF OUR CITY'S CHILDREN.

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MYTH

Charter schools produce better outcomes for their students.

TRUTH

80% of charter school students performed the same as or worse than students in traditional public schools

in a study of 2,403 charter schools. Director of the Stanford University research center and study lead author, Margaret E. Raymond said, "If this study shows anything, it shows that we've got a two-to-one margin of bad charters to good charters...That's a red flag."

Many city charter schools have a habit of counseling out students with behavioral and academic weaknesses.

Because charter schools operate privately, with little oversight, they can get away with this practice. When these schools find a student too challenging to work with, they simply ask him or her to go elsewhere. We cannot continue to allow those in power to tout the success of charter schools, when they are not doing the hard work of educating all learners. The brilliant intention of our public school system is that it was designed to serve everyone, not just a select few.

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MYTH

Charter schools act as lab sites for innovative ideas.

TRUTH

Charter schools were intended to be innovative, but the schools sprouting up in New York City are anything but.

A few charter corporations (Green Dot, Uncommon Schools, KIPP) run many schools and push students through a scripted and test-driven curriculum. A February 2011 Brooklyn Rail story details the Department of Education's own Office of Charter Schools recent report on the state of the city's charters: "The report shows that most of the schools are neglecting basic elements of decent education, yet in no case were they punished for this, or pressured to change their ways." Any sort of emphasis on critical thinking was missing from the instruction in many of the schools. Students were given little time for discussion and spent most of their time answering factual questions posed by their teachers. Very little of the learning appeared to be student-driven. Critical thinking is an essential skill, and it must be fostered and taught.

Charter schools are invading and privatizing public space.

Well over fifty percent of New York City's charter schools are co-located inside other functioning public school buildings, often to the detriment of the public school already there. Charter schools are given free space in public school buildings the Department of Education claims are "underutilized," however few have extra space to share. In most instances, the public schools are forced out of their classrooms or to consolidate classrooms to make room for the charter schools moving in. In many cases the charter schools continue to take more and more space each year from the public schools—in effect, taking over the building. At a public school in Brooklyn, special education students are receiving their services in hallways and stairwells, all so that PAVE Academy Charter School can have more classrooms. In each public school where a charter school has opened there are equally devastating stories.

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MYTH

Competition between schools will improve the system.

TRUTH

Any system based on competition will have winners and losers.

In the case of our educational system, the winners and losers are our children. We need to create a system in which everyone, especially our most needy, can excel. In a competitive system, one school's success is only possible when another fails. Education is not a game — it is a right.