

CHARTER SCHOOL

ADVOCACY

GUIDE



MISSOURI CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

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THINK OF THE CHARTER SCHOOL YOU LOVE:

Maybe you teach there, your child goes to school there, or your community benefits from having a high-quality school in the neighborhood.

Did you know that the charter school you love cannot exist without the support of your state lawmakers?

Charter schools are authorized under state law. While some states have passed charter school law, others haven't. And the law is constantly changing.

The charter school you love also can't grow and thrive without state support.

State law determines if charter schools are allowed to expand, if they receive funding that is equitable with other schools, where they are allowed to operate and much more.

Put simply, charter schools are fully dependent on state legislators' support.

So, all of us who benefit from and love charter schools must be a consistent voice of support to our state and federal lawmakers.

That's why we wrote this guide - to help you communicate your support for school choice to your lawmakers. Advocating for charter schools is a quick and easy process that makes a lasting difference in your community.



WHY CHARTER SCHOOLS?

If you're reading this guide, you probably already believe in the value of charter schools. But here are talking points to help you explain to others why charter schools are effective:

All children should have the opportunity to achieve at a high level, and charter schools are meeting that need.

- ★ Charter school students learn more and have higher college graduation rates than students in traditional public schools.
- ★ Charter schools are some of the top-performing schools in the country.
- ★ Charter schools are closing the achievement gap. They are raising the bar of what's possible—and what should be expected—in public education.
- ★ Charter schools are able to adjust curriculum to meet student needs.
- ★ Charter schools create unique school culture.
- ★ Charter schools develop next-generation learning models.

[adapted from <http://www.publiccharters.org/get-the-facts/public-charter-schools/>]

WHAT IS ADVOCACY?



Each day, the halls and inboxes of any state or national legislature are filled with advocates – paid and unpaid citizens who are advocating for causes they care about. Advocates’ passion often influences state and national legislation, so school choice enthusiasts must ensure their voice is heard.

Advocacy means telling others that you support school choice—and why. And your voice has the power to positively impact your neighborhood and school.

WHY ADVOCACY MATTERS

Lawmakers decide if charter schools are allowed to operate in a given state, what regulations are applied to them, if they can grow, how they are funded, if their funding is equitable with other public schools, and so much more.

If you want to see school choice thrive in your neighborhood and city, you must voice your support to lawmakers.

HOW TO ADVOCATE EFFECTIVELY



CREATING CHANGE THROUGH EMAIL OR LETTER.

Emailing or writing your legislators is a quick way to influence change.

In political advocacy, every voice counts – literally. Elected officials ask their staff to keep a daily tally of calls, emails and conversations they have with constituents. Often, these tallies are organized by topic and put into a simple yay or nay column, so they want to know if you are FOR or AGAINST a certain law.

You can find your lawmakers' contact information using the Missouri State Legislator search: senate.mo.gov/LegisLookup and house.mo.gov/legislatorlookup.aspx

We have a few tips for contacting your elected officials:

1. IDENTIFY YOURSELF

Make sure your legislator knows you are his or her constituent. Don't assume the legislator or staff person recognizes your address as being in their district. Do not send anonymous letters; include your name and address.

2. COVER ONLY ONE TOPIC PER LETTER/EMAIL

Different staff in a legislator's office cover different issues. If you attempt to cover multiple topics in one message, it may become lost or hung up with one staff person. If you have more than one issue to address, send more than one letter or email.

3. SELL YOUR POSITION

Be brief and concise. Prepare your letter clearly so it is easy to read.

- ★ In the very first paragraph, state your position and exactly what you want the legislator to do. For example, "I urge you to support and cosponsor House Bill #123, the bill to allow parents to choose their child's school."

- ★ Tell them *why* you support or oppose a piece of legislation by giving reasons for your position. Remember, you are essentially trying to sell your idea or position on an issue. While you may have many reasons for your position, focus on the one or two most compelling reasons why this issue matters. The more concise and focused you are, the more effective your letter will be.
- ★ When possible, use a short personal example to illustrate why you support (or oppose) this piece of legislation. The more a lawmaker understands how this proposal specifically and directly affects the lives of his/her constituents, the more likely they are to be swayed by your opinion.
- ★ Think about why your legislature should care about or support your school. Help them understand the difference your school makes every day and how it impacts the community your legislator is elected to represent. Are you providing high-quality education in an area where that's uncommon? Are you working with at-risk students or a community that lacks support and resources? Clearly state the "problem" your school is solving – why your school is beneficial for the community – and how this legislation would impact your work.

4. FOLLOW UP WITH A PHONE CALL

After submitting your letter, make a call to the legislator's office. Explain to the staff person that you have just sent a message. Then, state the issue, your position and exactly what you want the legislator to do. Urge the legislator to take a few moments to review your letter and state that you look forward to receiving their reply.

Legislators direct their staff members to keep count of the number of calls they receive FOR and AGAINST every issue. A phone call is equally important as written mail.



CREATING CHANGE WITH IN-PERSON VISITS.

Personal visits with lawmakers are the most persuasive tool for affecting change in the legislature. Legislators assume that an individual who takes the time and effort to go to the capitol must have a very strong belief in the issues. They take these visits very seriously. How can YOU be effective in your personal visit advocacy?

Here are some tips:

1. MAKE AN APPOINTMENT

If possible, set an appointment before you show up at the legislator's office. Legislators often have office hours for visits. Scheduling an appointment guarantees you will not waste a trip to see them.

2. BE FRIENDLY TO THE STAFF

The staff, including administrative assistants, can be extremely helpful with information and arrangements for you to speak with the legislator. They can also make sure the legislator receives information you leave or send. Conversely, since staff control the legislator's calendar, they can make it very challenging for you to get an appointment. Be kind!

3. KNOW YOUR LEGISLATOR

Legislators are human beings with interests, passions and opinions. Spend time researching the legislator before meeting them.

Collect information on your legislator(s), such as:

- Their educational, professional, family and religious background
- Their interest or hobbies
- Organizations they belong to
- Arguments they find convincing
- Approaches they typically respond to
- Committee membership
- Past voting record
- Other legislator's opinions they respect
- The social, economic, religious and ethnic makeup of their constituency.

All of these items can typically be found through internet searches and discussions with others. This information will give you ideas about how to approach the legislator and secure their support for your issue or position.

4. DON'T BE INTIMIDATED

Your legislators are your employees. You pay their salaries and vote them in or out of office. They have a responsibility to meet and listen to you – their constituent.

5. BE PREPARED

Study your issue until you feel comfortable with it. Anticipate questions and practice answers you may want to give. You don't need to be perfect but should be prepared.

6. INTRODUCE YOURSELF

Begin any meeting by introducing yourself and letting the legislator know you are a constituent. Reference your street name. Do not assume they already know you are their constituent – tell them.

7. PROVIDE INFORMATION

Explain why you think an issue is important and favor your position. Leave fact sheets or other materials that the legislator can review at a later time, BUT do not overwhelm him or her with a stack of paper. He or she is more likely to review something very direct and concise.

8. BE PERSONAL

Legislators can be affected by stories, especially relatable ones. Share your personal experiences or those of people you have known. (Use discretion when sharing about others.) Be alert as to how your story may be affecting the legislator.

9. LET THE LEGISLATOR TALK

Don't consume all of the air in the room; let the legislator share their thoughts and opinions. It will make them feel good that you are willing to listen and, most importantly, it will give you valuable information on their views and whether or not there is a chance of affecting their opinion or vote.

10. ANSWER THEIR QUESTIONS

When the legislator asks a question provide them an answer, if you know it, but do not make up answers. Don't worry if you don't know the answer to a question. Write the question down and tell the legislator you will find the answer and get back to him or her. Ask them the best way to respond and follow through.

11. DON'T GET INTO ARGUMENTS

Firmly present your position and correct mistaken information, but do so calmly and rationally. You can be clear that you disagree, but do not get into a shouting match. If the conversation becomes hostile or argumentative it is best to say, "thank you for your time" and leave.

12. DON'T THREATEN

Think of your visit as selling your ideas rather than coercing the legislators to accept your point of view. Do not tell a legislator that you will make sure they are defeated in their next election or make any other type of threats. Remember that you cannot guarantee a defeat and the legislator will not be impressed by threats. Keep in mind that for every constituent speaking for an issue they may have another constituent speaking against the issue. Legislators have to keep track of the majority and make a well-informed decision.

13. BE POLITE

Always be polite, even if others in the conversation are not. You represent your issue and your school best in this way.

14. BE HONEST

Do not make any promises you can't keep. Never mislead or lie to a legislator to make yourself or your organization look better. Don't pretend to know something when you really don't.

15. SAY "THANK YOU"

Thank the legislator after he or she meets with you, even if they don't agree with you! Follow up with a thank you note after the visit and offer any help that may be needed. Stay in touch with supportive legislators. Your friends will appreciate when you remember them.

16. KEEP A RECORD OF YOUR MEETING

Every time you meet with a legislator, write down a brief description of what happened, the legislator's position and any useful information gathered. It is very useful to have a record of these visits for future advocacy.










FAST FACTS

As we work with policy-makers day in and day out, we find that there are a few widely-held misconceptions about charter schools and school choice.

Arm yourselves with these facts so that you can dispel any myths, and consider proactively addressing these common myths as you speak or write with legislators.

#CHARTERSWORK


MYTH: Charter schools are not public schools.
FACT: Charter schools **are** public schools.


PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS		TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS
	Tuition-free and open to all students	
	Non-sectarian, do not discriminate on any basis	
	Publicly funded based on enrollment	
	Held accountable to state and federal standards	

#CHARTERSWORK

MYTH: Charter schools skim or cherry-pick the best students from district schools.
FACT: Charter schools serve **all students**.

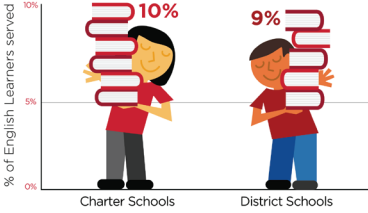
Which of the following is true about charter schools?

- A They have no selective admissions requirements
- B They must accept all students, including English learners and students with special needs
- C They hold lotteries to enroll students if there are not enough available seats to meet demand
- D All of the above 



#CHARTERSWORK


MYTH: Charter schools serve fewer English Learners than district schools.
FACT: There is **no significant difference** in the percentage of English Learners served by district schools or charter schools.*



*These data are from the 2011-12 NCEES Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), which is a nationally representative sample survey. Due to variability around the estimates, there is no significant difference in the percentage of EL students served by traditional public schools and public charter schools.

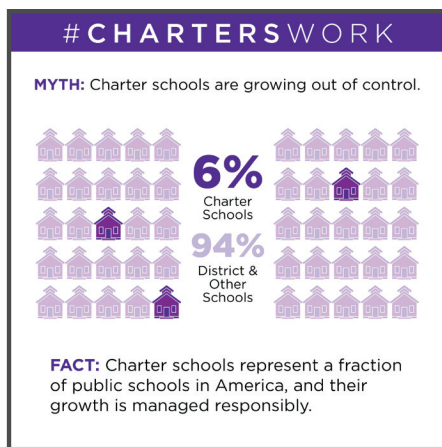
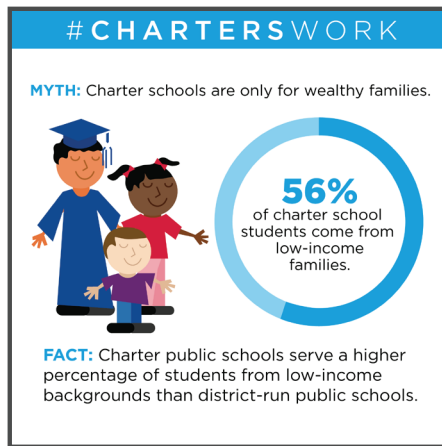
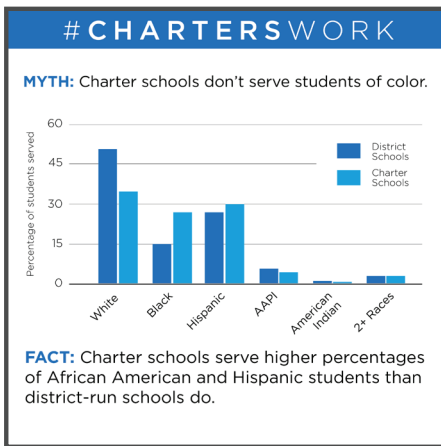
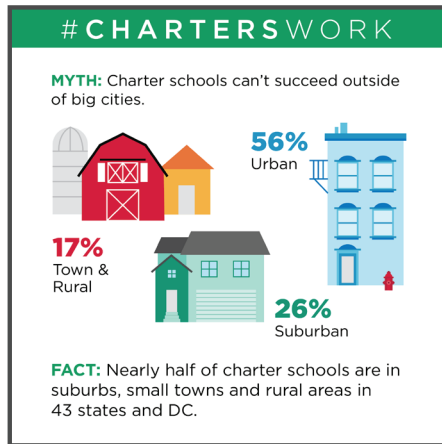
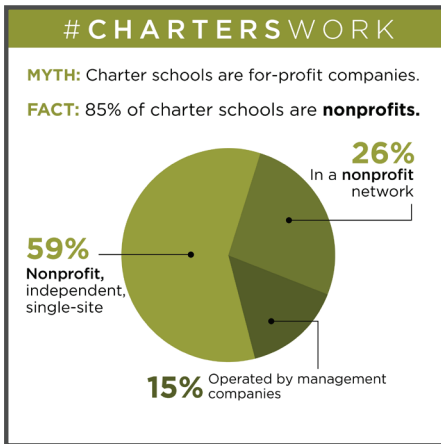
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MYTH: Charter school students do no better than district school students.
FACT: Between 2010 and 2013...



15/16 independent studies found that students attending charter schools do better academically than their district school peers.*

*the 16th study found mixed results



LEARN MORE



Want to stay up to date on charter school success throughout the country?

Text **MOCHARTER** to **52886** to receive updates from MCPSA.
(Message and data rates may apply.)

Follow:    @**MOCharterSchool** @**charteralliance**

Sign up to receive advocacy updates from the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools:

info.publiccharters.org/be-a-charter-school-advocate

Facts about Charter Schools:

publiccharters.org/get-the-facts/public-charter-schools/faqs

ENCOURAGING PARENTAL ADVOCACY

Parents are a valuable voice on behalf of your school and it is wise to catalyze their enthusiasm. We've found that an Executive Director or Principal who incorporates advocacy messages in their communication to parents and families can help create broader change within the charter school sector.

There are many ways to bring advocacy information to families.

Here are a few suggestions:

- ★ Incorporate a “Policy” section into your weekly or monthly parent newsletter. In this section, help parents understand what is going on at the state or national level that affects their child’s education and school.
- ★ Meet with the Parent group (for example, the PTO) at your school and educate them about why advocacy is important. If there are significant upcoming decisions at the state or national level, ask to be included on the next parent meeting agenda and explain the current climate to families. Give them specific steps for advocacy and involvement.
- ★ Clearly communicate with families about how policy personally affects your school and their students. For instance, if funding formulas are up for debate at the state level, show parents how your school’s funding differs from others. Are there discrepancies? Are their students receiving the same thing they’d receive at another school? The more specific you are, the more parents will be easily activated.
- ★ Invite parents to participate in MCPSA’s Parent Ambassador Program where they can join a coalition of charter school parents trained to advocate for their children, their school and charter public schools.
- ★ Think through your school’s future and identify moments when you will need parent support. Begin to lay the groundwork for this support now.
- ★ Arm parents with facts about charter schools that are often misunderstood. There is a fact section and a “For Parents” section in this guide that could be helpful.
- ★ Engage your Board of Directors in advocacy work. Their voice as constituents in the community can be a powerful tool in education advocacy.

HOW TO HOST A SCHOOL VISIT

One of the best ways to influence a state legislator is by exposing them directly to the life-transforming work your school does on a daily basis. ***Proactively plan to invite your legislators to tour your school once a year.***

Here are a few tips to make this visit one they won't soon forget:



BEFORE THE VISIT:

- Choose a few potential days for a visit that work well for your school schedule. Days with multiple field trips or non-uniform days are usually not best.
- Send an invitation to the legislator's office that includes the date, time, location and type of visit (school tour, event, etc.). Follow up with their scheduler after you send the invitation. Ask their scheduler when you can anticipate a response. Often, legislators' schedules aren't set until one to two weeks in advance.
- Plan the visit in detail and send a copy of the schedule to the legislator's office.
- Consider sending a press release to local media outlets.
- Compile a school fact sheet with impressive information about your school. Include information about how you use Charter Schools Program and state funding.

DURING THE VISIT:

- Think through the message you want to communicate about your school.
 - ★ Consider your school’s “why” – why do you exist? How are you making an impact? Why does your school matter? How does your school affect your community? Address these pressing questions in a simple, compelling “why” story where you tell the legislator exactly why your school matters.
 - ★ Create a concrete, simple story that demonstrates what makes your school unique and highlights your key differentiators. Are you a project-based learning school? Are you the only high-performing school in your neighborhood? Whatever makes you unique, tell your legislator about it using an emotional, person-based story.
 - ★ Allow your school’s key differentiators to come to life for your visitors by showing them classroom techniques in action or introducing them to students and staff who exemplify these messages.
 - ★ Consult MCPSA’s *How to Tell Your Charter School Story* guide for more specific tips about how to persuasively tell your school’s story during the visit.
- Give a compelling overview of your school and tour several classrooms.
- Allow time for Q & A.
- Describe the impact that state and national funding have on your school, and address any upcoming legislation.

AFTER:

- Send a prompt thank you note.
- Share photos on your school’s social media and consider sending a press release.
- Invite the legislator to future events at your school.

ADVOCATING FOR YOUR CHARTER SCHOOL

Charter schools are **creating change** in your family and community, providing access to high-quality, innovative instruction for all children in your city.

Lawmakers hold the keys to charter school access. Their votes and the laws they create determine if your child and community have access to school choice, and if those schools have equitable funding, are allowed to grow, and more.

As parents who support school choice, **it's imperative that you voice your support** to state and national lawmakers so that school choice can thrive in your neighborhood and city.

YOUR VOICE COUNTS.

Lawmakers instruct their staff to count every voice **FOR or AGAINST** a specific issue. So, every email, letter or call to your legislator is a vote in support of school choice and your child's school.










EASY METHODS TO CREATE CHANGE

1. Contact your lawmaker to voice your support for charter schools. You can find your lawmakers' contact information using the Missouri State Legislator search: senate.mo.gov/LegisLookup
2. Identify that you are their constituent.
3. Address one issue per email or call.
4. State your position for/against a specific bill or issue in the first sentence.
5. Tell them why this issue matters to you. Bring this issue to life for them by telling a short story about how your family or neighborhood has been influenced by charter schools.
6. Thank them for representing your family and concerns.

FAST FACTS.

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Which of the following is true about charter schools?

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- C They hold lotteries to enroll students if there are not enough available seats to meet demand
- D All of the above 



CHARTERSWORK

MYTH: Charter schools are only for wealthy families.




56% of charter school students come from low-income families.

FACT: Charter public schools serve a higher percentage of students from low-income backgrounds than district-run public schools.

CHARTERSWORK

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15/16

independent studies found that students attending charter schools do better academically than their district school peers.*

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LEARN MORE.

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HOW LAWS ARE MADE IN MISSOURI

All state laws first begin as a bill in the state legislature. In order for a bill to become a law, it must first follow a path that includes the following steps. A step highlighted in bold indicates a moment in the life of a bill where calls and letters from constituents are most influential.

HOUSE ACTION

The bill is introduced in the House of Representatives and read for the first time.

The bill is read a second time in the House and assigned to a House committee.

The bill is brought up for debate in the House committee and possibly amended.

The committee votes on the bill.

The bill is sent to the full House of Representatives.

The bill is debated on the floor of the House and possibly amended.

The bill is read for the third time.

The House of Representatives votes on the bill.

SENATE ACTION

The bill is sent to the Senate.

The bill is read the first time in the Senate.

The bill is read a second time and assigned to a Senate committee.

The bill is brought up for debate in the Senate committee and possibly amended.

The Senate committee votes on the bill.

The bill is sent to the full Senate.

The bill is brought up for debate and possibly amended.

The bill is read for the third time.

The Senate votes on the bill.

If the House and Senate versions of the bill are different, a conference committee is appointed to reconcile the two different bills.

The reconciled bill is sent to the House and the Senate for approval.

GOVERNOR ACTION

Once the House and the Senate versions of the bill are identical, the bill is sent to the Governor to be signed.

If the Governor signs the bill, it becomes law.

If the Governor vetoes the bill, the House and the Senate can override his veto with a vote of two-thirds of the House and two-thirds of the Senate.

It is important to note that the bill may be introduced simultaneously in both the House of Representatives and the Senate to speed the process through the Legislature.

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