



Public Charter Schools Support Economic Development

The economic vitality and viability of a community are closely linked to the capability of its citizens, and that in turn is largely determined by the community's success in educating its young people. In Maine today, our young people certainly have the talent and the potential that our state needs to prosper in the new, global economy.

The Maine Development Foundation (MDF) has identified the availability of high-quality human talent as a key challenge, since "indicators like personal incomes, productivity, employment, and health are closely tied to educational success."¹

Many of Maine's young people leave school ill-prepared for either work or post-secondary education: 20-25% of students do not complete a high school diploma on time; 30% drop out of college before obtaining either a 2-year or 4-year degree; and about 40% need remedial courses in college or re-training in the workplace.²

New approaches are clearly needed. The charter school model is an effective way to inject and sustain innovative approaches within Maine's public education sector. The benefits of public charter schools are many, as demonstrated by 5,000 charter schools in 40 other states.

Charter schools are:

- *Innovative public schools, free to all children*
- *Open to all students with no admissions tests*
- *Not allowed any religious affiliation*
- *Flexible in operation in exchange for greater accountability*
- *Voluntary – chosen by parents, students and teachers*
- *Accountable by performance contract for student learning*

Charter schools help to:

- Maintain a small school as the heart of a community and attract new families;
- Contribute to neighborhood revitalization through new, affordable public school options;
- Respond to community needs for trained and educated workers;
- Surmount barriers to change that hinder traditional schools;
- Encourage more entrepreneurial leadership in public education;
- Permit new working relationships between teachers and school leadership;
- Introduce competitive pressures that encourage all public schools to improve;
- Reduce the numbers of students who drop out, or graduate with inadequate preparation for work and/or further training and education.
- Improve the vitality and viability of local communities and the state economy.

The Androscoggin County Chamber of Commerce has recommended the introduction of public charter schools in Maine. Among their strategies for change, they include charter schools "to encourage school innovation and reward successes."³

Public charter schools have emerged as one of the most effective ways to improve public education outcomes for more children, answering a critical need, as two-thirds of new jobs being created today require advanced training or a college education.⁴ There is a clear link between educational attainment, economic progress, and community development. High-quality education is crucial to our ability, in Maine and America, to prosper in today's global economy.

¹ "Measures of Growth in Focus", Maine Development Foundation, p.3, 2011, www.mdf.org

² "Prepare Maine", A Snapshot of Education in Maine, 2010, www.preparemaine.org

³ "What We Stand For - 2011" - Education and Workforce Training Create Work Ready and Skilled Citizens; www2.androscoggincounty.com

⁴ "Corporations, Chambers, and Charters: How Business Can Support High-Quality Public Charter Schools", Institute for a Competitive Workforce, Affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Washington, D.C, 2008, <http://icw.uschamber.com>