

# Portland Press Herald

Posted: May 25

Updated: Today at 1:22 AM

## Our View: Charter school bill should be made law

**Families deserve to have choices when the traditional public school is not working for them.**

When the subject of charter schools comes up, critics typically make two arguments.

They point to studies that show that charters do not produce higher test scores.

And they warn that diverting large numbers of students to charters, along with the public money that follows those students, will weaken traditional schools at a time when they are already struggling with a lack of funding.

What the opponents can't explain, however, is why parents would take the trouble to send their children to schools that were not as good as the ones to which they've been assigned, or why a mass exodus of families from a traditional school indicates a problem with the alternative and not with the traditional school itself.



Students and parents gather Tuesday outside Georgia's Capitol in Atlanta to protest a state supreme court ruling that overturned a Georgia law allowing state-approved charter schools. A proposal to create charter schools in

Now, with a bill that would create up to 10 public charter schools over the next decade headed to the floor of the House and Senate, we can expect to hear these familiar arguments again. This time we hope lawmakers will listen to both sides and pass a law that provides a public education alternative to families that need one.

There are great things happening in Maine schools, and many students are getting very good educations.

But even the biggest boosters have to acknowledge that the public school system, as it currently operates, doesn't work for everyone, and too many students fail to graduate or finish unprepared for higher education or job training.

A school does not have to be a "failing school" to fail to reach some of its students. To say that the current system should be allowed to stay intact while families wait for reforms that might help them means that the people who are falling through the cracks will have to just keep falling.

Charter schools are public schools that have more flexibility in curriculum and scheduling, but still have to meet state and federal standards. A school could be designed with a specific subject-matter focus, like visual arts or agriculture. It could meet at night or over weekends to accommodate students with jobs.

If a school fails to meet standards, it can lose its charter, which is a level of accountability that regular public schools don't have.

Charter schools may not be *the* answer for everyone, but 20 years of experience in other states show that they can be *an* answer for many, and families that need options should be able to have them.

The Legislature has rejected charter schools 17 times; it should not do so again.

Charter schools deserve a chance in Maine. The Legislature should pass this sensible reform.