



Public Charter Schools: *Why MAINE? Why NOW?*

Today Maine faces increasing economic and social challenges, yet too many of our young people are unprepared for the workforce and higher education. Our young people certainly have the talent and the potential we need to prosper in the new, global economy, but our one-size-fits-all system of public education has left many struggling and disaffected young people. Countless top-down reforms have failed to produce the quality of next-generation workers we need to support and grow a quality economic environment.

1. In Maine today,

- About 20-25% of H.S. students fail to graduate in four years
- About 30-35% of H.S. graduates drop out of college before obtaining a 2-year or 4-year degree
- About 40% of H.S. graduates need remedial courses in college or re-training in the workplace
- In the past 10 years there has been little improvement in 4th, 8th grade achievement, or H.S. SAT scores

As a consequence, Maine citizens are paying high costs for remediation, retraining, social services, welfare, and juvenile justice programs.

2. Is this a good time to introduce public charter schools in Maine?

- Since Maine's educational challenges are growing, we need to create new innovations, new options now.
- Our economy and our state budget will benefit as more students succeed and we spend less on social services.
- Maine's charter school program should not require any new money from either the state or towns.
- Public charter schools have strong incentives to be efficient in their use of administrative funds, addressing the same objective as the school district consolidation effort.
- Districts can create or convert existing educational programs and receive large federal planning/start-up grants.
- A small community can preserve its vitality and viability by converting its existing public school to a charter school, preserving its local public education option in the face of consolidation and school closure.

3. Charter schools are the most significant, systemic innovation in public education since the Carnegie Commission's "A Nation at Risk report in 1983" spurred the US to focus on educational improvement.

- They are voluntary, non-religious, public, free, and open to all children (including special ed.) without entry tests.
- They have increased flexibility in operations in return for increased accountability for academic performance.
- They operate on a five-year charter contract issued by their authorizing agency, which monitors and assesses their performance, and decides if the contract should be renewed.
- They operate with the same funds as towns and the state now approve, with funds following each child to the public district or public charter school attended. This encourages greater innovation and responsiveness to a child's needs.

4. Who supports public charter schools?

- The Governor; Commissioner of Education; State Board of Education; the Maine PTA; the DOE's Advisory Council on Alternative Ed., Truancy, & Drop-outs; and countless educators, parents, and business people from all over Maine.
- Independents, Greens, Democrats, & Republicans have voted to approve charter school bills in Maine.
- The Federal Charter School Grant Program was started by President Clinton, continued by President Bush and President Obama, and has been consistently supported since by a bi-partisan Congress.
- US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has encouraged states to expand charter school options.
- Forty states and D.C. have created 5,000 charter schools enrolling 1.6 million children; most charters have waiting lists.
- High numbers of children from low-income families and children with limited English proficiency enroll in charter schools.
- Many dedicated Maine educators are ready to implement new, proven educational methods to help more children be successful in public education.