



Why Charter Schools Now, for Maine?

What Has Changed? What Will Change!

A new bill will soon be introduced in the Maine Legislature to enable the creation of Public Charter Schools in Maine.

*Past bills garnered significant bi-partisan support.
What has now changed in favor of enacting a charter schools bill?*

First, national attention has been focused on the success of public charter schools. Both presidential candidates promoted charter schools during their campaigns, and President-elect Barack Obama, as part of his promised change, proposes to double federal funding in support of expanding chartered public schools.

Second, public charter schools have earned recognition by their performance. Following Hurricane Katrina, public charter schools helped rebuild the poorly-performing educational system in New Orleans. And less dramatically, small charter schools across the US did what they said they would – they improved learning climates, parental involvement, and student achievement.

In its Annual List of the Best High Schools in the United States, US News & World Report named 18 charter schools in the top 100, despite their representing only 5% of public high schools. The only **Maine** school on the list, the Maine School of Science and Mathematics, ranked 12th nationally. It is a public “magnet” school, and shares key characteristics with the charter school model, i.e., flexibility in operations and greater accountability for results. The public chartered school contract model provides an efficient way to encourage new education options, rather than having the Legislature issue charters one-by-one as with the magnet school model. National data since 1992 documents the successful growth of over 4,600 charter schools now enrolling over 1.4 million students in 40 states.

Third, if Maine passes legislation enabling charter schools, significant money could flow into the public education system in Maine. Each new charter school is eligible to receive federal support of \$150,000 per year for each of three years for planning and start-up expenses - \$450,000 each. Additionally, the Maine Dept of Education is eligible for 5% of the grants to individual schools to develop and operate an office to support the implementation of the new charter school law.

Fourth, today, Maine needs public school options more than ever, to help meet the many needs of students who are not successful in our current educational system. By the National Governors Association’s calculation, 25% of our high school students do not graduate on time. Their “dropping out” is a huge financial drain on our economic system, from lost productivity to increased spending on social services, including welfare and prisons. (See graph, reverse side)

Fifth, all public education in Maine will benefit from the stimulus of creative new programs developed through the charter school model. New, untapped resources will emerge, fueled by the excitement of new educational approaches started by teachers, administrators, and others. Maine’s economy will also benefit from youth who graduate from specialty high schools focused on themes such as: agriculture, aquaculture, information technology, arts, trades, hospitality, etc.

Sixth, Maine's new charter school bill will be based on the model bill recently developed by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, which incorporates the experience and best practices that have evolved nationally, and it will continue to be tailored to Maine's special circumstances.

Seventh, and perhaps most important, by empowering families of all income levels with affordable options within an expanded public education system, Maine will help all of our students thrive.

Democrats now rule, in Maine as in Washington. Supporting public charter schools should be high on the legislative agenda for change -- in education, in social equity, and in economics.

President-Elect Obama said:

"I doubled the number of charter schools in Illinois despite some reservations from teachers unions. I think it's important to foster competition inside the public schools." (Presidential Debate, 10/08)

Bill Gates supports the president-elect's positions on education, specifically:

"focusing on teachers who really do the job well, (and) allowing charter schools to be expanded, both because there are some great ones and because they serve as a model." (Interview with Wolf Blitzer, CNN, 12/4/08) "We need to keep investing to improve the lives of the people who have been left out.... The greatest antidote to inequity in American life is a good system of public education.... There are public schools and charter schools serving some of the most disadvantaged students in the country, and yet they are recruiting great teachers, making the curriculum more rigorous, using data to see what works, and graduating students ready for college.... That's why I believe some of the highest-leverage, long-term investments come from improving public education, especially for low-income and minority students." Excerpts from Gates' speech to George Washington University, 12/4/08

Maine's Need:

High School Graduation Rates Inflated

by Victoria Wallack, Statehouse Reporter

AUGUSTA: While Maine has long boasted about its high-school graduation rate, it appears the numbers are being overstated by 10 percentage points or more – part of a national problem some suspected but talked little about.

The state Department of Education website lists the 2005 graduation rate at 87 percent, when in all likelihood it is closer to 76 percent, according to Education Commissioner Susan Gendron. A study by the national **Education Week** magazine had it at 74 percent.

For the full report and more on **Maine's Need**, see the link on the MACS Website: www.mainecharterschools.org



In Maine, for every 100 ninth grade students ...



... 76 students graduate from high school four years later.



... 41 students immediately enter college.



... 31 students are still enrolled in their second year.



... 22 students graduate with either an associate's degree within three years or a bachelor's degree within six years.