



National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

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For Immediate Release

National Alliance for Public Charter Schools Calls on State Legislators To Lift the Cap on Charter School Growth Now

WASHINGTON, Jan. 18, 2006 --- As states gear up for the start of their 2006 legislative sessions, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools is calling on policy makers to put the removal of charter school caps at the top of their agendas. Currently, there are more than a million children attending public charter schools across the country, and tens of thousands more on waiting lists. Yet caps in 25 states and the District of Columbia have put a halt to future growth and leave thousands of families stranded in failing schools with no other options, according to an issue brief on charter school caps released today by the Alliance. The brief, authored by Todd Ziebarth, senior policy analyst for the Alliance, highlights the types and severity of charter caps and their implications and provides recommendations for removing the mandated limits on charter school growth.

“The demand for charter schools is growing,” said Nelson Smith, president of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, noting that nearly 40 percent of charter schools have waiting lists averaging 135 students. “If we are to continue to close the achievement gap in this country and create real opportunity for children, caps on charter schools must be lifted—now.”

State-imposed caps are severely constraining charter school growth in 10 states—eight of which reached their caps at the beginning of this school year, including Connecticut, Hawaii, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio and Rhode Island. The other two, New York and Illinois, will likely reach their caps during this school year.

“Charter caps work against the most disadvantaged children,” added Smith. “Charter schools open doors for low-income families. There are schools that have achieved educational wonders with traditionally underserved student populations. This type of success should be replicated, not blocked.”

Caps were initially imposed by legislators opposed to charters and those who wanted to restrain charter growth until parental satisfaction and charter success could be gauged. Now that charters have proven to be extremely popular and effective at increasing student learning, caps should be removed, explained Smith.

“Everyone agrees that charter growth must be connected to quality,” explained Smith. “But legislated caps are not the answer—and they do nothing to improve educational results. In fact, caps prevent successful schools from expanding and replicating. Legislatures must remember that the goal is to create more high performing schools, not protect those that chronically fail. ”

The Alliance suggests state leaders look more closely at the factors directly impacting the quality of charter schools, such as authorizers--those responsible for charter school oversight.

“State leaders should work with authorizers to establish rigorous and transparent processes for the approval, funding and renewal of charter schools,” said Smith. “Caps don’t influence school performance, authorizing does.”

According to the Alliance, the ideal situation is a state without caps on charter growth. To move in that direction, the Alliance recommends the following:

1. Never cap quality schools and authorizers
2. Include sunset provisions
3. Make new charter laws free of limits
4. Make funding from the Federal Charter Schools Program contingent upon a cap-free state law

“Quality charter schools should be able to flourish and multiply to serve families seeking options in public education,” added Smith. “We urge policymakers to act now in the interest of children and lift charter caps this legislative session.”

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