



FLORIDA CONSORTIUM  
of PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS  
*"Florida's Charter Support Organization Since 1999"*

# ADVOCACY TOOLKIT FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

SEPTEMBER 2015





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Dear Charter School Leader,

Imagine that you had the influence to correct a social wrong. Imagine that your voice was powerful enough to speak up for children, and teachers. And, that a call or an email from you would initiate real change in the funding your school receives. Through advocacy, you have that power. You just have to learn how to use it.

FCPCS staff has been speaking up for charter school students and their teachers for close to two decades. We provide support to member schools year-round. We also tirelessly advocate on a local and state level on behalf of charter schools and the students, and families, they serve. Our efforts put us in front of legislators during legislative sessions and throughout the year. We tell your stories of success, and talk about the kids you serve and the academic gains your school is helping them make. These meetings help spread the word about the great work charter schools do every day, and how you are good stewards of public dollars. However, these meetings are missing one valuable component. You.

***Now more than ever  
we have to speak up  
for children and schools,  
and you have to  
get involved.***

Over the past few years, the funding charter schools in Florida receive has declined. The funding gap between what students at a district school and charter school get is widening. The diminishing funds impact your students directly, and compromise your ability to serve them. During the 2015 legislative session, charter school capital outlay was reduced by 50 percent. This was an incredible set back for charter schools. The threat of reduced funding will continue unless; we all work together to educate legislators about the great work charter schools do, how much communities and children depend on our schools for a quality education, and how diminishing the funds allocated to charter schools has a negative impact on the children we serve. Now more than ever we have to speak up for children and schools, and you have to get involved.

Public charter schools in Florida have experienced incredible growth in the past 18 years. That growth has been completely driven by parents who have demanded alternative and high quality K-12 education programs, and the innovative and sharp school founders and leaders who have given them what they want. Although academically successful, our schools are in danger of being choked by limited funding. During the legislative session, dozens of groups walk the state halls and meet with lawmakers in an effort to limit or restrict school choice programs and their funding. We are often on the defensive and must battle misinformation. But there is only so much that can be accomplished during those sessions. The real work must take place throughout the year.

Elected leaders need to hear from you right now! They need to meet school leaders and learn how charter schools are helping children in their district. One visit to your legislator's district office or extending an invitation to visit a charter school will make a powerful impact, and give you an opportunity to advocate for your school and the children you serve.

This toolkit will help you reach out to lawmakers so you can tell your story, and in the process influence policy changes that will help your students and teachers get equitable funding. You'll find ideas for activities, sample letters and much more.

There is no time to waste. Get started today.

Best Regards,

Robert Haag  
*President and CEO*  
FCPCS



## Florida's Charter Schools: Promoting Innovation & Excellence

A CREDO Urban Charter School Study released in March 2015 found that in many urban areas, charter school students, particularly minority, are achieving at a higher level than students at district-run schools, and there are more regions in which urban charter school students outpace their district counterparts than regions where charter students lag behind them. Many charter schools have figured out how to achieve substantially higher levels of growth with the students they serve.

These are good points to bring up to lawmakers. We need to remind them that charter schools are working to raise the academic performance of students, particularly those in underserved areas.

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### **Here are some other suggested talking points you may use when speaking with legislators, local elected officials, and media.**

- Charter schools are public schools. They have some unique traits, however, that increase the likelihood of a successful education for a child.
- Charter schools create an environment in which parents can be more involved, teachers are given the freedom to innovate, and students are provided the structure they need to learn.
- On average, charter school students get 20 percent less funding than students attending a district public school.\* [Ball State report May 2010, Thomas B. Fordham Institute report 2005]
- Local funding accounts for the largest disparity between district and charter schools. Capital millage is exclusively (except for a few counties in Florida) allocated to school districts – even though both district and charter school parents contribute to the fund.
- Charter schools are answering parents' increasing demand for high-quality public

schools. In Florida, enrollment in charter schools has grown steadily for the past eighteen years. There are now more than 260,000 students attending K-12 public charter school programs.

- **Choice:** Parents select the school their child attends. Most often, teachers chose to work in the school for the professional satisfaction and the opportunity to share school policy.
- **Innovation:** Charter school's flexibility to adapt to the educational needs of individual children, commitment to excel and serve the community, and high levels of accountability often lead to innovative methods of teaching that lead to improved student achievement.
- **Flexibility:** Charter schools are allowed the freedom to be more innovative while being held accountable for advancing student achievement. Charter school leaders are free to make timely decisions about developing curriculum, structuring the school day, and hiring teachers who meet the needs of their students.
- **Accountability:** Charter schools operate within a multi-layered accountability system. They are accountable to parents, to their authorizer (the school district) via a performance-based contract, and to the state. This leads to quality schools and high achievement.
- **Partnership with Parents and the Community:** Parents and community members are welcome in charter schools and are encouraged to be involved.
- Charter schools are raising the bar for what's possible and what should be expected in public education. Here are some examples of success on our campus:

[Here you should highlight your student achievement data and program successes, graduation rates, special programs, etc.]

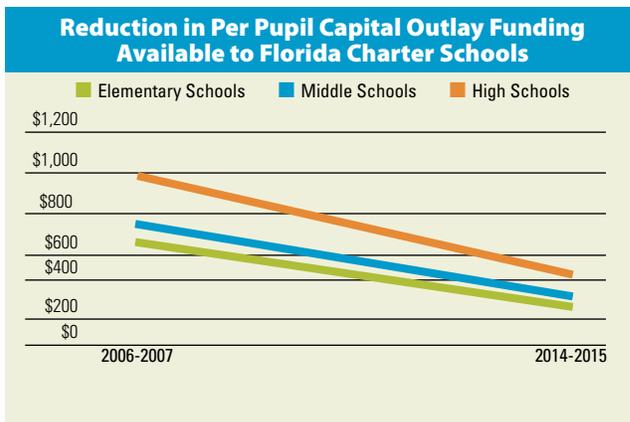


# 2015 FACT SHEET

## Charter Schools See Steep Drop in Capital Outlay Funding

- During the last eight years, capital outlay funding available to Florida's charter schools has plummeted.
- The decrease has had a major impact on charter schools' ability to add new facilities, renovate old ones, pay for student transportation and pay for insurance premiums.
- In the 2006-07 school year, charter schools were eligible to receive an average of between \$998 per pupil for high schools and \$681 for elementary schools.
- This school year, charter schools are eligible for an average of between \$495 for high schools and \$330 for elementary schools.

The costs of facilities have risen steadily while the funds available to pay for them have diminished substantially:



### Why Capital Outlay funding is so critical?

Capital outlay funding is critical to Florida's public charter schools because unlike district schools that have access to Capital Millage funding for facilities costs, charter schools must cover the costs of their initial facilities out of their per pupil operating funds.

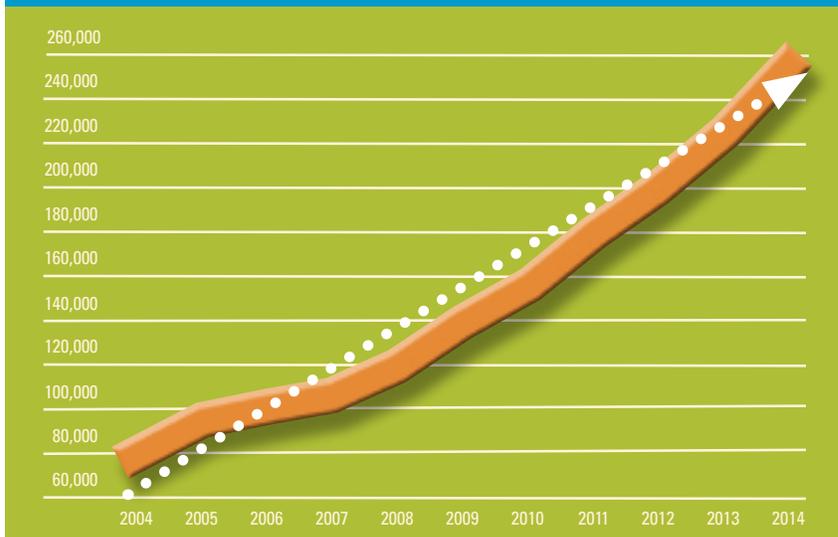
**The 250,430 students who attend public charter schools deserve equal access to good school facilities, instructional resources and bus transportation just as any other student attending a public school.** They are integral part of Florida's public school student population and their academic achievement help to boost the state's overall academic record (see story on page 2).

### Who Receives Capital Outlay Funds?

Capital outlay funds are only available to charter schools that meet the following criteria:

- Have been in operation for three or more years or are part of an expanded feeder chain of schools;
- Have been accredited by the Commission on Schools of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS-CASI) or AdvancED;
- Are financially stable;
- Have met student achievement benchmarks.

## 10 years of Growth: Florida Charter School Student Enrollment



## Enrollment in Florida Charters Exceeds 250,000 Students

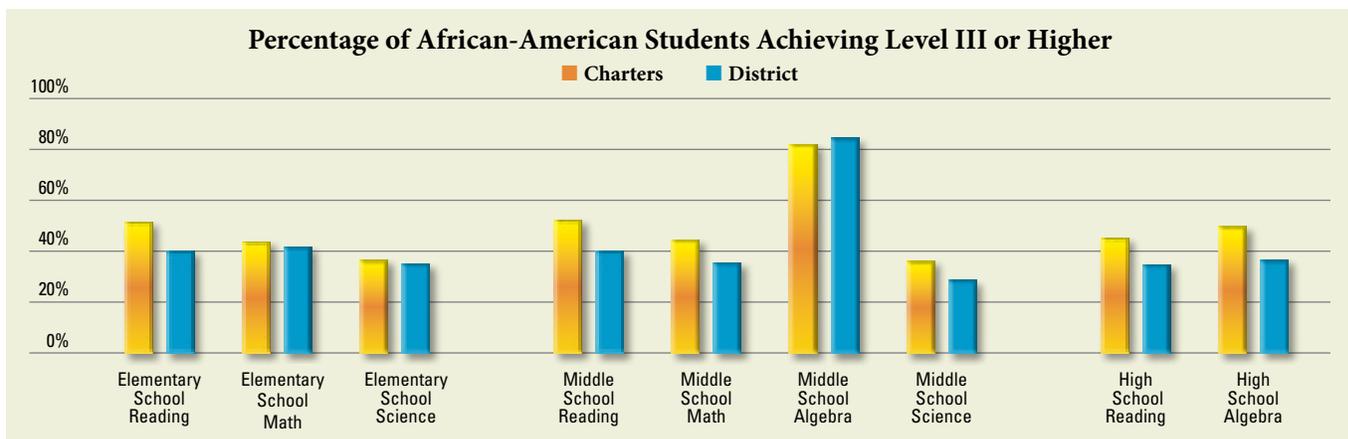
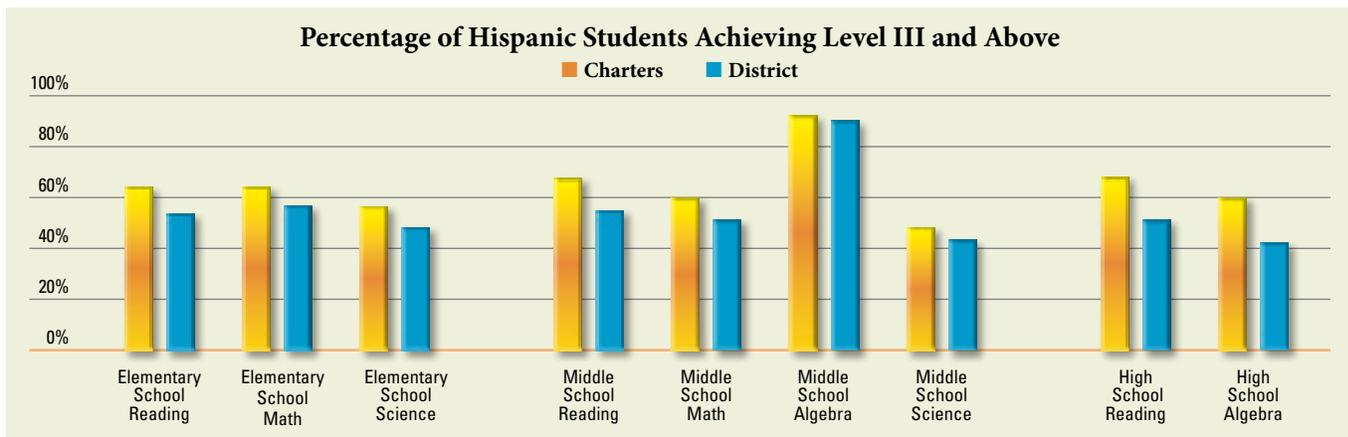
- Florida families continue to flock to charter schools to enroll their children. An additional 22,000 students enrolled in the state's 651 charter schools in the 2014-15 school year.
- Charter school students represent 9.1% of Florida's total public school population.
- Miami-Dade and Broward continue to be among the top ten schools districts in the country in terms of the number of students enrolled in charter schools. Duval and Palm Beach Counties are among the top three districts in the nation for the rate of charter school growth.<sup>1</sup>

## State Report: Most Students Do Better in Florida Charter Schools!

- Florida’s charter schools posted their most impressive student achievement results to date in the 2013-14 school year, according to the Florida Department of Education’s annual report on charter schools.<sup>2</sup>
- **The average charter school student’s performance on state tests exceeded that of the average district school student in nearly every grade level and subject.**
- Most striking is how charter schools are benefiting

*a higher percentage of students most at risk for underachievement, including Hispanic and Black students, students enrolled in the free and reduced lunch program, and students with disabilities.* This is most evident at the middle and high school level.

The report also demonstrates that charter schools were also more successful in closing the achievement gap between White and minority students.



### About the Florida Consortium of Public Charter Schools

FCPCS is the voice of the Florida charter school movement, with more than 400 charter school members.

It is one of the oldest and largest charter school membership associations in the nation.

Founded in 1999 by a grassroots group of charter school operators, it provides advocacy, support, resources, and networking opportunities to new and existing charter schools, parents, and students. FCPCS also promotes the establishment and operation of high quality public charter schools throughout the state.



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of PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

*“Florida’s Charter Support Organization Since 1999”*

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<sup>1</sup> A Growing Movement: America’s Largest Charter School Communities. National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. December 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Student Achievement in Florida’s Charter Schools: A Comparison of Performance of Charter School Students with Traditional Public School Students. Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Accountability Reporting. April 2014.



## Ideas for Activities

*Effectively articulating the successes at your school to lawmakers, whether they support charter schools or not, is sure to work in your benefit.*

### **Visit your State Representative and Senator at their district office.**

- Call their scheduler in advanced and request an appointment. Explain the purpose of your visit – to introduce yourself and talk about the academic successes at your school.
- Find your legislators here [LINK]
- Be on time and flexible. Legislators have busy schedules so be prepared for delays.
- Be prepared to deliver a focused message in five or ten minutes.
- Be prepared to answer questions about your campus and charter schools in general (the facts included in this packet will help you)
- Never go empty handed. Bring a brochure or information about your school and your contact info.
- Offer to help answer any education or charter school related questions that may come up during session
- Follow up the meeting with a thank you email and an invitation to visit your campus
- Bring a fact sheet and/or points to discuss and invite the legislator to visit your school before the holiday break.

### **Invite your State Representative and Senator to visit your campus.**

Don't make this just a campus tour but ask them to speak with a specific class or club. For example, the lawmakers can be asked to be a guest speaker in a civics or American History class, or meet with your SGA. Host a brief meet-and-greet with a few teachers and parents before she/he goes into the classroom.

### **Reach out to local elected officials and community leaders.**

Invite your mayor and/or city council members to visit your school. Make the person Principal for the day or invite them to be a guest speaker. The goal is to correct misperceptions about charter schools by letting people see firsthand a successful program in action.

Prior to these meetings, make sure you have speaking points ready, you have briefed your staff and parents attending the meet/greet and are prepared to bring up funding concerns. It's important not to complain. You are there to educate the legislator about charter schools, how they work, why they work, and how your school is helping children in their community thrive. You may not be able to convince a legislator to support more funding for charter schools, but respectful, informative, and persuasive communication can go a long way toward softening his/her position. Effectively articulating the successes at your school to lawmakers, whether they support charter schools or not, is sure to work in your benefit.

### **Communicate successes to media and local community leaders.**

Draft a press release or article about the positive academic results at your school. Distribute the story to parents, stakeholders, local education reporters, elected officials, school board members, and other partners.

Post successful outcomes on your school's website and social media. Also share that information with FCPCS and your local education reporters.

### **Parents for Charter Schools**

Ask your parents to join Parents for Charter Schools ([www.parentsforcharterschools.org](http://www.parentsforcharterschools.org)). There is NO membership fee. This organization will just send parents critical information about charter school legislation and funding they should be aware of.



## Checklist for Planning Activities

Use the checklist below to prepare for your activities. Please contact FCPCS if you have any questions or need assistance.

- Identify** your state representative and senator
- Draft** meeting request and invitation to visit your campus
- Send** request and/or invitation the legislators
- Follow up** with call to encourage attendance
- Develop** a fact sheet about your school
- Inform** FCPCS of upcoming activities / visits
- Inform** your parent/teacher group and invite a few to attend
- Appoint** an event coordinator
- Identify** individuals and/or team to take on different tasks (greeter, photographer, etc)
- Post** event activities:
  - Post visit photo and caption on your school's website and social media
  - Send photos to FCPCS for inclusion on our website and social media
  - Share the post with your parents and partners via email or newsletter
  - Have a student write a story about the visit for the school newspaper
  - Send a copy of the newsletter and/or student paper to the legislator along with any photos they may be able to use in their own newsletters.
  - Send post-event press release with a photo to the local paper



## Take Action Today!

### Sample Invitation Letter to a Legislator

The Honorable Jane Doe  
Florida House of Representatives OR Florida Senate  
Address  
City, FL zip

Dear (Representative Doe or Senator Doe),

On behalf of Downtown Charter School, I am writing to invite you to visit our campus. This will be an excellent opportunity for our students and faculty to meet you, and for you to learn about the great educational program our school has to offer.

Downtown Charter School opened in \_\_\_\_\_. The tuition-free public charter school serves students in grades x – x. We offer... xxxx program [include information about the academic program, and specific focus your program has – language, STEM, etc]. Since our inception, we have experienced incredible growth and academic success. During our xxx years of operations, Downtown Charter School has ... [list school grades and/or academic progress your students have made, graduation rate, etc].

I hope you will be available to visit our campus soon. During your visit, you will have the chance to speak with our xxx class about the importance of pursuing an education, and meet some of our faculty members and a few of our most active parents who are anxious to share their stories with you.

I will follow up with a call to your office next week to learn of your availability. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your consideration of this invitation.

We look forward to seeing you and showing you our school.

Sincerely,

(name) (title)