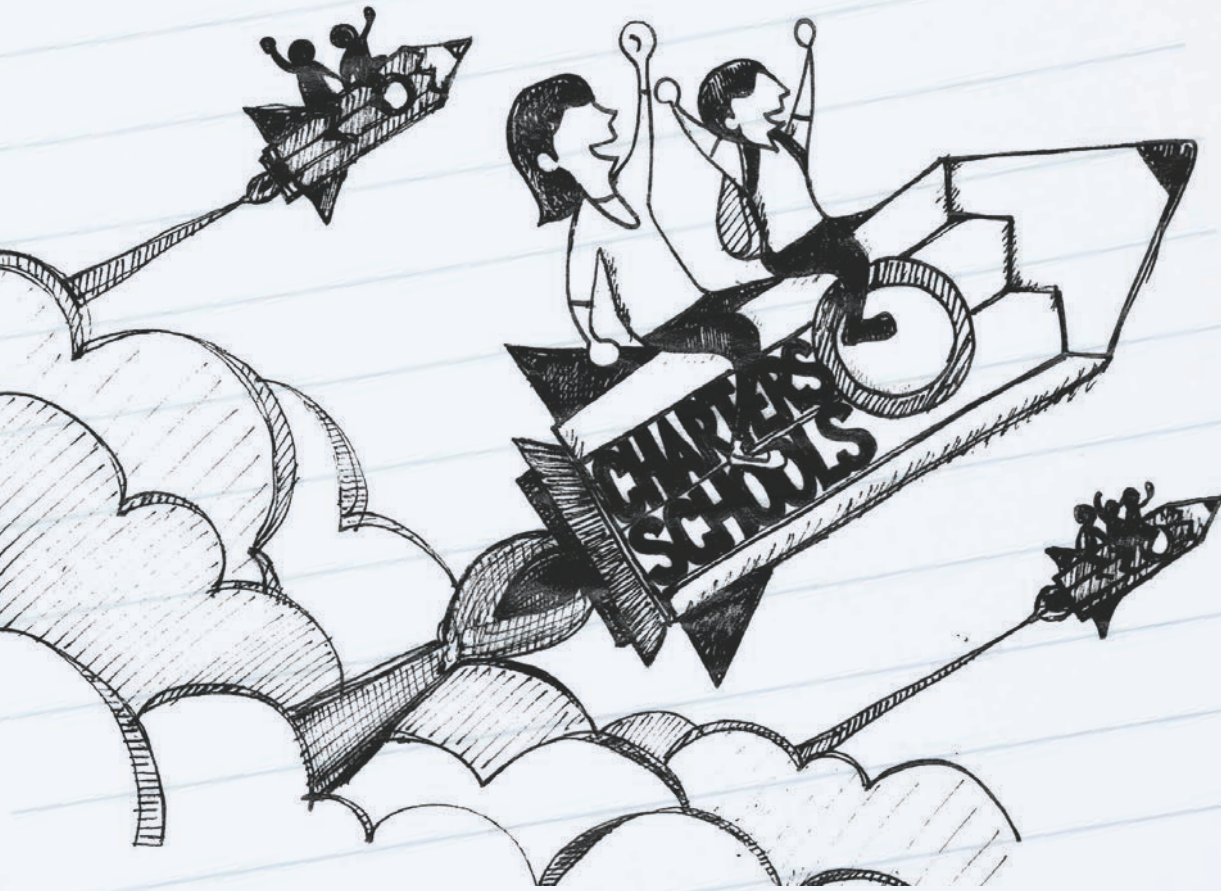


Promoting New Standards of Professionalism & Educational Enrichment

EDUCATION MATTERS

A publication of the Association of American Educators Foundation



N.J. Charter Schools Beneficial for Teachers and Students Alike

By Jomayra I. Torres

Public charter schools have been making headlines in New Jersey for years. As policymakers debate equitable funding and the expanding role of charter schools in the state, teachers like me are on the frontlines of this pioneering movement. I believe it's critical that teacher voices be heard when debating the future of charter schools in New Jersey.

I've been a teacher for four years. While I wasn't always sure what type of school I'd end up in, I've spent my career at BelovED Community Charter School, an independent, high-performing public charter school in Jersey City. It is in this innovative environment that I've been able to experience the flexibility and autonomy that I've always envisioned for my career.



Despite serving millions of students and employing thousands of educators across the country, these laboratory-like schools are still misunderstood in many communities. Independent charter schools are unique public schools offering bureaucratic freedom in exchange for real results. Just like traditional public schools, they don't charge tuition, are publicly funded and open to anyone who applies—including students with special needs.

Free from union contracts, my charter school has the freedom to adjust the school day, choose new and exciting curriculum resources, and develop strong models for learning. Teachers like me are treated as equal partners with valuable experience and ideas. Personally, I feel empowered by school leadership to teach in a way that is unique to every student in my classroom.

As the oldest of eight kids born and raised in Jersey City, I'm the only member of my family who graduated from high school, and college, and now has a career in education. I know from experience that great teachers make the difference for kids.

And I know that teachers across the state understand the transcending power of a high quality education. The vast majority of my colleagues enter the profession with dreams of changing lives and affecting communities. Nowhere is this dream more

alive than in public charter schools designed to serve New Jersey's most high-need students.

The truth is educators on the frontlines know that a one-size-fits-all system does little to address the unique needs of all our students. Students learn differently, just as teachers have different teaching styles. In adapting to the system of choice across the country, professional educators are realizing that advances like charter schools are not only meeting the needs of students but also providing professional opportunities to staff. We must see this progression across New Jersey.

While the status quo would have you believe educators are not in favor of choice initiatives like public charter schools, thousands of teachers support this new direction and are working in schools of choice every day.

According to a membership survey by AAE, the largest national non-union educators organization in the nation, teachers everywhere are open to policies that advance choice and innovation. As a member, I couldn't be more proud that my colleagues are embracing the wave of the future of education.

Specifically, 79 percent of AAE members support charter schools

as options for both students and teachers alike. Clearly there is an understanding among educators that options for students are beneficial and that educators, in turn, can also reap rewards.

My message to stakeholders in New Jersey and across the nation is simple. Charter schools are nothing to fear. My own son attends my school and is making huge gains. As a public charter school teacher, I'm directly benefitting from choices in education and I'm grateful. I wake up knowing that I am in an environment that challenges me professionally and allows me to work with kids who need me most.

Looking forward, I hope to see policymakers recognize the power of public charter schools in New Jersey by closing the funding gap and creating a comprehensive and fair charter law in our state. Students—and teachers—deserve the opportunity to succeed. ■

Originally published on nj.com.



Jomayra I. Torres is the lead 1st grade teacher at BelovED Community Charter School in Jersey City, New Jersey. An AAE member, she was the recipient of the 2014 Teacher of the Year award from the New Jersey Charter Schools Association.

FEATURE MY TEACHER

Do you know a teacher who deserves recognition for doing great things in their classroom? We want to hear about it! Learn more about getting your **#TeacherOfTheWeek** nationally recognized.

aaeteachers.org/FeatureMyTeacher

AAE Members are Amazing: See this Millennial Charter School Teacher in Action

Millennial educators are a growing force in the public charter school arena because they see the advantage that charter school teaching can bring to their career. This new wave of educators brings fresh perspective to the world of education and their insight is truly valuable. That's why we asked one of our millennial members to tell us about his experience as a charter school teacher. Meet Robert Kempton, a 5th-grade teacher at Noah Webster Academy in Orem, Utah:



Robert Kempton is a 5th-grade teacher at Noah Webster Academy, Orem, Utah.

Q: What would you like to tell teachers in other environments about teaching in a charter school?

A: There's a bigger sense of community at public charter schools than at other schools. At NWA, we want to encourage students and parents to get their friends and family to come here. We have a sense of pride in providing a unique brand of education that parents and students love.

Q: What do you like about teaching in a charter school?

A: I have taught in both traditional public schools and public charter schools and the thing that I LOVE about charter schools is that if changes need to be made, they can be done quickly. We don't have to worry about district guidelines so we are better able to fine tune what we need for our students. When I want to share my thoughts, it's as simple as bringing it up in a weekly staff meeting. Many times, changes are made by the following Monday!

Q: What would you like to tell teachers in other environments about teaching in a charter school?

A: I would tell teachers at other schools that an educator is an educator no matter where they teach. We don't think that teachers at charter schools are better than any other school. The goals of private, traditional public, or charter schools are the same and that's to help kids achieve academic and social success. We need to stop seeing other teachers and schools as competitors and more as collaborators.

JOIN
THE GROWING AAE FAMILY

If you or someone you know is interested in joining AAE, visit aaeteachers.org/CharterMembership to learn more about why AAE is right for charter teachers like YOU!

Q: What motivates you as an educator?

A: I'm motivated by students' willingness to learn and participate. This is a catch 22 situation because if I don't provide an environment they want to be in they will never want to learn and participate. There are days that most of my attention is taken by behavior problems but the days that learning is the actual focus are the days I live for. Those are the days I try very hard to pinpoint what magic combination of things made it happen so I can do it again.

Q: What are the misconceptions you face as a charter school educator?

A: I think big misconceptions about charter schools are that they are private institutions and we get all the money we want without following state guidelines. Charter schools are the same as public schools only we don't belong to a school district. We are held to the same standards that the rest of the state is. We don't "just get the smart or rich kids" and our struggles are the same as other teachers. ■

Check Out This Amazing School: Milwaukee Collegiate Academy

Friday mornings at MCA are vibrant and lively. Staff gathers at morning circle for announcements, celebrations, and to prepare to welcome the 250 students that attend each day. After the staff huddle breaks with a motivational cheer, teachers head off to their assigned areas to give shout-outs to individual students for various accomplishments. One teacher collects student cell phones while others make sure students are dressed in accordance with the school uniform policy.

MCA shares the sincere belief that every scholar who joins the MCA team and family can and will go through college. This core belief is the heart of everything it does. Its team is comprised of highly skilled educators who are committed to that mission and understand the hard work that must be done to accomplish it. They exhibit this commitment each and every day through instructional practice and relationship building with their scholars and families.



Photo via Milwaukee Collegiate Academy's website

MCA uses a blended-learning approach to instruction that combines the power of face-to-face instruction with the innovations and academic benefits of learning online. This allows it to personalize instruction for every student. MCA's mission of "to and through college" remains the same no matter where their students are on the academic spectrum when they come to MCA.

MCA takes and creates every opportunity it can for their students to grow and develop the character strengths needed to persist through college. Its learning environment is both structured and caring. They create high expectations for all of their scholars and hold them

accountable for meeting them. And along with high expectations, MCA provides amazing support. Each teacher has office hours after school to ensure students receive additional instructional support they need or to simply study in a quiet place.

Simply put, they transform lives.

MILWAUKEE COLLEGIATE ACADEMY

Milwaukee Collegiate Academy (MCA) is an inner city, independent public charter school in Wisconsin. Formerly known as CEO Leadership Academy, MCA opened in 2003 as a private school. It became a public charter school in 2011.

Student Demographics:

- 99% African American
- 96% are eligible to receive free or reduced lunch

Mission & Vision: MCA's mission is to nurture scholars capable of transforming their world, by sending them to and through college.

Its vision is to produce responsible leaders through academic mastery, community-focused education, and the fostering of lifelong learning in any environment.

Awards: 2015 Milwaukee Charter School of the Year

School Website:

milwaukeecollegiateacademy.org



“Our core value is that all students are capable of academic achievement and educational success past the secondary level regardless of their race or socioeconomic level! They know that when they work together, they are able to help capable, low-income students become college-bound scholars.”

— **Rashida Evans, Current Principal**

“I graduated from MCA knowing that I have the ability and essential skills I need to be the successful African-American leader that I want to be. I could not have done it without them.”

— **Amanda Paige, MCA Class of 2014; Howard University**



What makes MCA great?

100%

graduation rate for the past 3 consecutive years

90%

of MCA families indicate satisfaction with MCA

65%

of MCA graduating scholars have enrolled in a 2- or 4-year college or university since 2012

25%

improvement rate on ACT tests over the past 5 years

4x

National average of college persistence and graduation for low-income, black students since 2007

MCA College Acceptance Rate

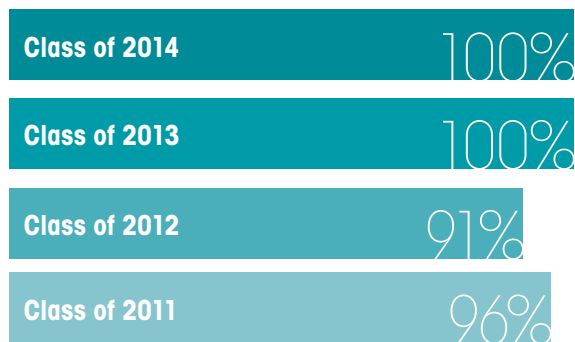


Photo via Milwaukee Collegiate Academy's website

Tips on how your school can mimic these results...

1. Remember to make everything a community effort.
2. Keep it positive. Positive reinforcement is key!
3. Create a required intervention program for struggling students.
4. Treat each student as an individual.
5. Invest in talented teachers and use their unique talents. ■

SPOTLIGHT YOUR SCHOOL

Do you know a school doing great things and getting results? We want to hear about it! Email editor@aaeteachers.org using subject line "Feature My School" with your name, phone number, and a brief description of your amazing school, and we may feature it in an upcoming edition of *Education Matters!*

Did You Know?

79% of AAE member survey respondents have expressed support for charter schools. As an organization that supports educators in all academic settings, AAE endorses innovative educational environments in which teachers and students can thrive.

Read more about our member survey at aaeteachers.org/natsurvey.



Georgia Member Perspective: A Psychologist in the Charter School System

By AAE Member,
Dr. Victor Gonzalez Jr., Psy.D.

In my 20+ years as a psychologist, I have worked with a wide variety of people across a range of settings. I have worked for hospitals, the courts, and the U.S. Justice Department as well as public school systems. I have also had the opportunity to work for several charter schools in the Atlanta area. While working in the charter school sector, I have met some of the most fascinating people, had some very interesting interactions, and I have come to realize a true sense of community in these schools.

As a psychologist, an aspect of what I do is to observe people and their environments so that when problems exist I can develop interventions that might improve their situation. As a school psychologist, a primary focus in what I do is to evaluate a student's relationship to their learning environment. More specifically, I am looking to evaluate an identified student's strengths and weaknesses so that I can help their teachers provide a better learning experience. This assistance can be for the gifted student as well as for the student who has special education needs. Within the charter school system, I have had the rewarding experience to work with both of these populations.

My work with the students in the charter school system has been some of the most rewarding in my career. As one might expect, many of the families bring their children to charter schools in pursuit of a quality education. These families and their stories are as diverse

as the reasons that brought them to the schools that I service. My encounters with these students and their families have ranged from challenging to enlightening to humbling. Interacting with these students, helping them along their journeys, and then watching as they accomplish goals that once seemed beyond them is always rewarding.

Along with the wonderful students and their families that I have encountered at the charter schools, the educational teams can be amazing. I don't know how they do it but charter schools seem to pull in truly talented and selfless people. Perhaps it is the very nature of being a part of a charter school that attracts this caliber of staff. They are upbeat, highly motivated, and outgoing individuals.

In addition, it has been my experience that the majority of these staff members are adaptable, creative, and ready to go the "extra mile" to take care of their students. They are often faced with difficult expecta-

tions and limited resources. However, rather than become frustrated or upset, they often find creative ways to surmount these challenges and to keep their students engaged in the learning process.

They also have a great understanding of teamwork. I have often watched them rally together to help a student, or fellow teacher, who is in trouble. It's a great feeling to work in an atmosphere that is family, team and community oriented. Working in this environment keeps me energized and enthusiastic about the challenges that await me when I walk into a school. Most importantly, I know that I will not be alone in my endeavors to help these students. ■

Originally published on the AAE Charter Blog.

Dr. Victor Gonzalez, Jr. is a licensed psychologist with experience working directly with children, adolescents, adults, and families. A past clinical director of psychological services at The Devereux Treatment Network, he also served as a regional school Psychologist for a national charter school management company.

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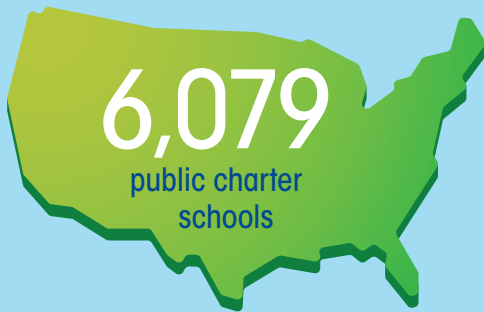
BOOKMARK THE AAE CHARTERS BLOG

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- How can I get involved with AAE for this year's National Charter Schools Week? What is the nation's foremost independent analyst of charter school effectiveness saying about charter school performance outcomes? Why did the teacher's union charter school fail? All those answers and more can be found right on the AAE charters blog! Keep up with the latest Charter School news written specifically for charter school teachers like YOU! Visit aaecharters.org/index.php/blog today!

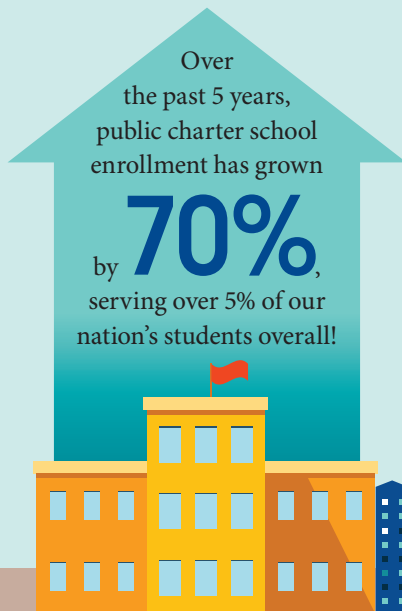
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Charter Schools by the Numbers



At the end of the 2013 school year, there were 6,079 public charters open in 42 states and DC serving nearly 2.7 million students nationwide.

As a national average, charter schools receive **nearly 30% less per pupil** than traditional public schools—yet for every \$1,000 in school funds, charters produce **reading scores that are 16 points higher and math scores that are 17 points higher on NAEP tests** than traditional public schools.



Charter schools served 340,000 children in 2000, 1.6 million just a decade later in 2010, and almost 2.3 million in 2012!



While the growth of charter school students has been exponential, the demographics have seen drastic changes with the percentage of Caucasians dropping from **42.5% in 2000 to 37.3% in 2010**. In contrast the percent of Hispanics rising **from 19.6% to 26.1%**.

Urban youth are the number one demographic to choose the public charter school option.
Urban youth comprise 54.8% of the charter school body.

More and more public charter school teachers are joining AAE every single day!



IN FACT,
56.7% of charter school students are African American or Hispanic as opposed to **38.7%** being served in traditional public schools.

Low income/impovertised youth being served by charter schools:



charter school students eligible for free/reduced lunch (as opposed to just **19%** served by traditional public schools). ■

AAE Charter School Partnerships

The Association of American Educators is proud to be partnered with several networks of charter schools across the country.

If you're interested in learning more about how to partner with AAE or if you would like more information on our current partnerships, contact us at charters@aaeteachers.org today!



Legal Guide for Charter School Educators

Charter schools thrive on flexibility, innovation, collaboration, accountability, and dedication. Teacher labor unions have been vocal in their opposition to the charter school movement and deliberate in their efforts to alter this reform model. Although the ultimate decision about whether to join a professional association or a union is up to the individual teachers and employees, charter school administrators best serve their team by fostering a healthy, collaborative environment in which employees are treated as fellow professionals.



To learn more, teachers can visit aaecharters.org/teacherlegalguidance.

If you are an administrator or think that an administrator at your school would like to know more about charter school unionization, then check out our abridged guide for charter school administrators.

Visit aaecharters.org/adminlegalguidance.

Get Involved with AAE

To reach an AAE representative at our partnership office about distributing AAE materials at your school, visit aaeteachers.org/materials. To request an AAE representative present at your school, or to purchase AAE membership for all of your employees, email charters@aaeteachers.org or call our toll-free number at **877.385.6264**.



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