

# Debunking the Myths of Charter Schools

By Ember Reichgott Junge, in partnership with **Houghton Mifflin Harcourt™**  
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As charter schools grow, so do the myths about chartering. Opponents can be intentional in creating and perpetuating myths. You hear them everywhere. How can you debunk the myths of chartering and turn hostile questions into opportunities? As the former Minnesota state senator who authored the first charter school law in 1991 in Minnesota and the nation, I urge you to challenge these myths to sustain chartering into the future. We cannot take chartering for granted!

You are on the front lines of chartering in this nation. As detailed in my book, *Zero Chance Of Passage: The Pioneering Charter School Story*, the myths of chartering today are the same myths we heard in Minnesota over twenty years ago. And yet, today there are over 2.5 million students attending over 6,400 public charter schools in 42 states and D.C., with one million names on waiting lists.



Former Minnesota state senator Ember Reichgott Junge is author of the first charter school law in Minnesota and the nation, and the book, *Zero Chance of Passage: The Pioneering Charter School Story* (ZeroChanceOfPassage.com). A member of the National Charter Schools Hall of Fame, she is a national leadership and education policy coach, presenter, trainer and messenger.

You can raise your voice to challenge the myths of charter schools. Let's confront the most common myths of chartering.

- **Myth:** Charter Schools receive more money than other public schools.
- **Fact:** Charter schools receive on average nearly 30% less funding per pupil than neighboring district schools.

Charter schools do more with less! The main reason for the gap? Charter schools usually do not receive property tax revenue or other funding for facilities.

- **Myth:** Charter schools take money from district schools.
- **Fact:** Public money follows the student to the charter school. Every child deserves an excellent education.

Money follows the student it is intended to educate. If a student moves from one district to another, the money follows the student. That is routine. So why is that different when a child moves from a district school to a charter school?

The real issue is who gets to spend the money. In district schools, the superintendent can decide which students in the district get full funding and which do not, according to district priorities. In chartering, the money follows the student, and it is **locked in**. Every student is **guaranteed** his fair share, because every child deserves an effective education.

- **Myth:** Charter schools are private schools.
- **Fact:** Charter schools are public schools.

One-third of the American public believes charter schools are private schools or privately run. Charter schools are, of course, public schools. They are independently run. Some call them “community grown.” They are overseen by a government-endorsed authorizing entity and a nonprofit board of directors.

We must challenge language that implies otherwise. We can’t let the phrase “charter schools and public schools” stand unchallenged. Next time you hear that phrase consider this response: “Do you mean *charter public schools and district public schools*?” We must correct it every time!

- **Myth:** Charter schools don’t perform as well as district schools.
- **Fact:** 15 of the last 16 national studies show charter public school students outperformed peers in district public schools and closed the achievement gap.  
(publiccharters.org)
- **Fact:** Charter school graduates are more likely to attend and graduate college and earn more income in the first years post-graduation—about 12% more! (Mathematica study)
- **Fact:** Charter schools disproportionately top the lists of the nation’s best high schools in *Newsweek*, *US News and World Report*, and *The Washington Post*. Even though an average of only 5% of public school students attend public charter schools, over a quarter of the high schools on the lists are currently charter public schools.

Though this data is encouraging, the bottom line is that it doesn’t make sense to compare performance of charter schools and district schools. Success in learning is not determined by whether a school is district-run or charter-run. Learning occurs if students are engaged. If a charter or district public school is working, let’s support it. If a charter or district school is not, let’s end it. That’s how we’ll improve public education for all.

- **Myth:** Management companies “own” charter schools and take public money.
- **Fact:** Charter schools are governed by a nonprofit board of directors that chooses the management company.

A management company may be selected by a nonprofit board of directors so that educators can focus on mission: student achievement. Management companies also provide economies of scale to reduce expenses and redirect dollars to the classroom.

***Thank you for debunking the myths of chartering. You are today’s pioneers!***

Want more information about the myths of chartering?  
Go to [publiccharters.org](http://publiccharters.org) (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools)  
or [ZeroChanceOfPassage.com](http://ZeroChanceOfPassage.com)

Connect with us:



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