

**Testimony of the New York City Charter School Center
as to the Executive Budget Proposal for Fiscal Year 2026-2027**

**NYS Legislature Joint Budget Hearing
Of the Senate Committee on Finance
and
The Assembly Committee for Ways and Means
January 29, 2026**

The New York City Charter School Center (Charter Center) respectfully submits the following testimony regarding the FY 2026-2027 Governor's Proposed Executive Budget (PEB). The Charter Center, which provides technical support and advocacy in support of New York City (NYC) charter schools, thanks the Senate Finance Committee and the Assembly Ways and Means Committee for providing the opportunity to comment.

1. Charter School Demographics, Enrollment Trends and Academic Performance

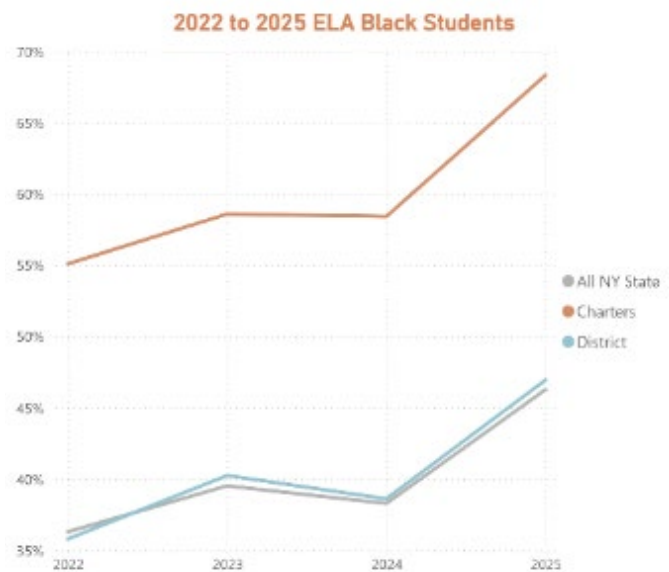
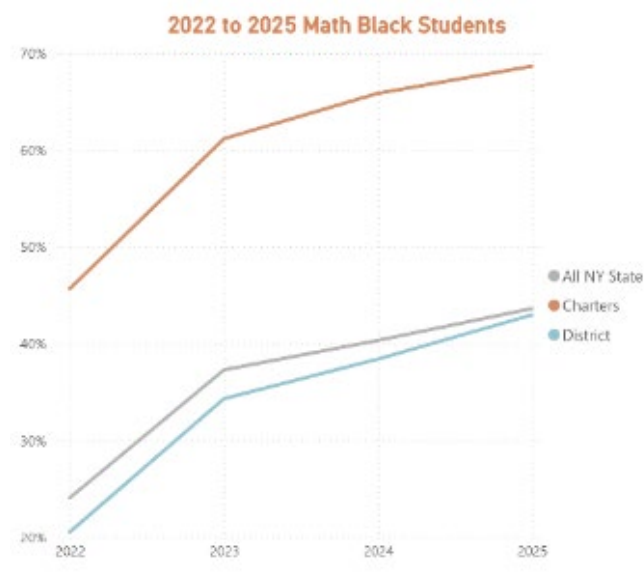
The New York State Charter Schools Act was passed by the Legislature over 25 years ago, and today there are 285 public charter schools operating in the five boroughs of NYC. These public schools educate an estimated 150,500 students at approximately 420 campuses, representing about 16% of public-school students, of which 89% are Black or Hispanic and 83% are economically disadvantaged.¹

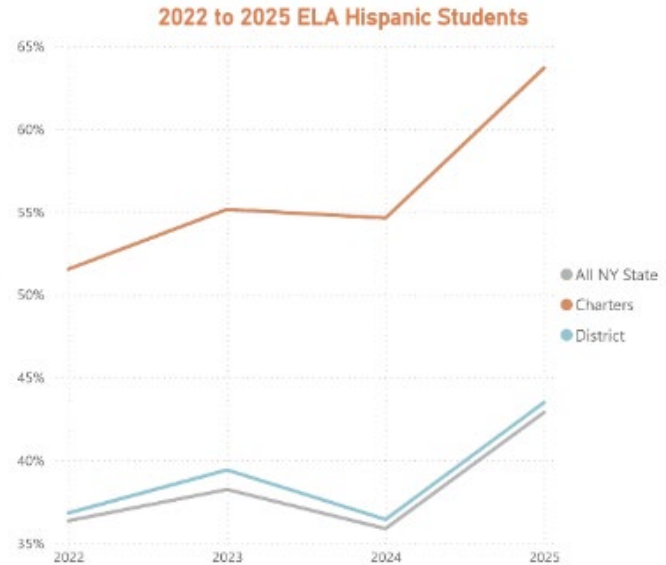
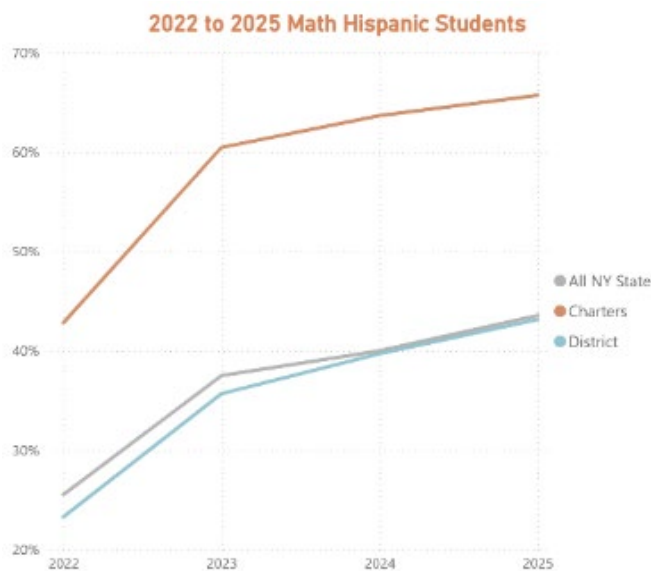
The number of NYC families choosing charter schools as the right public school for their children continues to increase. In the 2023-24 school year, nearly 39% of NYC's Black kindergarteners (enrolled in a public school) attended a public charter school. Charter school enrollment growth for grades K to 12 increased 13.7% between the 2019-20 and 2024-25 school years (enrollment numbers for 2025-2026 school year have not been released by New York State Education Department (NYSED)).

When asked why they have chosen a charter school, families point to a number of factors, including a caring environment and a commitment to family and community. But clearly a driving factor for parents is that NYC's charter schools are delivering on their promise to educate their children and provide them with a chance to thrive. The numbers tell the story.

¹ Figures based on New York City Department of Education data, available at <https://infohub.nyced.org/reports/school-quality/information-and-data-overview>; NYSED Enrollment Data for 2024-25 School Year available at <https://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/statistics/enroll-n-staff/home.html>.

The latest 2025 Math and ELA 3-8 assessment results showed once again that students in charter schools achieve startlingly high rates of proficiency, and equally, startlingly higher rates than their district counterparts. In ELA, fully two-thirds of Black and Hispanic charter school students were proficient or advanced proficient. When compared to their district counterparts, these students outperformed their district school counterparts by 21.4 percentage points (68.4% vs. 47.0%), and 20.2 percentage points (63.7% vs. 43.5%), respectively. In math, the story is same: two-thirds achieved proficiency and they outperformed their district counterparts by 25.7 percentage points (68.7% vs. 43.0%), and 22.6 percentage points (65.7% vs. 43.1%), respectively.





When the assessment results are disaggregated further across all proficiency levels (level 1 through level 4), the charter sector's success in raising student achievement becomes even more pronounced. Thirty percent of Black students in charter schools achieved a level 4 (advanced proficiency) in math; the same rate for Black students in the district was twelve percent. At the other end of the spectrum, only twelve percent of Black students in charter schools were at level 1, a number that is still far too high. However, when compared with the district's level of thirty percent of Black students at level 1, charter school achievement (partial as it is) should be not merely a subject of study, but a model worthy of emulation.

2. The Legislature Should Pass Rental Assistance for All legislation in the 2026-27 Budget

With respect to the students who receive no rental assistance, these students are the most underfunded public school students in New York City. The initial 2014 Facilities Access Law (Education Law Section 2853(3)(e)) provided co-locations or rental assistance to all new charters or charters with expanding grades in the 2014-15 school year and beyond. While this legislation has been instrumental in supporting NYC charter schools, there are approximately 26,000 charter students (attending over 80 school campuses) who are not eligible for such funding. As such, schools that serve these students must divert a significant portion of their per-pupil allocation to rent. The 2017 IBO analysis estimated charter students who do not receive rental assistance or co-located space are underfunded by \$4,863 compared to district students.² Again, there is every reason to believe that gap has increased some nine years later. We are grateful to Senator Luis Spedulva and Assemblymember John Zaccaro for introducing Rental Assistance for all bill (S5797/A85), which would provide partial funding for these students in the 2026-2027 school year and incrementally increase over five years until every student in NYC

² See *With State Formula for Charter School Funding Likely to Change, City Costs to Grow More Than Budgeted*, <https://ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/with-state-formula-for-charter-school-funding-likely-to-change-city-costs-to-grow-more-than-budgeted-march-2017.pdf>.

receives equitable facilities funding. In the first year, this program would only cost the state \$19 million. We urge all legislators to support this legislation.

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When the Legislature first authorized charter schools in December 1998, opponents confidently predicted they would fail. They didn't. They insisted charters were a passing fad that parents would abandon once the novelty wore off. They weren't. They argued charters would never serve a meaningful share of public school students. They do—and to be clear, they would serve even more if not for artificial caps on growth. Then when charter school outcomes first surpassed those of district schools, critics claimed the gap would vanish once charter schools reached scale. The gaps didn't disappear; they widened.

What this points to is that charter school leaders and educators, along with the students and families who rely on them, deserve not only your support and your commitment to get to equitable funding, but your recognition and appreciation. The fact that, in many instances, they still do not receive it is a stark reminder of how often the interests of adults are placed ahead of the needs of students.