

Massachusetts

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The landmark Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 initiated the creation of independently operated public charter schools to provide high-quality public school choice, particularly for educationally disadvantaged families. In the fall of 1995, 15 charter schools opened their doors in Massachusetts. By the fall of 2010, 63 charter schools were operating, 43 of which were located in urban areas, serving primarily low-income and minority students. Because Massachusetts charter schools provide access to high-quality educational opportunities for a proportionately higher percentage of educationally disadvantaged students, it is critical to ensure that the necessary capacity and resources exist to continue to create and implement high-quality schools. In passing the historic legislation of January of 2010 (An Act relative to the Achievement Gap), Massachusetts has demonstrated its national leadership by strategically lifting the cap on charter schools in the lowest-performing districts to provide high-quality educational opportunities for students most in need. Over the next six years, the number of seats made available in Massachusetts's lowest-performing districts will double from 9 to 18 percent.

The Massachusetts Charter School Program Project, 2011-2011, will support the federal Charter School Program goal to increase the national understanding of the charter school model and expand the number of high-quality charter schools available to students across the nation through the following objectives:

1. Increase the number of high-quality charter schools in Massachusetts, especially those serving high needs students who are at greatest risk of not meeting state academic standards;
2. Promote the dissemination of Massachusetts charter school best practices to other public schools;
3. Improve student achievement in Massachusetts charter schools, particularly for students who have historically underachieved.
4. Increase the number of charter high school graduates and college enrollment especially for high needs students (defined as students with disabilities, English learners, and low income students).

The Massachusetts Charter School Program Project will provide planning and implementation funds to charter founding groups and all schools chartered by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education over the next three years, with increased funding available to schools that will:

- be considered a high poverty school (defined as 50% of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch or are from low income families);
- focus on increasing high school graduation and college enrollment rates for high needs students; and
- serve a diverse population.

Successful charter schools may also compete for funds to disseminate the innovative best practices that they have developed. In addition, the project will provide funds to further strengthen the quality of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's oversight of and guidance for all new and currently operating charter schools. All of these activities serve to support the ultimate goal to improve student achievement for all students.