

Raising the

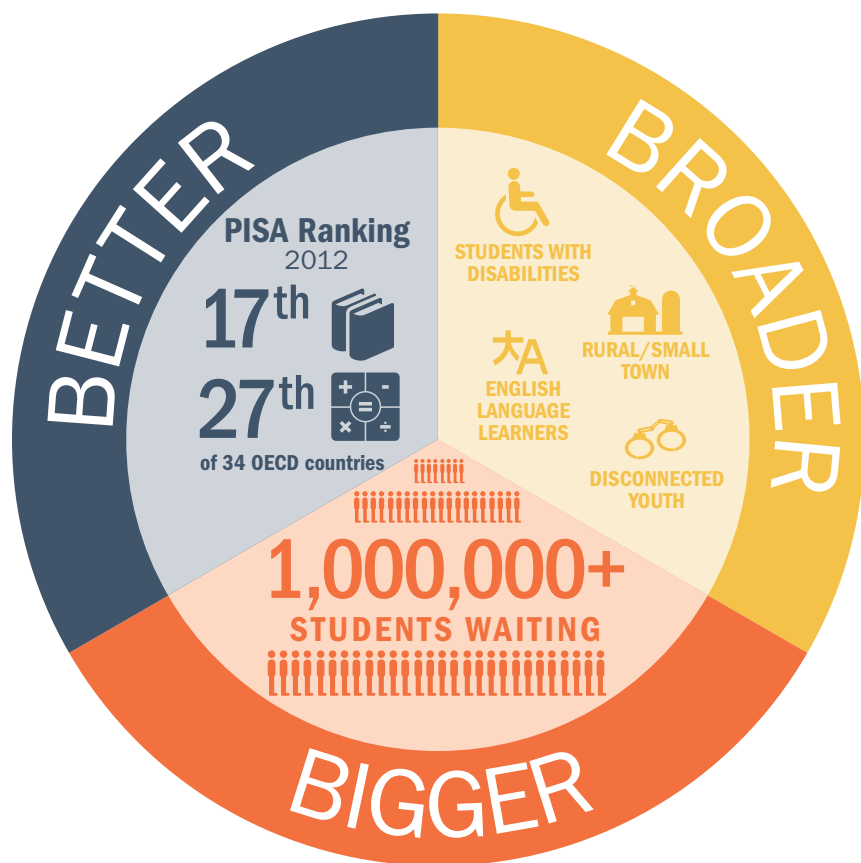
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Why Public Charter
Schools Must Become

EVEN MORE INNOVATIVE

Executive Summary

In their first 24 years, public charter schools have become a significant force for improvement in U.S. public education. Since 1991, the sector has created more than 6,700 new public charter schools serving 2.9 million students in 43 states and Washington, D.C. And charter schools, especially those in urban districts, often produce better outcomes for students.



But to reach its full potential and better prepare more students to thrive, the charter sector must: do a better job of offering quality instruction; broaden its reach to serve more students with disabilities, English language learners (ELLs), and other underserved populations; and expand to educate the 1 million-plus students already on waiting lists, many of them low-income children who especially deserve higher-quality education.

Public charter schools will not meet these challenges by doing more of the same. Instead, the sector needs a new wave of innovation to capitalize on the enormous potential that charter schools have to improve public education substantially for U.S. students. Simply put, the sector needs to be better, broader, and bigger.

THE INNOVATION IMPERATIVE FOR THE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL SECTOR

Better. Urban students are better off today because of charter schools. But to truly prepare more students for the 21st century, the charter sector needs to be not just somewhat better than traditional schools, but *substantially* better.



Broader. The charter school success story is largely about lifting the educational fortunes of low-income, urban young people, most of them children of color. These groups of students still need greater access to high-quality public charter schools. And other significant subgroups of U.S. students, including students in rural areas and small towns, “disconnected” youth, students with disabilities, and ELLs, have not benefited as much from high-quality charter schools...yet. In addition to getting “better,” the sector also needs to become “broader,” meeting the needs of students like these.

Bigger. High-quality public charter schools also need to reach more students. About 1 million students are on charter school waiting lists today, and many more students do not have high-quality school options...yet.

THE INNOVATION CHALLENGE

A better, broader, and bigger public charter sector will require innovations that go well beyond the current basic model. Though some charter schools have rethought how to use time, talent, space, and technology, most resemble traditional district schools. What will it take to tip the scales to innovation?

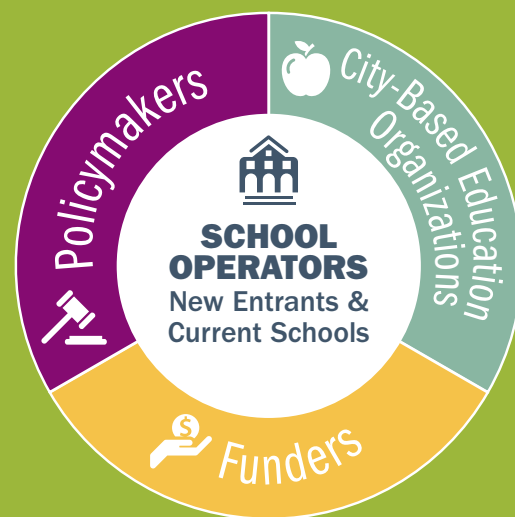
School operators could... explore improved or entirely new models of schooling, particularly those that challenge the traditional school model, to offer more students personalized and authentic learning experiences.

Policymakers could... consider bold policy changes that create a climate for innovation, such as investing public dollars in innovation-seeking entrepreneurs, deliberately authorizing for innovation, and enabling more rapid innovation via “micro-charters.”

City-based education organizations could... incubate break-the-mold models, support small-scale pilots, and attract talented entrepreneurs to develop new educational approaches. These groups also could advocate for policies that support innovation, collaborate to spread fresh ideas among cities, and help build an infrastructure of operational supports that allow charter school operators to focus less on the back office and more on the classroom.

Funders could... invest more in intermediaries that are comfortable with risk, skilled at due diligence, and have the support needed to make smart bets; create innovation divisions within their grant-making operations; and help already successful charter operators create breakthrough models.

KEY ACTORS IN CHARTER SECTOR INNOVATION



Read about how the public charter school sector can innovate more and further improve education for millions of children at www.themindtrust.org/raising-the-bar.



The Mind Trust

Prepared with Public Impact