

PENNSYLVANIA'S CHARTER SCHOOLS: DOING MORE WITH LESS

On average, Pennsylvania students who choose to attend a charter school get nearly

**25%
LESS**

financial support per year than their peers in district schools.

Average amount spent in 2015-16 to educate a student in a charter school was

**LESS THAN
\$13,000**

vs.

Average amount spent in 2015-16 to educate a student in a district school was

**MORE THAN
\$16,400**

On average, charter schools in Pennsylvania produce an

**11%
HIGHER**

return for each tax dollar spent than district schools.

Despite receiving less funding per student, charter schools are providing taxpayers a bigger bang for their buck than their district counterparts.

Did you know, some K-12 students in Pennsylvania receive less funding to support their education than their peers? Students across the Commonwealth are receiving substantially less education funding simply for choosing to attend a public charter school rather than their zoned district school. On average, Pennsylvania students who choose to attend a charter school get nearly 25 percent less financial support per year than their peers in district schools.

For example, in the 2015-16 school year, the average amount spent to educate a student in a charter school was a little less than \$13,000¹ (the average spent per non-special education student was \$10,559 and \$22,290 was spent to educate a special education student). In comparison, the amount spent per student by district schools during this school year was \$16,425².

Despite receiving less funding per student, charter schools are providing taxpayers a bigger bang for their buck than their district counterparts.

So how do we calculate the return on investment taxpayers are getting from charters compared to district schools? By measuring how much money was spent by these schools to reach their current level of productivity and student achievement. For each school district, we calculated two overall School Performance Profile (SPP) average scores: one for public charter schools attended by students from the district; and one for the district schools. We then calculated a school's SPP score per \$1,000 of per-pupil funding. On average, charter schools in Pennsylvania produce an 11 percent higher return for each tax dollar spent than district schools. This means that charters across the state are more cost effective than traditional public schools and produce a greater return on investment for taxpayers.

¹ \$13,000 is a weighted average of the amount spent to educate non-special and special education students.

² Per pupil expenditures are published each year by the PA Department of Education.

→ Over 70,000 students residing in the City of Philadelphia attended a charter schools in 2015-16 school year and the average amount spent per student by Philadelphia charters was \$10,211 (based on a weighted average of the amount spent to educate non-special and special education students). During that same school year, the School District of Philadelphia spent an average of \$13,880 per student. When looking at the productivity and student achievement levels of Philadelphia public schools, we found that charters are producing a 27 percent higher return on investment.

**PHILADELPHIA:
27% HIGHER
ROI**

→ In the 2015-16 school year, there were 4,051 students in the catchment area of Pittsburgh Public Schools who were enrolled in 33 different charter schools. That year, Pittsburgh spent an average of \$23,510 to educate a student, while charter schools only spent an average of \$18,941 per student. Based on student achievement results, charter schools serving students from Pittsburgh produced a 40 percent greater return on investment than the school district.

**PITTSBURGH:
40% HIGHER
ROI**

→ In the 2015-16 school year, the Allentown School District had 16,106 students enrolled in district schools and 3,703 students enrolled in charter schools. Taxpayers received a 17 percent higher return on investment for every \$1,000 spent by charter schools compared to the district.

**ALLENTOWN:
17% HIGHER
ROI**

→ In Central Pennsylvania, the students who chose to attend a charter school in the 2015-16 school year instead of the State College Area School District received \$1,479 less than their district peers. Despite receiving less funding, the charter schools produced a 22 percent better return on investment for every \$1,000 spent compared to the district.

**CENTRAL PA:
22% HIGHER
ROI**

Productivity and student outcomes matter. The bigger bang we get for our bucks, the better for consumers and citizens. Policymakers in Pennsylvania want to invest wisely and, in this case, respecting the thousands of parents who have chosen to enroll their children in charter schools is a sound investment.



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