



Our nation's system of public education becomes a learning organization when fostering opportunities for charter schools and traditional public schools to learn from each other. Optimal learning is bidirectional; however, there are a few areas where charter schools, by their very design, have expertise that can be shared across the public school sector.

Parent and Family Engagement

Family engagement in charter schools runs the gamut from passive, infrequent engagement to a cooperative model of education in which parents and families are fully involved. Some charter school best practices:

- Embrace an “unofficial” community school model by making facility space available for neighborhood food pantries, clothing closets, community health centers, workforce training programs, and parent/family resource centers.
- Promote parents and families as partners in education by offering frequent (weekly, monthly) and meaningful opportunities for engagement with workshops such as “Understanding School Performance Data” and “Effective Home Reading Activities.”
- Conduct home visits before enrollment and annually to develop relationships with families immediately and to better engage students and families in their communities.

School Mission and Branding

As most do not have a predetermined enrollment zone, charter schools must attract, recruit, and retain students to maintain enrollment and reliable levels of revenue. This has created experience in establishing a mission and vision and developing a school's

Charter School Best Practices

brand, including intentionally crafting an identity for the school and aligning the school's name, mission, educational program design, website, and core values.

This readily identifiable “brand” attracts teachers and families to the school from all over the city; canvassing in targeted neighborhoods develops a connection to the community.

Community Partnering

Charters, generally lacking the breadth of resources of a traditional school district, utilize partners to meet the needs of all students. Many establish this community partnership model at inception—when developing the new charter application—as an integral part of the educational program. They also:

- Leverage local university graduate students and faculty to teach electives, assist with data-driven instructional models, curriculum alignment, and social work services for students.
- Schedule music, art, dance, and drama classes during after-school sessions. The charter school partners with professional organizations in the community to teach these classes while dedicating more instructional time during the day to core courses. 

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