Our Work in Public Charter Schools

WHAT WE BELIEVE

The work of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, in the U.S. and around the world, is driven by the belief that all lives have equal value. At home and abroad, we believe that every person should have the chance to live a healthy and productive life. In the United States, we focus on education as the key priority for investment to support mobility from poverty. We envision an education system that expands opportunity for all students – particularly for students in low-income communities and students of color.

Supporting teachers, schools, and communities

We have learned over the years – both from the field and from our own investments – about the challenges of improving student outcomes. We’ve seen that education driven by great teaching and strong school leadership creates opportunities for students. Students are most likely to succeed when schools have both. That is why our next chapter of investments in K-12 education focuses on this intersection. We are working to connect groups of schools that share a focus on data-driven, ongoing learning and to support them in applying approaches that both meet their specific needs and have demonstrated improvement in student achievement. We believe we have a role to play in catalyzing good ideas from educators and helping to scale those approaches, whether that’s innovative ways to teach students algebra or supporting charter schools in their efforts to effectively serve students with special needs. Additionally, we can support the field by funding research and development to learn what’s working and help to drive innovation.

Research continues to demonstrate that high performing public charter schools accelerate achievement for Black, Latino and low-income students in large urban settings. These public charter schools – such as KIPP, Success Academy, Uncommon Schools, and Achievement First – are one important tool that can improve student learning – especially when we work to expand their most successful practices to reach even more students. These schools represent some of the best public schools in our country, and they have more freedom to be flexible and innovative in supporting students. While the vast majority of our investments in K-12 education work to support traditional public schools, we believe that continuing to support student success in high quality, not-for-profit, charter schools is a key element to success moving forward.

WHERE WE’RE GOING

Building on our previous work, the next phase of our investments within the charter sector will work to increase the number of high-quality seats, improve student outcomes and encourage collaboration between traditional public schools and public charter schools. We will focus our work in the charter sector on learning about effective models and approaches to serving students with disabilities, as well as continuing efforts to expand the number of high-quality, not-for-profit, charter schools. Specifically, we will:
Support and catalyze high quality, public charter school growth and improved collaboration among public schools

Research shows high quality charter schools have historically served all students well. According to data from the Center for Research on Education Outcomes, public charter school students gained 40 additional days of learning in math and 28 additional days in reading compared to their peers in traditional public school.

The next phase of our work is focused on an improved ability for states, districts, non-profit charter management organizations, and other non-profit organizations to work collaboratively to enable the creation of scalable, sustainable, high-quality public schools in communities with a high proportion of Black, Latino and low-income students. States, like Texas, have played an important role in facilitating environments conducive to collaboration by removing barriers and providing incentives to districts and charters to engage in this work.

This work builds on previous investments in District-Charter Collaboration Compacts and targeted support for school expansion within high performing public charters. As a foundation, we have supported District-Charter Collaboration Compact work since 2008, investing over $27 million to support compacts in cities including Boston, Denver, Hartford, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, and Houston, Texas. Some of these compacts demonstrated promise for improving practices across sectors. Evidence suggests compacts can be effective when the right level of resources is invested in an area where communities are working together.

Our new efforts build on our learning about what is needed to reduce barriers to successful collaboration between public charter schools and districts.

For more information about our K12 strategy, visit: [http://k12education.gatesfoundation.org/](http://k12education.gatesfoundation.org/)