



Advancing the human and civil rights of people with disabilities

SELF-ADVOCACY ASSISTANCE ★ LEGAL SERVICES ★ DISABILITY RIGHTS EDUCATION ★ PUBLIC POLICY ADVOCACY ★ ABUSE INVESTIGATIONS

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EFE Charter School Findings: Highlights

The Chicago Public Schools Board of Education will soon vote on whether 45 charter schools in Chicago can continue to operate. Reauthorization is essentially the only opportunity for meaningful public oversight of these schools for the next 5 years. These schools must be judged not only by how they serve students overall, but by how they serve the students who most need a quality education including students with disabilities.

As the state's leading disability-rights legal advocacy organization, Equip for Equality (EFE) is calling on CPS to **strengthen the reauthorization** process to better consider students with disabilities. CPS should:

- Analyze all performance, enrollment, and discipline data disaggregated by whether a student has a disability and disability type.
- Review admissions practices to ensure there are no unlawful barriers to enrollment such as requests for improper information prior to the lottery or admissions exams.
- Require charter school applications to include nondiscrimination statements.
- Include in new or reauthorized charter contracts the groundwork for specialized programs to promote the inclusion of students with disabilities.

CPS should also **investigate the troubling new findings** about many of the schools currently up for reauthorization. Highlights of our findings are listed below.

These findings come from a year-long investigation, review of charter school policies, compilation of public data and data secured via FOIA requests, and work on behalf of more than 150 families in over 50 charter schools. We focus on the schools which may be reauthorized soon: 34 in 2015 and 11 in 2016.

To see the complete findings, including school-by-school facts sheets:

Visit: www.equipforequality.org/charterrenewal/

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Equip for Equality, Inc. is an independent not-for-profit organization designated by the Governor to administer the federal protection and advocacy system for children and adults in Illinois with disabilities. EFE's mission is to advance the human and civil rights of people with disabilities and is accomplished through self-advocacy technical assistance and training, legal services, and public policy initiatives. EFE continues to represent students in charter and traditional schools statewide touching more than 1,300 families a year.

Highlights from EFE's Research on Charter Schools

- **Some charter schools still have enrollment rates for students with disabilities as much as 30-50% lower than comparable CPS schools.** The gap is especially large for charter elementary schools, where students with disabilities on average constitute 9.5% of the student enrollment, compared to 12.5% in similar CPS schools.
- **Access is an acute problem for students with significant needs.** Among charter school students with an IEP, just 4% of students receive an intensive level of services, which is 75% less than in non-charter CPS schools, where 15% of students with disabilities receive intensive services. During the 2013-14 school year, students receiving intensive services increased in CPS schools by 2%, but dropped by 21% in charter schools.
- **Charter school expulsions fall harshly on students with disabilities,** even more so than in CPS. In 2013-14, 26.2% of students expelled from charter schools had an IEP, compared to an enrollment rate of about 12%; only 22.5% of students expelled from CPS have an IEP.
- **Charter school high school students are nearly twice as likely to change schools** within CPS over the summer as students at similar CPS schools (9.9% versus 5.3%). This may be related to charter school policies that retain students for low-level behaviors or missing too many days of school (even if students pass all their classes).
- **In many charter schools, the enrollment of students with an IEP drops during the school year at higher rates than for non-disabled peers.** This is especially true for option schools, which grow by 10% on average during the year, but report an average 10.6% drop in students with IEPs. Some specific charter high schools facing reauthorization also have a problem with disproportionate losses of students with IEPs, including EPIC, Urban Prep and Prologue schools.
- **Charter school attrition is particularly high in Kindergarten, 8th grade, and 9th grade,** which are key years for students who are trying to access school options in Chicago. Charter Kindergarten and 8th grade classes shrink at **5x the rate** of similar CPS schools. Attrition is also uniquely high at Urban Prep during the 12th grade year, which has high attrition rates overall, and even higher attrition rates for students with disabilities.
- **Some charter schools have concerning admissions practices that may violate the Illinois charter school law,** including YCCS campuses that require minimum scores on academic admissions tests for admission and other schools that have transfer policies (at Urban Prep and EPIC for example) that screen applications through personal statements, grade, discipline, and test score information, and even recommendations from current administrators.