

**Worcester Regional Research Bureau
Christopher R. Anderson, President
Massachusetts High Technology Council, Inc.
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During the past three decades education policy has been a priority on equal footing with economic policy in the eyes of the hundreds of Mass High Tech CEOs who compete in a global market.

The reason is obvious: in order to run a successful technology business you need a workforce skilled in science, technology, engineering and math talent.

They see first hand the race to the top is increasingly being won by students in classrooms outside of the United States.

It is that reality that places transforming our public education system among the most important issues the Patrick Administration and legislature will address this year.

While Massachusetts is generally doing better in educating our children than the other 49 states, we have within our 351 cities and towns an unacceptable disparity between high performing **schools** and **school districts** and underperforming **schools** and **school districts**.

Recently, Massachusetts students ranked among the top students in the world in an international Math and Science assessment.

This distinction was highlighted during President Obama's call for strong standards and accountability (such as our MCAS system) as well as innovative school models such as charter public schools.

So we CAN compete. The question is; ARE we doing everything we can to compete?

Challenging schools across the nation to improve, the president called on states to "lift caps on the number of allowable charter schools, wherever such caps are in place." Having appointed Chicago's top educator and charter school champion Arne Duncan as his Secretary of Education, the president is challenging members of his party who have largely opposed charters to get on board.

That should be good news for students and parents in Massachusetts. The state's 1993 Education Reform Act launched a limited number of charter schools. But parent, student and teacher access to charter schools is capped by state statute.

The results of a definitive study on the benefits of charter schools conducted by the **Boston Foundation** this year are stunning.

- The estimated effect of a year spent in a Boston charter school is often quite similar to that of a year spent in one of the city's elite exam schools.
- Between fourth and eighth grade, the test scores of charter middle school students rose from slightly above Boston's average to almost equal to the Brookline public schools.
- Regarding middle school math, the effect of a single year spent in a charter school was equivalent to closing half of the black-white achievement gap.
- Performance in English Language Arts also significantly increased for charter middle school students, though less dramatically.
- Charter students also showed stronger performance scores in high school, in English Language Arts, math, writing topic development, and writing composition. Students in pilot high schools also made measurable progress.

This cap is denying parents and students freedom of educational choice. Proven options in high need communities like Boston, Holyoke, Worcester, Fall River, Lawrence and Springfield, are artificially limited and demand is high. Right now there are more than 21,000 children on waiting lists to gain admission to these schools. That alone should drive home the fact that we cannot afford to play politics at the expense of the needs of our children and the interests of the parents who are trying to provide what's best for them.

Innovative charter public schools represent just one element in a list of improvements required to close the achievement gap and create a world-class education system throughout Massachusetts.

In the case of charter schools, however, the demand is there, the results are proven, and the current limit is unjustifiable. We cannot consider ourselves a world-class education system while slamming the door in the faces of thousands of parents and students who seek a proven standard of education.