

# North Carolina Charter Schools: Excellence and Equity through Collaboration

On January 27, 2014, Self-Help and the A.J. Fletcher Foundation convened over 40 North Carolina education leaders to shed light on the challenges and opportunities of an expanding charter school sector, including opportunities for charter and district leaders to work collaboratively. This summarizes the issues and recommendations elevated at the convening and in subsequent discussions among the convening organizations.

## **Emphasize quality over competition.**

- Legislators and education leaders should work together to define what constitutes a “high quality” charter school and establish clear performance standards for charter schools.
- Charter schools that fall short of targets should face clear consequences swiftly.
- School districts should be encouraged to work with charter schools to focus on engaging students whose needs are not being met in their communities. Districts that collaborate with charter schools (e.g., by providing facilities) should be able to “count” charters as their own schools for accountability purposes.
- High-performing charters serving racially and socio-economically diverse student bodies should be documented and encouraged to expand.

## **Find ways to bridge the divide between charters and district schools.**

- The charter and traditional sectors have had far too few opportunities to communicate openly. Leaders from the charter and traditional sector should convene again to continue January’s dialogue and invite additional voices into the conversation, including district superintendents, county commissioners, and teachers.
- State leaders and funders should foster such collaboration by funding and documenting 2-3 pilot charter-district collaborative efforts in different regions of the state.

## **Improve charter authorizing and oversight practices.**

- North Carolina should more closely align with national model charter legislation and authorizing standards. This will require changes in statute, State Board policy, and DPI practice.
- The state should issue an annual request for applications that outlines the state’s vision for charters and then review applications based on criteria related to quality of proposed plan for a school.
- High-quality charter applications that meet documented needs within a community should receive bonus points in the approval process (e.g., for adding seats in an area lacking high-quality seats).

## **Ensure all students fair access to all public school options.**

- Charter schools and their neighboring districts should consider strategies such as a common enrollment application and weighted lotteries to equalize opportunity to attend high-quality schools. A common enrollment application would simplify the process for families and create a clear sense of fairness in school admissions. Weighted lotteries help schools to pursue the goal of diversity by giving students from under-represented groups a leg up in admissions lotteries.
- Districts and charters should identify ways that charters can partner with districts (including facilities and transportation) and districts can benefit from the ability of charter schools to innovate, particularly with challenging student populations.
- Funders should devote resources to creating and expanding charter schools that exhibit both academic quality and socio-economic and racial diversity in their student bodies.

Bold pursuit of these actions can increase equity between charters and traditional district schools, expand collaboration between the charter sector and traditional district schools, reframe the current charter debate, and enhance quality of all public education opportunities for all North Carolina students.

## Acknowledgements

This report was a collaborative effort among Self-Help, the A.J. Fletcher Foundation, and Public Impact.

The full report is available at <http://community.sh/nccharter-report>.

## About Self-Help

Founded in Durham, North Carolina in 1980, Self-Help is a nonprofit community development lender, credit union and real estate developer, with a mission to create and protect ownership and economic opportunity for all, especially people of color, women, rural residents, and low-wealth families and communities nationwide. Self-Help's family of organizations includes the Center for Community Self-Help, Self-Help Credit Union, Self-Help Federal Credit Union, Self-Help Ventures Fund and the Center for Responsible Lending. Together, these entities provide financing, technical support, consumer financial services and advocacy for those left out of the economic mainstream.

Self-Help strengthens underserved communities by providing financing to homebuyers, nonprofits, public charter schools, childcare centers, community health facilities, and residential and commercial real estate projects. The organization also provides responsible financial services through its two credit unions, offering a full range of financial products and services, in addition to financing personal, vehicle, mortgage, and business loans. These credit unions currently provide financial services to more than 113,000 individuals. Together, Self-Help's affiliates have provided \$6.5 billion in financing to more than 81,000 families, individuals and organizations since 1980. To learn more, visit [www.self-help.org](http://www.self-help.org).

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The mission of The A.J. Fletcher Foundation is to support nonprofit organizations that enrich the lives and well-being of people in North Carolina. To achieve this, Fletcher Foundation partners with nonprofit organizations to recognize and solve social and civic problems, providing necessary resources to advance big, bold ideas. To learn more, visit [www.ajf.org](http://www.ajf.org).

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Public Impact's mission is to dramatically improve learning outcomes for all children in the U.S., with a special focus on students who are not served well. We are a team of professionals from many backgrounds, including former teachers. We are researchers, thought leaders, tool-builders, and on-the-ground consultants who work with leading education reformers. For more on Public Impact, please visit [www.publicimpact.com](http://www.publicimpact.com).

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