



# Introduction

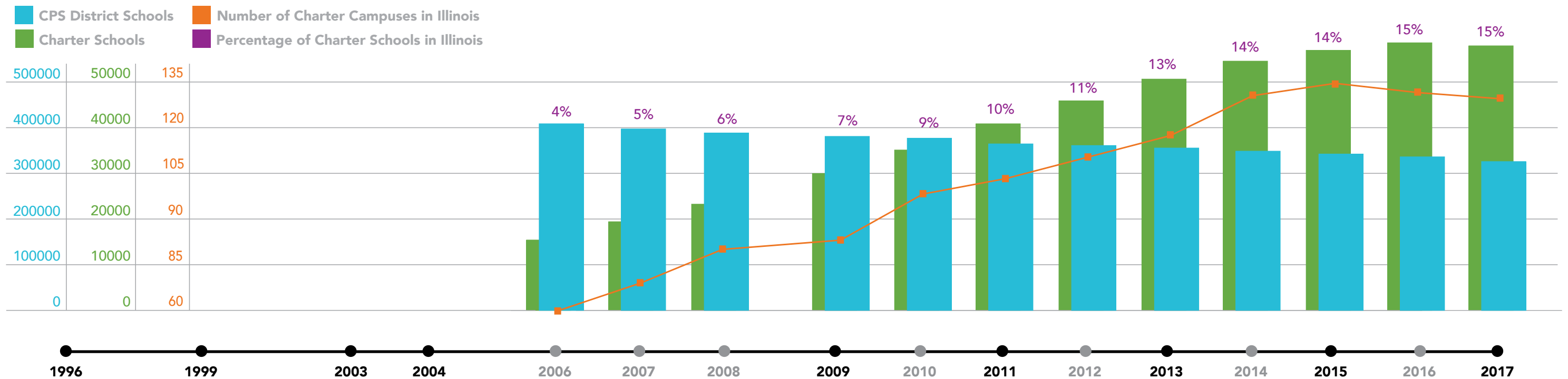
Twenty years ago, the Illinois state legislature passed the Illinois Charter Schools Law in an effort to disrupt the inequity inherent in the traditional district model and ensure that all parents have access to a high-quality school for their children.

Charter schools are unique public schools that are open to all children, do not charge tuition, and do not have special entrance requirements. **In exchange for more autonomy and flexibility, charter public schools were established to fulfill three key promises:**

- 1 Charter public schools will serve students in need of better educational models
- 2 Charter public schools will deliver better student outcomes and be easier to shut down should they fail
- 3 Charter public schools will migrate best practices to district-run schools, thus transforming and improving the way the state delivers public education to all students

Over the last twenty years, the charter school movement has grown rapidly and now serves a record 64,000 families throughout the state. One in four CPS high school students attend a charter school. Moreover, there were 30,000 more applications to charters than seats available in 2016.

After two decades of charter schools, it is time to address a critical question: Has the charter school model lived up to its three key promises in Illinois? Specifically, do charter public schools serve communities in need? Do charter public schools deliver better outcomes and tougher accountability? Do charter public schools share best practices with district-run schools in an effort to transform and improve the way the state delivers public education to all students?



**1996:** Illinois Charter School Law passes, providing a total of 45 charters with 15 charters in Chicago, 15 in the suburbs, and 15 in downstate Illinois.

**1999:** Thomas Jefferson and Prairie Crossing Charter Schools are the first suburban charters to open. They are approved on appeal to the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) after being denied by their local district.

**2003:** INCS opens its doors to serve as a statewide membership advocacy organization for all Illinois public charter schools.

**2003:** In Springfield, the charter law is amended to increase the charter cap to 60. This adds 15 more charters for Chicago (bringing the city's cap to 30 charters) and removes the geographic distinction between the suburbs and downstate Illinois.

**2003:** The ability to replicate is also legislatively limited to the first 15 charters awarded in Chicago. Certification requirements for teachers are instituted: all Chicago charters established before April 16, 2003, must have at least 75% of their teachers certified and all subsequent charters must have 50% of teachers certified.

**2004:** Mayor Richard M. Daley and Chicago Public Schools (CPS) CEO Arne Duncan launch Renaissance 2010, an effort to increase performance and parent options by opening 100 new schools of innovation.

**2009:** In Springfield, the cap on charter schools is raised to 120 (70 for Chicago, 45 outside of Chicago, and 5 replicating dropout recovery charters are instituted). There is a new phase in the certification requirement: in any given year, at least 50% of teachers in a Chicago charter school have to be certified, and 75% must be certified by year four of the school's existence.

**2011:** In Springfield, the Charter School Quality Act is passed, establishing the Illinois State Charter School Commission, which provides an appeals route for charter school developers and operators whose applications are denied or whose charter contracts are revoked or non-renewed, increasing accountability for authorizers.

**2013:** The CPS School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP), the district's new common accountability policy for measuring annual school performance for all schools (charter and district-run) using a five-tiered system, is implemented for the 2013-14 school year. At the end of the school year, each school receives its first School Quality Rating and a 2014-15 Accountability Status.

**2015:** CPS Board of Education approves the new Charter School Quality Policy, which sets performance standards for expansion, replication, renewal, and revocation of charter public schools authorized by the district. The policy sets thresholds based on the average number of points a school or network of schools have earned in the two most recent school years on the accountability rating system. CEO discretion is allowed, given the totality of factors, including the quality of surrounding schools.



# Do Charter Schools Serve Communities in Need?

Charter public schools serve higher rates of students historically underserved by the system

## LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE

The Illinois Charter Law states the primary purpose of charter public schools is to "increase learning opportunities for all pupils, with special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for at-risk pupils," which the law defines as those who "because of physical, emotional, socioeconomic, or cultural factors, is less likely to succeed in a conventional educational environment" (105 ILCS 5/27A-2, 3). In fulfillment of this promise, charter public schools across Illinois serve students most in need of a better choice when it comes to their education.

Charter public schools serve higher rates of students historically underserved by the system, including those living in poverty and African American and Latino students. Contrary to popular misconceptions, charter public schools also serve comparable rates of special education students and English language learners. Charter public schools are located in communities with higher rates of unemployment, single parent families, and households receiving federal food assistance benefits than district-run non-selective schools.

Only half of CPS students currently attend the school to which they were zoned, while many opt out due to the poor performance of their default option. This is particularly true at the high school level, where only 27% of students opt to attend their zoned high school. More than half of enrolled Chicago charter public school students were originally zoned to a failing district-run school, a school with the lowest rating on the CPS School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP).

