



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
October 8, 2015

CONTACT
Elizabeth Guyton
elizabeth.guyton@state.ma.us



Governor Baker Announces Legislation to Improve and Expand Educational Opportunity and Expand Charter Schools

Focus is on Serving State's Lowest Performing Districts & Highest Needs Students

BOSTON – Today, Governor Charlie Baker announced that he will file legislation, "An Act to Improve and Expand Educational Opportunity," adding up to 12 new Commonwealth charter schools and/or expansions annually – outside of the current cap of 120 – focusing the growth in districts that are performing in the bottom 25% of districts statewide.

"Every child in the Commonwealth deserves the opportunity to access high-quality education regardless of their zip code or background, and this bill would help make that a reality," **said Governor Baker**. "This legislation puts mechanisms in place to make sure that charter schools are able to – and do – serve more of the students they aim to educate, including low-income students, English Language Learners, and students with learning disabilities."

"We have some of the best charter schools in the nation, and this legislation would allow more families access to them, while opening up new opportunities for district-charter partnerships on behalf of communities with the greatest educational challenges," **said Secretary of Education James Peysers**. "We look forward to working with the legislature to find a path forward and help the students, families, and communities who need it most."

The Governor's legislation, "An Act to Improve and Expand Educational Opportunity," addresses some key components around charter school approvals and renewals, enrollment, facilities, and funding. Some of those components include:

- ***Expand access to charter schools in the state's lowest-performing districts:*** Allows the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to approve up to 12 new Commonwealth charter schools and/or amendments to increase enrollment annually in districts in the bottom 25% of state-wide performance; these charter schools would not count toward existing caps in current law.
- ***Improve access to charter schools, particularly for high-need students:*** Allow charter schools to use a weighted lottery system that provides additional weight to high-need and low-income students, as well as students within a particular geographic zone.
- ***Enable charters to become part of choice-based district enrollment systems:*** Allow charter schools to enter voluntary agreements with

districts to participate in district student enrollment systems that take into account parental preference, similar to the “common enrollment system” that has been proposed in Boston.

- ***Create new opportunities for charters to partner with districts in turning around their lowest-performing schools:*** More effectively leverage the expertise and demonstrated success of charter school operators to close the achievement gap and turn around failing schools by expanding strategic partnerships between those high-performing operators and underperforming district schools.

A Commonwealth charter school is a tuition-free public school granted a five-year charter by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) and overseen by an independent board of trustees. A Horace Mann charter school is a tuition-free public school operated under a five-year charter approved by the local school committee and granted by BESE. Horace Mann charter schools are operated and managed by a board of trustees independent of the local school committees. All charter renewals are based on meeting performance standards. Massachusetts law first authorized charter schools in 1993, and the first Massachusetts charter schools opened in 1995.

Current Massachusetts law (M.G.L. Chapter 70, Section 89) limits the growth of charter schools to 120, no more than 72 of which can be Commonwealth charter schools, with the remaining 48 reserved for Horace Mann charters. It also establishes financial limits on the enrollment sizes of Commonwealth charter schools. According to a May 2015 [report](#) by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, more than 37,000 students were placed on waiting lists for the 2015-16 school year.

###