PCCY
Public Citizens for Children and Youth

**Philadelphia Right To Education Task Force**

YOUTH UNITED FOR CHANGE

# Philadelphia's Charter Renewal Process
# Challenges and Recommendations

**The SRC is expected to make decisions on charter renewal requests from 16 charter schools serving nearly 12,000 students, or about 20 percent of the City's charter school population and over six percent of the overall school district population.**

- In making this decision, we believe that these students, parents and taxpayers of the city will be best served by a renewal process where decisions are based on clear and objective criteria with priority given to each charter's academic performance.

- Further, we believe that to guarantee that all students and parents have equal access to charter schools, where charter schools are serving students from across the city (i.e. not established to meet the needs of specialized populations or catchment areas) their student bodies should reflect the district's student body and vital services such as free and reduced priced meals, special education and English Language learner supports should be adopted as standard practice in the schools.

- Finally, given the district's gaping budget deficit, we believe that the district's financial position must not be further destabilized by charter expansion; where charter expansion occurs, it should proceed in tandem with enrollment expansion in high performing District schools.
  PCCY conducted a review of available public data associated with each charter seeking renewal.

**Our review found the following:**

**<u>Academic Performance</u>**

The PSSA results of the 16 charters seeking renewal indicate that one charter has academic results that are lower than the district's average results for at least the last two years. (see chart) Although PCCY supports academic evaluation that is more robust than standardized tests scores alone, low test scores are one indicator that the school is unable to offer its students the educational opportunity promised by the charter operator. Moreover, the comparison of charter school performance with the district's academic achievement average is also not an optimal comparison since the majority of the charters seeking renewal do not enroll percentages of low income, English Language Learners, or Special Education students comparable to the district's general admission schools.

**<u>Equity of Access</u>**

While we believe that the academic performance of a charter should be the chief criterion considered for renewal, the SRC has wisely adopted three domains in addition to academics to ensure that each charter's financial health, governance and customer service are considered in its evaluation.

However, in recent years, these domains have not uniformly considered the degree to which the charter school is educating a student body that reflects the district's overall student population. Since most charters operate city-wide, greater attention is needed to ensure that all students have an equal chance to apply, enroll and attend these schools. Some of these charter schools have student bodies that more closely reflect the district's magnet school population, even though, unlike magnet schools, charters are not supposed to be selective in admissions.

A few of the schools up for renewal are models for serving vulnerable student populations with enrollment that reflects the district's student demographics. These schools should be commended for their outreach and absence of application and enrollment barriers. However, most of the charters up for renewal do not enroll special education, English Language Learner and low income students at rates consistent with the school district's averages (see chart).

**PCCY finds that:**

- One charter school has a Special Education enrolled rate that is a third of the district's rate, another has a rate that is nearly half the district's enrollment rate, and five others have special education rates that are significantly less than the district average

- 13 of the charter schools have fewer than 2 percent English Language Learners compared to the district average of 8 percent

- 9 of the charter schools serve fewer low income students than the district average.

**Given these findings we recommend that the SRC:**

1. Establish clear academic performance criteria for charter renewals based on multiple valid measures that gauge if the charter is performing at or above the district's academic performance.

2. Not renew a charter that fails to meet or exceed the district's academic performance based on consistent and multiple valid measures where available.

3. Develop and enforce guidance for charter admissions and enrollment documents and processes to ensure that no inappropriate or unlawful barriers are in place and require that any renewing charter participate in the common application process that is in the planning stage with some charters and the district.

4. Establish equity enrollment targets for all charters. For those that admit students city wide, their student body should reflect the district's demographics. For those that serve a specific catchment area or special population, appropriate equity targets should be in place comparable with similar district schools. Renewing charters should be required to agree to annual incremental improvement targets with respect to equity.

5. Delineate equity targets in the charter agreement with the SRC, with provisions that permit the SRC to terminate the charter if the annual targets are not reached. Further, no enrollment increases should be awarded to a charter unless and until it is in compliance with the equity targets.

6. Require that any renewed charters offer free and reduced priced lunch and breakfast to eligible students.

7. Track student mobility among charter schools and between charter and traditional schools.

8. Publicly adopt standards and criteria for determining where a charter should be renewed so that SRC practice aligns with the Superintendent's Action Plan goal of "becoming a top quality charter authorizer by improving transparency and consistency."

9. Adhere to the adopted standards and criteria so over time current charters and those renewing have a clear understanding of what their schools must do to successfully receive approval for renewal in the future.

10. Protect the district's fiscal condition and permit charter enrollment expansion only if there are unused charter slots or by reassigning those that may become available due to closure and agree to proceed with charter expansion in tandem with enrollment expansion in high quality district schools.

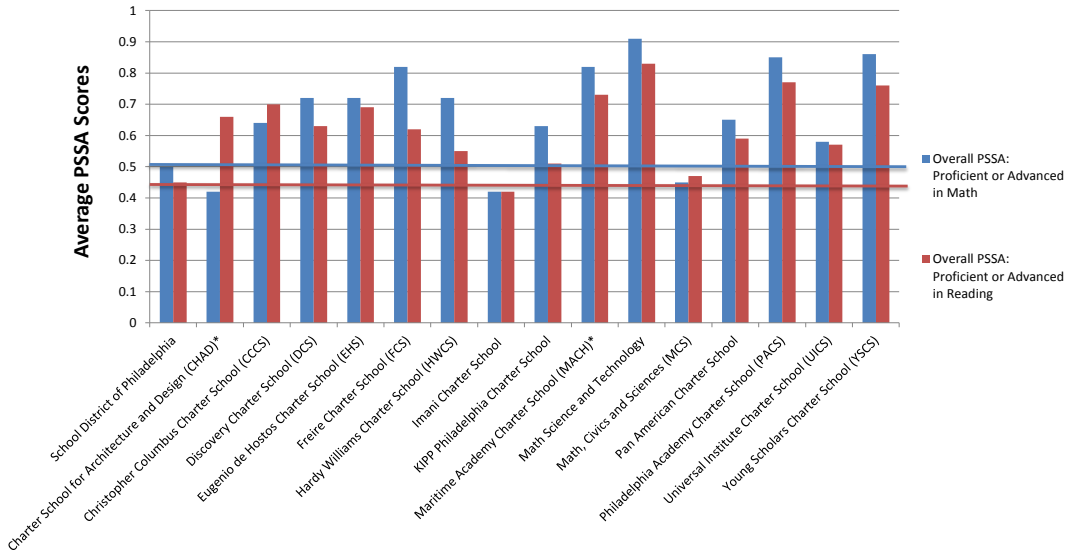
# Renewal Charters: School Profiles

| School | Free and Reduced Lunch Rate | ELL Students | Special Education | Overall PSSA: Proficient or Advanced in Math | Overall PSSA: Proficient or Advanced in Reading |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| School District of Philadelphia | 80% | 8.50% | 14% | 50% | 45% |
| Antonia Pantoja Charter School (APCS) | 91% | 10.0% | 16.1% | 63% | 57% |
| Architecture and Design (CHAD)* | 71% | 1.4% | 13.5% | 42% | 66% |
| Christopher Columbus Charter School (CCCS) | 62% | 0.4% | 11.3% | 64% | 70% |
| Discovery Charter School (DCS) | 64% | 0.0% | 11.8% | 72% | 63% |
| Eugenio de Hostos Charter School (EHS) | 82% | 6.7% | 13.0% | 72% | 69% |
| Freire Charter School (FCS) | 56% | 0.8% | 15.7% | 82% | 62% |
| Hardy Williams Charter School (HWCS) | 76% | 0.4% | 9.4% | 72% | 55% |
| Imani Charter School | 82% | 0.0% | 9.1% | 42% | 42% |
| KIPP Philadelphia Charter School | 87% | 0.6% | 15.0% | 63% | 51% |
| Maritime Academy Charter School (MACH)* | 54% | 0.6% | 10.5% | 82% | 73% |
| Math Science and Technology | 37% | 0.6% | 11.7% | 91% | 83% |
| Math, Civics and Sciences (MCS) | 82% | 0.3% | 4.2% | 45% | 47% |
| Pan American Charter School | 85% | 15.2% | 13.2% | 65% | 59% |
| Philadelphia Academy Charter School (PACS) | 31% | 0.3% | 24.6% | 85% | 77% |
| Universal Institute Charter School (UICS) | 95% | 1.2% | 7.5% | 58% | 57% |
| Young Scholars Charter School (YSCS) | 85% | 1.6% | 11.7% | 86% | 76% |

**Sources:**

SDP Office of Charter Schools: Enrollment/Attrition 2011-2012 , ELL Rate 2011-2012,
Special Education Rate 2011-2012

## Renewal Charters:
## Performance Comparison of Schools Serving Similar Populations

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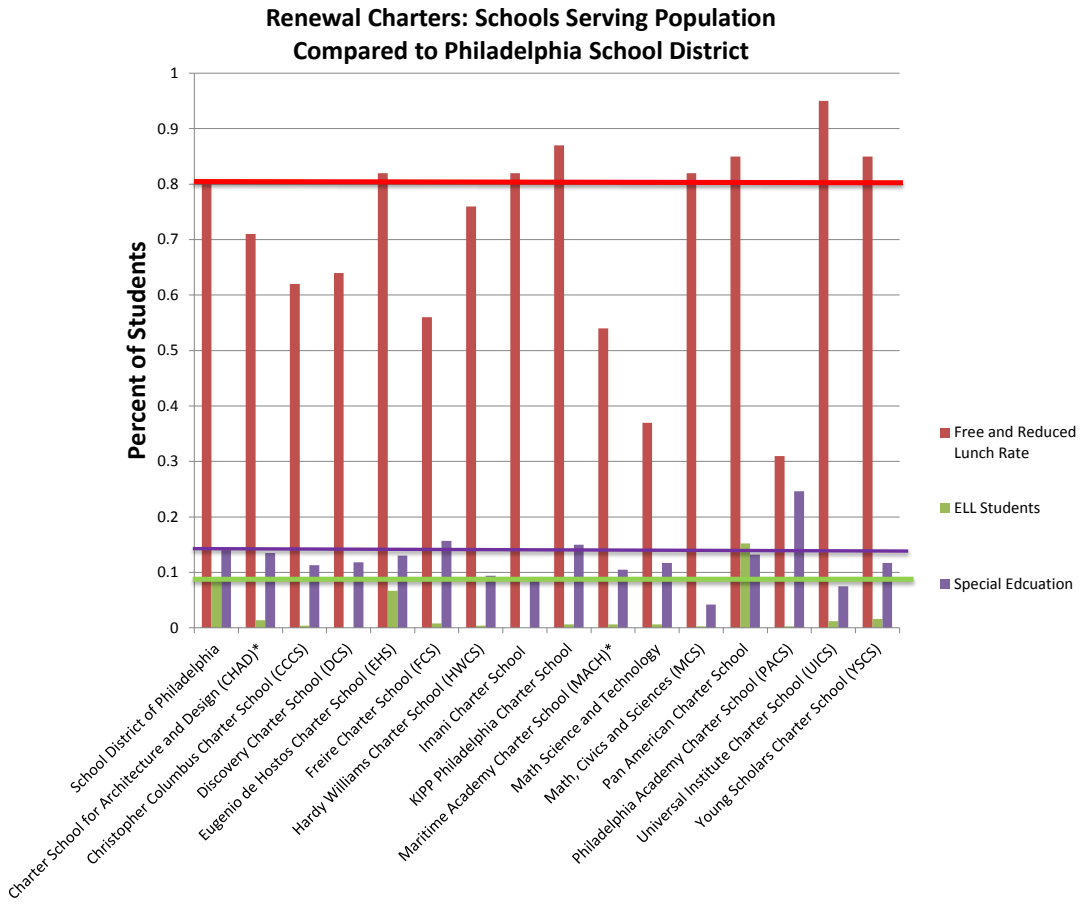


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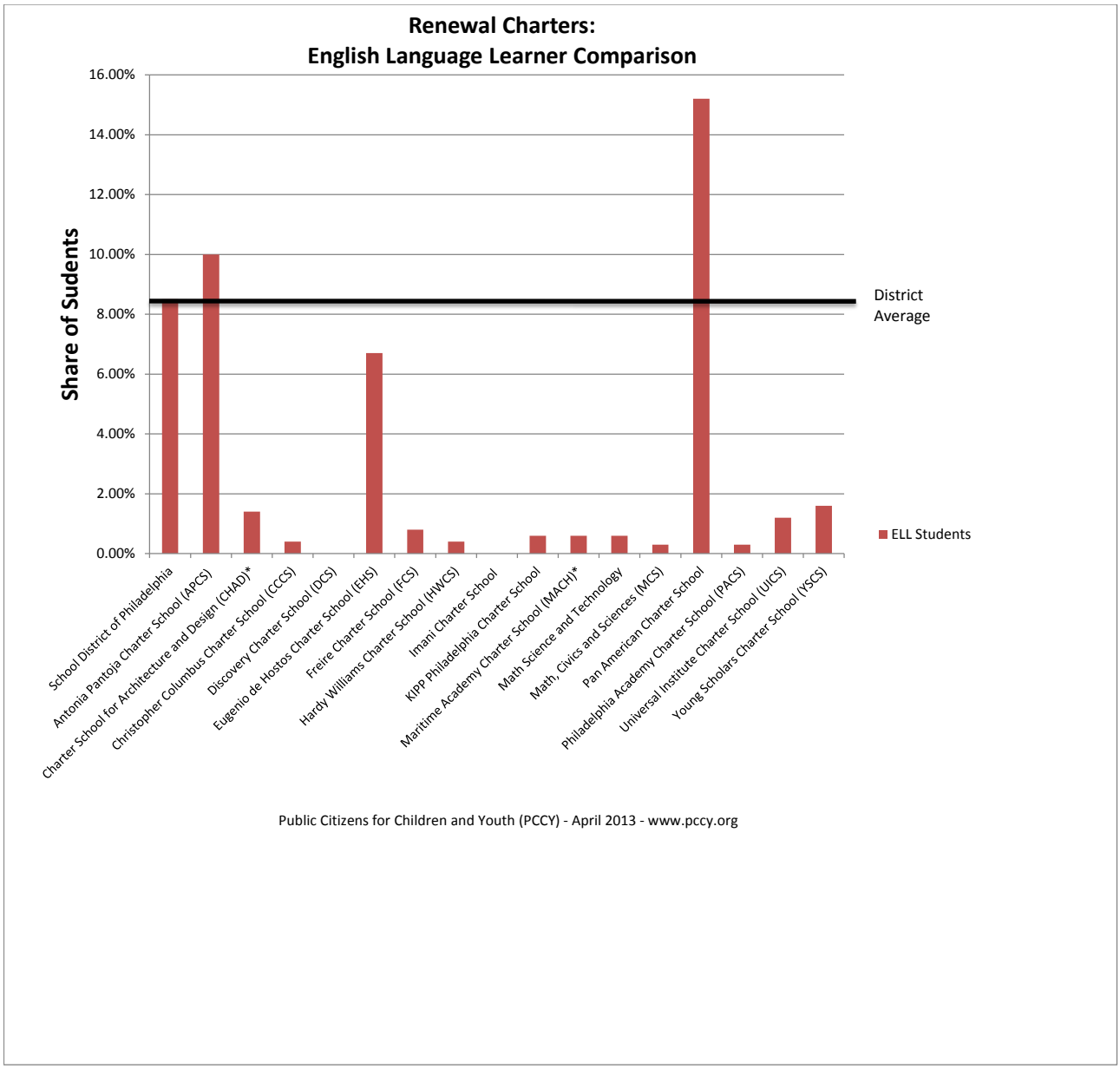


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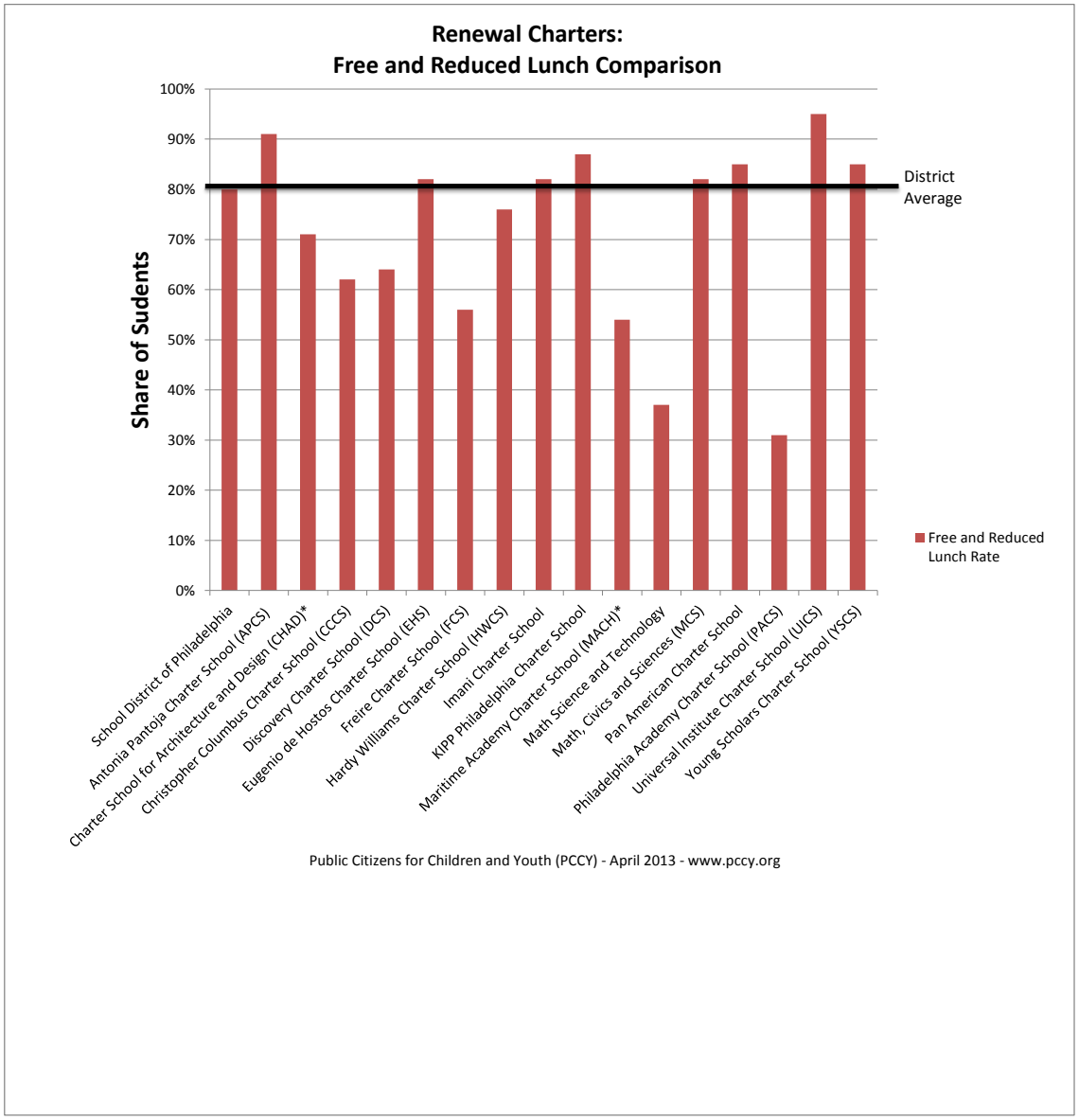
Renewal Charters:
Free and Reduced Lunch Comparison
Share of Sudents
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
District Average
Free and Reduced Lunch Rate
School District of Philadelphia
Antonia Pantoja Charter School (APCS)
Charter School for Architecture and Design (CHAD)*
Christopher Columbus Charter School (CCCS)
Discovery Charter School (DCS)
Eugenio de Hostos Charter School (EHS)
Freire Charter School (FCS)
Hardy Williams Charter School (HWCS)
Imani Charter School
KIPP Philadelphia Charter School
Maritime Academy Charter School (MACH)*
Math Science and Technology
Math, Civics and Sciences (MCS)
Pan American Charter School
Philadelphia Academy Charter School (PACS)
Universal Institute Charter School (UICS)
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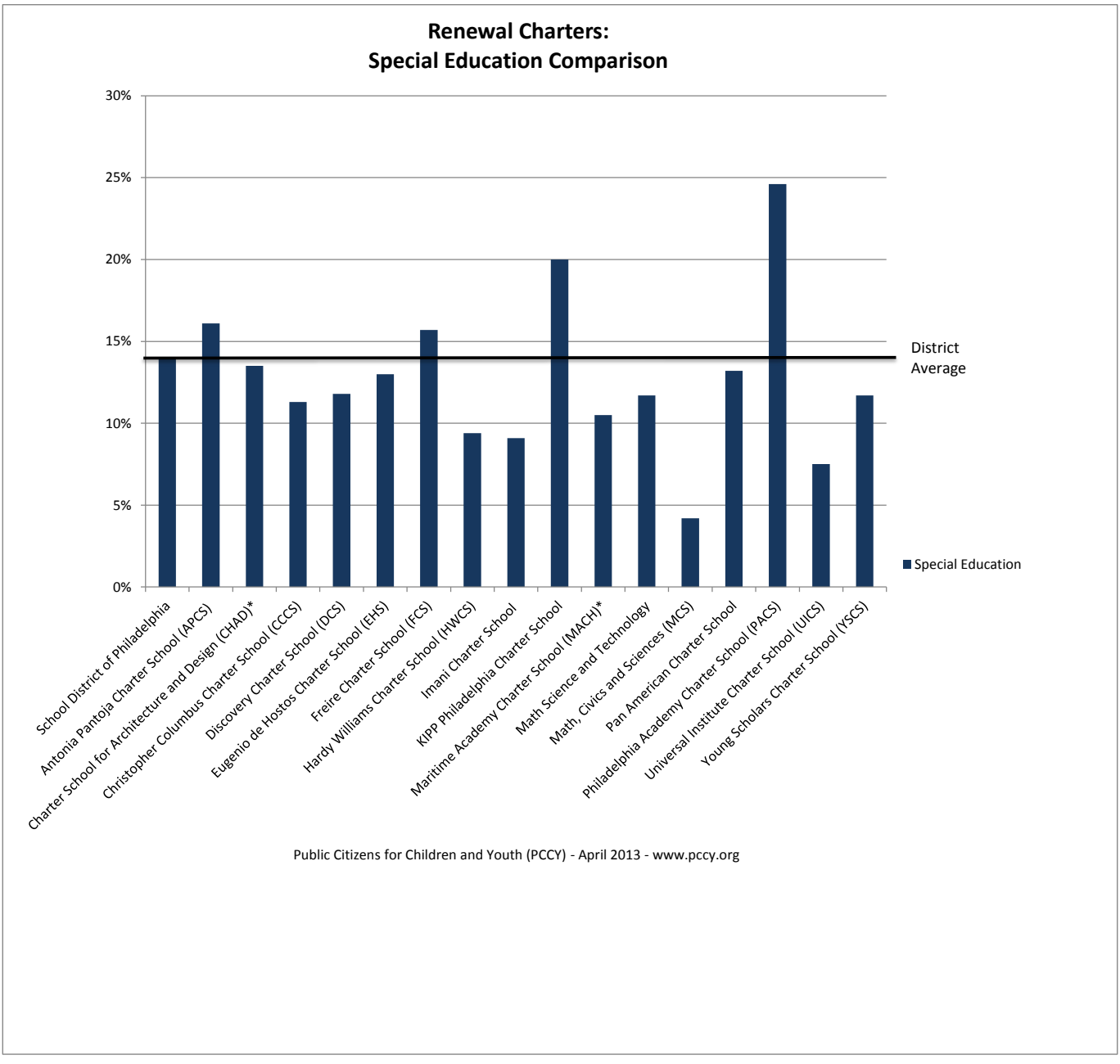


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# Notes on Barriers in Charter School Admissions Policies

Charter schools are public schools and must follow laws that protect the rights of public school students. These schools cannot refuse to admit or consider children because of their disability, level of English language proficiency, academic record, status as immigrants, status as a child in foster care, or as a child experiencing homelessness. Yet many of the policies of the 16 charter schools now seeking renewal contain application and enrollment requirements that are either unlawful or onerous. As a result, these schools do not ensure equal access for all children. What follows is a Public Citizens for Children and Youth and Education Law Center summary of the admission and enrollment requirements of the charter schools seeking renewal. We encourage the District to develop, as part of its accountability framework, protocols for reviewing both the enrollment policies and the practices of each charter school it has authorized, and to condition renewal upon compliance with the law.

## What can charter schools require prior to enrollment?

Four in the Door! Charter schools, like all public schools, can only require four things as a *condition of enrollment*:

1. Proof of residency.
2. Proof of required immunizations.
3. Proof of age.
4. A signed "Act 26" statement.[1]

As reflected in guidance issued by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, multiple forms of proof are acceptable to show age and residency. A birth certificate is an acceptable form of proof, but it cannot be required as the only form of proof of a child's age.

A charter school can stop enrolling students when it is "full" — as determined by its charter. A charter school is permitted to give enrollment preference to the siblings of current students and to the students of parents who "actively participated in the development of the charter school." A charter school is not permitted to discriminate on any basis that is illegal for a traditional public school, including on the basis of race, religion, and language, country of origin, disability, gender, or measures of achievement or aptitude. All public schools, charter and traditional, are prohibited from requesting that parents provide social security numbers and schools cannot inquire into the immigration status of a student.

In addition, all public schools are entitled to receive the educational records of incoming students. However, schools must request those records from the previous school and are not permitted to require incoming student to provide these records — report cards, PSSA scores, IEPs, etc. — as a condition of enrollment.

[1] An "Act 26" statement is used to inform a new school whether or not an incoming student has been previously, or is currently, under suspension or expulsion for an act involving weapons, drugs or alcohol, or an act of violence. However, schools are not permitted to discipline a student or deny the student enrollment on the basis of behavior that occurred prior to enrollment. See *Hoke v. Elizabethtown*, 833 A.2d 304, 314 (Pa.Cmwlth., 2003).

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| For more on enrollment see the Basic Education Circular from PDE, available at http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/purdon%27s_statutes/7503/enrollment_of_students/507350. | |
| **Antonia Pantoja Charter School (APCS)** | **Significant barriers.** The pre-lottery application requests the student's social security number and numerous parent and student short answer questions. The application is available online only in English. http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/c/charter_schools/schools/antonia-pantoja-charter-school. According to the 2010-2011 Annual Report to PDE, http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/annual_reports_and_enrollment_data/7357 students must apply for re-enrollment every year and failing to do so will result in being dropped from the roles. If students attempt to reenroll they are placed at the end of the wait list. |
| **Charter School for Architecture and Design (CHAD)** | **Significant barriers.** The pre-lottery application requires a student's most recent report card, birth certificate, two short-answer questions, submission of original student art work, and a letter of recommendation from a school counselor rating a range of issues from "effort and drive" to "to self confidence." The application is available in a number of languages through an automated Google translator. http://www.chadphila.org/admission.html.<br><br>After winning the lottery, the applicant and "one parent or legal guardian must attend [an] on-site visit to complete registration paperwork in order to be considered for admission." |
| **Christopher Columbus Charter School (CCCS)** | **Significant barriers.** The pre-lottery application requires a student's most recent report card, social security card, and a birth certificate. The application is available online, but only in English. http://www.cccs.k12.pa.us/. |
| **Discovery Charter School (DCS)** | **Minimal Barriers.** The pre-lottery application requires the last four digits of the student's social security number. The application is available on-line in English and Spanish. http://discoverycharterschool.com/apply/ |
| **Eugenio de Hostos Charter School (EHS)** | **Significant barriers.** The pre-lottery application contains no barriers and is available online in both English and Spanish. http://www.emhcharter.org/lottery.html. However, according to the EHS annual report to PDE (available at http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/annual_reports_and_enrollment_data/7357), EHC reports that students who win the lottery are "sent out a packet of applications and are mandated to attend an orientation." The application requires birthplace, U.S. citizenship, race/ethnicity, Social Security number, and whether the child has IEP. An official copy of the student's birth certificate and Social Security card is required at time of registration. A Photo ID of the parent or guardian containing their current name and address is also required at the time of registration. Academic transcripts and all other records from schools previously attended must be submitted. Upon admission a "complete Physical Examination conducted by a Primary Health-Care Provider will be necessary along with a copy of the child's Medical History. Copies of Dental Records and Dental Exams are required for students entering kindergarten and 3rd grade and ALL Special Education students." It is not clear whether students are denied enrollment if they do not provide these records. In addition, each student must re-enroll every Spring but only if they "qualify for re-enrollment each year. Students who have 3 or more suspensions, must attend an discipline hearing with the Board of Trustees to determine re-enrollment status." |

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| **Freire Charter School (FCS)** | **Significant barriers.** Pre-lottery application has two essay questions marked "optional**.**" Freire requires incoming students to submit academic records from their previous school. Application available online in English and Spanish. http://freirecharterschool.org/.<br><br>As recently as last school year, Freire's policy required parents of all students with disabilities to provide copies of their IEP. Freire also required all incoming students to have a 75% average in classes from their previous school. Students with lower than a 75% were required to take summer school as a condition of enrollment. These requirements appear to have been removed from this year's application. |
| **Hardy Williams Charter School (HWCS)** | **Significant barriers.** Prior to the lottery, the application requires PSSA and Terra Nova scores, most recent report card, social security card, birth certificate, and special education records. However policies also state that "test scores if available but will not halt process" and "Other secondary documentation may be used if no Social Security number exists." Following the lottery, students must also answer two essay questions. Parents and students must sign a contract agreeing to drug testing if student "exhibits behavioral symptoms indicating such abuse." Students and parents must also sign a "Non-Violence Contract" and a "Whatever It Takes Contract" as conditions of enrollment. The application is available online, but only in English.<br>http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/uploads/bd/92/bd92XUux7yUi83o1OkOayg/Mastery-Charter-Schools-12.13.pdf and<br>http://www.masterycharter.org/uploads/HardyWilliams_Academy/Enrollment%20Packet%202012%20HWACS.PDF |
| **Imani Charter School** | **Minimal barriers –** The application link on the school's website is not functional. Open Enrollment closed for the 2013-2014 school year. Currently enrolled students must re-enroll each year. It is not clear whether application is available in languages other than English. http://www.imanicharter.org/.<br><br>According to their annual report to PDE<br>http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/annual_reports_and_enrollment_data/7357<br>Imani requests copies of IEPs, but only after students are enrolled in the school. |
| **KIPP Philadelphia Charter School** | **No barriers**. The application is available in English and Spanish. See http://kippphilacs.org/enroll-at-kpcs.html. |
| **Maritime Academy Charter School (MACS)** | **Significant Barriers.** The application is not available on the school website. Applicants must call the school's main office. The website does say that the "Review Committee" conducts interviews of parents and students and that "students who are serious about learning and have a deep interest in math, science, technology are invited to apply." Appears that application is only available in English. See http://www.maritimecharter.org/enrollment.html.<br><br>According to MACS's annual report to PDE (available at http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/annual_reports_and_enrollment_data/7357/2011_charter_school_annual_reports/1199915), parents are asked to sign a contract in which they pledge to participate in the school as volunteers and as members of the Parents Association. Copies of child's latest report card, last year's standardized test scores, copy of birth certificate, and physical exam information from the student's doctor, as well as "transfer papers" from the current school are all required. |

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| **Math Science and Technology** | **Unknown**. The application was not reviewed because applications are only available from October 1 - February 1. PCCY visited the school to request an application and were handed a blue slip with a URL to an application. School confirmed that there were no paper applications available. Applications are only available online and appear to be available only in English. http://mastccs.org/about-us/admissions/. |
| **Math, Civics & Sciences (MCS)** | **Unknown.** There is no application information on the school's website. http://www.mcscs.org/. There is very little information regarding the enrollment policy in the annual report to PDE, other than stating that incoming first graders must submit a birth certificate as proof of age. |
| **Pan American Charter School (PACS)** | **Significant barriers.** The "intake" form, which is apparently the pre-lottery application, requests that parents provide the student's social security number as well as extensive information regarding income level, welfare status, parental income level and educational attainment. Students are required to reenroll by December of every year to maintain their spot at PACS for the following school year, or else be dropped from enrollment. The application is available online in English and Spanish. http://panamericanacademy.org/event/parent-information-session-for-new-applicants/<br><br>During the time of this review PACS changed their enrollment policy. As recently as March 2013, the enrollment application was not available on the schools website. In addition, parent attendance was required for admission. (See http://panamericanacademy.org/event/pan-american-adds-additional-information-session/) |
| **Philadelphia Academy Charter School (PACS)** | **Significant barriers.** The initial application is considered conditional and not complete until parents submit the student's birth certificate, as well as the following: child's most recent report card, IEP (If applicable), 504 plan (if applicable), physical and dental exam, request for student records, evidence of enrollment, free and reduced lunch application, and signed code of conduct agreement. In addition, the failure of parents to permit testing of incoming 9th graders results in children being removed from the accepted list and placed on the waiting list Applications are available in English and Spanish. (see http://www.pacsweb.org/admissions/) |
| **Universal Institute Charter School (UICS)** | **Significant barriers.** The school requires completion of a 20 page "enrollment" packet, with no delineation between pre/post-lottery. The packet requires copies of a student's previous year's final report card, most recent Terra Nova or PSSA Test scores, IEPs, latest physical exam, birth certificate, and Social Security card. Packet also requires parent/legal guardian to provide photo identification, to sign a release for information from previous schools, and to sign a release for school to receive student's complete private medical records, past, present and future. Application only available in English. http://www.universalcompanies.org/fckfiles/PDF/Universal_Family_of_Schools_Enrollment_Packet.pdf. |
| **Young Scholars Charter School (YSCS)** | **No barriers to the initial application to enter the lottery.** After the lottery YSCS requires submission of more than 20 pages of "enrollment materials" before the first day of school. Most of these materials are appropriate to *request* of incoming students, but it is unclear whether students will be denied enrollment if these materials are not completed. In addition, the school requires a release for previous school records. Application available in English and Spanish. https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1ZTtHIHaC9L6BnRAW_QvKjmIc4lpD7yZ0G9j24UIHxuE/viewform. |