NEIGHBORHOODS PRIMED FOR CHARTER SCHOOL GROWTH: Four Communities in the Bronx and Queens Are in Need of High Quality School Options
NEIGHBORHOODS PRIMED FOR CHARTER SCHOOL GROWTH

Even as the New York City Department of Education has committed resources toward turning around failing schools, sharing best practices to improve achievement across all schools, and testing innovative approaches – Renewal, Showcase, and PROSE schools, respectively – the fact of the matter is that this long-term approach is unproven and, at best, takes time. Meanwhile, far too many NYC students continue to languish in underperforming schools as our public policies play catch-up to meet their immediate needs.

One proven and successful education reform strategy that will immediately provide high quality public school options is opening new charter schools. A national study of 41 urban school districts found that on average, charter school students outperform their traditional district peers, and exhibit larger annual growth in both math and reading.1 Given the critical needs of many NYC students, particularly those in underserved communities, the Charter Center analyzed district school performance, charter demand, and Census data that identified four neighborhoods in the Bronx and Queens that would particularly benefit from the immediate growth of high quality charter schools.

PARENTS DEMAND HIGH QUALITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The consistently high demand for public charter schools is a testament to the need for more high quality public school options.

Student enrollment in NYC’s public charter schools tripled – from 30,000 to 95,000 – between 2010 and 2016. The sector is larger than the school districts of Baltimore, Denver, San Francisco, Boston, and the District of Columbia.1

Even as charter enrollment continues to grow, parent demand remains strong: Between the 2012-13 and 2017-18 application cycles, the number of applications submitted to charter schools more than doubled from 133,000 to 290,000. With just 25,200 available seats in the 2017-18 application cycle, nearly 48,000 students were left on waitlists without an available charter seat.3

2 Id.
3 2017-18 Enrollment Lottery Estimates.
CHARTER ELEMENTARY & MIDDLE SCHOOLS IN NEW YORK CITY

Distric ELA Proficiency Exceeds City Average
- No
- Yes

Distric Math Proficiency Exceeds City Average
- No
- Yes

Elementary & Middle Schools
Charters Have Proven to be Effective

New York City has one of the country’s top performing charter school sectors. A study by the NYC Independent Budget Office found that NYC charter schools outperform all other public schools in the state in both English Language Arts (ELA) and math when controlling for demographic differences. On the most recent grades 3-8 Common Core assessments, NYC charter school students outperformed their district peers overall; most notably, performance among charter students of color was particularly strong relative to their district counterparts: African-American and Hispanic charter students were at least twice as likely to be proficient in math than their district peers.

The NYC charter school sector has blazed a careful path of expansion that reflects its commitment to quality over unfettered growth. And, although the sector has doubled over the last four years in order to fill the void left by years of district school underperformance, tens of thousands of students remain on charter waitlists; the Charter Center estimates that nearly 48,000 students are currently on waitlists for the 2017-18 school year.

In neighborhoods that have seen the most growth in terms of the number of charter school options available, parent demand remains the highest: Schools in East and Central Harlem, and the South Bronx receive applications from thousands of families, and can only offer seats to a fraction of these students. In East Harlem, for example, there were 5,100 unique applicants for just 1,200 available seats. This is hardly surprising since charter schools in these communities outperform their district peers, in many cases by significant margins. The table below shows charter and district performance on the Grades 3-8 Common Core assessments. Even as charter school enrollment in these districts continued to grow (at least doubling between 2009-10 and 2015-16), charters consistently outperformed and outgained their district counterparts.

Noteably, district school performance in these communities also increased. While we cannot say for certain whether these improvements result from the presence of charters nearby, there is research to suggest that charter schools may have positive effects for neighboring traditional district schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL DISTRICT</th>
<th>ELA 2013</th>
<th>ELA 2014</th>
<th>ELA 2015</th>
<th>ELA 2016</th>
<th>4-YEAR CHANGE</th>
<th>MATH 2013</th>
<th>MATH 2014</th>
<th>MATH 2015</th>
<th>MATH 2016</th>
<th>4-YEAR CHANGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSD 4 – East Harlem</td>
<td>Charter 33.60% 38.10% 38.90% 44.60% +11.0</td>
<td>42.70% 54.80% 54.70% 54.40% +11.7</td>
<td>District 20.40% 22.20% 23.60% 31.80% +11.4</td>
<td>20.70% 26.30% 26.40% 27.80% +7.1</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSD 5 – Harlem</td>
<td>Charter 22.90% 27.60% 29.80% 44.90% +22.0</td>
<td>34.10% 47.20% 52.00% 58.40% +24.3</td>
<td>District 13.50% 15.40% 16.30% 21.50% +8.0</td>
<td>13.20% 14.90% 15.20% 16.70% +3.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSD 7 – South Bronx</td>
<td>Charter 26.20% 27.40% 27.90% 44.20% +18.0</td>
<td>38.20% 48.10% 42.70% 48.80% +10.6</td>
<td>District 9.10% 9.20% 11.00% 19.10% +10.0</td>
<td>9.50% 12.60% 14.00% 15.60% +6.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2 New York City Independent Budget Office, New York State Student Achievement Test Results: New York City Public Schools No Longer Lag Rest of the State, February 2016.
3 In math, Black and Hispanic charter school students outperformed district peers 48.8% vs. 20.0% (+28.8 points), and 46.9% vs. 24.4% (+22.6 points), respectively. Similarly, in ELA, Black and Hispanic charter school students outperformed district peers by +16.4 points (43.0% vs. 26.6%), and +13.1 points (40.3% vs. 27.3%), respectively.
5 Id.
6 Charter School Enrollment & Trends.
Four Neighborhood Clusters are Primed for Charter Growth

Given the potential benefits for both charter and district school students, and the overwhelming demand in large swaths of New York City, the Charter Center sought to identify neighborhoods and communities where there are particularly strong opportunities for charter school expansion. These communities share three critical characteristics: (1) district school performance lags behind both citywide and borough averages; (2) charter school demand from families in these communities is high; and (3) current charter school enrollment makes up a small fraction of total public school enrollment. Our analysis yielded four neighborhood clusters in two boroughs that are especially primed for charter school growth. These include:

The Bronx: Northeast Bronx and Central Bronx Clusters

Queens: Jackson Heights and Jamaica Clusters

These communities are hardly homogenous. The neighborhoods in the Central Bronx cluster, for instance, profile similarly to the current demographics of the NYC charter school sector with large proportions of residents of color (84.9 percent of the population identify as Black or Hispanic), and higher than average poverty rates (34.7 percent of families live below the poverty level). On the other hand, the neighborhood cluster that includes Jackson Heights and Corona in Central Queens reflects more closely the diversity of the city as a whole (52.5 percent Black or Hispanic, 19.4 percent of Asian descent, and 17.9 percent of families living below the poverty line). Nonetheless, the data suggest opportunities for growth in each of these communities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLUSTER/NEIGHBORHOOD</th>
<th># of Charter Schools</th>
<th>Charter School Enrollment (% of total public school enrollment)</th>
<th># Children Age 9 and under</th>
<th># Charter School Applications11</th>
<th>District School ELA Proficiency</th>
<th>District School Math Proficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New York City Overall</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>84,633 (11.3%)</td>
<td>1,050,296</td>
<td>126,333</td>
<td>38.0%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bronx</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>19,516 (11.7%)</td>
<td>201,533</td>
<td>84,930</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast Bronx Cluster</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>573 (3.9%)</td>
<td>21,947</td>
<td>12,731</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Bronx Cluster</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>716 (1.8%)</td>
<td>47,626</td>
<td>17,800</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queens</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6,784 (3.3%)</td>
<td>291,035</td>
<td>15,116</td>
<td>43.7%</td>
<td>43.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson Heights Cluster</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>949 (3.2%)</td>
<td>31,479</td>
<td>3,023</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica Cluster</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2,107 (8.2%)</td>
<td>41,630</td>
<td>3,774</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8 For more detail, see the Data and Methodology section.
11 Only those applications submitted through the 2017-18 Common Online Charter School Application are included.
CHARTER ELEMENTARY & MIDDLE SCHOOL DEMAND IN NEW YORK CITY

District ELA Proficiency Exceeds City Average
- No
- Yes

District Math Proficiency Exceeds City Average
- No
- Yes

Number of Elementary & Middle School Applications
- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-30
- 31-50
- More than 50 (max=118)
For many years, families in the Bronx have been among the strongest proponents of the choices that charter schools are providing. More than half the applications submitted through the Common Online Charter School Application were submitted by families in the Bronx. This overwhelming demand is not unjustified: in 2016, charter school students in the South Bronx—which includes community school districts 7, 8, and 9—were more than twice as likely to be proficient in both ELA and math than their district counterparts (43.7 percent vs. 21.9 percent in ELA and 46.9 percent vs. 19.0 percent in math).

Our analysis of neighborhoods in the Bronx highlights that there are two overlooked areas in the borough where additional charter schools can begin to meet some of the excess demand: in Northeast and Central Bronx. Families in the Northeast Bronx cluster appear to be clamoring for high quality school options as evidenced by the fact that nearly 13,000 applications were submitted from these neighborhoods alone. Despite this clear demand, there were just 410 charter seats available in these communities for the 2017-18 school year.12

Despite the lack of high quality options in their immediate neighborhoods, families continue to seek charter school seats, and appear to be willing to travel across the city as reflected in their application choices. Though many sections of these communities are isolated with limited public transportation options, nearly 25 percent of applications from families living in these communities were submitted to charter schools in the other four boroughs. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that families are willing to endure potentially long commutes in search of quality: of the 62 district schools in the Northeast Bronx communities, just seven tested at the average citywide ELA proficiency level, and only six tested at the average citywide math proficiency level.13

Similarly, the data show potential growth opportunities in a cluster of neighborhoods in the Central Bronx: for the 2017-18 school year, nearly 18,000 applications originated from this cluster. Fortunately, for many families, particularly those who live along the southern border of this cluster, charter school options are available in neighboring communities.14 Nevertheless, many families are left with few high quality options in their immediate communities: just one out of 24 district schools tested at the average citywide ELA proficiency level (just 22.6 percent of students were proficient), and three tested at the average citywide math proficiency level (18.7 percent of students were proficient).

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12 This encompasses all available charter seats in CSD 12, the district in which these neighborhoods reside. New York City Charter Schools: 2017-18 Enrollment Lottery Estimates and Common Online Charter School Application.
13 NYC Charter School Center analysis of 2015-16 Grades 3-8 Common Core assessments [NYSED].
14 There were approximately 1,800 charter seats available in CSDs 9 and 10, the districts in which these neighborhoods reside. New York City Charter Schools: 2017-18 Enrollment Lottery Estimates and Common Online Charter School Application.
QUEENS

The landscape in Queens presents a particularly interesting opportunity for potential charter school operators. Outside of Staten Island, Queens has the fewest number of charter schools, though the student-age population is the second highest among the five boroughs. Several factors may explain this phenomenon, including limited facilities and the fact that district schools in Queens are, on average, outperforming city averages. This should not obscure the fact that many Queens families continue to pursue charter school options throughout the city. Two areas in particular show the potential for growth, the neighborhoods surrounding Jamaica and Jackson Heights.

Covering a large area of land in the southeast corner of Queens, the Jamaica neighborhood cluster includes nine communities with a large student age population; the most recent Census counted over 41,000 children ages nine and under. While recent years have seen the opening of several new charter schools in the area to add to those that have been operating for many years, district performance in these neighborhoods highlights the continuing need for high quality options. District performance on the state assessment lagged far behind that of the city and the borough in both ELA and math: 30.7 percent and 23.3 percent of students were proficient, respectively. It is no surprise, then, that a quarter of charter school applications in the borough (3,800 of the 15,000) were submitted by families in these communities.15 Additionally, many families are also choosing to submit applications to charter schools in neighboring communities in Brooklyn.

APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED TO CHARTER SCHOOLS
BY FAMILIES IN JAMAICA CLUSTER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARTER SCHOOL LOCATION</th>
<th># of Applications</th>
<th>% of Total Applications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Queens</td>
<td>2,300</td>
<td>60.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooklyn</td>
<td>967</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manhattan</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bronx</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staten Island</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>3,744</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second Queens cluster encompasses the communities surrounding and including Jackson Heights. The second Queens cluster encompasses the communities surrounding and including Jackson Heights. While there are a few charter schools in these communities, the dearth of quality district schools has led many families to apply for charters outside of their community school districts. Over 20 percent (700 of 3,000) of the applications submitted by families in this cluster were submitted to charter schools in Brooklyn and Manhattan. In Corona, for example, district performance lags behind city averages by over ten percentage points (see table below), and a high quality charter school could provide a viable choice for families looking for a good neighborhood school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEIGHBORHOOD</th>
<th>2015-16 District ELA Proficiency</th>
<th>2015-16 District Math Proficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New York City Overall</td>
<td>38.0%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corona</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Corona</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15 Id.
A Call to Action for Charter Leaders & Starters

The neighborhoods profiled in this report represent particularly good opportunities for new and existing NYC charter school leaders looking to provide choices for families in need of high quality options. We urge school leaders and educators to further explore and gauge parent and community demand outside the traditional epicenters of charter growth, because the data suggest that opportunities for growth exist in previously untapped communities clamoring for high quality public education.

Elected Officials Must Take Action

In order to encourage and sustain growth, however, it is critically important that potential school leaders work in a policy environment that prioritizes long-term sustainability. We urge our state and city policymakers to leverage all policy solutions, including but not limited to the following recommendations:

STATE POLICIES

- **Remove the Cap on Charters**: Eliminate the arbitrary cap on the number of high quality charter schools that can open in New York City. Only 30 new charters are available for authorization in NYC, and, at the current pace of authorizing, there will be few, if any, charters left by the end of 2018 – this could stall the pipeline for future school leaders. The process of opening a charter school can take up to two years as school leaders garner comm-

### DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The Charter Center collected data from the New York State Education Department, including results from the 2015-16 grades 3-8 Common Core assessments; the 2017-18 Common Online Charter School Application (“Common Online App”), which is administered by the NYC Charter School Center through a third-party vendor; geography and neighborhood boundaries from the NYC Department of Planning; and demographics from the 2010 U.S. Census published by the NYC Department of Planning. Further, the analysis includes applications for charter seats in the elementary and middle school grades only, and corresponding data on schools and demographics are shown for those serving students in the elementary and middle grades and for children ages nine and under, respectively.

Using this data, the Charter Center identified community clusters that have a combination of high parent demand, a dearth of high quality district school options, the absence of charter options, and relatively large student age populations. As a baseline, the neighborhood clusters must have met the following objective thresholds for each of these components to be flagged as a charter school growth neighborhood:

- District school performance in these neighborhoods falls below both citywide and borough averages.
- Our measure of parent demand – the number of charter school applications submitted through the Common Online App platform – originating from families in these neighborhoods represents roughly 15 percent of all applications submitted in the borough.
- Charter school enrollment in these neighborhoods is currently no more than 10 percent of all public school enrollment, roughly the citywide average.
- The proportion of children ages nine and under as reflected by the 2010 Census is at least 10 percent of the borough total.

Additionally, the Charter Center created maps using ArcGIS as a way to visualize these geographic areas and the data corresponding to these communities. The neighborhood boundaries used in this report correspond to those defined by the NYC Department of Planning, specifically to its Neighborhood Tabulation Areas. The borough maps provide a high level, birds-eye view of the student age population, the number of charter applications for the 2017-18 school year, and the location of charter schools throughout the city. The neighborhood “Focus” map highlights just those communities that our analysis has identified as presenting opportunities for growth, and overlay additional layers of data on district school performance. Readers should use this “Focus” map to spatially locate each of the communities discussed in the paper in the context of its home borough.


2 For more information, please visit the website of the NYC Department of Planning: [http://www1.nyc.gov/site/planning/data-maps/nyc-population.page](http://www1.nyc.gov/site/planning/data-maps/nyc-population.page).
munity support, recruit academic and operational partners, prepare a lengthy and thorough application, and secure facilities, among the myriad of other tasks. As the number of available charters continues to dwindle, many leaders may be more cautious about embarking on the lengthy application process without the assurance that a charter is ultimately available.

• **Provide Start-up Facilities Funding:** Provide start-up capital funding for all new schools accessing private facilities. The combination of fewer public facilities and a challenging commercial real estate market makes facilities access one of the most pressing issues for new charter schools. Most new schools struggle to find appropriate private facilities, and many must retrofit such facilities to ensure safe and suitable spaces for students. With little public funding available during the start-up phase, school leaders are forced to aggressively court private philanthropy to mitigate these additional costs. Providing start-up funding, e.g., a state-funded grant program, would provide new schools with the assurance that they can seek adequate facilities without having to sacrifice time that should be dedicated to academic planning and programs.

**CITY POLICIES**

• **Increase Capacity and Plan for Charter Growth:** Increase the availability of public space for new and expanding charter schools, and plan for charter sector growth. As the charter sector continues to grow to meet increasing demand, the New York City Department of Education should account for projected growth in its capital plan. As families continue to seek public education options outside the traditional district sector, future capital planning should factor in these shifts in enrollment patterns, and any increase in capacity should reflect the increase in projected enrollment in both district and charter schools.

• **Close Continually or Persistently Struggling District Schools and Consolidate Under-Enrolled District Schools:** The NYC DOE’s announcement this year to close or merge nine schools in its Renewal Program is an important development as the district evaluates its school improvement strategies. Holding schools accountable for failing to meet expectations is one of the bedrock principles on which chartering is founded. The NYC DOE should continue to identify academically struggling schools, and take an aggressive approach toward accountability. Closures and mergers can free up underutilized facilities for other high quality schools, including charters.

This analysis identifies just a few of the communities that would particularly benefit from the expansion of high quality charter schools. As we reported earlier this year in the report, *New York City Charter Schools: 2017-18 Enrollment Lottery Estimates*, demand for charter school seats remains strong, and even in neighborhoods where charter enrollment represents a large proportion of all public school enrollment, parents continue to seek open charter seats (e.g., in Central and East Harlem, there were over 14,000 applicants for 3,100 seats). Our collective goal should be to ensure that all families have access to a high quality neighborhood school.

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17 Id.