Myths vs. Facts on DOE’s Vanguard Policy

Currently, the DOE contracts with a third-party vendor called Vanguard, which handles agency mass mailings of all kinds. Since students are not zoned for charter schools, for nearly 12 years, the DOE has allowed them to utilize Vanguard’s services to send information to prospective parents in their neighborhood. Mailing to parents via Vanguard is the single best and most efficient way for parents to find out about the public charter school choices in their neighborhood.

**MYTH:** Charter schools gain access to confidential information including student names, addresses, and data.

**FACT:** Charters NEVER have access to any student information from Vanguard. Charter schools are only able to request mailings be sent to children of a certain age and in certain zip codes.

**MYTH:** Allowing charters access to Vanguard costs the DOE money and drains public resources.

**FACT:** There are no costs to the DOE; charter schools must pay all expenses associated with their mailings.

**MYTH:** Utilizing Vanguard allows charter schools to mail information only to select high-performing students, cherry-pick the students to whom they’re mailing, and avoid recruiting multi-language learners or students with disabilities.

**FACT:** Even the DOE has said unequivocally it gives only student names, grade levels, and addresses to Vanguard and that it forbids the company to share the data with anyone else. The fact is that allowing charters to utilize Vanguard’s services actually prevents any cherry-picking, since charters may only request mailings be directed to certain age groups and zip codes.

**MYTH:** Mailings are only done by larger charter networks and the only impact this decision will have is on operators of multiple schools.

**FACT:** Public charter schools of all kinds use this service - that includes independent schools, replications, and network-affiliated schools. Vanguard’s services are the single most efficient way for parents to know about all of the public school in their neighborhoods, and as such, they’re used by charter schools of all sizes and types.

**MYTH:** This service is only available to charter schools.

**FACT:** The DOE utilizes Vanguard’s services to mail parents information about everything from PreK to school choice options. Also, any district school can opt to utilize this service if it needs to attract students.

**MYTH:** Reversing the policy levels the playing field between district and charter schools in attracting students.

**FACT:** District schools have students zoned to their schools – and charter schools do not. Therefore, charter schools need to notify parents of their options, including application deadlines, which they do through this service. Ultimately, parents are hurt by this potential change in policy, because it is – by design – aimed at limiting the amount of information they have to make a decision.

**MYTH:** Charter schools will have an easy time filling slots despite this proposed policy change.

**FACT:** This policy reversal is an existential threat. Even though charter schools outperform district schools on state exams, this does not mean families know about their options. Furthermore, new charter schools will have to overcome incredible hurdles to introduce families to their school. Charter middle schools that start in 5th grade – unlike the district model which starts in 6th grade – would not be able to let the entire community know about their school model.

**MYTH:** Vanguard services to charter schools expose the DOE to liability.

**FACT:** This policy has been in place for at least a decade. There has never been a breach of data, and no charter schools have ever gained access to any student data. The DOE would also continue to have a contract with Vanguard. It is unequivocally legal. Any claim that charter schools using Vanguard exposes the DOE to liability is a myth.