

[**Chieppo: Dems fail kids on charter schools**](http://www.bostonherald.com/opinion/op_ed/2016/08/chieppo_dems_fail_kids_on_charter_schools)

[**Charles Chieppo**](http://www.bostonherald.com/users/charles_chieppo) Sunday, August 21, 2016

It’s as though Massachusetts native and former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg had a crystal ball last month when he addressed the Democratic National Convention.

“Too many Republicans wrongly blame immigrants for our problems, and stand in the way of action on climate change and gun violence,” said the former Democrat and former Republican, who is now an Independent. “Meanwhile, many Democrats wrongly blame the private sector for our problems, and they stand in the way of education reform and deficit reduction.”

As if on cue, the Massachusetts Democratic State Committee responded by adopting a harshly critical resolution opposing a November ballot initiative to increase the number of charter public schools in the state.

It’s awfully hard to come up with any data to defend the move. A Stanford University center that studies national charter school performance found that Boston charters are closing the achievement gap between poor and more affluent students more successfully than any other group of public schools in the country. The study comes on the heels of countless others from researchers at Harvard, MIT and Duke over nearly a decade that reached similar conclusions.

On 2014 MCAS tests 18 charter schools — many of them urban — finished first in all of Massachusetts, which has the best-performing K-12 public schools in the country. It should come as no surprise that over 32,000 students are on charter school wait lists, a fact that Gov. Charlie Baker has rightly called “a disgrace.”

The facts have left charter opponents grasping at straws. Some claim charters create the illusion of success by drilling students to do well on state tests. But an MIT study published earlier this year finds that Boston charter school students have significantly higher SAT scores and are more likely to take Advanced Placement tests and attend four-year colleges than are their counterparts who entered the lotteries that determine admission to charter schools, but were not selected.

Another critics’ favorite is that charter schools somehow plot to educate fewer special education students and English language learners. But a second 2016 MIT study by researcher Elizabeth Setren concludes that charter schools’ English learners and special ed students score better on MCAS, are more likely to meet high school graduation requirements and earn state merit scholarships than their peers who applied but weren’t lucky enough to be chosen in charter lotteries.

Opponents’ real issues are the fact that charter school teachers are not required to be union members and, of course, money. When a student chooses to leave for a charter school, so *eventually* does the per-pupil funding associated with him or her.

Neither New Orleans nor Washington, D.C., the U.S. cities with the largest percentages of charter school students, reimburse the school district when students choose to leave. Massachusetts, on the other hand, has the nation’s most generous reimbursement, giving districts more than two years of funding even after a student has departed.

Republicans have their own set of problems this year, having nominated a veritable carnival barker as their presidential candidate. Let’s hope that sad fact doesn’t allow Democrats to succeed in their opposition to education reform when the charter school expansion ballot initiative comes before state voters in November.

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