

Waiting Lists to Attend Charter Schools Top 1 Million Names

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By Nora Kern and Wentana Gebru | May 2014

More than a Number

Charter schools across the country are changing the course of their students' lives by making college and career success a reality for thousands of children, including large numbers of low-income and minority students. Take Jose Serrano, a class of 2014 graduate from Noble Street College Prep in Chicago. The son of a single mother in a low-income household, Jose was recently accepted by Stanford University on a full-ride scholarship to study astrophysics. His achievement is what the Noble Street charter school is all about—overcoming the odds to ensure their students succeed.

Jose is one of the lucky ones. Each school year, hundreds of thousands of families faced with traditional public schools unable to meet their needs seek better options for their children by applying to public charter schools. Particularly in communities that have few high-quality public school options, the demand for charters can be significantly higher than the number of seats available. When this happens, charter schools hold randomized lotteries to determine which students will be able to attend. Every year far too many students are left without a seat in the school of their choice. No student's fate should be decided by a lottery ball.

Why Waitlist Numbers Matter

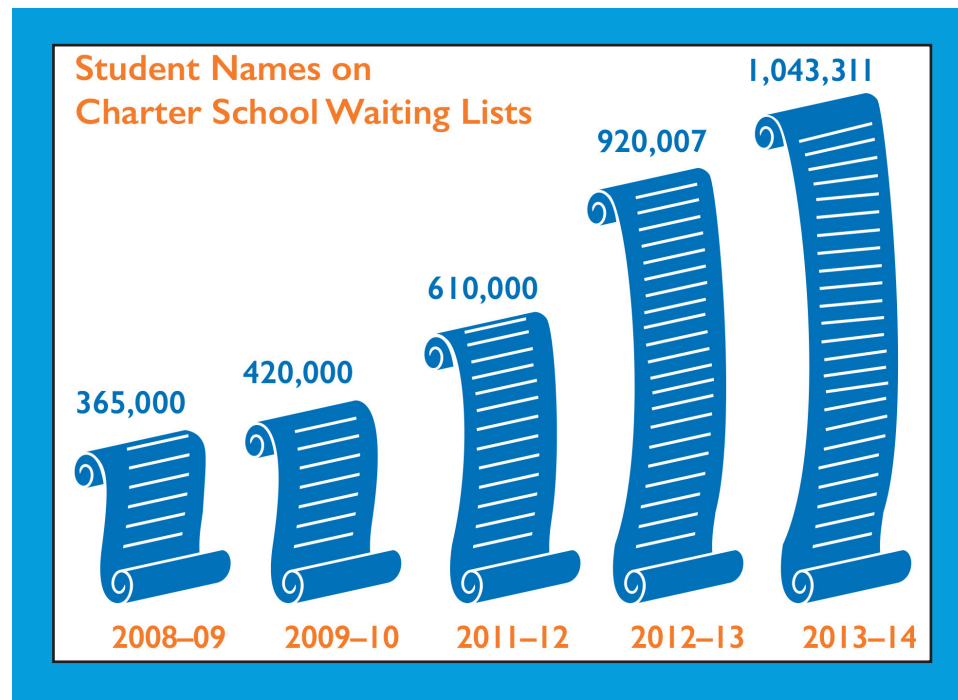
Each year the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools collects waitlist data to demonstrate the need to increase support for new and expanding public charter schools, and to change policies that limit charter school growth.



The National Alliance defines a charter school waiting list as the total number of applications a school receives, minus the number of available seats before the first day of school in the fall. In the 2013-14 school year, there were an estimated **1,043,311 student names** on charter school waitlists nationwide.

Starting with the 2012-13 school year, the National Alliance also began reporting an estimate of the number of individual students on waitlists to take into account the potential that families may apply to more than one charter school. For the 2013-14 school year, the National Alliance estimates **586,511 individual students** were hoping to attend a public charter school but were unable to enroll because more students applied than there were seats available. Although estimates, the waiting list figures provide evidence of growing parental demand for public charter schools.

The graph below shows the change in the national estimates of student names on waiting lists to attend public charter schools from when the National Alliance began collecting the data in the 2008-09 school year through the current 2013-14 school year. Since 2008-09, the number of students on charter school waiting lists has grown by a staggering 186 percent.





Data Sources

To calculate this year's national waitlist figures, the National Alliance gathered waitlist data from three sources. When possible, the National Alliance used data collected by state departments of education and state charter school support organizations. In addition, the National Alliance administered a survey to all public charter schools in states that do not collect waitlist data. In total, 1,032¹ out of 6,440 public charter schools (16.0 percent) reported through the three data sources whether their school had a waiting list before the 2013-14 school year. For the data sources that provided student-level data (Departments of Education, CSOs, and school survey respondents), 80.3 percent² of charter schools indicated having a waitlist at the start of the 2013-14 school year.

Number of Student Names on Waiting Lists as Reported by State Charter Support Organizations or Departments of Education

State/School District	Estimated Number of Student Names on Waiting Lists, 2013-14
California	164,519 ³
District of Columbia	22,130
Massachusetts	53,492
Maryland	11,719
New York	171,204
New York City	163,000 ⁴
Oregon	12,400
Rhode Island	9,654
Texas	105,690

¹ For states that provided statewide estimates without school-level data, the National Alliance assumed all charter schools responded to state waitlist surveys.

² This percentage uses only school-level data.

³ The California Charter Schools Association also estimates an unduplicated waitlist number of 91,292 individual students.

⁴ The New York City Charter School Center also estimates an unduplicated waitlist number of 50,400 individual students.