



Families
for
Excellent
Schools



THE
***PATH TO
POSSIBLE***

[#PathToPossible](#)



THE PATH TO POSSIBLE:

INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For the first time in New York City history, charter schools will serve more than 100,000 students. This makes the charter sector the 29th largest school district in the U.S., larger than the entire districts of Washington D.C, Baltimore, Boston and San Francisco, among others.

The vast majority of the charter sector's growth is in the city's eight worst-performing school districts. District 5 in Central Harlem; Districts 7, 9, and 12 in the Bronx; District 16 in Bedford-Stuyvesant; District 19 in southeast Brooklyn; District 23 in Brownsville; and District 32 in Bushwick.¹ 186,000 children attend school in these communities, 90 percent of whom are low-income children of color.² We call this constellation of schools, neighborhoods, and children the "Forgotten Fourth."

In these neighborhoods, **public charter schools** are the only viable path to possibility and opportunity for high-need children. **Public charter school students in these eight districts improved by 19 percentage points on math and ELA exams in 2016** – 10 points more than the city as a whole and more than three times the improvement of their district school peers.³ Public charter school students in these districts were **146 percent more likely to read and do math at grade level than if they attended their local district schools.**

In the three lowest-performing of these districts, charters delivered their most profound impact of all. In Central Harlem, Brownsville, and Bedford-Stuyvesant, **nearly 90 percent of the growth in students passing state exams came from charters - even though charters enrolled just 35 percent of test takers.**⁴

¹ District proficiencies in reading and math were retrieved from DOE's district-level [data files](#) and then averaged to identify the lowest performing quartile of NYC's 32 geographic school districts in 2016.

² Demographic data used in this analysis was retrieved from DOE's Demographic Snapshot [data file](#) for the 2015-16 school year.

³ Charter school achievement data was retrieved from DOE's Charter School Math and ELA [data file](#).

⁴ Between 2013 and 2016, the number of students passing reading and math assessments in these districts rose from 1,848 to 3,398 – a gain of 1,550 students scoring at grade level. Charter schools accounted for 1,347 (87 percent) of these students scoring at grade level for the first time despite enrolling just 35 percent of the students tested during this period.

Finally, charter performance in the Forgotten Fourth fuels perhaps the most impressive outcome of all: charters were the most impactful engine of citywide growth on 2016 state assessments.

Despite serving just nine percent of test-takers, 29 percent of the city's overall growth in students passing state exams since 2013 has come from charter schools, meaning a sector enrolling less than 10 percent of the city's children is responsible for nearly one-third of its overall improvement.

City Hall has a moral imperative to **double the city's charter sector to 200,000 children** to end education inequality.

Doubling to 200,000 children would eliminate the achievement gap in the city's poorest neighborhoods and chart a path to possibility for its highest-need learners. It would mean that children living in the city's poorest districts could read and do math at rates higher than the city's overall average, **eliminating a decades-old chasm in academic performance.**

Doubling to 200,000 children would provide communities trapped in cycles of poverty, communities that have borne the brunt of the city's failing schools crisis, with a pathway to educational opportunity and boundless possibility. **It is time for City Hall to put aside the politics of obstructionism and discrimination and support public charter schools. Only then will the Path to Possible be open to every child in New York City.**

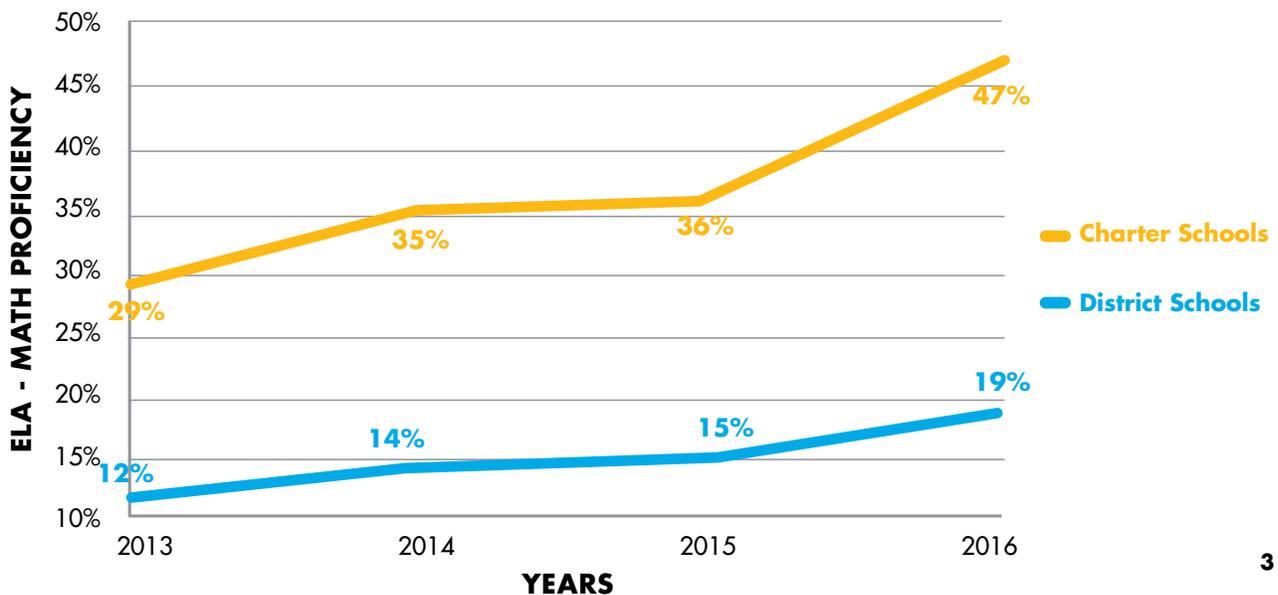
THE SOLUTION TO EDUCATION INEQUALITY: CHARTER PERFORMANCE IN THE FORGOTTEN FOURTH

The bottom quarter of New York City school districts have been mired in failure for generations. However, test score data from the past three years clearly demonstrates there is a solution to this crisis: public charter schools.

Collectively, the city's "Forgotten Fourth" school districts serve 186,000 of the most at-risk children in the city. 95 percent of these children are Black or Hispanic, and 89 percent are low-income. These are the children and communities that Mayor de Blasio spoke of when he called for ending New York's Tale of Two Cities. Without public charter schools, children in these communities would be almost universally forced into failed district schools. They include District 5 in Central Harlem; Districts 7, 9, and 12 in the Bronx; District 16 in Bedford-Stuyvesant; District 19 in southeast Brooklyn; District 23 in Brownsville; and District 32 in Bushwick.

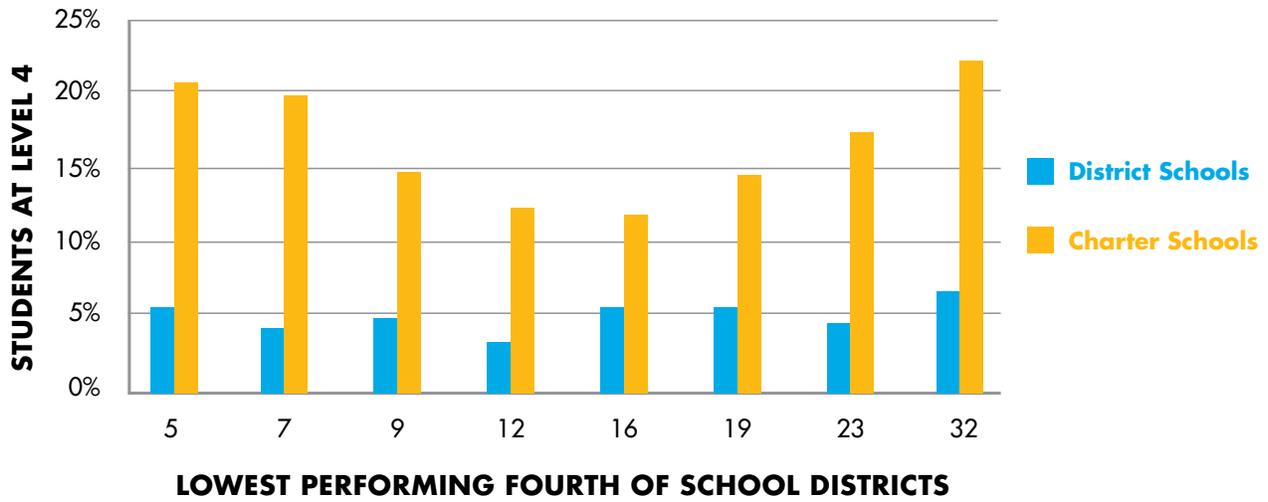
Since students began taking Common Core-aligned tests in 2013, **public charter school students in these neighborhoods have improved by 19 percentage points in reading and math** — 10 points more than the city as a whole and more than three times the gains of their district school peers. Despite enrolling just one-fifth of the students who took the state tests in these communities, charter schools accounted for a full 61 percent of the growth in students passing the exam. **By attending public charter schools, students in these districts were 146 percent more likely to read or do math at grade level than if they attended their local district schools.**

Students Scoring at Grade Level in Forgotten Fourth Districts



Public charter schools have also had a transformative impact on the number of students scoring at Level 4 — the highest achievement level on state exams. Charter school students **are three times as likely to score at Level 4.**

Students Scoring at Level 4 in Math & Reading



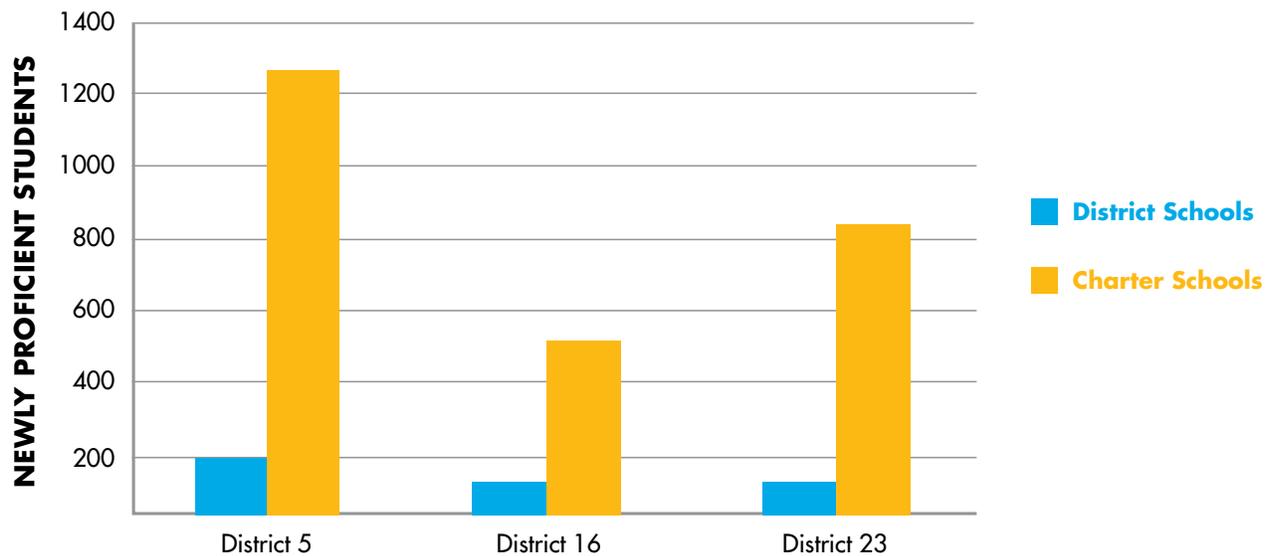
These dramatic gains for children in charter schools in the lowest performing districts have had an outsized impact on the city as a whole. **Despite serving just nine percent of test-takers, 29 percent of the overall, citywide growth in students passing state exams has come from charter schools, meaning a sector enrolling less than 10 percent of the city’s children is responsible for nearly one-third of its overall improvement.**

CLOSE-UP:

THE DISTRICTS MOST IMPACTED BY CHARTERS

Charters have delivered their most profound impact exactly where it is most urgently needed: in the city's most disadvantaged neighborhoods and districts. In three of the districts in the bottom quarter of the city — covering Central Harlem, Brownsville, and Bedford-Stuyvesant -- **nearly 90 percent of the growth in students passing state exams came from charters, even though charters enrolled just 35 percent of test takers. Put another way: charter school students are the only students making any meaningful gains in these districts.**

Growth in Students Passing State Exams: 2013 - 2016



DISTRICT 5

CENTRAL HARLEM

In Central Harlem's District 5, a district where the unemployment rate is almost double the borough average, over 90 percent of district school students are Black and Hispanic and 82 percent are from low-income families. Almost 79 percent of district school students failed the ELA exam, and over 83 percent of district students failed the math exam.

But since 2013, the number of children passing state exams in District 5 has almost doubled, going from 845 to 1,589. **87 percent of the growth in District 5 has come from charter schools**, where 97 percent of students are Black or Hispanic and 78 percent are from low-income households, an even greater percentage of high-need students than is served by local district schools.

As of the 2016-17 school year, 4,800 children in District 5 were on waitlists to attend charter schools -- the longest waitlist of any district in New York City.⁵

DISTRICT 16

BEDFORD-STUYVESANT

Bedford-Stuyvesant's District 16 has the second-highest unemployment rate in Brooklyn — 12.5 percent, a full 31 percent higher than the borough average. It also has the fourth-highest poverty rate in Brooklyn. Over 95 percent of the district students in District 16 are Black and Hispanic, and 88 percent are from low-income families. More than 77 percent of district school students in District 16 failed the reading or math exam.

But since 2013, the number of children passing state exams in District 16 has risen dramatically, going from 496 to 813 — **and 82 percent of this growth is attributable to charter schools**, where students of color make up 96 percent of enrollment.

⁵ Waitlist estimates for the 2016-17 school year were retrieved from New York City Charter Center's Enrollment Lottery Estimates [report](#) from June 2016.

DISTRICT 23

BROWNSVILLE

In Brownsville’s District 23, where the poverty rate is almost twice the citywide average and the highest in Brooklyn, almost 96 percent of the district students are Black and Hispanic and 88 percent are from low-income families. 83 percent of district school students failed the reading or math exam.

But since 2013, the number of children passing state exams in District 23 has nearly doubled, going from 508 to 996. **A full 90 percent of this growth is attributable to charter schools – meaning children at charter schools accounted for almost all of Brownsville’s proficiency gains.**

And while charters are the only schools driving student achievement in Brownsville, 1,200 students remain on charter school waitlists in District 23.

EQUALITY FOR ALL:

SWD AND ELL PERFORMANCE

Despite critics’ claims that charter schools do not serve the highest-need students, all of the evidence from these districts shows exactly the opposite: Students with Disabilities (SWDs) and English Language Learners (ELLs) are thriving in charters.⁶

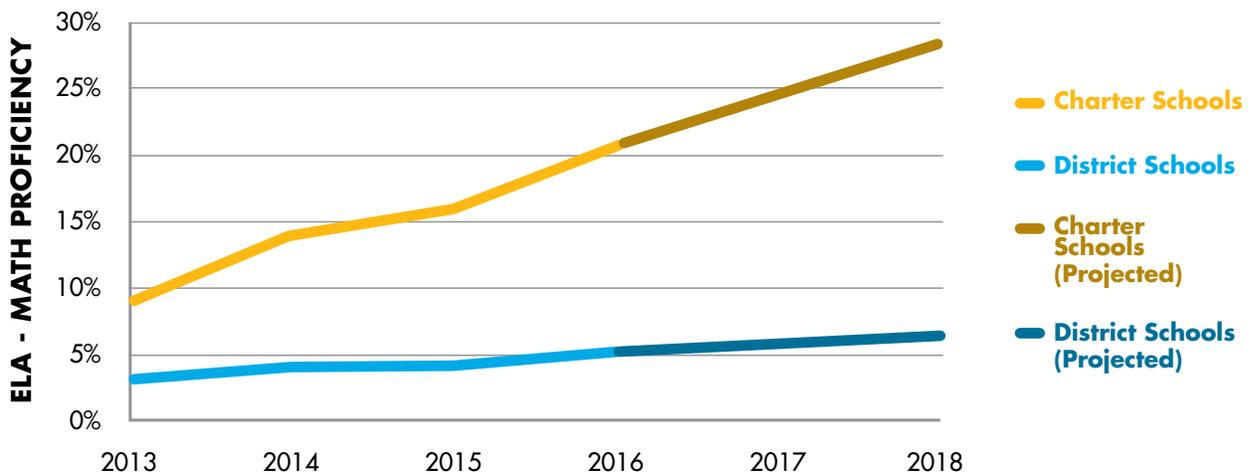
Attending a charter school in one of the Forgotten Fourth districts quadrupled a SWD test taker’s likelihood of passing the reading or math exam. 21 percent of students with disabilities in these districts passed state exams at charter schools last year, compared to just five percent of their local district school peers.

⁶ Achievement data for ELLs and students with disabilities enrolled in charter schools is not released by DOE and was retrieved from New York State Education Department’s 3-8 Assessment [Databases](#). District-level data for ELLs and students with disabilities was retrieved from DOE’s data files.

This disparity reflects the profound gains charters are making year after year with test takers with disabilities – since 2013, charters have accounted for 55 percent of the growth in students with disabilities learning to read and do math at grade level, and charters have out-improved traditional public schools by a six to one margin.

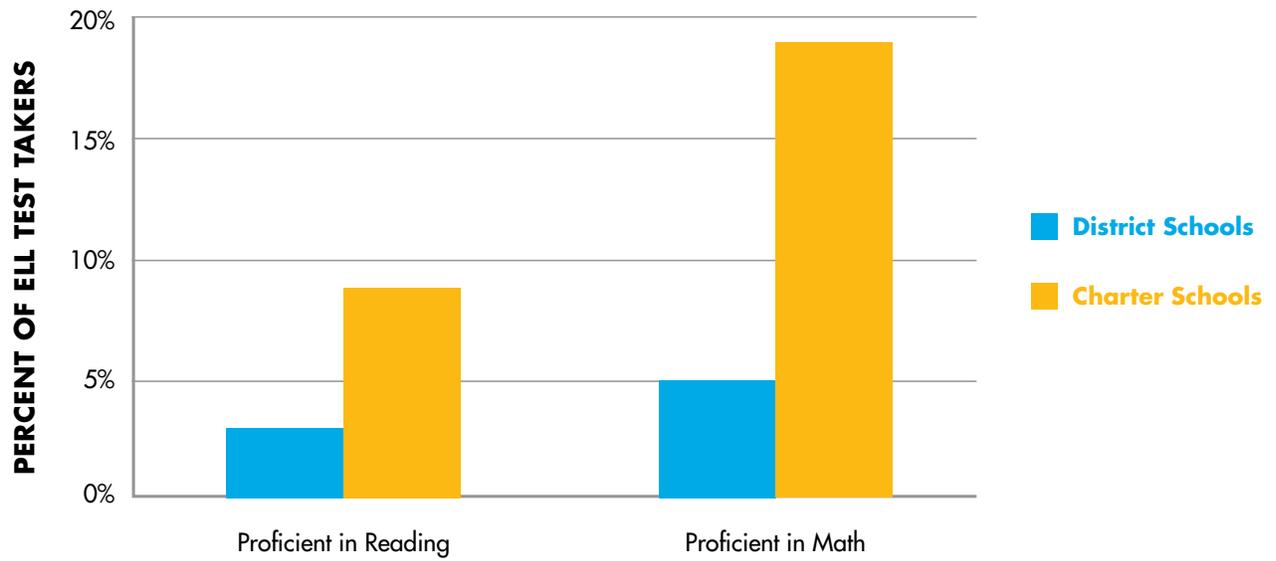
Assuming improvement trends continue at a similar rate, **28 percent of students with disabilities at charters in the Forgotten Fourth will be on grade level in just two years – at which point only 6 percent of their district school peers will pass state exams.**

Students With Disabilities in Forgotten Fourth Districts



Over the same time period, ELLs at charter schools have improved four times faster than their district school peers and are now three times as likely to read or do math at grade level. Over that time period, an additional 1,300 ELLs have enrolled in charter schools.

ELLs in Forgotten Fourth Districts: 2016



THE PATH TO POSSIBLE:

SERVING 200,000 CHILDREN, ENDING INEQUALITY

The facts are clear: public charter schools are the single best option for children in the city's poorest communities, and the schools are getting better as the sector gets bigger.

New York City charter schools are the path to possibility for the children who would otherwise be abandoned to the failing schools that have plagued high-need communities for generations.

Our path forward is clear: **City Hall must commit to a bold plan to double the city's charter sector, from 100,000 to 200,000 students.** Doing this would have a profound impact on the most underserved communities in the city. Doubling to 200,000 children would boost the number of students passing state exams far enough that they would surpass New York City's district-wide averages.⁷ **Put another way: it would close the citywide achievement gap.**

CONSIDER THE IMPACT ON THE CITY'S MOST UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES:

- **In Brownsville**, doubling charter enrollment would eliminate the achievement gap - students would outperform the citywide average by two points.
- Doubling charter enrollment in **Bedford-Stuyvesant** would enable 400 additional students to pass the exam -- closing the achievement gap with the citywide average.
- The achievement gap in **Central Harlem** would be eliminated as well. Doubling charter enrollment would mean that Central Harlem students would outscore the citywide average by 11 points.

Doubling to 200,000 children would provide communities trapped in cycles of poverty, communities that have borne the brunt of the city's failing schools crisis, with a pathway to educational opportunity and boundless possibility.

⁷ To project the impact of doubling charter enrollment in each district, the number of charter students tested in 2016 was doubled, and the resulting increase was subtracted from the number of district students tested in 2016. The resulting test taker total matched each district's historical total for 2016. The charter and district portions of the resulting population were weighted with their respective historical proficiency averages to determine each district's progress towards the city's 2016 average.

To make this vision a reality, **City Hall must abandon its anti-charter policies and politics and boldly support doubling the city's charter sector to 200,000 children.** They must end the practice of space discrimination and support the opening of new charters in public space. They must stop erecting bureaucratic roadblocks to charter expansion and continued operation. And they must stop standing in the way of parent choice. Only then will the Path to Possible be open to every child in New York City.