

CHARTER SCHOOL MESSAGING GUIDE

TOOLKIT



COLORADO LEAGUE of
CHARTER SCHOOLS



growing awareness and support
for charter schools in Colorado

CHARTER SCHOOL MESSAGING GUIDE

We all have an important role to play in growing awareness and support for charter schools in Colorado. How we talk about charter schools and the impact they have on students, families, staff, and communities shapes the perception of charters in Colorado. By having a unified narrative with consistent messages, we all can work to inform and persuade members of our community, policymakers and decision makers, and the general public of the value and necessity of charter schools to provide all Colorado children with quality public school options.

This messaging guide provides the resources and tools needed to create a strong, unified narrative that all members of the charter school community can use. Through unified consistent messaging, we aim to:

- **Elevate the real experiences and authentic stories of those at the heart of the charter school community**
- **Inform our communities on the value and impact of charter schools to create positive, pro-charter environments across the state**
- **Persuade policy and decision makers of the necessity of charter schools as an important part of the public school ecosystem and encourage the creation and support of pro-charter policies and programs**

In this toolkit you will find:

- **The core messages to use in communicating about charter schools**
- **Charter school myths: How to combat some of the most common**
- **Words and phrases to emphasize or avoid**
- **Charter facts, stats, and data to incorporate in your messaging**
- **Best practices when communicating about charter schools**



CORE MESSAGES FOR COLORADO CHARTER SCHOOLS

Charter School Messaging Guide

GENERAL

Charter schools are tuition-free public schools open to all students, regardless of zip code, race/ethnicity, income or ability level.

All Colorado children — regardless of zip code, race, ethnicity, income or ability — **deserve access to high-quality public-school options** that best meet their needs and help them reach their full potential.

Education **isn't one size fits all** — kids aren't all the same, schools shouldn't be either.

Charter schools are **transparent with taxpayer dollars** and structured as **nonprofits**.

Charter schools are subject to the **same standards and assessments** as all public-schools in the state.

Charter schools are a valuable part of the **public school ecosystem** in Colorado.

Talking points:

- **Charter schools are public schools**
- **Charters are structured as nonprofits and are transparent with their finances**
- **Charters are held to high academic standards**
- **Charters are open to all students**
- **Charters are diverse and unique**
- **Charters use their flexibility to find unique educational solutions**



CORE MESSAGES FOR COLORADO CHARTER SCHOOLS

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QUALITY

Charter schools **use their flexibility to find unique solutions** in areas such as curriculum, governance, leadership and operations.

In exchange for their flexibility, charter schools are **held accountable to high financial, academic and managerial standards**.

Charter schools **give teachers flexibility to teach creatively** and provide personalized attention to meet the individual needs of every student, giving students from all backgrounds the opportunity to go to a school that works for them.

CHOICE AND OPPORTUNITY

By listening to parents and being responsive to the community, public charter schools are creating **meaningful ways for parents to be engaged** in their child's education.

Parents want and deserve to be able to choose the school that **best meets the needs of their children**, and charters give families that opportunity.

Public charter schools are helping parents, teachers and students **work together towards success**.

EQUITY

Charter school programs and academic designs **are as diverse as the students they enroll**.

Colorado charter schools enroll more diverse students and more English Language Learners than traditional school counterparts.



COMBATTING MAJOR CHARTER SCHOOL MYTHS

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Common Myths and Criticisms

Responses to Use

Charter schools hurt public education.

- Charter schools are a critical part of the public school ecosystem in Colorado.
- All children deserve to get a great public education at a school that is the best fit for their unique needs, whether that is a district school or a public charter school.
- Charter schools are public-schools that strengthen the public-school system by offering more kids an opportunity for a great public education at a school that works best for them.
- We know a one-size-fits-all approach to education doesn't work. Charter schools provide options to meet students who may not be served well by traditional school models.
- Public charter schools make the entire public-school system stronger by taking creative approaches that give students from all backgrounds the opportunity to get an education that works for them.

Charter schools don't serve all students.

- Charter schools are tuition-free public schools open to all students. They do not discriminate and there are no test-in requirements to enroll.
- All Colorado children, regardless of zip code or background, deserve access to high-quality public-school options that best meet their needs and help them reach their full potential.
- On average, public charter schools in Colorado serve higher percentages of both English language learners and students of color than traditional public schools.
- Charter school programs and academic designs are as diverse as the students they enroll.



COMBATTING MAJOR CHARTER SCHOOL MYTHS

Common Myths and Criticisms

Charter schools aren't held to the same standards as traditional district schools.

Responses to Use

- Charter schools are transparent with taxpayer dollars, structured as nonprofits, and subject to posting their financial reports to their website for all to see.
- Charter schools operate with integrity and are held to the same state and federal education standards as district-run schools.
- Charter schools are semiautonomous public-schools of choice that operate via a contract or "charter" between the school's non-profit board and an authorizer.
- Charter schools use their flexibility to find unique solutions in areas such as curriculum, governance, leadership and operations.
- In exchange, they are held accountable to high financial, academic and managerial standards by their authorizer.

WORDS AND PHRASES TO USE

Words and Phrases to Avoid

- School choice
- Education reform or reinvent education
- Business-oriented words like customization, market share, or competition
- Experimental or laboratories of innovation
- Suggesting charter schools are a "replacement" strategy for traditional district schools

Words and Phrases That Work

- Educational options or opportunities
- Creativity, reimagine education
- Personalization, meeting individual student needs, freedom
- Creativity in the classroom, flexibility
- Charter schools are an important part of the public school ecosystem and make the public school system stronger

When talking about charter schools, use words and phrases like: effective, motivating, challenging, every child, every family, every community, proven and effective education strategies

When talking about charter students, use words like: inspired, encouraged, challenged, all children deserve equal opportunities and the schools that's best for their educational needs

When talking about charter teachers, use words and phrases like: inspired, committed, passionate, creative

When talking about parents and families, use words and phrases like: involved, supportive, giving families access to education options

When talking about charter school curriculum, use words and phrases like: challenging, balanced, equipping students for college and career.

CHARTER BASICS

- Charter schools in Colorado are tuition-free public schools that are open to all students and have been given the flexibility to be more innovative than traditional public schools to meet students' individual needs.
- Charters are established by a group of parents, teachers, and/or community members who operate through a contract or "charter" between the school's governing board and its authorizer.
- Charter schools are open to all students and do not discriminate or require any kind of "test-in" to enroll.
- In exchange for greater flexibility, charter schools are held to greater accountability standards. Charter schools are held accountable through:
 - Compliance with all federal and state education laws and regulations
 - Academic results based on state standards and assessments
 - Transparent finances
 - The school's charter contract with their authorizer
 - Organizational goals set with the school's governing board

Colorado Charter Landscape

- There are 269 charter schools in Colorado serving over 135,000 students.
- Charter school enrollment represents 15 percent of public school enrollment in the state.
- If Colorado public charter schools were combined into one school district, it would be the largest school district in the state by 50 percent.
- Colorado became the third state in the U.S. to pass a charter school law in 1993, and has the second strongest charter law in the country.
- Charters are in nearly 70 different cities and towns across Colorado.
- Colorado charter schools are geographically diverse and serve urban, suburban and rural communities.
- Colorado charter school enrollment continues to grow, and charter schools saw increases in student enrollment during COVID-19 despite large declines in overall enrollment in public schools generally in the state.
- Colorado charter schools are geographically dispersed across the state and serve urban, suburban and rural communities.



Charter Funding

- Charter schools, like all public schools, receive public funding based on the number of students enrolled. In Colorado, charters are funded with state taxpayer dollars in the form of “per-pupil operating revenue” or PPR.
- However, Colorado charters receive on average only 85% of the per-pupil funding for each student when compared to the funding district-run schools receive.
- Charter schools do not have equitable access to local and federal funds. School districts finance their facilities using property taxes, mill levies, and local bonds. Charter schools generally do not receive a proportionate share of these funds. As a result, money most often comes out of the classroom to pay for facilities and facilities-related expenses.

Charter Performance

- **Public charter schools have a proven record of delivering a great education** with strong academic outcomes and are narrowing the achievement gap for many of our state’s most historically underserved student populations.
- **Charter school academic performance outpace statewide averages** on English and Math, both overall and for disaggregated student groups.
- **Charter schools have shown they are consistently narrowing the achievement gap** for students from most all historically marginalized groups.
- **In 2022, charter schools outperformed district-managed schools on the state School Performance Framework (SPF).**
 - 85 percent of charter school students attended a school with a “performance” rating on the SPF, while 66 percent of district-managed students attended schools with a performance rating.
 - Two-thirds of charter students attending schools where at least 75 percent of students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch were in performance schools, while 19 percent of students in high-poverty district-managed schools were attending performance schools.
- **Charter school students in grades 3-8 outperformed their peers** in district-managed schools on both literacy and math tests.
 - 37 percent of charter students met or exceeded grade level expectations in English Language Arts compared to 31 percent of third- through eighth-graders in district-run schools.
 - 31 percent of charter students met or exceeded grade level expectations in math, compared to 27 percent in district-managed schools.

Additional Resources: www.coloradoleague.org/ResearchReports



BEST PRACTICES WHEN COMMUNICATING

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When Communicating about Charter Schools

- **Be clear and concise.** Don't use education jargon or overly complicated concepts — the more simple and direct your message is the more likely it is to be remembered and have impact.
- **Be consistent.** If your messaging doesn't match what your audience has heard before about charter schools, it can create confusion and further spread charter school myths and misinformation. Use the messages in this guide to help our charter community speak with a unified voice.
- **Be positive.** When people are constantly bombarded by crisis-based or negative messaging, they can easily start to disengage from "empathy fatigue". Stick to positive messaging affirming the benefits and values of charter schools.
- **Be inclusive.** Use "all" and "every" whenever possible so no matter who you're talking to, they can see how they fit into the narrative and have shared responsibility with our cause.
- **Be specific.** Think about who you are trying to target and tailor your messaging to effectively engage them. How familiar is your audience with charter schools? What is their role in relation to charter schools? Are you trying to inform or persuade your audience?
- **Be student, teacher, and family-centric.** Elevate the voices of those at the heart of our charter school community—who can speak to the lived experiences of the day-to-day in our charter schools.

