



Testimony of Darryl Cobb  
President  
Charter School Growth Fund

May 14, 2025

Chairman Kiley, Ranking Member Bonamici, and Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for the invitation to participate in today's hearing as we celebrate National Charter Schools Week. It is my honor to be here today to speak about the great work charter schools are doing across the country and to testify alongside my long time friend Eva Moskowitz.

I am Darryl Cobb, the President of the Charter School Growth Fund (CSGF) where I have spent the last 15 years of my professional career focused on growing our nation's highest performing charter schools. While I am an engineer by trade, my work in public charter schools was initially shaped by my experiences with students from the Noble Street Charter Schools in Chicago, as a school leader of a single-site turnaround charter school in Chicago and as the first chief learning officer at the KIPP Foundation. Those opportunities prepared me well for my current role.

I am honored to speak with you about our work at the Charter School Growth Fund. Founded in 2005, CSGF is a national non-profit organization that identifies the nation's best public charter schools, aggregates philanthropic capital to fund their expansion, and helps to increase their impact to prepare all students, especially those from underserved backgrounds, to realize their full potential.

I hope this testimony will shed light on the work of charter networks in CSGF's portfolio, the outstanding academic results and growth of charter schools, why we think that is, and how we have benefited from charter friendly federal policy along the way.

CSGF supports a portfolio of 1400 high-quality charter schools and charter school networks that collectively serve 760,000 students across 34 states.

Our portfolio includes a wide variety of educational models that meet the unique needs of their community, such as college prep high schools like Success Academies in NYC and Noble Network in Illinois, STEM schools like Purdue Polytechnic High Schools in Indiana and Discovery Charter School in North Carolina, and character focused schools such as Excellence Charter Schools in Connecticut. We support classical charter schools like True North in Miami, language charter schools, health focused charter schools, career connected schools, and everything in between. We serve as the largest private funder of charter school start up funding behind the federal government.

Since the first charter schools were launched over 30 years ago, there are now 8,150 charter schools educating 3.7 million students in 46 states. Charter school enrollment has increased nationally by 12% over the last five years. The charter school student population includes a higher proportion of Hispanic (36% compared to 28%), Black (24% compared to 14%), and economically disadvantaged students (61% compared to 54%) than traditional public schools, and comparable enrollment of English Learners (11% compared to 10%) and Special Education (11% compared to 14%) students. Seventy-eight percent of the students attending CSGF portfolio schools are economically disadvantaged. For example, in California our portfolio schools are serving 80% economically disadvantaged students compared to 63% in traditional districts.

Additionally, CSGF portfolio schools are outperforming other schools that serve students of similar demographics. Taken together, our schools outperform traditional public schools in their respective states in ELA by 26 percentage points and in Math by 16 percentage points. Many of these schools outperform similar schools, state averages and in some cases their more affluent peers while serving a higher percentage of economically disadvantaged students.

And you do not have to take my word for it.

A 2023 Stanford Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) titled, *As a Matter of Fact, National Charter School Study III* found that, nationally, charter school students outperformed their peers in traditional public schools in reading and math. Further, CREDO found that charter school students advanced their learning by 16 more days in ELA and 6 more days of learning in math than traditional public schools on average. Importantly, low income charter students showed stronger growth, as did English learners, and Black and Hispanic students outperformed their peers in traditional public schools in reading in math by large margins. Specifically Black students attending charters had 35 more days of growth in reading and 29 days in math and Hispanic students grew 30 days in reading and 19 days in Math. CSGF portfolio schools that were included in the study demonstrated an additional 61 days of growth in reading and 69 days in math compared to traditional public schools, this is equivalent to more than one-third of a school year of extra learning for students in CSGF portfolio schools.

In 2024, the Public Policy Institute released their study *Search for the Tipping Point: Scaling up Public School Choice Spurs Cityside Gains*. The report had three key findings that speak to the academic performance of charter school students and the benefit charter schools provide to their communities as a whole.

- First, over the last decade, cities that have aggressively expanded high-quality public school choices have seen a true rising tide: low-income students across these cities — whether they attend a public charter or district-operated school — have started to close the gap to statewide student performance levels.
- Second, this is particularly true when at least one-third of a city's students are enrolled in a public charter school or charter-like school.

- And third, in the 10 U.S. cities serving majority low-income students and where at least one-third of students are enrolled in charter schools, low-income students city-wide have made meaningful progress toward achieving parity with students statewide.

With all of these positive results, we are laser focused on identifying and growing the best charter schools. During the 2023-2024 school year, CSGF portfolio charter school networks opened 61 new schools, and grew enrollment across all schools by 60,000 more students than the previous year. The portfolio of schools typically share the following traits:

- They have the support and demand for high-quality school options from parents and their community.
- Their school leadership teams have the capacity to build the skills and expertise needed to accomplish their goals.
- They have had strong academic performance for multiple years as demonstrated by measures such as student academic growth, achievement on state tests relative to peers, sub-group performance, and long term student outcomes.
- They typically have waiting lists and want to expand their impact by opening more high-quality schools.
- They are committed to operating their schools with public funding and will not require significant philanthropy when they finish growing their network of schools.
- They share a commitment to serving students who have limited access to high-quality public schools in their communities.

The result is that CSGF supports some of the top public charter schools in their communities who are redefining what is possible in America's public schools. They are the exemplars highlighted in the previously mentioned reports. CSGF portfolio networks are leading the way on post pandemic academic recovery such as Wallace Stegner in Utah, innovative practice such as Ednovate in California, and preparing students for whatever comes next like Elevate in ID or the Excel Centers in Indiana.

And demand continues to grow. This year, CSGF received a record number of applications for our early-stage portfolio — those networks that are just starting or replicating from a single site. As a result, the percentage of CSGF supported charter schools opening across the country every year continues to grow. In fact, one quarter to one third of all charter schools that open in any given year are CSGF portfolio schools. Of course, CSGF and our charter school partners do not do this work alone. Growth in the charter school sector requires a supportive charter school ecosystem that includes families, community members, and community organizations, in addition to supportive policies at the local, state and federal level.

How do these amazing schools get this done? At CSGF we believe strong leadership is the key to successful charter schools. Our experience led us to create a CEO Excellence Framework that outlines the

leadership competencies we see in CEOs of high-performing charter school organizations who consistently unlock the greatest potential of their organization for the children and families they serve.

Great leaders operate with a mindset marked by relentless perseverance tempered with deep personal humility. They set a clear vision and choose the right strategies to realize it.

We can help these leaders by creating a policy environment that allows for growth and flexibility while also demonstrating to our communities our commitment to academic rigor.

The federal Charter School Programs, or CSP, administered by the U.S. Department of Education has been instrumental in fueling the growth of charter schools. The CSP provides for several helpful grants, including to states which allows them to run charter school subgrant programs, facilities grants, and grants to charter management organizations for the replication and expansion of high-quality charter schools. Between 2017 and 2024, approximately 72% of the CSP CMO replication grantees have been CSGF portfolio schools.

Charter schools must have access to suitable facilities as they start up and as they grow, and federal tax-exempt private activity bonds allow for significantly reduced borrowing costs for charter schools, which is critical. Charter schools do not have the same access to facilities financing structures as traditional district schools, and therefore must use their operating dollars to cover facilities costs. They typically rely on philanthropic solutions and, in some cases, specific state-funded programs for help in accessing facilities.

In conclusion, as you pursue your policy agenda in the days ahead, I hope you will remember these three things:

- One, that public charter schools have been shown to benefit *all* public school students in charter rich environments, even those not enrolled in charter schools.
- Two, that students from disadvantaged backgrounds have benefited the most from charter schools, which is the result of outstanding leadership and vision from our school and network CEOs.
- Third and finally, that the federal government has and must continue to have a role in providing the policy environment and resources necessary for charter schools to thrive.

Thank you for your invitation to participate in today's hearing. I am happy to answer any questions you have.