Telling Your Charter School Story

A toolkit for talking about your charter school
How to Use This Toolkit

The mission of the Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools (LAPCS) is to support, promote, and advocate for the Louisiana charter school movement, increasing student access to high quality public schools statewide. Through our programming and advocacy efforts, LAPCS works to support the success of our charter schools so that more families in Louisiana can choose a great school for their children.

As charter schools have increased in number and in academic success in Louisiana, something else has been happening: games are being played to prevent more charters from opening or to discredit charter accomplishments. Some seek to spread misinformation, for example, by equating charters with private schools. Others seek to destroy the autonomy and independence that defines a charter by saddling the movement with harmful regulations.

You have your own message that is resonating loud and clear with parents: parents deserve to have meaningful choices about where to send their children for public education and that choice should not be restricted by a zip code. The best way to counteract threats to the charter school movement is to ensure that this message, and the voice of YOUR charter school community, is heard.

This toolkit is designed to help you think about how to tell your story, both within your own community and the broader education community statewide. It is not a “one size fits all” guide, but it offers you ideas which may fit your differing needs at different times. In total, it should encourage you to have a year-long plan of what your message is, and what you hope to inspire people to do as a result. Plan your success. Tell your story. Inspire action.

We hope this guide will be of use to you and your team. Please don’t hesitate to reach out to us if you need more support. We’re always here to assist you in your journey as a charter school leader.

Sincerely,

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Build a Plan

Communications planning and implementation is everyone’s business, but best practices suggest that it should someone’s primary responsibility at your campus so that the mission and goals of your charter school are consistently and clearly presented to the public. In addition to your financial and academic goals, it is your school’s responsibility to inform the public about your school, and what makes it different and unique.

Specific public information requirements in the Louisiana charter school law are explained in more detail in the LAPCS Authorizer Toolkit and LAPCS Louisiana Charter School Board Legal Handbook, publications that are available on the LAPCS website at lacharterschools.org. These requirements should be part of your annual communications calendar, especially as it concerns public meeting notices and budget reporting.

Your communications plan should also be about branding and marketing your school — that is, inspiring parents and students to support and take pride in your school culture, and building community support.

As school leaders, you of course will prioritize what’s happening inside your schools and in your classrooms, as a successful campus and successful graduates speak for themselves. Word-of-mouth endorsements by those who attend, graduated from, and work at the school will do more for school promotions than any other marketing activity.

Nevertheless, your school will want to ensure that you have a general communications plan and some basic tools to communicate what makes your school unique.

**Communications planning involves five basic steps:**
- Outline your communications needs;
- Identify your internal audiences (parents, teachers, alumni) and how you wish to involve them in your communications plan;
- Identify your external audiences (donors, churches, businesses, feeder schools) and how you wish to involve them in your communications plan;
- Turn your communications plans or strategies into action steps with a timetable;
- Evaluate your success at implementing your action steps and modify your plan as needed.

One way to start a communications plan for the school year is to develop a communications component to your existing school calendar, identifying specific school events or holidays that you want to use to reach your communications and media goals. A sample calendar of news issues can be found on page 3.
Does your school communications plan include the following resources?

☐ Logo
☐ Mission statement
☐ Communications policy regarding use of school phone, email and internal/closed communications networks
☐ Communications policy regarding electronic communications
☐ Emergency communications plan (see Part 3 of this toolkit for more information on crisis communications)
  • Include policies for school community and public communications
☐ Parent contact system or communications tool (e.g. up to date parent email list, robocall/texting system with accurate parent phone numbers)
☐ Student media release forms
☐ Consistent policy regarding use of your logo and school name on all printed materials
  • School stationery, official documents
☐ Phone policy
  • All calls are answered in a professional manner that promotes your name and your unique culture
☐ Website and social media sites (if applicable)
☐ Brochures, flyers, banners
☐ Open house and event schedules
☐ Multi-lingual materials
☐ Enrollment forms
☐ Donation cards
☐ Testimonial statements from students, staff, parents and board leaders
☐ Photos and videos of activities at the school
☐ A paid media campaign plan with schedule and budget
  • If affordable, this is ideal for enrollment time
  • Don't forget the importance of visible signage at your school and on the lawns of staff and enrolled students
☐ A “free” or “earned” news media campaign plan with schedule (see next page for sample calendar of news-worthy issues
Sample Calendar of News Issues

AUGUST
- “Back to School” press release and media
- Weather closings
- Possible media issues
  - Transportation
  - Equity in enrollment

SEPTEMBER
- Open house activities
  - Publicize with paid ads if possible
  - Open house release
  - Open house flyer
- Possible media issues:
  - Special education

OCTOBER
- Make sure enrollment applications are up-to-date and accessible to all languages
- State Charter School Conference
- Fall announcements:
  - Fairs, galas
- Possible media issues:
  - School Performance Scores
  - Testing security
  - Online learning
  - Charter evaluations before authorizers

NOVEMBER
- Invite your Legislator to visit
- Winter announcements:
  - Teacher of the Year awards
  - Honor rolls
- Possible media issues:
  - Financial audits
  - Stories about Pre-K
  - Facilities

DECEMBER
- Application deadlines
- Holiday messages and performances

JANUARY
- Application deadlines
- National School Choice Week

FEBRUARY
- Enrollment
- Weather closings
- Prepare for spike in anti-charter messaging as legislative session nears

MARCH
- Teacher recruitment events
- Lotteries
- Spring announcements: galas, fundraisers, fairs

APRIL
- Legislative session
- End of year activities and awards
- Prepare, produce, and place Budget Hearing Ad
- Prepare for National Charter School Week (first week of May)

MAY
- National Charter School Week
- National Teacher Day (usually first Tuesday in May)
- Test scores
- Legislative session
- Teacher review
- Collection and submission of val-sal photos & info, graduation lists for high schools, scholarship announcements
- Possible media issues:
  - Salaries
  - Selective admissions
  - Unions

JUNE
- National Charter School Conference
- Prepare for Budget Completion ad

JULY
- Produce and place Budget Completion ad with all school dates
- Enrollment press release-vacancies at schools
- Prepare Back to School Press Release
- Annual PR Review: Outline for next 12 months
  - Update materials and website
Working with the News Media

Get to know your local media.

The best way to ensure consistent coverage in the media is getting to know your local media and developing a good working relationship with them.

- **Meet with education reporters in your area ahead of time.** Ask for a coffee meeting or invite them to your school; use this time to introduce yourself and learn more about the types of topics the specific reporter is interested in covering.

- **Don’t limit yourself to the major print newspapers in your area.** Find out if there are weekly papers, community newsletters, neighborhood blogs, or local TV/radio shows that cover education issues. Start a media contact list with journalists or reporters from each outlet, including information on what types of content they are most likely to cover.

- **Keep track of stories or mentions in the media about your school or education in general.** You’ll not only be able to track how successful your media outreach efforts are, but you’ll also develop a better sense of what your local media is looking for by the types of stories they cover.

Develop a clear media policy for your school.

- **Establish one or two official spokespeople for your school.** Most often, this will be the school leader; it can also be your board president or a communications staff member (if you have one). Let the media know who this approved spokesperson is.

- **Have a strategy for handling incoming press calls.** Make sure your staff know to notify you (and any other approved spokesperson) immediately when a reporter calls. Try to respond within an hour of when a reporter contacts you, even if it’s just to say you received their call. It’s okay to tell reporters that you need more time to respond to their inquiry. Just make sure you find out their deadline and actually call them back.

- **Know what is legal (and not legal) when dealing with media.** You are not required to let media in your school building, but you can’t stop them from interviewing parents just outside of the school. You should also know what types of student/employee information to keep private from the media.
Be proactive, not reactive.

- **Be organized and consistent with your key messages.** Use your overall communications plan for the year to identify key messages that you want the media to know about your school. Keep messages simple, and repeat them as often as you can, whether it be in interviews, in your marketing materials, or on your website.

- **Use your school calendar of events to drive press coverage.** Contact reporters or community news editors about your public events, ideally one to two weeks ahead of time. Include the date, time, place, and nature of your event in your email, along with a contact for more information.

- **Invite legislators and other key community leaders to your events.** A great way to drive press interest and coverage of your event is to have elected officials or other community leaders at the event. Make sure you let the press know that an elected official is attending your event if you receive confirmation of their attendance ahead of time.

Take advantage of different tools to get out your message to the media.

**The press release**

- Keep it brief, to the point, and meaningful. Don’t go over one page.
- Write a headline in your release to help a reporter easily grasp what the release is about.
- Begin your release with the single most important point of your story.
- Include a short quote from your school leader if appropriate.
- Send your release to all news media in your area. If your release mentions other partner organizations or funders, send a copy of your release to contacts at the organization to share.
- Aim to send out your release on Monday morning, when journalists tend to look for stories.

**The editorial**

- To gain an editorial praising your efforts, you usually need to schedule a meeting with the publisher and/or editorial board to discuss your issue.
- Limit attendance to yourself and one other community leader who may have friendships or influence over the publisher or editor.
- Bring a written information kit to leave behind which clearly states your main talking points.
- Keep meetings to 15 minutes or less. Briefly state your points of information and ask for questions.
- Guest op-eds should not exceed 600 words.

**Letters to the editor**

- You can initiate these by having individuals, such as teachers, parents, or community supporters, send original signed letters to the editor.
- Provide an outline of points you would like individuals to make in writing their letters. Do not provide a “form” letter because each submission must be unique.
- Limit letters to 200 words or less.

**The one-on-one interview**

- All interviews with the news media should be cleared by you. This is a rule for your staff to know and respect.
Five tips for building good relationships with the media

1. **Consider the needs of the media instead of your own.**
   When pitching or responding to the media, think about the needs and goals of the reporter. Their job is not to provide PR for your school — it is to get their audience reading, listening, watching, and interacting. Think about how you are helping them accomplish their goals when you reach out to them, instead of expecting them to help you publicize your school.

2. **Be a credible and reliable source.**
   The more a reporter views you as a credible source, the more they will reach out to you directly for stories or input on a particular story they are working on.
   - Always respond within an hour of receiving an inquiry, even if it’s just to say you received the message.
   - Double check any information you provide to the press for accuracy, including names and statistics.
   - Stick to the facts. Avoid making exaggerated claims or broad generalizations that you can’t back up with supporting information.

3. **Simplify your messages.**
   Keep your messages and responses simple, using short soundbites and sentences. Help reporters understand complicated education issues by explaining things in plain English and avoiding jargon.

4. **Provide corrections to the reporter only if there is a factual error in the published piece.**
   Reporters will only make corrections to a story if there is a clear factual error. Remember that reporters work with editors and producers to get the story published/on-air; things like headlines or TV teasers are usually not under the reporter’s control.

5. **Follow up with the reporter after he/she covers a story you pitched.**
   Thank the reporter for the time spent on the article or piece, and remind them that you are available as a resource for future pieces.
Crisis Communications

Communication is a critical part of crisis management. Staff, students, parents, community members, and media expect accurate information promptly during a crisis. Having a communication component in your school's emergency management plan will help you effectively manage communications during a time of crisis.

Planning Ahead

- **Emergency Management Plan.** Ensure your school has a crisis or emergency management plan that clearly lays out steps to take when there is an emergency situation. The plan should include building-level emergency response procedures, information on emergency contact lists for students and staff, and how to notify stakeholders in case of emergency.

- **Crisis Communications Checklist.** As part of your emergency plan, create a crisis communications checklist that is reviewed and updated at least annually. Make sure key staff have access to it both at work and at home. For a sample checklist, see page 9.

- **Crisis Team.** In your plan, you should identify the members of your crisis team. When a problem arises, get this small team on the phone as soon as possible to go through your emergency plan, including communications efforts. Within your crisis team, you should identify your spokesperson and a back up.

- **Media Training.** Ensure your spokesperson is comfortable with speaking to the media, including on camera. Spokespeople should be familiar with the school's key messages.

- **Key Audiences/Media List.** Keep contact information for the media and key audiences updated and on hand so that they can be easily contacted in a crisis. Key audiences beyond parents and staff could include public officials, community partners, and business leaders.

When Crisis Strikes

- **Deal with facts.** Assess the situation and identify with your team the facts of the situation and the best statement to issue to your key audiences. Consider what can and cannot be said, and whether or not you'll need legal or PR counsel. As the situation progresses, you may need to update your message to keep people on the same page.
• **Get ahead of the situation by notifying your stakeholders as soon as possible.** If you don’t get your message out, someone will get it out for you. Notify key groups, including employees, parents, and community stakeholders, with information on the situation as soon as it is possible to do so. Remind staff that all inquiries from the media or from other public organizations should be referred to the designated spokesperson and that they should refrain from commenting.

• **Notify media and respond to requests as necessary.** Use brief statements attributed to your main spokesperson, and provide factsheets and timelines when possible. Prepare questions and answers – especially the questions you hope will not be asked. Allow media access to your crisis communicator 24/7 until the situation is resolved.

• **Monitor media and provide corrections when needed.** Your crisis team should be monitoring traditional media (TV, radio, print news) as well as digital media (web stories, blogs, social media) for coverage of your story. Be sure inaccuracies are immediately corrected.

• **Move on by changing the dialogue.** When you have said all there is to say, move on to the “next steps” and guide the communications to a new direction.

**Post-Crisis Evaluation**

• **Secure loose ends.** You may want to communicate the resolution of the crisis to appropriate audiences. If you changed your website or voicemail during the crisis, make sure you update the platforms after the crisis is over. All media contacts should be double checked to ensure all questions were answered, and new contacts should be added to the district’s media list.

• **Recognition.** If appropriate, find ways to recognize those who were helpful and essential to the management of the crisis situation.

• **Crisis communications review.** Reconvene the crisis team to evaluate the response, actions, what didn't work, and what needs to be improved or revised for the future.

• **Media coverage assessment.** Review coverage and check for message consistency and effectiveness. Identify issues that may need further clarification and follow up as needed.

• **File and update.** File or archive notes, clips, talking points, media questions, and other communications used during the situation. Revise the communications plan if necessary.
Sample Crisis Communications Checklist

SAFETY
☐ Ensure safety of all students, staff, and site. Call 911 or the police department/sheriff’s office if needed.

NOTIFICATION
☐ Notify the school leader, other school leadership team members, board members, and the crisis team.

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS TEAM
☐ Key staff, including the school leader and board members, will convene to strategically review the situation and manage the communications surrounding the issue.

BEFORE GOING PUBLIC
☐ Determine crisis communications lead who is responsible for ensuring all tasks are completed.
☐ Determine the crisis communications spokesperson to make statements, give interviews, and/or answer media questions (most likely the school leader or board president).
☐ Assess the situation to determine the facts.
☐ Determine appropriate response/action and create an action plan for internal and external communications.
☐ Develop factual messages that reflect the status of the crisis, the school’s response, and if possible, proactive steps to resolve the situation.
☐ Prepare talking points for key staff, including board members, teachers, staff, or anyone answering incoming calls.
☐ Prepare drafts of all outgoing communications, which may include email updates, press releases, letters, phone scripts, web site copy, social media updates, etc.
☐ Assess what resources are necessary to manage the crisis (e.g. cell phone availability, press conference needs, on-location resources)
☐ Appoint staff to:
  ☐ Manage and keep track of media
  ☐ Keep the board/staff informed
  ☐ Contact business partners, community members if appropriate
  ☐ Record crisis details, actions taken, external responses, resolution

GOING PUBLIC
☐ Begin communications to internal audiences (board members, staff).
☐ Begin communications to parents.
☐ Begin media and other external audience outreach, using press releases and other communications vehicles.
☐ Update web site and organizational phone messages, if necessary.
☐ Evaluate message effectiveness as the situation progresses.
☐ Implement methods for updating key audiences with ongoing information.
☐ Distribute post-crisis communications.

EVALUATION
☐ Evaluate crisis communications efforts.
☐ Update communications plan/checklist as needed.
Quick Facts about Louisiana Public Charter Schools

Unite the voices in your school — the board, the faculty, the students, the parents, the school friends and donors, the neighbors — in a common message. Step one is to make sure they have the facts and the arguments to “bust” certain myths about charters.

- There are 134 authorized public charter schools in Louisiana.
- Charter school enrollment has more than doubled in Louisiana from about 26,000 students in 2007 to more than 70,000 today.
- Orleans Parish has the only all-charter school district in the United States.
- Louisiana has been recognized as having the 3rd strongest charter school law in the nation. State law does not cap public charter school growth, includes multiple authorizers, provides a fair amount of autonomy and accountability, and provides relatively equitable operational and categorical funding to charters.

What are charter schools?
Charter schools are independent public schools that are held accountable for improved student achievement.

- Charter schools are public schools that are free and open to any student.
- Charter schools have decision-making powers over key issues like curriculum, finances, and hiring.
- Children have different ways of learning, and charter schools offer families a wider variety of options to serve those differences.

There are currently 134 charter schools in Louisiana operating in 20 parishes, serving more than 70,000 students.

Charter schools operate from 3 basic principles:

1. Choice: Parents select the school their child attends. Teachers and principals choose to work in the school.
2. Autonomy: Charter schools are free to make timely decisions about developing curricula, structuring the school day, and hiring teachers who meet the needs of their students.
3. Accountability: Charter schools operate within a multi-tiered accountability system that leads to quality schools and high achievement.

Charter school principals have on-site decision-making power, including all budgeting, hiring and firing decisions, creation of their curricula, and implementation of all day-to-day operations of the school. Charter schools increase the professional autonomy of teachers to explore innovative ways to education children. Currently, there are approximately 2,500 charter school teachers working throughout Louisiana.
Who can attend public charter schools?

Charter schools are publicly funded, tuition-free public schools of choice.

Public charter schools have a fair and open admissions process, conducting outreach and recruitment to all subgroups of the community they serve. If enrollment requests exceed the number of seats available, the school holds a public lottery to determine who will attend. In Louisiana, charter schools serve significantly higher percentages of minority or economically disadvantaged students than the traditional public schools.

Charter schools may have non-academic admissions criteria to fulfill the school’s specialized mission, including language immersion, community school/neighborhood preference, military academy, etc. These schools must still run lotteries if demand exceeds the number of available seats.

In Orleans Parish, there are some charter schools that were converted from traditional public schools that allow for certain academic criteria for enrollment. These schools are exceptions to current state law, which prevents charter schools from having academic admissions requirements.

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**TYPES OF CHARter SCHOOLS IN LOUISIANA IN 2014-2015**

- **Type 1**
  - New school
  - Authorizer: Local school board
  - 23 schools

- **Type 2**
  - New or conversion school
  - Authorizer: BESE
  - 33 schools

- **Type 3**
  - Conversion school
  - Authorizer: Local school board
  - 13 schools

- **Type 4**
  - New or conversion school
  - Authorizer: Local school board & BESE
  - 1 school

- **Type 5**
  - Recovery School District schools
  - Authorizer: BESE
  - 64 schools

There are two new types of charter schools in Louisiana – Type 1B and Type 3B. A Type 1B charter is authorized by a local charter authorizer, a Type 3B charter school is a former Type 5 charter that transfers from the Recovery School District back to the jurisdiction of a local school system. As of 2013-2014, no Type 1B or 3B charters exist.

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**OVERSIGHT & GOVERNANCE OF CHARTER SCHOOLS IN LOUISIANA**

**Types 1 and 3**

- Local school districts are responsible for the oversight of the Type 1 and Type 3 charters they authorize.
- Each charter school or charter management organization has a board of directors that governs school finances, operations and administration.

**Types 2, 4, and 5**

- The Louisiana Department of Education is responsible for the oversight of BESE-authorized charter schools.
- Each Type 2 and 5 charter school or charter management organization has a board of directors that governs school finances, operations and administration.
- Type 4 schools are governed by their local school board.

Where We are Now

As the number of educational options continues to increase for Louisiana families, so does the level at which Louisiana’s students are achieving academically. In fact, even as the expectations have continued to heighten, students in Louisiana have demonstrated steady gains in standardized test scores.

Expanding Options

For the 2014–2015 school year, 15 new Type 2 and Type 5 charter schools were opened throughout the state, further expanding the options provided to families and continuing efforts to provide high-quality choices.

**TOTAL CHARTER SCHOOLS IN 2014–2015**

- Type 1: 23
- Type 2: 33
- Type 3: 13
- Type 4: 1
- Type 5: 64

**82.5% OF STUDENTS IN TYPE 2, 4, AND 5 CHARTERS ARE ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED**

**October 2014**

**70,119 STUDENTS SERVED**

- Type 1: 8,689
- Type 2: 17,946
- Type 3: 9,764
- Type 4: 556
- Type 5: 33,122

**51,424 in Types 2, 4, & 5**

Who oversees charter schools? How are they evaluated?

Charter schools are authorized and monitored by the state’s Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) or by the local school board. Each year, every charter school must demonstrate academic achievement, as well as fiscal and legal compliance with state laws and regulations, or face closure.

Charter schools must abide by the same high-stakes testing policies as traditional public schools.
All charter schools are subject to Louisiana’s School Accountability System. This means two things. First, charter school students are subject to the same high stakes tests and promotional policies as all other Louisiana public school students including federal No Child Left Behind testing requirements. Second, charter schools are part of Louisiana’s “letter grades” system for all public schools.

Charter schools are governed by a local board of community members.
Charter schools are governed by a local, volunteer nonprofit board that must comply with open meeting laws, providing a forum for parents and community members to discuss the schools’ operations. As such, charter schools provide opportunities for direct community involvement and parental input, enabling the schools to make quick, effective changes to meet students’ specific needs.
Myths (and Facts) about Charter Schools in Louisiana

MYTH: “Charter schools drain money from district public schools.”

FACT: Charter schools, as public schools, receive state and local dollars in the same way that traditional district public schools do.

Taxpayer dollars follow the student, so charters receive state and local funding through the Minimum Foundation Program (MFP) only when parents choose to enroll their children in charters.

Districts focus on how funds are reallocated to charters and away from districts, neglecting to mention that they no longer have to pay to educate the children who transfer.

MYTH: “Charter public schools are privately run and are trying to make a profit on Louisiana’s students.”

FACT: All charter schools are public schools governed by a nonprofit board of volunteers. They are tuition free and must participate in the state’s accountability system.

Just as traditional districts outsource services, charter school boards may choose to outsource certain operations to an Education Management Organization (EMO). These EMOs have contracts with and must report to the charter school board.

MYTH: “Charter public schools accept only the ‘cream of the crop’ and reject underperforming students.”

FACT: Charter schools are schools of choice. Generally, public charter schools are open to all students and any student may apply.

If enrollment requests exceed the number of seats, charter schools will hold a public lottery to determine who will attend. Enrollment is reflective of the educational choices parents make for their children.

Like some public magnet schools, there are a few charter schools that were authorized by the Orleans Parish School Board and converted from traditional public schools that use academic criteria for enrollment. These
schools are an exception, and under current state law, charter schools cannot use academic criteria for admissions. Non-academic admissions criteria may be in place to fulfill a school’s specialized mission. A specialized mission may include language immersion, community school/neighborhood preference, or a military academy. These schools must still run lotteries if demand exceeds the number of available seats.

**MYTH:** “Charter schools do not provide special education services.”

**FACT:** Charter schools are under the same state and federal obligations to provide services to special needs children as other public schools.

In fact, the percentage of special education students found in public charter schools in Louisiana is largely similar to that of district public schools. See Table 1 on page 16 for more information on demographics in traditional public schools and public charter schools.

**MYTH:** “National studies have shown repeatedly that charter public school students do no better than district public school students.”

**FACT:** Independent studies of Louisiana charters have confirmed that charter schools in the state are achieving at high academic levels.¹

National studies conducted have shown conflicting results for public charter schools, but Louisiana has a particularly strong charter program as a result of setting a high bar to obtain and keep a charter: standards are elevated and oversight is strict. Because of this, only strong charter applications are approved and low-performing charters are closed. For example, a recent report released by Stanford University’s Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO)² found that:

- Louisiana public charter schools are outperforming their non-charter school peers on student achievement.
- African-American students, as well as students in poverty, performed significantly better in Louisiana charter schools compared to their non-charter school counterparts.
- Statewide, Louisiana charter schools overall are improving student achievement at a faster rate than non-charter schools. Additionally, students in their second, third, and fourth year in a charter school saw significantly more positive achievement gains than their non-charter school counterparts.

**Charter School Impact by Growth Period**

To determine whether performance remained consistent over all the periods of this study, the average charter school effects were disaggregated into the five growth periods. Results are shown in Figure 5 along with the number of newly opened and persisting schools for each growth period.¹¹

**Figure 5: Impact by Growth Period, 2007-2011**

In both reading and math, charter students in Louisiana learned significantly more than their virtual peers in all five periods analyzed. In the most recent growth period, charter students had an additional 50 days of learning in reading and 65 additional days of learning in math compared to their TPS counterparts.

*Source: CREDO, Charter School Performance in Louisiana, August 2013*
MYTH: Charter public schools play by different rules.

FACT: Charter public schools must follow the same educational standards and administer the same standardized tests as all other public schools.

The big difference is the school management. For example, charters can lengthen their school days and school years to provide more time in the classroom, establish their own educational culture, hire and fire teachers for performance, tie teacher pay to performance, and set high standards for their students. In exchange for this additional flexibility, the expectations for charters are extremely high, and if a charter fails to meet those expectations, it can be closed.

MYTH: Public charter schools are not held accountable for performance.

FACT: Charter schools are subject to annual monitoring by their authorizer and must be approved for renewal.

It is extremely difficult to obtain and retain a charter. Unlike traditional public schools, public charter schools can be closed swiftly if they are failing to meet high standards inside and outside the classroom. All charters are reviewed after three years and again in their fifth year. At any time, if a charter fails to meet its academic, financial or operational obligations, it can face consequences including closure.

MYTH: Local communities have no meaningful say in the charter public school process.

FACT: Local communities are at the heart of public charter schools.

Schools are often founded by parents, neighbors, and citizens, and they are governed by local public nonprofit boards made up of people who live in the community.

References
Sample Public Information Campaigns

National School Choice Week
Website: www.schoolchoiceweek.com

When is it?
National School Choice Week 2016 will be held January 24-30.

What is it?
A one-week recognition, through a series of events and activities in the last full week of January, whereby a growing number of educational non-profits across America promote the tenet that all parents should be empowered to choose the best public educational option for their child within their school district.

Why do Louisiana charter schools participate?
Choice Week organizers support all education options: traditional and charter schools, private and public, vouchers, magnet schools, virtual charters, and homeschooling. While their message is broader than the charter school movement, it does uphold several central messages of the charter movement:

- Parents, students and teachers should choose the best public school environment for their child regardless of zip code, and
- Public school dollars should follow the child within that state’s school district.

What activities should my school engage in during Charter School Week?
1. Use your social media networks to promote school choice as important to parent empowerment.
2. Encourage your Principal, Board Chair or a parent to write a 200-word or less Letter to the Editor about why school choice has made a difference in their child’s charter school public education experience.
3. Hold an open house at your campus to invite the media, public officials, and the community to come talk to teachers and parents, and see first-hand what a charter school “looks like” and why charter education gives choice to parents to pick the right school environment for their child.
Sample press release to customize for your school:

NAME OF SCHOOL/CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD recognizes “School Choice Week”

In celebration of the public charter school movement in Louisiana which serves more than 70,000 students across 20 parishes, SCHOOL NAME/CHARTER BOARD is recognizing Jan. 24 to Jan. 30, 2016 as “School Choice Week” with a series of parent outreach initiatives.

DESCRIPTION/INFO ON PARENT OUTREACH EVENTS/INITIATIVES

“We’re excited to welcome our parents and community members to see what SCHOOL NAME is about, and why this school is a great option for the families of this community,” said SCHOOL LEADER/BOARD CHAIR.

Louisiana has one of the strongest public charter school laws in the country, according to the National Alliance of Public Charter Schools, and currently is home to 134 charter schools.

“Whether charter, traditional, private, or online, choices in education options add up to two words: parent power,” said Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools Executive Director Caroline Roemer Shirley. “We encourage parents and community leaders to visit their local charter school and see why this public school option is working so well.”

Louisiana state law now empowers parents and community leaders to forge new paths for educational options, with charter schools as one example. The larger concept celebrated by School Choice Week is to recognize all kinds of educational options to suit the child, said former State Senator Ann Duplessis, President, Louisiana Federation for Children.

“We want parents to take time to explore the concept of ‘school choice’ between January 24 and January 30, National School Choice Week. This is a great opportunity to explore all the options out there and become part of the ‘Power to Parents’ education movement.” said Roemer Shirley.

For information, visit www.schoolchoiceweek.com. For more information, contact YOUR SCHOOL LEADER OR COMMUNICATIONS LIAISON.

Sample Letter to the Editor (Actual letter published in 2014)

RE: Choice Week Letter

Imagine living in a place where your neighborhood dictates the school that your child is supposed to attend next school year. Your visit to this mandatory school produces panic as it isn’t clear how it exists in this Information/Technology Age and it doesn’t pass the shameful, unspoken appearance test. You leave the school feeling unexcited, sad, scared and wanting more for your child.

The situation described above was reality for me and my husband. Of course, when we were younger, we had to go to schools that we were “zoned” for—we assumed the same was true for our daughter. Thankfully, our fear and desire to want more than just a mundane education for our child overruled the zoning assignment. Having the freedom to choose shouldn’t just apply to material possessions, religion or spouse. The freedom to choose should also include your children’s learning environment. Our independent charter school has made school interesting for our children—they are excited to attend school! Because my children are excited, I want to know more; therefore, I am more involved with the school. Having the ability to choose a school that takes an innovative and modern approach to teaching is a great reason to celebrate school choice.

Gratefully,
BenDette McCaskill
Encore Academy Parent
Louisiana supports Parent Power... Because Louisiana supports school choice.
Charter, traditional, virtual, homeschool, magnet, private.
Your child, your choice.

National School Choice Week, Jan. 25-31
www.lacharterschools.org

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Sample Web Ads from 2015

Your child, your choice.
National School Choice Week January 25-31
www.lacharterschools.org
Louisiana supports Parent Power... Because Louisiana supports school choice.
Charter, traditional, virtual, homeschool, magnet, private.
National Digital Learning Day

Website: www.digitallearningday.org

When is it?
Digital Learning Day was held on March 13, 2015. A date for 2016 has yet to be announced.

What is it?
A one-day recognition in schools across the country to promote the use of instructional technology in the classroom, libraries, and virtual school settings.

Why do Louisiana charter schools participate?
Studies have shown that the use of technology in public education is promoted more readily in charter schools because of the flexibility that school leaders have. Principals and school leadership teams have the freedom to personalize instruction and respond more directly to the needs of teachers.


What activities should my school engage in during Digital Learning Day?
Registration through the website is encouraged. This is a day to promote STEM education at your campus, invite the media, and show-off issues like the following:

1. How teachers are using technology, such as 3D printers, robotics, or coding to inspire instruction;
2. How your school is ensuring that all children have access to technology, especially if there is a partnership to promote;
3. Innovative student projects utilizing technology that celebrate your academic focus.
Here’s how one Louisiana school marked this event in 2013:

Wood: Connections Academy celebrates digital learning

10:15 PM, Feb. 1, 2013 | 0 Comments

Connections Academy celebrates digital learning

Last week (Jan. 27 to Feb. 1) was National School Choice Week, which attempts to shine a spotlight on all the public school options now available to students and their families. Immediately following that week is Digital Learning Day on Wednesday. Both activities, while mostly celebrated in the education community, serve to recognize how technology is transforming public education.

As the principal of Louisiana Connections Academy, a full-time, free virtual K-12 public charter school, I see, first-hand, the benefits of school choice and technology everyday. I see it in the way our students, for whom the traditional classroom may not have been the best fit, are flourishing in their online learning environment. I see kids learning with the help of technology, at a pace that meets their individual needs; connecting with teachers one-on-one. I hear from parents who tell me that their child “loves school!”

For approximately 1,200 students from across Louisiana, our virtual charter school is what works for them and offers the best choice to that student’s needs, whether it was because they needed a more flexible school environment or needed more individualized instruction to meet their academic pace. Whatever the reason, Louisiana Connections Academy welcomes our children.

As our school gears up for enrollment for the 2013-14 school year, I want to thank all of the parents, students, educators, advocates, and policymakers for making their voices heard and making our school, and all of the other school choices in public education, possible. Our students deserve a future filled with new and innovative learning tools and options. Explore this option at www.LouisianaConnectionsAcademy.com.

- Caroline Wood
principal, Louisiana Connections Academy, Baton Rouge
National Charter School Week/Day

Website: www.publiccharters.org/involved/national-charter-schools-week

When is it?
National Charter School Week is the first full week of May.

What is it?
Every year, National Charter Schools Week gives charter schools across the country the chance to raise awareness about the success of the charter school movement. Whether it’s highlighting the academic successes of our students or the strong parental demand for more schools, this week focuses on sharing and celebrating the power of charter schools.

Why do Louisiana charter schools participate?
For Louisiana, this week always occurs during the State Legislative Session. Therefore, it is an excellent opportunity for LAPCS members to educate legislators about the facts regarding public charter education and dispel myths.

What activities should my school engage in?
LAPCS will invite schools to participate in a number of activities centered around the State Capitol and with congressional leaders. The Governor and Legislature have annually recognized National Charter School Day with proclamations. Our congressional delegation has in the past sponsored e-press conferences to highlight the strength of our charter school laws.

Each school, however, should register at the national website and download the “toolkit” of activities. The national toolkit will include graphic arts materials and logos, social media blurbs, factsheets, press release templates, draft letters for personalization to elected officials and media outlets, as well as event ideas. All materials are provided free of charge.
Here is a Louisiana logo you can customize for use in promotions:

Here is a sample press release to customize for your school:

Time to Celebrate Charter Schools in Louisiana: May 2-6, 2016

NAME OF YOUR SCHOOL and the Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools Mark National Charter School Week

NAME OF YOUR SCHOOL OR CHARTER BOARD joins the Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools in inviting the public to recognize May 2 - 6 as a celebration of National Charter School Week, and use this week as an opportunity to visit their local charter school to see what makes it work so well for students, parents and educators.

INFORMATION ON SPECIAL EVENTS MARKING CHARTER SCHOOL WEEK WITH QUOTE FROM SCHOOL LEADER

There are now 134 charter schools in Louisiana, serving over 70,000 children in 20 different parishes. Louisiana is also host to the nation’s only all charter district in Orleans Parish.

“I hope every public school advocate will explore three concepts during Charter School Week. First, our parents should have choice in educational options. Our principals should have autonomy, or freedom to decide how they improve student performance, not micromanagement by a central office. And at all times, parents deserve accountability in how their child’s school performs, not excuses,” said Caroline Roemer Shirley, executive director of the Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools.

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools says Louisiana has the third strongest charter school laws in the nation based on metrics such as quality, accountability, equitable funding and facilities, and no caps on charter school growth. The organization also ranked the state’s movement as the second most robust in the nation based on growth, quality and innovation.

YOUR SCHOOL NAME is a member of the Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools and is working with others across the state to inform parents that charter schools are indeed free, public schools that are funded by tax dollars. For more information contact YOUR SCHOOL LEADER/COMMUNICATIONS LIAISON.
Here is a sample proclamation to get your local governing body to pass in recognition of Charter School Week:

Whereas, Louisiana is a state whereby principals, parents, teachers, students, and volunteers can truly be thanked for creating a vibrant charter school reform movement; and

Whereas, charter schools are public schools, free and independent, open to all students, held accountable for state standards, and fully adhering to all federal and state laws; and

Whereas, more than 70,000 public school children walk through the doors of 134 charter schools each day in Louisiana, confirming that these are innovative, autonomous, functioning campuses with a unique school culture suited to the local community; and

Whereas, Louisiana has been ranked by the National Alliance of Public Charter Schools to have the third strongest charter school laws in the nation and the second most robust movement in the country; and

Whereas, the Center for Research on Education Outcomes said Louisiana charter schools were among the top five in the nation for academic growth; and

Whereas, as parents, we all want the best education possible for our children, and with this choice in education, our charter schools are raising the bar for academic success, growing school performance scores and reporting higher graduation rates; therefore

Be it Resolved that May 2 to 6 shall be known as Louisiana Charter Schools Week to highlight the numerous achievements and benefits of the public charter school movement and to help give parents power to recognize charters as the avenue to choice and change in the state’s public school system; and

Be it further resolved that THIS BODY recognizes and congratulates the hard work of the YOUR SCHOOL’S leadership team, charter boards, parents and students for making this a viable educational option in our community and state.