

## **State should pass bill, lift charter school cap**

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Illinois parents and kids are beating down the doors to get into the state's 35 public charter schools.

At UNO Charter School in Chicago, 2,220 applicants vied for 400 spots last year. Across Chicago, 7,000 students wait for a seat at one of 28 charters, which are spread across 65 campuses. Statewide, 13,000 sit on wait lists.

Parents flock to charter schools because they tend to be smaller, more innovative and -- most importantly -- their students usually do better than kids at comparable neighborhood schools. Parents know a good deal when they see it: a publicly funded school freed from bureaucracy, giving it room to set its schedule, adjust its curriculum and spend as it sees fit.

That's a compelling argument for more charter schools.

We support a bill in Springfield to allow for additional charter schools, which admit kids by lottery and, in Chicago, serve mostly low-income, minority kids. Currently, state law puts a cap of 60 charter schools in Illinois, with just 30 in Chicago.

This is among the most restrictive caps in the nation. Of the 10 largest states, Illinois has the fewest charter schools. California has more than 700, Ohio more than 300.

The Illinois bill, which has passed the Senate, wouldn't open the flood gates. It would simply raise the cap from 60 to 100 charters and remove limits on how many each city or region could have.

We are leery of ending the geographic restrictions, since the majority of new charters would likely end up in Chicago. A glut of charter schools could dilute overall quality. But we shouldn't stop at 30 in Chicago, despite what the Chicago Teachers Union says. The union says Chicago already has enough charter schools, particularly since existing charter schools can open multiple campuses. The CTU says existing charters must be held more accountable. We aren't buying it. Charter schools are required to meet performance standards over five years or risk being shut down. CPS upgraded its standards in 2006 and three charters have been revoked since 1997, when the first charter opened. The charter expansion bill is currently in a legislative no-man's land. Rep. Richard Bradley (D-Chicago) picked it up from the Senate but is sitting on it. He needs to hand it over to a true charter school proponent and give this bill an airing.

There's no time to wait. Thousands of students are waiting.