

# NEWS RELEASE



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## **CHARTER SCHOOL REFORM ACT OF 2009 POSITIONS ILLINOIS AS FIRST TO ANSWER PRESIDENT OBAMA'S CALL Illinois Charter Public Schools Wins Fight to Lift State's Restrictive Cap**

CHICAGO, IL – The passing of Senate Bill 612 (Charter School Reform Act of 2009) is a significant step in the growth of Illinois' charter public schools. After four years and countless hours of lobbying and deliberation, SB 612 passed the House of Representatives without opposition and the Illinois Senate by a vote of 45-10. The lifting of the restrictive cap will allow 120 charter schools with limited geographic constraints. This will include 40 new charter schools in Chicago, 15 for downstate Illinois, and five new schools allocated for drop-out recovery. The bill will also call for a task force to examine independent charter school authorizing in Illinois. The task force will report its findings to the General Assembly on January 1, 2010.

"Illinois has taken an important step forward in helping to bring more high-quality learning options to underserved communities," said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. "Illinois is the first state to deliver on President Obama's charge to expand charter school opportunities as a means for driving innovation and accelerating student achievement. As more charters open up in Illinois, it is important that we maintain high standards of accountability to ensure results for students and parents."

### **A Change Has Come**

The Illinois Network of Charter Schools (INCS) Executive Director, Elizabeth Evans, has led the charge to expand this tried-and-true school model across the state. "The charter school model puts students first. Our proven track record of educational success shows that this is an effective approach. We have fought extremely hard to lift the cap, and I truly believe that we will see an upswing in academic achievement and a narrowing of our state's educational achievement gap," said Evans. "Thanks to the leadership of Senator Kim Lightford, Senator Heather Steans, Representative Jerry Mitchell, the Civic Committee and other partners like the Chicago Public Schools, there is new life in the state's public education system," added Evans.

With the lifting of the cap, charter public schools will continue to change the lives of students, parents, their communities, and broader society. Currently, more than 13,000 families are waiting for the chance to attend a charter public school. The lifting of the cap will provide them with the opportunity to reap the benefits that charter schools provide. Currently, only one in 44,000 students can attend a charter public school; however, the tide is clearly moving in a more positive direction.

"We owe a great debt of gratitude to all the charter school parents who wrote letters to their legislators, traveled to Springfield for Charter School Lobby Days, spoke at events and rallies, and spread the word about charter schools to other parents and friends," said INCS Director of Public Policy Carlos Perez. "We will continue to count on their support as we face other challenges," Perez concluded.

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*The Illinois Network of Charter Schools (INCS) is dedicated to improving the quality of public education by promoting and invigorating the charter school concept. The voice of the state's charter schools, INCS advocates for legislation to strengthen charter schools, educates the public about the value of charter schools, and supports the dissemination of best practices throughout the system.*