



DEMOCRACY PREP PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Work Hard. Go to College. Change the World!

**Written Testimony of Seth Andrew
Founder & Superintendent of Democracy Prep Public Schools
Harlem, New York**

July 24, 2012

Chairman Hunter, Ranking Member Kildee and esteemed Members of The Subcommittee,

Thank you for inviting me here today to speak with you about what I believe to be the single most significant challenge our democracy faces: the need to recruit and grow a new generation of public school teachers and leaders who are excellently prepared for the rigors of becoming educators in the 21st century schoolhouse.

My name is Seth Andrew, and I am the Founder and Superintendent of Democracy Prep Public Schools, a district of seven public charter school campuses based in Harlem that serves 2,000 students in grades K-12. Our network was founded on the principle of ensuring that all of our scholars and our staff must work hard, go to college, and that they *will* change the world!

The legislation pending before this committee, which includes both H.R. 3989 and H.R. 3990, is a strong step in the right direction. As a K-12 product of NYC public education, a teacher, a principal, and now a superintendent, I believe that H.R. 3989 and 3990 are the single best leveraged changes to federal education policy to increase the quality of teachers by removing unproductive barriers to entry and to level the playing field so that all excellent teachers, whether traditionally certified, alternatively certified, or uncertified, are able to teach the scholars who need them most.

Unfortunately, most districts, states, and the federal government continue to use a course-based-certification model with a lock-step seniority pay system that deters the best and the brightest teachers from entering — and remaining in — the profession.

I have a few of our amazingly hard working scholars with me today who have helped Democracy Prep become the single highest performing Charter Management Organization in the City of New York over the past four years. These scholars represent a major milestone towards fulfilling Dr. King's dream, not just of equal access, but of a choice of excellent public schools for every student in America, regardless of which zip code he or she was born into. The education crisis for low-income scholars like Jaime, Michael, Omar, and Melia is the civil rights issue of our generation. From the time I first served as a Congressional Page from Harlem to this day, I have hoped that we could find bi-partisan solutions to our profound educational problems. Today, I believe that you have before this committee an opportunity to do just that.



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Democracy Prep Public Schools operate the highest growth middle schools in the city, and, just last week, our first turnaround elementary school, Harlem Prep, was recognized for having the single highest growth of any school in literacy in the entire State of New York, and the highest combined math and literacy proficiency growth in New York City. At the High School level, our scholars consistently outperform the wealthiest students in New York State, Westchester County, on the high-stakes Regents examinations.

What is most remarkable about these results is that our scholars are exactly those who many people have argued are the hardest to educate. Our schools are all Title-One school-wide programs, and:

- 100% of our scholars are African-American or Latino;
- 82% are eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL);
- 22% enter our schools with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs);
- 15% enter our schools involved with the Administration for Children's Services;
- 12% enter our schools designated as English Language Learners (ELLs); and
- 5% of our students are in the homeless system.

And yet, I'm extremely proud to tell you that these scholars and 100% of their classmates are now college-bound.

Despite these notable achievements, some critics remain skeptical. They assume we benefit from educating children whose parents are simply more motivated. They suspect we raise substantial sums through private philanthropy. Failing all else, they feel certain that we will not be able to reproduce these results at scale.

This skepticism is entirely misplaced. At our turnaround elementary school, we had the same parents, poverty, and social challenges as the year before, and yet the proficiency results improved by more than 30%. At our middle schools, we have now become the de-facto "zoned" middle school for Harlem. Even though we have 5,000 people *outside* of Harlem apply to our schools, we no longer have a lottery for an entering 6th grader who lives in our Zone; each is now *guaranteed* a seat.

As for financing, we educate each scholar solely on the public dollars allocated to us by the city, state and federal government from day one. This amounts to a base-funding amount of \$13,500 per student, which is significantly less than the New York City Public Schools receive for each student in a traditional public school.

We've grown from one grade of 125 students in 2006 to 2,000 in 2012, and each school has improved over time. But, more importantly, we've opened our doors to analysts from elite research universities — such as Harvard and Stanford — and from renowned think tanks — such as Brookings, AEI, The Manhattan Institute, and RAND — to conduct rigorous

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studies including those that are done as a “random trial” on a lotteried-in/ lotteried-out basis. What they have all found is that the Democracy Prep model is in fact affordable, replicable, and sustainable over time.

So, how do we do it? What’s the secret?

We attribute our success to the five core tenets that animate our organizational philosophy:

- 1) **Time:** By utilizing a longer school day, week, and year, we ensure our students attend school for at least 50% more time than do typical public school students.
- 2) **Rigor:** We hold our students to the highest academic expectations. To us, this is not just a buzzword; it is the norm. We not only offer Advanced Regents’ Diplomas, APs, and Honors classes, we require them of ALL students.
- 3) **Culture:** By building a culture around our DREAM values that help us to develop strong citizenship and character, we create learning environments that feature a paradoxical blend of warm and strict, joy and discipline, as well as enthusiasm and maturity.
- 4) **Data:** We build our schools with a robust and real-time data loop. Principals, teachers, students, and families all receive thoughtful, targeted data that allow us to differentiate instruction and to meet students where they are, regardless of where they start with us

And most importantly, the reason we are here today:

- 5) **Talent:** The single largest challenge we face as a network, and that I face as a Superintendent, is finding, training, and sustaining amazing teachers and leaders. The success of great schools like Democracy Prep is mostly a function of which *adults* they have in their buildings, not which *kids* are in their buildings.

So how do we ensure each student has the benefit of learning from an excellent teacher, and each teacher from an excellent principal? What can other schools, districts, and states learn from the federal government? The answer lies in the concept put forward by Nerav Kingsland, head of an organization called New Schools for New Orleans. Instead of trying to *reform* the existing certification regulations, we need policy makers to *relinquish* this power and allow more decisions to be made by the people closest to the students. This relinquishment needs to be accompanied by meaningful and tough accountability for student outcomes rather than for adult inputs. States and districts need to hold principals and superintendents accountable while empowering them to make decisions regarding who is working in their classrooms and schools.

As a public charter school district, we have been fortunate enough to have some flexibility from the Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT) rules under New York State law. State law has



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relinquished to us the ability to create our own recruitment, compensation, hiring, evaluation, and retention systems at Democracy Prep.

According to research conducted by Dr. Roland Fryer, Director of the Education Innovation Laboratory (EdLabs) at Harvard University, the percentage of teachers who have obtained a Master's Degree or higher has increased from 27.5% in 1971 to 61.8% in 2006. This increase is largely due to local state and federal policy that places inordinate emphasis on such credentialing. One might expect that that this increase in the relative education level of each teacher would translate to a commensurate increase in student achievement. And yet, as we all well know, student achievement scores in reading and math remained stagnant for 9, 13, and 17 year-old students across that entire timespan. In fact, a multi-year study of New York City charter schools conducted by EdLabs revealed teacher certification to play a statistically negligible role in determining student performance.

Our own experience at Democracy Prep has confirmed this data. In fact, we believe that traditional HQT designation and certification may in fact be *inversely* related with teacher quality on the whole. Last year across our district, only 18% of teachers possessed traditional certification. 52% were certified through a non-traditional route, such as TFA, TNTP, or the MATCH Teacher Residency, and 30% were wholly uncertified. Despite this, each of our schools continued to post dramatic gains in student proficiency levels across all grade levels and all subjects. Quite clearly, our students did not suffer on account of their teachers lacking the traditional HQT credentials that currently guide federal policy.

Next year, I will be entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing the education of over 2,000 students. Given our insistence on an uncharacteristically long school day, week, and year, our students are in Democracy Prep classrooms for the bulk of their waking hours, and it is imperative that the teachers who stand before our students each day have the mettle to thrive in our demanding *no excuses* environment. It makes no sense whatsoever to charge me with ensuring these students continue to grow academically, socially, emotionally and as citizens for our democracy while simultaneously disempowering me from deciding who gets to work in our classrooms.

The HQT standard places the illogical restriction on the talent pool that my principals are permitted to access and unnecessarily hamstring our search for the amazing teachers that our students need. Under current policy concerning HQT, it is a remarkable indicator that I could not hire any of the members of this committee to teach history or civics at Democracy Prep even with the benefit of the exemption in New York State Charter Law. Because I have already reached my 30% threshold of "uncertified" teachers, I cannot even use the HOUSSE provisions under HQT to make you eligible to teach at Democracy Prep.

This issue is *not* about traditional district schools versus public charter schools. Ensuring that all principals, Local Education Authorities (LEA's), State Education Authorities (SEA's)



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have the laws, regulations, and tools in place they need to recruit the best and the brightest teachers regardless of their route to certification is a public education national challenge for *all* schools. This is true regardless of whether they are traditional district, magnet, charter, or other forms of public education. However, in most states the situation is even more dire for traditional district schools, which aren't afforded the same flexibility as public charter districts like mine. Traditional districts are forced to turn away thousands of great candidates for teaching that charter districts are able to interview and hire.

Take my own personal case. I studied education as a major at Brown while pursuing my Bachelors Degree and received a Masters Degree in education from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Nevertheless, I would be ineligible to be hired by most traditional public school districts in America because I do not currently hold a valid traditional teacher certification. Despite having received an alternative certification in 2001, having taught in traditional district public schools in Massachusetts, and having taught and led schools for the past decade, I am still ineligible to teach in most schools in America. When we lose high quality potential teachers from the applicant pool, the people we hurt most of all are our children most in need of an excellent teacher.

Professor Marcus Winters of the University of Colorado has written a book about this topic, in which he studied Democracy Prep's practices closely. What he concluded is that we need to "open the floodgates" to *potential* teachers by lowering the barriers to entry, and to make the process far simpler for prospective educators and career-switching teachers to even be *considered* for a teaching job.

Please understand, this does not by any stretch of the imagination mean that **everyone** can, or should, be permitted to teach. It simply means that everyone with a clean criminal history and a Bachelors degree should be able to be *considered* for a teaching position. Whether they are hired, and whether they should remain employed as a teacher, should be based on how suited their skills, knowledge, and dispositions are for any given role, school, and school leader.

Democracy Prep has pioneered this process of "opening the floodgates." In fact, for ~200 teaching positions available in our district last year, we received approximately 10,000 applicants. If we were to have used a strict HQT or certification standard, we would have had to eliminate nearly two-thirds of those applicants upon initial screening. Instead, we reviewed **all** of the applicants for the best potential fit through a rigorous screening process that includes a resume review, a phone interview, an in-person interview, a sample lesson, a feedback loop, a second sample lesson when necessary, and reference checks. Then and only then, would we begin to discuss with a candidate their certification status and HQT.

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Subsequently, because of HQT, our school leaders spend hundreds of hours of wasted time and energy to work with our human resource team in an effort to identify ways to ensure that we become compliant with the letter of the law, while practicing “creative non-compliance” with the spirit of the law. In fact, the only thing that HQT does for our staff is encourage us to waste time stretching the definition of HOUSSE as far as humanly possible.

Congress has deliberated for quite some time without coming to agreement on how best to develop new policies on teacher evaluation. Our evaluation model at Democracy Prep might be considered a blueprint for schools across the nation. Once a teacher or leader is hired through this rigorous hiring process at Democracy Prep, they receive training in our thorough performance-based, outcome-driven evaluation rubric that outlines for them exactly how they will be measured and evaluated over the course of the year. Teachers are observed by their principals at least once a week and given a formal review once every trimester. Our evaluation rubric is made up of five discrete categories, each worth one-fifth of a teacher’s overall grade:

- 20% is based on demonstration of observable best practices in teaching and learning;
- 20% is based on demonstration of observable best practices in cultivating student citizenship, character, and behavior;
- 20% is based on demonstration of measurable outcomes in team-oriented behaviors, including communication with parents, students, and colleagues;
- 20% is based on student growth on internal assessments; and
- 20% is based on student performance on internal assessments.

Thus, 40% of a teachers’ performance is measured on “tests” and “data.” However, the measurement is focused on *growth*, and it actually isn’t measured at all on state test *performance*, which we believe is a lagging indicator. Rather, we measure leading indicators established by the district that help us determine at an early stage whether a teacher is struggling or whether he or she is becoming a model for others to emulate. At the end of each trimester, a teacher receives a score that encompasses a full range of performance and does not fall along a simple binary scale, such as the New York’s system of satisfactory/unsatisfactory.

Teachers’ final evaluation rubric score determines their raise year-over-year, which ranges from 0% for an underperforming teacher to 10% for a master teacher. Democracy Prep lead teachers earn base salaries starting at \$65,500 per year (at least 25% more than the NYC Department of Education’s starting salary). Consistently masterful teachers can earn up to \$150,000 per year after just eight years at Democracy Prep. And yes, this salary system is sustainable exclusively on the public funds we receive as a charter.



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In addition to an evaluation system that is de-linked from HQT or “certification” completely, we ensure that our teachers and leaders receive regular, thoughtful evaluations and ratings that are linked most of all to student growth. We do not incentivize proficiency for its own sake. By focusing on growth or “value-added,” we encourage our best teachers to work with our lowest performing students who have the most room to grow. Moreover, we incentivize our faculty to work with students in art, music, theater, civics and many other subjects that have been pushed out of the curriculum in schools where our only focus is ELA and Math proficiency.

If high-performing Local Education Authority (LEA)’s were empowered to create our own residency-based “certification” programs, based on outcomes not inputs, I believe that we could dramatically accelerate both the achievement-gap closing work of Democracy Prep and similar schools and to attract more and stronger candidates to the field of education. Our professional development program includes more than 300 hours each year of direct in-service training for all teachers, targeted to their specific areas of need. This approach would be far more valuable and effective in credentialing teachers than an on-line masters degree that serves as the current HQT route for many teachers each year. Approved school-based certification programs based out of the LEA would have a major impact on our ability to recruit, support, and retain great teachers for the profession.

In summary, enactment of H.R. 3989 and H.R. 3990 would mitigate some of the adverse consequences wrought by implementation of the well-intentioned, but ill-conceived, HQT standard. Some may contend that such action would constitute an unwarranted rollback of minimum standards for teachers. We believe that any policy that prioritizes credentials of adults over the needs of the students in low-performing classrooms is an affront to the principle of equality of educational opportunity. We must roll out the welcome mat to all potentially excellent teachers in America, including the members of this esteemed committee, and encourage them to enter the profession while holding principals, LEA district superintendents like me, and State Education Authorities accountable for the outcomes and results of those teachers, not their credentials and inputs.

Thank you for allowing me to join you today and for your attention to this extremely important matter.



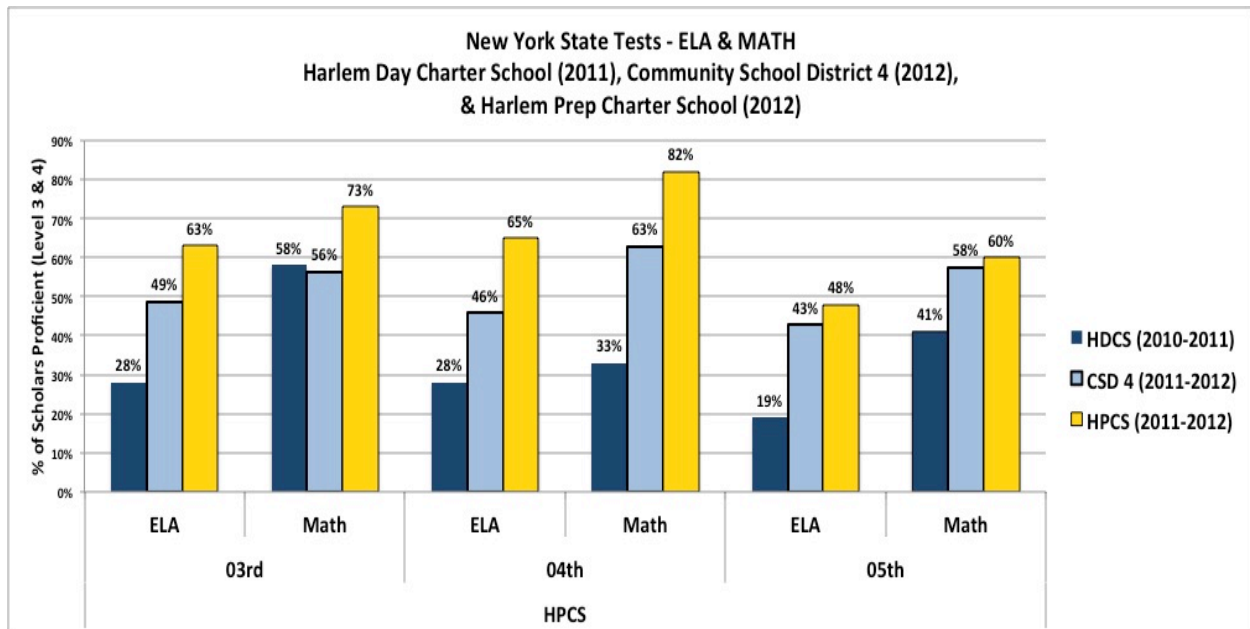
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HARLEM PREP PROVES SCHOOL TURNAROUND IS POSSIBLE Dramatic Improvements In Every Grade & Subject In Just One Year

Harlem Prep Charter School has become one of the single most impressive and exciting indicators of what is possible for America's lowest performing public schools. In less than one year, the teachers and leaders at Harlem Prep accomplished a challenge that many believed to be insurmountable for low-performing students: substantial turnaround in just 10 months. New York State ELA and Math Exam results released Tuesday show Harlem Prep's students improving tremendously, increasing overall proficiency scores by 34% in ELA and 28% in math and beating the district in every subject and grade level tested.

Just last year, the story was drastically different. *Harlem Day*, was the single lowest performing school of any kind in Harlem. By contrast, Democracy Prep (DPPS) ran some of the highest performing schools in New York and in March 2011 the SUNY Charter Schools Institute granted DPPS the state's first "Restructured Renewal" of a public charter school. DPPS began the transformation by changing the ten-year-old school's name to *Harlem Prep*, guaranteeing every student a seat to return, and requiring every staff member to reapply for a position. Harlem Prep was founded on the principle that every child will "*Work Hard, Go to College, and Change the World!*" Democracy Prep then replicated their proven formula for success: more time, better data, increased rigor, strong culture, and most of all, amazing teachers and leaders.



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Linda Easton, a former Trustee at Harlem Day, was elated to learn the results. “I’m just so thrilled for the children,” she said with a tear. “These are the same students who were at the bottom of Harlem only a year ago. When Harlem Prep opened, they were told how hard they needed to work, and they did. Look at them now! They performed better than I could have possibly imagined.”

“The breathtaking turnaround at Harlem Prep is a testament to great leadership by Principal Lindsay Malanga and Executive Director Katie Duffy,” said Democracy Prep Public Schools Founder and Superintendent, Seth Andrew. “Turnaround is about getting great people on the bus, and Lindsay and Katie knocked the cover off the ball!”

When asked what she did that the ten prior leaders of Harlem Day hadn’t, Duffy explained, “Our staff is a DREAM Team of educators and this was a 100% team effort. Ms. Malanga and the teachers demonstrated what we tell our scholars every day: Hard Work=Success.”

Lindsay Malanga, Harlem Prep’s Principal said, “This data only verifies what we already knew. Our citizen-scholars love coming to school every day. They enjoy art, music, physical education, civics, and so much more. That said, we are always keeping our eye on the prize of success in college and citizenship for each and every child who attends Harlem Prep, regardless of how far behind they may have started.”

Malanga reminds visitors that after just one academic year, Harlem Prep is not yet fully turned around, “We will be serving East Harem for a long time to come, and Harlem Prep must continue to improve. Next year, we’re opening a new Harlem Prep Middle School and we still have lots of work to do. Our scholars deserve nothing less!”

In order to share best practices, academic researchers, media outlets, teachers, and schools leaders are welcome to visit Democracy Prep at any time. To schedule a visit or to speak with our staff, teachers, families or scholars contact: SCunning@DemocracyPrep.org or for more information visit www.DemocracyPrep.org.

ABOUT DEMOCRACY PREP:

Democracy Prep Public Schools is a growing network of seven non-profit public charter schools serving more than 2,000 citizen-scholars in grades K-12. Over the past four years, Democracy Prep has been the highest performing Charter Management Organization on the Chancellor’s Progress Report and in 2010 Democracy Prep Charter School was named the #1 middle school in the entire City of New York. Harlem Prep is the first in what DPPS intends to be a growing network of turnaround public charter schools that share the same goal of ensuring that all scholars “Work Hard. Go to College, and Change the World.”

ABOUT CHARTER SCHOOL TURNAROUND:

According to a national study, only 16% of public charter schools nationwide achieve academic results better than traditional public schools, 53% achieve comparable results, and 31% achieve lower results than traditional public schools. With 84% of charter schools falling short of their goals, these schools must be held accountable, closed, or turned around.¹ The innovative “restructured renewal” model used at Harlem Prep is similar to recently thwarted efforts by the New York City Department of Education to turnaround 23 of the city’s lowest performing schools.

¹ *Multiple Choice: Charter School Performance in 16 States*. Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO), June 2009.



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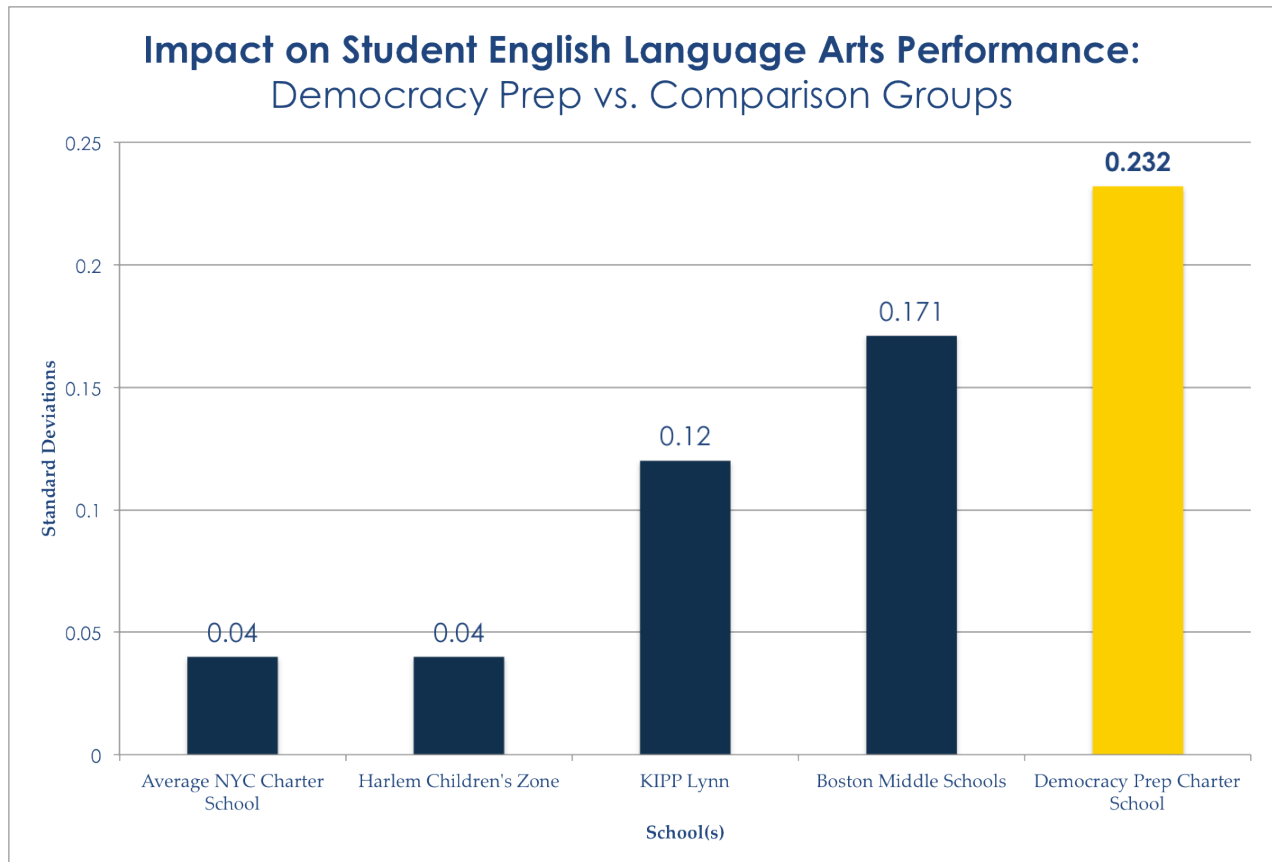
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A Proven Track Record of Academic Success

Democracy Prep's DREAM Team of teachers and staff currently achieves remarkable academic growth for all of its 2,000 scholars in grades K-12, especially those with special needs.

Research-Proven Effectiveness

Dr. Roland Fryer, MacArthur "Genius," Harvard economist, and founder of the university's Education Laboratory, approached Democracy Prep to evaluate its impact on student achievement. Using the lottery to create a randomly assigned treatment group, the gold standard in research methodology, Fryer estimated that Democracy Prep's effect on achievement is "statistically indistinguishable from the highest impacts ever seen in math or ELA." Additionally, Democracy Prep's effect on English achievement was the highest ever estimated in this methodology (Dobby, 2012). The graph below shows Democracy Prep's impact on English scores compared to other high-performing schools.



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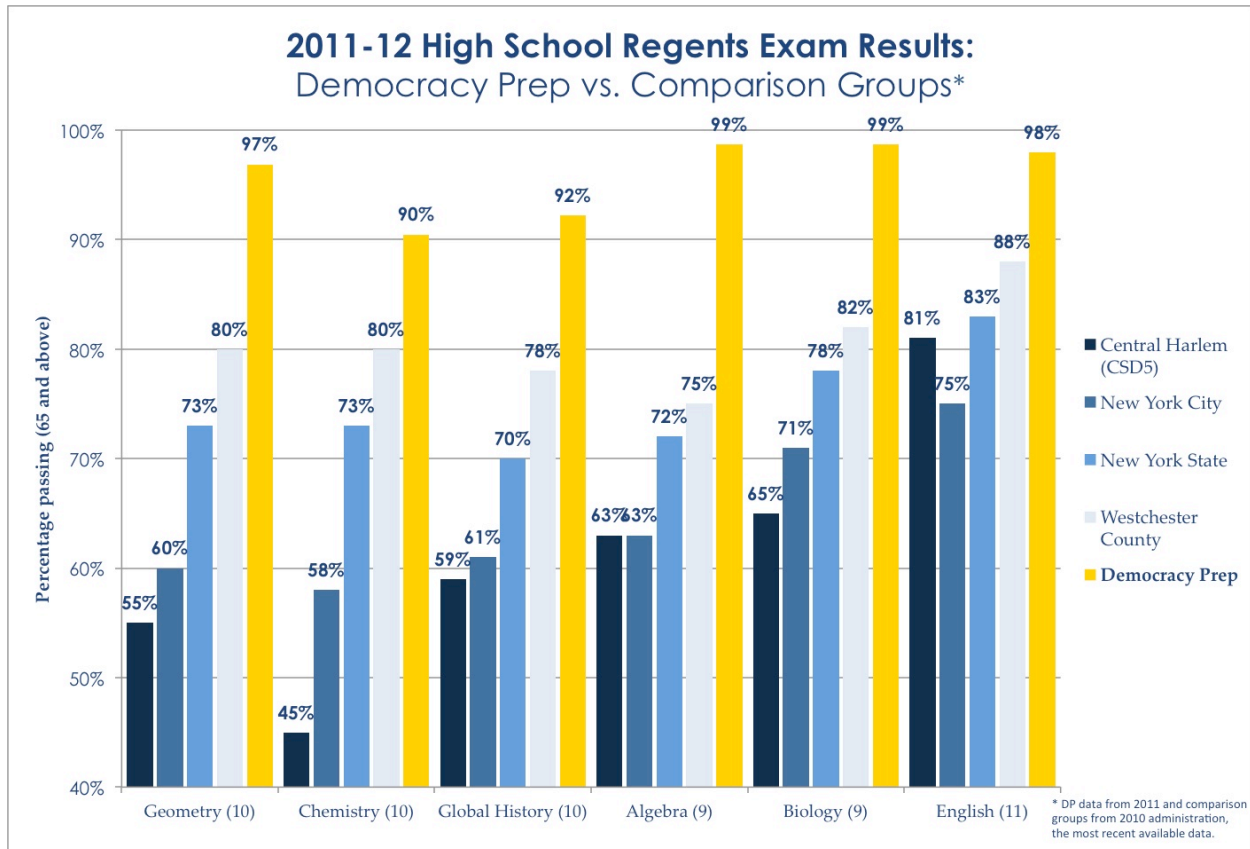


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Comparative Graphics

As the opposite page illustrates, Democracy Prep has consistently outperformed the rest of Harlem, New York City, Westchester County, and other high-performing charter management organizations in a variety of subjects.



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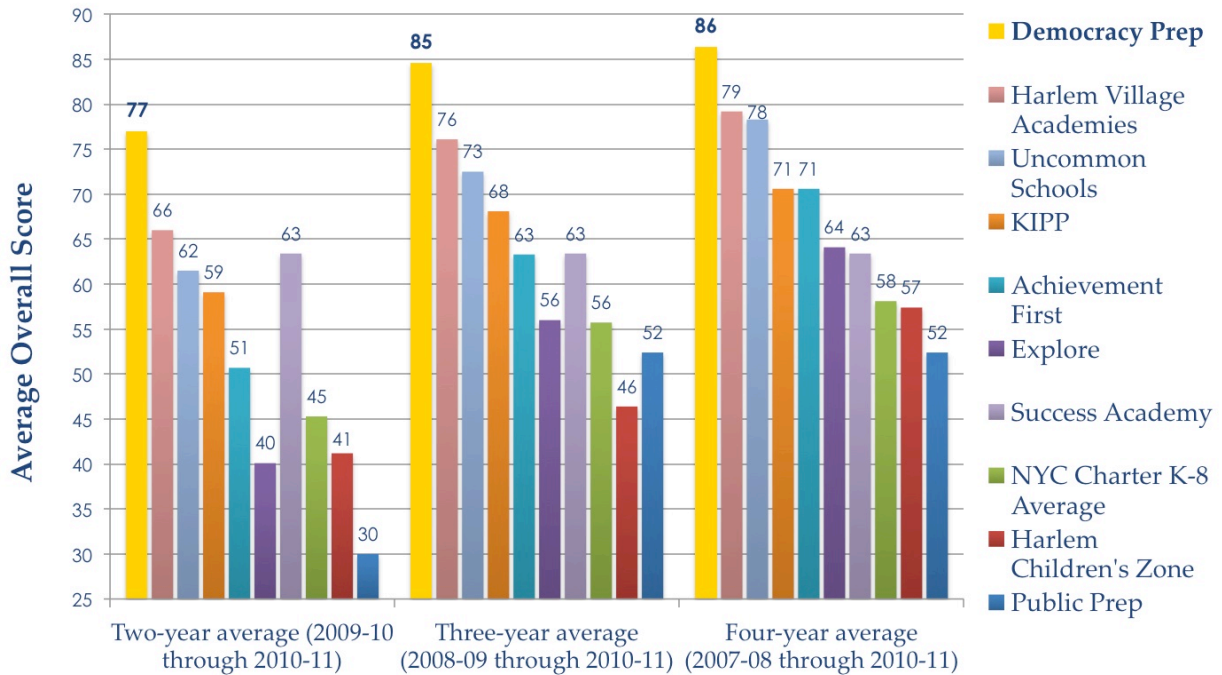


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NYC Chancellor's Progress Report Scores (2007-11):

Democracy Prep Public Schools vs.
Comparison Charter Networks (K-8)



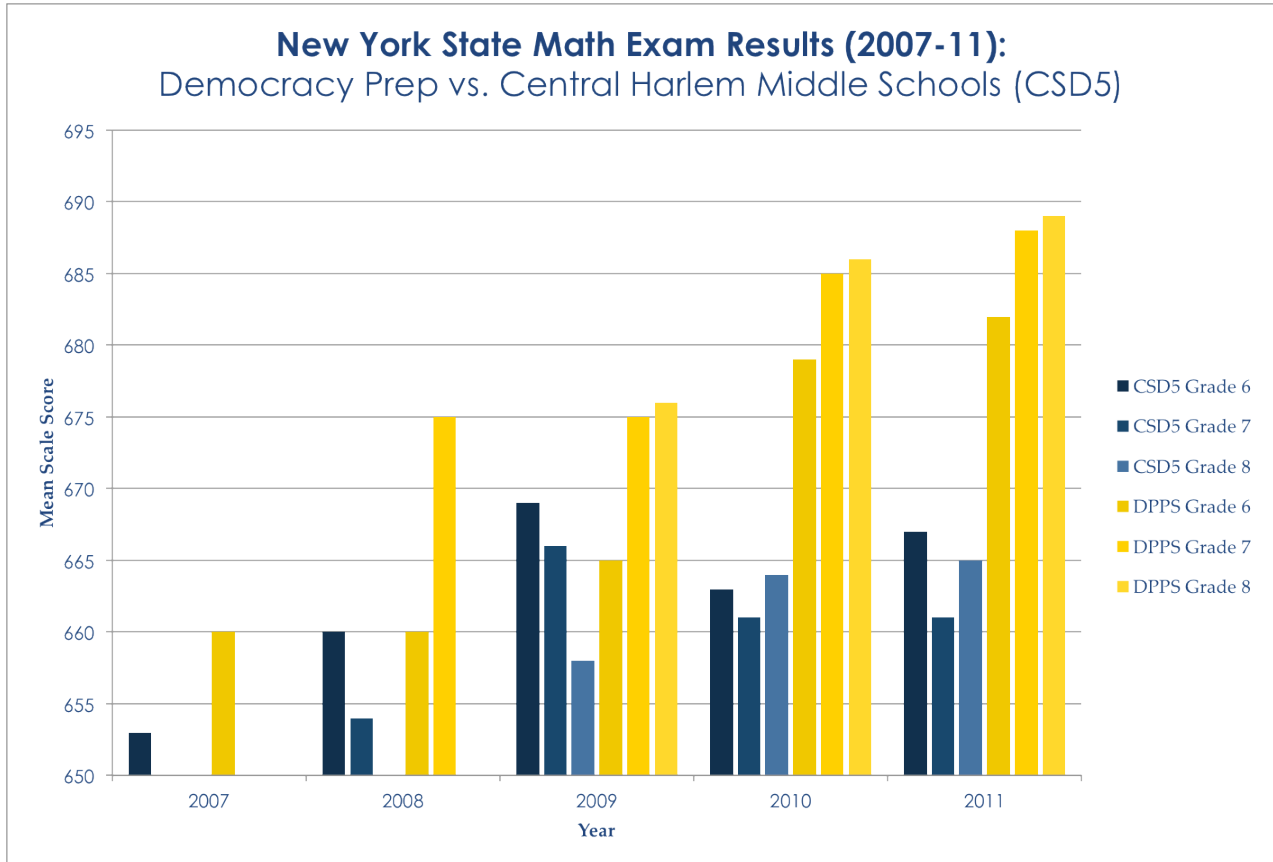
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