



New Report Offers Financial Snapshots of DC Public Charter Schools

By Soumya Bhat

Charter schools are a vital part of our public education system, educating more than 40 percent of the students in publicly funded schools. Charter schools have autonomy from the traditional system, and that's why having tools to understand how each charter spends its publicly-funded resources is important. A recently released Charter Audit Resource Management, or CHARM, [report](#) enhances budget transparency for the charter system by giving greater detail to the financial decisions made by individual charter schools/local education agencies (LEAs). Making this financial and budget data clear and accessible not only helps parents make more informed decisions about schools, but can also lead to stronger financial oversight.

Each charter school already is required to submit annual audits of their financial health to the Public Charter School Board, which are posted online. However, they are not displayed in a uniform way across schools, making it difficult to compare financial data between schools or assess the charter sector's overall financial health.

The CHARM report, a tool developed by the Public Charter School Board, the Office of the Chief Financial Officer, and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, offers school fiscal information in a more consistent, user-friendly format. It distills data provided in fiscal years 2010 – 2012 financial audits into snapshots for each individual charter school LEA.

Here are some interesting findings from the FY 2012 CHARM [report](#):

- **Sources of Revenue by School:** About 82 percent of all charter school funding comes from DC government, 12 percent from federal funds, 3 percent from donations and another 3 percent from other income.
- **Cash Position and Future Debt by School:** As of 2012, the long-term debt for the charter school sector is estimated at \$402 million.
- **Distribution of Expenses by School:** System-wide, 61 percent of charter school expenses are for personnel, 11 percent are direct student costs, 17 percent is occupancy, and 11 percent is other expenses.
- **Philanthropic Revenue by School:** In recent years, the charter school sector received \$24 million per year, on average, or an additional \$932 per student, in private resources, in-kind contributions and other outside support.

DCFPI is glad there is a resource available that can lead to greater budget transparency, and that the Public Charter School Board is open to suggestions from the community on how to make it even better.