

English translation of “El Debate sobre las escuelas charter,” from the March 10, 2010 edition of *El Diario*. For the piece as it appeared in *El Diario*, please click [here](#).

The Debate Over Charter Schools

By Ronnie Lowenstein

One part of the debate over the growing number of charter schools in the city has focused on whether public funding for students in charter schools is less or more than the support for students in traditional public schools. A new report, [Comparing the Level of Public Support: Charter Schools versus Traditional Public Schools](#), prepared at the request of Panel for Education Policy member Patrick Sullivan by the Independent Budget Office finds that the answer lies, in part, on location.

Charter schools are publicly funded but managed by independent boards rather than the local school district. After comparing the per student public financial support for charter schools to per student funding at traditional public schools for the 2008-2009 school year, we found that while public support per student at charter schools was less than at traditional public schools, the size of that difference depended on whether the charter school was located in a public school building or in private space.

General education spending per student at traditional public schools totaled \$16,678 last school year. For charter schools located in public school buildings, public support was just \$305 less per student than at traditional public schools and totaled \$16,373. For charter schools located in private space the shortfall was a more substantial \$3,017 per student and public support totaled \$13,661.

More than two-thirds of charter schools in the city are located in public school buildings, a practice not common in the rest of the country. While all of the city’s charter schools get the same funding allocation for each student as well as the same additional amount of aid for textbooks and some other items, there’s a big noncash benefit for charter schools housed in public school buildings. For these charter schools, IBO estimates savings valued at \$2,712 per student.

Charter schools in private space must pay their own way since there is no public allocation to these schools for lease costs, utilities, and school safety services. But charters located in public school buildings pay only nominal rent and the cost of utilities and school safety is covered by the traditional school that shares the building.

The competition for space in public school buildings has become increasingly heated. Last Wednesday’s vote by the Panel for Education Policy requiring a number of public schools to share their space with 13 charter schools was preceded by a series of contentious hearings. As long as the financial advantage remains for charter schools to find space in public school buildings, this competition will continue.

Ronnie Lowenstein is the director of the Independent Budget Office. The report is available at:
<http://www.ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/charterschoolsfeb2010.pdf>