32,000 Children Stuck on Public Charter School Waitlists

Long waitlists persist as parents demand school options, despite lagging inventory

HOUSTON, Texas, April 25, 2016 – Houston-based nonprofit Families Empowered today released new data and a map, which illustrates the scale of Houston’s waitlist problem: 32,793 students in Houston were placed on a waitlist for a seat at one of three high-performing public charter school for the 2015/2016 school year.

Data-sharing agreements with the school networks of Harmony Public Schools, KIPP Houston Public Schools and YES Prep Public Schools give Families Empowered a unique birds-eye view of the demand for public charter schools in Houston. Families must submit applications in order to attend a public charter school, and students are admitted after selection via blind lottery.

For the 2015-2016 school year, a total of 50,154 applications were submitted to all three networks, by families hoping to find a seat in a public charter school. That represents 43,254 unique Houston children in total, for whom an application was submitted. Of that number, 32,793 students were placed on a waitlist.

“The data points we are releasing today create a clear picture of demand: parents are looking for quality school options, and are willing to play the lottery and risk ending up on a waitlist to get access to it,” said Colleen Dippel, Families Empowered’s Founder and Executive Director.

“When over 32,000 kids are left waiting, our city has a problem. It’s time to end the waitlist,” Dippel said.

In Houston, even as demand for seats in schools of choice remains high, charter school operators cite existing barriers to their growth which slow their ability to create new seats. The primary barrier is an inequality in the school finance formula, which does not grant funding for facilities to public charter schools. The statewide average difference, according to the Texas Education Agency, is about $1,000 per student.

“The lack of school facilities funding keeps us from taking more children off our waitlist and into our classrooms,” said Sehba Ali, Superintendent of KIPP Houston Public Schools. “At KIPP, our waitlist is the same size as our enrollment. For every student we teach, there’s one more family who wants an education that they can’t have.”

“There are over 50,000 applications for just a few thousands available seats. It shouldn’t be this hard to get into a public school,” said Mark DiBella, CEO of YES Prep Public Schools. “The legislature should take a big step forward on behalf of the children and families that are waiting: equalize the facilities and per pupil funding to give all public schools the same opportunity to spur growth.”
“Our analysis shows that for every one lucky student who wins a lottery and finds a seat in Houston, there are six more left on the waitlist. A child’s education shouldn’t be decided by chance,” said Dippel.

Families Empowered serves all parents in need of assistance finding a school of their choice, including the tens of thousands of families that were unable to find a spot in Houston’s three largest charter districts this year.

The organization empowers parents to navigate school choice options in Houston and San Antonio, Texas. Families Empowered offers resources online at FamiliesEmpowered.org, and in person during the School Connection Fair on Saturday, May 14 in Houston.

“One Houston parent is facing a problem: they are demanding choice and seeking high-performing options, but the supply available to them in our city is just too low,” said Dippel.

About Families Empowered

Families Empowered is Texas’ only non-profit organization dedicated to helping families choose the schools their children will attend. Families Empowered provides parents with tools, resources, and events to choose a school for their child. We introduce families to the diverse school options available to them; we do not advocate any schooling option over another. For more information, go to www.FamiliesEmpowered.org.

About KIPP Houston Public Schools

KIPP, the Knowledge Is Power Program, is a national network of free college-preparatory public charter schools, open to all and dedicated to preparing students in educationally underserved communities for success in college and in life. KIPP Houston is KIPP’s largest region, with 24 public schools serving nearly 12,500 students and an additional 1,200 alumni in college and beyond. More than 50 percent of KIPP Houston alumni, tracked from the 8th grade, have graduated from college.

About YES Prep Public Schools

The mission of YES Prep Public Schools is to increase the number of students from underserved communities who graduate from college prepared to lead. YES Prep received the inaugural Broad Prize for Public Charter Schools, has consistently been named one of Houston’s “Best Places to Work” by the Houston Business Journal, and is nationally ranked by the U.S. News and World Report, The Washington Post, and others.

###
Map of Waitlisted Students

32,793 children were placed on a waitlist for the 2015/2016 school year at Harmony Public Schools, KIPP Houston Public Schools, and YES Prep Public Schools.

Houston, Texas & Surrounding Areas

The information contained herein was obtained from sources deemed reliable and accurate. However, this map is provided without guarantees or warranties of the completeness or accuracy.