More Than 26,000 Houston Kids Stuck on Charter School Waitlists

Parents demand school options, despite lagging inventory

HOUSTON, Texas, February 28, 2017 – School choice nonprofit Families Empowered reports today that more than 26,000 Houston students were placed on a waitlist for a seat at a public charter school for the 2016-17 school year. This new analysis—which covers the students seeking a seat in a school at a Harmony, KIPP Houston and/or YES Prep public school—illustrates parent demand for school options in Houston.

Data-sharing agreements with the school networks of Harmony, KIPP Houston and YES Prep public school networks give Families Empowered a unique birds-eye view of the demand for public charter school choices in the Houston area.

Families must submit applications in order to attend a public charter school. Students are admitted after selection via blind lottery.

For the 2016-2017 school year, a total of 44,449 applications were submitted to the three public charter school networks, by families hoping to find a seat. Due to lack of room, the schools were unable to admit 26,250 of those students, and placed them on a waitlist.

“There is clear demand for public school choice options. Parents are willing to play the lottery and risk ending up on a waitlist to get access educational opportunity,” said Colleen Dippel, Families Empowered’s Founder and Executive Director.

“The very high numbers of families on our waitlist along with other high quality charters indicates the need for educational options,” said Sehba Ali, Superintendent of KIPP Houston Public Schools. “We want to see all children learn and receive a high-quality education. One of the greatest challenges is the lack of facilities funding. We, along with families want our students to have the same opportunity afforded to all other students in high quality public schools.”

“In our nation and in our state, the right to a high-quality public education is a right that no family should be denied. Regardless of where they live, families should be able to choose the highest quality educational option for their children,” said Mark DiBella, CEO of YES Prep Public Schools. “At YES Prep we—the staff, community partners, and the families who choose to have their children in our schools—are among the growing number of Houstonians who want state leaders to know that we stand alongside them in their efforts to help every child, from every community, neighborhood, and income level, achieve at the highest level.”

“As the number of Texas parents searching for better educational options grows each year, Harmony Public Schools has seen our waitlist surpass 30,000 applicants across the state. We’re honored to have the community’s trust and support, and we’re excited to be opening seven new campuses this year where we can provide more Texas students quality STEM education,” said Zekeriya Yuksel, Superintendent of Schools for Harmony Public Schools.
“We know today that 26,000 kids were left waiting across just three public charter school networks in Houston – that’s far too many. Texas should be working to create greater access to high-quality schools of choice for families. An 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 thousands of families who were unable to find a spot in Houston’s largest charter school networks 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 live School Connection Fair on Saturday, April 8 in Houston.

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 Harmony Public Schools
Harmony Public Schools is a network of 48 high-performing K-12 college preparatory charter schools throughout Texas. Harmony blends the highest standards and expectations with a rigorous math- and science-centered curriculum and dedicated and engaged teachers and families to cultivate excellence and prepare students to succeed in college, careers and life. At Harmony Public Schools, we believe every child can succeed, and we are committed to helping them realize their full potential. To learn more about Harmony Public Schools and our 48 campuses across Texas, please visit: www.harmonytx.org, and follow us on Twitter at @HarmonyEdu and ‘Like’ us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/HarmonyTexas.

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.

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