

# Charter Schools and the Destruction of Public Education

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By [Margaret Kimberley](#), *Black Agenda Report* | Op-Ed

Every injustice in American life can be laid at the feet of the richest people in the country and the politicians who do their bidding. Nowhere is that terrible dynamic more obvious than in the destruction of public education by the charter school system.

The fix is officially in for charter schools in the state of New York. The legislature finished its session by giving these privately funded “public” schools more protection than they have almost anywhere else in the nation. Charter schools are allegedly public schools but that label is nothing more than public relations gimmickry. In March a New York state Supreme Court judge ruled that the comptroller had [no standing](#) to audit charter schools because they are educational corporations and not “units of the state.” The charter school executives who usually insist that they are running public schools were strangely silent and for once didn’t disagree when someone said their schools are not public after all.

Charter schools are a scam inflicted on black and Latino children and are meant to turn education into just another profit center. These schools take public money without being accountable to the public and they are funded by organizations like the Walton Family Foundation of WalMart fame and hedge fund chieftains. There is no data which proves that they provide superior education. They don’t have to accept children with special needs and often expel children who are struggling academically because they may bring down the all important test scores they use to justify their access to public dollars.

Bill de Blasio, New York City’s newly elected mayor, promised to slow down the process of co-locating schools, shoving charter schools into real public schools and depriving children of physical space and resources. At Public School 149 in East Harlem, special education students will literally not have a place in that school. A Success Academy charter school already in residence is expanding and the disabled children at P.S. 149 will have to be [moved elsewhere](#).

Teachers at charter schools are akin to fast food workers. They are the least experienced and have a high rate of turnover, all of which happens by design. The hedge fund honchos and the Walton Family Foundation want to get rid of the teaching profession and make educators as insecure in their work lives as everyone else in the country.

The protections recently given to New York state charter schools are the result of cynical collusion between governor [Andrew Cuomo](#), big money political donors and former New York City mayor [Michael Bloomberg](#). In the last weeks before he left office in December 2013, Bloomberg co-located an additional 45 new charters



(Image: [Jared Rodriguez / Truthout](#))

into public school buildings. The incoming mayor Bill de Blasio had a rather modest charter school reform agenda. He didn't propose the radical steps that are needed to eradicate them, instead choosing only to ask that they pay rent for taking up public school space. He even approved 17 of the new co-location plans.

But the big money people were having none of it. They worked with the nominally Democratic Cuomo to make sure that charter schools would continue to take over as many public school buildings as they want and not pay one penny in rent. Not only that but they conspired to get even more funds for charter schools from the state budget.

Cuomo is running for re-election in November 2014 and depends on campaign donations from people like Daniel Loeb, founder of Third Point hedge fund and chairman of Success Academies charter schools. Together they and others developed a lobbying effort which demolished any hope of the small reforms de Blasio proposed. A previously little known group, [Families for Excellent Schools](#), appeared on the scene with more than three million dollars worth of advertising featured black and latino parents making the case for charters. Families for Excellent Schools is certainly not made up of any New York City families. Its offices share an address with the infamous Michelle Rhee's StudentsFirst organization.

It was obvious very quickly that the mayor's little nod to protecting public education was no match for big money and his nemesis in the governor's office. When Success Academy charters closed all twenty of its schools for one day, and brought 7,000 parents and children to a [rally](#) in the state capital, it was clear that they had won the day.

Kenneth Langone is the founder of Home Depot and chairman of Promise Academies. He is a Republican who nonetheless contributed \$50,000 to Cuomo's last campaign. "He said that when the governor asked him to lead a group of Republicans supporting his re-election, he agreed because of Mr. Cuomo's support for charter schools. 'Every time I am with the governor, I talk to him about charter schools,' Mr. Langone said in an interview. 'He gets it.'"

Cuomo gets to stay in office because Langone, Loeb and others like them keep him there. It is impossible to run a viable campaign for governor of New York state without raising at least \$30 million. That means the rich will have access to promote charter schools or anything else they are interested in seeing come to fruition.

At the end of the day in New York state, charter schools and their wealthy backers got a [very good deal](#). They not only won't pay any rent for using public school space, but they can force the city to pay if they end up leasing space. They will also get a larger share of funds over the next three years, \$250 per pupil in the first year, \$350 in the second year and \$500 in the third year.

As the saying goes, de Blasio got his head handed to him. More importantly however, the hopes for good public education have been dashed by the evil nexus of money and political ambition. It is unfortunate that the real families for excellent schools have again gotten the shaft. In the charter school business as in every other field, money talks and everything else walks. Education has now been brought down to the level of every other institution in American society and that is a sad turn of events.

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