

# Beacon Hill Times

## “Boston Parents Say No on 2”

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By **Mary Battenfeld and Odette Williamson**

As Boston parents with deep commitments to improving educational opportunities for all children, we oppose ballot Question 2. This extreme lift of the state charter cap will destroy opportunities for many children, in order to create options for some others.

Our children have been Boston Public Schools students since preschool. Odette is also a former charter school parent. But when we think about the impact of Question 2, we think about students in the elementary schools in Dorchester and Mattapan that our children attended. These schools are made up almost entirely of low-income African-American, Latino, and Asian students. One school is a pioneer in inclusion, and another recognized for its work with autistic students. Both schools have sizable populations of students with disabilities, and English language learners.

Charters are not a choice for these children. If Question 2 passes, they and their public schools will suffer.

That’s a scary fact, and not, as former state representative Marty Walz said in an op-ed last week, a scare tactic. She and other “Yes” lobbyists want you to believe that a giant leap to uncapped charter growth, while grasping the same weak fiscal cord that already disadvantages district schools, won’t make the lights go out on public schools in Boston, and across the state.

But according to a city audit, Question 2 will have “devastating” consequences. If this ballot measure passes, by 2028, Boston will owe \$800 million to charters. 45 Boston school communities will be shuttered. Funding will be diverted from firefighters, affordable housing, and vital public services to cover assessments on privately run charter schools.

That’s with a conservative estimate of three new charters a year. Financial injury to towns, cities, and district schools is the main reason Boston and over 200 local school committees, along with Senator Warren, Mayor Walsh, and the Boston City Council, say No to Question 2. On Oct. 18, Ward 5 Democrats joined these leaders, giving a nearly unanimous No On 2 endorsement.

Financial injury sounds abstract, but the pain Question 2 will inflict on our state’s most vulnerable children is real. Students, for example, whose needs are so significant they require specialized services or placements costing over four times the state average foundation budget. Massachusetts has 10,000 such students. Charters educate only five of them.

Opening school doors to all children is the right thing to do. But it carries a cost, affecting everything from school budgets, to scores on high stakes tests. Proponents of Question 2 won't admit that cost to district schools. At the same time, they deny or make excuses for problems in charters, from lack of parent voice in school decision-making, to high suspension rates, to failing to educate English language learners and children with special needs.

In describing his reasons for opposing Question 2, civil rights icon Mel King said it is "unconscionable" to "look out for only some of the children in the Commonwealth." We agree, and hope that on November 8, you consider ALL children, and vote NO on 2.

*Mary Battenfeld and Odette Williamson are Boston Public Schools parents, and members of the parent group Quality Education for Every Student (QUEST)*