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Harmony Public Schools expand Northwest Houston charter campuses

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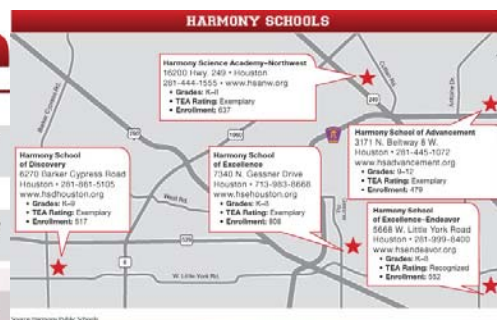
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By Molly Ryan Friday, 21 October 2011

NORTHWEST HOUSTON — Across the state, enrollment at public charter schools—public schools that offer students an educational alternative to traditional school districts—is on the rise. In Northwest Houston, where there are five Harmony Public Schools, which are public charter schools specializing in math and science, charter enrollment is soaring. Harmony established all five campuses in the area within the last six years.

TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS		PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS	
	Public school	Public charter school	
Ownership	Public entity	Private nonprofit corporation	
Governance	Publicly elected school board	Board members appointed by current board members in accordance with corporate bylaws	
Employment	Employment contracts	Employment "at will"	
Funding	State school revenue formula based on per-pupil funding and tax revenue for facilities	State school revenue formula per-pupil, cannot access tax revenues for facilities	
Tuition	None	None	
Academic accountability	State Academic Excellence Indicator System and federal No Child Left Behind	State Academic Excellence Indicator System and federal No Child Left Behind	

Source: Chenda Education CEO Richard Rickey, Texas Charter Schools Association



“I think more people are hearing about charter schools, and more people want a better quality of education for their children,” said Josie Duckett, vice president for public and

government affairs at the Texas Charter Schools Association.

“Harmony is clearly getting a response from the community it serves. They create an environment that is very focused on academics.”

In order to cope with the high demand for new students, Harmony has plans to continue growing. Harmony opened a new high school off N. Beltway 8 in August 2010, and it has plans to expand its Discovery Campus to include space for students from grades K–12 within the next year.

“We will expand as long as the demand expands,” said Bilgehan Yasar, superintendent for the five Northwest Harmony schools. “There is a huge demand for charter schools. Each [Harmony] school averages 2,000 people on the waiting list.”

Student success is the main reason why Harmony schools have gained so much popularity, said Sally Magnuson, administrative assistant for the Harmony School of Excellence, the first Harmony campus in the Northwest area, which opened in 2006. Harmony Public Schools opened its first campus in Houston in 2000.

“We have been ranked exemplary [by the Texas Education Agency] for all six years [at Harmony School of Excellence],” Magnuson said. “Part of the reason we are so successful is we know our kids and have the time to get to know them. The students can’t fall through the cracks here.”

Charter schools also have more flexibility with the types of materials they can teach students, Magnuson said. Students at charter schools still take TAKS tests and are required to take state-mandated courses, but charter school teachers are not required to follow some specific guidelines in their classrooms.

Charter schools are different in that teachers have more control, said Yasar. If a teacher does not think a textbook is working for a class, they can change it, or, if a teacher is not performing up to speed, the school can find a replacement mid-year.

“We get to think outside of the box,” Magnuson said.

Harmony is a public school, so all students can apply for admission, and it does not have boundary lines, so students can be admitted from all areas. At the end of each school year, new students are chosen for admission from a lottery.

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Harmony schools were investigated this past summer by the Texas legislature for misuse of public funds and are also under investigation by the FBI. Just a few weeks ago, parents at one Houston Harmony school complained that their elementary school-aged children were forced to scrub school bathroom toilets! And why no mention of Harmony schools connection to the Gulen movement? Yes, the schools will deny it, but there is more than enough evidence available to show a legitimate connection. Parents, do your homework before you consider entrusting your children and their education to Islamists! Read more at