

Countless U.S. Charter Schools Hire Many Uncertified Teachers

By [Dr. Shawgi Tell](#)

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Privately-operated non-profit and for-profit charter schools[1] run by unelected officials are legal in 45 states, Washington DC, Puerto Rico, and Guam.

According to a 2018 state-by-state information chart from the Education Commission of the States, more than 25 states (including Washington, DC) either do not require charter school teachers to be certified or allow charter schools to hire a large portion of teachers with no teaching certification (see [this](#)).[2]

And, on average, charter school teachers have fewer years of teaching experience and fewer credentials than their public school counterparts. They also tend to work longer days and years than public school teachers while generally being paid less than them. Further, many charter school teachers are not part of an employee retirement plan and are treated as “at-will” employees, which is linked to why nearly ninety percent of charter school teachers are not part of any organization that defends their collective interests.

A few examples of charter schools with uncertified teachers are worth noting. A May 30, 2019 [article in The Palm Beach Post](#) titled, “Underpaid, undertrained, unlicensed: In PBC’s largest charter school chain, 1 in 5 teachers weren’t certified to teach,” points out that the Renaissance Charter School chain in Florida routinely employed large numbers of substitute teachers and operated many schools where a quarter to a third of the teachers were not certified to teach.

Several years ago, one of the main charter school authorizers in New York State unilaterally further lowered teaching qualifications for teachers in charter schools. It willfully ignored numerous public demands to not further dilute teaching standards, prompting a lawsuit against its arbitrary actions. An October 18, 2019 [press release from New York State United Teachers \(NYSUT\)](#) titled, “Court rejects fake certification scheme for charter school teachers,” reads in part:

“After the union fought back against ‘fake’ certification for some charter school teachers, a midlevel appeals court this week ruled the SUNY Charter Schools Committee does not have the authority to set its own standards for certifying teachers. NYSUT President Andy Pallotta said the court ruling is a big win for the union and the

profession. ‘This is about preserving what it means to be a teacher in New York State’, Pallotta said. ‘This would have created a two-tiered certification system and allowed unqualified educators to practice in some charter schools’.”

While public school teachers in North Carolina have to be trained and certified to teach in public schools, charter schools are exempt from such requirements and can hire uncertified non-educators to teach (see [this](#)). And while they enroll a significant percentage of youth, in Arizona “Teachers at charter schools are not required to have any certification” (see [this](#)). Many other examples from across the nation could be given.

Taken together, these facts help explain why there is such persistently high teacher turnover rates in the crisis-prone charter school sector—a situation that does not serve students and families well. It is no accident that there has been an uptick in recent years in the number of charter school teachers striving to unionize. The most recent example comes from Chicago (see [this](#)).

It is not possible to build a modern society and nation by creating more corporatized schools that are segregated, non-transparent, deregulated, run by unelected officials, and staffed with a large number of uncertified teachers. Such neoliberal arrangements lower the level of education and are a slap in the face of thousands of teacher education students around the country who spend years and thousands of dollars training to become effective certified teachers.

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Shawgi Tell, PhD, is author of the book “Charter School Report Card.” His main research interests include charter schools, neoliberal education policy, and privatization. He can be reached at stell5@naz.edu.

Notes

[1] The “non-profit” versus “for-profit” distinction is generally a distinction without a difference: both types of entities engage in profit maximization. Charter school promoters always downplay the fact that there are many charter schools, including “non-profit” charter schools, run by for-profit entities.

[2] Public schools sometimes hire uncertified teachers as well, but what makes the corporatized charter school sector different is that many charter school laws are intentionally and explicitly set up to evade certified teachers. This usually has to do with the neoliberal goal of “cost-cutting” and profit maximizing. Such a set-up lowers the level of education.

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