



**To:** Joe Williams, Walton Education Coalition  
**From:** Jeff Plaut, Angela Kuefler, and Robin Graziano, Global Strategy Group  
**Date:** March 2017  
**Re:** Question 2: What Happened and What Happens Next?

## Executive Summary

Question 2 marked an important flash point for education reform broadly and for charters in particular. While emphasis has been placed on legislative prescriptions to improve schools, taking the fight to the people in the form of a ballot referendum remains relatively rare.

As a test case, it was important. And it failed.

But with failure comes opportunity for examination, and no loss is in vain if lessons can be learned and applied to future efforts. In this way, Question 2 provides many lessons: it exposed assumptions that proved incorrect and raised important considerations when it comes to the opposition, timing, messengers, and bedfellows. In our charge to answer questions, we uncovered many more...and unintended consequences that could make matters difficult for charters in Massachusetts in the current environment.

There is no one culprit, nor one bad decision that led to Question 2's defeat. The intent of this research is not to blame or scapegoat. Question 2 fell victim to assumptions that made sense at the time and did not stand up to a partisan election year and an uncompromising opponent.

Perhaps different decisions could have led to a slightly different outcome. But Question 2 faced an uphill battle from the moment it went on the ballot.

The following report seeks to investigate what happened with the Question 2 campaign in Massachusetts. This report intends to inform the strategy and conversation for charter school advocates moving forward.

This report is the result of a comprehensive research plan: a survey immediately following Election Day, focus groups among Question 2 voters, and longer one-on-one interviews with many who had some involvement in the campaign. Additional teacher and superintendent interviews provided an informed perspective on the race.

Interviews and public information aided in the construction of the timeline and decision making process presented here, but memories can be faulty and opinions and hindsight can influence recall. Where discrepancies appeared, the consensus of the interviews took precedence.

This is the story of Question 2.

## The Legislative Path

### Legislative deadlock

Charter advocates in Massachusetts have been looking for a way to expand the number of charter schools since a cap increase was passed as part of an omnibus education reform in 2010. Meeting in 2012, funders and advocates commissioned an initial viability study for an initiative to further increase the cap.

Advocates first pushed for a cap increase during the 2014 legislative session. To the frustration of the charter community, the resulting legislation passed by the House contained only a marginal cap increase and was never taken up by the Senate. Following the 2014 defeat, advocates recruited the help of Families for Excellent Schools to develop a legislative strategy.

Following the election of Governor Baker in 2014, advocates quickly moved forward with another attempt at a legislative fix in the 2015-2016 session. Advocates believed Governor Baker's influence, organization, and support would help push through a cap lift. But the Senate dismantled the RISE ACT with poison pill provisions that would have made matters worse for charters and included only an "illusory cap raise". In response, charter advocates abandoned the legislation and encouraged the House to drop the Act, in part because they were confident that taking the issue to the ballot would be a more successful approach.

But those opposed to lifting the cap told a different story to their allies at Beacon Hill. They conducted a poll that showed support for lifting the cap may be broad but it wasn't deep, and support could be eroded among voters. The opposition was so confident that they told their allies not to compromise or provide any concessions to charter advocates; they could kill the cap lift at the ballot.

### Ballot language emboldened the opposition

The experience from 2014 signaled to charter advocates that legislative compromise would be difficult. In preparation for the 2015-2016 session, they came up with a new plan and crafted a ballot question designed to force legislators' hands. Advocates decided to pursue a ballot initiative if Senators did not make legislative concessions for charters. While previous legislation explicitly confined the opening of new charters to the bottom 25% of performing districts, the ballot initiative called for up to 12 new charter schools a year that could open **anywhere** in the state. Advocates hoped that without a constraint on where charters could open, legislators would come to a compromise to prevent charters from opening in their own districts and creating local budget concerns.

As it would turn out, this gamble to force a legislative solution handed the opposition their winning message, and they had data—early on—to support their case. Question 2 was headed to the ballot.

## Voter Perceptions and Reactions to Question 2

### Where Question 2 bottomed out

All of the early data gave Question 2 supporters reason to be hopeful and confident. From GSG's initial poll to the post-election survey, support for Question 2 dropped 20 points overall. Within that time, the campaign lost supporters across **all** subgroups including parents and Republicans who were among the strongest charter advocates. The campaign suffered heavy blows with independents – particularly conservative independents (-37) and independent women (-29). The campaign only managed to secure majority support from registered Republicans (57%) and voters in Essex (53%).

Given the partisan landscape of the state, Republicans cannot and did not carry the initiative to success. Democratic support completely bottomed out, with 73% of Democrats voting no compared to 42% in August. With majorities of Democrats and independents (59% No) opposed to lifting the cap, the path to victory became very narrow.

<b>Support for Question 2</b>			
	<b>November</b>	<b>August</b>	<b>Difference</b>
<b>Total</b>	38%	58%	-20
<b>Men</b>	40	58	-18
<b>Women</b>	36	57	-21
<b>18-44</b>	35	58	-23
<b>45-64</b>	42	59	-17
<b>65+</b>	36	58	-22
<b>Non-college</b>	38	66	-28
<b>College Grad</b>	37	52	-15
<b>White</b>	37	57	-20
<b>Non-white</b>	42	62	-20
<b>Democrat</b>	27	44	-17
<b>Democratic men</b>	27	44	-17
<b>Democratic women</b>	28	44	-16
<b>Liberal Democrats</b>	25	35	-10
<b>Independent</b>	41	64	-23
<b>Independent men</b>	44	61	-17
<b>Independent women</b>	39	68	-29
<b>Conservative independents</b>	40	77	-37
<b>Republican</b>	57	68	-11
<b>Moms</b>	33	47	-14
<b>Dads</b>	35	60	-25
<b>Western MA</b>	32	58	-26
<b>Southern MA</b>	31	55	-24
<b>Suffolk</b>	35	57	-22
<b>Middlesex</b>	45	57	-12
<b>North Shore/Essex</b>	53	69	-16

### Question 2 became intensely partisan in a presidential year

Partisanship did not always define the debate over charter schools or Question 2. In August, a plurality of Democrats (36%) and independents (52%) thought charters helped Massachusetts' education system. But two polarizing candidates at the top of the ticket, Clinton and Trump, forced ideological lenses on voters and raised partisan tensions. Because voters were less informed on this race, partisan influences may have had an even greater influence on voters' perception of the ballot question. Although the Yes on 2 campaign had the support of the popular Republican Governor, leading Democrats including Senator Warren, Senator Sanders, and Mayor Walsh came out against the proposal. In August, the Senate Democrats publicly rejected Question 2 which further painted the campaign as a partisan debate.

*“It became an increasingly partisan question as the election rolled on with Elizabeth Warren coming in strongly against it, in addition to a bunch of other Democratic elected officials. It made it seem as if it were a Republican vs Democrat issue especially in a Presidential election year. We didn’t really expect that and it made a bad situation worse.” - IDI*

On Election Day, Question 2 fell along party lines with Democrats consolidating behind the No on 2 side and Republicans failing to fully back the Yes side: 73% of Democrats and 70% of Clinton voters voted No on Question 2 while only 57% of Republicans voted Yes.

### The message missed the point

The post-election survey and focus groups clearly show that voters heard Yes on 2’s message throughout the campaign. The Question 2 debate was not a question of what message was heard more, but rather which resonated. The Yes and No side matched one another in message communication: 85% heard that “District schools lose money to charter schools” and 84% heard “Parents should have a choice about where to send their children to school, and expanding charters would give them more choices.”

While voters heard charter advocates’ message and generally liked charters (59% favorable in August), the opposition’s message created enough confusion to cause voters to default to the status quo and vote no. Voters found the message on school choice believable (42% very believable) but the opposition’s frame of “we should improve public schools for everyone, not just those in charter schools” proved more resonate with voters and the deep value they place on education (60% very believable).

Question 2 was **not** a referendum on charter schools themselves or their effectiveness – what Question 2 came to symbolize was a question of equality and fairness (strong Democratic values) and what happens to those who are left in the struggling public schools as funding is taken away.

*“I mean it was a good argument but in the end it was like there’s still going to be a big waiting list, it still isn’t going to accommodate everybody, it’s going to take funds away from the public schools. I just felt like let’s fix what we already have.” – Female No voter*

*“I don’t think charter schools are a saving grace and I’m not ready to throw in the towel on public education.” – Female No voter*

### The opposition’s message was consistent, disciplined, and potent

Voters never clearly understood the role of charter schools, and throughout the campaign many voters became even more confused about their funding and operations. The Yes side failed to define the issue at the outset and provide a message that described the benefits of charter schools for students, nor provided a clear connection to a problem lifting the cap would solve. But the Yes side’s message ultimately became beside the point, as little could override the No side’s message that spoke to the values of the electorate. The opposition focused on high quality public schools for all--and it worked.

*“I voted no just because I simply didn’t know which piece of data was correct. There’s so much data out there and there’s no place to go to be like which piece of data about money and students and money coming out of the system- and there was no place to go to find out what the real answer was. So, the safer choice was to vote no. In an ideal world, I would vote yes, but I needed to figure out what was really happening.” – Male No voter*

*"I don't know what would have made a difference with the other side simply doing a very very good job of a single message that they drove over and over again based on the funding argument...they were very good at driving a single simple message that people largely bought." – IDI*

The main messages from both sides broke through, but opposition message that we must improve schools for everyone was more powerful

Most Effective Messages					
Heard	Total	Dem	Indep	Rep.	
85%	36%	47%	32%	25%	District schools lose money to charter schools.
		% very believable			
84	42	36	43	53	Parents should have a choice about where to send their children to school, and expanding charters would give them more choices.
80	60	67	57	48	We should improve public schools for everyone, not just those in charter schools.
77	42	42	42	42	There are thousands of students on waitlists to charter schools in Massachusetts.
76	27	27	27	32	All students have the opportunity to receive a high quality education and expanding charters gives more students that opportunity.
76	27	35	26	10	Too many charter schools would undermine traditional public education.
73	33	28	34	46	Massachusetts charters have successfully helped students in underperforming areas.

### Conversations driven by Question 2 opponents changed minds

Voters came to Question 2 relatively undecided since few had a thorough knowledge or understanding of the role charter schools played in public education. Of all the questions on the ballot, voters were “the most open-minded” about Question 2 and many actively sought information after hearing about the campaign.

*“Out of all the issues I was the most open-minded going into this one because I knew I was the least informed. I definitely sought out information.” – Female No voter*

*“I honestly didn't have any information about it. When they were talking about charter schools I thought it was a good thing because it would diversify the education and then I did research about what exactly the charter schools are and where they would be getting the money from.” – Female No voter*

Many undecided and uninformed voters heard from teachers on Question 2, and teachers were perceived to be completely opposed to lifting the cap: 66% believed teachers opposed and 76% perceived opposition from the teachers' union.

*“I didn't feel strongly either way. I have a good public school system so I sort of felt that it didn't involve me. I started talking to a lot of my friends who live in Boston and are teachers and started asking ‘Why are you voting no?’. My friends in Boston were voting no.” – Female No voter*

*“I was a yes vote up until the day before. And I was having a conversation with my friend and she made the same argument that [REDACTED] made why don’t we fix what’s already here instead of building more schools?” – Male No voter*

*“A lot of my friends who were teachers voted against it too and there was an influence from them. And they brought up the same argument [we should focus on the schools we already have].” – Male No voter*

Personal conversations with friends, family, and neighbors who were teachers ultimately convinced many voters to oppose Question 2 because it would harm traditional public schools and leave students behind. The post-election survey showed that just over a third of Massachusetts parents (34%) and just under a third (32%) of No voters spoke with teachers about Question 2. For a plurality of No voters, their first exposure to Question 2 was from their friends and family (20%) while Yes voters were informed by the media coverage (22%). Absent a clear understanding of the issue, voters were most likely to heed the advice of those they knew best rather than commercials.

A less robust ground game and mobilization effort by Yes on 2, could not counter the personal conversations driven by No voters. At the outset, there were few charter school teachers in the state and there was little concentrated effort to encourage them to talk with parents and voters. With all the confusion and misinformation surrounding Question 2, voters sided with those they knew, and trusted, best.

## Campaign Dynamics

### The campaign’s four assumptions

The campaign to lift the charter school cap was started, and rested, on four main assumptions:

1. Charters are fundamentally popular in Massachusetts
2. The more people learned about charter schools, the more they would support them
3. The Yes campaign would significantly outspend their opponents
4. The campaign had the most popular political figure in the state on their side, Governor Baker. His influence would sway last minute voters as a third-party verifier

However, as the campaign progressed many of these assumptions began to unravel.

### Developing the message

When funders and advocates first gathered to discuss lifting the charter cap, the group enlisted the support of Winner and Mandabach, a ballot consulting firm touting an over 90% win rate. In the initial round of research, the firm was confident Question 2 would pass. They recommended implementing messaging that capitalized on charter schools’ favorability and made the case that all students should have the option to attend them. With these recommendations, Winner and Mandabach was instrumental in setting the message and tone of the campaign very early on. Yet, while hindsight is 20/20, many at the time had some reservations about a message that didn’t define the issue or focus on the students and parents lifting the cap would help.

*“One of the things that never happened- in an issue campaign you have to introduce the issue almost always because A) you want to do it and B) in this case almost no one understood. I would actually argue there was a very fundamental step that was skipped over and missed in this campaign... very simply the effort to introduce the issue to the public and to frame it. It just didn’t happen. The first time the public heard from the proponents of the question was basically the ad that tried to argue that it wasn’t an issue that took money away from communities. It was a tactical mistake because we let the other side get out there first and define the issue. That was a big mistake and then our first ad was a response to their ad on their topic which we didn’t want to focus on.” – IDI*

*“The only viable message is one they called about the universal benefit of charters. Their view was charters were popular, they were perceived as high-quality, and rather than say there are have and have nots, some kids have great schools and some kids do not, we would be better off saying charters are another type of public school that benefit all kids in the state. Don’t go negative. Don’t take on the social justice message...In July, they worded the question to cover the entire state because they didn’t want to segment the population in fear of being too divisive.” – IDI*

It is unlikely that a different message would have changed the ultimate result. Not in this election year, and not given the opposition’s fierce mobilization and potent message. However, it does raise questions about the type of activation and rallying message needed to move a Democratic leaning electorate.

### [Selling the message to voters](#)

Following the election of Governor Baker, many former campaign staffers and advisors became key players in the Yes on Question 2 campaign. As the Governor’s people came to lead the direction of the campaign, Winner and Mandabach left; but the campaign continued to use their initial messaging recommendations. The strategy centered on running a campaign that touted the universal benefit of charters and utilized the Governor as third-party verifier at the close to sway undecideds.

However, No on 2 began their television advertising earlier than anticipated allowing them to define this issue for voters during a time when Yes on 2 believed they would have uninterrupted airtime to speak to voters.

Whereas the Yes on 2 campaign solely focused its messaging efforts on television, the No on 2 side ventured into digital ad buys and deployed an impressive ground strategy to bolster their media presence.

*“The reality is that we struggled to find any really compelling message here... I would advocate for the opposite message strategy that we ultimately developed and executed. The message strategy we developed and executed was it’s a right track, wrong track state people feel very good about where things are going, people feel very good about generally public education and the quality of their schools, but they know there are some schools where we have an achievement problem. So, we’re going to run a campaign that says charter schools are good, we’re going to wait for the other side to run a negative campaign, once we feel that their negative campaign has started to get traction we’ll attack it and finish with the Governor as a third-party verifier. And we will run a largely positive campaign. The reality is we let them define the stakes of the election, we let them drive their negative message, we underestimated the power of that message since we*

*didn't see it until the focus groups. And obviously the power of endorsements is limited in these types of matters and we experienced that first-hand.” – IDI*

*“Most people don't watch television right?... They tape it, they're watching things on their iPads and phones. And you have to have a digital play... There was almost no digital buy. And the union pretty much used digital like crazy.” – IDI*

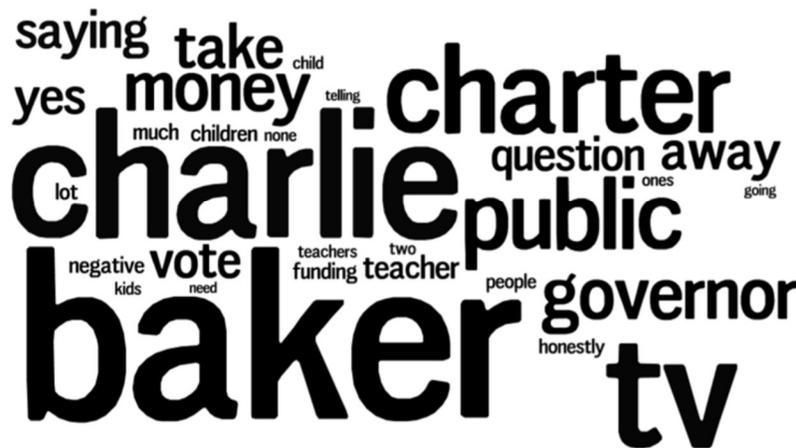
## Messenger Dynamics

### Messengers made a difference

Governor Baker became the face of Yes on 2. However, despite his high approval rating, his endorsement did not convince voters: they largely saw him as an irrelevant voice for an “education” debate.

This also came through in our post-election survey where a majority (55%) of voters believed that teachers were an important voice, but only 28% claimed that Baker's opinion was important to them. Along with writing off his opinion, given his lack of education experience, many questioned his motivation in endorsing Question 2. Some of this distrust stemmed from his business background since opponents claimed that charter schools are operated in corporate interests. While others distrusted a campaign chaired by a Republican figure-head, particularly with so many Democrats publicly opposed.

Most Memorable Television Ad



Voters wanted to hear about the impact of charter schools from those who would be affected the most by a cap raise: teachers, parents, and students. These voices were largely absent from the conversation on the Yes side.

But voters turned to, and trusted, the opposition's primary messengers: teachers. Many voters proactively reached out to teachers about Question 2 and teachers were fiercely activated by union leaders to spread the message that more charter schools would damage their classrooms. Teachers appeared all over the state to voice their opposition: in classrooms, in commercials, in newspapers, and in their communities. Unprecedented numbers of teachers and education officials spoke out against Question 2, ultimately persuading voters that Question 2 would have a detrimental impact on the traditional public school system.

*“The teachers and your friends who have kids matter.” – Male No voter*

*“It kind of angered me. I was like Charlie Baker I’m not going to believe you over the teachers and city councilors that I know. He’s a business guy. He’s a public official. Of course he’s on board it’s making education a business and he’s a businessman.” – Female No voter*

### Unprecedented union opposition

Charter school advocates and teachers’ unions frequently spar over education reform, but the union opposition to Question 2 was unprecedented. The new union leadership took a more extreme and ideological approach regarding charter schools. The new President, elected in 2014, pioneered uncompromising opposition to Question 2 and mobilized a grassroots campaign of teachers by attacking charter schools as corporate interests.

Unions capitalized on the Yes campaign’s out-of-state and corporate funding as a rallying cry for their active base of teachers. Funders, including Walton, were specifically called out for their donations to Yes on 2.

*“One of the interesting dynamics was that the MTA took such a hard turn... MTA was amenable in some cases to doing positive things... but Barbara Madeloni was positioned as a rabble rousing, outsider, activist, leftist. That’s how she ran and how she governed... She’s a very ideological and uncompromising person. She’s Occupy Wall Street and into claiming that education reform is all about corporatization.” - IDI*



*Taken from Save our Public Schools’ Twitter*

The Boston Teachers’ Union (BTU) and Massachusetts Teachers Union (MTA) regularly sent email blasts to teachers encouraging them to voice their opposition to Question 2 and call home to parents to discuss the issue. A teacher who had experience working in both a charter and traditional public school, felt the language in the debate was ‘polarizing’ but they heard less of this language from charter advocates. Unions launched a fierce negative campaign against charters for their unfair practices and for draining money from traditional public schools. Over half (56%) of Question 2 voters claim the No side ran more negative ads than the Yes on 2 campaign.

*“I got to work every day and heard a lot from the BTU about the cap and who was funding the question and who was funding the organizations that were trying to get the question approved or like putting charters on blast for seemingly innocent things.” – IDI*

As part of their expansive ground game, the unions convinced local school committees in many districts to pass resolutions condemning Question 2. Though symbolic in nature, these resolutions garnered local media attention and signaled to elected officials, to oppose, or stay quiet on, Question 2.

The vast mobilization of classroom teachers, the early TV spending, the digital ads, the t-shirts and bumper stickers and every other type of campaign material that clearly communicated to voters that teachers opposed Question 2 required a massive war chest. Much to the surprise of the Yes on 2 campaign, the teachers’ union spent an unprecedented amount of money. In previous campaigns the unions spent around \$5 million, but in 2016 the No side spent close to \$15 million. An influx of dollars from the national unions bolstered the war chest. National leadership had geared up to fight Right to Work in the Supreme Court, but with the death of Scalia no longer had to wage that war. Rather than contribute to Clinton’s campaign, which they assumed was wrapped up, the national chapters sent that money to Massachusetts to fight Question 2.

Although advocates still managed to outspend opponents by almost \$10 million, the campaign anticipated that the ability to significantly outspend the unions and dominate the airwaves would be enough. But given the No side’s more resonate and relevant messages and messengers, that assumption proved incorrect.

### [The current charter community did not fully buy in on Question 2](#)

The voices of charter school stakeholders and representatives remained largely absent in the debate on Question 2. There was almost no mobilization of charter school teachers or parents partly because the cap did not affect existing charter schools and partly because the Charter School Association was hesitant to involve themselves in the campaign. The Yes on 2 coalition of advocates was, at best, fractured. This came from tensions between traditionally unlikely bedfellows, which included many from the Governor’s team—who some believed were putting the interests of the Governor first.

With no unifying leadership to organize and mobilize the charter school community, charter schools in the state shied away from getting involved as lifting the cap would not benefit them. Many worried the debate would harm the reputation of charter schools, create divisions, and spur elected officials to oppose charters altogether. Charter leaders stayed quiet in hopes of remaining in the good graces of policymakers who determine their funding.

*“The charters themselves were very nervous about this entire thing. They didn’t want to upset anybody. There’s a constant “How do we placate the Mayor?”, “How do we play nice?”, “Maybe we should do this. Maybe we shouldn’t do that.” ... The non-replicating charters out in the other parts of Massachusetts were not in favor of the ballot initiative because it didn’t affect them and thought it might impact the powers that be and upset their funding mechanism... They want to be seen as good guys.” – IDI*

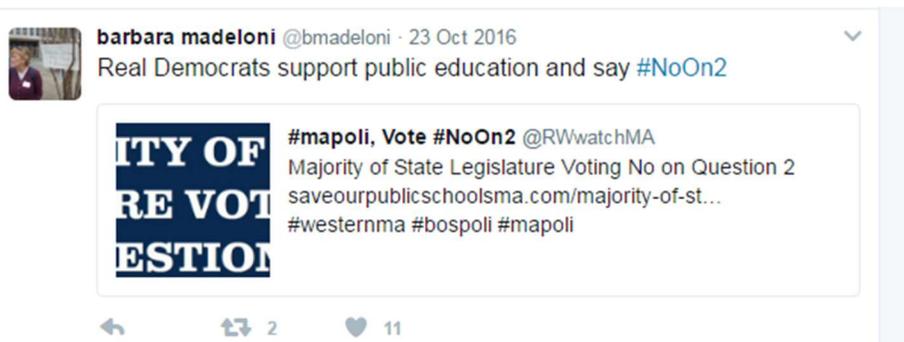
## Democrats didn't defend Question 2

Few Democrats publicly defended Question 2 to assuage the fears of a left-leaning electorate. Democratic advocates in Beacon Hill and other local elected officials did not stand up for Question 2 - at best they didn't get involved, at worst they vocally opposed it. Although some policymakers did not oppose charter schools, they saw no advantage for them to voice support, particularly given the pressure from the over 200 school committees that passed resolutions in opposition. Many also knew that advocating for Question 2 would jeopardize the union's support if they ran for re-election.

Considering the political climate of the 2016 election, the lack of endorsements and outright opposition from Democratic leaders exacerbated the partisan nature of Question 2.

*"We were definitely on the short end of the stick for endorsements and I think that's structural, not for lack of trying or effective efforts of people in those roles... The honest truth is candidates with ballot campaigns mostly just want to avoid taking risk. They want to avoid taking positions unless, occasionally, there is something where they agree with the message but by far the lowest risk position was to be with No. You could say not that I'm against charter schools, but this is going too far or I need to think about it a little bit more. It was just a much easier place for Democrats to be." – IDI*

*"Well you only have a handful of legislators who are publicly supportive of charter schools to begin with. And you've got some that may be – my schools is not bad but I'm not going out of my way to expand things – fence sitters and not in opposition because they didn't care and charters are not in their district. The opposition effort turned them into opponents as it relates to the Question." – IDI*



*Taken from Barbara Madeloni's Twitter account*

## Recommendations for ballot initiatives

Many factors both within and beyond the campaign's control led to the campaign's defeat. The recommendations below take into account lessons learned in both the qualitative and quantitative research to develop a framework of factors that should be considered before taking on another ballot campaign. Moving forward, when considering a ballot initiative:

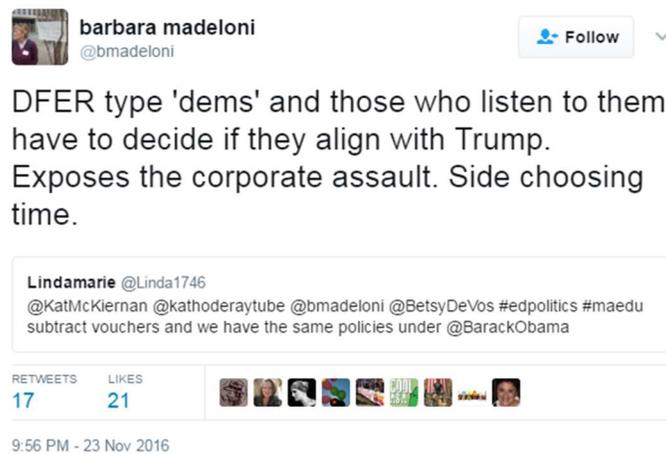
- **Complete extensive research designed to stress-test the initiative.** Sometimes quantitative message testing can lead to a false sense of security as many are less willing to change their mind in a 15-minute poll. But in qualitative, researchers can see reactions to messengers and gauge how the conversation changes after mock-ups of ads.

- **[Do a full assessment of the opposition.](#)** The campaign completed some prior research on previous union involvement in these fights, but more than just dollars should be taken into consideration. In 2014 the union elected an ideologue, Barbara Madeloni, who opposed charters, vowed to stop the corporate takeover of public schools, and had a national war chest to wage a war. The unions activated such a fierce opposition that No on Question 2 signs were seen in January at the Women’s March in DC and Madeloni spoke at the March in Boston in her “Save our Public Schools” shirt.
- **Consider the electoral context of everything else on the ballot.** Charter schools—historically—create *some* partisan divisions, but nothing like what happened on Election Day with Question 2. Conversations about the election—with an intense top of the ticket fight—shifted voters into their partisan mindsets.
- **Pro-charter teachers must mobilize.** When it comes to ballot campaigns about issues that voters don’t know much about, they often turn to people they trust (friends, family, neighbors, teachers). If the opposition is on the ground, they must be matched on the ground, by equally trustworthy validators.
- **Charter advocates and teachers MUST be fully bought in to the effort.** They have the power to provide significant boots on the ground, critical to countering the union ground game.
- **The coalition and partners must trust each other.** Education reform creates strange bedfellows; the best of intentions can be complicated by ideology and partisan divisions, even if the desired policy outcome is the same.
- **Consider specific Democratic messages, or at least targeted messages, particularly in liberal states.** Advocates should test owning the progressive mantle on education reform and charters: this is about social justice, civil rights, and giving kids a chance. While this is a problematic frame for the electorate as a whole, it may speak to the values of a Democratic electorate. The initial message recommendations to refrain from splintering the electorate was not wrong; this messaging discussing achievement gaps or inequality have sunk in other case studies. However, it could be the right approach for liberals in this new Administration.

## Recommendations for charter advocates

- **First, immediately, we have concerns about the upcoming legislative session.** Advocates will need to be on the defense for the future before they can sit down and discuss ways to lift the cap again. The opposition has momentum on their side, having captured the support of many legislators who traditionally sit on the fence. We heard rumors in our interviews that the legislature may consider unfavorable legislation- including a moratorium on charters in the state – in the upcoming session.
- **The charter brand must be rebuilt.** The No on Question 2 campaign has taken a toll on the reputation of charter schools in Massachusetts. Their unfavorability has spiked 19-points, and the number of voters who believe that charter schools hurt the education system has jumped 12-points. One of our first strategic actions should be to go back and take a critical step that was missed in this campaign: clearly defining charters and their role in the education system. We recommend a communications campaign that activates charter teachers and parents. We cannot assume that the charter brand will rebound on its own (especially in a Trump/DeVos world), and progress will cease until voters understand, and buy into, the role of charters in public education.

- **Develop a base of support to rival the union’s base of teachers.** Teachers and educators will likely always be trusted on issues of education and we need a counter-weight on our side if the teachers and unions voice their steadfast opposition. Parent voices may not be enough to balance teachers in the eyes of voters, but conversations with teachers suggest that they may value the opinions of their students’ parents more than those of the union. If parents can be mobilized to voice opposition, teachers may listen and break from the pack. Alternatively, research should be conducted to identify a voice, alternative to teachers, that can be trusted on education reform.
- **Do not abandon legislative options in the future.** In the short term, damage control is necessary to prevent further charter-busting regulation. Longer term, once the charter brand has stabilized, advocates should consider larger education bills that includes some acquiesce to unions, funding for traditional public schools, and provisions that help current charters. By giving a little to everyone, and sweetening deals with additional funding, the narrative that new charters will “take” from current schools becomes less relevant. Further, simply lowering the tenor of union opposition—even if they will never support a cap lift—will ease some of the partisan tensions that leads to ideological decisions.
- **Seek out opportunities to appease opponents.** Giving unions and traditional public schools additional funding—either legislatively or as part of a ballot initiative-- may abate intense pushback from these groups and will also create a win-win situation for traditional public school and charter school advocates.
- **Elected Democrats need space and cover to support education reform and charter schools.** While Question 2 did not start out as a partisan issue, it quickly devolved into one over the summer. The debate must be reframed as one that appeals to Democratic values and gives liberal voters in the state a reason to coalesce behind these reforms. As Trump and Education Secretary Betsy DeVos begin to champion school choice, we need to separate Democratic goals and motivations from theirs in left-leaning states.



*Taken from Barbara Madeloni’s Twitter account*

- **Understand the power of legislative leadership.** Charter advocates in the legislature hold little power. Legislative leadership must be bought in for any real change, or alternatively, plays must be made to elect leadership sympathetic to our goals.