

Uncommon|2021 Project Abstract

Uncommon Schools is a nonprofit organization that starts and manages outstanding urban charter public schools that close the achievement gap and prepare low-income students to enter, succeed in, and graduate from college. Uncommon currently manages 44 schools that serve nearly 14,000 students in six regions: Boston, MA; Camden, NJ; Newark, NJ; New York, NY; Rochester, NY; and Troy, NY. In five years, Uncommon will operate 66 schools serving more than 23,000 students in these regions.

The proposed CSP project, Uncommon|2021, will fuel a significant portion of this growth. Uncommon requests \$10.9 million to support the project's goal of demonstrating unequivocally that charter schools can scale while maintaining outstanding academic performance and cost efficiency. To achieve this goal, the project includes three specific, measurable, and ultimately attainable objectives:

1. Open 13 new Uncommon schools and expand four existing schools to create at least 5,500 new high-quality seats in educationally disadvantaged communities
2. Improve and scale Uncommon's record of outstanding academic performance and cost efficiency
3. Evaluate core elements of the Uncommon educational program—using a randomized controlled trial design that meets the WWC standards for evidence without reservations—and disseminate findings broadly

By meeting these objectives, Uncommon|2021 will contribute substantially to strategies designed to improve state-designated priority schools under section 1116 of ESEA. Currently, 89% of Uncommon schools are located in neighborhoods where the district school is on the state priority list. Uncommon's expansion will create more high-quality alternatives for families in these communities. It will also support Uncommon's efforts to provide professional development to low-performing district schools and to serve as a turnaround operator. Uncommon's first turnaround school produced breakthrough results in its first year by increasing proficiency rates from 18% in ELA and 28% in math to 60% and 70%, respectively.

Those results are consistent with Uncommon's decade-long track record of closing historic achievement gaps for educationally disadvantaged students. Across the network, 94% of Uncommon students are Black or Hispanic, and 80% come from low-income families. Over the past three years, students from these and all other disadvantaged subgroups outperformed state averages on annual assessments, 89-95% graduated from high school in four years, and 97-100% of high school graduates enrolled in college, where more than 80% of them persisted. To-date, Uncommon students have graduated from college at six times the rate of their low-income peers nationally.

According to a rigorous independent evaluation, "attending Uncommon Schools charters essentially eliminates the poverty/non-poverty learning gap." In recognition of these results, Uncommon received the Broad Prize for Public Charter Schools in 2013.

Uncommon|2021 will prove that charter networks can sustain and even improve these results while scaling rapidly.