

20  07

DEMOCRATS FOR
EDUCATION REFORM



Midyear *Impact &* *Investment* Report

January - July 2026



A Letter *from our CEO*

Dear Friends and Supporters,

2026 has so far been a year of unparalleled growth and influence. We are shaping education agendas in 18 states, driving national attention to a transformational federal scholarship program, and achieving record media reach, highlighted by commentary in the opinion pages of The New York Times and The Washington Post. Our electoral work has influenced some of the most consequential races in the country, including a comeback primary victory in Wisconsin, while our federal advocacy helped secure the highest-ever funding level in the Charter Schools Program's history. Our team is stronger than ever: Reed Hastings joined our Advisory Board, Sec. Arne Duncan and Ravi Gupta have joined us as inaugural fellows, and our staff of mission-driven experts across policy, communications, and operations continues to grow.

This report captures the impact your support has made possible. We are committed to finishing the year with urgency—pushing the Democratic Party to put students and families first as we approach November's pivotal midterms and the end-of-year deadline for governors to opt into the landmark scholarship program.



Sincerely,

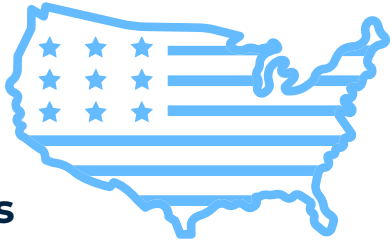
Jorge Elorza

CEO, Democrats for Education Reform

THE YEAR IN *Numbers*

24 States

with executive
engagement



\$500m

Federal Charter Schools
Program funding — the
highest in program history



42/10

House & Senate Democratic
signatories on the FY27
charter funding letter



+566%

increase in media
reach from 2025-2026



INSIDE THIS REPORT

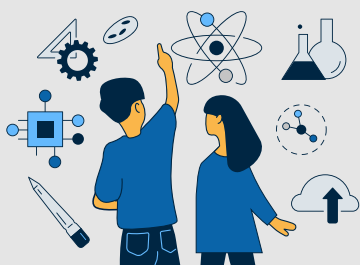
- 1 • Executive Engagement | 2 • Federal Advocacy
- 3 • Policy Impact | 4 • Thought Leadership

EXECUTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Our Core Strategy

Governors are the single most important K–12 education policymakers in the country. Our Executive Engagement Program is built on the premise that governors who understand and embrace a reform agenda can drive lasting change, and we are uniquely equipped to inform, persuade, and support them.

Reform Agenda: *The Three Pillars*



INNOVATION

Advancing microschools, new models, and modern approaches to teaching and learning.



ACCOUNTABILITY

Strengthening the standards and transparency that hold systems responsible for outcomes.



CHOICE

Expanding school choice options for families, including FSTC opt-in.

In 2026, we've engaged 13 governors on two or more of our reform pillars, with five additional governors engaged on at least one. We have also equipped promising candidates early with policy briefings, polling insights, and donor connections.

24

STATES
actively
engaged

13

GOVERNORS
on two or more
reform pillars

12^{key}

GUBERNATORIAL
races in play

Deep Partnerships With Key Governors

DFER's gubernatorial work runs deep. From helping elect new governors and shaping their education agendas on day one, to advancing FSTC opt-in and partnering on innovation and accountability, our team works alongside senior staff to move policy. The partnerships below span funding formula overhauls, the Science of Reading, school choice, and microschools—a portfolio of relationships where governors and their teams value us as a trusted resource.

Governor **Maura Healey**

MASSACHUSETTS

We've engaged Gov. Healey consistently, getting her closer to FSTC opt-in and building on a record that includes evidence-based K-3 reading curricula legislation and high-dosage tutoring initiatives.



Governor **Kathy Hochul**

NEW YORK

Alongside the efforts of our NY chapter, we pushed Gov. Hochul to commit to opt New York into the FSTC, sign record K-12 investments, and build on her Back to Basics literacy push and high impact tutoring initiatives.



Governor **Matt Meyer**

DELAWARE

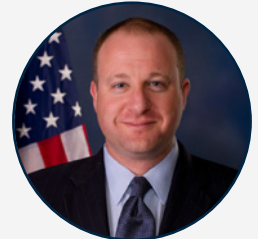
We helped elect Gov. Meyer and were a key partner in shaping his education agenda. Delaware is on the cusp of passing a new funding formula for the first time in over 40 years.



Governor **Jared Polis**

COLORADO

Gov. Polis was the first Democrat to commit to opting into the Federal Scholarship Tax Credit. We provided policy background to support his decision to opt into FSTC.



Governor **Mikie Sherrill**

NEW JERSEY

We helped elect Gov. Sherrill and directly shaped her education platform. The partnership has deepened in 2026 around early literacy, the Science of Reading, FSTC implementation, and district consolidation — expanding to a new school funding formula.



Governor **Josh Shapiro**

PENNSYLVANIA

We partnered with Governor Shapiro on accountability and innovation, including potential microschools legislation.



2026 Gubernatorial Campaigns

With 36 governorships on the 2026 ballot, DFER set a disciplined and strategic focus. We’ve engaged in the races that matter most, including toss-ups and competitive primaries. Alongside our electoral work, we’re partnering with sitting governors on federal scholarship tax credit (FSTC) opt-in and arming decision-makers with policy memos that shape real education reform.



BATTLEGROUND STATES ENGAGED
Ohio, Georgia, Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and Kansas.



WINS SECURED
Competitive primaries in Wisconsin, New Mexico and Georgia.

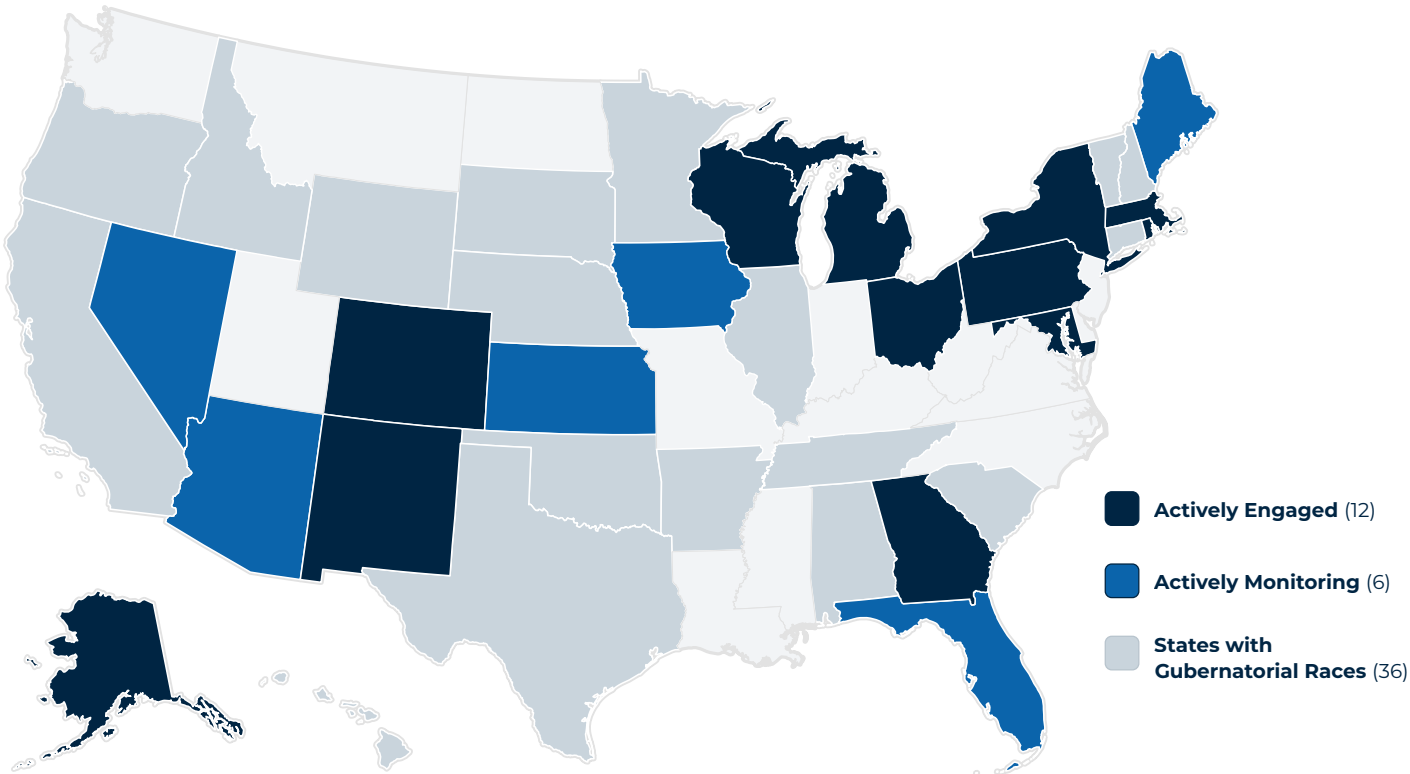


LEADING ON FSTC
Briefings for 23 sitting Democratic Governors, polling across 19 states, and coalition engagement in every region.



STATE POLICY MEMOS
New Jersey, Wisconsin, New Mexico, Michigan, Colorado, Ohio, Kansas, Georgia, Maine, Alaska, and Rhode Island.

2026 GUBERNATORIAL RACES & ENGAGEMENT



Case Study: Wisconsin Democratic Gubernatorial Primary

How DFER Helped Engineer One of the Most Dramatic Comebacks in Recent Memory

The Situation

DFER's partner organization ERNA conducted seven polls over eleven months in Wisconsin, becoming the first organization to identify a narrow but viable path to a Crowley victory. Working alongside CFC Action Fund, New Politics, and local Wisconsin partners, we provided the research, resources, and strategic framework that made his comeback possible.



The Strategy: 5 Conditions for Victory

Polling found the opening. ERNA's late-July survey was the first data to show the race was competitive: once voters heard Crowley's full story and learned of Governor Evers' endorsement, the race moved from Hong 30%, Crowley 14% — to a virtual tie.

1. Secured the Evers endorsement

Our polling showed Evers at +81 net favorability. When voters heard he backed Crowley, support "much more likely" jumped from 16% to 43%.

2. Consolidated the field

Crowley's only path required unifying moderates, traditional liberals, and progressives. Once Barnes and Rodriguez exited, that coalition was his to build.

3. Raised \$4M in the final 20 days

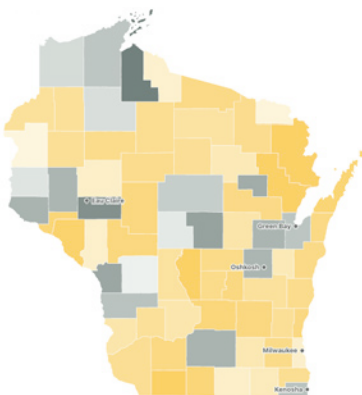
Targeted spending in Dane County kept the race competitive, while a Milwaukee surge erased a 15-point deficit in the state's largest county.

4. Turned education choice into an asset

CFC Action Fund used our research to target Black and Hispanic parents around Hong's plan to eliminate the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, flipping the issue from potential liability to an affirmative advantage.

5. Raised scrutiny of Hong's record

For nine months Hong avoided examination of her record. Targeted paid media and national press changed that in the final stretch as she closed the campaign defending positions out of step with Wisconsin voters.



The Result: A Comeback Victory for Crowley

Milwaukee County swung from a 15-point deficit to a 43%–41.5% Crowley victory. He remained competitive in Dane County (43%–37%). Record Democratic primary turnout, exceeding 2018 by an estimated 35–40%, broke in his direction.

Challenging the education status quo did not prevent Crowley from building a winning Democratic coalition. It gave him another way to distinguish himself.

Section 2

FEDERAL *Advocacy*

Our federal advocacy work continues to produce significant, measurable results. In 2026, we expanded the number of Democrats signing on to charter school funding letters and new legislation, surpassing our own ambitious targets, while deepening congressional relationships across more than 60 offices.

Federal Charter Schools Program

DFER's sustained advocacy reversed a proposed cut to the National Charter Schools Program, which would have dropped it from \$440M to \$400M, and instead secured a \$60 million increase to \$500 million, the highest funding level in program history.



\$400m

Held in FY 2025



\$500m

Held in FY 2026

Congressional Signatories · FY27 CSP Letter

We grew Congressional Democratic signatories on the charter funding letter and added co-sponsors across two new House charter bills, expanding our pro-charter coalition on both sides of the Capitol.

Grew from

32 to 42

House Democratic
signatories on the
charter funding letter

Went from

8 to 10

Senate Democratic
signatories on the
charter funding letter

Added

10

Democratic
co-sponsors across
three new House
charter bills

Influence in Action: Charter Schools Program

Policymakers are increasingly turning to us as a trusted partner. Sustained engagement by our team, alongside the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, helped bring 12 new congressional signers onto the Charter Schools Program appropriations support letter—10 in the House and two in the Senate—expanding our coalition of pro-charter champions on the Hill.

We have met with over **70** offices and **10** members have sponsored at least one of three pieces of legislation that aim to strengthen charter schools.

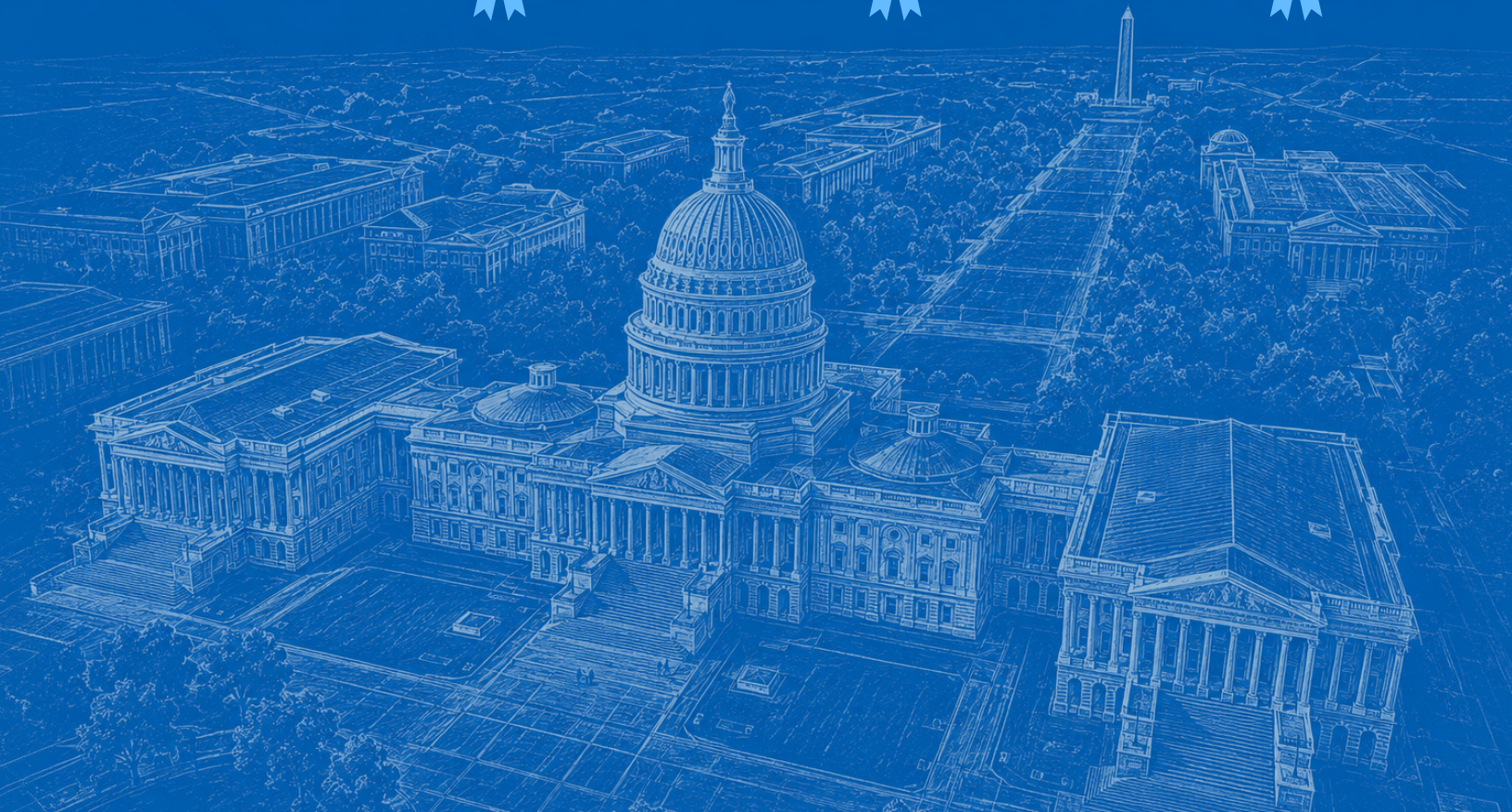
H.R. 3453/S. 1795
Empower Charter
School Educators
to Lead Act



H.R. 7082/S. 4328
FLEX Act (Fostering
Learning and
Excellence in
Charter Schools)



H.R. 7086/S. 1723
Equitable Access
to School
Facilities Act



POLICY IMPACT

The Federal Scholarship Tax Credit

We have achieved policy wins at the state and federal level that represent some of the most significant education reform gains in the organization's history. The landmark Federal Scholarship Tax Credit sits at the center of our 2026 advocacy.

Governors Moving to Opt-In

Through direct executive briefings and national thought leadership, we have directly influenced two Democratic governors to commit to opting in — and moved two more from disinterest to active consideration. Notably, in spite of aggressive lobbying from the teachers unions, only one governor has opted out of the program. We anticipate that almost every Democratic governor will opt in by the end of next year.

OPTED-IN

Governor
Jared Polis
COLORADO



We submitted formal regulatory comments to the Department of Treasury to shape FSTC rulemaking. In addition, we were a featured speaker when Treasury previewed its forthcoming rules, and have partnered directly with them to raise awareness of the program.

COMMITTED TO OPT-IN

Governor
Kathy Hochul
NEW YORK



NOW CONSIDERING

Governor
Michelle Lujan Grisham
NEW MEXICO

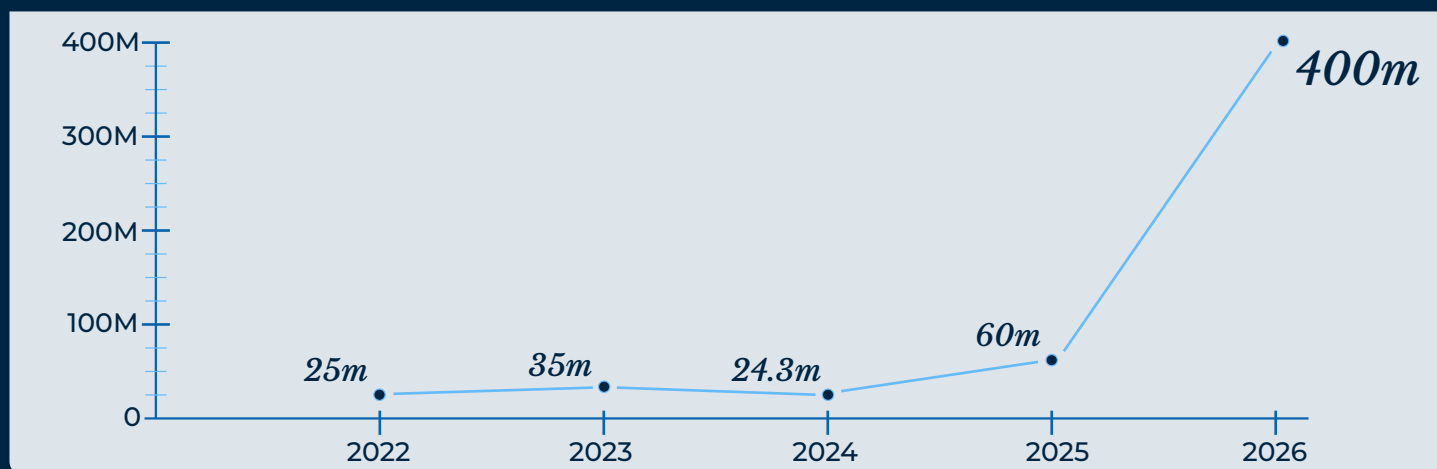


THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Driving the National Conversation

Our ability to shape the national education conversation has reached an unprecedented level. So far this year, CEO Jorge Elorza's thought leadership generated an estimated 400 million media impressions across national, regional, and trade publications.

2026 ESTIMATED MEDIA REACH



Landmark Media Placements

We have earned placement in the most prestigious publications in the country, often multiple times in a single quarter.

The Washington Post

Opinion

*"America faces an education depression.
Why are Democrats silent?"*

Co-authored with Ben Austin

The New York Times

OPINION

GUEST ESSAY

*"Democrats, This Is Why You
Haven't Fixed Schools Yet"*

POLITICO

*Coverage of our national FSTC
polling, cited by policy
organizations nationwide.*

The74

OPINION

*"Feds Are Offering New Money for
Public School Kids. Why Would Dems
Turn It Down?"*

A Unique & Essential Position in the Reform Landscape

As a center-left organization trusted by reform-minded leaders and institutions, we've long championed reforms like public charter schools and expanded school choice—ideas usually tied to the right.

We identify the policy levers that will improve outcomes for students, and we build the cross-partisan coalitions necessary to move them. Our work on the Federal Scholarship Tax Credit is perhaps the clearest current example: a Republican-authored federal program that DFER is championing with Democratic governors, because we believe outcomes for children must transcend party lines.

By positioning ourselves as conveners rather than partisans, we have consistently passed legislation and shaped policy in states where others could not get through the door.



THE STAKES HAVE *Never* BEEN HIGHER

The Federal Scholarship Tax Credit represents the largest expansion of educational choice in American history. The 2026 gubernatorial elections will determine which Democratic leaders are in office as the 2028 presidential primary takes shape — and that primary will set the national education agenda for a generation.

DFER is positioned at the intersection of every one of these inflection points. Your investment today is not just supporting an organization — it is directly shaping whether families, especially low-income families in blue states, gain access to the educational opportunities they deserve.

We are proud of what we have built together, and confident that the next chapter — backed by your continued partnership — will be the most impactful in our history.

