IN ONLY A DECADE, charter schools have grown from just a notion to some 2,700 schools across the nation. They range from small independent schools, often emanating from visionary teachers and parents, to franchise schools run by major education management firms, such as Charter Schools USA, Nobel Learning, and Edison Schools. As the movement matures, however, threats to its growth abound. School districts want to staunch the loss of students and funding to charters. Teacher unions object to the expansion of these public yet mostly nonunionized schools. Politicians cave in to the complaints of these powerful interests. And the movement itself needs to find the proper balance between small-scale, locally run schools and management firms that have the know-how and resources to finance their school models. All of which gives rise to a question crucial to the movement’s future: Can charter schools sustain their growth while retaining their innovative spirit?