



THE UNFULFILLED CHARTER SCHOOL PROMISE



*A **Children First** PA Charter Performance Center
Report on Charter Schools in Pennsylvania*

March 2023

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PA Charter Performance Center

The PA Charter Performance Center of Children First improves the quality of education, especially for at-risk students, by producing unbiased, accurate and timely information that will build momentum for the adoption of sound state-level charter school policy.

Charter schools are educating a growing share of Pennsylvania's K-12 students. Last year over 163,000 students attended a Pennsylvania charter school, more than double the number since 2010. Low-income Black and Hispanic students are more likely than other students to enroll in charters. While only 16% of district schools are located in high poverty areas, 58% of brick and mortar charter schools are operating in high poverty census tracts. This raises significant equity issues about who attends charters and how are they doing.

While enrollment is growing, student learning is not keeping pace. The 2018-2019 assessments show that 78% of 3rd through 8th grade charter students failed their Math PSSA and 56% failed English Language Arts. Over six in ten 11th graders attending charter schools failed the Algebra Keystone Exam and 45% failed Literature. More concerning is the fact that every one of Pennsylvania's 14 cyber charters has been identified as needing some level of support and improvement under the state's accountability system.

Absent unbiased, accessible information, there can be no accountability to boost charter school performance or close poorly performing operators. The Center seeks to close this gap by delivering reliable information on school performance for charters and district run schools to advance the policy conversation in Harrisburg and help parents make the best decisions for their children.

***The work of the Center is made possible
by a generous donation from the Ivywood Foundation.***

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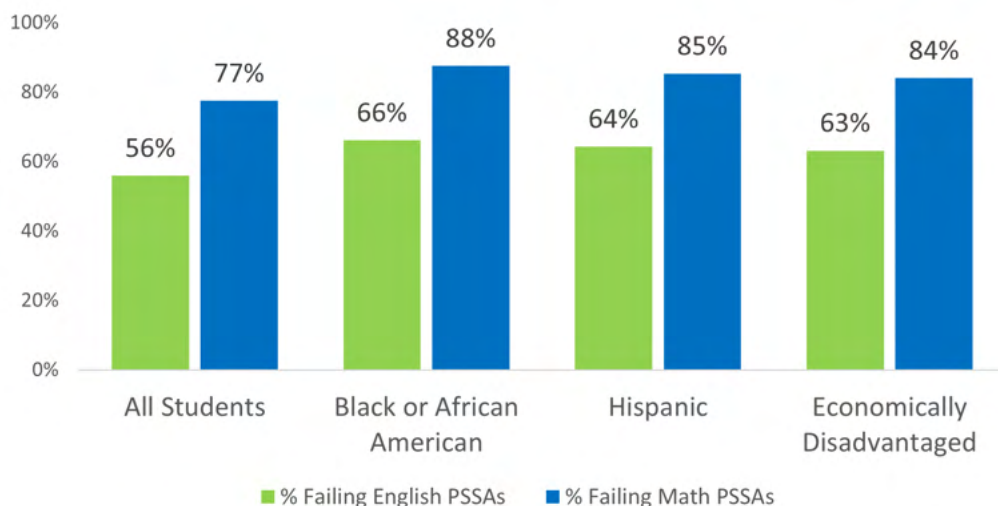
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Executive Summary

Pennsylvania’s charter school law dates back to 1997 which means we now have a quarter century of evidence to consider how well charter schools educate students. At a macro level, brick and mortar charter schools suffer from many of the same structural challenges as district-run schools. While charter schools have long been an important educational option for Black, Hispanic, and low-income students, their promise is unfulfilled because of funding and other structural barriers. As a result, charter schools have been unable to deliver, especially for Black and Hispanic students. Of the approximately 34,000 Black and Hispanic students who took the PSSAs in 2019, over 22,000 failed in English and 29,000 failed in math.

To be sure, Black and Hispanic students are also failing in traditional public schools and more needs to be done to ensure student success in both charter and district-run schools. However, it is a false narrative to suggest that charter schools are a refuge from failing public schools when over half of children of color and low-income charter school students are failing in English and more than three out of four are failing in math.

Chart 1: Most Black, Hispanic and Low-income Charter School Students are Failing the PSSAs



PA Charter School Students	All Students	Black Students	Hispanic Students	Low-Income Students
Number of Students Failing English	27,900	17,000	5,100	21,900
Number of Students Failing Math	38,100	22,100	7,000	28,900

Source: PA Department of Education, PSSA results, 2015-2019 (average)

Performance for Black and low-income charter school students has largely stagnated in recent years. While it is reasonable to expect that charter schools would do a better job as they gain more years of experience, the fact is that the percentage of students who are failing is largely unchanged for the brick and mortar charter school sector between 2015 and 2019.

We also compared charter school and traditional public school performance in four large school districts – Pittsburgh, Chester-Upland, Allentown, and Philadelphia – to create a head-to-head comparison of student outcomes. If the narrative that charter schools are a refuge for students escaping “failing public schools” is correct, we would expect Black and low-income students attending charter schools to be doing better than their counterparts in district-run schools. Instead, the data shows that charter schools are not doing a better job than district schools and, in many cases, are actually doing worse.

Charter schools have been held out as the solution for Black, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students. While the data confirms that there are many high performers, it also shows that Pennsylvania charter schools are failing to live up to their core educational mission for many students. Key takeaways include:

- The promise of charter schools as educational laboratories of innovation remains unfulfilled. Over six in 10 students in each student subgroup failed the English PSSAs and over eight in 10 are failing in math.
- Charter schools have not improved over the last five years. English and math outcomes for Black and low-income students were flat between 2015 and 2019. Hispanic students showed the largest improvement with 4% fewer students failing English and 3% failing math.
- Many charters schools are going in the wrong direction. Most (53%) charter schools posted lower outcomes in English for Black students in 2019 than in 2015, and 46% had lower results in math. Although Hispanic students posted the largest gains of any group, performance declined in about one out of three charter schools that enrolled Hispanic students.

Table 1: Takeaways for Black, Hispanic and Economically Disadvantaged Students			
	Black Charter School Students	Hispanic Charter School Students	Economically Disadvantaged Charter School Students
What percent of students failed English and math in 2015-2019 period?			
English	66%	64%	63%
Math	88%	85%	84%
Did the percent of students failing go up or down between 2015 and 2019?			
English	2% increase	4% decrease	No change
Math	1% decrease	3% decrease	1% decrease
How many charter schools had more students failing in 2019 than in 2015?			
English	53%	35%	48%
Math	46%	30%	45%

In short, while charter schools have been billed as the answer for Black, Hispanic, and low-income students, they are not fulfilling their promise to these students.¹

Instead, Pennsylvania’s approach to funding charter schools has added billions in costs to local school districts without improving student outcomes. School districts spent more than \$1.6 billion to send students to brick and mortar charter schools and another \$1 billion for cyber charter schools in the 2021 school year.

Payments to charter schools are projected to soar by another \$1.7 billion by 2023 making them the fastest-growing cost in the state’s education system.²

The very same school boards responsible for authorizing charter schools are left with the unenviable choice of raising property taxes or cutting costs by hiring fewer teachers, raising class sizes, or deferring needed investments in crumbling school buildings.



Payments to charter schools are projected to soar by another \$1.7 billion by 2025, making them the fastest-growing cost in the state’s education system. The very same school boards responsible for authorizing charter schools are left with the unenviable choice of raising property taxes or cutting costs by hiring fewer teachers, raising class sizes, or deferring needed investments in crumbling school buildings.



Policy Recommendations

Charter schools were intended to create a better pathway for Black, Hispanic, and low-income students than the opportunities available in traditional public schools. Twenty-five years later, that promise has not been realized. The majority of Black, Hispanic, and low-income students are failing in English and math and outcomes are not improving over time. The solution is not to pit charters against district-run schools but instead to adopt three policy reforms that will improve outcomes and strengthen the sector.

- 1. Address the structural issues that limit the progress of all schools.** Pennsylvania's school funding system does not meet the needs of all of its students and especially fails low-income students, and Black and Hispanic students. Pennsylvania ranks in the bottom two states in terms of the opportunity gaps between white students and students of color and low-income students, and the magnitude of the gaps have grown in recent years. Total spending on K-12 education is over \$4 billion below what it would take to provide an adequate education. This shortfall affects students attending both charter schools and district-run schools and lasting progress is not possible without addressing this gap.
- 2. Take steps to expand high-quality charter schools and turn around or close down low-performing schools.** There is no such thing as a typical charter school. At the one end of the spectrum, high-performing charters such as many from the KIPP and Mastery networks regularly score better than their feeder school districts. At the other extreme are charter schools where 90% or more of their students fail the PSSA assessments. Pennsylvania should take steps to close down the lowest performing schools while simultaneously expanding high-quality options. Since 2012, at least 23 states including Indiana, Ohio, and Texas have amended their laws to improve the quality of charter schools.
- 3. Implement an accountability matrix to give local authorizers the information they need to make good decisions.** The decision whether to renew or close a charter school should be made using data that allows the decision makers to assess performance with comparable schools. The problem is that, under the current system, local school boards are on their own because there is no central source of data to compare charter school performance. The state should create an Accountability Matrix covering academics, operations, governance, and fiscal factors accompanied by quality benchmarks to give local authorizers the information they need to improve charter school quality.

PA SCHOOLS ARE FAILING BLACK, HISPANIC, AND LOW-INCOME STUDENTS

Future Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall made history as the lead attorney successfully challenging the constitutionality of racial discrimination in public education in the landmark case of *Brown v the Board of Education*. In a unanimous decision, the Supreme Court affirmed the importance of education for all children on equal terms and instructed the states to act “with all deliberate speed.”⁴

Despite the plea for deliberate speed, almost 70 years later, Black, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students in Pennsylvania are still being left behind.

While barriers to equal opportunity persist across the country, Pennsylvania has shown less progress than virtually every other state. A 2022 study by independent researchers at Research for Action (RFA) documents that Pennsylvania ranks nearly the worst in the nation for educational opportunity gaps based on race and income levels.⁵ Among the 50 states, Pennsylvania ranked 49th in the Black-white opportunity gap, 50th in the Hispanic-white opportunity gap, and 49th in the gap between students from low-income families and their wealthier peers.⁶ Not only is Pennsylvania the only state that ranks in the bottom three on each measure, but the magnitude of the gaps have grown over the last two years.

These rankings, which include both district-run schools and charter schools, suggest that Pennsylvania is at the bottom of a deep hole that is only growing deeper. The RFA study concludes, “while troubling race and income disparities in access to educational opportunity exist in most states, the size and pervasiveness of PA’s gaps are among the most severe in the country.”⁷

For the last thirty years, some parents and education policy makers have argued that charter schools are the answer.

Charter Schools Come to the Commonwealth

In the early 1990s, states began passing legislation to improve educational opportunities by authorizing public charter schools. The theory behind this new kind of school is that, freed from most bureaucratic constraints, charter schools would have the flexibility and freedom to be educational laboratories of innovation and close the achievement gap between white students and other student groups. If the school failed to live up to the performance and other standards outlined in its charter, the school district board could decline to renew or revoke the charter.



*In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.*³

- *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka*, May 17, 1954



Pennsylvania followed suit in 1997 when the General Assembly passed Pennsylvania's Charter School Law enacting a framework for brick and mortar schools to operate in the Commonwealth. The legislative intent envisioned that charter schools would:

- Increase learning opportunities for students,
- Encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods,
- Create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site,
- Provide parents and students with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system, and
- Hold the schools established under this act accountable for meeting academic standards and provide the school with a method to establish accountability system.⁸

In exchange, Pennsylvania charter schools would operate under a different, more flexible set of state requirements than district-run schools. Specific examples of these flexibilities include:

- Charter schools may opt not to accept all students who want to enroll.
- Unlike traditional public schools, all professional staff at charter schools are not required to be appropriately certified by the state in the field they are teaching or supervising.
- Charter schools are exempt from the requirement that they evaluate teachers and principals using an annual, uniform system.
- Charter schools do not have to provide independent student transportation services and may instead rely on transportation services provided by local school districts.
- Governing boards of trustees for charter schools do not need to be elected by the public.
- Charter schools are not required to have budget transparency or independent annual year-end audits.⁹

A quarter century later, the basic framework remains in place in Pennsylvania. Charter schools have more flexibility with the expectation that they will foster innovation and new learning opportunities for the students they enroll including Black, Hispanic, and low-income students.

Charter Schools Promised Better Outcomes for Black, Hispanic, and Low-Income Students

While the charter school framework would, in theory, benefit all students, some educational thinkers believed that Black, Hispanic, and low-income students would experience the greatest gains in the classroom. For example, Albert Shanker, former president of the American Federation of Teachers and one of the earliest proponents of charter schools, made the case that charters would do a better job than traditional public schools of “helping children of different racial, ethnic, economic, and religious backgrounds come together to learn from one another.”¹⁰

Today, many school choice advocates have taken this argument a step further by claiming that Black, Hispanic, and low-income students can escape failing public schools by transferring to higher performing charter schools. In a 2022 op-ed, the Executive Vice President of the Commonwealth Foundation, wrote that “Democrats declaring war on charters is particularly insidious considering the majority demographics these schools serve are low-income and minority students. These students often flee to charter schools because their normal district schools — the schools assigned based on zip code alone — are unsafe, failing, or both.”¹¹

Similarly, the founder of PA Families for Education Choice penned in an open letter to the PA General Assembly stating that “The families of our commonwealth are depending upon the General Assembly to launch us into a new education era that will be filled with opportunities for our children to learn in a safe and fulfilling environment from kindergarten to graduation; ushering in a new society in which students are no longer trapped in a school building based on demographics, zip codes, or finances.”¹²

The Charter School Promise Has Not Been Realized

Implicit in this worldview is that charter schools are doing better than traditional public schools run by school districts. But is there evidence to support this claim? A quarter century into Pennsylvania’s charter school experiment, the data shows that the promised opportunities for Black, Hispanic, and low-income students have not been realized.

This report analyzes five years of Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) data for Black, Hispanic, and low-income charter school students with a special focus on four school districts with the largest number of students attending charter schools. We calculated the percent of all students in each category who failed the PSSAs and tracked the results over the 2015-2019 school years.

We then repeated this analysis for charter and non-charter students in four large school districts.



Three key findings emerged:

- Most Black, Hispanic, and low-income charter school students are failing their math and English assessments.
- Charter school performance for Black and low-income students has failed to improve over time.
- Charter schools are not doing a better job educating Black and low-income students than district-run schools and, in many cases, are doing worse.

There are several core reasons why charters and all public schools are coming up short.

Structural Issues Limit Progress of All Schools

To a large extent, charter schools are subject to the same structural problems as district-run schools. For example, Pennsylvania’s inadequate teacher pipeline makes it hard for school districts and charter schools to hire sufficient numbers of effective educators to lead their classrooms. Similarly, red tape and outdated practices add millions in unnecessary costs for both district and charter schools annually.

The biggest barrier to student progress, however, is Pennsylvania’s funding gap for both charter schools and traditional public schools. According to the state’s own calculations in its costing out study, state funding for K-12 schools is short by at least \$4 billion. Pennsylvania ranks 43rd in the nation when it comes to the share of revenue that the state provides local school districts. This lack of resources holds students back as “decades of research show that long-term investments in education are crucial for improving opportunities and outcomes for children—particularly children of color and children who come from poorer families and attend schools in poorer communities.”¹³

While most of the school funding conversation focuses on public school districts, the lack of adequate funding from the state also affects charter school tuition rates. Under PA Charter School Law, districts pay charter schools tuition based on the district’s per pupil spending, minus a few categories of spending such as transportation that do not apply to charters. To the extent that school districts expenditures are constrained by the lack of state resources, the shortfall flows downstream to charters in the form of lower charter school tuition rates.

In short, structural issues – including but not limited to funding adequacy – pose barriers that hold students back regardless of whether a school is operated as a traditional public school or a charter school. Pennsylvania’s unique system of funding charter schools, however, puts extra financial burdens on school districts.



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School Districts are Saddled with Rising Payments to Charter Schools

Charter schools are funded by local school districts which are required to make a payment – also called “tuition” – for every student who resides in the district and attends a charter school. Already underfunded, school districts face the added burden of escalating charter school tuition payments and other mandated costs that makes their financial position even worse.

School district payments to charter schools skyrocketed by 132% from \$1.1 billion in 2012 to \$2.7 billion in 2021. Payments are estimated to rise further to \$3.0 billion dollars in 2022 with no relief in sight. Temple University’s Public Policy Lab estimated total charter fees are projected to soar by an additional \$1.7 billion by 2025, making them the fastest growing cost in the state’s education system.

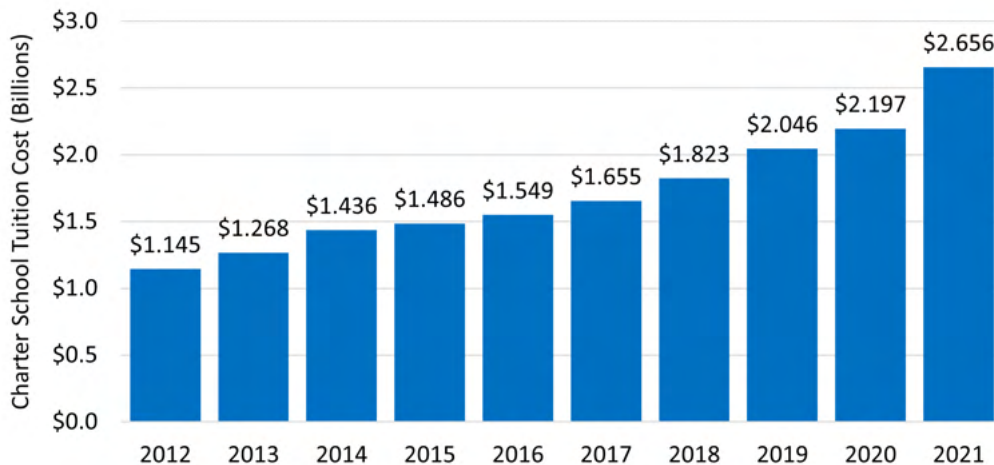
The system is out of balance, undermining school district finances and putting relentless pressure on local property taxes. Meanwhile, students attending district-run school suffer larger class sizes, outdated curriculum, crumbling school buildings, and fewer teachers as a direct result of mandated payments to charter schools. As this report shows, the unfortunate fact is that Black and Hispanic students given the opportunity to attend a charter school are not faring any better.



The sharp uptick in payments is even harder to explain given that the charter school tuition bill grew nearly three times faster than charter school enrollment (79% vs. 28%) between 2015 and 2021.



Chart 2: The Charter School Tuition Bill Has More Than Doubled



School Districts Bear Extra Special Education Costs

Pennsylvania uses a different set of rules to calculate special education funding for charter schools and district-run schools. PA Charter School Law requires that every school district calculates a charter school tuition rate for special education students using this multi-part formula:¹⁴

- Determine how much the district spends on special education,
- Subtract deductions that to remove costs that do not apply to charter schools,
- Divide the total by 16% of the district’s enrollment, and
- Add the result to the tuition rate for non-special education charter school students to arrive at the special education charter school tuition rate.

When all the calculations are complete, every school district will have its own special education tuition rate which currently ranges from \$18,000 to \$60,000 per student.

Of course, some special education students require more costly services than others. The cost of a full-time aide, for example, is much more expensive than the cost of an hour of speech or occupational therapy. Because charters are paid the same amount of money for all special education students regardless of the severity of their disabilities, they have an incentive to “cherry pick” students with low-cost needs and discriminate against students with high-cost needs.¹⁵ According to the PA Department of Education, last year, school districts educated 93% of the special education students requiring the most extensive services per student.¹⁶

In the aggregate, school districts spent 15 times more on special education services versus that charter schools in the 2019 school year, \$4.8 billion versus \$320 million,¹⁷ an imbalance that puts increasing pressure on school district budgets. One solution is to close the special education funding loophole by applying the same funding formula to all public schools, both charter and district-run, saving districts \$175 million annually.

Local Authorizers Limited by Weak Accountability Structure and Lack of Resources

Under PA Charter School Law, local school boards have the responsibility to approve or deny,¹⁸ annually assess,¹⁹ and, at the end of the five year term, renew or revoke the charter to local school boards.²⁰ School board members, most of who are unpaid community members, must consider the school’s academic performance, operations, governance, financial management, and a host of legal requirements.

This complex task is made more difficult by the fact that there is nothing in PA Charter School Law or the educational ecosystem that gives school boards the accountability infrastructure they need to make informed decisions. School boards lack a standard framework for evaluating charter school performance. Decision makers need also reliable and comparable data about peer schools to carry out their responsibilities.

Absent an evaluation framework and timely data, it is a difficult task for school boards to determine whether a charter school that is up for renewal is a high or low performer.

The other major problem is that most school boards lack the resources to complete detailed evaluations of proposed and existing charters. Currently, 155 brick and mortar charter schools are operating in 44 school districts across the state. Of these, the Philadelphia and Pittsburgh school districts have the most charters and both have staffed charter school offices. Philadelphia and Pittsburgh are the exception. Across the rest of the state, school boards must attempt to carry out their roles as charter school authorizers on top of their other responsibilities and with no additional resources.

Adding a requirement to PA Charter School Law that the PA Department of Education create an “Accountability Matrix” with directly comparable data for every charter school would give local authorizers the information they need and at least partially address the shortage of resources.

In light of this evidence, policymakers should look for opportunities to reform cyber charter school funding and simultaneously improve educational outcomes for students.



HOW WELL ARE CHARTER SCHOOLS EDUCATING BLACK, HISPANIC, AND LOW-INCOME STUDENTS STATEWIDE?

A Note About Cyber Charter Schools

Cyber charter schools' academic track record has been problematic nationally and in Pennsylvania. Researchers at the Brookings Institution summed up the national outcomes saying that "the impact of attending a virtual charter on student achievement is uniformly and profoundly negative." Closer to home, all 13 of the state's cyber charters score below the statewide average on the 2018-2019 English and math assessments and all 13 are designated by the state as "needing additional support." While the poor performance of cyber charters is concerning, this report is focused on brick and mortar charter school outcomes for Black, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged children. More information about cyber charters is available at PA Charter Performance Center: childrenfirstpa.org/pacpc

Understanding Charter School Performance

By design, charter schools use different teaching methods that yield different outcomes for students. Proficiency rates for the charter school sector masks wide variations at individual schools. For example, over half (56%) of all brick and mortar charter school students scored basic or below in English Language Arts in 2018-2019. Pass rates at individual charter schools ranged from a low of 8% for Souderton Charter School Collaborative to 89% at Khepera Charter School.

For math, three out of four (77%) charter school students scored basic or below. While some schools like the Environmental Charter School at Frick Park excelled with only 21% of students failing math, eight charter schools reported that virtually all of their students (98%) scored basic or below in math.

It is also important to look at outcomes for different groups of students to assess how well charter schools are delivering on their core educational mission. The next section of this report looks at charter school performance for three important subgroups of students – Black students, Hispanic students, and economically disadvantaged students – during the 2015-2019 period.

Standardized outcomes data is available from the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) from the PA Department of Education.²¹ The PSSA measures how well students have achieved in English Language Arts and math according to state standards and the results are categorized in four groups: below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced. In plain English, students scoring in the below basic and basic categories are considered to have failed the assessment.

We compiled the statewide data for each student group to consider two critical questions:

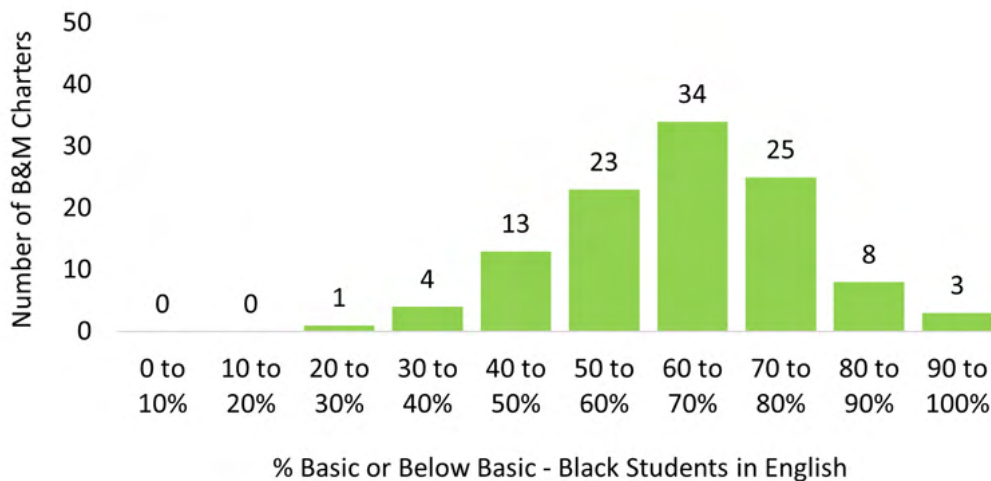
1. **How many students are failing?** One overall measure of performance is the percentage of charter school students in each group scoring in each of the four categories on the PSSA in English and math over the 2015 to 2019 period. Charter schools that are doing a better job will have lower percentage of students who fail, i.e., who score basic or below, on the assessments.
2. **Are schools getting better or worse?** A charter school that is trying to implement fresh approaches and innovative curriculum may be subject to a learning curve of its own. Other things equal, every year of additional operating experience should put charters schools in a stronger position to support rising student performance. By comparing student performance over a five year period, it is possible to gauge if there is any return on investment in terms of higher student achievement. If charter school innovations are effective, we would expect to see fewer student failing on the English and Math PSSAs in later years compared to earlier years.

CHARTER SCHOOL OUTCOMES FOR BLACK STUDENTS

Most Black Charter School Students are Failing English and Math

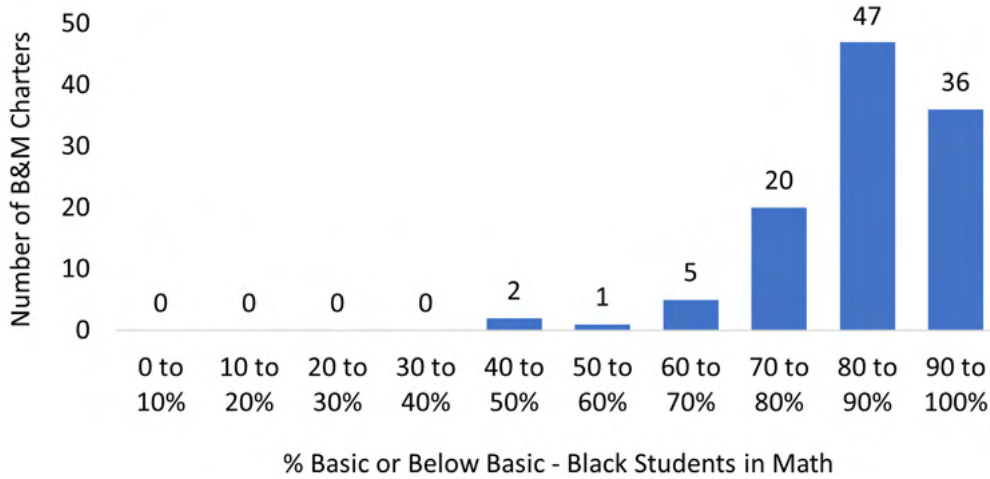
Between 2015-2019, 66% of Black charter school students failed English and 88% failed math where failing is defined as scoring basic or below on the PSSAs.

Chart 3: Two-Thirds of Black Charter School Students are Failing English



Outcomes varied by individual school with the share of Black students failing English ranging from 24% to 93%. In 93 of 111 schools, a majority of Black students failed English. Outcomes in math were generally worse. The share of Black students failing math ranged from 45% to 100%. In all but two schools, most Black students failed math.

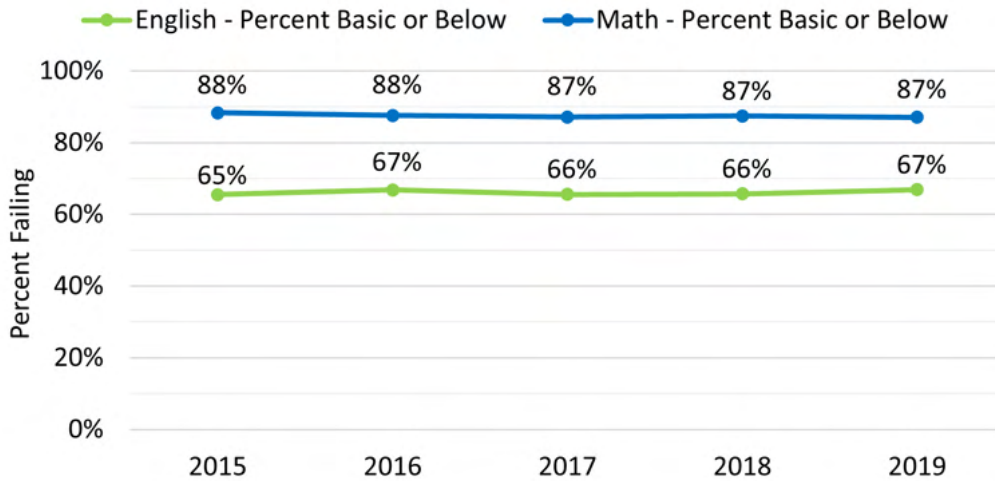
Chart 3.1: Nearly 9 in 10 Black Charter School Students are Failing Math



Failure Rate Barely Budged Over Five Years

The percent of Black students scoring basic or below basic showed little change between 2015 and 2019 in both English and math. The percent of students failing math declined by one percentage point and the percent failing English rose by two percentage points.

Chart 4: Little Change in Failure Rate for Black Charter School Students



Mixed Results in Individual Charter Schools for Black Students

The largest decrease was 30% for the Young Scholars Charter School and the largest increase was 39% for Arts Academy Charter School. For the group of schools that lost ground between 2015 and 2019, the English proficiency rate declined by an average of 9%. The math outcomes were somewhat stronger with slightly more than half (54%) of charter schools posting an increase in the percent of Black students who scored proficient or advanced.

In the remaining 46% of schools, math scores declined by an average of 6%. Executive Education Academy Charter School had the largest five-year gain (18%) and Maritime Academy Charter School and MAST Community Charter School had the two largest declines at 17% and 18% respectively.

Chart 5: English Scores for Black Students Declined in 53% of Charter Schools, 2015-2019

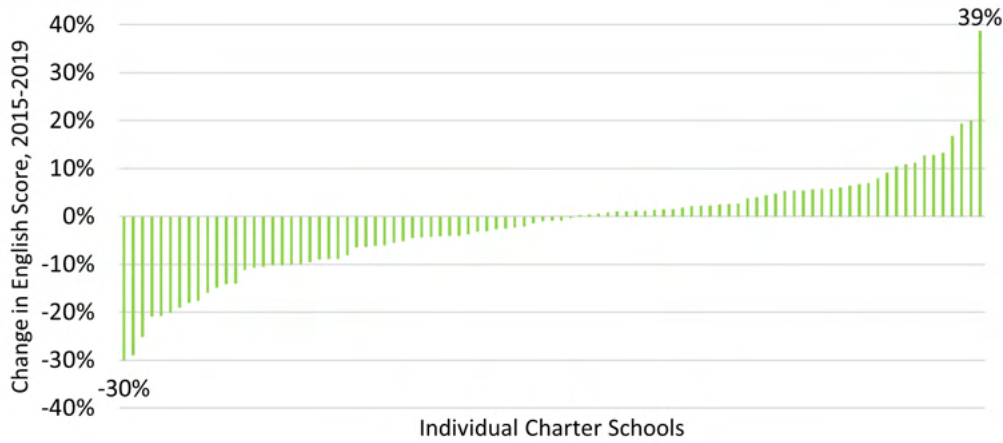
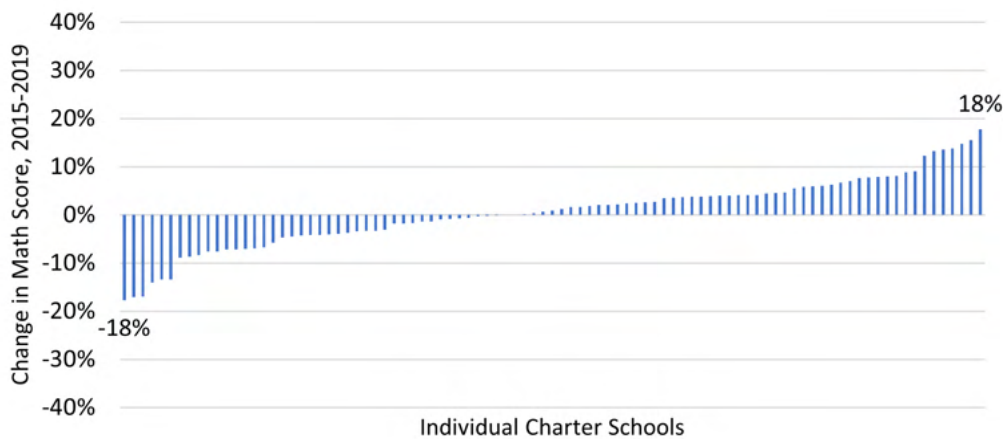


Chart 5.1: Math Scores for Black Students Declined in 46% of Charter Schools, 2015-2019



Between 2015 and 2019, the percent of Black students who scored proficient or advanced in English declined in more than half of the schools (53%), with English scores decreasing by more than 10% in 21 schools.



Table 2: Over half of Black Students Score Proficient or Above at these Schools for the Following Subjects:

English:	New Foundations CS
Ad Prima CS	Northwood Academy CS
Arts Academy CS	Propel CS-McKeesport
Christopher Columbus CS	Renaissance Academy CS
Easton Arts Academy Elementary CS	School Lane CS
Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures CS	Tacony Academy CS
Green Woods CS	Young Scholars of Central PA CS
Keystone Academy Charter School	
Laboratory CS	Math:
Lehigh Valley Academy Regional CS	MAST Community Charter School
MAST Community Charter School	Young Scholars of Central PA CS
MaST Community CS II	

CHARTER SCHOOL OUTCOMES FOR HISPANIC STUDENTS

Most Hispanic Charter School Students are Failing English and Math

Between 2015-2019, 64% of Hispanic charter school students failed English and 85% failed math where failing is defined as scoring basic or below on the PSSAs.

Looking at the results for individual schools, the share of Hispanic students failing in English ranged from 31% to 94% with two-thirds of schools reporting that a majority of their students failed.

The share of Hispanic students failing in math ranged from 46% to 100%. In all but two schools, most Hispanic students failed math.

Chart 6: Most Hispanic Charter School Students are Failing English

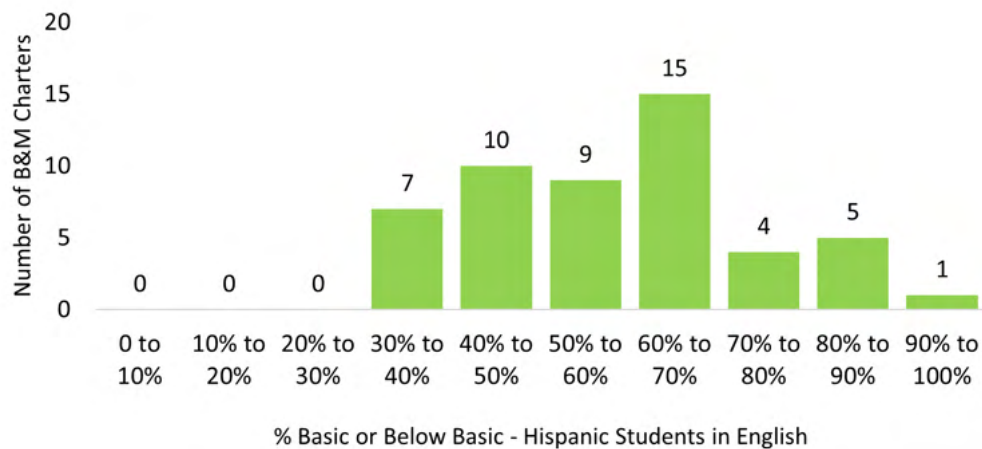
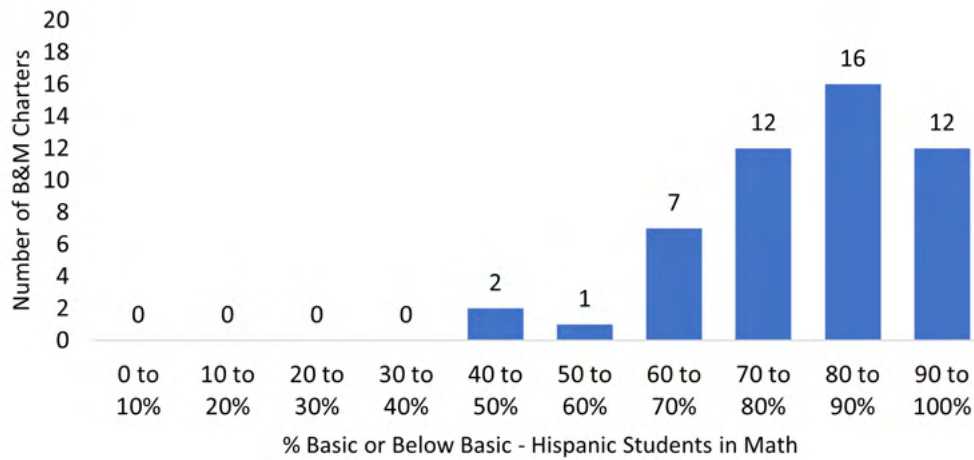


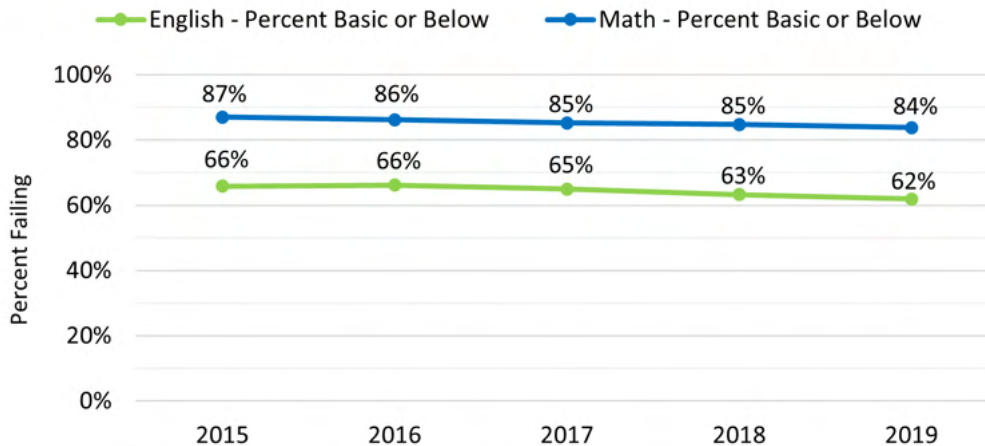
Chart 6.1: Most Hispanic Charter School Students are Failing Math



Failure Rate Edged Lower Over Five Years

The percent of Hispanic students scoring basic or below basic in English decreased from 66% to 62% between 2015 and 2019. The percent of Hispanic students scoring basic or below basic in math fell from 87% to 84% over the same five-year period.

Chart 7: Failure Rate for Hispanic Charter School Students Edged Lower



Most Charter Schools Showed Gains for Hispanic Students

The results for individual charters show that the majority posted positive gains for Hispanic students. Comparing scores from 2015 to 2019, average English scores improved in over two out of three schools (68%) with an average increase for these schools of 12%. At the other extreme, English scores declined by 5% or more in eight schools. Despite the relatively low math proficiency rates, many individual charters achieved some significant gains. For schools that posted PSSA results in both 2015 and 2019, average math scores improved in seven out of 10 schools and the average increase across all schools was nearly 11%. At the other extreme, math scores declined in 11 schools with scores in one school declining by 17%.

Chart 8: English Scores for Hispanic Students Improved in 65% of Charter Schools, 2015-2019

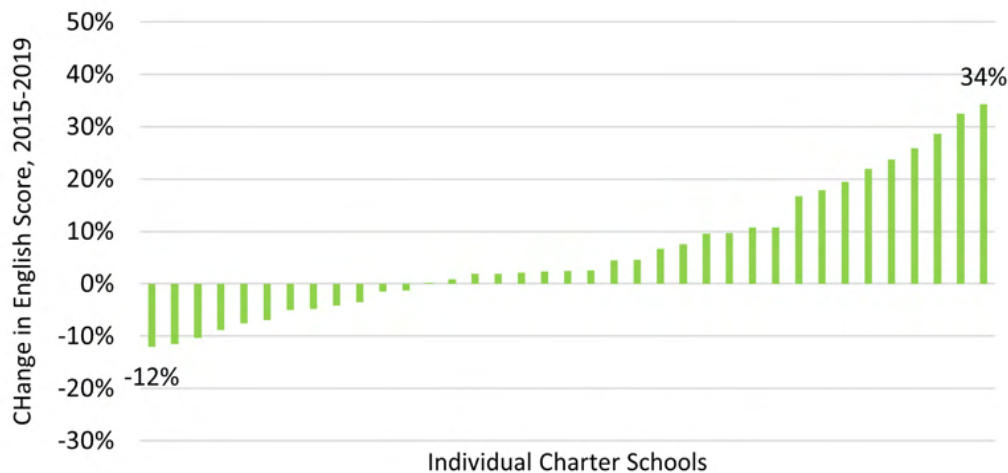


Chart 8.1: Math Scores for Hispanic Students Improved in 7 of 10 Charter Schools, 2015-2019

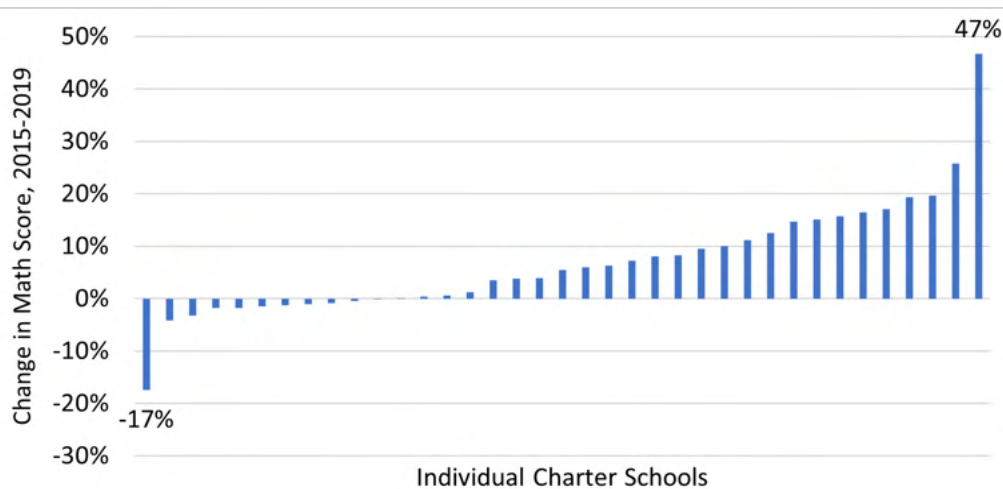


Table 3: Half or more Hispanic Students Scored Proficient or Above at these Schools for the Following Subjects:

English:	New Foundations CS
Arts Academy CS	Northwood Academy CS
Christopher Columbus CS	Philadelphia Academy CS
Easton Arts Academy Elementary CS	Philadelphia Performing Arts CS
Eugenio Maria De Hostos CS	School Lane CS
Franklin Towne Charter Elementary School	Sylvan Heights Science CS
Independence CS	Tacony Academy Charter School
Keystone Academy Charter School	
Lehigh Valley Academy Regional CS	Math
MAST Community Charter School	MAST Community Charter School
MaST Community CS II	Sylvan Heights Science CS

CHARTER SCHOOL OUTCOMES FOR ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

Most Low-income Charter School Students are Failing

Between 2015 and 2019, 63% of economically disadvantaged charter school students failed English and 84% scored failed math where failing is defined as scoring basic or below on the PSSAs.

The share of students that failed English ranged widely from 30% to 90% across individual schools with three out of four schools reporting that most economically disadvantaged students failed. Failure rates in math ranged from 45% to 100%. A majority of low-income students failed in all but three charters.

Chart 9: 63% of Low-Income Charter School Students are Failing English

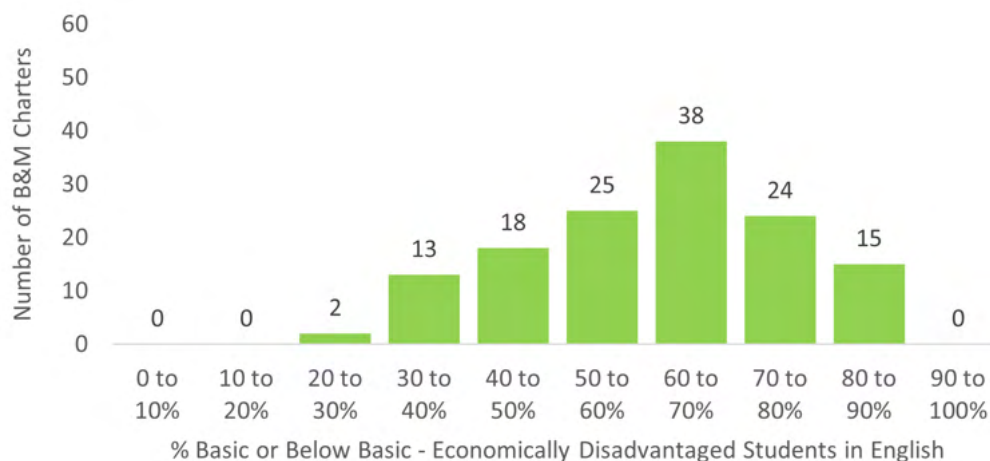
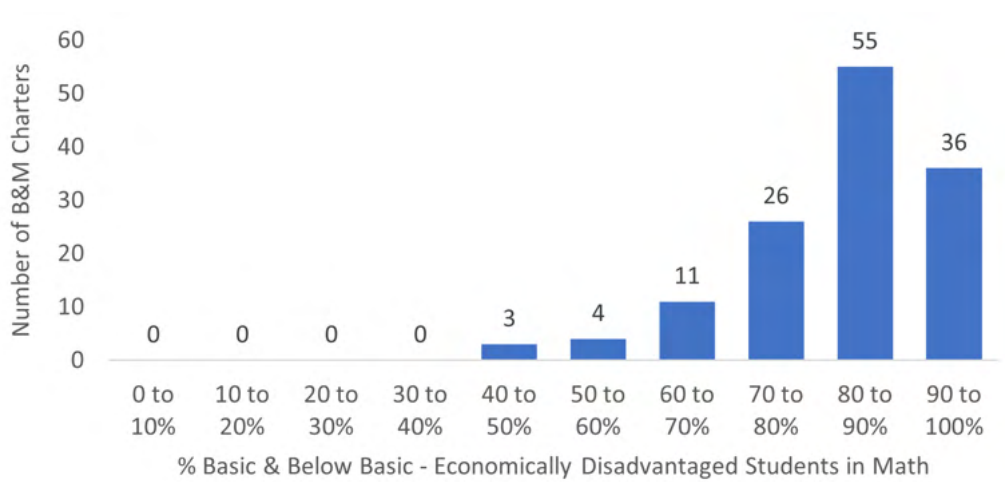


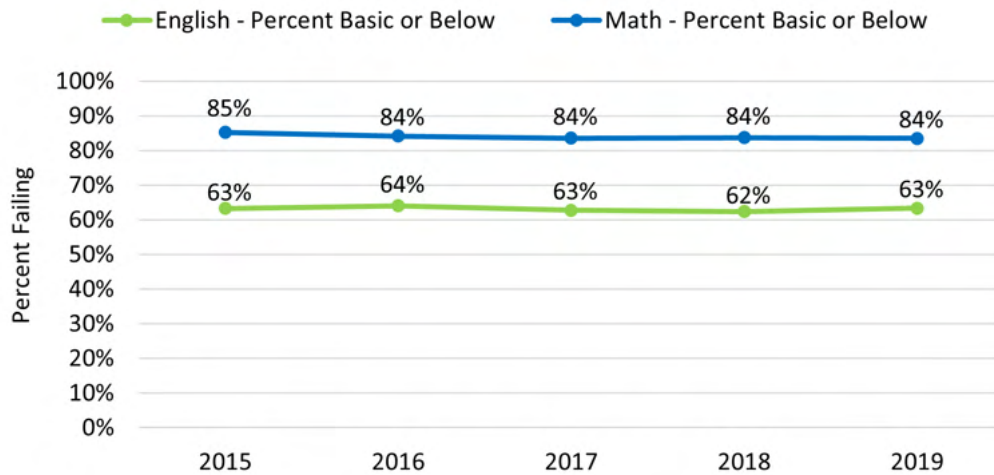
Chart 9.1: 84% of Low-Income Charter School Students are Failing Math



Failure Rate Barely Budgeted Over Five Years

The percent of economically disadvantaged charter school students scoring basic or below basic showed virtually no improvement in both English and math over the last five years. Failing rates in English varied narrowly from 62% to 64% with no net gain, while the rate of failure in math hovered around 84%.

Chart 10: Little Change in Failure Rate for Low-Income Charter School Students



Mixed Results In Individual Charter Schools for Low-income Students

For individual charter schools that were operating in both 2015 and 2019, slightly more than half (52%) improved performance in English for economically disadvantaged students and 48% declined. Sixteen schools posted declines of 10% or more. Similarly, 55% of charter schools improved performance in math for economically disadvantaged students, and 45% declined or had no change. Five schools posted declines of 10% or more with one school posting a 32% drop.

Chart 11: English Scores for Low-Income Students Improved in 52% of Charter Schools, 2015-2019

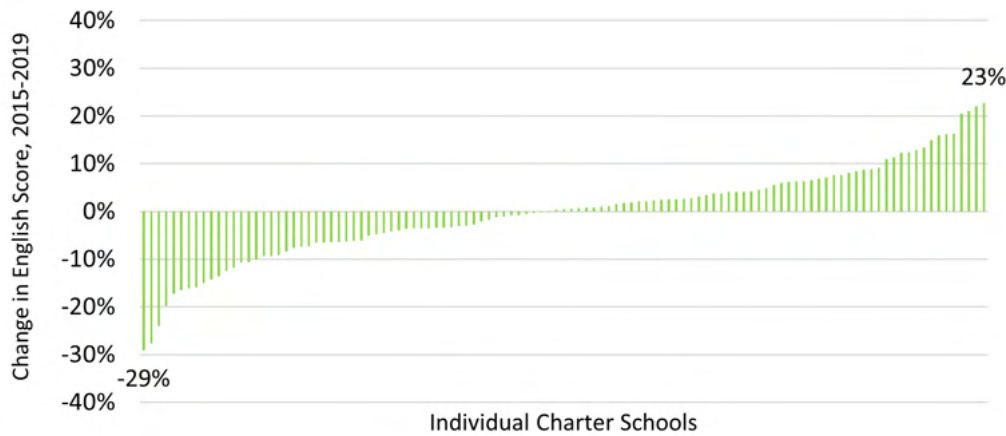


Chart 11.1: Math Scores for Low-Income Students Improved in 55% of Charter Schools, 2015-2019

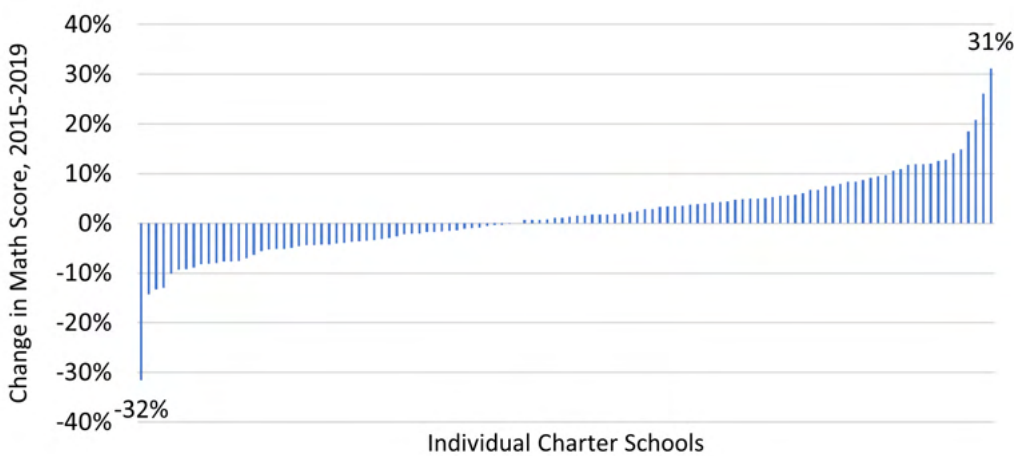


Table 4: Half or More Economically Disadvantaged Students Scored Proficient or Above at these Schools for the Following Subjects:

English:	Howard Gardner Multiple Intelligence CS	Propel CS-East
Ad Prima CS	Keystone Academy Charter School	Propel CS-McKeesport
Arts Academy CS	Laboratory CS	School Lane CS
Baden Academy CS	Lehigh Valley Academy Regional CS	Tacony Academy Charter School Eugenio Maria De Hostos CS
Bear Creek Community CS	Lincoln Park Performing Arts CS	York Academy Regional Charter School Renaissance Academy CS
Christopher Columbus CS	MAST Community Charter School	Young Scholars of Western Pennsylvania CS
Easton Arts Academy Elementary CS	MaST Community CS II	
Environmental CS at Frick PA	New Foundations CS	Math:
Fell CS	Northwood Academy CS	Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures CS
Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures CS	Penn Hills Charter School of Entrepreneurship	MAST Community Charter School
Franklin Towne Charter Elementary School	Pennsylvania Virtual CS	Philadelphia Academy CS
Gettysburg Montessori CSI	Young Scholars of Central PA CS	
Green Woods CS	Philadelphia Academy CS	

Takeaways for Black, Hispanic, and Economically Disadvantaged Charter School Students

Table 5: Takeaways for Black, Hispanic and Economically Disadvantaged Students			
	Black Charter School Students	Hispanic Charter School Students	Economically Disadvantaged Charter School Students
What percent of students failed English and math in 2015-2019 period?			
English	66%	64%	63%
Math	88%	85%	84%
Did the percent of students failing go up or down between 2015 and 2019?			
English	2% increase	4% decrease	No change
Math	1% decrease	3% decrease	1% decrease
How many charter schools had more students failing in 2019 than in 2015?			
English	53%	35%	48%
Math	46%	30%	45%

Charter schools have been held out as the solution for Black, Hispanic, and Economically Disadvantaged students. While the data confirms that there are many high performers, it also shows that Pennsylvania charter schools are failing to live up to their core educational mission for many students. Specifically:

- The promise of charter schools as educational laboratories of innovation remains unfulfilled. Over six in 10 students in each student subgroup failed the English PSSAs and over eight in 10 are failing in math.
- There is insufficient evidence that outcomes have improved over the last five years. English and math outcomes for Black and economically disadvantaged students were flat between 2015 and 2019. Hispanic students showed the largest improvement with 4% fewer students failing English and 3% fewer failing math.
- A substantial number of charters schools are going in the wrong direction. Most (53%) charter schools posted lower outcomes in English for Black students in 2019 than in 2015 and 46% had lower results in math. Although Hispanic students posted the largest gains of any group, performance declined in about one out of three charter schools that enrolled Hispanic students.

HOW DO CHARTERS SCHOOLS COMPARE TO DISTRICT-RUN SCHOOLS?

As of 2019, 165 brick and mortar charter schools operated in 27 counties statewide. Sixty-two percent of charter school students live in Philadelphia followed by Allegheny (8%), Chester (6%), Delaware (5%), Lehigh (5%) counties.

Brick and mortar charter schools must be authorized by the local school board in the school district where the charter is located. With limited exceptions, students attending brick and mortar charter schools live in the boundaries of the authorizing school district which means that charter schools are drawing from the same student population as district-run schools. With Pennsylvania's lengthy charter school experience, it is now possible to directly compare the performance at individual charter schools and their authorizing school districts.

We compared student outcomes for Black and economically disadvantaged students in four large school districts and the charter schools located in each district:

- Pittsburgh School District (Allegheny County)
- Chester-Upland School District (Delaware County)
- Allentown School District (Lehigh County)
- Philadelphia School District (Philadelphia)

Data for Hispanic students was not universally available due to reporting issues or because there were too few Hispanic students in a grade or school to be reportable. As a result, it was not possible to complete a head to head analysis for Hispanic students.

The analysis focused on three key questions.

First, how well are students doing? The key measure here is the percentage of students who are failing the English and math assessments during the 2015-2019 period.

Second, are schools getting better or worse? If Pennsylvania charter schools are effective incubators of innovation, we would expect to see better outcomes as they refine their educational models. We tracked annual outcomes between 2015 and 2019 to see if they made more progress than district-run schools.

Finally, how much do charter schools cost local school districts and local taxpayers? School districts pay charter schools tuition a per-student tuition for every student who enrolls in a brick and mortar charter, with higher payments for special education students. Because district do not receive any reimbursement from the state, local taxpayers shoulder the cost of charter school tuition.

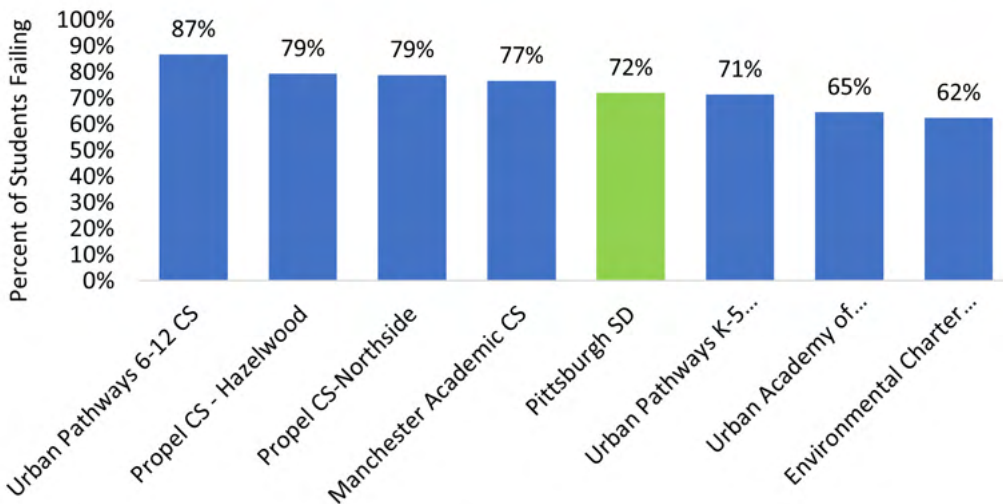
Pittsburgh Head to Head Comparison

Table 6: Head to Head Comparison Pittsburgh School District and Pittsburgh Charter Schools						
PITTSBURGH SCHOOL DISTRICT	# students taking ELA PSSA	# failing ELA	% failing ELA	# students taking math PSSA	# failing math	% failing math
CHARTER SCHOOLS						
All students	1,352	717	53%	1,352	1,010	75%
Black	902	710	67%	901	784	87%
Economically Disadvantaged	879	566	64%	879	751	85%
DISTRICT SCHOOLS						
All students	9,011	4,914	55%	9,028	6,513	72%
Black	4,616	3,152	68%	4,628	3,972	86%
Economically Disadvantaged	6,338	4,005	63%	6,350	5,133	81%

How Well are Black and Economically Disadvantaged Students Doing?

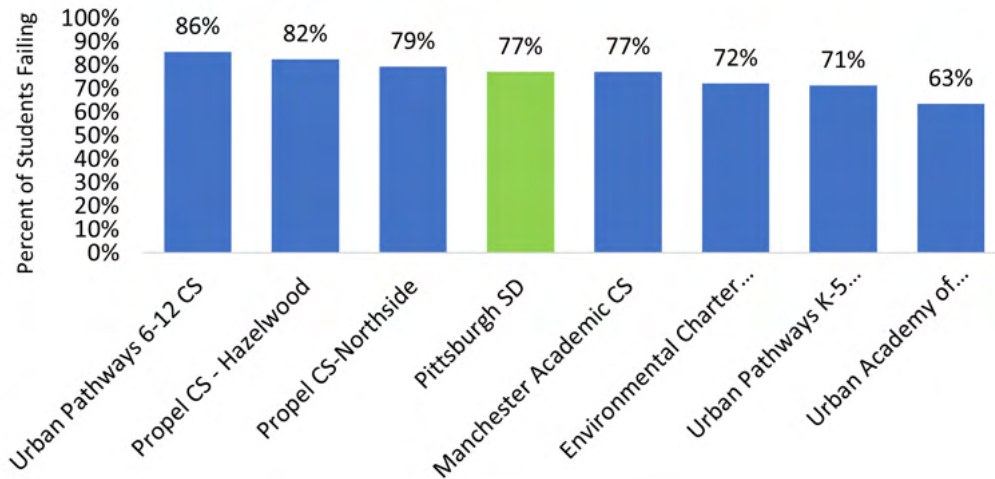
Over half of all Black and economically disadvantaged students are failing in English and math in Pittsburgh charters and district-run schools. While a majority of students are failing in both types of schools, charter schools, on balance, have weaker outcomes. Four out of seven Pittsburgh charter schools have a higher percentage of economically disadvantaged charter school students failing than in district-run schools.

Chart 12: Most Low-Income Pittsburgh Students are Failing in Charter and District-Run Schools



Four of seven Pittsburgh charter schools have the same or higher failure rates for Black students than Pittsburgh district schools. The Urban Academy of Greater Pittsburgh Charter Schools has the lowest percentage of Black students failing at 63%.

Chart 12.1: Most Black Pittsburgh Students are Failing in Charter and District-Run Schools



Are Schools Getting Better or Worse?

Outcomes for Black and low-income students attending Pittsburgh charter schools did not improve and, in fact, worsened slightly. In 2019, 77% of low-income charter school students failed the PSSAs, up three percentage points from 2015. The failure rate for Black charter school students rose by one percentage point to 78%. Outcome at district-run schools improved slightly for both groups during the same period.

Chart 13: Little Change in Math and English Outcomes for Low-Income Pittsburgh Students

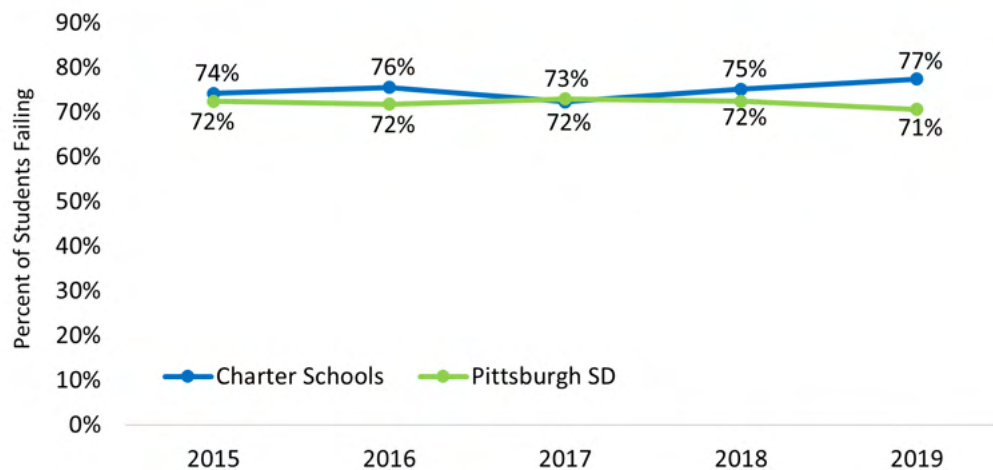
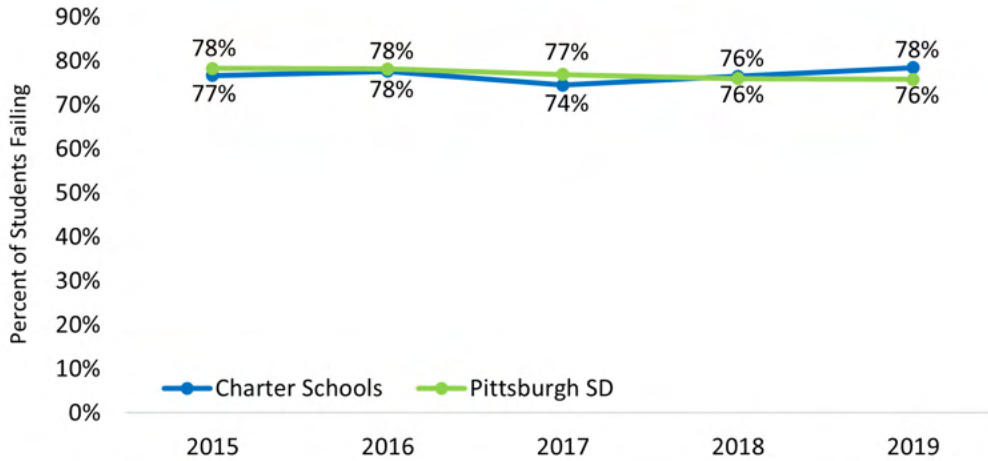


Chart 13.1: Little Change in Math and English Outcomes for Black Pittsburgh Students



How Much Do Charter Schools Cost Local School Districts and Local Taxpayers?

In the 2019 school year, the Pittsburgh School District paid \$78.5 million to brick and mortar charter schools or 11.2% of its total district expenditures. This figure does not include payments to cyber charter schools. Absent state reimbursement, local taxpayers are responsible for footing the charter school tuition bill.



Allentown Head to Head Comparison

Table 7: Head to Head Comparison Chester-Upland School District and Chester-Upland Charter Schools						
CHESTER-UPLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT	# students taking ELA PSSA	# failing ELA	% failing ELA	# students taking math PSSA	# failing math	% failing math
CHARTER SCHOOLS						
All students	2,469	1,980	80%	2,477	2,291	92%
Black	2,134	1,705	80%	2,142	1,985	93%
Economically Disadvantaged	2,324	1,882	81%	2,332	2,167	93%
DISTRICT SCHOOLS						
All students	805	651	81%	809	746	92%
Black	743	600	81%	746	688	92%
Economically Disadvantaged	654	531	81%	657	607	92%

How Well are Black and Economically Disadvantaged Students Doing?

Nine out of ten Chester-Upland Black and economically disadvantaged students are failing the PSSAs. This is true regardless of whether students are enrolled in charters or district-run schools. Chester Community Charter School with over 4,300 students has the highest failure rates and Chester Charter School for the Arts with just over 600 students had the best outcomes.

Chart 14: Three-Quarters of Low-Income Chester-Upland Students are Failing in Charter and District-Run Schools

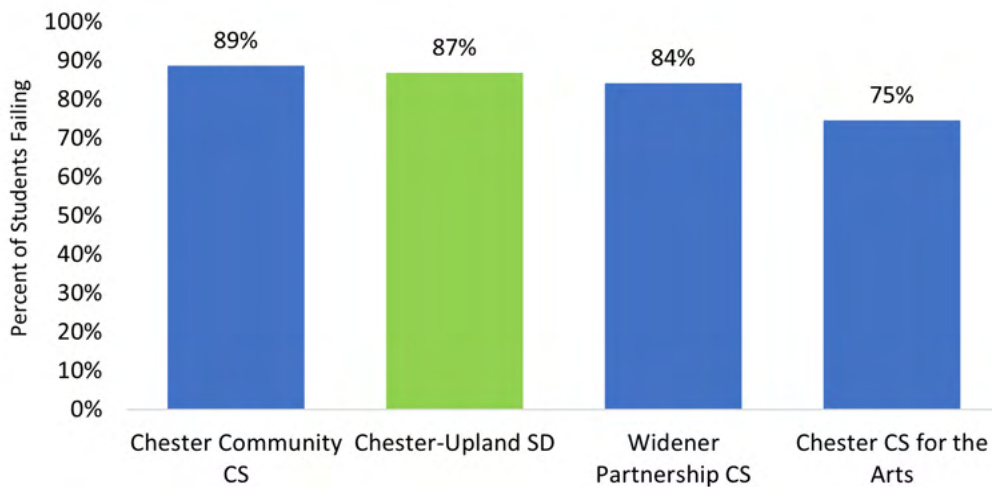
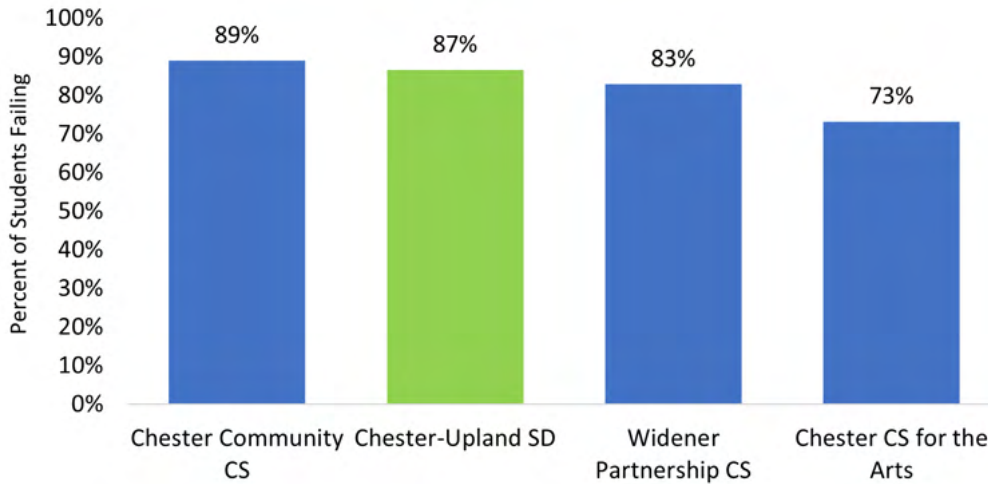


Chart 14.1: Three-Quarters of Black Chester-Upland Students are Failing in Charter and District-Run Schools



Are Schools Getting Better or Worse?

The percent of students failing remained stubbornly high between 2015 and 2019 for low-income students and Black students regardless of if they were enrolled in the Chester-Upland School District or a charter school. To the extent that Chester-Upland charter schools were created to providing a better alternative to a troubled school district, they did not achieve this mission.

Chart 15: Little Change in Math and English Outcomes for Low-Income Chester-Upland Students

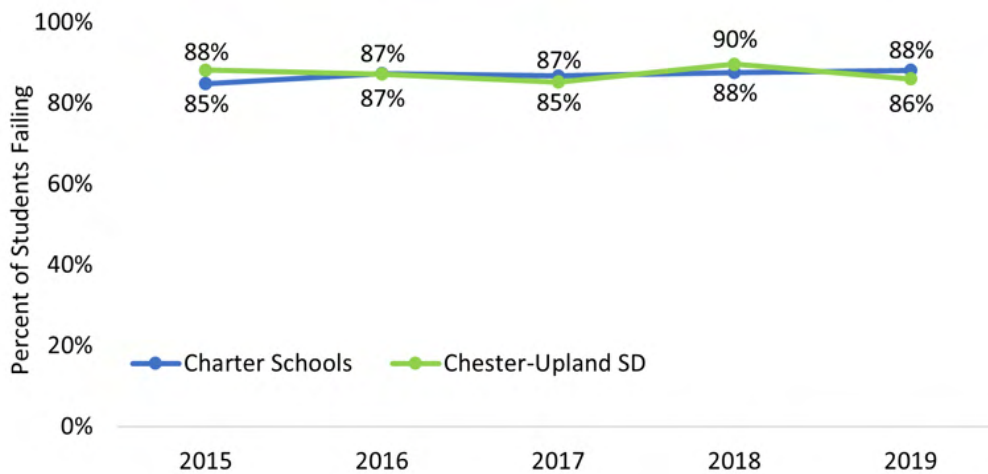
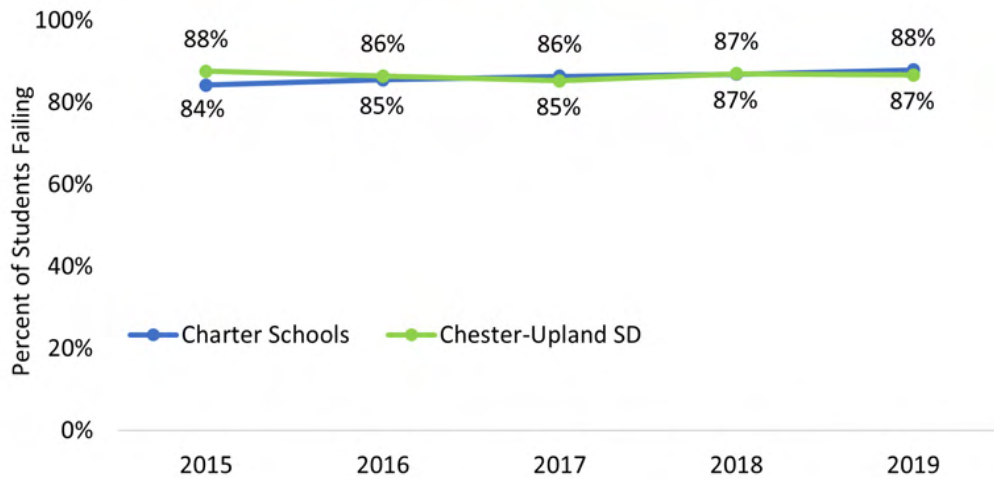


Chart 15.1: Little Change in Math and English Outcomes for Black Chester-Upland Students



How Much Do Charter Schools Cost Local School Districts and Local Taxpayers?

In the 2019 school year, the Chester-Upland School District paid \$51.1 million to operators of brick and mortar charter schools. This sum, which does not include charter school tuition payments, represents 38.1% of school district expenditures. The district and local taxpayers have no choice but to spend this sum on charter schools, further reducing the district's ability to invest in more teachers, better curriculum, and lower class sizes.



Allentown Head to Head Comparison

Table 8: Head to Head Comparison Allentown School District and Allentown Charter Schools						
ALLENTOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT	# students taking ELA PSSA	# failing ELA	% failing ELA	# students taking math PSSA	# failing math	% failing math
CHARTER SCHOOLS						
All students	1,277	701	55%	1,276	1,086	85%
Black	126	72	57%	124	109	88%
Economically Disadvantaged	933	565	61%	933	816	87%
DISTRICT SCHOOLS						
All students	6,598	4,292	65%	6,616	5,317	80%
Black	832	554	67%	835	709	85%
Economically Disadvantaged	5,769	3,822	66%	5,781	4,699	81%

How Well are Black and Economically Disadvantaged Students Doing?

Three out of four Black and economically disadvantaged students are failing in math and over half are failing in English. This finding holds true whether students are attending a charter school or a district-run school. The outcomes for the Allentown School District land in the middle of the pack with some charter schools performing slightly better and others slightly worse.

Chart 16: Most Low-Income Allentown Students are Failing in Charter and District-Run Schools

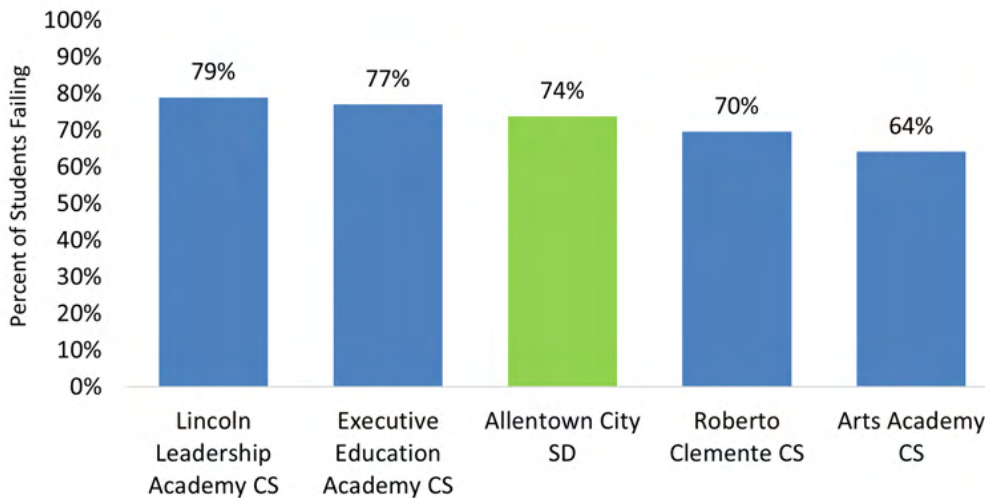
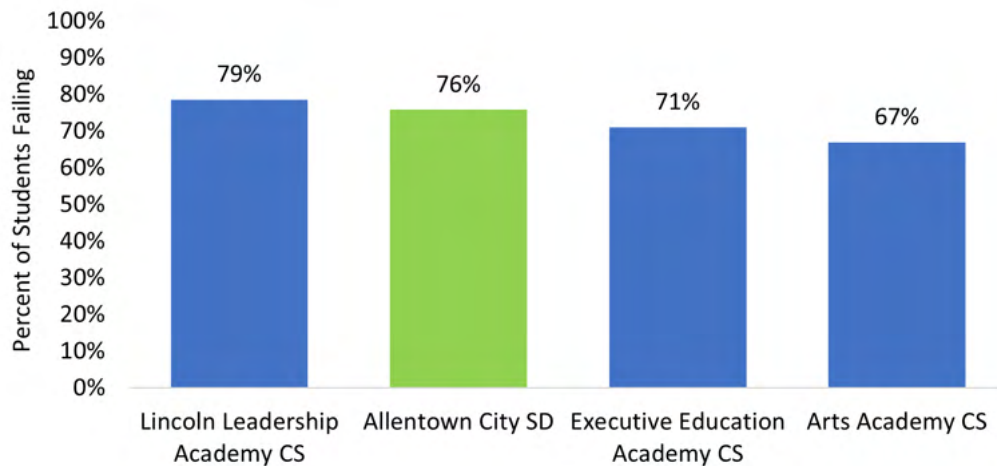


Chart 16.1: Most Black Allentown Students are Failing in Charter and District-Run Schools



Are Schools Getting Better or Worse?

Outcomes for Black and low-income students attending district-run schools did not change between 2015 and 2019 with about three-quarters of economically disadvantaged students and Black students failing English and math. Charter schools outcomes improved slightly for economically disadvantaged students as the failure rate declined from 78% to 73%. For Black charter school students, the failure rate declined to 66% in 2017 before rising to 73% in 2019. The bottom line is that even with these relatively small adjustments, Allentown schools are failing too many Black and low-income students.

Chart 17: Little Change in Math and English Outcomes for Low-Income Allentown Students

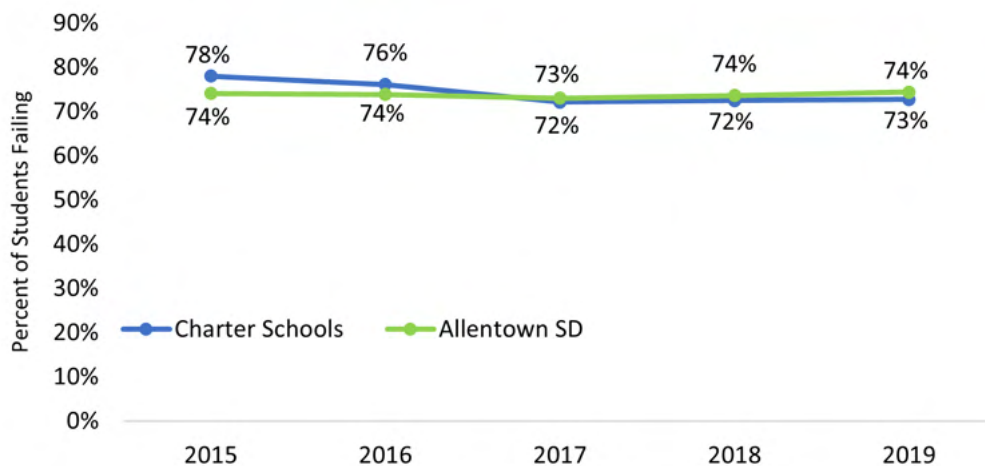
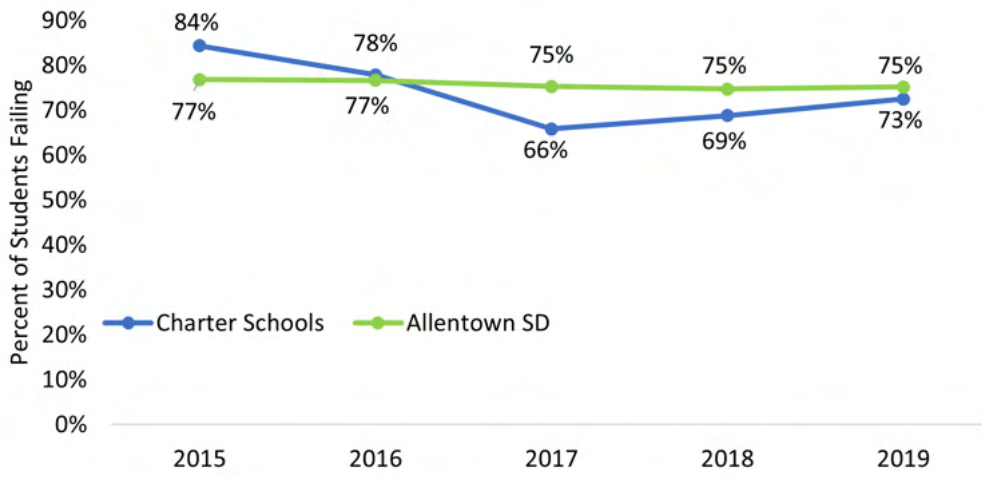


Chart 17.1: Failure Rate for Black Allentown Students Declines More Charter Schools



How Much Do Charter Schools Cost Local School Districts and Local Taxpayers?

In the 2019 school year, the Allentown School District paid \$46.9 million to brick and mortar charter schools or 14.2% of its total district expenditures, not including payments to cyber charter schools. This creates fiscal challenges for school districts that are compounded by “stranded costs” that remain on the books even after a student transfers to a charter school.



Philadelphia Head to Head Comparison

Table 9: Head to Head Comparison Philadelphia School District and Philadelphia Charter Schools						
PHILADELPHIA SCHOOL DISTRICT	# students taking ELA PSSA	# failing ELA	% failing ELA	# students taking math PSSA	# failing math	% failing math
CHARTER SCHOOLS						
All students	29,192	17,099	59%	29,190	23,391	80%
Black	17,571	11,448	65%	17,560	15,357	87%
Economically Disadvantaged	22,944	14,391	63%	22,942	19,263	84%
DISTRICT SCHOOLS						
All students	50,774	33,410	66%	50,902	41,266	81%
Black	24,125	18,106	75%	24,198	22,020	91%
Economically Disadvantaged	45,568	31,209	68%	45,684	38,114	83%

How Well are Black and Economically Disadvantaged Students Doing?

Philadelphia has the largest charter school footprint with 65,000 students enrolled in 83 charter schools; one out of three Philadelphia students attends a charter school. Despite the scale of the operation, Philadelphia schools – both charter and district-run – are failing most of their students. Specifically, three out of four Black and economically disadvantaged students are failing in English and math. In the aggregate, charter schools have somewhat lower failure rates than district-run schools but still far too many Black and low-income students are being left behind.

Chart 18: Three-Quarters of Low-Income Philadelphia Charter and District Students are Failing English and Math

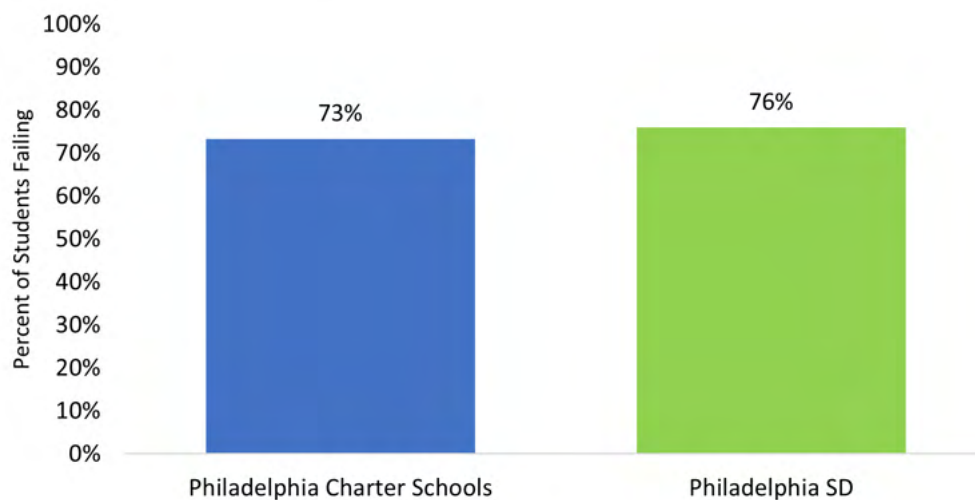
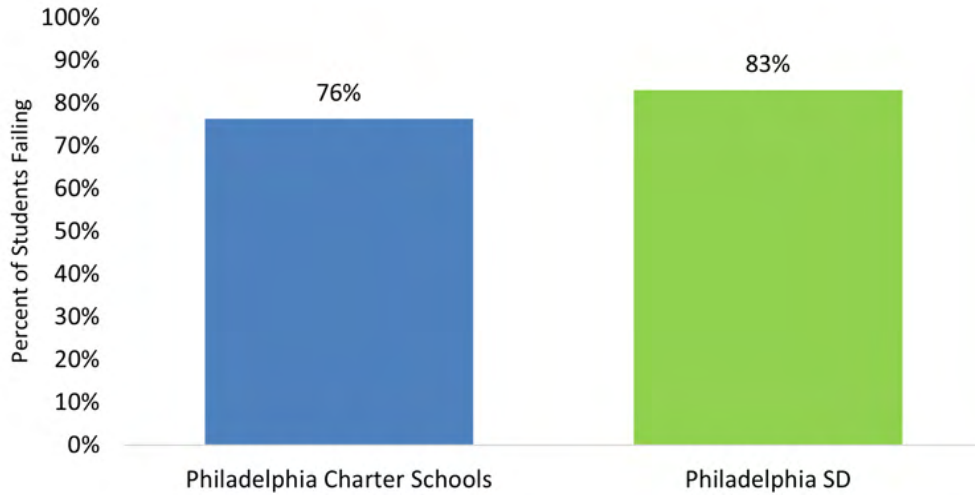


Chart 18.1: Three-Quarters of Black Philadelphia Charter and District Students are Failing English and Math



Are Schools Getting Better or Worse?

Outcomes for Black and low-income students attending Philadelphia charter schools remained largely unchanged between 2015 and 2019. In 2019, 73% of low-income charter school students and 76% of Black students failed the PSSAs. Outcome at district-run schools improved slightly for both groups during the same period but remain below acceptable levels.

Chart 19: Little Change in Math and English Outcomes for Low-Income Philadelphia Students

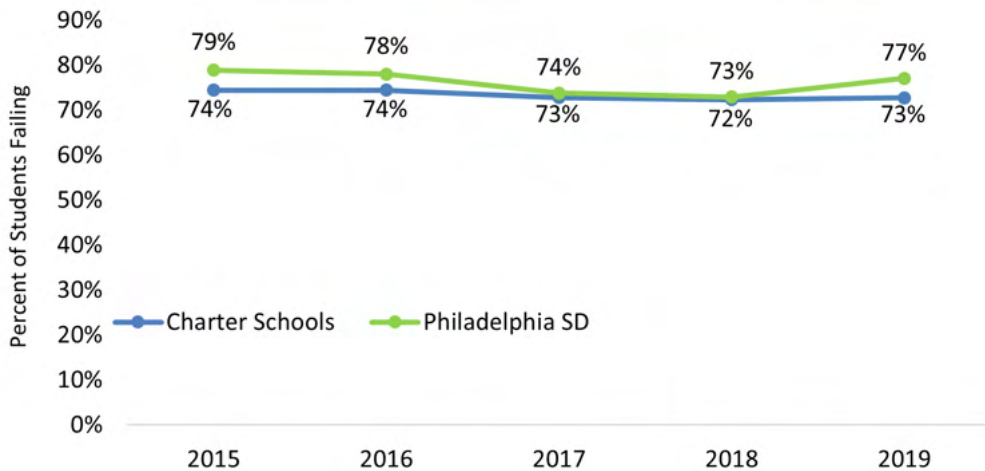
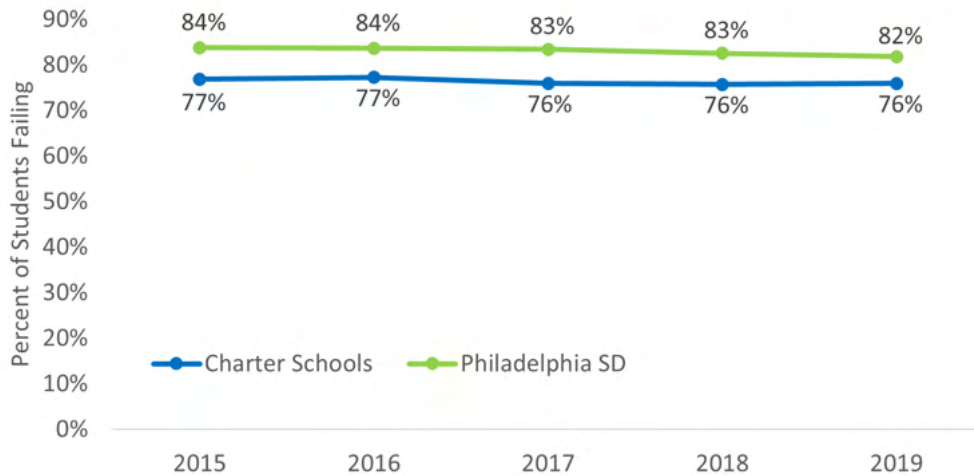


Chart 19.1: Little Change in Math and English Outcomes for Black Philadelphia Students



How Much Do Charter Schools Cost Local School Districts and Local Taxpayers?

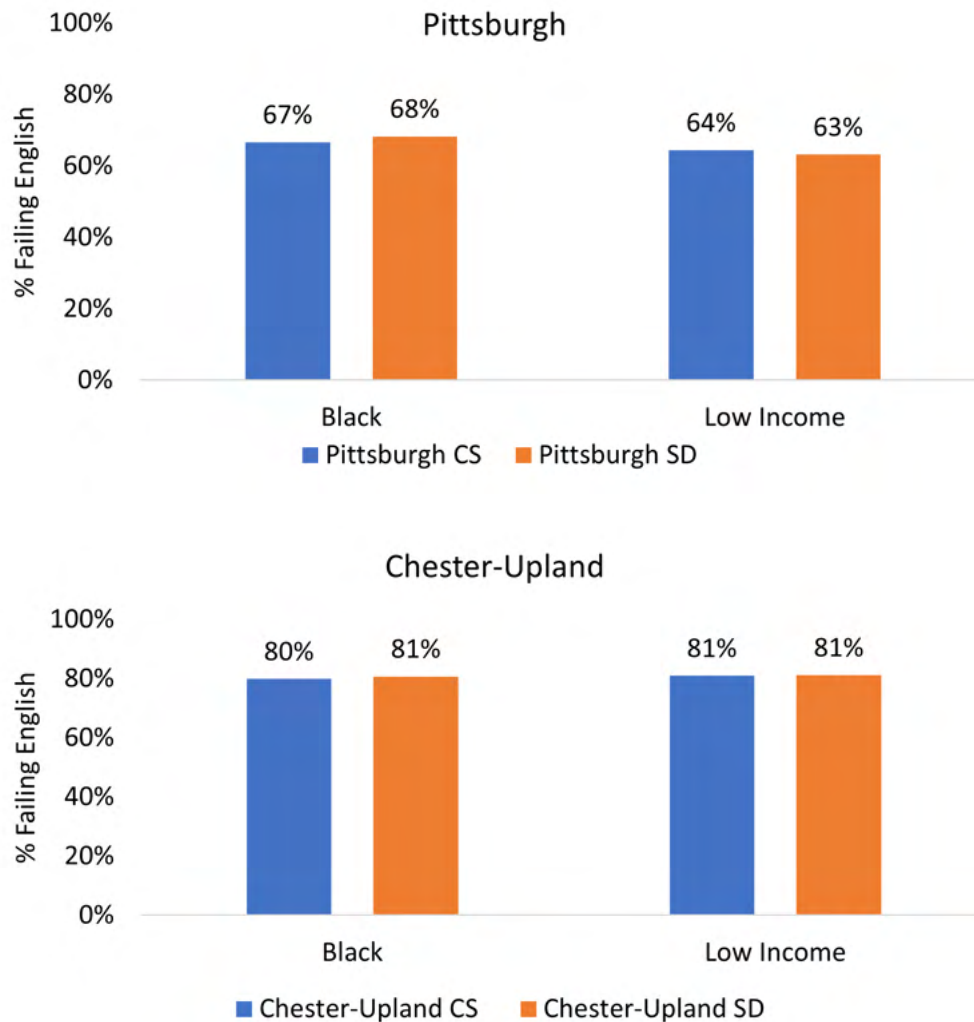
In the 2019 school year, the Philadelphia School District paid over \$862 million to brick and mortar charter schools, or about a quarter (24.8%) of total district expenditures. This figure does not include payments to cyber charter schools.

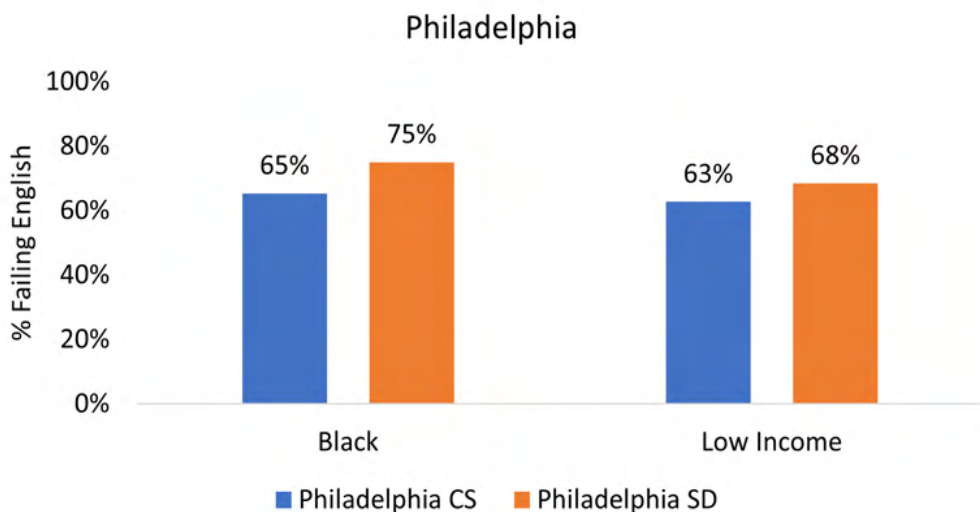
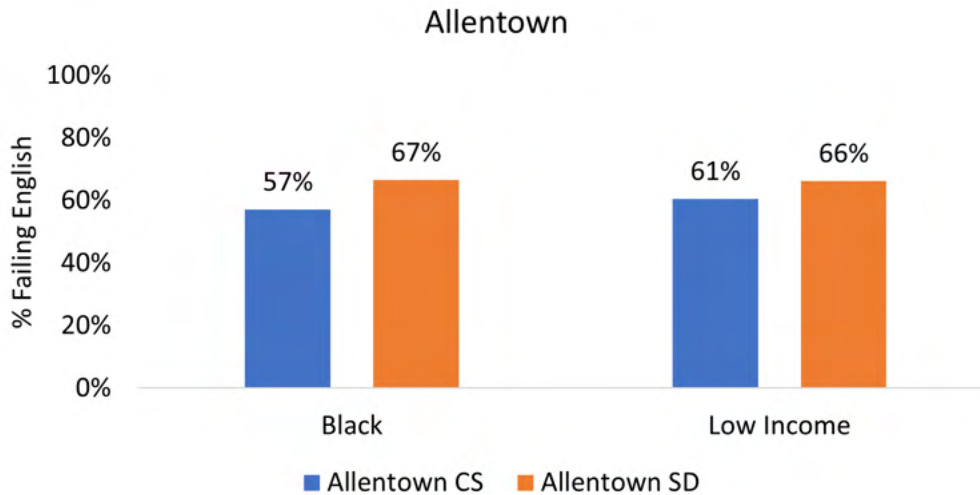


TAKEAWAYS FROM HEAD TO HEAD COMPARISONS

The case for charter schools is grounded in the belief that Black and low-income students need an alternative to failing public schools. The experience in four large Pennsylvania school districts challenges this narrative. Instead of a track record of progress and excellence, side-by-side comparisons of charter schools and district-run schools in four large Pennsylvania school districts show that schools are failing most Black and low-income students.

Chart Series 20: Too Many Black and Low Income Students are Failing in Charter and District-run Schools





Returning to the three questions that guided this analysis:

1. How well are students doing? Based on the percentage of students failing the PSSA, it is clear that charter schools are falling short of meeting the needs of most Black and economically disadvantaged students. In some cases, district-run schools performed slightly better and in some cases they performed worse.
2. Are schools getting better or worse? Charter schools did not post meaningful gains between 2015 and 2019 and, in some cases, did worse than district-run schools. The minimal change in performance makes clear that the promise of innovation and new models of education has gone unfulfilled.
3. How much do charter schools cost local school districts and local taxpayers? Because of Pennsylvania's system of funding charter schools, school districts paid between 11% and 38% of their budgets in charter school tuition in 2019. This is an expensive system that puts the burden on local taxpayers without delivering higher outcomes for students.

To be fair, the majority of Black and low-income students are failing in English and math in both charter schools and district-run schools. These troubling outcomes reflect the structural deficiencies of Pennsylvania’s school funding system that is holding students back. Students attending both charters and traditional public schools would benefit from addressing the funding gap.

Charter schools were created on the theory that unshackling them from heavy government regulation would lead to a greater share of high achieving students. Sadly, that success has not materialized. The PA Charter School Law granted charter schools added flexibility including more freedom about enrollment decisions, governance, budget transparency and audit requirements, and certification of professional staff. Unlike traditional public schools, teachers at most charter schools are not unionized. These flexibilities have not led to high student success. Improving student outcomes will require changes in state law to reward high performing charter schools and address the short comings of lower performing schools.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Pennsylvania should take the following steps to expand high quality options and improve charter school performance.

1. **Address the structural issues that limit the progress of all schools.** The most important structural issue is the need for adequate funding for Pennsylvania’s public schools. The head-to-head comparisons in this report demonstrate that we are failing low-income, Black, and Hispanic students in both district-run and charter schools. Total spending on K-12 education is more than \$4 billion below what it would take to provide an adequate education, which explains why Pennsylvania is in the bottom two states in terms of the gaps between white students and students of color and low-income students.

Charter school funding is calculated based on expenditures in their home school district. This means that reforming K-12 funding in traditional public schools will directly affect charter school funding. In short, all public schools have a shared interest in addressing the funding gap.

2. **Take steps to expand high-quality charter schools and turn around or close down low-performing schools.** Brick and charter schools are not a monolith. The data in this report makes clear that over half of Black, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students score proficient or advanced at high-performing charters. At the same time, far too many charters fail the vast majority of their students.

Since 2012, at least 23 states including Indiana, Ohio, and Texas have amended their laws to improve the quality of charter schools. The Shapiro Administration should explore options to amend Pennsylvania Charter School Law to:

1. Approve only high-quality applicants,
2. Let high-quality charters grow,
3. Protect students and taxpayers from failure by closing failing charter schools, and

4. Give students and school boards stability by establishing predictable criteria for reviewing charter school applications and renewal.

This framework defines a set of standards about quality and, in turn, applies these standards to decisions about funding. High-performing charters would have the flexibility to expand, paid for with funds saved by closing failing charter schools. A clearer renewal process would allow schools that are performing moderately well to move to the next level. Schools that consistently fail to meet standards have a chance to improve or risk closure. Over time, this system would give students greater access to high-quality charter schools.

- 3. Implement an accountability matrix to give local authorizers the information they need to make good decisions.** PA Charter School Law gives local authorizers the responsibility to decide whether to renew or revoke a charter at the end of its five year term, but is silent on the performance standards or data that they should use. This complicates an already difficult decision, especially given that most school board members are not charter school experts. Even the most dedicated school board would be hard pressed to collect the data needed to evaluate academic performance, operations and financial management for the charter and comparable schools.

Fortunately, this is a problem with a clear solution. The state should develop an Accountability Matrix covering academics, operations, governance, and fiscal factors accompanied by quality benchmarks to give local authorizers the information they need to improve charter school quality. At a minimum, the Accountability Matrix should cover:

- Student performance and growth
- Admissions and enrollment practices
- Attendance, chronic absenteeism, truancy, and attrition rates
- School climate, health, safety, and student discipline indicators
- Graduation rates and postsecondary transitions for charter school graduates
- Measures of parent, guardian, and family engagement
- Organizational governance, viability, and compliance with state ethics and opening meetings law
- Accepted standards of fiscal management or audit requirements
- Educator certification and measures for assessing educator effectiveness
- Compliance with special education laws
- Compliance with laws concerning education English learners

APPENDIX A - DATA AND METHODOLOGY

PSSA and Student Proficiency

Student proficiency outcomes are based on the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE)'s Pennsylvania System of School Assessments (PSSA) for the 2015 to 2019 school years. The PSSA is the best available validated statewide measure of how well students in charter schools and district-run schools have achieved in English Language Arts and math. Individual grade level results for students in grades three to eight were rolled up to create a composite proficiency measure for each school. PDE posts annual PSSA results at: <https://www.education.pa.gov/DataAndReporting/Assessments/Pages/PSSA-Results.aspx>.

Student outcomes in English Language Arts and math are broken out into one of four categories: below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced. This report combines the below basic and basic categories and adopts the vernacular that students in this category did not pass the PSSAs in English and/or math.

This report analyzes student outcomes for the five-year period covering the 2014-15 to 2018-19 school years. The PSSAs were not administered in the 2020 school year and too few students took the assessments in 2021 to make the results comparable to earlier years. Results for the 2022 school year were released too late to be included in this analysis.

In order to provide a more meaningful comparison of charter schools and district-run schools, outcomes for charter schools are compared to the subset of school districts that authorize charter schools as opposed to all school districts.

Charter school outcomes represent students attending brick and mortar charter schools only. Cyber charters were not included in this analysis.

Student Demographics

Enrollment data for Black and Hispanic students comes from PDE's Public School Enrollment Reports and are available at <https://www.education.pa.gov/DataAndReporting/Enrollment/Pages/PublicSchEnrReports.aspx>. The number of schools reporting results for Black and Hispanic students varies with the underlying demographics of the state.

Enrollment data for economically disadvantaged students is based on PDE's Public Schools Percent of Low-Income Reports and are available at <https://www.education.pa.gov/DataAndReporting/LoanCanLowIncome/Pages/PublicSchools.aspx>.

Local Education Agencies self-report the number of economically disadvantaged students using a combination of census, TANF, Medicaid, and child welfare data.

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Children First, formerly known as Public Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY), serves as the leading child advocacy organization working to improve the lives and life chances of children in southeastern Pennsylvania.

Children First undertakes specific and focused projects in areas affecting the healthy growth and development of children, including child care, public education, child health, juvenile justice, and child welfare.

Through thoughtful and informed advocacy, community education, targeted service projects, and budget analysis, Children First watches out and speaks out for children and families.

Children First serves the families of Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties as well as children across the Commonwealth. We are a committed advocate and an independent watchdog for the well-being of all our children.

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Children First
990 Spring Garden Street
Suite 200
Philadelphia, PA 19123
215-563-5848