

# Philadelphia Charter School Students Not Immune to Consequences of State Underfunding

## Executive Summary

All of Philadelphia’s students are being denied the best K-12 education because of Pennsylvania’s inadequate and unconstitutional school funding system. Students’ low academic performance is not a failure on their part – it is because schools simply cannot afford the academic resources and staffing costs required to deliver a 21st century education. Over half of the city’s students failed the math and ELA Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSAs) in 2023 in both traditional public schools and charter schools.<sup>1</sup> (Because private schools are not required to share performance data, there is no way to gauge their performance.)

All students can succeed when they have resources and support to learn, but students in Philadelphia are underfunded by a whopping \$7,000+ each.<sup>2</sup> Philadelphia ranks #460 out of Pennsylvania’s 500 school districts in per-student spending. This year, the Basic Education Funding Commission concluded that the state is underfunding schools by \$5.4 billion; Philadelphia traditional public schools and charter schools alone need \$1.4 billion additional dollars over the next seven years to bring them up to adequately funded.<sup>3</sup>

The academic challenges at the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) are widely known, but what’s less understood is that Philadelphia’s charter schools are not doing much better. While there is variation among the charter sector, too many charter schools are systematically failing their students. Philadelphia’s brick and mortar charter schools<sup>4</sup> failed more than half of their elementary/middle school students in 2023, most being Black, Hispanic, and from low-income households. Philadelphia’s charters enroll a higher share of these historically underserved student populations than the city’s traditional public schools.<sup>5</sup>



Charter schools began serving students in Pennsylvania in 2002 as laboratories of school innovation because many people believed that public schools lacked the flexibility to test new methods of teaching and learning. In 2023, there were 74 charter elementary and middle schools operating in Philadelphia. Proponents of charters argue that more should open to meet parent demand but about 10% of Philadelphia charter school seats (7,303) were empty as of February 2024.<sup>6</sup> Families are searching for the best educational option in a city where all public schools are grossly underfunded, and, in this search, they are leaving many charter seats unfilled.

Charter schools are plagued by many of the same structural challenges as the city’s district-run schools because they are both underfunded by the state. Inadequate school funding translates to low teacher retention, unsafe school facilities, insufficient curricular supports, and more. A recent study found that 22.6% of Philadelphia charter school teachers left the workforce in 2022 and that charter school attrition rates were consistently higher than SDP for the last 5 years.<sup>7</sup> Research has repeatedly found that high teacher attrition rates and low levels of teacher experience have a negative effect on student outcomes.

Now that students have been back in school buildings for multiple years after the COVID pandemic, we are examining how elementary/middle school students in Philadelphia’s brick and mortar charter schools performed on this year’s PSSAs.

This analysis builds on our recent report, *The Unfulfilled Charter School Promise*, which examined pre-pandemic PSSA data and found mixed results about Black and low-income elementary/middle school student performance in Philadelphia’s charter schools. Likewise, a recent study by Stanford University on statewide charter performance showed that Pennsylvania charter schools delivered low academic growth in both reading and math, first in 2013 and again in 2023.<sup>8</sup> Something needs to change.

It does not have to be this way. All students can succeed when they have the resources and supports they need – including safe facilities, qualified and caring educators, and a rigorous, supportive curriculum. Students who attend both charter and traditional public schools would benefit greatly from addressing the structural deficiencies in the way schools are funded.



The PSSAs are state tests that are administered annually to students in grades 3-8, so they offer a window into elementary and middle school student performance over time. While test score data has its limitations, it is the best available source of quantifiable data on academic performance.



**Finding 1:** Eighty-four percent of Philadelphia charter elementary/middle school students failed the Math PSSAs and 66% failed the ELA PSSAs. Failure rates in both subjects were higher for Black students and Hispanic students and those from low-income households.

Of the city’s 30,370 charter elementary/middle school students who took the Math PSSA in 2023, 83.5% failed, and in English Language Arts (ELA), 65.8% of students failed.

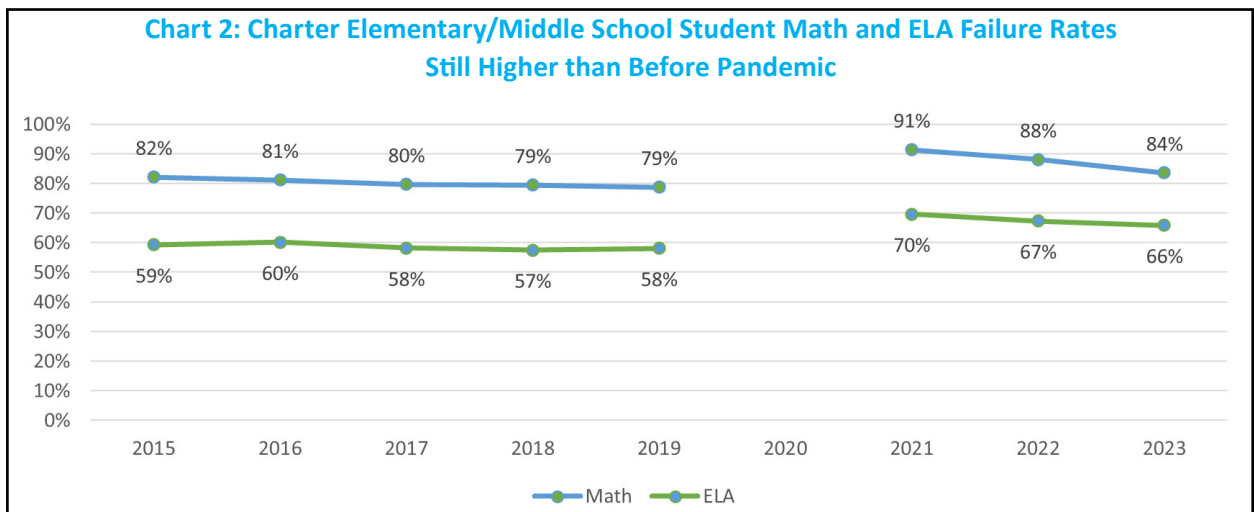
Chart 1: More than half of Philadelphia charter school elementary/middle school students failed the PSSAs in 2023		
	Percent who failed the 2023 Math PSSA	Percent who failed the 2023 ELA PSSA
<b>All Students</b>	83.5%	65.8%
<b>Black</b>	90.6%	72.6%
<b>Hispanic</b>	86.0%	69.1%
<b>Low-income households</b>	86.4%	69.1%

**How to read this chart:** On this chart and throughout the report, higher numbers are worse. A higher percentage means more students failed.

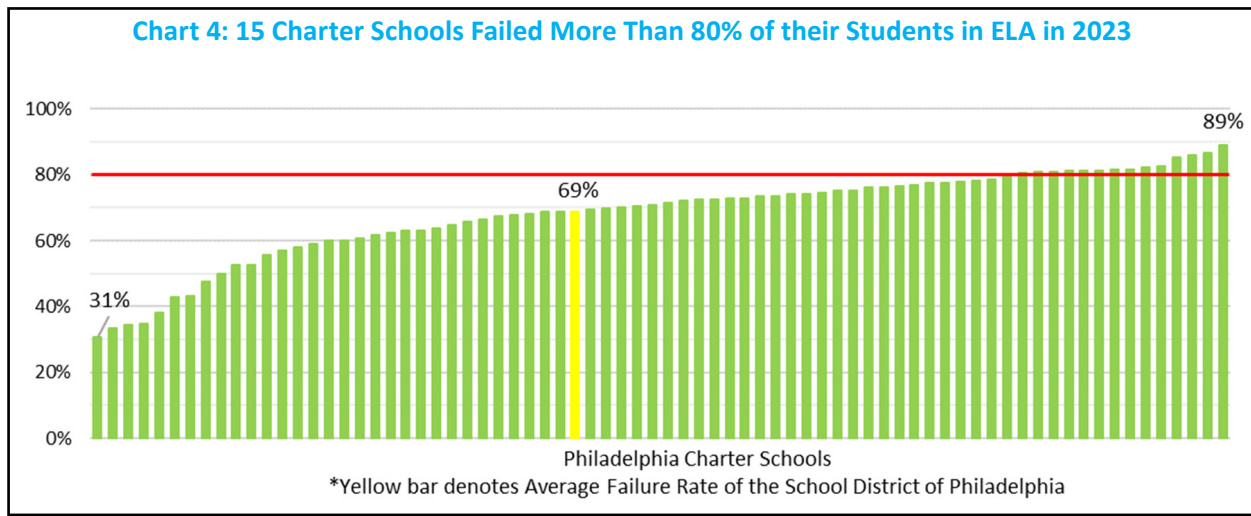
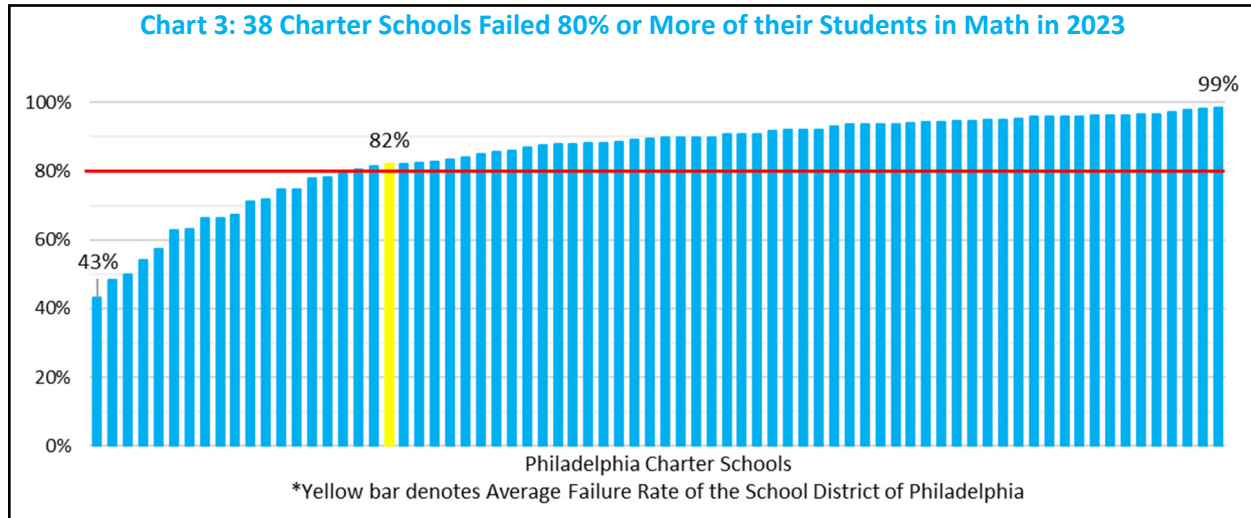
**Finding 2:** Philadelphia’s charter school failure rates for elementary/middle school students are still higher than before the pandemic.

The downward trend on the post-pandemic segment of the chart below is heartening at first glance. In both math and ELA, charter elementary/middle school students are rebounding – that is, their failure rates are lowering.

But charter schools’ 2023 failure rates were two percentage points higher in math and seven percentage points higher in ELA compared to 2015. It appears that charter schools were not immune to the COVID challenges and are struggling to rebound, especially in math.



**Finding 3:** Seventy-seven percent of charter schools failed at least 4 out of 5 of their elementary/middle school students in Math. And 21% of charter schools failed at least 4 out of 5 of their elementary/middle school students in ELA. The number of schools failing 80% or more of their Black and low-income elementary/middle school students was even higher.



The number of Philadelphia’s charter schools that are failing the large majority of its elementary/middle school students is a serious red flag. Sixty-five charter schools are failing at least 80% of their Black students and 35 charter schools are failing at least 80% of their Hispanic<sup>9</sup> students in math. In ELA, fewer schools reached this high failure rate, but it is still startling that 15 charter schools failed 80% or more of their elementary/middle school students in ELA.

<b>Chart 5: An Alarming Number of Elementary/Middle School Students are Failing more than 4 out of 5 Students</b>		
	Number of charter schools where 80% or more students failed Math	Number of charter schools where 80% or more students failed ELA
<b>All Students</b>	38	15
<b>Black</b>	65	14
<b>Hispanic</b>	35	8
<b>Low-income households</b>	58	16

Pennsylvania must hold charter schools accountable to ensure they meet their goals of educating and supporting students. Accountability reforms include only approving high-quality applicants, letting high-quality charters grow, protecting students and taxpayers from charter schools that fail, and providing stability to students and the charter sector through streamlined authorization processes. These reforms, when coupled with fair funding, will level the playing field for charter school students.

The Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania ruled in 2023 that the state’s education funding system is unconstitutional and state lawmakers have so far failed to boost funding. It is time to reform our education system – from funding to accountability and deliver all public school students the outcomes they deserve.

For a list of all charter schools that are failing 80% or more of their students, see Appendix A.





## Appendix A: Charter Schools with Failure Rates of 80% or More for Elementary/Middle School Student Subgroups

**Chart 6: 65 Charter schools where 80% or more of Black elementary/middle school students failed Math**

Charter Schools with Math Failure Rates of 80% or Greater	Share of Black Students Scoring Basic & Below
UNIVERSAL VARE CHARTER SCHOOL	99%
GLOBAL LEADERSHIP ACADEMY CS SOUTHWEST	99%
MEMPHIS STREET ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL @ JP	99%
MATH CIVICS SCHOOL AND SCIENCES CHARTER SCHOOL	98%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - CLYMER ELEMENTARY	98%
PHILADELPHIA CHARTER SCHOOL FOR ARTS AND SCIENCES	98%
COMMUNITY ACADEMY OF PHILADELPHIA	98%
LABORATORY CHARTER SCHOOL	97%
GLOBAL LEADERSHIP ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	96%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - FRANCIS D. PASTOR	96%
LINDLEY ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL AT BIRNEY	96%
PEOPLE FOR PEOPLE CHARTER SCHOOL	96%
YOUNG SCHOLARS CHARTER SCHOOL	96%
UNIVERSAL BLUFORD CHARTER SCHOOL	96%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - SHOEMAKER CAMPUS	96%
PAN AMERICAN ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	96%
RICHARD ALLEN PREPARATORY CHARTER SCHOOL	96%
FIRST PHILADELPHIA PREPARATORY	96%
ALLIANCE FOR PROGRESS CHARTER SCHOOL	96%
BELMONT CHARTER SCHOOL	95%
KIPP PHILADELPHIA CHARTER SCHOOL	95%
ESPERANZA ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	95%
BOYS LATIN OF PHILADELPHIA CHARTER SCHOOL	94%
DISCOVERY CHARTER SCHOOL	94%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - FREDERICK DOUGLASS	94%
FREIRE CHARTER SCHOOL	94%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - MANN CAMPUS	93%
MAST COMMUNITY CHARTER SCHOOL III	93%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - CLEVELAND ELEMENTARY	92%
MARITIME ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	92%
RUSSELL BYERS CHARTER SCHOOL	92%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - PICKETT CAMPUS	92%
DEEP ROOTS CHARTER SCHOOL	91%
PHILADELPHIA MONTESSORI CHARTER SCHOOL	91%

**Chart 6 (continued): 65 Charter schools where 80% or more of Black elementary/middle school students failed Math**

<b>Charter Schools with Math Failure Rates of 80% or Greater</b>	<b>Share of Black Students Scoring Basic &amp; Below</b>
WISSAHICKON CHARTER SCHOOL	91%
KIPP NORTH PHILADELPHIA CHARTER SCHOOL	91%
SOUTHWEST LEADERSHIP ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	91%
MASTERY PREP ELEMENTARY CHARTER SCHOOL	90%
INDEPENDENCE CHARTER SCHOOL WEST	90%
KIPP WEST PHILADELPHIA CHARTER SCHOOL	90%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - JOHN WISTER ELEMENTARY	90%
WEST PHILADELPHIA ACHIEVEMENT CHARTER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	89%
NORTHWOOD ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	89%
WEST OAK LANE CHARTER SCHOOL	88%
MARIANA BRACETTI ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	88%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - HARDY WILLIAMS	88%
PHILADELPHIA HEBREW PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL	88%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - GRATZ CAMPUS	88%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - HARRITY CAMPUS	87%
SANKOFA FREEDOM ACADEMY CHARTER	87%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - SMEDLEY CAMPUS	87%
CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS CHARTER SCHOOL	86%
MAST COMMUNITY CHARTER SCHOOL II	86%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - THOMAS CAMPUS	85%
TACONY ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	85%
UNIVERSAL ALCORN CHARTER SCHOOL	85%
PHILADELPHIA PERFORMING ARTS CHARTER SCHOOL	84%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - LENFEST CAMPUS	83%
KEYSTONE ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	82%
INQUIRY CHARTER SCHOOL	81%
UNIVERSAL INSTITUTE CHARTER SCHOOL	81%
HARAMBEE INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE	81%
FOLK ARTS-CULTURAL TREASURES CHARTER SCHOOL	81%
INDEPENDENCE CHARTER SCHOOL	80%
GREEN WOODS CHARTER SCHOOL	80%

**Chart 7: 14 Charter schools where 80% or more of Black elementary/middle school students failed ELA**

Charter Schools with ELA Failure Rates of 80% or Greater	Share of Black Students Scoring Basic & Below
PEOPLE FOR PEOPLE CHARTER SCHOOL	89%
PAN AMERICAN ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	88%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - CLYMER ELEMENTARY	86%
DEEP ROOTS CHARTER SCHOOL	85%
GLOBAL LEADERSHIP ACADEMY CS SOUTHWEST	85%
LABORATORY CHARTER SCHOOL	83%
UNIVERSAL BLUFORD CHARTER SCHOOL	83%
BELMONT CHARTER SCHOOL	82%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - FREDERICK DOUGLASS	82%
ALLIANCE FOR PROGRESS CHARTER SCHOOL	82%
MEMPHIS STREET ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL @ JP	81%
GLOBAL LEADERSHIP ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	81%
KIPP NORTH PHILADELPHIA CHARTER SCHOOL	81%
UNIVERSAL VARE CHARTER SCHOOL	80%

**Chart 8: 35 Charter schools where 80% or more of Hispanic elementary/middle school students failed Math**

Charter Schools with Math Failure Rates of 80% or Greater	Share of Hispanic Students Scoring Basic & Below
KIPP PHILADELPHIA CHARTER SCHOOL	100%
LINDLEY ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL AT BIRNEY	100%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - PICKETT CAMPUS	100%
UNIVERSAL VARE CHARTER SCHOOL	100%
PHILADELPHIA CHARTER SCHOOL FOR ARTS AND SCIENCES	98%
MEMPHIS STREET ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL @ JP	98%
ESPERANZA ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	96%
PAN AMERICAN ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	95%
FIRST PHILADELPHIA PREPARATORY	93%
COMMUNITY ACADEMY OF PHILADELPHIA	93%
DEEP ROOTS CHARTER SCHOOL	93%
MARITIME ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	93%
FREIRE CHARTER SCHOOL	93%
ANTONIA PANTOJA COMMUNITY CHARTER SCHOOL	91%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - FRANCIS D. PASTOR	90%



**Chart 8 (continued): 35 Charter schools where 80% or more of Hispanic elementary/middle school students failed Math**

Charter Schools with Math Failure Rates of 80% or Greater	Share of Hispanic Students Scoring Basic & Below
LABORATORY CHARTER SCHOOL	89%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - CLEVELAND ELEMENTARY	89%
FOLK ARTS-CULTURAL TREASURES CHARTER SCHOOL	88%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - GRATZ CAMPUS	88%
UNIVERSAL BLUFORD CHARTER SCHOOL	87%
SOUTHWEST LEADERSHIP ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	86%
MAST COMMUNITY CHARTER SCHOOL II	85%
NORTHWOOD ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	85%
MAST COMMUNITY CHARTER SCHOOL III	85%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - LENFEST CAMPUS	84%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - MANN CAMPUS	83%
INDEPENDENCE CHARTER SCHOOL WEST	82%
MASTERY PREP ELEMENTARY CHARTER SCHOOL	82%
TACONY ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	81%
PHILADELPHIA HEBREW PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL	81%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - SMEDLEY CAMPUS	81%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - CLYMER ELEMENTARY	81%
MARIANA BRACETTI ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	81%
KEYSTONE ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	81%
AD PRIMA CHARTER SCHOOL	80%

**Chart 9: 8 Charter schools where 80% or more of Hispanic elementary/middle school students failed ELA**

Charter Schools with ELA Failure Rates of 80% or Greater	Share of Hispanic Students Scoring Basic & Below
DEEP ROOTS CHARTER SCHOOL	89%
FREIRE CHARTER SCHOOL	86%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - CLYMER ELEMENTARY	84%
MEMPHIS STREET ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL @ JP	83%
ESPERANZA ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	83%
PHILADELPHIA CHARTER SCHOOL FOR ARTS AND SCIENCES	83%
PAN AMERICAN ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	81%
MARITIME ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	81%

**Chart 10: 58 Charter schools where 80% or more of elementary/middle school students from low-income households failed Math**

Charter Schools with Math Failure Rates of 80% or Greater	Share of Low-Income Students Scoring Basic & Below
MEMPHIS STREET ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL @ JP	99%
GLOBAL LEADERSHIP ACADEMY CS SOUTHWEST	98%
PHILADELPHIA CHARTER SCHOOL FOR ARTS AND SCIENCES	98%
MATH CIVICS AND SCIENCES CHARTER SCHOOL	98%
GLOBAL LEADERSHIP ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	97%
PEOPLE FOR PEOPLE CHARTER SCHOOL	97%
YOUNG SCHOLARS CHARTER SCHOOL	97%
ALLIANCE FOR PROGRESS CHARTER SCHOOL	97%
LABORATORY CHARTER SCHOOL	97%
LINDLEY ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL AT BIRNEY	96%
BOYS LATIN OF PHILADELPHIA CHARTER SCHOOL	96%
UNIVERSAL BLUFORD CHARTER SCHOOL	96%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - FRANCIS D. PASTOR	96%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - CLYMER ELEMENTARY	96%
ESPERANZA ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	96%
KIPP PHILADELPHIA CHARTER SCHOOL	95%
RICHARD ALLEN PREPARATORY CHARTER SCHOOL	95%
BELMONT CHARTER SCHOOL	95%
FREIRE CHARTER SCHOOL	95%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - SHOEMAKER CAMPUS	94%
DEEP ROOTS CHARTER SCHOOL	94%
FIRST PHILADELPHIA PREPARATORY	94%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - MANN CAMPUS	94%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - FREDERICK DOUGLASS	94%
DISCOVERY CHARTER SCHOOL	94%
UNIVERSAL VARE CHARTER SCHOOL	93%
PAN AMERICAN ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	93%
WISSAHICKON CHARTER SCHOOL	93%
COMMUNITY ACADEMY OF PHILADELPHIA	92%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - CLEVELAND ELEMENTARY	92%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - PICKETT CAMPUS	92%
KIPP NORTH PHILADELPHIA CHARTER SCHOOL	91%
RUSSELL BYERS CHARTER SCHOOL	91%
ANTONIA PANTOJA COMMUNITY CHARTER SCHOOL	91%
INDEPENDENCE CHARTER SCHOOL WEST	91%
KIPP WEST PHILADELPHIA CHARTER SCHOOL	91%
PHILADELPHIA MONTESSORI CHARTER SCHOOL	91%
MASTERY PREP ELEMENTARY CHARTER SCHOOL	91%
MARITIME ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	90%

**Chart 10 (continued): 58 Charter schools where 80% or more of elementary/middle school students from low-income households failed Math**

Charter Schools with Math Failure Rates of 80% or Greater	Share of Low-Income Students Scoring Basic & Below
SOUTHWEST LEADERSHIP ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	90%
WEST PHILADELPHIA ACHIEVEMENT CHARTER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	89%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - HARDY WILLIAMS	89%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - JOHN WISTER ELEMENTARY	88%
WEST OAK LANE CHARTER SCHOOL	88%
PHILADELPHIA HEBREW PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL	87%
NORTHWOOD ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	87%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - GRATZ CAMPUS	87%
SANKOFA FREEDOM ACADEMY CHARTER	87%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - HARRITY CAMPUS	86%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - SMEDLEY CAMPUS	85%
MARIANA BRACETTI ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	84%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - LENFEST CAMPUS	83%
UNIVERSAL ALCORN CHARTER SCHOOL	83%
TACONY ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	83%
MAST COMMUNITY CHARTER SCHOOL III	82%
HARAMBEE INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE	81%
UNIVERSAL INSTITUTE CHARTER SCHOOL	80%
AD PRIMA CHARTER SCHOOL	80%

**Chart 11: 16 Charter schools where 80% or more of elementary/middle school students from low-income households failed ELA**

Charter Schools with ELA Failure Rates of 80% or Greater	Share of Low-Income Students Scoring Basic & Below
DEEP ROOTS CHARTER SCHOOL	89%
PEOPLE FOR PEOPLE CHARTER SCHOOL	89%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - CLYMER ELEMENTARY	86%
GLOBAL LEADERSHIP ACADEMY CS SOUTHWEST	85%
PAN AMERICAN ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	84%
GLOBAL LEADERSHIP ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	84%
ALLIANCE FOR PROGRESS CHARTER SCHOOL	83%
KIPP NORTH PHILADELPHIA CHARTER SCHOOL	82%
LABORATORY CHARTER SCHOOL	82%

**Chart 11 (continued): 16 Charter schools where 80% or more of elementary/middle school students from low-income households failed ELA**

Charter Schools with ELA Failure Rates of 80% or Greater	Share of Low-Income Students Scoring Basic & Below
UNIVERSAL BLUFORD CHARTER SCHOOL	82%
PHILADELPHIA CHARTER SCHOOL FOR ARTS AND SCIENCES	82%
MASTERY CHARTER SCHOOL - FREDERICK DOUGLASS	82%
BELMONT CHARTER SCHOOL	81%
MEMPHIS STREET ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL @ JP	81%
ESPERANZA ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	81%
INDEPENDENCE CHARTER SCHOOL WEST	80%

## Appendix B: Test Taking Rates and Failure Rates by Public School Sector

<b>Chart 12: Head-to-Head Comparison: ELA performance in Philadelphia Charter Schools and School District of Philadelphia in 2023</b>		
	Brick and Mortar Charter Schools	School District of Philadelphia
<b>Number of students enrolled in grades 3-8</b>	33,082	51,621
<b>Number and share of students taking ELA</b>	30,206 (91%)	45,573 (88%)
<b>Number and share students who tested and failed ELA</b>	19,888 (66%)	29,987 (66%)

<b>Chart 13: Head-to-Head Comparison: Math performance in Philadelphia Charter Schools and School District of Philadelphia in 2023</b>		
	Brick and Mortar Charter Schools	School District of Philadelphia
<b>Number of students enrolled in grades 3-8</b>	33,082	51,621
<b>Number and share of students taking Math</b>	30,370 (92%) (No Cyber)	46,321 (90%)
<b>Number and share of students who tested and failed Math</b>	25,370 (84%) (No Cyber)	36,872 (80%)



## Data Note

The Pennsylvania System of School Assessments (PSSA) results data for 2023 was obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of Education's publicly available PSSA results data found here: [PSSA Results \(pa.gov\)](https://www.pdesas.org/pssa-results). The PSSA results for individual charter and public schools utilizes assessment data taken from the "2023 School Level Data" file, and the total PSSA results for the Philadelphia City School District (School District of Philadelphia or SDP) were taken from the "2023 District Level Data" file. Both files contain performance data for racial/ethnic and economic student subgroups.



Other publicly available PSSA results data for prior years do not contain district-level performance data. As such, the SDP assessment data from 2015 to 2022 was obtained through Freedom of Information Law requests filed in 2020 (for PSSA results from 2015 to 2019) and 2023 (for PSSA results from 2021 and 2022), while the assessment data for charter schools was obtained through the publicly available school-level data from 2015 to 2022.

The PSSA failure rates of SDP and Philadelphia-based charter schools include all students in grades 3-8 unless they specify a racial/ethnic or economic subgroup. A school's failure rate on either the English Language Arts or Math assessment is defined as the share of students who scored basic or below basic on the assessment. Notably, the failure rates of individual schools may vary on the grade-levels included within their analysis due to differences in the grades present with those schools.

To protect the identities of students, the Pennsylvania Department of Education does not disclose the proficiency scores of student populations of fewer than 11. As such, this analysis excludes school and district student populations of 10 or less when calculating PSSA failure rates as to prevent an underestimation of the share of the students scoring basic or below basic. This affects the summarized failure rates of Black, Hispanic, and low-income student subgroups. The analysis on the failure rates of charter and district schools omits one school for low-income students, six schools for Black students, and 79 schools for Hispanic students.

The PSSA failure rates of the sum and averages of Philadelphia-based charter schools do not include cyber charters located in the county. This means ASPIRA Bilingual Cyber Charter and Esperanza Cyber Charter were both excluded from the analysis.



## Endnotes

1. Compared to the school district, charter school students performed the same or worse on both ELA and Math PSSAs overall. However, because of the significant differences in the student population that charter schools serve compared to the school district, we cannot directly compare the two without accounting for differences in student income level, race, and other important factors that may impact test scores. The two sectors are considered “apples to oranges.” Please see Appendix B for an overview of the differences in test-taking rates and performance. We’re thankful to Dr. Ed Fuller from the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy Analysis at Penn State for guidance on this methodological constraint.
2. Data is from PDE annual financial report from the most recently available year, 2021-22. <https://www.education.pa.gov/Teachers%20-%20Administrators/School%20Finances/Finances/AFR%20Data%20Summary/Pages/default.aspx>
3. See the Basic Education Funding Commission majority report: <https://basiceducationfundingcommission.com/>
4. Throughout this report, charter schools refer to brick and mortar schools only. Cyber schools performed worse and were excluded from this analysis. Additionally, this report only analyzes students in elementary and middle school, since the PSSA’s are administered to students in grades 3-8.
5. According to 2023 PDE enrollment data, 80% Philadelphia’s charter schools’ enrollment consists of Black & Hispanic students compared to 71% of SDP enrollment. The district serves more Black and Hispanic students overall; 84,308 students of color in PSD compared to 51,285 students of color in charter schools.
6. 7,303 is the number of authorized seats that remained empty. This includes some seats that are technically authorized to be filled that charter schools have chosen not to fill due to preferences for smaller programming or capacity constraints.
7. Fuller, Ed. “Where Did They Go? Teacher Attrition in Philadelphia County (2018-2022). February 8, 2024. <https://ceepablog.wordpress.com/2024/02/08/where-did-they-go-teacher-attrition-in-philadelphia-county-2018-2022/>
8. <https://ncss3.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Credo-NCSS3-Report.pdf> page 51.
9. For the subgroup analyses, we are only able to report on schools where there are at least 11 students from each subgroup tested in grades 3-8. This particularly impacts the data on Hispanic students, since many charter schools serve a small number of Hispanic students. See the data note in the appendix for more information.

## 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.

Children First, formerly known as Public Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY), serves as the leading child advocacy organization that improves 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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