



Coalition for Public Education

Contact:  
Barbara Shaner, chair  
614-325-9562  
or Lisa Zellner  
614-257-4195

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## **Stronger Accountability Yields Slight Improvements in Some Charter Schools**

Traditional public school districts continue to provide a vastly better education for students, according to report card data released today by the Ohio Department of Education. Efforts to strengthen accountability for the state's privately operated, publicly funded charter schools in the last few years have led to slightly improved performance by charter schools. While the change does not demonstrate a dramatic trend, the even slight advances due to increased accountability indicate that greater oversight benefits students, noted the Coalition for Public Education.

State report card data shows steady general improvement in traditional public school districts' ratings with slight improvements in charter schools.

"We are encouraged by the impact that accountability provisions have had on improving the performance of charters since stronger standards were implemented over the last few years. Even given the slight improvements by some charters, traditional public school districts remain the clearly superior option for children," said Barbara Shaner, chair of the Coalition for Public Education.

The Coalition is a statewide alliance of education, parent and civic organizations interested in improving public education for Ohio's children and increasing accountability to taxpayers.

The report cards, which rate performance for the 2010-2011 school year, show that while strengthened accountability has led to improved performance for some charter schools, there remains a significant drop-off between the highly rated charters and the vast majority of poor-performing charters on Performance Index Scores; whereas the difference in Performance Index scores among public school districts isn't nearly as vast.

The Performance Index Score is calculated by examining how many students took the achievement assessments and what their scores were, with those who scored higher receiving a greater weight than those who did not. So the higher the index, the more students scored better than normal on the achievement assessments; the lower the score, the more students underperformed.

The Performance Index shows Ohio's public school districts clearly outperform most charter schools and are more uniformly successful than charter schools. However, there appear to be about two dozen charters (out of 324 rated) that are quite successful and are worthy of further examination. Charter schools still have a long way to go to match the performance of traditional public schools. It is important to note that only 7 percent of charter schools would rate in the top half of traditional public schools on the Performance Index rankings.

"We are encouraged that legislative changes in charter school accountability over the past few years seem to be having a positive impact, but are concerned that loosening those measures – as was done this summer in House Bill 153– will cause these modest gains to be quickly lost," said Ohio PTA President Gloria Cazan.

"This improvement happened with better accountability standards implemented, not the hands off approach lawmakers took in the first 8 years of the charter school program."

Overall, 43 percent of charters still earned failed grades for how they serve students.

"This failure rate is outrageous considering the program has been in place for 14 years and last year alone cost taxpayers \$800 million," Shaner said.

- Of the 296 ranked charter schools, 5 rate Excellent with Distinction – the state's top ranking, while 70 rate Effective (equivalent to a B) or better. That means 23.6 percent of charter schools provide an effective education for Ohio's children, which is slightly better than last year (slightly more than 21 percent) and much better than the previous year's rate of 7 percent. These improvements occurred during a period of strengthened accountability standards.
- Meanwhile, of the 609 school districts rated on the report card, 567 rate effective or better. That means that more than 93 percent of Ohio's school districts rate effective or better on the report card, an improvement over the 88 percent that rated that well on last school year's report card.
- A little more than 43 percent of all charter schools rate in Academic Watch (D) or Academic Emergency (F) while more than 57 percent of traditional public school districts rate Excellent (A) or Excellent with Distinction (A+), zero received an F and only 6 received a D rating, the lowest number of D-rated districts since 2005-2006.

Report card ratings also show that graduation is more likely to be in a student's future if he or she is enrolled in a public school district. In general, Ohio's children are much more likely to graduate from a traditional public school district than a charter school, with barely one-third of charter schools graduating student at a rate that's higher than the lowest traditional school rate.

\*\* A bulleted summary of findings is attached. If you did not receive it, email [lzellner@oft-aft.org](mailto:lzellner@oft-aft.org).

### **General Data**

**Theme: ODE Report Card data shows steady general improvement in traditional schools' ratings with slight improvements in charter schools. Traditional school districts remain the clearly superior option for children.**

- There are 339 charter schools, with 296 of them receiving report card rankings.

- Of the 296 ranked charter schools, 5 rate Excellent with Distinction – the state’s top ranking, while 70 rate Effective (equivalent to a B) or better. That means 23.6 percent of charter schools provide an effective education for Ohio’s children, which is slightly better than last year (slightly more than 21 percent) and much better than the previous year’s rate of 7 percent.
- Meanwhile, of the 609 school districts rated on the report card, 567 rate effective or better. That means that more than 93 percent of Ohio's school districts rate effective or better on the report card, an improvement over the 88 percent that rated that well on last school year’s report card.
- A little more than 43 percent of all charter schools rate in Academic Watch (D) or Academic Emergency (F) while more than 57 percent of traditional public school districts rate Excellent (A) or Excellent with Distinction (A+), zero received an F, and only 6 received a D rating, the lowest number of D-rated districts since 2005-2006.

### Performance Index Rankings

**Theme: The Index shows Ohio’s public school districts clearly outperform their charter school counterparts and are more uniformly successful than charter schools. However, there appear to be about two dozen charters (23 out of 324 rated) that are quite successful and are worthy of further examination.**

- The Performance Index Score is calculated by examining how many pupils took the proficiency tests and what their scores were, with those kids scoring higher receiving a greater weight than those that did not. So the higher the index, the more kids scored better than normal on the proficiency tests, the lower the score the more they underperformed.
- Given that the Performance Index was given much greater importance under HB 153, we’ve taken a look at where schools rank on this important measure.
- ***Only 7 percent of charter schools (23 out of 324) would rate in the top half of traditional public school districts on the PI rankings.***
- There is a significant drop-off between the highly rated charters and the vast majority of poor-performers; whereas the difference between school districts isn’t nearly as vast.

### Graduation Rates

**Theme: In general, Ohio’s children are much more likely to graduate from a traditional public school than a charter school, with barely one-third of charter schools graduating children at a rate that’s higher than the lowest traditional school rate.**

- More than 67 percent of charters that have graduation rates ranked have rates that are worse than Cleveland’s, which is the lowest of any traditional public school district.
- Only one of the statewide E-Schools has a graduation rate higher than Cleveland’s, yet that school’s rate is only better than about 6 percent of traditional public school districts.

- The Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow, where Gov. John Kasich spoke at its commencement this past year, only graduated 40.7 percent of its eligible students – a rate more than 20 percentage points lower than Cleveland.

### **Proficiency Tests**

**Theme: Traditional public schools again saw steady increases in their proficiency test scores and while charter schools saw their proficiency test scores increase, in some cases significantly, they still remain far short of their traditional public school district counterparts. We are encouraged by the impact that accountability provisions have had on improving the performance of charters since stronger standards were implemented over the last few years, but are concerned that loosening those measures – as House Bill 153 did – will cause these modest gains to be quickly lost.**

- Despite charter schools' gains, traditional public schools still had significantly higher test scores than their charter school counterparts, with some district scores nearly doubling . In fifth grade math, despite charter schools' scores increasing by a little over 2 percentage points, traditional school districts' scores outstripped the charter school scores by nearly 85 percent (71.2 percent proficient compared with 38.5 percent proficient).

### **Value Added**

**Theme: While it appears that charter schools may be holding their own on value added measures, it is unclear why these data are so anomalous with every other measurement (Performance Index, Graduation, Proficiencies and Report Card) showing traditional public schools' clear superiority.**

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