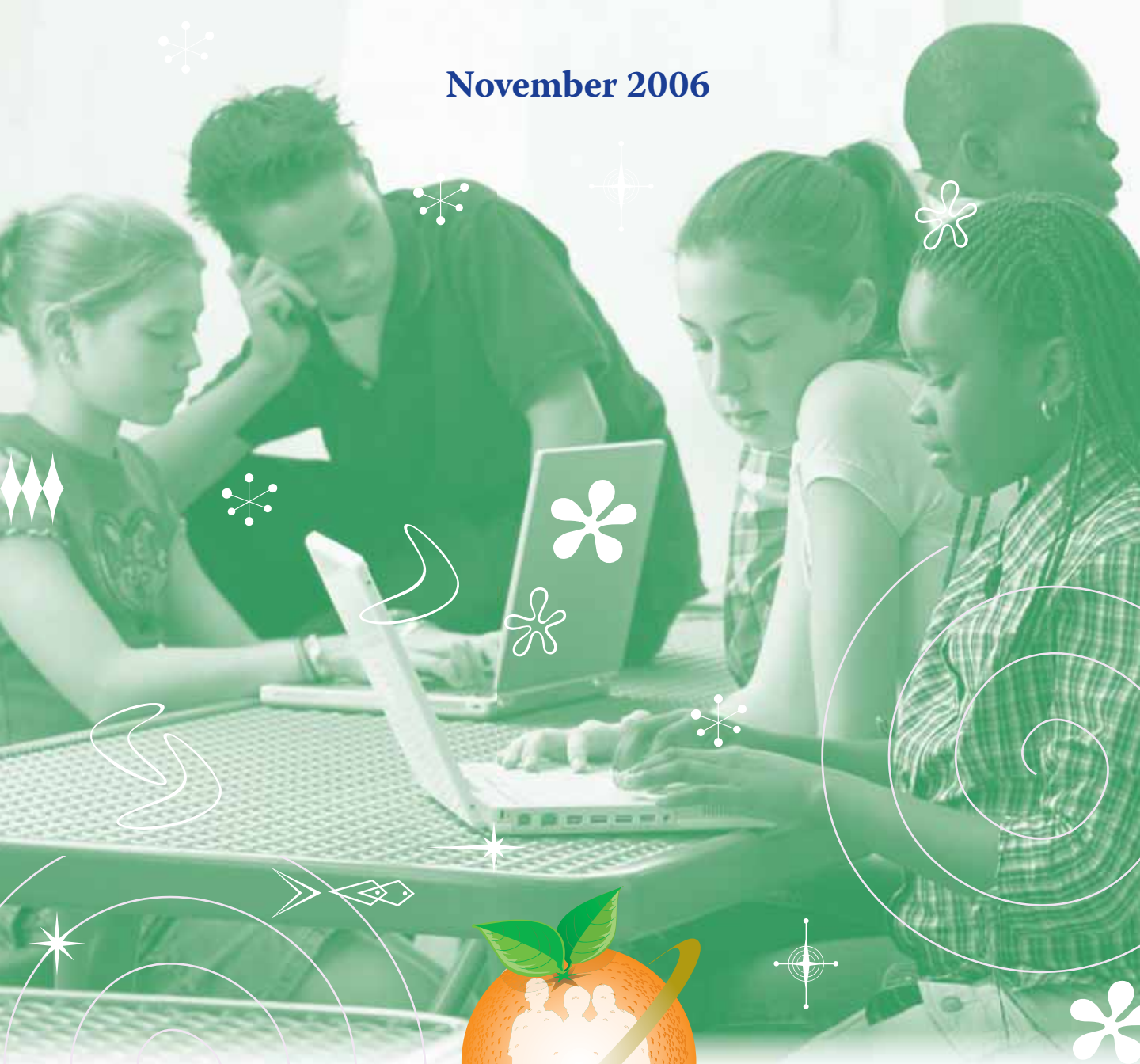


November 2006



F L O R I D A ' S
CHARTER SCHOOLS
A Decade of Progress

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

F L O R I D A ' S CHARTER SCHOOLS *A Decade of Progress*

Commissioner's Message

Since 1996 in Florida, charter schools have played a vital role in increasing parental options in public education by providing innovative learning opportunities for students. This report traces the history of charter schools and provides an overview of the important contributions charter schools have made to Florida's educational system.

As we celebrate a decade of progress, I encourage you to recognize and learn about the charter schools that are making a difference in Florida's public education system. I applaud their dedication and hard work, their successes, and the educational opportunities they provide to our state's parents and students. As we begin a new decade in Florida's charter school history, we must carry forward the powerful and promising vision of an education system that provides all students the opportunities and choices so they may reach their fullest potential.



Commissioner Winn observes a student at Terrace Community Middle Charter School in Hillsborough School District.

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FLORIDA'S CHARTER SCHOOLS

Early Beginnings

In the early 1990s, Florida committed to the concept of systemic educational reform and has never looked back. Fanning the reform movement was an almost universal recognition of the need to ensure higher student achievement levels in public education. Florida's major reform initiatives included establishing higher academic standards, providing parents more educational choices, and ensuring real accountability for results.

Charter schools are independent public schools of choice, created on the basis of an agreement or "charter" between a group of school organizers and a sponsoring body. Charter schools are granted flexibility in providing expanded learning experiences to meet the individual educational needs of each student by using innovative learning methods. In return, they are held accountable for measurable results and educational outcomes. Since Minnesota enacted the first charter law in 1991, charter schools have had a significant role in educational reform throughout the nation.

Early charter school advocates understood that transformation of Florida's public education must occur. Their hope for charter schools was threefold. First, charter schools would improve student learning and increase parental choice. Second, charter schools would improve the public education system through competition and dissemination of innovative practices. And third,

charter schools would allow local groups to establish schools with unique philosophies and to meet needs without the burdensome bureaucratic procedures and rules required of traditional public schools.

Charter school legislation was first introduced in the Florida Legislature in 1995 but failed to pass. The necessary groundwork was laid, however, enabling the charter school movement to gain momentum and a wider support base among Florida citizens. As a promising initiative, the concepts of innovation, flexibility, student performance, and local decision-making found in charter schools were consistent with Florida's statewide plan for school reform and accountability.

In May 1996, legislation authorizing the creation of charter schools as a part of Florida's state system of public education was officially signed into law. The law specifically charged charter schools to improve educational opportunities for low-performing students, increase parental choice, influence the traditional public school system, and foster innovation. The concept received overwhelming support in the legislature, with a vote of 96 – 18 in the House of Representatives and 32 – 8 in the Florida Senate.

Florida's charter school law took effect July 1, 1996. Within months after approval by the Florida Legislature, the law's impact on the public school system began to be realized. Charter applications were submitted and approved by school boards in Dade, Escambia, Leon, Polk and Walton school districts, resulting in five charter schools enrolling almost 350 students and opening their doors for the 1996-97 school year. At the same time, applications for charter schools were announced in twelve additional school districts and applications were being developed in at least seven others.



Escambia Charter School

Gonzalez, Florida

Escambia Charter School evolved from an alternative education program that began in 1993 to serve at-risk students. It became a charter school in June 1996, making it one of Florida's first charter schools. Initially, the facilities consisted of an administrative office and three campus locations. They have since moved to a single campus. Escambia Charter School serves high school students who are at risk of dropping out of school.

The mission of Escambia Charter School is to provide an alternative educational system that can aid "at-risk" students, preparing them academically, socially, and culturally to be responsible participants in society. The school is dedicated to kindling the hunger for learning, the respect for work, and the commitment to public service.

The staff believes that all young people should be encouraged to develop their abilities to the highest extent possible. Students are encouraged to believe that the habits and characteristics they develop while in school are determining factors in the way they will interact with society as adults. It is the obligation of the school to see that all students are provided with the opportunity to excel. As an alternative school, Escambia Charter School does not receive a performance grade.



Since the first year of operation of charter schools, Florida has experienced the rapid expansion of charter schools throughout the state. Every subsequent year has shown an increase in the number of charter schools operating in the state, as well as in the number of students enrolled in charter schools. Currently, Florida ranks third in the nation in the number of operating charter schools and second in the number of students enrolled in charter schools.

Ten years after Florida's first five charter schools opened in 1996, charter schools are filling a unique niche in the state's public school system. Florida's charter schools are currently educating more than 100,000 students each year and providing parents one of the state's fastest growing choice options. Charter schools often provide parents and students with smaller classes, alternative curriculums, and increased expectations of parental involvement.

The charter school concept continues to hold great promise for the many students, parents, and teachers who believe that more can, and must, be done within a public education setting. However, a decade of progress makes it clear that charter schools are not a panacea; nor are they for everyone. Many challenges remain for Florida's charter schools. We must work together to find attainable solutions to these challenges. However, policy-makers must work to ensure that charter schools maintain their momentum and original purpose.

Guiding Principles

Charter schools are independent public schools of choice. These schools operate under a contract with a chartering authorizer, which is, by law, intended to free charter schools from many regulations imposed on Florida's traditional public schools. Each charter school has its own governing board, consisting of community representatives and parents, which is responsible for setting policies and procedures.

Though charter schools are public schools, they have the opportunity to experiment with new organizational structures and teaching methods. The increased freedom and flexibility of charter schools allows teachers, parents and communities to establish schools that more directly address the instructional needs of their children and provide options to students who might benefit from a learning environment that operates outside the traditional school approach.

Although provided more freedom than traditional public schools, charter schools are still held accountable on multiple levels. The charter contract delineates expectations of the governing board and the sponsor regarding the school's academic and financial performance. Charter schools are expected to adhere to three guiding principles:

- Meet high standards of student achievement while providing parents flexibility to choose among diverse educational opportunities within the state's public school system.
- Promote enhanced academic success and financial efficiency by aligning responsibility with accountability.
- Provide parents with sufficient information on whether or not their child is reading at grade level and whether or not the child gains at least a year's worth of learning for every year spent in the charter school.

Types of Charter Schools

Many charter schools in Florida have innovative missions. Some charter schools include themed learning approaches such as arts, sciences, technologies; they also include provisions of services to special populations such as those at-risk of academic failure, autistic students, and students with cerebral palsy. While each charter school in Florida is unique in its educational approach, charter schools in Florida are classified according to their management structure:

- Start-up schools
- Schools managed by educational management organizations (EMOs)
- Conversion public schools
- Community partnerships
- University charter schools.

After ten years, start-up schools continue to comprise the majority of charter schools operating in Florida. Organized and privately operated by teachers, parents, administrators or community leaders, these schools frequently serve students who are at risk, offer a specialized curricula or core academic program, provide early intervention programs, or serve exceptional education students. The majority of Florida's charter schools managed by EMOs are located in



C.K. Steele-LeRoy Collins Charter Middle School

Tallahassee, Florida

In August 1996, C. K. Steele-LeRoy Collins was established as one of the first charter middle schools in Florida. The school's goal is to provide a learning environment that is both stimulating and challenging to meet the needs of students and to increase their performance levels.

The school's thematic program focus is "entrepreneurship." Through this focus, the school develops students skills of speaking, writing, and dressing appropriately for business. Further career exposure, such as school seminars, workshops, and visits to local businesses as well as visits from area professionals, provide real life experiences and information to students.

This small school of approximately 70 students is a close-knit educational community where all students and teachers know one another. The classes are small, giving each student more opportunity to participate in classroom discussions and to receive individual attention. Not only do most students get better grades, but they are actually eager to go to school. C. K. Steele-Leroy Collins Charter Middle School received a performance grade of "A" in the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 school years.





The Liberty City Charter School

Miami, Florida

Liberty City Charter School opened in August 1996, becoming one of Florida's first charter schools. It serves students from the economically disadvantaged families of Liberty City in Miami. Its mission is to demonstrate that students can learn at high levels, through an academically rigorous and innovative curriculum that incorporates the development of good character. The primary focus is not only on what students learn, but also on how they learn it. Essential to the achievement of this mission is the establishment of a community of learning built upon the foundation of academic integrity, dedicated and professionally competent staff, involved parents, high behavioral and academic expectations, and a continuous cycle of planning, evaluation, and refinement.

Liberty City Charter School seeks to partner with parents and teachers in educating the whole child, thereby preparing future generations academically, socially, and morally to become leaders within their communities. The school is built upon the cooperative efforts of parents, families, communities, educators and businesses for the common cause of providing a challenging educational experience for its students.

Liberty City Charter School received a performance grade of "A" in the 2005-2006 school year.

The APPLE School

Lakeland, Florida

The APPLE school, one of Florida's first charter schools, was established in August 1996. Its mission focused on educational techniques and curriculum recommended for children with attention deficit disorder (ADD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). However, the school accepted any student residing in the district. The APPLE School received a performance grade of "C" in the 2005-2006 school year. The school closed in June 2006.

those school districts with the largest charter school student enrollments. Twenty-one conversion schools are currently operating in Florida for the 2006-2007 school year, representing about five percent of the total number of charter schools in the state. Florida's charter school statute also allows for several special types of community partnership charter schools, including "schools-in-the-workplace," "schools-in-a-municipality," and "museum schools." Two charter lab schools are sponsored by one state university.

Charter School Closures

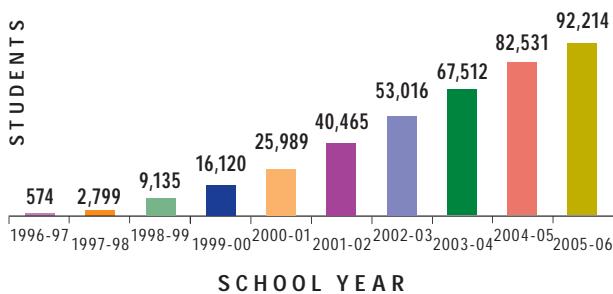
If a charter school fails to perform satisfactorily or to achieve its goals, the charter school faces the possibility of closure by its authorizing entity. Seventy-eight charter schools have closed in Florida since the first five schools opened in the 1996-1997 school year. These schools closed for a variety of reasons, including poor fiscal management, lack of leadership, governance issues, and receiving failing grades as a result of their students not performing at acceptable levels.



Students Served by Florida Charter Schools

No longer considered an experiment in education, charter schools are an integral part of Florida's public school system. Charter schools are a popular choice option for parents who seek smaller classes, alternative curriculums, and more opportunities to become involved in their children's education. Charter school enrollment has grown steadily over the decade. Charter schools served over 92,000 students in the 2005-06 school year, which translates to about 3% of Florida's total public school population. Enrollment in Florida's charter schools is projected to surpass 100,000 students in the 2006-07 school year.

The Number of Public Charter School Students in Florida Has Increased Steadily Since 1996-97



Offering innovative instructional strategies and flexibility not available in most traditional public schools, charter schools often find a means of helping students succeed who were unsuccessful in regular classrooms. Although open to all students within a school district, many charter schools offer specialized curricula or programs designed to meet the instructional needs of certain student populations. Florida's charter schools target the following student populations, as allowed by Florida Statute:

- Students within specific age ranges or grade levels;
- Students considered at-risk of dropping out of school or academic failure, including exceptional education students;
- Students enrolled in a charter school in the workplace or living in a specific municipality;
- Students residing within a reasonable distance of the charter school;



Seaside Neighborhood School

Santa Rosa Beach, Florida

Seaside Neighborhood School, one of Florida's first public charter schools, was established in 1996 in Walton County to provide excellence in public education to middle school students. The vision is to provide all students with an opportunity to realize their full potential in a setting that is safe, orderly, and small enough that students are recognized and nurtured.

The success of Seaside Neighborhood School is due to its innovative educational hands-on program. The goals are team planning and team teaching as much as possible to provide hands-on learning experiences.

Through mentoring, students are exposed to different professions and gather knowledge about many career choices and have the opportunity to learn new skills. Instruction is provided by teachers, parents, and community business members. Art, photography, cooking, media production, and financial planning are some of the vocations represented in this program.

The school has maintained an "A" grade and has made AYP since 2000. Writing scores have been consistently in the top one percent in the state each year, and in 2005-2006, the school had the second highest science score in the state.

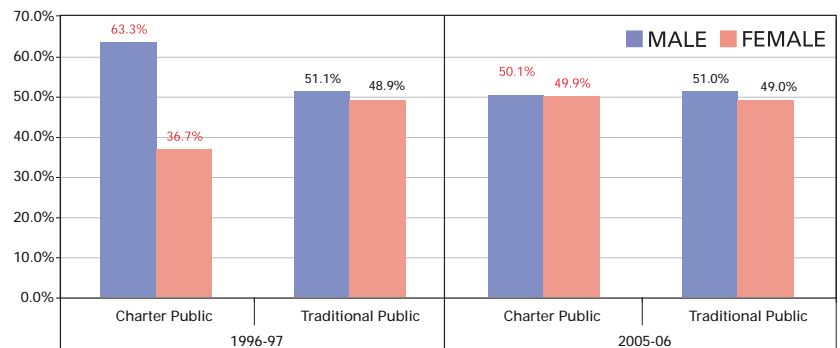


- Students who meet reasonable academic, artistic, or other eligibility standards established by the charter school; and
- Students articulating from one charter school to another pursuant to an approved articulation agreement.

While authorized and financially supported by local school districts, charter schools are largely free to provide innovative education, and provide effective programs and choice to underserved groups of students.

Since charter schools first opened in Florida, the majority of students served have been enrolled at the elementary level. Slightly over 63% of the charter school students in 1996-97 were male; 37% were female. The percentage of male and female students attending charter schools has become more similar over time and currently mirrors the student population in traditional public schools.

Charter Public School Male and Female Enrollment Compared to Florida's Traditional Public Schools



Racial/Ethnic Enrollment

Charter schools have increasingly diverse student populations. On average, charter schools serve a slightly greater proportion of minority students than Florida's traditional public schools. In 1996-97, the student population at charter schools was more heavily minority than the population at traditional public schools (56% minority in charter schools; 43% minority in traditional public schools). By 2005-06, both charter and traditional schools exhibited very similar distributions of minority students, with the charter school student population now 57% minority and the traditional school student population 52% minority.

One noticeable trend over the past decade is the growing enrollment of Hispanic students in charter schools. The Hispanic enrollment in charter schools has increased from 2% in 1996-97 to 29% in 2005-06.

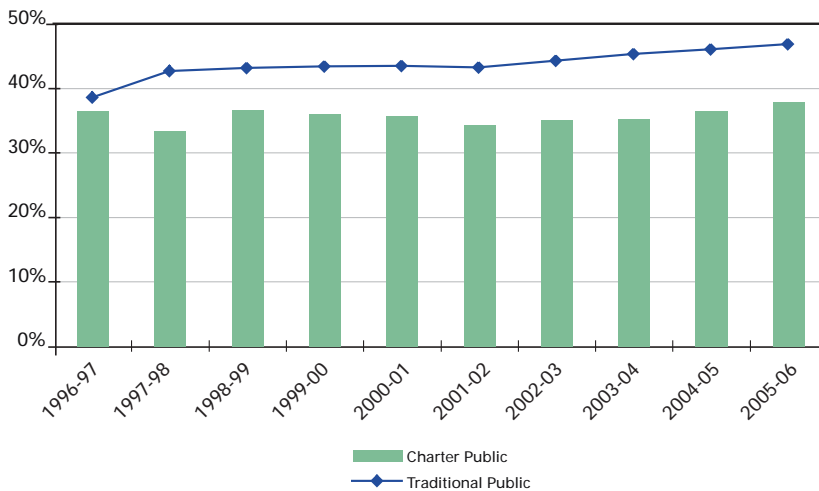
Percentage of Minority Students in Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools, 1996-97 – 2005-06

YEAR	Public Charter Schools				Traditional Public Schools			
	White	African American	Hispanic	Other	White	African American	Hispanic	Other
1996-97	44%	53%	2%	1%	57%	25%	16%	2%
1997-98	47%	47%	4%	2%	56%	25%	17%	3%
1998-99	54%	35%	9%	2%	55%	25%	17%	3%
1999-00	52%	32%	14%	3%	54%	24%	18%	3%
2000-01	50%	29%	18%	3%	53%	24%	19%	4%
2001-02	48%	28%	21%	4%	52%	24%	20%	4%
2002-03	46%	27%	23%	4%	51%	23%	21%	4%
2003-04	46%	25%	25%	4%	50%	23%	22%	5%
2004-05	45%	24%	27%	5%	49%	23%	23%	5%
2005-06	43%	23%	29%	5%	48%	23%	23%	6%

Eligibility for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch

In Florida, eligibility for free and reduced-price lunch indicates whether or not a student is economically disadvantaged. The percentage of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch has consistently been lower in charter public schools over time than in traditional public schools. In the 2005-2006 school year, approximately 38% of Florida charter school students qualified for free and reduced-price lunch. Comparatively, approximately 47% of Florida's public school students qualified for free and reduced-price lunch.

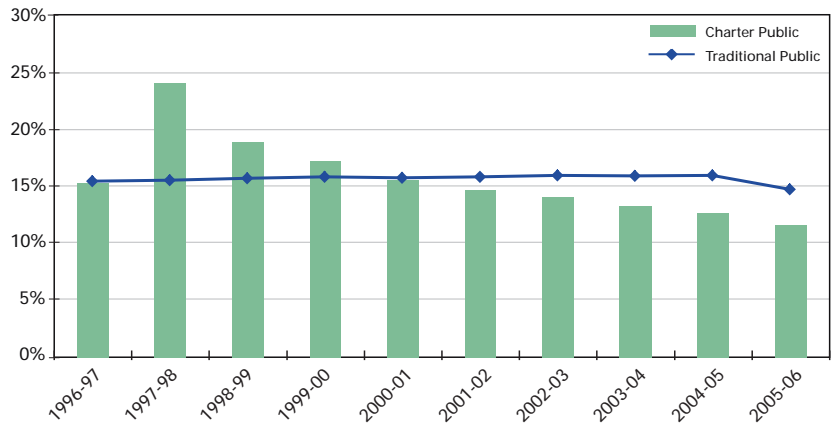
Charter Public School Students Eligibility for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Compared to Florida's Traditional Public Schools



Students with Disabilities

From 1996-97 through 2000-01, the percentage of students with disabilities in charter schools was equal to or higher than the percentage of students with disabilities in traditional public schools. In 1997-98, the percentage of charter school students with disabilities spiked to almost 25% of the state's charter school student population. Since 2001-02, charter schools on average have served a lower proportion of students with disabilities than traditional public schools.

Charter Public School Students with Disabilities Enrollment Compared to Traditional Public Schools



Charter School Accountability

No factor contributes more to a charter school's success than increased student achievement. A charter school cannot be considered successful if students are not learning at or above the levels at which they were learning when they entered the charter school. This raises an important question: Do charter schools outperform other traditional public schools?

Prior to 2002-03, no system was in place to allow all charter schools to be assessed through Florida's statewide accountability system. Only charter schools with more than 30 students enrolled in grade 4 (reading), grade 5 (mathematics), and grades 8 and 10 (reading and mathematics) could use Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) results to report student achievement. Charter schools were largely responsible for producing their own data on the basis of their individual school objectives and the student population served. With each charter school having its own mission and an individual contract with the sponsor, considerable variation existed in how charter schools reported progress toward their goals.

In 2002-03, Florida made significant improvements in how schools grades were calculated to fully implement the intent of the A+ Plan. One improvement was the use of FCAT developmental scores to track the learning gains of individual students from one year to the next. Additionally, a measure was added to determine whether the lowest performing students

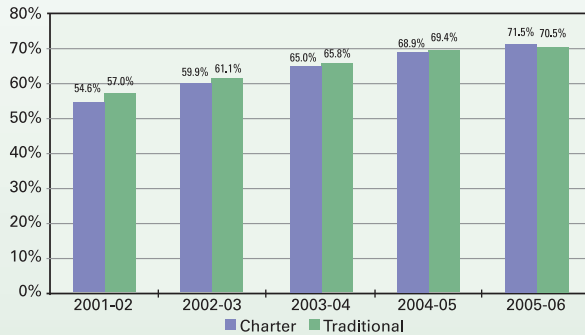
are making annual improvements in reading. These improvements not only increased the number of charter schools participating in Florida's statewide accountability system, they added depth and dimension to charter school accountability by allowing comparisons to be made between charter and traditional public school achievement.

Achievement in Charter Public Schools Compared with Traditional Public Schools

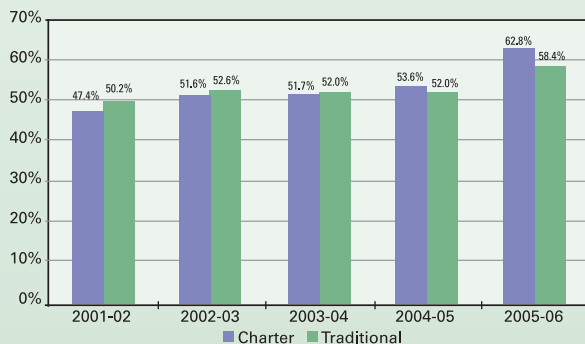
Florida charter law requires the Department of Education to prepare an annual statewide analysis of student achievement in charter schools versus the achievement of comparable students in traditional public schools. The current analysis examines the average performance of charter school students and traditional public school students using five years of FCAT test scores. Only students who were enrolled in a charter school or a traditional public school for a full-year are included in the analysis. Limiting the analysis to include only full-year students is consistent with the state's school accountability system for awarding school grades under the A+ Plan. Further, when comparing different types of schools such as charter and traditional public, limiting the analysis to include only those students who attended one of the school types for the entire year will maximize the effect of the school type on the student's performance.

Student Proficiency

**Percent of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on FCAT Reading—
Elementary School Grades 3, 4, and 5
Traditional Public Schools vs. Charter Schools, 2002 to 2006**



**Percent of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on FCAT Reading—
Middle School Grades 6, 7, and 8
Traditional Public Schools vs. Charter Schools, 2002 to 2006**



**Percent of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on FCAT Reading—
High School Grades 9 and 10
Traditional Public Schools vs. Charter Schools, 2002 to 2006**



NOTE: Percentages were not rounded to show precise differences in achievement.

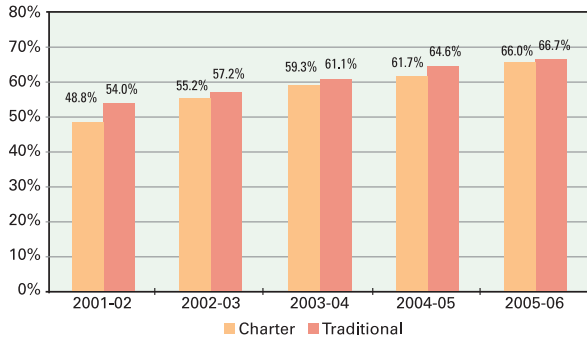
Student proficiency is defined as scoring an Achievement Level 3 or above on the FCAT. The tables on pages 10-11 show that in general, across school types, a greater percentage of traditional public school students are proficient on the FCAT in reading and math than students attending a public charter school. These findings are consistent with earlier studies that found many students entered charter schools already below the academic achievement level of their peers in traditional public schools. As a result, the average scores for charter school students were found to initially lag behind the average scores of traditional public school students.

However, the apparent proficiency gap between traditional and charter school students has narrowed over the last five years. In two cases, elementary school and middle school reading, a greater percentage of charter school students are now proficient in reading as compared to their traditional public school counterparts. The gap remains most evident in the scores of tested ninth and tenth grade students where a three percentage point gap in reading and a two percentage point gap in math remain. This result demonstrates that a greater percentage of traditional public school students are proficient than their charter school counterparts. However, the gap is down in high school reading and math from five percentage points and nine percentage points, respectively, in 2001-02.

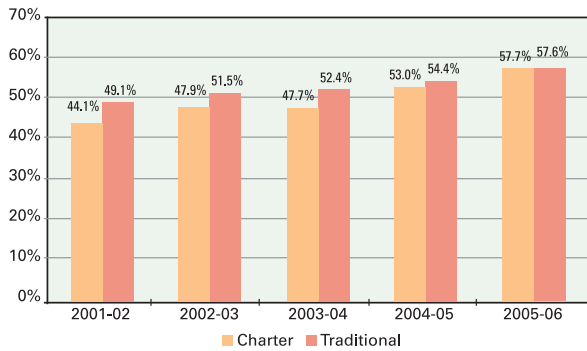
The greater similarities in student performance between charter school students and traditional public school students may be a reflection of the changing population at charter schools. More students are now being served in charter schools than five years ago. Also, the demographic make-up of charter schools more closely resembles the demographic distribution at traditional schools. As the charter school population becomes more diverse, it is not unexpected that student performance measures will more likely mirror those found at traditional public schools.

Charter schools today are more than a choice option for lower performing students. Their missions are more diverse, and likewise so are their student populations. The dissipation of the proficiency gap between charter school and traditional school students is evidence of that.

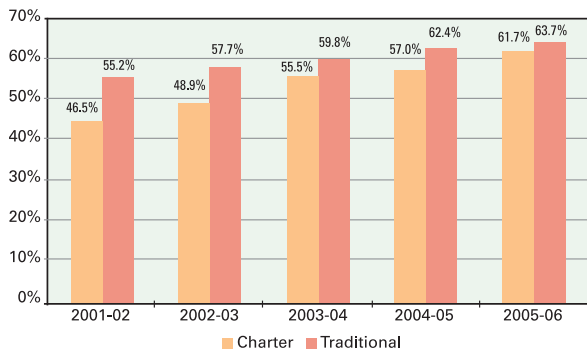
**Percent of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on FCAT Math—
Elementary School Grades 3, 4, and 5
Traditional Public Schools vs. Charter Schools, 2002 to 2006**



**Percent of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on FCAT Math—
Middle School Grades 6, 7, and 8
Traditional Public Schools vs. Charter Schools, 2002 to 2006**



**Percent of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on FCAT Math—
High School Grades 9 and 10
Traditional Public Schools vs. Charter Schools, 2002 to 2006**



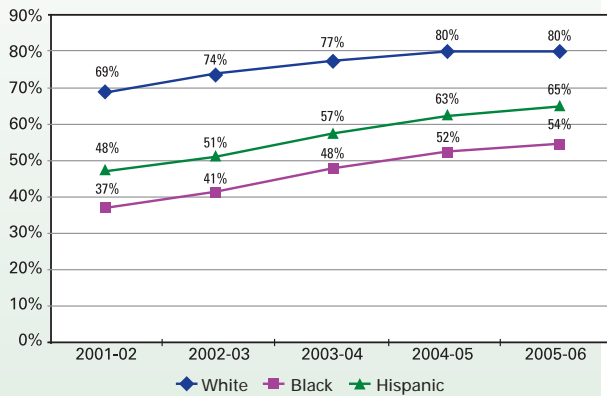
NOTE: Percentages were not rounded to show precise differences in achievement.



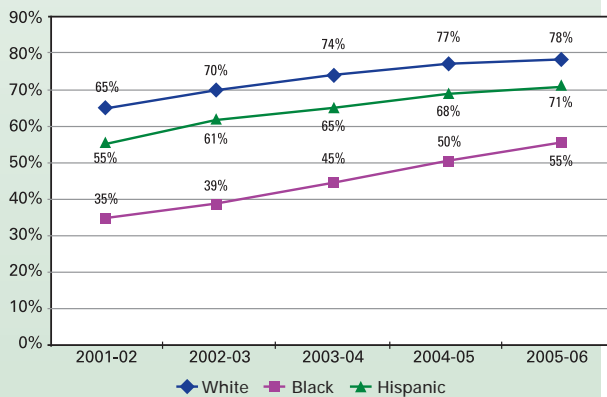
Closing the Achievement Gap in Reading

The previous analysis demonstrated that the overall proficiency gap between charter schools and traditional public schools has narrowed or disappeared altogether over the last five years at the elementary and middle school level. The charts on pages 12-16 explore the degree to which charter and traditional public elementary, middle, and high schools have narrowed the gap between white students and African-American and Hispanic students as it relates to performance on the FCAT Reading exam. Once again, the analysis includes students who were enrolled a full-year in either a charter school or traditional public school.

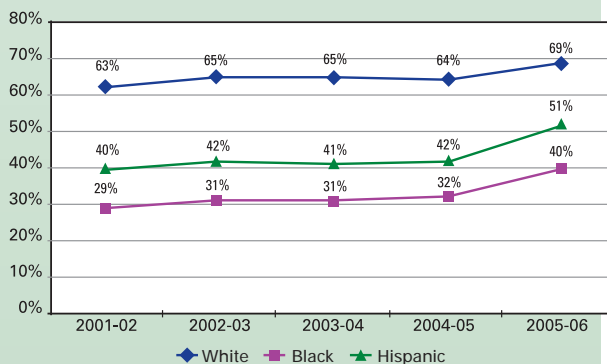
Traditional Public Elementary Schools FCAT Reading Achievement Level 3 and Above Grades 3, 4, and 5 by Race/Ethnicity



Charter Elementary Schools FCAT Reading Achievement Level 3 and Above Grades 3, 4, and 5 by Race/Ethnicity



Traditional Public Middle Schools FCAT Reading Achievement Level 3 and Above Grades 6, 7, and 8 by Race/Ethnicity



Elementary Schools

- Both charter and traditional public elementary schools have witnessed a similar closing of the achievement gap between white and African-American students and white and Hispanic students in reading over the last five years.
- From 2002 to 2006, the gap between white and African-American students decreased by 6-7 percentage points in both charter and traditional public elementary schools. The gap decreased from 30% to 23% in charter schools and from 32% to 26% in traditional public schools.
- Both school types experienced a narrowing of the achievement gap between white and Hispanic students as well, with the gap narrowing by a larger margin, 7 percentage points (22% to 15%), in traditional elementary schools, compared to 3 percentage points (10% to 7%) in charter elementary schools. Though the gap narrowed by a lesser degree in charter schools, the data demonstrated that unlike the white and African-American student populations, the Hispanic student population in charter elementary schools appears to be more proficient, on average, than the Hispanic student population at traditional elementary schools.

Middle Schools

- As with elementary schools, both charter and traditional public middle schools have witnessed a similar closing of the achievement gap between white and African-American students and white and Hispanic students in reading over the last five years.

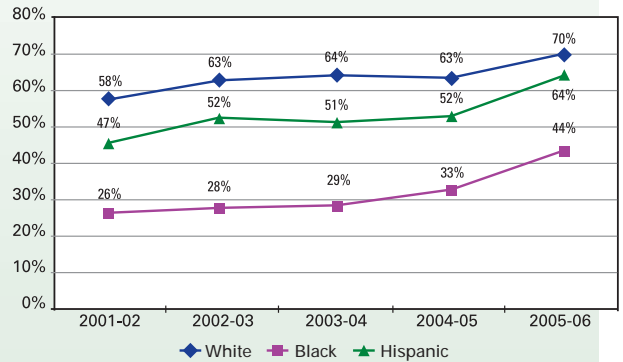
- From 2002 to 2006, the gap between white and African-American students decreased by 7 percentage points in charter middle schools (33% to 26%) and 5 percentage points in traditional public schools (34% to 29%).
- Both school types experienced a narrowing of the achievement gap between white and Hispanic students as well. Once again, the data demonstrated that unlike the white and African-American student populations, the Hispanic student population in charter middle schools appears to be more proficient, on average, than the Hispanic student population at traditional middle schools. The achievement gap between white and Hispanic students has narrowed to just 6 percentage points in 2006.

High Schools

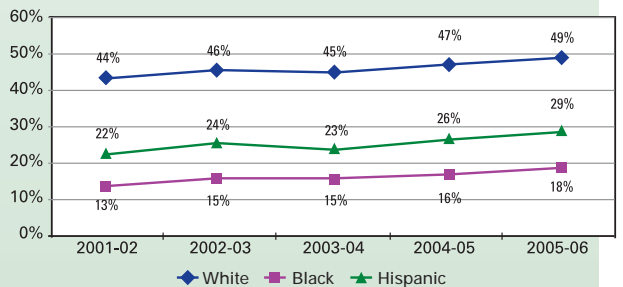
- At the high school level, the achievement gap between white and African-American students in reading has slightly increased over the last five years (22% to 25%) at charter high schools and remained the same (31 percentage points) at traditional public high schools.
- Both school types experienced a narrowing of the achievement gap between white and Hispanic students in reading. The gap decreased by 3 percentage points (9% to 6%) in charter high schools and 2 percentage points (22% to 20%) in traditional public schools. As with elementary and middle charter schools, the data demonstrated that the Hispanic student population in charter high schools appears to be more proficient, on average, than the Hispanic student population at traditional public high schools.



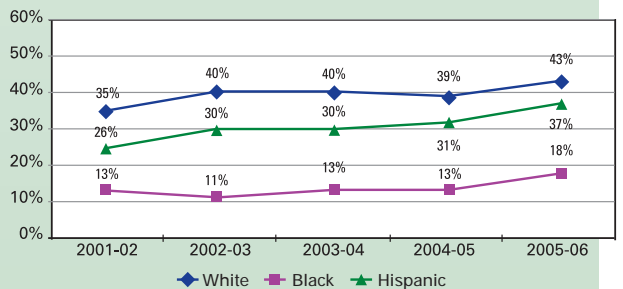
Charter Middle Schools FCAT Reading Achievement Level 3 and Above Grades 6, 7, and 8 by Race/Ethnicity



Traditional Public High Schools FCAT Reading Achievement Level 3 and Above Grades 9 and 10 by Race/Ethnicity



Charter High Schools FCAT Reading Achievement Level 3 and Above Grades 9 and 10 by Race/Ethnicity



Celebrating 10 Years!



FLORIDA'S CHARTER SCHOOLS *A Decade of Progress*

1996

Legislation authorized the creation of charter schools as a part of Florida's state system of public education.

Florida's first five public charter schools opened in Escambia, Leon, Miami-Dade, Polk, and Walton School Districts.

Florida was awarded a federal public charter schools grant to support the start-up and expansion of charter schools in the state.



1998

Legislation passed giving public charter schools access to capital outlay funds.

Florida's first municipally-run charter school—also credited as the nation's first—opened in Broward School District.

The first comprehensive public charter school in the country to serve homeless children was opened inside a homeless family shelter in Hillsborough School District.

The first museum partnership public charter school opened in Hillsborough School District.



1997

The number of public charter schools grew to 30, including Florida's first conversion charter school in Lake School District.



1999

Florida's first public charter school-the-workplace opened in Miami-Dade County.

The Charter School Review Panel was appointed and met for the first time to make recommendations for improvement of public charter schools.

The Florida Consortium of Charter Schools was founded to promote the establishment of high quality public charter schools within the state.



2000

Florida awarded federal charter school program grants to five public charter schools to promote best practices.



1996

FLORIDA'S PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS —

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2001

Florida's first community college partnership charter school opened in Okaloosa School District.
A public charter school in Alachua School District became Florida's first charter school to be independently accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).
Florida's first university authorized developmental research charter school opened in Leon School District.



2002

Charter school law was amended to modify the purpose of public charter schools, clarify facilities exemptions, support charter school conversions, and lift the cap on the number of charter schools that districts could authorize.



2003

The Charter School Appeal Commission was appointed to conduct a fair and impartial review of appeals by charter school applicants whose charters have been denied or whose charter contracts were not renewed by their sponsors.

Enrollment in charter schools exceeded 50,000 students.



2004

Accountability was strengthened by the availability of student data which allowed the first statewide report comparing public charter school and traditional public school achievement.



2005

With over 300 public charter schools, Florida had the third highest number of charter schools in the nation.



2006

Florida ranked second in the nation in public charter school student enrollment.
Public charter school student enrollment projected to surpass 100,000 students.
Charter legislation created an independent, statewide commission to sponsor public charter schools and authorize municipalities, state universities, community colleges, and other entities as co-sponsors.



Summary Chart – Reading Achievement Gap 2001 to 2006, Charter and Traditional Public Schools

	Charter Schools		Traditional Public Schools	
	Reading Gap in 2006	Change from 2001 to 2006	Reading Gap in 2006	Change from 2001 to 2006
White – African American Achievement Gap				
Elementary	23%	-7%	26%	-6%
Middle	26%	-7%	29%	-5%
High	25%	+3%	31%	0%
White – Hispanic Achievement Gap				
Elementary	7%	-3%	15%	-7%
Middle	6%	-6%	18%	-5%
High	6%	-3%	20%	-2%

Closing the Achievement Gap in Math

The charts on pages 17-19 explore the degree to which traditional public and charter elementary, middle, and high schools have narrowed the gap between white students and African-American and Hispanic students as it relates to performance on the FCAT Math exam. The analysis includes students who were enrolled a full-year in either a traditional public school or a charter school.

Elementary Schools

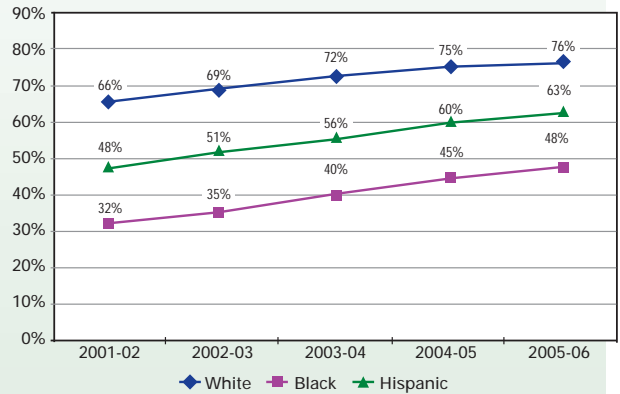
- As with reading, both charter and traditional public elementary schools have witnessed a similar closing of the achievement gap between white and African-American students in math over the last five years.
- From 2002 to 2006, the gap between white and African-American students decreased by 5 percentage point in charter and 6 percentage points in traditional public elementary schools (gap decreased from 31% to 26% in charter and from 34% to 28% percent in traditional public elementary schools).
- Traditional public elementary schools experienced a narrowing of the achievement gap between white and Hispanic students with the gap narrowing by 4 percentage points (18% to 14%), while in charter schools the gap actually slightly increased from 5% in 2001 to 7% in 2006. Though the gap increased in charter schools, the data demonstrated that unlike the white and African-American student populations, the Hispanic student population in charter elementary schools appears to be more proficient in math, on average, than the Hispanic student population at traditional elementary schools.

Middle Schools

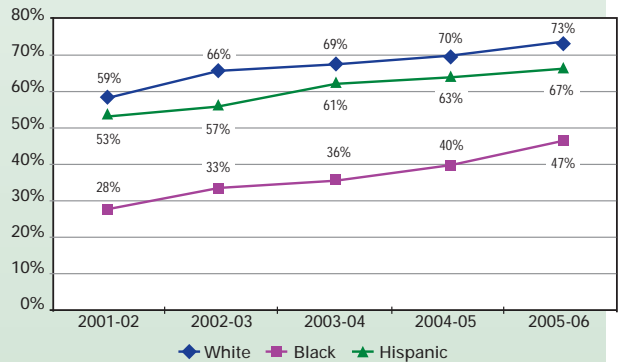
- The gap between white and African-American students in math decreased by a larger margin in charter middle schools (9 percentage points) than in traditional public middle schools (4 percentage points).
- From 2002 to 2006, the gap between white and African-American students decreased from 36% to 27% in charter middle schools and from 36% to 32% in traditional public middle schools.
- Both school types experienced a similar narrowing of the achievement gap between white and Hispanic students. Once again, the data demonstrated that unlike the white and African-American student populations, the Hispanic student population in charter middle schools appears to be more proficient in math, on average, than the Hispanic student population at traditional middle schools. The achievement gap between white and Hispanic students has narrowed to just 6 percentage points in 2006.



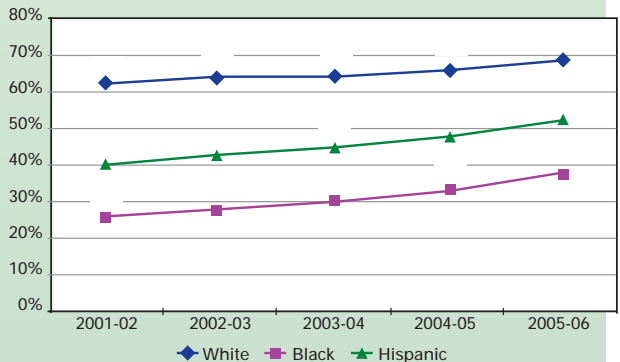
Traditional Public Elementary Schools FCAT Math Achievement Level 3 and Above Grades 3, 4, and 5 by Race/Ethnicity



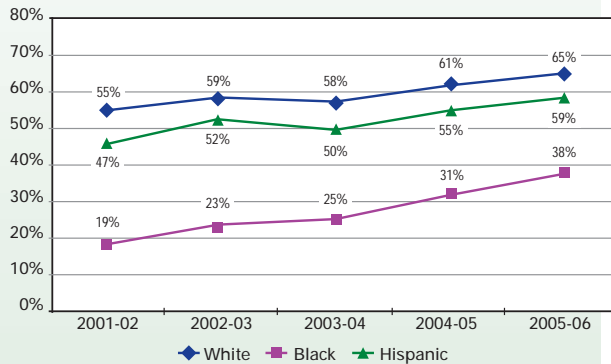
Charter Elementary Schools FCAT Math Achievement Level 3 and Above Grades 3, 4, and 5 by Race/Ethnicity



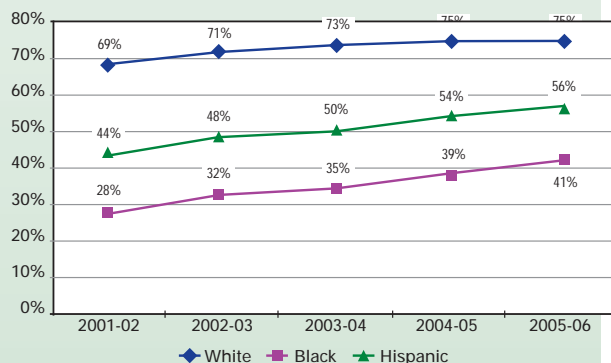
Traditional Public Middle Schools FCAT Math Achievement Level 3 and Above Grades 6, 7, and 8 by Race/Ethnicity



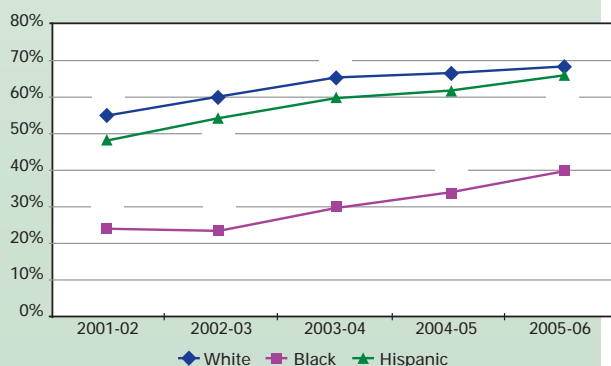
Charter Middle Schools FCAT Math Achievement Level 3 and Above Grades 6, 7, and 8 by Race/Ethnicity



Traditional Public High Schools FCAT Math Achievement Level 3 and Above Grades 9 and 10 by Race/Ethnicity



Charter High Schools FCAT Math Achievement Level 3 and Above Grades 9 and 10 by Race/Ethnicity



High Schools

- At the high school level, the achievement gap between white and African-American students in math decreased slightly over the last five years at charter high schools (1 percentage point) compared to a marked decrease found at traditional public high schools (7 percentage points).
- Both school types experienced a narrowing of the achievement gap between white and Hispanic students in math. The gap decreased by 4 percentage points (6% to 1%) in charter high schools and by 7 percentage points (26% to 19%) in traditional schools. As with elementary and middle charter schools, the data demonstrated that the Hispanic student population in charter high schools appears to be more proficient, on average, than the Hispanic student population at traditional high schools. In 2006, the achievement gap between white and Hispanic students in math at charter schools is nearly non-existent.



Summary Chart – Math Achievement Gap 2001 to 2006, Charter and Traditional Schools

	Charter Schools		Traditional Public Schools	
	Math Gap in 2006	Change from 2001 to 2006	Math Gap in 2006	Change from 2001 to 2006
White – African American Achievement Gap				
Elementary	26%	-5%	28%	-6%
Middle	27%	-9%	32%	-4%
High	29%	-1%	34%	-7%
White – Hispanic Achievement Gap				
Elementary	7%	+2%	14%	-4%
Middle	6%	-3%	18%	-3%
High	1%	-4%	19%	-7%

Student Learning Gains

The data on student proficiency above indicate that the gap between charter school performance and traditional school performance has decreased over time and, in some cases, has disappeared completely. Charter school students are now more closely mirroring the performance of students at traditional public schools in average student performance in a given year.

In contrast to a status model which investigates student performance at a single point of time, a learning gains analysis focuses on how much a student learns from one year to the next. This provides a more complete description of how well a student and a school has performed. For example, in a status model, a student scoring in Achievement Level 3 could count as a success for a school since he or she is on grade level. However, if

this student dropped from Achievement Level 5 the prior year, it might instead be considered an undesirable outcome. Similarly, a student scoring Achievement Level 1 and then Achievement level 2 is far different than one scoring Achievement Level 3 then Achievement level 2, though both have similar performance in the current year.

The FCAT Development Scale Score (DSS) is a vertical, continuous scale that allows the measurement of a student's growth from one grade level to the next. By examining the average change in DSS in both reading and math, from grade to grade, for charter school students and traditional public school students, one can gain insight on how well each school type is performing in furthering the academic progress of their students. As with the proficiency analysis, only students who were enrolled in a charter school or a traditional school for a full-year are included in this analysis. In addition, only students who progressed from one grade to the next are included. This is done because the DSS scale is a vertical scale, meant to measure prog-

ress from one grade to the next. Each grade level has a distinct DSS range. Therefore a student gain from third grade to fourth grade could not be compared to a student gain from third grade to third grade (i.e., a retained third grader retaking the third grade exam).

The table below shows the average DSS change in reading, by grade level, for charter school students and traditional public school students from 2001-02 to 2005-06. Cells are in bold if traditional public school students experienced a larger average gain (a minimum of 5 points) than charter school students; cells are italicized if charter school students experienced a larger average gain (a minimum of 5 points) than traditional public school students. The table demonstrates that a consistent pattern does not emerge. In some cases – most notably the earlier grades – traditional public school students tend to experience larger average learning gains than charter school students. However, in the middle grades, charter school students are more likely to show larger learning gains in reading than their traditional public school counterparts. In addition, there are a number of cases where there is little to no difference found in the average learning gains made between charter school students and traditional public school students.

Reading Learning Gains – Average Change in the FCAT Development Scale Score (DSS) by Grade Level, 2001-02 to 2005-06

	School Type	Grade 3 to 4	Grade 4 to 5	Grade 5 to 6	Grade 6 to 7	Grade 7 to 8	Grade 8 to 9	Grade 9 to 10
2001-02	Traditional	227	<i>53</i>	<i>117</i>	<i>83</i>	<i>136</i>	<i>-9</i>	<i>105</i>
	Charter	201	<i>64</i>	<i>113</i>	<i>81</i>	<i>135</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>120</i>
2002-03	Traditional	236	<i>70</i>	<i>118</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>148</i>	<i>3</i>	111
	Charter	220	<i>75</i>	<i>126</i>	<i>107</i>	<i>152</i>	<i>16</i>	98
2003-04	Traditional	218	58	<i>98</i>	90	<i>108</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>76</i>
	Charter	196	44	<i>103</i>	85	<i>108</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>77</i>
2004-05	Traditional	214	52	<i>85</i>	<i>77</i>	<i>107</i>	50	<i>54</i>
	Charter	200	43	<i>86</i>	<i>82</i>	<i>106</i>	43	<i>50</i>
2005-06	Traditional	172	44	<i>105</i>	<i>125</i>	<i>115</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>28</i>
	Charter	161	39	<i>123</i>	<i>140</i>	<i>116</i>	<i>78</i>	<i>32</i>

The same inconsistent type of pattern holds for math, where traditional public school students tend to out-gain their charter school counterparts in the earlier grades. In many cases, though, once again little to no difference is found in the average learning gains of charter school students and traditional public school students.

Math Learning Gains – Average Change in the FCAT Development Scale Score (DSS) by Grade Level, 2001-02 to 2005-06

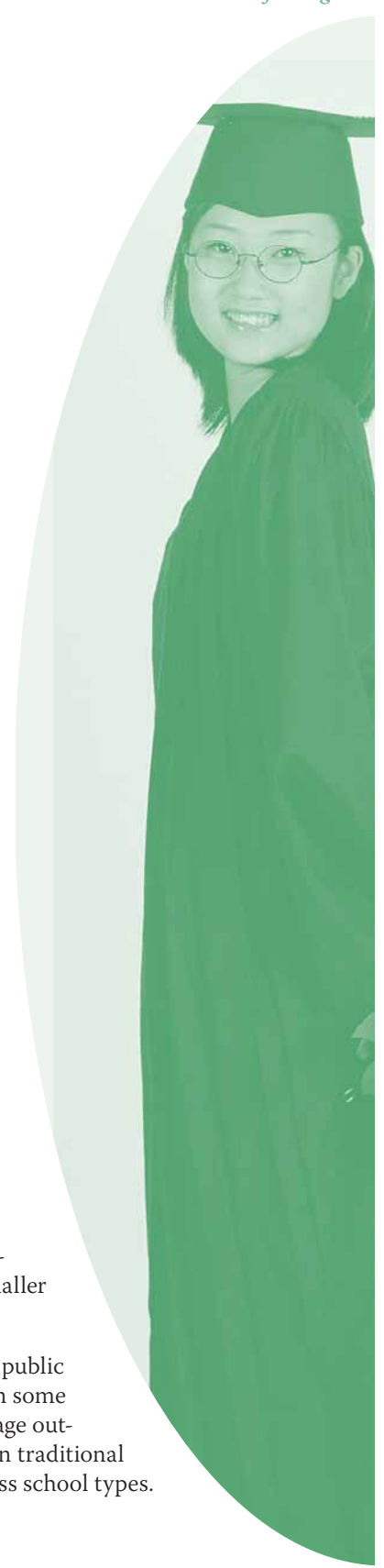
	School Type	Grade 3 to 4	Grade 4 to 5	Grade 5 to 6	Grade 6 to 7	Grade 7 to 8	Grade 8 to 9	Grade 9 to 10
2001-02	Traditional	167	206	48	140	105	32	65
	Charter	154	171	38	139	108	26	63
2002-03	Traditional	135	178	48	121	115	57	69
	Charter	132	164	46	128	116	53	60
2003-04	Traditional	131	168	34	117	108	54	59
	Charter	119	152	25	113	107	52	62
2004-05	Traditional	132	145	41	137	102	62	49
	Charter	114	128	38	142	103	57	49
2005-06	Traditional	127	140	47	134	90	56	47
	Charter	128	132	53	138	90	57	47

Key Achievement Findings

Over the last five years, charter school student performance has come to more closely resemble traditional public school performance. Whereas past performance indicated that, on average, student performance in charter schools in a given year has lagged behind student performance in a traditional public school, current performance indicates that is no longer the case in every situation. In fact, among elementary school and middle school students in the tested grades, a greater percentage of charter school students are now proficient in reading compared to their traditional public school counterparts. Growth in the number of students served at charter schools and a more diverse student population – mirroring that found at traditional schools – are likely reasons why this convergence is occurring.

In terms of the performance of minority students, both traditional and charter schools – across school levels – have seen on average similar decreases in the gap between white and African-American students and white and Hispanic students as it relates to performance on FCAT reading and math. The Hispanic student population at charter schools appears, on average, to be more proficient in reading and math than the Hispanic student population at traditional public schools. Though both traditional and charter schools have seen similar decreases, on the whole, in the magnitude of the achievement gap over time, the actual gap between white and African-American students and white and Hispanic students at charter schools is smaller across all school types in charter schools compared to traditional schools.

The learning gains witnessed among charter school students and traditional public school students provide no consistent pattern nor trend over time. Rather, in some cases – most notably the earlier grades – traditional public students on average out-gain charter school students. In other cases, charter school students out-gain traditional school students. And yet in other cases, the gains are indistinguishable across school types.





Grading Charter Schools

Like traditional public schools, charter schools are assigned a performance grade if they meet the eligibility criteria and are not an alternative school. Changes to the school grade calculations in 2002-03 resulted in an increased number of charter schools receiving performance grades. The percentage of charter schools receiving an “A” has increased from 42% in 2002-03 to 47% in 2005-06. Conversely, the percentage of “F” charter schools has decreased to 2% in 2005-06 from 16% in 2002-03.

**Charter Schools Grades
2002-03 – 2005-06**

YEAR	A	B	C	D	F
2002-03	42%	11%	18%	13%	16%
2003-04	38%	11%	24%	13%	14%
2004-05	36%	15%	22%	14%	12%
2005-06	47%	18%	20%	6%	2%

Successful Charter Schools

From schools specializing in the performing arts to those focusing on technical training, Florida's charter schools cover the spectrum of educational needs. One of the promises of charter schools is that they can serve as laboratories of innovation. Because they have greater autonomy than traditional public schools, and since they tend to attract pioneering educators, charter schools can try out new approaches to education. If proved effective, these approaches can be shared with other charter schools and transplanted back into the larger public education system.

It is in this spirit that some of Florida's successful charter schools are spotlighted. These schools have demonstrated success over time in boosting student achievement, implementing innovative instructional programs, and involving parents and the community in the educational process. These schools are among the best charter schools in the state and each has much to share with other schools.

Charter schools spotlighted in this publication were required to meet a majority of the following criteria:

- Fulfill Florida's statutory purposes for charter schools
- Serve the full grade set of students specified in its charter (in any configuration: K-8, K-6, 6-8, etc.)
- Serve over 50% minority students and/or free and reduced-price lunch students
- Meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the past two years
- Achieve high academic performance and/or significant growth

from year to year, with math and reading scores demonstrating over 50% meeting proficiency

- Show evidence of closing the achievement gap
- Maintain high performance as indicated by exemplary school grades or demonstrate impressive grade changes—for example, "D" to "C" to "A"
- Serve challenging student populations, for example, high minority, free and reduced-price lunch, limited English speaking, migrant, at-risk of dropping out
- Be the recipient of special recognition and honors.

Schools that met most of the criteria were reviewed further by Florida Department of Education staff and the charter school state conference planning committee. The committee was given the option of nominating additional schools for further review and consideration. Onsite visits were conducted to recommended schools to observe and verify some of the qualitative factors such as teaching strategies and administrative practices. With more than 350 charter schools operating throughout Florida, many more charter schools could have been identified and visited if resources had been available.

The charter school movement introduced educational freedom to Florida's public school system by providing flexibility and true educational choice for parents and students. As Florida's charter schools move beyond the first decade of progress, they deserve recognition and praise for their commitment to academic excellence for all students. Florida's challenge is to ensure that charter schools continue to thrive by holding true to the vision that drove the original 1996 legislation—give them room to be innovative, hold them accountable for results, and let parents decide if they meet the needs of their children.

In Their Own Words – Stories From Successful Schools

Alachua Learning Center

Alachua, Florida

The Alachua Learning Center opened in 1999 and seeks to create a community and family-centered learning environment with a low student-staff ratio utilizing performance-based, incremental learning curriculum for elementary and middle school students. The goal is to provide a stimulating and challenging atmosphere that motivates students to achieve their best so they may be fortified with good work habits and the necessary knowledge, skills, and cultural exposure to take them wherever they may aspire in a global economy favoring those who are educationally prepared.

The school's mission is for students to achieve excellence in practical life skills, receive a value-based education that enhances character development, and gain exposure to cultural contributions from around the world. In 2006-2007, the school is expanding its curriculum to include a variety of art, craft, and skill activities.

The school consistently scores well in reading, math, and science on the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test. Alachua Learning Center was honored as one of the top combination schools for outstanding academic achievement by the Department of Education. It has received a performance grade of "A" for the last four years. In addition, its cafeteria was chosen as one of ten top elementary school cafeterias in America by *Nick Jr. Family Magazine*.



Beulah Academy of Science

Pensacola, Florida

Beulah Academy of Science was founded in 1998 by a group of educators, community leaders, and parents who wanted a smaller, community-based middle school for the children of the area. Beulah Academy provides a safe and caring environment that encourages excellence in academic achievement and character development.

Students have the opportunity to participate in an extensive course study in agriscience. Interdisciplinary core curriculum is delivered through team teaching within a flexible grouping/non-graded organization of the students.

The educational experience of the students is enhanced by helping them develop applied life skills including coping skills, organizational skills, and interpersonal relationship skills. The focus is on the individual student. Agriscience, technology, and environmental sciences are included in the core curriculum.

Communication is very important. Beulah Academy believes that a strong relationship between students, parents, and teachers facilitates academic growth. The school received a performance grade of "A" in 2005-2006.



Crossroad Academy Charter School of Business

Quincy, Florida

Crossroad Academy Charter School of Business (CACSB) was the vision of the Executive Director of the Community and Economic Development Organization of Gadsden County, Inc. (CEDO). The Executive Director, as founder, has kept the school grounded in its mission to provide the highest possible professional level of educational services.

Crossroad Academy has always recognized the importance of enrolling students at a young age; thereby, helping to better prepare the students. The 2006 school year was the sixth year Crossroad operated with PK-8 and the eighth year as a charter school.

An intensive after school program prepares students for the FCAT. Raising the standards for participation in extra curricular activities (cheerleading, modeling, etc.) promotes academic growth and character development. What works best for Crossroad is its small setting and family-like atmosphere.

In 2006, Crossroad Academy was among the combination schools recognized for highest school grades and for making the most progress in school grades. The school received a performance grade of "A" in 2005-2006, the highest school grade in Gadsden County.

Dayspring Academy

Port Richey, Florida

Dayspring Academy began as an idea of a group of community members who wanted to create a back to basics, arts-centered charter school. Dayspring opened its doors in August 2000, utilizing a variety of unique learning methods to enable students to reach their fullest potential. In 2001, Dayspring expanded its enrollment to include elementary and middle-school grade levels.

Its mission is to create an atmosphere of learning which focuses on the basics of education to improve academic performance, self-esteem, and social responsibility of students and to nurture creativity by using and emphasizing the arts. Children are trained to appreciate the world around them and are taught a lifestyle of learning, experimenting, solving problems, thinking independently, and making their own decisions. Parents volunteer a minimum of 20 hours per academic year to assist students and the school.

From 2003 through the present, Dayspring Academy has been a top performing school. In 2005-2006, it was listed among the state's "Top High-Performing Combination Schools" for outstanding academic achievement. In addition, Dayspring Academy has received a school performance grade of "A" since 2003.



Explorer Elementary and Middle Charter School

Melbourne, Florida

Explorer Elementary and Middle Charter School opened in 1998. The school's mission is to improve student learning by offering a focused, high-quality education in a safe and caring environment with small class sizes. Explorer encourages innovative learning methods, individualized attention, and strong parental involvement. This allows students, teachers, and parents to work together to ensure every child has the opportunity to achieve his or her academic potential.

Explorer Elementary and Middle Charter School provides a developmentally appropriate curriculum for all types of learners in small, structured classes. Their philosophy is built on a back-to-basics education in which all children can realize success.

Explorer has received a performance grade of "A" for the last four years.



Mater Academy East Charter School

Miami, Florida

Mater Academy East Charter School is located in the heart of the Little Havana area of Miami-Dade County. The school opened its doors to students in August 1999. The school began with three classrooms and 75 students in kindergarten through the second grade. Currently, the school serves 400 students in kindergarten through ninth grade. The school's population is made up of students who are primarily from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Mater Academy East offers small class sizes, teacher assistants, and paraprofessionals in most classrooms, low teacher-to-pupil ratio, and a strong parental and community involvement program, all of which contribute to the school's overall success. Mater has a strong parental program whereby parents are required, as a condition of enrollment, to volunteer and/or contribute to the school as a positive stakeholder in educational accountability and school improvement.

Mater Academy East is recognized as one of the highest performing schools in Miami-Dade County, earning a letter grade of "A" during the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 school years as well as making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) every year. Additionally, Mater Academy East was named one of Florida's top 50 schools in the state because of the students' performance on the 2006 FCAT.

Pembroke Pines Charter Middle School

Pembroke Pines, Florida

Pembroke Pines Charter Middle School opened in 1999 and prepares students to attain their highest potential and to achieve academic excellence. The school is committed to providing a curriculum that addresses students' diverse learning styles and integrates technologies that enhance student learning. A rigorous instructional program has been implemented that is based on a culture of achievement with opportunities for students to achieve at their highest potential.

In order to meet students' needs, special emphasis has been given to reading, mathematics, science, social studies, writing, technology, and character education through an interdisciplinary curriculum. The overall mission states that students will achieve high academic standards, develop strong leadership skills, and become responsible, productive citizens.

Pembroke Pines Middle School offers a balanced, comprehensive, and success-oriented curriculum. Interdisciplinary curriculum development is stressed, with an emphasis on the natural relationship among academic subjects. Cohesive learning experiences are presented to students through integrative themes, topics and units. The school has received a performance grade of "A" for the last six years.



McKeel Elementary Academy

Lakeland, Florida

McKeel Elementary Academy, a charter school located in Lakeland, Florida, serves 360 students in kindergarten through fifth grade. The school opened August 2003, in response to parent and community requests for a more comprehensive feeder program for McKeel Academy of Technology, a highly successful sixth through twelfth grade school.

McKeel Elementary Academy recognizes each child's individual needs and abilities. The school is dedicated to providing a nurturing, safe environment in which students achieve academic success and receive a strong foundation to prepare them to confidently succeed in the future.

The school provides a challenging curriculum emphasizing the foundations of reading, writing, and mathematics. The school has achieved a school grade of "A" for the first three years of operation. There is a schoolwide focus on technology, with a SMART Board interactive white board in each classroom as well as computers for student use.

A supportive PTO provides volunteers in the office and classrooms, assisting teachers with special activities like class parties and field trips. The school has received a performance grade of "A" since 2003-2004.



Production of this report was a coordinated research and data analysis effort between staff in the following Florida Department of Education offices:

Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice
Evaluation and Reporting Section, Accountability, Research and Measurement
K-20 Education Data Warehouse, Accountability, Research and Measurement
Graphics and Design

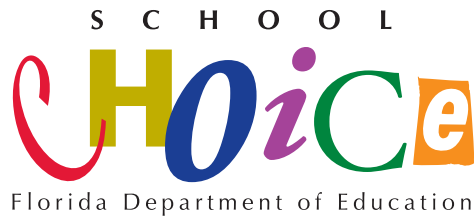
Appreciation is extended to the following for their assistance in identifying and gathering information about successful charter schools:

Florida Consortium of Charter Schools
2006 Charter School Conference Steering Committee

Additional information about charter schools and other school choice options is available at www.floridaschoolchoice.org.



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