

2012

State of Education

Charter Brief

A charter is a contract to improve student achievement

Introduction

As the non-profit membership and professional organization representing 540 charter schools currently serving 144,802 students, the Arizona Charter Schools Association is committed helping charter schools fulfill their statutory requirement to improve student achievement.

The Association's mission is to support student achievement through high-quality charter schools, advocate for student equity and charter school autonomy, and lead Arizona charter schools as a sustainable, strong credible organization.

The Association created the Arizona Center for Student Achievement to provide technical assistance and support to help public schools achieve strong performance with comprehensive professional development, coaching and resources.

This paper is a high-level overview of student and school performance in the 2011-12 school year. The Association will continue its investigative look into Arizona's student achievement results to answer two questions:

1. Are Arizona charter schools fulfilling their statutory mandate to improve student achievement?
2. How has the Association's technical assistance helped charter schools improve?

The Association believes a transparent explanation of public school and student performance provides powerful insight and possible policy changes for K-12 education.

Technical Information

The A-F letter grades serve as the state's school accountability metric. The letter grade is a composite of various school-level indicators including: student performance on the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) assessments; student growth as measured by Student Growth Percentiles, student mobility adjustments; distribution of achievement at each school and district; longitudinal indicators; graduation and dropout rates (high school only); and results of assessments for English Language Learners (ELL).

Schools are graded using one of four A-F Accountability models —Traditional, Small, Alternative or K-2. Each model is intended to reflect an accurate measure of achievement and account for the differences in the school organization or student population attending these schools.

Information in the paper is based on the 2011-12 A-F results, published by the Arizona Department of Education on August 15, 2012¹. The Department issued letter grades for 1,968 schools², with 1,841 receiving a letter grade and 127 receiving a "Not Rated" (due to having fewer than three years of data) or "Pending" indicator³. Of these 1,841 schools, 474, or 26 percent, are charter schools. Although most schools, whether district or charter, are measured using the traditional accountability model, charter schools are disproportionately represented in the Alternative and Small School accountability models.

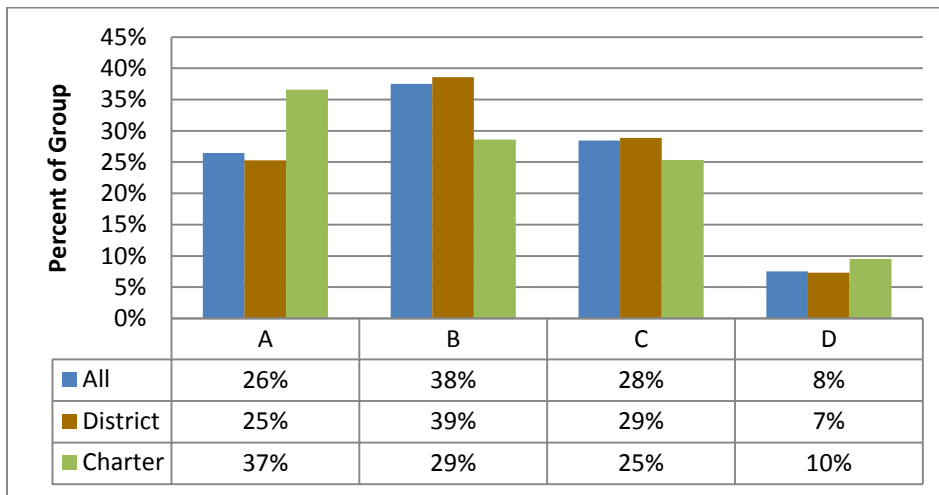
¹ Changes made to the data after August 15, 2012 are not reflected in this paper.

² A-F Letter Grades downloaded from <http://www.azed.gov/research-evaluation/a-f-accountability/> on August 15, 2012.

³ Forty-seven charter schools did not receive a letter grade.

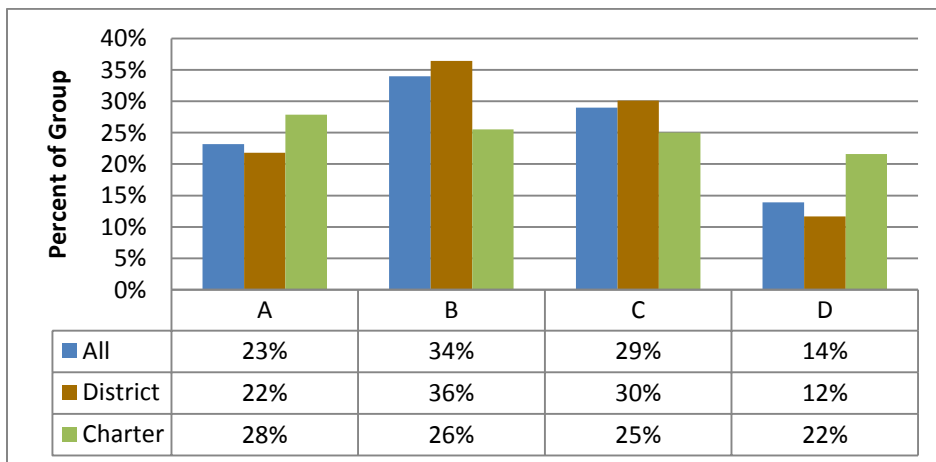
Students Comparison: Students Enrolled in Schools by Letter Grade

The first analysis looks at student enrollment in public schools, as the Association believes that it is absolutely paramount to student success to have a quality school or an “A” or “B” rated school. Twenty-six percent of all students in the state are enrolled in an “A” school in 2012. When the data are split by type of school, we see that 37 percent of charter school students are enrolled in an “A” school and only 25 percent of district students. When looking at the students enrolled in “D” schools, the percentages are much smaller than the school-level analysis listed next because only 10 percent of charter school students are in a “D” school compared to 7 percent of district students.



School Comparison: Traditional, Small and K-2 Letter Grades

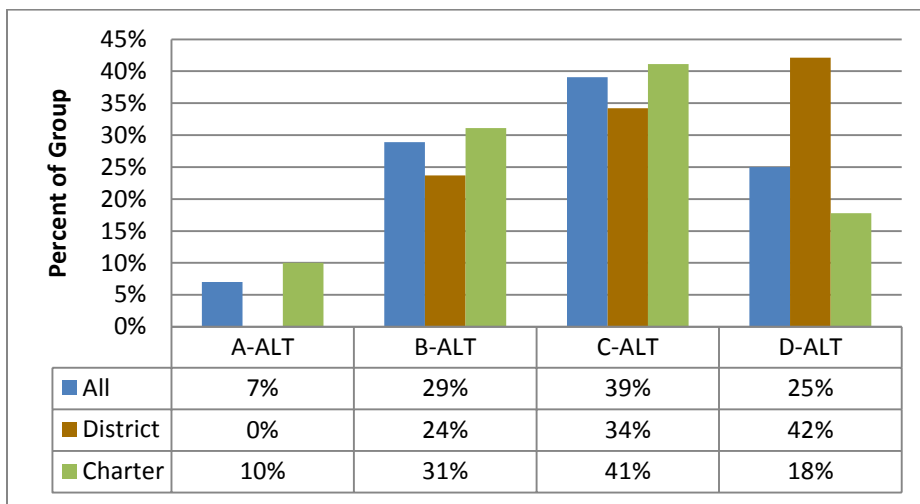
Here, we see that 23 percent of all schools in the state received an “A” grade. This, however, looks a bit different when we split the data by district and charter—22 percent of district schools and 28 percent of charter schools received an “A” grade. While this is a positive indicator for charter schools, we see that the “D” letter grade is also overrepresented by charters—12 percent of district schools and 22 percent of charter schools received the “D” letter grade. However, looking at these two charts together, we see that the 22 percent of “D” charter schools account for only 10 percent of charter school enrollment, indicating that these schools tend to be smaller than other charter schools—a finding with implications for future research.



School Comparison: Alternative School Letter Grades

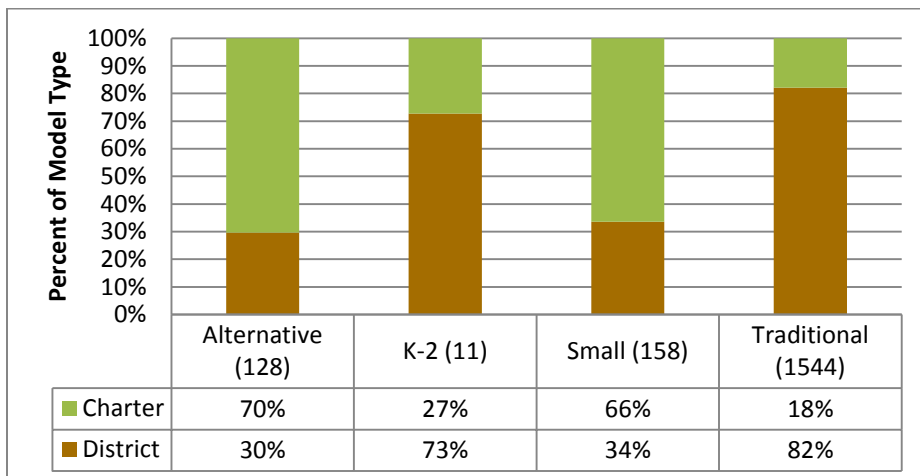
Alternative schools are designed to serve students with behavioral issues, former dropouts, adjudicated youth, pregnant or parenting students, and students in poor academic standing who are severely behind on academic credits or have demonstrated a pattern of failing grades, according to Arizona statute and regulation.

The data show charter schools consistently outperform their district counterparts. None of the district alternative schools received an “A-Alt” letter grade, while 10 percent of charter alternative schools received the top grade. At the other end of the scale, 42 percent of district alternative schools and 18 percent of charter alternative schools received a “D-Alt” grade.



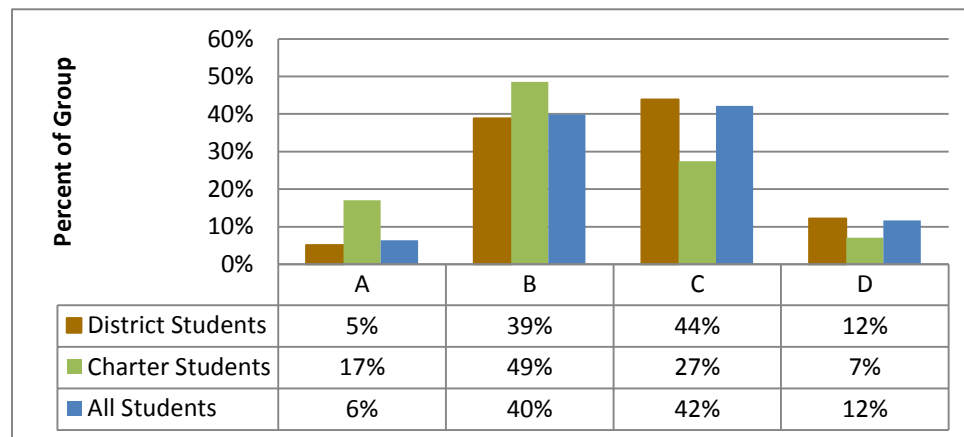
Charter School: Charter Schools in each Model

From this, we see that although charters make up 26 percent of all schools with a letter grade, they are only 18 percent of traditional schools. On the other hand, charters make up 70 percent of alternative schools, and 66 percent of schools measured using the Small School accountability model.



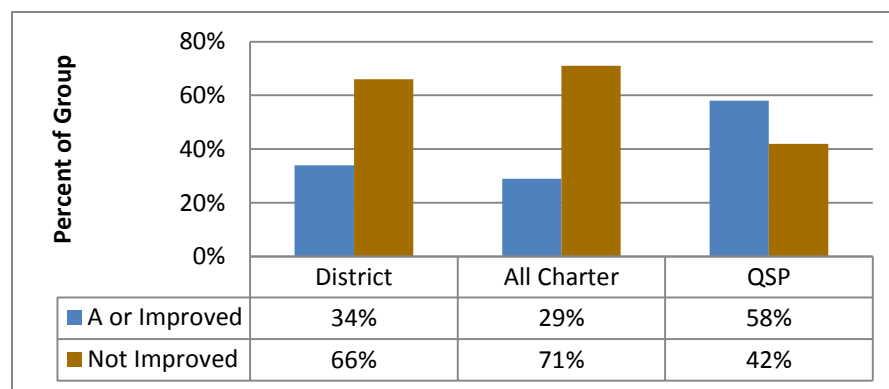
High Poverty Phoenix Students: A Focus on Arizona's Largest City

Over 105,000 students attend public charter and district schools in the Phoenix Union High School District boundaries⁴, and the majority attends schools where at least 70 percent of students qualify for free and reduced lunch. The data show that only 6 percent of the high poverty schools received an "A" label. Charter schools serving high poverty students are doing a better job than district schools as 66 percent of their students attend an "A" or "B" school, as compared to 44 percent in district schools. The data show the need for additional quality charter schools designed to serve low income students in the nation's sixth largest city.



Improving Student Achievement: Association Support

The Arizona Center for Student Achievement offers a menu of services to improve academic success. The Quality Schools Program is the largest program in the Arizona Center for Student Achievement. The program is designed to provide schools with a three-year program of support including intensive on-site training, guided practice and coaching. For charter schools participating in the Quality Schools Program in 2011-12, 58 percent improved their A-F letter grade or maintained an "A" Letter Grade from the 2010-11 school year to the 2011-12, while 100 percent of schools that implemented the Quality Schools Performance program with fidelity⁵ improved their A-F Letter Grade or increased the number of total points.



⁴ Schools not included in the data: alternative schools, schools with pending labels, schools not rated.

⁵ Fidelity means that the school's instructional leader and teachers attended the majority of trainings; administered at least three benchmark assessments in the school year; and followed through with all program components.

Arizona Charter Schools Association

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