

# A LOOK AT TENNESSEE'S CHARTER SCHOOLS



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STATE OF TENNESSEE

**COMPTROLLER OF THE TREASURY**

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March 31, 2006

The Honorable John S. Wilder  
Speaker of the Senate  
The Honorable Jimmy Naifeh  
Speaker of the House of Representatives  
and  
Members of the General Assembly  
State Capitol  
Nashville, Tennessee 37243

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Transmitted herewith is a review of state and national charter school research as directed by Public Chapter 414 of 2005. The report discusses the characteristics of Tennessee's charter schools, national research on charter school performance, and successful practices and policy for charter schools. The report contains recommendations for charter school policy and future research that we hope will prove useful for policy makers in strengthening the state's educational system.

Sincerely,

John G. Morgan  
Comptroller of the Treasury

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The charter school movement in Tennessee has grown gradually since 2002. Tennessee authorized charter schools with the *Tennessee Public Charter Schools Act of 2002* (Public Chapter 850). The 104<sup>th</sup> General Assembly amended the charter school legislation to require the Office of Education Accountability in the Office of the Comptroller to complete two charter school studies.<sup>1</sup>

This report addresses the first of these legislative requests, including a review of the following topics:

- Current state of Tennessee’s charter schools;
- National and state research on charter school performance;
- Successful practices and policy for charter schools; and
- Recommendations for charter school policy and future research.

A review of the state’s charter schools includes a discussion of the schools’ governance structures, student demographics, teacher characteristics, instructional methods, and culture. (See “Overview of Tennessee’s Charter Schools,” pages 5 to 16, for further discussion.)

## ***Overview of Charter School Performance***

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**Charter schools may out-perform, under-perform, or perform similarly to traditional public schools.** Despite the lack of consistent outcomes, several researchers have identified some recurring themes, including: the longer charter schools operate, the better students perform; and achievement differences between types of *students* often outweigh achievement differences between types of *schools*. However, the most apparent – and ironic – consistency is that charter school performance varies greatly. (See pages 18-24.)

**Diverse charter school characteristics and contextual factors contribute to the variance in charter school performance outcomes.** The charter school sector is consistently evolving; charter schools have different missions and educational programs serving various student populations; and charter schools exist within different political environments. (See page 24.)

**Differences in charter school research contribute to variation in performance outcomes.** Research studies have used various approaches to compare charter to traditional public school performance; some research studies measure performance using point-in-time achievement scores versus achievement scores over time; researchers use different indicators to measure student achievement; and the vast majority of research cannot make a causal link between charter school attendance and students’ academic outcomes. (See pages 24-25.)

**Charter school research varies greatly in its quality.** Therefore, it is increasingly important for research consumers to understand how to discern low quality studies from high quality studies with limitations. Research should recognize the complexity and nuances of making comparisons between charter and traditional public school performance. Research should also be honest about the utility of its findings, the scope of its implications, as well as its limitations. (See pages 17 to 26 for further discussion of charter school research.) (See pages 25-26.)

## ***Implications of the Research: What is Working for Charter Schools?***

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**In “successful” charter schools, their mission drives their practices; however, the nature of these practices is not always similar.** Despite the differences in practice, some common themes emerge, including: teacher commitment, data-driven instructional practices, professional

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<sup>1</sup> *Tennessee Code Annotated* 49-13-128.

culture, strategic use of time, and community involvement. Ironically, these promising practices reflect practices in all high-performing public schools – charter or non-charter. (See page 27.)

**Charter school policies can impact the likelihood of school success.** Researchers emphasize the need for quality authorization processes and governance structures, stable funding and facilities, as well as adequate time for planning and implementation. (See pages 28-29.)

### ***Recommendations for Policy and Research*** (See pages 31-32.)

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#### **Improve the process of charter school authorization, planning, and oversight.**

The Department of Education and local education agencies should continue working to improve this process by providing charter schools adequate time and resources for planning and implementation; encouraging collaboration between charter schools and their authorizers; enhancing the expertise, resources, and time for authorizers to fulfill their responsibilities; and improving the oversight and quality of charter schools' financial management practices.

#### **Share information about successful charter school practices.**

The Department of Education, local education agencies, and the Tennessee Charter School Resource Center might collaborate to disseminate information about successful charter school and authorizer practices. Strategies might include an online clearinghouse of promising practices, statewide conferences, or other tools for enhancing communication among charter school stakeholders.

#### **Make well-informed policy decisions.**

The General Assembly, the Department of Education, local education agencies, and other policymakers should remember that research does not yet speak to whether or not charter school attendance *causes* student achievement outcomes. These decision-makers should also consider whether achievement outcomes are influenced by policy more than by school type.

#### **Improve data collection on charter students and achievement.**

The Department of Education should continue using achievement data to track performance of individual students both *before* and *after* their entry into charter schools. The department should also, with help from charter schools, collect and analyze more comprehensive measures of charter school performance.

#### **Ask better research questions.**

Instead of asking *are* charter schools performing better or worse than traditional public schools, policymakers should ask:

- *Why* are some charter schools succeeding while others are not?
- *How* does Tennessee's charter school policy impact the success of the state's charter schools?
- *What* is innovative about charter schools, such as governance, school organization, curriculum and instruction?
- *How* are charter schools impacting education in the traditional public school sector?

**"The truth is that Americans are just now starting to ask tough questions about the effectiveness of particular schools, and to keep and analyze the kinds of hard data needed. The opportunistic and relatively crude studies done to date are actually reasonably good for the early stages of scientific inquiry, but they are not sound bases for policy."**

*-Hopes, Fears, & Reality  
(Lake & Hill, 2005, p. 29)*

See Appendix D for the official response to the report from the Commissioner of Education.

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# INTRODUCTION

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Charter schools are publicly-funded schools that operate independently from the traditional public school system. Guided by the two philosophies of autonomy and accountability, these public schools have greater freedom to develop their own mission and values, educational programs, governance models, and organizational structures in return for heightened systems of accountability. Systems of accountability, such as state assessments and charter agreements, monitor the adequacy of charter school performance.

**“Charter schools are creatures of state policy and therefore differ from one state to another and are as diverse as the states and legislation that permit them.”**  
-*Hopes, Fears, & Reality* (Lake & Hill, 2005, p. 2.)

Since Minnesota enacted the first charter school legislation in 1991, charter schools have multiplied substantially, but still enroll only a small portion of public school students across the U.S. As of the beginning of the 2005-06 school year, more than 3,600 charter schools were serving over one million students in 40 states and the District of Columbia.<sup>1</sup> Charter schools serve approximately two percent of the K-12 student population and constitute four percent of all public schools in the U.S.<sup>2</sup>

This report provides an overview of the charter school movement in Tennessee – its progress over the past several years, the current state of charter schools, and implications for the future of charter policy, practice, and research.

## ***Tennessee’s Charter School Legislation***

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The *Tennessee Public Charter Schools Act of 2002* (Public Chapter 850), the state’s initial charter school legislation, allowed for the creation of charter schools to serve students from schools failing to make adequate yearly progress. It established local boards of education as the sole chartering authorities and allocated 100 percent of local per pupil expenditures to charter schools. In 2005, the General Assembly enacted Public Chapter 414 which expanded the eligible student population for charter school attendance. The eligible charter school population now includes students from failing schools *and* students who, in the previous school year, failed to test proficient in reading or mathematics on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) or Gateway examinations.

The *Tennessee Public Charter Schools Act* allows nonprofit sponsors to establish charter schools that “operate within a school district structure but are allowed maximum flexibility to achieve their goals.”<sup>3</sup> The purpose and intent of this legislation is to:

- Improve learning for all students and close the achievement gap;
- Afford parents options to meet needs of students in high priority schools, as well as meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children;
- Encourage innovative teaching techniques and greater decision-making control to schools and teachers coupled with greater accountability for student achievement;
- Create new professional opportunities for teachers;
- Provide the state department of education and local school systems with options for the governance and improvement of schools failing to meet adequate yearly progress, and the delivery of instruction for students with special needs;
- Provide local school systems the option to work with the state’s public higher education institutions to establish “laboratories of teaching and learning” to foster educational innovations for implementation statewide.

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<sup>1</sup> The Center for Education Reform, “National Charter School Data At-A-Glance,” October 2005.

<sup>2</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, Tables 38 and 85, “Chapter 2. Elementary and Secondary Education,” *Digest of Education Statistics, 2004*, at [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d04/ch\\_2.asp#1](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d04/ch_2.asp#1).

<sup>3</sup> *Tennessee Code Annotated* 49-13-102.

**Exhibit 1: Tennessee Public Charter Schools Act, T.C.A., Title 49, Chapter 13**

<b>APPROVAL PROCESS</b>	
<i>Number of Schools Allowed</i>	50 statewide, including 20 in Memphis and 4 in Shelby County (T.C.A. 49-13-106)
<i>Number of Charter Sites Operating</i>	12 charter schools operating during the 2005-06 school year
<i>Chartering Authority</i>	Local Board of Education (T.C.A. 49-13-104)
<i>Eligible Applicants</i>	A not-for-profit organization. (T.C.A. 49-13-106) Charter school may <i>not</i> be sponsored by a for-profit entity, a private school, or a religious or church school. (T.C.A. 49-13-104)
<i>Types of Charter Schools</i>	Newly created charter schools and conversion of an eligible public school to charter status. Private, parochial, or home-based schools cannot convert to charter status. No cyber-based charter schools. (T.C.A. 49-13-106)
<i>Appeals Process</i>	Denial of an application for a newly approved charter school may be appealed by the sponsor to the State Board of Education. The decision of the State Board is final, but the LEA remains the chartering authority. (T.C.A. 49-13-108)
<i>Term of Initial Charter</i>	5 years; must submit a renewal application to the local board of education. (T.C.A. 49-13-121)
<i>Sunset of Law</i>	July 1, 2008
<b>ACCOUNTABILITY</b>	
<i>Academic Accountability</i>	Must administer state assessments and meet the same performance standards and requirements adopted by the State Board of Education for public schools. (T.C.A. 49-13-111)
<i>Annual Reports<sup>4</sup></i>	Charter school governing body must make an annual progress report to the sponsor, chartering authority, and commissioner of education. Reports must contain the following information: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The progress towards achieving goals outlined in the charter</li> <li>2) Information required in reports prepared by local boards of education pursuant to state laws, rules, and regulations</li> <li>3) Financial records, including revenues and expenditures</li> </ol> (T.C.A. 49-13-120)
<i>Renewal and Revocation</i>	Prior to receiving a five year renewal of the charter, the governing body must conduct a comprehensive review of progress toward achieving the objectives, pupil performance standards, and content standards of the approved charter agreement and disclose the costs of administration, instruction, and other spending categories. (T.C.A. 49-13-121)  A charter may be revoked or denied renewal if the school: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Violated conditions, standards, or procedures of the charter</li> <li>2) Failed to make adequate yearly progress</li> <li>3) Failed to meet standards of fiscal management</li> </ol> Decision to revoke a charter agreement can be appealed. (T.C.A. 49-13-122)
<b>OPERATIONS</b>	
<i>Automatic Waiver From Most State and District Education Laws, Regulations, and Policies</i>	No; the charter school sponsor must apply to the LEA or the commissioner of education for a waiver of any state board rule or statute. (T.C.A. 49-13-105)
<i>Governance</i>	The charter school governing body will decide matters including budgeting, curriculum, and other operating procedures, and will oversee management and administration. (T.C.A. 49-13-104)

<sup>4</sup> According to Sandra Gray (Director, Charter Schools and Choice, Tennessee Department of Education), charter school annual reports have been properly submitted as of February 2006.

<i>Transportation for Students</i>	Optional. (T.C.A. 49-13-114)
<i>Facilities Assistance</i>	None outside of BEP general funds.
<b>FUNDING</b>	
<i>Amount</i>	100% of the state and local education funds (i.e., Basic Education Program) based on the per pupil expenditure of the LEA. Other sources may include federal grants, state and local funds, as well as private donations. (T.C.A. 49-13-112)
<i>Fiscal Autonomy</i>	Governing body may not levy taxes or issue bonds except in accordance with state law. A public charter school may: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Contract for services, except for management or operation of the charter school by a for-profit entity.</li> <li>2) Buy, sell or lease property.</li> <li>3) Borrow funds as needed.</li> </ol> (T.C.A. 49-13-124)
<i>Start-up Funds</i>	Competitive federal grant – “Federal Charter School Program Grants” (Title VB of <i>No Child Left Behind</i> )
<b>TEACHERS</b>	
<i>Collective Bargaining</i>	Bargaining units are permissible but can bargain only with the charter school governing board and not with the board of the LEA. (T.C.A. 49-13-118)
<i>Licensure</i>	Current, valid Tennessee teaching license required
<i>Leave of Absence From District</i>	Permissible, but at the discretion of the LEA. Years of service acquired at a charter school may be used to obtain tenure status, but this is at the discretion of the LEA. Years of service at a charter school are creditable for salary rating purposes. (T.C.A. 49-13-117)
<b>STUDENTS</b>	
<i>Eligible Students</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Students previously enrolled in a charter school</li> <li>2) Students assigned to a school failing to make adequate yearly progress, giving priority to at-risk students</li> <li>3) Students who, in the previous school year, failed to test proficient in reading or mathematics on the TCAP examinations</li> <li>4) Students who, in the previous school year failed to test proficient on the gateway examinations in reading or mathematics (T.C.A. 49-13-106)</li> </ol>
<i>Preference for Enrollment</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Students attending any public school that converts to a charter school</li> <li>2) Students attending public schools within the LEA in which the charter school is located</li> <li>3) Students not enrolled in public school but who reside within the LEA service area of the charter school</li> <li>4) Preference may be given to siblings of current charter school students or to children of a teacher, sponsor, or member of the governing body of the charter school. Such students cannot exceed 10% of the total enrollment or 25 students, whichever is less. (T.C.A. 49-13-113)</li> </ol>

## **Methodology**

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Information, conclusions, and recommendations in this report are based on:

- Interviews with officials from the following entities:
  - Department of Education,
  - Tennessee School Boards Association,
  - Tennessee Education Association, and
  - Tennessee Charter School Resource Center;
- A review of *Tennessee Public Charter Schools Act*;
- Attendance at the Department of Education’s Charter School Applicant Workshop;<sup>5</sup>
- A review of charter school applications for 12 charter schools in operation as of the 2005-06 school year;
- A review of national and state research on charter school performance; and
- Information provided directly from charter school principals.<sup>6</sup>

## **Objectives**

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The 104<sup>th</sup> General Assembly amended the *Tennessee Public Charter Schools Act of 2002* to require the Office of Education Accountability in the Office of the Comptroller to complete two charter school studies.<sup>7</sup> The legislative mandate calls on the Office of Education Accountability to review relevant state and national charter school research related to school and student achievement, with an emphasis on curriculum design and teaching methods, by February 2006. The office will complete a second study by February 2008 that will provide a comprehensive review of the state’s charter schools, including an evaluation of charter schools’ progress and recommendations for improvement.

This report addresses the first of these legislative requests, including a review of the following topics:

- Current state of Tennessee’s charter schools;
- National and state research on charter school performance;
- Successful practices and policy for charter schools; and
- Recommendations for charter school policy and future research.

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<sup>5</sup> The Charter School Applicant Workshop was held on September 15, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Principals provided information on student demographics, teacher demographics, and elements of “school snapshots” (Appendix I). Administrators from Circles of Success Learning Academy, City University School of Liberal Arts, KIPP Academy Nashville, Memphis Academy of Health Sciences, Memphis Academy of Science and Engineering, Memphis Business Academy, Promise Academy, Smithson-Craighead Academy, Southern Avenue Charter School of Academic Excellence and Creative Arts, STAR Academy, Stax Music Academy Charter School, and Yo! Academy provided information.

<sup>7</sup> *Tennessee Code Annotated* 49-13-128.

# OVERVIEW OF TENNESSEE'S CHARTER SCHOOLS

The Tennessee charter school sector has grown gradually since 2002. Tennessee currently has 12 charter schools, including five that opened in the fall of 2005. Prior to charter school legislation, the Tennessee Charter School Resource Center launched in 1999 as a nonpartisan, nonprofit, educational organization, focused on raising awareness and support for quality charter schools in the state. The organization currently provides assistance to prospective charter school starters, as well as ongoing technical assistance and professional development for existing charter schools in Tennessee. In 2002, the Department of Education created the position of Director of Charter Schools. In 2003, this position assumed responsibility of school choice and supplemental education services, in addition to charter schools. The current Charter Schools and Choice unit, within the Office of Federal Programs, is comprised of 2.75 full-time equivalent staff members; it administers the state's charter school legislation and provides technical assistance to the state's charter school stakeholders, in addition to its other responsibilities for school choice and supplemental education services. The following "Timeline of Charter School Development in Tennessee" provides an overview of the state's charter school growth to date.

**Exhibit 2: Timeline of Charter School Development in Tennessee**

<b>1999</b>	Founding of the Tennessee Charter School Resource Center
<b>2002</b>	<i>Tennessee Public Charter School Act of Tennessee (T.C.A. Title 49, Chapter 13)</i> Establish Director of Charter Schools position within the Department of Education
<b>2003</b>	<b>Nashville</b> – Smithson-Craighead Academy <b>Memphis</b> – Circles of Success Learning Academy Memphis Academy of Health Sciences Memphis Academy of Science & Engineering
<b>2004</b>	<b>Memphis</b> – City University School of Liberal Arts STAR Academy Yo! Academy
<b>2005</b>	<i>T.C.A. Title 49, Chapter 13 amended to open enrollment to low-performing students, in addition to students from low-performing schools</i> <b>Nashville</b> – KIPP Academy <b>Memphis</b> – Memphis Business Academy Promise Academy Southern Avenue Charter School of Academic Excellence & Creative Arts Stax Music Academy
<b>2006</b>	<b>Nashville</b> – Nashville Academy of Science & Engineering (to open) <b>Chattanooga</b> – Chattanooga Academy of Science & Engineering (to open)

Sources: Tennessee Department of Education, "Tennessee Charter Schools, 2005-2006." Sandra Gray, Director, Charter Schools and Choice, Tennessee Department of Education.

Nationally, there are approximately 3,600 charter schools; 424 new charter schools opened this school year.<sup>8</sup> Although 40 states and the District of Columbia have charter school laws, the distribution of charter schools varies.<sup>9</sup> Sixty-two percent of all charter schools are located within

<sup>8</sup> The Center for Education Reform, "National Charter School Data At-A-Glance," October 2005.

<sup>9</sup> States without charter school laws are Alabama, Kentucky, Maine, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, Washington, and West Virginia.

six states – Arizona, California, Florida, Michigan, Ohio, and Texas. These states enroll 63 percent of the charter school students nationwide.<sup>10</sup> The following section provides an overview of the Tennessee charter school sector as it compares to national charter school trends.

**Tennessee has relatively few charter schools.**<sup>11</sup>

**Tennessee has relatively few charter schools compared to other charter states.** Tennessee does have more charter schools than 16 states – ten states without charter school legislation and six with charter school legislation.<sup>12</sup> Tennessee is also one of 16 states with charter school legislation that places a cap on the number of schools that may operate statewide.<sup>13</sup>

Tennessee law permits no more than 50 charter schools statewide, and places caps on specific cities (20 in Memphis and four in Shelby County).

Tennessee has more charter schools than Iowa, the only other state to pass charter school legislation in 2002. Iowa has seven schools, with none approved to open in 2006-07. However, Tennessee also has fewer charter schools than Maryland, a state that passed charter school legislation in 2003 – one year later than Tennessee. Maryland has 15 schools, with three more approved to open in 2006-07. Tennessee has far fewer charter schools than Indiana, a state that passed charter school legislation in 2001. Indiana has 29 schools, with six more approved to open in 2006-07.

**Exhibit 3: Number of Schools Operating in States Passing Charter Legislation in Similar Years**

State	Year Law Passed	Total Operating	Approved to Open 2006-2007
Indiana	2001	29	6
Tennessee	2002	12	2
Iowa	2002	7	0
Maryland	2003	15	3

Sources: US Charter Schools, "State by State #'s," Accessed January 31, 2006 at <http://www.uscharterschools.org/cs/sp/query/g/1595?x-order=year+desc.state+desc> ; The Center for Education Reform, "National Charter School Data At-A-Glance," October 2005.

**The local board of education is the sole chartering authority in Tennessee.**

**In Tennessee, the local board of education is the sole chartering authority.** Nationally, local boards of education are the most common type of charter authorizer, but they authorize the fewest number of charter schools on average. As of 2001, local boards of education represented 91 percent of authorizers, state education agencies three percent, universities five percent, and others at one percent.<sup>14</sup>

As of the 2005-06 school year, Tennessee's local boards of education had reviewed 71 applications and approved 14 charter schools.

<sup>10</sup> Robin J. Lake & Paul T. Hill, *Hopes, Fears, Reality: A Balanced Look at American Charter Schools in 2005*, National Charter School Research Project, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix I for a description of each Tennessee charter school.

<sup>12</sup> The Center for Education Reform, "National Charter School Data At-A-Glance," October 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Todd Ziebarth, "Stunting Growth: The Impact of State-Imposed Caps on Charter Schools," National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, January 2006 (<http://www.publiccharters.org/issuebriefs/caps.pdf>).

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Under Secretary, *Evaluation of the Public Charter Schools Program: Final Report*, Washington, D.C., 2004.

**Exhibit 4: Tennessee Charter School Applications, as of January 30, 2006**

Year	# of Applications Submitted	# of Applications Approved
2002	14 <sup>15</sup>	4
2003	28	3
2004	26	7 <sup>16</sup>
2005	3	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>14</b>

Source: Sandra Gray, Director, Charter Schools and Choice, Tennessee Department of Education.

Tennessee’s local school boards evaluate each charter school application based on the quality of the 20 legislatively required application elements, which are organized into four categories: mission, education plan, founding group, and business/operations plan.<sup>17</sup> The elements that carry the most weight, according to the state’s *Charter School Application Review Guide* (See Appendix II), are

- Instructional goals and methods: alignment of instruction and goals with target population’s needs; the capability to provide comprehensive learning experiences; research-based curriculum and instructional approach
- Student evaluation and remediation plans and procedures: alignment of assessment with school’s mission; external and internal assessment methods on a daily basis; performance data used to continuously improve instruction
- Governing body and Sponsor: experience and qualifications in education, management, finance, and nonprofit governance
- Mission and goals: the extent to which the school will serve the community; commitment to high performance; means of measuring school’s progress
- Operating budget: sound fiscal planning and management; demonstration of sustainable support for the charter school plan; sufficient to attract qualified staff and advance the school’s mission and goals.<sup>18</sup>

Nationally, states are concerned with both the academic performance and financial health of charter schools. States commonly oversee charter school compliance with the requirements of No Child Left Behind as well as other academic goals set forth in charter contracts. In many states, multiple agencies monitor the financial health of charter schools, including state departments of education, state boards of education, charter authorizers, and state auditors. The vast majority of states rely on audits to monitor charter school finances.<sup>19</sup>

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## **Charter school funding can be unpredictable.**

**Charter schools receive per pupil funding as determined by the state’s Basic Education Program (BEP), but federal grant money is a less stable source of funding.** As discussed in Exhibit 1: *Tennessee Public Charter Schools Act* (pp. 2-3), charter schools receive funding from various sources including

the BEP (100 percent of state and local education funds on the per pupil expenditure of the LEA), federal grants, and other private donations.

<sup>15</sup> In 2002, 12 applications were considered. Two applications missed the deadline.

<sup>16</sup> Five opened in 2005. Deferred opening of two -- Academy of Science and Engineering Nashville and Academy of Science and Engineering Chattanooga -- to 2006.

<sup>17</sup> Tennessee Department of Education, “Scoring Criteria for Application Narrative.”

<sup>18</sup> Note: “Financial health and stability” (i.e., school assets, ability to raise funds, understanding of debt and means to repay it) is a criteria given much less weight on the charter application process.

<sup>19</sup> United States Government Accountability Office, *Charter schools: To Enhance Education’s Monitoring and Research, More Charter School-Level Data are Needed*, 2005.

Since the inception of charter school legislation in 2002, state law requires the allocation of BEP funds to charter schools; however, federal grant money is a less stable funding source. In 2002, the state department of education applied for and received \$7.5 million through the competitive Federal Public Charter School Program Grant.<sup>20</sup> At that time, all approved charter schools received funding for planning, start-up, and implementation activities through this three-year federal grant. Upon reapplication for the three-year grant in 2005, the state department of education did not receive funds. The federal department of education granted Tennessee a second-year, no-cost extension to use the remaining funds from the original grant (approximately \$3.1 million) up until September 2007. The state department of education reapplied for the federal grant in March 2006, seeking \$16 million for a predicted 12 more charter schools over the next three-year grant cycle. Charter schools operate with some unpredictable resources because of this funding instability.

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## Approved waivers determine the flexibility and authority of Tennessee's charter schools.

Waivers granted to charter schools differ from one state or one district to another. Legislation that permits the creation of charter schools and the decisions of the authorizing bodies determine the schools' actual flexibility and autonomy.<sup>21</sup>

**Tennessee does not waive rules and regulations automatically.** A charter school must request a waiver from the local board of education or the Commissioner. This requires providing a rationale for each request, an alternate plan, and the expected long term results of each waiver. The waivers requested in Tennessee aim to improve student achievement and teaching quality.<sup>22</sup>

**Tennessee charter schools seek waivers intended to improve student achievement.** Many Memphis charter schools have received waivers that allow them to:

- Lengthen the school year so that students have more time on campus and in the classroom.
- Provide summer school for remediation and/or enrichment. Summer schools in traditional public schools are controlled by the local board of education.
- Increase the number of days for parent-teacher conferences. Traditional public schools allow one day for parent teacher conferences.
- Increase the number of days for faculty in-service education. Traditional public schools allow five days for in-service education.
- Eliminate the minimum enrollment requirements so that students can receive personal attention and a customized academic program. A traditional public high school must maintain an average daily attendance of 300 pupils.
- Incorporate a variety of materials, beyond those approved by the local board of education, to keep the curriculum and instructional methods aligned with the mission,

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<sup>20</sup> The Federal Public Charter School Program Grant, under Title VB of the *No Child Left Behind Act*, supports the planning, development, and initial implementation of charter schools. Grants awarded under this program are discretionary competitive grants. Grantees receive up to three years of assistance, of which the charter school may use not more than 18 months for planning and program design and not more than two years for the initial implementation of the charter school. State education agencies (SEAs) may compete for these grants if there is a charter school law in place in their state. SEAs that receive this grant in turn award sub-grants to successful eligible applicants with in their state. In addition, non-SEA eligible applicants may apply for funding directly from the U.S. Department of Education if the SEA in the state elects not to participate in the PSCP or does not have an application approved under the program. Accessed March 2006 from [http://www.tennessee.gov/education/fedprog/chrtrsch\\_grantapps.php](http://www.tennessee.gov/education/fedprog/chrtrsch_grantapps.php).

<sup>21</sup> The number of waivers granted to the 10 Memphis charter schools ranges from seven to 28, with an average of 19 waivers per school. In contrast, one Nashville charter school has zero waivers, and the other Nashville charter received a waiver only on class size only for the 2005-06 school year. The Board of Education in Nashville will not continue to approve this waiver.

<sup>22</sup> Stax Academy's Request for Waivers, provided by David Hill, principal. Yo! Academy's Request for Waivers, provided by Marie Milam, Executive Director. Star Academy's Request for Waivers and a list of waivers approved for the 10 charter schools in Memphis provided by Stacey Thompson, Memphis City Schools.

goals, and objectives of the school. Teachers in traditional public schools must use textbooks listed by the state's textbook commission.

**Tennessee charter schools seek waivers that allow them to maintain and improve the quality of the teaching force from within.** Many Memphis charter schools have received waivers that allow them to:

- Link evaluations, pay, and promotion to student performance and other operational and learning objectives.
- Develop evaluation systems and independent professional development plans for each teacher, guided by the mission, goals, and objectives of the school. Local boards of education develop the evaluative procedures for traditional public school personnel.
- Maintain the discretion to continue or discontinue employment of its personnel. The local board of education dismisses teachers in traditional public schools.
- Provide more duty-free time during the school day for planning and professional development. Teachers in traditional public schools receive 2 ½ hours of planning time each week.

In 2001-02, 37 percent of states granted automatic waivers of state laws, rules, or regulations to charter schools, and an additional 54 percent of states allowed some regulations to be waived on a case-by-case basis. Nine percent of states did not permit any waivers. Nationally, charter schools most often received waivers from requirements of teacher contract, hiring/firing policies, control of finances and teacher salary schedule.<sup>23</sup>

**Exhibit 5a: Most Common Charter School Waivers Granted, 2001-02**

Type of Waiver	Percentage of Schools (n=229)
Teacher contract year and tenure requirements	61
Teacher/Staff hiring/firing policies	56
Control of finances/budget/ability to allocate funds	56
Teacher salary/pay schedule	56

*Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Under Secretary, Evaluation of the Public Charter Schools Program: Final Report, Washington, D.C., 2004*

States' charter school laws often allow waivers from requirements for length of the school day or year.

**Exhibit 5b: Most Common Charter School Waivers Allowed in State Policies, 2001-02**

State Waiver/Exemption	Percentage of States that Allow Waiver (n=34)
Length of school day or year	68
Teacher/Staff hiring/firing policies	65
Teacher contract year and tenure requirements	61
Teacher salary/pay schedule	58
Control of finances/budget/ability to allocate funds	56

*Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Under Secretary, Evaluation of the Public Charter Schools Program: Final Report, Washington, D.C., 2004*

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Under Secretary, *Evaluation of the Public Charter Schools Program: Final Report*, Washington, D.C., 2004.

These and other waivers give charter schools greater authority over many key operational decisions.

**Exhibit 5c: Charter School Authority, 2001-02**

Decision Area	Percentage of Schools with Full Authority (n=477)
Daily Schedule	84
Purchasing of supplies and equipment	79
Staff hiring, discipline, and dismissal	72
Budgetary expenses, other than salary and benefits	67
Student discipline	64
Student assessment	63
School Calendar	59
Curriculum	59
Teacher certification requirements	45

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Under Secretary, *Evaluation of the Public Charter Schools Program: Final Report*, Washington, D.C., 2004

## Tennessee's charter schools are newly created.

**All of Tennessee's charter schools are newly created schools rather than conversions of existing public schools.** Similarly, as of 2001-02, over three-quarters of charter schools nationwide were newly created.<sup>24</sup>

As start-up schools, full implementation of goals and strategies gets stronger over time. During the 2003-04 school year, Tennessee charter schools struggled most to secure external support such as parent involvement and outside resources.<sup>25</sup> By their second year, these schools exhibited moderate to strong implementation in areas of curriculum, organization, and evaluation. Implementing instructional strategies and securing school support remained a concern.<sup>26</sup>

As of February 2006, no Tennessee charter schools have closed. Nationwide, however, the ratio of schools closed to schools opened is about one to seven.<sup>27</sup> More than 400 charter schools closed between 1991 and 2004.<sup>28</sup> To date, most charter school closures do not result from academic performance deficiencies. For example, during the 2002-03 school year, 93 charter schools closed for the following reasons – 61 were voluntary closures; 28 were revoked for non-academic reasons; and four non-renewals occurred, only one of which resulted from poor academic performance.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Under Secretary, *Evaluation of the Public Charter Schools Program: Final Report*, Washington, D.C., 2004.

<sup>25</sup> Steven M. Ross and Aaron J. McDonald, *First Year Evaluation of Tennessee Charter Schools, 2003-2004*, Center for Research in Education Policy, Memphis, Tenn., September 2004.

<sup>26</sup> Steven M. Ross and Aaron J. McDonald, *Second Year Evaluation of Tennessee Charter Schools 2004-2005*, Center for Research in Education Policy, Memphis, Tenn., October 2005.

<sup>27</sup> Lake and Hill, *Hopes, Fears, Reality*.

<sup>28</sup> National Education Association, <http://www.nea.org/charter/index.html>.

<sup>29</sup> United States Government Accountability Office, *Charter schools: To Enhance Education's Monitoring and Research, More Charter School-Level Data are Needed*, 2005.

**Charter schools are located within major cities.**

**In Tennessee, all charter schools are located in urban settings.** All of Tennessee’s charter schools are located within major cities – Memphis (10 charter schools) and Nashville (two charter schools). Two additional schools are scheduled to open in Nashville and in Chattanooga for the 2006-07 school year.

Nationwide, charter schools are three times as likely to be located in an urban setting; 30 percent of charter schools compared to 10 percent of traditional public schools operate in big city districts.<sup>30</sup>

**Charter schools serve more minority and low-income students.**

**Compared with traditional public schools, charter schools nationwide and in Tennessee serve higher proportions of African Americans, students eligible for Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL), and low-performing students.** However, when comparing the demographics in charter schools to the host district, the differences are smaller.

**Exhibit 6a: Characteristics of Students Attending Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools in Tennessee, Memphis, and Nashville**

Student Characteristic	Tennessee 2005-2006	Tennessee 2004-2005	Memphis 2004-2005	Nashville 2005-2006
	Charter Schools (n=1,720)	Traditional Public Schools (n= 920,562)	Traditional Public Schools (n= 119,000)	Traditional Public Schools (n= 70,089)
African American	97.8%	24.8%	86%	46.1%
Hispanic	1.0%	3.6%	4.5%	10.5%
White	1.2%	69.9%	8.5%	39.7%
Other	.06%	1.7%	1.0%	3.6%
Free or reduced-price lunch	79.3%	52.12%	75%	63.6%
Special education	5.2%	15.9%	11.8%	14.1%
Limited English Proficient	0.9%	2.2%	3.5%	10.0%

*Sources: OEA survey of charter school principals; Tennessee Department of Education, "Statewide Report Card 2005" and "Davidson County Report Card 2005;" Memphis City Schools Fact Sheet, 2005-06 Demographics.*

Between 1998-99 and 2001-02, the percentage of African American students in charter schools nationwide grew by 14 points, while the percentage of white students fell by 11 points. Charter schools, however, serve fewer special needs students than do traditional public schools.

**Exhibit 6b: Characteristics of Students Attending Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools Nationwide, 1999-2000**

Student Characteristic	National	
	Charter Schools (n= 1,122)	Traditional Public Schools (n= 9,893)
African American*	27	17
Hispanic*	21	15
White*	46	63
Free or reduced-	43	38

<sup>30</sup> Lake and Hill, *Hopes, Fears, Reality*.

price lunch*		
Special education*	9	12
Limited English Proficient (LEP)	8	7

Note: \*p<.01 (Indicates significant difference between charter schools and traditional public schools.)

Traditional public school demographics based on approximations from graphic representation of student characteristic differences.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Under Secretary, *Evaluation of the Public Charter Schools Program: Final Report*, Washington, D.C., 2004.

## **Charter schools serve small student populations.**

**Although the charter student population continues to grow, the 12 charter schools in Tennessee serve a small percentage of the state’s total public school population.** Tennessee charter schools serve 1,720 students.<sup>31</sup> This is 0.2 percent of the K-12 student population statewide and one percent of the combined K-12 student population in Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools and Memphis City Schools.<sup>32</sup>

Nationwide, charter schools’ overall share of the K-12 student population is minimal. The 3,600 charter schools nationwide serve over one million students – an increase of nearly 700,000 since 1999. However, this is only two percent of nation’s K-12 student population.

**Student enrollment is smaller in charter schools than in traditional public schools.** During the current school year (2005-06), Tennessee charter school size ranges from 54 to 380 students, with an average of 143. Average enrollment in the state’s traditional public schools is larger; 502 in elementary schools and 829 in secondary schools.<sup>33</sup> Class size in Tennessee charter schools also tends to be smaller, ranging from 15 to 20 students. In traditional public schools, the maximum is 20 for grades K-3, 25 for grades 4-6, and 30 for grades 7-12.

Nationally, the median enrollment during the 2003-04 school year was 250 in charter schools compared to 475 in traditional public schools. In 2003-04, 57 percent of charter schools enrolled fewer than 200 students.<sup>34</sup>

## **Charter schools provide a greater variety of grade configurations.**

**Tennessee charter schools provide a greater variety of grade level configurations than do traditional public schools.**

Tennessee’s charter schools have a greater percentage of Primary (K-3) and Middle/High school configurations. Nationwide, charter schools tend towards significantly different grade configurations than are typical in traditional public schools. Nationwide, charter schools have greater percentages of K-8, K-12, and middle/high school configurations than do traditional public schools.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> OEA survey of charter school principals.

<sup>32</sup> Calculations based on the Average Daily Membership reported in the Tennessee Department of Education’s *Statewide Report Card 2005*.

<sup>33</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, Tables 97 and 98, “Chapter 2. Elementary and Secondary Education,” *Digest of Education Statistics, 2004*, at [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d04/ch\\_2.asp#1](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d04/ch_2.asp#1). Note: enrollment data for Tennessee’s traditional public schools reflects the 2002-03 school year.

<sup>34</sup> Gregg Vanourek, *State of the Charter Movement 2005: Trends, Issues, and Indicators*, Charter School Leadership Council, May 2005.

<sup>35</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Under Secretary, *Evaluation of the Public Charter Schools Program: Final Report*, Washington, D.C., 2004.

**Exhibit 7: Grade Level Configurations of National and Tennessee Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools, 2005-06<sup>36</sup>**

Grade Level Configuration	National		Tennessee (Memphis City and Metro Nashville)	
	Charter	Traditional	Charter	Traditional
Primary	4%	5%	8%	0%
Elementary	23%	49%	25%	58%
Middle	10%	16%	25%	20%
Middle/High	9%	6%	17%	1%
High	19%	16%	17%	15%
Other*	35%	8%	8%	7%

\*K-8 or K-12

National configurations based on approximations from graphic representation of student characteristic differences.

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Under Secretary, *Evaluation of the Public Charter Schools Program: Final Report*, Washington, D.C., 2004. OEA survey of Tennessee charter school principals. Memphis City Schools Facts Sheet, 05-06, <http://www.memphis-schools.k12.tn.us/Budget-News/MCS-FactSheet.pdf>. Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools website, <http://www.mnps.org/Page12.aspx>.

## Teaching methods are traditional; use of instructional time is not.

**Charter and traditional public schools use similar instructional strategies.** Direct, or teacher-centered, instruction was the predominant instructional method in all Tennessee charter schools during both the 2003-04 and 2004-05 school years.<sup>37</sup> Tennessee's charter schools mostly use traditional instruction methods and center on themes of remediation and college/post-secondary prep.

A typology of charter schools was recently developed to better understand the curriculum, instruction, and targeted student populations among charter schools nationwide. The resulting typology sorts charter schools by their intended student population – open enrollment versus targeted populations – and by five curriculum/instructional themes – traditional, progressive, vocational, general, and alternative delivery. Overall, charter schools most often model the general, progressive, and traditional approaches to instruction.<sup>38</sup>

**General:** Focus of curriculum and instruction is indistinguishable from traditional public schools

**Progressive:** Focus on a “holistic” approach to learning, and a student-centered instructional approach (e.g., hands-on, project-based, and cooperative learning activities)

**Traditional:** Focus on high standards for academics and behavior, rigorous coursework, and a teacher-centered instructional approach

**Vocational:** Focus on transition from school to work, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training programs

**Alternative Delivery:** Curriculum and instruction takes place outside of school facility (i.e., at-home schooling, virtual schools<sup>39</sup>)

<sup>36</sup> Grade level configurations follow conventions used by the U.S. Department of Education and defined as follows: *Primary* includes only grades K-3; *Elementary* begins with K and goes no higher than grade 6; *Middle* ranges from grade 5 to grade 9; *Middle-High* includes any of grades 6-8 and any of grades 9-12 and no grades K-5; *High* ranges from grade 9 to grade 12.

<sup>37</sup> Ross and McDonald, *First Year Evaluation of Tennessee Charter Schools, 2003-2004* and *Second Year Evaluation of Tennessee Charter Schools 2004-2005*.

<sup>38</sup> Dick M. Carpenter II, *Playing to Type? Mapping the Charter School Landscape*, Thomas B. Fordham Institute, October 2005.

<sup>39</sup> These types of charter schools are not permitted in Tennessee, T.C.A. 49-13-106.

**Charter schools are less traditional in their organization of instructional time.** For example, charter schools often use interdisciplinary teaching, looping, extended school days, and extended school years.

**KIPP ACADEMY NASHVILLE** provides 35 percent more hours of school than traditional MNPS schools:

- Monday through Thursday, 7:25-5:00, and Friday, 7:25-3:30
- Every other Saturday, 8:55 to 1:00, and three weeks during summer

Students at **MEMPHIS ACADEMY OF SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING (MASE)** return to each of their six classes for 30 minute study sessions. Students see a topic twice a day in all classes and teachers fill the homework-assistance void.

**MASE** practices redundant instruction. Each course is divided into four “mini courses,” such as English 7a, 7b, 7c, 7d, which are offered simultaneously. Students deficient in 7a are not advanced to 7b. They will be reintroduced to the material.

**SOUTHERN AVENUE CHARTER SCHOOL OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE AND CREATIVE ARTS** has mandatory before and after school tutoring (7 am – 8 am and 4-5 pm) with optional tutoring (5-6 pm).

## School climate is strong in charter schools.

**School climate was strong in all Tennessee charter schools during the 2003-04 and 2004-05 school years.** As described by the Center for Research in Education Policy, school climate includes dimensions of expectations, instruction, leadership, collaboration, involvement, environment, and order. (See Exhibit 8.)

Tennessee charter schools have high overall ratings for climate. In 2004-05, “Instruction” received the highest score in three of the seven charter schools studied. “Expectations” and “Leadership” were the highest dimensions in the remaining schools. However, climate scores decreased in 2004-05 in three of the state’s four original charter schools. “Order” received the lowest score in five of the seven charter schools studied. “Environment” was the lowest dimension in the remaining schools.

**Exhibit 8: Dimensions of School Climate – Description and 2004-05 Average Scores<sup>40</sup>**

	Description	Tennessee Charter Schools (n=7)	Elementary and Secondary Schools (National) <sup>41</sup>
<b>Expectations</b>	The extent to which students are expected to learn and be responsible	4.42	3.93
<b>Instruction</b>	The extent to which the instructional program is well developed and implemented	4.40	4.11
<b>Leadership</b>	The extent to which the administration provides instructional leadership	4.33	4.01
<b>Collaboration</b>	The extent to which the administration, faculty, and students cooperate and participate in problem solving	4.16	3.79

<sup>40</sup> SCI scores range from 1 to 5 with 5 being the most positive indicator of each school climate indicator.

<sup>41</sup> The "national norms" are compiled from the approximately 1000 schools that the University of Memphis' Center for Research in Education Policy has worked with in the past, and are continually updated with each new SCI administration. Norms represent elementary and middle/high school.

<b>Involvement</b>	The extent to which parents and the community are involved in the school	4.13	3.77
<b>Environment</b>	The extent to which positive learning environments exist	4.06	3.84
<b>Order</b>	The extent to which the environment is ordered and appropriate student behaviors are present	3.84	3.38

Source: School Climate Inventory (SCI), Center for Research in Education Policy, University of Memphis

**Tennessee’s charter school teachers are satisfied with the overall mission and goals of the schools.** During the 2003-04 and 2004-05 school years, Tennessee’s charter school teachers were pleased with the school mission and educational program at their schools. Teachers were less pleased with resources and support from state and local education agencies.<sup>42</sup>

### **Charter schools have multiple paths for parental involvement and communication.**

**Parent participation, in its more conventional forms (i.e. parent conferences, open houses), is common in both traditional public and charter schools; but charter schools provide other less-traditional avenues for parent involvement.** Many Tennessee charter schools have direct means for parents to be involved in the administrative decision-making of the school, including parent representatives on the governing board<sup>43</sup> or a parent committee. Other charter schools encourage, and often

require, parent participation on a more personal level through weekly progress reports to parents, enrichment activities with parents on Saturdays, parent-child reading assignments, and developing a plan for their children’s education. Still others offer parent-specific programs, such as GED instruction, literacy development, and parenting skills.

**STAR ACADEMY** includes a parental involvement grade on each student’s report card each grading period indicating a parent’s number of volunteer hours during that grading period:

- E = 4-5 hours volunteered
- S = 3 – 3.99 hours
- N = 2 – 2.99 hours
- U = 0 – 1.99 hours

Parents at **MEMPHIS ACADEMY OF HEALTH SCIENCES MIDDLE SCHOOL** are required to complete 20 hours of volunteer work as chaperones, tutors, office and teacher aides, service learning assistants and/or test monitors.

Parents at **STAX MUSIC ACADEMY** ensure that students read for 45 minutes nightly, and **SOUTHERN AVENUE CHARTER SCHOOL OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE AND CREATIVE ARTS** has nightly 30 minute reading assignments for parents and students.

Compared to traditional public schools, charter schools nationwide are more likely to affirm parents’ participation in activities such as budget decisions, advisory committees, parent education workshops, and volunteer work. However, the percentage of charter schools nationwide reporting such parental involvement was relatively low, with a third or less confirming such activities.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Ross and McDonald, *First Year Evaluation of Tennessee Charter Schools, 2003-2004 and Second Year Evaluation of Tennessee Charter Schools 2004-2005.*

<sup>43</sup> *Tennessee Code Annotated* 49-13-104 (3): “The membership of a charter school’s governing body shall include at least one (1) parent representative whose child is currently enrolled in the charter school.”

<sup>44</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Under Secretary, *Evaluation of the Public Charter Schools Program: Final Report*, Washington, D.C., 2004.

**In Tennessee, charter school parent satisfaction was relatively high during both the 2003-04 and 2004-05 school years.** In 2003-04, parents were satisfied with principals' leadership and the increased student safety and individual attention that comes with small schools and classes. In 2004-05, parents were less satisfied with building/facilities, surroundings, transportation, and lack of extra-curricular activities.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ross, Steven M. and Aaron J. McDonald. *First Year Evaluation of Tennessee Charter Schools, 2003-2004*, September 2004, *Second Year Evaluation of Tennessee Charter Schools 2004-2005*, October 2005, Center for Research in Education Policy; Memphis, TN.

# OVERVIEW OF CHARTER SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

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Since charter schools entered the public education system in 1991, researchers, educators, policy analysts, legislators, and the public have been asking a fundamental question – how do charter schools impact students’ opportunities for learning and achievement? Nearly a decade and a half later, a definitive answer does not yet exist. Despite volumes of research, conflicting and incompatible findings leave the question unresolved. The following sections discuss what is and is not known about student achievement in charter schools, both in Tennessee and nationwide.<sup>46</sup>

## ***Charter versus Traditional Public School Achievement in Tennessee: What is and is not known?***

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Some initial research on Tennessee charter schools can provide an early – yet limited – understanding of the impact charter schools are having on student achievement. At the time of this report’s release limited achievement data was available directly from the public reporting of the Tennessee Department of Education. For example, the state’s most recent Report Card has data for the seven charter schools in existence during the 2004-05 school year, but much of the data is limited:<sup>47</sup>

- Four schools do not have AYP data;
- Five do not have value-added data (TVAAS);
- Demographics data does not align with reports coming directly from charter schools;
- Many schools only have one year of achievement data making it difficult to understand a valid pattern of achievement.

Consequently, the current reliability, validity, and utility of the department’s data make it suspect for conducting comparisons between charter and traditional public school achievement.

The Center for Research in Educational Policy (CREP)<sup>48</sup> is undertaking a series of annual evaluations focusing on charter school performance compared to the state’s traditional public schools. CREP uses indicators of student achievement (TCAP), student behavior, teaching quality, parent engagement, school climate, and efficacy of program implementation to assess the overall quality of charter schools.<sup>49</sup> CREP completed this research for the 2003-04 school year and plans to release findings from the 2004-05 school year in the coming months.

Findings from the first year evaluation (2003-04 school year), reveal a mixed message about the achievement of charter versus traditional public school students. At each individual charter school in Memphis, students out-performed their traditional public school counterparts on the 2004 TCAP in math, reading, and language arts, but not to a significant degree. One exception was the Memphis Academy of Science & Engineering (MASE), in which students had a statistically significant advantage in math. Overall, the charter school student population in Memphis had a statistically significant advantage in both math and reading.

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<sup>46</sup> This review is not intended to provide a complete review of all charter school research (neither time nor space would permit that); rather, it presents an array of studies that represent the general themes of the research that compares charter and traditional school performance.

<sup>47</sup> Tennessee Department of Education, *Report Card 2005*, retrieved from <http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/rptcrd05/> on February 16, 2006. The seven charter schools in existence during the 2004-05 school year included – Circles of Success Learning Academy, City University School of Liberal Arts, Memphis Academy of Health Sciences, Memphis Academy of Science Engineering, Smithson-Craighead Academy, Star Academy, and Yo! Academy.

<sup>48</sup> CREP’s research on charter school versus traditional public school performance is funded through a contract with the State Department of Education. This independent research is funded solely by a state grant.

<sup>49</sup> Note: CREP findings related to teaching quality, parent engagement, school climate, and efficacy of program implementation is discussed throughout an earlier section of the report – “Overview of Tennessee’s Charter Schools.”

Students at Smithson-Craighead Academy, the only Nashville charter school at that time, had lower average scores than their traditional public school counterparts in both Math and Reading, but neither difference was statistically significant.

These achievement findings are a starting point to better understand how charter school students perform compared to students in traditional public schools. In light of the limited achievement data in Tennessee, a review of national research findings can provide a broader understanding of general trends in charter school achievement.

### ***Drawing Conclusions from Multiple Research Studies Nationwide***

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#### **Charter schools may out-perform, under-perform, or perform similarly to traditional public schools.**

The following research reviews reiterate a common discovery about charter school achievement – charter schools may out-perform, under-perform, or perform similarly to traditional public schools. Achievement outcomes in charter versus traditional public schools present an array of findings.

#### ***Charter school achievement: What we know***<sup>50</sup>

This report is a meta-analysis<sup>51</sup> that summarizes and evaluates 38 studies that compare charter and traditional public school performance. The report's findings are

organized by two distinct research methodologies: (1) studies that reveal snapshot pictures of performance at specific points in time, and (2) studies that measure performance changes over time.

#### **Seventeen different studies, reporting on achievement results at specific points in time, reveal inconsistent findings.**

- Nine of the studies reveal charter school performance lower than that of traditional public schools.
- The other eight studies reveal either similar performance between school sectors, mixed performance outcomes (i.e., higher performance for charter schools in one subject but lower in another), or charter school performance as higher than that of traditional public schools.

#### **Inconsistent findings appear in the 21 studies that report on performance changes over time.**<sup>52</sup>

- In nine studies, the overall gains for charter school performance exceeded gains in traditional public schools.
- In three studies, charter school gains were higher in specific segments, such as at the elementary level or in charter schools that target at-risk student populations.
- In five studies, charter and traditional public schools shared similar performance gains.
- In three studies, overall gains in charter schools were lower than those in traditional public schools.
- In seven studies that specifically measure how performance changed with the aging of charter schools, five reveal that performance improved as charter schools age, but the other two reveal no significant differences between newer and older charter schools.

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<sup>50</sup> Bryan C. Hassel, *Charter School Achievement: What We Know*, Charter School Leadership Council, January 2005.

<sup>51</sup> Meta-analysis refers to a type of research that reviews multiple studies on a focused topic (i.e., such as charter school versus traditional public school achievement), integrates the findings, and identifies shared themes and discrepancies in the research.

<sup>52</sup> Of the 21 studies that measure achievement comparisons as they change over time, nine of them actually track individual students' performance over time while the other 12 follow broader changes, such as at the school or grade level.

*Hopes, fears, & reality: A balanced look at American charter schools in 2005*<sup>53</sup>

The first report by the National Charter School Research Project (NCSRP)<sup>54</sup> compiles the results of recent studies that examine the relationship between charter school attendance and student test scores. Upon review of 35 studies released since 2000, the NCSRP found varying results.

**Thirteen studies compare average test scores of charter school versus traditional public school students *without taking into account other variables, such as student or school characteristics.***

- Four reveal higher performance for charter schools.
- Five reveal lower performance for charter schools.
- Four reveal comparable performance results between school sectors.

**Five studies account for student and school characteristics in the analysis of charter school versus traditional public school performance *at one point in time.***

- Three reveal higher performance for charter schools.
- Two reveal lower performance for charter schools.

**Seventeen studies account for student and school characteristics in the analysis of *multiple years of achievement data from charter and traditional public schools.***

- Eight reveal higher performance for charter schools.
- Three reveal lower performance for charter schools.
- Six reveal comparable or mixed performance results.

**Across all studies, NCSRP found that most achievement differences between charter and traditional public schools are quite small.**

- Students in charter and traditional public schools have similar achievement results when controlling for student characteristics.
- Studies that compare *average* achievement scores of charter and traditional public schools mask the variation among students of various backgrounds within the same school.

***National Assessments:***

***Comparing performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress***

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In 2003 the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) included charter schools in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).<sup>55</sup> This national assessment of student achievement in both public and non-public schools is regarded as one of the best available indicators of student achievement nationwide. The inclusion of charter schools in the 2003 NAEP generated multiple reports highlighting comparisons between charter school and traditional public school performance. Some of these studies are discussed below.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Lake and Hill, *Hopes, Fears, & Reality*.

<sup>54</sup> The National Charter School Research Project (NCSRP) at the University of Washington was recently created to bring a national network of charter school scholars. In its first year, the NCSRP will launch two research projects, one on student achievement in charter schools and another on barriers to scaling up charter schools and best practices in overcoming those barriers. Foundation support for the National Charter Schools Research Center at the University of Washington comes from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Pisces Foundation, the Walton Foundation, the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, the Rodel Foundation, the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, and the Daniels Fund.

<sup>55</sup> The 2003 NAEP Pilot Study of charter schools included a sample of 150 charter schools from across the nation. Within each charter school, a random sample of students participated in the reading (n=3,296) and math (n=3,238) exams. The sample of traditional public schools included 6,764 schools; a random sample of students participated in the reading (n=188,148) and math (188,201) exams.

<sup>56</sup> Reports generated from the 2003 NAEP Pilot Study – *America's Charter Schools: Results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress* (NCES, 2004); *Charter School Achievement on the 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress* (AFT, 2004); *Charter, Private, Public Schools and Academic Achievement: New Evidence from NAEP Mathematics Data* (National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education, 2006). The AFT (2004) report, released prior to the NCES (2004) report, had some similar findings; however they reported more across-the-board

*America's charter schools: Results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress 2003 Pilot Study.*<sup>57</sup>

In 2004, NCES released findings from the 2003 pilot study of charter school students' performance on NAEP. This study compares charter and traditional public school students' performance on 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading and math assessments while accounting for several student (e.g., gender, race, socioeconomic status) and school (e.g., location, age, governance, teacher certification and experience) characteristics.

**"Patterns illustrate how important it is to look beyond simple comparisons of the two school types."**

*-America's Charter Schools  
(NCES, 2004, p. 10)*

**NCES found charter and traditional public schools perform similarly in reading, except ...**

**Overall, no significant difference exists between charter and traditional public school students' 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading achievement; when accounting for student and school characteristics, differences emerge.**

Reading achievement differences between charter and traditional public school students were not significant when comparing students and schools with the following characteristics:

- Student race/ethnicity (e.g., white, African-American, Hispanic)
- Location of school (e.g., central city, non-central city)
- Type of teacher certification (e.g., regular, temporary, emergency)

Charter students' reading achievement was significantly lower than that of traditional public schools when accounting for the following influences:

- Females and students of free or reduced-price lunch status scored lower in charter schools than in traditional public schools.
- Students of teachers having four years or less teaching experience scored lower in charter schools than in traditional public schools.

**NCES found that charter schools scored lower on math, however ...**

**In math, charter school students scored lower than those in traditional public schools; when accounting for student and school characteristics, differences emerge.**

Charter school math achievement was significantly lower than that of traditional public schools even when accounting for the following student and school characteristics:

- Males, females, and students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch scored lower in charter schools than traditional public schools
- In central city locations, charter schools had lower math achievement than traditional public schools.
- Students of teachers having four years or less teaching experience scored lower in charter schools than in traditional public schools.

Math achievement differences between charter and traditional public school students were not significant when accounting for the following student and school characteristics:

- Student race (e.g., white, African-American, Hispanic)
- Type of teacher certification (e.g., regular, temporary, emergency)

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disadvantages for charter schools students on NAEP. The AFT report has noteworthy limitations, some of which mirror limitations discussed in other NAEP studies; the AFT study also used analyses that did not account for the simultaneous influence of multiple variables on student achievement (e.g., race and SES).

<sup>57</sup> NCES, *America's Charter Schools: Results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress*, U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, 2004.

This 2003 NAEP pilot study has limitations to its scope, utility, and quality.

- The charter school sample for the study (150 schools) represented approximately three percent of the charter schools at that time, thereby limiting the generalizations that can be made to all charter schools nationwide.
- The NAEP data represents 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading and math achievement; therefore, speculations about achievement differences at other grade levels should not be made from this information.
- The NAEP data represents a snapshot of charter versus traditional public schools' performance. It does not provide a long-term review of how students' performance changes over time in each of the public school sectors.
- The analytical methods used are not sophisticated enough to account for the influence of multiple school and student characteristics at the same time.
- The study does not account for the selection bias that makes charter school students inherently different from their traditional public school counterparts who do not *choose* to attend charter schools.

*Charter, private, public schools and academic achievement: New evidence from NAEP mathematics data*<sup>58</sup>

In January 2006, the National Center for Education Statistics funded another study of the 2003 NAEP results, including achievement comparisons between charter schools and traditional public schools in 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade math.<sup>59</sup> This study provides the results of more sophisticated analyses of achievement differences; the analyses *simultaneously* account for the potential influence of school type, location, as well as school and student demographics (e.g., race, special needs status, socioeconomic status).

**Research found that charter schools score lower on math, however ...**

**At both grade levels, the average math score of charter school students was lower than that of traditional public school students; however, these differences became less prevalent when accounting for school and student characteristics.** Without accounting for any potential school or student influences, the average charter school math score in 4th grade was 6.1 points lower than the average score in traditional public schools.

When accounting for school demographics, location, and students' demographics, the disadvantage for charter school students was less prominent – 4.4 points lower than the average score in traditional public schools.

**Research found differences between students outweigh differences between school types.**

**Although differences do exist between achievement in charter schools and traditional public schools, the greatest differences are between *students*, not between *schools*.** When accounting for all potential influences, student demographics (e.g., race, special needs status, socioeconomic status) provided a greater explanation for the achievement differences than did the influence of school type, school demographics, or school location.

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<sup>58</sup> Chris Lubienski and Sarah Theule Lubienski, *Charter, Private, Public Schools and Academic Achievement: New Evidence from NAEP Mathematics Data*, New York: National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education, January 2006.

<sup>59</sup> According to researchers, the participation rate “for 8<sup>th</sup>-grade charter schools did not meet NAEP’s stringent reporting requirements; hence, results for these particular sub-samples should be viewed as only suggestive of patterns that may exist” (p. 5). Consequently, findings from this study will focus primarily on the 4<sup>th</sup>-grade NAEP results.

## **Proficiency Testing: Comparing performance on state-level tests**

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In 2004, Caroline Hoxby released a national study of charter versus traditional public school achievement on 4<sup>th</sup> grade exams. In *Achievement in charter schools and regular public schools in the United States: Understanding the differences*. Hoxby used a matched-schools comparison technique in which charter school performance is compared to performance of traditional public schools that charter students would have otherwise attended. The national study includes 99 percent of charter schools and takes into account student and school characteristics, such as student population served, geographic location, and the age of the schools. Hoxby used student proficiency on state exams as the indicator of student achievement for this research.

**Charter school students, especially those at-risk, are more likely to reach proficiency.**

**Charter school students are more likely to be proficient on state exams than their traditional public school counterparts.** When accounting for student characteristics, charter school students were five percent more likely to be proficient on reading exams and three percent more likely to be so on math exams.

**Charter schools offer the most significant academic advantages for poor and minority students in elementary schools.** Charter school students are more likely to be proficient on both reading (6.5 percent) and math (4.8 percent) exams in areas that have high proportions of poor students. In areas with lower percentages of poor students, the charter school advantage is not as great – nearly three percent on reading and nearly five percent on math.

Charter school students are more likely to be proficient on both reading and math exams in areas with high percentages of African-American (4.5 percent on reading, 2.6 percent on math) and Hispanic (7.6 percent on reading, 4.1 percent on math) students. In areas with lower proportions of minority students, the charter school advantage is not as pronounced – four percent on reading and two percent on math.

**The longer charter schools operate, the better students perform.**

**The longer charter schools are in operation the more likely their students will have an advantage on state exams.**<sup>60</sup>

In charter schools that had been operating four years or less, charter students were more likely to be proficient on reading exams (2.5 percent) and performed no differently on math exams.

In charter schools that had been operating five to eight years, charter students were more likely to be proficient on both reading (5.2 percent) and math (four percent).

In charter schools that had been operating nine to eleven years, charter students had the greatest advantage on both reading (10.1 percent) and math (10.8 percent).

Hoxby's study has limitations to its scope, utility, and quality.

- The study uses students' performance on state exams as an indicator of academic achievement. While charter and traditional public school students are held accountable

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<sup>60</sup> Hassel identified similar findings in his meta-analysis of charter school research. Of seven studies that examined how charter school performance changed as the school matured, five found that performance improved with time; the other two studies did not confirm that trend. See page 25 for a more extensive review of Hassel's meta-analysis. Carnoy, et al., reviewed several state studies that address this issue and found mixed results for the effect of charter school age; of these, most state studies revealed advantages for charter schools as they age with some advantages being more significant than others.

to similar standards *within* a state, those standards vary from state to state. A proficient student in one state may not be comparable to another state's proficient student.

- The study reports on 4<sup>th</sup> grade achievement and does not speak to other grade levels.
- The achievement outcomes represent a snapshot of charter versus traditional public school performance, not a long-term review of students' performance.
- The study does not account for the selection bias of students choosing to be in charter schools.

### ***Looking at Research from Other States***

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Several state-specific studies employ sophisticated approaches for comparing the achievement of charter and traditional public schools. Five of these state studies, Arizona, California, Florida, North Carolina, and Texas, follow the achievement growth of *individual* students over time.

#### **Arizona**

A 2004 study evaluated charter versus traditional public school students, comparing reading achievement outcomes for three consecutive school years (1997-98 to 1999-2000). The study accounted for the influence of several variables, including student attendance patterns, demographics, grade level, special needs status, and absenteeism. In the first school year, charter school student performance was lower than in traditional public schools. However, students staying in charter schools – as opposed to traditional public schools – during those three years, had significantly greater reading achievement gains.<sup>61</sup>

#### **California**

In 2003, RAND released its findings from a review of charter versus traditional school performance in California. This study used multiple years (1999-2002) of student achievement data to make comparisons, and also accounted for student race, parent education, English-language learner status, as well as the length of students' time enrolled in charter schools. Using the state's Academic Performance Index (API) to measure achievement, researchers found mixed results for average charter school performance. The structure of charter schools (i.e., conversion versus start-up charter, classroom-based versus non-classroom-based instruction) partly explained the varying performance results. However, a further review of achievement gains revealed comparable outcomes for charter and traditional public schools, and mixed results when looking at individual student gains.<sup>62</sup>

#### **Florida**

A 2004 research study compared test score achievement for charter and traditional public school students over time, accounting for variables such as demographics and student mobility. Reading and math achievement among charter school students was lower than that of their traditional public school counterparts. However, these trends did not hold when accounting for the age of charter schools. When accounting for the age of charter schools, charter school students had similar math achievement as those in traditional public schools, and a slight advantage in reading.<sup>63</sup>

#### **North Carolina**

In 2004, researchers released the results of a multi-year (1996-2002) study of charter versus traditional public school performance. The researchers followed a cohort of students from the third-grade to their 8<sup>th</sup>-grade year. The study accounted for the potential influence of students' grade level, gender, race, parent education, and school mobility. Achievement outcomes revealed

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<sup>61</sup> Arizona research conducted by Solmon and Goldschmidt (2004) as described in Carnoy, et al., (2005) *The Charter School Dust-Up* (pp. 82-83) and in Hassel (2005) *Charter School Achievement: What We Know* (pp. 6-7).

<sup>62</sup> California research conducted by Zimmer, et al., (2003) as described in Carnoy, et al., (2005) *The Charter School Dust-Up* (pp. 80-81) and in Hassel (2005) *Charter School Achievement: What We Know* (pp. 6-7).

<sup>63</sup> Florida research conducted by Sass (2004) as described in Carnoy, et al., (2005) *The Charter School Dust-Up* (pp. 86-87) and in Hassel (2005) *Charter School Achievement: What We Know* (pp.6-7).

a significant disadvantage for charter school students both in average scores and gains in reading and math.<sup>64</sup>

### Texas

In 2002, researchers released the results of a multi-year study (1996-2001) of charter school performance in Texas. Researchers accounted for an array of influences on achievement outcomes, from at-risk student characteristics, to race, gender, grade, and school mobility. Charter school student achievement gains were initially lower in both reading and math. Notably, as charter schools aged, the students' achievement gains were comparable to those in traditional public schools.<sup>65</sup>

## ***Many Studies, Little Agreement***

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**Perhaps the most apparent – and ironic – consistency is that charter school performance varies greatly.** The variance emerges from charter school characteristics, contextual influences, and the attributes of the very research that analyzes charter school achievement.

### **Different charter school characteristics contribute to variation in performance outcomes.**

#### **Diverse charter school characteristics and contextual factors contribute to the variance in charter school performance outcomes.**

The charter school sector is consistently evolving, and as new schools with new student populations come onto the scene, performance outcomes will likely change.

**“Every state has its own peculiar mix of regulations, barriers to entry, and funding provisions, all of which affect results.”**

*-Hopes, Fears, & Reality  
(Lake & Hill, 2005, p. 24)*

- Charter schools with different missions and educational programs serving varying student populations contribute to the variation in performance outcomes.
- Charter schools operate within different political environments that contribute to the likelihood of educational success.
- There are wide variations in laws, the degree of external oversight, and the regulations that establish limits of autonomy and accountability for these schools.
- Charter school performance seems to vary with the age of the school. Several studies suggest – but have not yet proven – that charter school performance improves with time.
- Student characteristics, such as race and socioeconomic status, contribute to the achievement differences that exist between school types.

### **Differences in charter school research contribute to variation in performance outcomes.**

#### **Charter school research varies in purpose, method, scope, and quality contributing to various performance outcomes.**

Research studies take different approaches to compare charter versus traditional public school performance. Researchers might compare the performance of charter school students with:

- students in traditional public schools which charter school students previously attended;

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<sup>64</sup> North Carolina research conducted by Bifulco & Ladd (2004) as described in Carnoy, et al., (2005) *The Charter School Dust-Up* (p. 88) and in Hassel (2005) *Charter School Achievement: What We Know* (pp.6-7).

<sup>65</sup> Texas research conducted by Hanushek et al, (2002) as described in Carnoy, et al., (2005) *The Charter School Dust-Up* (p. 89) and in Hassel (2005) *Charter School Achievement: What We Know* (pp.6-7).

- students who are in traditional public school and have comparable characteristics such as race, socioeconomic status, and age;
- students who applied but were not admitted to charter schools; or
- students' own achievement growth prior to and after entry into charter schools.<sup>66</sup>

Some research studies measure performance using point-in-time achievement scores, while others use achievement scores over time.

Researchers use different indicators to measure achievement – while some use scores from national standardized tests, such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress, others use results from state-specific exams.

The vast majority of research cannot make a causal link between charter school attendance and students' academic outcomes. These limitations arise for several reasons, such as not following individual student performance over time, and insufficiently taking into account variables that may influence outcomes, such as the self-selection bias inherent in school choice.<sup>67</sup>

### ***How to Tell the Good from the Not so Good?***

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**Charter school research varies greatly in its quality.** Therefore, it is increasingly important for research consumers to understand how to discern low quality studies from high quality studies with limitations. The ability to determine the quality of such research is central to understanding the merits of its findings and implications for policy. So what are the attributes of higher quality charter school research?

#### **Research should acknowledge the complexity of making performance comparisons.**

**Research should recognize the complexity and nuances of making comparisons between charter and traditional public school performance.** Making achievement comparisons is an enormously complex process requiring deliberate attention to detail.

percent proficient, value-added analysis).

It demands careful choices about *research design*, for example, what to compare (e.g., school-level or student-level performance) and how to measure achievement (e.g., standardized test scores,

*Research results* must also communicate the complex nature of these studies. Achievement data should be broken down by student characteristics (e.g., race, gender, socioeconomic status, special needs, grade level), school-level characteristics (e.g., location, demographics of student population, educational focus, age of school), and external context of schools (e.g., charter school law, type and function of authorizer, funding).

#### **Research should be candid about the utility and limitations of its findings.**

**Research should be honest about the utility of its findings, the scope of its implications, as well as its limitations.**

Making comparisons between charter and traditional public schools is a complex challenge with inevitable limitations. However, these limitations do not render research results unusable.

<sup>66</sup> P. T. Hill, "Assessing student performance in charter schools: why studies often clash and answers remain elusive," *Education Week*, Jan. 12, 2005. [www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/01/12/18hill.h24.html?rale=KQE5d7nM%2FXA](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/01/12/18hill.h24.html?rale=KQE5d7nM%2FXA).

<sup>67</sup> The "selection bias" refers to the inherent difference between those students choosing to attend charter schools and those that do not make that same choice. Researchers believe that students making the choice likely vary from their traditional school counterparts on influential variables such as past school experiences, motivation for school, and parent involvement.

The more transparent the limitations of a study, the better research consumers can understand the implications of the findings. For example, achievement comparisons often reveal performance differences at *one point in time*, not how achievement *growth over time* differs. Point-in-time information is useful as a snapshot of performance differences between sectors of the public school system; however it does not speak to the differences these schools provide for students' educational outcomes over time.

Charter schools and charter policy vary both between and within states. It is paramount that charter school researchers be explicit about the scope of their studies by answering questions such as:

- When was the research conducted?
- To whom (what kind of student) and to where (state, district, school type) do the findings apply?
- Under what policy circumstances did the findings emerge?

# IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH: WHAT IS WORKING FOR CHARTER SCHOOLS?

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This section moves the discussion from whether or not charter schools perform well to a discussion of *why* some may perform better than others. The following sections address both the internal and external influences that likely impact charter school success.

## ***The World within Charter Schools***

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Some charter school research attempts to describe the nature of instruction within schools, but it has yet to establish a link between instructional practice and student achievement in charter schools. Some preliminary efforts have started to fill this knowledge gap.

In 2004, the U.S. Department of Education released *Successful Charter Schools*, a review of eight charter schools around the nation. These schools were selected from 250 schools that made adequate yearly progress the previous year (2003) and demonstrated three consecutive years of student achievement growth on standardized tests. The final eight schools represented a mix of students and grade configurations. This research – while not able to establish a link between practice and achievement – can provide a glimpse into the common practices shared among these “successful” charter schools.<sup>68</sup>

### **Mission should drive the practice**

**In “successful” charter schools, their mission drives their practices.** Researchers found evidence that each school’s mission guides its practices from choosing curriculum and instructional programs, designing professional development, deciding on grade configuration, allocating the use of time, and devising

accountability systems to monitor school progress.

**The nature of best-practices in high-performing schools is not always similar.** Rather, the schools are similar in that all practices are well-aligned with the school’s distinct mission. Despite the differences in practice, some common themes emerge, including:

- Teachers are committed and set high expectations for student learning.
- Data drives instruction as teachers continually use formative and summative assessments to understand student progress and tailor instruction to meet students’ learning needs.
- The professional culture of the school enables teachers to communicate, self-reflect, and work together to understand student learning and improve student achievement.<sup>69</sup>
- Time is used strategically to improve student learning. It is not uncommon for schools to have longer school days, school on Saturdays, or longer class periods.
- Communities are involved in students’ learning as schools provide multiple opportunities for parents and community members to participate in school programs.

Ironically, these promising practices reflect findings about what works in public schools – charter or non-charter. The interesting question becomes what policies, structures, and programs enable such practices to flourish in schools? The following section discusses some of these contextual influences that impact the likelihood of charter school success.

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<sup>68</sup>Most of the information on “successful” charter school practices came from the U.S. Department of Education’s report *Successful Charter Schools* (2004); it highlights the practices of high-performing charter schools from across the nation.

<sup>69</sup> Bulkley and Fislser (2002) *A Review of the Research on Charter Schools* also noted the importance of professional culture for charter schools. They referred to the phenomenon as “learning communities” in which professionals are guided by a clear mission, strong instructional programs, clear performance standards and accountability measures, as well as strong school leadership.

## **The Policy around Charter Schools**

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An effective charter school movement is not determined solely by the internal operations of charter schools, but also by the surrounding policies that craft the environment within which schools can operate. The following discussion introduces some critical issues identified by researchers that should be considered when evaluating the efficacy of charter school policy.<sup>70</sup>

### **Charter school policy matters**

**Authorizers and Governance** – The methods used to approve, monitor, and hold charter schools accountable have implications for the success of charter schools.

#### **Does the selection process screen for the quality of charter applicants?**

The selection process should make clear the goals for charter schools in the state, the preferred skill sets and desired attributes of charter applicants. Applicant reviewers need to be well-versed in best practices research in order to identify viable applicants.

#### **Can oversight and accountability strategies identify schools with promise?**

The system of oversight should clarify the criteria for performance evaluations, use accurate and comprehensive indicators of school and student performance, and establish a rigorous process free of political pressure. Decisions whether or not to renew a charter should rely upon comprehensive measures of performance, including: student academic outcomes, achievement of other performance goals, as well as financial and regulatory compliance.

**“What we really want to know is how well chartering, as a policy, is working for a state. Is it producing new and better schools? Are good charter schools expanding and being copied, while poor schools close or stagnate? Is the quality of chartering getting better over time? Is the presence of chartering inducing non-charter public schools to improve?”**

*Charter School Achievement: What We Know*  
(Hassel, 2005, p. 1)

#### **Do charter authorizers and oversight agencies have the capacity to work effectively?**

A 2004 national review of charter schools revealed that lack of personnel and inadequate financial resources are primary challenges to effective authorization and oversight operations. These systems should be staffed by dedicated professionals adept at school-wide evaluations and performance-based accountability.

**Funding and Facilities** – Securing stable financial resources and facilities are common barriers to charter school establishment and operation. These issues can distract charter schools from focusing on more fundamental matters of teaching and learning.

#### **Are matters of funding and facilities demanding the attention of charter schools more than matters of teaching and learning?**

If this is the case, it is important to evaluate whether and how policy contributes to the situation, and what to do about it. Some suggest that charter schools should receive at least the same amount of money as other traditional public schools for both operational and capital needs. The federal department of education does offer competitive Per-pupil Facilities Aid to states that dedicate funding solely to the purpose of charter school

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<sup>70</sup>The discussion of how charter school policy matters comes from the following reports: Bulkeley & Fisler (2002) *A Review of the Research on Charter Schools*; Hill & Lake (2002) *Charter Schools and Accountability in Public Education*; Hoxby (2004) *Achievement in Charter Schools and Regular Public Schools in the United States: Understanding the Differences*; Lake & Hill (2005) *Hopes, Fears, & Reality: A Balanced Look at American Charter Schools in 2005*; National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) (2005) *Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing*; Policy and Program Studies Service. (2004). *Evaluation of the Public Charter Schools Program: Final Report*, U.S. Department of Education.

facilities. Currently, Tennessee is ineligible for this per-pupil facilities aid because state law does not earmark funding specifically for charter school facilities.

Time – Time is critical for planning and implementing charter schools effectively. Developing a strategic plan, hiring quality staff, securing facilities and funding, as well as engaging students, parents, and community in the school's development should not be rushed.

**Does policy encourage well-thought, unrushed development of charter schools?** Charter policy should permit and encourage applicants to be thoughtful and meticulous in charter school planning. For example, the authorization process should allow adequate time between approval and the start of the school year for the charter school to become a viable educational provider and a financially-sound organization.



# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY & RESEARCH

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The previous overview of national charter school research points out critical issues for consideration in Tennessee. This final section discusses several guiding principles and recommendations to improve upon and better understand the quality of charter school policy and practice in this state.<sup>71</sup>

## ***Recommendations for Charter Policy***

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### **Improve the process of charter school authorization, planning, and oversight.**

Both the Department of Education and charter authorizers (i.e., local boards of education) should continue working to improve the planning, authorization, and oversight process. Adequate time and resources are needed for the authorization and planning process, and for the transition between approval and the school's scheduled opening. The time period between notice of a charter's approval and the start of a school year is critical for securing facilities and funding, recruiting eligible students and school staff, and engaging the surrounding community. This process can be unnecessarily problematic if sufficient time and stable resources (i.e., funds for planning, start-up, and implementation; facilities aid) are not made available. The department and authorizers should consider how this process is impacting the quality of charter school start-up.

The authorization process should make explicit the extent of charter school autonomy, expected standards for charter school performance, evaluation strategies to be used by the authorizer, and consequences for under-performing charter schools. Charter schools and their charter authorizers should approach the authorization as a collaborative process. Both parties should have a clear understanding of what the authorization process entails, such as the responsibilities of each party and a clear timeline for how the authorization process should proceed.

The Department of Education should also consider how it can support local boards of education in their authorization and oversight responsibilities. Nationwide, authorizers need greater capacity to do their job well; the same need is apparent in Tennessee. The department should consider strategies to improve authorizer capacity by continuing to use the technical assistance provided by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers. Local authorizers likely need more staff with more training dedicated to the task of effectively identifying and monitoring the viability of charter schools. The department's division of Charter Schools and Choice will likely need more staff, as well, if the state's charter school sector continues to grow in coming years.

The Department of Education, charter authorizers, and charter schools should keep working together to improve financial management of charter schools. Financial management is a struggle for many charter schools nationwide and in Tennessee. Tracking financial practices with greater precision may alert schools, authorizers, and the state to financial problems soon enough to remedy the situation. The department and authorizers should ensure that schools receive adequate information, training, and resources needed to comply with financial reporting requirements. Charter schools should communicate openly with authorizers and the department, informing them of their financial management concerns. This communication can aid the department and authorizers in providing assistance that best meets charter schools' needs.

### **Share information about successful charter school practices.**

The Department of Education, charter authorizers, and the Tennessee Charter School Resource Center might collaborate to create more strategies for sharing information about successful charter school practices. State policymakers, local boards of education, and individual charter schools will benefit from a clearer understanding of which practices are and are not working for charter schools and charter school authorizers. Strategies might include an online clearinghouse

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<sup>71</sup> Note: OREA is required to report on the achievement of individual charter schools in 2008 and will, at that time, focus on more recommendations for school-level practice. See *Tennessee Code Annotated* 49-13-128.

of promising practices, statewide conferences, or other tools for enhancing communication among charter school stakeholders.

### **Make well-informed policy decisions**

The General Assembly, the Department of Education, local education agencies, and other policymakers should remember that the charter school sector, both nationally and in Tennessee, is continually changing with the arrival of new schools and new students. Therefore, charter school performance in years past may not serve as an accurate forecast of future charter school performance. Research does not yet speak to whether or not charter school attendance *causes* student achievement outcomes.

These same decision-makers should consider whether achievement outcomes are influenced by policy more so than by school type. For example, are policy issues related to the authorization process, instability of facilities and funding, or compliance-oriented accountability measures diverting too much attention away from the core operations of a school – teaching and learning?

## ***Recommendations for Charter Research***

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### **Improve data collection on charter students and achievement**

The Department of Education should continue using its student data to track performance of individual students both *before* and *after* their entry into charter schools. This performance data should be collected over multiple years in order to compare performance gains in charter and traditional public schools. This type of data provides researchers, such as those at the Center for Research in Educational Policy, with valuable information to compare achievement in charter and traditional public schools.

The department should also gather more comprehensive measures of charter school performance; for example, student behavior outcomes (e.g., attendance, discipline referrals, drop out, graduation), long-term educational success (e.g., college enrollment, college completion), indicators of parent involvement and satisfaction, and indicators of teaching quality (e.g., quality of professional development, extent of research-based instructional practices). Charter schools should collaborate with the department in providing a fuller picture of charter school performance.

### **Ask better research questions**

In addition to asking how charter schools are performing compared to traditional public schools, policymakers may wish to ask ...

- Why are some charter schools succeeding while others are not?
- How does Tennessee's charter school policy impact the success of the state's charter schools?
- What is innovative about charter schools, such as governance, school organization, curriculum and instruction?
- How are charter schools impacting education in the traditional public school sector?

**“The truth is that Americans are just now starting to ask tough questions about the effectiveness of particular schools, and to keep and analyze the kinds of hard data needed. The opportunistic and relatively crude studies done to date are actually reasonably good for the early stages of scientific inquiry, but they are not sound bases for policy.”**

*Hopes, Fears, & Reality  
(Lake & Hill, 2005, p. 29)*

## **APPENDIX A: SNAPSHOTS OF TENNESSEE CHARTER SCHOOLS**

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### **CIRCLES OF SUCCESS LEARNING ACADEMY<sup>72</sup>** MEMPHIS CITY SCHOOLS, OPENED 2003 SPONSORED BY THE WORKS INC.

#### **STUDENT ENROLLMENT**

- Current: K-4<sup>th</sup> grades (100 students)
- Planned Grade Span: K-5<sup>th</sup>

#### **MISSION**

- To educate the whole child, holistically surrounding them with the models, methods, and academic means of success.
- To educate the whole child to function productively in middle school and high school and ultimately in a global, pluralistic, and technologically advance society.

#### **CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION METHODS**

- Value and seek students' viewpoint. Adapt curriculum to address students' needs.
- After-school Tutoring Program using the U-TEACH model for tutors. Students are assigned tutors to assist in areas of weakness.
- Inclusion model classrooms & community-based learning
- Teacher Assistant in every classroom for a 10:1 student-teacher ratio.

#### **CURRICULUM SUMMARY**

- Literacy development and enhancement is at the center of the school's curriculum. Use reading and writing to enhance learning in core subjects. Phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension instruction
- Fine arts program to include Spanish, Ballet, Percussion, Violin, XPLORE Science, and Visual Arts.
- Service Learning
- Cultured Awareness

#### **ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK**

- Assess learning in context of teaching
- Curriculum-based and portfolio assessments
- Screening, diagnostic, and progress assessments of struggling students (primacy to those struggling in Reading and Language Arts)
- Star Reader assessment, Voyager assessment, and Renaissance Learning

#### **PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

- Parental Involvement Plan, Parent Surveys, Parent Advisory Board, and Parent representative on Governing Board
- School sends progress report every six weeks; teacher sends progress report every three weeks, newsletters every week, and current graded work every Wednesday.
- Interagency family support services, Parent Education programs (GED, literacy programs), finance and budgeting workshops
- Parent Advisory Board meetings every month

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<sup>72</sup> Information from Sheri Catron, Principal, and the charter school application on file at the Tennessee Department of Education.

- Multiplicity of parental involvement opportunities at flexible and variable hours

**CITY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS<sup>73</sup>**

MEMPHIS CITY SCHOOLS, OPENED 2004  
SPONSORED BY INFLUENCE 1 FOUNDATION

**STUDENT ENROLLMENT**

- Current: 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> grades (150 students)
- Planned Grade Span: 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>

**MISSION**

- A college preparatory high school with liberal arts core, operated as a Center of Excellence for Student Development.

**CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION METHODS**

- Strict Discipline Code of Conduct, Zero Tolerance reinforces scholarship and citizenship.
- Students are not allowed out of class during the first thirty minutes of the instructional period.
- After School Programming: 4:20-6:00 – extended hours offered for tutoring, service learning, club meetings, and extra-curricular activities.

**CURRICULUM SUMMARY**

- Aligned with Tennessee Content Standards and adapted from The College Board's standards and methods of instruction and AP course offerings.
- After School and Summer Academies for enrichment or remediation and access to resources:
  1. Doss Reading Academy (remediation)
  2. Snyder Writing Academy (remediation)
  3. Mayhue Creative and Technical Writing Academy (enrichment)
  4. Wright Communication Academy (enrichment – Mock Trial and Debate)
  5. Academy Term / Summer Academy (both remediation and enrichment)
  6. After School Academy (both remediation and enrichment)

**ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK**

- PSAT/NMSQT to assess skills necessary for college-level work; assist students in preparation for the SAT; afford students opportunities to enter competition for national scholarships; and allow students to receive information from colleges and universities.
- Writing portfolios, subject related projects, writing across the curriculum

**PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

- Parent Advisory Council and Parent Involvement Committee
- Weekly progress reports, parent conferences

<sup>73</sup> Information from Van Snyder, President, and the charter school application on file at the Tennessee Department of Education.

**KIPP ACADEMY NASHVILLE<sup>74</sup>**  
METRO NASHVILLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS, OPENED 2005  
SPONSORED BY THE KIPP FOUNDATION

**STUDENT ENROLLMENT**

- Current: 5<sup>th</sup> grade (57 students)
- Planned Grade Span: 5-8<sup>th</sup>

**MISSION**

- A College Preparatory Middle School where students “prepare for college” from day one. KIPP Academy Nashville cultivates the character and academic skills needed for students to be successful in rigorous high schools and colleges and to become responsible and productive citizens.
- Five Pillars: 1. High expectations (teachers, students, parents); 2. Choice and commitment; 3. More time on task; 4. Power to Lead; 5. Focus on results

**CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION METHODS**

- KIPP provides 35% more hours of school than traditional MNPS schools.
  - Monday through Thursday 7:25-5; Friday 7:25-3:30
  - Every other Saturday 8:55 to 1:00; 3 weeks during summer
- Instruction is standards based and varied (small group work, hands-on, role-playing, etc.). Lesson plans include auditory, visual, and kinesthetic activities.

**CURRICULUM SUMMARY**

- Preparation for high school and college: Honors courses, AP courses, and college prep standards to supplement MNPS academic standards
- 8 hours of math weekly. Literacy across the curriculum and daily reading blocks.
- Monthly Field Lessons to focus on teamwork. Weekly Paychecks to focus on character development. Daily morning work, such as math questions during breakfast. Annual week-long field lessons to broaden students’ horizons.

**ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK**

- Data collected during middle school years, and students’ success monitored in high school and college
- Diagnostic Testing: Baseline data gathered on students 4<sup>th</sup> grade TCAP and norm-referenced assessment upon entry.
- All students take Stanford 10 in fall and again in spring to measure growth
- Writing and reading portfolios; weekly math and English tests; biweekly science and social studies tests

**PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

- Parent surveys and weekly progress reports. Parent representative on Board of Directors.

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<sup>74</sup> Information from Randy Dowell, Principal, and the charter school application on file at the Tennessee Department of Education.

**MEMPHIS ACADEMY OF HEALTH SCIENCES MIDDLE SCHOOL**<sup>75</sup>  
MEMPHIS CITY SCHOOLS, OPENED 2003  
SPONSORED BY 100 BLACK MEN OF MEMPHIS, INC.

**STUDENT ENROLLMENT**

- Current: 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades (272 students)

**MISSION**

- Equip students with the skills to be competitive in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Students will demonstrate the ability to read, write, speak and calculate with clarity and precision. Successful transition to high school will be a primary goal for all.
- MAHS will bridge the needs of the students with the growing needs of Memphis' scientific and business community, therefore contributing to the academic and economic renaissance of the city.
- The Academy's structured yet caring environment will help instill in our students a desire to participate passionately and responsibly in their own learning and growth, their families, and the life of their community

**CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION METHODS**

- Developed an instructional program based on Effective Schools Research, implementing educational models and practices such as Mastery Teaching and Learning, Outcomes-Based Education, and Instructional Alignment
- Year round school provides students with more time on task, enabling them more opportunities to master and retain learning.
- Small group instruction, cooperative learning, peer and one-on-one tutoring, service learning, and technology based programs

**CURRICULUM SUMMARY**

- Curriculum composed of Tennessee standards and performance indicators
- Literacy-based program with a Health Sciences career theme, emphasizing math and science. Core academics are integrated with experiential learning and exposure to the health sciences fields.

**ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK**

- AGS Group Assessment Diagnostic Evaluation, a standardized assessment used to evaluate students' strengths and weaknesses in the areas in math and reading. Administered at the beginning of the academic year as a pre assessment and at the end of the year to measure growth. Identifies students who are deficient and supports instructional planning.
- Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) Computerized assessment. Administered regularly throughout the year to evaluate progress of students and instructors.

**PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

- The MAHS 100 Parent Council is actively involved in decision making at the school. The MAHS 100 is responsible for fundraising, school improvement and policy development.
- Parents are required to complete 20 hours of volunteer work as chaperones, tutors, office and teacher aides, service learning assistants and/or test monitors.

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<sup>75</sup> Information from Curtis Weathers, Principal, and the charter school application on file at the Tennessee Department of Education.

**MEMPHIS ACADEMY OF SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING<sup>76</sup>**  
MEMPHIS CITY SCHOOLS, OPENED 2003  
SPONSORED BY THE MEMPHIS BIOTECH FOUNDATION

**STUDENT ENROLLMENT**

- Current: 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> grades (380 students)
- Planned Grade Span: 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>

**MISSION**

- Produce lifelong learners, critical thinkers, effective communicators, and productive members of the global community through a focus on state and national standards, industrial partnerships,<sup>77</sup> research opportunities, technology, and staff committed to social awareness, excellence, and personal responsibility.

**CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION METHODS**

- Inquiry Based: Indirect instruction, experiential learning, independent study, field lessons, research-based learning, model building, simulations, and case studies
- Guided Immersion: Direct instruction, Socratic questioning, one-to-one teacher instruction, peer tutoring, guest speakers, and role play
- Saturday school: Review topics discussed in the week
- Study Sessions: Students return to each of their 6 classes for thirty minute study sessions, where teachers assign work and help with homework. Students see a topic twice a day in all classes and teachers fill the homework-assistance void. Sessions provide a safe environment during a time of day when students are most likely to be either the cause or victim of crime.

**CURRICULUM SUMMARY**

- Redundant instruction: Each course is divided into four “mini courses,” such as English 7a, 7b, 7c, 7d, which are offered simultaneously. Students deficient in 7a are not advanced to 7b. They will be reintroduced to the material.
- Develop science, math, engineering, and technology skills, capabilities, and interests, which often come from electives in traditional schools.
- Remedial action to bring all students to the same knowledge level. Redundant instruction through unique course scheduling

**ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK**

- Redundant instruction

**PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

- Enrichment activity with parents during Saturday sessions. Parental involvement as teaching strategy

<sup>76</sup> Information from Tommie Henderson, Principal, and the charter school application on file at the Tennessee Department of Education.

<sup>77</sup> Business Partners: IBM (mentors), Baptist Memorial Hospital (Develop health and safety courses), Methodist University Hospital (health and safety courses; sponsor writing competitions), St. Jude (mentors), and Fogelman YMCA (athletic facilities)

**MEMPHIS BUSINESS ACADEMY<sup>78</sup>**  
MEMPHIS CITY SCHOOLS, OPENED 2005  
SPONSORED BY THE MEMPHIS BUSINESS ACADEMY

**STUDENT ENROLLMENT**

- Current: 6<sup>th</sup> grade (62 students)
- Planned Grade Span: 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>

**MISSION**

- Improve the academic achievement of middle school students from North Memphis/Frayser area. Help them develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for post-secondary opportunities and a career in business.

**CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION METHODS**

- Instructional Methods include:
  1. Joint Productive Activity – Cooperative learning between students and with teachers
  2. Authentic tasks – contextualized activities to connect across content units
  3. Development of language and literacy across the curriculum (extended reading, writing, and speaking activities)
  4. Teaching through conversation – goal-oriented conversations
  5. Focus on complex thinking

**CURRICULUM SUMMARY**

- Interdisciplinary teaching of thematic units integrating concepts from each core subject – mathematics, science, social studies, and language arts – with a focus on issues related to business, entrepreneurship, and financial responsibility.
- At the culmination of each thematic unit, parents and community are invited for a “Culminating Activity” where students present work.
- Infusion of Technology to facilitate authentic learning.
- Core subject blocks (Language Arts/Social Studies & Mathematics/Science) for 2.5 hours daily. Additional 45 minute study sessions for review or remediation.
- Additional one-on-one tutoring available during study session or after school.

**ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK**

- Internal assessments to measure student achievement:
  1. Teacher observations and interviews
  2. Student journals and portfolios
  3. Teacher-designed tests
  4. Products created for authentic projects – “Culminating Activity”

**PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

- Progress reports every 3 weeks

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<sup>78</sup> Information from Celia Rousseau, former Principal, and the charter school application on file at the Tennessee Department of Education.

**PROMISE ACADEMY<sup>79</sup>**  
MEMPHIS CITY SCHOOLS, OPENED 2005  
SPONSORED BY THE PROMISE ACADEMY, INC.

**STUDENT ENROLLMENT**

- Current: Kindergarten (54 students)
- Planned Grade Span: K-8<sup>th</sup>, Chartered for K-5<sup>th</sup>

**MISSION**

- To teach and inspire the mind, body, and spirit of our children so that they can succeed in any academic or cultural setting.
- Prepare children to gain acceptance to competitive high schools (i.e. Memphis City Schools Optional Schools) and excel in the nation's most rigorous schools

**CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION METHODS**

- Remediation: Extended small group reading time, math instruction, and day tutoring program.
- Socratic seminars on a weekly basis to develop higher order thinking skills.
- Emphasis on reading. 2 ½ hours for instructional blocks in language arts.
- CORE Knowledge Social Studies Instruction

**CURRICULUM SUMMARY**

- Life and Culture Curriculum designed to guide students and engage families:
  1. Mastery of Mathematics and Technology – study of commerce and contact with Memphis business leaders
  2. Development of higher order thinking skills – exhibitions of portfolios, Socratic seminars to explore works of art, career choices, and social issues.
  3. Mastery of Language Skills – develop and present a Life and Culture portfolio and Promise Plan.
  4. Partnerships with Parents and Community – parents, business, and cultural organizations develop a Promise Plan for each student, which begins as an academic and social development plan and grows into a plan for rigorous high school, college, and profession.

**ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK**

- Identifying Student Needs (ISN) process
- Metropolitan Readiness Test, Developmental Reading Assessment, Scholastic Reading Inventory, Brigance Diagnostic Skills Inventory, SRA-Open Court Assessment, Everyday Math Assessment, Memphis City School Standards Assessment, STAR Reading Assessment
- School designed electronic portfolio system and public exhibition as part of Life and Culture Curriculum.
- University of Memphis designed survey for student and family's perceptions.

**PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

- Life and Culture Curriculum's Partnerships with Parents and Community

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<sup>79</sup> Information from Blakley Wallace, Principal, and the charter school application on file at the Tennessee Department of Education.

**SMITHSON-CRAIGHEAD ACADEMY<sup>80</sup>**  
METRO NASHVILLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS, OPENED 2003  
SPONSORED BY PROJECT REFLECT, INC.

**STUDENT ENROLLMENT**

- 2005-06: K-4<sup>th</sup> (195 students)

**MISSION**

- Assist student growth in critical thinking, self-discipline, and socialization for appropriate interaction in an Academy setting and on-going academic success.

**CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION METHODS**

- Auditory, visual, kinesthetic and tactile learning
- Socialization for academy learning. Study and review the rules daily:  
1) self-control; 2) obey teachers; 3) work before play.
- Repetition, reinforcement
- Talk time – informal 15-minute conversation
- Family Liaison for home-Academy partnerships

**CURRICULUM SUMMARY**

- Ungraded environment. Grade equivalencies based on skill levels.
- Ages 8 and 9 who have mastered skills will progress to the programs prescribed by the Metropolitan Academy curriculum.

**ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK**

- Skills Mastery Portfolio to determine gaps in learning. Group students according to need.
- At the end of each 6 weeks, the Principal will review each student's academic progress. Principal will work with any teacher whose class, as a whole, is not demonstrating adequate academic progress.

**PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

- Creates growth opportunities for parents in appropriate parenting skills

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<sup>80</sup> Information from Allison Cherry, Administrative Assistant, and the charter school application on file at the Tennessee Department of Education.

**SOUTHERN AVENUE CHARTER SCHOOL OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE  
AND CREATIVE ARTS<sup>81</sup>**

MEMPHIS CITY SCHOOLS, OPENED 2005

SPONSORED BY CHILDREN'S CARE AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER, INC.

**STUDENT ENROLLMENT**

- Current: K-1<sup>st</sup> grades (66 students)
- Planned Grade Span: K-3<sup>rd</sup>

**MISSION**

- Lay foundation for the child to enter 4<sup>th</sup> grade on grade level, ready for learning.

**CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION METHODS**

- Student-centered Instruction
  - Experiential Instruction
  - Holistic Instruction
  - Authentic Instruction
  - Expressive Instruction
  - Reflective Instruction
  - Social Instruction
  - Collaborative Instruction
  - Democratic Instruction
  - Cognitive Instruction
  - Developmental Instruction
  - Constructivist Instruction
- During the 1<sup>st</sup> week of school, students attend half days on staggered schedules to develop IEP's.
  - Mandatory before and after school tutoring (7am – 8am and 4-5pm), with optional tutoring (5-6pm)
  - Mandatory Kaleidoscope creative arts program (3-4pm)

**CURRICULUM SUMMARY**

- Literacy is the central theme. Reading goal for each student is 38 books per year.
- Foreign Language Program – Spanish 4 days a week for 30 minutes each day
- Computer Education Program – minimum of 15 minutes per day per child
- Kaleidoscope a Mandatory Creative Arts Program (3-4pm daily) - Chess Programs, Piano or Strings, Japanese, French, Chorus, Dance, Drama, Arts

**ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK**

- Skills testing at 6 week intervals to measure individual and class-level progress
- School will pay for 2<sup>nd</sup> graders to take 3<sup>rd</sup> grade TCAP to measure the gap between what they know and what they need to know

**PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

- Nightly 30 minute reading assignments for parents and students; 10 volunteer hours; Parent Advisory Committee; and Family Support Program

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<sup>81</sup> Information from Joyce Mathis, former Principal, and the charter school application on file at the Tennessee Department of Education.

**STAR (SOARING TOWARD ACADEMIC READINESS) ACADEMY<sup>82</sup>**  
MEMPHIS CITY SCHOOLS, OPENED 2004  
SPONSORED BY GOLDEN GATE DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION<sup>83</sup>

**STUDENT ENROLLMENT**

- Current: K-3<sup>rd</sup> grades (151 students)
- Planned Grade Span: K-5<sup>th</sup>

**MISSION**

- To become a beacon in the community as a school of excellence that meets the needs of the whole child by offering a balanced, coherent and academically rich curriculum in a nurturing atmosphere that is family oriented, community supported, and developmentally appropriate.

**CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION METHODS**

- Foster children's curiosity through directed, non-directed, and child-initiated methods including one-on-one, small group and whole-class instruction, collaborative learning, role playing, problem solving, and "real world" simulations.
- On and off campus events/field experiences that make content knowledge relevant and meaningful.

**CURRICULUM SUMMARY**

- Reading, writing, and mathematical achievement that will establish a solid foundation for life skills.
- Exploratory courses, including Spanish, music, technology, visual arts, creative writing, character education, and manners.
- After school program and 6-week summer camp to maintain safe environment and learning opportunities.

**ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK**

- An equal number of low/special needs, median and high achievers are assigned to each class so that teacher effectiveness can be monitored.
- Participation charts and individual development goals plan.
- Personnel, evaluators, and parents assess the attainment of the school's mission.

**PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

- Principal/Parent meeting at the beginning of the year
- STAR Family Night
- Parent conferences each grading period
- School newsletter sent home with report card each grading period
- "Take-home folders" sent home with daily conduct grades and graded work each day
- Parental involvement grade appears on each student's report card each grading period indicating a parent's number of volunteer hours (E = 4-5 hours volunteered that grading period; S = 3 – 3.99 hours volunteered that grading period; N = 2 – 2.99 hours volunteered that grading period; U = 0 – 1.99 hours volunteered that grading period)
- Active Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO)

<sup>82</sup> Information from Kia Young, Principal, and the charter school application on file at the Tennessee Department of Education.

<sup>83</sup> Chartered by the State in 1996 to develop youth programs and entrepreneurial endeavors, with emphasis on developing minority business. Operates early childhood center and a tutorial program as well.

**STAX MUSIC ACADEMY<sup>84</sup>**  
MEMPHIS CITY SCHOOLS, OPENED 2005  
SPONSORED BY STAX MUSIC ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL, LLC

**STUDENT ENROLLMENT**

- Current: 6<sup>th</sup> grade (55 students)
- Planned Grade Span: 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>

**MISSION**

- Improve students' lives through a world-class education program by placing music at the soul of learning in order to inspire student engagement and academic excellence.
- Founding principles:
  - Education rooted in community
  - Use musical heritage and legacy to educate
  - Music and the arts provides high levels of education

**CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION METHODS**

- Primary instructional methods in order of frequency:
  - Direct Instruction/Individual Work, Projects, and Cooperative Learning
- Other methods: Team Teaching, Individual Tutoring, Ability and Multi-aged Grouping, Experiential Learning, Independent Inquiry

**CURRICULUM SUMMARY**

- Musically rich, vigorously academic college preparatory school built on high expectations. All students are members of a string and rhythm orchestra, and there is one track – college prep.
- Staxology courses: Integration of the Stax Records legacy into the education program. Middle school students explore the connection between core academic areas and musical offerings. High school students apply multimedia skills, business, project management, and leadership to key academic concepts in a real world setting – the music industry.<sup>85</sup> Seniors have a final showcase project.
- Extended School Days (9.5 hour days). Saturday Sessions, Summer Session, and external tutoring for remediation.

**ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK**

- "Think-Links P.A.S.S." Program by Vanderbilt, with pre-assessment and 2 mid-year assessments to revise instruction for achievement benchmarks
- Portfolios and Juries/Exhibitions/Performances

**PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

- Parent commitment to ensure that students read for 45 minutes nightly
- Parent-Student-Teacher Conferences and Student-Parent-Faculty Surveys
- Parent Association (in developing stages).

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<sup>84</sup> Information from David Hill, School Director, and the charter school application on file at the Tennessee Department of Education.

<sup>85</sup> Currently, Staxology is not in operation at the middle school level. It is in development for high school.

**YO! ACADEMY<sup>86</sup>**  
MEMPHIS CITY SCHOOLS, OPENED 2004  
SPONSORED BY THE YO! MEMPHIS FOUNDATION

**STUDENT ENROLLMENT**

- Current: 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades (178 students)
- Target students from 12 area high schools with a history of low graduation rates, low achievement on English II and Algebra I Gateway, and behavior problems.

**MISSION**

- Create an academically challenging environment that will foster academic achievement through a focus on visual and performing arts.
- Provide students with personal attention from adults, a customized academic program, peer group with positive aspirations, and workplace readiness skills.

**CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION METHODS**

- One teacher for each core subject through all grades. Whole group instruction for new concepts. Small group activities for retention.
- 8 Saturdays for 4 hours per day (community service, conferences with teachers)

**CURRICULUM SUMMARY**

- Arts-infused Integrated Honors Curriculum and Thematic Units
- Course I “track” for students without requisite math and science courses. Course II “track” for students on grade level
- Computer-assisted instructional focus. All students receive wireless computers.
- 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Project: Performance or exhibition with a written thesis
- 12<sup>th</sup> Grade New York City Trip: 2 weeks visiting museums, plays, historical sites, college campuses, and internships
- Post-secondary Preparation, including financial aid guidance, college visits, dual enrollment, and ACT/SAT prep.

**ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK**

- Academic, psychological, and career inventory assessments for the development of an Individual Support Service Plan with academic and support service goals.
- Case Management Approach for day-to-day intervention

**PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

- Invited to collaborative projects at the Academy
- Case management partnerships and Parent Association
- Parent representative on Board of Directors

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<sup>86</sup> Information from Marie Milam, Executive Director, and the charter school application on file at the Tennessee Department of Education.

## APPENDIX B: CHARTER SCHOOL APPLICATION REVIEW GUIDE<sup>87</sup>

### Charter School Application Review Guide

Name of Proposed Charter School:	Application Reviewer's Name:
Legal Name of Group Applying for Charter:	Application Review Date:

**Instructions for Completing Review:** Evaluate the 20 legislatively required elements of the charter school application below. Each of the 20 elements is included in one of four categories: mission, education plan, founding group, business/operations plan. The numbers to the left of each element correspond to the number given to the element in Tennessee's charter legislation and to the number of the question in the application packet. Use the accompanying Scoring Criteria to rate the applicant on each element. The Scoring Criteria describe an "excellent," "adequate," and "inadequate" application on each element. Each element has a number of total possible points that can be awarded. An element that is inadequate in all components would receive a "0;" and, an element that is excellent in all components would receive the total possible points available. It is likely that most of the elements of each application will be scored somewhere between those two points. Half points (0.5) may be awarded as necessary. Provide additional specific and general comments as warranted.

#### MISSION

Question # and Element	Possible Points	Points Awarded	Comments
1. Statement defining the mission and goals of the proposed charter school	10		
<i>Total Points</i>	<b>10</b>		

#### EDUCATION PLAN

Question # and Element	Possible Points	Points Awarded	Comments
2. Proposed instructional goals and methods for the school	20		
3. Plan for evaluating student academic achievement and procedures for remedial action	15		
10. Code of behavior and discipline	5		
<i>Total Points</i>	<b>40</b>		

#### FOUNDING GROUP

Question # and Element	Possible Points	Points Awarded	Comments

<sup>87</sup> Tennessee Department of Education, <http://state.tn.us/education/fedprog/pdf/reviewguide.pdf>

<b>8. Members of the governing body AND 13. Sponsors</b>	13		
<b>7. Governance and operations rules and policies</b>	7		
<i>Total Points</i>	<b>20</b>		

**BUSINESS/OPERATIONS PLAN**

<b>Question # and Element</b>	<b>Possible Points</b>	<b>Points Awarded</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>4. Operating budget</b>	10		
<b>5. Audit method</b>	1		
<b>6. Timetable</b>	3		
<b>9. Admissions policies</b>	2		
<b>11. Health and safety compliance AND 19. Transportation</b>	2		
<b>12. Employee qualifications</b>	2		
<b>14. Purchasing procedures and investments</b>	1		
<b>15. Management/administrative plan</b>	5		
<b>16. Proposed by-laws</b>	1		
<b>17. Assurance of liability</b>	1		
<b>18. Insurance coverage</b>	1		
<b>20. Financial health and stability</b>	1		
<i>Total Points</i>	<b>30</b>		

## **APPENDIX C: PERSONS CONSULTED**

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Stephanie Butler, Senior Program Officer  
Hyde Family Foundations

Sheri Catron, Principal  
Circles of Success Learning Academy

Allison Cherry, Administrative Assistant  
Smithson Craighead Academy

Nancy Dill, Executive Director  
Adult & Alternative Programs/Charter  
Schools  
Metro Nashville Public Schools

Randy Dowell, Principal  
KIPP Academy Nashville

Jo Garner, Program Project Specialist  
Research, Evaluation, & Assessment  
Memphis City Schools

Sandra R. Gray, Director  
Charter Schools and Choice  
Tennessee Department of Education

Tommie Henderson, Principal  
Memphis Academy of Science and  
Engineering

David Hill, School Director  
Stax Music Academy Charter School

Jeremy Kane, Executive Director  
Tennessee Charter School Resource Center

Joyce Mathis, Principal  
Southern Avenue Charter School of  
Academic Excellence and Creative Arts

Marie Milam, Executive Director  
Yo! Academy

Celia Rousseau, Former Principal  
Anthony Anderson, Principal  
Memphis Business Academy

Charisse Sales  
Office of Charter Schools and Special  
Initiatives  
Memphis City Schools

Stephen Smith  
Director of Government Relations  
Tennessee School Boards Association

Van Snyder II, President  
City University School of Liberal Arts

Kay Stafford, Director  
Human Resources Department  
Metro Nashville Public Schools

Stacey Thompson  
Office of Charter Schools and Special  
Initiatives  
Memphis City Schools

Blakley Wallace, Principal  
Promise Academy

Curtis Weathers, Principal  
Memphis Academy of Health Sciences

William E. White II, Executive Director  
Research, Evaluation, & Assessment  
Memphis City Schools

Jerry Winters  
Manager of Government Relations  
Tennessee Education Association

Kia Young, Principal  
STAR Academy

## APPENDIX D: RESPONSE LETTER FROM COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION

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NOTES: (1) Portions of this letter refer to content from a previous draft of this report. The Department of Education decided not to alter its response following draft revisions.  
(2) Upon reviewing the report, the State Board of Education decided not to submit an official response letter to be included in the appendix.



**PHIL BREDESEN**  
GOVERNOR

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**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**  
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**LANA C. SEIVERS, Ed.D.**  
COMMISSIONER

March 8, 2006

Ms. Ethel R. Detch, Director  
Office Education Accountability  
Comptroller of the Treasury  
Suite 1700, James K. Polk Building  
Nashville, Tennessee 37243-0266

Dear Ms. Detch:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and respond to the report your office recently compiled on the charter school movement in Tennessee. The Tennessee Department of Education is committed to the idea that a quality education is the fundamental right of every child in each of the 1,700 public schools in Tennessee, and this of course includes children enrolled in the state's twelve public charter schools. Therefore, we will evaluate the feasibility of the recommendations for charter school policy and research made in the report, within the context of current Departmental resources.

Pursuant to a review of the report by appropriate Department personnel, we would offer the following observations:

- With regard to the recommendation item labeled "*Improve the process of charter school authorization and oversight*," the time frame for accepting, reviewing, and disposing of applications for new charter schools is outlined in the *Tennessee Public Charter Schools Act of 2002*. T.C.A. 49-13-107 sets the annual deadline for receiving applications as "on or before October 1 of the year preceding the year in which the proposed public charter school plans to begin operation." T.C.A. 49-13-108 identifies specific benchmarks within the timeframe.
- With regard to the recommendation item labeled "*Track charter school funding and expenditures with more precision*," the Department provides information, training, and resources to charter schools to enable them to comply with financial reporting requirements. Budgets, finances, and charter school funding are prominent topics at both a workshop offered for entities wishing to submit a charter school application and a workshop offered for charter school grant applicants that have had their charter school application approved. Financial consultants located each regional Field Service Center Office are available to assist charter

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schools on an ongoing basis, upon request. The Department has also developed a calendar for financial reporting and communicated this information to charter schools, and staff has been dedicated to reviewing said reports.

While charter schools have always had access to Tennessee Department of Education resources and personnel, recently, we have completed restructuring that specifically assigns *No Child Left Behind* Regional Support Consultants to coordinate with the Director of Charter Schools and Choice to act as an additional liaison with charter schools. These consultants will be available to visit the schools and offer them technical assistance.

Each day, the Tennessee Department of Education continues efforts to collaborate with all stakeholders to develop and refine a charter schools infrastructure that will serve the best interests of children, while respecting the autonomy afforded via the charter school concept.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lana C. Seivers".

Lana C. Seivers

# Offices of Research and Education Accountability Staff

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