



Public Schools of North Carolina  
State Board of Education  
Department of Public Instruction

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# Report to the North Carolina General Assembly

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Charter Schools Annual Report  
*S.L. 2013-335; S.L. 2014-115*

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**Date Due: February 15, 2018**  
Report # 46  
DPI Chronological Schedule, 2016-2017

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the first charter school was opened in North Carolina in 1997, the state has implemented a number of rules and regulations to ensure that charter schools were serving all students well. One such regulation was the requirement that the State Board provide an annual reporting of charter school performance, impact on traditional public schools, best practices, etc. The current year report describes the state of North Carolina's charter schools, and provides a more in-depth reporting of academic performance than in years past. OCS and the State Board of Education intend to continue in-depth investigation of charter school performance in future annual reports.

The State Board is pleased to report that, overall, charter schools are becoming more racially diverse, and the overall percentage of economically disadvantaged students enrolling in charter schools has increased from the previous year. In addition, the percentage of charter schools earning Ds or Fs has decreased over the past four years. With continued monitoring and oversight, and strong authorization processes, OCS is confident that the strength of the charter sector will continue to grow. To that end, the Charter Schools Advisory Board has implemented a number of measures to increase transparency and rigor in the charter school application process. These changes, and others, are discussed in greater detail in the body of the report.

## LEGISLATION AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In 1996, the North Carolina General Assembly passed the Charter School Act, thereby authorizing the establishment of “a system of charter schools to provide opportunities for teachers, parents, pupils, and the community to create and sustain schools that operated independently of existing schools, as a method to accomplish all the following:

1. Improve student learning;
2. Increase learning opportunities for all students, with special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for student who are identified as at risk of academic failure or academically gifted;
3. Encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods;
4. Create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunities to be responsible for the learning at the school site;
5. Provide parents and students with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public-school system;
6. Hold the schools established under this Part accountable for meeting measurable student achievement results, and provide the schools with a method to change from rule-based to performance-based accountability systems.

Codified in NC General Statute as Article 14A of Chapter 115C (115C-218, *et al.*), the charter schools law assigns the State Board of Education the sole authority to grant approval of applications for charters.

Statute originally capped at 100 the number of charter schools that could operate in the State in each school year, but the General Assembly removed that ceiling in August 2011. Thirty-four charter schools opened in the inaugural year of 1997. There are 173 charter schools operating in the 2017-18 school year, including 20 of the original 34 schools. Since 1997, 44 schools that have been open at some time have closed.

Current statute sets the parameters for how the system of charter schools must operate. The law includes the following sections:

- Purpose of charter schools; establishment of North Carolina Charter Schools Advisory Board and North Carolina Office of Charter Schools
- Eligible applicants, contents of applications; submission of applications for approval
- Final approval of applications for charter schools

- Charter school exemptions
- Charter school operation
- General requirements
- Accountability; reporting requirements to the State Board of Education
- Charter School Facilities
- Charter School Transportation
- Admission Requirements
- Employment Requirements
- Funding for charters
- Causes for nonrenewal or termination; disputes

Finally, G.S. 115C-218.110 directs that the State Board “shall report annually no later than January 15 to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee on the following:

- 1) The current and projected impact of charter schools on the delivery of services by the public schools.
- 2) Student academic progress in the charter schools as measured, where available, against the academic year immediately preceding the first academic year of the charter schools' operation.
- 3) Best practices resulting from charter school operations.
- 4) Other information the State Board considers appropriate.

This report addresses this legislated reporting requirement.

## CURRENT STATE OF CHARTER SCHOOLS IN NC

### School & Student Population

#### Schools

Between 1997 and 2011, the number of charter schools in NC first grew rapidly, then slowly, but steadily until it reached the legislative maximum of 100 schools. Since the restriction on the number of charter schools allowed was lifted in 2011, 367 applicants have submitted complete applications for charters, and the State Board has approved 110.

Over the past several years, the Charter Schools Advisory Board and the Office of Charter Schools have implemented many processes through which to provide additional supports for charter applicants. This includes an initial review of applications for completeness by OCS, and notification for any applicants whose applications have been deemed incomplete. These applicant groups are then given five business days to make necessary additions prior to being forwarded to external reviewers. Previously, incomplete applications were automatically disqualified from consideration for the current application cycle.

In 2016-17, the CSAB made additional significant changes to the application review process to increase transparency and rigor in recommending applicants for State Board approval. An additional opportunity for in-person clarification was established for applicants, thereby removing the unwelcome burden of responding in writing to external reviewers. In addition, initial application reviews were divided into two committees to allow CSAB members to focus deeply on a subset of applications during the first review.

In 2016, 38 applications were submitted to open schools in 2018-2019. Of those, 15 were approved by the State Board. Pending completion of a successful planning year, these schools will open in 2018-19.

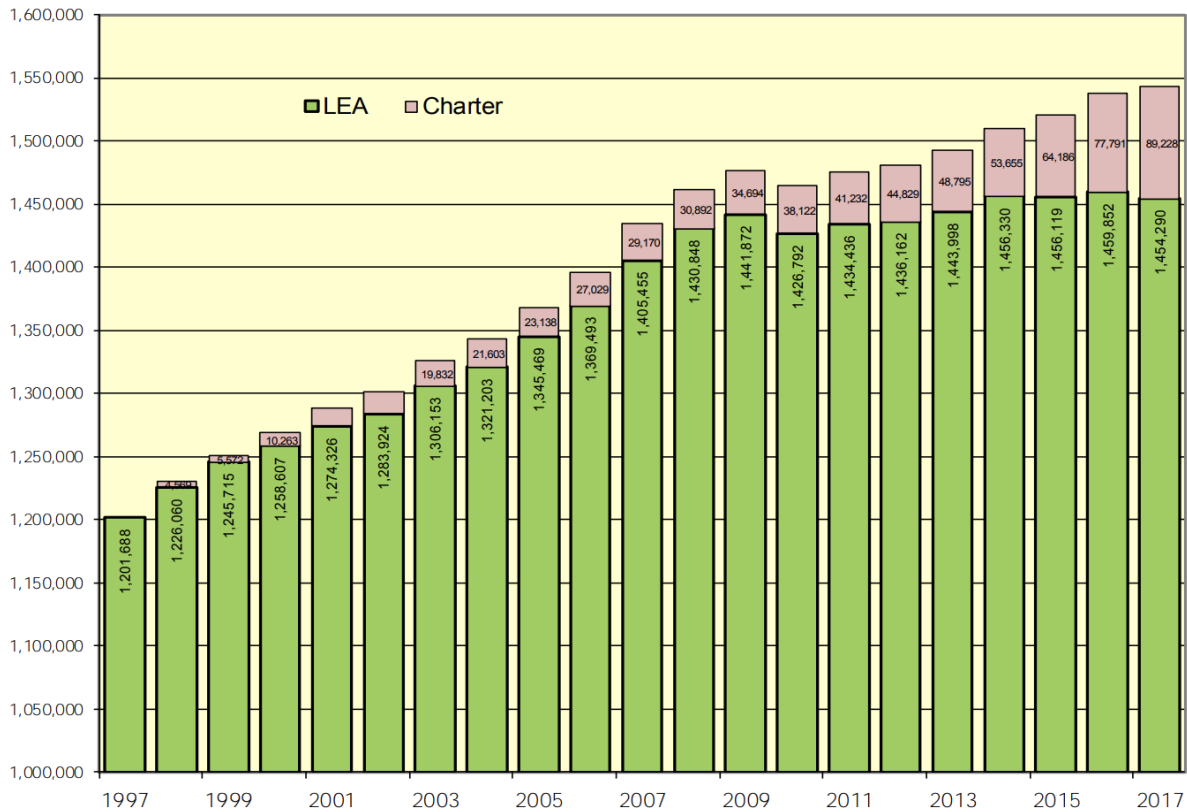
In the most recent application cycle, 29 nonprofit boards submitted complete applications. Of those 29, twenty were applications for schools to open in 2019-2020, five were for Acceleration and one for Fast Track Replication (to open in 2018), three were new or repeat applicants requesting an accelerated open, and two were conversion applicants requesting an accelerated open. These applications are currently under review.

173 charter schools are operating in 2017-18.

#### Students

The charter schools' student population has grown steadily since 1997, with larger annual increases occurring in the years since the cap on schools was lifted in 2011. The graph below illustrates the increase in allotted charter school student enrollments from 1997 to 2017. According to second month Average Daily Membership (ADM) figures certified in December 2017, 100,508 students are now being served by charter schools. This represents 6.56% of the total public-school population (1,533,180).

**Figure 1. Allotted Average Daily Membership 1997 – 2017**



*Data Source: Highlights of the North Carolina Public School Budget, February 2017, Information Analysis, Division of School Business, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction*

In addition to current charter schools’ student population, many students have applied to enroll in charter schools, but have not be able to enroll due to limited space. The NCDPI Office of Charter Schools surveys charter schools annually to gather data regarding the number of students on “waitlists” statewide. In the 2017 survey (closed December 2017), 134 charter schools (77.5% of the 173 schools in operation) responded and indicated that a total of 55,165 students are on waitlists. This figure reflects a point in time (waitlists could change daily), and cannot be verified as an unduplicated count of students (as a student could be on multiple school waitlists), but is the best information available regarding the number of students who have indicated interest in attending charter schools but are not currently enrolled.

## **Admissions and Student Demographics**

### **Background**

NC’s charter schools are not subject to school district geographic restrictions and often have student populations drawn from multiple local school districts. Charter schools are directed in G.S. 115C-218.45(e) to “make efforts [to have] the population of the school reasonably reflect the racial and ethnic composition of the general population residing within the local school administrative unit in which the [charter] school is located or the racial and ethnic composition of the specific

population that the school seeks to serve residing within the local school administrative unit in which the [charter] school is located.” There is no mechanism by which schools can guarantee racial and ethnic balance, however, nor is there an official consequence for not achieving it.

Charter schools may target certain students through admissions set-asides, if the student population being given priority for admission is identified as such through the school’s State Board-approved mission and admissions process. As of this writing, four charter schools have received approval to institute weighted lotteries to work towards a more diverse student body:

- Central Park School for Children, located in Durham County;
  - 2014-15: 15.2% ED
  - 2015-16: 15.83% ED
  - 2016-17: 22.11% ED
  - 2017-18: 23.4% ED
- Community School of Davidson, located in Mecklenburg County;
  - 2017-18: <5% ED
- GLOW Academy, located in New Hanover County; and
  - 2017-18: 71% ED
- Charlotte Lab School, located in Mecklenburg County
  - 2017-18: 6.6% ED

The ability to conduct a weighted lottery was codified in the 2015 long session in HB 334 and provides for charter schools to have additional controls to enroll underserved populations if supported by the school’s mission.

Charter schools may not discriminate in their admissions process based on race, creed, national origin, religion, or ancestry. Charter schools may target certain students through their marketing, but “any child who is qualified under the laws of [NC] for admission to a public school is qualified for admission to a charter school.” General Statute does offer a provision for single-gender schools. The Girls Leadership Academy of Wilmington (GLOW), approved for operation beginning in 2016, was the first single-gender charter school.

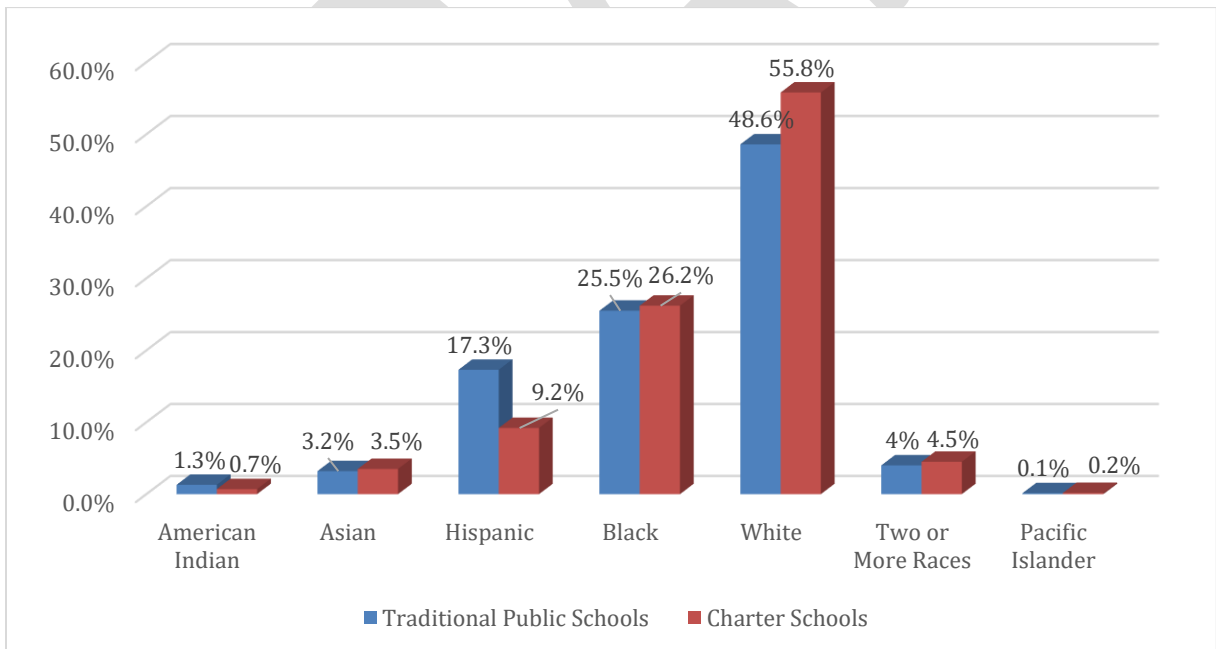
Each charter school has an authorized maximum funded enrollment. If a school receives more applications from qualified applicants than there are funded slots at the school, the school must conduct a lottery and establish a waitlist. Students who are not enrolled through the lottery must re-apply for admission each year. Students who are enrolled do not need to re-apply and may retain enrollment in subsequent years.

**Demographics: Race, Ethnicity, Sex**

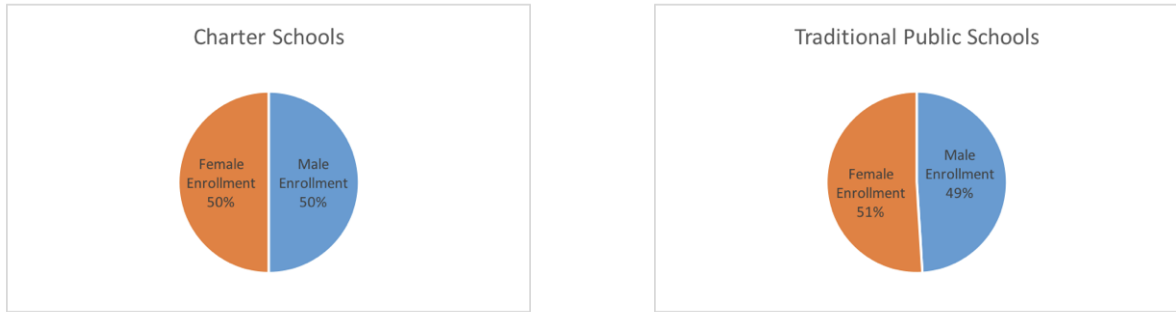
Based on data from 2016-17, overall student populations in the NC charter schools and traditional public schools remain largely like trends established in the past several years. In terms of overall percentages, charter school demographics largely mirror those of traditional public-school districts. As has been reported in previous annual reports, there remains a larger discrepancy between the percentage of White and Hispanic students in charter and traditional public schools. The percentage of male and female students enrolled in charter schools is quite similar to the percentage enrolled in traditional public schools.

In 2016, a task force was created by Lieutenant Governor Dan Forest to examine charter school outreach to Hispanic families. A poll of several hundred Hispanic parents across the state found that only 12% knew what a charter school was or were aware that they existed, and only 5% had attempted to enroll their student in a charter school. The task force concluded that this is not an issue unique to North Carolina, and suggested that charter school officials consult with states such as Florida- who have larger enrollments of Hispanic students- for solutions. The task force also found that many charter schools do not have applications in Spanish, and there exists no English to Spanish translation for the term “charter school.” To increase Hispanic participation, charter schools should be referred to as “public charter schools.” The percentage of Hispanic students served by charter schools in 2016-17 increased .8% from the previous year, and the percentage of White students served by charter schools decreased by 1.3%.

**Figure 2. Overall Traditional Public Schools and Charter Schools Racial Demographics**



**Figure 3. Overall Traditional Public Schools and Charter Schools Sex Demographics**



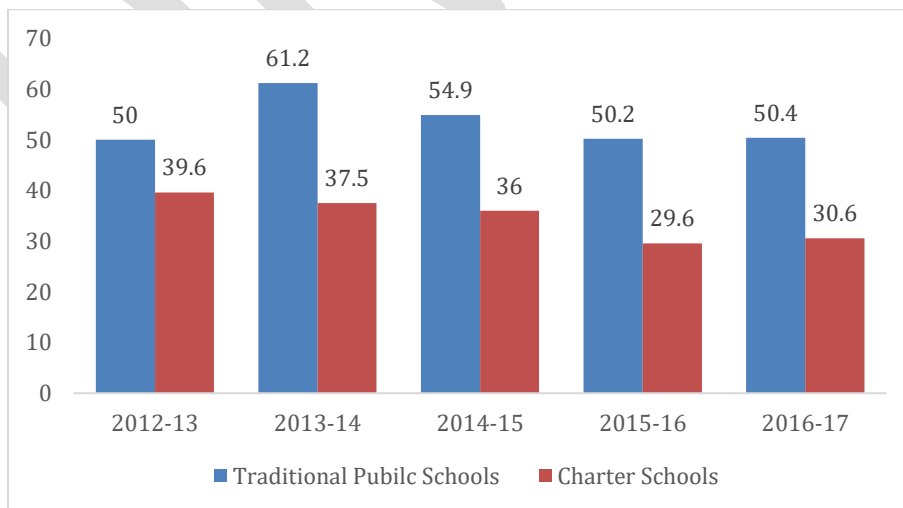
Source: 2016-17 Grade, Race, Sex Report <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/fbs/resources/data/>

**Demographics: Socioeconomic Status**

In previous years, ED student data was self-reported by charter schools and concerns regarding the accuracy of the data arose. To mitigate these concerns, improvements to the data collection process were implemented, and ED student data for the 2017-18 school year was compiled via collaboration between the National School Lunch Program and the Direct Certification System.

Overall, NC’s charter schools and traditional public schools differ in terms of the percentage of Economically Disadvantaged (ED) students (e.g., students from families with lower income) they serve. As illustrated in the chart below, the percentage of ED students in traditional public schools and charter schools has fluctuated over the past three years, but the overall percentage of ED students in charter schools in 2016-17 increased 1% from the previous year. The percentage of ED students in charter schools was approximately 19.8% lower than in traditional schools.

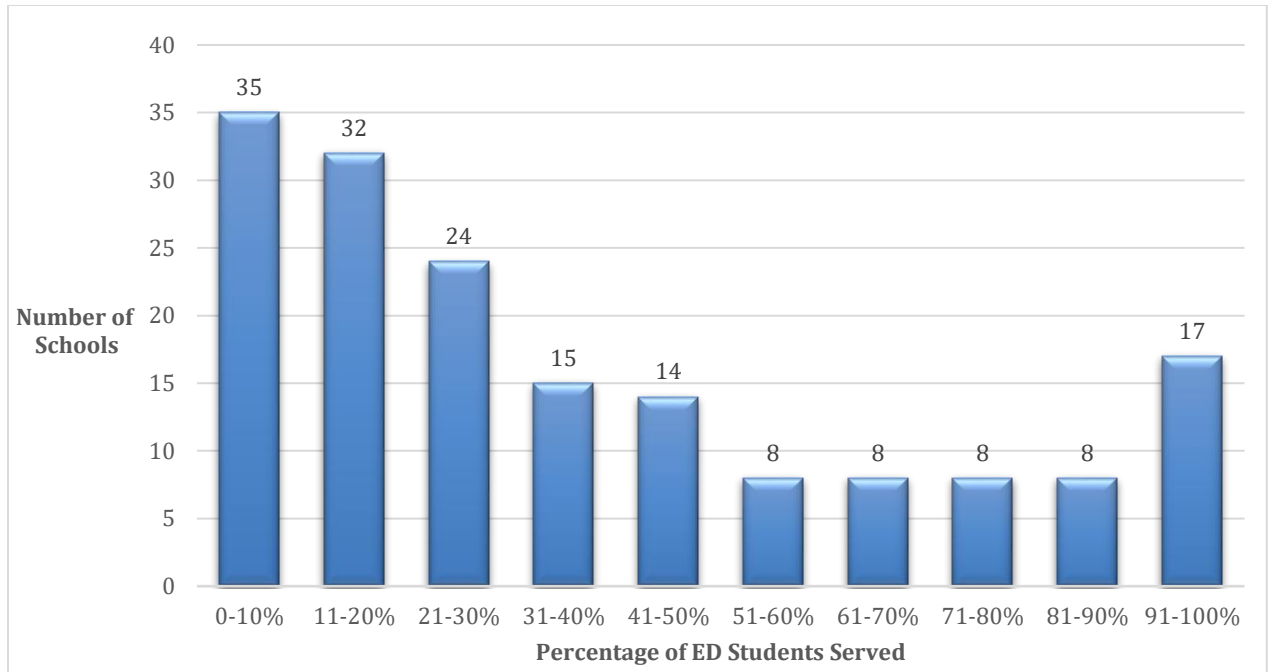
**Figure 4. Percentage of Overall Student Population that is Economically Disadvantaged**



Source: 2016-17 Annual Report, NCDPI Accountability Services Division

The chart on the following page displays the distribution of charter schools based on percentage of ED students served in 2017.

**Figure 5. Distribution of Charter Schools by Percentage of ED Students Served in 2017-18**



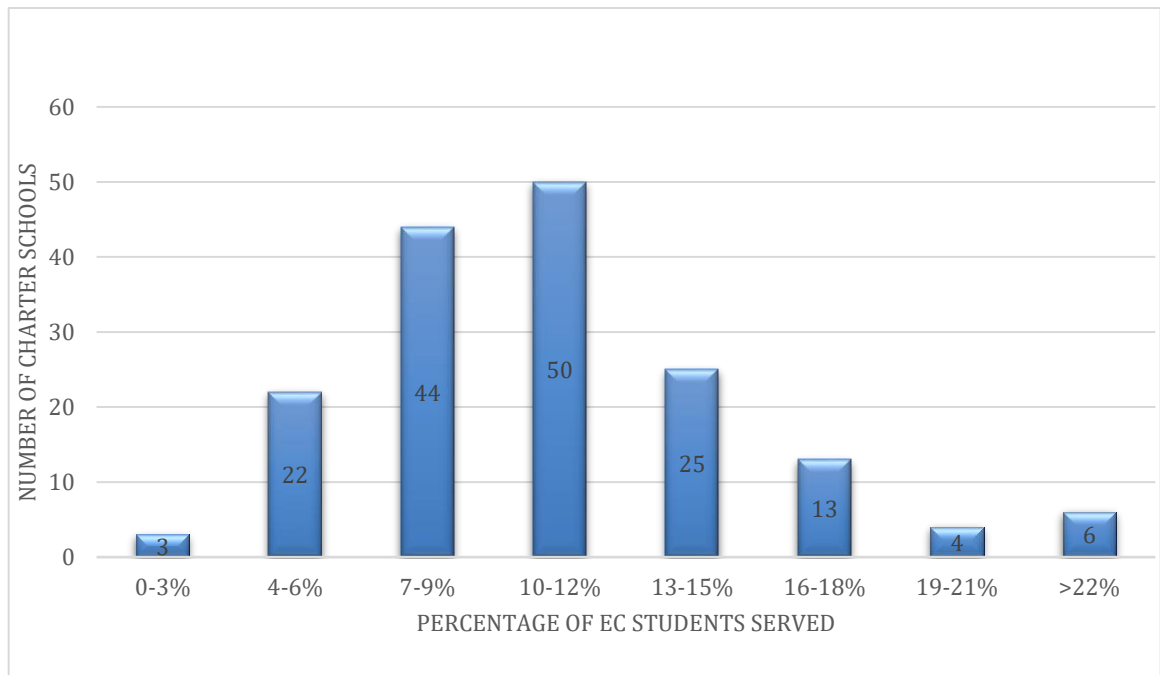
*Data Source: NCDPI Accountability Services, 2017-2018. Chart includes 169 of 173 schools; 4 schools did not report ED student numbers and therefore are not included in this distribution.*

**Demographics: Exceptional Children**

The Exceptional Children’s Division collects exceptional children headcount data twice annually. The last reported headcount was April 2017. The median percentage of charter school students requiring Exceptional Children’s services was 11% (almost one percentage point higher than 2016), compared to 13% of traditional public-school students. The overall median percentage of EC students served is 2% lower than the percentage served in traditional public schools, compared to a difference of 2.4% in 2016.

School-level data indicates that the median percentage of EC students served in charter schools is 11%, with most of charter schools serving between 7-12% EC students.

**Figure 6. Distribution of Charter Schools by Percentage of EC Students Served in 2016-17**



*\*Includes two virtual charter schools; NC Connections Academy serves 10.94% EC students, and NC Virtual Charter serves 11.27% EC students.*

### **Charter Schools Operating Requirements**

Charter schools, once approved, must complete a planning year and meet “Ready to Open” criteria that focus on ensuring quality charter board-approved policies to guide the following:

- Sound fiscal management
- Effective governance and operations
- Hiring of high quality staff
- Ensuring student health and safety
- Compliance with Testing and Accountability requirements
- Compliance with Exceptional Children’s requirements

Each charter school has significant flexibility in how it operates, however, once opened, the school must meet financial, governance, and academic standards set by the State through statute, State Board of Education policy, its approved charter application, and the terms of the Charter Agreement signed by each school when the State Board grants final approval of the charter. The

Office of Charter Schools helps the State Board monitor each school’s financial, academic, and operational performance annually, and does a comprehensive review, assisted by the Charter Schools Advisory Board, as part of considering whether to grant charter renewals.

In addition to these monitoring mechanisms, each individual charter school undergoes a yearly audit in compliance with the North Carolina Local Government Budget and Fiscal Control Act (LGBFCA). This external audit is extremely comprehensive in nature and required of every charter school. While individual traditional public schools are not required to produce an audit, each LEA is required to produce an audit on behalf of the entire district.

## Charter Schools Performance

### Academic Performance: School Performance Grades

Because of G.S. 115C-83.15, beginning with the 2013-2014 school accountability data, all public schools are assigned School Performance Grades (A-F) based on test scores, and, for high schools, additional indicators that measure college and career readiness. School Performance Grades (SPG) are based on student achievement (80%) and growth (20%). In 2014-2015 a letter grade of A<sup>+NG</sup> was added to represent schools that received an A rating and that did not have significant achievement and/or graduation gaps.

The NC Report Card website was recently redesigned to provide a more user-friendly platform, and now separates charter school performance data for the general public in a more efficient and easy-to-use manner.

### 2016-2017 School Performance Grades for All Public Schools

**Figure 7. Performance Grades by Public Schools and by Public Charter Schools\***

Overall Grade	District Schools		Charter Schools	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
A <sup>+NG</sup>	76	3.3	11	6.7
A	89	3.8	5	3.1
B	651	28.1	55	33.7
C	979	42.3	51	31.3
D	435	18.8	28	17.2
F	85	3.7	13	8.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,315</b>		<b>163</b>	

\*Due to rounding, the percent of schools may not total 100%.

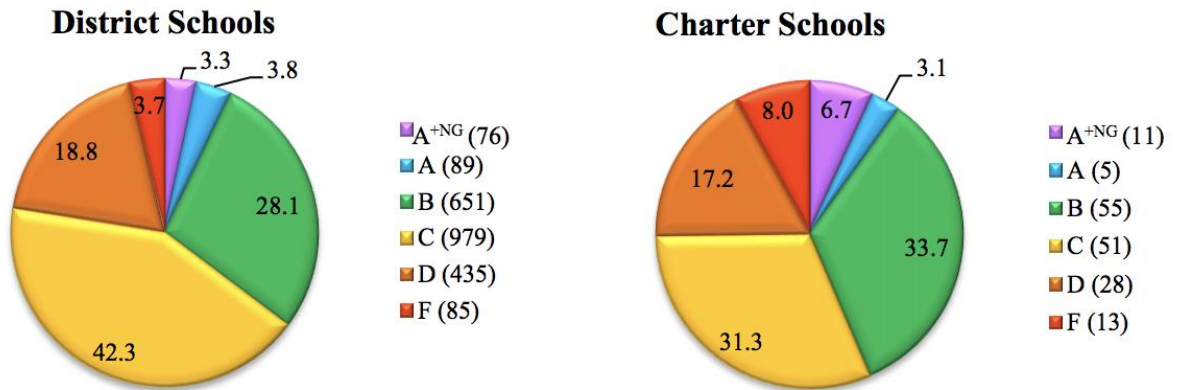
\*\*Figure 7 includes performance grades for North Carolina’s two virtual charter schools

**Figure 7b. Performance Grades by Public Schools and by Public Charter Schools\***

Overall Grade	District Schools		Charter Schools	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
A+NG	76	3.3	11	6.8
A	89	3.8	5	3.1
B	651	28.1	55	34.1
C	979	42.3	51	31.7
D	435	18.8	26	16.1
F	85	3.7	13	8.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,315</b>		<b>161</b>	

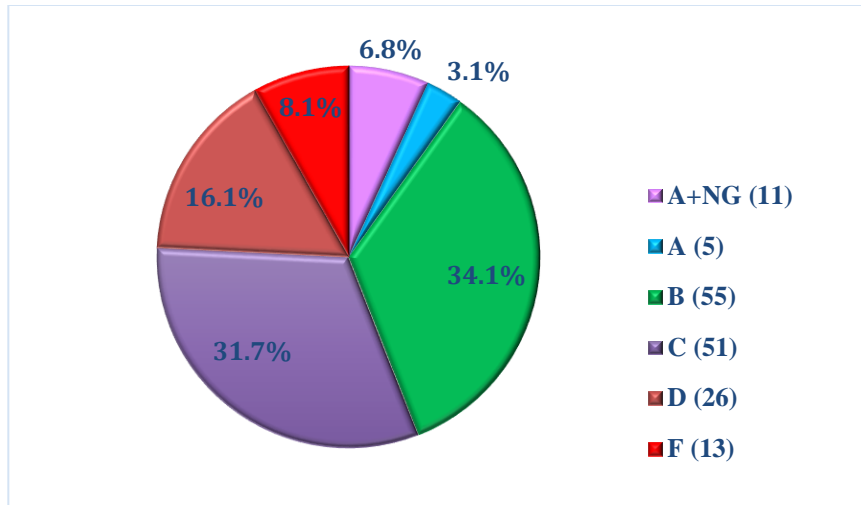
\*Figure 7b does not include performance grades for virtual charter schools.

**Figure 8. Performance Grades for District Schools and Charter Schools**



Data Source: <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/accountability/reporting/2017/documentation/exsumm17.pdf>

**Figure 8b. Performance Grades for Charter Schools, Excluding Virtual Charters**

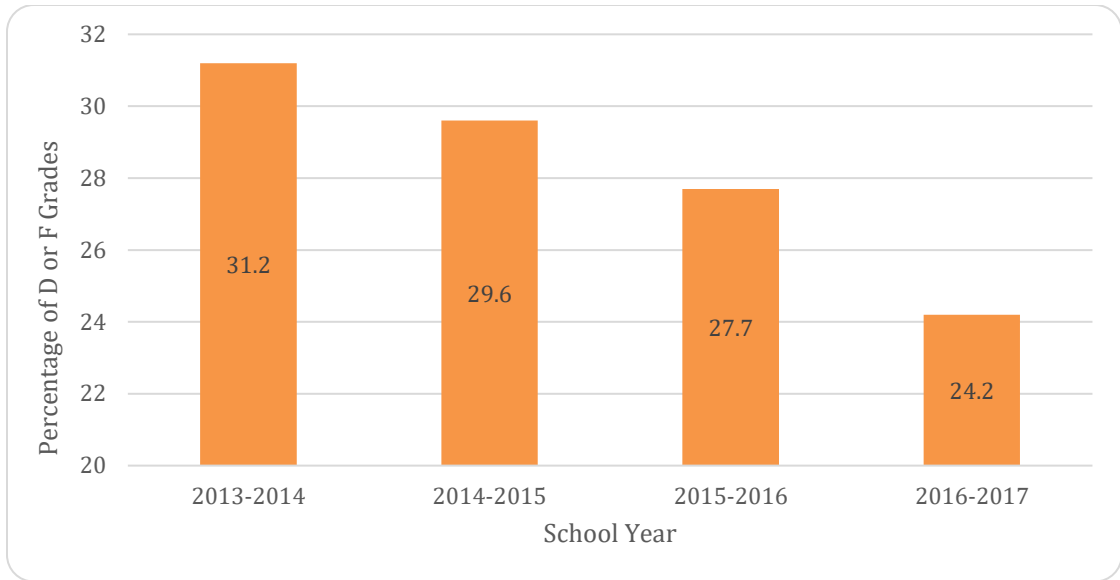


The 2016-2017 data indicate that charter schools had higher percentages of both A/A<sup>+NG</sup> and B ratings, and D and F ratings than traditional public schools. 43.5% of charter schools earned an A/A<sup>+NG</sup> or B, compared to 35.2% of district schools. 25.2% of charter schools earned a D or F, compared to 22.5% of district schools.

With virtual charter school grades eliminated, the statistics change slightly. The number and percentage of charters earning Ds decreases to 26 and 16.1%. The percentage of charter schools earning a D or F decreases to 24.2%, compared to 22.5% of district schools.

Charter schools appear to be strengthening in performance overall, with more schools earning As or Bs than the prior year, and fewer schools earning Ds or Fs than the prior year. In 2015-2016, 39.9% of charter schools earned an A/A<sup>+NG</sup> or B, while 43.5% of charters earned an A/A<sup>+NG</sup> or B in 2016-2017. 27.7% of charter schools earned a D or F in 2015-2016, while only 25.2% of charter schools earned Ds or Fs in 2016-2017. As demonstrated in the chart below, the percentage of charter schools earning grades of D or F has decreased for the past four consecutive years.

**Figure 9. Percentage of Charter Schools Earning D or F from 2013-2014 to Present\***



\*2016-17 percentage does not include performance grades from virtual charter schools. With virtual charter school performance grades included, 25.2% of charter schools earned a D or F in 2016-2017

**Figure 10. EVAAS Growth Status**

Growth Category	Number of Charters 2016-17	Percent of Charters 2016-17
Exceeded Expected Growth	36	22.4%
Met Expected Growth	77	47.8%
Did Not Meet Growth	48	29.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>161</b>	

Figure 10 illustrates the overall EVAAS growth status of North Carolina’s public charter schools. As the chart shows, more than 70% of public charter schools met or exceeded expected growth.

**Academic Performance: Performance by Subgroup**

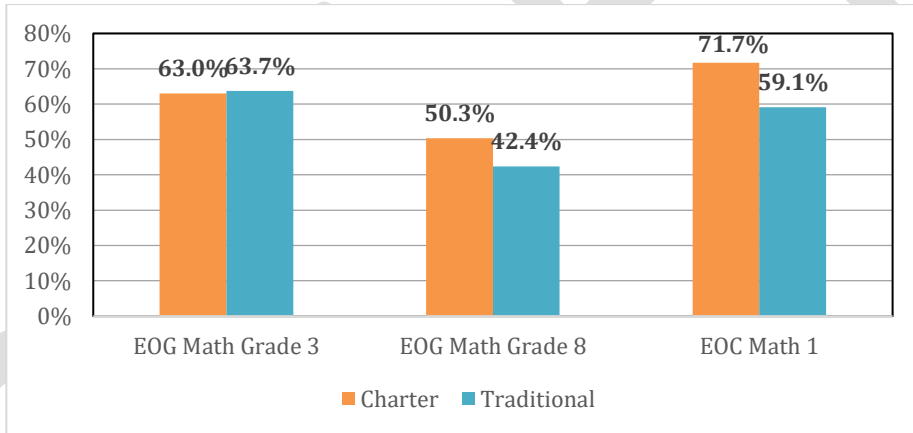
Preliminary data indicates that some charter school subgroups may be outperforming their traditional public school peers on certain performance measures. Analyses should be conducted to determine whether or not these differences in averages are statistically significant. In addition, more in-depth analysis using student-level data should be conducted in order to make definitive assertions or comparisons regarding subgroup performance.

The following graphs depict Math and English Language Arts performance overall as well as in subgroup comparisons, and were created using publicly available LEA-level data from NCDPI Accountability Services. English Language Arts proficiency is not represented for students with Limited English Proficiency due to a lack of data.

**EOG/EOC Mathematics  
Traditional Public Schools and Charter Schools**

**All Students Comparisons 2016-17**

Figure 10. Average Percentage of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on Math  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools (LEA)  
All Students



**Subgroup Comparisons 2016-2017**

Figure 11. Average Percentage of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on Math  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools (LEA)  
White Students

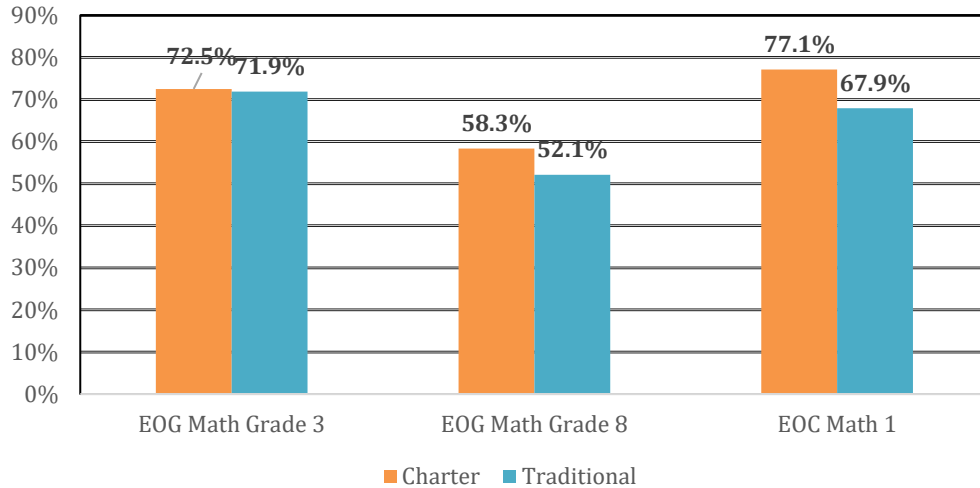


Figure 12. Average Percentage of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on Math Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools (LEA) African-American Students

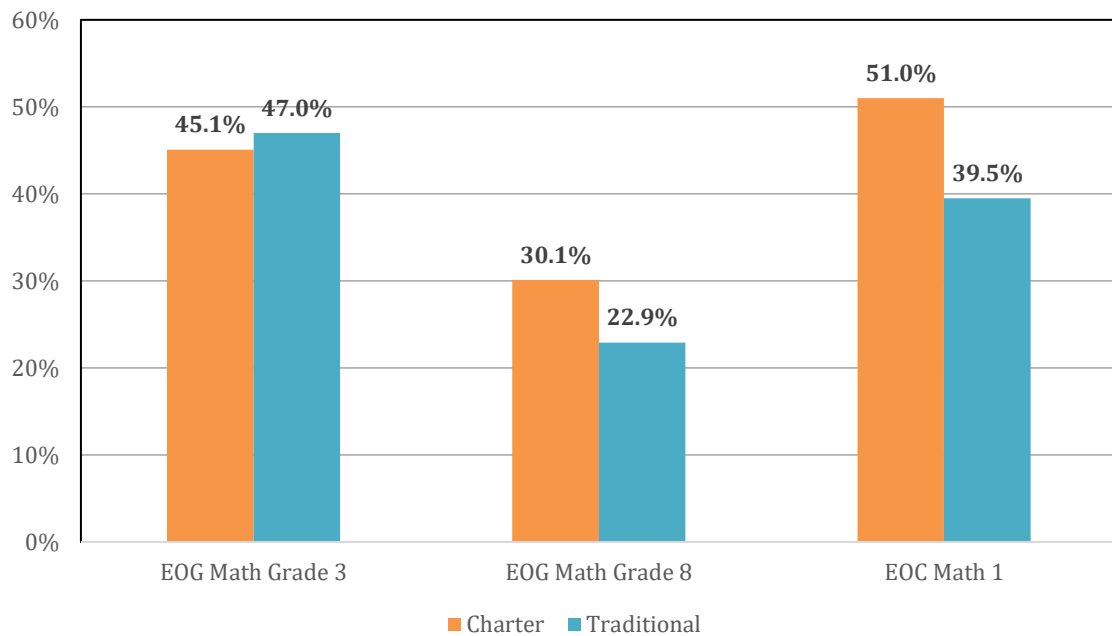


Figure 13. Average Percentage of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on Math Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools (LEA) Hispanic Students

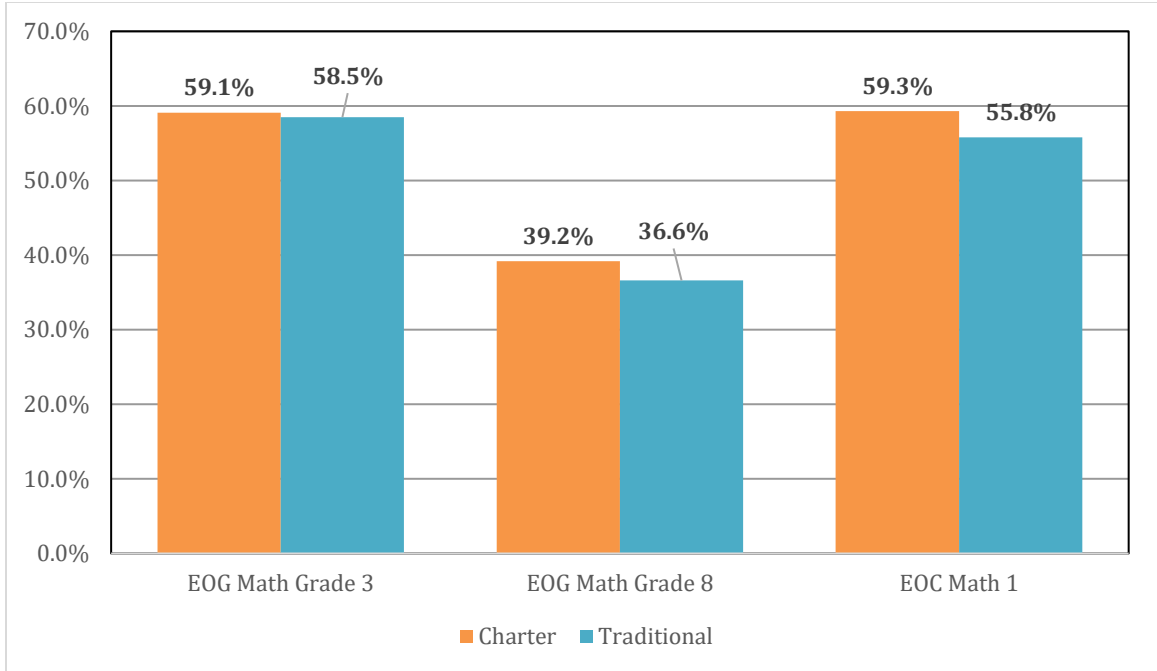


Figure 14. Average Percentage of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on Math  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools (LEA)  
Economically Disadvantaged Students

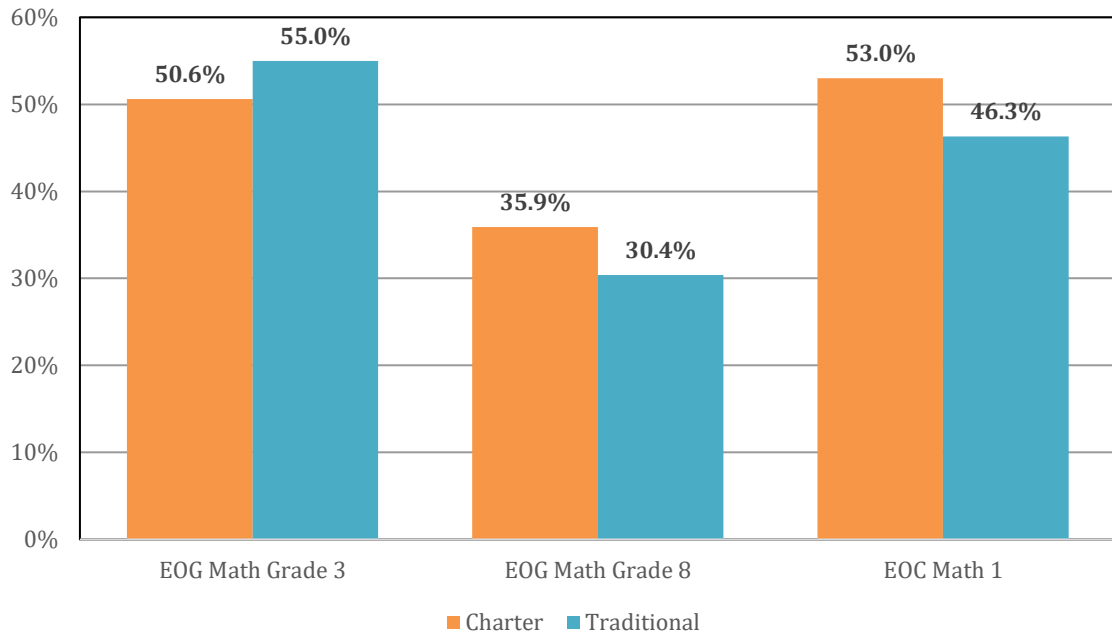


Figure 15. Average Percentage of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on Math  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools (LEA)  
Students Receiving Exceptional Children Services

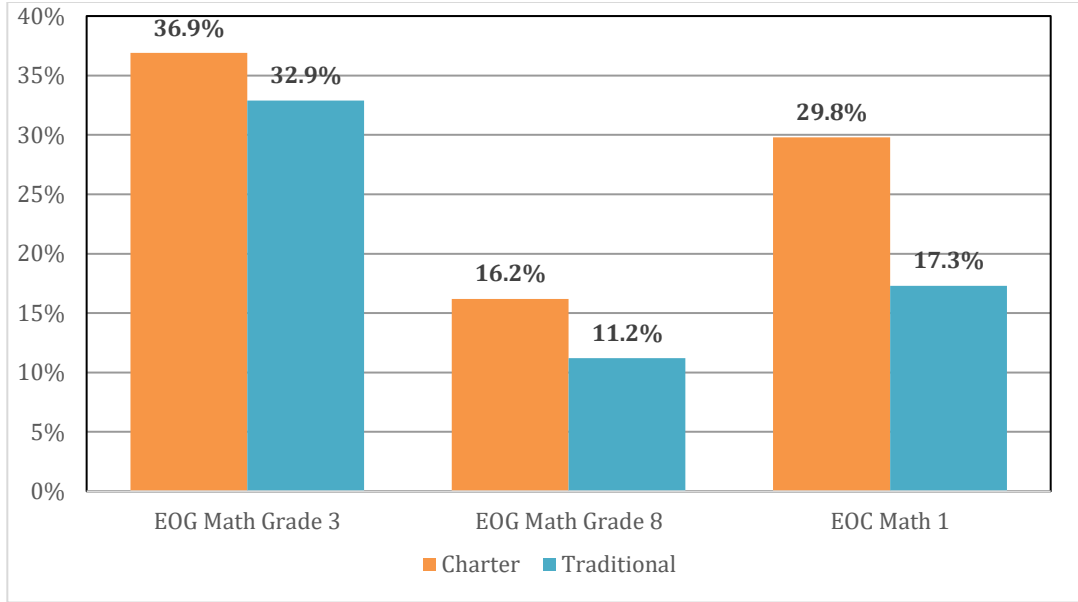
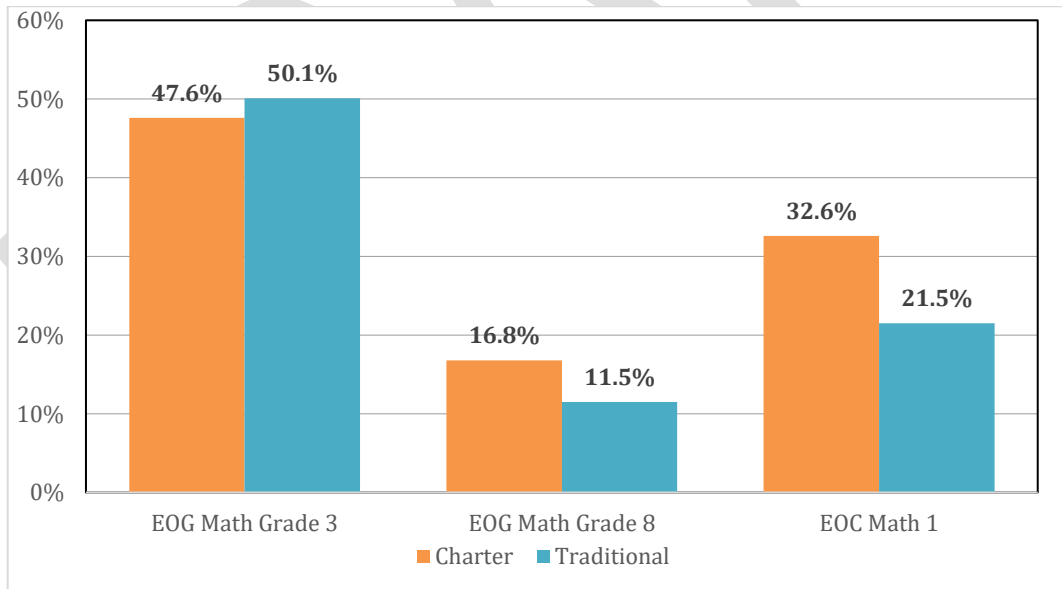


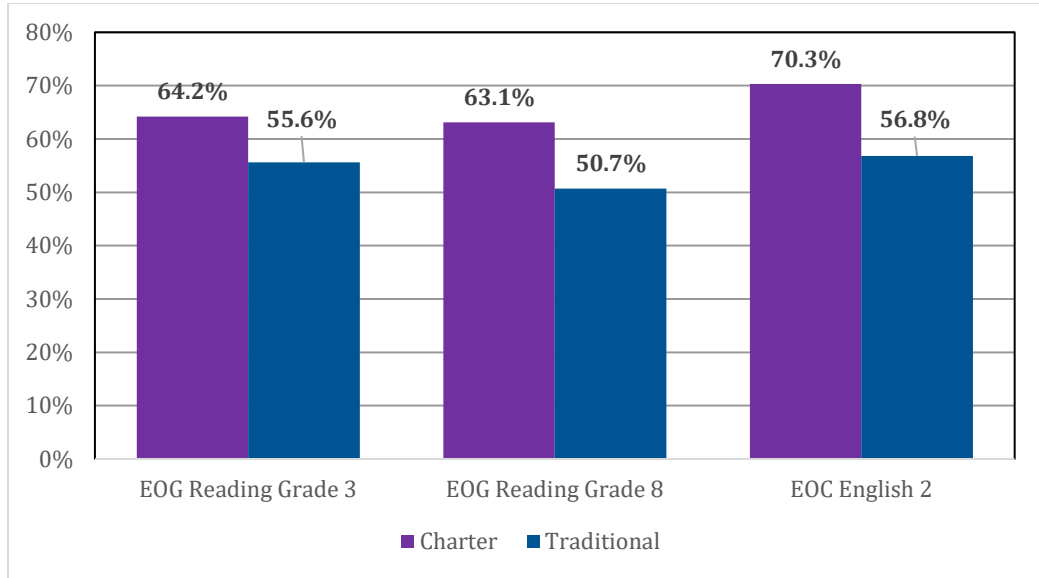
Figure 16. Average Percentage of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on Math  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools (LEA)  
Students with Limited English Proficiency



EOG/EOC English Language Arts  
Traditional Public Schools and Charter Schools

All Students Comparisons 2016-17

Figure 17. Average Percentage of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on English Language Arts (ELA)  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools (LEA)  
All Students



**Subgroup Comparisons 2016-2017**

Figure 18. Average Percentage of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on ELA  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools (LEA)  
White Students

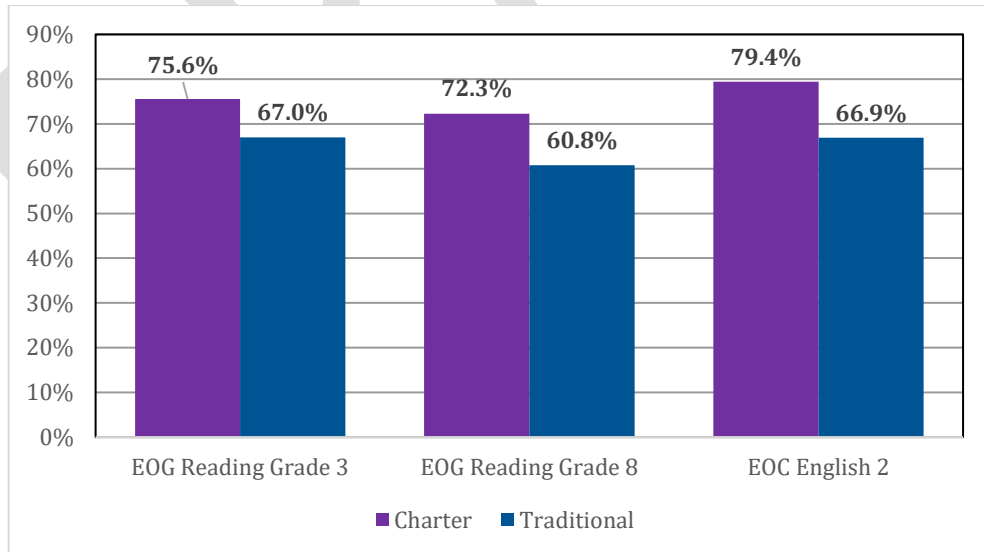


Figure 19. Average Percentage of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on English Language Arts  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools (LEA)  
African-American Students

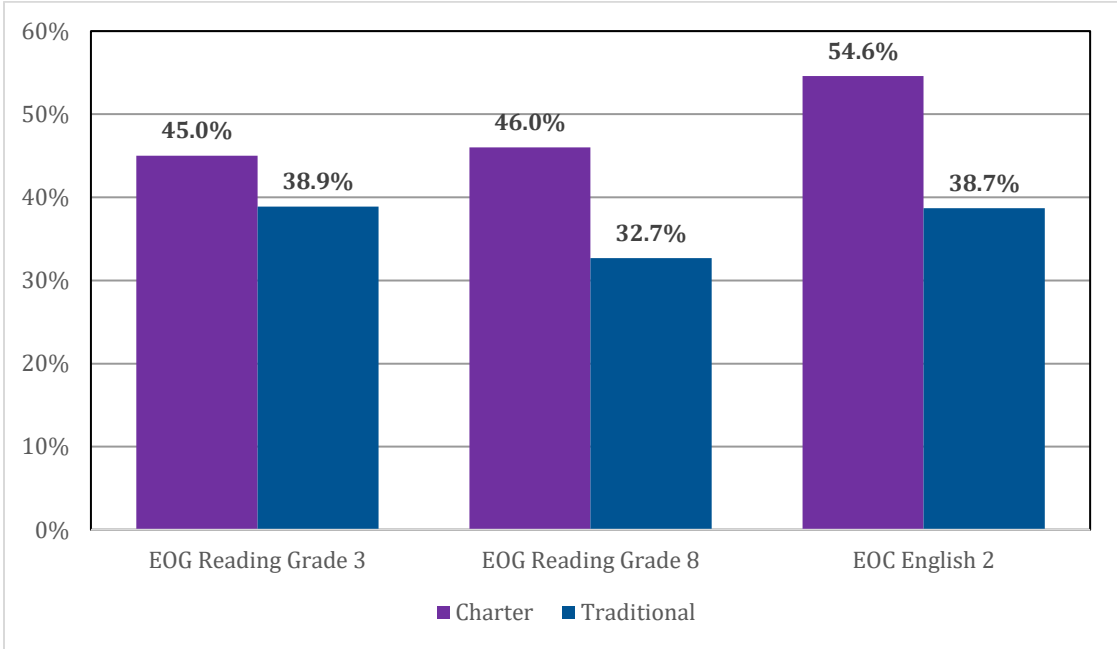


Figure 20. Average Percentage of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on English Language Arts Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools (LEA)  
Hispanic Students

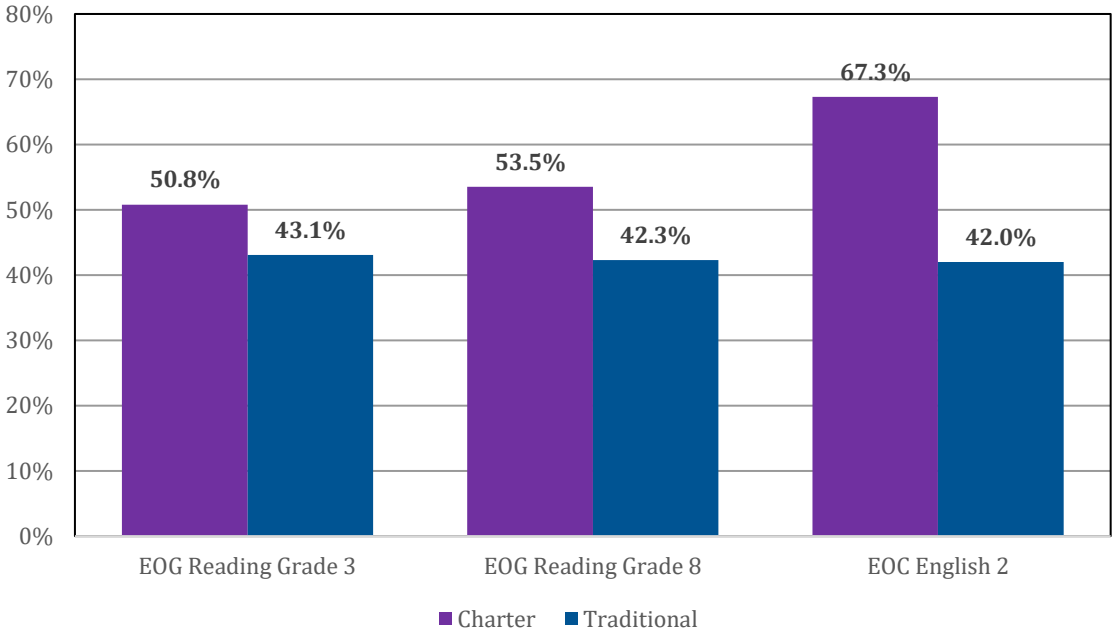


Figure 21. Average Percentage of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on English Language Arts Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools (LEA)

Economically Disadvantaged Students

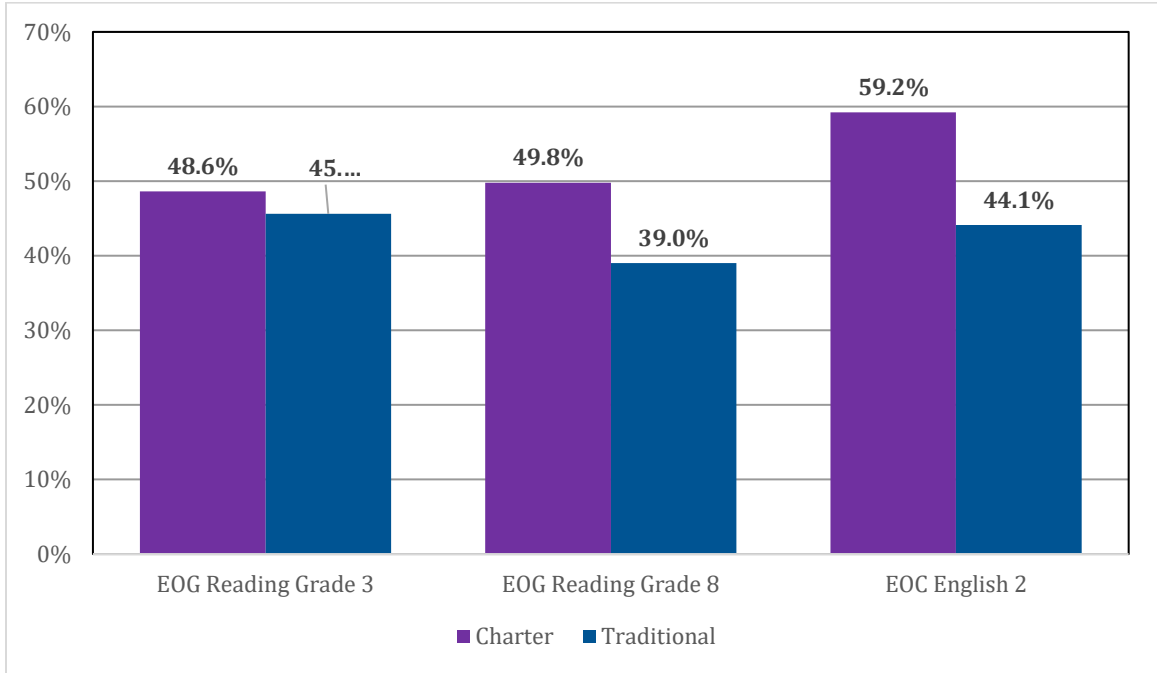
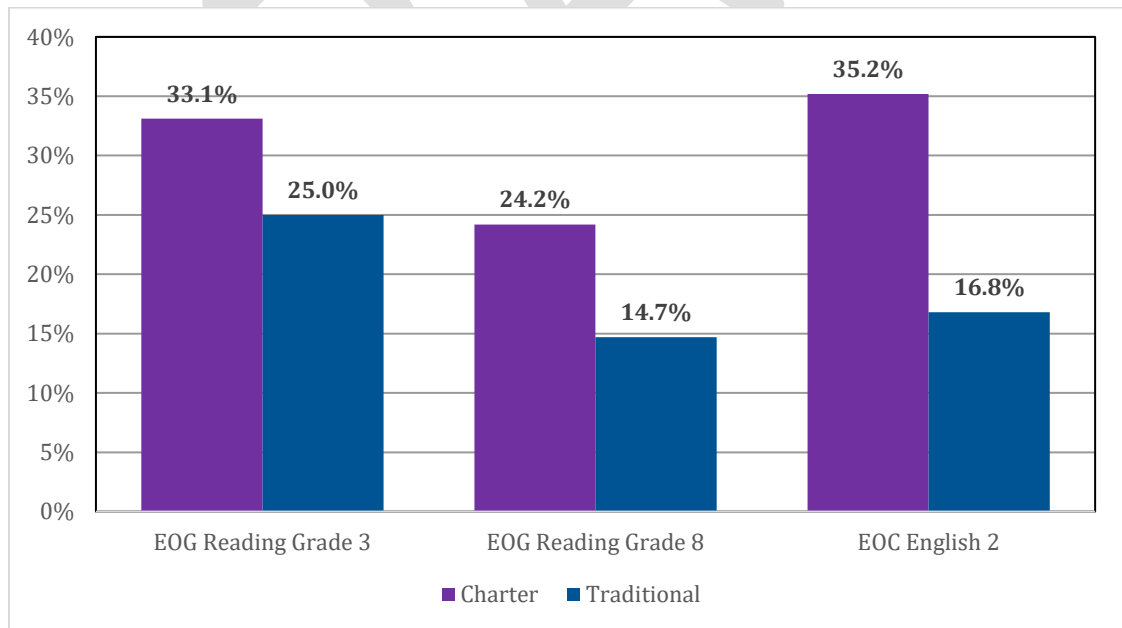


Figure 22. Average Percentage of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on English Language Arts Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools (LEA) Students Receiving Exceptional Children Services



**Academic Performance: Relative to State Board of Education Goals**

As part of its strategic planning initiative, the State Board of Education created a series of goals for charter school performance over time. Specifically, Goals 2.4.1a, 2.4.1b, and 2.4.2 set targets for charter school academic performance, as measured through percentage of students proficient on State tests, and school growth, as defined by the Education Value Added Assessment System (EVAAS). The following chart shows the charter schools’ actual results relative to the State Board’s goals and targets:

**Figure 23. State Board of Education Strategic Plan: Goals and Measures for Charter Schools**

Measure	2013-2014		2014-2015		2015-2016		2016-2017	
	Targeted	Actual	Targeted	Actual	Targeted	Actual	Targeted	Actual
2.4.1a Percentage of charter schools at or above 60% on EOG and EOC assessments (Students scoring Levels 4 & above: College-and-career- ready (CCR) standard)	49.2%	32.0%	51.7%	39.9%	43.0%	38.3%	45.0%	33.7%
2.4.1b Percentage of charter schools at or above 60% on EOG and EOC assessments (Students scoring Levels 3 & above: Grade Level Proficiency (GLP) standard)	49.2%	54.4%	51.7%	55.9%	58.0%	59.7%	60.0%	58.4%
2.4.2 Percentage of charter schools meeting or exceeding expected annual academic growth	73.0%	75.6%	75.0%	73.4%	75%	70.1%	75.0%	70.1%

Data Source: State Board of Education Strategic Plan (<http://stateboard.ncpublicschools.gov/strategic-plan/strategic-plan-full.pdf>)

It is important to note that these State Board measures, which align with statutory language delineating a floor for “academic adequacy,” are above and beyond what the Board uses to measure school performance for *all* public schools (see Objective 1.5/measures 1.5.1a-b, 1.5.2, and 1.5.3 in the State Board Strategic Plan, linked above). The charter schools’ performance on additional measures 2.4.1a and 2.4.1b that are only for charter schools (illustrated above), while not reaching the State Board’s targets, is higher than the average school performance against these

measures and higher than the average for traditional schools only. The chart below illustrates this comparison.

**Figure 24. Number and Percentage of NC Public Schools scoring above 3 or 4 on EOG/EOC Assessments**

<b>Percent of NC Public Schools At/Above 60% CCR (Level 4 or 5) on 2016-2017 EOG and EOC Assessments</b>				
Type of School	# LEAs/Charters Under 60%	# LEAs/Charters Over 60%	% Over 60%	SBE Target
Charter	110	56	33.7%	45.0%
Traditional	110	5	4.3%	N/A

<b>Percent of NC Public Schools At/Above 60% GLP (Level 3, 4, or 5) on 2016-2017 EOG and EOC Assessments</b>				
Type of School	# LEAs/Charters Under 60%	# LEAs/Charters Over 60%	% Over 60%	SBE Target
Charter	69	97	58.4%	60.0%
Traditional	65	50	43.5%	N/A

*Data Source: NCDPI Accountability Services Division*

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/accountability/reporting/2017/documentation/exsumm17.pdf>

**Academic Performance: Low-Performing and Continually Low-Performing Schools**

House Bill 242 approved in 2016 removed the language defining academic inadequate schools from 60% or growth in two of three years. The new language defined Low-Performing and Continually Low-Performing Charter Schools.

- Low performing charter schools are those that received a school performance grade of D or F and a school growth score of “met expected growth” or “not met expected growth.”
- A continually low-performing charter school is a charter school that has been designated by the State Board as low-performing for at least two of three consecutive years.
- In October 2017, 37 schools were on academic notice.
  - 1 closed at the end of the 2016-17 school year. (Community Charter School)
  - 17 were designated as Low-Performing
    - 12 within first 5 years of charter
    - 5 have been operating >5 years
  - 19 designated as Continually Low-Performing
    - 13 within first 5 years of charter
    - 6 have been operating >5 years

### *Charter School Closure*

Between 1997 and 2017, 60 charter schools closed. This total number includes schools that were not able to open, schools that relinquished their charters, and schools that either had their charters revoked or not renewed by the State Board of Education.

Most of charter school closures have been the result of financial or financially-related issues – low enrollment, fiscal noncompliance, excessive debt, etc. Out of the 46 schools that opened for operation, but then closed, 35 (or 80%) of those schools closed due to financial reasons.

Since 2011, 16 schools have closed. These 16 schools account for 26.7% of all school closures since the charter school law was first instituted in North Carolina. Since August of 2014, 12 charter schools have closed. Two of those schools relinquished the charter prior to opening and five schools were in the first year of operation. One of those schools was revoked due to non-compliance with requirements for services for Exceptional Children. Since 2012, four schools have closed due to low academic performance.

## IMPACT OF CHARTER SCHOOLS ON THE PUBLIC-SCHOOL SYSTEM

### Historical Overall Fiscal Impact

Growth in the number of charter schools combined with increased population at existing charter schools has increased the financial impact charter schools have on the overall system of public schools. The growing enrollments in charter schools mean an increase in State Public School Fund dollars allotted to them. As the chart on the next page shows, State funding for charter schools has increased from just over \$16 million in 1997 to more than \$513 million in 2016-2017.

**Figure 25. Charter Schools Status Report 1997 – 2017**

Year	Total in Operation	Planning Allotted ADM	% of Total ADM	Total of State Funds Allotted to Charters	Total State Funding (Charters and TPS)
1996-97	0				
1997-98	33	4,106	0.3%	\$16,559,947	\$4.7b
1998-99	56	5,572	0.4%	\$32,143,691	\$5.1b
1999-00	75	10,257	0.8%	\$50,104,210	\$5.5b
2000-01	86	14,230	1.1%	\$64,213,491	\$5.74b
2001-02	91	19,492	1.5%	\$77,177,902	\$5.8b
2002-03	93	19,832	1.5%	\$87,233,744	\$5.92b
2003-04	93	21,578	1.6%	\$94,286,726	\$6.1b
2004-05	97	24,784	1.8%	\$110,888,050	\$6.52b
2005-06	96	28,733	2.1%	\$132,089,910	\$6.86b
2006-07	93	29,170	2.0%	\$144,299,621	\$7.37b
2007-08	98	30,892	2.1%	\$169,871,326	\$7.91b
2008-09	97	34,694	2.3%	\$191,751,412	\$8.19b
2009-10	96	38,449	2.6%	\$187,726,898	\$7.35b
2010-11	99	41,314	2.8%	\$200,058,046	\$7.15b
2011-12	100	44,829	3.0%	\$228,291,552	\$7.5b
2012-13	107	48,795	3.3%	\$255,396,318	\$7.74b
2013-14	127	53,655	3.6%	\$304,459,644	\$7.81b
2014-15	148	64,186	4.2%	\$366,455,982	\$8.09b
2015-16	159	81,943	5.3%	\$444,131,335	\$8.44b
2016-17	167	92,112	6.0%	\$513,450,126	\$8.64b

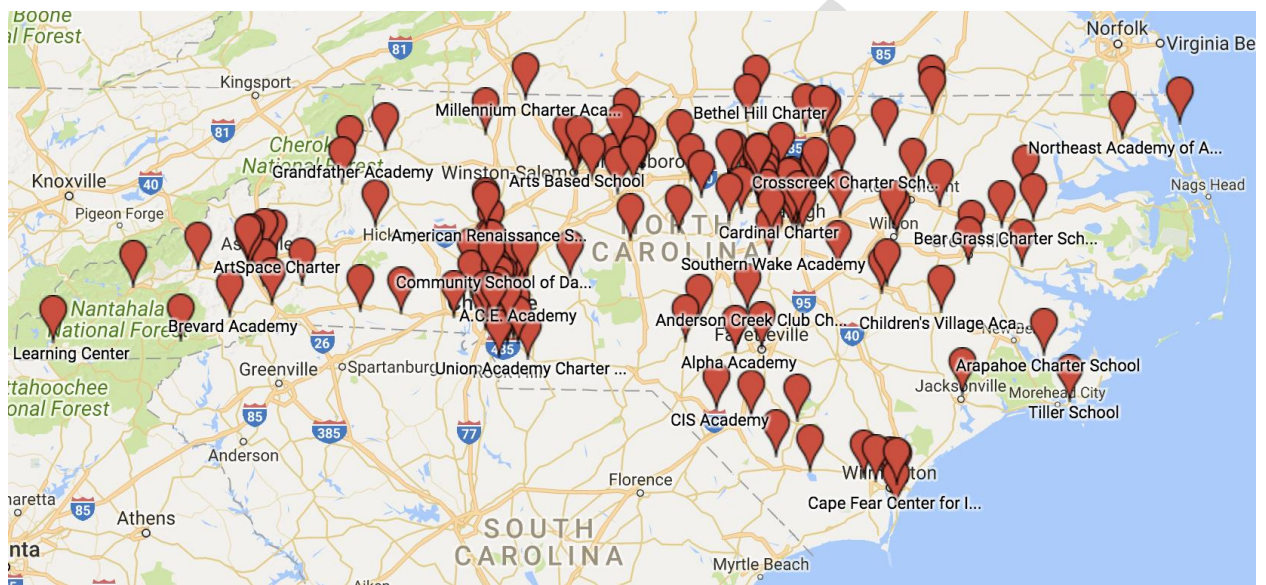
*Data Source: Highlights of the North Carolina Public School Budget, February 2017, Information Analysis, Division of School Business, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction*  
<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/fbs/resources/data/highlights/2017highlights.pdf>

### Current School Year (2017-2018) Specific Fiscal Impact

For the current academic year, over half of the 115 local school districts in North Carolina have charter schools located within them. Even though a charter may be located in a specific school

district, charter schools are not bound to only serve students from the district in which they are located. Many charter schools serve students from multiple school districts, in which cases the charter schools’ impact extends across school district boundaries. The specific fiscal impact of a given charter school on its “home district” and those around it will vary, depending on the number of students from the various districts who attend the charter school.

**Figure 26. 2017-2018 Currently Operating Charter Schools**



Data Source: <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/charterschools/schools/map>

173 charter schools, located in 62 school districts and 60 counties, are currently open and serving 100,508 students (second month ADM for 2017 – 2018). The projected enrollment for 2017-2018 was 101,689 students. Statewide, charter schools are at 100% of projected enrollment for 2017 – 2018.

Prior to 2013, the State Board of Education was required by legislation to solicit impact statements from LEAs when new applications for charters were being considered or when existing charter schools wanted to grow beyond what was normally allowed within the statute. The General Assembly removed the requirement that LEAs submit impact statements, but the State Board has continued to consider comments from school districts in situations involving charter school enrollment growth.

**Other Considerations: Other Fiscal and Non-Fiscal Impact**

Discussion of the impact of charter schools upon the overall system of public schools typically focuses on the amount of operational (also known as “current expense”) funding shifting from each school district to charter school(s) in or near the district; however, there are several other impacts, though perhaps harder to document, that are worth considering. For example, another

potential fiscal impact in urban school districts facing overcrowding is that they might have less immediate needs to expand facilities if significant numbers of students choose charter schools instead.

Charter schools may also have non-fiscal impacts on the system of public schools. Where charters exist, they typically do create alternative education options for parents to consider for their students, though the accessibility of these alternative options may be limited for some families in cases where a charter does not provide the same level of transportation or school nutrition services as the local school district. Presence of “competitive” charters in a district may create greater urgency and/or focus for all the schools – traditional and charters — to experiment in order to find what will work best to improve student outcomes for their particular student populations. Similarly, the presence of charter school options for parents may lead parents to engage more deeply with the public schools – traditional or charter – in order to better understand the options available for students.

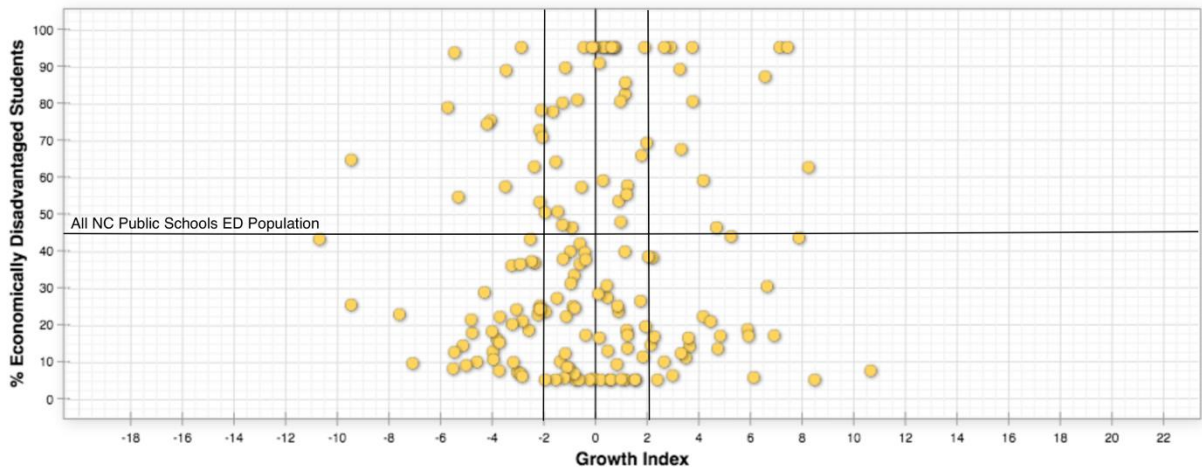
In addition to these considerations, there is much to be said for inequity in charter school funding. For example, students attending public schools in low-wealth counties receive low-wealth county funding. If a child living in a county with low-wealth funding attends a charter school in a different county, the low-wealth funding does not follow the child to their school. State policymakers may want to consider these and other state funding allotments that do not follow students to their respective charter schools. Moreover, charter schools do not receive funding for facilities nor are they eligible to participate in lottery facility funding. Facilities costs must be paid from each school’s operations budget, and this may consume a considerable share of the school’s available funds.

## **BEST PRACTICES RESULTING FROM CHARTER SCHOOL OPERATIONS**

### **High Academic Growth with Disadvantaged Student Population**

One measure of excellence for charter (and traditional) schools is achieving high academic growth, as measured by the Education Value Added Assessment System (EVAAS) with a student population that is economically disadvantaged. As illustrated below, eight charter schools exceeded growth expectations with student populations that were 70% or greater Economically Disadvantaged, and 3 of these schools achieved extremely high growth.

**Figure 28. 2016-2017 Charter Schools Percentage of Economically Disadvantaged Students and Academic (EVAAS) Growth**



Source: NCDPI School Report Card Online Platform

Based on this 2016-17 data, the following eight schools with an ED population over 70% exceeded expectations for student growth by achieving an EVAAS growth score of greater than +2:

- Maureen Joy Charter (32A)\*
- Global Scholars Academy (32M)
- KIPP Halifax College Preparatory (42A)\*
- Guilford Preparatory Academy (42C)
- KIPP Charlotte (60L)
- Gaston College Preparatory (66A)
- Henderson Collegiate (91B)\*
- Torchlight Academy (92L)

\*These schools achieved extremely high growth with indices of 6 or greater.

The following four charter schools with an ED population over the state average (all public schools) of 45.3% similarly exceeded expectations for student growth:

- Williams Academy (06B)
- Columbus Charter (24N)

- CIS Academy (78A)
- Sallie B. Howard School for the Arts (98A)

### **Charter Schools Receiving Special Awards and Recognition**

North East Carolina Preparatory School, located in Edgecombe County, was awarded \$36,000 via the new Coding and Mobile App Development Grant Program. The grants support partnerships with local businesses to help students develop computer science, coding, and mobile app development programs for middle and high school students.

Metrolina Regional Scholars Academy was named a 2017 National Blue-Ribbon School by the U.S. Secretary of Education. The school was selected as an Exemplary High Performing School, as it was among the state’s highest performing schools as measured by state assessments or nationally normed tests.

Raleigh Charter High School was ranked #56 in *US News and World Report’s* Best High Schools National Rankings. Additionally, twelve charter schools in NC were ranked in the top 50 high schools in the country by *US News and World Report*.

Envision Science Academy was named the 2017 STEM School of the Year at the second annual STEMmy Awards. This event was sponsored by STEM in the Park, and honorees were recognized for outstanding achievements in the STEM fields.

### **OTHER INFORMATION**

#### **NCDPI Support of Charter Schools**

As discussed in the Academic Performance section above, the State Board of Education has set a goal of increasing the number of charter schools that meet or exceed all operational, financial, and academic performance expectations. To this end, NCDPI, through the Office of Charter Schools (OCS) and other areas of the agency, provides a broad range of services to charter schools to help ensure that they understand how to meet all State and federal laws and policies and the promises they have made in their charter applications/agreements. In addition, though charter schools are not required to use the curricular, instructional, and technological resources provided for all public schools, NCDPI works to ensure that charter school leadership is fully informed about State-provided resources that could provide charters with cost effective, high quality materials and infrastructure if they so choose. OCS has implemented many initiatives to support charter school efforts and to monitor performance, including training camps for low performing charter schools, charter school regional huddles, an annual charter schools Leadership Institute, Ready-to-Open and Planning Year sessions, renewal site visits, quarterly reviews of school board minutes, quarterly compliance reviews, and other mechanisms through which struggling schools are identified and receive additional support. Finally, NCDPI responds almost daily to requests from charter school leaders and their contractors, charter school advocates, parents, and public officials for information about charter schools and/or technical assistance.

Highlights of the services that NCDPI provides to NC charter schools include the following:

- Office of Charter Schools (OCS)
  - Conducts Application Process training for prospective applicants for charters;
  - Hosts Planning Year training for new charter school boards and school leaders on topics including governance, state and federal law, SBE policies, and the Charter Agreement;
  - Delivers periodic refresher training for charter school board members and school leaders;
  - Maintains efficient, user-friendly online Application, Renewal, and Grade Enrollment & Expansion Request systems;
  - Maintains a website with OCS- and NCDPI-created resources, and links to externally created resources (such as those provided by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers);
  - Provides daily technical assistance through phone and email communication with school staff, parents, charter advocacy organization representatives, vendors, et al;
  - Processes individual schools' amendments to their charters (some amendments can be approved by OCS, while many require approval through State Board deliberations);
  - Staffs the State Board of Education's Education Innovation and Charter Schools Committee (to present charter school policy items and amendments that schools have requested) and the Charter Schools Advisory Board;
  - Meets with groups of charter school leaders periodically to hear their concerns and identified needs and discuss with these leaders how OCS can better serve them; and
  - Hosts annual charter school leadership institute where charter leaders can receive technical assistance from a variety of NCDPI experts and share with other charter school leaders.
  
- Academic Support Services and Curriculum & Instruction Divisions
  - Provide a range of training, technical assistance, and both face-to-face and online professional development opportunities, including the following:
    - Inviting all charter schools to participate in Summer Institutes and other statewide and regional professional development gatherings supported with Race to the Top funding between 2010-11 and 2015-16;

- Inviting all charter schools to participate in the Principal READY meetings (professional development specifically for principals and assistant principals) across the State;
  - Inviting all charter schools to participate in regionally-delivered professional development regarding standards and curriculum (i.e., instructional strategies);
  - Encouraging all charter schools to use the online professional development modules available through Home Base (and providing training for how to do so); and
  - Offering webinars on a variety of topics (such as how to use Home Base tools and the Statewide Educator Evaluation System) specifically targeted to charter school administrators.
- K-3 Literacy Division
  - Provides charter schools statewide with a dedicated consultant to conduct professional development for teachers and principals regarding literacy instruction and the State’s formative, diagnostic assessment system (required for use as part of the Excellent Schools Act/Read to Achieve legislation); and
  - Trains master literacy trainers (including charter schools representatives) across the state to provide ongoing support regionally to schools regarding early literacy instruction.
- Exceptional Children’s Division
  - Assists charter schools in accessing federal funds for students with special learning needs;
  - Provides a range of technical assistance services to help charter schools meet the needs of children with special learning needs;
  - Invites all charter schools to annual conference designed to provide professional development across a broad range of topics related to serving students with special learning needs;
  - Provide support in the new charter application evaluation process;
  - Provides support staff specific to Charter Schools; and
  - Supports the Office of Charter Schools and the Charter School Advisory Board by providing detailed school compliance information.

- Finance and Business Divisions
  - Advocate for adequate funding for State Public School Fund, which is the source of funds for both traditional and charter school funds (which rise and fall in concert, as the State funds for each charter are based on the funding to the district in which the charter is located);
  - Allot State funds to charter schools;
  - Provide efficient, user-friendly online Charter School Average Daily Membership (CSADM) system for schools to enter their projected enrollments;
  - Monitor and reports on charter school expenditures (in response to oversight by the General Assembly);
  - Process (with OCS) schools' requests for school enrollment and grade expansion;
  - Provide support in the new charter application evaluation process; and
  - Supports the Office of Charter Schools and the Charter School Advisory Board by providing detailed school compliance information.
  
- Information Technology Area and Digital Teaching & Learning Division
  - Enable charter schools to benefit from State economies of scale for technology solutions to set up to serve every school – traditional and charter – Statewide;
  - Provide all charter schools with cloud-based accounting system with many school management features, including scheduling and producing customized student transcripts;
  - Provide all charter schools with opportunity to use cloud-based professional development and instructional/classroom management tools (through Home Base); and
  - Provide charter schools with the opportunity to participate in and earn grant opportunities.
  
- Child Nutrition Division
  - Assists charter schools in accessing federal funding to support free and reduced price lunch; and
  - Provide technical support to ensure compliance with reporting requirements.

- Transportation Division
  - Provides free inspections and detailed reports regarding safety of charter school buses; and
  - Provides free replacement of school buses at retirement threshold when school has purchased a new bus.

## **Update on Legislation Affecting Charter Schools**

### **Appropriations Bill (S.B. 257/S.L. 2017-57)**

#### **Charter School Transportation Grant \$2,500,000 (R)**

- Grant program for charter school transportation to reimburse up to 65% of transportation costs;
- Eligible schools shall have at least 50% of the students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch;
- DPI shall establish the criteria by Aug 1;
- Maximum award \$100,000, and
- DPI shall report on the details of the grant by March 15, 2018.

#### **Office of Charter Schools/Web-based Record and Data Management**

- Mandated that up to \$200,000 per year from 2017-2019 be used to support the purchase of a Web-based electronic records and data management system to automate and streamline reporting and accountability requirements to assist OCS in complying with annual reporting obligations.

#### **House Bill 800/S.L. 2017-173: Various Changes to Charter School Laws**

- Allows education management organizations and charter management organizations to employ and provide teacher staffing for charter schools;
- Mandates that decisions on fast-track replication applications be made less than 120 days from the application submission date;
- Stipulates that enrollment growth of greater than 20% be considered a material revision of the charter if the charter is currently identified as low-performing. The State Board will not approve material revisions for enrollment growth of greater than 20% for charters currently identified as low-performing;

- Stipulates that, effective July 1, 2017, enrollment growth of greater than 25% will be considered a material revision for any charter school not currently identified as low-performing. Effective July 1, 2018, this enrollment threshold will increase to 30%;
- Allows charter schools to give enrollment priority to any student who was enrolled in another charter school in the state the previous year as well as to any student who was enrolled in a preschool program operated by the charter school in the prior year;
- Tasks the Office of Charter schools with assisting certain charter schools seeking to participate in the NC Pre-K program; and
- Allows charter schools to apply to a local contracting agency to participate in the NC Pre-K program.

**House Bill 159/S.L. 2017-98: Charter School TSERS Election**

- Extends the amount of time a charter school has to elect to participate in the Teachers' and State Employees' Retirement System

**Senate Bill 599 / S.L. 2017-189: Excellent Educators for Every Classroom**

- Mandates that charter school boards must indicate the reason of an employee's termination or dismissal, upon inquiry by any other local board of education, charter school, or regional school in the state; and
- Charter school boards must indicate if an employee's criminal history was relevant to the employee's resignation or dismissal. If a teacher's criminal history is relevant to a teacher's resignation, the board must report the reason to the State Board of Education.

**Update on 2017 Charter Renewals**

Thirty-two charter schools completed the renewal process in 2017. The Charter School Advisory Board utilized the same framework for determining recommendations for the number of years for each renewed charter terms from 2015. The State Board of Education approved all of the CSAB's 2017 renewal recommendations. Of the 32 renewals, 22 received a ten-year term, 2 received a seven-year term, 2 received a five-year term, and four received a three-year term.

One school, Community Charter, was recommended for assumption and ultimately closed, and another, Kestrel Heights, received a three-year renewal with highly specific recommendations due to reporting issues in its high school.

The State Board of Education approved 100% of the CSAB's 2017 renewal recommendations.

**Update on 2016 Charter Applications**

Thirty-eight charter applicants submitted applications for the 2018 – 19 school year through NCDPI's automated system in September 2016. The Office of Charter Schools reviewed the

applications, and the applicant groups with incomplete applications were given five days to submit or clarify incomplete items. Of the seventeen applicants whose applications were deemed incomplete, fourteen submitted missing information within the five days stipulated by law. Two applicants submitted information after the five-day period, and one applicant failed to respond. Of the 38 total applicants, 24 (63%) were recommended for a full interview with the CSAB. Of the 24 applicants who received full interviews with the CSAB, fifteen were recommended as Ready to Open, and all fifteen were approved for a charter by the State Board of Education.

Trends in the 2016 applications included the following:

- Continuing the trend from previous years, Mecklenburg County and surrounding counties continued to be the area with the most applicants.
  - Mecklenburg County (6 applicants)
  - Union County (3 applicants)
  - Gaston County (1 applicant)
- Urban areas received a significant proportion of charter applicants. Including Mecklenburg and surrounding counties, almost 2 out of 3 applications were for schools in urban districts.
  - Wake County (7 applicants)
  - Guilford County (6 applicants)
  - Durham (2 applicants)

### **Updates on 2017 Charter Applications**

Twenty-nine applicants submitted applications in September 2017 for schools to open in 2019-20. Eight applicants submitted incomplete applications, and five submitted missing information by the legislatively-mandated deadline of five business days. Twenty-six applications were deemed complete and moved forward for substantive review. Applicant groups are currently being interviewed by the CSAB as part of the formal review process. The CSAB will then make recommendations to the State Board of Education for applications to move into the Planning Year/Ready to Open process. The SBE will make final decisions regarding approval by August 15. Due to legislative changes mandating that fast track replication decisions be made within 120 days from the application submission deadline, the State Board has already voted on (and approved) one Fast Track Replication for Cardinal Charter Academy West Campus.

Eighteen of the 29 applicants were for schools in urban districts and surrounding areas.

- Mecklenburg County (7 applicants)
- Gaston, Union, and Iredell Counties each had one applicant (3 total applicants)
- Wake County (4 applicants)
- Guilford County (2 applicants)
- Forsyth County (2 applicants)

## **Charter School Teacher Absentee Rates**

A report released by the Fordham Institute found that approximately 13% of charter school teachers and 35% of traditional public-school teachers in North Carolina missed more than ten days of school due to sick or personal leave. The views and findings expressed in this report are those of the Fordham Institute, and have not been verified or validated by the Office of Charter Schools or NCDPI Office of Accountability Services.

The State Board of Education is in the process of defining “chronic absenteeism” among students and considering adding this metric to the strategic plan. Nationally, 37 states have added this metric to their Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) reporting plan and now report numbers of chronically absent students. OCS hopes to report the percentages of chronically absent students in charter schools and traditional public schools in future annual reports.

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