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**Texas**

**Open-Enrollment**

**Charter Schools**

Fourth-Year Evaluation

Executive Summary

Texas Open-Enrollment Charter Schools:

Fourth-Year Evaluation

September 2001

# **Executive Summary**

## Introduction

In 1995, the Texas Legislature authorized the creation of open-enrollment charter schools (Texas Education Code [TEC] §§ 12.101-120)—traditional public schools substantially released from state education regulations. Subsequent legislative modifications allowed an additional 100 open-enrollment charters and an unlimited number of open-enrollment charter schools with a declared intention to serve 75 percent or more students at risk of failure or dropping out of school (75 Percent Rule charter schools).[[1]](#footnote-1) During the 1996-97 school year, 17 open-enrollment charter schools operated in Texas. In 1997-98, charter schools numbered 19, and in 1998-99, 89 charter schools were in operation, 45 of which were designated to serve at-risk students. This evaluation centers on the 146 charter schools operating for the entire 1999-00 school year; of these, 46 were 75 Percent Rule charter schools.

## Methodology

The State Board of Education (SBOE) commissioned the annual evaluation pursuant to TEC § 12.118. The fourth-year evaluation encompasses a variety of data sources, including student and parent surveys, surveys of charter school directors and traditional school district officials, document analysis, and analysis of the Texas Education Agency’s Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) and Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) data.

Analysis by charter type and students served*.* In order to capture the wide variation among charter schools, evaluators grouped charter schools to distinguish between those that serve primarily traditional students and those serving a preponderance of students who are “at-risk” of leaving the public school system. Thus, the charter schools are usually assigned to one of three categories: 75 Percent Rule open-enrollment charter schools, open-enrollment charter schools serving primarily at-risk students (75 percent or more), and open-enrollment charter schools serving less than 75 percent at-risk students. In many cases, evaluators combined data for 75 Percent Rule schools and schools serving primarily at-risk students. The percentage of at-risk students used to classify charter schools is drawn from 1999-00 PEIMS data.

Analysis by duration of operation*.* Throughout the report, the term “Generation” refers to the time the SBOE awarded the charter, which often corresponds to years of operation. Analyses related to charter schools’ length of operation include 19 Generation 1 schools that began operation in 1996 or 1997, 39 Generation 2 schools, and 83 Generation 3 schools. In most cases, because of the challenges associated with the start-up year, data from charter schools in the first year of operation are not considered for campus-level analyses.

Study limitations. Several factors complicate the analysis of charter school data. First, the assessment of change over time is complicated because the number of charter schools has increased dramatically each year, whereas the number of traditional public school districts has remained relatively stable. Likewise, the numbers of students available for analysis varies widely across years. Second, with the exception of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), the majority of data are self-reported. Thus, information reflects respondents’ perceptions, and in some cases, the accuracy of charter school data entered into PEIMS is an issue. For example, 75 Percent Rule charter schools reporting very few at-risk students appears unreasonable in many cases, based on school characteristics. Third, TEA recognizes charter schools both as campuses and districts, so analyses involved both categories. Some comparisons use campus-level data, while others rely on district-level data—as a result, reported numbers of charter schools may vary. Finally, for the majority of comparisons, the school is the unit of analysis; for student performance, however, the student is the analysis unit. For school-level analyses, each school receives equal weight, whereas with the student as the unit, larger schools receive more weight in calculations. In general, the reader is urged to consider study limitations when interpreting the reported information.

## Major Findings

## *Characteristics of Texas Open-Enrollment Charter Schools*

Charter school classifications. Of the 141 charter schools operating in 1999-00 with AEIS reports, 44 had 75 Percent Rule charters. Of the 97general open-enrollment charter schools, 28 enrolled 75 percent or more at-risk students, while69 enrolled less than 75 percent at-risk students.

Numbers of charters revoked, returned, renewed*.* To date, 4 open-enrollment charters have been revoked by the SBOE; all revocations have been for financial irregularities. Eighteen schools have returned their charters. Of the 18 first-generation schools submitting renewal applications, 17 received charter renewals for a 10-year period, and one renewal application is pending.

Charter school campus size. In total, 176 charter school campuses operated in 1999-00, with an average of 146 students per campus and enrollments ranging from 6 to 823 students. Over the four years of the evaluation, average campus size has varied: 147 in 1996-97, 217 in 1997-98, 198 in 1998-99, 146 in 1999-00.

Charter school student demographics. Compared to Texas traditional public schools, charter school students are more ethnically diverse, slightly more economically disadvantaged, and less likely to be identified for special services (limited English proficient, special education).

* *Student race/ethnicity*. Compared to the student population in Texas traditional public schools, charter schools have greater proportions of minority students. Charter schools have a higher percentage of African American students (39% versus 14%) and a lower percentage of White students (22% versus 43%), whereas the percentage of Hispanic students (38%) is roughly the same as the state average (40%).
* *Homogeneous schools*. About a third of charter school campuses enroll predominantly one racial/ethnic group (90% or more). These campuses are more likely to serve African American (*n*=27) and Hispanic (*n*=20) students rather than White students (*n*=6).
* *Special populations*. Economically disadvantaged students comprise a slightly larger proportion of charter school students (52%) compared to the state (49%). However, charter schools have lower percentages of limited English proficient (4%) and special education students (7%) compared to state averages (14% and 12%, respectively).

Staffing characteristics in charter schools. Compared to traditional public schools, charter schools have less experienced teachers, lower teacher salaries, higher teacher turnover, more minority teachers, and higher student-teacher ratios.

* *Less experienced teachers*. Charter school teachers, on average, are less experienced (5.3 years) than teachers in traditional public school (11.9 years). The percentage of beginning teachers in charter schools is significantly higher than the state average (39% versus 8%), and the percentage of charter school teachers with one to five years experience is higher than the state average (41% versus 27%).
* *Lower salaries*. Teachers in charter schools (particularly in 75 Percent Rule schools) are paid considerably less than those in traditional public schools, with the average charter school teacher salary ($27,434) far below that for teachers in traditional public schools ($37, 567). Part of the difference in salaries may be accounted for by the relative inexperience of charter school teachers. The salary gap seen in the fourth-year evaluation ($10,000) is greater than the disparity reported in year 3 ($7,500).
* *Higher teacher turnover*. The turnover rate for teachers in charter schools–49%–is much higher than the stage average of 15%; however, the turnover rate is lower in more established first-generation schools (42%) compared to newer, third-generation schools (60%).
* *More minority teachers*. Charter school faculty have more minority teachers (44%) compared to the state (26%), with a greater proportion of African American teachers (38% versus 8%), the same proportion of Hispanic teachers (17%), and substantially less White teachers (43% versus 74%).
* *Higher student-teacher ratios*. The average student-teacher ratio in charter schools (17 to 1) is somewhat higher than the ratio in Texas’ traditional public schools (15 to 1); however, these are school-level rather than classroom-level ratios.

Charter School Revenues and Expenditures

Revenue sources. Charter schools have no taxable property and are funded almost entirely by the state (78%), although they also receive some federal funding (11%) and funding from local sources (11%). Charter schools do not have the authority to impose taxes; thus, all of their local funding comes primarily from grants and donations.

Per-pupil operating expenditures. Total operating expenditures per pupil for charter schools ($5,671) are less than the state average for traditional public schools ($6,354). Likewise, per-pupil instructional expenditures for charter schools ($3,045) are somewhat less than average state expenditures ($3,376).

Program expenditures. The percentage of charter school expenditures for regular education (95%) is greater than the state average for all districts (71%), whereas the percentage of expenditures for special education is less (6% versus 12%). This is reasonable given the small percentage of students in charter schools receiving special education services.

Fund balance. Charter schools report a 5% fund balance compared with the state average of 14%. It should be noted, however, that Generation 1 schools maintain a larger fund balance (10%) than Generation 2 schools (5%). For all charter schools, however, the small fund balances indicate that little money is available for unexpected expenses.

## *School-Level Performance of Charter Schools*

Traditional public schools outperform charter schools on school accountability ratings. Based on AEIS annual accountability ratings, traditional public schools outperform charter schools on both primary (as shown in Table 1) and alternative education rating categories.

* *Primary Accountability Ratings*. Of the 66 charter schools rated in 2000, the majority received Acceptable (52%) or Low-performing (30%) ratings, with smaller percentages of schools achieving Exemplary (8%) or Recognized (11%) status. In contrast, the vast majority of traditional public schools received either Exemplary (20%), Recognized (32%), or Acceptable (46%) ratings.

### *Alternative Education Ratings*. For 2000, 33 charter schools received ratings of either Acceptable (27%) or Needs Review (73%). Conversely, most traditional public schools were rated as Commended (2%) or Acceptable (88%), with a small percentage receiving Needs Review ratings (11%).

Table 1. Charter and Traditional Public School Performance (1998 to 2000), Primary Accountability Ratings

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Rating** | **1998** | | **1999** | | **2000** | |
| **Charter (N=10)** | **Public** | **Charter (N=15)** | **Public** | **Charter**  **(N=66)** | **Public** |
| Exemplary | 0% | 17% | 13% | 18% | 8% | 20% |
| Recognized | 10% | 27% | 20% | 30% | 11% | 32% |
| Acceptable | 70% | 55% | 47% | 51% | 52% | 46% |
| Low-performing | 20% | 1% | 20% | 2% | 30% | 2% |

*Source.* TEA Division of Student Performance Reporting. Schools are rated as campuses*.*

*Note.* A small percentage of regular campuses received other ratings related to data quality. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding*.*

* *Accountability trends*. Although the increasing number of charter schools each year limits interpretations, findings for 1998 to 2000 show the following trends:
  + The percentage of Low-performing charter schools increased across years (20%, 20%, 30%), whereas percentages in traditional public schools have remained consistently low (1% to 2%); and
  + The percentages of charter schools rated as either Exemplary or Recognized have varied (10%, 33%, 19%), while the percentages for traditional public schools have increased (44%, 48%, 52%).

Charter schools perform below state averages on TAAS. As shown in Table 2, TAAS performance in charter schools is lower than the state average in all areas—particularly in mathematics and writing. Moreover, lower performance rates are consistent across all student comparison groups. The gap between minority and economically disadvantaged students and White students (about 20 percentage points) is comparable to the state.

**Table 2. 2000 TAAS Performance for All Charter Schools and State Average**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Percent of All StudentsPassing TAAS\* | **Charter Schools** | **State Average** | **Difference** |
| All tests taken | 43.1% | 79.9% | 36.8 |
| Reading | 64.2% | 87.4% | 23.2 |
| Writing | 58.4% | 88.2% | 29.8 |
| Mathematics | 52.5% | 87.4% | 34.9 |
| **Percent Passing All Tests Taken** |  |  |  |
| African American | 39.4% | 68.0% | 28.6 |
| Hispanic | 43.4% | 71.8% | 28.4 |
| White | 60.4% | 89.3% | 28.9 |
| Economically disadvantaged | 41.4% | 70.0% | 28.6 |

*Source.* 2000 TEA AEIS reports for 141 charter schools.

*\**All students refers to students tested in grade levels at which TAAS is administered*.*

Charter schools’ TAAS progress over time varies by school type. To allow an examination of performance trends without the issue of new schools, Table 3 presents data from the Generation 1 schools operating in 1999-00 by school type. Although the number of schools is small, the following trends emerge:

* *Charter schools serving primarily at-risk students made significant progress*. Schools serving more than 75 percent at-risk students doubled their students’ performance levels for all tests taken and made notable gains across subject areas—still, it will take time to reach the average statewide performance level.
* *Charter schools serving less at-risk students had marginal success*. Charter schools serving less than 75 percent at-risk students lag behind the state TAAS passing averages, even though these schools report less economically disadvantaged students than the state average.

# **Table 3. TAAS Performance for Generation 1 Charter Schools**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Subject Area** | **Open-Enr ≥ 75% (N=5)** | | | **Open-Enr < 75% (N=14)** | | |
| **1998** | **1999** | **2000** | **1998** | **1999** | **2000** |
| All tests taken | 19.3% | 33.8% | 44.2% | 51.7% | 60.0% | 62.0% |
| Reading | 47.0% | 57.8% | 63.2% | 68.9% | 84.1% | 78.0% |
| Writing | 34.5% | 62.2% | 59.8% | 68.8% | 69.7% | 73.2% |
| Mathematics | 22.4% | 41.2% | 58.6% | 56.1% | 67.6% | 71.5% |

TEA peer groups outperform charter schools on TAAS. Charter school comparisons with their traditional public school “peer” groups (as determined by TEA based on comparable demographic characteristics) revealed the following trends:

* *TEA matched peer groups outperform charter schools on TAAS*. Performance differences between charter schools and peer groups are large across all school types.
* *The greatest TAAS performance disparity is for mathematics*. Mathematics performance for charter schools compares less favorably to the peer-group average than does reading performance, regardless of school type.

#### Table 4. Charter Schools and TEA Peer Groups, Comparison of TAAS Performance

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **All Charter Schools** | | **75% Rule**  **(N=9)** | | **Open-Enr ≥ 75% (N=8)** | | **Open-Enr < 75% (N=36)** | |
| **Charter** | **Peers** | **Charter** | **Peers** | **Charter** | **Peers** | **Charter** | **Peers** |
| All tests | 43.1% | 76.6% | 34.9% | 72.8% | 41.4% | 73.6% | 50.4% | 78.2% |
| Reading | 64.2% | 86.2% | 56.6% | 84.1% | 56.6% | 83.1% | 71.2% | 87.5% |
| Math | 52.5% | 84.5% | 45.0% | 81.8% | 45.0% | 83.6% | 58.9% | 85.4% |

Source. 1999-00 TEA AEIS database. Peer groups have been identified for less than half of charter schools.

Charter schools have greater advanced course completions but lower performance on end-of-course exams. Compared to analogous state comparison group averages, charter school students have higher percentages of advanced course completions but lower passing rates on end-of-course exams (see Table 5). Interestingly, districts set standards for course completions, while end-of-course exams are administered and scored by TEA.

**Table 5. End-of-Course and Advanced Course Performance**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Outcome Measure** | **75% Rule and Open-Enr ≥ 75%** | **State Eco-Dis Students** | **Open-Enr < 75%** | **State All Students** |
| Advanced course completion | 14.0% | 11.3% | 24.9% | 17.5% |
| Passing Biology | 57.8% | 68.2% | 63.8% | 80.3% |
| Passing Algebra | 20.1% | 31.3% | 28.2% | 43.9% |
| Passing English II | 55.5% | 68.6% | 59.6% | 77.7% |
| Passing U.S. History | 43.3% | 54.9% | 61.0% | 72.1% |

*Source.* TEA 2000-01 AEIS Reports

Charter schools have lower attendance rates and higher dropout rates. As shown in Table 6, charter schools have lower attendance rates and higher dropout rates than analogous state comparison groups.

**Table 6. Student Attendance and Dropout for 1999**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Outcome Measure** | **75% Rule and Open-Enr ≥ 75%** | **State Eco-Dis Students** | **Open-Enr**  **< 75%** | **State All Students** |
| Attendance | 90.1% | 95.1% | 90.9% | 95.4% |
| Annual dropout rate | 5.7% | 1.5% | 5.3% | 1.6% |

*Source.* TEA 2000-01 AEIS Reports

## *Student-Level Performance Over Time*

The student-level analysis compared the academic performance of students who were continuously enrolled in charter schools with student cohorts who moved between the traditional public school system and charter schools. TAAS reading and mathematics passing rates are based on Texas Learning Index (TLI) scores.

### A number of analysis issues limit the interpretation of results. Foremost, new charter schools open each year, so the numbers of students enrolled in charter schools has increased dramatically across years. Other analyses issues include (a) the accurate identification of students, (b) student survivorship over time, (c) small numbers of cases in comparison groups, (d) unexplained student reasons for returning to traditional schools, and (e) the limited number of students with TAAS scores. Tables 8 and 9 summarize results.

**Table 8. Percentage Passing TAAS Reading, by School Type over Two Years**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1998-99** | **1999-00** | **Reading** | | | |
| **75% Rule and Open-Enr ≥ 75%** | | **N Students** | **1999** | **2000** | **Difference** |
| Charter | Charter | 368 | 77.7% | 89.4% | 11.7 |
| Public | Charter | 896 | 63.1% | 62.3% | -0.8 |
| Charter | Public | 110 | 78.1% | 84.5% | 6.4 |
| Public\* | Public\* | 25 | 56.0% | 72.0% | 16.0 |
| **Open-Enr < 75%** | | **N Students** | **1999** | **2000** | **Difference** |
| Charter | Charter | 1,248 | 72.6% | 79.5% | 6.9 |
| Public | Charter | 1,729 | 75.6% | 74.9% | -0.7 |
| Charter | Public | 446 | 78.4% | 83.1% | 4.7 |
| Public\* | Public\* | 81 | 86.4% | 90.1% | 9.0 |

\* Students in traditional public schools who attended charter schools some time between 1996-97 and 1999-00.

**Table 9. Percentage Passing TAAS Mathematics, by School Type over Two Years**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1998-99** | **1999-00** | **Mathematics** | | | |
| **75% Rule and Open-Enr** ≥ **75%** | | **N Students** | **1999** | **2000** | **Difference** |
| Charter | Charter | 409 | 70.9% | 81.4% | 10.5 |
| Public | Charter | 1,033 | 52.2% | 56.7% | 4.5 |
| Charter | Public | 114 | 72.8% | 80.7% | 7.9 |
| Public\* | Public\* | 25 | 57.6% | 65.3% | 7.7 |
| **Open-Enr < 75%** | | **N Students** | **1999** | **2000** | **Difference** |
| Charter | Charter | 1,288 | 62.2% | 71.3% | 9.1 |
| Public | Charter | 1,786 | 70.1% | 69.6% | -0.5 |
| Charter | Public | 472 | 67.3% | 82.8% | 15.5 |
| Public\* | Public\* | 87 | 70.3% | 84.6% | 14.3 |

\* Students in traditional public schools who attended charter schools some time between 1996-97 and 1999-00.

### Analyses for students with matched scores revealed these student performance trends:

### *Continuous student enrollment in schools makes a difference*. Students who remained in charter schools for two years showed positive academic gains in reading and mathematics (about 7 to 12 percentage points). Likewise, students formerly in charter schools who were enrolled for two years in traditional public schools had positive reading and mathematics gains (about 8 to 16 percentage points).

### *Students who stayed in charter schools serving primarily at-risk students had high academic performance compared to other groups.* Students who remained in charter schools serving primarily at-risk students for two years had high passing rates (71 to 89 percent) and strong academic gains in TAAS reading and mathematics (11 to 12 percentage points).

* *Students who moved from traditional public schools to charter schools had small achievement changes*. Students who moved from traditional public schools to charter schools had small losses in percentage passing rates (less than one percentage point) in reading and mixed results for mathematics by school type.
* Students who moved from charter schools to traditional public schools had strong achievement gains. Students formerly in charter schools showed strong gains for TAAS reading (5 to 6 percentage points) and mathematics (8 to 16 percentage points) after returning to traditional public schools.
* *Students remaining in charter schools for three years demonstrate increasing levels of academic performance*. Data for an *additional* limited sample of students enrolled in charter schools serving less than 75 percent at-risk students for three years showed increasing TAAS passing percentages for reading (78%, 81%, 88%) and mathematics (73%, 76%, 87%).

## *Student Satisfaction with Charter Schools*

Satisfaction with charter school. Charter schools receive strong support from their students, with the majority either satisfied or very satisfied with their schools. Among those students eligible, a majority intends to return to their charter schools. The level of satisfaction, however, varies by school type. Students attending general open-enrollment schools tend to be more satisfied than students in 75 Percent Rule charter schools, and students in 75 Percent Rule charter schools are much less likely to report that they intend to return to the schools (about 25% compared to 50% in other charter schools).

The majority of students believe their charter school is better than their previous schools because it has teachers who care about students (61%), good teachers overall (60%), and smaller classes (60%). Students also report that the charter teachers give more personal attention to students (68%). Smaller percentages of students cite limitations relative to class offerings, location, and order in classrooms (9% to 30%).

Reasons students choose charter schools. The most important reason students choose to attend charter schools is because the school fits their specific academic needs (more than 75% said very important or important). Also of great importance to students was more attention from their charter school teachers and the belief that the charter school has better teachers (about 66% said very important or important)—however, students in 75 Percent Rule charter schools place less importance on teacher support.

Educational aspirations. Charter school students continue to have high post-graduation aspirations. In 1999-00, for the first time, close to half of students expressed an intention to attend a four-year college. In past years, about 25% of students anticipated attending a four-year college, with an equal number planning on enrolling in a community college. Also, in 1999-00, only about 12% of students plan on going directly into the workforce compared to 20% in previous years. To some extent, however, post-graduate expectations may be accounted for by the younger students included in the 1999-00 sample.

Satisfaction over time. Students remain satisfied with their charter schools, with satisfaction ratings relatively high throughout the four years of the study. Nearly 40% of students were very satisfied across years, and the grades that students gave their charter schools have remained consistently high, with the overwhelming majority giving a grade of either A or B. Furthermore, more than half of the non-graduating students expect to return to the charter school, and this percentage has remained constant over time.

Overall, the most satisfied students appear to be those attending charter schools with primarily at-risk students, while the least satisfied students appear to be those attending 75 Percent Rule charter schools.

## *Parent Participation and Satisfaction*

Parent characteristics. On average, parents of students attending open-enrollment charter schools are relatively similar in terms of education and income compared to parents in the traditional public school sample. For charter school parents, 30% are high school graduates, 32% attended college, 17% graduated from college, and 3% have advanced degrees. The majority of charter school parents have incomes ranging from $20,000 to $75,000.

Awareness of charter schools. A majority of open-enrollment charter parents learned about charter schools by talking to friends and relatives (53%). About 25% of traditional public school parents and campus charter parents learn about charter schools from teachers or public schools, while only a small percentage (9%) of open-enrollment charter parents learn of charter schools from these sources.

School attributes influencing choices. Open-enrollment charter school parents’ most important reasons for choosing a charter school are the teaching of moral values (28%), high math andreading test scores (23%), and better discipline (22%). Parents were less likely to cite school safety, school location, or a racially diverse study body. In contrast, parents of students in traditional public schools and campus charter schools cite high test scores most frequently, followed by safety. The teaching of moral values does not emerge as a motivating factor.

Parent satisfaction. Charter school parents express high satisfaction with the charter schools their children attend—about 75% of parents give these schools a grade of A or B. Less than half (46%) would give their child’s previous school such grades, and parents were more likely to give the previous school a failing grade. Overall, charter school parents are very satisfied with parent-teacher relations (64%), teaching moral values (62%), discipline (62%), and teachers (61%).

Parent participation in schools. Charter school parents most frequently participate through attending a parent-teacher conference (80%), attending a PTO meeting (70%), helping with fund raising (56%), and volunteering at school (51%). Parents’ participation levels changed little compared to involvement in their child’s previous school (2% to 3%).

Perspectives of Charter School Directors

Director qualifications. Directors are well educated, with approximately half holding a Masters degree, 18 directors with doctorates, and 2 with law degrees. About two-thirds of charter school directors taught in traditional public schools before coming to charter schools. Many had prior administrative experience—78 had been an administrator in a traditional public school and 44 in a private school.

Reasons for founding charter school. As in past years, the majority of charter school directors founded charter schools either to develop their own educational visions or to serve a special student population; however, directors in schools serving less than 75 percent at-risk students placed more importance on autonomy in educational programming from local school districts and in personnel matters.

Challenges to establishing and operating charter schools. Charter school directors identified their greatest challenge as lack of startup and operating funds, followed by lack of planning time. Lack of adequate facilities, various regulations, and hiring teachers are moderate barriers. In comparing the first year of operation with subsequent years, involving parents remains the greatest challenge for directors. Securing adequate funding, realizing the original vision, and attracting and retaining teachers and staff have also become more difficult.

Curriculum. Almost all (96%) of the directors report using state-adopted curricular materials, with 77% augmenting that curriculum with other educational programs. The most prevalent educational practices include mainstreaming students (87%), technology for learning (82%), individualized learning (82%), multi-age grouping (65%), performance-based assessments (65%), and alternative assessments (55%).

Student discipline. Overall, directors do not view discipline problems as particularly serious, although discipline is more of a problem in charter schools serving primarily at-risk students. Disciplinary incidents most commonly involve assault and drugs and are more likely to occur in schools serving primarily at-risk students. Compared to the previous year, the amount of time spent on discipline decreased, with administrators and teachers spending less than 15% of their time on discipline.

Organizational, community, and parent support. More than 90% of charter school directors received support from regional education service centers (ESCs), the Charter School Resource Center, and TEA. Charter schools serving primarily at-risk students are more likely to receive support from the local school district than schools serving less at-risk students. Charter schools also receive substantial support from businesses and the community, and schools serving less than 75 percent at-risk students report higher levels of support than schools serving primarily at-risk students. The most common types of support include equipment donations, field trips, time, and monetary donations. Mentoring, tutoring, and job shadowing are more common in schools serving primarily at-risk students. Parent participation is far more prevalent in charter schools serving less at-risk students, with fundraising and parent tutoring the most common type.

Returning students. Directors report that more than 75% of eligible students returned for the 1999-00 school year. About half had a waiting list in the current school year. Charter schools use a variety of recruitment techniques, most frequently word-of-mouth, fliers, and parent meetings. Students most often leave charter schools because they moved or completed a GED.

Effects of Open-Enrollment Charter Schools on Traditional School Districts

Effects from charter schools. Approximately 75% of the 154 respondents reported no effects from charter schools. Moreover, more than 66% of respondents from the 46 districts reporting effects characterized these as mild. Large districts reported effects from charter schools more frequently than did mid-size or small districts.

District students attending charter schools. Less than 25% of districts near operating charter schools report students leaving district schools to attend charter schools. Students moving to charter schools are more likely to be at-risk students. Administrators, in many cases, are uncertain about student movement to charter schools because no means exists to track student movement unless district records are requested. A specific problem mentioned by several respondents involves students transferring back to the traditional public schools without mastering course content for which they received credit.

Financial effects. Because student tracking is a problem, the financial effects are largely unknown, but about 25% of districts operating near charter schools reported experiencing financial effects. Respondents affected financially indicated that effects should be measured directly as lost ADA, and lost revenue estimates were $200,000 or less (11 districts) and $400,000 or more (9 districts). Respondents from districts unaffected financially by charter schools usually based their response on the fact that no students—or an insignificant number of students—left to attend charter schools.

Responses to the presence of charter schools. The most commonly reported responses to the presence of charter schools include district administrators meeting to discuss issues concerning charter schools (44%) and charter school issues included in the district’s board agenda (28%). Very few districts reported changes in policies, programs, or services in response to the presence of charter schools in the area. Similarly, very few reported any effects on district educators, students, or parents.

***Evaluation Continuation***

Currently, evaluation efforts are underway for the fifth-year evaluation of Texas open-enrollment charter schools. Evaluators will provide an in-depth examination of open-enrollment charter schools in operation for the majority of the 2000-01 school year as well as a longitudinal review of findings over the five years of the evaluation.

1. With House Bill 6, the 77th Texas Legislature eliminated the 75 Percent Rule designation. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)