

Evaluation of Texas Charter Schools 2009–10

Executive Summary

July 2011

Submitted to:
Texas Education Agency



State of Texas
Education Research Center
at Texas A&M University

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Executive Summary

Public schools in high-poverty neighborhoods, plagued by societal and contextual barriers to teaching and learning, have historically struggled with challenges related to attracting outstanding teachers and providing a quality education to their students (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Charter schools were developed, in part, to respond to the difficulties faced by traditional public schools, especially those in high-poverty areas. Since their inception in 1991, charter schools have been offered to students and families in the United States as an alternative to traditional public schools. The opportunity for school choice has allowed charter schools to become increasingly popular. By 2009, more than 4,700 charter schools enrolled over 1.4 million children in 40 states and in Washington DC (Center for Research on Education Outcomes [CREDO], 2009b).

The 74th Texas Legislature authorized the State Board of Education (SBOE) to establish charter schools in the state in 1995. Similar to charter schools in other states, Texas charter schools are exempt from many of the laws and rules that apply to traditional public schools, such as laws dictating teacher qualifications and class sizes. Charter schools' independence from many state regulations was intended to ensure fiscal and academic accountability, while eliminating undue regulation and encouraging individual schools to be more innovative in the methods used to provide education to students. Like traditional public schools in Texas, charter schools are monitored and accredited under the statewide testing and accountability system.

The specific purposes for the creation of public charter schools outlined in Texas Education Code (TEC) §12.001 are as follows: (a) to improve student learning, (b) to increase the choice of learning opportunities within the public school system, (c) to create professional opportunities that will attract new teachers to the public school system, (d) to establish a new form of accountability for public schools, and (e) to encourage different and innovative learning methods.

Background

TEC allows for four classes of charter schools: home-rule school district charter schools, open-enrollment charter schools, district (or campus) charter schools, and university or college charter schools. The majority of Texas students educated in charter schools attend open-enrollment charters. Currently, no home-rule school district charter schools operate in the state.

Classes of Existing Texas Charter Schools

District charter schools (Subchapter C). District charter schools are established in one of two ways. Either a majority of parents and teachers at an existing traditional public school petition the district's governing board to convert the campus to a charter school and the petition is approved (TEC §12.052), or the board of trustees of a school district grants a charter for a new district campus or for a program that is operated by an outside contractor at a facility located in the boundaries of the district (TEC §12.0521). Although district charter schools remain part of their original school district, they maintain curricular autonomy and are exempt from various local and state directives. All Texas school districts are required by the TEC to implement policy that provides for district charter schools.

Open-enrollment charter schools (Subchapter D). The most common form of charter schools in Texas, open-enrollment charter schools, are created by eligible entities (e.g., non-profit organizations, institutions of higher education (IHE), or governmental entities) as completely new local education agencies (TEC §12.101). Although the SBOE authorizes open-enrollment charter schools, the commissioner of education maintains authority over them. Open-enrollment charter schools are characteristically eligible for federal funding through categorical programs such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), and may draw their enrollment from multiple school district lines, as authorized by the SBOE. Open-enrollment charter schools may not charge students tuition (TEC §12.108). Currently, the number of open-enrollment charter schools that may be authorized by the SBOE through Chapter 12 Subchapter D of the TEC is capped at 215, but many open-enrollment charter schools operate multiple campuses, and the commissioner of education maintains the authority to allow these charters to expand.

College or university charter schools (Subchapter E). TEC §12.152 allows for an open-enrollment charter school to be established on the campus of a public junior or senior college or university or in the county in which the junior or senior college or university is located. Although college or university charter schools are considered to be a sub-set of open-enrollment charter schools and are treated as such in this analysis, a charter granted under this rule is not counted toward the limit on the total number of open-enrollment charter schools established in TEC §12.101(b).

2009–10 Evaluation of Texas Charter Schools

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) contracted with the State of Texas Education Research Center at Texas A&M University (ERC at TAMU) to conduct the annual evaluation of public charter schools in Texas for the 2009–10 academic year. This evaluation focuses on the classes of open-enrollment charter schools and district (campus) charter schools.

Designed as a descriptive, causal-comparative study, this evaluation consists of both survey and secondary source data analysis. Researchers utilized online surveys of charter school students, families, teachers, and administrators to describe school characteristics, as well as gauge the perceptions and satisfaction individuals had regarding their respective campuses. Additionally, analyses of data from the Public Education Information Management System¹ (PEIMS), and the Academic Excellence Indicator System² (AEIS) yielded findings related to school demographics, school revenues and expenditures, and charter school student performance. With the exception of the survey analyses, this report covers the 2008–09 school year.

¹ The PEIMS encompasses all data requested and received by TEA about public education, including student demographic and academic performance, personnel, financial, and organizational information.

² The AEIS pulls together a wide range of information on the performance of students in each school and district in Texas every year. This information is put into the annual AEIS reports, which are available each year in the fall.

The research team profiled the students who attended charter schools and examined the cost adjusted expenditures³ and relative performance of charter schools in Texas during the 2008–09 academic year. Because the analysis of demographic profiles indicated that charter school students are systematically different from traditional public school students, the expenditures and outcomes of non-residential⁴ charter school campuses were compared to one another and to a subset of traditional public school campuses that were similar to them with respect to key demographic characteristics. Those demographic characteristics were the grade level of the school; its enrollment; whether or not it was located in Dallas, in Houston, in San Antonio or in some other Texas metropolitan area; and the percent of students who were African American, Hispanic, economically disadvantaged, limited English proficient (LEP), at risk of dropping out, or in special education programs. The comparison schools were identified using propensity score matching, which is a statistical strategy used to construct a control group for experiments that do not use random assignment. In this context, propensity score matching identified the traditional public school campuses that were the best available comparison group for the non-residential open-enrollment and district charter campuses. Expenditures and outcomes for residential charter campuses were compared with the complete set of residential, traditional public school campuses.

Wherever appropriate, researchers conducted separate analyses for campuses subject to standard education accountability procedures (SEAP) and those subject to alternative education accountability procedures (AEAP), known as alternative education campuses (AECs). These AECs are campuses that (a) are dedicated to serving students at risk of dropping out of school, (b) are eligible to receive an alternative education accountability (AEA) rating⁵, and (c) register annually for evaluation under AEA procedures (TEA, 2009a). There are two types of AECs—residential AECs and AECs of Choice⁶.

Throughout the report, the term “significantly” has been used to indicate a statistically significant difference at the five-percent level, meaning that there was no more than a 5% chance that the observed difference could arise randomly.

Growth in Open-Enrollment and District Charter Schools

Open-enrollment charter schools are by far the most common form of charter school in Texas. Sixteen open-enrollment charter campuses opened their doors in the 1996–97 school year and another three opened the following year. The number of open-enrollment charter campuses more than tripled to 66 during the 1998–99 school year and expanded to

³ Cost adjusted expenditures were utilized because wage levels vary substantially from one part of the state to the next, and a district in a low-wage part of the state could easily pay 20% less than a district in a high-wage part of the state for a comparable staff member. Therefore, payroll expenditures were adjusted for labor cost differences using an updated version of the NCES comparable wage index.

⁴ Non-residential campuses are day schools, as opposed to residential campuses.

⁵ Under the state accountability system, campuses that met certain criteria have the option to be evaluated under alternative education accountability (AEA) procedures and receive accountability ratings based on different performance standards and indicators/measures than those used for regular campuses. These campuses are known as alternative education campuses (AECs).

⁶ Residential AECs are alternative education campuses in which the students reside on campus and AECs of Choice are non-residential alternative education campuses.

176 the following year. During the 2008–09 school year, there were 436 open-enrollment charter school campuses operated by 204 charter schools in Texas⁷ (Figure ES.1).

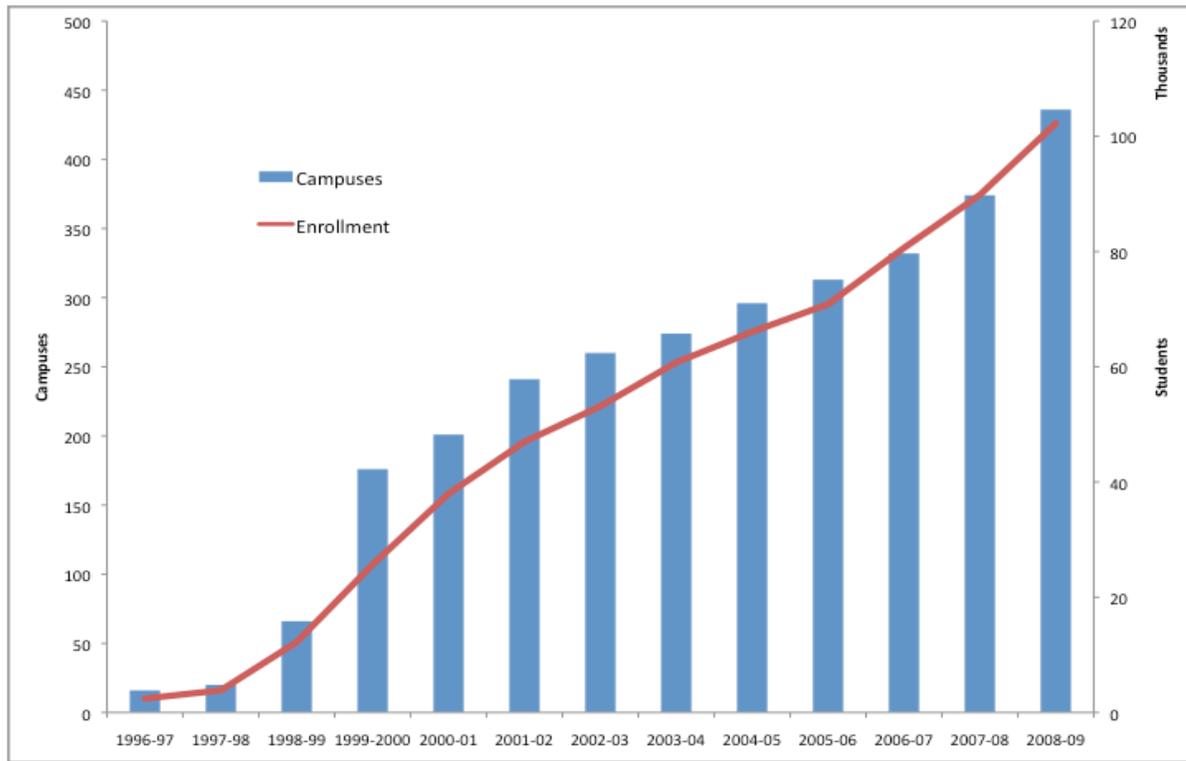


Figure ES.1
Growth in Open-Enrollment Charter School Campuses in Texas

Source. Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS).

As the number of campuses has increased across the state, open-enrollment charter schools have also experienced a remarkable increase in student enrollment. The number of students attending open-enrollment charter campuses increased from 2,412 in 1996–97 to 102,249 in 2008–09. Between the 1998–99 and 2008–09 academic years, the number of students attending Texas open-enrollment charter campuses increased dramatically, expanding by 736% in only 10 years. In traditional public schools, enrollment only grew by 18%. The line in Figure ES.1 illustrates the rapid growth in open-enrollment charter school enrollment.

The first district charter school in Texas was established one year after the first open-enrollment charter school. In the 1997–98 academic year, nine district charter campuses in Texas served 6,019 students. Eleven years later, in 2008–09, there were 61 district charter campuses serving 24,737 students—an enrollment increase of 311%. The line in Figure ES2 depicts district charter school enrollment growth over time.

⁷ The operations of two open-enrollment charters were suspended in the middle of the 2008–09 school year. Data from these schools were excluded from this analysis.

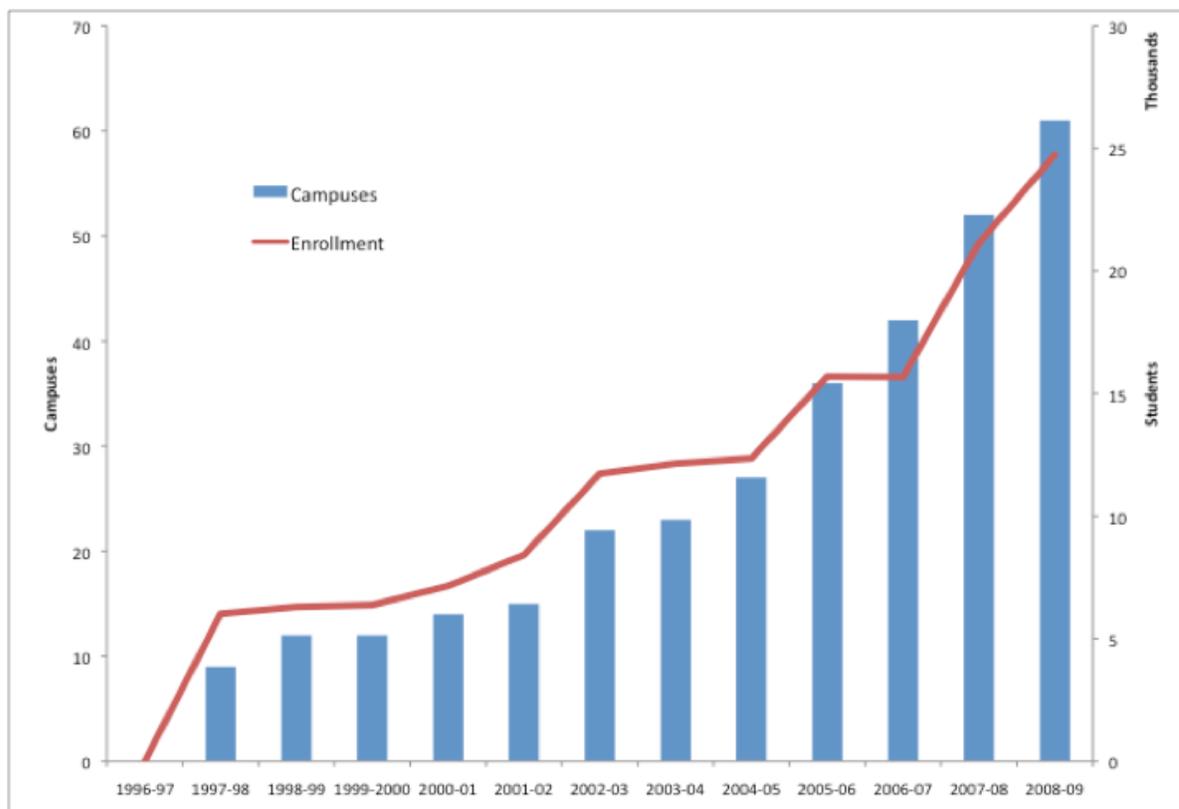


Figure ES.2
Growth in District Charter Schools in Texas
Source. Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS).

Despite all the rapid growth, however, charter schools remain a relatively small part of the educational landscape in Texas. Fewer than 3% of Texas students attended an open-enrollment charter school or district charter school in 2008–09.

As a general rule, students in metropolitan areas had greater access to charter schools than did students living outside of a metropolitan area. Only 26 of the 436 open-enrollment charter campuses were located outside of a metropolitan area, and eight of those were residential AECs. Only one district charter school, Wallace Accelerated High School in Colorado City, is located outside of a metropolitan area. More than half of the open-enrollment charter campuses and 90% of the district charter campus were located in the Houston, Dallas, or San Antonio metropolitan areas.

Most district charter schools were evaluated under SEAP. Only seven of the 61 district charter campuses were AECs, with none being residential. In contrast, 135 of the 436 open-enrollment charter schools were AECs of choice and 52 of the 436 were residential AECs.

Major Findings

Students who attended charter schools in Texas were systematically different from those who did not.

Figure ES.3 compares the ethnic composition of the students attending Texas charter campuses in 2008–09 with that of traditional public schools. As the figure illustrates, more than two thirds (68%) of the students attending district charter schools in 2008–09 were Hispanic, compared with 52% percent of the students attending open-enrollment charter schools and 48% of the students attending traditional public schools. District charter campuses also served a percentage of non-Hispanic white students (8%) that was significantly smaller than the percentages served in either open-enrollment charter schools (17%) or traditional public schools (35%). The percentage of African American students in district charter schools (21%) was halfway between the percentages in open-enrollment charter schools (28%) and traditional public schools (14%) and not statistically different from either type. However, the 14-point difference between open-enrollment charter schools and traditional public schools with respect to the percentage of African American students was statistically significant. In other words, Texas charter campuses served a student population that was disproportionately African American and Hispanic during 2008-09.

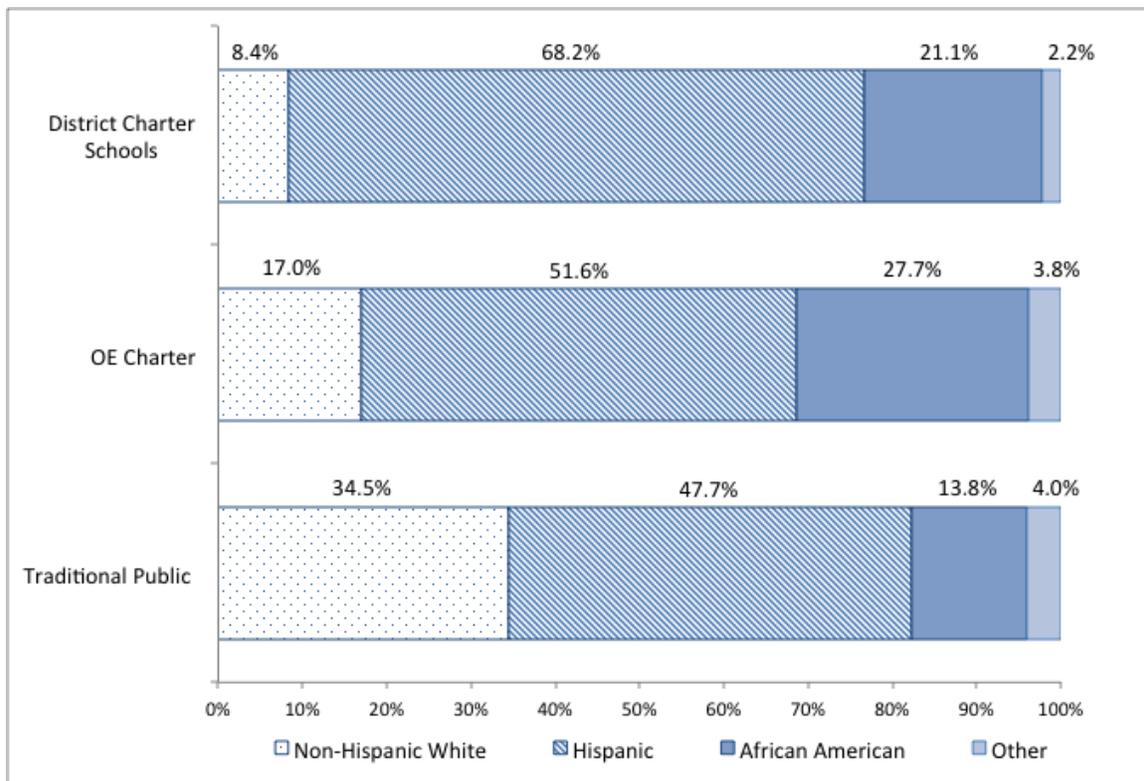


Figure ES.3
Ethnic Composition of Texas Charter Schools (2008–09)

Source. Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS).

Note. OE=Open-enrollment. In 2008-09, there were 24,737 students attending district charter schools, 102,249 attending open-enrollment charter schools, and 4,600,405 students attending traditional public schools.

Open-enrollment charter campuses and district charter campuses also served a significantly higher percentage of economically disadvantaged students than did traditional public schools, regardless of grade level or whether the schools were residential or non-residential. Among non-residential elementary campuses, the percentage of economically disadvantaged students was 11 percentage points higher for open-enrollment charter campuses and 31 percentage points higher for district charter campuses in comparison with traditional public schools. Among non-residential, non-elementary campuses (i.e., middle schools, high schools, and multi-level schools), the differentials were 16 and 19 percentage points, respectively.

Virtually all of the students from residential campuses were identified as at risk of dropping out of school, whether or not the campus was an open-enrollment charter school⁸. Among non-residential campuses, the percentage of at-risk students attending open-enrollment charter campuses was not significantly different from the percentage of at-risk students attending traditional public schools, once differences in the grade levels served were taken into account.⁹ District charter schools at the elementary level, however, served a significantly larger percentage of at-risk students than did either open-enrollment charter schools or traditional public schools.

Charter school teachers were also systematically different from teachers in traditional public schools.

Teachers in charter schools were also systematically different from teachers in traditional public schools. Open-enrollment charter schools had a larger percentage of African American and first-year teachers than did traditional public schools. On average, teachers in open-enrollment charter schools had less than half as many years of teaching experience as did teachers in traditional public schools. Open-enrollment campuses were also less likely to have teachers with advanced degrees, although the difference was not statistically significant for residential campuses. On average, the campus-level teacher turnover rates were twice as high at open-enrollment charter schools as at traditional public schools. Among non-residential campuses, average teacher salaries at open-enrollment charter schools were roughly \$10,000 per year lower than average teacher salaries at traditional public schools.

As a general rule, teachers in district charter schools were at least as highly educated and experienced as the teachers in traditional public schools and significantly more educated and experienced than the teachers in open-enrollment charter schools. Average salaries were significantly higher in district charter schools than in traditional public schools, which in turn were significantly higher than average salaries in open-enrollment charter schools. Teachers in district charter schools were also more likely to be Hispanic than were teachers in traditional public schools.

⁸ Students are identified as at-risk based on statutory criteria, including poor performance on standardized tests, a history of being held back in school, LEP, pregnancy, homelessness, placement in an alternative education program, or residence in a residential placement facility (AEIS glossary).

⁹ For the purpose of this report, traditional public schools are all non-charter public schools.

Revenues per pupil were lower at open-enrollment charter schools than at traditional public school districts.

Figure ES.4 shows the sources of revenue for open-enrollment charter schools and traditional school districts. As the figure illustrates, open-enrollment charter and traditional public school districts received similar amounts of federal funding per pupil. On average, open-enrollment charter schools received a larger share of revenue from the state and a smaller share from local sources (charitable donations, local taxes, and other local sources) than did traditional public school districts. Most of the local revenue for traditional school districts came from local taxes, with the remainder coming largely from other local sources. On average, traditional public school districts received only \$15 per pupil in charitable donations in 2008-09. In contrast, more than half of the local revenue for open-enrollment charter schools (\$448 per pupil, on average) came from charitable donations. That charitable revenue was not evenly distributed across the open-enrollment charter schools in the state, however. Most open-enrollment charter schools (80%) received less than \$100 per pupil, on average, in charitable donations in 2008-09, while a handful of open-enrollment charter schools received more than \$2,000 per pupil. KIPP Aspire Academy reported more than \$11,000 per pupil in charitable donations in 2008-09.

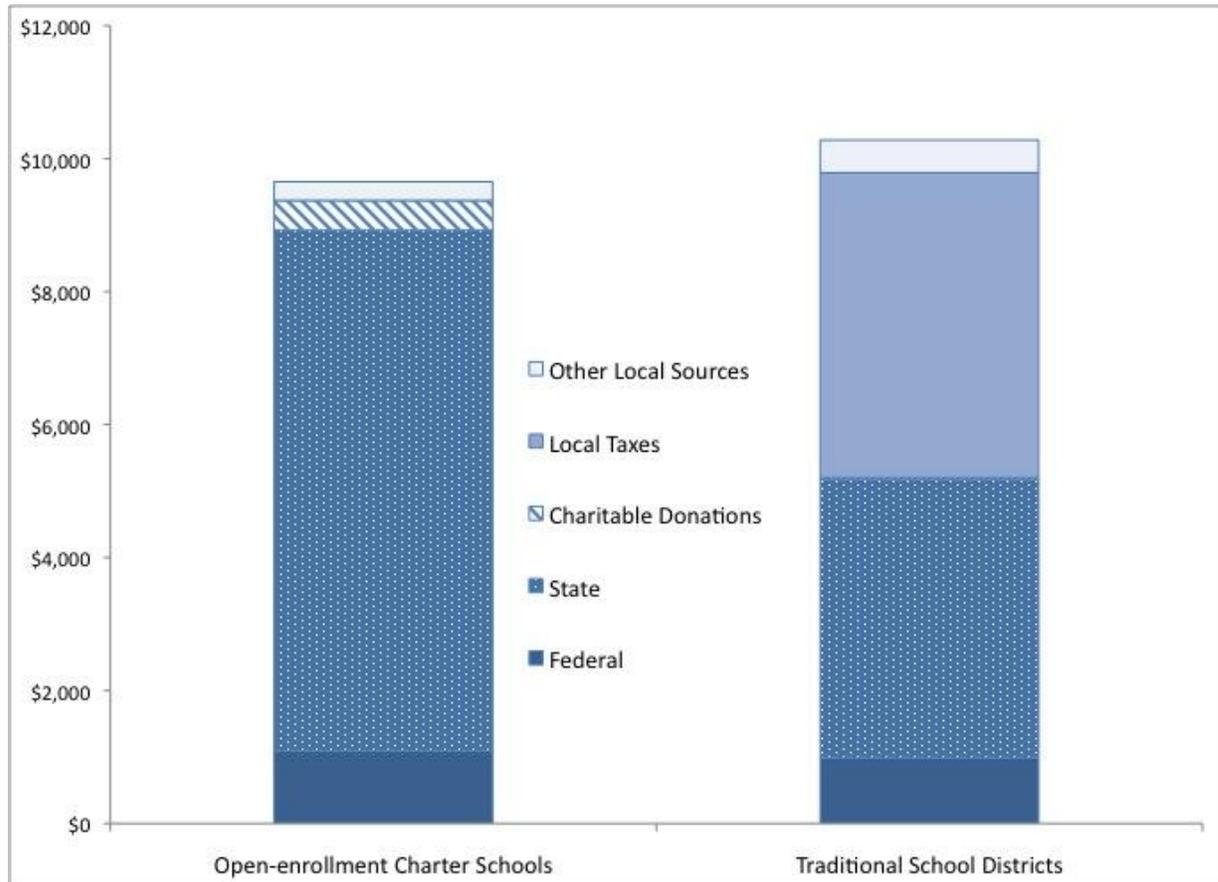


Figure ES.4
Sources of Revenue for School Districts (2008-09)

Source. Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) Actual Financials.

Cost adjusted expenditures were lower for charter schools than for traditional public schools with similar demographics.

Figure ES.5 compares cost-adjusted, current operating expenditures per pupil by accountability type and category. As the figure illustrates, among SEAP campuses, open-enrollment charter schools spent significantly less than district charter schools on instructional personnel and significantly more than district charter schools on non-personnel items like rent and supplies. Those differences in spending largely offset one another, leading to negligible differences in current operating expenditures between open-enrollment charter campuses and district charter campuses. Both types of charter campuses spent significantly less overall on current operating expenditures than matched traditional public school campuses.

There are two reasons why spending on instructional personnel was so much lower at open-enrollment charter schools. First, on average, open-enrollment charter schools had one fewer teacher per 100 students and half as many teacher aides as did traditional public school districts of comparable size.

Second, open-enrollment charter schools paid lower salaries, on average, than did traditional public school districts. Average teacher pay was 12% lower for teachers in open-enrollment charter schools than for teachers in traditional public school districts of comparable size, and adjusted for differences in local wage levels, average teacher pay was 24% lower. Average teacher salaries were lower not only because open-enrollment charter schools hired less experienced teachers, on average, but also because open-enrollment charter schools paid a smaller premium for additional years of teacher experience.

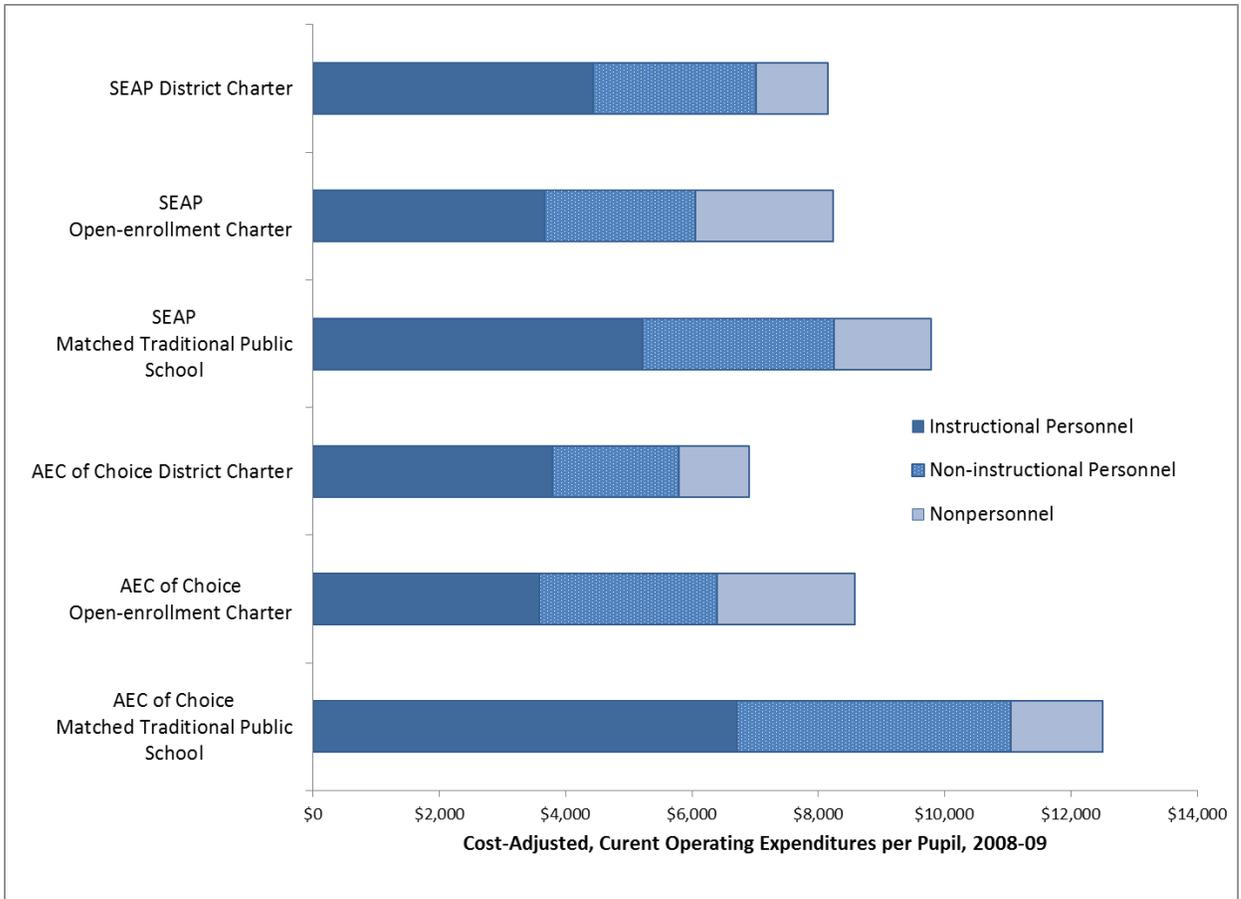


Figure ES.5
Cost-Adjusted Operating Expenditures per Pupil by School Type and Category (2008–09)

Source. Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) Actual Financials.

Note. OE=Open-enrollment and AEC=Alternative Education Campus.

Among AECs of Choice, operating spending at district charter schools was significantly lower than operating spending at open-enrollment charter schools, but spending on instructional personnel was comparable. The difference arises because open-enrollment charter campuses spent significantly more than district charter campuses on non-instructional personnel and non-personnel items. Across all three spending categories (instructional personnel, non-instructional personnel and non-personnel) the matched traditional public school campuses spent significantly more than either type of AEC charter campus.

Residential schools provide services around the clock, so it is not surprising that residential schools spend more than nonresidential schools on personnel. Residential open-enrollment charters spent more than twice as much per pupil as non-residential open-enrollment charters on instructional personnel. The differences in spending between residential traditional public schools and residential charter schools were not statistically significant.

Student performance at charter schools is comparable to student performance at matched traditional public schools.

Researchers explored five different dimensions of student performance: school accountability ratings, student performance on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), attendance rates, completion rates, and English language acquisition rates. Language acquisition is measured by the English language learner's (ELL's) progress measure, which indicates the share of LEP students making progress toward language proficiency, and the LEP transition rate, which indicates the share of LEP students in 2009 that were no longer considered LEP students in 2009–10. For all of the outcome measures, student performance at charter schools was compared to student performance at matched traditional public schools because demographic differences between charter schools and traditional public schools make it misleading to compare charter schools with the state as a whole. Focusing all of the comparisons on matched traditional public schools yields a somewhat more favorable picture of charter school performance than had been found in previous analyses comparing charter student performance to student performance statewide. (For example, see TCER, 2008).

Table ES.1 summarizes the findings from the separate analyses of SEAP campuses, AECs of Choice, and residential AECs. In all cases, the performance of students in matched, traditional public school campuses provides a baseline for examining the relative performance of open-enrollment charter and district charter campuses. A horizontal arrow indicates that performance of the charter type is comparable to that of the matched traditional public school campuses. An upward arrow indicates that the charter school type significantly outperforms the matched traditional public schools on the designated indicator, while a downward arrow indicates that the charter school type significantly underperforms the matched traditional public schools.

Table ES.1

Summary of Student Performance at Open-enrollment Charters and District Charters as Compared to Matched Traditional Public School Campuses (2008–09)

	TEA Ratings	TAKS Levels	TAKS Gains	Attendance Rates	Completion Rates	Language Acquisition
SEAP campuses						
OE charter	↔	↔	↓	↑	↔	↑
District charter	↔	↔	↔	↔	↑	↓
AECs of Choice						
OE charter	↓	↑	↔	↑	↓	↑
District charter	↔	↓	↓	↑	↔	↓
Residential AECs						
OE charter	↔	↔	↔	↔	↔	↔

Notes. TEA ratings are the state accountability ratings. TAKS levels for this report are a composite of TAKS passing rates and TAKS scores in mathematics and reading. TAKS gains are a composite of passing rate gains and average score gains in mathematics and reading. Completion rates are a composite of Completion rate I and II. Language acquisition is a composite of the ELL progress measure and the LEP transition measure. If either of the component indicators was significantly positive, the corresponding composite was positive and positive arrows were reported. If either of the component indicators was significantly negative, the corresponding composite was negative and negative arrows were reported. Horizontal arrows indicate that no indicator was statistically significant. OE means open-enrollment.

Among SEAP campuses, researchers in this study seldom found a statistically significant difference between the performance of charter school students (attending either open-enrollment or district charters) and the performance of students at matched traditional public schools. Between open-enrollment charter and matched traditional public school campuses, there were no reliable differences in accountability ratings, TAKS levels (i.e. TAKS passing rates and TAKS test scores), or completion rates. Passing rate gains were significantly lower for open-enrollment charter schools than for matched traditional public schools; but average TAKS test score gains were comparable.¹⁰ Attendance rates and language acquisition rates were significantly higher for open-enrollment charters than for matched traditional public schools. District charters were generally comparable to matched traditional public schools on the performance measures under analysis, although district charters outperformed matched traditional public schools with respect to completion rates and underperformed them with respect to one of the two measures of language acquisition (the LEP transition measure).

Among AECs of Choice, student school performance was more mixed. Compared to matched traditional public schools, open-enrollment charter schools had significantly lower accountability ratings and completion rates; significantly higher TAKS passing rates, attendance rates, and language acquisition rates; and comparable TAKS test scores and

¹⁰ Average test scores and passing rates provide different information about the distribution of student performance in a school district, so it is quite possible for passing rates to be higher even though average scores are comparable. Consider, for example, two school districts—one where all of the students score a 70 on the exam and therefore pass the course and another where half the students score an 80 and half the students score a 60. In either case, the average score would be a 70, but one school district would have a passing rate of 100% while the other would have a passing rate of 50%.

average test score gains.¹¹ Compared with matched traditional public schools, the handful of district charters that were AECs of Choice had significantly higher attendance rates, comparable accountability ratings and completion rates (including general educational development [GED]); and significantly lower TAKS passing rates, passing rate gains, TAKS test scores, test score gains, and language acquisition rates.

Among residential AECs, there were no systematic differences in performance between charter and matched traditional public school campuses. Both types of campuses had high attendance rates and language acquisition rates but generally low performance in other dimensions of student achievement.

Among SEAP campuses, open-enrollment charter campuses and district charter campuses were roughly comparable in effectiveness. The only statistically significant differences between charter school types were that open-enrollment charter schools had smaller gains in the TAKS passing rates than district charter schools; that open-enrollment charter schools had higher language acquisition rates than district charter schools; and that district charter schools had higher completion rates than open-enrollment charter schools.

Among AECs of Choice, district charter schools had higher accountability ratings and completion rates but significantly lower language acquisition rates and TAKS performance than open-enrollment charter schools. District charter campuses underperformed open-enrollment charter schools for all TAKS-based measures except passing rate gains for reading, where the two were comparable.

Among students at risk of dropping out of high school, TAKS test scores and passing rates were significantly higher at district charter campuses than at non-residential open-enrollment charter or matched traditional public school campuses, but gains were comparable. There were no differences in TAKS scores, passing rates or either measure of gains between open-enrollment charters and matched traditional public schools.

No statistically significant differences among non-residential, open-enrollment charter; district charter; and matched traditional public school campuses were found in TAKS performance for Hispanic students, economically disadvantaged students, LEP students, or students who attended a different school the previous year.¹² However, African American students and non-Hispanic white students had significantly lower passing rates at open-enrollment charter schools than they did at district charter schools or matched traditional public schools. Non-Hispanic white students performed significantly better in district charter campuses than in open-enrollment charter campuses on all of the TAKS-based performance measures.

¹¹ Accountability ratings for AECs of Choice are based on TAKS progress, and two measures of student completion (Completion Rate II and the annual dropout rate). The ratings also reflect performance by student subgroups rather than the population as a whole. See <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/aea/2009/manual/chapter10.pdf>.

¹² The schools attended the previous year could have been a charter school or a traditional public school.

Survey Respondents Are Generally Satisfied

The 2009–10 Texas Charter School Evaluation included surveys of administrators, teachers, students, and families at both open-enrollment campuses and district charter campuses. The surveys were administered in spring 2010, and stakeholders were asked to report on the 2009–10 school year. Only stakeholders from Generations 1–10 charter schools were surveyed for this report, as Generations 11–14 were recently surveyed as part of the Evaluation of New Texas Charter Schools, 2007–10 (TCER, 2009). The goal of surveying these groups was to ascertain their attitudes and opinions about their campuses, as well as their general satisfaction about charter schools. Only open-enrollment administrators, teachers, students, and families responded to the surveys. Some open-enrollment charter schools had multiple respondents; others had none.

Administrators. In order to describe charter school administrator characteristics, as well as address administrators' satisfaction with their respective charter campuses, the survey of administrators at open-enrollment and district charter campuses merged topics and questions from the 2006–07 evaluation surveys with items not previously asked (TCER, 2008). Responses were received from 198 administrators at 123 of the 414¹³ open-enrollment charter campuses surveyed, but no responses were received from administrators at the 29 district charter campuses surveyed. Of the open-enrollment campuses where administrators responded to the survey, 81 were from SEAP campuses and 42 were AECs. There were too few respondents from AECs to draw meaningful distinctions between AECs of Choice and residential AECs.

The demographic profile of the responding administrators was similar to that reported in the 2006–07 evaluation (TCER, 2008). Generally speaking, the responding charter school administrators were non-Hispanic white (44%), Hispanic (26%), or African American (24%); 61% were female.

On the subject of highest educational level attained, similar to the 2006–07 report on Texas Charter Schools (TCER, 2008), the majority (69%) of administrators held at least a master's degree, with 12% having obtained a doctorate as well. Notably, a higher percentage of administrators who worked at AEC campuses (71%) had master's degrees, as compared to administrators who worked at charter campuses evaluated under SEAP (51%). As was reflected in the 2006–07 report (TCER, 2008), open-enrollment charter campus administrators on average had 9.9 years of experience in administration and 8.5 years of experience as teachers.

According to survey respondents, the average class size was 20 students. SEAP campuses reported slightly larger classes (21 students) than AECs (17 students). In terms of the number of schools with a wait list—as well as the number of students included on the lists—variation among the types of schools was substantial. Of the SEAP campuses, 44% had wait lists (with an average of 104 students per list), while 24% of the AECs had a wait list (with an average of 50 students per list).

An overwhelming percentage (85%) of administrators identified serving at-risk students as a mission of their campus. Additionally, drop-out recovery (40%), special education (37%),

¹³ Three open-enrollment schools were not serving students by the time of survey administration but are included in generations 1-10.

and college preparation (35%) are heavily-identified missions of open-enrollment charter campuses.

In terms of teacher recruitment, no strategy was classified as being used to a great extent. Responding administrators did, however, identify the use of partnering with alternative certification programs and advertising in print and electronic media as the most frequently utilized strategies.

Two issues clearly stood out as the most influential factors in the decisions that charter school administrators make—standardized test scores (e.g., TAKS) and student attendance. Tardiness and absenteeism were administrators' top two discipline and behavior concerns, as reflected in the prior report (TCER, 2008). Inadequate facilities and too much paperwork/reporting requirements were rated by administrators as the most serious challenges they face, although administrators also commented on the challenges associated with balancing student needs with school costs. In general, however, administrators were satisfied with their charter campuses, specifically identifying small class sizes and a dedicated staff as school strengths.

Teachers. In contrast to the most recent charter school report (TCER, 2008), the 2009–10 Texas Charter Schools Evaluation included a survey of teachers at both open-enrollment and district charter campuses. Teachers have a significant impact on student outcomes; therefore, evaluators deemed the perspectives and experiences of classroom teachers at charter schools to be critical and essential aspects of a complete report. The survey also described teacher characteristics and addressed teachers' satisfaction with their respective charter campuses. In addition to the questions asked of charter school administrators, teachers were surveyed about the presence and use of classroom/campus technology.

Teacher respondents were non-Hispanic White (48%), Hispanic (30%), or African American (16%) and female (68%); holding, at minimum, a bachelor's degree (95%). On average, they had 7 years of experience overall as teachers and 3 years of experience specifically as teachers at their current charter campus.

All of the teachers who responded to this survey worked at open-enrollment charter campuses. An overwhelming percentage (80%) of teachers identified *servicing at-risk students* as a mission of their school. Additionally, *special education* (36%), *drop-out recovery* (34%), and *college preparation* (23%) were frequently identified as missions of open-enrollment charter schools. *Standardized test scores*, *other formal assessments*, and *student attendance* had the greatest influence on charter school teachers' decision-making. Similar to responses given by administrators, charter school teachers reported *student tardiness* and *student absenteeism* as the primary student behavior and discipline problems.

Results indicated that on the whole, the majority (81%) of teachers were either *satisfied* or *very satisfied* with their campuses. Via open-ended survey questions, some teachers described what they perceived as strengths of their charter campuses, and most responses echoed the recurring themes mentioned by their administrator counterparts: small campuses, low teacher-to-student ratios, and motivated teachers. Many teachers commented accordingly: "Since we are a small campus, we are able to reach all students and know their individual needs." Another teacher offered, "Our teachers are educated and motivated to help students succeed." Additionally, teachers shared: "We have a great opportunity to serve a group of very intelligent, highly at-risk students," and "[We have] a small community that brings more of a family-feel to the school's atmosphere."

Students and Families. Students offer first-hand insight and perspective into their classrooms and overall learning environments that cannot be described by any other stakeholders. Additionally, the role of families in choice-based, public charter schools is both obvious and fundamental; and families' points of view, as related to their children's educational experiences, are particularly valuable. It should be noted that, per the direction of TEA, parents were given an opportunity to preview the student survey prior to allowing their child to complete it, so there is no way to definitively determine whether parents/families or students themselves were responsible for the responses on the student surveys. Furthermore, although 314 student surveys and 75 family surveys were completed, all of the responses came from only 12 campuses. Therefore, caution should be used in interpreting these results.

Students. Almost 60% of the students who responded to the survey had not attended their current charter school the previous school year. Factors identified most often as contributors to students' charter school choice were smaller classes (77%) and good teachers (76%). The two issues that most influenced students' perceptions of the current school environment were that they work hard to earn the grades they receive (80%) and that their teachers encourage them to think about their future (79%).

Overall, 80% of charter school students were satisfied or very satisfied with their experiences at their current campuses. Students strongly agreed that they have computers available to use when they need them, and they enjoy using technology for academic purposes. However, students also commented on the desire for more computers at their campuses. Moreover, charter school students responding to the survey had generally positive attitudes about their teachers and classes.

Almost all charter school students (97%) believed they will graduate from high school, and the majority (66%) saw some form of higher education in their future. Most students (72%) indicated that they planned on attending their same charter campus the following year.

Families. Of the individuals who responded to the family survey, 90% were parents of the charter school students and the majority of the remainder were other family members (e.g., grandparents, aunts/uncles, etc.). The majority of family members (81%) had, at minimum, completed high school. On average (46%), family members indicated that their students had been enrolled in their current charter school for one year. Prior to choosing a charter school, 58% had attended a traditional public school.

The school factors that family members rated as most important were (a) meeting their child's specific needs and (b) the reputations of school's academics and personnel. Families strongly agreed that they expect their children to attend college. Every item related to family involvement indicated more participation at the current charter campus than at the previous school, and overall, 94% of the families indicated they were satisfied with their experiences at their current charter campus.

Conclusion

The charter school movement developed as an outgrowth of the educational reform concept of school choice. In response to challenges such as increased academic standards, fiscal accountability, and the difficulty of attracting quality teachers to high-poverty neighborhoods, charter schools have been offered to students and families in the United States as an alternative to their traditional neighborhood public schools.

Despite rapid growth, charter schools remain a small part of the Texas educational landscape. In 2008–09, open-enrollment charter schools and district charter campuses served less than 3% of the public school students in Texas. As a general rule, those charter school students were disproportionately African-American, Hispanic, economically disadvantaged and living in metropolitan areas. Any evaluation of charter schools must take these demographic differences into consideration. This analysis does so by comparing school expenditures and student performance in open-enrollment and district charter campuses with that of similar traditional public school campuses. Focusing both comparisons on matched traditional public schools yields a somewhat more favorable picture of charter school performance and spending than had been found in previous analyses such as TCER (2008).

This analysis supports three broad conclusions about charter schools in Texas:

1. *There are few systematic and reliable differences in educational outcomes between charter campuses and matched traditional public school campuses.* There were some measures of performance where charter campuses outperformed matched traditional public school campuses, some measures where they underperformed, and many measures where there was no reliable difference between charter and matched traditional public school campuses. Nothing in the analysis supports a conclusion that charter schools were systematically better—or worse—than matched traditional public schools serving similar student bodies.
2. *Charter campuses spent significantly less than matched traditional public school campuses.* On average in 2008–09, open-enrollment charter elementary campuses spent 12% less than did comparable traditional public school campuses, open-enrollment charter non-elementary campuses spent 25% less than did comparable traditional public school campuses, and district charter campuses spent roughly the same as open-enrollment charter campuses at either grade level. Charters achieved much of their cost savings by spending significantly less than matched traditional public school campuses for instructional personnel.
3. *Administrators, teachers, students and families in open-enrollment charter schools appear satisfied with their current campuses.* A low fraction of the charter school stakeholders responded to the satisfaction surveys, but most of those who did respond were satisfied or very satisfied with their current charter school.

In turn those three findings can be distilled into one overarching observation: On average, charter schools in Texas appear to be as effective as traditional public schools, and more cost effective. Both types of charter schools achieved similar results using substantially fewer resources than comparable traditional public schools.

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