



Annual Report 2018-19

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Cover photo: Students from Leadership Prep School (Frisco) at the National School Choice Week Rally

Friends,

The principals and teachers in Texas charter schools are busy every day finding creative ways to inspire nearly 300,000 students and put them on the road to a bright future. Our job at the Texas Charter Schools Association is to give these educators the support, resources, and freedom they need to do their life-changing work.

We're advocates for charter schools. We're also advisors and facilitators. We're in the statehouse, in the media, and in other venues where charter school policy is being debated. We're making the case for charter schools—why they're valued by families and educators, how they're improving the prospects of students and communities, and why more students should have access to a great charter school.

TCSA works with charter school leaders, board members, teachers, students, parents, alumni, and donors to build a strong infrastructure for charter school growth. As you'll see in this annual report, we are very active at the statehouse, making sure charter schools have a voice as education policy is made. In the most recent legislative session, we delivered big victories for charter schools, including increasing charter school funding as part of the most dramatic revamp of education funding in a generation. We achieved these successes by activating the charter school community across Texas, connecting charter schools with their legislators and bringing our advocacy army to the capitol.

We're also at work in the media, serving as a go-to source for facts and figures about charter schools and fighting back against myths and false claims. We're highlighting stories of schools that are changing lives, and of students and parents who are thrilled and deeply grateful that they've been able to choose a charter school.

Teachers have been a voice missing from the charter school debate for too long. This is especially unfortunate given that much of the opposition to charter schools is driven by powerful teachers' unions. Charter school teachers are the most dedicated education professionals around. They do awesome work with students and their passion is second to none. This past year, we made a major effort to amplify the voices of teachers, helping them to persuasively tell their stories and to become advocates for their schools and students.

In all our work at TCSA, we are thinking about the future. There are more than 140,000 names on charter school wait lists statewide; there's simply not enough room for them in the schools that exist today. This state needs more charter schools, and talented educators are ready to open new schools and expand existing high-quality schools. They need the resources and the support to navigate application processes, develop a deeper understanding of school board management, and wage the political battle for approval. We're guiding charter school leaders and prospective leaders through all these steps, while also pressing legislators to make sure charter schools have the money and freedom to grow.

I'm proud to lead a team at TCSA that is creating an environment that allows fantastic educators to do their best work for students. Our impact is felt in classrooms all around Texas. We represent 760 member schools, relying on their support—and the support of other charter school allies—to continue our important mission. This year, thanks

to our partners throughout the state, we had more engagement with lawmakers than ever before, we've got more stories to tell about children's lives changed, and we're more united as a community. In the pages that follow, you'll see the major results we delivered for charter schools this year. We love doing this work and we're motivated to keep bringing new opportunities to Texas students.

Lalee Coleman

Sincerely,

Starlee Coleman

CEO





Protecting the Community

"As a parent who wants to be an effective advocate, I have relied on the Texas Charter Schools Association for expertise and timesensitive information about what state lawmakers are deciding that will affect my children's school."

INGA COTTON

San Antonio Charter Moms

Where the Texas Charter Schools Association's work takes place in Austin, where we advance the interests of 760 charter schools and nearly 300,000 charter school students. We play both offense and defense, making sure that legislators understand the value families place on charter schools, and also standing up for our schools, teachers, and students when they're under attack from opponents.

As the 2019 legislative session got underway, the attacks facing public charter schools in Texas became clear. From calls for bans on new charter schools, to local governments discriminating against charter schools through zoning and local regulations, and mountains of proposed additional red tape, we were on the defense. Forty anti-charter bills were filed in the Texas House and Senate this year. TCSA worked harder than ever to defeat these threats while scoring major legislative wins for charter schools.

SECURING BETTER FUNDING

The 2019 legislative session was an especially big one for public education. For the first time in more than 30 years, the Texas legislature overhauled public school finance through House Bill 3 (HB 3). This was a significant opportunity for charter school advocates to increase funding for students who need it most. It was also an opportunity for charter school opponents to propose changes in the law that could limit charter school funding, autonomy, and growth for the next several decades. We had a lot at stake this year, and we're proud to say that we succeeded in increasing funding for charter schools and fending off attempts to harm our schools.

As a result of TCSA's advocacy:

- Charter schools will receive more funding per pupil under HB 3—an average increase of \$750 per student, which means raises for teachers and more money for the classroom;
- Charter schools now have access to \$120 million for facilities funding per biennium—double what was provided in the last legislative session;
- Seven of the ten charter-specific changes we requested in the final funding bill
 were approved, including making charter schools eligible for three new funding
 streams from which they had been excluded, as well as several concessions on
 reducing red tape and redundant bureaucracy;
- Every anti-charter bill that would have cut funding, limited the number and type
 of students we serve and where we can locate, or banned new campuses from
 opening was blocked.

Of course, we didn't accomplish this alone. Our power comes from our community. TCSA gives charter schools across Texas the tools to mobilize, to coordinate, and to maximize our effectiveness. In fact, our list of grassroots supporters has grown to more than 20,000. In the 2019 legislative session alone, our community worked together in powerful ways:

- Charter supporters conducted 50,000 advocacy actions—for instance, more than 400 people signed on to TCSA's letter to the legislature's school finance Conference Committee outlining our desires for HB 3;
- We mapped our 2019 target lawmaker districts with charter school campuses and grassroots activists, so that charter schools in every key legislative district were able to host briefings with parents and teachers;
- TCSA launched 33 grassroots mobilization campaigns, including notes of thanks to lawmakers who defended charter schools during committee meetings, as well as organizing outreach to lawmakers authoring anti-charter legislation.



On February 6, TCSA hosted CHARTER SCHOOL LOBBY DAY, coordinating in-person meetings with elected officials for more than 125 charter school leaders, board members, teachers, and supporters. We had meetings with 75 legislative offices, which created great buzz at the capitol and excitement among charter supporters in the Legislature. In preparation for Lobby Day, TCSA equipped coalition partners with facts, data, and helpful collateral to push back on myths in a coordinated and sophisticated way. We developed informational flyers with details about legislators' voting records and the charter school presence in their districts so that our advocates were well-prepared when attending meetings or site visits with legislators. We helped charter school leaders across the state become better advocates for their schools and established relationships between schools and legislators that will prove valuable for years to come.

"As Texas legislators finalize the school finance reform bill, House Bill 3, it is critical they make progress on closing the funding gap between charter and district schools. We must ensure our students aren't being shortchanged by an unequal funding system-because public education doesn't belong to one particular type of school, it belongs to our kids."

CRISTINA CORREA

IDEA College Preparatory San Juan teacher (Rio Grande Guardian, May 23, 2019)

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH LEGISLATORS

This year, one-third of the members of the Texas legislature were new, and margins between the majority and minority parties were slimmer than in previous sessions. Those factors made it all the more important to step up our game and build authentic relationships with elected officials in both parties. We made sure that new and returning members were aware of charter schools' priorities and met with educators leading our movement.

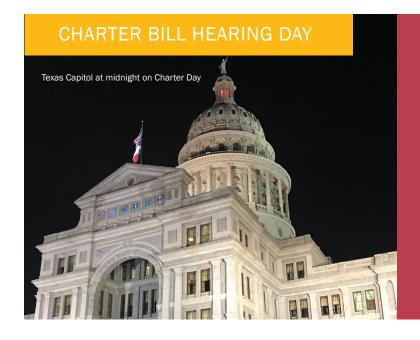
TCSA and Charter Schools Now, a TCSA-affiliated 501(c)(4), met with every key House and Senate legislator, including the House and Senate minority and majority leaders, House and Senate Education Committee members, and freshman lawmakers. We also hosted four dinners with lawmakers from both sides of the aisle to help members get to know us and find areas where we could work together to protect and advance charter schools.

TCSA's efforts to engage lawmakers paid off. In the 2019 session, all of TCSA's priority bills were introduced in the House and Senate and passed at least one full chamber vote. Just as importantly, we defeated all 40 of the explicitly anti-charter bills aimed at stopping or slowing charter growth. In addition to our funding win with HB 3, several other important bills became law. These new laws:

- Improve student safety: House Bill 3871 will increase student and school staff safety by allowing public charter schools to receive school zone signs when they ask for one.
- Protect charter school autonomy: Senate Bill 2293 makes sure that charter school leaders and teachers maintain their ability to innovate and respond to student needs by keeping workplace rules under the direction of charter leaders.
- Expand options for charter school teachers with children: House Bill 2190 will
 allow charter school teachers to send their children to the school where they work.
 This will help charter schools keep some of their best teachers in the classroom
 and give these parents more options for their child's education.
- Streamline the TEFRA bond approval process: HB 4258 moves TEFRA bond approval away from municipalities and authorizes the Attorney General's office to issue an approval, streamlining the process of charter schools opening schools in multiple locations.







On April 10, the Texas House Public Education Committee held "Charter Day" to debate 36 charter-related bills. Fourteen of these bills were harmful to charters. While the House has held charter days in the past, this was the first time there were so many anti-charter bills—a reflection of how contentious this year's statehouse session was. To make sure the voice of the charter school community was heard loud and clear on Charter Day, TCSA launched our most successful campaign to date: 2,554 advocates sent 33,093 emails in under 48 hours, while 56 charter school supporters from across the state went to the capitol on April 10, with 22 offering testimony. The charter school community demonstrated that we will be an active force in the statehouse!

SHAPING THE REGULATORY PROCESS

Once the legislature acts, the Texas Education Agency (TEA), State Board of Education (SBOE), and other agencies promulgate rules and regulations to either update the Texas Administrative Code or to create new code to guide the implementation of new laws. TCSA is always looking for opportunities to ensure that this regulatory process protects charter school freedoms and minimizes unnecessary compliance burdens. This is essential work, because when charter schools have more autonomy, they are better able to innovate, and when they are free from unnecessary compliance burdens, they can focus on educating children.

In 2018–2019, TCSA submitted seven public comment letters to TEA, which have resulted in changes to proposed rules that could have been harmful to charter schools. For instance, we ensured that charter schools affected by Hurricane Harvey are eligible for access to facilities funds.

After the historic 2019 legislative session ended, we also worked closely with TEA to ensure that our member schools stayed up to date on changes to their budgets based on HB 3, including hosting a joint call with charter schools, TCSA, and TEA staff.

In a tough legislative year, TCSA's effective advocacy and education campaigns brought charter school educators' passion for their schools and students directly to lawmakers. Together, we delivered major victories for our students, defeated efforts to limit charter schools' potential, and shaped the regulatory agenda to protect our schools' ability to do what they do best: deliver an outstanding education to students. We're already gearing up to protect charter schools and advance important policy changes in the next legislative session in 2021.



Telling Our Story

"The work you are doing is so meaningful not only to Winfree Academy and all charters in Texas, but more importantly to the invisible kids (in the eyes of many in Texas) that we serve every day."

BRANDY SCHOTT Winfree Academy Texas charter schools have great stories to tell. Stories of students who have discovered their passion for learning, of teachers who are empowered to do what they love, and of families and communities overjoyed to have a high-quality public school option for their children. When people ask, "What is a charter school?" or "Why do we need charter schools?" we want them to think of these stories. When lawmakers are taking votes on issues vital to charter schools, we want them to think of these stories. And when families are choosing schools for their children, we want them to think of these stories.

Through compelling narratives from students, parents, teachers, and leaders, TCSA is helping charter schools tell their stories better than ever. In a first for TCSA, this year we brought 17 charter school students, teachers, and parents to Austin to sit down with a camera crew to tell of their persistence, resilience, hope, and success. To date, their videos have received more than 175,000 views on Facebook, part of a robust social media strategy that saw engagement across TCSA's digital platforms grow by more than 20 percent.

ENGAGING THE MEDIA WITH FACTS, DATA, AND PERSPECTIVES

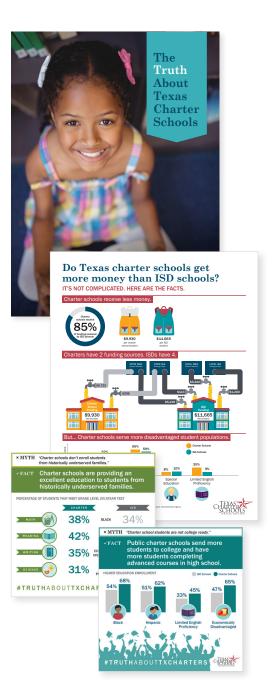
Sometimes telling the charter school story is simply about getting out the facts. TCSA is a go-to source for all charter-related stories in Texas. When journalists need to understand the charter community's take on a story, or need data about charter schools, they come to us. We provide key information and messaging, and connect reporters with local charter school leaders who have stories to tell. We also work with schools across the state to provide messaging guidance and make sure that we're all telling our stories with a coordinated voice.

In 2018–19, TCSA generated **26 positive major media hits circulated to more than 9.2 million people**. We were featured in stories across major news outlets including the *Texas Tribune*, *Austin American-Statesman*, *Rio Grande Guardian*, *Dallas Morning News*, *San Antonio Express-News*, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, and *The 74*, as well as TV and radio outlets around the state.

We also conducted editorial board meetings, desk-side briefings with reporters, and media conference calls to make sure our message reached journalists and to educate reporters and editorial writers about the issues confronting charter schools and public education. And we produced original publications to support our messaging and advocacy strategy, including:

- Charter School Enrollment and Demand, a report offering policymakers, reporters, and community leaders hard data about how many students are attending Austin charter schools and how many more would like the opportunity to attend a charter school;
- The Truth About Texas Charter Schools, a publication that presents facts about charter schools and refutes 25 commonly heard myths;
- Outcomes-Based School Funding: What Texas Can Learn from Florida's Successes, a primer on how Texas can emulate Florida's success in raising student achievement through teacher and school bonus funding; and
- Eight fact sheets designed to quickly and clearly communicate key data on major issues such as funding, student achievement, and charter school growth.

By capturing and communicating first-hand accounts and experiences from people throughout the charter school community and serving as a reliable source of information for lawmakers and journalists, TCSA is making sure the Texas charter school story gets heard.



GEORGE ROJANO



George Rojano graduate, Austin Achieve Public Schools

George Rojano is one of the students who shared his story as part of our video series capturing the experiences and perspectives of students, educators, and families throughout Texas's charter school community. George graduated from Austin Achieve High School in 2019 and started at Stanford University in the fall. It's an outcome he wouldn't have predicted for himself in middle school, where he struggled to find his place in a traditional school that didn't offer the kind of environment that suited the way George learns. He felt lost and disconnected. But at Austin Achieve, George found a home away from home. He enjoyed the tight-knit community and smaller class sizes. He appreciated the way teachers helped him find his passions and supported him in reaching his goals. That included step-by-step guidance through the college application and admissions process that led to Stanford. George felt like he had a strong team behind him at Austin Achieve. He gained confidence to succeed in high school and in the big challenges still to come!



Teacher Advocacy Leadership Institute

Teachers are vital to the success of schools and students, yet teachers' voices are often missing from the public discussion of charter schools. With much of the opposition to charter schools originating with teachers' union leaders, it's imperative that we empower charter school teachers to raise their voices and help people understand the opportunities that charter schools offer to both students and teachers.

TCSA's Teacher Advocacy Leadership Institute (TALI) is helping to amplify the voices and stories of teachers at high-performing charter schools across the state. TALI, a partnership with Teach Plus, is the first of its kind in Texas—there is no other charter-focused teacher leadership program that helps charter school educators become advocates.

Over the course of the 2018–19 school year, TALI connected 12 teachers with policy and advocacy experts and elected officials to strengthen their leadership skills and their ability to become effective advocates for their students, pushing for systemic change beyond the classroom. During the Texas legislature's session, TALI teachers—known as advocacy fellows—engaged in 113 advocacy actions, including meeting with legislators, testifying in committee hearings, hosting lawmakers on their campuses, writing op-eds, and creating original curriculum about advocacy for their students.

TALI advocacy fellows met with 28 elected officials and staff during Charter Lobby Day at the capitol. Several fellows participated in a "Why I Teach" campaign during Teacher Appreciation Week, including writing blogs for TCSA, which were shared across social media platforms, and publishing op-eds in the Rio Grande Valley and San Antonio to lend

their own first-person perspectives on why charter schools, and the teachers who make them a success, deserve appreciation.

Teachers are advocates for their students in the classroom every day. By giving them the tools and training to become advocates outside the classroom, TCSA is magnifying the impact that teachers can have on the future of public education in Texas.

TALI Advocacy Fellows 2018-19

Donnie Beeson

KIPP Austin Brave High School (Austin)

Cristina Correa

IDEA College Preparatory San Juan (Rio Grande Valley)

Travis Helm

Austin Achieve Public Schools (Austin)

Tristan Jones

KIPP Houston High School (Houston)

Jeremy Lippart

Harmony Science Academy (Austin)

Brooke Lucero

Great Hearts Northern Oaks (San Antonio)

Kelle' Martin

KIPP Sunnyside High School (Houston)

Shelley Pridgen

IDEA College Prep North Mission (Rio Grande Valley)

Heather Richmond

UT Tyler University Academy—Palestine Campus (East Texas)

Cameron Starc

Founders Classical Academy of Leander

Darla Sutton

Responsive Education Premier High School Amarillo (North Texas)

Amanda Walsh

KIPP Austin Comunidad (Austin)

"Since being selected as an inaugural member of the Teacher **Advocacy Leadership** Institute, not only have I had the opportunity to collaborate with and learn from knowledgeable education professionals, I've also become exponentially more informed about a variety of pressing concerns that face our schools today By serving as a teacher leader, I am thrilled to have the opportunity to use my voice to help advocate for charter school students and ensure their continued success."

HEATHER RICHMOND

TALI Advocacy Fellow



Growing Great Schools & Supporting Leaders

"When we talk about policy in the abstract, it is easy to lose sight of what's at stake and who is affected. My daughter remains on a waitlist, but that need not be the case for her or for the thousands of other families who are patiently waiting for their opportunity at a great education."

AIMEE MOLIEN

Austin-area mom, TribTalk/Texas Tribune, March 27, 2019 Students throughout Texas learn in different ways and will thrive in different types of schools. Tens of thousands of Texas schoolchildren are waiting for their opportunity to attend a charter school that suits the way they learn. The only way they'll get that chance is if charter schools can continue to grow and expand. TCSA fights to ensure that charter schools have the funding and regulatory support to keep growing to serve more Texas students.

If a group is interested in applying for a charter in Texas, TCSA supports them through the multi-step application process. If there's a successful and innovative charter model from another state, we help the leaders establish roots here in Texas. When an existing charter is knocking it out of the park with Texas students but needs support to expand to serve those on their waitlist, we provide services to help them accomplish their mission to grow.

LAUNCHING NEW SCHOOLS

We think it's no coincidence that every school awarded a new charter this year—Generation 24—received application support from TCSA. These four charter schools will open their doors in August 2020 with the capacity to serve an additional 4,000 students. TCSA provided technical assistance to the applicants through full-day workshops, webinars, and phone calls. In addition, 100 percent of Generation 23 charters received \$800,000 each in start-up funds through a competitive application process during their planning year, which TCSA advised on.

HELPING EXISTING SCHOOLS GROW

This year, TCSA launched its Strategic Growth Initiative, a program in partnership with Bellwether Education Partners to provide direct, meaningful support for high-performing small- or medium-sized schools to grow to serve more students. Six schools formed SGI's inaugural cohort. TCSA also visited with more than 30 high-performing schools to help them expand, often partnering with organizations like the Charter School Growth Fund, which provides funding and other strategic support to help the country's best charter schools grow. And in June, we hosted Texas's inaugural Facilities Summit, designed to help schools overcome the biggest hurdle to growth: securing a facility.

SUPPORTING GREAT LEADERS

Recognizing, supporting, and nurturing great leaders—from the board to the principal's office to the classroom—is essential to the growth and success of Texas's charter school movement. TCSA hosted 17 in-person custom trainings for charter school boards of directors this year to empower them with tools and knowledge to build and sustain high-quality schools. In addition, TCSA's Learning Zone provides a suite of 77 relevant online trainings so that school leaders and board members have quality training readily accessible.

Successful leaders must also be great advocates, so TCSA hosted a series of regional meetings and receptions to bring together school leaders, board members, community supporters, and elected officials in San Antonio, Austin, Houston, and Dallas. More than 50 people joined us for each meeting to learn about activities at the capitol and to engage with their state and local lawmakers.



School Leader of the Year

KATHLEEN ZIMMERMANN

Executive Director, NYOS Charter School

Ms. Zimmermann has unselfishly served TCSA and the Texas charter school movement in a number of ways, including through her past service on the TCSA Board of Directors, both as a former chair of the Member Council and most recently as the chair of the CEO search committee. As the leader of the search committee, Ms. Zimmermann devoted countless hours to evaluating resumes, screening candidates, arranging interviews, and ensuring that the entire process reached its successful conclusion. Those who have worked with Ms. Zimmermann praise her integrity, humility, skillful leadership, and dedication to the Texas public charter school movement. Awardees such as Ms. Zimmermann serve as models of leadership for their charter colleagues and their community.

NYOS Charter School — Not Your Ordinary School — was founded in 1998 by a group of parents who wanted more out of education for their children. NYOS fosters a collegial program that challenges each learner with rigorous academics, innovative strategies and expectations for civic engagement. Nominated as a Top 10 Area High School by Children at Risk, NYOS is an A-rated school that serves 1,000 students PK-12.

School Teacher of the Year

ALEXIA JOHNSON

Third Grade Teacher, Beta Academy

Ms. Johnson was a third grade teacher at **Beta Academy**, a charter elementary school in Houston. Though only in her third year of teaching, Ms. Johnson is known for her innovative teaching strategies and her effective use of Whole Brain Teaching. During any given lesson, you might find Ms. Johnson and her students standing on their desks or playing musical instruments, all to help students fully learn and understand new concepts. She also works hard to set a positive tone and learning environment, greeting each student with a handshake and warm smile when they arrive for the day.

On receiving her award, Ms. Johnson said, "It's a thrill and honor to be awarded Teacher of the Year. My own rocky educational journey motivates me to ensure that each child in my classroom is valued and thriving and the subjects I struggled with as a child are now my favorite ones to teach. As a 28-year-old African-American educator in pursuit of my Master's in Education, I am striving to reach my goals in order to help my kids become the best versions of themselves. This award is a huge encouragement that I am exactly where I should be, doing what I should be doing. Thank you to TCSA for this recognition."





2018 CONFERENCE

In October, charter school leaders, board members, teachers, students, and supporters from across Texas gathered in Houston for the annual Texas Charter Schools Conference to learn, plan, and network. This was our largest conference yet, with nearly 1,600 attendees who heard from our featured keynote speakers, Dr. Tim Elmore, Founder & President of Growing Leaders; and David Osborne, a noted expert and bestselling author on policy reform. The conference offered 119 breakout sessions on topics ranging from charter school law to marketing and recruitment. Attendees could earn up to 14 hours of quality training credit, too. Everyone who attends the Texas Charter Schools Conference sharpens their skills, makes new connections, and returns to their schools and classrooms ready to keep innovating and growing. Join us next year!



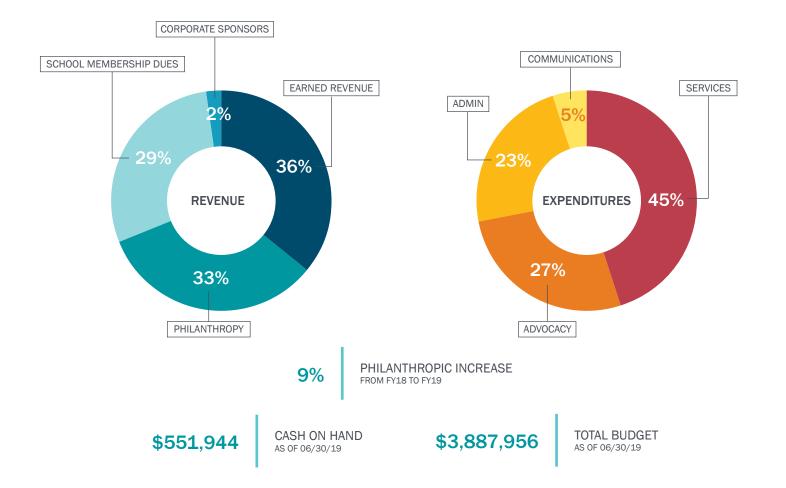






From left to right: Yvette East, conference chair, with students from Pasadena Classical Academy; students from International Leadership of Texas in Windmill Lakes; Oluwanifemi Ogundele from Southwest Schools; and TCSA sponsors kick back at the 2018 conference.

FINANCES



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Fatih Ay

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