25 YEARS OF TEXAS PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

A RISING TIDE IS LIFTING ALL BOATS

TEXAS
PUBLIC
CHARTER
SCHOOLS
ASSOCIATION

THE TEXAS PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL MOVEMENT FORMED IN 1995 DURING A DECADE OF GREAT EDUCATIONAL CHANGE. It had been 12 years since the U.S. National Commission on Excellence in Education declared that American schools were failing, and Texas lawmakers realized public-school students needed help.

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, Texas public school students in the early 1990's were performing only slightly above "Basic" in math and reading. In other words, they were learning only some of the skills they needed to thrive in college and beyond. The state would need meaningful reform to develop a well-educated and highly-skilled labor force of the future.

George W. Bush signed the law creating public charter schools in 1995 as one important pathway forward to improving student achievement. With bipartisan support, then-Governor Bush and the state legislature launched a new era in Texas public education. Senate Bill 1 made an ambitious promise: Public charter schools would improve student achievement and foster innovation across the entire state—including inside school districts—by providing choices to families stuck with school options that didn't work for them, as well as by incubating creative new practices.

As Texas marks the 25th anniversary of this trailblazing law, it is clear the public charter community has delivered on that promise. Today, public charter schools educate more than 330,000 students (6% of the state's public school enrollment). They continue to transform the public education system and rewrite expectations for what the state's children can achieve.

This report examines how the growth of public charter schools impacts overall student achievement. We model this based on how many fifth graders and eighth graders (as part of the Student Success Initiative) met state standards in math and reading from 2012 to 2019, taking either the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) or the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR). Results for these grade levels are critical for determining who will be promoted to middle and high school. Furthermore, math and reading scores in those grades are predictive of students' college readiness and enrollment.

In addition, we investigate STAAR scores in more depth from 2016 to 2019, because the STAAR exam is more rigorous and will be the only assessment schools administer in the future. Our analysis of STAAR scores from 2016 to 2019 only reaffirms our findings from 2012-2019 using data from both tests.

KEY FINDINGS

» **Both ISDs and charters are performing better as charters expand.** From 2012 to 2019, as total statewide charter enrollment nearly tripled, the average district raised its student achievement between 4% and 8%, depending on the grade and subject tested.

» **ISDs with charters in their attendance zones are more likely to improve than ISDs without charters.** From 2016 to 2019, for example, 82% of ISDs with charters in their attendance zones boosted their fifth grade reading scores—compared to 67% of ISDs without any charters.

» **Many ISDs with charters in their attendance zones are ascending to "high-performing" status.** Over the past three years, the number of ISDs where at least 95% of fifth graders met state math standards doubled. That compares to a 63% increase among ISDs without charters in their attendance zones.

While all public schools in Texas are getting better, this data demonstrates that ISDs with charter schools within their boundaries get better faster than their ISD peers with no charter schools in their boundaries.

This is great news for all students. Not only are charter school students doing better, students who stay at their ISD school are also doing better. Charters are helping create a win-win for Texas children—just as they promised they would 25 years ago.

Heritage Academy, San Antonio

Leadership Prep School, Frisco

Meyerpark Charter Elementary School, Houston
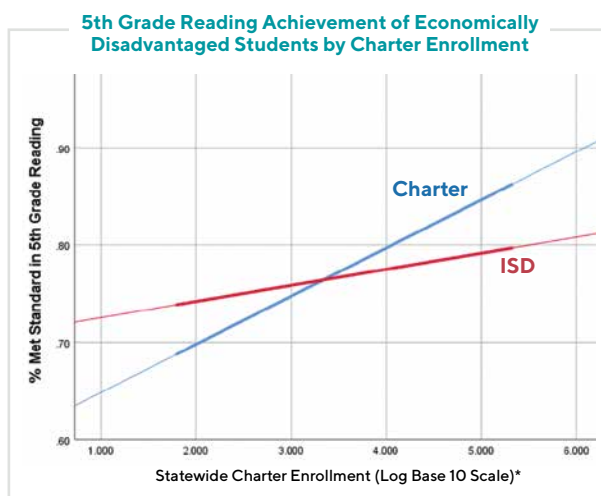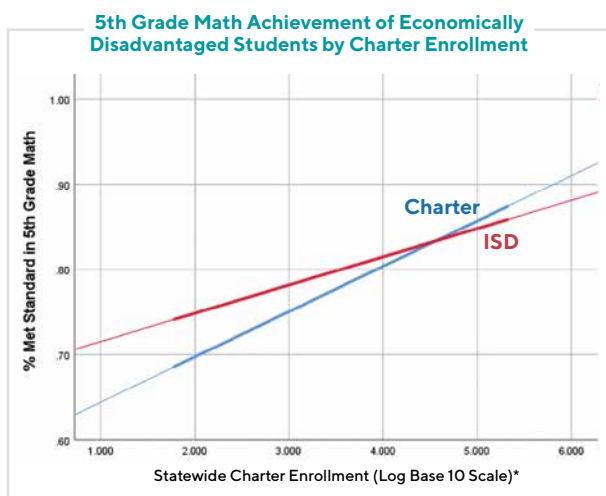
Fifth Grade Math and Reading Achievement

From 2012 to 2019, enrollment at Texas public charters tripled, from just over 100,000 to over 300,000. During this time, the average percentage of 5th grade students across all districts who met state standards in math increased by 5%. The average percentage of 5th grade students meeting state standards in reading increased by 8%.

The below charts show how increases to charter enrollment (plotted along the horizontal axis) affect student performance (plotted along the vertical axis).

5th Grade Math Achievement by Enrollment Growth

5th Grade Reading Achievement by Enrollment Growth
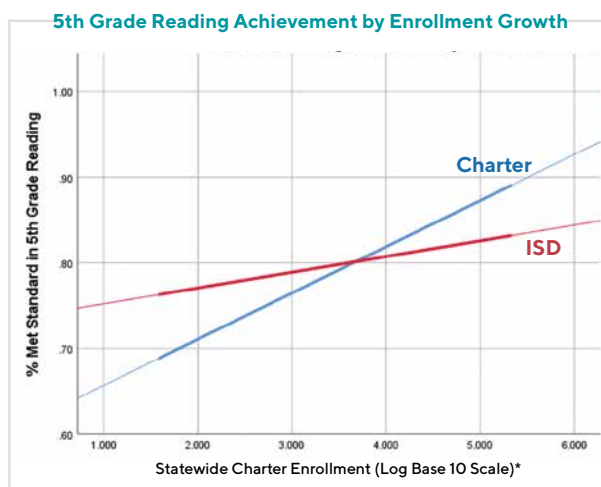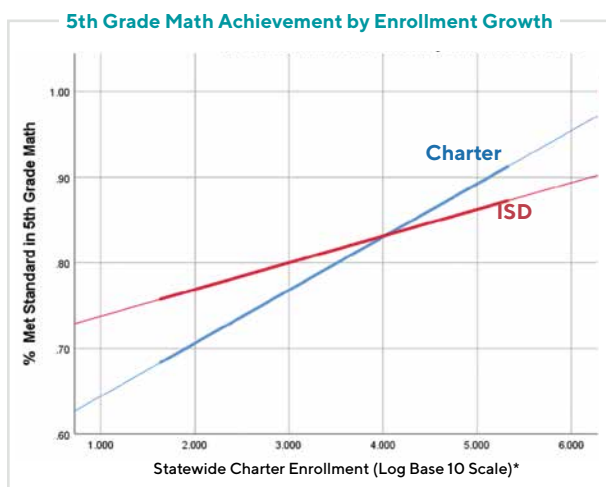
Three districts that increased 5th grade student achievement during this period include Dallas ISD, Austin ISD and San Antonio ISD—all districts that have experienced the largest growth in charter enrollment in the past 10 years. In fact, Dallas ISD leapfrogged 126 districts in math and 138 districts in reading in the years we analyzed.

A very similar relationship holds when isolating economically disadvantaged students—a large majority of public charter students. Growth in charter enrollment leads to higher performance among both charters and ISDs; at charters, achievement increases at a faster rate.

5th Grade Math Achievement of Economically Disadvantaged Students by Charter Enrollment

5th Grade Reading Achievement of Economically Disadvantaged Students by Charter Enrollment

*ENROLLMENT: 1 = 10 students | 2 = 100 students | 3 = 1,000 students | 4 = 10,000 students | 5 = 100,000 students | 6 = 1 million students

Charters Influence the Performance of 5th graders at ISD schools

Zooming in on STAAR results over the past four years (2016 to 2019), we also find that ISDs with charters in their attendance zones were more likely to improve than ISDs lacking charters:
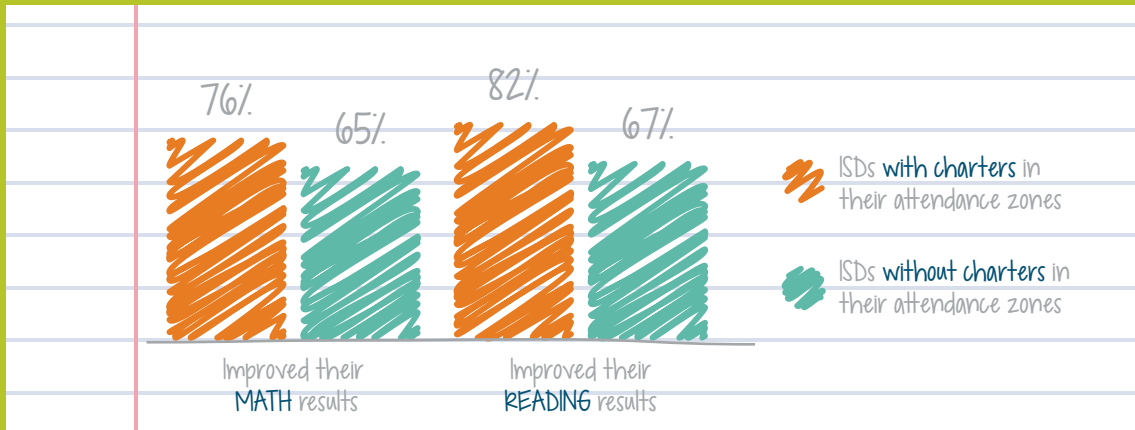
Additionally, ISDs with charters in their attendance zones more commonly ascended into the top tier of performance. We define "high-performers" in this context as districts where at least 95% of students met state standards.
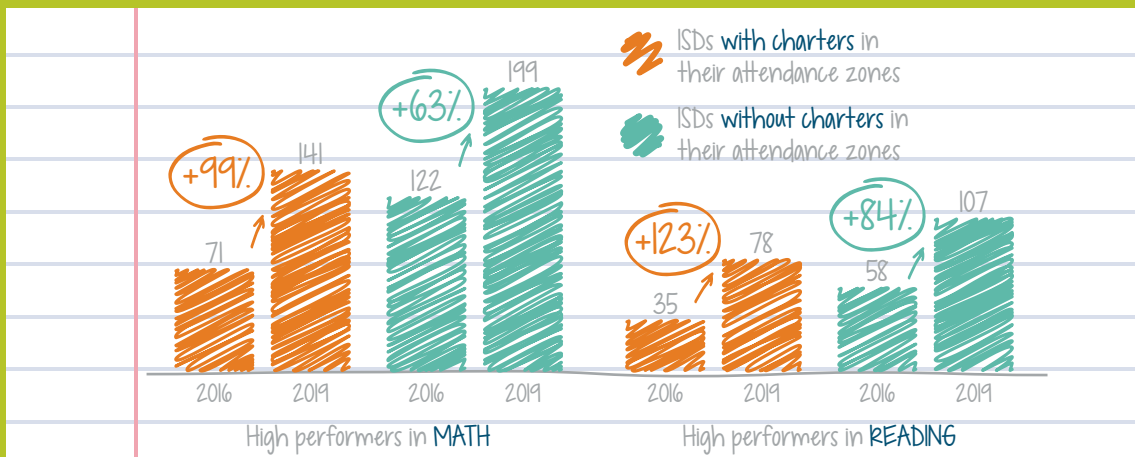

We find these success stories in all corners of the state. For example, Hidalgo ISD in the Rio Grande Valley, where 33% of public school students attend charters, increased its share of students meeting math standards from 84% to 96%. Ysleta ISD in greater El Paso, where there are more than 1,600 public charter school students, increased its share of students meeting math standards from 91% to 96%.
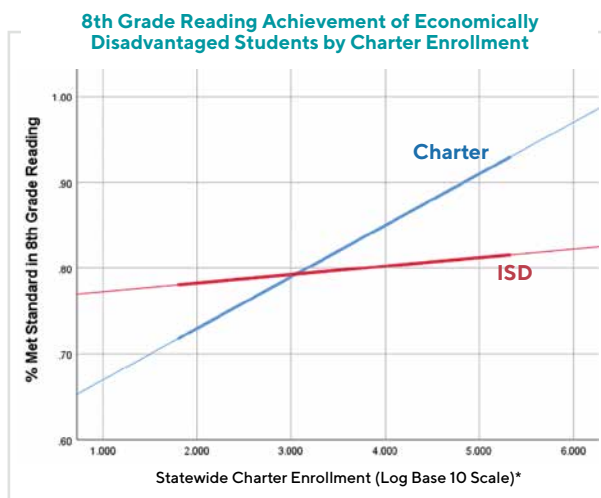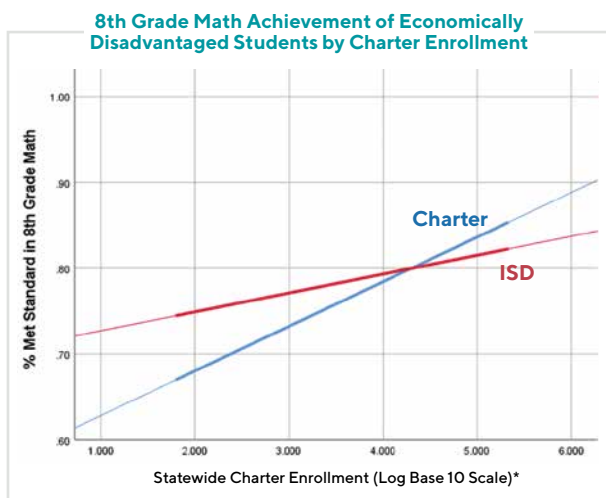
Eighth Grade Math and Reading Achievement

Similarly, the average percentage of 8th grade students meeting state standards in math increased by 4% during this period (2012–2019). The average percentage of eighth grade students meeting state standards in reading increased by 8%.

8th Grade Math Achievement by Enrollment Growth

8th Grade Reading Achievement by Enrollment Growth
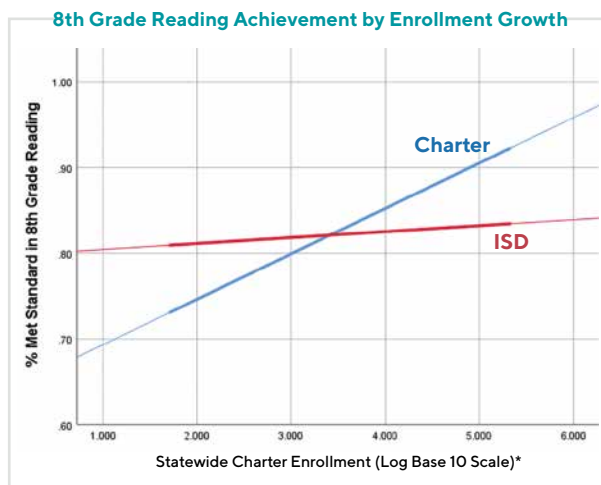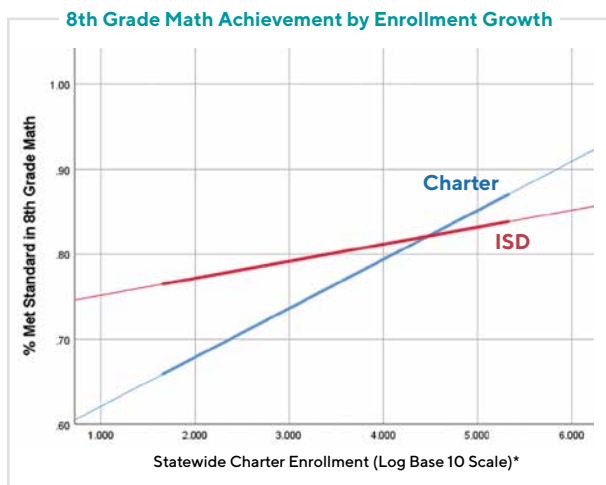
Just like the outcomes for fifth graders, we find a similar pattern for economically disadvantaged eighth graders. The percentage of 8th grade ISD students meeting standards increases with growing charter enrollment.

8th Grade Math Achievement of Economically Disadvantaged Students by Charter Enrollment

8th Grade Reading Achievement of Economically Disadvantaged Students by Charter Enrollment

*ENROLLMENT: 1 = 10 students | 2 = 100 students | 3 = 1,000 students | 4 = 10,000 students | 5 = 100,000 students | 6 = 1 million students

Charters Influence the Performance of 8th graders at ISD schools

Looking more closely at STAAR results from the past four years (2016 to 2019), we also find that ISDs with charters in their attendance zones were more likely to improve than ISDs lacking charters in math.

In reading, where scores statewide fell, ISDs with charters in their attendance zones were slightly less likely to improve (although the average decline was less steep at districts with charters in them).

Additionally, ISDs with charters in their attendance zones more commonly vaulted into the top tier of performance (or, in the case of eighth grade reading, were less likely to fall out of that tier).
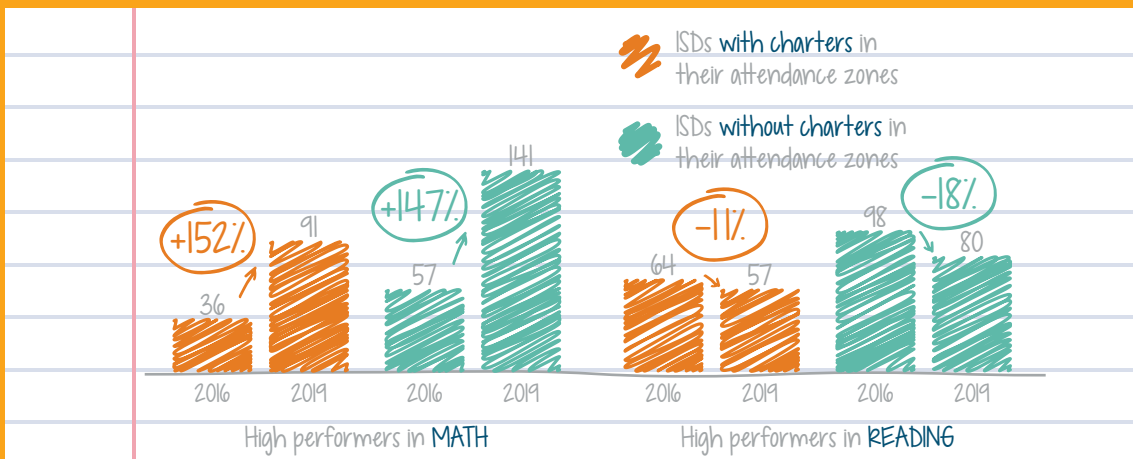
NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

The content of this report is based on a study TPCSA conducted on the relationship between public charter enrollment growth and the average rates of "Met Standard" for grades 5 and 8 as part of the Texas Success Initiative. TPCSA conducted correlation analysis on enrollment and Met Standard data (with the district as the unit of analysis) to determine the strength and direction of the correlations. TPCSA then created scatter plots and conducted Ordinary Least Squared (OLS) Regression to create lines of best fit for the data with statistically significant slopes or "coefficients." These lines of best fit appear on graphs in this report, two per graph––one for charter districts and one for ISDs. Positively sloped lines indicate that the average Met Standard rises at the same time charter enrollment increases.

To manage scale issues for scatter plots and OLS Regression, TPCSA converted enrollment numbers to logs with a base of 10 and average rates of Met Standard to decimals. Logs were an appropriate choice for solving scale issues, because they "act the same" mathematically as enrollment numbers in correlation and in OLS Regression. A key appears in each graph for the reader to translate logs on the horizontal axis to actual enrollment numbers.

All data in this report come from the Texas Education Agency's TAPR (Texas Academic Performance Report) database. This data is accessible from the following website: https://tea.texas.gov/texas-schools/accountability/academic-accountability/performance-reporting/texas-academic-performance-reports. TPCSA used this website to download data by school district for enrollment and the cumulative percentages of Met Standard for TSI for grades 5 and 8. TPCSA conducted missing data analysis. Enrollment data was available for all districts in the state. However, less than 5% of the data for percentage Met Standards was missing because of masking due to student privacy issues under FERPA. Therefore, TPCSA used linear interpolation to replace missing data, a methodology which is common for analysis on datasets with less than 5% missing data. Finally, TPCSA excluded all Met Standard data greater than 0.90, because scatterplots and regression smoothing techniques indicated that the relationship between charter enrollment and Met Standard was linear only when including Met Standard data greater than or equal to 0.90. The relationship between charter enrollment and Met Standard was nonlinear with Met Standard data greater than 0.90.

In order to compare the performance of ISDs with charters in their attendance zones to that of ISDs without charters, TPCSA categorized every charter campus in the state based on its county. Districts that share a county with at least one charter campus were then separated from districts that do not. TPCSA calculated the percentages of districts that increased Met Standard over time using that data. For each subject and grade, our analysis excludes ISDs that do not have reading or math data for each of the years in the time period we studied: 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019.

Please email Dr. Timothy Mattison at **tmattison@txcharterschools.org** with any questions about this report.

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