

TEXAS CHARTER AUTHORIZER ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT

2018–2019

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2017, the 85th Texas Legislature (regular session) passed SB 1882, authorizing school districts to partner with open-enrollment charter schools and certain eligible entities to improve student outcomes in low-performing schools across Texas. The bill provided two incentives to promote partnerships between school districts and open-enrollment charter schools. The first was a two-year relief from campus sanctions imposed at schools with low academic performance; the second was access to potentially increased state funding. Both of these benefits incentivized districts to enter into partnerships with outside entities to turn around low-performing schools or programs. Also in 2017, the Texas Legislature passed House Bill 21, allowing public charter schools, for the first time in Texas, to receive up to \$60 million in state funding annually for facilities (TEC §12.106 (d)-(2)).

Overview of Texas Charter School Campuses

In the 2018–19 academic year, 8,838 Texas public school campuses were in operation. Approximately 9% (801) of those campuses were charter school campuses, including SBOE-authorized campuses, ISD-authorized campuses, and COE-authorized campuses. In 2018–19, most charter school campuses were from SBOE-authorized (718) charter schools, 54 were ISD-authorized, and 29 were from COE-authorized charter schools. A total of 346,065 students were enrolled in charter school campuses, representing 6.4% of students enrolled in Texas public schools.

The aggregate performance outcomes presented in this report include 640 SBOE-authorized, 46 ISD-authorized, and 25 COE-authorized charter schools.

Key Findings for SBOE-Authorized and ISD-Authorized Charter School Campuses

These findings—comparing SBOE-authorized, ISD-authorized, and matched traditional public school campuses—include aggregate outcome measures related to: attrition; State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®) exams; graduation rates; college, career, and military readiness (CCMR) indicators; and Texas Education Agency (TEA) Accountability domains and overall ratings.

Attrition Rates

For the purposes of this report, the attrition rate is defined as the percentage of students enrolled in the fall of 2018–19 who did not return to the same campus in the fall of 2019–20. The attrition rates for this report were calculated using student-level data provided by TEA.

SBOE-authorized charter school campuses had a higher attrition rate than matched traditional public school campuses (23% vs. 19%), as did ISD-authorized charter school campuses compared to matched traditional public school campuses (28% vs. 18%). SBOE-authorized charter elementary school campuses had a higher attrition rate than matched traditional public school campuses (22% vs. 20%), as did middle school campuses (19% vs. 17%) and high school campuses (26% vs. 16%). ISD-authorized charter elementary school campuses demonstrated the same attrition rate as matched traditional public school campuses (20%), but ISD-authorized charter middle school campuses (28% vs. 15%) and high school campuses (19% vs. 17%) had higher attrition rates than matched traditional public school campuses.

STAAR Results

Analyzed in this report are the percentages of students achieving the Approaches Grade Level standard and Masters Grade Level standard on STAAR-Reading and STAAR-Mathematics exams taken by elementary school and middle school students in Grades 3–8, the STAAR-Algebra I end-of-course (EOC) exam taken by middle and high school students, and STAAR-English I and English II exams taken by high school students.

SBOE-authorized charter school campuses and matched traditional public school campuses demonstrated comparable performance in most subject areas and grade levels examined by STAAR performance. Notably, a lower percentage of SBOE-authorized charter school students in Grades 3–8 achieved the Masters Grade Level standard on the STAAR-Mathematics exam than those in matched traditional public school campuses (22% vs. 26%). Also, a higher percentage of students in SBOE-authorized charter schools achieved the Approaches Grade Level standard on English I and English II EOC exams than those in matched traditional public school campuses (67% vs. 64%).

When STAAR performance among SBOE-authorized charter school campuses and matched traditional public school campuses is disaggregated at the school level, more differences in performance surface. SBOE-authorized charter elementary school campuses had lower percentages of students achieving the Approaches Grade Level for STAAR-Reading (76% vs. 78%) and STAAR-Mathematics (78% vs. 81%) exams than matched traditional public school campuses and lower percentages of students achieving the Masters Grade Level standard for STAAR-Reading (24% vs. 26%) and STAAR-Mathematics (24% vs. 30%) exams than matched traditional public school campuses. Conversely, SBOE-authorized charter middle school campuses had higher percentages of students achieving the Approaches Grade Level standard on STAAR-Reading (78% vs. 71%) and STAAR-Mathematics (81% vs. 76%) exams and higher percentages of students achieving the Masters Grade Level standard on STAAR-Reading (24% vs. 21%) and STAAR-Mathematics (19% vs. 15%) exams than matched traditional public school campuses. SBOE-authorized charter high school performance was comparable to that of matched traditional public high schools, with the exception of SBOE-authorized charter school campuses having a lower percentage of students achieving the Approaches Grade Level standard on the STAAR-Algebra I EOC exam (75% vs. 79%).

Quite differently, ISD-authorized charter school campuses consistently demonstrated lower percentages of students achieving the Approaches Grade Level and Masters Grade Level standards than matched traditional public schools on STAAR exams across subject areas and school levels, with one notable exception: ISD-authorized charter school high school campuses had a higher percentage of students achieving the Approaches Grade Level standard on STAAR-English I and English II EOC exams than matched traditional public school campuses (77% vs. 66%).

Graduation Rates

SBOE-authorized charter school campuses had a higher four-year longitudinal graduation rate (96%) than matched traditional public school campuses (92%). The four-year longitudinal graduation rate was considerably lower at ISD-authorized charter school campuses (71%) than at matched traditional public school campuses (93%). Additionally, four-year longitudinal graduation rates for Alternative Education Accountability (AEA) campuses were examined; the rate was found to be lower (75%) at SBOE-authorized charter school campuses than at matched traditional public school campuses (85%) and the same at ISD-authorized charter school campuses and matched traditional public school campuses (89%).

TEA Accountability Domain Scores

The average COE-authorized charter school campus domain score was lower than the average matched traditional public school campus domain score across all three domains: Student Achievement (74 vs. 76), School Progress Part A (72 vs. 74) and Part B (67 vs. 76), and Closing the Gaps (67 vs. 76). The average TEA overall Accountability Rating for COE-authorized charter school campuses was lower than the average matched traditional public school campus score (75 vs. 80).

Study Limitations

This report provides a detailed description of charter school campuses and matched traditional public school campuses intended for comparison of school types. While propensity score