TEXAS OPEN-ENROLLMENT CHARTER SCHOOLS

2003-04 Evaluation

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

For nearly a decade Texas charter schools have evolved along with the charter school movement nationally. The charter concept varies greatly across states and individual schools, but a charter school is generally defined as a publicly funded, nonsectarian school that operates under a written contract, or *charter*, from an authorizing agency such as a local or state school board. These contracts specify how the school will be held accountable for student achievement in exchange for a waiver of most rules and regulations governing school operations (Nathan, 1996). According to Finn, Manno, and Vanourek (2000, p. 15), charter schools, as a whole, have five key features:

- They can be created by almost anyone.
- They are exempt from most state and local regulations, essentially autonomous in their operations.
- They are attended by youngsters whose parents choose them.
- They are staffed by educators who are also there by choice.
- They are liable to be closed for not producing satisfactory results.

As a way to better understand the charter school concept, this introduction describes the national evolution of charter schools, examines the charter school movement in Texas, and then presents the organizational framework for the report.

THE NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

"Reforming the public schools," according to Tyack and Cuban, "has long been a favorite way to improve not just education but society" (1995, p.1). Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, schools were community institutions run under lay or religious control, funded by both private and tax dollars, and managed by the community. This changed in the 1840s with the advent of reforms such as Horace Mann's "common school" that intended to serve children of all classes and ethnic groups through public support. State governments became increasingly more responsible for schooling in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries as progressive reformers applied scientific management principles and the factory model to public education (Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 2000).

Although public schools have generally served the nation well, the current round of educational reform was ignited in 1983 with the publication of *A Nation at Risk*. This report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education argued that the mediocre educational performance of American students would put the country at risk of a declining position in the world economy. Quality became an issue at the national level as it became apparent that standardized test scores and other achievement indicators were lagging behind those of other nations (Clark, 1997). Many began to question whether the current model of schooling could take us into the knowledge-based society of the twentieth-first century. Consequently, in many states, the broad public debate seemed to shift from (a) the determination of whether or not the existing K-12 public schools had failed to properly education children to (b) the identification of which reform movements promised better and quicker educational improvements (Electronic Media Research,

2002). As a form of "school improvement," charter schools and other choice programs were added to the public school equation.

In the late 1980s, Philadelphia started a number of schools-within-schools and called them "charters." Some of them were schools of choice. The charter concept was furthered in Minnesota as charter schools were developed according to the basic values of opportunity, choice, and responsibility for results. In 1991, Minnesota passed the first charter school law, with California following suit in 1992.

The charter schools that were developed were nonsectarian, publicly-funded schools, but they operated more like private schools in a free market. For example, charter schools were exempt from many state statutes and rules related to school operations; however, they still had to comply with federal and state statutes concerning health, safety, and civil rights. The charter schools that began to appear were created for many reasons, with the primary motivation being to provide a vision of schooling not available through the traditional neighborhood public school, to serve a specific student population, or to gain educational autonomy. Charter schools had the flexibility to use alternative curricula and non-standardized approaches.

Since Minnesota enacted the first charter legislation in 1991, 40 states and the District of Columbia have enacted charter school laws. According to the Center for Education Reform, as of January 2005, nearly 3,400 charter schools served close to a million students nationwide. While the number of charter schools has continued to grow nationally, the states with the most charter schools in operation are California (500), Arizona (491), Florida (258), Texas (241), and Michigan (210) (Center for Education Reform, 2005).

Charters are most commonly issued by local school boards, public universities, or state boards of education. They are operated by a broad range of organizations, from community groups to for-profit companies. Charter schools serve students in pre-kindergarten through grade 12 using a diverse array of grade configurations and instructional approaches. Typically, charter schools are smaller than most traditional public schools, having a median enrollment of about 250 students. California enrolls the most charter students of any state, serving 153,935 students in 2002-03. The number of students attending charter schools, however, amounts to less than one percent of public school students in the United States (Center for Education Reform, 2005).

One of the continuing issues concerning charter schools is the difficulty of starting a school without the resources of a public school district, particularly concerning facilities. For-profit educational management organizations (EMOs) such as TesseracT or Edison have provided some charter schools with administrative and facility start-up support, although Texas state regulations prohibit charter schools from accepting start-up money from EMOs. Some states have allocated funding that may be used by charter schools toward the purchase or improvement of existing facilities, such as Texas' School Repair and Renovation grant program.

To address funding challenges, charter schools also rely on federal start-up funding, other state and federal grants, fundraising efforts, and in-kind donations. In particular, the growth of the charter school movement coincides with the increase in federal support. Since 1994, the U.S. Department of Education has provided grants to support states' charter school efforts, starting

with $6 million in fiscal year 1995 and increasing to $218.7 million for fiscal year 2004 (Finnigan, Adelman, Anderson, Cotton, Donnelly, & Price, 2004).

Although charter schools are held accountable in very diverse ways, based on the state and/or district in which they are located, they have much more autonomy than traditional public schools. Because state regulatory practices differ greatly across the United States, there are varying degrees of monitoring. A study conducted for the U.S. Department of Education describes three phases of the accountability process for charter schools: the application process, the monitoring process, and the implementation of sanctions. According to the study, authorizers reported denying about 33 percent of 2001-02 charter applications because of problems or concerns. Authorizers also reported monitoring nearly all of their schools for compliance with federal or state regulations, student achievement results on statewide assessments, enrollment numbers, financial record keeping and viability, and special education services. Many charter schools also indicated that, in addition monitoring by authorizers, they have procedures in place to report on the school's progress to their governing board, education management organizations/community-based organizations, and the State Department of Education. As a whole, charter school authorizers are more likely to impose informal rather than formal sanctions. Revocation of a charter seldom occurs, as 96 percent of charter schools participating in the renewal process in 2001-02 had their charters renewed (Finnigan et al., 2004).

Although most charter schools use standardized test results for accountability purposes, other assessment methods are being incorporated into their assessment policies, such as performance assessments, parent satisfaction surveys, student surveys, student portfolios, behavioral indicators, and student interviews (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). According to a recent national study, states have implemented reporting systems to track charter school inputs and outcomes and little difference now exists between state reporting requirements for charter schools and those for traditional public schools (Finnigan et al., 2004).

TEXAS CHARTER SCHOOLS

As in other parts of the country, the charter school movement in Texas came about during a time when many saw a need for public school reform aimed at improving student academic performance. After the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1984, the Select Committee on Public Education produced a report with 12 recommendations for school improvement, including competency testing, lengthening the school year, and requiring students to pass academic courses in order to participate in extramural sports (Cole & Taebel, 1987). A significant next step in the progression toward the creation of charter schools was the establishment of the "Partnership Schools Initiative" by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) in October 1991. The initiative challenged schools to achieve educational excellence and equity for all students. Nearly 100 campuses received support, freedom from regulation, and empowerment in their efforts to involve all community stakeholders in school restructuring (Stevens, 1999). Despite progress, many would-be reformers were frustrated by what they saw as impediments to change, such as state laws, rules, and regulations; the state bureaucracy (particularly the TEA); school district policies; and central administrators and school boards.

A Sunset Review of the entire Texas Education Code in 1995 presented another opportunity for reform as "school choice" was identified as a key issue. Sunset Commission recommendations centered on helping parents "choose the most appropriate educational experience for their children within the public schools system" through mechanisms such as home-rule for school districts and the creation of a grant program allowing public school choice for students attending low-performing schools (Elliott, Hofer, & Biles, 1998; Stevens, 1999).

The 74th Texas Legislature passed legislation establishing state charter schools in 1995. In that session, legislators provided for the creation of 20 open-enrollment charter schools (TEC §§ 12.101-120). Open-enrollment charter schools are public schools that are substantially released from state education regulations and exist separate and apart from local independent school districts. They may be sponsored by an institution of higher education (public or private), a non-profit organization (501(c)(3)) as set out in the Internal Revenue Code, or a governmental entity. In 1997, the Legislature allowed an additional 100 open-enrollment charter schools and an unlimited number of open-enrollment charter schools serving students at risk of failure or dropping out of school (75 Percent Rule charter schools). In order to qualify as a 75 Percent Rule charter school, enrollment was required to include 75 percent or more at-risk students.

By 1998, Texas charter schools were receiving mixed reviews. With the academic and financial performance of charter schools in question, the State Board of Education (SBOE) recommended that the Legislature grant no additional charters until the existing charter schools had been proven successful (Vergari, 2002). Several of the major teacher groups and lawmakers in Texas also expressed concerns about the continued expansion of charter schools. In addition to low student performance, they also feared a racial/ethnic re-segregation of the public schools. In the end, lawmakers in 2001 eliminated the 75 Percent Rule designation, capped the number of charter schools the state board may grant at 215, allowed for an unlimited number of specialized charter schools sponsored by public senior colleges and universities, and gave the state education commissioner more power to oversee charter schools and to close those found to be failing.

The scrutiny of charter schools continued in the 78th Legislative session in 2003. However, no increase in the charter cap was proposed as the legislature limited itself to fine-tuning charter school regulations. A "wait and see attitude" appeared to prevail for charter schools in the state.

As a result of the enabling legislation, the number of Texas open-enrollment charter schools has increased dramatically, as shown in Figure 1.1. During the 1996-97 school year, 17 open-enrollment charter schools operated in Texas, and in 1997-98, charter schools numbered 19. A total of 89 charter schools operated in 1998-99, 45 of which were awarded under the 75 Percent Rule designation. In the 1999-00 school year, 146 charter schools operated for the entire year; of these, 46 were 75 Percent Rule schools. In 2000-01, 160 charter schools operated for the majority of the school year, of which 51 held 75 Percent Rule charters. The following three years, the number of new charter schools continued to climb at a steady pace.

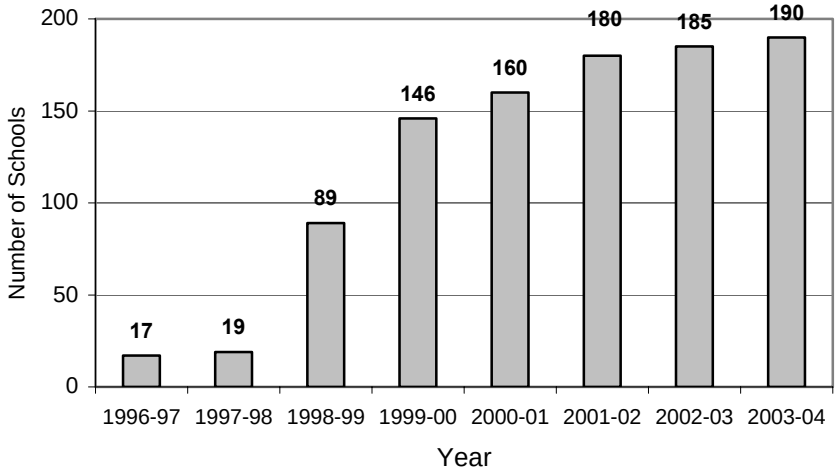

Figure 1.1 Texas Charter Schools 1996-97 through 2003-04.

EVALUATION OF TEXAS CHARTER SCHOOLS

TEC § 12.118 calls for the Commissioner of Education to designate an impartial organization with experience evaluating school choice programs to conduct an annual evaluation of Texas open-enrollment charter schools. The TEA designated the Texas Center for Educational Research (TCER) as the lead organization for the evaluation of charter schools for the 2003-04 school year. Responding to state statutes, the research team has considered:

- Student scores on assessment instruments;
- Student attendance, grades, and discipline;
- Socioeconomic data on students' families;
- Students' satisfaction with their schools; and
- Costs incurred by charter schools for instruction, administration, and transportation.

The current study does not address parents' satisfaction with their children's charter schools or the effects of open-enrollment charter schools on traditional public school districts.

METHODOLOGY

Study Approach

This study builds on previous Texas open-enrollment charter school evaluations. For the 2003-04 school year, researchers continued to use a research design that reduces the paperwork burden on charter schools and maximizes available financial resources. The design uses data available through the TEA's Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) and Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) for all of the 190 charter schools in operation the majority of the 2003-04 school year. For statewide surveys of charter school directors, teachers, and students, researchers randomly selected a sample of 61 charter schools (33.5 percent of 185 charter schools operating in 2002-03) and 81 associated campuses for participation in the study.

Charter schools that participated in the 2002-03 surveys were excluded from the sampling pool. In each chapter of this report, a detailed methodological explanation is provided for each data collection event undertaken to address the study's primary research questions:

- What are the characteristics of Texas open-enrollment charter schools and how do they differ from traditional public schools?
- What is the nature of management, governance, teaching, and learning in charter schools?
- What are the experiences of charter school students and their perceptions of the schools they attend?
- What are the performance and achievement outcomes for charter schools and students attending those schools?
- What are the major findings and policy implications?

Data Sources

The evaluation encompasses a variety of data sources including:

- Analysis of PEIMS and AEIS data for schools and campuses;
- Surveys of charter school directors, teachers, and students; and
- Analyses of Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) scores and other outcome measures for charter school students and a comparison group of traditional public school students.

Some analyses consider charter schools as a group, but in many cases, an aggregate result fails to capture the wide variation among schools. In particular, additional analyses examine data by school type and length of charter school operation.

Data Analysis

Analysis by charter school type. Charter schools that serve a predominantly at-risk student population are often quite different from those serving fewer at-risk students. For this reason, the evaluation team has grouped charter schools to distinguish between those that serve a greater proportion of advantaged students and those serving a preponderance of students who are at-risk of failure or dropout. Because schools serving a different population often have different missions, curriculum, and pedagogy, charter schools and campuses addressed in this report are frequently divided into two distinct types for purposes of analysis: (a) charter schools serving primarily at-risk students (70 percent or more) and (b) charter schools serving less than 70 percent at-risk students. Evaluators used students' PEIMS economically disadvantaged status as a surrogate for at-risk because it is explicitly defined by federal statute, whereas the state's at-risk indicator varies according to district interpretation of risk factors. The 70 percent cut-point, in contrast to 75 percent used in earlier evaluations, was selected to ensure that charter schools serving as Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Programs (JJAEPs)—which unquestionably serve a highly at-risk student population—were included in the comparison group with predominantly at-risk students.

Analysis by years of operation. For this report, years of operation refers to the number of school years that a charter campus has operated. Analyses related to charter schools' length of operation include comparisons for campuses in operation for one, two, three, four, five, and six or more years.

Study Limitations

Several factors complicate the analysis of charter school data. The first issue is data accuracy. With the exception of the TAKS, the majority of data are self-reported. Thus, information often reflects respondents' perceptions. In some cases, the accuracy of charter school PEIMS data is an issue. For example, charter schools have a higher average Person Identification Database (PID) error rate (4.6 percent) compared to the state average (0.4 percent). Second, student mobility reduces the number of charter school students included in the state accountability system. Only 58 percent of charter school students are included compared to 85 percent of students statewide.

Third, the TEA categorizes charter schools both as districts and campuses, so analyses involve both categories. In some comparisons, the unit of analysis is the district or "charter school," while in other cases, the unit of analysis is the charter school "campus." As a result, reported numbers of charter schools may vary. Finally, for the majority of comparisons, the "school or campus" is the unit of analysis. For some student performance indicators, however, the "student" is the analysis unit. For school-level analyses, each school or campus receives equal weight, whereas with the student as the unit, schools with larger student enrollments receive more weight in calculations. In general, the reader must consider study limitations when interpreting the reported information.

EVALUATION REPORT

The 2003-04 evaluation of charter schools is organized as follows:

- Chapter 1 provides the contextual background on the charter school movement in Texas and nationally. Dr. Kelly Shapley prepared this section.
- Chapter 2 presents information on the characteristics of open-enrollment charter schools. Dr. Daniel Sheehan prepared this section.
- Chapter 3 examines revenues and expenditures in open-enrollment charter schools. This section was prepared by Dr. Daniel Sheehan.
- Chapter 4 presents findings from surveys of the directors of open-enrollment charter schools. Dr. Daniel Sheehan and Dr. Kelly Shapley prepared this section.
- Chapter 5 presents findings from surveys of teachers in open-enrollment charter schools. This section was prepared by Dr. Keven Vicknair.
- Chapter 6 presents findings from satisfaction surveys of students enrolled in open-enrollment charter schools. This section was prepared by Dr. Daniel Sheehan.
- Chapter 7 presents student performance data for charter school students. Dr. Daniel Sheehan and Dr. Kelly Shapley prepared this section.

- Chapter 8 presents commentary on the 2003-04 evaluation findings. Dr. Kelly Shapley prepared this section.
- Appendix A includes the statutory provisions governing open-enrollment charter schools (TEC §§ 12.101-156).
- Appendix B includes basic information and the classification system for the open-enrollment charter schools operating for the entire 2003-04 school year.
- Appendix C includes copies of the survey instruments used to collect information from charter school directors, teachers, and students.
- Appendix D includes the construction of the *general student satisfaction*, *teacher satisfaction*, and *antisocial student behavior* scales as well as the hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) analyses.
- Appendix E includes accountability ratings for individual campuses.
- Appendix F includes student performance indicators for individual campuses.

The reader should be aware that the charter school evaluation set out in the Texas statute does not constitute a compliance review of charter schools. Evaluators do not examine whether charter schools fulfill their missions or whether they comply with the terms of their charters. The role of the evaluation team is to prepare an informational report about Texas open-enrollment charter schools.

CHAPTER 2
CHARACTERISTICS OF TEXAS OPEN-ENROLLMENT CHARTER SCHOOLS

In Texas, 190 open-enrollment charter schools and 274 charter school campuses operated for the majority of the 2003-04 school year. In this state, a sponsoring entity receives a charter to open a charter school, the rough equivalent of a traditional public school district. Under a single charter, many Texas charter schools have expanded by opening additional campuses. Thus, a single charter school may have one or more campuses associated with the approved charter. While the growth of charter schools has slowed in Texas over the past three years (only 10 new charter schools operating), an additional 74 campuses have been added to existing charters.

In this chapter, characteristics are reported for both charter schools and campuses. Unless otherwise indicated, the data source is TEA's 2003-04 Academic Excellence Information System (AEIS). TEA provides aggregate statistics for charter schools through AEIS reports. Evaluators conducted additional analyses to examine data by school type (schools or campuses serving 70 percent or more at-risk students and those serving less than 70 percent at-risk students) and length of charter school operation (one or two years through five or more years). In some cases, the unit of analysis is the district or "charter school," while in other cases, the analysis unit is the "campus."

Information to follow describes school/campus characteristics, student demographics, and staff and teacher characteristics. Information for individual campuses is provided in Appendix B.

CHARTER SCHOOLS AND CAMPUSES

Since the first Texas charter school opened in 1996, the number of charter schools operating in the state and students enrolled in these schools has risen steadily. As summarized in Table 2.1, 17 open-enrollment charter schools operated during the 1996-97 school year, and two more schools were in operation the following year.

Table 2.1
Number of Texas Open-Enrollment Charter Schools and Students Served, 1997-2004

School Year	Total Charter Schools in Operation	Number of 75% Rule Charters[a]	Number of Students Enrolled	Average Campus Enrollment
1996-97	17	--	2,498	147
1997-98	19	--	4,135	217
1998-99	89	45	17,616	198
1999-00	146	46	25,687	156
2000-01	160	51	37,696	188
2001-02	180	--	46,304	192
2002-03	185	--	53,156	204
2003-04[b]	190	--	60,748	222

Sources: TEA 2004 AEIS data files. Open-enrollment evaluation reports, years one to six (www.tcer.org).
[a]The 75 Percent Rule charter designation was authorized in 1997 and eliminated in 2001.

As Legislative provisions in 1997 raised the cap on the number of open-enrollment charter schools, the number of charter schools jumped in 1998-99 to 89, of which 45 were designated as 75 Percent Rule.[1] Charter schools numbered 146 in the 1999-00 school year, including 46 designated as 75 Percent Rule schools. The number of charter schools reached 160 in the following school year, with 51 of these holding 75 Percent Rule charters. Charter school growth then slowed as Legislative modifications eliminated the 75 Percent Rule charter school designation in 2001 and capped the number of charter schools at 215. Still, the number of new charter school campuses associated with existing charters has increased and expansion pace has accelerated.

In 2001-02, 180 charter schools and 241 campuses were in operation. The numbers increased to 185 charter schools and 260 campuses in 2002-03, and to 190 charter schools and 274 campuses in 2003-04. (Figure 1 displays the increasing number of charter schools and campuses across school years.) In 2003-04, 147 (77 percent) of charter schools consisted of a single campus, 28 (15 percent) had 2 campuses, 8 (4 percent) had 3 campuses, 3 (2 percent) had 4 campuses, and 4 charter schools were made up of 5, 6, 8, and 16 campuses, respectively.

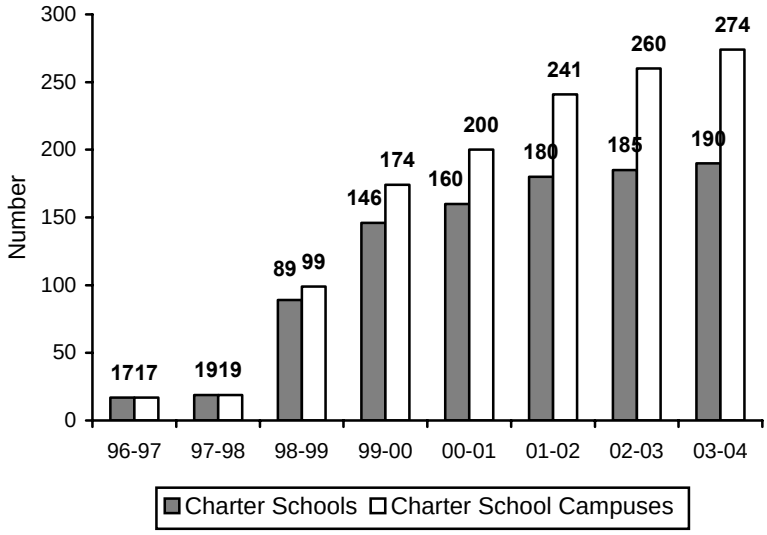

Figure 2.1. Number of Texas open-enrollment charter schools and campuses, 1997-2004.

The number of students enrolled in charter schools has also increased significantly, from 2,498 in 1996-97 to 60,748 in 2003-04. Yet, the total number of students enrolled in charter schools represents only a small proportion of the slightly more than 4.3 million public school students in Texas. Charter schools are typically small, with an average 2003-04 campus enrollment of 222, and a median enrollment of 167. Three-fourths of charter school campuses enroll 296 students or less. The 2003-04 campus enrollment ranges from 4 students to 1,026 students**.** Although charter schools are generally small, average student enrollment has increased steadily over the past three school years (192, 204, and 222 students).

[1] In 1997, legislative modifications allowed for an unlimited number of 75 Percent Rule charter schools that were required to maintain an enrollment of 75 percent or more at-risk students TEC §12.101(a)(2). Subsequent changes in the education code eliminated this designation.

Through November of 2004, 236 state-approved charters have been awarded. Thirty-five of these have been revoked, returned, rescinded, expired, or merged; 11 are not yet operational; and 190 are operational. Five open-enrollment charters have been revoked by the State Board of Education (SBOE) (a revocation rate of about 2 percent); four revocations have been for financial irregularities. In addition, 23 schools have returned their charters, 3 have expired, 2 have merged with another charter, and 1 has been rescinded. Of the 20 first-generation schools, 18 have submitted renewal applications and have received renewals for a 10-year period (Texas Education Agency, 2004).

CLASSIFICATION BY SCHOOL TYPE AND YEARS OF OPERATION

To learn more about charter school characteristics, evaluators examined data by school type and length of charter school operation. For this report, "school type" refers to charter schools serving primarily students at risk (70 percent or more) and charter schools serving less than 70 percent at-risk students. The 70 percent cut point was selected to designate charter schools serving 70 percent or more at-risk students and to include juvenile justice campuses in the at-risk category. PEIMS economically disadvantaged status (eligible for federal free or reduced-price lunch) is used to identify students at risk. While school type can be used to classify both charter schools and campuses, "years of operation" is a campus-level variable (as opposed to school-level). It is based on TEA-reported start dates for each charter campus. Length of operation includes comparisons for campuses in operation for one to three, four to five, and six or more years.

School Type

Table 2.2 shows that of the 274 charter school campuses in 2003-04, 138 (50 percent) served 70 percent or more at-risk students, while 136 (50 percent) served less than 70 percent at-risk students. Average student enrollment for charter school campuses (222 students) varied little by school type (serving primarily at-risk students versus serving less at-risk students). Enrollment was about 40 percent of the average student enrollment in traditional public schools (552 students).

Table 2.2
Number of Charter School Campuses by School Type, 2003-04

Campuses/ Enrollment	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk	CS < 70% At-Risk	All Charter Campuses[a]	Texas Public Schools
Number of campuses	138	136	274	7,813
Average enrollment	204	239	222	552
Total students	28,185	32,563	60,748	4,311,502

Source: Texas Education Agency and 2004 AEIS data files.
[a]The Academy of Houston and the Southwest Preparatory Virtual Pilot site did not serve students in 2003-04.

Years of Charter School Operation

Table 2.3 reveals that the majority of charter campuses have existed for five or more years. Approximately 53 percent of campuses have been operating five years (80 campuses) or six or more years (65 campuses). About 10 percent of campuses (27) have been operating four years, 17 percent (45) have been operating three years, 10 percent (26) have been operating two years,

and 11 percent (30) are in their first year of operation. Duration of charter school operation varied slightly by the type of students served. Campuses operating two or three years or six or more years served more students at risk.

Table 2.3
Charter Campuses by School Type and Years of Charter School Operation, 2003-04

Years of Operation	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk		CS < 70% At-Risk		Total Campuses	
	N	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
Six or more	37	13.6	28	10.3	65	23.8
Five	33	12.1	47	17.2	80	29.3
Four	10	3.7	17	6.2	27	9.9
Three	27	9.9	18	6.6	45	16.5
Two	16	5.9	10	3.7	26	9.5
One	15	5.5	15	5.5	30	11.0
Total	138	50.5	135	49.5	273[a]	100.0

Source: 2003-04 Texas Education Agency data.
[a] One charter campus did not have start date data.

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Table 2.4 reports the distribution of students across grades for charter schools and traditional public schools statewide. Compared to other public schools, there are proportionately more charter school students at pre-kindergarten and grades 9 through 12. There are proportionately fewer charter school students at kindergarten and grades 1 through 8. Charter schools enrolling primarily students at risk have relatively more students at pre-kindergarten and kindergarten and at grades 1 through 8. Conversely, the charters enrolling primarily non-at-risk students have proportionately more students at grades 9 through 12.

Table 2.4
Grade Level Disaggregation by School Type, 2003-04

Grade Level	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk		CS < 70% At-Risk		All Charters		Public Schools Statewide	
	N	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
EE	0	0.0	83	0.3	83	0.1	14,660	0.3
Pre-K	3,662	13.0	1,731	5.3	5,393	8.9	165,670	3.8
K	2,106	7.5	2,091	6.4	4,197	6.9	323,167	7.5
1	1,756	6.2	1,888	5.8	3,644	6.0	338,522	7.9
2	1,646	5.8	1,711	5.3	3,357	5.5	325,646	7.6
3	1,524	5.4	1,579	4.8	3,103	5.1	323,095	7.5
4	1,436	5.1	1,477	4.5	2,913	4.8	321,591	7.5
5	1,560	5.5	1,452	4.5	3,012	5.0	323,812	7.5
6	1,678	6.0	1,613	5.0	3,291	5.4	326,982	7.6
7	1,727	6.1	1,482	4.6	3,209	5.3	329,480	7.6
8	1,779	6.3	1,461	4.5	3,240	5.3	324,228	7.5
9	3,598	12.8	5,409	16.6	9,007	14.8	375,225	8.7
10	2,658	9.4	4,240	13.0	6,898	11.4	309,100	7.2
11	2,015	7.1	3,801	11.7	5,816	9.6	267,553	6.2
12	1,040	3.7	2,545	7.8	3,585	5.9	242,771	5.6
Total	28,185	100.0	32,563	100.0	60,748	100.0	4,311,502	100.0

Source: Charter and other public school data from AEIS 2004 campus data file.
Notes. Percentages are averages of campus percentages. Shaded cells denote proportionately more charter school students compared to state averages.

Table 2.5 summarizes student demographic information for 274 charter campuses. Major differences in student racial/ethnic group categories exist between charter schools and the state average. African American students make up 39 percent of Texas charter schools' student population, whereas this group constitutes approximately 14 percent of students in Texas public schools overall. The percentage of Hispanic students in charter schools (41 percent) is slightly less (about 3 percentage points) than the state average, but the percentage of White students (18 percent) is about half the state average (39 percent). The percentage of economically disadvantaged students in charter schools (63 percent) is more than the state average (53 percent).

Table 2.5
Student Demographic Information, 2003-04

Student Group	Charter Schools		State Average Percent	Difference
	N Students	Percent		
African American	23,672	39.0	14.3	+24.7
Hispanic	24,872	40.9	43.8	-2.9
White	11,171	18.4	38.7	-20.3
Other	1,033	1.7	3.2	-1.5
Economically disadvantaged	38,309	63.1	52.8	+10.3
Special education	6,888	11.3	11.6	-0.3
Limited-English proficient	5,499	9.1	15.3	-6.2

Source: AEIS 2004 campus data file.

The percentage of students in charter schools classified as limited-English proficient (9 percent) is lower in charter schools than statewide (15 percent), and the percentage of students receiving special education services (11 percent) is similar to the state average (12 percent).

Student Characteristics by School Type

Table 2.6 compares student characteristics for all charter schools and traditional public schools as well as charter campuses serving primarily at-risk students and those serving less students at risk. The predominance of African American students in charter schools persists when charter schools are examined by school type. In addition, charter schools enrolling primarily at-risk students have more Hispanics and fewer Whites than those enrolling less than 70 percent students at risk. Not surprisingly, charter schools serving 70 percent or more at-risk students have much higher percentages of economically disadvantaged students (86 percent) compared to those serving proportionally fewer disadvantaged students (43 percent).

Table 2.6
Student Demographic Information by School Type, 2003-04

Group	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk %	CS < 70% At-Risk %	All Charter Schools %	Texas Public Schools %
African American	40.1	38.0	39.0	14.3
Hispanic	52.1	31.3	40.9	43.8
White	7.3	28.0	18.4	38.7
Other	0.4	2.6	2.8	3.2
Economically disadvantaged	86.2	42.8	63.1	52.8
Special education	12.6	10.3	11.3	11.6
Limited-English proficient	12.7	5.9	9.1	15.3
Number of students	28,185	32,563	60,748	4,311,502

Source: AEIS 2004 campus data file.

Student Characteristics by Years of Charter School Operation

Table 2.7 contrasts student demographic information by years of charter campus operation. Percentages of White students are highest in the charter campuses four or five years old. Well-established charter campuses (six or more years) have the highest percentages of African American students (36 percent). The percentages of Hispanic students are similar (42 percent) at each level of campus operation. The percentage of economically disadvantaged students ranges from 61 to 69 percent, depending on years of operation. Special education students represent a higher percentage of students in the intermediate age charter campuses. The percentage of limited-English proficient students is largest for the oldest campuses and smallest for the youngest. The average school size increases for schools with greater longevity, with new campuses (one, two, or three years) just over half the size of established schools (six or more years).

Table 2.7
Student Demographic Information by Years of Charter Campus Operation, 2003-04

Student Group	Number of Years Charter Campus in Operation[a]		
	Six or More	Four or Five	One, Two, or Three
African American	35.6%	28.7%	31.8%
Hispanic	41.8%	42.4%	41.8%
White	20.6%	27.8%	25.3%
Other	2.1%	1.0%	1.0%
Economically disadv.	68.6%	60.6%	67.1%
Special education	13.1%	15.9%	13.1%
Limited-English profic.	9.4%	9.1%	5.5%
Average school size	287	239	164
Number of students	18,664	25,536	16,532

Source: 2003-04 AEIS data file.
[a] One charter campus did not have start date data.

Student Characteristics Over Time

Table 2.8 summarizes data from evaluation reports for 1996-97 through 2003-04. During the first four school years, charter schools enrolled increasing percentages of African American students and decreasing percentages of Hispanic students. However, data for 2001-02 through 2003-04 suggest that African American percentages have stabilized and Hispanic percentages are increasing. The percentage of White students peaked in 1997-98 and subsequently declined.

Table 2.8
Student Demographic Information, 1997-2004 (Percent)

	African American		Hispanic		White		Economically Disadvantaged	
Year	Charter	State	Charter	State	Charter	State	Charter	State
1996-97	27	14	52	37	20	46	51	48
1997-98	29	14	45	38	24	45	36	49
1998-99	34	14	43	38	22	45	53	49
1999-00	39	14	38	40	22	42	52	49
2000-01	41	14	37	41	20	42	54	49
2001-02	40	14	38	42	20	41	58	51
2002-03	40	14	40	43	19	40	61	52
2003-04	39	14	41	44	18	39	63	53

Sources: AEIS 2004 campus data file. Open-enrollment charter schools evaluation reports, years one to six (www.tcer.org).

Compared to traditional public schools, African American students have been consistently over-represented in charter schools. Hispanic students, which were initially over-represented in charter schools, have been slightly under-represented since 1999-00 compared to traditional public schools. Hispanic students, historically, have been more heavily concentrated in charter schools serving predominantly at-risk students (regardless of varying definitions of "at-risk" students used in evaluation reports). The percentages of White students in charter schools are consistently lower than traditional public schools, and White students are more heavily concentrated in schools serving less than 70 percent at-risk students. In sum, evidence shows that White students tend to enroll in charter schools that serve larger proportions of students from higher-income families, and Hispanic students tend to do the opposite.

STAFF CHARACTERISTICS

Table 2.9 shows staff data for charter schools and traditional public schools. For charter schools, 3 percent of staff is central administration and 9 percent is campus administration. This compares to 2 percent central administration and 4 percent campus administration in other Texas public schools. Because charter schools are generally smaller than most districts, percentages of staff members listed as administrators would be greater than overall public school averages, given economies of scale.

Charter school central and campus administrators earn considerably less than their peers in traditional public schools. Central administrators statewide average about $70,400, while central administrators in charter schools average about $59,400, a difference of about $11,000. Campus administrators statewide average about $60,700, while charter campus administrators average

about $46,000, a difference of nearly $15,000. Likewise, charter school teachers make about $8,000 less than teachers in other Texas public schools (about $31,800 compared to about $39,800). Because charter schools are much smaller than other public schools, the average number of teacher full-time equivalents (FTEs) in charter schools is about 14 compared to about 39 in other Texas public schools. There are similar percentages of teachers in charter schools and traditional public schools, but the student-teacher ratio is higher in charters (16.8 versus 14.2).

Table 2.9 also compares staff characteristics for charters serving primarily students at risk and those serving less students at risk. There are minor differences between these two types of charter schools in percentages of administrators, numbers of staff and teachers, and campus administrator and teacher salaries. However, charter schools serving primarily at-risk students have slightly lower percentages of teachers (71 percent versus 75 percent), lower student-teacher ratios (15.7 versus 18.0), and central administrators at these schools make about $4,000 less than their counterparts in schools serving proportionally fewer at-risk students.

Table 2.9
Charter School Staff Characteristics, 2003-04

Staff Characteristic	Charter Schools				Texas Public Schools
	N	CS ≥ 70%	CS <70%	All CS	
% Central administration[a]	190	3.1%	3.5%	3.3%	1.9%
% School administration	271	9.1%	7.8%	8.5%	4.3%
Average central administrator[a] salary	132	$57,172	$61,322	$59,436	$70,403
Average campus administrator salary	198	$46,244	$45,693	$45,977	$60,736
Average teacher salary	270	$31,136	$32,399	$31,758	$39,750
Average staff FTE	271	18.8	18.7	18.8	53.4
Average teacher FTE	271	13.0	14.1	13.6	39.3
% Teachers	271	70.8%	75.3%	73.0%	72.4%
Students per teacher	263	15.7	18.0	16.8	14.2

Source: 2004 TEA AEIS campus data file.
Note. Data for Texas Public Schools exclude charters.
[a] 2004 TEA AEIS district data file.

Figure 2.2 illustrates the change in charter school salaries from 2002 through 2004. Over that period, average charter central administrators' salaries increased from $52,308 to $59,436, or an increase of 13.6 percent. Average charter school campus administrators' salaries increased from $40,577 to $45,977, or an increase of 13.3 percent. Teacher salaries grew at a slower rate over the same period. Teacher salaries increased from $29,343 to $31,758, or an increase of 8.2 percent. As a frame of reference, over the same time period, the salary increases across the state of Texas were 7.0 percent, 3.9 percent, and 3.2 percent for central administrators, campus administrators, and teachers, respectively. While the salary increases have been smaller statewide, charter salaries still trail state averages by approximately $11,000 for central administrators, $15,000 for campus administrators, and $8,000 for teachers.

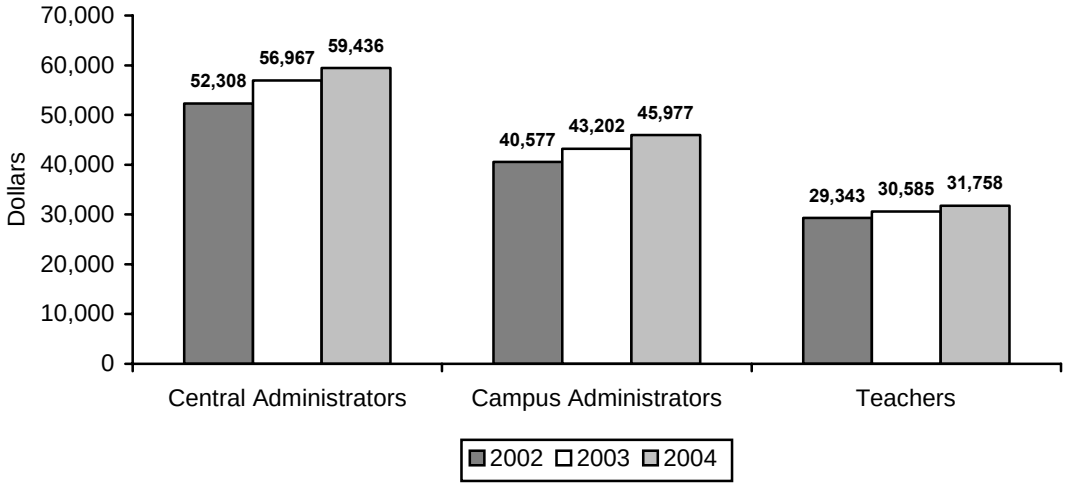

Figure 2.2. Charter school administrator and teacher salaries, 2002 through 2004.

Table 2.10 shows that compared to other Texas public schools, charter schools have higher percentages of African American teachers (32 percent compared to 8 percent) and lower percentages of White teachers (45 percent compared to 73 percent). The lower average salaries for teachers in charter schools may partially be accounted for by charter teachers' relative inexperience. As Table 2.10 illustrates, the percentage of beginning teachers in charter schools is much higher than the state average (18 percent versus 6 percent). On average, charter teachers have less than half as many years experience as teachers statewide (5 versus 12 years), and charter school teachers' experience has remained stable over the past three years. Teacher tenure, a measure of how much time the teacher has been employed in the district, is low in charter schools (1 year versus 8 years in other public schools). This may reflect the relative newness of some charter schools. The 2003-04 turnover rate for teachers in charter schools (44 percent) is much higher than the state average of 20 percent, but lower than the charter school averages for the previous two school years (53 percent and 46 percent).

Table 2.10 illustrates differences and similarities between charters serving primarily at-risk students and those serving less students at risk. Charters serving more students at risk have higher percentages of African American and Hispanic teachers, but a lower percentage of White teachers. The charters serving primarily at-risk students also have slightly lower percentages of teachers with advanced degrees, but higher percentages of teachers with no degree and higher teacher turnover. There are modest differences between these two groupings of charter schools in teacher tenure and experience.

Table 2.10
Charter School Teacher Characteristics, 2003-04

Teacher Characteristic	Charter Schools				Texas Public Schools
	N	CS ≥ 70%	CS < 70%	All CS	
% Minority teachers	271	64.0%	41.0%	52.6%	26.8%
% African American	271	36.7%	27.6%	32.2%	7.9%
% Hispanic	271	27.3%	13.0%	20.2%	17.5%
% White	271	33.4%	55.9%	44.6%	73.3%
Teacher average years of experience	271	5.0	5.9	5.4	12.0
Teacher tenure in years	271	1.1	1.4	1.3	7.9
% Beginning teachers	271	19.8%	16.6%	18.2%	6.4%
% 1-5 years experience	271	52.1%	47.6%	49.9%	27.7%
% 6-10 years experience	271	14.7%	17.8%	16.2%	18.8%
% 11-20 years experience	271	9.4%	12.2%	10.8%	25.6%
% More than 20 years experience	271	4.0%	4.9%	4.5%	21.3%
% Teachers with no degree[a]	190	11.8%	7.9%	9.7%	2.2%
% Teachers with advanced degrees[a]	190	13.5%	16.1%	14.9%	16.6%
Teacher annual turnover rate[a]	181	45.9%	42.0%	43.9%	20.0%

Source: 2004 TEA AEIS campus data file.
Note. Data for Texas Public Schools exclude charters.
[a] 2004 TEA AEIS district data file.

SUMMARY

The number of charter schools in Texas has climbed steadily since the first 17 opened in the 1996-97 school year. In 2003-04, the number of charter schools in operation reached 190. Concurrently, across the eight-year period, student enrollment increased from 2,498 to 60,748. Of the 274 charter school campuses operating in 2003-04, half (138) served 70 percent or more students at risk, while half (136) served less than 70 percent at-risk students. Most charter campuses have existed for a brief time. Only 24 percent (65 campuses) have been operating six or more years.

Compared to other public schools, charters have proportionately more students at grades 9 through 12 and at pre-kindergarten. Conversely, charters have proportionately fewer students at grades 1 through 8. Charters enrolling primarily at-risk students have relatively more students at kindergarten/pre-kindergarten and grades 1 through 8 and fewer students at grades 9 through 12.

Texas charter schools serve larger proportions of low-income and African American students than public schools statewide. Within traditional public school districts, 14 percent of students are African American, whereas this group comprises 39 percent of the charter school student population. The percentage of Hispanic students in charter schools (41 percent) is slightly less than the state average (44 percent), and the percentage of White students (18 percent) is about half the state average (39 percent). Overall, charter schools report about 11 percent of students in special education, which is similar to the state average, and about 9 percent as limited-English proficient, which is less than the state average. Over the past three school years, student ethnic

distributions in charter schools have stabilized, but the proportion of economically disadvantaged students has increased slightly from 58 percent to 63 percent.

Percentages of White students are highest in the intermediate age charter campuses (four or five years). Well-established charter campuses (six or more years) have the highest percentages of African-American students (36 percent). The percentages of Hispanic students are similar (42 percent) at each level of campus operation. African American students, however, have been consistently over-represented in charter schools compared to traditional public schools. White students tend to enroll in schools that serve fewer students at risk, and Hispanic charter school students tend to do the opposite. The average campus size increases for schools with greater longevity, with new campuses just over half the size of established schools.

About 3 percent of charter school staff is central administration, compared to about 2 percent statewide. While 9 percent of charter school staff is campus administration, only 4 percent is campus administration statewide. For both types of administrators and teachers, average salaries are lower in charter schools than in the state. Lower relative experience among charter school educators may partly account for the difference. Charter schools also have a higher percentage of beginning teachers (18 percent versus 6 percent) and teachers have less than half as many years experience as teachers statewide (5 versus 12 years). The teacher turnover rate in charter schools (44 percent), although 2 percentage points lower than 2002-03 and 9 percentage points lower than 2001-02, is still considerably higher than the state average (20 percent).

Average salaries for administrators in charter schools increased by about 13.5 percent during the past three years. Teacher salaries grew at a slower rate over the same period (8.2 percent). While the salary increases have been smaller statewide, charter salaries still trail state averages by approximately $11,000 for central administrators, $15,000 for campus administrators, and $8,000 for teachers.

CHAPTER 3
CHARTER SCHOOL REVENUE AND EXPENDITURES

In creating Texas charter schools, legislators aimed to grant schools greater fiscal and educational autonomy in exchange for student academic success. However, funding and financial issues both nationally and in Texas have posed the greatest obstacle to the establishment and success of charter schools. National research studies cite a lack of start-up funds, inadequate operating funds, and inadequate facilities as three of the top four barriers faced by charter schools (RPP International, 2000). Likewise, results for yearly surveys of Texas open-enrollment charter school directors have consistently identified lack of start-up funds, inadequate finances for ongoing operations, and inadequate facilities as challenges directors face in opening new charters and sustaining charter school operations (Taebel & Daniel, 2002; Daniel & Shapley, 2003; Sheehan & Shapley, Chapter 4).

Recognizing the importance of school finance, Texas statute [Texas Education Code (TEC), §12.118 (c)(1)] requires that the evaluation of open-enrollment charter schools include an examination of "the costs of instruction, administration, and transportation incurred by open-enrollment charter schools." Accordingly, this section describes charter school revenue and expenditures based on an analysis of actual financial records obtained through the Texas Education Agency's (TEA's) Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS). Financial data are reported from all fund sources, expenditure values represent actual expended amounts, and per-pupil values are calculated at the student level (as opposed to averages of school per-pupil values). Differences in some computed totals and aggregate state totals may be due to rounding.

Information is provided on revenue and expenditures for 176 charter schools with available financial data reports for 2002-03. As with other sections of the report, charter schools are classified into one of two categories: charter schools serving 70 percent or more at-risk students and those serving less than 70 percent at-risk students. Of the 176 charter schools discussed in this section, 81 are classified as serving primarily students at-risk, and 95 as serving fewer students at risk. Where practical, comparisons are made between the two categories of charter schools, as well as between other Texas public schools and charter schools. Longitudinal comparisons are also made for the last three years of charter school operation (2000-01 through 2002-03).

TEXAS SCHOOL FINANCE

Funding for Texas public school districts comes from three primary sources: local funds, primarily local property tax revenues; state funds from a variety of revenue sources, including the General Revenue Fund, the Available School Fund, and special fees; and federal funds. Charter schools do not have local property wealth to tax for the purposes of generating revenue and participating in the Foundation School Program. Instead, charter schools, historically, have received an amount of funding for each student in Average Daily Attendance (ADA) that is roughly equal to the amount of funding (state plus local and any applicable federal funds) that the traditional public school district in which the student resides would receive. Charter schools

supplement funding with federal funds and fundraising from private and community sources (Texas Center for Educational Research, 2001).

The 77th Texas Legislature modified state funding for Texas open-enrollment charter schools under House Bill 6 (HB 6). Charter schools are currently funded under a new scheme based on the statewide average funding generated by a student with the same program in which the charter student participates (e.g., special education, compensatory education). Per-pupil allotments are higher if a student is eligible for career and technology education, bilingual education, compensatory education, gifted and talented education, or special education. Additionally, charter schools will receive the cost of education index adjustment, the small and mid-size district adjustment, and the sparcity adjustment, which are included in the statewide average funding formula. (Texas Education Agency, Summary of Charter Laws as Amended by HB 6, 77th Legislature, 2001).

Charter schools beginning operation on or after September 1, 2001 are funded under the new method. In contrast, charter schools in operation before September 1, 2001 are being phased into the new scheme over 12 years. These schools will continue to receive part of their funding based on the calculation of the ADA each student would have earned from the sending district (TEC, §12.106-12.107). The new funding system will be phased in gradually for these charter schools, with all charter schools funded under the flat-funding scheme in the 2012-2013 school year (Texas Education Agency, Summary of Charter Laws as Amended by HB 6, 77th Legislature, 2001).

HB 6 also specifies the status and use of charter school funds (TEC, §12.107). Funds received by a charter holder are public funds that are held in trust by the charter holder for the benefit of students. Funds received by a charter school must be deposited into a bank, and charter schools are required to adhere to financial accounting standards necessary to ensure uniformity in financial accounting and reporting of state funds (Texas Education Agency, Summary of Charter Laws as Amended by HB 6, 77th Legislature, 2001).

To receive federal compensatory education funds, charter schools, similar to traditional public schools, must participate in the child nutrition program. Congress appropriates federal funds to schools and districts, usually for specific programs or populations of students (e.g., Title I program for low-income students), and funds must be expended for designated purposes, and must be used to supplement rather than supplant state or local dollars to fund a program. Charter schools are also entitled to receive state funding in the form of grants or other discretionary funding unless prohibited by state statute.

REVENUE SOURCES

Table 3.1 compares sources of revenue for traditional public schools with those of charter schools statewide for 2002-03. As noted previously, charter schools do not have the authority to impose taxes; therefore, all of their local funding is derived from sources other than local property taxes (TEC, §12.102 [4]). More than 80 percent of charter school funding (82 percent) is derived from state revenue, compared to only 40 percent for other public schools statewide. In contrast to the state, charter schools also receive proportionally more federal funds (14.5 percent versus 9.3 percent).

Table 3.1
Comparison of Revenue Sources for Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools for 2002-03 (Percent)

Revenue Source	Charter Schools (N=176)	Traditional Public Schools[a]
State	82.4	39.8
Federal	14.5	9.3
Local (property tax)	0.0	46.0
Local (other and intermediate)[b]	3.1	4.9
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Actual financial records provided by PEIMS for 2002-03.
[a] Statewide data do not include charter schools, so figures my differ from other state reports.
[b] Charter school funding from other local sources comes primarily from grants and donations.

The comparison of the per-pupil revenue for charter and traditional public schools in Table 3.2 shows the importance of state funding for charter schools. The total per-pupil revenue for charter schools was $8,045, or $17 more than the $8,028 for other public schools statewide. During the 2002-03 school year, charter schools' per-pupil revenue from *state* funds, *federal* funds, and *other local* funds ($8,045) was nearly double (1.86 times) that for other public schools ($4,335). However, traditional public schools received considerable revenue ($3,693 or 46 percent) from local taxes, whereas charter schools do not having taxing authority and received *no* funds from local taxes.

Table 3.2
Average Per-Pupil Revenue for Charter Schools and Public Schools Statewide for 2002-03

Revenue Source	CS ≥ 70% (N=81)	CS < 70% (N=95)	All CS (N=176)	Traditional Public Schools[a]
State	$6,434	$6,791	$6,633	$3,199
Federal	$1,460	$929	$1,164	$746
Local tax	$0	$0	$0	$3,693
Other local[b]	$339	$175	$248	$390
Total revenue	$8,233	$7,895	$8,045	$8,029

Source: Actual financial records provided by PEIMS for 2002-03.
Note. Amounts are rounded to the nearest dollar.
[a] Statewide data do not include charter schools, so figures may differ from other state reports.
[b] Charter school funding from other local sources comes primarily from grants and donations.

Charter schools serving 70 percent or more at-risk students receive about $300 more per pupil ($8,233 versus $7,895) than charters serving less than 70 percent at-risk students. This funding difference is due to more other local ($164 per pupil) and federal ($531 per pupil) monies going to the charters serving primarily at-risk populations.

EXPENDITURES

Texas schools report expenditures by function, object, and in some cases, by program. Functions describe the broad purpose of expenditures, such as instruction or administration; objects describe the service or item purchased, such as salaries or supplies; and program classifications are used to identify instructional areas or arrangements, such as regular, special, and bilingual education programs.

Expenditures by Function

The greatest expenditures by function for charter schools, as presented in Table 3.3, are for instruction (48 percent), general administration (14 percent), plant maintenance and operation (14 percent), and school leadership (8 percent). These expenditures include dollars for activities that directly relate to the interaction between teachers and students, the amount spent on charter school management and governance, and funds designated for maintaining and operating the charter school facility. Traditional public schools statewide also expend the greatest percentage of their budgets for instruction (58 percent), but lesser amounts for plant maintenance and operation (10 percent), school leadership (6 percent), and general administration (4 percent).

Table 3.3
Per-Pupil Function Expenditures for Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools for 2002-03

Expenditure Category	CS ≥ 70% (N=81)	CS < 70% (N=95)	All CS (N=176)	Traditional Districts[a]
Instruction	$3,387	$3,040	$3,194	$4,108
Instructional resources	$32	$33	$32	$130
Curriculum/staff develop	$79	$54	$66	$125
Instructional leadership	$104	$43	$70	$114
School leadership	$559	$473	$511	$393
Guidance/counseling service	$255	$106	$172	$251
Social work services	$21	$15	$17	$20
Health services	$23	$34	$29	$68
Student Transportation	$117	$105	$110	$193
Food services	$334	$222	$272	$361
Co-curricular activities	$63	$35	$47	$177
General administration	$992	$923	$954	$250
Plant maintenance & operations	$917	$949	$935	$725
Security/monitoring	$53	$70	$63	$45
Data processing services	$121	$91	$104	$83
Community services	$32	$19	$25	$46
Total average expenditures	$7,089	$6,212	$6,601	$7,089

Source: Actual financial records provided by PEIMS for 2002-03.
Note. Amounts are rounded to the nearest dollar.
[a] Statewide data do not include charter schools, so figures may differ from other state reports.

The per-pupil total operating expenditure for charter schools is $6,601, or $488 less than the $7,089 for other public schools statewide. Overall, charter schools spend more per-pupil than other public schools on school leadership ($511 versus $393), general administration ($954

versus $250), plant maintenance and operation ($935 versus $725), security/monitoring ($63 versus $45), and data processing ($104 versus $83). Most charter schools are smaller than traditional public schools and school districts, which may account for the greater administrative and plant maintenance costs due to the absence of a central infrastructure coupled with an inability to take advantage of economies of scale.

In most expenditure categories, charter schools serving primarily students at risk have higher per-pupil expenditures. This difference is largest in the area of instruction, with $3,387 per-pupil expended in charters serving primarily at-risk students and $3,040 expended in charters serving fewer students at risk. Overall, charter schools serving primarily at-risk students expend more per student ($7,089) compared to charter schools serving fewer at-risk students ($6,212).

Expenditures by Object

Object expenditures include payroll costs, professional and contracted services, supplies and materials, other operating expenses, debt service, and capital outlay. Capital outlay includes land, buildings, and equipment. Table 3.4 presents expenditure data for 2002-03 by object category.

Table 3.4
Per-Pupil Object Expenditures for Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools for 2002-03

Expenditure Category	CS ≥ 70% (N=81)	CS < 70% (N=95)	All CS (N=176)	Traditional Public Schools[a]
Payroll	$4,208	$3,834	$4,000	$5,725
Other operating	$2,910	$2,392	$2,622	$1,427
Debt service	$60	$72	$67	$676
Capital outlay	$100	$30	$61	$1,036
Total object expenditures	$7,278	$6,328	$6,750	$8,864

Source: Actual financial records provided by PEIMS for 2002-03.
Note. Amounts are rounded to the nearest dollar.
[a] Statewide data do not include charter schools, so figures may differ from other state reports.

Total per-pupil object expenditures are less for charter schools ($6,750) than other public schools statewide ($8,864). This difference comes from traditional public schools spending more per-pupil than charters on payroll ($1,725 more), debt service ($609), and capital outlay ($975). However, charter schools spend almost twice as much per pupil ($2,622 versus $1,427 or 84 percent more) on other operating expenditures including student support services, student transportation, food services, co-curricular/extracurricular activities, and curriculum and staff development. When object expenditures for charter schools are compared by category, charter schools serving primarily at-risk student populations spend $374 more on payroll and $518 more on other operating expenditures than charter schools serving fewer students at risk.

Expenditures by Program

Instructional expenditures are a sub-set of operating expenditures and are categorized by program. Table 3.5 presents 2002-03 per-pupil program expenditures for charter schools and other public schools statewide. Charter schools spend less than the state's traditional public

schools in all program categories. For example, for basic educational services, charter schools spend $2,488 compared to $3,168 in public schools statewide.

Program expenditures for charter schools serving varying percentages of at-risk students are dissimilar. Charter schools serving 70 percent or more at-risk students expend $809 more per-pupil ($4,248 versus $3,439). Much of this difference is due to more spending for basic educational services ($330), special education ($317), and for accelerated instruction ($176).

Table 3.5
Per-Pupil Program Expenditures for Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools for 2002-03

Expenditure Category	CS ≥ 70% (N=81)	CS < 70% (N=95)	All CS (N=176)	Traditional Public Schools[a]
Basic educational services	$2,672	$2,342	$2,488	$3,168
Gifted and talented	$6	$5	$5	$85
Career and technology	$114	$137	$127	$202
Special education	$706	$389	$530	$845
Accelerated instruction	$542	$366	$444	$458
Bilingual and special language	$61	$40	$49	$222
Non-discretionary alt. ed., AEP basic services	$0	$9	$5	$10
Non-discretionary alt. ed., AEP sup. services	$0	$0	$0	$7
Discretionary alt. ed., DAEP basic services	$0	$1	$0	$23
Discretionary alt. ed., DAEP sup. services	$0	$0	$0	$5
T1 A schoolwide-state comp. >= 50%	$129	$133	$131	$139
Athletics and related activities	$18	$17	$18	$123
Total program expenditures	$4,248	$3,439	$3,797	$5,287

Source: Actual financial records provided by PEIMS for 2002-03.
Note. Amounts are rounded to the nearest dollar.
[a] Statewide data do not include charter schools, so figures may differ from other state reports.

CHARTER SCHOOL REVENUE AND EXPENDITURES OVER TIME

This section discusses changes in charter school revenue and expenditures over the past two school years. Only two years of financial data are included because changes in the coding of financial data instituted in 2000-01 make comparisons to previous years confusing and potentially inaccurate.

Revenue Sources

Table 3.6 shows a comparison of charter school revenue sources for the last two years. Each year, the state was the greatest funding resource for charter schools, with 77 percent in 2001-02 and 82 percent in 2002-03. Federal revenue sources were similar in 2001-02 and 2002-03 (about 15 percent). However, the percentage of local (other and intermediate) revenue that charter schools receive decreased from 8 percent in 2001-02, and to 3 percent in 2002-03. This suggests that charter schools are receiving fewer dollars from grants and less support from their local community in the form of donations.

Table 3.6
Comparison of Charter School Revenue for 2001-02 and 2002-03 (Percent)

Revenue Source	2001-02	2002-03	2002-2003 Difference
State	76.9	82.4	+5.5
Federal	15.1	14.5	-0.6
Local (property tax)	0.0	0.0	0.0
Local (other and intermediate)	8.0	3.1	-4.9

Source: Actual financial records provided by PEIMS. Revenue includes all fund sources.

Figure 3.1 compares average per-pupil revenue for the last two years for charter schools and traditional public schools. Per-pupil revenue has increased for both types of schools. However, per-pupil revenue has increased more rapidly for charter schools. Between 2002 and 2003, average per-pupil revenue has increased by $1,283 for charter schools and by $177 for traditional public schools. Funding increases for charter schools may reflect changes instituted by the 77th Texas Legislature basing charter school revenue on the statewide average funding (TEC, §12.106-12.107).

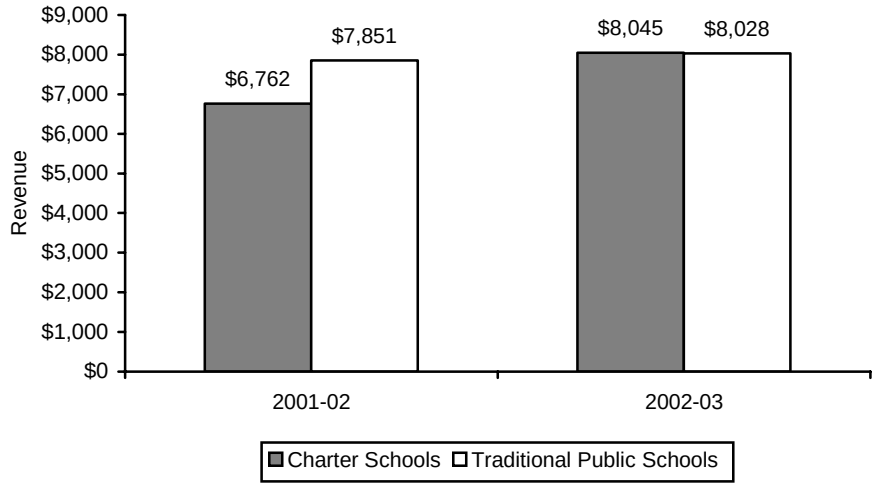

Figure 3.1. Average per-pupil revenue for charter schools for 2001-02 and 2002-03.

Expenditures by Function

Table 3.7 shows a comparison of the charter school per-pupil expenditures by function for the 2001-02 to 2002-03 school years. Over the two years, there was a total average per-pupil expenditure increase of only $3 (from $6,598 to $6,601). All but three categories recorded increased spending. The categories with the largest per-pupil increases were general administration ($89) and plant maintenance and operations ($79). The only reductions were for instruction (decrease of $232), curriculum and staff development (decrease of $9), and co-curricular activities (decrease of $3).

Table 3.7
Comparison of Charter School Per-Pupil Expenditures by Function for 2001-02 and 2002-03

Expenditure Category	2001-02 (N=175)	2002-03 (N=176)	2002-2003 Difference
Instruction	$3,426	$3,194	($232)
Instructional resources	$29	$32	$3
Curriculum/staff develop.	$75	$66	($9)
Instructional leadership	$57	$70	$13
School leadership	$557	$511	$46
Guidance counseling services	$137	$172	$35
Social work services	$11	$17	$6
Health services	$28	$29	$1
Transportation	$107	$110	$3
Food	$252	$272	$20
Co-curricular activities	$50	$47	($3)
General administration	$865	$954	$89
Plant maintenance/operations	$856	$935	$79
Security/monitoring	$49	$63	$14
Data processing services	$79	$104	$25
Community services	$11	$25	$14
Total average expenditures	$6,598	$6,601	$3

Source: Actual financial records provided by PEIMS.
Notes. Amounts are rounded to the nearest dollar. Debt services and facilities construction were not classified as expenditures by function in 2002-03. Therefore, they were omitted from this table.

Expenditures by Object

Table 3.8 displays a comparison of charter school per-pupil expenditures by object for the last two years. Over the two years, total object expenditures per-pupil decreased by $32, from $6,782 in 2001-02 to $6,750 in 2002-03. Payroll was the largest object expenditure for charter schools each year. Payroll increased by $214 per-pupil, from $3,786 in 2001-02 to $4,000 in 2002-03. Charter school expenditures for other operating expenses decreased by $296, from $2,918 in 2001-02 to $2,622 in 2002-03. Debt service was essentially the same each year. Capital outlay, which includes land, buildings, and equipment, increased from $0 per-pupil in 2001-02 to $61 per-pupil in 2002-03.

Table 3.8
Comparison of Charter School Per-Pupil Object Expenditures for 2001-02 Through 2002-03

Expenditure Category	2001-02 (N=175)	2002-03 (N=176)	2002-2003 Difference
Payroll	$3,786	$4,000	$214
Other operating	$2,918	$2,622	($296)
Debt service	$78	$67	($11)
Capital outlay[a]	$0	$61	$61
Total object expenditures	$6,782	$6,750	($32)

Source: Actual financial records provided by PEIMS.
Note. Amounts are rounded to the nearest dollar.
[a]The "$0" amount for capital outlay in 2001-02 may reflect errors in data entry.

SUMMARY

Texas open-enrollment charter schools continue to receive the overwhelming majority of their funding from the state. In 2002-03, the percentage of state revenue increased, federal revenue remained constant, while the percentage of other local and intermediate funding decreased. Charter schools serving primarily at-risk students receive more total revenue per pupil than charter schools serving fewer students at risk, and these schools receive more revenue from federal and other local sources. Absent the authority to impose local taxes, all charter schools receive no local tax funding. Over the past two years, the average per-pupil revenue for charter schools has increased and in 2002-03 surpassed per-pupil revenue generated by traditional public schools ($8,045 versus $8,028).

Over time, instruction continues to account for the greatest per-pupil expenditures for charter schools, followed by general administration, plant maintenance and operations, and school leadership. The largest contrast between charter schools serving primarily at-risk students and those serving fewer students at risk is that the former spend $347 or 11 percent more per pupil for instruction. In addition, in most expenditure categories, charter schools with proportionally more at-risk students have higher per-pupil expenditures. This probably reflects the additional expenditures required to educate special student populations, such as special education and compensatory education students, or students in residential care and treatment. As indicated in earlier reports, charter schools' small size, coupled with the absence of central administrative infrastructure and an inability to take advantage of economies of scale, may be contributing factors for their relatively high general administrative costs.

Among object expenditures, all charter schools expend the greatest amount of their total operating budget for payroll and other operating expenditures, and this has persisted over time. In 2002-03, charter schools' per-pupil object expenditures for payroll increased, while expenditures for other operating expenses decreased. Overall, total object expenditures were similar in 2001-02 and 2002-03 ($6,782 and $6,750, respectively).

CHAPTER 4
SURVEY OF CHARTER SCHOOL DIRECTORS

In contrast to traditional public schools that are almost always headed by a district superintendent and campus principal, charter schools have varied administrative roles, titles, and responsibilities. The situation is complicated further by the fact that a charter school often functions as both a district and campus—thus, an administrator may perform the combined roles of superintendent and principal. Although administrative configurations may vary, each charter school is headed by a chief operating officer, who may be called the director, superintendent, head of school, chief executive officer, and so forth. Directors, as the chief officers are called hereafter, implement policies developed by governing boards and exercise direct control over the charter school. Thus, a survey of charter school directors' views provides insight into the nature of charter schools.

METHODOLOGY

The survey of charter school directors, which appears in Appendix C, addresses charter school organization and operations, instruction and assessment, student discipline and behavior, parent involvement, school governance and management, interactions with other public and charter schools, and policies. Researchers collected the names of charter school directors from the Texas Education Directory (AskTED). In March 2004, surveys were mailed to a random sample of 61 charter school directors (33 percent of 185 charter schools operating in 2002-03). Of the 61 randomly selected directors, 45 returned a completed survey for a response rate of 74 percent.

Because charter schools that serve a predominantly at-risk student population are often quite different from those serving proportionally fewer students at risk, analyses were conducted to examine the perceptions of charter school directors overall and by school type. As shown in Table 4.1, responses are compared for schools serving 70 percent or more at-risk students (18 directors) and schools serving fewer than 70 percent at-risk students (27 directors). Students' economically disadvantaged status reported in PEIMS serves as a surrogate for at risk. Directors of charter schools serving fewer students at risk responded at a higher rate (79 percent) than their counterparts in schools with more students at risk (67 percent); thus, those directors are somewhat over-represented in overall results. Throughout the report, survey results are compared with findings from past evaluations of Texas charter schools, when applicable.

Table 4.1
Distribution of Survey Respondents, by School Type

School Type	Number of Directors	Number of Respondents	Percent of Directors Responding
CS ≥ 70% At-Risk	27	18	66.7
CS < 70% At-Risk	34	27	79.4
Total	61	45	73.8

Note. CS=Charter School.

DIRECTOR CHARACTERISTICS

Charter school directors responded to several questions about their personal characteristics and background. As Table 4.2 shows, directors are more likely to be male (55 percent) than female, a reversal from previous years. Schools serving fewer students at risk, however, have more female directors (58 percent), whereas schools serving predominantly at-risk students have more male directors (72 percent). For charter schools in general, there are more White directors (43 percent), but more Hispanics are taking leadership positions than in previous years (23 percent compared with 11 percent in 2003).

Table 4.2
Characteristics of Director Survey Respondents (Percent)

Characteristic	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk *N*=18	CS < 70% At-Risk *N*=26	All Charter Schools 2004 *N*=44	All Charter Schools 2003 *N*=53
Gender				
Male	72.2	42.3	54.5	39.6
Female	27.8	57.7	45.5	60.4
Race/Ethnicity				
Hispanic	27.8	19.2	22.7	11.3
African American	27.8	34.6	31.8	34.0
White	38.9	46.2	43.2	52.8
Asian or Pacific Islander	5.6	0.0	2.3	1.9
Highest Education Level				
Fewer than 4 years college	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.0
Bachelors degree	5.9	3.8	4.7	13.7
BA/BS and graduate courses	11.8	0.0	4.7	13.7
Master's degree	41.2	65.4	55.8	54.9
Doctorate	41.2	30.8	34.9	15.7
Texas Mid-Management Certification				
Yes	29.4	64.0	50.0	18.4
No	70.6	36.0	50.0	81.6

Note. The number of respondents varies slightly by item due to missing data.

Charter school directors are a highly educated group, with 56 percent having a master's degree and another 35 percent have a doctorate. The proportion of charter school directors with a master's degree has stayed constant for the past six evaluation years, but the proportion of directors with a doctorate has more than doubled in the past year, from 16 to 35 percent. Fifty percent of directors hold Texas mid-management certification, a dramatic increase over the 18 percent who held certification last year. However, directors in schools serving primarily at-risk students still are less likely to have Texas administrative credentials (29 percent) than those serving proportionally fewer at-risk students (64 percent).

Table 4.3 shows that many directors have prior educational experience either in public or private schools. About 58 percent of the directors (26 individuals) served as public school administrators for an average of 11.9 years, a considerable increase in proportion and number of years of public

school experience over past years. Although only 22 percent of directors have prior experience as administrators in religious or non-religious private schools, those individuals, on average, bring more than 8 years of administrative experience to their charter school positions. Overall, directors have 13.7 years of experience as administrators, and directors at charter schools serving primarily at-risk students tend to arrive with more years of administrative experience (17.4 years) than their counterparts in schools serving fewer at-risk students (11.0 years). This contrasts with past years when the more experienced directors tended to work for charter schools with fewer at-risk students. As a whole, directors have 3.7 years experience as administrators in charter schools.

Table 4.3
Charter School Directors' Prior Experience (Mean Years)

Experience	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk		CS < 70% At-Risk		All Charter Schools	
	N	Mean	*N*	Mean	*N*	Mean
Administrator						
Public schools	10	14.6	16	10.3	26	11.9
Non-religious private	8	8.1	2	9.0	10	8.3
Religious private	3	9.7	3	7.3	6	8.5
Charter school	16	4.6	26	3.2	42	3.7
Total years	18	17.4	26	11.0	44	13.7
Teacher						
Public schools	9	5.3	21	10.4	30	8.9
Non-religious private	3	5.7	3	9.0	6	7.3
Religious private	2	9.0	2	6.0	4	7.5
Charter school	4	4.8	3	3.7	7	4.3
Total years	15	6.8	24	11.2	39	9.5

Note. In total, 45 directors responded to the survey.

About two-thirds of charter school directors (30 individuals) taught in traditional public schools before coming to charter schools (8.9 years, on average), and about 38 percent of directors taught in private and charter schools. On average, directors have 9.5 years experience as teachers, but directors of schools serving fewer students at risk have about four more years of teaching experience (11.2 years) than other directors (6.8 years).

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

Charter school advocates contend that freedom from rules and regulations should encourage the creation of more innovative and effective forms of schooling. To understand the kinds of instructional programs implemented in charter schools, directors commented on their school's organizational approaches, availability of instructional technology, and assessment methods.

Organizational Strategies

Each director identified the approaches used in the charter school to organize and schedule classes and group students and teachers for instructional purposes. Table 4.4 shows the percentage of directors who report using each of seven organizational strategies. Directors also

specified on a 3-point scale whether the particular strategy was used for *some students* (1), *most students* (2), or *all students* (3)—thus, mean ratings closer to 3 show that more students are affected. Nearly three-fourths of directors (71 percent) say multi-age grouping is used in the school, most often for all students. An extended-day schedule (68 percent) and student and teacher teams (56 percent) are the second and third most prevalent strategies reported, but both are implemented less extensively than multi-age grouping. More than a third of directors say their schools use an extended-year schedule, credit through flexible courses, and block scheduling for at least part of their student population.

Table 4.4
Types of Organizational Strategies Used in Charter Schools

	Used Strategy[a]		Implemented with Students		
Organizational Strategy	***N***	***%***	**Some**	**Most**	**All**
Multi-age grouping	27	71.1	24.0	20.0	56.0
Extended-day schedule	26	68.4	38.5	15.4	46.2
Student and teacher teams	20	55.6	50.0	22.2	27.8
Extended-year schedule	14	40.0	71.4	7.1	21.4
Credit thru flexible courses	13	35.1	46.2	23.1	30.8
Block scheduling	12	34.3	25.0	25.0	50.0
Extended-week schedule	11	32.4	72.7	18.2	9.1

[a] The number of respondents reporting whether a strategy was used varied between 34 and 38. Some respondents said a strategy was used but did not report the extent of implementation.

In comparing schools serving different populations, some important differences emerge (see Table 4.5). Directors in schools with predominantly at-risk students more often report using extended-day or -week schedules, block schedules, and credit through flexible courses. In contrast, directors in schools with fewer students at risk report using student and teacher teams with a greater share of their student populations (*most* to *all*). About 40 percent of all charter-school directors use extended-year schedules. Compared to the previous year's survey, organizational strategies remained relatively stable. However, only about a third of directors (34 percent) report using block schedules compared to nearly half of them a year ago (48 percent), but when it is used, it tends to affect more students.

Table 4.5
Types of Organizational Strategies Used in Charter Schools, by School Type

Organizational Strategy	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk		CS < 70% At-Risk		All Charter Schools	
	% Use	Mean[a]	% Use	Mean[a]	% Use	Mean[a]
Multi-age grouping	73.3	2.5	69.6	2.2	71.1	2.3
Extended-day schedule	82.4	2.2	57.1	1.9	68.4	2.1
Student and teacher teams	50.0	1.5	60.0	2.0	55.6	1.8
Block scheduling	50.0	1.9	23.8	3.0	34.3	2.3
Extended-week schedule	40.0	1.7	26.3	1.0	32.4	1.4
Credit thru flexible courses	46.7	1.7	27.3	2.0	35.1	1.8
Extended-year schedule	40.0	1.7	40.0	1.4	40.0	1.5

Note. Percents based on the number of respondents indicating the strategy was used. Some respondents said the strategy was used but did not report the extent of implementation.
[a] Mean use rating based on a 3-point scale: *some students* (1), *most students* (2), *all students* (3).

Instructional Technology

In today's educational environment, computers and Internet availability are essential instructional tools—thus, it was important to explore the prevalence of technology in charter schools. Overall, charter schools are steadily acquiring technology. About 82 percent of directors indicate their schools have a computer lab (compared to 76 percent a year ago), with an average of 27 computers available for student use (compared to 19 a year ago). This represents a slight improvement in the number of labs and significant improvement in the number of computers available in labs. Directors in schools serving predominantly at-risk students report a higher average number of computers available in labs compared to schools serving fewer students at risk (37 versus 19 computers). Although 76 percent of all charter school classrooms have Internet access, a higher percentage of classrooms in schools serving proportionally fewer at-risk students have Internet access (79 percent) than do schools serving more students at risk (70 percent).

Table 4.6
Availability of Instructional Technology in Charter Schools and Classrooms

Technology	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk *N*= 14	CS < 70% At-Risk *N*= 22	All Charter Schools 2004 *N*=36	All Charter Schools 2003 *N=53*
Computer lab available in school	78%	85%	82%	76%
Average number of lab computers	37.0	18.9	26.8	19.0
Classrooms have Internet access	70%	79%	76%	75%
Average number of classroom computers	8.1	3.1	5.2	NA
Average class size (students)	17.2	19.2	18.4	17.6

Note. Some respondents did not answer all questions, so total numbers for each question differ.

Increased availability of technology in charter schools is encouraging, but traditional public schools still have more. According to a statewide survey of traditional public school principals in 2002, nearly all classrooms (99.7 percent) have computers available, and 99 percent of classrooms have at least one Internet connection (Benner, Shapley, Heikes, & Pieper, 2002).

Smaller class sizes have also been linked to greater educational opportunity. According to directors, the average class size in the sample of charter schools is 18.4 students. Schools serving greater proportions of at-risk students have only 17.2 students per classroom, while schools serving fewer students at risk have 19.2 students per classroom. These figures are similar to the student-to-teacher ratio reported in AEIS 2003-04 for charter schools (16.8 to 1). Differences in the unit of analysis (classroom versus campus) may account for some of the disparity.

Assessment Methods

Monitoring student educational progress is also associated with student success, so directors were asked about the methods used in their charter schools to assess students' performance. As Table 4.7 shows, directors responded to two-part items asking whether a particular assessment method was used, and if used, how often the method was used (*once a year, once a semester*, or *once a marking period*). At least two-thirds of directors report using all types of student assessments. Student writing samples, projects, and portfolios are used in the greatest proportion of schools (more than 90 percent), although the frequency of use differs for each assessment. Student writing samples are typically used at least once a marking period, whereas student projects and performances, which require a greater time investment, are used less often. Overall, proportionally fewer directors report using tests than in the past. In contrast, schools rely more often on individual student work samples to assess performance.

Table 4.7
Methods Used to Assess Student Performance in Charter Schools (Percent)

	Used Method		Frequency		
Assessment	*N*	*%*	Once a Year	Once a Semester	Marking[a] Period
Student writing samples	39	97.5	2.9	11.8	85.3
Student projects	36	94.7	5.9	26.5	67.6
Student portfolios	36	90.0	11.8	32.4	55.9
Tests from textbooks	32	80.0	6.5	9.7	83.9
Student performances	30	81.1	14.8	7.4	77.8
Criterion-referenced test	30	76.9	58.6	34.5	6.9
Performance-based tests	29	80.6	11.1	11.1	77.8
Norm-referenced test	26	65.0	54.2	45.8	0.0

Note. The number of respondents reporting whether a method was used varied between 36and 40. Some respondents said a method was used but did not report the frequency of implementation.
[a]At least once a marking period.

STUDENT DISCIPLINE AND BEHAVIOR

Directors also were asked to identify the extent to which various student discipline and behavior issues are a problem in their school. Directors rated the severity of six items on a 4-point scale as *not a problem* (1), *minor problem* (2), *moderate problem* (3), or a *serious problem* (4). Figure 4.1 illustrates that directors consider student absenteeism (89 percent) and tardiness (87 percent) as the most severe discipline problems in charter schools. More than half (58 percent) consider tardiness to be a *moderate to severe problem*, and 47 percent considered absenteeism to be a *moderate to severe problem*. Nearly two-thirds of directors consider vandalism of school property and physical conflicts among students to be problems, but these are mostly thought to be *minor problems*, as is student drug or alcohol abuse. Few directors (15 percent) cite student possession of weapons on school property as a problem, although this percentage has increased nearly four-fold from last year when only 4 percent of directors said weapons on campus were a problem.

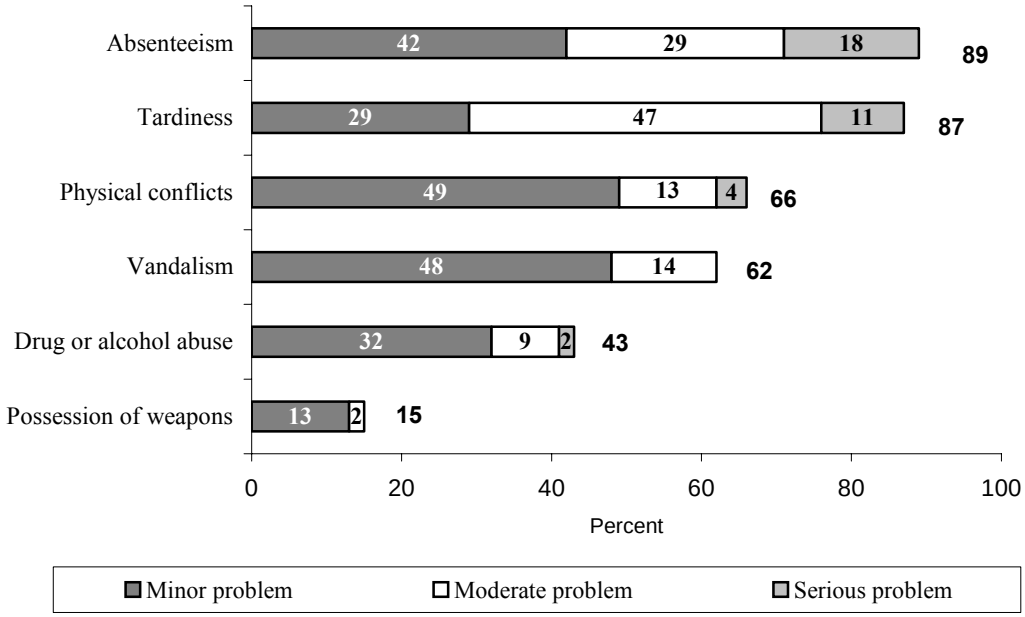

Figure 4.1. Percent of directors reporting student behavior problems (*N*=44).

Directors' mean, or average, ratings of student behavior problems are compared in Table 4.8 by school type and year. Each of the responses received a numerical value: *not a problem* (1), *minor problem* (2), *moderate problem* (3), or *serious problem* (4). Mean values calculated for all respondents are rank ordered in the table, with responses closer to 4 indicating more severe discipline problems. Rank ordering also allows comparisons between discipline problems for schools with different student populations.

Table 4.8
Mean Severity of Student Behavior Problems in Charter Schools, by School Type

Problem	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk *N*= 18	CS < 70% At-Risk *N*= 27	All Charter Schools, 2004 *N*= 45	All Charter Schools 2003 *N=53*
Student tardiness	2.3	2.7	2.6	2.4
Student absenteeism	2.4	2.6	2.5	2.4
Vandalism of school property	1.8	1.7	1.8	1.5
Physical conflicts among students	1.8	1.9	1.9	1.5
Student drug or alcohol abuse	1.4	1.7	1.6	1.6
Student possession of weapons at school	1.1	1.3	1.2	1.0

Note. Ratings made on a 4-point scale: *not a problem* (1), *minor problem* (2), *moderate problem* (3), or *serious problem* (4).

Surprisingly, directors of schools with proportionally fewer at-risk students consider tardiness, absenteeism, and student drug or alcohol abuse to be more severe problems than do directors in the comparison group, although the perceived severity of these problems grew more in the past year among directors at charter schools serving primarily high-risk students. Mean ratings for vandalism and physical conflicts among students are similar. Other problems cited by directors in open-ended responses include pregnancy, bullying, disrespect to authority, and an unwillingness to do homework and classroom assignments. Overall, student behavior remains only a minor to moderate problem in charter schools. Compared to the previous year, however, directors more frequently cited all types of behavior problems, with the exception of drug or alcohol abuse.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Even though all charter schools are administered by governing boards, individual schools have freedom in determining, within applicable law, the number of members, groups represented (e.g., community members, parents, teachers), method of member selection, and board responsibilities. Likewise, charter schools have discretion in defining titles, roles, and responsibilities of school officers and staff. Sections to follow present information on the responsibilities of charter school administrators, teachers, and governing boards; barriers to operating charter schools; and the kinds of external assistance charter school directors seek to support school operations.

Staff and Governing Board Responsibilities

To explore the duties of charter school staff and governing boards, directors identified the level of involvement in various aspects of charter school operations for the director, the campus leader or principal, teachers, and the governing board. For each position, the director rated the extent of involvement in areas of school governance and management on a 4-point scale as *not at all* (1), *small extent* (2), *moderate extent* (3), or *large extent* (4). Mean involvement ratings displayed in Table 4.9 indicate that, on average, the charter school director and campus leader/principal are involved to a large extent in all areas of governance and management.

Table 4.9
Mean Involvement in Areas of Charter School Governance and Management, by Position

Area	Director	Campus Leader/ Principal	Teachers	Governing Board
Maintaining focus on mission	**3.9**	**3.9**	**3.5**	**3.4**
Developing/approving budget	**3.7**	3.4	2.1	**3.8**
Setting school policies/procedures	**3.8**	3.7	2.8	**3.6**
Hiring administrators	**3.6**	3.3	1.8	**3.2**
Monitoring student performance	**3.5**	**4.0**	**3.9**	**2.6**
Developing educational programs	**3.5**	3.8	**3.3**	1.9
Hiring teachers	**3.5**	**4.0**	2.4	**2.6**
Creating the school schedule	3.4	**3.9**	3.0	1.7
Determining training priorities	3.4	3.8	**3.3**	2.2
Developing curriculum	3.4	3.7	**3.6**	1.8
Conducting teacher appraisal	3.2	**4.0**	1.8	1.3
PEIMS record keeping	3.4	3.5	2.4	1.7
Fundraising	3.1	3.0	2.5	2.3

Note. Mean extent of involvement based on a 4-point scale: *not at all* (1), *small extent* (2), *moderate extent* (3), or *large extent* (4). Bold text denotes the five highest areas of involvement for that position.

In contrast to administrators, teachers are involved in a limited range of management areas, with the greatest responsibility for monitoring student performance, developing curricula, and maintaining focus on the school mission. Governing board members' responsibilities, like teachers, have a more specialized focus, with board members more extensively involved in developing and approving the budget, setting school policies and procedures, maintaining focus on the mission of the school, and hiring administrators. Compared to the prior survey year, board members' involvement in hiring teachers increased.

Barriers to Operating Charter Schools

To further understand the challenges encountered in leading charter schools, directors identified barriers to operating schools by rating a list of school operational obstacles on a 4-point scale as *not a barrier* (1), *small barrier* (2), *moderate barrier* (3), or *great barrier* (4). Figure 4.2 shows that the greatest barrier directors' faced is inadequate finances for ongoing operations. A majority of directors cite inadequate finances as a barrier (87 percent), with finances considered a *great barrier* for one in four schools (25 percent). Concerns about budgeting and accountability requirements continue to grow, as they are now a barrier for three out of four directors, and 29 percent of directors say paperwork and reporting requirements are a *great barrier*. In previous director surveys, funding and facilities led the list of challenges, and although facilities are now less of an overall concern (71 percent of directors compared to 81 percent a year ago), fully 27 percent of directors say that inadequate facilities are a *great barrier*. The hiring of teachers continues to hinder charter school operations as does opposition from public schools. Internal conflicts remain a small but growing barrier to school operations, as they were cited as a barrier by 37 percent of directors this year compared to only 27 percent last year.

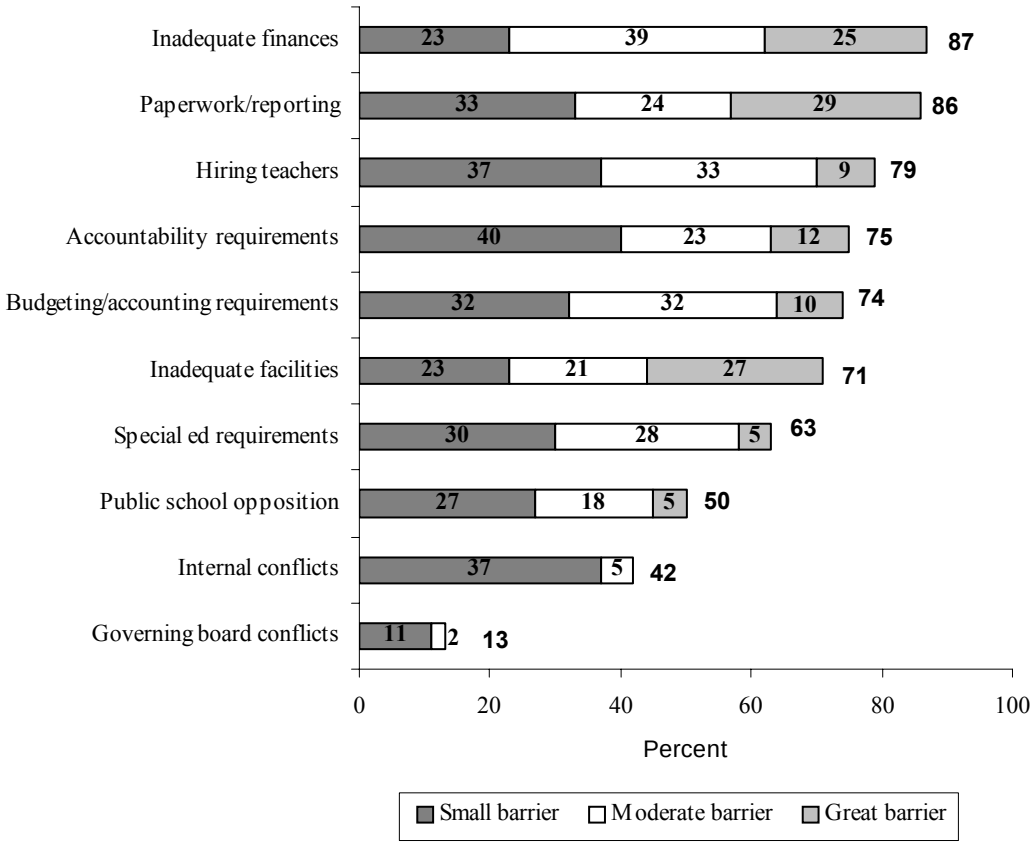

Figure 4.2. Percent of directors reporting issues as small, moderate, or great barriers to charter school operation (*N*=44).

Calculating the mean, or average, director response regarding barriers to the operation of charter schools on the 4-point scale, ranging from 1 (*not a barrier*) to 4 (*great barrier*), allowed comparisons between all charter schools and schools serving different proportions of at-risk students. Although statistical tests reveal no significant differences between means, findings in Table 4.10 reveal that charter school directors in schools with a greater share of at-risk students perceive inadequate finances and local public school opposition as greater obstacles than directors in other schools. In contrast, directors at charter schools with fewer at-risk students perceive greater barriers in the area of paperwork, reporting, and accountability, as well as noting a greater perception of internal conflicts in the school. Three directors cited "other" barriers including "overwhelming regulations" and "losing flexibility." One director wrote, "Inadequate facilities …[are] a great barrier for expanding."

Table 4.10
Barriers to Operating Charter Schools, by School Type

Barrier	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk *N*= 18	CS < 70% At-Risk *N*= 27	All Charter Schools 2004 *N*= 45	All Charter Schools 2003 *N*= 53
Inadequate finances for ongoing operations	2.9	2.7	2.8	3.0
Too much paperwork/reporting requirements	2.5	2.8	2.7	2.7
Inadequate facilities	2.4	2.5	2.5	2.6
Hiring teachers	2.3	2.3	2.3	2.5
Budgeting/accounting requirements	2.2	2.3	2.2	2.1
Accountability requirements	2.1	2.3	2.2	2.0
Special education requirements	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.8
Local public school opposition	1.9	1.7	1.8	1.8
Internal conflicts in the school	1.3	1.6	1.5	1.3
Conflicts with the school's governing board	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.2

Notes. Mean rating based on a 4-point scale: *not a barrier* (1), *small barrier* (2), *moderate barrier* (3), *great barrier* (4). The number of respondents varies by item.

External Support for School Operations

Directors also reported on the source and type of assistance they receive for implementing school operations (see Table 4.11). Directors could select from five potential sources of support received since the charter school opened—the Texas Education Agency (TEA), a regional education service center (ESC), a charter network or assistance center (e.g., Texas Charter School Resource Center), a management company, or a business or community group.

Table 4.11
Types and Sources of Assistance Accessed by Charter Schools (Percent)

Type of Assistance	TEA	ESC	Charter Network/ Center	Mgmt Company	Business/ Community Group	At Least One Source
Professional development	20.0	84.4	42.2	8.9	15.6	88.9
PEIMS	35.6	77.8	17.8	8.9	6.7	86.7
Curricular/instructional	33.3	64.4	35.6	4.4	8.9	84.4
Monetary	51.1	13.3	11.1	4.4	35.6	77.8
Business	28.9	53.3	24.4	13.3	20.0	71.1
Legal	35.6	28.9	31.1	13.3	24.4	64.4
In-kind donations	2.2	13.3	11.1	0.0	42.2	55.6

Note. *N=45*. TEA, ESC, Charter Networks/Assistance Center, Management Company, Business or Community Group.

Overall, charter school directors rely extensively on support from ESCs for professional development (84 percent), technical assistance on PEIMS (78 percent), as well as technical assistance on curricula and instructional issues (65 percent) and business issues (53 percent). Monetary support (loans, grants, donations) more often comes from the TEA (51 percent) and business or community groups (36 percent). Directors also turn to business or community groups

for in-kind donations of materials or resources (42 percent). It was also of interest to note the type of assistance charter schools seek most often. Almost all directors request technical assistance on professional development (89 percent) and on PEIMS (87 percent) from at least one source. Requests for help with curricula and instructional issues and monetary support also are common.

Charter directors are accessing help from TEA less often this year in every category except business support, and they are accessing charter networks or support centers more often this year in every category. Charter networks or support centers are used by about a third of directors for technical assistance on curricula and instructional issues and technical assistance with legal matters. Directors use management companies least often.

Comparing responses of directors from schools with different student populations revealed important distinctions. Overall, directors in schools with lower percentages of at-risk students seek assistance less often than other directors, a reversal from previous years when they tended to seek more assistance. Charter schools with mainly at-risk students sought assistance from TEA at a much higher rate than other schools in every area except professional development.

Table 4.12
Sources and Types of Assistance Accessed by Charter Schools, by School Type (Percent)

Type of Assistance	TEA	ESC	Charter Network/ Center	Mgt Company	Business /Comm Group	At Least One Source
CS ≥ 70% At-Risk						
Professional development	16.7	88.9	72.2	5.6	22.2	94.4
Technical assist/instructional	44.4	66.7	61.1	5.6	16.7	94.4
Technical assist/PEIMS	55.6	83.3	22.2	0.0	11.1	94.4
Technical assist/business	38.9	66.7	44.4	16.7	27.8	83.3
Technical assist/legal	38.9	27.8	50.0	16.7	33.3	83.3
Monetary	66.7	22.2	0.0	5.6	44.4	88.9
In-kind assistance	5.6	22.2	27.8	0.0	66.7	88.9
CS < 70% At-Risk						
Professional development	22.2	81.5	22.2	11.1	11.1	85.2
Technical assist/instructional	25.9	63.0	18.5	3.7	3.7	77.8
Technical assist/PEIMS	22.2	74.1	14.8	14.8	3.7	81.5
Technical assist/business	22.2	44.4	11.1	11.1	14.8	63.0
Technical assist/legal	33.3	29.6	18.5	11.1	18.5	51.9
Monetary	40.7	7.4	18.5	3.7	29.6	70.4
In-kind assistance	0.0	7.4	0.0	0.0	25.9	33.3

Note. *N=45*. Texas Education Agency (TEA), Education Service Center (ESC), Charter Networks/Assistance Center, Management Company, Business or Community Group.

INTERACTIONS WITH OTHER SCHOOLS

Recent efforts at the state and regional levels have centered on offering charter schools greater opportunities to interact in the public education environment. Charter schools are invited to state-level meetings and conferences sponsored by the TEA. In addition, the ESCs are charged with providing the same level of services for charter schools as provided for traditional public school districts, and open-enrollment charter schools are to have representation on the boards of directors of ESCs [TEC, §12.104 (c)].

To assess progress toward the creation of a more receptive climate for charter schools, directors were asked to respond to items regarding contact between educators at their school and educators in surrounding schools during the current or previous school year. Directors reporting contact further identified the types of contacts occurring with educators in traditional public schools and those in other charter schools (see Table 4.13). Not surprisingly, charter school educators are more likely to interact with other charter schools in the surrounding area rather than with educators in traditional public schools. Altogether, about half of all directors had some contact with educators at traditional public schools, and 90 percent had some contact with educators at other charter schools. The one exception was meeting to discuss student placement. Nearly equal proportions of directors said student placement discussions occurred with both traditional public school and charter school educators.

Table 4.13
Contacts with Educators in Other Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools

	Traditional Public Schools			Other Charter Schools		
	2004		2003	2004		2003
Type of Interaction	***N***	**%**	**%**	***N***	**%**	**%**
Networked at conferences	21	51.2	77.1	37	90.2	85.4
Met to discuss student placement	17	41.5	27.1	14	34.1	27.1
Interacted with educators at ESC events	16	61.0	73.9	36	87.8	78.3
Interacted during regional/state meeting	16	39.0	60.9	36	87.8	71.7
Received information or tech assistance	16	39.0	37.0	24	58.5	45.7
Provided information or tech assistance	14	34.1	39.6	28	68.3	58.3
Observed classrooms at other schools	13	31.7	34.8	25	61.0	41.3
Held organizational/planning meeting	7	17.1	14.6	27	65.9	45.8
Partnered on grant initiatives	6	14.6	13.0	19	46.3	23.9

Note. The N represents the number of directors reporting contact.

Overall, it was encouraging that charter school directors reported networking with traditional public school educators at professional conferences (51 percent) and interacting at ESC-sponsored events (61 percent) or regional/state-level meetings (39 percent); however, interactions with public school colleagues have decreased substantially compared to other years. Last year, 77 percent of charter school directors reported interacting with public school educators, compared to only 51 percent this year. In concert with previous years, interactions with other charter school educators still are far more likely to occur in more collaborative situations, such as providing information or technical assistance, holding organizational and planning meetings, and partnering on grant initiatives.

Consistent with previous director surveys, the overall relationship between charter and public school educators remains relatively cooperative. However, genuine partnerships and joint planning rarely occur, as interactions between charter and traditional schools are limited to receiving or exchanging information related to general school operations.

CHARTER SCHOOL POLICIES

At the end of the survey, directors had an opportunity to respond to two questions:

- What are the primary benefits of charter schools to Texas public education?
- What recommendations would you offer to policymakers on charter schools?

Directors' responses, summarized in the sections to follow, reveal their perceptions regarding the contribution of charter schools to public education in general and suggest future directions for charter school policies.

Benefits of Charter Schools to Public Education

Altogether, 38 directors (62 percent) took the opportunity to comment on the benefits of charter schools to public education, with many writing more than one comment. As reported in Table 4.14, qualitative analyses reveal five major categories of responses.

Table 4.14
Comments on the Benefits of Charter Schools to Public Education

Charter schools…	Number of Directors
Provide school choice for students and parents.	14
Spur innovative or different approaches through educational flexibility.	12
Serve students who need smaller classes or schools to succeed.	10
Serve at-risk students who may be headed toward dropout.	10
Serve students who do not fit the traditional public school model.	7

Directors most frequently say that charter schools *provide choice for students and parents*. Directors feel that choice results in no-cost "alternatives to traditional public schools." One director stated that charter schools "provide an opportunity for parents, particularly those without significant resources, to have a choice in a public education setting in where they send their students to school."

Directors also think that charter schools' *flexibility spurs innovation or different educational approaches*. Directors cite as beneficial their flexibility to develop innovative programs "directly related to students' needs and abilities" and ones "diverse in nature." One director linked innovation with student success and said the flexibility of the charter school allows them to "enhance student success and achievement." Other directors say that charter schools have the flexibility to offer fine arts programs, "high tech training," and "flex hours for older children who have to work and care for children."

A number of directors think charter schools *serve students who need smaller classes and/or schools to succeed*. Directors mention "smaller classes and campuses," "more individual, one-to-one" instruction, "strong parent involvement opportunities," "a safer environment," and the ability to "provide a small group setting for students."

Directors believe charter schools benefit public education by *serving at-risk students who may be headed toward dropout*. Directors say charter schools "develop programs that provide services to underserved students," "allow children the opportunity to learn at a pace where learning can be a realization for the children that have failed over and over in schools," "allow these students to succeed in school and life," and "reduce and recover dropouts." Another director stated that their charter school helps "bright students who are burned out" and "assures" that these students graduate.

Directors also believe charter schools benefit public education by *serving students who do not fit the traditional school model*. According to some directors, charter schools "work with a population who did not respond well to the local ISD" by "offering non-traditional education to non-traditional students." One director remarked that charter schools "serve students who would not be served." Another stated that charter schools "provide opportunities for students that do not advance or keep pace in the traditional setting."

Recommendations to Policymakers

Directors also made recommendations to policymakers on charter schools, with 37 directors (61 percent) writing suggestions for policies. As Table 4.15 shows, qualitative analyses revealed policy recommendations centering on five areas.

Table 4.15
Recommendations for Charter School Policy

Policy Area	Number of Directors
Charter school funding	15
State accountability system	14
Charter school autonomy	11
Funding for facilities	7
Provision of assistance	4

Directors most frequently cite the need for policy changes related to three areas: funding, accountability, and autonomy. Related to *charter school funding,* directors feel that charter schools are "hampered by a lack of monies" and "more funding" is needed to "accomplish our mission." Directors want equalization in funding. They want the "same funding formulas and resources that are afforded to the ISD's." Specifically, several directors express a need for *facilities funding*. They feel that charter schools "do not receive equitable funding" for facilities "in comparison to comparably-sized public school districts." As one director stated, "Level the playing field. If charters are public schools, equalize funding opportunities" in the area of facilities.

Almost as important to directors was the *state accountability system*. Directors believe that charter schools should be held accountable, but under an alternative system. Several directors believed that the accountability system "should not be as strict for charters as for other public schools" because charter schools have "a high mobility rate," "non-traditional students," and high rates of "at-risk students" coupled with "fewer resources." One director stated, "Programs serving at-risk students are penalized by the accountability system." At the same time, directors recognized the negative image conveyed by low-performing schools, with one director recommending that "schools with inadequate accountability" be shut down.

Directors also want to retain *charter school autonomy*. Consensus exists among directors that the state should "stop trying to turn alternative charter schools into traditional public schools." They believe that only with flexibility can charter schools adequately meet the needs of high-risk student populations. As in previous years, problems with funding and facilities remain paramount, but the current survey reflected more concerns over the state accountability system and less of an emphasis on the *provision of assistance*.

SUMMARY

Since Texas charter schools began operation in 1996, they have increased in numbers and experience. Concurrently, the characteristics of charter school directors—the chief operating officers—have evolved. As a group, charter school directors remain highly educated. However, directors increasingly mirror the ethnic diversity of their student populations (more Hispanic and African American), now include more males than females, and are currently more likely to hold Texas mid-management certification. On average, directors have 13.7 years experience as administrators (an increase from 8.5 the previous year). Directors of charter schools serving a greater proportion of high-risk students have more years administrative experience compared to directors in schools with less at-risk students (17 versus 11 years), but they are much less likely to hold Texas mid-management certification (29 percent versus 64 percent).

The most "innovative" organizational strategy employed in charter schools' is multi-age grouping, with nearly three-fourths of directors reporting the use of multi-age grouping in their schools. Extended time for learning is also common, as large percentages of charter schools are using extended-day (68 percent), extended-year (40 percent), and extended-week schedules (32 percent). Extended-day schedules, block scheduling, and credit through flexible courses are more pervasive in charter schools with primarily at-risk students, whereas teacher and student teams are somewhat more prevalent in schools with fewer students at risk. Charter schools are also continuing to add instructional technology. About 82 percent of directors indicate their schools have a computer lab (compared to 76 percent a year ago), with an average of 27 computers available for student use in labs (compared to 19 a year ago). Directors is schools serving predominantly at-risk students report a higher average number of computers available in labs compared to schools serving fewer at-risk students (37 versus 19 computers). In contrast, a higher percentage of school classrooms serving fewer students at risk have Internet access (79 percent versus 70 percent).

Directors consider student absenteeism (89 percent) and tardiness (87 percent) to be the most severe discipline problems in charter schools, with about half considering these as *moderate* to *severe* problems. Although discipline and behavior issues are generally considered as only *minor problems*, in 2004, directors more frequently cited problems with student absenteeism, physical conflicts, and vandalism compared to the previous year. Few directors (15 percent) cite student possession of weapons as a problem, but this increased nearly four-fold from the prior year. Surprisingly, directors of schools enrolling proportionally fewer at-risk students continue to consider student attendance issues and drug or alcohol abuse as more serious problems than do directors in schools with a greater proportion of students at risk. Directors' perceptions may reflect *actual* differences in the severity of the discipline problems or these directors may set higher standards and consider non-compliance as a more serious offense.

Staff and governing board responsibilities remain stable. Directors and governing boards deal with policy and overarching activities, such as budgets and school policies and procedures; principals manage the day-to-day operations such as hiring teachers, monitoring student performance, and conducting teacher appraisal; and teachers concentrate on curricular/instructional issues and students. Maintaining a focus on the charter school's mission is a high priority for everyone.

Directors continue to identify the same issues as the greatest barriers to charter schools. The majority of directors face inadequate finances for ongoing school operations (87 percent). They are also challenged by too much paperwork and excessive reporting requirements, the hiring of teachers, financial and accountability requirements, and inadequate facilities. To support school operations, directors are seeking assistance from a variety of sources. Directors rely heavily on support from Education Service Centers for professional development and technical assistance on PEIMS. Monetary support more often comes from the TEA and business or community groups. Notably, charter directors are seeking help from the TEA less often this year (except for business support), and they are accessing charter networks or support centers more often this year for every type of assistance. Overall, directors in schools with lower percentages of at-risk students seek assistance less often than other directors, a reversal from previous years when they tended to seek more assistance.

Recent efforts at the state and regional levels focused on connecting charter schools to public education support systems and traditional public schools appear to have lost some momentum. Although some charter school directors reported networking with traditional public school educators at conferences (51 percent) and interacting at ESC-sponsored events or regional/state-level meetings (39 percent), interactions with public school colleagues decreased substantially compared to the prior year. In contrast, interactions with other charter school educators generally increased, and they were more likely to occur in collaborative situations, such as providing information or technical assistance, holding organizational and planning meetings, or partnering on grant initiatives.

Directors remain optimistic about the potential of charter schools. Foremost, open-ended comments suggest that directors believe charter schools have benefited public education by providing school choice for students and by spurring innovative or different approaches through educational flexibility that allows them to meet students' diverse needs and abilities. Consistent

with surveys in previous years, directors recommend policy changes related to charter school funding and facilities, and some directors believe the autonomy envisioned in the original charter school legislation has been diminished over time by excessive rules and regulations. Similarly important to directors was the state accountability system. Some directors believe that charter schools should be held accountable, but under an alternate system. Directors believe accountability criteria should be relaxed for charter schools due to high rates of student mobility and the large numbers of at-risk students and non-traditional students in schools.

CHAPTER 5
SURVEY OF CHARTER SCHOOL TEACHERS

Numerous studies cite strong associations between teacher knowledge and skills and a higher level of student achievement (National Commission on Teaching and American's Future, 2003; Wayne & Youngs, 2003). In line with prevailing evidence, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) requires teachers to be *highly qualified* in their field. The NCLB requirements related to highly qualified teachers apply to open-enrollment charter schools. However, there is an important difference for charter school teachers with respect to the state certification requirement. Within the definition of highly qualified, NCLB defers to state law concerning certification requirements for charter schools. In Texas, state law does not require a teacher employed by an open-enrollment charter school to be certified *unless* the teacher is assigned to teach in special education or bilingual education programs. The minimum qualification under state law for other teachers at an open-enrollment charter school is a high school diploma. Nevertheless, the governing body of a charter school may set teacher qualifications at a standard above what the law requires, and many charter holders in the state require teachers to have college degrees (TEA, NCLB Program Coordination, October 15, 2003).

In order for a charter school teacher to be considered highly qualified under NCLB, the teacher must meet the state certification requirements as they apply to charter schools. In addition, teachers must meet the NCLB requirements related to (a) having a bachelor's degree in core academic subject areas and (b) demonstrating competency according to requirements for elementary or secondary teachers, as appropriate. The State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) has established a process for charter school teachers to be able to register for and take the ExCET/TExES content exams appropriate for their teaching assignment(s) (TEA, NCLB Program Coordination, October 15, 2003).

The most recently available statistics for Texas show that many charter school teachers may not meet the requirements for being highly qualified. Nearly 10 percent of charter school teachers have no degree compared to about 2 percent in traditional public schools (see Chapter 2 of this report). Moreover, charter school teachers are also less experienced (5.4 years) than teachers in traditional public schools (12 years), and there are nearly three times as many beginning teachers in charter schools. Teachers in charter schools are also paid considerably less than traditional public school teachers. In 2003-04, the average teacher salary in charter schools ($31,758) was more than $8,000 below that for teachers in traditional public schools ($39,750). The lower overall average salary in charters reflects, in part, the relative lack of classroom experience of charter school teachers.

Since flexibility over teacher hiring and certification practices is often one of the areas of autonomy for charter schools, it is not surprising that charter school teachers in Texas and nationally are less likely to have full state certification for the subjects they teach. A study by the University of California at Berkeley's Policy Analysis for California Education (Fuller et al., 2003) indicates that 48 percent of charter school teachers nationwide lack a teaching certificate.

In view of the importance of having highly qualified teachers in charter schools, this survey examines teacher quality issues within Texas charter schools. Charter schools exist under the assumption that schools unfettered by bureaucracy are better able to respond to and tailor an educational experience to meet the needs of students. However, if charter schools fail to attract and retain qualified teachers, student learning and achievement will almost certainly suffer.

METHODOLOGY

Survey Procedures

The survey of charter school teachers, as shown in Appendix C, addresses teachers' background and credentials, reasons for teaching in charter schools, educational activities and resources, professional development, student discipline, and charter school operations. For the 2003-04 statewide evaluation of charter schools, researchers randomly selected a sample of 61 charter schools and 89 associated campuses to participate in statewide surveys. In March 2004, the administrator of each campus connected with the randomly selected charter schools received a packet including teacher surveys (enclosed in reply envelopes) for each teacher. Teacher counts were based on the number of teachers reported in 2002-03 AEIS data. Campus leaders were asked to distribute the envelopes (with the surveys enclosed) to all teachers for completion. Administrators could request additional surveys, if needed. To protect their anonymity, teachers returned surveys to the Texas Center for Educational Research in postage-paid reply envelopes. Of the 1,124 teacher surveys distributed, 567 individuals returned a completed survey for a response rate of 50.4 percent. The 567 survey respondents represent about 18 percent of the approximately 3,200 charter school teachers statewide in the 2002-03 school year.

Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Table 5.1 shows the distribution of teacher survey respondents. Surveyed schools were divided into two groups: charter schools serving 70 percent or more at-risk students and charter schools serving less than 70 percent at-risk students. Of the 69 responding charter school campuses, 28 served primarily at-risk students, and 41 served fewer at-risk students. Although the overall response rate was 50 percent, teachers from charter schools serving predominantly at-risk students had a higher response rate (55 percent) than their counterparts in schools with fewer at-risk students (48 percent). To explore differences, results from the survey are presented in this chapter for all teachers and separately by school type. As a result of their higher response rate, teachers from charter schools serving fewer at-risk students are somewhat over-represented in the total pool of respondents compared to the sample.

Table 5.1
Distribution of Teacher Survey Respondents, by School Type

School Type	Number of Campuses Surveyed	Number of Campuses Responding	Number of Teachers Surveyed	Number of Respondents	Percent of Teachers Responding
CS ≥ 70% At-Risk	39	28	418	229	54.8
CS < 70% At-Risk	50	41	706	338	47.9
Total	89	69	1,124	567	50.4

Table 5.2 presents the characteristics of teacher respondents. Overall, about 50 percent of survey respondents are 35 years of age or younger, 40 percent are between the ages of 36 and 55, and 10 percent are 56 or older. There is little variation in teacher age for the two school types, although charter schools serving more than 70 percent at-risk students have 12 percent of teachers 56 or older compared to 8 percent in charter schools serving fewer at-risk students. Teachers in the sample are primarily female (68 percent), and there is little variation in teacher gender between the two types of schools.

Table 5.2
Characteristics of Teacher Survey Respondents (Percent)

Characteristic	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk *n*=229	CS < 70% At-Risk *n*=338	All Charter Schools *N*=567
Age			
35 or younger	49.6	50.6	50.2
36 to 55	38.0	41.4	40.1
56 or older	12.3	8.0	9.8
Gender			
Male	32.9	31.0	31.8
Female	67.1	69.0	68.2
Race/Ethnicity[a]			
Hispanic	14.7	16.3	15.6
African American	38.2	39.3	38.9
White	42.7	38.2	40.0
Other/NA	4.4	6.3	5.5

Note. Number of respondents varies slightly by category due to missing data.
[a] Survey respondents roughly approximate the characteristics of all charter school teachers in the state: 21.2 percent Hispanic, 33.7 percent African American, 42.8 percent White, and 2.3 percent other ethnicities.

Overall, 16 percent of teachers identified themselves as Hispanic, 39 percent as African American, and 40 percent as White. These sample statistics roughly approximate the demographic characteristics of all charter school teachers in the state (21 percent Hispanic, 34 percent African American, and 43 percent White). The percentages of African American teachers are similar in charter schools serving proportionally more and less at-risk students (38 percent versus 39 percent). Slightly higher percentages of White teachers (43 percent versus 38 percent) responded from charter schools serving primarily at-risk students. This is surprising

since, statewide, about half (53 percent) of teachers are White in charters serving fewer at-risk students, but only about a third (32 percent) are White in charters serving primarily at-risk students.

TEACHER CREDENTIALS AND EXPERIENCE

Surveyed teachers also reported on their educational credentials (higher education, certification, and their route to certification) and teaching experience.

Education and Certification

The majority of charter school teachers surveyed in 2004 (similar to the previous year) have a bachelors degree or higher (90.8 percent). Teachers in both types of charter schools report similar education levels in 2004. As Table 5.3 shows, 41 percent of teachers in charter schools serving at-risk students have a bachelor's degree compared to 34 percent in charters serving fewer at-risk students. In contrast, 26 percent of teachers in charter schools serving fewer at-risk students have either a masters or a doctorate compared to 18 percent in charters serving primarily at-risk students. Similar percentages (8 percent and 10 percent) report having fewer than four years of college as well as having a bachelor's degree and some postgraduate work (33 percent and 31 percent).

Overall, about 42 percent of charter school teachers are certified either in Texas or another state, which is about 3 percentage points higher than the previous year but remains below the national average (48 percent cited in Fuller et al., 2003). Additionally, all but 14 percent of teachers have their teacher certification or are working towards it. About equal percentages of teachers in both types of charter schools have obtained certification to teach in Texas, another state, or are working toward certification.

Table 5.3
Current Level of Teacher Education and Certification (Percent)

Teacher Education/Certification	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk *n*=229	CS < 70% At-Risk *n*=338	All Charter Schools 2004 *N*=567	All Charter Schools 2003 *N*=428
Highest Education Level				
Fewer than 4 years of college	7.9	10.1	9.2	10.3
Bachelors degree	40.8	33.7	36.6	43.6
BA/BS and graduate courses	33.3	30.5	31.6	27.9
Masters or doctorate degree	18.0	25.8	22.6	18.3
Level of Certification				
Certified to teach in Texas	35.4	37.3	36.5	32.2
Certified to teach in another state[a]	6.6	4.1	5.1	6.1
Working on Texas teaching certification	47.6	46.7	47.1	46.5
Not certified and not working to obtain certification	14.4	14.2	14.3	15.2

[a] Includes only teachers who are not certified in Texas. Some charter teachers hold dual certificates.

Of those teachers certified to teach, the primary certification routes are through the traditional college undergraduate program (45 percent) or an alternative certification program (37 percent). As Table 5.4 shows, teachers in charter schools with primarily at-risk students were more likely to be alternatively certified whereas teachers in charter schools serving fewer at-risk students received their certification through an undergraduate or post-baccalaureate program more often. The percentage of teachers alternatively certified increased substantially in 2004 (from 23 percent to 37 percent).

Table 5.4
Certification Route for Certified Teachers (Percent)

Route	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk *n*=115	CS < 70% At-Risk *n*=152	All Charter Schools 2004 *N*=267	All Charter Schools 2003 *N*=176
College/university undergraduate certification program	40.0	49.3	45.3	54.5
Alternative certification program	45.2	30.3	36.7	23.3
College/university post-bachelor certification program	14.8	20.4	18.0	22.2

Teaching Experience

Table 5.5 presents the average years of teaching experience for surveyed teachers. As a whole, teachers in charter schools have 7.2 years of total teaching experience. Years of experience ranges between 1 and 42 years, with a median of 5 years. On average, teachers in both types of charter schools have similar years teaching experience, including the total years of experience and years spent at their current charter school.

Table 5.5
Average Years of Teaching Experience, by School Type

Type of Teaching Experience	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk		CS < 70% At-Risk		All Charter Schools 2004		All Charter Schools 2003	
	n	Years	*n*	Years	*N*	Years	*N*	Years
Total years	229	6.7	338	7.5	567	7.2	415	7.4
At current charter school	228	2.3	338	2.4	566	2.4	424	2.1
At all charter schools	228	2.5	334	2.6	562	2.6	397	2.3
Public schools	129	5.2	177	6.2	306	5.8	239	6.3
Private schools	26	3.8	49	5.8	75	5.1	46	5.9
Religious private schools	28	6.8	61	4.7	89	5.3	71	5.4

REASONS FOR TEACHING IN CHARTER SCHOOLS

Teachers rated the importance of several factors in their decision to seek employment at their charter school. Using a 4-point scale, teachers rated items as *not important* (1), *somewhat important* (2), *important* (3), and *very important* (4). Findings reported in Figure 5.1 provide a graphic interpretation of their responses, with each bar on the chart representing those respondents indicating a factor had at least some level of importance.

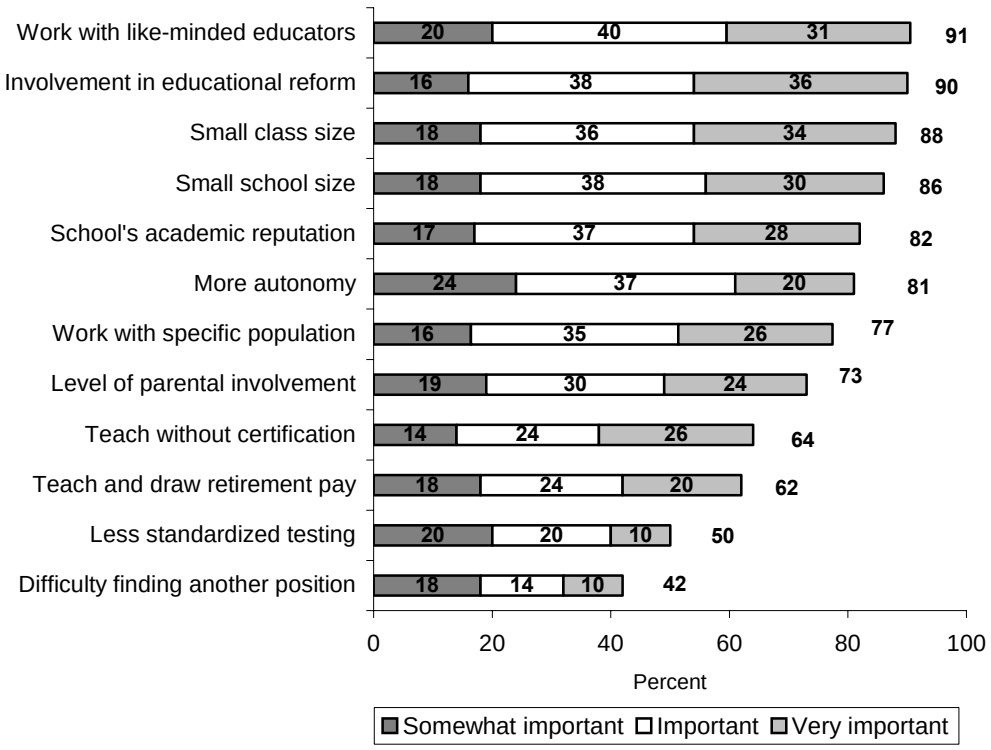

Figure 5.1. Percent of teacher reporting factors as somewhat important, important, or very important in their decision to seek employment at the charter school (*N*=567).

Teachers report that the most important factors in seeking employment at charter schools are working with like-minded educators (91 percent), being involved in an educational reform effort (90 percent), and having small class (88 percent) and school (86 percent) sizes. Many teachers are also attracted to charter schools by more favorable conditions, such as the school's academic reputation, greater autonomy, working with specific populations, and the high level of parental involvement. Other factors, such as difficulty in finding another position, less standardized testing, the ability to teach and draw retirement pay, and the ability to teach without certification are of less importance in teachers' decision making.

Teachers' decision factors for seeking employment in their charter school are rank ordered in Table 5.6 by school type and survey year. Each of the responses on the 4-point scale (*not important* to *very important*) has been assigned a numerical value between 1 and 4. A mean, representing the relative importance of each factor, was calculated for all respondents and the two groups of schools. Comparable to findings displayed in Figure 5.1, rank ordering of means for each factor shows that in making the decision to teach in charter schools, teachers are most influenced by the chance to be involved in educational reform, opportunities to work with like-minded colleagues, and small class and school sizes. Of lesser importance to teachers is the fear of not finding another position and the desire to be in an environment with less standardized testing. Teacher reasons for choosing charter schools changed little between 2003 and 2004.

Table 5.6
Reasons Teachers Chose to Teach at a Charter School, as Mean of Respondents

Decision Factor	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk *n*=239	CS < 70% At-Risk *n*=338	All Charter Schools 2004 *N*=567	All Charter Schools 2003 *N*=419
Involved in an educational reform effort	2.9	3.0	3.0	3.1
Work with like-minded educators	2.8	3.0	2.9	3.0
Small class size	2.9	2.9	2.9	2.9
Small school size	2.7	2.9	2.9	2.8
Academic reputation of the school	2.6	2.8	2.7	2.9
More autonomy	2.4	2.7	2.6	2.7
Work with specific student population	2.7	2.6	2.6	2.6
High level of parental involvement	2.3	2.7	2.5	2.7
Teach without certification	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.4
Teach and draw retirement pay	2.1	2.4	2.3	2.4
Less standardized testing pressure	1.9	1.9	1.9	2.0
Difficulty finding another position	1.8	1.7	1.7	1.6

Note. Mean ratings based on a 4 point scale: *not important* (1), *somewhat important* (2), *important* (3), *very important* (4).

There are differences between teachers in the two types of schools. In particular, teachers attracted to charter schools with less at-risk populations place greater importance on parent involvement, autonomy, and the ability to teach and draw retirement pay. They also place more importance on working with like-minded educators, small school size, and the academic reputation of the school. Teachers attracted to charter schools with primarily at-risk populations place slightly more importance on working with specific student populations and having difficulty finding another position.

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

Teaching Assignments

Teachers also reported on teaching assignments in charter schools, both by grade level and subject area. Because it is possible for teachers to work with multiple grade levels and subject areas, the percentages presented in Table 5.7 do not sum to 100 percent. Of the 567 teachers responding to the survey, 23 percent teach primary grades (pre-kindergarten to grade 2), 26 percent teach elementary grades (3 to 5), 40 percent teach the middle grades (6 to 8), and 59 percent teach in high school (9 to12). The distributions are moderately different for the two school types, with a greater concentration of teachers in charter schools serving primarily at-risk students teaching middle and high school. Compared to survey results for 2003, greater percentages of charter school teachers now teach middle and high school grades.

Table 5.7
Instructional Levels Taught, by School Type

Level	CS ≥ 70% At Risk *n*=239		CS < 70% At-Risk *n*=338		All Charter Schools 2004 *N*=567		All Charter Schools 2003 *N*=429	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Primary (PK-2)	42	18.3	90	26.6	132	23.3	126	29.4
Elementary (3-5)	59	25.8	86	25.4	145	25.6	105	24.5
Middle (6-8)	107	46.7	118	34.9	225	39.7	149	34.7
High school (9-12)	160	69.9	175	51.8	335	59.1	215	50.1

There are moderate differences in the distributions of teachers across subject areas. As Table 5.8 illustrates, there is a somewhat greater concentration of language arts, social studies, and mathematics teachers. There are higher percentages of teachers assigned to each subject in charters serving fewer at-risk students. This may indicate that more teachers in these schools have multiple subject assignments. Subject-area distributions remained relatively stable across survey years.

Table 5.8
Subject Areas Taught, by School Type

Subject Area	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk *n*=239		CS < 70% At-Risk *n*=338		All Charter Schools 2004 *N*=567		All Charter Schools 2003 *N*=426	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Language arts	108	47.2	178	52.7	286	50.4	245	57.5
Social studies	99	43.2	170	50.3	269	47.4	212	49.8
Reading	92	40.2	136	40.2	228	40.2	199	46.7
Mathematics	93	40.6	171	50.6	264	46.6	225	52.8
Science	81	35.4	159	47.0	240	42.3	197	46.2
Other	84	36.7	138	40.8	222	39.2	156	36.6

Instructional Methods

Charter school teachers were asked about their instructional methods and the extent to which different strategies are used in their classroom. As Figure 5.2 illustrates, almost all teachers provide one-on-one instruction, have students complete individual assignments, incorporate small groups, and use interactive discussions (98 to 100 percent). Less traditional methods, such as multimedia presentations, long-term projects, computer-based activities, and oral reports are used less often.

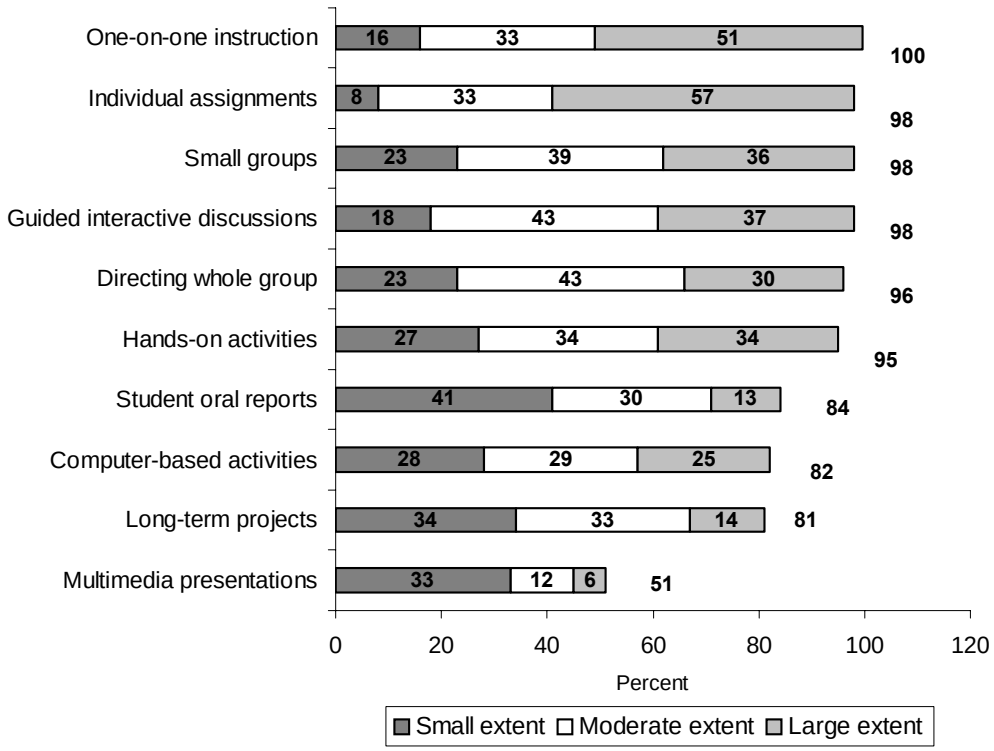

Figure 5.2. Percent of teachers reporting that various instructional methods are emphasized to a small, moderate, or large extent in charter school classrooms (*N*=567*).*

Overall, teachers use a variety of instructional methods, with the extent of use reflecting the time commitment required to implement each method. For example, 81 percent of teachers use long-term projects to some extent, with 34 percent reporting they use it to a small extent and 14 percent reporting they use projects to a large extent. This is the reverse of the responses seen for directing the whole group. Such differences probably reflect the fact that long-term projects by their very structure must be used less often.

The mean extent to which teachers report using specific instructional techniques is rank ordered in Table 5.9 and compared by school type and survey year. The order of importance for instructional methods is similar to findings in Figure 5.2 above. Rank ordering, however, readily conveys differences in use among comparison groups. Across all teachers, individual student assignments and one-on-one instruction are used more extensively. Between school types, teachers in schools serving fewer at-risk students use somewhat more long-term projects, oral reports, and computers than their counterparts in schools serving primarily at-risk students. Teachers' instructional methods varied little across survey years.

Table 5.9
Instructional Methods Used in Classrooms—Mean Response by School Type

Instructional Method	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk *n*=239	CS < 70% At-Risk *n*=338	All Charter Schools 2004 *N*=567	All Charter Schools 2003 *N*=426
Students complete individual assignments	3.4	3.5	3.5	3.5
One-on-one instruction	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.3
Guide whole-group interactive discussion	3.2	3.1	3.1	3.1
Students work in small groups	3.0	3.1	3.1	3.1
Direct the whole group (lecture, set pace)	3.0	3.0	3.0	2.9
Student work with hands-on activities	2.9	3.0	2.9	3.1
Student use computers	2.5	2.7	2.6	2.6
Students present oral reports	2.3	2.5	2.4	2.4
Long-term projects	2.3	2.5	2.4	2.5
Multimedia presentations	1.9	1.8	1.8	1.8

Note. Mean ratings based on a 4 point scale: *not at all* (1), *small extent* (2), *moderate extent* (3), *large extent* (4).

Class Size and Technology Resources

According to teachers, classes in charter schools are typically small, with an average class size of 17.7 students. Charter schools with fewer at-risk students have a higher student-to-teacher ratio (18.9 to 1) compared to schools with a greater proportion of students at risk (15.9 to 1). Most charter school teachers have limited access to technology resources in the classroom. About half of classrooms have either no computers (16 percent) or only one computer (34 percent), and only 66 percent of classrooms are connected to the Internet. Some teachers, however, report an abundance of classroom computers—more than one-fourth of teachers have 5 to 10 computers (14 percent) or more than 10 computers (12 percent). On average, classrooms in charter schools have 2.5 computers, with schools serving primarily at-risk students having slightly more computers (2.5) compared to classrooms in charters serving fewer at-risk students (2.4). The average number of classroom computers in charter schools increased slightly between 2003 (2.3) and 2004 (2.5), but Internet access remained stable.

Table 5.10
Class Size and Technology Availability, by School Type

	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk	CS < 70% At-Risk	All Charter Schools 2004	All Charter Schools 2003
Average class size	15.9	18.9	17.7	18.4
Classrooms with Internet access (% yes)	63.4%	68.4%	66.4%	66.2%
Average number of computers per classroom[a]	2.5	2.4	2.5	2.3
Number of computers per classroom				
0	19.3%	13.0%	15.5%	24.3%
1	23.9%	40.9%	34.0%	30.6%
2-4	32.1%	18.6%	24.0%	21.9%
5-10	10.6%	16.7%	14.2%	12.8%
More than 10	14.2%	10.8%	12.2%	10.4%

[a] Teachers in lab-type classrooms (15 or more computers) are excluded from average classroom numbers.

Assessment Methods

As with instructional methods, teachers use a variety of methods to assess student performance. Table 5.11 shows that traditional testing methods are used most often, with 91 percent of teachers reporting the use of teacher-made tests. Other methods, such as student demonstrations, writing samples, and student projects are also commonly used as assessment devices. Teachers in charter schools serving primarily at-risk students more often rely on teacher-made tests, and they use student projects and portfolios to a lesser extent than teachers in charter schools serving fewer at-risk students. There was a declining emphasis on the use of student projects and portfolios as assessment methods from 2003 to 2004.

Table 5.11
Methods Used to Assess Student Performance, by School Type (Percent)

Level	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk *n*=239	CS < 70% At-Risk *n*=338	All Charter Schools 2004 *N*=567	All Charter Schools 2003 *N*=426
Teacher-made tests	95.5	87.5	90.8	89.2
Student demonstrations or performances	86.9	87.4	87.2	87.1
Student writing samples	89.2	85.5	87.0	87.5
Student projects	80.3	83.0	81.9	86.7
Student portfolios	60.8	64.8	63.2	73.8
Other	6.6	9.5	8.3	12.0

Note. Number of teacher respondents varies slightly by category.

Table 5.12 presents the frequency of use for the various types of assessment instruments. As shown, teachers use most assessment methods frequently—*at least once a marking period*. Teacher-made tests are used by more teachers and are used most often. Similar percentages of

teachers use student demonstrations, performances, writing samples, and projects, but teachers are more likely to use them only *once a year* or *once a semester*.

Table 5.12
Methods Used by Teachers to Assess Student Performance in Charter Schools (Percent)

Assessment	Strategy Used		Frequency		
	n	%	Once a Year	Once a Semester	Marking[a] Period
Teacher-made tests	328	87.5	1.9	10.2	87.8
Student demonstrations or performances	326	87.4	4.1	29.4	66.5
Student writing samples	321	85.5	1.4	20.8	77.8
Student projects	324	83.0	4.7	44.2	51.1
Student portfolios	321	64.8	10.0	35.9	54.0
Other	47	8.3	9.8	17.1	73.2

[a] At least once a marking period.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Teacher Development Opportunities

On average, surveyed teachers attended nearly eight days of professional development in the past year, as Table 5.13 shows. Teachers in charter schools with primarily at-risk students attended about one day more of training than teachers in schools with fewer students at risk. Overall, teachers participated in a variety of professional development activities. Almost all teachers attended a session sponsored by their own charter school (94 percent) and three-fourths attended a session sponsored by a regional education service center (74 percent). Nearly a third of teachers attended sessions sponsored by a neighboring school district (27 percent) or completed college coursework (37 percent).

Table 5.13
Professional Development Activities Attended This Past Year, as Percent of Respondents

Professional Development Type	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk *n*=239	CS < 70% At-Risk *n*=338	All Charter Schools 2004 *N*=567	All Charter Schools 2003 *N*=424
Average number of days attended	8.3	7.2	7.6	6.8
Session sponsored by charter school	95.1	93.3	94.1	94.1
Session sponsored by an ESC	72.4	74.9	73.9	76.5
Teaming/shared conference periods	55.3	67.5	62.5	63.3
Professional conference	50.5	56.5	54.0	56.5
Peer observation and critique	51.9	52.6	52.3	55.9
Release time for independent training activities	49.8	50.5	50.2	50.8
Release time to work with other school educators	43.1	42.5	42.7	42.4
College or university coursework	37.1	37.5	37.4	32.1
Session sponsored by a traditional school district	26.6	27.6	27.2	32.1
Average number of days attended	8.3	7.2	7.6	6.8

Teachers in charter schools serving fewer at-risk students are more likely to participate in teaming or shared conference periods and professional conferences. Teachers in charter schools serving primarily at-risk students are slightly more likely to participate in sessions sponsored by their charter school. The mean number of professional development days increased from 6.8 to 7.6 between survey years, but the nature of activities remained relatively constant.

Teacher Appraisal

According to teachers, almost all charter schools (88 percent) have some type of formal teacher appraisal system (Table 5.14). Of those schools with an appraisal system, 61 percent use the state-developed Professional Development Appraisal System (PDAS) forms, and 27 percent use another appraisal system. Across all charter schools, 25 percent of teachers are observed by school administrators at least once a marking period, and 31 percent are observed at least once a semester. Teachers working in charter schools with proportionally more at-risk students more frequently report semester and yearly observation visits. The proportion of charter schools with a formal teacher appraisal process increased by 10 percentage points between 2003 and 2004.

Table 5.14
Teacher Appraisal and Observation System in Charter Schools (Percent)

	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk	CS < 70% At-Risk	All Charter Schools 2004	All Charter Schools 2003
Percent with a formal appraisal process	86.0	89.5	88.1	78.1
Percent using state system	51.0	67.4	60.8	No Data
Percent using another system	35.0	22.1	27.3	No Data
Frequency of administrative observations				
Once a marking period	25.1	24.3	24.6	19.6
Once a semester	34.7	28.6	31.1	24.7
Once a year	16.0	13.2	14.3	17.9
Other[a]	24.2	33.8	30.0	37.8

[a]The category "other" includes observation frequencies that do not fit the set categories. This includes "daily," "weekly," as well as a wide variety of additional frequencies.

STUDENT DISCIPLINE AND BEHAVIOR

Student discipline problems, as perceived by teachers, are reported in Figure 5.3. Attendance, both in terms of tardiness and absenteeism, is the greatest problem. Drug and alcohol abuse is seen as only about half as serious. The more serious the offense, the less it is seen by teachers as a problem. In fact, only small percentages of teachers reported physical conflicts, vandalism, drug or alcohol abuse, or weapon possession as serious problems or moderate problems at their schools.

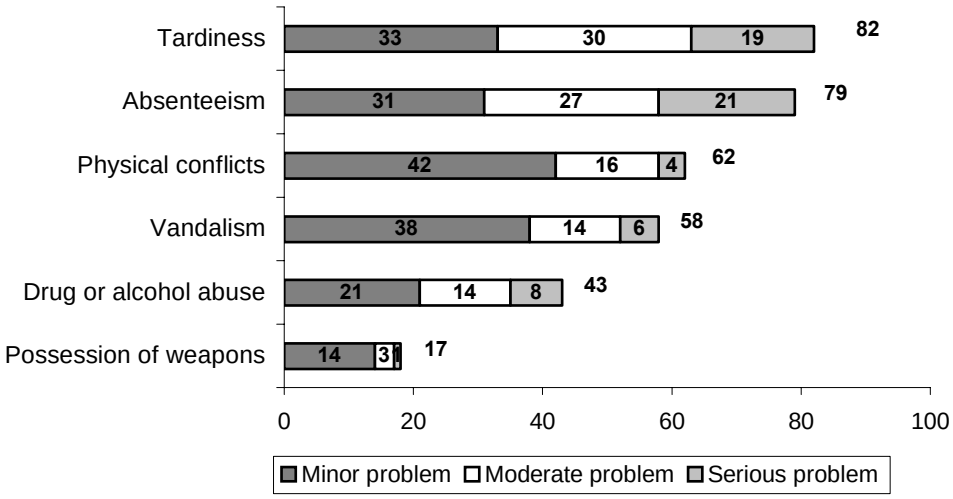

Figure 5.3. Percent of teachers reporting student behavior as a minor, moderate, or serious problem at their charter school (*N*=567).

There is, however, a difference in teacher perception based on the grade level taught. As Figure 5.4 shows, 60 percent of high school teachers think student absenteeism is at least a moderate problem, compared to 33 percent of middle and elementary school teachers. Likewise, 59 percent of high school teachers think tardiness is at least a moderate problem, compared to 36 percent of middle and elementary school teachers. Thirty-six percent of high school teachers think student drug and/or alcohol use is at least a moderate problem, compared to 11 percent of middle school teachers and 8 percent of elementary teachers. These results are to be expected. The only area where high school teachers express less concern than the lower grade teachers is physical conflicts among students. Nineteen percent of high school teachers perceive this as a problem compared to 23 percent of middle school teachers and 29 percent of elementary teachers.

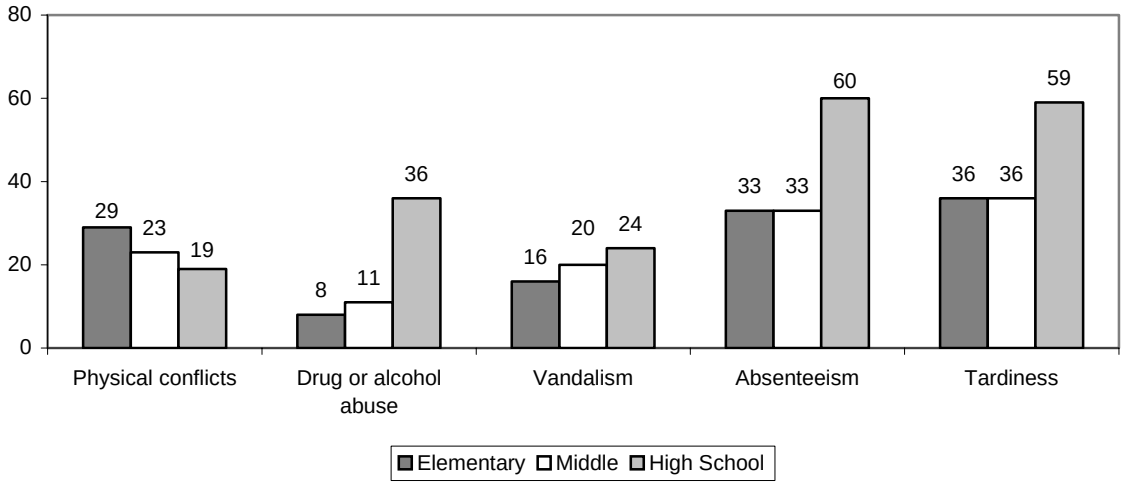

Figure 5.4. Percent of teachers reporting student behavior as a moderate or serious problem, by grade level (*N*=567*).*

Rank ordering of means in Table 5.15 highlights the extent of teachers' concerns. Overall, teachers perceive student tardiness and absenteeism to be about twice as problematic as student weapons possession. Teachers at charter schools serving primarily at-risk students perceive their schools to have slightly more problems in the areas of physical conflicts, vandalism, drug and alcohol abuse, and possession of weapons, and slightly fewer problems with tardiness and absenteeism. Comparisons for the two survey years revealed slight increases in teachers' perceptions of the severity of behavior problems for most categories.

Table 5.15
Teachers' Perceptions of Student Behavior Problems, Mean Severity by School Type

Problem	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk *n*=239	CS < 70% At-Risk *n*=338	All Charter Schools 2004 *N*=567	All Charter Schools 2003 *N*=424
Student tardiness	2.4	2.6	2.5	2.4
Student absenteeism	2.4	2.5	2.5	2.4
Physical conflicts among students	2.0	1.8	1.9	1.8
Vandalism of school property	1.9	1.8	1.8	1.7
Student drug or alcohol abuse	1.8	1.7	1.7	1.7
Student possession of weapons at school	1.3	1.2	1.2	1.2

Note. Mean ratings based on a 4 point scale: *not a problem* (1), *minor problem* (2), *moderate problem* (3), *serious problem* (4).

CHARTER SCHOOL OPERATIONS

To gain an overall impression of charter school operations, teachers were given a list of statements and asked if each statement applied to their school. The list contained both positive and negative statements such as, "This school is meeting students' learning needs," and "I have insufficient classroom resources." Teachers rated items on a 4-point scale as *strongly disagree* (1), *disagree* (2), *agree* (3), or *strongly agree* (4). Figure 5.5 provides a graphic representation of the percentage of teachers who either *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with each statement.

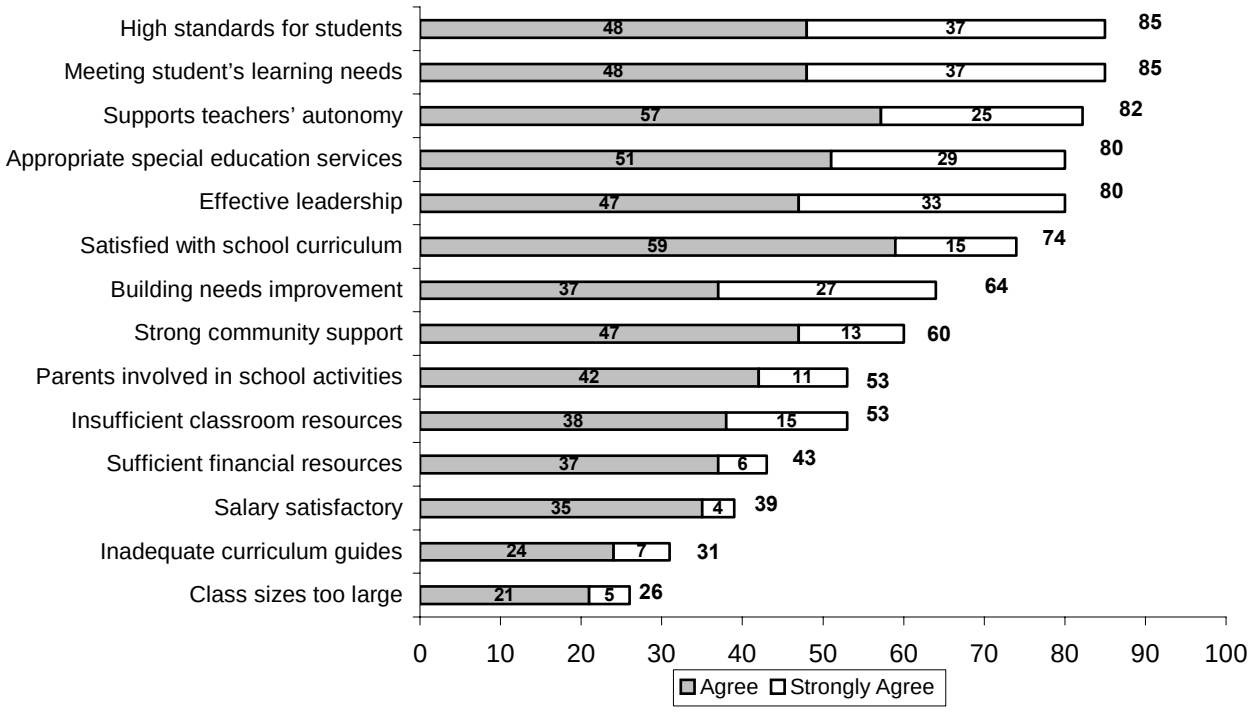

Figure 5.5. Percent of teachers reporting they agree or strongly agree with various aspects of their charter school (*N*=567*).*

Teachers are generally satisfied with the operation of their schools. Eighty-five percent of teachers either *agree* or *strongly agree* that their school has high expectations for students and the school is meeting students' learning needs. Moreover, at least 80 percent believe their school supports the autonomy of teachers, provides appropriate special education services, and has effective leadership. Although teachers have generally favorable impressions of their schools' missions, a number of teachers also believe charter schools lack adequate resources. Approximately half either *agree* or *strongly agree* that they have inadequate classroom resources (53 percent). Only 43 percent feel that their school has sufficient financial resources, and just 39 percent are satisfied with their salary. In addition, 26 percent think classes are too large in their schools.

Teachers' mean responses on the 4-point scale were calculated and rank ordered in Table 5.16. Results are presented for all respondents and also by school type and survey year. Although there are only a few differences in teachers' impressions across the two school groups, teachers in charter schools enrolling primarily at-risk students are less satisfied than teachers from charter schools with fewer at-risk students. These teachers are more satisfied with school standards and expectations, the extent to which the school is meeting students' needs, school leadership and teacher support, and the curriculum (but not with associated curriculum guides). They are also more satisfied with community support and parent involvement in school activities. However, teachers in charter schools enrolling primarily at-risk students are more satisfied with their salaries. Teacher satisfaction with charter schools remained generally stable across survey years.

The most notable differences were an increase in satisfaction with school leadership and decreases in satisfaction with parental involvement and their salaries.

Table 5.16
General Impressions of Charter School, Mean Responses by School Type

Item	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk *n*=239	CS < 70% At-Risk *n*=338	All Charter Schools 2004 *N*=567	All Charter Schools 2003 *N*=420
School has high standards/expectations for students	3.1	3.3	3.2	3.3
School is meeting students' learning needs	3.0	3.2	3.1	3.2
School has effective leadership	3.0	3.1	3.1	2.9
Schools has appropriate special education services	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
School supports teachers' autonomy	2.9	3.1	3.0	3.0
I am satisfied with the school curriculum	2.7	2.9	2.8	2.9
The school's buildings need improvement	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.8
School has strong community support	2.5	2.7	2.6	2.7
I have insufficient classroom resources	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5
Parents are involved in school activities	2.2	2.6	2.4	2.6
School has sufficient financial resources	2.3	2.3	2.3	2.4
I am satisfied with my salary	2.3	2.1	2.1	2.3
School has inadequate curriculum guides	2.2	2.0	2.1	2.1
Class sizes too large	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.9

Note. Mean ratings based on a 4 point scale: *strongly disagree* (1), *disagree* (2), *agree* (3), *strongly agree* (4).

SUMMARY

This chapter outlined important characteristics of charter school teachers and highlighted differences among teachers based on whether they taught in a charter schools serving proportionally more or fewer at-risk students. Based on survey responses, about half of charter school teachers are young (under 35 years old), and most are female. The majority of charter school teachers are either African American (39%) or White (40%), with a smaller percentage of Hispanic teachers (16%)

About 9 percent of charter school teachers report that they have less than four years of college, 68 percent have a bachelors degree, and 23 percent have a masters or doctorate. Less than half of charter school teachers (42 percent) have their teacher certification (either in Texas or another state)—however, about 47 percent of uncertified teachers indicate that they are working on obtaining Texas teaching certification. Of those teachers certified to teach, about one-third (37 percent) participated in an alternative certification program, and two-thirds used undergraduate (45 percent) or post-bachelor certification programs (18 percent).

Teachers sought employment in a charter school for a variety of reasons. The most important reasons were working with like-minded educators, being involved in an educational reform effort, and small class and school sizes. Many teachers are also attracted to charter schools by factors such as an individual school's reputation, greater autonomy, working with specific

populations, and the high level of parental involvement. Other factors, such as difficulty in finding another position, less standardized testing, the ability to teach and draw retirement pay, and the ability to teach without certification are of less importance in teachers' decision making.

Teachers utilized a variety of instructional methods and assessment techniques. Instructional methods included one-on-one and small-group instruction, students completing individual assignments, interactive discussions, directing the whole class, and hands-on activities. Less traditional methods such as multimedia presentations are used less often. Assessment techniques often included the use of teacher-made tests. Other methods, such as student demonstrations, writing samples, and student projects, are also commonly used as assessment devices. Teachers in charter schools serving primarily at-risk students more often rely on teacher-made tests, and they use student projects and portfolios to a lesser extent than teachers in charter schools serving fewer at-risk students.

Teachers greatest area of concern regarding discipline is student attendance, with 49 percent of teachers reporting tardiness and 48 percent reporting absenteeism to be a moderate or serious problem. There were minimal differences in perceptions of student discipline by school type, but a difference was found by grade level. High school teachers perceived more discipline problems in all areas, except for physical conflicts among students. About 60 percent of high school teachers think student absenteeism and tardiness is at least a moderate problem, compared to just over 30 percent of middle and elementary school teachers. Similarly, over 30 percent of high school teachers think student drug and/or alcohol use is at least a moderate problem, compared to about 10 percent of middle and elementary school teachers.

Charter school teachers are generally satisfied with the operation of their schools. At least 80 percent agree that their school has high expectations for students, is meeting students' needs, supports the autonomy of teachers, provides appropriate special education services, and has effective leadership. However, many teachers also believe charter schools lack adequate resources. Approximately half think that they have inadequate classroom resources. Only about 40 percent feel that their school has sufficient financial resources and are satisfied with their salary. Although there are only a few differences in teachers' impressions across the two school types, teachers in charter schools enrolling primarily at-risk students are less satisfied than teachers from charter schools with fewer at-risk students.

CHAPTER 6
SURVEY OF CHARTER SCHOOL STUDENTS

Charter schools in Texas and nationally represent one facet of the growing school choice movement. Based on a free-market economy concept, charter schools provide families with an alternative to the traditional neighborhood public school. As the charter school movement has grown, it has become of greater interest to understand why families choose charter schools for their children and their level of satisfaction with charter schools. While research has addressed the factors that influence parents' choice of a charter school and their satisfaction with charter schools, few large-scale studies have addressed *students'* opinions on these issues. One study found that three-fifths of students say their charter school teachers are better than their previous school teachers (Vanourek, Manno, Finn, & Bierlein, 1997). Results from the five-year evaluation of Texas charter schools show similarly high levels of satisfaction among charter school students. Over 80 percent of Texas charter school students surveyed reported being *satisfied* or *very satisfied* with their school in the 2001-02 school year (Barrett, 2002). Likewise, in 2002-03, approximately three out of four Texas charter school students believed that the charter school was a good choice for them (77 percent), felt safe at school (73 percent), and learned more at their charter school (71 percent) (Pieper, 2004).

This study further explores the reasons students and parents seek charter schools, students' perceptions of schools currently attended, and organizational characteristics influencing student satisfaction. Students' views also provide insight into everyday educational experiences and interpersonal relationships in charter schools that may contribute to student satisfaction. Moreover, students' experiences and perspectives might also shed light on factors that influence parents' school choices.

METHODOLOGY

Survey Procedures

The student survey included objective items addressing student characteristics (gender, ethnicity, grade level, age), schools previously attended, grades earned, future plans, reasons for choosing their charter school, and satisfaction with the school. Two additional opened-ended items allowed students to comment on the most positive school features and any problems or issues students encounter. The *Survey of Charter School Students* appears in Appendix C.

In March 2004, researchers distributed surveys to a sample of 10,773 students enrolled in grades 6 through 12. To identify survey recipients, investigators randomly selected a sample of 61 charter schools and 89 associated campuses to participate in the statewide survey. The administrator of each randomly selected charter campus received a packet including surveys for all enrolled students, with counts based on campus enrollments reported in AEIS 2002-03. Administrators were asked to distribute the surveys to all teachers in their building who teach students in grades 6 to 12. If more surveys were needed, administrators could copy the survey or request additional surveys. Instructions for each teacher asked that they administer the survey during the first period (or at the beginning of the school day) to ensure that each student responded to the survey only once. After administering the survey, teachers returned them to the

campus office. Administrators then mailed all student surveys in postage-paid envelopes or boxes to the Texas Center for Educational Research. Of the 10,773 student surveys distributed, 6,464 surveys were returned, for an overall response rate of 60 percent. The student survey respondents in the sample represent about 12 percent of charter school students statewide.

Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Table 6.1 shows the distribution of student survey respondents. Surveyed schools were divided into two groups for comparisons purposes: charter schools serving 70 percent or more at-risk students and charter schools with less than 70 percent at-risk students. Although the overall response rate was 60 percent, students in schools serving primarily at-risk students responded at a higher rate (65 percent) than those from schools serving fewer at-risk students (57 percent). Even so, the distribution of respondents from schools serving primarily at-risk students (44 percent) and respondents from schools serving fewer at-risk students (56 percent) duplicates the statewide student population in charter schools, which is also 44 percent from schools serving primarily at-risk students and 56 percent from schools serving fewer students at risk.

Table 6.1
Distribution of Student Survey Respondents, by School Type

School Type	Number of Campuses Surveyed	Number of Campuses Responding	Number of Students Surveyed	Number of Respondents	Percent of Students Responding
CS ≥ 70% At-Risk	39	24	4,430	2,858	64.5
CS < 70% At-Risk	50	39	6,343	3,606	56.8
Total	89	63	10,773	6,464	60.0

Table 6.2 displays the demographic characteristics of student survey respondents. The majority of students (70 percent) are between 13 and 17 years of age. This is expected considering only students in grades 6 through 12 were surveyed. Overall, survey respondents, similar to charter school students statewide, are concentrated in the upper grade levels, with between 15 and 19 percent of respondents in each of the high school grade levels (9-12). Ninth graders are under-represented, whereas eleventh and twelfth graders are over-represented in the sample. The grade-level distribution of respondents varies between schools serving different proportions of at-risk students. Charters serving primarily at-risk students have proportionately more respondents in grades 8 through 10 and fewer in grades 6, 7, 11, and 12. Males predominate among survey respondents from schools serving primarily at-risk students, while the proportions of male and female respondents are similar from schools serving fewer at-risk students.

Table 6.2
Characteristics of Student Survey Respondents (Percent)

Characteristic	Survey Sample			Charter Schools Statewide
	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk *N*=2,850	CS < 70% At-Risk *N*=3,599	All Charter Schools *N*=6,449	*N*=53,156
Age				
12 and under	8.8	12.9	11.0	--
13 to 17	71.9	68.4	69.9	--
18 and over	19.3	18.8	19.0	--
Grade Level				
6	6.6	10.1	8.5	9.1
7	10.7	11.5	11.1	9.9
8	12.2	9.8	10.9	10.2
9	22.3	16.2	18.9	26.0
10	20.4	18.1	19.1	19.4
11	15.3	18.0	16.8	15.4
12	12.4	16.2	14.5	10.1
Gender				
Male	59.4	49.0	53.6	52.0
Female	40.6	51.0	46.4	48.0
Race/Ethnicity				
Hispanic	56.4	40.8	47.7	39.6
African American	27.5	32.2	30.1	39.9
White	10.8	19.6	15.7	18.8
Other	5.3	7.3	6.5	1.7

The racial/ethnic distribution of the sample respondents also differs from the statewide distribution, with Hispanic students over-represented and African American and White students under-represented in the sample. Likewise, racial/ethnic distributions differ by the two types of schools. Among schools serving primarily at-risk students, Hispanic students make up a larger proportion of respondents (56 percent), whereas White students account for a smaller percentage (11 percent). In contrast, Hispanic (41 percent), African American (32 percent), and White (20 percent) students are more equally represented among respondents in schools serving less than 70 percent at-risk students.

Analytic Weights

Weighting of survey data is used to correct imbalances between the population of inference (i.e., Texas charter school students) and actual survey respondents. Analytic weights can be developed so that, when applied to the survey data, the survey responses are balanced to reflect known population distributions, thus appearing "representative." The use of analytic weights, however, increases the likelihood of sampling errors. Thus, if weighted survey data do not differ substantially from raw survey data, then analytical weights may not be necessary. For this survey, researchers explored the use of analytic weights because the student survey sample respondents differed from the overall student population of Texas charter schools (see Table 6.2). African American and White students are under-represented in the survey sample respondents, whereas Hispanic students are over-represented. The grade-level distribution of the

survey sample shows that ninth graders are under-represented, whereas eleventh and twelfth graders are over-represented.

Researchers determined that the race/ethnicity variable was the most salient and, thus, calculated weights based on this variable. Data analyses were completed for both the raw survey data and the weighted survey data. After comparing these analyses, it was determined that the weighted results did not differ substantially from the unweighted results. Therefore, weighted results are not utilized in this report.

PREVIOUS SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

To understand the previous educational experiences of charter school students, respondents were asked to identify the kinds of schools attended before coming to their current charter school. Table 6.3 shows that the large majority of students (83 percent) indicated that they previously attended a public school. This is true of students in both types of charter schools. Students in schools serving fewer at-risk students were more likely to have attended a private school prior to attending their current charter school. Students in both types of charter schools were equally likely to have received other types of schooling. Results for the current student survey mirror those from the previous year.

Table 6.3
School Attended Before the Charter School (Percent)

School Type	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk *N*=2,850	CS < 70% At-Risk *N*=3,599	All Charter Schools 2004 *N*=6,449	All Charter Schools 2003 *N*=5,159
Public school	85.1	81.5	83.1	83.9
Private school	3.5	8.3	6.2	6.0
Home schooled	2.4	2.6	2.5	3.1
Did not attend school	2.6	1.1	1.8	1.3
Other	6.3	6.4	6.4	5.8

FACTORS INFLUENCING SCHOOL CHOICE

Students also identified reasons why they and their families chose the charter school. Students were asked to rate the importance of several factors on a 4-point scale as *not important* (1), *somewhat important* (2), *important* (3), or *very important* (4) in their choice of a charter school. Figure 6.1 provides a graphic representation of students' responses, with each bar on the chart representing those respondents indicating a factor had at least some level of importance.

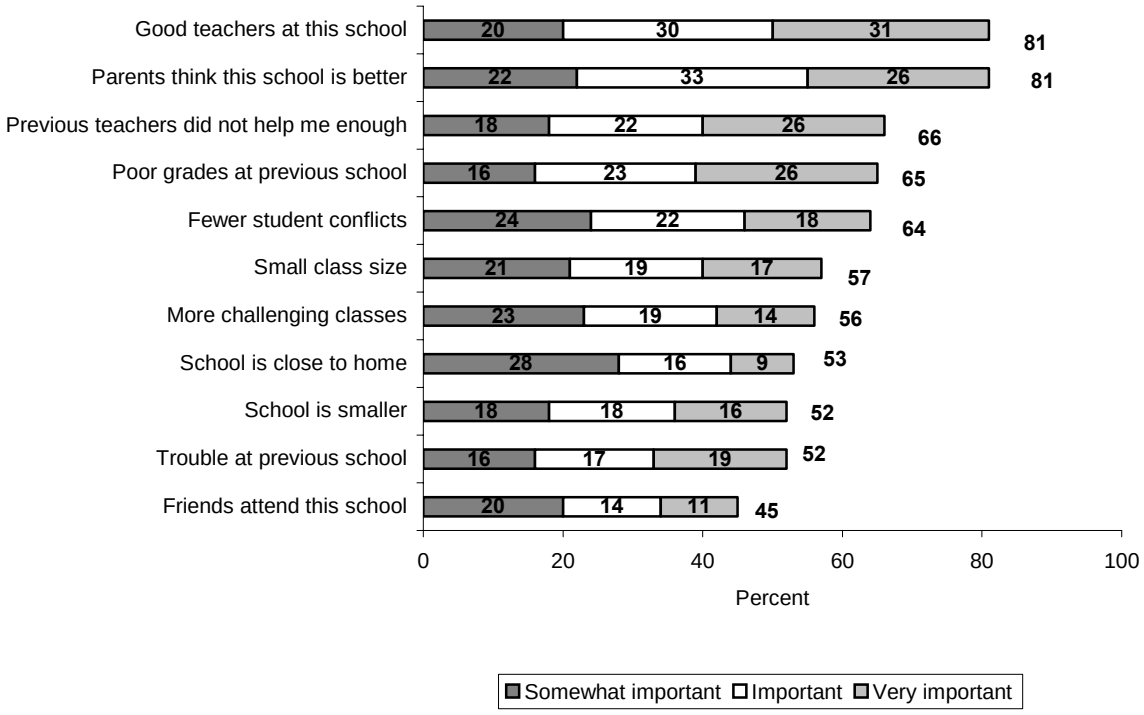

Figure 6.1. Percent of students reporting factors as *somewhat important*, *important*, or *very important* in their decision to attend the charter school.

Overall, students indicate that teacher quality (81 percent) and their parents' opinions of the school (81 percent) are the most important factors influencing their decision to attend the charter school. Other influential factors include previous teachers not helping enough (66 percent), poor grades at a previous school (65 percent), and fewer student conflicts (64 percent). Factors considered less important in students' choice of the charter school include its proximity to their home, the charter school being smaller, trouble at the previous school, and the presence of friends at the school.

Table 6.4 compares students' ratings of decision factors for charter schools serving primarily at-risk students and charters serving fewer at-risk students. Students in both types of schools report the same factors as important in their decision making (i.e., good teachers at the school and parents think the school is better). Differences between the two types of charter schools were very small. On five decision factors, the mean importance ratings for students in schools serving primarily at-risk students were slightly lower (0.1 to 0.2 points lower on a 4.0 point scale) than mean ratings for students in schools serving fewer at-risk students. One factor, getting into trouble in a previous school, received a slightly higher mean rating of importance (0.01 points higher) from students in schools enrolling more students at risk. Five factors were rated equally by students from both types of charter schools.

Comparisons between survey results for 2003 and 2004 were nearly identical. Students' and parents' decisions regarding charter schools are strongly influenced by their perceptions of teacher and school quality.

Table 6.4
Reasons Students and Their Families Chose a Charter School, as Mean of Respondents

Decision Factor	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk *N*=2,850	CS < 70% At-Risk *N*=3,599	All Charter Schools 2004 *N*=6,449	All Charter Schools 2003 *N*=5,159
Good teachers at this school	2.7	2.8	2.7	2.8
Parents think this school is better	2.6	2.7	2.7	2.7
Previous teachers did not help me enough	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.4
Poor grades at previous school	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.4
Fewer student conflicts	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.3
Small class size	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.1
Trouble at previous school	2.1	2.0	2.1	2.0
School is smaller	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
More challenging classes	1.9	2.0	2.0	2.0
School is close to home	1.8	1.9	1.9	1.9
Friends attend this school	1.7	1.9	1.8	1.8

Note. Mean rating based on 4-point scale: *not important* (1), *somewhat important* (2), *important* (3), *very important* (4).

Comparisons by Accountability Ratings

Student survey responses were also compared based on the accountability rating assigned to the student's campus. (Accountability ratings were not assigned to campuses in 2002-03 because of the transition to a new assessment measure. Thus, accountability ratings from 2001-02 were used.) Campuses were organized into three groups—those receiving high-performing ratings of Exemplary or Recognized (standard system) or Commended (alternative education system); those receiving Acceptable ratings in either the standard or alternative education system; and those receiving ratings of Low-Performing (standard system) or Needs Peer Review (alternative education system). Table 6.5 presents students' mean importance ratings for each factor influencing their choice of school. Students in all three categories rated teacher quality and parental opinion factors as the most influential reasons for their choice of school. Students in more highly rated schools, however, assigned higher levels of importance to teacher quality and parental opinion than did students in less highly rated schools. Additionally, students in schools rated Exemplary, Commended, or Recognized were less likely to report that poor grades or getting into trouble at their previous school were influential factors in their choice of a school, and they cited the desire for more challenging classes as a more important factor in their choice.

Table 6.5
Reasons Students and Their Families Chose a Charter School, by 2001-02 Accountability Rating, as Mean of Respondents

Decision Factor	High-Performing[a] *N*=529	Acceptable[b] *N* = 3,919	Low-Performing[c] *N* = 1,116	All Charters N=5,564
Good teachers at this school	3.0	2.8	2.7	2.8
Parents think school is better	3.1	2.6	2.8	2.7
Previous teachers did not help me enough	2.3	2.4	2.4	2.4
Poor grades at previous school	2.1	2.4	2.5	2.4
Fewer student conflicts	2.3	2.2	2.2	2.2
Smaller class sizes	1.9	2.1	2.1	2.1
More challenging classes	2.5	1.9	1.9	2.0
Trouble at previous school	1.8	2.1	2.1	2.0
School is smaller	1.8	2.0	2.1	2.0
School is close to home	1.8	1.9	1.8	1.9
Friends attending this school	2.0	1.8	2.0	1.9

Note. Mean rating based on 4-point scale: *not important* (1), *somewhat important* (2), *important* (3), *very important* (4).
[a] Campuses rated as Exemplary or Recognized (standard system) or Commended (alternative system); *N*=6.
[b] Campuses rated as Acceptable (standard and alternative systems); *N*=26.
[c] Campuses rated as Low-Performing (standard system) or Needs Peer Review (alternative system); *N*=15.

SATISFACTION WITH CHARTER SCHOOLS

Researchers also sought to gauge students' satisfaction with and beliefs about their current charter school. Students rated a variety of statements (e.g., "I feel safe at this school") on a 4-point scale as *strongly disagree* (1), *disagree* (2), *agree* (3), or *strongly agree* (4). Figure 2 displays students' responses in order of their level of agreement. The vast majority of students (87 percent) agree or strongly agree that they work hard to earn the grades they get at the charter school. Large percentages of students also indicate that their teachers know them by name (82 percent), encourage them to think about their future (80 percent), and help them understand concepts (79 percent). Approximately three out of four students feel that the charter school is a good choice for them (73 percent). About 70 percent feel safe at school (69 percent) and learn more at this school (67 percent). However, less than half (47 percent) of the students believe that other students help them learn and students are interested in learning (49 percent). In addition, only 33 percent agree that the school has enough extracurricular activities, and only 29 percent agree that they have more homework at their current school than at their previous school.

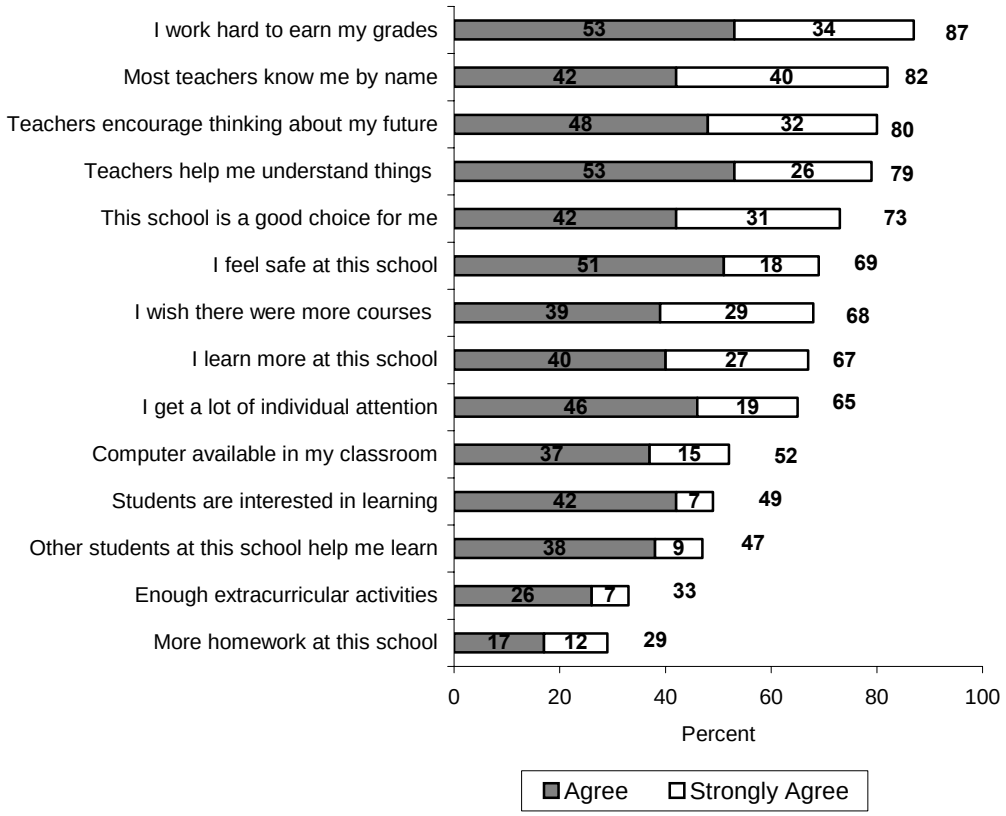

Figure 6.2. Students' opinions about their charter school.

Table 6.6 compares responses of students in schools serving primarily at-risk students to those serving fewer at-risk students. Overall, the responses are similar for students in both types of charter schools. Seven of the factors were given the same ratings by students from both charter school classifications. On another six factors, the mean ratings for students in schools serving primarily at-risk students were slightly lower (0.1 to 0.2 points lower on a 4.0 point scale) than the mean ratings for students in schools serving fewer at-risk students. For example, there is a small difference (0.2 points) in average ratings between the two groups of students for the statement, "This school is a good choice for me." The lower mean rating in schools serving primarily at-risk students indicates that these students are slightly less satisfied with their schools. On one factor, computer availability in the classroom, the mean rating was slightly higher (0.1 points) for students in schools with larger at-risk populations.

Students' satisfaction with their charter school declined slightly across two survey years with lower student satisfaction ratings for 9 of 14 statements.

Table 6.6
Students' Opinions About Their Charter School, as Mean of Respondents

Student Opinion	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk *N*=2,850	CS < 70% At-Risk *N*=3,599	All Charter Schools 2004 *N*=6,449	All Charter Schools 2003 *N*=5,159
I work hard to earn my grades	3.1	3.2	3.2	3.2
Most teachers know me by name	3.1	3.3	3.2	3.2
Teachers encourage thinking about my future	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.1
Teachers help me understand things	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
This school is a good choice for me	2.8	3.0	2.9	3.0
I learn more at this school	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.9
I feel safe at this school	2.7	2.8	2.7	2.8
I get a lot of individual attention	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.8
I wish there were more courses	2.8	2.9	2.9	2.8
Computer available in my classroom	2.5	2.4	2.5	2.6
Students are interested in learning	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.5
Other students help me learn	2.3	2.3	2.3	2.5
Enough extracurricular activities	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.2
More homework at this school	2.0	2.2	2.1	2.1

Note. Mean rating based on a 4-point scale: *strongly disagree* (1), *disagree* (2), *agree* (3), *strongly agree* (4).

Comparisons by Accountability Ratings

Table 6.7 presents students' responses regarding their current charter school, organized by 2001-02 campus accountability ratings. For 13 of the 14 statements, students attending Exemplary, Commended, or Recognized schools assigned higher levels of agreement to the statements than students in less highly rated schools. In particular, students in higher performing charter schools are more likely to believe they get more homework at school (3.2 compared to 2.0 and 2.1). Examples of other statements rated slightly higher by students in top-rated charter schools include teachers helping students understand, teachers encouraging thinking about students' futures, a wish for more good courses, a sense that students learn more at the school, feeling safe at school, and having sufficient extracurricular activities.

Table 6.7
Students' Opinions About Their Charter School, by 2001-02 Accountability Rating, as Mean of Respondents

Student Opinion	High-Performing *N*=529	Acceptable *N*=3,919	Low-Performing *N*=1,116	All Charters *N*=5,564
Most teachers know my name	3.4	3.1	3.3	3.2
I work hard to earn my grades	3.3	3.2	3.2	3.2
Teachers help me understand	3.2	3.0	2.9	3.0
Teachers encourage thinking about my future	3.3	3.0	3.0	3.0
I wish there were more courses	3.1	2.8	2.9	2.9
This school is good choice for me	3.0	2.9	2.8	2.9
I learn more at this school	3.2	2.8	2.7	2.8
I feel safe at this school	2.9	2.7	2.6	2.7
I get a lot of individual attention	2.8	2.7	2.6	2.7
Computer available in my classroom	2.5	2.5	2.4	2.5
Students are interested in learning	2.5	2.4	2.2	2.4
Other students help me learn	2.4	2.3	2.3	2.3
More homework at this school	3.2	2.0	2.1	2.1
Enough extracurricular activities	2.3	2.1	2.0	2.1

Note. Mean rating based on a 4-point scale: *strongly disagree* (1), *disagree* (2), *agree* (3), *strongly agree* (4).

In addition to responding to survey items, students had the opportunity to write responses to the following questions:

- What do you like most about this charter school?
- What is the biggest problem or the thing you dislike the most at this school?

Students' responses were analyzed to identify particular issues or themes mentioned frequently by students.

Positive Aspects of Charter Schools

Generally, students' comments regarding the most positive aspects of their school centered on *teachers*, *school and class size, self-paced instruction*, and *ease of schooling*. Similar to the results seen in the quantitative survey items, many students felt their teachers were fair, understanding, helpful, attentive, and caring. One student wrote, "The teachers are fair, and you take your time in doing your work." Another stated, "You have more time to do and understand your work. You also work at your own pace." Yet another said, "Teachers have time to explain the work. They have more one-on-one time with students."

Smaller school and class sizes were also mentioned. "Knowing everyone" was mentioned by several students. Students liked the smaller classes because it allowed for more personal attention. One student explained, "When you need help, you get help immediately." A second student stated, "The classes are not as big as public school, so the teachers have more time to help you." Another said, "It's small, and everybody knows almost everyone." (Note that not all

charter schools have small class sizes. Compared to public schools statewide, the student-teacher ratio is actually higher in charter schools.)

A number of schools surveyed utilize a self-paced (often computerized) educational program with an abbreviated daily schedule. Student responses in these types of schools differed from responses offered by students in other schools. Students in these schools were more likely to mention *self-paced instruction*, a *flexible curriculum*, and *ease of schooling*. These students wrote about working at their own pace and not following a structured program. One student stated, "You are able to work at your own pace and attend any class desired during the day." Another said, "It has a slightly laid back environment, and unique assignments." School being easy and not taking up much time was mentioned very often. Sample responses included, "This school is easier to pass," "You can graduate in three years," "It's easier and only half a day," "There is no homework," "We go home after testing," "We get out at 12:00," and "Periods are only 30 minutes." Several students pointed out that the short school day allowed them to retain a job or care for their children.

In contrast to students enrolled in schools utilizing a self-paced program, students in other charter schools reported liking different features of their schools. These students were more likely to say they *learn more* in their school and that the work is *more challenging*. One student stated, "They give us a lot of opportunities to prepare for college." Students in these schools also said they like specific aspects of the *curriculum* (e.g., management class, music class, field trips, the orchestra, etc.), as well as the security (e.g., there is "more order than in public schools") and learning environment (e.g., it is a "quiet place to work") provided by the smaller school size.

School Problems and Concerns

Students' responses regarding things they dislike about their school were less distinctive by school type. Generally, students commented on issues that typically concern them—*school rules including dress codes or uniform requirements* and *school food*. Students had general complaints about rules like mandatory searches, no cell phones, and punishment being unfair, as well as restrictions enforced by the school regarding clothing (e.g., no piercings, no facial hair, wearing blue clothes) or uniforms. Many students also wrote responses about their dislike of the food provided by the school, lack of or poor selection from vending machines, and the length or structure of lunch periods.

Commonly mentioned issues related to *school facilities* or *supplies*. Students indicated that their schools were too small, in poor condition (e.g., inadequate heating system, overcrowding, a dirty building), lacked facilities like a gym, cafeteria, or lockers, or they did not have adequate supplies such as books or computers. Similar to results from the survey items, a number of students also noted a *lack of extracurricular activities* at their schools. These included no field trips, sports teams (e.g., tennis, soccer, baseball), and clubs. Several students stated that their school had *financial problems*.

Consistent with students' survey responses, some students mentioned needing a *wider selection of course offerings* (e.g., physical education, history of math, spelling, automobile technology, and language classes like Spanish and French). Additionally, a few students said their *schoolwork was not challenging*, with comments like "I'm not challenged" and "E-Z grades."

Others stated that there were *disruptive classmates*. One student stated, "It's hard for me to learn here, the teachers try to teach, but there are constant disruptions from students, which makes it impossible to receive instructions." The school being *unorganized* was another area of concern for some students. Other students mentioned *not receiving adequate assistance from their teachers*. Some students indicated that the lack of assistance was due to overcrowding, the school schedule (e.g., teachers could not help because they have lunch duty), lack of tutors, and too little class time. Others reported that some of their *teachers were not skilled* in explaining ideas or concepts. One student wrote, "The thing I dislike most is that we don't do much around here, and some teachers don't know how to teach, and we need more attention."

STUDENT GRADES

One of the items to be considered in the evaluation of open-enrollment charter schools is student grades [TEC, §12.118 (b)(3)]. On one part of the survey, students were asked to report the kinds of grades received at their previous school and at their current charter school. Students selected from among options relating to traditional grading standards: *Mostly A's*, *A's and B's*, *Mostly B's*, *Mostly B's and C's*, and so forth. Figure 6.3 shows that students' reported grades have improved from their previous school to their current charter school. The percent of students earning *mostly A's* or *mostly A's and B's* increased from 31 percent to 45 percent, while the percent of students making *C's and D's* or *D's and F's* declined from 23 percent to 9 percent.

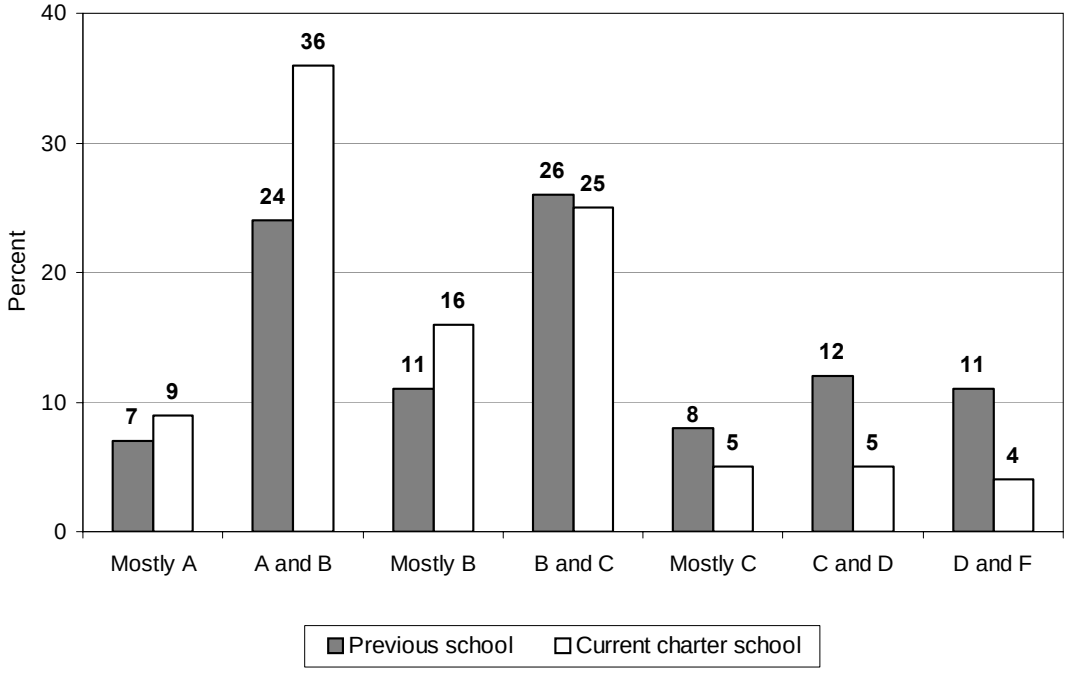

Figure 6.3. Percent of students reporting the kinds of grades received in their previous school and current charter school (N = 6,449).

Table 6.8 compares student grades by school type. Students in both types of schools indicate their grades have improved at their current charter school. There are little differences in school types. For example, while 42 percent of students in schools serving 70 percent or more at-risk students said they earned *mostly B's* or higher at their previous school, 59 percent said they earned *mostly B's* or higher at their current charter school. Those percentages in schools serving 70 percent or less at-risk students are 44 percent who said they earned *mostly B's* or higher at their previous school, and 64 percent who said they earned those grades at their current charter school. Lower percentages of students in both types of schools report earning *D's and F's* in their current schools as compared to their previous schools.

Students' reports of their grades earned in their previous and current charter school varied little by survey year. Like 2004, students in the previous survey year reported improved grades as they moved to the charter school.

Table 6.8
Student Grades Earned at Previous School and Current Charter School (Percent)

	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk *N*=2,850		CS < 70% At-Risk *N*=3,599		All Charter Schools *N*=6,449	
Grade	Previous School	Current School	Previous School	Current School	Previous School	Current School
Mostly A	5.1	8.3	9.2	9.7	7.4	9.1
A and B	24.1	34.1	24.1	37.6	24.1	36.1
Mostly B	12.4	16.3	10.5	16.3	11.3	16.3
B and C	26.7	26.2	25.1	24.2	25.8	25.1
Mostly C	9.5	5.8	7.4	4.4	8.3	5.0
C and D	11.7	5.4	12.0	4.5	11.9	4.9
D and F	10.5	3.9	11.6	3.2	11.2	3.5

FUTURE PLANS

Table 6.9 presents students' responses about their plans after high school. Overall, approximately half of students plan to attend a four-year college (33 percent) or a community college (15 percent). When comparing responses from students in both types of schools, small differences emerge. Students in schools serving primarily at-risk students are more likely to report planning to get a job. A lower percentage of students in schools serving 70 percent or more at-risk students indicate they plan to attend a four-year college (29 percent) than students in schools serving fewer at-risk students (37 percent). Students' post-high school plans changed little between the 2003 and 2004 surveys.

Table 6.9
Students' Post-High School Plans (Percent)

Student Plans	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk *N*=2,850	CS < 70% At-Risk *N*=3,599	All Charter Schools *N*=6,449
Go to a four-year college	28.8	36.5	33.1
Other	15.6	15.1	15.3
Go to a community college	14.9	15.6	15.3
Get a job	16.3	10.4	13.0
Don't know	10.6	10.3	10.4
Join the military	7.0	6.6	6.8
Go to a technical school	6.8	5.4	6.0

Students' reports of their plans after high school were also analyzed by grade level (see Table 6.10). While the same general pattern of responses is apparent, some noticeable differences between middle school and high school students emerge. A significantly higher percentage of middle school students say they plan to attend a four-year college (52 percent compared to 25 percent). Conversely, more high school students report they plan to attend a community college (19 percent compared to 8 percent). While this seems counterintuitive, it may be that high school students realize the challenges they face in attending a four-year college and see community college as a more attainable option.

Table 6.10
Students' Post-High School Plans by Grade Level (Percent)

Student Plans	Middle School Students *N*=1,963	High School Students *N*=4,452	All Charter Schools *N*=6,415
Go to a four-year college	51.6	25.0	33.2
Other	10.8	17.2	15.2
Go to a community college	7.5	18.8	15.4
Get a job	10.6	14.1	13.1
Don't know	10.9	10.2	10.4
Join the military	6.4	7.0	6.8
Go to a technical school	2.3	7.6	6.0

Lastly, students were asked to indicate whether they would attend their current charter school the following year. As Table 6.11 shows, under half (43 percent) report that they will return to their charter school. Students in schools serving fewer at-risk students, however, are more likely to say that they will attend their charter school the following year than those in schools serving primarily at-risk students (47 percent compared to 40 percent). Comparisons with survey results for 2003 reveal that the percentage of students planning to attend the charter school the following year has declined, and the decline was larger in charters serving fewer at-risk students.

Table 6.11
Plans to Attend Charter School Next Year (Percent)

Response	CS ≥ 70% At-Risk	CS < 70% At-Risk	All Charter Schools
2004	***N*=2,850**	***N*=3,599**	***N*=6,449**
Yes	39.6	46.5	43.4
No	39.9	29.7	34.2
Not sure	20.6	23.8	22.4
2003	***N*=1,818**	***N*=3,341**	***N*=5,159**
Yes	40.8	62.5	55.1
No	35.6	14.0	21.2
Not sure	24.2	23.6	23.8

Note. Includes responses from only those students eligible to return to the same charter school.

CHARTER SCHOOL ORGANIZATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS AND STUDENT SATISFACTION

The relationships between student satisfaction with their charter schools and school characteristics were explored using hierarchical linear modeling (HLM). Data for the analyses came from the 2003-04 student and teacher surveys and charter school organizational characteristics extracted from 2003-04 AEIS data files. (See a detailed explanation of procedures in Appendix D.)

Methodology—Constructing Variables

Researchers first conducted analyses of student and teacher survey items to construct measures of students' *general school satisfaction, teacher satisfaction,* and teachers' perceptions of *student behavioral problems.* In addition, we constructed a measure of *student-reported grades*.

Student satisfaction. The 14 student survey items covering views on and satisfaction with charter schools were analyzed using maximum likelihood factor analysis. One factor, *general school satisfaction*, accounted for 31 percent of the item variance. Items defining this factor include (a) this school is a good choice for me, (b) I get a lot of individual attention, (c) I am learning more at this school, (d) teachers help me understand, (e) I feel safe at this school, (f) teachers encourage me to think about the future, and (g) students at this school are interested in learning. Factor scores were computed for each student, and these school satisfaction scores were used as the dependent variable in the analyses described below.

Teacher perceptions of charter school. The 19 teacher survey items covering views on student discipline and charter school operations were also analyzed using maximum likelihood factor analysis. Two distinct factors emerged. One *teacher satisfaction* factor (e.g., I am satisfied with the curriculum; the school has effective leadership, is meeting student needs not addressed at other schools, supports teacher autonomy, has high standards and expectations, and has strong community support) accounted for 28 percent of the item variance. A second factor, *student behavioral problems* (e.g., student absenteeism and tardiness, drug or alcohol abuse, vandalism of school property, and student possession of weapons) accounted for 11 percent of the item

variance. Factor scores on each factor were computed for each teacher, aggregated at the campus level, and used as independent variables in predicting campus student satisfaction.

Student-reported grades. Student-reported grades also came from the 2003-04 student survey. Students selected the "kinds of grades" they get at their "charter school this school year," with selections ranging from "mostly A's" to "mostly F's."

Methodology—Statistical Analysis

Statistical analyses revealed that charter schools vary in their levels of *general student satisfaction*. Some charter schools have relatively high levels of student satisfaction, others have moderate levels, and still others have low levels of student satisfaction. Our goal was to account for this variation in charter school student satisfaction. However, before we could do this, we had to control for factors that were related to student satisfaction within charter schools. Specifically, we controlled for gender (1 if female, 0 if male), ethnicity (1 if other, 0 if Hispanic or African American), grade level (0 if grade 6 through 6 if grade 12), plans to attend a four-year college (1 if yes, 0 if no), and reported course grades (ranging from 8, mostly A's, to 0, mostly F's).

Once we had controlled the extent to which student satisfaction was shaped by gender, ethnicity, grade level, future plans, and reported grades, we examined a variety of organizational factors that could possibly explain variation in student satisfaction between charter schools. These factors included the student-to-teacher ratio, teacher experience in years, the total per-pupil operating expenditure, average teacher salary, the percentage of non-degreed teachers, student mobility, the percentage of students passing all 2003-04 TAKS tests, the number of students in the school, high minority concentration (1 if the percentage of Hispanic and African-American students exceeded 70 percent, 0 otherwise), and campus averages of the teacher survey *teacher satisfaction* and *student behavioral problems* scales.

Results

Findings for the HLM analysis revealed that, within charter schools, female students tended to be more satisfied than males, and minority students tended to be more satisfied than non-minority students. In addition, student satisfaction was higher when course grades were perceived as being high.

Several organizational characteristics were also associated with levels of charter school students' satisfaction. Levels of student satisfaction were *unexpectedly* higher in charter schools having a higher student-to-teacher ratio. Although this finding is difficult to interpret, it may indicate higher levels of satisfaction in schools with less than 70 percent at risk students, which tend to have higher student-to-teacher ratios compared to schools with more students at risk. On the contrary, a high (greater than 70 percent) concentration of African American and/or Hispanic students was associated with lower charter school student satisfaction. Increased student mobility was also associated with lower charter school student satisfaction.

Teacher satisfaction with their charter school was also important. Levels of charter school student satisfaction were higher when school-level teacher satisfaction scores were higher. That is, when teachers were satisfied with their charter school and felt that the school was meeting student needs and had high standards, effective leadership that supports teacher autonomy,

community and financial support, and appropriate special education services, students were more satisfied with their charter school.

SUMMARY

Charter school students indicate that teacher quality and the opinions of their parents are the most important factors influencing their decision to attend the charter school. Other influential factors include previous teachers not providing enough help, poor grades at a previous school, and fewer student conflicts.

The ratings of the factors influencing school choice were compared for students in high-performing, acceptable, and low-performing charter schools. Students in the high-performing charter schools assigned higher levels of importance to teacher quality and parental opinion than did students in less highly rated schools. These students were also less likely to report that poor grades or getting into trouble at their previous school were influential factors in their choice of school. In addition, they were more likely to cite the desire for more challenging classes as an important factor in school choice.

Students report varying levels of satisfaction with their charter schools. Almost 90 percent of students believe that they work hard to earn the grades they get at the charter school. Large percentages also indicate that their teachers know them by name, encourage them to think about their future, and help them understand concepts. Approximately 70 percent feel that the charter school is a good choice for them, feel safe at school, and learn more at this school. However, only about half of the students believe that other students help them learn and students are interested in learning. In addition, only about 33 percent agree that the school has enough extracurricular activities, and only about 30 percent agree that they have more homework at their current school than at their previous school. Overall, the responses are similar for students in schools serving primarily at-risk students compared to schools serving fewer at-risk students. Students in schools serving 70 percent or more at-risk students are only slightly less likely to feel that *this school is a good choice for me*.

Students in higher performing charter schools are more likely to believe they get more homework at school. They are also more likely to feel they learn more at school, are safe at school, have sufficient extracurricular activities, and teachers help them understand and encourage thinking about their future. These students in higher performing charter schools also wish for more courses.

Charter school students' reported grades have improved from their previous school to their current charter school. The percentage of students earning *mostly A's* or *mostly A's and B's* has increased, while the percentage of students making *C's and D's* or *D's and F's* has decreased.

Approximately half of charter school students plan to attend a four-year college or a community college. Students in schools serving primarily at-risk students are more likely to report planning to get a job, and slightly less likely to indicate they plan to attend a four-year college. A significantly higher percentage of middle school students say they plan to attend a four-year college. Conversely, more high school students report they plan to attend a community college. It

may be that high school students realize the challenges they face in attending a four-year college and see community college as a more attainable option.

Lastly, over 40 percent of charter school students report that they will return to their charter school next year. Students in schools serving fewer at-risk students are more likely to say that they will attend their charter school the following year than those in schools serving primarily at-risk students.

The relationships between organizational characteristics and levels of charter school student satisfaction were explored using AEIS as well as student and teacher survey data. It was found that females, minority students, and students with higher course grades were more satisfied with their charter schools. In addition, several organizational factors were associated with higher school levels of student satisfaction. These included a higher student-to-teacher ratio, a lower concentration of minority students (70 percent or less), and lower student mobility. In addition, levels of charter school student satisfaction were higher when teachers were more satisfied with the charter school. When teachers were satisfied with their school, its services, standards, leadership, resources, and community support, students as a group were more satisfied.