

Executive Summary

Components of the Report

This report is organized into several sections. First is the **Executive Summary**, followed by **Charter School Data** sections for each of the charter schools. These data include: each school's mission statement; attendance and dropout statistics; the distribution of charter schools and enrollment of students by grade, gender, and ethnicity; the number of reported English language learners; student academic performance on all State, national, and local standardized assessments; fiscal impact upon the sending districts; and a comparison of assets and liabilities, total net assets or fund balance, and changes in unrestricted net assets or fund balance, as described in the yearly audits. A **Discussion and Conclusions** section follows, which provides detailed analyses of the data. A **Recommendations** section then follows, which includes a rationale for expanding, terminating or modifying the charter school approach. The appendices include data summaries for all charter schools, projections of financial stability, a list of all current approved charter schools, and the New York Charter Schools Act of 1998. The attachments include all annual reports for all charter schools for the school years 1999-2000 through 2002-03.

Background

The Board of Regents is required by §2857(4) of the Education Law to “review the educational effectiveness of the charter school approach authorized by this article and the effect of charter schools on the public and nonpublic school systems.” This report contains data for each charter school that include its mission statement, attendance statistics and dropout rates, student performance on standardized tests, and fiscal impact data. Where appropriate, comparisons with other public schools are made. Recommendations are provided concerning the charter school approach in New York State.

Projections of financial stability, in the form of five-year projected revenues and expenses, are included in Appendix B. It should be noted that such information is not available for all schools chartered by either the Trustees of the State University of New York or the Chancellor of the New York City Schools. Representatives from those charter entities have concluded that the Department has no authority to ask charter schools for any information other than that specifically referenced by the New York Charter Schools Act. Related correspondence may also be found in Appendix B.

Distribution and Enrollment

To date, a total of 60 charter schools have been created by the Board of Regents (16), the Chancellor of the New York City Public Schools (9), the Trustees of the State University of New York (34), and the Buffalo Board of Education (1). Of those, 55 continue to exist today. In the 2003-04 school year, 50 of them are open for instruction. Three have surrendered their charters, and two have had their charters revoked. Most

charter schools are located in urban areas and generally serve a mostly minority student population. The dispersal of approved charter schools in New York State as of July 18, 2003 is as follows:

- Albany: three
- Buffalo: nine
- Kenmore-Tonawanda: one
- Lackawanna: one
- New York City: 29
- Riverhead: one
- Rochester: four
- Roosevelt: one
- Schenectady: one
- Syracuse: three
- Troy: one
- Wainscott: one

The distribution of students overall by gender and ethnicity for the 2002-03 school year is as follows:

- Male: 5,160 students/48.8 percent
- Female: 5,417 students/51.2 percent
- Black: 7,101 students/67.1 percent
- Hispanic: 1,678 students/15.9 percent
- White: 1,598 students/15.1 percent
- American Indian/Alaskan Native and Asian/Pacific Islander: 200 students/1.9 percent
- Total number of students in charter schools 2002-03: 10,577

Based on these data, it is clear that charter schools attract a predominantly minority population. Two-thirds of the students are Black, which is a high percentage compared to the Black enrollment in the districts of location. The percent of Hispanic students in charter schools is low (15.9 percent) compared to the enrollment of Hispanic students in the districts of location. The percent of White students in charter schools is generally less than that seen in the districts of location.

There are many students in poverty attending charter schools. The majority of charter school students are eligible for free or reduced lunch (74 percent in 2002-03). Many charter schools have over 50 percent of their students receiving public welfare. In 2002-03, 21 of 37 charter schools reported having more than 50 percent of their students coming from families who receive public welfare.

The percent of students with disabilities in charter school is smaller compared to the percent of students with disabilities in the districts of location. In 2002-03, the charter schools reported a total of 896 students with disabilities out of 10,577 students.

In the district of location the percent generally ranged from 10.4 percent in Roosevelt to 16.9 percent in Syracuse (Wainscott reported only 4.1 percent).

Student Academic Performance

Student academic performance results for charter schools tend to be mixed. First-year test results on State assessments tend to be very low, which may be explained in part because the grade 4 State English Language Arts (ELA) exam is given only four months after students have enrolled in a charter school for the first time. Most charter schools fall below State standards on grade 4 ELA, grade 8 ELA, and grade 8 math. The majority of charter schools meet the State standard for grade 4 math. The performance of general education students in charter schools is below that of general education students in the districts of location for grade 4 ELA and math and grade 8 math. However, general education students in charter schools perform better than the general education students in the districts of location on grade 8 ELA. Students with disabilities in charter schools generally performed at comparable levels to students with disabilities in the districts of location on all State assessments in grades 4 and 8.

Most charter schools, even those which had very low student academic performance on the State assessments, have improved. The pattern of gains accelerated in 2002-03. The largest improvement was seen in the grade 4 math results, consistent with the statewide pattern of results for all public schools. In many cases, charter school gains exceeded the gains made by their districts of location (12 of 16 charter schools that had given the grade 4 math exam for two or more years). See also Tables 4 - 7 in Appendix A.

The number of years a charter school has been in operation does not predict student academic performance on State assessments. Some of the highest performing charter schools were only in their first year of operation when they demonstrated high levels of student performance (e.g., the South Buffalo Charter School and the Tapestry Charter School, both in Buffalo, for grade 4 ELA). Conversely, some of the lowest performing charter schools are in their third or fourth year of operation (e.g., the John V. Lindsay Wildcat Academy Charter School in CSD #2 and the New Covenant Charter School in Albany, on grade 8 math).

In 2000-01, one charter school (the REACH Charter School) was considered to be furthest from State standards. In 2001-02, five charter schools (the Ark Community Charter School in Troy, the Charter School of Science and Technology in Rochester, the Rochester Leadership Academy Charter School in Rochester, the Sisulu Children's Academy Charter School in CSD #5, and the Stepping Stone Academy Charter School in Buffalo) were considered to be furthest from State standards. In 2003-03, two charter schools (the John V. Lindsay Wildcat Academy Charter School in CSD#2 and the New Covenant Charter School in Albany) were considered to be furthest from State standards.

Conversely, the KIPP Academy Charter School in CSD #7 has consistently been the highest performing charter school on both the grade 8 ELA and math State assessments over the past three years. Student achievement has ranged from 61.5 percent of students scoring at or above Level 3 on both the grade ELA and math exams in 2001-02 to 78.9 percent of students scoring at or above Level 3 on the grade 8 math exam in 2002-03. The South Buffalo Charter School in Buffalo and the Beginning with Children Charter School in CSD #14 have been the highest performers in grade 4 ELA. The Renaissance Charter School in CSD #30 has consistently been the highest performing charter school on the grade 4 State assessment in math over the past three years. Student achievement has ranged from 60.0 percent of students scoring at or above Level 3 in 2000-01 to 95.6 percent of students so scoring in 2002-03. All of these high-performing charter schools exceed the State standards.

Fiscal Impact

In the 1999-2000 school year, the lowest adjusted expense per pupil (AEP) paid was \$6,207 per student in New York City, and the highest was \$8,104 per pupil paid by the Troy City School District. The average AEP was \$6,523. Overall fiscal impact in New York City appeared to be negligible (0.01 – 0.03 percent impact on the district budget), while it was 2.76 percent of the Albany City School District budget.

In the 2000-01 school year, the lowest AEP paid was \$6,029 per student in Syracuse, and the highest was \$26,287 per pupil paid by the Wainscott Common School District. The average AEP was \$6,663. Overall fiscal impact in New York City appeared to be negligible (0.002 – 0.03 percent impact on the district budget). In 2000-01, fiscal impact ranged from .01 percent of the school budget for several school districts with a small number of students attending charter schools to 3.05 percent of the Roosevelt Union Free School District budget.

In the 2001-02 school year, the lowest AEP paid was \$5,902 per student in the Cleveland Hill Union Free School District, and the highest was \$33,379 per pupil paid by the Bridgehampton Union Free School District. The mean AEP was \$7,425. Overall fiscal impact in New York City appeared to be negligible (0.193 percent impact overall on the district budget). In 2001-02, fiscal impact ranged from .01 percent of the school budget for several school districts with a small number of students attending charter schools to 4.40 percent of the Albany City School District budget. Cumulative impact was 2.90 percent on the Rochester City School District budget and 2.66 percent on the Buffalo City School District budget.

For the 2002-03 school year, the lowest AEP paid was \$6,177 per student in the Gananda Central School District, and the highest paid was \$18,681 per pupil by the Shelter Island Union Free School District. The average AEP was \$8,554. Overall fiscal impact in New York City appeared to be negligible (0.29 percent overall on the district budget). Fiscal impact ranged from 0.01 of the school budget for several school districts with a small number of students attending charter schools to 5.30 percent of the Lackawanna City School District Budget. The cumulative fiscal impact was 5.00

percent for the Albany City Schools, 3.75 percent for the West Irondequoit Central Schools, 3.33 percent for the Buffalo City Schools, 2.94 percent for the Rochester City Schools, 2.05 percent for the Schenectady City Schools, and 2.02 percent for the Syracuse City Schools.

Charter School Data

This section provides information for each charter school that has been created since the enactment of the New York Charter Schools Act. At a minimum, that information includes:

- the school's mission statement as provided in its charter;
- the maximum allowable enrollment per year, as determined by the charter;
- attendance and dropout statistics from each school's BEDS report for each year that the school has provided instruction;
- student enrollment disaggregated by grade, gender, and ethnicity, as reported by the schools on their BEDS reports;
- student achievement data from State test results and/or the school's annual report for each year that the school has provided instruction;
- fiscal impact data, which are taken from Schedule U of the State Aid Claim Worksheet and Projections (§3601 and §3604(11) of Education Law);
- comparisons of assets and liabilities, total net assets or fund balance, and changes in unrestricted net assets or fund balance, as described in the yearly audits; and
- projections of financial stability based upon five-year projected revenues and expenditures

Note that most of the information is self-reported by the charter schools, and it is their responsibility to ensure the accuracy of the data. If the reader has questions regarding the accuracy of any data, s/he is encouraged to contact the charter school directly.

Additional data may also be included, as appropriate, to provide a more comprehensive picture of a particular charter school.

Summary data are also provided in Appendix A. The projections of financial stability, in the form of revenues and expenditures projected over five years, may be found in Appendix B.