

**CHARTER SCHOOLS IN TENNESSEE:
ISSUES OF INNOVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY**



February 2008



STATE OF TENNESSEE

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February 19, 2008

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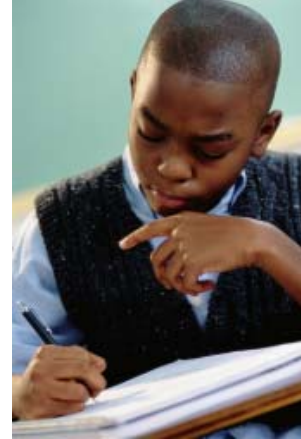
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Transmitted herewith is a review of Tennessee charter schools as directed by Public Chapter 414 of 2005. The report discusses characteristics of Tennessee's charter schools, student achievement and teaching methods in Tennessee's charter schools, and elements of charter school legislation. The report contains recommendations for charter school policy and provides information that may be useful to policymakers in considering ways to strengthen the state's educational system.

Sincerely,

John G. Morgan
Comptroller of the Treasury

CHARTER SCHOOLS IN TENNESSEE: ISSUES OF INNOVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Charter schools are publicly funded schools sponsored and operated by not-for-profit organizations.¹ They are affiliated with a school district through a written contract but operate independent of many regulations that apply to traditional public schools.

Charter schools are created to function both as laboratories for educational innovation and as viable educational alternatives for parents and students. To help charter schools fulfill the laboratory function, policymakers must consider issues of school autonomy and dissemination of best practices. In order to help charter schools fulfill their intended function as an educational alternative for parents and students, policymakers must consider issues of sustainability for individual schools.

Public Chapter 414 (2005) required the Comptroller's Office of Education Accountability to complete two charter school studies. The first of these reports, *A Look at Tennessee's Charter Schools*, was released in March 2006 and reviewed state and national charter school research related to school and student achievement.² This report addresses the second legislative request by reviewing the following topics:

- status of charter schools in achieving the purposes established in *Tennessee Code Annotated (T.C.A.) 49-13-102*,
- test data from charter schools and traditional public schools in Tennessee,
- teaching methods and governance structures of charter schools in Tennessee,
- charter school legislation and student achievement in other states, and
- recommendations for improvement.

This report describes various practices in and features of Tennessee's charter schools. Information is based on interviews with charter school administrators and board members, and, as such, represents an internal assessment of the charter school experiment. Some of these practices and features are present to varying degrees in traditional public schools; many characteristics of successful charter schools are characteristics of successful traditional public schools. (See Appendix A for a complete list of contacts.)

Laboratories for Educational Innovation: Autonomy and Dissemination

Neither the Tennessee Department of Education nor the local education agencies (LEAs) have established mechanisms to identify and disseminate charter schools' best practices.

Consequently, Tennessee charter schools are not functioning as laboratories of educational innovation for implementation statewide. (See pages 8-9.)

Many Tennessee charter schools have adopted broad missions. The broad purposes reported by charter school administrators and board members include revitalizing the local community, educating parents, and preparing students for college. (See pages 9-10.)

Charter school administrators view the autonomy to select teachers as an essential benefit. Many charter school administrators emphasize the importance of hiring teachers directly supportive of the school's mission. Charter school teachers in Tennessee enter one year renewable contracts or work without contracts. (See page 10.)

Charter school administrators grant teachers professional flexibility, but require increased responsibility. Administrators encourage and challenge teachers to be creative and to develop their skills, and they expect teachers to take on increased responsibility. (See page 10.)

Teachers in Tennessee charter schools and traditional schools use similar instructional practices. Both school types tended to use "traditional methods" such as direct instruction and seatwork, while supplementing these methods with student-centered strategies such as higher level questioning and the teacher acting as coach/facilitator. (See page 11.)

Charter schools add instructional time in several ways. Whether through longer or additional instructional days, charter schools allow certain students to address deficiencies in their major course program or engage in enrichment courses and accelerated academic preparation courses. (See pages 11-12.)

Teachers give Tennessee charter schools higher school climate ratings than traditional schools. While both Tennessee traditional and charter schools had positive climate ratings in 2005-06 and 2006-07, the majority of School Climate Inventory items yielded higher ratings for charter school teachers in both years. (See pages 12-14.)

Tennessee charter school teachers had significantly higher positive perceptions of their schools' educational programs than their traditional school counterparts. Of particular note, the largest difference was seen in response to perceptions of the educational program encouraging students to have high standards for their own work. Perceptions in this area were more positive among charter school teachers. (See pages 14-15.)

Some charter schools have specific parental involvement requirements. Although not a condition of enrollment, many charter schools make it clear that parental involvement is strongly encouraged and expected. (See pages 15-16.)

Charter school governance structures facilitate site-based decision-making. Most charter school boards are responsible for policy setting and financial accountability. (See pages 16-17.)

Tennessee law allows only local school boards to serve as charter authorizers. The Memphis City Schools (MCS) Board of Education and the Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) Board of Education include multiple district administrative staff in the approval and renewal decision-making processes. MCS created an Office of Charter Schools, but MNPS does not have staff dedicated solely to charter school issues. (See page 17.)

Student Achievement in Tennessee's Charter Schools

Secondary Charter Schools (See pages 18-19.)

To compare student achievement in Tennessee's charter schools with that of Tennessee's traditional public schools, the Office of Education Accountability contracted with the Center for Research in Educational Policy (CREP) at the University of Memphis. After pairing each middle and high charter school student with a comparable "control" student who attended the district school that the charter school student previously attended, CREP found evidence that some charter schools are helping local school districts reach students that they were not reaching before. In middle and high schools,

- Charter school students had higher scores than control students in 46 comparisons, with 11 being statistically significant differences.³
- Control students had higher scores than charter students in 25 comparisons, with four being statistically significant differences.
- A higher percentage of charter students reached Proficient or Advanced in 35 comparisons, with three being statistically significant.
- A higher percentage of control students reached Proficient or Advanced in 18 comparisons, none of which were statistically significant differences.
- An equal percentage of charter and control students reached Proficient or Advanced in 10 comparisons. (See pages 18-19.)

Elementary Charter Schools (See pages 19-20.)

From a descriptive standpoint, elementary charter students had higher scores in the majority (58 percent) of 2007 TCAP Achievement comparisons, but few differences can be statistically attributed to attending a charter school. In Math, charter school students had higher average scores in eight of 12 grade level comparisons. In Reading/Language Arts, charter school students had higher average scores in six of 12 grade level comparisons.

Viability Educational Alternatives: Sustainability

Tennessee's student eligibility restrictions may affect the long-term viability of individual charter schools. Tennessee's charter school law is the most restrictive in the nation in terms of student eligibility.⁴ Many other state laws allow open enrollment in charter schools. Some states give preference to certain students but do not limit enrollment to the preference group. (See pages 22-23.)

Limited facilities funding compromises the continued viability of charter schools. T.C.A. 49-13-112 provides, in part, that "the local board of education shall allocate one hundred percent (100%) of the state and local education funds to the charter school on the per pupil expenditure of the LEA." The practice in Memphis City Schools and Metro Nashville Public Schools has been to allocate to charter schools only capital outlay funds included in the BEP operating funds (for FY08, capital outlay comprises about 10% of the total BEP formula) and not to allocate capital outlay funds generated outside the BEP. It is unclear if this practice is consistent with the intent of the statute.

Forty-two percent of Tennessee's charter schools have relocated from their original building; 75 percent share space with another organization. (See pages 23-24.)

The relationship between a charter school and the authorizing LEA is defined by both statute and a chartering agreement. The governing body of the charter school may amend the chartering agreement only by petitioning the chartering authority. The chartering authority may also amend the contract during the charter renewal process. (See page 24.)

Recommendations - Innovation (See page 25.)

The General Assembly may wish to authorize the Tennessee Department of Education, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, and the Tennessee Board of Regents to create a charter school institute or research center in a state public higher education institution.

The Office of Charter Schools and Choice in the Tennessee Department of Education, in collaboration and cooperation with charter schools, should identify charter school best practices and implement a system for dissemination.

School boards of authorizing districts should hold regular meetings with charter school governing boards and/or principals.

Recommendations - Sustainability (See page 25.)

The General Assembly may wish to consider making eligibility for charter school enrollment less restrictive.

The General Assembly may wish to consider revising the charter school statute to more precisely define the state and local charter school facilities funding responsibilities.

The local education agencies (LEAs) may wish to allow charter schools access to unused or underused district facilities and land.

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INTRODUCTION

Charter schools are publicly funded schools sponsored and operated by not-for-profit organizations.⁵ They are affiliated with a school district through a written contract but operate independent of many regulations that apply to traditional public schools. A charter agreement between a local education agency and a charter school sponsor organization is “a shell, into which the operators place an instructional and management program.”⁶ Charter schools therefore vary in their programmatic emphases and governance structures.

Charter school policy in large measure is guided by the two principles of autonomy and accountability. Charter schools are public schools, but have greater freedom to develop their own mission and values, educational programs, governance models, and organizational structures. In return they are subject to heightened accountability. Local education agencies monitor charter school performance on state assessments and hold charter schools accountable for fulfilling the conditions of charter agreements.

Objectives

Public Chapter 414 (2005) required the Comptroller’s Office of Education Accountability to complete two charter school studies. The first of these reports, *A Look at Tennessee’s Charter Schools*, was released in March 2006 and reviewed state and national charter school research related to school and student achievement.⁷ This report addresses the second legislative request by reviewing the following topics:

- status of charter schools in achieving the purposes established in *Tennessee Code Annotated (T.C.A.) 49-13-102*,
- test data from charter schools and traditional public schools in Tennessee,
- teaching methods and governance structures of charter schools in Tennessee,
- charter school legislation and student achievement in other states, and
- recommendations for improvement.

Methodology

Information, conclusions, and recommendations in this report are based on:

- A review of the *Tennessee Public Charter Schools Act, T.C.A. Title 49, Chapter 13*;
- Interviews with charter school administrators and governing board members;
- Interviews with staff from Memphis City Schools and Metro Nashville Public Schools;
- A review of national and state research on charter school performance; and
- Work produced by the Center for Research in Educational Policy (CREP) at the University of Memphis under contract with the Comptroller’s Office of Education Accountability (OEA). CREP compared instructional practices, school climate, teacher perceptions, and student achievement in Tennessee’s traditional and charter schools. OEA reviewed CREP’s student matching methodology and results.

See Appendix A for a complete list of persons contacted.

BACKGROUND

Nationwide Charter School Performance

The academic effectiveness of charter schools varies from state to state. Reasons are difficult to determine precisely but in general are linked to the differences in the individual charter schools. Each charter school has a unique instructional program and management structure. Each charter school is also at a different stage of development. Newer schools face start-up and implementation issues that older schools have overcome. Finally, each state has a unique charter law and policy environment. Among other features, states differ in funding, authorizing and regulatory agencies, and the amount and type of facilities assistance.

Although many studies find student achievement in charter schools differs from that in conventional public schools, the differences, positive or negative, are small. Some longitudinal studies find larger overall gains in charter schools than in traditional public schools; some find comparable gains in both settings; others find smaller overall gains in charter schools than in traditional public schools.

Higher scores in charter schools:

- Charter school students in New York City, on average, are posting higher gains in reading and math than comparable students who attend the city’s regular public schools. The strongest charter gains in New York City are in math.⁸
- Low-performing students enrolled in Texas charter schools earned higher math scores in 2006 than comparable students enrolled in traditional district schools.⁹

Mixed results:

- A Wisconsin study found positive effects of charter schools on math scores and no effect on reading scores. However, “the positive charter effect in math was smaller for African-American students than for white or Hispanic students.”¹⁰
- A study of an anonymous, large urban district found mixed effects on achievement but positive effects on student behavior.¹¹

Effect linked to age of charter school and student’s time in the charter school:

- A Florida study found that “student achievement was lower in Florida’s first-year charter schools than in conventional public schools,” but charter schools with five or more years of experience were outperforming conventional public schools.¹²
- In Texas, “students who remain continuously enrolled in charter schools for longer periods of time (e.g., three years) have improved testing outcomes.”¹³

No achievement difference:

- A California study found that students in charter schools were doing about as well as those in conventional public schools in both reading and math, in elementary and secondary grades.¹⁴
- A Michigan study found no statistically significant differences between achievement in 4th grade in charter schools and in comparable conventional public schools.¹⁵

Lower scores in charter schools:

- A North Carolina study found that “students in charter schools had lower test-score growth in both reading and math than students in public schools.”¹⁶
- An Idaho study made a cautious conclusion that charter schools have smaller achievement benefits than conventional public schools.¹⁷

Elements of Successful Charter Schools

Charter schools, and the communities they serve, vary considerably. However, the United States Department of Education has identified many similarities among successful K-8 charter schools and charter high schools.¹⁸ The Center on Innovation and Improvement also identified key principles of effective charter school models.¹⁹ These similarities and principles fall into six categories. Readers should note, however, that many characteristics of successful charter schools are characteristics of successful traditional public schools as well.

Category 1: Driven by Mission and Positive School Culture

In successful charter schools, “the mission is almost tangible” and the school maintains a positive culture where “everyone can focus on learning.”²⁰ Administrators and teachers adopt a relentless, clear focus on high expectations and student success. They establish a supportive, student-centered culture, provide the necessary support and “scaffolding” for students to be successful, and expect students to behave in a manner conducive to learning. Because the mission sets the tone for each school, administrators value the autonomy to make hiring decisions based on more than the simple possession of a teaching credential.

Category 2: Teach for Mastery and Focus on College Preparation

Successful charter schools often adopt a rigorous curriculum and provide real-world experiences to expand the student's world beyond family and neighborhood. They establish structures for both remediation and acceleration, and therefore rely upon data-driven teaching. They often use interim assessments to gauge student progress and discover which students need support, acceleration, or remediation and to spot weaknesses and help mold instruction. In addition, successful charter schools demystify the college-going experience for parents and students by allowing time to research colleges and scholarships, preparing students for the SAT and ACT exams, taking students on college tours, and providing parent workshops on financial aid.

Category 3: Innovate Across the Program

Successful charter schools take advantage of their autonomy and make creative scheduling, curriculum, and instruction decisions. They often customize the academic program to fit the needs of their students by structuring easy access to adult support through low student-to-teacher ratios, after-school tutoring, mentors from the community, and on-site specialists. In addition, their innovation often reaches into the larger community.

Category 4: Engage Families as Partners

Successful charter schools emphasize shared responsibility between families and school staff. They structure a strong connection between school and home and either encourage or require parents to be involved in their children's education. In addition, many successful charter schools provide adult education opportunities.

Category 5: Value Professional Learning

In successful charter schools, principals serve as instructional leaders and teachers are held accountable for meeting goals. Principals ensure classroom accountability through frequent classroom visits, and they encourage teachers to learn from one another. Charter school teachers are carefully selected by the individual school and may receive higher salaries and merit pay. These schools promote high quality teaching through rigorous teacher evaluations, with rewards for good performance and tough consequences for poor performance.

Category 6: Hold Themselves Accountable

Successful charter schools hold themselves accountable for academic performance and fiscal management. These schools have consistent, stable leadership, whether a principal or governing board members, and focus on continuous improvement. Principals have the autonomy to release teachers if they fail to advance the school's mission. Similarly, the governing board often has the autonomy to release the principal if he or she fails to advance the school's mission.

Tennessee's Charter Schools

T.C.A. 49-13-102 establishes multiple charter school purposes, many of which mirror other states' charter school laws. According to the U.S. Department of Education, the essence of the charter school movement is "to level the playing field so that every child has access to an excellent public education."²¹ Charter schools aim to improve the academic environment by enhancing opportunities for all involved in education – students, parents, teachers, and school administrators. (See Exhibit 1.)

T.C.A. 49-13-102 also describes the intention of the charter school legislation: the creation of new schools, the conversion of existing schools, the education of children with special needs, and the fostering and dissemination of educational innovations. All of Tennessee's current charter schools are newly created. (See Exhibit 2.)

Exhibit 1: Purposes of Tennessee’s Charter Schools

Students	Teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve learning for all students and close the achievement gap. ▪ Ensure that children have the opportunity to reach proficiency on state academic assessments. ▪ Provide options relative to the delivery of instruction for those students with special needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods. ▪ Create new professional opportunities for teachers.
Parents	Administrators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide options for parents to meet educational needs of students in high priority schools. ▪ Afford parents meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide greater decision making authority to schools and teachers in exchange for greater responsibility for student performance.

Source: T.C.A. 49-13-102

Exhibit 2: Implementation of Tennessee’s Charter School Law

Newly Created	Conversion
<p>“Provide an alternative means within the public school system for ensuring accomplishment of the necessary outcomes of education by allowing the establishment and maintenance of public charter schools that operate within a school district structure but are allowed maximum flexibility to achieve their goals.”</p> <p>Tennessee Experience: All of Tennessee’s current charter schools are newly created.</p>	<p>“Provide both the state department of education and local school systems with options relative to the governance and improvement of high priority schools failing to meet adequate yearly progress.”</p> <p>Tennessee Experience: The Memphis City Schools Board of Education recently approved the state’s first conversion charter school, but the approved school is not a high priority school.</p>
Special Education	Joint Venture with Higher Education
<p>“Provide the state department of education and local school systems with options relative to the delivery of instruction for those students with special needs as specified in the federal IDEA.”</p> <p>Tennessee Experience: Tennessee charter schools do not serve a sizable special education population.</p>	<p>“Provide local school systems the option to work in concert with the state’s public higher education institutions to establish charter school laboratories of teaching and learning as a means of fostering educational innovations for implementation statewide.”</p> <p>Tennessee Experience: Tennessee charter schools do partner with local colleges and universities for student teachers, tutors, and volunteers. However, no school districts have partnered with higher education institutions to create charter school research centers for the identification and dissemination of promising innovative practices.</p>

Sources: T.C.A. §49-13-102. Information provided by charter school administrators.

Nationally, and in Tennessee, charter schools serve a small segment of the student population.

Although charter schools have multiplied substantially since Minnesota enacted the first charter school legislation in 1991, they continue to enroll only a small portion of public school students across the United States. As of the beginning of the 2007-08 school year, nearly 4,000 charter schools were serving over one million students in 40 states²² and the District of Columbia.²³ They constitute four percent of all public schools in the U.S. and enroll approximately two percent of the K-12 student population.²⁴

Tennessee's 12 charter schools constitute 0.7 percent of all public schools in the state.

- Memphis's nine charter schools constitute 4.6 percent of all public schools in Memphis.
- Nashville's three charter schools constitute 2.3 percent of all public schools in Nashville.

Tennessee's 12 charter schools enroll 0.3 percent of all public school students in the state.

- Memphis's nine charter schools enroll 2.1 percent of all public school students in Memphis.
- Nashville's three charter schools enroll 0.6 percent of all public school students in Nashville.

Tennessee's charter schools serve a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students. Eighty-two percent of Tennessee's charter school students, compared to 52 percent of charter school students nationwide,²⁵ qualify for free and reduced price lunch. (See Exhibit 3.)

Exhibit 3: Economically Disadvantaged Students

	Charter Schools	District
Memphis City Schools	80%	83%
Metro Nashville Public Schools	89%	72%

Tennessee has relatively few charter schools. The prevalence of charter schools varies by state. Fifty-two percent (2,030) of all charter schools are located within five states – Arizona, California, Florida, Ohio, and Texas.²⁶

With 12 charter schools, Tennessee has more charter schools than 16 states – 10 states *without* charter school legislation and six *with* charter school legislation.²⁷ Exhibit 4 compares Tennessee to its neighboring states.

An estimated 500 charter schools have closed nationwide; one Tennessee charter school has closed. Most charter school closures nationwide do not result from academic performance deficiencies, but rather from financial and management deficiencies.²⁸ However, citing the inability of the school to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in Algebra I for two years in a row, the Memphis City Schools Board of Education revoked the Yo! Academy charter in August 2007.²⁹

Over three-quarters of charter schools nationwide are newly created rather than conversions of existing public schools.³⁰ All of Tennessee's current charter schools are newly created schools. However, the Memphis City Schools Board of Education approved the state's first conversion charter school in December 2007. KIPP Diamond Academy will operate as a charter school beginning in the fall of 2008. Exhibits 5 and 6 provide an overview of Tennessee's charter schools.

Exhibit 4: Charter Schools in Tennessee's Neighboring States

	Year Charter Law Passed	Charter Schools
Alabama	No law	0
Kentucky	No law	0
Mississippi	1997	1
Virginia	1998	3
Tennessee	2002	12
Arkansas	1995	20
Missouri	1998	27
Georgia	1993	71
North Carolina	1996	98
		232

Sources: U.S. Charter Schools, "State by State #'s." The Center for Education Reform, "Annual Survey of America's Charter Schools: 2006 Data," April 2007. Information provided by charter school offices within the Departments of Education in Arkansas, Georgia, and North Carolina.

Local boards of education are the sole chartering authorities in Tennessee. They are charged with approving and denying applications, closing charter schools, and renewing applications at the end of the five-year contract term. As of January 2008, Tennessee’s local boards of education had reviewed 90 charter school applications, approved 20, and renewed 4. Of the approved applications, 12 schools are in operation, one school is no longer in operation, three schools were approved but did not open, and four schools are approved to open in 2008. (See Exhibit 7.)

Exhibit 5: Timeline of Charter School Development in Tennessee

2002	The General Assembly passes the <i>Tennessee Public Charter School Act of 2002 (T.C.A. Title 49, Chapter 13)</i> .
2003	<p>Nashville – Smithson-Craighead Academy (SCA)</p> <p>Memphis – Circles of Success Learning Academy (COSLA) Memphis Academy of Health Sciences (MAHS) Memphis Academy of Science & Engineering (MASE)</p>
2004	<p>Memphis – City University School of Liberal Arts STAR Academy Yo! Academy</p>
2005	<p>The General Assembly opens charter school enrollment to low-performing <i>students</i>, in addition to students from low-performing <i>schools</i> (Public Chapter 414).</p> <p>Nashville – KIPP Academy</p> <p>Memphis – Memphis Business Academy Promise Academy Southern Avenue Charter School of Academic Excellence & Creative Arts Stax Music Academy (renamed The Soulsville Charter School in 2006)</p>
2007	<p>Nashville – LEAD Academy</p> <p>Closures – Memphis City Schools Board of Education closes Yo! Academy.</p> <p>Renewals – Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools Board of Education renews charter for SCA. Memphis City Schools Board of Education renews charters for COSLA, MAHS, and MASE.</p> <p>Approvals – Memphis City Schools Board of Education approves 3 charter schools to open in the fall of 2008: Memphis Academy of Health Sciences High School, Memphis Business Academy High School, and Power Center Academy.</p> <p>Memphis City Schools Board of Education approves the state’s first conversion charter school – KIPP Diamond Academy.</p>

Sources: Tennessee Department of Education, “Tennessee Charter Schools 2007-08.” Information provided by Memphis City Schools, Office of Charter Schools. Amy Griffith, “Denied Charter School Hopefuls prepare to appeal Metro’s decision,” *The City Paper*, November 26, 2007.

Exhibit 6: Descriptors of Tennessee Charter Schools, 2007-08

	Year Opened	Location	Grades Served	Full Planned Grade Range	Enrollment
Circles of Success Learning Academy	2003	Memphis	K-5 th	Reached	115
Memphis Academy of Health Sciences	2003	Memphis	6 th -8 th	Reached	305
Memphis Academy of Science & Engineering	2003	Memphis	6 th -11 th	6 th -12 th	667
Smithson-Craighead Academy	2003	Nashville	K-4 th	Reached	205
City University School of Liberal Arts	2004	Memphis	9 th -12 th	Reached	310
STAR Academy	2004	Memphis	K-5 th	Reached	240
KIPP Academy Nashville	2005	Nashville	5 th -7 th	5 th -8 th	156
Memphis Business Academy	2005	Memphis	6 th -8 th	Reached	217
Promise Academy	2005	Memphis	K-2 nd	K-8 th	177
The Soulsville Charter School	2005	Memphis	6 th -8 th	6 th -12 th	167
Southern Avenue Charter School of Academic Excellence & Creative Arts	2005	Memphis	K-3 rd	K-5 th	145
LEAD Academy	2007	Nashville	5 th -6 th	5 th -12 th	91

Source: Information provided by charter school administrators.

Exhibit 7: Tennessee Charter School Applications, Openings, Renewals, and Closures

	Applications			Schools	
	Submitted	Approved	Renewed ^a	Opened	Closed
2002	14	4	N/A	N/A	N/A
2003	28	3	N/A	4	0
2004	26	7 ^b	N/A	3	0
2005	3	0	N/A	5	0
2006	5	2 ^c	N/A	0	0
2007	14 ^d	4 ^e	4	1	1
	90	20	4	13	1

Source: Eric Hilgendorf, Director, Charter Schools and Choice, Tennessee Department of Education.

Notes: a: Approved and renewed charter school agreements are five-year contracts (T.C.A. 49-13-121(a)).

b: Of these, five opened in 2005. Although the openings of Academy of Science and Engineering Nashville and Academy of Science and Engineering Chattanooga were deferred to 2006, neither school opened.

c: Only LEAD Academy opened. The Florence Crittenton Agency application received de facto approval when the Knox County Board of Education did not respond to the school proposal within the 60-day period prescribed by TCA §49-13-108. However, the school did not open due to contracting difficulties with Knox County Schools.

d: Ten applications for new charter schools and four renewal applications.

e: Scheduled to open in the fall of 2008.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

Charter schools are created to function both as laboratories for educational innovation and as viable educational alternatives for parents and students. To help charter schools fulfill the laboratory function, policymakers must consider issues of school autonomy and dissemination of best practices. The degree of flexibility afforded individual charter schools is, for the most part, defined in the agreement between the charter school and the LEA. A well-formulated system for dissemination of best practices would allow school districts and the state to learn from the successes (and failures) of alternative approaches to teaching methods, school calendar, school governance, and other elements.

In order to help charter schools fulfill their intended function as an educational alternative for parents and students, policymakers must consider issues of sustainability for individual schools. Charter schools are intended “to provide an alternative means [of education] within the public school system,” but there is an explicit assumption in statute that charter schools will also “[ensure the] accomplishment of the necessary outcomes of education.”³¹ In this latter sense charter schools are no different from traditional public schools. Policymakers should ensure that all of the operations and activities that are ancillary to the primary educational function should be adequate and sustainable over time.

The following sections describe various practices in and features of Tennessee’s charter schools. Information is based on interviews with charter school administrators and board members, and, as such, represents an internal assessment of the charter school experiment. Some of these practices and features are present to varying degrees in traditional public schools; many characteristics of successful charter schools are characteristics of successful traditional public schools. (See Appendix A for a complete list of contacts.)

Laboratories for Educational Innovation: Autonomy and Dissemination

Neither the Tennessee Department of Education nor the local education agencies (LEAs) have established mechanisms to identify and disseminate charter schools’ best practices.

As Metro Nashville Public Schools’ Policy 1452 states, charter schools are “expected to serve as centers of reform and innovation from which educators, parents, and community members can learn new, successful dynamics and methods that could ultimately be replicated.” By starting the charter school experience with a limited student population, Tennessee has given itself an opportunity to learn what works best to help those students at greatest risk of failing.

However, to benefit from that opportunity, best practices must be disseminated. *T.C.A. 49-13-102(e)* refers to charter schools as “laboratories of teaching and learning.” However, neither the Tennessee Department of Education nor the LEAs have established mechanisms to formally share the schools’ most promising practices with school districts and traditional public schools. Consequently, Tennessee charter schools are not functioning as laboratories of educational innovation for implementation statewide.

The federal government allows states to reserve up to 10 percent of the Public Charter Schools Program grant³² for the purpose of awarding dissemination subgrants to individual charter schools. Although 30 states have participated in the federal dissemination grant program, Tennessee has not.³³ Because Tennessee is a relatively new chartering state, the state has used the Public Charter Schools Program grant to provide financial assistance for the planning, program design, and initial implementation of charter schools. However, because the federal financial support is also intended to assist charter schools in their role as laboratories for innovative practices, it might be appropriate for Tennessee to use these funds for dissemination in the future.

Between 2000 and 2005, helping existing charter schools was the most common goal mentioned in state dissemination grant applications. Instructional programs, curricula, and school management techniques were the most common types of information being disseminated. However, disseminating best practices requires collaboration between charter schools and school districts.

Charter school administrators in Memphis have taken steps to help other charter schools. Charter school principals in Memphis meet once a month to share successes and shortcomings. They rotate their meetings from charter school to charter school to see the unique aspects of each school.

Purposes of Charter Schools in Tennessee

Many Tennessee charter schools have adopted broad missions.

preparing students for college.

Charter schools have adopted goals and purposes beyond those established in *T.C.A. 49-13-102*. Charter school administrators and board members report goals such as revitalizing the local community, educating parents, and

Revitalizing the Local Community

- Memphis Business Academy's charter school application cites Memphis's "dubious distinction as the bankruptcy capital of the nation" and mentions the root problem of financial illiteracy. In response, the school was designed to provide students with financial literacy and expand business career opportunities. By integrating themes of business, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy, Memphis Business Academy (MBA) meets students' practical needs and impacts the North Memphis community.
- Many Tennessee charter school facilities are multi-purpose buildings. Several allow community groups to hold weekly meetings or operate in their facilities.

Parent Education

- Promise Academy pays for one parent of each child to go on field trips and eat lunch. This gives parents new experiences and gives the parent and child a common experience outside the home.
- Memphis Business Academy provides business enrichment at parent meetings. This includes information on community services, real estate (understanding the finances of renting, owning, mortgages, etc.), utility services (how to save on rising energy costs and prepare your home for the winter), and investments (financial planning).
- There are not yet formal "parent" classes at LEAD Academy, a first-year charter school. However, the school is arranging services provided by community groups for their parents and families. For example, LEAD connected parents with English as a Second Language (ESL) classes and a nursing program in the community.

College Preparation

- All aspects of City University School of Liberal Arts are shaped by a "college bound" frame of mind. The College Board, who administers the SAT, built a curriculum for City University School by taking the Tennessee curriculum standards and bumping them up to SAT Standards. All students must apply to three colleges or universities and gain acceptance to one as a requirement for graduation. In addition, seniors take college English at Christian Brothers University.
- STAR Academy is a college preparatory elementary school. Each year the students visit various colleges and universities. In 2006-07, the 2nd grade students visited colleges in Nashville; 3rd and 4th grade students visited colleges in Atlanta. In 2007-08, the 3rd through 5th grade students will tour various colleges throughout Tennessee. During each trip, the students visit at least three historically black colleges and three non-black colleges.

- Soulsville Charter School’s students attend a three-week summer term on the Rhodes College campus. This required term allows students to experience the “place” for which they are preparing – college.

Teaching in Tennessee’s Charter Schools

Charter school administrators view the autonomy to select teachers as an essential benefit.

hinders a school’s ability to build a sense of community, identity, and ownership.

Many charter school administrators emphasize the importance of hiring teachers directly supportive of their schools’ mission. They believe that the state and district practice of placing teachers and administrators in schools

Teacher applicants complete a rigorous interview and are observed teaching a class prior to hiring. In some schools, the governing board and sponsor agency are heavily involved in interviewing and hiring teachers. In others, the principals include current teachers in the interviewing and decision making processes for new hires.

Charter school teachers in Tennessee enter one year renewable contracts or work without contracts. Charter school administrators and board members believe that autonomy to hire and fire allows a school to build and maintain a culture and identity. While a teacher who does well is given a new contract, the charter school can terminate a teacher’s contract at any time or the teacher can leave the school if it is not the right fit. Without the guarantee of a new contract, charter school teachers must continually earn the privilege of educating the state’s children.

In most cases charter school teachers receive higher salaries than the comparable district salary. Charter school administrators report that teacher salaries can be up to 20 percent higher than the district’s. Some schools offer performance-based bonuses as well. The criteria for such bonuses vary by school but include school-wide student achievement, individual teacher’s student achievement, teacher attendance, and meeting the school’s expectations. However, the increased pay is not enough to be the sole attraction to a school. In some schools, teachers’ summer break is as short as two weeks, and in other schools teachers work or are on-call 70 to 80 hours per week.

Charter school administrators grant teachers professional flexibility, but require increased responsibility.

Administrators encourage and challenge teachers to be creative and to develop their skills. Charter school administrators report that teachers may experiment with student groupings and teaching styles.

Administrators expect teachers to take on increased responsibility. Administrators encourage teachers to research best practices and communicate the innovations they plan to incorporate into their classrooms. Charter teachers are often members of smaller learning communities within the school. Each learning community develops a different expertise, such as

- assessment, school improvement, and accountability
- discipline and student personal growth
- instructional strategies, lesson planning, and curriculum
- leadership, vision, and diversity.

Teachers in Tennessee charter schools and traditional schools use similar instructional practices.

The Comptroller of the Treasury's Office of Education Accountability contracted with the Center for Research in Educational Policy (CREP) at the University of Memphis to evaluate instructional practices in traditional and charter schools. Using the School Observation Measure (SOM), trained classroom observers examined the extent to which various

instructional practices were used in Tennessee charter and traditional public schools during the 2005-06 academic year. (See Appendix B for more information on the SOM process.)

According to the 2005-06 Academic Year SOM results:

- Both school types tended to use "traditional methods" such as direct instruction and seatwork, while supplementing these methods with student-centered strategies such as higher level questioning and the teacher acting as coach/facilitator.
- High levels of academically focused class time and student engagement were frequently observed in both types of schools.
- Out of seven SOM items with significant differences between the groups, only one, "Parent/community involvement in learning activities," had a significantly higher rating for charter schools over controls.
- The traditional schools had significantly more usage of six SOM items. These items were: "Work Centers," "Project-based learning," "Teacher acting as a coach/facilitator," "Independent inquiry/research on the part of students," "Computer for instructional delivery," and "Technology as a learning tool or resource."

Charter schools add instructional time in several ways.

Many charter school administrators emphasized the importance of additional instructional time, which allows students access to remediation and enrichment. Whether

through longer or additional instructional days, charter schools allow certain students to address deficiencies in their major course program or engage in enrichment courses and accelerated academic preparation courses. Exhibit 8 reveals the prevalence of various efforts to secure additional instructional time.

Charter school officials report that while their teaching methods look like those in traditional public schools, the established culture in each charter school allows for a higher level of student engagement. Several charter school elements build an environment for higher level student engagement:

- Classroom instruction, weekend enrichment activities, internships, and field trips often reflect the school's theme and mission. For example, the Memphis Business Academy integrates weekly business topics into every class; members of the local business community are guest speakers every Friday.
- Small class size, differentiated learning plans, and multiple adults in the classroom combine to create a sound learning environment. Fifty-eight percent of Tennessee charter schools have multiple teachers, assistants, or volunteers in certain classrooms, 33 percent have these in each classroom, and 17 percent have tutors available during regular school hours. In these environments, students have fewer distractions and teachers can monitor individual student progress more closely.

- Full participation in school activities is used to inspire students to establish and maintain a positive school culture. For example, all Soulsville Charter School students must participate in the Symphony Orchestra. However, students earn the privilege to participate in performances by following Soulsville’s three core values: 1) Respect the learning environment, 2) Work hard, and 3) Display good character.
- A focus on social development and character education puts students in position to develop academically. Promise Academy administrators report that many kindergarten students arrive with a three-year-old development level, so the school structures time and opportunities to develop peer interaction skills. All students participate in character education classes divided by gender and in field trips scheduled to enhance social development.

Exhibit 8: Methods of Adding Instructional Time

School Feature	Percent of Tennessee Charter Schools
Longer School Day^a	
Mandatory for all students	83%
Mandatory for students requiring additional assistance	8%
Optional for students requiring additional assistance	8%
Saturday Sessions^b	
Mandatory for all students	33%
Mandatory for students requiring additional assistance	25%
Optional for students seeking enrichment	8%
Not offered	42%
Summer Program^b	
Mandatory for all students	33%
Mandatory for students requiring additional assistance	50%
Optional	33%
Not offered	8%
Longer Academic Year	
Mandatory	67%
Not offered	33%

Notes: a: Percents do not total 100 due to rounding.

b: Totals more than 100% because some schools have Saturday Sessions and Summer Programs that are mandatory for certain students and optional for others.

Source: Charter school administrators.

Teachers give Tennessee charter schools higher school climate ratings than traditional schools.

The Office of Education Accountability contracted with CREP to evaluate school climate and teacher perceptions in traditional and charter schools. The School Climate Inventory (SCI-R) was used to analyze perceptions of school climate during the 2005-06 and 2006-07 academic years. The SCI-R consists of 49 statements linked to seven dimensions of effective school climate. (See Exhibit 9.)

While both Tennessee traditional and charter schools had positive climate ratings in 2005-06 and 2006-07, the majority of SCI-R items yielded higher ratings for charter school teachers in both years. However, the charter school averages declined slightly over the two years, while the traditional school averages increased slightly. Thus, the “strength” of the difference between the two groups changed from 2005-06 to 2006-07. (See Appendix C for complete SCI-R results.)

2005-06 Academic Year

- Approximately one-half (24 out of 49) of the items showed statistically significant differences in favor of charter schools. These items included:

All students in this school are expected to master basic skills at each grade level.

Teachers have high expectations for all students.

Teachers, administrators, and parents assume joint responsibility for student discipline.

The administration communicates the belief that all students can learn.

Low achieving students are given opportunity for success in this school.

Parents are often invited to visit classrooms.

The faculty and staff share a sense of commitment to the school goals.

The principal is highly visible throughout the school.

Faculty and staff feel that they make important contributions to this school.

Teachers at each grade (course) level design learning activities to support both curriculum and student needs.

Teachers often provide opportunities for students to develop higher-order skills.

Teachers use appropriate evaluation methods to determine student achievement.

Parents are treated courteously when they call or visit the school.

Students participate in solving school-related problems.

Faculty and staff cooperate a great deal in trying to achieve school goals.

- Although no items showed statistically significant differences in favor of traditional schools, three items showed a more positive rating for traditional schools. These items were:

Varied learning environments are provided to accommodate diverse teaching and learning styles.

The school building is neat, bright, clean and comfortable.

Student behavior is generally positive in this school.

2006-07 Academic Year

- Only eight of 49 SCI-R items were statistically significantly higher for charter school teachers relative to traditional school teachers. These items were:

Parents are often invited to visit classrooms.

Students share the responsibility for keeping the school environment attractive and clean.

Community businesses are active in this school.

School rules and expectations are clearly communicated.

All students in this school are expected to master basic skills at each grade level.

Teachers, administrators, and parents assume joint responsibility for student discipline.

Rules for student behavior are consistently enforced.

Students are held responsible for their actions.

- Though not statistically significant differences, 13 items showed a more positive rating for traditional schools. These items included:

- Parent volunteers are used wherever possible.
- Information about school activities is communicated to parents on a consistent basis.
- The goals of this school are reviewed and updated regularly.
- Varied learning environments are provided to accommodate diverse teaching and learning styles.
- Parents are invited to serve on school advisory committees.
- Teachers use a wide range of teaching materials and media.
- Student behavior is generally positive in this school.
- Parents actively support school activities.

Exhibit 9: Seven Dimensions of Effective School Climates

Dimension	Description
Order	The extent to which the environment is ordered and appropriate student behaviors are present
Leadership	The extent to which the administration provides instructional leadership
Environment	The extent to which positive learning environments exist
Involvement	The extent to which parents and the community are involved in the school
Instruction	The extent to which the instructional program is well developed and implemented
Expectations	The extent to which students are expected to learn and be responsible
Collaboration	The extent to which the administration, faculty, and students cooperate and participate in problem solving

Source: The Center for Research in Educational Policy (CREP), *An Exploratory Comparison of Teacher Perceptions and Instructional Practices between TN Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools*, 2008.

SCI-R Dimension Mean Comparison

- The Overall score and all dimensions yielded higher ratings for charter schools than traditional schools in 2005-06.
- The Overall score and all dimensions except Involvement yielded higher ratings for charter schools than traditional schools in 2006-07.
- While the Overall score and all dimensions except Environment were rated statistically significantly higher in charter schools in 2005-06, only Expectations was rated statistically significantly higher in charter schools in 2006-07.
- The effect sizes for both years favored charter schools, yet the climate results were also positive for traditional schools, especially in the 2006-07 academic year.

Tennessee charter school teachers had significantly higher positive perceptions of their schools’ educational programs than their traditional school counterparts.

(See Appendix D for more information on CSTQ and CSRTQ.)

Charter school teacher perceptions of their school experiences were gathered using the Charter School Teacher Questionnaire (CSTQ). Traditional school teacher perceptions of their school experiences were gathered using the Comprehensive School Reform Teacher Questionnaire (CSRTQ). CREP compared responses to 12 common items from both the CSTQ and CSRTQ for teachers in Tennessee

The charter school teacher questionnaire responses included in this analysis were from the 2006-07 academic year. The traditional school teacher questionnaire responses were taken from the 2003-04 academic year because of insufficient numbers of responses in more recent years. Additionally, the traditional schools were implementing “reform programs” whereas the charter schools were all new start-up schools. Thus, the results should be interpreted with caution because of the differing instruments and timeframes for data collection.

Analysis of teacher perceptions in charter schools and traditional schools revealed,

- Charter school teachers rated 92 percent of the items more positively than teachers in traditional schools.
- Of particular note, the largest difference was seen in response to perceptions of the educational program encouraging students to have high standards for their own work. Perceptions in this area were more positive among charter school teachers.
- Charter school teachers rated 58 percent of the items statistically significantly more positive than teachers in traditional schools. These were:

Teachers are given sufficient planning time at this school.

Our educational program encourages students to have high standards for their own work.

Teachers are generally supportive of this school’s educational program.

My school receives effective assistance from other external partners (e.g., universities, businesses, community groups).

Teachers are adequately involved in school decision making.

Parents are active partners with this school.

As a school staff, we regularly review academic and non-academic goals to evaluate progress.

Parent Involvement in Tennessee’s Charter Schools

Some charter schools have specific parental involvement requirements.

Because charter school parents made a decision to seek out an educational alternative, there is a sense that they are more actively involved in their children’s education. However, according to charter school administrators, parents’ reasons for wanting to send their children to charter schools vary and,

thus, the level of parental involvement varies.

Charter schools offer multiple opportunities for parental engagement. Although not a condition of enrollment, many charter schools make it clear that parental involvement is strongly encouraged and expected.

Parent Involvement Grading Policies

- Parents of students at STAR Academy and Promise Academy receive a grade of E, S, N, or U. To earn an E at STAR Academy, a parent must volunteer a minimum of five hours per nine week period. To earn an E at Promise Academy during the first nine week period, a parent can miss no more than two days reading with their child, reviewing assignments in their child’s homework folder, and returning signed documents. New parent involvement requirements are added each nine week grading period.

School Contracts

- Parents and students at Memphis Academy of Science and Engineering sign a “Commitment of Excellence” contract, and parents are asked to volunteer 15 to 20 hours a year.

- LEAD Academy parents, students, teachers, staff, and board members must sign a Commitment to LEADership contract. Signing the contract is a formal representation of the shared commitment to the school, the students, and the mission.

Volunteering

- Smithson-Craighead Academy parents commit to volunteering a minimum of eight hours per year. This volunteer commitment encompasses attending meetings, assisting in the classrooms, attending field trips, and similar activities.
- Southern Avenue Charter School requires parents to volunteer 10 hours each semester. Parents can help in the pick-up and drop-off line in the morning and afternoon; help serve breakfast, lunch, or afternoon snacks; tutor students; become room parents; answer office phones; assist with school-wide fundraisers; run copies for teachers; or help recruit students.
- Circles of Success Learning Academy has adopted a “Village Collaboration” approach in which each classroom is a Cooperative Community with seven parent volunteers and one elder relative volunteer.

Behavioral and Instructional Intervention

- When a Memphis Business Academy student reaches “Level 3” of the school’s discipline plan, a parent is required to chaperone the child, spending a full day with the student in every class.
- KIPP Academy Nashville has a mandatory Saturday school program for students “significantly below” grade level. The school invites parents to attend as well so they can see how to help their child.

Governance Structures in Tennessee’s Charter Schools

Charter school governance structures facilitate site-based decision-making.

Charter school governing boards are deliberately formed. In a charter school’s first year, the board is extremely involved in the creation of the school. Founding board members typically bring expertise in teaching, curriculum, and education law.

Once a school is operating, the board’s focus shifts to making the school stronger. The board becomes more focused on the business aspects of the school, such as development and fundraising. As a school develops, the board recruits members from the business community who can raise money and create community partnerships. The most successful charter school leaders nationwide “are those who are able to mobilize substantial amounts of capacity outside the school and deploy it strategically to fulfill the mission.”³⁴

Each charter school has a board focused on that school’s needs. By having individual governing boards, charter schools are directly accountable to students and parents via their own policies and procedures.

Most charter school boards are responsible for policy setting and financial accountability. Early board responsibilities include creating the application, defining the mission, hiring the principal, helping choose curriculum, and securing a facility.

Once a school is operating, charter school boards in Tennessee mirror the national pattern, in that “one of the most important functions of a governing board is fundraising.”³⁵ Typical ongoing board responsibilities in Tennessee include

- Fundraising, monitoring financial stability, and approving the budget
- Setting policy

- Coordinating volunteers and creating and maintaining partnerships
- Providing guidance to the principal and evaluating the principal
- Handling teacher appeals.

Given the nature of board responsibilities, most charter school principals report meeting with the governing board once a month and having weekly communication with individual board members.

Many governing board members have made a commitment to be visible on the premises of the school. Some board members assist in the classrooms, serve as guest lecturers, or tutor students. Some charter school boards attempt to have an annual meeting with parents, while others report an open door policy for staff and parents to enhance communication. However, some school district board members question whether parents of charter school students understand the governance structure. They believe that some parents are still under the impression that the district school board has authority over the charter schools.

Tennessee law allows only local school boards to serve as charter authorizers.

The charter approval process varies by state. *T.C.A. 49-13-104(2)* establishes the local board of education as the sole chartering authority. The Memphis City Schools (MCS) Board of Education and the Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools

(MNPS) Board of Education include multiple district administrative staff in the approval and renewal decision-making processes. MCS created an Office of Charter Schools, but MNPS does not have staff dedicated solely to charter school issues.

Memphis City Schools (MCS)

The 2007 Charter School Application Review Committee for Memphis City Schools included members of the following school district administration divisions: Assessment, Research, Finance, Human Resources, Secondary Instruction, Exceptional Children, Elementary Instruction, and Guidance. In addition, the committee includes a principal and teacher from a traditional school and a parent from another traditional school. MCS Board Policy establishes that the members of the Charter School Application Review Committee serve for two years but can be reappointed to multiple terms. The 2007 Review Committee had both new and returning members.

The charter application and the Committee's opinion are then reviewed at additional levels: the Director of Schools' leadership cabinet, the Director of Schools, and a select committee of the MCS Board of Education. After the select committee makes a recommendation to the full MCS Board of Education, the Board votes to approve or reject the charter school application.

Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (MNPS)

The 2007 Charter School Application Review Committee for Metro Nashville Public Schools included members of the following school district administration divisions: Policy and Planning, Data, Special Education, and Business. The committee also included one MNPS Board member and two community members.

The Review Committee shares its opinion with the MNPS Board of Education, and the full board votes to approve or reject the charter school application. The MNPS Director of Schools defers to the board in matters of charter school approval.

Student Achievement in Tennessee's Charter Schools

Secondary Charter Schools

Because states have varying approval processes, eligible student populations, achievement tests, and funding mechanisms, it is problematic to compare charter school student achievement in Tennessee to charter school student achievement nationally. To compare student achievement in Tennessee's charter schools with that of Tennessee's traditional public schools, the Office of Education Accountability (OEA) contracted with the Center for Research in Educational Policy (CREP) at the University of Memphis. OEA reviewed CREP's student matching methodology and results. The following information was extracted from CREP's resulting report, *Student-Level Analysis of Year 4 (2006-07) Achievement Outcomes for Tennessee Secondary Charter Schools*.

After pairing each middle and high charter school student with a comparable "control" student who attended the district school that the charter school student previously attended, CREP found evidence that some charter schools are helping local school districts reach students that they were not reaching before. (See Appendix E for a full description of the student matching methodology for the secondary schools' analysis.) In middle and high schools, there were a total of 71 grade level, cohort, and subject area (Math and Reading/Language Arts) comparisons using the number of items answered correctly on the TCAP Achievement or Gateway Tests. The analysis showed:

- Charter school students had higher scores than control students in 46 comparisons, with 11 being statistically significant differences.³⁶
- Control students had higher scores than charter students in 25 comparisons, with four being statistically significant differences.

In addition to examining the number of items answered correctly, CREP conducted a supplementary analysis to examine the percentage of charter students and control students reaching different proficiency levels (Below Proficient, Proficient, or Advanced). There were a total of 63 such comparisons in middle and high schools. The analysis showed:

- A higher percentage of charter students reached Proficient or Advanced in 35 comparisons, with three being statistically significant.
- A higher percentage of control students reached Proficient or Advanced in 18 comparisons, none of which were statistically significant differences.
- An equal percentage of charter and control students reached Proficient or Advanced in 10 comparisons.

Charter Students: Statistically Significant Higher Test Scores

Charter students had significantly higher scores than control students in 11 comparisons – six Math and five Reading/Language Arts.

- Students at The Soulsville Charter School had higher scores than control students on:
 - 6th Grade TCAP Math
 - 6th Grade TCAP Reading/Language Arts
 - 7th Grade TCAP Math
- Students at Memphis Academy of Health Sciences (MAHS) had higher scores than control students on:
 - 6th Grade TCAP Math
 - 7th Grade TCAP Reading/ Language Arts
 - 8th Grade TCAP Math
 - 8th Grade TCAP Reading/ Language Arts (students who took regular 8th grade math)
- Students at Memphis Academy of Science and Engineering (MASE) had higher scores than control students on:
 - 8th Grade TCAP Reading/ Language Arts (students who also completed the Gateway Algebra I exam)
 - 10th Grade Gateway English 10

- Students at KIPP Academy Nashville had higher scores than control students on:
 - 5th Grade TCAP Math
 - 6th Grade TCAP Math

Charter students had a significantly larger percentage of students score Proficient or Advanced in three Math comparisons:

- MAHS third year cohort 8th grade students (those who started at MAHS in the 6th grade) TCAP Math
- MAHS 8th Grade Gateway Algebra I
- Memphis Business Academy (MBA) 7th Grade TCAP Math

Exhibit 10 compares the percentage of charter school students scoring Proficient or Advanced with the percentage of control students, the district, and the state.

Traditional Public Students (control): Statistically Significant Higher Test Scores

Control students had significantly higher scores than charter students in four math comparisons.

- Control students had higher scores than students at Yo! Academy on 9th Grade Gateway Algebra I.
- Control students had higher scores than MASE students on:
 - 6th Grade TCAP Math
 - 8th Grade TCAP Math
 - 9th Grade Gateway Algebra I

Elementary Charter Schools

Because most elementary charter school students do not have “pre-charter school” test scores, individual student matching could not be performed. Instead, the comparison group was comprised of all students from non-charter, Title I schools in Memphis City Schools (MCS) in 2nd through 4th grades who took both the 2005-06 and 2006-07 TCAP Achievement Test and all 1st grade students who took the 2006-07 TCAP Achievement Test. A similar procedure was used for Davidson County to examine the achievement of Smithson-Craighead Academy students. (See Appendix F for a full description of the methodology for the elementary schools’ analysis.) The following information was extracted from CREP’s resulting report, *Student-Level Analysis of Year 4 (2006-07) Achievement Outcomes for TN Elementary Charter Schools*.

The lack of “pre-charter school” data greatly limits the extent to which charter school membership can be statistically linked to higher or lower scores. As shown below, charter school attendance had a significant influence on achievement in only five comparisons.

From a descriptive standpoint, elementary charter students had higher scores in the majority (58 percent) of 2007 TCAP Achievement comparisons, but few differences can be statistically attributed to attending a charter school. In Math, charter school students had higher average scores in eight of 12 grade level comparisons. In Reading/Language Arts, charter school students had higher average scores in six of 12 grade level comparisons.

Memphis Charter School Recognized for Exceptional Student Performance

STAR Academy in Memphis has been recognized by the state of Tennessee as a 2007-08 “State Title I Distinguished School in Exceptional Student Performance.” STAR Academy was selected for exhibiting “exceptional student performance for two or more consecutive years.” The State has recognized 15 Title I Distinguished Schools since 2001, and STAR Academy is the first Tennessee charter school to receive the honor.

Sources: Tennessee Department of Education, Federal Programs: Title I, Part A-Distinguished Schools Information Website, <http://www.tennessee.gov/education/fedprog/fpdistinguished.shtml>. *Memphis Daily News*, “Local Charter School Receives State Title,” December 10, 2007.

Charter Students: Statistically Significant Higher Test Scores

Charter students had significantly higher scores than control students in one reading comparison.

- Students at Circles of Success Learning Academy (COSLA) had higher scores than control students on 4th Grade Reading/Language Arts.

Traditional Public Students (control): Statistically Significant Higher Test Scores

Control students had significantly higher scores than charter students in four comparisons – three math and one reading.

- Control students had higher scores than students at Southern Avenue Charter School in 2nd grade math.
- Control students had higher scores than students at COSLA on:
 - 5th Grade Math
 - 5th Grade Reading/Language Arts
- Control students had higher scores than students at Smithson-Craighead Academy in 3rd grade math.

Exhibit 10: Percentage of Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced, 2006-07

◇ = In comparison to these groups, a lower percentage of charter school students scored Proficient or Advanced.
 ★ = In comparison to these groups, a higher percentage of charter school students scored Proficient or Advanced.
 ⇔ = No difference in percentage of students scoring Proficient or Advanced.

		Control	District	State
Circles of Success Learning Academy (COSLA)	3 rd Grade - TCAP/AT Math	★	★	★
	3 rd Grade - TCAP/AT Reading/LA	★	★	★
	4 th Grade - TCAP/AT Math	★	★	★
	4 th Grade - TCAP/AT Reading/LA	★	★	★
	5 th Grade - TCAP/AT Math	★	★	★
	5 th Grade - TCAP/AT Reading/LA	★	★	★
City University School of Liberal Arts	9 th Grade - Gateway Algebra I	★	★	◇
	10 th Grade - Gateway English 10	★	★	★
KIPP Academy Nashville	5 th Grade - TCAP Math	★	⇔	◇
	5 th Grade - TCAP Reading/LA	★	★	★
	6 th Grade - TCAP Math	★	★	★
	6 th Grade - TCAP Reading/LA	★	★	◇
Memphis Academy of Health Sciences (MAHS)	6 th Grade - TCAP Math	⇔	★	★
	6 th Grade - TCAP Reading/LA	◇	★	◇
	7 th Grade - TCAP Math	◇	★	★
	7 th Grade - TCAP Reading/LA	★	★	★
	8 th Grade - TCAP Math (students in regular 8th grade math)	★	★	★
	8 th Grade - TCAP Reading/LA (students in regular 8th grade math)	★	★	★
	8 th Grade - Gateway Algebra I	★	★	★
	8 th Grade - TCAP Reading/LA (students in Algebra I)	★	★	★

Memphis Academy of Science and Engineering (MASE)	6 th Grade - TCAP Math	◇	★	★
	6 th Grade - TCAP Reading/LA	★	★	★
	7 th Grade - TCAP Math	★	★	★
	7 th Grade - TCAP Reading/LA	★	★	★
	8 th Grade - TCAP Math (students in regular 8th grade math)	◇	◇	◇
	8 th Grade - TCAP Reading/LA (students in regular 8th grade math)	★	★	★
	8 th Grade - Gateway Algebra I	◇	★	◇
	8 th Grade - TCAP Reading/LA (students in Algebra I)	★	★	★
	9 th Grade - Gateway Algebra I	◇	★	◇
	10 th Grade - Gateway English 10	★	★	★
Memphis Business Academy (MBA)	6 th Grade - TCAP Math	◇	★	◇
	6 th Grade - TCAP Reading/LA	◇	★	◇
	7 th Grade - TCAP Math	★	★	★
	7 th Grade - TCAP Reading/LA	★	★	★
Smithson-Craighead Academy	3 rd Grade - TCAP/AT Math	◇	★	◇
	3 rd Grade - TCAP/AT Reading/LA	◇	★	◇
	4 th Grade - TCAP/AT Math	◇	◇	◇
	4 th Grade - TCAP/AT Reading/LA	◇	◇	◇
The Soulsville Charter School	6 th Grade - TCAP Math	◇	★	◇
	6 th Grade - TCAP Reading/LA	★	★	★
	7 th Grade - TCAP Math	★	★	★
	7 th Grade - TCAP Reading/LA	★	★	★
STAR Academy	3 rd Grade - TCAP/AT Math	★	★	★
	3 rd Grade - TCAP/AT Reading/LA	★	★	★
	4 th Grade - TCAP/AT Math	★	★	★
	4 th Grade - TCAP/AT Reading/LA	★	★	★
Yo! Academy^a	9 th Grade - Gateway Algebra I	◇	◇	◇
	10 th Grade - Gateway English 10	◇	★	◇

Notes: Comparisons in Exhibit 10 are based on the restricted sample of charter school and comparison students. Approximately 32% of middle and high school charter students were dropped from the analysis. (See Appendix E.) Approximately 20% of elementary school charter students were dropped from the analysis. (See Appendix F.) However, the Department of Education Report Card contains information for all test takers. Therefore, comparisons of percentages of students scoring Proficient or Advanced based on Report Card data for charter schools might yield slightly different results.

Promise Academy and Southern Avenue Charter School are not included because these schools only served students in grades K-1 and K-2 respectively in 2007. The calculation of TCAP proficiency levels begins in grade 3.

a: The MCS Board of Education closed Yo! Academy in 2007.

Source: Center for Research in Educational Policy (CREP).

Viable Educational Alternatives: Sustainability

Charter schools are entrusted with students and public dollars. Yet, without policy changes, charter schools face many challenges to sustainability, including an unpredictable student enrollment and limited funding.

Student Eligibility

Tennessee’s student eligibility restrictions may affect the long-term viability of individual charter schools.

Tennessee’s charter law is the most restrictive in the nation in terms of student eligibility.³⁷ Many other state laws allow open enrollment in charter schools. Some states give preference to certain students but do not limit enrollment to the preference group.

Although charter schools are defined by autonomy, enrollment policies for Tennessee’s charter schools are more restrictive than the enrollment policies for traditional public schools. For example, while Memphis City Schools’ open enrollment policy “allows a parent/legal guardian to choose a school other than the one assigned by address if space is available in the school selected,”³⁸ T.C.A. 49-13-106(a) limits the eligible charter school student population to:

- (1) Students who were previously enrolled in a charter school;
- (2) Students who are assigned to, or were previously enrolled in, a school failing to make adequate yearly progress...giving priority to at-risk students;
- (3) Students who, in the previous school year, failed to test proficient in the language arts/reading or mathematics in grades three through eight (3-8) on TCAP; or
- (4) Students who, in the previous school year, failed to test proficient on the gateway examinations in language arts/reading or mathematics.

This limited student eligibility is especially problematic for elementary charter schools. Tennessee charter schools are unable to recruit students from schools making AYP until the student has failed to test proficient in the 3rd grade, the first time that TCAP “counts.” According to charter school administrators, this creates problems, such as:

- K-3rd grade charter school students must come from the dwindling number of schools failing to make AYP.
- By the time a student fails to test proficient in the 3rd grade, it takes much more to get the student to grade level and beyond.

Students enter charter schools well below grade level. For example, 54 percent of 6th graders entered Memphis Academy of Health Sciences two or more grade levels behind. Under the law, students who just met standards but are not excelling must be turned away. A school or student can pass or fail by the slimmest margins. Like receiving a D- on a report card, these schools and students are not “failing,” but neither are they passing with success or confidence.

Many charter school administrators report that they are equally concerned about students who perform well on TCAP but do not achieve in the classroom. These students are not performing up to their potential in their current setting.

The charter law creates an environment in which charter schools are seen as competitors rather than allies. Under current law, the existence of charter schools depends on the failure of traditional district schools. As neighborhood schools are restructured or earn their way off the “failing” list, the size of the charter school student pool gets smaller.

Other states have less restrictive eligibility for charter schools. Charter schools in many states are open to all students in the school district where the charter school is located. For example, in Connecticut, charter schools are considered an educational alternative, and parents are encouraged to learn about various schooling options in the state.³⁹

Financing Tennessee's Charter Schools

Limited facilities funding compromises the continued viability of charter schools.

Thirteen states provide some type of funding for charter school facilities costs through per-pupil allocations, grants, or loans.⁴⁰ For example,

- California reimburses charter schools for the lesser of \$750 per student or 75 percent of the lease costs incurred.
- California established a charter school revolving loan fund to provide loans of up to \$250,000 to charter schools in their first five years at a rate that is three to five percentage points below private lenders' rates.
- Minnesota law provides facility aid up to 90 percent of the actual cost of leasing (up to \$1,200 per pupil).⁴¹

However, Tennessee's current charter school law is silent on the issue of facilities assistance. Consequently, finding and financing adequate facilities has been a significant challenge for Tennessee charter schools. One Tennessee charter school administrator reports that the need for a better facility is the main constraint limiting realization of the school's mission.

T.C.A. 49-13-112(a) provides, in part, that "the local board of education shall allocate one hundred percent (100%) of the state and local education funds to the charter school on the per pupil expenditure of the LEA." The practice in MCS and MNPS has been to allocate to charter schools only capital outlay funds included in the BEP operating funds (for FY08, capital outlay comprises about 10% of the total BEP formula) and not to allocate capital outlay funds generated outside the BEP. It is unclear if this practice is consistent with the intent of the statute.

However, given that capital outlay funds generated outside the BEP are typically generated by local governments on behalf of local education agencies, they are not an "expenditure of the LEA" and therefore may not be subject to allocation under *T.C.A. 49-13-112*. Funding for school buildings may be financed as part of a local government's larger capital outlay program financed through the issuance of federal tax-exempt bonds. Construction expenditures, including those for school facilities, may be accounted for through the government's capital outlay fund. Likewise, annual appropriations for debt service (principal and interest) may be appropriated to and expended from the government's debt service fund. (See *T.C.A. 9-21-129* and *T.C.A. 49-3-1008*.)

Additionally, school construction and capital outlay expenditures are episodic and project-oriented. Given the nature of this funding, together with restrictions on the use of bond proceeds, it would be problematic to determine an allocation to charter schools on a per pupil expenditure basis. An allocation of capital outlay funds on behalf of charter schools might require incremental additional appropriations whereas allocating operating funds on a per student basis is thought to be essentially neutral in terms of overall funding requirements.

Nevertheless, as previously noted, lack of facilities funding exacerbates a charter school's challenge of sustainability. The relatively short term for which a charter is granted and the limitations on enrollment of new students is likely to significantly limit a charter school's ability to obtain commercial long-term financing for facilities.

In the five years since charter schools were first authorized in Tennessee, 42 percent have relocated from their original building. While the reasons are often financial, they also include outgrowing the original facility or facing a dwindling eligible student population in the neighborhood.

Seventy-five percent of Tennessee’s charter schools share space with another organization. Only four of Tennessee’s charter schools are housed in former district school buildings: five share space with local churches; two share space with their sponsor agency; and one shares space with a Catholic school.

The relationship between a charter school and the authorizing LEA is defined by both statute and a chartering agreement.

According to *T.C.A. 49-13-110*, the approval of a public charter school application “shall be in the form of a written agreement signed by the sponsor and the chartering authority, which shall be binding upon the governing body of the public charter school.” The governing body of the charter school may amend the chartering agreement only by petitioning the chartering authority. The chartering authority may also amend the contract during the charter renewal process.

Like most states, chartering agreements in Tennessee must be renewed every five years. However, charter terms range from three to 15 years in other states. In Florida, charter schools operating for 3 years that have demonstrated success can renew for a 15-year term to facilitate financing.

Metro Nashville Public Schools withholds approximately five percent of BEP allocations to charter schools as an administrative fee. The fee is designed to cover costs associated with:

- Providing employee benefits for charter schools’ support and certificated employees,
- Disbursing funds such as BEP, state sales tax, and local property tax,
- Assisting the charter school, governing board, and sponsor in maintaining financial records and financial reporting,
- Monitoring financial compliance,
- Managing student data and reporting student assessment for the Tennessee Department of Education.

Memphis City Schools has not withheld an administrative fee in the past, but the district is planning to add this requirement to renewed charter school contracts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations - Innovation

The General Assembly may wish to authorize the Tennessee Department of Education, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, and the Tennessee Board of Regents to create a charter school institute or research center in a state public higher education institution. Statute currently allows local school systems to “work in concert with the state’s public higher education institutions to establish charter school ‘laboratories of teaching and learning’ as a means of fostering educational innovations for implementation statewide” (T.C.A. 49-13-102(e)). A central research center could more effectively identify and disseminate charter school best practices statewide.

The Office of Charter Schools and Choice in the Tennessee Department of Education, in collaboration and cooperation with charter schools, should identify charter school best practices and implement a system for dissemination. Such a system should include identification of those schools that could benefit most directly from innovative practices in charter schools. This would allow LEAs across the state and traditional public schools to learn from charter schools’ most promising practices.

School boards of authorizing districts should hold regular meetings with charter school governing boards and/or principals. The local school board is required to renew or revoke a charter even though they may have had limited contact with the school while in operation.

Recommendations - Sustainability

The General Assembly may wish to consider making eligibility for charter school enrollment less restrictive. The charter school law could be amended to allow a district’s open enrollment policy to come into play once the charter school has been populated by students currently identified in statute as eligible for charter school enrollment. If, according to the charter agreement there is still space available after the charter school is populated in this manner, policy could allow parents/legal guardians to choose a charter school.⁴² Limited student eligibility may compromise the continued viability of charter schools.

The General Assembly may wish to consider revising the charter school statute to more precisely define the state and local charter school facilities funding responsibilities. Charter school administrators and governing board members identified capital needs as a primary concern. The state or LEA may wish to consider providing funding for charter school facilities costs through grants, loans, or increased per-pupil allocations.

The local education agencies (LEAs) may wish to allow charter schools access to unused or underused district facilities and land.

Appendix A: Persons Contacted

Anthony Anderson
Memphis Business Academy Governing Board

David Arnett
Maryland State Department of Education

Steve Bares
Memphis Academy of Science and Engineering
Governing Board

J.C. Ballew, Jr.
South Carolina Department of Education

Tom Beazley
Promise Academy Governing Board

Julie Blaney
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Ross Booher, Chair
KIPP Academy Nashville Board of Directors

Willie Brooks
STAR Academy Governing Board

Mary Ann Brown
Arkansas Department of Education

Andrew Broy
Georgia Department of Education

Sheri Catron, Principal
Circles of Success Learning Academy

David Church
South Carolina Association of Public Charter
Schools

Menthia Clark, Principal
Memphis Business Academy

Randy Dowell, Principal
KIPP Academy Nashville

Allison Driver
Smithson Craighead Academy

Reshela DuPuis
Hawaii Charter School Administrative Office

Elise Evans
Southern Avenue Charter School Governing Board

Linda Fleetwood
Delaware Department of Education

Janelle Glover, Principal
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Glenda Gregory
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Tennessee Department of Education

David Hill, School Director
The Soulsville Charter School

Mary Kay Hill
Wyoming Department of Education

Del Hoover
Iowa Department of Education

Jeremy Kane, Founder & School Director
LEAD Academy

Dean Kern, Director
Charter Schools Program
United States Department of Education

Shannon L. Kimball
Georgia Department of Education

Tom McCormack
Nevada Department of Education

Martha Morgan
Arizona State Board for Charter Schools

Jack Moyer
North Carolina Office of Charter Schools

Denise Mund
Colorado Department of Education

Joann Neuroth
Michigan Department of Education

Greg Patterson
Chair, Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools
Charter School Review Committee

Matthew Pepper
Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools

Mary Perry
Texas Education Agency

Deborah Probst
California Department of Education

Paul R. Prussing
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Amy Ragland
Memphis Academy of Science and Engineering

Kecia Ray
Policy and Planning
Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools

Lemoyne Robinson, Founder & Chancellor
City University School of Liberal Arts

Marilyn Robinson
Circles of Success Learning Academy Governing
Board

Charisse Sales
Office of Charter Schools
Memphis City Schools

Jo Schmitt
Utah State Office of Education

Stephanie Simms
Maryland Charter School Network

Sister Sandra Smithson, Founder
Smithson Craighead Academy

Van Snyder II, Principal
Southern Avenue Charter School

Kia Tate, Principal
STAR Academy

Stacey Thompson
Office of Charter Schools
Memphis City Schools

Matt Throckmorton, Executive Director
Tennessee Charter Schools Association

Blakley Wallace, Principal
Promise Academy

Staci Warren
Kansas Department of Education

Curtis Weathers, Principal
Memphis Academy of Health Sciences

William White, Director
School Choice and Student Accounting
Memphis City Schools

Todd Ziebarth
National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

Kyle Zinth
Education Commission of the States

Appendix B: School Observation Measure (SOM)

The School Observation Measure (SOM) was developed to determine the extent to which different common and alternative teaching practices are used throughout an entire school. The standard, or whole-school SOM[®] procedure involves observers visiting 10-12 randomly selected classrooms, for 15 minutes each, during a three-hour visitation period. Using a 5-point scale (0 = Not observed, 1 = Rarely, 2 = Occasionally, 3 = Frequently, and 4 = Extensively), the observer summarizes the use or nonuse of select teaching practices across all observed classes in each school.

The SOM strategies include traditional practices, such as direct instruction and independent seatwork, and alternative, predominantly student-centered methods associated with educational reforms, such as cooperative learning, project-based learning, inquiry, discussion, and using technology as a learning tool. The strategies were identified by policymakers, researchers, administrators, and teachers as those most useful in providing indicators of schools' instructional philosophies and implementations of commonly used reform designs.

To ensure the reliability of data, observers receive training, a manual providing definitions of terms, examples and explanations of the strategies, and a description of procedures for completing the instrument. After receiving the manual and instruction in a group session, each observer participates in sufficient practice exercises to ensure that his/her data are comparable with those of experienced observers.

Appendix C: School Climate Inventory (SCI-R)

Teachers self-report their level of agreement with each statement on the SCI-R via a 5 point scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. Higher scores indicate a more positive school climate.

School Climate Inventory (SCI-R), 2005-06

		Charter Average (N=103)	Traditional Average (N=7179)
Strongly Favor Charter Schools			
1	All students in this school are expected to master basic skills at each grade level.	4.69	4.23
2	Students are held responsible for their actions.	4.35	3.82
3	Teachers have high expectations for all students.	4.67	4.31
4	Students share the responsibility for keeping the school environment attractive and clean.	4.10	3.57
5	Rules for student behavior are consistently enforced.	4.24	3.70
6	Teachers, administrators, and parents assume joint responsibility for student discipline.	4.10	3.58
7	The administration communicates the belief that all students can learn.	4.76	4.45
8	Low achieving students are given opportunity for success in this school.	4.72	4.40
9	Parents are often invited to visit classrooms.	4.14	3.72
10	Students participate in classroom activities regardless of sex, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, or academic ability.	4.76	4.49
11	The faculty and staff share a sense of commitment to the school goals.	4.73	4.45
Moderately Favor Charter Schools			
1	School rules and expectations are clearly communicated.	4.55	4.21
2	The principal is highly visible throughout the school.	4.55	4.18
3	Teachers are encouraged to communicate concerns, questions, and constructive ideas.	4.47	4.13
4	Faculty and staff feel that they make important contributions to this school.	4.48	4.18
5	Teachers at each grade (course) level design learning activities to support both curriculum and student needs.	4.57	4.33
6	Student discipline is administered fairly and appropriately.	4.21	3.82
7	Teachers often provide opportunities for students to develop higher-order skills.	4.43	4.19
8	Students are encouraged to help others with problems.	4.28	4.03
9	Teachers use appropriate evaluation methods to determine student achievement.	4.53	4.32
10	Most problems facing this school can be solved by the principal and faculty.	4.37	4.04
11	Parents are treated courteously when they call or visit the school.	4.61	4.41
12	School employees and students show respect for each other's individual differences.	4.23	3.97
13	Students participate in solving school-related problems.	3.65	3.35

14	Faculty and staff cooperate a great deal in trying to achieve school goals.	4.53	4.29
15	The administration does a good job of protecting instructional time.	4.40	4.12
16	An atmosphere of trust exists among the administration, faculty, staff, students and parents.	4.11	3.82
17	The administration encourages teachers to be creative and to try new methods.	4.51	4.31
18	People in this school really care about each other.	4.45	4.24
19	Pull-out programs do <i>not</i> interfere with basic skills instruction.	3.99	3.75
20	The school is a safe place in which to work.	4.59	4.41
21	Teachers use a variety of teaching strategies.	4.59	4.45
22	Teachers are active participants in the decision making at this school.	4.02	3.79
23	Parent volunteers are used wherever possible.	4.35	4.17
24	Student misbehavior in this school does <i>not</i> interfere with the teaching process.	3.42	3.18

Slightly Favor Charter Schools

1	Parents actively support school activities.	4.07	3.89
2	Community businesses are active in this school.	3.85	3.69
3	Information about school activities is communicated to parents on a consistent basis.	4.45	4.33
4	The principal is an effective instructional leader.	4.34	4.18
5	Parents are invited to serve on school advisory committees.	4.25	4.14
6	The principal (or administration) provides useful feedback on staff performance.	4.22	4.08
7	Student tardiness or absence from school is not a major problem.	3.50	3.37
8	Teachers use a wide range of teaching materials and media.	4.40	4.35
9	Teachers use curriculum guides to ensure that similar subject content is covered within each grade.	4.50	4.46
10	The goals of this school are reviewed and updated regularly.	4.28	4.23
11	Teachers are proud of this school and its students.	4.38	4.36

Slightly Favor Traditional Schools

1	Student behavior is generally positive in this school.	3.93	3.98
2	Varied learning environments are provided to accommodate diverse teaching and learning styles.	4.16	4.19
3	The school building is neat, bright, clean, and comfortable.	4.07	4.08

Note: Bold indicates statistically significant at 0.001.

School Climate Inventory (SCI-R), 2006-07

	Charter Average (N=126)	Traditional Average (N=3898)
Strongly Favor Charter Schools		
1 Parents are often invited to visit classrooms.	4.14	3.73
Moderately Favor Charter Schools		
1 Students share the responsibility for keeping the school environment attractive and clean.	3.97	3.61
2 Community businesses are active in this school.	4.09	3.77
3 School rules and expectations are clearly communicated.	4.47	4.17
4 All students in this school are expected to master basic skills at each grade level.	4.54	4.31
5 Teachers, administrators, and parents assume joint responsibility for student discipline.	4.02	3.69
6 Rules for student behavior are consistently enforced.	4.07	3.74
7 Students are held responsible for their actions.	4.13	3.82
8 Faculty and staff cooperate a great deal in trying to achieve school goals.	4.51	4.28
9 Teachers have high expectations for all students.	4.53	4.35
10 The faculty and staff share a sense of commitment to the school goals.	4.60	4.42
11 Low achieving students are given opportunity for success in this school.	4.56	4.39
12 Teachers often provide opportunities for students to develop higher-order skills.	4.43	4.29
13 Teachers use appropriate evaluation methods to determine student achievement.	4.49	4.36
14 The principal is an effective instructional leader.	4.36	4.15
15 Most problems facing this school can be solved by the principal and faculty.	4.35	4.16
Slightly Favor Charter Schools		
1 The administration communicates the belief that all students can learn.	4.59	4.46
2 Student discipline is administered fairly and appropriately.	4.04	3.86
3 School employees and students show respect for each other's individual differences.	4.18	4.03
4 People in this school really care about each other.	4.38	4.24
5 Faculty and staff feel that they make important contributions to this school.	4.30	4.15
6 The principal (or administration) provides useful feedback on staff performance.	4.23	4.07
7 An atmosphere of trust exists among the administration, faculty, staff, students and parents.	3.98	3.81
8 Students are encouraged to help others with problems.	4.19	4.08
9 Teachers at each grade (course) level design learning activities to support both curriculum and student needs.	4.46	4.38
10 The administration does a good job of protecting instructional time.	4.27	4.15
11 The school is a safe place in which to work.	4.59	4.51

12	Teachers are encouraged to communicate concerns, questions, and constructive ideas.	4.24	4.13
13	Teachers are active participants in the decision making at this school.	3.90	3.79
14	Students participate in classroom activities regardless of sex, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, or academic ability.	4.60	4.54
15	Student misbehavior in this school does <i>not</i> interfere with the teaching process.	3.50	3.41
16	The principal is highly visible throughout the school.	4.23	4.16
17	Parents are treated courteously when they call or visit the school.	4.48	4.45
18	The administration encourages teachers to be creative and to try new methods.	4.35	4.34
19	Teachers use a variety of teaching strategies.	4.52	4.51
20	Teachers are proud of this school and its students.	4.41	4.41
Slightly Favor Traditional Schools			
1	Student behavior is generally positive in this school.	4.02	4.16
2	Parents actively support school activities.	3.95	4.06
3	Student tardiness or absence from school is not a major problem.	3.46	3.55
4	The school building is neat, bright, clean, and comfortable.	4.12	4.15
5	Pull-out programs do <i>not</i> interfere with basic skills instruction.	3.86	3.88
6	Teachers use curriculum guides to ensure that similar subject content is covered within each grade.	4.47	4.48
7	Students participate in solving school-related problems.	3.46	3.47
Moderately Favor Traditional Schools			
1	Parent volunteers are used wherever possible.	4.07	4.29
2	Information about school activities is communicated to parents on a consistent basis.	4.23	4.42
3	The goals of this school are reviewed and updated regularly.	4.08	4.28
4	Varied learning environments are provided to accommodate diverse teaching and learning styles.	4.06	4.25
5	Parents are invited to serve on school advisory committees.	4.03	4.21
6	Teachers use a wide range of teaching materials and media.	4.27	4.41

Note: Bold indicates statistically significant at 0.001.

Appendix D: Charter School Teacher Questionnaire (CSTQ) and Comprehensive School Reform Teacher Questionnaire (CSRTQ)

Charter school teacher perceptions of their school experiences were gathered using the Charter School Teacher Questionnaire (CSTQ). This instrument is unique to charter schools, and thus, is not utilized by traditional public school teachers. To examine the perceptions of traditional school teachers, the Comprehensive School Reform Teacher Questionnaire (CSRTQ) was chosen to create a set of “control group” questions because (a) there are no non-charter schools that administered the CSTQ and (b) the content overlap of several questions on the two instruments. Twelve common items from both the CSTQ and the Comprehensive School Reform Teacher Questionnaire (CSRTQ) were examined.

The CSRTQ responses were taken from the 2003-2004 academic year because there were insufficient numbers of responses in more recent years. The charter school teacher questionnaire responses included in this analysis were from the 2006-2007 academic year. It is important to note that the results should be interpreted with caution due to the differing instruments and timeframes for data collection.

Appendix E: CREP's Methodology for Secondary Charter Schools' Student Achievement Analysis

Given the different grade levels served and curricular objectives emphasized by each charter school, the results for each school were analyzed separately using a matched program-control design at the student level. Prior to the matching process, charter school students who fell into any of the following categories were dropped:

1. Students who were not continuously enrolled at the school,⁴³
2. Special education students,⁴⁴
3. ELL students,⁴⁵
4. Students who had been retained from the previous year, and
5. Students missing any of the following data:
 - a) 2006-07 or baseline⁴⁶ TCAP/Achievement Test (TCAP/AT) Math/Gateway Algebra I or TCAP/AT Reading/Language Arts (Reading/LA)/Gateway English 10 subtests,
 - b) grade level,
 - c) test level,
 - d) lunch status,
 - e) special education status,
 - f) ELL status, or
 - g) membership status.

The remaining charter school students were matched with comparable non-charter students in the school district based on the following criteria:

1. Enrollment at the same traditional school that the charter school student had previously attended,
2. Baseline TCAP/AT Math Number Correct (+/-3) for the 2004-05 and 2005-06 years. Otherwise, TCAP/AT Math Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE)⁴⁷ (+/-5) was used for the 2001-02, 2002-03, and 2003-04 years,
3. Baseline TCAP/AT Reading/LA Number Correct (+/-3) for the 2004-05 and 2005-06 years. Otherwise, TCAP/AT Reading/LA NCE (+/-5) was used for the 2001-02, 2002-03, and 2003-04 year,
4. Gender,
5. Ethnicity,
6. Lunch status (Free lunch, Reduced lunch, and Full pay),
7. Grade level in 2006-07 and the baseline year,
8. Test level in 2006-07 and the baseline year,
9. Not a Special Education student,
10. Not an ELL student,
11. Not a retained student, and
12. Student was continuously enrolled.

There were three matching circumstances: (1) Charter and control students were matched satisfying all the above criteria, (2) charter and control students were matched satisfying all criteria except baseline location, and (3) charter and control students were matched satisfying all criteria except baseline location and lunch status. In the case of a lunch status discrepancy, only Free and Reduced Meal students were acceptable matches. Also, in order to choose the best available match within all students satisfying all possible criteria, priority was given to those students with the closest prior achievement score to that of the charter school student.

Group equivalence on achievement variables at baseline was confirmed with one-way ANOVAs (analysis of variance) for each subject area within each school sample. For the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school years, the TCAP/AT Math and Reading/LA number correct scores were used as the baseline. For a student to be matched as a control, she or he had to be within three points above or below the number correct score

of the charter school student in both subjects. For the 2001-02, 2002-03, and 2003-04 school years, the TCAP/AT NCE score was used as the baseline. For a student to be matched as a control, she or he had to be within five NCEs above or below the NCE of the charter school student in both subjects. Number correct scores were used for 2004-05 and 2005-06 because the TCAP/AT was criterion-referenced for those years, meaning only number correct scores were available. For 2003-04 and earlier, the TCAP/AT was primarily norm-referenced, meaning that scores available (e.g., NCE, percentile) reflected the student's relative standing compared to the norm group. Effect sizes⁴⁸ were calculated on these pre-program achievement scores to confirm the similarities between charter and control student groups. Correlations were also performed to test the relationship between baseline and outcome achievement scores.

Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) or Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) was used to assess the impact of charter school membership on 2006-07 student Math and/or Reading/LA achievement scores, with students' baseline achievement score(s) used as the covariate(s). Effect sizes were calculated for both unadjusted and adjusted mean differences within each subject area within each school sample.

For the Gateway Algebra I and English 10 analyses, results from both the December 2006 and May 2007 administrations were available. If a student took the test at both times, the higher score was used. Finally, chi-square analyses were conducted to compare proficiency levels attained by charter and control students by subject area in two ways: Percent at Below Proficient, Proficient, Advanced (three levels), and also by collapsing the Proficient and Advanced categories to look at proficiency by pass/fail status (two levels).

Appendix F: CREP's Methodology for Elementary Charter Schools' Student Achievement Analysis

To examine student achievement outcomes for elementary schools, student-level matching was not conducted because most students who attended these charter schools did not attend a previous school. Therefore the students did not have pre-charter school test data to use for matching purposes. To create the control group, all students from non-charter, Title I schools in Memphis City Schools (MCS) in 2nd through 4th grades who took both the 2005-06 and 2006-07 TCAP Achievement Test and all 1st grade students who took the 2006-07 TCAP Achievement Test were included in the analysis. To examine achievement outcomes for students attending the Smithson Craighead Academy (SCA) in Nashville, a similar procedure was conducted utilizing data from Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS). The analysis for SCA was limited to the 3rd and 4th grades because MNPS students in earlier grades did not take the TCAP achievement test in spring 2007.

Charter school or control students that fell into any of the following six categories were not included in the analyses:

1. The grade level tested did not match the grade level in which the student was enrolled (e.g., a fourth grade student who took the 3rd grade level test), or
2. Not continuously enrolled in the 2006-07 year,⁴⁹ or
3. Special education students in the 2006-07 year,⁵⁰ or
4. ELL students in the 2006-07 year,⁵¹ or
5. Retained students in the 2006-07 year (i.e., the student was in the same grade in both 2005-06 and 2006-07), or
6. Missing data, including Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE)⁵² Math and Reading (for 1st and 2nd grades), Number Correct Math and Reading/LA (grade 3 and above), gender, lunch status (Free, Reduced, or Full Pay), grade level, or test level for either the 2005-06 or 2006-07 years (excluding the 2005-06 data for the students in 1st grade).

In addition, any control students who attended an Optional School or were not in a Title I school in the 2006-07 school year were also dropped.

The Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program: Achievement Test (TCAP/AT) Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) scores in Reading/Language Arts (Reading/LA) and Math were the outcome variables (dependent variables) for students in grades 1 and 2. The number correct scores in Reading/Language Arts and Math were the outcome variables for students who were in grades 3 through 5 during the 2006-07 school year. Prior achievement in Reading/LA and Math were measured as follows: (1) Grades 4-5: Student TCAP/AT CRT number correct score in the 2005-2006 year, (2) Grades 2-3: Student TCAP/AT NRT NCE score in 2005-2006, and (3) Grade 1: Not applicable (no prior year data available).

Ordinary least squares multiple regressions were used to determine the effects of charter school enrollment, lunch status, gender, and prior achievement (where applicable, in grade 2 and above) on current year (2006-07) achievement to determine the extent to which: (1) all three or four variables combined explained variability (variance) in achievement, and (2) which individual variables, if any, had a unique, significant influence on current year achievement. The standardized regression coefficient, Beta, was used to assess the strength of each independent variable that was significant. In addition, the R-square values were discussed for each analysis to indicate the proportion of variance the independent variables explained in the outcome variable. The higher the variance explained, the better the regression model. In these analyses, the primary variable of interest was *charter school enrollment*, which if statistically significant, would constitute a reliable predictor of students performing higher or lower on TCAP: (a) based on their enrolling or not enrolling in a charter school and (b) after controlling for their prior achievement (where available), gender, and lunch status. Effect sizes were also computed using "Cohen's d." Each effect size (or d) indicates the number of standard deviations by which the charter school student mean differs from the control student mean.

Appendix G: Summary of Achievement Results for each School, by Cohort

Second-Year Schools

KIPP Academy Nashville. KIPP students had significantly higher Math scores than control students in both 5th and 6th grades.

Memphis Business Academy (MBA). A significantly higher percentage of MBA students scored Proficient or Advanced in 7th grade Math compared to controls.

Promise Academy. Control students had slightly better performance in Reading/Language Arts while Promise students had slightly better performance in Math. It is important to note, however, that charter school membership was not a significant influence on achievement in 2006-07.

Southern Avenue. 1st grade students at Southern Avenue had better performance in both Reading/Language Arts and Math, while controls had better performance in both subjects in 2nd grade. Charter school membership was only a significant influence on 2006-07 achievement in 2nd grade Math.

The Soulsville Charter School. Soulsville students had significantly better performance than controls in 6th and 7th grade Math and 6th grade Reading/Language Arts. A significantly higher percentage of control students scored Proficient while a significantly higher percentage of Soulsville students scored Advanced in 6th grade Math.

Third-Year Schools

City University School of Liberal Arts. Algebra I and English 10 Gateway test scores were analyzed; no major effects were found.

Star Academy. Suggestive positive effects were found in both Reading/Language Arts and Mathematics at all grade levels. Charter school membership, however, did not significantly influence achievement in 2006-07.

Yo! Academy. Control students had significantly better performance in Algebra I; no significant differences were found in English 10 Gateway test scores. (The MCS Board of Education closed Yo! Academy in 2007.)

Fourth-Year Schools

Circles of Success Learning Academy (COSLA). In 2nd grade, COSLA had higher Math scores than controls, while the opposite was true for Reading/Language Arts. Suggestive positive effects were evidenced in both Reading/Language Arts and Math in 3rd and 4th grades. Controls had better performance in both subjects in 5th grade. Charter school membership was a significant influence on 2006-07 achievement in 4th grade Reading/Language Arts and for both subjects in 5th grade.

Memphis Academy of Health Sciences (MAHS). MAHS students had significantly better performance than controls in 6th and 8th grade Math (for students taking the regular 8th grade Math course), 7th and 8th grade Reading/Language Arts, and students scoring Proficient in 8th grade Algebra I. Control students had a significantly higher percentage scoring Advanced in 8th grade Algebra I.

Memphis Academy of Science and Engineering (MASE). Significant positive effects were found for MASE in 8th grade Reading/Language Arts (for those students also enrolled in Algebra I), students scoring Proficient in 8th grade Algebra I, and 10th grade English 10 performance. Control students had significantly better performance in 6th and 8th grade Math, 9th grade Algebra I, and students scoring Advanced in 8th grade Algebra I.

Smithson Craighead Academy (SCA). In third grade, Smithson students had lower average scores in both Reading/Language Arts and Math. Charter school membership was significant in Math. The average number correct for 4th grade Smithson-Craighead students was lower than controls in both Math and Reading/Language Arts. Charter school membership, however, was not significant.

Appendix H: Response Letter from the Commissioner of Education



PHIL BREDESEN
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TIMOTHY K. WEBB, Ed.D.
ACTING COMMISSIONER

February 12, 2008

Ms. Ethel R. Detch
Director
Offices of Research and Education Accountability
Suite 1700
505 Deaderick Street
Nashville, Tennessee 37243-0268

Dear Ms. Detch:

Thank you for the opportunity to review the 2008 Report on Tennessee Charter Schools. The Department concurs with your recommendation on capturing and disseminating the innovating practices found in charter schools to illustrate student and organizational strategies for success. As you correctly report, because Tennessee is still relatively new to the national charter movement, much of the previous and current emphasis of the Department has been in assisting with the creation and sustenance of the charter schools, rather than in documenting their levels of innovation.

For Tennessee charter schools to truly be laboratories of educational innovation, they must not only be practitioners of innovative ideas but disseminators of innovation as well. The Department believes that all effective practices should be disseminated to broaden the overall scope and effect of public education for all Tennessee children. In December 2007, the Department's Office of Charter Schools and Choice initiated discussion with the United States Department of Education on the possibility of amending the current award to include dissemination practices.

We will continue to work diligently with the General Assembly and other stakeholders to equip Tennessee with the best possible resources for improving public education.

Thank you again for the opportunity to review and contribute to this report.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Timothy K. Webb in cursive script.

Timothy K. Webb
Acting Commissioner

TKW/EH

Endnotes

- ¹ T.C.A. 49-13-106 (b)(1)(B) states that "A public charter school shall be operated by a not-for-profit organization with exemption from federal taxation under 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. No charter shall be granted to a for-profit corporation."
- ² Comptroller's Office of Education Accountability, *A Look at Tennessee's Charter Schools*, 2006, <http://www.comptroller1.state.tn.us/repository/RE/charterschools2006.pdf>.
- ³ Statistical significance indicates effects considered "sufficiently" reliable, inferably due to actual differences and not due to chance or sampling error.
- ⁴ Education Commission of the States, "School or Student Preference," <http://mb2.ecs.org/reports/Report.aspx?id=79%20>. "Tennessee Charter School Law," memo to author prepared by Todd Zeibarth, State Policy Director, National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, November 9, 2007. Author verified these sources through review of other state charter laws and communication with education officials in various states.
- ⁵ T.C.A. 49-13-106 (b)(1)(B) states that "A public charter school shall be operated by a not-for-profit organization with exemption from federal taxation under 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. No charter shall be granted to a for-profit corporation."
- ⁶ *Charter School Achievement: What We Know*, 3rd edition, National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, October 2006, p. 3.
- ⁷ Comptroller's Office of Education Accountability, *A Look at Tennessee's Charter Schools*, 2006, <http://www.comptroller1.state.tn.us/repository/RE/charterschools2006.pdf>.
- ⁸ Caroline M. Hoxby and Sonali Muraka, *New York City's Charter Schools Overall Report*, New York City Charter Schools Evaluation Project, June 2007.
- ⁹ Texas Center for Educational Research, *Texas Open-Enrollment Charter Schools, 2005-06 Evaluation*, March 2007.
- ¹⁰ Brian Gill, P. Mike Timpane, Karen E. Ross, Dominic J. Brewer, and Kevin Booker, *Rhetoric Versus Reality: What We Know and What We Need to Know About Vouchers and Charter Schools*, Rand Corporation, 2007 edition, p. 104.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 101.
- ¹³ Texas Center for Educational Research, p. v.
- ¹⁴ Gill, Timpane, et al., p. 102.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 98.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 102.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 104.
- ¹⁸ *Charter High Schools: Closing the Achievement Gap: Innovations in Education*, U.S. Department of Education, 2006. *K-8 Charter Schools: Closing the Achievement Gap: Innovations in Education*, U.S. Department of Education, 2007.
- ¹⁹ *What Works: Inside Model Charter Schools*, Center on Innovation and Improvement, 2007.
- ²⁰ *K-8 Charter Schools: Closing the Achievement Gap: Innovations in Education*, U.S. Department of Education, 2007, p. 12-13.
- ²¹ *K-8 Charter Schools: Closing the Achievement Gap: Innovations in Education*, U.S. Department of Education, 2007, p. 12.
- ²² Alabama, Kentucky, Maine, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, Washington, and West Virginia lack charter school laws.
- ²³ The Center for Education Reform, "Annual Survey of America's Charter Schools: 2006 Data," April 2007.
- ²⁴ Calculations based on National Center for Education Statistics, Tables 33 and 83, "Chapter 2. Elementary and Secondary Education," *Digest of Education Statistics, 2006*, at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/2007017.pdf>.
- ²⁵ National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, "Growth and Quality in the Charter School Movement: 2007 Dashboard."
- ²⁶ The Center for Education Reform, "Charter School Enrollment and Closures, By State," April 2007.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*
- ²⁸ Todd Zeibarth, National Alliance of Public Charter Schools, "Re: charter school legislation," Email to the author, August 23, 2007.
- ²⁹ Dakarai I. Aarons, "School board slams door on Yo! Academy," *The Commercial Appeal*, August 14, 2007.
- ³⁰ U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Deputy Secretary, *Evaluation of the Public Charter Schools Program: Final Report*, Washington, D.C., 2004.
- ³¹ T.C.A. 49-13-102(b).
- ³² Tennessee received the Public Charter Schools Program grant (a three-year grant) in 2002 (\$7.7 million) and 2006 (\$6.5 million).
- ³³ WestEd, *Assessment of Charter Schools Program Dissemination Funding*, November 2007.
- ³⁴ Peter Frumkin, *Creating New Schools: The Strategic Management of Charter Schools*, Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003, p. 22.
- ³⁵ *K-8 Charter Schools: Closing the Achievement Gap: Innovations in Education*, U.S. Department of Education, 2007, p. 27.
- ³⁶ Statistical significance indicates effects considered "sufficiently" reliable, inferably due to actual differences and not due to chance or sampling error.
- ³⁷ Education Commission of the States, "School or Student Preference," <http://mb2.ecs.org/reports/Report.aspx?id=79%20>. "Tennessee Charter School Law," memo to author prepared by Todd Zeibarth, State Policy Director, National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, November 9, 2007. Author verified these sources through review of other state charter laws and communication with education officials in various states.
- ³⁸ Memphis City Schools, Open Enrollment Information Site, <http://www.mcsk12.net/Open-Enrollment/>.
- ³⁹ Connecticut State Department of Education, "Public School Choice in Connecticut: A Guide for Students and Their Families, 2007-2008," <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/equity/choice/schoolchoice2007.pdf>.
- ⁴⁰ "Tennessee Charter School Law," memo to author prepared by Todd Zeibarth, State Policy Director, National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, November 9, 2007.
- ⁴¹ U.S. Department of Education, State Charter School Facilities Incentive Grants Program Information Site, <http://www.ed.gov/programs/statecharter/awards.html>.

⁴² The initial contract agreement between a charter school and an authorizing LEA establishes the maximum enrollment for the school. If the school wishes to increase enrollment beyond what is stated in the contract, they must petition the Board of Education for permission.

⁴³ “Continuously enrolled” is defined as being enrolled at the school since the first 20-day attendance reporting period until the test administration. Schools are only held accountable under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) for making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) based on students who are defined as “continuously enrolled” at their particular school. This is also known as the student’s “membership” status.

⁴⁴ CREP did not have access to the portfolio assessments of special education students. Additionally, the number of special education students was very small for each school/grade, and therefore, they were not examined separately.

⁴⁵ CREP’s analysis included English Language Learner (ELL) students who were T1 or T2. T1 and T2 are ELL students who have tested as “English Language Proficient” on the state’s ELL exam. They are designated as T1 their first year after testing proficient, and T2 their second year after testing proficient. T1 and T2 are counted in the ELL subgroup for AYP purposes. ELL students are exempt from AYP calculations in their first year in an American school. Additionally, the number of ELL students was very small for each school/grade.

⁴⁶ With the exception of the 8th grade Algebra I analyses, baseline refers to the pre-charter school enrollment year. For example, if a charter school begins with sixth grade, the baseline year would be fifth grade, the year before the student could enter the charter school. In the case of 8th grade Algebra I, the previous year’s 7th grade (2005-06) TCAP/AT Math score was used.

⁴⁷ A Normal Curve Equivalent score is a standardized score with a mean of 50 and standard deviation of 21.06. NCE’s represent student scores on a normal curve, similar to a percentile rank.

⁴⁸ Effect sizes were computed by a formula called “Cohen’s *d*.” Each effect size (or *d*) indicates the number of standard deviations by which the charter school student mean differs from the control student mean. Thus, an effect size of say, +0.50, would indicate a half of a standard deviation advantage—a highly substantial educational impact. Generally, in education, effect sizes exceeding +0.20 would be considered meaningful and fairly strong when obtained for a whole-school intervention. In all cases, Cohen’s *d* effect size was computed as the mean difference (treatment – control) divided by the pooled standard deviation.

⁴⁹ “Continuously enrolled” is defined as being enrolled at the school since the first 20-day attendance reporting period until the test administration. Schools are only held accountable under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) for making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) based on students who are defined as “continuously enrolled” at their particular school. This is also known as the student’s “membership” status.

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⁵² A Normal Curve Equivalent score is a standardized score with a mean of 50 and standard deviation of 21.06. NCE’s represent student scores on a normal curve, similar to a percentile rank.

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