

Dropout Recovery Charter Schools

By Aaron Churchill

March 2014

BACKGROUND

Definition and Accountability

Charter schools that enroll a majority of their students, aged 16 to 21, who are at-risk of dropping out or have done so may be defined as a “dropout-prevention-and-recovery” school. Because these schools serve mainly at-risk youth, they are considered a special subset of charter schools for accountability purposes.

House Bill 79 (2006) enacted Ohio’s “automatic closure” statute for chronically low-performing charters, but the bill exempted dropout-recovery schools from this provision. Eligible schools received a waiver from the Ohio Department of Education or in certain circumstances from the State Board of Education. Dropout-recovery charter schools, however, fell under the same accountability framework as non-exempt charter schools. For example, dropout-recovery charters received an overall rating (e.g., “academic watch”) on their school report cards.

The accountability framework for dropout-recovery charters changed under House Bill 555 (2012). The legislation established an alternative accountability framework, which includes a separate set of measures, while placing these schools under an automatic closure provision for low-performance.¹ Effective July 2014, a dropout-recovery charter school will be subject to automatic closure if it receives a designation of “does not meet standards” for two of the three most recent school years (they will not receive an overall A-F letter grade).

The accountability metrics for dropout-recovery charters include the following ([ORC 3314.017](#)):

- **Graduation Rates** Four, five, six, seven, and eight-year graduation rates (seven-year rate to come in 2014; eight-year to come in 2015);
- **Ohio High-School Achievement Assessments:** The percentage of twelfth-grade students and enrolled students who are within three months of their 22nd birthday who passed all applicable state high-school assessments.
- **Annual Measurable Objectives:** Same as the AMO calculations for other charter and traditional district schools.

¹ For more on alternative accountability policies for dropout-recovery charters, see the testimony of Jody Ernst of the Colorado League of Charter Schools who [testified before the Ohio Senate in April 2012](#). See also the National Association of Charter School Authorizer’s report [Anecdotes Aren’t Enough: An Evidence-Based Approach to Accountability for Alternative Charter Schools](#) (2013).

- **Student Growth:** Ohio is working on a growth model for dropout-recovery charters which would use reading and math results from a nationally norm-referenced assessment.²

Dropout-recovery charters will receive an overall rating (exceeds standards, meets standards, does not meet standards) starting in August 2015. It will be based 30 percent on graduation rates, 30 percent on student growth, 20 percent on state assessment results, and 20 percent on AMOs.

The state excludes a district-authorized dropout-recovery school's data from that district's report card. Under normal circumstances—when the district-authorized charter school is *not* a dropout-recovery—state law requires that the charter data be included in the district's report card [[ORC 3302.03\(I\)](#)].

² The state has drafted proposed [administrative code provisions](#) that would establish the accountability rules.

DATA³

Enrollment

Last year, 13,372 students attended one of the state's 73 dropout-recovery charter schools. The enrollment in dropout recovery schools grew consistently from 2006 until 2011, but since then enrollment has fallen as Chart 1 shows. The enrollment dip between 2011 and 2012 can be partly attributed to decrease in the Life Skills Center schools' enrollments (Chart 2). The number of Life Skills Centers has remained constant (15 schools) with the exception of 2005-06 when there were 14 schools.

Chart 1: Enrollment in dropout recovery charter schools, 2005-06 to 2012-13

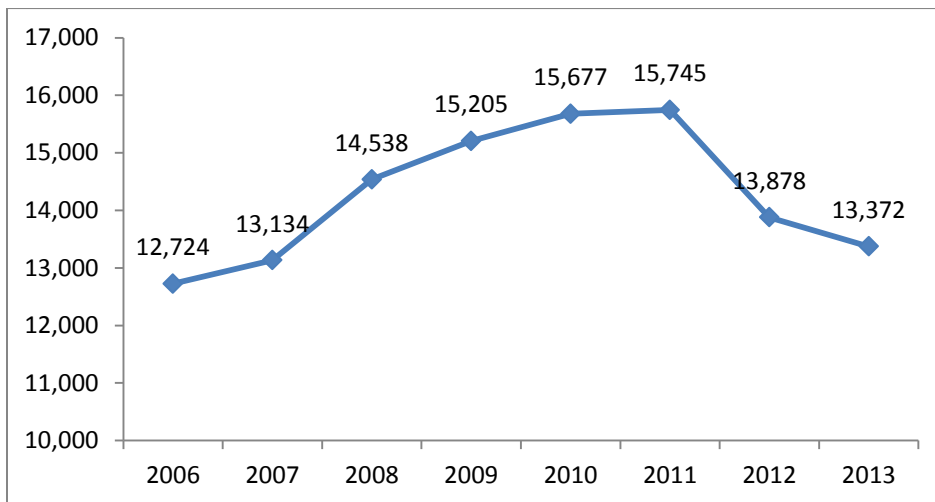
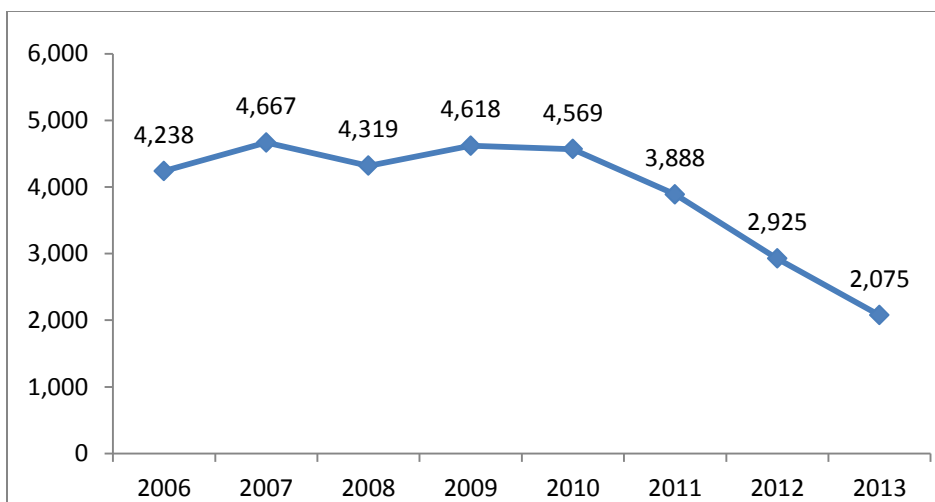


Chart 2: Enrollment in Life Skills Center dropout-recovery charters, 2005-06 to 2012-13



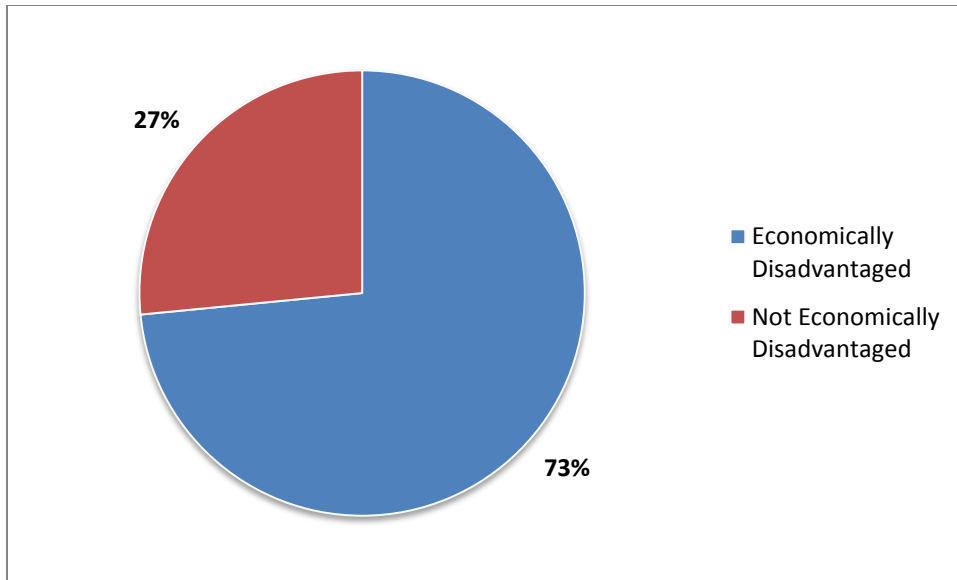
Note: Three former Life Skills Centers (then operated by White Hat) changed management companies and school names effective July 2012. These schools are not included in the totals of Chart 2.

³ Unless noted otherwise, the source of data is the Ohio Department of Education's [Advanced Reports](#).

Demographics

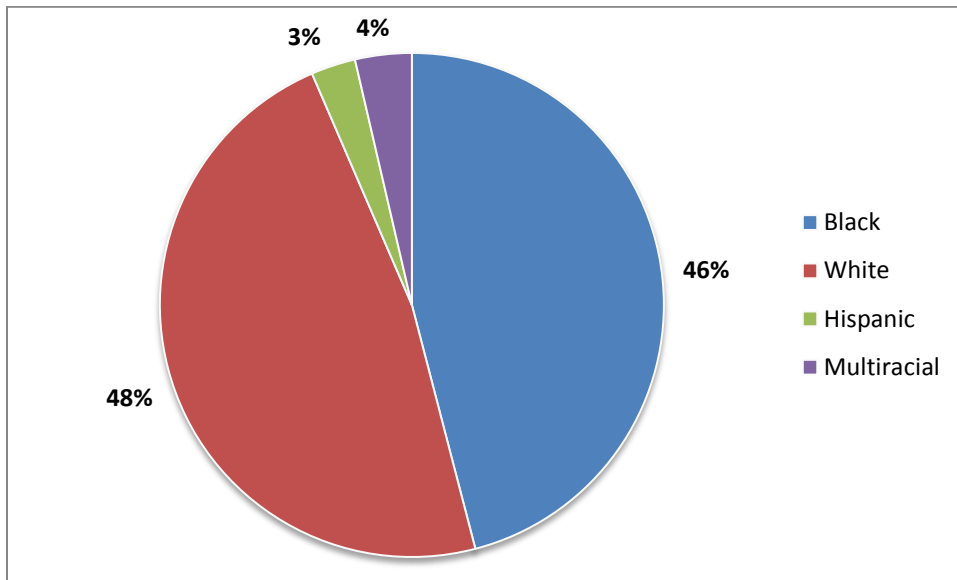
Dropout-recovery charter schools enroll disproportionate numbers of low-income and black students relative to the general school-age population. The male-female ratio is even and reflects the statewide gender ratio. Charts 3 to 5 show the demographic breakout of enrollment across Ohio’s dropout-recovery schools for 2012-13.

Chart 3: Percentage of dropout-recovery charter students, by economically disadvantage, 2012-13.



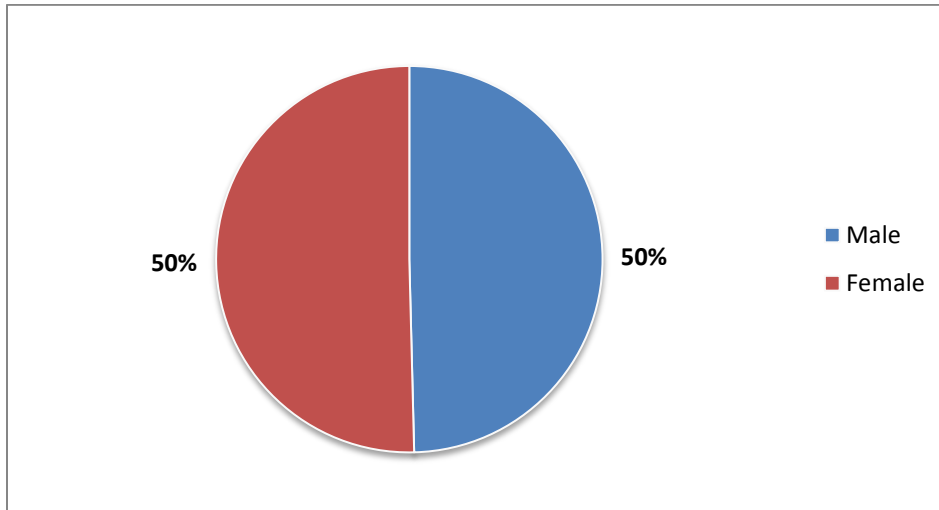
Statewide Average: 47% economically disadvantaged; 53% non-economically disadvantaged

Chart 4: Percentage of dropout-recovery charter students, by race, 2012-13



Statewide Average: 74% white; 16% black; 4% Hispanic; 4% multiracial; 2% Asian

Chart 5: Percentage of dropout-recovery charter students, by gender, 2012-13

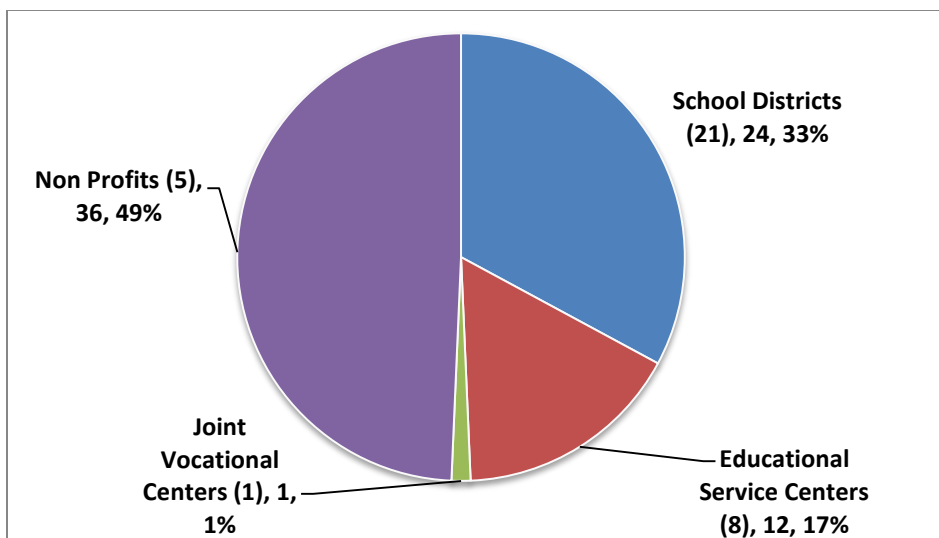


Statewide Average: 51% male; 49% female

Authorizers

Nonprofits, school districts, educational service centers (ESCs), and a vocational center authorize dropout-recovery charter schools. Twenty-one school districts authorize 24 dropout-recovery charters. Eight ESCs authorize 12 charters. Among the nonprofit entities, St. Aloysius is the largest single authorizer, authorizing 12 schools. Educational Resource Consultants authorizes 9 schools. The Tri-Rivers Joint Vocational Center authorizes one school, the TRECA e-school, which enrolls over 2,000 students.

Chart 6: Number of dropout-recovery schools by authorizer type, 2012-13



How to read the chart: The chart displays the breakdown of dropout-recovery charters by their authorizer type. For example, there are 21 school districts that together sponsor 24 dropout-recovery schools, which comprise 33 percent of all dropout-recovery charter schools in Ohio.

Student Mobility

The Fordham Institute and Community Research Partner’s research found that many dropout-recovery charters experience massive student mobility over the course of a school year. Some dropout-recovery schools have mobility rates upward of 200 percent—the highest rates among all types of schools in Ohio. This means that during a school year, these schools experience twice as many incidences of mobility relative to their baseline enrollment.⁴ In short, some dropout-recovery charters are a revolving door of students going in and out of their school.

Table 1: Mobility (or “churn”) rates for selected dropout-recovery charter schools, October 2010 to May 2011

Table 24. Highest and lowest churn rates for dropout recovery charter schools

School	County	Grade range	Enroll.	Rating	Econ. disadv. (%)	Churn rate (%)
Frederick Douglass Reclamation Academy	Cuyahoga	8-12	88	NA	84.2	6.0
The Arch Academy	Franklin	8-12	84	NA	89.8	11.8
New Beginnings Academy	Franklin	8-12	61	NA	88.1	14.3
Youthbuild Columbus Community	Franklin	9-12	234	A	80.6	21.5
Langston Hughes High School	Cuyahoga	8-12	149	F	54.0	46.4
Cleveland Academy for Scholarship Technology and Leadership	Cuyahoga	9-12	283	D	77.1	50.0
Lakewood City Academy	Cuyahoga	K-12	161	B	64.7	54.2
Dayton Technology Design High School	Montgomery	9-12	133	F	87.3	54.5
Foxfire High School	Muskingum	9-12	268	C	69.4	61.1
General Chapple James Leadership Academy	Montgomery	9-12	120	C	60.7	63.7
The ISUS Institute of Health Care	Montgomery	9-12	75	A	93.3	197.3
Life Skills Ctr Of Cleveland	Cuyahoga	9-12	298	F	94.4	200.8
Life Skills Center of Elyria	Lorain	9-12	185	D	85.8	204.1
Lancaster Digital Academy (E-charter)	Fairfield	K-12	97	NA	70.6	205.2
Life Skills Of Northeast Ohio	Cuyahoga	9-12	374	F	81.4	205.3
Marion City Digital Academy (E-charter)	Marion	K-12	169	F	67.7	207.4
Life Skills Center of Dayton	Montgomery	9-12	353	F	89.6	227.2
Life Skills Center of Columbus Southeast	Franklin	9-12	276	C	79.4	229.3
Mahoning Unlimited Classroom (E-Charter)	Mahoning	4-12	183	C	71.6	323.3
Mansfield Enhancement Academy	Richland	9-12	52	NA	73.6	344.2

Source: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, [Student Nomads: Mobility in Ohio’s Schools](#) (Columbus: Author, 2012).

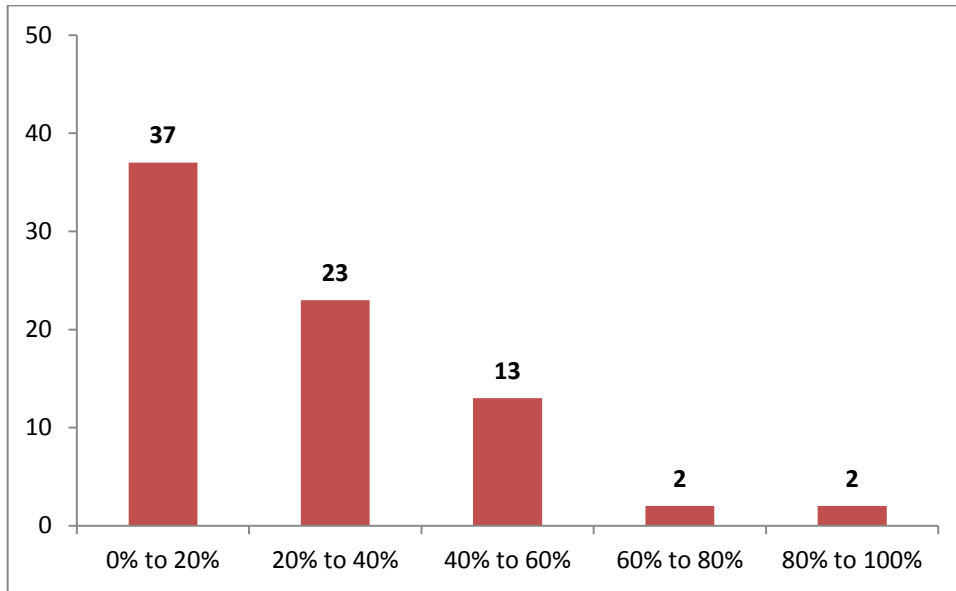
School Performance

Generally speaking, the performance of dropout-recovery schools has been suspect. To a certain extent, this might be expected given the at-risk characteristics of their students (i.e., low-income, mobile, low-achieving). Even so, the near majority of dropout-recovery charter schools still have five-year graduation

⁴ An incidence of mobility is either a student admittance into or a student withdrawal from a school.

rates below 20 percent, and the overall average five-year graduation rate is 25 percent across all dropout-recovery schools. There are few dropout-recovery schools that display relatively strong graduation rates (above 60 percent): Auglaize County Educational Academy – 60 percent; Miamisburg Secondary Academy – 81 percent; Rushmore Academy – 83 percent; Zanesville Community School – 76 percent.

Chart 7: Number of dropout-recovery charter schools by five-year graduation rates, 2011-12.



How to read the chart: The chart displays the number of dropout-recovery charter schools across five equal ranges with respect to their graduation rates. For example, there were 37 dropout-recovery schools that reported a five-year graduation rate between 0 and 20 percent, and there were 2 schools within the 80 to 100 percent range.