

OHIO

Examining the State's Lowest-Performing Schools

OVERVIEW

In principle, charter schools face greater results-based accountability in exchange for wide-ranging operational autonomy. One might, therefore, expect the charter sector to have fewer persistently low-performing schools because they either close or improve. But does this really happen?

This profile examines the trajectory of Ohio's lowest-performing charter and district schools over a recent five-year period. It is part of a 10-state study that compares the rates of turnaround and closure among charter and district schools and investigates how responses to school failure differ within and between the two sectors of public education.

The big news for the Buckeye State is that Ohio has been much more aggressive in closing low-performing schools (both the district and the charter variety) than the other nine states in the study. Closure rates were roughly the same within Ohio's charter and district sectors: Thirty-five percent of Ohio's low-performing charter schools and 34 percent of Ohio's low-performing district schools were closed (compared with 19 percent and 11 percent, respectively, for the entire 10-state sample).¹ Of the low-performing Ohio schools that remained open, few made much progress over the five-year period, and none were "turned around." This points to the challenge facing failing schools in both sectors, and suggest that charter schools, despite having greater operational autonomy, may not be better at turnarounds than their district counterparts.

Characteristics of Ohio's Low-Performing Schools

The study identified a school as low-performing if its average combined reading and math proficiency rate in 2002-03 and 2003-04 ranked among the lowest 10 percent of the state's public elementary

BACKGROUND ON OHIO'S CHARTER SECTOR

Ohio first passed charter legislation in 1997. According to the Center for Education Reform (CER), 338 charter schools operated in the state in 2009-10.² These schools served over 100,000 students, or 5 percent of all Ohio public-school pupils.³ Sixty-two charter schools have closed in the state since 1997, representing 16 percent of all charters ever opened in Ohio.

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS) reports that 56 percent of Ohio's charter schools are independently operated, while 21 percent partner with nonprofit charter management organizations (CMOs) and 23 percent are affiliated with for-profit education management organizations (EMOs). The strength of Ohio's charter law was ranked twenty-sixth (among forty states) by NAPCS.⁴ The state allows school boards, state universities, and nonprofit organizations to authorize charters, but caps the number of charter schools that each authorizer can sponsor.⁵ Only school operators that meet certain performance targets are presently allowed to open new start-up schools in Ohio.⁶

or middle schools and the school also failed to meet the state's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) proficiency target in both years. This definition is consistent with the federal criteria used to identify schools for Title I School Improvement Grants (SIGs). **It is important to note, however, that this definition does not reflect a school's value-added performance. Therefore, some schools designated as low-performing may actually have above-average impact on student growth, despite producing consistently low proficiency rates.**

Low-performing schools were identified from a statewide dataset of all elementary and middle schools in which more than twenty students participated in state testing in the baseline years (2002-03 and 2003-04). Schools that opened in 2003-04 or after were excluded, as were schools serving only students with disabilities. In the end, forty-nine Ohio charters and 2,413 district schools were included in the dataset.⁷

Table 1 shows that thirty-four of the forty-nine charter schools (69 percent) met the criteria for low-performance, as did 207 of the 2,413 district schools (9 percent). The fact that Ohio's charter sector has proportionately more low-performing schools may reflect, in part, the large fraction of charter schools located in disadvantaged, urban areas.

Table 1. Ohio Schools Designated as Low-Performing in Baseline Years

	CHARTER	DISTRICT	ALL SCHOOLS IN DATASET
Low-Performing	69% (n=34)	9% (n=207)	10% (n=241)
Others	31% (n=15)	91% (n=2,206)	90% (n=2,221)
Total Schools	49	2,413	2,462

Notes: Dataset restricted to non-special-education schools with publicly available reading and math proficiency scores for more than twenty students in 2002-03 and 2003-04. "Low-performing" indicates all schools with average combined reading and math proficiency rates in 2002-03 and 2003-04 ranking in the lowest 10 percent among all public schools of the same type (elementary or middle) that also failed to meet the state's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) proficiency target in both years.

Source: Author's calculations. Ohio Department of Education (2010).

Table 2 (see page 90) compares characteristics of the low-performing charter and district schools with other schools in their respective sectors. Low-performing schools in both sectors enrolled higher proportions of poor and minority students and were more likely to be located in urban areas. The average enrollment of low-performing district schools was 451, compared with 414 in other district schools; the average enrollment of low-performing charter schools was 449, versus 254 in the other charters.

Table 2. Characteristics of Ohio's Low-Performing Schools in 2003-04

	DISTRICT SECTOR			CHARTER SECTOR		
	LOW PERFORMERS	OTHER SCHOOLS	AVERAGE	LOW PERFORMERS	OTHER SCHOOLS	AVERAGE
Location (%)						
Urban	84.5	17.5	23.3	94.1	73.3	87.8
Rural	1.0	29.3	26.9	0.0	6.7	2.0
Other	14.5	53.1	49.8	5.9	20.0	10.2
Student Population (%)						
Free/Reduced-Price Lunch	80.3	32.7	36.8	78.1	62.7	73.1
Special Education	17.2	13.7	14.0	10.1	11.5	10.5
Limited English Proficiency	2.9	2.0	2.0	0.1	0.0	0.1
Hispanic	8.3	6.4	6.5	5.9	7.9	6.8
Black	71.2	22.9	29.1	81.0	57.0	73.3
# Schools	207	2,206	2,413	34	15	49
Avg. Enrollment	451	414	418	449	254	390

Notes: All figures are unweighted averages of school-level data from 2003-04. School locations based on National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) Locale Codes: "Urban" designates schools located in urbanized areas within principal cities with populations larger than 100,000; "Rural" designates schools in non-urbanized areas with fewer than 2,500 residents and population densities less than 1,000 people per square mile; "Other" designates schools in non-rural areas outside of principal cities, which NCES refers to as suburbs or towns.

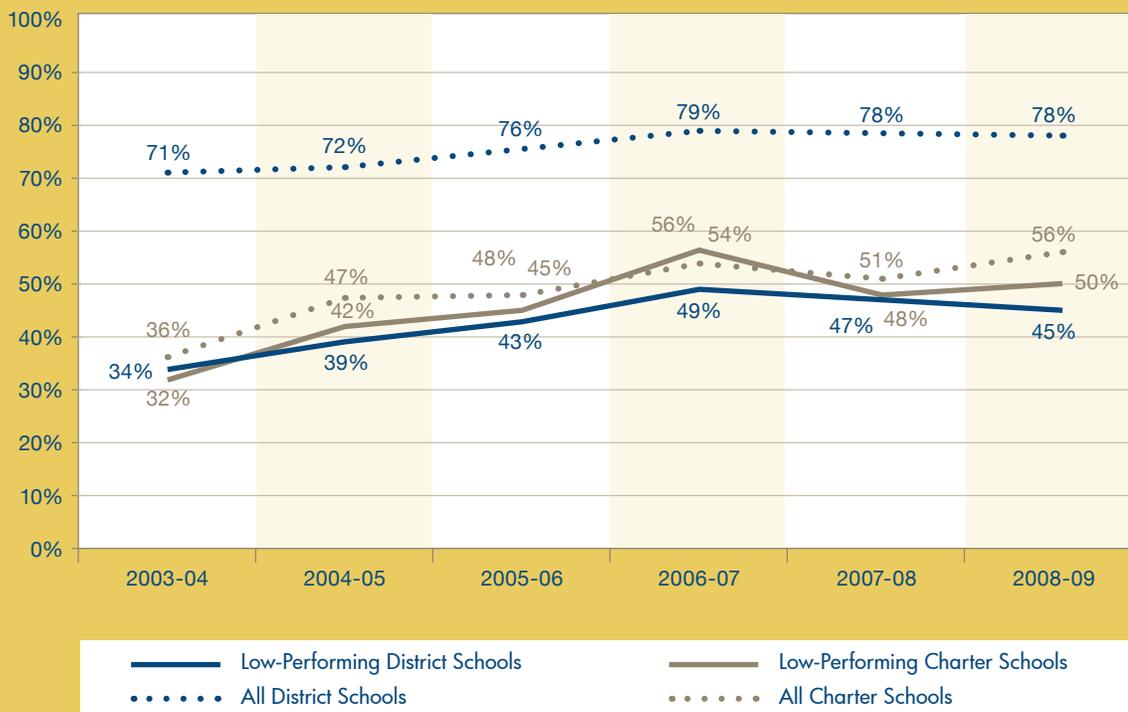
Source: Author's calculations. National Center for Education Statistics' Common Core of Data (2003-04).

READING AND MATH PROFICIENCY TRENDS FROM 2003-04 TO 2008-09

The study tracks the performance of those schools classified as low-performing in 2003-04 across five years to determine whether they made any progress by 2008-09. Figure 1 (see page 91) presents the average reading and math proficiency rates of the original low-performing charter and district schools from 2003-04 through 2008-09 as compared with all charter and district schools in the statewide dataset.

Average proficiency rates improved steadily in both sectors over the five-year period.⁸ Larger increases were seen in the charter sector, although its average proficiency rate remains more than 20 percentage points below the district sector.⁹ Ohio's low-performing charter schools averaged larger proficiency gains than low-performing district schools from 2003-04 to 2008-09, but this difference was not statistically significant.¹⁰

Figure 1. Ohio's Reading and Math Proficiency Rates (2003-04 to 2008-09)



Notes: Calculations limited to dataset, which includes all non-special-education elementary and middle schools with publicly available reading and math scores for over twenty students in 2002-03 and 2003-04. Proficiency-rate trends based on 207 low-performing district schools, 2,413 total district schools, thirty-four low-performing charter schools, and forty-nine total charter schools.

Source: Author's calculations. Ohio Department of Education.

PROGRESS OF LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS FROM 2003-04 TO 2008-09

Over time, low-performing schools can take different paths. Some might vastly improve (i.e., “turn around”); others might improve modestly, remain stagnant, or close. To examine the progress—or lack thereof—of low-performing charter and district schools in Ohio from 2003-04 to 2008-09, the original low performers (from 2003-04) were placed into four classifications (see Figure 2 on page 92) based on their average combined 2007-08 and 2008-09 reading and math proficiency rates and whether or not they were still in operation in 2008-09.¹¹

Turnaround:	By 2008-09, school performed at or above the 51st state percentile in reading and math proficiency.
Moderate Improvement:	By 2008-09, school performed between the 26th and 50th state percentiles in reading and math proficiency.
Persistent Low Performance:	By 2008-09, school performed at or below the 25th state percentile in reading and math proficiency.
Closed:	School ceased operations prior to the 2009-10 school year.

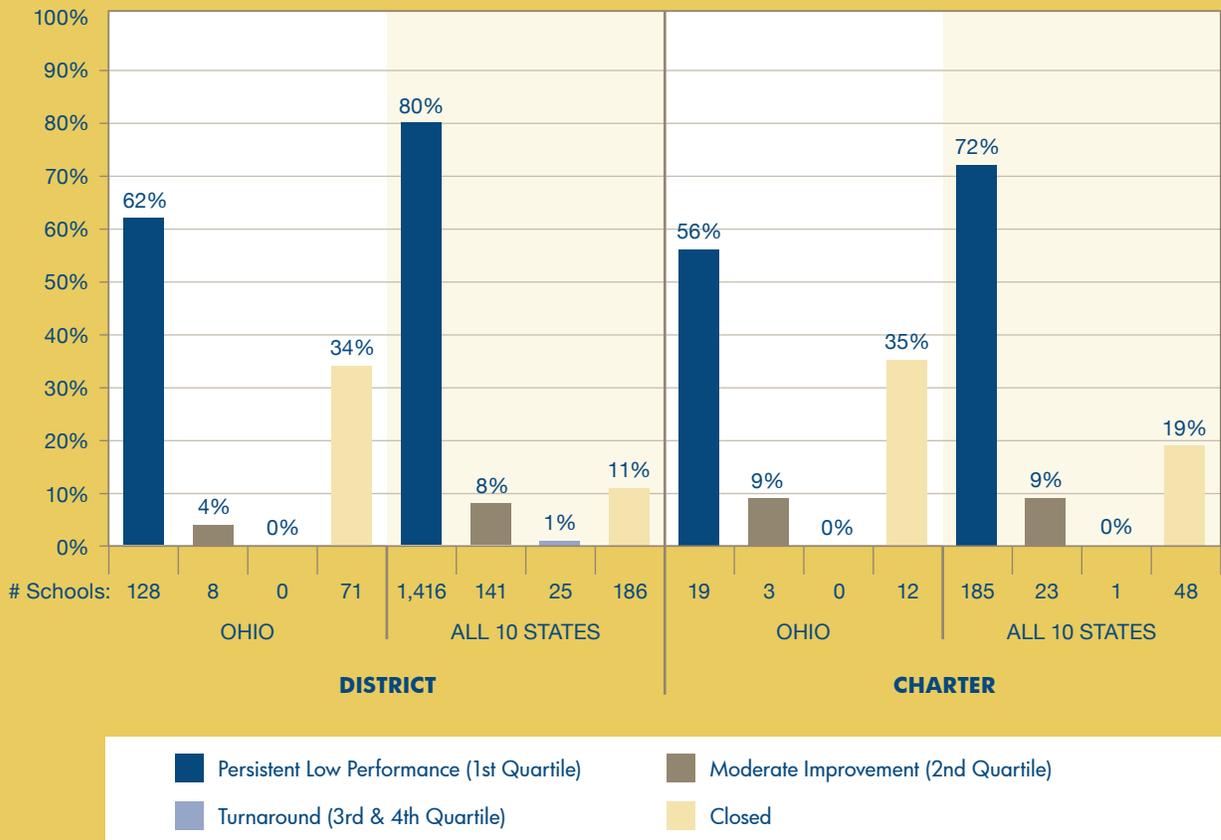
Figure 3 (see page 93) shows the extent to which low-performing charter and district schools in 2003-04 altered their status by 2008-09. Ohio's figures are presented alongside those for the full 10-state sample. Three notable findings emerge:

- Ohio had the smallest proportion of persistently low-performing schools of the ten states in the study. Yet most of the schools in both sectors that were low-performing in 2003-04 remained in the bottom quartile of reading and math proficiency five years later: Fifty-six percent (n=19) of the low-performing charter schools remained in the bottom quartile as did 62 percent (n=128) of the low-performing district schools.
- Ohio's charter and district sectors also closed the largest percentages of low-performing schools among the ten states in the study. Closure rates were roughly the same within Ohio's charter and district sectors: 35 percent (n=12) of Ohio's low-performing charter schools and 34 percent (n=71) of Ohio's low-performing district schools were closed.
- None of Ohio's low-performing schools in 2003-04 qualified as a "turnaround" by 2008-09. Turnaround rates in the 10-state sample were not much better, with only 0.4 percent and 1.4 percent of charter and district schools meeting the criteria. These statistics illustrate the tough odds facing America's numerous school turnaround efforts.

On balance, neither Ohio's charter sector nor its district sector showed itself skilled at dramatically improving its low-performing schools. Yet both Ohio sectors were more successful in closing low-performing schools than their counterparts among the other nine states in this analysis: A low-performing school in either Ohio sector had a roughly a one-in-three chance of closure.

Ohio can improve the quality of its public education system by continuing to shut down low-performing schools.¹² Even with their additional autonomy, charter schools rarely make dramatic turnarounds in performance. For those charter authorizers who defer the closure option in hopes that weak schools will make dramatic improvement, these results suggest that they are likely to be disappointed.

Figure 3. Status of 2003-04 Low-Performing Schools in 2008-09



Notes: Schools were classified as demonstrating “persistent low performance” if their average combined reading and math proficiency rates in 2007-08 and 2008-09 ranked in the bottom quartile in the state; schools were classified as making “moderate improvement” if their proficiency rates rose to the second quartile in the state; schools were classified as “turnaround” if their proficiency rates rose above the 50th percentile in the state; schools were classified as “closed” if the school was no longer in operation in the 2009-10 school year. Percentages may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

Source: Author’s calculations. Ohio Department of Education and the National Center for Education Statistics’ Common Core of Data.

ILLUSTRATIVE CASES

We offer here two illustrative cases of Ohio schools—one charter and one district—that were low-performing in 2003-04. Though anecdotal, they provide some insight into the different experiences of the state’s low-performing charter and district schools by exploring their respective accountability pressures and improvement strategies, as well as other influences on school performance. Information for these cases was gathered from public documents retrieved via the Internet and, when possible, interviews with school and district leaders.

Because Ohio was relatively successful in closing low performers, at least when compared with other states in this study, the following two cases profile two schools that were in fact closed during this period.

Washington Park Elementary

Thirty-four percent of Ohio’s low-performing district schools shut their doors between 2003-04 and 2008-09, mostly as a result of school consolidation efforts. These consolidations were undertaken in response to dwindling district enrollments caused by the growth of charter schools as well as by demographic decline in most Ohio cities. Cincinnati Public Schools closed fifteen schools in our sample between 2003-04 and 2008-09, while Columbus Public Schools and Cleveland Public Schools closed ten and seven schools, respectively.

One school closed in Cincinnati was Washington Park Elementary. Though the school failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in 2005,¹³ the reason for its closure depends upon whom one asks. Media accounts told varying stories: Some depicted its closure as a move to aid the area’s economic growth; others accused the district of deciding that the school “was no longer needed”;¹⁴ still others blamed lagging attendance and difficult home environments for the school’s poor performance.¹⁵ A representative from the deputy superintendent’s office, however, had another version: “The school was closed as a part of a consolidation effort” that had nothing to do with the school’s academic performance, she explained. The consolidation came into effect in August 2007, when Washington Park combined with Rothenberg Preparatory Academy.¹⁶

To be fair, ambiguity surrounding Washington Park’s closure is not unique among closed schools in this report; because low performance and low enrollment are often intertwined, it can be difficult to tease out the primary reason for a school’s closure.

Colin Powell Leadership Academy

Thirty-five percent of Ohio’s low-performing charter schools were closed between 2003-04 and 2008-09, the highest closure rate among the ten state charter sectors in the study. A handful of these charters were closed in consequence of former attorney general Marc Dann’s intense campaign against the state’s charter schools.

Colin Powell Leadership Academy was an elementary school located in Dayton. Over 95 percent of its students were African American and poor, and its student mobility rate ranged from 60 to 70 percent. The school was targeted in a lawsuit filed by Dann that accused it (and other schools) of failing to educate children and therefore failing to meet its fiduciary responsibilities as a charitable trust. In light of the lawsuit and the many operational challenges facing the school, its board and superintendent opted to voluntarily surrender its charter in January 2008, during the middle of a school year.

Dann’s attack on charter schools seemed politically motivated, but it was also indicative of growing frustration over the failure of Ohio’s authorizers to hold their schools accountable. Colin Powell Leadership Academy’s low performance left little room for arguments against its closure. Despite various efforts by the school to improve via class-size reductions, after-school tutoring, and professional development—and to engage its authorizer in providing academic supports and evaluations—its proficiency rates ranked consistently in the bottom 10 percent statewide. It was rated in “Academic Emergency” by the state’s accountability system for three straight years prior to its closure. In 2005-06, it met just one of twelve school accountability indicators, yet its authorizer provided little evidence that it did much to support the school or to close it. According to the school’s former superintendent, the authorizer focused most of its energy on ensuring that the school’s financial documents were in order.

REFERENCES

1. Ohio underwent a massive school construction campaign during this time that included minimum sizes for buildings; thus some of these closures could be due to the consolidation of buildings. For more information, see the Ohio School Facilities Commission's 2002 annual report at http://www.osfc.state.oh.us/Portals/0/PDFs/pub_2002.pdf.
2. *Annual Survey of America's Charter Schools 2010* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Education Reform, 2010), http://www.edreform.com/download/CER_Charter_Survey_2010.pdf.
3. National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, Public Charter School Dashboard, <http://www.publiccharters.org/dashboard/home>.
4. Todd Ziebarth, *How State Charter Laws Rank Against the New Model Public Charter School Law* (Washington, D.C.: National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2010), http://www.publiccharters.org/files/publications/DB-ModelLaw_Report_01-12-10.pdf.
5. Ohio Revised Code, "3314.015 Oversight of Sponsors," LAWriter Ohio Laws and Rules, <http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/3314.015>.
6. Ohio Revised Code, "3314.016 Operators of New Start-up Schools," LAWriter Ohio Laws and Rules, <http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/3314.016>.
7. The National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) Common Core of Data (CCD) reports a total of 3,988 public schools in Ohio in 2003-04. This analysis was limited to 2,462 schools after excluding sixty-two schools designated by NCES as special-education schools, 786 schools designated by NCES as high schools, sixty-one schools that NCES designated as new in 2003-04, and 617 other schools that did not have publicly available reading and math proficiency data for more than twenty students for 2002-03 and 2003-04 from the Ohio Department of Education.
8. Modest increases were also observed in 4th- and 8th-grade math and reading scores from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (National Center for Education Statistics, "NAEP State Profiles," U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/states/>).
9. This analysis is insufficient to yield conclusions regarding the overall effectiveness of Ohio's charter and district sectors. More rigorous student-level analyses suggest that academic growth is lower, on average, in Ohio's charter schools. Specifically, a 2009 study by Stanford's Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) found the average growth of Ohio's charter-school students is 0.06 standard deviations lower, on average, than similar district students (*Multiple Choice: Charter School Performance in 16 States*, Stanford, CA: Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2009, http://credo.stanford.edu/reports/MULTIPLE_CHOICE_CREDO.pdf).
10. Proficiency trends in the charter and district sectors could reflect changes in student characteristics. But Ohio showed no statistically significant differences between the low-performing charter and district schools in average changes in the percentage of Free and Reduced-Price Lunch (FRL) students, special-education students, and Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students from 2003-04 to 2008-09.
11. The analysis used average proficiency rates over two years to ensure that the measure accurately represented the performance of a school, not idiosyncratic test performance in a single year.
12. In 2005, Ohio passed legislation requiring the automatic closure of any charter school meeting specific low-performance criteria. This legislation was modified in 2006 and again in 2009. The 2009 amendment dictates that schools meeting the following criteria must close automatically: For schools serving students in grade three and below, closure is required for schools that have been in academic emergency for three of the four most recent school years; for schools serving students from grades four to eight (or grades four to nine, but no grade higher than nine), closure is required for schools that have been in academic emergency and that have demonstrated less than one standard year of academic growth in reading or math for at least two of the three most recent years; for schools serving students in grade ten and above, closure is required for schools that have been in academic emergency for three of the four most recent years. The first two schools affected by this legislation were slated to close in June 2009. See Ohio Revised Code, "3314.35 Permanent Closure After July 1, 2008 - Criteria," LAWriter Ohio Laws and Rules, <http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/3314.35> (accessed November 15, 2010), and Ohio Department of Education School Options, "Annual Reports on Ohio Community Schools," Ohio Department of Education, <http://education.ohio.gov/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?page=3&TopicRelationID=662&ContentID=42095&Content=91368>.
13. Denise Smith Amos, "Low Rating Can Cost Schools," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, August 18, 2005.
14. Ken Alltucker, "Plan's Dilemma: Drop-inn Center," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, June 15, 2004; Editorial, "CPS Should Deal on Washington Park," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 9, 2008.
15. Denise Smith Amos, "Kids Rewarded for Showing Up," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, October 11, 2003; Denise Smith Amos, "Many of Our Kids Live in War Zone, Too," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 30, 2003.
16. See Cincinnati Public Schools' timetable for closing buildings at <http://www.cps-k12.org/facilities/modifications/FMPModFeb07.htm>.