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BAD SCHOOLS RARELY DIE, NEW STUDY FINDS

Vast majority of low-performing charter and district schools remain weak five years later, neither improved, transformed, nor shut down

WASHINGTON – Low-performing public schools—both charter and traditional district schools—are stubbornly resistant to significant change, according to a new study released today by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. Reviewing ten states over five years, analysts found the vast majority of such schools remained open and low-performing. The charter sector did slightly better at closing down weak schools, but neither sector has cause for celebration.

“We hear a lot, especially from Secretary Duncan, about ‘turning around’ chronically failing schools, but we can now see how rarely this actually happens,” said Fordham president Chester E. Finn, Jr. “We need to overhaul our accountability systems to make it tougher for bad schools to continue.”

Are Bad Schools Immortal? The Scarcity of Turnarounds and Shutdowns in Both Charter and District Sectors, identified some 2,025 low-performing charter and district schools across ten states and tracked them from 2003-04 through 2008-09 to determine how many were turned around, shut down, or remained low-performing. Results were dismal. Seventy-two percent of the original low-performing charter schools remained in operation—and remained low-performing—five years later, as did 80 percent of district schools.

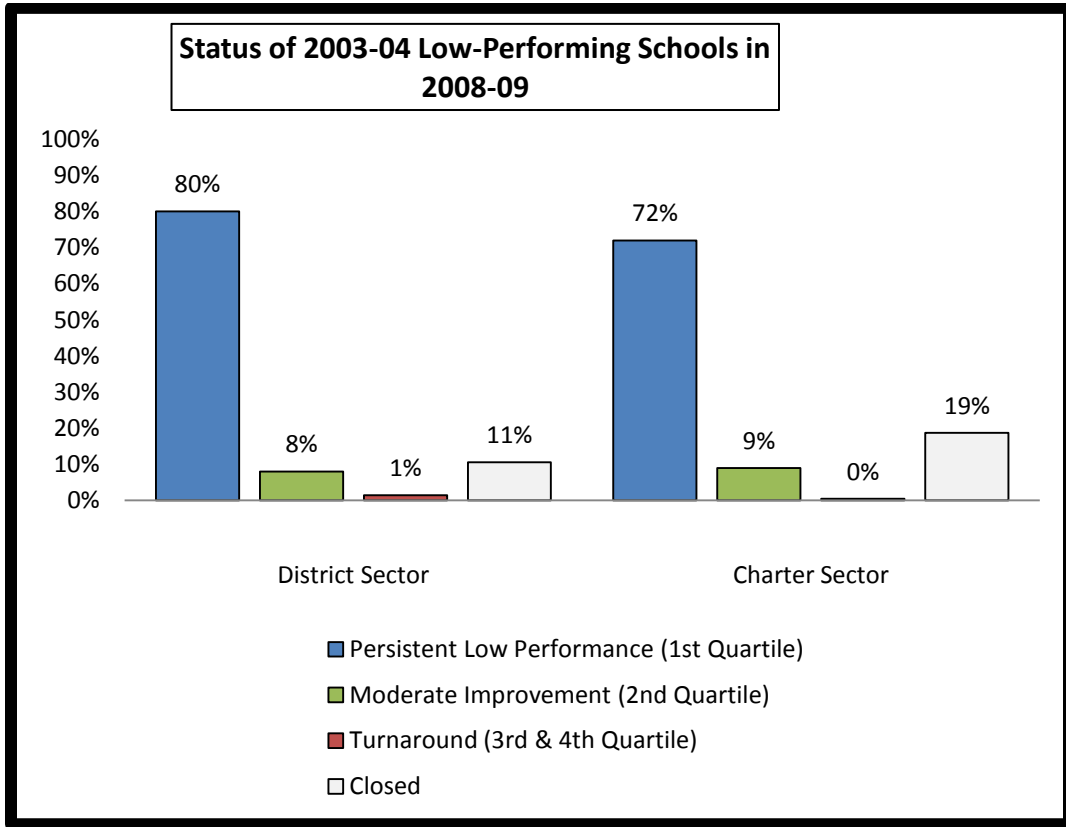
Other key takeaways:

*The charter sector across all ten states does a bit better than the district sector at closing bad schools: 19 percent of low-performing charters identified in 2003-04 had closed by 2008-09, vs. 11 percent in the district sector. But this isn’t great news—and it challenges the belief that charters’ special governance and accountability arrangements ensure that bad ones don’t linger.

*Real transformation is rare in both sectors. Few low-performing schools—barely one percent—managed to dramatically improve their proficiency rates over this five-year period. And fewer than 10 percent made even moderate improvements over that time.

*Results varied by state. For instance, in Arizona, Florida, and California, the charter sectors did notably better than districts at closing schools. And Ohio was notably more successful in closing

low-performing schools in both sectors than the other nine states in the study. By contrast, Minnesota's charter and district sectors displayed both the highest rates of persistent low performance and the lowest rates of closure among the ten states.



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For more information on this study, or the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, please visit www.edexcellence.net.

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