



ANALYZING THE SUCCESS OF ARKANSAS'S CHARTER SCHOOLS – UNFULFILLED PROMISES

The Arkansas Public Policy Panel

Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families

The Arkansas Education Association

An analysis of Arkansas benchmark test scores from the 2008-09 academic year shows that open enrollment charter schools score better than their peer public schools on standardized tests, but that this success is driven by the distinct demographic characteristics of the charters rather than being attributable to any advantage of educational strategy.

Arkansas open enrollment charter schools, on average, have student populations that have fewer children of color and substantially fewer low-income children than their peer traditional public schools. Once these factors are controlled, ***Arkansas's charter schools do not outperform their traditional school peers.***

There are several demographic factors that have been shown consistently to correlate with lower academic achievement—race, ethnicity, and poverty—because of persistent opportunity to learn and corresponding achievement gaps. Open enrollment charter schools, by catering to higher income students and fewer students of color, could in fact exacerbate this opportunity to learn gap.

A few models of charter schools do outperform their public school peers for low income and children of color – such as the KIPP Charter School in Helena – but these are not the rule.

Looking at just test scores without considering demographic data, Arkansas's charter schools perform relatively well compared to their traditional peer schools, as a 2009 study from the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University, and others, have noted. This contrasts with the relative poor performance of charters around the country. Arkansas has a relatively small number of charters and has a careful screening process for the creation of new open enrollment charters that involves analysis by the state Board of Education. Arkansas' charters are generally better than other states, but they still do not produce a statistically significant improvement in test scores when key demographics are taken into account.

These findings have several important ramifications in the context of current education reform and charter school policy debates:

- Proposals to loosen restrictions on open enrollment charter schools and increase the number of charter schools – such as SB346 – are not merited based on their performance.

- Expanding charter schools under looser restrictions will likely result in:
 - more segregation with even fewer low income and children of color in charters;
 - fewer resources for students, predominantly low income and children of color, left in under-resourced traditional public schools;
 - and a larger opportunity to learn gap and resulting achievement gap between demographic classes of students.
- Evidence suggests that Arkansas needs MORE criteria and accountability for charter schools that focus on:
 - Exceeding the performance of their public schools peers;
 - Providing enhanced opportunities to learn, especially for low income and children of color;
 - More accountability to close charter schools that underperform or fail to meet their mission;
 - And increased transparency so other schools can learn from what is working.
- High quality public schools – charter or traditional – must be Arkansas’s goal.

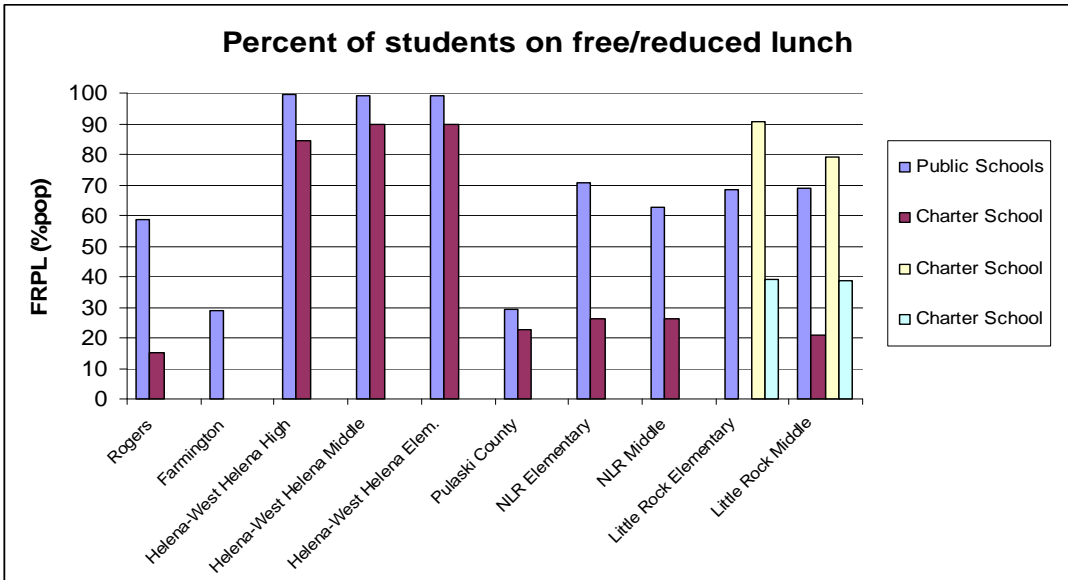
The data and analysis:

An analysis of Arkansas benchmark test scores from the Arkansas Department of Education for the 2008-09 academic year reveals:

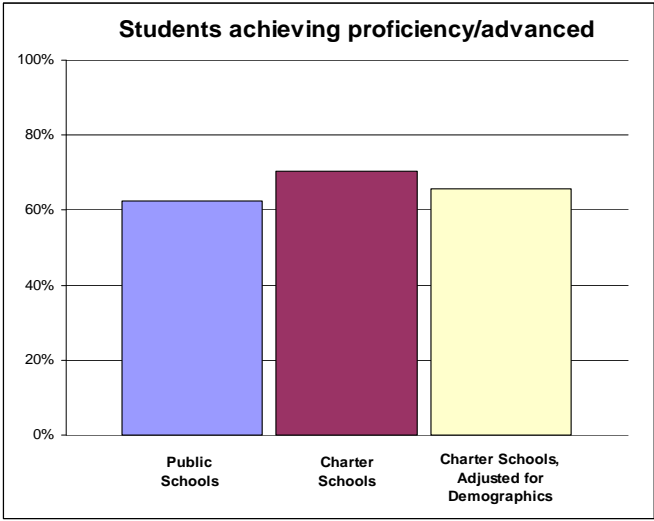
1. The percentage of students in a grade achieving proficiency or advanced proficiency in math and literacy is higher for charters than for the traditional schools in the district in which that charter is located¹.
 - a. Charters have an average of 70.4% of students achieving proficiency/advanced in a given subject area while neighboring traditional schools have an average of 62.4% of students achieving that level of academic success across grades and subject areas.²
 - b. We can say with 99% confidence that this better performance by charter schools is not due to chance.
2. Open enrollment charters differ from traditional schools demographically. An accurate gauge of the efficacy of charter schools in Arkansas as compared to traditional schools requires accounting for these differences that consistently correlate with academic achievement. The biggest difference between charter and public school student populations is in incomes, where traditional public school students are nearly twice as likely to qualify for free and reduced lunches as those students in charter schools in the same community (63.9% vs. 36.8%). Charter schools have a 38.1% African American student population compared to 40% in their traditional public school peers, and a 4% Latino student population compared to 6.6% in their traditional public school peers.

¹ In this report charter schools are compared with traditional public schools in the same district to ensure that the different student bodies came from demographically similar communities.

² The total number of cases examined—both charter and traditional—is 163. This includes, where pertinent, math and literacy scores in grades 3 through 8 and literacy scores in grade 11.



- a. A multivariate regression model was used that included whether a school in this dataset was a charter or not, the percentage of students in the school/district that are African-American, the percentage of students in the school/district that are Latino, and the percentage of students in the school/district that are eligible for the federal Free and Reduced Lunch Program.
 - b. We can be 99% confident that race was a contributing factor to schools/districts with higher percentages of African-Americans having lower scores.
 - c. We can be 95% confident that income was a contributing factor to schools/districts with higher percentages of children from poor families also having lower scores.
 - d. Latino ethnicity and charter school attendance did not play a statistically significant role in affecting school or district test score proficiency levels.
3. If one assumes that charter schools had the same demographics as their traditional public school peers, we estimate that 65.8% of the charter student body would test proficient or advanced, as opposed to 62.4% in traditional schools – not a statistically significant difference.



4. Below are the data tables used in this analysis:

Rogers School District and Benton County School for the Arts:

Rogers School District	Literacy (% pro-adv)	Math (% pro-adv)	White (% pop)	Black (% pop)	Latino (% pop)	Native American (% pop)	Asian (% pop)	FRPL (% pop)
3 rd Grade	73.1	90.1	84	0.5	20.5	1.2	1.4	58.6
4 th Grade	74.4	84.4						
5 th Grade	75.6	83.1						
6 th Grade	77	85.5						
7 th Grade	74.5	73.3						
8 th Grade	84.2	71.8						
11 th Grade	68.4	-						

Benton County School of the Arts	Literacy (% pro-adv)	Math (% pro-adv)	White (% pop)	Black (% pop)	Latino (% pop)	Native American (% pop)	Asian (% pop)	FRPL (% pop)
3 rd Grade	76.4	92.7	90.1	2.4	5.4	0.9	1.3	15.1
4 th Grade	64.9	70.2						
5 th Grade	75	69.6						
6 th Grade	80.7	86						
7 th Grade	94.9	87.2						
8 th Grade	100	88.9						
11 th Grade	-	-						

Farmington High School and Haas Hall Academy

Farmington High School	Literacy (% pro-adv)	Math (% pro-adv)	White (% pop)	Black (% pop)	Latino (% pop)	Native American (% pop)	Asian (% pop)	FRPL (% pop)
11 th Grade	58.7	-	91.4	2.3	4.6	1	0.7	28.8

Haas Hall Academy	Literacy (% pro-adv)	Math (% pro-adv)	White (% pop)	Black (% pop)	Latino (% pop)	Native American (% pop)	Asian (% pop)	FRPL (% pop)
11 th Grade	93.3	-	90.4	0	0.7	1.8	0.9	0

Central High School (Helena-West Helena) and KIPP Delta College Prep High School

Central High School (Helena-West Helena)	Literacy (% pro-adv)	Math (% pro-adv)	White (% pop)	Black (% pop)	Latino (% pop)	Native American (% pop)	Asian (% pop)	FRPL (% pop)
11 th Grade	27.1	-	2.8	96.9	0.3	0.0	0.1	99.6

5.

KIPP Delta College Prep High School	Literacy (% pro-adv)	Math (% pro-adv)	White (% pop)	Black (% pop)	Latino (% pop)	Native American (% pop)	Asian (% pop)	FRPL (% pop)
11 th Grade	91.3	-	5.5	94.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	84.4

Helena-West Helena Elementary Schools, Miller Jr. High (Helena-West Helena) and KIPP Delta College Prep School

Helena-West Helena Elementary Schools	Literacy (% pro-adv)	Math (% pro-adv)	White (% pop)	Black (% pop)	Latino (% pop)	Native American (% pop)	Asian (% pop)	FRPL (% pop)
3 rd Grade	58.4	68.3	4.6	95.1	0.1	0.0	0.2	99.3
4 th Grade	58.5	64.7						
5 th Grade	53.7	59.1						

Miller Jr. High (Helena-West Helena)	Literacy (% pro-adv)	Math (% pro-adv)	White (% pop)	Black (% pop)	Latino (% pop)	Native American (% pop)	Asian (% pop)	FRPL (% pop)
7 th Grade	38.3	38.9	5	94.4	0.3	0.0	0.3	99.2
8 th Grade	45.2	34.4						

KIPP Delta College Prep School	Literacy (% pro-adv)	Math (% pro-adv)	White (% pop)	Black (% pop)	Latino (% pop)	Native American (% pop)	Asian (% pop)	FRPL (% pop)
5 th Grade	57.4	48.1	2.8	96.8	0.4	0.0	0.0	89.7
6 th Grade	67.3	81.6						
7 th Grade	73	93.7						
8 th Grade	82	75.4						

Pulaski County Special School District and Academics Plus

Pulaski County Special School District	Literacy (% pro-adv)	Math (% pro-adv)	White (% pop)	Black (% pop)	Latino (% pop)	Native American (% pop)	Asian (% pop)	FRPL (% pop)
3 rd Grade	61.8	76.1	72.5	22.1	3.0	0.5	0.8	29.5
4 th Grade	69.8	72.8						
5 th Grade	63.8	61						
6 th Grade	55.5	68.9						
7 th Grade	52.4	54.1						
8 th Grade	63.6	50.4						
11 th Grade	47.5	-						

Academics Plus	Literacy (% pro-adv)	Math (% pro-adv)	White (% pop)	Black (% pop)	Latino (% pop)	Native American (% pop)	Asian (% pop)	FRPL (% pop)
3 rd Grade	83.3	80	79.3	14.9	4.2	0.4	1.3	22.7
4 th Grade	63.4	75.6						
5 th Grade	66.7	69.2						
6 th Grade	77.3	79.5						
7 th Grade	90	60						
8 th Grade	87.2	48.7						
11 th Grade	75.7	-						

NLR Elementary Schools, NLR Middle Schools and LISA Academy North Middle School

NLR Elementary Schools	Literacy (% pro-adv)	Math (% pro-adv)	White (% pop)	Black (% pop)	Latino (% pop)	Native American (% pop)	Asian (% pop)	FRPL (% pop)
3 rd Grade	58.6	65.8	32.4	59.7	4.9	0.2	1.2	70.6
4 th Grade	64.4	66.8						
5 th Grade	59.1	60.8						

NLR Middle Schools	Literacy (% pro-adv)	Math (% pro-adv)	White (% pop)	Black (% pop)	Latino (% pop)	Native American (% pop)	Asian (% pop)	FRPL (% pop)
6 th Grade	50.6	65.6	34.4	59	5.4	0.0	1.2	62.6
7 th Grade	52.5	60						
8 th Grade	64	54						

LISA Academy North Middle School	Literacy (% pro-adv)	Math (% pro-adv)	White (% pop)	Black (% pop)	Latino (% pop)	Native American (% pop)	Asian (% pop)	FRPL (% pop)
3 rd Grade	95.5	100	54.8	34.7	3.1	0.7	6.8	26.2
4 th Grade	84	84						
5 th Grade	83.3	62.5						
6 th Grade	70.7	86.2						
7 th Grade	74.2	80.6						
8 th Grade	84.2	57.9						

LR Elementary Schools, LR Middle Schools and AR Virtual Academy

LR Elementary Schools	Literacy (% pro-adv)	Math (% pro-adv)	White (% pop)	Black (% pop)	Latino (% pop)	Native American (% pop)	Asian (% pop)	FRPL (% pop)
3 rd Grade	53	67.8	24.1	64.7	8.6	0.4	2.2	68.5
4 th Grade	58	64.8						
5 th Grade	54.7	54.6						

LR Middle Schools	Literacy (% pro-adv)	Math (% pro-adv)	White (% pop)	Black (% pop)	Latino (% pop)	Native American (% pop)	Asian (% pop)	FRPL (% pop)
6 th Grade	47.7	63.5	19.8	71.6	7.1	0.2	1.2	68.8
7 th Grade	48.7	50.2						
8 th Grade	57.8	41.8						

AR Virtual Academy	Literacy (% pro-adv)	Math (% pro-adv)	White (% pop)	Black (% pop)	Latino (% pop)	Native American (% pop)	Asian (% pop)	FRPL (% pop)
3 rd Grade	64.2	79.2	92	6.2	0.6	0.4	0.8	0.0
4 th Grade	74	76						
5 th Grade	75.6	71.1						
6 th Grade	73.6	79.5						
7 th Grade	69.4	57.1						
8 th Grade	79.5	51.3						

LR Elementary Schools and Dreamland Academy

LR Elementary Schools	Literacy (% pro-adv)	Math (% pro-adv)	White (% pop)	Black (% pop)	Latino (% pop)	Native American (% pop)	Asian (% pop)	FRPL (% pop)
3 rd Grade	53	67.8	24.1	64.7	8.6	0.4	2.2	68.5
4 th Grade	58	64.8						
5 th Grade	54.7	54.6						

Dreamland Academy	Literacy (% pro-adv)	Math (% pro-adv)	White (% pop)	Black (% pop)	Latino (% pop)	Native American (% pop)	Asian (% pop)	FRPL (% pop)
3 rd Grade	25.6	30.2	4.0	91.1	4.9	0.0	0.0	90.8
4 th Grade	25.9	24.1						
5 th Grade	23.1	7.7						

LR Elementary Schools and E-Stem Elementary Charter School

LR Elementary Schools	Literacy (% pro-adv)	Math (% pro-adv)	White (% pop)	Black (% pop)	Latino (% pop)	Native American (% pop)	Asian (% pop)	FRPL (% pop)
3 rd Grade	53	67.8	24.1	64.7	8.6	0.4	2.2	68.5
4 th Grade	58	64.8						
5 th Grade	54.7	54.6						

6.

E-Stem Elementary Charter School	Literacy (% pro-adv)	Math (% pro-adv)	White (% pop)	Black (% pop)	Latino (% pop)	Native American (% pop)	Asian (% pop)	FRPL (% pop)
3 rd Grade	70.7	80	38	54.7	4.2	0.3	2.8	39.1
4 th Grade	63.5	71.8						

LR Middle Schools and LISA Academy

LR Middle Schools	Literacy (% pro-adv)	Math (% pro-adv)	White (% pop)	Black (% pop)	Latino (% pop)	Native American (% pop)	Asian (% pop)	FRPL (% pop)
6 th Grade	47.7	63.5	19.8	71.6	7.1	0.2	1.2	68.8
7 th Grade	48.7	50.2						
8 th Grade	57.8	41.8						

7.

LISA Academy	Literacy (% pro-adv)	Math (% pro-adv)	White (% pop)	Black (% pop)	Latino (% pop)	Native American (% pop)	Asian (% pop)	FRPL (% pop)
6 th Grade	95.3	96.3	38.8	29.6	4.8	0.0	26.8	21.0
7 th Grade	96.5	93						
8 th Grade	88.3	74						
11 th Grade	85.7	-						

LR Middle Schools and Covenant Keepers

LR Middle Schools	Literacy (% pro-adv)	Math (% pro-adv)	White (% pop)	Black (% pop)	Latino (% pop)	Native American (% pop)	Asian (% pop)	FRPL (% pop)
6 th Grade	47.7	63.5	19.8	71.6	7.1	0.2	1.2	68.8
7 th Grade	48.7	50.2						
8 th Grade	57.8	41.8						

Covenant Keepers	Literacy (% pro-adv)	Math (% pro-adv)	White (% pop)	Black (% pop)	Latino (% pop)	Native American (% pop)	Asian (% pop)	FRPL (% pop)
6 th Grade	31	48.3	1.7	86.0	12.4	0.0	0.0	79.3
7 th Grade	38.5	30.8						
8 th Grade	38.9	16.7						

LR Elementary Schools, LR Middle Schools and E-Stem Middle Charter School

LR Elementary Schools	Literacy (% pro-adv)	Math (% pro-adv)	White (% pop)	Black (% pop)	Latino (% pop)	Native American (% pop)	Asian (% pop)	FRPL (% pop)
3 rd Grade	53	67.8	24.1	64.7	8.6	0.4	2.2	68.5
4 th Grade	58	64.8						
5 th Grade	54.7	54.6						

LR Middle Schools	Literacy (% pro-adv)	Math (% pro-adv)	White (% pop)	Black (% pop)	Latino (% pop)	Native American (% pop)	Asian (% pop)	FRPL (% pop)
6 th Grade	47.7	63.5	19.8	71.6	7.1	0.2	1.2	68.8
7 th Grade	48.7	50.2						
8 th Grade	57.8	41.8						

E-Stem Middle Charter School	Literacy (% pro-adv)	Math (% pro-adv)	White (% pop)	Black (% pop)	Latino (% pop)	Native American (% pop)	Asian (% pop)	FRPL (% pop)
5 th Grade	79.5	76.1	39.2	52.9	5.1	0.5	2.3	38.5
6 th Grade	68.2	76.1						
7 th Grade	73.9	67.4						
8 th Grade	87.0	67.4						

This report was a collaborative effort of Arkansas Public Policy Panel, Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families and Arkansas Education Association.