

Charters' Report Card Scores Compared To Urban 8 Debated; Schiavoni Announces Bill To Increase Oversight

Friday, September 6, 2013

The latest report card results show charter schools continue to outperform urban district buildings when it comes to student growth, an analysis by advocates indicates.

A long-time charter foe says, however, community school student populations are not as similar to urban schools as one might expect and therefore should not be compared to the state's largest districts.

[Sen. Joe Schiavoni](#) (D-Boardman) meanwhile has introduced legislation to change the regulation of charter schools.

The favorable review of the start-ups performance comes through an analysis of report card results conducted by the Ohio Alliance for Public Charter Schools, which looked back seven years and found charters regularly do better on the Value-Added metric than the urban districts where the bulk of community schools are located.

The Value-Added system measures whether students have achieved one year's worth of growth or more or less than that over the course of the school year. This year's report card, which for the first time assigned A-F grades to certain measures, granted Cs for one year's worth of growth, with As and Bs going to higher gains and Ds and Fs going to lower growth.

"We feel that that's a very helpful measure, particularly in evaluating the effectiveness of the urban schools," OAPCS Vice President for Research and Accountability Marianne Lombardo said in an interview.

"The 2013 results (show) for the past four years consistently and for six of the past seven...overall students in charter schools in the urban districts are evidencing much stronger student growth when compared to the district schools."

Nearly half of the 225 charters in the urban areas showed significant growth in student learning compared to a third of big eight school buildings with similar results, the analysis shows.

Of the 65,000 students in brick-and-mortar charter schools that received VA ratings, only 5,000 attend charters not located in the urban eight districts. The analysis excludes dropout recovery schools.

"We think it's very important that comparisons be made with similar student populations, and that's why we always look at Columbus city charter students versus Columbus City School students," Ms. Lombardo said.

But Steve Dyer, an education fellow with Innovation Ohio, said comparing, for instance, Columbus Preparatory Academy with CCS is not appropriate. Only half of that high-performing charter's students come from the urban district, while 42% are from the suburban South-Western City Schools and 5% are from Hilliard, Bexley, Dublin, Olentangy and Westerville districts.

"I know that charter school associations want to only be compared with the Big 8, but 47% of all of the kids in charter schools in this state do not come from Big 8 districts," he said.

"Only 125 charter schools in this state take more than 90% of their kids from Big 8 districts. So I'm not entirely sure that it's fair to be comparing the performance of charter schools with just Big 8 urban districts."

Ms. Lombardo said she looked at the same data from the Department of Education Mr. Dyer used and does not understand his methodology because she got different results.

"We always look at the schools that are serving students in the urban eight areas," she said. "We exclude the conversion schools, we try to make as much of an apples-to-apples comparison as we can."

When specifically looking at the charters in Columbus, 41 of them have 75% or more of their kids from CCS and 19 had less. She excluded three schools that were either conversion charters from the suburban schools or part of a suburban district.

"The ones that have very low percentages - Oakstone, it's an autism school, West Side Academy, it's sitting on the border of South-Western City School District, the same thing with Groveport - some of it's geographic, some of it's the program; there's reasonable explanations," Ms. Lombardo said.

Looking only at the Value-Added measure, Mr. Dyer said charters look decent, but not appreciably better. A specific breakout of VA on the report card for students in the bottom 20% shows a "neutral" result.

"We were told that charter schools would be cheaper and they would educate our kids better, and what the data from the report card indicates is that they are in many ways performing worse especially on graduation rates."

On a separate measure, Performance Index, charter schools also look better than urban districts. PI measures the achievement of every student on the state's standardized tests and not just whether or not they reach a score of "proficient."

"This year we looked specifically at the Performance Index score as the better measure of how well are students performing," Ms. Lombardo said. "Statewide we found that charter students were more likely to be attending a higher performing school when compared to the urban district schools."

Statewide, nearly 60% of the time students in charters were attending schools outperforming the weighted state average on PI, she said. That equates to 30,000 students in those community schools. The calculation excludes dropout recovery, special needs and e-schools.

The results were especially positive for charters in the Cleveland area, where 83% of students attending a charter school in the area were in a school with a PI higher than the Cleveland Municipal School District.

In Dayton, 75% of students in charter schools were in schools with a PI higher than the district, and in Youngstown, 70% of students were in better performing charters.

"We're very encouraged by those results," Ms. Lombardo said.

OAPCS has developed an interactive [data visualization](#) of the state that allows for geographic looks at how district and charter schools perform on various report card measures.

Ms. Lombardo said the prevalence of students in charters with high PI scores could be an indication of informed school selection by parents. She said OAPCS works with community leaders to get information about school performance into parents' hands.

She said she is confident charters are showing ongoing improvement in their state grades, especially in Value Added.

"We've been very consistent and we think that is a very important measurement tool," she said. "I think that we are seeing that some areas of the state, the community school market has matured and become much more effective.

"We're seeing a higher number of high performing schools and number of students that are attending those schools and particularly in Cleveland and Columbus, we're seeing a greater awareness of cooperation and collaboration that what matters the most regardless of school type is that school kids are getting a quality education. It's very exciting, very satisfying to see those numbers increase and to help...offer families quality options."

Mr. Dyer said the report card data shows what it has in the past, "which is that they are no better than the urban districts and they are in many ways worse."

Legislation Pending: Sen. Schiavoni said he will introduce legislation to create more oversight of community schools in a way that is similar to what traditional districts are subject.

He said the measure would require the state auditor to annually audit each school and require the charters to follow public records laws. The schools would be blocked from using state funding for advertising, recruiting or promotional materials.

With the aim of greater transparency, the bill would require charter teachers are evaluated in the same way as district educators and that they be licensed the same and paid equivalently, the lawmaker said. Parents would also have to be given the report cards of the home district and the charter school they select when transferring a student.

Lastly, Mr. Schiavoni said his bill would require community schools follow the same course of study requirements, disciplinary standards, and that school board members abide by the same

standards. Closure laws would be altered to prevent a "repetition of failure" in schools unable to meet the standards.

"This is not about the different approaches to education but the fundamental idea that every child deserves to attend a quality school," Sen. Schiavoni said in a release. "We need to be stringent on all schools in order to not only protect our taxpayers' investments, but most importantly make certain that we are preparing our young people to be successful."

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