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## CHARTER SCHOOLS: A PROGRESS REPORT PART I: ACHIEVEMENT

The following examples are early evidence of the effectiveness of charter schools in raising academic achievement. While there are dozens of other indicators of success emerging each year, these are some of the most dramatic illustrations of objective, verifiable academic achievement. The Center for Education Reform is pleased to provide these detailed examples for the benefit of answering those with concerns, but more important, to make clear the impact charters are having on thousands of children. *This progress report is the first in a series examining recent success and struggles experienced by charters.*

### ARIZONA

...1997

In September 1995, some 30% of entering students to Phoenix's **ABC Alternative Learning Center** were performing below grade level in reading and/or math. Each of them received two hours of individual remedial tutoring weekly. By the school's third year, those same students were being tutored in advanced-level classes. According to the 1997 Stanford 9 Examination, all students in grades 3 through 6 scored at or above grade level.

...1998

Results released among the sixty Arizona charter schools that administered the Stanford 9 Achievement Test revealed that forty-three percent of the schools improved reading scores in over 50% of their grade levels. Thirty-eight percent improved in math scores in most grade levels. Forty-two percent improved their language scores for most grade levels, and forty-seven percent improved composite scores for most grade levels. Seventeen Arizona schools that took the test had at least one grade level with a composite score in the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile or higher. Of these 17, eight were charter schools.

The fifth graders at **Hermosa Montessori School**, in Tucson, AZ, boasted the highest charter school composite score results for the Stanford 9 test. They fell into the 92<sup>nd</sup> percentile.

The sixth, seventh, and eighth graders at the multi-locational **Villa Montessori School**, hold the highest math scores in their grade levels in the state.

## CALIFORNIA

...1995

In its first year after converting from a traditional public school, **The Charter School of San Diego** reported that test scores on the 1994/95 ASAT for both reading and math rose by an average of 5% from the previous year, the dropout rate fell from 11% to 7.8%, and the school awarded 41 high school diplomas, up from 17 the previous year. According to an evaluation performed by the San Diego school district, "The school has been successful in reversing the downward spiral of failure in student achievement."

Student test scores at **Horizon Instructional Systems** located in Lincoln, CA, increased an average of 10% more than the rest of the district in the school's first two years.

...1996

**The Accelerated School** in South Central Los Angeles recorded substantial increases in test scores (California Test of Basic Skills) from 1995 to 1996: math scores rose 50% and reading scores by 16%. The student attendance rate, at 95%, is considered one of the highest in the area, and parent participation in school meetings is 80%.

...1997

Seven years ago, **The Bowling Green Elementary School** was one of the most troubled schools in the Sacramento City Unified school district. Its students scored third from the bottom in an already low scoring district on district wide tests. In 1993, the school converted to charter status. Since then, scores have steadily improved. On the Sacramento Achievement Levels Test (SALT), Bowling Green posted the strongest gains of any school in the Sacramento district. *The Sacramento Bee* said, "[Bowling Green] has improved student achievement in one of the most challenging student populations to be found anywhere [81 percent of Bowling Green students are eligible for the free lunch program and 41 percent are categorized as limited English proficient]."

In its first two years of operation as a charter, **Vaughn Next Century Learning Center** in Los Angeles recorded increases in its language arts scores from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 39<sup>th</sup> percentile, and increases in its math scores from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 57<sup>th</sup> percentile. Of the school's 1,140 students, nearly 95 percent are Hispanic, and most of the others are African-American and 83 percent have only limited English proficiency. In the last five years, student achievement based on test scores and independent evaluation has gone up 330 percent, bringing student performance closer to the national median in math and language. Student attendance is 99.4 percent, and the number of students who are now proficient enough in language to be taught in English have tripled. In 1995 the state education department bestowed the California School Award upon Vaughn Next Century Learning. And in May of 1997, Vaughn was named one of 34 National Blue Ribbon Schools, a program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education.

In 1994-95, the first year following **Fenton Avenue Charter School's** conversion from district to charter public school, scores on the California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) and Aprenda, an equivalent Spanish-language test, rose an average of 16.1 percent over the previous year. At the same time, attendance rates went from 90% before the charter to 98%. Reading scores improved by 10%, math scores by 20% and language skill scores by 18%. In May 1997, Fenton was named a California Distinguished School.

A recent research project compared the students of **O'Farrell Community School**, a charter middle school in San Diego, with those from several other middle schools, including magnet schools with admissions tests, and found that O'Farrell graduates went on to earn better grades and higher test scores in high school.

Dr. James Catterall, an independent evaluator from UCLA, found substantial gains at **Options for Youth** from La Crescenta, CA. Former dropouts go on "to regular schools, graduation, the military, and GED degrees." "Students tend to show mathematics achievement growth commensurate to the number of months in the program," and "writing samples show consistent improvement in writing and communication skills for participants."

While not based necessarily on academic gains from year to year, six charter schools did make the Distinguished Schools list. In order to receive the honor, schools must demonstrate success in meeting student needs, adopting and applying a challenging academic curriculum, and in incorporating the staff, parents and community into the school vision. The honorees are: **Louisiana Schnell Elementary** (Placerville, CA), **Fenton Avenue Charter School** (Lake View Terrace), **The Open Charter School** (Los Angeles), **Clear View Charter School** (Chula Vista), **San Carlos Learning Center** (San Carlos), and the **Peabody Charter School** (Santa Barbara).

...1998

The **Vaughn Next Century Learning Center**, located in San Fernando, CA, reports test scores of students are twice what the average is in San Fernando.

## COLORADO

...1994

**The Connect School** showed gains in student achievement after its first year in operation. Between Fall 1993 and Fall 1994, standardized test scores among the school's 55 original students increased by nearly 8% in writing and 13% in math.

...1996

The students at The **Academy of Charter Schools** in Adams County have advanced by an average of 13 percentile points in the Basic Battery categories for the past two years, and by 11 and 10 percentile points respectively for the 1995-1996 and 1994-1995 years in the Composite Batteries.

Third graders at **Jefferson Academy** in Broomfield scored the fifth highest in reading and math among Jefferson County's 90 elementary schools taking the Iowa Test of Basic Skills in 1996. The previous year, certain rankings for the charter school were as much as 19 points higher than the district average. All grades scored in the 61<sup>st</sup> percentile or better on the reading portion of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and in the 74<sup>th</sup> percentile or better on the math section. First graders scored in the 81<sup>st</sup> percentile in reading, and the 93<sup>rd</sup> in math. The school was one of three charters to receive the Colorado Board of Education's Schools of Excellence Award this year, recognized particularly for its emphasis on parental involvement and work toward closing the "gender gap" in student achievement.

The third graders at **Parker's Core Knowledge Charter School** posted the highest combined reading and math scores on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills in their county, composed of 23 elementary schools. Parker's third graders' math scores hit the 94<sup>th</sup> percentile.

Like Jefferson Academy, standardized test scores for the **Core Knowledge Charter School** in Parker, were, for some rankings, as much as 19 points higher than district averages. Third graders averaged in the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile in reading and the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile in math on the California Test of Basic Skills.

**Cherry Creek Academy's** third graders scored the sixth highest in reading and math among the 30 elementary schools in Cherry Creek taking the Iowa test.

...1997

At **Academy Charter School** in Castle Rock, scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills for grades 2 through 7 increased 3 percentile points in reading, 4 in language, and 9 in math. The school's charter was renewed recently in part because average test scores have increased 10-20 percent. In April 1997, for the second year in a row, Academy Charter School received the Colorado Board of Education's John J. Irwin Colorado Schools of Excellence Award.

**Cherry Creek Academy** third-graders scored gains making it the sixth highest scoring school in reading and math among the 30 elementary schools in the county taking the 1996 Iowa Test of Basic Skills. All their students, from the first to the sixth grade, scored at the 82<sup>nd</sup> percentile or better in reading, and at the 73<sup>rd</sup> percentile or better in math, reflecting significant improvement over the year: 41% gain in reading scores, 55% in language arts, and 47% in math. Second graders scored in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile in reading, and the 96<sup>th</sup> percentile in math, averaging a 78% gain over the start of the year. In the 1995-96 school year, 20 students entered first grade unable to read. However, for 1996-97 all first grade class started the year able to read. All of these students were products of the Cherry Creek Academy's kindergarten class. In national comparisons, Cherry Creek Academy students showed marked gains from 1995 (when they were still in district schools) to 1996. In 1995, fourth graders' median scores for reading comprehension were at the 55 percentile, just above the national average. After one year at Cherry Creek Academy, those scores jumped 16 points to a median score of 71 -- better than 70% of fourth graders nationally. Scores jumped in other grades: 12 points for fifth graders, and 21 points for sixth graders. No district schools showed such gains.

Along with **Jefferson Academy** and **Academy Charter School**, **Eagle County Charter Academy** received the Colorado Board of Education's 1997 John J. Irwin Colorado Schools of Excellence Award for high attendance and academic performance. Just ten schools in the state received the award, three of these were charter schools. Eagle County Charter Academy was honored for student achievement in which more than 90 percent of its students score consistently high on reading and writing exams.

Eighty-three percent of students at **Sci-Tech Academy's** in Littleton are considered at-risk. However at least 75% of them earn A's and B's, and the school's standardized test scores are nearly identical to the local district's average.

...1998

Eighty-eight percent of the students at the **Cherry Creek Academy** were at or above the 'proficient' level for reading, while only 70% of students for the rest of the Cherry Creek School District were. For writing, the academy was 48% at or above the 'proficient' level, compared to 45% for the rest of the district.

**Parker's Core Knowledge Charter** also had a larger proportion of its students at the proficient level than the rest of its district: 90% in reading (vs. 75% for the district) and 65% in writing (vs. 46% for the district).

Seventy percent of **Jefferson Academy** students now read at or above the 'proficient' reading level and 57% at the 'proficient' writing level. This beats the district's scores of 62% (reading) and 37% (writing).

The **Stargate Charter** outdid its district by the largest margin, as every one of its students is reading at a 'proficient level' or better while only 49% of district educated children are. The charter school beat the district in writing as well: 73% of the students scored at or above 'proficient' vs. 24% for the district.

## GEORGIA

...1996

The **Addison Elementary School** showed positive results after their first year in operation. After taking the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, the students increased their composite scores by more than one grade level. They also increased their scores by one grade level in the Math Problem Solving Ability section for grades three and four.

Remarkable gains in achievement were shown by students of The **Charles Ellis Montessori Academy** with results of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Fourth graders' scores increased from the 21<sup>st</sup> percentile to the 40<sup>th</sup> in reading and went from the 26<sup>th</sup> percentile to the 30<sup>th</sup> in math. The sixth graders demonstrated higher reading scores than any other 6<sup>th</sup> grade class in the county ranking in the 61<sup>st</sup> percentile.

The **Midway Elementary School** also demonstrated gains after taking the ITBS. Second graders' scores increased by an average of 15 points, and the schoolwide average gain was 4.5 percentile points in math, 7.5 points in language, 4.75 points in reading, and 3.0 points in science.

...1997

Students at **Addison Elementary School** saw gains for The Iowa Test of Basic Skills results for the second year in a row. Students improved 7 points in fifth grade math scores and 4 points in third grade math scores. At the **Charles Ellis Montessori Academy**, there was a gain of 6 points in grade 6 reading scores and 15 percentile points in grade 6 math scores. The **Midway Elementary School** showed a gain of 7 points in grade 3 reading scores and 10 points in grade 3 math scores. Third graders at the **Bryant Elementary School** gained 7 points in reading scores and 6 points in math. The **Eastvalley Elementary School** showed a gain of 3 percentile points in grades 3 and 5 reading scores respectively, and gains of 3 percentile points in grade 5 math scores. Lastly, the **Sedalia Park Elementary School** demonstrated gains of 8 percentile points in grade 3 reading scores and 7 percentile points in grade 3 math scores.

## ILLINOIS

...1998

At both school campuses of the **Chicago International Charter School** hold the highest percentage of students at national norms. At the "north" Campus, 46 percent of the third through eighth graders hit or beat national reading norms, and 50.5 percent met math norms. At the "south" campus, 32.5 percent of third to eighth graders and 26.5 percent of ninth-graders

hit national reading norms; in math, 35 percent of third to eighth graders and almost 20 percent of ninth graders reached the national average.

## MASSACHUSETTS

### ...1996

Upon first coming to Boston's **City on a Hill**, only 38% of pupils (who are largely disadvantaged minority youth) were able to do the math expected of their age group; one year later, 58% could. Similarly, 55% were more than two years behind in reading when they started at the charter school; a year later, only 39% were. At the end of their first year, 44 percent could read at grade and 55 percent could write a good paragraph.

**Boston Renaissance** fourth graders who took the Massachusetts Educational Assessment Program (or MEAP) in spring 1996 exceeded the scores of comparable students (based on similar socioeconomic characteristics) statewide by significant margins in reading, math, science, and social studies. Renaissance third and fifth graders who took the Stanford Achievement Test, administered in Spring 1996 to all Boston public school students in those grades, scored at or above grade level in reading and in math.

Students from grades 2, 3, and 4 at the **Benjamin Franklin Charter School** gained an average of more than a full grade equivalent from the fall of 1995 to the spring of 1996.

In Lawrence, **Community Day Charter School** students in grades 2, 3, and 4 averaged 1.5 grade equivalent gains throughout the 1995 - 1996 school year.

### ...1997

**SABIS International Charter School** students (Springfield, Massachusetts) advanced on average, nearly 18 months in their first seven months at SABIS. When the school opened in September 1996, every grade except the seventh tested at below grade level. According to the Iowa Test results, by spring every class was working at grade level or above. Fourth graders had jumped nearly two grade levels, from grade 3, month 5 to grade 5, month 3. Seventh graders, who started in the fall at grade 7, month 8, by spring were working at a ninth grade level (grade 9, month 5).

At the **Lowell Middlesex Academy**, a charter school for former dropouts, students gained 12.5 percentage points on the Computerized College Placement Exams.

### ... 1998

The **Academy of the Pacific Rim Charter School** demonstrated gains in their first year. Sixth graders improved 1.7 years in math and .7 years in reading. The seventh graders improved 1.8 years in math and 1.7 years in reading.

Before its change to a charter school, the **SABIS International Charter School** was one of the worst district schools, as measured by tests, in Springfield, Massachusetts. Sixty-two percent of the students scored below grade level when the school opened as a charter in 1995. However, by the end of its second year in operation, 62 percent of the students tested at or above grade level.

## MICHIGAN

...1996

**Excel Charter Academy** in Grand Rapids achieved dramatic gains from fall 1995 to spring 1996. First grade scores improved 44%, with 73% of the students scoring above the national average. For the school overall, 69% scored above the 50<sup>th</sup> national percentile. First grade reading scores increased 25.1 points; third grade math scores increased 28 points.

...1997

Modeled after Marva Collins Westside Preparatory Academy, **Northside Preparatory** in Kalamazoo opened in the fall of 1996 and serves kindergarten through second grade. Most of its students are at the poverty level, yet in its first year the kindergarten scored at or above grade level in four of the six academic categories measured by the California Achievement Test. The test also measures 12 specific academic objectives of which the kindergarten children demonstrated mastery in 86 percent of the categories.

...1998

**Michigan's charter schools** made significant gains on this year's statewide achievement tests, including a 24-point increase in fourth grade math scores.

About 60 percent of the fourth graders in Michigan charter schools received satisfactory math scores, up from 35 percent last year. Almost two-thirds of the charter schools tested for fourth grade reading and math in Michigan improved by 20+ points in either one or both of those subjects.

Nearly half of the charter schools doubled, and sometimes tripled, the number of "satisfactory" scores in fourth grade math, reading or both. About half of the charter schools improved their satisfactory scores in fifth grade science, writing or both by 100% or more. At least half of the Michigan charter schools improved their fifth and eighth grade science scores. These scores frequently improved as much as fifteen points. Seventh graders increased their math scores by 8 points.

The seventh graders of **Island City Academy**, of Eaton Rapids, had a 75 percent satisfactory rating for reading.

Ninety-three percent of fifth graders who are enrolled at **EXCEL Charter Academy** in Grand Rapids have reached proficiency levels in writing.

Fourth and fifth grade students at **Detroit's Martin Luther King Jr. Education Center** scored perfect 100's in writing.

The eight charters managed by National Heritage Academies showed an increase in achievement on the Metropolitan Achievement Test: **Eagle Crest Charter Academy** gained by 12.9%, **Knapp Charter Academy** increased by 3.5%, **Vanguard Charter Academy** by 8.5%, **Walker Charter Academy** by 14.1%, **Excel Charter Academy** by 6.9%, **Cross Creek Charter Academy** by 10.8%, **Vanderbilt Charter Academy** by 15.3%, and **Vista Charter Academy** by 1.7%.

The **Livingston Developmental Academy** boasts a different kind of achievement. When the school opened in September 1996, it housed 54 students diagnosed with ADD or ADHD and

on the prescription drug Ritalin. Thanks to the curriculum of Dr. Stephen Ingersoll (one of the founders of the school), only four students are currently still on the medication.

## MINNESOTA

...1995

In just its first three years in operation as a charter school, 140 of St. Paul's **City Academy** 156 graduates -- 90% -- qualified for two or four-year college programs. All of the school's 1995 graduates -- 42 former high school dropouts in St. Paul -- were accepted in post-secondary programs.

...1998

**New Visions School** in Minneapolis, serves 180 inner city students. A significant number of these students have behavioral problems and have had past difficulties with other schools. Over the last five years, students have gained at least one year of academic growth per year on average.

## NEW JERSEY

...1998

**The LEAP Charter School**, the only charter school in Camden, NJ (serving a highly at-risk community), just graduated its kindergarten class, which is reading at a first grade level.

## NEW MEXICO

...1995

**Taylor Middle School**, in Albuquerque, was the only National Blue Ribbon School selected in the state for the 1995-96 school year. It converted to charter school status in the fall of 1994.

## NORTH CAROLINA

...1998

The kindergartners at **Healthy Start Academy** averaged in the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile for reading and the 97<sup>th</sup> percentile for math on the IOWA test of basic skills. Almost all of the Healthy Start's children qualify for the federal free lunch program and come from low income black neighborhoods in East Durham. The first and second grades also posted gains. The first-graders moved from the 21<sup>st</sup> percentile to the 32<sup>nd</sup>, while second-graders went from the 38<sup>th</sup> to the 75<sup>th</sup>.

**Rocky Mount Advantage Charter School's** kindergartners also took the Iowa Test of basic skills and posted impressive scores in reading, language, and math, with students rising from the 47<sup>th</sup> percentile to the 82<sup>nd</sup> in the seven months that the school has been in existence.



The 5<sup>th</sup> graders also posted gains in reading, language, and math tests, rising up eight points from the 38<sup>th</sup> percentile to the 46<sup>th</sup> since the beginning of the year.

The **Exploris Middle School** and the **Magellan Charter School** received the best ABC test scores in the state of North Carolina (98<sup>th</sup> and 97<sup>th</sup> percentile respectively).

The **Summit Charter School** also posted excellent test scores on the ABC. They were within the 87<sup>th</sup> percentile.

## TEXAS

...1998

At the **Wesley Elementary Charter School**, located in a poor neighborhood in northwest Houston, more than 90 percent of all students passed state tests in reading, writing and math. Ninety-three percent of the students are black and 84 percent qualify for free lunch.

**West Houston Charter School** educates 120 students, 41 percent of these students are classified as 'at risk' and 37 percent are identified as Special Ed. The Wide Range Achievement Test - Third Edition, taken by students reveals that 89 percent of the students improved at least one academic year.

**Kipp Academy** students posted exemplary scores of between 96% and 100% in reading and math scores for grades 5-8.

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