The background of the image is a classroom. At the top, a series of alphabet cards are hanging from a string. Each card features a letter (uppercase and lowercase) and a small illustration: K (kitten), Buch (book), N (nose), T (tea), Ei (egg), R (record), D (dinosaur), W (wheel), Au (auto), F (fish), H (house), B (ball), Z (zebra), G (guitar), and Sch (school). Below the cards is a large whiteboard. In the foreground, there are several rows of empty blue school desks and chairs.

NORTH CAROLINA CHARTER SCHOOLS: UNDERMINING QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL

PUBLIC SCHOOLS FIRST NC

May 2025



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Table of Contents

List of Tables.....	3
List of Figures.....	4
Executive Summary	5
Origins.....	6
Growth.....	7
Differences Among Charter Schools.....	11
Network Affiliations.....	11
Curriculum and Instruction	11
Parent Volunteer Requirements	11
Dress Codes	12
Example of Dress Code Student Discipline: Classical Charter Schools of America	12
Lunch	13
Examples of Lunch Practices	13
Transportation.....	13
Examples of Transportation Information	14
Student Populations	15
Race	17
Students with Disabilities	21
English Learners.....	23
Economically Disadvantaged Students	26
Example: Anderson Creek Academy	28
Religious Affiliation.....	29
State-Level Coordination and Oversight	32
Office of Charter Schools.....	32
Charter School Advisory Committee	33
Charter School Advisory Board.....	33
Charter Schools Review Board	33
Management of Individual Charter Schools.....	36
Nonprofit Boards.....	36
For-Profit Charter School Management Companies.....	36
Baker Mitchell, Classical Charter Schools of America, and Roger Bacon Academy.....	39
Glenn Way, American Leadership Academies and Charter One.....	40
John Hage, Charter Schools USA, Red Apple Development, and Ryan Companies US.....	41
John Bryan, TeamCFA and The Challenge Foundation.....	42
Funding	44
Federal Funding.....	44

State Funding.....	44
Local Funding.....	45
The Role of Private Equity	46
Financial Irregularities	47
Applications to Open Charter Schools	48
Converting an Existing School to a Charter School	48
Application Process	49
Planning Year	51
Example of Bypassing the Process: Trinitas Academy	51
Student Admissions and Enrollment	52
Student Academic Outcomes	53
Accountability Mechanisms	55
Office of Charter Schools Complaint Process	55
Reviews, Renewals, Non-renewals, and Terminations	55
Recommendations.....	60
Deeper Dive: Student Demographics	64
White Flight Private Schools.....	64
Networks of Segregated Charter Schools	64
Segregation in Charlotte-Mecklenburg.....	65
Local Examples of Extreme Racial and Economic Segregation	67
Deeper Dive: Student Discipline.....	69
Student Discipline Definitions	69
Short-term Suspensions	70
Long-Term Suspensions and Expulsions.....	72
KIPP Schools.....	72
Deeper Dive: Charter School Closures	75
Failing to Ensure Academic Success	78
Fiscal Irresponsibility	78
Low Student Enrollment.....	84
Inadequately Serving Students with Disabilities	86
Multiple Problems	88
Torchlight Academy, Three Rivers Academy, Essie Mae Kiser Foxx, and Elaine Riddick ...	91
Endnotes.....	97
Appendix A: National History of Charter Schools	116
Appendix B.....	118
Appendix C.....	126
Appendix D	130
Appendix E.....	131

List of Tables

Table 1: NC School Districts with the Highest Percent of Public School Students in Charter Schools: 2023-24.	9
Table 2. NC Charter Schools Opened in 2024.	9
Table 3. NC Charter Schools Approved for 2025.....	9
Table 4. NC Charter School Applications to Open In 2025 or 2026.	10
Table 5. Examples of Charter School Networks Operating in North Carolina.	11
Table 6. Examples of Charter School Charges Preschool or Pre-K Tuition: 2024-25.	16
Table 7. NC Charter Schools with Less than One Percent White Students: 2023-24.	18
Table 8. NC Charter Schools with Lowest Percent of Students with IEPs and Students with Disabilities Compared to School Districts Where They Reside: 2023-24.....	21
Table 9. Eligibility for Students with IEPs in NC Charter Schools Compared to Traditional Public Schools: 2023-24.	22
Table 10. NC Charter Schools with Less than Two Percent English Lerner Student Population vs. School Districts Where Charter School is Located: November 2023.....	24
Table 11: NC Charter Schools by Percent Eligible for the National School Lunch Program Compared to Public School District Where Charter School Located: April 2024.	27
Table 12. NC Charter Schools by Percent of Students Eligible for the NSLP Compared to Public School District Where Charter School is Located: April 2024.	27
Table 13. NC Charter Schools Review Board: March 2025.	35
Table 14. Examples of EMOs Operating in North Carolina: 2024-25.....	37
Table 15. NC Report Card Grades for Classical Charter Schools of America Schools: 2024.	40
Table 16: NC Report Card Grades for ALA-Affiliated Schools: 2024.	41
Table 17. NC Report Card Grades for USA-Affiliated Charter Schools in NC: 2024.	42
Table 18. NC Report Card Grades for Challenge Foundation Academy-Affiliated Charter Schools in NC: 2024.	43
Table 19. NC Charter Schools Grades D or F: 2014-15 to 2023-24.	54
Table 20. NC Charter School Renewal Guidelines.....	57
Table 21. NC Charter Schools with Highest Short-Term Suspension Rates: 2023-24.....	70
Table 22. NC KIPP Schools: 2023-24.....	72
Table 23. KIPP schools in North Carolina: 2023-24.....	73
Table 24. Short-term Suspension Rates in NC KIPP Schools: 2023-24.....	73
Table 25. Out-of-School Suspensions for NC KIPP LEAs by Year: 2015-15 to 2023-24.....	73
Table 26. NC Charter School Relinquishments: 2024-25.	75
Table 27. NC Charter School Non-renewals: 2024-25.....	77
Table 28. NC Charter School Revocations: 2024-25.....	77

List of Figures

Figure 1: Number of Charter Schools 1996-97 to 2024-25.....	7
Figure 2: Student Enrollment in Traditional Public Schools 2003-04 to 2023-24.....	8
Figure 3. State Funding for NC Charter Schools 1996-97 to 2024-25.....	8
Figure 4. NC Charter School Student Enrollment: 2003-04 to 2023-24.....	8
Figure 5. Student populations at Metrolina Regional Scholars Academy Compared to Closest Charlotte-Mecklenburg Traditional Public Elementary Schools: 2023-24.....	17
Figure 6. Percent of NC Students in Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools by Selected Characteristics: 2023-24.....	18
Figure 7. Percent Economically Disadvantaged Students at ACA and Nearby Schools: 2023-24..	28
Figure 8. Taxpayer-Funded Charter Schools Fund EMOs.....	39
Figure 9. NC Charter School Application Review Process.	49
Figure 10. Percent Achieving School Performance Grades for Charter and Traditional Public Schools: 2023-24.	53
Figure 11. NC Percent Growth Metrics for Charter and Traditional Public Schools: 2023-24.....	54
Figure 12. Hobgood Charter School Students by Percent White Compared to Surrounding Public School Districts: 2023-24.....	64
Figure 13. Charlotte Movement Schools Compared to Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools: 2023-24.	65
Figure 14. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools by Percent White: 2003-04 to 2023-24.	66
Figure 15. Example of an NC Disproportionately White Charter Schools Compared to Public School District Where They Reside and Nearest Traditional Public School: 2023-24.	67
Figure 16. Examples of Disproportionately Black NC Charters Schools Compared to the School Districts in Where They Reside and Nearest Traditional Public Schools: 2023-24.....	67
Figure 17. Examples of NC Charter Schools with Lower Percent of students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch to School Districts Where They Reside and Nearest Traditional Public School: April 2024.....	68
Figure 18. Examples of Racial Disparities at Selected Charter Schools with 100+ Short-Term Suspensions: 2022-23.....	71

Executive Summary

North Carolina charter schools are publicly funded elementary and secondary schools operated independently by non-profit organizations, some of which partner with for-profit groups. Charter schools first opened in North Carolina in 1997. In 2011, despite evidence of uneven student outcomes, lawmakers abandoned the original statewide numerical cap. Where the legislature once had limited the statewide number of charter schools to 100, there is now no cap. Predictably, the number of charter schools in the state has significantly increased.

This report examines the three-decade North Carolina charter school experiment. It explores the original justifications for charter schools; analyzes the pedagogical and operational differences among charter schools; considers the mechanisms through which charter schools evade accountability measures that apply to public schools; and discusses the mixed student academic outcomes. The report then identifies and analyzes four problematic features of charter schools that should trouble taxpayers, parents, and lawmakers: racial segregation, exclusionary student discipline, the rate of school closures, and the financial mismanagement. These features suggest that, despite the public funding for and growth of charter schools, heightened scrutiny by taxpayers and policymakers is warranted.

The 2024-25 school year began with 210 operating charter schools. However, with the closure of one charter school in July 2024 and another in September 2024, 208 charter schools received well over \$1.18 billion¹ in taxpayer money, even as public-school districts remain grossly underfunded. As a result, North Carolina now has two primary systems of elementary and secondary public schools – a system of charter schools and a system of traditional school systems – despite the state constitutional requirement that the General Assembly provide a “*uniform* system of free public schools.” Moreover, the growth of taxpayer-funded private school tuition vouchers adds a third system of state-funded education.

Origins

In 1995, Republicans gained control of one house of the North Carolina General Assembly for the first time in the twentieth century.² The following year, the General Assembly passed the “Charter Schools Act of 1996,” opening the door for charter schools in North Carolina.³ Since then, the stated purposes of charter schools – according to Chapter 115C, Article 14A of the North Carolina General Statutes – have been to:

- improve student learning;
- increase learning opportunities for all students, with special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for students who are identified as at risk of academic failure or academically gifted;
- encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods;
- create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunities to be responsible for the learning program at the school site; and
- provide parents and students with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system.⁴

In the original legislation, the General Assembly gave the State Board of Education (SBE) sole authority to approve charter schools and included provisions about charter school applications and approvals, operations, instructional programs, employees, accountability, admissions, non-renewals and terminations, and funding.⁵

Lawmakers exempted charter schools from various statutes and rules and rules applicable to school districts.⁶ These exemptions enable charter schools to filter out certain students, to relax staffing expectations, and to minimize accountability. For example, charter schools are not required to provide transportation or free and reduced-priced meals for students. Charter schools need not follow the North Carolina Standard Course of Study. They can set their own school calendars. They can have whatever class sizes they want. Their teachers do not need to have any specific credentials. Unlike their public-school counterparts, charter school educators have no specific professional development requirements. They are not required to have governance by citizen-elected school boards. Finally, they are not bound by competitive bidding requirements for contracted services.⁷

The Charter Schools Act capped the total number of charter schools statewide at 100.⁸ In 1997, the state’s first 34 charter schools began operating. Just three years later, the 100-school cap was reached.⁹

Growth

In 2011, when Republicans gained control of both the House and Senate in the General Assembly -- for the first time since 1870 -- ¹⁰ they removed the cap on charter schools. ¹¹ Since then, the numbers of charter schools, students attending charter schools, and public funding for charter schools in the state have all steadily increased. ¹² (Figures 1, 2, 3, 4) From 2011-12 to 2024-25, the number of charter schools increased from 100 to 208; ¹³ the number of charter school students increased by 225%; and the percentage of all elementary and secondary public school students who attended a charter school increased from 3% to 10%. ¹⁴ The growth rate is the fifth highest in the nation. ¹⁵

"In the future, districts and existing charter schools will face a saturation point as more new schools are projected to open. That point will hamper both the district and charter school efforts to fulfill their educational mission for student excellence."

- NCDPI's "2015 Annual Charter Schools Report"

During the same period, student enrollment in public school districts decreased by 4%. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in fall 2021, North Carolina had the eighth most students enrolled in charter schools and the 14th highest percentage of students enrolled in charter schools among all 50 states. ¹⁶ During 2023-24, if charter schools combined to constitute a school district, it would be the state's largest district. ¹⁷

Figure 1: Number of Charter Schools 1996-97 to 2024-25. ¹⁸

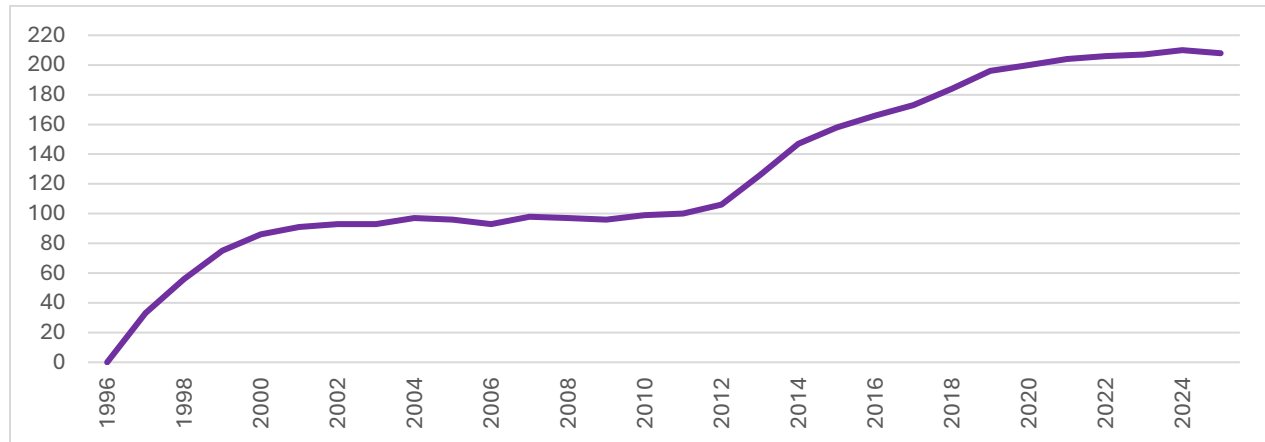


Figure 2: Student Enrollment in Traditional Public Schools 2003-04 to 2023-24.¹⁹

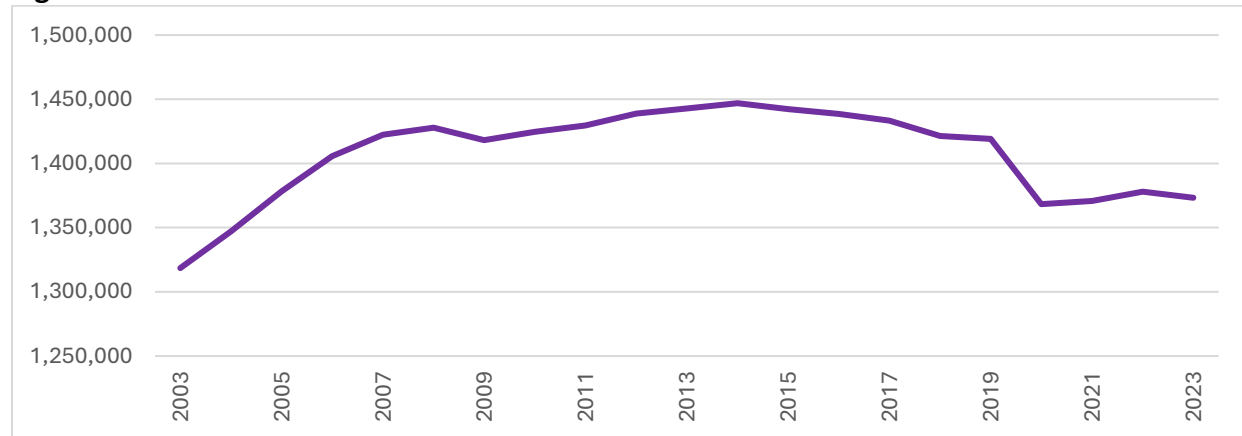


Figure 3. State Funding for NC Charter Schools 1996-97 to 2024-25.²⁰

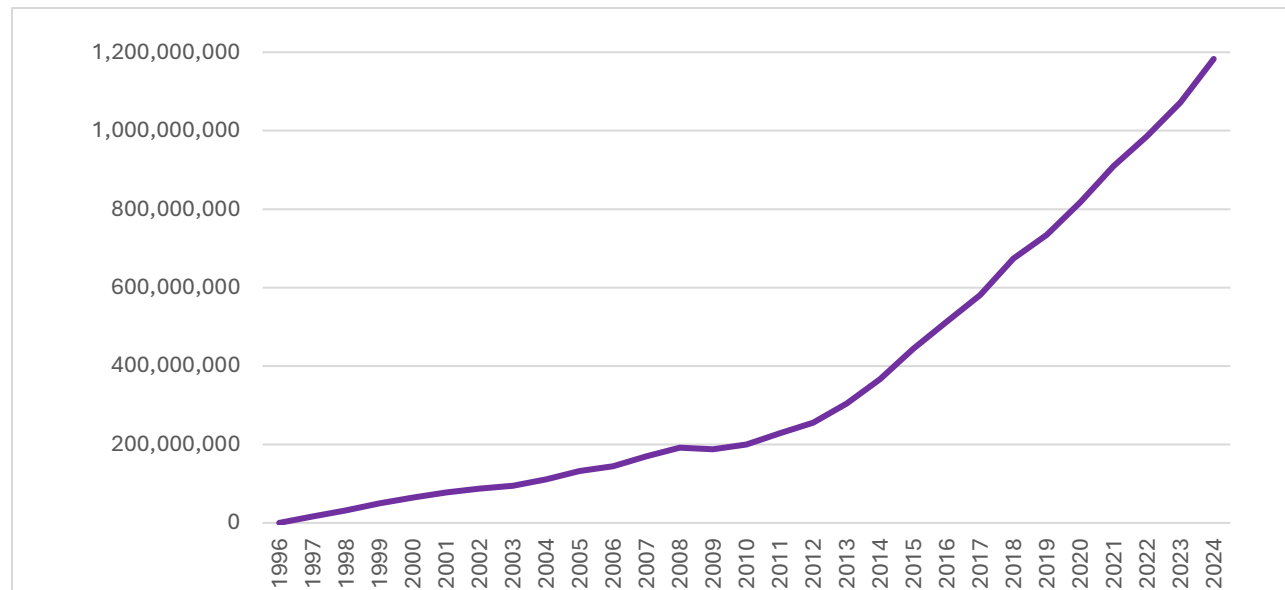
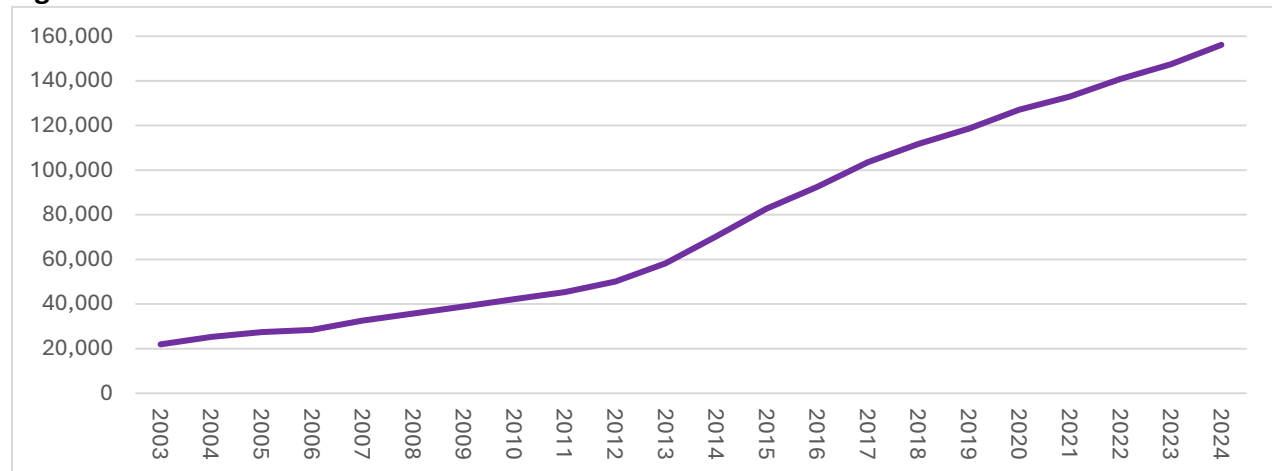


Figure 4. NC Charter School Student Enrollment: 2003-04 to 2023-24.²¹



During 2024-25, only 49 of the state’s 115 school districts did not have at least one charter school located within their boundaries. These 49 districts were, for the most part, very small and rural. Heavily populated areas tended to have the most charter schools. For example, there were: 33 charter schools within Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools’ boundaries; 26 within Wake County Public School System’s boundaries; 14 within Durham Public Schools’ boundaries; and 13 within Guilford County Schools’ boundaries. However, when rural counties do have charter schools, they tend to enroll a larger share of the student population (Table 1).²²

Table 1: NC School Districts with the Highest Percent of Public School Students in Charter Schools: 2023-24.

School Districts by County	Percent of Public School Students in Charter Schools
Northampton	49.2
Vance	30.8
Washington	21.1
Person	19.9
Halifax (Halifax, Roanoke Rapids, and Weldon City Schools)	19.8

Despite the troubling implications for public education, more charter schools are on the way. Seven new charter schools opened in 2024 (5 are remote charter schools), and the State has already approved 21 charter schools to open in 2025 or 2026 (Tables 2, 3, and 4). More information is shown below about the application process and review board.

Table 2. NC Charter Schools Opened in 2024.

School	County	Year Opened
American Leadership Academy (ALA) Monroe	Union	2024
Ascend Leadership Remote Academy	Lee	2024
NE Carolina Prep School Remote Academy	Edgecombe	2024
Pine Springs Preparatory Remote Academy	Wake	2024
Riverside Leadership Academy	Craven	2024
Telra Institute Remote Academy	Mecklenburg	2024
Uwharrie Charter Remote Academy	Randolph	2024

Table 3. NC Charter Schools Approved for 2025.

School	County	Year
Carolina Achieve	Orange	2025
Crossnore Community Charter	Forsyth	2025
HYPE Leadership	Hoke	2025
Liberty Charter Academy	Guilford	2025
Movement School Gastonia	Gaston	2025
Movement School Greensboro	Guilford	2025
Sledge Institute	Vance	2025
Triad International Studies Academy	Guilford	2025

Table 4. NC Charter School Applications to Open In 2025 or 2026.

School	County	Year
Trinitas Classical	Iredell	2025
2 Hr Learning Online	Remote/Statewide	2025
ALA Garner	Wake	2026
Bettis Academy	Wake	2026
Bright Scholars	Mecklenburg	2026
Centerpoint Classical	Guilford	2026
Focus Charter	Wake	2026
Granite Charter	Chatham	2026
Legacy NC	Forsyth	2026
NC Connections	Remote/Statewide	2026
Somerset Preparatory	Union	2026
Virtual Horizons	Remote/Statewide	2026
Warren YES	Warren	2026

For a brief history of charter schools across the nation, see Appendix A.

Differences Among Charter Schools

Charter schools in North Carolina differ in numerous respects, including funding, fees and volunteer requirements for parents, extracurricular activities and before-and-after-school care offered, student academic achievement, and staff qualifications. Some are brick-and-mortar, while others are virtual. Other key differences are described in the following sections.

Network Affiliations

Some charter schools are local and independent, while others are part of state or national networks or chains. In 2024-25, a quarter of all North Carolina charter schools were part of a state or national network (Table 5).

Table 5. Examples of Charter School Networks Operating in North Carolina.

Network	Headquarters	Schools in NC
American Leadership Academy ²³	Mesa, AZ	6
Challenge Foundation Academies ²⁴	Forest City, NC	7
Classical Charter Schools of America ²⁵	Leland, NC	4
Doral Academy, Inc. ²⁶	Doral, FL	1
Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) ²⁷	San Francisco, CA	8
Movement Schools ²⁸	Charlotte, NC	4
National Heritage Academies ²⁹	Grand Rapids, MI	16
Triangle Math and Science Academy ³⁰	Cary, NC	4
TOTAL		50

Curriculum and Instruction

Some charter schools have a standard curriculum. Others focus on particular subjects, such as art,³¹ environmental studies,³² world languages,³³ agriculture,³⁴ career and technical education (CTE),³⁵ or science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).³⁶ Some are dedicated to preparing students for, or inculcating them in the values of, military service³⁷ or entrepreneurship.³⁸ Charter schools might take a particular approach to curriculum and pedagogy, such as “classical education,”³⁹ Montessori education,⁴⁰ Waldorf education,⁴¹ place-based learning,⁴² project-based learning,⁴³ outdoor education,⁴⁴ or expeditionary learning.⁴⁵

Parent Volunteer Requirements

Some charter schools require parents and guardians to perform volunteer work. This can be difficult for working parents – especially parents who work multiple jobs, who do not have leave time, who are paid hourly, or who have limited transportation options. Several examples illustrate the types of requirements found in the state’s charter schools:

- **Cardinal Charter Academy’s** “Student-Parent-Family Handout” reads, “Each school year parents are required to volunteer a minimum of 20 service hours per family. Parents with two or more students at the school are required to volunteer a minimum of 30 service

hours per family. Hours are prorated to two hours a month for students enrolling after the school year has begun.”⁴⁶

- **Union Academy’s** “Family Volunteers” website reads, “When new students arrive, we ask parents to sign a Partnership Agreement. This agreement asks parents to contribute a minimum of six hours a month, or 60 hours per year.”⁴⁷

Dress Codes

Charter schools often adopt stricter dress codes, sometimes necessitating out-of-pocket costs for families. These may include uniform purchases or requiring particular types of clothes, shoes, and colors. Some charter management companies, such as Charter One (C1 Apparel, Inc. for American Leadership Academy) and Charter Schools USA (Red Apple Uniforms for its schools), have started subsidiary corporations to profit from uniform sales to families at the schools they manage.⁴⁸ The “preferred vendor” for all National Heritage Academy schools, for example, is Image Builders Marketing, Inc., a Michigan-based company.⁴⁹ At some schools, students may be able to pay to “dress down” on certain days. For example:

- **North East Carolina Preparatory School** students may wear appropriate non-school uniforms by paying \$2 on designated days.⁵⁰
- **Union Academy** students must pay \$1 to dress down on dress down days.⁵¹
- **North Carolina Leadership Academy** families that donated \$1,000 or more per year received “6 dress down passes per child” and other recognitions.⁵²

Example of Dress Code Student Discipline: Classical Charter Schools of America

Charter Day School (now Classical Charter Schools of Leland and part of the CCSA network) had a dress code premised on strict, traditional gender roles. Until 2022, the school required female students to wear a skirt, jumper, or skort; they could not wear shorts or pants. The school argued that the dress code was justified because it was part of an effort to “preserve chivalry and respect.” Baker Mitchell, the founder of the network and its for-profit management company, Roger Bacon Academy, said chivalry is “a code of conduct where women are treated, they’re regarded as a fragile vessel that men are supposed to take care of and honor.” Additionally, he said the requirement was intended to ensure that girls are treated “courteously and more gently than boys.”

Parents of female students sued the school. The school argued that it was a private entity and therefore did not have to respect students’ constitutional rights. In 2022, The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit rejected the school’s argument, finding that it violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. In 2023, the U.S. Supreme Court denied the school’s petition for review, despite CCSA’s support from right-wing politicians and organizations.

Despite this ruling, CCSA maintains gendered, racialized strict uniform requirements aimed at reinforcing adherence to conservative norms. Students must wear a white or navy top, tucked in at all times; khaki bottoms; a khaki or brown belt; white, black, navy, or khaki socks with no designs; closed-toe and closed-heel secure shoes; and a CCSA logo uniform for PE. CCSA’s uniform policy reads, “We encourage parents to groom their children so as to emphasize they are team players working for a common goal of academic achievement.” It requires “high standards of decency, cleanliness and conservative grooming,” “clean and neat” clothes; and hair that is “kept clean, well groomed, and worn out of the face from eyebrows to chin” and “of a natural color.” The policy allows only one kind of earring, “single stud and small earrings that are

no longer than ½ inch (no more than two per ear),” which only girls may wear; “[no more than one] small, non-eccentric necklace and bracelet” but only for girls; “conservative make-up” but only for middle school girls; and “clean shaven” facial hair for boys. Finally, the policy prohibits visible manufacturer’s logos, trademarks, or embroidery; clothing that is “torn, dirty or not properly fitted;” “polo dresses;” cargo shorts or pants; denim pants; flip-flops, Crocs, sandals, platform or high heel shoes; hairstyle “deemed a distraction by School administration;” “facial piercings;” and “jewelry or decorative objects” for boys.

Lunch

During the 2023-24 school year, only about 40% of charter schools participated in the National School Lunch Program.⁵³ Charter schools use a variety of practices for student lunches, including: (a) requiring parents to send their student with a lunch from home;⁵⁴ (b) traditional cafeteria food;⁵⁵ (c) contracting with the local school district;⁵⁶ (d) catering from outside companies or restaurants;⁵⁷ or (e) allowing families to order and pay for lunch – either through the school or third-party websites and apps (e.g., My Hot Lunchbox) – to be delivered from a restaurant.⁵⁸ Many charter schools do not have a cafeteria, forcing students to eat in classrooms, outside, or in other common areas.⁵⁹

Examples of Lunch Practices

Arts Based School: To help fund lunches for students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, students may opt to purchase pizza every Friday.

Emereau Bladen: Lunch is \$5 per day. Examples of lunch in spring 2024 included: fish sticks, French fries, and fruit; beefaroni, corn, roll, and fruit; corndog, French fries, and fruit; sloppy joe, corn, and fruit; and Shepard’s pie, corn, and fruit.

Gray Stone Day School: Catered meals are available for \$6 per day. Salads are offered for \$4, and a salad bar is offered for \$5.

IC Imagine Public Charter School: Lunch is \$6 per day generally and \$4.50 per day for economically disadvantaged students.

Research Triangle High School: A group of students organizes hot lunch delivery to school four days a week.

Transportation

Charter schools are not required to provide bus service to their students. They are only required to develop a “transportation plan” in which they verify that transportation is not a barrier for any student who resides in the school district in which the school is located.⁶⁰ Charter schools may themselves provide transportation to students.⁶¹ According to the NC Department of Public Instruction, in 2023, 58% of charter schools provide busing (typically to one or more clusters/hubs, such as a church or business parking lot). An additional 24% provided transportation only on an “as needed” basis. Sixteen percent of charter schools helped parents coordinate carpools. Finally, the plan for 2% of charter schools was to have students use public transportation.⁶² Some charter schools charge parents for bus service,⁶³ while others had a waitlist for transportation.⁶⁴

Examples of Transportation Information

American Leadership Academy – Johnston, *Student and Parent Handbook*: “Parents/legal guardians are responsible for safely transporting students to and from school. Carpools are strongly encouraged. ALA is not responsible for carpools and assumes no liability for matters related to the organization, management, or execution of carpools.”

Anderson Creek Academy, *Parent/Scholar Handbook*: “For scholars who reside in Anderson Creek Club, a walking/golf cart path is available to transport scholars. To use your golf cart on the path, you must pre-register and provide proof of insurance for your golf cart in the office.”

Bethany Community School, “Transportation” webpage: “Transportation to and from school is not a service the school can provide for every student. We believe that parents are our partners in education, and we rely on our community to band together. Transportation to and from school is the responsibility of the individual family. ... Families with transportation hardships should contact the office to discuss the issue individually. Maybe we can do something to help.”

The Capitol Encore Academy, “Transportation & Dismissal Plan” webpage: “As a Public Charter School, TCEA has students that travel from multiple different counties to come to our school. To help better serve our students, we’ve created a Carpool page for parents to meet up with other parents that drive from the same area in hopes to help alleviate the pressure of daily commuting to our school.”

Cardinal Charter Academy, *Student-Parent-Family Handbook*: “Cardinal Charter Academy believes that transportation should not be a barrier to school attendance. Therefore, parents are encouraged to carpool and make sure that students are dropped off and picked up during the posted school hours. Please see School Administration if you experience a hardship with transportation.” Other Charter Schools USA-managed schools have similar language in their handbooks.

Carolina International School, “Transportation” webpage: “CIS relies on parent-organized carpooling for two reasons: 1) our families are widely spread across several counties and 2) the expense of operating a fleet of buses is prohibitive when we have so many other operational costs. By relying on parents to transport their children to school, CIS can direct its resources to provide the best possible educational program for our students. We encourage families to consider carpooling Carpooling arrangements for Carolina International School are voluntary and at the discretion of the parents. The school does not assume responsibility for carpool arrangements.”

Evergreen Community Charter School, *Community Handbook*: “Parents are expected to transport their child to and from school or to carpool with other families. ... Should transportation be a barrier to attendance, please contact our office for assistance in making travel arrangements.”

The Exploris School, *Family & Student Handbook*: “At Exploris, we have chosen to focus our resources on teacher quality and a safe facility, rather than providing transportation for students on school buses. All families who can provide transportation to and from school are asked to do so.”

Falls Lake Academy, *Student-Parent Handbook*: “FLA provides no bus transportation. All transportation – including to and from school as well as field trips and all other student trips – is the responsibility of the parents.”

Forsyth Academy, *Parent and Student Handbook*: “Although transportation is not required to be provided by the school, the school will assist families in facilitating transportation needs through providing information to parents regarding carpooling, private carriers, and public transportation possibilities.” Other National Heritage Academies-managed schools have similar language in their handbooks.

Global Scholars Academy, *Parent & Scholar Handbook*: “GSA does not provide transportation to and from school for its scholars. However, GSA will support parents in networking with other parents interested in carpooling. GSA will disseminate transportation communication to parents via our school website and newsletter. Scholars will not be allowed to take public transportation home alone. Scholars must be accompanied by an adult when arriving and departing campus. ... [N]o scholar is permitted to walk to school unaccompanied by an adult.”

Longleaf School of the Arts, “LSA FAQs” webpage: “[A]s a charter school, LSA does not receive the funding necessary to provide transportation. Parents/Guardians are responsible for providing their child's transportation to attend LSA. ... A group of parents in North Raleigh has privately contracted with a shuttle bus company to transport their children and split the cost amongst themselves. Interested families can email here for more information.”

Mountain Island Charter School, “Transportation” webpage: “Mountain Island Charter School offers a bus service in selected neighborhood areas for students attending MICS. ... Bus service is \$75 per child, per semester or \$150 per child, per school year.”

Neuse Charter School, *Student & Family Handbook*: “As a Charter school without bus transportation, parents will often be required to provide transportation to the field trips. ... NCS does not provide transportation to and from school.”

Stewart Creek High School, “Transportation” webpage: “Students attending the school will receive public transportation passes if they live more than two miles from the school.”

Washington Montessori Public Charter School, “FAQ” webpage: “WMPCS does not provide transportation to or from school. Parents and guardians are responsible to ensure their child is brought to and from school. Although the school does not officially have a bus, the Greenville, NC, parents have contracted with a bus company for transportation to and from Greenville. In addition, there are numerous carpools from surrounding counties.”

Water’s Edge Village School, *Student/Parent Handbook*: “WEVS does not provide a school transportation program. Due to Water’s Edge Village School’s geographic isolation, carpooling is highly encouraged, however the school cannot govern or accept any liability for carpool. The teachers and Board of Directors do not participate in the organization of the carpool nor in establishing the policies and procedures for it. Because WEVS does not have a school transportation program, we rely on parents to transport students to and from field trips.”

Student Populations

Unlike regular school districts, charter schools are not restricted to serving only the students residing and domiciled within a particular county or district. Many charter schools serve students who are spread across multiple school districts. During 2024-25, the sizes of brick-and-mortar charter schools ranged from as few as 50 students (at **Water’s Edge Village School** in Corolla) to

as many as 2,315 students (at **Lincoln Charter Academy** in Denver and Lincolnton).⁶⁵ The largest charter schools in North Carolina are online schools – **NC Virtual Academy** (3,618) and **North Carolina Cyber Academy** (2,483).⁶⁶

Charter schools serve specific grades or all K-12 students. In 2017, state lawmakers passed legislation allowing charter schools to participate in the North Carolina Pre-K Program.⁶⁷ Some charter schools also have private, tuition-based preschool and pre-kindergarten programs that may cost upwards of \$10,000 a year (Table 6).

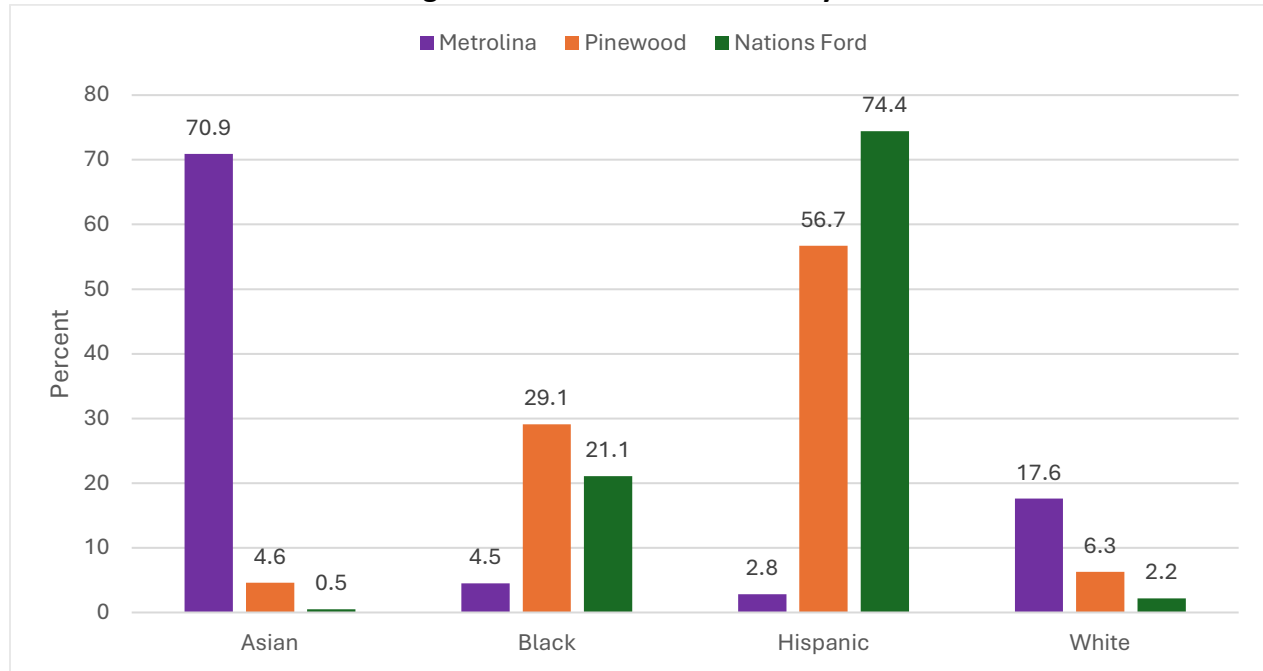
Table 6. Examples of Charter School Charges Preschool or Pre-K Tuition: 2024-25.

School	Pre-kindergarten or Preschool Tuition for 2024-25
Casa Esperanza Montessori ⁶⁸	\$9,975-\$10,175 for full-time*
Doral Academy of North Carolina ⁶⁹	\$7,425 for full-time
East Voyager Academy ⁷⁰	\$4,200-\$4,500 for full-time*
Island Montessori ⁷¹	\$8,247 for part-time \$10,020 for full-time
Raleigh Oak Charter School ⁷²	\$5,265 for half-day, five days per week \$3,465 for half-day, three days per week \$2,556 for half-day, two days per week
Sterling Montessori ⁷³	\$10,105 for full-time
Wake Preparatory Academy ⁷⁴	\$6,175-\$6,850 for part-time* \$8,875-\$9,850 for full-time*
Washington Montessori Public Charter School ⁷⁵	\$3,625 for half-day \$5,575 for full day

* Amount depends on the payment schedule

Some charter schools serve specific student populations. Examples include students identified as academically or intellectually gifted,⁷⁶ female students,⁷⁷ “motivated students who are pursuing high-intensity training outside the classroom,”⁷⁸ “at-risk” students,⁷⁹ and students who have struggled in traditional public schools.⁸⁰ For example, Metrolina Regional Scholars Academy in Charlotte serves “highly gifted children.”⁸¹ Prospective students must undergo cognitive/IQ testing by a licensed psychologist or licensed psychological associate and provide a teacher nomination form.⁸² Its student population has a significantly higher percentage of Asian and white students than the nearest Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) schools – Pinewood Elementary School, 1.8 miles away, and Nations Ford Elementary School, 2.1 miles away (Figure 5). Moreover, Metrolina serves very few students with IEPs – only seven students with a speech or language impairment and one student with “other health impairment” in 2022-23. Only two percent of Metrolina students had an IEP, compared to 11% of students in CMS.

Figure 5. Student populations at Metrolina Regional Scholars Academy Compared to Closest Charlotte-Mecklenburg Traditional Public Elementary Schools: 2023-24.

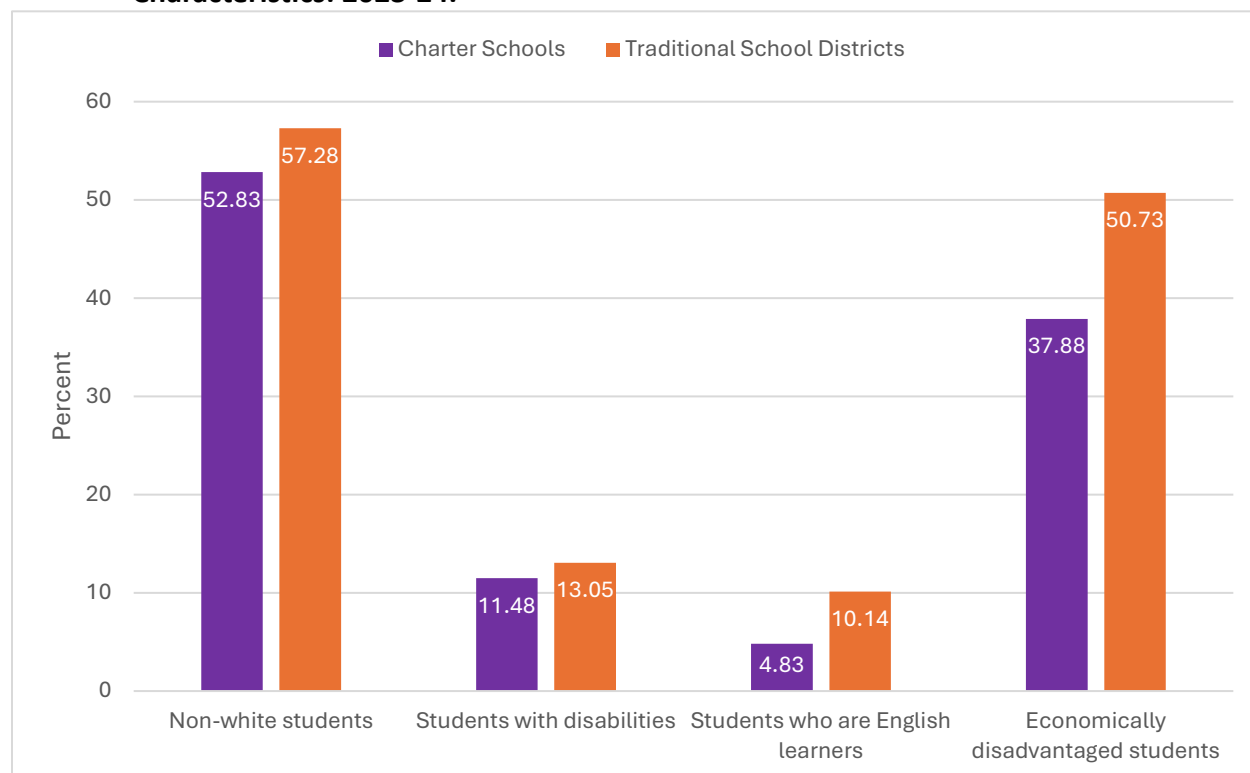


Statewide, charter schools serve lower percentages of non-white students, students with disabilities, students who are English learners, and economically disadvantaged students than traditional public schools (Figure 6). However, comparing statewide demographic data understates the segregation impacts of charter schools, because neither demographic subgroups nor charter schools are evenly distributed across the state. Local comparisons – at least when the NC DPI makes such data available – are more meaningful as a means of illustrating how charter schools divide students by race, disability, English language ability, and socioeconomic status. This section compares the student populations of specific charter schools to the school districts in which they are located and to the nearest traditional public schools (where data is available).

Race

Over 70 years ago, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the concept of “separate but equal” has no place in public education.⁸³ Moreover, the harms of school segregation and the benefits of school integration are by now well documented.⁸⁴ Yet researchers found that between 1999 and 2012, individual charter schools in North Carolina became “increasingly racially imbalanced, in the sense that some are serving primarily minority students and others are serving primarily white students.”⁸⁵ The problem has continued unabated. A 2022 study by the North Carolina Justice Center found that “North Carolina’s charter schools continue to skew whiter than traditional public schools in the same county. More than a third of all charter schools (Figure 6) have a white enrollment that exceeds the county average by more than a standard deviation.”⁸⁶

Figure 6. Percent of NC Students in Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools by Selected Characteristics: 2023-24.



During 2023-24, 15 charter schools had fewer than five white students; two had no white students (Table 7). Forty-eight charter schools – nearly one in every four in the state – were racially isolated minority schools, defined as having 90% minority students, despite many being in racially diverse areas.⁸⁷

Table 7. NC Charter Schools with Less than One Percent White Students: 2023-24.

School	Location	# of White Students	% of White Students
The College Prep. and Leadership Academy	Guilford	0	0.0
Global Scholars Academy	Durham	0	0.0
Sugar Creek Charter	Charlotte-Mecklenburg	2	0.1
Quality Education Academy	Winston-Salem/Forsyth	1	0.1
Reaching All Minds Academy	Durham	1	0.3
KIPP - Durham College Preparatory	Durham	1	0.3
KIPP - Charlotte	Charlotte-Mecklenburg	4	0.4
Invest Collegiate	Charlotte-Mecklenburg	2	0.6
Carter G. Woodson School	Winston-Salem/Forsyth	3	0.7
Old Main STREAM Academy	Robeson	2	0.7
Dillard Academy Charter School	Wayne	2	0.7

During 2023-24, 45 charter schools had a student population that was more than 25 percentage points whiter than the district in which the school was located. Nineteen charter schools had a student population that was more than 25 percentage points less white than the district in which the school was located.⁸⁸ Several examples highlight these differences:

- **Pocosin Innovative Charter School's** student population was 72.2% white, compared to 7.6% of students in Washington County School District.
- **Southeastern Academy's** student population was 66.1% white, compared to 10.0% of students in Public Schools of Robeson County.
- **Vance Charter School's** student population was 74.4% white, compared to 10.1% of students in Vance County Public Schools.
- **Monroe Charter Academy's** student population was 65.9% Black, compared to 12.1% of students in Union County Public Schools.
- **Success Institute Charter School's** student population was 77.9% Black, compared to 14.0% of students in Iredell-Statesville School District.
- **Z.E.C.A. The School of Arts and Technology's** student population was 65.9% Black, compared to 15.9% of students in Onslow County School District.

During 2023-24, some charter schools had a student population that was more than 50 percentage points more white or Black than the nearest traditional schools.⁸⁹ Below are examples of both types of extreme population differences.

- **Bear Grass Charter School** 6-12 student population was 90.7% white, compared to 23.5% at Riverside Middle and 25.3% at Riverside High.
- **Corvian Community School** K-12 student population was 62.6% white, compared to 5.6% at Parkside Elementary, 8.2% at Ridge Road Middle, and 8.1% at Mallard Creek High.
- **East Wake Academy** K-12 student population was 70.0% white, compared to 16.7% at Zebulon Elementary, 15.0% at Zebulon Middle, and 16.7% at East Wake High.
- **Oxford Preparatory** K-12 student population was 74.2% white, compared to 14.0% at Credle Elementary, 18.8% at North Granville Middle, and 22.0% at Webb High.
- **Pioneer Springs Community School** K-12 student population was 62.6% white, compared to 5.0% at Cox Elementary, 5.0% at Alexander Middle, and 6.2% at North Mecklenburg High.
- **Tillery Charter Academy** K-8 student population was 78.4% white, compared to 8.0% at Greenridge Elementary and 25.3% at East Middle.
- **Vance Charter School** K-12 student population was 74.4% white, compared to 6.4% at Rollins Elementary School, 7.1% at Vance County Middle, and 6.4% at Vance County High.
- **Washington Montessori** K-12 student population was 85.4% white, compared to 26.6% at Eastern Elementary, 32.0% at P.S. Jones Middle, and 34.1% at Washington High.
- **A.C.E. Academy** K-8 student population was 75.7% Black, compared to 19.7% at Harrisburg Elementary and 19.6% at Hickory Ridge Middle.
- **Asheville PEAK Academy** K-6 student population was 66.7% Black, compared to 14.5% at Herring Elementary.
- **KIPP Charlotte's** K-8 student population was 85.7% Black, compared to 26.4% at Briarwood Elementary and 32.5% at Martin Luther King Jr. Middle.

- **Monroe Charter Academy** K-6 student population was 65.9% Black, compared to 14.5% at Benton Heights Elementary.
- **Movement Charter School** K-7 student population was 88.0% Black, compared to 9.6% at Grand Oak Elementary.

Prior to 2013, the law governing admission to North Carolina’s charter schools read, “Within one year after the charter school begins operation, *the population of the school shall reasonably reflect the racial and ethnic composition of the general population* residing within the local school administrative unit in which the school is located or the racial and ethnic composition of the special population that the school seeks to serve residing within the local school administrative unit in which the school is located” (emphasis added).

In 2013, however, the relevant law was amended to no longer require charter schools to reflect the demographics of local communities. Instead, the statute changed to require only that charter schools “make efforts” to reasonably reflect the population.⁹⁰ As demonstrated by the data above, however, many charter schools have either fallen short in their attempts or failed to even try. The charter schools alone may not deserve the blame, as the State has done little to enforce this statutory requirement.

These so-called desegregation plans do little to accomplish their putative ends. Since January 2022, all charter schools are required to submit plans to the OCS showing how the school is making efforts to comply with this statute.⁹¹ To date, the OCS has not made the plans public or communicated what, if anything, they doing with the plans, leaving key questions remaining:

- What does “reasonably reflect mean”?
- Why are charter schools not required to make efforts before they even open – for example, in the marketing and recruitment phases?
- What components must desegregation plans include, and must they be research-based?
- Do OCS staff have the training and expertise necessary to effectively review the plans?
- How are OCS staff assessing the plans, if at all?
- What, if anything, will the OCS (or the SBE or CSRB) do about schools that fail to submit plans or submit inadequate plans?
- Will the OCS (or the SBE or CSRB) hold schools accountable for implementing plans, and if so, how?
- Why are charter schools not required to make similar desegregation efforts with respect to students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, and students who are English learners?

For additional data about racial segregation among North Carolina charter schools, see Deeper Dive: Student Demographics.

Students with Disabilities

A similar admissions dynamic is apparent with respect to students with disabilities. In theory, charter schools must comply with the same laws and regulations as traditional public schools and districts,⁹² including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA),⁹³ Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973,⁹⁴ Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and North Carolina Policies Governing Services for Children with Disabilities.⁹⁵ In other words, charter schools may not discriminate on the basis of disability.⁹⁶ For example, charter schools must not: ask whether a prospective student has a disability, an individualized education program (IEP),⁹⁷ or a Section 504 plan; counsel a prospective student (or the student's parents) against applying to or enrolling because of the student's disability; advise an enrolled student to withdraw because of the student's disability; or long-term suspend or expel a student with a disability without first conducting a manifestation determination.⁹⁸ Additionally, during each period of enrollment, charter schools must enroll an eligible student who submits a timely application, unless the number of applications exceeds the capacity of a program, class, grade level, or building, in which case, students shall be accepted by lottery.⁹⁹

In practice, however, many charter schools appear to elude federal law. They serve a much lower percentage of students with disabilities than public school districts (Table 8). During 2023-24, 11.5% of charter school students had an IEP, compared to 14.1% of traditional school district students. Less than five percent of students at 9 charter schools had an IEP, despite the fact that the school districts in which they are located have student populations that are between 11.6% and 16.9% students with IEPs. See Table 8. For example, 2.6% of Gray Stone Day School's students had an IEP, compared to 13.1% of students in Stanly County Schools. At Roxboro Community School, 5.2% of students had an IEP, compared to 18.4% of students in Person County Schools.¹⁰⁰

Table 8. NC Charter Schools with Lowest Percent of Students with IEPs and Students with Disabilities Compared to School Districts Where They Reside: 2023-24.

Charter School	% of Students with an IEP	School District where Charter School is Located	% of Students with an IEP	Percentage Point Difference
Gray Stone Day School	2.6	Stanly	13.1	10.5
Metrolina Regional Scholars Academy	2.8	Charlotte-Mecklenburg	11.6	8.8
Raleigh Charter High School	3.0	Wake	12.8	9.8
Triangle Math and Science Academy	3.7	Wake	12.8	9.1
Math and Science Academy of Apex	4.0	Wake	12.8	8.8
Franklin Academy	4.7	Wake	12.8	8.1
NE Regional Sch. - Biotech/Agriculture	4.8	Elizabeth City-Pasquotank	16.9	12.1
Telra Institute	4.9	Charlotte-Mecklenburg	11.6	6.7
Reaching All Minds Academy	4.9	Durham	15.8	10.9
Roxboro Community School	5.2	Person	18.4	13.2
Youngsville Academy	5.6	Franklin	14.1	8.5
East Voyager Academy	5.7	Charlotte-Mecklenburg	11.6	5.9
Pine Springs Preparatory Academy	5.8	Charlotte-Mecklenburg	11.6	5.8
Legacy Classical	5.8	Harnett	14.6	8.8
Dillard Academy	5.8	Wayne	14.9	9.1

The students with disabilities who do attend charter schools tend to require fewer and less expensive services than those who attend public schools. For example, 1.6% of charter school students and 2.1% of traditional public school students have autism. Compared to charter schools, school districts' populations of students with disabilities have higher percentages of students with autism, blindness, deafness, developmental delays, hearing impairments, intellectual disabilities, serious emotional disabilities, and traumatic brain injury. The only subgroup of students with disabilities that charter schools serve at higher rates than school districts are students eligible for an IEP for an "other health impairment," such as asthma, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, or diabetes.¹⁰¹ In 2023-24, 2.3% of students in charter schools had an "Other Health Impairment" compared to 2.2% of public school students (Table 9).

Table 9. Eligibility for Students with IEPs in NC Charter Schools Compared to Traditional Public Schools: 2023-24.¹⁰²

Eligibility for Service Under the IDEA	Charter Schools		Traditional Schools	
	% of Students with IEPs	% of All Students	% of Students with IEPs	% of All Students
Autism	13.8	1.6	15.0	2.1
Deaf-Blindness	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Deafness	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0
Developmental Delay	4.5	0.4	8.7	1.2
Hearing Impairment	0.6	0.1	0.7	0.1
Intellectual Disability - Mild	3.7	0.4	4.9	0.7
Intellectual Disability - Moderate	1.1	0.1	2.1	0.3
Intellectual Disability - Severe	0.1	0.0	0.4	0.1
Multiple Disabilities	0.4	0.0	1.4	0.2
Orthopedic Impairment	0.2	0.0	0.2	0.0
Other Health Impairment	20.3	2.3	15.7	2.2
Serious Emotional Disability	1.5	0.2	2.1	0.3
Specific Learning Disability	35.4	4.0	33.5	4.6
Speech or Language Impairment	17.8	2.0	14.4	2.0
Traumatic Brain Injury	0.4	0.0	0.5	0.1
Visual Impairment, incl. Blindness	0.3	0.0	0.3	0.0

English Learners

Charter schools, in theory, must have policies and practices that accommodate students who are English learners. For example, they must:

- have procedures in place to accurately and timely identify potential English learner (EL) (sometimes known as multilingual learner) students;
- determine if potential EL students are in fact English learners through a valid and reliable test that assesses English language proficiency in speaking, listening, reading and writing;
- provide EL students with appropriate language assistance services to enable them to become proficient in English and to participate equally in the standard instructional program within a reasonable amount of time;
- provide an EL program that is educationally sound in theory and effective in practice;
- have qualified EL teachers, staff, and administrators to effectively implement their EL program;
- provide EL students with access to their grade-level curricula so that they can meet promotion and graduation requirements;
- provide EL students with an equal opportunity to participate in all programs;
- provide EL students with disabilities with both the language assistance and disability-related services to which they are entitled under federal law;
- monitor the progress of all EL students to ensure they achieve English language proficiency and acquire content knowledge within a reasonable amount of time;
- annually administer a valid and reliable English language proficiency assessment – in reading, writing, listening, and speaking – that is aligned to state English language proficiency standards;
- monitor and compare, over time, the academic performance of EL students in the program and those who exited the program, relative to that of their never-EL peers; and
- evaluate EL programs over time using accurate data to assess the educational performance of current and former EL students in a comprehensive and reliable way, and timely modify their programs when needed.¹⁰³

In fall 2023, 162,778 identified EL students, or 10.14% of all students, were enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools in North Carolina.¹⁰⁴ Only 4.83% of charter school students, however, were EL students.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, at least 31 charter schools had a student population that consisted of less than two percent EL students. For example, only 0.89% of students at Community School of Davidson were EL students, compared with 21.41% of students in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.¹⁰⁶ DPI's "2023 Annual Charter Schools Report" read, "[C]harter schools continue to show ... much lower rates of enrollment when compared to traditional (non-charter) public schools (Table 10)."¹⁰⁷

While school choice programs may give multilingual families additional educational options beyond the school or schools assigned to their home address, the value of these options hinges upon whether these families are able to recognize and pursue them. They cannot take advantage of these systems—and effectively pursue their interests through them—if they lack valuable information about charter school options and/or charter school enrollment policies. “... Many of these families may not engage with charter schools because public sources of information designed to orient families with their school choice options are often provided solely in English. ... With this in mind, local efforts to develop and disseminate multilingual information about charter school options should be regularly reviewed to ensure that they are effectively expanding opportunities to multilingual families.”

Conor Williams, “English Learners and School Choice: Helping Charter Schools Serve Multilingual Families,” The Century Foundation (Apr. 29, 2019)

Table 10. NC Charter Schools with Less than Two Percent English Lerner Student Population vs. School Districts Where Charter School is Located: November 2023.¹⁰⁸

Charter School	% EL	District in which the School is Located	% EL
Community School of Davidson	0.89	Charlotte	21.41
Cornerstone Charter Academy	1.04	Guilford	12.50
Pine Springs Preparatory Academy	1.10	Wake	12.16
Voyager Academy	1.17	Durham	21.15
Clover Garden	1.26	Alamance	13.79
Mallard Creek STEM Academy	1.47	Charlotte	21.41
Mountain Island Charter	1.49	Gaston	10.58
NC Leadership Charter Academy	1.54	Winston Salem	16.36
Emereau: Bladen	1.72	Bladen	10.23
Falls Lake Academy	1.79	Granville	11.15
Lake Norman Charter	1.94	Charlotte	21.41
Southern Wake Academy	1.99	Wake	12.16
Franklin Academy	≤ 0.54*	Wake	12.16
Vance Charter School	≤ 0.94*	Vance	11.42
Jackson Day School	≤ 0.98*	Charlotte	21.41
The College Prep. & Leadership Academy	≤ 1.04*	Guilford	12.50
Eno River Academy	≤ 1.11*	Orange	13.97
Endeavor Charter	≤ 1.14*	Wake	12.16
Faith Academy	≤ 1.15*	Rowan	11.10
Community Public Charter	≤ 1.19*	Gaston	10.58
Envision Science Academy	≤ 1.21*	Wake	12.16
Revolution Academy	≤ 1.24*	Guilford	12.50
The Franklin School of Innovation	≤ 1.27*	Buncombe	12.35
Arts Based School	≤ 1.47*	Winston	16.36
The Hawbridge School	≤ 1.50*	Alamance	13.79

Charter Schools in North Carolina

Charter School	% EL	District in which the School is Located	% EL
Ascend Leadership Academy: Lee County	≤ 1.50*	Lee	19.12
Chatham Charter	≤ 1.54*	Chatham	14.75
Pioneer Springs Community School	≤ 1.59*	Charlotte	21.41
Raleigh Charter High School	≤ 1.61*	Wake	12.16
The New Dimensions School	≤ 1.62*	Burke	13.10
Woods Charter School	≤ 1.76*	Chatham	14.75

* The DPI does not release data for schools with fewer than 10 students.

Economically Disadvantaged Students

Economically disadvantaged students face significant obstacles to enrolling in North Carolina charter schools. For example, charter schools in North Carolina are not required to participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP); in fact, only about 40% do.¹⁰⁹ They also are not required to provide transportation to students, which is particularly problematic given how many charter schools are constructed far from low-wealth communities. Instead, charter schools must merely “develop a transportation plan so that transportation is not a barrier to any student who resides in the local school administrative unit in which the school is located.”¹¹⁰ According to the OCS, during 2022-23, 58% of charter schools provide busing, 24% provided transportation “as needed,” 16% coordinated parent carpools, and 2% provided public transportation passes or information.¹¹¹ However, as demonstrated by the examples on pp. 16-17, some schools that provide busing have only a small number of pick up and drop off locations or charge parents for bus services; and some of the schools “coordinate” carpools by telling parents to contact each other. Such results are not surprising given that the OCS does not explain what providing transportation “as needed” means.

“[T]he accessibility of [charter schools] may be limited for some families in cases where a charter does not provide the same level of transportation or school nutrition services as the local school district.”

- DPI’s 2016 & 2017 “Annual Charter Schools Report”

“We know that transportation and child nutrition are essential components to access.”

- Ashley Baquero,
OCS Director

Unsurprisingly, charter schools serve a lower percentage of economically disadvantaged students than traditional public schools. As of June 30, 2023, 37.88% of charter school students were economically disadvantaged,¹¹² compared with 50.73% of students in traditional school districts¹¹³ (Tables 11 and 12). For additional data about socioeconomic segregation among North Carolina charter schools, see Deeper Dive: Student Demographics.

A state law enacted in 2023 (House Bill 219; Session Law 2023-107) gives enrollment priority in charter schools to any “student who was enrolled for at least 75 consecutive days in the prior semester in a preschool program operated by an entity other than the charter school ... [when]... the charter school has a written enrollment articulation agreement with the program operator to give the program's students enrollment priority.” The law could contribute to further underrepresentation of economically disadvantaged students in charter schools. For example, if charter schools enter into agreements with high-priced, private preschool programs, there will be fewer kindergarten spots for economically disadvantaged students who are in, or on the waitlist for, the NC Pre-K program.¹¹⁴

Table 11: NC Charter Schools by Percent Eligible for the National School Lunch Program Compared to Public School District Where Charter School Located: April 2024.¹¹⁵

Charter School	% NSLP Eligible	District in which the School is Located	% NSLP Eligible	Difference
Southeastern Academy	23.7	Robeson	72.1	48.4
The Expedition School	7.8	Orange	50.6	42.8
The Hawbridge School	21.5	Alamance-Burlington	62.9	41.4
Woods Charter	9.4	Chatham	50.6	41.2
Research Triangle High School	14.8	Durham	55.5	40.7
Revolution Academy	16.7	Guilford	57.4	40.7
NC Leadership Charter Academy	18.2	Forsyth	58.6	40.4
Metrolina Regional Scholars Academy	< 5.0*	Charlotte-Mecklenburg	45.0	≥ 40.1
Cornerstone Charter Academy-CFA	17.5	Guilford	57.4	39.9
Ascend Leadership Academy Lee County	23.1	Lee	62.6	39.5
Gray Stone Day	14.9	Stanly	54.4	39.5
Summerfield Charter Academy	19.4	Guilford	57.4	38.0
Youngsville Academy	18.7	Franklin	56.6	37.9
Wake Preparatory Academy	18.8	Franklin	56.6	37.8
Eno River Academy	12.9	Orange	50.6	37.7
Telra Institute	7.4	Charlotte-Mecklenburg	45.0	37.6
Lake Norman Charter	7.5	Charlotte-Mecklenburg	45.0	37.5
Anderson Creek Academy	20.1	Harnett	56.9	36.8
Greensboro Academy	20.7	Guilford	57.4	36.7
Community School of Davidson	10.3	Charlotte-Mecklenburg	45.0	34.7
Willow Oak Montessori	17.0	Chatham	50.6	33.6
Falls Lake Academy	19.9	Granville	53.4	33.5
Voyager Academy	22.2	Durham	55.5	33.3
Pine Lake Preparatory	5.3	Iredell-Statesville	38.2	32.9
Magellan Charter	< 5.0*	Wake	36.8	≥ 31.9
Quest Academy	< 5.0*	Wake	36.8	≥ 31.9
Excelsior Classical Academy	23.9	Durham	55.5	31.6
Raleigh Charter High School	5.5	Wake	36.8	31.3
The Math and Science Academy of Apex	5.6	Wake	36.8	31.2

* The DPI does not report data for schools with fewer than 10 students.

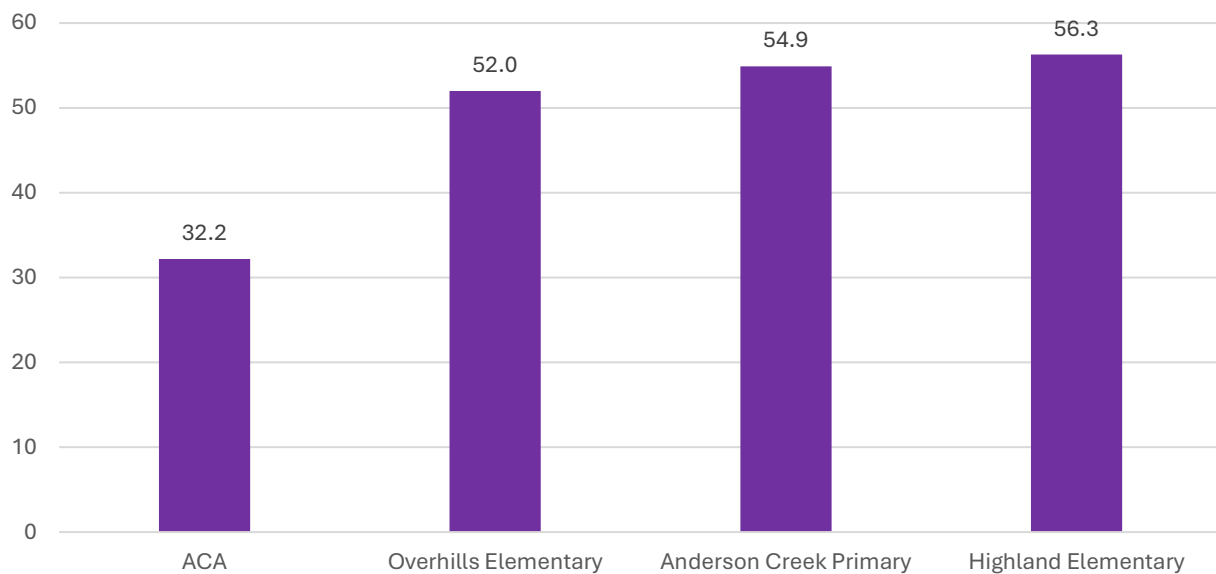
Table 12. NC Charter Schools by Percent of Students Eligible for the NSLP Compared to Public School District Where Charter School is Located: April 2024.¹¹⁶

Charter School	% NSLP Eligible	District in which the School is Located	% NSLP Eligible	Difference
Success Institute Charter	91.0	Iredell-Statesville	38.2	52.8
PreEminent Charter	88.1	Wake	36.8	51.3
Steele Creek Preparatory Academy	83.9	Charlotte-Mecklenburg	45.0	38.9
Wilmington Preparatory Academy	78.9	New Hanover	44.9	34.0
Forsyth Academy	91.6	Winston-Salem/Forsyth	58.6	33.0
Movement Charter School	77.2	Charlotte-Mecklenburg	45.0	32.2
American Leadership Academy Charlotte	76.6	Charlotte-Mecklenburg	45.0	31.6
Community School of Digital & Visual Art	86.9	Durham	55.5	31.4
KIPP Charlotte	76.3	Charlotte-Mecklenburg	45.0	31.3
Asheville PEAK Academy	77.3	Buncombe	47.1	30.2
Z.E.C.A. School of Arts and Technology	81.2	Onslow	51.1	30.1

Example: Anderson Creek Academy

Anderson Creek Academy (ACA) is a K-5 charter school located within, and listed as an amenity of, the Anderson Creek Club,¹¹⁷ “a luxury, gated community in Spring Lake, NC.”¹¹⁸ In 2012, the club’s developer, David Levinson,¹¹⁹ and other members of the Anderson Creek Club Charter School, Inc., applied to open Anderson Creek Club Charter School.¹²⁰ In 2014, ACA opened just 2.5 miles from Overhills Elementary School, 5.8 miles from Anderson Creek Primary School, and 6.6 miles from Highland Elementary School,¹²¹ all of which are part of Harnett County Schools.¹²² Compared to Harnett County Schools, ACA serves lower percentages of students with disabilities, students who are English learners, and economically disadvantaged students (Figure 7). ACA does not provide breakfast, lunch, snacks, or transportation.¹²³ The school contemplates that students’ caregivers own golf carts. For example, ACA’s “Parent/Scholar Handbook” reads, “For scholars who reside in Anderson Creek Club, a walking/golf cart path is available to transport scholars. To use your golf cart on the path, you must pre-register and provide proof of insurance for your golf cart in the office.”¹²⁴

Figure 7. Percent Economically Disadvantaged Students at ACA and Nearby Schools: 2023-24.



Religious Affiliation

North Carolina charter schools are legally obligated to abide by the Establishment and Free Exercise Clauses of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and the Religious Liberty provisions of the North Carolina Constitution (Art. I, Section 13).¹²⁵ They may not limit admission to students on the basis of religion.¹²⁶ In addition, they must be nonsectarian in their programs, admission policies, employment practices, and all other operations.¹²⁷ Moreover, they must not be affiliated with a nonpublic sectarian school or a religious institution.¹²⁸

However, state law allows charter schools to lease space from sectarian organizations if: (a) classes and students are physically separated from any parochial students; (b) religious artifacts, symbols, iconography, or materials are not on display in the charter schools' entrances, classrooms, or hallways; and (c) the school does not use the name of that organization in the name of the charter school.¹²⁹ Notably, state law does not say anything about religious symbols and materials being in charter schools' parking lots, cafeterias, gymnasiums, or other spaces.

Numerous North Carolina charter schools are closely connected to churches. For example:

- **Quality Education Academy** had school wide assemblies that involved prayers, including Christian prayers.¹³⁰ The school's board chair is the minister at the local Church of Christ.¹³¹
- In 2009, **Global Scholars Academy** opened as a joint venture between Union Baptist Church and a professor at the Kenan-Flagler Business School, who was a member of that church. Two years later, it converted to a charter school.¹³²
- In 2011, **Neuse Charter School** moved to the former Johnston Christian Academy campus.¹³³
- In 2014, a teacher at **Thomas Jefferson Classical Academy** taught students a lunch-time prayer to God and gave them church pamphlets.¹³⁴
- For seven straight years, the **Lake Norman Charter School** held its spring graduation at the Park Church in Charlotte. However, in August 2018, it changed locations after Americans United for Separation of Church and State sent the school a letter saying the taxpayer-funded school was violating the Constitution by holding the ceremony in a church.¹³⁵
- **Global Achievers School**, which opened in August 2018, was housed in the former Falls Road Baptist Church building when its charter was revoked just three months later.¹³⁶
- In May 2022, the graduation speaker at the **Thomas Academy's** graduation was Elizabethtown-based Pastor Jason Williams. Williams told a reporter who authored an article about his speech, "I would describe myself as an entrepreneur of Jesus. My goal and heart is to help as many people in need reach their goals through the love and power of Jesus Christ."¹³⁷ At the graduation, Williams told students, "Your future is in the hands of God. It is up to you to submit, and surrender, and trust God for the amazing plans He has in store for you in your life. ... Live up to the potential that God has for you."¹³⁸ The school has held an information session at Riegelwood Baptist Church,¹³⁹ and its Glee Club presented a gospel medley at Bridge Presbyterian Church during the worship services.¹⁴⁰
- In September 2022, **Clover Garden School** had a belief statement that read, in part, "With the help of God and family, we strive to demonstrate unconditional love, integrity, faith, and honesty in all we do."¹⁴¹ Its website now reads, "Updated belief statement coming

soon!” The school has held a “College Night” at Integrity Church,¹⁴² jazz band performance at St. Mark’s Church,¹⁴³ school play at Stoney Creek Church,¹⁴⁴ and banquet at New Hope Church.¹⁴⁵ In December 2016, the school’s director wrote on the school’s Facebook page, “This week, the Christmas spirit is alive here at Clover Garden School. Our band is performing at the annual Mebane parade this Friday and then again at the Graham Parade Saturday morning. You can wrap up your weekend by attending the Christmas Chorus Cantata at Stoney Creek Church by watching our chorus class perform musical medleys. These three events sure will start your Christmas season off right! Please check out the school calendar for times and all of our other Christmas celebration events on campus this month.”¹⁴⁶ In October 2021, the school posted a video of an employee and “the rest of Sisters in Christ” performing the National Anthem.¹⁴⁷

- Until October 2023, **Community Public Charter** was located at the Community Pentecostal Center in Gaston County. The church’s pastor, Eddie McGinnis, applied for the charter.¹⁴⁸ The school’s mission starts, “With a focus on traditional American values”¹⁴⁹ The school has held information sessions at Dallas Baptist Church (in January 2019),¹⁵⁰ at Core Church (in November 2017),¹⁵¹ and at Springfield Memorial Baptist Church (in October 2017).¹⁵² Biographies on the school’s website indicate that the executive director “is actively involved in her church’s orchestra;” that a reading intervention assistant works with children in her church;” an instructional coach also works as a motor coach operator for Burke Christian Tours; and a teacher assistant loves to work at her church. A first-grade teacher assistant’s biography reads, “Prior to CCS, I worked at Cramerton Christian Academy, as an interim PE teacher and substitute. I obtained a bachelor’s degree from Lee University in 2017 majoring in Christian Education. ... According to Psalm 127, “Children are a heritage from the Lord, and I believe that it is our duty as educators to give children the best care and education possible.”
- The founder and lead administrator at **MINA Charter School of Lee County** is also the pastor at God’s Promise Church.¹⁵³
- **Rowan Academy** opened in a building owned by the Church of God of Prophecy.¹⁵⁴
- **BLUE-GREEN Academy** opened in St. Peter’s World Outreach Center.¹⁵⁵
- **Alpha Academy** opened in a church gym.¹⁵⁶
- **Longleaf School of the Arts** was housed in an old downtown Raleigh church.¹⁵⁷
- **Lincoln Charter School** students earned mandatory community service hours by volunteering at Denver United Methodist Church’s Vacation Bible Camp.¹⁵⁸
- **Corvian Community School** leased space from Greater Vision United Methodist Church.¹⁵⁹
- Larry Henson, the former headmaster at private Catholic schools, became the founder and director of **Youngsville Academy Charter School**.¹⁶⁰ The school leased space from Faith Baptist Church for four years. Henson told the North Carolina Family Policy Council, “And what I started seeing was that education has been deteriorating in rural America. And a lot of the reason for that is we created a US Department of Education. And the control went from the community who was proud of their schools to a federal government saying this is what you need to do.”¹⁶¹
- In 2018, Jackson Day School, a Christian private school in Charlotte, converted into a charter school and changed its name to Mountain Island Day Community Charter School.

After just a couple of years, the school changed its name back to **Jackson Day School**.¹⁶² It offers dual enrollment at Belmont Abbey, a private, Catholic college.

State-Level Coordination and Oversight

At the state level, there are two main entities with responsibilities for the coordination and oversight of charter schools: the NC DPI's Office of Charter Schools (OCS) and the Charter Schools Review Board (CSRB) (formerly the Charter School Advisory Board, and before that, the Charter School Advisory Committee).

Office of Charter Schools

In 2015, state legislation created the Office of Charter Schools (OCS).¹⁶³ The OCS is administratively located in the NC DPI but subject to the supervision, direction, and control of the State Board of Education.¹⁶⁴ The mission of the OCS is "to sustain the success of quality charter schools through operations, compliance, and support."¹⁶⁵ The office has the following statutory powers and duties:

- serve as staff to the CSRB and fulfill any task and duties assigned to it by the CSRB;
- provide technical assistance and guidance to charter schools and to nonprofit corporations seeking to operate charter schools;
- provide or arrange for training for charter schools that have received preliminary approval from the CSRB;
- assist charter schools in coordinating services with the DPI;
- assist charter schools seeking to participate in the North Carolina Prekindergarten Program; and
- other duties as assigned by the SBE.¹⁶⁶

The OCS must consist of an executive director appointed by the Superintendent and "such other professional, administrative, technical, and clerical personnel as may be necessary to assist the [OCS] in carrying out its powers and duties."¹⁶⁷ According to the SBE's "2023 Annual Charter Schools Report,"¹⁶⁸ the OCS was staffed by eight consultants and an executive director, with office responsibilities divided into three teams: an authorizing team,¹⁶⁹ an accountability team,¹⁷⁰ and an external support team.¹⁷¹

Ashley Baquero has been the director of the OCS since 2022.¹⁷² She took over for Dave Machado, who stepped down to become the North Carolina state director of Charter Schools USA, a for-profit education management company based in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

The SBE's "2022 Annual Charter Schools Report" reads, "Most authorizers [in other states] (80%), have a ratio of no more than ten schools per full-time employee. North Carolina's average of six consultants staffing the [OCS] provides a ratio of 34.3 schools per consultant."¹⁷³ The 2023 annual report indicated that, with eight consultants staffing the OCS, North Carolina's ratio had lowered to 29 schools per consultant; however, that figure means that North Carolina's is still significantly higher than the national standard.¹⁷⁴ In short, the OCS's staffing structure raises questions about whether it is able to help make charter schools effective or accountable.

Charter School Advisory Committee

North Carolina has had three different versions of a state-level charter school committee/board. First, the “Charter Schools Act of 1996” allowed the SBE to create a Charter School Advisory Committee (CSAC) to provide technical assistance to chartering entities or to potential applicants, review applications for preliminary approval, make recommendations as to whether the SBE should approve applications for charters, make recommendations concerning grievances between a charter school and its chartering entity, and provide any other assistance as may be required by the SBE.¹⁷⁵ CSAC members were required to represent the following categories: charter school officials; public school employees; business and community leaders; local boards of education; the North Carolina Parents and Teachers Association; and county commissioners.¹⁷⁶

Charter School Advisory Board

The SBE utilized the CSAC until 2013, when the General Assembly passed legislation creating the Charter School Advisory Board (CSAB). Provisions in early versions of the legislation would have created an independent charter school board separate from the SBE and done away with all teacher licensure requirements for charter schools. However, after significant opposition, the law was changed to create a CSAB that was located administratively within the NC DPI and would report to the SBE.¹⁷⁷

The CSAB began its work in January 2014. The CSAB was required to:

- make recommendations to the SBE on the adoption of rules regarding all aspects of charter school operation, including timelines, standards, and criteria for acceptance and approval of applications, monitoring of charter schools, and grounds for revocation of charters;
- review applications and make recommendations to the SBE for final approval of charter applications;
- make recommendations to the SBE on actions regarding a charter school, including renewals of charters, non-renewals of charters, and revocations of charters; and
- undertake any other duties and responsibilities as assigned by the SBE.¹⁷⁸

Charter Schools Review Board

The legislation creating the Charter Schools Review Board followed a series of events in which the SBE refused to approve applications for two charter schools approved by the CSAB.

In September 2022, the CSAB recommended to the SBE that charters be approved for two American Leadership Academy (ALA) schools – one in Monroe and one in Garner.¹⁷⁹ ALA is a chain with charter schools in Arizona, North Carolina, and South Carolina.¹⁸⁰ All ALA schools are managed by Charter One, an Arizona-based, for-profit corporation. Many of these corporations make large profits from managing charters and from owning the land or buildings where charters are located.¹⁸¹

In December 2022, the SBE voted to reject ALA Garner’s application. SBE members raised concerns about several issues: giving funding to for-profit charter school operators, Charter One’s rapid

expansion in North Carolina, and the extensive control Charter One would have had over ALA Garner.¹⁸² ALA Garner's application then went back to the CSAB for additional review and reconsideration of the original approval recommendation. However, before the SBE voted again on ALA Garner, Charter One withdrew the application for the school to save ALA Monroe. The CSAB again voted to recommend to the SBE that it grant a charter to ALA Monroe. In January 2023, the SBE denied ALA Monroe's application.¹⁸³

In March 2023, State Senators Todd Johnson, and David Craven, who represent Union County, introduced legislation to require the SBE to approve ALA Monroe's application. The following month, eight days after announcing that she was switching her party affiliation from Democrat to Republican (thereby giving Republicans veto-proof majorities in both legislative chambers), Representative Tricia Cotham introduced a House Bill (HB) 618 to: (a) convert the CSAB into the Charter School Review Board (CSRB); (b) shift the authority to approve or deny charter school applications and review charter school performance from the SBE to CSRB; and (c) create a right to appeal CSRB decisions made any time after July 1, 2022 to the SBE. In June 2023, the General Assembly ratified HB 618. The following month, Governor Roy Cooper vetoed HB 618, writing:

"The North Carolina Constitution clearly gives the State Board of Education the oversight authority for public schools, including charter schools. This bill is a legislative power grab that turns that responsibility over to a commission of political friends and extremists appointed by Republican legislators, making it more likely that faulty or failing charter schools will be allowed to operate and shortchange their students. Oversight of charter schools should be conducted by education experts not partisan politicians."¹⁸⁴

Even though Article IX, Section 5 of the State Constitution requires the SBE to "supervise and administer the free public school system," the General Assembly overrode Cooper's veto and stripped the SBE of its constitutional duty as it pertains to charter schools.¹⁸⁵

The CSRB must include the Superintendent (or the Superintendent's designee) as the secretary and non-voting member, as well as the following voting members:

- four members appointed by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the President Pro Tempore of the Senate;
- four members appointed by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Speaker of the House of Representatives;
- two members appointed by the SBE who are not current members of the SBE and "who are charter school advocates in North Carolina;" and
- the Lieutenant Governor or the Lieutenant Governor's designee.¹⁸⁶

All members are required to "have demonstrated an understanding of and a commitment to charter schools as a strategy for strengthening public education." Collectively, members are also required to "possess strong experience and expertise in public and nonprofit governance, management and finance, assessment, curriculum and instruction, public charter schools, and public education law."¹⁸⁷ As of May 2024, the CSRB consisted of eight charter school founders or

former or current charter school directors; the director of a for-profit charter management corporation; an associate professor whose research focuses on promoting charter schools and vouchers; and Parents/Partners for Educational Freedom in NC's Board Vice Chair (Table 13).

Table 13. NC Charter Schools Review Board: March 2025.

Name	Appointed By	Background
Eric Sanchez	SBE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Co-Founder/CEO, Henderson Collegiate ● Former Teacher, KIPP: Gaston College Preparatory ● Former School Director, Teach for America
Bruce Friend	House	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Head of School, Pine Springs Preparatory Academy ● Founder and former Board Chair, Pine Springs Preparatory Academy ● Former COO, International Association for K-12 Online Learning iNACOL ● Former President, Friend Consulting, and Ignite Learning Partners ● Former Director, SAS Curriculum Pathways ● Former COO/Vice President, Florida Virtual School
Hilda Parlér	House	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Founder/President of the Board of Directors at Wake Forest Charter Academy ● Broker in Charge, Parlér Properties
Dave Machado	House	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● NC State Director, Charter Schools USA ● Former Director, NCDPI Office of Charter Schools ● Former Chief Administrator, Lincoln Charter School ● Former small business owner and manager
Shelly Shope	House	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Headmaster, Pinnacle Classical Academy
Bartley Danielson	Senate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Associate Professor of Finance, NC State University (research focuses on promoting charter schools and vouchers) ● Former consultant that helped corporations pay less in taxes
Rita Haire	Senate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● CFO, A.M. Haire Manufacturing & Service Corporation ● Board Vice Chair, Parents/Partners for Educational Freedom in NC ● Former Principal and Director of Advancement, High Point Christian Academy ● Former teacher, Davidson County Schools
Todd Godbey	Senate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● CEO, GLOW (the nonprofit foundation behind the Girls Leadership Academy of Wilmington)
John Eldridge	Senate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Headmaster, Chatham Charter School ● Former regional superintendent, Guilford County Schools
Stephen Gay	Lt. Governor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Former Executive Director, Bradford Preparatory School ● Former Superintendent, East Wake Academy charter school ● Former Superintendent, American Renaissance School
Jeremy Wall	Superintendent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Principal, Former Dean of Students, Maureen Joy Charter School ● Former Assistant Principal, C.E. Jordan High School ● Former 3rd Year Corps member Adviser, Teach for America ● Former Math, Special Ed. Teacher, Maureen Joy Charter School
Lindalyn Kakadelis	House	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Executive Director, North Carolina Coalition for Charter Schools ● Former Senior Consultant, NC Education Strategies ● Former Director of Education Outreach, John Locke Foundation ● Owner, Outland Gift and Cigar

Management of Individual Charter Schools

By law, each North Carolina charter school must have a nonprofit organization that holds its charter, and the organization's board of directors must make decisions regarding the school's operation. Many charter schools also outsource management and operations to for-profit corporations that charge exorbitant fees – up to 15% of schools' total taxpayer funding.¹⁸⁸

Nonprofit Boards

North Carolina's charter schools must be operated by a private nonprofit corporation that receives federal tax-exempt status no later than 24 months following final approval of its application.¹⁸⁹ Additionally, charter schools must have a board of directors that decides matters related to the operation of the school, including budgeting, curriculum, and operating procedures.¹⁹⁰

Some charter school networks have one board of directors for all their schools in the state. For example, all **Movement Schools** have one board that consists of eight members:

- Michelle Crawford, the wife of Casey Crawford, co-founder and CEO of Movement Mortgage and Chair of the Board for Movement Bank;
- Michelle Donnelly, former Chief Commercial Officer for Movement Mortgage;
- Tim Hurley, Executive Director of the Movement Foundation;
- Garrett McNeill, Director of the Movement Foundation;
- Lorraine Roussell, Associate General Counsel for Movement Mortgage;
- Jason Terrell, Program Officer for the Walton Family Foundation;
- Kerri-Ann Thomas (Member Ex Officio), CEO of Movement Schools;
- Montel Watson, Director of Diversity Lending & Strategic Partnerships for Movement Mortgage.¹⁹¹

For-Profit Charter School Management Companies

A charter school's board may choose to partner with a management organization, which North Carolina's Administrative Code defines as one of the following:

- a charter management organization (CMO), which is "a non-profit organization that operates or manages one or multiple charter schools by centralizing support and operations;"¹⁹²
- an education management organization (EMO), which is "a for-profit organization that contracts with new or existing public-school districts, charter school districts, and charter schools to operate and manage one or multiple charter schools by centralizing support and operations;"¹⁹³ or,
- a charter support organization (CSO), which is "a for-profit or non-profit, nongovernmental entity that provides: assistance to developers during the application, planning, program design, and initial implementation of a charter school; or technical assistance to operating charter schools, including specific and limited services such as professional development, non-profit board development, payroll, and curriculum development."¹⁹⁴

A charter school’s board must receive the CSRB’s approval before partnering with a management organization.¹⁹⁵ In determining whether to grant approval, the CSRB must consider whether the partnership with the management organization “is in the best interest of the school, its staff, and its students.”¹⁹⁶

Education should be a public good. To ensure the best interest of school, staff, and students, profit considerations should play no role in teaching and learning in public schools. However, there are at least 11 private, for-profit charter management corporations operating in North Carolina, seven of which are headquartered outside of the state (Table 14). The heads of some of these corporations have been criticized for donating to North Carolina legislators who set laws and policies regarding charter schools.

Table 14. Examples of EMOs Operating in North Carolina: 2024-25.

Name	Headquarters
Academica ¹⁹⁷	Miami, FL
Acadia NorthStar ¹⁹⁸	Rutherfordton, NC & Raleigh, NC
Accelerated Learning Solutions (now Second Mile Education) ¹⁹⁹	Orlando, FL
American Traditional Academies ²⁰⁰	Summerfield, NC
Charter One ²⁰¹	Mesa, AZ
Charter Success Partners ²⁰²	Durham, NC
Charter Schools USA ²⁰³	Fort Lauderdale, FL
K12 Inc./Stride Inc. ²⁰⁴	Herndon, VA
National Heritage Academies ²⁰⁵	Grand Rapids, MI
Roger Bacon Academy ²⁰⁶	Leland, NC
The Romine Group, Inc. ²⁰⁷ (also operating as NC Educational Solutions) ²⁰⁸	Utica, MI

EMOs function to privatize many aspects of a school’s operations which, in a traditional school, would be subject to public accountability structures. EMOs are also paid large sums to manage charter schools. EMOs may receive a set fee or a percentage of the school’s revenue. Some of the companies, such as **Charter One**, collect up to 15% of each school’s revenue.²⁰⁹ The local boards at **Charter Schools USA** schools pay annual fees to the company and lease the school furniture and equipment. The boards lease buildings owned by a Charter Schools USA sister company called Red Apple.²¹⁰

Some EMOs use “sweeps” contracts, meaning that the client school pays the EMO most or all of the school’s revenue for the EMO to provide virtually all services for the school, such as charter applications; marketing, recruitment, and student registration; curriculum development and mapping; employee recruitment, hiring, and training; accounting and payroll; fundraising and grants management; managing contracts for various services, including transportation, food, technology, and facilities maintenance; board management; technology; and government compliance and reporting.²¹¹ For instance, **National Heritage Academies** require the local boards to hand over taxpayer money they get under “sweeps” contracts. The company reportedly gives

school boards a small grant for discretionary expenses, such as single pieces of furniture, art supplies, or to support sports teams.²¹²

Many EMOs are also closely connected to real estate, construction, and finance companies as well as other for-profit entities. These companies own the land where the school is located and lease the land back to the school; build the school's facilities; rent furniture, computers, and other items to the school; and lend money (as conventional loans or as bonds) to the school (often at exorbitant interest rates. Some business executives have a lot of money from owning all the various corporations connected to the operation of chains of "non-profit" charter schools. For example, Baker Mitchell opened four charter schools in North Carolina. The schools pay one of Mitchell's companies, **Roger Bacon Academy, Inc.**, for management and another one of Mitchell's companies, Coastal Habitat Conservancy, LLC, for equipment and supplies. The non-profits and private companies even share an address in Leland, North Carolina.

These financial arrangements frequently happen in the absence of competitive bidding processes to which public schools must adhere. The EMOs often ensure that the schools' unelected board members are company employees or their family members, business associates, friends, and other allies. In such instances, the nonprofit board's objectivity is at risk. The EMOs then get the board's rubber stamp to contract with their "sister" companies. Schools make payments using taxpayer money from federal, state, and local governments. If the EMO is ever fired, the school's board may have to buy back its own school.

There are a multitude of problems with "charters for profit" schemes:

- EMOs and their associated corporations are often motivated primarily by profit, not student well-being and achievement. There are financial incentives to cut corners when it comes to, for example, teacher salaries, class sizes, and services for students with disabilities and students who are English learners. People who believe in unregulated markets even for schools claim that a profit motive will translate into benefits for students because higher student achievement means more profit. Therefore, administrators will have financial incentives to provide excellent curriculum and construction. However, as demonstrated by so many average and below average charter schools continuing to operate at capacity year after year, the education free marketers' claim is untrue. Moreover, the claim rests on the fallacy of "customers" (i.e., parents) having perfect information (that is, knowing everything they need to know to make the best choice).
- Unlike public school districts, charter schools' boards are not elected. And the EMOs to which many charter schools transfer authority are not subject to public records laws or other requirements designed to make institutions transparent and accountable. The undemocratic and secretive nature of the charter school industry often leads to fraud, waste, and mismanagement. Many charter school supporters argue that charter schools are accountable because dissatisfied "customers" can simply withdraw their children and enroll them in regular public schools. However, this argument minimizes the negative consequences of school transitions on children and families; the difficulties traditional school districts have, particularly mid-school year, in receiving unexpected student transfers; the real possibility that some traditional schools that were once near a family's

residence may have closed due to dwindling enrollment caused by the explosive growth in charter schools; and the fact that traditional public schools have been starved of the resources needed to consistently provide an excellent educational experience.

Collectively, EMOs make millions in profits from North Carolina taxpayers each year (Figure 8). In public schools, by contrast, school boards are prohibited by law from profiting from school operation.²¹³

Figure 8. Taxpayer-Funded Charter Schools Fund EMOs.



Several prominent EMOs have steadily grown in influence in North Carolina since the charter school cap was lifted back in 2011. Together, these organizations and their founders have garnered hundreds of millions in taxpayer funds. The four individuals and their organizations highlighted below all operate in multiple states and have all followed a similar pattern. They established multiple corporations in North Carolina to service all aspects of charter school development and operation. They recruit allies to serve on schools' nonprofit boards and frequently donate to politicians who exert influence over education laws and policies. Through these practices, they have made hundreds of millions of dollars from North Carolina taxpayers.

Baker Mitchell, Classical Charter Schools of America, and Roger Bacon Academy

In 1999, Mitchell registered three entities with the North Carolina Secretary of State: (a) the Roger Bacon Academy, Inc. (RBA), a private, for-profit education management company (EMO); (b) Coastal Habitat Conservancy, LLC (CHC), a private, for-profit equipment and supplies rental company; and (c) Charter Day School, Inc. (CDS, Inc.), a nonprofit organization.²¹⁴ He listed 3610 Thaddeus Lott Lane in Leland, North Carolina as the address for all three entities. He also applied for a charter from the State to open Charter Day School.²¹⁵

In 2000, Mitchell opened Charter Day School. Charter Day School, Inc. held the charter for the school. Mitchell served on CDS, Inc.'s Board of Trustees, which entered into no-bid contracts with Mitchell's companies, RBA and CHC. RBA controlled Charter Day School's employment matters, management, operation, administration, accounting, and education. Mitchell went on to open several more charter schools. The schools' uniform requirements are met through clothing and accessories purchases at another Mitchell company, Shop RBA (Table 15).²¹⁶

Network of Charter Schools and Associated Companies

- Classical Charter Schools of America (formerly Charter Day Schools): Non-profit corporation that holds charters for four schools in North Carolina.²¹⁷
- Roger Bacon Academy: Private, for-profit EMO that operates charter schools in Southeast North Carolina.²¹⁸
- Coastal Habitat Conservancy: Private, for-profit equipment and supplies rental company.
- Shop RBA: Online source for school uniforms.²¹⁹

Table 15. NC Report Card Grades for Classical Charter Schools of America Schools: 2024.

School	Year Opened	Grades Served	NC School Report Card Grade (2024)
Classical Charter Schools of Leland (formerly Charter Day School)	2000	K-8	C
Classical Charter Schools of Southport (formerly South Brunswick Charter School)	2014	K-8	C
Classical Charter Schools of Whiteville (formerly Columbus Charter School)	2007	K-8	D
Classical Charter Schools of Wilmington (formerly Douglass Academy)	2013	K-5	D

None of the CCS schools provides transportation or meals for students, including free or reduced-priced meals for economically disadvantaged students.

Glenn Way, American Leadership Academies and Charter One

Glenn Way, a former Utah state representative, opened his first charter school in Utah but soon moved to Arizona where he launched the American Leadership Academies (ALA). His network now operates charter schools in Arizona, South Carolina, and Texas and nine schools in North Carolina (Table 16). They control or assist in all aspects of the charter schools, from charter applications, land purchases and school management, to uniform purchases.²²⁰

Network of Charter Schools and Associated Companies

- American Leadership Academy: Network of charter schools in Arizona, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas.²²¹
- Charter One: For-profit EMO that provides “full scale management services including operations, curriculum, accounting, marketing, human resources, information technology, and compliance.”²²²
- SchoolHouse Development: Private, for-profit company that assists with finance, design, permitting and construction.²²³
- ALA Apparel: Online uniform and accessory purchases for ALA students.²²⁴

Table 16: NC Report Card Grades for ALA-Affiliated Schools: 2024.

School	Year Opened	Grades Served	NC School Report Card Grade (2024)
ALA Charlotte	2013	K-6	F
ALA Coastal	2017	K-10	D
ALA Johnston K-5	2022	K-5	D
ALA Johnston K-11	2022	K-11	D
ALA Monroe K-8	2024	K-8	N/A*
Bonnie Cone Classical Academy	2019	K-6	C
Bonnie Cone Leadership Academy	2023	K-12	D
Valor Preparatory Academy (formerly Cabarrus Charter Academy)	2015 (as CCA)	K-12	D
Wake Preparatory Academy	2022	K-12	C

*New in 2024 so no school report grade has been reported.

John Hage, Charter Schools USA, Red Apple Development, and Ryan Companies US

Jon Hage became involved with charter schools while living in Florida. After working as a researcher for the Heritage Foundation and a speechwriter for George H.W. Bush, Hage became the director of research at the Foundation for Florida's Future, a public policy organization founded by former Florida Governor Jeb Bush. Hage helped draft Florida legislation to authorize charter schools. In 1996, after the Florida legislature passed laws authorizing charter schools, Hage left the Foundation for Florida's Future and started a consulting group, giving advice on how to get charter school applications approved by school districts.²²⁵

In 1997, Hage founded Charter Schools USA (CSUSA), a for-profit CMO. He has been the company's chair, president, and CEO since then. The Fort Lauderdale-based company currently has more than 154 grade level-based schools serving more than 80,000 students across four states: Florida, Louisiana, North Carolina, and South Carolina,²²⁶ including 10 in North Carolina (Table 17).

Network of Charter Schools and Associated Companies

- Charter Schools USA: for profit EMO that manages all stages of charter development, from feasibility studies and applications to facility maintenance, education delivery, and human resources.²²⁷
- Ryan Companies US, Inc.: Real-estate development company.²²⁸
- Red Apple Development handles the acquisition, design, and development of charter school facilities²²⁹
- Red Apple Uniforms provides custom uniform apparel and accessories for schools.²³⁰

Table 17. NC Report Card Grades for USA-Affiliated Charter Schools in NC: 2024.

School	Year Opened	Grades Served	NC School Report Card Grade (2024)
Cabarrus Charter Academy (became Valor Preparatory Academy)	2013	K-12	D
Langtree Charter Academy	2013	K-12	C
Iredell Charter Academy of Arts and Science	2016	K-8	D
Concord Lake STEAM Academy (formerly Kannapolis Charter Academy)	2016	K-8	C
Steele Creek Preparatory Academy	2019	K-8	D
Cardinal Charter Academy	2014	K-8	C
Cardinal Charter Academy at Wendell Falls	2020	K-8	D
Union Preparatory Academy at Indian Trail	2020	K-10	C
West Lake Preparatory Academy	2019	K-8	D

John Bryan, TeamCFA and The Challenge Foundation

John Bryan grew up in Livingston, Montana and spent his first career operating chemical plants in multiple states. He was the co-founder and vice president of operations at Georgia Gulf Corporation before retiring in 1989. In 1988, Bryan formed a charitable trust that became The Challenge Foundation.²³¹ There seven charter schools in North Carolina associated with the Challenge Foundation (Table 18).

Bryan said that one of his goals was to “inculcate [his] belief in the libertarian, free market, early American Founder’s principles” into schools. According to the Challenge Foundation Group’s website, it now has three initiatives:

- Properties: Partnering with charter schools on site selection, building, and/or renovating, including financing, negotiating, and purchasing
- Academies: Charter management services, including teacher training, administration, board management, marketing, and “policy support”
- Choice: “rally support for policy efforts and initiatives” for school choice

Network of Charter Schools and Associated Companies

- TeamCFA (Challenge Foundation Academies): Network of charter schools²³²
- The Challenge Foundation: Partners with charter schools on site selection, building/renovating, financing, negotiation, and purchasing; charter management services, teacher training, administration, marketing, and policy support.²³³

Table 18. NC Report Card Grades for Challenge Foundation Academy-Affiliated Charter Schools in NC: 2024.

School	Year Opened	Grades Served	NC School Report Card Grade (2024)
Brevard Academy	1998	K-8	B
Cornerstone Charter Academy-CFA	2012	K-12	B
Davidson Charter Academy	2018	K-8	C
Excelsior Classical Academy	2015	K-12	C
Thomas Jefferson Classical Academy	1999	K-12	B
Unity Classical Charter School	2017	K-8	C
Veritas Community Charter School	2015	K-8	F

Funding

Like traditional public schools, charter schools receive federal, state, and local funding. Charter schools also pursue private fundraising from parents, foundations, and other sources.

Federal Funding

Charter schools receive several types of federal financial assistance. This includes, for example, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funds for students with disabilities.²³⁴ Charter schools may also choose to participate in the National School Lunch Program and receive federal funding to provide free and reduced-price meals to eligible students.²³⁵ In addition, they receive federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) funds²³⁶ – administered through the NC DPI – including Title I funds to support low-income students, Title II funds to support professional development, Title III funds for students who are English learners, Title IV grant funds through the Expanding Opportunity through Quality Charter Schools program, Title VI funds for American Indian and Alaska Native students, and Title IX funds for homeless students. In recent years, dozens of North Carolina charter schools also received millions of dollars in Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans and Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funds.²³⁷

Federal funding is at risk under President Trump’s administration. The President’s executive order to dismantle the Department of Education and relegate its duties to the state’s leaves the outcome of federal funds for education unknown beyond June 30th, 2025.

Charter schools are eligible for additional money that is not available to public schools. For example, in 2018, the State received a \$36.6 million federal Charter School Program Grant to fund the North Carolina Advancing Charter Collaboration and Excellence for Student Success (NC ACCESS) Program.²³⁸ The five-year program sought to:

- award 60 school-level sub grants to increase the number of educationally disadvantaged students attending high-quality charter schools (90% of the total grant);
- create a cohort of 160 charter school leaders who can develop and demonstrate best practices in serving educationally disadvantaged students; and
- broadly disseminate best practices in serving educationally disadvantaged students and foster collaboration in the charter school community and between charter schools and traditional public schools.²³⁹

State Funding

State law requires the SBE to allocate specific funding amounts to each charter school:

- an amount equal to the average per-pupil allocation for “average daily membership” (a count of the number of students) from the local school district allotments in which the charter school is located for each child attending the charter school;
- an additional amount for each child attending the charter school who is a child with a disability; and

- an additional amount for children with limited English proficiency attending the charter school.²⁴⁰

Charter schools may also receive state grant funds for such items as safety, transportation,²⁴¹ and STEM grants.

In fiscal year 2023-24, charter schools received \$1,071,911,255 in state funding, out of the \$12.35B public school budget.²⁴² During 2024-25, just under \$1.2 billion in state funding went to charter schools out of a \$12.6B budget. State funds are allocated based on the number of students in the average daily membership at an individual charter school. State funds may be used for any purpose, except for purchasing a building.²⁴³

For a complete list of federal, state, and local funds allocated to charter schools, see Appendix B.

Local Funding

For each student who attends a charter school, the school district in which the child resides **must transfer to the charter school an amount equal to the per pupil share of the local current expense fund of the district for the fiscal year.**²⁴⁴ The local current expense appropriation includes direct appropriations by the county for operating expenses; revenues from local fines, penalties, and forfeitures; state monies disbursed directly to the local school district; and the proceeds of supplemental taxes levied by or on behalf of the local school district.²⁴⁵

Prior to August 2023, charter schools had to secure and finance their own buildings, although they could use public funds to pay for leases.²⁴⁶ **In August 2023, HB 219/SL 2023-107 (known as the “Charter School Omnibus Bill”), opened the door for dedicated public funding for charter school buildings for the first time in North Carolina.**²⁴⁷ Now, state law allows counties to provide funds to charter schools for the acquisition of real property for school purposes (for example, school sites, playgrounds, and athletic fields) or for the acquisition, construction, reconstruction, enlargement, renovation, or replacement of buildings and other structures (such as buildings for classrooms and laboratories, physical and vocational educational purposes, libraries, auditoriums, and gymnasiums).²⁴⁸

In addition, state law allows charter schools to request appropriations directly from cities.²⁴⁹ Unlike counties, municipal governments may appropriate money directly to charter schools that serve their residents for both capital and operating expenses.²⁵⁰ Municipal funding is purely discretionary. It may be used to supplement other charter school funding sources.

Both counties and municipalities may donate surplus, obsolete, or unused personal property to charter schools.²⁵¹ Any such donation must be made contingent on the charter school continuing to use the property for educational purposes.²⁵²

A local school district is not required or authorized to provide capital funding to a charter school. However, a district must lease, upon request of a charter school, any available building or land

owned by the district unless the school district's governing board demonstrates that the lease is "not economically or practically feasible or that the local board does not have adequate classroom space to meet its enrollment needs."²⁵³ The district may lease the capital to the charter school for free, but the charter school must pay for maintenance and insurance. If a charter school and district are unable to reach an agreement on the lease, the charter school may appeal to the board of county commissioners in which the building or land is located. The county commissioners have final decision-making authority on the leasing of the available building or land.²⁵⁴

The Role of Private Equity

In August 2024, the *Charlotte Observer* published an analysis revealing at least \$279 million in private equity investments in North Carolina charter schools since 2013. According to the newspaper, B.C. Ziegler and Company,²⁵⁵ a Chicago-based investment bank, facilitated loans, acquisitions, or debt refinancing of six North Carolina charter schools in the past four years: **Unity Classical Charter School, The Franklin School of Innovation, The Capitol Encore Academy, Bonnie Cone Classical Academy, The Point College Prep and Leadership Academy, and Pine Springs Preparatory Academy.**²⁵⁶

As the *Charlotte Observer* article explained:

The most common financing tool for charter schools is a tax-exempt bond, a specialty of Ziegler's.

Ziegler connects schools with investors who want to purchase tax-exempt bonds and are willing to accept lower interest rates for the tax benefit, said managing director Scott Rolfs. The bond proceeds go toward school upgrades and are seen as more manageable for schools because repayment spans 30 to 40 years like a home mortgage.

In 2021, Ziegler facilitated a \$17.18 million bond issuance for Bonnie Cone Classical Academy in north Charlotte, enabling the school to acquire and renovate its facilities. The school will repay Kansas City-based UMB Financial Corporation until 2056, according to property records.

If the school thrives, investors receive interest payments. If the school fails, investors may recoup their initial investment by selling, converting, or leasing the property, already zoned for education, to a for-profit private school or to another charter school operator.

Ziegler receives fees for its work with schools and it also receives some profits from helping to issue bonds and other financing measures, Rolfs said. But individual investors receive the bulk of profits.²⁵⁷

Financial Irregularities

Charter schools have been found to have misused funding. A few examples illustrate a range of issues that highlight the need for closer scrutiny of and accountability for how taxpayer funds are used by charter schools.

- **Children’s Village Academy** inflated the number of students in the after-school program to get more federal money, misspent over \$150,000 in federal grant money, and switched employees to independent contractors to avoid paying benefits. Board member Peggy Carr had gotten \$140,000 in interest payments from a \$188,000 loan she gave the school.²⁵⁸
- The founder and former executive director of **Corvian Community School** used state and federal funds to pay for clothing at J Crew, Neiman Marcus and Nordstrom; a \$690 helicopter sightseeing flight in Chicago; more than \$6,000 in first-class airfare for herself and occasionally other senior staff; at least \$2,500 in private executive car services to get from the airport to conferences; and \$1,200 for a group of school administrators to go on a private van on a tour of Pikes Peak in Colorado.²⁵⁹
- Staff at **Bridges Academy** falsified enrollment numbers to obtain more than \$400,000 in state money it was not entitled to; misused almost \$79,000 in taxpayer funds to support a preschool, which also required tuition fees from parents of the children; and failed to prepare and submit required 1099 tax forms for contract workers, resulting in underreported compensation of nearly \$490,000.²⁶⁰
- The director and board chair of **Concrete Roses STEM Academy** had sole control over financial decisions and payments required his authorization alone. He used public money to make payments on his car and pay his vehicle tax, pay himself \$3,000 for gas, and pay several hundred dollars’ worth of cell phone expenses. Stone failed to record expenses, kept financial records at his home instead of at the school, and made thousands of dollars of cash withdrawals without documentation. There were checks written to Stone worth nearly \$15,000, as reimbursement for workshop fees, travel, office supplies, and computer software, but no documentation was provided.²⁶¹
- The executive director of **STEM Education for a Global Society (SEGS) Academy** was Devoria Berry. Her brother was the board’s chair; her niece had janitorial and transportation contracts with the school; and her other niece was a board member and the school’s contracted finance officer. The school entered into multiple contracts with Berry’s businesses. Additionally, the school did not have documentation of a loan from Berry for \$200,000, nor was it approved by the Board. The school dispersed “loan” repayments totaling \$184,000 to Berry without board approval. The school had a deficit and was delinquent in payments to the North Carolina State Health Plan.²⁶²

For more information about financial scandals in the charter school sector, see the deeper dive below: Charter School Closures.

Applications to Open Charter Schools

Throughout the United States, there are a variety of entities – known as authorizers – that approve charter schools for operation. Examples of authorizers include state education agencies, local school districts, independent charter boards, higher education institutions, nonprofit organizations, and non-educational government entities (e.g., a mayor’s office).²⁶³

In North Carolina, there is one authorizer – the CSRB. The OCS serves as staff to the CSRB and, as such, creates, implements, monitors, and supports the entire authorizing process, from application creation to final ready to open status.²⁶⁴ Any nonprofit corporation may apply to the CSRB for a charter to open and operate a charter school.²⁶⁵ The nonprofit and its board members need not have any experience in educational administration – in charter, private, or public schools.

The OCS has an electronic application platform.²⁶⁶ The application window is typically open from January to April.²⁶⁷ The CSRB must provide timely notification to an applicant of any formatting issues or incomplete information in the initial application and provide the applicant at least five business days to correct those issues in the initial application.²⁶⁸ Additionally, before taking action regarding an application, the CSRB must provide an opportunity for the applicant to address the CSRB at a meeting.²⁶⁹

Converting an Existing School to a Charter School

Applicants may seek to convert a private school into a charter school thereby increasing their revenue with taxpayer monies.

- **Hobgood Academy**, a private school founded in Halifax County amid “white flight” in 1969, became a charter school in 2019. Hobgood was experiencing declining enrollment and had failed twice in attempts to obtain a charter.²⁷⁰
- In 1996, Chatham Academy, a private K-8 school in Chatham County, became **Chatham Charter School**.²⁷¹
- In 1999, the Helen Paesler School, a private school in Raleigh, became **Quest Academy**, a charter school.²⁷²
- In 2004, the Children’s Community School (CCS), a private school operating out of Lake Norman Baptist Church in Huntersville, became a charter school, **Community School of Davidson**.²⁷³
- In 2013, facing declining enrollment, **Southeastern Academy** converted from a private school to a charter school in Robeson County.²⁷⁴ The day after being awarded a charter by the state, the school opened for public enrollment for just eight hours, during the school day.²⁷⁵
- In 2018, **Jackson Day School**, a private Christian school in Charlotte, converted into a charter school and changed its name to Mountain Island Day Community Charter School.

After just a couple of years, the school changed its name back to Jackson Day School, but it remained a charter.²⁷⁶

Applicants may also seek to convert a traditional public school to a charter school. If so, the application must only include: (a) a statement signed by most of the teachers and instructional support personnel currently employed at the school indicating that they favor the conversion; and (b) evidence that a significant number of parents of children enrolled in the school favor conversion.²⁷⁷

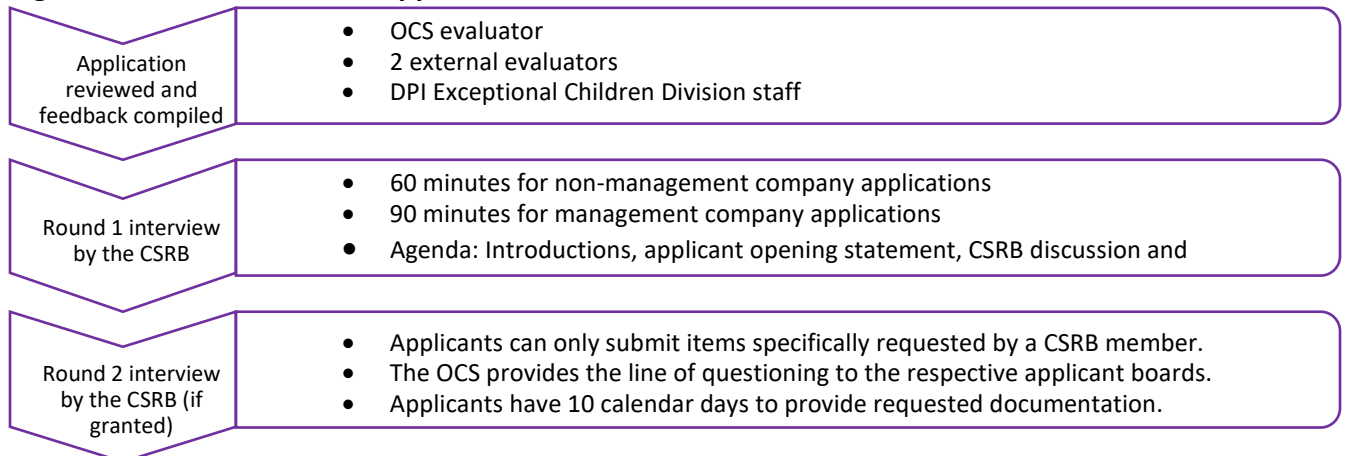
Application Process

There are two types of charter school applications: standard/regular and accelerated/fast-track. Standard applications are for schools that will open in two years – that is, an application in spring 2025 would be for a charter to open a school in fall 2027. Accelerated applications are for schools that will open the following year; an application in spring 2025 would be for a charter to open in fall 2026. Fast-track applications are reserved for the proposed “replication of high-quality charter schools currently operating in the State.”²⁷⁸ Fast-track applicants must have a facility that is “feasible for opening on an accelerated schedule,”²⁷⁹ whereas standard applicants are not required even to have a facility at the point of application or interview.²⁸⁰

The process is explained in the “2023 Annual Charter Schools Report” and reads:

Once an application is deemed complete, it is presented to evaluators including external evaluators with a variety of charter and educational experience, NC DPI staff evaluators, and CSRB members. Applicant boards then appear for an interview with the CSRB and are either forwarded to a second-round interview or recommended for denial or approval. If an applicant is forwarded to a second-round interview, the CSRB makes a final vote of recommendation for denial or approval. Those applicants partnering with a management organization receive additional interview time to allow the CSRB members to direct questions toward said management organization (Figure 9).²⁸¹

Figure 9. NC Charter School Application Review Process.²⁸²



Prior to 2013, state law required the SBE to solicit impact statements from local school districts when new applications for charters were being considered or when existing charter schools wanted to grow beyond what was normally allowed within the statute. This requirement allowed school districts to show exactly how their operations would be harmed by the creation of a new charter school. In 2013, the General Assembly removed the requirement that school districts submit impact statements, but the SBE and CSAB continued to consider comments from school districts that chose to submit them.²⁸³

Then, in 2023, the state legislature went a step further. HB 218/SL 2023-107 and converted the CSAB into the CSRB and transferred approval authority from the SBE to the CSRB and prohibits the Charter School Review Board from considering any alleged impact on local school districts when deciding whether to grant, renew, amend, or terminate a charter.²⁸⁴ The CSRB may grant final approval of an application so long as it finds the application meets the requirements set out in state law and other requirements adopted by the SBE,²⁸⁵ the applicant has the ability to operate the school and would be likely to operate the school in an educationally and economically sound manner, and granting the application would achieve one or more of the purposes of charter schools set out in state law.²⁸⁶ The applicant need not demonstrate a previous track record of educational success or experience of any kind.

"To better understand the perspective of school districts, the LEA impact statements are a source of information worth consulting."

- NC DPI's "2015 Annual Charter Schools Report"

The CSRB makes final decisions on the approval or denial of standard applications by August 15.²⁸⁷ The CSRB may – but is not required to -- make the final decision for approval contingent upon the successful completion of a planning period prior to enrollment of students.²⁸⁸ The length of initial charters is capped at 10 years.²⁸⁹

The requirements are more stringent only when an applicant seeks a "fast-track" approval. In that case, the proposed school's board must provide three years of financially sound audits for each school it governs and either:

- demonstrate that most charter schools the board already governs in North Carolina has student academic outcomes from the three prior school years that are equal to or greater than the student academic outcomes in the school district(s) in which the charter schools are located; or
- agree to contract with an EMO or CMO which can demonstrate that the majority of charter schools in North Carolina that it manages have student academic outcomes from the three prior school years that are equal to or greater than the student academic outcomes in the school district in which each charter school is located.²⁹⁰

The Review Board must approve or deny fast-track application decisions in fewer than 120 days from the application submission date and no later than October 15 of the year immediately preceding the year of the proposed school opening.²⁹¹ An applicant, charter school, or the Superintendent may appeal a final decision of the CSRB to grant a charter by submitting notice to

the SBE chair within 10 days of the CSRB's decision. The SBE must review appealed decisions de novo (i.e., consider the application anew) and issue a written decision within 60 days of the date that the notice of appeal was submitted.²⁹²

From 1997 to 2024, the number of charter school applications submitted to the State varied between a high of 71 (2013) and a low of six (2008); the average number of applications received was just under 32 applications; and the average percentage of applications approved was 26.26% of yearly applications.²⁹³ In 2023, the first year that the CSRB had the power to rule on charter applications, the approval rate doubled. Fifteen applications were submitted; three were withdrawn, four were denied, and eight (53.33%) were approved.²⁹⁴

Planning Year

Boards that submit a standard application and are granted a charter must go through a planning year to prepare for their first year of operation.²⁹⁵ For applicants selected through the fast-track application process, on the other hand, the SBE may not require a planning year.²⁹⁶ During the planning year, the OCS provides training relevant to opening a charter school as well as technical assistance and guidance.²⁹⁷

Example of Bypassing the Process: Trinitas Academy

State Senators Todd Johnson's and David Craven's request that the SBE approve ALA Monroe's application (see Charter School Review Board above) has not been the only instance of lawmakers seeking to influence application and approval processes. This was contained inside a 271-page budget bill introduced in June 2024 was a provision that would allow an unnamed charter school to bypass state review and open in Mooresville in August 2024. The description in the bill applied to only one charter school: Trinitas Academy. Trinitas had not even begun the state review process.²⁹⁸ At the time, the school's board included:

- Susan Tillis, the wife of U.S. Senator Thom Tillis,²⁹⁹
- Will Bowen, the press secretary, and prior regional director for Congressman Patrick McHenry,³⁰⁰
- Marcus Long, a retired judge from Virginia who was appointed by the Virginia General Assembly.³⁰¹
- Mikail Clark, a Liberty University graduate, and a corporate lawyer at Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton LLP,³⁰² and
- Joe Higgins,³⁰³ whose website indicates that he is a resident of Tucson, Arizona and describes himself as "a serial entrepreneur, change agent, radio personality, candidate for office, developer, and CEO in the medical and charter school arenas."³⁰⁴

Days after media reports surfaced about the request to fast track Trinitas Academy in June 2024, Tillis' name was removed from the school's website and the school submitted to the OCS a fast-track application to open in August 2025.³⁰⁵ In September, the CSRB turned down the school's application for 2025, citing conflicts of interest and an inappropriate focus on religious teachings.³⁰⁶

Student Admissions and Enrollment

Technically, any child who is qualified under North Carolina law for admission to a public school is also qualified for admission to a charter school.³⁰⁷ Admission of a student to a charter school generally must not be determined according to the school attendance area or school district in which the student resides.³⁰⁸

In theory, charter schools must comply with several requirements that seem aimed at ensuring fairness and equity in admissions. Except as otherwise provided by law or the mission of a school as set out in its charter, the school must not limit admission to students based on intellectual ability, measures of achievement or aptitude, athletic ability, or disability. Moreover, a charter school must not limit admission to students based on race, creed, national origin, religion, or ancestry. A charter school with single-sex education as part of its mission may limit admission based on sex. Within one year after the charter school begins operation, as discussed above, it must make efforts for its student population to reasonably reflect the racial and ethnic composition of the general population residing within the local school district in which the school is located or the racial and ethnic composition of the special population that the school seeks to serve residing within the local school district in which the school is located.³⁰⁹ **Despite these criteria, data show that North Carolina charter schools are more likely than regular public schools to be racially segregated and to enroll fewer students with disabilities and English learner students.**³¹⁰

During each period of enrollment, charter schools must enroll an eligible student who submits a timely application unless the number of applications exceeds the capacity of a program, class, grade level, or building, in which case, students shall be accepted by lottery.³¹¹ In practice, however, charter schools enjoy certain unique privileges. For example, they **are explicitly permitted to give enrollment priority to certain students**, including, for example, a student who:

- is the sibling of a currently enrolled student who was admitted to the school in a previous year;
- was enrolled in a **preschool program** operated by the school in the prior year;
- is the child or grandchild of a person employed full-time by the school or of the school's board of directors;
- was enrolled in another charter school in North Carolina in the previous school year; or has a parent or legal guardian on active military duty.

Beginning in 2024-25,³¹² any charter school that is unable to fill its current enrollment with students qualified under North Carolina law for admission to a public school may enroll out-of-state students who are domiciled in other states. The charter school must charge out-of-state students a tuition amount of at least 50% to 100% of the total of the per pupil allocation of the local appropriation for the county in which the charter school is located and the per pupil state appropriation for that school year. The number of out of state students who are domiciled in other states who are enrolled in a charter school may not exceed 10% of the students enrolled in the charter school.³¹³ Once enrolled in a charter school, students are not required to reapply in subsequent enrollment periods.³¹⁴

Student Academic Outcomes

Despite their claims and despite enjoying a comparatively loose regulatory regime, charter schools are generally no more likely to be “high performing” than regular public schools. Instead, much like regular public schools, charter schools run the gamut from low performing to high performing. The SBE’s “2023 Annual Charter Schools Report” read, “The academic performance of charter schools in North Carolina varies widely. While some charter schools consistently demonstrate strong academic outcomes and exceed state standards, others face challenges related to student achievement, teacher retention, and resource allocation.”

The most recent data available on school performance grades and growth metrics show that grades achieved by for charter schools and traditional public schools are similar, though traditional public schools have a slight edge. In 2023-24, a higher percentage of traditional public schools received A grades (8%) than charter schools (7%) and traditional public schools had fewer schools with F grades (6%) than charter schools (8%). A higher percentage of traditional public schools also met or exceeded growth projections (72%) than charter schools (70%) (Figures 10 and 11).³¹⁵

Figure 10. Percent Achieving School Performance Grades for Charter and Traditional Public Schools: 2023-24.

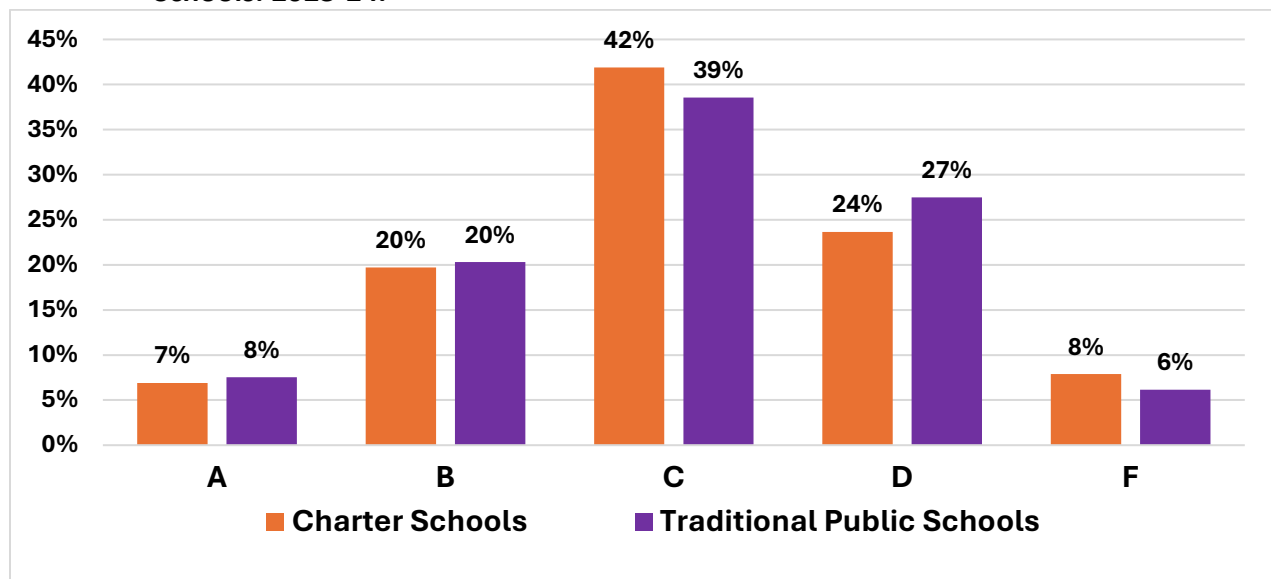
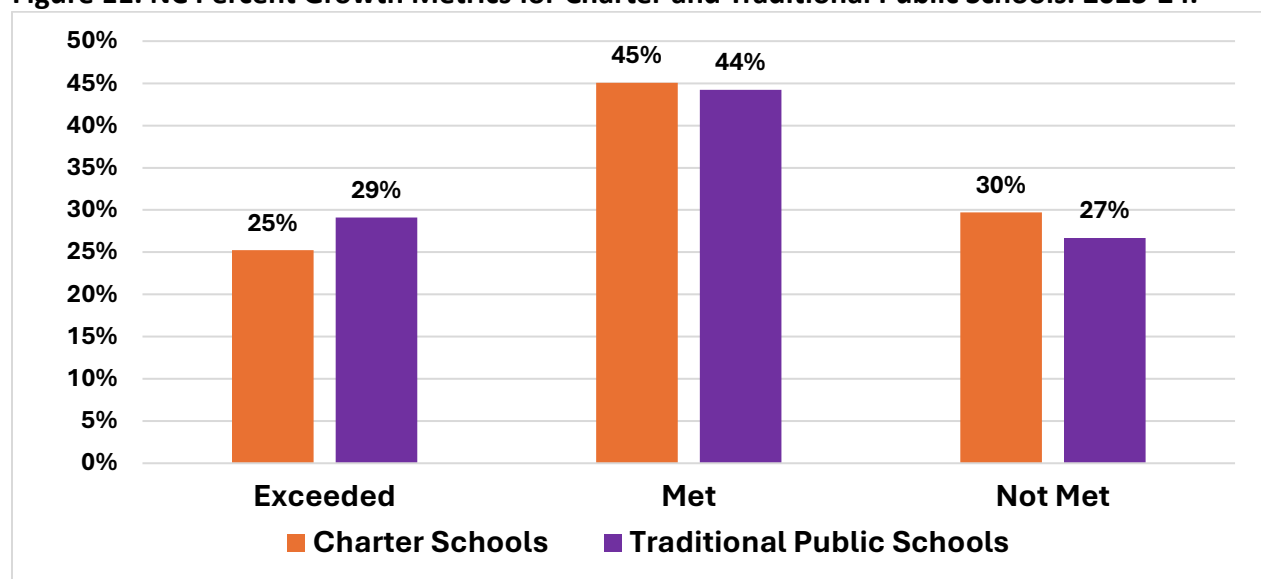


Figure 11. NC Percent Growth Metrics for Charter and Traditional Public Schools: 2023-24.


One of the few ways that the state may hold charter schools accountable is that the SBE is required to identify low-performing charter schools on an annual basis.³¹⁶ A low-performing charter has a school performance grade of D or F, and a growth status of “Met” or “Not Met.” Continually low performing means that the school was low-performing in any two of the previous three years.³¹⁷ At the end of 2023-24, 64 charter schools – nearly one third of charter schools in the state – were designated as “continually low performing.”³¹⁸ At least 15 charter schools have received a state letter grade of D or F for at least the last five years for which grades are available³¹⁹ (Table 22).

Table 19. NC Charter Schools Grades D or F: 2014-15 to 2023-24.³²⁰

School	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2021-22*	2022-23	2023-24
A.C.E. Academy	D	F	F	D	D	D	D	D
Carter G. Woodson School	D	D	D	D	F	F	F	F
Children's Village Academy	D	D	D	D	F	D	D	F
Classical Charter Schools of Wilmington	n/a	C	D	D	D	D	D	D
Community School of Digital & Visual Art	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
Dillard Academy	F	F	F	D	D	D	D	F
Haliwa-Saponi Tribal School	D	F	D	F	D	F	F	F
KIPP Charlotte	C	C	D	D	D	F	F	D
KIPP Durham College Preparatory	n/a	D	F	D	D	F	F	F
KIPP Halifax College Preparatory	C	D	C	D	D	F	F	F
Rocky Mount Preparatory	D	D	D	D	D	F	F	F
Success Institute Charter	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
The Inst. Development Young Leaders	D	D	F	D	D	D	D	D
Wilmington Preparatory Academy	C	D	D	D	D	D	F	D
Z.E.C.A. School of Arts and Tech.	F	F	F	F	F	F	D	D

*School performance grades were not produced for 2019-20 and 2020 – 21 due to Covid pandemic disruptions.

Accountability Mechanisms

The “2023 Charter Schools Annual Report” suggests that the primary mechanism for holding charter schools accountable is through parental choice. The report echoes a refrain from charter school advocates: “As schools of choice, charter schools are accountable to parents and guardians, who may withdraw their student(s) and re-enroll them elsewhere, should the school not meet expectations.”³²¹ However, suggesting that students can simply switch schools if they are not happy understates the negative impact of transfer on students. For example, the report fails to discuss the fact that the existence of charters – and vouchers – may mean that the closest traditional school may have closed because of lack of state funding. Moreover, nearby school districts may not be prepared, financially or otherwise, to effectively absorb the student.

Office of Charter Schools Complaint Process

The OCS has a stakeholder complaint process; however, the OCS website indicates that the office “does not have a formal complaint process available,” “has very limited authority to formally investigate schools,” “does not interfere with the [school’s] grievance process,” “is not a legal office,” and “does not directly work on legal cases, complaints.” In other words, stakeholders who file complaints with the OCS should not expect to receive any investigation, decision, or relief.³²² Moreover, the OCS website directs stakeholders who have complaints about civil rights to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (the wrong agency), not the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (the correct agency).³²³

Reviews, Renewals, Non-renewals, and Terminations

Every charter school is required to undergo a renewal process prior to having its charter term extended. These renewal processes were developed to ensure that any charter in the state meets the requirements to operate.

Charter schools are required to:

- enter into a “Charter Agreement” with the State;³²⁴
- administer the student assessments required by the SBE and to comply with North Carolina’s Accountability Model, unless otherwise approved by the SBE;³²⁵
- undergo an annual audit for its finances and compliance with applicable federal and state laws and policies;³²⁶
- report at least annually to the CSRB and the SBE the information required by rules adopted by the SBE;³²⁷ and
- undergo a renewal process prior to having their charter term extended.³²⁸

The SBE must review and evaluate the educational effectiveness of charter schools and the effect of charter schools on the public schools in the local school district in which the charter schools are located.³²⁹ Moreover, SBE Policy CHTR-022 reads:

Consistent with its constitutional and statutory duty to supervise and administer the free public schools; consistent with its obligations to oversee the operations of

public-school entities; and consistent with the State Board's duty to hold public schools accountable for student performance, the State Board may request and shall receive regular reports on charter school finance, legal compliance, and student performance from the Review Board, the Office of Charter Schools, the Office of Financial and Business Services, the Office of Testing, and Accountability, the Office of Exceptional Children, the Office of Federal Programs, and other NCDPI divisions as appropriate.³³⁰

The CSRB must review the operations of each charter school at least once prior to the expiration of its charter to ensure that the school is meeting the expected academic, financial, and governance standards.³³¹

The CSRB may, at any time, initiate revocation proceedings of the charter of any school.³³² Additionally, every charter school is required to undergo a renewal process prior to having its charter term extended. To request renewal of a charter, a school must notify the OCS, submit a self-study form,³³³ pay a \$500 fee, and complete the renewal process.³³⁴

The self-study form includes an executive summary and a description of the school's education program, how the school has been successfully fulfilling its mission that was formally approved by the CSRB, and the school's goals for the next five years.³³⁵ During the two-year renewal process, OCS staff:³³⁶

- conduct a site visit to the school to review its progress toward meeting its mission, tour the school, and meet with an administrative team, a board committee, a staff committee, and a parent committee;³³⁷
- meet with an inter-departmental DPI compliance team; and
- compile a "DPI Portfolio" with site visit records and other materials, such as audit reports, financial records, student accounting information, accountability results, exceptional children compliance records, and board agendas and minutes.³³⁸

The OCS provides the DPI Portfolio to the CSRB, which then decides whether to renew a charter for three, five, seven, or 10 years, or not at all. The CSRB has renewal guidelines that it is supposed to follow (Table 20).³³⁹ The CSRB must renew a charter upon the request of the chartering entity for a subsequent period of 10 years, unless one of the following applies:

- the charter school has not provided financially sound audits for the immediately preceding three years;
- the charter school's student academic outcomes for the immediately preceding three years have not been comparable to the academic outcomes of students in the local school district in which the charter school is located;³⁴⁰ or
- the charter school is not, at the time of the request for renewal of the charter, substantially in compliance with state law, federal law, the school's own bylaws, or the provisions set forth in its charter granted by the CSRB.³⁴¹

The CSRB may terminate a school's charter, not renew a school's charter, or seek applicants to assume a school's charter through a competitive bid process upon any of the following grounds:

- failure to meet the requirements for student performance contained in the charter;
- failure to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management;
- violations of law;
- material violation of any of the conditions, standards, or procedures set forth in the charter;
- two-thirds of the faculty and instructional support personnel at the school request that the charter be terminated or not renewed; or
- another good cause identified.³⁴²

An applicant may appeal a final decision of the CSRB to renew, revoke, or amend a charter by submitting notice to the chair of the SBE within 10 days of the CSRB's decision. The SBE must review appealed decisions de novo and issue a written decision within 60 days of the date the notice of appeal was submitted.³⁴³

Table 20. NC Charter School Renewal Guidelines.

Renewal Term	Renewal Criteria
10-year	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The charter school has provided financially sound audits for the immediately preceding 3 years; and 2. The charter school's student academic outcomes for the immediately preceding 3 years have been comparable to the academic outcomes of students in the local school district in which the charter school is located. If a school's charter results in it providing services to certain targeted subgroups, the CSRB may also consider the comparison to the academic outcomes of students in the same subgroups and in the local school administrative unit where the school is located. Comparability in grade level academic outcomes may also be considered; and 3. The charter school is currently in compliance and has complied for the immediately preceding 3 years, with state law, federal law, the school's own bylaws, and the provisions set forth in its charter granted by the CSRB.
7-year	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No evidence of compliance Issues in the past 2 years that would show a pattern of unresolved or persistent issues; and 2. The charter school has provided financially sound audits for the immediately preceding 2 years; and 3. The school has not been on Financial Noncompliance Disciplinary Status at any time in the immediately preceding 3 years; and 4. Academic outcomes have been comparable to the local school district for the last 2 out of 3 years or have met or exceeded growth in each of the immediately preceding 3 years. If a school's charter results in it providing services to certain targeted subgroups, the CSRB may also consider the comparison to the academic outcomes of students in the same subgroups and in the school district where the school is located. Comparability in grade level academic outcomes may also be considered; and 5. The school is not currently designated as low-performing.
5-year	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No evidence of compliance issues in the past year that would show a pattern of unresolved or persistent issues; and 2. The charter school has provided financially sound audits for the immediately preceding 2 years; and

Renewal Term	Renewal Criteria
	<p>3. The school has not been on Financial Noncompliance Disciplinary Status at any time in the immediately preceding 2 years; and</p> <p>4. Academic outcomes have been comparable to the local school district for 1 out of the last 3 years or has met or exceeded growth in 2 of the past 3 years. If a school's charter results in it providing services to certain targeted subgroups, the CSRB may also consider the comparison to the academic outcomes of students in the same subgroups and in the local school district where the school is located. Comparability in grade level academic outcomes may also be considered; and</p> <p>5. The school is not currently designated as continually low-performing.</p>
3-year	<p>1. No Compliance Issues in the past year that shows a pattern of unresolved or persistent issues, or, if Compliance Issues exist, there is a strategic improvement plan in place and is making measurable progress toward meeting it; or</p> <p>2. Inability to provide sound audits for the immediately preceding year, but the strategic improvement plan addresses this and there is evidence provided to convince the SBE and CSRB that adequate and successful corrective measures are in place; or</p> <p>3. Academic outcomes have not been comparable to the local school district, but the school has met growth in at least 1 of the immediately preceding 3 years or the charter school has a strategic improvement plan and is making measurable progress toward meeting it. If a school's charter results in it providing services to certain targeted subgroups, the CSRB may also consider the comparison to the academic outcomes of students in the same subgroups and in the local school district where the school is located. Comparability in grade level academic outcomes may also be considered.</p>
Non-renewal or assumption	<p>1. A failure to meet the requirements for student performance contained in the charter and academic outcomes have not been comparable to the local school district in any of the immediately preceding 3 years and the school has not met or exceeded growth in the last 2 years (with either no strategic improvement plan or measurable progress identified toward meeting that plan); or</p> <p>2. A persistent pattern of failure to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management and lack of financially sound audits in 2 of the preceding 3 years; or</p> <p>3. A pattern of unresolved, persistent, and/or intentional material violations of law; or</p> <p>4. A pattern of unresolved, persistent, and/or intentional material violation of any of the conditions, standards, or procedures set forth in the charter; or</p> <p>5. Two-thirds of the faculty and instructional support personnel at the school request that the charter be terminated or not renewed; or</p> <p>6. Current and persistent patterns of material noncompliance with directives of the OCS, the CSRB and/or the SBE; or</p> <p>7. Other documented good causes were identified.</p>
Additional factors	<p>1. Feedback from site visits</p> <p>2. Declining or increasing average daily membership (ADM)</p> <p>3. Pattern of high, or low, student and/or staff attrition</p>

The data on reviews and renewals are startling insofar as they show dismal performance. From 1997 to 2025, 53 schools relinquished their charter (i.e., voluntarily surrendered it); one school's board assumed another school's; 14 schools failed to receive a charter renewal from the State;

and 22 schools had their charter revoked by the State.³⁴⁴ **Since North Carolina started allowing charter schools, approximately 30% of charter schools have closed.**

Charter schools close regularly, and in so doing create a new set of harms that compound those created when they open. There are four ways a school can lose its charter: (1) the State revokes the charter; (2) the State does not renew the charter and the charter term expires; (3) the school voluntarily relinquishes its charter; and (4) another charter board assumes the charter. From 1998 to summer 2024, 22 charters were revoked, 15 charters were non-renewed, 52 charters were relinquished, and one charter was assumed.³⁴⁵ Some schools lost their charter before they even opened for students; others closed mid-year or at the end of a school year. The primary reasons for closures were noncompliance with laws and regulations governing students with disabilities, financial noncompliance or other money problems, mismanagement or other improper governance, low student enrollment, and poor academic performance.

Charter school closures create substantial harm for parents, students, educators, state officials, and taxpayers. Parents must find new schools for their children, children must transition to those new schools, and those new schools must absorb the students – all of which may happen during the school year, often with little notice. **Charter schools that close tend to have higher rates of academic failure.** Then, their students enter schools that often have neither the space nor funding for them. The ill-prepared receiving schools are evaluated based on test scores of students poorly served from their previous, now-closed charter schools. Research shows that school mobility is associated with lower levels of academic achievement, increases in suspensions, and higher dropout rates.³⁴⁶ Not only do parents experience the stress and anxiety of finding a new school for their child but also, they aren't reimbursed for the charter school's uniforms and fees. Moreover, former employees of a failed charter school must find new employment, while carrying possible reputational damage from being associated with the school. The State also wastes a tremendous number of resources invested in a closed charter school's application, opening, monitoring, and closing.

These harms disproportionately impact Black students. Since 1998, 61 charter schools opened, began serving students, and then closed. More than three-quarters of these (77%) served a predominantly Black student population (i.e., 50% or more); more than half of them (54%) had a student population that was at least 80% Black; and almost one-quarter (23%) had a student population that was at least 95% Black. During this same time, about a quarter of the statewide student population was Black.

Recommendations

This report has revealed how charter schools are worsening existing disparities and drawing resources away from public schools, functioning in ways that are unaccountable to North Carolina taxpayers, and are failing to serve all students equally. The current charter landscape has ample examples of schools that need more accountability for finances and student academic outcomes. The State should consider a moratorium on opening any new charter schools until some of the processes have a better remedy.

The State must also invest in public school districts so they can fulfill their constitutional duty to provide a sound basic education. To address the issues described in this report – and to promote equity, fairness, transparency, accountability, and effective use of taxpayer dollars – the following recommendations are offered.

Transparency and Accountability

1. Return the power to approve, renew, and revoke charters to the State Board of Education according to the language of the North Carolina State Constitution.
2. Disband the Charter School Review Board, reinstitute the Charter Schools Advisory Board, and include in its membership experienced educators and education policy experts, not just charter school advocates.
3. Fully staff the Office of Charter Schools, which has been severely understaffed since its inception, to allow effective and more timely oversight.
4. Commission a comprehensive study about the impact and effectiveness of charter schools conducted by non-partisan, impartial education researchers, scholars, and experts.
5. Promote informed decision-making in “school choice” by requiring every charter school to post on its website homepage a profile form that includes, at a minimum:
 - a. the year the school was opened;
 - b. the grades served by the school;
 - c. the percentage of teachers who have an educator license from the NC DPI;
 - d. a brief description of the school’s transportation services, if any;
 - e. a brief description of the school’s lunch program, including the lunch provider, the cost of lunch, and whether free or reduced-price lunch is offered;
 - f. a brief description of the school’s gifted and talented education program, if any;
 - g. for high schools, a list honors classes, advanced placement courses, or International Baccalaureate programs available, if any;
 - h. a list of co-curricular and extracurricular activities at the school, if any;
 - i. a list of any fees charged by the school, if any;
 - j. whether uniforms are required and the average cost per uniform set;
 - k. a brief description of parent volunteer requirements, if any;

- l. the school's state report card grades for the most recent three school years;
 - m. the school's student turnover rate for the most recent three school years;
 - n. for high schools, the school's graduation rates for the most recent three school years;
 - o. the name of the nonprofit that holds the school's charter; and
 - p. whether the school has a management organization, and if so, the name and website of the organization.
- 6. Allow local school districts to submit impact statements to the CSAB and the SBE, and require these boards to consider the statements.
- 7. Open the charter renewal process to written and oral public comment.
- 8. Create and implement a meaningful state-level process for complaints regarding charter school matters that do not fall under the jurisdiction of other government entities (such as the DPI Exceptional Children Division's Dispute Resolution and the Office for Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Education, just to name two) and require all charter schools to post a link to the complaint system on their websites.
- 9. Collect and publish student data on when students leave charter schools, including a breakdown of reasons for withdrawals and student demographics.
- 10. Include disaggregated student discipline data in the annual charter schools report and as a consideration in charter renewals and revocations. More information is provided in the Student Discipline deeper dive section below.
- 11. Prohibit charter schools that failed and closed to re-open as a private school and receive state vouchers.

Serving All Students

- 12. Require every charter application to include a plan for its student population to reflect the student population demographics in the nearby school districts.
- 13. Require charter applications to include how the school will promote a positive school climate and research-based, non-exclusionary approaches to student behavior (for example, positive behavioral interventions and supports, restorative practices, and mental health services).
- 14. Require charter schools to participate in the National School Lunch Program.
- 15. Require charter schools to provide transportation to the same extent as traditional public school districts.
- 16. Ensure that charter schools' transportation hubs do not contribute to segregation by, for example, only situating pickup hubs in whiter or more affluent areas.
- 17. Ensure that charter schools' marketing and recruitment efforts do not contribute to segregation by, for example, advertising only in whiter or more affluent areas.
- 18. Eliminate the option for charter schools to give enrollment priority to students enrolled in private, tuition-based preschool or pre-kindergarten programs.

19. Ensure that charter schools do not inquire during the admissions process about whether prospective students have a disability.
20. Ensure that schools' marketing materials, websites, and application and enrollment materials are available in multiple languages.

Focus on Students, Not Financial Profits

21. Ban for-profit charter and education management companies (and their associated "nonprofits").
22. Require charter schools to post on their website copies of any contracts with management organizations.
23. Prohibit management organization employees, their family members, and their close associates from serving on charter school boards.
24. Prohibit charter schools from entering into "sweeps" contracts.
25. Require charter schools to engage in open, public bidding for contracts.
26. Prohibit a management organization and charter school board from having the same attorney or law firm.

Other Recommendations

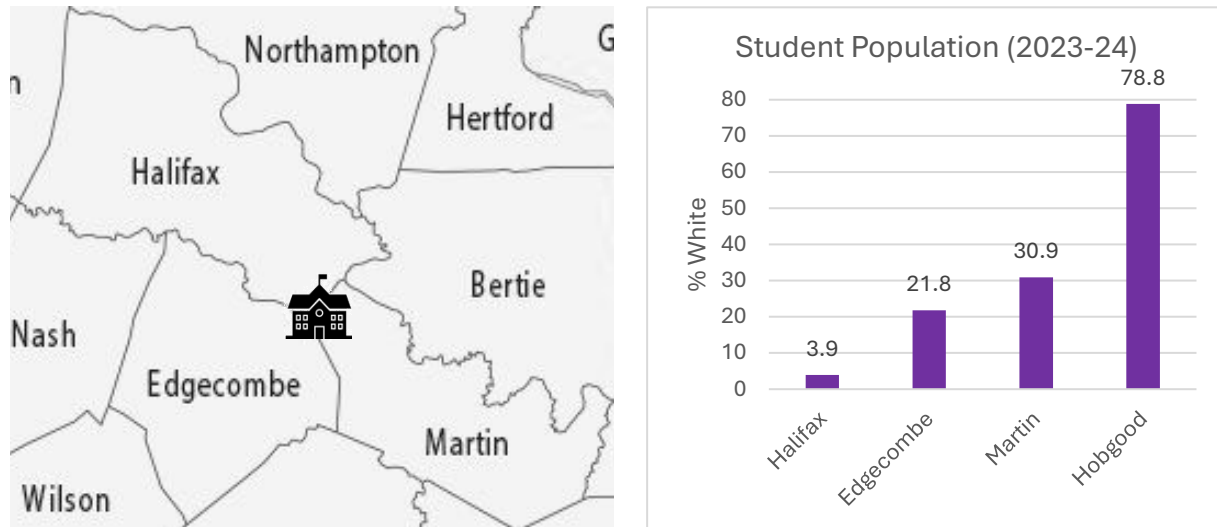
27. To account for changes in enrollment, adjust throughout the year the per-pupil funding the state provided to charter schools.
28. Prohibit charter schools from being located in church buildings.
29. Prohibit charter schools from using taxpayer money on students domiciled out of state.

Deeper Dive: Student Demographics

White Flight Private Schools

In the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education*, a number of private “segregation academies” opened in North Carolina and across the South, catering to white parents. Currently, North Carolina law allows these schools to convert into publicly funded charter schools when their directors deem it fiscally advantageous. For instance, Hobgood Charter School is located in Halifax County, near the meeting point of Halifax, Edgecombe, and Martin counties.³⁴⁷ In 1970, on the heels of court-ordered desegregation, it opened as Hobgood Academy, a private school.³⁴⁸ This predominantly white school at the intersection of mostly non-white counties struggled to survive on tuition alone, even though it had begun receiving voucher funding for nearly 20% of its students. So, to secure more public funding, it applied for a charter three separate times. The third time was successful; the school converted to a charter school and re-branded as Hobgood Charter School in August 2019. During 2023-24, the school’s student population was nearly 80% white, while Halifax County, Edgecombe County, and Martin County school districts were 3.9%, 21.8%, and 30.9% white, respectively.³⁴⁹ See Figure 10.

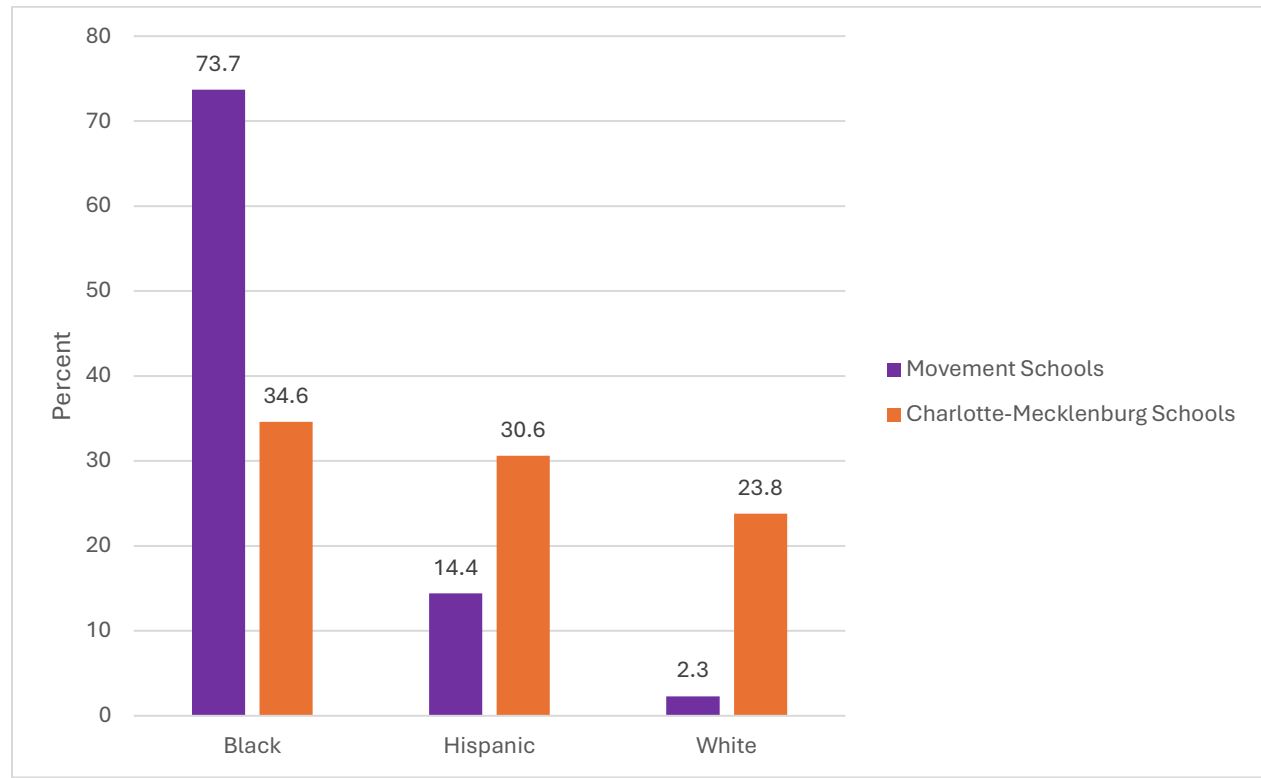
Figure 12. Hobgood Charter School Students by Percent White Compared to Surrounding Public School Districts: 2023-24.³⁵⁰



Networks of Segregated Charter Schools

North Carolina also allows charter school networks to set up racially isolated schools. Movement Schools and Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) are two examples. During 2023-24, the combined student population in Movement Schools’ network of four schools in the Charlotte area were 73.7% Black, 14.4% Hispanic, and 2.3% white (Figure 13).³⁵¹ KIPP’s four schools – in Charlotte, Durham, Gaston, and Halifax – were 78.0% Black, 12.5% Hispanic, and only 2.8% white.³⁵²

Figure 13. Charlotte Movement Schools Compared to Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools: 2023-24.³⁵³



Segregation in Charlotte-Mecklenburg

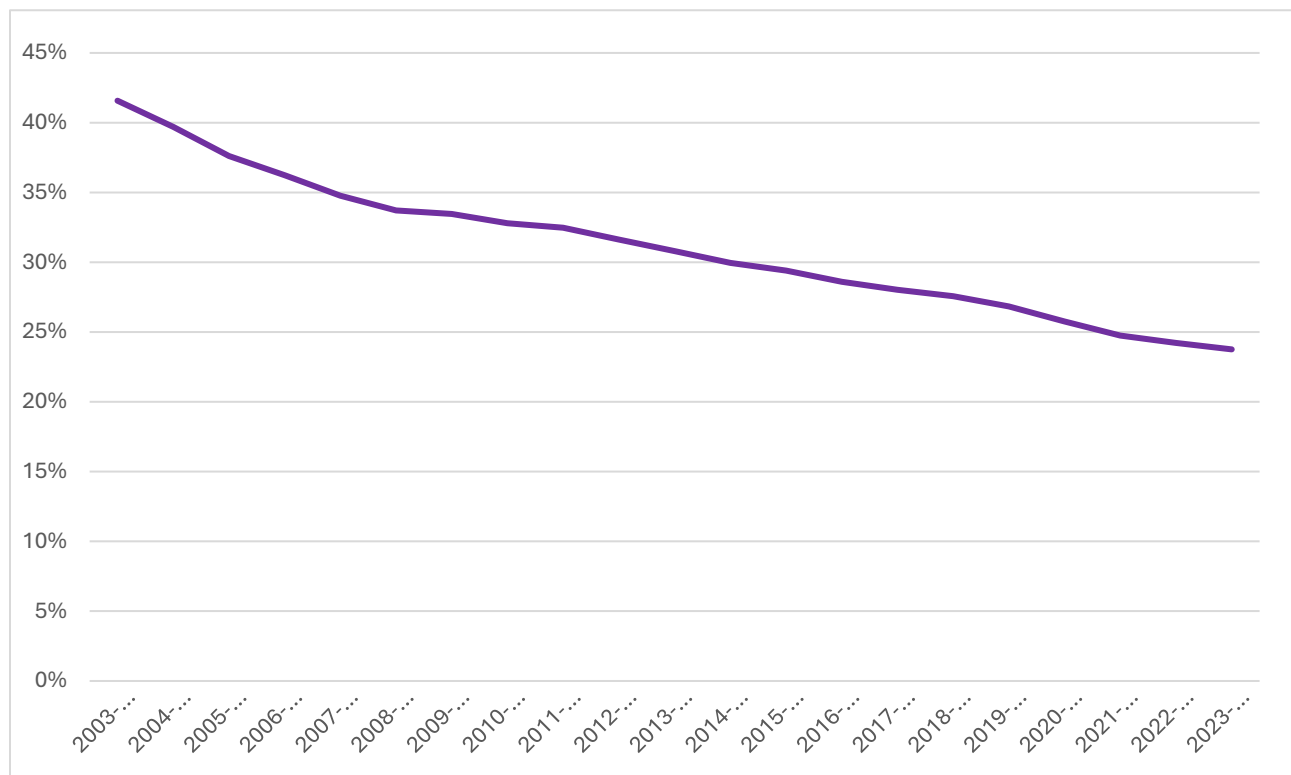
In January 2018, researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte published a study with two central findings on how charters create and exacerbate racial isolation in schools:

1. “The departure of some middle-class, academically proficient students who are white or Asian from traditional public schools for charters directly made the task of socioeconomic and racial desegregation mechanically more difficult because their departure to the charters leaves fewer middle class white and Asian students in the traditional school, thereby contributing to more segregated schools in both sectors.”
2. “The proliferation of charters in Mecklenburg County was grist for the political activism of suburban parents who threatened a middle-class exodus from CMS to the charter sector if new assignment boundaries did not honor their current neighborhood school assignments. These threats indirectly undermined policy actors' initial willingness to act boldly and decisively in revamping pupil assignments to curb socioeconomic segregation.”³⁵⁴

Less than six months after the study was published, the North Carolina General Assembly ratified legislation permitting four predominantly white towns around Charlotte – Cornelius, Huntersville, Matthews, and Mint Hill – to create their own charter schools and limit the enrollment to families living within their borders.³⁵⁵ Irv Joyner, a lawyer and the legal redress chair for the North Carolina NAACP, called the law “an effort to go back to the 1900s with Jim Crow where these enclaves for whites are being allowed to be set up.”³⁵⁶ James E. Ford – a former North Carolina Teacher of the Year and SBE member – said the legislation was “a design for racial and economic segregation.”³⁵⁷ Arthur Griffin, a former school board chair and current chairman of the local Black Political Caucus, called the bill “morally reprehensible.”³⁵⁸ The NAACP and Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law sued the State, alleging that the law violated North Carolina’s state constitutional guarantees of a uniform public school system and equal protection and would exacerbate persistent racial and socio-economic segregation in the county district.³⁵⁹ In April 2022, a North Carolina Court of Appeals three-judge panel held that the lawsuit should be dismissed because the plaintiffs did not allege in their complaint they were directly injured, or were likely to suffer a direct injury, as a result of the legislation.³⁶⁰

Over the last two decades, as predominantly white charter schools in the Charlotte suburbs proliferated, the percentage of white students in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools has declined dramatically (Figure 14).³⁶¹

Figure 14. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools by Percent White: 2003-04 to 2023-24.³⁶²



Local Examples of Extreme Racial and Economic Segregation

As a result of charter school growth in North Carolina, many schools, both charter and traditional public schools have become segregated by race. Below are examples of schools where the racial composition of white or Black students at the charter school is markedly different from the composition of the nearby traditional public schools (Figures 15 and 16). Charter school growth has also driven economic segregation, with some charter schools serving a disproportionately small number of economically disadvantaged students than their nearby traditional public schools (Figure 17). More examples of schools exhibiting these types of segregation are provided in Appendices C, D, and E.

Figure 15. Example of an NC Disproportionately White Charter Schools Compared to Public School District Where They Reside and Nearest Traditional Public School: 2023-24.

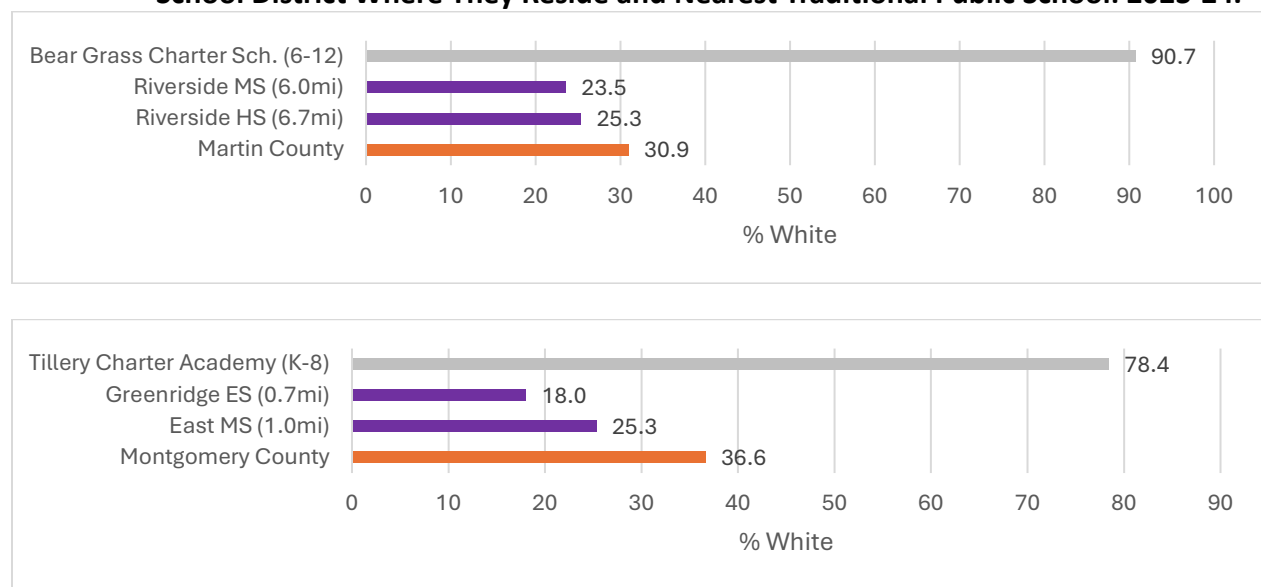
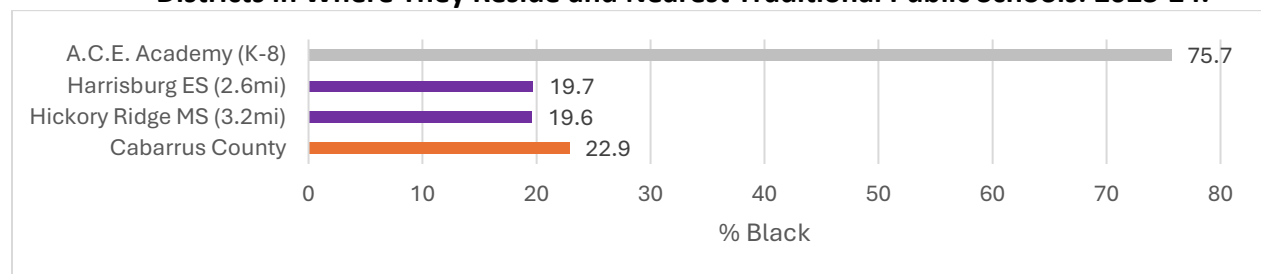


Figure 16. Examples of Disproportionately Black NC Charters Schools Compared to the School Districts in Where They Reside and Nearest Traditional Public Schools: 2023-24.



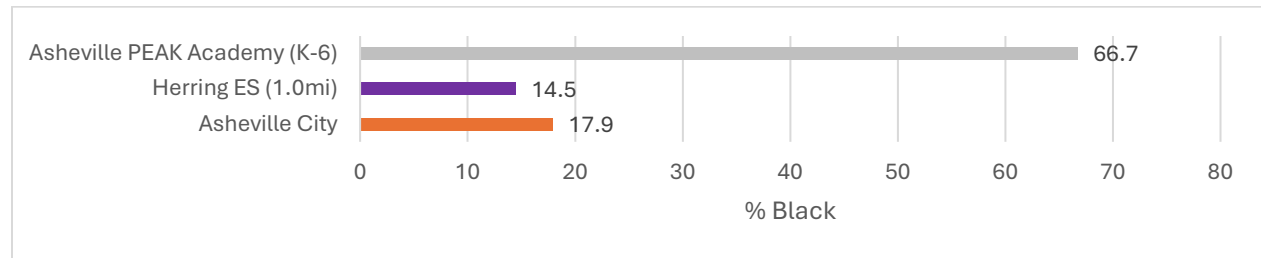
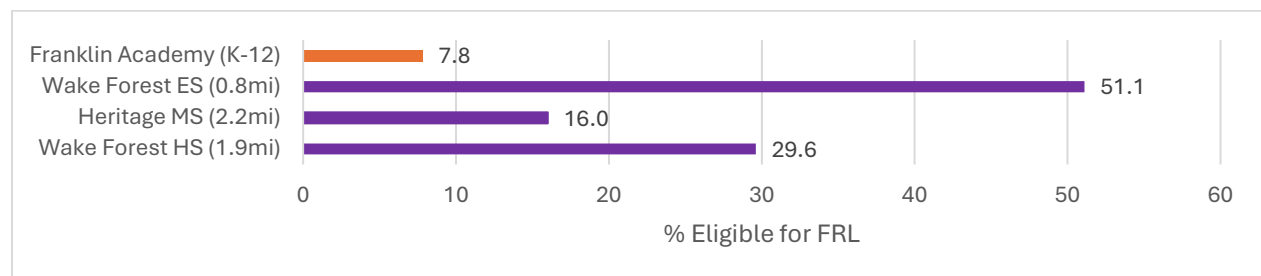
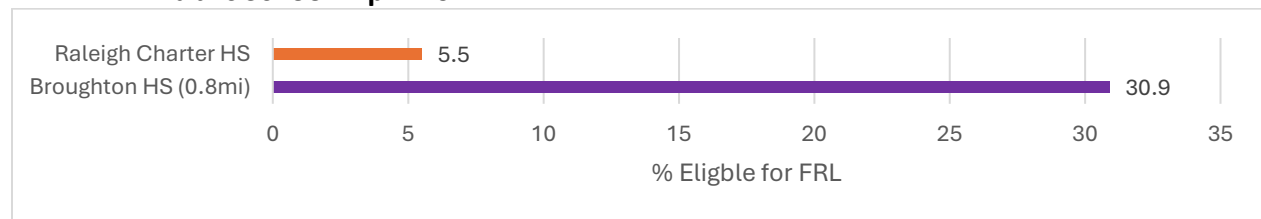


Figure 17. Examples of NC Charter Schools with Lower Percent of students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch to School Districts Where They Reside and Nearest Traditional Public School: April 2024.³⁶³



Deeper Dive: Student Discipline

Numerous studies have found that suspending and expelling students from school is not only an ineffective method of managing behavior but also that such removals: (a) have negative effects on school climate, attendance, academic outcomes, and dropout and graduation rates; (b) exacerbate student alienation, disengagement, and misbehavior; and (c) are associated with an increased likelihood of student grade retention, use of alcohol and drugs, chronic illness, and justice system involvement.³⁶⁴ Nevertheless, during 2023-24,³⁶⁵ North Carolina's public schools reported to the DPI:³⁶⁶

- 264,510 in-school suspensions given to 131,704 students;
- 244,836 short-term suspensions given to 133,046 students;
- 730 long-term suspensions given to 719 students;
- 30 expulsions to students; and
- 3,781 alternative learning placements as a disciplinary action given to 3,375 students.³⁶⁷

Student Discipline Definitions

- In-school suspension: When a student is reassigned, for a relatively short period of time, to an area apart from their regular classroom.³⁶⁸
- Short-term suspension: The exclusion of a student from school attendance for disciplinary purposes for up to 10 days.³⁶⁹
- Long-term suspension: The exclusion of a student from school attendance for disciplinary purposes for more than 10 days. There are three categories of long-term suspensions: long-term suspensions of 11 days or more (excluding remainder of the school year and 365-day suspensions), remainder of the school year suspensions, and 365-day suspensions.³⁷⁰
- Expulsion: The indefinite exclusion of a student from school enrollment for disciplinary purposes.³⁷¹
- Alternative learning placements (as a disciplinary action): The reassignment of a student, for a relatively longer period of time, where the student is provided direct or computer-based instruction and continued access to courses and supervising teachers for those courses.³⁷²

Statewide, male students, Black students, American Indian students, and students with disabilities were disproportionately subjected to these disciplinary measures – as they have been for many years.³⁷³ (NCDPI makes student discipline data for charter schools available to the public that is disaggregated by race and sex, but not by disability.)

Meaningfully comparing student discipline rates in traditional schools to discipline rates in charter schools is unproductive. First, charter schools and traditional schools serve disparate student populations (see the “Deeper Dive: Student Demographics” section of this report). Second, many charter schools serve only elementary school grades, which, compared to middle and high school grades, generally have lower discipline rates. Third, it is unknown if charter schools may avoid discipline reporting obligations when parents voluntarily withdraw their child and enroll them in traditional schools to avoid being subject to suspension or expulsion.³⁷⁴ Fourth, and most significantly, charter schools have an avenue not available to public schools. Charters may exclude (i.e., remove/expel) a student from the school and return that student to another school in the local school district in accordance with the terms of its charter after adhering to minimal due process requirements.³⁷⁵

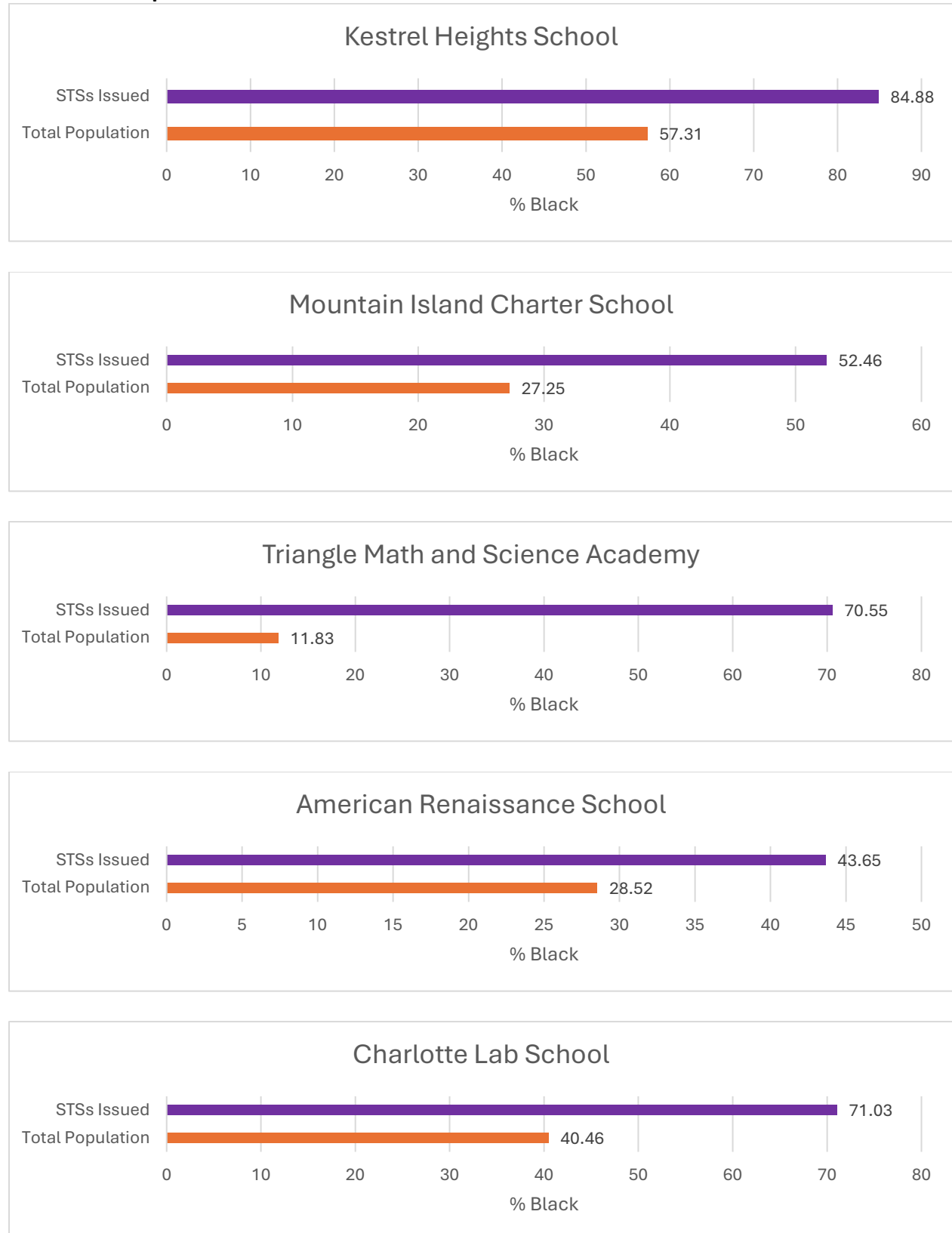
Short-term Suspensions

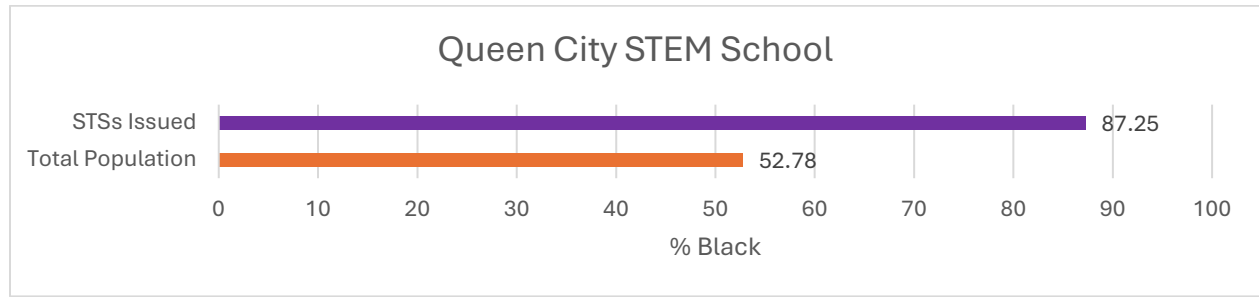
During 2023-24, North Carolina charter schools reported 13,803 short-term suspensions for a total of 39,866 school days. Twenty-six charter schools issued at least one short-term suspension for every five students enrolled (Table 21).³⁷⁶

Table 21. NC Charter Schools with Highest Short-Term Suspension Rates: 2023-24.³⁷⁷

School Name	# of STS	Total STS Days	Avg. Days per STS	STS per 100 Students
Dillard Academy	245	849	2.7	127.35
Children's Village Academy	143	279	2.4	81.12
Thomas Academy	75	148	2.9	68.00
Classical Charter Schools of Wilmington	135	126	1.9	48.15
Washington Montessori	409	188	1.1	42.30
Aspire Trade High	184	402	5.5	39.67
Sallie B Howard School	1,204	1,612	3.6	36.71
Wilson Preparatory Academy	722	926	3.7	34.21
KIPP Halifax College Preparatory	536	553	3.1	33.58
Forsyth Academy	742	730	3.0	32.88
KIPP Gaston College Preparatory	1,150	1,197	3.2	32.61
VERITAS Community School	150	107	2.4	29.33
Classical Charter Schools of Whiteville	847	692	2.8	29.16
Haliwa-Saponi Tribal School	142	163	4.0	28.87
East Voyager Academy of Charlotte	162	123	2.7	28.40

Figure 18. Examples of Racial Disparities at Selected Charter Schools with 100+ Short-Term Suspensions: 2022-23.





Long-Term Suspensions and Expulsions

State law requires students who are long-term suspended from public school to be offered alternative education services absent a significant or important reason. It is unclear whether charter schools – despite, in some cases, engaging in high rates of suspension – are adhering to this requirement. American Leadership Academy Johnston, Wake Preparatory Academy, and KIPP Gaston College Preparatory had the most long-term suspensions among charter schools, with 10 each. These charter schools had more long-term suspensions than 99 of the 115 entire school districts in the state.

Question to Consider

State law (G.S. § 115C-390.9) requires that students who are long-term suspended be offered alternative education services unless the superintendent provides a significant or important reason for declining to offer such service. What are charter schools offering?

Wake Preparatory Academy had seven expulsions, which was more than all but two school districts. Among all charter schools, school districts, laboratory schools, and regional schools in the state, KIPP Gaston College Preparatory, MINA Charter School of Lee County, and Raleigh Oak Charter School were among the eight with the highest rate of long-term suspension.³⁷⁸

KIPP Schools

The KIPP Public Schools network is made up of 275 K-12 schools, 27 regional support organizations, and the nonprofit KIPP Foundation.³⁷⁹ One of the regional organizations is KIPP North Carolina Public Schools.³⁸⁰ There are four KIPP local education agencies (LEAs), including eight KIPP schools, that serve over 3,300 students in North Carolina (Table 22).³⁸¹

Table 22. NC KIPP Schools: 2023-24.

LEA	Schools	Grades
KIPP Charlotte	KIPP Change Academy ³⁸²	K-4
	KIPP Academy Charlotte ³⁸³	5-8
KIPP Durham College Prep	KIPP Durham College Prep Elementary ³⁸⁴	K-3
	KIPP Durham College Prep Middle ³⁸⁵	6-8
KIPP Gaston College Prep	KIPP Gaston College Prep Primary ³⁸⁶	K-4
	KIPP Gaston College Prep Middle ³⁸⁷	5-8
	KIPP Gaston College Prep High ³⁸⁸	9-12
KIPP Halifax College Prep	KIPP Halifax College Prep ³⁸⁹	K-8

The schools are racially isolated, with a combined student population that is 2.5% white (Table 23).

Table 23. KIPP schools in North Carolina: 2023-24.

LEA	Total Pop.	% Black	% Hispanic	% White
KIPP Charlotte	932	81.3	11.7	0.3
KIPP Durham College Prep	365	49.6	45.5	1.1
KIPP Gaston College Prep	1,183	81.1	7.0	4.9
KIPP Halifax College Prep	542	84.7	3.7	3.5

Nationally, KIPP has been criticized for its “no excuses” approach to student discipline.³⁹⁰ In the wake of protests surrounding the police murder of George Floyd in 2020, the network reportedly began to rethink and shift away from zero tolerance.³⁹¹ KIPP North Carolina’s “Student Behavior & Response Plan,” for example, now indicates that the schools “believe that mistakes and unhealthy choices are met with compassion and empathy, and seen as an opportunity for learning and growth.”³⁹²

However, data tell a different story. During 2023-24, KIPP’s North Carolina schools issued nearly three out-of-school suspensions for every 10 students enrolled (Table 24).³⁹³

Table 24. Short-term Suspension Rates in NC KIPP Schools: 2023-24.

LEA	Total Population	Short-term Suspensions	Long-term Suspensions	Out-of-School Suspensions per 100 Students
KIPP Charlotte	883	233	2	26.6
KIPP Durham College Prep	353	96	2	27.8
KIPP Gaston College Prep	1,150	375	8	33.3
KIPP Halifax College Prep	536	180	0	33.6

From 2015-16 to 2023-24, KIPP’s four North Carolina LEAs – Charlotte, Durham, Gaston, and Halifax – reported to DPI having issued nearly 5,000 out-of-school suspensions (Table 25)³⁹⁴

Table 25. Out-of-School Suspensions for NC KIPP LEAs by Year: 2015-15 to 2023-24.

School Year	Charlotte (K-8)	Durham (K-8)	Gaston (K-12)	Halifax (K-8)	Total
2015-16	123	13	83	12	231
2016-17	390	27	132	19	568
2017-18	297	142	156	47	642
2018-19	305	149	94	80	628
2019-20*	233	34	66	56	389
2020-21	Data not reported due to COVID				
2021-22	214	167	239	77	697
2022-23	267	98	415	165	945
2023-24	235	98	383	180	896

* After March 16, 2020, schools were closed for the remainder of the school year and students participated in remote learning only.

KIPP Gaston College Prep was particularly punitive. During 2023-24, the school issued 375 short-term suspensions and 8 long-term suspensions.³⁹⁵ It was among the LEAs with the highest short-term suspension and long-term suspension rates in the state.³⁹⁶

Deeper Dive: Charter School Closures

This deeper dive profiles some of the charter schools that closed for a variety of reasons. Some charter schools voluntarily relinquished their charters (voluntarily surrenders its charter), effectively ending the school's operations as a public charter school (Table 26). Some charters are not renewed after the term of the charter expires (Table 27). The CSRB can choose not to renew a charter for various reasons, including failure to meet student performance requirements, fiscal mismanagement, violations of law or the charter, or noncompliance with directives from the CSRB or the Office of Charter Schools. If a charter is not renewed, the school must cease operations as a public school. However, the school can potentially stay open by converting to a private school. Finally, some charter schools had their charters revoked by the CSRB before the end of their charter term (Table 28). The revocation of a charter means the state, through the CSRB, has determined that the school is no longer meeting the requirements outlined in its charter agreement and is no longer authorized to operate as a charter school.

The charter schools that follow are examples of schools that relinquished their charter or had their charter revoked or not renewed by the CSRB.

Table 26. NC Charter School Relinquishments: 2024-25.

School	Year Approved	Year Relinquished	Years Open	% Black in Year Closed
The Apprentice Academy	2018	2024	6	14.5
The Learning Center	1997	2022	25	0.5
Bridges Academy	1997	2021	24	8.7
Davis Academy	2020	2021	0	n/a
North Raleigh Charter	2020	2021	0	n/a
BLUE GREEN Academy	2019	2020	1	84.9
Grandfather Academy	1997	2020	23	15.6
Bishop George W. Brooks Make Academy	2019	2019	0	n/a
Hope Charter Academy	2019	2019	18	94.5
Robert J. Brown Leadership Academy	2019	2019	0	n/a
Cardinal Charter Academy at Knightdale	2017	2018	0	n/a
Cardinal West	2017	2018	0	n/a
Montcross Charter Academy	2017	2018	0	n/a
The Paideia Academy	2017	2018	0	n/a
Twin City High School	2016	2017	0	n/a
Carolina STEM	2013	2015	0	n/a
Providence Charter	2014	2015	0	n/a
SEGS Academy	2013	2015	1.75	61.2
Concrete Roses	2014	2014	0.1	n/a
Student First Academy	2013	2014	0.75	90.5
Howard and Lillian Lee	2012	2013	0	n/a
Kinston Charter Academy	2003	2013	8	93.6
The STEAM Academy (downtown Middle)	1997	2013	16	91.2
Omuteko Gwamazimma	1999	2008	9	100.0

School	Year Approved	Year Relinquished	Years Open	% Black in Year Closed
The Laurinburg Homework	1999	2008	9	69.5
American Renaissance Elementary	1998	2007	9	16.6
Rowan Academy	1999	2006	7	90.9
Visions Charter	1997	2006	9	23.2
Ann Atwater	2001	2005	3	65.6
Lakeside Charter	1997	2005	8	48.6
Developmental Day School	1999	2002	3	25.0
Harnett Early Childhood Academy	1998	2002	4	98.3
Oak Ridge Charter School	2001	2002	0	n/a
Stanly County Outreach	1999	2002	3	95.2
Success Academy	1999	2002	3	100.0
Tar Heel Charter High School	2000	2002	0	n/a
Turning Point Academy	1998	2002	4	98.1
Bear Grass Charter School	1998	2001	0	n/a
Sankore	1998	2001	3	98.0
Cabarrus County Charter School	1999	2000	0	n/a
Hope Elementary School	1999	2000	0	n/a
OMA's Inc. Charter School	1998	2000	2	57.7
Partnership Academy	1998	2000	0	n/a
Arts and Basics Charter	1998	1999	1	9.4
Catawba Valley Tech	1998	1999	0	n/a
Change for Youth	1998	1999	1	66.7
Harnett Technical High	1999	1999	0	n/a
School in the Community	1997	1999	2	57.9
Tarheel Challenge – East	1999	1999	0	n/a
Tarheel Challenge - West	1999	1999	0	n/a
United Children's Ability Nook	1997	1999	2	15.6
Odyssey Charter School	1997	1998	0	n/a
Wilkes Technical School	1998	1998	0.5	n/a

Table 27. NC Charter School Non-renewals: 2024-25.

School	Year Approved	Month/Year Nonrenewed	Years Open	% Black in Year Closed
Children's Village Academy	1997	2024	27	89.9
Ridgeview Charter School	2019	2024	5	72.3
Eastside STREAM Academy	2013	May 2023	10	76.1
Invest Collegiate: Transform	2013	May 2023	10	89.2
UpRoar Leadership Academy	2017	Mar. 2022	5	88.9
Ignite Innovation Academy	2015	Feb. 2020	4	80.1
Charlotte Learning Academy	2014	June 2019	5	85.1
Community Charter School	1997	June 2017	20	78.0
Kennedy Charter School	1997	June 2016	18	93.9
Crossroads Charter High School	2000	June 2016	15	97.2
Coastal Academy	1998	June 2014	16	11.6
Provisions Academy	1999	June 2009	10	57.3
SPARC Academy	1998	June 2008	10	98.5
Laurinburg Charter School	1998	June 2006	8	100.0
Wayne Technical Academy	1998	July 2003	4	100.0

Table 28. NC Charter School Revocations: 2024-25.

School	Year Approved	Month/Year Revoked	Years Open	% Black in Year Closed
School of the Arts for Boys Academy (SABA)	2020	Dec. 2023	0.5	46.9
Torchlight Academy	2000	May 2022	22	59.0
Three Rivers Academy	2018	April 2022	3.5	85.9
CE Academy	2018	July 2021	0	n/a
Elaine Riddick	2018	July 2021	0	n/a
Kaleidoscope Charter High School	2018	July 2020	< 1	n/a
Essie Mae Kiser Foxx	2018	2020	3	76.8
Global Achievers School	2017	Dec. 2018	< 1	41.9
Dynamic Community Charter School	2014	June 2015	1	16.4
PACE Academy	2003	May 2015	11	51.4
Entrepreneur High School	2013	Jan. 2015	0.5	58.0
Highland Charter School	1997	July 2012	15	81.6
John H. Baker Jr. High School	1997	June 2007	10	81.8
Imani Institute Charter School	1998	July 2006	8	95.3
East Winston Primary School	1998	Nov. 2005	7	84.6
Right Step Academy	1997	Jan. 2001	4	96.9
PHASE Academy	1998	Dec. 2000	2	86.6
Elizabeth Grinton Charter School	1997	Dec. 1999	2	10.3
LIFT Academy	1997	Dec. 1999	2	99.4
Bright Horizons	1997	Aug. 1999	2	87.4
Nguza Saba Charter School	1997	Jan. 1999	2	100.0
Bonner Academy	1997	May 1998	1	88.0

Failing to Ensure Academic Success

A number of charter schools close due to poor academic performance.

Charlotte Learning Academy opened in Charlotte in 2014. Stacey Rose was the school's founder and principal, and her husband, Andre Rose, was on the school's board. Stacey was the principal of another charter school, the Kennedy Charter School, which the State Board of Education (SBE) closed in June 2016. Charlotte Learning Academy received F grades from the state for five straight years (2015 to 2019). In March 2019, the SBE voted to not renew the school's charter.³⁹⁷

In fall 2019, Stacey and Andre Rose reopened the school as Legacy Preparatory School, a private school. Approximately 135 of 145 Legacy Prep students attended with State-funded vouchers – totaling \$283,500. On January 3, 2020 – just before students were set to return for the spring semester – Stacey emailed parents that the school was not reopening after winter break.³⁹⁸

Highland Charter School opened in Gastonia in 1997. In 2012, the school was among the first two in the state to lose its charter for academic failure. The school's board chair said, "Let's be honest here, we didn't do a good job of understanding our challenges as it got harder along the years." The school did not have a principal, and its director did not work at the school for the last two years it existed. The director said, "It really was not where I wanted to be. I'm not a people person." She also said, "People who can see you have expectations, and I found myself hiding a lot. I preferred to deal with computers and paper and that sort of thing."³⁹⁹

Hope Charter Leadership Academy was a private religious school for at-risk students run by Building Together Ministries when the SBE approved it to become a charter school in Raleigh in 2001. The school received Fs for performance grades in 2014, 2015, and 2016. The Charter School Advisory Board ordered the school to create a plan to improve academic performance, and then rejected the plan because it was not aggressive enough. In 2018 and 2019, the school received an F and a D, respectively. In June 2019, the school relinquished its charter, leaving about 125 students to find a new school.⁴⁰⁰

Fiscal Irresponsibility

A second reason charters close is that they fail to manage the charter school's finances responsibly.

Bridges Academy opened in Yadkin County in 1997. From 2015 to 2019, the school received three Ds and two Cs as letter grades from the State. In March 2021, the State Bureau of Investigation (SBI) and State Auditor's Office launched investigations into the school on the heels of reports that it had fraudulently obtained excess funding from the State. During the investigation, the school's operations director told investigators that "some (of the records) have been burned because (the school) can't keep everything." On June 4, 2021, the school's board voted to close, effective June 30, and issued a press release claiming that "(financial) irregularities were concealed from the Board of Directors."⁴⁰¹ Over 100 students had to find a new school.

In April 2022, the State Auditor's Office released a report finding that the school: (a) had falsified student enrollment records to get more than \$400,000 in state funding it was not entitled to receive;⁴⁰² (b) impermissibly used \$78,576 in state money intended for the charter school to support the operations of a preschool, despite charging tuition and receiving funding from the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services for children to attend the preschool; and (c) failed to report (with 1099 tax forms) to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) nearly \$500,000 in payments to contractors (e.g., director, instructional staff, and support staff). The findings were referred to the local district attorney, the IRS, and the N.C. Department of Revenue. The SBE filed a \$483,547 legal claim against the school.⁴⁰³

Children's Village Academy opened in Lenoir County in 1997. The school has a long history of financial woes. During six different years between 2011 and 2022, the school ran deficits. The DPI had recommended revoking its charter in 2013. A decade later, the DPI received complaints against the school and launched an investigation. In December 2023, the DPI released its findings, which included: (a) understated liabilities resulting in misstated financial statements; (b) inadequate documentation for a loan from a board member; (c) inadequate documentation to substantiate start-up cost treatment; (d) invalid voting procedures followed related to a conflict of interest; (e) unallowable costs charged to state and federal funds; (f) utility bills paid for property outside contract rental dates, and (g) ineffective internal control structure.⁴⁰⁴

In 2008, the vice chair of the board, Peggy Carr, made a loan of \$188,000 to the school. Peggy is the daughter of the school's founder, Anna Bell Carr, and the sister of an administrator at the school, Gloria. The original promissory note indicated that the school would repay \$208,336 in personal loans and interest (9%) to Peggy Carr. However, by 2023, the school still had not fully repaid the loan and was on track to pay Peggy Carr \$155,505 in interest. Additionally, each year, the school's board signed a contract with Math & Esther Properties, a company partially owned by Peggy, for startup and upgrade costs. The total amount of the loan due was never reported as a liability or as a note in financial statements. Moreover, the school paid rent to Peggy Carr for use of a floor of a building she owned across the street. The building was partially occupied by other tenants, including a U-Haul truck rental business, but the school paid utility bills for the entire property between June 2022 and February 2023.⁴⁰⁵

The unallowable expenses included using state funding for gift cards, IT services for a private daycare center, and soda (using school nutrition funds). The school also paid a custodian/bus driver, who was married to Gloria, \$15,000 in federal grant funding in just two months.⁴⁰⁶

Another report, issued in December 2023 by the DPI's Office of Federal Programs, raised similar questions about \$287,000 spent from a federal grant that supports afterschool programs. The expenses in question included: (a) furniture totaling \$5,000 outside the scope of approved educational expenses; (b) eight months of utility bills totaling \$3,200 for a property the school did not always have a contract to occupy and was also used by other tenants; and (c) costs for school supplies and technology tools totaling \$5,018 incurred by a contractor who was not hired to make those purchases and did not produce receipts showing they actually bought those items.⁴⁰⁷ In February 2024, the DPI ordered the school to repay \$162,597 in "unallowable costs" to the U.S. Department of Education.⁴⁰⁸ The following month, about 40% of the employees at the school were

reclassified as independent contract employees, reducing their pay by 20% and eliminating many benefits – without an official board vote.⁴⁰⁹

In June 2024, a panel upheld the Charter School Review Board’s decision to not renew the school’s charter. John Blackburn, a board member said, “The extensive record before the state board demonstrates years of financial mismanagement issues, legal violations and charter violations that have been ongoing, even during the last two years of renewal review.” About 150 students would have to find a new school for 2024-25.⁴¹⁰

Concrete Roses STEM Academy’s board applied for a charter in spring 2013.⁴¹¹ The CSAB agreed to send its application forward toward approval. Board members pointed out numerous flaws in its application, including: (a) unrealistic enrollment projections; (b) not having a budget item for school bus maintenance; (c) having an athletics director but no line item for athletics in the budget; (d) having one person, Cedrick Stone, as the school’s director and board chair; and (e) Stone budgeting to pay himself \$95,000.⁴¹²

In 2014, the school opened in Charlotte. A parent told the media that parents began pulling their children out of the school about two weeks into the year and that her children came home with no books and no homework and with stories of the curriculum not being ready. State officials who visited the school after the start of the school year found, according to the *Charlotte Observer*, that “teachers had not received an appropriate curriculum nearly four weeks into the school year,” “the principal did not receive direction from the board of directors,” and “the school also did not have Internet access.”⁴¹³

On September 17, 2014, the Office of Charter Schools (OCS) sent the school a letter indicating that: (a) the State was putting the school on financial disciplinary status and freezing its access to cash; (b) the school did not report its expenditures for the months of July and August, in violation of state law; and (c) the school had already spent \$285,170 of its allotment from the state. At 8:00 p.m., the school’s board met and decided to close the school. The next day, the school told the parents that it was closing the following day. On September 19, the school closed, leaving about 126 students scrambling to find a new school.⁴¹⁴

Stone had sole control over financial decisions; payments required his authorization alone. A report from the State indicated that Stone used public money to make two car payments of about \$650 on his 2014 Chevrolet Impala, pay his vehicle tax to the Department of Motor Vehicles, pay himself \$3,000 for gas, and pay several hundred dollars in cell phone expenses (and staff said they did not receive phones). The report also mentioned that Stone failed to record expenses and kept financial records at his home, instead of at the school. According to the report, bank statements from July and August showed thousands of dollars of cash withdrawals without documentation. They also listed checks written to Stone worth nearly \$15,000, supposedly as reimbursement for workshop fees, travel, office supplies, and computer software, but no documentation was provided.⁴¹⁵

According to his LinkedIn profile, Stone went on to become a business school professor. In February 2024, his profile read, “Many years of corporate management and leadership

experience. A diverse background in business and education, excelling in both industries. ... Founded a STEM charter school for At-risk youths; offering a strong student-friendly culture in a business environment preparing students for competitive global opportunities in the 21st century.”⁴¹⁶

Imani Institute Charter School opened in Guilford County in 1998. The school failed to file audits with the State for four straight school years (2001-02 to 2004-05). Greensboro accountant Paul Callaway Jr. had embezzled an unspecified amount of money from the school, which contributed to the late audits. On August 3, 2006, the SBE revoked the school’s charter, leaving parents only three weeks to find new schools before the new school year began.⁴¹⁷

Kinston Charter Academy opened in 2004. Three years later, it had a \$374,000 deficit, even though five board members had taken out personal loans for the school. The DPI put the school on “Financial Probationary Status” in 2008, “Financial Disciplinary Status” in 2010, and “Fiscal Noncompliance Status” in 2010 and 2012. Also in 2012, the OCS notified the school that its significant dip in student academic performance could lead to its closure. During the 2012-13 school year, Ozie Hall Jr., the school’s CEO, hired his daughter as the academy’s “academic officer.” His daughter did not have a degree in education and had never worked at a school.⁴¹⁸

In 2013, the DPI continued to warn the school, placing it on “Financial Disciplinary Status” in January and “Governance Cautionary Status” in June. The latter happened after the school: (a) withheld funds from its employees’ paychecks for their health insurance plans but then failed to submit the amounts withheld to the State Treasurer; (b) accepted federal Race to the Top (RttT) grant funds but then made it difficult for State RttT coordinators to schedule a monitoring visit; (c) failed to comply with program requirements; and (d) was slow in providing documentation and submitting grants or budgets to the DPI’s Exceptional Children Division.⁴¹⁹

On August 6, 2013, the school received approximately \$666,000 from the state for the 2013-14 school year. Over the next 18 days, the school paid: (a) Hall \$5,000 for “unused vacation time” and \$1,500 for “unused annual leave;” (b) his daughter \$2,500 for a “website redesign” that was never implemented; and (c) his wife and the school’s dean of students and board chair, Demyra McDonald-Hall, over \$1,000 as an advance against her “unused annual leave.”⁴²⁰

On August 26, 2013, the school opened for 2013-14 with 189 enrolled students – 177 less than the estimate the school submitted to the DPI in spring 2013. The same day, the school’s board met to consider the OCS’ recommendation that the school relinquish its charter. On September 3, the day before the SBE was scheduled to begin the process of terminating the school’s charter, the school’s board decided to surrender its charter. The next day, the school notified parents that September 6 would be the last day of school for students.⁴²¹

About 189 students were displaced. The school had only \$3,000 in its accounts, despite having received more than \$600,000 in public funding for the beginning of the school year. SBE member Buddy Collins said he was concerned about Lenoir County Public Schools having to deal with the fallout of the school’s closing. “Dumping 230 students into a small school district will cause financial problems,” said Collins.⁴²²

In January 2015, the Office of the State Auditor released a report finding that the school had “overstated enrollment,” the school had “employed defendants Hall and McDonald-Hall’s unqualified relatives at a cost to the school [of] \$92,500 in the final year,” and that “defendants Hall and McDonald-Hall accepted over \$11,000 in questionable payments despite owing more than \$370,000 in payroll obligations” to the Academy’s employees. The State did not recoup any funds from the school after it closed. In April 2016, the State filed a lawsuit against the school and Hall.⁴²³

Hall requested that the State’s complaint be dismissed based on “public official immunity.” In December 2021, the North Carolina Supreme Court unanimously ruled (overturning a Court of Appeals decision written by Judge Phil Berger Jr.) that nonprofit charter schools cannot avoid facing civil fraud claims alleging mismanagement of taxpayer money by arguing they are immune from such lawsuits like a state agency.⁴²⁴

According to Hall’s LinkedIn profile, he is now an “independent educational consultant” and the author of nine books, including *Seven Steps: To Start a Public Charter School*, *Converting Traditional Public Schools to Charter Schools*, *Charter School Board Members*, and *The KCA Story*.⁴²⁵

The Learning Center opened in Murphy (Cherokee County) in 1997. The school’s director used school funds for what a board member referred to as his own “private enterprise” and hid the financial irregularities from the board. In May 2022, the school announced that it was closing, and The Cherokee County Board of Commissioners formally requested a criminal investigation into the school. In June 2022, the school closed and relinquished its charter, leaving approximately 200 K-9 students to find a new school.⁴²⁶

LIFT Academy opened in the early 1980s as a private school for students who were struggling in regular public schools. In 1997, it became a charter school for “at-risk” students. In 1999, the CSAB learned that the school: (a) owed the IRS \$33,000 in payroll taxes from the last year the school operated as a private school; (b) had not been able to keep proper financial records; (c) had engaged in a number of questionable financial practices, such as misusing money earmarked for other purposes and paying the cell phone bills of employees; and (d) the school had a debt of about \$90,000. The SBE revoked the school’s charter. About 150 students in grades six to 12 had to find a new school. After losing its appeal, the school filed a lawsuit against the State. Over the next eight months, while the lawsuit remained in courts, LIFT was able to remain open long past the SBE’s vote for revocation. Test scores from 2000 showed that less than 10% of students were achieving at grade level. The school lost its lawsuit and finally closed.⁴²⁷

OMA’s Inc. Charter School opened in Cumberland County in 2019. A deadly shooting at the school’s first location forced students and teachers to move into an office building. In December 2000, the school held an emergency meeting and decided to relinquish its charter. The school was more than \$350,000 in debt.⁴²⁸

PHASE Academy opened in Onslow County in 1998. In 2000, the State placed the school on “Financial Cautionary Status,” then “Financial Probationary Status,” and then “Financial

Disciplinary Status” due to: (a) missing checks; (b) an absence of receipts or invoices for funds paid out and documentation for salary payments; (c) delinquent remittance of payroll taxes to state and federal governments; (d) a deficit of over \$124,000; and (e) failures to make required payments to the State Health Plan for employee health insurance premiums, to balance bank accounts for several months, and to provide an accurate list of outstanding debts/accounts payable. The principal was paying herself \$100,000 to lead a school with only 100 students. According to reports, teachers who were friends with the principal received bonuses and had a 13-month paycheck cycle; other teachers did not receive any pay. In December 2000, the SBE revoked the school’s charter.⁴²⁹

Rowan Academy opened in 1999 in a building owned by the Church of God of Prophecy in East Spencer (Rowan County). Between August and December, the school lost four staff members — three teachers and a curriculum specialist — which amounted to 60% of the school’s lead instructional staff. In January 2006, the headmaster was accused of beating a first-grade student and arrested, board members resigned, and the school closed. It was more than \$200,000 in debt.⁴³⁰

STEM Education for a Global Society (SEGS) Academy opened in Delco (Columbus County) in 2013. The school projected having 300 students but fewer than 80 enrolled. During its first year, the school’s administration turned over, it had testing irregularities, it earned an F grade from the State, and it was delinquent in payments to the North Carolina State Health Plan. In August 2014, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) placed the school on financial disciplinary status and began allotting the school’s funds on a monthly basis due to its “inability to provide adequate documentation regarding its financial delinquency and student membership concerns.” In December 2014, the DPI’s Division of School Business issued a reporting finding “a number of serious internal control and financial issues,” including: (a) relatives of board members were employed in administrative and staff positions in the school; (b) a lack of written procedures, such as the basic duties and responsibilities of time-keepers, supervisors, and managers in preparing and retaining time and attendance records; and (c) failure to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management requiring that accounts payables remain current, cash flow is positive, and assets are safeguarded against loss from unauthorized use or disposition. At the end of June 2014, the school had an unrestricted general fund balance deficit of \$36,351 and expenditures exceeded revenues by \$27,802.⁴³¹

The executive director was Devoria Berry. Her brother, Randolph Keaton, was the board’s chair; her niece, Leslie McLaurin, had janitorial and transportation contracts with the school; and her other niece, Andrea Simmons, was a board member and the school’s contracted finance officer. Katie Graham was the wife of a board member, David Serrett, and the school’s child nutrition director. The school entered into multiple contracts with Berry’s businesses, Community Support Agency LLC and Men and Women United. Additionally, the school did not have documentation of a loan from Berry for \$200,000, nor was it approved by the Board. The school dispersed “loan” repayments totaling \$184,000 to Berry without board approval.⁴³²

In January 2015, Berry resigned. The next month, Simmons resigned, and teachers took a pay cut and began providing janitorial services. The month after that, eight school employees sent state

officials a letter stating the school was “deteriorating rapidly” and urging the state to close the school immediately for the benefit of the students. The school had four full-time teachers and two substitutes for 87 students in kindergarten to seventh grade. On March 30, 2015, the SBE voted to initiate revocation of the school’s charter. Hours later, the school had an emergency board meeting and voted to relinquish its charter. The following day, the school’s board notified parents that the school would be closing on April 2, even though the state would have allowed the school to remain open through the end of the 2014-15 school year. The school’s principal wrote to a DPI administrator, “I cannot wait for this mess to be over!” Approximately 61 students had to find a new school for the last two months of the school year.⁴³³

Low Student Enrollment

Sometimes, charter schools cannot sustain themselves because students do not enroll. While public schools, too, sometimes close due to low enrollment, they close at a much lower rate than charter schools.

BLUE-GREEN Academy opened in Winston-Salem in 2019. Male and female students were taught separately – males in the Boys Learning Under Excellence (BLUE) Academy and females in the Girls Receiving Every Education Need (GREEN) Academy – in St. Peter’s World Outreach Center. In June 2020, the school had only 48 enrolled students (under the 80 minimum required by the State); its board decided to relinquish its charter due to low enrollment and St. Peter’s Church not renewing its lease with the school. The following month, the SBE approved the school’s relinquishment of its charter. The school still owed the church \$86,000.⁴³⁴

Entrepreneur High School opened in a former grocery store in Charlotte in 2014, with a plan to provide vocational-technical education to “at-risk” high school students. Before the school opened, the CSAB had found serious inadequacies with the school’s application. The school received the lowest possible rating on a “ready to open” report from the OCS, which had flagged the application for: (a) an unclear mission statement; (b) an education plan that did not meet the rigor necessary for a school that targets an at-risk student community; (c) a too-slim budget for staffing and professional development; (d) having school employees also serve as voting members on the school’s board; and (e) only the principal/founder to balance the books “at least monthly.” The SBE approved the school’s charter anyway.⁴³⁵

Problems arose in 2014, as the school lost students but continued to over-report student enrollment, did not record its accounting entries in a timely manner, and struggled to obtain a certificate of occupancy for its facility, which caused the school to open in a temporary facility.⁴³⁶

In January 2015, the *Charlotte Observer* reported that the school had only \$14 remaining in its bank account and only 30 enrolled students, far below the anticipated 180 and statutorily required 65. The newspaper also reported that the school owed more than \$275,000 to the State, the DPI’s Division of School Business projected that the school would close the fiscal year with a deficit in excess of \$400,000, and the school’s board had fired its founder and principal and was looking to a management company to take over the school.⁴³⁷ In March 2015, the SBE voted to revoke the

school's charter. Becky Taylor, a member of both the CSAB and the SBE, said she had a gut feeling that revocation would happen. She added, "And it's actually worse than what I thought it would be."⁴³⁸

Global Achievers School opened in August 2018 in Spring Hope (Nash County). The CSAB was aware of issues with the school before it even opened, including low enrollment (only 65 students had enrolled, although the school projected 240), as well as issues with the exceptional children program, lunch program, transportation, and its policy manual. Additionally, the school had initially held classes in the gymnasium of an old school and planned to move into mobile classroom units on the property of the old school. However, county inspectors told the school it would have to vacate until the buildings were renovated. Forced to find a temporary campus, Global Achievers began to hold classes at the former Falls Road Baptist Church School, shuttling the entire student body from Spring Hope to Rocky Mount on school buses the school purchased. The long bus rides, coupled with reports from parents on social media of several instances of bullying on the bus ride, caused parents to remove their children.⁴³⁹

By October 8, 2018, the school still had only 63 students enrolled. In September, the school had drawn down \$73,372 more than the authority to draw based on actual month one student average daily membership. NCDPI issued a letter of financial noncompliance to the school.

Southern Nash News reported: "The closure not only affects the Global Achiever students, but also their counterparts at Spring Hope Elementary who will now have to make room for the majority of what is the equivalent of three more full classes. While other area schools lost students to Global Achievers, Spring Hope seemed to bear the brunt of the loss. Spring Hope's staffing levels were decreased this fall in response to the number of students (and public funding) that left and headed across town to Global Achievers. The sudden influx of students could mean overcrowded classrooms and dozens of students having to adjust back to the public school curriculum as opposed to the Project-Based curriculum that is offered at Global Achievers. It is also unclear if any of the public funds that went to Global Achievers for each child could be recouped to offset the expense of adding them back to Nash-Rocky Mount Schools."⁴⁴⁰

On November 1, 2018, the SBE revoked the school's charter. The school appealed. By the end of November, its enrollment was down to 47. On December 14, 2018, after a panel upheld the SBE's decision, the school closed. Staff had not been paid for December.⁴⁴¹ The school's principal, Lisa Swinson, went on to become a principal mentor for N.C. State University and to open an educational consulting firm.⁴⁴²

Grandfather Academy, which obtained a charter from the State in 2002 and was located in Banner Elk (Avery County), served students who had been placed in a Grandfather Home for Children's residential treatment program and students who needed specialized education because of abuse or neglect. By April 2020, the school was not serving any students from the local community and had only five other students – all of whom were placed in Grandfather Academy's psychiatric residential treatment facility. In June 2020, the school relinquished its charter and closed.⁴⁴³

The School of the Arts for Boys Academy (SABA) opened in Pittsboro (Chatham County) in August 2023. It was projected to have 116 students in grades three through six. On October 10, 2023, the DPI's School Business Division placed the SABA on both governance and financial noncompliance status. About a week later, the Charter Schools Review Board (CSRB) revoked the school's charter and ordered it to close by December 31, 2023. The SABA had only had 50 students, below the minimum of 85 students required under state law for charter schools; and it needed 88 students to break even financially. In December 2023, the SBE rejected the SABA's appeal.⁴⁴⁴

NC Newsline reported that weeks before the Charter School Review Board revoked SABA's charter citing enrollment concerns, Toomer filed a "notice of intent to establish a private school" with the state Division of Non-Public Education. On January 8, 2024, the SABA officially became a private school. The school's director, Valencia Toomer, encouraged families to apply for private school vouchers from the State. She told NC Newsline, "One hundred percent of our families to date have applied for the state vouchers for the upcoming school year."⁴⁴⁵

Inadequately Serving Students with Disabilities

Charter schools have also closed or had their charters revoked due to inadequately serving students with disabilities.

Dynamic Community Charter School opened in Raleigh in 2014, with plans to serve about 70 students with intellectual and developmental disabilities in grades 6-12. The school's building had been used as a nursing home; the small rooms remained. In November 2014, the principal resigned, as did the lead special education teacher.

During the first half of the school's first school year, DPI staff found: (a) that the school's administrator was not well-versed in serving students with disabilities; (b) "significant issues" with the school's staff training, curriculum and materials, teaching strategies, teacher licensure, safety and health, and inappropriate behavior between teachers and students; and (c) noncompliance with legal requirements related to identifying and evaluating students with disabilities (known as "Child Find"), placing students in the least restrictive environment, having a continuum of alternative placements, having highly qualified special education teachers, and individualized education program (IEP) development and implementation.

At its December 2014 meeting, the CSAB learned that the people who applied for a charter were no longer on the school's board, the school's budget did not reflect accurate information, and "the school appeared completely unprepared for" exceptional children. The school owed every student compensatory services. By January 2015, the school had a deficit of \$265,000, despite cutting teacher salaries in November and December; and it still owed about \$36,000 in compensatory services.

In February 2015, DPI staff found, during a follow up visit, that IEPs were not being followed, the school did not have a guidance counselor to assist with high school graduation, and teachers were

teaching outside their licensure areas. The following month, the SBE voted to revoke the school's charter. The school lost its appeal in June 2015.⁴⁴⁶ Materials from the SBE read⁴⁴⁷:

... [C]oncerns arose with respect to the educational services by [the school] and about the safety of students attending the school. This prompted further investigation, which revealed a number of instances where the school has been untruthful in dealing with DPI and raised significant doubts about mutual trust. Concerns included IEPs developed and managed incorrectly with an by non-EC certified staff; scripts provided to staff to use with DPI representatives to divert attend from trust practices; Teacher Assistant used inappropriately; improper student supervision and unattended students in unsafe situations; no healthcare plans for students; little to no appropriate instruction for students; improperly trained staff in management or instruction of the special student population; inordinate staff absences; and numerous problems surrounding upcoming test administration.

Elizabeth Grinton Charter School opened in Wilkes County in 1997, with plans to serve students who had learning disabilities or trouble in other schools. In December 1999, the school's charter was revoked for non-compliance with laws and regulations regarding students with disabilities, including failing to re-evaluate special education students properly, not following state procedures for suspending students with disabilities, and the school's special education teacher did not hold a teaching license.

Problems at the school continued. A May 2015 report for the SBE found: (a) inaccurate reporting of student headcounts; (b) missing student attendance records and sign-in/sign-out records; (c) that the EC program needed a full continuum of services; (d) that teachers needed more familiarity with IEPs; (e) special education paperwork that was not properly completed; (f) more specifically designed services were necessary for IEPs; and (g) more collaboration was necessary between the EC program and the general educational program. The SBE again voted to revoke the school's charter. The school lost its appeal and closed.⁴⁴⁸

Partnership Achieving Community Education (PACE) Academy opened in Chapel Hill in 2004, with plans to serve high school students who had learning disabilities or behavioral problems.⁴⁴⁹ In November 2013, the CSAB unanimously recommended to the SBE that it reject the school's application for a renewal of its charter. The CSAB cited "a pattern of noncompliance issues, financial concerns, declining student enrollment, and low academic performance." Specifically, the CSAB reported that: (a) the school failed to adequately test 95% of its students in 2010 and 2011; (b) over four consecutive years, the school's test results failed to meet goals for subgroup growth; (c) at one point, the school claimed it had 169 students, but a state audit found just 89 present; and (d) spending by the school exceeded revenues by \$245,000 in 2012-13, a sign of "serious cash flow issues." The OCS was also looking into the school's involvement with Bull City Prep Academy, a for-profit club basketball team. Nine of the club's high school team's 11 players attended the school.⁴⁵⁰

In February 2014, the SBE voted to revoke the school's charter, citing patterns of non-compliance, low academic performance, and concerns related to financial stability. The school's leaders appealed. In June 2014, the parties settled with an agreement that state officials would grant a three-year renewal.⁴⁵¹

In December 2014, DPI staff visited the school and found: (a) that specially designed instruction was not properly delivered by school staff; (b) problems with the school's attendance record-keeping procedures; (c) a failure to provide students with a free appropriate public education for all students; and (d) a teacher who was scheduled in the student accounting system to teach two different courses, in two different classrooms, to two different sets of students, at the same time. The SBE revoked the school's charter after the 2014-15 school year.⁴⁵²

Multiple Problems

Sometimes charter schools close because they experience multiple problems at the same time.

Coastal Academy for Technology and Science opened in Carteret County in 1998. During the 2012-13 school year, only about 20% of students were proficient on the end-of-course exams and one-third of the school's students withdrew. The SBE voted not to renew the school's charter. After a lengthy court battle, the SBE agreed that the school could remain open through June 30, 2014, provided it kept accurate financial records and audit reports and maintained satisfactory test scores. However, in January 2014, the CSAB recommended to the SBE nonrenewal of the school's charter due to a variety of factors, including high student absenteeism rate, low academic performance and inadequate growth, financial noncompliance, noncompliance with requirements related to exceptional children, inadequate record-keeping, and insufficient student enrollment. Additionally, for several years the school has had the highest dropout rate in the state. In February 2014, the SBE voted not to renew the school's charter after it expired that June.⁴⁵³

East Winston Primary School opened in Forsyth County in 1998. In January 2001, the State placed the school on a financial warning due to a large operating deficit. From December 2001 to April 2003, the school operated without a board of directors. Numerous school staff members complained to the OCS about a lack of oversight at the school and financial matters, including the lack of receipts to support questionable credit card bills. The SBE initiated revocation. The School requested a review of the SBE's decision. A review panel found that the school: (a) failed to establish and maintain a viable governance structure for the school; (b) was guilty of filing false reports; (c) failed to provide prompt and accurate responses to requests for information; (d) failed to comply with the State Open Meetings Law; (e) failed to keep full and accurate minutes of its board meetings; (f) failed to maintain proper accounting practices; (g) submitted false student enrollment information; and (h) failed to explain and substantiate numerous questionable credit card charges. An administrative law judge upheld the revocation on appeal.⁴⁵⁴

Ignite Innovation Academy opened in Greenville (Pitt County) in 2016. The SBE did not renew the school's charter for after 2019-20. The school's enrollment had dropped from a high of 251 students in 2018 to 171 in 2019. Additionally, for three straight years, the school received an F from the State. During 2018-19, only 11.7% of Ignite's economically disadvantaged students were

grade-level proficient compared to 42.7% of the county's economically disadvantaged students. Moreover, the school had a large turnover rate among staff, and only about 60% of teachers were certified. Finally, the school's 2019 audited financial records showed three financial weaknesses, including a low unassigned fund balance of \$6,323, liabilities exceeding current assets by \$5,107, and expenditures exceeding revenue by \$30,319.⁴⁵⁵

Kennedy Charter School opened on the campus of Elon Homes and Schools for Children in Charlotte in 1998. The school initially served high school students who had been removed from abusive or neglectful families. Rev. Fred Grosse ran Elon Homes for Children, which also oversaw the school. Grosse was the school's superintendent. The non-profit, which also ran foster care and mental health charities, paid him \$187,000 per year and his wife more than \$120,000 per year. The charity also loaned the couple \$175,000 to cover the mortgage on a home they could not sell and paid for Grosse's country club membership.⁴⁵⁶

In 2012, Kennedy Charter School became a K-12 school. Later that year, the CSAB expressed concerns about the school's low academic achievement and recommended renewal of the school's charter for only three years. Then, in February 2016, the SBE voted to not renew the school's charter due to its declining enrollment, F from the State for 2014-15 (only 19% of students passed state exams), deficit of \$30,000, and tardy financial audit.⁴⁵⁷

Laurinburg Charter School opened in Scotland County in 1998. In 2003, the North Carolina High School Athletic Association (NCHSAA) heard a report from the Review and Officiating Committee, which recommended that the school be dropped from the association based on five issues: (a) using boarding students; (b) providing students with financial aid, when needed; (c) playing out-of-state, non-sanctioned events; (d) using non-certified officials at home games; and (e) failing to respond to the NCHSAA's repeated requests for information. The following year, the CSAB recommended revocation of the school's charter due to financial mismanagement, irregularities in the school's administration of state accountability testing, and breaking student enrollment/residency laws. In fiscal year 2022, the school drew \$102,539.76 in state funding for 24 out-of-state students. The school closed in 2006. It owed hundreds of thousands of dollars to the State.⁴⁵⁸

Provisions Academy opened in Lee County in 2000. In November 2008, the DPI's Office of Child Nutrition Services sent a three-person team to the school after a complaint was filed. The team was unable to obtain required documentation, and thus, was unable to determine or validate the school's claims for federal reimbursement for nutrition programs. The records were incomplete, inaccurate, or nonexistent. The audit showed that far fewer students were in attendance at the school than appeared on the rolls, that students were not accounted for, that food was not properly accounted for, and applications for free and reduced lunch were incomplete or inaccurate. The team also noted that there was a significant lack of discipline and little apparent learning at the school.⁴⁵⁹

The following month, a Child Nutrition Services consultant visited the school a second time and found substantially the same problems as before. The consultant's report read, "It is also of concern that the school appears to be designating students who have difficulty with coming to school regularly, or who have difficulty with the structure of the school day as 'homebound,' and

that those students are then provided with instruction only when they decide to come to school to get assignments or seek help from a teacher.” The SBE revoked the school’s chart at the end of 2008-09.⁴⁶⁰

Student First Academy opened in 2013 in Charlotte. It was previously a private school that sought public charter funding to pull itself out of the financial crisis. Phyllis Handford co-founded the school and served on its board. Her husband and son were employed by the school. In November and December 2013, DPI staff investigated the school and found: (a) missing records for enrolled students and unopened records for enrolled students with disabilities; (b) voluminous unopened mail (including overdue bills, demand notices, and time-sensitive reporting materials); (c) significant amounts of missing financial data (e.g., receipts for credit cards and bank statements); (d) out-of-date staff contact information; (e) no custodial or maintenance schedule in place, an untidy environment, and restrooms lacking paper towels and soap; (f) incomplete employee files; (g) inconsistent and haphazard student schedules; (h) no schedule of special education for students with disabilities; (i) safety and occupational environmental deficiencies; (j) faculty members not using lesson plans; (k) virtually no textbooks ordered or purchased; (l) children taking naps as part of the day (some for as long as two hours); (m) general disorder throughout the middle school; (n) no lead teachers; (o) no teacher observations; (p) no nursing license for the person listed as the school nurse; and (q) no intervention referral team.⁴⁶¹

Additionally, DPI staff learned that: (a) Phyllis Handford had been maintaining a separate checking account to which she made internet transfers from the school’s account; (b) staff consistently arrived late for work or did not show up at all; (c) busses consistently showed up late (as much as 90 minutes after the start of the school day); (d) salaries of \$90,000 and \$85,000 for the head of school and deputy head of school, respectively, even though the charter application indicates that their salaries would be \$65,000 and \$55,000, respectively; (e) several hearing-impaired children were enrolled but the school had not hired or contracted with an audiologist to serve the students; (f) the head of school and deputy head of school had alternating schedules and were both working approximately half-time, even though they were listed as full-time employees; (g) employee background checks were not completed until October 2013; (h) the school owed \$450,000 to vendors dating back to July 2013; and (i) the board chair, Victor Mack, had given Handford a \$25,000 raise without reading the contract and admitted that he had not known that Handford had been convicted of misrepresentation to obtain unemployment benefits.⁴⁶²

The board fired Handford and her co-founder, Sandra Moss, in December 2013. Nevertheless, the school’s problems continued into the spring. In February 2014, reports emerged that the two founders set up a separate bank account for some of the money they managed for the school and spent at least \$92,000 without proper documentation. In March 2014, the school had over \$600,000 in overdue bills and bank loans. Also, OCS staff inspected the school and reported concerns regarding instruction and support for students with disabilities. By April, the school’s student population had dropped by over 20%.⁴⁶³

On April 1, 2014, the school’s board held an emergency meeting and voted to surrender its charter. The next day, the board relinquished its charter at the SBE meeting. SBE member John

Tate said, “We haven’t had a disaster like this that I can recall,” and he said the school’s collapse serves as a warning about the need for tight scrutiny of charter schools. On April 3, families learned that the school would close on April 11, 2014, leaving about 270 students scrambling to find schools less than two months before the end of the year.⁴⁶⁴

Parents were understandably upset. Erinn Rochelle “beat herself up for months” for having enrolled her son in the school, where he “had learned virtually nothing” and “fell behind in all subjects.” Kimyatta Evans said, “My daughters are heartbroken, heartbroken.” Tanya McCray said closure had been “a big challenge” and she did not wish the experience on any parent. Connie Dobie said, “The heart-rending part of the whole deal is the students. They’re asking ‘What do we do now? Where are we going?’” Rucelle Robinson wrote, “I feel as though I failed my son in this process of trying to achieve a better education for him. (End-of-grade) tests are coming (and) he is ill prepared, lack of books all year, not even a full classroom set of books.” Inga Mayfield said the school “really failed the children by not staying open to the end of the year.” Jackie Davis said, “My youngest son is afraid of the unknown and upset over having to leave behind teachers he has come to like. But the oldest, well, he thought the closing of the school meant he could stay home the rest of the school year.”⁴⁶⁵

Staff were also upset. For example, second-grade teacher Richard Ramos, a native of the Philippines, claimed school leaders misled him into believing the school was arranging to have his work visa extended. However, he said the school’s leaders not only failed to get the extension but filed tax paperwork listing him a contract worker, rather than a full-time employee. He learned his only recourse was to leave the country immediately, with his wife, a three-year-old son, and a baby only weeks old. “We’re broke and on our own now, so I’m talking with a church to see if we can get money for plane tickets home to the Philippines,” he said. “I had other options for jobs, and if I’d chosen to go to another school, this wouldn’t have happened.”⁴⁶⁶

Torchlight Academy, Three Rivers Academy, Essie Mae Kiser Foxx, and Elaine Riddick

These four charter schools were owned and operated by Donnie and his wife, Cynthia McQueen. In 2002, Donnie and Cynthia McQueen, took over a failing charter school, Northeast Raleigh Charter Academy, Inc., in Wake County and renamed it Torchlight Academy.⁴⁶⁷

In June 2014, McQueen formed Torchlight Academy Schools, LLC (TAS), a for-profit education management organization (EMO), which began managing Torchlight Academy. Not long after, they became part of Global Education Resources, LLC (GER), another for-profit EMO. At GER, they joined Simon Johnson and his wife Dollean, as well as Eugene Slocum and his wife, Susan. Simon had founded College Preparatory and Leadership Academy in High Point and Quality Education Academy in Winston-Salem.⁴⁶⁸ Eugene and Susan founded and ran Alpha Academy in Fayetteville.⁴⁶⁹

By 2019, GER had largely dissolved, leaving the McQueens to manage both TAS and GER. That same year, they attempted to expand their portfolio. TAS was listed as the EMO for five charter applicants: Rise Academy, Power Elite Male Academy, North Davidson Academy, Lighthouse

Charter School of the Arts, and BEAM Academy. None of the applications were approved by CSAB or the State Board.⁴⁷⁰

Meanwhile, the four charter schools that McQueen managed, Torchlight Academy, Three Rivers, Essie Mae Kiser Foxx Charter School, and Elaine Riddick Charter School were experiencing operational issues that ultimately resulted in the revocation of their charters.⁴⁷¹

Torchlight

From 2016 to 2021, Torchlight paid Donnie McQueen over \$5,000,000 in management fees. He and his wife Cynthia also paid themselves salaries to be the school's executive director and principal, respectively. For example, during the 2019-20, they were each paid \$100,000; and during 2020-21, they were each paid \$160,000. They hired their daughter, Shawntrice Andres, as the exceptional children director, with an annual salary of \$65,000. Also, they hired their son-in-law, Aaron Andrews, as a teaching assistant or co-teacher, for which he was paid \$32,000; they paid Aaron's custodial company, Luv Lee Sanitation, \$20,000 a month to clean six classrooms and some common areas of the school. In 2019, McQueen registered S.O.D. Holdings to do business in North Carolina. The company held the deed for the property that housed Torchlight. The school applied for federal 21st Century Community Learning funds to rent space from S.O.D. Holdings for an afterschool program in 2019-20 and 2021-22. In other words, McQueen sought federal funding for his charter school to pay the company's rent.⁴⁷²

In December 2021, the CSAB found that the school had committed numerous violations with respect to its exceptional children program, including lack of qualified staff, failure to properly implement students' IEPs, alteration and falsification of student records, failure to provide documentation requested by the DPI's EC Division, and "grossly negligent" administrative oversight⁴⁷³. The SBE found that the school "demonstrated a substantial failure" to comply with the federal and state laws governing the education of students with disabilities. The school failed to correct the identified deficiencies in the delivery of special education services.

The school failed to submit its financial audit for the 2020-21 school year to the DPI, which was due by the end of October 2021. The deadline was extended a month; the school missed that deadline too.⁴⁷⁴

On February 28, 2022, the CSAB voted to recommend revocation of the school's charter for the following reasons:

1) violations of laws and regulations including special education laws and federal conflict of interest and self-dealing regulations 2) violations of the charter agreement including failure to provide requested documents and failure to provide adequate oversight and management of school 3) failure to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management, failure to retain and provide to DPI required documentation of expenditures of state and federal monies and comply with other fiscal requirements 4) allowing the ongoing self-dealing and conflicts of interest by the EMO Torchlight LLC.⁴⁷⁵

In response, the board held an emergency meeting and voted to: (a) remove Torchlight Academy Schools, LLC as its EMO; (b) accept the resignation of McQueen as Executive Director; (c) dismiss his wife, daughter, and son-in-law; and (d) terminate its contract with Luv Lee Sanitation. The board's actions were insufficient. In March 2022, the SBE voted to revoke the school's charter.⁴⁷⁶ Then, in May 2022, the SBE voted to reject the school's appeal.⁴⁷⁷

The school closed in June 2022. About 600 K-8 students had to find a new school for 2022-23. The school's board was granted a temporary restraining order to prevent McQueen from "taking, moving, secreting or destroying property" at the school. The board also demanded that McQueen return two Ford Expeditions, 12 big-screen televisions, and 23 laptop computers and tablets taken from the school.⁴⁷⁸

Three Rivers Academy

In 2014 Heritage Collegiate Leadership Academy opened in Bertie County. Shortly thereafter, it began experiencing problems, including missing deadlines to submit audits and operating close to a financial deficit. It was labeled as low-performing by the State in 2015 and 2016.⁴⁷⁹

In November 2017, the SBE voted to revoke Heritage Collegiate Leadership Academy's charter. However, in May 2018, before the revocation went into effect, the SBE agreed to pass control of Heritage Collegiate Leadership Academy to GER. Steven Walker – then CSAB vice-chair, former policy director for Lt. Governor Dan Forest, and a lawyer for charter schools – said, "The people who make up Global Education Resources have shown they have the 'know-how' to run a high-quality charter school in Bertie County. ... I look forward to seeing outstanding results in Bertie County as this strong nonprofit board teams up with proven charter leaders to operate a much-needed charter school"⁴⁸⁰.

In 2018, the school began operating as Three Rivers Academy. Allegations surfaced that the McQueens utilized a variety of questionable practices to increase the school's enrollment and secure additional public funding. The alleged conduct included: (a) reporting as enrolled dozens of children who seldom showed up for class; (b) paying families for students to attend class; (c) approaching families outside of local stores and showing them pictures of children wearing freshly pressed uniforms and riding in fancy cars; and (d) giving parents who enrolled their children a raffle ticket for a BMW⁴⁸¹.

In January 2022, the SBE voted to revoke Three Rivers' charter because the school had: (a) failed to meet accepted standards of student performance; (b) failed to provide financial records and audits; (c) violated federal and state law (including special education law); (d) violated its charter by failing to promptly provide requested information; and (e) failed to provide required oversight and accountability over the school's CMO. The SBE also found that the school's governing board had failed to properly monitor Three Rivers' affairs. McQueen appealed.⁴⁸²

On April 8, 2022, the SBE issued an order that read, "While the State Board would prefer to close a school at the end of the school year, the State Board finds that immediate closure is necessary to protect the education needs, welfare, and rights of students currently enrolled in Three Rivers

Academy, and to safeguard the financial and other public assets that are in the school's possession."⁴⁸³ The SBE authorized Bertie County Schools to be the fiscal agent related to the school closure, including making final payments to vendors and employees. About 85 students had to find a new school for the final weeks of the 2021-22 school year. On June 30, 2022, the school's charter was officially terminated.⁴⁸⁴

Before the end of 2022, Kashi Bazemore, the chairperson of the school's board of directors applied for a charter to open Heritage Collegiate Leadership Academy (HCLA) of Wake County. The CSAB recommended that the SBE approve the charter. In March 2023, the SBE rejected the application. The SBE upheld a recommendation by its three-member appeals panel to deny HCLA of Wake County a charter.⁴⁸⁵

Essie Mae Kiser Foxx Charter School

In 2018, Essie Mae Kiser Foxx Charter School opened in Rowan County and hired McQueen to run the school. After its first year, the school was identified as low-performing, with an "F" grade. Only 10.9% of students were grade-level proficient during that school year, according to state data. In contrast, the county's grade-level proficiency rate was 42.5%.⁴⁸⁶

In September 2019, school leaders appeared before the CSAB. The board determined that the school was noncompliant with the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), school leaders could not clearly articulate the school's financial position and operating budget, and the school had testing irregularities in spring 2019. The CSAB also approved the school ending its relationship with McQueen. School officials said TAS had failed to account for expenditures, pay operating costs, and follow policies, rules, regulations, and the curriculum adopted by the school's governing board. Tina Wallace, who chaired the school's board, accused McQueen of poor fiscal and operational management. The CSAB placed the school on state funding "allotment restrictions."⁴⁸⁷

The school started the 2020-21 school year with 124 students. At the end of the first month, it was down to 99. On December 2, 2020, the CSAB voted to recommend that the SBE revoke the school's charter. A week later, the school submitted its first-year financial report – 13 months late – to the DPI. In January 2021, the SBE voted to revoke the school's charter because of its late financial reports and failure to meet student performance requirements. In March 2021, the second-year financial report, which was due in October 2020, still had not been submitted. The SBE upheld its decision. In 2021-22, the school reopened as Essie Academy, a private school. It served 37 students in Southern City Tabernacle AME Zion Church. For 2022-23, the school moved to the lower level of an old bank facility and received \$157,200 in state voucher ("Opportunity Scholarship") funds.⁴⁸⁸

Elaine Riddick Charter School

In October 2018, Tony Riddick applied for a charter to open Elaine Riddick Charter School in Perquimans County in fall 2020. He selected McQueen's TAS to manage the school. In June 2019, the SBE granted the school a charter, contingent upon successful completion of a planning year.

In August 2020, the SBE voted to delay opening the school due to insufficiencies with enrollment, liability insurance, the lunch program, facilities, and staffing. In June 2021, the school appeared before the CSAB, which voted to not allow the school to move forward to opening for students.⁴⁸⁹ The following month, the SBE unanimously voted to accept the CSAB's recommendation. The SBE revoked Elaine Riddick's charter because it failed to obtain federal tax-exempt status and an Education Certification of Occupancy for the building it intended to use as a school. The school appealed the SBE's decision and had a panel hearing on August 2, 2021. The panel recommended upholding the decision, which the SBE did.

In August 2021, the school's board again applied for a charter; this time they applied for a fast-track application to open in August 2022. The application read:

The school has been working and expending resources to grow enrollment for 3 years to this date. For context, the school was approved in 2018 to open in 2020. The school did not open in 2020 due to related COVID obstacles, like many other schools set to originally open in 2020. In the subsequent planning year, the school ran into issues obtaining its Educational Certificate of Occupancy which ultimately resulted in the Charter School Advisory Board voting the school not ready to open. However, the school already had 150 confirmed enrollments for the 2021 school year.

Now, the school is in a position where it does not wish to lose its work and momentum. Having 150 confirmed enrollments from interested families puts our position in a unique position to understand that we have more than just interest in the school but willing school participants that have bought into the mission and vision of our school. Charter applications at this juncture typically only have surveys to illustrate interest. Elaine Riddick Charter School is submitting an application where parents have filled out actual enrollment forms that were ready to attend in just 1 month from the submission of this application.⁴⁹⁰

Anne White, chair of the Perquimans Board of Education, shared her concerns about McQueen with the DPI. She wrote, in part:

Torchlight Academy Schools LLC is listed as both a third-party consultant ... and as the contracted management company of the Elaine Riddick Charter School. A review of Torchlight's performance data is alarming. Over the past six years, data reviewed show the average school performance grade of Torchlight Academy as 53 and the school earned 4 Cs, 1 D, and 1 F. Five years of data for Three Rivers, also operated by Torchlight, the average performance grade was 34 including 2 Ds and 3 Fs.⁴⁹¹

In November 2021, the CSAB questioned Riddick about using TAS as the school's EMO and discussed McQueen's non-compliance with federal rules for exceptional children at Torchlight Academy and Three Rivers Academy. "The current non-compliance status would make it

impossible for us to agree today for you to partner with Torchlight,” Advisory Board Chairwoman Cheryl Turner said. The CSAB voted to recommend not moving the school to “ready to open status.” A news headline read, “Proposed charter school’s application slowed by link to troubled management firm.”⁴⁹²

In January 2022, the SBE agreed with the CSAB’s recommendation. Ultimately, Elaine Riddick Charter School never opened, and its charter was effectively revoked.⁴⁹³

Endnotes

- ¹ North Carolina State Board of Education Department of Public Instruction, March 2025 Highlights of the North Carolina Public School Budget
- ² Dennis Patterson, *N.C. Assembly Made a Bit of History in '95*, ASSOCIATED PRESS, December 26, 1995, https://greensboro.com/n-c-assembly-made-a-bit-of-history-in-95/article_698f30b2-50e6-5888-a034-9a2b7466ecb8.html.
- ³ North Carolina State Board of Education Department of Public Instruction, 2023 Annual Charter Schools Report 6
- ⁴ N.C.G.S. § 115C-218(a).
- ⁵ N.C.G.S. § 115C-218.110.
- ⁶ N.C.G.S. § 115C-218.10.
- ⁷ N.C.G.S. § 115C-218.10
- ⁸ G.S. § 115C-238.29D(b).
- ⁹ John Manuel, *Charter Schools Revisited: A Decade After Authorization, How Goes the North Carolina Experience?*, NORTH CAROLINA INSIGHT, NORTH CAROLINA CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH (May 2007) https://nccppr.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Charter_Schools_Revisited.pdf.
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- ³³ E.G., East Voyager Academy
- ³⁴ E.G., Pocosin Innovative Charter
- ³⁵ E.G., Apprentice Academy HS of NC, Aspire Trade High School
- ³⁶ E.G., Concord Lake STEAM Academy, Envision Science Academy, Mallard Creek STEM, Queen City STEM School, Southwest Charlotte STEM, The Math & Science Academy of Apex, Triad Math and Science Academy, Triangle Math and Science Academy, Wayne STEM Academy, Research Triangle High School, Reaching All Minds Academy, Discovery Charter School, Next Generation Academy, Eno River Academy, Northeast Academy of Aerospace and Advanced Technology
- ³⁷ E.G., Paul R. Brown Leadership Academy
- ³⁸ E.G., A.C.E. Academy, Pinnacle Classical Academy
- ³⁹ E.G., Bonnie Cone Classical Academy, Classical Charter Schools of Leland, Excelsior Classical Academy, Legacy Classical Academy, Piedmont Classical High, Pinnacle Classical Academy, Shining Rock Classical, Thomas Jefferson Classical, Unity Classical, Monroe Charter Academy, Millennium Charter Academy, Lake Lure Classical Academy,
- ⁴⁰ E.G., Casa Esperanza Montessori, Island Montessori Charter, Moore Montessori Community School, Mountain City Public Montessori, Sterling Montessori Academy, Washington Montessori, and Willow Oak Montessori
- ⁴¹ E.G., Raleigh Oak Charter
- ⁴² E.G., Pioneer Springs Community School, Summit Charter
- ⁴³ E.G., Alamance Community School, Central Park School for Children, Falls Lake Academy, Ascend Leadership Academy, Wilmington School of Arts
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- ⁵⁷ E.G., Summerfield Charter Academy uses Southwest Foodservice Excellence (SFE), The Arts Based School uses Goodness Gracious (Monday- Thursday). The Capitol Encore Academy uses J&S Food Company. Lakeside Charter Academy partners with Wholesome Food Services. Gate City Charter Academy uses SLA Management. Summit

Creek Academy uses SLA Management. Paul R. Brown Leadership Academy, Shining Rock Classical Academy, Bradford Preparatory School, Charlotte Lab School uses Charlotte-based caterer Two Guys 'N a Kitchen.

Roxboro Community School, Millennium Charter Academy, The Exploris School

⁵⁸ E.G., Community Public Charter School, Falls Lake Academy, The Experiential School, Shining Rock Classical Academy, The Hawbridge School, Alamance Community School, New Dimensions, Woods Charter, Excelsior Classical Academy, NC Leadership Academy, Neuse Charter School, Lincoln Charter School, Metrolina Regional Scholars Academy, Socrates Academy, Corvian Community School, East Wake Academy

Eno River Academy

Southern Wake Academy

Casa Esperanza Montessori

Endeavor Charter

Triangle Math & Science

Pine Springs Prep

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⁶² North Carolina State Board of Education Department of Public Instruction, 2023 Annual Charter Schools Report 38

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⁶⁵ North Carolina State Board of Education Department of Public Instruction, [March 2025 Highlights of the North Carolina Public School Budget](#)

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145

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The OCS reported that, during 2022-23, its staff implemented CSAB meetings, presented at monthly SBE meetings, processed charter amendments, supported and trained charter school applicants, managed the charter school application process, created and sent weekly communications to charter schools, responded to requests for data and records, reviewed compliance documents, reviewed documents during planning years to ensure alignment with the charter agreement and charter school laws, conducted trainings for charter school boards, facilitated the charter school teacher of the year and principal of the year evaluation processes, conducted stakeholder interviews for renewal schools, managed grievances from stakeholders, approved alternative evaluation instruments, conducted site visits, and participated on numerous committees. North Carolina State Board of Education Department of Public Instruction, Report to the North Carolina General Assembly, 2022 Annual Charter Schools Report 8

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¹⁶⁸ State law directs that the SBE “shall report annually no later than June 15 to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee on the following: 1) The current and projected impact of charter schools on the delivery of services by the public schools; 2) Student academic progress in charter schools as measures, where available, against the academic year immediately preceding the first academic year of the charter schools’ operation; 3) Best practices resulting from charter school operations; 4) Other information the State Board considers appropriate.” G.S. § 115C-

¹⁶⁹ “The OCS Authorizing Team works to ensure a transparent charter authorizing and opening process which is aligned to state law and holds charter boards to high expectations resulting in quality charter schools.” North Carolina State Board of Education Department of Public Instruction, Report to the North Carolina General Assembly, 2022 Annual Charter Schools Report

¹⁷⁰ The OCS Accountability Team works to ensure North Carolina’s charter schools are fiscally, operationally, and academically strong by providing support, oversight, and rigorous renewal standards. North Carolina State Board of Education Department of Public Instruction, Report to the North Carolina General Assembly, 2022 Annual Charter Schools Report

¹⁷¹ The OCS External Support Team works to support the diverse stakeholders of the NC charter school system including members of the public, media, researchers, parents, and staff. North Carolina State Board of Education Department of Public Instruction, Report to the North Carolina General Assembly, 2022 Annual Charter Schools Report

¹⁷² Baquero had worked as a consultant in the OCS for more than four years. Her primary duties as a consultant included serving as the liaison between the OCS and the Charter School Advisory Board and overseeing risk assessments, the charter school ready-to-open process, charter school application reviews, and annual reports to the State Board of Education and General Assembly. Prior to working at DPI, she worked as an attorney representing municipalities in land use and employment matters and then as a Teach for America Corps member in Atlanta and charter school teacher for six years. <https://www.linkedin.com/in/ashleybaqueronc/>

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a description of a program that implements one or more of the purposes of charter schools in state law; a description of student achievement goals for the school's educational program and the method of demonstrating that students have attained the skills and knowledge specified for those student achievement goals; the governance structure of the school, including the names of the initial members of the board of directors of the nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation and the process to be followed by the school to ensure parental involvement; the local school district in which the school will be located; admission policies and procedures; a proposed budget for the school and evidence that the financial plan for the school is economically sound; requirements and procedures for program and financial audits; a description of how the school will comply with various state laws; types and amounts of insurance coverage, including bonding insurance for the principal officers of the school, to be obtained by the charter school; the term of the charter; the qualifications required for individuals employed by the school; the procedures by which students can be excluded from the charter school and returned to a public school; the number of students to be served, which number shall be at least 80, and the minimum number of teachers to be employed at the school, which number shall be at least three (however, the charter school may serve fewer than 80 students or employ fewer than three teachers if the application contains a compelling reason, such as the school would serve a geographically remote and small student population); information regarding the facilities to be used by the school and the way administrative services of the school are to be provided; and the process for conducting a weighted lottery that reflects the mission of the school, if the school desires to use a weighted lottery. G.S. § 115C-218.1(b).

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Appendix A: National History of Charter Schools

1971: UC Berkeley professors Stephen Sugarman and Jack Coons publish “Family Choice in Education,” which outlines the concept of a charter school model that they called “Independent Public Schools.”

1974: University of Massachusetts Amherst Professor Ray Budde authored an article titled “Education by Charter.”

1983: The National Commission on Excellence in Education publishes *A Nation at Risk*, which laments that “the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people.”

1988: In a National Press Club speech, Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, calls for establishing charter schools (or “schools of choice”) run by teams of teachers and charged with creating innovative solutions to the challenge of underserved students.

1991: Minnesota passes the first charter school law in the U.S.

1992: The country’s first charter school opens in St. Paul, Minnesota.

1992: California becomes the second state to authorize charter schools.

1993: Colorado becomes the third state in the U.S. to enact a charter school law. Massachusetts, Michigan, New Mexico, and Wisconsin follow suit.

1994: President Clinton includes a charter school grant program in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization.

1994: Arizona, Hawaii, and Kansas pass charter school laws.

1994: Congress establishes the U.S. Department of Education’s Charter School Program to provide funds to state education agencies to create and support charter schools.

1995-2017: Many more states, D.C., and Guam pass charter school laws, including Alaska, Arkansas, Delaware, Louisiana, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Texas, and Wyoming in 1995; Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, North Carolina, South Carolina, and D.C. in 1996; Nevada, Ohio, and Pennsylvania in 1997; Georgia, Idaho, Missouri, New York, Utah, and Virginia in 1998; Oklahoma and Oregon in 1999; Indiana in 2001; Iowa and Tennessee in 2002; Maryland in 2003; Guam in 2009; Mississippi in 2010; Maine in 2011; Alabama in 2015; Washington in 2016; and Kentucky in 2017.

2002: President Bush signs The No Child Left Behind Act, which promoted charter schools.

2012: President Obama launches the Race to the Top initiative, which promotes charter schools.

2017: Betsy DeVos – a prominent supporter of charter schools and private school vouchers, and President Trump’s nominee for U.S. Secretary of Education – is confirmed by the U.S. Senate.

2018: Puerto Rico passes a charter school law.

2019: West Virginia becomes the 45th state to allow charter schools.

2021-22: According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in fall 2021, 3,674,712 students (7.5% of all students enrolled in public schools) attend 7,847 charter schools nationwide.

2023: Oklahoma became the 46th state to authorize charter schools.

2025: North Dakota became the 47th state to authorize charter schools.

Appendix B

NC Charter Schools Ranked by Per Pupil Expenditure Rank: 2023-24.¹

Charter School Name	State PPE	Federal PPE	Local PPE	Total PPE	Total Rank
REVOLUTION ACADEMY	7,172.33	334.85	31,297.43	38,804.61	1
YOUNGSVILLE ACADEMY	7,816.29	261.17	20,428.44	28,505.90	2
AMERICAN LEADERSHIP ACADEMY CHARLOTTE	8,298.54	2,384.08	15,425.58	26,108.20	3
CHILDREN'S VILLAGE	9,093.04	3,230.37	9,686.64	22,010.05	5
FERNLEAF	7,367.71	366.74	13,642.07	21,376.52	8
MARJORIE WILLIAMS ACADEMY	9,376.13	3,077.25	7,693.33	20,146.71	11
HALIWA-SAPONI TRIBAL SCHOOL	10,555.38	6,931.54	2,373.06	19,859.98	12
THOMAS ACADEMY	8,630.84	5,682.32	5,063.86	19,377.02	14
RISE SOUTHEAST RALEIGH	7,647.94	1,379.80	10,334.98	19,362.72	15
ARAPAHOE CHARTER SCHOOL	11,330.46	1,602.31	6,150.67	19,083.44	16
STEELE CREEK PREPARATORY	7,705.03	4,013.74	7,255.76	18,974.53	18
KIPP GASTON COLLEGE PREP	12,430.05	2,146.56	4,235.99	18,812.60	19
CLASSICAL CHARTER SCHOOL	7,463.16	3,705.77	7,178.04	18,346.97	20
ASHEVILLE PEAK ACADEMY	7,988.18	2,123.02	8,133.68	18,244.88	21
MAUREEN JOY CHARTER SCHOOL	8,336.43	2,486.47	7,265.41	18,088.31	22
RIISING LEADERS ACADEMY	8,917.03	840.21	8,249.55	18,006.79	23
KIPP HALIFAX COLLEGE	11,392.87	2,675.51	3,793.13	17,861.51	24
Z.E.C.A. SCHOOL OF THE ARTS AND TECH	8,121.08	5,322.23	4,201.26	17,644.57	25
GLOBAL SCHOLARS ACADEMY	8,633.30	2,830.14	6,064.69	17,528.13	26
DURHAM CHARTER SCHOOL	7,697.26	884.38	8,296.87	16,878.51	28
COMMUNITY SCHOOL OF DIGITAL AND	7,890.09	2,869.99	6,087.90	16,847.98	29
GIRLS LEADERSHIP ACACEMY	8,048.90	2,470.56	6,317.77	16,837.23	30
SUMMIT CHARTER	8,036.81	222.66	8,551.12	16,810.59	31
MOORE MONTESSORI COMMUNITY SCHOOL	7,548.40	442.09	8,767.00	16,757.49	32

Charter School Name	State PPE	Federal PPE	Local PPE	Total PPE	Total Rank
HENDERSON COLLEGIATE	9,376.40	4,490.74	2,843.09	16,710.23	33
KIPP DURHAM COLLEGE	7,868.40	2,561.16	6,153.20	16,582.76	34
SUCCESS INSTITUTE CHARTER SCHOOL	8,872.50	1,334.79	6,327.90	16,535.19	35
DAVIDSON CHARTER ACADEMY	7,867.47	561.49	7,971.76	16,400.72	36
WEST LAKE PREPARATORY	7,510.73	832.72	7,893.22	16,236.67	37
REACHING ALL MINDS ACADEMY	9,016.80	1,307.20	5,897.61	16,221.61	38
MOVEMENT SCHOOL NORTH	7,184.15	302.82	8,606.32	16,093.29	39
QUALITY EDUCATION ACADEMY	7,476.01	2,924.51	5,434.05	15,834.57	40
METROLINA REG SCHOOL	6,559.79	1,191.08	8,077.99	15,828.86	41
CHARLOTTE SECONDARY	8,380.25	1,368.91	5,672.04	15,421.20	43
COLLEGE PREP AND LEADERSHIP ACADEMY	7,229.99	1,623.00	6,481.33	15,334.32	44
THE INSTITUTE FOR THE DEV OF YOU	7,893.46	2,693.06	4,422.56	15,009.08	45
MOUNTAIN DISCOVERY	9,906.09	732.34	4,325.89	14,964.32	46
POCOSIN INNOVATIVE	12,289.26	711.05	1,751.46	14,751.77	47
CENTRAL WAKE HIGH SCHOOL	8,734.51	2,148.60	3,856.73	14,739.84	48
CARTER G. WOODSON SCHOOL	7,652.47	1,643.49	5,350.48	14,646.44	49
WATER'S EDGE VILLAGE	7,159.35	217.93	7,162.57	14,539.85	50
TRIAD MATH AND SCIENCE	7,468.14	1,762.20	5,258.44	14,488.78	51
BONNIE CONE CLASSIC ACADEMY	7,195.65	838.75	6,330.17	14,364.57	52
HOBGOOD CHARTER SCHOOL	11,359.61	829.9	2,161.93	14,351.44	53
WILLOW OAK MONTESSORI	7,937.46	353.05	6,057.20	14,347.71	54
LAKE LURE CLASSICAL ACADEMY	8,570.10	965.26	4,722.72	14,258.08	55
CENTRAL PARK SCHOOL	8,434.26	426.98	5,375.63	14,236.87	56
CLASSICAL CHARTER SCHOOL	9,615.20	2,574.99	2,033.32	14,223.51	57
RALEIGH OAK CHARTER	7,954.38	494.33	5,655.36	14,104.07	58
EAST VOYAGER ACADEMY	7,814.31	683.36	5,531.38	14,029.05	59
BONNIE CONE LEADERSHIP ACADEMY	7,198.32	886.89	5,837.82	13,923.03	60

Charter School Name	State PPE	Federal PPE	Local PPE	Total PPE	Total Rank
TILLERY CHARTER ACADEMY	9,040.47	1,872.08	2,975.26	13,887.81	61
UNITED COMMUNITY SCHOOL	8,058.27	595.08	5,227.55	13,880.90	62
LAKESIDE CHARTER ACADEMY	8,063.67	1,248.54	4,478.66	13,790.87	63
NEXT GENERATION ACADEMY	7,075.40	2,405.06	4,300.77	13,781.23	64
ISLAND MONTESSORI CHARTER SCHOOL	7,792.58	200.67	5,738.41	13,731.66	65
SUGAR CREEK CHARTER SCHOOL	7,464.18	1,984.07	4,278.83	13,727.08	66
EVERGREEN COMMUNITY CHARTER	7,556.21	399.18	5,716.64	13,672.03	67
DISCOVERY CHARTER SCHOOL	7,539.05	455.43	5,655.02	13,649.50	68
RIDGEVIEW CHARTER SCHOOL	7,736.30	2,250.97	3,640.12	13,627.39	69
ASPIRE TRADE HIGH SCHOOL	7,724.78	260.38	5,604.91	13,590.07	70
WOODS CHARTER	7,516.29	395.56	5,671.24	13,583.09	71
COMMONWEALTH HIGH SCHOOL	7,798.22	2,841.45	2,925.46	13,565.13	72
VALOR PREPARATORY ACADEMY	7,265.63	761.52	5,511.09	13,538.24	73
TELRA INSTITUTE	6,936.20	177.02	6,421.92	13,535.14	74
FRANCINE DELANY NEW SCHOOL	7,725.32	515.25	5,064.89	13,305.46	75
KIPP CHARLOTTE	7,494.75	3,486.04	2,307.42	13,288.21	76
APPRENTICE ACADEMY	7,839.81	1,366.97	4,019.79	13,226.57	77
BREVARD ACADEMY	8,644.30	465.77	4,100.42	13,210.49	78
MOUNTAIN CITY PUBLIC MONTESSORI	7,744.34	569.89	4,892.57	13,206.80	79
A.C.E. ACADEMY	7,692.09	1,102.65	4,394.85	13,189.59	80
PAUL R. BROWN LEADERSHIP ACADEMY	8,108.68	2,648.07	2,431.06	13,187.81	81
SALLIE B HOWARD SCHOOL	8,364.64	1,702.79	2,996.88	13,064.31	82
ROCKY MOUNT PREPARATORY	8,037.01	2,071.81	2,944.70	13,053.52	83
THE EXPEDITION SCHOOL	7,729.84	1,709.08	3,596.16	13,035.08	84
CARDINAL CHARTER ACADEMY	7,578.37	1,316.84	4,116.58	13,011.79	85
VERITAS COMMUNITY SCHOOL	7,091.14	1,950.67	3,825.63	12,867.44	86
MONROE CHARTER ACADEMY	7,994.69	3,464.07	1,316.51	12,775.27	87

Charter School Name	State PPE	Federal PPE	Local PPE	Total PPE	Total Rank
TMSA CHARLOTTE	7,714.35	449.9	4,574.33	12,738.58	88
BEAR GRASS CHARTER SCHOOL	9,429.34	393.63	2,897.19	12,720.16	89
COMMUNITY SCHOOL OF DAVIDSON	7,437.96	536.57	4,729.28	12,703.81	90
STEWART CREEK HIGH SCHOOL	8,151.54	1,515.93	3,014.78	12,682.25	91
CORVIAN COMMUNITY SCHOOL	7,033.46	458.47	5,189.64	12,681.57	92
CASA ESPERANZA MONTESSORI	7,426.56	432.01	4,816.46	12,675.03	93
TILLER SCHOOL	7,902.77	404.66	4,328.60	12,636.03	94
WILMINGTON PREPARATORY	7,401.88	1,293.94	3,903.53	12,599.35	95
IC IMAGINE	7,666.25	503.49	4,371.90	12,541.64	96
PIONEER SPRINGS COMMUNITY	7,527.73	398.65	4,573.52	12,499.90	97
MALLARD CREEK STEM	7,204.78	489.83	4,781.47	12,476.08	98
STARS CHARTER SCHOOL	7,298.52	365.07	4,790.16	12,453.75	99
UNITY CLASSICAL CHARTER SCHOOL	7,005.78	365.97	5,063.50	12,435.25	100
VOYAGER ACADEMY	7,791.06	545.67	4,061.84	12,398.57	101
CARDINAL CHARTER ACADEMY	7,311.24	774.67	4,253.65	12,339.56	102
CLASSICAL CHARTER SCHOOL	7,806.50	507.41	4,000.05	12,313.96	103
SUMMIT CREEK ACADEMY	6,989.89	1,322.18	3,971.35	12,283.42	104
SHINING ROCK CLASSICAL ACADEMY	7,947.92	609.21	3,724.93	12,282.06	105
DILLARD ACADEMY	8,181.01	2,710.10	1,350.28	12,241.39	106
CIS ACADEMY	9,748.74	830.88	1,659.05	12,238.67	107
TWO RIVERS COMMUNITY SCHOOL	7,824.58	1,573.55	2,773.16	12,171.29	108
THE EXPERIENTIAL SCHOOL	8,058.88	419.48	3,673.77	12,152.13	109
THE FRANKLIN SCHOOL	7,645.68	852.96	3,645.29	12,143.93	110
WILMINGTON SCHOOL OF THE ARTS	7,819.73	807.62	3,491.27	12,118.62	111
KESTREL HEIGHTS SCHOOL	7,440.49	1,522.39	3,154.20	12,117.08	112
CAPE FEAR CENTER FOR INQUIRY	7,574.19	567.4	3,971.72	12,113.31	113
ALPHA ACADEMY	8,082.34	2,047.84	1,963.09	12,093.27	114

Charter School Name	State PPE	Federal PPE	Local PPE	Total PPE	Total Rank
THE MOUNTAIN COMMUNITY SCHOOL	7,948.23	488.27	3,617.12	12,053.62	115
MOVEMENT CHARTER SCHOOL	7,178.84	1,255.73	3,595.20	12,029.77	116
THE EXPLORIS SCHOOL	7,369.63	748.72	3,893.33	12,011.68	117
MOVEMENT SCHOOL SOUTH	7,563.87	570.34	3,873.47	12,007.68	118
TRIANGLE MATH AND SCIENCE	6,604.29	271.84	5,073.21	11,949.34	119
THE ARTS BASED SCHOOL	7,377.66	991.26	3,547.54	11,916.46	120
EXCELSIOR CLASSICAL	7,383.57	348.14	4,167.47	11,899.18	121
OLD MAINSTREAM ACADEMY	8,514.39	1,057.55	2,256.91	11,828.85	122
NORTHEAST ACADEMY OF AEROSPACE &	8,796.74	668.46	2,334.05	11,799.25	123
PIEDMONT CLASSICAL	7,307.30	775.81	3,705.86	11,788.97	124
CROSSCREEK CHARTER	8,539.78	857.33	2,375.53	11,772.64	125
SOUTHWEST CHARLOTTE	7,165.90	1,064.23	3,531.73	11,761.86	126
IREDELL CHARTER ACADEMY	7,220.90	914.46	3,595.85	11,731.21	127
CLASSICAL CHARTER SCHOOL	7,601.56	1,185.41	2,936.82	11,723.79	128
BETHEL HILL CHARTER	8,203.15	549.43	2,900.74	11,653.32	129
ARTSPACE CHARTER SCHOOL	7,919.93	988.05	2,744.32	11,652.30	130
STERLING MONTESSORI	7,174.04	202.25	4,262.71	11,639.00	131
VANCE CHARTER SCHOOL	9,061.90	613.65	1,941.70	11,617.25	132
MOVEMENT SCHOOL EAST	7,422.91	620.57	3,557.02	11,600.50	133
WAYNE STEM ACADEMY	8,628.34	787.27	2,166.81	11,582.42	134
SOUTHERN WAKE ACADEMY	7,871.08	358.85	3,279.21	11,509.14	135
ENO RIVER ACADEMY	7,484.81	488.02	3,530.20	11,503.03	136
FALLS LAKE ACADEMY	8,277.69	387.12	2,794.48	11,459.29	137
ACHIEVEMENT CHARTER	8,522.88	873.85	2,047.61	11,444.34	138
MAGELLAN CHARTER	6,976.58	237.11	4,185.70	11,399.39	139
WAKE PREPARATORY ACADEMY	8,038.53	406.86	2,936.11	11,381.50	140
AMERICAN LEADERSHIP ACAD - JOHNSTON	7,577.96	591.17	3,186.04	11,355.17	141

Charter School Name	State PPE	Federal PPE	Local PPE	Total PPE	Total Rank
PINE LAKE PREPARATORY	7,016.56	247.87	4,077.50	11,341.93	142
CHARLOTTE LAB SCHOOL	7,427.59	344.01	3,550.73	11,322.33	143
BRADFORD PREPARATORY	6,988.51	613.62	3,707.98	11,310.11	144
ANDERSON CREEK ACADADEMY	7,913.99	425.7	2,950.40	11,290.09	145
JACKSON DAY SCHOOL	7,163.34	349.43	3,767.80	11,280.57	146
NORTH EAST CAROLINA PREPARATORY	9,131.02	1,139.57	997.4	11,267.99	147
LONGLEAF SCHOOL OF THE ARTS	7,463.83	374.68	3,428.74	11,267.25	148
FAITH ACADEMY CHARTER	7,606.92	1,346.98	2,311.37	11,265.27	149
CONCORD LAKE STEAM ACADEMY	7,462.27	1,377.21	2,416.83	11,256.31	150
EMEREAU: BLADEN	9,179.07	965.78	1,105.07	11,249.92	151
AMERICAN LEADERSHIP ACADEMY - COAST	6,923.23	335.03	3,945.79	11,204.05	152
CORNERSTONE CHARTER	7,048.48	381.19	3,751.16	11,180.83	153
OXFORD PREPARATORY	8,045.71	319.58	2,792.78	11,158.07	154
CHATHAM CHARTER	7,402.69	705.35	3,042.43	11,150.47	155
UNION PREP ACADEMY	6,963.94	489.39	3,672.52	11,125.85	156
PREEMINENT CHARTER	7,679.04	1,061.87	2,354.81	11,095.72	157
THE MATH AND SCIENCE ACADEMY OF APEX	6,676.86	1,317.36	3,087.74	11,081.96	158
LINCOLN CHARTER SCHOOL	7,148.68	591.39	3,271.87	11,011.94	159
MOUNTAIN ISLAND CHARTER	6,948.70	365.02	3,686.15	10,999.87	160
OAK HILL CHARTER SCHOOL	8,160.60	975.9	1,856.67	10,993.17	161
ENVISION SCIENCE ACADEMY	7,070.94	386.52	3,517.93	10,975.39	162
WAYNE PREPARATORY ACADEMY	8,570.21	1,019.44	1,339.60	10,929.25	163
AMERICAN RENAISSANCE	7,419.57	792.3	2,687.63	10,899.50	164
FORSYTH ACADEMY	7,788.35	1,697.11	1,413.89	10,899.35	165
ENDEAVOR CHARTER SCHOOL	7,173.78	251.39	3,437.66	10,862.83	166
CAROLINA INTERNATIONAL	7,606.05	452.53	2,775.88	10,834.46	167
THOMAS JEFFERSON CLASSICAL ACADEMY	8,123.77	715.47	1,943.47	10,782.71	168

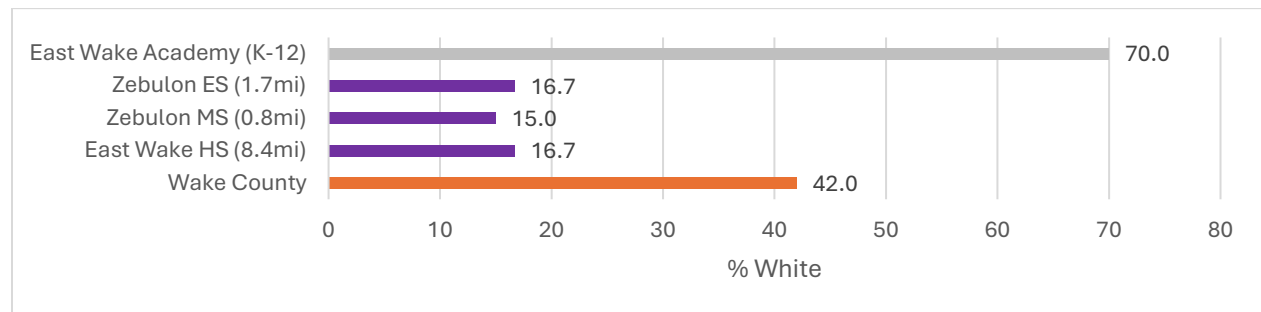
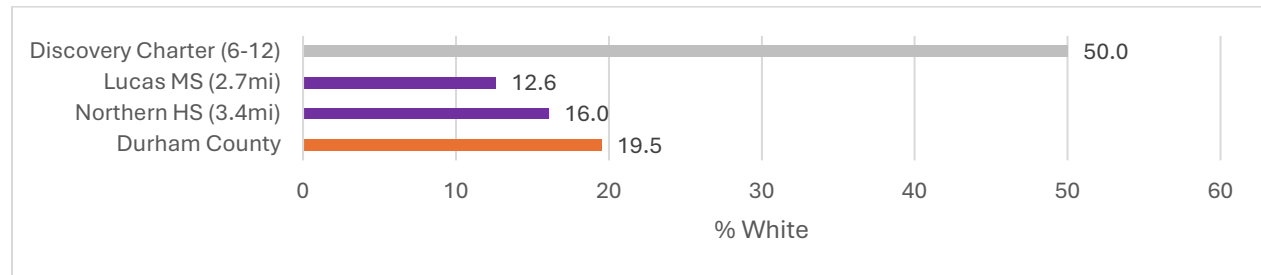
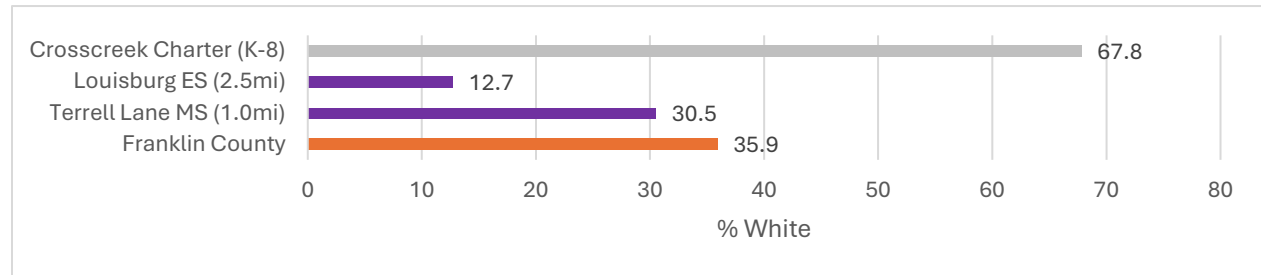
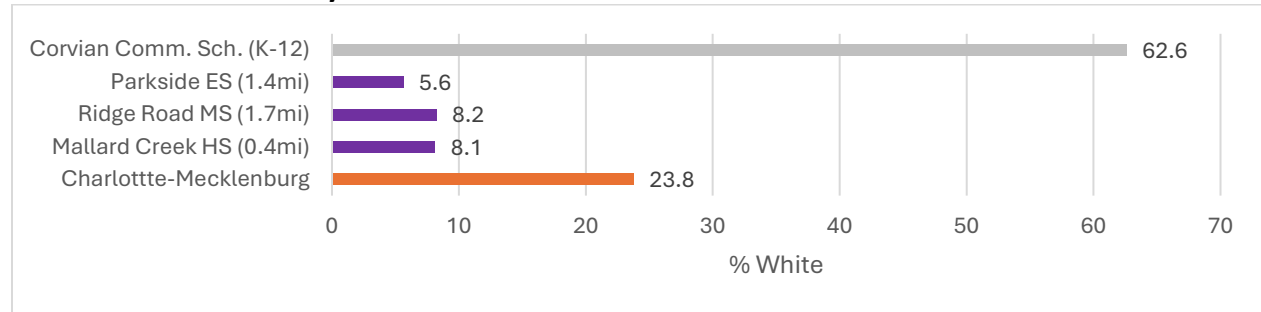
Charter School Name	State PPE	Federal PPE	Local PPE	Total PPE	Total Rank
WASHINGTON MONTESSORI	8,163.06	118.13	2,477.39	10,758.58	169
COMMUNITY PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL	7,132.75	371.13	3,247.42	10,751.30	170
THE HAWBRIDGE SCHOOL	7,307.34	332.41	3,085.52	10,725.27	171
LAKE NORMAN CHARTER	6,828.23	445.72	3,442.73	10,716.68	172
PINE SPRINGS PREPARATORY	6,937.68	239.59	3,474.78	10,652.05	173
ASCEND LEADERSHIP ACADEMY	7,666.44	221.96	2,735.56	10,623.96	174
SOCRATES ACADEMY	6,876.26	374.5	3,292.40	10,543.16	175
UNION DAY SCHOOL	7,111.52	362	3,052.21	10,525.73	176
GATE CITY CHARTER	7,617.76	691.99	2,186.37	10,496.12	177
CENTRAL CAROLINA ACADEMY	7,313.38	855.58	2,289.16	10,458.12	178
LANGTREE CHARTER ACADEMY	7,283.87	719.38	2,452.85	10,456.10	179
RALEIGH CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL	6,670.88	166.77	3,582.45	10,420.10	180
RESEARCH TRIANGLE HIGH SCHOOL	7,010.60	211.88	3,132.46	10,354.94	181
MILLENNIUM CHARTER	8,575.63	306.43	1,440.36	10,322.42	182
WILSON PREPARATORY	7,948.92	564.15	1,788.88	10,301.95	183
ROXBORO COMMUNITY SCHOOL	7,878.50	469.19	1,931.63	10,279.32	184
ALAMANCE COMMUNITY SCHOOL	7,668.23	450.2	2,137.69	10,256.12	185
NEW DIMENSIONS SCHOOL	8,128.46	372.77	1,752.20	10,253.43	186
BETHANY COMMUNITY SCHOOL	8,375.69	756.47	1,096.27	10,228.43	187
ROLESVILLE CHARTER ACADEMY	7,273.14	322.18	2,511.59	10,106.91	188
GUILFORD PREPARATORY ACADEMY	7,345.68	1,356.90	1,385.62	10,088.20	189
WINTERVILLE CHARTER	8,143.15	611.65	1,295.51	10,050.31	190
PINNACLE CLASSICAL	8,089.13	816.69	1,069.32	9,975.14	191
EAST WAKE ACADEMY	7,133.47	430.79	2,395.11	9,959.37	192
UWHARRIE CHARTER ACADEMY	7,975.97	470.28	1,479.03	9,925.28	193
QUEST ACADEMY	6,844.92	376.21	2,670.71	9,891.84	194
UNION ACADEMY	7,017.23	465.12	2,370.34	9,852.69	195

Charter Schools in North Carolina

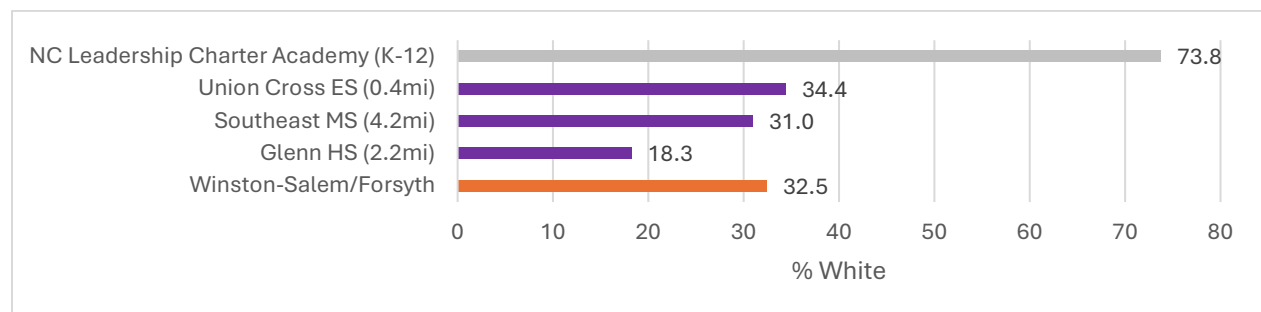
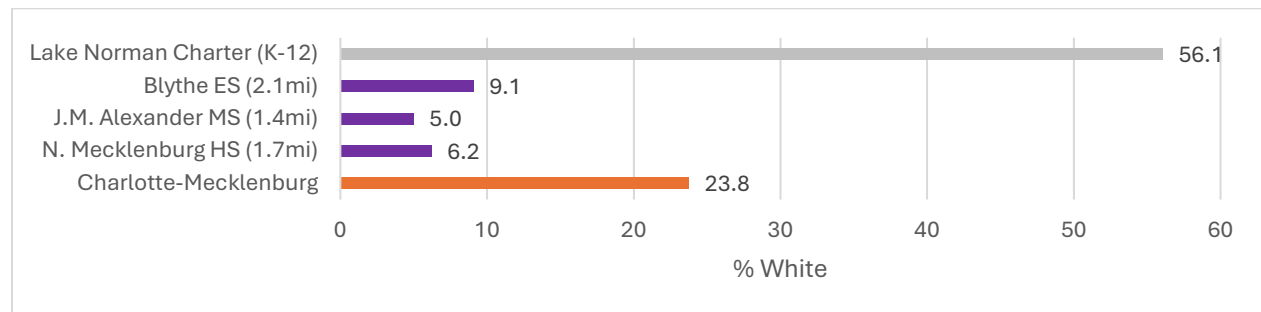
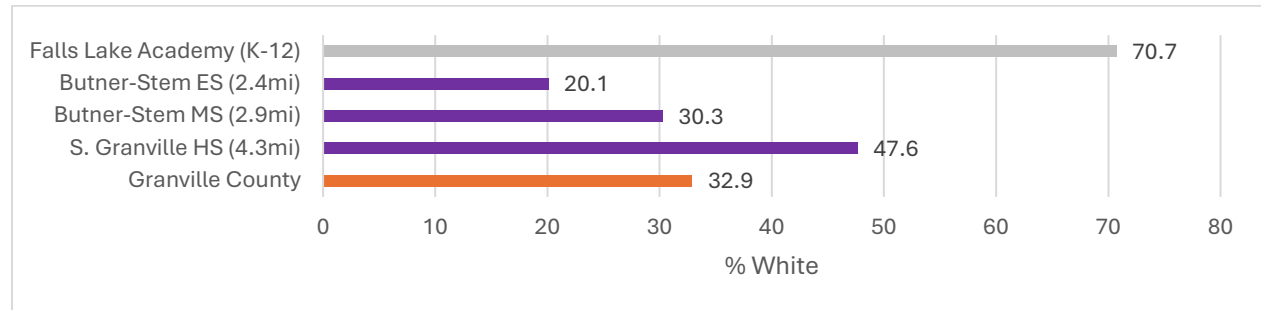
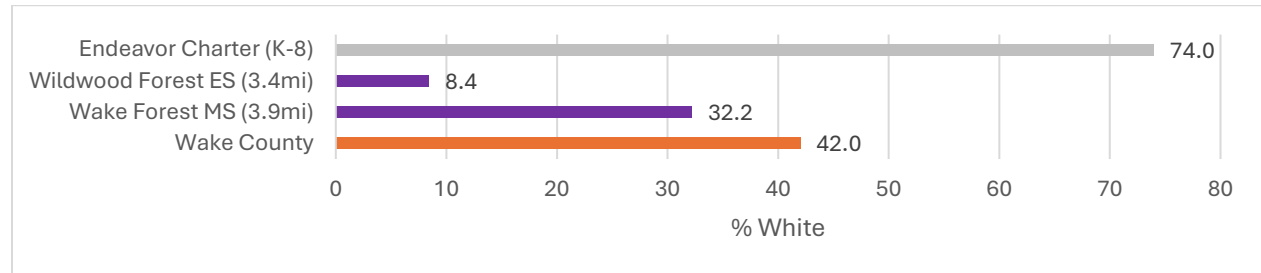
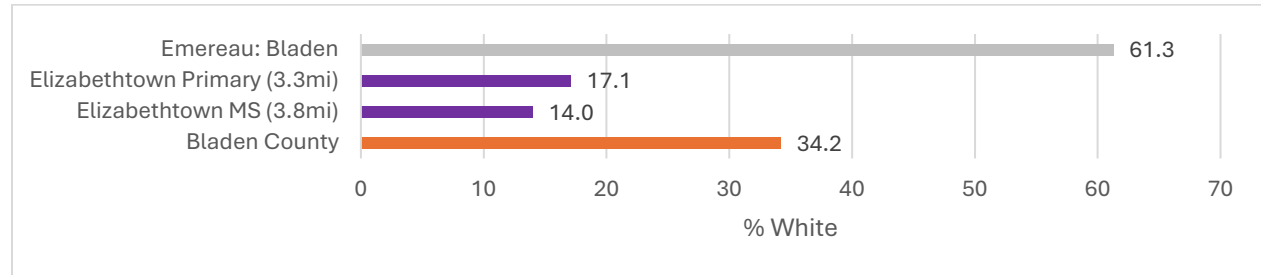
Charter School Name	State PPE	Federal PPE	Local PPE	Total PPE	Total Rank
CLOVER GARDEN	7,364.38	262.43	2,225.51	9,852.32	196
NEUSE CHARTER SCHOOL	7,649.74	757.11	1,374.62	9,781.47	197
RIVER MILL ACADEMY	7,187.58	254.22	2,327.15	9,768.95	198
THE ACADEMY OF MOORE COUNTY	7,598.21	185.58	1,840.93	9,624.72	199
DORAL ACADEMY OF NORTH CAROLINA	6,463.40	663.62	2,482.35	9,609.37	200
SOUTHEASTERN ACADEMY	8,774.11	257.04	489.1	9,520.25	201
MATTHEWS CHARTER ACADEMY	7,378.21	406	1,720.76	9,504.97	202
RESEARCH TRIANGLE CHARTER	7,494.38	879.84	1,122.51	9,496.73	203
GRAY STONE DAY SCHOOL	7,412.23	252.83	1,829.68	9,494.74	204
NC LEADERSHIP CHARTER	7,096.27	296.21	2,047.45	9,439.93	205

Appendix C

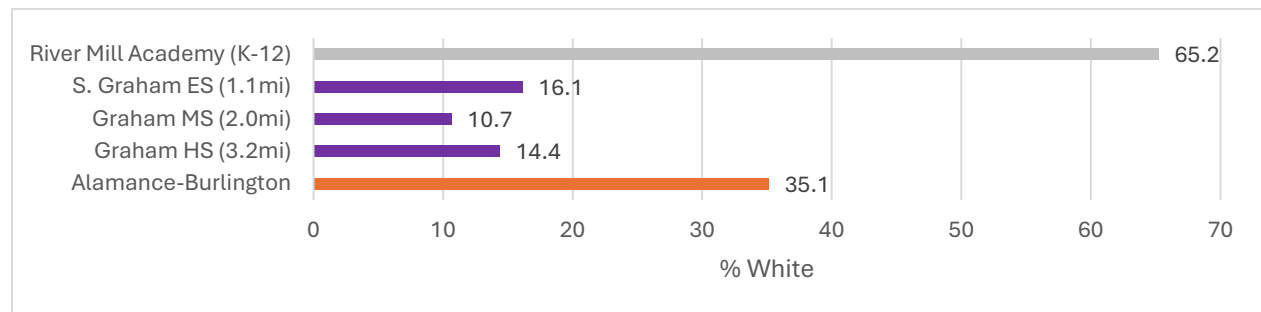
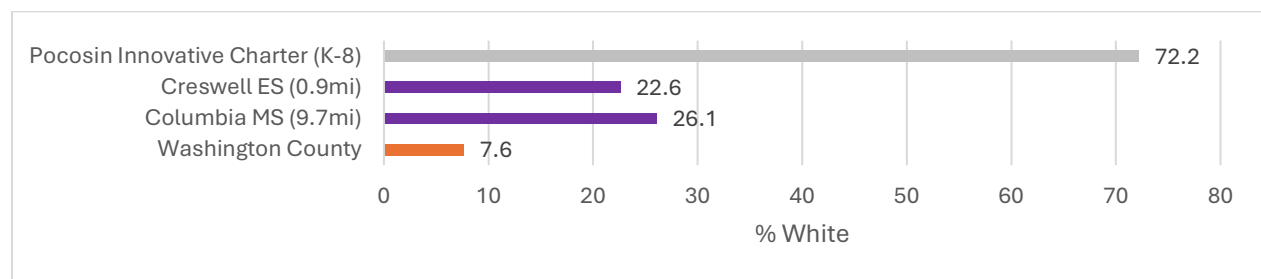
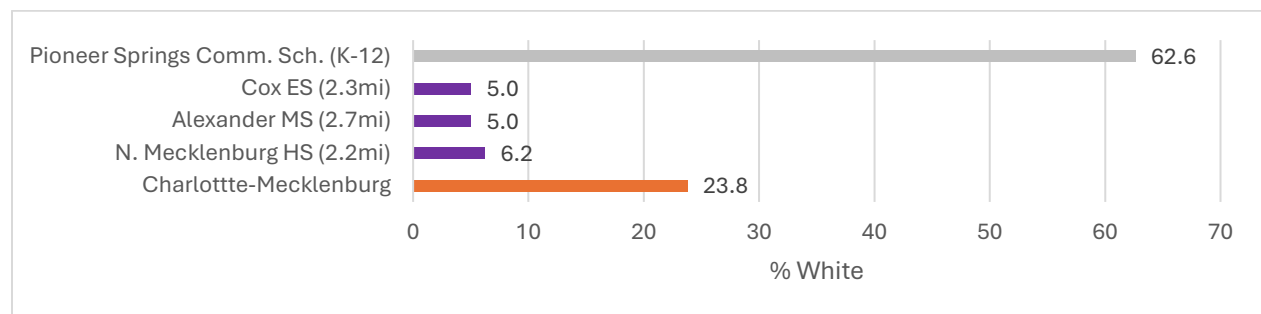
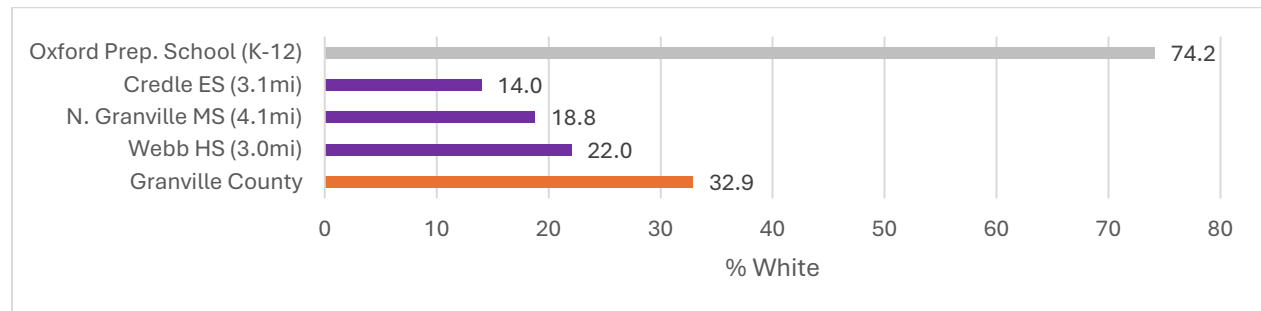
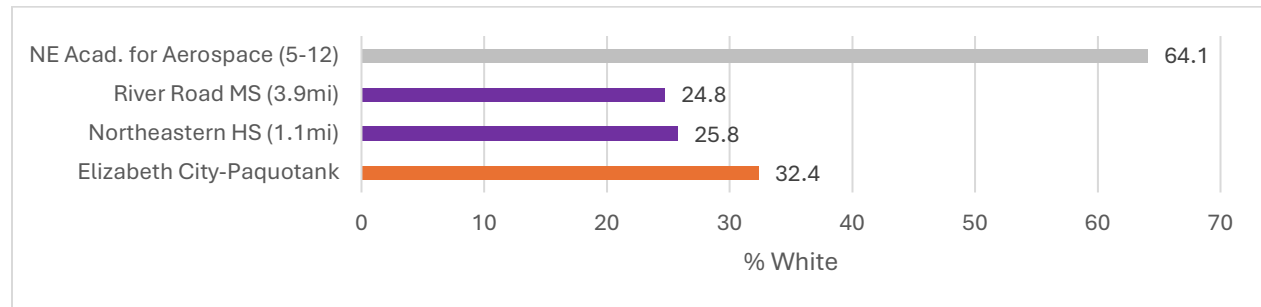
Examples of Disproportionately White Charter Schools Compared to the Public School District Where They Are Located and Nearest Traditional Public School: 2023-24.



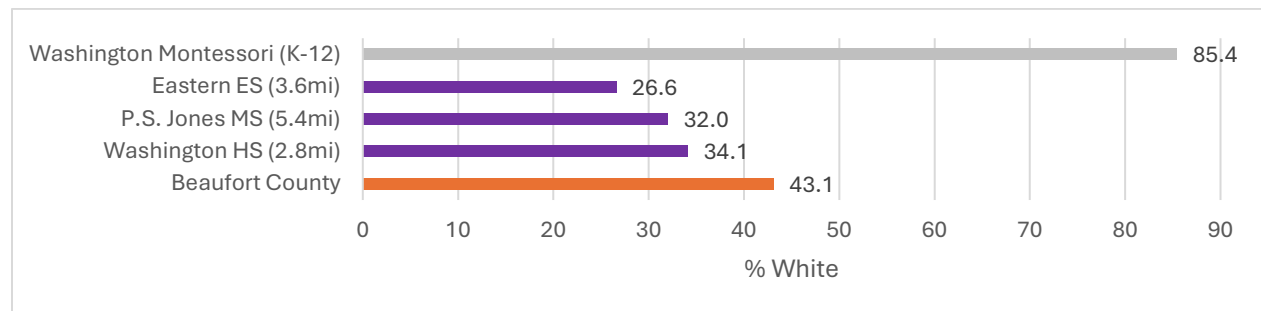
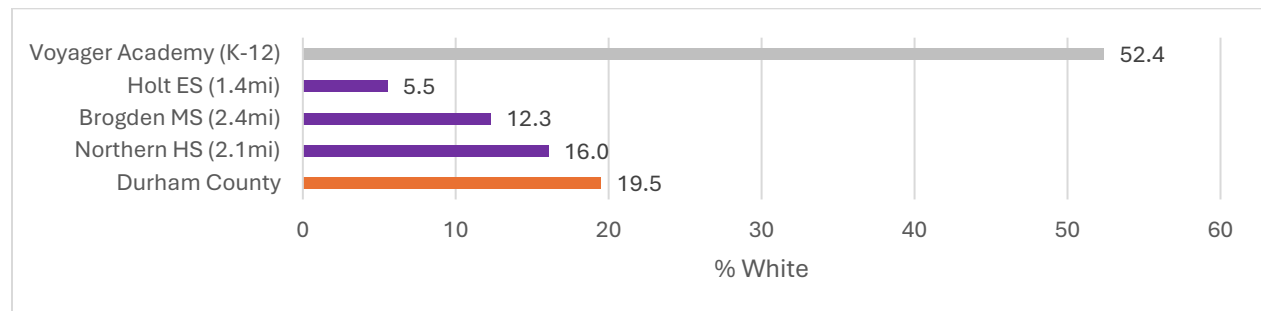
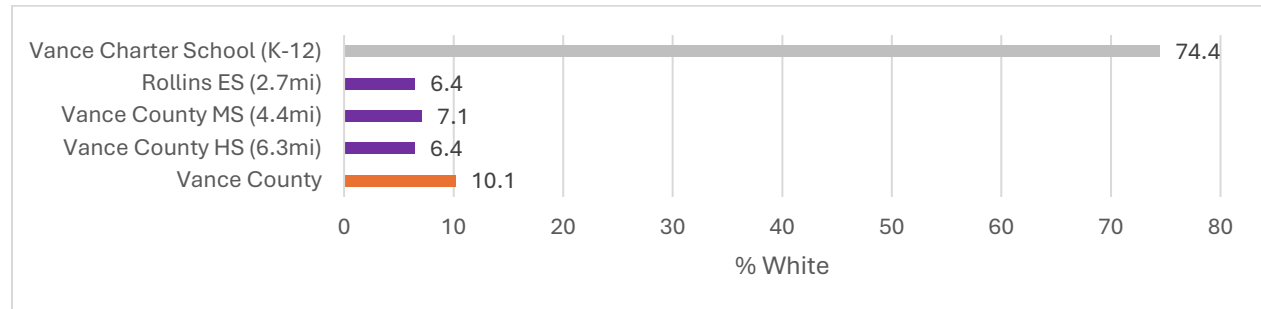
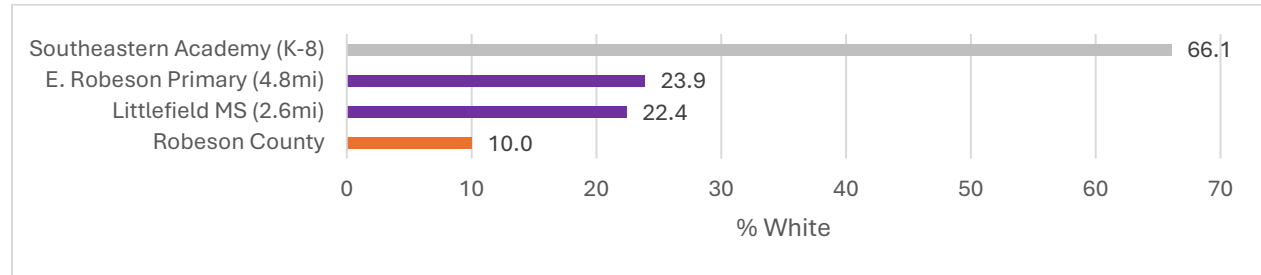
Charter Schools in North Carolina



Charter Schools in North Carolina



Charter Schools in North Carolina



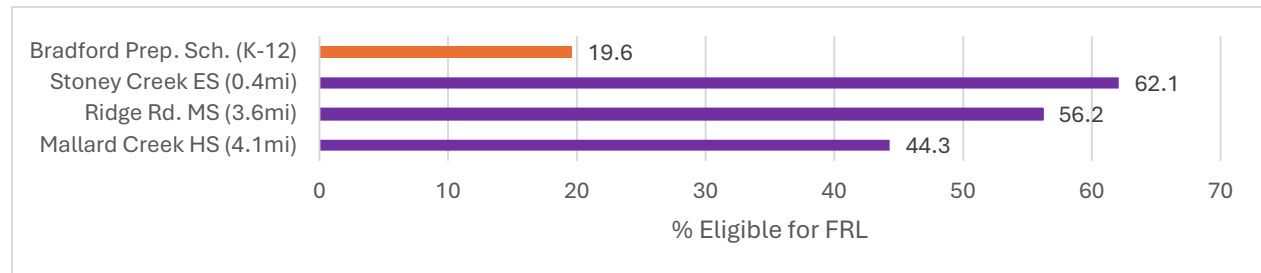
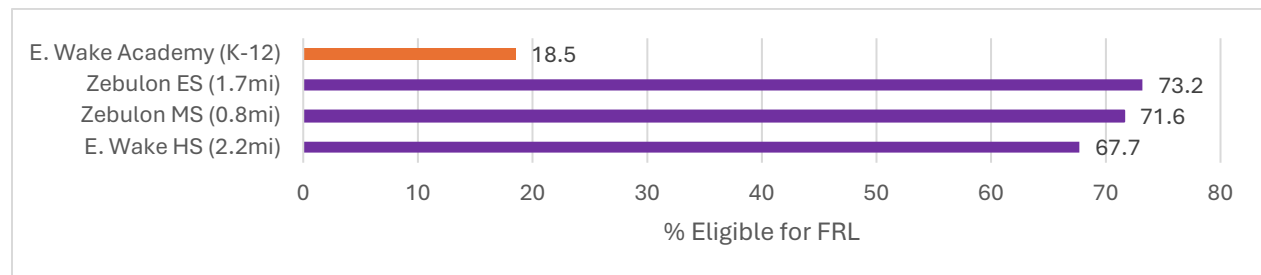
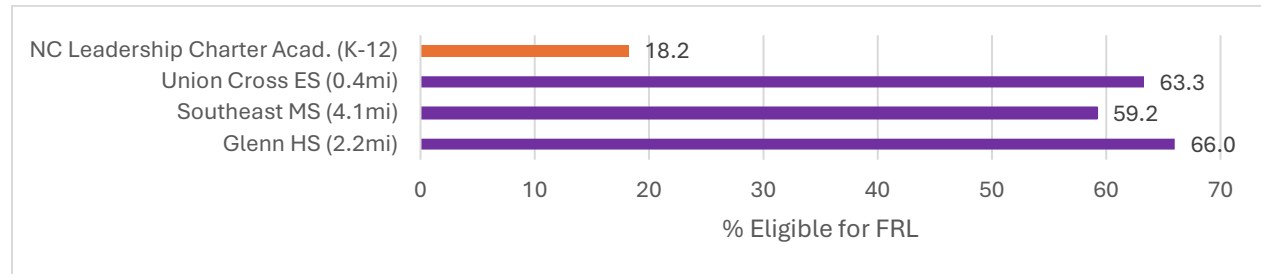
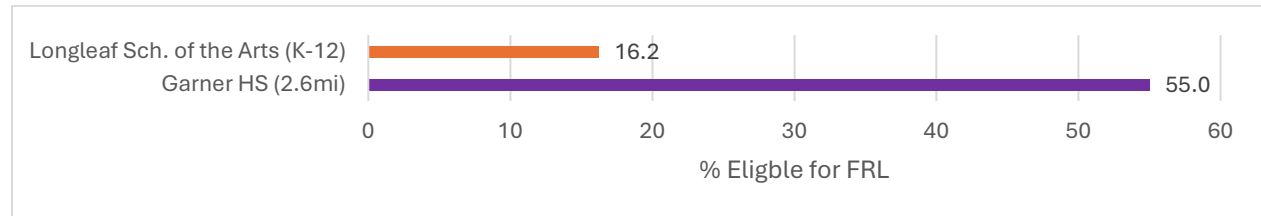
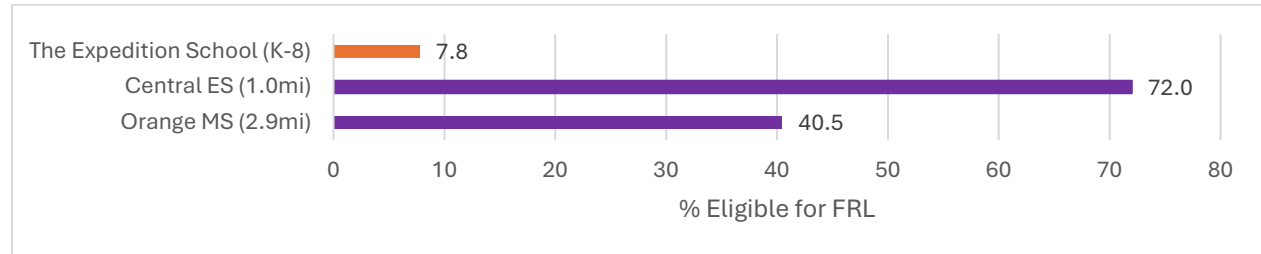
Appendix D

Examples of Disproportionately Black NC Charters Schools Compared to the School Districts Where They Are Located and Nearest Traditional Public Schools: 2023-24.

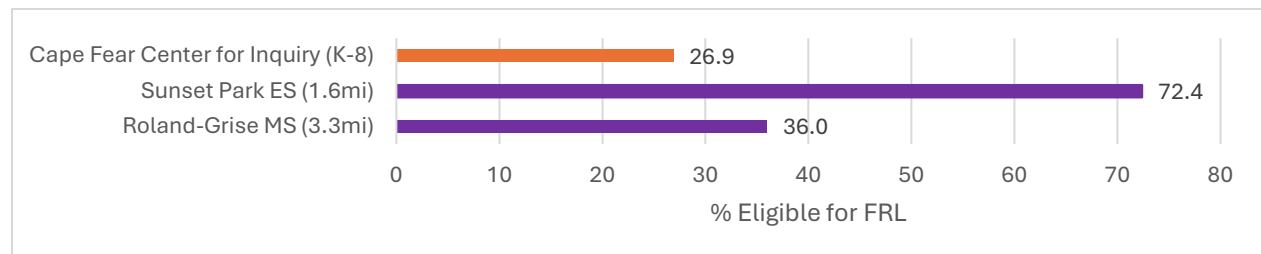
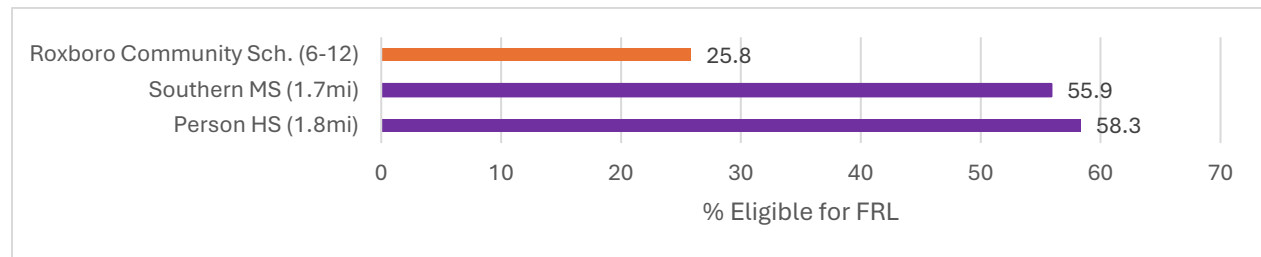
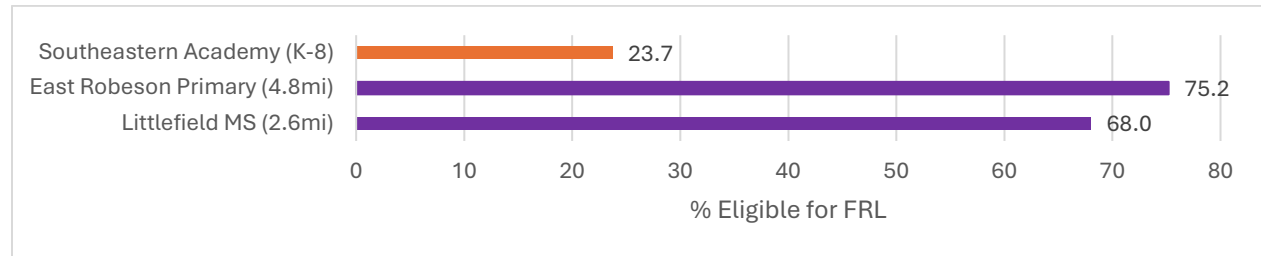
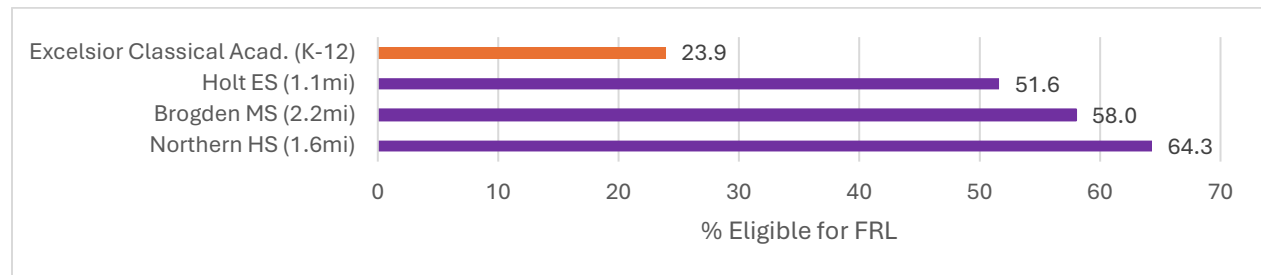
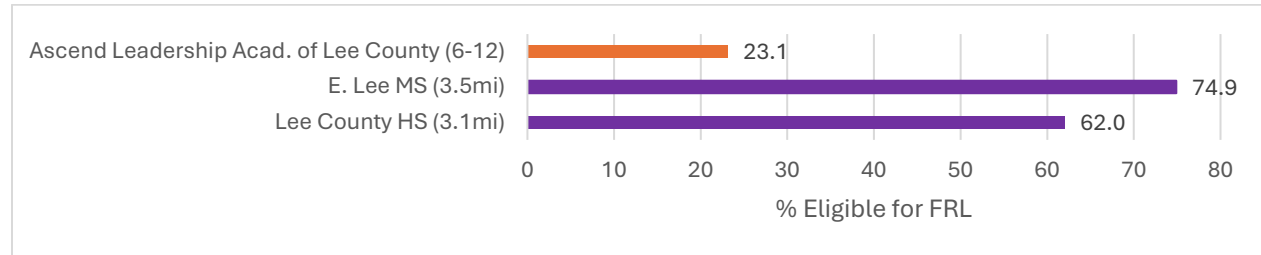
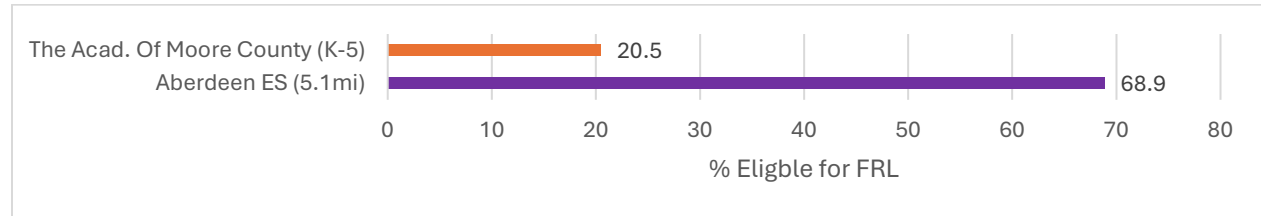


Appendix E

Examples of NC Charter Schools with Lower Percentage of Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch Compared to School Districts Where They Are Located and Nearest Traditional Public School: 2024.



Charter Schools in North Carolina



Charter Schools in North Carolina

