



## **A Snapshot of Public Charter Schools in NC**

2/9/2011

As officials in the Obama administration have stressed since early on, as well as increasing numbers of policymakers on both sides of the aisle, public charter schools are one important tool in a toolset for educators to use to improve student achievement and graduation rates. Here are the facts on North Carolina's public charter schools.

### **Charter School Performance**

- **Public charter school performance is improving throughout North Carolina. Last year, a much greater percentage of public charter schools achieved the highest level of performance (Honors School of Excellence) than did district schools. No charter schools were labeled “low performing” in 2009-10. A recent Stanford University study found that reading gains were significantly higher for charter school students than for their district school peers.**

Approximately 77 percent of North Carolina's public charter schools made AYP in 2009-10, compared to approximately 57 percent of district schools.<sup>i</sup> No charter schools were labeled as “low performing,” while 16 district schools received this lowest categorization of public school performance.<sup>ii</sup> Twenty-five percent (24 of the 96 tested) received the highest label of “honors school of excellence” which means schools made at least expected growth, had at least 90% of their students' scores at or above Achievement Level III, and made AYP. This compares to just 7.3% of district schools.<sup>iii</sup>

Public charter schools were also achieving much higher levels of growth than district schools. In 2009-10, 62 percent of public charter schools were considered high growth versus 53 percent of district schools.<sup>iv</sup>

### Other Research Findings on Achievement

A 2009 study from Stanford University found that public charter schools in North Carolina had reading gains that were significantly higher compared to their district school peers (with math gains less compared to district school peers).<sup>v</sup> For students that were low income, charter schools had a larger and more positive effect on reading (with no difference in math) compared to their district school peers.<sup>vi</sup>

## Charter School Revenues

- **Charter schools receive less per pupil funding support than district schools, mainly due to capital funding disparities.**

The most recent nationwide district-charter school finance comparison study was released by Ball State University in 2010. Using 2006-07 data, researchers found that the district to charter disparity in North Carolina was at least \$913 -- meaning on average, district schools had \$913 more in revenues available than charter schools per pupil.<sup>vii</sup> While at first glance \$913 may not seem like much, if one multiplies that figure by 400 students, that figure quickly moves to over \$365,000! This statewide disparity had increased 33% from the previous study (which used 2003-04 data).

## Charter Schools & Transportation

- **Many public charter schools, in both urban and rural areas, provide transportation services for students. Charter schools, however, unlike most district schools which use local assignment areas, are “open enrollment” public schools, meaning that admission is neither dependent on the school attendance area nor the local school administrative unit in which a student resides. Public charter schools must therefore accept students from across the state. For some charters throughout our state, this means they serve students residing in nine counties or more, making provision of transportation services financially and logistically impossible.**

Data from the Department of Public Instruction from 2007-08 (most recent data available from the Transportation Services Section in February 2011) shows that 39 charter schools provide transportation services, via bus and/or van to students.

A February 2011 survey of 62 members of the North Carolina Alliance for Public Charter Schools found that 51% of respondents provided transportation services to their students (note: this survey was conducted with a 24 hour deadline and may not capture all possible answers). These schools owned buses and vans or contracted with private transportation companies to provide transportation services. Other schools coordinated carpool plans, used public city bus lines, and one school arranged private transportation for families experiencing homelessness. Several schools said that they did not provide transportation services but would provide it to those families that requested it.

## Charter Schools & Food Service

- **Approximately 35 public charter schools participate in the federal school lunch program. Many other charter schools provide food to children on an as-needed basis, at lunch as well as for consumption outside of school hours.**

Of the 35 schools that participated in the federal school lunch program, 62.4% of charter school students were classified as needy.<sup>viii</sup> This is compared to 53.7% of students in district schools.<sup>ix</sup>

A February 2011 survey of 62 members of the North Carolina Alliance for Public Charter Schools found that of those who did not participate in the federal child nutrition program, most cited lack of kitchen facilities as an impediment, since charter schools, unlike district schools, receive no public funding for school buildings and cafeterias. To meet the nutritional needs of impoverished students, many of the non-participating schools provided food to families who requested it, others purchased catered lunches for students who could not afford lunch. One school provided a free lunch to students, paying for the cost from operational funds. One school routinely added additional food to poor children's lunchboxes when they brought their lunches to school. Several of the schools went beyond lunch provision, providing a food pantry for families and sending home food with students for the weekend.

## Charter School Demographics

- **Public charter schools are diverse, though, like district schools, do not always perfectly mirror the demographics of the surrounding population.**

In North Carolina, nearly 250 district schools enroll 90% or more non-white students, as do 23 public charter schools. Many public charter schools, in both rural and urban areas, reach out specifically to populations that have been underserved. As a whole, district schools serve 46% non-white student populations, while public charter schools serve 39%. Some public charter schools reach out to serve specific student populations with special needs, such as those classified as autistic or behaviorally and emotionally handicapped. In 2008, 10.6 percent of public charter school students were identified as having special needs, while 12.8 percent of district students were identified as such.

### Race/Ethnicity, 2008-09<sup>x</sup>

Race/Ethnicity	Charter Schools	District Schools
Black	31.5%	31.2%
Hispanic	4.2%	10.7%
Asian	1.9%	2.5%
Native American	1.3%	1.4%
White	61.2%	54.2%

### Students with Special Needs, 2008-09<sup>xi</sup>

Students in charter schools with special needs: 10.6%

Students in district schools with special needs: 12.8%

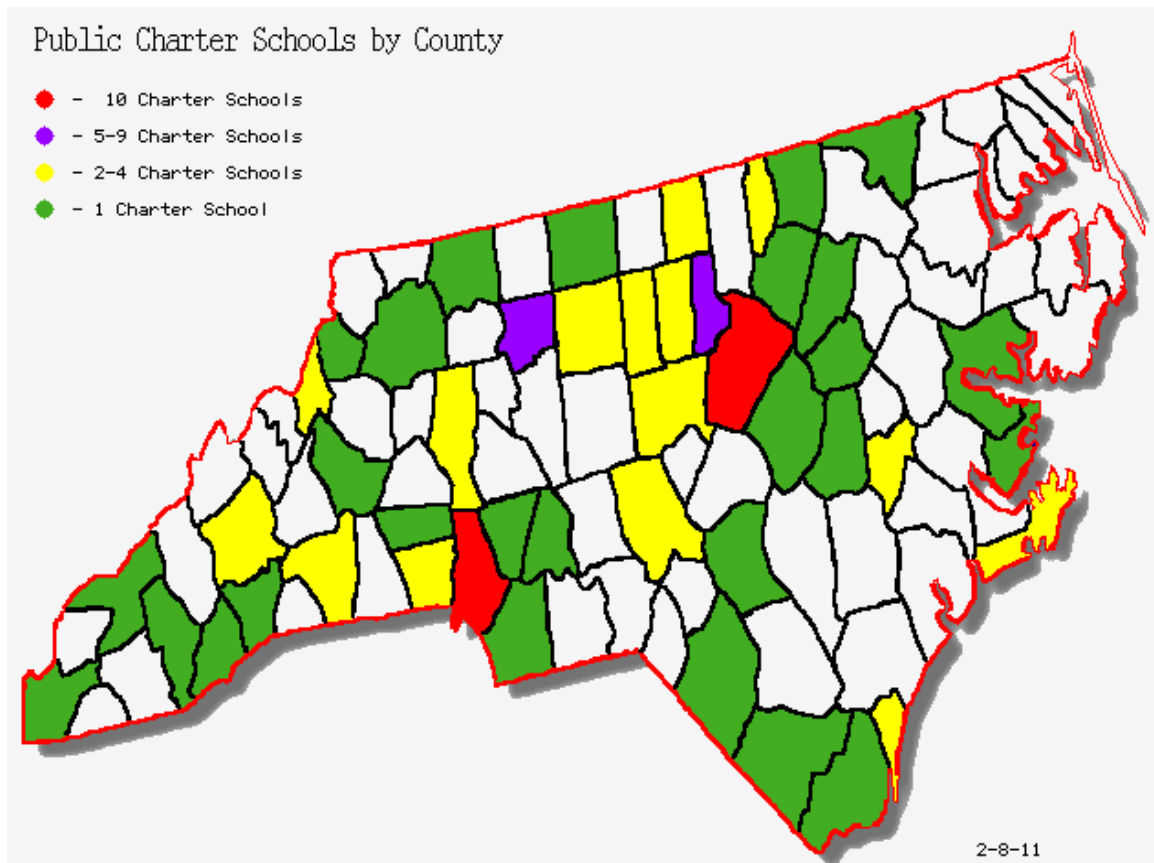
### Needy Students, 2009-10<sup>xii</sup>

Needy students in charter schools: 62.4%

Needy students in district schools: 53.7%

*Note: neediness is defined by students participating in free and reduced lunch*

### Charter Distribution by County<sup>xiii</sup>



## Charter Schools by Age & Grade Levels, 2009-10<sup>xiv</sup>

### Number of Years Open

Open 1-3 Years	9	9.4%
Open 4-6 Years	7	7.3%
Open 7-9 Years	14	14.6%
Open 10+ Years	66	68.8%
<i>Average Number of Years Open</i>	<i>9.9</i>	

### Schools by Grade Levels

Elementary Schools	59	61.5%
Middle Schools	7	7.3%
High Schools	7	7.3%
Middle/High Schools	4	4.2%
Elementary/Middle/High Schools	19	19.8%

***This brief was created by Michelle Godard Terrell, Co-Founder of the North Carolina Alliance for Public Charter Schools.***

<sup>i</sup> Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, ABC Performance Data, accessed online:

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/accountability/reporting/abc/2009-10/>

<sup>ii</sup> Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, ABC Performance Data, accessed online:

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/accountability/reporting/abc/2009-10/>

<sup>iii</sup> Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, ABC Performance Data, accessed online:

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/accountability/reporting/abc/2009-10/>

<sup>iv</sup> Source: Public Impact's calculations based on performance data provided by DPI

<sup>v</sup> For more information, see:

[http://credo.stanford.edu/reports/statepressreleases/North\\_Carolina.pdf](http://credo.stanford.edu/reports/statepressreleases/North_Carolina.pdf)

<sup>vi</sup> For more information, see:

[http://credo.stanford.edu/reports/statepressreleases/North\\_Carolina.pdf](http://credo.stanford.edu/reports/statepressreleases/North_Carolina.pdf)

<sup>vii</sup> For more information, see:

<http://www.bsu.edu/teachers/media/pdf/charterschfunding051710.pdf> and

<http://www.bsu.edu/teachers/media/pdf/northcarolina.pdf>

<sup>viii</sup> Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Child Nutrition Services, 2009-10 data

<sup>ix</sup> Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Child Nutrition Services, 2009-10 data

<sup>x</sup> Source: Parents for Educational Freedom in North Carolina's analysis of NCDPI data, 2009 Statistical Profile

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<sup>xii</sup> Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Child Nutrition Services, 2009-10 data

<sup>xiii</sup> Source: Parents for Educational Freedom in North Carolina, 2011

<sup>xiv</sup> Source: National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2009-10