Evaluation of the Delaware Charter School Reform

Year 1 Report

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Executive Summary

The Delaware charter school reform dates back to 1995 when legislation was initially passed that allowed the creation of charter schools. Two schools opened in 1996, and 13 charter schools are currently operating in the state. They enroll more than 6,200 students, which accounts for nearly 5.4 percent of all public school students. Another charter school is slated to open in the autumn of 2005. Thus far, 2 schools have closed due to financial and other organizational difficulties.

The students enrolled in the charter schools vary extensively in terms of demographics. This is largely due to the location of the schools and the schools' profiles and marketing strategies. In a number of instances, the demographic characteristics of the charter schools differ greatly from the surrounding communities. In some cases, the charter schools are enrolling more disadvantaged students. In other cases, they are enrolling students who are substantially less disadvantaged.

Comparing Delaware's Charter School Law With Laws in Other States

Delaware's charter school law is considered by some to be very permissive or "charter school friendly" because of the extensive autonomy charter schools are granted. However, regulations put in place over time and the manner in which they have been enforced have led many charter school leaders to believe that Delaware's reform is very restrictive and "unfriendly" to charter schools.

Delaware's legislation has many areas of strength for charter school applicants and charter holders. Among the most prominent strengths that became apparent after comparing Delaware's legislation with other states are the following:

- ❏ no cap on the number of charter schools
- ❏ multiple charter authorizers (although more are allowed, there are currently only 2 authorizers)
- ❏ wide range of eligible charter applicants
- ❏ no requirement of evidence for local support for new start-up charter schools

- ❏ full funding
- ❏ transportation funding
- ❏ collective bargaining exemption
- ❏ teacher access to state retirement system

While the examination of existing legislation did not reveal any serious weaknesses, a few areas might be looked at more closely for possible revision:

- ❏ longer term of the initial charter (this was extended to 4 years in the summer of 2004, but most states have an initial contract for 5 years)
- ❏ additional start-up funds and financial support for facilities
- ❏ longer leave of absence for public school teachers to work in charter schools

Regardless of whether a charter school law is deemed permissive and charter school friendly or restrictive and unfriendly to charter schools, it is important to keep in mind that a "strong" charter school law is one that results in the accomplishment of anticipated outcomes. The findings uncovered in this statewide evaluation suggest that Delaware does indeed have a strong charter school law.

Delaware Charter School Teachers

In the first year of this 3-year evaluation project, a considerable amount of attention was given to charter school teachers. Questionnaires were administered to all teaching staff and key administrators in the charter schools. These questionnaires focused on teacher characteristics and qualifications, reasons for choosing to work at a charter school, and teachers' perceptions regarding their school and the extent to which it is able to fulfill its mission.

Teacher background characteristics. In terms of gender and race/ethnicity, Delaware charter school teachers are similar in many respects to teachers in traditional public schools. There are slightly more minority teachers in charter schools, but large differences exist among the schools in their percentage of minority teachers. The age distribution for Delaware charter school teachers indicates that they are younger than teachers in traditional public schools.

Teacher qualifications. On the average, Delaware charter school teachers had more than 7 years of experience as educators versus 14 years of experience for traditional public school classroom teachers. The charter school teachers appear to be well qualified in terms of education but are less likely than teachers in traditional public schools to have graduate degrees.

Reasons for choosing to work at a charter school. Based on charter school teacher surveys, important factors influencing their decision to work at a charter school were the opportunity to work with like-minded educators, safety at school, committed parents, and the

academic reputation (high standards) of the school. Teachers also appreciated small class size, autonomy, and involvement in curriculum.

Teacher attrition. Teacher attrition is high in the charter schools; for example, more than 30 percent of certified teachers and more than 48 percent of noncertified teachers left during or immediately following the 2002-03 school year. There were large differences in attrition rates across charter schools, and the highest staff turnover rates occurred in those run by for-profit management companies. While teacher attrition can be damaging for charter schools, it is also important to keep in mind that some of the attrition can be deemed as "functional." In other words, charter schools have greater ability to hire and fire teachers; in order to build a more focused learning community, they sometimes have to fire and not rehire teachers that do not fit a school profile.

*Teachers' perceptions of their school*s. In general, teachers were content with their schools and satisfied with the services they provide. A large proportion of teacher reported that they are autonomous and creative in their classrooms and that the school supports innovative practices. Student discipline, teacher salary, quality of facilities, leadership/administration issues, and availability of resources were frequently noted as concerns of teachers; but responses varied widely among schools. In the questionnaires, the teachers and staff were asked to rate a number of items in terms of their initial expectations before coming to a charter school. In connection with this, the teachers/staff were asked to rate these same items with respect to what they were currently experiencing at the school. While the teachers were generally satisfied, it was apparent that the expectations of teachers and staff were still not being met over time.

Accomplishment of Mission

Charter schools are intended to have unique missions and educational approaches. As part of the charter schools' "autonomy in exchange for accountability" bargain, the schools must effectively demonstrate progress toward accomplishing these unique missions. Distinctive missions, goals, and benchmarks, as well as specified means of measuring success should all be a part of a school's charter or binding performance agreement with its authorizer. The performance agreements made between the Delaware Department of Education (DOE) and the 11 schools it sponsors are exemplary in that they contain clear and measurable objectives, specific benchmarks, and rigid reporting requirements.

The structure of the DOE performance agreement calls for objectives to be set in the following areas: academic achievement, behavior of students, market accountability, and parent satisfaction. The results presented in Chapter 5 of the technical report indicate that the charter schools are doing a rather good job of living up to their performance agreements. More work is needed with some schools, however, to ensure that they report fully on their

academic achievement. Nevertheless, the results regarding behavior goals, market accountability, and parent satisfaction were complete and—for the most part—satisfactory.

The goals and objectives specified in the charter schools' performance agreements are unique from most other states in that they also include indicators of market accountability. The use of market indicators in the performance agreement can help provide early warnings regarding a failing charter school. Early warnings mean that steps can be taken to assist schools at risk of closure or to buffer the impact on district schools from the closure of a charter school.

On the teacher/staff questionnaires, we included a number of items that looked at teachers' satisfaction with their charter school's mission and their perception of whether or not the school could fulfill the mission. Nearly all teachers and staff indicated that they were familiar with the unique missions of their schools. Teachers and staff also indicated that they were very satisfied with the missions of their respective schools; however, a lower proportion of the teachers and staff were satisfied with their schools' ability to fulfill the mission.

Student Performance on the Delaware Student Testing Program

Reports and Web-based documents prepared by the Department of Education provide extensive data on school performance for charter schools and traditional public schools alike. The nature of the data and indicators presented, however, does not allow us to calculate accurately the impact of charter schools on student learning. To do so, we need to track individual students and measure growth of these students while enrolled at a charter school relative to growth of demographically similar students enrolled in traditional public schools during the same time period.

The Delaware Department of Education provided extensive student level data to members of the evaluation team. The data did not contain personal information, although they did have unique identifiers that allowed us to track individual students over time and to link students with background demographic information.

During year 1 of the evaluation we analyzed the results from the Delaware Student Testing Program (DSTP) math, reading, and writing tests, which are administered at grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. The scope and nature of these data allowed us to use a matched student design to examine the impact that charter schools were having on student learning. The matched student design is a quasi-experimental design in which students in the experimental group (i.e., charter schools) are matched according to all relevant background and demographic indicators with students in the control group (i.e., traditional public schools). Students are followed over time, and we track and compare relative gains.

Six panels were created and tracked over time. In order to be included in the panels, students had to have valid test scores for both the pretest and posttest. This, unfortunately, removed students who repeat a grade or students coming from private schools who did not take the state assessment at the designated pretest time. The largest panels included more

than 500 students, and the smallest panels (tracing students from grade 8 to grade 10) had just under 200 students.

To address the central reform question—Is there a difference in achievement between students attending charter schools vs. students attending noncharter schools?—an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted on the last DSTP assessment with the previous DSTP assessment score as the covariate. Separate ANCOVA analyses were examined for DSTP scaled score and SAT-9 normal curve equivalents for the reading and math assessments and with the writing raw score for the writing assessment. The findings presented in the report focused on the reading and math results because of the inherent weaknesses in the measure available for the writing assessment.

The results outlined in detail in chapter 6 indicate that charter school students often perform better than matched traditional public school students in the upper grades. There were small differences between the charter school students and comparison students between grades 3 and 5. Only two differences were statistically significant; one of these differences favored traditional public schools, and one difference favored charter schools. At grade 8, two of the four comparisons proved to have large differences that were statistically significant and both of these differences favored charter schools.

The largest differences between charter school students and matched students in traditional public schools were at grade 10. Three of the four comparisons showed that the differences were statistically significant, and all these differences favored charter school students. In other words, the charter school students included in the panels were gaining more on the DSTP between grade 8 and grade 10 than demographically matched students in traditional public schools. One serious limitation to keep in mind here is that many students in the grade 8 to grade 10 panels did not actually enter a charter school until grade 9. Also, many students were dropped from this panel because they did not have a grade 8 DSTP score. This is likely because they were enrolled in private schools or were coming from out of state.

The findings indicate that the panels ending in 2004 had more differences that favored charter schools than the panels ending in 2003. This provides some tentative evidence that charter schools are improving over time. However, this may also be explained by the fact that the more recent panels include more schools, some of which have fewer years of operation. The results varied extensively by school with some schools performing especially well, while other are struggling. The findings in chapter 6 also highlight results by individual schools.

Creaming the best or serving the neediest? While many charter schools establish curricular profiles and marketing materials that make them most attractive to students failing in traditional public schools, some charter schools also have profiles and marketing practices that help them attract high performing students. In addition to calculating gain scores for students over time, our analysis of student achievement also yielded interesting findings with regard to whether charter schools were attracting and enrolling high performing students or at-risk or low performing students. The covariate means that we calculated for our analyses

represent the pretest scores of students that are matched by race, gender, free and reduced lunch status, English Language Proficiency status, and Title I status. A comparison of the covariate means at grade 4 illustrates that the charter school students and demographically similar students in the control group have similar pretest performance levels. This means that at lower elementary levels, the charter schools were serving students that were similar in performance levels to the traditional public schools. At grade 8, however, the charter schools are clearly attracting and enrolling higher performing students. This difference is further exacerbated in grade 10, where the charter school students have substantially higher pretest scores than their demographically similar peers. These comparisons suggest that while the charter schools on the whole are not "creaming" or attracting the best performing students in the lower elementary grades, they clearly are doing so in the lower and upper secondary levels. [Because our analysis controls for pretest scores, this finding should not discount the fact that charter school students still were gaining more on the state assessment than matched students in the upper grades.]

Limitations and future analyses. While the findings have a number of limitations, which are spelled out at the end of chapter 6, we hope and expect that some of these limitations can be addressed in future analyses of the data:

- ❏ Conduct more specific analyses of subgroups, including characteristics of "stayers" and "leavers."
- ❏ Apply and compare other study designs.
- ❏ Include additional years of test data and additional subjects (i.e., science and social studies).

Dilemmas and Issues Related to Overseeing a Successful Charter School Reform

The final chapter of the technical report contains a summary of the relevant findings and a discussion of issues related to the oversight of Delaware charter schools. Among the questions that are addressed are the following:

- ❏ How do authorizers differ in terms of oversight practices?
- ❏ What are the advantages and disadvantages of rigorous oversight?
- ❏ What factors or conditions facilitate rigorous oversight?

Differences in authorizers. The Delaware charter school law allows only the Department of Education (with consent of the State Board of Education) and local district boards to sponsor charter schools. While the state has sponsored 11 schools, only 1 local district— the Red Clay Consolidated School District—had gotten involved by sponsoring 2 charter

schools. The 2 authorizers are similar in that they have set the bar high for new applications (the DOE has increased its expectations for new applications over time). The authorizers differ, however, in the amount and nature of oversight they undertake. The local district engages in very little oversight of its 2 charter schools and does not appear to have a rigorous performance agreement or reporting mechanisms in place. The local district indicated that it will engage in oversight at the time the charter needs to be renewed. The Department of Education, on the other hand, conducts extensive oversight of the charter schools it sponsors. even though the charter schools complain loudly about the extensive oversight. With respect to the work of DOE, Delaware provides much more careful and rigorous oversight of its charter schools than most other states.

Advantages and disadvantages of rigorous oversight. Many issues need to be considered and balanced when it comes to rigorous oversight of charter schools. Below is a brief list of some of the primary advantages and disadvantages of rigorous oversight, such as that pursued by the Delaware Department of Education. The main advantages include the following:

- ❏ More likely that only the best applications for charters are approved
- ❏ More likely that poor performing charter schools will close
- ❏ Less likely that less serious management companies with high cost structures will remain
- ❏ Less likely that children and communities are negatively affected by poor performing charter schools or untimely closure of charter schools

On the other hand, the main disadvantages of rigorous oversight and regulation include the following:

- ❏ Charter schools are less free to innovate.
- ❏ Charter schools have less autonomy and flexibility that may be necessary to ensure a more efficient and effective use of limited resources.
- ❏ Human and financial resources of the Delaware State Board of Education and Delaware Department of Education are disproportionately directed to charter schools that serve a small portion of the states' public school students.

Factors or conditions that facilitate rigorous oversight. The Delaware Department of Education is able and willing to monitor closely the performance and viability of the charter schools and hold them accountable to regulations and their specific performance agreements. The capacity for this type of oversight can be attributed to a number of factors including (i) small size of the state and scale of the reform, (ii) detailed and centralized accountability system, (iii) devoted and effective DOE staff, and (iv) timely and well targeted technical assistance. These factors are elaborated in chapter 7.

Conclusions

It is clear from the findings that the charter schools in Delaware are highly accountable, and their performance—in terms of student achievement—is similar or better than what we find in traditional public schools. The strong accountability and the relative positive performance of these schools can be attributed to a number of factors. Key factors that are likely to explain the positive outcomes include the following:

- ❏ Rigorous approval process
- ❏ Rigorous oversight
- ❏ Clear and measurable expectations
- ❏ Comprehensive and valid data that are readily available
- ❏ Provisions of extensive technical assistance
- ❏ Relatively strong funding
- ❏ Bipartisan support

Each of these factors is described and discussed in detail in chapter 7.

Delaware charter schools and their authorizers have benefited from their collective experiences over time. The DOE has strengthened its capacity to screen charter school proposals, set high expectations, train new charter school operators, and manage data. Charter schools have learned to operate in the challenging environment in which much is expected of them. In the next phase of the charter school reform in Delaware, progress can be made in several areas including the streamlining and systematization of data collection by the DOE, further development of a supportive charter school network, and support organizations that can shift some responsibility for technical assistance away from DOE.

The Delaware charter school reform is among the more closely monitored and regulated reforms in the nation. We say this based not only on our evaluation of charter school reforms in five other states, but also on what we have learned from the literature. This said, it is important to point out that more rigorous regulation and oversight of charter schools is not necessarily bad. Although the charter schools complain of too much interference, and although staff and resources at the Delaware Department of Education are taxed with extra work, it is likely that this more rigorous regulation and oversight has led to more stable, viable, and better performing charter schools.

While moderate success is obvious in the charter schools, a number of negative or unanticipated outcomes need to be watched and considered carefully. These include accelerating the resegregation of public schools by race, class, and ability and the disproportionate diversion of district and state resources (both financial and human resources) to the more recently established charter schools. These possible unanticipated outcomes will be addressed in year 2 of the study, along with further examination of the original outcomes that were the intent of the state's charter school law.

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Acknowledgments

The process of planning the study, collecting and analyzing the data, and preparing the final report was an arduous task that required the assistance and involvement of a large number of people. Here, on this page of acknowledgments, I wish to recognize the many people who collaborated in the conduct of the evaluation or contributed to the preparation of the final report.

First and foremost, I want to recognize the assistance and collaboration of the charter school directors, teachers, and other staff at the charter schools who made time for us during our site visits, who completed surveys, and who shared documentation with the evaluation team. Representatives from several local school districts also made time to share information and insights with us. Staff at the Red Clay Consolidated School District, which is the only local district sponsoring charter schools, were particularly helpful in providing time to meet with us for interviews. Martha Manning from the Charter School Network and Gary Fredericks from the Innovative Schools Development Corporation also made time to provide input to the study and to share information and insights regarding the implementation of the reform.

Extensive support and assistance were provided to the evaluation team by staff at the Delaware Department of Education and the members of the charter school accountability committee. We have conducted evaluations of charter schools in five other states and have never received such well-organized and comprehensive data as that which we received from the Delaware Department of Education. This certainly made our work easier and helped to improve the overall quality of the final report. DOE staff at all levels were readily available to provide answers to our numerous questions throughout the course of the study. While DOE staff who provided assistance are too many to mention, particular recognition needs to be given to Dr. Larry Gabbert, who heads the charter school office. During the planning phase and during data collection, input and information were provided by the Secretary of Education, Ms. Valerie Woodruff; the Deputy Secretary of Education, Dr. Nancy Wilson; and the Associate Secretaries of Education, Ms. Dorcell Spence and Ms. Robin Taylor. In the assessment office, guidance and feedback was provided by Dr. Wendy Roberts, and Ms. Helen Dennis. These and other persons at the Department of Education also reviewed and provided comments on the report before it was finalized.

All members of the State Board of Education were involved in providing input and information during the course of the evaluation. In particular, the contributions of Dr. Joseph Pika and Ms. Jean Allen need to be recognized as they met with us on numerous occasions and provided advice and insights that substantially influenced the evaluation. They also reviewed and commented on the final report. Ms. Ann Case, who is the policy analyst for the State Board of Education, served as a program officer and liaison person for the evaluation. In addition to contributing to the design and conduct of the study, as well as feedback on the final report, she and her administrative assistant, Ms. Dani Moore, provided extensive assistance in scheduling meetings, identifying information sources, and securing documentation.

At The Evaluation Center, a number of persons assisted with data collection, data entry, and the preparation of the final report. Several very capable research assistants helped enter and organize both the qualitative and quantitative data: Antoinette Brown, Christine Ellis, Quentin Witkowski, and Brandon Youker. Dr. Antoinette B. Brown conducted some of the site visits and made a major contribution to Sections 2.1 and 2.2 of the final report. Ms. Barbara Wygant served as project manager for the evaluation and orchestrated most of the data entry and data management. She also drafted Chapter 3 of the report. Dr. Carolyn Sullins helped conduct the analysis for Chapter 5 and drafted sections 5.1 and 5.2 of the report. Dr. Brooks Applegate collaborated with the analysis of student achievement data and the writing of Chapter 6. Finally, I want to recognize the assistance of Ms. Sally Veeder, who edited the final report. While recognizing the contributions of my many very qualified colleagues, I am responsible for any errors that may exist in the text of the final report.

The evaluation was commissioned and funded by both the Delaware State Board of Education and the Department of Education. Their decision to commission an external evaluation of the charter school reform reflects their genuine interest in improving the implementation and operation of the reform as well as the performance of the charter schools.

Gary Miron
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Chapter One
Purpose and Conduct of the Evaluation

This report serves as the Year 1 final report for evaluation of the Delaware charter school reform. The project was initiated in November 2003 with the majority of the site visits to schools conducted in the early spring of 2004. Student achievement data were not obtained until the late autumn when much of the analysis was undertaken and the final report prepared.

In this first chapter of the report, we provide information regarding the purpose and conduct of the evaluation. The objectives or main evaluation tasks are addressed in the following section, followed by a description of data sources and methods for data collection. Finally, limitations of the study and an overview of the report are contained at the end of this chapter.

1.1 Evaluation Questions

The Request for Proposals (RFP) for this evaluation outlined a 3-year project. In the first year, the following tasks were to be covered:

- ❏ Analysis of Delaware's charter law and regulations relative to other states, designed to determine areas of strengths and weaknesses for the charter school applicants, charter holders, and the charter authorizers.
- ❏ Review the time, effort, and expense devoted to compliance issues for applicants and authorizers and its impact on the charter schools as well as public education as a whole.
- ❏ Review and synthesis of evidence regarding the accomplishment of the mission found in the original charters, charter school annual reports, and other school level documentation for those schools in operation prior to the 2002-03 school year.
- ❏ Provide a comparison of charters granted by individual school districts, states or other central authority to determine if there is any evidence that "chartering" closer to the community is more effective.

During the second year, the tasks listed below were to be addressed in addition to the year 1 tasks:

- ❏ Review and synthesis of evidence regarding the accomplishment of the mission found in the original charters, charter school annual reports, and other school level documentation for those schools opened after the 2002-2003 school year.

- ❏ Update information on the compliance issues for applicants and authorizers and its impact on the charter schools as well as public education as a whole.

Finally, in year 3, three additional tasks were to be added to the list of tasks addressed by the evaluation:

- ❏ Review and synthesis of evidence regarding the accomplishment of the mission found in the original charters, charter school annual reports, and other school level documentation for all charter schools.
- ❏ Update information on the compliance issues for applicants and authorizers and its impact on the charter schools as well as public education as a whole.
- ❏ Provide any additional recommendations on best practices for charter schools and authorizers as determined by analysis of Delaware's experience and data collected from other states.

In addition, each year of the study, the following areas should be analyzed:

- ❏ Synthesis and descriptive analysis of charter school-level data including demographics and financial data with comparisons to similar noncharter public schools.
- ❏ Analysis of gain scores on the Delaware Student Testing Program (DSTP) with charter schools and demographically and geographically similar noncharter public schools.
- ❏ Analysis of longitudinal data on students who remain in a charter school for more than one DSTP tested grade.

1.2 Methods of Data Collection

The RFP indicated that each charter school would receive at least one site visit annually by the evaluation team for the purpose of interviewing the principal/director and a random sample of teachers to gather input for the research questions. Checklists to guide the review of facilities and relevant documentation are also to be used. Interviews with representatives of local school districts and stakeholder groups will be conducted as needed to identify issues of concern and/or support. Based on these guidelines and reflecting the data needs expressed by the evaluation tasks, we used the following methods for collecting information:

1. Individual interviews with charter school directors or principals at each school. When possible we also interviewed teachers, board members, and students.
2. Interviews with other key informants and stakeholders outside of the charter schools such as (i) state-level policymakers, (ii) staff from the Department of Education, (iii) representatives of the charter school association and a charter school support and resource organization, and (iv) representatives of the school districts in which the charter schools reside.
3. Site visits were made to all 13 schools which, in addition to interviews and collection of documents, included brief observations of school activities and classroom lessons as well as a tour of the school facilities.

4. Surveys of teachers and staff at all 13 schools plus optional surveys of students and parents in a few of the schools. This was done using charter school questionnaires developed by The Evaluation Center, which include both closed- and open-ended questions.[1]
5. Review of documentation from the schools, the district, state-level organizations, the media, and the larger body of literature and research on charter schools
6. Analysis of test data and available demographic data for the charter schools and relative comparison groups

Efforts were made to help ensure that the charter schools were disrupted as little as possible by the data collection. We are aware that charter schools are of considerable public interest and that they are bombarded with requests for information that can drain the resources of the relatively small staffs of charter schools. Therefore, we made efforts to use existing data that may be required for other reports. Also, in the course of our data collection we focused only on those issues that are important and necessary for this study and selected respondents who were considered to be knowledgeable about the issue(s) being addressed and who could contribute to the quality of the information/data that we collected. We hope the process for obtaining information was viewed as time well spent by the informants and useful by stakeholders.

Information for answering the key evaluation questions often included a variety of sources and a combination of qualitative and quantitative data/information. For example, we examined the level of satisfaction with the charter schools from the vantage point of teachers and administrators from our own data collection and then reviewed satisfaction data collected from parents by the schools themselves. We also used a combination of qualitative (e.g., interviews) and quantitative (e.g., surveys) data to look at particular issues. We considered evidence of academic achievement from test scores as well as from evidence in annual reports. Additionally, we asked stakeholders at each school about their school's success in fulfilling its mission and meeting its goals.

Details on the specific methods used in the study are elaborated throughout the report and are presented with their corresponding research findings. For example, in the chapter on charter school teachers and their working conditions the reader will find details regarding the sample, response rates, and the analyses of the data collected from charter school teachers and staff. Specific methodological details with regard to student achievement results are found in Chapter 6 where we explain how and why we analyzed differences between charter school students and students in traditional public schools with regard to gains on the state assessment test.

1.3 Limitations to the Evaluation

A number of limitations to this study need to be weighed and considered. Below we describe the major limitations and—where appropriate—we discuss how we have addressed or compensated for the limitations.

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[1] Separate school level reports were prepared for each school based on the survey data we collected. The results were shared both in hard copy and electronically. Initial feedback from a number of the charter school directors was that they found the reports we prepared for them to be insightful and helpful as they worked to improve and further develop their schools.

Lack of Time on Site

Only one site visit per school was called for in the study and supported by the budget. This posed an important limitation in terms of firsthand knowledge of the schools. To compensate for this, we collected extensive school level documentation and information both from charter schools and from the Department of Education.

Sampling

While the overall response rate for the teacher/staff surveys was high compared with other similar studies (i.e., 78 percent of the teachers and staff returned a completed questionnaire), it is important to point out that the response rate was low in a number of schools; in 1 school only 38 percent of the staff responded.

Informant Bias

Because of vested interests, there is obviously the possibility of misleading information being provided by those we interviewed. Wherever possible, we tried to double-check information; or when references to financial issues or testing results were made, we attempted to confirm such information using the data obtained from the Delaware Department of Education.

Age of the Reform

The charter school reform in Delaware is still relatively young. While two schools now have been operating for close to eight years, nearly half the schools have operated for three or fewer years. Because these schools have been in operation for a short period of time, we have insufficient data to do an in-depth examination of their impact and effectiveness. However, each additional year of data helps us further complete the picture of these schools in terms of their success in establishing their schools and producing outcomes according to the goals they have set.

Start-Up Phase of Schools

During the last year of this study, the schools were in their second through fifth years of operation. We have become increasingly aware of the growing pains associated with opening a new school and the heavy demands on the personnel who run it. We know that new schools require a few years in which to implement their plans. A few years is often required to even secure or renovate a permanent facility. We recognize that the schools have been in various stages of their start-up phase and that any fair summative evaluation will need to wait a few more years. For these reasons the evaluation is largely formative in nature; when we describe outcomes, we qualify them and remind the reader of the specific limitations that apply.

Chapter Two
Description and Comparative Review of the Delaware Charter School Reform

Charter schools are semiautonomous public schools founded by educators, parents, community groups, or private organizations that operate under a written contract with a state, district, or other entity. This contract, or charter, details how the school will be organized and managed, what students will be taught and expected to achieve, and how success will be measured. Many charter schools enjoy freedom from rules and regulations affecting other public schools as long as they continue to meet the terms of their charters. Charter schools can be closed for failing to satisfy these terms.

As of November 2003, 40 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico had enacted charter school legislation. As of January 2003, about 2,700 charter schools were serving more than 684,000 students across the country. Charter school laws often vary from state to state and often differ on several important factors, including who is allowed to sponsor charter schools, how much money charter schools receive for operational and facilities expenses, and whether the teachers in a charter school have to be certified.

Charter schools in Delaware are authorized by Del. C., Title 14, Chapter 5, which was enacted in 1995. The creation of the charter school legislation was intended to (i) improve student learning, (ii) encourage the use of different and innovative or proven school environments and teaching and learning methods, (iii) provide parents and students with improved measures of school performance and greater opportunities to choose public schools within and outside their school districts, and (iv) provide for a well-educated community. In 2002, the Department of Education recommended and the State Board of Education approved Regulation 275 to provide rules to govern the implementation of the charter school law. The Delaware Code was revised further in 2004.

An analysis of Delaware charter school law and regulations relative to other states was conducted in order to determine its areas of strengths and weaknesses for Delaware charter school applicants, charter holders, and charter authorizers. Delaware's charter school law and regulations were compared with those of comparable states including the District of Columbia, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and North Carolina. Among the resources used for the analysis were the state laws and regulations and secondary analyses conducted by various organizations including the Center for Education Reform, the Center for Leadership on School Reform, the Education Commission of the States, the U.S. Department of Education, and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation.

2.1 Basic Policy and Procedural Areas of Charter School Law

The contents of charter school laws vary from state to state. Nevertheless, several basic policy and legal areas are covered by most state charter laws:

1. Charter School Development and Start-Up
2. School Status
3. Fiscal Issues
4. Students
5. Staffing and Labor Relations
6. Accountability

Charter School Development and Start-Up

Among the topics generally covered in the area of charter development are (a) the number of schools allowed to be chartered; (b) eligible chartering authorities;(c) the appeals process, if any; (d) eligible applicants; (e) whether or not formal evidence of local support is required; (f) the recipient of the charter; and (g) the length of the initial charter.

Number of schools allowed. Delaware charter school law does not have a cap on the number of charter schools. Like Delaware, New Jersey and Pennsylvania place no cap on the number of charter schools. The District of Columbia has a yearly cap of 20 new schools annually. Connecticut has a limit of 24 schools, and North Carolina has a limit of 100 charter schools. Nationwide, 71 percent of the states with charter school legislation place no cap on the number of charter schools. The absence of a cap on the number of charter schools in Delaware is seen by charter school advocates as a strength.

Eligible chartering authorities. Delaware charter school law allows the state board of education (SBOE) and local school boards to authorize or approve new charter schools. The other states in the comparison group, with the exception of New Jersey, also allow for multiple charter school authorizers. In Connecticut local charter schools must be approved by the local or regional board of education and the state board of education. State charter schools must be approved by the state board of education.[2] The District of Columbia Board of Education and the Public Charter School Board may approve charter school applications. In Pennsylvania, only local school boards may approve charter applications although the Pennsylvania Department of Education is now responsible for granting charters to cyber charter schools. North Carolina permits local school boards, the University of North Carolina, or the state board of education to approve charter applications. Only in New Jersey is there a single authorizer—in this case, the state commissioner of education. The eligibility of multiple authorizers can be seen as an area of strength for charter school applicants.

[2] In practice only 2 local charter schools were sponsored by a local district (i.e., by Hartford Public Schools). These 2 schools were later converted to magnet schools in 2002. No local districts have sponsored charter schools since then.

Appeals process. Delaware charter school legislation states that if an application for a charter school is made to the SBOE or a local school board and the charter application is not approved, such decision shall be final and not subject to judicial review. Like Delaware, Connecticut has no appeals process in place for charter applicants. Three states in the comparison group—New Jersey, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania—have an appeal process. The District of Columbia has no appeals process, but decisions can be subject to judicial review. In North Carolina and New Jersey, denied applications may be appealed to the state board of education. In Pennsylvania applications denied by a local school board may be appealed to the state Charter Appeals Board. A survey of states with charter legislation reveals that the majority (74%) have an appeals process in place for charter applicants.

While the absence of an appeals process in Delaware may be considered a weakness from the point of view of a charter applicant, it may be seen as a strength from the point of view of a chartering authority that might have to spend time and resources assessing the same application more than once. Of course, applicants are permitted to resubmit their application the following year.

Eligible applicants. Delaware legislation is intended to encourage any person; university; college; or nonreligious, non-home-based, nonsectarian entity that can meet the necessary requirements to form a charter school. No private or religion-affiliated school may apply to become a charter school. Existing public schools may also be converted to charter schools. All the states in the sample allow existing public schools to be converted to charter schools.

The legislation for all of the states in the sample, with the exception of the District of Columbia, specifies who may apply to open a charter school. Like Delaware, a wide variety of applicants are eligible to open charter schools. Pennsylvania's legislation specifies that individuals, parents, teachers, nonsectarian institutions of higher education, museums, nonsectarian incorporated not-for-profits, corporations, associations, or any combination thereof are eligible. In New Jersey teachers and/or parents or a college, university, or private entity in conjunction with teachers and/or parents are eligible to apply. In North Carolina a person, group of persons, or nonprofit corporation may apply. Connecticut's legislation is unusual in that boards of education are also eligible to apply. In Connecticut any person, association, corporation, organization or other entity, public or independent institution of higher education, local or regional board of education, two or more boards of education jointly, or regional educational service center may apply to start a charter school. The wide range of groups eligible to apply for a charter is a strength of the Delaware law.

Evidence of local support. Evidence of local support is usually needed only for conversions of public and private schools, and not all legislation addresses this issue. North Carolina's legislation does not address the issue of local support. Delaware charter school legislation stipulates that a public school may be converted to a charter school only by approval of the board of the school district in which it is located and only if the charter application received the approval of more than 50 percent of the teachers and more than 50 percent of the parents with a child or children under the age of 18 years residing in the school's attendance area. The vote by eligible parents is for those that attend a public meeting held for the specific purpose of voting on the proposed conversion.

New Jersey and the District of Columbia, like Delaware, require formal evidence of local support for conversions. In New Jersey 51 percent of teachers and 51 percent of parents must support conversions. In the District of Columbia, two-thirds of teachers, two-thirds of parents of minor students, and two-thirds of adult students must support conversions.

In Pennsylvania a majority of teachers and a majority of parents must support conversions. In addition, all charter applications must demonstrate local support. Connecticut's legislation requires that a public hearing and survey be conducted to determine local interest prior to approval by the local school board for a "local charter school." For state charter school applications, the legislation requires a public hearing in the affected district and solicitation of comments from the local school board and contiguous school boards.

The requirement of local support prior to approval of existing school conversions, while time-consuming and costly, may be seen to be a strength of the legislation for charter school applicants and authorizers who need to predict potential enrollment and public support and also to protect the interests of existing school students and their parents.

Charter recipient. Delaware legislation defines the recipient of the charter as the charter school board of directors. The legislation of the other states in the comparison group contain similar language. Only a few states, allow private or for-profit entities to directly apply for and hold the charter. Delaware is not unique in this respect so this is neither or strength or weakness of its law.

Length of the initial charter. With the passing of Senate Bill No. 330 in 2004, Delaware charters are now granted for an initial period of 4 years of operation and are renewable every 5 years thereafter. Previously, the initial charters were for 3 years in Delaware. The states in the comparison group all have longer terms of the initial charter. New Jersey's initial charter contracts are for 4 years; those of Connecticut, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania are up to 5 years; and the District of Columbia's initial charter contract is for 15 years with at least 1 review every 5 years. The 4-year initial charter term might be seen as a weakness of the Delaware legislation for charter holders and charter authorizers because of the need for relatively frequent reauthorization efforts including application and review. A longer initial charter term, with periodic review, might be more cost-effective, although a careful study of the experience of states with longer initial terms would be instructive.

School Status

Among the topics generally covered in the area of school status are how charter schools are *legally defined*, whether or not they receive *automatic waivers from laws*, the extent of their *legal autonomy*, the structure and manner in which they are *governed*, whether or not they are subject to *open meeting laws*, and—finally—the extent to which they receive *technical assistance*.

Legal status. Delaware charter schools operate independently of any school board, as do those in Connecticut, New Jersey, North Carolina, and the District of Columbia. For special education purposes, District of Columbia charter schools may choose to be part of the school district. The legal status of a Pennsylvania charter school is negotiated and determined in its charter contract.

Automatic waivers from most education laws, regulations, and policies. According to the text of the law, Delaware charter schools are "free of most state and school district rules and regulations governing public education" (Title 14, Chap 5, § 501). Paragraph 505 of the law, which addresses exemptions from rules and regulations, states the following:

> (a) Except as otherwise specified in this chapter and title, a charter school is exempt from all provisions of this title except the provisions of Chapter 31, and all regulations of any board of education of a reorganized school district, although a charter school may elect to comply with 1 or more such provisions.
> (b) The Department of Education shall have the authority to promulgate rules and regulations that would further define the application, approval criteria and processes.

Therefore, while Delaware charter schools have an automatic waiver of most laws and regulations that traditional public schools have, the Department of Education has authority to establish rules and regulations regarding operations and procedures as they relate to charter schools. Charter schools in the District of Columbia and Pennsylvania similarly are exempt from most state and district education laws, regulations, and policies. North Carolina charter schools are exempt except for the local district-sponsored charters that must negotiate for waivers from district rules. In New Jersey exemptions from particular laws, regulations, and policies may be requested in charter applications; and in Connecticut, charter schools, like other public schools, may seek waivers from the state board of education on a case-by-case basis. Automatic waivers in Delaware can be considered a strength from the point of view of charter applicants and holders because it provides flexibility. Automatic waivers can also be seen as a strength from the point of view of charter authorizers because it allows authorizers to avoid the process of reviewing applications for exemptions.

Legal autonomy. Charter schools in Delaware have limited legal autonomy. The Delaware Department of Education has the authority to promulgate rules and regulations regarding operations and procedures as they relate to charter schools. Charter schools in the comparison states also have limited legal autonomy, with the exception of District of Columbia, whose charter schools all have legal autonomy.

Governance. The board of directors of a Delaware charter school shall be deemed public agents authorized to control the school. The charter school boards are required to have both parents and teachers represented. Further, no person shall serve as a member of a Delaware charter school board of directors who is an elected member of a local school board of education. The board of trustees is the governing agent of charter schools in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and the District of Columbia. Pennsylvania charter school law requires that the board of trustees be established according to the terms in the charter and that no member of a local school board may serve on the board. In New Jersey, if the charter school is established by a private entity, its representatives may not constitute a majority of the board. The board of trustees for District of Columbia charter schools must have an odd number of members, not to exceed seven, and must include at least two parents of enrolled children. The majority of board members must be District of Columbia residents. Governance of charter schools in North Carolina and Connecticut is specified in the charter agreement. Teachers and parents of students must be represented in the governing body of Connecticut charter schools. Delaware's arrangement regarding governance is a strength in that parents and teachers are involved.

Open meetings. Boards of directors of Delaware charter schools are subject to open meeting laws, as are all but one of the states in the sample. District of Columbia charter school law legislation

does not address this issue. Legislation subjecting charter school governing bodies to open meeting laws seems to be a strength for Delaware charter school parents and teachers because it provides broad access to the governance decision-making process.

Technical assistance. Technical assistance may be provided to Delaware charter schools by the department of education upon request, as stipulated in legislation. North Carolina charter school legislation also stipulates that technical assistance be provided by the department of education as well as by nongovernment entities upon request. Legislation in the remaining states in the sample does not address technical assistance, but technical assistance is provided by the department of education as well as by nongovernment entities upon request. Technical assistance from the department of education is a strength for charter school applicants, charter holders, and charter authorizers. Technical assistance strengthens the capacity of applicants and charter holders to meet their obligations and provide adequate services to students and their parents. Nonetheless, a conflict of interest may be seen when the same entitity (i.e., DOE) is expected to provide technical assistance to charter schools at the same time that it oversees these schools. Some states, such as Pennsylvania, have shared the burden of technical assistance between the state department of education and charter school resource centers.

Fiscal Issues

Fiscal issues include (a) the level of funding, (b) types of funding provided, and (c) the amount of fiscal independence and autonomy allowed each charter school.

Level of funding. The level of funding provided to charter schools varies widely. Delaware, District of Columbia, and North Carolina charter schools receive 100 percent of computed state funding based on the state unit funding formula and 100 percent of local funding based on the previous year's per-pupil expenditure (in the student's district of residence), which follows the student.

In Connecticut, funding for local charters is specified in the charter. For state charters 110 percent of state and district operations funding follows students, based on average district per-pupil revenue. In New Jersey charter schools receive 90 percent of the lesser of (a) state and district operations funding based on average district per-pupil revenue or (b) state-mandated minimum per-pupil spending. The district also pays categorical aid.

Pennsylvania funding for charter schools follows students, based on the average district per-pupil budgeted expenditure of the previous year. Depending on the district, charter school funding will be 70-82 percent of the district's per-pupil revenue. For regional charters and nonresident students, funds come from the district of the student's residence. Charters receive additional funding for special needs students or may request the intermediate unit to assist in providing special-needs services at the same cost level as provided to district schools.

Delaware legislation providing charter schools with 100 percent of computed state and local funding is a strength for charter school applicants and for existing charter schools because it provides the schools and students with resources equal to those of other public schools. Students and parents are not penalized for choosing charter schools.

Types of funding. Delaware charter schools are eligible to receive support or assistance for transportation of their students. Charter schools may request the local district to provide transportation for their students residing within their boundaries on the same basis offered to students attending schools operated by the district. Otherwise, charter schools may choose to provide transportation themselves and can request from the state up to 75 percent of the average per-pupil costs for transportation within the vocational district in which the charter school is located.

Delaware districts must make unused buildings available for charter schools. This is potentially a strength although there is no abundance of unused building to share. Although Delaware charter schools may apply for federal start-up funds, no state funding is available specifically for the renovation or construction of facilities. The range of funding available to charter schools in the comparison states is somewhat the same as that available to Delaware charter schools.

In most cases charter school students are eligible for transportation assistance with the exception of North Carolina. North Carolina charter schools must provide the same transportation services as other district public schools, but charter schools do not receive reimbursement from the district for that service. Transportation is provided by the district to charter schools in New Jersey and Pennsylvania (with some limitations). In Connecticut transportation is provided by the district for students residing in the district in which the charter is located unless other arrangements are specified in the charter. Districts, at their discretion, may provide transportation for resident students attending a charter school outside their district and will be reimbursed for reasonable costs for such services by the state. In the District of Columbia, charter school students, like regular public school students, are eligible for reduced public transportation fares. Delaware legislation regarding transportation assistance is a strength for charter school students and parents because it removes possible barriers to charter school attendance.

In terms of facilities, the District of Columbia and North Carolina charter schools receive some assistance with facilities acquisition. District of Columbia charter schools have preference over other applicants for vacant district buildings. Congress is also considering legislation requiring that unused public school facilities be provided to charter schools at less than market rates. In North Carolina the school district may lease or provide free-of-charge facilities for charter schools. State facility leasing funds are available to charter schools. Pennsylvania and New Jersey provide no facilities assistance from state funds. Aside from earlier one-time limited allocations, Connecticut does not provide facilities assistance, but charter schools may apply for low-interest loans from the Connecticut Health and Educational Facilities Authority.

The Delaware requirement that districts make unused buildings available to charter schools is a strength for charter school applicants. The cost involved with securing a building is a challenge for most charter applicants. Having an unused building available to rent may make it easier for a group to start the charter process. In addition, the legislation may also improve the revenue stream for districts with unused buildings. A survey of all the states with charter school legislation reveals that little more than half (55%) of the states provide facilities funds or other facilities assistance.

Like Delaware, none of the states in the sample provide start-up finds, although charter applicants are eligible for federal start-up grants in all the states. The failure to supply additional state start-up funds may be seen as a weakness, because charter school applicants are required to use a large part of their funding before state or district funding is available. Across the U.S. only 20 percent of the states with charter school legislation provide start-up and/or planning grants to charter schools. The lack of start-up funding is a serious obstacle for charter applicants.

Fiscal autonomy. Delaware charter school legislation allows the charter schools fiscal autonomy as does legislation enacted by all the states in the sample. Delaware charter schools, however, must operate within the state finance system as do other public entities. In Connecticut, although charter schools have fiscal autonomy, state officials still maintain some control over funding, as specified in the school charter.

Student Enrollment

Student issues include how schools are to address eligibility and preference for enrollment. Delaware legislation mandates that all students in the state are eligible to attend charter schools. Preference may be given to these students:

- ❏ siblings of enrolled students
- ❏ students attending an existing public school converting to charter status
- ❏ students residing within a 5-mile radius of a new charter school
- ❏ students residing within the regular school district of a new charter school
- ❏ students who have a specific interest in a new charter school's teaching methods, philosophy, or educational focus
- ❏ students who are at risk of academic failure
- ❏ children of founders and employees

The other states in the sample also indicate that all students in the state are eligible to attend charter schools, and each state allows charter schools to give preference for enrollment to one or more categories of students. The most common categories for preference are listed below:

- ❏ siblings of enrolled students
- ❏ students attending an existing school converting to charter status
- ❏ students residing within the school district or within attendance boundaries
- ❏ children of employees, founders, and board members

Nationwide, 88 percent of the states with charter legislation specify the categories of students that may be given preference for enrollment. Legislation that defines categories of students who are to be given preference for enrollment can be seen as a strength for charter school parents and parents of children in schools applying for a conversion. This legislation protects the interests of students and parents who may decide to enroll in a converted school and those of parents with children already enrolled in charter schools who wish to enroll additional children.

Staffing and Labor Relations

Staffing and labor relation topics include (a) proportion of teachers that must be certified, (b) which labor relations laws apply, and (c) other staff rights and privileges.

Teacher certification. Delaware charter school legislation states that unless otherwise provided in Section 507, all teachers working in charter schools shall hold an appropriate teaching certificate and license. Notwithstanding the foregoing, in any school year where there is no "qualified alternative certification" in effect, a charter school may, where it deems it beneficial to the success of its education program, hire teachers that are not fully certified and licensed as long as such teachers have at least a bachelor's degree in the content area in which they are teaching and comprise no more than 35 percent of the teachers in the school.

With the exception of the District of Columbia where teachers in charter schools do not have to be certified, the states in the sample require that teachers be certified, although the percentage of uncertified teachers allowed varies. In Connecticut at least 50 percent of a charter school's teachers must have standard certification, and up to 50 percent of teachers may have alternative certification or temporary certification and be working toward standard certification. In Pennsylvania up to 25 percent of teachers may be uncertified. North Carolina allows up to 25 percent of teachers in grades K-5 and up to 50 percent of teachers in grades 6-12 to be uncertified.

Only four states in the United States do not require teachers in charter schools to be certified: the District of Columbia, Arizona, Georgia and Texas. Delaware's legislation appears to be consistent with that of comparable states. This provision grants some flexibility to charter seekers and charter holders while still ensuring competent instruction for students.

Collective bargaining. Delaware charter school legislation allows employees of charter schools to have the same right to organize and bargain collectively as employees of other public schools. The employees of a school converted to charter status and who are employed by the charter school shall not be part of any collective bargaining unit that represented employees of the school before it was converted to a charter school.

Similarly, the legislation of Pennsylvania and the District of Columbia states that a charter school's teachers are not covered by school district collective bargaining agreements but may negotiate as a separate unit. Charter school teachers in Connecticut, New Jersey, and North Carolina are covered by the school district's collective bargaining agreement although variations exist. In Connecticut a local charter school's teachers would be covered by the school district's collective bargaining agreement, but such agreement may be modified by a majority of charter school teachers and the charter school governing council. A state charter school's teachers may negotiate as a separate unit with the charter school governing council or work independently. In New Jersey teachers in converted public schools are covered by the school district's collective bargaining agreement. Teachers in start-up schools may remain covered by the school district's collective bargaining agreement, negotiate as a separate unit with the charter school's governing board, or work independently.

In the U.S., the majority of states with charter school legislation (58%) exempt charter schools from school district collective bargaining agreements. Legislation freeing charter schools from the district's collective bargaining agreement and allowing school employees to form their own collective bargaining unit can be perceived as a strength of the legislation because charter holders and employees have the flexibility to negotiate their own working conditions.

Staff rights and privileges. Delaware charter school legislation allows teachers in traditional public schools to have a one year leave of absence to work in charter schools that are still in their

first year of operation, unless specified otherwise in the collective bargaining agreement. The other states in the sample similarly allow teachers a leave of absence to teach in charter schools, although the length of the leave varies. North Carolina teachers may have a leave only up to one year. New Jersey teachers may have a leave up to three years, Connecticut up to four years, and Pennsylvania teachers up to five years. Teachers in the District of Columbia may have a two-year leave of absence with an unlimited number of two-year extensions. Delaware legislation may be seen as a weakness in this area because of the relatively short leave of absence allowed. A longer leave of absence might be seen as a greater strength to permit teachers more flexibility and help ensure that more experienced teachers seek employment in charter schools.

Delaware's charter school teachers have equal access to the public school system's retirement system. The same is true in the other states in the sample, with the exception of the District of Columbia where charter school teachers have equal access to the public school teachers' retirement system only if they transfer from a public school. The Delaware legislation can be seen as a strength because it gives prospective charter school teachers access to an attractive and well established retirement system.

Accountability

Accountability issues include (a) whether or not charter schools are held accountable to the state's standards and assessments, (b) reporting requirements, and (c) charter renewal and revocation issues.

Application of state standards and assessments to charter schools. Delaware charter school legislation requires charter schools to set goals for student performance and utilize satisfactory indicators to determine whether its students meet or exceed such goals and the academic standards set by the state. The indicators shall include the assessments required for students in other public schools, although the charter school may adopt additional performance standards or assessment requirements. Similarly for the states in the comparison group, state standards and assessments are applicable to charter schools. In the case of the District of Columbia, districtwide standards and assessments are applicable to charter schools. This aspect of Delaware legislation can be seen as a strength because it holds charter schools accountable for the same level of evidence of student learning as other public schools in the state.

Reporting requirements. Delaware charter school legislation requires charter schools to prepare an annual report and undergo annual financial audits. The annual report is to be submitted to the approving authority, the department of education, and the state board of education. In turn, the legislation requires the state department of education to prepare an annual report for the governor and the legislature. Other charter schools in the sample must prepare annual reports and are subject to financial audits. All the states in the sample, with the exception of the District of Columbia, require the state education agency to report to the legislature on the effectiveness of the charter schools. This reporting requirement can be viewed as a strength of the legislation because it provides a basis for charter school accountability.

Charter renewal and revocation. Although the initial charter is for 4 years in Delaware, up until the summer of 2004, charter schools had to seek renewal in their third year of operation. Three years after a Delaware charter school has commenced its instructional program and not later than every five years thereafter, the approving authority shall, upon notice to the charter school, review the performance of the charter school to determine its compliance with its charter. The charter school legislation lists grounds for terminating a school's charter. Similarly, the other states in the sample define the renewal process and list the grounds for termination of the charter. This process appears standard and can be seen as a strength because it protects the stakeholders from fraud or substandard operation.

2.2 Analysis of the Delaware Charter School Law Relative to Nearby States

In this section, an analysis of the Delaware charter school law is provided using the rating framework estabished by the Center for Education Reform (CER). The CER is an advocacy group for charter schools and believes that the best charter school laws are those that grant the most autonomy to the schools. Each year, CER updates and revises its ratings and rankings of charter school laws. Its ratings are based on the text of the law and not the manner or degree to which is is applied.

The CER has assigned grades to each charter school state and region (District of Columbia and Puerto Rico) on the basis of the strength of its charter laws. Each state or region receives a grade of A through F. Laws with a grade of A are deemed to be very permissive or least restrictive, and laws with an F are deemed to be very restrictive. The strength of a charter school law is defined by how restrictive it is based on 10 different factors such as the number of schools allowed, waivers from regulations, autonomy, and funding. On each factor, the state's charter law is graded on a scale of 1 through 5; a maximum of 50 points can be earned. Delaware, the District of Columbia, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and New Jersey were determined by CER to have strong to medium strength laws (A-B). Connecticut was determined to have a weak law.

Delaware scored a total of 44.5 points out of 50 possible points, giving it an A and a ranking of fourth place in all states and regions in 2002 (see Table 2:1). In the sample of comparison states or charter school laws, only the District of Columbia has stronger charter school legislation. Delaware's charter law ranking fell from second place in 2001 to fourth place in 2002.

Table 2:1 Grading and Ranking of Charter School Laws by the Center for Education Reform

State/Region	*Grade*	*Total Points*	*Rank (2002)*
Delaware	A	44.5	4
Connecticut	C	23.0	28
District of Columbia	A	44.8	3
New Jersey	B	32.5	17
North Carolina	B	37.3	12
Pennsylvania	B	36.8	13

Delaware received the maximum score (5) in the following five areas: number of schools allowed (states that permit an unlimited or substantial number of charter schools score high); eligible charter applicants (states that permit a variety of individuals and groups to start charter schools score high); guaranteed full per-pupil funding (states that guarantee 100 percent of per-pupil funding score high); fiscal autonomy (states that give charter schools full control over their own budgets score high); and exemption from collective bargaining agreement/district work rules (states that give charter schools complete control over personnel decisions score high). Table 2:2 contains scores and ratings by specified criteria.

Table 2:2 Ranking Scorecard Adapted from the Center for Education Reform, 2003

Criteria	*DE*	*CT*	*DC*	*NJ*	*NC*	*PA*
Number of schools allowed	5.0	1.5	4.5	5.0	3.0	5.0
Multiple chartering authorities	4.0	2.5	4.0	3.0	3.0	1.8
Eligible charter applicants	5.0	1.5	5.0	4.0	5.0	5.0
New starts allowed	4.5	4.0	4.8	4.5	4.8	4.5
New school may be started without evidence of local support	3.5	1.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.5
Automatic waiver from state and district laws	3.5	2.5	5.0	1.0	4.0	3.0
Legal/operational autonomy	4.0	0.5	4.5	2.0	3.0	3.0
Guaranteed full per-pupil funding	5.0	3.5	4.5	2.0	4.5	3.0
Fiscal autonomy	5.0	3.0	4.5	5.0	4.0	3.5
Exempt from collective bargaining agreement/district work rules	5.0	2.5	5.0	3.0	3.0	4.5
Total	44.5	23.0	44.8	32.5	37.3	36.8

Delaware received 4.5 of 5 points in the area of allowing new starts: States that permit new schools to start up score higher than states that permit only conversions. Likewise, Delaware received 4 of 5 points in two areas: multiple chartering authorities (states that permit a number of authorizing entities score high) and legal/operational authority (states in which charter schools are independent legal entities score high).

Delaware received 3.5 of 5 points in two areas: Schools may be started without evidence of local support (states that permit new charter schools to apply without proving local support score high) and automatic waiver from state and district laws (states that provide automatic blanket waivers of most or all state and district rules score high).

These high scores indicate that Delaware's charter school law is strong from the point of view of charter school applicants and charter holders. To support new charter applicants, the Delaware charter school law has no cap on the total number of schools, allows conversions as well as new starts, and provides for multiple chartering authorities. To support the autonomy of charter holders, the Delaware charter school law guarantees full per-pupil funding; allows for a high level of fiscal,

legal, and operational autonomy; provides waivers from state and district laws; and permits exemption from collective bargaining agreements and district work rules.

Compared with the other states in the sample, only the District of Columbia (DC) had a higher score. DC received a higher score in the areas of new starts allowed, legal/operational autonomy, and automatic waiver from state and district laws. DC's charter school law might be considered more friendly to current charter holders.

The remaining states in the sample—North Carolina, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Connecticut—all scored lower than Delaware on the CER scorecard. Connecticut scored considerably lower than the other ranked states in the sample. There was a high level of agreement between the states in the sample in four areas:

- ❏ Number of schools allowed (DC, DE, PA, and NJ all scored either 4.5 or 5.)
- ❏ Eligible charter applicants (DC, DE, NC, and PA all scored 5.)
- ❏ New starts allowed (All six states scored either 4.75 or 4.5.)
- ❏ School may be started without evidence of local support (DC, DE, NC, PA, and NJ all scored 3 or 3.5.)[3]

There was a lower level of agreement between the ranked states in six areas:

- ❏ Multiple chartering authorities (DC and DE scored 4, others ranged from 3 to 1.75.)
- ❏ Automatic waivers from state and district laws (Scores ranged from 5 to 1. DE scored 3.5.)
- ❏ Legal/operational autonomy (Scores ranged from 4.5 to 0.5. DE scored 4.)
- ❏ Guaranteed full per-pupil funding (Scores ranged from 5 to 2. DE scored 5.)
- ❏ Fiscal autonomy (Scores ranged from 5 to 3. DE and NJ scored 5.)
- ❏ Exempt from collective bargaining agreement/district work rules (Scores ranged from 5 to 2.5. DC and DE scored 5.)
- ❏ Delaware's charter school law received the highest score in guaranteed full per-pupil funding (5).

Although the CER rankings imply that strength in a state's charter school law is a positive quality, others disagree. For example, it can be argued that excessive permissiveness in charter school laws may lead to a lack of accountability, potential for discrimination, fiscal irresponsibility, and the proliferation of poorly performing charter schools (Miron & Nelson, 2002). A synthesis of 17 studies of student achievement in charter schools (Miron & Nelson, 2004) revealed that there was no relationship between CER's ratings on the "strength" of charter school laws and their impact on the performance of students on standardized tests.

Summary of Strengths and Weaknesses

Delaware's charter school legislation has many areas of strength for charter school applicants, charter holders, charter authorizers, students, and their parents. A comparison of Delaware legislation with comparable states and an analysis conducted by the Center for Education Reform revealed these areas of strength:

[3] Delaware requires community support for public conversions but not for new start-ups.

- ❑ no cap on the number of charter schools
- ❑ multiple charter authorizers
- ❑ wide range of eligible charter applicants
- ❑ legal autonomy
- ❑ no requirement of evidence for local support for new start-up charter schools
- ❑ waivers from most education laws, regulations, and policies
- ❑ full funding
- ❑ transportation funding
- ❑ teacher certification requirements
- ❑ collective bargaining exemption
- ❑ teacher access to state retirement system
- ❑ teacher leave of absence, although only for 1 year
- ❑ application of state standards and assessments
- ❑ reporting requirements

While the examination of existing legislation did not reveal any serious weaknesses, a few areas might be looked at more closely for possible revision:

- ❑ longer term of the initial charter; this was extended to 4 years in the summer of 2004, but most states have an initial contract for 5 years
- ❑ additional start-up funds and financial support for facilities
- ❑ longer leave of absence for public school teachers to work in charter schools

2.3 Thoughts From Charter School Administrators Regarding the Delaware Charter School Legislation and Regulations[4]

From the perspective of the charter school administrators, the key concern is not with the charter school legislation. Rather, it's the manner in which it is being interpreted by the Department of Education (DOE). In fact, 5 out of the 13 charter schools specifically referred to disagreements in interpretation of the legislation as their primary concern regarding the work and role of DOE. In their view, the charter schools view the interpretation of the legislation by DOE as "overly rigid" and "anticharter."

Four general areas were identified as being of particular concern for the charter schools: (i) commitment letters, (ii) funding, (iii) modifications, and (iv) teacher certification. Some of these areas were also pointed out by DOE officials and representatives of local districts as being problematic.

[4] The data for this section are based on interviews with charter school administrators and staff, as well as interviews with representatives of the charter school advocacy or support groups.

Commitment Letters

Delaware law requires that a student remain enrolled in the charter school for a minimum of one school year, and the student's parents or guardians are required to sign a commitment letter to that effect. However, during the first year, a student may withdraw for "good cause";[5] after the first year a student may withdraw from the charter school with or without "good cause." Letters of commitment are intended to help charter schools and local district schools plan more effectively for enrollments.[6] At the same time, this is one area where enforcement is overly burdensome and infeasible.[7]

Seven of the 13 charter school principals expressed strong opinions regarding the utility and impact of the commitment letters. There concerns were partially addressed in new legislation passed in the summer of 2004. Previously, the letters of commitment were due March 1 each year and they were audited once in March and again in May. Now the letters of commitment are due May 1 and while there is no formal audit, the charter schools are required to notify the Department of Education and all school districts from which they enroll students. The notification from the charter school is to include a roster of students who are enrolled at the charter school, together with their home address and district of residence.

Commitment letters are rather unique to Delaware can be deemed an unnecessary burden on charter schools. Nonetheless, because the commitment letters and notifications from charter schools will help local district plan better, it is possible that this will lead to more friendly relations between charters schools and traditional public schools. Therefore, with the revised provisions regarding commitment letters this aspect of the law should be seen as a strength.

Funding Issues

The charter school administrators expressed a variety of concerns and opinions about legislation and regulations regarding school funding; the key issues were fair and timely distribution of funds. Seven charter schools identified funding as a major concern, and most of the charter schools think some aspect of their current funding is unfair or unjust. While the merits of these claims cannot be

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[5] This is explained in 14 Del. C. Section 506 (d).

[6] This requirement is rather unique to Delaware. Research from other states, including our own work, (see Horn & Miron, 2002) had identified that one of the most serious problems for districts occurs during a charter school's first year of operation when parents express interest in a charter school but do not wish to officially exit the district school. Competing requests for school records ensues, and neither the district nor charter school can be certain how many teachers to employ or the number of students for which they must prepare. After the first year confusion, the numbers of students transferring is considerably smaller and presents less of a problem for charter schools and districts alike.

[7] One principal called the commitment letters "intimidating" for the students and families. Charter schools are intended to be schools of choice, and the schools stressed that they did not want to "enroll students whose families did not want to be there." A few principals commented that the DOE does not want to enforce the commitments. This point was made clear in one charter school where around 10 students decided not to stay, even though their parents had signed a commitment letter during the previous spring. The charter school board decided that the school should retain the student records and it sent a letter to the DOE requesting help to have these students returned to them. The school reported that it received no response from DOE . While the school kept these students on its roster, reportedly it was not able to count them for funding purposes.

confirmed, we believe that it is worthwhile to reiterate these claims to provide some insight into the perspective of the charter schools.[8]

Delaware legislation states that charter schools shall receive resources equal to those of other public schools. Funding for public schools in Delaware comes from the local tax base and from state sources. Therefore, charter schools get a portion of their funding from the state and a portion from the local district. A number of charter school administrators complained that funding from the local district is often late. "I'd like to see something enforceable to make local districts pay and to pay on schedule. It's now almost February and we've had money due in November that the district has still not paid." In contrast, a district administrator claimed that "the charter schools hold on to students through the September 30th count and then they are encouraged to return to public schools after the count."

Because of their relatively small size, several charter schools pointed out that funding guidelines were unfair and made them vulnerable. For example, a few charter schools thought they received less money than the larger districts for administration or specific things such as school health or special education. One charter school director pointed out how vulnerable a charter school could be if it were to receive more expensive-to-educate students than the average per-pupil calculations accounted for: "If one child with a disability is required to be sent out of the state for service, it would break us."

Several of the schools reported that the funding for transportation was unfair. As explained earlier in this chapter, charter schools may request the local district to provide transportation for charter school students residing within its boundaries on the same basis offered to students attending schools operated by the district. Otherwise, charter schools may choose to provide transportation themselves and can request from the state up to 75 percent of the average per-pupil costs for transportation within the vocational district in which the charter school is located. While many charter schools cater to students in close proximity to their school, some of them recruit and enroll students from throughout the county and beyond. In these instances, the charter schools thought they should receive funding for transportation equivalent to the county vo-tech schools.

Based on concerns such as these, many representatives from charter schools indicated that they would like to have an examination of the payment process to ensure fair and timely payments.

Modifications

Regulations governing charter schools sponsored by SBOE require that schools wishing to make modifications to the charter agreement must formally apply for this from the DOE. The application form for a modification is 18 pages long. The form for a minor modification is 5 pages long. According to nearly half of the charter school administrators we interviewed, modification of the charter agreement is excessively complex and time-consuming. One principal reported that the modification application and approval process took 90 days before it was approved. The process is viewed by the charters as labor intensive and tedious; if there are errors in the application form, the process can take much longer.

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[8] In year 2 of this project, an in-depth analysis of charter school finance will be conducted that will compare and contrast patterns of revenues and expenditures among charter schools and between charter schools and traditional public schools. This should shed further light into claims regarding fair and equitable finance.

A number of examples were used by the charter schools to illustrate how even apparently modest changes could consume substantial time and resources for both charter schools and DOE staff. The general consensus by the charter schools was for increased flexibility, less paperwork, and a quicker application process when it comes to modifications in the charter agreement.

Teacher Certification

As noted earlier in this chapter, Delaware has the same high standards and requirements for charter school teachers as they do for traditional public school teachers. While greater autonomy is given to charter schools to hire and fire teachers, this autonomy does not allow them to hire noncertified teachers. Several schools indicated that the standards set out in the legislation regarding teacher qualifications were too difficult to meet. Many examples were shared with regard to the hardships schools were facing as they strove to fully comply with teacher certification regulations. One principal questioned the logic and "value of 100 percent certification as long as they are still accountable for student performance." Not surprisingly the schools that were in compliance and the schools with less teacher attrition did not complain as loudly about this issue.

Conclusion

The current opinion of many of the charter schools is that the overregulation of the charter schools limits their capacity for providing high quality service to students and their families. The charter schools also thought that strict regulations inhibit their ability to be innovative and adaptive to local conditions. One charter school director stated, "They [DOE] seem to use the threat of probation too often .... Furthermore, DOE forces you to have lots of administration." Another director explained how he felt inundated with requests from DOE and overwhelmed by so many different people and offices with whom to correspond. He opined, "DOE has to let loose some so that I can run my school."

While many complaints were leveled at the Department of Education for its rigid interpretation and enforcement of legislation and regulations, the charter schools were also quick to acknowledge that the support and guidance provided by the Department of Education were constructive and very helpful. While some charter school representatives indicated that they thought that the DOE is anticharter school, this view was not shared by all.[9]

Department of Education officials also indicated that they are aware of the heavy regulatory burden on the schools. After all, this was also seen as a burden for DOE. A DOE administrator indicated that the DOE continues to improve the process of how to handle the work of charter schools by simplifying the process and by enhancing clarity in the process. In the opinion of a few DOE staff, the reasons that charter schools were struggling with regulations included such things as insufficient technical knowledge and limited knowledge and experience in policy and business. Another likely reason that charter schools were struggling with compliance with regulations was reported to be high turnover among staff and teachers.

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[9] Based on our own interviews with DOE and SBOE representatives, it was clear that these individuals had a good understanding of the charter schools and that they were not biased against them. While DOE officials could clearly point out problem areas and schools that were struggling, they were also quick to point out successes in the schools and awards that some had been receiving.

Chapter Three
Description of the Schools and Their Students

In this chapter, we provide a general description of Delaware charter schools and student enrollment patterns. The first section discusses the growth and development of charter schools in Delaware. To support the findings in this section, we have included Appendix A, which contains a detailed table of school level data with information on how each charter school was formed, start-up funding sources, and information about each school's board of directors. Section 3.2 discusses the management and governance of charter schools and includes information on relevant legislation, types of authorizing agencies, and education management organizations. Section 3.3 describes innovations in Delaware charter schools, including school-by-school innovation profiles. The final section examines school enrollment patterns for 13 charter schools.

3.1 Growth and Development of the Schools

The number of charter schools in Delaware and their student enrollment have continued to grow since the first two charter schools in the state opened in September 1996. Currently, 13 charter schools are operating in the 2004-05 school year with a total enrollment of 6,257 students (DDOE, n.d.). Approximately 5.4 percent of Delaware public school students attend charter schools. Figure 3:1 shows the growth rate of total student enrollment for all Delaware charter schools from 1996-2004.

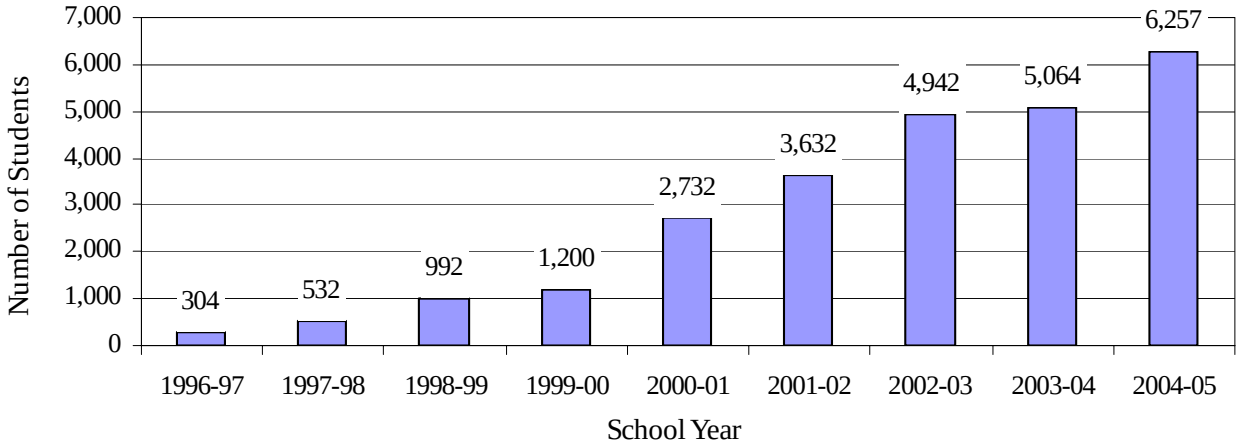


Figure 3:1 Total Students Enrolled in Delaware Charter Schools
Source: 1996-1999 enrollment data from DDOE, 2004, p. 345; 2000-2004 data from DDOE School Profiles
Note. 2001-02 data do not contain enrollment data for Georgetown Charter School

According to the Delaware Department of Education Web site, an additional charter school, Sussex College Academy, is scheduled to open in 2005-06. Thus far, two charter schools have closed after one or less year of operation due to financial problems and other difficulties (i.e., Richard Milburn Academy closed in summer 2000 and Georgetown Charter School closed in March 2002). Figure 3:2 shows the number of new charter schools opened annually and the total number of charter schools in operation from 1996-2004.

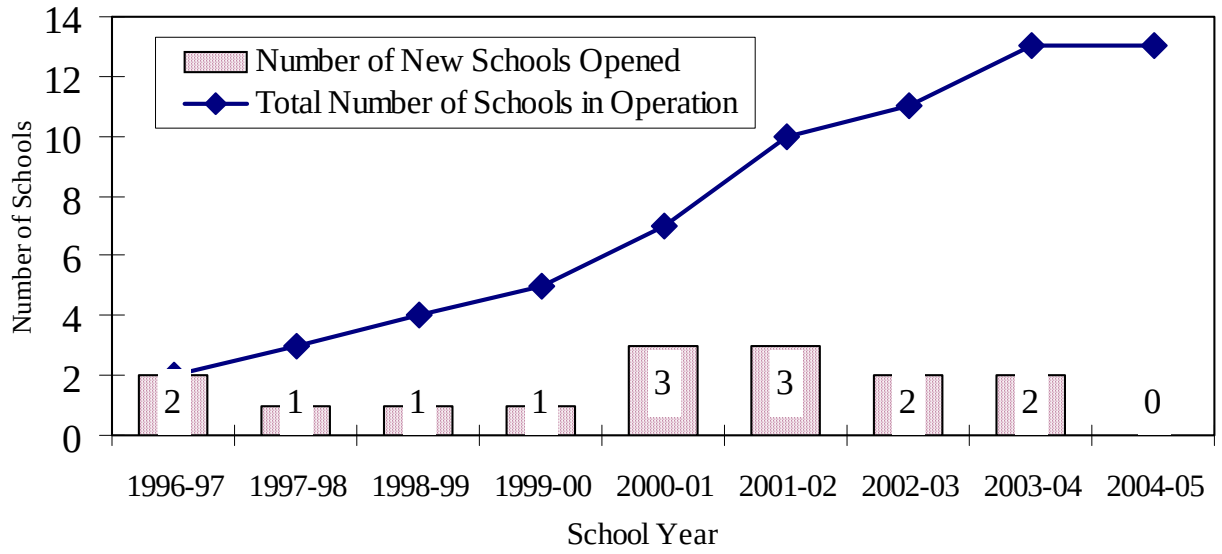


Figure 3:2 Growth of Delaware Charter Schools (DDOE, 2004)

As of 2004-05, no Delaware charter school has a complete K-12 curriculum. Instead, the 13 charter schools have an average offering of close to 7 grades, with a minimum of 3 grades offered at 1 school and a maximum of 12 grades available at 1 school (from Grades 1 to 12, but no K). Three charter schools provide instruction for upper secondary (two with Grades 9-12 and one with Grades 7-12), 2 schools offer only middle school instruction (Grades 5-8 and 6-8), and 7 charter schools focus on elementary and middle grades (three K-6 and four K-8).

Many charter schools open with a limited range of grade offerings and expand upwards by adding a grade each year until they reach the limit agreed upon in their charter contract. Interestingly, several charter schools have specific goals based on enrollment and facility expansion. Several schools also have caps and limits to growth determined as part of an ultimate long-term operating plan. Most schools report that they have waiting lists for enrollment, and 1 school's wait list includes 500 students (ISDN, n.d.).

Appendix A contains brief narratives about how each Delaware charter school was started, including the primary catalyst leading to the charter. Catalysts for creating charter schools most commonly include a group of parents and a visionary leader. However, catalysts also span a range that includes a housing authority agency, staff from an adolescent psychiatric unit of a hospital, and a miliary commandant. Appendix A also outlines start-up funding sources for those schools that provided the information in interviews.

3.2 Management and Governance of Charter Schools

Delaware Code, Title 14, Chapter 5 was enacted in 1995 and provides the framework for charter schools operating in the state. Section 503 of the code defines the legal status of charter schools and specifies that the approving authority (or the "authorizer") can be a public school district or the State Department of Education. The charter is granted for an initial period of four school years of operation and renewable every five school years thereafter by a public school district or the State Department of Education with the approval of the State Board of Education. The authorizer that grants the charter for the school is responsible for the oversight and renewal of the school's charter. The charter school is governed and managed by a board of directors, which operates independently of any school board (State of Delaware, 2004, §503).

Eleven of 13 Delaware school charters were approved by the Delaware Department of Education and the State Board of Education. Two school charters (Charter School of Wilmington and Delaware Military Academy) were approved by the Red Clay Consolidated School District Board of Education. Based on interview data, the two chief administrators from the district-authorized charter schools were pleased with the amount and nature of oversight from the Red Clay Consolidated School District. This was not the case for schools chartered by the State Board of Education.

Each charter school's governing board of directors is made up of parents, teachers, and community members. Many boards also include founding members of the charter school, key business people, and professionals such as lawyers and accountants. A few school boards have representatives from universities, colleges, and public agencies. Some boards are very successful at fund- raising efforts, in part because of the networks and affiliations of board members. Appendix A contains a more detailed description of board makeup for individual schools. The information is based on interviews with charter school district administrators and Web site information retrieved in October 2004.

Two charter schools are currently run by for-profit education management organizations (EMOs). The Academy of Dover is operated by Mosaica Education, Inc., a charter school management company. Thomas A. Edison Charter School of Wilmington is operated by Edison Schools, Inc. At least three charter schools in the state have terminated contracts with management companies (Providence Creek Academy, MOT, and Marion T. Academy). Another for-profit company, Richard Milburn Academies, opened one charter school in Delaware but the school closed after its first year of operation.

Analyses of performances of schools run by private companies is difficult for several reasons, including these: (1) private companies often operate less transparently than public entities; (2) the rapid growth of the EMO sector, including mergers and changes in operation, makes tracking and following data more complicated; (3) many states don't require stringent reporting requirements from EMOs; and (4) the speed with which some EMO-run schools close or terminate management agreements. During 2004 site visit interviews with Delaware charter school district administrators, three principals from EMO-managed charter schools reported satisfaction with the EMO. However, one of those schools has since terminated its agreement with the EMO. Another EMO-run charter school administrator thought the EMO was helpful and most active during the start-up period of the school; but involvement has waned, and the school continues to pay them more than a half million

dollars a year for their services. At least three principals/directors stated they were strongly opposed to EMOs running their school. One director said he would consider contracting out certain services when it's cost efficient, but he "would rather close than [be run by a] management company."

On the whole, the Delaware charter reform has not been a particularly fertile ground for education management organizations. One reason for this is the requirement that all schools use the state's purchasing system, which is transparent and uniform for all schools. Many EMOs have their own budgeting and purchasing systems that they prefer to use across sites. Another reason is that some EMOs attempt to protect their investment in a school by exercising authority on the governing board. This is not permitted and actually led to one EMO leaving the state before its school could be started. Finally, the overall rigor of oversight in Delaware has produced an environment that the EMOs find less hospitable. In fact, the states in which EMOs are most common are states with very permissive charter school laws, such as Arizona, Florida, Michigan, and Ohio.

3.3 Innovations in Delaware Charter Schools

When asked about innovations at his charter school, one director stated, "The innovations are site-based management and market accountability. We are always looking to improve everything we're doing." Other directors also stated "site management" as being innovative to their school versus standard district "bureaucracy."

Charter school governance varies in terms of board of director makeup. Each school has different levels of support groups that fit into its overarching governance structure. These groups include some active and strong Parent Teacher Organizations (PTOs); foundation and fund-raising boards; and subcommittees that focus on specific issues such as advisory duties, development, and curriculum.

During interviews with charter school administrators, many said that too much of their time is spent on reporting and regulation requirements versus site management. One frustrated director said she spent two-and-a-half weeks a month responding to DOE requests. Some administrators thought the statewide student testing and performance requirements did not allow time for innovative curriculums to be fully implemented. These topics and related items are discussed in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

General Innovations by School

Innovations in Delaware charter schools include focus on a particular curriculum, additional college credit (AP) classes, serving at-risk student populations, parent involvement, community volunteer activities, and emphasis on world cultures. Several charter schools offer a special curriculum package or framework. Many schools incorporate the curriculum model's core principles into the goals and mission of the school. Specific innovations for each operating charter school are listed below. This information is based on charter school administrator interviews, DDOE student profile information, and Web-based information.

Academy of Dover. This charter school is run by the EMO Mosaica, Inc., which uses a proprietary curriculum called Paragon that integrates the humanities. The school also incorporates

the Open Court reading program where students learn to read and then they read to others. The school has a longer academic year (200 days) and a one-hour longer school day (8:00am-3:30pm).

Campus Community Schools. The school uses a constructivism approach based on the philosophy of Dr. William Glasser, author of *The Quality School: Managing Students Without Coercion.* The curriculum involves hands-on learning with no textbooks. Schools are part of a "Quality School" network, and students and staff are taught to use Choice Theory in their lives and in their work. The goals and objectives of these theories are related to the charter school's mission. The administration is site-based and involves a management team.

Charter School of Wilmington. This is a selective school with a rigorous academic profile. The curriculum emphasizes the development of math, science, and technology skills. The director stated, "It's not what we do; it's how we do it." The school is adding five college courses on site from the University of Delaware so students will graduate with college credits. It has an extensive AP program. The director also stated that morale is important; to illustrate an example of this, he said they use positive reinforcement such as sending parentgrams with good news about students.

Delaware Military Academy. This charter school offers the first all-Navy Jr. Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) curriculum in the U.S. The school day is an hour longer so students earn 26 credits, rather than 22, to accommodate the military science courses. It offers modified block scheduling (every other day) and college preparatory classes. The school is developing the capacity to offer AP courses.

East Side Charter School. The charter school offers an 11-month schedule, extended day program (after school hours from 3:30-6:00 p.m.), small class size (16 students per class), breakfast and lunch, and uniforms for all grades. They want to remain small with no more than 16 students in a class. All the students receive free and reduced lunches. All the students are "at-risk" children. Parents sign a commitment to volunteer four hours a month. Parents do many things including making repairs, maintaining the grounds, cleaning classrooms, before and after care, kitchen work, recess duty, and aide duty. The director is thinking of starting volunteer hours for students.

Kuumba Academy. The curriculum is based in part on the work of Dr. Howard Gardner and the Project Zero education research group at the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University. The curriculum uses the arts as a tool for learning, multiple modes of intelligence, respecting individual learning differences, and other principles. The director stated that the difference between this charter school and other schools is the school culture. Innovative practices are used, such as Spanish instruction; parent presence and involvement; character education and citizenship through principles of Kwanza; building a sense of self-worth and confidence; focusing on learning about world cultures; and using the arts to enhance learning.

Marion T. Academy. At the time of site interviews, the school was run by EMO Mosaica, Inc. The school partially used Paragon, the proprietary curriculum from Mosaica. The principal described the curriculum as "cutting edge" and incorporating differentiation instruction and learning.

MOT Charter School. The director stated, "Innovations are on the horizon" and that they had to align the curriculum first and obtain instructional materials. Last year [2002-03] was the school's first year of operation and it went through two principals. The following year, two weeks at the beginning of the year were lost to a mold delay. All the carpets had to be torn up. The curriculum emphasizes "hands-on" science and technology learning. School profile data state that the curriculum also emphasizes core values and fundamentals of learning such as Hirsch Core Knowledge program. The Hirsch curriculum focuses on the "Four S's of Core Knowledge: Solid, Sequenced, Specific, and Shared."

Newark Charter School. The school sets rigorous academic standards for students. In relation to how the charter school was different from traditional public schools, the director stated, "The whole program—parent involvement, behavior, core knowledge, grouping, decorum, dress code, and community service. There's a big difference in the way we operate and hire teachers to operate."

Positive Outcomes Charter School. The charter school provides educational opportunities for students at risk. Each student works toward graduation and employability, which helps develop an increased self-esteem. Individuality is valued, and individual needs are addressed. The school seeks a cooperative working relationship with the traditional school districts and vocational school districts and is committed to serving students who have been unsuccessful at other schools.

Providence Creek Academy. The curriculum emphasizes project-based learning, differentiated instruction, and a strong emphasis on literacy. The school has an open-door policy for parents. The school offers an outdoor learning experience with access to a watershed estuary and nature trails. There are also many optional courses to choose from such as music, art, library, Spanish, and Latin.

Sussex Academy of Arts and Sciences. The school focuses on the "3 C's: conceptualize, coping, communication." Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound (ELOB) curriculum framework is used and involves multiage grouping, a focus on civility with layers of respect, cooperative learning, a schoolwide service component, and schoolwide expeditions. Expeditionary Learning "emphasizes learning by doing with a particular focus on character growth, teamwork, literacy, adventure and service . . ." (ELOB, n.d.). The director stated, "There's a spirit of adventure. Last year's schoolwide, year-long theme was 'think globally, act locally.'" The charter school uses block schedules and teamed teaching.

Innovations That can be Replicated in Traditional Public Schools

Many district administrators thought the growth and influence of charter schools in Delaware impacted traditional public schools in various ways. One interesting quote from a charter school director was "If there's any negative impact, it's on the other districts—I'm not taking the best kids, I'm taking the best parents." Another charter school director stated his school "does take the best kids. Its hard to compete with" that charter school. One director at a charter school for at-risk students said, "The other schools love us. We take the kids they don't want."

More than a few directors stated that they most affected private school enrollment. One charter school director said about 40 percent of their enrollment came from private schools. Another school director said the school most impacted parochial schools by taking some of their students.

Administrators thought the growth and demand of charter schools had a positive effect upon traditional public schools. Some referenced specific school districts that are now examining their curriculums and making changes as a result of innovations at charter schools. Most innovations discussed by charter school administrators were in the categories of scheduling, curriculum, and parent involvement. Quotes from charter school administrators about these innovations are included below.

Scheduling

- ❏ "Two schools [at another district] are going to year-round scheduling next year. No schools in our district have made changes. One or two schools are starting full-day kindergarten."
- ❏ "The pressure for all-day kindergarten comes from charters and advocacy."
- ❏ "The biggest change has been full-day kindergarten; the other districts had to offer full-day kindergarten because parents left for the charters. Parents needed it."

Curriculum

- ❏ "The surrounding districts are rising to the competition and recruiting. They now offer strands for gifted children and offer more extracurricular activities. There's a spirit of competition, of reexamining themselves, and creating new courses."
- ❏ "The nonpublics and [a nearby public school district] have started to define a school focus . . they are redefining themselves."
- ❏ [The charter school] "has pushed the public schools to increase the math and science required for graduation. [Another school district] is proposing concentrations such as a school of math and science and a performing arts school . . . . There's a technology, math, and science competition. [One public] district is looking at our curriculum."
- ❏ "Public schools are now using more arts programming."
- ❏ "Other schools outside the state have shown interest in ROTC high schools including Nevada, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Florida."

Parental involvement

- ❏ "For the first time we have hundreds of parents who are reading the literature, questioning decision making. Schools are following the trends, treating kids and parents as customers."
- ❏ "Districts complain about loss of students, but they don't think of why students leave. Regular schools are not responsive to parents."

Charter school administrators had varying outlooks on how charter schools' innovations were perceived and supported by the traditional public school districts. One administrator said the nearby school district is very supportive and is having a problem with overcrowding. Many administrators reported good relationships with the other districts. Some stated the other school districts were uninterested and "resistant" to their innovations.

3.4 Students Enrolled in Delaware Charter Schools

Student enrollment characteristics vary greatly among charter schools. This section examines the following student characteristics: race and ethnicity, Limited English Proficiency (LEP), low income, and special education. Enrollment information is based on data from DDOE Fall 2004 School Profile information. Student achievement and testing data can be found in Chapter 7 of this report.

Race and Ethnicity

Figure 3:3 and Table 3:1 contain data regarding the student ethnicity for each charter school. One charter school has an African-American enrollment of close to 99 percent. Four charter schools have more than 90 percent enrollment of African-American students, and 1 charter school has 85 percent African-American students. Two charter schools have greater than 90 percent enrollment of white students in addition to 2 schools with more than 80 percent enrollment of white students. The 13 charter schools range from fewer than 1 percent to 6 percent enrollment of Hispanic students. Asian-American student populations range from 0 percent to close to 17 percent, and the Native American student population totals range from 0 percent to close to 2 percent at individual schools.

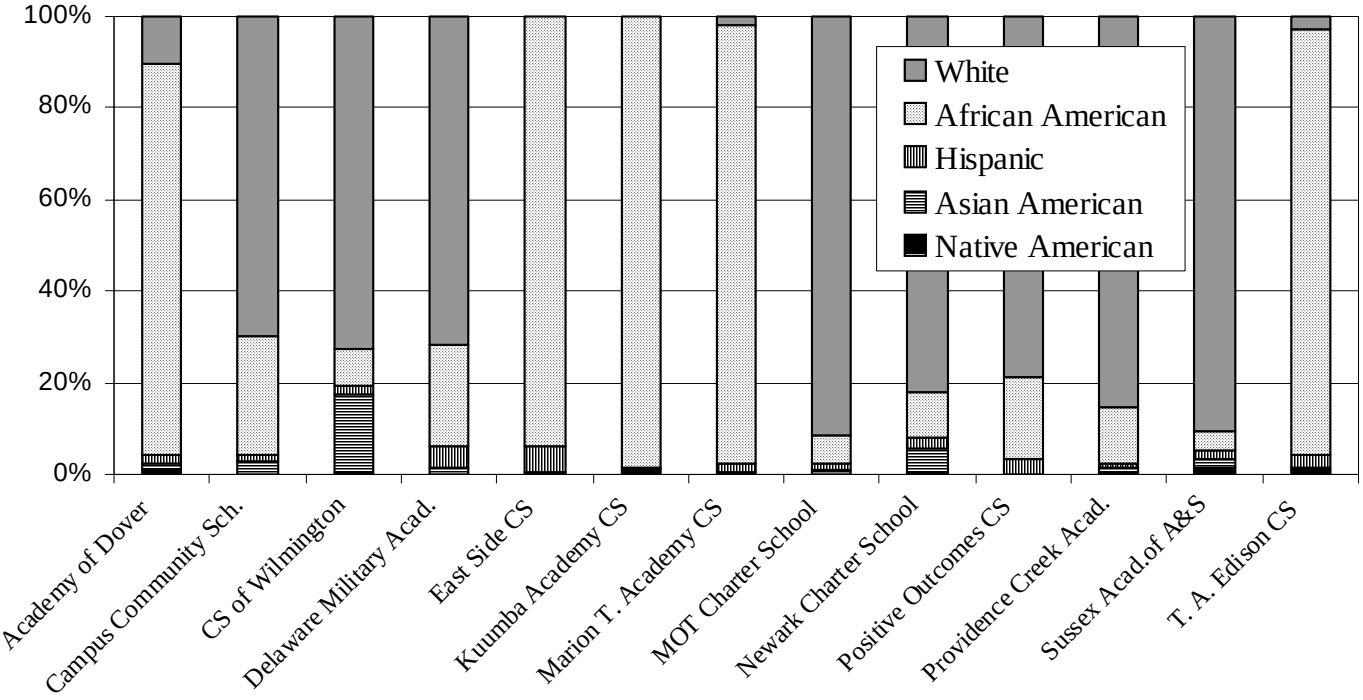
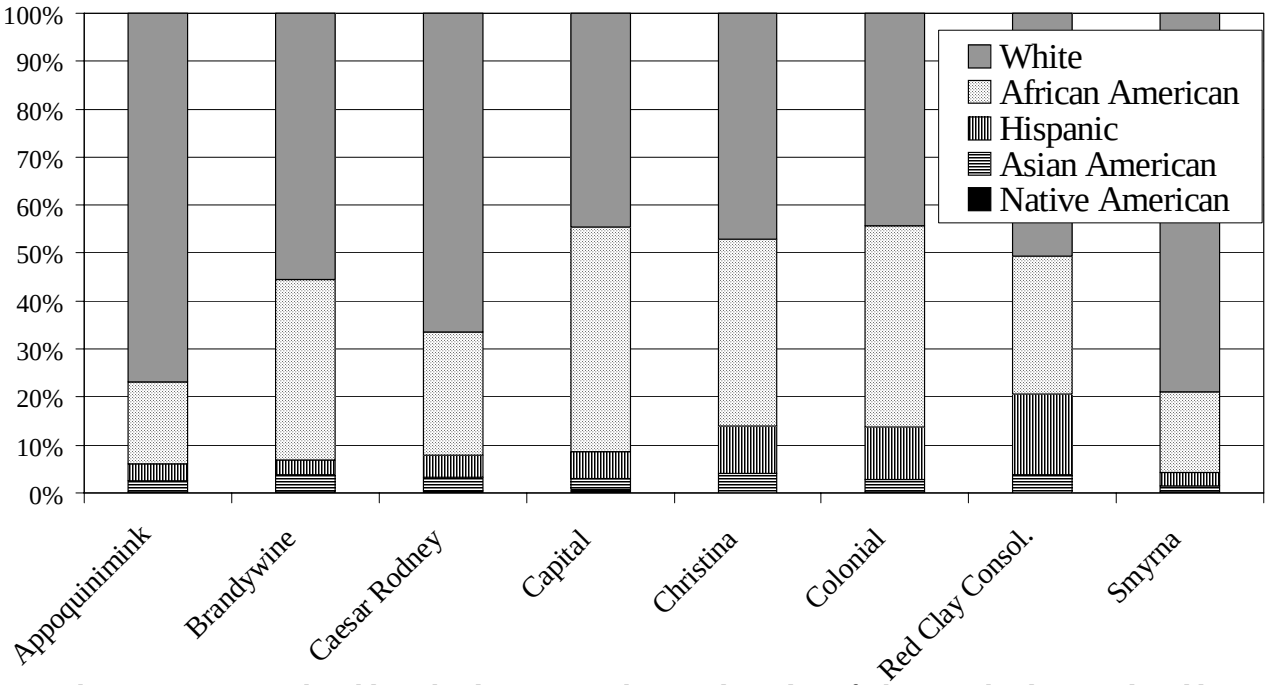


Figure 3:3 Delaware Charter School Student Race/Ethnicity (2004)

Table 3:1 Charter School Race/Ethnicity of Total Student Enrollment (2004)

Charter School District	*White*	*African American*	*Hispanic*	*Asian American*	*Native American*
Academy of Dover	10.3%	85.5%	2.0%	1.2%	1.0%
Campus Community School	69.9%	25.8%	1.6%	2.5%	0.2%
CS of Wilmington	72.5%	8.2%	2.0%	16.7%	0.7%
Delaware Military Academy	71.8%	22.0%	4.9%	1.3%	0.0%
East Side Charter School	0.0%	93.8%	5.6%	0.0%	0.7%
Kuumba Academy CS	0.0%	98.8%	0.4%	0.0%	0.8%
Marion T. Academy CS	1.7%	95.9%	2.0%	0.0%	0.5%
MOT Charter School	91.6%	5.9%	1.5%	1.0%	0.0%
Newark Charter School	82.3%	9.8%	2.1%	5.3%	0.5%
Positive Outcomes CS	78.8%	17.7%	3.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Providence Creek Academy CS	85.4%	12.2%	1.2%	0.8%	0.5%
Sussex Academy of A & S	90.6%	4.2%	2.0%	1.6%	1.6%
T. A. Edison CS of Wilmington	2.6%	93.3%	2.7%	0.4%	1.0%

Figure 3:4 and Table 3:2 shows noncharter and non-vo-tech school district data for districts within a 5-mile radius of any Delaware charter school. The districts within a 5-mile radius were determined using National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Common Core of Data (CCD) information. The traditional school districts appear to be much less polarized in terms of race. The schools range from nearly 17 percent to less than 47 percent African-American student enrollment. This is a striking difference from charter schools' African-American enrollment where six schools



Noncharter, Non-Vo-Tech Public School District Within 5 Mile Radius of Charter School Zip Code Address

Figure 3:4 Race/Ethnicity of Traditional Public Schools in Proximity to Charter Schools

have more than 85 percent enrollment of African-American students. Four charter schools also have enrollments of more than 80 percent white students, while no traditional public school district within a 5-mile radius has an enrollment of more than 80 percent white students. The noncharter school districts also appear to enroll a higher percentage of Hispanic students.

Table 3:2 Race/Ethnicity of Traditional Public Schools in Proximity to Charter Schools (2004)

School District	*White*	*African American*	*Hispanic*	*Asian American*	*Native American*
Appoquinimink	77.0%	17.1%	3.4%	2.3%	0.3%
Brandywine	55.4%	37.7%	3.1%	3.6%	0.2%
Caesar Rodney	66.5%	25.6%	4.7%	2.8%	0.4%
Capital	44.5%	46.8%	5.6%	2.4%	0.7%
Christina	47.0%	38.9%	9.9%	4.0%	0.1%
Colonial	44.4%	41.8%	11.1%	2.4%	0.3%
Red Clay Consolidated	50.7%	28.8%	16.7%	3.8%	0.1%
Smyrna	78.9%	16.7%	2.8%	1.4%	0.2%

Note. These districts were selected because they are within 5 miles of a charter school.

Other Student Characteristics: LEP, Low Income, Special Education

Delaware charter school districts also have considerable variance among other charter school districts when comparing other student characteristics such as LEP, low income, and special education. Figure 3:5 and Table 3:3 show the percentage of these characteristics compared with total student enrollment at each charter school. Two charter schools specialize in serving populations of

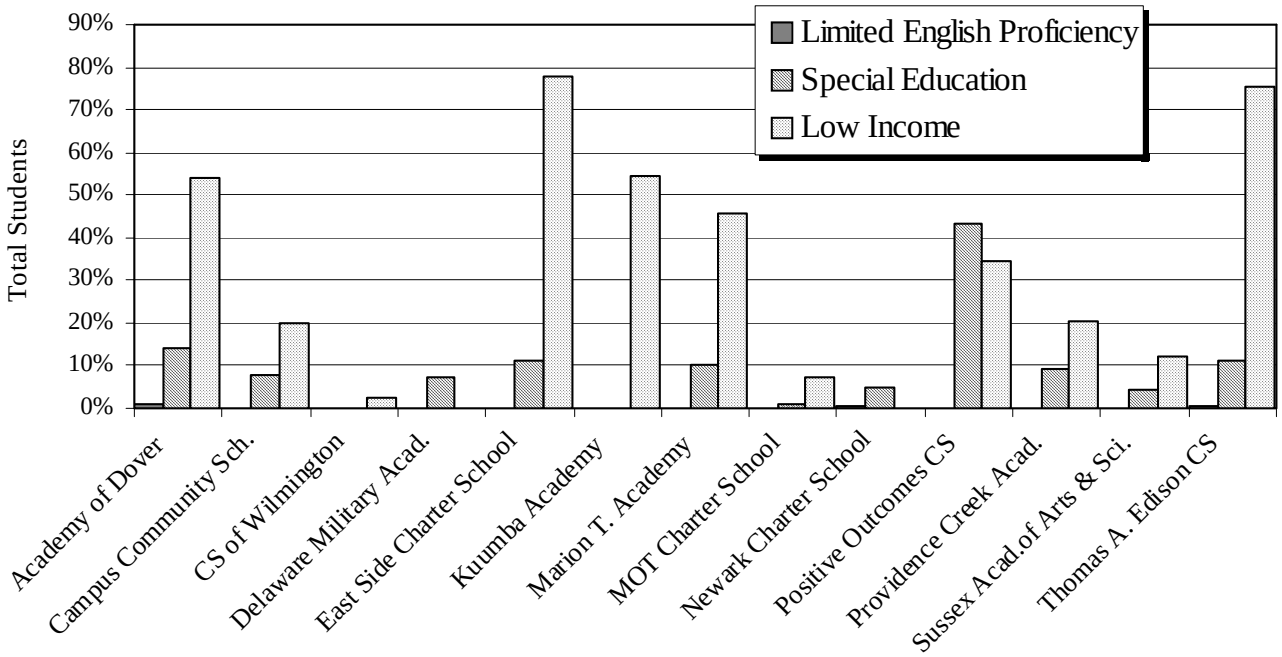


Figure 3:5 Student Enrollment Characteristics for Charter Schools

at-risk students. According to the director at one of these schools, all the students have IEPs or 504 plans (this charter school has the smallest enrollment of any Delaware school district and also the largest special education population of any district).

Table 3:3 Charter School LEP, Low Income, Special Education Percentages

Charter School District	*LEP*	*Special Ed*	*Low Income*	*Total Enrollment*
Academy of Dover	0.1%	14.0%	53.9%	408
Campus Community School	0.0%	7.6%	19.9%	569
CS of Wilmington	0.1%	0.2%	2.2%	918
Delaware Military Academy	0.0%	7.5%	0.0%	305
East Side CS	0.0%	11.1%	77.8%	144
Kuumba Academy CS	0.0%	0.0%	54.6%	240
Marion T. Academy CS	0.0%	10.2%	45.7%	606
MOT CS	0.2%	1.0%	7.4%	594
Newark CS	0.3%	4.8%	0.0%	621
Positive Outcomes CS	0.0%	43.4%	34.5%	113
Providence Creek Academy CS	0.0%	9.3%	20.3%	656
Sussex Academy of A& S	0.0%	4.6%	12.1%	307
T. A. Edison CS of Wilmington	0.3%	11.0%	75.4%	776

Charter schools varied in terms of income characteristics. Two schools reported no low income students, while 2 schools reported more than 75 percent low income students. In total, 5 charter schools reported more than 45 percent of students from low income groups. Additionally, 5 charter schools reported low income student enrollments ranging from 0 percent to 13 percent.

The low income enrollment figures for charter schools are much different than the traditional public schools within a five-mile radius. Figure 3:6 and Table 3:4 show LEP, low income, and special education characteristics at the nearby public school districts. The noncharter districts have no schools that fall above 45 percent low income student enrollment or below 13 percent total low income enrollment.

Delaware charter schools also have considerable variance among individual state charter school districts and also the traditional public school districts when comparing special education. One district administrator at a charter school with a high percentage of low income students and no special education students said, “Special education is underrepresented because their identification process needs more work.” However, all the special education enrollments at charter schools, except for Positive Outcomes Charter School, fall at 14 percent or below, including 5 schools that enroll fewer than 5 percent special education students. The traditional public school districts’ special education populations range from close to 14 percent to more than 22 percent of total district enrollment.

Student profile data for the 13 charter schools show each having zero, or close to 0 percent, LEP and LEP acquiring English student characteristics. LEP enrollment rates at noncharter school districts range from fewer than 1 percent to 7 percent. LEP acquiring English students range from 0 percent to approximately 10 percent at traditional public schools.

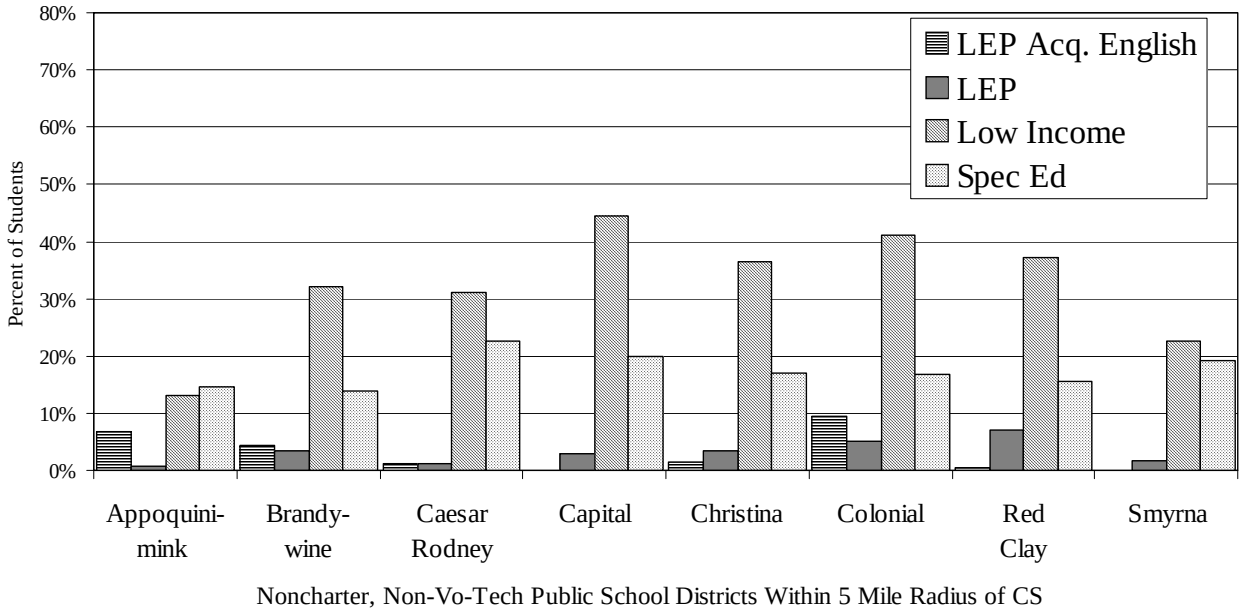


Figure 3:6 Student Enrollment Characteristics for Noncharter Public Schools by District

Table 3:4 Noncharter School District LEP, Low Income, Special Education Percentages (2004)

Districts	*LEP Acq. English*	*LEP*	*Spec Ed*	*Low Income*	*Total Enrollment*
Appoquinimink	6.7%	0.7%	14.6%	13.2%	6393
Brandywine	4.3%	3.5%	13.9%	32.0%	10601
Caesar Rodney	1.3%	1.2%	22.6%	31.2%	6608
Capital	0.0%	2.8%	20.0%	44.5%	5909
Christina	1.4%	3.4%	17.0%	36.5%	19407
Colonial	9.6%	5.1%	16.8%	41.1%	10339
Red Clay Consolidated	0.5%	7.0%	15.6%	37.1%	15556
Smyrna	0.0%	1.6%	19.3%	22.7%	3311

Note. We have included data for LEP Acq. English for the local districts. However, the charter school profiles did not indicate that they enrolled any students in this category.

The findings in this chapter, particularly those in this final section, highlight a number of large differences among the charter schools and between charter schools and traditional public schools. Although the charter schools differ in many respects, they now account for 5.4 percent of all public school students. As the schools grow in numbers and increase in size, the charter school reform will increasingly shape the public school system in Delaware.

Chapter Four
Description of Charter School Staff and Their Working Conditions

The state of Delaware mandates the provision of professional development opportunities for teachers. Moreover, the charter concept makes certain assumptions about the attitudes and behaviors of teachers and staff. In this chapter, we provide a general profile of charter school teachers and staff; and we will examine working conditions, professional development, and levels of satisfaction for charter school teachers and staff. Questions that will be addressed in this chapter include the following:

- ❑ How many teachers and staff do charter schools employ?
- ❑ What are the demographic characteristics of charter school teachers (gender, race/ethnicity, age)?
- ❑ What proportion of teachers and staff are devoted to instruction? What roles do other staff play?
- ❑ How much and what kinds of experience/education and training do charter school teachers have?
- ❑ What proportion of teachers are certified to teach in their area? What are the credentials of those who do not hold DE teaching licenses?
- ❑ Why do teachers/staff choose to join a charter school?
- ❑ What are the working conditions of charter school teachers and staff, and how satisfied are the teachers with these conditions?
- ❑ What are the initial expectations of teachers, and how do these compare with their current experiences?
- ❑ How much teacher/staff turnover is there in charter schools? What factors appear to be associated with turnover?

4.1 Description of Charter School Teachers and Staff

There are two main sources of data for the findings reported in this section. One is from the questionnaires we collected from a sample of teachers and staff in April 2004 (the full set of results from this survey are in Appendix B). The other main source is data collected and reported by the Delaware Department of Education. The source of the data and information is included when reporting findings.

Survey Sampling of Teachers and Staff

In sampling teachers and staff, we included all instructional staff and key administrators at each charter school. In total, 373 teachers and staff completed and returned surveys from the 478 that

were targeted (78 percent response rate). All participating schools are included in the analysis. There were varying response rates. One school had a response rate under 38 percent; 2 schools had a 100 percent response rate; 5 schools had response rates between 80 percent and 99 percent; and the remaining schools had response rates between 50 and 80 percent. Given the number of surveys and that all of the charter schools were sampled, we think the sample provides a representative picture of the teachers and staff at the charter schools in Delaware.

Gender

In terms of gender differences, 73.1 percent of the charter school teachers, staff, and administrators were female and 26.9 percent were male. Female teachers are still the majority in charter schools, just as they are in other public schools. Among charter school classroom teachers alone, 72.3 percent were female, which compares with 75.3 for all Delaware public school teachers. According to the Department of Education, the state average of male classroom teachers was 24.7 percent, while the average percentage of female teachers was 75.3. These numbers indicate that there are slightly more male teachers in the charter schools.

Race/Ethnicity

When we aggregate the data across all charter schools, we find that the ethnic composition of teachers in charter schools is not very different from the aggregate of public schools across the state. This, of course, masks large differences that exist among the charter schools and among all public schools. From the charter school survey data we collected (N=277 teachers responding to this question), we determined that 81.6 percent of teachers were white, compared with 86.9 percent from all of the public schools in the state.[10] There were 13.4 percent African-American teachers reported at charter schools, while the state reported 11.4 percent. Of particular note, 4 charter schools had 50 percent or more teachers and staff of African-American descent, and 7 charter schools had 90 percent or more white teachers and staff.

Another comparison of teacher and staff ethnicity can be made from the Delaware School Profile data for 2003-04 and the total public school figures stated above that are for full-time teachers only. While the charter school data in the preceding paragraph are based on survey data broken out by teacher-only data, the 2003-04 School Profile data contains race/ethnicity data for all instructional staff (which is comprised of approximately 93 percent teachers and 7 percent pupil support staff). The compilation of teacher characteristics data from the School Profiles can be found in Appendix C. The race/ethnic background for the 13 charter schools combined shows that 23.7 percent of the instructional staff were African American and 73.1 percent were white (N=382). The table in the Appendix C also shows 5 charter schools had 55 to 80 percent African-American instructional staff, and 5 charter schools had 94 to 100 percent white instructional staff.

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[10] The 2003-04 ethnicity and gender data for Delaware public school full-time classroom teachers are from the *Delaware Educational Personnel Report*, Table 1: Profile of Full-Time Classroom Teachers. Retrieved November 25, 2004, from http:/www.doe.k12.de.us/reporting/0304PersonnelReport/Personnel.html

Age

The age distribution among the Delaware charter school teachers and administrators indicates that they are younger than teachers in traditional public schools. Among classroom teachers in 2003-04 (n=284), 36.3 percent were in their 20s, 25.7 percent were in their 30s, 19 percent were in their 40s, and 19 percent were 50 or older. The classroom teachers were the youngest among the various groups of staff, while the principals/directors were considerably older.

The state of Delaware reported that the typical public school teacher is 41 years of age with 13 years' experience. The typical administrator is 48 years of age with 21 years of educational experience. The profile of the typical public school teacher and administrator indicates that the charter school teachers are significantly younger and less experienced than teachers at the regular public schools in the state.

It was hard to find comparison data for traditional public school teachers that matches the age groups designated in our survey, but comparisons with national data indicate that the Delaware charter school teachers are younger than their regular public school counterparts (see Table 4:1).

Table 4:1 Age Distribution of Charter School Teachers Compared With National Distribution

Age Group	*Delaware Charter School Teachers 2003-04*	*National Public School Teachers 1996-97 (NCES, 2000)*	*Age Group*	*Delaware Public School Teachers 2003-04*[11]
20-29	36.3%	11.0%	< 25	7.3%
30-49	44.7%	64.2%	25-44	42.6%
50 or older	19.0%	24.8%	44-54	33.6%
			55 or older	16.5%

Role and Proportion of Staff Devoted to Instruction

Among the 373 teachers and staff sampled in 2003-04, 72.4 percent indicated that they were teachers, 3.8 percent teaching assistants, and 4.3 percent special education teachers. Approximately 8 percent indicated that they were directors, principals, or other key administrators; and 11.8 percent indicated that they had some other title or position.

Distribution of Teachers and Staff by Grade Level

Teachers and staff were asked to indicate which grade they work with most. Teachers appear to vary in distribution by school level (i.e., elementary, middle, or high school), but even larger differences exist by particular grade levels. Other staff members are concentrated in grades K-2 (this is driven

[11] This information is based on DDOE *Delaware Educational Personnel Report*, Table 1: Profile of Full-Time Classroom Teachers, 1999-00 through 2003-04. The percentages in this report for the "Age" category appear to have some inconsistencies with total teacher numbers for 2001-2004. The percentages in this report for this specific item are calculated using 6,720 teachers reported in the "Age" category of 2003-04 DDOE data.

by a high number of teaching assistants in these grades). Figure 4:1 illustrates the distribution of all teachers and staff by grade level as well as the distribution of teachers only across the various grade levels.

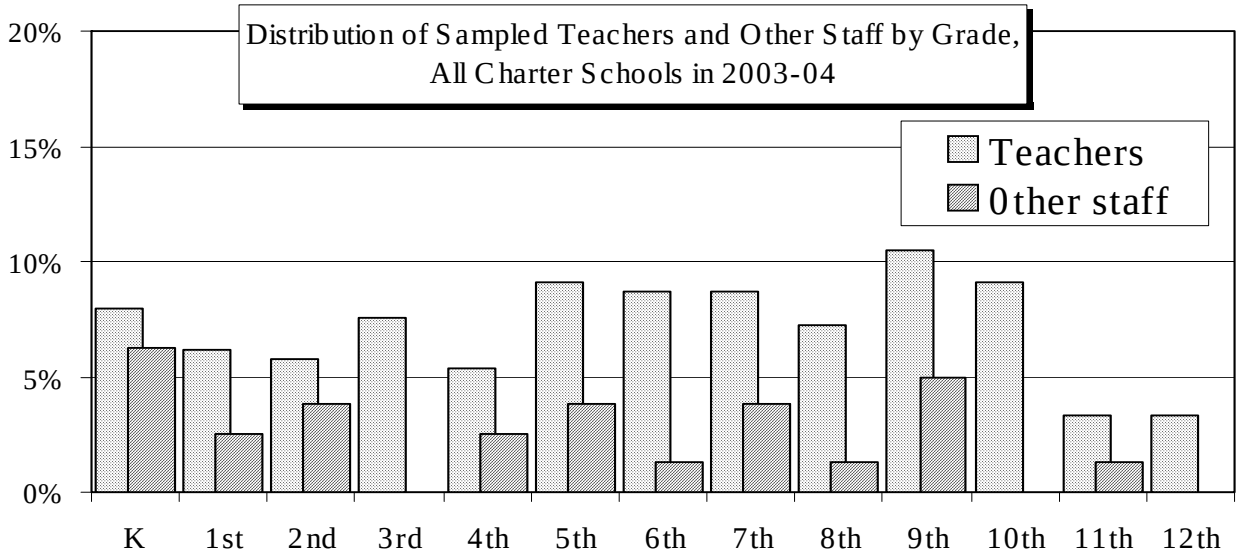

Figure 4:1 Distribution of Sampled Teachers and Other Staff by Grade, 2003-04
Note. 20 teachers and 58 other staff indicated that grade level was not applicable for their position.

4.2 Educational Background and Years of Experience of Delaware Charter School Teachers and Staff

In this section, details regarding teacher background characteristics as well as years of experience are covered. Data presented are based on our survey of charter school staff. Appendix C contains tables with teacher data based on figures from the Delaware Department of Education.

Certification of Teachers

Of the 270 staff who indicated they were teachers in the 2003-04 sample, 77.3 percent reported that they are currently certified to teach in Delaware. The percentage of staff who were certified in another state was 5 percent. The percentage of staff who were working to obtain certification was 17 percent in 2003-04, while the percentage of teachers who were not certified and were not working to obtain certification was 0.7 percent. This information should be considered indicative and not conclusive. For example, among the 48 teachers who reported that they are working to obtain certification, many may be working for a second certification. It may also be the case that the "teachers" who are working to obtain certification are, in fact, only teaching assistants and did not answer the question on role in school correctly.

Most teachers reported that they were teaching in a subject area in which they are certified to teach, although approximately 8.8 percent of the teachers indicated they were not certified in the

subjects they taught. Just under 7 percent of the teachers stated that certification in subject area was not applicable to them.

Educational Background of Charter School Staff

In terms of formal education, the charter school staff appear to be well qualified (see Tables 4:2 and 4:3). Among those respondents who had completed a university degree, 55.5 percent had a B.A. as their highest college degree, 40.3 percent had an M.A., and 0.9 percent had a 5-6 year certificate. There were 3.3 percent with a doctorate. Of 367 teachers, staff, and administrators, more than 36.5 percent were working toward another degree; and 78.2 percent of those working toward another degree were going for an M.A. (74.6 %). There was great variance in percentage of charter school teachers with a master's degree. Across schools, only 8 percent of one schools' teachers had a master's degree; conversely, another school had more than 72 percent with a master's.

Table 4:2 Role and Amount of Formal Education for Charter School Staff, 2003-04

Role	*Did not complete high school*	*Completed high school*	*Less than 4 years of college*	*College graduate BA/BS*	*Graduate courses, no degree*	*Graduate/ professional degree*
Teacher	0.0%	0.4%	3.4%	29.8%	29.8%	36.6.%
Special ed. teacher	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	25.0%	62.5%
Teaching assistant	0.0%	14.3%	21.4%	42.9%	7.1%	14.3%
Key administrator	0.0%	0.0%	3.6%	10.7%	3.6%	82.1%
Other	0.0%	11.9%	31.0%	19.0%	2.4%	35.7%
Total (N=373)	0.0%	2.2%	7.1%	26.8%	23.6%	40.3%

Note. Figures based upon data from teacher surveys.

Table 4:3 Role and Highest Academic Degree for Charter School Staff, 2003-04

Role	*Bachelor's*	*Master's*	*5- or 6-year cert.*	*Doctorate*
Teacher	61.9%	34.6%	0.8%	2.7%
Special ed. teacher	37.5%	62.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Teaching assistant	77.8%	22.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Principal	15.4%	65.4%	3.8%	15.4%
Other	33.3%	66.7%	0.0%	0.0%
Total (N=373)	55.5%	40.3%	0.9%	3.3%

Note. Figures based upon data from teacher surveys.

The Department of Education's statistics regarding full-time classroom teachers in 2003-04 indicated that 25.9 percent of the traditional public school teachers had a B.A., 22 percent were working on an M.A. degree, 17.6 had an M.A. degree, 32.9 percent had an M.A. plus additional

graduate work, and 0.8 percent had a doctorate. While the charter schools had slightly more teachers with a doctorate, the teachers in traditional public schools were much more likely to have a graduate degree.

Years of Experience

Most of the previous experience for charter school staff was accrued in public schools. Table 4:4 contains the results by role and school type. On average, the charter school teachers had more than 7 years of experience as educators. Overall, the levels of formal education and amount of working experience of the charter school staff is similar to charter school teachers in other states we have studied. In terms of years at current school, we can see that the principals and key administrators have, on average, spent more years at their charter schools than the regular education teachers and special education teachers have (3.7 years for administrators versus 2.5 years for teachers and 2.3 years for special education teachers).

Table 4:4 Mean Years of Experience by Role and in Various Types of School, 2003-04

	Private School	*Parochial School*	*Charter School*	*Public School*	*Total Yrs. of Experience**	*Years at Current School*
Teacher	0.49	0.97	2.54	3.44	7.44	2.54
Special education teacher	0.44	0.50	2.31	4.19	7.44	2.31
Teaching assistant	0.44	0.21	1.57	2.21	4.43	1.57
Key administrator	0.62	3.48	3.69	7.34	15.14	3.69
Other staff	0.05	0.41	2.77	2.55	5.77	2.77

* Total years of experience as an educator in the school types/roles listed in the table

Data for classroom teachers in traditional public schools in Delaware reveal that they had 13 years of teaching experience on average, which is nearly double that for the charter school teachers. This can be explained partially by the fact that the charter schools are relatively new and new organizations are more likely to be staffed by newly certified teachers looking for their first position. The Delaware charter school law does allow for experienced teachers in traditional public schools to take a one year leave of absence to work in a charter school that is in its first year of operation, although we did not receive any reports of this occurring.

4.3 Reasons to Seek Employment at a Charter School

In our teacher survey forms, a number of possible reasons for teachers and staff to seek employment at a charter school were listed, and the staff were asked to rate each reason on a 5-point scale according to how relevant each reason was in influencing their decision to seek employment at the charter school. Table 4:5 includes the descriptive statistics for the results on these items. The items in the table are rank ordered from top to bottom with the most important reasons for seeking employment in a charter school listed at the top.

Table 4:5 Reasons for Seeking Employment at This School (Rank Ordered According to Means), 2003-04

	Not important				*Very important*			
	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*Mean*	*STD*	*Median*
Opportunity to work with like-minded educators	1.9%	3.9%	15.2%	36.7%	42.3%	4.14	0.94	4
Safety at school	2.7%	3.5%	17.2%	32.2%	44.4%	4.12	1	4
Parents are committed	2.7%	5.4%	18.0%	32.7%	41.1%	4.04	1.03	4
Academic reputation (high standards) of this school	5.2%	5.2%	16.5%	29.4%	43.7%	4.01	1.13	4
More emphasis on academics	4.9%	7.6%	28.3%	33.2%	26.1%	3.68	1.09	4
My interest in being involved in an education reform effort	5.2%	11.4%	23.4%	31.3%	28.8%	3.67	1.16	4
This school has small class sizes	8.0%	10.0%	28.3%	22.7%	31.0%	3.59	1.24	4
Promises made by charter school's spokespersons	13.4%	10.4%	21.6%	30.6%	24.0%	3.42	1.32	4
Convenient location	19.1%	13.5%	28.6%	17.8%	21.0%	3.08	1.38	3
Difficult to find other positions	49.9%	17.0%	17.8%	9.3%	6.0%	2.05	1.26	2

The most important factor was "The opportunity to work with like-minded educators." Given the nature of the reform and its emphasis on building focused learning communities, this finding is what we would hope and expect to find. Other important factors influencing employment at charter schools were safety at school, committed parents, and the academic reputation (high standards) of the school. The least important factor in seeking employment at the respective schools was "difficulty in finding other positions," with approximately 15 percent of the teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing that this was a factor.

In the open-ended portion of the survey, nearly 19 percent of the teachers identified the school's philosophy, mission, and educational theory as an important reason for choosing their charter school. Teachers also stated that they joined their school because of the quality staff and administration (16.1%) and the high priority on curriculum/language, arts, and computers (15.5%). However, there were differing responses among the schools depending on many factors. For example, one school's most frequently stated reason for the teachers to select the school was that the school was new, while another school's teachers appreciated that they could be working with a specific student population. One teacher reported that at her school, "teachers have the 'freedom' to teach using nontraditional teaching methods. Also, the management encourages teachers to take students out into the world through field trips to see how what they are learning is relevant to the real world." Another teacher said, "The school's mission statement to provide children with lifelong skills and character education is my motivation to be and stay employed here." In contrast, a teacher from a different school provided the reasons why he chose the school but was disappointed after being hired. The teacher said, "I wanted to work at this school because when I was hired, I was told about things that go on here that made the school seem like the perfect opportunity. When I took the position, rarely did I,

or have I, seen what was promised, by all the 3 principals that I've worked with since 2002." This opinion was not indicative of the majority of the surveyed charter school teachers, who expressed a general satisfaction with their school.

4.4 Working Conditions for Teachers and Staff and Levels of Satisfaction

The quality of school facilities varied extensively among the charter schools. Therefore, it was not surprising to see an even split in the responses from teachers and staff concerning the quality of their school's facilities. Approximately 59 percent of the staff were satisfied or very satisfied with the school buildings and facilities. Additionally, 33.5 percent of the teachers and staff agreed or strongly agreed that their school has sufficient financial resources. However, in the open-ended portion of the survey, 20.6 percent of the respondents identified insufficient space as a hindrance to fulfilling the school's mission. One school had a majority of the teachers and staff report that physical space was a significant issue for them in working with the students. One respondent wrote, "The lack of facilities is the greatest hindrance. Since we have to share the building with another school, space is limited. For example, it is difficult for science teachers to find a lab to work in, the library is often filled by the other school, as is the gym and auditorium."

Survey results indicate that the schools vary widely in the quality of their facilities and the availability of resources. This was also confirmed during site visits and interviews. Roughly 57 percent of the teachers and staff agreed or strongly agreed that the physical resources available for instruction were good, while the rest were either not satisfied with the resources or were uncertain. Nevertheless, nearly 18 percent of the teachers and other staff were dissatisfied with their resources. A few staff and teachers identified inadequate resources as a problem and a number of the staff stated that this was among the biggest weaknesses of their school. One teacher said, "Financial constraints hinder staff pay, cleanliness of building, availability of resource positions and in-house testing (special education) support personnel are used for duties that a paid lay person could perform (carpool, lunch room duty). Paid recess aides could free teachers for more planning time." Parents and students occasionally agreed with the teachers and staff and expressed their frustration as well. In the open-ended section of the survey, 17.5 percent identified school funding and resources as one of the greatest negatives of their school

A number of items in the questionnaire addressed class size and issues related to human and fiscal resources. It was clear that this was an important reason for seeking employment at a charter school and an aspect of the schools of which the teachers were particularly interested. More than 60 percent of staff disagreed that class sizes at their schools was too large to meet individual students' needs.

One of the most frequently mentioned negatives or hindrances to providing quality education noted in the open-ended surveys was student discipline. Fourteen percent of respondents acknowledged discipline as a barrier, and nearly 9 percent identified discipline as one of the top differences between their former school(s) and their current charter school. One respondent remarked, "The greatest weakness at this school is that there is no school wide discipline policy." Another teacher stated, "Where I student taught, the children were very well behaved and disciplined. They feared the office. Here the students know they'll be heading right back to class."

Throughout the country, the limits of human and fiscal resources mean that schools may lack auxiliary staff such as janitors and secretaries. Thus, teachers may have to take on responsibilities beyond teaching. Similar to findings in Pennsylvania and unlike the findings in Michigan and Connecticut, about 50 percent of teachers and staff in Delaware charter schools reported that they did not have many noninstructional duties in addition to their teaching load. Nevertheless, some teachers considered this an issue. More than 40 percent of the teachers at one school and nearly 25 percent at another school reported in the open-ended part of the survey that they were frustrated with the increase in responsibilities without an increase in pay. A teacher reported her frustrations with pay by saying, "Longer days, longer year, less pay—all of which hurt morale. I love my job—but that doesn't put food on my table." This issue appeared particularly relevant to these two schools and was minimally discussed by the other schools.

Autonomy of Delaware Charter School Teachers

On the whole, the teachers indicated that they have autonomy and can use their ideas and creativity in designing the curriculum at their schools. While we did not have a clear response to this from many teachers, a number of the schools were exemplary in regard to this issue. A teacher summed up the view of many others regarding teacher autonomy by saying, "The greatest strength of this school is teacher freedom and teacher involvement in the curriculum." In ths open-ended portion of the survey, 18 percent thought their school was innovative for providing curriculum and programs not offered at other schools and/or their curriculum was individualized and specialized. Additionally, almost 13 percent of the respondents appreciated the school's independence and academic freedom. A satisfied teacher reported, "Teachers are given many opportunities to teach creatively or through various techniques to help students internalize materials, learn and retain information. [There is a] supportive atmosphere for innovativeness. Do what needs to be done to get the job done." Some of our findings particular to individual schools are included in the following examples:

- ❏ At a few schools, many of the teachers indicated they have a greater degree of autonomy than at other schools where they have taught.
- ❏ Teachers appreciated the planning and development that goes into the curriculum; teachers have ownership over curriculum and lesson ideas.
- ❏ Teachers appreciated the flexibility to adapt to student needs.
- ❏ Teachers liked the mixture of strategies to teach all subjects.

Opportunities for Developing Innovative Instructional Practices

The teacher survey asked teachers about their initial expectations and to compare these with what they are currently experiencing in their schools. They were asked whether their schools support/are supporting innovative practices and whether they will be/are autonomous and creative in their classrooms. As indicated in Table 4:6, there is a 16 percent discrepancy between expectation and current experience in the area of innovations and a 6 percent discrepancy between their expectation and current experience in the areas of autonomy and creativity.

Table 4:6 Teacher Expectations and Current Experience With Regard to Innovative Practices and Autonomy

	Initial Expectation					*Current Experience*				
	False	*Partly True*	*True*	*Mean*	*STD*	*False*	*Partly True*	*True*	*Mean*	*STD*
The school will support/is supporting innovative practices	1.1%	15.9%	83.0%	2.82	0.41	3.7%	28.9%	67.4%	2.64	0.55
Teachers will be/are autonomous and creative in their classrooms	0.7%	15.2%	84.1%	2.83	0.39	1.4%	21.1%	77.5%	2.76	0.46

Teachers submitted a variety of responses in terms of their autonomy. A large proportion reported that they are autonomous and creative in their classrooms. Others expressed that they are empowered in decisions related to curriculum, instruction, and day-to-day operation of the school. Several said their working conditions are very flexible compared with work in previous schools. Some teachers became aware of innovative practices or opportunities to be innovative when they joined their charter school. One teacher stressed that the most positive aspect of her school was the following:

> *Teachers are empowered here. Our ideas are heard and valued. Teachers can create change that positively affects student achievement.*

A different teacher stated, "The school's ability to change the curriculum to meet the students' needs. For example: The math department has created many new courses to satisfy all of our students. Also, we are in the process of changing our math course for the upper level students of our school. The department decides what needs to be changed, not the administration or board." There were, however, some barriers to autonomy and opportunities to innovate. A few teachers complained about the lack of time available to create unique lessons.

Satisfaction With Salaries and Working Conditions

The Delaware charter schools' average teacher salary in 2002-03 was $38,682. Charter school teacher salaries were roughly $10,500 less than the state average for public schools. According to the Delaware Department of Education, the teacher salaries among the charter schools ranged from $30,077 to $46,031 in 2002-03. The difference in mean salary between charter and noncharter school teachers can be explained to a great extent by the large difference in educational background and years of experience. As noted earlier, teachers in traditional public schools were more likely to have graduate level education and more years of experience.

The teachers displayed varying levels of satisfaction with their salaries and benefits. Nearly 17 percent were very satisfied with their salary, and just over 21 percent were very satisfied with their fringe benefits. Roughly 32 percent of teachers were moderately satisfied with both salary and benefits. By contrast, slightly more than 9 percent of teachers were not very satisfied with their salary and 6 percent were not very satisfied with their benefits. About 12 percent agreed that they were moderately not very satisfied with their salary and benefits. Table 4:7 contains the descriptive

statistics from the teacher survey items that addressed satisfaction with various aspects of their job, working conditions, and school.

Table 4:7 Levels of Teacher and Staff Satisfaction with Working Conditions

	Not very satisfied				*Very satisfied*	*Mean*	*STD*	*Median*
	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*			
Salary level	9.2%	12.0%	31.0%	31.3%	16.6%	3.34	1.16	3
Fringe benefits	5.7%	12.0%	26.9%	33.7%	21.7%	3.54	1.13	4
Resources available for instruction	5.6%	12.3%	25.3%	30.6%	26.2%	3.6	1.16	4
School buildings and facilities	9.5%	13.3%	18.2%	27.2%	31.8%	3.58	1.31	4
Availability of computers and other technology	5.4%	8.2%	21.3%	23.2%	42.0%	3.88	1.2	4
School governance	3.1%	7.7%	24.5%	34.8%	29.9%	3.81	1.05	4
Administrative leadership of school	2.5%	9.8%	21.3%	28.4%	38.0%	3.9	1.1	4
Evaluation or assessment of your performance	3.8%	5.8%	23.0%	33.8%	33.5%	3.87	1.06	4

Just under 48 percent of the teachers and staff were satisfied or very satisfied with the salaries they received, while 21.2 percent were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their salaries. Nearly one-third of the staff (31 percent) indicated that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their salaries. More than 55 percent were satisfied or very satisfied with their benefits, while 17.7 percent were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

Additionally, in the open-ended survey 13.7 percent of the respondents recognized the Department of Education's interference as a barrier to quality services. The teachers, staff, and administrators were said to be school strengths according to 38.3 percent of the open-ended survey respondents. A teacher from one school said, "the administration and faculty are top performing professionals working toward the same goal of educational excellence."

4.5 Initial Expectations and Current Experiences of Teachers and Staff

A number of identical items were used in the surveys to examine and compare the charter school staffs' "initial expectations" as opposed to "current experience" (See Appendix B, Teacher/Staff Results, Question 16). In general, it is clear that the teachers and other staff were content with their schools and satisfied with the services they provide. It is interesting to note, however, that there were statistically significant differences on all variables between what was initially expected and

what the educators were currently experiencing. What the staff were reporting as "current experience" was significantly less positive than their "initial expectations.[12]"

The biggest differences between initial expectations and current experience were on the following items:

1. The school will have/*has* effective leadership and administration.
2. There will be/*are* new professional opportunities for teachers.
3. Students will/*are* receiving appropriate special education services, if necessary.
4. Teachers will be/*are* able to influence the steering and direction of the school.
5. Support services (i.e., counseling, health care, etc.) will be/*are* available to students
6. Students will receive/*receive* sufficient individual attention.

This does not imply that teachers and staff were not satisfied with these aspects of their school. Rather, it infers that they had high expectations in these areas that did not correspond with what they were currently experiencing. For example, most teachers appreciate the autonomy to create their own curriculum, yet one teacher commented that the "laissez faire leadership style sometimes lacks focus and commitment."

It is important to consider the educational significance of these findings. Likewise, it is important to consider likely explanations for these findings. Given the feedback we received from teachers and staff, it seems that teachers simply expected too much. A large portion of the teachers were seeking jobs at schools that were relatively new or were not yet in operation. Given such a situation, expectations are understandably high. Unfortunately, we do not have comparable data from regular public schools.

It is interesting to note the discrepancies in the factors that influence teachers/staff to join a charter school. Teachers/staff were asked about their initial expectations and current experience in the school having effective leadership and administration. There was a 29.9 percent difference between their expectations (89 percent) and current experience (59.1 percent) that the leadership and administration is effective. In terms of teacher empowerment, there is a large difference between teachers' expectations and current experience in influencing the steering and direction of the school and new professional opportunities for teachers. At one school, there was an expectation for improved teacher salary. "Everyone came here knowing our salaries would be lower than average and accepted this with the understanding that they would increase each year for two years, with a substantial increase in the third year. This promise needs to be fulfilled."

Teacher/staff surveys included still other items regarding professional development. Slightly fewer than 45 percent of teachers agreed with the statement that there are new professional development opportunities for teachers, while less than 40 percent thought the statement was partially true. However, there was more than 20 percent difference between initial expectations for professional development opportunities and what the teachers received in reality. One teacher expressed her concern over the lack of training by reporting, "The staff that is presently working at

[12] Because these questions are actually nonparametric in nature and the variables are ordinal, the marginal homogeneity test was used to compare the paired distribution of responses. This also found significant reductions in expectations on all items ($p = .001$) except the item "parents will be able to influence the direction of the school."

this school lacks the educational training and professionalism [necessary] to steer this school in the right direction."

The gap between teachers' expectations and their current experiences is a warning sign for charter schools. Although there are differences between teachers/staff's initial expectations and current experience, teachers/staff generally are still positive about their schools.

4.6 Attrition of Teachers and Staff in Delaware Charter Schools

One factor that is limiting to charter schools is the relatively high rates of attrition among teachers and staff. Based on documentation provided by the Delaware Department of Education, we were able to calculate attrition or turnover rates for 11 of the charters schools that were in operation for at least 2 years. One-third of all charter school personnel (i.e., the teachers, aides, clerical/administrative/custodial staff, and administrators) left during or immediately following the 2002-03 school year. While this figure is quite high, it is in line with what we have seen in charter schools in other states. Table 4:8 outlines the attrition data by school and for staffing type.

Classroom teachers are considered the most important staff members in providing instruction, so attrition within this group is very critical. Our analysis separated out certified and noncertified teachers. Of the 248 certified teachers, 169 returned and 79 did not. This is equivalent to a 31.4 percent attrition rate. Among the noncertified teachers, 45 percent did not continue with the same school in 2003-04. The higher attrition rate among noncertified teachers is not surprising; many likely were not retained because of the fact that they were not certified, or perhaps they left the school in order to complete their training.

Roughly 23 percent of the charter school administrators left or were not retained. Seven schools had all of the key administrators return, while two schools did not retain any of their administrator(s) and two schools lost half of their key administrators.

Our data also included information on other staff in the school. Besides teachers and administrators, there were data for three other categories of staff: clerical, paraprofessionals, and classroom aides. The average attrition rate for other staff (staff not including teachers and administrators) was 44 percent.

There were large differences in the attrition rates across schools. Among the certified teachers, 1 school lost 72 percent of its teachers between the 2 years, and another lost 61 percent. At the other extreme, 1 school did not lose any certified teachers, and 4 schools lost fewer than 15 percent of their certified teachers.

Based on conversations with charter school principals and teachers, our findings regarding attrition were confirmed. One administrator said that after the school's first year of operation, the contracts of only 5 of the 13 teachers were renewed because the rest were not qualified. The administrator said that the following year, only one teacher was lost. One teacher explained their high attrition rate by explaining that, "We have had 3 principals in 2 years. There have been too many changes without consideration to staff and how it affects us."

Teacher attrition in charter schools is expected to be higher because the teachers are on one-year contracts and they are not part of collective bargaining units. The principal is most often

Table 4:8 Attrition Rates Among Charter School Staff from 2002-03 to 2003-04

	Certified Teachers			*Noncertified Teachers*			*Administrators*			*All Staff*		
	Total in 2002-03	*Returned in 2003-04*	*Percent Attrition*	*Total in 2002-03*	*Returned in 2003-04*	*Percent Attrition*	*Total in 2002-03*	*Returned in 2003-04*	*Percent Attrition*	*Total in 2002-03*	*Returned in 2003-04*	*Percent Attrition*
Campus Community	28	24	14.3%	7	2	71.4%	2	2	0.0%	47	36	23.4%
Charter School of Wilmington	45	39	13.3%				4	4	0.0%	62	51	17.7%
East Side	9	6	33.3%				2	2	0.0%	18	12	33.3%
Kuumba Academy	8	7	12.5%	5	3	40.0%	2	2	0.0%	21	18	14.3%
Marion T. Academy	25	7	72.0%				6	3	50.0%	51	17	66.7%
MOT	25	15	40.0%				1	0	100.0%	39	16	59.0%
Newark Charter School	20	17	15.0%	7	4	42.9%	2	1	50.0%	36	28	22.2%
Positive Outcomes	5	4	20.0%	3	2	33.3%	1	1	0.0%	15	11	26.7%
Providence Creek	28	11	60.7%				1	0	100.0%	34	13	61.8%
Sussex Academy	20	16	20.0%				2	2	0.0%	28	23	17.9%
Thomas A. Edison	35	23	34.3%	15	8	46.7%	3	3	0.0%	72	47	34.7%
Total	248	169	31.9%	37	19	48.6%	26	20	23.1%	423	272	35.7%

Notes. Teachers whose certification was pending or under review were included as noncertified.

Data sheets from Charter School of Wilmington, East Side, Marion T. Academy, MOT, Providence Creek, and Sussex Academy did not distinguish between certified and noncertified, in which case they were all grouped as certified.

In three instances, the staff members were counted as retained even though they returned in another position at the school.

Positive Outcomes charter school had two uncertified substitute teachers that we included among their noncertified teachers.

The “all staff” category in the right-hand column includes teachers, administrators, clerical, paraprofessionals, and classroom aides.

responsible for hiring and firing, with the board of directors' agreement. Teachers that do not match the mission of the school or teachers that are deemed less effective can be removed easily. In cases such as this, the attrition is what we would refer to as "functional attrition." The high rates of attrition, however, suggest that the schools likely are also losing effective or promising teachers due to dissatisfaction with working conditions, salary, or other reasons. Other factors that may affect attrition rates include the urbanicity of a school's location, the racial and economic makeup of the district, and the relative years of experience of the teachers.

The 4 charter schools with the highest staff turnover rate in 2002-03 were those run by EMOs, including 2 schools that opened in September 2002 and terminated their management agreements with the out-of-state corporations they had originally contracted to handle the day-to-day operations within weeks of opening (DDOE, 2004). A third school terminated its agreement with the EMO after a few years of operation. Among the 4 EMO-related charter schools, more than 50 percent of the certified teachers left in 2002-03. The 7 non-EMO charter schools had an average retention rate of more than 85 percent for certified teachers. The higher attrition rates in the EMO-run schools may be due to the turmoil surrounding the ending of contracts, or it may be due to greater dissatisfaction with working conditions. This is a question that should be looked at in the next stage of the research.

One item on the teacher/staff questionnaire that provided a related indicator of attrition was the question, "Do you plan (hope) to teach here next year?" Ninety-three percent of the staff in 2003-04 indicated that they wished/intended to return the next year. For those teachers/staff who planned not to return next year (6.9 percent), their dissatisfaction was most often with school governance, administrative leadership, resources available for instruction, and teachers' salary levels. These sources of dissatisfaction and job insecurity seemed to factor into their decisions to leave. These reasons are very similar to what we have observed in other state evaluations.

A majority of school personnel indicated they were not insecure about their futures at their particular schools, as 55.9 percent of the certified and noncertified teachers reported that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, "teachers are insecure about their future at this school." There are numerous possible reasons for insecurity. It could be due to uncertainty about the charter school reform as a whole. The role of the particular school in its community and its ability to live up to its mission could also be issues. Additional factors include the lack of teachers' unions, tenure, and other contributors to job security. When discussing the things that hinder the school's performance, one teacher said, "Consistency with the teachers. It is almost a totally new staff every year with the exceptions of maybe five people. The students never have time to get used to anything or anyone for a prolonged period of time."

Regardless of the reasons for turnover, it is clear that high turnover can be problematic to morale and to student achievement. High turnover impacts a great number of staff, parents, and especially students. On the other hand, it is important to keep in mind that not all attrition is bad. Because charter schools are much freer to remove teachers that do not perform well or who do not match the mission of the school, they should be more able to build focused learning communities. Further study is needed to examine the factors behind teacher attrition as well as the impact of this attrition.

Chapter Five
Accomplishment of Mission and Performance Accountability

> *Lofty sounding mission statements often adorn school conference rooms and superintendents' offices. But if a mission statement is to be a true road map for change, it must be both broadly understood and translated into explicit criteria for assessing results.* -Wagner, 1993

As "schools of choice," charter schools are intended to have unique missions and related educational approaches. As part of the charter school's "autonomy in exchange for accountability" bargain, the schools must effectively demonstrate progress toward accomplishing these unique missions. Such performance accountability components may include unique goals, benchmarks, and means of assessing achievement. Ideally, schools also must explore reasons for success or failure in meeting the goals and develop plans for continuing their successes and correcting their shortcomings. This is what helps schools become "learning organizations" that continually evaluate themselves and strive toward improvement (Awsumb Nelson 2002). Such self-evaluation is especially important in charter schools that pilot mission-based educational innovations (Awsumb Nelson, 2002).

Not only are charter schools expected to innovate within their own schools, but their innovations are hoped to serve as potential role models for noncharter schools. Some even view charter schools as a source of "research and development" for pioneering new curricular and instructional ideas that—if successful—may eventually be adopted by other schools. Thus, the charter schools' missions and education practices have the potential to improve achievement at traditional public schools (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2001; Nelson, Miron, & Risley, 2002). However, they must first demonstrate that these ideas and practices are indeed successful.

Distinctive missions, goals, benchmarks, as well as specified means of measuring success should all be a part of a school's charter or binding performance agreement with its authorizer. The state charter laws and local authorizers may have their own specifications as to what must be measured and reported and what levels of achievement are acceptable.

The findings in this chapter are based on a review of charter school annual reports. Specifically, we examined the general conditions outlined in the performance agreements as well as the corresponding indicators of success. We also looked at the missions and goals of the schools as stated in the school profiles. We explored whether the conditions of the performance agreement are congruent with (a) the indicators of success and (b) the missions and goals as stated in the school profiles. Beyond these goals, which are defined and agreed upon with the Department of Education, we also examined whether the schools are meeting the goals they set for themselves.

We were able to obtain school profiles for all 11 of the schools that are at least 2 years old. Of these, the 10 that were sponsored by the Delaware Department of Education also provided their performance agreements, results from a parent satisfaction survey, and indicators of success. An additional school, which is also sponsored by the Department of Education, was in its first year and did not yet have an annual report available for review.

After presenting our findings, we conclude this chapter by discussing the appropriateness of Delaware's performance accountability system and its implications on reaching the vision of the charter school movement.

5.1 General Conditions Specified in the Performance Agreements and Objectives Specified in School Profiles

In Delaware, the State Board of Education (SBOE) is the authorizer of 11 of the state's 13 charter schools. Red Clay Consolidated School District authorizes the other 2. The Delaware Department of Education (DOE) is the oversight agent for the schools sponsored by SBOE. The DOE requires a *performance agreement* that includes conditions concerning academic performance, behavior, market accountability, and parent satisfaction. The specified conditions are the agreed-upon measurable outcomes for the school. Each charter school determines the achievement targets, or criteria and benchmarks, for indicating progress in each of these 4 areas. Each year the charter school must report on its progress in these 4 areas. In its own annual report of charter schools, the Department of Education summarizes each school's success according to the specified conditions in a section labeled "Indicators of Success." To illustrate the nature of the conditions specified in the performance agreements, we have included a number of examples below:

- ❏ The school will demonstrate that its students are increasing in academic achievement as measured by the state assessment (DSTP) and other standardized assessments.
- ❏ The school will demonstrate that its students exhibit positive behavior related to academic success.
- ❏ The school will demonstrate that it has strong market accountability.
- ❏ The parents of students enrolled at the school will express satisfaction with the school's administration and educational program.

Charter schools in Delaware, like all other public schools, will have a school profile. Each school profile includes a mission statement and a list of goals and objectives that should be based on this mission. The overall quality of the goals and objectives is mixed. Some schools include only simple descriptions of their program; for example, one school described this as a goal: "The curriculum integrates individualized learning and social growth with academics, the arts . . . and the study of world cultures." Some goals are not readily measurable; many are quite broad and vague (e.g., "to prepare students with strong academic preparation in all areas"). On the other hand, some are carefully defined and are quite measurable. Some can be assessed via standardized tests, the simplest and most straightforward, although limited and often controversial methods of assessment. Other goals transcend the boundaries of what standardized tests can possibly assess (e.g., raising self-esteem, fostering technological literacy). In Table 5:1, we have included examples of missions and related goals from the school profiles.

Table 5:1 Examples of Missions and Goals From School Profiles

School	*Mission Component*	*Goal*	*Measurability*
Newark	. . . meaningful academic accomplishment in a community of educators, families, and students . . .	Foster parent/family involvement	Yes. Was measured via data on membership in the PTA, parental involvement in school governance, and DOE's Parent Partnership Award
Positive Outcomes	Provide an opportunity for children to learn in a safe, caring environment where their individuality is valued . . .	Develop increased self-esteem	Possibly. However, no outcomes were reported, only processes geared toward accomplishing it.
Kuumba	. . . an innovative learning environment focused on the whole child . . .	The development of each student's potential for learning in a positive environment	No. Too vague to measure.
Marion T. Academy	Open portals of opportunity for children and adults in the community through excel-lence in public education	Students who attend for three years will at a minimum achieve grade level proficiency as measured by state assessments.	Yes. Clearly measurable, although certainly not unique.

One limitation of these goals is the lack of correspondence between these stated goals and the goals and conditions covered by the performance agreements.

5.2 Findings Regarding Performance Accountability

In this section, we detail the four main goals that are stated in the performance agreements and describe how well the schools are reporting their progress on each of these goals in their indicators of success.

Academic Achievement

The conditions of the schools' performance agreement mandate that the Delaware Student Testing Program (DSTP) and other standardized assessments are used to demonstrate academic achievement. Each school's performance agreement listed 2 to 5 academic goals, each of which were based on the results of standardized tests.

The use of standardized tests facilitates clearly measurable goals. In addition to the unique mission and goals that we discussed earlier, each school profile includes an extremely detailed report of the DSTP results. These reports include displays of DSTP achievement by grade level, subject area, and student characteristics (e.g., race, gender, income, English learner, or special education status). Based on the DTSP scores, an overall rating from "Superior" through "Academic Watch"[13]

[13] The levels—from highest to lowest—are Superior, Commendable, Academic Review, Academic Progress, Academic Progress-Under Improvement, Academic Watch, and Academic Watch-Under Improvement. See http://www.doe.k12.de.us/AAB/Accountability%202004%20no%20 summary%20 version3.pdf for details.

is displayed on the front of the school profile, along with the school's mission and goals. However, a school's unique, mission-based academic goals are rarely, if ever, included in the performance agreements. Apart from standardized test scores, no other measures of student academic performance were used in the performance agreements. This was true even when the goals of a school, as stated by its school profile, included areas not measured by standardized tests. Thus, the opportunities to display alternative forms of performance accountability are rarely utilized.

Standardized tests have the advantage of being comparable across all the schools that use them. Some may argue that school-to-school comparisons are not appropriate for charter schools, some of which serve large proportions of students who are at risk of school failure. This is why charter schools may define their own benchmarks for success, rather than using uniform definitions. However, these differing benchmarks can be problematic when it comes to aggregating data across charter schools. Although the charter schools all use the DSTP, they not only use differing benchmarks, but differing criteria altogether. For example, some use year-to-year comparisons, some use comparisons with the local school district or state, and some make comparisons relevant to a given level. Some look at the percentage of students who pass a certain benchmark, while others use the mean scores. More uniform criteria, with leeway for differing benchmarks, would make comparisons among charter schools clearer. For example, all schools could use percentage of students who pass as a criterion. Schools with large proportions of at-risk students could use a lower benchmark than those with mainly high-performing students. Success or failure would be determined by the school's results as compared with the previously stated goals, but overall results could still be compared with one another. Additional criteria that are more specific to the school's particular mission and goals could be added.

More problematic is that the criteria and benchmarks listed in the performance agreements frequently fail to correspond with those reported in the Indicators of Success section of the annual reports. For example, a school may list a particular standardized test in its performance agreement, but not report on its results in the annual report nor provide an explanation as to why. In other cases a performance report will include change scores as a criterion, but the annual report will include only information about the current scores. Several schools stated that their criteria for DSTP assessments would include only students who had been enrolled in the school for a certain number of years. The annual reports, however, would report on the school as a whole; no explanation was given for this change in criteria. In such cases it was not always possible to determine whether or not a school met its stated goals.

Of the ten schools for which we had performance agreements, only one school, Newark, reported on progress toward its goals in a manner that was fully congruent with the goals as stated in performance agreement (see Table 5:2). Additionally, this school fully met both of the goals it set for itself and was listed as "Superior" according to the school profile. However, in its profile the school reported on some, although not all, of its mission-related goals that could be measured using the DSTP. For example, one goal was "to foster parent/family involvement and student self-esteem." The school profile included evidence toward achieving parent/family involvement, such as 100 percent family membership in the PTA, parental involvement in school governance, and DE DOE's Parent Partnership Award. There were no data regarding student self-esteem; this concept—of course—is quite difficult to measure. However, neither parent involvement nor self-esteem were included in the performance agreement. Evidently this school, despite better reporting on its goals than any of the other Delaware charter schools, seemed to echo the attitude of an Ohio

charter school administrator, who explained how "State standards are what we're judged on" by the authorizers, while the unique mission-based standards "are used more for parents and kids" (reported by Sullins & Miron, 2003).

Table 5:2 Progress on Academic Goals Reported in the Performance Agreements

School	*Performance Rating*	*Academic Goals*					*Notes*
		1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	
Campus Community	Academic Review	Mostly Met	Met	Mostly Met	UC	NR	The performance agreement lists "above national average" for DSTP (goal 2) and ITBS (goal 4). IOS says that scores were above national average, but didn't specify for which test(s).
East Side	Commendable	Partially Met	NR	NR			Evidence did not cover CTBS scores even though this was in performance agreement
Kuumba Academy	Commendable	Did Not Meet	Met	Met			For the first goal there were some positive indicators ("above state standards"), but these weren't listed as indicators in the performance agreement (which only listed state average).
Marion T. Academy	Academic Review	UC	Did Not Meet				The goal referred to improvement, but the results indicated that all were below the state average.
MOT	Not Applicable	Met	Met	Met			There is some lack of congruence between the performance agreement and the IOS (e.g., "among those who enrolled for 3 years" on PA, but grades as wholes are used in the IOS.) Also, no data were provided to support goal #3.
Newark	Superior	Met	Met				Clear match between performance agreement and summarized indicators of success.
Positive Outcomes	Academic Review	Met	Met	NR			PA states "all students enrolled at school at least 6 months," but IOS reported "average."
Providence Creek Acad.	Not Applicable	NA	NR	NA			
Sussex Academy	Superior	NA	NA	Met			
Thomas A. Edison	Academic Review	NA	UC	NA	NA	NR	

Notes. Achievement of each goal is rated as "Did Not Meet," Partially Met," "Mostly Met," and "Met." Academy of Dover was too new to be included. Charter School of Wilmington and Delaware Military Academy are not included because they are sponsored by the district and not required to submit performance agreements.
PA=Performance Agreement (proposed benchmarks)
IOS=Indicators of Success (achievement)
NR = not reported
UC = unclear
NA = Not applicable; goals refer to past or future years

Behavior

Although the performance agreements also include items reflecting positive behavior, these are measured almost exclusively through attendance and number of reportable behavioral offenses. Several schools listed behavioral/attitudinal goals in their school profile (e.g., "Students will learn appropriate skills/techniques for the purpose of making decisions and choices that are beneficial to their health and quality of life."), but there was no mention of them in their performance agreements. Further, there was rarely mention of progress on them elsewhere in the school profile, although occasionally there would be detailed descriptions of elements or processes designed to address behavioral issues. Even Positive Outcomes, which was designed specifically for students with psychological or psychiatric disorders, reported its students' behavioral progress using only the two aforementioned measures. Table 5:3 displays the progress on the behavioral goals for each school that listed such goals in its performance agreement.

Table 5:3 Progress on Behavioral Goals

School	*Attendance Rates*	*Benchmark*	*Met?*	*Reportable Discipline Events*	*Benchmark*	*Met?*
Campus Community	95%	Not reported	NA	5	Less than county average	
East Side	96%	90%	met	0	Less than state average	met
Kuumba Academy	No data	Same or better than state average		No data	Less than county average	
Marion T. Academy	96%	90%	met	0	Less than county average	met
MOT	at least 90%	90%	met	Less than county average	Less than county average	met
Newark	97%	Same or better than state average		4	Less than state average	met
Positive Outcomes	91%	90%	met	1	Fewer than 10	met
Providence Creek	--	--	--	--	--	--
Sussex Academy	98%	90%	met	0	Less than county average	met
Thomas A. Edison	94%	90%	met	2	Fewer than 10	met

Note: Academy of Dover was too new to be included. Charter School of Wilmington and Delaware Military Academy are not included because they are sponsored by a local district that does not require performance agreements. Providence Creek Academy did not have any conditions in its performance agreement that addressed behavioral goals, nor did the school provide any data regarding behavior in its annual report.

Market Accountability

Adequate enrollment, with its per-pupil funding, is essential to the fiscal survival of a charter school. Indeed, market laws of supply and demand are a cornerstone of the charter school theory. It is appropriate that the annual reports explored several indicators of market accountability: level of enrollment, attrition throughout the year, and year-to-year attrition. Based on data reported in the annual reports, all but one school, Thomas A. Edison Charter School, performed satisfactorily according to these variables. While the Edison school did not meet its enrollment target, it was permitted to modify is charter to reduce the maximum allowable number of students by 13 percent.

In most, but not all, the performance agreements a common objective was that the school would fill all places and have a waiting list. The data in the annual report did not specify the size of the waiting lists; rather, it simply indicated whether or not a waiting list existed. In some instances, the objective was that the school would enroll the maximum number of students instead of, or in addition to, the objective to have a waiting list.

Several schools indicated that their attrition goals referred only to families that remained in the district. This is appropriate, as a considerable proportion of school mobility is due to family relocations beyond the school district. However, it was not clear whether the schools' reported attrition data took interdistrict relocation into account. Nevertheless, all the schools that had retention rates as goals met their respective benchmarks. All had end-of-year retention rates of at least 90 percent, and the year-to-year reenrollment averaged 86 percent (range 70-99%). See Table 5:4 for details on enrollment and retention figures.

Table 5:4 Progress on Market Accountability Goals

School	*Waiting Lists*	*Bench-mark*	*Met?*	*Before End of Year Retention*	*Bench-mark*	*Met?*	*Year-to-Year Re-enrollment*	*Bench-mark*	*Met?*
Campus Community	NR	NR		92%	90%	met	87%	80%	met
East Side	NR	yes		98%	90%	met	96%	80%	met
Kuumba Academy	NR	yes		98%	90%	met	70%	70%	met
Marion T. Academy	yes	yes	met	94%	90%	met	84%	75%	met
MOT	yes	yes	met	at least 90%	90%	met	75%	75%	met
Newark	yes	yes	met	100%	90%	met	99%	75%	met
Positive Outcomes	yes	yes	met	99%	NR		80%	75%	met
Providence Creek	yes	NR		NR	NR		NR	NR	
Sussex Academy	yes	yes	met	NR	NR		97%	70%	met
Thomas A. Edison	no	yes	not met	97%	NR		NR	75%	

Note: Academy of Dover was too new to be included. Charter School of Wilmington and Delaware Military Academy are not included because they are sponsored by the district and not required to submit performance agreements.

Self-reported parental satisfaction is an important consideration regarding market accountability. It is important to keep in mind, however, that a decision to enroll in a charter school could reflect the most tolerable of several dissatisfying choices. We now explore how Delaware's charter schools measured and measured up to this criterion.

Parental Satisfaction

Although parental satisfaction, as reported via surveys, is often considered an indicator of market accountability, for the purpose of the Performance Agreements this was reported as a separate variable. In the spring of 2003, a 2-page parent survey created by the Research and Development Center at the University of Delaware was administered to parents in every charter school sponsored by the State Board of Education. This survey's 38 items covered topics such as academic and behavioral expectations, comparisons to previous school, parent involvement, and the charter school movement in general. There was one open-ended item: Do you have any other comments about this charter school and/or any recommendations for improvement? Each of the 10 school's annual reports contain results from the entire survey; response rates ranged from 32 percent to 59 percent, with 47 percent as the mean. The results of the quantitative items were reported in percentages. Responses to the open-ended question were categorized (e.g., positive comments about teachers; comments regarding student behavior, etc.), and the numbers of responses in each category were presented.[14] Beneath each category's heading, every open-ended response was quoted in its entirety.

Table 5:5 Results of Parent Satisfaction Survey

School	*Sample Size*	*Response Rate*	*Parent Satisfaction**	*Benchmark*	*Met?*
Campus Community	223	54.3%	92%	90%	met
East Side	29	32.2%	93%	85%	met
Kuumba Academy	69	33.9%	88%	90%	not met
Marion T. Academy	138	32.0%	86%	85%	met
MOT	180	50.0%	92%	85%	met
Newark	246	55.2%	99%	90%	met
Positive Outcomes	40	55.6%	95%	75%	met
Providence Creek Academy	167	46.0%	88%	**	
Sussex Academy	169	58.5%	96%	85%	met
Thomas A. Edison	133	54.5%	87%	85%	met
Mean	139	47.2%	91.6%	85.6%	

* Percentage who rated the overall success of the school as 3 or above on the 5-point item, "Overall, what is your opinion on the success of this charter school?" (Also see text.)

** Benchmark was listed as "a minimum of 3 on a 4 point satisfaction scale." The minimum was not specified as a mean or a bottom range point; further, the scale was 5 point instead of 4 point.

[14] Occasionally, there were problems with these categories. For example, in one case 12 responses were counted under the category, "Positive comments regarding academic programs." Among these 12 responses, 4 were each listed twice, and 2 were exclusively negative.

However, the "indicators of success" section includes only one indicator of parent satisfaction. The item asks parents to rate the overall success of the school on a scale of 1-5. Nine schools specified a particular percentage of satisfied parents as their benchmark (a range of 75% to 90%). The summary pages did not specify how they came up with their achieved percentages of satisfaction, but a perusal of the data showed that it was the percentage who rated the overall success of the school as 3 or above on this singular item. Further, Providence Creek Academy used a benchmark that was unclear and incongruent with the data (see note on Table 5:5).

As seen in the results regarding teacher satisfaction (see Chapter 4) and parent satisfaction, key stakeholders such as parents may not make stringent demands regarding evidence that their schools are actually accomplishing their respective missions. Often they view satisfaction with their school in terms other than performance outcomes. In Delaware's parent satisfaction surveys, many parents expressed satisfaction with caring teachers, higher teacher-student ratios, or a positive school environment. There can exist, of course, a disconnect between parent satisfaction and actual school performance.[15]

5.3 Satisfaction With and Accomplishment of School Mission

In addition to providing choices to parents, charter schools allow teachers to choose learning communities in which to work that match their interests and skills. Note that the choice premise of the charter concept assumes that teachers choose schools according to mission and that this, in turn, makes them more likely to work harder for student outcomes. In this section, we explore three general questions related to school mission: (i) How familiar are teachers and staff with the mission of their school? (ii) Do teachers and staff believe the mission of their school is being met? and (iii) Are charter schools able to fulfill their missions?

All but 14 staff members (3.8 percent) indicated that they were aware of their school's mission. Of those who indicated they were familiar with the mission of the school, 44.3 percent thought the mission was being followed "very well," while 40.3 percent thought it was being followed "well," 12 percent "fair," and 3.4 percent "not very well." Figure 5:1 illustrates these findings. These results indicate that most teachers and staff thought their school was living up to its mission. This is illustrated by a teacher who stated, "The mission of the school allows children to learn through experiment and experience. I feel this tool for learning only allows individuality to come through and each child can expand their knowledge in their own unique way." However, not all teachers were satisfied with the effort made by the school in fulfilling its mission. As one teacher remarked, "The greatest barrier to fulfilling our mission is the small percentage of parents and staff members who do not truly believe in our mission: that every child can learn."

The survey for teachers and staff included a number of questions that compared and contrasted the initial expectations of charter school staff relative to their current experience. Teachers were asked to indicate the extent to which they thought a number of statements regarding their charter

[15] Studies of other states' charter schools show similar disconnects between performance outcomes and customer satisfaction. For example, in Cleveland many parents cited philosophical (e.g., Afrocentric), structural (e.g., small class size), relational (e.g., family-like culture), or process-related (e.g, hands-on learning) factors as the greatest strength of their charter school (Sullins & Miron, 2003). Further, a study of Michigan charter schools showed no statistical relationships between parent satisfaction and student achievement (Miron & Nelson, 2002).

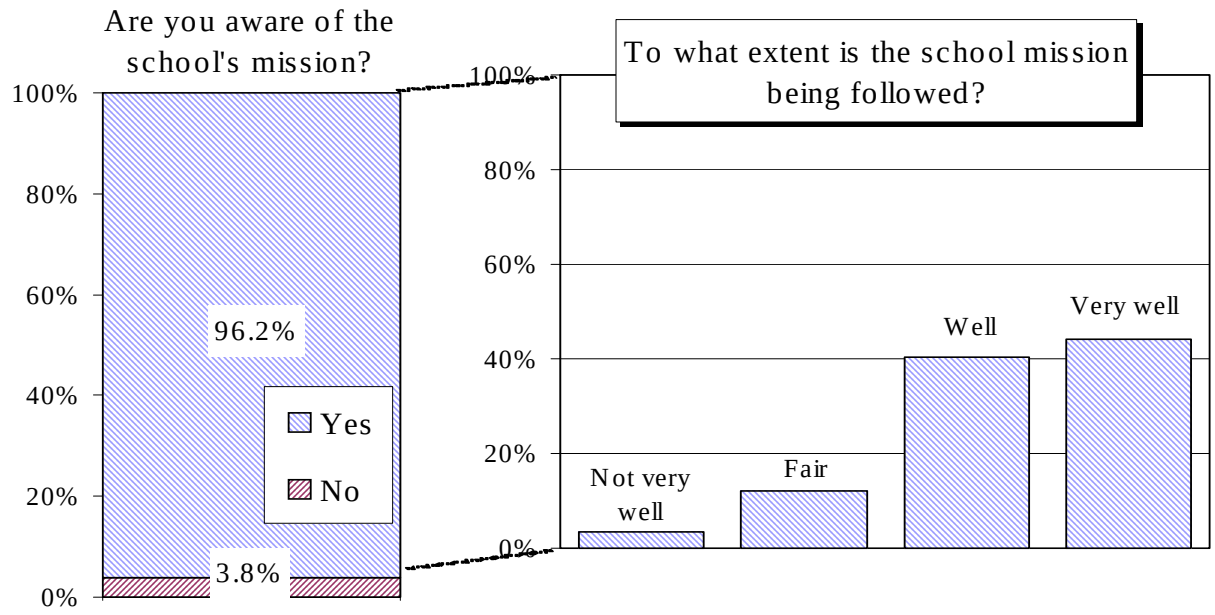

Figure 5:1 Responses from Charter School Staff Regarding Their Awareness of School Mission and the Extent to Which it is Being Followed

school was true or false. Figure 5:2 illustrates the findings regarding the item "Teachers will be/*are* committed to the mission of the school." As can be seen, teachers and staff initially believed they would be more committed when they initially came to the school. At the time of the survey (spring 2004), most staff still felt committed to the mission although the proportion of committed staff had declined.

In another section of the questionnaire, the staff were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with a number of aspects of the school, including school mission statement. Here, 46.6 percent of the staff indicated that they were "very satisfied" with the mission of their school, while another 32.7 percent indicated that they were "satisfied" with it. While the teachers and staff were generally quite satisfied with the schools' missions, they were not equally convinced that the schools could fulfill them. Nearly 10 percent of the staff indicated that they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their school's ability to fulfill its mission, while 20.2 percent were uncertain. Still, 34.4 percent of the staff indicated that their school could fulfill its mission, and 35.5 percent were convinced that their school could do this. One charter school teacher stated, "I believe [the school] has come a long way in just one semester. If progress continues at this rate the

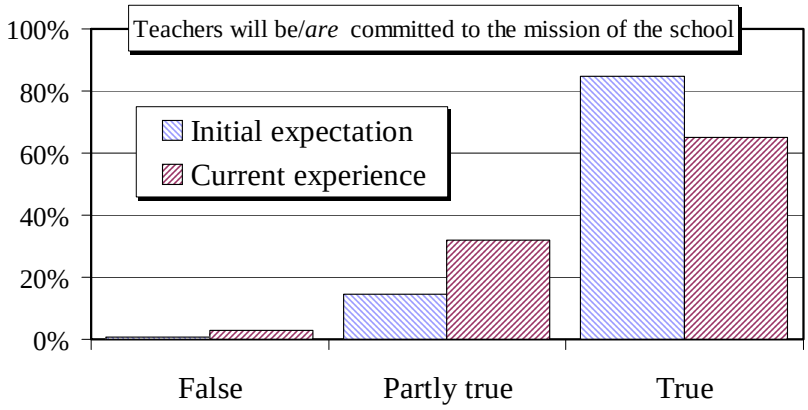

Figure 5:2 Charter Schools' Staff Self-Rated Commitment to the School Mission

school will fulfill its mission. The belief that every child can be successful when put in a nurturing, positive, and focused environment is beginning to catch on in the school community. Teachers and staff that buy into this philosophy will be kept on and thus we can build on our success."

Table 5:6 contains the descriptive statistics for these two items from the teacher/staff survey. When comparing the two items in the table, there was a significant difference in the level of satisfaction in terms of the school's ability to fulfill its mission (Z= -7.440, p=0.00).[16] Hence, there is a significant difference between the "ideal school" represented by the school mission and the "actual school" represented by the perceived ability of the school to fulfill its stated mission. With more time, hopefully this difference will decrease.

Table 5:6 Level of Satisfaction With the Mission of the School, 2003-04 (N=352)

	Very dissatisfied				*Very satisfied*	*Mean*	*STD*
	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*		
School mission statement	1.1%	2.0%	17.6%	32.7%	46.6%	4.22	0.88
Ability of school to fulfill its stated mission	3.1%	6.8%	20.2%	35.5%	34.4%	3.91	1.05

There were 175 total responses to the open-ended question of what is the greatest barrier to fulfilling the school's mission. Slightly more than 30 percent of the respondents claimed that insufficient funding was the primary hindrance of making progress toward their missions. A teacher summarized the frustration of others by providing an example of how funding has affected the school. "We were not funded correctly by the Department of Education and we are all feeling the wrath. We don't have the internet in some classrooms, one copier for all grades, K-7, and teachers have to buy more supplies." Additionally, 20.6 percent reported inadequate physical space was a barrier, and 13.7 percent identified the Delaware Department of Education's interference or lack of support as retarding the fulfillment of the mission. A survey respondent complained about the school's space issues and provided an example: "[We] need our own building--the quality of teaching isn't affected as much as the external services--my office is 3 drywall pieces around a divider block wall with no ventilation. There literally was no physical space for me when I was hired."

5.4 Discussion of Findings

There is a paradox in the charter school concept that provides greater autonomy for schools in exchange for greater accountability. By requiring rigid and concrete forms of accountability, the schools actually have their autonomy constrained. While charter schools are given greater freedom in the organization of their school and the delivery of instruction, the curriculum is prescriptive since

[16] Wilcoxon signed ranks test was used to analyze the difference between these two variables. This nonparametric procedure tests the hypothesis that the two related variables have the same distribution. It makes no assumptions about the shapes of the distributions of the two variables.

it is based on the state standards and—more importantly—the state assessment test, which is used for accountability purposes.

Delaware's accountability system for charter schools requires an extensive amount of documentation and information. Although this ensures that schools provide thorough data regarding attendance, staffing, promotions, programs, and—above all—progress on standardized tests, it does not provide incentives for charter schools to develop programs centered around alternative missions and goals measured with unique assessments and indicators.

The goals and objectives specified in the charter schools' performance agreements with the Department of Education are unique from most other states in that they also include indicators of market accountability. Typically, the charter contracts or performance agreements only cover objectives related to performance accountability and perhaps regulatory accountability. Market accountability works on its own, out in the marketplace. In other words, parents who don't like a charter school leave and charter schools without customers close. The use of market indicators in the performance agreement can help provide early warnings regarding a failing charter school. Early warnings mean that steps can be taken to assist schools at risk of closure, or steps can be taken to buffer the impact on district schools from the closure of a charter school.

The results presented in this chapter indicate that the charter schools are doing a rather good job of living up to their agreed-upon performance agreements. More work is needed with some schools to ensure that they report fully on their performance objectives. However, the results regarding behavior goals, market accountability, and parent satisfaction were complete and—for the most part—satisfactory.

Chapter Six
Student Performance on Delaware Student Testing Program: Cross-Year Analysis

In this chapter, we examine the performance of charter school students on standardized tests. One of the key arguments for charter schools is that by granting them more autonomy and allowing them to establish a more focused learning community students enrolled in them will demonstrate increased performance relative to students enrolled in traditional public schools. Charter school performance can be measured in two principal ways. The first is the extent to which a school can achieve its measurable objectives that reflect its mission (see Chapter 5). The second is the performance of charter school students on standardized tests.

General information on school performance is available from the Delaware Department of Education. This includes extensive group level data that allow cross-sectional looks at how schools are performing. These publicly available data do not take into consideration the value added by the school over time. Nor does it facilitate comparisons with other schools with similar demographic characteristics.[17] Oftentimes, the charter schools have fewer than 15 test takers in a particular group so the data are not publicly reported to help protect their confidentiality. While these data facilitate a snapshot of current performance, they are not able to attribute impact of the school on student learning. While the Department of Education provides extensive information and test data to the public, we have sought to measure the impact of the charter school on students over time.

In addition to its extensive warehousing of school level data, the Delaware Department of Education has an advanced performance data system that yields and tracks data for all students in the state. A data set was provided to us by the Department of Education with test data in two subject areas from the past 7 years. This dataset included both students in charter schools and students in traditional public schools. Identifying information was removed and replaced with unique identifier codes that allowed us to link students from year to year. The scope and nature of these data allowed us to use a matched student design to examine the impact that charter schools were having on student learning. The matched student design is a quasi-experimental design in which students in the experimental group (i.e., charter schools) are matched according to all relevant background and demographic indicators with students in the control group (i.e., traditional public schools). Students are followed over time, and we track and compare relative gains.

[17] The data do, however, break out performance data by such categories as ethnic background and free and reduced lunch status, which can facilitate some comparisons at the same point in time with the state average or with other schools.

More on the specific methods used in our analyses is included in the following section. Following the methodology section, we present the results for all charter school students and followed by the results broken out by school. Finally, we close this chapter by discussing limitations in the analyses as well as additional analyses for the future.

While reading this chapter and interpreting its findings, it is important to keep in mind that these analyses represent an initial effort to study the performance of these schools, because all but four have been operating for three or fewer years. In addition to this precautionary statement, and in light of the limitations spelled out later in the chapter, readers should be careful in generalizing the findings across other charter schools within or outside of Delaware.

6.1 Methodology

In this section, a thorough description of the methodology used for our analyses is included. First, we describe the source and nature of the data made available to us; then we describe how we designed and compiled charter school and comparison groups in separate panels. Finally, a description and justification for the analytical strategy used is included.

This section is—admittedly—very technical. The findings in Sections 6.2 and 6.3 are sufficiently explained that readers can choose to go directly to the results. Readers that wish more technical details on how the study was conducted can wade through the details in the remainder of this section.

About the Assessment Instrument

Data for the analyses are from the Delaware Student Testing Program (DSTP), which is the statewide assessment program. The DSTP is used to measure how well students are prepared relative to the Delaware Content Standards in English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. The state's standards have been carefully drawn up and have garnered praise as exemplary standards. These standards are thoroughly disseminated so that schools and teachers know what to expect in terms of the state assessment system.

The DSTP in reading, mathematics, and writing began in Spring 1998 in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. Science and social studies began in Spring 1999 in grades 8 and 11 and in Fall 1999 in grades 4 and 6. For this initial round of analyses, we have obtained results only for reading, mathematics, and writing. Science and social studies will be included in future analyses. Table 6:1 illustrates the number of charter school students that took the DSTP test by school, year, and grade. Before 2001, the number of students was very limited. The enrollment grew after 2001 because of the addition of new charter schools as well as the growth of existing schools. As can be seen in the data, two schools have test data for only one school year and therefore have to be excluded from any longitudinal analyses.

Results from the test are reported at various levels, including the state, district, school, and individual student. Individual student data are carefully protected by the state, and obtaining access to these data involved a lengthy application and permission process. The data obtained for our analyses were stripped of all information that identifies students. Unique identifiers were included, however, which allowed us to track and link student data from year to year.

Table 6:1 Total Number of Charter School Students Taking the DSTP by School, Grade, and Year

School	*Year*	*1998*				*1999*				*2000*				*2001*				*2002*				*2003*				*2004*			
Name	*Grade*	*3*	*5*	*8*	*10*	*3*	*5*	*8*	*10*	*3*	*5*	*8*	*10*	*3*	*5*	*8*	*10*	*3*	*5*	*8*	*10*	*3*	*5*	*8*	*10*	*3*	*5*	*8*	*10*
Charter Sch of Wilmington					135				152				180				246				248				225				228
Positive Outcomes Charter School				11	9			11	12			12	15			14	10			13	12			12	16			18	16
East Side Charter School		10				15				7				31				14				16	31			18	15		
Campus Community School						32	53	8		38	30	30		61	28	23		24	35	50		40	49	82	26	34	27	109	44
Thomas A. Edison Charter School														98	84			110	96	68		100	88	50		96	86	51	
Sussex Acad.of Arts & Sci.																24				57				105				83	
Kuumba Academy																		23				34	18			32	25		
Marion T. Academy														70	25			78	68			73	67			84	69	25	
Newark Charter School																			161				109	130			160	133	
MOT Charter School																						73	75			73	75		
Providence Creek Academy																						66	69			93	84		
Delaware Military Academy																												11	77
Academy of Dover																										65	68		
Total		10	0	11	144	47	53	19	164	45	30	42	195	260	137	61	256	249	360	188	260	402	506	379	267	495	609	430	365
Total all grades by year		165				283				312				714				1,057				1,554				1,899			

The results are reported by grade and subject area and the measures used include both scaled score results on the DSTP and the normal curve equivalent (NCE) scores[18] on the SAT-9. A number of items from the SAT-9 are incorporated in the DSTP math and reading tests (not the writing component) so that equivalent scores can be calculated for the SAT-9.[19] The measures used on the writing component is a raw score which is based on prompts that vary from year to year. For this reason, it is not possible to accurately trace change scores using the writing test. The data sets we obtained also included such measures as the cut scores with regard to state performance levels. These were not used, however, because they were less sensitive to change by students.

Panel Definition

The goal of our panel definition was to create a random sample of noncharter students who were demographically matched with charter school students that spanned the greatest number of DSTP assessments. Multiple panel designs were considered. Our aim was to use a panel design with three data points; however, this resulted in too few students with valid test scores at all three data points. We believe this was due to student mobility and the fact that many charter schools did not exist or had limited grade range in the early years of the reform. The panel design outlined in Table 6:2 is a compromise that limits the longitudinal perspective of our analyses, but allows sufficient samples for matching demographic characteristics of students. Development of the six panels (A - F) began with the most current DSTP assessment year (either 2003 or 2004) and looked back in time to the previous DSTP assessment. Thus, we were able to build three panel pairs that examined longitudinal growth from third to fifth grade, fifth to eight grade, and eight to tenth grade. As can be seen from Table 6:2, the panel sample size in the more recent assessment years and at younger grade levels is greater than in the earlier and older assessments, reflecting an increasing enrollment trend for charter schools.

Six panels were defined (see Table 6:2) through a series of steps outlined below. The Delaware Department of Education supplied seven data files that were preprocessed in a spreadsheet program by standardizing variable names and missing data identifiers. Following this, we converted the data files to SAS[20] data sets for further analysis. After merging the resulting seven SAS data sets by identification number, all demographic-related variables were stripped and saved for later processing. The remaining data then were written to three data files: reading, math, and writing. This process resulted in four primary data sets.

A panel was created by merging one DSTP subject area (reading, math, writing) with the demographic data and selecting subjects who had valid test data in the two years selected for the

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[18] We used NCEs instead of National Percentile Ranks because the NCE scores are a preferred measure when comparing change scores over time. The distance between NCE units is equivalent, which is not true for the difference between percentile group units because they are ordinal in nature. An NCE score has a minimum of 1, a maximum of 99, a mean of 50, and a standard deviation of 21.06. The standardization inherent in NCE scores makes comparisons between different assessments possible.

[19] The test company that works with the Department of Education is Harcourt Brace Educational Measurement. This company also has the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT-9) in its portfolio of assessments, which makes it possible to include SAT-9 items in the state test.

[20] For the analysis of the data, SAS version 9 was used. This a statistical software package.

panel[21] and who were in the target grade in the last panel year, e.g., grade 5 in 2004 in Panel A. Once the appropriate population of students were selected, e.g., the above condition, the matching and random selection processes were undertaken.

Table 6:2 Description of the Panels

	Total Number of Charter School Students in Analysis			*Year of DSTP Data With Test Grades Highlighted in Bold*				
Panel	*Math*	*Reading*	*Writing*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*	*2004*
A	515	491	516			**3rd**	4th	**5th**
B	428	411	427		**3**th	4th	**5th**	6th
C	328	316	328	4th	**5th**	6th	7th	**8th**
D	295	293	284	**5th**	6th	7th	**8th**	9th
E	221	211	222	6th	7th	**8th**	9th	**10th**
F	180	179	181	7th	**8th**	9th	**10th**	

Charter students were matched with noncharter students on four demographic characteristics: gender, ethnicity, Title I status, and FRL status. It is important to note that charter school status was defined by where a student was enrolled in the final DSPT assessment for that panel. According to the codebook supplied by DOE, there were five coding levels for ethnicity and two each for gender, Title I, and FRL. Thus, there were 40 different demographic strata for matching.[22] We also considered matching on special education status (two levels) and limited English proficiency (two levels), but this resulted in 160 possible demographic combinations. There was almost no variability in these last two demographic variables, so they were not considered further.

After the 40 demographic strata were defined, the total panel population was broken down among the 40 strata for charter schools and noncharter schools. Table 6:3 contains an illustrative example of the numbers of students in the charter school within each strata as well as the total number of students from the traditional public schools from which we could randomly draw a matching student. This process resulted in several of the strata not containing any students, so the actual number of observed demographic strata was less than 40. Additionally, since there were fewer students in the charter schools than in the noncharter schools, there may have been demographic strata expressed in the noncharter schools that were not present in the charter schools and therefore the charter school students remained unmatched. After the panel population was stratified, demographically matched samples could be drawn from each strata. For example, in strata 8, there were 104 students enrolled in the charter schools and 1,309 students enrolled in the noncharter

[21] For example, in panel A, ReadAF04="Y" and ReadAF02="Y")

[22] We came up with 40 demographic strata based by multiplying the number of values in each demographic variable: 2*2*2*5=40 possible demographic combinations.

schools. A randomly selected comparison sample of 104 noncharter students was drawn from the population of 1,309 noncharter students. Thus, a comparison sample was randomly drawn from noncharter school students that was proportional to the number of charter school students across four demographic characteristics.

Table 6:3 Panel-D Population Strata

	Demographic Group																				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Public	7	242	43	384	121	40	34	1309	275	1	.	245	48	369	97	47	38	65	1273	227	64
Charter	1	7	7	6	16	4	2	104	7	1	1	5	4	3	10	5	2	1	100	7	2

Note. *Public* refers to traditional public schools and c*harter* refers to public charter schools.

Analytical Strategy

To address the central reform question, Is there a difference in achievement (reading, math, and writing) between students attending charter schools vs. students attending noncharter schools, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted on the last DSTP assessment with the previous DSTP assessment score as the covariate. Separate ANCOVA analyses were examined for DSTP scaled score and SAT-9 NCE for the reading and math assessments.

The writing assessment did not have scaled scores or SAT-9 scores so we used the writing raw scores. Using ANCOVA with raw scores raised critical methodological questions. For this reason, we removed the writing assessment from our main summary of findings in the next section. Readers that wish to review the findings from the writing assessment can find them in Appendix E.

The use of the previous DSTP as the covariate will act as a statistical matching procedure where the means on the last DSTP assessment for each group (charter and noncharter) are adjusted to what they would be if the two groups had scored equally on the previous DSTP assessment. Thus, using the previous DSTP assessment is a statistical control for previous achievement level; as such, the evaluative question directly addressed by the ANCOVA is "Is enrollment in a charter school associated with higher DSTP mean assessment scores in math and reading than enrollment in a noncharter school after adjustment for previous DSTP assessment performance?" ANCOVA in this use is not a proxy for determining causality; for that, random assignment of students to schools would be necessary. As such, we cannot draw causal conclusions regarding the effect of being enrolled in a charter school and gains (or losses) in achievement. Moreover, the ANCOVA does not adequately control for enrollment in a charter school at the time of the first DSTP data point.

6.2 Findings Across All Charter Schools

Table 6:4 contains the results from our analysis that incorporated all charter school students. There are two panels and two subjects (i.e., reading and mathematics) for each grade, which means that there will be four analyses at each grade level (note that the findings from the writing assessment are in Appendix E). We have not aggregated the results by grade or subject. Instead, we have reported

the results from each analysis separately. In our description and discussion of the findings, we will draw conclusions by grade and subject.

Before discussing the results in Table 6:4, we should review and explain the statistics and column headings in the table. The results are reported by grade and subject area and include both scaled score results on the DSTP and the normal curve equivalent (NCE) scores on the SAT-9. As noted earlier, a number of items from the SAT-9 are incorporated in the DSTP test so that equivalent scores can be calculated for the SAT-9. Therefore, while the scaled score results reflect total scores on the DSTP, the NCEs reflect performance on a subset of questions. This can explain differences in relative performance levels that exist between the two sets of scores.

The *covariate mean* is the mean score for all students in the group in the prior DSTP assessment. Therefore, the covariate mean for students in grade 5 would be their scores two years earlier in grade 3. The *adjusted mean* is the focus of the ANCOVA analysis, the second DSTP assessment. This is not the observed mean score (weighted mean) for the group; rather, it is a mean score adjusted for students' performance on the prior assessment. The ANCOVA provided two statistical tests: one for the covariate (slope of the relationship between the prior assessment and the target assessment is non zero) and one for the adjusted means (the hypothesis of interest). If the covariate is found to be statistically significant, then the ANCOVA will allow a more powerful test of the adjusted means, which is the second hypothesis considered in the model. Evaluation of the covariate should always be considered and in all analyses was statistically significant. This data is not presented in 6:4. Thus, the use of the ANCOVA was justified in that there was a statistically significant relationship between the prior DSTP assessment and the target DSTP assessment. In Table 6:4 the F-value and associated p-value reported correspond to the hypothesis of no difference between the adjusted (target) DSTP means (charter vs non charter). If the F-value is large and the corresponding p-value small it is common practice to reject the hypothesis of no difference in favor of the alternative hypothesis, there exists a difference in the adjusted DSTP means between charter and non charter schools.

The ANCOVA carries two important statistical assumptions which should be carefully examined for valid interpretation. The first is the assumption of homogeneity of variance and the second is the homogeneity of regression slopes. Of the 24 analyses presented in Table 6:4, in one analysis the assumption of equal slopes was violated and in four analyses the equal variance assumption was violated.

The results in Table 6:4 indicate that the charter school students often perform better than matched traditional public school students in the upper grades. There were small differences between the charter school students and comparison students between grades 3 and 5. Only two differences were statistically significant; one of these differences favored traditional public schools, and the other difference favored charter schools. At grade 8, two of the four comparisons proved to have large differences that were statistically significant. These differences were for Panel C (not Panel D) and all of these differences favored charter schools.

The largest differences between charter school students and matched students in traditional public schools were at grade 10. Here three of the four comparisons showed that the differences were statistically significant, and all these differences favored charter school students (Panel F reading had significant differences favoring charter schools on the SAT-9 items, but not on the DSTP). In other words, the charter school students included in the panels were gaining more on the DSTP between grade 8 and grade 10 than traditional public school students. The differences that

Table 6:4 Performance on DSTP for Charter School Students and Comparison Students by Grade and Subject Area

Grade and Subject Area	Scaled Score on the DSTP				Normal Curve Equivalent on the SAT-9			
	Covariate Mean	Adjusted Mean	F-value	P-value	Covariate Mean	Adjusted Mean	F-value	P-value
Grade 5 Reading, Panel A								
Charter school	442.3	483.2	0.02	0.8853	58.6	57.8	5.84	**0.0158**
Control group	446.8	483.4			61.2	55.8		
Grade 5 Reading, Panel B								
Charter school	435.9	482.5	0.17	0.6775	57.2	56.0	0.39	0.5309
Control group	439.5	481.8			58.3	55.3		
Grade 5 Math, Panel A								
Charter school	435.2	471.2	8.21	**0.0043**	61.1	63.2	2.28	0.1312
Control group	435.3	475.5			62.9	61.7		
Grade 5 Math, Panel B								
Charter school	428.9	466.8	0.20	0.6530	59.4	59.1	0.00	0.9540
Control group	431.9	467.5			61.0	59.0		
Grade 8 Reading, Panel C								
Charter school	484.7	532.8	1.81	0.1787	58.5	64.3	6.61	**0.0104***
Control group	479.9	530.5			58.9	61.4		
Grade 8 Reading, Panel D								
Charter school	486.1	531.6	1.41	0.2348	60.3	62.2	0.09	0.7697
Control group	478.0	529.5			57.3	61.9		
Grade 8 Math, Panel C								
Charter school	474.6	513.0	7.56	**0.0061***	64.2	64.3	5.86	**0.0157***
Control group	468.5	508.2			60.1	61.5		
Grade 8 Math, Panel D								
Charter school	477.0	509.0	1.36	0.2434	63.3	61.5	2.05	0.1527
Control group	469.1	511.2			61.3	59.8		
Grade 10 Reading, Panel E								
Charter school	550.2	544.5	20.30	**>.0001***	72.3	62.3	34.42	**>.0001***
Control group	532.6	534.5			63.8	54.7		
Grade 10 Reading, Panel F								
Charter school	550.8	540.0	3.29	0.0704	74.3	62.3	17.68	**>.0001***
Control group	528.3	535.6			64.4	56.1		
Grade 10 Math, Panel E								
Charter school	539.5	564.1	7.75	**0.0056***	74.6	69.4	1.76	0.1853
Control group	510.1	556.2			62.2	67.3		
Grade 10 Math, Panel F								
Charter school	534.7	563.1	22.35	**>.0001***	75.2	68.8	8.54	**0.0037**
Control group	505.7	550.2			60.0	64.0		

Notes. Comparison group is matched on gender, ethnicity, FRL, and Title I status.

Differences between the charter school students and comparison students are statistically significant when the P-value is less than 0.05; these scores are highlighted in **bold**. When P-values are underlined and bolded, this refers to an advantage to the noncharter school students.

P-values with an asterisk "*" refer to differences that remained statistically significant at least 80 percent of the time with repeated randomly selected comparison groups.

were significant at grades 8 and 10 typically were larger and remained statistically significant even after we generated additional randomly selected comparison groups. One serious limitation to keep in mind here is that many students in the grade 8 to grade 10 panels did not actually enter a charter school until grade 9. Also many students were dropped from this panel because they did not have a grade 8 DSTP score. This is likely because they were enrolled in private schools or were coming from out of state.

Where differences were especially large and significant on the DSTP scaled score, the difference on the NCE for the SAT-9 subset of items was also statistically significant. When the differences were small but still statistically significant, it often happened that only the scaled score or only the NCE score proved to be statistically significant.

The panels that included more recent years of data (i.e., Panels A, C, and E which ended in 2004) showed more differences that favored charter schools than the more earlier panels (Panels B, D, and F which ended in 2003). This provides some tentative evidence that charter schools are improving over time. However, this may also be explained by the fact that the more recent panels include more schools, some of which have fewer years of operation. Over time, the Department of Education has raised the bar in terms of new applicants which may explain why more recently established charter schools help lift the performance of Panels A, C, and E).

In the next section, we use the same approach to examine the performance of individual charter schools. This may shed further insight into the relative performance levels of charter schools according to the number of years they have been in operation.

Creaming the Best or Serving the Neediest?

The data in Table 6:4 illustrate important information about the types of students attracted to charter schools. While many charter schools establish curricular profiles and marketing materials that make them most attractive to students failing in traditional public schools, some charter schools also have profiles and marketing practices that help them attract high performing students. The covariate means in Table 6:4 represent the pretest scores of the students that are matched by race, free and reduced lunch status, English Language Proficiency status, and Title I status. When the covariate mean for the charter school group and control group is similar, this means that the charter school has students who are performing similarly to their demographically matched peers. When the charter school group has a higher covariate mean than the control group, this indicates that the enrolled charter school students already have higher performance levels at the time of pretest.

A comparison of the covariate means at Grade 4 illustrates that the charter school students and demographically similar students in the control group have similar pretest performance levels. At grade 8, the charter schools are clearly attracting and enrolling higher performing students. This difference is further exacerbated in grade 10, where the charter school students have substantially higher pretest scores than their demographically similar peers. These comparisons suggest that while the charter schools on the whole are not “creaming” or attracting the best performing students in lower elementary grades, they clearly are doing so in the lower and upper secondary levels.

The data in 6:4 are aggregated across all the schools, which masks large differences between the schools, both in terms of the students they enroll and in terms of the growth in test scores they can affect. The next section includes a breakout of the data by school, which uncovers the fact that the

types of students attracted to the schools (in terms of academic performance) differ greatly just as the overall impact of individual schools differs.

6.3 Findings by School

We have compiled separate analyses for each of the 11 schools. The order of the schools presented in this section is based on the number of years they have been in operation. Therefore, we will start with the two oldest schools and cover the newest schools at the end of the section. Two schools, Academy of Dover and Delaware Military Academy, have only one year of test data available. Therefore, we were not able to measure growth in students over time. For this reason, they will not be covered in this section.

Each school has a separate table outlining the results for that school alone. The methods used were identical to those used for the aggregate of all charter schools, which was covered in the previous section. In the tables, P-values highlighted in bold indicate that there are statistically significant findings. P-values that are also underlined indicate that the matched students in the traditional public schools outperformed the charter school students.

Charter School of Wilmington (Grades 9-12, Opened in 1996)

The Charter School of Wilmington is unique in many ways from the other charter schools. First of all, this is one of the two oldest charter schools in the state, with 8 years of operating experience. Secondly, this is the only charter school that focuses solely on high school. Thirdly, this school is widely recognized for being highly selective. The school has a curricular profile and marketing materials that present it as "college preparatory" in nature. Further, the school uses an academic test to help place new students, as well as to screen applicants. Together, these practices help establish a school with a focused learning community and with students who have demonstrated their eagerness to learn and who are prepared for the high expectations in this academic setting.

The pretest scores illustrate that the students who enrolled in this school were already performing far above their demographically similar peers in grade 8 (see covariate means where the charter school students have a much higher mean score than the control group). At the eighth grade level these students already had test scores on the SAT-9 that were higher than 80 percent of their peers (of all demographic backgrounds). Table 6:5 contains the findings from our analyses for this school for reading and mathematics. The findings on the writing assessment are included in Appendix E..

Initially, we thought that the advantages of a more selective school would be minimized in our analyses since we control not only for demographic backgrounds of students, but also for initial performance levels on a pretest. Interestingly, this school still showed larger gains than the control group even after we controlled for the initial performance levels at grade 8. In fact, these relative gains were statistically significant in both reading and math, and they were also the largest among all the 11 charter schools.

One important limitation relative to this school is that a portion of the instruction the students received between the grade 8 test and the grade 10 test was provided by another school, since the charter school serves grades 9-12. Nevertheless, since the grade 8 DSTP is administered in the spring, the time spent in another school between the pre- and posttest is likely to be minimal. Another critical limitation is that more than 40 percent of the students were dropped from the

analysis since they did not have a valid pretest score. Presumably, most of these students were coming from private schools, which are not required to take the DSTP. Because this population of students is likely to be different than the students retained in the sample (i.e., those coming from public schools), we are concerned that this may represent a sampling bias.

Table 6:5 Performance on DSTP for Students from the Charter School of Wilmington and Comparison Students by Grade and Subject Area (N=136)

Grade and Subject Area	Scaled Score on the DSTP				Normal Curve Equivalent on the SAT-9			
	Covariate Mean	Adjusted Mean	F-value	P-value	Covariate Mean	Adjusted Mean	F-value	P-value
Grade 10 Reading, Panel E								
Charter school	564.5	558.1	33.32	**>.0001**	79.1	68.3	40.03	**>.0001**
Control group	534.8	540.3			63.4	57.2		
Grade 10 Math, Panel E								
Charter school	564.6	586.9	12.53	**0.0005**	85.9	79.9	14.61	**0.0002**
Control group	512.8	572.5			62.4	72.4		

The Charter School of Wilmington is controversial in many ways, and the existence and practices of this school also raise a number of important policy issues. Theoretically, charter schools are supposed to outperform traditional public schools since they can establish more focused learning communities. This school is a good example of one that has created a very focused learning community, in part by using an entrance test to screen and place students. On the grade 10 DSTP test, the students are all at similar performance levels,[23] which are—by the way—the highest in the state for public schools. The school is better able to serve and provide instruction to this group since they are similar in so many respects. This focused learning community, in turn, can help explain why the school was able to advance the learning of their students at a faster rate than demographically similar students in traditional public schools, where the population of students is more diverse in terms of ability and family background characteristics.

Positive Outcomes Charter School (Grades 7-12, opened in 1996)

Outcomes at this school appear to be positive—at least in reading—as the name of the school suggests. Our analyses indicate that the school typically enrolls students who are performing lower than their demographically matched peers on the pretest. By the time of the posttest, the students are performing higher than their demographically matched peers in reading. The gains in math made by the charter school students is similar to the control group, since no statistically significant differences appeared. Table 6:6 contains a complete set of the findings.

[23] The students enrolled in this school are relatively homogeneous in terms of performance levels. When we looked at the standard deviations on the scaled scores in reading and math, we found that 10th grade students in this school performed substantially higher than the state average. Yet they had a standard deviation which was noticeably smaller.

Table 6:6 Performance on DSTP for Students from Positive Outcomes Charter School and Comparison Students by Grade and Subject Area

Grade and Subject Area	Scaled Score on the DSTP				Normal Curve Equivalent on the SAT-9			
	Covariate Mean	Adjusted Mean	F-value	P-value	Covariate Mean	Adjusted Mean	F-value	P-value
Grade 8 Reading, Panel C								
Charter school	436.6	523.3	10.06	**0.0099**	37.1	67.6	10.91	**0.0080**
Control group	453.0	477.5			48.6	40.8		
Grade 8 Math, Panel C								
Charter school	435.4	494.5	0.14	0.7159	44.1	57.1	0.49	0.4937
Control group	458.8	490.7			50.1	52.8		
Grade 10 Reading, Panel E								
Charter school	499.2	482.9	11.32	**0.0083**	51.8	45.0	0.44	0.5248
Control group	545.8	477.5			66.1	48.0		
Grade 10 Math, Panel E								
Charter school	462.3	504.0	0.32	0.5748	41.5	52.2	0.67	0.4218
Control group	492.1	512.9			54.2	44.5		

There are two important limitations in the findings for this school. First of all, since the school only serves students in grades 7-12, at least a third of the instruction the 8th grade test takers received between the pretest in grade 5 and the posttest at grade 8 was received at a different school. The second limitation is that the number of students upon which the findings are based is very small (i.e., 18 students in the grade 8 group and 16 students in the grade 10 group.

East Side Charter School (Grades K-6, opened in 1997)

East Side Charter School enrolls a high proportion of minority students and a high proportion of students from low-income families. Compared with students with similar demographic characteristics, this school attracted and enrolled students that were performing higher than their matched peers in noncharter public schools at the time of the pretest (i.e., grade 3). Between grades 3 and 5, the students enrolled in this school gained less than their matched peers in reading and math, although the differences were too small to be significant (see Table 6:7 for complete findings).

Table 6:7 Performance on DSTP for Students from East Side Charter School and Comparison Students by Grade and Subject Area

Grade and Subject Area	Scaled Score on the DSTP				Normal Curve Equivalent on the SAT-9			
	Covariate Mean	Adjusted Mean	F-value	P-value	Covariate Mean	Adjusted Mean	F-value	P-value
Grade 5 Reading, Panel A								
Charter school	424.7	463.8	0.38	0.5413	52.7	52.3	0.16	0.6941
Control group	418.0	469.9			49.8	50.2		
Grade 5 Math, Panel A								
Charter school	437.4	448.6	1.79	0.1924	55.4	52.4	0.24	0.6268
Control group	411.9	460.2			51.6	54.6		

The findings in Table 6:7 are based on only 12 students, so they need to be interpreted carefully. More years of data and, hopefully, larger numbers of test takers are needed to draw more conclusive findings regarding the performance of this school.

Campus Community School (Grades 1-12, opened in 1998)

A considerable amount of data is available for this school since it serves a wide range of grades (grades 1-12) and also because it has been open for more than 6 years. The performance of the students enrolled at the school are very similar to their demographically matched peers in traditional public schools at the time of the pretest. Between the pre- and posttest, the charter school students exhibited similar gains on the standardized tests as their matched peers. In math at grades 5 and 8 the differences between the groups were statistically significant and favored the students in traditional public schools. Table 6:8 below contains the complete set of findings for this school.

Table 6:8 Performance on DSTP for Students from Campus Community School and Comparison Students by Grade and Subject Area

Grade and Subject Area	Scaled Score on the DSTP				Normal Curve Equivalent on the SAT-9			
	Covariate Mean	Adjusted Mean	F-value	P-value	Covariate Mean	Adjusted Mean	F-value	P-value
Grade 5 Reading, Panel A								
Charter school	444.4	488.4	0.14	0.7066	59.0	62.3	0.38	0.5380
Control group	458.8	490.6			65.3	60.3		
Grade 5 Math, Panel A								
Charter school	432.0	472.6	5.75	**0.0205**	57.9	62.7	2.71	0.1063
Control group	443.2	484.2			64.6	69.5		
Grade 8 Reading, Panel C								
Charter school	473.5	524.4	0.53	0.4674	54.5	59.5	0.46	0.5003
Control group	470.4	521.3			52.8	57.7		
Grade 8 Math, Panel C								
Charter school	465.8	497.4	6.41	**0.0124**	59.3	54.8	5.80	**0.0173**
Control group	465.1	506.0			56.8	60.2		
Grade 10 Reading, Panel E								
Charter school	528.4	523.6	0.56	0.4574	61.4	51.5	0.66	0.4202
Control group	526.1	527.4			59.6	54.2		
Grade 10 Math, Panel E								
Charter school	508.0	537.8	0.00	0.9968	60.0	56.6	0.94	0.3358
Control group	514.1	537.8			61.4	60.6		

Thomas A. Edison Charter School (Grades K-8, opened in 2000)

Grades 5 and 8 results are available for the Thomas A. Edison Charter School. The findings in Table 6:9 indicate that at the time of the pretest the students were performing generally less well than their demographically matched peers. At the time of the posttest, the students in the Edison school had gained more than their peers when adjusting for pretest performance levels. Most of these differences in reading and math are large and statistically significant.

Table 6:9 Performance on DSTP for Students from Thomas A. Edison Charter School and Comparison Students by Grade and Subject Area

Grade and Subject Area	Scaled Score on the DSTP				Normal Curve Equivalent on the SAT-9			
	Covariate Mean	Adjusted Mean	F-value	P-value	Covariate Mean	Adjusted Mean	F-value	P-value
Grade 5 Reading, Panel A								
Charter school	415.9	470.3	7.01	**0.0092**	46.3	53.8	18.57	**>.0001**
Control group	424.7	460.1			49.0	43.4		
Grade 5 Math, Panel A								
Charter school	400.0	463.8	11.96	**0.0007**	46.7	63.8	27.32	**>.0001**
Control group	413.9	450.9			54.3	49.7		
Grade 8 Reading, Panel C								
Charter school	447.0	514.5	0.06	0.8022	42.1	58.9	7.06	**0.0096**
Control group	453.8	513.3			46.9	50.4		
Grade 8 Math, Panel C								
Charter school	427.6	491.5	5.62	**0.0200**	41.4	65.6	31.15	**>.0001**
Control group	438.9	478.8			46.7	46.6		

The findings in this case must be considered with caution. While the participation rates on the state test are only slightly worse than the state average, the school level data reveal that there are very high retention rates in this school which may bias the sample. While most charter schools had retention rates that varied between 0 and 2 percent, the Edison school had large retention rates that went as high as 17 percent at grade 5 and 22 percent at grade 6 (see Appendix D, which contains tables of retention rates, summer school participation, and other related indicators). The design of our analysis assumes that students progress a grade each year. Because of this, the struggling students at the Edison Charter School that are retained for one or more grades are automatically dropped from the analysis, producing analyses that are biased in favor of the highest performing students at Edison. Closer examination of the data in year 2 should yield more insights into the characteristics of the students that are retained and how retention affects the school level results.

Sussex Academy of Arts & Sciences (Grades 6-8, opened in 2000)

The population of students at Sussex Academy of Arts & Sciences score high on standardized tests, and they score noticeably higher than their demographically matched peers. In other words, this school is attracting and enrolling a group of students that are already performing exceptionally on standardized tests. This can be seen from the covariate means that reflect the performance of students at grade 5 (see Table 6:10).

While the students in this charter school performed similarly in math as their demographically matched peers, they outgained their peers in reading. This differences in performance levels in reading was not great but it was found to be statistically significant.

Table 6:10 Performance on DSTP for Students from Sussex Academy of Arts & Sciences and Comparison Students by Grade and Subject Area

Grade and Subject Area	Scaled Score on the DSTP				Normal Curve Equivalent on the SAT-9			
	Covariate Mean	Adjusted Mean	F-value	P-value	Covariate Mean	Adjusted Mean	F-value	P-value
Grade 8 Reading, Panel C								
Charter school	510.9	549.8	4.09	**0.0451**	68.8	69.4	0.21	0.6485
Control group	480.9	542.8			60.7	68.3		
Grade 8 Math, Panel C								
Charter school	501.1	525.7	0.21	0.6472	77.6	66.9	0.08	0.7757
Control group	472.9	524.0			60.5	67.6		

Marion T. Academy (Grades K-8, opened in 2000)

Students attracted to and enrolled at this school are typically lower performing students. At the time of the pretest, the students scored noticeably lower than their demographically matched peers. Between grades 3 and 5, the students typically lost ground relative to their peers. In fact, there were statistically significant differences that favored noncharter schools in both subject areas at grade 5. Between grades 5 and 8, however, the students performed similarly to their matched peers since there were no statistically significant differences. Table 6:11 contains the full set of results. The results should be interpreted carefully as the sample size, particularly at grade 8 was very small (Table 6:1 contains figures that illustrate the total number of test takers at each grade).

Table 6:11 Performance on DSTP for Students from Marion T. Academy and Comparison Students by Grade and Subject Area

Grade and Subject Area	Scaled Score on the DSTP				Normal Curve Equivalent on the SAT-9			
	Covariate Mean	Adjusted Mean	F-value	P-value	Covariate Mean	Adjusted Mean	F-value	P-value
Grade 5 Reading, Panel A								
Charter school	409.7	457.6	4.99	**0.0276**	43.9	45.8	0.00	0.9449
Control group	437.3	476.5			55.8	46.0		
Grade 5 Math, Panel A								
Charter school	395.5	444.8	6.47	**0.1210**	45.2	49.4	1.87	0.1734
Control group	425.3	455.3			59.1	53.0		
Grade 8 Reading, Panel C								
Charter school	435.3	493.2	0.08	0.7759	43.2	44.6	0.00	0.9454
Control group	459.8	455.3			49.4	44.2		
Grade 8 Math, Panel C								
Charter school	463.0	470.3	1.22	0.2772	38.4	43.3	0.78	0.3843
Control group	484.7	477.4			51.8	47.1		

Kuumba Academy (Grades K-6, opened in 2001)

Based on their grade 3 test results, this school attracts and enrolls students who are generally average, with normal curve equivalents ranging from 48.7 to 51.8. Relative to demographically matched students in traditional public schools, students at Kuumba Academy were performing less

well at grade 3. Between grades 3 and 5, the students performed similarly to their matched peers. The one significant difference, based on the normal curve equivalents, was in math. This difference favored the charter school students.

Table 6:12 Performance on DSTP for Students from Kuumba Academy and Comparison Students by Grade and Subject Area

Grade and Subject Area	Scaled Score on the DSTP				Normal Curve Equivalent on the SAT-9			
	Covariate Mean	Adjusted Mean	F-value	P-value	Covariate Mean	Adjusted Mean	F-value	P-value
Grade 5 Reading, Panel A								
Charter school	418.6	469.3	0.05	0.8277	48.7	51.5	0.52	0.4773
Control group	430.6	470.7			52.9	48.6		
Grade 5 Math, Panel A								
Charter school	402.3	468.2	3.79	0.0594	51.8	63.0	4.96	**0.0323**
Control group	434.7	454.5			64.3	51.3		

Newark Charter School (Grades 5-8, opened in 2001)

Students attracted to and enrolled at this school score far above national norms and far above their demographically matched peers in traditional public schools. At grade 3, the students scores on the SAT-9 items placed them high above the national norms (NCE of 67.9 in math, and 74.1 in reading). Aside from this finding from the grade 5 (Panel A) analyses, there is not much more we can derive from the grade 5 results. That is because the students spent more time at a different school than at Newark Charter School between the test administered in grade 3 and the test administered in grade 5. Increases or drops in performance level could be due to the impact of the previous school as much as from the charter school (see Table 6:13).

Table 6:13 Performance on DSTP for Students from Newark Charter School and Comparison Students by Grade and Subject Area

Grade and Subject Area	Scaled Score on the DSTP				Normal Curve Equivalent on the SAT-9			
	Covariate Mean	Adjusted Mean	F-value	P-value	Covariate Mean	Adjusted Mean	F-value	P-value
Grade 5 Reading, Panel A								
Charter school	464.6	504.0	7.96	**0.0052**	67.9	63.0	1.22	0.2704
Control group	453.5	494.3			59.6	60.7		
Grade 5 Math, Panel A								
Charter school	471.6	498.3	1.80	0.1806	74.1	72.8	0.32	0.5751
Control group	450.2	493.9			69.3	71.7		
Grade 8 Reading, Panel C								
Charter school	499.9	538.4	0.20	0.6546	64.2	66.3	2.21	0.1384
Control group	484.5	537.1			59.1	63.4		
Grade 8 Math, Panel C								
Charter school	495.6	529.0	8.77	**0.0034**	74.8	70.2	3.36	0.0682
Control group	474.7	520.2			63.1	66.7		

Findings from the grade 8 (Panel C) analyses more likely reflect the impact of the charter school on student learning. Even though the students represented in Panel C took the pretest (grade 5) at a previous school (this is because the school did not open until the autumn of 2001), it is likely that most of the students spent all of 6th, 7th, and 8th grades at Newark Charter School before taking the grade 8 posttest in the spring of 2004. Only one comparison at grade 8 (i.e., math scaled score) was statistically significant and this favored the charter school.

On the whole this school is attracting high performing students. The evidence to suggest that the school can move this group farther and faster than expected is still insufficient given the limited years of operation.

MOT Charter School (Grades K-8, opened in 2002)

Students attracted to and enrolled at MOT Charter School perform at levels high above the national average (NCEs are 70 in reading and 67.6 in math for the pretest) and higher than their demographically matched peers. Between grades 3 and 5 the charter school students were outperformed by the comparison group, although the differences were small and nonsignificant in reading. Only in math were the differences favoring the noncharter school students statistically significant.

Important caveats with the findings for MOT and the next school we report on, Providence Creek, are that the schools are relatively new and have only two years of test data. Also, the short operating time of the school means that students took the pretest at another school.

Table 6:14 Performance on DSTP for Students from MOT Charter School and Comparison Students by Grade and Subject Area

Grade and Subject Area	Scaled Score on the DSTP				Normal Curve Equivalent on the SAT-9			
	Covariate Mean	Adjusted Mean	F-value	P-value	Covariate Mean	Adjusted Mean	F-value	P-value
Grade 5 Reading, Panel A								
Charter school	464.0	491.1	0.50	0.4797	70.0	62.2	0.00	0.9540
Control group	455.3	494.0			64.5	62.1		
Grade 5 Math, Panel A								
Charter school	452.8	477.4	14.31	**0.0002**	67.6	69.2	0.14	0.7129
Control group	447.1	493.1			67.4	70.1		

Providence Creek Academy (Grades K-8, opened in 2002)

The pretest scores suggest that while the students attracted to the school perform better than national means, the students had lower scores than their demographically matched peers at the time of the pretest. Between grades 3 and 5, the students at Providence Creek Academy lost ground to their peers after adjusting for pretest scores. In both subject areas, statistically significant differences favored the noncharter students.

As noted earlier, this school was relatively new and has had a rough start-up after firing its initial management company and replacing it with another locally based management company started by

the organization that owns the facilities. There were no grade 8 results since this grade was added in 2004. Another concern about the findings is that reportedly high student attrition, due to the rough start, may have resulted in sampling bias, as families leaving the school may have been better performing students than those that remained.

Table 6:15 Performance on DSTP for Students from Providence Creek Academy and Comparison Students by Grade and Subject Area

Grade and Subject Area	Scaled Score on the DSTP				Normal Curve Equivalent on the SAT-9			
	Covariate Mean	Adjusted Mean	F-value	P-value	Covariate Mean	Adjusted Mean	F-value	P-value
Grade 5 Reading, Panel A								
Charter school	446.3	478.8	7.10	**0.0088**	61.3	59.6	0.03	0.8582
Control group	456.3	489.7			65.9	60.0		
Grade 5 Math, Panel A								
Charter school	440.5	466.2	14.6	**0.0002**	66.3	61.7	4.01	**0.0475**
Control group	444.3	482.4			66.9	67.6		

6.4 Limitations in Our Analyses and Findings

In this section we highlight and discuss some key limitations. Most importantly, the limitations have to do with controlling for the number of years students spend at the charter schools and controlling for mobility.

Controlling for Number of Years at a Charter School

As a consequence of the characteristics of the data we received from the Delaware State Department of Education, we were not able to adequately control for the number of years a student was enrolled in a charter school. At best, a student could appear every other year in the data. Thus, we conducted several pilot analyses to examine the effect of this possibility. Using the same analytical strategy, we constructed a second covariate representing the number of years a student was enrolled in a charter school. Thus, this new covariate ranged from 0 to 2 or 3, depending on the panel. Using Panel A Math Scale Score and NCE SAT-9, we examined the influence of adding the second covariate. ANCOVA findings indicated that both covariates (previous assessment score and the new covariate, years) were statistically significant in the math scaled score analysis. Moreover, the statistically significant difference observed in Table 6:4 favoring the noncharter schools actually increased when we controlled for the number of years at a charter school (adjusted mean for charter schools was 468.1, and the adjusted mean for noncharter schools was 478.6).[24] Although this brief examination remains limited, the impact of adding a covariate that statistically controls for the

[24] As in Table 6:4, parallel findings were observed in the NCE SAT-9 analysis. Only the first covariate, previous assessment score, was statistically significant. There was no overall statistically significant difference in the adjusted group means, $p = 0.4888$.

number of years a student attended a charter school did not alter the general findings presented in Table 6:4. [25]

Controlling for Mobility

Related to our challenge to control for the number of years students actually spend at a charter school is the issue of mobility. Due to limitations in data and in the design used, we have not controlled for mobility across schools in our analyses. When we attempted to build panels across more than two assessment points, students inevitably changed schools, since the range of grades within most charter schools was limited. At the posttest, all students are enrolled in a charter school. However, our analyses do not require that the student also be enrolled in the same school at the time of the pretest. It is implicit in our interpretation that students remain enrolled in the same school although it is possible that some students moved to the charter school shortly before the posttest. While the data would allow us to restrict the analyses only for students who remained at the same school, there were a number of complications with this. For example, the DSTP does not test students at every grade level and most of the charter schools provide for only limited grade ranges. Therefore, large portions of the students have to switch schools between tests.[26]

We also examined the impact of mobility by comparing mobility among charter school students (experimental group) and the traditional public school students (control group). Specifically, we compared the total number of students at the time of the posttest. This represents the target population we were seeking to capture. The panel design, however, requires that students take the DSTP 2 years previously in Panels A, B, E, and F, and 3 years previously for Panels C and D. The first data column in Table 6:16 illustrates number of students at the time of the posttest. The next column contains the figures for the number of students that were included in the panels. As one can see the numbers in the panel are smaller than the numbers of actual test takers. The reason for the drop in students is because a portion of the students did not have pretest scores. This can be due to a number of reasons, including (i) student was not enrolled in a public school in Delaware (some students move to the state, and others are enrolled in private schools, which are not required to take the DSTP); (ii) the student did not receive a valid test score at the time of the pretest either because he or she was not present or because he or she may have been classified as special education or limited English proficiency; or (iii) the student was retained or repeated one or more grades.

As one can see from the figures in Table 6:16, the charter schools had a larger proportion of their students excluded from the panels. This can potentially bias the data in a number of ways, particularly when the students excluded differ in performance levels from the students included. For example, a sizeable proportion of the students in the Edison school were excluded because they had to repeat one or more grades. Students that are repeating grades are likely to be lower performing students, and excluding them presumably has biased the analyses.

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[25] When we examined this possibility at the school level, we found that, due to the limited manner in which we constructed our panels, addition of the second covariate was not justified. For example, in the Charter School of Wilmington, only 1 student previously had been enrolled in a charter school. A large portion of these students presumably came from private schools.

[26] In a school like the Charter School of Wilmington, which serves grades 9-12, only one grade is tested in this range (i.e., grade 10). Therefore, the pretest for this group is the DSTP at grade 8. All students would be classified as "movers."

Table 6:16 Potential Sample Bias Based on Comparison of the Number of Test Takers and the Actual Numbers of Students Included in the Panels

	Total number of test takers	*Total number of students in the panel*	*Percentage of students taking posttest that were included in the panel*
Panel A, Charter	609	515	84.6%
Panel A, Noncharter	6,764	6,267	92.7%
Panel C, Charter	430	328	76.3%
Panel C, Noncharter	6,372	5,819	91.3%
Panel E, Charter	271	221	81.5%
Panel E, Noncharter	6,230	5,471	87.8%

Looking specifically at the Panel E, Grade 10 figures, we see that the total panel population contained 6,230 students enrolled in noncharter schools and 271 students enrolled in charter schools. This population is then reduced by dropping students without an 8th grade assessment score, which results in 5,471 noncharter students and 221 students enrolled in charter schools. Thus, we captured 87.8 percent of the noncharter students and 81.5 percent of the charter students in the aggregated data presented in Table 6:4. While this difference does not look great, the school-level analyses illustrated very large and dramatic differences. For example, in the Charter School of Wilmington, only 136 students had both valid 8th and 10th grade scores, yielding only a 59.6 percent capture rate. Thus, the analyses for this school are somewhat suspect in that there is an unknown sampling bias that has resulted in a large drop in students with both 8th and 10th grade scores. Using the same panel, we examined the decline in sample for Campus Community School. Of the 44 possible students, only 30 of them also had 8th grade scores providing a 68.2 percent capture rate.

In our aggregate analyses we assumed that all charter schools delivered the same curriculum. Without this assumption, the DSTP could not be considered a valid measure of student learning in Delaware. Moreover, it is fundamental to the validity of the aggregate analyses. However, if one or more schools take a divergent approach to meeting the state standards, this assumption may be stretched.

Other general limitations to keep in mind are the fact that the charter school reform in the state of Delaware is still relatively new. More critically, some of the school level findings are based on schools that have operated for only two to three years, which is still too early for drawing sound conclusions regarding the impact of the schools. In recent months, a few charter school studies have been highlighted in the media, with headlines that suggest widespread generalizations about charter schools. Because charter school reforms vary so extensively by state, one needs to be very cautious and restrain from such generalizations, especially across states.

6.5 Future Analysis of Charter School Performance Using DSTP Data

Extensive work was involved in cleaning, sorting, and organizing the data into specific SAS datasets. Following this, programs were written to match charter school students with randomly selected students in traditional public schools with similar demographic backgrounds. After this groundwork

was done, it was possible to test our design possibilities and proceed with the analysis of data. While the findings have a number of noteworthy limitations, as outlined in the previous section, we hope and expect that some of these limitations can be addressed in future analyses that seek to do the following:

- ❑ Conduct more specific analyses of subgroups
- ❑ Apply and compare other study designs
- ❑ Include additional years of test data and additional subjects (i.e., science and social studies)

Analysis of Subgroups

An analysis of subgroups, such as the students that leave or move to charter schools, would yield important information about the schools and their relative performance. Characteristics of the "leavers" should be contrasted with the characteristics of the "stayers." Other subgroup analyses that would yield beneficial information would look at the length of time students have spent in charter schools, as well as groupings of schools based on grade levels they serve and the general profiles of the schools. Finally, it will be important to study the characteristics of the students that are retained or that are required to attend summer school.

Apply and Compare Other Study Designs

Availability of charter school test data in many states restrict analyses to cross-sectional designs or group level comparisons. The data in Delaware actually allow for a variety of study designs. In our current report we have applied a more rigorous design. In future work, we would like to analyze the data using a variety of designs, including cross-sectional designs and designs using the same cohorts or consecutive cohorts of students. Contrasting results from these differing designs will allow us to weigh in on the larger debate regarding evaluations of reforms using differing study designs.

Specific to our analysis of stayers, our future analysis of Delaware charter school test data will consider a case-control type of analysis. If one considers students enrolled in a charter school as "cases" and students enrolled in noncharter schools as "controls" then a case-control design can be examined for students that are classified as stayers.[27]

Include Additional Years of Test Data and Additional Subjects

Given the limited time we had to work with the data this year, we decided to restrict our initial analyses to the reading, mathematics, and writing components of the DSTP (as noted earlier, the measure available for the writing component limited drawing comparisons over time so we did not include these findings in the chapter but listed them in Appendix E instead. Next year, science and social studies should be added to the overall analysis. Adding additional years of test data will also be important since many of the schools are still relatively new and have limited years of test data.

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[27] Erik Bergstralh and Jon Kosanke (http://www.mayo.edu/hsr/sasmac.html, 11/15/04) have developed a computer program that will match each of N "cases" with a minimum of "a" controls from a total pool of "A" controls based on a "distance matrix." Controls can be matched to cases by one or more factors (covariates). Optimal matching occurs when a control is matched to a case if it is the closest observation in terms of the distance matrix. The goal of the matching is to minimize the total distance over all cases.

Conclusion

Based on feedback from the Delaware Department of Education and the State Board of Education, we will consider additional study designs for future analyses. Furthermore, we will explore other means of aggregating and disaggregating the data so that it best serves the needs of policymakers and key stakeholders.

Chapter Seven
Dilemmas and Issues Related to Overseeing a Successful Charter School Reform

In this final chapter, a summary of the relevant findings and a discussion of issues related to oversight of Delaware charter schools is provided. Important questions are addressed such as, How do authorizers differ in terms of oversight practices? How does Delaware compare to other states with regard to oversight of its charter schools? Is there any evidence that "chartering" closer to the community is more effective? What factors or conditions facilitate rigorous oversight? What are the advantages and disadvantages of rigorous oversight? What is the impact of rigorous oversight? We have saved this chapter for last, in part because answers to some of these questions are built upon findings presented in earlier chapters.

The first section includes a description of the oversight activities by the two authorizers. The second section includes a summary of thoughts and comments from the charter schools regarding oversight, particularly as it relates to the work of DOE. The third section summarizes findings from relevant research that provides a comparative look at the oversight of charter schools in Delaware. Key policy issues are discussed in the fourth section, and the fifth and final section of this chapter examines the likely factors related to the relative success of Delaware's charter schools.

7.1 Oversight of Delaware Charter Schools

A charter is a contract between a school represented by its governing board and the authorizer that approved or sponsored the charter school. It is important for both the school and the authorizer to cooperate and perform their respective jobs as expected in order for the overall reform to work successfully. The school needs to abide by applicable regulations and produce the results it has promised, and the authorizer needs to provide oversight and use its authority to intercede when things are not working and to revoke the charter when the school is no longer viable or no longer able to live up to terms agreed upon in the performance contracts.

Multiple authorizers or sponsors of charter schools are permitted under the legislation governing the Delaware charter school reform. The State Board of Education (SBOE) and the boards of local districts are allowed to sponsor charter schools. While the SBOE has granted charters for 13 charter schools thus far (2 of these have since closed), the only other board to sponsor a charter school has been the Board of Education for the Red Clay Consolidated School District, which has sponsored 2 charter schools.

Analysis of Time and Effort Devoted to Charter Schools by DOE and SBOE

One important component of the evaluation of the Delaware charter school reform was an examination of the amount of time devoted to charter schools by the State Board of Education and the Department of Education. This issue arose out of a concern by SBOE and DOE officials that charter schools, while enrolling only 5.4 percent of the states' students, were requiring a disproportional amount of time and resources.

An analysis of time allocation was conducted for this study. From the minutes of State Board of Education meetings from 2002-2004, it was estimated that approximately 8 percent of the time in the meetings was devoted to charter school matters. This varied by meeting and also according to the time of the year. When new charter school applications were being considered, a larger portion of the meeting time was devoted to charter schools.

The amount of time that State Board members devote to charter school matters varies by person by time of year. At busier times, it was reported that board members were devoting around 20 percent of their time to charter schools. One board member serves as the point person for charter school issues, and she reported that she spends a majority of her time in meetings or reviewing documentation in relation to charter school matters.

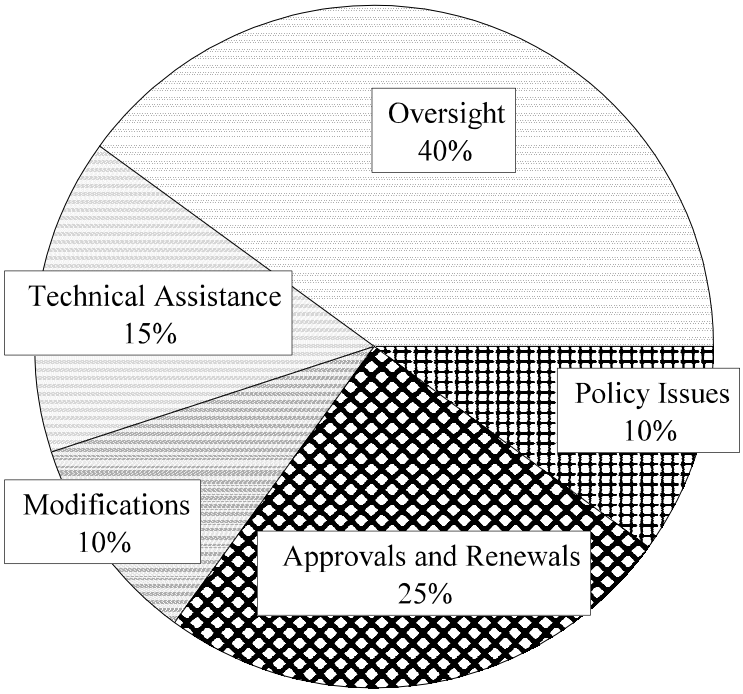

Figure 7:1 Breakout of Time Devoted by Select DOE Staff to Charter Schools by Activity Type

Based on the literature and based on our previous studies, it is apparent that the Delaware State Board of Education is far more involved in charter school-related matters than what one would see in other states where state boards sponsor charter schools. Board members spend time reviewing reports and documents to prepare for decisions to be made regarding charter schools at their regular board meetings. They attend or participate in accountability committee meetings, and they occasionally venture out to visit charter schools on their own time or as part of official events.

A second component of the time allocation study was a series of interviews we conducted with senior DOE employees such as the deputy and associate secretaries of education, as well as employees working with such programs as special education and teacher certification. While the DOE employee assigned to the charter school office reported that 100 percent of his time was devoted to charter school matters, other DOE personnel reported that charter school-related matters comprised between 15 and 60 percent of their time. Of the total time spent dealing with charter schools, about 40 percent of this time was spent on routine oversight such as reading reports,

reviewing records and, in some cases, making site visits. Figure 7:1 illustrates the estimated proportion of time DOE staff we interviewed were devoting to charter school-related activities.

Summary of Work from the Charter School Accountability Committee

A larger portion of the oversight work undertaken by the DOE is conducted by the Charter School Accountability Committee. This committee is comprised of several senior DOE staff. A member of the SBOE serves as an exofficio member of this committee. We analyzed the monthly or twice-monthly updates on charter schools, which are prepared for the accountability committee by Dr. Larry Gabbert, who runs the charter school office in the Department of Education. These reports, dating back to the summer of 2002 were prepared for the Charter School Accountability Committee. Every report listed the status of each charter school (i.e., no action pending, compliance issue, charter modification application, formal review, or probation) and provided a brief description.

Based on this review of reports, interviews with committee members, and notes from observing a committee meeting, we were able to gain considerable insight into the work and functioning of this committee. Among the many topics discussed by the members of committee, some of those that receive considerable time and attention are listed below:

- ❏ Discussion of new charter applications
- ❏ Applications to renew charters and recommendations thereof (often a multistep process)
- ❏ Detailed discussions of EMO relationships with pending schools
- ❏ Determination of whether or not probable grounds exist to order remedial measures for schools that are out of compliance
- ❏ Recommendations for modification requests (again, often a multistep process)
- ❏ Status of charter schools' compliance

Oversight by the Red Clay Consolidated School District

The school board of the Red Clay Consolidated School District has sponsored two charter schools. One is the Charter School of Wilmington, which was the first charter school (chartered in 1995 and opened in 1996). The other is the Delaware Military Academy. Both schools have very focused profiles and specific niches. Based on a review of limited available documents and on an interview with a district official and the directors of the two charters schools it sponsored, we were able to gain some insight into the nature of the oversight provided by the district.

All key informants agreed that the amount of oversight provided by the district was minimal. In the words of one satisfied charter school director, "The district issues the charter and gets out of the way. They've been great." In referring to the oversight of the Red Clay district, another charter school director indicated, "Red Clay's oversight is sufficient and appropriate . . . I spend very little time responding to requests or preparing reports." A Red Clay district official also indicated that they spend little time on oversight. He indicated that the time for oversight comes up when it is time for renewal of charters or when new applications are being considered.

While the Red Clay Consolidated School District does not provide extensive oversight, it is very careful with regard to the schools it charters or sponsors. By sponsoring only sound and viable groups, the district has helped to ensure that less oversight would be required over time.

As noted above, the district personnel and administrators of charter schools authorized by the Red Clay Consolidated School District report good relationships and satisfaction with the limited amount and nature of the oversight. Because of the more lax oversight and lack of documentation regarding compliance by these schools, it is hard to know whether charter schools sponsored by Red Clay are more accountable or have fewer problems with regard to following regulations.

The charter schools sponsored by the Red Clay district indicated that they received informal visits by the local district school board as well as DOE. Representatives from these schools spoke positively about the support and technical assistance they receive from DOE. Although staff from DOE do visit the schools sponsored by the Red Clay district and do provide technical assistance, they do not provide oversight of these schools directly. Concerns and complaints[28] about enrollment practices at one of the schools reached the DOE and SBOE, and a DOE representative indicated that it would not be passing on further federal funds to this charter schools since it does not have a lottery system in place that allows all students an equal chance for enrollment.

7.2 Charter Schools' Comments and Concerns Regarding DOE Oversight

In Chapter 2 we provided a summary of the comments and views of charter school representatives regarding the charter school law. In this section, we provide a summary of the opinions and comments of charter school administrators with regard to oversight. The information in this section is based on interviews with charter school administrators and representatives of charter school support or advocacy groups.

The vast amount of paperwork required by the DOE at inconvenient periods was the primary complaint of the charter schools in regard to DOE oversight. Other concerns include the following:

- *Excessive regulation and oversight*. Many DOE-sponsored charter school directors said they thought the DOE "regulates too much."
- *Need to better coordinate oversight* in order to eliminate repetition and confusion and to create a more conducive environment for direct communication. Further, it was noted by a few that there was poor coordination between DOE's many departments. This frequently leads to time-consuming duplication of paperwork for the charter schools.
- *Excessive requests for information*. In the eyes of the charter schools, there were too many requests for information and the requests often required lengthy responses. For example, according to the schools, having 53 questions on the quality review form is excessive.[29]
- *Untimely requests for information*. One administrator indicated that his school had 2 DOE requests for information, one of which was 33 pages in length and the other 8 pages long. These 2 requests for information arrived on May 15 and June 15, the busiest and most inconvenient time of the year for school officials.

[28] Lawsuit settled out of court, with school decision to increase the enrollment numbers to include child of plaintive.

[29] Charter school directors complained that they spend too much time involved with paperwork for DOE and not enough time working with students. One school director stated that he spends nearly half his time dealing with activities and paperwork required by DOE.

- *Need for greater flexibility*. While charter schools are granted greater autonomy, many charter school representatives argued that rigid enforcement of regulations has not allowed schools the flexibility they need to adapt to their particular settings and circumstances. One example of an area where greater flexibility was requested was to allow flexible benchmarks on the performance agreement that increased over time rather than a single target that actually requires a few years to attain.

- Need *to improve communication between DOE and charter schools*. One complaint raised by a few individuals was that information was being shared by DOE indirectly. These persons asked that DOE share relevant and important information directly with all the schools, simultaneously. A charter school principal suggested that DOE create a specific person or department with whom the charter schools would conduct all business or to decentralize the DOE's supervision altogether.

  While most charter school representatives were especially pleased with the responsiveness of DOE to their varied questions, one charter school claimed that it gets only about 10 percent of its questions answered by DOE. Another reported that its school requested information in writing from the DOE regarding student enrollment and the commitment letters, but the DOE never sent a reply.

  A few charter school representatives pointed out that they often are not included in DOE briefings to which local districts are invited. A member of the State Board of Education noted that when the DOE realizes that charter schools are not informed about new changes in legislation and regulations (i.e., No Child Left Behind), the DOE has to hold another briefing, which creates duplication in communications.

- *Location and times for public hearings*. According to a few administrators, midday meetings can be difficult for interested parties who must travel greater distances to participate.

- *Need for a more charter school-friendly DOE*. While charter school staff indicated that they were very pleased with technical assistance provided by DOE, most also expressed their concern that the DOE is not charter school-friendly. They accused the DOE of not being supportive or sufficiently patient with the charter schools. A few administrators also indicated that they perceive the DOE to have a threatening mindset. In the words of charter school directors, "They [DOE] use the threat of probation too often." "It's easy to get on probation, but hard to get off." "DOE finds charters a nuisance." "The level of oversight and quality control is inappropriate. There's a lack of trust."

This list is a sampling of the more common concerns and complaints voiced by the charter schools. Comments listed were not necessarily shared by all charter schools.

It is important to point out that the charter schools also identified many positive aspects of their relationship with DOE. For example, most of the schools volunteered that they appreciated the technical assistance provided by DOE. A third of the charter schools indicated that they were very pleased with the friendly and timely telephone assistance provided by staff throughout the Department of Education.

7.3 Cross-State Comparison of Oversight Practices

The importance of oversight is increasingly being seen as critical for the success of charter school reforms. As evident in our previous state evaluations and as is evident from the literature, oversight varies considerably between authorizers in the same state, as they do between DOE and the Red Clay Consolidated School District. Large differences also exist between states. The differences exist due to the particular roles and interests of the authorizer granting the charter, and they exist depending on guidance provided by laws and regulations. Finally, they also differ depending on the amount and source of funding available for oversight activities. In this section, we include a summary of findings from cross-state studies of authorizer and charter school oversight. Particular attention is given to the findings that are particular to Delaware or findings that cover the states used in Chapter 2 for the comparison of charter school laws.

Bierlein Palmer and Gau study on charter school authorizers (2003). To examine the pivotal role of the charter authorizer, Bierlein Palmer and Gau (2003) conducted a study to answer questions about charter school authorizing. The study focused on a number of indicators that covered such topics as the support of state policy environments for charter schools and authorizers, practices of oversight and accountability, and respect for charter school autonomy.

The study, funded by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, relied on data collected from nearly 900 individuals representing authorizers, charter operators, and charter observers across 23 states and the District of Columbia. The investigators gave a letter grade for each state based on its charter policy environment and its charter authorizer behavior. The criteria for the state charter policy environment included support for charter schools and support and external accountability for authorizers. The criteria for charter authorizer behavior included the application and approval processes, performance contracts, oversight, renewal and revocation processes, and transparency and internal accountability. Delaware ranked 14 out of 24 states with an overall letter grade of C+. Interestingly, no state was given an overall grade better than a B+. Table 7:1 includes the grades and overall ranking of states from the larger region surrounding Delaware.

Table 7:1 State Summary of Accountability Ratings (Adapted from Bierlein Palmer and Gau 2003)

State	*Policy Environment*	*Authorizer Behavior*	*Overall Grade*	*Overall Rank*
Massachusetts	B	A-	B+	1
New Jersey	B-	B+	B	4
North Carolina	C	B+	B	5
District of Columbia	C	B	B-	9
Connecticut	D+	B	B-	10
New York	C	B-	B-	13
Delaware	C	C+	C+	14
Pennsylvania	D	D+	D+	23

Bierlein Palmer and Gau (2003) reported that, despite interest in the development and operation of charter schools, survey respondents gave Delaware an overall grade of C+. The grades for the main categories are shown in Table 7:2. The findings in the following paragraphs reflect the summative statements prepared by Bierlein Palmer and Gau (2003, pp. 39-40).

Survey respondents gave Delaware a C- in the area of support for charter schools because of a perceived lack of political support, a reportedly weak public understanding of charter schools, and a reported lack of acceptance by districts. With the exception of the Red Clay Consolidated School District, no other school district has yet sponsored a charter school. The researchers gave Delaware high marks for nongovernmental support for charter schools because of the Delaware Charter Schools Network and the Innovative School Development Company that serves as a resource center and offers loan guarantee funds for charter facilities.

The grade of B- in the category of support and external accountability for authorizers was due to reports provided to the legislature, the existence of the Charter School Accountability Committee, and the existence of a comprehensive, school-based accountability system for all public schools. Based on responses from their informants, concerns were expressed about adequate state funding for charter school authorizing staff and activities.

Table 7:2 Authorizer Ratings for Delaware by Category (Adapted from Bierlein Palmer and Gau, 2003)

Criteria	*Average Score (4 point scale)*	*Grade*
1. State Policy Environment		C
A. Support for Charter Schools	2.45	C-
B. Support & External Accountability for Authorizers	2.73	B-
2. Authorizer Practices		C+
A. Application Processes	2.09	D
B. Approval Processes	2.73	B-
C. Performance Contracts	3.09	B+
D. Oversight	2.94	B
E. Renewal & Revocation Processes	2.90	B
F. Transparency & Internal Accountability	2.49	C-
Overall Grade		C+

Grades in the area of authorizer practices ranged from a D for application processes to a B+ for performance contracts. Although there are published requirements for a charter application, survey respondents reported a lack of information on how applications were to be scored. The application processes grade was also low because the Department of Education and the districts can decline to accept applications. Delaware received high marks, however, for having a detailed application time line.

The B- in the approval processes category reflects the uncertainty over the consequences of new charter regulations created as clarifications of the law. Delaware received high scores for allowing an adequate time period for schools to prepare to open and for responding to applicants' questions about charter proposals.

The B+ in the category of performance contracts is Delaware's highest score. The state received high marks for contracts that incorporate all the performance expectations. Delaware received a B for its oversight processes. The authorizers monitor numerous compliance and performance measures such as financial reports, student achievement, and parent satisfaction (see Chapter 5 for more details regarding the performance agreements).

In terms of oversight, the Bierlein Palmer and Gau study gave Delaware a B. This relatively high grade was due to the compliance-oriented practices, existence of performance benchmarks that were agreed upon and measurable, regular site visits, compilation of financial and performance reports, and communication with schools with regard to compliance issues.

Delaware's B in the category of renewal and revocation processes is related to the clear written criteria for renewal, analysis of school data, and the quality of the processes. The state received a C- in the area of transparency and internal accountability because of its perceived lack of transparency about key decisions and the failure to evaluate its authorizing practices.

In summary, Delaware's extensive procedures and guidelines for charter schools appear to have both positive and negative consequences. Although the approach provides a framework for assessment, it focuses largely on compliance with processes rather than on the outcomes of a school's innovative performance.

Hassel and Batdorff study on high stakes decision making by authorizers (2004). In a different study, Hassel and Batdorff (2004) examined 50 cases where charter school authorizers had to make decisions to renew, not renew, or revoke charters. Their analysis shed important insights into the performance of authorizers. On the basis of their research, they identified three pillars of an accountability system necessary to provide the information to authorizers in order to make good decisions. Those pillars are setting clear and measurable expectations, gathering adequate and appropriate information, and making decisions based on performance compared with expectations.

Among relevant key findings of their study are that many authorizers lacked one or more of the basic pillars necessary to make key decisions, and authorizers' activities often lack transparency. Authorizers that were successful at setting clear expectations and collecting relevant data were more often larger authorizing entities with adequate staff and resources devoted to charter school oversight.

Delaware charter authorizers and schools earn high marks in the areas of setting clear expectations and collecting adequate data. Hassel and Batdorff commended the Delaware documentation pertaining to the charter schools' goals and progress toward those goals. They reviewed the documentation for the initial three-year performance agreement, the application for a five-year renewal, and the Accountability Committee's evaluation of a school's progress. The researchers found that the documents showed clearly defined goals and expectations that could form the basis for a performance audit. Sixty percent of the cases reviewed for the study had clear expectations in place.

7.4 Discussion of Key Policy Issues Relevant to Oversight

Relative to what we have seen in other states, it appears that DOE and the SBOE are more active and involved in overseeing charter schools than most other authorizers. Also differing from authorizers in other states is DOE's distribution of responsibility for oversight across a large number of persons. In other states it is more common for a single program officer or representative of the authorizer to oversee the charter schools and present items for action or approval to a board or a senior level executive. In Delaware, a larger number of persons across the department and—in particular across the accountability committee—share responsibility for decisions and actions with regard to

oversight. This can result in better decision making, but it also means there is more work for more persons.

A number of informants said that they think the amount of time devoted to oversight and to modifications will decrease over time. Establishing sound routines and practices for oversight is best done early, rather than later. While it is apparent that DOE and SBOE have been devoting a large proportion of their resources to charter school-related matters, this may actually pay in the long run. Although representatives from the charter schools complain about excessive oversight, it is clear that Delaware's charter schools are more highly accountable than charter schools we have seen in other states.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Rigorous Oversight

Many issues need to be considered and balanced when it comes to rigorous oversight of charter schools. Below is a brief list of what we see to be the primary advantages and disadvantages of rigorous oversight, such as that pursued by the Delaware Department of Education. The main advantages of more rigorous oversight include the following:

- ❏ More likely that only the best applications for charters are approved
- ❏ More likely that poor performing charter schools will close
- ❏ Less likely that less serious management companies with high cost structures will remain
- ❏ Less likely that children and communities are negatively affected by poor performing charter schools or untimely closure of charter schools[30]

On the other hand, the main disadvantages of rigorous oversight and regulation include the following:

- ❏ Charter schools are less free to innovate.
- ❏ Charter schools have less autonomy and flexibility that may be necessary to ensure a more efficient and effective use of limited resources.
- ❏ Human and financial resources of the Delaware State Board of Education and Delaware Department of Education are disproportionately directed to charter schools that serve a small portion of the states' public school students.

Factors Related to DOE Rigorous Oversight

The extensive and thorough oversight provided by DOE is rather unique. The Delaware Department of Education is able and willing to monitor closely the performance and viability of the charter schools and hold them accountable to regulations and their specific performance agreements. The capacity for this type of oversight can be attributed to a number of factors including (i) small size of the state and scale of the reform, (ii) detailed and centralized accountability system, (iii) devoted and effective DOE staff, and (iv) timely and well targeted technical assistance.

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[30] Although there has been one high profile closure that negatively affected students and surrounding schools in midyear, on the whole we can expect that fewer students and communities will be negatively affected by poorly operated charter schools.

One key factor is the small size of the state and the relatively small number of charter schools. Many examples were shared with us to illustrate that everyone knows everyone in the state. This type of environment leads to better communication and greater responsiveness. The statistical indicators for charter schools in the state data files were surprising in that there were few instances of missing data.[31] The small number of charter schools means that it is possible to know and communicate with all of them on a regular basis. Although the total number of schools is relatively small for a state, they are sufficient for a single authorizer as it works to achieve some relative economy of scale. Developing oversight routines and procedures may take time, but when these can apply to 11 schools rather than 1 or 2, the oversight becomes more cost-efficient.

Another important factor is the highly detailed and centralized accountability and monitoring system that exists. The state assessment system allows DOE and district staff to readily monitor and review detailed student, class, school, and district level data. The charter schools are included in the existing databases used for the districts in the states, including the assessment system, teacher certification, and finance/purchasing.

A third factor that makes rigorous and effective oversight possible is devoted and well-organized DOE staff. An example to illustrate this point is that DOE staff that serve on the Accountability Committee report that they spend substantial amounts of time outside of regular working hours reading and reviewing materials so that they are well prepared for meetings and hearings. An illustration of why the staff are effective in their work is a tracking system used by the charter school office to monitor compliance activities and track the status and action on all conditions that need to be addressed by charter schools.

The oversight provided by DOE is dependent upon the training and skills of administrators and administrative assistants at charter schools who have to use the entered and updated data. The DOE has been active in providing guidance and training for charter school employees responsible for data entry. Also, the schools indicated that the *Delaware Charter School Technical Assistance Manual* was helpful in answering questions and providing instructions for completion of applicable forms.

The rigorous oversight will get easier over time as schools become more familiar with requirements and move beyond the start-up phase and as DOE is able to streamline routines and oversight activities. A problem in other states that may also be relevant to Delaware is the lack of funding for oversight activities. This may be particularly important for districts that may have limited human and financial resources available to establish and implement oversight activities.

Balance Between Rigorous Oversight and Autonomy of Charter Schools

In Delaware the rigor of oversight has increased over time.[32] Some reported that this was in response to pressure from local school districts to make the legislation more restrictive. Others indicated that this was a response to untimely closure of Georgetown Charter School and the importance of avoiding scandals. One person who was interviewed said, “We can’t afford scandals in our public schools like we see up in Chester Uplands district, just north of the state in Pennsylvania.”

[31] In other states, monitoring of charter schools is undermined by the extensive amount of missing data or misreported data from charter schools.

[32] This is referred to as “compliance creep” by Bierlein Palmer and Gau (2003), which means the tendency by authorizers to slide further toward the accountability-via-compliance camp at the cost of flexibility.

Regardless of the reasons for the increasing expectations for the charter schools, it was widely reported by the charter schools that the increasing demands for compliance and accountability have restricted their flexibility to pursue unique missions or to adapt to the unique and changing needs of the charter schools.

At the same time, Delaware's charter school law is characterized by more safeguards for traditional public schools, such as commitment letters, caps on the number of students funded in each charter school, etc., than what is typically seen in other states. These safeguards are critical to the overall success of the reform, particularly in terms of minimizing unanticipated outcomes. At the same time, such safeguards may also lessen the competitive response that charter schools are intended to spark.

While many charter schools consistently are not in compliance with all relevant regulations, the DOE must ensure that they become compliant. This has led to excessive time on the part of DOE employees who are burdened with communication and activities related to due process given the schools. In the words of one DOE official, "We are tired of hand holding." While many of the compliance issues are not major, more time is needed to know whether the charter schools are going to be able to play by the rules set for them.

To lighten its burden DOE can choose to overlook minor indiscretions, or it can choose to take more drastic action, like initiating steps to close schools not in compliance.[33] If closing a charter school was an easy measure without possible negative impacts on students in surrounding district schools, the latter alternative might be easy. However, closure of charter schools is anything but easy. Closure is difficult because the schools have a constituency; they have infrastructure and material goods that are difficult to liquidate; and many steps are involved in allowing the schools due process, which is costly in dollars and in personnel associated with this work.

Establishing and maintaining a balance that protects the charter schools' autonomy while maintaining rigorous oversight is important for the years to come. It is also hoped that the issues that surface regarding the nature and amount of oversight provide a better framework for understanding the balance that is needed between oversight to ensure quality schools and autonomy and flexibility needed to operate a charter school. In many respects, the DOE and SBOE are in good place right now. It is easier to back off on tight oversight than it is to try to get tougher on regulations after schools establish working practices.

7.5 Conclusion

It is clear from the findings outlined in chapters 5 and 6 that the charter schools in Delaware are highly accountable and their performance—in terms of student achievement—is similar to or slightly better than what we find in traditional public schools. The strong accountability and the relative positive performance of these schools can be attributed to a number of factors. Key factors that are likely to explain the positive outcomes include the following:

[33] Closing poor performing charter schools improves the aggregate performance of charter schools since the data and results from the poor schools are dropped from the group. Closing poor performing schools also sends a strong message to other charter schools that they need to be accountable.

Rigorous Approval Process

Red Clay Consolidated School District indicated that it has been very selective in the schools it sponsors. Over time, the State Board of Education has also raised the bar in terms of the quality of applications it will consider and approve. As pointed out by board members, some of the most important oversight occurs during the application phase.

Rigorous Oversight

As noted earlier, the Delaware Department of Education rigorously oversees the charter schools. Unlike many other states, the Delaware Department of Education has also demonstrated that it is able and willing to intercede when schools are struggling and take action against schools that are not in compliance with applicable regulations. The rigor of the oversight has apparently increased with time. This may not be appreciated by charter schools and it may impede the autonomy of the schools, but it appears that this oversight helps ensure the viability of the schools and keep them focused on the outcomes they have agreed to meet.

Clear and Measurable Expectations

Rigorous oversight would be undermined or difficult to enforce if there were not clear and measurable expectations for the charter schools. Each charter school sponsored by the SBOE has a performance agreement with clear and measurable objectives. The work of the SBOE and DOE are exemplary in this respect and should be seen as a model for other authorizers. The comprehensive and detailed data yielded by this system facilitate and hopefully lead to data driven decision making. While other authorizers find it difficult to close poor performing schools due to insufficient evidence, this will not be the case in Delaware.

Comprehensive and Valid Data That are Readily Available

Comprehensive school level data are available for all public schools in Delaware. The charter schools are included and incorporated into existing statistical and informational data sets, and these are typically available online from the Department of Education Web site. While it is common in other states to find that charter schools have substantial amounts of missing data in school data files, we were surprised and pleased to find that there were few or no instances where charter schools had missing data in the Delaware statistical files. Beyond the general data reported by schools, there was a careful and thorough audit of data that was self-reported by charter schools in their annual reports. Comprehensive and valid data that are readily available is critical for data-driven decision making.

Extensive Technical Assistance

Technical assistance is provided by DOE in a number of forms. First of all, a comprehensive technical assistance manual has been developed by DOE. Another form of technical assistance include workshops and special training sessions that are provided to charter school staff. Staff throughout the DOE are available to answer questions from charter schools and traditional public schools alike. Support and technical assistance are also provided by the Innovative Schools Development Corporation

Relatively Strong Funding

While many states allocate less funding to charter schools than to traditional public schools, Delaware's funding mechanism calls for 100 percent of the per-pupil revenue received by district schools. Charter schools also received start-up funds from the federal Public Charter School Program. Many of the charter schools, however, indicate that they have insufficient funds to secure or renovate facilities for use. At the same time, a number of the schools reported substantial amounts of private funds that have been used for facilities.

Bipartisan Support

In states where the charter school reform is polarized, we typically see excessive attacks on charter schools, whether this is warranted or unwarranted. We also typically find much less transparency. Both of these instances create an environment that is less conducive to good oversight. The charter school reform in Delaware is rather bipartisan in terms of political support, which has helped create a more constructive environment for supporting and overseeing the schools.

Final Comments

Delaware charter schools and their authorizers have benefitted from their collective experiences. Over time, the DOE has strengthened its capacity to screen charter school proposals, set high expectations, train new charter school operators, and manage data. Charter schools have learned to operate in the challenging environment in which much is expected of them. In the next phase of the charter school reform in Delaware, progress can be made in several areas including the streamlining and systematization of data collection by the DOE, further development of a supportive charter school network, and support organizations that can shift some responsibility for technical assistance away from DOE.

The Delaware charter school reform is among the more closely monitored and regulated reforms in the nation. We say this based not only on our evaluation of charter school reforms in five other states, but also on what we have learned from the literature. This said, it is important to point out that more rigorous regulation and oversight of charter schools is not necessarily bad. Although the charter schools complain of too much interference, and although staff and resources at the Delaware Department of Education are taxed with extra work, it is likely that this more rigorous regulation and oversight has led to more stable, viable, and better performing charter schools.

While moderate success is obvious in the charter schools, there are a number of negative or unanticipated outcomes that need to be watched and considered carefully. These include accelerating the re-segregation of public schools by race, class, and ability, and the disproportionate diversion of district and state resources (both financial and human resources) from districts to the more recently established charter schools. These possible unanticipated outcomes will be addressed in year 2 of the study, along with further examination of those anticipated outcomes of the charter school reform.

Appendix A
Delaware Charter School Founding Histories and Administration Information

Charter School (Year Open)	*Grades*	*Founded By, History, Catalyst for Opening*	*Board and Administration Information*
Academy of Dover (2003)	K-6	An EMO from Michigan originally sought to open the school but failed. The group of parents connected with school formation turned to Mosaica. The local group began its efforts in 2000.	9-member Board of Directors includes two retired teachers from the community, two parents, one businessman, one CPA, one retired superintendent, one city council member, and one retired university professor. Active Parent-Teacher Organization.
Campus Community (1998)	1-11 (Gr. 12 added in '04)	Founding group was formed and a professor at Wesley College wrote the charter. The school had an experienced businessperson to open the school. The school was started with parents. Some founders still involved. One had to drop out due to conflict of interest. The school is still involved with Wesley College, including elementary school lease. The high school was renovated using funds from Longwood Foundation, a loan from Wachovia, and three years of savings by the school.	The board has 10 members. One teacher is elected by the teachers, and there are 5 parents, and 4 community members (including lawyer, retired university educator, and politician). A site-based management team meets monthly. The team consists of 4 teachers, 3 parents, PTA president, a Wesley College representative, and 2 administrators from the school.
CS of Wilmington (1996)	9-12	The catalysts were six companies in Delaware, and their representatives still sit on the board. Two individuals are original members. They donated $590,000 to start up. This was before federal funding. They gave CSW clout and credibility. CSW was the first school. No one knew what it was. CSW paid for transportation for a year before the state paid for transportation, then they cut the charter transportation funds 25 percent. That slows the school down, spending time fighting battles instead of academics.	Representatives from the six founding member companies are on the board as well as are parent and teacher reps. The board's role is to provide philosophy. The board reviews reports, but does not approve. Twelve individuals serve on the board: 7 from companies (appointed); 1 parent rep; 1 faculty rep; 1 City of Wilmington rep; 1 educator (UDel); 1 at large from New Castle.
Delaware Military Academy (2003)	9-12	The commandant was the catalyst and was involved in the initial founding of the school. They received federal start-up funding: year 1, $50,000; year 2, $100,000; year 3, $100,000. That was important because it allowed the commandant to work full-time for a year before they opened. Red Clay district chartered the school. It granted the charter because the market is there. There's crowding in the schools. The superintendent has vision. The school also secured approximately $800,000 through ISDC's Loan Guaranty Program.	Eleven individuals serve on the board: 2 parents; chair of board is CEO of Georgia Lynch, voted the best business in Delaware. Had the same board chair for 3 years. Only lost a couple. Vice-chair is a businessman, also others from the business sector. There's a state policeman and two teachers who are elected. The commandant is not a voting member; but the business manager, also a cofounder, is a voting member.

Charter School (Year Open)	*Grades*	*Founded By, History, Catalyst for Opening*	*Board and Administration Information*
East Side Charter School (1997)	K-6	Wilmington Housing Authority (WHA) was the catalyst in 1997 with parents.	The original exec. director and most of the board left. Two of the original parents are still on it. WHA ran into financial trouble. There were those who were pushed out of WHA and left the board. One founding member had to leave the board last year to work for the state. The new board dates from 2000. Some have served on the board for 3 or more years. Sixteen people serve on the board. They continue to have two parents, one teacher, and community members. Community board members include 2 lawyers; 3 bankers (2 are bank presidents); 2 accountants; 1 advertiser; 1 construction company owner, and a few educators from local universities (Delaware Tech, Delaware State, and Uni.of Delaware)
Kuumba Academy (2001)	K-6	Catalyst: parents, staff, and volunteers from Christina Arts Center and city of Wilmington officials. All but one are still involved. Volunteers worked for 4 years before the school opened. An administrative assistant was hired for one year before it opened. The delayed opening was for 1 year because the facility wasn't ready. Start-up resources included $100,000 federal start-up grant. Other resources were in-kind contributions from Rodale, Christina Arts Center, Delaware Community Foundation, and the municipal government.	There are 25 board members: 4 parents, 3 teachers, one administrator (dean) and others from business and community.
Marion T. Academy (2000)	K-8	Rev. Johnson was the catalyst and board president. He named the school after his parents. He wanted to make a difference in the community and he's accomplished a lot. The founding members are still on the board and successful at fund-raising. The original commitments were the most important resources. Mosaica is the management company. For the future they are building a middle school building and intend to cap at 675.	Eight people serve on the board: 1 parent, 1 teacher, 2 community members, mostly the founders. The board concerns itself mostly with policy. The board raised a lot of money early on--$2 million; but the board had to spend money on trailers and there were bridge loans because some of the commitments didn't come in because of the economy, so it has some long-term debt.
MOT Charter School (2002)	K-8	Three parents were the catalysts behind the school charter; the director didn't know about the initial founding of the school. They originally had a management company, but they separated.	Nine members serve on board of directors, almost all parents/founders and one teacher.
Newark Charter School (2001)	5-8	The school was started by Christiana Public School parents who had a vision of a school with high standards. That includes a dress code and behavior standards. They assessed the need for a school with a 4-year configuration (grades 5-8) and a size limit. Years 1 and 2 were spent in trailers on land leased from Amtrak with a two-year limit. They had to raise funds for the new building. ISDC guaranteed a $1.7 million loan that enabled the school to obtain an additional $8.5 million to build a new facility. The parent volunteers led the fund-raising effort.	The board consists of 3 parents elected by parents, 2 teachers elected by the teachers, and 2 community representatives selected by the board. The school council consists of 6 parents, 2 faculty, the principal, and the dean. The principal is not on the board. A PTA meets once a month.

Charter School (Year Open)	*Grades*	*Founded By, History, Catalyst for Opening*	*Board and Administration Information*
Positive Outcomes Charter School (1996)	7-12	Positive Outcomes was originally sponsored by Kent General Hospital. There was a need for a high school for adolescent psychiatric clients of the hospital. The founding group was comprised of staff in the adolescent psychiatric unit. They were the landlord of the original school building. The school received a $12,000 start-up loan from a board member. After the first year they received $100K in federal start-up money (one time).	Six members serve on the board: one teacher, two from the Capital School District, a stockbroker (a founding member), a state trooper (parent), and a grandmother of former students.
Providence Creek Academy (2002)	K-8	The school was founded originally by a group of parents. The group changed over time when the likely location of the school changed. EMO Beacon was first charged with finding a site in the Middletown area. No site could be found, but later they partnered with local citizens who founded St. Joseph's at Providence Creek. In 1997 the Saint Joseph's Project Foundation was created to acquire, renovate, and place the facility back into service to the community and the surrounding area. In April 1998, the Foundation took control of the facility, successfully raising more than $800,000 in state, local, and philanthropic grants. A $2.7 million loan guarantee from the United States Department of Agriculture's office of Rural Development was secured by the St. Joseph's Project Foundation to renovate four buildings and the surrounding areas for students and community groups.	5 member board: 2 parent representatives, 1 teacher, and 2 from business sector
Sussex Academy of Arts & Sciences (2000)	6-8	Start-up funds were received from the Longwood and Crystal Foundations. Their goal is to fund one charter school in each county. The school received $1.5 million on capital expenses of $4 million. A separate group is applying for a high school charter. Sussex will stay small and become financially stable.	The principal wrote the charter and put together a board of parents. Most of the terms have expired, and they are on the foundation board now. Board membership varies from 9-11, with a balance by region and race. The board has been very stable. The executive board oversees the operation. There is also a foundation board. Now there are nine 3-year terms.
Thomas A. Edison CS of Wilmington (2000)	K-8	The school was started by EMO Edison.	Twelve board members serve: 2 parents, 2 teachers, and 8 community members (2 university professors, 1 medical doctor, 1 lawyer, 1 business banker, 1 education consultant, and 2 unfilled spots)

Note. The information in this table is based on evaluation team interviews with charter school district administrators in Spring 2004 and Web site information retrieved in November 2004.

Appendix B
Aggregate Results from the Charter School Teacher Survey

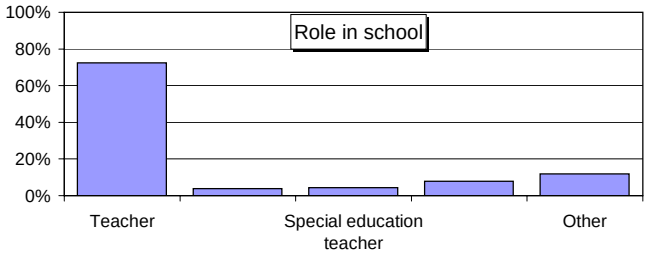
Delaware Charter Schools - State Totals

2003-04 Charter School Survey

Informant Group: **Teachers/Staff (N=373) Response rate: 77.9%** **Descriptive statistics**

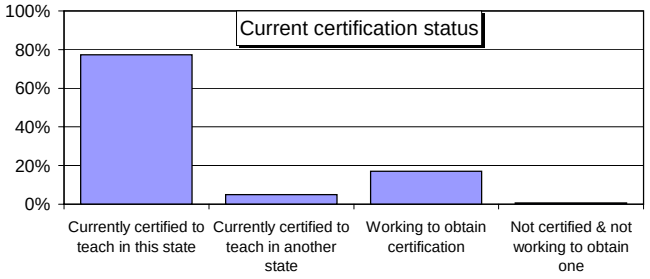
1. What is your role at this school?

	Teacher	Teaching assistant	Special education teacher	Principal/director	Other	Total	Missing
N	270	14	16	29	44	373	0
%	72.4%	3.8%	4.3%	7.8%	11.8%	100.0%	



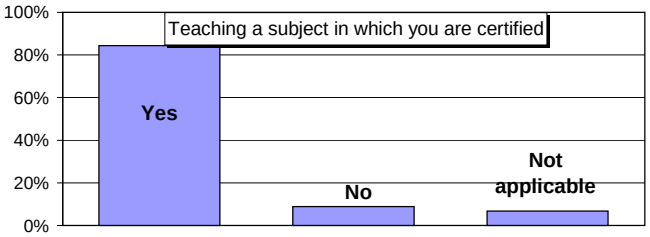
2. What is your current teaching certification status (teachers only)?

	Currently certified to teach in this state	Currently certified to teach in another state	Working to obtain certification	Not certified and not working to obtain certification	Total
N	218	14	48	2	282
%	77.3%	5.0%	17.0%	0.7%	100.0%



3. Are you teaching in a subject area in which you are certified to teach? (teachers only)

	Yes	No	Not applicable	Total
N	239	25	19	283
%	84.5%	8.8%	6.7%	100.0%

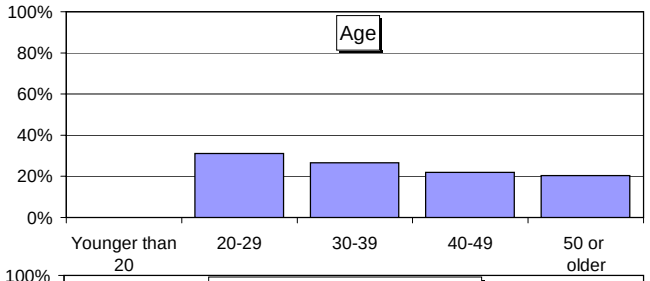


4. With which grade do you mostly work?

	Grade Level															
	K	1st	2nd	3td	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th	Not applicable	Total	Missing
N	26	19	18	21	17	28	25	27	21	33	25	10	9	75	354	19
%	7.3%	5.4%	5.1%	5.9%	4.8%	7.9%	7.1%	7.6%	5.9%	9.3%	7.1%	2.8%	2.5%	21.2%	100.0%	

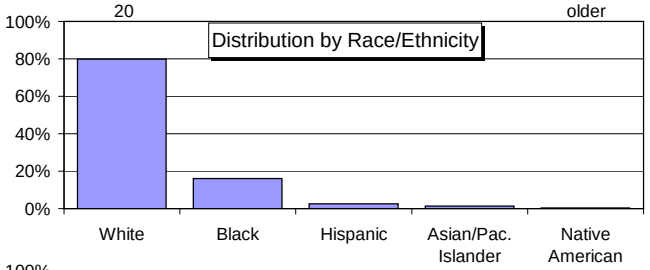
5. What is your age?

	Younger than 20	20-29	30-39	40-49	50 or older	Total	Missing
N	0	115	98	81	75	369	4
%	0.0%	31.2%	26.6%	22.0%	20.3%	100.0%	



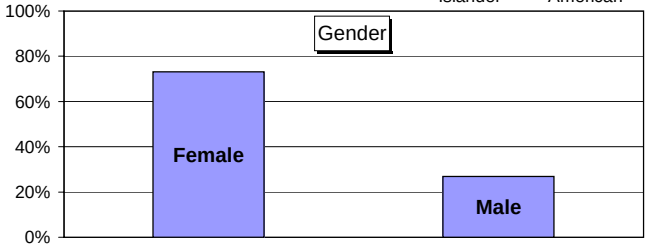
6. What is your race/ethnicity?

	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/Pac. Islander	Native American	Total	Missing
N	288	58	9	5	1	361	12
%	79.8%	16.1%	2.5%	1.4%	0.3%	100.0%	



7. What is your gender?

	Female	Male	Total	Missing
N	255	94	349	24
%	73.1%	26.9%	100.0%	



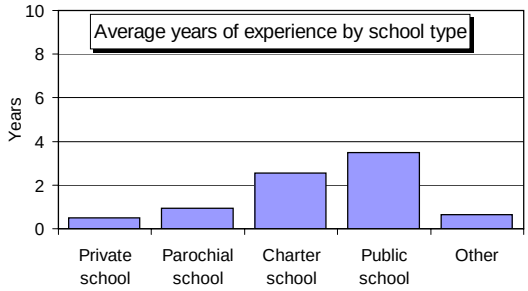
Note: Questions 2 and 3 include the responses from only those staff who indicated that they were teachers.

8. How many years of experience have you had in each of these types of schools (teachers only)

	Private school	Parochial school	Charter school	Public school	Other	Total	Total (excluding "other")
Mean	0.49	0.94	2.54	3.49	0.65	8.12	7.46
STD	1.99	3.25	2.06	5.49	2.78	7.63	7.07

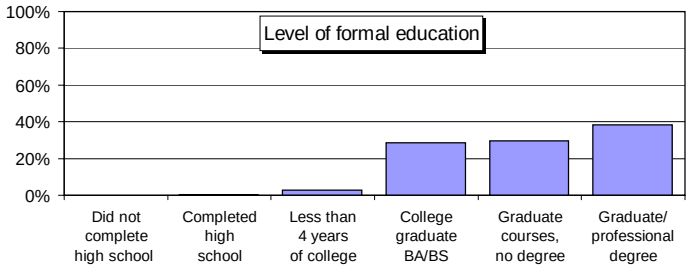
9. Years at current school?

Years at current school
2.54
2.06



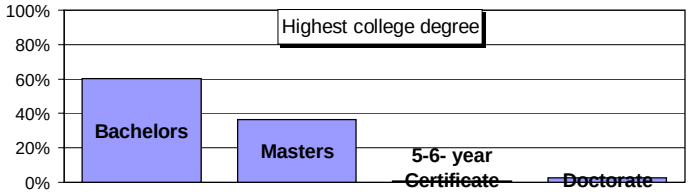
10. How much formal education have you had (teachers only)

	Did not complete high school	Completed high school	Less than 4 years of college	College graduate BA/BS	Graduate courses, no degree	Graduate/ professional degree	Total
N	0	1	8	80	83	107	279
%	0.0%	0.4%	2.9%	28.7%	29.7%	38.4%	100.0%



11. What is the highest college degree you hold? (teachers only)

	Bachelors	Masters	5-6- year Certificate	Doctorate	Total
N	165	100	2	7	274
%	60.2%	36.5%	0.7%	2.6%	100.0%

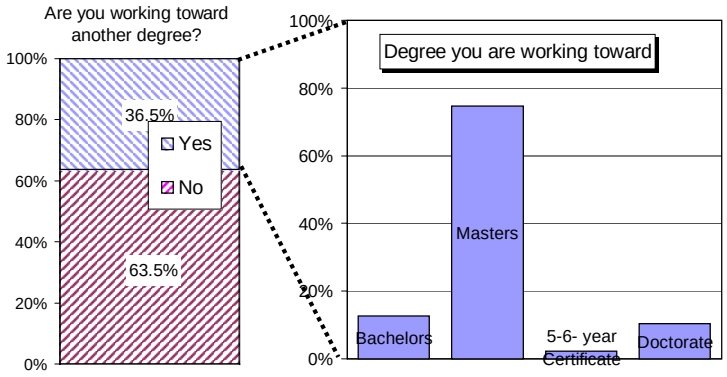


12a. Are you working toward another degree at this time?

	No	Yes	Total	Missing
N	233	134	367	6
%	63.5%	36.5%	100.0%	

12b. If yes, what degree?

	Bachelors	Masters	5-6- year Certificate	Doctorate	Total	Missing
N	17	100	3	14	134	239
%	12.7%	74.6%	2.2%	10.4%	100.0%	

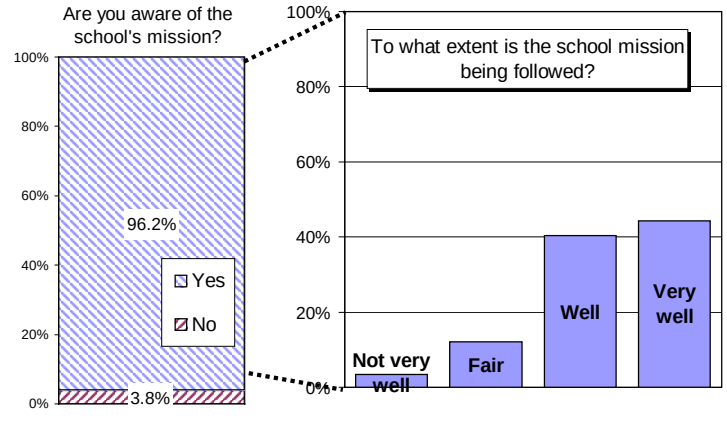


13a. Are you aware of the school's mission?

	No	Yes	Total	Missing
N	14	356	370	3
%	3.8%	96.2%	100.0%	

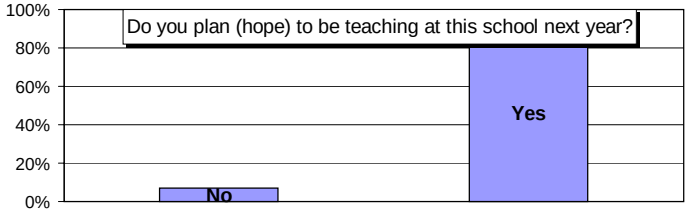
13b. If yes, to what extent is the mission being followed by the school?

	Not very well 1	Fair 2	Well 3	Very well 4	Total	Missing
N	12	43	144	158	357	16
%	3.4%	12.0%	40.3%	44.3%	100.0%	



14. Do you plan (hope) to be working at this school next year?

	No	Yes	Total	Missing
N	23	312	335	38
%	6.9%	93.1%	100.0%	



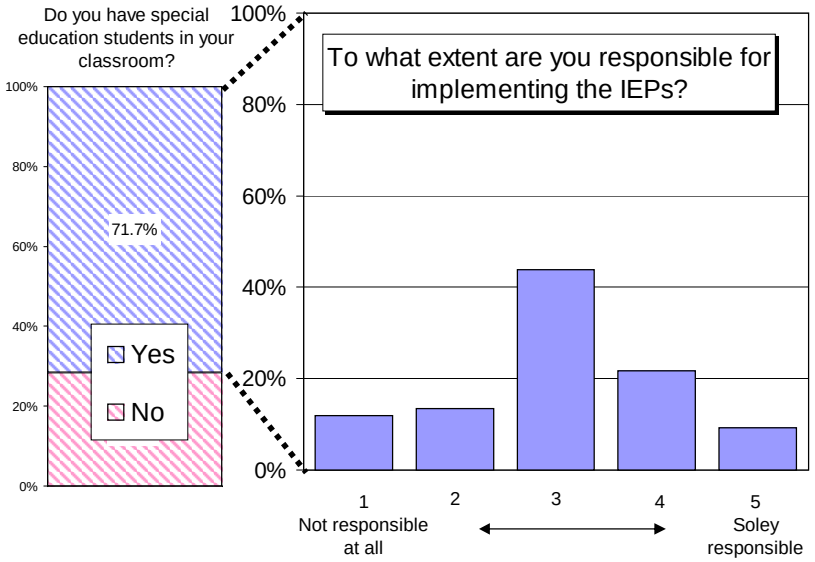
Note: Questions 8, 9, 10 and 11 include the responses from only those staff who indicated that they were teachers

15a. If you are a classroom teacher, do you have students identified for special education services in your classes?

	No	Yes	Total	Missing
N	75	190	265	108
%	28.3%	71.7%	100.0%	

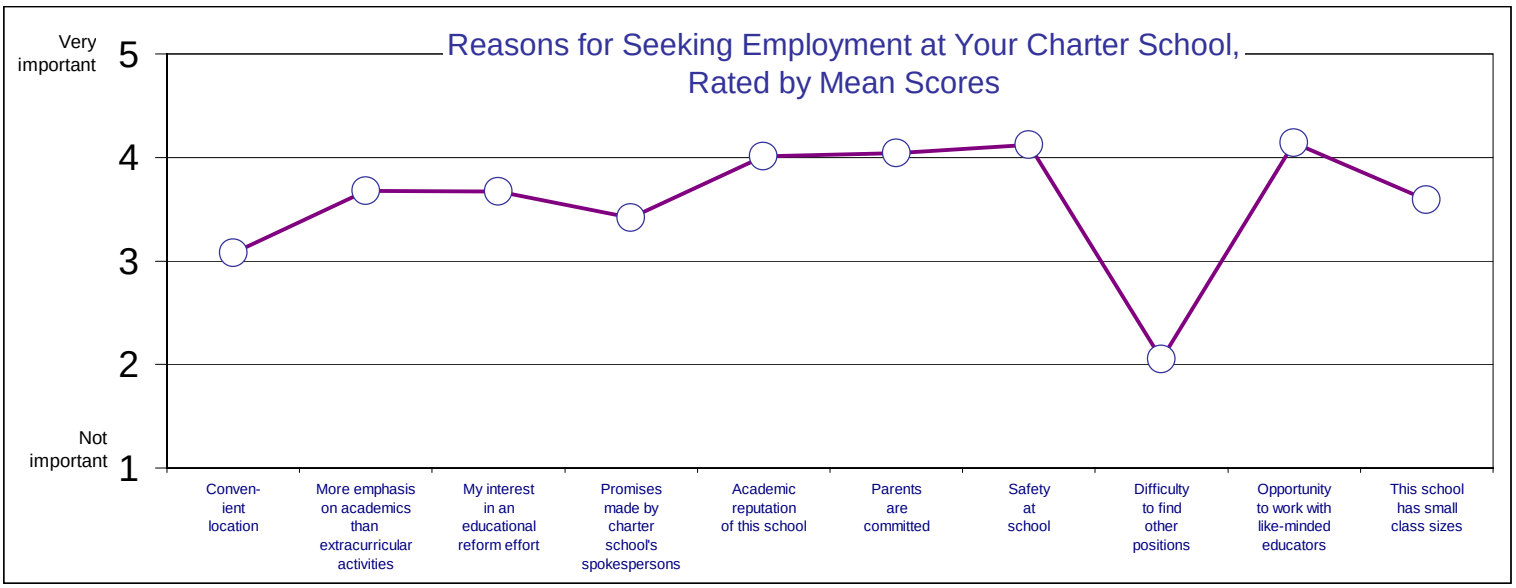
15b. If yes, to what extent are you responsible for implementing the IEPs?

	Not responsbile at all 1	2	3	4	Solely responsible 5	Total	Missing
N	23	26	85	42	18	194	179
%	11.9%	13.4%	43.8%	21.6%	9.3%	100.0%	



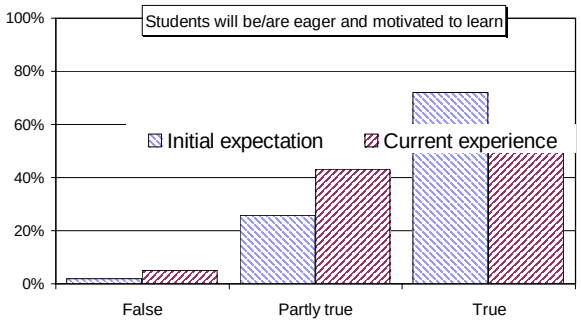
16. Rate the importance of the following factors in your decision to seek employment at this school.

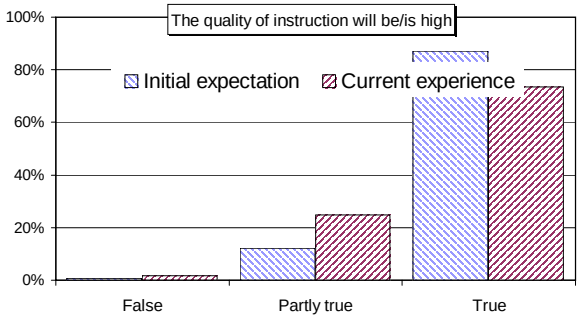
	Percentages: Not important 1	2	3	4	Very important 5	Mean	STD	Median	N	Missing
Convenient location	19.1%	13.5%	28.6%	17.8%	21.0%	3.08	1.38	3.0	371	2
More emphasis on academics as opposed to extracurricular activities	4.9%	7.6%	28.3%	33.2%	26.1%	3.68	1.09	4.0	368	5
My interest in being involved in an educational reform effort	5.2%	11.4%	23.4%	31.3%	28.8%	3.67	1.16	4.0	368	5
Promises made by charter school's spokespersons	13.4%	10.4%	21.6%	30.6%	24.0%	3.42	1.32	4.0	366	7
Academic reputation (high standards) of this school	5.2%	5.2%	16.5%	29.4%	43.7%	4.01	1.13	4.0	364	9
Parents are committed	2.7%	5.4%	18.0%	32.7%	41.1%	4.04	1.03	4.0	367	6
Safety at school	2.7%	3.5%	17.2%	32.2%	44.4%	4.12	1.00	4.0	367	6
Difficulty to find other positions	49.9%	17.0%	17.8%	9.3%	6.0%	2.05	1.26	2.0	365	8
Opportunity to work with like-minded educators	1.9%	3.9%	15.2%	36.7%	42.3%	4.14	0.94	4.0	362	11
This school has small class sizes	8.0%	10.0%	28.3%	22.7%	31.0%	3.59	1.24	4.0	361	12

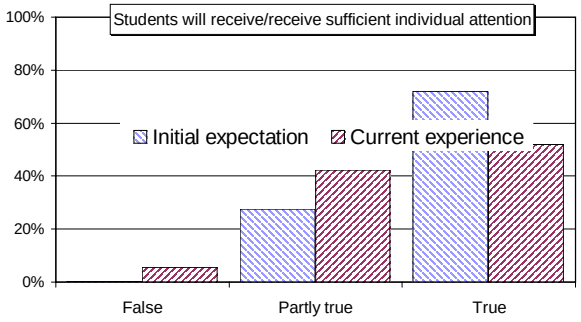


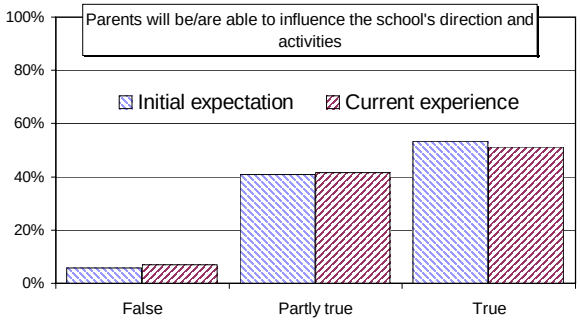
17. Rate each of the following statements as to what you expected when you first began working at this school (initial expectation)and how you would rate it today (current experience).

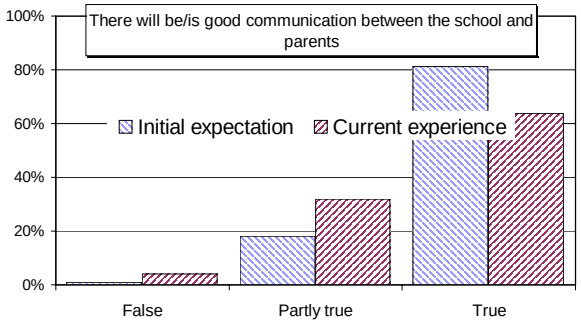
	Initial Expectation							Current Experience						
	False	Partly True	True	Mean	STD	Don't know	Mis-sing	False	Partly true	True	Mean	STD	Don't know	Mis-sing
	1	2	3					1	2	3				
Students will be/are eager and motivated to learn	2.0%	25.9%	72.2%	2.70	0.50	12	9	5.0%	43.0%	52.0%	2.47	0.59	4	11
The quality of instruction will be/is high	0.8%	12.1%	87.0%	2.86	0.37	7	12	1.7%	24.9%	73.4%	2.72	0.49	2	14
Students will receive/ receive sufficient individual attention	0.3%	27.6%	72.1%	2.72	0.46	16	13	5.6%	42.4%	52.0%	2.46	0.60	4	15
Parents will be/are able to influence the direction and activities at the school	5.7%	40.9%	53.4%	2.48	0.60	26	12	7.0%	41.7%	51.3%	2.44	0.62	16	14
There will be/is good communica-tion between the school and parents/ guardians	0.9%	18.0%	81.1%	2.80	0.42	13	10	4.2%	31.9%	63.9%	2.60	0.57	0	13





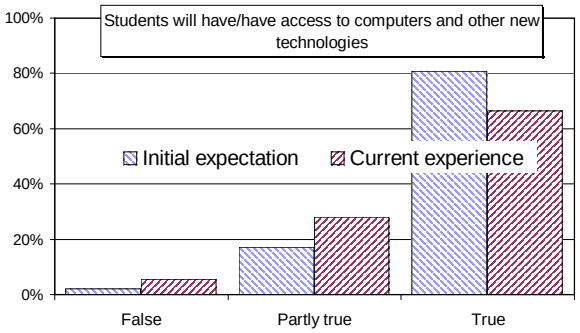


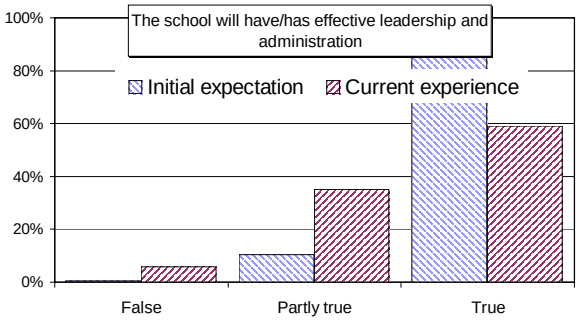


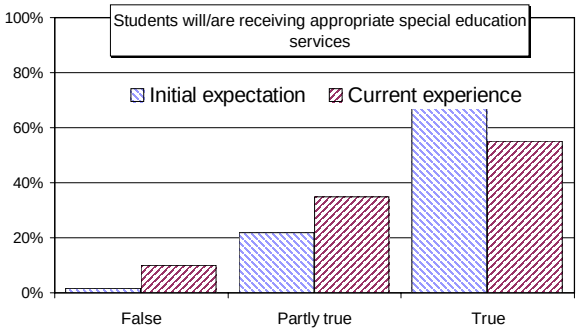


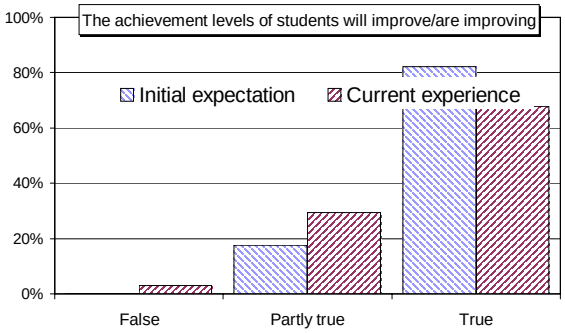
17. Rate each of the following statements as to what you expected when you first began working at this school (initial expectation)and how you would rate it today (current experience).

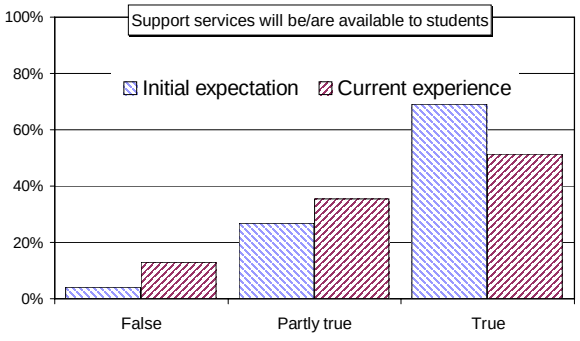
	Initial Expectation							Current Experience						
	False	Partly True	True	Mean	STD	Don't know	Mis-sing	False	Partly true	True	Mean	STD	Don't know	Mis-sing
	1	2	3					1	2	3				
Students will have/have access to computers and other new technologies	2.0%	17.2%	80.8%	2.79	0.45	9	9	5.5%	28.1%	66.4%	2.61	0.59	0	10
The school will have/has effective leadership and admin-istration	0.6%	10.5%	89.0%	2.88	0.34	11	8	5.8%	35.1%	59.1%	2.53	0.61	1	13
Students will/are receiving appropriate special education services, if necessary.	1.6%	21.9%	76.5%	2.75	0.47	47	16	10.0%	35.0%	55.0%	2.45	0.67	28	16
The achievement levels of students will improve/are improving	0.3%	17.5%	82.2%	2.82	0.39	21	9	2.9%	29.4%	67.7%	2.65	0.54	17	12
Support services (i.e., counseling, health care, etc.) will be/are available to students	4.1%	26.8%	69.1%	2.65	0.56	22	8	13.1%	35.6%	51.4%	2.38	0.71	4	9





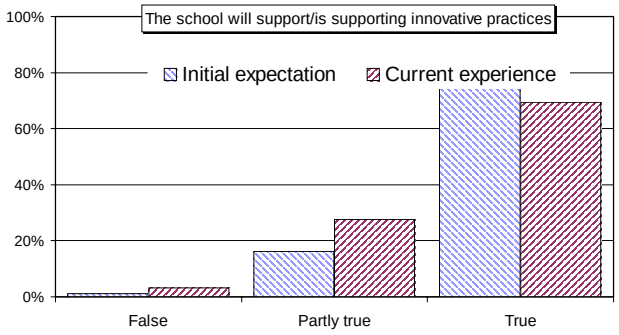


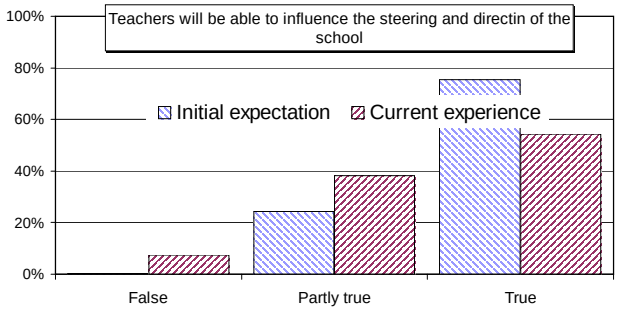


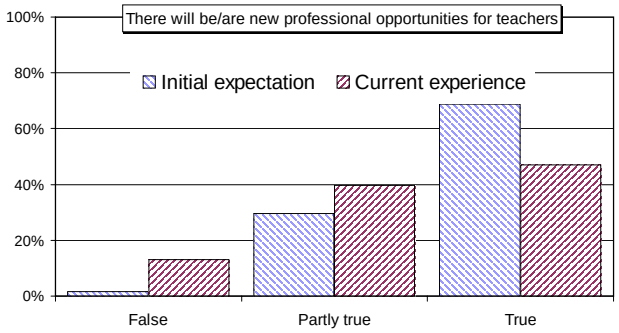


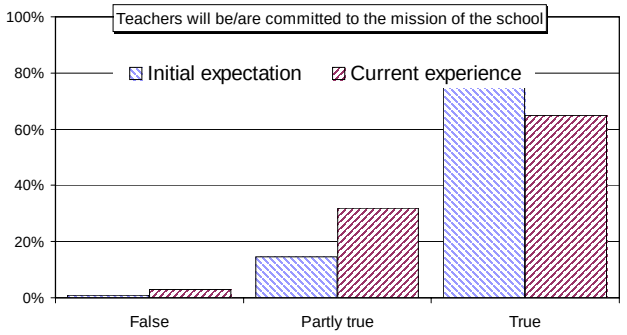
17. Rate each of the following statements as to what you expected when you first began working at this school (initial expectation)and how you would rate it today (current experience).

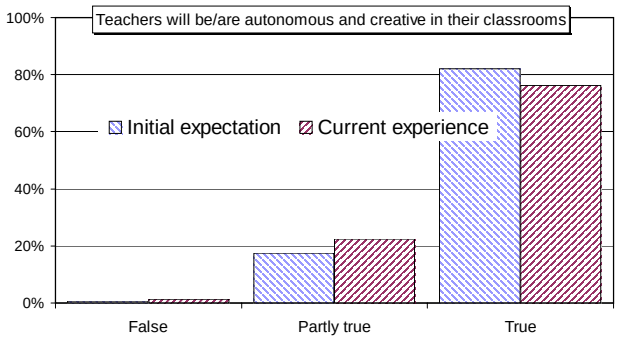
	Initial Expectation							Current Experience						
	False	Partly True	True	Mean	STD	Don't know	Mis-sing	False	Partly true	True	Mean	STD	Don't know	Mis-sing
	1	2	3					1	2	3				
The school will support/is supporting innovative practices	1.2%	16.1%	82.7%	2.82	0.42	18	14	3.1%	27.6%	69.3%	2.66	0.54	8	13
Teachers will be able to influence the steering and direction of the school	0.3%	24.3%	75.4%	2.75	0.44	23	9	7.4%	38.2%	54.4%	2.47	0.63	10	12
There will be/are new professional opportunities for teachers	1.6%	29.6%	68.9%	2.67	0.50	46	9	13.1%	39.8%	47.1%	2.34	0.70	37	9
Teachers will be/are committed to the mission of the school	0.9%	14.5%	84.7%	2.84	0.39	12	9	3.1%	31.9%	65.0%	2.62	0.55	4	9
Teachers will be/are autonomous and creative in their classrooms	0.6%	17.4%	82.1%	2.81	0.40	13	9	1.4%	22.5%	76.1%	2.75	0.47	8	9





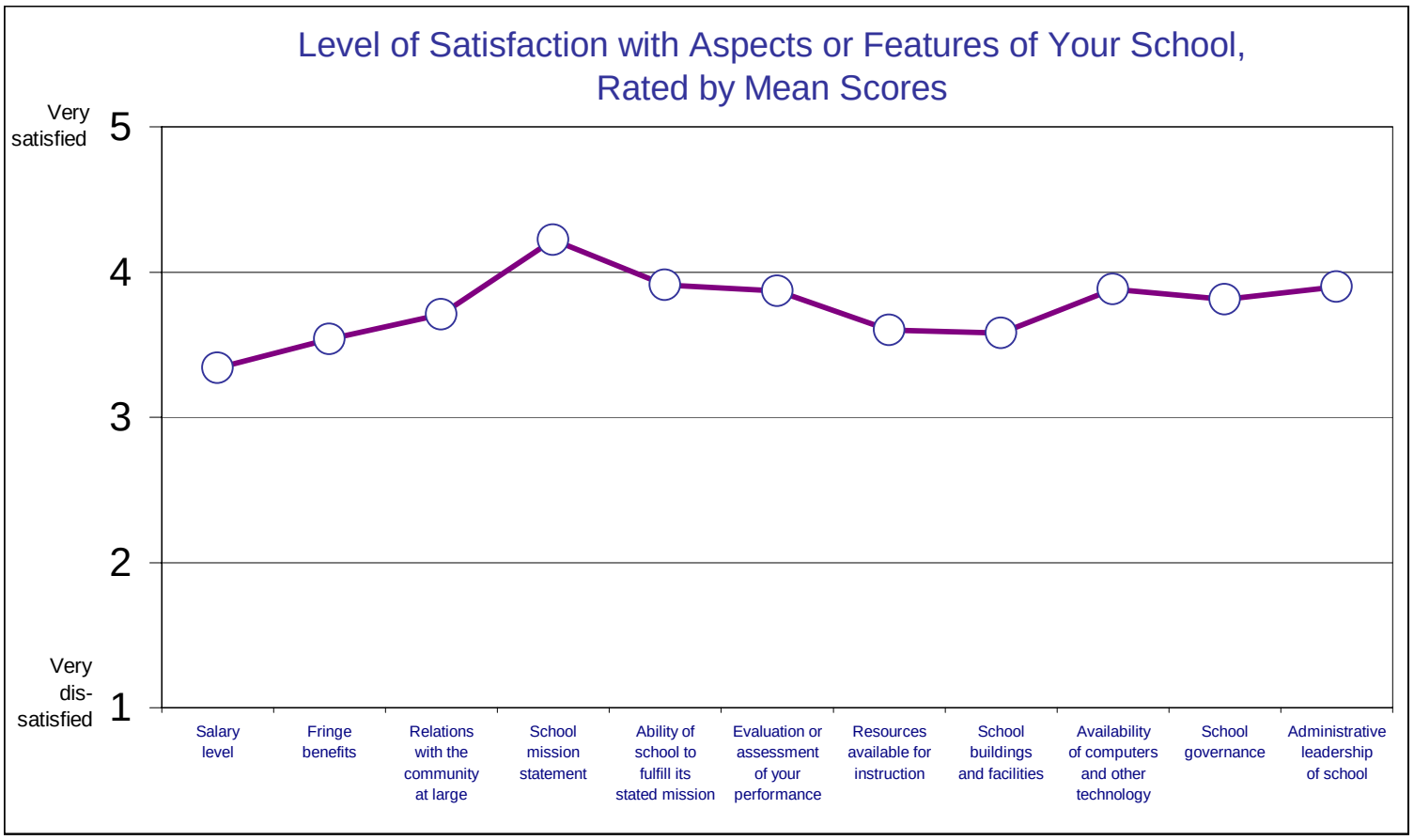






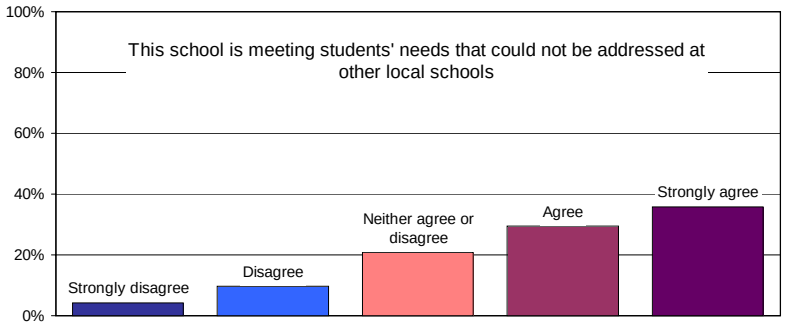
18. Rate your level of satisfaction with the following aspects or features of your school.

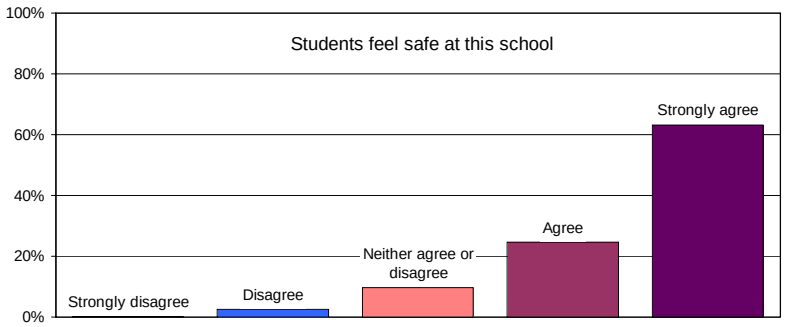
	Percentages: Not very satisfied 1	2	3	4	Very satisfied 5	Mean	STD	Median	N	Don't know	Missing
Salary level	9.2%	12.0%	31.0%	31.3%	16.6%	3.34	1.16	3.00	368	1	4
Fringe benefits	5.7%	12.0%	26.9%	33.7%	21.7%	3.54	1.13	4.00	350	16	7
Relations with the community at large	1.1%	9.9%	33.1%	28.9%	26.9%	3.71	1.01	4.00	353	11	9
School mission statement	1.1%	2.0%	17.6%	32.7%	46.6%	4.22	0.88	4.00	352	14	7
Ability of the school to fulfill its stated mission	3.1%	6.8%	20.2%	35.5%	34.4%	3.91	1.05	4.00	352	14	7
Evaluation or assessment of your performance	3.8%	5.8%	23.0%	33.8%	33.5%	3.87	1.06	4.00	343	19	11
Resources available for instruction	5.6%	12.3%	25.3%	30.6%	26.2%	3.60	1.16	4.00	359	6	8
School buildings and facilities	9.5%	13.3%	18.2%	27.2%	31.8%	3.58	1.31	4.00	368	0	5
Availability of computers and other technology	5.4%	8.2%	21.3%	23.2%	42.0%	3.88	1.20	4.00	367	0	6
School governance	3.1%	7.7%	24.5%	34.8%	29.9%	3.81	1.05	4.00	351	15	7
Administrative leadership of school	2.5%	9.8%	21.3%	28.4%	38.0%	3.90	1.10	4.00	366	2	5

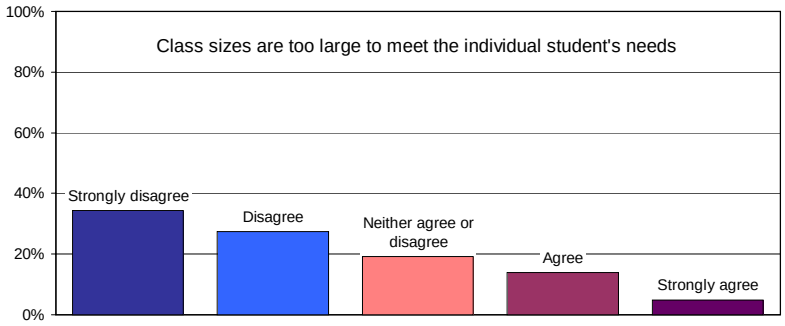


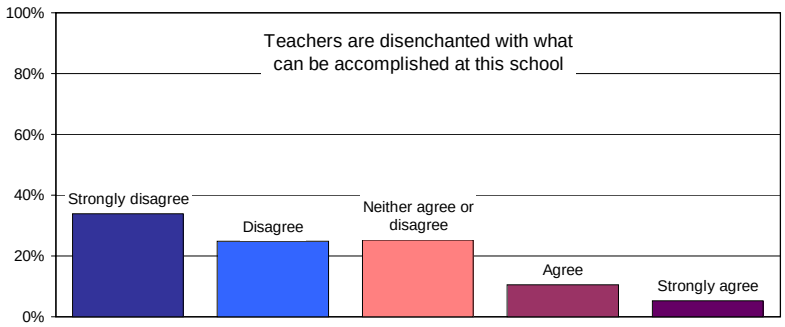
19. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your school?

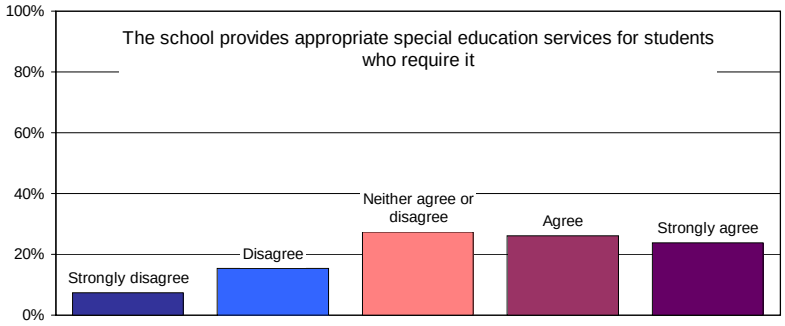
	Strongly disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly agree 5	Mean	STD	N	Don't know	Mis-sing
This school is meeting students' needs that could not be addressed at other local schools	4.3%	9.7%	20.9%	29.4%	35.7%	3.83	1.15	350	16	7
Students feel safe at this school	0.3%	2.5%	9.6%	24.6%	63.1%	4.48	0.79	366	2	5
Class sizes are too large to meet the individual student's needs	34.3%	27.5%	19.2%	14.0%	4.9%	2.28	1.21	364	3	6
Teachers are disenchanted with what can be accomplished at this school	34.0%	24.9%	25.2%	10.6%	5.3%	2.28	1.19	341	17	15
The school provides appropriate special education services for students who require it	7.4%	15.4%	27.3%	26.1%	23.7%	3.43	1.22	337	29	7





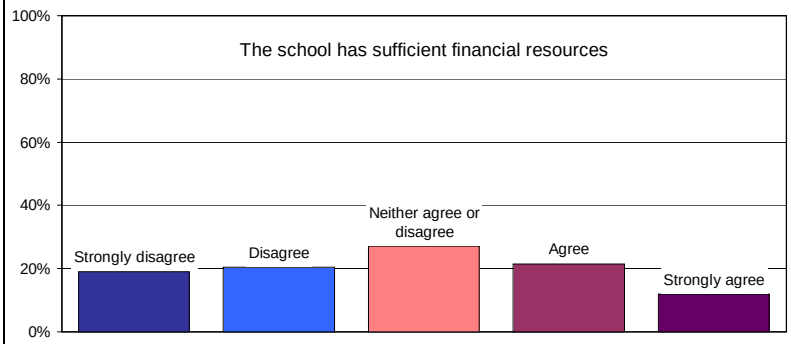


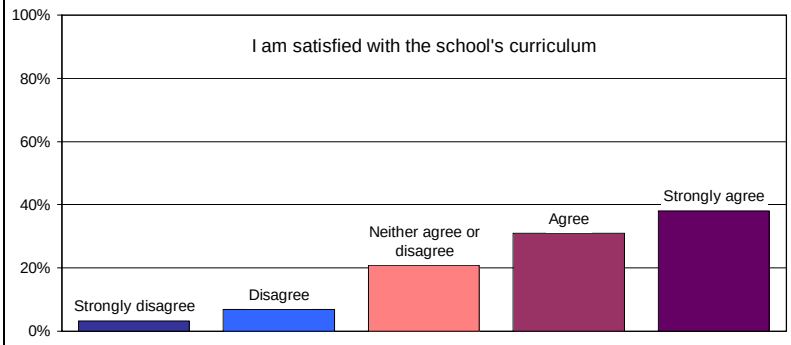


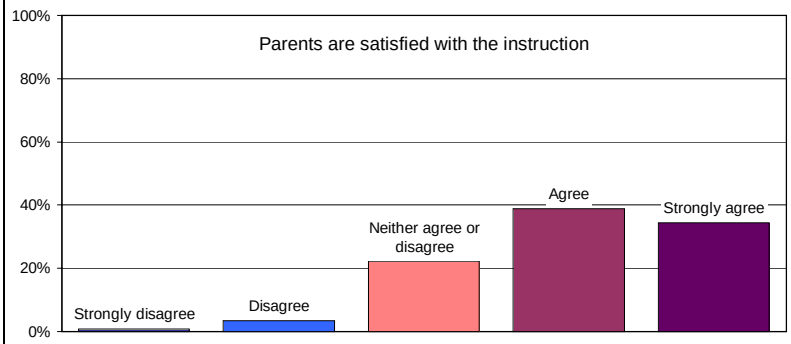


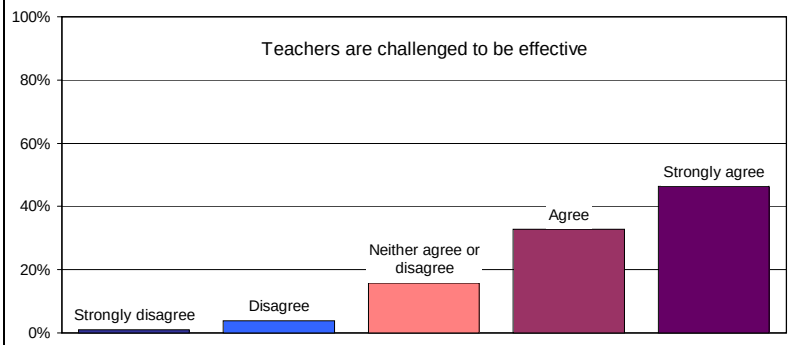
19. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

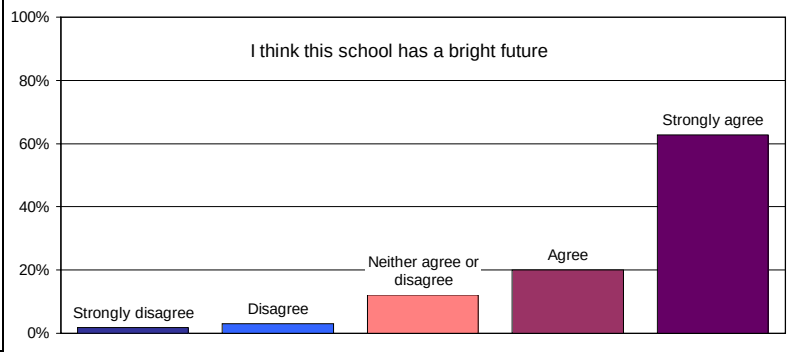
	Strongly disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly agree 5	Mean	STD	N	Don't know	Mis-sing
The school has sufficient financial resources	19.0%	20.5%	27.2%	21.4%	11.9%	2.87	1.28	327	42	4
I am satisfied with the school's curriculum	3.3%	6.9%	20.8%	31.0%	38.0%	3.93	1.08	361	8	4
Parents are satisfied with the instruction	0.9%	3.5%	22.2%	38.9%	34.5%	4.03	0.89	342	26	5
Teachers are challenged to be effective	1.1%	3.9%	15.8%	32.8%	46.4%	4.19	0.92	360	8	5
I think this school has a bright future	1.9%	3.1%	12.2%	20.0%	62.8%	4.39	0.95	360	6	7





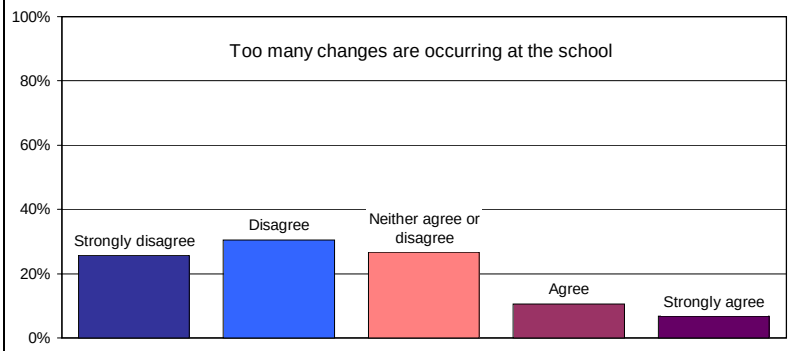


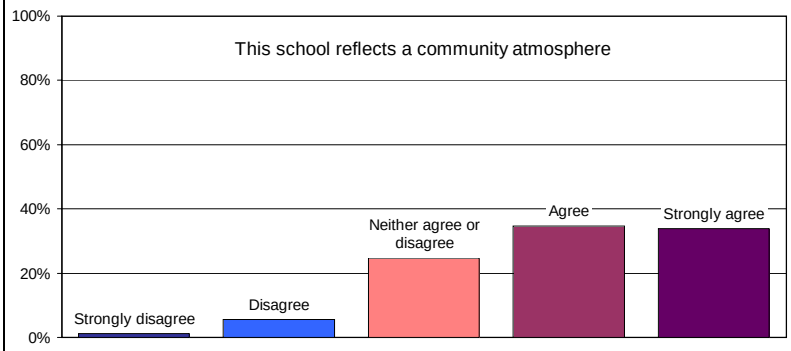


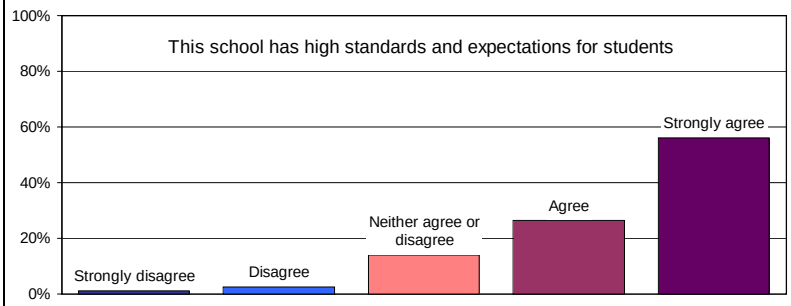


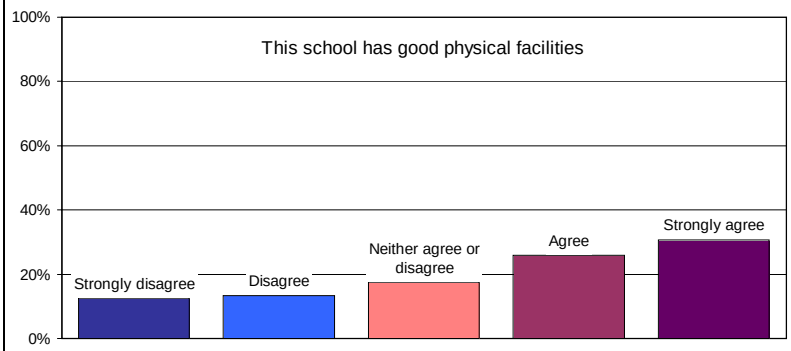
19. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

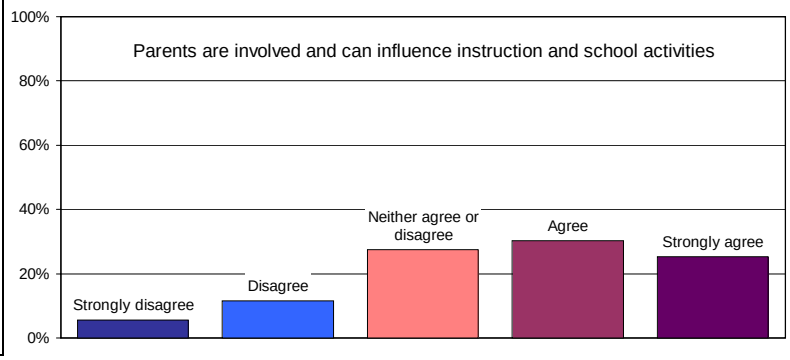
	Strongly disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly agree 5	Mean	STD	N	Don't know	Mis-sing
Too many changes are occurring at the school	25.6%	30.4%	26.7%	10.6%	6.7%	2.42	1.17	359	10	4
This school reflects a community atmosphere	1.1%	5.6%	24.7%	34.7%	33.9%	3.95	0.95	360	6	7
This school has high standards and expectations for students	1.1%	2.5%	14.0%	26.4%	56.0%	4.34	0.89	364	0	9
This school has good physical facilities	12.6%	13.4%	17.5%	25.8%	30.7%	3.48	1.38	365	2	6
Parents are involved and can influence instruction and school activities	5.5%	11.6%	27.4%	30.2%	25.2%	3.58	1.15	361	6	6





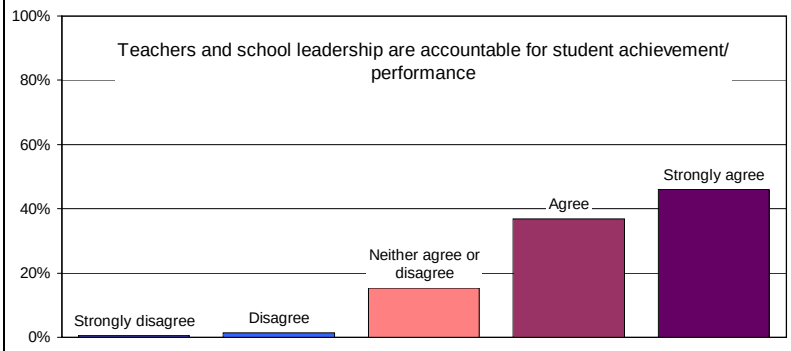


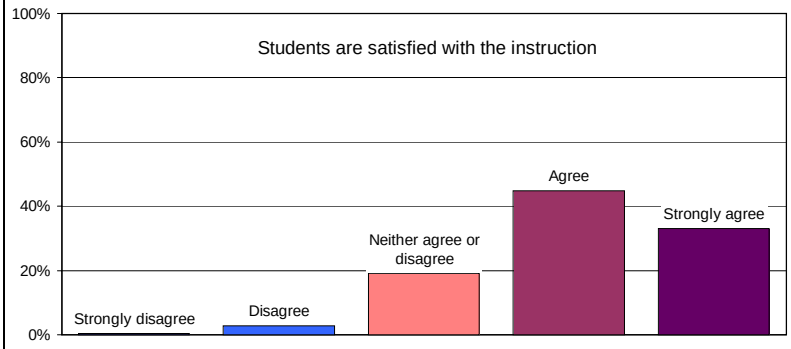


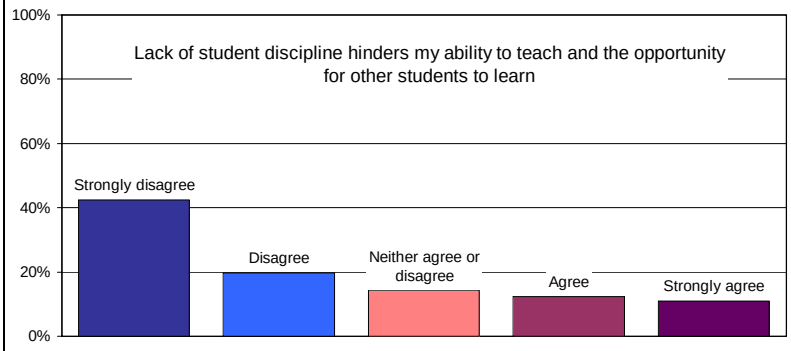


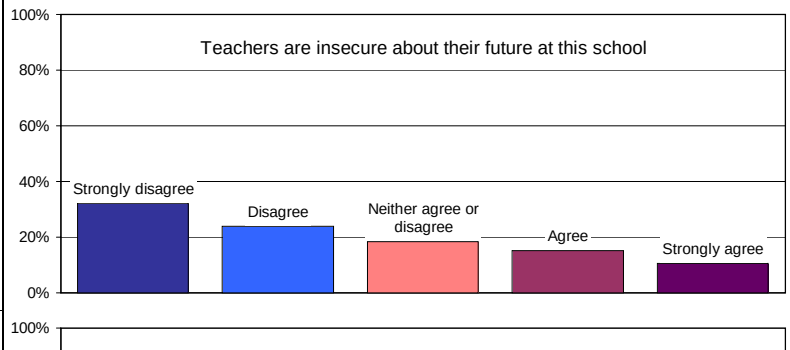
19. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

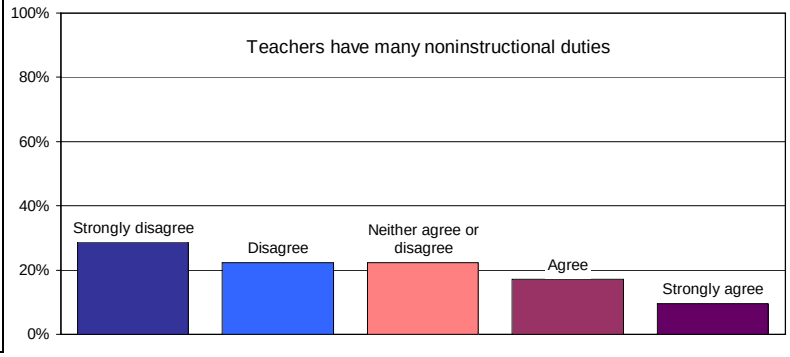
	Strongly disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly agree 5	Mean	STD	N	Don't know	Mis-sing
Teachers and school leadership are accountable for student achievement/ performance	0.6%	1.4%	15.3%	36.8%	46.0%	4.26	0.81	359	8	6
Students are satisfied with the instruction	0.3%	2.7%	19.1%	44.8%	33.1%	4.08	0.81	335	31	7
Lack of student discipline hinders my ability to teach and the opportunity for other students to learn	42.4%	19.8%	14.4%	12.4%	11.0%	2.30	1.40	354	10	9
Teachers are insecure about their future at this school	32.1%	23.8%	18.3%	15.2%	10.6%	2.48	1.36	349	17	7
Teachers have many noninstructional duties	28.6%	22.4%	22.4%	17.1%	9.5%	2.57	1.32	357	10	6











Appendix C
Characteristics of Charter School Teachers
Compiled from the School Profiles

	2003-04 Staffing Ratios					*Race/Ethnicity*			*Gender*		*Average Teacher Salary*
	Students per teacher	*Students per administrator*	*Students per instructional staff*	*Students per support staff*	*School staff per administrator*	*Black*	*White*	*Other*	*Female*	*Male*	
Academy of Dover	17.0	204.0	11.7	408.0	20.0	63.2%	34.2%	2.6%	84.2%	15.8%	
Campus Community Sch.	13.9	189.7	12.4	142.3	18.7	5.9%	88.2%	5.9%	84.3%	15.7%	$41,882
CS of Wilmington	20.0	306.0	20.0	229.5	20.3	0.0%	95.7%	4.4%	50.0%	50.0%	$45,572
Delaware Military Acad.	23.5	152.5	23.5	152.5	10.0	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	46.2%	53.8%	
East Side Charter School	16.0	48.0	8.5		7.3	80.0%	20.0%	0.0%	48.0%	52.0%	$37,427
Kuumba Academy CS	17.1	240.0	16.0	120.0	19.0	62.5%	37.5%	0.0%	75.0%	25.0%	$33,615
Marion T. Academy CS	20.2	303.0	15.2	303.0	23.0	58.5%	29.3%	12.2%	85.4%	14.6%	$34,672
MOT Charter School	20.5	118.8	16.1	297.0	8.6	7.9%	89.5%	2.6%	86.8%	13.2%	$30,077
Newark Charter School	19.4	207.0	18.8	155.3	14.7	2.9%	94.3%	2.9%	80.0%	20.0%	$43,581
Positive Outcomes CS	10.3	56.5	8.7	113.0	8.0	15.4%	84.6%	0.0%	53.8%	46.2%	$42,742
Providence Creek Acad.	18.7	164.0	17.3	656.0	10.3	2.5%	97.5%	0.0%	77.5%	22.5%	$31,979
Sussex Acad. of A&S	18.1		18.1			0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	77.8%	22.2%	$46,031
Thomas A. Edison CS	15.5	194.0	12.9	388.0	16.5	55.0%	43.3%	1.7%	78.3%	21.7%	$37,926

Note: Ratio, Race/Ethnicity, and Gender Information from Delaware Department of Education 2003-2004 School Profiles

Appendix D
Retention Rates and Summer School Participation Rates

Percent of Students Retained by School and Grade, 2003-04

	K	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*9*	*10*	*11*	*12*
Campus Community School		0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	7.0%	0.0%	3.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	
CS of Wilmington										2.2% dropout rate (Grades 9-12)			
East Side Charter School	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%						
Kuumba Academy	0.0%	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%	1.0%	0.0%						
Marion T. Academy						no info available							
MOT Charter School	2.0%	7.0%	1.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%					
Newark Charter School						0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%				
Positive Outcomes Charter School								5.7% annual school dropout rate (Gr. 9-12)					
Providence Creek Academy CS	4.0%	2.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%					
Sussex Academy of Arts & Sciences							6.0%	3.0%	1.0%				
T. A. Edison CS of Wilmington	8.0%	10.0%	7.0%	16.0%	9.0%	17.0%	22.0%	3.0%	2.0%				

Percent of Students Attending Summer School by School and Grade *(2003-04)*

	K	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*9*	*10*	*11*	*12*
Campus Community School		17.0%	12.0%	8.0%	7.0%	29.0%	13.0%	16.0%	41.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	
CS of Wilmington													
East Side Charter School	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	6.0%	6.0%						
Kuumba Academy	3.0%	3.0%	5.0%	5.0%	4.0%	3.0%	0.0%						
Marion T. Academy													
MOT Charter School	0.0%	1.0%	8.0%	6.0%	5.0%	13.0%	11.0%	6.0%					
Newark Charter School						2.0%	0.0%	0.0%	3.0%				
Positive Outcomes CS													
Providence Creek Academy CS	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	16.0%	4.0%	6.0%	4.0%	0.0%					
Sussex Academy of Arts & Sciences							15.0%	8.0%	11.0%				
T. A. Edison CS of Wilmington	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	40.0%	8.0%	34.0%	10.0%	0.0%	59.0%				

Note. Academy of Dover and Delaware Military Academy were excluded from the tables since they were in their first year of operation and reported no data.
Source: Delaware Department of Education 2003-2004 School Profiles

Appendix E
Results from the ANCOVA Analysis of the Writing Raw Scores

Performance on DSTP Writing Test for Charter School Students and Comparison Students by Grade and Panel

Grade and Subject Area		Scaled Score on the DSTP			
		Covariate Mean	Adjusted Mean	F-value	P-value
Grade 5 Writing, Panel A					
	Charter school	6.4	7.4	4.00	**0.0458**
	Control group	6.4	7.6		
Grade 5 Writing, Panel B					
	Charter school	6.0	7.3	1.99	0.1585
	Control group	6.0	7.5		
Grade 8 Writing, Panel C					
	Charter school	7.9	8.8	0.81	0.3681
	Control group	7.6	8.7		
Grade 8 Writing, Panel D					
	Charter school	7.4	9.0	4.86	**0.0279***
	Control group	7.0	8.8		
Grade 10 Writing, Panel E					
	Charter school	8.8	9.5	10.90	**0.0010***
	Control group	8.3	9.0		
Grade 10 Writing, Panel F					
	Charter school	9.0	9.7	46.37	**>.0001***
	Control group	8.3	8.6		

Notes. Comparison group is matched on gender, ethnicity, FRL, and Title I status. The measure used was a raw score which is based on writing prompts that change from year to year. Because of the nature of the measure, one must be cautious in interpreting change over time.

Differences between the charter school students and comparison students are statistically significant when the P-value is less than 0.05; these scores are highlighted in **bold**. When P-values are underlined and bolded, this refers to an advantage to the noncharter school students.

P-values with an asterisk "*" refer to differences that remained statistically significant at least 80 percent of the time with repeated randomly selected comparison groups.

Performance on DSTP Writing Test by School and Grade

Grade and Subject Area		*Scaled Score on the DSTP*			
		Covariate Mean	*Adjusted Mean*	*F-value*	*P-value*
Charter School of Wilmington					
Grade 10 Writing, Panel E					
	Charter school	9.3	10.4	47.96	**>.0001**
	Control group	8.5	9.2		
Positive Outcomes Charter School					
Grade 8 Writing, Panel C					
	Charter school	6.6	6.9	1.38	0.2531
	Control group	7.8	7.6		
Grade 10 Writing, Panel E					
	Charter school	5.5	5.8	7.36	**0.0124**
	Control group	7.9	7.6		
East Side Charter School					
Grade 5 Writing, Panel A					
	Charter school	6.3	7.4	1.39	0.2483
	Control group	5.4	6.5		
Campus Community School					
Grade 5 Writing, Panel A					
	Charter school	6.8	7.4	3.72	0.0599
	Control group	6.3	8.1		
Grade 8 Writing, Panel C					
	Charter school	7.7	8.3	0.63	0.4273
	Control group	7.1	8.5		
Grade 10 Writing, Panel E					
	Charter school	8.4	8.3	0.29	0.5913
	Control group	8.3	8.5		
Thomas A. Edison Charter School					
Grade 5 Writing, Panel A					
	Charter school	5.2	7.1	1.13	0.2898
	Control group	5.7	6.8		
Grade 8 Writing, Panel C					
	Charter school	6.8	8.2	2.25	0.1371
	Control group	7.0	7.8		

Grade and Subject Area		*Scaled Score on the DSTP*			
		Covariate Mean	*Adjusted Mean*	*F-value*	*P-value*
Sussex Academy of Arts & Sciences					
Grade 8 Writing, Panel C					
	Charter school	8.6	10.0	24.29	**>.0001**
	Control group	7.9	8.9		
Marion T. Academy					
Grade 5 Writing, Panel A					
	Charter school	5.1	6.2	10.15	**0.0018**
	Control group	6.1	7.2		
Grade 8 Writing, Panel C					
	Charter school	7.4	7.6	1.27	0.2675
	Control group	7.3	7.1		
Kuumba Academy					
Grade 5 Writing, Panel A					
	Charter school	5.3	6.7	0.16	0.6930
	Control group	5.6	6.5		
Newark Charter School					
Grade 5 Writing, Panel A					
	Charter school	7.5	8.6	3.57	0.0601
	Control group	7.2	8.3		
Grade 8 Writing, Panel C					
	Charter school	8.6	9.0	0.11	0.7439
	Control group	7.9	9.0		
MOT Charter School					
Grade 5 Writing, Panel A					
	Charter school	6.9	7.6	1.15	0.2854
	Control group	6.2	7.9		
Providence Creek Academy					
Grade 5 Writing, Panel A					
	Charter school	6.8	6.7	17.10	**>.0001**
	Control group	6.7	7.7		

Notes. Comparison group is matched on gender, ethnicity, FRL, and Title I status. The measure used was a raw score which is based on writing prompts that change from year to year. Because of the nature of the measure, one must be cautious in interpreting change over time.

Differences between the charter school students and comparison students are statistically significant when the P-value is less than 0.05; these scores are highlighted in **bold**. When P-values are underlined and bolded, this refers to an advantage to the noncharter school students.

P-values with an asterisk "*" refer to differences that remained statistically significant at least 80 percent of the time with repeated randomly selected comparison groups.

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