



Foundation for Education Reform & Accountability

POLICY POINTS MEMORANDUM

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Analysis of Albany Public Charter and District Student Proficiency Rates on New York State English Language Arts Exams

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Albany is home to one of the highest concentrations of public charter schools in a single school district in the U.S., and the high levels of academic success these schools have achieved are making the effort a national model. Albany's network of high-performing charter schools has been featured in *Education Next*, the nation's most influential journal in education, and were highlighted in a keynote address delivered by the U.S. Education Secretary at the national public charter schools conference.

The attention that Albany charter schools are receiving is deserved when student academic proficiency rates, trends in comparison to district school students, are outperforming district students, and the performance gap between the two groups of students are analyzed.

Proficiency Rates

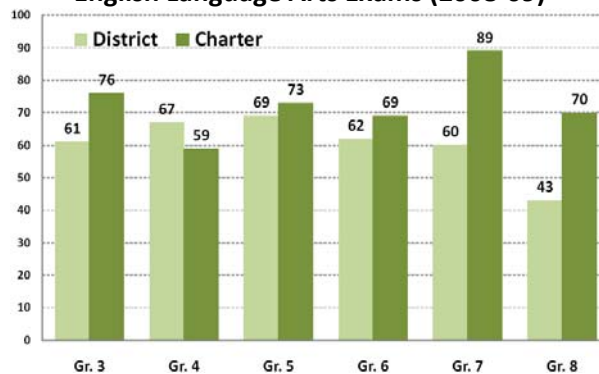
An examination of student proficiency rates on the 2008-09 English language arts exams shows that Albany public charter school students outperformed district students in five out of the six tested grade levels (the only grade level that district school students outscored charter school students was 4th grade). 2008-09 was the first year that Albany public charter school students outscored traditional district school students on a majority of state English language arts (ELA) exams: in 2005-06, district

school students outperformed charter school students in all four grade levels that charter school served; in 2006-07, charter school students outperformed district school students in one of four grade levels in 2007-08, charter school students outperformed district school students in two of five grade levels that charter schools served.

“Albany public charter school students outperformed district students in five out of six tested grade levels.”

The rapid increase in the performance of charter school students is unlike anything ever seen in district-school settings. Consider the following results on the 2008-09 New York State English language arts exams follows:

Student Proficiency Rates on New York State English Language Arts Exams (2008-09)



- In 3rd grade, charter students' proficiency rate of 76 percent outscored district students by 15 points.
- In 4th grade, district students' proficiency rate of 67 percents outscored charter students by 8 points.

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- In 5th grade, charter students' proficiency rate of 73 percent outscored district students by 4 points.
- In 6th grade, charter students' proficiency rate of 69 percent outscored district students by 7 points.
- In 7th grade, charter students' proficiency rate of 89 percent outscored district students by 29 points.
- In 8th grade, charter students' proficiency rate of 70 percent outscored district students by 27 points.

Albany public charter school students have outscored traditional district school students in each of the last three years on the state's 6th grade English language arts exam, ever since. Albany charter schools first started serving 6th grade.

Grade 6 ELA Proficiency

	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Charter	48%	49%	69%
District	45%	46%	62%

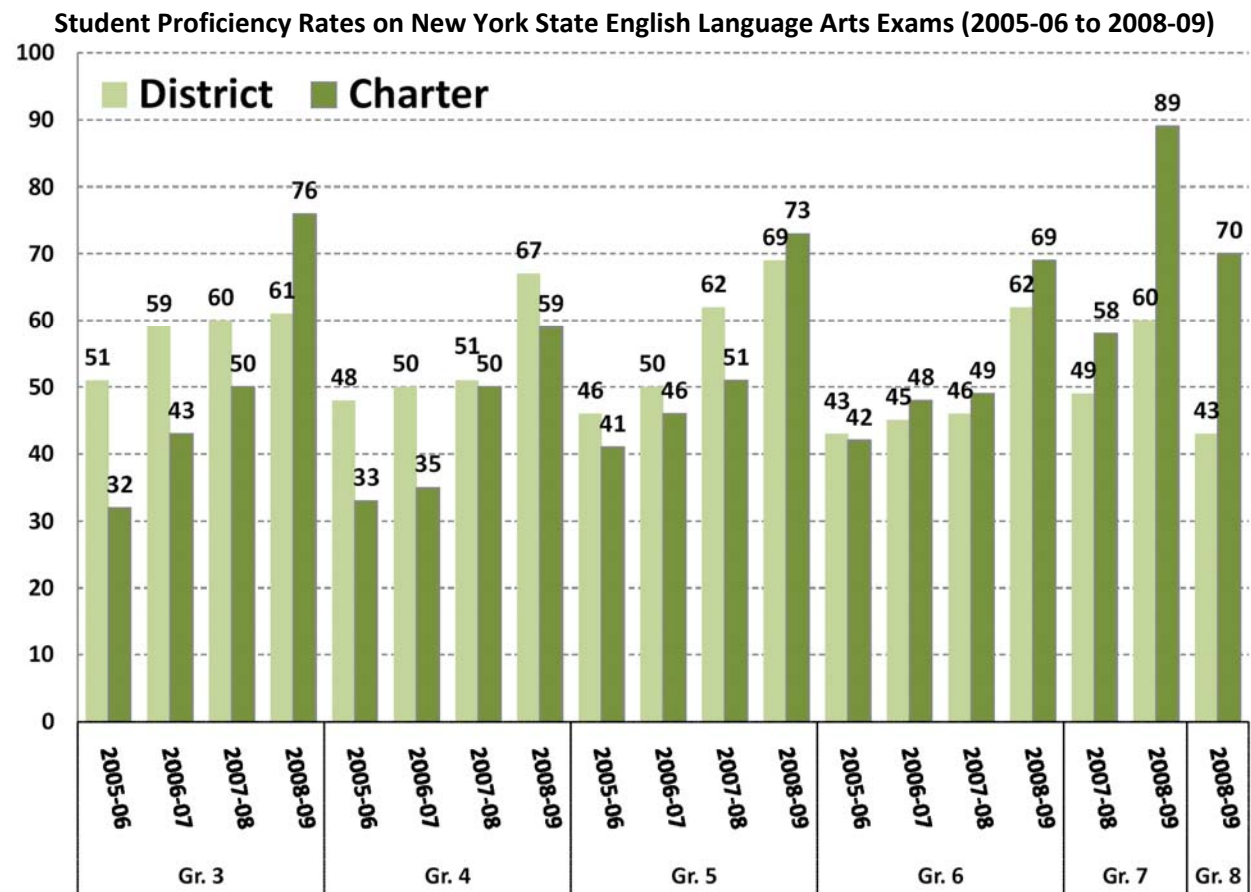
Albany public charter school students outscored traditional district school students in each of the last two years on the state's 7th grade English language arts exam, again, ever since charter schools first started serving 7th grade in 2007-08.

Grade 7 ELA Proficiency

	2007-08	2008-09
Charter	58%	89%
District	49%	60%

Multi-Year Grade-Level Trends

The performance of public charter schools students has continued to improve as these schools mature beyond their start-up years (see chart below).



Performance Gaps Shift and Grow

Examining the four grade levels (3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th) that Albany district and charter schools have both served since 2005-06, the gap between the percent of charter and district school students scoring proficient has significantly changed due to dramatically increasing scores among charter school students.

In 3rd grade, Albany public charter students scored a proficiency rate of 32 percent in 2005-06, 19 points below the district student proficiency rate of 51 percent. Three years later (2008-09), 76 percent of 3rd grade charter students scored proficient compared to 61 percent of district students, a performance gap of 15 points in favor of charter schools (a swing of 34 points in the gap). The 3rd-grade charter student proficiency rate increased by 44 points during the three years while the district student proficiency rate increased by just 10 points.

The gap in 3rd grade dramatically shifted in one year from 10 points in favor of the district students in 2007-08 (60 percent proficient for district students vs. 50 percent proficient for charter students) to 15 points in favor of charter students in 2008-09 (61 percent proficient for district students vs. 76 percent proficient for charter students). The charter student proficiency rate dramatically increased by 26 points in 2008-09 thanks in part to a 22-point one-year gain at the Brighter Choice Charter School for Boys and the first-year test results at the Albany Community Charter School, where 3rd grade students achieved a proficiency level of 94 percent.

In 4th grade, Albany charter students scored a proficiency rate of 33 percent in 2005-06, 15 points below the district student proficiency rate of 48 percent. Four years later (2008-09), 59 percent of 4th-grade charter students scored proficient compared to 67 percent of district school students, a performance gap of eight points in favor of district students. Despite the current gap, it has been narrowed by seven

points over the last three years. The charter student proficiency rate in 4th grade increased by 26 points over the last three years compared to the district student proficiency rate increasing by 19 points.

In 2007-08, the 4th-grade gap between charter and district schools was just 1 percent, with the district student proficiency rate at 51 percent and the charter student proficient rate at 50 percent. District 4th grade students showed a significant one-year gain of 16 points (76 percent proficient) in 2008-09 compared to charter school gains of 9 points (59 percent proficient).

In 5th grade, Albany charter students scored a proficiency rate of 41 percent in 2005-06, five points below the district student proficiency rate of 46 percent. Three years later (2008-09), 73 percent of 5th-grade charter students are scoring proficient compared to 69 percent of district students, a performance gap that of four points in favor of charter schools. The charter student proficiency rate in 5th grade increased by 32 points over three years while the district student proficiency rate increased by 23 points.

The 5th-grade proficiency rate for charter student increased by 15 points from 2007-08 to 2008-09, a significant one-year increase that put the charter student proficiency rate above that for the district schools (69 percent). District students experienced one-year gains of just 7 points in 2008-09. Partly responsible for the charter students' 5th grade gains is the performance of Achievement Academy Charter School where 79 percent of students scored proficient in 2008-09 compared to 48 percent in 2007-08, a one-year increase of 31 points.

In 6th grade, Albany charter students scored a proficiency rate of 42 percent in 2005-06, just one point below the district student proficiency rate of 43 percent. Three years later (2008-09), 69 percent of 6th-grade charter students scored proficient compared to 62 percent of district students, a performance gap of 7 points in favor of charter schools. The charter student

proficiency rate in 5th grade increased by 27 points over three years while the district student proficiency rate increased by 19 points.

Conclusion

Given the widespread academic success of students attending Albany public charter schools – students who are a higher percentage Black and Hispanic and qualify for the federal free and reduced-priced meals program at higher rates than Albany’s traditional district

school students – it is no wonder that the charter schools in the capital city have attracted so much national attention. Albany public charter school students are achieving high levels of academic success, significantly closing the racial achievement gap, and are on a path that will likely lead them to graduate high school and attend college at rates much higher than their peers.

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The Foundation for Education Reform & Accountability is an independent, nonprofit, research organization dedicated to improving education in New York State by promoting accountability, stimulating innovation, and supporting school-choice efforts across the state.