



## Pennsylvania charter schools continue to underperform

As Pennsylvania implements a new system of rating the performance of its public schools, the results show that charter schools continue to academically underperform.

Less than half of the brick and mortar charter schools met the benchmark score for passing as defined by the PA Department of Education, and none of the cyber charter schools met the mark. Nearly three quarters of traditional public schools, however, earned passing scores in the first year of the new measuring system.

### New ways of measuring performance and accountability

In 2013, the PA Department of Education (PDE) implemented some major changes for measuring the performance of public schools and staff, and they are intertwined in the fact that they use state assessment scores as a component of measurement.

The first was the **Educator Effectiveness Project**, which is a new system for evaluating teachers, non-teaching professionals and principals. The new rating system for teachers was implemented as of July 1, 2013. The new evaluations for non-teaching professionals and principals will begin implementation on July 1, 2014. The rating includes measurement of multiple components, including student performance at the school building level.

The second change is the new **School Performance Profile** (SPP) scoring system for school buildings, charter and cyber charter schools, and career and technical centers. This data covers eight different measurements including exam results, graduation and promotion rates, and attendance data. The scores are posted on PDE's website, and under the site, each school building will



receive a performance score on a 100-point scale that is based upon indicators that PDE selected to define a high performing school. The building-level data is used as a component of the state’s new teacher and principal evaluation system.

The third change is that Pennsylvania received a **waiver from the U.S Department of Education from certain requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)**. Among the many changes is that the state no longer uses the NCLB “Adequate Yearly Progress” (AYP) designations that identified all schools in categories ranging from “Making AYP” to “Corrective Action.”

The new accountability system calls for **Title I schools only** (those with a high percentage of low-income students) to be subject to four Annual Accountability Measures (AMOs) based on state assessment results (including Mathematics/Reading PSSAs, Algebra I/Literature

Keystone Exams, and the PA Alternate System of Assessment (PASA)). The four AMOs include: 1) Test Participation Rate; 2) Graduation Rate/Attendance Rate; 3) Closing the Achievement Gap: All Students; and 4) Closing the Achievement Gap: Historically Underperforming Students.

Under the new accountability system, Title I schools only are designated in one of three categories: **Reward** (with separate High Achievement and High Progress designations), **Focus** and **Priority**. The state will give top-performing schools recognition and greater flexibility while lower-performing schools receive progressively more prescriptive technical assistance, support and monitoring. Non-Title I schools will not receive a federal accountability designation. They will receive a School Performance Profile (SPP) score and will have access to all of the interventions and supports available to Title I schools.

### Comparing the performance of traditional and charter schools

In the fall of 2013, **all Pennsylvania public schools received a year-one SPP score**. This score is based on data for the current year to the extent possible. Exceptions to this include data for graduation, promotion and attendance. Because SPP scores are intended to be used comparatively over time, scores assigned in the first year essentially can be viewed as baseline data. **Acting Education Secretary Carolyn Dumesq defined a score of 70 based on a 100-point scale as the benchmark necessary to be “moving toward success.”**

PSBA’s analysis of first year SPP scores divided 3,004 schools into categories, including all schools, traditional public schools, brick and mortar charter schools, and cyber charter schools.

### Performance Results

Percentage of Schools With SPP Score of 70 or Above	
All Schools	72.6%
Traditional Public Schools	74.8%
Brick and Mortar Charter Schools	43%
Cyber Charter Schools	0%

Number of Schools With SPP Score of 70 or Above	
All Schools	2181
Traditional Public Schools	2113
Brick and Mortar Charter Schools	65
Cyber Charter Schools	0





**All Schools** – This category includes traditional public schools, brick and mortar charter schools, cyber charter schools, and career and technology centers. The average SPP score in the “All Schools” category was 76.3. Five Pennsylvania schools received perfect scores with more than 428 scoring at a 90 or better. The lowest score in this category was 11.4 and the median score was 78.6. **More than 72% (2,181 schools) earned a score greater than 70, the benchmark indicated by PDE as the mark of moving toward success.**

**Traditional Public Schools** – Scores for traditional public schools, which make up 2,826 (94%) of the total 3,004 schools in the All Schools category, were consistent with scores in the All Schools category. The average score for traditional public schools was 77.1 with a median score of 79.1. Five schools in this category earned perfect scores, and 425 schools received scores of 90 or better. **Nearly three**

**quarters of traditional public schools, or 2,113 schools, received a score greater than 70.**

**Brick and Mortar Charter Schools** – Only 43% of the 148 brick and mortar charter schools in Pennsylvania earned a score greater than 70. The average score among brick and mortar charter schools was only 66.4 with a median score of 66.6. **Of the brick and mortar charter schools, there were 83 that failed to meet the benchmark score of 70, and only three received a score above 90.**

**Cyber Charter Schools** – Cyber charter school performance according to SPP scores was consistent with comparison analysis of performance in prior years using Adequate Yearly Progress, where none of the schools met the AYP benchmark of achievement. **With student enrollments of more than 32,000 school-aged children, none of Pennsylvania’s 16 cyber charter schools scored above 70.** The aver-

age score among cyber charter schools was 46.4 – 30 points below the average for traditional public schools and 20 points below the average for brick and mortar charters. The median SPP score for cyber charter schools was 46.8. **Further, under the new federal accountability rating designations, 10 of the 16 cyber charter schools are considered as underperforming.** Four cyber charter schools have received a “Priority” status, and six received a “Focus” status. The remaining schools either were not Title I schools or did not receive a designation.

As the General Assembly considers necessary charter school reforms, these results must be considered before critical decisions are made. The questions must be asked: Are charter schools providing quality education for their students? Why should changes be made to allow for the expansion of charter schools and charter school authorizers?