

STATE REPORT CARD: CHARTER SCHOOLS NOT EVEN A CLOSE SECOND TO REAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The original promise of charter and voucher advocates: Charters will out-place school districts. The data show a different outcome.

There is no data available from private schools to make a comparison.

Scott DiMauro, President of the Ohio Education Association, in a November 3 commentary in the Ohio Capital Journal shared a comparison of charter school report card results with real public schools. The results show that charter school kids are the real losers.

Do state officials care? Apparently not.

State Report Cards Should Be A Wakeup Call For Ohio's Charter, Voucher Hawks

Scott DiMauro

SCOTT DIMAURO

NOVEMBER 3, 2021 12:20 AM

I remember taking home my report cards when I was in school. I was a pretty good student; my grades always reflected my passion for subjects I loved, and more importantly, provided some real-time feedback on areas where improvement was needed — Time management, for example, was a skill I had to learn over time. During my years as a high school social studies teacher, I strived to give that same kind of useful assessment to my students when I was putting report cards together for them.

The state puts report cards together for school buildings and districts, too. In spirit, at least, they have the same mission, quantitatively assessing where our publicly funded institutions across the state are succeeding and where there is room for growth. And not surprisingly, after a year and a half of serious challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, the latest round of state report cards shows there's some extra room for improvement, with about a 10% drop in Performance Index (PI) scores for Ohio's traditional public schools from the 2018-2019 school year to the 2020-2021 one. Chronic absenteeism also climbed to 17%, up from 7.5%, during that time.

But, over that same period, charter schools in the state saw a 25% drop in PI scores – a 2.5 times greater loss than traditional public schools. And chronic absenteeism in those institutions soared from 22% up to 45%, meaning nearly half of all charter school students in Ohio missed a big chunk of the last school year.

While the Ohio Education Association applauds the change in state law that removed letter grades from the state report card system, it is clear Ohio's charter schools are not making the grade. As a teacher, I'd give them a D-minus at best.

This should be seriously alarming to Ohio's taxpayers, who see their money taken from their local public schools to fund these poorer performing alternatives. The PI drop for KIPP, a charter school in Columbus, was 66% — more than double the decline seen in Columbus City Schools. The seven biggest PI drops in Ohio charter schools were Breakthrough Schools in the Cleveland area, which are often touted by charter advocates as shining examples of success, with PI scores plummeting 77% to 84%. Charter advocates often complain about comparing all school districts' performance with charters, but last year, 606 out of 612 public school districts in the state lost scarce resources to charter schools.

Recent test score data on Ohio's private, mostly religious schools — which receive millions in taxpayer funded vouchers — is not available to make a comparison, since those schools are not subject to any of the same accountability standards as public districts.

Now, if some lawmakers get their way, the situation will get exponentially worse for the 90% of Ohio's kids who rely on public education. House Bill 290 — known as the "Backpack Bill" — would create so-called "Education Savings Accounts" that are just universal vouchers with even less accountability. Even with these vouchers, most families still couldn't afford tuition at the private schools in their communities, and for those that do go to the private schools, Ohio taxpayers who foot the bill don't get much bang for their buck. The Cincinnati Enquirer revealed last year that nearly 90% of all voucher students do worse on state tests than students in traditional public schools in the same zip codes.

The data paint a troubling picture. Vouchers and charters take critical resources and weaken the public schools that serve the vast majority of Ohio's children while delivering worse educational outcomes for our kids. What's worse is that now we have a school funding system worth investing in — the Fair School Funding Plan. Failing to fully fund that system while pouring more resources into the worse-performing charter and voucher system is wasting an extraordinary opportunity to once and for all fix the way Ohio funds education for the 90% of students and families who attend Ohio's public schools.

Ohioans need to tell their lawmakers to oppose House Bill 290 and focus on their constitutional responsibility to fund Ohio's public schools to ensure a high-quality education for all of Ohio's kids.

[State report cards should be a wakeup call for Ohio's charter, voucher hawks - Ohio Capital Journal](#)