

A model of success

Chicago's charter schools hold the top nine spots for 2012 ACT scores

by Joshua Dwyer, Director of Education Reform and Ted Dabrowski, Vice President of Policy at the Illinois Policy Institute

Oct. 8, 2012

The problem

Too many of Chicago's children don't reach their full potential because traditional public schools are failing them.

Our solution

Chicago's charter schools are proving, once again, that low-income children can succeed if given a chance.

Why this works

Recently released 2012 ACT scores confirm that charter schools are succeeding where public schools are failing. Every Chicago Public Schools, or CPS, high school requires eleventh graders to take the ACT, a widely known, reputable college readiness exam. Not surprisingly, selective schools – those who admit most of their students based on previous test scores, entrance exams and behavior in middle school – are leading the pack and setting the bar.

But among high schools that are open to all, charter schools continue to dominate the top of the rankings.

In 2012, charter schools held the top nine spots for open-enrollment, non-selective public high schools in Chicago. Another charter school ended up in a three-way tie for tenth. The Noble Network of Charter Schools led the pack, with a total of nine schools in the top 10, one of which was included in the tie. The average ACT score for charter schools in the top 10 was 20.6, with Noble Network's UIC College Prep campus scoring 21.9 – the highest-ever average at an open-enrollment, non-selective CPS high school.

Chicago's top nine open-enrollment, non-selective high schools are charter schools; another ties for 10th

2012 average ACT composite scores for top 10 high schools. Highlight designates charter school.

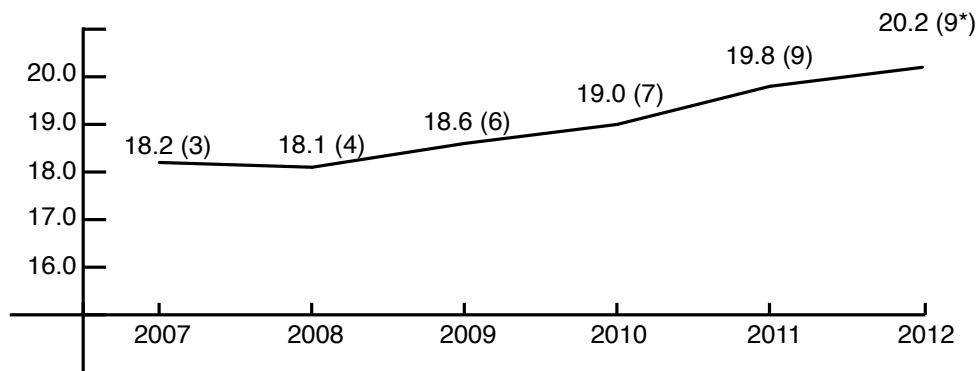
Rank	School	Average ACT score	Percent low-income
1	Noble Network - UIC	21.9	81.9
2	Noble Network - Pritzker	21.4	94.8
3	Noble Network - Rauner	21	85.9
T-4	Noble Network - Chicago Bulls	20.8	88
T-4	Noble Network - Muchin	20.8	81.2
6	Noble Network - Golder	20.1	90.2
7	Noble Network - Noble	20	91.4
8	Noble Network - Rowe Clark	19.7	92.1
9	CICS - Northtown	19.6	76.7
T-10	Chicago Academy	19.3	81.8
T-10	Kenwood	19.3	72.9
T-10	Noble Network - Comer	19.3	89

Source: Chicago Public Schools' Strategy, Research, and Accountability Office, www.cps.edu/SchoolData/Pages/SchoolData.aspx

The 2012 results represent a trend of continuous improvement in ACT scores among the city's top charter schools. The average ACT score in 2007, a year when only three charter schools made it into the top 10, was 18.2. In 2012, the average of the top 10 open-enrollment, non-selective schools – which included nine charter schools and one that tied for tenth – reached 20.2. The difference in scores represents an impressive 11 percent increase over five years.

Charter schools have raised the bar for the top 10 open-enrollment, non-selective high schools in Chicago

Average ACT composite scores of Chicago's top ten schools: 2007-2012
 Parentheses indicate number of charter schools included in top 10 that year



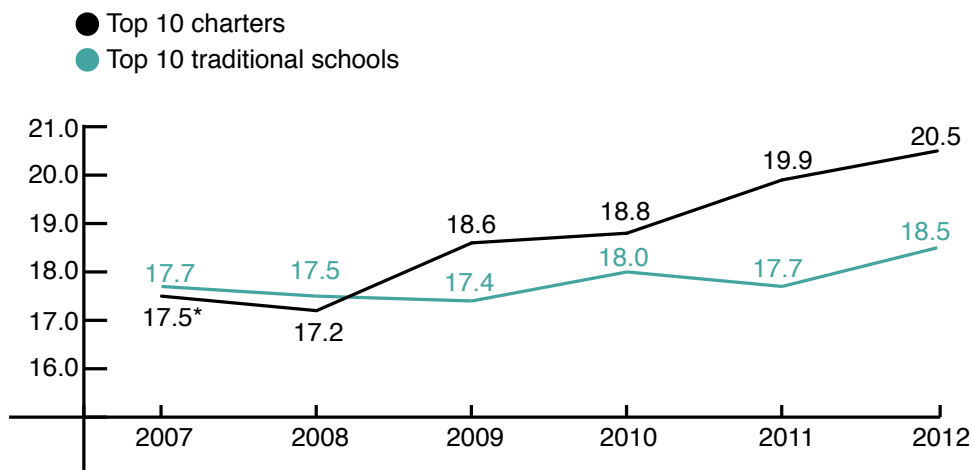
* An additional charter school was in a three-way tie for tenth place

Source: Chicago Public Schools' Strategy, Research, and Accountability Office, www.cps.edu/SchoolData/Pages/SchoolData.aspx, Illinois Policy Institute

Not only are charter schools outperforming their peers on the ACT, a comparison of Chicago's top 10 charter high schools to the top 10 open-enrollment, non-selective, traditional public high schools shows that charters' pace of improvement is significantly greater. Since 2007, top charter school scores have increased by 17 percent, while the top traditional schools have gained nearly 5 percent.

Top 10 charters outperform top 10 open-enrollment, non-selective, traditional high schools in Chicago

Average of ACT composite scores: 2007-2012



*Scores from only eight charter schools were available in 2007

Source: Chicago Public Schools' Strategy, Research, and Accountability Office, www.cps.edu/SchoolData/Pages/SchoolData.aspx, Illinois Policy Institute

Charter schools, which receive most of their money from the districts in which they operate, differ from traditional public schools in a variety of ways. They are free to innovate – to set high expectations for students and create a unique environment where teachers, school leaders, parents and students can focus on meeting them. They can offer longer school days and a longer academic year in order to get the most out of the education calendar. They can also set their own class size, student-teacher ratios, and budget. In exchange for the increased autonomy, charter schools are held directly accountable to their local school board and to the Illinois State Board of Education for maintaining high academic standards.

Chicago’s charter schools are proving that a student’s starting point does not define his or her potential. The ACT scores themselves are only one part of the story; in fact, because the proficiency of incoming students varies widely across schools, it is critical to also examine student growth data to determine the degree to which schools help students improve. On this dimension, charters also shine.

On the EPAS¹ series of exams, which shows growth of a single cohort of students over three years, 17 out of the 26 charter high schools with sufficient data outperformed average growth in Chicago in 2011. Across all charter high schools, the average growth rate of 3.8 scale points over those three years is 60 percent higher than the Chicago average, an average that includes selective-enrollment high schools.

Charter school students, like other students in CPS, primarily come from low-income backgrounds (91 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunch), represent mostly racial minorities (60 percent African-American and 35 percent Hispanic) and must overcome a range of challenges (9 percent are English Language Learners and 12 percent have special needs). They are not untouched by the violence plaguing many of the city’s neighborhoods. And, yet, despite all of these obstacles, they are succeeding.

2012 charter school enrollment: high-need students

Category	Percent	Number of students
Free or reduced-price lunch	91	41,346
English-language learners	9	4,269
Special education	12	5,236
Total	100*	45,478*

**Some students may be in more than one category. The total number of charter students is 45,478
Source: CPS 20th day enrollment data*

2012 charter school enrollment: by race

Race	Percent	Number of students
African-American	60	27,144
Hispanic	35	16,004
Other	3	1,478
White	2	852
Total	100	45,478

Source: CPS 20th day enrollment data

Charter schools offer a real alternative to Chicago kids. A path to better education for the public school students of Chicago has already begun. State and local officials must work side by side to offer more options to Chicago parents eager to find a place where their children can truly succeed.

¹ EPAS – Acronym for a testing system that begins with the Explore in the 8th or 9th grade, Plan in the 10th grade, and the ACT in the 11th grade.

Appendix

All data in this report were acquired from the website of the Chicago Public Schools’ Strategy, Research, and Accountability Office. Determinations of whether individual high schools should be considered “selective” or “open-enrollment” were made using information from CPSs’ website and interviews conducted by the Illinois Network of Charter Schools.

Schools labeled as selective enrollment were Northside College Prep, Walter Payton Prep, Whitney Young Prep, Jones College Prep, Lane Tech College Prep, Lindblom College Prep, Gwendolyn Brooks College Prep, King College Prep and Westinghouse High School. By definition, these were not considered open-enrollment schools. Seven additional schools were placed on this list since they admit at least fifty percent of their students through a selective process: the “magnet schools” DeVry High, Von Steuben High, Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences and Curie High; the “neighborhood schools” Lincoln Park High and Daniel Hale Williams Prep School; and finally the “contract school” Chicago High School for the Arts.

The city’s Military Academies, like selective-enrollment schools, use test scores to determine admissions. Past school attendance and behavior are considered as well. The following were labeled as selective: Air Force High School, Rickover Naval Academy, Phoenix Military Academy, Marine Military Academy, Chicago Military Academy and Carver Military Academy.

13 of Chicago’s top 20 open-enrollment, non-selective high schools are charter schools

2012 average ACT composite scores for Chicago’s top 20 high schools
 Highlight designates charter school

Rank	School	Average ACT Score	% Low-Income
1	Noble Network - UIC	21.9	81.9
2	Noble Network - Pritzker	21.4	94.8
3	Noble Network - Rauner	21	85.9
T-4	Noble Network - Chicago Bulls	20.8	88
T-4	Noble Network - Muchin	20.8	81.2
6	Noble Network - Golder	20.1	90.2
7	Noble Network - Noble	20	91.4
8	Noble Network - Rowe Clark	19.7	92.1
9	CICS - Northtown	19.6	76.7
T-10	Chicago Academy	19.3	81.8
T-10	Kenwood	19.3	72.9
T-10	Noble Network - Comer	19.3	89
13	Lake View	18.6	86.8
14	Taft	18.4	57
15	UNO - Garcia	18.3	90.6
T-16	Chicago Math & Science Academy	18.2	92.1
T-16	Perspectives - Joslin	18.2	82.9
18	Morgan Park	18.1	80.1
19	Alcott	18	15
20	Kennedy	17.9	76.4

Source: Chicago Public Schools’ Strategy, Research, and Accountability Office, www.cps.edu/SchoolData/Pages/SchoolData.aspx

Guarantee of quality scholarship

The Illinois Policy Institute is committed to delivering the highest quality and most reliable research on matters of public policy.

The Institute guarantees that all original factual data (including studies, viewpoints, reports, brochures and videos) are true and correct and that information attributed to other sources is accurately represented.

The Institute encourages rigorous critique of its research. If the accuracy of any material fact or reference to an independent source is questioned and brought to the Institute's attention in writing with supporting evidence, the Institute will respond. If an error exists, it will be corrected in subsequent distributions. This constitutes the complete and final remedy under this guarantee.