

# The State's Efforts to Privatize Local Public Schools is NOT Improving Student Outcomes – The State's Academic Accountability Rating System Provides the Evidence

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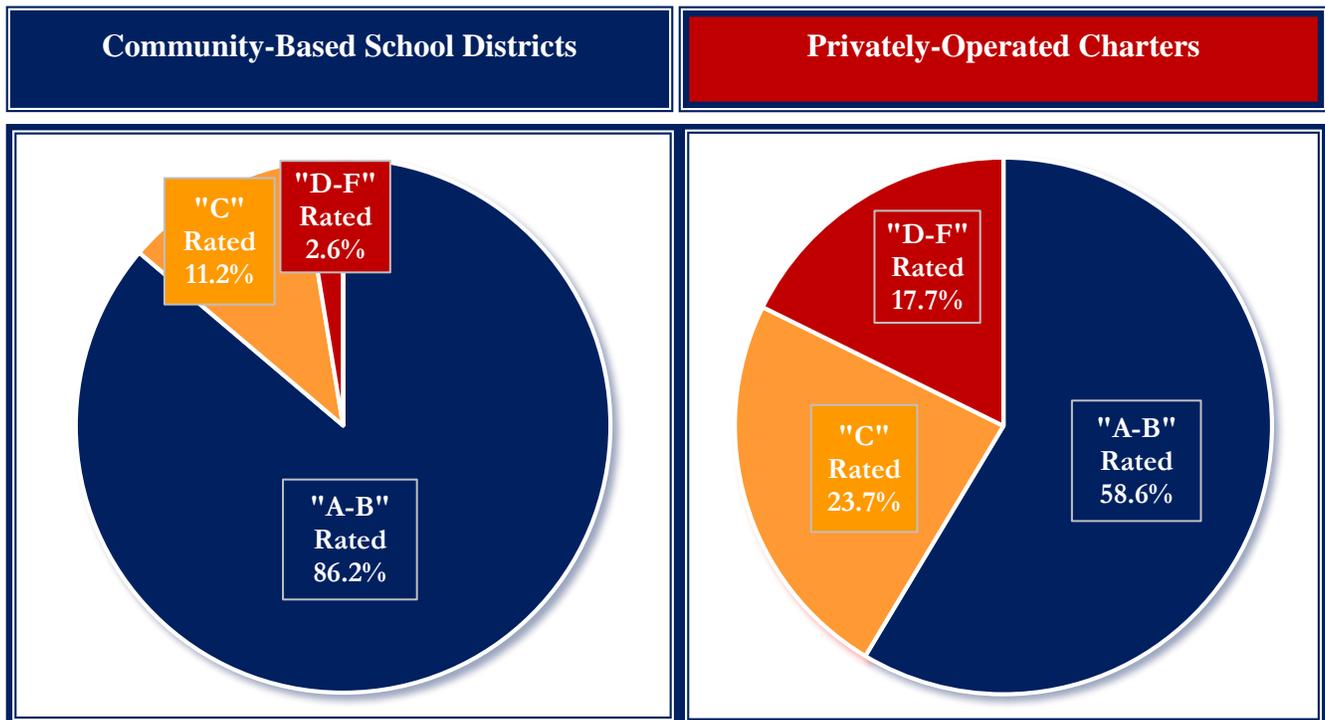
The Texas Education Agency (“TEA”) has released its 2019 Academic Accountability Ratings for taxpayer funded schools. In this regard, ratings were assigned to both locally governed, community-based school districts and State approved, privately-operated charters that comprise the State’s “dual education” system (see “*TXSchools.gov*”). In total, 1,089 taxpayer funded entities received ratings from TEA: 1,020 community-based school districts and 169 State approved, privately-operated charters (“charters”).

Charters are private organizations that the State unilaterally approves to operate schools in local communities with taxpayer funding. Originally authorized by the Texas Legislature in 1995, the State has provided privately-operated charters with over \$20 billion of taxpayer funding to improve student learning in local communities. The “charter promise” was that in exchange for the State transferring the control of local schools to private organizations and allowing charters to be more autonomous with taxpayer funding, charters would produce better student outcomes.

However, the State’s 2019 Academic Accountability Rating System documents that privately-operated charters are producing lower student outcomes than community-based school districts. As a result, students and taxpayers are both paying the price for the State’s ongoing policies that support the operation and expansion of lower performing, privately-operated charters in local communities.

**Rating Summary:** According to the State’s ratings, an impressive 86.2% of community-based school districts received an “A” or “B” rating and only 2.6% of community-based school districts were assigned a “D” or “F” rating. In other words, 97.4% of the 1,020 community-based school districts were awarded the “good housekeeping seal of approval” by the State.

In comparison, the percentage of charters receiving an “A” or “B” rating was significantly lower at 58.6%, which is 27.6 percentage points lower than the percentage of community-based school districts with “A” or “B” ratings. The differences do not stop there. The percentage of charters receiving a rating of “C” or below was 41.4%, while the percentage of community-based school districts rated “C” or below was only 13.8%. In addition, an alarming 17.7% of State approved charters received a “D” or “F” rating. In other words, almost 1 of every 5 charters was deemed “low performing” by the State.



**Largest Community-Based School Districts and Privately-Operated Charters – Rating Summary:** The 4 largest community-based school districts in Texas serve the unique needs of 586,112 students and these school districts are not immune to scrutiny and criticism. Often, the criticism is from politically motivated State legislators, privately funded charter school advocacy organizations and charter school leaders that claim community-based school districts are failing students.

Despite these “self-serving” criticisms to promote the need for more charter schools, these claims are simply NOT true according to the State’s Academic Accountability Ratings. The reality is that although the largest community-based school districts enroll and serve the diverse needs of all students in their community, each received a high “B” rating (86-89) from the State. In comparison, despite the benefits of excluding enrollment to certain students and serving 479,347 fewer students, the 4 largest privately-operated charters that the State approved to improve student learning also received a “B” (85-89) rating.

<b>2019 Academic Accountability Ratings: 4 Largest Community-Based School Districts and Privately-Operated Charters</b>					
District	State Rating	Enrollment	Privately-Operated Charters	State Rating	Enrollment
Houston ISD	B (88)	209,040	IDEA Public Schools	B (89)	42,748
Dallas ISD	B (86)	155,030	KIPP Texas	B (86)	27,047
Cypress-Fairbanks ISD	B (89)	116,245	Uplift Education	B (87)	18,709
Northside ISD	B (87)	105,797	IL Texas	B (85)	18,261
<b>Totals</b>	<b>(86) - (89)</b>	<b>586,112</b>	<b>Totals</b>	<b>(85) – (89)</b>	<b>106,765</b>

**Low Performing Charter Campuses:** The State has approved 288 separate charters to operate in local communities. To date, 110 of these charters have been surrendered or mandatorily closed and are no longer permitted to serve students. Despite these closures, many charters are still negatively impacting student outcomes. According to the State’s academic ratings, 17.3% of privately-operated charter campuses were rated “D” or “F” and many of these campuses serve students in higher performing community-based school districts. The table below summarizes a few of the “low performing” charter campuses that currently serve students from community-based school districts with “A” or “B” academic ratings.

<b>Certain Low Performing Charter Campuses Currently Serving Students From “A” or “B” Rated Community-Based School Districts</b>			
Privately-Operated Charter Campus	State Rating	Privately-Operated Charter School	State Rating
IL Texas – Houston (Orem Elem.)	F (45)	Great Hearts Western Hills	F (56)
The Varnett School - Northeast	F (49)	High Point Academy	D (62)
Harmony Science Academy (Waco)	F (51)	Responsive Education Virtual Learning	D (62)
Jubilee Leadership Academy	F (51)	IDEA Najim College Prep.	D (63)
KIPP Truth Elem.	F (52)	Founders Classical - Mesquite (Resp. Ed.)	D (64)
La Fe Preparatory (El Paso)	F (52)	Life School – Cedar Hill	D (64)
School of Science and Technology	F (52)	Uplift Meridian	D (66)
North Texas Collegiate Acad. - North	F (54)	Odyssey Academy - Bay	D (66)

**S.B. 1882 Partnerships - Results:** In 2017, the Legislature approved S.B. 1882 that provides financial and accountability incentives for community-based school districts to partner with private organizations to operate existing schools. S.B. 1882 and TEA rules also require that any community-based school district campus with a “D” or “F” rating for 5 consecutive years must be turned over to a private charter/non-profit or closed. If neither of these occur, the community-based school district becomes subject to a State takeover.

S.B. 1882 is based upon the premise that “privatization” will improve the results of low performing campuses. However, the State’s premise is not based upon documented research or fact. For the 2018/19 school year, the 8 community-based school district campuses listed below were turned over to privately-operated charters/non-profits pursuant to S.B. 1882 partnerships. Unfortunately, most of these privately-operated campuses experienced a decline in student performance. In fact, the average academic ratings of these campuses declined by 8.25 points with private organizations at the helm. In addition, 4 of the campuses that had previously been rated “met standard” were relegated to an “Improvement Required” (“F”) rating under the control of private organizations.

<b>Summary of Campus Ratings - S.B. 1882 Partnerships with Private Organizations</b>					
<b>Community-Based School District</b>	<b>Campus</b>	<b>Private Organization</b>	<b>State Rating 2017/18</b>	<b>State Rating 2018/19</b>	<b>Change</b>
<b>Austin ISD</b>	<b>Mendez Middle</b>	<b>T-STEM</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>-4</b>
<b>San Antonio ISD</b>	<b>Stewart Elem.</b>	<b>Democracy Prep</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>-23</b>
<b>San Antonio ISD</b>	<b>Storm Elem.</b>	<b>Relay Lab School</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>-23</b>
<b>Waco ISD</b>	<b>Alta Vista Elem,</b>	<b>Prosper Waco</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>+1</b>
<b>Waco ISD</b>	<b>Brook Avenue Elem.</b>	<b>Prosper Waco</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>+20</b>
<b>Waco ISD</b>	<b>J.H. Hines Elem.</b>	<b>Prosper Waco</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>-18</b>
<b>Waco ISD</b>	<b>G.W. Carver Middle</b>	<b>Prosper Waco</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>-20</b>
<b>Waco ISD</b>	<b>Indian Spring Middle</b>	<b>Prosper Waco</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>+1</b>
<b>Average</b>					<b>-8.25</b>

**Conclusion:** While it can certainly be debated that the State’s Academic Accountability Rating System does not accurately reflect the effectiveness of a school, especially since it relies upon the performance of students on the standardized STAAR test and it ignores the many other positive educational attributes that schools provide to students every day. However, the system is the measuring stick that the State has chosen to evaluate student learning. It is also the accountability system that the State has chosen to govern the quality of public education deployed in local communities. So:

- The purpose of privately-operated charters was to “improve student learning” by providing a State controlled, taxpayer funded alternative to community-based school districts; but
- The State’s Academic Accountability Rating System documents that:
  - ✓ Community-based school districts have significantly higher academic ratings than State approved charters;
  - ✓ Charters continue to operate a higher percentage of the “low performing” schools in local communities; and
  - ✓ The “privatization” of campuses pursuant to S.B. 1882 partnerships has primarily resulted in reduced student outcomes.

So why is the State continuing to support the operation and rapid expansion of privately-operated charter schools in community-based school districts? Why is the State offering financial incentives to “privatize” local schools? Could the answer be that politics and “special interests” are driving the State’s efforts to “privatize” schools in local communities?

The State created privately-operated charters to improve student learning in community-based school districts and it created the Academic Accountability Rating System which documents that State approved charters are producing lower student outcomes than community-based school districts. This creates quite a dilemma for the current policies of the State, but that is usually what happens when a “politically motivated” bad policy is exposed by another bad policy. If it is truly about the “kids” and providing the highest quality education to students, it is time for parents, taxpayers and communities to hold the State accountable. It is time to return the control of public schools to taxpayers and democratically governed, community-based school districts that have proven to consistently produce better outcomes for students!

*DISCLOSURES: The author is a voluntary advocate for public education and this material solely reflects the opinions of the author. The author has not been compensated in any manner for the preparation of this material. The material is based upon information provided by the Texas Education Agency, TXSchools.gov and other publicly available information. While the author believes these sources to be reliable, the author has not independently verified the information. All readers are encouraged to complete their own review and make their own independent conclusions.*