E-schools Show Superior Results

Analysis of state value-added data confirms e-schools students' progress.

About the Ohio Alliance for Public Charter Schools

The Ohio Alliance for Public Charter Schools (OAPCS) is a non-profit, non-partisan and independent membership organization dedicated to the enhancement and sustainability of quality charter schools through standards, values, best practices, business and financing resources and technical assistance programs. Charter schools are a major element of public education reform in the United States, and Ohio has the fifth-largest charter school enrollment in the nation. OAPCS emphasizes the need for excellence among Ohio's public charter schools, with a credo of quality that includes standards and principles for its members, ultimately leading to the Ohio Alliance for Public Charter Schools' certification of qualified schools.

Our Mission

The Ohio Alliance for Public Charter Schools (OAPCS) aspires to provide children with greater educational opportunities by improving the quality and fostering the growth of Ohio's public charter schools.

Background and Purpose

KidsOhio, a nonpartisan, nonprofit educational research group based in Ohio, released a report on June 9, 2009 detailing its analysis of state data that showed both Ohio charter schools and Big 8 urban district schools on average rank low on student test scores but rank much higher (right around the state average) on the state's "value-added" scoring, which measures student improvement from year to year.

The KidsOhio report[1] compared all charter schools as a group with the most similar district schools, all Big 8 traditional schools, as a group.*

Both Ohio Governor Ted Strickland in his "evidence-based" education plan and the Ohio House of Representatives in H. B. 1 have recommended that charter e-schools' state funding be reduced more than any other public school type. Because such funding cuts to e-schools (up to 74%) would result in the closure of these state public schools, OAPCS undertook further analysis to compare the effectiveness of statewide charter e-schools as a group to the Big 8 traditional districts.

Using data recently made public by the Ohio Department of Education,[2] OAPCS examined the following questions for statewide charter e-schools and Big 8 traditional districts:

1. What student populations do these schools serve and how do they differ?
2. What does Ohio's Local Report Card tell us about their comparative academic achievement and progress?
3. How do their average per-pupil expenditures compare?

The OAPCS also investigated recent findings[3] by the RAND Corporation that questioned Ohio e-school performance. The RAND report advised caution and noted uncertainty in its estimates because of incomplete data. These recently released state data were not available at the time of the preparation of the RAND Corporation study and in our view fill in relevant missing information by including the average academic starting points of students in all traditional districts and charter schools.

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[1]"Analysis Shows Ohio's 8 Large Urban Districts and Charter Schools Rank Higher on Educational Progress Than on Absolute Test Scores"; KidsOhio.org; 2009

[2]Data can be found at the following website: https://ohiova.sas.com/evaas/welcome.jsp

[3]"Charter Schools in Eight States: Effects on Achievement, Attainment, Integration, and Competition"; Rand Corporation; Ron Zimmer, Brian Gill, et al; 2009

**The KIDSOHIO analysis focused on individual school buildings. Since e-schools more closely resemble districts than individual school buildings because of their grade level distribution and operational structure and since this analysis focuses on the relative academic performance of e-schools, district information provides for more appropriate comparisons.*

1. Who attends Ohio's statewide e-schools and how do they compare academically with students attending Ohio's Big 8 urban districts?

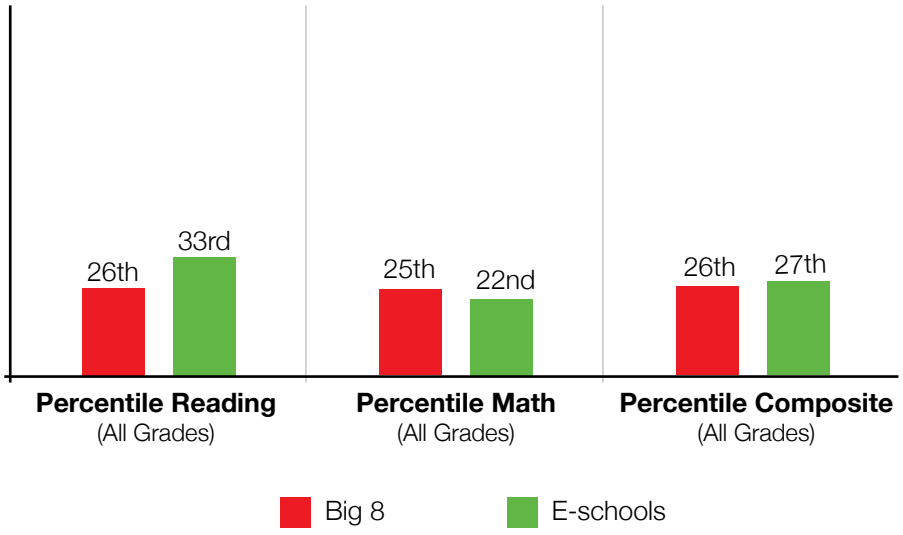
Key Finding:

- **Newly released state data show that Ohio's Big 8 urban districts and statewide charter e-schools serve similar student populations, both comparatively low in preparation and achievement, with e-schools having the added disadvantage of serving students with higher mobility rates (rate at which students move among schools).**

The Ohio Department of Education recently released data[4] showing average students' academic performance for prior years. These data are used as the starting point for the state's "value-added" evaluation, which measures student growth from year to year.

By interpreting these newly released data, Chart 1.1 shows the average percentile of students entering the 2007-2008 school year for all Ohio Big 8 districts and statewide charter e-schools. By definition, the statewide average for all schools is the 50th percentile. The data show that both Big 8 traditional districts and statewide charter e-schools serve students with extremely low and virtually identical demonstrated achievement in prior years. Statewide charter e-school students entered the year in the 27th percentile, and the Ohio Big 8 districts entered the year in the 26th percentile.

Chart 1.1—2008 Achievement Percentile of Students Served

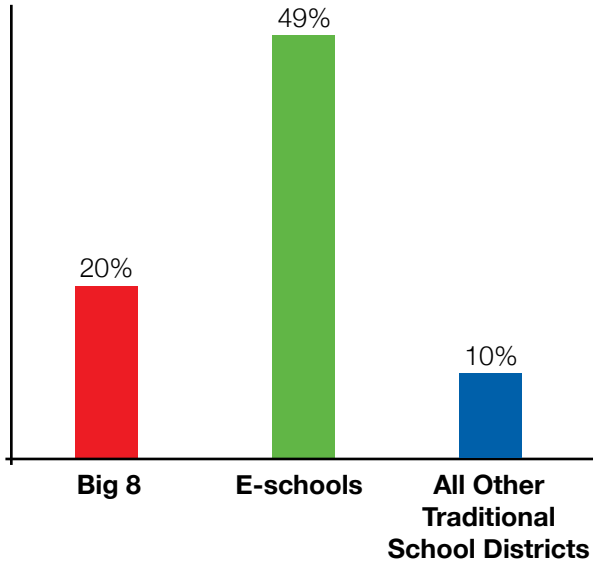


[4]*Data can be found at https://ohiova.sas.com/evaas/welcome.jsp.*

One noticeable difference becomes clear when comparing the two average populations. Statewide charter e-schools have a much higher mobility rate than Big 8 districts.

Chart 1.2 below shows that the mobility rate, as defined by the percentage of students enrolled in the district for less than one year, on average for statewide charter e-schools is 49%. The Ohio Big 8 average is 20%, which is still higher than the state average for all schools of 10%.

Chart 1.2—2008 Percentage of Students Enrolled Less Than One Year



E-schools have an average mobility rate significantly higher than other forms of schooling, which means they do not have as much of an opportunity to serve the majority of their students over multiple years.

Big 8 districts, while displaying a mobility rate that is higher than other districts, nevertheless enjoy the advantage over e-schools of more sequential learning opportunities, year-over-year, to impact student achievement and growth.

E-school mobility rates can be explained, at least partially, by the unique reasons students choose to attend the schools where they are able to learn online from home. Reasons given by OAPCS member e-schools include family mobility factors such as military or mission work, flexibility requirements to allow for chronic health or required work circumstances, teenage pregnancies, among others.

2. What does Ohio's Local Report Card tell us about the academic achievement and progress in statewide charter e-schools and Big 8 urban districts?

Key Findings:

- **The state's Local Report Card, which weights average test scores over actual student performance gains from year to year, does not adequately describe overall school effectiveness—especially for schools with high mobility rates and whose students enter grade levels behind.**
- **Both Big 8 urban districts and statewide charter e-schools rank higher when looking at their "value-added" progress over one year rather than simply measuring their one-time testing performance in the spring, as reported on the state's annual Local Report Card.**
- **On average, e-school value-added results are significantly higher than Big 8 districts.**

Overall Performance Index

The overall performance index score is the primary measurement used currently by the state's Local Report Card rating and accountability system. The performance index is an average of test scores for all students.

Using the newly released state data, it is possible to calculate the correlation between performance index and prior years' academic performance (NCE percentile rank). Chart 2.1, shows a strong correlation between the two at every grade level.

Chart 2.1

2007Average Composite NCE (Percentile Rank)	Correlation With 2008 Performance Index
Grade 3	0.84*
Grade 4	0.86*
Grade 5	0.89*
Grade 6	0.88*
Grade 7	0.89*
Grade 8	0.86*

*(*Measured on a scale of -1 to 1)*

(NCE: Normalized Curve Equivalent)

The strong correlation between performance index and prior year academic performance demonstrates that the current Local Report Card system rates districts/schools based on little more than students' previous school performance.

The state's current Local Report Card rating system poorly serves statewide charter e-schools matriculating highly mobile students who enter the schools grade levels behind. The Local Report Card does not adequately measure or account for overall school effectiveness with this population of students.

Value-added Analysis

The real question in evaluating school effectiveness is, "What progress are students making?"

The state's "value-added" analysis measures growth over time to determine the average "value" gained by students during that time.

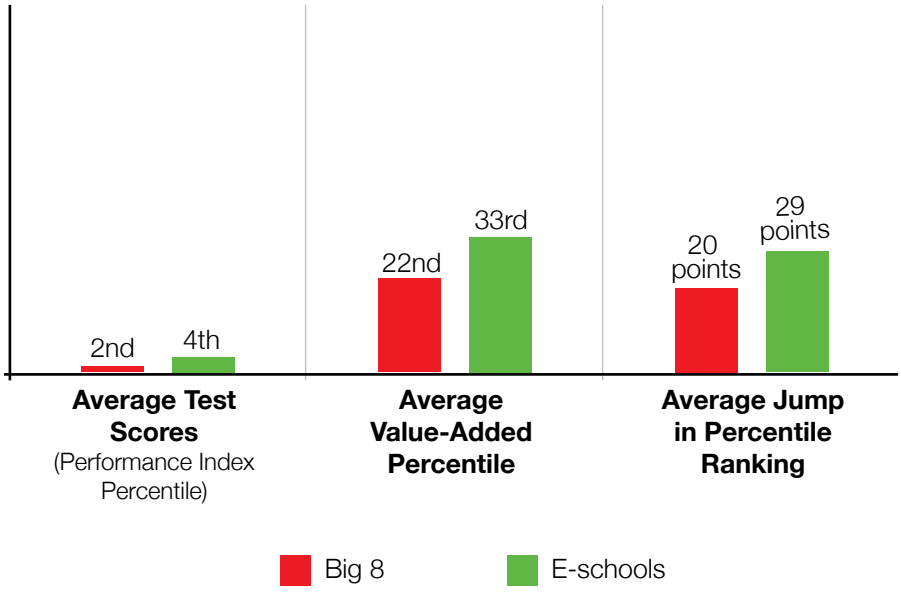
As the KidsOhio.org study showed, the Big 8 urban districts and charter schools rank low on the state's Local Report Card ratings, but much higher when their "value-added" scores are examined. This report concludes that the same statement can also be made emphatically for statewide charter e-schools.

Chart 2.2 on the next page shows what percentile the districts/schools rank among all districts in both performance index and "value-added" and the difference between the two. Both Ohio Big 8 districts and statewide charter e-schools are near the bottom when looking at the performance index. Statewide e-schools fall in the 4th percentile and Big 8s fall in the 2nd percentile.

This makes sense since in view of the correlation between the performance index and the prior year academic performance (see chart 2.1). However, both Big 8 districts and e-schools' ranks jump considerably when looking at their "value-added" ranks. Big 8 districts jump 20 percentile points from the 2nd percentile to the 22nd percentile and statewide e-schools jump 29 percentile points from the 4th percentile to the 33rd percentile.

While both the e-schools and the Big 8 performance outcomes are bolstered by these value-added analyses, e-schools demonstrate superior performance over the Big 8.

Chart 2.2—Big 8 and E-schools Jump in Ranking Attributable to Value-Added Gains



The state's local report card also gives each school/district a "value-added" designation based on how much growth their students show in one year's time. Those exceeding expectations are given a "green" designation, those meeting expectations are given a "yellow" designation, and those below expectations are given a "red" designation for "value-added" assessment.

Chart 2.3 shows that more statewide charter e-schools are meeting or exceeding the state's "value-added" assessment expectations than Big 8 districts despite their overall Local Report Card rating. **Five of the seven statewide charter e-schools are meeting or exceeding the state's expectations for "value-added," whereas only two of the Big 8 urban districts are meeting or exceeding the requirement.**

Chart 2.3—2008 Value-Added Performance as Designated by the Ohio Department of Education

	Big 8 Districts	Statewide E-schools
Above Expectations	0 (0%)	1 (14.29%)
Meeting Expectations	2 (25%)	4 (57.14%)
Below Expectations	6 (75%)	2 (28.57%)
n=	8 (100%)	7 (100%)

This analysis further demonstrates that the state's local report card rating system does not give sufficient weight to its own "value-added" measure, which tracks actual student growth from year to year. Again, this analysis, using available state data, calls into question the findings of the recent RAND Corporation study which, despite advising caution when using the analysis because of incomplete data, found that charter e-schools did not appear to be performing as well as their traditional school counterparts.

3. How do the average per-pupil expenditures of Big 8 urban districts and statewide charter e-schools compare?

Key Findings:

- **Statewide charter e-schools spend $5,540 (44%) less in taxpayer funds per pupil than the average of Big 8 urban districts.**
- **On average, e-schools achieve better gains while spending less per pupil than Big 8 urban districts.**

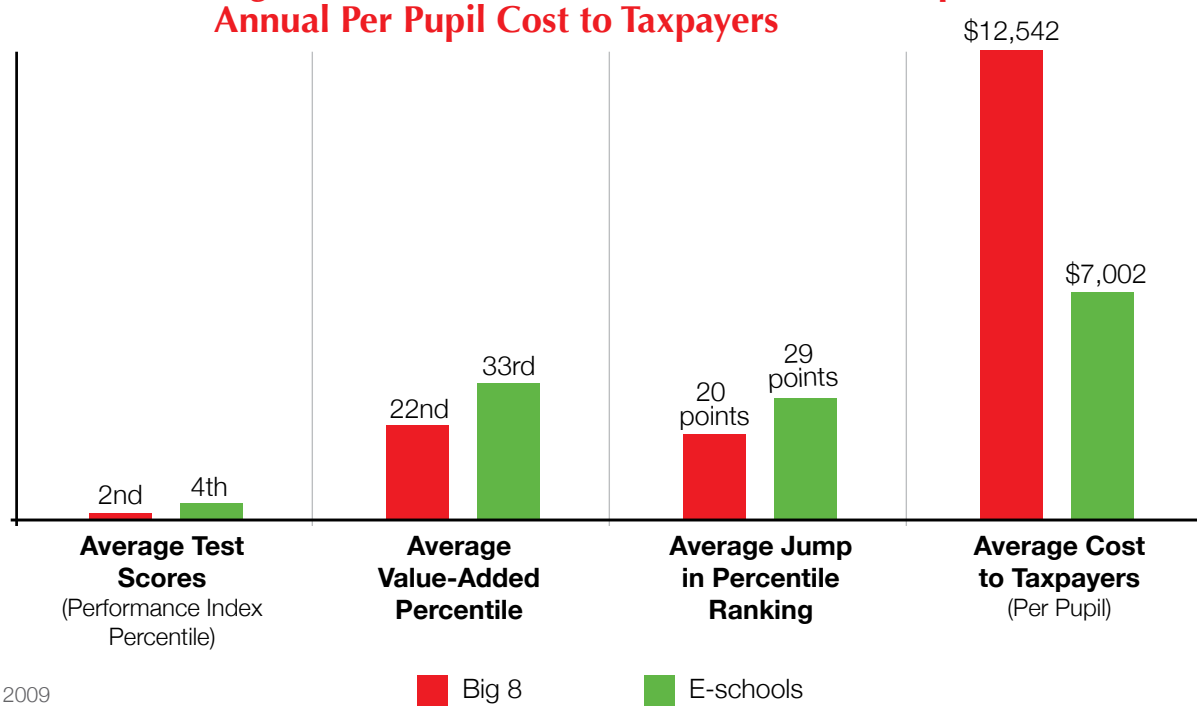
Comparing this report's e-school performance data with per-pupil expenditures of Big 8 urban districts and statewide charter e-schools has relevancy.

E-schools serve a similarly challenged population of students as the Big 8 districts, yet on growth (value-added) measures they outperform the Big 8 districts and cost taxpayers less.

On average, e-schools spent $5,540 (44%) less in taxpayers' funds in 2008 than the Big 8 urban districts per pupil per year.

Chart 3.1 below shows the average per-pupil expenditures as well as repeated information from previous charts showing the gains these schools are making in relationship to other districts/schools when the "value-added" progress measure is included.

Chart 3.1—Big 8 and E-schools Value-Added Gains Compared with Annual Per Pupil Cost to Taxpayers



Conclusion

The findings of this study, along with the recent KidsOhio.org report, merit strong consideration by policy-makers in the current deliberations on education funding.

Despite what their Local Report Card ratings may show, the state's own figures show that e-schools on average are achieving higher "value-added" academic results than school districts with similarly challenging student populations (Big 8 urban districts). Furthermore, e-schools are spending an average of $5,440 (44%) less than Big 8 districts to achieve these results.

Nationally, charter schools receive 78 cents on the dollar of the per-pupil funding amount of their traditional district peers. Ohio e-schools only expend 56 cents on the dollar of their district peers (Chart 3.1).

Governor Strickland's evidence-based education plan and the House version of the state budget bill proposed up to 74% cuts in funding for charter e-schools.

E-schools, along with other charter schools, are serving a vital public need, are already funded at levels well below the national average for charter schools, and should not be penalized with further reduced funding. We encourage policy-makers to review these findings and use the true state evidence to support appropriate funding levels for all schools.