



Co-exist or Collaborate? Strategic Options for Growing the Number of Quality Public School Seats in Houston

The question shouldn't be "charter or traditional?" but rather "How can public policies ensure a supply of good schools – charter, traditional, or something else – to meet the needs of kids in each community in our city?" – Sara Mead, Education Week

Executive Summary

All children in the greater Houston area should have access to a good education that will prepare them well for college or career. This is what they need in order to earn a decent wage in today's knowledge-based economy, and it is imperative to the region's economic future.

Families' strong desire for better educational opportunities for their children is evidenced by the high level of demand for seats in the best district and charter schools. The problem is that there are not nearly enough of these seats for all of the students who want and need them. There are a variety of ways to quantify school quality, and Children At Risk provides one useful and readily available approach. Their 2015 school rankings show the following:

- ❖ During the 2013-2014 school year, 431 district and charter schools in the Houston area¹ received a grade of A from Children At Risk based on their student achievement and achievement growth.² These schools were educating about **420,600 students**, or about a third of the region's public school students.
- ❖ At the other end of the spectrum, 439 schools received a grade of D or F. They were educating more than **362,000 students**.
- ❖ Across more than half of the F middle schools, the percentages of students performing at the "advanced" level on the state's STAAR assessments (the level associated with being on track for college and career readiness) were in the single digits.

Furthermore, according to a new report from Education Cities, achievement gaps between low-income students in Houston and their higher income peers are widening. Out of the 94 cities included in the study, Houston ranked 86th for its lack of success in narrowing achievement gaps between 2011 and 2014, signifying that low-income students in the Houston area are falling farther and farther behind.³

Such disappointing results for so many students and schools foreshadow dire outcomes for students, for families, for the region, and for Texas as a whole. The question is, what should leaders do about it?

There are a variety of options available. The goal of this paper is to consider whether the current approach—characterized by districts and charters operating largely in isolation and doing little to share information or coordinate strategically with one another—is likely to meet the urgent need for quality school options or whether it would be more fruitful and expedient for school districts and charters to collaborate on key strategic efforts to improve the region's supply of seats in quality schools.

In the following pages, we present data on the level of demand for better school options (district and charter), consider challenges that constrain growth of high-performing schools, and offer examples of

how leaders in other cities and communities are tackling the challenge of ensuring that all children have access to the kind of education they need to succeed. Our ultimate objective is to spark the crucial conversations that need to occur in order to make much more rapid progress toward that end goal.

The Need for Quality Schools

The mission of the state’s public education system, according to the Texas Education Code, is to ensure that all children in Texas have access to a quality education that enables them to achieve their potential and participate fully in the social, economic, and educational opportunities of our state and nation. Yet despite many years of reform efforts, too many schools are falling short of fulfilling this mission.

To understand the magnitude of the challenge, it is helpful to look at Children At Risk’s 2015 school rankings data. During the 2013-2014 school year, 431 district and charter schools in the greater Houston area (elementary, middle, and high schools combined) received a grade of A based on their student achievement and achievement growth.⁴ These schools, spread across eight counties (Harris, Fort Bend, Montgomery, Brazoria, Galveston, Chambers, Liberty, and Waller), were educating about 420,600 students or approximately one-third of all public school students in the region.

On the other hand, 439 schools received a grade of D or F, and they were educating more than 362,000 students (*see Table 1; additional data provided in attachments*). This represents the real and urgent need for quality schools.

When people think of “good” (A) or “bad” (D or F) schools, stereotypes often come to mind, but in fact there is a great deal of variability among the schools in each category. For example, there are high performing public schools in which the vast majority of the students are economically disadvantaged. Children At Risk compiles an annual list of these “Gold Ribbon” schools (*see table in the attachments for more information*).

At the other end of the spectrum, the D and F schools also vary widely. For example:

- Some of the F schools are small (about 200 students), while others are quite large (over 1,100); the average enrollment was 760 students.
- Almost 40 percent of the F schools in the Houston area (71 of the 189) were in the Houston Independent School District (HISD), while the rest were spread across other local districts and charters.
- Across the F schools, the percentage of White students ranges from 1 to 68 percent; the percentages of African American and Hispanic students range from 3 to 100 percent.
- In some of the F schools, almost every student was eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, but in others, only about half were.⁵

Table 1: Number and Enrollment of District and Charter Schools in the Houston Area Rated D or F in 2015 Children At Risk School Rankings

	Number (%) of schools rated D or F	Number of students in these schools
Elementary schools	270 (31%)	179,156 (28%)
Middle schools	106 (34%)	81,599 (30%)
High schools	60 (37%)	101,385 (33%)

Based on analyses using the 2015 Children At Risk data file. Includes schools in Harris, Fort Bend, Montgomery, Brazoria, Galveston, Chambers, Liberty, and Waller counties.

What the lowest rated schools also have in common, by definition, is dismal performance. Across more than half of the F middle schools, for example, the percentages of students performing at the “advanced” level on the state’s STAAR assessments (the level associated with being on track for college and career readiness) were in single digits.

Students who fail to master crucial skills and content in middle school are at much higher risk of dropping out before completing high school, and if they do graduate and pursue postsecondary education, their likelihood of earning a degree is very low.⁶ This, in turn, leads to limited job prospects and earnings.⁷ All of this falls vastly short of the mission of the state’s public education system.

Demand for Choice: Applications to HISD Magnet Schools and Local Charter Schools

These data on the numbers and enrollment of low-performing schools represent one way to enumerate the level of need for quality schools. Another way is to examine parents’ efforts to find alternatives to their local neighborhood schools—that is, to try to exercise the school choice options available to them (assuming, of course, that alternative options are available). We do so first by studying the numbers of applications to district magnet schools, then the growth of the charter sector.

HISD has by far the most extensive school choice system in the region as a result of the city’s size and desegregation history; this yields concrete data on parental demand for alternatives. An analysis of the numbers and distribution of HISD magnet school applications uncovers some surprising findings:

- During the 2015-2016 school year, HISD had **18,569 magnet seats** at the elementary, middle, and high school level and received **71,743 applications** for those seats. In other words, there were almost four applications for every seat. (*Note: The latter number reflects applications rather than students, since a student often applies to more than one school.*)
- Only five magnet schools received fewer applications than the number of seats available.
- 14 magnet programs were “oversubscribed” by least 1,000. In these highly sought-after programs, the number of applicants per seat ranged from 2.5 to more than 30 (*see Table 2*).
- All of these oversubscribed magnet schools received high grades (A or B) from Children At Risk. Thus, the relationship between magnet school quality and appeal to parents exercising school choice appears to be strong.

Table 2: Magnet School Demand in HISD, 2015-2016

Schools	Children At Risk Rating	No. of Applications	No. of Seats Available	Gap	No. of Applications per Seat
The Rice School K-8	A-	2,880	172	2,708	16.7
T.H. Rogers K-8	A+	3,024	319	2,705	9.5
Pin Oak Middle School	A+	2,392	163	2,229	14.7
Bellaire High School	A+	2,022	194	1,828	10.4
River Oaks Elementary	A+	1,705	56	1,649	30.4
Lanier Middle School	A+	1,903	270	1,633	7.0
Lamar High School	A	2,710	1,100	1,610	2.5
Carnegie Vanguard High School	A+	1,741	234	1,507	7.4
DeBakey High School	A+	1,611	259	1,352	6.2
Reagan High School	B-	1,517	220	1,297	6.9
HSPVA	A+	1,436	175	1,261	8.2
Pershing Middle School	B+	1,452	200	1,252	7.3
Baylor College of Medicine @ Ryan	A+	1,617	400	1,217	4.0
Johnston Middle School	B	1,501	393	1,108	3.8

Source: HISD, Magnet Two-Year Comparison Applications and Seats, 2014-2015 and 2016-2017.

Parents' and education reformers' dissatisfaction with low-performing district schools has also fueled the growth of charter school enrollment over the past few decades:

- In the five-year period from 2009-2010 to 2014-2015, charter enrollment **doubled** in Texas.
- During the 2014-2015 school year, **approximately 280,000 students were being educated in charter schools across the state**, representing about 5 percent of the state's 5.1 million public school students (*see Figure 1*).⁸
- In the Houston area, **61,540 students are enrolled in charter schools** according to Children At Risk. This includes approximately 28,500 students in elementary schools, 27,000 in middle schools, and 6,200 in high schools.⁹

But despite the remarkable pace of charter growth, the sector has been unable to grow fast enough to keep up with demand. Statewide, the Texas Charter School Association reports that more than 105,000 students are on charter waitlists.¹⁰ And according to Families Empowered, the Harmony, KIPP, and YES Prep charter school systems in Houston had to place roughly **25,200 applications on their waitlists** in 2015-2016.¹¹ As shown in the map in the attachments, the demand for seats in high-performing charters is not evenly distributed; it tends to be concentrated in particular communities.

Collectively, these district and charter data provide strong evidence of the high level of demand for quality district and charter school options.

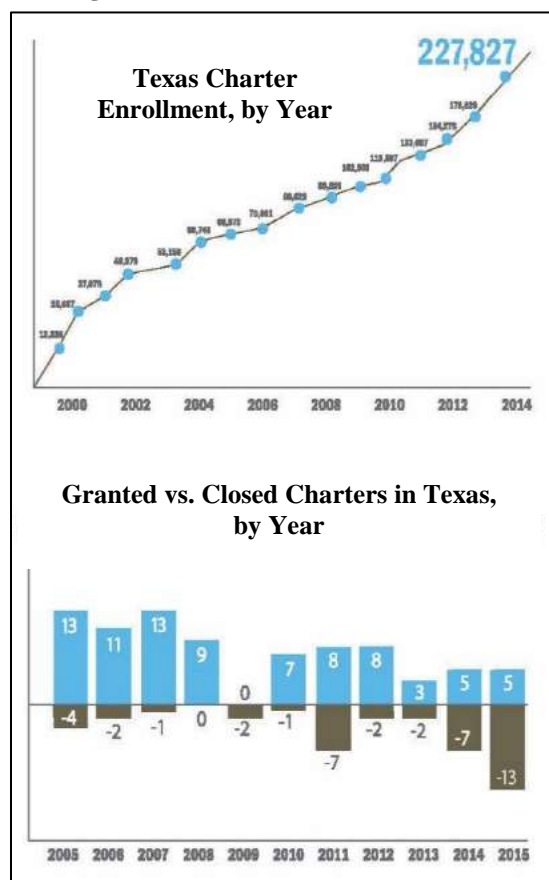
Comparing the Performance of District and Charter Schools

As both critics and advocates of charter schools point out, not all students moving from traditional district schools to charter schools are better served. As our own analyses show (*see Appendix tables for more details*), almost one out of every five middle school students attending charter schools in the greater Houston area are in a school rated D or F by Children At Risk. This compares with one out of every three students attending traditional public (i.e., non-charter) schools. At the high school level, nearly one out of every ten charter school students are attending D or F schools, compared with one of every three students attending traditional public schools.

Researchers comparing the performance of charter and traditional public schools overall have also found mixed results:

- A 2009 RAND analysis of charter middle and high schools in eight states found no evidence that they were skimming the highest-achieving students from traditional public schools and that charter students performed similarly to peers in traditional public schools. The charter students were more likely to graduate and attend college, however.¹²
- A 2009 study conducted by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford found wide performance differences among charter schools across the U.S. "A

Figure 1: Texas Charter School Trends



Source: Texas Charter Schools Association

decent fraction (17 percent) provide superior education opportunities for their students,” the authors wrote, but “almost half have results that are no different from the local public school options and 37 percent deliver learning results that are significantly worse than their students would have realized had they remained in traditional public schools.”¹³

- A follow-up CREDO study in 2013 found that the charter sector overall had improved since 2009. “On average, students attending charter schools have eight additional days of learning in reading and the same days of learning in math per year compared to peers in traditional public schools (TPS),” the authors wrote. “In both subjects, the trend is on an upward trajectory, with the relative performance of the charter sector improving each year.”¹⁴
- Multiple studies of KIPP charter schools conducted by Mathematica have found positive results. The latest, based on five years of data, found that KIPP schools have “positive, statistically significant, and educationally meaningful impacts on student achievement, particularly at the elementary and middle school levels,” while serving a student population that is predominantly low-income and minority.¹⁵
- A 2015 CREDO study found that urban charter school students overall were achieving higher levels of annual growth in math and reading than their TPS peers. The gains were especially large for Black, Hispanic, and low-income students; the gains for low-income minority students amounted to months of additional learning per year.¹⁶
- The same study also found that some urban areas had no charter schools that performed better than TPS alternatives in terms of achievement gains, and many were significantly worse. Charter students in these communities “lag the learning gains of their TPS peers to a distressingly large degree,” the study authors noted.
- Traditional public school students in Texas *overall* outperformed their charter school peers, according to CREDO researchers. But in Houston and Dallas, charter school students outperformed their TPS peers in reading and math, equal to 14 days of extra learning per subject. Moreover, the academic advantage for Texas charter students increased the longer they stayed in a charter school. Their math and reading growth tended to decline initially, then rebound, and by their third and fourth years, their gains far exceeded TPS.¹⁷
- A recent study in Florida found that although attending a charter school did not have a significant impact (overall) on students’ test scores, charter school students were more likely than their traditional district school peers to persist in college.¹⁸
- Many researchers have found problems with the performance of online charter schools. In 2015, a national CREDO study found that their students overall made far less academic growth than TPS peers in bricks-and-mortar schools, and the results for low-income students in online charter schools were even worse. The authors wrote, “the percent of online charter schools whose students have weaker growth than their comparison is concerning.” They noted that these overall data mask positive results for online charter schools in a few states, however, and urged others to learn from these examples.¹⁹

There are many reasons for the variability in charter school quality, but among the most important are weak authorizing criteria and inadequate processes for revoking low-performing charters. This also helps to explain why the sector as a whole has been improving as more states have strengthened their charter laws.

Our own state illustrates this trend. Until recently, Texas was very slow to close low-performing charter schools, which helps to explain why its charter sector overall did poorly in both the 2009 and 2013

CREDO studies. Yet this scenario has changed as a result of a new law passed in 2013, which tightened charter oversight and intervention.²⁰ In the spring of 2015, for example, 15 charter schools (62 campuses) were closed in Texas—one of the highest closure rates in the country.²¹

Collectively, these research findings convey that charter performance still varies considerably, despite progress over time, but that the best charters are achieving exceptional results. This is apparent in local data, too. For instance, a 2015 Children At Risk study found that 21 Houston-area charter campuses/networks were “beating the odds”—i.e., beating the state in STAAR testing for all subjects and grades among low-income, Black, and Hispanic students. The authors wrote, “These charters are fulfilling their intended mission by taking students that, by traditional measures, should have less success and instead are giving them the tools necessary for success in academia.”²²

Data on postsecondary outcomes for high-performing charter schools in Houston provide additional evidence of their beneficial impact over the long term. When a 2011 study showed that 33 percent of the students in KIPP’s first graduating class of eighth graders had earned a college degree within six years,²³ many observers were impressed that these completion numbers were far better than the national average for low-income students (8 percent) and comparable to those for young adults overall (31 percent). Even more significant to some was the fact that KIPP was tracking its college outcomes, since most traditional public schools do not.

But KIPP’s leaders were dissatisfied with these outcomes and determined to do much better. As one writer described, the report “changed the No Excuses narrative almost instantly from college acceptance to college completion.”²⁴ KIPP made significant investments in programming aimed at better preparing all of its students for college, as well as partnering with colleges and universities across the country to ensure strong support once they got there. As a result, by 2014, the CMO had raised the college completion rate for its graduates to 44 percent. And its leaders still were not satisfied; their goal is for 80 percent of “KIPPsters” to earn a four-year degree, equivalent to the rate for students in the highest income quartile.²⁵

College outcomes are also impressive for another CMO born in Houston, YES Prep. All of its students are required to be admitted to a four-year college, and its six-year college completion rate is similar to KIPP’s. Furthermore, average SAT scores for YES Prep’s African American students are significantly above not only the national average for African American students but also the national average for *all* students. Additionally, less than 5 percent of graduates are required to take remedial coursework when they get to college. “Within the No Excuses world,” one author noted, “a strong case can be made that YES Prep graduates are as academically ready for college as anybody.”²⁶

The Result of Ad Hoc Charter Growth and Population Shifts: Empty Seats

The growth of high-performing charter schools in Houston and elsewhere has expanded the supply of quality options for low-income families who want to exercise school choice. But this capacity expansion—combined with changes in population density in urban areas and resistance to closing schools—has resulted in a glut of empty seats in many public school buildings.

Because this problem is most pronounced in the most highly urbanized areas, it is helpful to study HISD’s situation as an example. Estimates based on current enrollment and capacity data indicate that although some HISD campuses are overenrolled, there are *approximately 46,000 open seats in district schools* (see Figure 2).²⁷ In other words, roughly 17 percent of all seats in the district are unoccupied.

A deeper analysis suggests that as many as 130 of the district's 257 schools have at least 100 open seats (*Figure 3*). Some of these seats are in higher performing schools (those rated A or B by Children At Risk), but estimates indicate that almost two-thirds are in the lowest performing schools. At the middle school level, for example, the number of open seats in the 15 low-performing schools that are the most severely underutilized range from approximately 310 to 880 empty seats each, for a total of almost 8,000 empty seats. At the high school level, five of the district's lowest performing schools appear to be less than half full based on enrollment and capacity data.

These capacity data have financial consequences. HISD uses a decentralized budget system based on weighted student funding, so each school receives its budget allocation based on the number and characteristics of the students it enrolls. Underenrolled schools, by definition, receive less money.

Historically, HISD has used a small school subsidy to provide a funding boost to small campuses, and as enrollment has dropped in some of the lowest-performing schools, some of them have become eligible for the subsidy.²⁸ The end result is that schools that fewer and fewer families are choosing are rewarded with extra funding, even though history shows that the additional money seldom restores the school's enrollment and performance.

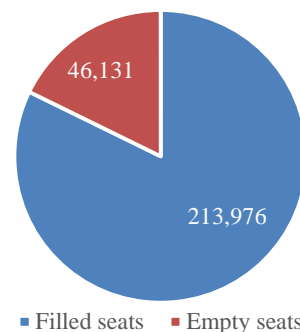
Enrollment vs. capacity gaps like these are not unique to HISD. And as many have seen (e.g., Kansas City, Philadelphia, Chicago, and others), operating a large number of underutilized schools is a costly and complex proposition. During easier financial times, a district can sometimes find ways to keep dwindling schools afloat to avoid closures. But it is a different matter when budget times are hard. In 2013 and 2014, for example, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) decided not to close schools or reduce school budgets despite declining enrollment; the district elected to use funds from a surplus in another area of the budget to ensure that no school would experience a decrease in funding under CPS's per-pupil funding formula.²⁹ Now, however, CPS is facing a \$1.1 billion budget deficit, and both school-based budget cuts and closings are again on the table.

Can Districts Significantly Increase the Supply of Quality School Seats?

Over the years, school districts in the Houston area, like their counterparts elsewhere, have invested huge amounts of time and money into efforts to expand the supply of high-quality schools and decrease the number of acutely and chronically low-performing schools. They have done so primarily through two methods: turnarounds and new school models.

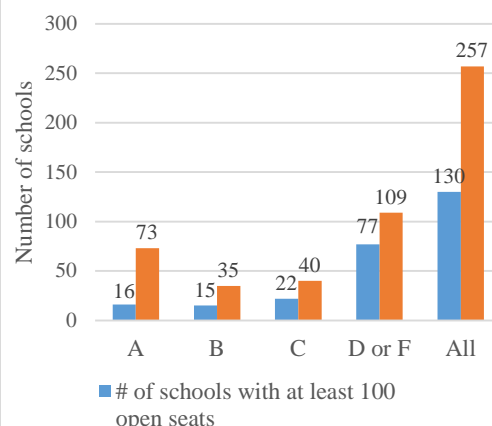
School turnarounds

Figure 2: Number of Empty Seats in HISD Schools, 2015-2016



Calculated based on HISD membership summary and detail reports, Dec. 2015. Includes students in pre-k. See endnotes for more information on.

Figure 3: Number of HISD Schools with at Least 100 Open Seats, by CAR School Grade



Based on analyses of 2015 HISD school capacity/enrollment data and Children At Risk rankings data.

Like every other urban district across the country (and many edge-city districts, too), HISD has had a number of schools that have not been able to shed their history of low achievement despite a plethora of reform efforts. When former HISD superintendent Terry Grier was challenged to decide what to do with nine of the district's lowest-performing campuses, he had four options available to him under state law: he could reconstitute them, allow a CMO to operate the schools, implement programmatic changes, or close them. Grier chose the first option, developing a plan called Apollo 20 designed to integrate five best practices from high-performing charters into these schools: an expanded school day and year, data-driven instruction, excellence in teaching and school leadership, a culture of high expectations, and intensive tutoring.

Some of the Apollo program's early results appeared to be encouraging.³⁰ But the turnaround initiative was expensive (by mid-2013, HISD had spent roughly \$59 million on the initiative, funded by mix of federal and district money supplemented by private donations).³¹ And although one of the Apollo partners, EdLabs, cited research demonstrating the program's positive impact, an independent analysis revealed a more mixed picture. Kinder Institute researcher Ruth Lopez Turley reaffirmed the positive impact of the initiative's tutoring component but concluded the following:

The Apollo program implemented five bold strategies that aimed to improve the achievement of highly disadvantaged students attending the worst-performing schools in HISD. Taken together, these strategies had positive effects on math gains but negligible effects on reading gains. The reported effects were stronger when the analyses included students that were zoned to, but not actually enrolled in, Apollo schools, and there was no evidence that these effects persist over time. There was also no evidence of improved human capital among teachers or principals.³²

The outcomes of the Apollo program are not atypical. Nationally, the results of turnaround efforts have often been largely disappointing. Schools may improve for a few years but then often slip back into low performance. There are many reasons why this happens. A report from the Wallace Foundation identified some of the significant reasons, including:

- *Research*—Lack of research and evidence on how to implement and scale up effective turnarounds.
- *Public/political will*—Key actors find it difficult to make the hard decisions needed to turn around schools. Moreover, ongoing leadership and governance changes make it challenging to sustain change efforts over time.
- *Conditions*—District and state policies and conditions are often contrary to what is needed to be successful in turnaround efforts.³³

On the latter point, it is worth noting that school districts in Texas will have a different set of options in the future for what to do with their lowest performing schools as a result of recent policy changes. House Bill 1842, approved by Texas lawmakers in 2015, specifies that any school receiving two consecutive “IR” (Intervention Required) ratings will be required to create and implement an improvement plan. And if the school fails to improve by the end of the fifth year, the Commissioner of Education has the authority to order the school's closure or assign an emergency board to oversee the whole district.³⁴ This policy shift could further amplify the pressure on district leaders to achieve demonstrable results and cause them to think differently about the strategic options available to them.

The bottom line is that reviving a chronically struggling school is difficult and rare. Often, its reputation has been so badly damaged by years of low performance that people remain dubious of its “brand” (sometimes for generations) even when improvements *do* occur. In other words, it is very hard for a school to shed an image of failure.³⁵

As a result, chronically low-performing schools often see steady attrition of families with wherewithal. Some move their children to magnets or other public schools, either by following the rules of choice or by falsifying their address. As we have seen, some apply to charter schools, if such options are available, and if they can make it through the lottery and secure a seat. Some transition to private schools if they can afford them or receive a scholarship. Regardless of where they go, these students are gone, and the peers left behind are often those with the most significant challenges. At HISD's Kashmere High School (one of the first round of Apollo Schools), for example, more than 27 percent of the students are now in special education.³⁶

Some believe that the most straightforward fix to the challenge of chronically low-performing and underenrolled schools is to close them. HISD did end up closing some of the Apollo schools due to ongoing low performance and shrinking enrollment. But nobody likes to close schools and leave behind an empty building. Neighborhoods want better schools—not closed schools.

Furthermore, researchers in other cities have found that the students who are moved to another school as a result of a closure often fall even further behind. For example, a study in Chicago found that 8 out of 10 Chicago Public Schools students who were displaced by school closings ended up transferring to another severely low-performing school. One year after the school closings, the displaced students who enrolled in other weak schools (those with test scores in the bottom quartile of all schools districtwide) ended up losing more than a month's worth of learning in reading and math. Those who were displaced to *better* schools, on the other hand (those in the top quartile systemwide), ended up making achievement gains that amounted to almost two months of instruction in math and one month in reading.³⁷

The problem, as we have seen throughout this paper, is that even if a district closes its underenrolled and underperforming schools, ***there are not nearly enough “better” schools*** to absorb their students. To make a high-quality education accessible to all students, it is therefore sensible to consider creating new schools, with a successful new brand, and giving students in the area (and beyond) the opportunity to attend.

New schools

HISD has launched new schools with considerable success; the following are a few examples. Each of these is a magnet without an attendance zone. Some of them have entry criteria, while others have an open enrollment lottery system. All of them have been successful in attracting students, and the early performance results are very positive.

- ❖ ***Challenge Early College High School*** is a “no-zone” high school that educates students in grades 9 through 13 on a campus shared with Houston Community College. This innovative high school opened in August 2003 through a partnership of HISD, Houston A+ Challenge, and Houston Community College. After being housed in temporary buildings for its first two years, the school moved into a newly constructed school within HCC in August 2005 as part of a joint project of HISD and HCC. By integrating the high school curriculum with dual credit college courses, Challenge makes it possible for its students to graduate with a high school diploma and an associate's degree. The school has earned extensive recognition over the years, including #79 in the nation and #21 in the state on *The Washington Post's* list of America's Most Challenging High Schools. In 2011, Challenge was recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School.

Challenge Early College High School has also earned consistently high ratings from Children At Risk (e.g., an A+ in the 2015 rankings), and as seen earlier, the number of applications it receives far exceeds the number of seats available. For the 2015-2016 school year, it received 1,124 applications for the 142 open slots. It currently enrolls 450 students, 69 percent of whom are economically disadvantaged. (*See attachments for additional information on enrollment and capacity in this and other schools that HISD has created.*)

The successful early college high school model has been successfully replicated across Texas and all over the country. And the evaluation results are very positive overall. Researchers have found, for example, that ECHS students are significantly more likely to enroll in college than comparison students (81 percent vs. 72 percent) and to earn a college degree (25 percent within the study period, vs. 5 percent of comparison students).³⁸

- ❖ ***Mickey Leland's College Preparatory Academy for Young Men*** is an all-boys magnet school (i.e., no attendance zone) educating students in grades 6-12. In July 2009, amid protests from elected officials, the HISD school board considered closing E.O. Smith School, a campus that was rated academically unacceptable by the state and whose enrollment had shrunk to 139 students. The following December (again amid protests), the board approved creation of a new all-boys school in the E.O. Smith building, in which all students would be required to wear blazers and ties. Some in the historically black Fifth Ward were upset that the school would require students to apply (i.e., students zoned to Smith would be rezoned to other campuses).³⁹

The school opened in the fall of 2011, and by 2015-2016, there were 420 students enrolled, 73 percent of whom were economically disadvantaged. The school received more than two applications for every seat available: 509 applications for 220 slots). Moreover, Leland attracts students from across HISD as well as 41 students from outside the district (*see Attachments*). In 2015, the school earned distinctions in a variety of areas from the Texas Education Agency, including achievement in reading, math, and social studies; closing performance gaps; and postsecondary readiness. It also received an A- in the 2015 Children At Risk rankings.

- ❖ ***Baylor College of Medicine Academy at Ryan*** opened in Fall 2013 at a school with a long history of low performance. Over the years, HISD leaders had tried numerous reforms and invested large amounts of money in efforts to attract more families to Ryan Middle School and improve its low-performing status. In 2008, HISD Superintendent Abe Saavedra and the trustees approved a costly and controversial reconstitution of Ryan's staff,⁴⁰ but it did not yield the turnaround that the district or community wanted. A few years later, Ryan was among HISD's first 20 Apollo schools, Superintendent Terry Grier's signature reform program, receiving extra staffing, time, and resources. Yet the school still struggled. In May 2012, when the HISD board considered closing the school, enrollment was down to 265 students (compared with 780 a decade earlier). At that time, HISD Middle School Officer Dallas Dance informed the board that HISD had supplemented the school's budget by an average of \$438,000 annually over the past five years.⁴¹ The following year (2012-2013), HISD spent more money on the school, including funding five additional teachers. By this time, Ryan's annual budget was roughly \$2 million—almost double that of a nearby middle school that was educating twice many students.⁴²

The HISD school board voted to close Ryan in March 2013, amid protests. The next month, the board approved the creation of a new magnet program at the campus called the Baylor College of Medicine Academy at Ryan, serving students in grades 6 through 8.⁴³ Baylor College of Medicine (BCM)'s Center for Educational Outreach helped create the program and health-based curriculum, and BCM also conducts professional development for teachers at the school, provides science and health curriculum content and resources, facilitates and evaluates joint activities of the Ryan school teachers with BCM faculty and students, and encourages collaboration between Ryan and DeBakey High School teachers and students. All classes are pre-AP, and enrollment is open to students throughout the district, who are chosen by lottery if the number of applicants exceeds the number of slots. The school earned an A+ in the 2015 Children At Risk school rankings, and by 2015-16, it received more than four applications for every available seat (i.e., more than 1,600 applications for 400 seats). The school enrolled 787 students, 81 percent of whom were Black or Hispanic, and 59 percent of whom were economically disadvantaged.

- ❖ ***Energy Institute High School***, another innovative magnet school approved in April 2013, became the nation's first magnet school with a focus on energy.⁴⁴ Students are chosen through an open enrollment lottery, and in the school's first year (2013-2014), the number of applicants was three times the number of seats available. A total of 564 students now attend the school, which uses a project-based learning model and partners with the Independent Petroleum Institute of America. The Energy Institute was initially located at Holden Elementary, a vacant HISD school in the Heights, then moved across town to the recently closed Dodson Elementary.⁴⁵ The school's new but loyal enrollment remained despite the move. A new, permanent campus on the site of Lockhart Elementary School in Third Ward is planned through the district's recent bond. In 2015-2016, the school had two applications for every available seat (i.e., more than 1,100 applications for 550 open slots). It enrolled 564 students this school year, approximately 84 percent of whom are Black or Hispanic and 69 percent of whom are low income.⁴⁶

These examples illustrate how a district can expand the menu of school choices available to families by launching new schools—schools that are attracting students from across the community and demonstrating exemplary results. In some cases, they are also achieving a mix of students with differing race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status.⁴⁷ It remains to be seen, however, whether these schools will demonstrate the same intense commitment demonstrated by KIPP, YES Prep, Harmony, and other high-performing charter schools to ensuring that their students are not only college-ready but are also equipped to persist through completion of a degree.

Furthermore, despite these district successes, the exodus to charter school continues, and the need for seats in quality schools continues to far exceed the available supply.

Can High-Performing Charter Schools Meet the Need for Quality School Seats?

High-performing charter schools in Houston and nationally have shown that they are capable of steady growth. As of late 2015, KIPP had roughly 70,000 students across the country. Harmony had more than 28,500 across Texas. IDEA had almost 20,000, Aspire had nearly 15,000, and many others were in the 9,000 to 13,000 range. As a recent analysis by Bellwether Education Partners concluded, “High-performing CMOs comprise [an] increasing share of charter growth, and some have reached unprecedented scale while maintaining strong performance.”⁴⁸

How does the growth and health of the charter sector in Texas compare with other states? In other words, is Texas a “greenfield”⁴⁹ for charter growth, or are state and local policies having a constrictive effect? A recent report from the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools suggests the latter, as Texas ranks #11 out of 18 states in the health and growth of the charter movement. Although 16 communities across the state now have a charter market share above 10 percent, the percentage of Texas public school students enrolled in charters remains low, at about 5 percent.⁵⁰

What about the Houston area? Is it a greenfield for charter expansion? Historically, it has been; it is well known that this city was the birthplace of some of the nation's high-performing charter schools, including KIPP and YES Prep. These two CMOs, along with Harmony Public Schools, have grown steadily in the number of schools and enrollment over time while maintaining quality. In the 2015 Children At Risk school rankings, for example, all four YES Prep high school campuses received grades of A or A+, as did KIPP Houston High School and the Harmony Science Academy. At the middle school level, eight Harmony schools, five YES Prep schools, and four KIPP schools were rated A or B, though some other campuses received lower grades.

While Houston seems to be a favorable place for high-caliber charters to grow, however, state policies invariably constrain charter growth here. Furthermore, experts predict that the charter movement as a whole will face considerable challenges in the future. A recent study by Bellwether Education Partners

grouped challenges to charter growth into three categories: scaling, policy and politics, and quality (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Challenges for Charter Schools as Market Share Increases

Scaling	Policy & Politics	Quality
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of access to facilities • Insufficient pipeline of high-quality human capital • Effective board governance will be more challenging as sector scales • Building a pipeline of quality new schools (e.g., new starts, expansion of high-performing CMOs, etc) • Securing start-up capital • Reliance on a narrow base of philanthropic support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political opposition will intensify as movement grows • State policies create barriers to growth or undermine quality • Inequitable funding for operations and facilities • Lack of racial/ethnic diversity among charter leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ineffective authorizing remains a significant challenge • Too many poor-performing charter schools persist • Concerns about equity, students served, etc.

Source: Adapted from Bellwether Education Partners, *The State of the Charter School Movement*, Sept. 2015

The Bellwether report highlighted Texas for raising its charter cap, empowering the Commissioner of Education to close low-performing charters (via Senate Bill, passed by the legislature in 2013, and reducing fiscal inequity between charters and district schools in recent years (one of 15 states to do so). But one of the biggest challenges to charter growth in the Houston area remains: lack of access to facilities and facilities funding. It not only forces charters to use operating dollars to pay for facilities but also leads to inequitable learning opportunities for charter school students. For example, the schools that charters build or acquire often lack libraries, science labs, sports facilities, and other features that benefit students. While deconstructing Texas school finance lies beyond the scope of this report, it is important to note that the lack of facilities funding for charter schools in Texas is an important difference in how they and district schools are funded and a key barrier to their expansion.

The bottom line is that because districts are often resistant to sharing space with charters, Houston (like many other communities) is experiencing the proliferation of new charter school facilities at the same time growing numbers of seats in some district schools sit vacant. The author of an *Education Next* article entitled “Whose School Buildings Are They, Anyway?” reminded readers that these buildings belong to the public:

The denial of facilities funding would be less problematic if charter schools had routine access to existing buildings that had been built for public school use and already paid for with tax dollars. But the laws governing school facilities were written a century or more before charters existed, when there was only one kind of “public school” in this country. Under such legacy laws, traditional districts remain the sole proprietor, able to make fairly arbitrary decisions about who else might benefit from these public goods.⁵¹

Some states, such as California and Colorado, require school districts to share facilities with charters. For example California’s Proposition 39 gives charter schools the legal right to access district facilities, and Senate Bill 740 provides facilities subsidies for charters utilizing private space. Colorado provides charters the opportunity to participate in local bonds and prohibits charging rent for using district space.⁵²

Texas does not address the facilities issue either with funding or by mandating partnerships. A few districts in the Houston area—such as Spring Branch and Aldine—are forging their own facility use agreements with charters, but these are the exceptions rather than the rule.

As a result of facilities challenges and other barriers to expansion, the number of high-quality CMOs operating in Houston remains fairly small, and despite their impressive pace of growth, they are still addressing only a fraction of the need for seats in quality schools. Even if other charter operators enter the Houston market, evidence from elsewhere shows that it often takes time to become established and grow. And turmoil is not unusual. For example, Rocketship scaled back its planned expansion efforts after it encountered difficulties with its school replication efforts in Washington, D.C. and Tennessee.⁵³ Similarly, Houston-based CMO YES Prep cancelled its plans to expand in Memphis due to changes in district policy related to co-locations as well as community resistance and pushback.⁵⁴

Given these and other challenges to charter schools' growth, and in light of the magnitude of the need, it seems highly unlikely that they will be able to meet the entire need to significantly expand high-quality educational opportunities in the Houston area.

Strategic Options for Districts and Charters: Coexist or Collaborate?

Collectively, the evidence presented above suggests that both districts and charter schools are capable of expanding the supply of quality schools by incubating and replicating effective school models. Yet the magnitude of the challenge at hand appears to be bigger than either can address alone. It therefore seems crucial to ask the question: *is it time to bridge the divide between districts and charters?*

We are not the only ones asking this question. The authors of a recent Public Impact report reflected, “For the foreseeable future, most cities are likely to continue with a blend of these sectors. So we want to know, can they peacefully co-exist? Can they do better than that? Can they actually collaborate in the service of students, families, and the public interest?”⁵⁵

A growing number of leaders in urban districts around the country clearly believe that the answer is “yes.” As experts at the Center for Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington observed:

As charter schools continue to expand across the country, and especially where they serve large percentages of a community's children, school districts and charter schools are increasingly choosing to abandon negative competition in favor of collaborative partnership. This is not to say that charter schools have moved from the margins to the mainstream or that they never face fierce opposition. But in a growing number of communities across America, the relationship between charter schools and districts is transforming, from the traditional paradigm of opposition, competition, and indifference to a partnership based on trust and collaboration through a shared mission, shared resources, and shared responsibility.⁵⁶

In light of this trend, we propose that Houston area leaders consider whether district and charter schools should continue to merely coexist or whether it would be better to collaborate much more fully and more strategically. In other words:

- **COEXIST**—Continue the current situation, in which district and charter schools operate in largely separate spheres; or
- **COLLABORATE**—Leaders from districts and the charter sector join with other community and educational leaders to develop a unified strategy for expanding the supply of quality schools based on need and demand.

What might a collaborative approach look like? There are many possibilities. The Public Impact report describes a variety of permutations, providing case studies on district-charter collaborations in Boston, Cleveland, Washington, D.C., and other cities.

Collaboration can include information sharing (e.g., sharing of best practices) or partnering on certain programs (e.g., on principal training or professional development for teachers). It can also include more intensive forms of collaboration. One example is a ***common application system*** to make it much easier for families to navigate school choice. Such systems often include common application dates across all participating schools, a single application form where families can list their school preferences, a matching process (using an algorithm agreed upon by the district and participating schools), and a process for families to accept or appeal the match they receive.

Many cities across the U.S. have either implemented or are in the process of implementing common application and/or common enrollment systems. Some of these efforts appear to have gone smoothly while others have been controversial, raising fears about why and how they are being implemented or what the downstream consequences might be for traditional public schools. As a recent brief from the Center for Reinventing Public Education noted, however, “common enrollment systems can benefit cities and districts by eliminating the need to authenticate results from multiple charter lotteries, and by providing data on school demand throughout the city that can inform strategic decisions about managing the school supply.”⁵⁷

Another option for district-charter collaboration is to “***co-locate***” ***charters in underenrolled district schools***. Though operationally complex and sometimes controversial, the latter offers a “win-win,” as many district schools have empty space and quality charter schools need space to grow. Recently, the new leader of the Los Angeles school district, Michelle King, expressed support for state rules requiring the district to provide available classroom space to charters. “Sharing space is appropriate because these are all public schools. We have to get to working together to serve all kids.” She then added: “When it comes to delivering a strong education, this is something we need to do together. I can’t do this alone.”⁵⁸

Over the past several years, a growing number of urban school leaders across the U.S. have embraced these and other forms of district-charter partnering in an effort to strategically expand the supply of high-quality school options for families, breaking down the silos that have been the norm.⁵⁹

Coexist or Collaborate?
Strategic Options for Expanding the Supply of Quality Schools

	COEXIST		COLLABORATE
	Districts continue to try to turn around failing schools and launch new schools	Charters continue to replicate successful models	Districts and charters work together strategically to expand access to quality schools
Rationale / justification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Districts will continue to educate the vast majority of students in the future Districts have more capacity to scale up successful models District schools have direct governance oversight by elected school boards Neighborhood schools are the heart of the community Charter schools vary in quality, so expanding charter schools is not a panacea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charter schools are public schools Parent choice is the ultimate accountability Districts are bureaucratic and inefficient Districts have not been able to turn around failing schools⁶⁰ The state can close failing charters without becoming embroiled in local politics Districts should relinquish control when reforms are having too little impact⁶¹ Long waitlists for high-performing charters show strong demand Philanthropy is supportive of charters' mission and results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Districts and charter schools have the same mission No matter what kind of school they attend, the kids are all "our kids" Collaboration is the best way to expand quality schools and achieve economies of scale Most districts have under-enrolled schools, and charters need facilities to grow Districts and charters need to work together to remove existing barriers to school choice Partnering is fair to taxpayers who support district facility improvements but have their children in charter schools
Implementation challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainable funding to pay for reforms / new schools Community resistance to change Potential decline in taxpayer support Human capital challenges (supply of quality principals, teachers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilities funding Policy, funding, cultural, and other obstacles to growth Lack of economies of scale Human capital challenges (supply of quality principals, teachers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anti-charter attitudes Complexities/time demands inherent in collaboration Challenges of maximizing potential of collaboration Operational challenges Human capital challenges (e.g., supply of quality principals, teachers)
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Continue turnaround efforts with positive results</i> <i>Magnet schools</i> <i>New no-zone schools</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Expansion efforts underway in most cities</i> <i>Houston is tied for 18th nationally in charter market share (21%)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Information and data sharing</i> <i>Joint programs (e.g., professional development)</i> <i>Common application systems</i> <i>Facilities sharing</i>

Some of the most dynamic and innovative work has been taking place through a “portfolio districts” program orchestrated by the Center for Reinventing Public Education (CRPE). Though there are many misconceptions as to what a portfolio district is, Joe Siedlecki (formerly of the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation) clarifies that simply having a decent number of charter schools in a city does not constitute a portfolio strategy. Nor is the portfolio strategy a “one-time event”—for example, leaders deciding to close x number of schools and open x number of new ones. Rather, a “true” portfolio strategy is a “problem-solving framework through which education and civic leaders develop a citywide system of high-quality, diverse, autonomous public schools.” In its purest form, it consists of at least these three elements:

1. A common definition of quality across district and charter schools,
2. Regular assessments of school quality against that definition and against neighborhood need and parent demand, and
3. A commitment to taking strategic action based on assessments of school quality, need, and demand—for example, replicating high-performing schools, growing new schools in neighborhoods with the most extreme needs, and phasing out chronically low performing schools.⁶²

Launched in 2009, CRPE’s network of cities and communities that are implementing robust portfolio strategies now includes more than 45 localities across the U.S., including New York City, Los Angeles, Boston, Baltimore, Denver, and the District of Columbia, among others. In Texas, districts that have embarked on a portfolio strategy include Austin, Spring Branch, Aldine, and Grand Prairie. Participants in the portfolio network meet regularly to share information and results, and CRPE staff use a snapshot instrument to track their progress in implementing the portfolio strategy over time. (*See attachments.*)⁶³

Denver has gone farther than most cities in using a portfolio approach to significantly expand school choice and enhance charter-district collaboration in order to grow the numbers of seats in quality schools. The superintendent, school board, and local charter leaders—with strong support from city leadership—have planned and implemented an impressive array of strategies aimed at removing common barriers to exercising choice, including:

- Developing a unified enrollment system that includes neighborhood, magnet, and charter schools in a single form;
- Bringing charter and district teachers together to develop curricula, share data, and engage in professional development;
- Collaborating to ensure that charter schools attract more special education students and are equipped to serve them well;
- Launching a new website that allows families to compare schools side by side;
- Co-locating in district facilities, to the point where 60 percent of the city’s charter schools are now occupying space in Denver Public Schools buildings;
- Allowing charter schools to share local mill levy tax revenue so that their students will be on more equal financial footing with their traditional public school peers; and
- Establishing a separate 501(c)(3) organization apart from the district to manage a cluster of “Innovation Schools allows them to be more autonomous, increasing the likelihood that they can be sustained through district leadership and governance changes that inevitably occur over time.

Overall, the development of school choice in Denver appears very promising. A 2015 study found that the majority of families participating in choice were matched to their top school pick, and the proportion of seats in highly rated schools has increased over time, especially at the high school level. The Brookings Institution Choice and Competition Index identified Denver as the best city in the country for school choice.⁶⁴

Yet there is still room for improvement. Quality seats still remain unevenly distributed across the city, and there are still not enough of them to meet demand.⁶⁵ Although the Education Equality Index ranked Denver second nationally based on its progress in narrowing achievement gaps between 2011 and 2014, it still had some of the largest achievement gaps in the nation.⁶⁶

Looking across the country at districts and communities that are exploring better ways for districts and charters to work together strategically, one sees that approaches vary, and each is in a different place in terms of implementation and progress. As a result, outcomes vary, and some places have yet to bear fruit from this work in terms of student achievement outcomes and other metrics. But what all of these communities have in common is a recognition of the urgent need for more quality public school options and a determination to expand quality options for children by doing things differently.

Closing Thoughts

Today, many young people in Houston are receiving an education that will prepare them well for anything they aspire to. But many more are tragically being cut off from future opportunities at an early age as a result of attending chronically low-performing schools. We therefore propose that it is time for Houston's district, charter, higher education, business, and community leaders to come together around a shared commitment to significantly expanding the supply of seats in high-quality schools and figuring out the best way to achieve this goal. (It is worth noting that discussions about expanding the supply of "seats" may become increasingly obsolete in the not-too-distant future as technology-based delivery such as online education and virtual schools continues to expand. Regardless, the need for expanding quality educational *opportunities* will continue to be central.)

From our perspective, it matters less whether these seats are in traditional district schools or charter schools. Though people often view districts and charters as opposing camps, this polarization is not helpful to children. The goal is to scale up what works as quickly and efficiently as possible so that all children get the education they need and deserve.

The superintendent of Indianapolis Public Schools made this point eloquently in a recent leadership profile. As the author of the profile wrote:

Lewis Ferebee may seem like an unlikely champion of charter schools. The son of educators whose own career has been built by rising through district schools' leadership ranks, he has a decidedly traditional educational pedigree . . . [and] he's the head of a struggling urban school system that many argue has been hurt even more by a fast-growing charter sector. But Ferebee shrugs off attempts to categorize him. "There's this idea that you have to be on one side or the other—you can't wave both flags," Ferebee says of district and charter schools. "The more we encourage people to wave both flags, the more effective we will be in educating our children."⁶⁷

A growing number of other people have also been making the case for a more agnostic approach to improving public education. In *The Urban School System of the Future*, for example, Andy Smarick of Bellwether Education Partners recommends replicating the best schools (those "on the right tail of the bell curve") regardless of what type of school they are—traditional, charter, or otherwise—while phasing out those in the far left tail of the curve.⁶⁸ Doing so would have a dramatic impact not only on the lives of students and their families but on the entire region. Indeed, it is essential to Houston's future economic prosperity and quality of life. We therefore hope the city's leaders will commit themselves to working together closely and collaboratively to ensure that all students have access to a high-quality school.

ATTACHMENTS

Data for Houston-Area* Elementary Schools, 2014

	# of Schools	% of Schools	Enrollment	% of Total Enrollment	Average % of Economically Disadvantaged Students	% of Students at Adv. Level in STAAR Reading	% of Students at Adv. Level in STAAR Math
ALL ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS							
A	274	31%	211,549	34%	37%	30	35
B	167	19%	124,889	20%	64%	17	21
C	159	18%	114,195	18%	77%	12	16
D	162	19%	109,001	17%	80%	9	11
F	108	12%	70,155	11%	89%	5	6
	870	100%	629,789	100%	69%	15	18
NONCHARTER							
A	258	32%	202,816	34%	35%	31	35
B	161	20%	121,371	20%	63%	17	21
C	151	18%	110,398	18%	77%	12	16
D	151	18%	104,200	17%	80%	9	11
F	96	12%	63,950	11%	89%	5	6
	817	100%	602,735	100%	69%	15	18
CHARTER							
A	16	30%	8,733	32%	77%	23	30
B	6	11%	3,518	13%	83%	16	18
C	8	15%	3,797	14%	83%	11	15
D	11	21%	4,801	18%	88%	10	9
F	12	23%	6,205	23%	88%	6	5
	53	100%	27,054	100%	84%	13	15

*Harris, Fort Bend, Montgomery, Brazoria, Galveston, Chambers, Liberty, and Waller counties.

Source: Secondary analysis of CHILDREN AT RISK 2015 school data file.

Notes:

- ✓ Half of all elementary schools in the Houston area are rated A or B, vs. 31% rated D or F.
- ✓ 28% of Houston-area elementary school students attend schools rated D or F, vs. 54% attending schools rated A or B.
- ✓ 44% of charter elementary schools are rated D or F, vs. 30% of noncharter elementary schools.
- ✓ A-rated charter schools are serving a much higher percentage of economically disadvantaged students (77% on average) compared to noncharter schools (35%).

Data for Houston-Area Middle Schools, 2014

	# of Schools	% of Schools	Enrollment	% of Total Enrollment	Average % of Economically Disadvantaged Students	% of Students at Adv. Level in STAAR Reading	% of Students at Adv. Level in STAAR Math
ALL MIDDLE SCHOOLS							
A	99	31%	97,201	35%	42%	31%	26%
B	60	19%	58,192	21%	60%	18%	12%
C	50	16%	37,787	14%	73%	14%	8%
D	56	18%	43,389	16%	75%	11%	5%
F	50	16%	38,210	14%	82%	6%	3%
	315	100%	274,779	100%	66%	16%	11%
NONCHARTER							
A	81	31%	86,145	35%	34%	34%	26%
B	52	20%	54,510	22%	56%	19%	12%
C	37	14%	31,391	13%	69%	14%	8%
D	49	19%	41,162	17%	73%	11%	5%
F	44	17%	36,119	14%	82%	6%	3%
	263	100%	249,327	100%	63%	17%	11%
CHARTER							
A	18	35%	11,056	43%	75%	21%	25%
B	8	15%	3,682	14%	87%	13%	15%
C	13	25%	6,396	25%	82%	12%	8%
D	7	13%	2,227	9%	92%	8%	5%
F	6	12%	2,091	8%	82%	4%	3%
	52	100%	25,452	100%	84%	12%	11%

**Harris, Fort Bend, Montgomery, Brazoria, Galveston, Chambers, Liberty, and Waller counties.*

Source: Secondary analysis of CHILDREN AT RISK 2015 school data file.

Notes:

- ✓ 30% of the middle school students in the Houston area attend schools rated D or F, vs. 56% attending schools rated A or B.
- ✓ 25% of charter MS are rated D or F, vs. 36% of noncharter MS.

Data for Houston-Area* High Schools, 2014

	# of Schools	% of Schools	Enrollment	% of Total Enrollment	Average % of Economically Disadvantaged Students	% of Students at Adv. Level in STAAR Reading	% of Students at Adv. Level in STAAR Math
ALL HIGH SCHOOLS							
A	58	36%	111,914	36%	38%	16	21
B	15	9%	34,801	11%	52%	6	8
C	30	18%	60,851	20%	60%	3	6
D	29	18%	56,050	18%	63%	2	4
F	31	19%	45,325	15%	72%	1	2
	163	100%	308,951	100%	57%	5	8
NONCHARTER							
A	52	34%	107,172	35%	33%	17	20
B	14	9%	34,516	11%	49%	6	8
C	29	19%	60,143	20%	58%	3	6
D	29	19%	56,060	18%	63%	2	4
F	31	20%	45,325	15%	72%	1	2
	155	100%	303,216	100%	55%	6	8
CHARTER							
A	6	75%	4,742	83%	83%	11	21
B	1	13%	285	5%	94%	0	9
C	1	13%	708	12%	93%	0	10
D	0	0%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
F	0	0%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	8	100%	5,735	100%	90%	4	13

*Harris, Fort Bend, Montgomery, Brazoria, Galveston, Chambers, Liberty, and Waller counties.

Source: Secondary analysis of CHILDREN AT RISK 2015 school data file.

Notes:

- ✓ One-third of the high school students in the Houston area are attending D or F schools.
- ✓ Charter high schools are much more likely than noncharter high schools to be rated A or B (88% vs. 41%), despite the fact that they are serving much higher percentages of economically disadvantaged students.

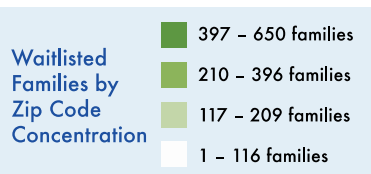
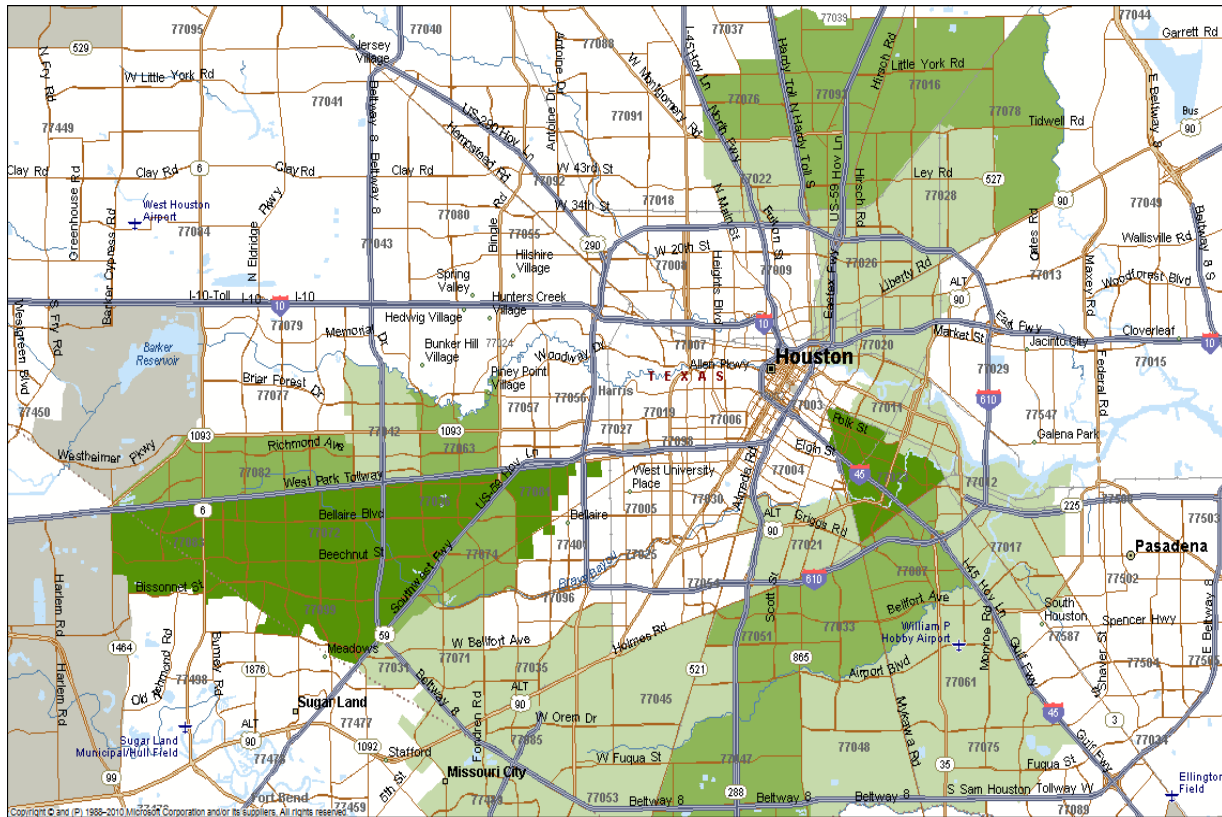
Children At Risk “Gold Ribbon” District Schools in the Houston Area, 2015

	District	Enrollment	% FRL	Demographics	Campus Perf Index Percentile
ELEMENTARY					
Park Place	Houston ISD	1,034	92%	75% Hisp; 23% Other	95
De Chaumes	Houston ISD	820	96%	97% Hisp; 1% Afr Amer	95
Lyons	Houston ISD	1,016	94%	98% Hisp; 1% Afr Amer	91
Neff	Houston ISD	730	94%	79% Hisp; 9% Afr Amer	84
Anderson	Houston ISD	637	96%	83% Hisp; 11% Afr Amer	82
Seguin	Houston ISD	664	97%	89% Hisp; 10% Afr Amer	81
Southmayd	Houston ISD	698	95%	98% Hisp; 1% Afr Amer	78
Ketelsen	Houston ISD	655	95%	98% Hisp; 1% Afr Amer	78
Golfcrest	Houston ISD	790	97%	94% Hisp; 4% Afr Amer	78
Field	Houston ISD	455	91%	91% Hisp; 5% Afr Amer	77
Briscoe	Houston ISD	421	93%	96% Hisp; 2% Afr Amer	74
Scarborough	Houston ISD	761	96%	95% Hisp; 3% Afr Amer	74
Pilgrim Academy	Houston ISD	1,115	96%	94% Hisp; 3% Afr Amer	71
Moreno	Houston ISD	807	97%	96% Hisp; 2% Afr Amer	68
Henderson	Houston ISD	795	93%	98% Hisp; 1% Afr Amer	68
Bonner	Houston ISD	988	96%	95% Hisp; 1% Afr Amer	67
Pomeroy	Pasadena ISD	968	93%	95% Hisp; 2% Afr Amer	67
Sanchez	Houston ISD	625	97%	98% Hisp; 1% Afr Amer	65
Pleasantville	Houston ISD	317	98%	21% Hisp; 77% Afr Amer	64
Carroll Academy	Aldine ISD	1,065	92%	96% Hisp; 1% Other	63
South Shaver	Pasadena ISD	645	92%	92% Hisp; 2% Afr Amer	61
Port Houston	Houston ISD	343	96%	98% Hisp; 2% Afr Amer	61
Frost	Houston ISD	597	100%	28% Hisp; 70% Afr Amer	59
Richey	Pasadena ISD	895	93%	95% Hisp; 1% Afr Amer	57
Rucker	Houston ISD	611	94%	97% Hisp; 1% Afr Amer	57
Durkee	Houston ISD	741	94%	82% Hisp; 16% Afr Amer	57
Cloverleaf	Galena Park	862	93%	89% Hisp; 1% Afr Amer	56
MIDDLE					
Pilgrim Academy	Houston ISD	1,115	96%	94% Hisp; 3% Afr Amer	82
Crenshaw	Galveston ISD	159	89%	42% Hisp; 52% White	74
Woodland Acres	Galena Park ISD	462	87%	94% Hisp; 2% Afr Amer	69
Southmore	Pasadena ISD	864	88%	92% Hisp; 3% Afr Amer	63
HIGH					
Reagan	Houston ISD	2,190	76%	83% Hisp; 11% Afr Amer	60

Adapted from Children At Risk.

Criteria for inclusion: These are schools with a high composite index percentile (which is based on student achievement and growth) that are educating a high concentration of low-income students (>90% of students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch).

Map of Waitlisted Families Applying to High-Performing Charter Schools in the Houston Area, 2015-2016



Source: Families Empowered

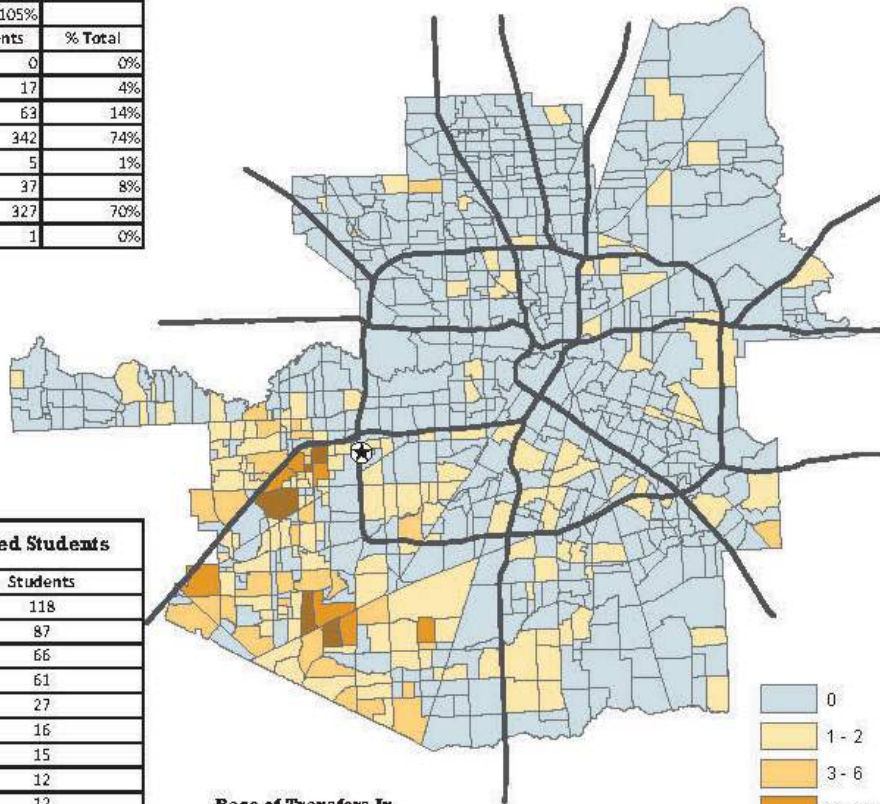
Enrollment and Capacity Data for New HISD Schools



Challenge Early College High School Early College Magnet

Campus Enrollment and Capacity

Snapshot 2015	Students	Share
Living in Zone	0	0%
Transfers In	464	100%
Membership	464	
Facility Capacity	444	
Facility Utilization	105%	
Group	Students	% Total
American Indian	0	0%
Asian/Pac. Islander	17	4%
African-American	63	14%
Hispanic	342	74%
Multi-Racial	5	1%
White	37	8%
Econ. Disadvantaged	327	70%
Immigrant	1	0%

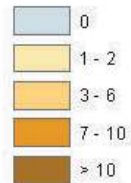


Home Campus of Enrolled Students

Campus	Students
Lee	118
Madison	87
Sharpstown	66
Westbury	61
Bellaire	27
Worthing	16
Out of District	15
Lamar	12
Sterling	12
Yates	8
Waltrip	5
Chavez	5
Westside	5
Reagan	4
Kashmere	4
Washington	4
Wheatley	3
Furr	2
All Other Schools	10

Race of Transfers In

4% Asian/Pac. Islander
14% African-American
74% Hispanic
8% White
1% Multi-Racial

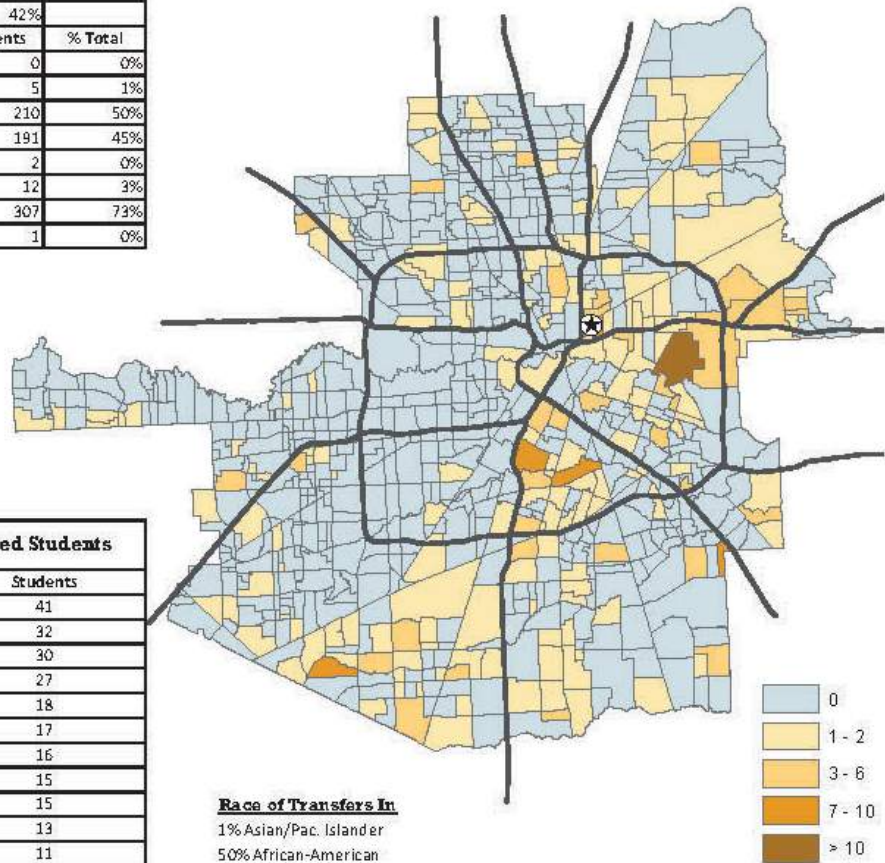




Leland College Preparatory

Single-Gender Magnet, 6-12

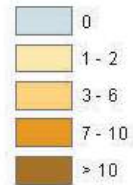
Campus Enrollment and Capacity		
Snapshot 2015	Students	Share
Living in Zone	0	0%
Transfers In	420	100%
Membership	420	
Facility Capacity	999	
Facility Utilization	42%	
Group	Students	% Total
American Indian	0	0%
Asian/Pac. Islander	5	1%
African-American	210	50%
Hispanic	191	45%
Multi-Racial	2	0%
White	12	3%
Econ. Disadvantaged	307	73%
Immigrant	1	0%



Home Campus of Enrolled Students	
Campus	Students
Out of District	41
Cullen	32
Dowling	30
Holland	27
Yates	18
Madison	17
Fleming	16
Wheatley	15
Thomas	15
Edison	13
Ortiz	11
Attucks	10
McReynolds	10
Forest Brook	10
Key	9
Furr	9
Davis	8
Austin	8
All Other Schools	121

Race of Transfers In

1% Asian/Pac. Islander
 50% African-American
 45% Hispanic
 3% White
 0% Multi-Racial

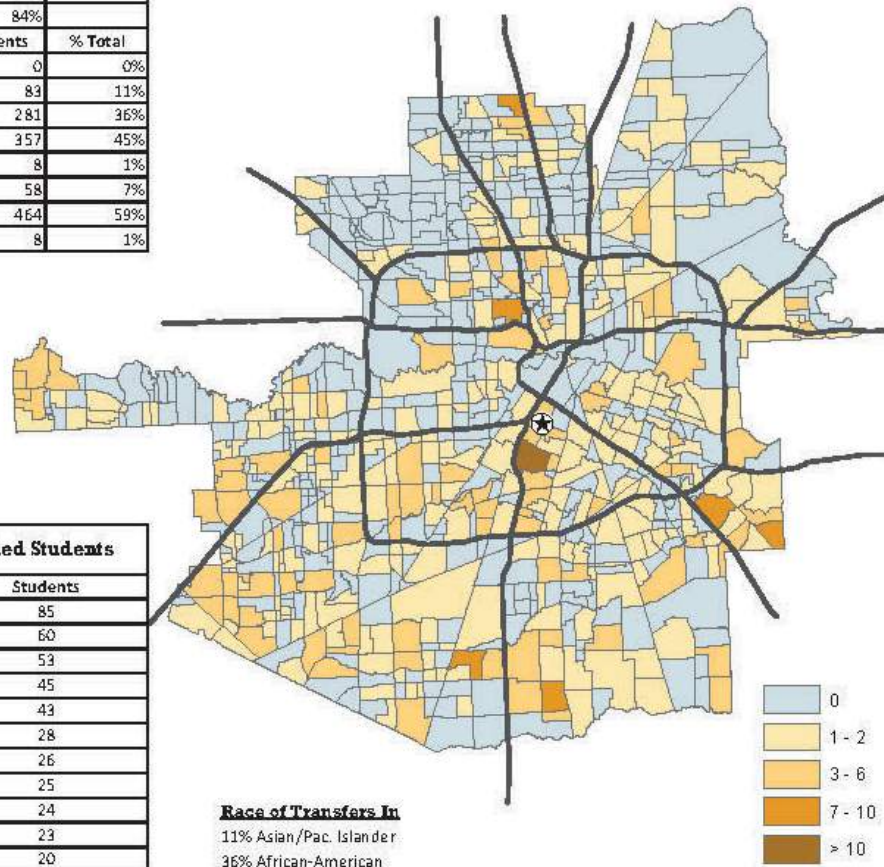




Baylor College of Med. Academy at Ryan

STEM Magnet

Campus Enrollment and Capacity		
Snapshot 2015	Students	Share
Living in Zone	0	0%
Transfers In	787	100%
Membership	787	
Facility Capacity	941	
Facility Utilization	84%	
Group	Students	% Total
American Indian	0	0%
Asian/Pac. Islander	83	11%
African-American	281	36%
Hispanic	357	45%
Multi-Racial	8	1%
White	58	7%
Econ. Disadvantaged	464	59%
Immigrant	8	1%



Home Campus of Enrolled Students	
Campus	Students
Cullen	85
Dowling	60
Thomas	53
Welch	45
Pershing	43
West Briar	28
Henry	26
Deady	25
Grady	24
Jackson	23
Stevenson	20
Marshall	20
Revere	20
Key	19
Holland	19
Hogg	19
Fondren	19
Ortiz	19
All Other Schools	220

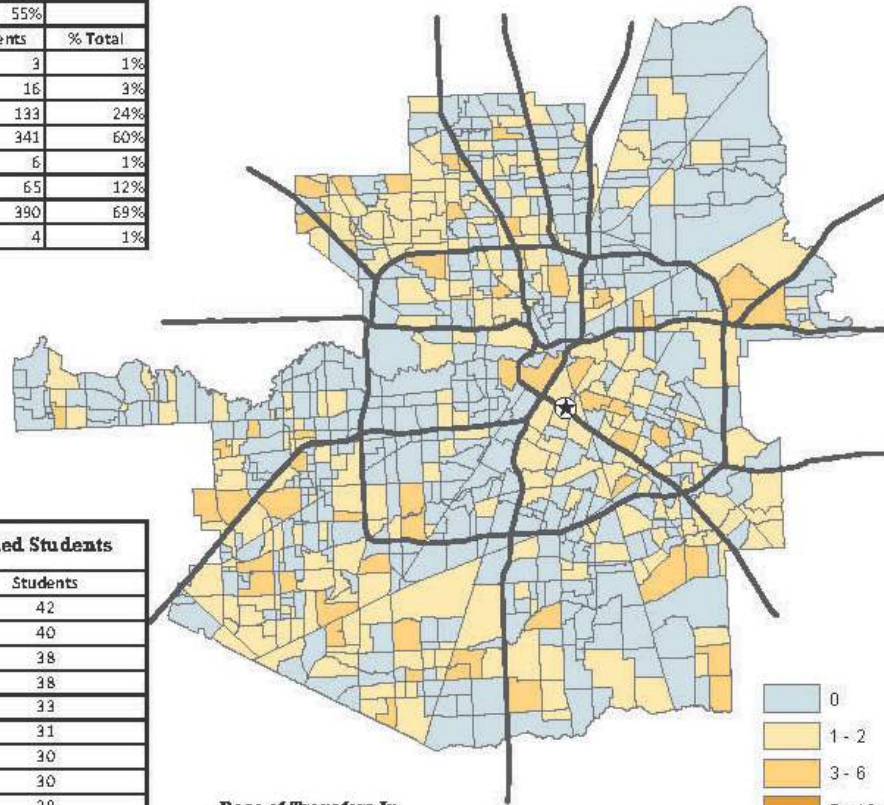


Energy Institute High School

STEM Magnet

Campus Enrollment and Capacity

Snapshot 2015	Students	Share
Living in Zone	0	0%
Transfers In	564	100%
Membership	564	
Facility Capacity	1,033	
Facility Utilization	55%	
Group	Students	% Total
American Indian	3	1%
Asian/Pac. Islander	16	3%
African-American	133	24%
Hispanic	341	60%
Multi-Racial	6	1%
White	65	12%
Econ. Disadvantaged	390	69%
Immigrant	4	1%

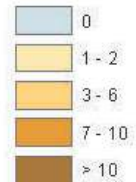


Home Campus of Enrolled Students

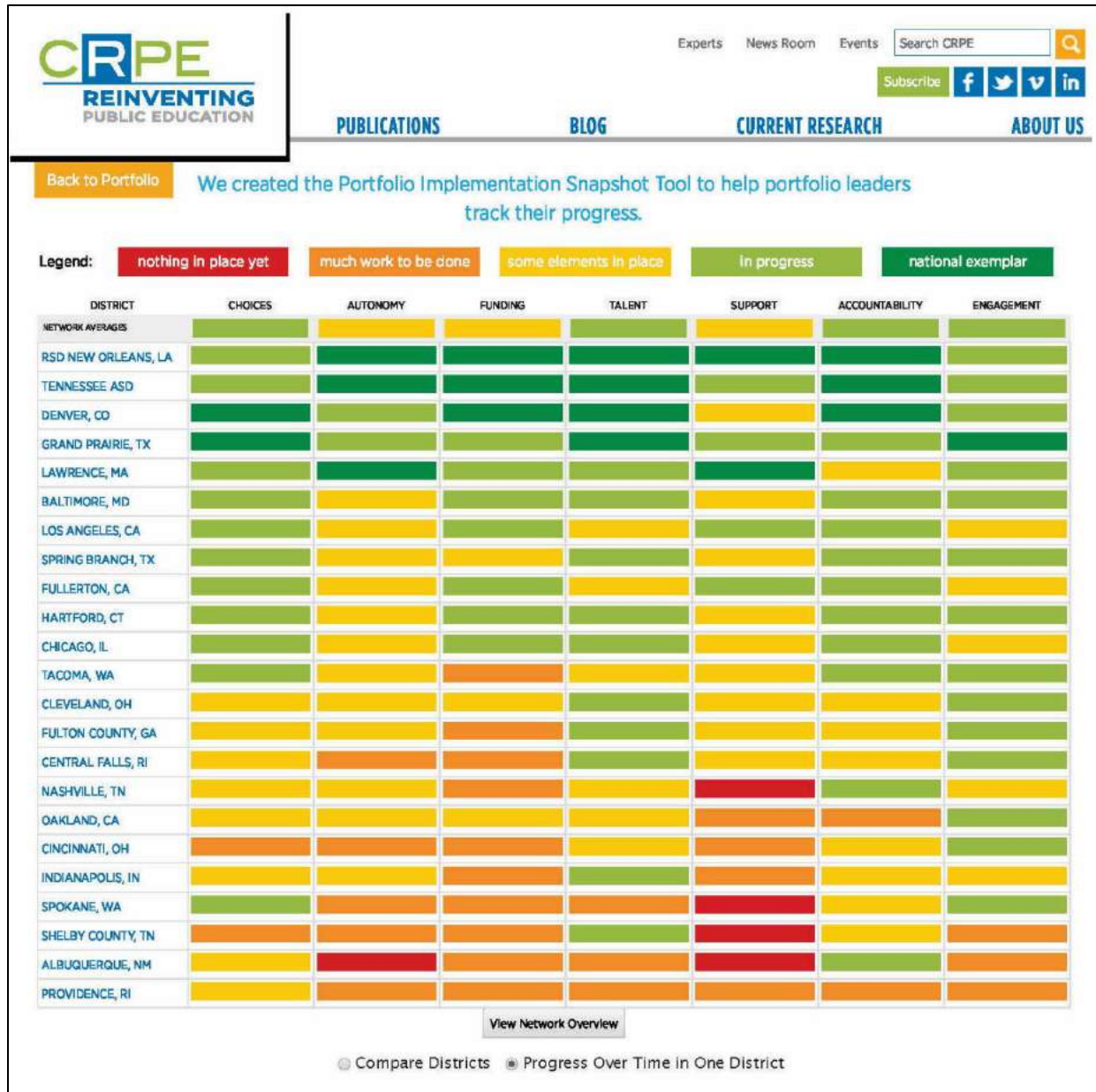
Campus	Students
Westbury	42
Madison	40
Austin	38
Lee	38
Sharpstown	33
Waltrip	31
Sam Houston	30
Worthing	30
Scarborough	29
Wheatley	29
Sterling	29
Reagan	26
Washington	23
Out of District	21
Bellaire	18
Yates	18
Chavez	17
Davis	15
All Other Schools	57

Race of Transfers In

3% Asian/Pac. Islander
 24% African-American
 60% Hispanic
 12% White
 1% Multi-Racial



Portfolio Strategy Implementation Snapshot Tool



Source: CRPE

Endnotes

¹ Analyses based on the 2015 Children At Risk data file; includes schools in Harris, Fort Bend, Montgomery, Brazoria, Galveston, Chambers, Liberty, and Waller counties.

² Children At Risk ranks all public school campuses in Texas based on three indices: Student Achievement, Campus Performance, and Growth. High schools are also ranked using a College Readiness Index. For each index, a weighted score is calculated for each campus. Then, a composite index is calculated for each campus based on the weighted average of its index scores. Grades are assigned to all schools based on their composite index:

A=Above the 75th percentile

B=At or above the 55th percentile but below the 75th percentile

C=At or above the 35th percentile but below the 55th percentile

D=At or above the 15th percentile but below the 35th percentile

F=Below the 15th percentile

Though there are other ways to quantify school quality, delving into the strengths and shortcomings of various options lies beyond the scope of this paper. The authors believe that the Children At Risk rankings are useful because they provide a user-friendly snapshot of each school's performance relative to other schools, based on achievement as well as growth. We encourage further research on other ways to define and quantify school quality.

³ Ericka Mellon, "Poor Children Fall Further Behind in Houston Schools, Report Finds," *Houston Chronicle*, March 22, 2016.

⁴ For more information about the methodology, see Children At Risk, 2015 Texas Public School Rankings Methodology, April 2015. <http://173.45.238.175/content/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/2015-School-Rankings-Methodology.pdf> These figures include schools in Harris, Fort Bend, Montgomery, Brazoria, Galveston, Chambers, Liberty, and Waller counties.

⁵ Each of the following districts had 2 middle schools in Tier 4 in 2012: Fort Bend, Galveston, North Forest, Pasadena, Spring Branch, and Spring.

⁶ Complete College America provides statistics on postsecondary outcomes in Texas and across the U.S. Their data show, for example, that 51% of students entering two-year colleges in Texas require remediation, and among these students, less than 6% graduate within three years. See: http://www.completecollege.org/state_data/

⁷ Average earnings in the United States vary significantly by level of schooling completed. Data from the U.S. Census show that bachelor's degree holders earn nearly twice as much as high school graduates and are far more likely to be employed. For more information, see: U.S. Bureau of the Census. (2012). *Current Population Survey—Education Pays*; www.bls.gov/emp/ep_chart_001.htm

⁸ Data from the National Association of Public Charter Schools.

⁹ Children At Risk, 2015 Texas Public School Rankings.

¹⁰ Texas Charter Schools Association, Fast Charter Facts (undated). This figure may contain some duplicates, however—i.e., students who apply to charter schools managed by different providers being counted more than once.

¹¹ Data provided by Families Empowered, March 2016. Note: this reflects the number of applications rather than families, since a family often applies to more than one school.

¹² Ron Zimmer et al., *Charter Schools in Eight States: Effects on Achievement, Attainment, Integration, and Competition*, RAND, 2009.

¹³ Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO), *Multiple Choice: Charter School Performance in 16 States*, 2009.

¹⁴ Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO), *National Charter School Study*, 2013.

¹⁵ Christina Clark Tuttle et al., *Going to Scale: As KIPP Network Grows, Positive Impacts Are Sustained*, Mathematica Policy Research, September 2015.

¹⁶ Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO), *Urban Charter School Study: Report on 41 Regions*, 2015.

¹⁷ Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO), *Charter School Performance in Texas*, July 22, 2015.

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- ¹⁸ Arianna Prothero, "Charter School Graduates More Likely to Stay in College, Earn Higher Salaries," *Education Week*, April 6, 2016.
- ¹⁹ Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO), *Online Charter School Study*, 2015.
- ²⁰ The adoption of Senate Bill 2 during the 83rd Texas Legislature (2013) led to more closures of low-performing charter schools.
- ²¹ National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, *A Closer Look at the Charter School Movement, 2015-16*.
- ²² Children At Risk, *The Status of Charter Schools in Texas: Dispelling the Myths*, 2015.
- ²³ KIPP, *The Promise of College Completion: KIPP's Early Successes and Challenges*, 2011. Also see: Jay Mathews, "KIPP Criticizes Its College Graduation Record," *The Washington Post*, April 29, 2011.
- ²⁴ Robert Pondiscio, "No Excuses Kids Go to College," *Education Next*, Spring 2013.
- ²⁵ Jay Mathews, "KIPP Is Helping Its Graduates Get Through College," *The Washington Post*, March 26, 2014.
- ²⁶ Robert Pondiscio, "No Excuses Kids Go to College," *Education Next*, Spring 2013.
- ²⁷ HISD, *Membership Summary and Detail Report*, December 18, 2015 (Day #80). It should be noted that the number of empty seats in HISD may change somewhat as a result of school construction and renovations currently underway through the most recent bond election and as a result of refinements to the district's school capacity formulas and figures (currently underway). It is not yet clear what the cumulative impact of those changes will be—i.e., whether the number of empty seats will increase, decrease, or remain approximately as estimated here.
- ²⁸ Elementary schools with enrollment below 500, middle schools with enrollment below 750, and high schools with enrollment below 1,000 are eligible for the Small School Subsidy. Each school receives an amount capped at 15% of its base allocation or \$228,480. In 2014, the total outlay for the Small School Subsidy was \$6.6 million.
- ²⁹ Juan Perez, Jr., "CPS: Enrollment Numbers Won't Lead to School Budget Cuts," *Chicago Tribune*, September 26, 2014.
- ³⁰ Houston Independent School District, "Study Shows Apollo 20 Academic Achievement Gains Match Top Charters," Press Release, October 6, 2011; for the full paper on the initial study, see: Roland Fryer, *Creating 'No Excuses' (Traditional) Public Schools: Preliminary Evidence from an Experiment in Houston*, National Bureau for Economic Research, Working Paper 17494, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w17494>
- ³¹ Ericka Mellon, "Grier Seeks Extra Funding for HISD's Apollo Schools Program," *Houston Chronicle*, April 18, 2013.
- ³² Ruth N. Lopez-Turley, *Review of Dr. Roland Fryer's Apollo 20 Report*, February 2014.
- ³³ The Wallace Foundation, *The School Turnaround Field Guide*, 2010.
- ³⁴ See, for example, Texas Education Agency, *Texas Education Today*, August 2015, Volume XXX(5).
- ³⁵ Dana Brinson and Lucy Steiner, *Building Family and Community Demand for Dramatic Change in Schools*, Public Impact, May 2012.
- ³⁶ HISD School Profile, Kashmere High School; accessed at <http://www.houstonisd.org/domain/40440>.
- ³⁷ John Engberg et al., "Closing Schools in a Shrinking District: Do Student Outcomes Depend on Which Schools Are Closed?" *Journal of Urban Economics* 71(2), 2012. Also see: Marisa de la Torre and Julia Gwynne, *When Schools Close: Effects on Displaced Students in Chicago Public Schools*, University of Chicago Consortium on School Research, October 2009.
- ³⁸ Andrea Berger et al., *Early College, Continued Success: Early College High School Initiative Impact Study*, American Institutes for Research, January 2014.
- ³⁹ Ericka Mellon, "HISD Will Open All-Boys School Next Fall in 5th Ward," *Houston Chronicle*, December 10, 2010.
- ⁴⁰ Ericka Mellon, "HISD Can't Find Jobs for Teachers from Failing Schools," *Houston Chronicle*, August 12, 2008.
- ⁴¹ Ericka Mellon, "HISD's Ryan Middle School Slated for Closure," *Houston Chronicle*, May 3, 2012.

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- ⁴² Ericka Mellon, “Plan to Close 2 HISD Schools Draws Protests,” *Houston Chronicle*, March 7, 2013.
- ⁴³ Ericka Mellon, “HISD Board Approves Creation of Baylor College of Medicine Academy at Ryan,” *Houston Chronicle*, April 23, 2013.
- ⁴⁴ Ericka Mellon, “HISD Trustees Approve Two New Magnet Schools,” *Houston Chronicle*, April 12, 2013.
- ⁴⁵ Jennifer Radcliffe, “Energy Institute Thrives in Inaugural Year,” *Houston Chronicle*, February 24, 2014.
- ⁴⁶ Energy Institute does not yet have a grade from Children At Risk.
- ⁴⁷ See, for example, Ann Owens, “Growing Economic Segregation Among School Districts and Schools,” *The Brown Center Chalkboard*, September 10, 2015.
- ⁴⁸ Sara Mead, Ashley LiBetti Mitchel, and Andrew Rotherham, *The State of the Charter School Movement*, Bellwether Education Partners, September 2015, Slides 4 and 14.
- ⁴⁹ Rick Hess used the term “greenfield” in his book *Education Unbound: The Promise and Practice of Greenfield Schooling* (2010) to convey the idea of “removing entrenched bureaucratic barriers and rethinking restrictive norms and routines.” He asks, “What if the key to breakthrough school improvement is not mandating new solutions? What if we were free to start from scratch? This is the greenfield reform strategy: create an environment that invites new solutions to surface and provide the infrastructure necessary for them to succeed.”
- ⁵⁰ National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, *The Health of the Charter Public School Movement: A State-By-State Analysis (Second Edition)*, March 2016, p. 154.
- ⁵¹ Nelson Smith, “Whose School Building Are They, Anyway?” *Education Next*, Fall 2012.
- ⁵² Sara Mead, Ashley LiBetti Mitchel, and Andrew Rotherham, *The State of the Charter School Movement*, Bellwether Education Partners, September 2015, Slide 72.
- ⁵³ Ibid.
- ⁵⁴ Daarel Burnette, “YES Prep Pulls Out of Memphis,” *Chalkbeat*, March 25, 2015.
- ⁵⁵ Daniela Doyle, Christen Holly, and Bryan Hassel, *Is Détente Possible? District-Charter School Relations in Four Cities*, November 2015.
- ⁵⁶ Parker Baxter with Elizabeth Cooley, “Mastering Change: When Charter Schools and School Districts Embrace Strategic Partnership,” in Robin Lake and Betheny Gross, Eds., *Hopes, Fears, & Reality: A Balanced Look at American Charter Schools in 2011*, Center for Reinventing Public Education, 2012.
- ⁵⁷ CRPE, *Coordinating Enrollment Across School Sectors: An Overview of Common Enrollment Systems*, 2014.
- ⁵⁸ Howard Blume, “New L.A. Schools Chief Michelle King Calls for Making Peace with Charters,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 2016.
- ⁵⁹ Leaders in Baltimore, Denver, Hartford (CT), Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Nashville (TN), New Orleans, New York City, and Rochester (NY) have joined an initiative funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to initiate new ways for public charter schools and traditional public schools to work together. Leaders in each community have signed a District-Charter Collaboration Compact, which commits districts to replicating high-performing models of traditional and charter public schools while improving or closing schools that are not serving students well. The Compacts also address sources of tension between district and charter schools and identify opportunities for the two groups to leverage each others’ strengths. For more details, see: <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/press-releases/Pages/new-charter-school-partnerships-101207.aspx>.
- ⁶⁰ Some argue that school districts should be eradicated and that all public schools should be charter schools. See, for example, Andy Smarick, *The Urban School System of the Future: Applying the Principles and Lessons of Chartering*, 2012; as reported in “Chartering the future,” *Education Gadfly*, October 18, 2012.
- ⁶¹ The champion of the “relinquish” rather than “reform” argument is Neerav Kingsland of New Schools of New Orleans; see, for example: “An Open Letter to Urban Superintendents in the United States of America,” *Education Week* [Rick Hess “Straight Up” Blog], January 23-27, 2012.
- ⁶² Joe Siedlecki, *Four Common Myths of Portfolio District Strategy*, The Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, February 11, 2013.

⁶³ For more information, see: <http://www.crpe.org/research/district-charter-collaboration>

⁶⁴ Brookings Institution, *The 2015 Education Choice and Competition Index*, February 2016.

⁶⁵ Bethany Gross and Patrick Denice, *An Evaluation of Denver's SchoolChoice Process, 2012-2014*, A+ Denver/CRPE, January 2015.

⁶⁶ Johnny Kampis, "Study Shows Denver Charters Have Lower Achievement Gaps Than Other Schools," *Colorado Watchdog.org*, March 24, 2016.

⁶⁷ Arianna Prothero, "Indianapolis Superintendent Enlists Charters as Allies to Improve City's Schools," *Education Week 2016 Leaders to Learn From*, February 24, 2016.

⁶⁸ Andy Smarick, *The Urban School System of the Future: Applying the Principles and Lessons of Chartering*, New Frontiers in Education, 2012.