North Carolina Insight

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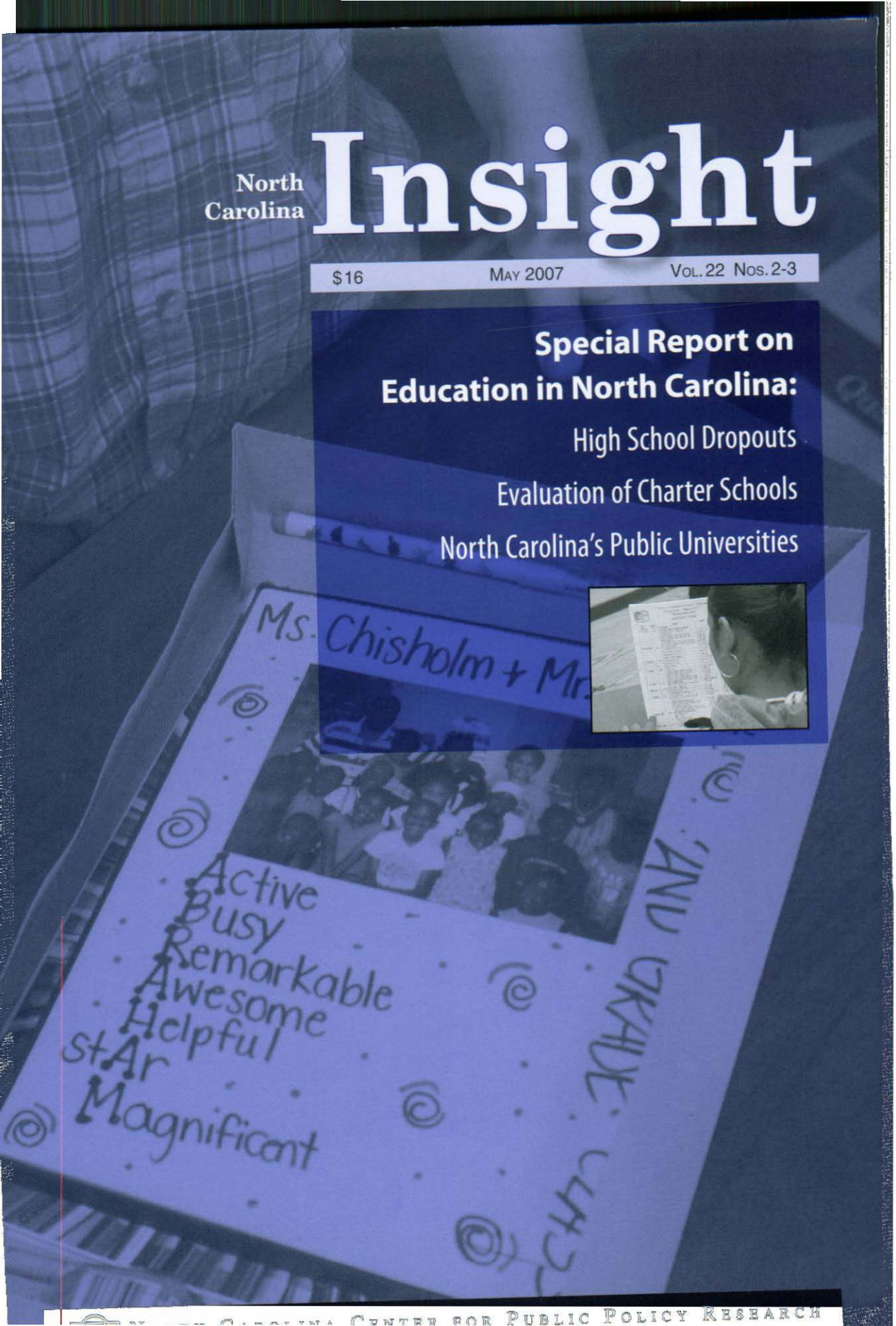
Special Report on Education in North Carolina:

High School Dropouts

Evaluation of Charter Schools

North Carolina's Public Universities



North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research

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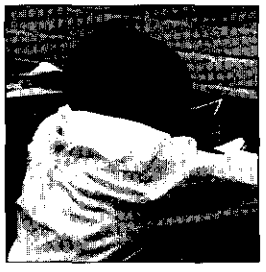

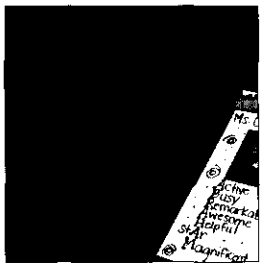

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Education in North Carolina

Charter Schools Revisited:

A Decade After Authorization, How Goes the North Carolina Experience?

by John Manuel

Executive Summary

Charter schools are hybrids of nonprofits and publicly-funded schools. As nonprofits, they receive freedom from many government regulations, and they are free to raise money from foundations, corporations, and individuals. Their volunteer governing boards are not subject to local boards of education, and they are free to recruit the best teachers. Yet charter schools are public schools in that anyone is eligible to attend, the schools do not charge tuition, and they receive normal state funding per student. The idea behind charter schools is that freedom from various rules and regulations will create room for innovation and then transmit fresh ideas to the public school system.

North Carolina first authorized charter schools in 1996. In the ensuing years, each of the available 100 charters has been awarded under the law. Some have been revoked or relinquished, meaning 138 schools have at one time or another held a state charter. Efforts to raise or eliminate the cap have been made in the North Carolina General Assembly since the cap was reached in the year 2000. But the state needs to know how charter schools have performed before expanding the experiment. So how do these schools perform in educating the state's children compared to traditional public schools? The law establishing charter schools outlined six purposes that provide a broad measure for success.

The N.C. Center for Public Policy Research first evaluated charter schools in 2002 and found them to be meeting only half the purposes set out for them in enabling legislation. We found that charter schools: (1) gave teachers new professional opportunities; (2) expanded school choice in the 47 counties that then had charter schools; and (3) were held accountable for student performance by being subject to the state accountability program.

However, the Center found charter schools fell short on the statutory goals of: (1) improving student learning; (2) serving as laboratories of innovation for the traditional public schools; and (3) increasing learning

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opportunities for all students. Moreover, the Center found charter schools much more likely to be racially segregated than the public schools as a whole, despite a state law requiring charter schools to reasonably reflect the racial make-up of their school district. However, for many of the schools, there was a lack of five full years of data to provide a clear trendline on charters' performance. Based on these findings, the Center concluded that the state should continue the charter schools experiment but should not allow for expansion or removal of the cap limiting the numbers of charters in the state to 100. The Center said the state should have five full years of accountability testing data in hand before deciding whether the cap should be raised or eliminated. The data are now in hand. What do the data tell us about charter school performance?

Academic Performance

The state accountability testing program, known as the ABCs, assigns each school a performance composite, which is a percentage of students scoring at or above grade level (Achievement Level III). Any school with a performance composite where less than 50 percent of the students make expected academic growth is identified as a low-performing school which may need special assistance.

Charter schools achieving 70–100 percent performance composites rose from 37.5 percent in 1997–98 to 39.7 percent in 2000–01 to 68.9 percent in 2004–05. Results for 2005–06 are based on a revised accountability model, and the results are not comparable to those from previous years. In 2005–06, 43.4 percent of charter schools achieved performance composites between 70–100.

Charter schools registering a performance composite score below 50 percent dropped from 58.4 percent in 1997–98 to 44.9 percent in 2000–01 to 5.5 percent in 2004–05. In 2005–06, 16.1 percent of charter schools had a performance composite below 50.

Based on the data from 1997–2005, charter schools seemed to be improving, as measured by end-of-grade testing results. However, the 2005–06 data, while not comparable to the data from previous years, raise serious questions about the performance of charter schools.

The ABCs program classifies schools according to seven categories of performance. The top four categories are Honor Schools of Excellence, Schools of Excellence, Schools of Distinction, and Schools of Progress. The remaining three categories are No Recognition, Priority Schools, and Low-Performing Schools. In 2005–06, there were 99 charter schools in North Carolina: seven were Honor Schools of Excellence, none were

Schools of Excellence, 12 were Schools of Distinction, 15 were Schools of Progress, 23 were No Recognition schools, 23 were Priority Schools, and six were Low-Performing Schools. Thus, 23 percent of charter schools were in the no recognition category, meaning these schools did not attain the academic progress the state thinks they should have, given the make-up of their student bodies. When No Recognition Schools, Priority Schools, and Low-Performing Schools are combined, an alarming 52 percent, or more than half, of the charter schools fell into the lowest three categories, as determined by the state ABCs testing program. Statewide, 48.1 percent of schools fell into the bottom three performance categories in 2005–06.

In 2005–06, 52.7 percent of charter schools made adequate yearly progress, as required by the federal No Child Left Behind Act, 47.3 percent did not, and the adequate yearly progress of eight charter schools is under review. Statewide, 45.2 percent of schools made adequate yearly progress, and 54.8 percent did not.

In February 2007, the N.C. Department of Public Instruction released for the first time four-year cohort graduation rates for 2006 by school. While, statewide, 68.1 percent of students graduated in four years, only 55.3 percent of charter schools students graduated in the same amount of time.

Furthermore, another strong qualitative study in North Carolina indicates that charter school students do not perform as well on end-of-grade tests as demographically similar students who remain in the traditional public schools. While advocates may argue that the state's accountability testing does not measure all the benefit students receive from attending charter schools, it is the measure the state uses to gauge classroom performance. For all their accomplishments, charters come up short on this measure.

The study by researchers Helen Ladd and Robert Bifulco of the Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy at Duke University found that students in charter schools do not do as well on end-of-grade tests as their counterparts in traditional public schools, and that some of the difference is attributable to the charter schools themselves rather than to unobservable characteristics of the students. The researchers conclude that the academic gains of charter school students in both reading and math is significantly less than would have been the case had those same students remained in traditional public schools.

Other studies have found that while charter school student performance typically trails that of traditional public schools for charters that are newly opened, the difference in performance disappears for charters that

have been operating for three or four years. Ladd and Bifulco conducted additional analysis to control for the length of time a charter had been opened. They found that the negative effects of charter schools in North Carolina "remain statistically significant and large even for schools that have been operating for five years."

Racial Balance

Of further concern is that charter schools remain more racially segregated than the traditional public schools as a whole. The issue has not been resolved since the Center originally examined charter schools in 2002. Of the 97 charter schools operating in 2000–01, 30 had student populations more than 80 percent non-white, despite a state law indicating charter schools must "reasonably reflect" the racial make-up of their school district. In 2003–04, 24 of 93 charter schools then operating were more than 80 percent non-white, and 15 of these 24 had student bodies that were more than 95 percent African American. In 2005–06, 39 of 99 charter schools had more than a 50 percent minority student population. Twenty-six of these schools were 80 percent or more non-white, and 14 of those were more than 95 percent African American. Four of the 99 charter schools were 100 percent African American. Two schools—Haliwa-Saponi Tribal and CIS Academy—have Native American student populations over 85 percent.

Transfers of Innovations in Charter Schools to Public Schools

Many charter schools have adopted a number of innovative approaches to learning, ranging from arts-based instruction at schools such as Arts Based Elementary in Winston-Salem and Sandhills Theater Arts Renaissance School in Vass, to international themes at schools such as Carolina International School in Harrisburg and Exploris Middle School in Raleigh, to Socratic dialogue at schools such as Socrates Academy in Charlotte and Thomas Jefferson Classical Academy in Mooresboro. While some innovations may have seeped into the traditional public schools, the Center finds there is little evidence that any have been adopted on a large-scale basis. Thus, the notion that charter schools could serve as a testing ground for educational innovations that ultimately could move into the public schools appears to be unfounded.

Management and Financial Compliance

When the Center examined the charter school experiment in 2002, 14 charters had closed or had their charters revoked, eight of them at least in part because of financial management problems. Concerns about financial management have eased somewhat after adoption of a 2002 requirement that charter school applicants spend a year planning before they can open their doors to students. The Center commends the N.C. Department of Public

Instruction and the State Board of Education for implementing this requirement, which was recommended by the Center in our 2002 evaluation.

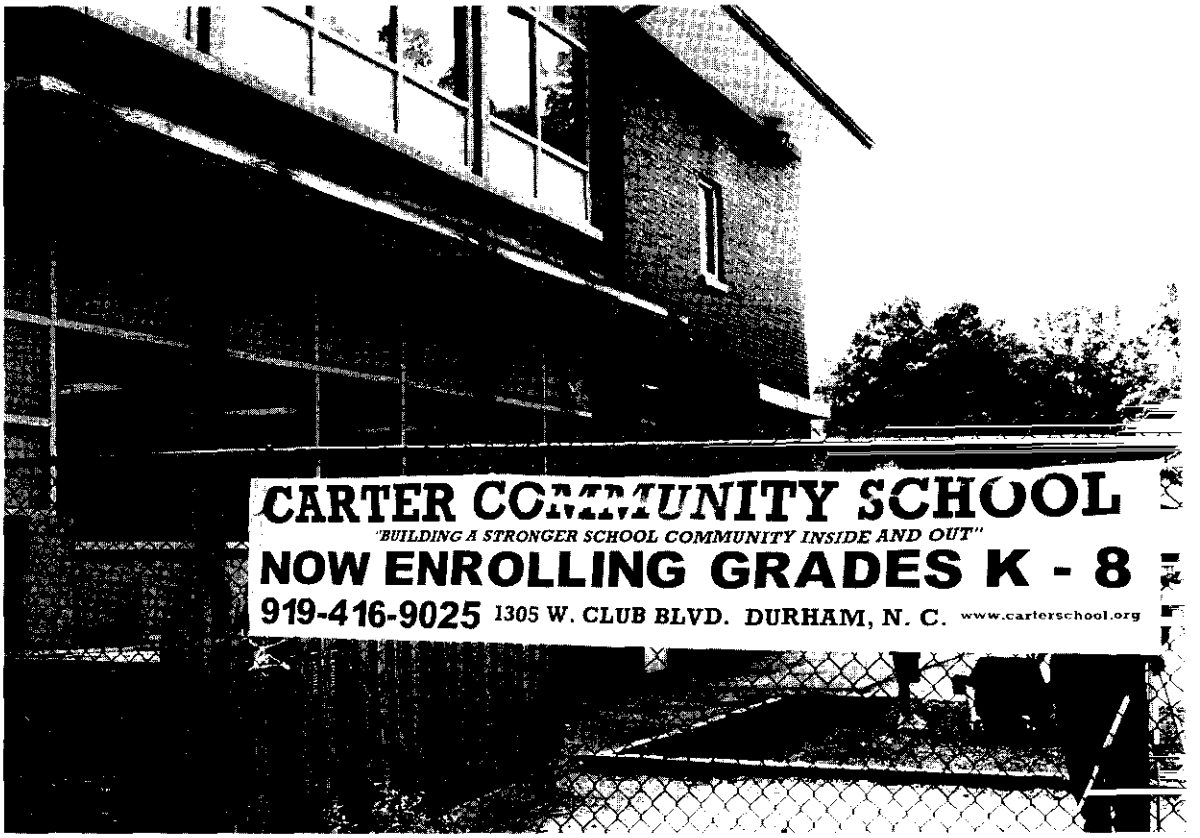
However, financial concerns have not abated entirely. The total number of charter schools that have closed or had their charters revoked has now reached 27 of the total number of 138, or 19 percent, mostly because of insufficient enrollment or financial "noncompliance." For example, the State Board of Education revoked the charter of Imani Institute Charter School in Greensboro in July 2006. The school had not filed financial audits from 2001–02 through 2004–05. Baker Charter High School, authorized to operate in the Wake County Jail, had its charter revoked in October 2006, effective June 30, 2007. State regulators declared the books of the schools could not even be audited due to inadequate record-keeping and alleged that students attended classes no more than an hour a day.

Conclusion

These findings by the Center—low overall academic performance compared to public schools, greater racial segregation, little if any innovation that was replicated in the traditional public schools, and problems with management and financial compliance—do not provide sufficient justification for expansion of the state's charter schools.

In 2004–05, the most recent financial data available, charter schools received a total of $189,582,506—federal ($16,472,667), state ($112,798,911), and local revenue ($60,310,928). That's a lot of money, especially when more than half of the charter schools fell in the bottom three performance categories, as determined by the state's ABCs testing program. North Carolina needs to make sure that charter schools are worth the money. Charter schools are a worthy experiment only if we get a return on our investment.

The Center offers three recommendations that could improve the records of charter schools across the state and thus warrant expansion of the charter school program if it is eventually successful: (1) charter schools that have failed to meet academic growth expectations for five consecutive years should be placed on immediate probation and given two years to achieve expected growth or must give up their charters; (2) revoked charters should be awarded to proposed schools that provide convincing evidence they will be able to meet the state's academic growth standards, with a preference given to granting charters in counties that do not already have a charter school; and (3) the North Carolina General Assembly should not increase the current cap of 100 charter schools it authorized by statute in 1996. Charter schools are an experiment, and it was and is important to try them. But, more attention needs to be given to the question of performance and whether these schools provide the "sound basic education" the State Constitution requires for all of North Carolina's children before expanding the experiment.



Nearly a decade has passed since the General Assembly launched the charter schools experiment in North Carolina. Currently, more than 27,000 children are enrolled in the state's charter schools supported by 1,898 teachers. A total of 138 schools have been chartered, though in keeping with the limit prescribed in the law, no more than 100 have been in operation at any one time. Schools are operating in 46 of the state's 100 counties, serving all manner of populations and employing a variety of educational philosophies and techniques.

Charter schools are public schools operated as private nonprofits and subject to fewer regulations than the traditional public schools. For example, charter schools frequently do not have cafeterias or bus service, and they can use the savings to provide academic programs. Charter schools are free to the public and if demand requires it, students are chosen by lottery.

The original language in the 1996 law that authorized charter schools in North Carolina said charter schools were intended to: (1) improve student learning; (2) increase learning opportunities for *all* students, with a special emphasis on at-risk or gifted students; (3) encourage the use of different or innovative teaching methods; (4) create new professional opportunities for teachers, including "opportunities to be responsible for the learning program at the school site;" (5) provide expanded choice for parents and students within the school system; and (6) hold charter schools accountable for student performance.[1]

John Manuel is a free-lance writer and editor residing in Durham, N.C. and the co-author of the Center's 2002 study on charter schools in North Carolina. Photographs used to illustrate this article are from Carter Community School, a Durham charter school with themes of promoting financial independence and good citizenship. Photographs are by Karen Tam.

This article analyzes charter school performance in four areas — academic performance, diversity, educational innovation, and financial stability. First and foremost is academic performance. Schools are in the business of producing learners who must be ready to advance to the next level. How are charter students performing compared to those in traditional public schools? Are there qualities inherent to charter schools, individually or as a whole, that cause students to either excel or lag behind their counterparts in the traditional public schools?

Diversity is a second issue the Center examines. The law establishing charter schools states, "Within one year after the charter school begins operation, the population of the school shall reasonably reflect the racial and ethnic composition of the general population residing within the local school administrative unit in which the school is located or the racial and ethnic composition of the special population that the school seeks to serve residing within the local school administrative unit in which the school is located."[2] Some charter schools have been specifically created to attract and promote learning among certain racial and ethnic groups. Others, by virtue of their location or by the make-up of the applicants, end up catering to homogenous populations. Are charter schools meeting the legal requirements in the law?

Third is the question of educational innovation. Are charters successfully introducing innovations in curriculum and other areas? Are these innovations being adopted by traditional public schools? The final section deals with the question of financial stability. Can charter schools survive financially? Are they capable of managing their finances responsibly?

Some charters have reached the "promised land," occupying beautiful buildings and ranking among the top schools in the state academically. Others have foundered after just a few years, unable to raise sufficient capital or to manage their finances responsibly. Many are still charting their path, secure in the belief that they have what it takes to succeed, but still seeking improvements in facilities and academics.

Waiting at the docks are more than a dozen applicants, eager to launch their own charters with a fresh crew of teachers and students. Each year, they compete for the handful of slots made available by schools that have closed or had their charters revoked. In 2005, 12 applicants competed for a single open slot. In 2006, 17 applications came in to the N.C. Office of Charter Schools, which forwarded 15 to the N.C. Charter School Advisory Committee. Ultimately, nine were considered by the State Board of Education for five open slots. This situation invariably leaves many applicants disappointed, along with parents, students, and teachers who look to charter schools as an alternative to the traditional public schools.

Seven bills were introduced in the 2005 N.C. General Assembly to allow more charter schools or to authorize new sources of funding. One bill would have raised the cap by 10 charter schools each year, and another would have eliminated the cap entirely. None of the seven bills was enacted in 2005. When the legislature convened in May 2006, 39 of 57 Republican House members and three of 63 House Democrats co-sponsored a House Joint Resolution to allow the General Assembly to consider legislation removing the cap.[3] Once again, the effort was unsuccessful, but the partisan nature of the request demonstrated how the ground has shifted under the charter schools movement. When the initial legislation passed, a coalition of progressive Democrats, Republicans, and African-American lawmakers agreed to enter into an experiment with hopes of improving public education generally. Now, at least in the halls of the General Assembly, support for charter schools lies primarily with Republican legislators. Legislators from both sides of the aisle will need to decide whether the charter experiment in North Carolina is worthy of continuing or expanding, and if so, by how much.

In the 2007 session of the N.C. General Assembly, several bills have been introduced concerning charter schools. Some would raise the cap on the number of charter schools in the state (H.B. 30, S.B. 39, and S.B. 590), while others would eliminate

the cap altogether (H.B. 252, H.B. 416, and S.B. 106). Several bills address funding issues related to charter schools (S.B. 105 and S.B. 589), including giving access to lottery proceeds to charter schools (H.B. 152). By contrast, House Bill 236 concerns low-performing charter schools and directs the State Board of Education to terminate the charter of a school that fails to meet expected academic performance growth for seven consecutive years (see the Center's recommendation on p. 67).

Four years ago, the Center recommended that the General Assembly maintain the cap of 100 charter schools based on concerns about overall academic performance, a lack of racial diversity, and poor fiscal management on the part of certain schools. The General Assembly followed that recommendation, refusing to pass bills that variously called for raising the cap to 135 schools or for eliminating the cap altogether. The Center recommended that the General Assembly wait until it had five full years of student performance data before it considered raising the cap. These data are now in hand.

The Tale of the Tests—The Record of Charter Schools on Student Achievement

Pressure to raise the cap on the maximum number of charter schools allowed in the state began almost as soon as the cap was reached. In the summer of 2002, when the General Assembly gave strong consideration to raising the cap, many of the charters had only been open for a year or two, raising the question of whether they had sufficient time to demonstrate the effectiveness of the charter curriculum and teaching. Now, the N.C. Department of Public Instruction has five full school years of state end-of-grade testing data on almost all charters. In addition, several studies, including one national and one specific to North Carolina, provide a specific comparison of charter schools to their traditional public school counterparts.

The state accountability testing program, known as the ABCs, assigns each school a "performance composite," which is a percentage of students scoring at or above grade level (Achievement Level III). Any school with a performance composite of less than 50 where students fail to make expected academic growth is identified as a low-performing school which may need special assistance. In this respect, charter schools showed consistent progress from 2000–05, but dropped back in the 2005–06 school year. Charter schools achieving 70–100 percent performance composites rose from 37.5 percent in 1997–98 to 39.7 percent in 2000–01 to 69.8 percent in the 2003–04 school year, before dropping slightly to 68.9 percent in 2004–05. Schools registering a composite score below 50 percent dropped from 58.4 percent in 1997–98 to 44.9 percent in 2000–01 to 14.4 percent in 2003–04 to only 5.5 percent, or five schools, in 2004–05 (see Table 1, p. 12). One charter school was classified as Low-Performing in 2003–04, down from 14 in 2000–01. And, no charter schools were labeled Low-Performing in 2004–05.

Academic performance results for 2005–06 are based on a revised accountability model used for the ABCs, and the results are not comparable to those from previous years. In 2005–06, 43.4 percent of charter schools achieved performance composites between 70–100, and 16.1 percent had a composite score below 50 percent. Six charter schools—CIS Academy, Healthy Start Academy, Maureen Joy Charter School, PreEminent Charter School, Sallie B. Howard School, and Torchlight Academy—were Low-Performing.

The ABCs program also assigns each school a status designation, which reflects the school's growth and performance composite. Schools were originally assigned to one of four categories: Exemplary Growth, Expected Growth, No Recognition, or Low-Performing. In 2003–04, the state added new classifications, including Honor Schools of Excellence, Schools of Excellence, Schools of Distinction, Schools of Progress, No Recognition, Priority Schools, and Low-Performing Schools. *(continues on page 24)*


Ms. Chisholm + Mr. Johnson
Active
Busy
Remarkable
Awesome
Helpful
stAr
Magnificent

Table 1. Performance of All N.C. Charter

	Charter School / Grade Span	Year Opened	1997–1998 Met Expected Growth	1997–1998 Met Exemplary Growth	1997–1998 Performance Composite	1998–1999 Met Expected Growth	1998–1999 Met Exemplary Growth	1998–1999 Performance Composite	1999–2000 Met Expected Growth	1999–2000 Met Exemplary Growth	1999–2000 Performance Composite
	A Child's Garden School	*Franklin*									
	K-5	2001	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1	Alpha Academy	*Cumberland*									
	K-8	2000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
2	American Renaissance Charter School	*Iredell*									
	K-5	1998	NA	NA	NA	No	No	62.0	No	No	60.1
3	American Renaissance Middle	*Iredell*									
	6-8	1999	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	No	No	68.6
4	Ann Atwater Community School	*Durham*									
	4-9	2001	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
5	Arapahoe Charter School	*Pamlico*									
	K-8	1997	No	No	74.0	Yes	Yes	88.5	Yes	No	83.4
6	Arts Based Elementary	*Forsyth/Winston-Salem*									
	K-5	2002	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
7	ArtSpace Charter School	*Buncombe*									
	K-8	2001	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
8	John H. Baker Charter School	*Wake*									
	9-12	1997	ID	ID	ID	Yes	Yes	32.4	Yes	Yes	15.9
9	Bethany Community Middle School	*Rockingham*									
	6-8	2000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
10	Bethel Hill Charter School	*Person*									
	K-6	2000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
11	Brevard Academy	*Transylvania*									
	K-8	1998	NA	NA	NA	No	No	83.5	Yes	No	86.3
12	Bridges Charter School	*Wilkes*									
	K-8	1997	No	No	51.8	No	No	54.0	No	No	53.7
13	C. G. Woodson School of Challenge	*Forsyth*									
	K-12	1997	No	No	37.8	No	No	38.6	Yes	No	44.8
14	Cape Fear Center for Inquiry	*New Hanover*									
	K-8	2000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
15	Cape Lookout Marine Science H.S.	*Carteret*									
	9-12	1998	NA	NA	NA	ID	ID	ID	Yes	Yes	41.5
16	Carolina International School	*Cabarrus*									
	K-9	2004	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
17	Carter Community School	*Durham*									
	K-8	1998	NA	NA	NA	ID	ID	ID	No	No	31.8

Schools on End-of-Grade Tests from 1997–2006

2000–2001			2001–2002			2002–2003			2003–2004			2004–2005			2005–2006			
Met Expected Growth	Met Exemplary Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Met Expected Growth	
NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	No	No	65.7	Yes	Yes	90.6	Changed name to Crosscreek Charter School (see No. 28 below)						
No	No	52.7	No	No	49.8	Yes	No	55.8	No	No	69.7	No	No	72.8	Yes	No	50.7	
No	No	64.0	No	No	73.6	Yes	No	81.9	No	No	80.2	Yes	Yes	84.1	No	No	75.5	
No	No	62.9	No	No	74.3	Yes	Yes	85.8	No	No	85.2	Yes	Yes	87.4	No	No	75.2	
NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	No	No	52.0	No	No	61.5	No	No	61.7	Closed			
Yes	No	81.8	No	No	87.5	Yes	Yes	91.5	Yes	Yes	95.1	Yes	No	93.5	Yes	No	77.2	
NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	No	No	86.7	No	No	77.1	No	No	72.8	No	No	60.2	
NA	NA	NA	No	No	74.5	Yes	Yes	82.4	Yes	No	85.3	Yes	No	82.0	Yes	No	71.0	
NA	NA	NA	No	No	19.0	NA	NA	NA	Yes	No	50.0	Yes	Yes	50.0	No	No	38.7	
No	No	63.8	No	No	81.8	Yes	No	82.8	No	No	87.2	No	No	87.1	No	No	76.7	
No	No	60.0	Yes	Yes	80	Yes	Yes	88.5	Yes	No	91.3	Yes	No	90.9	No	No	81.0	
No	No	84.2	No	No	82.3	Yes	Yes	85.8	Yes	No	89.9	Yes	Yes	89.2	No	No	68.4	
No	No	68.5	Yes	No	69.2	Yes	No	64.0	Yes	Yes	75.3	No	No	65.1	No	No	53.5	
No	No	42.6	No	No	39.3	Yes	Yes	64.3	Yes	Yes	71.6	Yes	Yes	73.6	No	No	50.0	
No	No	89.7	Yes	No	88.8	Yes	No	88.9	Yes	No	88.0	No	No	83.9	No	No	76.0	
Yes	No	46.0	Yes	No	53.8	Yes	Yes	44.7	Yes	Yes	49.4	No	No	0.0	Yes	Yes	53.0	
NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	No	No	94.5	Yes	No	85.9	
No	No	31.5	No	No	33.1	No	No	54.6	No	No	53.4	Yes	Yes	67.7	Yes	No	46.6	

(continues)

Table 1. Performance of All N.C. Charter Schools

	Charter School / Grade Span	Year Opened	1997–1998 Met Expected Growth	1997–1998 Met Exemplary Growth	1997–1998 Performance Composite	1998–1999 Met Expected Growth	1998–1999 Met Exemplary Growth	1998–1999 Performance Composite	1999–2000 Met Expected Growth	1999–2000 Met Exemplary Growth	1999–2000 Performance Composite
		County/Local School District									
18	Casa Esperanza Montessori	*Wake*									
	K-6	2003	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
19	Central Park School for Children	*Durham*									
	K-5	2001	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
	Chapel Hill Free Academy	*Orange*									
	K-8 (Formerly Village Charter)	1997	Yes	No	77.0	Yes	Yes	74.1	No	No	67.1
20	Charter Day School	*Brunswick*									
	K-8	2000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
21	Chatham Charter School	*Chatham*									
	K-8	1997	No	No	56.1	Yes	Yes	63.0	Yes	Yes	81.1
22	Children's Community School	*Mecklenburg*									
	K-5	2004	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
23	Children's Village Academy	*Lenoir*									
	K-6 (Formerly Children's Academy)	1997	No	No	30.4	Yes	Yes	55.1	No	No	54.9
24	CIS Academy	*Robeson*									
	6-8	1997	No	No	7.3	Yes	No	29.0	No	No	26.0
25	Clover Garden	*Alamance/Burlington*									
	K-12	2001	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
26	Community Charter School	*Charlotte/Mecklenburg*									
	K-5	1997	No	No	35.0	No	No	40.5	No	No	46.2
27	Community Partners Charter High	*Wake*									
	9-12	2000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
28	Crosscreek Charter School	*Franklin*									
	K-8	2001	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
29	Crossnore Academy	*Avery*									
	K-12	1999	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	Yes	No	35.8
30	Crossroads Charter High	*Charlotte/Mecklenburg*									
	9-12	2001	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
31	Dillard Academy	*Wayne*									
	K-4	1998	NA	NA	NA	No	No	33.3	No	No	38.1
32	Downtown Middle	*Forsyth/Winston-Salem*									
	5-8	1997	No	No	84.3	No	No	81.4	No	No	79.4
33	East Wake Academy	*Wake*									
	K-12	1998	NA	NA	NA	Yes	No	81.9	No	No	62.7
34	East Winston Primary School	*Forsyth/Winston-Salem*									
	K-3	1998	NA	NA	NA	No	No	3.3	Yes	No	20.8

on End-of-Grade Tests from 1997–2006, *continued*

Met Expected Growth	Met Exemplary Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Met Expected Growth
2000–2001			2001–2002			2002–2003			2003–2004			2004–2005			2005–2006		
NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	ID	ID	ID	No	No	82.0	Yes	No	78.3
NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	ID	ID	ID	No	No	82.8	No	No	64.1
No	No	73.1	No	No	69.6	No	No	67.6	Closed								
ID	ID	ID	No	No	53.5	Yes	Yes	80.5	Yes	No	86.2	Yes	Yes	91.9	Yes	Yes	78.8
No	No	73.2	Yes	No	78.6	Yes	Yes	89.2	No	No	79.2	Yes	No	81.8	Yes	Yes	73.2
NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	Yes	No	93.8	Yes	No	87.0
No	No	47.0	No	No	48.6	Yes	Yes	60.2	Yes	Yes	65.8	Yes	Yes	80.8	Yes	No	56.0
Yes	Yes	39.0	Yes	No	50.7	Yes	Yes	79.2	Yes	Yes	63.6	No	No	63.2	No	No	33.0
NA	NA	NA	No	No	77.2	Yes	Yes	83.8	No	No	80.9	Yes	No	88.1	No	No	73.1
No	No	57.0	No	No	68.6	Yes	Yes	82.6	No	No	70.5	Yes	Yes	78.9	No	No	51.3
No	No	49.2	Yes	No	53.5	Yes	No	57.3	No	No	51.7	No	No	63.6	No	No	53.6
NA	NA	NA	ID	ID	ID	ID	ID	ID	ID	ID	ID	No	No	80.5	No	No	56.2
No	No	39.7	No	No	39.2	Yes	Yes	51.8	Yes	Yes	62.5	Yes	No	68.5	Yes	No	50.0
NA	NA	NA	No	No	14.6	Yes	Yes	15.1	Yes	Yes	26.7	NA	NA	NA	No	No	23.7
No	No	37.9	Yes	Yes	77.3	Yes	Yes	52.9	Yes	Yes	78.6	Yes	Yes	57.1	No	No	50.0
No	No	79.5	No	No	83.9	No	No	87.3	No	No	87.4	Yes	No	86.6	No	No	65.3
No	No	76.2	No	No	81.8	Yes	No	79.9	No	No	79.5	No	No	83.0	No	No	71.2
NA	NA	NA	Yes	Yes	76.8	Yes	Yes	76.6	No	No	38.9	Closed					

(continues)

Table 1. Performance of All N.C. Charter Schools

	Charter School / Grade Span	Year Opened	1997–1998 Met Expected Growth	1997–1998 Met Exemplary Growth	1997–1998 Performance Composite	1998–1999 Met Expected Growth	1998–1999 Met Exemplary Growth	1998–1999 Performance Composite	1999–2000 Met Expected Growth	1999–2000 Met Exemplary Growth	1999–2000 Performance Composite
	Engelmann School of the Arts & Sciences	*Catawba*									
	K-8	1997	No	No	64.3	No	No	40.5	No	No	40.8
35	Evergreen Community Charter School	*Buncombe*									
	K-8	1999	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	No	No	70.2
36	Exploris Middle School	*Wake*									
	6-8	1997	Yes	Yes	98.1	Yes	Yes	94.8	Yes	Yes	94.9
37	Forsyth Academies	*Forsyth/Winston-Salem*									
	K-8	1999	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	No	No	61.9
38	Francine Delany New School for Children	*Buncombe/Asheville City*									
	K-8	1997	Yes	No	70.0	Yes	Yes	74.6	No	No	71.1
39	Franklin Academy	*Wake*									
	K-12	1998	NA	NA	NA	No	No	64.8	Yes	Yes	81.0
40	Gaston College Preparatory (GCP)	*Northampton*									
	5-10	2001	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
41	Grandfather Academy	*Avery*									
	4-12	1997	ID	ID	ID	ID	ID	ID	Yes	No	37.5
42	Gray Stone Day School	*Stanly*									
	9-12	2002	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
43	Greensboro Academy	*Guilford*									
	K-8	1999	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	No	No	76.4
44	Guilford Preparatory	*Guilford*									
	K-11 (Formerly Guilford-SABIS© Charter School and then Guilford Charter)	1999	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	ID	ID	ID
45	Haliwa-Saponi Tribal	*Warren*									
	K-11	2000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
46	Healthy Start Academy Charter Elem.	*Durham*									
	K-8	1997	ID	ID	ID	No	No	41.9	No	No	35.2
47	Highland Charter Public School	*Gaston*									
	K-3	1997	ID	ID	ID	ID	ID	ID	ID	ID	ID
48	Hope Elementary School	*Wake*									
	K-5	2001	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
49	Imani Institute Charter School	*Guilford*									
	6-8	1998	NA	NA	NA	No	No	57.5	No	No	56.3
50	Kennedy School	*Charlotte/Mecklenburg*									
	6-12	1998	NA	NA	NA	ID	ID	ID	ID	ID	ID
51	Kestrel Heights School	*Durham*									
	6-11	1998	NA	NA	NA	ID	ID	ID	Yes	No	59.7

on End-of-Grade Tests from 1997–2006, *continued*

Met Expected Growth	Met Exemplary Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Met Expected Growth	
2000–2001			2001–2002			2002–2003			2003–2004			2004–2005			2005–2006			
Yes	Yes	64.0	No	No	66.4	Yes	Yes	63.4	Changed name to Visions Charter School (see No. 98 below)									
No	No	76.1	No	No	84.5	Yes	Yes	87.0	No	No	92.1	No	No	87.0	Yes	No	74.1	
Yes	Yes	96.5	Yes	Yes	98.4	No	No	97.3	Yes	Yes	97.8	Yes	Yes	98.3	Yes	Yes	94.6	
No	No	63.5	No	No	74.9	Yes	Yes	84.1	Yes	No	86.3	Yes	No	86.5	Yes	No	70.8	
Yes	Yes	85.4	Yes	Yes	86.6	Yes	Yes	85.4	Yes	Yes	90.7	Yes	Yes	89.7	No	No	74.0	
No	No	82.5	No	No	91.2	Yes	Yes	92.4	Yes	No	91.5	Yes	No	92.2	Yes	No	84.9	
NA	NA	NA	Yes	Yes	91.8	Yes	Yes	99.6	Yes	No	94.8	Yes	Yes	97.5	Yes	Yes	86.7	
No	No	34.1	No	No	44.6	No	No	54.8	Yes	No	60.7	Yes	No	65.9	Yes	No	55.7	
NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	Yes	Yes	97.7	Yes	Yes	94.7	Yes	No	93.8	No	No	89.4	
No	No	82.3	No	No	86.6	Yes	Yes	92.9	Yes	No	94.5	Yes	No	94.9	Yes	Yes	90.5	
ID	ID	ID	No	No	66.7	Yes	Yes	74.8	No	No	76.6	No	No	72.5	Yes	No	61.7	
No	No	52.3	No	No	59.6	Yes	Yes	72.0	Yes	No	80.2	Yes	No	75.7	No	No	59.2	
No	No	43.9	No	No	45.6	Yes	Yes	56.9	No	No	64.3	No	No	50.0	No	No	38.0	
ID	ID	ID	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	No	No	NA	No	No	NA	NA	NA	NA	
NA	NA	NA	No	No	50.0	Yes	Yes	78.1	No	No	79.3	No	No	56.2	No	No	50.0	
No	No	53.0	No	No	52.8	No	No	58.9	No	No	63.0	No	No	62.8	No	No	50.0	
Yes	Yes	16.3	Yes	Yes	28.3	No	No	27.0	Yes	No	18.6	Yes	No	28.1	Yes	No	21.4	
Yes	No	71.6	Yes	Yes	73.6	No	No	70.7	No	No	72.6	No	No	70.3	No	No	67.8	

(continues)

Table 1. Performance of All N.C. Charter Schools

	Charter School / Grade Span	Year Opened	1997–1998 Met Expected Growth	1997–1998 Met Exemplary Growth	1997–1998 Performance Composite	1998–1999 Met Expected Growth	1998–1999 Met Exemplary Growth	1998–1999 Performance Composite	1999–2000 Met Expected Growth	1999–2000 Met Exemplary Growth	1999–2000 Performance Composite
		Continued from Local District									
52	Kinston Charter Academy	*Lenoir*									
	K-8	2004	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
53	Lake Norman Charter School	*Charlotte/Mecklenburg*									
	5-8	1998	NA	NA	NA	Yes	Yes	87.0	Yes	Yes	88.6
54	Lakeside School	*Alamance/Burlington*									
	6-12	1997	ID	ID	ID	No	No	7.0	Yes	Yes	23.7
55	Laurinburg Charter School	*Scotland*									
	9-12	1998	NA	NA	NA	ID	ID	ID	No	No	2.9
56	Laurinburg Homework Center	*Scotland*									
	8-12	1999	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	No	No	33.3
57	Lincoln Charter School	*Lincoln*									
	K-6	1998	NA	NA	NA	No	No	76.0	No	No	70.9
58	Magellan Charter School	*Wake*									
	4-8	1997	Yes	Yes	95.7	Yes	Yes	97.2	Yes	Yes	96.4
59	Maureen Joy Charter School	*Durham*									
	K-3	1997	ID	ID	ID	No	No	26.9	No	No	29.8
60	Metrolina Regional Scholars' Academy	*Charlotte/Mecklenburg*									
	K-8	2000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
61	Millennium Charter Academy	*Surry/Mt. Airy*									
	K-7	2000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
62	Mountain Discovery Charter	*Swain*									
	K-8	2002	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
63	New Century Charter High School	*Alamance*									
	9-12	1998	NA	NA	NA	ID	ID	ID	Yes	Yes	52.2
64	Omuteko Gwamaziima	*Durham*									
	K-8	1999	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	No	No	29.6
65	Orange Charter School	*Orange*									
	K-8	1997	No	No	78.4	Yes	Yes	78.6	Yes	Yes	82.0
66	PACE Academy	*Orange*									
	9-12	2004	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
67	Phoenix Academy	*Guilford*									
	K-9	2000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
68	Piedmont Community Charter School	*Gaston*									
	K-11	2000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
69	PreEminent Charter School	*Wake*									
	K-8	2000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

on End-of-Grade Tests from 1997–2006, *continued*

Met Expected Growth	Met Exemplary Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth
2000–2001			2001–2002			2002–2003			2003–2004			2004–2005			2005–2006			
NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	Yes	Yes	79.6	Yes	Yes	63.0
Yes	Yes	93.2	Yes	Yes	98.1	Yes	Yes	99.3	No	No	98.9	Yes	Yes	98.6	Yes	No	92.4
No	No	26.1	No	No	10.1	No	No	22.6	No	No	39.7	Yes	No	26.3	No	No	NA
Yes	Yes	24.7	No	No	23.5	NA	NA	NA	Yes	No	52.8	NA	NA	NA	No	No	15.3
No	No	15.4	No	No	37.5	Yes	Yes	52.9	Yes	Yes	63.2	Yes	No	30.4	Yes	No	25.7
Yes	No	80.6	No	No	79.9	Yes	Yes	86.7	Yes	No	84.3	NA	NA	NA	Yes	No	78.8
Yes	Yes	99.2	Yes	Yes	99.2	Yes	Yes	99.9	Yes	Yes	99.9	Yes	Yes	100	Yes	Yes	97.9
Yes	Yes	60.3	No	No	61.6	Yes	Yes	69.5	No	No	63.8	No	No	60.9	No	No	43.6
No	No	98.7	Yes	Yes	100	No	No	100	Yes	Yes	99.2	Yes	Yes	100	Yes	No	100
No	No	81.2	No	No	82.5	Yes	Yes	89.0	No	No	86.4	Yes	No	91.6	Yes	No	86.0
NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	Yes	No	79.5	Yes	Yes	86.9	No	No	74.7	No	No	59.0
No	No	26.1	No	No	49.0	No	No	39.2	Yes	Yes	36.9	Yes	No	40.2	Yes	Yes	44.7
No	No	30.5	No	No	46.3	Yes	No	50.3	Yes	Yes	58.3	No	No	58.6	No	No	50.0
No	No	86.8	No	No	82.2	Yes	Yes	87.0	No	No	87.5	Yes	Yes	91.3	Yes	No	71.8
NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	No	No	56.3	Yes	Yes	56.7
No	No	79.1	Yes	Yes	83.0	Yes	Yes	93.1	Yes	No	95.3	No	No	95.7	No	No	81.5
No	No	59.9	Yes	No	75.4	Yes	Yes	89.4	No	No	88.0	Yes	No	91.3	Yes	No	74.1
ID	ID	ID	No	No	47.4	Yes	No	66.4	Yes	No	76.1	Yes	Yes	79.2	No	No	46.6

(continues)

Table 1. Performance of All N.C. Charter Schools

	Charter School / Grade Span	Year Opened	1997–1998 Met Expected Growth	1997–1998 Met Exemplary Growth	1997–1998 Performance Composite	1998–1999 Met Expected Growth	1998–1999 Met Exemplary Growth	1998–1999 Performance Composite	1999–2000 Met Expected Growth	1999–2000 Met Exemplary Growth	1999–2000 Performance Composite
70	Provisions Academy	*Lee*									
	6-12	1999	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	No	No	20.2
71	Quality Education Academy	*Forsyth*									
	6-8	1997	No	No	26.4	Yes	Yes	53.6	No	No	52.5
72	Queen's Grant Community Schools	*Charlotte/Mecklenburg*									
	K-8	2002	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
73	Quest Academy	*Wake*									
	K-8	1999	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	Yes	Yes	94.3
74	Raleigh Charter High School	*Wake*									
	9-12	1999	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	Yes	Yes	87.6
75	Research Triangle Charter Academy	*Durham*									
	K-8	1999	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	No	No	31.4
76	River Mill Academy	*Alamance*									
	K-12 (Formerly River Mill Charter)	1998	NA	NA	NA	No	No	51.2	Yes	No	62.5
77	Rocky Mount Preparatory	*Nash*									
	K-12 (Formerly Charter Public School and then Rocky Mount Charter)	1997	No	No	52.5	No	No	52.5	Yes	No	51.9
78	Rowan Academy	*Rowan*									
	K-5	1999	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	No	No	37.4
79	Sallie B. Howard School	*Wilson*									
	K-8	1997	No	No	51.4	Yes	No	45.8	No	No	45.7
80	Sandhills Theatre Arts Renaissance School (STARS)	*Moore*									
	K-8	1999	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	No	No	46.6
81	Socrates Academy	*Mecklenburg*									
	K-2	2005	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
82	SPARC Academy	*Wake*									
	K-8	1998	NA	NA	NA	ID	ID	ID	No	No	31.4
83	Sterling Montessori Academy	*Wake*									
	K-8	1997	ID	ID	ID	Yes	Yes	75.6	Yes	Yes	78.6
84	Success Institute	*Iredell*									
	K-8	2000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
85	Sugar Creek Charter School	*Charlotte/Mecklenburg*									
	K-8	1999	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	No	No	26.6
86	Summit Charter School	*Jackson*									
	K-8	1997	Yes	Yes	87.2	No	No	80.6	Yes	Yes	80.0

on End-of-Grade Tests from 1997–2006, *continued*

2000–2001			2001–2002			2002–2003			2003–2004			2004–2005			2005–2006		
Met Expected Growth	Met Exemplary Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Met Expected Growth
No	No	39.0	No	No	39.2	No	No	45.0	Yes	No	44.2	Yes	No	39.0	Yes	No	18.1
Yes	No	57.0	No	No	54.0	Yes	Yes	63.7	Yes	Yes	75.9	Yes	No	76.2	No	No	61.5
NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	No	No	88.3	Yes	Yes	91.1	Yes	No	93.1	Yes	No	83.4
Yes	Yes	93.5	Yes	Yes	99.5	Yes	Yes	100	Yes	Yes	100	Yes	Yes	100	Yes	Yes	99.1
Yes	Yes	92.7	Yes	Yes	92.9	Yes	Yes	94.9	Yes	Yes	96.9	Yes	Yes	95.4	Yes	No	97.6
No	No	49.1	Yes	Yes	71.7	Yes	Yes	80.6	No	No	82.9	Yes	No	81.2	Yes	No	67.1
Yes	No	66.3	No	No	79.0	Yes	No	88.0	No	No	91.8	Yes	No	92.6	No	No	80.7
Yes	Yes	65.0	No	No	65.7	Yes	Yes	76.9	No	No	76.2	No	No	73.5	No	No	57.8
Yes	Yes	36.4	Yes	Yes	64.1	Yes	Yes	75.7	Yes	No	76.8	Yes	Yes	74.2	NA	NA	NA
Yes	No	60.1	No	No	66.3	Yes	Yes	77.2	Yes	Yes	81.8	NA	NA	NA	No	No	46.6
No	No	54.3	Yes	No	63.6	No	No	62.5	Yes	No	74.0	No	No	64.8	No	No	50.0
NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
No	No	47.6	No	No	52.8	Yes	Yes	57.3	No	No	63.0	No	No	70.8	Yes	No	42.7
No	No	76.8	No	No	80.0	Yes	Yes	86.8	No	No	90.7	NA	NA	NA	Yes	No	81.4
No	No	45.3	NA	NA	NA	Yes	Yes	56.0	Yes	No	82.1	No	No	71.5	No	No	54.7
No	No	41.1	No	No	41.8	Yes	Yes	59.4	Yes	No	64.4	No	No	69.3	No	No	50.3
No	No	85.7	Yes	Yes	93.7	Yes	No	88.5	Yes	No	95.7	Yes	No	92.3	Yes	No	88.2

(continues)

Table 1. Performance of All N.C. Charter Schools

	Charter School / Grade Span	Year Opened	1997–1998 Met Expected Growth	1997–1998 Met Exemplary Growth	1997–1998 Performance Composite	1998–1999 Met Expected Growth	1998–1999 Met Exemplary Growth	1998–1999 Performance Composite	1999–2000 Met Expected Growth	1999–2000 Met Exemplary Growth	1999–2000 Performance Composite
87	The Academy of Moore County	*Moore*									
	5-8 (Formerly Mast School)	1997	No	No	81.9	Yes	Yes	76.3	No	No	72.3
88	The Learning Center	*Cherokee*									
	K-8	1997	No	No	56.1	Yes	No	68.6	No	No	57.8
89	The Mountain Community School	*Henderson*									
	K-8	1999	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	Yes	Yes	90.7
90	The New Dimensions School	*Burke*									
	K-5	2001	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
91	The Woods Charter School	*Chatham*									
	1-12	1998	NA	NA	NA	ID	ID	ID	No	No	62.1
92	Thomas Jefferson Classical Academy	*Rutherford*									
	6-12	1999	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	No	No	81.0
93	Tiller School	*Carteret*									
	1-6	1998	NA	NA	NA	Yes	Yes	74.4	Yes	Yes	77.0
94	Torchlight Academy	*Wake*									
	K-5 (Formerly NE Raleigh Charter Academy)	1999	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	No	No	52.6
95	Two Rivers Community School	*Watauga*									
	K-8	2005	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
96	Union Academy	*Union*									
	K-10	2000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
97	Vance Charter School	*Vance*									
	K-8	1999	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	No	No	72.9
98	Visions Charter School	*Catawba*									
	K-6	2003	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
99	Washington Montessori	*Beaufort*									
	K-8	2000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
	Wayne Technical Academy	*Wayne*									
	9-12	1999	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	Yes	Yes	8.5

Source: N.C. Department of Public Instruction. See *http://abcs.ncpublicschools.org/abcs/* for data.

ID = Insufficient data as reported by N.C. Department of Public Instruction

NA = School not open or data not available

Note: Results for 2005–06 are based on a revised accountability model and are not comparable to results from previous years. High growth was referred to as exemplary growth prior to 2002.

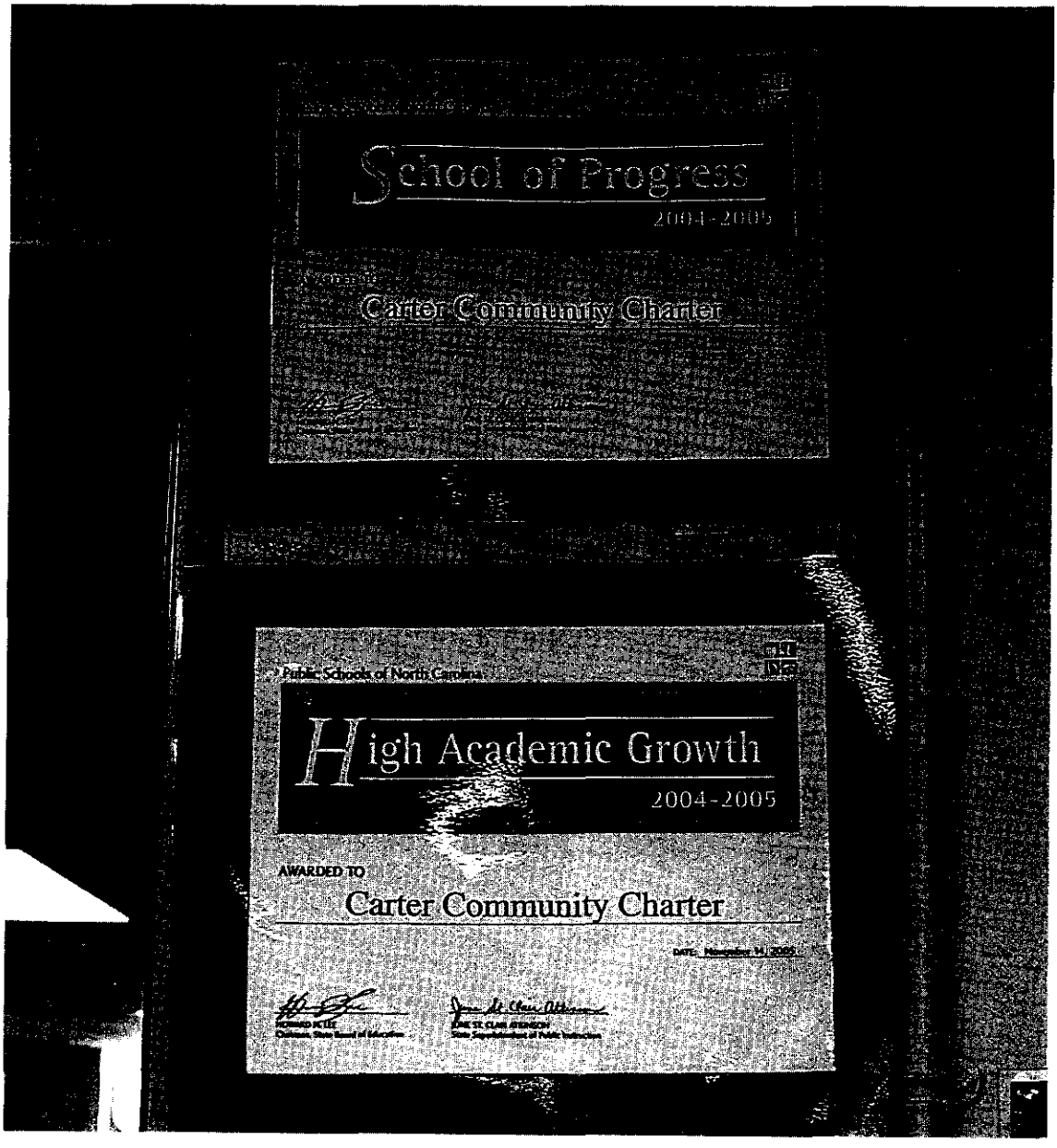
on End-of-Grade Tests from 1997–2006, *continued*

2000–2001			2001–2002			2002–2003			2003–2004			2004–2005			2005–2006		
Met Expected Growth	Met Exemplary Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Performance Composite	Met Expected Growth	Met High Growth	Met Expected Growth
No	No	65.1	Yes	Yes	68.4	Yes	No	70.3	Yes	Yes	80.3	No	No	62.3	No	No	55.8
No	No	77.1	No	No	71.8	Yes	Yes	72.2	No	No	73.5	Yes	No	78.3	Yes	Yes	83.1
No	No	88.4	Yes	Yes	94.2	Yes	No	85.5	Yes	No	94.2	Yes	No	93.6	No	No	88.1
NA	NA	NA	ID	ID	ID	ID	ID	ID	No	No	59.4	No	No	63.5	Yes	No	49.0
Yes	Yes	81.8	Yes	Yes	79.5	No	No	88.6	Yes	No	86.7	NA	NA	NA	Yes	No	88.3
No	No	83.3	No	No	86.8	No	No	87.1	No	No	86.8	Yes	No	90.6	No	No	85.0
Yes	Yes	87.8	Yes	No	89.2	Yes	Yes	90.0	No	No	84.9	Yes	No	92.3	No	No	69.9
No	No	39.8	No	No	48.8	Yes	Yes	55.2	No	No	66.3	No	No	58.1	No	No	38.3
NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	No	No	80.4
No	No	84.2	Yes	No	87.0	Yes	No	90.4	No	No	91.4	No	No	88.6	Yes	No	83.6
No	No	73.3	Yes	No	85.6	Yes	Yes	90.7	Yes	No	93.5	Yes	Yes	93.6	Yes	No	82.9
NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	Yes	No	51.6	No	No	56.9	Yes	No	60.0
ID	ID	ID	No	No	78.6	Yes	Yes	82.7	Yes	Yes	87.2	No	No	85.1	No	No	66.2
No	No	5.8	Yes	No	16.4	No	No	31.4	Closed								

The N.C. Department of Public Instruction reported ABC data for 99 charter schools in 2005–06. Seven of those charter schools have closed: East Winston Primary School, Lakeside School, Ann Atwater Community School, Rowan Academy, Visions Charter, Laurinburg Charter School, and Imani Institute. In 2006–07, there are 93 charter schools operating in North Carolina, including John H. Baker Charter High, which will close on June 30, 2007. Seven charter schools are in the preliminary planning stages: Charlotte Secondary School, KIPP: Charlotte, Columbus Charter School, Voyager Academy, Pine Lake Preparatory, Neuse Charter School, and the Wilmington Preparatory Academy. Only Columbus Charter in Columbus County and Neuse Charter in Johnston County would be in counties without charter schools.

(continued from page 10) Within these categories, the ABCs recognizes schools of high growth (referred to as exemplary growth prior to 2001), expected growth, and less than expected growth.

The new classifications — added to account for federal testing standards in the No Child Left Behind law — make it difficult to compare charters' ABC status with previous years. However, it is possible to make comparisons with the traditional public schools for the same year. For example, during the 2003–04 school year, a much higher percentage of traditional public schools than charter schools (72.4 percent versus 49.2 percent) ranked in the top four categories. These categories are Honor Schools of Excellence, Schools of Excellence, Schools of Distinction, and Schools of Progress. Correspondingly, a much lower percentage of traditional public schools than charters (27.3 percent versus 50.2 percent) landed in the bottom three categories. These categories carry the labels No Recognition, Priority Schools, and Low-Performing Schools. Charters had a particularly heavy percentage of schools,



42.1 percent, classified as No Recognition, meaning students at each of these schools did not register sufficient academic growth over the course of the school year after adjusting for demographics and prior academic performance of the student body.

At the same time, 20.4 percent of charters were ranked as Honors Schools of Excellence. Included in these is the highest-ranked school in the state, Quest Academy in Raleigh, with a performance composite of 100, followed closely by Magellan Charter of Raleigh with a 99.9, and Metrolina Regional Scholars Academy in Charlotte with 99.2. While these schools differ in terms of racial and ethnic diversity, ranging from a low of 6 percent minority students and no African-American students to a high of 39.8 percent minorities at Metrolina Regional Scholars Academy, they share a common distinction. No students at any of the three schools qualify for free and reduced priced lunches, a statistic used to measure the number of students at a school facing economic hardship. That's not to say all charter schools that perform well on state accountability tests share this characteristic. For example, at Gaston College Preparatory Academy, with its longer school day and year, more than 95 percent of students scored at grade level. The school, with a student body that is 92.8 percent minority and with 70 percent of its students qualifying for a free or reduced-price lunch, earned the designation Honor School of Excellence. However, Gaston College Preparatory Academy is the exception, rather than the rule.

There once was a pretty good student,
Who sat in a pretty good class
And was taught by a pretty good teacher;
Who always let pretty good pass.

...

When he looked for a pretty good job.
It was then, when he sought a position,
He discovered that life could be tough.

...

The pretty good town in our story
Was part of a pretty good state,

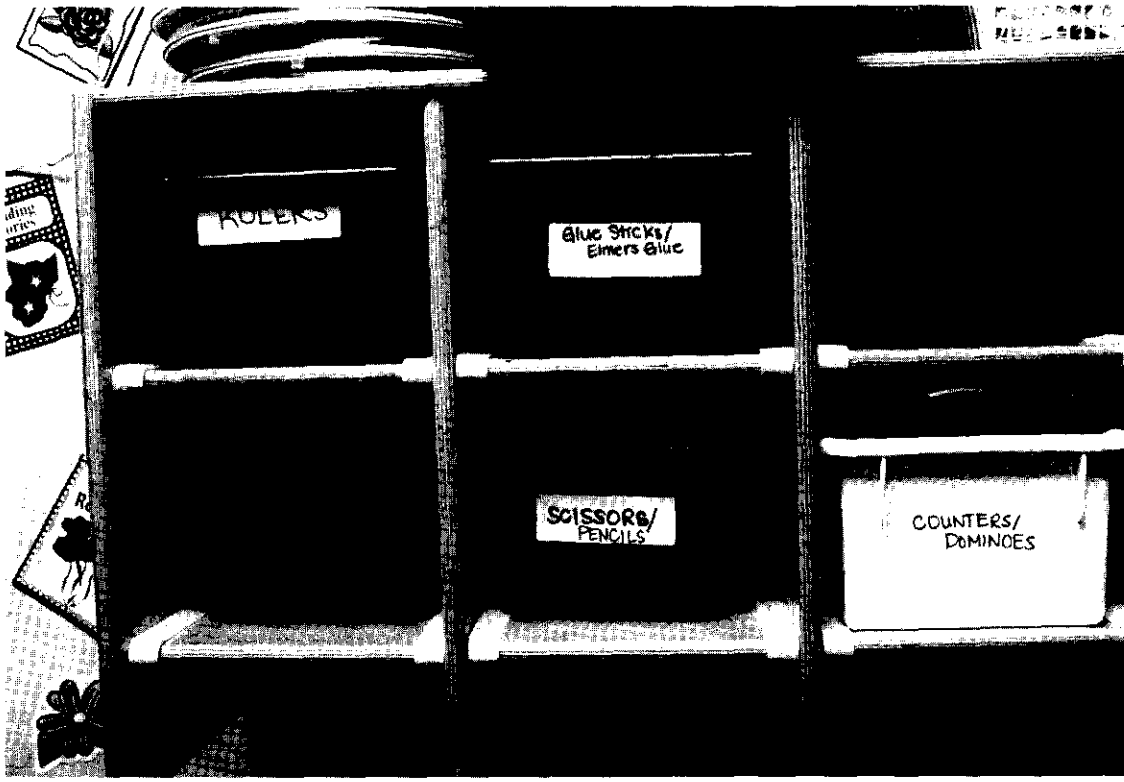
...

Pretty proud of the greatness it had,
Which learned much too late,
If you want to be great,
Pretty good is, in fact, pretty bad.

—CHARLES OSGOOD
"THE OSGOOD FILE"

Yet another means of measuring academic performance of charter schools is whether all populations of students within the school are making adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Both traditional and charter public schools have struggled to meet academic proficiency targets for all *subgroups* of students as required under the law. For the 2004–05 school year, 57.3 percent of traditional public schools made adequate yearly progress compared to 61.1 percent of charter schools.[4] A higher percentage of charter schools than traditional public schools also made adequate yearly progress in the 2002–03 and 2003–04 school years. Because charter schools are smaller, they often have fewer subgroups within their student bodies, which can make achieving adequate yearly progress less challenging. Of the 37 charter schools that failed to make adequate yearly progress in 2004–05, Crossroads Charter High School in Charlotte achieved the distinction for only one of seven subgroups. At Guilford Charter in Guilford County, eight of 13 subgroups made adequate yearly progress, while seven of 13 subgroups made adequate yearly progress at Healthy Start Academy in Durham, and none of the three subgroups at Lakeside School in Alamance County achieved the distinction.

But Jack Moyer, Director of the Office of Charter Schools, says an equally troubling list could be made of traditional public schools where adequate yearly progress was not attained by large numbers of subgroups. These include Fairmont Middle School in Robeson County, where seven of 13 subgroups made adequate yearly progress, the grades 6–12 alternative school Lakeview in Durham with zero of four subgroups attaining adequate yearly progress, and West Hoke Middle School in Hoke



County, where eight of 13 subgroups made adequate yearly progress. Moyer adds that it isn't fair to criticize charter schools for testing smaller numbers of subgroups because the same is true of many traditional public schools. "Merely discounting the AYP status due to lower numbers of subgroups undermines charter schools' accomplishments because just as many traditional schools with lower numbers of subgroups fail to attain AYP," says Moyer. "We cannot discount a school's performance, charter or LEA, because they have a handful of subgroups (i.e. many of the early college high schools in 2006 only had one or two subgroups)."

Charters offer teachers a chance to realize their dreams. If you have a good idea, and it's in the best interest of the kids, we'll let you try it.

—**Rob Matheson**
Teacher, Kestrel Heights Charter School in Durham

In 2005–06, 52.7 percent of charter schools made adequate yearly progress, 47.3 percent did not, and the adequate yearly progress of eight charter schools is under review. Statewide, 45.2 percent of schools made adequate yearly progress and 54.8 percent did not.

In addition to their disappointing performance on the state's ABCs testing and on the federal government's adequate yearly progress, charter schools also do not have graduation rates as high as those achieved statewide. In February 2007, the N.C. Department of Public Instruction released for the first time four-year cohort graduation rates for 2006. This measure tracks each freshman through four years of high school. Statewide, 68.1 percent of freshman graduated, but only 55.3 percent of freshman in charter schools graduated. Six charter schools had cohort graduation rates lower than 30 percent: Cape Lookout Marine Science High (28.6%), Laurinburg Charter (27.8%), Crossnore Academy (27.3%), The Laurinburg Homework Center (23.3%), Kennedy Charter (20.0), and Crossroads Charter High (14.3%) (see Table 2, p. 27).

In conclusion, the academic performance of charter schools—as measured by the ABCs, adequate yearly progress, and cohort graduation rates—needs to improve before North Carolina increases or eliminates the cap on the number of charter schools.

Other Studies of Charter Schools in North Carolina

So how do North Carolina's charter schools compare to traditional public schools on the whole? In 2004, two studies were published that specifically compared the performance of several charter schools with traditional public schools in North Carolina. Researchers Helen Ladd and Robert Bifulco of the Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy at Duke University published "The Impacts of Charter Schools on Student Achievement: Evidence from North Carolina" in August 2004. This study asked three questions:

Table 2. 2006 Four-Year Cohort High School Graduation Rates by Charter School

School Name	Graduates/ Numerator	Class Size/ Denominator	Percent Graduated
1. Crossroads Charter High	4	28	14.3%
2. Kennedy Charter	3	15	20.0%
3. The Laurinburg Homework Center	7	30	23.3%
4. Crossnore Academy	6	22	27.3%
5. Laurinburg Charter	5	18	27.8%
6. Cape Lookout Marine Science High	18	63	28.6%
7. CG Woodson School of Challenge	12	30	40.0%
8. Baker Charter High	6	14	42.9%
9. Thomas Jefferson Classical Academy	15	31	48.4%
10. New Century Charter	11	22	50.0%
Charters Average			**55.3%**
11. Gray Stone Day	31	55	56.4%
12. Clover Garden	6	10	60.0%
Statewide Average			**68.1%**
13. East Wake Academy	16	22	72.7%
14. Community Partners Charter	16	20	80.0%
15. Rocky Mount Preparatory	17	20	85.0%
16. Woods Charter	21	23	91.3%
17. Franklin Academy	24	26	92.3%
18. River Mill Academy	13	14	92.9%
19. Raleigh Charter High	98	101	97.0%

Source: N.C. Department of Public Instruction. *2006 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate by School.* See *http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/docs/newsroom/news/2006-07/byschool-attach4.pdf.*

1) Do students who attend charter schools make larger achievement gains, on average, than they would have in the absence of charter schools?

2) Do students who attend traditional public schools located near charter schools, and thus subject to competition from charter schools, make larger achievement gains than they would have in the absence of charter schools?

3) What accounts for quality differences between charter schools and traditional public schools?[5]

The study followed five cohorts of students, collectively encompassing all public school students in North Carolina, entering third grade during the 1995–96 school year through the 2000–01 school year, when most would graduate from eighth grade. Students' scores on end-of-grade (EOG) reading and math tests were used to mark their progress. Significantly, the study included 8,745 students who attended both traditional public schools and a charter school at some point between grades 3–8. This allowed researchers to compare the test score gains of students in charter schools with the test score gains made by the same students in traditional public schools.

The study found that, on average, students in charter schools do not do as well on end-of-grade tests as their counterparts in traditional public schools, and that some of the difference is attributable to the charter schools themselves rather than to unobservable characteristics of the students. Charter school students exhibit "considerably smaller achievement gains" in reading and math, on average, than they would have in traditional public schools.[6]

Noting that other studies have shown that charter school student performance typically lags that of traditional public schools for charters that are newly opened, but disappears for charters that have been operating for three or four years, Ladd and Bifulco conducted an additional analysis to control for length of time a charter had been open. They found that the negative effects of charter schools in North Carolina "remain statistically significant and large even for schools that have been operating for five years."[7]

The study did not find that the presence of a charter school had any effect on the achievement of students in nearby traditional public schools. As to why students make smaller test score gains in charter schools than traditional public schools, the authors suggest that high student turnover in some charter schools may be the difference. "On average, the percentage of students in a school between grades 4 and 8 that have made a non-structural transfer in the last year is higher in charter schools than in traditional public schools," the authors state. A non-structural transfer occurs when a student decides to transfer to a new school before completing the full grade span at the school he or she is attending. As expected, the average student turnover is lower in charter schools that have been open longer. However, the authors find that average turnover rates remain twice as high in charters even when they have been open for five years.

Be good enough not to have students leave your schools.

—**Roger Gerber**
Director, N.C. League of Charter Schools

A separate study by George M. Holmes, Jeff Desimone, and Nicholas G. Rupp was published by the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, a long-time advocate of charter schools. It found that examining performance at the school level rather than the level of the individual student did show a competition effect of improvement at North Carolina traditional public schools located near charter schools The authors speculate that this finding, which is contrary to the finding by Ladd and Bifulco, may be because traditional schools faced with competition tended to focus on students just shy of achieving grade level, so that gains by a few students could have a big effect on the overall performance of the school. "In short, our results reveal substantial improvements in traditional public school performance due to the introduction and *(continues on page 32)*

The Tried, the True, and the New: Profiles of Four North Carolina Charter Schools

Gaston College Preparatory

Is it possible to take a group of school children, only 49 percent of whom read at grade level, and raise that to 93 percent in a single year? Gaston College Preparatory School has done that and more in the most unlikely of locations.

Gaston College Preparatory is a middle school (grades 5–8) located in Northampton County, one of the poorest counties in the state. The school was founded by Caleb Dolan and Tammy Sutton, both veterans of Teach for America, a nonprofit organization modeled after the Peace Corps that places teachers in schools needing help. In 1996, Teach for America sent Dolan and Sutton to Gaston Middle School, a low-performing school serving primarily African-American students. During that time, Dolan learned of KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program), an educational strategy emphasizing long school days, high expectations, and a college track that has been successfully employed in two middle schools in Houston and the Bronx (the latter featured on the CBS television news program *60 Minutes*). The pair decided to start a similar school in Northampton County, and with the blessings of the KIPP Foundation, opened Gaston College Preparatory in the fall of 2001.

"The idea of school choice was alien down here, and they'd never heard of a school like ours," says Dolan. "We said you will be expected to wear uniforms, stay late, and work hard."

The school enrolled 80 fifth graders, only 49 percent of whom were reading at grade level. By the end of the first year, that figure had risen to 93 percent. In 2004, Gaston College Prep's ABCs performance composite was 94.8 percent, seventh highest amongst all charter schools in North Carolina, and in 2005–06, it was 86.7 percent and 13th highest. The school has won the ABC's School of Distinction Award four times and Most Improved award once.

The school day at Gaston College Preparatory begins at 8:00 a.m. and lasts until 5:00 p.m. Teachers are required to stay after school to help any children that need it and are available by cell phone until 8:30 p.m. Classes are held two Saturdays a month. Parents sign a form saying they will agree to check their children's homework every night.

Discipline at the school is strict. A system called "paycheck" rewards well-behaved students with trips to places like Boston, New York City, and Washington, D.C. Those who misbehave lose checks and travel privileges. Yet the atmosphere is upbeat. Bright colors reign in the halls. Teachers and students are enthusiastic.

"You can be one of the top students in the class or one of the bottom and the teachers will go out of their way to help you," says Chevron Boone, an eighth grader. "They make you believe you will receive what you work for."

Every student at Gaston College Preparatory expects to go to college, and their aim is high. The eighth grade has collectively visited Duke, UNC, Yale, Harvard, and Columbia, among others.

Gaston College Preparatory received an initial loan from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Self-Help Credit Union in Durham, N.C., to purchase the land for the school and construct modular classrooms and a gymnasium. All other expenses are covered by the state per-pupil average daily membership appropriation awarded to all school systems for operating expenses.

Quest Academy

Quest Academy, a K–8 school in North Raleigh, has been ranked a School of Excellence every year it's been open except the first, when it was considered "too small" to be eligible for that ranking. For the 2003–04 school year, Quest was the top ranked school in the state on the end-of-grade test with a 100 percent passing rate. Asked what is responsible for the school's success, principal Charles Watson replies, "I wish I could tell you I've come up with a secret, but I haven't."

Watson, a veteran of 30 years in teaching and administration in the North Carolina public schools, goes on to cite Quest's defining features, which may not be revolutionary, but have yielded impressive results. Classes are small, limited to 15 students per classroom. All teachers are licensed, certified, and teaching in their area of expertise. They average 11 years of experience, and 40 percent hold advanced degrees.

"Most important, they are asked to perform only one job—teach," Watson says. "They have no other meetings, no nights, no weekends, and no teacher workdays. I treat them all professionally. They have keys to the door. They have no limits on instructional supplies. We pay them comparable salaries to the [traditional] public schools."

Contrary to schools like Gaston College Prep that demand long hours of their students, Quest's school day runs only from 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. This allows students time to pursue extracurricular activities of their own choosing. "We tend to attract kids who are very accomplished at a particular sport or hobby," Watson says. "We've had gymnasts, skaters, swimmers, and even Broadway performers."

Quest has made maximum use of its 6,800 square feet of space. Rooms are small but brightly lit. Rather than having a separate computer lab, the 126 students have access to 15 wireless laptop computers connected with a single high-speed printer. Lunch is served in the front entry three days a week. Kids shoot baskets in the parking lot.

Watson apologizes for not having more to show. "All we have is instruction and lunch," he says. "But we take our responsibility to teach our children very seriously."

In 2005–06, Quest Academy had a performance composite of 99.1 percent, the second highest among charter schools.

Children's Community School

Opened in August 2004, Children's Community School in Davidson, N.C., might be said to represent the new and improved generation of charter schools approved by the state. The school was launched with a strong business plan put together by its board. That board secured a $1.7 million loan from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (Davidson is considered a rural community), which allowed for the renovation of a 40,000 square-foot office/industrial building to house the school. Top flight teachers were recruited, some with master's degrees and the rest with bachelor's degrees. Some 650 students applied for 35 open slots.

Principal Joy Warner talks enthusiastically about the school's approach of looking at children as individuals and designing the curriculum appropriately. "Parents want a school that respects and honors children as individuals," Warner says. "They want a place where kids are not just regurgitating what the teacher tells them."

She touts the school's "whole child" approach, focusing on the child's social, emotional, and physical, as well as cognitive development. "You'll see kids doing the crabwalk or the wheelbarrow down the hall as a way of building upper body strength, which helps with handwriting, and calming them down if they've got a lot of excess energy," Warner says.

Children's Community School employs the arts as a method of instruction. For example, the third grade is studying Charlotte's history. The students are researching

famous people associated with the city, creating likenesses of them out of wax, and publishing a book about them in a writing class.

Children's Community follows The Basic School approach developed by Dr. Ernest Boyer, past president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Boyer researched elementary schools for 25 years to determine what teaching practices were most effective. His conclusion, published in *The Basic School,* was that education needed to return to "basic" values, focusing on neighborhood schools and the first years of formal learning.

"It's time to stop pretending there's some magic innovation we have yet to discover and start concentrating on what good teachers already know and do," Boyer wrote.

The Basic School is focused on four priorities—community, curriculum, climate, and character. All members of the school community are expected to hold a shared vision of learning. Teachers are considered leaders and parents as partners. The curriculum focuses on literacy as the first and most essential goal, with all children expected to become proficient in the written and spoken word, as well as in mathematics and the arts. The school seeks to enhance the climate for learning through small class sizes, ample learning resources from building blocks to computers, and support services ranging from academics to health to counseling. Finally, the basic school teaches a commitment to character centered around seven core virtues—honesty, respect, responsibility, compassion, self-discipline, perseverance, and giving.

Children's Community currently serves grades K–3, with plans to add grades 4 and 5 in the next two years. Classes range in size from 18 to 22 students with a full-time teacher and assistant in every classroom. A literary coach also assists reading classes.

Though only about 10 percent of students are racial minorities, Warner says the school is "working double time to get diversity into our lottery." Warner says the school enrolls a high percentage of special needs children (she estimates 60 out of 350 students), including those with Downs syndrome, severe physical handicaps, and speech and language disabilities. "We try to include these students in the regular classrooms, but we also have breakout classes where needed," Warner says.

Children's Community opened in the fall of 2004, and in 2005–06, its performance composite was 87 percent, 12th highest among charter schools.

Carolina International School

Carolina International School occupies 16 modular units on 34 acres in the fast developing countryside of southern Cabarrus County, an area known as University City due to its proximity to the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Cabarrus County needs 15 new schools; a recently passed bond measure approved money for five. So any school, even a K–7 charter enrolling 320 students, is welcomed.

Carolina International School (CIS) was founded in 2004 by director Richard Beall, who felt the need for a charter school with a strong multi-cultural focus. "International education is essential to prepare U.S. citizens of the 21st century," Beall says. "Not only is our world increasingly interconnected and interdependent, our local communities are growing in multicultural diversity. Our students must develop a broad awareness of other cultures and the differences that distinguish them. But they must simultaneously acquire a deep understanding of all that we share in common as human beings and occupants of a single planet."

CIS follows the *North Carolina Standard Course of Study,* but international education is interwoven thoughout the curriculum and the life of the school. CIS is collaborating with the Charlotte and Concord Sister Cities Programs to align each grade with one of seven international cities for the duration of the students' years at CIS.

"This will enable our students to develop *sustained* relationships with their peers

in other countries through pen pal and Internet correspondence and through visiting delegations from these countries," Beall says. Guests from more than 20 countries have visited the campus in collaboration with Charlotte's International House and the U.S. Department of State.

Faculty at CIS come from seven different countries. Two teachers hail from Uganda, representing the UNITE program (Uganda and North Carolina International Teaching for the Environment), sponsored by the N.C. Zoological Park. CIS is the first charter school to be a partner with World View, the prestigious center in Chapel Hill that provides international education programs, seminars, workshops, and travel experiences for K–12 educators worldwide.

CIS follows the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program, an international, transdisciplinary program designed to foster development of the "whole child," including social, physical, emotional, and cultural as well as academic needs. The Primary Years Program employs six transdisciplinary themes school-wide for each six-week term: who we are, where we are in place and time, how we express ourselves, how the world works, how we organize ourselves, and sharing the planet.

The teaching follows units of inquiry. "The 4th grade might be studying North Carolina history, which has involved a tremendous growth in population from in-migration," Beall states. "A unit of inquiry might ask, what are the deeper events going on? Why do people move? Students might develop a project on migration and movement."

CIS also places a strong emphasis on environmental education. Beall hopes the 34-acre campus with its forest and wetlands will become an outdoor classroom for various activities that promote environmental awareness and stewardship. Plans for permanent buildings call for energy and water-saving features such as daylighting (clerestory windows that replace the need for artificial lights) and cisterns to gather rainwater for use in flushing toilets. Teachers and students work together on environmental service projects "to cultivate respect, learn responsibility, develop solutions and offer service while having fun." In 2005–06, CIS had a performance composite of 85.9 percent, 15th highest among charter schools.

—John Manuel

(continued from page 28) growth of charter school choice," the authors conclude. "Read alongside the results of studies based on student-level data, they suggest that even a little bit of competition can force schools to appear to be improving, but that policymakers need to take care to ensure that translates into real gains for the average student."[8]

"Charter school students exhibit 'considerably smaller achievement gains' in reading and math, on average, than they would have in traditional public schools."

— Study by Helen Ladd and Robert Bifulco

In 2004, SRI International conducted a study for the U.S. Department of Education entitled "Evaluation of the Public Charter Schools Program." The federal government supports charter schools through the Public Charter Schools Program (PCSP). PCSP funds the state grant program, supports charter school research and demonstration programs, and underwrites national charter school conferences. The SRI report was designed to: (1) provide the public and education policymakers with the findings from a descriptive examination of how the PCSP operates, and (2) continue documentation of the evolution of the charter school movement.

The report contains case studies of charter schools in five states, including North Carolina, analyzing data from the 2001–02 school year. Based on these case studies, the report concludes that charter schools are less likely to meet state performance standards than traditional public schools. For North Carolina, the key finding was that 12 percent of charter schools did not meet the state performance standard (e.g., were classified as Low-Performing under the ABCs program) during the 2001–02 school year, as opposed to 1 percent of traditional public schools.[9] The study does not attempt to answer whether this is due to some attribute of the charter schools themselves, the prior achievement of the students, or some other factor. However, the authors make clear that "charter schools were less likely to meet performance standards compared with traditional public schools" in all five states studied: Colorado, Illinois, Massachusetts, North Carolina, and Texas.[10] (For more, see "Issues Surrounding Charter Schools: A Look at Other States," pp. 38–43.)

"[O]ur results reveal substantial improvements in traditional public school performance due to the introduction and growth of charter school choice."

— STUDY BY GEORGE M. HOLMES, *ET AL.*

Weighing the Numbers

The mission of the Office of Charter Schools within the N.C. Department of Public Instruction is to provide leadership and technical assistance to people interested in starting a public charter school and, once started, to help the schools maintain high-quality academic programs and assist with issues around management and governance within the school in compliance with the North Carolina Charter Schools Act.[11] While a state agency, the office advocates for charter schools within the scope of the law. That's in part because without charter schools, the office would have no reason to exist. Officials in the office are quick to point to the dramatic improvement in charter schools' performance composites for the 2003–04 school year over 2000–01, the last year considered in the Ladd-Bifulco study. They are especially proud of the fact that only one of the 94 charters ranked as Low-Performing in 2003–04, compared to 19 in 2000–01. And, no charter schools were designated as Low-Performing in 2004–05.

"We closed some schools and worked really hard with others to bring them up," says Jackie Jenkins, education consultant for the Office of Charter Schools. Jenkins says the key to improving the schools' performance has been The Instructional Leadership Coaching Program (ILCP) sponsored through federal grants aimed at improving charter school performance. ILCP engaged five experienced educators to work as coaches with the leaders of 15 charter schools designated as Low-Performing or priority schools in the 2000–01 school year, and the Office of Charter Schools staff says the program was implemented successfully for four years. The focus of the coaching effort was to develop an organizational structure in the schools and instructional leadership behaviors in the principals that supported improved teaching and better student performance. The program was designed specifically for low-performing charter schools and *was not offered to traditional public schools.*

"Research on effective schools points to the fact that the ultimate determination of excellence is in the leadership of the school and the quality of the teaching staffs," Jenkins says. "We believe that leadership development and focused, quality staff development provides the framework that supports teaching excellence."

Moyer, Director of the Office of Charter Schools, says performance of new charter schools has been helped dramatically by a state requirement put in place in 2002 as part of a federal grant approved through the U.S. Department of Education, that charter schools conduct a full year of planning before opening.[12] New schools receive a $100,000 grant from the federal government to assist with this planning, to train the nonprofit school's board of directors, and to get computers set up. "This is the best

thing the state has done," Moyer says. "The state has taken a huge responsibility in helping charter schools be successful, and it's really paid off."

"It comes as no surprise to teachers in the traditional public schools that children transferring in from charter schools are behind. We've been seeing this for some time."

— CAROLYN MCKINNEY, VICE-PRESIDENT, N.C. ASSOCIATION OF EDUCATORS

Further measures the state has taken to help charter schools succeed include: creation of a 10-year charter to help schools qualify for school construction loans; an annual charter schools conference that highlights best practices; regular visits to charter schools by consultants from the N.C. Office of Charter Schools; specialization of the consultant staff in areas such as board training, administrative mentoring, and exceptional children; and development of an interactive "mailbox" system to help charter schools comply with administrative reporting requirements.

Moyer is not dissuaded by the studies that show North Carolina charter schools lagging in performance behind traditional public schools. He points to a steady record of improvement beginning in 2001–02 in the percentage of charter schools making expected or high growth on the state's accountability tests based on make-up of their student bodies. While charter schools still trail the traditional public schools on this measure, Moyer says there have been some years where charter school growth showed improvement while traditional school growth declined.[13] "No one can say that if a child was in another school, they'd be doing 'X,'" Moyer says. "Many of the students who choose charters do so because they were struggling academically in traditional public schools. You can't expect charters to turn them around in a year or two." Moyer also points to a 2006 policy brief that details the difficulty of evaluating the charter schools movement nationally. As the authors put it, "There is no single method, and no single study, that can convincingly tell policymakers all that they need to know about the impact of charter schools on student learning."[14]

Roger Gerber, executive director of the N.C. League of Charter Schools of Chapel Hill, N.C., agrees. "There are studies that come to different conclusions," Gerber says. "The results are all over the place. You have to look at the author's agenda."

Duke professor Ladd defends her study, pointing out that she and Bifulco were not hypothesizing what students would do, but comparing actual gains of students in charter schools with gains the same students made in traditional public schools. "Sometimes the students went from public schools to charter schools, and sometimes it was the other way around," she says. "We observed the same negative effect either way. You wouldn't expect charter school students [coming from traditional public schools] to do *worse* even if they were unhappy with the public schools."

As for any hidden agenda, Ladd asserts she is not anti-charter. "My husband is on the board of a charter school in Durham that's doing quite well," she says. "But charters cannot claim to improve academic achievement."

Carolyn McKinney, vice-president of the N.C. Association of Educators, says the anecdotal information she gets from traditional public school teachers supports Ladd and Bifulco's findings. "It comes as no surprise to teachers in the traditional public schools that children transferring in from charter schools are behind," McKinney says. "We've been seeing this for some time."

Bryan Hassel is executive director of Public Impact, a Chapel Hill-based nonprofit organization conducting research on charter schools. Hassel was commissioned by the Charter School Leadership Council, now called the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, to do a national review of research on charter school achievement. *Charter School Achievement: What We Know,* published in July 2005, analyzes 26 studies that looked at change over time in student or charter school performance. Of these, says Hassel, 11 follow individual students over time, which he characterizes as the "ideal way to examine change." The remaining studies use other methods, such

as looking at school-wide or grade-wide changes in performance. Of the 26 studies, 12 found that overall gains in charter schools were larger than for other public schools. Four found charter schools' gains higher in certain significant categories of schools (e.g., elementary schools, high schools, or schools serving at-risk students). Six studies found comparable gains in charter and traditional public schools. Four studies, including two that focused specifically on North Carolina schools (Noblit & Dickson's 2001 study and Ladd & Bifulco's 2004 study), found that charter schools' gains lagged those of the traditional public schools generally.[15]

But a careful read shows a mixed picture. "At some level, mixed results are inevitable," writes Hassel. "The charter sector is host to a vast diversity of schools, utilizing all manner of educational and organizational approaches. The charter is but a shell, into which the operators place an instructional and management program. Asking about the quality of 'charter schools' as a group is a bit like asking about the quality of 'new restaurants' or 'American cars' — any overall generalization will mask the great diversity within."[16]

Of the two North Carolina studies Hassel reviews, the Bifulco and Ladd study is discussed above. The other study was conducted by George Noblit of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's School of Education under contract with the N.C. Department of Public Instruction. Noblit found that, "When compared to traditional public schools, charter schools as a group do not demonstrate better performance; in fact, their students tend to trail those in other public schools, even though their students as a group appear to have exhibited higher achievement scores prior to entering the charter schools."[17]

Both of the North Carolina studies fit Hassel's description of the ideal study design in that they followed the performance of individual students over time. And though he is an advocate for charter schools, Hassel does not dispute the findings of the North Carolina studies. Why would North Carolina charters do poorly in comparison to those in some other states?

"It could be due to the authorization process," Hassel says. "I feel the bar was originally set too low in terms of charter schools' academic plan and leadership. Now, the state is much more aware of the need for good planning."

Moyer points out that besides academics, other areas of performance can be measured. "One of those areas is the safety of the school, and this would directly influence a parent's decision to place their child in a charter school" Moyer says. "Charter school students are significantly less likely to be involved as victims or perpetrators of violent acts." In 2003–04, North Carolina charter schools had 2.52 reportable criminal or violent acts per 1,000 students while traditional public schools, reporting by local school district, had 7.37 reportable criminal or violent acts per 1,000 students. In 2004–05, the numbers were 2.293 for charter schools compared to 7.485 for traditional public schools. In 2005–06, the numbers were 1.6138 for charter schools and 7.90 for traditional public schools.

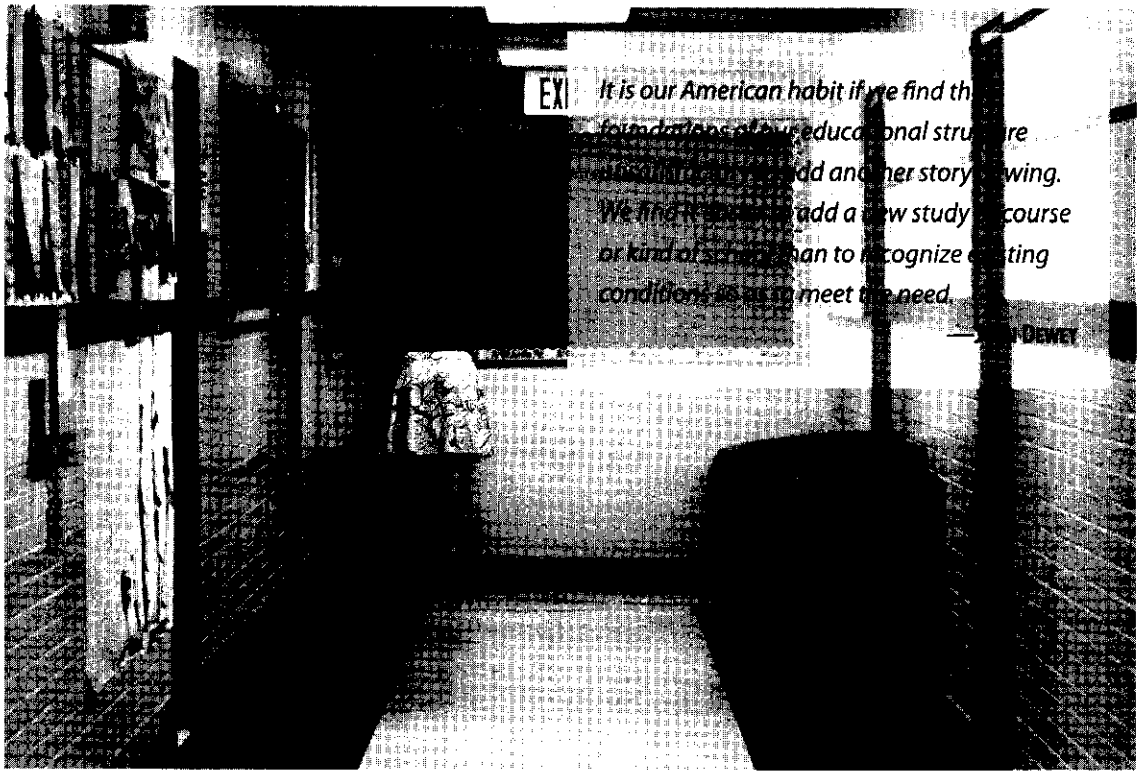
"Many of the students who choose charters do so because they were struggling academically in traditional public schools. You can't expect charters to turn them around in a year or two."

—**Jack Moyer, Director, N.C. Office of Charter Schools**

The Record of Charter Schools on Racial Balance

The state law authorizing charter schools has this to say on the subject of racial balance within North Carolina's charter schools: "Within one year after the charter school begins operation, the population of the school shall reasonably reflect the racial and ethnic composition of the general population residing within the local school administrative unit in which the school is located or the racial and ethnic composition of the special population that the school seeks to serve residing within the local school administrative unit in which the school is located."[18] Early critics of the charter school movement worried that charter schools were going to become a bastion for white flight. Sen. Doug Berger (D-Franklin) believes the concern is a legitimate one. Berger says he has opposed expansion of the cap on the number of charter schools because he believes the schools have been used as a vehicle to escape desegregated schools. As an example, Berger cites Vance Charter School in Henderson, N.C. Berger says the school is overwhelmingly white and has resisted his suggestion that a percentage of its classroom seats be reserved for students eligible for a free or reduced-cost lunch. "I'm not ideologically opposed to charter schools," says Berger, "provided that children get a quality education and it's not a means by which people can functionally engage in white flight."

Vance Charter School is one of several charter schools with disproportionate numbers of whites, but the number of disproportionately African-American charter



schools is far greater. In its previous analysis of charter schools, the Center found that a significant number of charters (30 in 2000–01) had student populations more than 80 percent non-white.[19] Some were specifically targeted toward certain racial groups, with an Afro-centric or similar emphasis in their charters.

Reflecting the original charter schools authorizing legislation and the Center's concern that the charter schools movement should not promote resegregation of public schools any more than is already occurring, the Center recommended in 2002 that the State Board of Education not grant any new charters for schools that target a narrow racial or ethnic population. Few charters have been granted for such schools and at least 15 predominantly African-American charter schools have had their charters terminated, though that was for other reasons such as declining enrollment, failing to comply with financial regulations, and poor business management, according to the Office of Charter Schools.

However, the number of schools dominated by a single ethnic group — usually African American — is still significant. In 2005–06, 39 of 99 charter schools had more than a 50 percent minority student population. In fact, 26 of the 99 charter schools (26.26 percent) were 80 percent or more non-white, and

(continues on page 44)

"Within one year after the charter school begins operation, the population of the school shall reasonably reflect the racial and ethnic composition of the general population residing within the local school administrative unit in which the school is located or the racial and ethnic composition of the special population that the school seeks to serve residing within the local school administrative unit in which the school is located."

— N.C.G.S. § 115C-238.29F(G)(5)

Issues Surrounding Charter Schools: A Look at Other States

Florida: Accountability and Mismanagement

During the summer of 2005, a battle raged in Florida courtrooms as teachers and parents fought to keep two local charter schools open. Riviera Beach Academy and Delray Boynton Academy were sanctioned by state authorities and asked to close their doors to students. These schools' low performance on statewide standardized tests had prompted the Palm Beach County school district to close them down or have funds for the entire district withheld by the state. Both Riviera Beach and Delray Boynton Academies argued that they were operating as middle schools that focused on high-risk students, and therefore should not be held accountable to the same standards as traditional schools. High-risk students are those who have performed poorly academically or behaviorally in traditional school settings.

When the state and local orders were passed down to the schools though, parents and teachers took the fight to the courtroom and sued to have their schools stay open. Florida state law mandates that any school not given a passing grade on standardized tests for two consecutive years must close. This is referred to as "the double F standard." "We can't tolerate failure," says Florida Governor Jeb Bush, a Republican, in support of the standard.[1]

But the schools argued in court that their alternative, or high-risk, students should not have been graded at all for the 2003–04 school year, a year in which the state did not grade other alternative schools. Stewart L. Karlin, a lawyer representing the schools, says, "They got kids who basically flunked out of the school system. You can't apply the double-F standard to these kinds of schools, because they're taking kids who are substantially behind the curve already."[2]

Eventually, the court decided to let the schools stay open and mediate the problem with the state. By October 2005, the state decided to let the schools stay open but revoked their charters, essentially making district officials the governing body of the schools. The schools were officially closed as charters, but remained open as state-funded, public alternative schools, or schools that serve high-risk students.

A separate issue in Florida, as well as other states, has been the development of charter schools operated by for-profit companies. One such company, Imagine Schools Inc., owns and operates 13 schools in central Florida. A 2005 audit of all of the state's 326 charter schools found 10 Imagine charters with severe financial deficits. Eight of those schools had reported a financial deficit for two or three years in a row.[3] Likewise, an analysis by the *Orlando Sentinel* found that those 10 schools spent 50 percent less on individual student instruction than other schools nearby. The extra monies that should have been spent on instruction were instead found to be applied to salaries and administrative costs.[4]

Management companies are operating in several states, including North Carolina, where Imagine Schools Inc. already owns Kestrel Heights of Durham and plans to open new schools. Another for-profit firm, National Heritage Academies, also owns five separate schools in North Carolina. The mismanagement of schools by for-profit companies has not been an issue in North Carolina, but Florida's problems with these large companies have led to recommendations for changes in Florida's policy, including requiring a financial recovery plan for all schools reporting a two-year deficit.[5]

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California:
More For-Profit Fallout

The concern with for-profit companies running charter schools has run rampant in California after the severe mismanagement and collapse of nearly 60 charter schools in four districts sent state and county officials scrambling to clean up the mess during the summer and fall of 2004. The aftermath of this collapse left almost 6,000 students without a school for the fall and left their immunization and grade records abandoned across the state.[6] According to a state investigation, the breakdown of the California Charter Academy (CCA) was due to poor management and the abuse and misuse of schools funds. C. Stephen Cox, who founded CCA in 1999, also started and acted as CEO of two separate companies in subsequent years: the Educational Administrative Services Corporation (EASC) and the American Public Agency Authority (APAA). The EASC provided Cox's charter schools with administrative services while the APAA provided insurance coverage for the schools.

A state audit of the records of these three companies found grave mismanagement and misappropriation of government funds. Among the findings in the audit were the transferal of $233,000 in CCAs' accounts without the approval of the boards' use of $1.2 million in CCAs' funds to employ members of Cox's family, and a finding that more than $1 million in credit card charges by Cox and another EASC employee were for "personal purchases and trips." The audit found the boards of each school failed to oversee the services of each of Cox's companies, and both schools were closed.[7] "The magnitude of waste of precious education funds outlined in this audit is appalling," says Jack O'Connell, California's state schools Superintendent, in response to the CCA audit.[8] San Bernardino County Superintendent Herbert Fischer also was troubled by the report. "While charter schools can provide alternative and innovative options for students and families, we must take action to ensure they are accountable for the use of public funds and education of students," Fischer says.[9] Although this mismanagement occurred in California, The Center for Education Reform, a pro-charter research group, rated the state as having the 15th strongest charter law, earning the state the grade of B in a 2004 evaluation of charter school laws across the states.[10]

Ohio:
Constitutionality of Charters

While financial mismanagement and accountability problems have caused serious administrative fallout in both Florida and California, Ohio teachers and officials hope to keep for-profit charter schools out of their state. In a 2001 lawsuit, the Ohio Federation of Teachers (OFT), The American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the AFL-CIO and other teacher and parent advocacy groups questioned the constitutionality of charter schools run by management companies. Calling themselves the Ohio Federation of Parents and Teachers, the intent of their legal challenge was to prevent for-profit entities from opening and operating charter schools. As OFT President Paul Mooney argued, "The notion was supposed to be small, autonomous public schools with some unique educational program to offer. Instead, the concept has been hijacked by people whose goal is to privatize education."[11]

The market for "sponsoring" charter schools has turned into a multimillion-dollar industry in Ohio. "Sponsoring" consists of non-profit and for-profit groups charging local charter schools for management and maintenance services. The standard cost of these services is 3 percent of each student's funding and can range as high as 12 percent. Two of the 70 sponsoring organizations in Ohio earned more than three million dollars in the 2005–06 fiscal year.

Some Ohioans are wary of this system. "There is no oversight because sponsors are evaluating their own work, so there is a conflict of interest," said state Senator Teresa Fedor (D-Toledo).[12] The Lucas County Educational Service Center, one of Ohio's largest sponsors, produced $1.84 million from charging schools for "fiscal services" in 2005–06.[13]

While the Federation focused on private management firms as the most egregious offenders in their lawsuit, they also perceived all charters as falling outside the Ohio Constitution's parameters for public education. Ohio law mandates that public education throughout the state should be administered through "common schools."[14] The Parents and Teachers Congress sees chartering as a private matter since, apart from funding, the state is not in control of the school board. "The concept set forth in the constitution in 1851 was that there was going to be a common system [of education] funded on a uniform basis with uniform standards," says OFT President Mooney.[15]

The Ohio Court of Appeals heard *State ex rel. Ohio Congress of Parents & Teachers v. State of Ohio Board of Education* on August 24, 2004. The court separated the claims of the Parent and Teacher Congress into three issues: (1) Whether management companies are in "violation of statutes governing the operation of community schools," (2) the challenge to the constitutionality of the community schools, and (3) whether the state treasury funds appropriated to community schools could be recovered.[16] In the end, the court found the unconstitutional claims to be faulty, saying the Legislature's power to "... create, change, and modify school districts does not impinge upon constitutional rights."[17] In the other two issues, the appeals court sent the decisions back to the trial court and asked that the trial court spend more time reviewing the subject.

Yet another issue in Ohio is the creation of a separate set of standardized tests that Ohio created for charter schools. A law enacted during the summer of 2005 called for a new, additional set of standardized tests at the start and end of each school year for those charters that met certain criteria. Essentially, those schools that underachieve on the traditional set of tests have another opportunity to achieve higher scores. Those schools that do not meet the state's expectations for three years must close down. The new tests are considered to be diagnostic, measuring the skills and weaknesses of individual children, as opposed to the old proficiency-based testing.[18] Jeanne Allen, the president of the pro-charter Center for Education Reform, supports Ohio's new law. "This will give a clear, transparent understanding of whether and how Ohio's charter schools are performing," says Allen.[19] OFT President Mooney instead views the new law as lessening accountability requirements for charters as opposed to the traditional public schools. "They have now set a lower standard for charters," says Mooney. "That's pretty stunning."[20]

New York: The Cap Debate Rages On

When North Carolina developed its law enabling the establishment of charter schools in 1996, it instituted a maximum cap of 100 charter schools as means of controlling the growth of the schools and monitoring them. The state of New York also initially limited its number of charter schools to 100. But demand

for more schools has produced a controversy between pro- and anti-charter school groups.

During the spring of 2006, Governor George Pataki proposed a plan to raise the cap to 250 schools from its current maximum of 100. Governor Pataki, in a speech to the state Senate and Assembly on January 17, 2006, told legislators that, "Charter schools work. The entire 100 charters have now been used. So let's increase the number."[21] Alan B. Lubin, the president of a union of various teachers' organizations, including the American Federation of Teachers, said, "Charter schools have not distinguished themselves from public schools in terms of innovative technique, or by raising the level of achievement on state assessments. We cannot stand by idly while the governor dramatically expands the unproven charter school experiment."[22]

Several other officials have backed the notion of lifting or increasing the cap. Joel Klein, chancellor of New York City schools, said, "Today, the evidence shows that authorizing charter schools is a sound investment in our future."[23] New York Senator James S. Alesi added, "I would predict that the cap is going to be raised this year. Much of the appetite for charter schools comes from those urban areas and predominantly urban families that want to have a choice. So it's turning Democrat Assembly members, and most of them are people of color, on to an idea...."[24] Senator Alesi was proven wrong though, as the New York General Assembly adjourned in the summer of 2006 without even voting on the bill. "It's not there for now, not for this legislative session," says Speaker Sheldon Silver.[25]

South Carolina: Sending Charters Statewide

Lawmakers in South Carolina are instituting a statewide charter school district. The idea has already been implemented in Colorado, but South Carolina's system differs in that Colorado only allows certain counties meeting specific criteria to approve charter schools. The Colorado Charter Schools Institute, the board directing the statewide district, mostly acts as a charter granting body and its involvement in charter matters is mainly restricted to that task.[26] Charter law in South Carolina allows every local school board in the state to grant charters. In North Carolina, charters can be granted by the State Board of Education, the University of North Carolina system, and local school boards. This allows charter schools some means around their local school boards. The State Board of Education has been the primary charter granting institution thus far in North Carolina, as the University of N.C. has yet to explore that avenue.

The South Carolina statewide district would allow more charters to open up without the approval of local boards, which are likely to be unreceptive to charter schools due to issues around losing students and funding. The charters are allowed to remain within the jurisdiction of their local boards if they wish, but the new district would give them the chance to revoke their current charters and reapply with the new board.

In May of 2006, South Carolina's Republican Governor Mark Sanford signed Bill H 3010 and officially brought the statewide charter school district into being. Sanford said the statewide district "... is needed to provide another option for people looking to establish these schools."[27] He says the statewide district will ease "the regulatory burden from local school districts" and will further "streamline the approval process and create more of these schools."[28] Some charter supporters are ecstatic about the possible growth of the charter program in a state where only 26 are in operation, despite the charter law's ratification in 1996.[29] "I believe it's going to make a huge difference," says David Church, a former principal and now executive

director of the S.C. Association of Public Charter Schools.[30] He also said that this was a first step towards improving the charter program in South Carolina.

While the statewide district idea has impressed some pro-charter groups and legislators, others are not quite as pleased with the new law. The most common concerns raised with this legislation are growth of the state bureaucracy and the quality of the oversight provided by the new charter district board. "It's creating a new school system that's not accountable to local needs," says S.C. Sen. Phil Leventis (D-Sumter). "It's the antithesis of accountability."[31] Scott Price of the S.C. School Boards Association likewise finds the new oversight board to be an unnecessary addition to the state bureaucracy. "We don't feel we need to be growing government or government bureaucracy," says Price.[32]

Even some pro-charter advocates are not in favor of the statewide district plan. Jeanne Allen, the founder and president of the pro-charter schools Center for Education Reform, has met with Gov. Sanford in an attempt to curb his enthusiasm about the new district. She warned his staff that this legislation would actually harm charter schools, taking away local funding, of which some charters count as 50 percent of their total funds. "His staff has not served him well," she says. "It's almost become, 'We couldn't possibly be wrong.'"[33] Audrey Breland, dean of a high school charter in Richland, is also concerned about the effects of the new district. "I don't see the benefit," Breland says. "It doesn't appear that this is in the best interest of the charter schools. It's already a big risk to start a charter school. This is no incentive."[34]

Washington State: Third Time Not the Charm for Charters

For Washington pro-charter groups, the last decade has been one of disappointment and missed opportunities. Beginning in 1996, three separate charter bills have been proposed and voted down, with the most recent in 2004 actually getting ratified. Each time the bill has become increasingly narrower in terms of how many schools it would allow and the autonomy it would grant schools. The 2004 version included a maximum of 45 schools over six years, with only five a year allowed to open for the first three years. In addition, only nonprofit organizations would be allowed to run charter schools. In an effort to curb the substantial dropout rates in Washington, totaling 21.5 percent of all high school students in 2004, the majority of these schools were to be reserved for those that serve disadvantaged or high-risk children.[35] The Washington charter school bill officially became law in March 2004.[36] Many parents and pro-charter organizations were excited at the prospect of new charter schools. "I think it would be awesome," said Washington parent Delfina Bright of the possibility of charter schools. "The only reason my daughter is not in a private school is because we can't afford it."[37]

But even after the bill finally passed in both the House and Senate, Washington voters were not ready for the change. By July 2004, charter school opponents had amassed 135,745 valid signatures to force a referendum. Referendum 55, as it was titled, allowed Washingtonians to vote as to whether they wanted charter schools, operating in their state. By a margin of 52 to 48 percent, the charter law was defeated. Jeanne Allen, the president of the Center for Education Reform, was upset with the outcome. "Once again, Americans show they are uncomfortable voting directly on any issue that would dramatically change the way schools do business," she said.[38]

But charter school foes say Referendum 55 does reflect the opinion of the voters, despite pro-charter efforts to persuade them differently. "Voters get it. Charter schools are not the right direction," says Jennifer Lindenauser, communications

director for Protect Our Public Schools, a group organized to campaign against charters in Washington. Patti Lehman, a pre-school teacher, agrees. "We should be working within the system hiring competent and qualified people," she says.[39]

—Aisander Duda

FOOTNOTES

[1] Alan Richard, "Florida Forces Charter School Closures, Sparks New Debate," *Education Week*, Washington, D.C., August 31, 2005.

[2] Erik W. Robelen, "Disputes Over Charter Closures Winding Up in Court," *Education Week*, Washington, D.C., January 4, 2006, p. 1.

[3] William O. Monroe, "Report on Significant Findings and Financial Trends in Charter School and Charter Technical Career Center Audit Reports Prepared by Independent Certified Public Accountants," Florida Auditor General, Tallahassee, Fla., Report No. 2006-034, September 2005, pp. 9–18.

[4] Vicki McClure and Tania Deluzuriaga, "Overhead Saps Cash at Most Imagine Charter Schools," *Orlando Sentinel*, Orlando, Fla., February 20, 2005, p. A1.

[5] Robelen, note 2 above.

[6] Sam Dillon, "Collapse of 60 Charter Schools Leaves Californians Scrambling," *New York Times*, New York, N.Y., September 17, 2004, p. A1.

[7] Larry E. Reider, "Extraordinary Audit of the California Charter Academy," Office of Kern County, Bakersfield, Calif., April 14, 2005, pp. 2–4.

[8] Nanette Asimov, "Charter school accused of misusing $25 million: State superintendent wants charges filed against executives," *San Francisco Chronicle*, San Francisco, Calif., April 15, 2005, p. A1.

[9] Christine McGrew and Dan Evans, "California Charter Academy Audit Released," San Bernardino County School System Press Releases, San Bernardino, Calif., April 14, 2005, Web site *www.sbcss.k12.ca.us/news/gen_info/news_archive.html*.

[10] *CER's ranking of the nation's strongest to weakest laws*, The Center for Education Reform, Washington, D.C., Web site *www.edreform.com/_upload/ranking_chart.pdf*.

[11] Bill Cohen, "Ohio Teachers Union Sues Over Charter Schools," *Stateline.org*, Washington D.C., May 17, 2001.

[12] Ignazio Messina, "Groups clamor to sponsor Ohio charter schools," *The Toledo Blade*, Toledo, Ohio, July 3, 2006, p. A1.

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] Erik W. Robelen, "Ohio Supreme Court to Rule on Charter Law," *Education Week*, Washington, D.C., December 7, 2005, p. 25.

[15] *Ibid.* at p. 27.

[16] *State ex rel. Ohio Congress of Parents & Teachers v. State Bd. Of Edn.*, 2004-Ohio-4421, p. 3.

[17] *Ibid.* at p. 15.

[18] Amy Germuth, "The State Testing Program for Ohio and How It Works: A Primer for Charter Schools," Thomas B. Fordham Institute, Washington, D.C., October 24, 2003.

[19] Erik W. Robelen, "Ohio Mandates New Tests for Charters," *Education Week*, Washington, D.C., July 27, 2005, p. 31.

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] *Ibid.*

[22] Erik W. Robelen, "Fight Over Charter Cap Erupts in Empire State," *Education Week*, Washington, D.C., February 22, 2006, p. 43.

[23] Joel Klein, "Let 'Em Flower: N.Y. Lawmakers Must Lift Cap on Charter Schools," *New York Post*, New York, N.Y., May 23, 2006, p. 31.

[24] Robelen, note 22 above.

[25] Erin Einhorn, "'F' is for Full," *New York Daily News*, New York, N.Y., June 25, 2006, p. 13.

[26] Eric W. Robelen, "South Carolina Eyes State Charter District," *Education Week*, Washington, D.C., February 22, 2006, p. 26.

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] S.C. Governor Mark Sanford, "Contract for Change: More Educational Choices for Parents," S.C. Governor's Office Press Release, October 12, 2004, Web site *www.scgovernor.com*.

[29] *State by State Charter Law Profile*, The Center for Education Reform, Washington, D.C., Web site *www.edreform.com/index.cfm?fuseAction=cLaw*.

[30] Wayne Washington, "Questions Plague Statewide Charter School District Bill," *The State*, Columbia, S.C., February 7, 2006, p. B1.

[31] *Ibid.*

[32] *Ibid.*

[33] *Ibid.*

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] Pete Bylsma and Lisa Ireland, "Graduation and Drop-out Statistics for Washington's Counties, Districts, and Schools, School Year 2003–2004," *Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction*, Olympia, Wash., September 2005, p. 19.

[36] Melissa Lambert Milewski, "Creating New Opportunities to Learn: Charter Schools and Education Reform in Washington." *Washington Policy Center*, Seattle, Wash., September 2004, pp. 1–2.

[37] Brad Shannon, Heather Woodward, John Dodge, "Charter Referendum Falls Short, New Primary Passes," *The Washington Charter School Resource Center*, Seattle, Wash., November 3, 2004, Web Site *www.wacharterschools.org/news/wanews/2004-11-03_Olympian.htm*

[38] David J. Hoff, Andrew Trotter, "Voters Largely Reject Funding, Policy Shifts," *Education Week*, Washington, D.C., November 10, 2004, p. 22.

[39] *Ibid.*

(continued from page 37) 14 of those were more than 95 percent African American. Four of the 99 were 100 percent African American (see Table 3, p. 45).[20] Two schools—Haliwa-Saponi Tribal and CIS Academy—have Native American student populations over 85 percent.

"If you compare charter schools on a school-by-school basis, the diversity issue does provide concern," says Moyer. "However, certain school districts in North Carolina have high numbers of minority students in less than diverse schools—Charlotte/Mecklenburg and Durham." And, while African-American students were one of the largest racial or ethnic groups attending the state's charter schools, the total enrollment numbers now more closely resemble those of the traditional public schools when broken down by race. In other words, while there is broad variation in diversity among individual charter schools, charter school attendance on the whole is not skewed toward one racial group or another.

For Berger, who is white, predominantly African-American or other non-white ethno-centric schools are less troubling than those that are primarily white. That's because socio-economic difficulties characteristic of many minority groups create self-esteem issues that may interfere with learning, says Berger. "Good self-esteem is a critical component toward children being successful," Berger says.

I'm not suggesting that lack of diversity is unacceptable in all instances, but we should not accept these kinds of student enrollment patterns without asking some pretty probing questions. I fear we may some day look back on this period as the early Balkanization of our society.

—MICHAEL WARD
FORMER STATE SUPERINTENDENT
OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Because people voluntarily apply to charter schools and schools choose from among these applicants by lottery, charter school administrators say they cannot dictate who attends their schools. And in granting charters, state and other officials have only marginal leverage to impact the racial make-up of charter schools. "Any time you force a school of choice not to be a school of choice, you've got a problem," says Michael Fedewa, former chairman of the N.C. Charter Schools Advisory Committee, which screens applications for new charters before

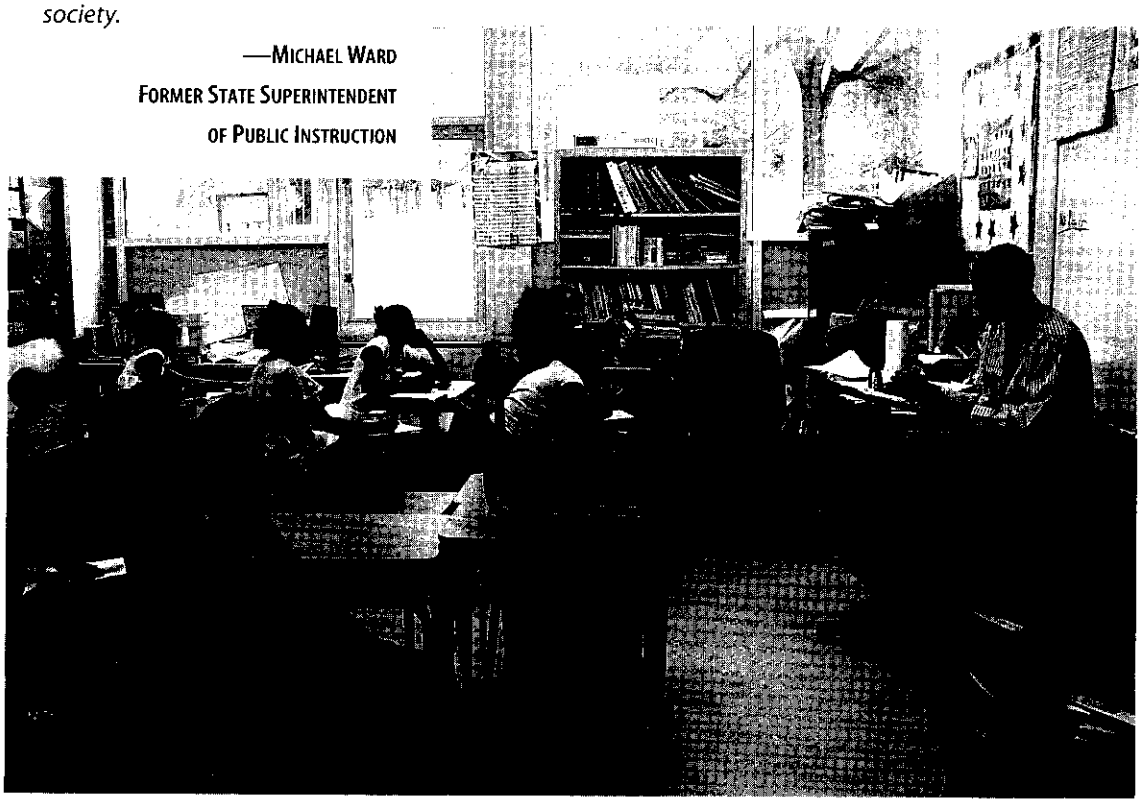


Table 3. N.C. Charter Schools That Are Majority African American (2005–06)

#	School Name	County/School System	Percent African American
1	Children's Village	Lenoir	100.00%
2	Dillard Academy	Wayne	100.00%
3	Laurinburg Charter	Scotland	100.00%
4	Omuteko Gwamaziima	Durham	100.00%
5	Healthy Start	Durham	99.10%
6	Highland Charter	Gaston	99.07%
7	Hope Elementary	Wake	98.95%
8	Maureen Joy	Durham	98.62%
9	Sugar Creek Charter	Charlotte/Mecklenburg	98.19%
10	Torchlight Academy	Wake	98.19%
11	Success Institute	Iredell	97.94%
12	PreEminent Charter	Wake	97.89%
13	SPARC Academy	Wake	96.94%
14	Imani Institute	Guilford	95.31%
15	Kinston Charter	Lenoir	94.63%
16	Crossroads Charter	Charlotte/Mecklenburg	94.15%
17	Kennedy Charter	Charlotte/Mecklenburg	92.86%
18	Rowan Academy	Rowan	90.90%
19	Carter Community	Durham	90.51%
20	Gaston College Prep	Northampton	89.87%
21	Quality Education Academy	Forsyth/Winston-Salem	87.37%
22	Guilford Charter	Guilford	85.53%
23	East Winston Primary	Forsyth/Winston-Salem	84.62%
24	Alpha Academy	Cumberland	80.00%
25	Baker Charter	Wake	79.17%
26	CG Woodson	Forsyth	77.59%
27	Research Triangle Charter	Wake	76.15%
28	Downtown Middle	Forsyth/Winston-Salem	71.90%
29	Community Charter	Charlotte/Mecklenburg	70.83%
30	Laurinburg Homework Center	Scotland	66.02%
31	Ann Atwater	Durham	65.63%
32	Provisions Academy	Lee	62.66%
33	Rocky Mount Preparatory	Nash	61.13%
34	Sallie B. Howard*	Wilson	59.02%
35	Kestrel Heights	Durham	57.75%
36	STARS Charter	Moore	56.79%
37	Forsyth Academies	Forsyth/Winston-Salem	51.24%

N.C. Charter Schools That Are Majority Native American

#	School Name	County/School System	Percent Native American
1	Haliwa-Saponi Tribal	Warren	88.08%
2	CIS Academy	Robeson	85.86%

* The Sallie B. Howard School also has a significant Hispanic population — 38.53% of the student population. The total percentage of non-white students at this school is 97.85%.

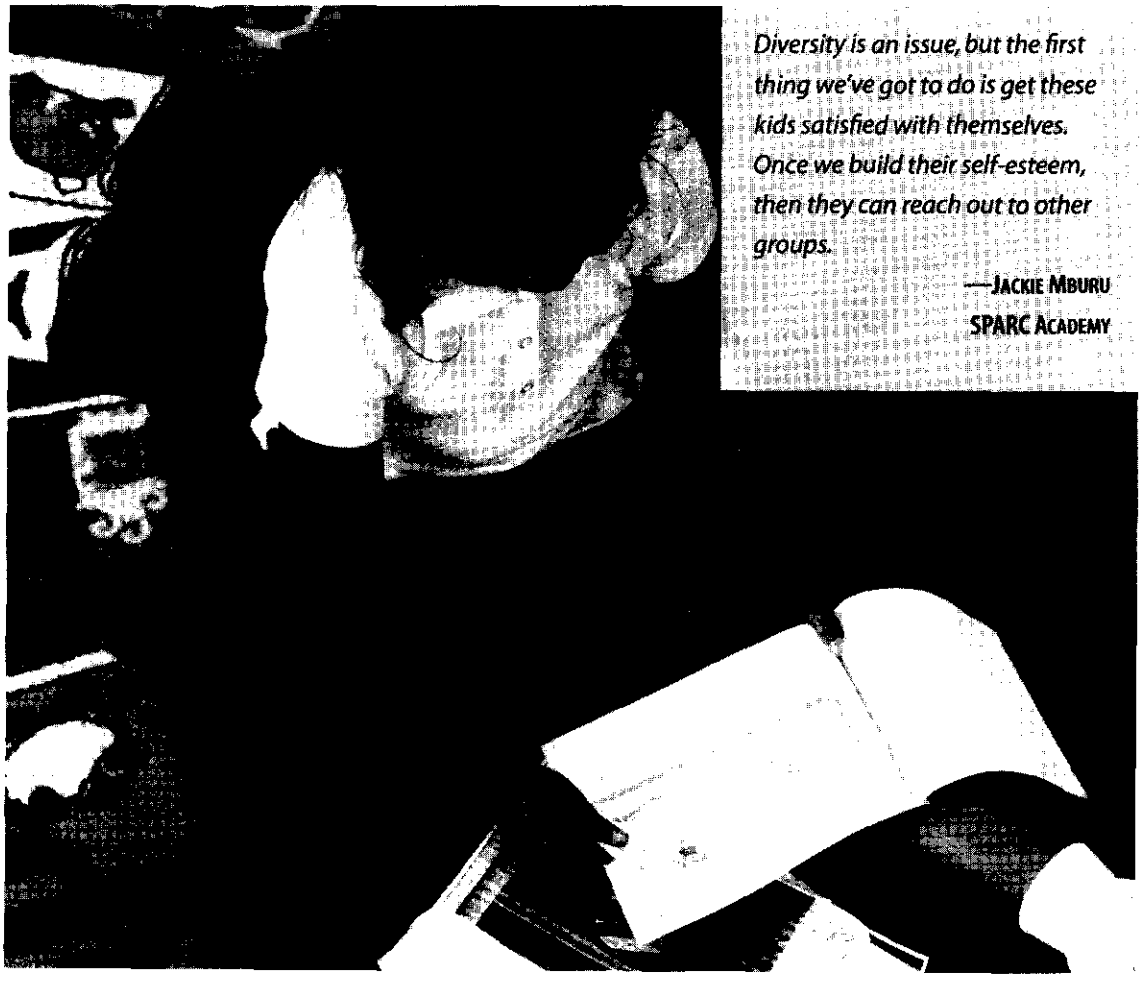
Source: North Carolina Public Schools Statistical Profile 2006. Table 36. Charter School Membership by Race and Sex, 2005–06, pp. 317–18. See *http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/docs/fbs/resources/data/statistical profile/2006profile.pdf.*

they are passed on to the State Board of Education. "From a committee standpoint, we ask that they make a good faith effort [to diversify], but that only goes so far." Indeed, one successful charter school attempted to set aside 15 percent of its slots for minorities but was rebuffed by the Charter School Advisory Committee under the advice of the N.C. Attorney General's Office on grounds that the rules require a straight lottery for open seats. "The state statute requires the use of a lottery if applications exceed the number of seats available," says Moyer. "The school's lottery cannot be established to favor particular groups just as the N.C. Education Lottery, to be open and fair, cannot be established to favor certain citizen groups.

However, Sen. Doug Berger believes the rules would not stand in the way of setting aside a certain percentage of seats for children from families of lower socioeconomic status. That is how the Wake County Public Schools have chosen to maintain diversity in the face of court rulings that forbid the assignment of students to schools by race, Berger says.

While segregation in substantial numbers of charter schools has been apparent for some years, Moyer says few people have publicly expressed concern. "We don't hear any complaints except from the media and a few public school administrators who feel charter schools are taking the cream of the [student] crop," Moyer says.

The authors of the SRI International study for the U.S. Department of Education examined the association between academic performance and school type after controlling for the proportion of minority students. Charter schools in North Carolina



Diversity is an issue, but the first thing we've got to do is get these kids satisfied with themselves. Once we build their self-esteem, then they can reach out to other groups.

—JACKIE MBURU
SPARC ACADEMY

serve larger proportions of minority students than traditional public schools, and the authors wanted to know if this was a factor in the lower performance. They found that charter schools were still less likely to meet state performance standards regardless of the proportion of minority students.[21]

Federal and state law have mandated integration of the public schools on the basis that segregated schools violated the U.S. constitutional guarantee of "equal protection under the laws" and the state guarantee of an "equal educational opportunity" and thus were by definition inferior, at least when it came to the plight of African Americans. The widely held view was that diversity benefits everyone. Today, African Americans and other minorities in some instances choose to attend schools with members of their own race.

"Race does matter, but it's all in the way it's handled," says Jackie Mburu, an African American and former principal of Raleigh's SPARC Academy, which promotes African culture in its setting and curriculum. "It's like Baptist churches. One might have an African-American congregation, and another down the road might be white. If you choose to attend a church where you feel comfortable and where you're not knocking the other church, what's wrong with it?"

"Evidently, many of our kids feel rejected by the public education system," says Sen. Larry Shaw, an African-American state Senator (D-Cumberland) and sponsor of a bill to raise the cap on charter schools. "That's why we feel we need to get behind the charter movement."

"Evidently, many of our kids feel rejected by the public education system. That's why we feel we need to get behind the charter movement."

— Sen. Larry Shaw (D-Cumberland)

Fedewa believes that one reason that traditional public school administrators have not spoken out against minority-dominated charter schools is that the latter provide a valuable alternative for students that may present academic or behavioral challenges.

Table 4. Number of Charter Schools in N.C., by County (2006–07)

County	Number	County	Number	County	Number
1. Alamance	3	35. Franklin	1	69. Pamlico	1
2. Alexander	0	36. Gaston	2	70. Pasquotank	0
3. Alleghany	0	37. Gates	0	71. Pender	0
4. Anson	0	38. Graham	0	72. Perquimans	0
5. Ashe	0	39. Granville	0	73. Person	2
6. Avery	2	40. Greene	0	74. Pitt	0
7. Beaufort	1	41. Guilford	4	75. Polk	0
8. Bertie	0	42. Halifax	0	76. Randolph	0
9. Bladen	0	43. Harnett	0	77. Richmond	0
10. Brunswick	1	44. Haywood	0	78. Robeson	1
11. Buncombe	3	45. Henderson	1	79. Rockingham	1
12. Burke	1	46. Hertford	0	80. Rowan	0
13. Cabarrus	1	47. Hoke	0	81. Rutherford	1
14. Caldwell	0	48. Hyde	0	82. Sampson	0
15. Camden	0	49. Iredell	3	83. Scotland	1
16. Carteret	2	50. Jackson	1	84. Stanly	1
17. Caswell	0	51. Johnston	0	85. Stokes	0
18. Catawba	0	52. Jones	0	86. Surry	1
19. Chatham	2	53. Lee	1	87. Swain	1
20. Cherokee	1	54. Lenoir	2	88. Transylvania	1
21. Chowan	0	55. Lincoln	1	89. Tyrrell	0
22. Clay	0	56. Macon	0	90. Union	1
23. Cleveland	0	57. Madison	0	91. Vance	1
24. Columbus	0	58. Martin	0	92. Wake	14
25. Craven	0	59. McDowell	0	93. Warren	1
26. Cumberland	1	60. Mecklenburg	9	94. Washington	0
27. Currituck	0	61. Mitchell	0	95. Watauga	1
28. Dare	0	62. Montgomery	0	96. Wayne	1
29. Davidson	0	63. Moore	2	97. Wilkes	1
30. Davie	0	64. Nash	1	98. Wilson	1
31. Duplin	0	65. New Hanover	1	99. Yadkin	0
32. Durham	6	66. Northampton	1	100. Yancey	0
33. Edgecombe	0	67. Onslow	0	**Total:**	93
34. Forsyth	5	68. Orange	2		

Number of 100 counties without charter schools: 54

Source: http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/docs/charterschools/resources/charterschoolqa.ppt#269,19.
Charter Schools by County 2006–2007 School Year.

"The [traditional] public schools are happy to have charters take kids that are having trouble," Fedewa says. "In fact, the Chapel Hill City Schools expressed considerable concern when it appeared that School in the Community charter was going to close. They didn't want to have to take those kids back."

However, the Ladd study examining academic performance indicates students in North Carolina charter schools are sacrificing academic gains as a result of moving to charter schools, so public officials have reason to be concerned. In a more recent paper focusing more narrowly on race and charter schools, Bifulco and Ladd reach two important conclusions: (1) students who move from traditional public schools to charter schools generally move into a more racially isolated environment; and (2) this combined with poorer academic performance for African American students when they move to charters may contribute to the race-based academic achievement gap in the North Carolina public schools.[22] In considering state policy toward the cap on charter schools, legislators will need to consider whether the proliferation of charter schools serving racial minorities should be discouraged, encouraged, or simply accepted as freedom of choice. Bifulco and Ladd's latest study provides food for thought on this question.

How Much Innovation Occurs in Charter Schools?

One of the original goals of the charter school movement, as stated in the authorizing legislation, was to "Encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods."[23] The idea was that charter schools could provide an opportunity for teachers and administrators to try innovations in the classroom which, if successful, could serve as models to be copied in the traditional public schools. Charter schools have adopted a number of innovative approaches to learning, ranging from arts-based instruction at schools such as Arts Based Elementary in Winston-Salem and Sandhills Theater Arts Renaissance School in Vass, to international themes at schools such as Carolina International School in Harrisburg and Exploris Middle School in Raleigh, to Socratic dialogue at schools such as Socrates Academy in Charlotte and Thomas Jefferson Classical Academy in Mooresboro. Yet there is little evidence that traditional public schools have adopted these innovations on a large-scale basis.

At SPARC Academy, boys and girls are educated separately, starting in sixth grade. Administrators insist this makes for a better learning environment. "When the boys and girls are together, you can see and feel the difference between the way they respond to each other and to the teacher," says Jackie Mburu, the former principal of SPARC Academy. "By separating them, the single genders stay more focused, more open to discuss things without the opposite gender making comments."

Joy Warner of Children's Community School in Davidson insists that arts-based instruction does wonders for her children. "Brain research says hands-on learning is crucial for young children, and that's why we use a lot of arts," Warner says. "All classes perform what they study in class."

At Quest Academy in Raleigh, one of the top-ranked schools in the state on ABC scores, Principal Charles Watson sticks to a simple formula of small classes and good teachers. "All our teachers are certified; 40 percent hold masters degrees," Watson says. "We ask them to do only one thing — teach 15 kids," Watson says. The school day at Quest, where the grade span is kindergarten through 8th grade, is short (five hours), and no extracurricular activities are provided. The typical traditional public school offers a seven-hour school day and average student-teacher ratios of 19:1 for grades K–3 and 21:1 for grades 4–8.

Gaston College Preparatory School, in the Northampton County town of Gaston, N.C., follows a formula of long days (eight hours compared to seven in the typical public school) and lots of extracurricular activities, including field trips to Ivy League

colleges. Classes are large. Most teachers are not certified. "If you walked into any of our classrooms, you would not be able to tell the difference between a teacher that is certified and one that is not," says Caleb Dolan, principal of Gaston College Preparatory. State law requires that charter schools employ at least 75 percent certified teachers for grade K–5 and 50 percent certified teachers for grade spans 6–8 and 9–12.[24]

"Realistically, I don't think the public schools can afford to do what we do. They can't get smaller. They can't shorten their instructional day. You can't take a large public school and tell the teachers they don't have any work days."

— **Charles Watson, Principal, Quest Academy Charter School**

Aside from an annual conference coordinated by the Office of Charter Schools, the state has not established a vehicle by which the traditional public schools can examine charter schools innovations and consider them for adoption. And some in the traditional public schools may not feel there is much to be learned. Indeed, spokespersons for the North Carolina Association of Educators and the N.C. School Boards Association could cite no example where a charter school innovation had been adopted by a traditional public school in North Carolina.

"I don't know how we can get innovation accepted," Moyer says. "The traditional public schools don't necessarily want to listen." But Moyer says traditional public schools are quietly adopting some of the innovations that occur in charter schools. "Actually, movement of innovations from charter schools to LEAs is occurring, but the LEA would not advertise this fact," says Moyer. "Further, if the LEA decides not to adopt an innovation that is their choice, but that does not indicate these novel practices are not occurring."

Moyer offers several instances where North Carolina charter schools have offered information on innovations to the state's traditional public schools or where the traditional public schools had sought that information out.

For starters, Moyer says the Office of Charter Schools has invited every LEA superintendent in the state to attend its annual conference in the fall. Further, a number of innovations have been adopted or explored around the leasing and construction of buildings on a tight budget. In addition, Moyer cites numerous partnerships between charters and traditional public schools where ideas and resources are shared. "These are just a few among many others," says Moyer.

The examples include:

- Arts Based Elementary School and Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools, where the local school system provides buses to the charter school for field trips, does the charter school's payroll, and provides additional administrative support.

- Chatham Charter School and Chatham County Schools, where the administrators at the charter school are incorporated into local leadership training sessions.

- Cape Lookout Marine Science High School, in Carteret County, where the charter school provides services for local students in partnership with the LEA. Further, the school currently leases its facility from the county.

- ArtSpace Charter School in Buncombe County, which has hosted training for teachers in Buncombe County. The training focused on how to integrate the arts into the classroom while also providing resources for this arts integration through the National Archives website.

- Charter Day School in Brunswick County, where the school has provided training for two elementary school faculties on how to implement Direct Instruction.

These schools were low-performing, but their scores have risen with this charter school's assistance. Charter Day School also has trained the "lead trainer" in Brunswick County Schools on Direct Instruction for use in the county school system.

And, Moyer cites one example where a traditional public school uses a concept tried out at a charter school just down the street. "Exploris Middle School, located in downtown Raleigh, has a partnership with the Exploris Museum," says Moyer. "Their curriculum is closely tied to the offerings of the museum as well. Wake County Schools opened a school on the same square called Moore Square Museum Magnet School. This is clear evidence of an innovation moving to an LEA."

However, there are some instances where innovations tried in charter schools just may not be feasible in larger public schools. Quest Academy Principal Watson, a veteran of 30 years in teaching and administration in the traditional public schools, says he doubts the public schools could adopt any of the traits that have proven successful at his charter, such as smaller classes, shorter days, and elimination of teacher workdays. "Realistically, I don't think the public schools can afford to do what we do," Watson says. "They can't get smaller. They can't shorten their instructional day. You can't take a large public school and tell the teachers they don't have any work days."

This raises the question among some advocates for charter schools as to whether the charter experiment should really be considered a proving ground for innovation or simply another choice in public education. "The whole innovation premise needs to be redefined," says Fedewa. "The charters as a rule have not provided that 'aha' experience, but choice is itself an innovation."

Table 5. 10 Highest-Performing Charter Schools on End-of-Grade Tests, 2005–06

	School System	School Name	Grade Span	Performance Composite Score
1.	Charlotte/Mecklenburg	Metrolina Regional Scholars Academy	K-8	100.0
2.	Wake County	Quest Academy	K-8	99.1
3.	Wake County	Magellan Charter	4-8	97.9
4.	Wake County	Raleigh Charter High	9-12	97.6
5.	Wake County	Exploris	6-8	94.6
6.	Charlotte/Mecklenburg	Lake Norman Charter	5-8	92.4
7.	Guilford County	Greensboro Academy	K-8	90.5
8.	Stanly County	Gray Stone Day	9-12	89.4
9.	Chatham County	Woods Charter	1-12	88.3
10.	Jackson County	Summit Charter	K-8	88.2

10 Lowest-Performing Charter Schools on End-of-Grade Tests, 2005–06

	School System	School Name	Grade Span	Performance Composite Score
1.	Scotland County	Laurinburg Charter	9-12	15.3
2.	Lee County	Provisions Academy	6-12	18.1
3.	Charlotte/Mecklenburg	Kennedy Charter	6-12	21.4
4.	Charlotte/Mecklenburg	Crossroads Charter High	9-12	23.7
5.	Scotland County	The Laurinburg Homework Center	8-12	25.7
6.	Robeson County	CIS Academy	6-8	33.0
7.	Durham County	Healthy Start Academy	K-8	38.0
8.	Wake County	Torchlight Academy	K-6	38.3
9.	Wake County	Baker Charter High	9-12	38.7
10.	Wake County	SPARC Academy	K-8	42.7

Source: N.C. Department of Public Instruction. Kennedy Charter, Laurinburg Homework Academy, Provisions Academy, Crossroads Charter High, Lakeside School, Laurinburg Charter, Grandfather Academy, Crossnore Academy, and Baker Charter High are allowed to use alternative assessments due to the high-risk nature of their students. Laurinburg Charter closed in June 2006. Baker Charter High is located in the Wake County Jail. In October 2006, the State Board of Education voted to revoke the school's charter. It will close June 30, 2007.

Table 6. Comparison of Charter Schools with Traditional Public Schools

Areas of Special Treatment for Charter Schools	Areas Where Charter Schools are Disadvantaged Compared to Traditional Public Schools	Areas Where There Is No Difference Between Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools
Are eligible for special federal grants available only to charter schools	Receive no state or local dollars for capital construction	Both receive state and local average daily membership funding
Able to offer longer school day and school year	No state lottery money for school construction	Both receive local fines and forfeitures money collected by the courts
Able to offer smaller class size	Classes less likely to be taught by fully licensed and certified teachers	Both are subject to state and federal school accountability requirements for academic performance
No accountability for racial balance	Each charter school functions like its own school district so there is no support from the local education administrative unit (LEA). However, there is support from the Office of Charter Schools in the state Department of Public Instruction.	
Not required to operate cafeteria or provide bus service		
Greater flexibility in hiring and firing of teachers		
Special mentoring and greater support from state in business management and planning		
Students or their parents can select a charter school and are not subject to reassignment like traditional public school students		
Freedom from many state regulations governing schools, though must take state and federal academic performance tests		

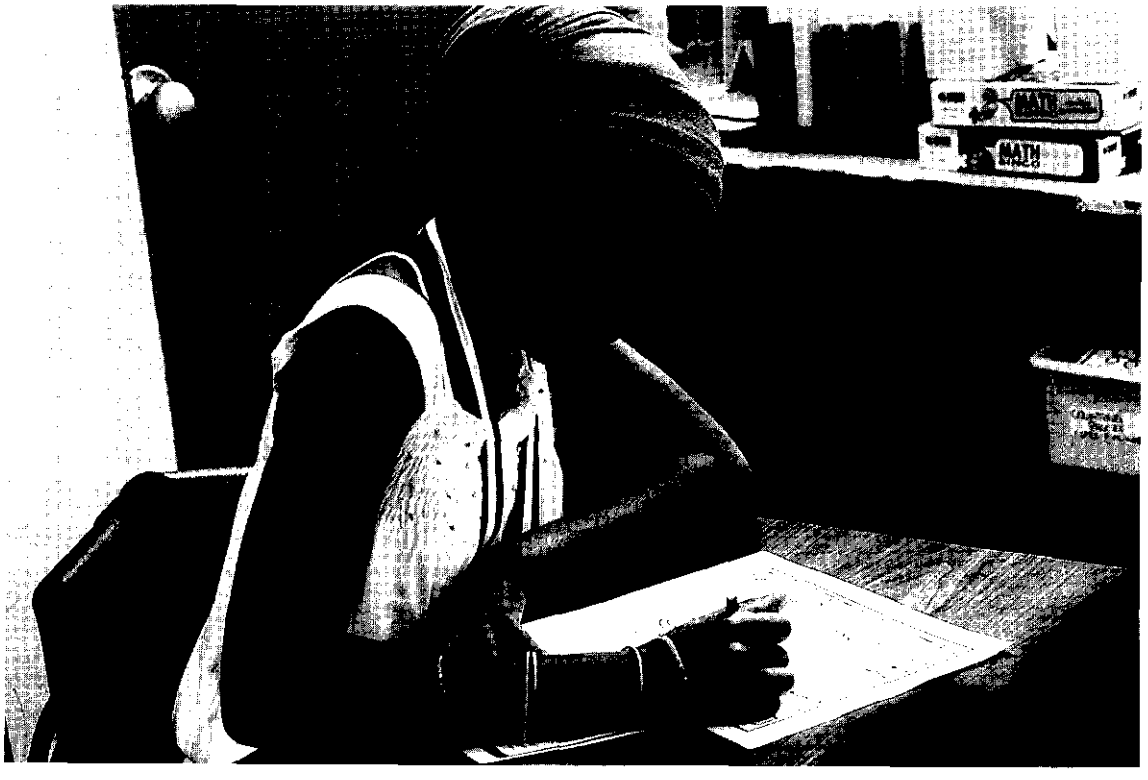
Management and Financial Viability of Charter Schools

Charter Schools That Closed or Had Charters Revoked

Since the state began the charter school experiment in 1997, at least 27 charters have closed or had their charters revoked, most because of insufficient enrollment or financial "noncompliance." Another 11 were granted charters but never opened (see Table 7). Of these, five failed to open due to incomplete planning, two failed to open due to unresolved legal issues, two failed to open due to inability to secure an adequate school facility, and one failed to open because initial enrollment fell short.

Laurinburg Charter School had its charter revoked in November 2004 based on a broad range of findings, including an audit exception for the school's drawing state funding of $102,539.76 for 24 out-of-state students in fiscal year 2002–03. In addition, the Charter School Advisory Committee found irregularities in the school's administration of state accountability testing. "The Committee was not satisfied that, in light of the years of inadequate, if not evasive, testing procedures, the School has the ability or the desire to rectify the situation," wrote Office of Charter Schools Director Jack Moyer in a September 13, 2004, letter to the school outlining reasons the advisory committee was recommending revocation.

Imani Institute in Greensboro joined the list of schools forced to close when the State Board of Education revoked its charter in July 2006. The school had not filed required annual financial audits from 2001–02 through 2004–05. And in October 2006, the State Board of Education revoked the charter of John H. Baker Charter High School, effective June 30, 2007. Charter school regulators say the school failed to keep adequate records on enrollment and finances, and that classes were limited to as little as an hour a day. Authorized to operate in the Wake County Jail, the school began operating offsite and even met in public libraries. In the end, regulators determined that Baker Charter was operating more like a tutoring program than a school.



Because funding is directly tied to the number of students at a school, declining enrollment can quickly lead to serious financial issues. Of the 27 schools that have closed, at least 15 were attributed to some degree to declining enrollment that decimated funding. Insufficient funding can compromise the quality of a learning environment and closure of a school can disrupt children's lives. Forced closure of charter schools can make embarrassing headlines. But some see this as part of the natural evolution of the charter experiment.

"I don't see the closure of these charters schools as a negative," Moyer says. "It eliminates the problem schools and allows us to put in new charters that are properly planned." However, Leanne Winner, government affairs director for the N.C. School Boards Association, says closures can create problems for both the students attending problem schools and the local school systems that must take students back, sometimes in the middle of the school year when state and local funding for the student already has been allocated to the failed charter school. "They've had kids come back with no funds attached, and they just have to absorb them," says Winner.

For a large and growing district like Wake County, the opening of another charter may be a relief because there are so many students crowding into the system, but for a small, rural district, the loss of ADM funds caused by the opening of a charter can have a very negative effect.

—**Jan Crotts**
Former Executive Director
N.C. Association of School Administrators

What the State Office of Charter Schools Does To Improve Financial Viability

Moyer hails a requirement adopted in 2002 as part of a federal grant that charters conduct a year of planning in advance of opening. The Office of Charter Schools in the N.C. Department of Public Instruction has established a mentoring program for charter school administrators that helps them improve their financial management and other leadership skills. New charters also are required to attend a monthly training program in Raleigh designed and instituted by the Office of Charter Schools. And, the office has added a staff person to work with schools on an on-going basis to improve their financial management.

"Having Karen Frazier [a financial analyst] on our staff is great," says Moyer. "She's out there working with the schools, giving them training. That is a huge improvement from the past."

Through the Office of Charter Schools, schools applying for a charter from the state can receive a federal grant (Charter School Implementation Grant) of $100,000 for preliminary planning. If they are granted a charter by the State Board of Education, the schools can receive an additional $200,000 plus $250 per child for each of the first two years of operation. Schools also are eligible to apply for a competitive grant in the third year of operation to be used to disseminate information about their school and programs. Traditional public schools are not eligible for this funding, which is intended to promote the growth of high quality charter schools.

In addition to providing funds for individual charters, the federal grant covers administrative and program expenses of the state Office of Charter Schools. State money only covers staff salaries. One of the chief arguments advocates make for lifting the cap on charter schools is to take advantage of this federal money and allow the state office to continue providing valuable services.

"Without new schools to open, we will lose our federal funding," says Jackie Jenkins, the education consultant in the Office of Charter Schools. "We have one school to open next year (2005–06), and the amount of money we could keep for one school would be small. So it is important to have the cap removed or we would not be able to continue programs that improve learning and operations of all charter schools." The state awarded four new charters in 2006–07, *(continues on page 60)*

Table 7. Revocations and Voluntary Relinquishments of

County	Charter School	Year Approved	Year Opened
1. Pitt	Right Step Academy	1997	1997
2. Forsyth	LIFT Academy	1997	1997
3. Wilkes	Elizabeth Grinton Charter School	1997	1997
4. Wayne	Bright Horizons	1997	1997
5. Caldwell	Nguza Saba Charter School	1997	1997
6. Wake	Bonner Academy	1997	1997
7. Onslow	PHASE Academy	1998	1998
8. Orange/Chapel Hill City School	School in the Community	1997	1997
9. Orange	Odyssey Charter School	1997	Withdrew—did not open (one year delay)
10. Martin	Bear Grass Charter School	1998	Withdrew—did not open
11. Wake	Sankore	1998	1998
12. Cumberland	OMA's Inc. Charter School	1998	1998
13. Durham	Partnership Academy	1998	Withdrew—did not open (one year delay)
14. Wilkes	Arts and Basics Charter	1998	1998
15. Wayne	Change for Youth	1998	1998
16. Catawba	Catawba Valley Tech	1998	Withdrew—did not open
17. Wilkes	Wilkes Technical High	1998	1998
18. Iredell	Developmental Day School	1999	1999
19. Wake	Hope Elementary School	1999	Withdrew—did not open (one year delay)
20. Harnett	Harnett Technical High School	1999	Withdrew—did not open
21. Cabarrus	Cabarrus County Charter School	1999	Withdrew—did not open

Charters Authorizing Charter Schools, 1997–2006

Action	Date	Reason for Action
Revocation	January 2001	Financial noncompliance
Revocation	December 1999	Financial noncompliance
Revocation	December 1999	Exceptional children noncompliance
Revocation	August 1999	Student enrollment/business
Revocation	January 1999	Student numbers/business
Revocation	May 1998	Financial/governance noncompliance
Revocation	December 2000	Financial noncompliance
Relinquishment	May 1999	Enrollment/business
Relinquishment	January 1998	Incomplete planning
Relinquishment	August 2001	Incomplete planning
Relinquishment	March 2001	Enrollment/business
Relinquishment	December 2000	Enrollment/business
Relinquishment	August 2000	Incomplete planning
Relinquishment	October 1999	Enrollment/business
Relinquishment	September 1999	Enrollment/business
Relinquishment	April 1999	Enrollment
Relinquishment	November 1998	Enrollment/business
Relinquishment	January 2002	Inadequate funding/declining enrollment
Relinquishment	February 2000	Incomplete planning
Relinquishment	September 1999	Incomplete planning
Relinquishment	February 2000	Incomplete planning

(continues)

Table 7. Revocations and Voluntary Relinquishments of

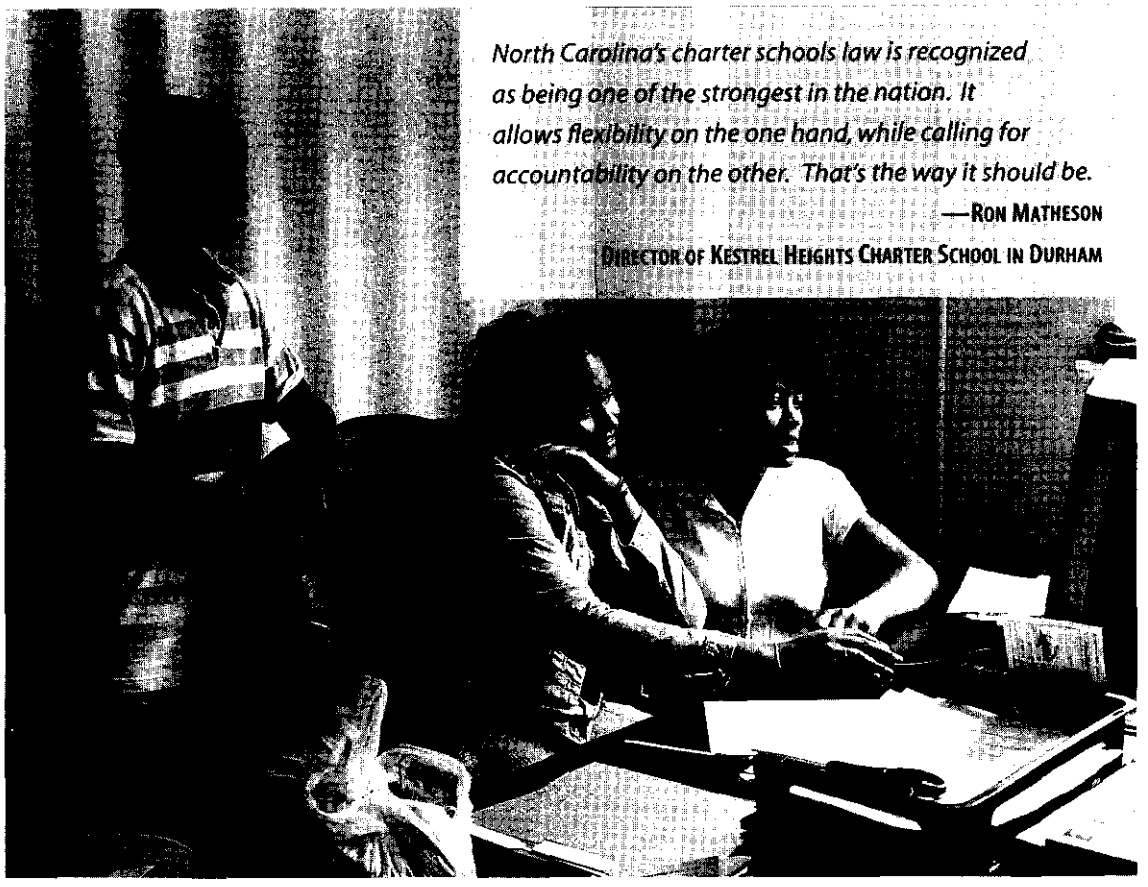
County	Charter School	Year Approved	Year Opened
22. Mecklenburg	Tarheel Challenge-West	1999	Withdrew—did not open
23. Sampson	Tarheel Challenge-East	1999	Withdrew—did not open
24. Harnett	Harnett Early Childhood Academy	1998	1998
25. Durham	Turning Point Academy	1998	1998
26. Durham	Success Academy	1999	1999
27. Stanly	Stanly County Outreach	1999	1999
28. Bladen	Tar Heel Charter High School	2000	Withdrew—did not open
29. Guilford	Oak Ridge Charter School	2001	Withdrew—did not open
30. Wayne	Wayne Technical Academy	1998	1999
31. Forsyth	East Winston Primary School	1998	1998
32. Alamance	Lakeside School	1997	1997
33. Durham	Ann Atwater Community School	2001	2001
34. Rowan	Rowan Academy	1999	1999
35. Catawba	Visions Charter	1997	1997
36. Scotland	Laurinburg Charter School	1998	1998
37. Guilford	Imani Institute	1998	1998
38. Wake	John H. Baker Charter High	1997	1997

Note: One school, Chapel Hill Free Academy formerly Village Charter, is no longer open. It is unclear why it is not on this list from DPI.

Source: Data maintained by N.C. Office of Charter Schools and meeting records of the State Board of Education.

Charters Authorizing Charter Schools, 1997–2006, *continued*

Action	Date	Reason for Action
Relinquishment	May 1999	Unresolved legal issues
Relinquishment	May 1999	Unresolved legal issues
Relinquishment	February 2002	Enrollment/business
Relinquishment	August 2002	Enrollment/business
Relinquishment	August 2002	Enrollment/business
Relinquishment	August 2002	Enrollment
Relinquishment	May 2002	Facilities
Relinquishment	July 2002	Facilities
Renewal not approved	July 2003	Business, enrollment, reporting, governance
Revocation	December 2003	Governance, business, reporting, financial
Relinquishment	December 2005	Closing of children's facility
Relinquishment	December 2005	Low enrollment
Relinquishment	February 2006	Finance
Relinquishment	March 2006	Low enrollment/finance
Renewal not approved	June 2006	Governance, finance, enrollment
Revocation	July 2006	Governance, finance
Revocation	Effective June 30, 2007	Governance



North Carolina's charter schools law is recognized as being one of the strongest in the nation. It allows flexibility on the one hand, while calling for accountability on the other. That's the way it should be.

—**Ron Matheson**
Director of Kestrel Heights Charter School in Durham

(continued from page 55) and the Office of Charter Schools continues to support raising the cap to open still more schools.

Leanne Winner, director of government relations for the North Carolina School Boards Association, says the argument that expansion is needed in order to continue to provide administrative services from Raleigh is a poor one. "You're making the assumption that federal funds will always flow, and we all know that's not necessarily true," says Winner. "The schools will require ongoing resources, and the money won't last," she says, adding that continuing the flow of federal funds "would only help serve the existing staff," while demands for services would increase with the number of schools.

Moyer says the idea that federal funds cover employee salaries is "completely untrue," though it does pay for a range of programs. "The state covers the Office of Charter School employees," says Moyer. "Under our current federal grant, money will revert to the federal government because we cannot spend it — the cap prevents further charter schools," says Moyer. "If these federal funds evaporate, the state will have to cover costs for the following programs or cut them entirely, which diminishes services to charter schools — the administrative mentoring program, perpetual consultant site visits, the annual charter schools conference that highlights best practices, teaching coaching, etc."

The State Board of Education (SBE) supports a one-time increase in the cap of 8–10 schools, says Rebecca Garland, executive director. "They would like it to be very slow and incremental growth, because every time you add another charter school, it's like adding another LEA (or local school district)," says Garland, and that places a greater administrative burden on the state. "The State Board supports slow, incremental change — so [charter schools] can grow successfully."

Funding of Capital Expense and Construction of Charter Schools

Finding funds to cover capital expenses also continues to be a challenge for charter schools. By law, charters cannot use state or local money for the purchase or renovation of buildings. In the 2005 session of the N.C. General Assembly, Sen. Edward Goodall (R-Union) introduced a bill that would allow counties to levy property taxes to provide funds for charter schools within the county to cover operations or capital expenses, but the bill died in committee.[25] A similar bill introduced by Sen. Larry Shaw suffered the same fate.[26] Additionally, charter schools advocates are seeking a share of school construction funds to be allotted from the new state lottery, so far without success. Of the 35 percent of state lottery revenues earmarked for education, 40 percent is to be set aside for school construction.[27] Historically in North Carolina, school construction has been primarily a local responsibility.

So far, the state has drawn the line at providing tax dollars to charter schools earmarked for school construction. According to Winner, the North Carolina School Boards Association would like to keep it that way. "The premise has been, if they have enough community support, they should be able to figure out a way to provide a building," says Winner.

At the time of the Center's previous article on charter schools, the issue of whether charter schools could receive fine and forfeiture monies collected by the state and made available to the local education agencies was in doubt. Lawsuits had been filed by charter schools against the Asheville City Schools and Durham County Public Schools. Those suits since have been settled in the charter schools' favor, clearing them to receive fines and forfeiture monies. A pro rata share of funding now is automatically distributed to charter schools in each county based on the percentage of students who attend charter schools from those counties, says Gene Bruton, an accountant in the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's Business Services Division. This proportionate share of funding follows the student wherever the student attends school, Bruton says.

The Question of the Cap on the Number of Charter Schools

In February 2005, Sen. Shaw introduced the Charter Schools Managed Growth Act (Senate Bill 490) in the N.C. General Assembly.[28] The bill, which never got out of the Senate Education/Higher Education Committee in the 2005–06 session, would have authorized the State Board of Education to approve up to 10 additional charter schools per year above the present cap of 100. "The traditional wisdom at the time we passed the initial charter law was that it would take us 10 years to reach the cap of 100 schools," Shaw says. "We've reached that, and there are many counties that want charters that don't have them. We want controlled growth." Of North Carolina's 100 counties, 54 do not have charter schools.

Sen. Eddie Goodall (R-Union), a co-sponsor of S.B. 490, also introduced his own bill that would eliminate the cap entirely.[29] "I prefer no cap at all, but an increase of at least 10 a year would be better than nothing," Goodall says. "We are eligible for $6.2 million of federal funds for new charters. It is incomprehensible to me that we would turn this money down."

But Sen. Linda Garrou (D-Forsyth) takes the position that public schools generally do not get enough resources, and the existing resources should not be spread thinner by authorizing more charter schools. "My concern is that we're so limited with the amount of dollars for public schools," say Garrou.

> *"You're making the assumption that federal funds will always flow, and we all know that's not necessarily true. The [charter] schools will require ongoing resources, and the money won't last."*
>
> — LEANNE WINNER, DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS, NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

Other Studies of Charter Schools' Academic Performance

How do charter schools compare to traditional public schools in terms of academic performance? The question has been fiercely debated among researchers. Beginning in the late 1990s, they have concluded everything from charters performing better than traditional public schools on tests of student performance to those same schools falling far behind the traditional schools on proficiency tests. That means the picture is less than clear. Certain states have been studied carefully and others less so, but what bearing do all of these studies have on North Carolina's decision to either expand or maintain its charter system?

Caroline M. Hoxby of Harvard University and the National Bureau of Economic Research conducted one of the most highly debated studies. Entitled *Achievement in Charter Schools and Regular Public Schools in the United States: Understanding the Differences*, Hoxby concluded that on the whole, "charter students are 5.2 percent more likely to be proficient in reading and 3.2 percent more likely to be proficient in math on their state's exams."[1] She used the proficiency exams for each state and compared the scores from elementary charter schools that were "matched" with local traditional elementary schools. The "matched" schools approach compared the academic performance of two schools in a geographic region that were similar in both racial and socio-economic make-up of their student bodies.

Though positive for charter schools on the whole, Hoxby's study found North Carolina charters to be far behind the national average, and in both reading and math, North Carolina charter schools lagged 4 percent behind their traditional school counterparts.[2] Several parties have tried to refute Hoxby's findings and her methodology. In fact, the National Charter School Research Project, a research group focused on unbiased measurement of all facets of charter schools, rated this specific study as "poor" because her model type had "no regression used."[3]

In another study by researchers Robert Bifulco and Helen F. Ladd of Duke University, which focused primarily on North Carolina, the results were also "discouraging for charter school supporters." Students in grades 3 through 8 were found to make "considerably smaller achievement gains in charter schools than they would have in traditional public schools."[4] Their study used individual information from the North Carolina Education Research Data Center, and followed the progression of 3rd through 8th graders, marking their academic achievement

"We get a lot of concern from people that we are not funding our public schools to the amount we want to." Of further concern, says Garrou, is academic performance at some charter schools. "I'm not seeing the results that would make me want to look at raising that cap," she says.

The Charter Schools Advisory Committee agrees with raising, but not eliminating, the cap. "I believe the proposal to add 10 schools a year would be prudent," Fedewa says. "The Committee has recommended this to the State Board of Education, and the Board said they would support this. We've been in a holding pattern since the last action [by the General Assembly]. The cap is discouraging people from applying."

Moyer says the Office of Charter Schools could easily handle a limited number of new charters. "I believe the cap needs to go up," Moyer says. "Looking at our staff, if we could add 9 or 10 new schools a year, we could do a good job. I personally don't favor eliminating the cap. You need to have controlled growth."

as they moved through those grades. The researchers studied student gains on standardized tests, using standard deviations as their means of measuring the results. Their initial findings showed that "... a student enrolled in charter schools for 5 years would score nearly one-half of a standard deviation lower in reading and nearly eight-tenths of a standard deviation lower in math than they would if they remained in traditional public schools."[5] This means that students in charter schools are significantly farther behind in both reading and math than if they had attended traditional public schools for five years.

A 2003 study of California charter schools by the highly respected RAND Corporation yielded results that carried nationwide implications. *Charter School Operations and Performance: Evidence from California* was authored by 11 noted researchers who studied charter schools in California. According to these researchers, charter schools can be evaluated in terms of whether they both (1) "improve learning of pupils over time" and (2)"outperform conventional public schools."[6] In the California study, researchers used both methods and found that on average charters do tend to improve learning over time, as both traditional and charter schools "have experienced growth in student performance in recent years." But in terms of outperforming traditional schools, the study found, "Charter schools generally have comparable or slightly lower test scores...."[7]

—Aisander Duda

FOOTNOTES

[1] Caroline M. Hoxby, *Achievement in Charter Schools and Regular Public Schools in the United States: Understanding the Differences*, Program on Education Policy and Governance, Cambridge, Mass., December 2004, p. 1.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] See NCSRP listing of Achievement Studies at Web Site *www. ncsrp.org/cs/csr/print/csr_docs/achstud.htm.*

[4] Robert Bifulco and Helen F. Ladd, "Results from the Tar Heel State," Hoover Institution, Stanford, Calif., 2005, p. 10.

[5] Robert Bifulco and Helen F. Ladd, "The Impacts of Charter Schools on Student Achievement: Evidence from North Carolina," Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy, Durham, N.C, August 2004, pp. 19–20.

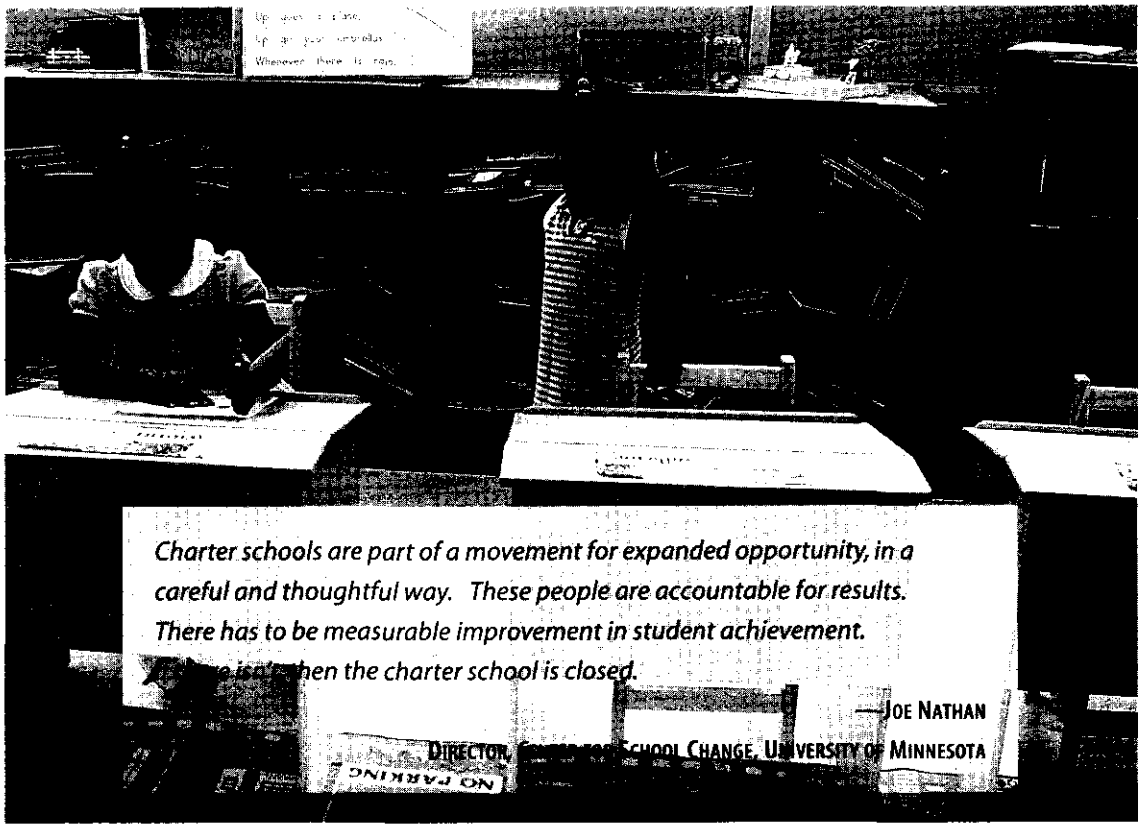
[6] RAND Education, *Charter School Operations and Performance: Evidence from California,* RAND Publishing, Santa Monica, Calif., 2003, pp. 175–176.

[7] *Ibid.*

The State Board of Education supports an increase of 8–10 charter schools based on the premise that some 80 of the 100 charters schools operating in the state are "very successful," says Rebecca Garland, State Board of Education executive director. "Raising the cap 8 to 10 percent would be comfortable for them," she says. However, that's less than the 10-schools-per-year increase for multiple years recommended by the advisory committee and sought by the N.C. Office of Charter Schools.

Roger Gerber of the League of Charter Schools wants no constraints on the growth of charter schools. "I want to see the cap eliminated," Gerber says. "Last year, there were 17 applications for three spots, and there's only one available now. The demand for new charters is there. Why shouldn't we give people a choice?"

However, Winner of N.C. Schools Boards Association says the association opposes raising the cap at all for three reasons. First, she says charter schools were intended by statute to be small, experimental schools that could serve as laboratories



for trying innovations that could be taken to the traditional public schools. "The mechanism for sharing information and innovation has never happened," says Winner. Secondly, at a time when state level resources are stretched thin, each charter school requires almost as much staff time and administrative support from the state as an entire local school district. Meanwhile, local school districts are "crying for resources" from the state, Winner says. Third, resources provided to the schools do not necessarily align with the services they provide. For example, a school for children ages kindergarten through 5th grade receives funds from the career technical education fund even though career technical education services begin in the 8th grade, says Winner.

* * *

There are some shining jewels among the state's charter schools that suggest unrealized promise for the experiment as a whole. There may be more gems that deserve the chance to shine. But in the final analysis, the state must assure that parents who exercise school choice have the opportunity to choose among schools that have a chance of providing the "sound basic education" that the State Constitution requires for all North Carolina's children.

Table 8. Number of Charter Schools in 2006 by State and Strength of Laws Governing Charter Schools, As Evaluated by the Center for Education Reform, Which is Pro-Charter Schools

State	Allows Charter Schools	Number of Charter Schools in State	Strength of Charter Law**	Rank in Strength of Charter Law	Grade of Charter Law	Number of Charter Schools Allowed
1. Alabama	No	0				
2. Alaska	Yes	20	18.8	34	D	60
3. Arizona	Yes	449	46	1	A	Unlimited
4. Arkansas	Yes	11	17	35	D	12 New*
5. California	Yes	592	35.75	15	B	550, 100 per year*
6. Colorado	Yes	116	39	9	B	Unlimited
7. Connecticut	Yes	15	23	30	C	24
8. Delaware	Yes	15	44.45	4	A	Unlimited
9. District of Columbia	Yes	43	44.75	3	A	20 per year*
10. Florida	Yes	326	39.25	8	B	Unlimited
11. Georgia	Yes	49	25	26	C	Unlimited
12. Hawaii	Yes	27	20	33	C	25 New, 23 Conversion*
13. Idaho	Yes	23	23.7	27	C	6 per yr.*
14. Illinois	Yes	41	27	24	C	60
15. Indiana	Yes	29	39.25	7	B	Unlimited
16. Iowa	Yes	7	6.5	40	F	10
17. Kansas	Yes	25	13	39	D	30
18. Kentucky	No	0				
19. Louisiana	Yes	16	26.25	25	C	42
20. Maine	No	0				
21. Maryland	Yes	15	14.5	37	D	Unlimited
22. Massachusetts	Yes	57	40.3	6	A	120
23. Michigan	Yes	233	44.45	5	A	Unlimited
24. Minnesota	Yes	126	45.25	2	A	Unlimited
25. Mississippi	Yes	1	2.3	41	F	6
26. Missouri	Yes	26	36	14	B	Unlimited
27. Montana	No	0				
28. Nebraska	No	0				
29. Nevada	Yes	20	23	30	C	20 State, Unlimited Local*
30. New Hampshire	Yes	6	28	23	C	Unlimited
31. New Jersey	Yes	52	32.5	17	B	Unlimited
32. New Mexico	Yes	51	30	20	B	100
33. New York	Yes	51	38.3	10	B	100 New*
34. North Carolina	**Yes**	**100**	**37.25**	**12**	**B**	**100**
35. North Dakota	No	0				
36. Ohio	Yes	277	37.5	11	B	225
37. Oklahoma	Yes	13	29	21	C	Unlimited
38. Oregon	Yes	62	34.75	16	B	Unlimited

Table 8, *continued*

State	Allows Charter Schools	Number of Charter Schools in State	Strength of Charter Law**	Rank in Strength of Charter Law	Grade of Charter Law	Number of Charter Schools Allowed
39. Pennsylvania	Yes	103	36.75	13	B	Unlimited
40. Rhode Island	Yes	11	15	36	D	20
41. South Carolina	Yes	26	28.75	22	C	Unlimited
42. South Dakota	No	0				
43. Tennessee	Yes	12	20.75	32	C	10 per year
44. Texas	Yes	259	30.75	19	B	215*
45. Utah	Yes	39	23	28	C	Unlimited
46. Vermont	No	0				
47. Virginia	Yes	5	13.1	38	D	Unlimited
48. Washington	Yes	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	45*
49. West Virginia	No	0				
50. Wisconsin	Yes	188	32.05	18	B	Unlimited
51. Wyoming	Yes	3	21.75	31	C	Unlimited
Totals	Yes = 42	3,568	State Has Cap on Total Schools Allowed = 22			

* Arkansas law allows 12 new charter schools to open, while also allowing unlimited conversions from private to charter. In California, the current cap of 550 increases by 100 schools each year (i.e. next school year 650), allowing for gradual growth. D.C. schools are allowed only 20 charter openings a year, with no long-term, numerical limit. Hawaii's charter law allows a maximum of 25 new charter schools and 23 converted charters. Six charter schools a year may be opened in Idaho, with no school district receiving more than one in a given year. A cap of 21 schools is in effect in Nevada, but they also allow unlimited new charter schools that serve high-risk students. New York charter law provides 100 new charter openings with unlimited conversions from private schools. The Texas cap of 215 does not include university-operated schools. Washington's legislature passed a law to authorize charter schools and funding of them, but this was defeated in a citizen referendum in November 2004. The proposed cap would have been 45 schools, with 5 schools added per year.

** The strength of a state's charter schools law rating is from an evaluation by the Center for Education Reform, a Washington, D.C. think tank which advocates for charter schools and school choice. The group evaluates charter schools on factors such as whether a state has multiple chartering authorities, whether schools have a guaranteed source of per pupil funding, whether a school may be started without evidence of local support, whether schools have legal and operating autonomy, and the number of schools a state allows. States were awarded a letter grade as well as an overall score and ranking. For complete results, see CER's Ranking of the Nation's Strongest to Weakest Laws and CER's State By State Charter Law Profiles, on the Worldwide Web at *www.edreform.com*. Mailing address: Center for Education Reform, 1001 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 204, Washington, DC, 20036. Phone: (202) 822-9000.

Conclusions and Recommendations by the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research

In considering whether to raise the cap of 100 charter schools authorized for North Carolina, legislators need to ask if charter schools *are fulfilling the six purposes set out in the original statute creating the schools.* North Carolina's authorizing legislation said charter schools were intended to: (1) improve student learning; (2) increase learning opportunities for *all* students, with a special emphasis on at-risk or gifted students; (3) encourage the use of different or innovative teaching methods; (4) create new professional opportunities for teachers, including "opportunities to be responsible for the learning program at the school site;" (5) provide expanded choice for parents and students within the school system; and (6) hold charter schools accountable for student performance.

Charter schools as a group have had mixed results at: improving student learning (purpose #1); increasing learning opportunities for all students (purpose #2); and encouraging the use of innovative teaching methods (purpose #3). Charter schools have done poorly in complying with the state statutory requirement of racial balance, since 26 charter schools were 80 percent or more African American and 14 charter schools were more than 95 percent African American in the 2005–06 school year. Charter schools *have* given teachers expanded professional opportunities at the school site, the fourth purpose in the legislation. As for purpose #6 in the authorizing legislation, holding schools accountable for student learning, the picture also has been mixed. While charter schools participate in state and federal school accountability programs, the overwhelming number of school closures has been for fiscal or management issues rather than for academic performance. The only purposes in the legislation charter schools clearly have met are providing increased opportunities for teachers at the school site (purpose #4) and expanding school choice (purpose #5) for some parents and students. Charter school advocates say the legislature did not anticipate that each charter school would meet every purpose set out in the law. Would-be schools are only asked to address one or more of the six purposes in their charter applications. But on the whole, charter schools are not performing as well as the traditional public schools in meeting primary academic goals. Thus, the legislature has no basis for raising or eliminating the cap on the number of charter schools operating in North Carolina.

Many of North Carolina's charter schools have improved their performance as measured by the state's Accountability Basics and Control (ABC) end-of-grade or course testing program. Yet the Center is troubled by the number of schools that continue to lag after years of opportunity to prove that charter schools are equal to or better than traditional public schools. A total of 29.3 percent of the state's 99 charter schools participating in its end-of-grade testing program received no recognition or were rated low-performing for the 2005–06 school year. Of even greater concern is that students who turn to charter schools because they have not performed well in traditional schools may actually fall further behind, as suggested in the finding by respected researchers at Duke University that North Carolina's traditional public schools do a superior job of educating at risk or low-performing students.

If this is the case, why continue the experiment? Charter school advocates cite multiple reasons. One is that the traditional public schools have done a less than ideal job of educating students at risk of failure in the past. Thus, parental dissatisfaction

has led these students to seek an alternative, and many have found a home at charter schools.

However, choice is only one of six factors cited in the law passed by the legislature in 1996. Others were to give teachers professional opportunities, to hold themselves accountable via the state accountability testing program, to improve student performance, to serve as laboratories of innovation for the traditional public schools, and to increase learning opportunities for all students. The Center finds that charter schools do provide another avenue of choice, and at least hold themselves accountable by participating in statewide end-of-grade testing, though academic shortcomings have rarely if ever been cited as reasons for school closure. However, those same end-of-grade tests demonstrate that charter schools, though improving, fall short at improving student learning as compared to the traditional public schools. As for providing laboratories of innovation for the public schools, the role of charter schools thus far has been negligible, as indicated by examples provided by the Office of Charter Schools itself. Finally, the academic track record of charter schools thus far does not suggest that these schools increase learning opportunities for all students. Rather, it is suggestive of a "boutique-style" approach to learning that can be very successful on a limited scale, as indicated by success stories like Quest Academy in Raleigh, Gaston Preparatory Academy in Warren County, and Raleigh Charter High School.

Thus, the Center offers the following recommendations intended to put a stronger emphasis on performance while preserving choice for charter schools that can meet reasonable performance standards.

Recommendation # 1:

Charter schools that have failed to meet expected growth, as defined by the state ABCs school accountability plan, for five consecutive years should be placed on immediate probation and given two years to achieve expected growth or be required to give up their charters. In year one, schools should develop a credible plan for meeting academic growth standards, and these schools should show progress toward meeting expected growth standards by the end of the first year. A total of 42.1 percent of charter schools landed in the No Recognition category for the 2003–04 school year, meaning these schools did not attain the academic progress the state thinks they should have, given the make-up of their student bodies. In 2004–05, the number of no recognition schools fell to 34.4 percent of charter schools operating that school year, but still more than a third. In 2005–06, based on a revised DPI accountability model, 23.2 percent of charter schools did not receive recognition. And, when No Recognition Schools, Priority Schools and Low Performing Schools are combined, an alarming 52 percent, or more than half, of the charter schools fell into the lowest three categories, as determined by the state ABCs testing program.

In February 2007, the N.C. Department of Public Instruction released for the first time four-year cohort graduation rates for 2006 by school. While, statewide, 68.1 percent of students graduated in four years, only 55.3 percent of charter schools' students graduated in the same amount of time.

This recommendation merely requires charter schools to do what they say they can do — educate children, and it only requires that they do so at the "expected" level, which can be achieved at a well-functioning school. If they already have failed for five years, action needs to be taken now to weed out the low-performing schools.

Recommendation # 2:

Revoked charters under the 100-school cap should be awarded to proposed schools that stand a strong chance of meeting or exceeding the state's academic expectations. Preference should be given to schools from counties currently without a charter school where founders have engaged in appropriate planning and identified revenue sources that provide a strong likelihood of success. Currently, 54 of the

state's 100 counties do not have a charter school. Combined with Recommendation #1, this recommendation should relieve some of the pent-up demand for charters and address the credible argument that charters were too loosely awarded when the state's charter schools law initially took effect.

Recommendation # 3:

The legislature should not increase the cap of 100 charter schools it authorized by statute in 1996. With more than five years of performance data in hand, charter schools are not performing as well as the traditional public schools in improving student learning. And, a study by researchers Helen Ladd and Robert Bifulco of the Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy at Duke University indicates that charter school students do not perform as well on end-of-grade tests as demographically similar students who remain in the traditional public schools. While advocates may argue that the state's accountability testing does not measure all the benefit students receive from attending charter schools, it is the measure the state uses to gauge classroom performance.

The study also found that students in charter schools do not do as well on end-of-grade tests as their counterparts in traditional public schools, and that some of the difference is attributable to the charter schools themselves rather than to unobservable characteristics of the students. The authors conclude that the academic gains of charter school students in both reading and math is significantly poorer than would have been the case had those same students remained in traditional public schools.

Charter schools also have not delivered innovation that can be replicated in the public schools classroom, as groups as diverse as the North Carolina Association of Educators, the N.C. School Boards Association, and even some charter schools officials themselves attest. And, too many charter schools are racially segregated or close to it, violating the spirit and perhaps the letter of the law. In 2005–06, 26 of 99 charter schools then operating were 80 percent or more non-white. Of these, 14 were more than 95 percent African American. Four of the 99 were 100 percent African American. A second study by Robert Bifulco and Helen Ladd of Duke University finds that students who move from traditional public schools to charter schools typically move to a more racially isolated environment, strengthening the argument that charter schools contribute to racial separation.

In 2004–05, the most recent financial data available, charter schools received a total of $189,582,506—including federal ($16,472,667), state ($112,798,911), and local revenue ($60,310,928). That's a lot of money, especially when more than half of the charter schools fell in the bottom three performance categories, as determined by the state's ABCs testing program. North Carolina needs to make sure that charter schools are worth the money. Charter schools are a worthy experiment only if we get a return on our investment.

Charter School Resources

North Carolina Resources

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction
Office of Charter Schools
Jack Moyer, Director
6303 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-6303
919-807-3302
email: *jmoyer@dpi.state.nc.us*

The League of Charter Schools
Roger Gerber, Director
200 Stags Trail
Chapel Hill, NC 27516-7310
919-967-1029
www.charterleague.org
e-mail: *roger@charterleague.org*

Public Impact
Bryan C. Hassel, Co-Director
Emily A. Hassel, Co-Director
504 Dogwood Drive
Chapel Hill, NC 27516
919-967-5102
email: *info@publicimpact.com*

North Carolina Center for Nonprofits
1110 Navaho Drive, Ste. 200
Raleigh, NC 27609
919-790-1555
www.ncnonprofits.org
email: *info@ncnonprofits.org*

Self-Help Community Facilities Fund
Jane Ellis
Charter Schools Loan Officer
919-956-4407 or 800-478-7428
email: *jane.ellis@self-help.org*
Hugh Deaner
Charter School Loan Officer
919-956-4687 or 800-478-7428
email: *hugh.deaner@self-help.org*
301 W. Main St.
Durham, NC 27701

National Resources

US Charter Schools
www.uscharterschools.org
email: *uscharterschools@wested.org*

National Alliance for Public Charter Schools
1101 14th Street, NW, Ste. 801
Washington, DC 20005
202-289-2700
www.publiccharters.org
email: *dennis@publiccharters.org*

National Association of Charter School Authorizers
1125 Duke Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
703-683-9701
www.charterauthorizers.org
email: *info@charterauthorizers.org*

National Charter School Clearinghouse
P.O. Box 11864
Tempe, AZ 85284-0032
480-907-5900
www.ncsc.info
email: *info@ncsc.info*

National Charter Schools Institute
2520 S. University Park Drive, Ste. 11
Mount Pleasant, MI 48858
989-774-2999
www.nationalcharterschools.org
email: *info@nationalcharterschools.org*

Center for Education Reform
1001 Connecticut Ave, NW, Ste. 204
Washington, DC 20036
202-822-9000
www.edreform.com
email: *cer@edreform.com*

American Academy for Liberal Education—Charter School Accreditation
1050 17th St NW, Ste. 400
Washington, DC 20036
202-452-8611
www.aalecharters.org
email: *charters@aale.org*

FOOTNOTES

[1] N.C.G.S. 115C-238.29

[2] N.C.G.S. 115C-238.29F(g)(5)

[3] House Joint Resolution 2486 of the 2005 General Assembly, Regular Session 2006.

[4] *The ABCS of Public Education: 2004–05 Growth and Performance of North Carolina Schools, Executive Summary,* Division of Accountability Services, N.C. Department of Public Instruction, Raleigh, N.C., Feb. 27, 2006, p. 2. The following is the link for the ABCs for charter schools in North Carolina in 2005–06: *http://abcs.ncpublicschools.org/abcs/abcVo11List.jsp?pYear=2005-2006&pList=5&pListVal=12&GO=Go.*

[5] Robert Bifulco and Helen F. Ladd, *The Impacts of Charter Schools on Student Achievement: Evidence From North Carolina,* Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy, Duke University, Durham, N.C., August 2004, pp. 5–6.

[6] *Ibid.* at p. 6.

[7] *Ibid. at* p. 23.

[8] George M. Holmes, *et al.*, "Friendly Competition — Does the presence of charters spur public schools to improve?" *Education Next,* the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, Calif., Winter 2006, pp. 69–70.

[9] *Evaluation of the Public Charter Schools Program, Final Report, 2004.* Prepared for the U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Deputy Secretary, Policy and Program Studies Service, by SRI International, Washington, D.C., 2004, Appendix E-6, p. 125.

[10] *Ibid.* at p. 53.

[11] N.C.G.S. 115C-238.29.

[12] John Manuel and Mike McLaughlin, "The Charter School Experience in North Carolina," *North Carolina Insight,* North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research, Raleigh, N.C., Vol. 20, Nos. 1–2, July 2002, p. 62.

[13] In 2004–05, the percentage of traditional public schools making expected or high growth as indicated by state accountability testing fell to 70 percent from the previous year's 75 percent, while charter schools improved to 64 percent from the previous year's 57 percent.

[14] The Charter School Achievement Panel, *Key Issues In Studying Charter Schools And Achievement: A Review And Suggestions For National Guidelines,* Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington, Seattle, Wash., National Charter School Research Project White Paper Series, No. 2, May 2006, p. 10.

[15] Bryan Hassel, *Charter School Achievement: What We Know,* Public Impact, Chapel Hill, N.C., for the Charter School Leadership Council, July 2005, p. 7.

[16] *Ibid.* at p. 1.

[17] George W. Noblit and Dickson Corbett, *North Carolina Charter School Evaluation Report,* prepared under contract for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Raleigh, N.C., November 21, 2001, p. I–4.

[18] N.C.G.S. 115C-238.29F(g)(5).

[19] Manuel and McLaughlin, note 12 above, p. 42.

[20] *Department of Education Statistical Research Section, Pupils in Membership by Race and Sex, Charter Schools 2003–04.* Unpublished document provided by N.C. Office of Charter Schools.

[21] *Evaluation of the Public Charter Schools Program,* note 9 above, p. 57.

[22] Robert Bifulco and Helen F. Ladd, *School Choice, Racial Segregation and Test-Score Gaps: Evidence from North Carolina's Charter School Program,* forthcoming in the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management,* Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management, Washington, D.C., pp. 10–12 and 18–19.

[23] N.C.G.S. 115C-238.29A(3).

[24] N.C.G.S. 115C-238.29F(e)(1).

[25] Senate Bill 212 of the 2005 General Assembly. See p. 9–10 for a discussion of 2007 bills.

[26] Senate Bill 490 of the 2005 General Assembly.

[27] N.C.G.S. 18C-164(c)(2)

[28] *Ibid.*

[29] Senate Bill 213 of the 2005 General Assembly.

Missing Persons:

Understanding and Addressing High School Dropouts in North Carolina

by Trip Stallings

Executive Summary

North Carolina's dropout rate has become the source of controversy. Are the high on-time graduation rates reported by the state a few years ago indicative of how many actually receive a high school diploma? Or is the real number closer to the findings of a number of major studies of the dropout problem nationally, which tend to place North Carolina in the bottom 10 among states? The answer appears to lie somewhere in between, but lost in the discussion is a sad truth. Too many North Carolinians drop out of school, and the trend is toward dropouts completing fewer grades before quitting.

Part of the confusion around the issue lies in the various ways in which dropout statistics are tracked, generated, and reported. The four most common dropout and dropout-related statistics are the event rate, the status rate, the completion rate, and the cohort rate. The **event rate** *is the ratio of dropout events (occurrences of dropout) to the total student population in a given period of time (usually a full year). Theoretically, a student could drop out, re-enroll the next year, and drop out again, thus recording two dropout events. As a result, relying purely on event rates could overestimate the total number of dropouts. The* **status rate** *looks at the percentage of students who leave school within a given range of years. For example, the state's entering senior class of 81,935 in 2005–06 is about 20 percent smaller than the 102,615 students who entered eighth grade in 2001–02. From this, one could infer an estimated dropout status rate of around 20 percent. Another major counting method is the* **completion rate,** *which looks at people of a certain age and asks what percentage has completed high school. One of the most commonly measured age ranges is the 18 to 24-year-old age range. The United States Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) estimates that between 1999 and 2001, North Carolina's high school completion rate for this age group was 84.7 percent. Finally, there is the* **cohort rate,** *which follows a particular group of students as they enter and progress through*

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a span of grades. If a student within the group, or cohort, moved out of the school system, that student would still be tracked. Tracking the cohort rate is in many ways considered the most accurate way to track dropouts because it follows the actions of individual students. In 2006, the four-year cohort graduation rate in North Carolina for all students was 68.1 percent.

A few years ago, a good deal of controversy was generated by dropout statistics—two on-time graduation rates—the state reported to the U.S. Department of Education to comply with the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act requirements. North Carolina reported the percentage of high school graduates who earned a diploma in four years or less; dropouts were not included in the calculation. Because most students who graduate do so on time, the percentage reported in compliance with NCLB legislation was very high: the figure was 92.4 percent in 2001–02, and for 2002–03, the figure was an even healthier-looking 97 percent, the highest reported rate in the nation. The calculation used to generate this figure technically did meet the letter of the NCLB reporting law, but it was somewhat misleading. Not surprisingly, several groups called North Carolina to task on using such a figure, but in attempting to make their cases, they, too, may have overstated the point in the opposite direction.

A key issue in the debate is how the parties choose to use the **on-time graduation rate.** *Studies showing up to a third of the nation's high school students as high school dropouts typically count students who do not finish high school in the prescribed four years as dropouts, even if they finish later. One such study found North Carolina's graduation rate to be only 61.2 percent in 2000. By contrast, the National Center for Education Statistics estimates that North Carolina's high school completion rate, including those who graduate on time and those who do not, approaches 85 percent for persons ages 18–24.*

In 2007, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction began to phase out its use of the on-time graduation rate in favor of a cohort rate that shows the percentage of the freshmen class who actually graduate four years later. This percentage takes into account dropouts, but it does not remove all ambiguity from the statistics. Things like student mobility and migration issues continue to be roadblocks to accurately tracking all dropouts.

Thus, knowing the precise number of high school dropouts in North Carolina is difficult, if not impossible, given the current tracking ability of the state. Yet no one is arguing that the state does not have a significant dropout problem. The largest number of dropouts leave school between the 9th and 10th grades—after the first year of high school. In 2005–06, 9th grade dropouts accounted for around 33 percent of all dropouts and more than 34 percent of all high school dropouts. But, the most frequent dropout age is

17, followed by 18. Neither of these is a traditional 9th grade age, suggesting that students are having a harder time clearing the 9th grade hurdle and adjusting to high school.

In North Carolina, Native Americans have the highest dropout rates, followed in rank order by Latinos, African Americans, whites, and persons of Asian descent. No matter the race or ethnicity, boys are more likely to drop out than girls. The ratio of male dropouts to females has held steady at about 3:2 over the last seven years.

Students drop out for a host of reasons, many of them overlapping. But these reasons cluster into two broad categories: external family and environmental reasons, or "pull" factors that tend to pull a student away from school, and "push" factors, or school experiences that tend to push a student out of school. Pull factors could include issues such as pregnancy or the perceived need to become a family breadwinner. Push factors include issues around behavior or academic performance, relevancy of the school curriculum, a school's willingness to accept and accommodate students, and societal signaling devices such as the state's compulsory attendance law, which allows a student to drop out legally after age 16.

But while it's easy to identify issues that might contribute to student decisions to drop out, it's more difficult to identify actual students who do so. Even the best models for identifying students at risk of dropping out pinpoint less than half of students who ultimately will actually quit school. Who will drop out is hard to predict, and experts say a variety of programs are needed to capture a sizable portion of these students and encourage them to stay in the classroom until they earn a high school diploma.

Efforts already are being made on a broad front. One of the most extensive statewide efforts to reduce the number of students who drop out is the ***Communities in Schools (CIS)*** *network, which operates 37 programs across the state and attempts to address the broad-ranging issues that push or pull students out of school, beginning in the early grades and working through high school. CIS encourages and supports the development of personal one-on-one relationships for students with adults, safe school and home environments, the acquisition of marketable skills, opportunities for students to participate in community service, and improving the physical, mental, and emotional health of all students. Yet another approach is* ***drop-out prevention counseling,*** *used by several school systems, including the Durham County Schools. The program includes efforts to locate students who fail to report to school, home and neighborhood visits to encourage better school attendance and performance, and efforts to re-enroll recent dropouts or connect them with services they need to have a greater chance to be successful such as General Educational Development (GED) or Job*

Corps programs. Students who have been suspended 10 or more days and who exhibit additional dropout risk factors are assigned a child and family support team.

Some school systems promote extracurricular activities aimed at students at risk of dropping out. One such program is ***BRIDGE, or Building Relationships to Initiate Diversity, Growth, and Enrichment,*** *an initiative of U.S. Lacrosse. The program originated in the mid-1980s when the City of Baltimore was seeking ways to prevent teenage delinquency. It has since spread to places like New Hanover County, where more than 350 male and female students participate countywide. Participants are recruited from all walks of life, participating not only in organized sports but in enrichment activities such as community volunteering. Unlike many school-sanctioned events, students are allowed to participate even if they get low grades, and they receive academic tutoring and support to help bring their grades up.*

Other programs for North Carolina students at risk of dropping out include ***alternative schools,*** *where students who cannot have their needs met in the regular classroom can continue their education, and* ***Eckerd Therapeutic Camps,*** *which provide outdoor behavior modification treatment for almost 1,000 troubled North Carolina students a year.*

Programs not specifically designed for dropout prevention but thought to help with the problem include middle college, the smaller schools initiative, and curriculum changes such as block scheduling. ***Learn and Earn Early College*** *and* ***Middle College*** *programs are high school programs housed at local community colleges and universities that expose students to a broader array of job skills than the typical high school student. These programs provide students the opportunity to earn an associates degree or industry certification along with a high school degree, with the Early College program allowing students to achieve this in only five years. Normally, graduation from high school requires four years while an associate's degree requires an additional two years. Another approach thought to help keep students enrolled and engaged in their studies is the* ***small schools*** *movement, aided by substantial support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation of Seattle, Washington. This may help to address the sense of anonymity many high school students feel, particularly those who are not successful academic performers. As for* ***block scheduling,*** *the approach on its surface seems little more than a different way to divide the class day. But under block scheduling, students take four classes each semester rather than six classes lasting an entire year. Experts say the benefit for struggling students is that those who fail a class have more frequent opportunities to make it up as opposed to enrolling in summer school or repeating a grade.*

A final area where the state attempts to address the dropout problem is through ***restrictions on driver's licenses.*** *Since August 1998, students have been required to show adequate progress in school in order to attain and keep a driver's license. Unlicensed teens are prohibited from applying for a license for 90 days, and two-time offenders must wait an additional six months to apply. Licensed teens also can have their license revoked if they are unable to maintain adequate academic progress or if they drop out of school.*

These programs and structural changes have the potential to enhance the chances that struggling students will stay in school. Other changes hold potential to help the state to understand with greater precision the magnitude of the dropout problem. These include the long anticipated statewide rollout of N.C. WISE (Windows of Information on Student Education). This new student information software package is currently operating in about one-third of the state's 115 school systems. N.C. WISE enables the state to give each student a unique identifying number and solves the current problem schools have with identifying students by Social Security number. For many years, the greatest block to generating accurate data on dropouts has been the inability to track all students who move across state lines or even between school systems.

What more needs to be done? The Center offers six recommendations with the intent of establishing the dropout problem as a statewide priority and making greater progress toward eliminating the problem. These recommendations are: (1) The state should expand its effort to provide the true picture of the dropout problem by reporting multiple high school completion totals and rates annually in addition to the current dropout event rate, with coherent explanations of each. (2) The N.C. Department of Public Instruction should improve its data collection system to enhance the way local school systems, schools, social workers, and guidance counselors report reasons for students dropping out of school. (3) The N.C. General Assembly's Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee should study the impact of raising the compulsory school attendance age to 18 and as part of a policy of encouraging as many students as possible to complete high school. (4) The N.C. Department of Public Instruction should consider revising and updating its school curricula by adding more real-world elements such as service learning, internships, and career exploration with an eye toward increasing relevance and increasing the number of students who stay in school. (5) The N.C. General Assembly should require the N.C. Department of Public Instruction to formally evaluate all existing dropout prevention programs and policies and appropriate funds for this evaluation. (6) Once the N.C. Department of Public Instruction completes its research, it should require each local school system to develop a dropout-prevention plan that addresses the unique needs of its school population and incorporates resources already available in the community.

Over the past several years, North Carolina's official annual dropout rate for grades seven through 12 has declined, though at an uneven pace, from 4.34 percent in the 1999–00 school year to a low of 3.23 percent in 2004–05, before rising slightly to 3.46 percent in 2005–06, and the total number of annual dropouts has fallen by around 7 percent (see Table 1). Many of the state's individual schools systems, or Local Education Agencies (LEAs), have been able to boast even more impressive local numbers (see Table 2). This news is especially heartening given that the state's overall secondary school population has *increased* over that same period by about 98,000 students, a gain that would have given the state some degree of leeway toward explaining static or even increasing dropout numbers.

Good news indeed. And yet, considered from another perspective, the same numbers verge on the tragic. The total number of official high school dropout events[1] between 1999 and 2006 is a sobering 152,582—about three times the number of secondary students in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg district, the state's largest school system. In the Annie E. Casey Foundation's most recent *Kids Count* report, North Carolina was cited as ranking 37th worst in the nation.[2] "It's just unacceptable to have this number of dropouts," says Marvin Pittman, Director of Middle Grades Education for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI). "Even though we are doing well, it's still too many students." says Pittman.[3] Therein lies the paradox of the dropout problem in North Carolina.

Understanding the full scope of the dropout problem is no easy task when declining rates stand side-by-side with such staggering totals. Added to the difficulty is the fact that many who study the dropout issue have called into question the accuracy of the state's official dropout rate and the methodology used to calculate that rate and other related figures (such as the state graduation rate). Beyond questions of counting, there is also the dual challenge of first understanding and then addressing the complex and overlapping forces that compel students to drop out.

Becoming discouraged by the complexity of the issue, however, is not an option. The social costs of not addressing the problem are overwhelming. The unemployment rate for dropouts is more than 30 percent higher than it is for people with a high school diploma,[4] and dropouts also tend to earn roughly 30 percent less than their diploma-holding peers.[5] Consequently, dropouts are much more likely to require public assistance, and they are more likely to end up in prison.[6] One estimate puts the social cost *per class of dropouts* nationwide for all of these interventions and losses at over $200 billion over their lifetimes.[7] As state Senator Stan Bingham (R-Davidson) observes, "Kids who drop out of school … are going to be a tremendous cost to this state." Finally, with state and federal school accountability standards reaching unprecedented levels and with the growing need for a better-educated work force that can handle the challenges of a rapidly evolving global economy, it is more critical now than ever before to determine what more the state can do to attack the dropout problem.

Making those determinations requires answers to these key questions: First, how does North Carolina track and measure dropout rates, and should the state adjust its methodology? Second, which students drop out, and why do they drop out? Third, how are North Carolina and local school districts attempting to reduce the number of dropouts? Fourth, what works in reducing dropout totals, and how do we know? And fifth, where do we go from here?

Editor's Note: Trip Stallings is a doctoral student in education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He previously has written for Insight *about the federal "No Child Left Behind" school accountability law and how it dovetails with the state accountability standards known as the ABCs of public education. In 2004–05, Stallings returned to the high school classroom for a year. During this period, the Center asked him to keep a notebook on the high school dropout problem. His "school snapshots" interspersed throughout this article are taken from observations he made while teaching in the North Carolina public schools. Photographs are by Karen Tam. (Kids pictured are not dropouts.)*

1. How Does North Carolina Track and Measure Dropout Rates?

School Snapshot:[8] *In my 2004–05 high school classes, 27 students did not finish the year. Of those 27, 14 were officially recorded as dropouts (one out of every nine of my 126 students, a dropout event rate of 11 percent). Of the remaining 13, one was given credit for finishing the year and was assumed to be returning in the fall, one opted for home schooling, six transferred to other schools in our district, and the last five indicated to their guidance counselors that they were transferring to out-of-district or out-of-state schools. Even though the schools to which these five transferred requested student information folders (had they not, these students also would have been counted as dropouts), there is neither a procedure nor time for guidance counselors to follow up on whether each of these students actually re-enrolled. Whether the home schooled student will complete any classes at home—much less earn a high school diploma—is also unclear. Of my 27 missing students, 14 dropped out and seven re-enrolled; the status of the other six remains uncertain.*

Approaches to Counting Dropouts: Event, Status, Completion, and Cohort Rates

One of the most challenging barriers to understanding the dropout rate in North Carolina is deciphering the various ways in which dropout statistics are tracked, generated, and reported. Much of this difficulty is a result of the perplexing variety of counting methods. The four most common dropout and dropout-related statistics are the *event rate,* the *status rate,* the *completion rate,* and the *cohort rate.*[9]

Table 1: North Carolina Statewide Dropout Totals and Rates, Grades 7 through 12, 1999–2006

School Year	Total	Rate
1999–2000	24,611	4.34%
2000–2001	22,387	3.86%
2001–2002	21,046	3.52%
2002–2003	19,384	3.23%
2003–2004	20,817	3.29%
2004–2005	20,944	3.23%
2005-2006	22,943	3.46%

Source: N.C. Department of Public Instruction (2007). Annual Report on Dropout Events and Rates. February 2007, Table 3.

N.C. Department of Public Instruction (2006). Dropout Prevention & Reporting.

School Improvement Division. Accessed on March 1, 2006, from *http://www.ncpublicschools.org/school improvement/effective/dropout/.*

EVENT RATE

The event rate is a measure of the total number of occurrences of students dropping out of school *in a given time period and for a given group of students.* The standard time period is one year (including the academic year and one summer), and the groups most frequently analyzed are either 7th through 12th graders (secondary school students) or 9th through 12th graders (high school students). The term "dropout event" is significant because it leads to what is known as double-counting. When a state counts dropout *events* instead of individual students identified as dropouts, a student who drops out during one school year, re-enrolls during the next school year, and then drops out again is not counted as one dropout. Instead, two separate dropout *events* are recorded. As a result, relying purely on event rates could overestimate the total number of dropouts.

North Carolina officially reports annual dropout event rates, and, for the 2005–06 school year, that rate was 3.46 percent, or 22,943 students, in grades seven through 12. In dropout parlance, the event rate is the "speed" with which dropping out occurs (that is, the percentage of students *each year* who drop out). Yet, if one looks at the size of the entering 12th grade class in 2005–06 (81,935 students) and compares this figure to its size in 2001–02 when most of the same students were 8th graders (102,615 students),[10] there appears to be a change in size of about 21,000 students for this group alone over a five-year period, or just over 20 percent. This discrepancy represents the difference between the event rate and the second method of counting, the status rate.

STATUS RATE

The status rate represents the percentage of students who drop out of school at any time during a given *range* of years (for example, between their 8th grade and 12th grade years). Thus, Edgecombe County may report accurately a dropout ***event rate*** of 7.30 percent (181 students) *for grades seven through 12 for the 2005–06 school year* and still have experienced an estimated dropout ***status rate*** of around 24 percent (from 604 enrolled 8th graders in 2001–02 to 457 enrolled 12th graders in 2005–06, or 147 students total) of all students in the graduating class of 2006.[11] Neither the event rate nor the status rate is necessarily wrong; each just represents a different way of accounting for dropouts, which may lead to confusion for people unfamiliar with the differences.

COMPLETION RATE

The third major counting method is the completion rate, which takes people in a certain age range and asks what percentage has completed high school. Because it counts diploma-earners and not dropouts, the completion rate is actually a graduation

statistic and not a true dropout statistic, but it is often cited alongside dropout rates (Table 3). One of the most commonly measured age ranges is the 18- to 24-year-old age range. The United States Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) estimates that between 1999 and 2001, North Carolina's high school completion rate for this age group was 84.7 percent.[12] The inverse (15.3 percent) is called a non-completers rate, but it is not technically a dropout rate either, since some of those non-completers might still be working on diplomas.

COHORT RATE

A fourth and final counting method is the cohort rate. The cohort rate, which is also a graduation and not a dropout rate, follows a particular group of students as they enter a certain grade (for example, 7th grade) at the same time and then progress through a span of grades. A student may drop out or move out of the school system, but that particular student is still tracked. Unlike calculations of the status rate, a cohort rate is not bound by a specific school or district population. In many ways, the cohort rate is the most accurate assessment of the dropout phenomenon because it follows individual students who all started a certain grade at the same time. Every other measure is a victim of the effects of student migration, retention, and incarceration on the size of grade-level populations.

According to Ken Gattis, who supervises dropout data collection for N.C. DPI, "The cohort rate accounts for each student by subtracting out those students who transfer out (and therefore cannot complete school in the school or district of interest) and by adding into the cohort students who transfer in. If a student transfers from Wake County to Durham County, he is subtracted out of a Wake County cohort and added into a Durham County cohort; however, he's still in the state's cohort for that year. Durham will then track the student's progress. If a student transfers out of state from Wake County, the student is subtracted from Wake County's and the state's cohort. No one in North Carolina will track the progress of this student."

Table 2. North Carolina's Lowest and Highest Local Education Agency Dropout Event Rates, Grades 9-12, 2005–06 School Year

10 LEAs with Lowest Dropout Rates			*10 LEAs with Highest Dropout Rates*		
	Rate	**Total**		**Rate**	**Total**
1. Chapel Hill-Carrboro	1.59	57	115. Vance	8.26	217
2. Newton Conover City	2.28	21	114. Northampton	8.00	87
3. Alleghany	2.69	13	113. Lee	7.80	230
4. Mount Airy City	2.83	18	112. Perquimans	7.75	47
5. Hyde	3.16	7	111. Tyrrell	7.56	17
6. Dare	3.28	54	110. Robeson	7.46	548
7. Guilford	3.41	766	109. Lenoir	7.43	246
8. Edenton/Chowan	3.54	29	108. Edgecombe	7.30	181
9. Cumberland	3.64	618	107. Nash-Rocky Mount	7.07	411
10. Gates	3.69	26	106. Roanoke Rapids City	7.04	68

Source: N.C. Department of Public Instruction (2007). Annual Report on Dropout Events and Rates. Report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee. These rates exclude charter school students and students who were expelled. LEA=Local Education Agency.

The price for this level of accuracy, however, is high. Because the cohort rate relies on exact information about individual students, the tracking necessary to keep up with every student in a given class is very difficult and costly. According to the N.C. Department of Public Instruction, in 2006, the 4-year cohort graduation rate in North Carolina for all students was 68.1 percent (based on 70,484 graduates and a class size of 103,441). It is important to note that this rate is based on on-time graduation and not eventual graduation figures, which will not be known until the state can factor in all late graduators.

Many researchers tend to agree that there is not a single, definitive, "best" dropout statistic, mainly because each statistic reveals something that the others cannot.[13] For example, the status rate may indicate how many students over a given time period drop out of school, but it does not indicate in which grades they are most frequently dropping out. An event rate is a much more useful tool for answering this "when" question, but it is unable to capture the total. Neither statistic can describe accurately the graduation status of a certain age group—only the completion and cohort rates can handle this task. It is clear, however, that a state's or district's decision about the way in which it reports dropouts can have a major impact on how dropout rates and the effectiveness of dropout prevention programs are perceived by the public.

But she won't drop out her
parents a'look at her funny
...
She's so precious with the peer
pressure

—Kanye West
"All Falls Down"

How North Carolina Counts

North Carolina has made an official ***annual event rate*** dropout count every year since 1985, but the methodology has evolved quite a lot since that first statewide count. The count started as only an *estimate* of the total annual number of dropouts statewide, but, since the 1988–89 school year, the count has reflected an effort to determine the exact number of students who drop out each year. For the 1991–92 school year, the state adopted the federal dropout guideline known as the duplicate count (described above), and in 1998, the state also started to count as dropouts those students who leave school before graduation to enroll in community college programs, including those who leave to earn a General Education Development (GED) certificate. State Sen. Walter Dalton (D-Rutherford) says this may actually serve to overestimate the dropout problem in North Carolina. Referring to the community college system as "the state's largest high school," Dalton says, "A great community college system and an accessible community college system may work against us in the dropout situation."

The state now follows the dropout definition used by the National Center for Education Statistics (see "The National Center for Education Statistics Definition of Dropout," p. 84). The official state dropout rate for a given school year is then calculated by dividing the number of school-year dropouts by an average of the total number of public secondary school students in the state (including dropouts) from the school year of record and the following school year.[14]

Missing the Count

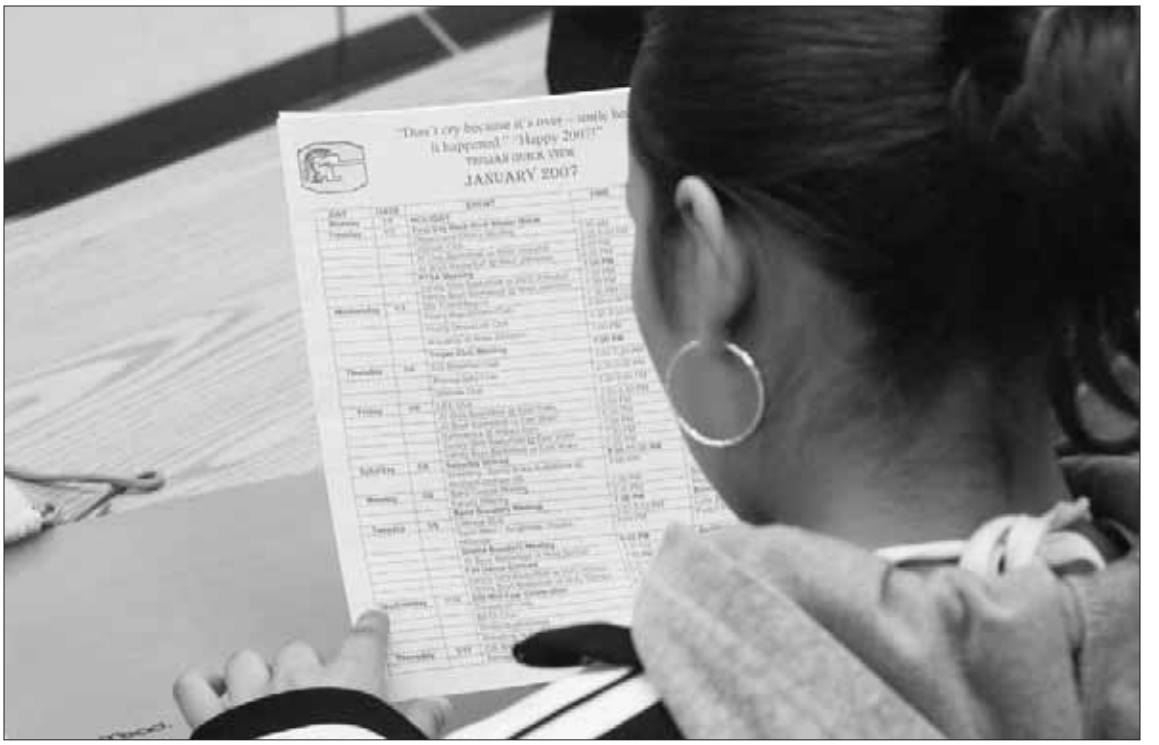
While the state has pursued greater precision in its official count, the accuracy of the final number is still somewhat murky. Dropout counts generally are hampered by several methodological and philosophical gray areas, each of which has significant ramifications not only for generating dropout statistics themselves but also for determining funding and evaluating program success. In some of these gray areas—such as the state's counting policies for GED earners and for students who complete alternative or equivalency programs—the state appears to have made good decisions; in others—such as valuing on-time graduation and overcoming the challenges posed by student mobility—there is still room for improvement.

THE GENERAL EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (GED) CERTIFICATE

The GED is a test that students who do not complete high school can take to indicate that they have achieved mastery of a set of basic skills equivalent to the skills of students who have earned a high school diploma. The number of GED completers is on the rise, but should the state count those completers as high school graduates or as high school dropouts? Some national groups (like the conservative Heritage Foundation) argue that equivalency is similar enough to high school completion that GED earners should not be counted as dropouts; others (like Educational Testing Services)[15] imply the opposite in their dropout calculations.

This is one area in which the state appears to have made a sound statistical decision. As noted earlier, since 1998 North Carolina has counted students who leave school to earn a GED as dropouts, and there are good reasons to continue to do so. First of all, if one of the purposes of counting dropouts is to assess how well our secondary schools are contributing to the education of our children, then GED earners—who leave high school and complete their work elsewhere—should not be included in that pool. Furthermore, as researchers Stephen Cameron and James Heckman note, in many ways GED recipients are "statistically indistinguishable from high school dropouts."[16] On average, GED recipients earn less than high school graduates,[17] are less likely to be employed, are only half as likely to earn an associate's degree, and are one-fifth as likely to earn a bachelor's degree.[18]

Another compelling reason to include GED earners in the dropout count is the implied (and growing) incentive that GED availability gives to students to drop out in the first place. Why stay in high school for several years when one can take a single test to demonstrate high school skill proficiency? Nationally, the increased availability of the GED has been linked to a decrease in the high school completion rate: only about 7 percent of all GED earners in the late 1990s were teenagers, but some estimates suggest that those teenagers represented almost one-third of all total dropouts.[19]



In 1990, only 6.3 percent of all North Carolina GED recipients were between the ages of 16 and 17, but that number increased to 23.5 percent in 2000.[20]

ALTERNATIVE OR EQUIVALENT DEGREES

The second counting problem involves a small but significant group of students who complete high school, but who do not earn a traditional diploma. For its Common Core of Data (CCD) surveys, the National Center for Education Statistics officially counts "high school completers" rather than high school graduates. That is, any official recognition of completion from a state counts as a graduation event, in large part because some states declare all completers as graduates, even though other states (like North Carolina) may award a separate, non-diploma "certificate of attendance."[21]

Should North Carolina do the same? NCES found that 666 North Carolina students completed high school and earned something other than a traditional high school diploma in 2000–01.[22] Statistically, this is a small number that does not dramatically affect the overall state graduation rates, but it is the equivalent of one small high school a year. According to Belinda Black, DPI's Program Administrator for Curriculum and School Reform, the state has to report these students as dropouts in federal documents because they do not meet the federal definition of a graduate (someone who has earned an official high school diploma), but for internal state counts, they are counted as "completers."[23] Like its decision to exclude GED completers, the state's policy of including non-diploma completers as graduates also appears to be valid. Many of these students are special-case completers who, even though they did not meet the technical requirements for a North Carolina diploma, dutifully attended school and met the requirements of their alternative programs. In two other gray areas of measurement, however, recent state policies are much less defensible.

ON-TIME GRADUATION

Perhaps the most questionable dropout-related statistic provided by the state in recent years has been the graduation rate officially reported to the United States Department of Education in compliance with *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) requirements. In the past, North Carolina has reported the percentage of *graduates* who earned a degree *within four years or less.* In other words, the state did not include dropouts in this calculation, instead reporting only the proportion of all *graduates* who *graduated on time.* Because most students who graduate do so on time, the state's figures reported in compliance with NCLB regulations sometimes have been very high: the figure was 92.4 percent in 2001, and for 2002–03, the figure was an even healthier-looking 97 percent, the highest reported rate in the nation.[24]

The National Center for Education Statistics Definition of Dropout

A dropout is a student who:

- was enrolled in school at some time during the previous school year, which is the reporting year;
- was not enrolled on Day 20 of the current school year;
- has not graduated from high school or completed a state or district approved educational program and does not meet any of the following reporting exclusions:
  1. transferred to another public school district, private school, home school or state/district approved educational program,
  2. temporarily absent due to suspension or school approved illness, or
  3. death.

Source: Dropout Data Report, 2003–04, p. iii

The calculation used to generate this figure technically did meet the letter of the NCLB reporting law, but it was somewhat misleading. Not surprisingly, several groups took North Carolina to task for using such a figure, but in attempting to make their cases, they, too, may have overstated the point in the opposite direction. In both cases—North Carolina's optimistic NCLB numbers and critics' pessimistic calculations—the key issue is the use (or misuse) of the on-time graduation rate.

Well, we busted out of class—had to get away from those fools
We learned more from a three-minute record baby than we ever learned in school.

—Bruce Springsteen
"No Surrender"

The on-time graduation rate is, as the name implies, the measure of the proportion of students who graduate within four years of entering high school. Some recent reports that estimate a national dropout *status rate* of almost one-third of all high school students are usually based on the inverse of the on-time graduation rate (that is, on the percentage of students who either do not graduate at all or who do not graduate on time) and do *not* count students who complete high school *after* the traditional four years.[25] For example, one report that used on-time graduation figures indicated that North Carolina's graduation rate was only 61.2 percent in 2000.[26] By contrast, as mentioned earlier, estimates by NCES suggest that North Carolina's completion rate, which includes on-time graduates and those who graduate after the traditional four years, is almost 85 percent (see Table 3 for a comparison of these and other graduation rate figures).[27] The on-time graduation rate, then, can be misleading in two ways—it can be used to both over-represent and under-represent the actual graduation population, depending on how students who do not graduate within the traditional four years are treated. If they are not considered at all, the on-time graduation rate can make the percentage of students who graduate appear very high. If they are considered to be non-completers, even if they eventually do receive a diploma, they can make the percentage of students who graduate appear low. For this reason alone, there seems to be little reason to report this particular rate unless the reporting agency also provides some context for the figure.

DPI is in the process now of addressing this problem in a different way. For the 2005–06 school year, the state has calculated a *cohort* graduation rate for the first time—a rate that is affected by dropouts because it indicates the percentage of students from the 2002–03 9th grade class who graduated in 2006. According to the DPI, in 2006, the four-year cohort graduation rate in North Carolina for all students was 68.1 percent (based on 70,484 graduates and a class size of 103,441). For the first year, this new cohort graduation rate will be reported alongside the originally-reported rate,[28] but eventually, the original rate will be abandoned in favor of the new rate. Belinda Black, DPI's Program Administrator for Curriculum and School Reform, notes that there may even be a third rate reported in federal documents in 2006—the federal Department of Education's Average Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR). The Department of Education describes this rate as the number of high school graduates receiving a regular diploma in a given year divided by the average of the number of students enrolled in 8th grade five years earlier, 9th grade four years earlier, and 10th grade three years earlier.

STUDENT MOBILITY

Another source of counting inaccuracy in the state is a direct product of the frequent mobility of the school-aged population, a characteristic that educators like Eddie Gray, a 30-year teaching veteran at Garner High School in Wake County, think may be on the rise. "It seems like we have a more transitory population in school now," says

Gray. "We even have kids transferring in with three weeks to go in the year, and that never used to happen." The trend is especially prevalent among minority students and students of lower-income families. In fact, a 1994 United States General Accounting Office report estimated that about one-quarter of all Hispanic and African-American students had changed schools three or more times by the third grade, almost twice the rate of Caucasian students.[29] The first part of the problem is the complex issue of tracking students who transfer to other LEAs. The state's *Dropout Data Collecting and Reporting Procedures Manual* is clear about how a school should determine a departing student's status (dropout, withdrawal, or transfer). By state policy, a student can be counted as a transfer instead of a dropout if the school to which the student is transferring makes a formal request for information from the original school. Susan Alden, a Durham guidance counselor, knows all too well how difficult tracking can be.

Table 3. Same Year, Different Rates: Comparing Different Dropout and High School Completion Rate Measures Across States, 2000–01

	Event	Four-Year High School Completion			Age-Range Completion
State	NCES Dropout Event Rate, 2000–01	NCES Completion Rate, 2000–01[1]	NBETPP Completion Rate, 2000–01[2]	NCLB State-Reported Graduation Rate, 2000–01	NCES Status Completion Rate, 18- to 24-Year-Olds, 1999–2001
Alabama	4.1%	80.0%	65%	---[3]	82.0%
Alaska	8.2%	75.2%	71%	84.5%	90.9%
Arizona	10.9%	68.3%	65%	70.8%	77.6%
Arkansas	5.3%	79.1%	73%	85.1%	86.7%
California	---	---	78%	86.9%	85.1%
Colorado	---	---	75%	81.8%	82.4%
Connecticut	3.0%	86.6%	80%	87.3%	93.6%
Delaware	4.2%	81.6%	70%	83.1%	90.8%
D.C.	---	---	---	63.5%	88.2%
Florida	4.4%	---	63%	64.7%	83.8%
Georgia	7.2%	71.1%	68%	62.0%	84.7%
Hawaii	5.7%	77.7%	73%	78.9%	91.3%
Idaho	5.6%	76.9%	80%	77.1%	88.3%
Illinois	6.0%	75.8%	78%	85.2%	88.4%
Indiana	---	---	73%	91.0%	89.4%
Iowa	2.7%	89.2%	87%	89.4%	92.4%
Kansas	3.2%	---	79%	85.1%	88.2%
Kentucky	4.6%	79.9%	74%	80.7%	87.4%
Louisiana	8.3%	65.0%	68%	---	82.6%
Maine	3.1%	86.5%	70%	86.1%	93.6%
Maryland	4.1%	83.2%	84%	84.7%	84.9%
Massachusetts	3.4%	86.3%	80%	---	91.4%
Michigan	---	---	79%	86.0%	88.1%
Minnesota	4.0%	82.5%	86%	87.9%	93.1%
Mississippi	4.6%	77.3%	61%	72.0%	84.3%
Missouri	4.2%	81.0%	78%	82.5%	90.4%
Montana	4.2%	82.1%	81%	84.1%	92.4%
Nebraska	4.0%	83.9%	84%	84.0%	90.8%
Nevada	5.2%	73.5%	72%	63.7%	79.6%

"[T]he counselor-to-student ratio is usually about 1:400. We give that responsibility to the next school so that we can focus on the 400 who are left."

Gattis, who collects dropout data for DPI, adds: "Another factor is that students may drop out in one school, later enroll in another school, and then drop out at the second school. It's possible that a number of students get reported twice, by different schools, even though dropout events are only supposed to occur once in each year. We have a system in place for schools to try and catch these, but when the schools don't catch the duplicate, over-reporting of dropouts occurs."

Accurate dropout tracking is difficult at best when a student changes school systems. The challenge is magnified when students cross state lines or into other countries.

Table 3. ***Continued***

	Event	Four-Year High School Completion			Age-Range Completion
State	**NCES Dropout Event Rate, 2000–01**	**NCES Completion Rate, 2000–01[1]**	**NBETPP Completion Rate, 2000–01[2]**	**NCLB State-Reported Graduation Rate, 2000–01**	**NCES Status Completion Rate, 18- to 24-Year-Olds, 1999–2001**
New Hampshire	5.4%	---	77%	84.5%	86.6%
New Jersey	2.8%	88.0%	90%	88.7%	89.3%
New Mexico	5.3%	74.4%	70%	76.6%	85.0%
New York	3.8%	81.6%	72%	75.0%	86.8%
North Carolina	**6.3%[4]**	**---[5]**	**69%**	**92.4%[6]**	**84.7%**
North Dakota	2.2%	90.1%	85%	90.6%	96.8%
Ohio	3.9%	81.0%	79%	82.8%	87.0%
Oklahoma	5.2%	79.2%	75%	68.8%	86.0%
Oregon	5.3%	76.4%	70%	79.5%	86.3%
Pennsylvania	3.6%	84.0%	84%	86.4%	89.8%
Rhode Island	5.0%	79.8%	78%	71.4%	85.5%
South Carolina	3.3%	---	62%	77.6%	84.5%
South Dakota	3.9%	84.6%	78%	97.0%	91.6%
Tennessee	4.3%	79.5%	63%	75.7%	86.6%
Texas	4.2%	---	75%	82.8%	79.9%
Utah	3.7%	82.6%	84%	86.1%	88.9%
Vermont	4.7%	81.9%	80%	82.0%	86.6%
Virginia	3.5%	83.8%	82%	84.7%	88.2%
Washington	---	---	76%	79.0%	88.3%
West Virginia	4.2%	83.4%	76%	---	88.5%
Wisconsin	2.3%	90.0%	90%	90.8%	90.3%
Wyoming	6.4%	76.5%	73%	77.2%	87.3%

[1] Percent of 9th grade students who earned a high school diploma or other high school completion certificate within four years.

[2] 8th grade graduates who graduated from high school four years later.

[3] — = rate not available or not reported

[4] The 2000–01 9–12 event dropout rate reported by NC DPI was 5.71%.

[5] At the time this data was compiled, North Carolina did not report enough data for NCES to generate a four-year completion rate.

[6] For NCLB reporting, North Carolina reported the percent of graduates who graduated within four years.

A second mobility-related roadblock to generating a true dropout rate is that students who leave school to return to a home country (for instance, students born in Mexico) are not counted as dropouts when the school has reasonable documentation that the move took place. Belinda Black says that this policy was put in place to make the state's counting policies more consistent with federal reporting guidelines, which do not hold school systems accountable for students who move back to their home country. There is, however, no guarantee that these students actually re-enroll in schools in their home countries, nor is there currently any reliable or efficient way to find out. In a state that is experiencing a sharp increase in the number of foreign-born students, emigration could add significantly to the underestimation of the actual dropout rate. North Carolina's Hispanic/Latino population increased by 394 percent from 1990 to 2000 and its Asian population grew by 128 percent, according to the 2000 U.S. Census. Growth in these populations has accelerated since the 2000 Census.

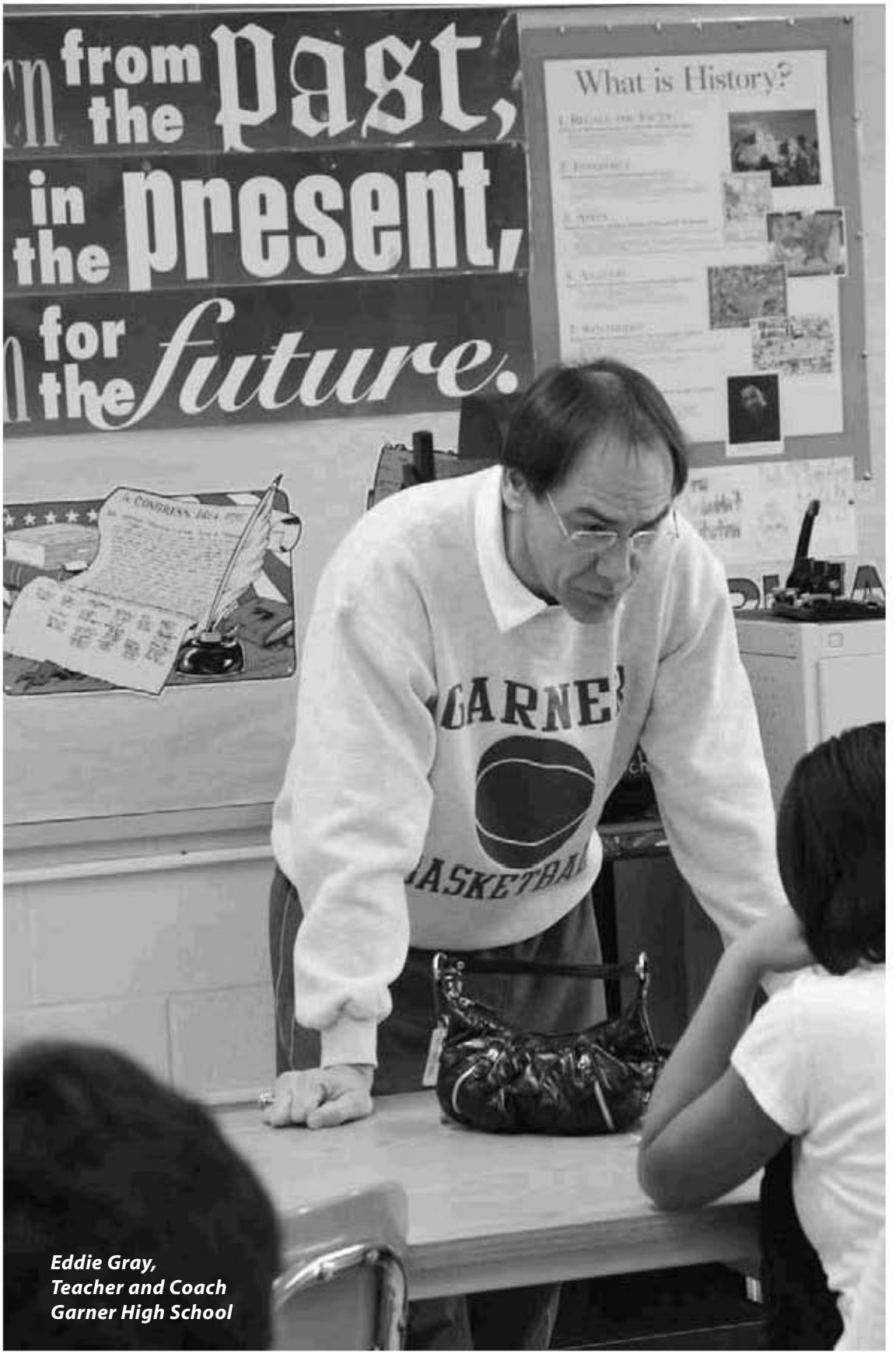
Education is not the filling of a pail,
But the lighting of a fire.

—William Butler Yeats

The third mobility variable is the effect that changes in a region's population size have on dropout statistics. Students move into a school district, causing grade level numbers to grow, and students move out of a school for reasons other than dropping out, causing grade level numbers to shrink. When this in-and-out movement is balanced (that is, when there is no net change in a school's population), there is no mathematical effect on the dropout rate. However, when there is greater natural movement out of a school district than into it, the dropout rate can become exaggerated, because the rate is calculated based on total attendance figures. Conversely, more student movement into rather than out of a system may soften dropout figures.

For example, in Thomasville City Schools during the 2004–05 school year, 29 students in the 9–12th grades were recorded as dropouts at a calculated *event* rate of 4.01 percent. In 2005–06, the same number of students dropped out, but the rate was lower (3.76 percent), probably due to a net increase in the *overall* school population. Similarly, Cabarrus County saw an increase in the *total number* of dropout events in the 9–12th grades from 2004–05 to 2005–06 (375 to 382), but the calculated dropout rate was actually a fraction lower (5.24 to 5.03). The reverse phenomenon happens too. In 2004–05, Whiteville City Schools lost 39 students who dropped out in grades nine through 12 at a calculated rate of 4.76 percent; the county lost one fewer student (38) during the 2005–06 school year, but this time with a fractionally higher calculated rate of 4.79 percent.[30] This effect is dampened somewhat because the state calculates dropout rates based on an average of the total student population for the year of record and the following year to accommodate for population shifts, but even with that concession, discrepancies like the ones above still occur.

Is all of this just mathematical nit-picking? After all, none of these mobility curveballs represent large changes, and individually they lead to only a minor increase or decrease in a school system's dropout rates, but they do point up the need for better tracking and the importance for politicians and the media to report the state-provided raw numbers as well as rates. Policymakers who focus money and programs on geographic areas or LEAs based on the rise and fall of the reported dropout *rate* only may be misallocating funding and giving attention to school districts that may or may not have the worst problem. LEAs with high dropout rates but also with a high rate of growth might have a larger numerical dropout problem than their rates (kept lower by a growing district population) imply. LEAs with lower dropout totals but also with negative growth rates may be the benefactors of extra funding based on exaggerated dropout rate figures.



Eddie Gray,
Teacher and Coach
Garner High School

2. Which Students Drop Out and Why?

School Snapshot: "You know who she is, don't you?" asked one of my co-workers. "That's the girl who was shot in the chest last year and missed the last two months of school. She failed because she was unable to come to school regularly." And here she was, back in the game, trying again. She started off well enough, which is to say she did enough to pass, but she was very quiet and not particularly strong academically. And then one day, without warning, she just stopped coming to school. After 10 days, she was withdrawn automatically by policy, and she did not return to reinstate herself. She was 16 and was not legally required to do so. I asked one of the students about her, and she said, "It's her injury. She never really got over it. Plus, it still hurts her and she doesn't feel like coming some days."

Formalizing and instituting a consistent, accurate, and equitable counting, reporting, and tracking system for calculating dropout rates and totals is crucial, but it is only the first part of the problem. Once schools clearly identify *how many* dropouts there are, what remains are the more important tasks of figuring out *who* our dropouts are, *why* they drop out, and *what* can be done to prevent them from doing so.

Table 4.
N.C. Dropout Event Rates, 2005–06

Grade	Total	Percent*
7	123	0.5%
8	542	2.4%
9	7,576	33.2%
10	5,946	26.0%
11	5,190	22.7%
12	3,461	15.2%
7–12 Total	**22,838**	**—**
9–12 Total	**22,173**	**—**

* Percent of all dropout events grades seven through 12

http://www.ncpublicschools.org/fbs/reports.htm.

Source: Education Statistics Access System (ESAS), Financial and Business Services, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2006.

Who Drops Out in North Carolina? Sorting the Numbers[31]

Since the rollout of the ABCs accountability system in 1997, the N.C. Department of Public Instruction has rapidly expanded and improved the availability of data that enables the student population to be examined by such variables as age, gender, and race. Fortunately, dropout data are no exception, and they provide a window on the dropout population.

WHEN DO STUDENTS DROP OUT?

No matter how one counts dropouts, the highest numbers of dropout events by far in North Carolina occur between the 9th and 10th grades—during and after the first year of high school. While this pattern also has been true across the country for years and is getting worse, in one study North Carolina's dropout rate for this grade level was the sixth worst in the nation.[32] In 2005–06, 9th grade dropouts accounted for around 33 percent of dropouts in grades seven through 12, and for more than 34 percent of all high school dropouts (see Tables 4 and 5).[33] Tellingly, the most common dropout age is 17, followed by 18, neither of which is a traditional 9th grade age (9th grade students are usually 14 or 15 years old). In other words, the highest number of dropouts are 9th graders, but the highest concentration of dropouts are *not* of 9th grade age. A fair number of the state's dropouts are likely to be dropping out after repeating (or attempting to repeat) a grade, most commonly the 9th grade. In fact, only about 14 percent of all 9th graders who drop out are under the age of 16.[34] For many educators, the problem of over-age 9th graders is not surprising. "Now, it's like kids are having a harder time getting out of 9th grade," says Susan Alden, a Durham guidance counselor. "And, I think with stricter [state] standards for them to get promoted, we do have a few kids who are older when they first come to us. We have 16-year-olds who are 9th graders for the first time, and it doesn't take much failure to push them over the edge."

Table 5. Dropout Totals by Race and Grade, 2005–06

Grade	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Native American	Multi-racial	White	All Races
7	1	54	13	1	6	48	123
8	6	195	78	7	11	245	542
9	72	3,028	909	202	141	3,224	7,576
10	57	2,076	580	149	101	2,983	5,946
11	63	1,593	407	96	95	2,936	5,190
12	44	942	201	53	61	2,160	3,461
7-12 Total	**243**	**7,888**	**2,188**	**508**	**415**	**11,596**	**22,838**
9-12 Total	**236**	**7,639**	**2,097**	**500**	**398**	**11,303**	**22,173**

http://www.ncpublicschools.org/fbs/reports.htm

Source: Education Statistics Access System (ESAS), Financial and Business Services, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2006.

WHAT DO DROPOUT RATES LOOK LIKE ACROSS RACE AND GENDER?

The dropout problem is not evenly distributed across race or gender, either. Jay Greene's 2002 study[35] for the Manhattan Institute estimated graduation rates at three levels: national, state, and district. In his study, the national graduation rate was 71 percent, with a 78 percent graduation rate for white students, a 56 percent rate for African-American students, and a 54 percent rate for Latinos. As dramatically different as those numbers are, they tell an even more devastating story when compared to his results for North Carolina, which ranked 42nd out of 50 states and the District of Columbia in the study. According to Greene's calculations, North Carolina's *graduation rate* was 65 percent, with sub-group rates of 68 percent for white students, 55

The ultimate goal of the educational system is to shift to the individual the burden of pursuing his own education.

—JOHN GARDNER
SELF-RENEWAL

Table 6. Ethnic Representation of Dropouts by Grade, 2005–06

Grade	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Native American	Multi-racial	White
7	0.8%	43.9%	10.6%	0.8%	4.9%	39.0%
8	1.1%	36.0%	14.4%	1.3%	2.0%	45.2%
9	1.0%	40.0%	12.0%	2.7%	1.9%	42.6%
10	1.0%	34.9%	9.8%	2.5%	1.7%	50.2%
11	1.2%	30.7%	7.8%	1.8%	1.8%	56.6%
12	1.3%	27.2%	5.8%	1.5%	1.8%	62.4%
7–12 Total	**1.1%**	**34.5%**	**9.6%**	**2.2%**	**1.8%**	**50.8%**
9–12 Total	**1.1%**	**34.5%**	**9.5%**	**2.3%**	**1.8%**	**51.0%**

http://www.ncpublicschools.org/fbs/reports.htm

Source: Education Statistics Access System (ESAS), Financial and Business Services, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2006.

percent for African-American students, and only 38 percent for Latino students.[36] Another modified cohort approach used in a study for the United States Department of Education estimates 2000–01 *dropout rates* in North Carolina at 11.7 percent for Native American students, 10.6 percent for Hispanic students, 7.6 percent for African-American students, 5.4 percent for white students, and 4.6 percent for Asian students.[37]

The state's 2005–06 dropout event rates mirror these results in many ways, with the highest 9–12 dropout rate occurring among Hispanic and Native American students (8.69 and 8.37 percent, respectively), followed by African-American students (5.63 percent).[38] Dropping out also does not occur at the same rate among ethnic groups from grade to grade. In grades seven and eight, dropouts are more likely to be minorities than white students. Between 53 percent and 59 percent of all dropouts in the state in grades seven and eight from 1999 to 2006 were minorities. In 2005–06, minorities represented more than three-fifths of all 7th grade dropouts and well over half of all 8th grade dropouts (see Table 6). However, when one study clustered 8th grade dropouts by socio-economic status, the differences in the dropout rate across ethnicities almost vanished.[39] In other words, different dropout rates across ethnicities may have less to do with the ethnicity itself than with the socio-economic conditions those ethnicities typically face.

Either the United States will destroy ignorance or ignorance will destroy the United States.

—W.E.B. DuBois

The Souls of Black Folk, 1903

Perhaps not surprisingly, the dropout rate is different for males and females, with the male dropout rate higher overall and for each ethnicity.[40] The percent of male-to-female dropouts has held steady over the last six years at a ratio of about 3:2 (see Table 7).

Why Do Students Drop Out?

Students at all ages and from all racial groups in North Carolina are dropping out, but why? The answer is often multi-dimensional, and it is different for almost every demographic group of students. Most counselors and researchers agree that dropping out is not a static event. "[D]ropping out [of school] is a long-term process of disengagement that occurs over time and begins in the earliest grades," and it often involves multiple factors.[41] As one researcher described it:

> If a student has family or community responsibilities that can't wait or can't be forgotten until 3:00; if he or she doesn't enter school speaking standard English or has a disability; if his or her community, values, and heritage are [different] from those represented in the faculty, the texts, and the curriculum at large; if a high school degree seems to be of questionable value; or if the world around him or her is filled with social fractures along race/ethnic, class, and gender lines, public education as currently practiced fails.[42]

There are countless reasons why a student might choose to drop out, but it is possible to group these reasons into two broad categories. These are external family and environmental characteristics, or "pull" factors (factors that pull a student out of school), and school experiences, or "push" factors (factors that push a student away from school).[43]

FAMILY AND ENVIRONMENTAL "PULL" FACTORS

Environmental variables are strong social "pull" factors that often originate somewhere other than the school. These "pull" factors may include situations such as high absenteeism due to family demands and unforeseen stressful life events (like unexpected pregnancy or the need to become a family's primary wage-earner).[44] Eighteen-year-old Yessica, who is now enrolled in a high school completion program at a community college, dropped out because of another common "pull" factor. "I got pregnant, and I had a baby, and I couldn't spend all my time in school." In addition, parental behaviors can act as "pull" factors and influence students. Recent studies suggest that when parents form close relationships with their children, monitor their children's activities, provide them with emotional support, and encourage them to make independent decisions, students are less likely to drop out of school.[45]

The absence of these characteristics may contribute to the "pull" some dropouts feel. As Guretta, who left high school in the ninth grade, puts it, "Home wasn't a good place." Qwatisha, who also did not finish high school, adds, "I had people who were there for me, but nobody to really push me."

Joseph Capps, a science teacher at Harnett Central High School in Harnett County, thinks part of the reason some parents show less concern about their children's school progress may be increased strain on parents as a result of

Table 7. Dropouts by Gender,[a] Grade 9–12, 1999–2006

				Total
1999–00	Male	58.3%	13,637	23,377
	Female	41.7%	9,740	
2000–01	Male	58.5%	12,261	20,971
	Female	41.5%	8,710	
2001–02	Male	58.7%	11,840	20,175
	Female	41.3%	8,335	
2002–03	Male	59.1%	11,193	18,948
	Female	40.9%	7,755	
2003–04	Male	58.7%	11,767	20,031
	Female	41.3%	8,264	
2004–05	Male	59.2%	11,939	20,175
	Female	40.8%	8,236	
2005–06	Male	59.9%	13,280	22,180
	Female	40.1%	8,900	

the disappearance of the traditional nuclear family unit. "I have very few parents who are able to commit time to caring about what is going on in school. My students tell me that there is so much more stress on their families, and parents have so many new worries that they don't have time to be parents."

SCHOOL "PUSH" FACTORS

There are several questions schools can ask of themselves to assess the degree to which they might be directly or indirectly encouraging students to drop out by "pushing" them out of school. Is the curriculum relevant to the students' lives? Are teachers accessible and accommodating? What school policies are contributing to the problem? In many cases, DPI's Pittman notes, "[d]ropout is tied to suspensions, expulsions, and academic performance.... They are all interrelated."

"Push" factors can include student-centered characteristics such as poor grades, disruptive behavior, feelings of alienation or discomfort in a school setting, grade retention, and school climate. Push factors also can include school-wide characteristics such as lack of support for students who struggle academically, inadequate school resource allocation (for example, for equitable pupil/teacher ratios), and school structure (for example, school size and location).[46] Qwatisha, now enrolled in a completion program in which she feels more comfortable, experienced many of these "push" factors firsthand. "It took me longer to catch on when someone explained something to me," she says. She adds that she felt uncomfortable because not only did other students complain about having to wait for her, but so, too, did some of her teachers. "It embarrassed me to ask and made me not want to speak up. Some teachers would say, 'Didn't I just explain this?'" Coronda, who is now enrolled in the same program, agrees. "You need more teachers who care [about their students]," she says. "The teachers, the principals, the staff need to be more involved with their students. If teachers are more involved with their students, that means the students will work harder."

The secret of education lies in respecting the pupil.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Or, push factors can be statewide rather than school specific, such as North Carolina's compulsory attendance law, which allows a student to drop out legally after age 16. As Garner High's Gray suggests, another factor may be the steady decrease in the average experience level of the state's teachers. "When I started at Garner, teachers stayed here for a lifetime, and you rarely had a teacher who was absent," Gray says. "I think that kind of dedication has an impact on reducing dropout." Three additional "push" factors North Carolina should watch closely are suspension and grade retention policies, possible negative side-effects of the state's high-stakes testing program (the ABCs of Education), and the limited relevancy of some of the curricula behind those tests.

Long-Term Suspensions and Grade Retention

Two longstanding and unresolved problems that most researchers and educators agree do affect dropouts are the related issues of long-term suspensions and grade retention. In some cases, acknowledges Pittman, long-term suspensions for certain actions (such as fighting and possession or distribution of drugs) based on so-called "zero-tolerance" discipline policies make sense. On the other hand, other applications of the policy—however well-intended—might contribute more to students dropping out than to a safer school environment. Pittman cites one case in which the State Advisory Council on Indian Education raised a concern about out-of-school suspensions for smoking. A higher-than-average percentage of Native American students smoke, according to the Council, and smoking in some LEAs is a zero-tolerance issue. These students, when caught, immediately face out-of-school suspensions, but, as indicated by the high percentage of Native American students who drop out (8.37 percent of North Carolina's total Native American student population in 2005–06—more than one out of every 12), many of these students may need very little incentive to drop out. Assigning students to suspension rather than some other sanction for smoking thus may cause more problems than it solves.

Potentially more devastating for some students than long-term suspension is grade retention. Is repeating a grade ultimately

academically beneficial or harmful for students? The hoped-for benefit of retention is that students will gain the academic skills they did not master the first time around, but it comes at the risk of increased student disengagement from school and the awkwardness and frustration of being older than one's classmates.[47] Indeed, most evidence indicates that retention does not prevent students from dropping out. One study estimates, for example, that between 70 percent and 80 percent of all retained 9th graders eventually drop out anyway,[48] and another calculated that one grade retention increased the risk of dropping out by between 40 percent and 50 percent, with the increase in risk rising to 90 percent when a student is retained more than once.[49] And yet, as some defenders of grade retention might argue, it is possible that, without retention, an even *greater* percentage of these students might have dropped out. And, passing a student who has not mastered the material on to the next grade undermines a sense of responsibility for educating students who are more difficult to teach.

HIGH-STAKES TESTING

The advent of minimum competency testing in the 1970s, the academic standards movement of the 1980s, and, most recently, the new emphasis on achievement tests also may be adding to the exodus from schools.[50] Student discouragement because of test results might be one factor in a student's decision to drop out, and another factor might be pressure from school administrators to leave school early.

School performances on end-of-grade (grades three through eight) and end-of-course (high school grades) tests have become central factors in both state and national evaluations of schools and school districts. In many cases, bonuses or sanctions for a school or even for an entire district can hinge on overall student performance or the performance of one particular sub-group (like students with special needs). Consequently, there is a growing incentive for schools to work around the requirement to test all students. Because the federal *No Child Left Behind* legislation requires testing at least 95 percent of all students who are in attendance at a school (95 percent

overall and in each sub-group), encouraging a borderline student to drop out before testing happens is, sadly, one option a school official faced with sanctions might consider.[51]

However, the gradual decline in dropout events in North Carolina since the advent of the ABCs (1996–97) might argue otherwise, and there is no direct evidence of such events happening in North Carolina. "Testing is designed to help identify the areas of weakness in students so additional efforts can be expended in these areas," says Phil Kirk, a former chairman of the State Board of Education and an advocate for the state's accountability program. "Testing actually is of more benefit to the less talented students (who may drop out) than it is for the gifted." Because several states (including Texas, Alabama, and New York) recently have dealt with instances of students being encouraged to quit school in order to improve overall test scores,[52] a degree of vigilance may be in order. Kirk says the State Board of Education has been proactive in this regard. "The State Board, at my insistence, put the dropout rate as part of the accountability model so students would not be pushed out of school to make the test results higher."

RELEVANCY OF THE CURRICULUM

John Reimer, an alternative school counselor in Caldwell County and president of the North Carolina Dropout Prevention Association, sees another way in which the growing emphasis on testing may be pushing students out of school. Rather than lifting all boats, he argues, the rising tide of basic skills and testing has led to the neglect of several other critical areas for student growth, such as pragmatic life lessons and problem-solving skills. "[We need] to bring the concentration back to kids and learning the skills they need outside of school.... For example, kids don't know how to balance checkbooks, how to make decisions, how to work as a team, [or even] what cooperation is." Time that might be dedicated to that kind of learning is now being used instead for more test preparation, which may in turn render school more meaningless to students already on the edge, he says. "In the last three school years, it has been pretty common throughout the state for schools to spend at least 25 days of the school year reviewing for tests."

Reimer is not alone in his criticism of the content of the state's curriculum. Jackie, who left school during 10th grade, notes, "Once I went to the 10th grade, my interest [in school] dropped. Everything got boring, so I left, even though my grades were pretty decent." Sen. Stan Bingham offers another perspective. "I hear the same things [from dropouts] that I heard myself say when I was 16 and I wanted to quit school, and that is 'I am and have been and continue to be interested in machinery ... I'm not interested in literature and poetry.' A lot of boys have an interest in automobiles and things they can put their hands on ... but we don't have anything [in schools] ... that makes a student feel adequate in any way if he has those interests. You study history, you study calculus ... but is it always possible to convince a young man that he will use calculus?"

Gray, a social studies teacher, thinks the curriculum still is not flexible enough to reach all students—and never has been. "Schools in general throughout history haven't met the needs of every single person," says Gray. "We have always had this mindset that everybody is supposed to go to college, and that's just not accurate."

Kirk, the former State Board of Education chair, pointing to recent reforms, disagrees that the curriculum only serves college bound students. "Vocational and technical courses are making a comeback in quality and quantity," says Kirk. "The curriculum is not designed for everyone to go to college. The State Board of Education spent considerable time developing four pathways for graduation."

For Bingham, the *pleasure* of learning is a key factor in reducing the dropout rate, but one that is often missing in the school experiences of some students. "If we can keep these kids in school, I don't [care] what they learn. If they learn about designing marbles or they learn about spaceships—whatever topics would stimulate some interest in them—we will have succeeded tremendously in getting these kids through those tough ages of 16 to 19. It's amazing what a student can do if he gets to study something he likes."

I cannot teach anybody anything, I can only make them think.

—SOCRATES

REASONS FOR DROPPING OUT ACROSS RACE, GRADE, AND GENDER

Dropout rates in North Carolina for each race, grade level, and gender are quite different, and, as it turns out, so are their reasons for dropping out. The N.C. Department of Public Instruction has been collecting data on this question for several years. Located on the Financial and Business Services section of the department's webpage is a link to the North Carolina Education Statistics Access System (ESAS), which is a database containing substantial amounts of quantitative and qualitative data, including dropout data.[53] Not only are dropout numbers by race, grade level, gender, and school district since the 1998–99 school year available, but so, too, are primary *reasons* provided by dropouts and their counselors for why students drop out. Although anecdotal data of this sort are not as reliable as more quantitative data, these data still can provide insight into why students drop out.[54]

Differences Among Races

While most students who drop out reportedly leave for school-related reasons as opposed to family or personal reasons (especially because of attendance problems), school-related reasons for dropping out were much less common for Asian and Hispanic students at 76.3 percent and 74.9 percent, respectively, in 2005–06 (see Table 8). Instead, Asian and Hispanic dropouts were more likely to cite work-related "pull" reasons (12.4 percent and 13.5 percent) than were other groups. These and

Table 8. Reasons Cited for High School[a] Dropout by Race, 2005–06

	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Native American	Multi-Racial	White	All Races
Number of dropouts	236	7,639	2,097	500	398	11,303	22,173
Percent for which reason cited for dropout	78.8%	88.9%	81.1%	93.8%	94.0%	93.4%	90.5%
Moved, school status unknown (no reason cited)	21.2%	11.1%	18.9%	6.2%	6.0%	6.6%	9.5%
Of known dropout status, % whose reason for dropout[b] was for:							
School-Related Reasons[c]	76.3%	85.4%	74.9%	85.5%	85.8%	84.0%	83.7%
Academic problems	4.8%	7.7%	5.8%	4.7%	7.5%	7.3%	7.2%
Attendance (school)	3.2%	4.0%	3.4%	1.5%	4.5%	4.5%	4.2%
Attendance (general)	51.1%	51.1%	55.0%	67.2%	52.4%	51.7%	52.1%
Community college enrollment w/ no h. s. diploma	10.8%	11.6%	6.8%	8.7%	14.4%	15.8%	13.4%
Discipline problem	2.7%	4.1%	1.4%	1.7%	2.7%	2.1%	2.7%
Failure to return after long-term suspension	3.8%	6.9%	2.5%	1.7%	4.3%	2.5%	4.0%
Work-Related Reasons	12.4%	3.9%	13.5%	4.7%	4.0%	4.6%	5.2%
Attendance (work)	0.5%	0.3%	0.5%	0.4%	0.3%	0.5%	0.4%
Employment necessary	0.5%	0.2%	1.2%	0.0%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%
Choice of work over school	11.3%	3.4%	11.8%	4.3%	3.5%	3.8%	4.4%
Family or Personal Reasons	10.2%	7.9%	10.9%	9.0%	8.6%	10.3%	9.5%
Attendance (family)	0.5%	0.4%	0.5%	0.2%	1.3%	0.6%	0.5%
Attendance (personal)	5.4%	3.6%	3.9%	1.7%	3.2%	5.1%	4.4%
Need to care for children	0.5%	0.9%	1.5%	1.1%	0.3%	0.5%	0.7%
Health problems	0.5%	0.2%	0.5%	0.4%	0.0%	1.0%	0.7%
Unstable home environment	1.1%	0.9%	0.4%	3.0%	0.8%	1.0%	0.9%
Marriage	0.5%	0.0%	1.1%	0.0%	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%
Pregnancy	0.5%	1.1%	1.9%	1.1%	1.6%	1.2%	1.2%
Runaway	1.1%	0.9%	1.2%	1.5%	1.1%	0.7%	0.8%
Crime-Related Reasons	1.1%	2.8%	0.6%	0.9%	1.6%	1.1%	1.6%
Suspected substance abuse	0.0%	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%	0.5%	0.3%	0.2%
Incarcerated in adult facility	1.1%	2.7%	0.4%	0.6%	1.1%	0.8%	1.4%

[a] Grades 9–12

[b] Reasons for dropout are solicited from students when possible, but when not possible, they are provided by data managers and/or dropout prevention counselors. Dropout Data Report, N.C. DPI, p. 18

[c] Major (bold-faced) category groupings are the author's and are not those of N.C. DPI.

Table 9. Reasons Cited for High School[a] Dropout by Grade, 2005–06

	7	8	9	10	11	12	7–12 Total	9–12 Total
Number of dropouts	123	542	7,576	5,946	5,190	3,461	22,838	22,173
Percent for which reason cited for dropout	80.5%	64.0%	88.3%	90.6%	92.1%	93.1%	89.9%	90.5%
Moved, school status unknown (no reason cited)	19.5%	36.0%	11.7%	9.4%	7.9%	6.9%	10.1%	9.5%
Of known dropout status, % whose reason for dropout[b] was for:								
School-Related Reasons[c]	74.0%	51.1%	75.1%	74.7%	76.7%	77.8%	75.2%	75.8%
Academic problems	5.7%	2.4%	5.8%	6.3%	7.1%	7.7%	6.4%	6.5%
Attendance (school)	3.3%	2.4%	4.1%	3.6%	3.2%	4.3%	3.7%	3.8%
Attendance (general)	46.3%	32.8%	48.9%	46.6%	45.8%	46.6%	46.9%	47.2%
Community college enrollment w/ no h. s. diploma	3.3%	3.3%	7.9%	12.1%	16.0%	15.7%	11.9%	12.1%
Discipline problem	7.3%	2.6%	2.9%	2.8%	2.2%	1.4%	2.5%	2.5%
Failure to return after long-term suspension	8.1%	7.6%	5.5%	3.3%	2.4%	2.1%	3.8%	3.7%
Work-Related Reasons	0.0%	4.1%	4.1%	5.3%	4.9%	4.8%	4.7%	4.7%
Attendance (work)	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%	0.4%	0.6%	0.5%	0.4%	0.4%
Employment necessary	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	0.4%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%
Choice of work over school	0.0%	4.1%	3.6%	4.5%	4.0%	4.0%	4.0%	4.0%
Family or Personal Reasons	6.5%	8.5%	7.6%	9.1%	9.1%	9.0%	8.6%	8.6%
Attendance (family)	0.0%	0.7%	0.4%	0.5%	0.5%	0.3%	0.5%	0.5%
Attendance (personal)	1.6%	1.3%	3.2%	4.6%	4.1%	4.7%	3.9%	4.0%
Need to care for children	0.0%	0.7%	0.5%	0.7%	0.7%	0.9%	0.7%	0.7%
Health problems	0.0%	0.2%	0.4%	0.6%	0.8%	0.8%	0.6%	0.6%
Unstable home environment	1.6%	1.3%	1.0%	0.6%	1.0%	0.7%	0.9%	0.8%
Marriage	0.0%	0.4%	0.1%	0.3%	0.2%	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%
Pregnancy	0.8%	1.7%	1.0%	1.1%	1.2%	1.2%	1.1%	1.1%
Runaway	2.4%	2.2%	1.0%	0.8%	0.6%	0.3%	0.8%	0.7%
Crime-Related Reasons	0.0%	0.4%	1.5%	1.5%	1.4%	1.4%	1.4%	1.5%
Suspected substance abuse	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.2%	0.3%	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%
Incarcerated in adult facility	0.0%	0.4%	1.4%	1.3%	1.1%	1.1%	1.2%	1.3%

[a] Grades 9–12

[b] Reasons for dropout are solicited from students when possible, but when not possible, they are provided by data managers and/or dropout prevention counselors. Dropout Data Report, N.C. DPI, p. 18

[c] Major (bold-faced) category groupings are the author's and are not those of N.C. DPI.

other patterns have fluctuated over the previous several academic years, with the most notable change for the 2005–06 school year being the sharp drop-off in the proportion of family and personal reasons cited by all groups (from a high of 18.5 percent in 2002–03 to a low of 9.5 percent in 2005–06). Though rarely cited for any racial group, crime-related reasons (either incarcerated in an adult prison or suspected substance abuse) for dropping out have been consistently highest for African Americans (peaking at 3.1 percent of reasons given in both the 2001–02 and the 2002–03 school years).

Differences Across Grades

A major difference in the reasons cited for leaving school across grade levels is the frequency with which middle school (grades seven and eight) and high school (grades nine through 12) dropouts cited school-related reasons (around 50 percent of the time for grades seven and eight with a noticeable spike for 7th graders in 2005–06 versus well over 70 percent of the time for grades 9–12). While this difference is due in part to the availability of alternative community college programs to high school students, high school dropouts also have been much more likely than middle school students to cite academic and attendance problems (see Table 9). However, of all of the comparisons possible with the anecdotal dropout data, those between middle and high school are the most questionable. For one thing, since most dropouts occur between grades nine and 12 (around 97 percent in 2005–06), there are statistical risks associated with drawing conclusions about differences between the middle and high school groups. Another confounding factor may be the different ways in which middle and high school guidance counselors and students interpret (and subsequently report) reasons for dropping out. Finally, as indicated in Table 9, a high percentage of middle school dropout events were not coded due to uncertain school enrollment status after a move (about 30 percent, compared to only 9.5 percent at the high school level in 2005–06).

Differences Between Genders

For both genders, as with most races and grade levels, the most commonly cited reason for dropping out is attendance and not, as some might suppose, academic problems (see Table 10). Whether for work, family, or personal reasons, attendance was cited by 60.3 percent of the male respondents and 63.7 percent of the female

Table 10. Reasons Cited for High School[a] Dropout by Gender, 2005–06

	Male	Female	Total
Number of dropouts	13,276	8,897	22,173
Percent for which reason cited for dropout	91.1%	89.7%	90.5%
Moved, school status unknown (no reason cited)	8.9%	10.3%	9.5%
Of known dropout status, % whose reason for dropout[b] was for:			
School-Related Reasons[c]	85.1%	81.6%	83.7%
Academic problems	7.7%	6.5%	7.2%
Attendance (school)	4.0%	4.5%	4.2%
Attendance (general)	51.3%	53.3%	52.1%
Community college enrollment w/ no h. s. diploma	12.8%	14.4%	13.4%
Discipline problem	3.8%	1.2%	2.7%
Failure to return after long-term suspension	5.5%	1.8%	4.0%
Work-Related Reasons	6.4%	3.4%	5.2%
Attendance (work)	0.6%	0.2%	0.4%
Employment necessary	0.4%	0.3%	0.3%
Choice of work over school	5.5%	2.9%	4.4%
Family or Personal Reasons	6.1%	14.6%	9.5%
(Family/Personal Reasons Minus Pregnancy)	6.1%	11.5%	8.3%
Attendance (family)	0.4%	0.6%	0.5%
Attendance (personal)	4.0%	5.1%	4.4%
Need to care for children	0.1%	1.7%	0.7%
Health problems	0.4%	1.1%	0.7%
Unstable home environment	0.7%	1.3%	0.9%
Marriage	0.0%	0.5%	0.2%
Pregnancy	0.0%	3.0%	1.2%
Runaway	0.5%	1.3%	0.8%
Crime-Related Reasons	2.4%	0.4%	1.6%
Suspected substance abuse	0.3%	0.1%	0.2%
Incarcerated in adult facility	2.1%	0.3%	1.4%

[a] Grades 9–12

[b] Reasons for dropout are solicited from students when possible, but when not possible, they are provided by data managers and/or dropout prevention counselors. Dropout Data Report, N.C. DPI, p. 18

[c] Major (bold-faced) category groupings are the author's and are not those of N.C. DPI.

respondents in 2005–06. That compares to 7.7 percent of males and 6.5 percent of females for whom academic problems were cited as their reason for dropping out. The most noticeable difference between male and female responses is the weight that female dropouts give to family-related reasons. Even when pregnancy is factored out, females still cited family-related reasons for dropping out 17.6 percent of the time in 2004–05, far outdistancing males at 11.6 percent. Discipline (whether because of the discipline problem itself or reluctance to return to school after a suspension) was a much more common reason cited by males who dropped out than for females (9.4 percent versus 3.1 percent in 2003–04).

3. How the State and Local School Districts Are Attempting To Reduce Dropouts and What Works in Reducing Dropout Totals

School Snapshot: Larry slept through most of my 6th period class—not because he was bored (well, at least no more bored than anyone else) but because he was tired. He worked full shifts at a fast food restaurant after school, and yet he still managed to turn in decent work to me. He made it through half of the school year before he decided that he just couldn't afford to stay in school any more. He was two years over-age, stuck in a 10th grade class, and at least two full years away from graduating. Every hour he worked at school was one less hour that he could be working in the "real" world. At age 18 and with few prospects for college, high school was becoming a waste of time. He did not have a bad attitude; he just saw clearly that his future was not necessarily going to improve by sticking it out in school writing essays about Lord of the Flies *or taking multiple choice tests about American history. Larry needed something else. He needed curriculum options at school and someone who could help him balance school and work.*

Ray Samuels,
Freshman Seminar Teacher
Enloe High School

Moving from Numbers to Actions

The most important message the numbers deliver is that effective dropout prevention will require much more than a single, one-size-fits-all solution. For this reason, says Elizabeth Glennie, Director of the North Carolina Education Research Data Center and a researcher at the Center for Child and Family Policy at Duke University, "You've got to tailor dropout prevention programs to the needs of specific kids."

The challenge is a daunting one, and the face of dropout is anything but simple—it affects all races, ages, and genders, and it affects them differently and in complex ways. And yet, despite some fluctuation, dropout events have remained below the level set in 1999 (see Table 1). Part of the reason for the decline is that local school districts have been implementing innovative solutions to the problem. While the numbers of dropouts still remind us that no district has found the perfect combination of interventions to deliver the knock-out punch to the dropout problem, some of these approaches—both new and tried-and-true—may bear fruit on a more regular basis in the long run.

CURRENT PROGRAMS, INTERVENTIONS, AND POLICIES IN NORTH CAROLINA

Most programs fit into one of three categories: **supplemental services for at-risk students; alternative education programs;** and **school restructuring efforts.** Here are some examples of available programs and efforts already under way in the state.

SUPPLEMENTAL SERVICES FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS

Communities in Schools

High school teacher Gray believes students could use more support at the school level. "I think one of the reasons students drop out now is that they don't have any advocates at the school," says Gray. One of the most extensive statewide efforts to address this deficiency and reduce the number of dropouts is the Communities in Schools (CIS) network, which operates 37 programs across the state and is seeking funding for 10 more. CIS helps communities develop collaborative strategies for improving the manner in which existing community programs and agencies serve students and their families. One of the guiding principles of CIS is awareness of the multiple stresses both in and out of school—the "push" and "pull" factors described above—that can influence a student's decision to drop out. In addition, CIS encourages and supports the development of personal one-on-one relationships for students with adults, safe school and home environments, the acquisition of marketable skills, opportunities for students to participate in community service, and improving the physical, mental, and emotional health of all students. As Qwatisha notes, it is that kind of personal relationship that in the end could foster an inner desire to stay in school. "It makes you feel good to see that someone really does care," says Qwatisha. Guretta adds, "That's all we need—a little one-on-one time."

Upon the subject of education, not presuming to dictate any plan or system respecting it, I can only say that I view it as the most important subject which we as a people may be engaged in. That everyone may receive at least a moderate education appears to be an objective of vital importance.

—ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Linda Harrill, president of Communities in Schools of North Carolina, says one key to successful reduction of the dropout problem that CIS embraces is the provision of services across the entire sweep of a student's school experience, not just in high school. Many of the more than 400 schools in which CIS works are elementary and middle schools, because "[working] in high school is like crisis intervention, like building a dam when the water's already coming over it, but what we need to do is build more dams upstream." At the same time, Harrill adds that CIS is also active in developing innovative high school programs, such as the

ThinkCOLLEGE program, which helps students complete college applications. "We are trying to increase the number of outside opportunities for kids to think about college who might not have thought about it before." CIS already has helped more than 200 students from the Charlotte area enroll in college, most of whom were awarded scholarships. Many of these students are first-generation high school graduates, and all are first-generation college students.

Formal evaluations of CIS are encouraging as well. A 1996 Urban Institute study revealed that the annual dropout rate for CIS participants was around 7 percent, which, while higher than typical overall state rates, was very low for the population CIS serves. Also, high absenteeism, a major dropout factor in North Carolina, was reduced for almost 70 percent of the participants with chronic absence problems. The report found evidence of overall academic improvement as well, including improved grade-point averages for almost 80 percent of all participants who entered the program with an average below 1.0.[55] Additionally, more recent CIS self-evaluations indicate that attendance, behavior, and suspensions all declined for more than 80 percent of all participants, and nearly 90 percent demonstrated improvement in academic achievement, with almost 70 percent of participants going on to some form of post-secondary education. Most tellingly, 98 percent of participants remained in school.[56]

Dropout Prevention Counseling

Every Local Education Agency (LEA) is required to designate one employee as its Dropout Prevention Coordinator, but personnel with this title are responsible only for gathering and submitting dropout numbers to the state every October. Several LEAs, however, have used the flexibility of their state-provided school counselor and at-risk student funding allotments to support positions designated specifically for dropout prevention counseling.[57]

Durham's multi-layered package of counseling services for students at risk for dropping out is a good example of the kinds of counseling approaches LEAs across the state are taking. Each high school counselor in Durham is responsible for working with some of his or her school's population of students at risk for dropping out.[58] Some of the training these counselors receive includes suicide intervention training and emotional response training.

Each fall, social workers and guidance counselors in Durham work together to locate missing students who should have reported to school but have not yet done so. Social workers make home and neighborhood visits, too, and the school system will make similar efforts every quarter. In addition, Durham hosts "Transitions to Opportunities Days" programs throughout the year, during which the system attempts to re-enroll recent dropouts. While the mission is to get these students to come

back to school, representatives from other organizations like Job Corps and Durham Technical Community College's GED program are also on hand.

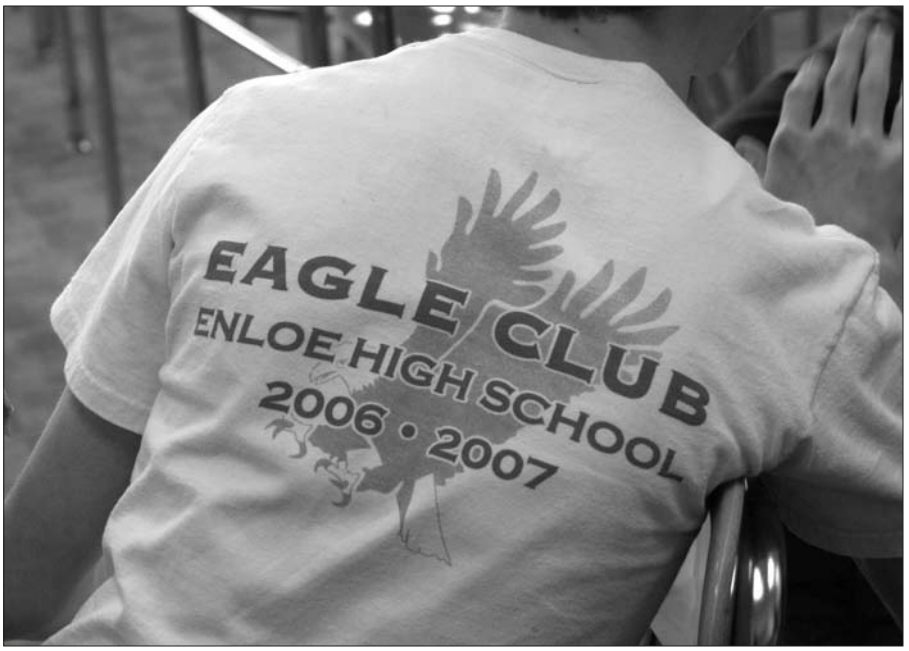
In 2004–05, Durham introduced a new wrinkle to its dropout prevention efforts when it adopted the System of Care approach to intervention, a process that the Durham County Mental Health Unit uses to help children with mental health issues. System of Care works by bringing together people in the community who form teams to aid families. Durham adapted it specifically for students who have been suspended 10 or more days and who exhibit additional dropout risk factors. Each student has a child and family team made up of significant adults in a student's life who make plans for the student. "This is a real paradigm shift for a lot of our counselors," says Elizabeth Feifs, Durham's former executive director for Student Services. "The counselors are used to seeing kids who come to them, but now counselors will seek out students at risk. These are not the kids who typically go to the counselors on their own."

Extracurricular Offerings

Gray, a long-time basketball coach, believes that extracurricular activities may be the key to retaining some students, but he is frustrated that guidelines sometimes prevent the students who need them most from participating. "Getting more kids involved in extracurricular activities would be another way to keep them here, but at the same time, we are trying to maintain these high academic standards, and then students end up being ineligible for programs that might keep them in school, that might hook them." To counter this dilemma, some LEAs promote special extracurricular offerings designed specifically to reach at-risk students. One of the most extensive efforts is in New Hanover County, where the school system provides a wide menu of non-traditional school opportunities, some of which help with dropout prevention. One such program is the New Hanover County Schools BRIDGE Lacrosse Program. BRIDGE—***B***uilding ***R***elationships to ***I***nitiate ***D***iversity, ***G***rowth, and ***E***nrichment—is an initiative of U.S. Lacrosse (the sport's national governing body) that originated in the mid-1980s when Baltimore was looking for ways to reduce teen delinquency in the inner city. The idea has since spread to places like New Hanover County. "We identify and recruit kids who come from all walks of life, not just your [traditional] athlete, and basically we get them involved in the sport of lacrosse as well as in learning life skills, tutoring, and in being a part of a team," says Don Oesterbo, an experiential learning coordinator for New Hanover Schools. Teams also participate in enrichment activities such as outdoor challenge courses that help the students to learn how to work together, service-learning projects, and diversity dialogues.

BRIDGE started as a small effort focused on middle school boys in 1991, but by 2004–05, there were more than 350 male and female participants county-wide. Part of the program's appeal may be that, unlike so many other school-sanctioned sports, BRIDGE does not eliminate students because of low grades. Those students are instead allowed to participate and are simultaneously provided with the help they need to bring their grades up. Wins and losses are not the main focus, according to Oesterbo. "Our main goal is to provide positive youth development through lacrosse, enrichment programs, and tutoring at least once a week," he says.

New Hanover also offers several experiential learning programs to promote positive youth development. Some of these programs identify kids in the 4th and 5th grades



who already are showing the behaviors or classroom struggles that indicate disconnection from school. These programs focus on life skills such as behavior management, healthy lifestyles, and teamwork.

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Alternative Schools

Alternative schools are now in operation in almost 40 percent of school districts across the country. In the Southeast, about 80 percent of all LEAs offer at least one alternative school. Overall, these schools serve only 1.3 percent of the school population, but around one-third of them are filled to capacity.[59]

In North Carolina, the alternative school population jumped 31 percent between 1996 and 2000.[60] In this state, an alternative school is any public school that "addresses the needs of students which typically cannot be met in a regular school, even with special education programs; provides nontraditional education curriculum and instruction; serves as an adjunct to a regular school or is independently organized; and falls outside of the categories of regular, special education, or vocational education," according to the N.C. Department of Public Instruction. Students are often referred to alternative schools for many of the same reasons that lead to dropping out, like behavior problems or special personal issues (such as pregnancy) that might otherwise prevent completion of schooling.

Unfortunately, the success of alternative schools at retaining students who would otherwise have dropped out is not yet fully studied,[61] and determining program effectiveness will be difficult because of the vastly different structures among these schools. In addition, the National Center for Education Statistics reports that fully 16 percent of all staff assigned to alternative schools are assigned involuntarily, the highest such rate among all types of schools nationally.[62] Generating staff commitment and an atmosphere of community are hard to achieve when the staff itself does not want to be there.

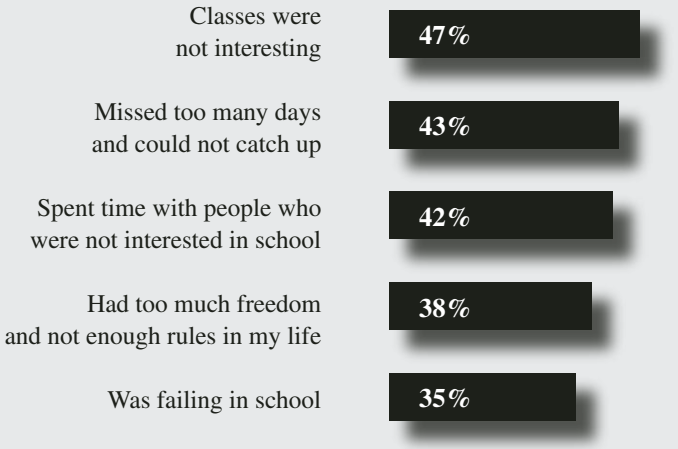
Eckerd Therapeutic Camps

While many school systems offer alternative school options, there also are several state-approved third-party programs. Some of the most well-established in the state are operated by Eckerd Youth Alternatives (EYA) of Clearwater, Florida, which has supported a variety of intervention programs for at-risk youth since 1968. EYA operates seven Eckerd Therapeutic Camps in North Carolina, each with a regional draw, that provide outdoor therapeutic treatment for almost 1,000 students a year.[63] These programs are formally recognized by the N.C. Department of Public Instruction as alternative education settings, and participants are not counted as dropouts.[64] In fact, during the 2002–03 school year, Eckerd served more than 400 students in North Carolina whose enrollment was fully funded by the state. Most of those students were behind in school by more than one year, and more than half of them had criminal records. Nearly 77 percent of these participants completed the program, and their average stay was just under eleven months. Among program completers, reading and math gains were modest—1.3 and 0.9 grade levels, respectively—but they were strong relative to traditional-school achievement gains for the students the program serves. In follow-ups with program completers, almost 80 percent were still enrolled in school and an additional 8 percent were gainfully employed a year after leaving the program.[65]

Futures for Kids Program

Another program with ambitions to provide services statewide is the Futures for Kids program. In collaboration with more than 30 North Carolina business and industry leaders, the program attempts to inform students about opportunities that await them if they complete school. "Studies show that one of the primary reasons students do not complete high school is a lack of career direction and perceived opportunities" says Susan Milliken, a business development representative in the *(continues)*

Top Five Reasons Dropouts Identify as Majors Factors for Leaving School



Source: John M. Bridgeland, John J. DiIulio, Jr. and Karen Burke Morison, "The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts," Civic Enterprise in association with Peter D. Hart Research Associates for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Washington, D.C., March 2006, p. 3.

Why They Quit: Dropping Out from the Dropout's Perspective

Why do students quit school? A recent study funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation of Seattle, Wash., goes to an obvious source: the students who dropped out themselves, interviewed in a series of focus groups and surveys that took place across the nation. The answer is, there is no single answer. However, an analysis of responses of high school dropouts by Civic Enterprises, LLC, a Washington think tank, provides a range of reasons, with boredom and the relevancy of classroom pursuits the common denominator.[1] A minority cited academic difficulties such as failing in school as a primary reason for dropping out.

Nearly half the students surveyed (47 percent) said they quit because classes were not interesting. More than two-thirds (69 percent) reported that they were not motivated or inspired to work hard, and two-thirds said they would have worked harder if more had been demanded of them. Fully 70 percent expressed confidence that they could have graduated if more had been demanded of them, including a majority of those with low GPAs.

A substantial percentage of students gave personal reasons for leaving school, with 32 percent indicating they had to get a job and make money, 26 percent reporting they had become a parent, and 22 percent saying they had to care for a family member. Many young people among this group reported that they had been doing fairly well in school. They were the most likely to say they would have worked harder if their schools had expected more of them and provided additional support.

For about a third of students interviewed (35 percent), "failing in school" was a major factor in dropping out of school. Three of 10 said they were unable to keep up with their schoolwork, and 43 percent said they missed too many days and could not catch up. Nearly half (45 percent) said they were poorly prepared for high school based on earlier schooling. Almost a third (32 percent) said they had been required to repeat a grade before dropping out, and 29 percent said doubted they could have completed their high school's requirements even if they put forth the effort.

The study found dropping out to be a gradual process that often started with escalating attendance problems. "Too much freedom" and too few rules was a problem for 38 percent of respondents. And, proactive parental involvement for this group of students was low. Indeed, 68 percent of respondents said their parents became involved only when they were on the verge of dropping out.

Among adult participants in the study, 81 percent said graduating from high school is important to success in life, and 74 percent said if they had it to do over again, they would remain in school. Additionally, nearly half (47 percent) said not having a diploma makes it hard to find a good job.

As to what it would take to help students stay in school, four out of five students (81 percent) asked for more opportunities for real world learning. Additionally, 81 percent wanted better teachers, and three-fourths thought smaller classes with more individualized instruction would be helpful. More than half (55 percent) said more needed to be done to help problem learners, and 71 percent said additional summer school, tutoring, and extra time with teachers would have improved their odds of graduating. Other changes that, according

to study participants, could have improved students chances of graduating were increased supervision in the school (seven in 10), more classroom discipline (62 percent), and greater efforts to help students feel safe from violence (71 percent).

As a further aid to completing school, more than three out of five (62 percent) said their school needed to do more to help students with problems that occurred outside class, and seven in 10 favored more parental involvement. Two-thirds (65 percent) said a staff member or teacher at the school cared about their success. Just over half (56 percent) said they could go to a staff person for school problems and two-fifths (41 percent) said there was someone at school they could talk to about personal problems. Study participants strongly supported improved communications between parents and school and increased parental involvement in their children's education as a means of preventing students from dropping out. Less than half (47 percent) said schools contacted their parents when they were absent and only 48 percent said their parents were contacted when they dropped out of school.

According to the authors, the study findings suggest a broad range of policy changes that take into account student voices as to what would help them succeed in school. These include:

Different schools for different types of students, with options that connect what they are learning in the classroom with work and life experiences, smaller classrooms and schools, alternative education for at-risk students, and high expectations for all students.

Parental education strategies and graduation plans. Schools should strengthen communication with parents to assure that students show up for school and do their assigned work. Development of a graduation plan also is recommended, with an early warning system that triggers when students are going off track, including a system by which parents are notified when their children are absent.

Other strategies. The study indicates support for a broad range of additional strategies to help struggling students stay in school, including literacy programs, school and peer counseling, mentoring, tutoring, and service learning programs. Additionally, the study recommends more support for pregnant students and students with disabilities.

State-Level Strategies. At the state level, the study recommends reexamining compulsory school attendance laws and considering raising the age at which students can legally drop out of school from 16, as in North Carolina, to 18, with additional support for struggling students. Additionally, the study calls for a common means of calculating graduation rates for all 50 states and improved data collection and reporting so that dropout rates can tracked over time. Nationally, the study recommends incentives in the federal No Child Left Behind law that would raise both test scores and graduation rates. The recommendation is based on countering the possibility that under the current law, there's an incentive to force potential dropouts out of school in order to meet federal accountability testing requirements.

FOOTNOTE

[1] John M. Bridgeland *et al., The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts,* Civic Enterprises LLC in association with Peter Hart Associates for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Washington D.C., March 2006, pp. iii–vi.

program's Raleigh office.[66] Through videos, on-line career interest assessments, and other tools, the program attempts to match students with future opportunities in the workplace.

A study by Civic Enterprises, a Washington, D.C., public policy think tank, supports the notion that students who drop out lack direction and focus. That study found boredom and lack of motivation to be greater contributors to students' decision to drop out of school than fear of academic failure.[67] Indeed, 70 percent of students who dropped out expressed confidence they could have done the work needed to graduate if they had put in the necessary effort. Students cited opportunities for real world learning that would make the classroom more relevant, including internships and service learning, as a primary improvement that could be made to encourage them to stay in school.[68] (See "Why They Quit," pp. 110–111, for more on this study.)

Middle College Programs

Several LEAs across the state are experimenting with Middle College programs, which are high school programs housed at local colleges and universities. For potential dropouts, these programs provide exposure to a wider variety of vocational courses, opportunities to earn college credits before graduation, and flexible schedules that may help alleviate some of the "push" and "pull" pressure to leave school that these students often feel. With enough initiative and support, students in these programs can even earn associate's degrees or industry certification along with their high school diplomas.

While dropout prevention is not an exclusive focus of these programs, their alternate settings and schedules make them ideal for certain students in the dropout population. Also, Middle Colleges typically are smaller than regular high schools, so students have the opportunity to benefit from more individualized attention from teachers and counselors. "The amazing thing is that, due to the school's size, which

is usually 100–135 students, the students who may not have been successful in traditional high schools now are happy that everyone knows their name," says Anne Murr, instructional improvement officer for Guilford County, which operates several Middle College schools.

Charles Nolan, principal of a new Middle College high school housed at Durham Technical Community College—the product of a partnership between the Durham, Orange, and Chapel Hill-Carrboro school systems—believes that one of the strengths of the Middle College program is that it has the potential to reach a group of students at risk of dropping out that does not often get addressed. "The students that Middle College is going to attract are students for whom the traditional approach to high school—the big box school—isn't working, but who are still very bright. [Middle College] is for a different kind of student—a student who doesn't fit in at the traditional high school but who can still do the work."

But Johnny can't read
Summer is over and he's gone to seed
You know that Johnny can't read
He never learned nothin' that he'll ever need—

Well, is it Teacher's fault? Oh no
Is it Mommie's fault? Oh no
Is it Society's fault? Oh no
Well, is it Johnny's fault? Oh no
...
Is it the President's fault? Oh no
Well, is it Johnny's fault? Oh no!

—Don Henley and Danny Kortchmar
"Johnny Can't Read"

The most complex and fully-developed offering of Middle College programs is in Guilford County, which has six Middle College programs open on local campuses in 2006–07, each one with a different subject focus. The motivation to provide so many Middle Colleges, says Murr, is simple: "[We are] trying to really connect them with a potential career or goal that makes sense to them, and the school size, the small classes, the connection with the college campuses really makes it almost like magic."

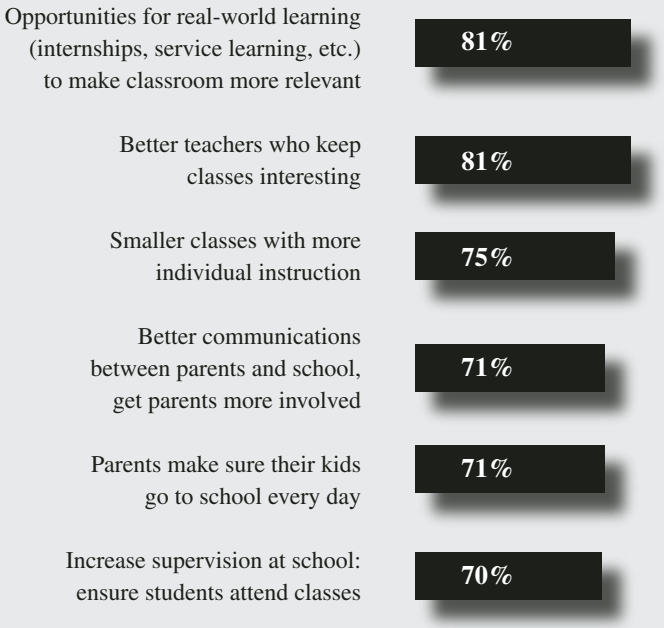
Middle College is the kind of program that might have prevented Jon, who is now enrolled in a completion program and has an eye on a career in real estate, from dropping out at the end of the eleventh grade. "[I] didn't know what I wanted to do for myself," says Jon of his high school experience. He says he might have benefitted from having more time and flexibility to figure out career options.

Guilford County and the Durham-Orange area are not alone in experimenting with Middle College programs. Early college programs are also on the rise, and there were 13 such programs in operation across the state during the 2005–06 school year, and 33 are in operations for 2006–07.[69] "There are many ways to educate our students to become productive citizens, and the traditional K–12 model is only one of them," says Nolan. "It is time to start looking at our schools in more innovative ways, and that may mean creating some type of hybrid between high school and college, which is exactly what Middle College is."

As yet, there is limited research-based information on the impact of middle colleges and other credit-based transition programs, and information about programs that recruit students with a broad range of abilities is even scarcer. In addition, most programs have yet to implement systematic data collection procedures. Nevertheless, some early studies of Middle College programs suggest that participating students who are identified as being at risk for school failure generally perform better on average than do their counterparts in other alternative education settings, with both higher graduation rates and lower dropout rates.[70] There also is some indication that one of the benefits to participants is an increase in confidence in personal academic ability.[71] More recent studies have generated less clear and less positive results, however,[72] with one potential problem being that some programs fail to recruit and retain an academically and socio-economically diverse student body.[73]

What Dropouts Believe Would Improve Students' Chances

This would improve students' chances of staying in school



Source: John M. Bridgeland, John J. DiIulio, Jr. and Karen Burke Morison, "The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts," Civic Enterprise in association with Peter D. Hart Research Associates for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Washington, D.C., March 2006, p. 13.

SCHOOL RESTRUCTURING EFFORTS

Smaller Schools Initiative

As part of the state's New Schools Project, smaller schools and schools-within-schools (fully-functioning schools with small student populations that operate within the context of a larger "parent" school) are gaining momentum in North Carolina as one means of reducing the number of students dropping out of school. Governor Mike Easley has been a strong proponent of the New Schools movement, along with Learn and Earn Early College, and restructuring of low-performing high schools, all of which are expected to play a role in reducing dropout rates. An Easley administration spokesperson says dropout rates are a problem for all racial and ethnic groups, and the shrinking pool of low-skills jobs makes completing high school essential. In bygone days, there may have been a job waiting in a textile or furniture factory for a young person who failed to finish school.

Small size is a factor in several of the characteristics associated with schools that are successful at reducing their numbers of dropouts,[74] in part because it can help to reduce the anonymity that often haunts the typical high school student. Gray of Garner High School has seen that problem grow as the population of Wake County has grown. "How can we relate to these kids now?" asks Gray. "Schools have gotten so large, and I think the small schools movement is one approach to addressing this problem."

One major component in making small schools a reality across the state has been substantial support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation,[75] and the legislature also may play a continuing role in the support of these efforts. One component of state Senate Bill 1057, enacted as the Education Improvement Act of 2005,[76] helps to expand small school opportunities across the state by providing pilot money for the development of 11 small specialty high schools within existing schools. Not surprisingly, one of the hoped-for outcomes of these pilot schools listed in the bill is improved graduation rates. Communities in Schools' Linda Harrill says that her organization already is involved in a Gates-funded small schools effort. "One of the newest things we are doing is we are working on creating some new small high schools focused on students 16 and older who come into the 9th grade academically challenged but who could do the work if they were in smaller environments," says Harrill. CIS, in partnership with the Charlotte/Mecklenburg Public School System, opened one small high school in Charlotte in the fall of 2006 modeled after a CIS/Gates Foundation small-schools effort in Georgia, and Harrill hopes CIS will be able to open at least 12 more over the next two to three years.

Block Scheduling

Another important school restructuring effort happening statewide is the rapid switch to block scheduling. A majority of the secondary schools in the state now operate on a block schedule, and while there is much debate about the academic merits of block scheduling, most scheduling variations result in additional opportunities for students to earn credits, which is a key ingredient in reducing the number of students who drop out. For example, schools on a block schedule with four complete classes per semester (commonly referred to as a 4x4 schedule) will be able to schedule two more classes a year than they would be able to under a traditional full-year six-course schedule. In practical terms, this means that a student who fails a core required course (like English or math) in the first semester will be able to take it again in the second semester without having to resort to summer school or repeating a grade.

OTHER SIGNIFICANT PROGRAMS AND CHANGES

Restrictions on Driver's Licensure

The reasons that students drop out extend beyond school boundaries, and in North Carolina not all dropout prevention policies are limited to schools' sphere of influence. Since August 1998, obtaining and keeping a driver's license in North Carolina has carried with it not only an "evidence of adequate progress in school" standard but also a truancy limitation. Unlicensed teens who are guilty of truancy are prohibited from

applying for a license for 90 days, and two-time offenders must wait an additional six months to apply.[77] Licensed teens also can have their license revoked if they are unable to maintain adequate academic progress or if they drop out of school.[78]

Student Information Management

For many years, the greatest block to generating accurate data on dropouts has been the inability to track all students who move across state lines or even between school systems. For in-state student transfers, this tracking problem has persisted in part because the state did not require school systems to assign unique identifying numbers to students. While most school systems use Social Security numbers to identify students, others—including Charlotte-Mecklenburg, the state's largest school district—use their own unique numbering system. Still other school systems change student numbers when students change schools, and some school systems even re-use numbers once students leave a system. All of this has led to a situation in which neither the state nor a local school system can match specific data to specific students reliably statewide.

That problem may disappear in North Carolina by the end of the 2007–08 school year. By that time, according to Bob Bellamy, former Associate Superintendent for Technology Services at the N.C. Department of Public Instruction, all LEAs should be using a new student information software package called N.C. WISE (North Carolina Windows of Information on Student Education). Statewide implementation of N.C. WISE has been delayed for years because of disputes with the developer, IBM Corporation, but the state now has canceled the partnership and will see the project to completion on its own with the assistance of smaller vendors operating under more specific, performance-based contracts. About one-third of the state's 115 local education agencies already are using the system, and DPI is aiming to implement the information management system statewide by fiscal year 2008. Not only will this system

be a dramatic improvement over its predecessor, but it also will ensure that every student in North Carolina has an identifying number. "We are building a unique student ID system into N.C. WISE that will be in place in all schools by the end of the rollout," says Bellamy. The numbers will be assigned by the system and not by the LEAs, and they will replace current student ID numbers.

"There are some folks who would very much like to use Social Security numbers because they are already out there, but we only have a Social Security number on about 80 percent of the kids," Bellamy says. By federal law, families are not required to provide Social Security numbers to the schools, and illegal immigrants do not have Social Security numbers, but new federal reporting requirements have made it necessary for states to create unique statewide numbering systems. Even though the requirement means added expense for the state, it also means that the goal of school officials and researchers alike—tracking students when they move across state lines—is no longer as far off as it once seemed.

Have you ever really had a teacher? One who saw you as a raw but precious thing, a jewel that, with wisdom, could be polished to a proud shine? If you are lucky enough to find your way to such teachers, you will always find your way back.

—Mitch Albom
Tuesdays With Morrie

Caring Leadership that Makes Dropout Prevention a Priority

A less formal but no less effective means of preventing students from dropping out may be school leadership that places a priority on keeping children in school. One school system that is being aggressive in this regard is the Henderson County Public Schools, where Superintendent Steve Page is committed to and involved in addressing the problem. Among other tactics, he has posted on the wall of his office the picture, name, and school of high school dropouts. One by one, school officials try to find these young people, interview them, find out why they dropped out, and make a plan with them to get them back in school.

Cautions About Successfully Addressing the Dropout Problem Through Current Programs

With so many programs in place across the state, why does the dropout problem persist? It is important to remember that the dropout problem, like most other social problems, is not an isolated event but is instead a symptom of much larger school and societal problems—some of the "push" and "pull" factors described earlier—that may not be completely or even partially addressed by any single program or even by an entire school system. Significant dropout prevention is only likely to come about as a result of much broader societal changes.

Also, a program targeted at one group of students may not have a similar effect on another group. For example, a program aimed at potential Hispanic dropouts with an emphasis on balancing competing work and school demands is less likely to have an impact on African-American dropouts, who cite work-related reasons for dropout with much less frequency than do their Hispanic peers (13.5 percent versus 3.9 percent, respectively, in 2005–06; see Table 8). Since, as one report put it, "there is not one right way to intervene,"[79] North Carolina should continue to offer a variety of interventions. Furthermore, dropout prevention specialists should remember that the dropout problem is in a constant state of change. For example, in past decades the typical dropout nationally was an 11th or 12th grader, but now he or she is in 9th or 10th grade,[80] meaning that the typical dropout is now not only younger but also less well-educated.

Finally, there is some evidence that efforts to identify and prevent potential dropouts from dropping out of school ultimately are inefficient in that they often fail to identify a majority of the students who would actually drop out without intervention. In a 2002 article, Philip Gleason and Mark Dynarski of *(continued on page 128)*

Table 11. Dropout Events and Dropout Rates in Grades 9 through 12,

LEA #	School System or Charter School	1999–00		2000–01		2001–02	
		#	Rate	#	Rate	#	Rate
	School System						
010	Alamance-Burlington Schools	436	7.3	379	6.1	341	5.3
020	Alexander County Schools	104	6.8	85	5.4	124	7.8
030	Alleghany County Schools	28	6.3	15	3.6	13	3.2
040	Anson County Schools	119	9.1	84	6.6	78	6.1
050	Ashe County Schools	84	7.9	53	5.2	62	6.2
060	Avery County Schools	54	7.7	32	4.7	26	3.9
070	Beaufort County Schools	154	7.0	145	6.6	152	6.7
080	Bertie County Schools	70	6.0	69	6.0	56	5.1
090	Bladen County Schools	75	4.6	76	4.8	64	4.1
100	Brunswick County Schools	253	8.5	211	7.0	265	8.5
110	Buncombe County Schools	537	7.2	443	5.9	465	6.1
111	Asheville City Schools	75	5.6	67	5.0	61	4.6
120	Burke County Schools	289	7.3	221	5.4	191	4.5
130	Cabarrus County Schools	305	5.5	270	4.7	290	4.7
132	Kannapolis City Schools	73	6.2	59	4.8	65	5.2
140	Caldwell County Schools	227	6.4	216	6.1	176	4.8
150	Camden County Schools	38	9.0	28	6.4	23	5.1
160	Carteret County Schools	176	6.3	149	5.4	119	4.4
170	Caswell County Schools	81	7.5	40	3.7	55	5.0
180	Catawba County Schools	286	6.0	268	5.5	190	3.9
181	Hickory City Schools	138	10.5	122	8.9	80	5.9
182	Newton Conover City Schools	23	2.9	32	3.9	23	2.9
190	Chatham County Schools	157	7.9	157	7.7	126	6.0
200	Cherokee County Schools	60	5.5	61	5.6	37	3.4
210	Edenton/Chowan Schools	43	5.3	35	4.4	39	4.8
220	Clay County Schools	36	7.9	25	5.9	10	2.5
230	Cleveland County Schools	136	5.5	144	5.6	114	4.4
240	Columbus County Schools	175	7.5	146	6.5	157	7.0
241	Whiteville City Schools	51	6.1	44	5.2	47	5.4
250	Craven County Schools	288	6.6	294	6.8	250	5.8
260	Cumberland County Schools	765	5.1	708	4.6	656	4.1

Excluding Expulsions, for All 100 Counties in North Carolina

	2002–03		2003–04		2004–05		2005–06		LEA
	#	Rate	#	Rate	#	Rate	#	Rate	#
	370	5.4	361	5.1	390	5.4	407	5.6	010
	91	5.7	82	5.0	78	4.7	89	5.2	020
	15	3.5	17	3.9	25	5.4	13	2.7	030
	88	6.6	71	5.3	74	5.4	89	6.5	040
	50	4.9	50	4.9	44	4.3	40	3.8	050
	27	4.0	35	5.0	40	5.6	38	5.2	060
	112	4.9	125	5.4	163	6.8	134	5.7	070
	57	5.2	58	5.2	48	4.3	46	4.3	080
	99	6.0	94	5.5	102	5.7	106	5.8	090
	193	6.2	169	5.2	206	6.0	205	5.7	100
	386	5.0	423	5.3	423	5.2	442	5.4	110
	60	4.6	54	4.1	75	5.6	67	5.0	111
	230	5.2	198	4.4	329	6.9	276	5.9	120
	269	4.2	273	4.1	375	5.2	382	5.0	130
	56	4.4	72	5.3	82	5.9	91	6.6	132
	150	4.0	260	6.5	279	6.8	190	4.6	140
	23	4.9	19	3.9	20	3.8	27	4.9	150
	137	5.0	145	5.2	97	3.5	127	4.5	160
	78	6.9	93	8.3	64	6.0	56	5.1	170
	246	4.8	208	4.0	195	3.7	218	4.0	180
	91	6.3	126	8.2	111	7.3	100	6.6	181
	27	3.2	26	2.9	29	3.1	21	2.3	182
	105	4.7	124	5.3	108	4.5	90	3.7	190
	61	5.3	55	4.8	52	4.6	60	5.1	200
	41	5.0	40	5.0	37	4.7	29	3.5	210
	8	2.0	7	1.7	12	2.9	22	4.9	220
	117	4.2	112	2.8	304	5.6	381	6.8	230
	106	4.8	105	4.8	115	5.3	119	5.4	240
	36	4.2	46	5.3	39	4.8	38	4.8	241
	236	5.5	204	4.7	240	5.4	239	5.3	250
	628	3.8	619	3.7	556	3.3	618	3.6	260

(continues)

Table 11. Dropout Events and Dropout Rates in Grades 9 through 12,

LEA #	School System or Charter School	1999–00		2000–01		2001–02	
		#	Rate	#	Rate	#	Rate
270	Currituck County Schools	89	8.7	58	5.7	58	5.5
280	Dare County Schools	82	5.9	103	7.2	76	5.3
290	Davidson County Schools	314	5.5	392	6.8	320	5.6
291	Lexington City Schools	60	7.2	73	8.7	59	7.1
292	Thomasville City Schools	33	6.0	27	4.7	21	3.4
300	Davie County Schools	90	5.7	85	5.2	110	6.5
310	Duplin County Schools	126	5.3	160	6.5	133	5.5
320	Durham Public Schools	502	6.1	391	4.6	548	6.2
330	Edgecombe County Schools	201	8.6	181	7.9	132	5.8
340	Forsyth County Schools	813	6.4	719	5.5	786	5.8
350	Franklin County Schools	188	8.9	135	6.4	136	6.1
360	Gaston County Schools	674	7.5	606	6.6	548	5.8
370	Gates County Schools	50	7.5	33	5.1	33	5.1
380	Graham County Schools	19	5.9	27	7.9	24	7.1
390	Granville County Schools	174	8.2	137	6.2	190	8.0
400	Greene County Schools	68	7.3	68	7.3	54	5.9
410	Guilford County Schools	1,070	6.0	710	3.9	719	3.8
420	Halifax County Schools	133	7.3	110	6.3	115	6.5
421	Roanoke Rapids City Schools	47	5.3	57	6.1	61	6.5
422	Weldon City Schools	15	4.9	13	4.4	20	6.4
430	Harnett County Schools	352	7.8	340	7.3	326	6.8
440	Haywood County Schools	142	6.2	148	6.4	170	7.1
450	Henderson County Schools	204	5.7	197	5.4	211	5.7
460	Hertford County Schools	109	8.0	65	5.1	87	6.8
470	Hoke County Schools	159	9.5	138	8.3	130	7.7
480	Hyde County Schools	28	12.4	7	3.6	7	3.5
490	Iredell-Statesville Schools	326	6.9	310	6.3	274	5.3
491	Mooresville City Schools	58	4.9	80	6.3	54	4.3
500	Jackson County Schools	67	5.8	63	5.4	55	4.8
510	Johnston County Schools	336	6.4	333	6.0	344	5.8

Excluding Expulsions, for All 100 Counties in North Carolina, *continued*

2002–03		2003–04		2004–05		2005–06		LEA
#	Rate	#	Rate	#	Rate	#	Rate	#
46	4.2	71	6.0	74	5.8	61	4.7	270
64	4.3	41	2.6	46	2.8	54	3.3	280
287	5.0	266	4.5	299	4.9	376	5.8	290
61	7.2	60	7.1	55	6.5	47	5.6	291
27	4.1	27	3.9	29	4.0	29	3.8	292
85	5.1	84	4.9	68	3.7	100	5.2	300
108	4.4	140	5.5	134	5.2	150	5.8	310
534	5.8	572	5.9	566	5.7	520	5.2	320
162	6.8	151	6.3	144	6.0	181	7.3	330
747	5.3	756	5.2	760	5.0	919	5.7	340
140	6.1	145	6.2	110	4.6	150	6.0	350
551	5.7	490	4.9	531	5.1	588	5.5	360
29	4.3	40	5.8	29	4.2	26	3.7	370
18	5.1	16	4.2	24	6.3	16	4.5	380
124	5.1	104	4.1	144	5.4	189	6.6	390
49	5.3	71	7.6	60	6.4	62	6.3	400
588	3.0	639	3.1	644	3.0	766	3.4	410
91	5.3	71	4.3	106	6.4	78	4.8	420
50	5.5	59	6.3	62	6.5	68	7.0	421
16	5.0	17	5.1	16	4.8	14	4.1	422
311	6.4	274	5.5	305	5.8	347	6.3	430
150	6.2	187	7.5	176	7.1	150	6.0	440
196	5.2	214	5.5	137	3.5	156	3.9	450
76	6.2	50	4.4	64	5.5	68	5.8	460
143	8.4	110	6.4	111	6.1	118	6.4	470
6	2.9	12	5.5	1	0.5	7	3.2	480
277	5.0	273	4.7	260	4.3	257	4.0	490
50	3.9	56	4.2	63	4.4	87	5.6	491
65	5.7	70	6.0	90	7.5	79	6.7	500
337	5.3	339	5.0	325	4.5	404	5.1	510

(continues)

Table 11. Dropout Events and Dropout Rates in Grades 9 through 12,

LEA #	School System or Charter School	1999–00		2000–01		2001–02	
		#	Rate	#	Rate	#	Rate
520	Jones County Schools	24	5.7	23	5.7	26	6.4
530	Lee County Schools	166	6.7	207	8.1	190	7.3
540	Lenoir County Schools	234	7.6	195	6.4	186	6.1
550	Lincoln County Schools	247	7.6	178	5.4	180	5.3
560	Macon County Schools	89	7.0	82	6.4	78	5.9
570	Madison County Schools	37	5.1	47	6.4	33	4.5
580	Martin County Schools	107	7.3	82	5.9	84	6.0
590	McDowell County Schools	132	7.2	128	7.2	64	3.6
600	Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	1,981	6.8	1,729	5.8	1,479	4.8
610	Mitchell County Schools	25	3.4	23	3.2	50	6.6
620	Montgomery County Schools	109	8.1	75	5.9	81	6.4
630	Moore County Schools	168	5.2	162	4.8	107	3.1
640	Nash-Rocky Mount Schools	399	7.7	370	7.2	294	5.6
650	New Hanover County Schools	390	5.8	369	5.5	338	5.0
660	Northampton County Schools	83	7.4	70	6.5	60	5.7
670	Onslow County Schools	429	6.7	355	5.6	339	5.3
680	Orange County Schools	82	4.7	94	5.2	80	4.2
681	Chapel Hill-Carrboro Schools	32	1.2	57	1.9	41	1.3
690	Pamlico County Schools	34	5.0	27	4.1	33	5.0
700	Pasquotank County Schools	124	6.9	132	7.2	125	6.6
710	Pender County Schools	142	7.6	93	5.1	133	6.7
720	Perquimans County Schools	52	8.6	43	7.4	32	5.5
730	Person County Schools	103	6.3	113	6.9	92	5.5
740	Pitt County Schools	433	7.4	422	7.1	405	6.6
750	Polk County Schools	19	3.0	27	4.0	35	5.1
760	Randolph County Schools	385	8.1	289	6.0	300	5.9
761	Asheboro City Schools	83	7.6	84	7.3	72	5.9
770	Richmond County Schools	151	6.7	141	6.3	119	5.3
780	Robeson County Schools	719	10.2	758	10.7	535	7.7
790	Rockingham County Schools	228	5.5	252	6.0	240	5.5

Excluding Expulsions, for All 100 Counties in North Carolina, *continued*

2002–03		2003–04		2004–05		2005–06		LEA
#	Rate	#	Rate	#	Rate	#	Rate	#
17	4.2	15	3.8	36	8.6	19	4.7	520
161	6.0	163	5.9	207	7.2	230	7.8	530
165	5.4	184	5.9	179	5.7	246	7.4	540
177	5.0	177	4.8	166	4.3	235	5.9	550
77	5.8	85	6.4	79	6.0	90	6.6	560
39	5.1	35	4.3	44	5.2	34	4.0	570
64	4.6	86	6.0	85	6.0	73	5.4	580
98	5.2	131	6.6	157	7.6	127	6.3	590
1,301	4.0	1,528	4.5	1,108	3.1	1,724	4.6	600
44	5.8	41	5.4	36	4.8	40	5.4	610
47	3.7	63	4.7	64	4.6	72	5.1	620
92	2.6	125	3.3	101	2.6	181	4.6	630
326	6.0	329	5.9	349	6.1	411	7.1	640
354	5.0	398	5.4	414	5.4	306	4.0	650
65	6.0	54	4.9	59	5.3	87	8.0	660
294	4.5	293	4.4	313	4.6	329	4.7	670
116	5.8	95	4.6	109	4.9	98	4.3	680
33	1.0	43	1.2	54	1.5	57	1.6	681
37	5.3	40	5.6	34	4.9	44	6.3	690
129	6.5	119	5.9	112	5.5	118	5.8	700
106	5.1	141	6.5	107	4.7	145	6.0	710
32	5.2	46	7.3	36	5.9	47	7.8	720
73	4.2	84	4.6	99	5.3	89	4.8	730
436	6.8	464	7.0	454	6.6	417	5.9	740
30	4.3	20	2.8	48	6.2	36	4.6	750
341	6.5	341	6.3	313	5.6	342	5.9	760
93	7.1	71	5.3	66	4.8	53	3.9	761
85	3.7	114	4.9	108	4.5	120	4.9	770
597	8.4	586	8.2	525	7.3	548	7.5	780
237	5.3	247	5.3	301	6.3	304	6.5	790

(continues)

Table 11. Dropout Events and Dropout Rates in Grades 9 through 12,

LEA #	School System or Charter School	1999–00		2000–01		2001–02	
		#	Rate	#	Rate	#	Rate
800	Rowan-Salisbury Schools	398	6.6	343	5.6	319	5.0
810	Rutherford County Schools	270	9.2	227	7.9	216	7.4
820	Sampson County Schools	78	3.8	102	4.9	95	4.5
821	Clinton City Schools	56	7.2	43	5.7	38	5.0
830	Scotland County Schools	159	7.9	130	6.5	82	4.2
840	Stanly County Schools	149	4.9	132	4.4	104	3.4
850	Stokes County Schools	144	6.5	113	5.1	113	5.0
860	Surry County Schools	162	6.8	153	6.4	126	5.3
861	Elkin City Schools	6	2.0	13	4.1	11	3.4
862	Mount Airy City Schools	14	2.6	29	5.2	16	2.8
870	Swain County Schools	33	6.1	38	6.9	20	3.7
880	Transylvania County Schools	83	6.4	83	6.4	60	4.7
890	Tyrrell County Schools	4	1.6	14	5.6	8	3.3
900	Union County Schools	326	5.4	278	4.4	327	4.8
910	Vance County Schools	178	8.8	143	6.8	191	8.5
920	Wake County Schools	1,097	4.1	1,024	3.7	1,020	3.5
930	Warren County Schools	112	11.0	85	8.6	70	6.9
940	Washington County Schools	28	3.9	38	5.4	44	6.4
950	Watauga County Schools	98	6.0	76	4.7	93	5.7
960	Wayne County Schools	281	4.9	292	5.1	260	4.5
970	Wilkes County Schools	205	6.7	202	6.4	251	7.9
980	Wilson County Schools	285	7.9	255	7.2	220	6.2
990	Yadkin County Schools	91	5.4	113	6.5	100	5.7
995	Yancey County Schools	44	6.0	42	5.5	34	4.5
999	NORTH CAROLINA[a]	23,597	6.4	21,368	5.7	20,202	5.3

[a] Including Charter Schools

Sources: N.C. Department of Public Instruction, School Improvement Division, *http://www.ncpublicschools.org/schoolimprovement/effective/dropout/,* North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2007). Annual Report on Dropout Events and Rates. Report to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee. February 2007.

Excluding Expulsions, for All 100 Counties in North Carolina, *continued*

2002–03		2003–04		2004–05		2005–06		LEA
#	Rate	#	Rate	#	Rate	#	Rate	#
341	5.2	389	5.8	374	5.5	300	4.4	800
155	5.2	153	5.0	151	4.8	193	5.9	810
86	3.9	130	5.6	145	6.1	160	6.8	820
20	2.6	46	5.5	51	5.8	48	5.0	821
83	4.3	93	4.7	91	4.6	97	4.7	830
102	3.3	123	3.9	104	3.3	127	4.0	840
120	5.2	122	5.3	117	5.0	135	5.6	850
104	4.2	124	4.7	138	5.0	162	5.8	860
6	1.8	14	3.8	10	2.6	15	3.8	861
16	2.8	8	1.4	19	3.1	18	2.8	862
32	5.6	55	9.0	43	7.0	37	5.7	870
71	5.5	74	5.7	55	4.3	65	5.0	880
7	2.9	20	8.1	14	6.0	17	7.6	890
330	4.4	283	3.5	322	3.7	389	4.1	900
144	6.3	161	6.7	192	7.5	217	8.3	910
791	2.6	1,130	3.5	1,274	3.7	1,437	3.9	920
59	5.6	56	5.2	55	5.1	39	3.8	930
32	4.9	35	5.5	17	2.6	28	4.2	940
65	4.1	67	4.3	51	3.3	76	4.8	950
248	4.3	317	5.4	304	5.1	344	5.7	960
199	6.4	224	7.2	223	7.1	189	6.1	970
222	6.1	193	5.2	229	6.0	258	6.7	980
92	5.1	89	4.8	76	4.0	89	4.6	990
30	3.8	38	4.7	50	6.0	36	4.3	995
18,964	4.8	20,035	4.9	20,175	4.7	22,180	5.0	999

(continues)

Table 11. Dropout Events and Dropout Rates in Grades 9 through 12,

LEA #	School System or Charter School	1999–00		2000–01		2001–02	
		#	Rate	#	Rate	#	Rate
	Charter Schools						
01A	Lakeside School	NA	NA	NA	NA	2	6.5
01B	River Mill Academy	NA	NA	3	4.1	7	9.0
01C	Clover Garden	NA	NA	NA	NA	0	0.0
01D	New Century Charter High	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
06A	Grandfather Academy	NA	NA	NA	NA	0	0.0
06B	Crossnore Academy	5	16.9	5	16.1	3	8.3
16A	Cape Lookout Marine Science High	37	26.7	36	26.1	NA	NA
19B	Woods Charter	NA	NA	4	7.2	10	13.3
32D	Kestrel Heights School	NA	NA	5	9.4	7	13.0
32J	Ann Atwater Community	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
34D	C G Woodson School of Challenge	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
36B	Piedmont Community Charter	NA	NA	NA	NA	0	0.0
41C	Guilford Preparatory	NA	NA	NA	NA	0	0.0
53A	Provisions Academy	NA	NA	NA	NA	8	22.9
55A	Lincoln Charter	NA	NA	NA	NA	0	0.0
60C	Kennedy Charter	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
60H	Crossroads Charter High	NA	NA	NA	NA	99	29.8
64A	Rocky Mount Preparatory	NA	NA	NA	NA	0	0.0
66A	Gaston College Preparatory	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
68N	Pace Academy	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
81A	Thomas Jefferson Class Academy	NA	NA	NA	NA	0	0.0
83A	Laurinburg Charter	NA	NA	51	29.3	30	16.4
83B	The Laurinburg Homework Center	NA	NA	8	13.2	3	4.5
84B	Gray Stone Day	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
90A	Union Academy	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
92C	Baker Charter High	33	49.2	31	44.9	28	41.2
92F	Franklin Academy	NA	NA	NA	NA	0	0.0
92G	East Wake Academy	NA	NA	NA	NA	0	0.0
92K	Raleigh Charter High	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
92P	Community Partners Charter H.S.	NA	NA	NA	NA	7	5.4
93A	Haliwa-Saponi Tribal School	NA	NA	NA	NA	0	0.0
95A	Two Rivers Community School	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
999	NORTH CAROLINA[b]	23,597	6.4	21,368	5.7	20,202	5.3

[b] Including traditional schools

NA: Data were not available NOTE: These data are self-reported by LEAs and charter schools, and N.C. DPI does not conduct audits to validate accuracy. This table was created from the data that were initially released in past years. Any manual corrections to numbers or rates that were made after the initial release of data in any given year are not reflected here.

Excluding Expulsions, for All 100 Counties in North Carolina, *continued*

	2002–03		2003–04		2004–05		2005–06		LEA
	#	Rate	#	Rate	#	Rate	#	Rate	#
	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	01A
	0	0.0	1	1.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	01B
	1	3.8	0	0.0	1	1.5	2	2.4	01C
	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	01D
	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	06A
	3	7.3	2	5.6	1	3.3	2	5.5	06B
	69	38.4	49	30.2	40	24.4	66	32.9	16A
	7	8.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	1.0	19B
	1	3.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	6	5.8	32D
	1	6.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	32J
	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	0	0.0	34D
	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	36B
	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	41C
	1	2.9	0	0.0	2	3.9	2	3.8	53A
	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	1.9	55A
	2	5.3	2	3.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	60C
	64	20.0	28	10.4	10	4.4	16	6.9	60H
	1	0.8	4	2.5	9	5.2	4	2.3	64A
	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	0	0.0	66A
	0	0.0	0	0.0	11	11.0	8	7.3	68N
	1	1.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	81A
	47	25.7	31	22.1	NA	NA	0	0.0	83A
	11	11.5	19	17.8	25	21.4	30	22.6	83B
	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	0	0.0	84B
	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	0	0.0	90A
	21	34.4	20	28.4	50	42.9	96	67.1	92C
	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	92F
	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.7	92G
	0	0.0	1	0.2	4	0.8	3	0.6	92K
	10	7.6	2	1.7	9	7.7	15	13.6	92P
	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	93A
	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	NA	NA	95A
	18,964	4.8	20,035	4.9	20,175	4.7	22,180	5.0	999

(continued from page 117) Mathematica Policy Research in Princeton, New Jersey, describe in detail their attempts to verify the validity and predictive power of the most commonly-referenced indicators of potential dropout risk. Their findings are discouraging: "[R]isk factors commonly used by dropout prevention programs are weak predictors of dropping out.... A program designed to be large enough to serve all future dropouts in a school would end up serving well under half the dropouts if it were to use common risk factors to identify its participants."[81] Their study examined the predictive power of 20 different indicators associated with middle school students dropping out, but even when examining students who exhibited as many as four of these indicators, the predictive power was only 18 percent (i.e., only 18 percent of those students who exhibited all four factors actually eventually dropped out). Mirroring the Education Statistics Access System (ESAS) data used throughout this article, the best single factors for predicting that middle school students would drop out were high absenteeism and students who were over-age for their grades, but their predictive powers were only 15 percent and 14 percent, respectively. In other words, a middle school dropout prevention program that recruits students based on factors like these is populated by a vast majority of students who without intervention would not drop out anyway. High school prediction was better, but even when working with 40 different identifiers, the indicators accurately predicted only about 42 percent of dropouts.[82] Harnett Central High's Capps, who teaches tenth graders, has seen evidence of this phenomenon firsthand. "The students I have taught who drop out are not usually the students who struggle academically," says Capps. "The students who drop out are sometimes very capable of doing their work."

Gleason's and Dynarski's point is not that dropout prevention programs are a waste of time. Rather, they argue that predicting who will drop out of school is excessively difficult and that even the best prevention programs will be inefficient. Without more accurate indicators that a student is likely to drop out, no one program is likely to work for all students.

5. Where Should We Go From Here? Conclusions and Recommendations

Antoine failed almost every class, but he did not drop out. Somewhere along the line, he decided that, no matter what, he was going to pass high school, even after he lost the support of his friend Alex, who seemed to have inspired Antoine to perform better in school (albeit too late in the year), when Alex moved away. Perhaps it was his mother's concern and interest. Perhaps it was the relationships he developed with me and with a few other teachers. Perhaps he discovered something inside himself that none of us knew about. Whatever the reason, Antoine had acquired the one elusive characteristic that might help him see it through to the end—resiliency. At our final meeting after the year had ended, Antoine set his sights clearly on what he needed to do to pass when he returned in August.

North Carolina and the state's public school systems are not sitting by idly while students drop out. In April 2005, the N.C. Department of Public Instruction made a presentation to the State Board of Education in which it outlined several recommended strategies for reducing the dropout rate. These included: developing programs to ease the transition from elementary to middle and from middle to high school; establishing stronger collaborations among agencies that provide services for children and families; reducing suspensions and expulsions; improving student tracking; differentiating instruction; and working on developing smaller learning communities.[83] In addition, there are many efforts to reduce the number of dropouts at the local level, and recent trends suggest that the state as a whole is making some progress. The scope and speed of this progress, however, must be increased, and that is not likely to happen until elimination of the dropout problem is more firmly established as a statewide priority. To arrive at that point, North Carolina must continue to change and improve the ways in which the state measures and reports the dropout rate and the ways in which the N.C. Department of Public Instruction and local school systems encourage students to stay in school.

Recommendation # 1: N.C. Department of Public Instruction and State Board of Education should reform and expand counting and reporting practices regarding dropouts to give a more accurate picture to the public and allow better comparisons nationally.

To the N.C. Department of Public Instruction's credit, its official annual dropout document is very forthright in its explanation of how this state's dropout count is calculated, how the rate has changed over the years, and even how the state continues to fall short in its efforts to eliminate dropout events. The event rate is the ratio of dropout events (occurrences of dropout) to the total student population in a given period of time (usually a full school year). Theoretically, a student could drop out, re-enroll the next year, and drop out again, thus recording two dropout events. As a result, relying purely on event rates could *overestimate* the total number of dropouts. However, the choice to report event rates exclusively may lead to unnecessary confusion. As one federal task force noted, "No single indicator of graduation, completion, or dropouts can serve all purposes."[84] For example, for the same year in which North Carolina reported its lowest dropout event in recent years (3.23 percent in 2003–04), the Annie E. Casey Foundation in its annual *Kids Count* report cited North Carolina as having one of the highest rates in the nation of 16 to 19-year-olds without high school diplomas and not enrolled in school (9 percent). No wonder the public is confused. First and foremost, therefore, North Carolina's Department of Public Instruction and State Board of Education should demonstrate national leadership in public education by reporting multiple high school completion totals and rates

annually in addition to the current dropout event rate, with coherent explanations of each. These rates and totals should include:

- **Completion Rates** and Total—The state should use the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey methodology (percentage of persons under 24 not graduated and not enrolled); and

- **Cohort Rates** and Total—The state should use the four-year cohort graduation rate released by N.C. DPI in February 2007.[85] The state should track four-year cohort dropout rates as well.

While a status rate is somewhat different from a true cohort rate, the N.C. Department of Public Instruction does not need to report this rate as well. The cohort rate serves a purpose similar to that of the status rate, it is more accurate, and the presentation of too many reported rates may obscure rather than clarify the dropout picture for citizens and policymakers. In addition and where possible, the state should disaggregate each rate by the same federal No Child Left Behind categories it uses to report state Accountability, Basics, and Control (ABCs) achievement testing data (ethnicity, gender, and special populations), just as it already does for the data contained in the state's Education Statistics Access System.

Recommendation # 2: The N.C. Department of Public Instruction should improve its data collection system to enhance the way local school systems, schools, social workers, and guidance counselors report reasons for students dropping out of school.

Elizabeth Glennie, the director of the North Carolina Education Research Data Center, believes that the state is already a leader in its data collection and management. However, even with the recommended change above, the system will still have plenty of room for improvement in the area of dropout data. "Given that students leave school for different reasons, the first thing I'd want to do is learn more about who is leaving for what reasons," she says, adding that one major help would be "having standards for the ways in which items are reported," including "having a definition of what the [dropout reason codes] mean."

Counselors and other local school personnel sometimes cite general lack of attendance as a reason for students dropping out when in almost every instance there is a more specific reason. In some local school districts, general attendance is cited when the person who records the data does not know a student's actual reason for dropping out. This hurts educators' ability to understand why students are dropping out and tailor efforts to keep students in school. Thus, the N.C. Department of Public Instruction should stop accepting "general attendance" as a reason for students dropping out of school, issue standards and definitions for the codes for dropping out, and require local school systems to be more specific in their documentation and reporting.

Recommendation # 3: The N.C. General Assembly's Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee should study the impact of raising the compulsory attendance age to 18 as part of a policy of encouraging as many students as possible to complete high school.

North Carolina can eliminate at least one of its factors pushing students to drop out by revising the state's compulsory attendance law. As mentioned earlier, students are required to attend school until age 16 in North Carolina. If a 17-year-old leaves school without a diploma, she or he is still considered a dropout and is counted as such, but there is no legal impetus to stay in school. While there may be circumstances under which a student should legally be granted the opportunity to drop out before the age of 18, this state and others with an early dropout age send the message that

adulthood (as indicated by the right to choose to stay in school or to leave and join the work force) begins at age 16, even though the guarantee of state-provided schooling continues for most students until the age of 18. The message became less mixed with the passage of the dropout prevention driver's license law of 1998, which applies to all students under the age of 18, not 16,[86] but that policy alone is not enough.

The N.C. Department of Public Instruction recommended in April 2005 that the State Board of Education look into the possibility of increasing the mandatory attendance age.[87] In the 2007 legislative session, bills have been introduced to raise the compulsory school attendance age to 17 (S.B. 171) and to 18 (H.B. 1474). Some states have long had a compulsory attendance age of 18 (such as Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin), and several states recently have raised the compulsory attendance age to 18, including New Mexico, Louisiana, and Texas. The majority of states now have a compulsory attendance age of at least 17. While it is too early to determine the effect these changes have had on the dropout rates of states that have most recently changed the compulsory age, evidence from states with an established age of 18 is promising.[88] The dropout rates for Minnesota and Wisconsin are the second and third lowest in the nation. One early study cited evidence that compulsory schooling does constrain some students from dropping out who would have chosen to drop out otherwise, and that there is "a greater decline in the enrollment of sixteen-year olds in states that permit sixteen-year olds to leave school than in states that compel sixteen-year olds to attend school."[89] Student respondents to a more recent survey about dropouts that was sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation suggested that having "too much freedom" was a factor in decisions to drop out, and that institution of more rigorous requirements and oversight would reduce their willingness to drop out.[90] By all measures, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin—all of which have long had a compulsory attendance age of 18—experience lower dropout rates than does North Carolina. The common denominator for these three states is compulsory school attendance until age 18.

Recommendation # 4: The N.C. Department of Public Instruction should consider revising and updating the high school curricula by increasing real-world elements such as service learning, internships, and career exploration with an eye toward adding relevance and increasing the number of students who stay in school. At the same time, the department must maintain academic rigor for all students.

One factor that is pushing students out of school but which is difficult to identify and eliminate is a lack of relevancy for some students in the state's Standard Course of Study. The curriculum is currently weighted more toward college-bound students and sets admirable standards for the expectations we have for all students, but unless and until schools do a better job of making college a possibility for all students, curricula and graduation requirements must be *relevant* and *meaningful* to the large population of non-college-bound students.

John Reimer, an alternative school counselor in Caldwell County and president of the North Carolina Dropout Prevention Association, sees a connection between the dropout rate, school curricula, and the shrinking economic opportunities in many areas of the state that are still tied to tobacco, textiles, furniture, and declining manufacturing. Now that schools are turning their attention with more regularity to testing, Reimer says students are spending more days during the school year learning how to master tests rather than learning how to learn and how to be resilient in a rapidly-changing economic landscape. "Resilience is what keeps kids bouncing back," Reimer says, whether at school or at work, and if school does not provide students with the tools necessary to be successful at work, they will see little reason to stay. Senator Stan Bingham agrees. He says students with little to connect to in school are sometimes only one failing experience away from losing sight of the value of

schooling. "It's almost as if you fall off the cliff, you make a mistake, and then you're doomed."

Recent experiments statewide with Early College, Middle College, and the New Schools Project are positive steps toward addressing this concern about curriculum, but they are not yet available statewide, and there is as yet little data to indicate how successful these programs ultimately will be. Research indicates that high school dropouts long for opportunities for real world learning that would make the classroom more relevant, including internships and service learning. The N.C. Department of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education need to incorporate more of these kinds of experiences for students that society has deemed less likely to succeed.

Recommendation # 5: The N.C. General Assembly should require the N.C. Department of Public Instruction to formally evaluate all existing dropout prevention programs and policies and appropriate funds for this evaluation.

Many of the programs and practices described in this article are wonderful examples of the varied and creative approaches that local school districts are taking to address the dropout problem, but too little hard evidence has been accumulated to establish what works. Without hard data on program and policy effectiveness, progress toward a comprehensive statewide plan for reducing and eliminating the dropout problem will be limited. To date, evidence on the effectiveness of dropout prevention programs is somewhat sketchy.

Recommendation # 6: Once the N.C. Department of Public Instruction completes its research, and it should do so by 2009, the Center recommends that DPI require each local school system develop a research-based Dropout Prevention Plan that addresses the unique needs of its local population and incorporates the resources in its own community.

A running theme throughout this article has been that a student's decision to drop out is often the product of a long series of events and circumstances, and, consequently, that it will take more than one type of dropout prevention intervention to stem the dropout tide statewide. As researchers Gleason and Dynarski warn, there is a history of unsuccessful or only moderately successful dropout prevention programs, from the local level to the federal level. For example, the School Dropout Demonstration Assistance Program, which was funded by the federal government between 1988 and 1995, supported dozens of local dropout prevention programs, but none of them showed more than mixed results, and several showed no impact at all.[91] Also, most programs address only student-related factors; few attempt to address the many family-related factors that data suggest also contribute to a student's decision to drop out.

Senate Bill 408, sponsored by Senator Bingham and passed by the 2005 General Assembly,[92] required the State Board of Education to "review the research for best practices, effective policies, and model programs" around the country in reducing the dropout rate and the number of suspended students. "Look at the top performing schools in the country [and learn] what courses they are teaching," says Bingham. "What is New Jersey doing? What is Arizona doing? I want the Board to go to other states and see what they are doing. Why waste our time *imagining* what *should be* when there are programs out there that [already] work?" In response, the N.C. Department of Public Instruction prepared a 30-page report delivered to the State Board of Education in December 2005 and the legislature's Joint Education Oversight Committee in January 2006. The report provides a checklist of efforts in other states and paragraph-long descriptions of what are labeled model programs. While a good first step, the report fell short of the sort of evaluative research Bingham advocated.

Such research would provide an excellent foundation for the Dropout Prevention Plans recommended by the Center for local education agencies. For many LEAs, such

plans may be nothing more than formal declarations of the coordinated and thoughtful work already taking place, but for several other districts it could provide the impetus for the development of a long-needed roadmap. In any case, DPI and the State Board of Education need to focus LEAs on the effort to develop research-based dropout prevention plans.

* * *

All of these recommendations point in one common direction, and that is toward first raising awareness of the problem of students dropping out and then encouraging broader statewide engagement in reducing the number of dropouts in North Carolina. The numbers are going down, but reducing and ultimately eliminating the dropout problem is beyond the reach of schools alone. In many of its recommendations to the State Board of Education, the N.C. Department of Public Instruction acknowledges the role the wider community must play,[93] and in order to bring the problem to its knees, dropouts should receive the same kind of sweeping attention that student achievement on standardized tests has garnered in recent years. Until the state provides more and better data, until more people both in and out of schools work on the problem, until the dropout issue becomes a statewide concern, and until individualized and creative programs saturate our schools and communities, North Carolina will continue to lose the potential of thousands of children who drop out every year.

FOOTNOTES

[1] A dropout event is not the same as a dropout. Each time a student drops out, whether he or she has dropped out before, the event is counted as a dropout. Therefore, the total number of students who dropped out between 1999 and 2006 is lower than the total number of dropout events, but, because North Carolina only reports events, there are no data available to determine the number of students.

[2] For the 2003–04 school year, 9 percent of North Carolina's 16-to-19-year-olds did not have a high school degree or a General Educational Development certificate and were not enrolled in school. From: "Percent of teens who are high school dropouts," 2006 Kids Count Data Book Online, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore, Md., 2006, p. 45, on the Internet at *http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/sld/db06_pdfs/entire_db.pdf.* States ranking lower than North Carolina were: Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina, ranked 41st; Arizona, Nevada, and Tennessee, tied at 45th; Georgia and New Mexico, tied at 49th; and Indiana, ranked 50th.

[3] In an interview with Jessica Jones that aired on public radio station WUNC-FM, Chapel Hill, N.C., February 2005.

[4] U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2004–2005,* Indicator Number 608.

[5] U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey, 2004,* Table 9.

[6] Daria Hall, *Getting Honest About Grad Rates: How States Play the Numbers and Students Lose,* The Education Trust, Washington, D.C., 2005, p. 2 (statistics cited from the United States Census and the Department of Justice); "School Dropouts: Education Could Play a Stronger Role in Identifying and Disseminating Promising Prevention Strategies," U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO-02-240), Washington, D.C., 2002, p. 1.

[7] J. Catteral (1985), cited in Hoor Bhanpuri and Ginger M. Reynolds, *Understanding and Addressing the Issue of High School Dropout Age,* Learning Point Associates, Naperville, Ill., 2003, pp. 3–4.

[8] Each of the four School Snapshots in this article is based on events that transpired in the author's high school classroom during the 2004–05 school year. The names have been changed, but the events themselves are unaltered.

[9] USGAO (2002), pp. 12–13; Beth A. Young, *Public High School Dropouts and Completers from the Common Core of Data: School Year 2000–01* (NCES 2004–310), National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C., 2003, p. 15.

[10] Both figures are derived from data available in the *Education Statistics Access System* [ESAS], Financial and Business Services, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. Data retrieved June 15, 2005, March 3, 2006, and February 8, 2007 from *http://www.ncpublicschools.org/fbs/reports.htm.*

[11] This calculation does not make corrections for certain conditions and events that would alter the final result, such as students who repeat a grade, or overall relative growth or reduction in a county's school-aged population. Those factors alone, however, do not account for the total difference between the number of students who were enrolled in the 8th grade in 2001 and the number of students who started 12th grade in the 2005–06 school year.

[12] Phillip Kaufman and Christopher D. Chapman, *Dropout Rates in the United States: 2001* (NCES 2005-046), National Center for Education Statistics, U. S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C., 2004, Table 8A, pp. 41–42.

[13] The 2002 GAO report cited in note 6 above stated that "no one measure is ideal for all situations" (p. 12). A recent federal task force established to resolve the counting issue, the Committee on Educational Excellence and Testing Equity, also noted that "no single indicator of graduation, completion, or dropouts can serve all purposes." (National Research Council, *Understanding Dropouts: Statistics, Strategies, and High-Stakes Testing* [NCES 2005-105]. Alexandra Beatty, Ulric Neisser, William T. Trent, and Jay P. Heubert, Editors, National Academy Press, Washington, D.C., 2001, p. 12).

[14] *Dropout Data Report, 2003–2004,* N.C. Department of Public Instruction, Raleigh, N.C., 2005, p. iii. Averaging attendance over two years accommodates for student population growth during the school year of record. "School year" means from the first day of school to the last day of summer vacation before the next school year. Thus, students who drop out over the summer are counted against the previous school year's dropout total. Also, students who are first-time enrollees in an LEA and who do not remain enrolled for more than 20 days are not counted as dropouts. This exemption keeps LEAs from being held responsible for highly transient students, according to DPI.

[15] Michael J. McLaughlin, "High school dropouts: How much of a crisis?" *Backgrounder,* The Heritage Foundation, Washingon, D.C., August 3, 1990, No. 781. On the Internet at *http://www.heritage.org/Research/Education/BG781.cfm.* Also see Paul E. Barton, *One-Third of a Nation: Rising Dropout Rates and Declining Opportunities,* Educational Testing Service, Princeton, N.J., February 2005, p. 31. On the Internet at *http://www.ets.org/media/onethird.pdf.*

[16] Quoted in Jay P. Greene, *High School Graduation Rates in the United States,* The Manhattan Institute, New York, N.Y., 2002, p. 6.

[17] Duncan Chaplin, *GEDs for Teenagers: Are There Unintended Consequences?* The Urban Institute, Washington, D.C., 1999, p. 8. On the Internet at *http://urban.org/uploadedPDF/GED/pdf.*

[18] Donna W. James (ed.) with Sonia Jurich, *More Things That Do Make a Difference for Youth: A Compendium of Evaluations of Youth Programs and Practices, Volume II,* American Youth Policy Forum, Washington, D.C., 1999, p. 123. On the Internet at *http://www.aypf.org/compendium/index.html.*

[19] Chaplin, note 17 above, pp. 3–4, 21; Chaplin notes that when states require parent permission to

take the GED, the high school completion rate rises (p. 28).

[20] Barton, note 15 above, p. 32.

[21] Young, note 9 above, p. 4.

[22] *Ibid.* at Table 5.

[23] *Dropout Data Collecting and Reporting Procedures Manual,* N.C. Department of Public Instruction, Raleigh, N.C., 2004, pp. 3–4.

[24] Paul E. Barton, *Unfinished Business: More Measured Approaches in Standards-Based Reform,* Educational Testing Service, Princeton, N.J., 2005, Table 4, p. 46.; and Hall, note 6 above, pp. 5–6.

[25] *Ibid.* at pp. 47–48.

[26] *Ibid.* at p. 46.

[27] Kaufman *et al.,* note 12 above, pp. 41–42.

[28] DPI will need to retain the original rate for at least one additional year in order to be able to calculate what is known as "safe harbor" status for schools, a condition that allows a school to meet NCLB Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) goals if it demonstrates notable improvement from the previous year in a certain statistical area by at least 10 percent, even if it falls below the expected standard for a given statistical category.

[29] Barton, note 24 above, p. 52.

[30] Data from N.C. DPI (2006). Dropout Prevention & Reporting, School Improvement Division. Retrieved March 1, 2006, from *http://www.ncpublicschools.org/schoolimprovement/effective/dropout/.* Also see *Annual Report on Dropout Events and Rates.* Report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee. February 2007. Retrieved February 2007 from *http://www.ncpublicschools.org/schoolimprovement/effective/dropout/.*

[31] Even though data for 1998–1999 are available, I have limited my data analyses in this section and ones that follow to school years 1999–2000 and up because the dropout rate was only incorporated into the state's accountability model as of the 1999–2000 school year.

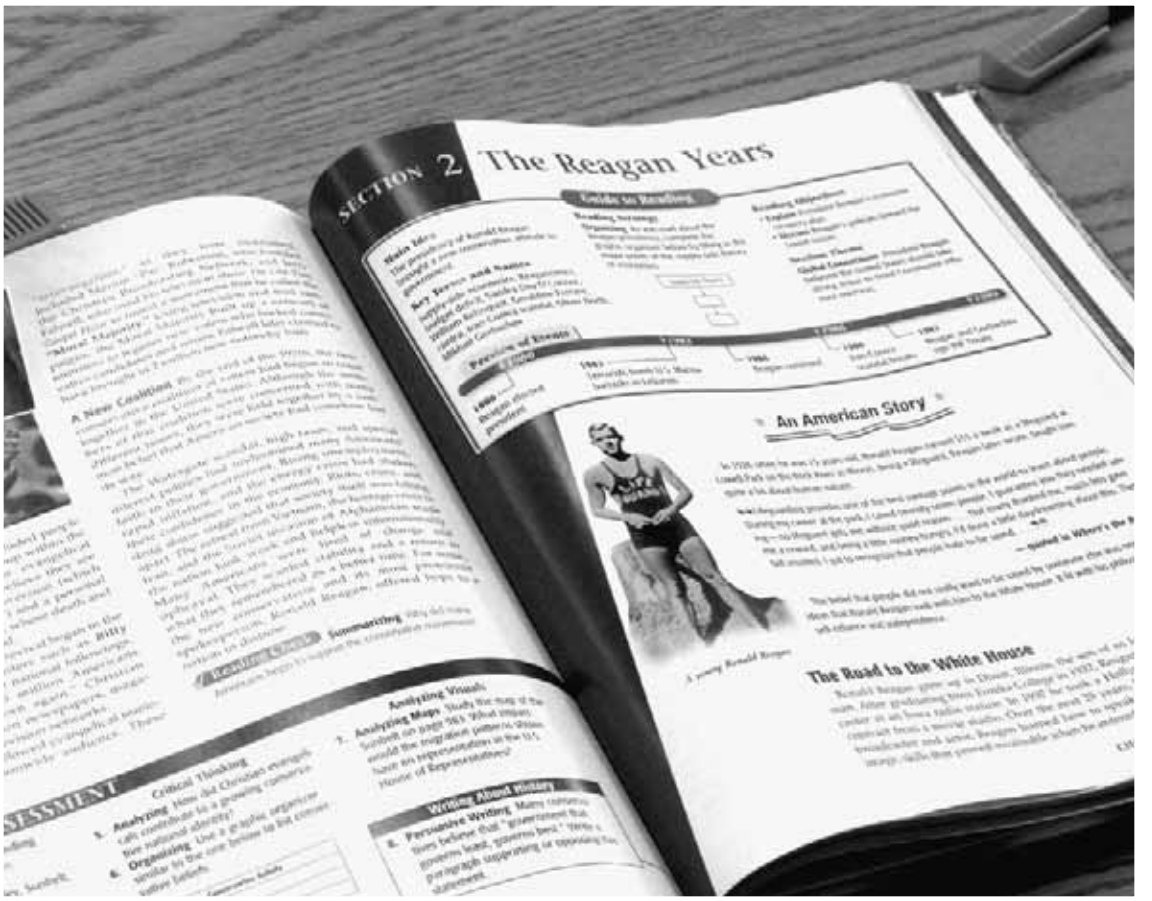
[32] Walt Haney *et al., The Education Pipeline in the United States 1970–2000,* The National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy, Boston College, Boston, Mass., 2004, pp. 10–11, p. 13 (Table 2).

[33] Data from N.C. Department of Public Instruction, Dropout Prevention and Reporting, School Improvement Division. Retrieved March 1, 2006, from *http//:www.ncpublicschools.org/schoolimprovement/effective/dropout/.* Also see *Annual Report on Dropout Events and Rates.* Report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee. February 2007. Retrieved February 2007 from *http://www.ncpublicschools.org/schoolimprovement/effective/dropout/.*

[34] ESAS, note 10 above.

[35] Greene used a modified *cohort* rate approach.

[36] Greene, note 16 above, pp. 3, 11, 12, and 16. Of the 50 largest school districts in the na-



tion, North Carolina has only two—Charlotte-Mecklenburg and Wake County—and their graduation rates were ranked 22nd and 18th, respectively. All data are for 1998.

[37] Young, note 9 above, Table 3.

[38] *Annual Report on Dropout Events and Rates,* see note 30 above, figure 6, p. 8. For 2005–06, the rate for Caucasian students was 4.40 percent and the rate for Asian students was only 2.71 percent.

[39] U.S. General Accounting Office, note 6 above, p. 13.

[40] *Annual Report on Dropout Events and Rates,* see note 30 above, figure 9, p. 10.

[41] U.S. General Accounting Office, note 6, above, p. 16.

[42] Michelle Fine, *Framing Dropouts: Notes on the Politics of an Urban Public High School,* State University of New York Press, Albany, N.Y., 1991, p. 182.

[43] U.S. General Accounting Office, note 6 above, p. 15; Haney *et al.,* note 32 above, pp. 53–55; Will J. Jordan, Julia Lara, and James M. McPartland, *Exploring the Complexity of Early Dropout Causal Structures,* Johns Hopkins University Center for Research on Effective Schooling for Disadvantaged Students, Baltimore, Md., 1994, CDS Report No. 48, pp. 1–33.

[44] Camilla A. Lehr *et al.*, *Essential Tools: Increasing Rates of School Completion: Moving from Policy and Research to Practice,* National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, ICI Publications, Minneapolis, Minn., 2004, pp. 12–13.

[45] Russell W. Rumberger, *Why Students Drop Out of School and What Can Be Done,* University of California, Santa Barbara, Calif., 2000, pp. 12–13.

[46] *Ibid.* at pp. 14–15, Lehr *et al.* (2004), note 44 above, pp. 12–13.

[47] M. Gail Jones, Brett D. Jones, and Tracy Y. Hargrave. *The Unintended Consequences of High-Stakes Testing,* Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Lanham, Md., June 2003, p. 130.

[48] Haney *et al.,* note 32 above, p. 16.

[49] Jones *et al.,* note 47 above, pp. 129–130.

[50] See, for example, Haney *et al.,* note 32 above, pp. 49–51.

[51] For more on *No Child Left Behind* and North Carolina's compliance with the legislation, see Trip Stallings, "Pass/Fail: Meeting the Challenges of the State ABC and Federal 'No Child Left Behind' Accountability Programs," *North Carolina Insight,* Vol. 21, No. 3, August 2004, pp. 32–57.

[52] Haney *et al.,* note 32 above, pp. 53–55.

[53] On the Internet at *http://www.ncpublicschools.org/fbs/resources/data/esas/.*

[54] The reasons for dropping out described in this section are solicited from students when possible, but when not possible, they are provided by data managers and/or dropout prevention counselors. As such, these data only represent *reported* reasons for dropping out and are subject to various biases on the part of both students and counselors (including differences in reporting tendencies across LEAs and even across schools). *(Dropout Data Report,* note 14 above, p. 18.) Finally, the largest category, Attendance (General), is in many ways a catch-all category that some data managers use when precise reasons for dropout are not known (Elizabeth Stearns and Elizabeth Glennie, "When and Why Dropouts Leave School," *Youth and Society,* Vol. 38, Issue 9, pp. 29–57 (2006)). Thus, a student whose reason for dropping out is reported as Attendance (General) may in fact belong in one of the other attendance-related categories (Work, Family, and School), or even another dropout category altogether. A more rigorous analysis and discussion of these data can be found in the Stearns and Glennie article.

[55] Donna W. James and Cheryl Donahue, Eds. (1999). *Some Things Do Make a Difference for Youth.* Washington, D.C.: American Youth Policy Forum. Retrieved 17 May, 2006, from *http://www.aypf.org/publications/compendium/comp01.pdf.*

[56] Dan Linton, Jr., Louis Moser, Christina Holden, and Susan Siegel. (2006). 2004–2005 *Results from the CIS Network.* Alexandria, Va.: Communities in Schools.

[57] The 2006 N.C. General Assembly enacted S.B. 571, "School Counselors and Dropout Prevention/Study," which requires the State Board of Education to report on the role school counselors play in providing dropout prevention and intervention services to secondary students.

[58] In past years, each secondary school had a designated dropout prevention counselor.

[59] Brian Kleiner, Rebecca Porch, and Elizabeth Farris, *Public Alternative Schools and Programs for Students at Risk of Education Failure: 2000–01,* National Center for Education Statistics, Washington, D.C., 2002, pp. iii–iv and 6.

[60] Debbie Cenziper and Ted Mellnik, "How North Carolina Creates More Dropouts," *The Charlotte Observer.* Charlotte, N.C., Dec. 17, 2001, p. 1A. On the Internet at *http://www.bridges4kids.org/articles/12-03/CharObserver12-17-01.html.*

[61] Barton, note 15 above, p. 21.

[62] Kleiner *et al.,* note 59 above, p. 26.

[63] Rhonda Carpenter, "Duke Endowment Gives to Help EYA's North Carolina Youth Succeed," *Eckerd Youth Alternatives* Website, July 7, 2005. On the Internet at *http://www.eckerd.org/NewsCenter/pressreleases05/Duke_Endowment_Help_EYA_NC.html.*

[64] *Dropout Data Collecting and Reporting Procedures Manual,* note 23 above, pp. 4 and 27.

[65] Eckerd Youth Alternatives. (2004). *Eckerd Wilderness Educational System Evaluation Report—Fiscal Year 2003: North Carolina.*

[66] Tom Murphy, "Dropout program seeks aid—RBC Centura aims to help lower rates," *The Rocky Mount Telegram,* Rocky Mount, N.C., June 9, 2005, p. 1A.

[67] John M. Bridgeland *et al., The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts,* Civic Enterprise in Association with Peter D. Hart Research Associates for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Washington, D.C., March 2006, p. 6.

[68] *Ibid.* at p. 13.

[69] Governor Michael Easley, Address to the 18th Annual Meeting of the North Carolina Education Governing Boards, Duke University, Durham, N.C., February 16, 2006. See *http://www.newschoolsproject.org* or call 919-277-3760 for more information.

[70] Thomas Bailey and Melinda Mechur Karp, *Promoting College Access and Success: A Review of Credit-Based Transition Programs,* Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C., 2003, pp. 1 *ff.*

[71] Katherine L. Hughes, Melinda Mechur Karp, Baranda J. Fermin, and Thomas R. Bailey, *Pathways to College Access and Success.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education.

[72] Bailey *et al.,* note 70 above.

[73] Hughes *et al.,* note 71 above.

[74] Jacqueline Ancess and Suzanna Ort Wichterle, *Making School Completion Integral to School and Design,* National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching, New York, N.Y., 2001, pp. 17–22. On the Internet at *http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/dropouts/ancess.pdf.* The major elements of schools successful at reducing the number of dropouts, according to these authors, are: smaller class sizes with lower student-teacher ratios; smaller school sizes; portfolio assessments (i.e., assessments based on a historical collection of a student's work) instead of test-only assessments; a shared sense of school as an intellectual community; and staff members who are committed to the school mission.

[75] Easley, note 69 above. In addition to Easley's comments, New Schools official Tony Habit projected 150 such small schools programs by 2008 at the February meeting of the Governor's Education Cabinet. Paul Bonner, "State Plan Gives Students Level Playing Field.," *The Durham Herald-Sun,* February 17, 2006, pp. A1 and A2.

[76] Session Law 2005-276 (S.B. 622), Section 7.52.(a).

[77] N.C.G.S. 20-11.

[78] N.C.G.S. 20-11; North Carolina Community College System, *Dropout prevention/driver's license guidelines,* Raleigh, N.C., 1998, p. 3.

[79] Lehr *et al.,* note 44 above, p. 18.

[80] Haney *et al.,* note 32 above, p. 10.

[81] Philip Gleason and Mark Dynarski. "Do We Know Whom To Serve? Issues in Using Risk Factors to Identify Dropouts," *Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk,* University of Louisville, Louisville, Ky., Volume 7, No. 1, 2002, p. 26.

[82] *Ibid.* at pp. 34 and 37.

[83] Marvin Pittman *et al., SBE Issues Session: Dropout Prevention, Suspensions/Expulsions and Related Issues,* Presentation to the North Carolina State Board of Education, Raleigh, N.C., April 6, 2005.

[84] Committee on Educational Excellence and Testing Equity, note 13 above, p. 9.

[85] The federal Task Force endorses this method for all performance indicators, including graduation, completion by alternative or additional means, transfer, and dropout statistics. *Ibid.* at p. 4.

[86] N.C.G.S. 20-11.

[87] Pittman *et al.,* note 83 above.

[88] Bhanpuri and Reynolds, note 7 above, p. 6; for example, the dropout rates for Minnesota and Wisconsin are the 2nd and 3rd lowest in the country.

[89] Joshua D. Angrist and Alan B. Krueger. (1991). Does compulsory school attendance affect schooling and earnings? *The Quarterly Journal of Economics,* 106(4), 979–1014.

[90] John M. Bridgeland, John J. DiIulio, Jr., and Karen Burke Morison. (2006). *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts.* Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Retrieved May 17, 2006, from *http://www.gatesfoundation.org/nr/downloads/ed/TheSilentEpidemic3-06FINAL.pdf.*

[91] GAO, note 6 above, p. 4. Federal dropout prevention funding was continued under NCLB as the School Dropout Prevention Program, but there are as yet no comprehensive studies of its effectiveness.

[92] Session Law 2005-271 (S.B. 408).

[93] Among the recommendations were strategies for raising public awareness of dropout prevention, involving faith communities in the discussion, and increasing the role social workers play in reducing dropouts (Pittman *et al.,* note 83 above).

A QUIZ

In May 2005, the North Carolina State House of Representatives hired its first historian. The historian spent 20 months writing a report on the Speakers of the House that served our state from 1963 through 2006. The historian never finished the task, but the 23-page report cost taxpayers $80,000. One page of the report contains only a reference to lyrics from a song sung by the Hall of Fame rock band The Who. Just that page cost taxpayers $3,478.26. Several errors in the report also caught our attention. Here's a quiz to see just how closely you read the report. . . .

1. Which famous song by The Who is quoted in the report?
   A. Pinball Wizard
   B. Eyesight to the Blind
   C. Little Billy
   D. Won't Get Fooled Again

2. What shapes the climate of North Carolina?
   A. Forces of nature
   B. The topography of the state
   C. Global warming
   D. The Speakers of the House of Representatives

3. One of former House Speaker Jimmy Green's tobacco warehouses was destroyed by fire. His associate was _____ for arson. Fill in the blank.
   A. Indicted
   B. Ignited
   C. Idealized
   D. Implemented

4. When is power a wonderful thing?
   A. When you have lost electricity.
   B. On the basketball court.
   C. At a monster truck rally.
   D. When used to make life better for the majority.

5. What do people at the legislature have in common?
   A. They are *homo sapiens.*
   B. They live and work in North Carolina.
   C. They frequent the legislative cafeteria for lunch.
   D. Who knows?

The Speaker

"Meet the new boss, same as the old boss."

The Who

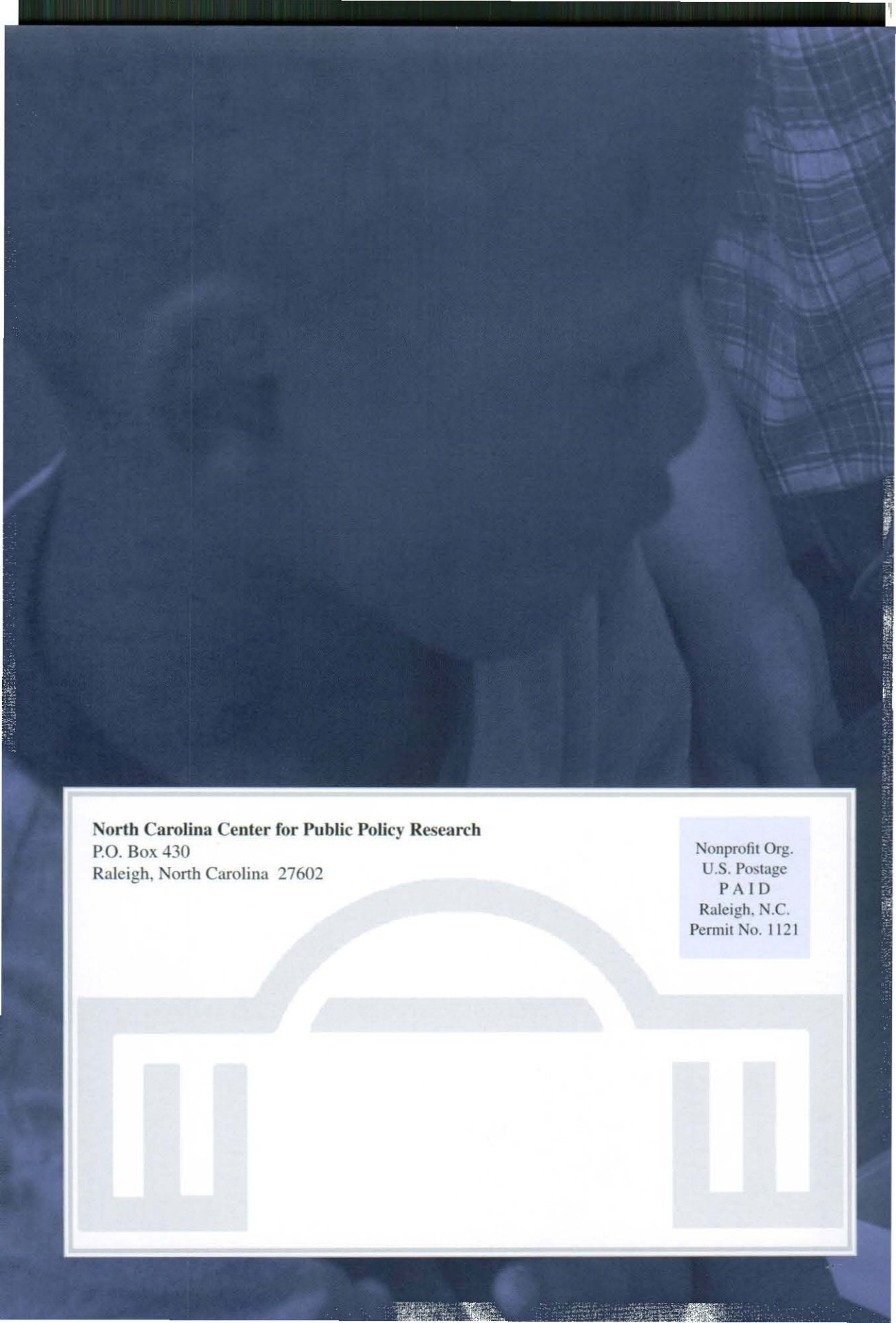
and with each session the speaker has contributed their share of history. With this journal you will find a comucopia of personalities which reflect distinctive leadership styles. The unique creativity of each speaker helps to determine the outcome of the laws on North Carolina. Each has shared their ability and skill to shape the climate of North Carolina. With their help North Carolina has grown to be the state that she is. Through the years North Carolina has gone back in history to once again become one of the more

Note. In the 1990's Green's tobacco business was in trouble. Several of his warehouses had burned and were totally destroyed. Prior to this incident another warehouse had been destroyed by fire and one of his associates was implemented for arson. Now, Green and his son were under investigation. After a highly publicized trial, his son was convicted of arson and received a short prison term. Jimmy Green was convicted for tax evasion in 1997 and served his conviction in house arrest for several years.

Power is a wonderful thing when used to make life better for the majority...

Entering the front doors, of the large, white North Carolina Legislative Building on Jones Street can be overwhelming. Finding ones way around can be confusing. Some people seem to just belong; some are like a guest who will never leave, while others never quite feel as if they are welcomed. Taking a step into the world of the legislature can draw you into another example of human nature. Nothing quite fits. Here you will discover people from all backgrounds. Together they have one common element. But, to this day I have yet to figure out what it is. Being a part of the legislature can either be happy and rewarding or it can be mean and

The answer to each question is D. Makes us wonder what kind of grade this report would receive on the North Carolina Writing Assessment required for 10th graders.



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