
News Release: What Do the Top 10 Charter Schools for Student Growth Have in Common?

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What Do the Top 10 Charter Schools for Student Growth Have in Common?

Nearly all of them serve very high proportions of economically disadvantaged, non-white students. And they're crushing it.

"If you're a parent or a politician or a taxpayer, this is a big reason you back public charter schools."

Durham, NC – In the Durham neighborhood surrounding Reaching All Minds Academy, per-capita income is just half the Durham average. One-in-five residents live below the poverty line, and nearly a quarter hail from Latin America.

Not every student at the public charter school comes from the neighborhood, but it's a good stand-in for the student body. Almost every student is economically disadvantaged. The vast majority, 73%, is Hispanic.

And they're excelling.

Reaching All Minds Academy is the **No. 3-ranked** public charter school in the state for student growth this year, and student performance reached the highest level since the school's founding **a decade ago**. Even though the school has a far higher proportion of economically disadvantaged students than Durham County at large, its third-graders performed better than their Durham peers on the Read to Achieve benchmark.

It's a similar story for the other top-student-growth public charter schools in North Carolina. None of them has a majority-white student body, and seven of the top 10 have economically disadvantaged student populations above 60%.

"If you're a parent or a politician or a taxpayer, this is a big reason you back public charter schools," said Bruce Friend, chair of the Charter Schools Review Board.

Kids from tough backgrounds usually enter school further behind academically than their peers from well-off families. Schools that serve economically disadvantaged students, then, have a higher "ceiling" for student growth simply because their student body usually starts behind academically.

"Of course there's no guarantee students *will* grow – it's a challenge for any school," said Dave Machado, executive director of the NC Coalition for Charter Schools. "The charter schools that do record high student growth are clearly doing something right, and they're often doing it under challenging circumstances. We should look to their example."

The top 10 public charter schools for academic growth in the 2024-25 academic year are:

1. Institute for the Development of Young Leaders (Durham County) | Economically Disadvantaged: 56%
2. Durham Charter School (Durham County) | Economically Disadvantaged: 71%
3. Reaching All Minds Academy (Durham County) | Economically Disadvantaged: 94%
4. Triangle Math and Science Academy (Wake County) | Economically Disadvantaged: 11%
5. The Sallie B. Howard School (Wilson County) | Economically Disadvantaged: 63%
6. KIPP Gaston College Preparatory (Northampton County) | Economically Disadvantaged: 72%
7. Sugar Creek Charter (Mecklenburg County) | Economically Disadvantaged: 64%
8. Wilson Preparatory Academy (Wilson County) | Economically Disadvantaged: 66%
9. Henderson Collegiate (Vance County) | Economically Disadvantaged: 70%
10. Math and Science Academy of Apex (Wake County) | Economically Disadvantaged: 6%

Two schools on this list – Triangle Math and Science Academy and the Math and Science Academy of Apex – ranked in the top-10 North Carolina charter schools for both growth *and* performance, which is a remarkable achievement.

(Note: Academic growth data was compiled by the Office of Charter Schools and is for the 2024-25 school year. Data on the proportion of economically disadvantaged students is taken from the SAS dashboard and is current as of the 2023-24 school year.)

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