



NYC charter school students outscore public school peers on state English, math exams

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They're on a roll.

New York City charter school students [outscored their public school peers](#) on the state's standardized reading and math exams for grades 3-8 last academic year, a new analysis reveals.

The gap was particularly glaring [among black and Hispanic students](#), with those at charters scoring leaps beyond their counterparts in public schools, according to the study.

"These are startlingly large gaps that demand further investigation," the non-profit New York City Charter School Center said [in its analysis](#).

Overall, charter school students scored 7 percentage points higher on the English Language Arts (ELA) exam, with 59% passing versus 52% at schools run by the city Department of Education.

On the math exam, charter kids overall scored 13 percentage points higher — a 63% pass rate compared to 50% at public schools.

Black charter school students outperformed their district counterparts by 19 percentage points — 59% vs. 40% — on the ELA and by 27 percentage points on the math exam, 61% vs. 34%.

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Hispanic charter school kids outperformed their public school peers by 16 percentage points (55% vs. 39%) in English and by 25 percentage points (61% vs. 36%) in math.

Students at city charter schools outscored their public school peers on state standardized reading and math exams for grades 3-8 last academic year:

English Language Arts exam:

59 percent of charter students passed

52 percent of public school students passed

Math exam:

63 percent of charter students passed

50 percent of public school students passed

About a third — 32% — of charter school kids with disabilities passed the ELA and 40% made the grade in math, compared to 22% and 24% of traditional school students with special needs.

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The city now has 274 charter schools — privately managed and publicly funded— serving 142,500 students, or about 15% of those enrolled in public schools.

Many have a longer school day and school year, set their own curriculum and operate outside the powerful teachers' union contract.

Ninety percent of students enrolled in city charter schools are black and Hispanic, 80% come from low-income families and nearly 20% have special needs.

“For 25 years, New York City families have trusted charter schools with preparing their children for success in and out of the classroom, and it’s no surprise as to why: charter school students — many of whom come from historically underserved communities — consistently close proficiency gaps, outperform their peers, and excel year after year,” said James Merriman, CEO of the NYC Charter School Center.

Among other key findings of the analysis:

- Students at Success Academy — the city’s largest charter school network, with 56 schools — notched an 80.4% pass rate in English and 92.7% pass rate in math.
- Two Success Academy schools — Harlem 4 and SA Bensonhurst — posted 100% pass rates.
- At the four Classical Charter Schools in the South Bronx, 90% passed the English test and 97.7% excelled on the math exam.

“We are delighted that so many Classical scholars performed successfully on the recent ELA and math tests. This achievement is particularly noteworthy as it extends to our English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities,” said Classical founder and executive director Lester Long.

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“The fact that these special populations excelled on these tests is a testament to our rigorous, data-based, and inclusive program,” he added.

The Zeta Charter Schools network, which operates seven schools in the Bronx and northern Manhattan, also fared well — 87% of students passed the math test and 76% exceeded standards in ELA.

Zeta founder and CEO Emily Kim stressed that her schools have strong arts, music, sports and chess programs to go along with teaching core subjects such as English, math and science.

“Our 2023 scores show that our dual focus on rigorous academics and whole-child education is what students need to excel and reach their limitless potential,” Kim said.

Both charter schools and public schools [notched higher scores](#) on the state tests this year compared to 2022.

Schools Chancellor David Banks previously announced the citywide results — with the percentage of kids passing ELA up 3 points and math up 11 points.

The charter sector saw even larger gains in proficiency rates in math between 2022 and 2023 than the traditional public schools, increasing 17 percentage points compared to 12 percentage points. The gains in English were about the same.

“The gains in math are suggestive of a long-standing ‘charter school instructional effect’ in math. We have long recommended that researchers and practitioners take a close look at math instruction in high-performing charter schools,” the Charter School Center said.

The state Legislature earlier this year [fought to restrict](#) the opening of more charter schools, despite their academic success and popularity among parents — claiming they

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divert funds and students from traditional public schools, parroting criticism of the United Federation of Teachers union.

Critics have also long complained that it is unfair to compare scores at charter and public schools, arguing the latter enroll more immigrant students who don't count English as their native language, as well as students with special needs.

In its analysis, the Charter School Center acknowledged that it is not a precise apples-to-apples comparison.

"These results are the starting point for further inquiry," the analysis said.

The DOE had no immediate comment.