

# Student Achievement in Florida's Charter Schools:

A Comparison with Achievement in Traditional Public Schools



**FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**  
Improving K-12 Educational Choice Options

## About This Report

Section 1002.33(23), Florida Statutes, requires the Florida Department of Education to prepare an annual statewide analysis of student achievement in charter schools versus the achievement of comparable students in traditional public schools. This report of charter school student performance fulfills the statutory requirement for the 2008-09 school year. The analysis examines the average performance of charter school students and traditional public school students using eight years of Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) reading and math test scores, as well as the FCAT science test scores that were added to the school grading calculation in 2007-08. Only students who were enrolled in a charter school or a traditional public school for an entire school year are included in the analysis. Limiting the analysis to include only full-year students is consistent with the state's school accountability system for awarding school grades under the A+ Plan. In addition, the report compares charter and traditional public schools in terms of achievement gaps and student learning gains.

The analysis and production of this report was a coordinated effort between the Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice and the Bureau of Research and Evaluation in the Division of Accountability, Research, and Measurement. Additional information about charter schools and other school choice options is available on the Department's Web site at: [www.floridaschoolchoice.org](http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org).

**Section 1002.33(23), Florida Statutes (23) ANALYSIS OF CHARTER SCHOOL PERFORMANCE.**--Upon receipt of the annual report required by paragraph (9) (1), the Department of Education shall provide to the State Board of Education, the Commissioner of Education, the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives an analysis and comparison of the overall performance of charter school students, to include all students whose scores are counted as part of the statewide assessment program, versus comparable public school students in the district as determined by the statewide assessment program currently administered in the school district, and other assessments administered pursuant to s. 1008.22(3).



FLORIDA'S  
**CHARTER**  
*Schools*

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## Student Achievement in Florida's Charter Schools: A Comparison with Achievement in Traditional Public Schools

Charter schools are independent public schools created on the basis of an agreement between a group of school organizers and a sponsoring body. Florida's charter schools have been growing by near record numbers since the first five charter schools were opened in 1996. During the 2008-09 school year, 389 operated throughout the state in 42 school districts and at two state universities. While each charter school is unique in its educational approach, charter schools are generally classified as start-up schools, schools managed by educational management organizations, conversion public schools, community partnerships, or University charter lab schools. Each charter school has its own governing board that is responsible for setting policies and procedures. Charter schools have flexibility in providing expanded learning experiences to meet students' individual educational needs by using innovative learning methods. In return, they are held accountable for achieving results. Although provided more freedom than traditional public schools, charter schools are held accountable on multiple levels. The charter contract delineates expectations of the governing board and the sponsor regarding the school's academic and financial performance. As part of their contract, charter schools are held accountable for academic and financial results, embodied in the following three guiding principles:

- Meet high standards of student achievement while providing parents flexibility to choose among diverse educational opportunities within the state's public school system;
- Promote enhanced academic success and financial efficiency by aligning responsibility with accountability; and
- Provide parents with sufficient information on whether or not the child gains at least a year's worth of learning for every year spent in the charter school.

## Students Served by Florida Charter Schools

Charter schools provide parents with additional choices for selecting the most effective educational programs for their children and offer creative solutions for improving student achievement in Florida. The charter school movement in Florida began as an avenue to improve student learning, increase parental choice, influence the traditional public school system, and foster innovative instructional practices. Charter school enrollment has grown steadily over the last decade. As shown below, charter schools served 118,000 students in the 2008-09 school year, which translates to more than 4.5% of Florida's total public school population. Of these students, males and females each made up 50% of the population. Approximately 59% of charter school students were minorities compared to 54% of traditional public school students. Charter schools had a lower percentage of students who qualified for free and reduced price lunch. In addition, charter schools served a smaller proportion of students with disabilities than traditional public schools.

2008-09 Charter School and Traditional School Student Populations

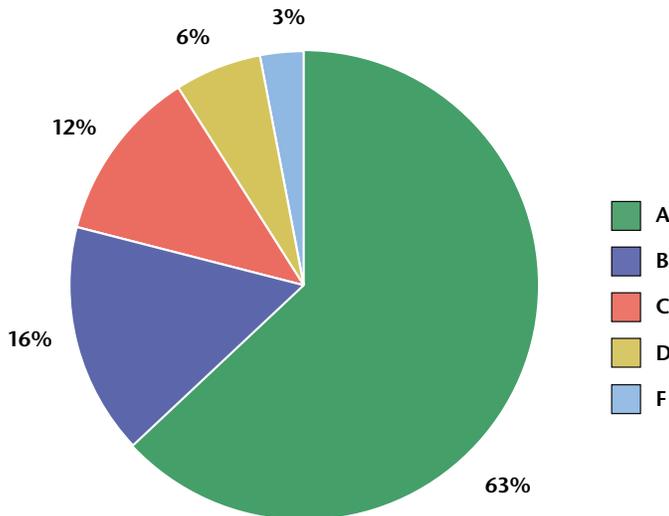
|  | Charter | Traditional |
|--|---------|-------------|
| <b>Student Membership</b>              | 118,058 | 2,552,937   |
| <b>Gender</b>                          |         |             |
| Male                                   | 50%     | 48%         |
| Female                                 | 50%     | 52%         |
| <b>Race</b>                            |         |             |
| White                                  | 41%     | 46%         |
| African American                       | 22%     | 23%         |
| Hispanic                               | 31%     | 25%         |
| Asian                                  | 2%      | 2%          |
| American Indian                        | 0.4%    | 0.3%        |
| Multi-Racial                           | 4%      | 4%          |
| <b>Free and Reduced Lunch Eligible</b> | 38%     | 49%         |
| <b>Exceptional Student Education</b>   | 10.8%   | 14.2%       |

## Grading Charter Schools

Like traditional public schools, charter schools are assigned a performance grade if they meet the eligibility criteria and are not an alternative school. Changes to the school grade calculations in 2002-03 resulted in an increased number of charter schools receiving performance grades. The percentage of charter schools receiving an "A" has increased from 42% in 2002-03 to 63% in 2008-09. Conversely, the percentage of "F" charter schools has decreased to 3% in 2008-09 from 16% in 2002-03.

| YEAR    | A   | B   | C   | D   | F   |
|---------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 2002-03 | 42% | 11% | 18% | 13% | 16% |
| 2003-04 | 38% | 11% | 24% | 13% | 14% |
| 2004-05 | 36% | 15% | 22% | 14% | 12% |
| 2005-06 | 50% | 20% | 21% | 6%  | 3%  |
| 2006-07 | 48% | 21% | 19% | 8%  | 5%  |
| 2007-08 | 52% | 20% | 19% | 4%  | 5%  |
| 2008-09 | 63% | 16% | 12% | 6%  | 3%  |

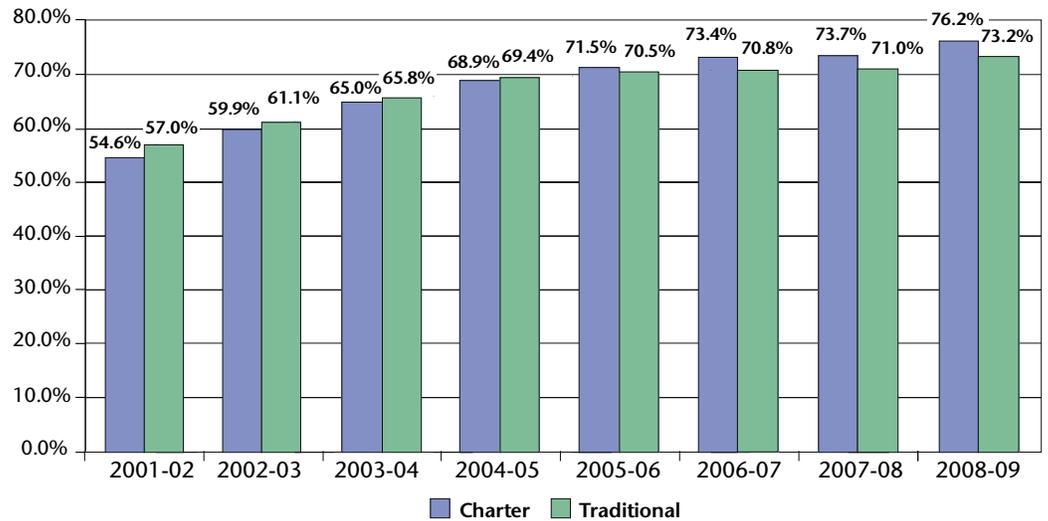
2009 Charter School Performance Grades



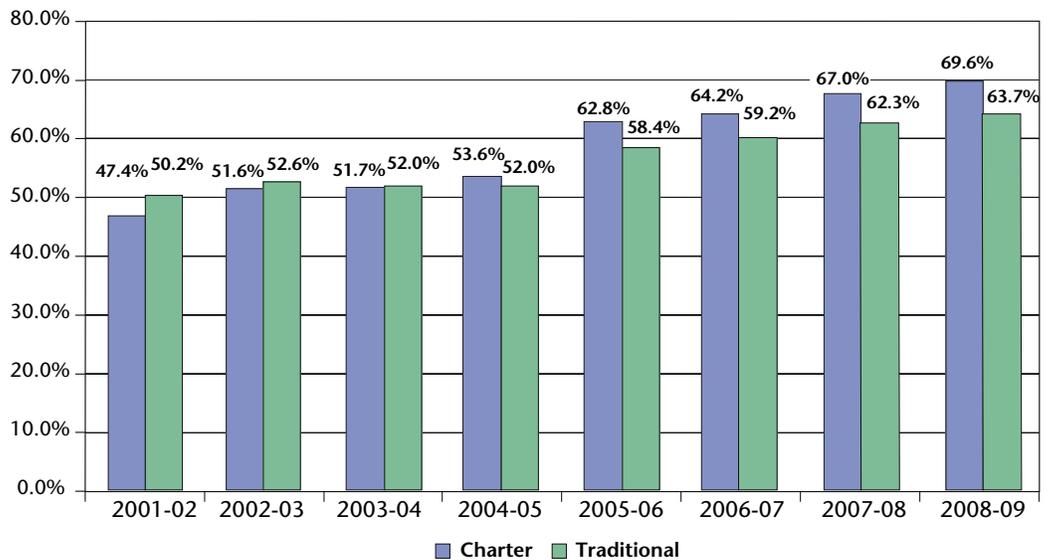
Reading

## FCAT Reading Traditional Public Schools and Charter Schools 2002-2009

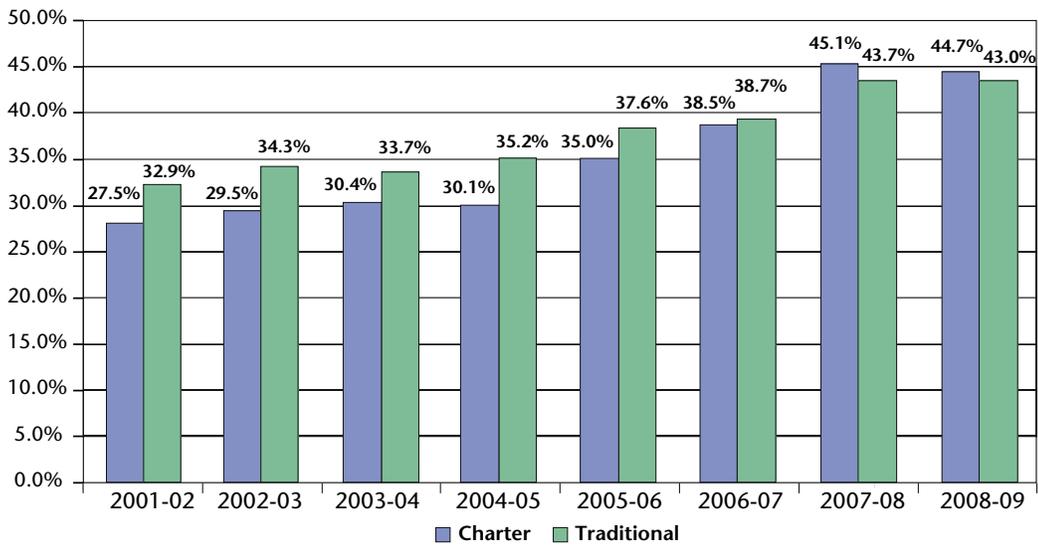
Percent of Students Scoring at Level 3 or Above on FCAT Reading  
Elementary School Grades 3, 4, and 5  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools, 2002 to 2009



Percent of Students Scoring at Level 3 or Above on FCAT Reading  
Middle School Grades 6, 7, and 8  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools, 2002 to 2009



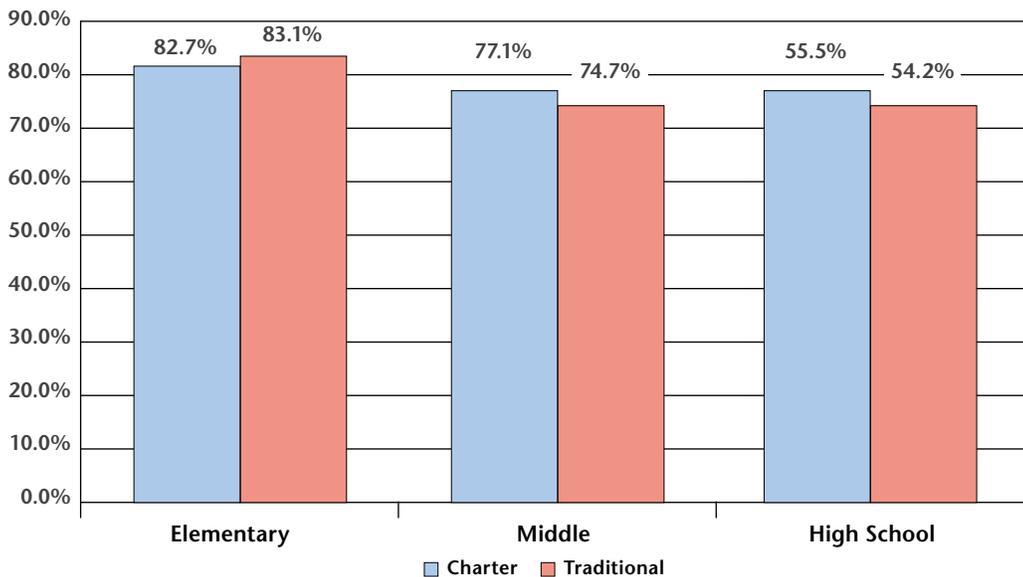
**Percent of Students Scoring at Level 3 or Above on FCAT Reading  
High School Grades 9 and 10  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools, 2002 to 2009**



Reading

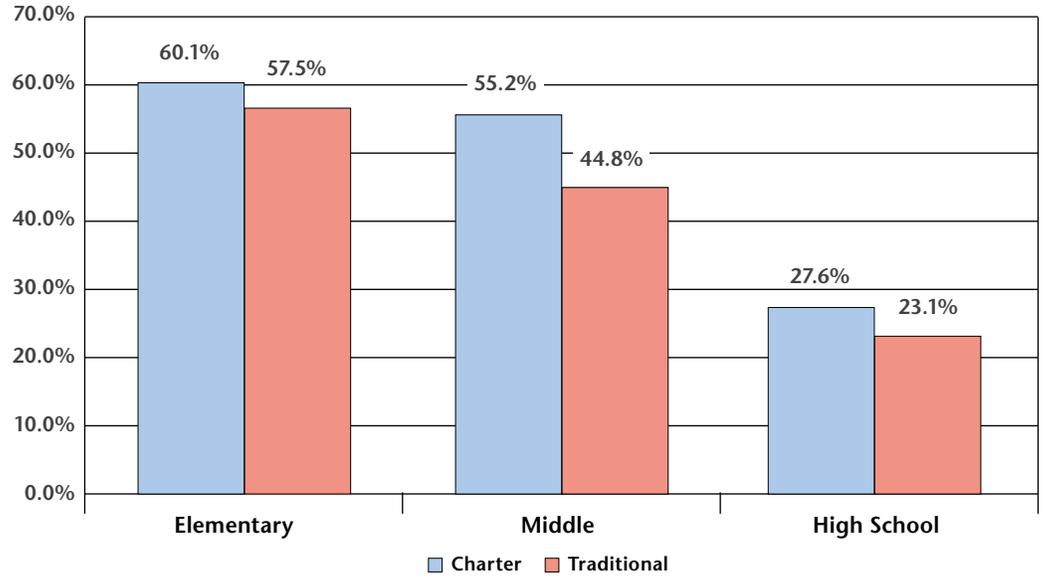
**FCAT Reading  
Traditional Public Schools and Charter Schools  
SUB - G R O U P   C O M P A R I S O N S   2 0 0 9**

**Percent of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on FCAT Reading  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools  
White Students**

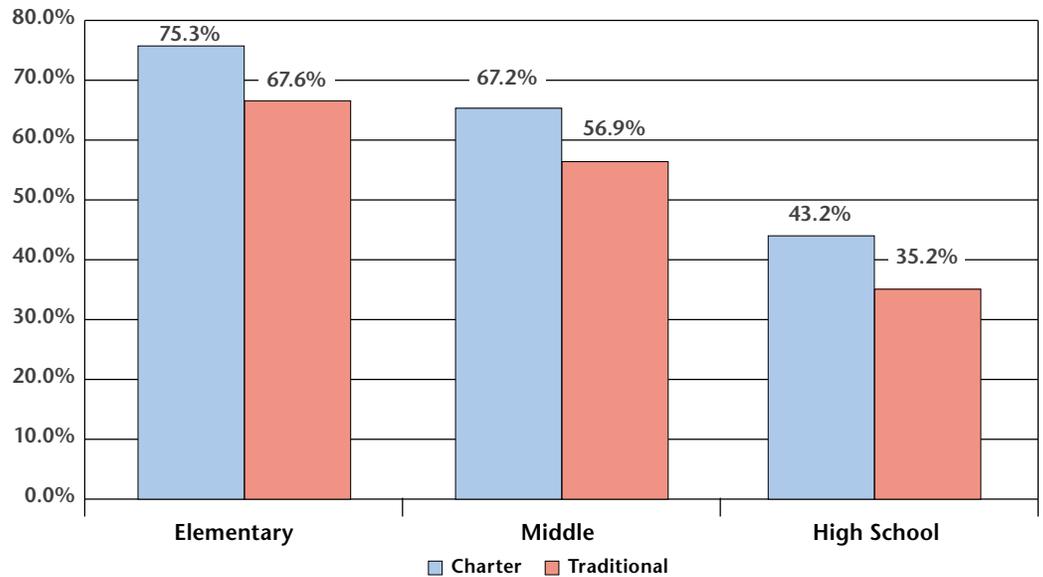


# Reading

**Percent of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on FCAT Reading  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools  
African-American Students**

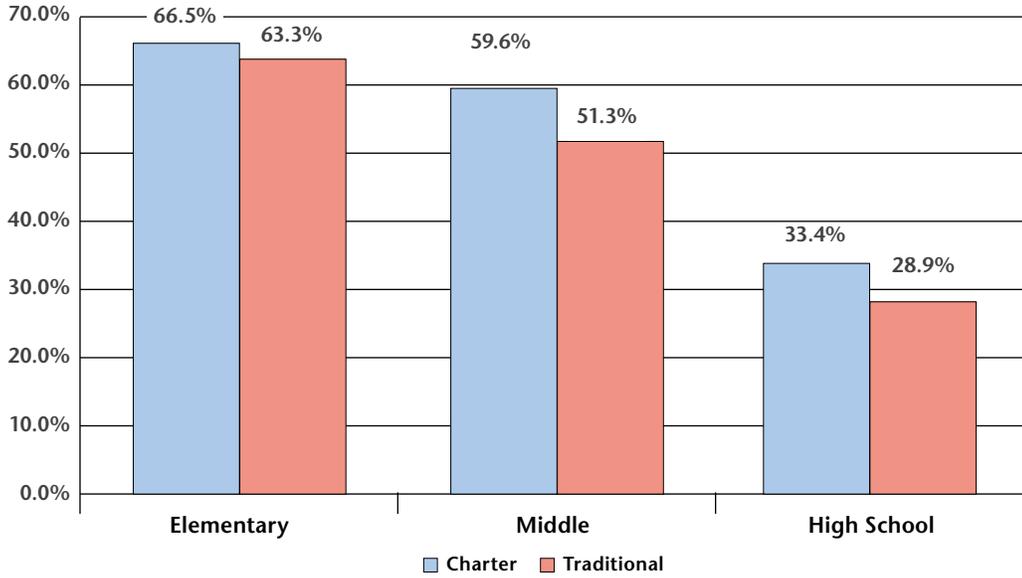


**Percent of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on FCAT Reading  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools  
Hispanic Students**

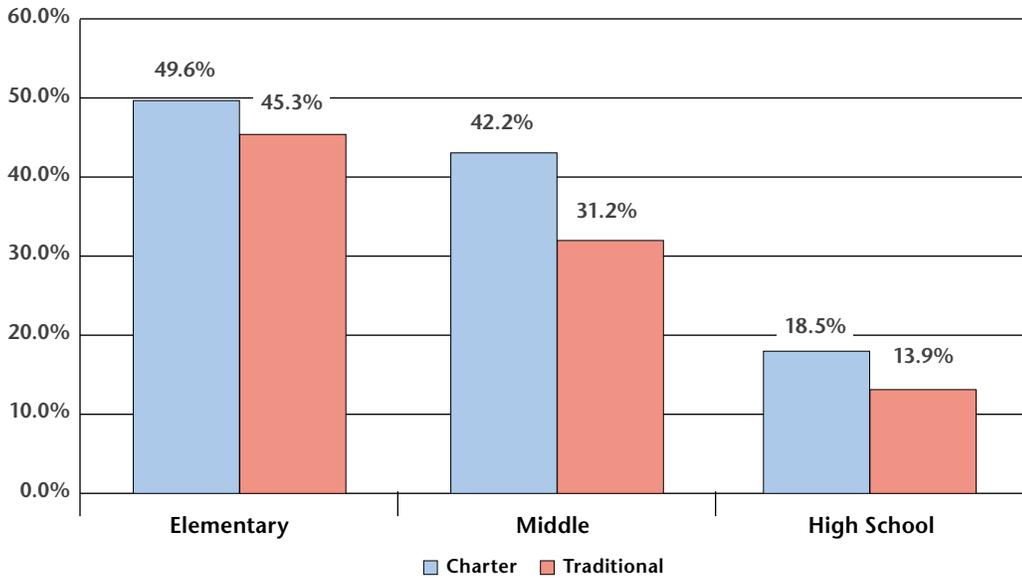


# Reading

**Percent of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on FCAT Reading  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools  
Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL)**



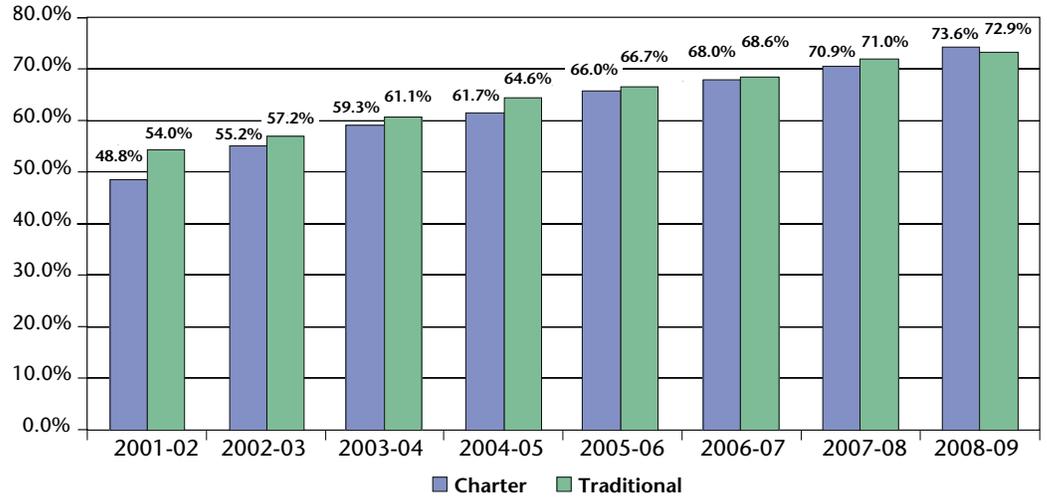
**Percent of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on FCAT Reading  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools  
Exceptional Education Students**



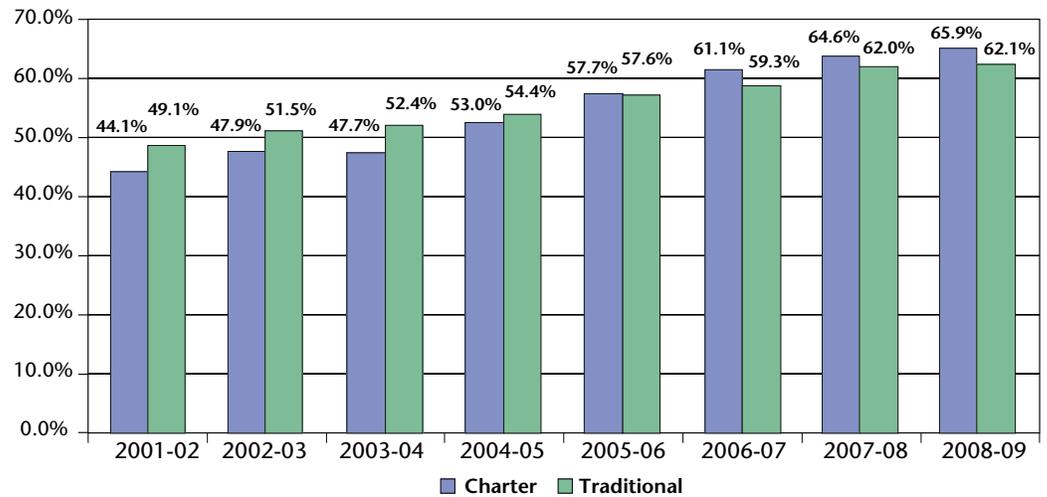
Math

## FCAT Math Traditional Public Schools and Charter Schools 2002-2009

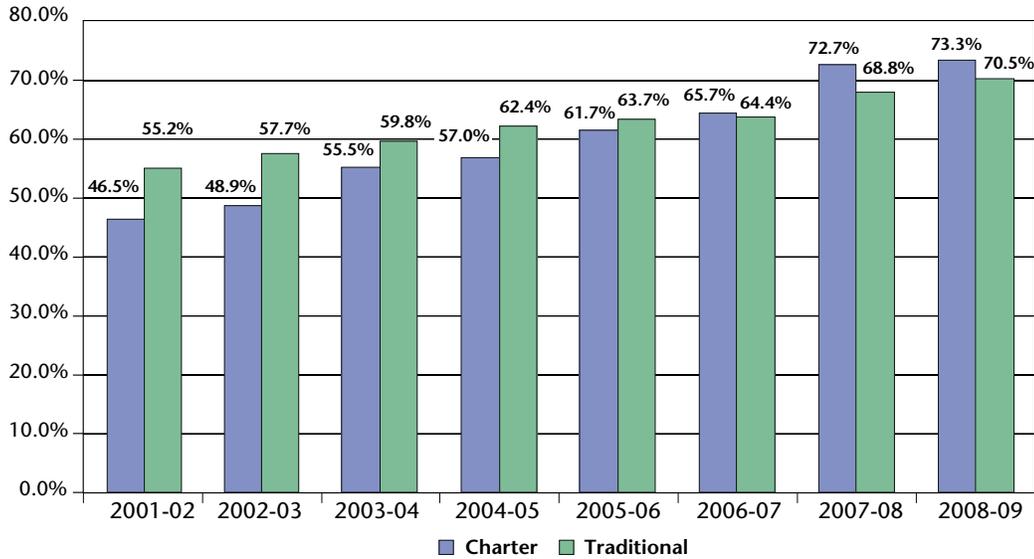
**Percent of Students Scoring at Level 3 or Above on FCAT Math  
Elementary School Grades 3, 4, and 5  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools, 2002 to 2009**



**Percent of Students Scoring at Level 3 or Above on FCAT Math  
Middle School Grades 6, 7, and 8  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools, 2002 to 2009**



**Percent of Students Scoring at Level 3 or Above on FCAT Math  
High School Grades 9 and 10  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools, 2002 to 2009**

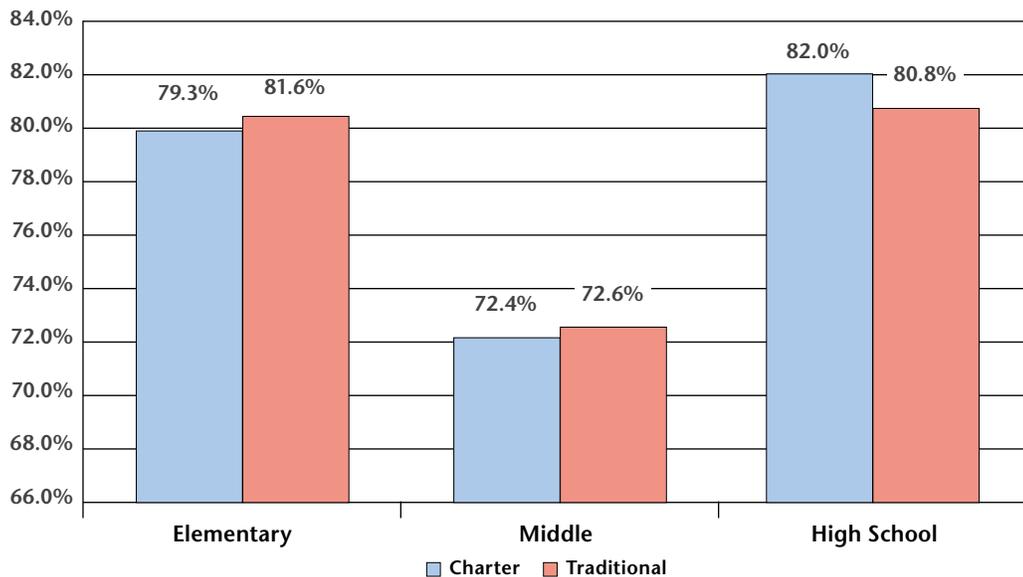


Math

## FCAT Math Traditional Public Schools and Charter Schools

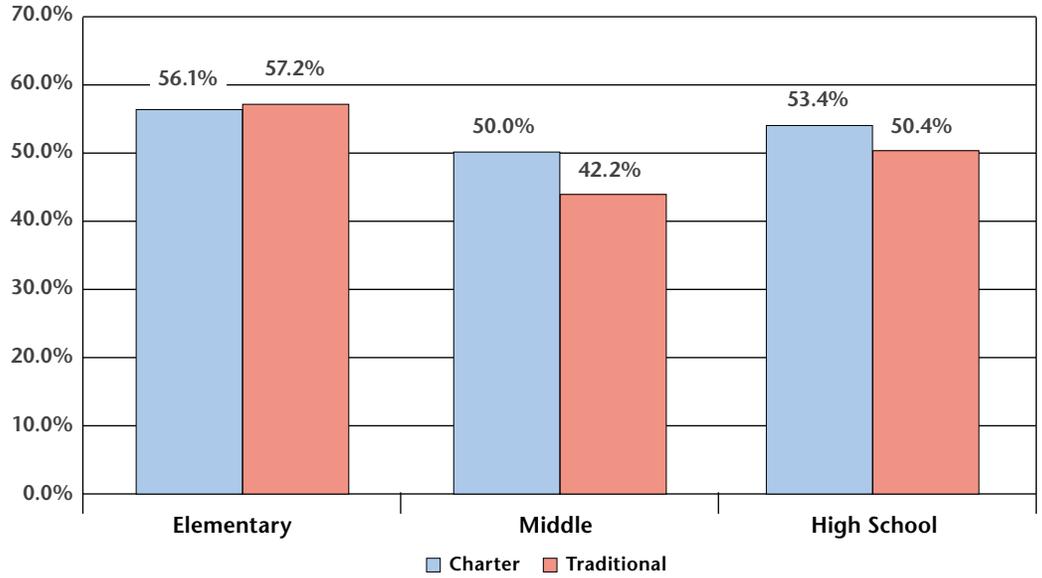
SUB - G R O U P   C O M P A R I S O N S   2 0 0 9

**Percent of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on FCAT Math  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools  
White Students**

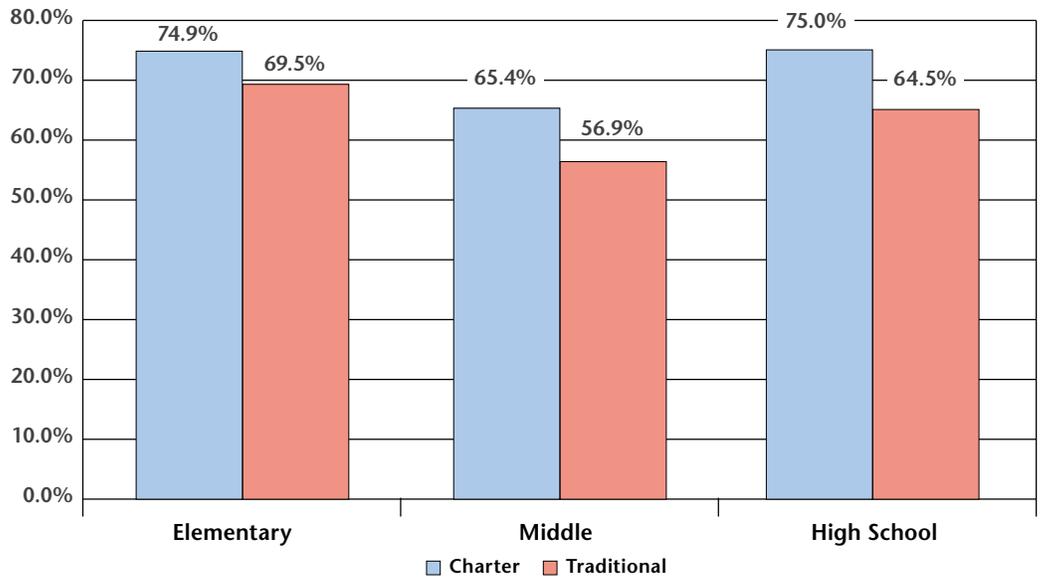


Math

**Percent of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on FCAT Math  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools  
African-American Students**

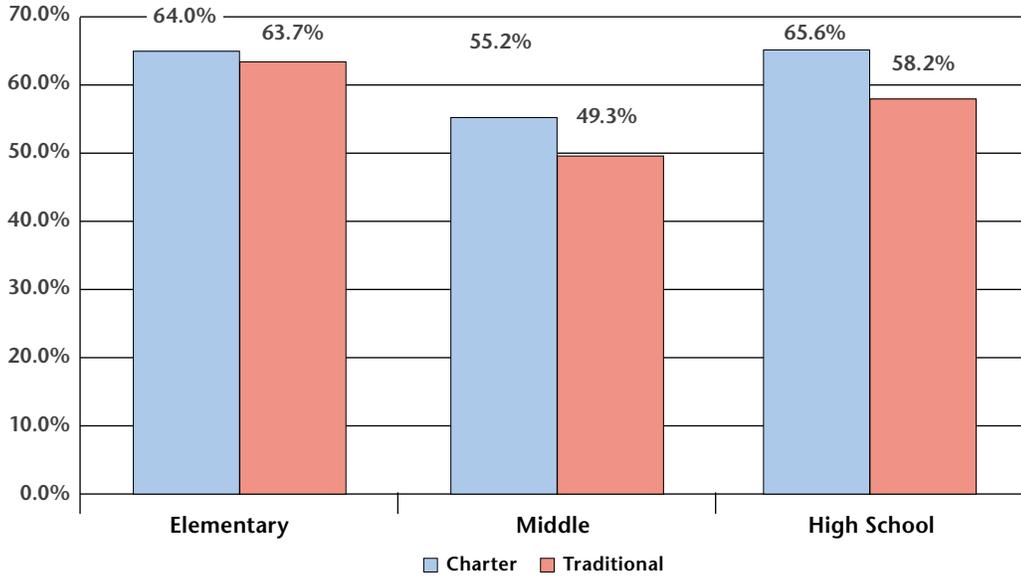


**Percent of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on FCAT Math  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools  
Hispanic Students**

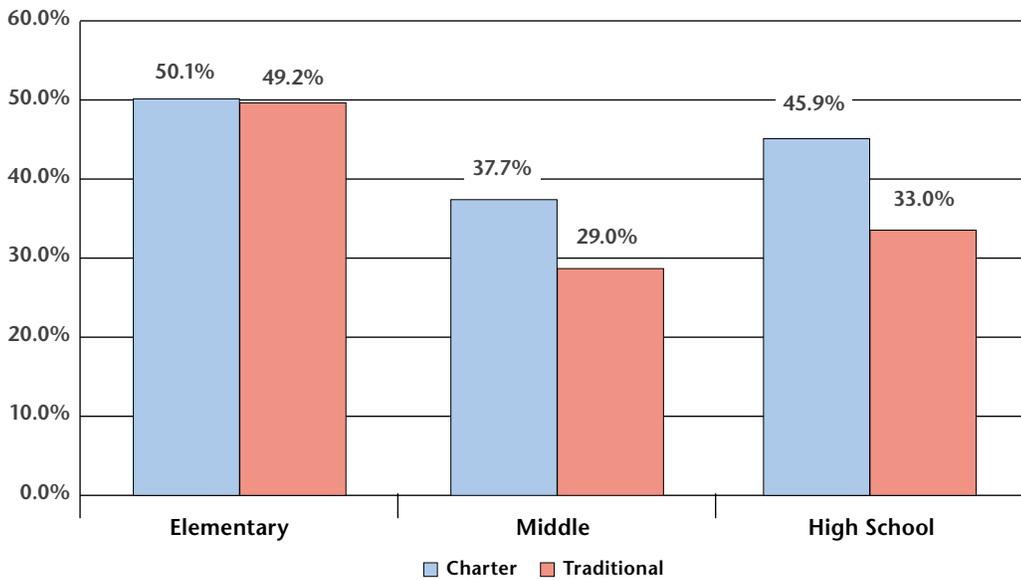


Math

**Percent of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on FCAT Math  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools  
FRL Students**



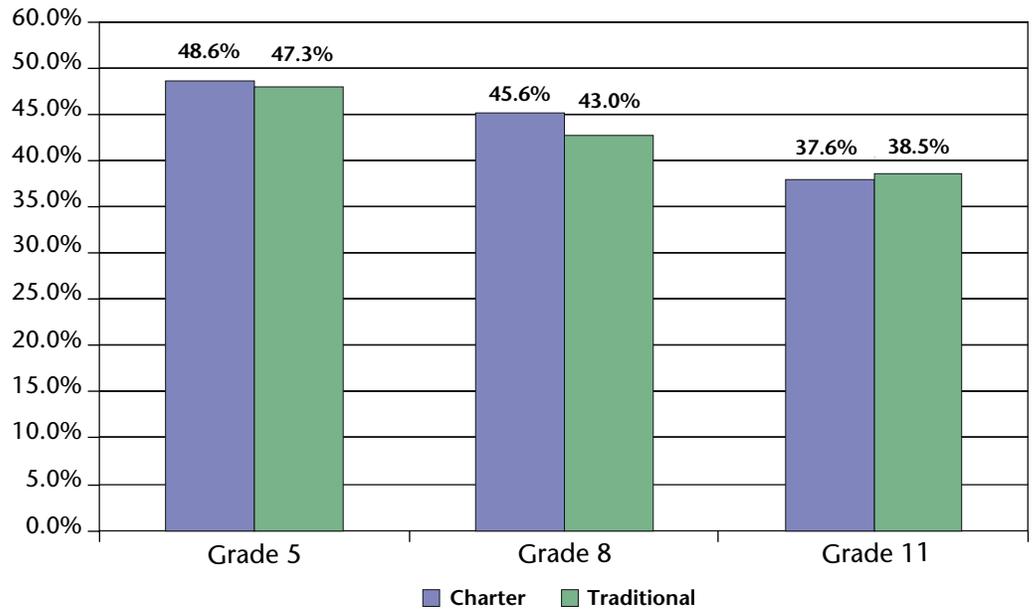
**Percent of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on FCAT Math  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools  
Exceptional Education Students**





## FCAT Science Traditional Public Schools and Charter Schools 2009

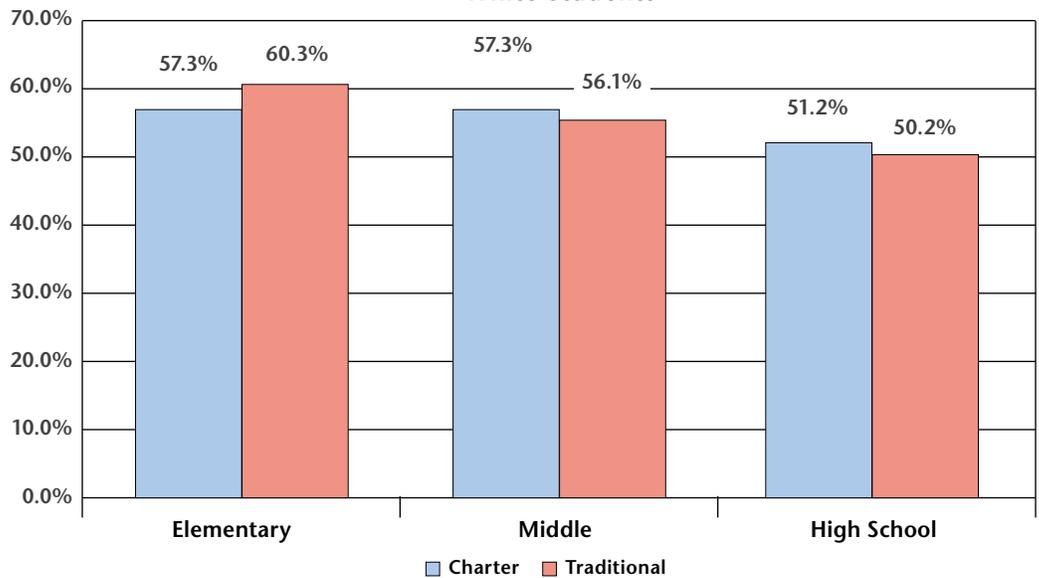
Percent of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on FCAT Science  
Grades 5, 8, and 11  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools



## FCAT Science Traditional Public Schools and Charter Schools

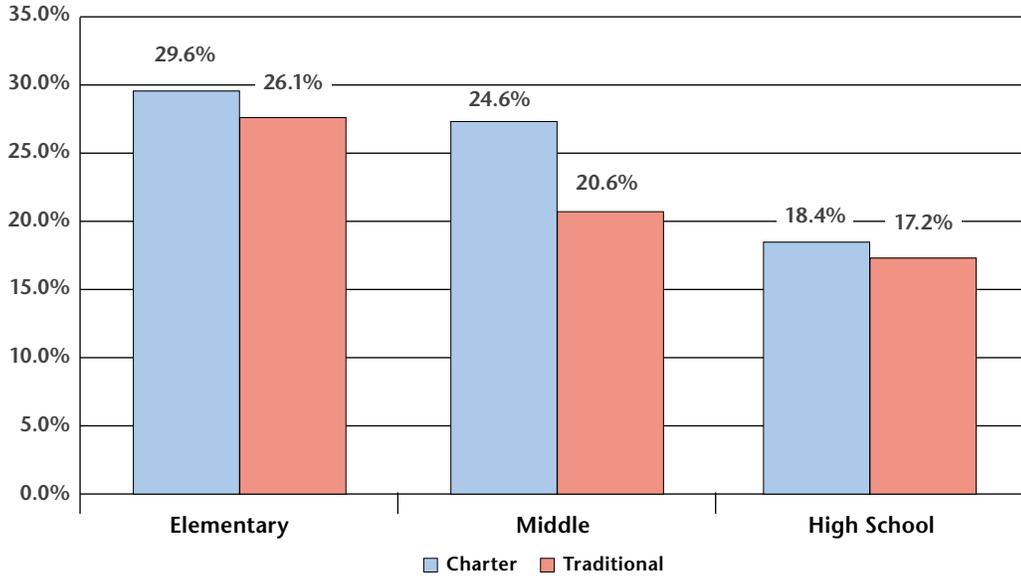
### SUB - GROUP COMPARISONS 2009

Percent of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on FCAT Science  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools  
White Students

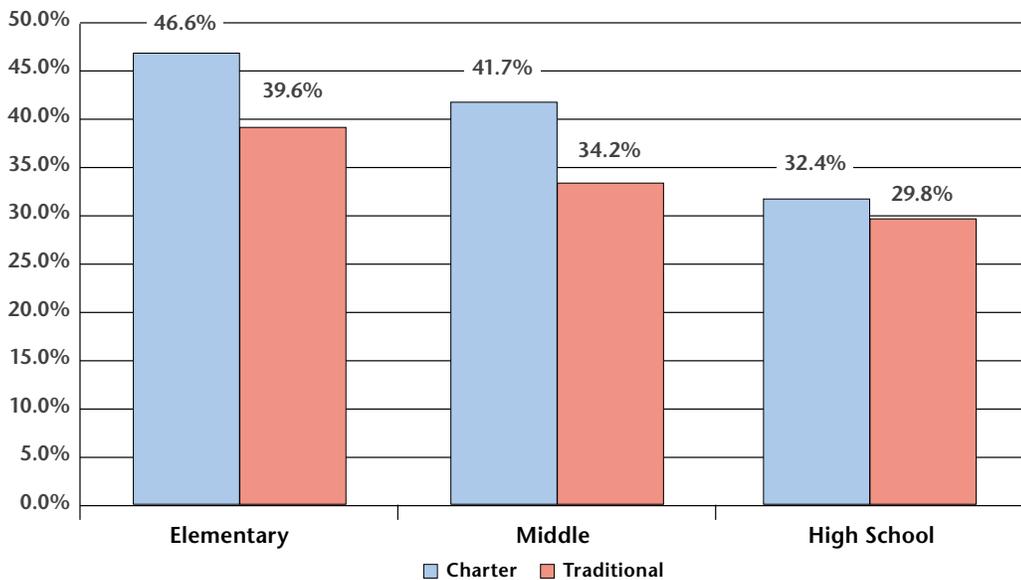


Science

**Percent of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on FCAT Science  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools  
African-American Students**

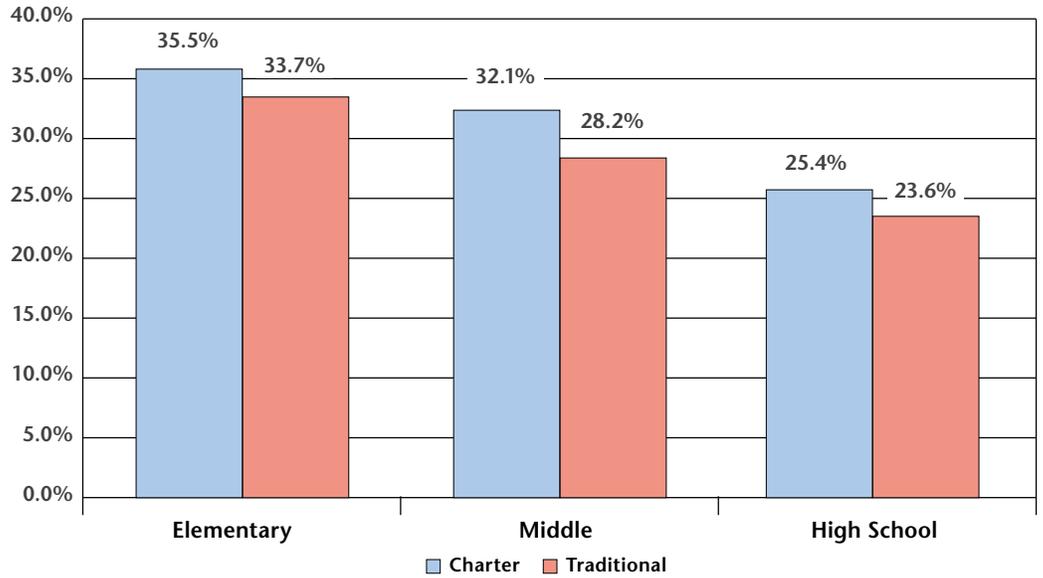


**Percent of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on FCAT Science  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools  
Hispanic Students**

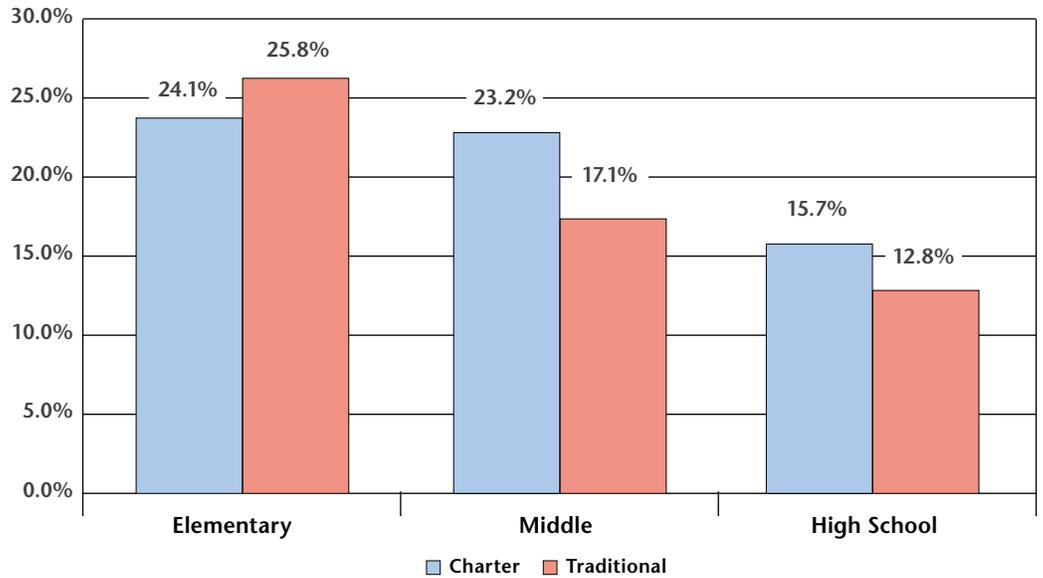


Science

**Percent of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on FCAT Science  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools  
FRL Students**



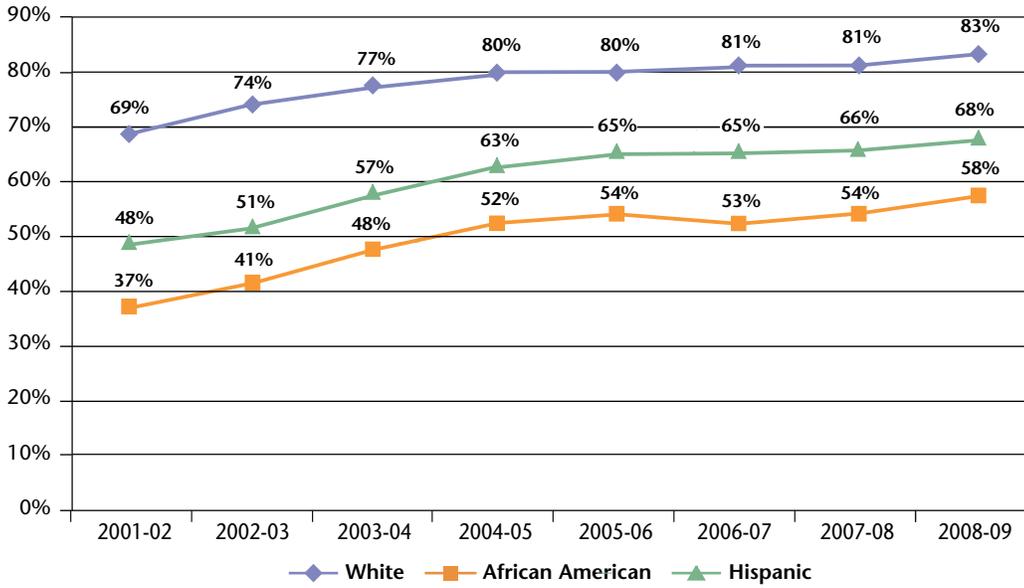
**Percent of Students Scoring a Level 3 or Above on FCAT Science  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools  
Exceptional Education Students**



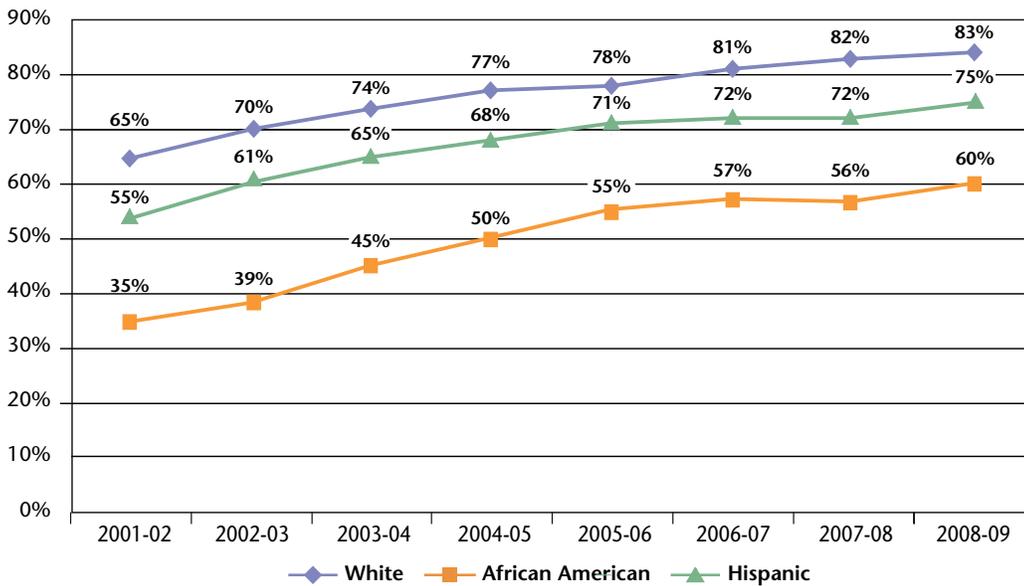
Reading

# Closing the Achievement Gap in Reading Traditional Public Schools and Charter Schools 2002-2009

**Traditional Public Elementary Schools**  
FCAT Reading Achievement Level 3 and Above  
Grades 3, 4, and 5 by Race/Ethnicity

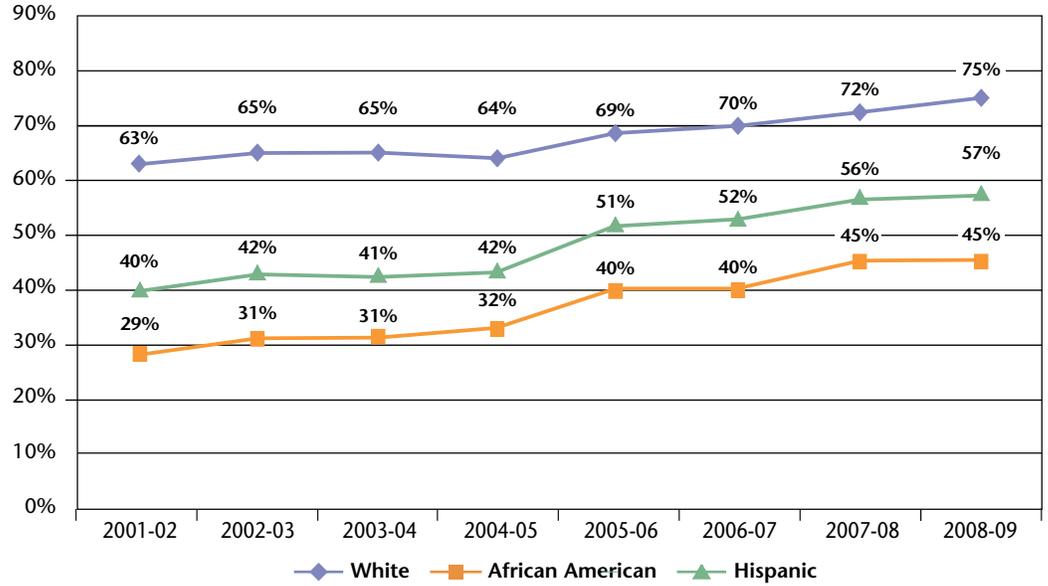


**Charter Elementary Schools**  
FCAT Reading Achievement Level 3 and Above  
Grades 3, 4, and 5 by Race/Ethnicity

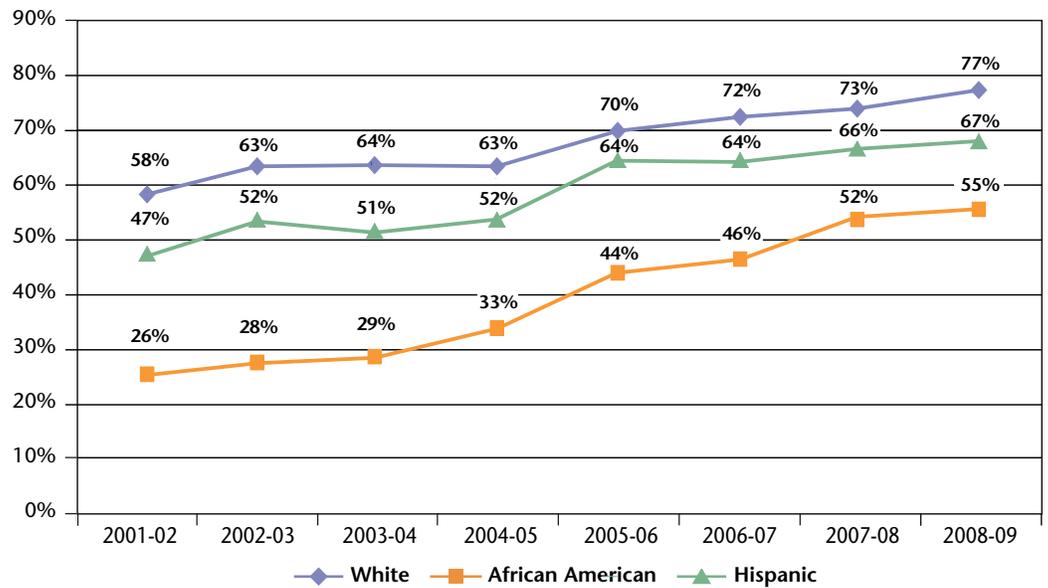


# Reading

**Traditional Public Middle Schools  
FCAT Reading Achievement Level 3 and Above  
Grades 6, 7, and 8 by Race/Ethnicity**

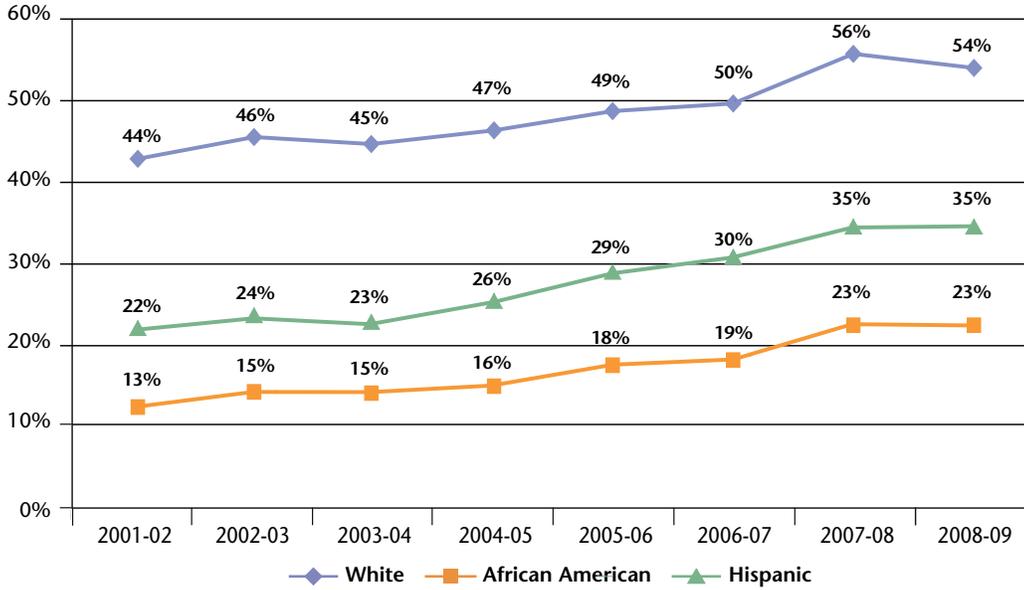


**Charter Middle Schools  
FCAT Reading Achievement Level 3 and Above  
Grades 6, 7, and 8 by Race/Ethnicity**

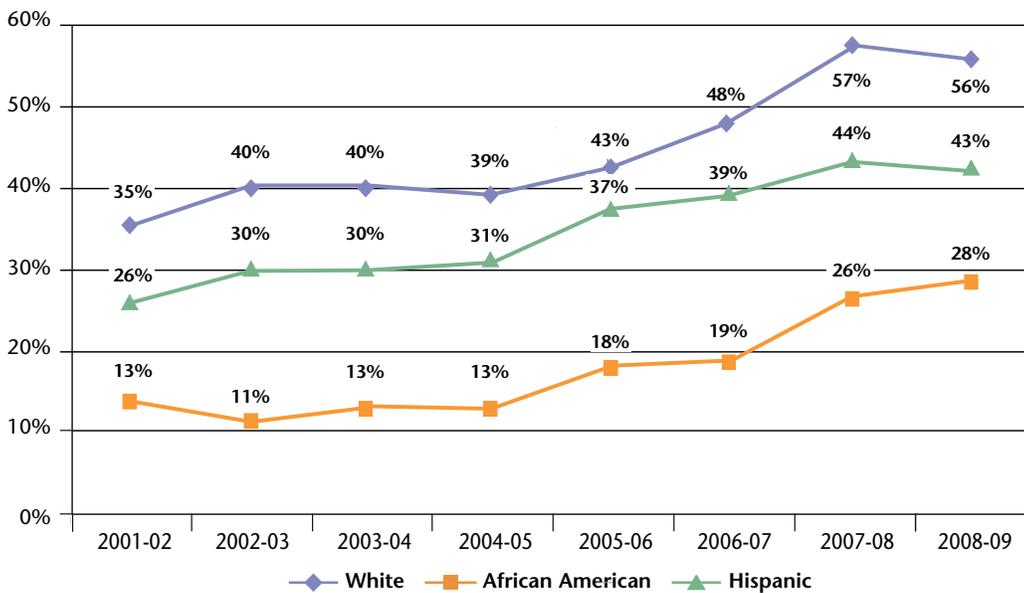


# Reading

**Traditional Public High Schools  
FCAT Reading Achievement Level 3 and Above  
Grades 9 and 10 by Race/Ethnicity**



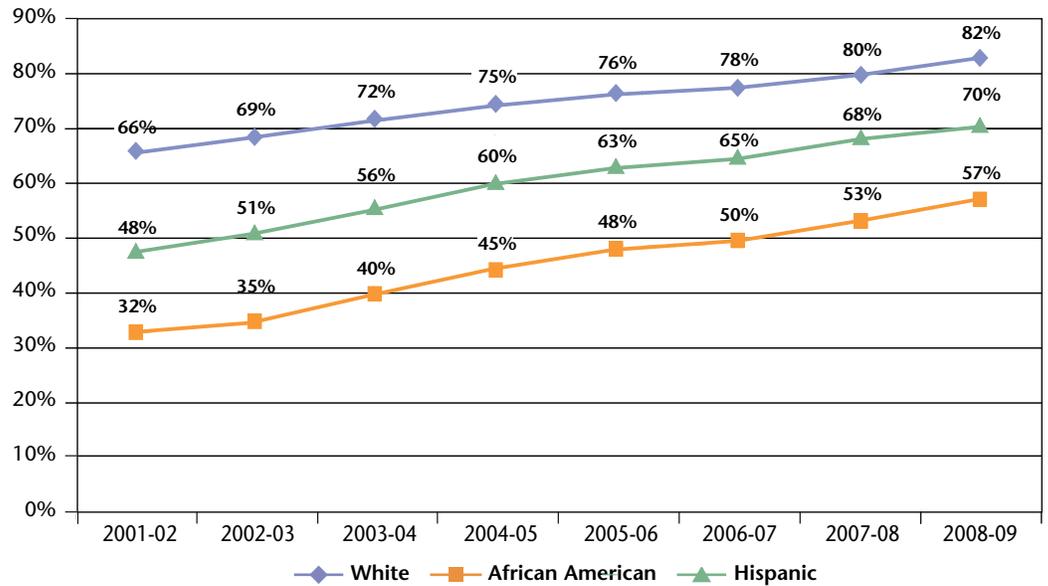
**Charter High Schools  
FCAT Reading Achievement Level 3 and Above  
Grades 9 and 10 by Race/Ethnicity**



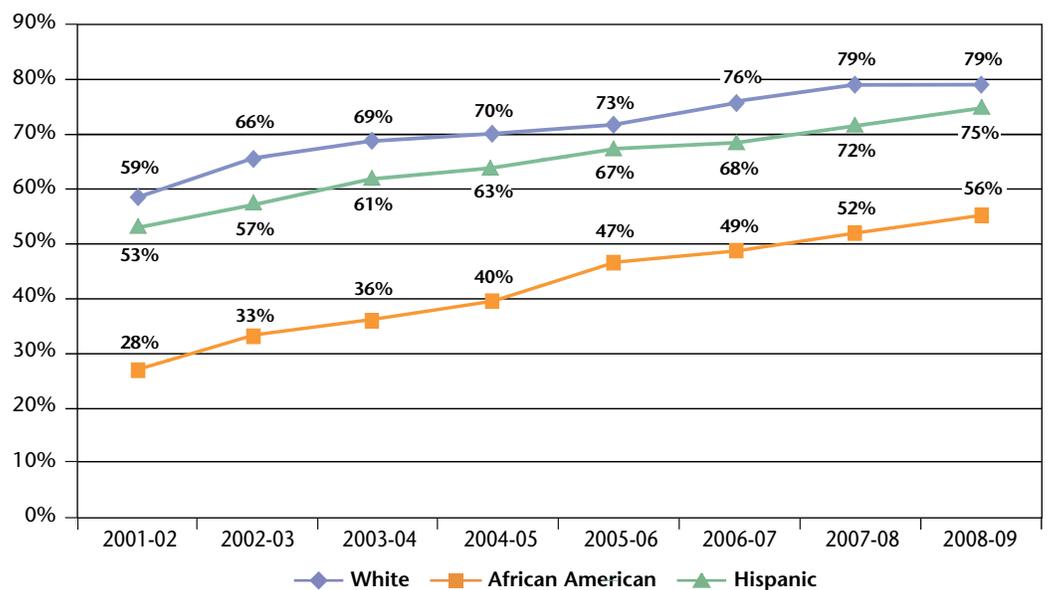
Math

## Closing the Achievement Gap in Math Traditional Public Schools and Charter Schools 2002-2009

**Traditional Public Elementary Schools**  
FCAT Math Achievement Level 3 and Above  
Grades 3, 4, and 5 by Race/Ethnicity

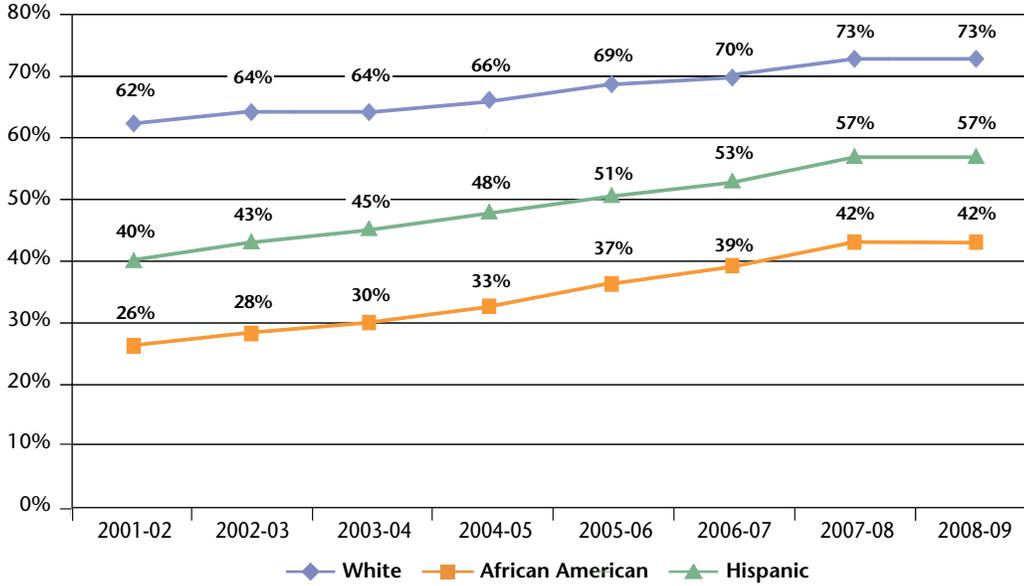


**Charter Elementary Schools**  
FCAT Math Achievement Level 3 and Above  
Grades 3, 4, and 5 by Race/Ethnicity

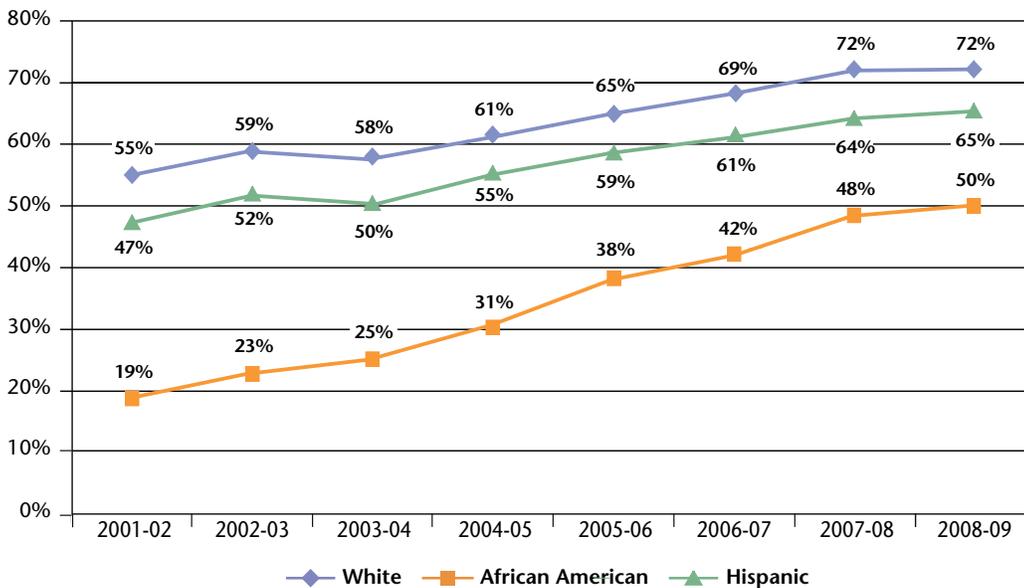


Math

**Traditional Public Middle Schools  
FCAT Math Achievement Level 3 and Above  
Grades 6, 7, and 8 by Race/Ethnicity**

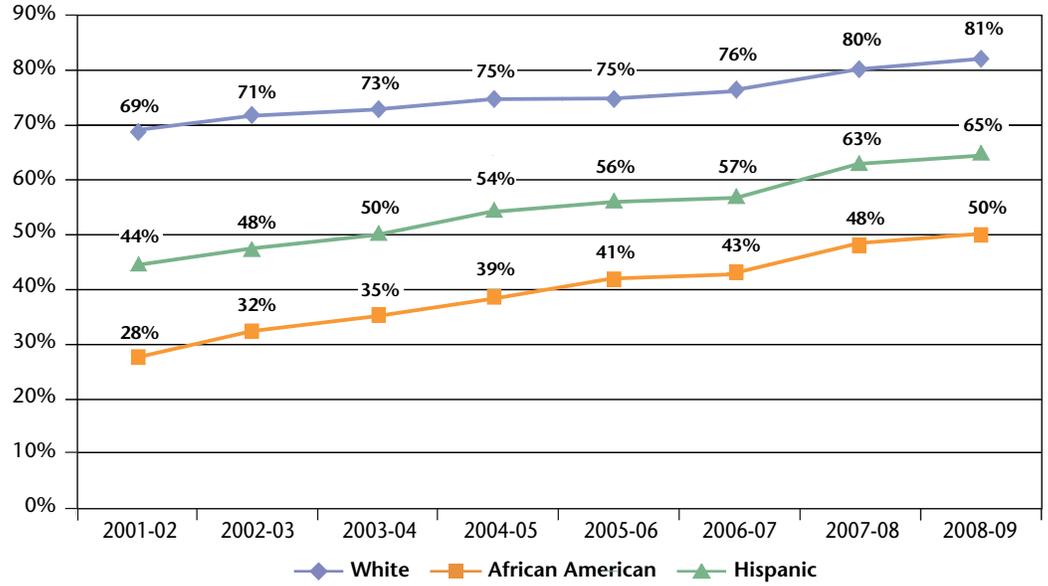


**Charter Middle Schools  
FCAT Math Achievement Level 3 and Above  
Grades 6, 7, and 8 by Race/Ethnicity**

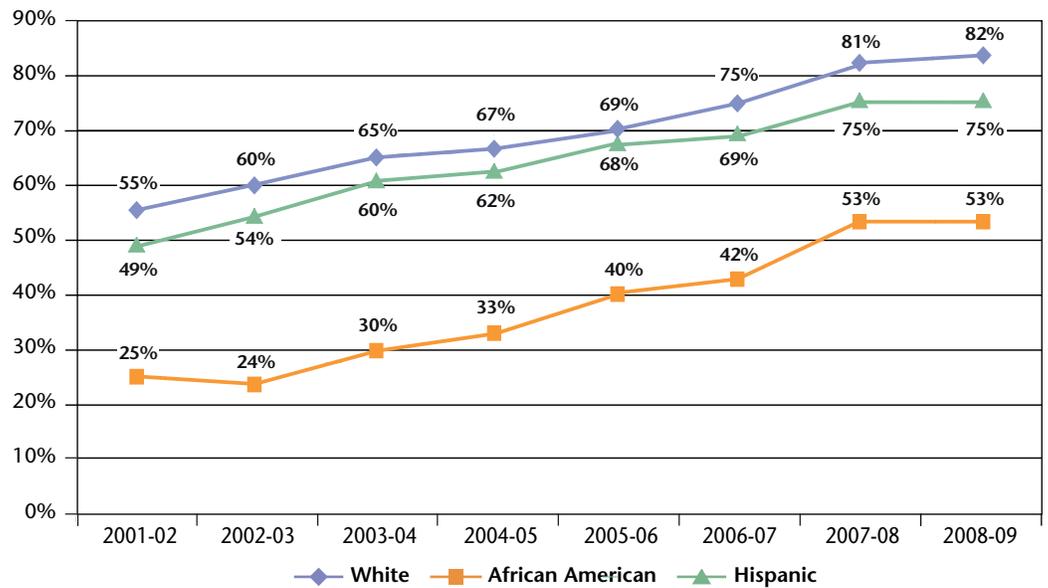


Math

**Traditional Public High Schools**  
**FCAT Math Achievement Level 3 and Above**  
**Grades 9 and 10 by Race/Ethnicity**



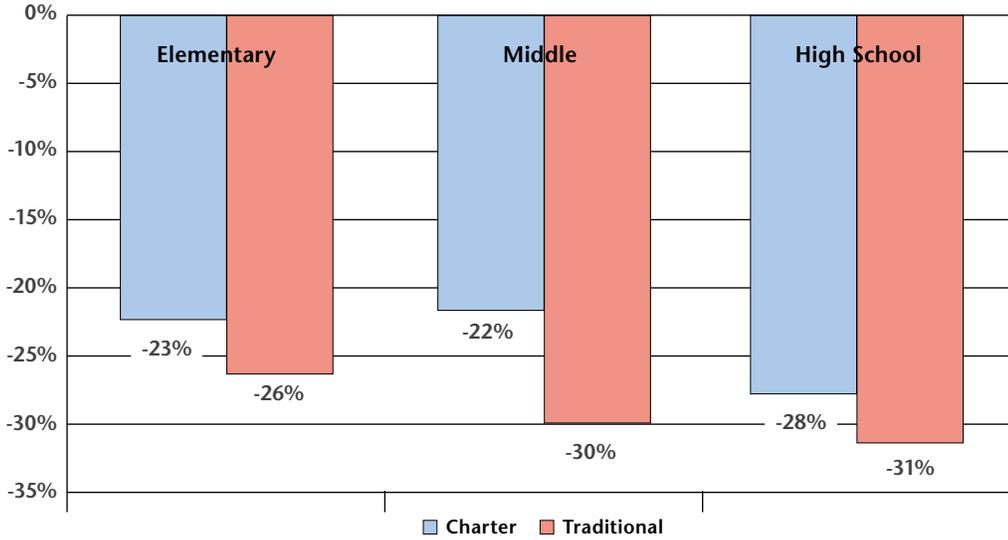
**Charter High Schools**  
**FCAT Math Achievement Level 3 and Above**  
**Grades 9 and 10 by Race/Ethnicity**



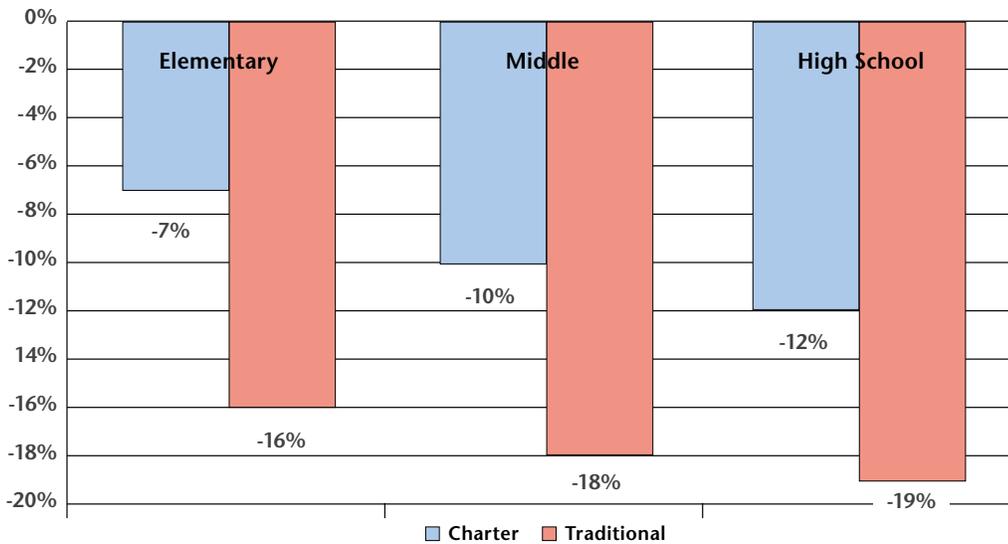
# Achievement Gap Summary Data 2008-09 School Year

Reading

**Achievement Gap in Reading  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools  
African-American Students and White Students**

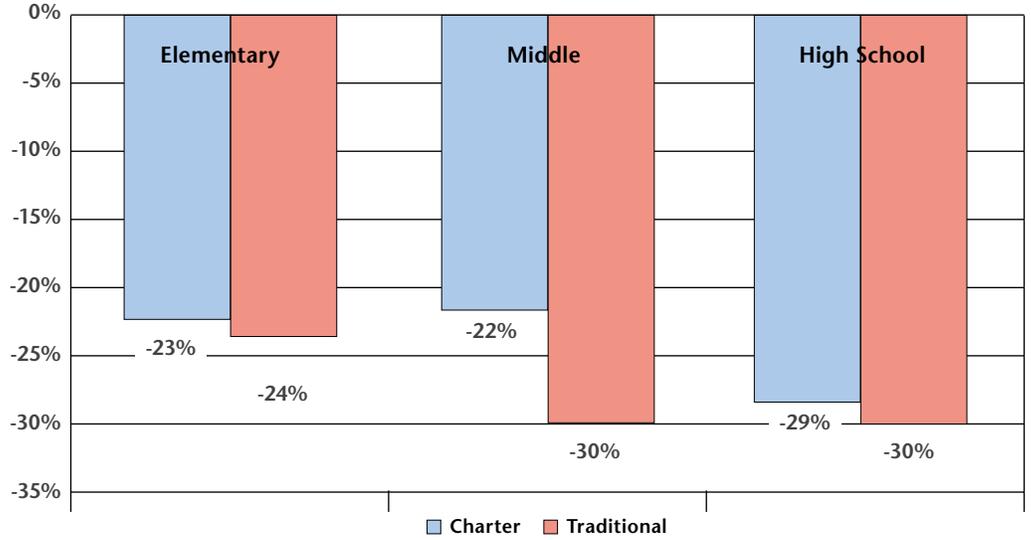


**Achievement Gap in Reading  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools  
Hispanic Students and White Students**

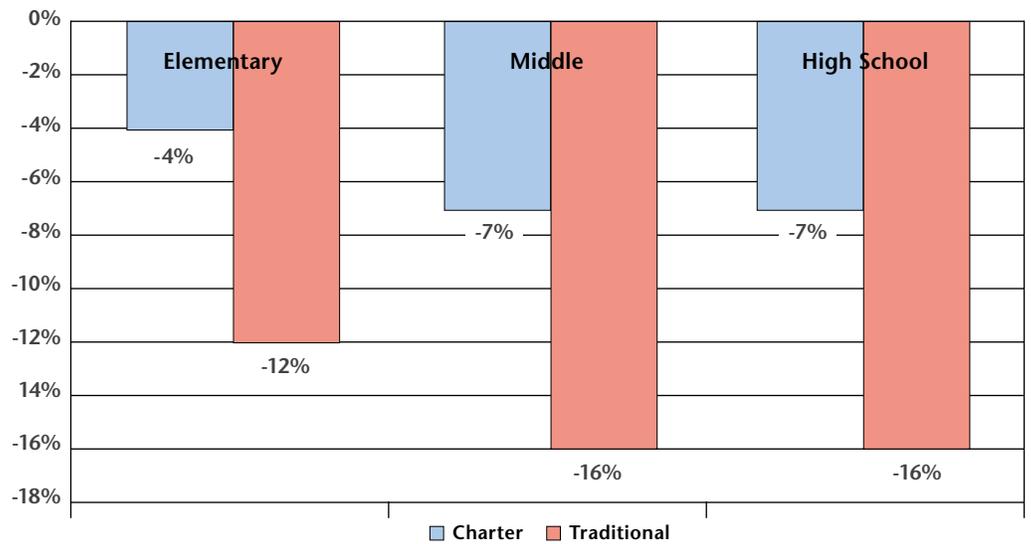




**Achievement Gap in Math  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools  
African-American Students and White Students**

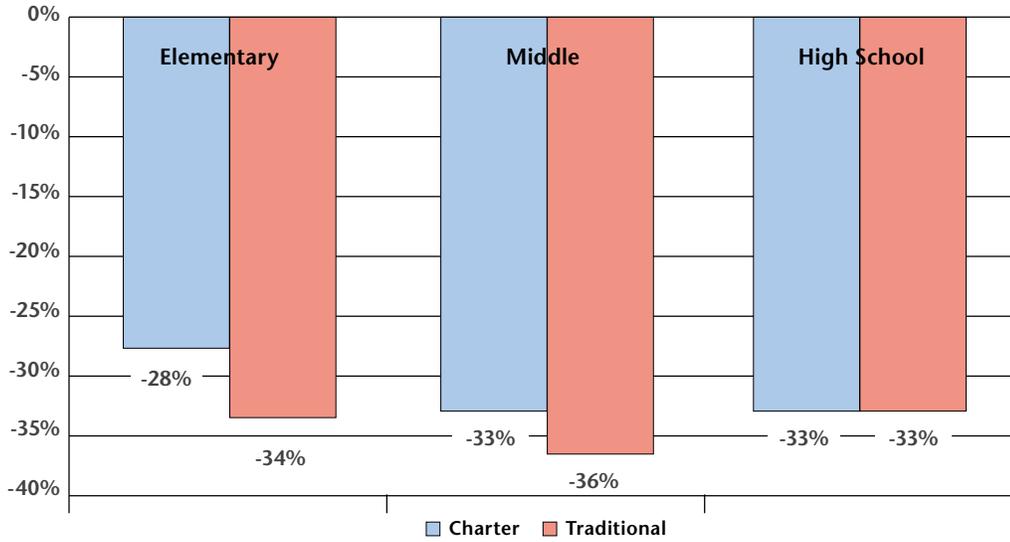


**Achievement Gap in Math  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools  
Hispanic Students and White Students**

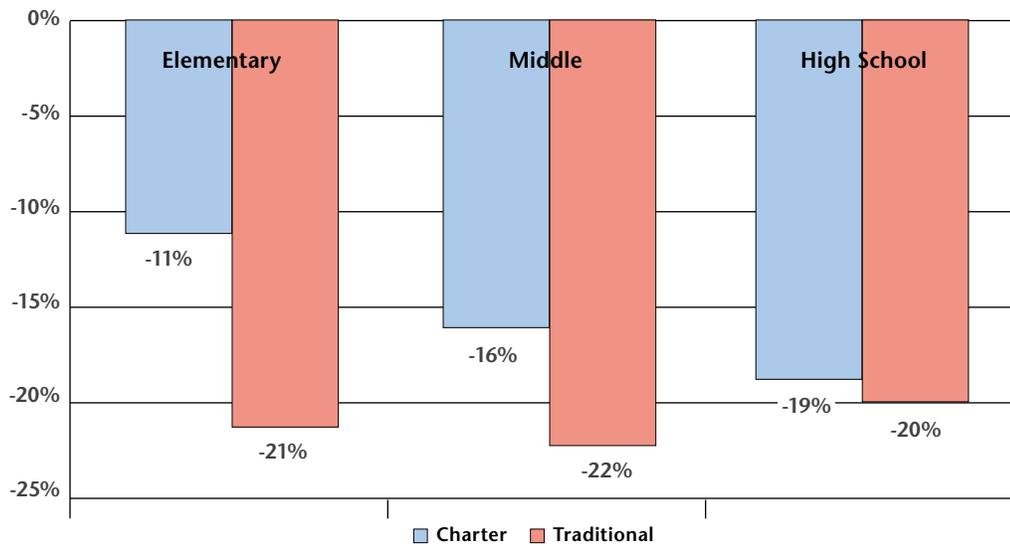


Science

**Achievement Gap in Science  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools  
African-American Students and White Students**

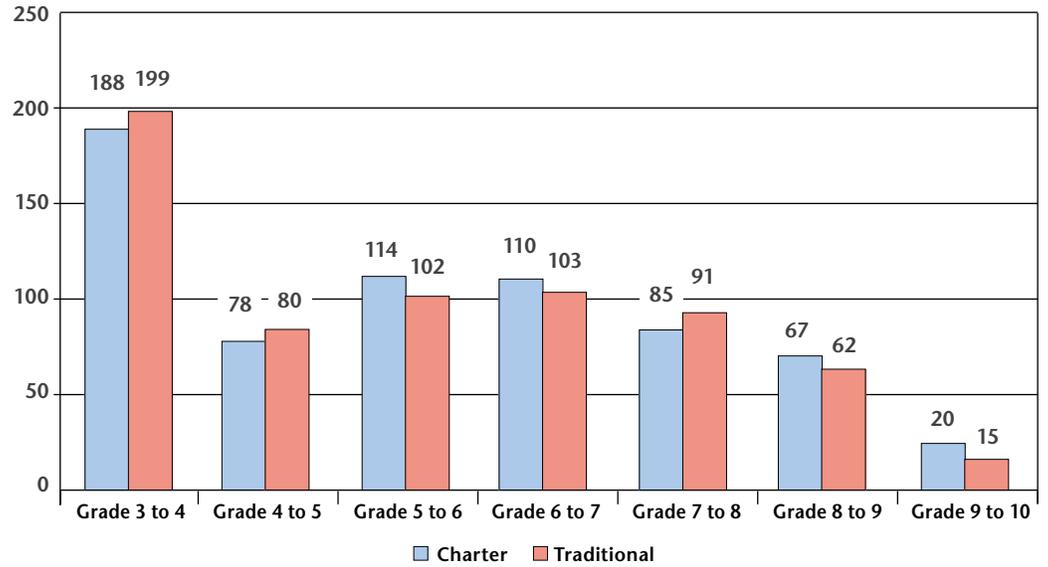


**Achievement Gap in Science  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools  
Hispanic Students and White Students**

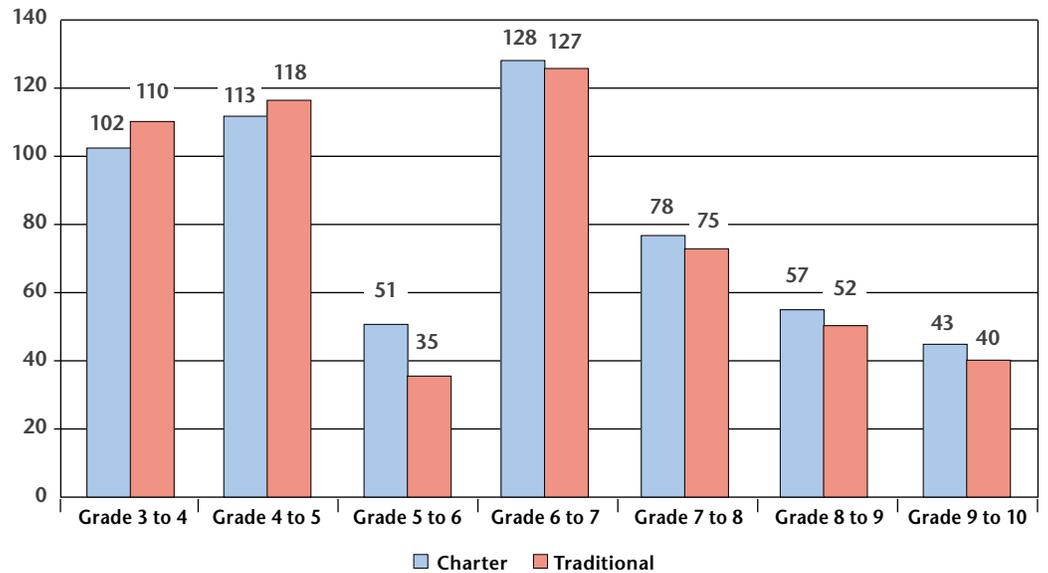


## Developmental Scale Scores Learning Gains Comparison 2008-2009 School Year

**DSS Gains Reading  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools**



**DSS Gains Math  
Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools**



## Key Achievement Findings

The ultimate proof of success for any charter school is the achievement of its students. If students are not learning at or above the levels at which they were learning when they enrolled in a charter school, then the primary mission of the charter school has not been accomplished. The analysis of 2008-09 student achievement data demonstrates that charter schools offer parents and policy makers a viable option for improving education in the state.

The data contained in this report is derived from student performance on the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT), and is designed to allow a comparative analysis of the academic achievement of students attending charter schools versus students attending traditional public schools. The report contains data spanning eight years of FCAT results. Using data from the 2008-2009 school year the report makes 86 comparisons covering three measurements: FCAT proficiency percentages, achievement gaps, and learning gains. Each of these measurement areas are further broken down to offer a more nuanced view of student achievement.

The FCAT proficiency percentages are used to measure both overall rates of proficiency by grade groupings, as well as comparisons of subgroup performance. This section of the report contains 54 separate comparisons of student achievement. Charter school students outperformed traditional public school students in 47 of the 54 comparisons.

The achievement gap section of the report contains both historical and current data that is used to analyze the gap between white students and African American students and white students and Hispanic students, in reading, math, and science. This section of the report includes 18 separate comparisons of current achievement gaps. The achievement gap was lower for charter school students in 17 of the 18 comparisons, with one tie.

The learning gains section of the report contains data on the FCAT Developmental Scale Scores. The data includes 14 comparisons of the learning gains made by charter school students and traditional public school students. Charter school students had higher average learning gains in 9 of the 14 comparisons.

Data

| DATA 2008-2009                               |                                   |          |                       |             |                       |  |
|--|-----------------------------------|----------|-----------------------|-------------|-----------------------|--|
|  |                                   | Charter  |                       | Traditional |                       |  |
| <b>Total # of Students with FCAT results</b> | <b>Reading</b>                    | 63,590   |                       | 1,386,911   |                       |  |
|  | <b>Math</b>                       | 63,560   |                       | 1,384,649   |                       |  |
| <b>Total % Proficient</b>                    |                                   |          |                       |             |                       |  |
|  | <b>Reading</b>                    | <b>%</b> | <b>Total Students</b> | <b>%</b>    | <b>Total Students</b> |  |
|  | Elem                              | 76.2     | 25,678                | 73.2        | 529,549               |  |
|  | Mid                               | 69.6     | 28,144                | 63.7        | 515,257               |  |
|  | High                              | 44.7     | 9,768                 | 43          | 147,255               |  |
|  | <b>Math</b>                       |          |                       |             |                       |  |
|  | Elem                              | 73.6     | 25,688                | 72.9        | 529,456               |  |
|  | Mid                               | 65.9     | 28,141                | 62.1        | 514,908               |  |
|  | High                              | 73.3     | 9,731                 | 70.5        | 340,285               |  |
|  | <b>Science</b>                    |          |                       |             |                       |  |
|  | Elem                              | 48.6     | 8,137                 | 47.3        | 171,966               |  |
|  | Mid                               | 45.6     | 8,308                 | 43          | 171,106               |  |
|  | High                              | 37.6     | 4,349                 | 38.5        | 150,068               |  |
|  | <b>Total % Proficient by Race</b> |          |                       |             |                       |  |
|  | <b>Reading - White</b>            |          |                       |             |                       |  |
|  | Elem                              | 82.7     | 11,241                | 83.1        | 237,993               |  |
| Mid  | 77.1                              | 11,559   | 74.7                  | 241,481     |                       |  |
| High   | 55.5                              | 3,622    | 54.2                  | 167,870     |                       |  |
| <b>Math - White</b>                          |                                   |          |                       |             |                       |  |
| Elem   | 79.3                              | 11,239   | 81.6                  | 237,949     |                       |  |
| Mid  | 72.4                              | 11,553   | 72.6                  | 241,330     |                       |  |
| High   | 82                                | 3,614    | 80.8                  | 167,180     |                       |  |
| <b>Science - White</b>                       |                                   |          |                       |             |                       |  |
| Elem   | 57.3                              | 3,611    | 60.3                  | 78,910      |                       |  |
| Mid  | 57.3                              | 3,335    | 56.1                  | 81,053      |                       |  |
| High   | 51.2                              | 1,677    | 50.2                  | 75,019      |                       |  |
| <b>Reading - African Am.</b>                 |                                   |          |                       |             |                       |  |
| Elem   | 60.1                              | 4,619    | 57.5                  | 118,522     |                       |  |
| Mid  | 55.2                              | 5,242    | 44.8                  | 112,950     |                       |  |
| High   | 27.6                              | 2,104    | 23.1                  | 73,147      |                       |  |
| <b>Math - African Am.</b>                    |                                   |          |                       |             |                       |  |
| Elem   | 56.1                              | 4,626    | 57.2                  | 118,474     |                       |  |
| Mid  | 50                                | 5,247    | 42.2                  | 112,867     |                       |  |
| High   | 53.4                              | 2,088    | 50.4                  | 72,693      |                       |  |
| <b>Science - African Am.</b>                 |                                   |          |                       |             |                       |  |
| Elem   | 29.6                              | 1,458    | 26.1                  | 37,420      |                       |  |
| Mid  | 24.6                              | 1,497    | 20.6                  | 37,263      |                       |  |
| High   | 18.4                              | 912      | 17.2                  | 31,898      |                       |  |

Data

|   |                           |       |        |        |         |
|---|---------------------------|-------|--------|--------|---------|
|   | <b>Reading - Hispanic</b> |       |        |        |         |
|   | Elem                      | 75.3  | 7,970  | 67.6   | 135,475 |
|   | Mid                       | 67.2  | 9,721  | 56.9   | 127,267 |
|   | High                      | 43.2  | 3,575  | 35.2   | 81,080  |
|   | <b>Math - Hispanic</b>    |       |        |        |         |
|   | Elem                      | 74.9  | 7,975  | 69.5   | 135,473 |
|   | Mid                       | 65.4  | 9,719  | 56.9   | 127,178 |
|   | High                      | 75    | 3,566  | 64.5   | 80,459  |
|   | <b>Science - Hispanic</b> |       |        |        |         |
|   | Elem                      | 46.6  | 2,485  | 39.6   | 43,490  |
| Mid   | 41.7                      | 3,006 | 34.2   | 42,038 |         |
| High  | 32.4                      | 1,542 | 29.8   | 34,292 |         |
| <b>Total % Proficient by Free and Reduced Lunch</b> |                           |       |        |        |         |
|   | <b>Reading</b>            |       |        |        |         |
|   | Elem                      | 66.5  | 10,260 | 63.3   | 298,828 |
|   | Mid                       | 59.6  | 11,726 | 51.3   | 265,877 |
|   | High                      | 33.4  | 3,838  | 28.9   | 142,949 |
|   | <b>Math</b>               |       |        |        |         |
|   | Elem                      | 64    | 10,273 | 63.7   | 298,751 |
|   | Mid                       | 55.2  | 11,724 | 49.3   | 265,633 |
|   | High                      | 65.6  | 3,831  | 58.2   | 141,954 |
|   | <b>Science</b>            |       |        |        |         |
|   | Elem                      | 35.5  | 3,146  | 33.7   | 94,285  |
| Mid   | 32.1                      | 3,310 | 28.2   | 84,763 |         |
| High  | 25.4                      | 1,544 | 23.6   | 56,011 |         |
| <b>Total % Proficient by ESE</b>                    |                           |       |        |        |         |
|   | <b>Reading</b>            |       |        |        |         |
|   | Elem                      | 49.6  | 2,549  | 45.3   | 78,494  |
|   | Mid                       | 42.2  | 2,401  | 31.2   | 66,394  |
|   | High                      | 18.5  | 713    | 13.9   | 35,828  |
|   | <b>Math</b>               |       |        |        |         |
|   | Elem                      | 50.1  | 2,557  | 49.2   | 78,481  |
|   | Mid                       | 37.7  | 2,405  | 29     | 66,318  |
|   | High                      | 45.9  | 711    | 33     | 35,472  |
|   | <b>Science</b>            |       |        |        |         |
|   | Elem                      | 24.1  | 742    | 25.8   | 24,815  |
| Mid   | 23.2                      | 673   | 17.1   | 21,381 |         |
| High  | 15.7                      | 299   | 12.8   | 14,033 |         |



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