

Dr. Sanborn is a noted leader, advocate, and activist for education and children and the President and CEO of CHILDREN AT RISK. Dr. Sanborn earned his undergraduate degree at Florida State University and his doctorate at Columbia University in New York City. Before entering the non-profit sector, he had a distinguished career in higher education at institutions such as Rice University and Hampshire College. He has worked and served as a senior leader with many organizations, always bringing with him a focus on innovation, collaborations with like-minded groups, resource developing partnerships, and a belief that all children deserve extraordinary opportunities to succeed.

Under his leadership, CHILDREN AT RISK has expanded its influence considerably. Notable achievements include launching the Public Policy & Law Center, CHILDREN AT RISK Institute and the Center to End Trafficking and Exploitation of Children, directing significantly increased media attention to the issues championed by the organization, and increasing the organizational capacity to drive macro-level change to improve the lives of Houston's most defenseless children. In recognition of the significant impact Dr. Sanborn has had within the Greater Houston community, he recently received the Houston Area Association for the Education of Young Children "Advocate of the Year Award" and the "Seeds of Hope" award for his work to end poverty at a systematic level through advocacy with community organizations and an increased awareness among public officials and the media.



Ease the Way for Outstanding Charter Schools While Holding Poor-Performers Accountable

Texas is home to some of the nation's most well-known charter schools. Charter school networks such as KIPP, YES Prep, Uplift, and IDEA are impressive success stories that illustrate the results that are possible when charter schools get it right. However, the charter school landscape in Texas is not completely rosy. Charter schools tend to cluster at the top and at the bottom when it comes to performance measures. Many Texas charter schools have abysmal records when it comes to graduation rates and standardized test scores. Too many of Texas' children are languishing in poor-performing charters, while the outstanding charters have waiting lists that run into the hundreds. This imbalance must be addressed.

Proposed Policy Reform: CHILDREN AT RISK proposes that all Texas charter schools be held to high accountability standards that are equal to those placed upon traditional public schools. Additionally, charter schools must be financially well-managed and transparent. If charter schools are unable to maintain these standards, they should be closed in a manner that will cause minimal disruption for students. Charter school authorizers should also be carefully scrutinized to ensure that all the charter schools in their portfolio adhere to these standards.

Rationale: Charter schools in Texas serve large populations of low-income and minority students. Over 40% of charter school students are considered "at-risk" by the Texas Education Agency, and over 68% are economically disadvantaged. For these young people, a good education is a pathway out of poverty. Charter schools that recruit these students and then fail to deliver good results are doing their communities a great disservice. Such schools should be shuttered, making way for the charter schools that deliver on their promise to provide an outstanding education for their students.

Scope of the Problem: There are a total of 308 non-alternative charter school campuses in Texas, serving a total of 103,725 students. Over half of high school charters fell below the state average in the percentage of their students scoring at the commended level on the TAKS math exam. Similarly, 66% of charter elementary schools failed to meet the state average for percentage of students scoring at the commended level on the TAKS Reading/ELA exam.

For Questions or comments please contact:

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Charter School Best Practices

CHILDREN AT RISK conducts annual school rankings that examine the performance of over 7,000 public schools across the state. The results of these rankings provide a picture of the best (and worst) performing campuses in the state. According to CHILDREN AT RISK's calculations, a number of charter schools consistently rank among the top schools in the state. By examining the structures and cultures of these high-performing charters, CHILDREN AT RISK has pinpointed best practices for Texas charter schools:

Time on Task: For low-income children, time spent on task in school is essential. Top charter schools have school days that can stretch as long as 10 hours and school years that extend beyond the traditional 180 days. Many hold classes and tutorial sessions on the weekends.

Rigorous Coursework: Top charter schools hold high expectations for all their students, without exception. All students are exposed to rigorous, demanding coursework.

Focus on College and Career Success: At the best charter schools, the expectation is that every single student will attend college and go on to successful careers. No students are dismissed as "just not college material."

High-Performing Teachers and School Leaders: Teachers at high-performing charters are committed and held to high standards of excellence. Hard work and long hours are expected, but they are supported by strong school leaders who appreciate their talented staff and work to cultivate a positive school culture.

Parent Contract: Parents are an indispensable part of the education equation. Many outstanding charter schools focus on including parents in their children's education, often asking them to sign a contract stipulating that parents will provide their children with the support and involvement necessary for them to succeed.

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Charter School Performance in Texas

Texas is the birthplace of high-performing charter networks such as KIPP, YES, IDEA, and Uplift. Charter schools are home to highly diverse student bodies: 25% of their students are African American, and 53% are Hispanic. Compared to their traditional public school peers, charter schools house a higher proportion of students living in poverty (68% vs. 59%), and they serve similar proportions of at-risk and Limited English Proficient (LEP) students.

Texas Charter Schools vs. Traditional Public Schools - Demographics								
	Total Campuses	Total Enrollment	% Economically Disadvantaged	% At-Risk	% LEP	% African American	% Hispanic	% White
Charter Schools	308	103,725	68.1%	40.8%	16.7%	24.6%	52.5%	16.2%
Traditional Schools	7,767	1,755,681	58.9%	46.0%	16.9%	12.6%	50.1%	31.6%

Unfortunately, student performance in Texas charter schools is decidedly mixed. Some campuses excel, while others lag behind. In an examination of the percentage of students who scored at the commended level on TAKS exams, many charter campuses failed to meet the statewide average. At the third grade level, a full 73% of charter schools fell below the state average for the number of students scoring at the commended level (compared to 57% of traditional schools). By the eleventh grade, the trend reverses: on the TAKS math exam, more traditional schools failed to reach the state average compared to their charter school peers (64% vs. 53%, respectively).

Texas Charter Schools vs. Traditional Public Schools – Performance						
<i>% Falling Below the State Average for Percentage of Students Scoring at the Commended Level on TAKS</i>						
	3 rd Grade Reading	3 rd Grade Math	8 th Grade Reading	8 th Grade Math	11 th Grade Reading	11 th Grade Math
Charter Schools	66.7%	73.0%	42.5%	68.0%	58.4%	53.2%
Traditional Schools	56.5%	57.3%	55.5%	65.3%	54.6%	63.5%

Some charter schools are consistent underperformers. Charter schools represent 6% of all public school campuses in the state, but they make up 18% of Texas campuses that failed to meet AYP for the past five consecutive years.

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