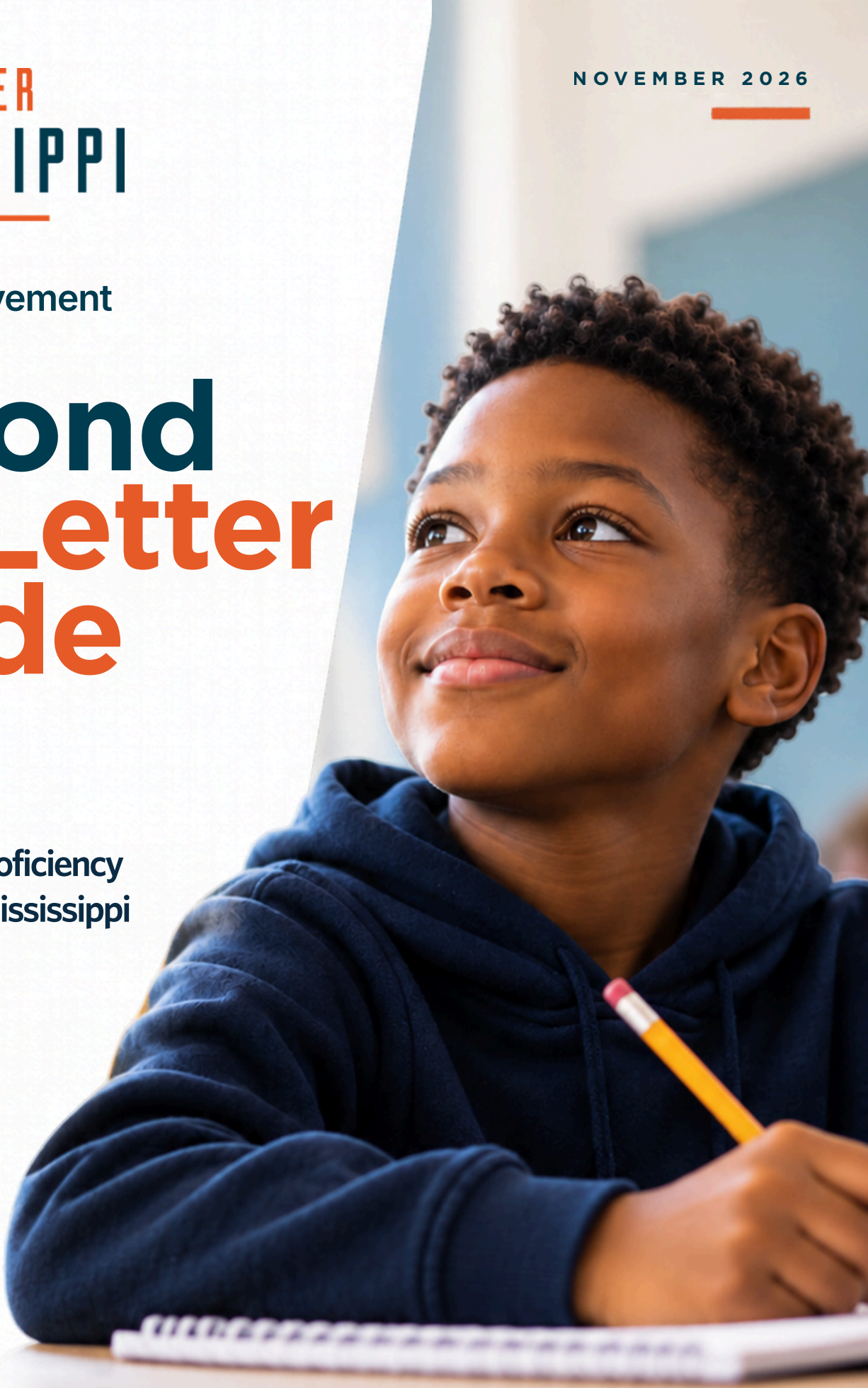
EMPOWER MISSISSIPPI

NOVEMBER 2026

Charter Achievement

Beyond the Letter Grade

What Student Proficiency Reveals About Mississippi Charter Schools



BY THE NUMBERS

Jackson's Six Charter Schools

Charter schools are not a single solution for all students. But across tested grades 3–8, students at Jackson's six charter schools are reaching proficiency at higher rates than their peers in district-run schools.

What is proficiency? A student is proficient when they perform at or above Mississippi's grade-level standards on state assessments.

OVERALL • READING AND MATH

28% **MORE CHARTER SCHOOL STUDENTS ARE PERFORMING AT OR ABOVE GRADE LEVEL THAN THEIR PEERS IN DISTRICT-RUN SCHOOLS.**

All six charter schools • tested grades 3–8

27.3% charter | 21.3% JPS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

23%

more charter school students are performing at or above grade level in ELA

Charter 28.8% | JPS 23.5%

MATHEMATICS

35%

more charter school students are performing at or above grade level in math

Charter 25.7% | JPS 19.1%

3,059

STUDENTS

Enrolled in Jackson's six charter schools in 2025–26. Without these schools, families would lose a valuable public school option and could face lower-performing alternatives.

HOW THE COMPARISONS WORK

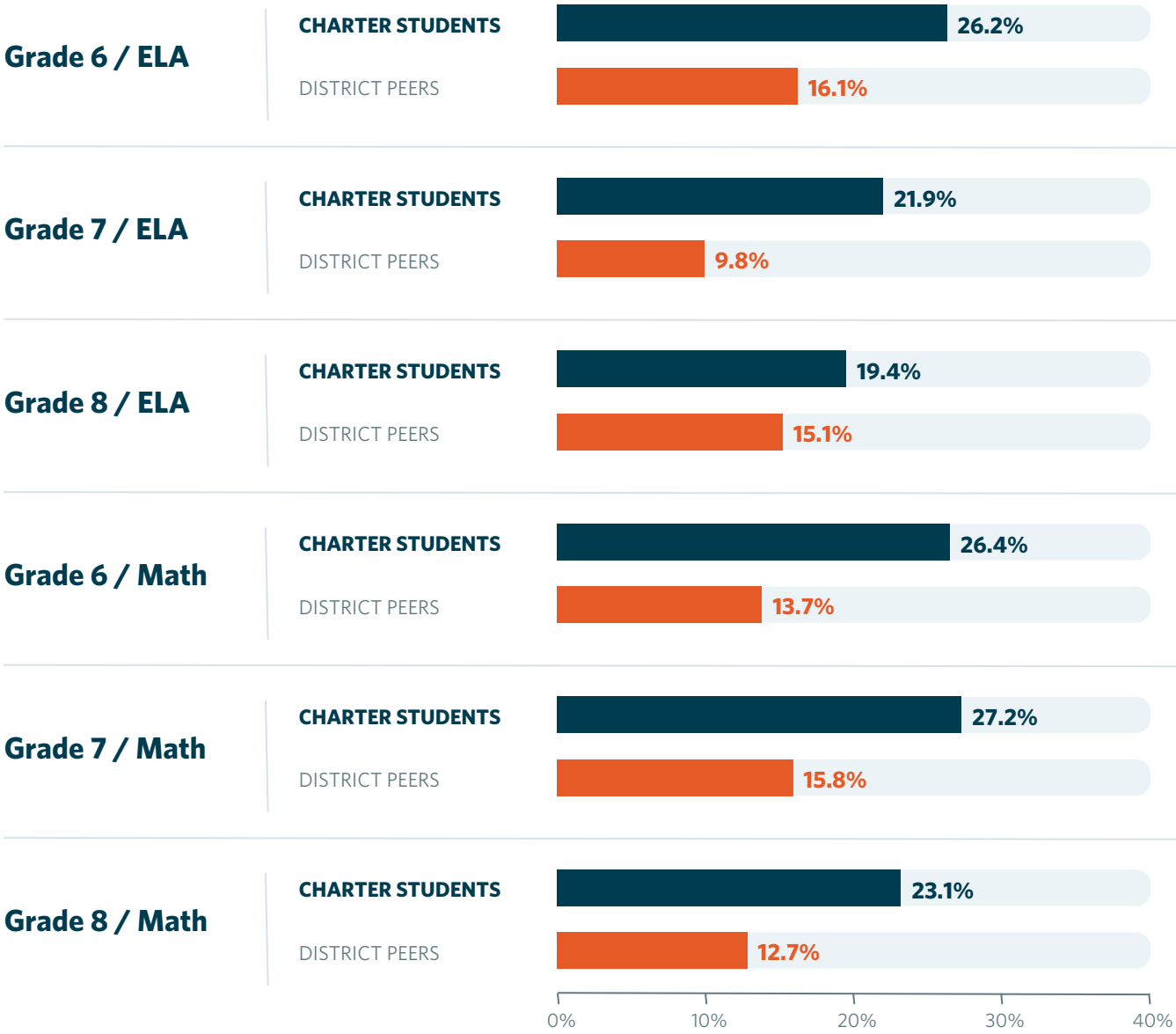
All six charter schools; Mississippi Academic Assessment Program (MAAP)-tested grades 3–8 only. Each charter school–grade–subject result is matched to the same JPS grade and subject, excluding schools that admit only high-performing students. "More" means a relative difference, not percentage points; overall combines English language arts (ELA) and math assessment results.

Sources: MDE 2026 Accountability Report and MAAP; 2025–26 enrollment from MDE data.

THE JACKSON COMPARISON

Charters Outperform District Peers

In the six middle-grade English language arts (ELA) and math comparisons below, the combined charter school proficiency rate is higher than the combined Jackson Public School (JPS) proficiency rate.



Note: Charter proficiency rates combine results from Jackson charter schools in the same grade and subject. District comparisons exclude schools that admit only high-performing students. Source: 2026 MAAP results.

Higher in all six comparisons.
But most students in both groups are still not proficient.

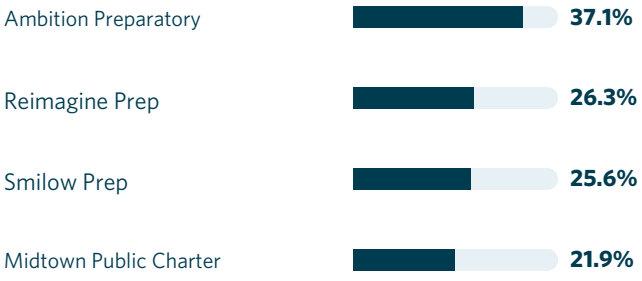
JACKSON SCHOOLWIDE RESULTS

A Closer Look at Jackson's Middle Schools

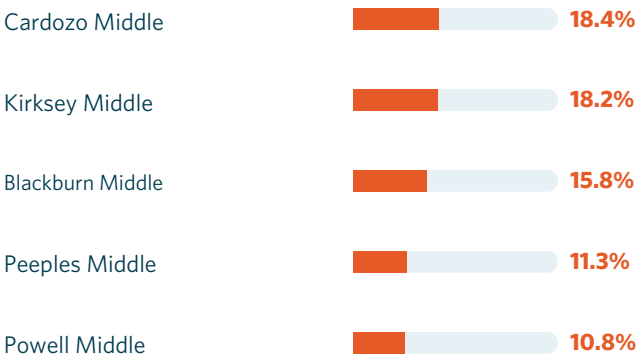
Schoolwide reading and math results show higher proficiency rates at all four charter schools than at the five nonselective district middle schools.

READING PROFICIENCY

CHARTER SCHOOLS

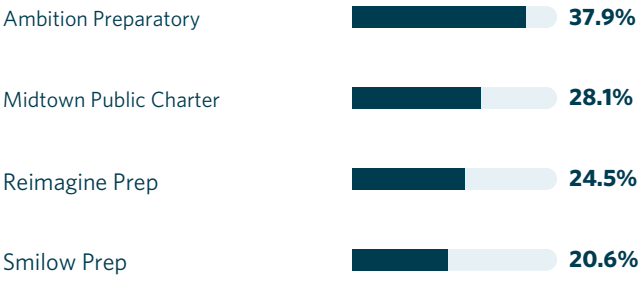


DISTRICT-RUN SCHOOLS

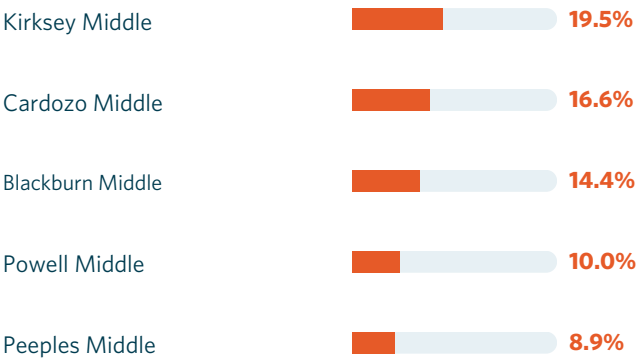


MATH PROFICIENCY

CHARTER SCHOOLS



DISTRICT-RUN SCHOOLS



All four charter schools rank above all five district-run schools shown.

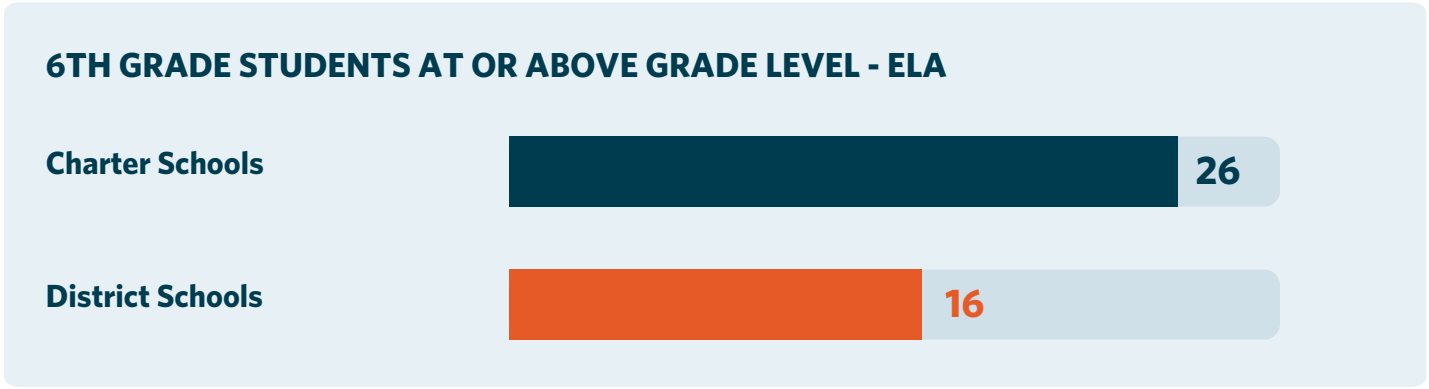
Source: Mississippi Department of Education, 2026 School Accountability Report (MAAP-based proficiency). Bailey APAC and Northwest Middle, district-run schools that admit only high-performing students, are excluded.

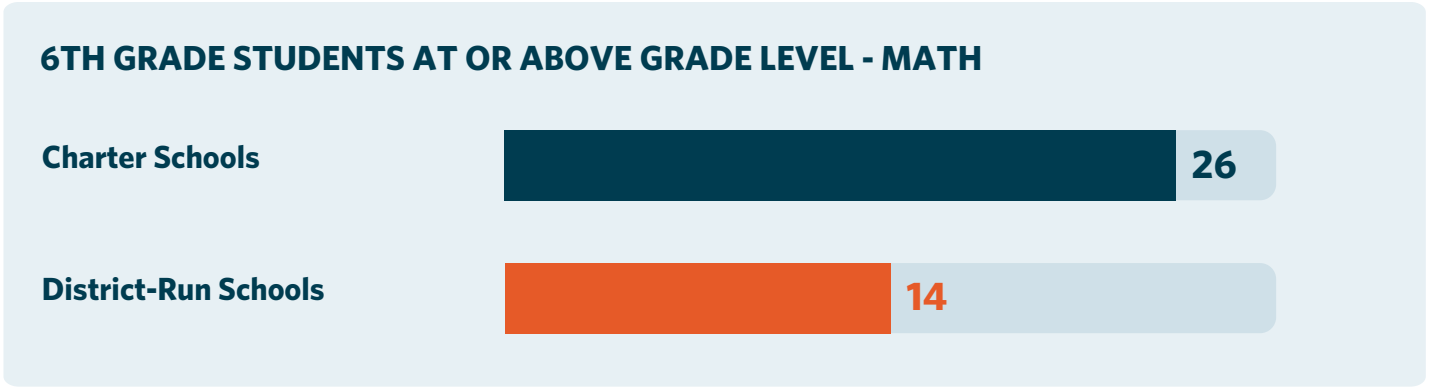
WHAT THE NUMBERS MEAN

Picture 100 Sixth-Graders

Imagine 100 students taking the sixth-grade state test in Jackson. How many meet the state standard in English language arts (ELA) and math?

Out of 100 students tested:





Note: Out of every 100 sixth-graders tested in Jackson, about 26 charter school students and 16 district-run school students met the state standard in ELA, and about 26 charter school students and 14 district-run school students met the state standard in math.

The charter group has about 10 more proficient students per 100 tested in ELA and about 12 more proficient students per 100 tested in math. That is a meaningful difference.

BEYOND THE LETTER GRADE

What a Letter Grade Misses

There's no question charter schools need to improve, but let's look at the schools their students would have to attend if charters weren't available to them.

In the 2025-26 school year, every charter school in Mississippi except one had a higher percentage of students performing at or above grade level in English language arts (ELA) than the local district-run schools that serve the same grade levels as the charter. Most of them outperformed the district schools at every grade level. ELA includes reading, writing, and other language skills.

This reality is masked by a hyper-focus on the letter grade assigned to Mississippi's public schools, including charter schools, in the recent report from the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) on the state's accountability model.

Critics of charter schools are using letter grades to say charter schools are not working. There's no question charter schools need to improve, but let's look at the schools their students would have to attend if charters weren't available to them.

The most striking contrast is in the city of Jackson, where one charter middle school is graded C and three are graded D. That doesn't look good.

However, four of the seven middle schools run by the Jackson Public School district (JPS) are graded F.

One of the remaining three is a D, and the other two, Bailey APAC and Northwest Middle School, only admit students who are already high-achieving and have no negative behavior record.

That means middle school students in Jackson who are struggling academically would be forced to attend a D – or more likely an F – school the district assigns them to, based on where they live, if they didn't have a charter school available to them.

***Every* district-run middle school in Jackson except Northwest and Bailey has fewer than 20% of their students who are proficient in reading and in math. *None* of the charter middle schools in Jackson have such a low percentage in either subject.**

That's not to say charter schools don't need to improve. However, it is one indicator that charter schools are doing a better job than most other public schools in their area (reminder: charter schools are public schools but are not run by the district), especially for struggling students.

One problem (of many) with using only the letter grade to compare schools – charter or traditional – is that the grade applies to the entire school, which can mask how well and/or how poorly the school is doing in different subjects and different grade levels.

A more direct comparison is possible by using grade-level scores on each academic subject on the state tests. Third grade math scores at a charter school can be compared to third grade math scores at district schools, a charter's fifth grade science scores can be compared to fifth grade science scores at district schools, and so forth.

BEYOND THE LETTER GRADE

These are important distinctions that aren't seen when one letter grade is assigned to an entire school.

Even more specifically, results for each grade level and subject are reported by how many students scored in each of five scoring categories, labeled Levels 1-5, with Level 4 or 5 being proficient or advanced, which essentially means performing at or above grade level.

When charter school students are compared to students in the same grade levels in their local district schools, every charter school in the state except one had a higher percentage of proficient students in ELA. For example, a charter school serving grades 4-8 was compared to all students in grades 4-8 in their local district-run schools. This provides a more direct comparison of the achievement levels of children in grades 4-8 than the state accountability scores which lump that school into a comparison with ones that serve grades K-5 or 6-8, for example.

(For purposes of this comparison, we only include schools that accept all students, just as charter schools do, not schools that restrict admission.)

When considering the test results for the state as a whole, charter schools in almost all cases score better than their district peers in ELA but not as much in math. (See appendix.)

In math, charter schools underperformed district schools in 3rd through 5th grade but in 6th, 7th, and 8th grade, they compared much more favorably. This could be an indication that the longer students are in a charter school, the better they perform compared to their peers in district-run schools, though no study has been done to confirm that indication.

These are important distinctions that aren't seen when one letter grade is assigned to an entire school.

One more note on how unwise it is to use the single letter grade in the accountability system, especially for districts as a whole. **There are six D-graded district-run schools in A-graded districts, 15 D schools in B districts, and 92 D schools in C districts. There are two F schools in districts graded B; there are 11 F schools in C districts.**

That means students in 126 D or F schools are stuck in the school they've been assigned to, with no hope of a new charter school opening in their district. That's because new charter schools are not allowed to open in any A, B, or C district unless the school board approves – which has never happened. Only a change in the state's charter school law would fix that.

Charter schools generally draw children whose parents are looking for an alternative to the school assigned to them by the district because their children are not doing well at that assigned school. According to charter school leaders, the students who enroll in their schools generally arrive two to three grade levels behind.

Charter schools are intended to offer a different way to do public education. Comparing them to schools that follow a more traditional path is difficult. But as demonstrated above, when digging below the surface of a single letter grade, charter schools are providing value to students and parents who choose them.

We need more of them.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Five Things to Know About Charter Schools.

01



A Letter Grade Doesn't Tell the Whole Story.

A school's accountability rating is only one measure of success. Student proficiency and academic growth tell us more about what children are learning.

02



The Right Comparison Is Local.

Charter schools should be compared with the district schools students can actually attend, looking at the same grades and subjects whenever possible, and excluding schools that only enroll high-performing students.

03



In Jackson, Charter Students Are Outperforming Their Peers.

At each grade level in both reading and math, charter middle school students reached proficiency at higher rates than their peers in the district comparison group.

04



Catching Up Takes Time.

Charter schools only open in struggling districts. School leaders report that many students arrive significantly behind academically. Measuring their progress matters, too.

05



More Options. Real Accountability.

Charter schools must continue improving and be held to clear standards. But families should have access to public schools that deliver stronger results for their children, not fewer choices.

DATA APPENDIX

Jackson Charter Schools

Charter proficiency by assessed course and grade, compared with local district peers

COURSE / GRADE	% PROFICIENT	DIFF. FROM DISTRICT	TESTERS
Ambition Preparatory Charter School (Jackson)			
ELA3	49.4%	**+26.3%**	79
ELA4	33.3%	**+1.8%**	78
ELA5	43.7%	**+4.3%**	71
ELA6	23.9%	**+7.7%**	67
ELA7	31.0%	**+21.1%**	71
MAT3	48.1%	**+29.8%**	79
MAT4	29.5%	**+4.1%**	78
MAT5	28.8%	**+1.9%**	73
MAT6	43.3%	**+29.6%**	67
MAT7	39.4%	**+23.6%**	71
SCI5	65.8%	**+12.2%**	73
Joel E. Smilow Collegiate Charter School (Jackson)			
ELA3	22.8%	-0.3%	114
ELA4	36.4%	**+4.8%**	110
MAT3	14.4%	-3.8%	111
MAT4	23.9%	-1.5%	109
Midtown Public Charter School (Jackson)			
ELA4	26.5%	-5.0%	49
ELA5	29.3%	-10.1%	41
ELA6	25.6%	**+9.5%**	82
ELA7	16.4%	**+6.5%**	55
ELA8	16.5%	**+1.3%**	79
MAT4	26.5%	**+1.2%**	49
MAT5	28.6%	**+1.7%**	42
MAT6	30.1%	**+16.4%**	83
MAT7	36.4%	**+20.5%**	55
MAT8	24.1%	**+11.4%**	79
SCI5	59.5%	**+6.0%**	42
SCI8	40.5%	**+17.3%**	79

ELA3 - English language arts - 3rd Grade
MAT3 - Mathematics - 3rd Grade
SCI5 - Science - 5th Grade (science is only tested in 5th and 8th grade)
ALG - Algebra
BIO - Biology

"Diff. From District": This shows the difference, in percentage points, between charter schools and district schools in the same grade and subject in the district where the charter school is located.

DATA APPENDIX

Jackson Charter Schools
(Continued)

Charter proficiency by assessed course and grade, compared with local district peers

COURSE / GRADE	% PROFICIENT	DIFF. FROM DISTRICT	TESTERS
Reimagine Prep Charter School (Jackson)			
ELA5	45.2%	**+5.8%**	31
ELA6	24.7%	**+8.6%**	85
ELA7	27.9%	**+18.1%**	86
ELA8	23.0%	**+7.9%**	113
MAT5	32.3%	**+5.4%**	31
MAT6	13.8%	**+0.1%**	87
MAT7	30.6%	**+14.8%**	85
MAT8	26.1%	**+13.4%**	115
SCI5	53.3%	-0.2%	30
SCI8	36.2%	**+13.0%**	116
Revive Collegiate Charter School (Jackson)			
ELA3	29.2%	**+6.1%**	113
ELA4	49.2%	**+17.7%**	63
MAT3	20.4%	**+2.1%**	113
MAT4	22.2%	-3.2%	63
Smilow Prep Charter School (Jackson)			
ELA5	40.8%	**+1.4%**	120
ELA6	28.7%	**+12.5%**	129
ELA7	15.6%	**+5.7%**	135
ELA8	18.0%	**+2.9%**	122
MAT5	23.5%	-3.4%	119
MAT6	23.8%	**+10.1%**	126
MAT7	14.5%	-1.3%	131
MAT8	19.7%	**+7.0%**	122
SCI5	40.3%	-13.2%	119
SCI8	23.0%	-0.2%	122

ELA3 - English language arts - 3rd Grade
MAT3 - Mathematics - 3rd Grade
SCI5 - Science - 5th Grade (science is only tested in 5th and 8th grade)
ALG - Algebra
BIO - Biology

"Diff. From District": This shows the difference, in percentage points, between charter schools and district schools in the same grade and subject in the district where the charter school is located.

DATA APPENDIX

Charter Schools Beyond Jackson

Charter proficiency by assessed course and grade, compared with local district peers

COURSE / GRADE	% PROFICIENT	DIFF. FROM DISTRICT	TESTERS
Clarksdale Collegiate Charter School (Clarksdale)			
ELA3	34.3%	**+16.2%**	70
ELA4	30.9%	**+8.7%**	68
ELA5	30.3%	-9.2%	76
ELA6	28.6%	**+3.3%**	63
ELA7	28.1%	**+4.3%**	64
ELA8	18.5%	**+1.4%**	65
MAT3	25.7%	**+7.6%**	70
MAT4	8.8%	-31.9%	68
MAT5	15.8%	-6.1%	76
MAT6	27.0%	-3.1%	63
MAT7	29.7%	-20.9%	64
MAT8	13.8%	-12.3%	65
SCI5	56.6%	**+7.8%**	76
SCI8	43.1%	**+7.9%**	65
ALG	33.3%	-12.5%	39
BIO	26.8%	-31.0%	41
Leflore Legacy Academy Charter School (Greenwood)			
ELA6	27.4%	**+1.5%**	73
ELA7	24.2%	**+0.7%**	66
ELA8	29.4%	**+12.0%**	68
MAT6	16.4%	-4.3%	73
MAT7	28.8%	-12.4%	66
MAT8	32.9%	**+4.6%**	70
SCI8	50.7%	**+11.7%**	67
ALG	38.9%	**+9.8%**	18
Instant Impact Global Prep Charter School (Natchez)			
ELA3	24.4%	-6.1%	45
ELA4	34.8%	-2.6%	23
MAT3	8.9%	-25.7%	45
MAT4	4.3%	-40.9%	23
SR1 College Prep & Stem Charter School (Canton)			
ELA3	41.2%	**+3.5%**	17
MAT3	23.5%	-22.9%	17

DATA APPENDIX

All Jackson Elementary Schools

Charter and District

Schoolwide reading and math proficiency, listed in order of reading proficiency.

SCHOOL (GRADES SERVED)	GRADE	READING*	MATH
JACKSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS / JPS DISTRICT GRADE: C / CHARTERS HIGHLIGHTED IN DARKER SHADING			
North Jackson Elementary (preK-5)	A	57.7%	56.2%
Spann Elementary (K-5)	B	43.9%	32.7%
Timberlawn Elementary (K-5)	B	41.7%	29.5%
McLeod Elementary (preK-5)	C	40.3%	29.1%
Walton Elementary (preK-5)	C	39.1%	32.5%
Ambition Preparatory Charter (K-8)	C	37.1%	37.9%
John Hopkins Elementary (preK-5)	C	36.9%	30.8%
Revive Collegiate Charter (K-4)	D	35.8%	22.3%
Van Winkle Elementary (preK)	C	30.4%	25.3%
Joel E. Smilow Collegiate Charter (K-4)	D	29.7%	19.3%
Shirley Elementary (preK-5)	C	29.1%	16.0%
Pecan Park Elementary (preK-5)	D	29.1%	21.2%
Bates Elementary (K-5)	C	28.9%	25.6%
Clausell Elementary (K-5)	F	28.3%	14.3%
Oak Forest Elementary (K-5)	D	27.5%	16.1%
Johnson Elementary (preK-5)	C	27.0%	21.8%
Green Elementary (preK-5)	D	24.7%	21.1%
Boyd Elementary (K-5)	D	24.3%	17.8%
Key Elementary (preK-5)	F	21.5%	6.1%
Galloway Elementary (preK-5)	D	20.7%	9.8%
Wilkins Elementary (K-5)	C	19.7%	21.9%
Isable Elementary (K-5)	D	17.9%	31.6%

*Some percentages may differ from charts/tables earlier in this report, which showed broader English language arts (ELA) scores. This is focused on reading and comes from the state accountability report, which does not include reading scores by grade level.

DATA APPENDIX

All Jackson Middle Schools

Charter and District

Schoolwide reading and math proficiency, listed in order of reading proficiency; Schools that only admit high-performing students were not included in the comparison of open-admission schools.

SCHOOL (GRADES SERVED)	GRADE	READING*	MATH
JACKSON SCHOOLS WHERE ONLY HIGH-PERFORMING STUDENTS ARE SELECTED / NOT COMPARED			
Northwest Middle (6-8)	B	63.2%	63.2%
Bailey Middle APAC (4-8)	B	59.6%	67.1%
JACKSON MIDDLE SCHOOLS / JPS DISTRICT GRADE: C / CHARTERS HIGHLIGHTED IN DARKER SHADING			
Ambition Preparatory Charter (K-8)	C	37.1%	37.9%
Reimagine Prep Charter (5-8)	D	26.3%	24.5%
Smilow Prep Charter (5-8)	D	25.6%	20.6%
Midtown Public Charter (4-8)	D	21.9%	28.1%
Cardozo Middle (6-8)	D	18.4%	16.6%
Kirksey Middle (6-8)	F	18.2%	19.5%
Blackburn Middle (6-8)	F	15.8%	14.4%
Peeples Middle (6-8)	F	11.3%	8.9%
Powell Middle (6-8)	F	10.8%	10.0%

DATA APPENDIX

Schoolwide Results Beyond Jackson

Schoolwide reading and math proficiency at charter and district schools within each district, listed in order of reading proficiency.

SCHOOL (GRADES SERVED)	GRADE	READING*	MATH
CLARKSDALE (CLARKSDALE MUNICIPAL DISTRICT GRADE: C)			
Oakhurst Intermediate (5-6)	D	34.0%	26.3%
Clarksdale Collegiate Charter (K-9)	D	29.0%	21.1%
Kirkpatrick Magnet (preK-4)	C	24.5%	31.9%
Booker T Washington Magnet (K-5)	C	21.1%	25.0%
W.A. Higgins Middle Academy (7-8)	D	20.2%	36.8%
Geo H Oliver Visual and Perf. Arts (K-5)	D	13.5%	22.5%
GREENWOOD (GREENWOOD-LEFLORE DISTRICT GRADE: C)			
Leflore Legacy Academy Charter (6-8)	D	28.4%	28.1%
Greenwood Middle	D	21.6%	30.9%
NATCHEZ (NATCHEZ-ADAMS DISTRICT GRADE: C)			
McLaurin Elementary (2-4)	C	33.2%	39.4%
Instant Impact Global Prep Charter (K-5)	F	27.9%	7.4%
West Elementary (preK-1)	C	25.6%	39.5%
CANTON (CANTON PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT GRADE: C)			
Jimmie M. Goodloe Elementary (PreK-5)	A	49.7%	49.2%
Reuben B. Myers Sch of Art & Sciences (preK-5)	B	46.9%	39.0%
Canton Elementary (K-5)	A	46.3%	63.8%
SR1 College Prep & Stem Academy Charter (K-3)	N/A	41.2%	23.5%
McNeal Elementary (preK-5)	B	37.6%	39.2%

*Some percentages may differ from charts/tables earlier in this report, which showed broader English language arts (ELA) scores. This is focused on reading and comes from the state accountability report, which does not include reading scores by grade level.

DATA APPENDIX

A/B/C Districts With D/F Schools

Districts where new charter schools are not allowed to open but operate D or F schools.

DISTRICT	DISTRICT GRADE	D SCHOOLS	F SCHOOLS	TOTAL	D/F %
Desoto County School District	A	4	0	40	10%
Lamar County School District	A	1	0	15	7%
Harrison County School District	A	1	0	21	5%
Smith County School District	B	1	1	6	33%
North Tippah School District	B	1	0	3	33%
Louisville Municipal School District	B	2	0	6	33%
George County School District	B	2	0	8	25%
West Jasper Consolidated School District	B	1	0	4	25%
Lowndes County School District	B	1	1	8	25%
Amory School District	B	1	0	4	25%
Perry County School District	B	1	0	4	25%
Chickasaw County School District	B	1	0	5	20%
Greene County School District	B	1	0	5	20%
Forrest County School District	B	1	0	6	17%
Marion County School District	B	1	0	6	17%
Hinds County School District	B	1	0	8	13%
Moss Point Separate School District	C	3	0	4	75%
Noxubee County School District	C	2	0	3	67%
East Tallahatchie Consolidated School District	C	2	0	3	67%
Greenwood-Leflore Consolidated School District	C	7	0	11	64%
Coahoma County School District	C	3	0	5	60%
Lawrence County School District	C	3	0	5	60%
Brookhaven School District	C	3	0	5	60%
Holmes County Consolidated School District	C	3	1	7	57%
Sunflower County Consolidated School District	C	6	0	11	55%
Laurel School District	C	2	1	6	50%
Holly Springs School District	C	2	0	4	50%
North Panola School District	C	2	0	4	50%
Baldwyn School District	C	1	0	2	50%
Hollandale School District	C	1	0	2	50%

(Continued on next page)

DATA APPENDIX

A/B/C Districts With D/F Schools
(Continued)

Districts where new charter schools are not allowed to open but operate D or F schools.

DISTRICT	DISTRICT GRADE	D SCHOOLS	F SCHOOLS	TOTAL	D/F %
Yazoo County School District	C	3	2	10	50%
Clarksdale Municipal School District	C	3	0	7	43%
Jackson Public School District	C	9	6	35	43%
Leake County School District	C	2	0	5	40%
Tate County School District	C	2	0	5	40%
Walthall County School District	C	2	0	5	40%
Lee County School District	C	5	0	13	38%
Cleveland School District	C	3	0	8	38%
Amite County School District	C	1	0	3	33%
Okolona Separate School District	C	1	0	3	33%
Franklin County School District	C	1	0	3	33%
Jefferson County School District	C	1	0	3	33%
Aberdeen School District	C	1	0	3	33%
Newton Municipal School District	C	1	0	3	33%
Simpson County School District	C	2	0	6	33%
Wayne County School District	C	2	0	6	33%
Vicksburg Warren School District	C	4	0	14	29%
Quitman School District	C	0	1	4	25%
Kemper County School District	C	1	0	4	25%
Nettleton School District	C	1	0	4	25%
Scott County School District	C	2	0	8	25%
Natchez-Adams School District	C	1	0	5	20%
West Point Consolidated School District	C	1	0	6	17%
Covington County School District	C	1	0	7	14%
Canton Public School District	C	1	0	7	14%
Marshall County School District	C	1	0	8	13%
TOTAL D OR F SCHOOLS IN A, B, OR C DISTRICTS		**113**	**13**	**406**	**31%**

Blue districts currently have a charter school that opened when the district was rated D or F. Additional charter schools in these C-rated districts now require district consent.



For questions about this report, please contact Forest Thigpen, Senior Advisor, at **forest@empowerms.org.**

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Empower Mississippi makes every reasonable effort to ensure the accuracy of the data and information presented in its research. Reports reflect the best available information at the time of analysis and publication. Source data may contain errors or omissions and may be revised, updated, or supplemented after publication. If material errors or updated information are identified, Empower Mississippi will review the information and revise its analysis as appropriate.

EMPOWER MISSISSIPPI

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