



Report Highlights

Louisiana Charter School Compliance with Economically-Disadvantaged Enrollment Requirements

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Why We Conducted This Audit

State law dictates that the best interests of economically-disadvantaged students should be the overriding consideration when charter school laws are implemented. We conducted this review in response to a legislative request on whether charter schools are enrolling the required number of economically-disadvantaged students and to provide an update to a finding in our 2017 LLA audit that found that 19% of charter schools authorized by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) had not enrolled the required percentage of economically-disadvantaged students. Most types of charter schools are required by state law to enroll a certain percentage of economically-disadvantaged students – generally 85% of the rate of economically-disadvantaged students from its enrollment area. As of Academic Year (AY) 2021-22, there were 146 charter schools serving 88,292 students in Louisiana, with 108 having an economically-disadvantaged enrollment requirement serving 65,689 students.

What We Found

Overall, we found that, while there has been improvement in the number of charter schools meeting the economically-disadvantaged enrollment percentages, some schools are still not meeting the requirement. Most of these schools have repeatedly failed to meet this requirement. To help ensure schools meet this requirement, the legislature may wish to consider providing guidance in state law about how to enforce this requirement. Specifically, we found:

- **Between AY 2016-17 and 2021-22, 27 (22.0%) of 123 charter schools did not meet their required economically-disadvantaged enrollment percentage for at least one year, most of them repeatedly.** However, the percent of charter schools meeting this requirement has improved by 11% over this time period. In addition, schools authorized by BESE had better rates of economically-disadvantaged enrollment compliance than those authorized by local school boards – with an average noncompliance rate of 14.3%, compared to 18.5% for locally-authorized schools.
- **Even though state law requires most types of charter schools to enroll a certain percentage of economically-disadvantaged students, it does not provide specific guidance about how to enforce this requirement.** As a result, while most charter schools do enroll a sufficient number of these students, a relatively small segment of charter schools – most of which are high academic performers – have struggled to meet this requirement and have chronically low enrollment of economically-disadvantaged students as compared to other charter schools.

Charter Schools Not Meeting Economically-Disadvantaged Enrollment Requirements • AY 2016-17 through 2021-22

Academic Year	Local School Board-Authorized Schools (Types 1 & 3)			BESE-Authorized Schools (Types 2 & 4)		
	Number of Charter Schools	Not Meeting Enrollment Requirement	% Not Meeting	Number of Charter Schools	Not Meeting Enrollment Requirement	% Not Meeting
2016-17	40	9	22.5%	40	8	20.0%
2017-18	48	12	25.0%	42	8	19.0%
2018-19	55	11	20.0%	43	6	14.0%
2019-20	60	12	20.0%	40	6	15.0%
2020-21	65	10	15.4%	39	4	10.3%
2021-22	67	8	11.9%	40	3	7.5%
Average	55.8	10.3	18.5%	40.7	5.8	14.3%

*Total does not include Type 3B and 5 charter schools. Belle Chasse Academy, a Type 2 charter school, is also excluded due to unique economically-disadvantaged requirements concerning the dependents of U.S. military members.

Source: Prepared by legislative auditor staff using data from the Louisiana Department of Education.

View the full report, including management’s response, at www.la.gov.