



Report Highlights

Monitoring of Charter Schools Louisiana Department of Education

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Why We Conducted This Audit

In 2013, the Louisiana Legislative Auditor recommended that the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) implement a more comprehensive process to annually assess the compliance of type 2, 4, and 5 charter schools with legal/contractual obligations (organizational performance). In its response, LDE stated that its new Charter School Performance Compact (CSPC) would satisfy that recommendation. We conducted this audit to evaluate LDE's use of the CSPC to monitor type 2, 4, and 5 charter schools' organizational performance.

What We Found

We found that LDE, through the CSPC, has implemented a more comprehensive process to annually monitor charter schools. However, we also identified areas where LDE's monitoring could be strengthened to enhance performance accountability. Specifically, we found:

- LDE conducted all required annual CSPC reviews from academic years 2013-14 to 2015-16. However, LDE weighs all critical and non-critical organizational performance indicators equally when determining a school's organizational performance rating.** Weighting critical violations more than non-critical violations and deducting points for each critical issue would allow LDE to present information to BESE that better reflects the severity of the violations and result in improved charter school accountability.

Board of Elementary and Secondary Education- (BESE) Authorized Charter School Types* (Academic Year 2015-16)			
Charter Type	Description	Number of Schools	Number of Students
Type 2	New or conversion charter school operated by a nonprofit corporation	35	20,228
Type 4	New or conversion charter school operated by a local school board	1	383
Type 5	Failing public school transferred to the Recovery School District and operated as a charter school	62	32,429
Total		98	53,040
<p>Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using charter law and information from LDE.</p>			

- LDE has not monitored two provisions of the charter school enrollment law, which may have contributed to some schools enrolling fewer at-risk students than they were statutorily and contractually required to enroll.** Seven (19%) of the 36 type 2 and 4 charter schools in academic year 2015-16 failed to enroll the required number of at-risk students.

Continued on next page

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Louisiana Department of Education

What We Found (Cont.)

- **LDE should consider conducting routine unannounced monitoring visits for charter schools in addition to its announced annual review visits.** Unannounced visits would allow LDE the ability to proactively identify issues that may not be detected during announced visits.
- **LDE should develop specific and consistent procedures on how to address concerns and violations at charter schools.** Currently, LDE procedures do not specify when a school should receive a “Notice of Concern” letter and do not require schools to send a “Return to Good Standing” letter once violations have been corrected.
- **Although LDE has developed a complaint process for charter schools, it needs to better inform parents with students in type 2 or 4 charter schools of this process.** We found that even though type 2 and 4 charter schools comprise 37% of the charter schools LDE oversees, only 53 (11%) of the 494 complaints filed were from a parent with a child in a type 2 or 4 charter school. This could indicate that these parents do not know where to go to file a complaint.

In addition, we identified an area for further study related to R.S. 17:3991(B), which establishes criteria on the minimum percentage of at-risk students that type 2 and 4 charter schools must enroll.