



**Texas Public Charter School Program
Start-Up Grant Evaluation Report:
2016–17 and 2017–18**

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List of Acronyms Used in this Report

Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)
Charter Management Organization (CMO)
U.S. Department of Education (ED)
English Learner (EL)
End-of-Course (EOC)
Ordinary Least Square (OLS)
Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
Professional development (PD)
Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS)
Professional Learning Community (PLC)
Propensity score matching (PSM)
Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)
Quasi-experimental design (QED)
State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC)
Special education (SPED)
State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)
Texas Education Agency (TEA)

Executive Summary

Background

In 2016, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) awarded a five-year Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant to the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The grant is intended to increase national understanding of the charter school model by providing financial assistance for the planning, program design, and initial implementation of charter schools; and by expanding the number of high-quality charter schools available to students. The grant program is also intended to increase understanding through an evaluation of the effects of such schools on student outcomes, staff, and parents. The federal grant guidelines allow for start-up funding not to exceed 18 months for planning and program design of the charter school and 24 months for the initial implementation of the charter school. In line with these requirements, TEA awarded sub-grants to 26 charter schools. The first cohort consisted of nine campuses that received funding from TEA from August 2016 through July 2018. Similarly, the second cohort of 17 campuses received funding from TEA May 2017 through July 2019.

Program Evaluation

In May 2017, TEA contracted with Safal Partners and their research partners Mathematica and Gibson Consulting Group to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the Texas Charter School Program Start-Up Grant. Broadly, the purpose of the evaluation is to identify promising practices exhibited by charter school start-up grantees and established, high-performing charter schools across the state, examine student and teacher recruitment and retention strategies within the start-up grantee campuses, and assess the efficacy and impact of student enrollment in start-up charter school campuses.¹

The evaluation utilized a variety of data collection and analysis strategies to address the research objectives, including online surveys of charter school leaders conducted in spring 2018, interviews with charter school principals and teachers, and classroom observations conducted during the course of fall 2017 and spring 2018 site visits. In addition, TEA provided student-level, teacher-level, and school-level data, which was used to analyze the relationship between student enrollment at campuses funded through the Texas Public Charter School Start-Up Grant and academic outcomes for students. The findings in this report are based on an analysis of the 26 Cohorts 1 and 2 start-up grantee campuses and high-performing charter school campuses.

Promising Practices from Charter School Start-Up Grantee Campuses

Planning Practices

School leaders and teachers at new charter start-up grantee campuses shared a number of important aspects to getting their new charter school up and running, including:

- Developing processes that drive campus practices and norms, such as deciding upon day-to-day systems that match the charter school's model, increasing student enrollment through various methods, and holding meetings with various stakeholders to encapsulate the mission and vision for the charter school.

¹ Statistical models were used to assess the performance of a sample of 100 high-quality campuses based on standardized test scores (i.e., STAAR-Reading, STAAR-Mathematics for Grades 3–8, and EOC exam scores for Grades 9–12). Campuses ranked in the top half of the 100 high-quality charter school campuses were categorized as high-performing for the purposes of this evaluation. See Appendix A for additional detail on high-performing schools for the purpose of this evaluation.

- Establishing defined roles and responsibilities, and developing campus teams. Teachers noted the utility of a supportive system and the importance of creating a positive culture among staff to build a sense of community as critical to establishing a new campus.
- Receiving critical support from either their CMO or district office staff while planning a new charter school campus, and guidance from TEA for guidelines such as how to submit amendments for new items, guidance on how to spend funding, expectations for curriculum, information on the required number of school days, and other school-related policies.

Organizational Practices

The study explored a number of key factors related to start-up grantee campus school organization and management, including important practices related to the charter school campus mission, and parent involvement with the school and in their child's education. Key findings include:

- Principals rated the use of data to inform instruction and hiring exemplary teachers to support other teachers among the most important practices for executing their campus' mission.
- Principals rated the regular individualized teacher-parent communication and having a system for parents to monitor their students' progress among the most important practices for getting parents involved in their child's education.
- Principals felt that word-of-mouth advertising and online advertising about the school, and current teachers recruiting other educators were among the most effective teacher recruitment methods.
- When hiring new teachers, principals shared that strong pedagogical skills and fit with the educational philosophy of the school were the most important criteria.
- Principals rated providing teachers with regular feedback on their instructional practices and providing dedicated planning time were among the most important practices for retaining high-quality teachers.
- Similar to teacher recruitment, principals cited word-of-mouth advertising from parents of currently enrolled students as the most effective method for attracting students. The use of social media was a distant second in terms of effectiveness in this category.

Instructional Practices

After establishing effective organizational practices and methods for recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers, providing support for teachers is essential for charter campuses to deliver the highest quality of instruction possible to their students. Key findings related to instructional practices are as follows:

- Principals shared that the use of formative data to inform instruction and establishing a positive relationship between the teacher and student were among the most impactful instructional practices observed at their schools.
- Principals felt that providing feedback to teachers after walk-throughs or informal observations and reviewing student data with teachers were among the most impactful approaches for improving instructional practices.
- Overall, classroom observation scores were in the upper mid-range at charter school start-up grantee campuses, indicating relatively high-quality teacher-student interactions across multiple domains.

- Observations of classrooms at charter school start-up grantee campuses reveal that Emotional Support domain scores were higher at start-up grantee campuses than high-performing charter schools. Emotional Support domain scores at start-up grantee campuses may be indicative of teachers providing supports for students in at-risk situations.
- The Classroom Organization domain was significantly lower for teachers at start-up grantee campuses than it was for teachers at high-performing charter schools. This finding may be reflective of more experienced teachers working at high-performing charter schools and/or additional classroom management training or systems in place at high-performing charter schools.
- The use of in-class small group, differentiated, and individualized instruction, as well as the development of strong teacher-student relationships, were ranked among the most impactful approaches for closing the achievement gap for educationally disadvantaged students. These same methods, in addition to targeted pull-out instruction by an interventionist, were rated as most impactful for closing the achievement gap for low-performing students.

School Climate and Staff Morale

There is a wide array of factors that contribute to high staff morale and the development of a positive campus environment. The study examined the climate, staff morale, and teaching conditions at charter school start-up grantee campuses.

- Half of the principals at charter school start-up grantee campuses “strongly agreed” that teachers trust each other and trust their principal, and that there is an inclusive work environment at their school, while less than half of the principals “strongly agreed” that there is a culture of professionalism and staff morale is high.
- Principals shared that the most important indicators of a positive school climate include a culture of respect between students and teachers and genuine care for students.
- Principals rated clear behavioral expectations, the development of strong teacher-student relationships, and effective student engagement in the classroom as the three most impactful approaches for maintaining positive teacher-student and student-peer relationships.

Impact of Student Enrollment at Charter School Start-Up Grantee Campuses

This study estimated the effects of enrollment in a charter school start-up grantee campus on STAAR Reading, STAAR Mathematics, Algebra I EOC, and English I EOC exams. Students who attended charter school start-up grantee campuses during the 2016–17 school year were matched with students at traditional public school campuses in order to identify a group of students enrolled in traditional public school campuses who share similar prior test scores and other student and school characteristics. Statistical models that controlled for differences in student characteristics and prior academic achievement were used to estimate the effect of enrollment at a charter school start-up grantee campus on student academic outcomes.

At the elementary and middle school levels, there were individual charter school start-up grantee campuses that showed statistically significant differences, some positive and some negative, in STAAR Mathematics and STAAR Reading test results compared to matched students enrolled in traditional public schools, after controlling for student differences. However, there were no significant overall differences on average for STAAR Mathematics or STAAR Reading test results across the four elementary start-up grantee campuses or the six middle school grantee campuses in the analyses with matched

traditional school campuses. For Algebra I and English I EOC exams for students enrolled in the high school grantee campus, after controlling for differences in student and school characteristics, students enrolled in the campus showed statistically higher Algebra I and English I EOC exam scores, compared with matched students enrolled in traditional public schools.

When comparing the overall performance of start-up grantee campuses to the performance of students in different student groups, in most cases, the STAAR results for each student group are very similar to the overall results. The consistency of results across student groups indicates that the overall results are not driven by the performance of any particular student group.

An additional descriptive analysis of early elementary data found that, of the four charter school start-up grantee elementary campuses, three of the campuses had a lower percentage of students ready for Kindergarten compared to students in feeder districts. Feeder district is defined by where the students attending the charter school would have attended had they remained in traditional public schools; see Appendix A for details. These three campuses also had higher rates of eligibility for accelerated reading instruction compared to students in feeder districts.

Best or Promising Practices from High-Performing Charter School Campuses

The study utilized survey data collected from principals at high-performing charter school campuses and other established charter school campuses not identified as high-performing to assess differences in practices between these two groups of schools. Differentiating characteristics of high-performing charter schools were identified as potential best or promising practices that could be emulated by other charter school campuses across the state. These survey findings were further supplemented with interview data collected from school leaders and teachers at high-performing charter schools. The results are organized by organizational practices, instructional practices, and practices that contribute to the establishment of a positive school climate.

Organizational Practices

The study explored a number of key factors related to school organization and management, including the execution of the charter school campus mission, parental involvement, and the educational experience of charter school campus principals. Key findings are provided below.

- Although various practices, such as using data to inform instruction, monitoring through classroom observations, and maximizing instructional time, were identified as important to executing the mission of the school across all charter school campuses, the following differentiating practices were evident at high-performing charter schools:
 - Ensuring that clarity in the educational philosophy of the school is instilled in campus staff and teachers; and
 - Creation of a youth culture at the campus.
- Differentiating practices related to increasing parent involvement in their child's education that were apparent at high-performing charter schools include:
 - Holding parent-teacher conferences;
 - Organizing regular school-day events for parents to interact with their children;
 - Encouraging parents to attend meetings at the schools, conferences, open houses, and other campus events; and
 - Encouraging parents to participate in school fundraising events.

- Across all charter schools, using current teachers to recruit colleagues, using word-of-mouth advertising about the school, and holding job fairs were identified as the most effective teacher recruitment strategies which should be considered best practices. Differentiating practices that were apparent at high-performing charter schools include:
 - Using online advertising to recruit high-quality teachers;
 - Considering a teacher’s fit with the educational philosophy of the school; and
 - Considering a teacher’s fit with the mission of the charter school campus.
- Regardless of charter school classification, instructional effectiveness, classroom management, student engagement, student performance, and cultural fit with the campuses were identified as the most important aspects when deciding whether or not to retain a teacher. Principals at high-performing charter schools tended to rate student engagement as a more important teacher retention factor than principals at other charter school campuses.
- In assessing the most effective methods for retaining high-quality teachers, principals across all charter school campuses consistently ranked having smaller class sizes and providing regular feedback to teachers regarding instructional practices as the top two most effective approaches. Differentiating practices at high-performing charter schools also included the establishment of professional learning communities to improve instructional practices and collaboration.
- Recruiting and retaining students is a major challenge for all new charter school campuses. Word-of-mouth advertising from parents of currently enrolled students was ranked as the most effective recruitment tool across all school leaders. However, the effective use of open houses to bring the community into the school and introduce families to school leadership, teachers, and the educational philosophy of the school is perceived to be a more effective practice at high-performing charter schools than at other charter schools across the state.
- Regardless of whether a principal was at a high-performing school or another charter school campus, principals felt that building meaningful relationships between teachers and students, and establishing a safe and collaborative environment at the campus were the top two most effective methods for retaining students. Differentiating practices at high-performing charter schools include:
 - Student-centered instruction; and
 - The use of multiple instructional approaches to meet the academic needs of students was an effective student retention strategy.

Instructional Practices

The study explored best or promising practices related to instructional practices and teacher supports and how various approaches may differ across high-performing and other charter schools. Key findings are provided below.

- The establishment of positive relationships between the teacher and student was reported to be the most frequently observed instructional strategy by all charter school principals. Principals at high-performing charter schools placed more emphasis on the following practices than their peers at other charter schools:
 - Maximizing learning time;
 - Creating opportunities for meaningful peer interactions; and
 - Effective scaffolding.

- Across all charter schools, principals tended to rank some of the same teacher support approaches among the five most important (e.g., reviewing student performance data with teachers, coaching support feedback after observations, PLCs), but principals at high-performing charter school campuses tended to be more data-focused than their peers at other charter schools as they also used student achievement data to gauge the performance of teachers.
- For high-performing charter school campuses, average classroom observation scores for the “Emotional Support”, “Classroom Organization”, and “Student Engagement” domains were in the upper end of the mid-range of teacher-student interaction scores, which reflect effective teacher student-interactions across multiple domains of instruction.
- The average observation score for the “Instructional Support” domain also fell in the mid-range of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) teacher-student interaction scores, but it is important to note that, historically, teachers tend to score substantially lower in this domain. Observations at high-performing charter campuses reflect a reasonable degree of rigorous, high-quality instruction.
- All charter school principals felt that establishing strong teacher-student relationships and connections and using various forms of in-class and out-of-class academic interventions were impactful approaches for closing achievement gaps for educationally-disadvantaged and low-performing students. The following practices for closing achievement gaps have emerged as being more prominent at high-performing charter schools than other charters across the state:
 - The use of special education;
 - Differentiated instruction in class;
 - Individualized instruction in class; and
 - Communications with parents about their child’s performance.

School Climate and Staff Morale Practices

Many factors contribute to a positive campus environment, which can impact teacher collaboration, continuous improvement of instructional practices, and the retention of teachers and students. The evaluation examined the climate, staff morale, and teaching conditions at high-performing and other charter school campuses.

- Principals at high-performing schools were much more inclined to “strongly agree” that staff morale is high at their campus, that teachers trust their principal, and that teachers trust each other.
- A higher percentage of principals at high-performing charter school campuses were also in strong agreement that their campus has an inclusive work environment, that a high value is placed on teamwork and collaboration, and that there is a culture of professionalism at their school more often than school leaders at other charter schools.
- Across all charter school principals, they consistently agreed on important approaches to maintaining a positive school climate, such as campus staff sharing a common set of beliefs about schooling, genuine care for students, a culture of respect, and academic growth of students. However, the following differentiating characteristics of high-performing charter schools emerged as best or promising practices through the analyses:
 - Campus staff sharing a common set of beliefs about schooling and learning; and
 - Socio-emotional growth of students.

- Principals at high-performing and other charter school campuses were in agreement that developing strong teacher-student relationships, effectively engaging students in the classroom, and having clear behavioral expectations were the three most impactful approaches to maintaining positive interactions between teachers and students and among students. However, the following differentiating approaches were evident through principal survey data at high-performing charter schools:
 - The use of proactive steps to curb misbehavior in the classroom; and
 - The establishment of strong anti-bullying policies.

Summary of Key Findings

This evaluation report is the first in a series of annual reports related to the Texas Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant. The findings in this report shed light on the planning, organizational, and instructional practices of new charter schools. In future reports, school practices will be monitored as the grantee campuses mature into their second, third, and fourth years of operation. The Year 3 evaluation report will include an additional 11 charter school campuses — bringing the total to 37 for the 2018–19 school year.

Results reveal some key differences in the characteristics of students enrolled at charter school start-up grantee campuses, as well as the experience level of teachers employed at these campuses when compared to matched traditional public school campuses. Findings related to school outcomes that represent an exploratory examination of the academic impact of a student enrolling at a new charter school are also presented in this report. While the research methods are rigorous, the short operation time of these campuses suggests that these results should be interpreted with caution. Lastly, the examination of organizational practices, instructional practices, and practices related to maintaining a positive school climate in place at high-performing and other charter schools reveal a wide array of approaches that can be considered promising practices for potential replication at other charter school campuses across the state.

Chapter 1 — Introduction and Background

Overview of the Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant

In 2016, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) was awarded a five-year Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant from the U.S. Department of Education (ED).² The goals of this grant for ED are to increase national understanding of the charter school model by:

- Providing financial assistance for the planning, program design, and initial implementation of charter schools;
- Evaluating the effects of such schools, including the effects on students, student achievement, staff, and parents; and
- Expanding the number of high-quality charter schools available to students.

Under the terms of the federal grant, TEA received funding for approximately 10 to 15 new charter school campuses annually, for a total of 40 to 60 new campuses over the five-year grant award period.³ Awards will be issued by TEA to four different cohorts of grantees. The first cohort consisted of nine campuses, receiving funding from TEA from August 2016 through July 2018. Similarly, the second cohort of 17 campuses received funding from TEA May 2017 through July 2019.

Table 1.1 provides a list of Cohorts 1 and 2 campuses funded through the Texas Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant, as well as the grades they serve and whether they are an open-enrollment charter school campus or an in-district charter school campus.

² The federal grant guidelines allow for start-up funding not to exceed 18 months for planning and program design of the charter school and 24 months for the initial implementation of the charter school. In line with these requirements, the Texas Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant, funded from the larger federal grant, allows four to five months for the planning period (or 16 to 17 months if the charter school postponed opening after receiving the grant) and 22 to 23 months for initial implementation (or 10 to 11 months if the charter school had postponed opening).

³ As of the 2016–17 school year, there were a total of 625 open enrollment charter school campuses authorized by the State Board of Education (SBOE) or the Commissioner of Education and 75 campus charter schools authorized by independent school districts in operation in the state.

Table 1.1 Profile of Texas Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grantee Campuses, Cohorts 1 and 2

Grantee Organization	Charter Campus Name	Cohort	Type of Charter School Campus	Grades Served
A+ Unlimited Potential	A+ Unlimited Potential	1	Open Enrollment	6-8
Harmony Public Schools - Harmony School of Science – Houston	Harmony School of Innovation - Katy	1	Open Enrollment	K-12
Harmony Public Schools - Harmony Science Academy (El Paso)	Harmony School of Excellence (El Paso)	1	Open Enrollment	K-6
Kauffman Leadership Academy	Kauffman Leadership Academy	1	Open Enrollment	6-10
Meadow Oaks Education Foundation	Pioneer Technology & Arts Academy	1	Open Enrollment	
Riverwalk Education Foundation - School of Science and Technology	School of Science and Technology - Houston	1	Open Enrollment	K-6
Riverwalk Education Foundation - School of Science and Technology Discovery	School of Science and Technology - Advancement	1	Open Enrollment	K-8
Portico Education Foundation	Trivium Academy	1	Open Enrollment	K-6
The Hughen Center Inc - Bob Hope School	Bob Hope Elementary	2	Open Enrollment	PK-5
Compass Rose Academy	Compass Rose Academy	2	Open Enrollment	6-12
Harmony Public Schools - Harmony School of Excellence	Harmony School of Enrichment - Houston	2	Open Enrollment	K-5
Harmony Public Schools - Harmony School of Science (Houston)	Harmony School of Excellence - Sugar Land	2	Open Enrollment	6-8
Harmony Public Schools - Harmony Science Academy (Austin)	Harmony Science Academy - Cedar Park	2	Open Enrollment	PK-4
Harmony Public Schools - Harmony Science Academy (San Antonio)	Harmony School of Innovation - Brownsville	2	Open Enrollment	6-12
Harmony Public Schools - Harmony Science Academy (San Antonio)	Harmony School of Excellence - Laredo	2	Open Enrollment	9-12
Harmony Public Schools - Harmony Science Academy (Waco)	Harmony School of Innovation - Grand Prairie	2	Open Enrollment	PK-6
Harmony Public Schools - Harmony Science Academy (Waco)	Harmony School of Innovation - Waco	2	Open Enrollment	7-12
Longview ISD	East Texas Montessori Prep Academy	2	In-District	PK-K
Longview ISD	Bramlette STEAM Academy & Judson STEAM Academy (092303044)	2	In-District	1-8
Sam Houston State University	Sam Houston State University Charter School	2	Open Enrollment	K-2
San Antonio ISD	CAST Tech HS	2	In-District	
San Antonio ISD	Advanced Learning Academy	2	In-District	PK-11
San Antonio ISD	Lamar Elementary	2	In-District	EE-6
San Antonio ISD	Mark Twain Dual Language Academy	2	In-District	PK-2
San Antonio ISD	Ogden Elementary	2	In-District	EE-6
Wilco Montessori Partners Inc.	Goodwater Montessori School	2	Open Enrollment	PK-8

Source: Texas Education Agency, 2017.

Over the course of this five-year grant period, TEA expects to fund two additional cohorts of grantee recipients.

Purpose of the Report

The broad purpose of this evaluation is to:

- Examine the effectiveness and impact of the Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant;
- Identify promising practices exhibited by grantees and successful charter schools within the state; and
- Examine student and teacher recruitment strategies within start-up grantee campuses.

To accomplish these broad research goals, this report addresses the following five research objectives:

- Objective 1 — Identify best or promising practices in high-quality charter schools within the state
- Objective 2 — Identify best or promising practices within Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant recipients
- Objective 3 — Examine the impact of the Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant
- Objective 4 — Examine if and how Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant recipients attract, recruit, admit, enroll, serve, and retain students
- Objective 5 — Examine if and how Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant recipients attract, recruit, and retain highly-qualified instructors

This current evaluation report covers the May 2017 to August 2018 period. Subsequent reports will follow existing (Cohorts 1 and 2) and new (Cohorts 3 and 4) charter school campuses funded through the charter school start-up grant.⁴

TEA contracted with Safal Partners and its research associates, Mathematica Policy Research and Gibson Consulting Group, to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the Texas Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant.

Organization of the Report

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 provides information related to the practices of Public Charter School Start-Up grantee campuses. Chapter 3 provides results from preliminary analyses related to the performance of charter school start-up grantee campuses. Chapter 4 provides information about best or promising practices in place at high-performing charter school campuses. These results are contrasted against those of other charter schools. Chapter 5 includes a summary of key findings from this evaluation.

Appendix A includes an overview of the evaluation approach and data collection methods. Appendix B includes technical details related to the charter school start-up grantee impact analyses. Appendix C provides detailed information related to the CLASS observation protocol. Appendix D contains the charter school principal survey instrument administered in spring 2018. Appendix E contains the

⁴ Two more evaluation reports are planned, one through August 2019 and the other through August 2020. A total of 11 campuses were included in Cohort 3 (2018–2020) but are not included in the analyses presented in this report.

principal interview and teacher focus group protocols used to collect program information from participants at charter school start-up grantees and high-performing charter schools. Lastly, Appendix F contains statistical output related to the charter school start-up grantee impact analyses.

Data and Methods

This evaluation relied on a variety of data and methods to address the five evaluation research objectives.⁵ To address these objectives, TEA provided student-level, teacher-level, and school-level data. This TEA data included student achievement on State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) exams, grade-level retention data, attendance data, State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) data related to teacher certifications, and demographic data from the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS).⁶ This data was then used to analyze the relationship between student enrollment at campuses funded through the Texas Public Charter School Start-Up Grant and academic outcomes for students.

To complement this statistical analysis, primary data were collected through a survey, site visits, and classroom observations. The team administered a statewide survey of charter school principals (spring 2018), and then collected on-site data during visits to 10 start-up grantee campuses (fall 2017) and 10 high-performing⁷ charter school campuses (spring 2018). The on-site data collection activities included principal interviews, teacher focus groups, and observations of classroom instruction using CLASS.⁸

⁵ Additional detail on the evaluation approach and data collection methods are provided in Appendices A and B.

⁶ Teacher-level data related to certification and length of tenure were also collected and analyzed in the evaluation.

⁷ Statistical models were used to assess the performance of a sample of 100 high-quality campuses, based on standardized test scores (i.e., STAAR-Reading, STAAR-Math for Grades 3–8, and end-of-course exam scores for grades 9–12). Campuses ranked in the top half of the 100 high-quality charter school campuses were categorized as high-performing for the purposes of this analysis.

⁸ Additional details regarding the CLASS observation tool are provided in Appendix C.

Chapter 2 — Practices at Charter School Start-Up Grantee Campuses

This chapter investigates practices at new charter school campuses, funded through the Texas Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant.

Findings in this chapter are generally organized into two areas:

- 1) Planning and getting a new charter school campus off the ground
- 2) Operating a new charter school campus and serving students

Practices related to the following key areas are explored in this chapter:

- Organizational practices (including practices related to getting a new campus up and running);
- Teacher recruitment and retention strategies;
- Student recruitment and retention strategies;
- Instructional practices (including methods used to close the achievement gap for educationally-disadvantaged and low-performing students); and
- Practices related to maintaining a positive school climate.

Data and Methods

To explore practices at charter school start-up grantee campuses, the evaluation relied on a charter school principal survey, 10 grantee site visits, and administrative data provided by TEA. Practices in this chapter of the report are based on the perspectives of principals and teachers at charter school start-up grantee campuses, and classroom observations conducted for the evaluation.⁹ The survey for this evaluation was administered to all charter school principals across the state in spring 2018; fifteen of these respondents were start-up grantee principals. See Appendix D for the full survey questionnaire. Similarly, during the fall 2017 site visits to start-up grantees, data were collected through interviews with school leaders, focus groups with teachers, and classroom observations.¹⁰ See Appendix C for the detailed CLASS Observation Protocol which was used during all classroom observations. The survey responses and feedback collected through the interviews and classroom observations inform this chapter on start-up grantee practices.

Finally, TEA provided administrative data that was used to explore student characteristics, student retention, student mobility, and teacher retention of the Cohort 1 (2016–18) and Cohort 2 (2017–19) charter school campuses funded through the Texas Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant. Forthcoming evaluation reports will compare data collected in 2017–18 to data collected in 2018–19 and 2019–20 school years. This comparison will allow for an assessment of changes in perspectives over time as charter school campuses mature.¹¹

Due to the smaller number of survey responses and site visits, these results may not generalize to all start-up grantees and should be viewed as exploratory rather than the definitive Texas start-up grantee

⁹ A total of 48 teachers observed in fall 2017 at 10 different charter school start-up campuses.

¹⁰ Teacher-student observations were scored using the CLASS Observation Protocol and scores for each of the following domains were compiled: Emotional Support; Classroom Organization; Instructional Support; and Student Engagement. At least three classroom observations occurred at each school.

¹¹ This report reflects Year 1 and Year 2 of this multi-year evaluation. Year 3 and Year 4 reports will build on this work and explore more grantees as they grow in number and existing grantees mature.

experience. Forthcoming evaluation reports for the 2018–19 and 2019–20 will help solidify and further mold the narrative presented in this chapter on practices at start-up grantees.

Characteristics of Charter School Campuses Funded through the Texas Public Charter Program Start-Up Grant

As Table 2.1 shows, teachers working at charter school start-up grantee campuses in 2016–17 were less likely to have advanced degrees and were typically younger than teachers in comparison schools. Teachers working at charter school start-up grantee campuses possessed fewer years of teaching, were more likely to be first-year teachers, and had less tenure at their school. Teachers working at these grantee campuses were also more likely to have provisional or probationary certification (19% vs. 16%) and to have taken an alternative certification route (47% vs. 40%), compared to teachers at schools in feeder districts, which are defined by where the students attending the charter school would have attended had they remained in traditional public schools (see Appendix A for details).

Table 2.1 Characteristics of Teachers at Charter School Start-Up Grantee Campuses Compared to Teachers Working at Feeder Districts

Teacher Characteristic	Charter School Start-Up Grantee Campuses	Feeder Districts
Average age of teachers	35.7	40.2
Average number of years of teaching experience	3.3	10.1
Percentage of first-year teachers	49%	9%
Average number of years of tenure at campus	0.8	7.0
Percentage of teachers with provisional or probationary certifications	19%	16%
Percentage of teachers receiving certifications through alternative certification programs	47%	40%
Percent of teachers with masters or Ph.D.	21%	27%

Source: State Board of Educator Certification and Public Education Information Management System databases, Texas Education Agency, 2016–17.

Note: Analyses include a total of 179 teachers employed at campuses which received funding through the Texas Public Charter School Start-Up Grant program and 81,952 teachers at comparable traditional public school campuses. Feeder district is defined by where the students attending the charter school would have attended had they remained in traditional public schools; see Appendix A for details.

Findings

Getting Started: Planning a New Charter School Campus

During the fall 2017 site visits, principal and teacher focus groups at grantee campuses discussed organizational practices important to getting their campuses started. This section covers key planning activities related to the development of these processes and procedures, roles and responsibilities, and the receipt of outside support. This section also includes challenges faced by charter school leaders when trying to get their school up and running.

Development of Processes and Procedures

During the fall 2017 site visits to charter school start-up grantees, principals and teachers participating in focus groups discussed planning processes important to getting their campuses off the ground.

The majority of principals (80%) and teacher groups (70%) discussed the importance of developing processes that drive campus practices and norms. These processes range from deciding upon day-to-day systems that match the charter school's model, thinking through "the best way to meet and increase" enrollment, and holding meetings with various stakeholders to "start talking about what type of school" the charter wanted to be. According to participants, schedules and staffing decisions were built around student enrollment and curriculum development.

Roles and Responsibilities

Principals interviewed in fall 2017 provided guidance on organizational practices they felt were important to getting campuses started. Six of 10 principals interviewed shared that the first step they took to get their campus off the ground was establishing defined roles, responsibilities, and teams. Some principals indicated that administrators even filled these roles, such as an assistant principal responsible for special education (SPED) or operations.

For one principal, this role-defining process began when they structured applications, where the "job descriptions and ... who is going to do what" were outlined and continued to be used as a valuable reference. Not only did this help with individual roles, but it also helped determine "who needs to be on the team, and who needs to do what."

Thirty percent of the principals interviewed also noted the importance of accessibility and open communication with teachers and parents. To accomplish this, some mentioned that they worked with a design team to ensure decisions about their new school were not made isolated in "silos." Similarly, principals mentioned the importance of working with outside organizations, such as university partners, districts, and school personnel, and ensuring multiple voices were heard to "make the meeting[s] most effective."

Teachers within focus groups conducted at start-up grantee campuses in fall 2017 noted the utility of a supportive and communicative administration, including having distinct administrator roles and responsibilities. For one teacher, this involved "making sure that there's open communication between admin, staff, parents, everyone." When there were distinct administrative roles, it was easier for staff to "have a specific person to go to." For instance, respondents noted, "If it's an academic issue, then you can go talk to the academic principal." This role definition was also perceived to be positive for administrators, as they "only have the one thing to deal with instead of a multitude of things."

Similarly, teachers from four of the 10 focus groups conducted at start-up campuses echoed a general sentiment expressed during principal interviews: the importance of having supportive and communicative school leaders. These leaders included having administrators with distinct roles and responsibilities.

Likewise, three of the 10 teacher focus groups had participants that felt creating a positive culture among staff and building a sense of community were critical to establishing a new campus. One teacher shared that this work increased the campus' positive school climate, as school staff "build that sense of community and family with our kids."

Outside Support

Principals that participated in fall 2017 interviews at start-up campuses reported receiving critical support from outside organizations while planning a new charter school campus. Three of 10 principals

at these start-up charter campuses received support from either their CMO or district office staff. This support came in various forms, but generally provided structure to planning activities. Some of the planning support principals received included purchasing educational materials, providing curriculum or curricular support, developing student handbooks, building processes for teacher trainings and student orientations, and guiding school uniform decisions. Principals also received support in the form of funding “to sustain this charter work in addition to the grant money” (along with support to help track expenditures).

Half of the start-up principals interviewed indicated that TEA supported them by providing grantee guidelines in various ways. In this context, school leaders refer to guidelines on how to submit amendments for new items, how to spend funding, expectations for curriculum, information on the required number of school days, and other school-related policies. One principal referenced the TEA charter school summit as a platform for answering grantee unknowns. After attending, this principal was able to “leave there and start building these pieces that we didn’t know.” Similarly, another respondent shared that “the guidelines that TEA has set has just kept us on track...if we didn’t have those guidelines...would we really be using that money effectively?”.

A few principals that were interviewed specifically cited the availability of TEA staff in addressing questions and concerns. One principal shared that TEA staff are “always answering my questions and talking as long as I need, and even follow-up with email” to provide additional sources of information. Another principal was less involved in communicating with TEA but noted that the “superintendent has quite a few people on speed dial...anytime he has a question...everyone has been very responsive.”

For many interviewed principals, receiving the start-up grant from TEA was a major form of support for their charter school. TEA grant funding has provided charter schools with the ability to purchase materials and equipment and has “helped a lot.”

Challenges

During fall 2017 principal interviews, respondents were asked to describe the challenges they experienced when starting their campuses. These respondents reported several challenges related to start-ups, including school construction, student enrollment, and funding.

Two principals discussed the physical construction of the school as a challenge. For these respondents, involvement in the construction activities added to the difficulty of getting their campus started. They found it challenging to run a school while “trying to lead or be involved in the construction efforts.” One principal mentioned areas of concern found during construction, such as open areas around stairs that would cause the building to not pass inspection. These types of safety issues impacted other deadlines related to opening their campus.

Three of the 10 start-up campus principals interviewed mentioned challenges with enrollment and recruitment, both for students and staff. One principal pointed out that “enrollment drives how much money we have coming in, and then drives who we can hire; [enrollment] drives everything.” Recruiting staff members who are a “good fit” was also cited as a challenge by these school leaders.

Start-up school leaders also mentioned two distinct financial challenges related to student enrollment and staff compensation. In one case, the charter school experienced much lower student enrollment

than expected, which resulted in fewer resources. In another instance, securing additional funding (e.g., incentive pay or compensation for working extended hours) needed for teaching staff was a challenge.

Organizational Practices

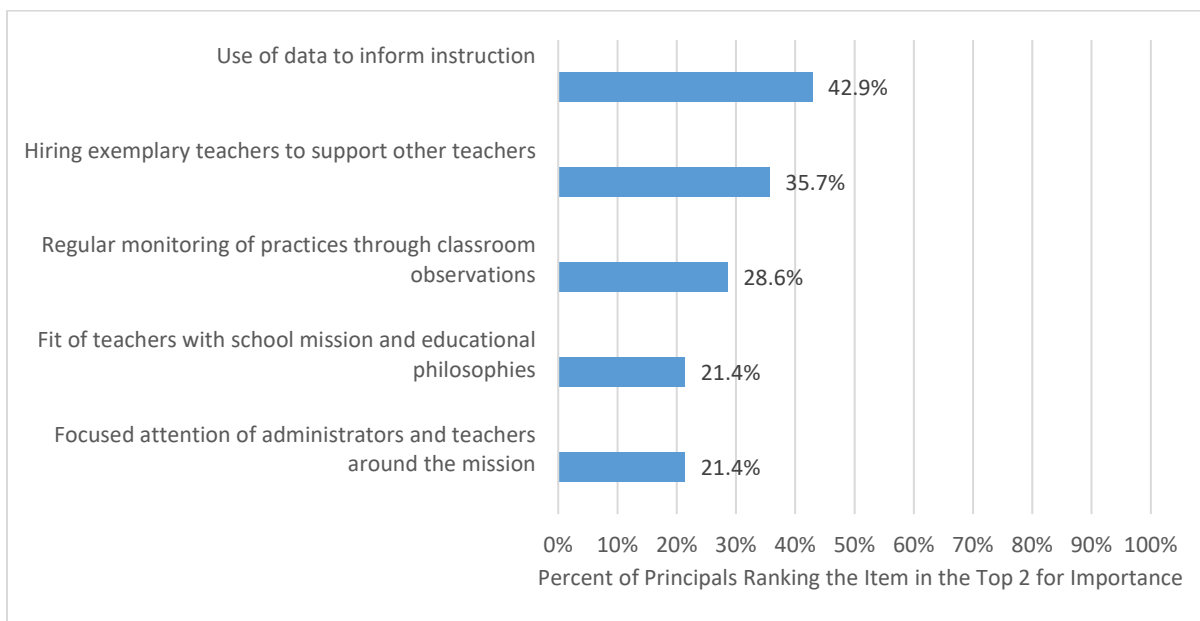
The study explored a number of key factors related to start-up grantee campus school organization and management, including important practices related to the charter school campus mission, and getting parents involved with the school and in their child’s education.

Executing Charter School Campus Mission

Start-up principals were surveyed in spring 2018 and were asked to rank the most important practices to execute their campus’ mission. They ranked “Use of data to inform instruction” (43%), “Hiring exemplary teachers to support other teachers” (36%), and “Regular monitoring of practices through classroom observations” (29%) as one of the top two most important practices.

Similarly, start-up principals also often ranked “the fit of teachers with the school mission and education philosophies” and the “Focused attention of administrators and teachers around the mission” as important practices to execute their start-up campuses’ mission. Both of these strategies were ranked as one of the two most important practices associated with executing the campus’ mission by over 20% of start-up principals. (Figure 2.1)

Figure 2.1. Practices Ranked Most Important by Principals to Execute Mission



Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

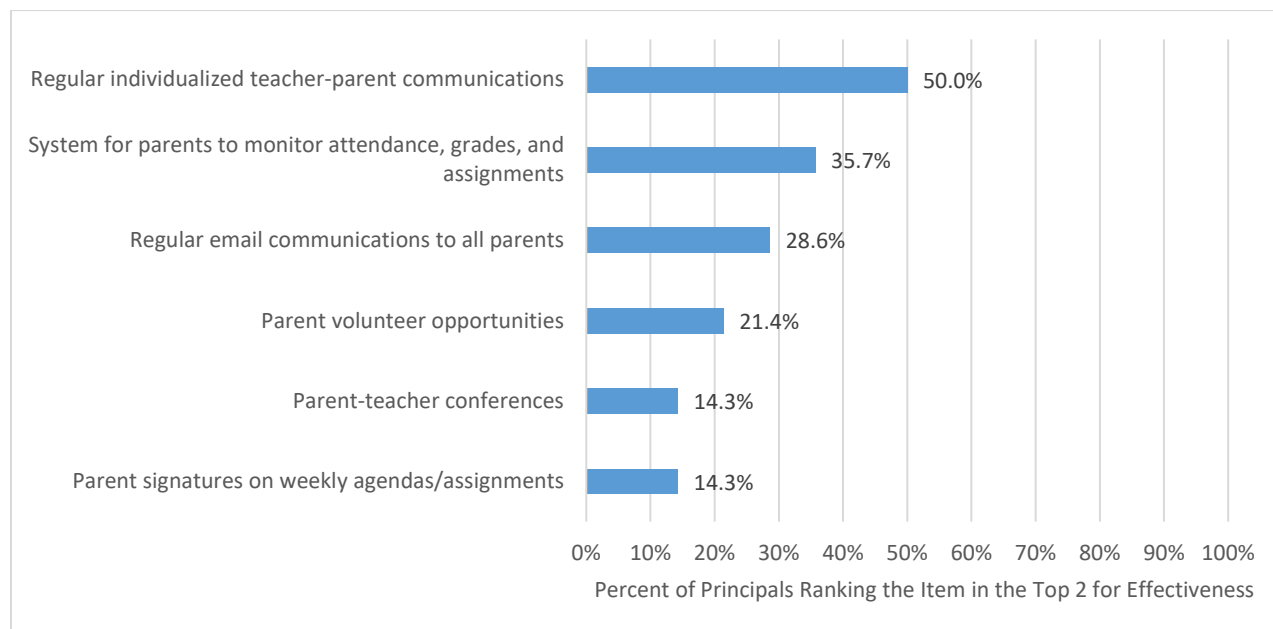
Note: Results based on 14 responses from principals at campuses who have received funding through the Texas Public Charter School Program Start-up Grant.

Parent Involvement

Getting parents involved in their child’s education, as well as involved with supporting a new charter campus, are both important objectives for schools that received funding through the program.

As Figure 2.2 illustrates, 50% of start-up principals surveyed ranked “Regular individualized teacher-parent communications” as one of the two most effective methods for getting parents involved in their child’s education. Other effective approaches, based on principal ranking, include having a “System for parents to monitor attendance, grades, and assignments” (36%), “Sending out regular email communications to all parents” (29%), and creating “Parent volunteer opportunities” (21%). A smaller portion of principals (14%) rated “parent-teacher conferences” and “parent signatures on weekly agendas and assignments” as one of the two most effective means for getting parents involved.

Figure 2.2 Start-Up Grantee Principal Survey Responses: Most Effective Methods to Increase Parent Involvement



Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

Note: Results based on 14 responses from principals at campuses who have received funding through the Texas Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategies

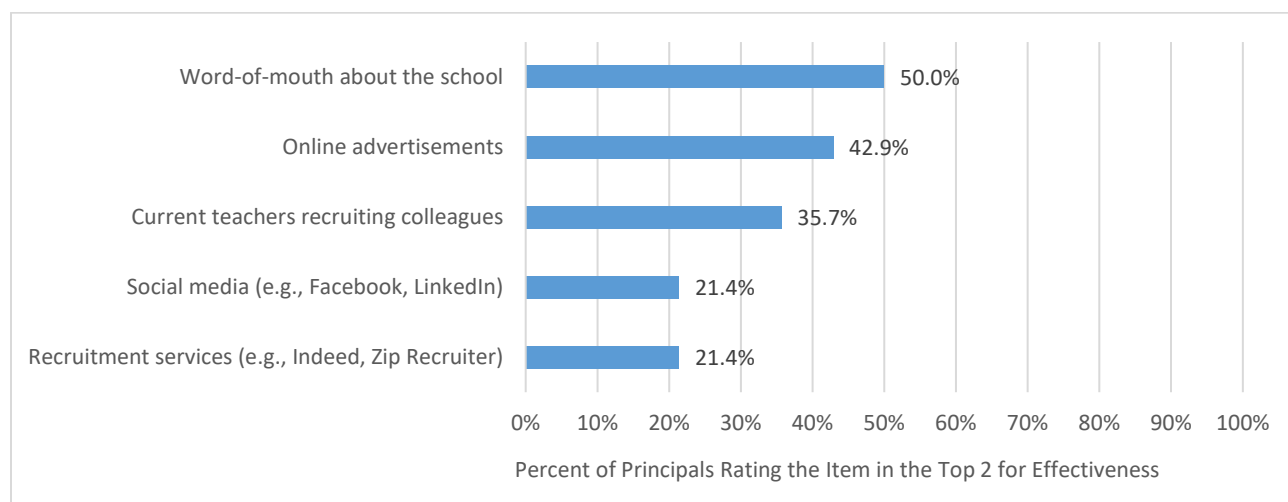
Recruiting and retaining high-quality educators is important when developing a new charter school campus or expanding an existing campus due to an enrollment increase. With this in mind, the evaluation examined several issues related to recruiting and retaining high-quality educators at start-up campuses: methods for attracting, criteria for hiring, and criteria and methods for retaining high-quality teachers.

Methods for Attracting and Recruiting High-Quality Teachers

As Figure 2.3 illustrates, many start-up principal survey respondents indicated that “Word-of-mouth about the school” (50%), “Online advertisements” (43%), and “Current teachers recruiting colleagues” (36%) were one of the two most effective ways to attract high-quality teachers to their campuses. Two other recruitment methods that ranked in the top two in terms of effectiveness included “Social media” (21%) and “Recruitment services” (21%).

During interviews conducted with start-up principals, six of 10 principals discussed the use of networking or word-of-mouth approaches to recruiting quality teachers. They noted using “internal networks to go and recruit” and used relationships with other institutions and organizations to identify potential high-quality teachers. One principal shared, “[that connection] can get me access to a group of teachers that I might want to get the word out to.” Sometimes these connections “send us their rosters, and we can filter and select” potential teachers. Another principal utilized a blend of word-of-mouth and an internal network by having their current teaching staff recommend “the best teachers [they] know.” Half the principals interviewed claimed a presence at job fairs as “the most effective” recruitment method, and that they had “been very successful” and “hired some of our very best teachers there.”

Figure 2.3 Start-Up Grantee Principal Survey Responses: Most Effective Teacher Recruitment Methods for High-Quality Teachers



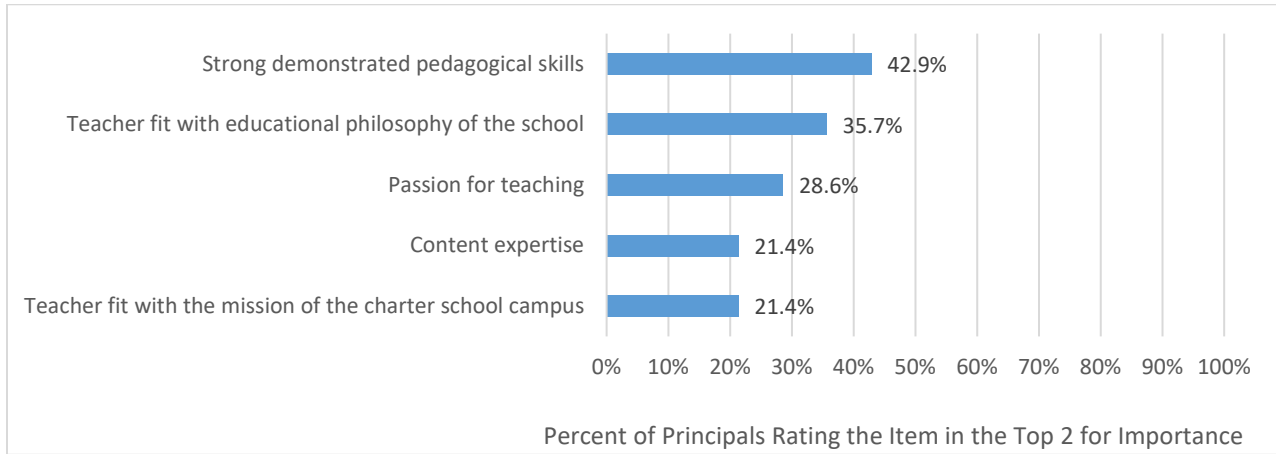
Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

Note: Results based on 14 responses from principals at campuses who have received funding through the Texas Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant.

Criteria for Hiring Teachers

When hiring new teachers, it is important that school leaders establish criteria for teacher candidates. Almost 43% of principal survey respondents at start-up campuses ranked “Strong demonstrated pedagogical skills” (43%) as either the first or second most important consideration when hiring new teachers. Other criteria these principals felt were important included “Teacher fit with the educational philosophy of the school” (36%), “Passion for teaching” (29%), “Content expertise” (21%), and “Teacher fit” with the mission of the charter school campuses (21%). (See Figure 2.4.)

Figure 2.4 Start-Up Grantee Principal Survey Responses: Most Important Criteria for Hiring New Teachers



Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

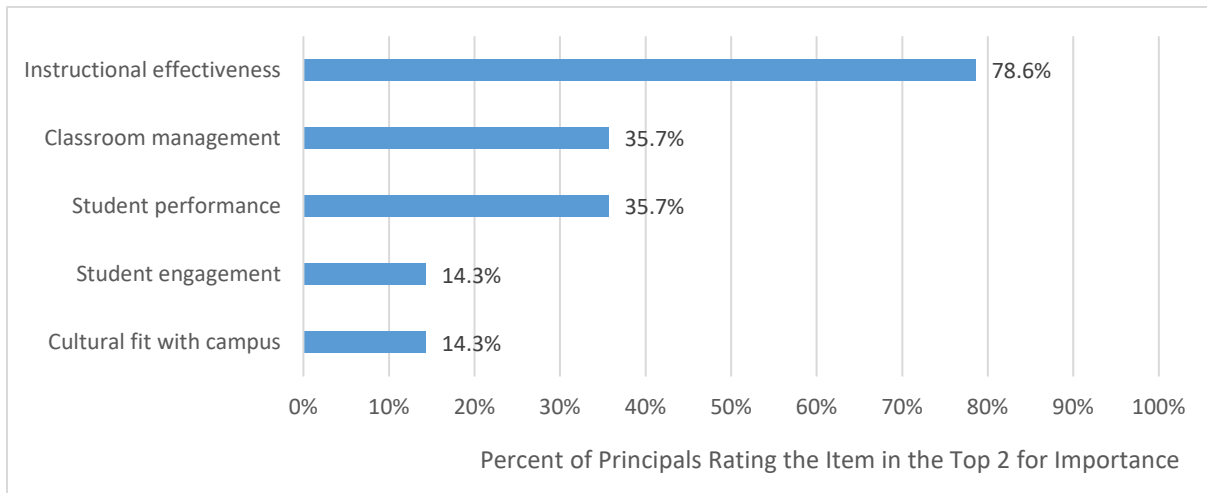
Note: Results based on 14 responses from principals at campuses who have received funding through the Texas Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant.

In addition to the survey, during fall 2017 start-up site visits, start-up principal interviews were asked what qualifications prospective teachers should possess. Half of the 10 interviewed school leaders felt teachers should be state-certified, though some schools only require this for certain subjects or grade levels. Additionally, four of the 10 principals discussed how teachers need to be student-centered in their instructional approaches, describing teachers who are “interested in focusing on the student and not the curriculum” and whom they “can tell ... care about kids.”

Criteria for Retaining Teachers

Through the fall survey, start-up principals were also asked to weigh the importance of various criteria when considering whether or not to continue a teacher’s employment at their campus. As Figure 2.5 illustrates, “Instructional effectiveness” is the most heavily weighted criteria for survey respondents when considering continuing a teacher’s employment. Approximately 79% of start-up principal respondents rated this as the first or second most important consideration to teacher retention, followed by “Classroom management” (36%), “Student performance” (36%), “Student engagement” (14%), and “Cultural fit with the campus” (14%).

Figure 2.5 Start-Up Grantee Principal Survey Responses: Most Heavily Weighted Criteria When Considering Whether to Retain a Teacher



Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

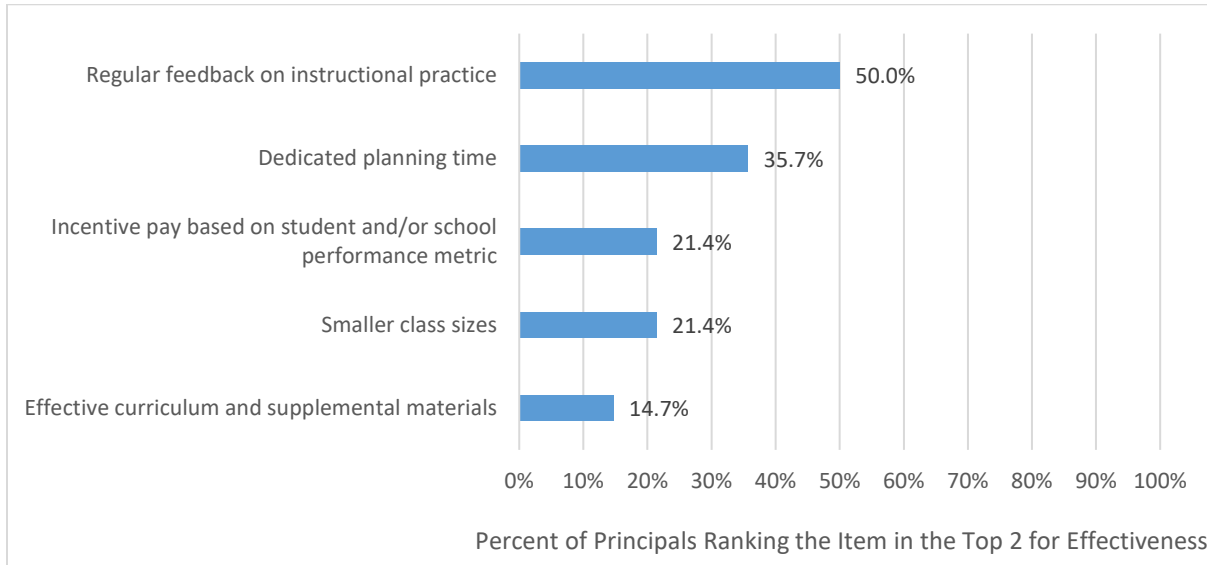
Note: Results based on 14 responses from principals at campuses who have received funding through the Texas Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant.

Methods for Retaining Teachers

The stress associated with working at a new charter school can be high for teachers and staff, so developing effective approaches for increasing teacher retention from year to year is important to the long-term success of charter school campuses.

Half the start-up principals that responded to the survey ranked “Regular feedback to teachers” as either the first or second most effective method for retaining high-quality teachers. Over one-third of principals (36%) ranked “Dedicated planning time” as either the first or second most effective method for retaining high-quality teachers. Other methods deemed by principals to be effective in retaining high-quality teachers included “Incentive pay based on student and/or school-level performance metrics” (21%), “Smaller class sizes” (21%), and providing teachers with “Effective curriculum and supplemental materials” (15%). (See Figure 2.6)

Figure 2.6 Start-Up Grantee Principal Survey Responses: Most Effective Methods for Retaining High-Quality Teachers



Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

Note: Results based on 14 responses from principals at campuses who have received funding through the Texas Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant.

Comparison of Teacher Retention and Mobility Patterns for Teachers at Public Charter School Start-Up Grantee Campuses and Comparable Traditional Public School Campuses

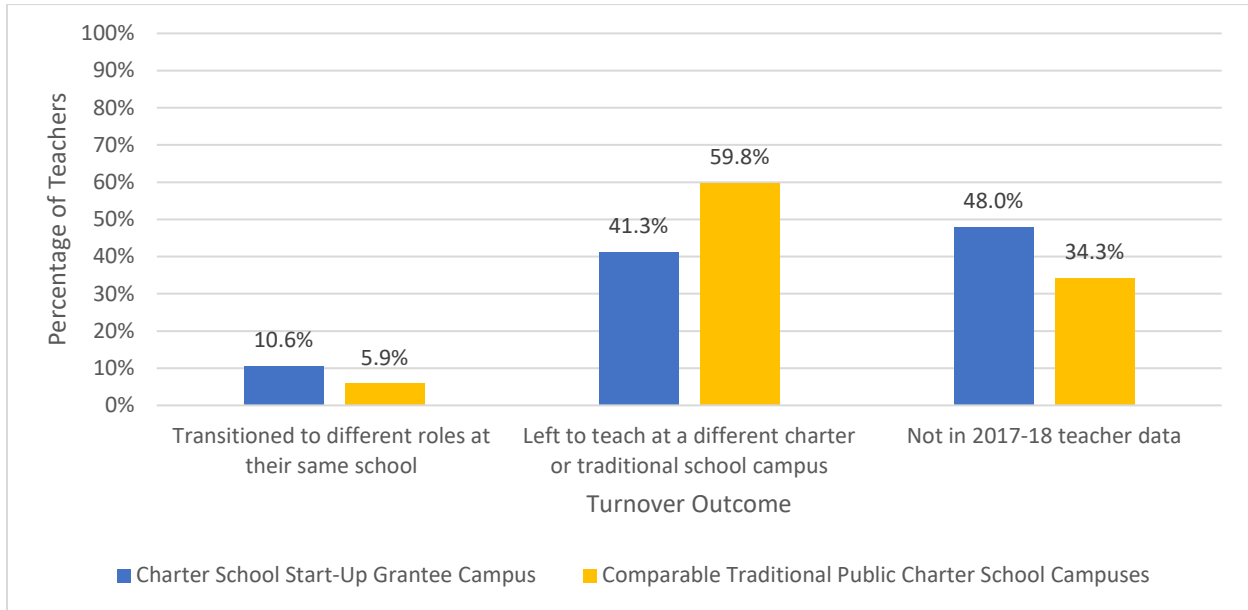
The teacher retention rate (between the 2016–17 and 2017–18 school years) at charter school start-up grantee campuses (58%) was substantially lower than the retention rate for teachers working at comparable traditional public school campuses (75%).

The evaluation also explored mobility patterns of teachers who did leave their charter school start-up grantee campus between the 2016–17 and 2017–18 school years. 75 out of 179 teachers who taught at charter school start-up grantee campuses in 2016–17 were not teaching at that school in 2017–18. Of those 75 teachers:

- 11% transitioned to different roles at their same school (n=8);
- 21% left to teach at another charter school (n=16);
- 20% left to teach at a traditional public school (n=15); and
- 48% were not in the 2017–18 teacher data (n=36).

Figure 2.7 illustrates differences in mobility patterns for teachers at charter school start-up campuses and comparable traditional public school campuses. Teachers who left their teaching positions at their 2016–17 charter school start-up grantee campus were more likely to transition to a different role at their campus (11% vs. 6%) or not be teaching in a Texas public school (48% vs. 9%), and less likely to leave to teach at another school (41% vs. 60%) when compared to teachers who left their teaching position at their 2016–17 traditional public school campus.

Figure 2.7 Comparison of Mobility Patterns between 2016–17 and 2017–18 for Teachers at Charter School Start-Up Grantee Campuses and Comparable Traditional Public School Campuses who Departed their 2016–17 Campus



Source: Public Education Information Management System databases, Texas Education Agency, 2016–17 and 2017–18.

Note: Analyses include a total of 75 teachers employed in 2016-2017 at campuses which received funding through the Texas Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant program who were not teaching at that school in 2017–18 and 20,353 teachers at comparable traditional public school campuses.

Comparing characteristics of the 104 (of 179) teachers who remained teaching in their charter school start-up grantee campus with the 75 teachers who were not teaching at that school in 2017–18, teachers who left were more likely to be white (87% vs 48%), more likely to have been in their first year of teaching (61% vs 41%) and first year at that school in 2016–17 (84% vs 67%), and more likely to have taken an alternative certification route (61% vs 40%).

Student Recruitment and Retention Strategies

Creating interest in a new charter school, attracting parents and students to the school, and maintaining adequate enrollment is critical to the success of any new charter campus. Considering this, the evaluation examined effective methods used by charter school start-up grantee campuses to recruit students.

Effective Methods for Recruiting Students

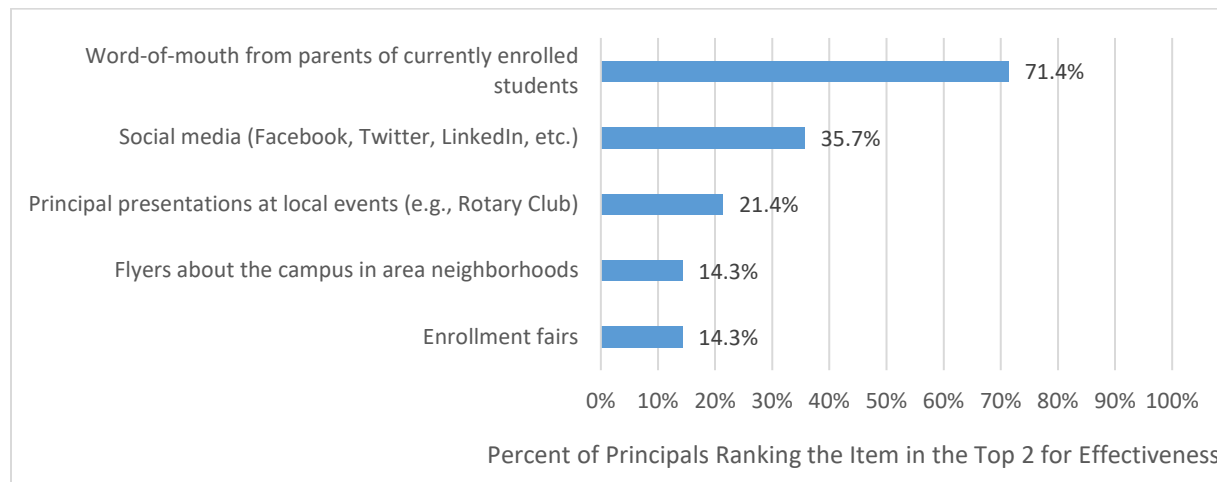
The majority of start-up principal survey respondents ranked “Word-of-mouth from parents of currently enrolled students” (71%) as either the first or second most effective student recruitment approach. This was followed by “Social media” (36%), “Principal presentations at local events” (21%), “Passing out flyers in nearby neighborhoods” (14%), and “Enrollment fairs” (14%). (See Figure 2.8.)

Based on interviews conducted with principals at start-up grantee campuses, the vast majority (90%) indicated that “word-of-mouth has been great” and that “most of our students usually come hearing

from our current students, our current parents, or our teachers. That’s the biggest one that brings us students.”

Seven of 10 principals indicated that taking part in formal information sessions, including those that help generate “great press coverage” or parent meetings to “explain what we’re doing” have helped with student recruitment. These events may also include booths at community functions, holding tours and hosting open houses. For these principals, these methods helped their schools become “very visible” and demonstrated that their school is “genuine ... not a corporation trying to make money.”

Figure 2.8 Public Charter School Start-Up Grantees: Most Effective Methods for Attracting Students



Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

Note: Results based on 14 responses from principals at campuses who have received funding through the Texas Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant.

Effective Methods for Retaining Students

During fall 2017 site visits, principals and teachers were asked directly about effective methods for retaining students at their start-up campuses. They were asked about their role in student retention and what factors they consider important to retaining students.

Four of the 10 start-up campus principals discussed the importance of creating a positive community for students. Principals shared that they want the students “to feel invested,” to keep students happy and learning, and to establish an overall “sense of belonging.” Respondents believed that when students are happy, “the retention rate will be high.”

Similarly, teachers participating in eight of the 10 focus groups expressed that their role in student retention included developing a positive relationship with both students and parents. As one respondent in the teacher focus group described it, she wants “to make sure that our kids know that we care about them, and that their families feel like they have a voice, and that I care what they have to say.”

This relationship-building can contribute to positive word-of-mouth, which not only helps with retention but also with recruitment and can help build students’ sense of belonging. One focus group participant mentioned that teachers are encouraged to do home visits to “talk to families.”

During both principal interviews and teacher focus groups during start-up site visits, communication with parents was seen as a key method for developing positive relationships.

Four of 10 principals stressed the importance of parent communication. These school leaders indicated that “parent communication is probably the biggest thing” regarding student retention. Because once principals provide parents a clear picture of student success, parents are better at gauging whether the school is a good long-term fit for their child. One principal interviewee relayed that parent communication helps ensure “that we have that connection with our parents, and that’s how we are able to retain [students].”

Likewise, participants from four of 10 teacher focus groups discussed the importance of parent communication to retaining students at their campuses. Teachers shared that parent communication and knowledge of how their students are learning has “been helpful.” These conversations even helped parents understand what type of information to expect from the school. When parents and teachers communicate, it also allows parents to provide feedback regarding retention and satisfaction, such as relaying that their child “used to hate going to school, and now they don’t...they don’t pretend to be sick.”

The third key driver for student retention, noted by both principals and teachers, is quality instruction. Three of 10 interviewed start-up principals discussed quality instruction as a key to retaining students. One school leader indicated that when “students are learning, and they are enjoying learning...they really like attending here.” For these interviewees, providing quality instruction also includes having “a clear message to share with kids, [and] consistency from class to class.”

Likewise, teachers in half of the 10 focus groups at start-up campuses shared that their role in student retention included providing quality instruction to students. Some teachers indicated that “the delivery of your lesson has a lot to do with it” and that they “try to make [class] engaging” by “getting all [students] involved.” Interesting and quality instruction “keeps [students] here” and can consist of providing tutorials for students. This concept also involves aiming instruction at all students and all levels of students, rather than focusing attention on only those who need assistance or those who have a higher chance of passing. Teachers in two of 10 focus groups specifically discussed the student learning environment as a key aspect of student retention. These teachers indicated that a “better environment of learning, innovation, and communication” can contribute to the creation of a “safe and engaging environment that allows [students] to be successful.”

Finally, transportation was also noted as a retention issue for some new charter school campuses. Two of the 10 principals interviewed during site visits shared that transportation was an important service that contributed to student retention. One respondent mentioned that their school tended “to lose students due to transportation.” The perception was that if transportation was available to families, retention rates would increase.

[Comparison of Student Characteristics and Mobility Patterns for Students Enrolled at Public Charter School Start-Up Grantee Campuses and Comparable Traditional Public-School Campuses](#)

To supplement site visit information on approaches to student recruitment and retention, the evaluation used student-level data collected from TEA. The study conducted an analysis of student characteristics and mobility patterns at campuses that received funding through the Texas Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant.

The characteristics, retention, and mobility patterns of students enrolled at grantee campuses were compared to those of students at traditional public school campuses.

Student Characteristics

To determine the patterns of student enrollment, retention, and attrition at campuses that received funding through the Public Charter School Start-Up Grant, and how these patterns compared to traditional public school campuses in feeder districts, the evaluation includes an analysis of student-level data collected by TEA through PEIMS.

As Table 2.2 shows, students attending charter school start-up grantee campuses in 2016–17 are somewhat less likely to be African American or Hispanic and more likely to be white than students attending traditional public schools in feeder districts. Students attending charter school start-up grantee campuses also were slightly less likely to be female or receive special education services, and slightly more likely to be an English Learner (EL). Larger differences were observed between the percentage of economically disadvantaged students (51% for charter school start-up grantee campuses vs. 64% at traditional public school campuses) and at-risk students (49% for charter school start-up grantee campuses vs. 62% at traditional public school campuses).

Table 2.2 Comparison of Student Characteristics at Charter School Start-Up Grantee Campuses and Traditional Public Charter School Campuses in Feeder Districts, 2016–17

Student Characteristics	Charter School Start-Up Grantee Students	Traditional Public School Students
African American	20%	23%
Hispanic	45%	48%
White	23%	17%
Female	48%	51%
Economically Disadvantaged	51%	64%
English Learners	18%	15%
Received Special Education Services	7%	9%
At-risk	49%	62%

Source: Public Education Information Management System, 2016–17.

Note: Analyses include a total of 2,394 students attending campuses which received funding through the Texas Public Charter School Start-Up Grant program and 397,241 students at comparable traditional public school campuses. Feeder district is defined by where the students attending the charter school would have attended had they remained in traditional public schools; see Appendix A for details.

Student Mobility Patterns

The vast majority of students enrolled at charter school start-up grantee campuses in 2016–17 completed the 2016–17 school year at the same campus (88%). For those who transferred during the school year, approximately two-thirds of them (67%) went to traditional public schools while 16% of those who transferred enrolled at a different charter school campus. See Appendix A for details of the methodology.

Specifically, of the 2,377 students who were enrolled at the start of the 2016–17 school year at campuses that were funded through the Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant, 290 (12%) of them were not enrolled at the same campus at the end of the 2016–17 school year. Of these 290

students that left, 47 transferred to a different charter school campus (16%), and 193 transferred to a traditional public school (67%). The remaining 50 students (17%) left the school system.

The evaluation compared the characteristics of those 290 students that transferred out of start-up campuses during the year to those who remained at their start-up campus. The students who left during the year were less likely to be ELs, less likely to be at-risk, and on average had lower prior year test scores in both STAAR Mathematics and STAAR Reading tests.

The evaluation also explored the number of students that returned to their start-up campus the following year, identified by comparing end-of-school-year enrollment data to fall enrollment data. Just over three-quarters (77%) of students enrolled at charter school start-up campuses in 2016–17 returned to that campus for the 2017–18 school year. Of the 548 students (23%) that transferred the following year (and did not return to that campus), 53% left for a traditional public school and 29% attended a different charter school in 2017–18. The remaining 18% of students left the school system.

Comparing the characteristics of the students who transferred out during the summer to those who remained in the start-up grantee campuses, students who left during the summer were more likely to be at-risk and had lower average reading and math scores in 2016–17.

As Table 2.3 shows, students who left a start-up grantee campus during the summer of 2017 (identified by comparing end-of-school-year enrollment data to fall enrollment data) were more likely to be white and less likely to be Hispanic, female, or at-risk compared to students who continued in that school in 2017–18.

Table 2.3 Comparison of Exiting Student Characteristics at Charter School Start-Up Grantee Campuses and Traditional Public Charter School Campuses in Feeder Districts

Student Characteristics	Charter School Start-Up Grantee Leaving Students	Charter School Start-Up Grantee Continuing Students
African American	20%	22%
Hispanic	43%	47%
White	24%	20%
Female	47%	52%
Economically Disadvantaged	50%	54%
English Learners	18%	17%
Received Special Education Services	7%	7%
At-risk	47%	53%

Source: Public Education Information Management System, 2016–17.

Note: Analyses include a total of 1,983 students attending campuses which received funding through the Texas Public Charter School Start-Up Grant program.

Instructional Practices

After establishing effective organizational practices and methods for recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers, providing support for teachers to be successful is essential for charter campuses to deliver the highest quality of instruction possible to their students.

Considering this, the evaluation examined the following at charter school start-up grantee campuses:

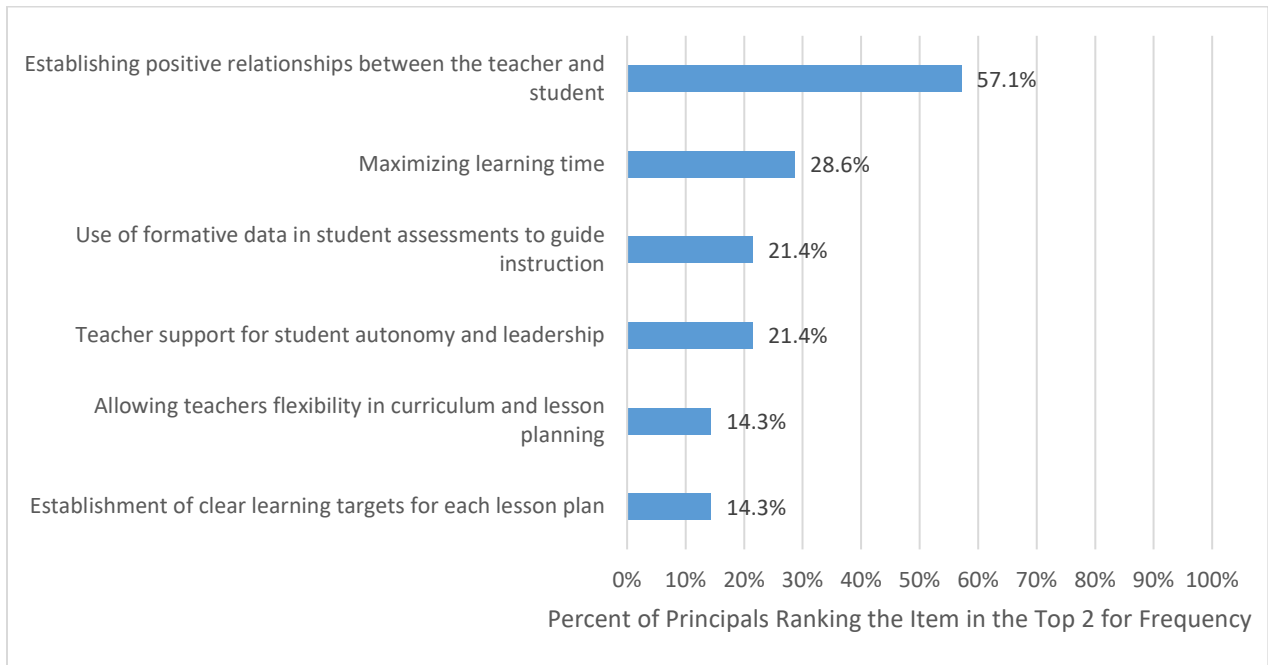
- Frequently observed instructional practices;
- Impactful instructional practices;
- Impactful teacher supports for improving instructional practices;
- Approaches for closing the achievement gaps for educationally disadvantaged students; and
- Methods for closing the achievement gaps for low-performing students.

Additionally, data related to instructional practices observed at start-up grantee campuses are presented in this section.

Most Frequently Observed Instructional Practices

As Figure 2.9 shows, “Establishing positive relationships between teachers and students” was the most frequently observed instructional approach at start-up grantee campuses, with 57% of principal survey respondents ranking this as the first or second most commonly observed instructional practice. Other instructional practices ranked as one of the top two most frequently observed approaches were “Maximizing learning time” (29%), the “Use of formative data in student assessments to guide instruction” (21%), and “Teacher support for student autonomy and leadership” (21%). Additionally, 14% of start-up grantee campus principals felt that “Allowing teacher flexibility in curriculum and lesson planning” and the “Establishment of clear learning targets” were among the two most frequently observed instructional practices.

Figure 2.9 Public Charter School Start-Up Grantees: Most Frequently Observed Instructional Practices



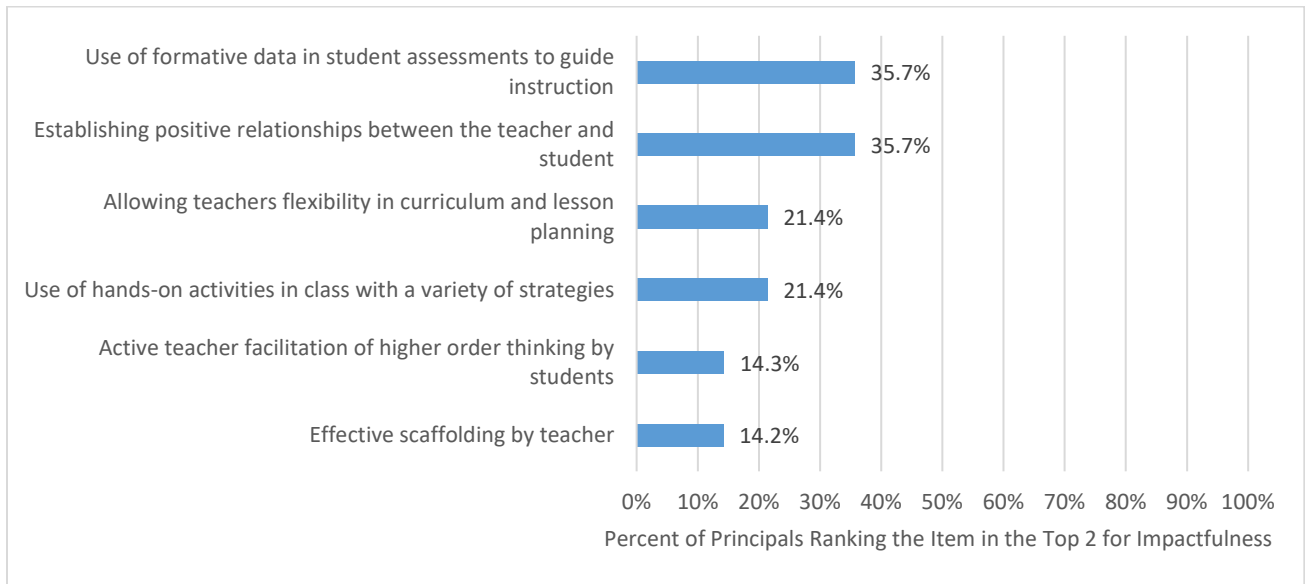
Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

Note: Results based on 14 responses from principals at campuses who have received funding through the Texas Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant.

Most Impactful Instructional Practices

As Figure 2.10 shows, the “Use of formative data in student assessments to help guide instruction” (36%) and “Establishing positive relationships between teachers and students” (36%) were ranked in the top two by start-up grantee campus principal survey respondents as the most impactful instructional practices observed. Other instructional practices ranked among the two most effective by principals at charter school start-up grantee campuses include “Allowing teachers flexibility for curriculum and lesson planning” (21%), the “Use of hands-on activities in class with a variety of different strategies” (21%), “Active teacher facilitation of higher-order thinking by students” (14%) and “Effective scaffolding by teachers” (14%).

Figure 2.10 Public Charter School Start-Up Grantees: Most Impactful Instructional Practices



Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

Note: Results based on 14 responses from principals at campuses who have received funding through the Texas Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant.

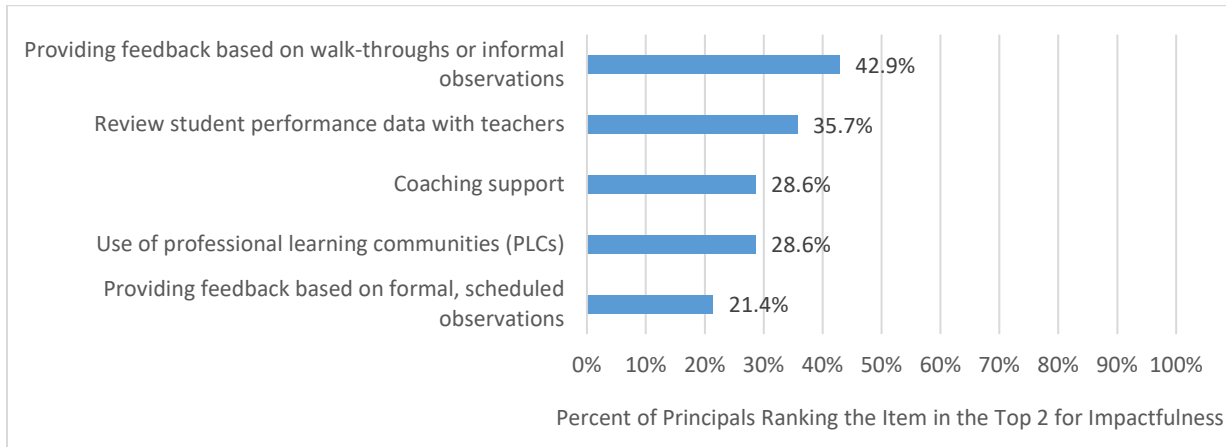
Most Impactful Teacher Supports for Improving Instructional Practices

Nearly 43% of start-up principals that responded to the survey ranked “Providing feedback to teachers after walk-throughs or informal observations” as the first or second most impactful method for improving their teachers’ instructional practices. Also ranked as one of top two most impactful supports for improving instructional practices at these principal’s start-up campuses were, “Reviewing student performance data with teachers” (36%), “Coaching support” (29%), the “Use of professional learning communities (PLCs)” (29%), and “Providing feedback to teachers based on formal, scheduled observations” (21%). (See Figure 2.11.)

Teachers that participated in fall 2017 focus groups were asked how they supported each other in improving instructional practices at their campuses. Teachers from eight of 10 focus groups focused on providing feedback after observations during informal sessions where teachers “springboard off each other” to solve problems or to check in on each other and share resources. Communication at charter schools allows teachers to share ideas and to see “what are you teaching, [and] how are you teaching it?”

Teacher focus group respondents were asked how school leadership supported them in lesson-planning efforts and ways in which school leadership helped teachers improve their craft. Six of 10 teacher focus groups referenced the lack of a template and their ability to make adjustments as needed “to teach what you need to teach, no matter how long it takes, as long as it’s aligned with TEKS.” This experience was in stark contrast to their experiences working in traditional districts, in which it’s already “decided ... what you’re going to do. Here’s the lesson plan, and all you got to do is just let it go out of your mouth.” The concept of flexibility also encompasses teacher creative freedom to meet the needs of students, as leadership “understand[s] that different kids need different things at different times.”

Figure 2.11 Public Charter School Start-Up Grantees: Most Impactful Teacher Supports for Improving Instructional Practices



Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

Note: Results based on 14 responses from principals at campuses who have received funding through the Texas Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant.

Evidence of Instructional Quality at Charter School Start-Up Grantee Campuses

In fall 2017, the research team visited a total of 10 Public Charter School Start-Up Grant recipients and observed 48 different teachers. The evaluation observed these teachers using the CLASS K-3 (for Grades K-3), CLASS Upper Elementary (for Grades 4-5), and CLASS Secondary (for Grades 6-12) protocols. See Appendix C for a more detailed description of the CLASS observation protocol that was used for these observations. Data collected through observations of teachers at high-performing charter schools in spring 2018 are provided as a reference point in this section for the start-up grantee campus scores. (The definition of high-performing charter schools is based on an analysis of charter school campuses designated as high-quality by TEA; see Appendix A for the full definition.) The CLASS observation tool was used to assess instructional quality across the 10 charter school campuses. Mean scores were calculated for the following four CLASS domains:

- **Emotional Support** (Includes dimensions such as positive and negative climate, teacher sensitivity, and regard for student perspectives)
- **Classroom Organization** (Includes dimensions such as behavioral management, productivity, and instructional learning formats)
- **Instructional Support** (Includes dimensions such as concept development, content understanding, analysis and inquiry, quality of feedback, instructional dialogue, language modeling, analysis, and problem-solving)

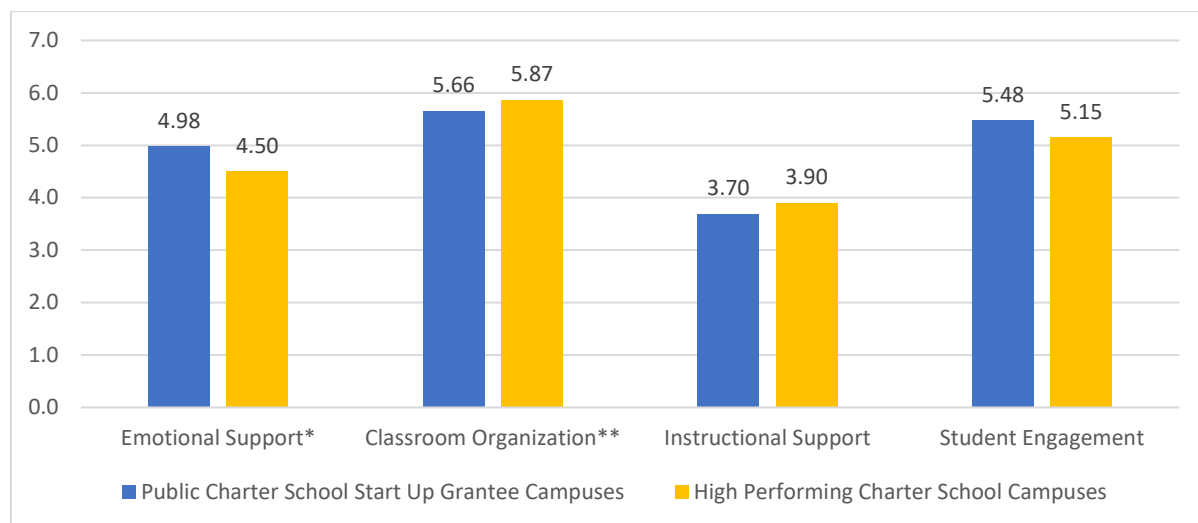
- **Student Engagement** (The degree to which students are focused and are participating in the learning activity presented or facilitated by the teacher)¹²

As Figure 2.12 illustrates, teachers at Charter School Start-Up grantees received CLASS observation scores roughly in-line with those of teachers at high-performing charter campuses.

Mean CLASS observation scores for the “Emotional Support” domain were significantly higher for teachers at start-up grantee campuses (4.98) than they were for teachers at high-performing charter schools (4.50). The Emotional Support domain measures the ability of teachers to support social and emotional functioning in the classroom and includes measurements related to positive and negative climate, responsiveness to students’ academic and emotional needs, and the extent to which teachers place an emphasis on students’ perspectives, interests, and motivations. Therefore, higher Emotional Support domain scores at start-up grantee campuses may be indicative of teachers providing supports for students in at-risk situations (Pianta, La Paro & Hamre, 2015).

On the other hand, the “Classroom Organization” domain was significantly lower for teachers at start-up grantee campuses (5.66) than they were for teachers at high-performing charter schools (5.87). This finding may be reflective of more experienced teachers working at high-performing charter schools and/or additional classroom management training or systems in place at high-performing charter schools. No statistically significant differences were observed between teachers at start-up grantee campuses and high-performing campuses for the “Instructional Support” and “Student Engagement” domains.

Figure 2.12 CLASS Observation Scores for Public Charter School Start-Up Grant Recipients and High-Performing Charter Schools



Source: CLASS Observation Scores, fall 2017 and spring 2018, Texas Education Agency, 2018.

Note: Results based on 48 observations of teachers at Public Charter School Start-Up Grant campuses in fall 2017 and 39 observations of teachers at high-performing charter schools in spring 2018. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

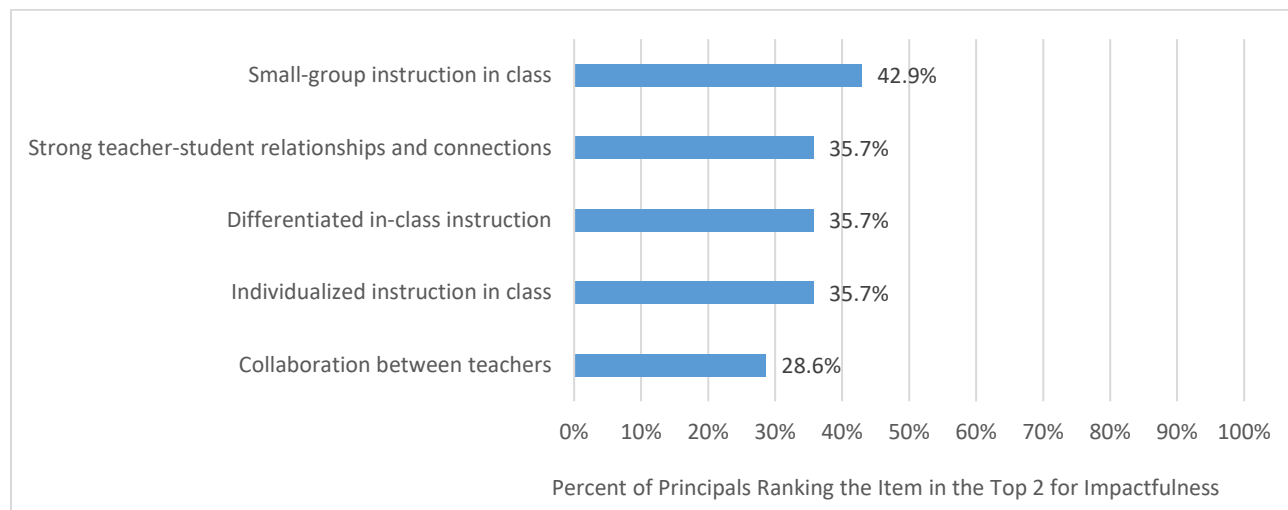
¹² Dimensions included in the four CLASS domains vary depending upon the CLASS instrument used (i.e., K-3, Upper Elementary, Secondary)

Closing the Achievement Gap for Educationally Disadvantaged Students

Educationally disadvantaged students were defined in this evaluation as those students identified as being at risk of dropping out of school. These students often require additional assistance and focus at any campus. This section focuses on strategies for closing the achievement gap for these students at start-up campuses.

Forty-three percent of start-up campus principal survey respondents ranked “Small-group instruction in class,” which allows teachers to use class time to provide targeted instruction and assistance, as one of the top two most impactful strategies for closing the achievement gap for educationally disadvantaged students. Likewise, nearly 36% of principals also ranked “Strong teacher-student relationships and connections,” “Differentiated in-class instruction,” and “Individualized in-class instruction” among the two most impactful approaches to closing the achievement gap for educationally-disadvantaged students.¹³ Lastly, “Collaboration between teachers” was rated as either the first or second most impactful approach by 29% of principals at start-up campuses. (See Figure 2.13.)

Figure 2.13 Public Charter School Start-Up Grantees: Most Impactful Approaches for Closing Achievement Gaps for Educationally Disadvantaged Students



Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

Note: Results based on 14 responses from principals at campuses who have received funding through the Texas Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant.

In addition to the methods noted by principals, teachers from seven of the 10 teacher focus groups conducted in fall 2017 spoke about a range of socio-emotional strategies, including building relationships with students so they could understand and adapt to outside factors that influenced a student during the school day. One teacher shared that, for many students, it is “new for them ... [that] they have an adult at school who is not quick to reprimand, punish, expel, and wants to hear what’s going on in their lives.” Teachers further shared that this approach made a “huge difference” with

¹³ A more socio-emotional approach to student support can focus on building a sense of belonging while layering academic components. As a principal mentioned during fall 2017 interviews, socio-emotional support is ultimately about “building relationships ... that goes a long way to helping those lowest-performing. They know failure and we are trying to help them see the success that is in them too.”

student academic achievement. Teachers also indicated that they spent time building student confidence, working to correct negative self-perceptions, and providing a safe and stable learning environment.

Participants in four of the 10 teacher focus groups also mentioned that they used tutorials to target particular areas of improvement — citing that tutorials can be held in class and teachers had time “which is dedicated to ... tutoring ...for students before or after school, during lunch sometimes.”

Closing the Achievement Gap for Low-Performing Students

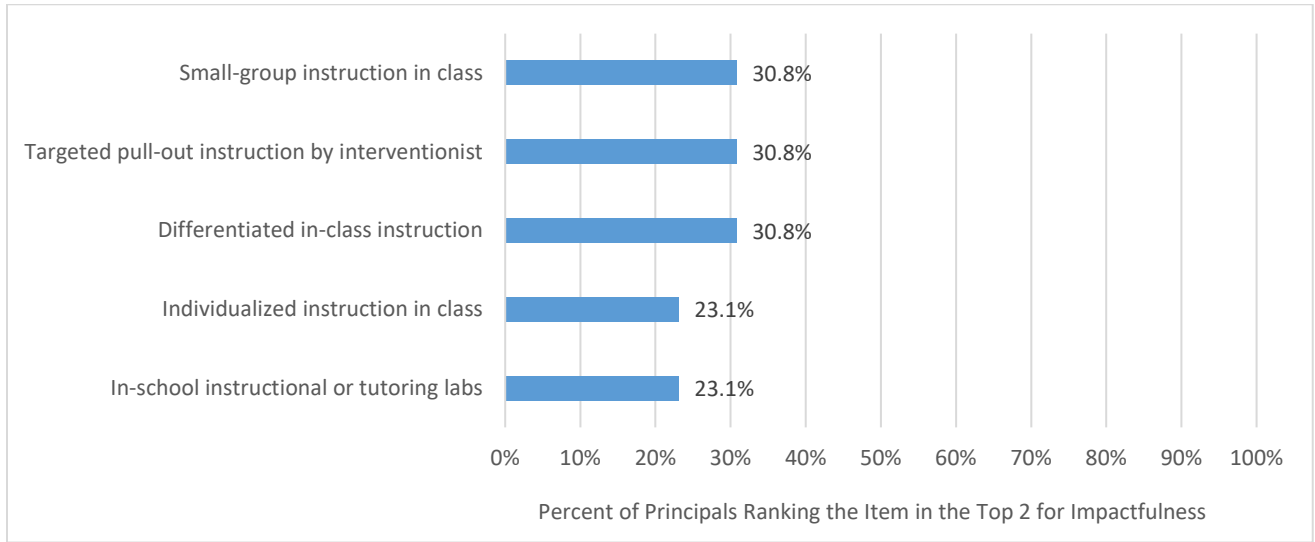
Students identified as lowest-performing were defined in this evaluation as those students at the bottom 10% in reading and math. This section explores how charter schools work with low-performing students and identified best or promising practices related to closing the achievement gaps for this group of students.

The results for the most impactful methods for closing achievement gaps for the lowest-performing students do not differ materially from the results for approaches used with educationally disadvantaged students. As Figure 2.14 illustrates, just over 30% of principal survey respondents ranked “Small-group instruction in class,” “Targeted pull-out instruction by an interventionist,” and “Differentiated in-class instruction” as the first or second most impactful method for closing the achievement gap for the lowest-performing students enrolled at their start-up campuses.

Almost a quarter (23%) of the principals at start-up campuses ranked “Individualized instruction in class” and “In-school instructional or tutorial labs” among the two most impactful methods for closing the achievement gap for low-performing students. (See Figure 2.14.)

When discussing differentiated instruction during fall 2017 site visit interviews, start-up principals identified effective differentiated instruction as “meeting [students] where they’re at.” One principal shared that this is accomplished by allowing “students ... to work on instructional software that’s geared towards the level that they’re at.” Differentiated instruction enables teachers to identify “areas that [students] can focus on to help build skills.”

Figure 2.14 Public Charter School Start-Up Grantees: Most Impactful Approaches for Closing Achievement Gaps for the Lowest Performing Students



Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

Note: Results based on 14 responses from principals at campuses who have received funding through the Texas Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant.

Similarly, five of the 10 principals interviewed during fall 2017 site visits also discussed the importance of socio-emotional supports for closing the achievement gaps for educationally disadvantaged students. For some schools, this involved moving away from a more traditional reward/punishment schema, and instead aiming to help “students to develop some of that internal control.”

Practices Related to Maintaining a Positive School Climate

There is a wide array of factors that contribute to the development and maintenance of a positive campus environment. This section examines perceptions of climate, staff morale, and teaching conditions at start-up grantee campuses. It also captures information critical to maintaining a positive school climate and effective methods for maintaining positive interactions between students and teachers (including disciplinary procedures).

Principal Perceptions of Campus Climate and Staff Morale at their Schools

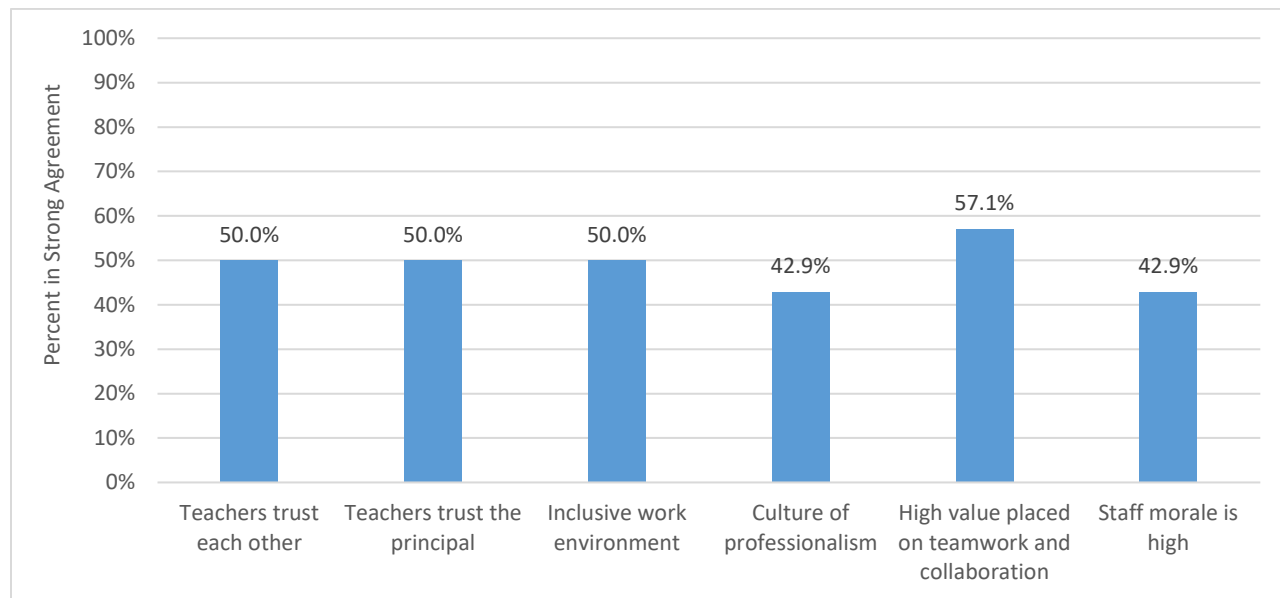
Principal survey respondents at charter school start-up grantee campuses were asked to rate their level of agreement about a series of statements related to campus climate and working conditions.¹⁴ As Figure 2.15 shows, less than half of these principals at start-up grantee campuses were in strong agreement that staff morale is high at their campus. However, half the principals were in strong agreement that “Teachers trust each other” and that “Teachers trust their principal.”

Collaboration and the development of an inclusive work environment help create a more positive work environment. With this in mind, half the principal survey respondents at start-up campuses strongly agreed that their campus had an “Inclusive work environment,” 43% strongly agreed that there was a

¹⁴ A 4-point scale was used where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree.

“Culture of professionalism” at their campus and 57% strongly agreed that there was a “High value placed on teamwork” at their campus. (See Figure 2.15.)

Figure 2.15 Percentage of Principals at Charter School Start-up Grantee Campuses in Strong Agreement with Statements Related to Campus Culture and Staff Morale



Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

Note: Results based on 14 responses from principals at campuses which received funding through the Texas Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant.

During the fall 2017 site visits to start-up grantee campuses, interviewed principals were asked how they would characterize the school climate, staff morale, and teaching conditions at their campus. Teachers were asked to explore the same questions in teacher focus groups on-site at these campuses.

Seventy percent of interviewed principals at start-up campuses described staff morale as positive while acknowledging that there are natural “ups and downs” during an academic year. Principals perceived morale to be positive, despite any dips, “because [staff] are not only supported by administrators, but the parents here are very supportive.”

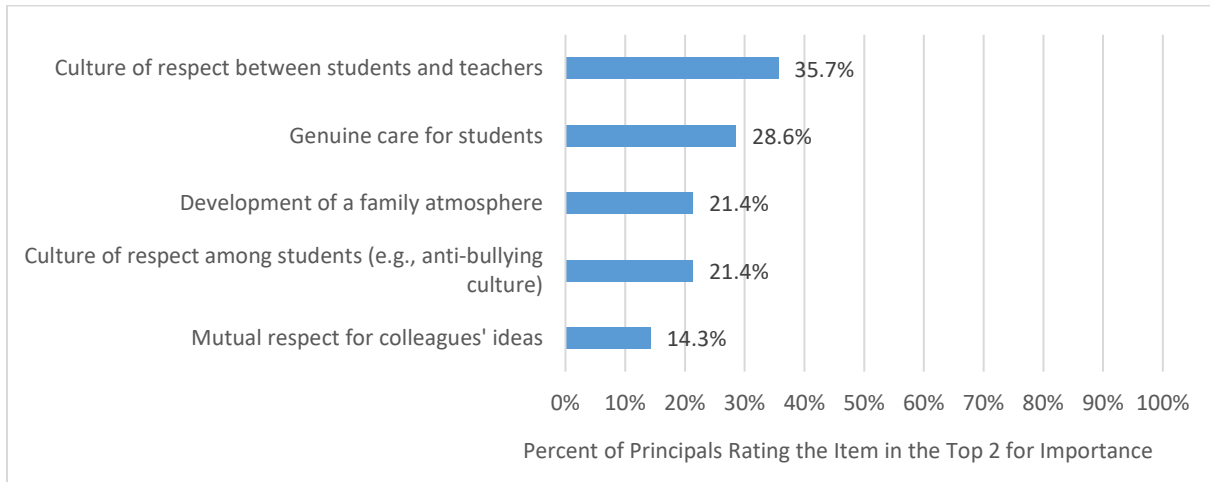
Principals participating in on-site interviews were also asked about the climate and teaching conditions at their campus. The majority of principals described both climate and conditions at their campus to be supportive (70%), indicating a collaborative environment that is conducive to teachers feeling “supported by leadership.” Principals also acknowledged that “it’s not an easy job. It’s a demanding place ... [teachers] are hard workers. [Teachers] feeling supported or heard makes [the school] a good, appealing place for them.”

The majority of teacher focus groups also described their school climate as supportive (80%). Teachers described their climate as feeling “very much like family because we spend so much time together,” that there are feelings of collaboration and inclusion, and a feeling like they can share their concerns with others.

Approaches to Developing and Maintaining a Positive School Climate

As Figure 2.16 shows, a “Culture of respect between students and teachers” (36%) and “Genuine care for students” (29%) were most commonly ranked as the first or second most important indicators of a positive school by start-up principal survey respondents. The “Development of a family atmosphere” (21%), “Culture of respect among students” (21%), and “Mutual respect for colleague’s ideas” (14%) rounded out principals’ perspectives on the five most important indicators of a positive school climate.

Figure 2.16 Public Charter School Start-Up Grantees: Most Important Indicators of a Positive School Climate



Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

Note: Results based on 14 responses from principals at campuses who have received funding through the Texas Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant.

Teaching Conditions

When asked about teaching conditions, the majority (60%) of the 10 teacher focus groups conducted at start-up campuses in fall 2017 indicated that they had adequate resources and materials, such as classroom technology, planning time, and “manageable” class sizes. Teachers also indicated feeling supported by their administration and that school leadership was responsive to concerns about classroom furniture.

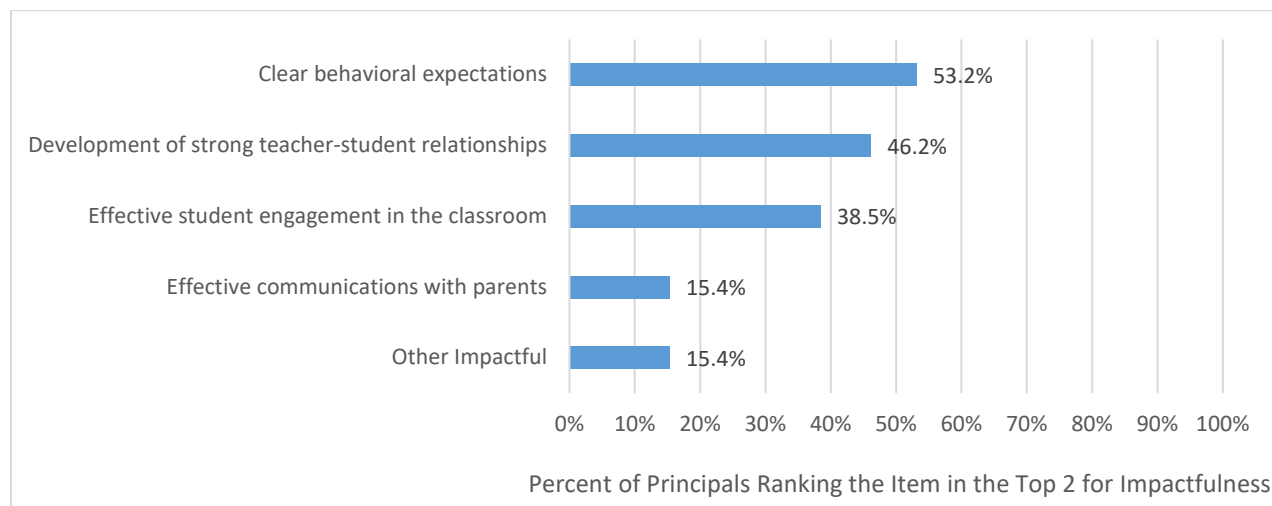
Participants from four of the 10 teacher focus groups indicated that there were areas that needed improvement. These areas included the need for direction in lesson planning, the inadequacy of physical spaces (e.g., peeling floors, the need for new light filters), a lack of planning time, and the fact that school leadership had “added a lot of intervention work” that needed to take place during the school day.

A smaller proportion of teacher focus groups indicated feeling stretched (three out of ten), whether from feeling “submerged” due to teaching a large number of students across several subjects and grade levels or having additional duties like planning time flow into weekends. Some mentioned that they faced multiple deadlines and trainings that resulted in respondents feeling like they’re always catching up and feeling like there are more expectations placed on charter school teachers compared to traditional public schools.

Methods for Maintaining Positive Student/Teacher and Student-to-Student Interactions

As Figure 2.17 illustrates, setting clear behavioral expectations (53%), developing strong teacher-student relationships (46%), and effective student engagement in the classroom (39%) were ranked by start-up principal survey respondents as either the first or second most effective approach for maintaining positive teacher-student and student-to-student interactions at their campuses. Effective communication with parents was also ranked as one of the top two effective approaches by 15% of principals.

Figure 2.17 Public Charter School Start-Up Grantees: Most Impactful Approaches for Maintaining Positive Teacher-to-Student and Student-to-Student Interactions



Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

Note: Results based on 13 responses from principals at campuses who have received funding through the Texas Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant.

During fall 2017 site visits, principals that were interviewed were asked about effective approaches to reducing student behavioral issues. Similarly, teacher focus group participants at start-up site visits were asked to describe their approach to managing student behavior in the classroom, effective classroom management approaches, and the ways in which school leaders support them with disciplinary issues.

Principals specifically identified having or building a strong relationship with students as an effective approach to reducing student behavioral issues. This relationship included building an environment of mutual respect that eases conflict resolution, transitioning students away from a more punitive system, helping to build relationships between students and the staff they interact with, greeting students in the morning, and providing encouraging words to start the day.

These principals also discussed restorative practices, or moving towards restorative practices, such as engaging in “student meditations,” “talking about making things right with the community after [the student] violated agreements,” and having “natural consequences for kids paired with a lot of proactive positive interventions.”

Teachers in seven of 10 focus groups also expressed that they use various restorative practices including modeling behavior for “how we’re going to handle situations, how we’re going to treat one another,”

pulling students aside to engage in a conversation about problems or behavior, having students use a mood-meter so that teachers can adopt different approaches, and generally respecting the students.

Teachers in five of 10 focus groups also indicated following a system that awards points or demerits based on student behavior, providing immediate rewards, and using clip charts so students can visually identify where they stand.

When asked about classroom management approaches, teachers in 40% of the focus groups referred to building a classroom culture, as well as upholding classroom contracts and student rules as effective approaches to reducing student behavior. One teacher shared that they “have the students come up with their own rules that were within a certain boundary, then they go along the school rules. Then, I have my own expectations, and then we meet in the middle and build a contract.”

Summary of Key Findings

The most impactful, important, or effective practices noted by principals through survey and interview responses, and confirmed by teachers during focus group sessions, include the following approaches:

Planning and Organizational Practices

- Principals noted the importance of defining roles and responsibilities during the planning process, while teachers appreciated open communication and knowing whom to approach for specific questions. Both principals and teachers mentioned the importance of creating a positive culture and strong community at the outset of opening a school.
- During the planning and school start-up process, principals reported receiving critical support from CMOs or district office staff and TEA.
- Using student data to inform instruction, hiring exemplary teachers as grade-level leads, departmental leads, or coaches to support other teachers, and using classroom observations to monitor instructional quality were ranked by principals as the three most important practices related to executing the campus’s mission.
- While principals were split regarding which methods were most effective at encouraging parent involvement, regular individualized teacher-parent communications and having a system for parents to monitor student attendance, grades, and progress emerged as the two most commonly noted approaches.
- School leaders reported several challenges related to start-ups, including school construction, student enrollment, and funding.

Teacher Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention

- While principals shared a wide array of effective teacher recruitment methods, they rated word-of-mouth and online advertising as the most effective teacher recruitment strategies and tended to focus on pedagogical skills and fit with the charter school’s educational philosophy when hiring teachers.

- Strong demonstrated pedagogical skills and teacher fit with the educational philosophy of the schools were rated by principals as the two most important considerations when hiring new teachers.
- Principals and teachers cited the importance of maintaining a positive school culture, providing instructional supports through regular feedback and lesson modeling, and allowing for adequate planning time as key drivers for retaining high-quality teachers.
- Principals shared that instructional effectiveness is by far the most important consideration when deciding whether to retain a teacher, and the use of teacher evaluation rubrics and observation tools were most commonly used by school leaders to make this assessment.
- Principals at new charter school campuses were split on the use of bonus pay based on student performance as a means to incentivize teachers.
- Start-up grantee teachers are less likely to have advanced degrees, are typically younger, typically have less experience in teaching, more likely to be first-year teachers, and have less tenure at their school than their counterparts at traditional public school campuses.
- Teacher retention between 2016–17 and 2017–18 was lower at charter school start-up grantee campuses (58%) than matched traditional public school campuses (75%).

Student Recruitment and Retention

- Word-of-mouth advertising through parents, social media, and principal presentations at local events were ranked by principals as the most effective methods for recruiting students to their new charter school campus.
- Teachers at charter school start-up grantee campuses felt that establishing positive relationships with parents and students, creating a sense of belonging for students, and delivering high-quality instruction were the keys to retaining students.
- Just over three-quarters (77%) of students enrolled at charter school start-up campuses in 2016–17 returned to that campus for the 2017–18 school year. Of these students that transferred, 53% left for a traditional public school and 29% attended a different charter school in 2017–18.

Instructional Practices

- Establishing positive relationships between students and teachers and the use of formative data to guide instruction were rated by principals as both the most frequently observed and most impactful instructional practices.

- Providing feedback to teachers based on walk-throughs and informal observations and the review of student performance data with teachers were rated by principals as the most impactful teacher supports for improving instructional practices.
- Public Charter School Start-Up Grant recipients received higher CLASS observation scores for the “Emotional Support” and “Student Engagement” domains than high-performing charter schools, but lower “Classroom Organization” and “Instructional Support” domain scores.
- Principals felt that a variety of in-class interventions, along with strong teacher-student connections and collaborative work between teachers, are the most effective approaches to closing the achievement gap for educationally disadvantaged students at risk of dropping out of school.
- In-class academic interventions, targeted pull-out instruction by an interventionist, and in-school tutorial labs were rated by principals as the most effective methods for closing the achievement gap for persistently low-performing students.

Campus Climate and Staff Morale

- Principals felt that developing a culture of respect between teachers and students and the demonstration of genuine care for students were the two most important factors associated with creating a positive school climate.
- Principals and teachers felt that staff morale and working conditions were good at their campuses, citing feelings of collaboration, inclusion, and support from school leadership, while a minority of teacher focus groups expressed a certain degree of stress associated with multiple responsibilities at the charter school campus.
- Setting clear behavioral expectations, developing strong teacher-student relationships, the use of restorative practices, positive behavioral rewards, and providing engaging instruction in the classroom were all rated by principals as key drivers for curbing student behavioral issues.

Chapter 3 — Charter School Start-Up Grantee Outcomes

This chapter presents findings from a series of statistical analyses that examine the relationship between student enrollment at campuses funded through the Texas Public Charter School Start-Up Grant Program and academic outcomes. This chapter also includes results related to how enrollment at charter school start-up grantee campuses may have differentially impacted various student groups. Data from Cohort 1 and 2 start-up campus grantees were included in this series of statistical analyses.

Data and Methods

The evaluation used a quasi-experimental design with matched comparison groups to estimate the effect of enrollment in a start-up grantee campus during the 2016–17 school year on the following student outcomes:

- STAAR Reading;
- STAAR Mathematics;
- Algebra I End-of-Course (EOC) exam; and
- English I EOC exam.

Students that attended charter school start-up grantee campuses during the 2016–17 school year were matched using propensity score matching (see Appendix B for details) with comparable students at traditional public school campuses in order to identify a group of students enrolled in traditional public school campuses who share similar prior test scores and other student and school characteristics. Statistical models were then developed which controlled for differences in student characteristics and prior academic achievement between students enrolled at the two different types of campuses. These statistical models were used to estimate the effect of enrollment at a start-up grantee campus on various student academic outcomes.

The statistical model for estimating effects compares average outcomes on the STAAR Mathematics and Reading tests and the Algebra I and English I EOC exams for students attending charter school start-up grantee campuses and the matched comparison students using a regression approach that accounts for students' baseline characteristics. The regression approach combines grade levels and groups campuses by the grade range they serve. Because the analysis is quasi-experimental, these control variables play the important role of accounting for any initial differences between the charter school start-up grantee and comparison group students before the former group entered a charter school start-up grantee campus. All students initially entering a charter school start-up grantee campus remain members throughout the analysis, regardless of where they were subsequently enrolled.¹⁵

¹⁵ Selection bias is a potential problem in student departures from charter campuses before completion of all grades. If students who leave charter campuses early tend to be those who perform academically worse than their peers, the analysis, by including only persisting students, could overstate charter campus impacts. To account for this attrition, any student who enrolled in a charter is kept in the charter group regardless of whether the student remains in a charter school campus or transfers to another school. This method likely produces a conservative estimate of charter campuses' full impact on students who remain in the charter school campus (Tuttle et al. 2015). See Appendix A for more details.

The evaluation also examined whether campus effects differed across the following seven student groups:

1. Females (versus males)
2. Race/ethnicity
3. Students receiving special education services
4. Students classified as economically disadvantaged
5. Students classified as English Learners
6. Students classified as at risk of dropping out
7. Students who are low-performing and educationally-disadvantaged

Due to the relatively short period of time that the charter school start-up grantee campuses have been operational (i.e., one to two years), these outcome analyses should be viewed with caution and considered as exploratory in nature.

Findings

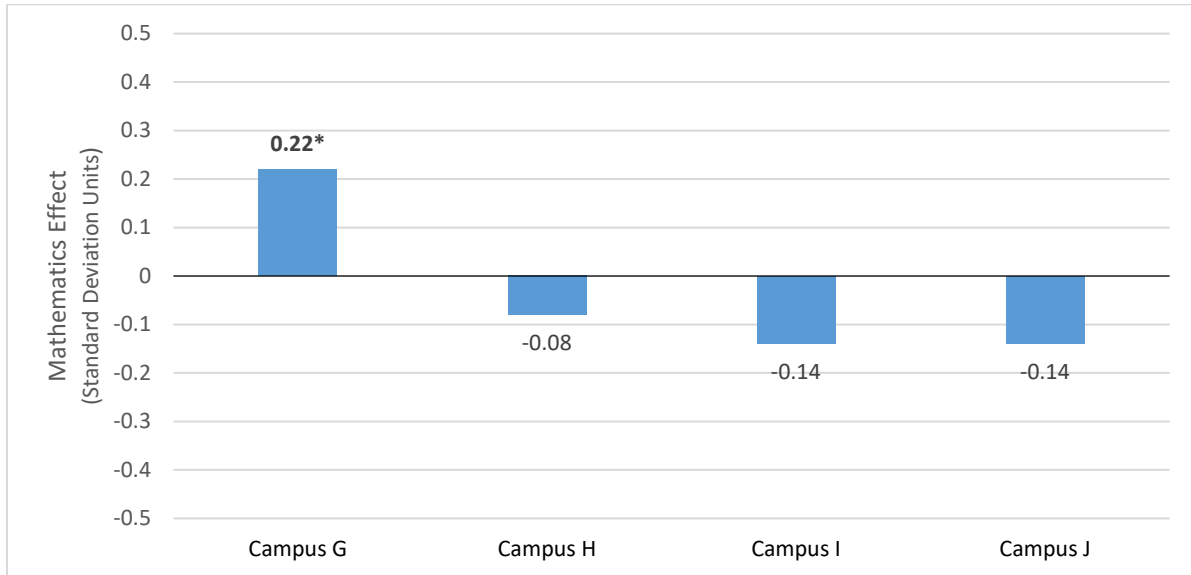
Relationship between Student Enrollment in a Charter School Start-Up Grantee Campus and Outcomes

The evaluation estimated the effects of enrollment in a charter school start-up grantee campus on the following student outcomes: STAAR Reading, STAAR Mathematics, Algebra I EOC exams, and English I EOC exams. To facilitate comparisons across schools, test scores were standardized across each subject, grade, and year, using information from the entire statewide Texas student population. Results presented in these standardized units can be described, relative to the standard deviation of the overall test score distribution, as standard deviation units. More detailed information on this process and outcomes are found in Appendix F.

Figure 3.1 shows the STAAR Mathematics results for elementary schools. After controlling for student and school characteristics, one start-up grantee campus, Campus G, had significantly higher STAAR Mathematics scores, compared with matched students enrolled in traditional public schools.¹⁶ Enrollment in this particular school was associated with an increase of 0.22 standard deviation units on the STAAR Mathematics test, which is approximately equivalent to the difference between a student scoring at the 42nd percentile (the percentile corresponding to the comparison students' mean score) and a student scoring at the 51st percentile. No grantee campuses had statistically lower STAAR Mathematics scores, compared with matched students enrolled in traditional public schools. The overall average effect across the four elementary grantee campuses in STAAR Mathematics was negative (-0.04) and not statistically different from zero.

¹⁶ Throughout this report, the term “significantly” indicates something that is statistically significant at the 5% level, meaning that there is less than a 5% chance that the difference is due to chance alone.

Figure 3.1 STAAR Mathematics Outcomes for Charter School Start-Up Grantee Elementary Campuses, 2016–17



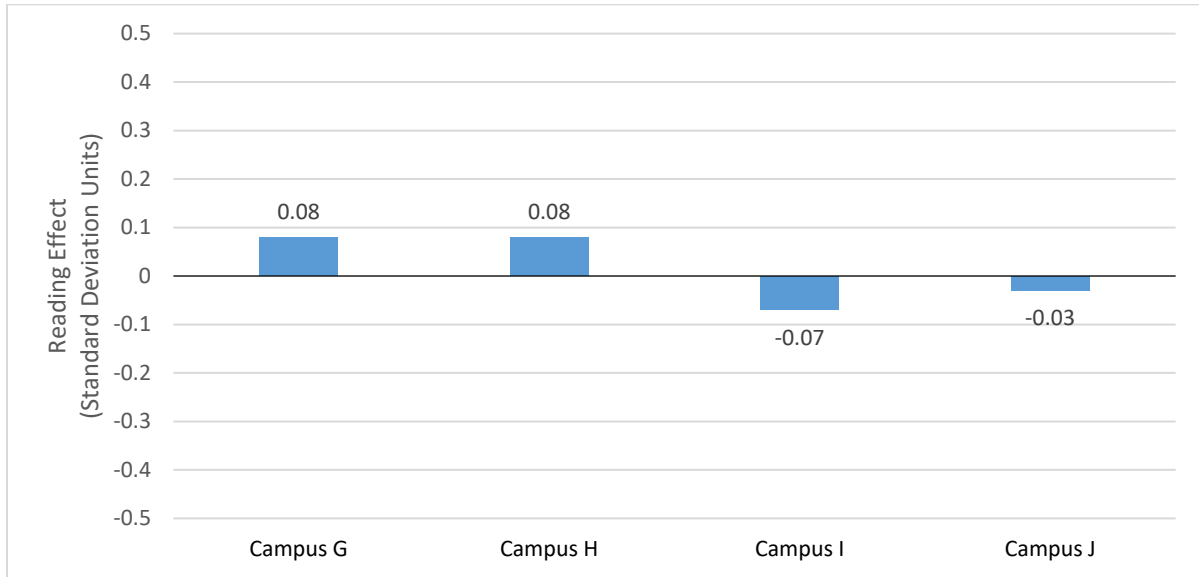
* Indicates statistically significant where $p < 0.05$.

Source: Public Education Information Management System STAAR data, Texas Education Agency, 2016–17.

Note: Reported effects are statistically adjusted for student and school characteristics. Test scores were standardized by subject, grade, and year, based on statewide means and standard deviations. Sample size includes 581 students attending Charter School Start-up Grantee campuses and 581 matched comparison students. See Appendix F for full results and details.

Figure 3.2 shows the STAAR Reading results for elementary schools. After controlling for student and school characteristics, no start-up grantee campuses had significantly higher or lower STAAR Reading scores compared with matched students enrolled in traditional public schools. The overall average effect across the four elementary grantee campuses was positive (0.02) and not statistically different from zero.

Figure 3.2 STAAR Reading Outcomes for Charter School Start-Up Grantee Elementary Campuses, 2016–17



* Indicates statistically significant at the 0.05 level. There were no statistically significant scores for STAAR Reading at elementary campuses.

Source: Public Education Information Management System STAAR data, Texas Education Agency, 2016–17.

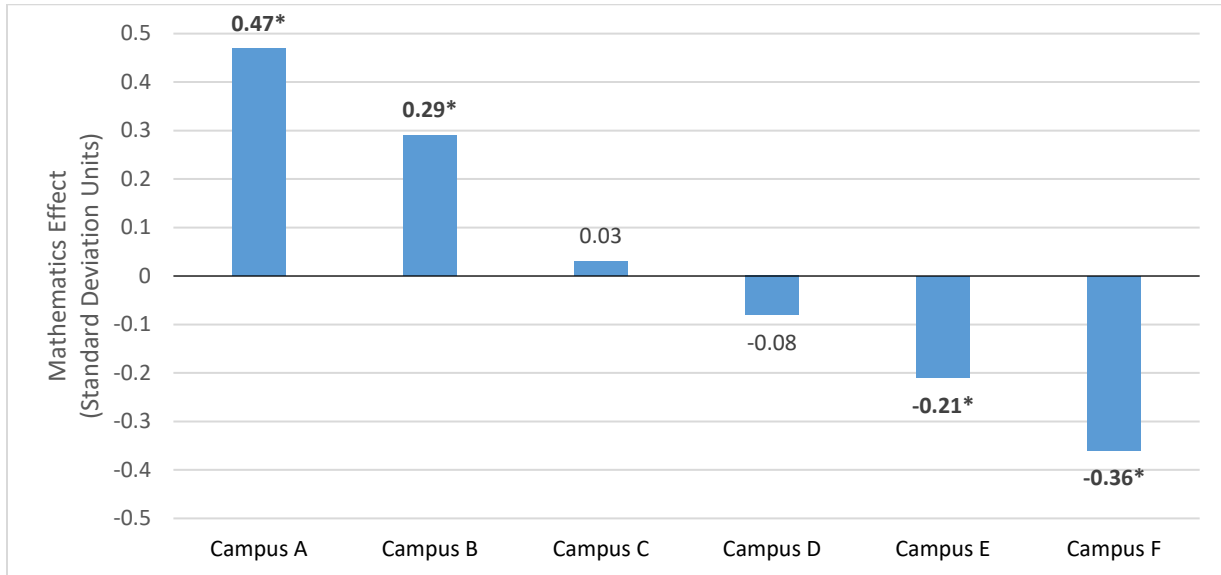
Note: Reported effects are statistically adjusted for student and school characteristics. Test scores were standardized by subject, grade, and year, based on statewide means and standard deviations. Sample size includes 581 students attending Charter School Start-up Grantee campuses and 581 matched comparison students. See Appendix F for full results and details.

Figure 3.3 shows the STAAR-Mathematics results for middle schools. After controlling for student and school characteristics, campuses A and B had significantly higher STAAR-Mathematics scores for the start-up grantee group, compared with matched students enrolled in traditional public schools. One had an estimated effect of 0.47 standard deviation units, approximately equivalent to moving a student from the 51st percentile to the 69th percentile, and the other of 0.29 standard deviation units, or moving from the 51st percentile to the 62nd percentile.¹⁷

Two grantee campuses had statistically lower STAAR Mathematics scores, compared with matched students enrolled in traditional public schools. Enrollment in the first campus was associated with a decrease of 0.36 standard deviation units on the STAAR Mathematics test, equivalent to the difference between scoring at the 51st percentile compared to the 37th percentile. Enrollment in the second campus was associated with a decrease of 0.21 standard deviation units, or moving from the 51st percentile to the 42nd percentile. The overall average effect across the six middle school grantee campuses for STAAR Mathematics was positive (0.07) and not statistically different from zero.

¹⁷ The percentile a student scores in indicates the percentage of students that scored lower than that student, so a student scoring at the 42nd percentile would have a higher score than 42 percent of students who took that test.

Figure 3.3 STAAR Mathematics Outcomes for Charter School Start-Up Grantee Middle School Campuses, 2016–17



* Indicates statistically significant where $p < 0.05$.

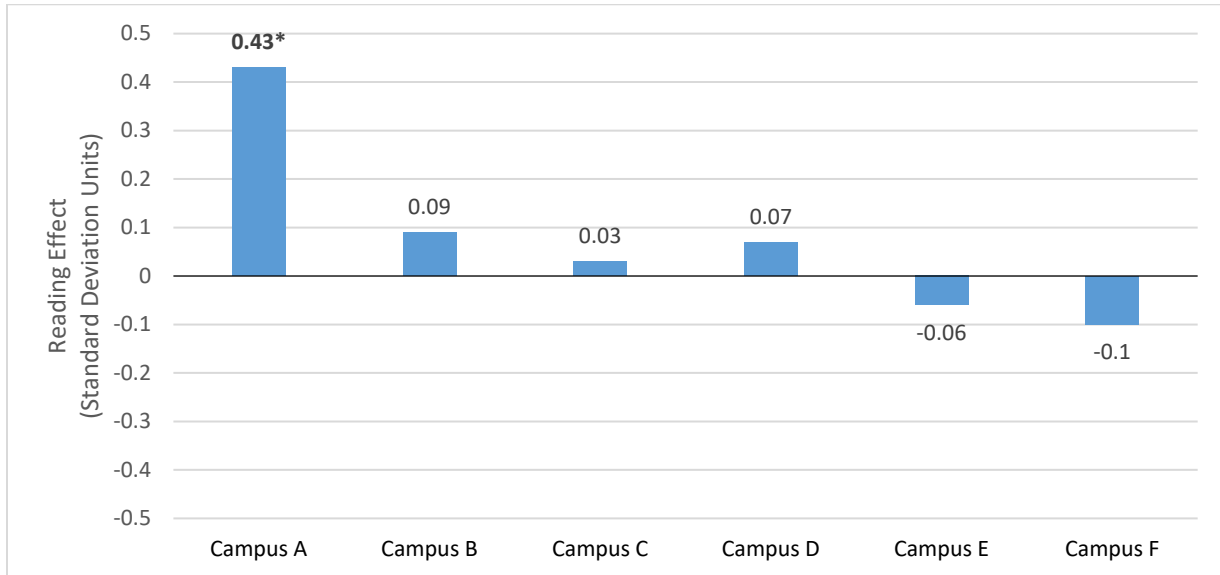
Source: Public Education Information Management System STAAR data, Texas Education Agency, 2016–17.

Note: Reported effects are statistically adjusted for student and school characteristics. Test scores were standardized by subject, grade, and year, based on statewide means and standard deviations. Sample size includes 501 students attending Charter School Start-up Grantee campuses and 501 matched comparison students. See appendix F for full results and details.

Similarly, Figure 3.4 shows the middle school model for STAAR Reading scores. One campus had significantly higher STAAR Reading scores for the start-up grantee group, compared with matched students enrolled in traditional public schools, with an estimated effect of 0.43 standard deviation units, which is approximately equivalent to the difference between scoring at the 45th percentile compared to the 62nd percentile.

No grantee campuses had statistically significant lower STAAR Reading scores, compared with matched students enrolled in traditional public schools. The overall average effect across the six middle school grantee campuses in reading was positive (0.08) and not statistically different from zero.

Figure 3.4 STAAR Reading Outcomes for Charter School Start-Up Grantee Middle School Campuses, 2016–17



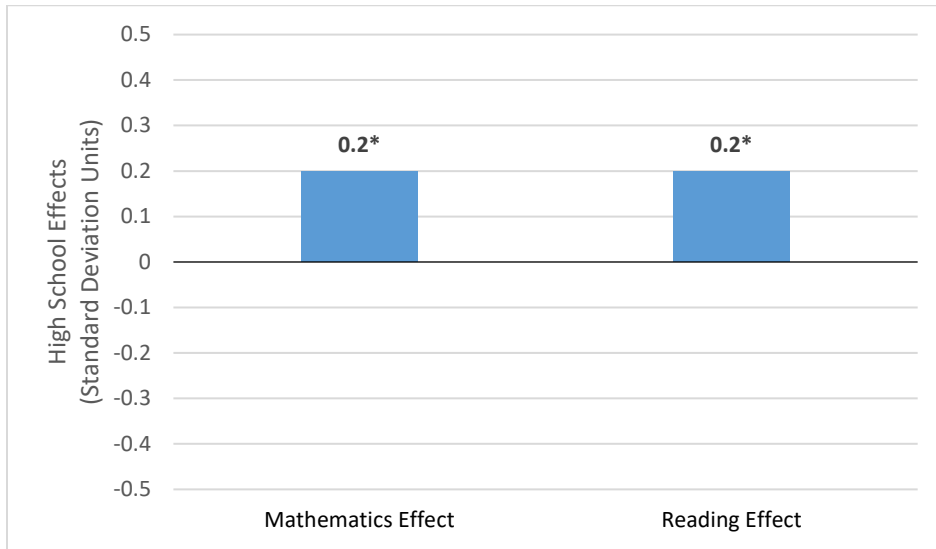
* Indicates statistically significant where $p < 0.05$.

Source: Public Education Information Management System STAAR data, Texas Education Agency, 2016–17.

Note: Reported effects are statistically adjusted for student and school characteristics. Test scores were standardized by subject, grade, and year, based on statewide means and standard deviations. Sample size includes 501 students attending Charter School Start-up Grantee campuses and 501 matched comparison students. See Appendix F for full results and details.

After controlling for student and school characteristics, the one start-up grantee campus with enough high school students to include in the study had significantly higher Algebra I EOC exam scores and English I EOC exam scores, compared with matched students enrolled in traditional public schools. The scores had estimated effects of 0.2 standard deviation units in both subjects, approximately equivalent to the difference between scoring at the 53rd percentile compared to the 61st percentile. (See Figure 3.5.)

Figure 3.5 Algebra I and English I EOC Exam Outcomes for Charter School Start-Up Grantee High School Campuses, 2016–17



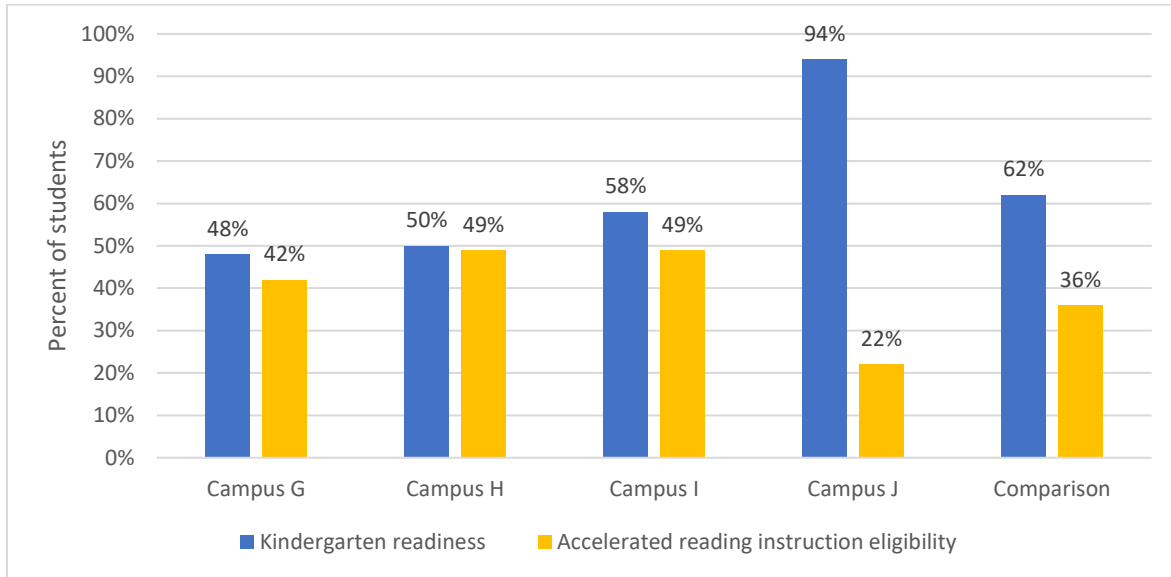
* Indicates statistically significant where $p < 0.05$.

Source: Public Education Information Management System STAAR data, Texas Education Agency, 2016–17.

Note: Reported effects are statistically adjusted for student and school characteristics. Test scores were standardized by subject, grade, and year, based on statewide means and standard deviations. Sample size includes 23 students attending Charter School Start-up Grantee campuses and 23 matched comparison students. See Appendix F for full results and details.

In addition to the STAAR test score outcomes for elementary school grades, the evaluation also analyzed data on early reading indicators and kindergarten readiness indicators. Because no baseline data is available for students on these outcomes, a regression-based impact analysis was not feasible. However, descriptive analyses of outcomes for the four start-up grantee campuses that serve these grade ranges were possible. Note that these represent simple differences in average outcomes across campuses and should not be interpreted as impacts. These descriptive results are shown in Figure 3.6 below.

Figure 3.6 Kindergarten Readiness and Early Reading Indicators for Charter School Start-Up Grantee Elementary Campuses, 2016–17



Source: Public Education Information Management System databases, Texas Education Agency, 2016–17.

Note: Analyses include a total of 770 students enrolled in campuses which received funding through the Texas Public Charter School Start-Up Grant program and 331,741 students at comparable traditional public school campuses.

Of the four charter school start-up grantee campuses with students in elementary grades, three of the campuses have a lower percentage of students ready for Kindergarten, and higher rates of eligibility for accelerated reading instruction, compared to students enrolled in traditional public school campuses.

Charter School Enrollment Effects across Student Groups

In addition to the performance of the overall student population enrolled in charter school start-up grantee campuses, it is also important to see how students in different student groups perform at those campuses, compared to a matched comparison sample of students from that student group enrolled in traditional public schools. To examine performance for students in these different student groups, the same statistical model was used as was used for the overall sample, except for allowing the effect to vary by student group. This adjustment yields results that give an estimate of how well students in those student groups are performing at each grantee campus, after controlling for differences in student groups.

The evaluation examined whether campus impacts differed across the following seven student groups:

1. Females (versus males)
2. Race/ethnicity
3. Students receiving special education services
4. Students classified as economically disadvantaged
5. Students classified as ELs
6. Students classified as at-risk
7. Students who are low-performing and educationally-disadvantaged

The results of the student group models are presented in Appendix F. The summary is that in most cases the STAAR results for each student group are very similar to the overall results, with overall effects generally small and insignificant and estimated effects for specific student groups generally very similar to the overall effects. Across the different student groups and grade ranges, there are a couple of cases where the results are not as similar for a particular outcome and student group. These cases are caused by instances where one or more campuses have substantially different estimated effects for a particular outcome and student group than the overall estimated effect for those campuses. This amount of variation by student group is expected and indicates that the overall results are not in large part driven by particular student groups.

The first case where a student group result is substantially and significantly different from the overall effect is for middle schools, where the estimated effect for STAAR Reading for the economically disadvantaged student group (see Appendix Table F.7) is different from their overall estimated effect. One grantee campus has a slightly lower estimated effect for economically disadvantaged students than the overall effect and another has a positive estimated effect for economically disadvantaged students as opposed to their negative overall estimated effect on STAAR Reading.

The other case where a student group result is substantially different from the overall effect is for elementary schools, where the estimated effect for STAAR Reading for the EL student group (see Appendix Table F.9) is different from the overall effect. In this case, one grantee campus switches from a negative overall estimated effect for STAAR Reading to a positive estimated effect for the EL student group.

Comparing Estimated Effects to Achievement Gaps

To provide additional context, the size of the estimated effects of enrollment at charter school start-up grantee campuses on student performance and the effects for different grade ranges and outcomes were compared to the size of the achievement gap at feeder districts for each campus (see Appendix A for details). More specifically, the study measured both the gap between white and African American/Hispanic students and the gap between economically disadvantaged and not economically disadvantaged students. This comparison was done in order to understand how the magnitude of the effects on students' performance compared to different achievement gaps in feeder districts, and to help understand how meaningful such effects might be in terms of closing achievement gaps.

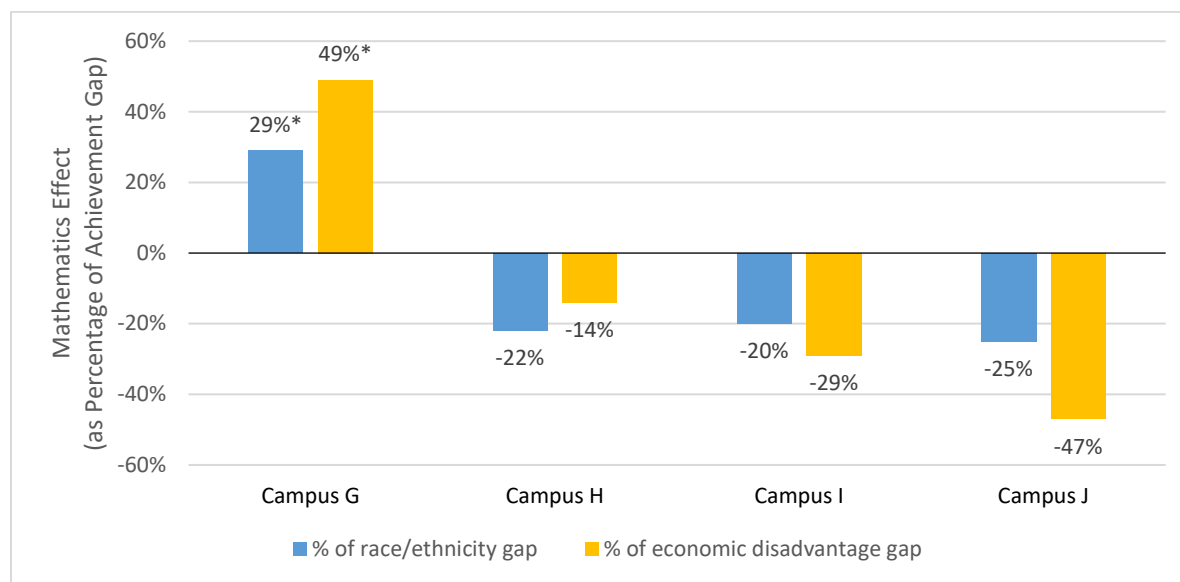
The comparison of effects with achievement gaps occurs separately for elementary, middle, and high schools. Because effects are presented as a percent of a particular achievement gap, the larger that gap is, the smaller the effect will be as a percentage. For example, if the impact of a grantee school is 0.3 standard deviation units and in the feeder school districts there is an achievement gap of 0.5 standard deviations between the average test scores of African American/Hispanic students and white students, then the size of the impact produced by that grantee school would be compared to the size of the achievement gap. In this case, the effect is about 60% of the achievement gap between white and African American/Hispanic students.

Figure 3.7 shows the results of these comparisons of estimated effects on STAAR Mathematics scores with average achievement gaps for elementary schools in feeder districts. These gaps are different for each charter school start-up grantee campus, as they are based on the feeder districts for each campus. The race/ethnicity gap is the difference between the average standardized math score for white students in feeder districts and the average score for African American and Hispanic students in those

districts. Similarly, the economic disadvantage gap is the difference between the average scores for students who are not classified as economically disadvantaged and those who are classified as economically disadvantaged. As context for understanding these results, for STAAR Mathematics scores the race/ethnicity gap for feeder districts ranges from 0.37 to 0.76 standard deviations, and the economic disadvantage gap ranges from 0.30 to 0.56 standard deviations.

Comparing estimated effects on STAAR Mathematics scores for elementary schools to the achievement gaps at feeder districts, charter school start-up grantee campus G had the largest estimated math effect had, equal to 29% of the feeder district race/ethnicity gap, and 49% of the feeder district economic disadvantage gap. In thinking about how meaningful the positive effect on STAAR Mathematics is, this means that the effect is almost half the size the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged and non-economically disadvantaged students in feeder districts, and almost a third as big as the gap based on student race/ethnicity. On the other end of the scale, the elementary grantee campus with the lowest estimated math effect has a negative effect with magnitude equal to 25% of the race/ethnicity gap at feeder districts, and 47% of the economic disadvantage gap. In both cases, these impacts are equal to almost half of the economic disadvantage gap, which is a substantial difference. The other two elementary grantee campuses have estimated math effects with magnitudes of less than 30% of the race/ethnicity and economic disadvantage test score gaps.

Figure 3.7 STAAR Mathematics Outcomes for Charter School Start-Up Grantee Elementary Campuses Compared to Feeder District Achievement Gaps, 2016–17



* Indicates statistically significant where $p < 0.05$.

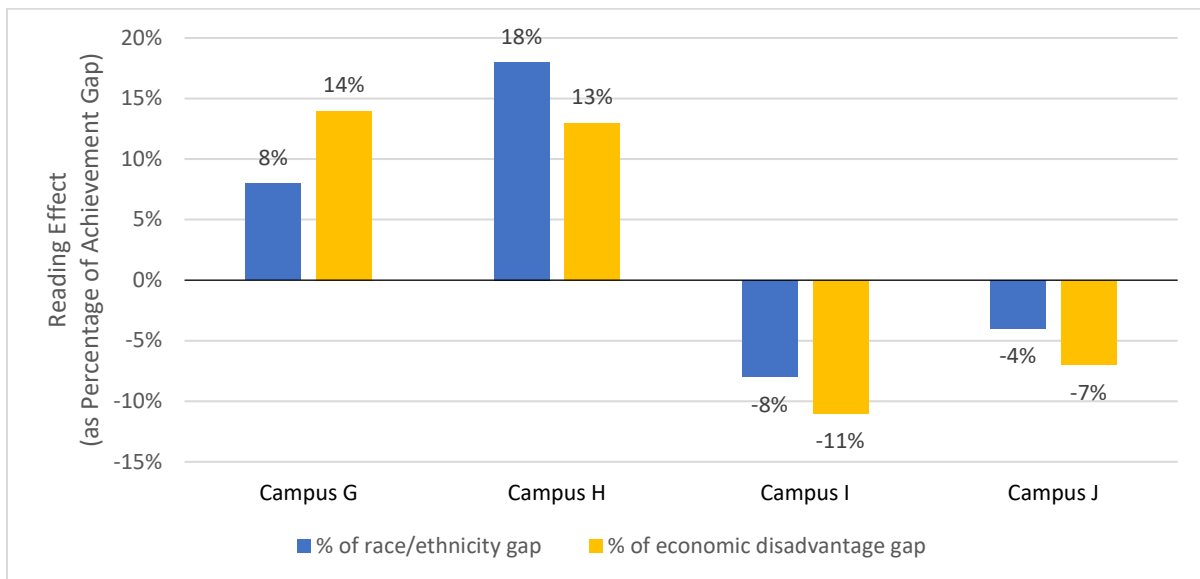
Source: Public Education Information Management System STAAR data, Texas Education Agency, 2016–17.

Note: Reported effects are statistically adjusted for student and school characteristics. Test scores were standardized by subject, grade, and year, based on statewide means and standard deviations. Sample size includes 581 students attending Charter School Start-up Grantee campuses and 581 matched comparison students. See appendix F for full results and details.

Figure 3.8 shows the results of these comparisons of estimated effects on STAAR Reading scores for elementary schools with achievement gaps for feeder districts. For elementary charter school start-up

grantee campuses' reading scores, the feeder district race/ethnicity gap ranges from 0.45 to 0.95 standard deviations, and the economic disadvantage gap ranges from 0.45 to 0.66 standard deviations. The elementary grantee campus with the largest estimated reading effect has an effect equal to 8% of the feeder district race/ethnicity gap and 14% of the economic disadvantage gap. This means that, in terms of the achievement gaps, the STAAR Reading effects are much smaller than for STAAR Mathematics. On the other end of the scale, the elementary grantee campus with the lowest estimated reading effect has a negative effect with magnitude equal to 8% of the feeder district race/ethnicity gap, and 11% of the economic disadvantage gap. The other two elementary grantee campuses also have estimated reading effects with magnitudes of less than 20% of the feeder district race/ethnicity and economic disadvantage test score gaps. There were no statistically significant effects on STAAR Reading at elementary campuses.

Figure 3.8 STAAR Reading Outcomes for Charter School Start-Up Grantee Elementary Campuses Compared to Feeder District Achievement Gaps, 2016–17



* Indicates statistically significant where $p < 0.05$. There were no statistically significant effects on STAAR Reading at elementary campuses.

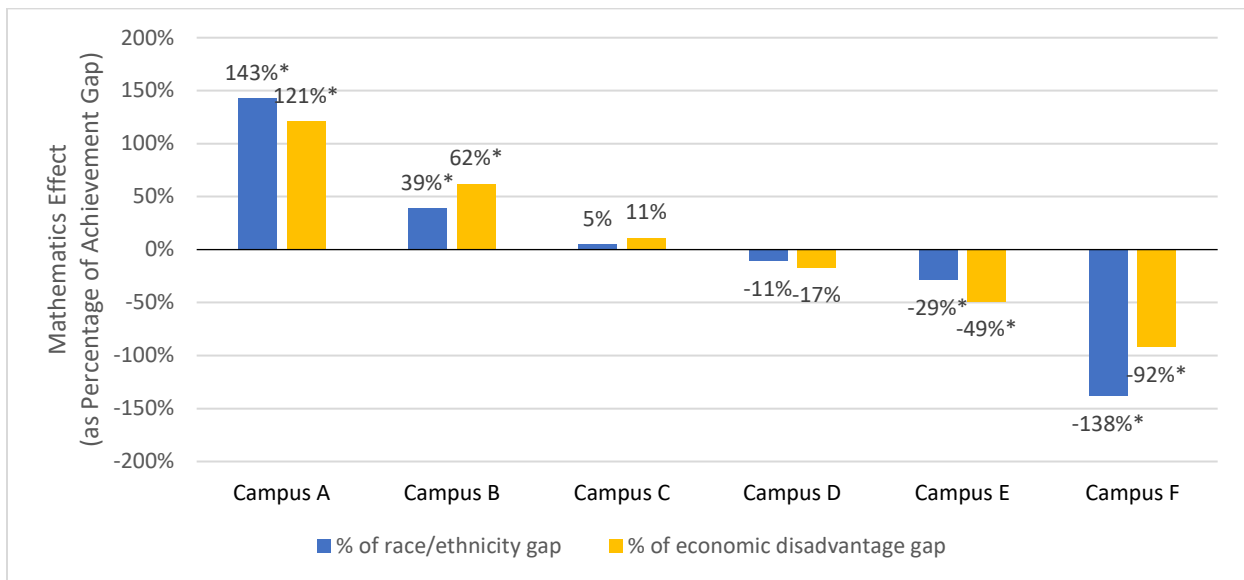
Source: Public Education Information Management System STAAR data, Texas Education Agency, 2016–17.

Note: Reported effects are statistically adjusted for student and school characteristics. Test scores were standardized by subject, grade, and year, based on statewide means and standard deviations. Sample size includes 581 students attending Charter School Start-up Grantee campuses and 581 matched comparison students. See appendix F for full results and details.

Figure 3.9 shows the results of these comparisons of estimated effects on STAAR Mathematics scores for middle schools with feeder district achievement gaps. For middle school mathematics scores, the feeder district race/ethnicity gap ranges from 0.26 to 0.74 standard deviations, and the economic disadvantage gap ranges from 0.28 to 0.47 standard deviations. Campus A, the charter school start-up grantee campus with the largest estimated math effect (the campus's estimated performance in standard deviation units) has an effect equal to 143% of the feeder district race/ethnicity gap, and 121% of the economic disadvantage gap. These effects on achievement gaps at the middle school level are much larger than at the elementary schools, due in part to the achievement gaps themselves being smaller at the middle school level for these feeder districts.

On the other end of the scale, the charter school start-up grantee campus with the lowest estimated STAAR Mathematics effect has a negative effect with magnitude equal to 138% of the feeder district race/ethnicity gap, and 92% of the economic disadvantage gap. The other four middle school grantee campuses have effects with magnitudes of less than 65% of the feeder district race/ethnicity and economic disadvantage test score gaps. Note that these percentages are larger than those for STAAR Reading, due both to the effects themselves being larger and to the STAAR Mathematics achievement gaps being smaller than those for STAAR Reading. The overall average effect across the six charter school start-up grantee middle school campuses in STAAR Mathematics was not statistically different from zero.

Figure 3.9 STAAR Mathematics Outcomes for Charter School Start-Up Grantee Middle School Campuses Compared to Feeder District Achievement Gaps, 2016–17



* Indicates statistically significant where $p < 0.05$.

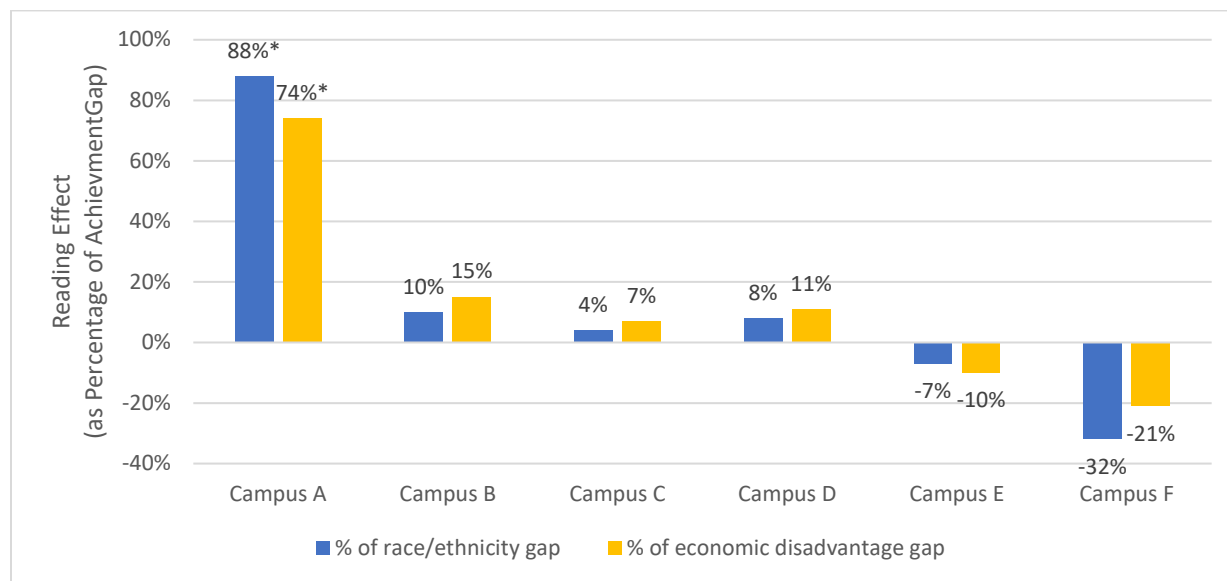
Source: Public Education Information Management System STAAR data, Texas Education Agency, 2016–17.

Note: Reported effects are statistically adjusted for student and school characteristics. Test scores were standardized by subject, grade, and year, based on statewide means and standard deviations. Sample size includes 501 students attending Charter School Start-up Grantee campuses and 501 matched comparison students. See Appendix F for full results and details.

Figure 3.10 shows the results of these comparisons of estimated effects on STAAR Reading scores for charter school start-up grantee middle schools with feeder district achievement gaps. For middle school STAAR Reading scores, the race/ethnicity gap ranges from 0.31 to 0.94 standard deviations, and the economic disadvantage gap ranges from 0.43 to 0.63 standard deviations. The middle school charter school grantee campus with the largest estimated reading effect (the campus’s reading performance in standard deviation units) has an effect equal to 88% of the feeder district race/ethnicity gap, and 74% of the economic disadvantage gap. Again, this effect is quite large relative to the achievement gaps; it is almost as large as the race/ethnicity gap and about three-fourths of the economically disadvantaged gap.

On the other end of the scale, the charter school start-up grantee campus with the lowest estimated reading effect has a negative effect with magnitude equal to 32% of the feeder district race/ethnicity gap, and 21% of the economic disadvantage gap. The other four middle school grantee campuses have effects with magnitudes of less than 20% of the feeder district race/ethnicity and economic disadvantage test score gaps. The overall average effect across the six charter school start-up grantee middle school campuses in STAAR Reading was not statistically different from zero.

Figure 3.10 STAAR Reading Outcomes for Charter School Start-Up Grantee Middle School Campuses Compared to Feeder District Achievement Gaps, 2016–17



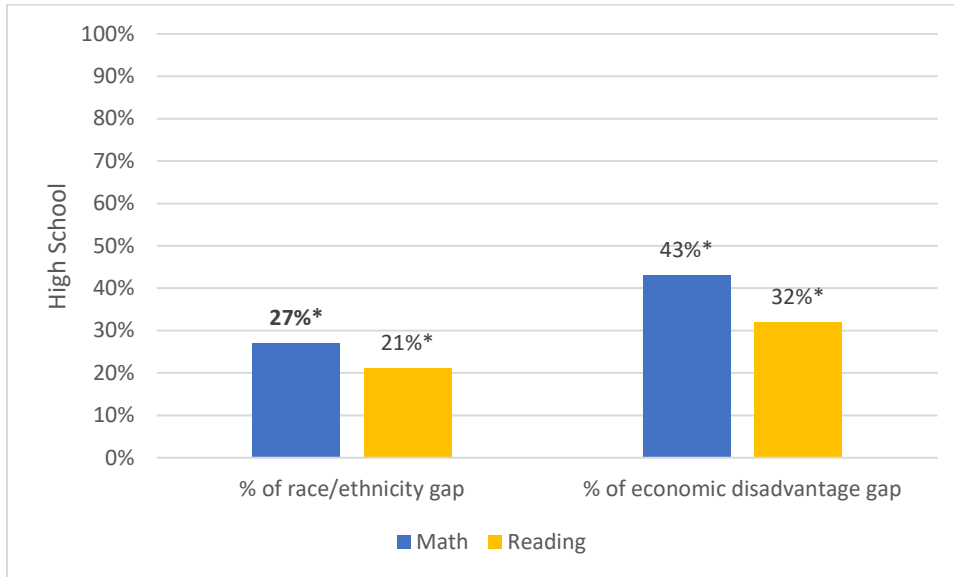
* Indicates statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Source: Public Education Information Management System STAAR data, Texas Education Agency, 2016–17.

Note: Reported effects are statistically adjusted for student and school characteristics. Test scores were standardized by subject, grade, and year, based on statewide means and standard deviations. Sample size includes 501 students attending Charter School Start-up Grantee campuses and 501 matched comparison students. See Appendix F for full results and details.

Figure 3.11 shows the results of comparisons of estimated effects on Algebra I and English I EOC exam scores with feeder district achievement gaps, for the one charter school start-up grantee campus with enough high school students to be included in the analysis. The high school grantee campus has an estimated math effect equal to 27% of the feeder district race/ethnicity gap, and 21% of the economic disadvantage gap, and an estimated reading effect equal to 43% of the feeder district race/ethnicity gap, and 32% of the economic disadvantage gap. Just as the results for the charter school start-up grantee high school campus were statistically significant for the overall effects, they were also significant for the effects on the achievement gap.

Figure 3.11 Algebra I and English I EOC Exam Outcomes for Charter School Start-Up Grantee High School Campuses Compared to Feeder District Achievement Gaps, 2016–17



* Indicates statistically significant where $p < 0.05$.

Source: Public Education Information Management System STAAR data, Texas Education Agency, 2016–17.

Note: Reported effects are statistically adjusted for student and school characteristics. Test scores were standardized by subject, grade, and year, based on statewide means and standard deviations. Sample size includes 23 students attending Charter School Start-up Grantee campuses and 23 matched comparison students. See Appendix F for full results and details.

Summary of Key Findings

The key findings from the statistical comparison of performance for students enrolled in a charter school start-up grantee campus and a matched comparison sample of students enrolled in traditional public schools are listed below.

Relationship between Student Enrollment in a Charter School Start-up Grantee Campus and Outcomes

- For STAAR Mathematics outcomes for students enrolled in charter school start-up grantee elementary campuses, after controlling for differences in student groups, only one of the four grantee campuses showed significantly higher STAAR Mathematics scores compared to a matched sample of students enrolled in traditional public schools. The magnitude of this effect was approximately equivalent to the difference between scoring at the 42nd percentile compared to the 51st percentile in STAAR Mathematics performance. The overall average effect across the four elementary grantee campuses was not statistically different from zero.
- For STAAR Reading outcomes for students enrolled in charter school start-up grantee elementary campuses, after controlling for differences in student groups, none of the grantee campuses had performances that were statistically different from zero.
- For STAAR Mathematics outcomes for students enrolled in charter school start-up grantee middle school campuses, after controlling for differences in student groups, students enrolled in two of the six start-up grantee campuses showed significantly higher STAAR Mathematics scores compared to a matched sample of students enrolled in traditional public schools. One had an

estimated effect approximately equivalent to the difference between scoring at the 51st percentile compared to the 69th percentile, and the other had an effect approximately equivalent to the difference between the 51st percentile and the 62nd percentile. Two other grantee campuses showed statistically lower STAAR Mathematics scores compared to the matched sample, the first equivalent to the difference between scoring at the 51st percentile compared to the 37th percentile, and the second to the difference between the 51st percentile and the 42nd percentile. The overall average effect across the six charter school start-up grantee middle school campuses in STAAR Mathematics was not statistically different from zero.

- For STAAR Reading outcomes for students enrolled in charter school start-up grantee middle school campuses, after controlling for differences in student groups, students enrolled in one of the six grantee campuses showed significantly higher STAAR Reading scores, compared to a matched sample of students attending traditional public schools, with an estimated effect approximately equivalent to the difference between scoring at the 45th percentile compared to the 62nd percentile. The overall average effect across the six charter school start-up grantee middle school campuses in STAAR Reading was not statistically different from zero.
- For Algebra I and English I EOC exams for students enrolled in the charter school start-up grantee high school campus, after controlling for differences in student groups, students showed significantly higher Algebra I and English I EOC exam scores, compared with matched students enrolled in traditional public schools. The effect was approximately equivalent to the difference between scoring at the 53rd percentile compared to the 61st percentile.
- Of the four charter school start-up grantee elementary campuses, three of the campuses had a lower percentage of students ready for Kindergarten and higher rates of eligibility for accelerated reading instruction compared to students in local districts.

Charter School Enrollment Effects across Student Groups

- When comparing the overall performance of charter school start-up grantee campuses to the performance of students in different student groups, in most cases the results for each student group are very similar to the overall estimated effects from the full statistical model, with a couple of exceptions.
- There are two cases where a student group result is substantially different from the overall effect. This amount of variation by student group is expected and indicates that the overall results are not in large part driven by particular student groups.

Comparing Estimated Effects to Achievement Gaps

- Comparing estimated effects on STAAR Mathematics scores for elementary grantee campuses to the achievement gaps at feeder districts is done in order to provide context for understanding the magnitude of the effects on students' performance by comparing them to the size of different achievement gaps in feeder districts. This could also provide context for understanding how meaningful such effects might be in terms of closing achievement gaps. The campus with the largest estimated math effect had an effect equal to 29% of the feeder district race/ethnicity

gap, and 49% of the economic disadvantage gap. The grantee campus with the lowest estimated math effect had a negative effect with magnitude equal to 25% of the feeder district race/ethnicity gap, and 47% of the economic disadvantage gap. This effect is therefore almost half the size of the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged and non-economically disadvantaged students in feeder districts, but less than a third as big as the gap based on student race/ethnicity. The other two elementary grantee campuses had estimated mathematics effects with magnitudes of less than 30% of the feeder district race/ethnicity and economic disadvantage test score gaps.

- Comparing estimated effects on STAAR Reading scores for charter school start-up grantee elementary campuses to the feeder district test score gaps, the elementary campus with the largest estimated reading effect has an effect equal to 8% of the feeder district race/ethnicity gap, and 14% of the economic disadvantage gap. The elementary campus with the lowest estimated reading effect has a negative effect with magnitude equal to 8% of the feeder district race/ethnicity gap and 11% of the economic disadvantage gap. As a result, the study concludes that, in terms of the achievement gaps, the STAAR Reading effects are much smaller than for STAAR Mathematics.
- Comparing estimated effects on STAAR Mathematics scores for charter school start-up grantee middle school campuses to the feeder district test score gaps, the start-up grantee campus with the largest estimated mathematics effect has an effect equal to 143% of the feeder district race/ethnicity gap and 121% of the economic disadvantage gap. The grantee campus with the lowest estimated STAAR Mathematics effect has a negative effect with magnitude equal to 138% of the feeder district race/ethnicity gap and 92% of the economic disadvantage gap. These effects are much larger in terms of the achievement gaps than for elementary schools, due in part to the achievement gaps themselves being smaller at the middle school level for these feeder districts.
- Comparing estimated effects on STAAR Reading scores for charter school start-up grantee middle school campuses to the feeder district test score gaps, the charter school start-up grantee campus with the largest estimated reading effect has an effect equal to 88% of the feeder district race/ethnicity gap, and 74% of the economic disadvantage gap, and the charter school start-up grantee campus with the lowest estimated reading effect has a negative effect with magnitude equal to 32% of the feeder district race/ethnicity gap, and 21% of the economic disadvantage gap. As stated above, this effect is quite large relative to the achievement gaps, almost as large as the race/ethnicity gap and about three-fourths of the economically disadvantaged gap.
- Comparing estimated effects on Algebra I and English I EOC exam scores for the high school with feeder district achievement gaps, the campus has an estimated mathematics effect equal to 27% of the feeder district race/ethnicity gap and 21% of the economic disadvantage gap, and an estimated reading effect equal to 43% of the feeder district race/ethnicity gap and 32% of the economic disadvantage gap.

Chapter 4 — Best or Promising Practices at High-Performing Charter School Campuses

This chapter investigates promising practices in place at high-performing charter school campuses. Practices related to the following key areas were explored: 1) Organizational practices; 2) Teacher recruitment and retention strategies; 3) Student recruitment and retention strategies; 4) Instructional practices (including methods used to close the achievement gap for educationally disadvantaged and low-performing students); and 5) Practices related to maintaining a positive school climate. Meaningful differences in responses between principals at high-performing and other charter school campuses are also highlighted in this chapter. The purpose of these comparisons is to identify practices in place at high-performing charter schools that may be absent, considered less important, or deemed less impactful at other charter school campuses.

Data and Methods

The evaluation relied primarily on survey data collected from charter school principals statewide in spring 2018 and data collected through interviews with school principals, focus groups with teachers, and classroom observations.¹⁸

To assess best or promising practices, charter school campuses were organized into two categories: 1) High-performing (based on an analysis of charter school campuses designated as high-quality by TEA); and 2) Other charter school campuses not designated as high-quality by TEA.^{19, 20, 21} Principals of high-performing and other charter school campuses were asked to rank the importance or effectiveness of various items related to organizational practices, teacher recruitment and retention, student recruitment and retention, school climate, and instructional functions through a survey administered to all charter school campuses in the state. The study then calculated the percentage of principals at high-performing and other charter school campuses who rated a particular response option as the first or second most important, impactful, or effective approach for a wide array of questions related to key aspects of schools noted above.

Through this approach, the study identifies and assesses differences between the two groups of charter campuses that were considered by principals to be most impactful, effective, or important. Results presented in this report chapter are largely based on 23 surveys completed by high-performing charter school campus principals and 172 surveys completed by principals working at other charter school campuses.

¹⁸ Teacher-student observations were scored using the CLASS Observation Protocol and scores for each of the following domains were compiled: 1) Emotional Support; 2) Classroom Organization; 3) Instructional Support; and 4) Student Engagement.

¹⁹ See Appendix A for additional details on how high-performing charter schools are defined by TEA and the determination of high-performing charter schools by the evaluation.

²⁰ Statistical models were used to assess the performance of a sample of 100 high-quality campuses based on standardized test scores (i.e., STAAR-Reading, STAAR-Mathematics for Grades 3–8, and EOC exam scores for Grades 9–12). Campuses ranked in the top half of the 100 high-quality charter school campuses were categorized as high-performing for the purposes of this evaluation.

²¹ Other campuses include those not identified as high-quality by TEA and were subsequently not included in the analysis related to high-performing charter school campuses.

To supplement these survey results, the study includes data from site visits to 10 charter school campuses determined to be high-performing based on statistical models measuring the academic performance of charter campuses designated as high-quality by TEA. Of the 100 campuses included in the analyses, campuses that fell in the top half of the overall average performance were classified as “high-performing” and became the subject of the analysis of high-performing campuses within this evaluation.²² Site visits included interviews with the campus principal, observations of three or four teachers per campus, and a focus group at each campus with those observed teachers.

Findings

Each of the areas explored in this chapter discusses the five responses most commonly ranked as one of the top two most important, impactful, or effective approaches by principals at high-performing and other charter school campuses. For example, in Table 4.1, the five most important organizational practices related to executing the campus mission are ranked for principals at high-performing and other charter schools. This ranking provides us with the opportunity to explore how principals at high-performing schools approach this key organizational function differently than principals at other charter schools. In addition, the study highlights approaches that were used more frequently at high-performing charter schools and highlights these differences in the text of each subject area section. Some of the differences may be items among the five most prominent, and others may be less frequently cited approaches which still reflected substantive differences between high-performing charter schools and other charter schools.

The purpose of this analysis is to differentiate practices in place at high-performing charter schools and other charters across the state to point to potentially promising practices across organizational practices, teacher and student recruitment and retention, school climate and culture, and instructional domains.

Organizational Practices

This study explored a number of key factors related to school organization and management, including the execution of the charter school campus mission, parental involvement, and the educational experience of charter school campus principals.

Executing Charter School Campus Mission

High-performing campus principals most often rated “Clarity in the educational philosophy instilled” as the most or second most important practice related to executing their campus’ mission (38%). Other important practices noted by principals at high-performing charters included “Regular monitoring of practices through classroom observations,” “Use of data to inform instruction,” “Focused attention of administrators and teachers around the mission,” and “Concentration on maximizing instructional time.”²³ (See Table 4.1.)

Table 4.1 Principals’ Perceptions of the Five Most Important Organizational Practices Related to Executing Campus Mission

²² For additional information regarding the determination of high-performing charter school campuses, please refer to Appendix A.

²³ Several of these items were also viewed as important to executing the charter schools’ mission by principals at other charter schools.

High Performing Charters		Other Charters	
Response Items	Percentage of principals who rated item as first or second most important	Response Items	Percentage of principals who rated item as first or second most important
1. Clarity in the educational philosophy instilled	38.4%	1. Use of data to inform instruction	38.4%
2. Regular monitoring of practices through classroom observations	34.8%	2. Regular monitoring of practices through classroom observations	36.6%
3. Use of data to inform instruction	26.1%	3. Hiring exemplary teachers to support other teachers	30.2%
4. Focused attention of administrators and teachers around the mission	26.1%	4. Fit of teachers with school mission and educational philosophies	23.8%
5. Concentration on maximizing instructional time	26.1%	5. Concentration on maximizing instructional time	19.8%

Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

Note: Results are based on 22 responses from principals at high-performing charter school campuses and 171 principals at other charter school campuses.

When examining differences in charter school principal survey responses at high-performing and other charter schools, the study examined contrasts in the percentage of school leaders who rated a survey response item differently in terms of importance.

For instance, “Clarity in the educational philosophy” (35% for high-performing charters vs. 12% for other charters), and the “Creation of a youth culture” (13% for high-performing charters vs. 5% for other charters) were considered by principals at high-performing charter school campuses to be more important to executing the campus’ mission than principals at other charter school campuses. Moreover, “Clarity in the educational philosophy” was the top-ranked item for principals at high-performing charter school campuses, but it was not in the top five in importance for principals at other charter school campuses. (See Table 4.1.) These differentiating approaches at high-performing charter schools may be of interest to new charter schools and schools trying to improve their culture.

During site visits to high-performing charter schools in spring 2018, principals were asked what things their school did that made their charter school campus successful. Likewise, teachers participating in focus groups were asked what they felt their campus did that separated them from other charter school campuses across the state. In answering this question, eight of the 10 principals spoke about how instructional rigor and richness made their campus successful. Here, principals cited extension of school lab times, “additional hours ... where [students] work on either a software-based program or a small

group intervention with teachers,” and a “focus on rigor” both as factors contributing to the success of their campus. For some principals, this focus results from “a strong culture of achievement” and “making data-driven decisions with goals in mind,” where you have to have that rich level of teaching every day.

Similar to principals, teachers from half of the focus groups conducted at “high-performing” charter school campuses focused on instruction when thinking about how their school was different from others in the state. Teachers discussed how student-centered instruction, alignment with the TEKS, utilization of tutorials, and instruction based on school-day data helped the campuses meet their missions. Teachers in four of the 10 focus groups also indicated that high levels of collaboration and “communication between teachers helps a lot. [Teachers] can talk about what the students are lacking,” and that collaboration between “parents, staff members, administrators ... helps students understand that we care about them ... and they also trust us.” Collaboration also built a culture of positivity and teamwork that enables teachers to “support each other.”

Parental Involvement

Getting parents involved in their child’s education and connected to their school is an important objective for every campus. As Table 4.2 shows, over half of high-performing charter school campus principal survey respondents rated “Parent-teacher conferences” as the first or second most effective method for involving parents in a student’s education. Other prominent approaches that ranked among the top two most effective by principals at high-performing charter schools included:

Communication-oriented strategies

- 1) “Regular email communications to all parents” (33%)
- 2) “Regular individualized teacher-parent communications” (26%)

Interactive strategies

- 1) “Regular school day events for parents to interact with their children” (21%)
- 2) “Parent volunteer opportunities” (22%)

Table 4.2 Principals’ Perceptions of the Top Five Most Effective Methods for Parents Involvement

High Performing Charters		Other Charters	
Response Item	Percentage of principals who rated item as first or second most effective	Response Item	Percentage of principals who rated item as first or second most effective
1. Parent-teacher conferences	52.2%	1. Regular individualized teacher-parent communications	34.9%
2. Regular email communications to all parents	33.0%	2. Regular email communications to all parents	33.7%
3. Regular individualized teacher-parent communications	26.1%	3. Parent-teacher conferences	30.8%
4. Regular school day events for parents to interact with their children	21.7%	4. System for parents to monitor attendance, grades, and assignments	27.2%
5. Parent volunteer opportunities	21.7%	5. Parent volunteer opportunities	15.4%

Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

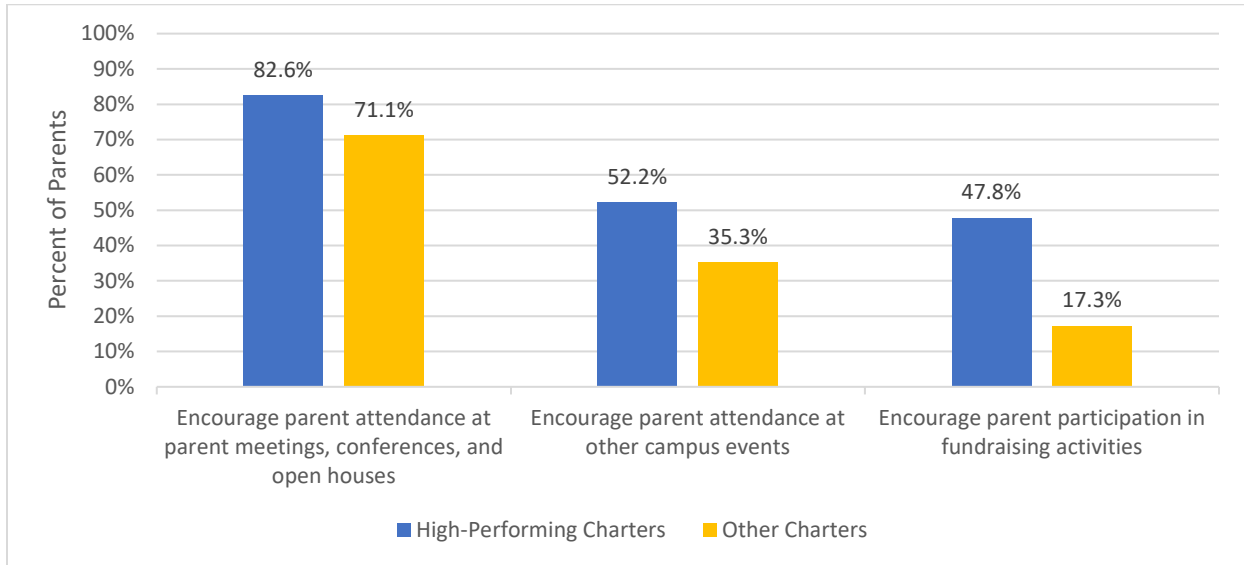
Note: Results based on 23 responses from principals at high-performing charter school campuses and 169 principals at other charter school campuses.

Parent-teacher conferences, which were ranked by both charter school campus types as one of the most effective means for getting parents involved in their child’s education, had a much higher proportion of high-performing charter school principals rating the item as the first or second most effective approach (52% for high-performing charters vs. 31% for other charters). In the same way, a larger proportion of principals at high-performing charter school campuses ranked regular school day events for parents to interact with their children (22% for high-performing charters vs. 8% for other charters) as the first or second most effective methods for getting parents involved in their child’s education.

Principals were also asked to indicate where parents are encouraged to agree to various campus expectations. As Figure 4.1 illustrates, a larger proportion of principals at high-performing charter school campuses indicated that they encouraged parent attendance at parent meetings, conferences, and open houses (83% vs. 71%) and other campus events (52% vs. 35%) than principals at other charter school campuses.

Additionally, a larger proportion of principals at high-performing charter school campuses (48%) indicated that parents are encouraged to participate in fundraising activities than principals at other charter school campuses (17%). Emphasis on fundraising may signal an attempt by the principal to create greater buy-in to the charter school and increased engagement in their students’ education.

Figure 4.1 Percent of High-Performing Charter School Principals that Encouraged Parent Participation in Events, Compared to Other Charter School Campuses



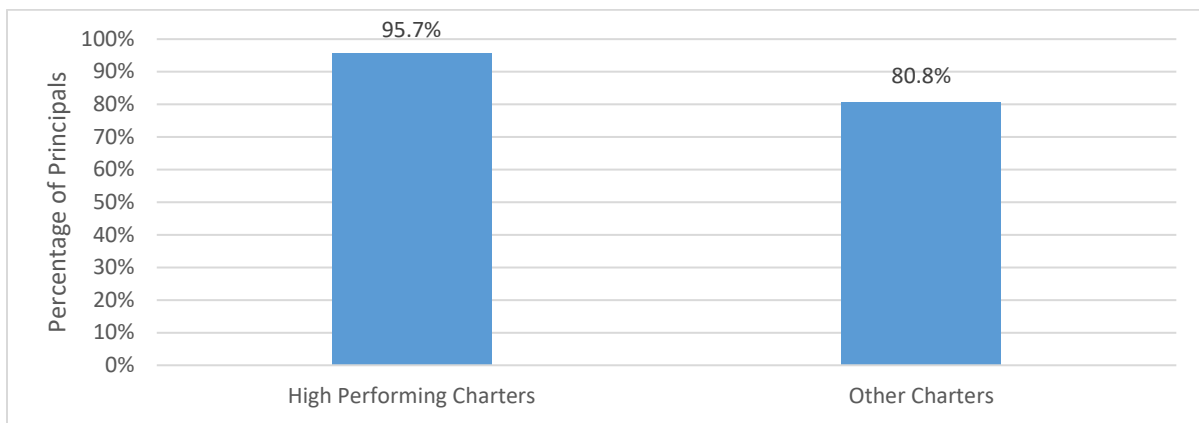
Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

Note: Results based on 23 responses from principals at high-performing charter school campuses and 173 principals at other charter school campuses.

Education Level of Charter School Principals

Some differences were observed in the educational experiences of charter school leaders at high-performing campuses and other charter school campuses in Texas. As Figure 4.2 illustrates, a higher percentage (96%) of principals leading high-performing charter school campuses held a master’s degree or higher, compared to 81% of principals leading other charter school campuses.

Figure 4.2 Percent of Principals with a Master’s Degree or Higher by Campus Designation



Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

Note: Results based on 23 responses from principals at high-performing charter school campuses and 172 principals at other charter school campuses.

Overall, principals at high-performing charter schools seemed to place a higher priority on the mission and educational philosophy of their campus and are more likely to have master’s degrees than the principals at other charter school campuses. Principals at high-performing charter schools also place a higher priority on the importance of parent-teacher and parent-student interaction compared to principals at other charter school campuses.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategies

The ability to recruit and retain high-quality teachers is central to the success of charter schools. The evaluation examined several different issues related to recruiting and retaining high-quality educators. Included in this section of analysis are the following areas: effective methods for attracting high-quality educators, criteria for hiring teachers, criteria for retaining teachers, and effective methods for retaining teachers.

Methods for Attracting High-Quality Teachers

When starting a new campus, expanding a campus, or replacing teachers due to attrition, attracting instructional talent to campuses is critical. Charter school principals were asked to rank the most effective recruitment efforts to attract high-quality teachers to their campuses. As Table 4.3 shows, principals in both groups of charter school campuses ranked “Current teachers recruiting colleagues” as the most important method for recruiting high-quality teachers. Fifty-five percent of principals at high-performing charters and 53% of principals at other charter campuses rated these teacher referrals as the first or second most effective teacher recruitment strategy. This finding was further solidified through spring 2018 interviews with high-performing principals who noted this strategy as effective for attracting high-quality teachers. The majority of principals interviewed (80%) mentioned that “word-of-mouth is really important,” and that their best teachers are “people we got through some kind of networking.”

Other methods rated as most effective by principals at high-performing charter school campuses included online advertisements (35%), word-of-mouth about the school (35%), job fairs (20%), and CMO or district offices (20%). Principals at high-performing charter school campuses were more inclined to rank online advertisements as one of the two most effective methods for attracting high-quality teachers (35%) compared to 13% of principals at other charter campuses. (Table 4.3)

Table 4.3 Principals’ Perceptions of Five Most Effective Teacher Recruitment Methods for High-Quality Teachers

High Performing Charters		Other Charters	
Response Item	Percentage of principals who rated item as first or second most effective	Response Item	Percentage of principals who rated item as first or second most effective
1. Current teachers recruiting colleagues	55.0%	1. Current teachers recruiting colleagues	53.3%
2. Online advertisements	35.0%	2. Word of mouth about the school	51.3%
3. Word of mouth about the school	35.0%	3. Job fairs	27.6%
4. Job fairs	20.0%	4. Recruitment services (e.g., Indeed, Zip Recruiter)	20.4%
5. CMO or school district resources	20.0%	5. Social Media	13.2%

Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

Note: Results based on 20 responses from principals at high-performing charter school campuses and 152 principals at other charter school campuses.

Criteria for Hiring Teachers

As Table 4.4 shows, some consistency was observed across survey responses of charter school principals when it came to examining the most important considerations when hiring teachers. Principals at high-performing charter school campuses most commonly rated “Teacher fit with educational philosophy of the school” (43%) and “Teacher fit with the mission of the campus” (43%) as one of the two most important hiring criteria for teachers at their campuses. Other important hiring factors for principals at high-performing charters include “Teacher certification” (33%), “Passion for teaching” (19%), and “Content expertise” (14%).

While it was an important factor for principals in both groups of charter school campuses, making sure a teacher candidate shared the educational philosophy of the school was rated among the top two most important considerations for hiring a teacher much more frequently by principals at high-performing charter school campuses (43%) than principals of other charter campuses (22%). Though it was not in the top five in terms of importance for hiring teachers, considering the education level of the prospective teacher candidate was more prominent among principals at high-performing charter schools (14%) when compared to principals at other charter schools (2%).

Table 4.4 Principals’ Perceptions of Five Most Important Considerations When Hiring New Teachers

High Performing Charters		Other Charters	
Response Item	Percentage of principals who rated item as first or second most important	Response Item	Percentage of principals who rated item as first or second most important
1. Teacher fit with educational philosophy of the school	42.9%	1. Teacher fit with the mission of the charter school campus	36.6%
2. Teacher fit with the mission of the charter school campus	42.9%	2. Passion for teaching	31.4%
3. Teacher certification	33.3%	3. Desire to work with at-risk population	29.4%
4. Passion for teaching	19.0%	4. Teacher certification	27.5%
5. Content expertise	14.3%	5. Teacher fit with educational philosophy of the school	21.6%

Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

Note: Results based on 21 responses from principals at high-performing charter school campuses and 153 principals at other charter school campuses.

Criteria for Retaining Teachers

As one means of assessing promising or best practices in teacher retention, principal survey respondents were asked to rank the factors that carry the most weight when considering whether to continue a teacher’s employment the following school year.

Instructional effectiveness was ranked as the first or second most important criteria by the majority of respondents regardless of whether the principal was at a high-performing charter school (62%), or another charter school (67%). Classroom management, student performance, student engagement, and cultural fit with the campus were all rated among the five most important factors regardless of the charter school category. (Table 4.5)

There were a few factors that principals at high-performing charter school campuses survey respondents rated as the first or second most heavily weighted considerations for retaining a teacher more commonly than principals at other Texas charter schools. For instance, “Student engagement” was rated as the first or second most heavily weighted factor when considering teacher retention by one-third of principals at high-performing charter schools compared to 24% of principals at other charter schools.

Similarly, classroom management was rated as the first or second most heavily weighted factor when considering teacher retention by 38% of principals at high-performing charter school campuses, compared to 31% of principals at other charter school campuses.

Table 4.5 Principals’ Perspectives on the Five Most Heavily Weighted Criteria When Deciding to Retain a Teacher

High Performing Charters		Other Charters	
Response Item	Percentage of principals who rated item as carrying first or second most weight	Response Item	Percentage of principals who rated item as carrying first or second most weight
1. Instructional effectiveness	61.9%	1. Instructional effectiveness	67.4%
2. Classroom management	38.1%	2. Student performance	38.4%
3. Student engagement	33.3%	3. Classroom management	30.8%
4. Student performance	33.3%	4. Cultural fit with campus	25.0%
5. Cultural fit with campus	14.3%	5. Student engagement	23.8%

Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

Note: Results based on 21 responses from principals at high-performing charter school campuses and 172 principals at other charter school campuses.

Effective Methods for Retaining Teachers

As Table 4.6 shows, when principals were asked about the most effective methods for retaining high-quality teachers, “Smaller class sizes” and “Regular feedback on instructional practices” were consistently the top two most effective methods cited by all charter school principals. However, some differences in prioritizations between principals at high-performing and other charter school campuses were observed.

Principals at high-performing charter school campuses (40%) were more inclined than their counterparts at other charter school campuses (30%) to rank “smaller class sizes” as one of their top two most effective methods for retaining high-quality teachers. Additionally, a larger proportion of principals at high-performing charter school campuses (20%) than principals at other charter schools (8%) ranked structured PLCs as one of their top two most effective methods for retaining high-quality teachers.

During on-site interviews with school leaders from high-performing charter schools, the majority of principals (80%) mentioned that PLCs benefitted their campus. Benefits from these PLCs included a more collaborative environment that enabled a sense of community, vertical alignment, and “meaningful conversations about what we need to be and where our students need to be.” The PLCs also highlighted areas in which additional professional development would be useful and provided a safe space to learn from one another in a less evaluative environment.

However, most principals at high-performing campuses that responded to the survey did not consider performance pay to be an important factor in retaining teachers. Principals at high-performing charter campuses were less likely (8%) than other charter school principals (20%) to rank incentive-based pay as one of their top two most effective methods for retaining high-quality teachers. (Table 4.6)

Table 4.6 Principals’ Perceptions of Five Most Effective Methods for Retaining High-Quality Teachers

High Performing Charters		Other Charters	
Response Item	Percentage of principals who rated item as first or second most effective	Response Item	Percentage of principals who rated item as first or second most effective
1. Smaller class sizes	40.0%	1. Regular feedback on instructional practices	40.5%
2. Regular feedback on instructional practices	35.0%	2. Smaller class sizes	30.4%
3. Effective curriculum and supplemental materials	25.0%	3. Dedicated planning time	23.8%
4. Structured professional learning communities	20.0%	4. Incentive pay based on student and/or school performance metrics	20.2%
5. Flexibility in lesson planning	15.0%	5. Flexibility in lesson planning	15.5%

Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

Note: Results based on 20 responses from principals at high-performing charter school campuses and 168 principals at other charter school campuses.

Student Recruitment and Retention Strategies

Attracting students and maintaining adequate student enrollment is essential to the success of charter campuses. Given this, the evaluation examined effective methods for recruiting students, as well as effective methods for retaining students.

Effective Methods for Recruiting Students

Regardless of the charter campus, surveyed principals agreed on the five most effective methods for recruiting students to enroll in their charter schools. The top three ranked by principals participating in the survey included: “Word-of-mouth from parents of students currently enrolled,” “Open houses,” and the “Charter school campus’ website.” (Table 4.7)

Principals at high-performing charter school campuses (50%) were more likely to rank “Open houses” where information about the schools is shared as one of the two most effective methods for attracting students to their schools than principals at other charter school campuses (23%).

Table 4.7 Principals’ Perceptions of Five Most Effective Methods for Student Recruitment

High Performing Charters		Other Charters	
Response Item	Percentage of principals who rated item as first or second most effective	Response Item	Percentage of principals who rated item as first or second most effective
1. Word-of-mouth from parents of currently enrolled students	85.0%	1. Word of mouth from parents of currently enrolled students	78.8%
2. Open houses where information about the campus is presented	50.0%	2. Charter school campus website	37.0%
3. Charter school campus website	30.0%	3. Open houses where information about the campus is presented	23.0%
4. Flyers about the campus in area neighborhoods	10.0%	4. Social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.)	22.4%
5. Social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.)	10.0%	5. Flyers about the campus in area neighborhoods	15.2%

Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

Note: Results are based on 20 responses from principals at high-performing charter school campuses and 165 principals at other charter school campuses.

Effective Methods for Retaining Students

Principals from both groups were also queried about the most effective methods for getting students to return to their campus for another academic year. While there were commonalities among charter school principals at high-performing and other charter school campuses, differences in priority rankings were also observed. Regardless of whether a principal was at a high-performing school or a school not categorized as high-performing, principals felt that “Building meaningful relationships between teachers and students” (35% vs 41%), and “Establishment of a safe and collaborative environment” at the campus were among the top two most effective methods for retaining students (25% vs. 26%). (Table 4.8)

On the other hand, high-performing charter schools placed greater emphasis on instructional strategies as a key contributor to improving student learning experiences and subsequent student persistence at the charter school campus. For instance, principals at-high-performing charter schools ranked “Student-centered instruction” (40% vs. 16%), and the “Use of multiple instructional approaches to meet academic needs” (25% vs. 13%), as more effective retention strategies than their peers at other charter school campuses. While acknowledging the importance of teacher-student relationships, moving toward a student-centered instructional model and employing varied instructional modalities may be promising practices that other charter schools could use to replicate successes experienced at high-performing charters.

While not necessarily ranked as one of the most effective means for retaining students, a higher proportion of principals at high-performing charter school campuses (15%) ranked extracurricular

activities as one of the two most effective approaches for retaining students at their schools compared to just 6% of principals at other charter school campuses.

Table 4.8 Principals’ Perceptions of Five Most Effective Methods for Retaining Students

High Performing Charters		Other Charters	
Response Item	Percentage of principals who rated item as first or second most effective	Response Item	Percentage of principals who rated item as first or second most effective
1. Student-centered instruction	40.0%	1. Building meaningful relationships between teachers and students	41.2%
2. Building meaningful relationships between teachers and students	35.0%	2. Establishment of a safe and collaborative environment at the campus	26.1%
3. Establishment of a safe and collaborative environment at the campus	25.0%	3. Demonstrated academic growth of students	24.8%
4. Use of multiple instructional approaches to meet academic needs	25.0%	4. Effective communications between teachers and parents	20.0%
5. Demonstrated academic growth of students	15.0%	5. Student-centered instruction	15.8%

Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

Note: Results based on 20 responses from principals at high-performing charter school campuses and 165 principals at other charter school campuses.

Instructional Practices

After establishing effective organizational practices and methods for recruiting and retaining high-quality educators, providing the support necessary for new and veteran teachers to be successful is essential for charter school campuses to deliver the highest quality of instruction possible to students. This study examined the following aspects of instructional practices at high-performing charter schools: frequently observed instructional practices, impactful instructional practices observed, impactful teacher supports for improving instructional practices, approaches for closing the achievement gaps for educationally disadvantaged students, and methods for closing the achievement gaps for low-performing students.

Most Frequently Observed Instructional Practices

Regardless of whether a campus was designated as high-performing, the “Establishment of positive relationships between the teacher and student” was reported as the most frequently observed instructional practice by principal survey respondents. However, as Table 4.9 shows, some variation existed in the most frequently observed instructional practices at high-performing and other charter school campuses. For example, maximizing learning time (30% vs. 21%), the observance of meaningful

peer interactions (17% vs. 4%), and effective scaffolding (13% vs. 6%) were observed more frequently by principals at high-performing charter schools than they were by principals at other Texas charter schools. Differentiating practices highlighted here at high-performing charter schools, such as increasing time on task, creating more opportunities for students to intellectually engage with one another, and effective scaffolding strategies, are best practices that can be used to improve instruction across Texas charter schools.

Table 4.9 Principals’ Perceptions of Five Most Frequently Observed Instructional Practices

High Performing Charters		Other Charters	
Response Item	Percentage of principals who rated item as first or second most frequent	Response Item	Percentage of principals who rated item as first or second most frequent
1. Establishing positive relationships between the teacher and student	30.4%	1. Establishing positive relationships between the teacher and student	44.2%
2. Maximizing learning time	30.4%	2. Establishment of clear learning targets for each lesson plan	29.1%
3. Use of formative data in student assessments to guide instruction	21.7%	3. Use of formative data in student assessments to guide instruction	26.7%
4. Use of hands-on activities in class with a variety of modalities	21.7%	4. Maximizing learning time	20.9%
5. Allowing teachers flexibility in curriculum and lesson planning	21.7%	5. Allowing teachers flexibility in curriculum and lesson planning	19.2%

Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

Note: Results based on 23 responses from principals at high-performing charter school campuses and 172 principals at other charter school campuses.

Most Impactful Instructional Practices Observed

While the practice is relatively important to all principals, school leaders at high-performing charter school campuses (46%) were more likely to rate the “Use of formative data in student assessments to guide instruction” as one of the two most impactful instructional practices than principals at other charter school campuses (30%). Similarly, “Maximizing learning time” was rated as one of the two most impactful instructional practices by 32% of principals at high-performing charter school campuses compared to 21% of principals at other charter school campuses. (Table 4.10)

The quality of teacher-student academic interactions in the classroom is perceived as a more impactful instructional strategy by principals at high-performing charter school campuses than their peers at other charter campuses in Texas. For instance, “Cumulative content-driven exchanges between teachers and students” were rated as one of the two most impactful instructional strategies by 18% of principals at

high-performing charter schools compared to 8% of principals at charter campuses not rated as high-quality by TEA.

Table 4.10 Principals’ Perceptions of Five Most Impactful Instructional Practices Observed

High Performing Charters		Other Charters	
Response Item	Percentage of principals who rated item as first or second most impactful	Response Item	Percentage of principals who rated item as first or second most impactful
1. Use of formative data in student assessments to guide instruction	45.5%	1. Establishing positive relationships between the teacher and student	45.0%
2. Maximizing learning time	31.8%	2. Use of formative data in student assessments to guide instruction	29.8%
3. Establishing positive relationships between the teacher and student	27.3%	3. Establishment of clear learning targets for each lesson plan	26.1%
4. Use of hands-on activities in class with a variety of strategies	27.3%	4. Maximizing learning time	21.1%
5. Cumulative content-driven exchanges between teacher and students	18.2%	5. Use of hands-on activities in class with a variety of strategies	16.4%

Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

Note: Results based on 22 responses from principals at high-performing charter school campuses and 171 principals at other charter school campuses.

Most Impactful Teacher Supports for Improving Instructional Practices

As Table 4.11 shows, when asked to rate the most impactful supports for improving teacher instructional practices, there was general agreement among principal survey respondents about which practices were among the five most impactful. However, some meaningful differences were observed in the order in which principals ranked the impact of support practices. For instance, principals at high-performing charters tended to be more focused on reviewing student data with teachers, while school leaders at other charter schools tended to be more focused on providing feedback to teachers after walk-throughs or informal observations. This difference may reflect a more data-oriented approach to improving teacher instruction at the high-performing charter schools.

During six of the 10 teacher focus groups conducted at high-performing charter schools, teachers shared that receiving feedback has been very “critical” and “important” to developing their craft. One teacher focus group shared that “there’s always positive feedback on the things that we’re doing well and ... we always have an action step that we can take to work for that improvement.” Feedback works best when it is not overwhelming, and in environments where teachers “feel comfortable not to be afraid to ask for

help.” Feedback can come as a result of classroom observations or from mentors or coaches and is provided both face-to-face and via email.²⁴

Additionally, survey data from principals showed that the “Use of student achievement data to gauge the performance of teachers” was ranked as the third most impactful teacher support strategy by principals at high-performing schools, while this approach was not ranked in the top five in terms of impact by principals at other charter campuses.

Principals at high-performing charter school campuses were more likely to feel that “Reviewing student performance data with teachers” (41%) was more important than principals at other charter school campuses (28%). Likewise, principals at high-performing charter campuses were more likely to feel that the “Use of student achievement data to gauge the performance of teachers” was a more impactful instructional practice than principals at other Texas charter school campuses (32% for high-performing vs. 14% for other charter school campuses). While it was not rated as one of the most impactful instructional strategies by any of the categories of charter school campuses, principals at high-performing charter schools (14%) were more inclined to feel that allowing teachers the “Flexibility in the use of curriculum and lesson planning” was one of the two most impactful strategies than principals at other charter school campuses (7%). These differences in practice at high-performing and other charter schools may signal areas where charter schools across the state can emulate the practices of the highest performing charters.

²⁴ Respondents from eight of 10 teacher focus groups at high-performing charter school campuses referred to receiving “some type of feedback to implement” into their lesson planning. This support may come directly from administration or from a coach provided by the school. Feedback has been helpful, as it does not involve school leadership “walking into [the] classroom and saying ... what you are doing is wrong,” but instead by providing support and highlighting ways in which teachers can improve.

Table 4.11 Principals’ Perceptions of Five Most Impactful Teacher Supports for Improving Instructional Practices

High Performing Charters		Other Charters	
Response Item	Percentage of principals who rated item as first or second most impactful	Response Item	Percentage of principals who rated item as first or second most impactful
1. Review student performance data with teachers	40.9%	1. Providing feedback based on walk-throughs or informal observations	40.4%
2. Coaching support	36.4%	2. Coaching support	38.0%
3. Use of student achievement data to gauge the performance of teachers	31.8%	3. Review student performance data with teachers	27.5%
4. Providing feedback based on walk-throughs or informal observations	27.3%	4. Providing dedicated planning time for teachers to collaborate	22.2%
5. Use of professional learning communities	18.2%	5. Use of professional learning communities	21.6%

Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

Note: Results based on 22 responses from principals at high-performing charter school campuses and 171 principals at other charter school campuses.

Evidence of Instructional Quality at High-Performing Charter School Campuses

During spring 2018 site visits to high-performing charter schools, a considerable amount of time was spent discussing the quality of instruction with principals at their campuses.

When asked to describe the quality of instruction at their school, half of the principals at the high-performing campuses who were interviewed described instruction as better or improved since they’ve been principal at their school. In part, this was due to “constantly looking at data to see what areas are weak” and determining “great best practices.” Some principal respondents started with first-year teachers, and as the school has been “growing our ... teachers” instruction was standardized and became more consistent. The other half of principals interviewed described the quality of instruction as high or good, as schools focus on strategies to close “gaps by placing students in the right program” and building their “instructional system based on the student needs.” Instruction is also described as high-quality due to “building systems and structures for PD [professional development] to align to teacher needs” with a mission to “deliver better [instruction] for our students.”

During the course of the interviews, half the school leaders interviewed referred to observing teachers with an eye towards student productivity and engagement, rather than “looking at what the teacher is doing.” These observations allow the school to provide support and advice to teachers. They also discussed observing trends in student data by tracking data as key to providing quality instruction, as it allows the school to know “where each student is, and then referring him or her to what interventions ... they need.”

The evaluation also observed and scored a sample of teachers at 10 high-performing charter school campuses using the CLASS K-3 (for Grades K–3), CLASS Upper Elementary (for Grades 4–5), and CLASS Secondary (for Grades 6–12) protocols. In spring 2018, a total of 39 different teachers at high-performing charter school campuses were observed.²⁵ The CLASS observation tool was used to assess instructional quality across charter school campuses. Mean scores for the following four CLASS domains are provided in Figure 4.3:

- **Emotional Support** (Includes dimensions such as positive and negative climate, teacher sensitivity, and regard for student perspectives)
- **Classroom Organization** (Includes dimensions such as behavioral management, productivity, and instructional learning formats)
- **Instructional Support** (Includes dimensions such as concept development, content understanding, analysis and inquiry, quality of feedback, instructional dialogue, language modeling, analysis, and problem solving)
- **Student Engagement** (The degree to which students are focused and are participating in the learning activity presented or facilitated by the teacher)²⁶

As Figure 4.3 shows, for high-performing charter school campuses, mean CLASS observation scores for the “Emotional Support” (4.50), “Classroom Organization” (5.87), and “Student Engagement” (5.15) domains fell on the upper end of the mid-range of teacher-student interaction scores (between 4.50 and 5.99 on the 7-point scale).

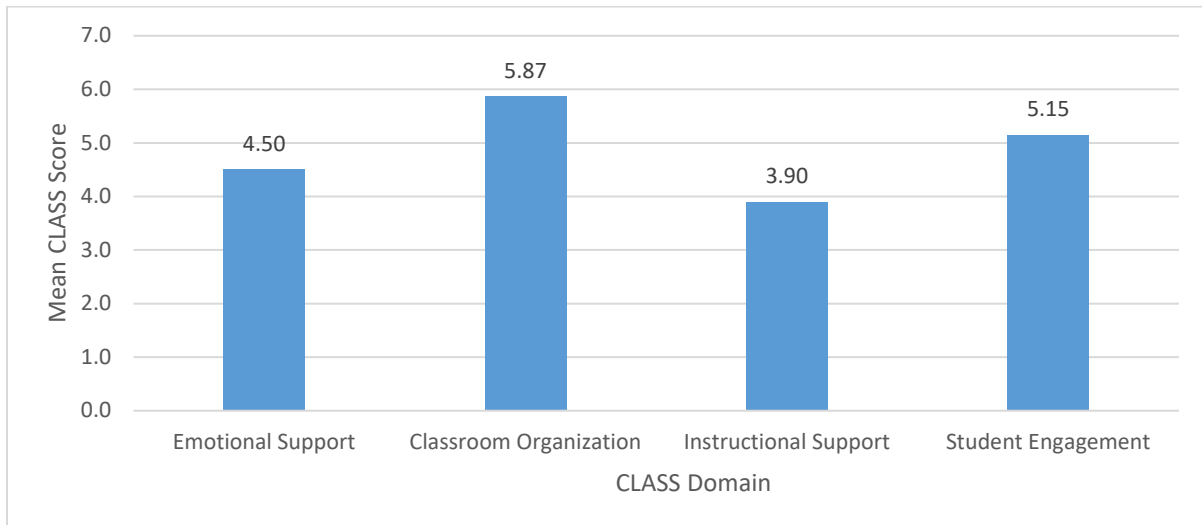
The mean CLASS score for the “Instructional Support” domain also fell in the mid-range of CLASS teacher-student interaction scores, but it is important to note that, historically, teachers tend to score substantially lower in this domain. To score in the mid to upper range for the instructional support domain, teachers are required to use a variety of techniques to improve the quality of dialogue in the classroom to promote students’ higher-order thinking skills. The mean score of 3.9 for these high-performing charter schools reflects a reasonable amount of this type of rigorous, high-quality instruction.

The CLASS observation scores presented in Figure 4.3 represent skillful classroom organization and management, higher than average instructional support skills, and corresponding high levels of student engagement. The Emotional Support domain, on which it is often easier to score higher, appears to be an area where the high-performing charters could improve substantially.

²⁵ Teachers were observed for three to four cycles lasting between 15 and 20 minutes to arrive at a composite score for each dimension of the CLASS observation tool.

²⁶ Dimensions included in the four CLASS domains vary depending upon the CLASS instrument used (i.e., K–3, Upper Elementary, Secondary).

Figure 4.3 CLASS Observation Scores for Teachers at High-Performing Charter Schools



Source: CLASS Observation Scores, fall 2017 and spring 2018, Texas Education Agency, 2018.

Note: Results based on 39 observations of teachers at high-performing charter schools in spring 2018.

Closing the Achievement Gap for Educationally Disadvantaged Students

Educationally disadvantaged students are defined in this evaluation as students identified as being at risk of dropping out of school. As Table 4.12 shows, strong teacher-student relationships and connections and various forms of in-class academic interventions (i.e., small group instruction, differentiated instruction) and out-of-class academic interventions (i.e., targeted pull-out instruction by interventionist) are ranked as some of the most impactful approaches to closing achievement gaps for educationally disadvantaged students. However, only principals at high-performing charter school campuses ranked special education services as one of the five most impactful.

Almost 23% of principals at high-performing charter school campuses ranked special education services as one of the top two most impactful approaches for closing the achievement gap for educationally disadvantaged students. This compared to just 3% of other charter school principals. While differences were more modest, 9% of principals at high-performing charter school campuses ranked home visits by teachers and counselors as one of the top two most impactful approaches for closing the achievement gap for educationally disadvantaged students, compared to 4% of principals at other charter schools. Approaches utilized by high-performing charter schools to close achievement gaps for educationally disadvantaged students, particularly special education services, may represent a promising practice and should be carefully considered by other charter schools.

Table 4.12 Principals’ Perceptions of Five Most Impactful Approaches in Closing the Achievement Gaps for Educationally-Disadvantaged Students

High Performing Charters		Other Charters	
Response Item	Percentage of principals who rated item as first or second most impactful	Response Item	Percentage of principals who rated item as first or second most impactful
1. Strong teacher-student relationships and connections	36.4%	1. Strong teacher-student relationships and connections	46.2%
2. Differentiated in-class instruction	31.8%	2. Small-group instruction in class	30.2%
3. Small-group instruction in class	22.7%	3. Differentiated in-class instruction	30.2%
4. Targeted pull-out instruction by interventionist	22.7%	4. Collaboration between teachers	19.5%
5. Special education services	22.7%	5. Targeted pull-out instruction by interventionist	17.2%

Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

Note: Results based on 22 responses from principals at high-performing charter school campuses and 169 principals at other charter school campuses.

Closing the Achievement Gap for Low-Performing Students

As noted in Chapter 2, students identified as lowest-performing were defined as those at the bottom 10% in reading and mathematics. This section of the report explores how high-performing charter schools worked with low-performing students and identified best or promising practices related to closing the achievement gaps for these students.

As Table 4.13 shows, principals across high-performing and other charter school campuses were in general agreement of the most impactful approaches to closing the achievement gap for low-performing students — focusing on various in-class and out-of-class instructional and intervention strategies. Some subtle differences between high-performing charter schools and other charter schools were observed.

For instance, principals at high-performing charter school campuses tended to emphasize communications with parents regarding student performance more prominently than other charter school principals.

A higher percentage of principals at high-performing charter school campuses (36%) rated the use of individualized instruction in class as one of the two most impactful strategies for closing the achievement gap for low-performing students compared to 24% of principals at other charter school campuses. Principals at high-performing charter school campuses also ranked differentiated instruction in class (36% vs 25% for other charter schools), communications with parents regarding student performance (23% vs. 11% other charter schools) as more impactful than other charter school principals.

Table 4.13 Principals' Perceptions of Five Most Impactful Approaches in Closing the Achievement Gaps for Low-Performing Students

High Performing Charters		Other Charters	
Response Item	Percentage of principals who rated item as first or second most impactful	Response Item	Percentage of principals who rated item as first or second most impactful
1. Differentiated in-class instruction	36.4%	1. Small-group instruction in class	34.7%
2. Individualized instruction in class	36.4%	2. Differentiated in-class instruction	25.3%
3. Targeted pull-out instruction by interventionist	27.3%	3. Individualized instruction in class	23.5%
4. Communications with parents regarding student performance	22.7%	4. Targeted pull-out instruction by interventionist	22.9%
5. Small-group instruction in class	18.2%	5. Collaboration between teachers	16.5%

Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

Note: Results based on 22 responses from principals at high-performing charter school campuses and 170 principals at other charter school campuses.

Practices Related to Maintaining a Positive School Climate

Organizational practices, hiring effective educators, and instructional practices impact the culture and climate of a charter school. This section examines principal perceptions of campus climate and staff morale at their schools, critical aspects of maintaining a positive school climate, and effective methods for maintaining positive teacher-student and student-to-student interactions (including disciplinary procedures).

Principal Perceptions of Campus Climate and Staff Morale at their Schools

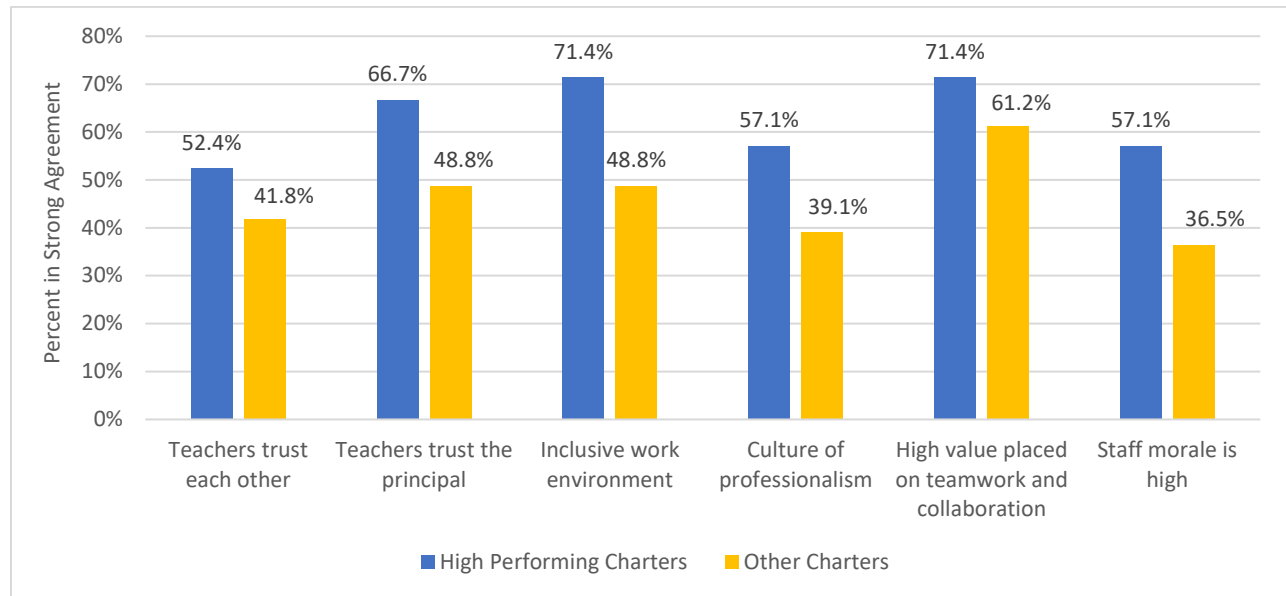
Principals survey respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement²⁷ about a series of statements related to campus climate and working conditions. As Figure 4.4 illustrates, principals at high-performing schools (57%) were more inclined to “strongly agree” than principals at other charter school campuses (37%) that staff morale is high at their campus. Trust is another important component of school climate. A larger proportion of principals at high-performing charter schools were in strong agreement that teachers trust each other (52% vs. 42%) and teachers trust their principal (67% vs. 49%) than principals at other charter school campuses.

A collaborative and inclusive work environment also contributes to a positive school climate. A higher percentage of principals at high-performing charter schools were in strong agreement that their campus has an inclusive work environment (71% vs. 49%) and that a high value is placed on teamwork and collaboration (71% vs. 61%) than did principals at other charter school campuses. Principals at high-

²⁷ A 4-point scale was used where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree.

performing charter school campuses were also more likely to strongly agree (57%) that there is a culture of professionalism at their school than their counterparts at other charter schools (39%). (Figure 4.4)

Figure 4.4 Percentage of Principals in Strong Agreement with Statements Related to Campus Culture and Staff Morale



Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

Note: Results based on 21 responses from principals at high-performing charter school campuses and 170 principals at other charter school campuses.

During teacher focus groups conducted at high-performing charter schools during spring 2018 site visits, participants mentioned collaboration with other teachers, whether formally via meetings or informally. They discussed “brainstorming ways that we can help each other,” including providing instructional support. Teachers discussed collaboration with other grade levels to learn best practices and identify areas that students are struggling with, including “curricular needs or behavioral management.”

Maintaining a Positive School Climate

For high-performing charter school campus principal survey respondents, the top five most important aspects for maintaining a positive school climate included campus staff sharing a common set of beliefs about schooling and learning (which aligns with a prior finding related to the importance of teacher fit with the educational philosophy of the charter school), genuine care for students, a culture of respect between students and teachers, academic growth of students, and the development of a family atmosphere at the school. (Table 4.14)

While many commonalities existed between high-performing and other charter campuses, some important distinctions emerged in principal responses to the statewide survey. Principals at high-performing charter school campuses (40%) were more likely to rank campus staff sharing a common set of beliefs about schooling and learning as one of the two most important aspects to maintaining a positive school than did principals at other charter school campuses (25%). Additionally, a greater proportion of principals at high-performing charter schools (20%) ranked the socio-emotional growth of

students as one of the two most important aspects to maintaining a positive school climate than their peers at other charter school campuses (4%). This finding points to the fact that maintaining a positive school climate goes far beyond a series of tasks, but must also focus on a best or promising practice of ensuring that their staff share a common set of beliefs about how to educate students and the importance of social-emotional learning and growth among students.

Table 4.14 Principals’ Perceptions of the Five Most Important Aspects to Maintaining a Positive School Climate

High Performing Charters		Other Charters	
Response Item	Percentage of principals who rated item as first or second most important	Response Item	Percentage of principals who rated item as first or second most important
1. Campus staff share a common set of beliefs about schooling/learning	40.0%	1. Genuine care for students	33.5%
2. Genuine care for students	30.5%	2. Culture of respect between students and teachers	26.5%
3. Culture of respect between students and teachers	30.0%	3. Development of a family atmosphere	25.9%
4. Academic growth of students	25.0%	4. Campus staff share a common set of beliefs about schooling/learning	25.3%
5. Development of a family atmosphere	25.0%	5. Academic growth of students	21.8%

Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

Note: Results based on 20 responses from principals at high-performing charter school campuses and 170 principals at other charter school campuses.

Methods for Maintaining Positive Student/Teacher and Student-to-Student Interactions

Developing a culture where peer interactions between students and student-teacher interactions are positive contributed to an environment where teaching and learning can be most effective. To assess promising or best approaches for addressing student discipline issues, principals were asked to rank a series of methods that impact positive student-to-teacher and student-to-student interactions at their campuses. There was a great deal of consistency in answers across principals at high-performing and other charter school campuses: “Developing strong teacher-student relationships”, “Effective student engagement in the classroom”, and “Clear behavioral expectations”,²⁸ proactive steps to curb

²⁸ Eight of 10 teacher focus groups conducted at high-performing charter schools had participants discuss the importance of setting behavioral expectations. Teachers shared that it is “important at the beginning of the year to have clear expectations and ... holding [students] accountable to your expectations.” When students know what is and is not allowed from the beginning, classroom behavior issues can be mitigated.

misbehavior in the classroom, and effective communications with parents ranked in the top five impactful approaches by all principals surveyed. (Table 4.15)

Still, some differences between the perceptions of principals at high-performing and other charter school campuses did emerge. A larger-proportion of principals at high-performing charter school campuses (26%) ranked the use of proactive steps to curb misbehavior in the classroom as one of the two most impactful approaches in maintaining positive student-to-student and student-to-teacher interactions than their counterparts at other charter school campuses (13%). A higher percentage of principals at high-performing charter schools also rated strong anti-bullying policies (13% vs. 4%) as more impactful than school leaders at other charter school campuses. Both observational and survey data show that high-performing charter schools emphasize proactive classroom management systems that are consistent across classrooms; this may be another important area for other charters to note as a promising practice.

Table 4.15 Principals’ Perceptions of Five Most Impactful Approaches in Maintaining Positive Student-to-Teacher and Student-to-Student Interactions

High Performing Charters		Other Charters	
Response Item	Percentage of principals who rated item as first or second most impactful	Response Item	Percentage of principals who rated item as first or second most impactful
1. Development of strong teacher-student relationships	47.8%	1. Development of strong teacher-student relationships	48.0%
2. Effective student engagement in the classroom	34.8%	2. Clear behavioral expectations	45.0%
3. Clear behavioral expectations	30.4%	3. Effective student engagement in the classroom	33.9%
4. Proactive steps to curb misbehavior in the classroom	26.1%	4. Effective communications with parents	23.4%
5. Effective communications with parents	13.2%	5. Proactive steps to curb misbehavior in the classroom	12.7%

Source: Spring 2018 Charter School Campus Principal Survey.

Note: Results based on 23 responses from principals at high-performing charter school campuses and 171 principals at other charter school campuses.

During spring 2018 site visits to high-performing charter schools, the concept of restorative justice emerged in over half of the high-performing principal interviews as a means to improve student behavior. One principal shared that everything they do “falls under that restorative bucket ... even our after-school detention ... they go through mindfulness practice and they go through individualized reflection forums.”

The intention is to try and keep students in the classroom, working on skills like patience and conflict resolution, and avoiding “treating [students] like criminals.”

Another principal shared that they use restorative techniques designed to redirect behavior by talking with students about “natural consequences” or having a “reset conversation.” Teachers in half of the focus groups conducted at high-performing charter schools also discussed restorative practices as a means to improve student behavior.

Summary of Key Findings

The study identifies differentiating characteristics of high-performing charter schools to suggest best or promising practices that could be replicated by other charter schools across the state. Practices which emerged through the analysis of data collected from principals at high-performing charter school campuses, and confirmed by teachers during focus group sessions and through objective observations of classroom instruction, are organized below by the various organizational and instructional areas explored in this evaluation.

Organizational Practices

Executing the School’s Mission

While there were a number of practices, such as using data to inform instruction, monitoring through classroom observations, and maximizing instructional time, that were commonly noted as important to executing the school’s mission at all charter schools, differentiating practices emerged at high-performing charter schools. Some of these best or promising practices include:

- Ensuring that there is clarity in the educational philosophy of the school that is instilled in campus staff and teachers; and
- The creation of a youth culture at the campus, which can impact student satisfaction with their educational experience, academic performance, and student retention at the school.

Similar to principals, teachers from half the focus groups concentrated on instruction when thinking about how their school was different from others in the state. Teachers discussed how student-centered instruction, alignment with the TEKS, utilizing tutorials, and basing instruction on school-day data helped their charter school excel.

Getting Parents Engaged in their Child’s Education

Best or promising practices to increase parent engagement in their child’s education at high-performing charter school campuses include:

- Parent-teacher conferences; and
- Regular school-day events for parents to interact with their children.

Encouraging parents to attend parent meetings, conferences, open houses, and other campus events, and to participate in school fundraising events was also much more common at high-performing charter schools and can be considered a promising practice to engage parents in their child’s education and connect them to the charter school.

Teacher Recruitment and Hiring

Across all charter schools, using current teachers to recruit colleagues, word-of-mouth advertising about the school, and job fairs were commonly noted as the most effective teacher recruitment strategies which should be considered best practices.

Best or promising practices for recruiting and hiring teachers that were more prominent at high-performing charter schools include:

- The use of online advertising to recruit high-quality teachers;
- Considering a teachers' fit with the educational philosophy of the school; and
- Considering a teachers' fit with the mission of the charter school campus.

Teacher Retention

Across all charter schools, instructional effectiveness, classroom management, student engagement, student performance, and cultural fit with the campuses were deemed by principals to be most important when deciding whether or not to retain a teacher. These should be considered best practices.

- Principals at high-performing charter schools tended to rate student engagement as a more important teacher retention factor than school leaders at other charter school campuses.

When it came to assessing the most effective methods for retaining high-quality teachers, principals across all charter school campuses consistently ranked smaller class sizes and providing regular feedback to teachers regarding instructional practices as the top two most effective approaches.

Differentiating practices at high-performing charter schools for retaining teachers include:

- Smaller class sizes; and
- The establishment of professional learning communities.

It is interesting to note that performance pay was not considered to be a very important factor in retaining teachers at high-performing charter schools, compared to other charter school principals who ranked incentive-based pay as one of their top five most effective methods for retaining high-quality teachers.

Student Recruitment and Retention

One of the biggest challenges for any new charter is the recruitment and retention of students. For all charter school principals, word-of-mouth advertising from parents of currently enrolled students was ranked as the most effective recruitment tool.

- The effective use of open houses to bring the community into the school and introduce parents to school leadership, teachers, and the educational philosophy of the school is perceived to be a more effective practice at high-performing charter schools than at other charter schools across the state.

Regardless of whether a principal was at a high-performing school or another charter school campus, principals felt that building meaningful relationships between teachers and students and establishing a safe and collaborative environment at the campus were among the top two most effective methods for retaining students. However, differentiating characteristics related to student retention were found at high-performing charter schools when compared to other charter schools.

- High-performing charter schools placed greater emphasis on instructional strategies as a key contributor to improving student learning experiences and subsequent student persistence at the charter school campus.
- When asked about effective student retention strategies, principals at high-performing charter schools ranked student-centered instruction and the use of multiple instructional approaches to meet academic needs higher than their peers at other charter school campuses. These approaches can be considered as best or promising practices that can be emulated by other schools.

Instructional Practices

Effective Instructional Practices

While organizational practices are critical to ensuring that charters are running like “well-oiled machines”, the quality of instruction ultimately drives performance and student outcomes. The establishment of positive relationships between the teacher and student was reported to be the most frequently observed instructional strategy by principals across all charter schools. Differentiating characteristics observed by principals at high-performing charter schools include:

- Maximizing learning time,
- Creating opportunities for meaningful peer interactions; and
- Effective scaffolding.

Methods for Improving Instructional Effectiveness

Instructional supports provided to teachers is one of the most critical factors in a school’s continuous improvement process. It is also an important contributor to teacher retention. While principals at high-performing and other charter schools tended to rank some of the same teacher support approaches among the five most important (e.g., reviewing student performance data with teachers, coaching support feedback after observations, PLCs), some promising practices at high-performing charter schools emerged from the analyses.

- Principals at high-performing charter school campuses placed more emphasis on reviewing student performance data with teachers and using student achievement data to gauge the performance of teachers than principals at other Texas charter school campuses.

Quality of Instruction at High-Performing Charter School Campuses

For high-performing charter school campuses, average classroom observation scores for the “Emotional Support”, “Classroom Organization”, and “Student Engagement” domains were in the upper end of the mid-range of teacher-student interaction scores, which reflect effective teacher student-interactions across multiple domains of instruction.

The average observation score for the “Instructional Support” domain also fell in the mid-range of CLASS teacher-student interaction scores, but it is important to note that, historically, teachers tend to score substantially lower in this domain. The average “Instructional Support” domain score of 3.9 for these high-performing charter campuses reflects a reasonable degree of rigorous, high-quality instruction.

Closing the Achievement Gap for Educationally Disadvantaged and Persistently Low-Performing Students

Across all charter school principals, establishing strong teacher-student relationships and connections and various forms of in-class (i.e., small group instruction, differentiated instruction, individualized instruction) and out-of-class academic interventions (i.e., targeted pull-out instruction by interventionist) are ranked as some of the most impactful approaches to closing achievement gaps for educationally disadvantaged and low-performing students. The following practices for closing achievement gaps have emerged as being more prominent at high-performing charter schools than other charters across the state

- The use of special education;
- Differentiated instruction in class;
- Individualized instruction in class; and
- Communications with parents about their student's performance.

School Climate and Staff Morale

Campus Climate and Staff Morale

As evidenced by survey responses from charter school principals, staff morale and campus climate appear to be much more positive at high-performing charter schools than other charter schools in Texas.

- Principals at high-performing schools were much more inclined to “strongly agree” that staff morale is high at their campus, that teachers trust their principal, and that teachers trust each other.
- A higher percentage of principals at high-performing charter school campuses than their counterparts at other charter schools were in strong agreement that their campus has an inclusive work environment, that a high value is placed on teamwork and collaboration, and that there is a culture of professionalism at their school.

Maintaining a Positive School Climate

While there was some consistency regarding important approaches to maintaining a positive school climate (e.g., campus staff sharing a common set of beliefs about schooling, genuine care for students, culture of respect, academic growth of students) across all charter school principals, the following differentiating characteristics of high-performing charter schools emerged as best or promising practices through the analyses:

- Campus staff sharing a common set of beliefs about schooling and learning (which is closely related to the best practice of hiring teachers who are a fit with the educational philosophy of the school); and
- Socio-emotional growth of students.

Maintaining Positive Teacher-Student and Student-Student Interactions

There was a consistency in responses across principals at high-performing and other charter school campuses with developing strong teacher-student relationships, effective student engagement in the classroom, and clear behavioral expectations as the three most impactful approaches. However, the

following differentiating approaches were evident through principal survey data at high-performing charter schools:

- The use of proactive steps to curb misbehavior in the classroom (which is further supported by effective classroom organization and management skills demonstrated during classroom observations). This includes the consistent use of student redirection techniques and the setting of clear student behavior expectations.
- Strong anti-bullying policies.

Chapter 5 — Summary of Findings

This chapter summarizes the findings from an investigation of the practices of Public Charter School Start-Up grantee campuses described in Chapter 2, preliminary analyses related to the performance of start-up charter school campuses described in Chapter 3, and information about best or promising practices in place at high-performing charter school campuses described in Chapter 4.

Practices at Charter School Start-Up Grantee Campuses

An investigation of practices at the charter school start-up grantee campuses led to a number of key findings related to planning and organizational practices; teacher recruitment, hiring and retention; student recruitment and retention; instructional practices; and school climate

During interviews, school leaders reported several challenges related to starting a new school, including school construction, student enrollment, and funding. Support from external organizations such as CMOs, district office staff, and the TEA, was critical during the planning and school start-up process.

Across the six school start-up topics discussed during interviews, principals of these campuses placed great importance on establishing clear responsibilities and open communication, along with developing a positive culture and strong community based on respect. Principals felt that developing a culture of respect between teachers and students and the demonstration of genuine care for students were the two most important factors associated with creating a positive school climate.

When it comes to quality instruction, both principal interviews and teacher focus groups noted positive relationships as key, specifically positive relationships between students and teachers and frequent feedback from campus leadership to teachers. The use of formative data to guide instruction was also rated by principals as one of the most frequently observed and most impactful instructional practices. Public Charter School Start-Up Grant recipients received higher CLASS observation scores for the “Emotional Support” and “Student Engagement” domains than high-performing charter schools, but lower “Classroom Organization” and “Instructional Support” domain scores. This may reflect new charter schools’ focus on creating a positive school culture immediately, while more complex improvement in instructional and classroom organization and management may take additional time to establish. In-class academic interventions, targeted pull-out instruction by an interventionist, and in-school tutorial labs were rated by principals as the most effective methods for closing the achievement gap for persistently low-performing students.

Principals deploy a wide array of effective teacher recruitment methods; however, they rated word-of-mouth and online advertising as the most effective teacher recruitment strategies. Principals rated strong demonstrated pedagogical skills and teacher fit with the educational philosophy of the school as the two most important considerations when hiring new teachers. Instructional effectiveness is by far the most important consideration when deciding whether to retain a teacher. Start-up grantee teachers are less likely to have advanced degrees. Additionally, they are typically younger, less experienced in teaching, more likely to be first-year teachers, and have less tenure at their schools than their counterparts at traditional public school campuses. Teacher retention between 2016–17 and 2017–18 was substantially lower at charter school start-up grantee campuses (58%) than at matched traditional public school campuses (75%).

Word-of-mouth advertising through parents, social media, and principal presentations at local events were ranked by principals as the most effective methods for recruiting students to their new charter school campuses. Just over three-quarters (77%) of students enrolled at charter school start-up campuses in 2016–17 returned to those campuses for the 2017–18 school year. Of the students who transferred, 53% attended traditional public schools, 29% attended different charter schools in 2017–18, and 18% left the school system.

Charter School Start-Up Grantee Outcomes

The evaluation estimated effects of enrollment in a charter school start-up grantee campus on the following student outcomes: STAAR Reading, STAAR Mathematics, Algebra I EOC exams, and English I EOC exams.

At the elementary and middle school levels, there were individual charter school start-up grantee campuses that showed statistically significant differences, some positive and some negative, in STAAR Mathematics and STAAR Reading test results compared to matched students enrolled in traditional public schools, after controlling for student differences. However, there were no significant overall differences on average for STAAR Mathematics or STAAR Reading test results for the four charter school start-up grantee elementary campuses or the six charter school start-up grantee middle school campuses in the analyses and matched traditional school campuses. For Algebra I and English I EOC exams for students enrolled in the charter school start-up grantee high school campus, after controlling for differences in student and school characteristics, students enrolled in the campus showed significantly higher Algebra I and English I EOC exam scores compared with matched students enrolled in traditional public schools.

Of the four charter school start-up grantee elementary campuses, three of the campuses had a lower percentage of students ready for Kindergarten and higher rates of eligibility for accelerated reading instruction compared to students in feeder districts.

When comparing the overall performance of start-up grantee campuses to the performance of students in different student groups, in most cases the results for each student group were very similar to the overall results when looking at all students, with two exceptions. The overall story is that in most cases the STAAR results for each student group are very similar to the overall results, with overall effects generally small and insignificant, and with the estimated effects for specific student groups generally very similar to the overall effects. Across the different student groups and grade ranges, there are a couple of cases where the results are not as similar for a particular outcome and student group, caused by instances where one or more campuses have substantially different estimated effects for a particular outcome and student group than the overall estimated effect for those campuses. This amount of variation by student group is expected, and indicates that the overall results are not in large part driven by particular student groups.

Best or Promising Practices from High-Performing Charter School Campuses

The research team explored promising practices at high-performing charter school campuses and all charter school campuses related to organization practices, teacher recruitment and retention, student recruitment and retention, instruction, and positive school climate.

Organizational Practices

- Clarity in the educational philosophy and mission of the charter schools were rated by principals at high-performing charter school campuses as the most important practice to executing the campus' mission, and high-performing charter school principals were more likely to rate this as an important item than principals at other charter school campuses.
- The creation of a youth culture at the campus, which can impact student satisfaction with their educational experience, academic performance, and student retention at the school was also an emerging practice at high-performing charter schools.
- Getting parents connected to the school and involved in their child's education is an important organizational activity for charter schools. It requires a great deal of intentionality, focus, organization, and creativity. Principals at high-performing charter schools placed more emphasis on the use of open houses and regular school day events for parents to interact with their children to increase parent engagement than their counterparts at other charter school campuses.
- Principals at high-performing charter schools were also more likely to encourage parents to attend parent meetings, conferences, open houses, and other campus events, and to participate in school fundraising events. These practices can be considered promising practices to engage parents in their child's education and connect them to the charter school.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention

- Principals at all charter schools (high-performing and other) ranked the use of current teachers to recruit colleagues as the most important method for recruiting high-quality teachers, while high-performing charter school principals were more likely to rank online advertisements as one of the two most effective recruitment methods.
- Similar to start-up campus principals, instructor effectiveness was ranked as the first or second most important criteria when considering teacher retention. None of the high-performing charter school principals considered incentive pay to be one of their top two methods for recruiting teachers. Importantly, principals at high-performing charter schools were more inclined to consider a teacher's educational fit with the school's educational philosophy and mission when hiring new educators at their campuses.
- For both high-performing and other charter schools, instructional effectiveness, classroom management, student engagement, student performance, and cultural fit with the campuses were deemed by principals to be most important when deciding whether or not to retain a teacher.
- Regarding the most effective methods for retaining high-quality teachers, principals across all charter school campuses consistently ranked smaller class sizes and providing regular feedback to the teacher regarding instructional practices as the top two most effective approaches. Principals at high-performing charter schools placed more emphasis on providing teachers with

smaller class sizes and professional learning communities to support teacher retention and reduce the risk of burn out.

- Principals at high-performing charter schools did not rank teacher incentive pay as an effective tool for retaining high-quality teachers.

Student Recruitment and Retention

- For all charter school principals, word-of-mouth advertising from parents of students currently enrolled was ranked as the most effective recruitment tool. However, the use of open houses and the educational philosophy of the school was more commonly ranked as an effective practice by principals at high-performing charter schools than at other charter schools.
- Building meaningful relationships between teachers and students and establishing a safe and collaborative school environment were among the two most effective methods for retaining students in both groups of charter school campuses. However, high-performing charter school campuses placed a greater emphasis on instructional strategies (e.g., student-centered instruction and the use of multiple instructional approaches to meet academic needs) as effective student retention strategies.

Instructional Practices

- The establishment of positive relationships between the teacher and student was reported to be the most frequently observed instructional strategy by principals across all charter schools. However, maximized learning time, meaningful peer interactions, and the effective use of scaffolding were more frequently observed by principals at high-performing charter schools than principals at other charter school campuses.
- Principals at high-performing charters were more likely to indicate that reviewing student data with teachers and using student data to gauge the performance of teachers were more impactful strategies for improving instructional practices than principals at other charter school campuses.
- For both principals at high-performing and other charter schools, establishing strong teacher-student relationships and connections and various forms of in-class and out-of-class academic interventions (i.e., targeted pull-out instruction by interventionist) are ranked as some of the most impactful approaches to closing achievement gaps for educationally disadvantaged and low-performing students.
- The use of special education services, differentiated and individualized instruction in class, and communications with parents about their child's academic performance were deemed by principals at high-performing charter schools to be more critical approaches for closing achievement gaps for economically disadvantaged and low-performing students

- Instructional practices observed at high-performing charter schools reflect high-quality teacher-student interactions related to effective instructional supports and classroom management approaches.

Campus Climate and Staff Morale

- Principals at high-performing schools were much more inclined to “strongly agree” that staff morale is high at their campus, teachers trust their principal, and that teachers trust each other than their counterparts at other charter schools. In addition, a larger proportion of principals at high-performing charter school campuses were in strong agreement that their campus has an inclusive work environment that a high-value is placed on teamwork and collaboration, and that there is a culture of professionalism at their school.
- Principals at all charter schools consistently chose the following important approaches to maintaining a positive school climate: campus staff sharing a common set of beliefs about schooling, genuine care for students, a culture of respect, and academic growth of students. However, principals at high-performing charter schools placed more emphasis on campus staff sharing a common set of beliefs about schooling and learning and the social-emotional growth of students.
- High-performing charter schools differed from other charter schools in their classroom management practices as well, with a larger proportion of principals at high-performing charter school campuses ranking use of proactive steps to curb misbehavior and strong anti-bullying policies as the two most impactful approaches in maintaining positive student-to-student and student-to-teacher interactions than their counterparts at other charter school campuses.

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Appendix A: Overview of Evaluation Approach and Data Collection Methods

This appendix includes additional detail related to data collection and analysis approaches used in the evaluation of the Texas Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant.

Statewide Survey of Charter School Principals

To learn about what principals at high-performing charter schools felt were the most impactful, effective, and important methods for various school functions (e.g., organizational practices, instructional practices, teacher recruitment and retention, student recruitment and retention, and maintaining school morale), the evaluation administered a survey to all principals in Texas. This allowed for the comparison of responses by principals at high-performing charter schools and principals at other charter schools.

Identifying High-Performing Campuses from Student Impact

TEA designated 184 charter campuses as “high-quality” in 2017. Using the initial population of 184 campuses, 100 “high-quality” charter campuses were selected for analysis using stratified random sampling. To conduct this analysis, TEA data sources were used to 1) conduct propensity score matching to identify a comparison group for each high-quality charter school campus and 2) estimate impact models to measure the extent to which campuses improved student outcomes.²⁹

More specifically, the evaluation used de-identified, longitudinally-linked student data from TEA. The variables included:

- STAAR Reading and Mathematics exam scores in Grades 3 through 8: the primary outcome, a key matching variable, and a baseline covariate;
- STAAR end-of-course (EOC) exam scores, a primary outcome for high school grades;
- Early reading indicators and school readiness (for kindergarten) indicators, representing potential baseline covariates and matching variables for early elementary school grades; and
- Demographic characteristics used for matching and as baseline covariates.

The impact model the evaluation used was a matched comparison group quasi-experimental design (QED) for the subsample of 100 “high-quality” charter campuses.³⁰ Moreover, high-performing campuses in this model were identified using three-year impacts calculated with TEA data for the 2013–2014 school year (to capture baseline data) through the 2016–2017 school year.

Finally, to make this analysis of state test scores comparable across grades and years, all raw test scores were converted to z-scores defined relative to the statewide distribution of scores in each grade, year, and subject.

²⁹ Of the 184 initial campuses, all 63 campuses that comprise Charter Schools with four or fewer campuses are included. For the nine charter LEAs with five or more campuses, stratified random sampling was used to select a sample of 37 campuses, stratifying by grade range and geographic location, ensuring a representative sample. This yielded a total analysis sample of 100 high-quality charter campuses.

³⁰ The methods used for the matched-student QED are based extensively on the methods developed and presented in Tuttle, et al., 2013.

Students whose baseline test score(s) were missing were imputed for the treatment group, ensuring all students with at least one recorded baseline test score remained in the sample.

Data Collection

The purpose of the spring 2018 survey of charter school principals was to inform the following research objectives:

- 1) Research Objective 1 related to the identification of best or promising practices in high-quality charter school campuses within the state;
- 2) Research Objective 2 related to identification of best or promising practices in Public Charter School Start-Up Grant recipients;
- 3) Research Objective 3, which examines the impact of the Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant;
- 4) Research Objective 4, which examines if and how Public Charter School Start-Up Grant recipients attract, recruit, admit, enroll, and retain students; and
- 5) Research Objective 5, which examines if and how Public Charter School Start-Up Grant recipients attract, recruit, and retain highly-qualified instructors.

To accomplish these project objectives, the evaluation developed a survey instrument which gathered information from charter school principals across the areas of interest: 1) Respondent background; 2) Organization-level practices; 3) Instructional practices; 4) Working with educationally disadvantaged students; 5) Working with low-performing students; 6) Student discipline; 7) Teacher recruitment and retention; 8) Student recruitment and retention; and 9) School climate.

The survey was developed in fall 2017 and was approved by the Texas Education Agency Data Governance Board during their January 2018 meeting.

To improve the accuracy of principal emails required for the online survey, the evaluation downloaded the AskTED list of charter school campus principals and engaged in a systematic process of verifying principal contact information through the review of charter school websites and by making telephone inquiries to charter school campuses. This contact verification process took place in January and February 2018. The charter school principal survey was then programmed into Qualtrics, the online survey platform used by Gibson, and initial email invitations to participate in the data collection effort were delivered on February 12, 2018. The survey remained open until April 2, 2018. Over this period, a total of 10 reminder emails were delivered to principals who had not yet completed their survey.

Of the 765 charter school principals included on the original survey distribution list, a total of 693 surveys (91%) were successfully delivered. A total of 308 completed surveys were received, for an overall response rate of 44%.

Responses from the following three groups of charter school principals were included in the analyses presented in this report:

- **14** surveys were completed by principals at campuses which received funding through the Texas Charter School Start-Up Grant Program (54% response rate)
- **23** surveys were completed by principals at high-performing charter school campuses (47% response rate)
- **172** were completed by principals at other charter school campuses which were not included on TEA's 2017 "high-quality" charter school campus list (45% response rate)

Findings related to the survey responses from the 14 charter school grantee campus principals are reported in Chapter 2 of this report. A comparison of responses from 23 principals at high-performing charter school campuses and responses from 172 principals at other charter school campuses not included on TEA's 2017 "high-quality" charter school list are reported in Chapter 4 of this report.³¹

Charter School Site Visits: Charter School Start-up Grantee Campuses and High-performing Campuses

The purpose of the fall 2017 site visits to charter school start-up grantee campuses and spring 2018 site visits to high-quality, high-performing charter school campuses was to collect information related to best or promising practices related to:

- Organizational practices
- Instructional-level practices
- Serving educationally disadvantaged and low-performing students
- Methods for reducing student behavioral issues
- Approaches for recruiting and retaining students
- Approaches for recruiting and retaining teachers
- Methods for establishing a positive school climate

To accomplish these project objectives, the evaluation developed interview protocols for campus principals and a focus group protocol for teachers. Interviews with campus principals and focus groups with teachers were conducted while onsite at 10 sampled Public Charter School Program Grant campuses. The evaluation also observed and scored a sample of teachers at each charter school campus using the CLASS K-3 (for Grades K-3), CLASS Upper Elementary (for Grades 4-5), and CLASS Secondary (for Grades 6-12) protocols. All site visit team members who conducted observations were certified as reliable on one or more levels of the CLASS observation protocol. The CLASS observation tool was used to assess instructional quality across charter school campuses.

Charter School Start-up Grantee Campuses

A statewide sample of 10 Texas Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant recipients was selected by the evaluation and approved by TEA staff. Geographic region, cohort (i.e., when the campus began serving

³¹ A total of 98 survey responses from new charter schools not part of the charter school start-up grant program (n=26), designated as "high-quality" by TEA in 2017 (n=72) are not included in the analyses conducted for this evaluation.

students) and charter school type (i.e., open enrollment, In-district charter) were taken into account when selecting centers for fall 2017 site visits. The sample included four campuses from Cohort 1 and six campuses from Cohort 2 Between October 17th and November 16th, 2017, A total of 49 different teachers were observed and scored using the CLASS protocol, 48 teachers participated in focus groups interviews, and each of the 10 campus principals was interviewed.

High-performing charter school Campuses

Based on an analysis of student performance data conducted by the evaluation, a statewide sample of 10 high-performing charter school campuses was selected by the evaluation and approved by TEA staff. Geographic region, grade span served, and student performance on STAAR-Reading and STAAR-Mathematics were taken into account when selecting centers for spring 2018 site visits.

Over the March 19 to April 26, 2017 period, a total of 39 different teachers were observed and scored using the CLASS protocol, 40 teachers participated in 60-minute focus group interviews, and each of the 10 campus principals participated in 75–90-minute interviews.

Analysis of Charter School Outcomes

Matching Students from Feeder Schools to Find the Strongest Campuses

The validity of the research design hinges on the extent to which propensity matching accounts for important differences between students who enter charter school campuses and students in comparison groups.

This matching was done using a variant of the propensity score matching (PSM) approach employed in Tuttle et al., 2013 and Tuttle et al., 2015, methods relying on observed demographic characteristics and baseline achievement to select a well-matched comparison group for charter students at each high-quality charter school campus.

The treatment group consisted of any student entering one of the 100 Texas charter school campuses during the 2014–15, 2015–16, or 2016–17 school years. The comparison group was selected by considering all students across districts identified as feeder districts to that charter school, defined by examining where the students attending those charter schools would have attended had they gone to a traditional public school.

Overall the analysis of high-quality charter schools included a sample of 100 schools, sampled from a group of 184 high-quality charter schools identified by TEA. The analysis calculated three-year impacts, using data from 2013-14 through 2016–17. Three-year impacts allow for following students for up to three years at the school and estimating the combined impact of all three years at the school on their cumulative achievement growth. For students observed for less than three years, the model estimated the impacts for the period the students were at the school.

To make the analysis of state test scores comparable across grades and years, all raw test scores were converted to z-scores defined relative to the statewide distribution of scores in each grade, year, and subject. In other words, first, the difference between each student's raw score and the mean score in that grade, year, and subject is calculated, then divided the difference by the standard deviation of raw scores in that grade, year, and subject. Thus, each z-score reflects a student's achievement level relative

to the average student in the relevant cohort (in terms of the number of standard deviations above or below the mean).

While the study's matching procedures (described below) ensured that the treatment group and matched comparison group were equivalent at baseline, the study does not observe outcome measures for every matched student in every outcome sample. To check that treatment and comparison students included in each of the analysis samples (that is, with valid data on an outcome) have equivalent observable characteristics, the study examined baseline equivalence separately for each model and outcome. The study looked at nine baseline characteristics including baseline STAAR reading and mathematics test scores; gender, race, special education, English Learner (EL) status, and economically disadvantaged status.

Out of the 12 outcome samples in the analysis, none of them had a statistically significant difference in baseline mathematics or reading test scores. With respect to the baseline demographic characteristics examined, six showed zero statistically significant differences between the treatment and control group and six showed only one significant difference in a demographic characteristic. In cases that there was a statistically significant difference in a demographic indicator, the magnitude was small: for all the baseline demographic attributes examined, the treatment group is within three percentage points of the control group in each outcome sample.

Some students may not, for various reasons, have valid data in the year when a given outcome was measured. For example, some students may transfer to a different state, while others may transfer to local private schools or drop out of school altogether. In a small number of cases, students may simply have missing variable values in a given year or subject. These cases when students disappear from the analytic sample were categorized as out-of-sample transfers. If treatment students transfer out-of-sample at a different rate than matched comparison students, it could undermine the validity of impact estimates. As noted above, the study checked for this by examining the baseline equivalence of the sample for each of our 12 outcome/model combinations. There were no differences in baseline reading or mathematics scores on any of the outcome samples and no outcome sample had more than one significant difference in a demographic characteristic. All variables assessed for baseline equivalence are also controlled for in our impact regression model.

To avoid omitting students who are missing one or more baseline test scores, missing baseline data for students in the treatment group is imputed, ensuring all students with at least one recorded baseline test score remain in the sample. Missing outcome observations are not imputed.

This approach ensured the comparison and treatment group students matched in terms of the school type they attended at baseline. In other words, the treatment group was defined to include, whenever possible, those who attended a traditional public school at baseline prior to charter school campus entry. Then, the comparison group was selected from among a pool of students who attended the same schools or types of schools.

For charter school campuses serving middle and high school grades, the baseline test scores used in the PSM are the STAAR Mathematics and Reading scores from the year prior to charter entry: Grade 8 scores for students entering a charter high school in Grade 9 and Grade 5 scores for students entering a charter middle school in Grade 6. However, the earliest grade for which STAAR tests are available is Grade 3; therefore, students entering a charter elementary school in Grade 3 or earlier did not have

baseline STAAR test scores. In these cases, students in Grades 4 and 5 were included using the students' Grade 3 STAAR scores as a "baseline" test score for matching.

The propensity model was used to estimate propensity scores for each treatment and comparison student in the sample for every "high-quality" charter school campus evaluated. With these propensity scores determined for each student, comparison group students were matched to similar treatment group students.

Propensity score matching was done using a variant of the PSM approach employed in Tuttle et al., 2013 and Tuttle et al., 2015, which relies on observed demographic characteristics and baseline achievement to select a well-matched comparison group for charter students at each high-quality charter school campus. The treatment group consists of any student entering one of the sample Texas charter school campuses during the 2014–15, 2015–16, or 2016–17 school years. The comparison group is selected by considering all students across districts identified as feeder districts to that charter school, where feeder districts are defined as those including at least one non-treatment campus identified as the campus of residence for at least five students in that charter school, in the same grade and year as potential comparison students, while retaining in the actual comparison group only those students whose characteristics and achievement during the baseline period match those of treatment group students. Such an approach can yield unbiased impact estimates if the comparison group closely matches the treatment group on the characteristics of interest and the characteristics fully capture the relevant differences between the treatment and comparison groups (that is, no unmeasured differences between the two groups are directly related to test scores during the follow-up period). The PSM approach also ensures that the comparison and treatment group students match in terms of the type of school they attended at baseline. In other words, the treatment group is defined to include, whenever possible, those who attended a traditional public school at baseline prior to charter school campus entry and then select the comparison group from among a pool of students who attended the same schools or types of schools.

The propensity score matching was implemented by first estimating, separately for each school, and among students in traditional public schools in the appropriate feeder districts for that school during the baseline period, a logistic regression model predicting whether a given student enters a charter school campus in the subsequent year (the model's dependent variable) based on their baseline characteristics and test scores (the model's independent variables). The first step for the PSM approach was to estimate a propensity score for each student in the sample. The propensity score model used baseline mathematics and reading test scores (measured in the grade prior to charter entry or earliest grade, as discussed above) as predictors. Other predictors include corresponding missing test score indicators, indicators for sex, race/ethnicity, campus of residence, students classified as economically disadvantaged, SPED, EL, and any two-way interactions of these covariates.

With these propensity scores determined for each student, nearest-neighbor matching (without replacement) matched comparison group students to treatment group students, testing for equivalence on baseline test scores and the key demographic characteristics (race/ethnicity, SPED, EL, economically disadvantaged). "Single nearest-neighbor matching without replacement" involves selecting for the comparison group the single "nonparticipant" with the most similar propensity score to each "participant" (see Smith and Todd 2005 for more detail).

The study tested the balance of the treatment group and the matched comparison group by conducting a test of the significance of differences between the two groups in their baseline test scores and other demographic variables (race/ethnicity, gender, special education status, FRL status, and limited English proficiency status). For the matched comparison group sample associated with each treatment school, the study required the baseline test scores of treatment students and comparison students to be balanced in both STAAR mathematics and reading; the study also required there to be no more than one significant difference on any of the other demographic characteristics listed above. The study considers a covariate to be balanced when the means of this covariate for the comparison group are not significantly different from the treatment group at the 5% level. If the first round of matching did not identify a comparison group meeting these criteria, the propensity score estimation model for that school was adjusted, a new set of propensity-scores was re-estimated, a new matched comparison group was obtained, and the balance between the treatment group and the new matched comparison group was tested. These steps were iterated until the matched comparison group achieved balance with the treatment group according to the study's criteria.

The combination of propensity-score matching and regression analysis accounts for differences in observed baseline characteristics and achievement scores between treatment students and comparison students (in other words, the differences associated with initial selection into charter schools). But it remains possible that treatment students and comparison students differ in unobserved ways that may affect later test scores. However, previous studies have suggested that applying a combination of propensity-score matching and regression analysis, as done here, can succeed in replicating experimental impact estimates in certain contexts (Cook et al. 2008; Bifulco 2012; Furgeson et al. 2012; Tuttle et al. 2013; Fortson et al. 2015). This analytic approach for the propensity score matching model was implemented in Mathematica's analysis of impacts of KIPP charter schools (Tuttle et al. 2013 and 2015). As part of those reports, a variety of sensitivity tests were run to check the robustness of the model to alternatives to the main specifications, and the impacts were not sensitive to any of the changes in specification.

Measuring the Impact of These High-Performing Campuses

Under this QED, charter campus students were compared with their matched comparison group—students with similar baseline characteristics attending traditional public schools in nearby districts. This approach was used to estimate an impact model that regresses STAAR outcomes on a treatment indicator for whether or not a student attended a charter campus.

This model estimates the impact of charter school campuses on student STAAR outcomes using average differences between student treatment and comparison groups, producing estimates of impact for each charter school campus. To improve the precision of these estimates, baseline student characteristics were adjusted for in the regression model.

As with the PSM procedure, the baseline test score model covariates are the STAAR Mathematics and Reading scores from the year prior to charter entry. For students in Grades 4 or 5 who entered the charter school campus in Grade 3 or prior, the student's Grade 3 STAAR scores were used as baseline test scores for matching. The baseline test scores for these students occur after they enter the charter school campus; therefore, the estimated impact for these students omits the effect the charter campus had on their performance prior to the baseline test.

The combination of PSM and Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regression is designed to address initial selection into charters—that is, differences between charter students and comparison students at the time when they enter the charter campus. However, selection bias is a potential problem in student departures from charter campuses before completion of all grades. If students who leave charter campuses early tend to be those who perform academically worse than their peers, the analysis, including only persisting students, would overstate charter campus impacts.

To account for this attrition, early exits from charter school campuses are ignored. Any student who ever enrolled in a charter remains permanently in the charter treatment group regardless of whether the student remains in a charter school campus or transfers to another school. In other words, a student who is enrolled in a charter school in Grade 5 for the 2014–2015 school year but leaves the charter school campus after completing Grade 6 at the end of the 2015–2016 school year would remain in the treatment group for all the years in which he or she appears in the data (from 2014–2015 through 2016–2017, inclusive).

This approach resembles an “intent to treat” analysis conducted in an experimental context. By including all students observed attending a charter school campus, regardless of completing all grades, evaluators avoid overstating the effect of the charter school campus.

In fact, this method likely produces a conservative estimate of charter campuses’ full impact on students who remain in the charter school campus. From the perspective of parents, students, or policymakers, this method appropriately accounts for the fact that not all students entering charter school campuses remain in these schools.

Selecting the Highest-Performing Campuses

Finally, the estimated impacts for each charter campus were used, identifying which campuses have a positive, negative, or statistically insignificant impact to rank the initial 100 “high-quality” schools provided by TEA.³² This ranking is simply an ordering of a campus’s impact estimate separated by the grade levels served (e.g., elementary, middle, high, and K-12 schools).

³² A high-quality charter school campus is one that has a current accreditation status of “Accredited.”

In addition, if evaluated under the standard procedures of the state accountability rating system, a high-quality charter school campus must have received the highest or second highest academic accountability rating for three of the last five years, with at least 75% of the campuses rated under the charter school campus also receiving the highest or second highest rating and no campus having an academically unacceptable rating in the most recent ratings. If evaluated under the alternative education accountability (AEA) procedures, a high-quality charter school campus must have received the highest or second highest rating for the past five of five years and all campuses must be rated academically acceptable. Additionally, at least 30% of the students in the following groups — African American, Hispanic, white, or classified as special education, economically disadvantaged, English language learner, or at-risk — must have met the state student passing standard in the most recent reporting period for the charter school campus. No campus under the high-quality charter school campus label may be identified for federal interventions. The high-quality charter campus may also not be under any sanctions by the agency regarding compliance. In addition, performance on the Charter School Performance Framework will be included in the determination which includes an evaluation of academic, financial, and operational criteria.

³² Statistical models were used to assess the performance of a sample of 100 high-quality campuses. Based on standardized test scores (i.e., STAAR-Reading, STAAR-Mathematics for Grades 3–8, and EOC exam scores for Grades 9–12). Campuses ranked in the top half of the 100 high-quality charter school campuses were categorized as high-performing for the purposes of this evaluation.

For instance, for middle school campuses, the estimated mathematics and reading impacts for each campus were averaged, then rank-ordered based on each campus's average score. Similarly, for high schools, STAAR English I and Algebra I EOC impact estimates were averaged and then rank-ordered based on this average impact. These campus impact estimates were used to identify campuses making the largest positive impact on student outcomes, becoming what this analysis refers to as "high-performing" campuses.

Elementary and K-12 campuses have a slightly more complicated impact estimate. For elementary and K-12 schools, there are two different models estimating impacts. The first model estimates impact for students *only* with baseline scores *prior* to entering the charter campus. Because these students generally transferred into the campuses at a later grade than most, this model is referred to as the "transfer" model.

The second model includes *all* students with available baseline scores in the model, even if those baseline scores occurred *after* the student entered the charter school campus. This model captures the additional growth students made following those baseline scores and is therefore called the "growth" model.

Most schools included in each model have positive impact estimates in both mathematics and reading. This is possible because these impact estimates are not relative to other schools in the model but instead based on comparisons with matched students at schools in feeder districts. Therefore, it is possible for most of the schools to show positive impacts.

The overall performance for each campus was averaged across any impact average model it was included in, getting an overall average performance for each campus. Schools that fell in the top half of the overall average performance were classified as "high-performing" and became the subject of the analysis of high-performing campuses within this evaluation. One caveat to this high-performing analysis is that the list of these academically successful Texas charter campuses is likely not exhaustive. In short, there may be impactful high-performing charter campuses not included in the analysis group.

Analysis of Teacher Characteristics and Retention Patterns

In order to examine characteristics and retention patterns for teachers teaching at start-up grantee campuses, the study first identified all teachers who taught at those schools in the 2016–17 school year. In identifying teachers for the sample, this document followed the TEA definition for a classroom teacher as an educator who is employed by a school district and who, not less than an average of four hours each day, teaches in an academic instructional setting or a career and technology instructional setting, excluding teacher's aides or full-time administrators.

The study then compared characteristics of teachers teaching at grantee campuses to teachers teaching at campuses in the feeder districts for grantee campuses, comparing average teacher characteristics such as advanced degree attainment, gender, race/ethnicity, age, experience teaching, tenure in the district, certification status, and route to certification. The comparison included 179 teachers at grantee campuses and 81,952 teachers at campuses in feeder districts.

Additionally, in order to examine teacher mobility and retention, the study linked the teacher data to where each teacher taught in the 2017–18 school year. This allows for comparison of characteristics of

teachers who left start-up grantee campuses to those who remained, as well as an examination of where teachers who left both grantee campuses and campuses in feeder districts. The analysis examined the percent of teachers from each group who transitioned to different roles in their same campus, left to teach at a different campus, or left the teacher data altogether.

Analysis of Student Characteristics and Mobility Rates

In order to examine the characteristics of students who entered and exited start-up grantee campuses, the study first restricted the sample to students attending grantee campuses in 2016–17 for at least two hours per day. It then compared the characteristics of students who remained at a grantee campus for the entire school year to those who exited the campus during the school year, examining the characteristics of the students and the type of campus they left to. The study conducted a similar comparison for students who entered a grantee campus during the 2016–17 school year.

The study also examined the characteristics of students who were enrolled in a start-up grantee campus at the end of 2016–17 but did not attend that same campus at the beginning of the 2017–18 school year and compared student characteristics for those leaving students to characteristics of students who remained at the same grantee campus at the start of the 2017–18 school year. Because some students did not have the option of remaining at the same campus, either because they were in Grade 12 and graduating, or because they were in the highest grade offered by their campus, those students are omitted from this comparison. The study also examined what type of campus the students who exited during the summer enrolled at to begin the 2017–18 school year.

Appendix B: Technical Appendix – Impact Analysis Methodology

Estimating impacts on achievement and other outcomes

The analysis of impacts for start-up grantee campuses uses a similar matched comparison group quasi-experimental design model as was used to estimate impacts for identifying high-quality charter campuses, as described in Appendix A. This model allows the impact estimates to vary across campuses, creating a separate impact estimate for each grantee campus. In other words, this model estimates an OLS regression model including all campuses in a grade range, with separate impact estimates for each student outcome.

The campuses in the start-up grantee sample opened during the period of our analysis. Therefore, many students entered the campuses in grades above what would normally be considered the campus's lowest grade offered. For instance, for a typical middle school campus, a larger number of middle school students may have entered in Grade 7 rather than Grade 6, the first Grade offered by the campus.

For middle school students, baseline test scores from prior to campus entry were used for both matching and control variables. Similarly, for high school students, STAAR Mathematics and Reading performance from prior to campus entry were used as baseline test scores and controls.

Likewise, for elementary campuses, if students entered in Grades 4 or 5, their prior STAAR Mathematics and Reading scores were used, using these once again as both matching and control variables to measure impact.

The overall impact estimate is the simple average value of the site-specific estimates for the schools in the sample.³³ To perform a robustness check of these estimates, the study computed estimates that weight the site-level impact estimates by the sample size in each site, accounting for the fact that impacts are more precisely estimated in sites with larger samples.

³³ Another difference between the impact model for Objective 1 and the model used here is that, since the study only has one year of data due to all the grantee schools having opened in 2016–17, there is no need for two separate models (“growth” and transfers”) for elementary and K-12 schools, as it can be assumed that every student attending a grantee school in 2016–17 was attending a different school in the prior year.

Appendix C: CLASS Observation Protocol

Classroom observations were conducted at charter school start-up grantee campuses in fall 2017 and at high-performing charter school campuses in fall 2018. This appendix provides an overview of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), which measures effective teacher-student interactions in Pre-K – 12th grade, taking into account important developmental and contextual differences between students at different age levels.

Classroom Assessment Scoring System

CLASS is an observational tool that provides a common lens and language focused on what matters—the classroom interactions that boost student learning. It has been used extensively for both research and professional development purposes. Data from CLASS observations are used to support teachers’ unique professional development needs, set school-wide goals, and shape system-wide policy at the local, state, and national levels. Based on research from the University of Virginia’s Curry School of Education and studied in thousands of classrooms nationwide, the CLASS Observation Tool:

- Focuses on effective teaching
- Helps teachers recognize and understand the power of their interactions with students
- Aligns with professional development (PD) tools
- Works across age levels and subjects

CLASS dimensions are based on developmental theory and research suggesting that interactions between students and adults are the primary mechanism of student development and learning (Hamre & Pianta, 2015). At the broadest level, for each of the three CLASS instruments being used for this evaluation (K-3, Upper Elementary – Grades 4-6, and Secondary) interactions between teachers and students can be grouped into the following domains:

1. Emotional Support
2. Classroom Organization
3. Instructional Support
4. Student Engagement (for CLASS Upper Elementary and Secondary only)

This organizational structure has been validated in thousands of classrooms across the country.

CLASS Dimensions

Emotional Support Domain (CLASS Dimensions are the same for all 3 protocols)

- **Positive Climate:** The emotional connection, respect, and enjoyment demonstrated between teachers and students and among students.
- **Negative Climate:** The level of expressed negativity such as anger, hostility, or aggression exhibited by teachers and/or students in the classroom.
- **Teacher Sensitivity:** Teachers’ awareness of and level of responsiveness to students’ academic and emotional concerns.

- **Regard for Student Perspectives:** The degree to which teachers' interactions with students and classroom activities place an emphasis on students' interests, motivations, and points of view.

Classroom Organization Domain (CLASS Dimensions are the same for all 3 protocols)

- **Behavioral Management:** How effectively teachers monitor, prevent, and redirect behavior.
- **Productivity:** How well the classroom runs with respect to routines and the degree to which teachers organize activities and directions so that maximum time can be spent in learning activities.
- **Instructional Learning Formats:** How teachers facilitate activities and provide interesting materials so that students are engaged and learning opportunities are maximized.

Instructional Support Domain (Dimensions differ by protocol)

- **Concept Development (This Dimension is used for all 3 protocols):** How teachers use instructional discussions and activities to promote students' higher-order thinking skills in contrast to a focus on rote instruction.
- **Analysis & Problem Solving (This Dimension is only used in the CLASS Upper Elementary and Secondary Protocols):** Assesses the degree to which the teacher facilitates the use of higher-level thinking skills, such as analysis, problem-solving, reasoning, and creation through the application of knowledge and skills.
- **Quality of Feedback (This Dimension is used for all 3 protocols):** How teachers extend students' learning through their responses to students' ideas, comments, and work.
- **Language Modeling (This Dimension is used only in the CLASS K-3 protocol):** The extent to which teachers facilitate and encourage students' language through language-stimulation and language-facilitation techniques.
- **Instructional Dialogue (This Dimension is used only in the CLASS Upper Elementary protocol):** Captures purposeful use of dialogue – structured, cumulative questioning and discussion which guide and prompt students' understanding of content and language development.

Student Engagement Domain (This Domain is used only in the CLASS Upper Elementary and Secondary protocols)

- This scale is intended to capture the degree to which all students in the class are focused and participating in the learning activity presented or facilitated by the teacher. The difference between passive engagement and active engagement is of note to the rating.

The research team has chosen the CLASS protocol as the observation instrument for this study for a number of reasons, including:

- The CLASS tool provides a common lens for observers to provide consistent and reliable ratings across a wide range of classroom interactions directly related to student learning.
- CLASS dimensions are grounded in developmental theory and research.
- CLASS observation tools are nationally recognized and supported by rigorous training for observers by Teachstone CLASS content experts certified through a Trainer-of-Trainer model. All CLASS observers must be certified as “reliable” through rigorous online testing before they can utilize the protocol in classrooms.
- Each teacher will receive three class scores for each dimension based on 15-20-minute observation periods. Multiple scores will improve the reliability of the teacher-level scores.
- The use of the CLASS instrument is a cost-effective approach for the Public Charter School Start-Up Grant evaluation.

How CLASS Data was used in the Evaluation

All observed classrooms received scores from 1 to 7 for each of the 10 CLASS dimensions. Each classroom received three scores, based on 15-20-minute observation periods for each dimension, which were compiled to create an average score per dimension. Dimension scores were aggregated to the domain level to create classroom scores for each related domain (e.g., Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, Instructional Support, and Student Engagement (for grades 4-12)). CLASS observation scores are based on detailed notes taken by researchers during the period of observation. (Pianta, La Paro & Hamre, 2015).

Appendix D: Principal Survey Instrument

Texas Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant Evaluation Spring 2018 – Charter School Campus Principal Survey

Background Questions

1. Please complete this survey for [INSERT CAMPUS NAME, COUNTY DISTRICT CAMPUS NUMBER (CDCN)].

Are you currently the principal for this charter school campus?
 - Yes
 - No (If no, terminate survey and go to Thank You landing page.)

2. What is your highest level of educational attainment?
 - Associate degree
 - Bachelor's degree
 - Master's degree
 - PhD
 - EdD
 - Other (Please describe.)

3. How many total years have you been a principal at this or any charter school campus?
 - OPEN-ENDED

4. How many years have you been a principal at this charter school campus?
 - OPEN-ENDED

5. Before you became a principal, how many total years of elementary or secondary teaching experience did you have?
 - OPEN-ENDED

Organizational-Level Practices

6. Grade levels served at this campus in 2017–18: (Select all that apply.)
 - Prekindergarten
 - Kindergarten
 - Grade 1
 - Grade 2
 - Grade 3
 - Grade 4
 - Grade 5
 - Grade 6

- Grade 7
- Grade 8
- Grade 9
- Grade 10
- Grade 11
- Grade 12
- Adult education

7. Is there a formal parent organization at your campus in 2017–18?

- Yes
- No

8. Of the following methods for getting parents involved in their children’s education, which 5 were most effective during the 2017–18 school year? (Please rank from 1 to 5, where 1 is the most effective and 5 is the fifth most effective.)

- ___ Parent volunteer opportunities
- ___ Regular email communications to all parents
- ___ Active Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)
- ___ Regular school day events for parents to interact with their children
- ___ Parent-teacher conferences
- ___ After-school events for parents to interact with their children
- ___ Parent contracts with the campus
- ___ Parent involvement in assisting children with their homework
- ___ Parent signatures on weekly agendas/assignments
- ___ System for parents to monitor their children’s attendance, grades, and assignments
- ___ Regular individualized teacher-parent communications
- ___ Other (Please specify.)
- ___ Other (Please specify.)

9. Of the following organizational practices related to executing your charter campus’s mission, which 5 were most important during the 2017–18 school year? (Please rank from 1 to 5, where 1 is the most important and 5 is the fifth most important.)

- ___ Focused attention of administrators and teachers around the mission
- ___ Clarity in the educational philosophy instilled in campus staff and teachers
- ___ Effective interventions with staff to change existing attitudes and behaviors
- ___ Fit of teachers with school mission and educational philosophies
- ___ Concentration on maximizing instructional time
- ___ Creation of a youth culture at your charter school campus
- ___ Hiring exemplary teachers to support the practices of other teachers at your charter school campus
- ___ Design of the campus building
- ___ Use of data to inform instruction
- ___ The use of technology at your charter school campus

- Regular monitoring of instructional practices through classroom observations
- Other (Please specify.)
- Other (Please specify.)

10. Does your campus have a class size limit for the 2017–18 school year (i.e., maximum number of students in the classroom), excluding electives such as band, PE, etc.?

- Yes
- No

11. (Display logic: only to respondents who choose “yes” for Q10.) If Yes, what is the maximum number of students that are allowed to be enrolled in a class at your campus during the 2017–18 school year? _____

12. **(For Campuses Opening in 2016–17 and 2017–18 Only, the survey system will know which campuses will see this question)** of the following activities or new systems, which 5 required the greatest amount of your time during the 2017–18 school year? (Please rank from 1 to 5, where 1 is the most time-intensive and 5 is the fifth most time-intensive.)

- Building-related issues (e.g., design, construction, finance)
- Communications with parents
- Planning activities
- Developing and monitoring campus budget and expenditures
- Developing support systems for teachers to ensure high-quality instructional practices
- Determining technology needs
- Selecting rigorous curriculum
- Addressing student behavioral issues
- Ensuring the development of effective lesson plans
- Hiring high-quality teachers
- Student recruitment
- Other (Please specify.)
- Other (Please specify.)

13. Up to this point in the 2017–18 school year, on average what percentage of time do you estimate that you spend on the following tasks? (Note: proportions of time must sum to 100%)

- a. Internal administrative tasks (e.g., human resource/personnel issues, regulations, reports, campus budget, etc.)
- b. Curriculum and teaching-related tasks (e.g., teaching, lesson preparation, classroom observations, mentoring teachers, etc.)
- c. Student interactions, including discipline and academic guidance
- d. Parent interactions, including formal and informal interactions
- e. Other (Please specify.)
- f. Other (Please specify.)

- % adding up to 100

14. What are the key tenets of your charter school campus's mission?

--- OPEN ENDED RESPONSE

15. What organizational practices have you found to be most important in helping your campus run effectively?

--- OPEN ENDED RESPONSE

Instructional Practices

16. Of the following instructional practices, which 5 did you observe most frequently at your charter school campus during 2017–18? (Please rank from 1 to 5 where 1 is most frequent and 5 is fifth most frequent.)

- Establishing positive relationships between the teacher and student
- Teacher support for student autonomy and leadership
- Maximizing learning time
- Use of formative data in student assessments to guide instruction
- Establishment of clear learning targets for each lesson plan
- Use of hands-on activities in class with a variety of modalities
- Meaningful peer interactions
- Active facilitation of higher-order thinking by students
- Cumulative content-driven exchanges between teacher and students
- Allowing teachers flexibility in the use of curriculum and related lesson planning
- Effective scaffolding by teacher
- Effective use of technology in the classroom
- Other (Please specify.)

17. Of the following instructional practices that you have observed from your teachers during the 2017–18 school year, which 5 were most impactful? (Please rank from 1 to 5, where 1 is the most impactful and 5 is the fifth most impactful.)

- Establishing positive relationships between the teacher and student
- Teacher support for student autonomy and leadership
- Maximizing learning time
- Use of formative data in student assessments to guide instruction
- Establishment of clear learning targets for each lesson plan
- Use of hands-on activities in class with a variety of instructional strategies
- Meaningful peer interactions
- Active teacher facilitation of higher-order thinking by students
- Cumulative content-driven exchanges between teacher and students across lessons and units
- Effective scaffolding by teacher
- Allowing teachers flexibility in the use of curriculum and related lesson planning
- Effective use of technology in the classroom
- Other (Please specify.)

___ Other (Please specify.)

18. Of the following teacher supports, which 5 have you found to be most impactful in improving instructional practices at your charter school campus during the 2017–18 school year? (Please rank from 1 to 5 where 1 is most impactful and 5 is fifth most impactful.)

- ___ Providing feedback to teachers based on walk-throughs or informal observations
- ___ Providing feedback to teachers based on formal, scheduled observations
- ___ Use of research-based rubrics (e.g., CLASS, Danielson) to give teachers useful feedback
- ___ Use of instructional rounds where teachers have opportunities to observe other teachers in the classroom
- ___ Use of professional learning communities (PLCs)
- ___ Co-teaching opportunities
- ___ Coaching support
- ___ Providing dedicated planning time for teachers to collaborate
- ___ Allowing teachers flexibility in the use of curriculum and related lesson planning
- ___ Use of student achievement data to gauge the performance of teachers
- ___ Review student performance data with teachers
- ___ Other (Please specify.)
- ___ Other (Please specify.)

19. Please describe instructional practices and supports in place at your campus during the 2017–18 school year that you feel are most important to maintaining the highest quality of instruction possible.

--OPEN ENDED RESPONSE

Working with Educationally Disadvantaged Students

20. Of the following approaches, which 5 have you found to be most impactful in closing the achievement gaps for educationally disadvantaged students (identified as being at risk of dropping out of school) at your charter school campus during the 2017–18 school year? (Please rank from 1 to 5 where 1 is most impactful and 5 is the fifth most impactful.)

- ___ Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
- ___ Social service supports
- ___ Special education services
- ___ Home visits by school counselors or teachers
- ___ Strong teacher-student relationships and connections
- ___ Small-group instruction in class
- ___ Individualized instruction in class
- ___ Differentiated in-class instruction
- ___ Strategies to improve student attendance
- ___ Targeted pull-out instruction by interventionist
- ___ In-school instructional or tutoring labs
- ___ Out-of-school learning opportunities

- Online learning tools for math and/or ELA
- Collaboration between teachers
- Other (Please specify.)
- Other (Please specify.)

21. Describe the methods you have found to be most effective in closing achievement gaps for educationally disadvantaged students (identified as being at risk of dropping out of school) at your charter school campus during the 2017–18 school year.

--- OPEN ENDED RESPONSE

Working with Low-Performing Students

22. Of the following instructional practices, which 5 have you found to be most impactful in closing the achievement gap for low-performing students (identified as being in the bottom 10% in math or reading) at your charter school campus during the 2017–18 school year? (Please rank from 1 to 5, where 1 is most impactful and 5 is the fifth most impactful.)

- Communications with parents regarding student performance
- Small-group instruction in class
- Individualized instruction in class
- Differentiated in-class instruction
- Flexible grouping strategies in class
- Strategies to improve student attendance
- Targeted pull-out instruction by interventionist
- In-school instructional or tutoring labs
- Online learning tools for math and/or ELA
- Before or after school tutoring or enrichment programs
- Summer school or summer instructional sessions
- Collaboration between teachers
- A unique use of technology to address student needs
- Other (Please specify.)
- Other (Please specify.)

23. During the 2017–18 school year, please indicate if students are assigned or tracked into any of the following classes (e.g., below grade, on-grade, above grade) based upon their CURRENT LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENT (e.g., test scores, prior grade-level performance) as opposed to by age alone.

- Reading/English Language Arts (Y/N)
- Mathematics (Y/N)
- Science (Y/N)
- Social Studies (Y/N)

24. Describe one approach you have found particularly effective in closing achievement gaps for low-performing students at your charter school campus during the 2017–18 school year. Why do you believe it worked exceptionally well?

--- OPEN ENDED RESPONSE

Student Discipline

25. Of the following approaches, which 5 have you found to be most impactful in maintaining positive student-to-teacher and student-to-student interactions at your charter school campus in 2017–18? (Please rank from 1 to 5 where 1 is most impactful and 5 is fifth most impactful.)

- PBIS
- Clear behavioral expectations
- Removal of disruptive students from the classroom
- Policy of no in-school or out-of-school suspensions
- Development of strong teacher-student relationships
- Use of contracts with parents regarding expectations and responsibilities
- Use of contracts with students regarding expectations and responsibilities
- Effective communications with parents
- Effective student engagement in the classroom
- Proactive steps to curb misbehavior in the classroom
- Strong anti-bullying policies
- Other (Please specify.)
- Other (Please specify.)

26. Did your campus encourage parents to sign a code of conduct, handbook, compact, or contract outlining campus expectations for the 2017–18 school year?

- Yes (Go to Question #27.)
- No (Skip to Question #28.)

27. [IF YES to Question #26] In which of the following areas are parents encouraged to agree to campus expectations? (Select all that apply.)

- a. Attendance at parent meetings, conferences, and open houses
- b. Parent attendance at other campus events
- c. Child school attendance/punctuality
- d. Participation in fundraising activities
- e. Participation in the school's parent/teacher organization
- f. Assistance and supervision in completion of homework
- g. Support of campus discipline procedures
- h. Support of campus uniform policy
- i. Other (Please describe.)

28. Did your campus encourage students to sign a code of conduct, handbook, compact, or contract outlining campus expectations for the 2017–18 school year?
- Yes (Go to Question #29.)
 - No (Skip to Question #30.)
29. [IF YES to Question 28] In which of the following areas are students encouraged to agree to campus expectations? (Select all that apply.)
- a. Daily attendance and punctuality
 - b. Responsible and acceptable personal behavior
 - c. Following campus and classroom rules
 - d. Uniform and grooming policies
 - e. Preparation for class (having appropriate materials)
 - f. Completion of homework
 - g. Respecting the rights of others (students, staff, other adults)
 - h. Other (Please describe.)
30. Prior to (or during) the 2017–18 school year, have staff on this campus trained in PBIS?
- Yes
- No

Teacher Recruitment and Retention

31. When did your campus administration begin recruiting teachers for the 2017–18 school year?
- Dropdown with month/year listed from earlier than May 2016, May 2016 through August 2017.
 - I did not need to recruit teachers for the 2017–18 school year.

32. **(Ask Only if Respondent DID NOT Answer “I didn’t need to recruit teachers for the 2017–18 school year “ for Q31)** When hiring new teachers for your charter school campus for the 2017–18 school year, which of the following were most important to you? (Please rank from 1 to 5 where 1 is most important and 5 is fifth most important.)

- Teacher fit with the mission of the charter school campus
- Teacher certification
- Prior experience working with the teacher
- Education level
- Number of years of teaching experience
- Passion for teaching
- Prior charter school teaching experience
- Prior school district teaching experience
- Content expertise
- Teacher fit with educational philosophy of the school
- Desire to work with at-risk population
- Strong demonstrated pedagogical skills
- Ability of teacher to adapt unstructured curriculum into effective lesson plans
- Other (Please describe.)
- Other (Please describe.)

33. **(Ask Only if Respondent DID NOT Answer “I didn’t need to recruit teachers for the 2017–18 school year” for Q31)** Of the following teacher recruitment methods, which 5 have you found to be most effective in attracting high-quality teachers to your campus for the 2017–18 school year? (Rank from 1 to 5, where 1 is most effective and 5 is the fifth most effective.)

- Current teachers recruiting colleagues
- Word of mouth about the school
- Online advertisements
- Job fairs
- Billboard advertisements
- Recruitment services (e.g., Indeed, Zip Recruiter)
- CMO or school district resources
- Social media (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn)
- Other (Please describe.)
- Other (Please describe.)

34. Of the following criteria, which 5 will carry the greatest weight when deciding whether to continue a teacher's employment from 2017–18 to the next year? (Rank from 1 to 5, where 1 carries the greatest weight and 5 carries the fifth-greatest weight.)

- Student performance
- Student engagement
- Classroom management
- Parent satisfaction with teacher performance
- Instructional effectiveness
- Collaboration with other teachers
- Attendance
- Cultural fit with campus
- Other (Please describe.)
- Other (Please describe.)

35. Approximately what percentage of teachers were asked to return to your campus between 2016–17 and 2017–18?

- 25% or less
- Between 25% and 50%
- Between 50% and 75%
- Between 75% and 90%
- More than 90%, but less than 100%
- 100% of teachers
- 2017–18 is the first year of operation for this campus

36. Approximately what percentage of teachers returned to your campus between 2016–17 and 2017–18?

- 25% or less
- Between 26% to 50%
- Between 51% to 75%
- Between 76% to 90%
- More than 90%, but less than 100%
- 100% of teachers
- Not Applicable — Our campus just began serving students in 2017–18

37. For teachers who were **not** renewed between 2016–17 and 2017–18, how many years, on average, did they work at your campus?

One year

2 to 3 years

4 to 5 years

6 to 10 years

More than 10 Years

Not Applicable — Our campus just began serving students in 2017–18, so all teachers are new to the campus

38. In preparation for the 2017–18 school year, which of the following did your campus require of teacher applicants during the hiring process? (Select all that apply.)

Written or online application

Resume

Proof of certification

Reference list

Interview with hiring principal

Interview with hiring committee chair

Demonstration/sample performance lesson with students

Demonstration/sample performance lesson with adults

Sample lesson plans/teaching portfolio

Other (Please specify.)

Other (Please specify.)

39. Of the following approaches, which 5 have been most effective to successfully retain high-quality teachers? (Rank from 1 to 5, where 1 is most effective and 5 is the fifth most effective).
- Classroom assistance (e.g., educational aides)
 - Flexibility in lesson planning
 - Technology in the classroom
 - Effective curriculum and supplemental materials
 - Smaller class sizes
 - Nonperformance-based differentiated pay for teachers
 - Incentive pay based on student and/or school performance metrics
 - Dedicated planning time
 - Structured PLCs
 - Regular feedback on instructional practices
 - Opportunities to participate in instructional rounds where teachers can observe other classrooms
 - Other (Please describe.)
 - Other (Please describe.)

40. If you recruited teachers for the 2017–18 school year, what methods were most effective in **recruiting** high-quality educators to your campus?
- OPEN ENDED RESPONSE

41. If your campus was open in 2016–17, what methods were most effective in **retaining** high-quality educators between the 2016–17 and 2017–18 school years?
- OPEN ENDED RESPONSE

Student Recruitment and Retention

42. For the 2017–18 school year, of the following student recruitment methods, which 5 have you found to be most effective in attracting students to enroll at your campus? (Rank from 1 to 5, where 1 is most effective and 5 is the fifth most effective.)
- Enrollment fairs
 - Public facing advertisements (e.g. billboards)
 - Open houses where information about the campus is presented
 - Published information about campus in community newsletters
 - Word of mouth from parents of currently enrolled students
 - Principal presentations at local events (e.g., Rotary Club)
 - Posted and/or distributed flyers about the campus in area neighborhoods
 - Social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.)
 - Charter school campus website
 - Other (Please describe.)
 - Other (Please describe.)

43. What methods were most effective in **recruiting** students for the 2017–18 school year?

--- OPEN ENDED RESPONSE

44. **(Only for campuses serving students in 2016–17 and 2017–18)** Considering retention between the 2016–17 and 2017–18 school years, of the following approaches for retaining students at your campus, which 5 have you found to be most effective? (Rank from 1 to 5, where 1 is most effective and 5 is the fifth most effective.)

- Effective communications between the campus leadership and parents
- Effective communications between teachers and parents
- Student-centered instruction
- Building meaningful relationships between teachers and students
- Demonstrated academic growth of students
- Rigorous curriculum
- Use of multiple instructional approaches to meet students' academic needs
- Effective strategies to meeting students' socio-emotional needs
- Establishment of a safe and collaborative environment at the campus
- Location of the campus
- Technology available for students at the campus
- Extracurricular activities and clubs available to students
- Other (Please describe.)
- Other (Please describe.)
- Not Applicable — Our campus just began serving students in 2017–18

45. If your campus was open in 2016–17, what methods were most effective in **retaining** students between the 2016–17 and 2017–18 school years?

--- OPEN ENDED RESPONSE

School Climate

46. Indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements related to the 2017–18 school year? (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree).

- a. Teachers at this campus trust each other.
- b. Teachers at this campus trust me as their principal.
- c. My campus has an inclusive working environment.
- d. There is a culture of professionalism at my campus.
- e. High value is placed on teamwork and collaboration at my campus.
- f. Staff morale is high at my campus.

47. Consider the 2017–18 school year culture and climate at your campus. From the following list of indicators of positive school climate, which 5 are the most important for your campus? (Please rank from 1 to 5, where 1 is the most important aspect to maintain a positive school climate and 5 is the fifth most important.)

- Campus staff share a common set of beliefs about schooling/learning
- Mutual respect for colleagues' ideas
- Culture of shared success
- Opportunities for teachers to collaborate
- Development of a family atmosphere
- Academic growth of students
- Socio-emotional growth of students
- Genuine care for students
- Adequate planning time to develop lesson plans
- Culture of respect between students and teachers
- Culture of respect among students (e.g., anti-bullying culture)
- Flexibility in lesson design and delivery
- Other (Please describe.)
- Other (Please describe.)

48. What effective approaches have you used at your campus to create a positive climate in 2017–18?

--- OPEN ENDED RESPONSE

Final Thoughts

49. What are the three most important things that have made your charter school campus effective in 2017–18?

--- OPEN ENDED RESPONSE

Appendix E: Principal Interview and Teacher Focus Group Protocols

Texas Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant Evaluation Principal Interview Questions – Start-Up Charter Schools

Introductions and Organizational-level practices

1. How long have you been in the field of education? Where were you before and how did you come to this charter school?
2. What is the mission of your charter school? What steps do you take to ensure that your charter school stays on mission?
3. Could you describe the composition of your campus leadership team? What is the primary role of the leadership team?
4. What do you do to get parents involved in their child's education at this charter school?
5. What planning activities have you found to be most important in getting your charter school started?
6. What organizational practices have you found to be most important in helping your school run efficiently?
7. **(If part of CMO or District)** How does your charter management organization or school district help to support your start-up activities? Of these activities, what have you found to be most helpful?
8. What challenges have you faced thus far in getting your charter school up and running
9. **(Ask if challenges are reported in Q8)** How have you overcome those challenges?
10. In what ways has TEA supported your charter school start-up activities? What has been helpful in terms of these supports?

Instructional-level practices

11. **(Cohort 1 only)** After your first year of operation, how would you describe the quality of instruction at your school? What adjustments (if any) did you make regarding quality of instruction in your second year of serving students?
12. **(Cohort 2 only)** While you have just begun serving students this fall, how would you describe the quality of instruction at your school? What adjustments (if any) do you plan to make regarding teaching and learning at your school?
13. What methods for providing the highest quality of instruction at your school are you finding to be most effective?
14. Does your school follow a set curriculum? If yes, how did you decide on this curriculum?
 - a. **If yes**, in what ways are teachers able to modify or make adaptations to any aspect of the curriculum?
 - b. **If yes**, what do you find particularly effective about this curriculum?
15. Has your school established professional learning communities (PLCs)?
 - a. **If yes**, is time set aside during the school day for teachers to participate in PLCs?
 - b. **If yes**, how are PLCs benefitting your campus?

- c. **If no**, are you planning to establish PLCs at your school?
16. Does your school use instructional rounds?
- a. **If yes**, how often do teachers participate in instructional rounds?
 - b. **If yes**, how are instructional rounds a benefit to your campus?
 - c. **If no**, are you planning to implement instructional rounds at your school? If so, when?
17. Do your teachers have access to formal coaching support?
18. **(Cohort 1)** To what extent do you tailor professional development (PD) to the individualized needs of the teacher? Please describe your process for making this happen.
(Cohort 2) To what extent will you tailor professional development (PD) to the individualized needs of the teacher? Please describe your process for making this happen.

Global Question Related to Student Challenges

19. What are the biggest challenges that face students enrolled at your school?

Educationally disadvantaged students

20. What services does your charter school offer to support students who are educationally disadvantaged (i.e., considered at risk of dropping out of school)?
21. **(Cohort 1 only)** What methods have you found to be most effective in closing the achievement gap for educationally disadvantaged students at this charter school?
22. **(Cohort 2 only)** What methods do you anticipate having the greatest impact on closing the achievement gap for educationally disadvantaged students at this charter school?

Lowest-performing students

23. What data are used to determine which students are the lowest-performing and may need additional supports?
24. In what ways does your school support the lowest-performing students?
25. How do you monitor the progress of lowest-performing students?
26. **(Cohort 1 only)** What methods have you found to be most effective in closing the achievement gap for low-performing students?
27. **(Cohort 2 only)** What methods do you anticipate having the greatest impact on closing the achievement gap for low-performing students?

Student discipline (5 minutes)

28. Does your charter school encourage students and/or parents to sign a contract with the school?
- a. What are the major tenets of these contracts?
 - b. What occurs when a student or parent fails to meet the terms of the contract?
29. **(Cohort 1 only)** What approaches have been most effective at reducing student behavioral issues at your school?
30. **(Cohort 2 only)** What approaches do you anticipate will have the biggest impact on reducing student behavioral issues at your school?

Student recruitment/retention

31. What is your target population for student recruitment? What methods of student recruitment have you found to be most effective?
32. How do parents and/or students learn about your school? What methods do you use to disseminate information about your school?
33. Are there any transportation services provided by your charter school available to the students? If yes, please explain how those services are provided?
34. **(Cohort 1 only)** Have recruitment practices evolved from your first to second year of operations? If so how?
35. **(Cohort 1 only)** What steps are you taking in your second year to ensure high rates of student retention?
36. **(Cohort 1 only)** What barriers or challenges have you encountered with regard to student retention?
37. **(Cohort 2 only)** What barriers or challenges have you encountered, or do you expect to encounter in your first year with respect to student retention?
38. Is enrollment at this school at full capacity? Is there a waiting list, or are you still recruiting more students?
 - a. **[If there is a waiting list]** How do you handle enrollment from the waiting list? Do you employ a “first come, first serve approach,” or is there a lottery system in place?
(If there is a lottery system in place)
 - b. Is there a sibling exemption in the lottery policy?
 - c. Are there any other exemptions to the lottery policy?
39. **(Cohort 1 only)** With regard to retaining your student population, what methods have you found to be most effective?
40. **(Cohort 2 only)** What do you need to have in place to ensure high student retention rates at your school?

Teacher recruitment/retention

41. What methods do you use to recruit potential teachers?
42. What methods have been most effective in recruiting highly-qualified educators to your charter school?
43. What qualifications and skills do you look for when recruiting teachers?
44. **(Cohort 1 only)** What criteria do you use to determine if a teacher is performing, at, above, or below the expected level?
(Cohort 2 only) What criteria will you use to determine if a teacher is performing, at, above, or below the expected level?
45. **(Cohort 1 only)** What steps are involved in bringing a teacher’s performance up to expectations?
(Cohort 2 only) What steps will be involved in bringing a teacher’s performance up to expectations?
46. **(Cohort 1 only)** What rewards or bonuses, if any, are available to high-performing teachers and other staff?

(Cohort 2 only) What rewards or bonuses, if any, will be available to high-performing teachers and other staff?

47. What methods do you use to retain highly qualified teachers at your charter school?

48. **(Cohort 1 only)** What methods have been most effective in retaining highly-qualified educators at your charter school?

49. **(Cohort 2 only)** What methods do you anticipate having the biggest impact on teacher retention at your charter school?

School climate

50. How would you characterize the school climate and teaching conditions at your school? Why do you feel that way?

51. What is your sense of the staff perception of school climate?

52. What is your sense of the overall perception of teaching conditions at your school? (*Interviewer note: adequate resources, planning time, curriculum*)

53. How would you describe staff morale?

54. What factors do you think play a part in creating the current conditions?

Closing Questions

55. What specific things do you think will make your charter school successful this year, and in years to come?

56. What guidance would you like from TEA or other high-performing charter schools to help you improve the quality of education for the students you serve?

**Texas Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant Evaluation
Teacher Focus Group Questions – Start-Up Charter Schools**

Introductions and Organizational-level practices

1. Let's take a few minutes for introductions. Please tell me:
 - a. Your name
 - b. What grades and subjects you teach this year.

Note for interviewer: Remind participants to state their name before providing an answer (to provide clarity during transcription/analysis. If need be, reiterate elements of confidentiality statement)

2. **(Ask each teacher to answer this question; follow-up on any questions the teacher does not answer)** Please describe what type of school you worked at before this (e.g., local ISD, another charter, working in industry, etc.), how you were recruited into your position at this school, and what interested you about this school or position?

Note for interviewer: Remind participants that they are now free to jump in and add to the conversation in any way, or any time; this is now supposed to be more conversational/discussion-based

3. In what ways were you involved in the planning process for getting this school off the ground?
4. What organizational practices have you found to be most important in getting this charter school off the ground?

Instructional-level practices

5. In what ways does the leadership at this school help support your lesson planning efforts?
6. In what ways does the leadership at this school help you to be a more effective teacher? That is, what types of supports are offered to you to help improve your craft as a teacher?
7. From an instructional perspective, what do you think is happening at this charter school that will make students academically successful?
8. Please describe the ways you support each other as teachers in terms of improving instructional effectiveness at this school. **Probes** (if no responses by teachers, probes may include PLCs, instructional rounds, departmental meetings, grade-level meetings, etc.)
9. **[Cohort 1 only]** How frequently do you attend professional development (PD) sessions? What kind of PD sessions do you attend? How helpful are the PD sessions you attend?
[Cohort 2 only] How frequently will you attend professional development (PD) sessions? What kind of PD sessions do you expect to attend? How helpful are the PD sessions you attend?
10. **[Cohort 1 only]** Please describe how teacher performance is evaluated at this school?
[Cohort 2 only] Please describe how teacher performance will be evaluated at this school?
 - a. **[Cohort 1 only]** How often are teacher classroom observations conducted? How is feedback provided to teachers?
[Cohort 2 only] How often will teacher classroom observations be conducted? How will feedback be provided to teachers?

- b. **[Cohort 1 only]** What are the consequences (if any) for teachers who are not meeting expectations?
- c. **[Cohort 2 only]** What will be the consequences (if any) for teachers who are not meeting expectations?
- d. **[Cohort 1 only]** What steps are involved in bringing a teacher's performance up to expectations?
[Cohort 2 only] What steps will be involved in bringing a teacher's performance up to expectations?

Generic Question Related to Challenges with Student Population

- 11. What are the biggest challenges that face students enrolled at your school?

Educationally disadvantaged and low-performing students

- 12. How do you tailor your instruction to support educationally disadvantaged (i.e., students who have been identified as being at risk of dropping out of school) or your lowest-performing students?
- 13. What do you do differently for these low-performing students (i.e., students in the bottom 10% in reading and math) to improve their academic results?

Student discipline

- 14. Please describe your general approach to managing student behaviors in your classroom.
- 15. Which classroom management approaches have been most effective?
- 16. In what ways do school leaders support you with disciplinary issues?

Student recruitment/retention

- 17. What role, if any, do teachers at your charter school play in the student recruitment process? If you do play a role, what approaches to student recruitment have you found to be most effective?
- 18. **[Cohort 1 only]** As a teacher, what things do you do to help promote student retention at your charter school?
[Cohort 2 only] As a teacher, what things will you do to help promote student retention at your charter school?
- 19. **[Cohort 1 only]** What factors do you think are most important in getting students to return to your school each year?
[Cohort 2 only] What factors do you think will be most important in getting students to return to your school each year?

School climate

- 20. How would you characterize the climate of your school? Why do you feel that way?
- 21. How would you characterize the teaching conditions at this school? Why do you feel that way?
- 22. What factors influence your decision to remain at this school? What factors would cause you to consider leaving your position at this school?

Closing Question(s)

23. What advice would you like to receive, or do you wish you had received about best practices with regard to:
- a. Lesson planning?
 - b. Instructional quality?
 - c. Recruiting and retaining students?

Texas Public Charter School Program Start-Up Grant Evaluation Teacher Focus Group Questions – High-performing charter schools

Introductions and Organizational-level practices

1. Let's take a few minutes for introductions. Please tell me:
 - a. Your name
 - b. What grades and subjects you teach this year
 - c. How long you have been at this charter school
2. **(Ask each teacher to answer this question)** Please describe what type of school you worked at before this (e.g., local ISD, another charter, working in industry, etc.), how you were recruited into your position at this school, and what interested you about this school or position?
3. ***Your school has been identified as a high-performing charter school.*** What do you think your school is doing that separates it from other charter schools across the state?
4. What organizational practices have you found to be most important to the success of this charter school?

Instructional-level practices

5. In what ways does the leadership at this school help support your lesson planning efforts?
6. In what ways does the leadership at this school help you to be a more effective teacher? That is, what types of supports are offered to you to help improve your craft as a teacher?
7. From an instructional perspective, what do you think is happening at this charter school that has or will make students academically successful?
8. Please describe the ways you support each other as teachers in terms of improving instructional effectiveness at this school. **Probes** (if no responses by teachers, probes may include PLCs, instructional rounds, departmental meetings, grade-level meetings, etc.)
9. How frequently do you attend professional development (PD) sessions?
 - a. What kind of PD sessions do you attend?
 - b. How helpful are the PD sessions you attend?
10. Please describe how teacher performance is evaluated at this school.
 - a. How often are teacher classroom observations conducted? How is feedback provided to teachers?
 - b. What are the consequences (if any) for teachers who are not meeting expectations?
 - c. What steps are involved in bringing a teacher's performance up to expectations?

Global Question Related to Student Challenges

11. What are the biggest challenges that face students enrolled at your school?

Educationally disadvantaged and low-performing students

12. How do you tailor your instruction to support educationally disadvantaged (i.e., students who have been identified as being at risk of dropping out of school) or your lowest-performing students?
13. What do you do differently for these low-performing students (i.e., students in the bottom 10% in reading and math) to improve their academic results?

Student discipline

14. Please describe your general approach to managing student behaviors in your classroom.
15. Which classroom management approaches have been most effective?
16. In what ways do school leaders support you with disciplinary issues?

Student recruitment/retention

17. What role, if any, do teachers at your charter school play in the student recruitment process?
 - a. **If teachers play a role:** What approaches to student recruitment have you found to be most effective?
18. As a teacher, what things do you do to help promote student retention at your charter school?
19. What factors do you think are most important in getting students to return to your school each year?

School climate

20. How would you characterize the climate of your school? Why do you feel that way?
21. How would you characterize the teaching conditions at this school? Why do you feel that way?
22. What factors influence your decision to remain at this school?
 - a. What factors would cause you to consider leaving your position at this school?

Closing Questions

23. What advice would you give to new Start-Up Charter School instructors about best practices with regard to:
 - d. operational effectiveness
 - e. lesson planning
 - f. instructional quality
 - g. recruiting and retaining students
 - h. recruiting/retaining high-quality teachers?

Appendix F: Impact Analysis Tables

Table F.1 shows the regression coefficients for the models estimated for the three different grade ranges, with the first three columns showing the results from the three math regressions, and the last three columns for the reading regressions.

Table F.1. Regression Output for Impact Models of Charter School Start-up Grantee Campuses, 2016–17

Variable	Middle Schools, STAAR Math	Elem Schools, STAAR Math	K-12 Schools, Algebra I EOC	Middle Schools, STAAR Reading	Elem Schools, STAAR Reading	K-12 Schools, English I EOC
Baseline math z-score	.609* (.024)	.614* (.022)	.356* (.071)	.194* (.021)	.219* (.025)	.296* (.087)
Baseline reading z-score	.216* (.025)	.223* (.022)	.073 (.094)	.564* (.024)	.593* (.025)	.648* (.103)
Female	-.053 (.031)	-.038 (.035)	.039 (.102)	.006 (.031)	.026 (.030)	.074 (.123)
Economically disadvantaged	-.036 (.033)	-.059 (.035)	-.016 (.099)	-.022 (.034)	-.057 (.035)	-.038 (.145)
English Learner	.012 (.049)	-.009 (.034)	-.391* (.148)	-.179* (.046)	-.173* (.034)	-.075 (.172)
SPED	-.079 (.051)	-.077 (.053)	-.425 (.245)	-.304* (.056)	-.117 (.048)	-.176 (.225)
African American	-.013 (.049)	-.022 (.066)	.013 (.150)	-.075 (.051)	-.055 (.061)	.328 (.178)
Hispanic	-.034 (.052)	-.040 (.058)	.021 (.161)	-.064 (.050)	-.042 (.056)	.365 (.170)
Other race	.093 (.057)	.187 (.075)	.551* (.189)	-.068 (.055)	-.012 (.069)	.269 (.215)
Number of observations	1,492	1,727	90	1,626	1,722	84
Adjusted R-squared	0.71	0.64	0.69	0.66	0.64	0.74

*Notes: Robust standard errors in parenthesis. * indicates statistically significant where $p < 0.01$. Test scores are standardized with a statewide mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. They are presented in z-score units. Baseline and outcome tests are from statewide assessments collected by TEA. No baseline differences are significant at the 0.05 level, two-tailed test. Reported coefficients are from regressions of the relevant outcome variable on a treatment indicator and other covariates and adjusting for students' baseline test scores in reading and math and students' demographic characteristics. All regressions use robust standards errors and the student is the unit of assignment and unit of analysis.*

Table F.2 shows math and reading score outcomes for three different grade ranges. The first four rows show the elementary school results, for the four K-6 grantee schools. The next six rows show the middle school results for the grantee schools starting in Grade 6. Both models use STAAR test scores as the outcomes. The final row shows the results for the high school EOC model, for the one school with enough students to be included (the 6-10 school had too few students with EOC scores).

Table F.2. Results of Impact Analysis of Charter School Start-up Grantee Campuses, 2016–17

School Name	Grade range	STAAR Mathematics Impact estimate	STAAR Reading impact estimate	Number of treatment students
<i>Elementary school results, STAAR test outcomes</i>				
CAMPUS G	K-6	0.22*	0.08	88
CAMPUS H	K-6	-0.08	0.08	255
CAMPUS I	K-6	-0.14	-0.07	128
CAMPUS J	K-6	-0.14	-0.03	110
<i>Middle school results, STAAR test outcomes</i>				
CAMPUS A	6-7	0.47*	0.43*	34
–CAMPUS B	6-12	0.29*	0.09	288
CAMPUS C	6-7	0.03	0.03	63
CAMPUS D	6-8	-0.08	0.07	39
CAMPUS E	6-8	-0.21*	-0.06	41
CAMPUS F	6-10	-0.36*	-0.10	36
<i>K-12 school results, EOC test outcomes</i>				
–CAMPUS K	6-12	0.20*	0.20*	23

Notes: * indicates statistically significant where $p < 0.05$. Test scores are standardized with a statewide mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. They are presented in z-score units. Baseline and outcome tests are from statewide assessments collected by TEA. No baseline differences are significant at the 0.05 level, two-tailed test. Reported impacts are from regressions of the relevant outcome variable on a treatment indicator and other covariates and adjusting for students' baseline test scores in reading and math and students' demographic characteristics. All regressions use robust standard errors and the student is the unit of assignment and unit of analysis. Data shown in this table include imputed values for baseline variables but not for outcome variables.

Table F.3 shows a descriptive look at data on early reading indicators and Kindergarten readiness indicators for the four start-up grantee campuses with elementary grades. Because no baseline data is available for students on these outcomes, a regression-based impact analysis is not feasible.

Table F.3. Kindergarten Readiness and Early Reading Indicators for Charter School Start-up Grantee Campuses, 2016–17

School Name	Kindergarten readiness	Number of students	Accelerated reading instruction eligibility	Number of students
<i>Elementary charter school start-up grantee schools</i>				
CAMPUS G	48%	29	42%	112
CAMPUS H	50%	106	49%	313
CAMPUS I	58%	60	49%	183
CAMPUS J	94%	64	22%	162
<i>Elementary schools in feeder districts</i>				
Overall feeder sample	62%	82,064	36%	331,741

In addition to estimating charter school campus impacts among all students, the study also examined whether impacts differ for different student groups. To estimate student group impacts, the treatment group indicator is interacted with an indicator of whether a student is a member of the relevant student group under consideration. The impact estimate for that student group is the sum of the estimated coefficient on the treatment variable and the estimated coefficient on the interaction term.

Tables F.4 through F.7 show the results of the different student group analyses. For each student group and model, the first column shows the number of students in that student group, followed by the math and reading impacts for that student group. In cases where there are fewer than 20 students in a student group at a school, impacts for that student group at that school are set to missing. For high schools none of the student groups had 20 or more students, so the high school is omitted from the student group results.

Table F.4. Results of Impact Analysis of At-Risk and Low-Performing Student Groups at Charter School Start-up Grantee Campuses, 2016–17

School Name	Number of at-risk students	Math impact, at-risk students	Reading impact, at-risk students	Number of low-performing students	Math impact, low-performing students	Reading impact, low-performing students
<i>Elementary school results, STAAR test outcomes</i>						
CAMPUS G	58	0.25	0.15	49	0.21	0.07
CAMPUS H	164	-0.11	0.11	138	-0.06	0.06
CAMPUS I	66	-0.20	-0.05	67	-0.12	-0.15
CAMPUS J	30	-0.16	-0.17	39	-0.21	-0.28
<i>Middle school results, STAAR test outcomes</i>						
CAMPUS A	17			20	0.40	0.41
–CAMPUS B	151	0.23	0.12	96	0.13	0.04
CAMPUS C	45	0.07	0.01	40	-0.03	-0.03
CAMPUS D	18			24	-0.12	0.01
CAMPUS E	25	-0.27	-0.13	27	-0.17	-0.12
CAMPUS F	25	-0.32	-0.10	29	-0.35	-0.11

Notes: Test scores are standardized with a statewide mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. They are presented in z-score units. Baseline and outcome tests are from statewide assessments collected by TEA. No baseline differences are significant at the 0.05 level, two-tailed test. Reported impacts are from regressions of the relevant outcome variable on a treatment indicator and other covariates and adjusting for students' baseline test scores in reading and math and students' demographic characteristics. All regressions use robust standard errors and the student is the unit of assignment and unit of analysis. Data shown in this table include imputed values for baseline variables but not for outcome variables. Impacts are set to missing for schools with fewer than 20 students in the model for that student group.

Table F.5. Results of Impact Analysis of African American and Hispanic Student Groups at Charter School Start-up Grantee Campuses, 2016–17

School Name	Number of Black students	Math impact, Black students	Reading impact, Black students	Number of Hispanic students	Math impact, Hispanic students	Reading impact, Hispanic students
<i>Elementary school results, STAAR test outcomes</i>						
CAMPUS G	42	0.20	0.04	29	0.08	0.14
CAMPUS H	4			238	-0.08	0.08
CAMPUS I	45	-0.18	-0.16	61	-0.10	-0.04
CAMPUS J	3			20	-0.09	-0.04
<i>Middle school results, STAAR test outcomes</i>						
CAMPUS A	1			5		
–CAMPUS B	103	0.37	0.15	69	0.25	0.13
CAMPUS C	11			39	0.09	-0.07
CAMPUS D	10			16		
CAMPUS E	31	-0.30	-0.12	7		
CAMPUS F	1			6		

Notes: Test scores are standardized with a statewide mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. They are presented in z-score units. Baseline and outcome tests are from statewide assessments collected by TEA. No baseline differences are significant at the 0.05 level, two-tailed test. Reported impacts are from regressions of the relevant outcome variable on a treatment indicator and other covariates and adjusting for students' baseline test scores in reading and math and students' demographic characteristics. All regressions use robust standard errors and the student is the unit of assignment and unit of analysis. Data shown in this table include imputed values for baseline variables but not for outcome variables. Impacts are set to missing for schools with fewer than 20 students in the model for that student group.

Table F.6. Results of Impact Analysis of Female and Economically Disadvantaged Student Groups at Charter School Start-up Grantee Campuses, 2016–17

School Name	Number of female students	Math impact, female	Reading impact, female	Number of economically disadvantaged students	Math impact, economically disadvantaged students	Reading impact, economically disadvantaged students
<i>Elementary school results, STAAR test outcomes</i>						
CAMPUS G	42	0.29	0.07	64	0.16	0.13
CAMPUS H	112	0.02	0.14	195	-0.05	0.10
CAMPUS I	78	-0.12	-0.08	90	-0.08	-0.02
CAMPUS J	48	-0.29	-0.15	18		
<i>Middle school results, STAAR test outcomes</i>						
CAMPUS A	14		0.43	16		
–CAMPUS B	148	0.13	0.09	136	0.32	0.16
CAMPUS C	32	-0.03	0.04	48	0.03	-0.04
CAMPUS D	18			17		
CAMPUS E	21	-0.15	-0.08	29	-0.27	-0.08
CAMPUS F	20	-0.12	-0.10	22	-0.25	0.04

Notes: Test scores are standardized with a statewide mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. They are presented in z-score units. Baseline and outcome tests are from statewide assessments collected by TEA. No baseline differences are significant at the 0.05 level, two-tailed test. Reported impacts are from regressions of the relevant outcome variable on a treatment indicator and other covariates and adjusting for students' baseline test scores in reading and math and students' demographic characteristics. All regressions use robust standard errors and the student is the unit of assignment and unit of analysis. Data shown in this table include imputed values for baseline variables but not for outcome variables. Impacts are set to missing for schools with fewer than 20 students in the model for that student group.

Table F.7. Results of Impact Analysis of EL and Special Education Student Groups at Charter School Start-up Grantee Campuses, 2016–17

School Name	Number of EL	Math impact, EL	Reading impact, EL	Number of SPED students	Math impact, SPED students	Reading impact, SPED students
<i>Elementary school results, STAAR test outcomes</i>						
CAMPUS G	34	0.35	0.08	5		
CAMPUS H	85	-0.12	0.02	23	-0.25	-0.07
CAMPUS I	28	-0.06	0.05	7		
CAMPUS J	1			10		
<i>Middle school results, STAAR test outcomes</i>						
CAMPUS A	3			4		
–CAMPUS B	45	0.28	0.09	16		
CAMPUS C	25	0.06	0.05	9		
CAMPUS D	3			5		
CAMPUS E	1			6		
CAMPUS F	0			7		

Notes: Test scores are standardized with a statewide mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. They are presented in z-score units. Baseline and outcome tests are from statewide assessments collected by TEA. No baseline differences are significant at the 0.05 level, two-tailed test. Reported impacts are from regressions of the relevant outcome variable on a treatment indicator and other covariates and adjusting for students' baseline test scores in reading and math and students' demographic characteristics. All regressions use robust standard errors and the student is the unit of assignment and unit of analysis. Data shown in this table include imputed values for baseline variables but not for outcome variables. Impacts are set to missing for schools with fewer than 20 students in the model for that student group.

Table F.8 compares the math impact estimates for start-up grantee campuses to the size of the local achievement gap, both the gap between white and African American/Hispanic students and the gap between higher- and lower-income students, as measured by eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch. The local achievement gap for this comparison is measured as the difference in average performance across different student groups for students enrolled in the feeder districts for each charter school. This comparison occurs separately for elementary, middle, and high schools. So, for instance, if the impact of a grantee school is 0.3 standard deviations, and in the local school district there is a gap of 0.5 standard deviations between the average test scores of African American/Hispanic students and white students, then the size of the impact produced by that grantee school would be equivalent to about 60% of the local white African American/Hispanic test score gap.

These achievements are different for each school, as they are based on the feeder districts that each school is located near. The race/ethnicity gap is the difference between the average standardized math score for white students in nearby districts and the average score for African American and Hispanic students in those districts. Similarly, the economic disadvantage gap is the difference between the average scores for students who are not economically disadvantaged and those who are economically disadvantaged. For math scores, the race/ethnicity gap ranges from 0.26 to 0.76, and the economic disadvantage gap ranges from 0.28 to 0.56.

Table F.8. Math Impacts for Charter School Start-up Grantee Campuses Compared to Race/ethnicity and Economically Disadvantaged Student Test Score Gaps, 2016–17

School Name	Math Impact estimate	Race/ethnicity test score gap	Impact as percent of gap	FRL test score gap	Impact as percent of gap
<i>Elementary school results, STAAR test outcomes</i>					
CAMPUS G	0.22*	0.76	29%	0.45	49%
CAMPUS H	-0.08	0.37	22%	0.56	14%
CAMPUS I	-0.14	0.69	20%	0.49	29%
CAMPUS J	-0.14	0.55	25%	0.30	47%
<i>Middle school results, STAAR test outcomes</i>					
CAMPUS A	0.47*	0.33	143%	0.39	121%
–CAMPUS B	0.29*	0.74	39%	0.47	62%
CAMPUS C	0.03	0.58	5%	0.28	11%
CAMPUS D	-0.08	0.71	11%	0.47	17%
CAMPUS E	-0.21*	0.73	29%	0.43	49%
CAMPUS F	-0.36*	0.26	138%	0.39	92%
<i>K-12 school results, EOC test outcomes</i>					
–CAMPUS K	0.20*	0.74	27%	0.47	43%

Notes: * indicates statistically significant where $p < 0.05$. Test scores are standardized with a statewide mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. They are presented in z-score units. Baseline and outcome tests are from statewide assessments collected by TEA. No baseline differences are significant at the 0.05 level, two-tailed test. Reported impacts are from regressions of the relevant outcome variable on a treatment indicator and other covariates and adjusting for students' baseline test scores in reading and math and students' demographic characteristics. All regressions use robust standard errors and the student is the unit of assignment and unit of analysis. Data shown in this table include imputed values for baseline variables but not for outcome variables.

Table F.9 compares the reading impact estimates for start-up grantee campuses to the size of the local achievement gap, both the gap between white and African American/Hispanic students and the gap between higher- and lower-income students, as measured by eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch. The race/ethnicity gap ranges from 0.31 to 0.94, and the economic disadvantage gap ranges from 0.43 to 0.66, indicating that the test score gaps tend to be slightly larger for reading than for math.

Table F.9. Reading Impacts for Charter School Start-up Grantee Campuses Compared to Race/ethnicity and Economically Disadvantaged Student Test Score Gaps, 2016–17

School Name	Reading impact estimate	Race/ethnicity test score gap	Impact as percent of gap	FRL test score gap	Impact as percent of gap
<i>Elementary school results, STAAR test outcomes</i>					
CAMPUS G	0.08	0.95	8%	0.58	14%
CAMPUS H	0.08	0.45	18%	0.62	13%
CAMPUS I	-0.07	0.88	8%	0.66	11%
CAMPUS J	-0.03	0.74	4%	0.45	7%
<i>Middle school results, STAAR test outcomes</i>					
CAMPUS A	0.43*	0.49	88%	0.58	74%
–CAMPUS B	0.09	0.94	10%	0.62	15%
CAMPUS C	0.03	0.76	4%	0.43	7%
CAMPUS D	0.07	0.88	8%	0.63	11%
CAMPUS E	-0.06	0.91	7%	0.59	10%
CAMPUS F	-0.10	0.31	32%	0.47	21%
<i>K-12 school results, EOC test outcomes</i>					
–CAMPUS K	0.20*	0.94	21%	0.62	32%

Notes: * indicates statistically significant where $p < 0.05$. Test scores are standardized with a statewide mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. They are presented in z-score units. Baseline and outcome tests are from statewide assessments collected by TEA. No baseline differences are significant at the 0.05 level, two-tailed test. Reported impacts are from regressions of the relevant outcome variable on a treatment indicator and other covariates and adjusting for students' baseline test scores in reading and math and students' demographic characteristics. All regressions use robust standard errors and the student is the unit of assignment and unit of analysis. Data shown in this table include imputed values for baseline variables but not for outcome variables.