



## Charter opponents don't have Ohio to kick around anymore

By Jim Waters

During the raging debate in recent years about whether Kentucky would join America's education civilization by allowing charter schools, Ohio's dismal charter performance became a favorite whipping boy of school-choice opponents.

Less than three years ago, the headline atop a 1,000-word exposé in The Washington Post on the Buckeye State's charter schools read: ["Troubled Ohio charter schools have become a joke – literally."](#)

Ohio's bad charter schools provided piles of [fodder](#) for Kentucky's anti-choice zealots committed to keeping these schools out of the Bluegrass State.

Worse is that Ohio's failures gave charter-school opponents nationwide a convenient ploy to divert attention away from the decades-long academic failure of many school districts in other states, including Kentucky's largest in Jefferson County, where parents would leap at the opportunity of enrolling their children in charters – if only they had it.

However, as an old Bob Dylan hit heralds: "The Times They Are A-Changin'."

Confirmation of the truth in Dylan's lyrics is found in the newly released National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results showing [dramatic improvement](#) in black charter school students' performance in Cleveland, formerly a most-troubled area for Ohio's charter schools which led in large part to the Post's article.

Cleveland's black charter-school students demonstrated a surprisingly quick turnaround and now significantly outperform blacks in the Rock and Roll Capital of the World's traditional public education system.

NAEP reports that fourth-grade and eighth-grade blacks in Cleveland's charter schools outperformed their black peers in traditional public schools by 13 points or more in reading and mathematics, including an immense 22-point difference in fourth-grade reading.

Bluegrass Institute analyst and national NAEP expert Richard Innes notes that for blacks in Cleveland charter schools to outperform their peers in traditional schools by such margins is "something very hard for charter schools to do" for many reasons.

"For one, it takes a really big score" to achieve such a "statistically significant difference," Innes said.

The challenge of turning in a performance like Cleveland's charters is better understood by keeping in mind that, as Innes notes, "students don't instantly turn into scholars when they enter charter schools."

Sound analysis like that done by scholars at Stanford University's Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) shows it takes students about [three years](#) after enrolling in charter schools to fully benefit.

After all, the reason many parents choose charters in the first place is that their children had fallen behind in a traditional public school.

Since NAEP tests include charter students who haven't fully blossomed, the scores often understate great work occurring in these schools of choice.

All of which offers a stark contrast in the recent performance between charter and non-charter students in Cleveland with the financial mismanagement, corruption and academic failure that dominated the news regarding charters from Cincinnati to Cleveland a few years ago.

Plus, this turnaround occurred without causing financial harm to the city's traditional schools.

During the 2016-17 school year, the ACCEL Turnaround Schools performed better than the Cleveland Community Schools and at nearly the same level as the municipal city school district although 99 percent of its students were classified by the Ohio Department of Education as "economically disadvantaged" and the charters spent only [\\$8,500 per student](#) compared to the \$21,000 the municipal district expended to get nearly identical results.

Not only do Kentucky's school-choice opponents no longer have Ohio's – or at least Cleveland's – charter schools to kick around anymore, but here's a city that turned around its failing charter-school performance in just a few years and at half the cost.

What a contrast with our state, its 27 years of the Kentucky Education Reform Act, [increasing achievement gaps](#) and gobs of additional money?

It's an amazing achievement which even the most irrational and vociferous charter-school opponent cannot credibly dismiss.

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