

Polk LWV Summary of Charter School Study*

1. At the present time, Polk has 24 charter schools. None are run by management companies, although we have had in the past. (see list of closed charters)
2. Only the Montessori charters have a board member from outside the county.
3. All of the Polk charters have personnel with the appropriate State of Florida certification.
4. At the present time Polk has no charters that are run by religious groups. Only one is housed in a religious facility and that is temporary.
5. There are 3 Polk charters that are ESE centers. They have the appropriate personnel. The cluster or center option is not available to district schools because of federal and state regulations prohibiting clustering.
6. Several of the programs cited by the charter schools as innovative are or have already been in use in the district schools.
7. There are 8 charters who were not graded by the state. Of those, 3 were the ESE centers- 1 was Lakeland Montessori Schoolhouse where students are ungraded and do not receive grades for course work, although they do take the FCAT. Another, New Beginnings, says its student population could not meet the attendance requirements for grading by the state so would always be an "F" School. The other 2 are the collegiate schools connected to Polk State which did not have enough students in their programs to qualify. (See below)

See <http://schoolgrades.fldoe.org/pdf/1112/SchoolGradesTAP2012.pdf> and www.orlandosentinel.com/orl-special-charterschools-part1,0,5859445.htmlpage

"Pursuant to State Board Rule, the Commissioner will determine the school types to earn school grades. Schools that meet all of the following criteria will receive school grades: For reading and math performance measures, the school serves at least 30 full-year-enrolled students⁵ with valid assessment scores in reading and math, including banked end-of-course (EOC) assessment scores for entering 9th graders as applicable (for high schools, the minimum number of scores required in math is now 10 instead of 30); and For reading and math learning gains measures, the school serves at least 30 full-year-enrolled students⁶ with valid assessment scores in reading and math in both the current year and the previous year, not counting banked EOC scores. (For high school math learning gains and Low 25% learning gains, the minimum number of scores is set at 10 students instead of 30.)"

8. Of the 9 charters that received an "A" grade from the state, only 1 had demographics that came close to the district in % of free/reduced lunch students or % of minorities. All but 2 had far fewer of each group than the district.
9. The 2 charter schools that received a "C" from the state, had student percentages that were the same as the district.

10. Some charters blame their lack of diversity and their “inability” to keep retained students on their charter provisions that require lottery admissions and/or lack of interest by students living in their attendance zones. Others seem able to overcome those problems. (Charters are allowed to comply with the class size amendment with school wide census figures, rather than for each classroom, which was enough to allow some charters to retain students without affecting their lottery admissions.)
11. There were 3 charters whose minority enrollment and/or enrollment of economically disadvantaged students was considerably lower than the district had no plans to increase their diversity. These 3 charters also dismiss for low grades and poor FCAT scores.
12. Keeping retained students or students who have poor scores on the FCAT has lowered the school grade for at least one of the charters
13. Salaries at thirteen charters are mostly less than the district. In 6 schools they were about the same and in at least 1 the salaries were higher than the district scale. In 2 schools it was hard to determine because information was missing from the state website. (Most of the schools whose salaries are less than the district also give bonuses, some across the board, others based on “merit”.)
14. Several charters had off site training for teachers
15. Most of the charters had parent contracts requiring them to attend teacher conferences and “support the school’s policies” but did not require them to volunteer.
16. Several charters had overnight trips for students
17. At least one charter has amended their original charter. Others said that the terms of their charters cannot be changed.
18. All of the Polk charters appear to have adequate or better technology programs already in place to meet the new state guidelines
19. Several startup charters have no media centers and/or media specialists, relying instead on Nooks, I-Pads, etc.
20. Several other startup charters have very small media centers that would not meet state standards for regular district schools.
21. The classroom sizes in several of the startup charters are too small to meet state standards for district schools.
22. All of the Polk charters interviewed participate in the Federal Lunch Program but the cost of student lunches varied among charter schools.
23. None of the charters in Polk have been asked to share any of what they consider their successful programs with the district, although some individual teachers have shown an interest in adopting aspects of the programs. Charter personnel are not included in principals’ meetings or other informative meetings for district personnel. At least one of the charters would be interested in partnering with the district to do pilot programs.
24. The State of Florida grades charters who dismiss students or counsel out failing students, students who do poorly on the FCAT or students who must be retained at grade level on the same grading scale as regular public schools and charters who do not dismiss for these reasons.

*Sources:

1. Interviews with all charter schools in Polk except Berkley Accelerated Middle, Polk Pre Collegiate, and Polk State Collegiate, Lakeland who did not respond to repeated requests for an

interview. Interviewers were: Charlene Bennett, Larry Hardaway, Mary Jo Jarrett, Paula Mims, Georgianna Pentinen, Connie Prince, Sue Schultz, and Nancy Simmons

2. State of FL Dept. of Ed website for teachers' salaries listed by county, analyzed by Lillian Blessing, Ruby Stinson, and Terry Wilson
3. State of FL Dept. of Ed on the grading system for schools in FL
3. Various charter school websites- the interviewers
4. School Board of Polk County website for charter schools, SPAR report for 2012-2013- Nancy Simmons
5. Proofers- Connie Prince, Zita Stanley

Additional information from the web- gathered by Terry Wilson

U of Central FL Research <http://stateimpact.npr.org/florida2012/11/15researcher-florida-district-schools-outperform-charter-schools-on-average/>

PTA-FL <http://floridapta.org/index.php/advocacy/legislation/advocacy-tool-kit?view=document&id=319>

FL Schools Boards Assn. <http://www.fsba.org/userfiles/fiel/3c%291014-Proposed-Platform.pdf>

FL Assn. Of District School Superintendents

<http://www.fadss.org/docs/content/2013%20Legislative%20Session/Final%20Platform%2012413.pdf>

FL Ed Assn. <http://feaweb.org/charter-schools1>

Am Fed. Of Teachers <http://www.aft.org/issues/schoolchoice/charters>

NEA <http://www.nea.org/home/16332.htm>

(for complete list of websites as well as newspaper articles, please see members packets or Polk League website.)