Dropout Rate for Texas Charter Schools Triples the State Rate

IDRA Attrition Analysis Shows Charter Schools Lose 44% of their Black Students

by Christina Quintanilla-Muñoz, Ph.D.

Charter schools in Texas have substantially higher dropout and attrition rates than traditional public schools. Charter schools are losing one in three students compared to one in five lost to attrition by traditional public schools.

Expansion of Charter Schools in Texas Needs Accountability

In 1995, the Texas Legislature authorized a pilot program of 20 open enrollment charter schools. What began as a small experiment has ballooned despite little or no evidence of effectiveness or protections against their harm on the ability of public schools to serve students and families in their communities.

Recent policy actions in Texas reflect a broader shift toward expanding charter school infrastructure. House Bill 2 in 2025 represented a major $8.5 billion investment in public education. The bill provided funding for student and teacher programs through specific allotments, but also expanded facilities funding for charter schools on a per-pupil basis (Latham Sikes, 2025).

In 2017, the legislature laid the groundwork for this shift. HB 21 moved charter facilities funding from a capped grant program to a per-student formula that was capped statewide at $60 million.

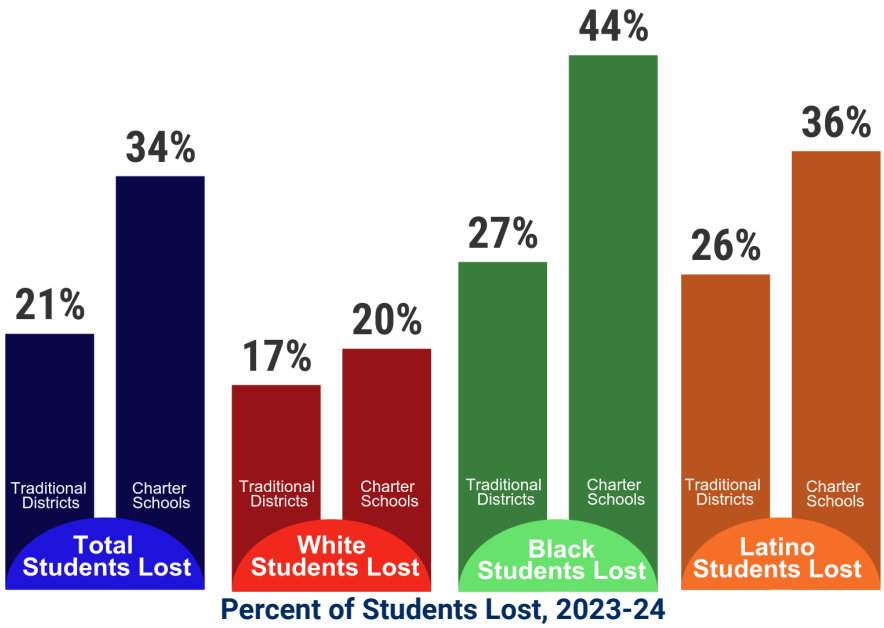
HB 2 in 2025 removed this cap to further embed charter facilities funding in the school funding formula (TEA, 2025).

These policy developments signal a clear, coordinated trajectory toward expanding charter schools and publicly funded systems outside of traditional public education. This underscores the need for continued transparency and accountability across all school models.

In 2017, IDRA studied the annual dropout and longitudinal graduation rates in Texas charter schools, showing that the Class of 2016's longitudinal graduation rate was 62% in charter districts, compared to 90% in traditional school districts and the state average of 89% (Johnson, 2017).

Charter schools are losing one in three students compared to one in five lost to attrition by traditional public schools.

Statewide, Charter Schools have Much Higher Attrition Rates than Traditional Public School Districts



Percent of Students Lost, 2023-24

IDRA, 2026

This year, IDRA conducted an attrition analysis of charter school districts by county, using the same methodology as IDRA's annual traditional public school attrition study.

Charter School Annual Dropout Rate More Than Triples the State Rate

TEA reports annual dropout data for Texas traditional public schools and in-district charter schools (as well as other nontraditional school models, such as Early College High Schools) in its annual publication, *Secondary Completion and Dropouts in Texas Public Schools*. In 2023-24, the annual high school dropout rate for charter schools was 6.3%. This is much higher than the 1.9% rate for all traditional and charter schools combined.

Of the 108,134 students enrolled in charter schools in grades 9-12, a total of 6,841 dropped out of school.

Charter schools served 6% of Texas students but represented 21% of all students who dropped out in 2023-24.

Since IDRA's last report in 2017, dropout rates for Texas charter schools have reversed the declining trends observed in the years 2016-17 and 2018-19. After peaking in 2021-22 at 8%, charter school dropout rates have since shown progress toward pre-COVID-19 levels.

73% Charter School Longitudinal Graduation Rate

TEA data indicate that ninth grade four-year longitudinal graduation rates for charter school students fluctuated between 17% and 20% between 2016-17 and 2023-24. Among the Class of 2024 students enrolled in charter schools, 73% graduated in four years, and 10% were reported to be continuing their education. The statewide longitudinal graduation rate for charters and traditional public schools combined was 91%.

Nearly 17% of the Class of 2024 who were enrolled in charter schools dropped out, which is almost three times the statewide rate for all students (6%). TEA's state summary includes student counts from traditional public and charter school models; however, following TEA's 2020-21 changes to reporting conventions, the agency no longer presents direct comparisons between charter schools and traditional public schools.

However, archival data indicate a persistent, significant gap in completion trends between charter and traditional schools between 2016-17 and 2019-20, with Texas charter schools between three and four times more likely than traditional public schools to lose students before graduation.

Charters Lose 44% of Black Students

Using the same methodology as IDRA's annual attrition study, IDRA analyzed statewide attrition rates for charter school districts by county. While data masking and small student populations posed significant limitations and prevented complete racial and ethnic subgroup analyses in several counties, the available data reveal important patterns in student persistence across charter school settings.

Statewide, IDRA found charter schools had an attrition rate of 34% for the Class of 2024, substantially higher than the traditional public school attrition rate that year (18%). Across racial and ethnic groups, attrition rates were highest for Black students (44%), followed by Latino students (36%) and white students (20%).

Charter school attrition rates varied considerably by county, with several large urban counties reporting notably high overall attrition rates, including Bexar County (49%), Hidalgo County (49%) and Travis County (47%).

In contrast, some counties with fewer charter school districts had substantially lower attrition rates. However, these estimates should be interpreted with caution due to small sample sizes and incomplete subgroup data. In multiple counties, masked or insufficient data resulted in unavailable or unstable estimates.

Despite these limitations, IDRA's findings suggest that charter school attrition remains a critical area for further investigation. Higher attrition rates across student groups in charter schools suggest differences in student mobility, retention practices and access to support that warrant closer examination.

It is essential that the state strengthen data transparency and consistency in reporting to enable communities to understand and address attrition patterns across traditional public and charter schools in Texas.

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Status of Open-Enrollment Charters, 2024

Status	Count
Total Awards	350
Total Closures	165
Default Closures	57
Revocations	39
Expirations/ Non-Renewals	18
Voluntary Closures	108
Surrenders/Returns	63
Consolidations	45
Active Charters	189
Active but not operating	1
Operational Charters	188

Data source: TEA. Division of Charter School Authorizing, Summary of Charter Awards and Closures, 2024

IDRA, 2026

Four-Year Longitudinal Graduation and Dropout Rates, Charter Schools and Traditional Public School Districts, 2017-2024

	Enrolled Students in Graduating Class	Graduated Number	Graduated Rate (%)	Continued Number	Continued Rate (%)	Dropped Out Number	Dropped Out Rate (%)
Charters							
2016-17	17,059	11,011	64.5	2,726	16.0	3,037	17.8
2017-18	18,598	12,309	66.2	2,704	14.5	3,313	17.8
2018-19	20,304	13,575	66.9	2,800	13.8	3,627	17.9
2019-20	21,020	13,782	65.6	3,302	15.7	3,667	17.4
2020-21	21,457	14,375	67.0	2,859	13.3	4,011	18.7
2021-22	22,920	15,706	68.5	2,524	11.0	4,477	19.5
2022-23	23,599	16,975	71.9	2,299	9.7	4,115	17.4
2023-24	24,941	18,161	72.8	2,388	9.6	4,163	16.7
Traditional Districts							
2016-17	343,547	312,362	90.9	11,728	3.4	18,134	5.3
2017-18	354,321	323,191	91.2	11,646	3.3	18,099	5.1
2018-19	362,147	330,446	91.2	11,239	3.1	19,035	5.3
2019-20	363,580	333,610	91.8	11,559	3.2	17,221	4.7
2020-21	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
2021-22	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
2022-23	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
2023-24	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
State							
2016-17	360,606	323,373	89.7	14,454	4.0	21,171	5.9
2017-18	372,919	335,500	90.0	14,350	3.8	21,412	5.7
2018-19	382,451	344,021	90.0	14,039	3.7	22,662	5.9
2019-20	384,600	347,392	90.3	14,861	3.9	20,888	5.4
2020-21	388,517	349,496	90.0	15,210	3.9	22,618	5.8
2021-22	396,228	355,537	89.7	13,966	3.5	25,501	6.4
2022-23	403,301	364,227	90.3	12,586	3.1	25,229	6.3
2023-24	405,019	367,549	90.7	12,547	3.1	23,645	5.8

Note: Counts for charters and traditional districts may not add up to state count, as some students may have attended more than one district during the school year. Thus, students may be counted in more than one category but counted only once in the state total. Percentage totals may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

* Prior to 2020-21, TEA published data tables comparing annual dropout, four-year longitudinal, and attrition rates between Texas public schools and charter districts. Beginning in 2020-21, TEA changed reporting conventions for charter schools. These included publishing independent data tables for "nontraditional school models," such as Early College High Schools (ECHS), Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools (P-TECH) and state-authorized charter schools. TEA tables presenting such data now exclude a comparison to traditional public schools.

Data source: TEA. Secondary School Completion and Dropouts in Texas Public Schools, 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21, 2021-22, 2022-23, 2023-24.

IDRA, 2026

Summary

Publicly funded open-enrollment charter schools have been in operation in Texas since 1996, and recent policy changes signal a move toward their further expansion. But Texas charter schools continue to report higher statewide annual dropout rates and lower four-year graduation rates than traditional public school districts.

The state is responsible for ensuring students of all backgrounds receive a high-quality public education that prepares them to succeed beyond high school. This requires sustained oversight and a clear understanding of how each school model serves students.

Policymakers and education stakeholders should strengthen oversight of charter-district partnerships and closely monitor disaggregated attrition trends for student subgroups to ensure that all students, particularly those from diverse racial backgrounds.

Communities, including school leadership, families and students, also must continue to hold the state accountable for transparent and accurate reporting of performance, accountability and student outcome data for charter schools and traditional public school districts.

Resources

Johnson, R.L. (2017). Annual Dropout and Longitudinal Graduation Rates in Texas Charter Schools, 2009-2016. IDRA.

Latham Sikes, C. (September 2025). Texas School Funding – Major Elements in House Bill 2 – IDRA Issue Brief.

TEA. (2026). Secondary School Completion and Dropouts in Texas Public Schools, 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21, 2021-22, 2022-23, 2023-24. Texas Education Agency.

TEA. (2026). Texas Charter Schools, webpage. Texas Education Agency.

TEA. (July 10, 2025). House Bill 2 (HB 2) Implementation. Texas Education Agency.

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Annual Dropout Rate, Grade 9-12, Charter Schools and Traditional Public School Districts

	Total Student Population		Number of Dropouts	Percent of Dropouts	Annual Dropout Rate
	Number	Percent			
Charters					
2016-17	88,505	5.4	4,770	15.7	5.4
2017-18	92,818	5.6	5,095	16.8	5.5
2018-19	95,291	5.7	5,891	19	6.2
2019-20	97,293	5.7	5,412	20.3	5.6
2020-21	92,412	5.6	6,854	17.6	7.4
2021-22	99,996	5.9	7,903	20.7	7.9
2022-23	102,453	6.0	6,610	18.8	6.5
2023-24	108,134	6.2	6,841	20.8	6.3
Traditional Districts					
2016-17	1,558,233	94.6	25,545	84.3	1.6
2017-18	1,573,163	94.4	25,199	83.2	1.6
2018-19	1,589,376	94.3	25,033	81	1.6
2019-20	1,601,951	94.3	21,233	79.7	1.3
2020-21	*	*	*	*	*
2021-22	*	*	*	*	*
2022-23	*	*	*	*	*
2023-24	*	*	*	*	*
State					
2016-17	1,570,360	100	30,296	100	1.9
2017-18	1,592,485	100	30,273	100	1.9
2018-19	1,611,202	100	30,898	100	1.9
2019-20	1,631,776	100	26,626	100	1.6
2020-21	1,654,030	100	38,874	100	2.4
2021-22	1,694,789	100	38,132	100	2.2
2022-23	1,721,734	100	35,078	100	2.0
2023-24	1,743,153	100	32,848	100	1.9

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