

## ABSTRACT

### EVALUATING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT WITHIN ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION SCHOOLS: A COMPARISON OF DISTRICT SCHOOLS AND CHARTER SCHOOLS IN ARIZONA

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The purpose of this study was to determine whether students enrolled in Secondary (9-12) alternative educational schools, i.e.- district schools vs. charter schools, demonstrate significant differences in achievement as measured by the 2019 A-F Letter Grade Accountability System, as well as to determine whether district and charter schools differ in enrollment characteristics of their student bodies. This quantitative study took place in Arizona using data provided to the Arizona Department of Education. Data collected were from publicly accessible records representing most of the alternative education school from 13 of Arizona's 15 counties. Survey data were collected from only 128 out of the 164 alternative schools due to lack of data reporting from educational agencies.

Research question one (is there a statistically significant difference in student proficiency scores in secondary alternative public schools and secondary alternative charter schools using the revised 2019 A-F School Letter Grade Business Rules?) consisted of evaluating alternative school A-F rating scores based upon 5 weighted categorical indicators: 1) Academic proficiency at 15%, 2) Growth toward graduation at 30%, 3) English learners (EL) proficiency at 10%, 4) Graduation rates at 10%, and finally 5) College and career readiness for enrollees at 35% as well as available bonus points and assessed if a statistical difference existed between alternative charter and alternative district schools in overall achievement scores and letter grade rankings.

Research question two (what, if any, are the differences in enrollment characteristics, i.e. - demographics including SPED, between alternative district schools and. alternative charter schools?) was developed to address the potential of enrollment selection bias. Data collected were disaggregated by student subgroups, i.e. - ethnicity, income eligibility, EL proficiency, and by students with disabilities and reported using descriptive statistics. This study did not use summations to conclude significance levels of any of the subgroups comparisons. Student body enrollments characteristics were adjusted on a per capita basis as well as a reported with the proportional range of overall student bodies based upon the standard deviations calculated.

Research question three (is there a statistically significant difference in student dropout rates between alternative district schools and alternative charter schools?) evaluated total dropout rates for all student subgroups, i.e.- ethnicity, gender, homelessness status, income eligibility, and student with disabilities. This study examined if a statistical difference existed between alternative charter and alternative district schools in student graduation rates by examining both the subgroup characteristics as well as the aggregate total student body populations. Comparison mean scores were converted to percentiles to reflect the per capita enrollment representation with higher scores indicating higher dropout rates.

Upon evaluation this study concluded that there is a statistical significant difference in the A-F letter grades between alternative district schools and alternative charter schools, with charter schools showing higher final cut scores as well as higher A-F school letter grade rankings. This study also determined that those gains were predominately due to the college and career readiness indicators, and not from increased academic performance, on-track graduation rates, credits earned, EL proficiency, or overall graduation rates. This study also concluded that alternative charter and alternative district schools showed similar student body enrollment

subgroup consistencies, suggesting that there is no inherent enrollment selection bias or overrepresented subgroups in either institution. This study also determined that there was not a statistical difference between alternative district and alternative charter schools and their graduation rates in their overall student populations.