

Charter Day School Tops List in Brunswick, Columbus Counties for Highest ABC Scores

Direct instruction with systematic phonics, basic math facts credited with success

Leland - Charter Day School has the highest proficiency score of all elementary schools in Brunswick and Columbus Counties that passed the Federal AYP standard – **A**dequate **Y**early **P**rogress. A school’s proficiency score is the percentage of how many tests were passed by students in relation to the total number of tests that these students were given. Tests included in the total were reading, math, computer science, and writing. The 2007-2008 data were released in Raleigh after the election by the State Board of Education.

Charter Day School also beat the county and state averages as shown in the table below. Nearly 40% more Charter Day School low-income students achieve proficiency than the state average.

		Charter Day School	Brunswick County	Columbus County	State of NC
All Students % Proficient	Reading	62.4%	54.2%	45%	55.6%
	Math	82.4%	68.3%	57.4%	69.9%
Economically Disadvantaged % Proficient	Reading	55.6%	43.3%	34.9%	38.8%
	Math	78.2%	59.6%	49.8%	56.6%
% of All Students Economically Disadvantaged		42%	54%	65%	47%

Mark Cramer, Superintendent of Charter Day School and its sister school Columbus Charter School in Whiteville, says that every parent is free to choose to send their child to one of these schools.

Cramer said that some parents have the mistaken idea that because of the above-average scores that the schools are only for the advanced or gifted students. “But nothing could be further from the truth,” he said. “Many parents choose to transfer to our school because their child was not being successful in his former school. Our direct instruction methods usually enable the student to catch up to grade level within a year or even less,” he explained.

“In particular, our low-income students enjoy a 40% higher success rate here at the school – operated by The Roger Bacon Academy – than low-income students on average in the county or state,” he added. “These are the students who, if not properly prepared, will risk dropping out of high school.”

Charter Day School is a tuition-free public school of choice open to all North Carolina children. It currently has 721 students enrolled in grades K through 8 from five coastal counties. Charter Day trains its teachers to use a direct instruction systematic phonics-based reading curriculum and a direct instruction math curriculum that builds on basic math facts. Both subjects stress speed and accuracy in performance of basic skills. Forty-two percent of its student body qualifies for free or reduced meals based on low family income. Interested parents may call 655-1214 for information.

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Charter Day School Raises Reading, Math Scores for Low-Income Students

Direct instruction, systematic phonics credited with gains

Leland - Low-income students scored significantly higher in reading and math at Charter Day School, operated by The Roger Bacon Academy, than in state or county scores according to data released last week by the State Board of Education in Raleigh.

Last June, over 650,000 children in grades 3 through 8 took the state's End-of-Grade tests in reading and math. Of these, 47% are classified as from low-income families or "Economically Disadvantaged." The state also reported that over 30,000 students drop out of high school each year, and nearly half these are from low-income families.

"Statewide, only 38.9% of low-income students passed the reading end-of-grade test while 55.6% of our Roger Bacon Academy low-income kids passed," said Cramer.

Cramer also compared their math scores of 78.2% proficient for their low-income students to 56.7% for the state's low-income kids. "In both subjects, our low-income students passed the ABC's at a 40% higher rate than the state average," Cramer added.

"...our low-income kids passed the ABC's at a 40% higher rate than the state average..."

When asked what factor was responsible for the greater success of his low-income students and for the school as a whole, the school's founder Baker Mitchell stressed it was not money, classroom size, or teacher experience.

"Our greater success with all students and particularly low-income students is because of the curricula and teaching methods that we use," Mitchell said.

Mitchell explained that the teachers receive extensive training and coaching in direct instruction methods from the school's training teams. Instead of the standard "whole language" approach used for reading in most schools, he said they use direct instruction to impart a systematic phonics-based set of reading skills with emphasis on speed and accuracy of oral reading. By the end of Kindergarten, nearly all students are reading chapter books, he said. In math, speed and accuracy of basic facts is stressed as the concepts are taught using direct instruction methods.

"...success is due to curricula and teaching methods..."

According to Cramer, one of the keys to using direct instruction successfully is to continually reinforce children for their good performances. They use small instructional groups of four to ten children where each child can benefit from personal attention by the teacher and receive praise or feedback, he added.

"These kids love racing each other in reading or doing math problems as much as they love racing each other on the playground or in PE," Superintendent Cramer added. "But the point is for each student to continually try and improve on his or her personal best score – they love competing with themselves and charting their improvement from one day to the next," Cramer observed.

A side benefit of having a successful curriculum with good training and support is that the school has a very low teacher turnover according to Cramer. Teachers feel good and like their profession when they are supported with tools that work, he said.

"We embrace the goal of having 100% of our children at or above grade level in every subject, and we are continually refining our methods and coaching to achieve this goal," declared founder Mitchell. "We accept the challenge of No Child Left Behind; and if a child isn't succeeding we view that as our failure, not the child's," he said.

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All data may be found on the state's website at disag.ncpublicschools.org/2008/

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