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En
ENROLLMENT PRACTICES

Building a Typology of Charter Schools in Texas

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About CSPI

Funded through grants from the Walton Family Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Houston Endowment, and the Powell Foundation, the Charter School Policy Institute (CSPI) was formed in 2005 to advance quality public school choice. The Institute proactively provides timely high quality information, analysis, and opinion to policymakers, thought leaders, and key stakeholders in Texas and across the nation. By elevating policy discussions above the noise of day-to-day charter school operator issues, CSPI is a resource for independent information about quality public charter schools. The Institute's efforts stem from the belief that the power of credible and unbiased information in the hands of key stakeholders can influence the direction of Texas charters and increase the quality of public school choice. CSPI works to ensure that the new generation of public charter schools fulfills their potential to transform public education. The Institute convenes academic, business, school, and civic leaders in discussion forums, facilitates and promotes policy reports and research on issues critical to school improvement, and offers analysis and opinion to the media and key stakeholders.

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Executive Summary

Most studies comparing charter schools to traditional public schools have generally disregarded the differences in their student populations and have not differentiated between *types* of charter schools, which often have fundamentally different missions, curricula, and enrollments. Because these schools differ widely, it is difficult to fairly and accurately evaluate the academic performance of public charter schools without considering their differences. In contrast to most traditional public schools that serve all students in a specified geographic area, public charters are organized to serve specific groups of students or communities. Studies that report the average performance of all charter students as a whole tend to overlook the underlying principle that charters are organized in order to be different.

This latest report in CSPI's "Essential Elements" series, *Building a Typology of Texas Charter Schools,* presents a replicable typology (or classification system) of state-authorized charter schools in Texas based on their enrollment practices, missions, and curricula. The authors compare the academic performance of students in each charter category to those within Texas traditional public schools. Three types of charters were identified:

- **Highly Academic / College Preparatory**: Schools with a primary focus on academic programs and preparation for college. These schools often require students and their parents to sign academic and/or behavioral contracts.

- **Risk / Recovery**: Schools organized to serve students who have dropped out, are at risk of dropping out, or are performing poorly in traditional public schools. Programs are often developed to address specific community concerns.

- **Non-Traditional / Alternative**: Schools that provide an alternative for families who are dissatisfied with traditional public schools and offer such things as seemingly safer environments, alternate instructional styles, small classes, or increased personal attention. Their focus is often on social programs more than academics.

The results of CSPI's analysis confirm that public charter schools on average serve a higher proportion of minority and economically-disadvantaged students than do traditional public schools, are smaller in size, and typically have a longer school day and/or year. The report presents additional differences among the characteristics and performance between the three charter types, as well as comparisons to traditional public schools. Other interesting findings include:

- Highly Academic charters perform very well academically. When compared to students in traditional public schools with similar demographics, the Highly Academic charters appear to out perform the traditional ones. Emphasis on academics appears to produce the desired results.

- Risk/Recovery charters, as expected, serve a predominantly minority, economically disadvantaged, and high-risk population, as well as a special education population that is over twice as large proportionally as traditional public schools or other charter schools. Even so, reported academic results are not significantly different from traditional campuses serving at-risk population. In fact, a comparison between elementary charter schools rated in the Texas Alternative Educational Accountability system (for schools serving large numbers of at-risk

students) to similarly-rated traditional campuses shows charters to be outperforming the traditional campuses in elementary mathematics and about even in other comparisons.

- Non-Traditional charters have mixed results when compared to traditional public schools. When demographics are considered, these charters are close to the state averages in reading/ language arts but behind in mathematics. Considering their primary focus on social issues, rather than academics, these results are not surprising.

In conclusion, public charter schools appear to be serving the selected populations of students for which they are organized. The academic results in each of these schools can be largely explained by student demographics and school mission. By offering parents and students educational options not available elsewhere in the public school system, proponents argue that charters are serving their intended purpose. This is supported by data that suggests high parent satisfaction with these public schools of choice.

The results also emphasize that lumping all charters schools together for comparative purposes is not useful. Without a typology, it is hard to categorize the differences among the various types of charter schools. To really create meaningful comparisons, tracking students' individual performance over time and comparing them to like students in charter and traditional public schools will provide a better measure of increases in knowledge attained across the academic year.

Policymakers and educators should adopt a framework for evaluating charter school performance in a way that effectively compares the mission of each school. The typology developed by CSPI helps inform decisions regarding the success of various types of public charter schools. Only after performance data is disaggregated can we begin to make useful comparisons between charter schools and their traditional public school counterparts.

Furthermore, CSPI's study has immediate implications for Texas' 80th legislative session. If enacted, Senate Bill 4, known as "The Champion Charter Schools Act," would potentially close a significant number of charter schools across the state (particularly Risk Recovery charters), without taking their students' backgrounds or growth into consideration—even though our analysis shows that these charters are performing no better or worse than their counterparts in the traditional public school system (for more information, see CSPI's Policy Brief 2, *The Potential Impact of Senate Bill 4 on Texas Charters*).

Introduction

The nation's charter school movement has now surpassed its 15-year mark, with over one million students attending 3,613 public charter schools across the country (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2006). Paralleling this growth in charter school enrollment is the growing body of research on charter schools and their effectiveness in improving academic achievement. So far, many studies have found that charters tend to perform similar to or slightly worse than their traditional public school counterparts in terms of mean academic achievement (Carnoy, Jacobsen, Mishel, & Rothstein, 2005; Hill, 2005; Miron & Nelson, 2002; Nelson, Rosenberg, & Van Meter, 2004; U. S. Department of Education, 2004). But when comparing growth in achievement over time, other studies have found charters to have the upper hand (Carpenter, 2006; Gronberg & Jansen, 2001, 2005; Texas Education Agency, 2005).

Regardless, the methodological quality of studies on charter schools remains mixed, the findings are often limited, and perhaps most importantly, they still do not compare apples to apples (Betts & Hill, 2006). In particular, many studies disregard the differences in student populations between charter schools and traditional public schools. Charter schools typically serve significantly more at-risk and disadvantaged students than do traditional public schools (Center for Education Reform, 2006; Miron & Nelson, 2000). Most studies also have not differentiated between *types* of charter schools, which often have fundamentally different missions and curricula. For example, while some charter schools resemble highly-academic, college preparatory schools, others have been formed as drop-out recovery programs serving at-risk students who have not fared well in traditional public school settings.

What is a Typology?

The purpose of this study is to create a replicable typology of public charter schools based on the types of students the schools typically enroll and their curricular focus. A typology can be thought of as a classification system, taxonomy, or analytical framework, which can be used to organize information and facilitate the analysis of differences between groups.

We applied our typology to all charter schools currently operating in Texas, in order to understand which types of charter schools are most common, the distinguishing characteristics of the schools within each type, and what kinds of students are attracted to each of the school types. We also explored how different types of charters compare to traditional public schools on certain performance measures (though our analysis is purely descriptive and in no way implies causality). From the results, we hope to help policymakers and other stakeholders understand the charter school landscape, evaluate charter school research, and make better decisions regarding charter school policy.

Background

Several studies have explored the differences between various types of charter schools, in terms of their organizational structure (Brown, Henig, Lacireno-Paquet, & Holyoke, 2004; Miron & Nelson, 2002); founder type (e.g., for-profit company or non-profit organization) (Henig, Holyoke, Brown, & Lacireno-Paquet, 2005); student populations (Gronberg & Jansen, 2001; Lacireno-Paquet, Holyoke, Moser, & Henig, 2002); facility types (Krop & Zimmer, 2005), start-up status (Zimmer, Buddin, Chau, Daley, Gill, Guarino, Hamilton, Krop, McCaffrey, Sandler, & Brewer, 2003); and other factors. But not all models can be applied to every state or locality. For example,

some researchers have focused on the differences between charters operated by for-profit education management organizations (EMOs), which tend to be more market-oriented, and non-EMOs, such as non-profit organizations, which are often more mission-oriented (Henig, Holyoke, Brown, & Lacireno-Paquet, 2005; Lacireno-Paquet, 2006). But this dichotomy does not apply to states like Texas, which does not allow for-profit organizations to operate charter schools.

Furthermore, very few empirical studies have attempted to systematically compare the academic achievement of charters based on such typologies. Using a simple dichotomy, Gronberg and Jansen (2001, 2005) compared the achievement of Texas charters serving at-risk students to those not serving at-risk students. In a more nuanced analysis commissioned by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, Carpenter (2006) created a typology of charter schools in five states (Arizona, California, Florida, Michigan, and Texas), using data from charter school websites and state education agencies for the 2001-02 school year. The author found a total of 55 school types, which were then grouped into five distinctive categories of charter schools based on their curriculum and instruction: progressive, traditional, vocational, general, and alternative delivery. Charters in these five categories were further distinguished according to whether they typically served all students (open-enrollment charters) or whether they served targeted student populations (such as pregnant teens or gifted students). In general, the traditional, general/open-enrollment, and progressive schools were found to have higher standardized math and reading scores than the vocational, general/targeted, and alternative delivery schools. However, the lower-performing schools showed the greatest amount of improvement over a one year period.

While the Fordham (2006) study was an important step in the right direction, the study's author urges caution in interpreting his conclusions due to a number of issues, such as "regression to the mean" (which must be taken into account any time you are measuring an extreme group, such as low-performing, at-risk students), selection bias between those schools that chose to participate in the study and those that did not, and incongruent measures of performance between the states used to form the typology. In addition, the classification system and its usefulness are still open to debate. For example, many charter schools offer more than one type of academic program, each of which may fall under a different category as defined in the Carpenter report. For example, American YouthWorks, in Austin, Texas, offers both a general curriculum as well as a credit recovery program. Likewise, some alternate delivery charter schools (i.e., virtual schools) may offer "traditional" curricula, thereby falling into two of Carpenter's categories.

In attempting to create a more parsimonious typology, we ran into similar issues as well. For example, if too few charter types are identified and examined, the typology does not capture the wide variation between types, which makes it very difficult to draw any conclusions about their real effectiveness and risks overreaching conclusions. At the same time, if too many categories are created, it is difficult to find statistically significant differences between many small groups, and replication of the typology also becomes more problematic, especially when examining charters across states. Furthermore, the more groups that are identified, the more complicated (and less useful) the typology becomes for policymakers and the general public.

Recognizing these challenges, we attempted to take the Carpenter analysis a step further by comparing the characteristics and performance of the charter schools within each type to that of non-charter traditional public schools (TPS).

Methodology & Data Analysis

To create our typology, we surveyed the universe of 241 state-authorized public charter school campuses in Texas in 2006-07. We interviewed charter principals and superintendents via phone, e-mail, and mail between June and August 2006, resulting in a response rate of 75%. The survey instrument included both closed and open-ended questions (see Appendix)[1]. We then supplemented and cross-checked our survey data with data from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) on the school and student characteristics of charter schools and traditional public schools for the 2005-06 school year, such as total enrollment, mobility rate, TAKS scores, and other variables. Whenever possible, we also consulted various documents and websites to gain richer information on schools' missions and curricula and to determine whether schools targeted specific types of students.

Our survey and analyses included only state-authorized, open-enrollment charter schools and not district-authorized/home-rule charters (though we intend to include the latter in our updated analysis in 2008). We analyzed the number of charter campuses in Texas, rather than the number of charters districts, because a number of charters (N=59) operate more than one campus, and different campuses run by the same charter did not always have the same curricula or student populations[2].

Based on this data, we coded each charter campus according to its mission and goals (e.g., "to prepare students for entering college," "to provide a safe environment in which all students can learn," "to provide an alternative to students who have difficulty in the traditional educational environment"); curriculum and instructional method (e.g., TAKS aligned, Montessori, computer-aided instruction); types of programs offered (e.g., college prep, GED, school-to-work); and the types of students that the school attempts to target (e.g., at-risk, underserved, pregnant teens). We then attempted to form mutually exclusive categories, so that campuses would be less likely to be categorized into more than one type. Although there was inevitably some subjectivity in the rating process, the two authors independently established the three types of schools (inter-rater reliability was 92%). For any individual charter on which the two raters did not agree, a third rater was used to settle the difference. The three charter types that were identified in our analysis are as follows:

[1] All data analyzed for the study are available on CSPI's website at http://www.charterschoolpolicy.org/yes/review, including: charter sponsor, year founded, school principal, school location and contact information, TEA campus number, target population, curriculum, distinguishing characteristics, community sponsors or partnerships, cross-registration with local colleges, 2004 and 2005 TEA Accountability Ratings, and which schools had waiting lists for 2006. This information is currently being updated for 2007.

[2] For example, the Brazos School for Inquiry and Creativity operated four campuses; three campuses were classified as Risk/Recovery, while the other one was classified as Non-Traditional.

1) ***Highly Academic / College Preparatory***: These charters include those that focus on providing their students with a rigorous college preparatory curriculum, have high academic standards, and strive to make their students college-ready, often beginning at a very early age. Some schools may offer a wide range of Advanced Placement (AP) classes or an International Baccalaureate (IB) program. *Examples: KIPP Austin Prep Inc., Harmony Science Academy*

2) ***Risk / Recovery***: These charters focus on remediation and recovery of course credit for students who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out of school, such as pregnant teens. These charters include schools that work within residential facilities and detention centers as well as those who offer half-day, self-paced, or accelerated courses, or GED programs. *Examples: University Charter School at the Oaks Treatment Center, American YouthWorks*

3) ***Non-Traditional / Alternative***: The principals and superintendents of these charters often stated that parents and students choose these schools because they were looking for an alternative to the traditional public school (TPS) system. They may differ from non-charter TPS in a variety of ways, but cannot be classified as Highly Academic or Risk/Recovery. These charters offer alternative pedagogical methods, smaller classes, and/or safer, more personal educational environments than those provided by their students "home" schools (i.e., the traditional public school they would most likely have attended if not attending the charter school). However, many of the schools in this category have characteristics similar to those of non-charter TPS. *Examples: El Paso School of Excellence, Alief Montessori School*

The ability to categorize a charter school depended on the adequacy of information provided by survey respondents or documents—which, unfortunately, was not always available or accurate. We also relied on administrators' own assessments about whether or how their schools targeted certain kinds of students, although this, too, was found to be highly subjective and varied greatly across all types of schools, and thus these results may have been biased. For example, if a school served a high percentage of at-risk students, but its administrator did not report that they targeted such students in our survey, then we did not classify the campus as Risk/Recovery—although that may indeed have been the more accurate classification.

Finally, we ran a series of one-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs), with Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons[3], in order to estimate the differences between the three charter types on school and student characteristics and performance measures, as well as to estimate the mean differences between each of the three charter types and Texas' traditional public schools (TPS). Because charters have multiple grade configurations, we disaggregated our analyses of charter schools according to two main grade levels: primary grades (i.e., kindergarten through eighth grade) and secondary grades (i.e., ninth through twelfth grades). Some charters were included in both the primary- and secondary-grades' analyses, because they served both grade levels, and we did not assume that these charters had the same curricula or student enrollments for both primary and secondary education (although our analyses ultimately showed that this was not the case in any charter school).

[3] ANOVAs assess whether there are group differences; Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons show which groups differ statistically from one another.

Results

Charter School Types by Grade Levels

Based on our survey data, a majority of primary charter schools were Non-Traditional (62% of charter campuses serving primary grades only and 31% of those serving both primary and secondary grades), while a bulk of the secondary charters were Risk/Recovery schools (70% of schools serving secondary grades alone; 34% of charters serving both grade levels). As shown in Table 1, we did not have enough data to classify 18% of all charter campuses, even though officials from 75% of Texas charter schools responded to our survey, and 52% of the campuses had websites from which we were able to obtain information. This amount of missing data raises some concern about the validity of our results, which we hope to rectify in our next annual survey.

Table 1: ***Frequency of Charter School Types by Grade Levels***

Charter Types	Charters Serving Primary Grades Only (N=118)	Charters Serving Secondary Grades Only (N=89)	Charters Serving Both Primary and Secondary Grades (N=106)	All Charters (N=313)
Highly Academic	15 (13%)	1 (1%)	12 (11%)	28 (9%)
Risk/Recovery	9 (8%)	62 (70%)	36 (34%)	107 (34%)
Non-Traditional	73 (62%)	17 (19%)	33 (31%)	123 (39%)
Could not be classified (no data)	21 (18%)	9 (10%)	25 (24%)	55 (18%)

The following sections present the findings on school characteristics, student enrollment, and performance measures according to the grade level which charters served (i.e., primary and/or secondary level)[4], and compares the findings from the three types of charter schools to those of non-charter traditional public schools (TPS).

Primary-Level Charter Schools

School Characteristics

Our analyses revealed several statistically significant differences between types of primary-level charter schools (see Table 2). For schools serving kindergarten through the eighth grade, non-charter traditional public schools (TPS) had significantly higher overall enrollments, higher average teaching experience (in years), and the lowest percentage of first year teachers than all three charter types. However, students in non-charter TPS spent significantly less time in the classroom than students in all three types of charter schools, although these differences were not significant between Risk/ Recovery charters and non-charter TPS. Students attending the Highly Academic

[4] Charters serving both grade levels were included in both sets of analyses.

primary charter schools spent the most time in the classroom during the 2005-06 school year, averaging 46 minutes per day and over one week per year longer than those in non-charter TPS.

Table 2: ***Differences in School Characteristics Between Primary-Level Charter School Types***

	School Type				F-value
2005-06 School Characteristics	**Highly Academic Mean (SE)**	**Risk/ Recovery Mean (SE)**	**Non-Traditional Mean (SE)**	**Non-Charter TPS Mean (SE)**	
Total Enrollment	324.19 [a] (44.14)	194.46 [b] (27.73)	288.56 [c] (19.18)	534.54 [a,b,c] (3.81)	46.04***
Length of School Day (in Hours)	7.77 [a,b] (0.26)	7.06 [a] (0.28)	7.30 [a,b] (0.06)	7.00 [b] (0.00)	305.14***
# Days in School Year	187.69 [a] (2.60)	190.34 [a] (2.67)	182.09 [a] (0.83)	181.00 [a] (0.00)	470.91***
# Students Per Teacher	14.30 (0.48)	15.37 (1.92)	15.52 (0.50)	14.72 (0.16)	0.203
% First-Year Teachers	26.04 [a] (4.50)	21.46 [b] (3.83)	29.33 [b] (2.52)	7.21 [a,b] (0.09)	331.76***
# Years Teaching Experience	5.02 [a] (0.84)	5.33 [b] (0.73)	4.77 [c] (0.29)	11.48 [a,b,c] (0.40)	246.60***
Per-Pupil Expenditures	$4,328.52 (332.02)	$6,470.23 (730.43)	$4,080.49 (310.98)	$6,518.32 (972.62)	0.04

Note: Significance level: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Charter types that share superscripts are statistically different from one another at the $p < .05$ level or lower.
SE = Standard error. TPS = Traditional public school (non-charter).

There were no significant differences between the three primary-level charter types on either the number of students per teacher or the average expenditure per pupil. Both of these factors, however, may not be truly representative of the differences between the school types[5]. The student-teacher ratio, for example, was defined by dividing the number of full-time equivalent teachers by the total enrollment (which is taken on one day in the school year). Some schools have multiple sessions during the day (e.g., a morning and an afternoon option), but the same teachers are likely to cover both. Therefore, if a school has three full-time teachers and 20 students attending each session, then its student-teacher ratio would be 13:3. If another school with three full-time teachers had 20 students that attended 6.5 hours per day, then the student-teacher ratio would be 6:7. Both schools have 20 students at any one time, but their student-teacher ratios are quite different.

[5] In addition, the TEA has many different variables for determining total per-pupil expenditures. We selected the "Expenditure by Program, Total Per Pupil, All Funds" variable as the most appropriate indicator of the amount spent per student on direct instruction. This figure does not include expenditures for facilities or other operational functions, which may also differ between the school types.

Student Enrollment

Our analyses also revealed statistically significant differences between school types on all demographic indicators and enrollment patterns, with the exception of the percentage of students enrolled in vocational education programs (see Table 3). Primary-level charter schools classified as Risk/Recovery served the highest percentage of African American students; Highly Academic primary charters served the highest percentage of Hispanic students; and non-charter TPS served the highest percentage of white students. Risk/Recovery charters also served the highest percentage of economically disadvantaged and at-risk students and the lowest percentage of students with limited English proficiency (LEP). However, for the percentage of LEP students served, Risk/Recovery charters were only significantly different from traditional public primary schools.

Table 3: ***Differences in Student Enrollments Between Primary-Level Charter School Types***

	School Type				F-value
2005-06 Student Characteristics	**Highly Academic Mean (SE)**	**Risk/ Recovery Mean (SE)**	**Non-Traditional Mean (SE)**	**Non-Charter TPS Mean (SE)**	
% Black	20.30[a,b] (4.70)	38.59[b,d] (4.81)	37.32[a,c] (3.42)	14.02[c,d] (0.24)	74.55***
% Hispanic	53.87[a] (6.67)	29.57[a,b] (4.49)	42.18 (3.25)	44.53[b] (0.41)	3.88**
% White	21.83[a] (5.31)	29.84 (4.10)	18.36[b] (2.42)	38.70[a,b] (0.40)	19.19***
% Economically Disadvantaged	63.09 (5.80)	77.42[a] (4.95)	69.67[b] (2.68)	60.21[a,b] (0.35)	9.53***
% Limited English Proficiency (LEP)	10.64 (2.69)	4.24[a] (1.76)	12.44 (1.79)	16.85[a] (0.25)	8.14***
% At-Risk	43.15[a] (5.57)	76.27[a,b,c] (5.11)	48.89[b] (2.77)	47.20[c] (0.29)	22.30***
% Bilingual Education	9.72 (2.48)	4.12[a] (1.73)	11.54 (1.72)	15.67[a] (0.24)	7.50***
% Special Education	6.45[a] (0.694)	39.80[a,b] (5.84)	9.50[b] (7.13)	12.87[a] (0.15)	73.82***
% Gifted and Talented	6.58[a,b] (2.94)	0.07[b,d] (0.07)	1.04[a,c] (0.26)	6.31[c,d] (0.08)	36.92***
% Vocational Education	4.40 (1.71)	7.22 (2.72)	2.29 (0.76)	4.83 (0.16)	2.03

Note: Significance level: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Charter types that share superscripts are statistically different from one another at the $p < .05$ level or lower.
SE = Standard error. TPS = Traditional public school (non-charter).

Table 3 also shows that non-charter TPS have the lowest mobility rates compared to the three charter types; however, the difference is not statistically significant from Highly Academic charters. Given that Risk/Recovery charters primarily serve students at risk for dropping out of school, it should not be surprising that they had the highest mobility rates. However, their mobility rate appears to be a function of students transferring *into* Risk/Recovery charters, given the +95% attendance rate in these schools.

Primary-level non-charter TPS had the highest percentage of students in bilingual education programs during 2005-06—although the difference was statistically significant only between the non-charter TPS and Risk/Recovery charters. Nearly 16% of students in non-charter TPS were enrolled in bilingual education programs, compared to roughly 4% of those in Risk/Recovery charters. When comparing the percentage of students enrolled in special education programs, non-charter TPS fell in the middle, statistically differing from the Risk/Recovery and Highly Academic charters. Risk/Recovery primary charters enrolled nearly 40% of their students in special education programs, compared to 13% of students enrolled in non-charter TPS, 10% of students in Non-Traditional charters, and 6% of students in Highly Academic charters. Student enrollment in gifted and talented education programs was similar between the Highly Academic charters and non-charter TPS, both enrolling between 6-7%. Gifted and talented enrollment was also similar (and significantly lower than the former two school types) between the Risk/Recovery and Non-Traditional charters, each enrolling less than 1.5%.

Performance Measures

Next we looked at schools' performance measures, such as attendance rates, and measures of student performance (i.e., TAKS pass rates) as a function of schools type. As shown in Table 4, there appeared to be no difference between Highly Academic charters and non-charter TPS on the percentage of students passing the TAKS tests in both math and reading. The students attending Non-Traditional and Risk/Recovery charters, however, do seem to be passing the TAKS at significantly lower rates than the students at non-charter TPS. There were no significant differences between the school types on average annual attendance rates. These results highlight the fact that comparing charters as whole to traditional public schools (TPS) does not provide an accurate picture of charter schools' effectiveness.

Table 4: *Differences in Performance Measures Between Primary-Level Charter School Types*

	School Type				F-value
2005-06 Performance Measures	**Highly Academic Mean (SE)**	**Risk/ Recovery Mean (SE)**	**Non-Traditional Mean (SE)**	**Non-Charter TPS Mean (SE)**	
Mobility Rate	29.29 [a] (4.39)	69.29 [a,b] (4.32)	30.59 [b] (1.81)	22.04 [b] (0.23)	93.08***
Attendance Rate	95.72 (0.65)	95.05 (1.02)	95.27 (0.24)	94.72 (0.16)	0.133
% Passing TAKS Math	80.53[a] (3.68)	39.12[a,b] (5.49)	65.25[a,b] (2.09)	81.22[b] (0.17)	135.38***
% Passing TAKS Reading	88.50[a] (2.13)	71.15[a,b] (3.58)	81.84[b] (1.22)	88.02 [b] (0.11)	51.37***
% Passing TAKS, All Subjects	72.96 [a] (4.20)	38.47 [a,b] (4.26)	57.49 [a,b] (2.10)	73.36 [b] (0.20)	92.85***

Note: Significance level: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Charter types that share superscripts are statistically different from one another at the $p < .05$ level or lower.
SE = Standard error. TPS = Traditional public school (non-charter).

Secondary-Level Charter Schools

School Characteristics and Student Enrollment

For the secondary grade-level school comparisons, the results on school characteristics and student enrollments were very similar to those in the primary-grade level comparisons; therefore, we provide the results in table format only. Table 5 shows the results of the comparisons for school characteristics, and Table 6 shows the results for the student demographics and program enrollment patterns. Interestingly, for secondary schools, non-charter TPS no longer had the lowest mobility rates—this ranking went to the Highly Academic charters.

Table 5: *Differences in School Characteristics Between Secondary-Level Charter School Types*

	School Type				F-value
School Characteristics	**Highly Academic Mean (SE)**	**Risk/ Recovery Mean (SE)**	**Non-Traditional Mean (SE)**	**Non-Charter TPS Mean (SE)**	
Total Enrollment	385.64 (74.00)	181.27 [a] (16.99)	269.96 [b] (29.17)	645.55 [a, b] (19.56)	12.91***
Length of School Day (in Hours)	7.39 [a, b] (0.40)	6.15 [a, b] (0.20)	6.99 [a] (0.14)	7.00 [b] (0.00)	127.98***
# Days in School Year	184.45 [a, b] (3.46)	187.26 [a, b] (1.52)	181.44 [a] (3.46)	181.00 [b] (0.00)	122.10***
# Students Per Teacher	15.07 (1.08)	17.93 (1.08)	15.16 (0.82)	13.27 (0.62)	1.17
% First-Year Teachers	23.32 [a] (5.34)	22.82 [b] (2.80)	32.34 [b] (3.99)	7.28 [a, b] (0.20)	141.96***
Average Years Teaching Experience	5.45 [a] (1.06)	6.04 [b] (0.48)	5.02 [c] (0.47)	12.70 [a, b, c] (0.08)	187.46***
Per-Pupil Expenditure	$4,266.45 (479.08)	$5,212.73 (362.13)	$4,720.69 (685.06)	$11,481.50 (3,277.28)	0.12

Note: Significance level: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Charter types that share superscripts are statistically different from one another at the $p < .05$ level or lower.
SE = Standard error. TPS = Traditional public school (non-charter).

Table 6: *Differences in Student Enrollments Between Secondary-Level Charter School Types*

	School Type				F-value
Student Demographics and Program Enrollments	**Highly Academic Mean (SE)**	**Risk/ Recovery Mean (SE)**	**Non-Traditional Mean (SE)**	**Non-Charter TPS Mean (SE)**	
% Black	17.82 (8.07)	26.20 [a] (2.52)	27.68 [b] (4.53)	12.75 [a, b] (0.41)	24.96***
% Hispanic	55.33 (10.41)	42.66 (2.96)	43.03 (4.75)	38.15 (0.70)	2.13
% White	23.89 (8.09)	29.65 [a] (2.52)	27.77 [b] (4.24)	47.37 [a, b] (0.71)	17.76***
% Economically Disadvantaged	55.58 (7.52)	71.00 [a] (2.66)	65.97 [b] (3.93)	48.38 [a, b] (0.60)	28.97***
% Limited English Proficiency (LEP)	8.63 (4.41)	4.87 (0.93)	8.01 (1.79)	5.23 (0.20)	2.17
% At-Risk	39.59 [a] (7.55)	86.94 [a, b] (1.84)	60.69 [b] (4.22)	61.11 [a] (0.61)	32.66***
Mobility Rate	29.91 [a] (6.64)	79.25 [a, b, c] (1.52)	49.15 [b] (3.92)	39.89 [c] (0.78)	43.583***
% Bilingual Education	7.31 (3.44)	3.89 (2.32)	7.22 (1.67)	4.36 (0.18)	2.73*
% Special Education	6.99 [a] (1.22)	27.37 [a, b, c] (2.92)	14.27 [b] (1.73)	18.44 [c] (0.45)	8.37***
% Gifted and Talented	12.63 [a, b] (5.91)	0.28 [a] (0.13)	0.77 [b] (0.31)	6.54 [a, b] (0.18)	27.69***
% Vocational Education	17.16 [a] (5.91)	26.22 [b] (2.96)	23.42 [c] (4.67)	47.81 [a, b, c] (0.70)	27.69***

Note: Significance level: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Charter types that share superscripts are statistically different from one another at the $p < .05$ level or lower.
SE = Standard error. TPS = Traditional public school (non-charter).

Performance Measures

As in the primary grade-level comparisons, non-charter traditional public schools (TPS) did not significantly differ from the Highly Academic charter schools on measures of performance and school effectiveness. In general, the Highly Academic charters are performing slightly better than non-charter TPS, but these differences are not statistically significant. The largest difference between the primary and secondary grade-level analyses was found in the comparison of attendance rates. In the primary grade-level analysis, there was no significant difference between the school types. However, when comparing secondary-level school types, all three of the charter school types had significantly higher attendance rates than did the non-charter TPS.

Table 7: ***Differences in Performance Measures Between Secondary-Level Charter School Types***

	School Type				F-value
Performance Measures	**Highly Academic Mean (SE)**	**Risk/ Recovery Mean (SE)**	**Non-Traditional Mean (SE)**	**Non-Charter TPS Mean (SE)**	
% Passing TAKS Math	71.36 [a] (25.1)	27.20 [a, b] (2.02)	47.39 [a, b] (3.21)	63.62 [b] (0.49)	88.35***
% Passing TAKS Reading	87.00 [a] (3.58)	66.31 [a, b, c] (1.51)	74.68 [b] (1.99)	86.38 [c] (0.29)	97.32***
% Passing TAKS, All Subjects	64.64 [a] (8.04)	29.22 [a, b] (1.64)	42.87 [a, b] (2.72)	56.32 [b] (0.48)	62.69***
Attendance Rate	94.91 [a] (0.92)	90.53 [a] (0.78)	92.86 [a] (0.62)	85.75 [a] (0.58)	2.840*
Drop-out Rate	0.64 [a] (0.36)	2.26 [a, b] (0.30)	1.76 (0.38)	0.92 [b] (0.55)	11.023***
Completion Rate I	79.86 (4.97)	64.94 [a] (4.20)	71.07 [b] (5.40)	85.70 [a, b] (0.63)	15.960***
Completion Rate II	91.49 (4.23)	85.68 (3.16)	81.52 (5.26)	90.44 (0.58)	2.333

Note: Significance level: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Charter types that share superscripts are statistically different from one another at the $p < .05$ level or lower.
SE = Standard error. TPS = Traditional public school (non-charter).

A few additional effectiveness factors were able to be assessed at the secondary grade level, specifically, drop out rates and completion rates. The Highly Academic charter schools had the lowest average drop out rates of the school types, followed by non-charter TPS. However, Highly Academic charters and non-charter TPS again showed no statistically significant differences on these measures. Risk/Recovery charters had the highest drop out rates, averaging 2.26%, and the lowest completion rates when those students earning GEDs were not taken into account (Completion Rate I, as classified by the TEA). However, when GED earners were included in the completion figure (Completion Rate II), Risk/Recovery charters no longer showed the lowest average completion rates. In fact, when GED completion was taken into consideration, there were no significant differences between any school types.

TEA Accountability Status and Ratings

Finally, we looked at the proportion of schools in each category, and as an aggregate, in the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) alternative education accountability system (AEA) versus the standard accountability system (Table 8), and the various ratings that each were given in 2006 (Table 9). As of 2006, schools rated according the alternative accountability system (AEA) must have at least 65% of their students designated as "at risk" for academic failure (TEA, 2006a). Therefore, AEA campuses have different requirements for obtaining an academically acceptable rating.

Table 8 illustrates that charter schools serving primary grades tend to be rated under the standard accountability system, but that a majority of charters serving secondary students tend to be rated under the alternative system. However, most Risk Recovery campuses at both the primary and secondary levels were registered as alternative education campuses.

Table 8: *Frequency of Accountability Status Within Each School Type*

	School Types				
Accountability Status	**Highly Academic**	**Risk/ Recovery**	**Non-Traditional**	**All Charters**	**Non-Charter TPS**
*Primary Grades**	(N=27)	(N=45)	(N=108)	(N=224)	(N=6,005)
AEA	3 (11%)	26 (58%)	18 (17%)	80 (36%)	40 (4%)
Standard/Non-AEA	24 (86%)	13 (29%)	90 (83%)	144 (64%)	5,965 (96%)
*Secondary Grades**	(N=11)	(N=99)	(N=49)	(N=195)	(N=1,950)
AEA	2 (12%)	90 (78%)	24 (35%)	145 (57%)	246 (13%)
Standard/Non-AEA	9 (53%)	9 (8%)	25 (36%)	50 (21%)	1,704 (87%)

Note: The "All Charter" column includes charters that did not have enough information to be classified; therefore, this column should not be viewed as a summation of the other three charter school columns.
* includes schools that serve both primary and secondary schools, therefore, proportions are as a percentage of the number of charters in the analysis.

Table 9 shows the number and percentage of the campuses in each category that received various ratings under both the standard and alternative rating systems.

Table 9: *2006 TEA Accountability Ratings by School Type and Grade Level*

	School Types				
Accountability Rating	**Highly Academic**	**Risk/ Recovery**	**Non-Traditional**	**All Charter Campuses**	**Non-Charter TPS**
*Primary Grades**	(N=28)	(N=45)	(N=108)	(N=224)	(N=6,005)
Exemplary	5 (19%)	0 (0%)	7 (7%)	12 (5%)	540 (9%)
Recognized	9 (33%)	1 (2%)	21 (20%)	34 (15%)	2,609 (43%)
Acceptable-Std	7 (26%)	4 (9%)	45 (42%)	60 (27%)	2,252 (38%)
Acceptable-AEA	3 (11%)	25 (56%)	18 (17%)	80 (36%)	37 (1%)
Unacceptable-Std	2 (7%)	3 (7%)	14 (13%)	21 (9%)	140 (2%)
Unacceptable-AEA	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	2 (1%)	3 (<1%)
Not Rated-Other	1 (4%)	4 (9%)	3 (3%)	15 (7%)	424 (7%)
*Secondary Grades**	(N=11)	(N=99)	(N=49)	(N=195)	(N=1,950)
Exemplary	2 (18%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (<1%)	15 (<1%)
Recognized	4 (36%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	6 (3%)	247 (13%)
Acceptable-Std	1 (9%)	5 (5%)	16 (33%)	23 (12%)	932 (48%)
Acceptable-AEA	2 (18%)	84 (84%)	24 (49%)	137 (70%)	234 (12%)
Unacceptable-Std	2 (18%)	3 (3%)	8 (16%)	17 (9%)	101 (5%)
Unacceptable-AEA	0 (0%)	6 (6%)	0 (0%)	8 (4%)	11 (<1%)
Not Rated-Other	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	2 (<1%)	410 (21%)

Note: The "All Charter" column includes charters that did not have enough information to be classified; therefore, this column should not be viewed as a summation of the other three charter school columns.
* includes schools that serve both primary and secondary schools, therefore, proportions are as a percentage of the number of charters in the analysis.
Std= standard accountability system, AEA= alternative education accountability.

Though the figures in Table 9 provide only a descriptive snapshot of how each of the school types were rated in 2006, the results further support the conclusion that not all charters are being outperformed by traditional public schools. For example, when primary charters are compared as a whole to traditional primary public schools, a lower percentage of charters received Exemplary ratings (4% compared to 9%, respectively). However, when the different types of charters are compared to traditional public school, the Highly Academic charters rated under the standard accountability system had a far higher proportion receive the top rating (19% compared to 9% in TPS). For secondary schools overall, roughly the same proportion of charter schools and traditional public schools were rated Exemplary, but upon closer examination of the three charter types, 18% of the Highly Academic secondary charters were rated as Exemplary, compared to less than 1% of TPS serving secondary grades.

To make sure that we were really comparing apples to apples, we disaggregated our analysis of certain performance measures for AEA Risk/Recovery charters and AEA non-charter traditional public schools (TPS). Although the AEA Risk/Recovery charters showed slightly lower average pass rates on the three TAKS measures, none of the differences between these schools were significant (see Table 10). Therefore, we can conclude that AEA Risk/Recovery charters are doing no better, but also no worse, than traditional public schools at educating at-risk students in Texas.

Table 10: *Differences in Performance Measures Between AEA Risk/Recovery Charters and AEA Non-Charter Traditional Public Schools (TPS)*

	AEA Risk/Recovery Charters Mean (SD)	AEA Non-Charter TPS Mean (SD)	t-value
Primary Grades			
% Pass TAKS Math	25.35 (19.33)	29.08 (21.24)	0.578
% Pass TAKS Read	64.39 (17.56)	67.36 (19.08)	0.531
% Pass TAKS All	31.38 (18.44)	35.14 (20.77)	0.661
Secondary Grades			
% Pass TAKS Math	23.92 (13.62)	28.11 (20.84)	1.699
% Pass TAKS Read	64.93 (12.74)	67.67 (19.05)	1.237
% Pass TAKS All	28.26 (14.16)	29.03 (20.25)	0.328

Next, we compared all AEA charter types to their corresponding AEA non-charter TPS schools to see if our classification of schools into the Risk Recovery category was somehow biasing the results. Similar to Table 10, the results shown in Table 11 support the conclusion that charters serving at-risk students are performing on par with comparable non-charter TPS, with the exception of primary-level math, in which students in AEA charters are performing *better*. The difference between the average percentage of students passing each of the tests in AEA non-charter TPS versus AEA charters ranged from -5.11 to +0.26, with an average difference of +0.44 in favor of AEA non-charter traditional public schools. Although this difference was not statistically significant, the result further supports the conclusion that charters should be evaluated against comparable public schools.

Table 11: *Differences in Performance Measures Between All AEA Charter Campuses and AEA Non-Charter Traditional Public Schools (TPS)*

	All AEA Charter Schools Mean (SD)	All AEA Non-Charter TPS Mean (SD)	t-value
Primary Grades			
% Pass TAKS Math	34.19 (19.36)	29.08 (21.24)	-1.089
% Pass TAKS Read	65.31 (14.62)	67.36 (19.08)	0.564
% Pass TAKS All	32.04 (14.71)	35.14 (20.77)	0.729
Secondary Grades			
% Pass TAKS Math	27.68 (16.03)	28.11 (20.84)	0.184
% Pass TAKS Read	65.77 (13.09)	67.67 (19.05)	0.951
% Pass TAKS All	28.77 (13.99)	29.03 (20.25)	0.126

Finally, we aggregated all charters under the standard accountability system and compared their average TAKS scores to those of non-charter traditional public schools under the standard accountability system. While charters assessed under the alternative accountability system were performing at about the same level as their non-charter TPS counterparts, charters using the standard accountability system (as a group) were, on average, performing significantly *worse* than similar non-charter TPS (see Table 12). The average difference in the percentage of students passing between standard/non-AEA traditional public schools and standard/non-AEA charter schools as a whole was 8.78%, favoring non-AEA traditional public schools; the range of the average percent passing differences was 3.63% to 11.05%.

Table 12: *Differences in Performance Measures Between All Standard Accountability (Non-AEA) Charter Schools and Non-Charter Traditional Public Schools (TPS)*

	All Standard Accountability Charter Schools Mean (SD)	All Standard Accountability Non-Charter TPS Mean (SD)	t-value
Primary Grades			
% Pass TAKS Math	70.79 (19.93)	81.46 (12.40)	6.797***
% Pass TAKS Read	84.49 (11.76)	88.12 (8.25)	3.913***
% Pass TAKS All	62.51 (21.50)	73.56 (14.34)	6.522***
Secondary Grades			
% Pass TAKS Math	57.83 (26.50)	67.24 (14.24)	2.592*
% Pass TAKS Read	79.04 (18.69)	88.44 (7.53)	3.717***
% Pass TAKS All	50.95 (24.40)	59.48 (15.34)	2.574*

Discussion

Our analysis uncovered three distinct types of charter campuses: those focused on high academic standards and college preparation, those focused on recovering students who are at high risk of dropping out of school, and those in the middle, which focus on providing parents and students with a viable alternative to the traditional public school system. We established that these charter types differ fundamentally from one another on school characteristics, such as average enrollment and the average amount of time spent in the classroom. We also established that these three charter types, by definition, differ in the percent of students participating on various programs, such as gifted and talented and special education programs. Finally, we discovered that these three types of charters differ, often dramatically, from one another on measures of performance and school effectiveness.

In addition, we found that students attending charter schools that focus on high academic standards and preparing their students to go to college performed similarly to students attending non-charter traditional public schools. Unfortunately, we also found that the charters serving primarily at-risk students fell grossly behind their traditional public school counterparts, at both the primary and secondary grade levels. Student attending Non-Traditional charter schools also performed below students from non-charter TPS, but not as dramatically as those from the Risk/Recovery schools. These latter findings, in particular, support the argument that charter

schools should not be compared as an aggregate to traditional public schools in terms of school effectiveness.

These finding expand on the current literature on charter school effectiveness by assessing not only differences between charter types (as done in the Fordham report), but also comparing how each of the types differ from non-charter traditional public schools. However, given the data available, we were not able to compare individual students' academic growth over time between charter and traditional public schools. Therefore, we cannot make any conclusions regarding the causal relationship between school types and measures of student performance. In other words, students attending Highly Academic charters may be performing better than students from the other charters simply because Highly Academic charters tend to attract higher ability students from actively involved families—not because of the differences in the quality of programs offered or time spent in the classroom. Only by tracking individual students' performance over time would we be able to assess how much improvement is occurring and compare average academic improvement between the school types (Ballou, Sanders, & Wright, 2004; Chiang & Hoxby, 2005; Sander & Horn, 1994).

There are other important caveats to consider. As with any study that relies on self-reported data, our results may have been affected by the accuracy of the survey participants' responses. In a few instances, principals were new to the school (or the school itself was new) and therefore could not provide all of the information requested. And as other researchers have found, the various reports that charter schools are required to submit to the Texas Education Agency are not always as reliable as one would hope. This continues to be the case in the current investigation. In addition, a lot of data must be considered missing, because data are not released by the TEA for schools with very small enrollments, due to confidentiality concerns (TEA, 2006b). This is especially problematic for assessing the performance of small charter campuses.

Furthermore, the negative press and increasing legislative scrutiny on charter schools and their academic and financial performance has made many administrators hesitant to participate in surveys regarding their schools—and perhaps caused some administrators to give guarded (and potentially false) responses when they do participate. For example, because all open-enrollment charter schools must, by definition, admit any students that apply (either on a first-come, first-serve or lottery basis), some principals may have stated that they did not "target" certain types of students (even though their schools' mission statements may have catered to a particular group, such as low-income or minority students). We have attempted to account for data inaccuracy by reporting the standard errors for each of the factors in the tables and by collecting data from multiple sources.

Finally, our categorization of charter campuses was the result of a subjective process. We have attempted to make our methodology transparent, so that other researchers may replicate our results both within Texas and across other states.

Conclusion

Over one million of our nation's students now attend charter schools—a number that is growing rapidly each year (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2006). In Texas alone, the number of charter schools has nearly doubled since 2001-02, the school year from which Carpenter's (2006) typology data is taken. This study expands upon previous typologies and their applications, and the results should signal to researchers and policymakers to be more careful when

generalizing about all charter schools and comparing charters to traditional public schools with dissimilar student characteristics.

CSPI intends for this study to serve an essential practical function as well as a theoretical one, by providing the most up-to-date, descriptive information on each charter school operating in the state of Texas to parents, policymakers, and other stakeholders. The authors hope that it will become a valuable resource to parents in helping them decide whether to choose a charter school for their children, and if so, which one. It also provides policymakers better information on which school types should be expanded (and perhaps which types should be more closely monitored). We also hope to help move the debate about charter schools' effectiveness away from "snapshots" of average test scores in a given year to a more value-added measurement of performance. Only by applying a growth model to a typology such as ours can we begin to fairly and accurately compare apples to apples when discussing the true effectiveness of charter schools.

Furthermore, CSPI's study has immediate implications for Texas' 80th legislative session. If enacted, Senate Bill 4, known as "The Champion Charter Schools Act," would potentially close a significant number of charter schools across the state (particularly Risk Recovery charters), without taking their students' backgrounds or growth into consideration—even though our analysis shows that these charters are performing no better or worse than their counterparts in the traditional public school system (for more information, see CSPI's Policy Brief 2, *The Potential Impact of Senate Bill 4 on Texas Charters*).

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Appendix: Survey Instrument

1. What is the date that this school began operating as a charter school?

2. Who is your sponsoring entity?

3. How many students were enrolled during the 2005-2006 school year?

4. What type of curriculum is used at your school?

5. Does your school serve any specific types of students?

6. How long is your school day?

7. How many days of instruction are there during the academic year?

8. What grades does your school serve?

9. Does your school currently have a waiting list for the 06-07 academic year?

10. What was the average ability level of your students before they entered your school?

11. Does the total daily expenditure per pupil at your school differ between at-risk students and non-at-risk students? If yes, do you have figures for the two groups separately?

12. Does your school receive funding from or have a partnership with any of the local area businesses? If yes, would you mind sharing their names with us?

13. What do you feel is the primary distinguishing characteristic of your school?

About the Authors

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Dr. Jody L. Ernst joined CSPI as a research fellow in March 2006. Jody received her doctorate in differential psychology from the University of Texas at Austin in 2006. She has worked as a graduate research assistant for the Texas Adoption Project, studying the effects of genetic and environmental factors on the development of intelligence, personality, and problem behaviors. She was also an assistant instructor at UT, teaching courses in introductory psychology and research methods and statistics. Her own research focuses on the emotional, behavioral, and academic development of high-risk adolescents.

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CSPI provides analysis of existing research on critical public school choice issues as well as conducts original research on the essential elements of quality public charter schools. The essential elements are defined as crucial aspects of successful public charter schools, and represent the major areas of focus for the Institute.

Financial Transparency

Charter schools are primarily funded by tax dollars. Policymakers and taxpayers should be knowledgeable about the way public charter schools operate fiscally. CSPI studies a range of financial issues from the transparency of charter school business operations to the impact statewide funding formulas have on charters.

Enrollment Practices

Public charter schools are open to all students in a given community, regardless of previous academic performance or other criteria. Enrollment caps and the size of charter schools make them unique public schools. CSPI focuses on the capacity of charters to serve community needs and the role selection plays in the academic and financial performance of schools.

Student Achievement

The obligation of all public schools is to provide students with an education that will lead to success in work and life. The academic benchmarks charter schools and their authorizers use to determine success are critical. Charters often educate students who, for a variety of reasons, do not perform well in traditional academic settings. CSPI investigates strategies that dramatically improve student achievement year after year.

Best Practices

In order to create and replicate quality public charter schools, it is necessary to study and promote models that work. To the extent public policy enables good charter schools, CSPI identifies model legislative and regulatory actions. At the campus level, through case studies, interviews, and analysis, CSPI highlights the most successful school policies.

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