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Grade shock: Regular schools top charters

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City charters fell harder.

Traditional public schools bested the city's charter schools on annual report-card grades -- scoring 10 points higher on average on a 100-point scale, new data shows.

The city's more than 1,000 public elementary and middle schools averaged a B on their so-called "progress reports," which assign letter grades to schools based largely on how much students improve on state math and reading tests in a given year.

By comparison, the city's 60 charter schools that received letter grades this year averaged a C+.

"This means that either the strategy Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor [Joel] Klein have touted so often for school reform -- the creation of more charter schools -- isn't working, or that the entire progress-report methodology, which relies almost completely on standardized test scores, is flawed," said United Federation of Teachers President Michael Mulgrew.

His union's UFT Charter School in Brooklyn was among the 70 percent of traditional public and charter schools to see their grades plummet after the state raised the passing bar on math and reading tests this summer.

Charter-school supporters said those adjustments -- along with changes in the way school grades were calculated -- might explain the lackluster ratings of charters.

"Obviously, with the inconsistency and shift in how the grades are actually arrived at, it's hard to know what to make of these grades," said James Merriman, CEO of the New York City Charter Schools Center. "Nonetheless, it is one data point that I certainly would expect charter leaders -- particularly those in schools that did not get good grades -- to look at and figure out why that is."

The overall damage -- which saw 49 schools hit with a D grade and eight branded with a dreaded F out of the 1,140 schools graded this year -- would have been much worse if city officials hadn't set a limit on how far grades could drop.

That policy, which limited a school's downfall to two letter grades, buoyed 110 schools that otherwise would have been slapped with D's or F's, according to Department of Education data.

"In a year like this where there are a lot of changes happening, we just don't think it's fair to see a school go from an A to an F," said Deputy Chancellor for Accountability Shael Suransky. "If a school goes from A to a C, that's a big wakeup call for that school, and they need to really pick up their game."

Last year, after state test scores surged to unprecedented heights, a whopping 97 percent of elementary and middle schools got A's or B's.

It was in part those off-the-charts results that sparked this year's change in the passing mark on state tests.

Schools with consecutive years of C's, D's or F's run the risk of being shut down.

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