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## Transforming Education by Putting Kids First



### **IDRA Newsletter – This Issue's Focus: Keeping the Public in Public Education**

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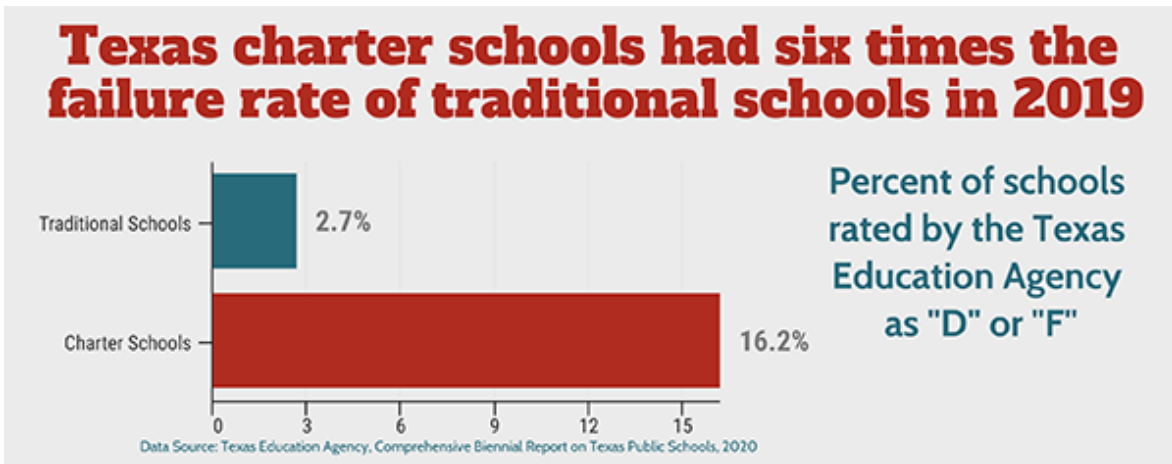
# Texas Must Scrutinize Potential Charter Schools Before Issuing Approvals for Growth

by *Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D.*

In Texas, institutions that started out as experiments for innovations to be used in traditional public schools have instead grown significantly in ways that harm public schools. Starting with 20 schools and just 2,400 students in 1995, charter schools have ballooned to nearly 337,000 students in 2019-20, or about 6.1% of the Texas school population. These schools also account for 14% of state funding, or over \$3.5 billion this year.



Given the global pandemic and unprecedented disruptions to health and the economy, traditional public schools need more support than ever as opposed to having funds siphoned by charter schools. In addition to insufficient accountability and mixed academic results, charter schools offer a rocky performance record for serving marginalized students to include Black students, Latino students, students with disabilities, and English learners.



Moving forward, the Texas Education Agency should scrutinize every charter school’s potential financial impact and segregating effects on the local school district. The priority should be to strengthen and properly invest in existing public schools that sever diverse communities of students.

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## Pandemic No Excuse for Growth of Poorly Performing Virtual Charter Schools in U.S. South

by Terrence Wilson, J.D.

Emergency funding to mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis has allowed private schools and online charters to receive significantly more aid than traditional public schools. These investments are reflective of the larger trend showing 30% of COVID-19 relief funds are committed or have been disbursed to private and charter schools that only serve about 15% of the total student population.



Studies on virtual charters in the U.S. South show that their students overwhelmingly perform worse than students who attend brick-and-mortar district schools.

Given the performance of charter school education pre-pandemic, education leaders should exercise prudence and caution before making additional investments in these institutions. Recommendations for transparency and efficiency range from allowing more public input in the processes of establishing charters to rigorously studying the potentially negative impacts of expanding charters in local school districts and communities.

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## A&M-Commerce Partners with IDRA in Groundbreaking Collaboration – IDRA will Teach Graduate-Level “Social Justice through Education Policy” Course this Spring

Texas A&M University-Commerce and IDRA are partnering to create a trailblazing collaboration aimed at increasing access to higher education and providing students with insight into navigating the educational policymaking process. As part of the agreement, IDRA will provide the curriculum for an online elective course on social justice through policy.



The A&M-Commerce Department of Educational Leadership will offer the graduate-level course in the spring of 2021. Celina Moreno, J.D., IDRA president & CEO and Morgan Craven, J.D., IDRA national director of policy, advocacy and community engagement will teach the course. In turn, A&M-Commerce will offer several incentives for IDRA staff and coalition members to attend the university.

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A promotional banner for IDRA's Texas Education CAFE™ Advocacy Network. The banner is split into two main visual sections. On the left, a group of diverse people, including children and adults, are shown in a meeting or community setting. On the right, the Texas State Capitol building is shown under a blue sky. Overlaid on the left side is a dark blue box with white and gold text. The text reads: 'JOIN TODAY!' in gold, 'IDRA's Texas Education CAFE™ Advocacy Network' in white, 'Family &amp; community advocacy network focusing on education issues in the Texas legislative session' in white, and the URL 'https://idra.news/Subscribe' in white.

## Join IDRA's Texas Education CAFE Advocacy Network

IDRA's family leadership in the education process, Education CAFE™, supports parents and caregivers to understand and influence public school policy and practice. This January, families in Texas will have various opportunities to inform legislators and staff about their priorities, needs and hopes for the education of their children, from birth through college graduation.

Due to COVID-19, there likely will be a drastic change in how the general public will be able to interact with policymakers during the Texas legislative session. Now more than ever, policymakers need to hear from the very people their decisions will impact.

IDRA is launching a family and community advocacy network focusing on education issues in the Texas legislative session. We invite families and



community advocates to join in. Start by signing up to receive our new email alerts, which will be available in English and Spanish.

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## IDRA Legislative Priorities: Keep the Public in Public Education

Public funds should remain in public schools with public oversight from local communities. Recommendations from IDRA for the upcoming 2021 Texas legislative session include prioritizing public schools by ending the expansion of charters and holding charters to the same standards as their public counterparts, ensuring that charters cannot “cream” students by selecting only preferred candidates, providing additional supports to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 in the schools, and ensuring that local communities are involved in the decision-making processes that impact their public schools.

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## Chief Science Officer Students Lead the Way

Chief Science Officer Arturo was recognized by the San Antonio Museum of Science and Technology for his project about STEM career pathways. Through the [IDRA Texas CSO program](#), teens create action plans to promote STEM in their schools and communities.



Due to the pandemic, CSO Arturo Quiñónez wanted to collaborate with a local STEM partner and reached out to SAMSAT, which happily served as his mentor. To spread career awareness so other students can see their future in STEM, Arturo created a model showcasing 12 different careers.

After presenting his project to education specialists, Douglas King, the CEO of SAMSAT, acknowledged his hard work and awarded him with a certificate and a pin with the CSO motto: “We don’t just hope it happens. We make it happen!”

CSO Shreya Chaudhary shared her experiences as a Chief Science Officer on a webinar panel on Elevating Youth Voice in STEM Programming, held by

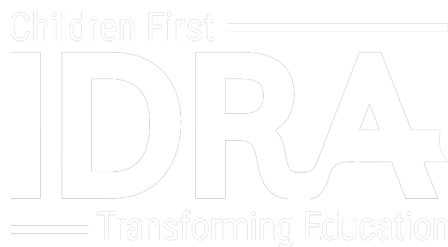
National Girls Collaborative Project. As she described her role on the CSO program, she said, “A big thing we stress is students leading the way.” Learn more about the IDRA Texas Chief Science Officer program and how to bring the program to your school.

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The Intercultural Development Research Association is an independent, non-profit organization. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs.

IDRA works hand-in-hand with hundreds of thousands of educators and families each year in communities and classrooms around the country. All our work rests on an unwavering commitment to creating self-renewing schools that value and promote the success of students of all backgrounds.

December 23, 2020