Oklahoma's Public High School Outcomes by Sector

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May 2026

About this Study

The author is grateful to Annenberg Institute at Brown University researcher Andrew Camp, University of Oklahoma political science professor Deven Carlson, OCEP faculty director Daniel Hamlin, and University of Oklahoma doctoral student Sam Naab for their helpful feedback on drafts of the report. Any errors or omissions are the responsibility of the author.

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Oklahoma High Schools

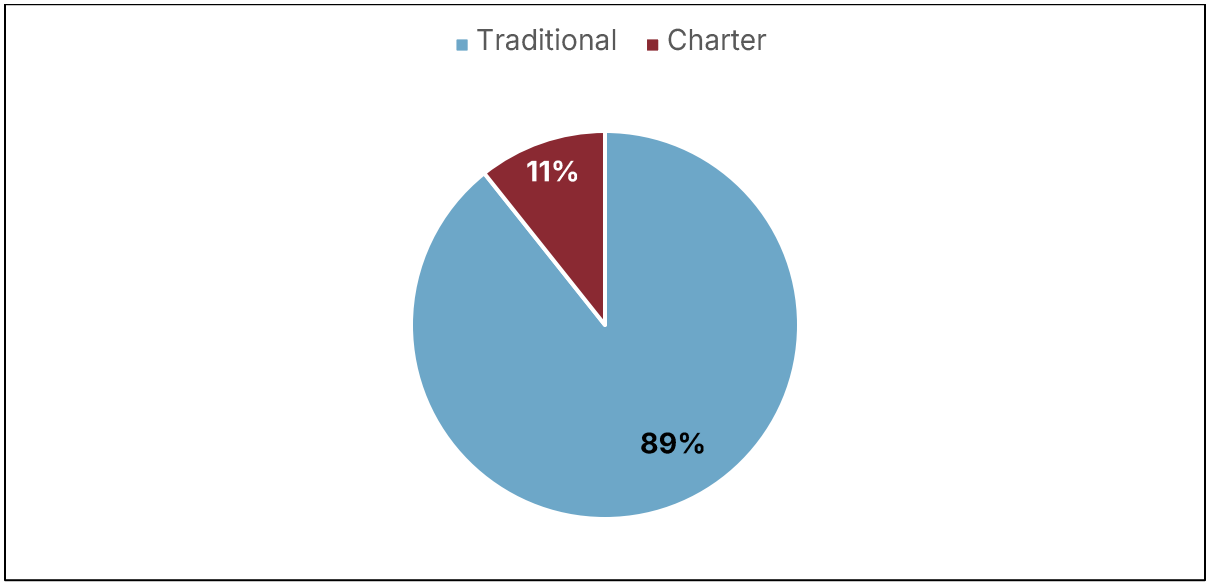
Oklahoma's public schools face serious academic challenges. As shown in the recent Oklahoma Center for Education Policy (OCEP) report *The Fall to 48th: Documenting Oklahoma's Educational Decline*, Oklahoma now ranks near the bottom nationally in student achievement after a long decline from its stronger position in the 1990s.[1] That statewide picture raises an obvious next question: What do we know about the performance of Oklahoma's public high schools?

This report focuses on one aspect of that question: how outcomes differ across Oklahoma's three public high school sectors: traditional public schools, in-person charter schools (sometimes called "brick-and-mortar"), and virtual charter schools. The distinction between in-person and virtual charter schools matters. In public debate, charter schools are often discussed as if they are a single category, but in Oklahoma most charter high school students do not attend an in-person school but rather a virtual charter school. Any valid comparison of high school outcomes in Oklahoma therefore needs to separate in-person charter schools from virtual charter schools.

Oklahoma's Public High School Sectors

Oklahoma's public high school landscape is still dominated by traditional public schools. In 2025, Oklahoma had 482 public schools serving 210,425 students in grades 9 through 12. Of those students, 187,906 attended traditional public schools, while 22,519 attended charter schools. Put differently, almost 90 percent of Oklahoma public high school students attended traditional public schools (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Almost 90 percent of Oklahoma's public high school students attend traditional public schools.

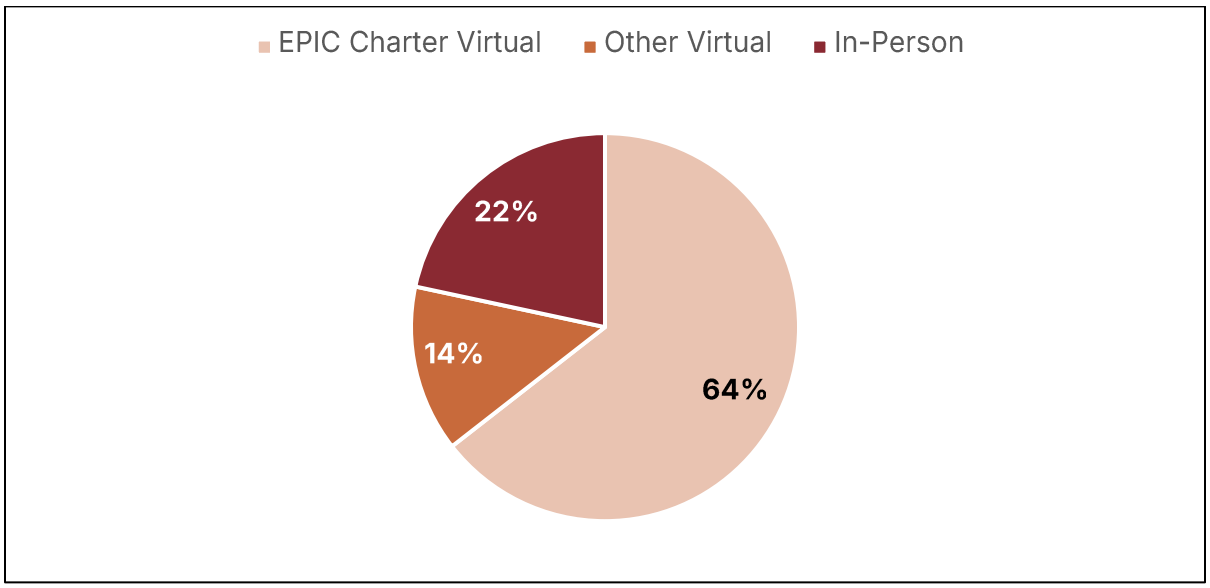


Note. This figure represents 210,425 students across 482 Oklahoma public high schools.

But the charter sector itself is not mostly made up of in-person schools. According to 2025 data, Oklahoma has 21 charter schools serving high school students. Fourteen are

in-person charter schools, serving 4,873 students. Seven are virtual charter schools, serving 17,646 students. In other words, less than one-fourth of Oklahoma's charter high school students attend in-person schools (Figure 2), and in-person charter schools serve 3 percent of the state's public high school population.

Figure 2. Oklahoma's high school charter sector is dominated by virtual schools.



Note. This figure represents 22,519 students across 21 Oklahoma public charter high schools.

Figure 2 also shows that the state's virtual charter enrollment is highly concentrated. Nearly two-thirds of all charter high school students in Oklahoma attended a single school: EPIC Charter Virtual High School. This means that statewide charter high school averages are heavily shaped by the performance of virtual schools, and especially by EPIC. For that reason, this report separates charter high schools into two categories: in-person charter schools and virtual charter schools. There are 14 in-person charter schools and seven virtual charter schools in Oklahoma (Table 1).

This distinction matters because in-person and virtual charter schools use different educational models and also may attract different types of families. For example, families that move frequently for short-term work may be more likely to enroll their students in virtual schools. Although fully explaining why families opt for different types of schools is beyond the scope of the present study, analyzing these sectors separately helps to clarify important distinctions in both enrollment patterns and student outcomes.[2]

Table 1. Oklahoma's Charter High Schools

Modality	School Name	Location	Enrollment (Grades 9–12)
In-person	Santa Fe South	OKC Metro	1,081
	Tulsa Honor	Tulsa Metro	547
	Harding Charter Preparatory	OKC Metro	538
	ASTEC Charter	OKC Metro	435
	Harding Fine Arts	OKC Metro	400
	Santa Fe South Pathways Mid-College	OKC Metro	394
	Dove Science Academy (OKC)	OKC Metro	389
	Dove Science Academy (Tulsa)	Tulsa Metro	343
	Tulsa School of Arts and Science	Tulsa Metro	294
	KIPP Tulsa University Prep	Tulsa Metro	249
	Proud to Partner Leadership	OKC Metro	55
	Academy of Seminole	Seminole County	50
	Oklahoma Youth Academy	Pottawatomie County	49
	Tulsa Classical Academy	Tulsa Metro	49
Virtual	EPIC Charter Virtual	Statewide	14,517
	Oklahoma Virtual Charter Academy	Statewide	1,229
	Insight School of Oklahoma	Statewide	877
	Oklahoma Connections Academy	Statewide	560
	E-School Virtual	Statewide	312
	Dove Virtual	Statewide	124
	Virtual Prep	Statewide	27

Note. Oklahoma Youth Academy is an alternative school run by the Oklahoma Office of Juvenile Affairs with the mission to support the state's most at-risk youth. Tulsa Classical Academy and Virtual Prep served no students in grades 11 or 12 in the 2025 data.

Prior Research on Charter Schools and Virtual Schools

Research on charter schools nationally has shown important variation in the quality of charter schools and the differences in their effects on students, compared with the effects of traditional public schools. On average, charter schools tend to perform similarly to traditional public schools, with some studies finding modest positive effects of charter schools relative to traditional public schools. For example, the most recent national study by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University found small average gains for charter students relative to similar students in traditional public schools, but also substantial variation across schools, locations, and student groups.[3]

Studies from urban, in-person charter schools serving disadvantaged students have tended to show more positive effects for charter schools. For example, lottery-based studies of Boston charter high schools find large positive effects on college preparation, including SAT scores, AP participation, and performance on the state's high-stakes graduation exam.[4] The research on charter high schools specifically is thin, but rigorous studies from Florida and Chicago find positive effects for charter high schools, including that their students are more likely to graduate, enroll in college, persist in college, and earn more in young adulthood, compared to their traditional public school counterparts.[5]

Oklahoma's charter sector has also received favorable attention in national rankings. A recent *Education Next* "charter report card" ranked Oklahoma sixth nationally in charter school performance, though such rankings should be interpreted as broad indicators rather than direct evidence about any individual school or sector.[6]

The evidence on virtual charter schools generally points to negative effects on students. CREDO's 2015 national study found that full-time online charter students made far weaker academic progress than comparable students in traditional public schools, with estimated losses equivalent to 72 fewer days of learning in reading and 180 fewer days in math.[7] A longitudinal Oklahoma study using data from 2016 to 2019 and focusing on students in rural areas likewise found large negative associations for virtual school students, with especially large losses in math and negative effects for all grade bands.[8] CREDO's 2023 national charter study similarly found large negative results for virtual charter students, including especially large math losses.[9]

Data and Methods

This report uses data from the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to describe outcomes across Oklahoma public high school sectors. The analysis focuses on schools serving students in grades 9 through 12 during the 2025 reporting year (i.e., the 2024–25 academic year).

Because school performance varies considerably between in-person and virtual charter schools (see *Prior Research on Charter Schools and Virtual Schools*), this study groups schools into three sectors: traditional public high schools, in-person charter high schools, and virtual charter high schools. Sector classification was verified using information provided by the Oklahoma Statewide Charter School Board.

There are important demographic differences across sectors (Table 2). In particular, Oklahoma's in-person charter high schools serve an especially high-poverty student population. Statewide, 84 percent of in-person charter high school students are economically disadvantaged, compared with 56 percent of traditional public school students and 72 percent of virtual charter school students. In-person charter schools also serve a primarily Hispanic population and disproportionately serve Black students, while serving much smaller shares of Native American and White students than traditional public schools or virtual charter schools. Although in-person charter schools serve a higher proportion of English learners than other sectors, they serve a somewhat smaller share of special education students.

Table 2. Summary Statistics by Sector

Student Group		Traditional Public Schools	In-person Charter Schools	Virtual Charter Schools
Race/Ethnicity	Asian and Pacific Islander	3%	2%	1%
	Black	8%	14%	7%
	Hispanic	20%	65%	16%
	Multi-racial	13%	5%	19%
	Native American	11%	2%	7%
	White	45%	13%	50%
Student Factors	Economically Disadvantaged	56%	84%	72%
	English Learner	9%	35%	6%
	Special Education	14%	9%	15%
Enrollment	Mean Enrollment	408	348	2,521
	Total Enrollment	187,906	4,873	17,646
Schools		461	14	7

Note. Percentages are weighted by school enrollment. Data come from the 2025 OSDE fall enrollment data file.

Several schools are excluded from the outcomes analysis to keep the comparison focused on public high schools serving the full high school grade span. Excluded schools include special education schools such as the Oklahoma School for the Deaf and the Oklahoma School for the Blind; alternative schools such as Oklahoma Youth Academy and Emerson Alternative High School; schools without complete demographic data; and schools that serve high school students but do not serve the upper grades, such as junior high schools.

The analysis uses school-level data, and outcomes are weighted by student enrollment so that larger schools contribute proportionally more to statewide averages for each sector.

The analysis also examines results separately for Oklahoma's two major metro areas, Oklahoma City and Tulsa, where most in-person charter high schools are located (Table 3). Metro areas are defined using county location and NCES locale classifications, including schools labeled as city, suburb, town-fringe, or rural-fringe. As most charter schools are located within the core urban district of each metro area, outcomes for high schools in Oklahoma City Public Schools (OKCPS) and Tulsa Public Schools (TPS) are included as additional context.

Table 3. Summary Statistics by School Sector in Oklahoma Metro Areas

Student Group		OKC			Tulsa		
		All Traditional Public	Oklahoma City Public Schools	Charter	All Traditional Public	Tulsa Public Schools	Charter
Race/Ethnicity	Asian and Pacific Islander	5%	3%	1%	4%	3%	2%
	Black	11%	21%	16%	18%	22%	12%
	Hispanic	26%	60%	56%	32%	41%	71%
	Multi-racial	11%	6%	7%	10%	10%	3%
	Native American	7%	2%	2%	3%	4%	1%
	White	39%	9%	17%	33%	20%	11%
Student Factors	Economically Disadvantaged	54%	59%	83%	50%	75%	85%
	English Learner	16%	39%	37%	18%	29%	34%
	Special Education	12%	13%	11%	13%	12%	7%
Enrollment	Mean Enrollment	1,253	938	470	1,431	859	296
	Total Enrollment	33,820	9,383	3,292	32,909	8,594	1,482
Schools		27	10	7	23	10	5

Note. Percentages are weighted by school enrollment. Metro areas are defined as schools located within the core county (i.e., Oklahoma County or Tulsa County) and labeled geographically as "City," "Suburb," "Town-Fringe," or "Rural-Fringe." Included schools are all in-person schools. Data for the largest district in each metro area are included in the metro average and also reported separately.

Outcomes

The analysis focuses on three sets of high school outcome measures: ACT performance, results on the College and Career Readiness Assessments (CCRA), and four-year graduation rates. ACT outcomes include school-level averages for composite scores and scores in English, mathematics, reading, and science.[10] CCRA outcomes include OSDE-reported index scores for U.S. history and science, as well as the overall high school academic achievement composite, which incorporates ACT and CCRA performance. Graduation outcomes are measured using each school's reported four-year graduation rate.

Together, these measures capture several dimensions of high school performance: college-entrance exam performance, state accountability results in core high school subjects, and whether students complete high school on time. ACT subgroup results are not available in the school-level data provided to OCEP, and many schools do not report subgroup results for several student groups on other outcomes. As a result, subgroup analyses are limited to economically disadvantaged students where sufficient data are available.

Caveats

These findings should be interpreted as descriptive comparisons, not causal estimates. The analysis does not use random assignment, lottery data, student-level controls, or

quasi-experimental methods. Differences across sectors likely reflect not only differences in school quality, but also differences in student composition, family choice, mobility, prior achievement, and other factors not captured in school-level aggregate data.

ACT Outcomes by Sector

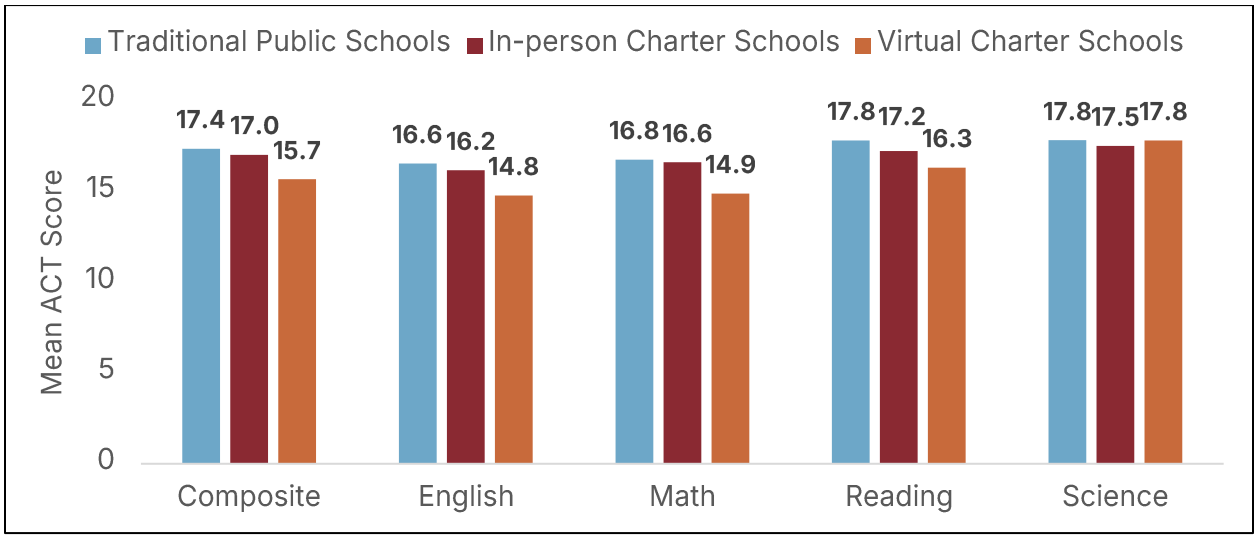
The ACT exam is scored on a scale from 1 to 36 for each subject, and the composite score is the average of the ACT subject scores. Average ACT composite scores among Oklahoma high schools range from 12.6 (Putnam Heights Academy) to 22.7 (Classen High School of Advanced Studies).

Statewide, traditional public high schools post slightly higher ACT scores than in-person charter schools and considerably higher scores than virtual charter schools (Figure 3). Traditional public high schools have an average composite score of 17.4, compared with 17.0 for in-person charter schools and 15.7 for virtual charter schools.

The pattern is similar in English, reading, and math. Traditional public schools score 16.6 in English, compared with 16.2 for in-person charter schools and 14.8 for virtual charter schools. In reading, traditional public schools score 17.8, compared with 17.2 for in-person charters and 16.3 for virtual charters. In math, traditional public schools score 16.8, compared with 16.6 for in-person charters and 14.9 for virtual charters.

Science is an exception in which students in all sectors post similar scores. Traditional public schools and virtual charter schools both average 17.8 in science, while in-person charter schools average 17.5.

Figure 3. High school students in traditional public schools earn slightly higher ACT scores than their charter school counterparts, while science scores are similar across sectors.



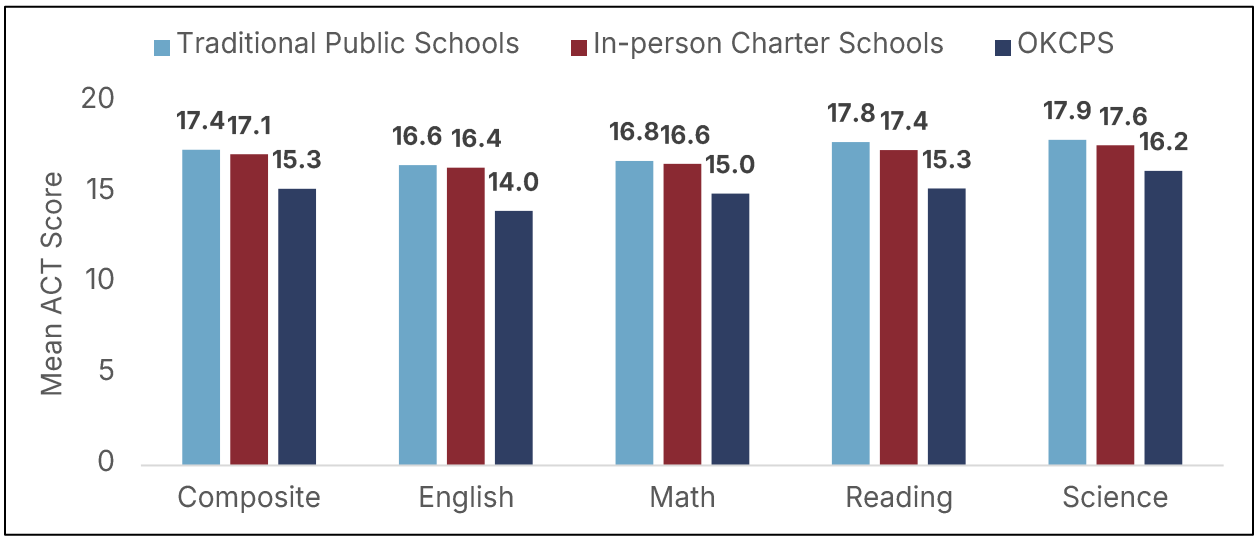
Note. Traditional public schools N = 442; In-person charter schools N = 12; Virtual charter schools N = 6. Outcomes are weighted by student enrollment.

ACT Outcomes by Metro Area and Sector

The ACT comparisons look similar in Oklahoma's two major metro areas. In both Oklahoma City and Tulsa, traditional public high schools have slightly higher ACT composite scores than in-person charter high schools.

In the Oklahoma City metro area, traditional public schools average 17.4 on the ACT composite, compared with 17.1 for in-person charter schools (Figure 4). OKCPS has a lower average ACT composite, averaging 15.3. The subject-level differences between the traditional public schools and in-person charter schools in the Oklahoma City metro are small, but OKCPS averages are more than one point lower than the metro average and the local charter schools in every ACT subject.

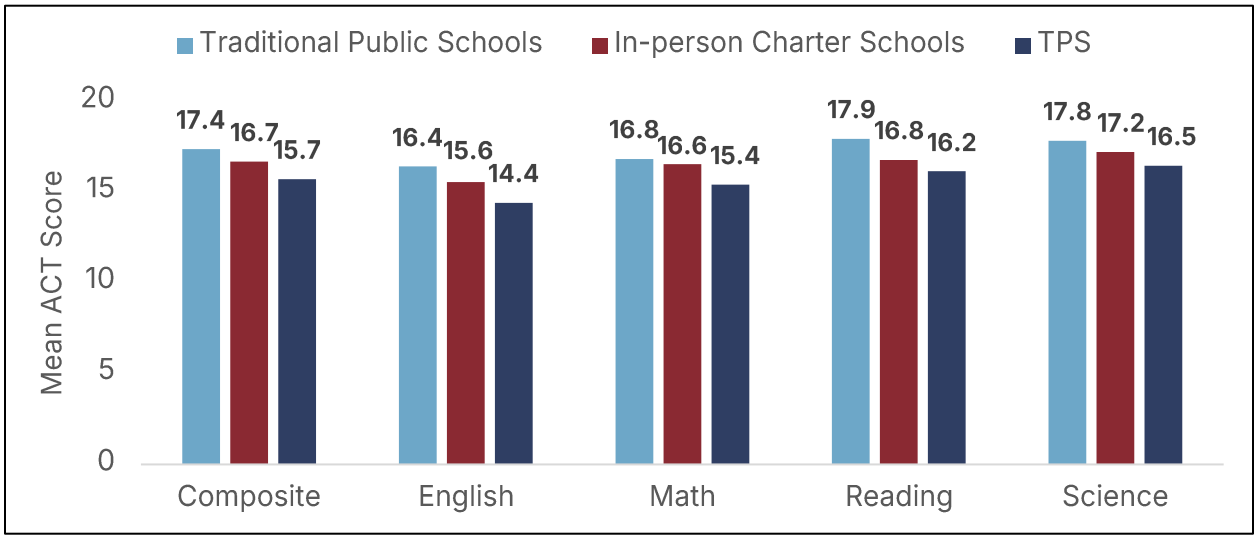
Figure 4. High school students in traditional public schools earn slightly higher ACT scores than their charter school counterparts in the Oklahoma City metro area.



Note. Oklahoma City traditional public schools N = 26; Oklahoma City in-person charter schools N = 7; OKCPS N = 10. Outcomes are weighted by student enrollment. OKCPS refers to Oklahoma City Public Schools.

The Tulsa metro area exhibits a similar pattern, although the gaps between the traditional public schools and in-person charters are slightly larger while the gaps between in-person charter schools and the core district, TPS, are a bit narrower (Figure 5). Traditional public schools average 17.4 on the composite, compared with 16.7 for in-person charter schools. The average ACT composite score in TPS high schools is 15.7. Traditional public schools in the Tulsa metro area also score higher than their in-person charter school counterparts in English, reading, and science, but in-person charter schools score higher than TPS high schools on all of those subjects.

Figure 5. High school students in traditional public schools earn slightly higher ACT scores than their charter school counterparts in the Tulsa metro area.



Note. Tulsa traditional public schools N = 21; Tulsa in-person charter schools N = 4; TPS N = 10. Outcomes are weighted by student enrollment. TPS refers to Tulsa Public Schools.

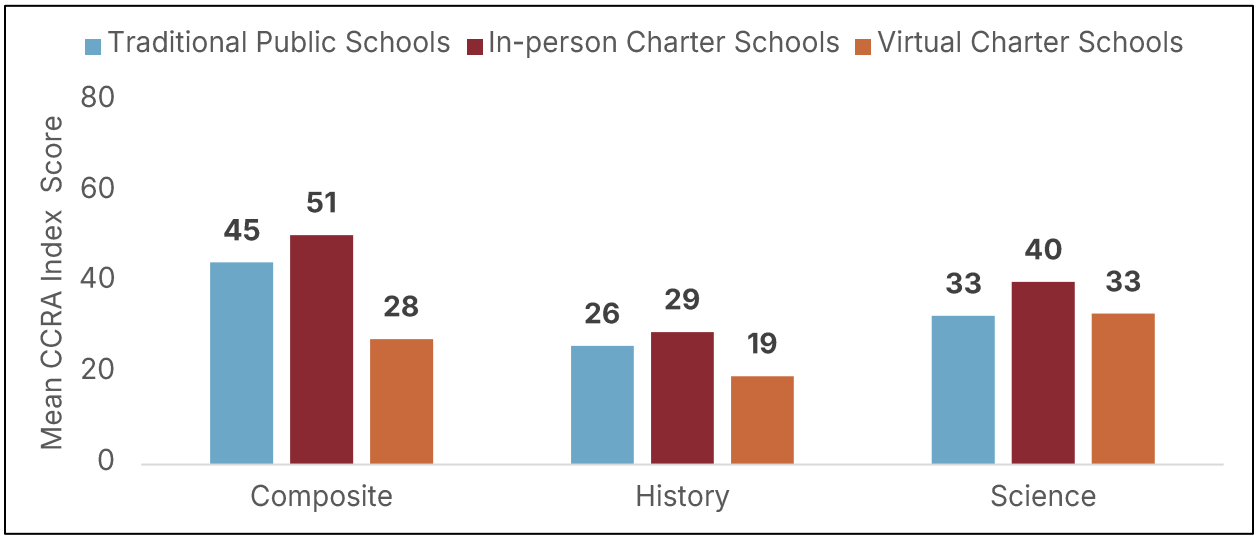
CCRA Outcomes by Sector

Oklahoma's high school CCRA measures 11th grade performance in U.S. history and science, reported as index scores. These CCRA index scores are weighted calculations based on points students earn for meeting proficiency targets and reaching various performance levels, with additional weighting for priority student groups (e.g., students from low-income families).[11] The resulting aggregated scores range from 0, for seven high schools, to 100 (Felt High School). The composite CCRA score combines CCRA history and science results with ACT performance (see *ACT Outcomes by Sector*).

Statewide, the CCRA results (Figure 6) tell a somewhat different story than the ACT results. In-person charter high schools have a higher average composite score (51) than traditional public schools (45). Virtual charter schools again trail both sectors, with an average composite score of 28.

In-person charter schools also score higher than traditional public schools in both the history and science CCRA assessments. In history, in-person charters average 29, compared with 26 for traditional public schools and 19 for virtual charter schools. In science, in-person charters average 40, compared with 33 for traditional public schools and virtual charter schools. Science is the one CCRA assessment subject where students attending virtual charter schools equal their traditional public school counterparts.

Figure 6. High school students attending in-person charter schools earn higher CCRA scores than their traditional public school counterparts, and virtual charter students trail both groups on the composite and history assessments.



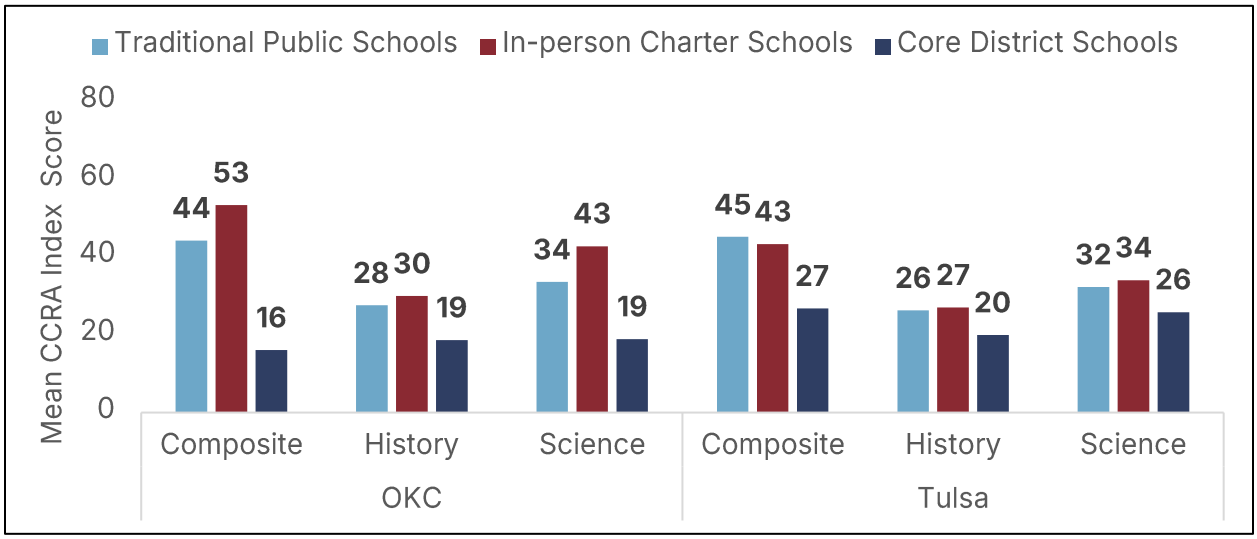
Note. Traditional public schools N = 444; In-person charter schools N = 12; Virtual charter schools N = 6. Outcomes are weighted by student enrollment.

CCRA Outcomes by Metro Area and Sector

In Oklahoma City, in-person charter high schools outperform traditional public schools on all three CCRA measures and strongly outperform OKCPS high schools. Local charter schools have an average composite score of 53, compared with 44 for traditional public schools and 16 for OKCPS. The Oklahoma City metro's in-person charter schools also score higher than the local traditional public schools, including OKCPS, on history and science (Figure 7).

In the Tulsa metro, the pattern is more mixed. There, traditional public schools have a higher composite CCRA score, 45, compared with 43 for in-person charter schools, but TPS's average composite score is much lower, at 27. The subject-level differences are small, and in-person charter schools score higher than local traditional public schools, including TPS, in both history and science.

Figure 7. High school students attending in-person charter schools earn somewhat higher CCRA scores than their traditional public school counterparts in the OKC metro area, but the differences between sectors in Tulsa are smaller and mixed.



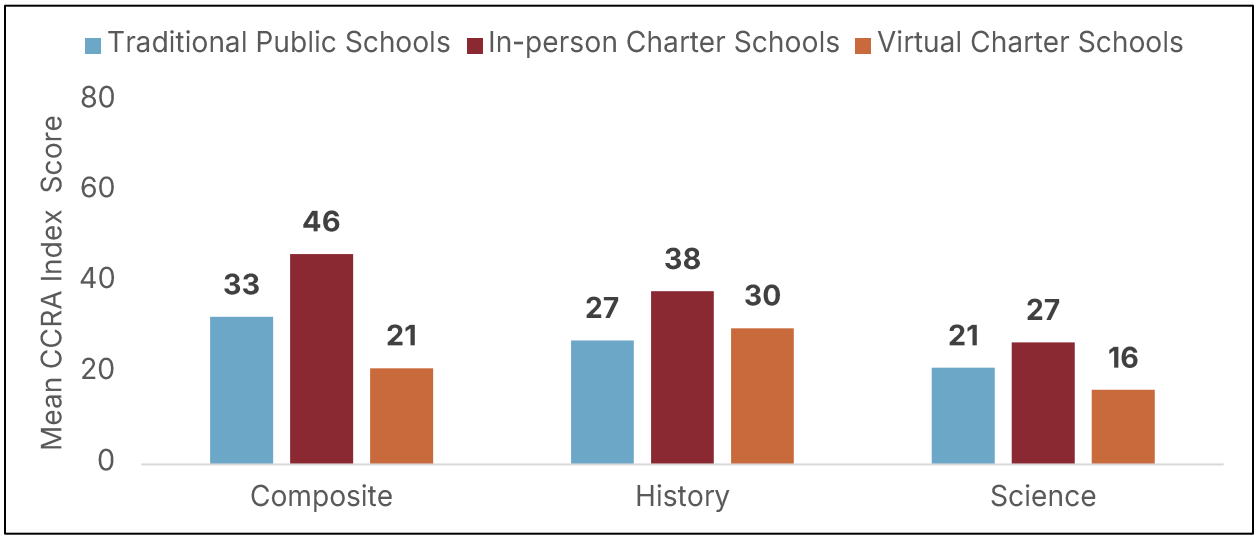
Note. Oklahoma City traditional public schools N = 26; Oklahoma City in-person charter schools N = 7; Tulsa traditional public schools N = 21; Tulsa in-person charter schools N = 4. Outcomes are weighted by student enrollment. OKC refers to Oklahoma City. "Core District Schools" refers to the largest districts in each metro area, Oklahoma City Public Schools and Tulsa Public Schools, respectively.

CCRA Outcomes for Economically Disadvantaged Students by Sector

Figure 8 shows that, among economically disadvantaged students, in-person charter high schools post stronger CCRA results than both traditional public schools and virtual charter schools.

Economically disadvantaged students attending in-person charter schools have an average composite score of 46, higher than the average for students in traditional public schools (33) and much higher than the average for students in virtual charter schools (21). We see a similar pattern in science, where economically disadvantaged students attending in-person charter schools score 27, higher than the average for students in traditional public schools (21) and far higher than for those attending virtual charter schools (16). In history, students in both charter sectors outscore their traditional public school counterparts. Students attending in-person charter schools score 38 on average, outscoring their counterparts in traditional public schools (27) and virtual charter schools (30).

Figure 8. Economically disadvantaged high school students attending in-person charters earn higher CCRA scores than their counterparts in other public schools.

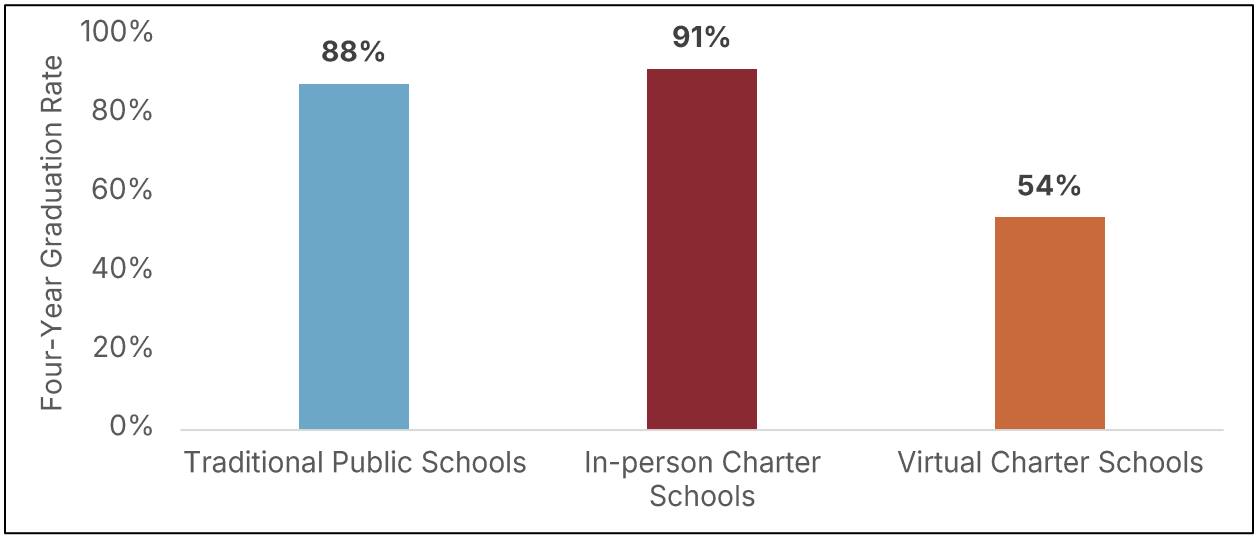


Note. Traditional public schools N ranges from 356 to 359; In-person charter schools N = 10; Virtual charter schools N = 5. Outcomes are weighted by student enrollment.

Graduation Rate by Sector

Graduation rates show a pattern of sector differences similar to the CCRA outcomes (Figure 9). Statewide, in-person charter high schools have a four-year graduation rate of 91 percent, compared with 88 percent for traditional public high schools. Virtual charter schools, however, have a much lower graduation rate of 54 percent. The difference between in-person charter schools and traditional public schools is modest, but the difference between virtual charter schools and both other sectors is large.

Figure 9. Statewide, in-person charter schools have slightly higher graduation rates than traditional public schools, and virtual charter schools have the lowest graduation rates by a wide margin.



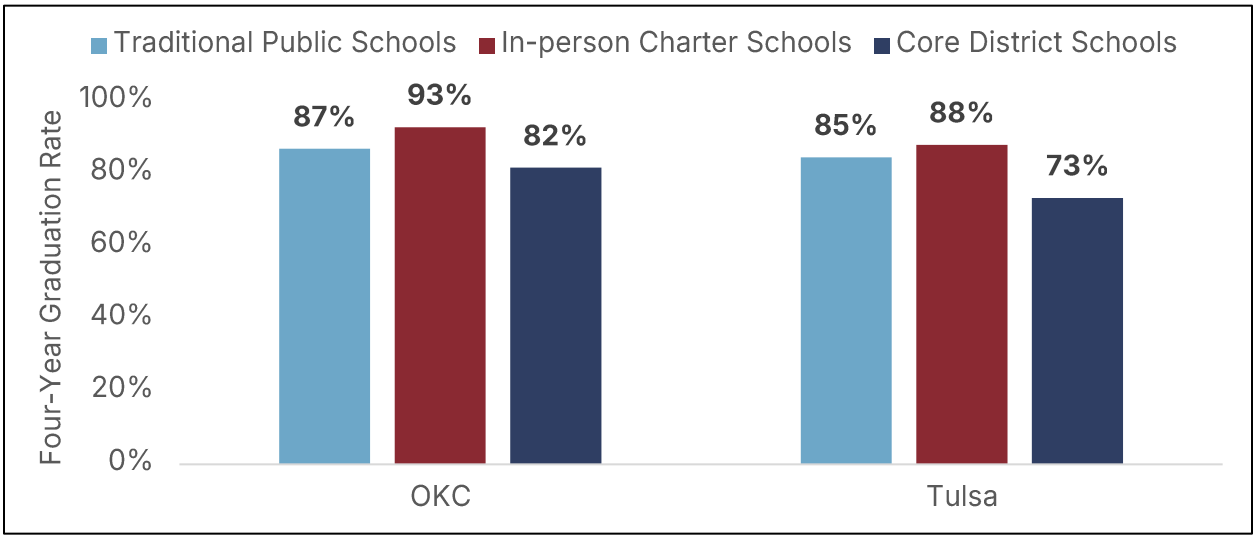
Note. Traditional public schools N = 444; In-person charter schools N = 11; Virtual charter schools N = 6. Outcomes are weighted by student enrollment.

Graduation Rate by Metro Area and Sector

In Oklahoma's two major metro areas, in-person charter high schools have higher graduation rates than traditional public schools (Figure 10).

In the Oklahoma City metro area, in-person charter schools have a graduation rate of 93 percent, compared with 87 percent for traditional public schools. In the Tulsa metro area, in-person charter schools have a graduation rate of 88 percent, compared with 85 percent for traditional public schools.

Figure 10. In both the OKC and Tulsa metro areas, in-person charter schools have higher graduation rates than traditional public schools.

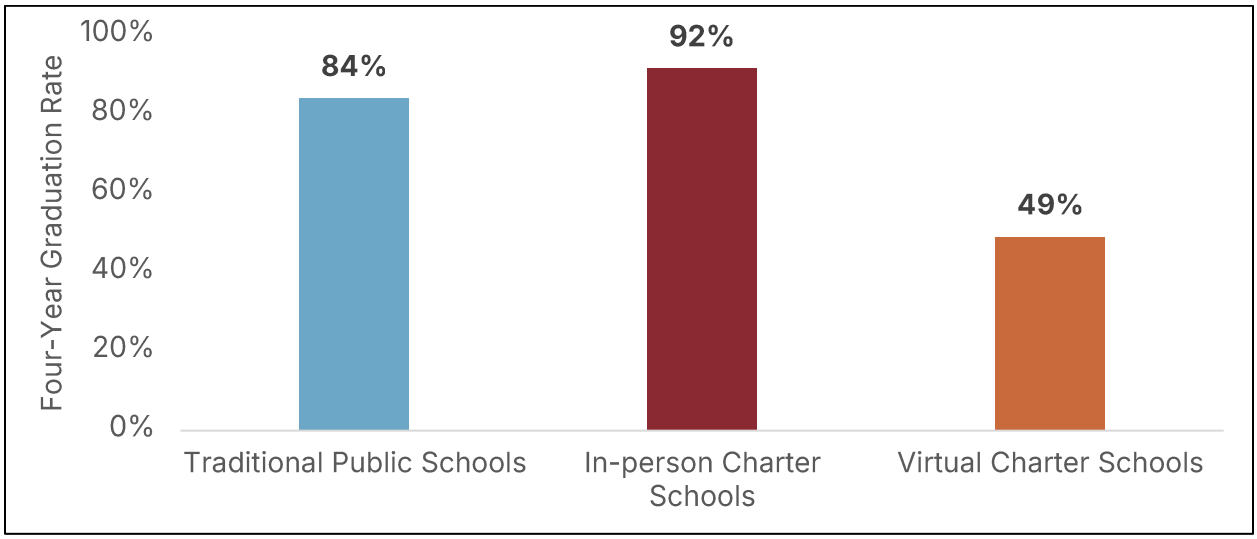


Note. Oklahoma City traditional public schools N = 26; Oklahoma City in-person charter schools N = 6; OKCPS N = 10; Tulsa traditional public schools N = 21; Tulsa in-person charter schools N = 4; TPS N = 10. Outcomes are weighted by student enrollment. OKC refers to Oklahoma City. "Core District Schools" refers to the largest districts in each metro area, Oklahoma City Public Schools and Tulsa Public Schools, respectively.

Graduation Rate for Economically Disadvantaged Students by Sector

The graduation-rate advantage for in-person charter schools seen above is even larger when the analysis is restricted to economically disadvantaged students (Figure 11). Statewide, economically disadvantaged students attending in-person charter high schools have a graduation rate of 92 percent. That compares with 84 percent in traditional public schools and 49 percent in virtual charter schools.

Figure 11. Economically disadvantaged students attending in-person charter schools graduate at higher rates than their traditional public school counterparts, and those attending virtual charters graduate at much lower rates.



Note. Traditional public schools N = 365; In-person charter schools N = 11; Virtual charter schools N = 5. Outcomes are weighted by student enrollment.

Discussion

Using a methodology slightly different from the one used in this report, a 2025 fact sheet from ACT Inc. reports Oklahoma's average ACT composite score as 17.5. That places Oklahoma below every other universal-ACT state in the region, including Nebraska (19.2 average ACT), Tennessee (18.8), Arkansas (18.5), Louisiana (18.3), Alabama (18.0), and Mississippi (17.7).[12]

The conclusion is hard to avoid: Oklahoma's high schools are struggling, no less than its elementary and middle schools. The state's long-term achievement challenges do not end after eighth grade. They continue into high school, where too many students are leaving school without strong academic preparation for college, career, or civic life.

This report adds a sector-level picture of those high school outcomes by comparing traditional public schools, in-person charter schools, and virtual charter schools. The results suggest that Oklahoma's high school sectors differ in important ways—and that we should resist treating both "charter schools" and "traditional public schools" as monolithic categories.

Traditional public high schools serve the overwhelming majority of Oklahoma public high school students. Statewide, they also post slightly stronger ACT outcomes than in-person charter schools, including in the Oklahoma City and Tulsa metro areas. They strongly outperform the state's virtual charter schools, as well.

A focus on the largest urban public school districts, however, tells another story. OKCPS and TPS both serve more disadvantaged populations than the typical district in the state,

and both districts report substantially worse outcomes on every measure of high school performance than the statewide averages and their respective metro area averages.

According to measures of economic disadvantage, in-person charter high schools serve student populations that are even more disadvantaged than those of the large urban districts. Yet these in-person charter high schools outperform the large urban districts on every available high school outcome, in some cases by substantial margins. In-person charter schools also have higher graduation rates than traditional public schools statewide, higher graduation rates than traditional public schools in both major metro areas, and notably higher graduation rates for economically disadvantaged students than traditional public schools. These schools post better CCRA results than traditional public schools statewide and even stronger CCRA outcomes for economically disadvantaged students than their traditional public school counterparts.

Given the descriptive nature of this study, these results do not prove that in-person charter schools are more effective, but they do make them worthy of closer attention and further study.

Virtual charter schools likely deserve greater scrutiny. They serve a majority of Oklahoma's charter high school students, yet their outcomes are weak and, in some cases, highly concerning. Their ACT composite scores are lower than those of both traditional public schools and in-person charter schools. Their CCRA composite scores are far below those of the other sectors. Their four-year graduation rate is an alarming 54 percent overall and 49 percent for economically disadvantaged students.

More broadly, Oklahoma's high schools deserve more sustained attention. In recent years, state leaders have understandably focused on the early grades, especially elementary reading, and the state recently enacted legislation doubling required recess time for public school students in kindergarten through fifth grade.[13] Although the solutions will look different than those for earlier grades, Oklahoma's secondary education challenges are no less real.

Endnotes

[1] Adam Tyner, *The Fall to 48th: Documenting Oklahoma's Educational Decline* (Norman, OK: Oklahoma Center for Education Policy, University of Oklahoma, 2026), https://ou.edu/content/dam/education/centers-and-partnerships/education-policy/fall-to-48th-11Feb2026.pdf

[2] More specifically, virtual and in-person charters may be thought of as part of the same sector (i.e., the charter sector) but with different modalities of instruction. For simplicity, the present study refers to these types of schools as belonging to different sectors.

[3] Margaret E. Raymond, James L. Woodworth, Won Fy Lee, and Sally Bachofer, *As a Matter of Fact: The National Charter School Study III 2023* (Stanford, CA: Center for Research on Education

Outcomes, Stanford University, 2023), https://ncss3.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Credo-NCSS3-Report.pdf

[4] Joshua D. Angrist, Sarah R. Cohodes, Susan M. Dynarski, Parag A. Pathak, and Christopher R. Walters, "Stand and Deliver: Effects of Boston's Charter High Schools on College Preparation, Entry, and Choice," *Journal of Labor Economics* 34, no. 2 (April 2016): 275–318, https://doi.org/10.1086/683665

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