

To The Editor
Washington Times

Last Friday's Metropolitan Times reported on the release of Stanford-9 test scores for six schools overseen by the DC Public Charter School Board. Much of the piece was out of kilter, starting with the headline: "Charter schools still fall short in testing." How could the schools "*still* fall short" the first time they've administered the test?

In releasing the results, the Board took pains to say that they should be considered a baseline against which future SAT9 performance can be gauged, keeping in mind that standardized test scores are just one element of charter school accountability. Each school's annual report (due in November) will contain additional data on student achievement and other measures of school performance.

What can we learn from these early results? First of all, we should avoid premature conclusions about how charter schools do vs. the District's other public schools. With just six charter schools reporting, ranging in size from 40 to more than 1200 students, it makes no sense to assess their performance against a systemwide average for DCPS. That's precisely why the Board reported the results on a school-by-school basis: For a sample this size, the specific approach and population of each school must be taken into account.

Consider Maya Angelou Public Charter School, for example. Fifty-six percent of their students tested at or above the "basic" level in reading -- about equivalent to average secondary-level reading scores for DCPS. But the school primarily serves young people who had already been involved in the juvenile justice system. Many had dropped out of school altogether before enlisting in this rigorous, 11-hour-a-day program. Against that backdrop, their scores are mighty impressive.

The article mentions that 55 percent of students at Washington Math Science Technology Public Charter High School (WMST) scored above the basic level in math, without noting that this far exceeds the citywide average for DCPS secondary schools. It also mentions the DCPS school where WMST originated -- but omits the fact that students there were 93 percent *below* basic in last year's math assessments.

While more data is needed, these results do tend to subvert the popular idea that charter schools are "creaming" the best students from DCPS. We already know that the overall economic profile of charter-school students closely resembles that of students in the traditional system (about 66% low-income in

both groups). The SAT9 scores suggest that if there is any difference in academic makeup, charter schools are drawing students who have had difficulty in traditional public schools -- not those who would excel in any environment.

The DC Public Charter School Board has developed an accountability plan with each school that requires steady growth in test scores and other performance indicators over the life of the school's charter. The ultimate goal is high achievement for all students, but each school will get there by its own route. This first set of scores represents the starting point. We invite parents, taxpayers, public officials, and the press to watch how well the schools go the distance.

Sincerely,

Josephine Baker
Chair

School contacts and opening dates:

Marriott-Hospitality: (Sept. 7)	DeDe McClure, Executive Director: 202-312-2007
Edison-Friendship: ¹ (Sept. 13)	Vonelle Middleton, Principal: 202-544-6672
Southeast Academy: (Sept. 7)	Elizabeth Smith, Executive Director: 202-561-5601
Arts & Technology: (Sept. 8)	Jim Ford, Board member: 202-518-7099
Meridian. (Sept. 7)	Lou Steadwell, Board chair: 202-363-1118
Cesar Chavez: (Sept. 7)	Irasema Salcido, Principal: 202-387-6980

¹ Note: Only the Blow-Pierce middle school campus is opening on Sept. 13. Edison-Friendship's two elementary campuses re-opened on August 16.