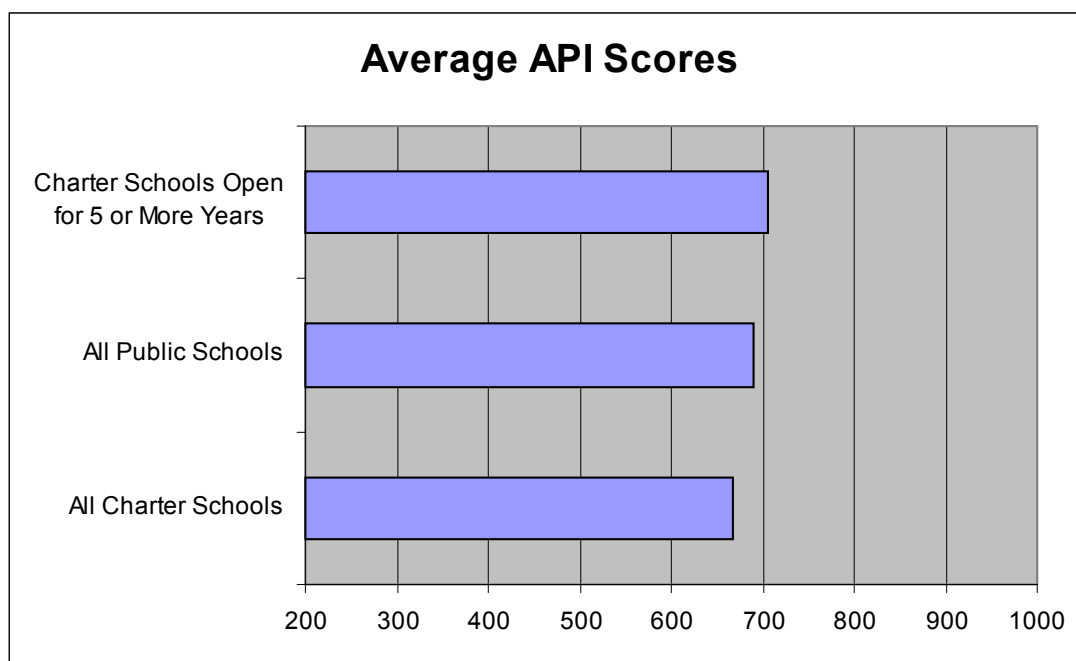




Veteran Charter Schools Outperform Non-Charterers on API

This past February, 2002 API base scores were released to all public schools. 58% of currently operating charter schools had enough valid scores to receive a base report. Results show that charter schools that have operated for five or more years outperformed non-charter public schools and younger charter schools.



The 2002 API base scores were based primarily on the California Standards Tests and the California High School Exit Exam and based only minimally on the Stanford 9. The California Department of Education will continue to make changes to the way the API scores are calculated until additional scoring indicators have been incorporated, with the goal of incorporating other standards based tests as well as graduation and attendance rates into the current formula.

In addition to test scores, the information collected for the API Base Report includes a variety of other data points. The following table illustrates a few of the differences between charter schools and the rest of the public school system. In comparison to all California public schools, charter schools are significantly smaller, have close to twice the percentage of special education students excused from taking the API based on their individualized education plans (IEPs), and have over three times the percentage of students excused from taking state mandated tests because of parental written requests.

Category	All Public Schools	Active Charter Schools
Average Number of Students Tested	588	306
Percent of Special Education Students Excused from Testing by their IEPs	.8%	1.3%
Percent of Students Excused from Testing by Parental Written Requests	.7%	2.5%

This past fall, public schools also received API growth scores. Of the 38 percent of charter schools that received reports, 70 percent showed growth on their API scores. 53 percent met both their school-wide and comparable improvement (i.e. sub-group) targets – the same percentage as non-charter public schools.

Although these results are promising, one should be careful about using this data to draw general conclusions about the API performance of all charter schools. Over 40% of active charter schools did not receive API base scores, and over 60% did not receive growth scores. Charter schools not currently receiving API results include those that only serve kindergarten and 1st grade (which are not subject to state-mandated testing), new schools that have not yet received scores, schools that have yet to enroll a large enough student population to receive valid scores, and charter schools that believe strongly in individualized, alternative assessments and have high numbers of parents who opt out of the standardized tests, invalidating the schools' scores. In the future, a higher percentage of charter schools that receive scores and more complete information about charter schools may increase the utility of this data.

Although API data is one indicator of charter school performance, it is impossible to draw conclusions about charter schools' overall academic performance based solely on API scores. The API continues to face serious psychometric and statistical flaws. While some of these problems are being addressed over the next several years (e.g. the lack of a reliable system for tracking longitudinal growth in individual student performance), other serious flaws will remain (e.g. lack of language appropriate assessments, lack of out-of-level testing for students below grade level, disproportionate reliance on closed response, “#2 pencil” assessments, etc.)

Stay posted to CSDC's web site for updated information on charter school performance. For those interested in broader charter school statistics and information on individual charter schools, CSDC has just released “A Profile of California's Charter Schools, 2002-03,” available for order from our website or office.

-- Michael Agostini