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REPORT



EFI Charter School Ecosystem Rankings | ECER 2024

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Introduction

This 2024 EFI Charter School Ecosystem Ranking of states (ECER 2024) is an updated version of our original 2021 and 2022 reports that endeavored to change the way the education policy community measured the success of charter school ecosystems across states.¹

The purpose of the initial reports was to engage the education policy community (parents, researchers, policymakers, advocates) with regards to radically changing how we think about ranking states with respect to charter schools. In our June 2021 paper we were revisiting the question: Which states should the education policy community consider as models when making charter school policies? The two best-known and most widely used prior efforts to address this question focused on policy inputs only. In other words, neither of their ranking schemes accounted for how charter schools actually perform or how many students have access to charter schools in each state. These prior efforts to rank state charter school policies were produced by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) and the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS).

To create the Beta version of the EFI Charter Ecosystem Rankings (ECER Beta) in our June 2021 report, we used data on how well states provide accessibility to charter schools and how well they promote student academic success. By focusing on accessibility and academic success (as opposed to policy inputs), we produced a significantly different ranking than the leading prior efforts.

We continued to focus on accessibility and success when ranking in states in our 2022 EFI Charter Ecosystem Rankings (ECER 2022), and we used 2018-19 data for the charter school access measures and up through 2017-18 for charter school outcome measures in that prior effort.

Our original ECER rankings received strong praise from the education policy community.² Below is a slice of the feedback we received:

Like all education policy reform proposals, school rankings should focus on benefits to children. To that end, EFI's charter ecosystem rankings succeed where many other ranking systems have failed. By measuring access and outcomes, EFI has provided policymakers a direct tool to gauge how well their charter school laws are serving kids and families."

[State Policy Network member organization]

"States can have a charter law that looks great on paper but doesn't do a whole lot of good for parents and students. A new paper from the Educational Freedom Institute (EFI) takes a fresh approach."

[Thomas B. Fordham Institute]

"This report makes an important contribution to our understanding of education choice. It points the way to a better system of measuring charter public school success, based on how many students can access them and how well they help students learn. Charter schools in (our state), for one, would get a fairer shake, letting people better see the value these options bring to students and families."

[SPN member organization]

I like it. I've long lamented the NACSA and NAPCS rankings for being completely detached from meaningful criteria."

[A state charter school association]

Despite the praise we received and the intuitiveness of the ECER (ranking states based on accessibility and academic success), there continues to be rankings of state charter school policies that we find to be flawed. For example, in a 2022 report, the NAPCS bases its state rankings on a weighted list of 21 "components of a strong public charter school law." Many of these components are individually quite reasonable; and most charter school advocates would agree that

they probably have value. They include items such as requiring a variety of authorizers, automatic exemptions from most laws and regulations, and several components related to funding.³ But these rankings are silent on whether these laws actually produce meaningful numbers of high quality charter schools in reality.

Given the feedback we received and given that rankings that we view as problematic are still being produced, EFI and the authors decided to update the ECER (where ECER is pronounced eck-er) with newly available and more recent data. This new ECER, ECER 2024, is the most current and comprehensive ranking of state charter school ecosystems; and states at the top of the ECER should be considered models for other states to emulate with respect to charter school policy. Further, as presented in the next section, the education policy communities in each state can use the component scores of their rankings to help guide improvements in their charter school policymaking as well.

To create the 2024 EFI Charter Ecosystem Rankings (ECER 2024), we used 2021-22 data for two charter school accessibility measures: the percent of public school students in each state enrolled in a charter school (share) and the percent of public school students who attend school in a zip code that houses a charter school that serves their grade level (access).⁴ The charter school performance measures for the ECER 2024 were drawn from CREDO's 2023 National Charter School Study III. The accessibility and performance measures we used will be described in detail in the next section.



Since we are using newer data in this report and have slightly modified our approach to measuring charter school accessibility and academic success, the ECER 2024 yields significantly different rankings for a handful of states—compared to our earlier efforts, as some states had tremendous growth in charter school access in recent years and therefore moved up the rankings. Some states did not have much change in charter school access in recent years, so they moved down the rankings as other states experienced growth. Some states improved their charter academic performance significantly, while others had almost no improvement—which also impacted their rankings.

Changes in the rankings of a few states, from using more recent data, suggest that the ECER should be periodically updated to reflect changes in charter school accessibility and success among states. By updating the ECER, the education policy community will know which states to look toward in order to design the “best” charter school policies, where “best” is defined by the ECER as providing the most access and the best academic outcomes for students.

All of that said, families with school-aged children, voters, policymakers, and education service providers (ESPs) should use



the ECER as a “first-pass” when considering the performance of charter schools in their states. That is, the ECER is a statewide metric that may not reflect what is happening in a specific community, and it is merely a snapshot of one point in time that may not reflect where a state’s charter school ecosystem is headed in the future. For example, a nearby charter school may be the best educational and social option for a given family in a state with a low ECER score—therefore, that low ECER score in their state should not deter them from enrolling their children in the best educational option available for their children. Also, an ESP may not wish to expand in a given state with a high ECER score if that state currently has policies that make it difficult for the ESP to operate quality schools or grow to an efficient scale.

Nevertheless, those interested in promoting the success of the charter school movement can look to states with high ECER scores to see what they can learn to help charter schools successfully serve more children in their states. Moreover, readers should not denigrate the charter schools in states ranked lower in the ECER 2024. The ECER 2024 is a ranking of state charter ecosystems. Instead, members of the charter movements in states ranked low should look to policies and cultures in the top ranked ECER 2024 states and emulate aspects of the charter movements from those states—if their goal is to promote charter school accessibility and academic success for students.

Table 1 (at right) shows the ECER 2024 for the 30 states with complete data available.

Table 1. 2024 Ranking of State Charter School Ecosystems, ECER 2024

Rank	State	ECER points
1	RHODE ISLAND	130
2	NEW YORK	117
3	MICHIGAN	107
4	DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA	106.5
5	COLORADO	104
6	ARIZONA	101.5
7	MASSACHUSETTS	96
8	IDAHO	95
9	ILLINOIS	94
10	MINNESOTA	88
10	NEVADA	88
12	MISSOURI	86
12	NEW MEXICO	86
14	FLORIDA	81.5
14	TENNESSEE	81.5
16	CALIFORNIA	77.5
17	MARYLAND	77
18	WISCONSIN	76.5
19	NEW JERSEY	75.5
20	TEXAS	74
21	WASHINGTON	71
22	NORTH CAROLINA	70
23	LOUISIANA	68
24	UTAH	66.5
25	ARKANSAS	55.5
26	PENNSYLVANIA	43
27	OHIO	31.5
28	OREGON	31
29	INDIANA	26
30	SOUTH CAROLINA	25.5

What experts consider well-written laws do not always produce actual charter schools, and those schools do not always result in increased achievement by students. This is illustrated by the fact that the ECER 2024 ratings – based solely on accessibility and achievement outcomes – differ, sometimes in dramatic ways, from the input-based NAPCS rankings. (Please see the Appendix for a side-by-side comparison of the ECER 2024 and NAPCS 2022 rankings).

We rank Rhode Island first this year. In the ECER rankings, Rhode Island is in the top half to top third in terms of access, but had easily the strongest academic scores among the states we ranked. In Reading, Rhode Island charter school students appear to have gained 90.2 extra days of instruction compared to their peers in traditional public schools (TPS), while in Math they gained 87.9 days. In other words, in Rhode Island, students have average to somewhat-above-average access to charter schools, and those that do enroll have the most learning gains compared to their TPS peers. NAPCS 2022 ranks Rhode Island 40th out of 45 states.

On the other hand, NAPCS ranks Indiana first, for the seventh year in a row. We rank them 29th out of 30 based on low access and success metrics. Only 5 percent of Indiana students actually



attend charter schools, and only 21.6 percent even have access to one – the fourth-lowest access percentage in our rankings. In terms of performance, Indiana charter school students only outperform their peers by 2.9 days of learning in Reading, while in Math they seem to be 26.6 days behind their peers.

Several of the states NAPCS ranks in their report do not appear in the ECER 2024 – because those states' laws have produced no charter schools, or have offered charters only too recently. Alabama is one such case; NAPCS ranks Alabama third. The state has seen considerable relative growth in its charter sector since then, but had only 5 charter schools in 2020–21, prior to this ranking.

Mississippi is another; NAPCS ranks 7th in their report, with 7 charter schools statewide, serving under 3,000 students. We were also not able to rank Mississippi due to lack of data.

NACPS itself is altering course, perhaps in response to these ECER rankings. According to their most recent report (2022):

The purpose [of their charter school law ranking reports] is to determine which states have created the statutory and regulatory environments that best support high-quality public charter schools. On two occasions, we also produced reports that explore the impact of these environments on the growth, innovation, and quality of a state's public charter schools. This year's state charter school laws rankings report represents the final one within this framework. In 2022, we plan to revisit the model law itself, and rethink the criteria and data the rankings report is based upon. We also plan to create a new approach for evaluating state charter school movements, one that will likely encompass both a state's statutes and regulations as well as the impacts of those policies.⁵

We hope that the NAPCS produces a new report that focuses on the “impacts” of charter schools.

The rest of this report is organized as follows. Section II describes how our ECER 2024 was constructed, and section III contains concluding remarks about the ECER 2024 state rankings.

II. Construction of the ECER 2024⁶

Outside of biological realms, ecosystems are “any system or network of interconnecting and interacting parts.”⁷ In states that permit charter schools, there is a charter school ecosystem that is comprised of governing laws and regulations along with the actors in the charter school space—authorizers, charter school boards, leaders, educators, education service providers (ESPs), charter network operators (CNOs), and families. Each of these “parts” of a state’s charter school ecosystem work together to provide K-12 educations to students who attend public charter schools. That is, each of the parts is needed for charter schools to even exist at all.

Laws and regulations determine what is permissible for families and charter schools—and they also yield incentives for each. Some laws and regulations make it easier for charter schools to be created and for parents to have more choice, some provide incentives for charter schools to be effective, while other laws and regulations hinder the accessibility and success of charters. Relevant laws and regulations that impact the actors in charter school ecosystems include statutes and regulation regarding flexibility, accountability, governance, funding, personnel, authorizing, etc.

Charter governing boards, charter school heads and educators, ESPs, and CNOs that work within each state’s legal and regulatory framework directly impact the quality and diversity of educational and social offerings available to families in the charter school space. Families have the final say as to whether their children are educated in the charter sector and in which charter school. Of course, families are constrained by legal and regulatory environments and the effectiveness and creativity of the charter schools present in their communities. Finally, families also have the final say with respect to how engaged they choose to be in their children’s charter schools

and in their overall education. How involved parents choose to be is, in part, also a function of laws and regulations and the effectiveness of charter schools themselves.

Each of these parts—from state and local regulations and laws to charter school leaders and educators to charter school families—work together in state charter school ecosystems with the goal of providing children access to the highest possible educational and social experiences during their K-12 education, to as many children whose families wish to choose a charter school.

Our goal in constructing the 2024 EFI Charter School Ecosystem Rankings (ECER 2024) in this report is to use readily accessible information to construct a ranking of state charter school ecosystems. Here, state charter school ecosystems are ranked according to their outcomes for students; specifically, states are ranked on the accessibility and academic performance of their charter schools. We call our state rankings: The 2024 EFI Charter Ecosystem Rankings (ECER 2024, where ECER is pronounced eck-er).

In a famous quote from his 1932 dissenting opinion in *New State Ice Co. v. Liebmann*, Justice Louis Brandeis said, “a single courageous State may, if its citizens choose, serve as a laboratory; and try novel social and economic experiments without risk to the rest of the country.”

Over 40 states have served as laboratories for charter schools. State charter school ecosystems vary widely across the country, with some states making it relatively easy to start charters; some states limiting the number of charters; some states aggressively closing charters deemed as low performing, some providing more flexibility for leaders and educators, etc. By ranking state charter school ecosystems in terms of their impacts on outcomes—in terms of both accessibility and value-added learning gains for students, we direct families, charter school advocates, voters, and policymakers to the best charter school states—best in terms of their accessibility and academic outcomes for students. Policymakers may then emulate the legal and regulatory structures in the highest performing states and design charter school laws and policies that have proven to be successful in practice.



Our approach is in stark contrast to the methodologies used by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA, 2015) and the National Association for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS, 2016, 2020, 2022) to rank states based on their policies.⁸ Both NACSA and NAPCS judge states—not based on outcomes for students—but based on each state’s fidelity to arrays of charter policies created by experts.⁹ NAPCS (2016) comes closest to our approach, but subsequently the NAPCS produced 2020 and 2022 reports based on policy inputs and has not updated its 2016 report since that time. That said, the approach in NAPCS 2016 is based, in part, on states fidelity to policies deemed as wise by experts—and not solely based on outcomes for students, as our approach does.

The state ranking that we construct in this paper points state policymakers, voters, researchers, and charter advocates to the states that have the “best” charter ecosystems—in terms of the best actual outcomes for students.

It is our hope that state policymakers and charter school advocates will be more likely to seek to mimic the state policies that have actually produced the best outcomes for students—and not just pick policies that “sound good” to experts. We also hope that NACSA, NAPCS, and others adopt the ECER in order to point policymakers and the charter school community to the policies in the highest performing ECER states and away from policies adopted in the lowest performing states—whatever those policies may be.

In our prior reports, we showed that both the NACSA and NAPCS rankings of states often point policymakers, advocates, and others to states that have poor charter school accessibility and/or performance. In addition, some states with relatively high charter school accessibility and performance are deemed as having poor charter school policies by NACSA and NAPCS.

Michigan, for example, is our third-ranked state. It has relatively high scores on both access and success measures. NAPCS, however, ranks the state 30th out of 45. This places Michigan, with nearly 150,000 students in charter schools two spots below West Virginia.¹⁰ At the time of the NAPCS report, West Virginia had no charter schools.¹¹

We believe that approaches used in the analyses and rankings by NACSA and NAPCS have it backwards. Their reports are based largely or entirely on inputs and judgements by experts, regardless of actual results. Policies or laws that experts deem as “good” are not the goal of charter school movement. The goal of the charter school movement is to have high performing charter schools available to every family who wants one for their children. As such, laws and regulations should be chosen that serve families and students best in terms of the accessibility and performance of charter schools. The ECER 2024 allows readers to clearly see which states are best in terms of charter school accessibility and success—and it is these states that have laws and regulations that are, therefore, worth emulating.



Our approach ranks states based solely on outcomes for students. The outcomes that we use are accessibility and estimates of charter school student performance on state Reading and Math exams, as compared to the traditional public schools (TPS) they otherwise would have attended. Thus, states with charter schools that are more available to students and states with charter schools that produce greater learning gains for students relative to their local TPS are ranked higher using our approach. States that do not have much accessibility to charter schools and/or have charters that produce smaller learning gains for students relative to their local TPS are ranked lower.

We use two access outcomes and two performance outcomes and aggregate them to construct the ECER 2024. We describe next how we aggregate these four outcome measures to create the state rankings in the ECER 2024.

The two access measures are as follows. A 2016 report released by the Hamilton Project and the Brookings Institution¹² used publicly available data from the National Center for Education Statistics

Common Core of Data (NCES CCD) to calculate two components of statewide accessibility to charter schools: (1) the percent of students enrolled in charter schools; and (2) the percent of students who live in a ZIP code that contains a charter school.¹³

The data used for their report was from the 2013–14 academic year. We follow their methodology and construct both of these access measures using 2021–22 data from the NCES CCD.¹⁴ Hamilton/Brookings included virtual charter school enrollment in their overall enrollment measure, but not in their ZIP code measure. We followed this approach. These two measures get at two somewhat different types of access – the availability and usage of any charter school to students, including virtual charter schools, and the actual availability of physical schools in the widest geographic area of a state.

1. The percent of public school students in each state who are enrolled in charter schools

This first accessibility measure ranks all states in terms of their share of public school students who attend charter public schools. We deem this component of our ranking as an accessibility measure, because as charter schools become more accessible, then more students are able to attend them. However, it is also a quality measure. A long research literature suggests that families choose schools for their children for a variety of reasons, including safety, preparation for college, curricular and non-curricular offerings, etc.¹⁵ In addition, students have different needs and interests, and to the extent that charter schools increase the diversity of academic and other offerings, more families will choose them. Thus, states with a larger proportion of students choosing charter schools clearly measures charter schools being more accessible to students, but it also measures an aspect of charter school quality. As an example, charter schools could be very close to where many students reside in a given state, but if they are not of high quality, then their share of public school enrollment will be relatively low.

2. The percent of public school students in each state who reside in a ZIP code with a charter school that serves their grade level

Our second component is a pure, albeit incomplete, measure of accessibility. This second component is the percent of public school students who attend schools in the same ZIP code as a charter school that serves their grade level. There is no perfect measure of accessibility given commuting patterns, traffic, etc. Thus, having a charter school located in a given ZIP code may not mean the charter school is necessarily easily accessible to all students in the ZIP code. Second, a charter school in an adjacent ZIP code may be very accessible for some students. For these two reasons, this measure of accessibility is direct, but it is not a perfect measure of accessibility. Having the first measure of accessibility, described above, helps capture true accessibility as well. However, we believe this second measure of accessibility should be a component of ranking states as well, because it



gets at the statewide geographic diversity of charter schools. For example, a given state may have a few large charter schools in densely populated urban areas. However, these charters would not be accessible to many students who live in faraway suburban or rural areas.

We believe both of these accessibility measures need to influence the ranking of state charter school ecosystems, as they measure slightly different aspects of accessibility. In addition, the first component also captures aspects of charter school quality that are not measured by the value-added learning gains defined by Reading and Math test scores.

To measure academic outcomes, we used statewide estimates made by Stanford University's CREDO 2023 National Charter School Study III. The state-specific estimates of charter school performance in CREDO 2023 come from test performance data from the 2015 to 2019 academic years. CREDO was only able to obtain data from 30 states. Essentially, the CREDO researchers endeavor to compare the learning gains that charter school students made annually on state Reading and Math exams to estimates of the learning gains those charter school students would have made if they had instead attended the local district public school. Thus, CREDO created two estimates for each state for which they had data—the state average of charter school student performance on Reading and Math exams relative to how these students would have performed if they had instead attended a TPS. We use both of CREDO's estimates, from both Reading and Math exams, to construct the ECER 2024.

While their approach is intuitively appealing (how did the charter school students perform as compared to how they would have performed in they had instead attended their district public school?), the methodological approach in the CREDO studies has critics.¹⁷ Nevertheless, their effort was nothing short of herculean in terms of data collection and analysis. We are thankful to have been able to access their statewide value-added measures for charter schools for the purposes of our report.

Creating an Index Score for Each State

There are myriad reasonable ways to combine these four state-level components into a single ECER 2024 index score for each state. A single index score—one for each state—is needed in order to create an overall ranking of state charter school ecosystems using information from all components. Table 2 lists each of these four components.

Table 2. Components of State Charter School Outcomes that are Used to Construct ECER 2024

Share %	of students attending a charter school
Access	% of students residing in a zip code with a charter school serving their grade
Reading	Reading Performance for all charter students, compared to TPS (times 1.5)
Math	Math Performance for all charter students, compared to TPS (times 1.5)

For each of the four components, each state can be ranked from the highest to the lowest performance. To construct the ECER 2024, the highest performing state in each component receives 30 points, the second highest performing state receives 29 points, and correspondingly the state with the lowest performance receives only 1 point.

To obtain our rankings, we first ranked the states in our dataset on each of the access and academic performance measures. Next, we summed the rankings of each of the four components, and counted the Reading and Math performance measures using a factor of 1.5 to create an index score of charter school success in each state. As an example, if a given state had been the best performer on each component—the highest share of charter school students in the nation; the highest percent of students in the nation residing in a ZIP

code with a charter; the highest Reading performance (compared to their local TPS) among students enrolled in charter schools in the nation; and the highest Math performance (compared to their local TPS) among students enrolled in charter schools in the nation —then that state would receive an index score of “150” [$150 = 30 + 30 + (30 \times 1.5) + (30 \times 1.5)$], as this state was the best in each of the four components. By multiplying the state rankings on Reading and Math performance by 1.5, we are giving these relative test performance measures 60 percent of the weight in the ECER 2024, while the two accessibility measures receive the remaining 40 percent of the weight. [No state actually ranked as the best performer on each of the components, so this example merely demonstrates how we created the index scores for each state.]

The next two tables show how each state ranked on each of these four components, listed from the best performer to the lowest performer. Table 3 shows the state rankings for the two accessibility measures.



Table 3. Charter School Accessibility Measures by State

State	Share	Share Ranking Points	State	Share	Share Ranking Points
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA	44.1%	30	DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA	95.0%	30
ARIZONA	20.9%	29	ARIZONA	74.1%	29
COLORADO	15.5%	28	NEVADA	69.6%	28
NEVADA	14.5%	27	UTAH	69.3%	27
FLORIDA	13.6%	26	IDAHO	65.8%	26
LOUISIANA	13.4%	25	COLORADO	63.7%	25
CALIFORNIA	11.7%	24	FLORIDA	54.3%	24
UTAH	11.6%	23	NEW MEXICO	52.4%	23
MICHIGAN	10.8%	22	RHODE ISLAND	50.2%	22
NEW MEXICO	10.1%	21	NORTH CAROLINA	49.5%	21
PENNSYLVANIA	9.7%	20	MINNESOTA	48.6%	20
NORTH CAROLINA	9.2%	19	MICHIGAN	47.0%	19
IDAHO	9.1%	18	NEW YORK	45.8%	18
RHODE ISLAND	9.1%	18	TEXAS	45.5%	17
ARKANSAS	8.7%	16	CALIFORNIA	44.8%	16
TEXAS	8.5%	15	WISCONSIN	38.7%	15
MINNESOTA	7.9%	14	ARKANSAS	37.8%	14
OREGON	7.6%	13	OHIO	33.9%	13
NEW YORK	7.3%	12	OREGON	32.4%	12
OHIO	7.1%	11	SOUTH CAROLINA	29.8%	11
SOUTH CAROLINA	6.4%	10	LOUISIANA	29.7%	10
WISCONSIN	6.0%	9	ILLINOIS	27.7%	9
MASSACHUSETTS	5.4%	8	PENNSYLVANIA	26.2%	8
INDIANA	5.0%	7	MASSACHUSETTS	25.5%	7
NEW JERSEY	4.6%	6	TENNESSEE	22.9%	6
TENNESSEE	4.5%	5	NEW JERSEY	22.0%	5
ILLINOIS	3.4%	4	INDIANA	21.6%	4
MISSOURI	2.9%	3	MARYLAND	15.3%	3
MARYLAND	2.7%	2	MISSOURI	6.0%	2
WASHINGTON	0.4%	1	WASHINGTON	3.9%	1

We are only able to rank 30 states, including Washington, DC, because some states do not have charter schools, some states chose not to share their test score data with the CREDO researchers at Stanford University, and some states had too few charter schools or only had charter schools that were too recently created (so no requisite historical data) to be incorporated in CREDO's analysis.

Washington, DC and Arizona rank first and second, respectively, in both the share of public school students enrolled in charter schools and with regards to the percent of students attending public schools in ZIP codes that have a charter school that serves their grade level. An astounding 44.1 percent of DC public school students attend a charter public school, and 95 percent of DC public school students attend schools in zip codes that house a charter school that serves their grade level. Since there are 30 states with complete data on test score performance, Table 3 includes the accessibility measures for only those 30 states.

To compute the ECER 2024, described below, each state is ranked in descending order according to their share of public school students attending charter schools (share, left panel of Table 3) and the percent of students living in a zip code with access to a charter school for their grade level (access, in the right panel of Table 3). Since Washington, DC had the highest share and access measures, they receive 30 share points and 30 access points, which will be used to construct their overall ECER 2024 score.

Washington state had the lowest share of students attending a charter school (0.4 percent) and the lowest access (3.9 percent of Washington state students live in a zip code with a charter school that serves their grade level). Therefore, Washington state receives 1 share point and 1 access point.

Including both of these rankings adds information about accessibility, as opposed to using only one or two of these rankings. As an example, Colorado had the 3rd highest share of public school students attending charter schools (15.5 percent).

However, Colorado ranked 6th in percent of students attending schools in ZIP codes with a charter school for their grade (63.7 percent). That said, the correlation between the two accessibility rankings is very high, 0.87.

NAPCS (2022) produces some stark differences compared to our results. To note Washington state again, for example: Washington was the 6th-ranked state by NAPCS, and had only 0.4 percent of students enrolled in charter schools in our data, and only 3.9 percent of students with access to a charter school. In fact, while the 2022 NAPCS report ranks Washington 6th, NAPCS elsewhere notes that, “The 2021-2022 Washington State Legislature did not renew the authorization window for new charter public schools in 2022. Until the law is changed by the State Legislature, no new schools may apply for authorization.”¹⁸ Clearly Washington state does not have charter policies that other states should emulate.

Table 4 shows the rankings of learning gains in charter schools (relative to their TPS counterparts) in Reading and Math, respectively, and these rankings will be combined with the accessibility rankings in Tables 3 to create a single index score for each state and ultimately the EFi Charter Ecosystem Rankings (ECER 2024).



Table 4. Charter School Reading and Math Performance by State

State	Share	Share Ranking Points	State	Share	Share Ranking Points
RHODE ISLAND	90.2	30	RHODE ISLAND	87.9	30
NEW YORK	74.6	29	NEW YORK	72.8	29
MASSACHUSETTS	41	28	MISSOURI	56.1	28
ILLINOIS	39.9	27	ILLINOIS	48	27
MISSOURI	39.3	26	MASSACHUSETTS	41	26
MARYLAND	37	25	WASHINGTON	39.3	25
MICHIGAN	36.4	24	TENNESSEE	38.7	24
TENNESSEE	33.5	23	MARYLAND	37	23
NEW JERSEY	32.9	22	DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA	32.4	22
WASHINGTON	26	21	NEW JERSEY	31.8	21
TEXAS	24.3	20	MICHIGAN	23.7	20
MINNESOTA	21.4	19	WISCONSIN	16.2	19
ARIZONA	19.7	18	COLORADO	13.3	18
IDAHO	17.3	17	IDAHO	7.5	17
COLORADO	15	16	MINNESOTA	7.5	17
WISCONSIN	15	16	NEW MEXICO	6.9	15
NORTH CAROLINA	13.3	14	LOUISIANA	5.8	14
CALIFORNIA	11	12	CALIFORNIA	4	13
NEW MEXICO	11	13	NEVADA	3.5	12
FLORIDA	8.1	11	ARIZONA	0.6	11
NEVADA	7.5	10	ARKANSAS	-1.2	10
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA	4.6	9	FLORIDA	-1.2	10
ARKANSAS	3.5	7	TEXAS	-4.6	8
LOUISIANA	3.5	8	UTAH	-14.5	7
INDIANA	2.9	6	NORTH CAROLINA	-16.8	6
PENNSYLVANIA	-1.2	5	PENNSYLVANIA	-21.4	5
UTAH	-1.7	4	INDIANA	-26.6	4
OHIO	-4	3	OREGON	-31.8	3
SOUTH CAROLINA	-8.1	2	OHIO	-37.6	2
OREGON	-18.5	1	SOUTH CAROLINA	-47.4	1

The Reading and Math scores in Table 4 above are estimates of the difference in the annual number of days of learning in charter schools relative to nearby traditional public schools. For example, a Reading score of 60 for a given state would mean that CREDO estimates that the charter schools in that state produced 60 more days of learning per year relative to what those students' learning gains would have been if they had instead attended their local traditional public school, where the latter is an estimate, of course.

As shown in Table 4, charter school students in Rhode Island, New York state, and Massachusetts experienced the best student performance on Reading exams between 2015 and 2019. Please recall that this performance metric indicates that charter school students in these three states performed the best on their state's Reading exams, relative to how they would have performed if they had instead attended their local TPS, according to the estimates produced by CREDO.¹⁹

For Math performance, charter school students in Rhode Island, New York state, and Missouri had the best performance, which earned them 30, 29, and 28 Math performance points, respectively.



Combining Access and Performance Rankings to Create the ECER 2024

The rankings of each of these four components from the tables above are added together (with the performance measures multiplied by 1.5) to create an index score for each state. These index scores are reported alphabetically by state in Table 5 below.

Table 5. ECER 2024 Raw Index Scores

RANK	State	Raw ECER Index Score	Share Points	Access Points	Reading Points	Math Points
6	ARIZONA	101.5	29	29	18	11
25	ARKANSAS	55.5	16	14	7	10
16	CALIFORNIA	77.5	24	16	12	13
5	COLORADO	104	28	25	16	18
4	DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA	106.5	30	30	9	22
14	FLORIDA	81.5	26	24	11	10
8	IDAHO	95	18	26	17	17
9	ILLINOIS	94	4	9	27	27
29	INDIANA	26	7	4	6	4
23	LOUISIANA	68	25	10	8	14
17	MARYLAND	77	2	3	25	23
7	MASSACHUSETTS	96	8	7	28	26
3	MICHIGAN	107	22	19	24	20
10	MINNESOTA	88	14	20	19	17
12	MISSOURI	86	3	2	26	28
10	NEVADA	88	27	28	10	12
19	NEW JERSEY	75.5	6	5	22	21
12	NEW MEXICO	86	21	23	13	15
2	NEW YORK	117	12	18	29	29
22	NORTH CAROLINA	70	19	21	14	6
27	OHIO	31.5	11	13	3	2
28	OREGON	31	13	12	1	3
26	PENNSYLVANIA	43	20	8	5	5
1	RHODE ISLAND	130	18	22	30	30
30	SOUTH CAROLINA	25.5	10	11	2	1
14	TENNESSEE	81.5	5	6	23	24
20	TEXAS	74	15	17	20	8
24	UTAH	66.5	23	27	4	7
21	WASHINGTON	71	1	1	21	25
18	WISCONSIN	76.5	9	15	16	19

Our neighboring state of Florida has a raw index score of 81.5. This index score was generated as follows:

$$81.5 = 26 + 24 + (11 \times 1.5) + (10 \times 1.5), \text{ where Florida was ranked:}$$

- 5th** in charter school enrollment share (left panel of Table 3) and therefore received 26 share points.
- 7th** in percent of students living in a ZIP code with access to charter school serving their grade level (right panel of Table 3) and therefore received 24 access points
- 20th** in Reading performance (left panel of Table 4) and therefore received 11 Reading performance points
- 21th** Tied for 21st in Math performance (Right panel of Table 4) and therefore received 10 Math performance points

This approach to aggregating the rankings across components uses only the ordinal nature of the rankings and therefore does not use the cardinality of the rankings. There is no obviously “correct” way to preserve the cardinality of the various rankings to create an overall index number for each state—because the components measure such different things. For example, how should one compare a 5–percentage point difference in charter school enrollment shares between two states with a 5–day difference in learning gains in Reading between the states? We hope this example demonstrates that any approach to using the cardinality would be arbitrary.

We chose Florida as an example because it is a neighbor to our home state of Georgia, but also because Florida has a significant amount of both charter school choice and private school choice available to their families.²⁰ Given that the research overwhelmingly shows that public schools improve their academic performance when they are subject to more competition via educational choice²¹, it is perhaps not surprising that Florida ranked so highly in charter school access yet ranked much lower on charter school “performance.” The point we are making is that it may not be the case that Florida’s charter schools are lower performing relative to most states in our analysis—rather, it may be the case that the large degree of educational choice given to Florida families may have led to significant improvements in their traditional public schools, as compared to other states. (The CREDO methodology compares the Reading and Math scores of charter school students in each state to an estimate of how well those charter school students would have scored on those exams if they had instead attended a nearby TPS. If the traditional public schools have higher performance in Florida, relative to other states, the CREDO methodology will show lower charter performance in Florida—and in states with lots of choice such as Arizona—as compared to other states with lower performing traditional public schools.)

We make these remarks about Florida so that readers are educated consumers of the ECER 2024 rankings. We encourage readers to consider each of the four component scores separately along with the overall ECER 2024 state rankings listed in the next section. In addition, we recommend that readers put all of this information in context when making their own evaluation of the state of the charter school ecosystems in each state.

III. The EFI Charter Ecosystem Rankings (ECER 2024)

ECER 2024 incorporates two state-level measures of charter school accessibility, and two state-level measures of charter school performance, where the accessibility measures are inspired by the Hamilton/Brookings “Who Has Access to Charter Schools?” report and we borrow estimates of charter school reading and Math performance generated by CREDO in their “National Charter School Study III, 2023”.

This updated version of the ECER based on these measures are reported in Table 6. Table 6 displays the ordinal ranking of states using the ECER 2024 raw index scores from table 5.

Table 6. 2024 Ranking of State Charter School Ecosystems, ECER 2024

Rank	State	ECER Points
1	RHODE ISLAND	130
2	NEW YORK	117
3	MICHIGAN	107
4	DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA	106.5
5	COLORADO	104
6	ARIZONA	101.5
7	MASSACHUSETTS	96
8	IDAHO	95
9	ILLINOIS	94
10	MINNESOTA	88
10	NEVADA	88
12	MISSOURI	86
12	NEW MEXICO	86
14	FLORIDA	81.5
14	TENNESSEE	81.5
16	CALIFORNIA	77.5
17	MARYLAND	77
18	WISCONSIN	76.5
19	NEW JERSEY	75.5
20	TEXAS	74
21	WASHINGTON	71
22	NORTH CAROLINA	70
23	LOUISIANA	68
24	UTAH	66.5
25	ARKANSAS	55.5
26	PENNSYLVANIA	43
27	OHIO	31.5
28	OREGON	31
29	INDIANA	26
30	SOUTH CAROLINA	25.5

Discussion of the EFI Charter Ecosystem Rankings

In ECER 2024, Rhode Island, New York, Michigan, and the District of Columbia are the four highest ranking states. We discuss in turn each of these states with quality charter ecosystems.



Rhode Island

Charter schools in Rhode Island have the highest academic performance according to CREDO's analysis. However, Rhode Island allows only mediocre charter school accessibility to Ocean State families. Perhaps policymakers should permit significantly more charter school accessibility to Rhode Island families in order to improve academic achievement in the state.



New York

Charter school students in the Empire State have the second highest academic performance according to CREDO, but the Empire State ranks very low in terms of charter school accessibility. It seems as if New York state policymakers should also allow families to have more accessibility to charters.



Michigan

Michigan ranks very high on charter school accessibility, and it also ranks relatively high on charter school performance as well. The ECER 2024 appears to support the Great Lakes State continuing to increase access to charter schools for Michigan families.



District of Columbia

While the District of Columbia provides the most access to charter schools in the nation, its charter school performance is relatively low as compared to other states. Like Florida discussed above,

DC families have tremendous access to educational choice²² via both charter schools and private school choice. It is quite possible that DC charter schools are, in fact, high performing, but that the CREDO analysis labels them lower performing because there are traditional public schools that have improved so much due to competition via charters and the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program. There is evidence that DC public schools have increased their performance significantly over the past 22 years²³; therefore it appears that Our Nation's Capitol should continue to increase charter school accessibility.

At the other end of the table, South Carolina has the lowest ranked charter school ecosystem, according to our methodology. The reason for South Carolina's low rankings are that the state has relatively low charter school accessibility and among the lowest charter school performance. The charter school community in South Carolina may want to (1) analyze what state laws and/or regulations are limiting access to charters; (2) seek to understand why higher performing charter operators are not coming to the Palmetto State; and (3) whether state laws or policies are limiting charter school success and/or prohibiting charters from locating near the lowest performing traditional public schools. Surely the charter school community in South Carolina knows infinitely more than us about the state of their state's charter schools, and we hope our report gives them help in advocating for improvements in their charter ecosystem.

While the ECER 2024 rankings should be used by parents, researchers, policymakers, and advocates to see which states have charter school laws and policies worth emulating, we also need to tell you what the ECER 2024 rankings are not. Specifically, the ECER 2024 rankings do not tell parents that the charter school their child attends in South Carolina is bad in some way. Parents will choose a given charter school for their children if the entire package—the educational and social

environment at the charter school—is better for their children than the traditional public school for which they are zoned. Parents consider all their educational options and choose the best one for their children. Thus, readers should not consider charter schools in lower ranking states as somehow having necessarily “bad” schools.

ECER 2024 is a ranking of state charter school ecosystems. States that are lower ranked have charter ecosystems that are not conducive to providing the best accessibility and academic outcomes in their charter sectors overall. States that are ranked lower in ECER 2024 should not denigrate existing charters—instead, they should seek to mimic the laws, regulations, policies, and culture of the charter sectors in the highest ranked states.



Evaluating Charter School Ecosystems in a Straightforward and Clear Manner – ECER 2024

As Adam Smith addressed the problem of judging policies based on inputs (as opposed to outputs) in 1789, economist Thomas Sowell addressed it in our own time, writing:

“The real question is not which policy or system would work best ideally, but which has in fact produced better results with far from ideal human beings. Even with the more modest task of evaluating different policies within a given system, the real question is not which policy sounds more plausible, or which would work best if people behaved ideally, but which policy in fact turns out to produce better results with actual people, behaving as they actually do.”

Rather than serving as a menu of theoretical “best practices,” or a list of experts’ policy preferences, the ECER 2024 strives to measure a state’s charter school ecosystem by asking two straightforward questions:

“How much access do students have to charters schools?”

“What evidence do we have that the education students are getting at those charter schools is any good?”

Though states with relatively large numbers of students in charter schools, and in charter schools which are scoring well, may not have policies that echo some person’s or some group’s “best practices” or theoretical white papers, it is possible with widely accessible data, if a bit imperfectly, to measure the size and performance of states’ charter school sectors and to compare them to each other. States’ records on actually creating charter schools vary quite a bit; those charter schools’ records of performance vary quite a bit as well. Policymakers and anyone else interested in improving student outcomes should look to states that rank high on the ECER 2024, and on its individual components, and mimic their policies.

APPENDIX: ECER (2024) and NAPCS (2022) Comparison Rankings

ECER 2024 Rank	State
1	RHODE ISLAND
2	NEW YORK
3	MICHIGAN
4	DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
5	COLORADO
6	ARIZONA
7	MASSACHUSETTS
8	IDAHO
9	ILLINOIS
10	MINNESOTA
10	NEVADA
12	MISSOURI
12	NEW MEXICO
14	FLORIDA
14	TENNESSEE
16	CALIFORNIA
17	MARYLAND
18	WISCONSIN
19	NEW JERSEY
20	TEXAS
21	WASHINGTON
22	NORTH CAROLINA
23	LOUISIANA
24	UTAH
25	ARKANSAS
26	PENNSYLVANIA
27	OHIO
28	OREGON
29	INDIANA
30	SOUTH CAROLINA

NAPCS 2022 Rank	State
1	INDIANA
2	COLORADO
3	ALABAMA
4	MINNESOTA
5	FLORIDA
6	WASHINGTON
7	MISSISSIPPI
8	LOUISIANA
9	NEVADA
10	MAINE
10	DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
12	OHIO
12	MASSACHUSETTS
14	ARIZONA
14	NORTH CAROLINA
16	DELAWARE
17	GEORGIA
18	IOWA
19	OKLAHOMA
20	NEW HAMPSHIRE
21	IDAHO
22	NEW YORK
23	SOUTH CAROLINA
24	CALIFORNIA
25	UTAH
26	TENNESSEE
27	MISSOURI
28	WEST VIRGINIA
29	NEW MEXICO
30	MICHIGAN
31	HAWAII
32	TEXAS
33	ARKANSAS
34	WYOMING
35	NEW JERSEY
36	OREGON
37	PENNSYLVANIA
38	ILLINOIS
39	CONNECTICUT
40	RHODE ISLAND
41	WISCONSIN
42	VIRGINIA
43	ALASKA
44	KANSAS
45	MARYLAND

1. Our ECER 2022 report may be retrieved here, <https://secureservercdn.net/45.40.149.34/n5e.cd2.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/EFI-ECER2022.pdf> . Our original June 2021 concept paper on ranking state charter school ecosystems "Inputs or Outcomes? Ranking State Charter School Ecosystems" may be retrieved here, <http://efiinstitute.org/charter-school-ecosystems/> .
2. While we did not hear from any, surely opponents of charter schools did not like our June 2021 report as well as not liking prior efforts to rank states. Among those open to charter schools, we received almost universal support for our original ECER efforts.
3. NAPCS "Measuring the Model: A Ranking of State Public Charter School Laws." <https://publiccharters.org/news/measuring-up-to-the-model-a-ranking-of-state-public-charter-school-laws-2022/>
4. We literally use zip code tabulation areas (ZCTAs) as opposed to zip codes. ZCTAs are generally the same level of geography as zip codes, but ZCTAs exclude zip codes that have no or very few residents. Thus, when only a small number of residents are present in a given zip code, these residents are placed in a different zip code for tabulation purposes—and these combined zip codes would be a ZCTA for which the ZCTA is not coterminous with a single zip code. Again, the vast majority of individual ZCTAs are coterminous with a single zip code. For a concise explanation of the difference between zip codes and ZCTAs, please see: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/guidance/geo-areas/zctas.html> and <https://help.healthycities.org/hc/en-us/articles/115006016767-What-is-the-difference-between-ZIP-Codes-and-ZCTAs#:~:text=ZCTAs%20or%20ZIP%20Code%20Tabulation,same%20as%20its%20ZIP%20Code.>
5. NAPCS "Measuring the Model: A Ranking of State Public Charter School Laws." <https://publiccharters.org/news/measuring-up-to-the-model-a-ranking-of-state-public-charter-school-laws-2022/>
6. To provide context for readers who have not seen our prior work, we have borrowed liberally from our previous EFI reports in this section.
7. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/ecosystem> .
8. NACSA "State Policy Analysis 2015": https://www.qualitycharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/NACSA_State_Policy_Analysis_2015.pdf
- NAPCS "The Health of the Public Charter School Movement: A State by State Analysis 2016": http://www.publiccharters.org/sites/default/files/migrated/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Health-of-the-Movement_2016.pdf
- NAPCS "Ranking of State Public Charter School Laws 2020." https://www.publiccharters.org/sites/default/files/documents/2020-01/2020_model_law_ranking_report-single-draft2%20%281%29.pdf
- NAPCS "Measuring the Model: A Ranking of State Public Charter School Laws." <https://publiccharters.org/news/measuring-up-to-the-model-a-ranking-of-state-public-charter-school-laws-2022/>
9. In 1759 in the Theory of Moral Sentiments Adam Smith wrote critically of such a focus on prescriptive processes and inputs: "The man of system, on the contrary, is apt to be very wise in his own conceit; and is often so enamoured with the supposed beauty of his own ideal plan of government, that he cannot suffer the smallest deviation from any part of it. He goes on to establish it completely and in all its parts, without any regard either to the great interests, or to the strong prejudices which may oppose it. "He seems to imagine that he can arrange the different members of a great society with as much ease as the hand arranges the different pieces upon a chess-board. He does not consider that the pieces upon the chess-board have no other principle of motion besides that which the hand impresses upon them; but that, in the great chess-board of human society, every single piece has a principle of motion of its own, altogether different from that which the legislature might chuse to impress upon it. If those two principles coincide and act in the same direction, the game of human society will go on easily and harmoniously, and is very likely to be happy and successful. If they are opposite or different, the game will go on miserably, and the society must be at all times in the highest degree of disorder." These prior efforts at ranking states based on their charter school policies devised their rankings systems solely or largely on policy inputs. In the roughly two and a half centuries since Adam Smith more formally founded the discipline of economics, economists have been analyzing outcomes of policy. This report endeavors to follow in this tradition and evaluate the effectiveness of charter school ecosystems in each state based on their outcomes.
10. NAPCS "Michigan Charter Schools." <https://publiccharters.org/charter-school-state-resources/michigan/>
11. NAPCS "West Virginia Charter Schools." <https://publiccharters.org/charter-school-state-resources/west-virginia/>
12. Schanzenbach, et al., 2016. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Read-the-full-paper.pdf>
13. Please see endnote iii above regarding the zip code geography we use to construct the ECER 2024.
14. The enrollment counts for students enrolled in both charter public schools and conventional public schools were retrieved from the National Center for Education Statistics at the U.S. Department of Education, <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/elsij/> .
15. See, for example, Kelly and Scafidi (2013), <http://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/More-Than-Scores.pdf> .
16. <https://credo.stanford.edu/reports/item/national-charter-school-study-iii/>
17. See, for example, the back and forth between Caroline Hoxby and CREDO here: <https://credo.stanford.edu/publications/credo-hoxby-debate> .
18. NAPCS "Washington Charter Schools." <https://publiccharters.org/charter-school-state-resources/washington/>
19. Please consult the CREDO report to see a detailed description of their methodology for estimating the performance of charter school students on Reading and Math exams, <https://ncss3.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Credo-NCSS3-Report.pdf> .
20. <https://www.edchoice.org/engage/2023-edchoice-share-where-are-americas-students-educated/>
21. See, for example, <https://www.edchoice.org/research/the-123s-of-school-choice-2/> .
22. <https://www.edchoice.org/engage/2023-edchoice-share-where-are-americas-students-educated/>
23. See, for example, the District's gains on NAEP exam scores, https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/profiles/districtprofile/overview/XW?sfj=NL&chort=2&sub=MAT&sj=XW&st=MN&year=2022R3&cti=PgTab_OT
24. Sowell, T. (2008). Applied economics: Thinking beyond stage one. Hachette UK.



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