Unraveling DESE’s APR shows strong charter school results.

Each year, anxious educators await the arrival of their Annual Performance Report (APR) from Missouri’s Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE). The APR score is touted as the way to assess the academic health of Missouri schools. The problem is very few people understand how these scores are calculated and the results are misleading, especially to parents.

Trying to compare an entire district to an individual charter school presents problems. Out of the 140 possible points a district is eligible to receive most charter schools are only eligible for 50 to 80 points. For example, elementary charter schools serving a K-5 or K-8 population are not able to receive points for graduation rates. For these schools, the scores assigned to “Academic Achievement” carry more weight, whereas districts can use the points for high attendance and graduation to compensate for lower scores on achievement tests.

This report shows that while all Missouri School Districts are accredited, roughly 65% of the students attending either Kansas City Public Schools or St. Louis Public Schools are unable to read proficiently at their grade level and more than 75% are below proficient in math. If you compare charter schools to the traditional neighborhood school you find that overall charter schools are performing at least as well as their traditional school counterpart, and in some cases outperforming them by as much as 50 percentage points.

Buried in this report you can find APR comparisons of charter schools to individual district buildings. This comparison more accurately reflects how charter school’s performance stacks up to district building performance. In both Kansas City and St. Louis, if you remove the data for schools who have selective enrollment (magnet and select schools), the charter schools strongly outperform their district school counterparts. This is the information that communities and parents need to have when making decisions about their children’s education.

Having a transparent and understandable method of measuring performance is critical to improving Missouri’s education system and to providing the public with meaningful information. If our goal is to ensure that all children have access to a quality education, an equitable standard to measure performance is needed.

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