



The Center for
Learner Equity

Ensuring Equity for ESE in Charter Schools

Florida Department of Education Charter School Project | **9.13.21**



For too long, systemic ableism has left students with disabilities an afterthought. The Center for Learner Equity is working to ensure that public schools-both within the charter school sector and beyond it-are designed for inclusivity and equity from the start. When we improve access and outcomes for students with disabilities, all students benefit.

www.centerforlearnerequity.org/

Mission

We are committed to ensuring that students with disabilities, particularly those in under-resourced communities, have the quality educational opportunities and choices they need to thrive and learn. We accomplish this through research, advocacy, coalition formation, and capacity building with national, state, and local partners.

Overview of the Center for Learner Equity's work

The FLDOE has partnered with the Center for Learner Equity to improve the education of students with disabilities in Florida's charter public schools (CPS).

The first year of work, which ends in October 2021, is focused on understanding the core elements within the state impacting how students with disabilities are educated in CPS, including legal, policy, programmatic and operational factors.

Year 1 landscape analysis research methods include:

- Interviews with key stakeholders (e.g., district & charter school leaders, state leaders)
- Data analysis of students with disabilities attending CPS vs. TPS
- Three statewide surveys for: (1) district authorizers; (2) CPS leaders; and (3) parents/guardians of students with disabilities

**The Center for Learner Equity's legal name is the National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools; the organization is doing business as the Center for Learner Equity. For the purpose of this presentation, we use Center for Learner Equity/CLE throughout.*

Framing for today's conversation

Through our research, we uncovered strengths, challenges, and potential areas for improvement, for both charter schools and school districts to consider.

Over the next three years, we will use our findings to provide professional development and technical assistance to charter school leaders and school district leaders to support education equity for students with disabilities.

Today's conversation will focus on the locus of control within a school district, including tangible ways district leaders can improve equitable access to quality ESE programming in charter schools for students with disabilities.

→ Throughout today's discussion, please use [jamboard](#) or the chat function to write any reflections/comments in response to the materials being shared.



Welcome & Connect

10 minutes

Introductions



In the chat, please enter your:

- Name
- Role, School District
- Something they are hoping to learn from today's session

Today's Agenda

1	Welcome & Connect	<i>10 min</i>
2	Landscape Analysis Findings	<i>10 min</i>
3	Panel Discussion: Best Practices	<i>20 min</i>
4	Breakout Group Discussions	<i>15 min</i>
5	Final Reflections & Close	<i>5 min</i>

Session Objectives

Participants *learn best practices* for how districts can support high-quality ESE programming in charter schools

Participants *discuss challenges and potential solutions* for supporting ESE in charter schools

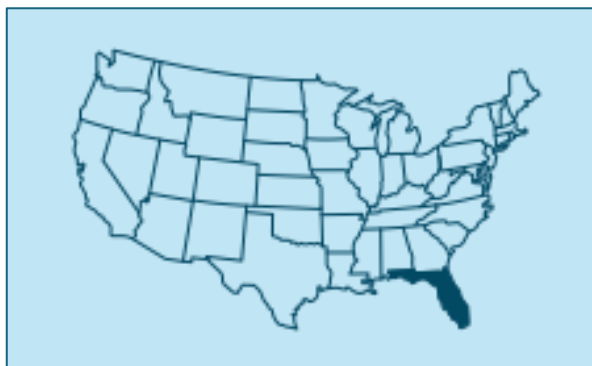
Participants *identify one action item to implement* when they return to work in support of high-quality ESE



Landscape Analysis Findings

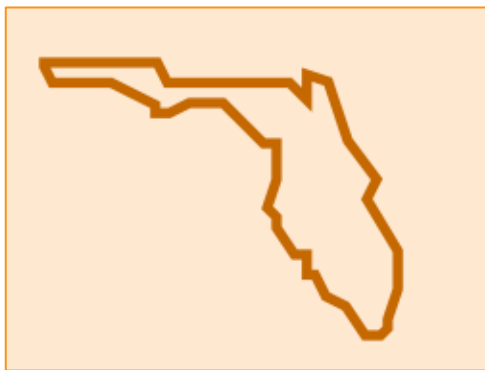
10 minutes

In 2020, enrollment rates of students with disabilities are 14.1% nationally and 14.5% in Florida



14.1%

of enrolled students
nationwide identified as
students with disabilities



14.5%

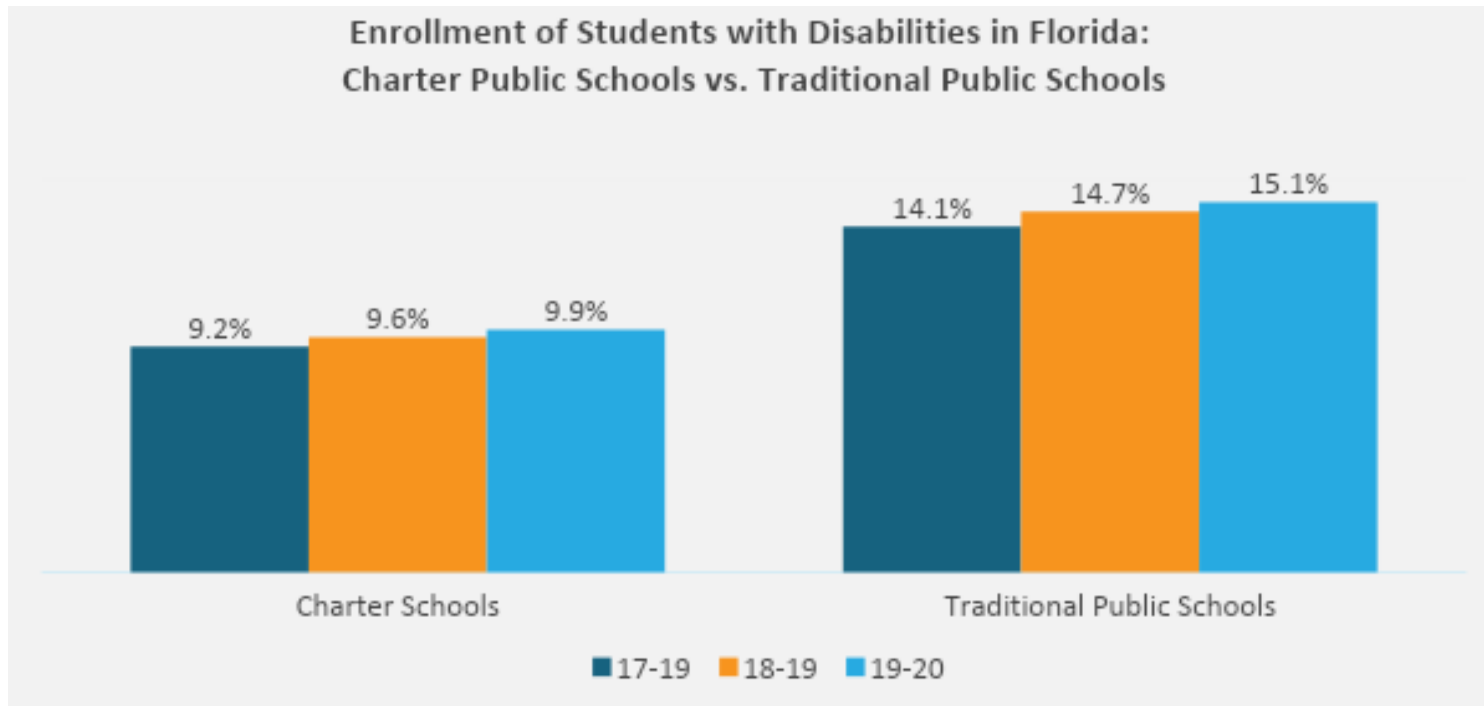
of enrolled students in
Florida identified as
students with disabilities

Across the country and in Florida, enrollment of students with disabilities continues to increase.

Nationally, the number of students with disabilities grew from 13.4% in 2007-08 to almost 13.7% in 2017-18 to 14.1% in 2020-2021.



Enrollment of students with disabilities in Florida has increased over the last three years in CPS & TPS, yet enrollment gaps persist



**National data from the 2015-16 school year, the most recent year available, shows Florida is below the national CPS average in terms of enrollment of students with disabilities.*

IDEA Funds to Charter Schools

Funds &
Services

Authorizing
& Oversight

State Support
& Technical
Assistance

IDEA Funds vs. Services to Charter Schools

- In general, charter and district leaders lack clarity around IDEA funds and what charter schools are entitled to receive.
- School districts typically use IDEA funds to provide ESE resources to charter schools in lieu of direct funds.
- School district leaders and charter school leaders would like more information on how to calculate the amount of IDEA funds a charter school can expect to receive if the school requests funds rather than services.

Questions to consider

- What questions do you have about IDEA funds and services in charter schools?
- What guidance from FLDOE would be helpful?

IDEA Funds to Charter Schools

Funds &
Services

Authorizing
& Oversight

State Support
& Technical
Assistance

Annual District IDEA Plan

- Charter schools aren't typically involved in the creation of the district's annual IDEA plan, which can cause confusion/issues down the road.
- Implementing a process for involving charter school leaders during the creation of the district's annual IDEA plan can increase clarity around IDEA funds and create shared ownership of students with disabilities among charter school and district staff.

Questions to consider

- What questions do you have about IDEA funds and services in charter schools?
- What guidance from FLDOE would be helpful?

ESE Administrative Services

Funds &
Services

Authorizing
& Oversight

State Support
& Technical
Assistance

ESE Administrative Services from School Districts to Charter Schools

- Charter schools pay a 5% fee to school districts in exchange for administrative services to CPS, including ESE administrative services.
- The law doesn't clearly define what "administrative services" includes, which leaves room for a murky interpretation of the law. This contributes to the lack of transparency around charter school funding for both charter school leaders and district leaders.
- School district and charter school leaders would like further guidance from FLDOE to clarify what duties should be included (or offer recommendations) as part of the district's administrative services.

Questions to consider

- What services does your district provide as part of the ESE administrative fee?
- Would you recommend changing anything about how the district uses these funds?
- What type of support from FLDOE would be helpful?

ESE Roles & Responsibilities

Funds &
Services

Authorizing
& Oversight

State Support
& Technical
Assistance

ESE Administrative Services from School Districts to Charter Schools

- There is a gap in understanding at all levels of the system in terms of the most effective way to structure roles & responsibilities between districts and charter schools to ensure high-quality ESE services for all students.
- Though the charter school authorization process is robust, delineating ESE roles and responsibilities once a charter school is operationalized needs improvement.
- Given authorizing practices vary drastically from district to district, it's difficult to identify the most effective delineation of roles.

Questions to consider

- What are the strengths and areas for improvement in terms of how your school district delineates roles and responsibilities?
- What remains unclear for district and/or charter school leaders as it pertains to ESE roles and responsibilities?
- What type of support from FLDOE would be helpful?

Siloed ESE & Authorizing Departments

Funds &
Services

Authorizing
& Oversight

State Support
& Technical
Assistance

Siloed ESE & Authorizing Departments

- Districts tend to have a charter authorizing office and a separate ESE office. As a result, charter school leaders typically interact with staff from the authorizing office and may not have access to district ESE leaders.
- Based on district interviewees, a prerequisite for successful ESE programming seems to be ensuring the district's ESE and school choice offices work closely together.

Questions to consider

- In what ways does your authorizing office currently work with the ESE office to support charter schools?
- To what extent do charter school leaders in your district have access to ESE district staff?
- How can the authorizing office and the ESE office collaborate more closely to ensure equitable access to ESE programming in charter schools for students with disabilities?

State Support & TA

Funds &
Services

Authorizing
& Oversight

State Support
& Technical
Assistance

Support & guidance from FLDOE

- According to state and district leaders, there's a particular need for more training and support to district authorizers focused specifically on best practices rather than compliance.
- Many interviewees, especially authorizers, would like the FLDOE to provide explicit ESE guidance and more definitive answers when it comes to ESE programming in charter schools. While interviewees understand why the state can't always do this legally, there is a desire to find a middle ground in terms of the type of guidance the state provides CPS leaders, district leaders, and TA providers.

Questions to consider

- What type of professional development and technical assistance would be most helpful to your district as you think about how to improve education equity for students with disabilities?



Panel Discussion

20 minutes

Panel Discussion: Best Practices

Panelists:

- **Dr. Kia Sweeney-Scott**, Senior Director of School Choice, Services at Orange County Public Schools
- **Dr. Tricia Phillip-Magee**, Senior Administrator at Orange County Public Schools
- **Dr. Shana Rafalski**, Executive Director of Educational Choices at Osceola County School District

Discussion Questions:

1. What challenges does your district face when supporting equitable access and ESE programming in charter schools for students with disabilities?
2. How have you addressed these challenges? What were the implications of this work?
3. What advice would you give other district leaders who are working to improve access and education for students with disabilities?

Breakout Group Discussion

15 minutes

Breakout group discussions

Discussion Questions:

1. What challenges does your district face when supporting equitable access and ESE programming in charter schools for students with disabilities?
2. Based on the panel discussion and the landscape analysis takeaways, what ideas do you have to address these challenges?
3. What action item do you commit to implementing when you return to work?
4. What additional support and training would you like to see from the FLDOE and the Center for Learner Equity?

We will use [this google doc](#) to capture break-out group takeaways.



Reflections & Close

5 minutes

Final Reflections & Close

What action items do you commit to implementing when you return to work?

→ Please write it in the chat or in *Jamboard*

Questions in the future?

Please contact Kathleen (kcduttaconsulting@gmail.com)