

# The Columbus Dispatch

## Charter school stands out

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### ABOUT THE DISPATCH

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Kirk Davis: CEO, GateHouse Media Inc.

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It has been a rough year for Ohio's charter-school movement. A state official was caught cooking the books to make some failing e-school sponsors look successful. Other e-schools were told to repay millions for billing the state for students whose attendance couldn't be documented. And wealthy charter-school operators continued their efforts to neuter the state's new charter-school reform law.

Amid all this turmoil, Columbus Collegiate Academy's two middle schools stand out as a neon reminder that Ohio shouldn't throw out the baby with the bathwater.

"All you have to do is say 'charter school,' and you'll get people who close the door," said Andy Boy, founder and CEO of United Schools Network, which operates Columbus Collegiate. Ohio's weak oversight of charter schools and laughable tolerance for failure has turned many against charters. Boy is frustrated that the academies he started are getting lumped in with "well-intentioned people with no training, starting schools, who have no business doing so."

He is just 37, but he's seems to have found the secret sauce to providing disadvantaged children with the strong education that can change their lives. His schools fulfill the hopes that launched Ohio's charter-school movement — that starting up schools less-fettered by regulation and more nimble to innovate might find solutions that can be replicated in failing district schools.

Columbus Collegiate Academy has, in fact, showed impressive results with a high-risk demographic of students: inner-city middle-schoolers.

Last year, the eighth-graders at academy's Franklinton and Near East Side campuses bested all students statewide, rich and poor, on state tests. The comparison is eye-popping: 79 percent of eighth-graders at CCA's Near East Side campus tested as proficient in reading on grade level. In math, 67 percent were proficient.

In the same area of town is Champion Middle School, a Columbus City Schools building where just 21 percent of eighth-graders were reading at grade level and only 16 percent comprehended eighth-grade mathematics.

Statewide, the 2014-15 school-year proficiency averages for all eighth-graders were, for reading, 68 percent, and, for math, 54 percent.

And CCA's West Side academy is doing even better, with eighth-grade reading proficiency at 85 percent and math proficiency scores at 79 percent. Roughly speaking, twice as many CCA students are succeeding than their peers in Columbus City Schools.

This charter school "takes sixth-graders from all over the city who are behind, and in three short years they best state averages," noted Chad Aldis of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, which sponsors Columbus Collegiate. "... It would be nice to capture and bottle what they're doing."

What they are doing is applying common sense. Teachers switch classrooms, not students. This adds up to a half hour of extra instruction a day for students. Teachers get 30 days a year of training, and up to two hours a day for classroom planning. The school is organized and has a laser focus on its mission.

CCA has thrived by finding and training highly qualified teachers, establishing a culture of respect for learning where it's cool to get good grades and helping students beyond the classroom, including guiding them into a successful high school and developing character.

Charter schools such as Columbus Collegiate are demonstrating models for larger public-school districts. But now it's up to the districts to do what they preach to their students: Pay attention. Learn the lesson.