

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-105226](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Almost one-half of DC's public school students were enrolled in 128 charter schools during school year 2020-21, according to PCSB. The School Reform Act requires PCSB—DC's sole chartering authority—to approve charters, monitor schools, and submit annual reports on its work.

The District of Columbia Appropriations Act of 2005, as amended, included a provision for GAO to review DC's chartering authorities every 5 years. This report describes how PCSB reviews applications, monitors charter schools and takes corrective actions, and examines the extent to which PCSB complies with its annual reporting requirements, among other objectives.

GAO reviewed PCSB policies and procedures, including the 2021 Charter Application Guidelines, 2020-21 Charter Review and Charter Renewal guidelines, and PCSB's 2021-2024 strategic plan, known as the Strategic Roadmap. GAO also compared PCSB's 2021 Annual Report to School Reform Act requirements and interviewed PCSB's board chair and staff and DC government officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends PCSB include all required reporting elements in its annual report and, as appropriate, provide links to additional information on its website. PCSB agreed with the recommendation.

View [GAO-22-105226](#). For more information, contact Jacqueline M. Nowicki at (617) 788-0580 or nowickij@gao.gov.

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DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA CHARTER SCHOOLS

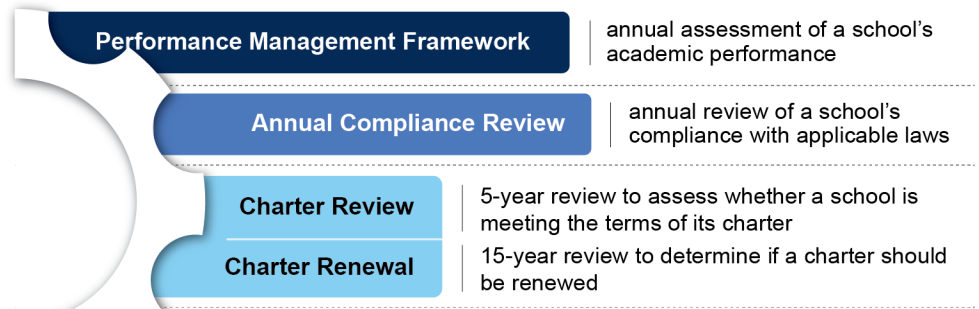
DC Public Charter School Board Should Include All Required Elements in Its Annual Report

What GAO Found

The District of Columbia School Reform Act of 1995, as amended, (School Reform Act) authorizes the DC Public Charter School Board (PCSB) to review and approve applications to establish charter schools. Using a multi-step process, including interviews and public hearings, PCSB requires applicants to demonstrate that a school was needed in the proposed location and would be able to recruit and retain students. However, in line with a revised application process stemming from its 2021-2024 strategic plan, beginning in 2023 PCSB plans to approve or deny new applications, in part, based on a school's ability to fill a need not already met by a traditional public school or charter school elsewhere in the district. PCSB staff said they plan to assess the district's need for charter schools by conducting an annual needs assessment and collaborating closely with DC government. Staff said PCSB is not accepting new applications until 2023.

PCSB uses several mechanisms to monitor charter schools' academic performance and compliance with applicable legal requirements (see figure). PCSB is revising one of these mechanisms—its performance management framework—to incorporate equity measures and address concerns that top-rated schools are not meeting the needs of all their students. For example, rather than reporting performance measures for all students as a single group, PCSB plans to begin reporting this information by student subgroups, such as race/ethnicity, gender, and disability status. PCSB uses an escalating system of actions to encourage schools to correct issues identified through monitoring.

DC Public Charter School Board (PCSB) Monitoring Mechanisms



Source: GAO summary of PCSB policies. | [GAO-22-105226](#)

PCSB's 2021 Annual Report fully included 12 of the 15 elements required by the School Reform Act. Staff gave a range of reasons for excluding parts of three required elements. For example, staff said that much of the excluded information is available on PCSB's website and is more comprehensive than could be presented in the Annual Report; however, the Annual Report does not include web addresses that link to the information. By including all elements in its annual report and providing links to information on its website, as appropriate, PCSB can meet its reporting requirements while providing parents and stakeholders with access to comprehensive information on DC's charter schools.