

Innovations in Arizona's Accountability Policies and Frameworks for Alternative Schools

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Abstract

This study presents Arizona's innovations in academic accountability policy and academic accountability frameworks for alternative schools. A timeline of statutes and regulations including the State Board of Education approved alternative school definition provides Arizona's context for alternative school accountability policy and frameworks. Arizona is relatively unique with its development of two state-level accountability frameworks for alternative schools. In addition to presentation of the Arizona Department of Education's (ADE) Alternative A-F model and the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools (ASBCS) Academic Framework for Alternative Schools, this study offers a comparison of the two systems. Bar graphs present two years, fiscal years 2012 and 2013, of accountability results. Correlation coefficients for both years show a strong correlation between ADE's Alternative A-F and ASBCS' Academic Framework. This analysis provides empirical findings that will help further discussion of these innovations in policies and frameworks leading to more appropriate accountability for alternative education campuses. (Contains 14 figures and 4 tables)

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study is to present Arizona's innovations in academic accountability models for alternative schools and findings from the first two years of academic achievement labeling resulting from these policy innovations and subsequent frameworks. This paper's objectives are:

1. Describe the context in the state for alternative school accountability policy and frameworks.
2. Present the two accountability frameworks for alternative schools.
3. Present two years of accountability results for the state's alternative schools.
4. Begin discussion of whether these policy innovations bring more appropriate academic labels for alternative schools that educate high-risk students.

Perspectives and Theoretical Framework

Perspectives

Research and scholarly publications on the influence of race-ethnicity, urban settings, and socio-economic status on the achievement gap or students "at-risk" abounds. In contrast, inquiry into alternative education is relatively limited. Alternative education research is often linked to the special needs of the student population served by alternative schools (Gorney & Ysseldyke, 1993; Kattsiyannis & Williams, 1998; Lehr & Lange, 2003). In 2009, the Alternative Schools Research Project published a synthesis of state-level policy on alternative schools (Lehr, Tan, & Yssekdyke). Much has happened in public education since that report used 2008 data.

In 2010, Jobs for the Future issued its report, *Reinventing Alternative Education: An Assessment of Current State Policy and How to Improve It*. In that work, one of the recommendations is that states adopt an accountability framework for alternative schools (Almeida, Le, Steinberg, & Cervantes, 2010). A comparison of the alternative education accountability policies and frameworks in the six states identified in the Jobs for the Future report provides more detail about those six states (Schlessman & Hurtado, 2012). A 2013 issue of the *Educational Researcher* features an essay about rethinking the common assumptions about the relationship among the federal government, states, and local agencies in policy making for public education (Marsh & Wohlstetter).

Arizona began revising its school achievement profiles in 2011 and its alternative school accountability model in School Year 2011 - 2012. There are some innovative elements of the Arizona Department of Education's alternative school accountability model such as its Improvement measure and Academic Persistence (Arportela & Laczko-Kerr, 2013). The Arizona State Board for Charter Schools Academic Framework for Alternative Schools (2014) offers even more innovation to alternative school accountability by identifying subgroups, i.e. English Language Learners, Free and Reduced Lunch eligible students, and students with special needs, and appropriate minimum subgroup sizes. However, school leaders are often confused about the similarities and differences between the two accountabilities. There has not been an effort to compare and contrast the two frameworks. This paper presents a comparison of the two accountabilities which operationalize policy decisions.

Theoretical Framework

The author of this study recognizes the “bias” that humans bring to empirical inquiry. State-level policy makers chose to use quantitative instruments, e.g. the state-mandated test of standards, state reports of cohort status and graduation rate, etc. in the alternative school academic accountability frameworks. Other policy analysis looks at the legal and compliance interpretation that state and school level educational leaders use when implementing policy (Hemmer, Madsen, & Torres, 2013). Legal and compliance interpretation is beyond the scope of this inquiry.

This study does recognize that policy decision is a directive that is operationalized in an instrument. Scholarly thinking, dating back to Kant’s epistemology (Russell, 1945) and American pragmatism such as Peirce (Buchler, 1955) and Dewey, has identified limits that instrumentation brings to inquiry. Some of the instruments used in the Arizona frameworks, specifically the way that full academic year is defined for alternative schools or graduation rate as seen through the lens of cohort status, is subject to data integrity issues such as human error and the limitations of the state’s student data reporting system. The limits of the selected instruments are a limitation reflected in the data presented in this study.

Even though much of this initial analysis remains at the descriptive level, this inquiry satisfies some minimum canons of logic, e.g., no generic fallacy, no reductionist fallacy, parsimony. The syntax chosen for comparison of the Arizona Department of Education’s alternative school accountability model and the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools’ Academic Framework reflects intended structure and a parsimonious presentation of the relationship among indicators and measures in

both frameworks.

Methods, techniques, & mode of inquiry

This study begins with descriptive research of the two state accountability frameworks and includes two years, fiscal year 2012 and fiscal year 2013, of school labeling with each framework. The sample is a census of all alternative schools that were labeled by each academic accountability framework in 2012 and in 2013. Then, analysis of the findings from this research suggests implications of these policy innovations.

Data sources & evidence

Data sources are publicly available documents from the Arizona Department of Education and the Arizona State Board for Charter School's website. The websites include:

- Department of Education presentations about the A – F models (ADE, 2012 & 2013)
- Annual technical manual of the state's labeling system (ADE, 2013 a & b)
- Annual reports of Letter Grade labeling (ADE, 2012 & 2013)
- The Arizona State Board for Charter Schools' strategic plan (ASBCS, 2011)
- The Arizona State Board for Charter Schools' Academic Framework (ASBCS, 2014)

Also, the Arizona State Board of Charter Schools supplied its source files with calculations of Academic Dashboards. In addition, statute creating alternative education and regarding alternative school accountability is found in the Arizona Revised Statutes, Title 15, (LexisNexis, 2012).

Findings and Substantiated Conclusions

State Context for Accountability of Alternative Schools

This following timeline presents key statute and regulation regarding alternative school accountability in Arizona.

1986 – Arizona Revised Statute §15-796 established alternative education.

2000 - Arizona Revised Statute §15-241. J established a “parallel achievement profile for accommodation schools, alternative schools as defined by the state board of education...”

2002 – State board of education defined alternative schools. The state adopted five categories for students served:

1. Students with behavioral issues (documented history of disruptive behavior)
2. Students identified as dropouts
3. Students in poor academic standing or have demonstrated a pattern of failing grades
4. Pregnant and/or parenting students
5. Adjudicated youth (ADE, 2013)

2004 – Arizona Department of Education published achievement profiles for alternative schools for the first time.

2010 – Arizona legislature revised A.R.S. §15-241 to create an A – F accountability system.

2011 - State Board of Education adopted A – F accountability system. The traditional school model was established, but not the parallel accountability model for alternative schools.

2012 – State Board of Education approved policy specific to alternative schools. Alternative A – F was adopted and implemented for first academic year.

2013 – Arizona State Board for Charter Schools approved an Academic Performance Framework specifically for alternative charter schools.

2014 – The Arizona State Board for Charter Schools amended its Academic Performance Framework and Guidance document to include Appendix G, a methodology section (ASBCS, 2014).

Arizona’s Alternative Schools

Arizona has almost 2000, 1968 in 2012 and 1962 in 2013, public schools. Just less than 10% of the schools are alternative schools. Alternative schools serve close to 30,000 students. It is difficult to report exact enrollment because most alternative schools have open enrollment, even to the end of the school year, and enrollment figures are a “snapshot” from a specific date. Arizona has roughly a million (1,023, 905) public school students (Aportela & Lackzo-Kerr, 2013). Alternative schools serve about 3% of the public school population. Average number of students at an alternative school was 168 in fiscal year 2012 (Giovannone, 2012). Alternative schools are accommodation district schools, charter schools, and district schools.

Table 1 reports the number and percentage of alternative schools in Arizona for fiscal years 2012 and 2013.

Table 1

Arizona’s Public Schools and Alternative Schools by Number and Percentage in 2012 and 2013

<u>Year</u>	<u>Public Schools</u>	<u>Alternative Schools</u>
2012	1968	165/1968, 8%
2013	1962	184/1962, 9%

About a quarter of Arizona’s public schools are charter schools. Alternative charter schools are between a fifth and a quarter of Arizona’s charter schools.

Table 2**Arizona's Charter Schools & Alternative Charter Schools, Number and Percentage, 2012 and 2013**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Charter Schools</u>	<u>Alternative Charter Schools</u>
2012	521/1968, 26% of public schools	102/521, 20% of charter schools
2013	519/1962, 26% of public schools	118/519, 26% of charter schools

Alternative charter schools are about two-thirds of Arizona's alternative schools.

Table 3**Arizona's Alternative Charter Schools by Number and Percentage in 2012 and 2013**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Alternative Charter Schools</u>
2012	102/165, 62% of alternative schools
2013	118/184, 64% of alternative schools

Figure 1 presents a Venn diagram of Arizona's public schools and the subsets of alternative schools, charter schools, and alternative charter schools.

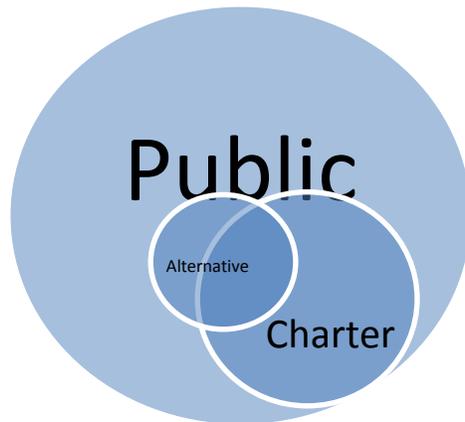


FIGURE 1. *Venn diagram of Arizona's public schools, public charter schools, and alternative schools*

Arizona Department of Education’s Accountability Model for Alternative Schools

The Arizona Department of Education developed a parallel accountability model for alternative schools early in 2012. The State Board of Education approved the model in May 2012. Figure B presents the indicators and measures used in Arizona’s A-F Alternative model. Information about the model from the Technical Manuals (ADE, 2013 a & b) and accountability presentations (ADE, 2012 & 2013) explains the indicators and measures, plus data parameters such as Full Academic Year student counts, used in calculations.

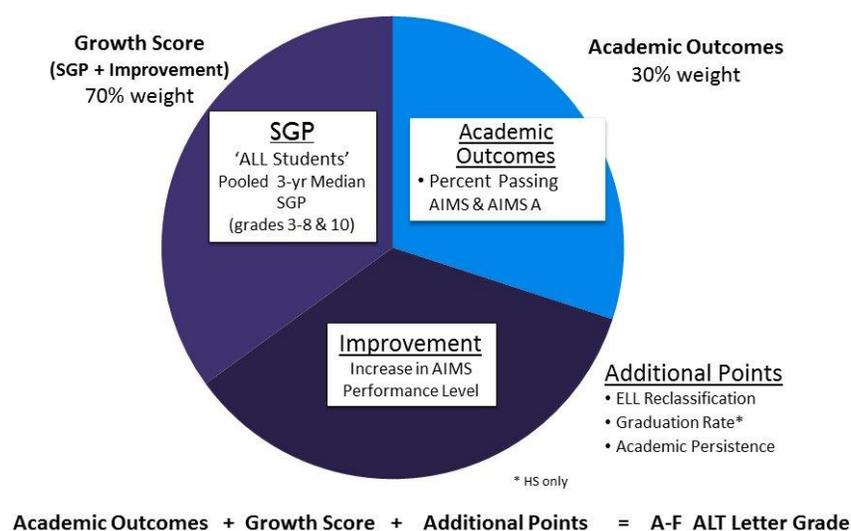


FIGURE 2. Arizona’s A – F accountability model for alternative schools

Source: Arizona Department of Education, 2012 A-F Technical Manual

Arizona’s alternative school A-F Letter Grade model has two basic indicators, Academic Outcomes and Growth. Academic Outcomes is proficiency on the state-mandated assessment, Arizona’s Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) in mathematics and reading. The second indicator, Growth, has two measures, Student Growth Percentile (SGP) and Improvement. The Arizona Growth model, based on the work of Damian Betebenner (2011) with its SGP is

explained in the Arizona A-F Letter Grade Technical manuals (2013 a & b). Improvement is an innovative measure of growth specific to the Arizona alternative school model. SGP can only be used to demonstrate growth through the 10th grade, and the vast majority of testers at Arizona alternative high schools are re-testers. Students that are in 11th grade or in a 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, sometimes even 8th year of being a “senior” have two opportunities each school year to test AIMS. Improvement measures the percentage of students who increased a performance band level on AIMS testing. AIMS uses four performance bands, “Fars Fall Below,” “Approaches,” “Meets,” and “Exceeds.” Student “improve” when they increase from one performance band to the next. Even if a student doesn’t “pass” the AIMS test, the student can “improve” by moving from “Fars Fall Below” to “Approaches.” The ADE Technical Manuals (2013 a & b) provide further explanation of “Improvement”. Academic Outcomes (proficiency) is weighted 30%. Each measure within Growth, SGP & Improvement, is weighted 35% for a total of 70%.

In addition to the two basic indicators, Proficiency and Growth, and the three measures, AIMS proficiency, SGP, and Improvement, there are three components in which schools can receive additional points. The three additional point components are

- ELL reclassification. This is the same formula used in Arizona’s traditional school model.
- Graduation rate. 5th year cohort-based graduation rate is looked at in terms of the graduation rate for all alternative high schools in Arizona. There are three ways for alternative high schools to earn these points.
- Academic Persistence. This is another innovative component of the alternative school model. Academic Persistence additional points reward alternative schools for keeping students enrolled in public school. An academically persistent student is enrolled in an

alternative school at the end of one school year and then is re-enrolled in any public school the following year.

Again, the *Technical Manuals* provide a more detailed explanation of the additional point components (ADE, 2013 a & b).

ADE's Alt A-F is a 200 point scale. The additional points are worth 3 points each for a total of 9 points. 3 out of 200 points is .015. Any additional points are added after the 70/30 weighting for Growth and Proficiency is calculated.

Arizona State Board for Charter Schools' Academic Framework for Alternative Schools

The Arizona State Board for Charter Schools uses the Arizona Department of Education designation of alternative school status to identify its alternative charter schools. Around two-thirds (2/3) of Arizona's alternative schools are charter schools and about a bit a fifth of Arizona's charter schools are alternative charter schools. In the fall of 2012, just a few months after Alt A-F was first calculated and publicly released in August 2012, the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools (ASBCS) developed and approved an Academic Framework for alternative charter schools. The *Academic Performance Framework and Guidance* document presents the alternative charter school framework, the weighting of indicators and measures, and the methodology (ASBCS, 2014). The ASBCS Academic Framework uses data collected by and analyzed by the Arizona Department of Education. Most of the components of the Academic Framework are the same as those found in the Arizona Department of Education's alternative school model, yet Improvement and Academic Persistence are calculated a bit differently, plus there are sub-group measures for proficiency. The Academic Framework weights the indicators and measures differently and includes the school's Alt A-F letter grade as one indicator.

The indicators for the ASBCS Academic Framework for alternative schools are:

1. Student Progress over Time, or Growth
2. Student Achievement, or Proficiency
3. A-F Letter Grade State Accountability
4. Post-Secondary Readiness (for high schools only)

There are two measures of Growth, SGP and SGP for the bottom 25% of students at elementary and middle alternative schools and Improvement on AIMS performance band for high schools. Proficiency has two measures, the overall percent passing and subgroup proficiency. The Framework looks at proficiency for three sub-groups - English Language Learners, Free & Reduced Lunch eligible students, and special education students. Sub-group proficiency allows a closer look at how the charter school serves these distinct student populations. The measure of the A-F Letter Grade State Accountability System is the letter grade the school received. Alternative high schools are evaluated for student Post-Secondary Readiness by High School Graduation Rate, as measured in the ADE Alternative School model, and Academic Persistence.

Figure 3 shows the Framework's measures of alternative charter school accountability and their weighting.

Measure	Alternative Charter Schools Weight		
	Elementary and Middle	High School	K-12*
1a. SGP	30%	5%	15%
1b. SGP of Bottom 25% (Improvement for alternative high schools)	20%	25%	25%**
2a. Percent Passing	15%	20%	15%
2c. Subgroup proficiency	10%	10%	10%
3a. A-F Letter Grade State Accountability System	10%	5%	5%
4a. High School Graduation Rate	NA	15%	15%
4b. Academic Persistence – (Alternative Schools)	15%	20%	15%

*This category includes any grade ranges across K-12 that do not fall solely in K-8 or 9-12.

**An Alternative K-12 School will be evaluated for both "SGP of Bottom 25%" for its Elementary and Middle School Students and "Improvement" for its High School Students. The 25% weighting will be divided equally between the two measures and within each measure divided equally between math and reading.

FIGURE 3. *Measures and weighting in Arizona State Board for Charter Schools' Academic Framework for Alternative Schools*

Each year after public issue of letter grades in August and data is available from the state's student assessment information system for calculation by Research and Evaluation at Arizona Department of Education, the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools issues an Academic Dashboard for each of its authorized alternative charter schools. There are a few alternative charter schools that are authorized by other entities and do not receive Academic Dashboards. Figure 4 illustrates an academic dashboard for an alternative charter high school that was designated as an alternative school in both 2012 and 2013.

		2012 Alternative High School (9-12)			2013 Alternative High School (9-12)		
1. Growth		Measure	Points Assigned	Weight	Measure	Points Assigned	Weight
1a. SGP	Math	33	75	2.5	NR	0	0
	Reading	24	25	2.5	NR	0	0
1b. Improvement	Math	24	50	12.5	25.3	50	15
	Reading	33	50	12.5	50	75	15
2. Proficiency		Measure	Points Assigned	Weight	Measure	Points Assigned	Weight
2a. Percent Passing	Math	19 / 19.6	50	10	24 / 19.1	75	10
	Reading	50 / 47.3	75	10	58 / 52.1	75	10
2b. Subgroup ELL	Math	NR	0	0	12 / 21.2	50	1.67
	Reading	NR	0	0	54 / 48.2	75	1.67
2b. Subgroup FRL	Math	18 / 18.5	50	2.5	24 / 18.2	75	1.67
	Reading	46 / 46.1	50	2.5	59 / 50.4	75	1.67
2b. Subgroup SPED	Math	14 / 4.8	75	2.5	5 / 5.3	50	1.67
	Reading	21 / 20.2	75	2.5	6 / 21.6	50	1.67
3. State Accountability		Measure	Points Assigned	Weight	Measure	Points Assigned	Weight
3a. State Accountability		C-ALT	50	5	C-ALT	50	5
4. Graduation		Measure	Points Assigned	Weight	Measure	Points Assigned	Weight
4a. Graduation		Not Met	50	15	Not Met	50	15
4b. Academic Persistence		67	50	20	87	75	20
Overall Rating		Overall Rating			Overall Rating		
Scoring for Overall Rating 89 or higher: Exceeds Standard <89, but > or = to 63: Meets Standard <63, but > or = to 39: Does Not Meet Standard Less than 39: Falls Far Below Standard		53.75			65		

FIGURE 4. *Illustration of an Arizona State Board for Charter Schools' academic dashboard for an alternative charter school in 2012 and 2013*

Comparison of the Two Accountability Models

The Arizona State Board for Charter Schools' Academic Performance Framework and Guidance document states, "The academic framework includes measures that are similar to components of the Arizona A-F Letter Grade Accountability System..." (2014, p.4). Some measures are calculated identically, yet there are some differences. Certain technical nuances of the calculations are explained in the ADE Technical Manuals (2013a & b) and the Methodology

appendix of the ASBCS Guidance document (2014.) It is not the purpose of this paper to reproduce what has already been written, but rather to provide an overview comparison.

Growth

Student Growth Percentile

ADE calculates SGP for alternative schools by pooling three years of data. In 2012, “To be included in the pooled measure, the SGP must have been associated to a student who was FAY (Full Academic Year – *my clarification*) in the current year. (ADE, 2013a, p. 36) In 2013, ADE modified its pooling method. A school could lack grade 10 students with a current year (FY 13) SGP entirely yet still have SGP data for the alternative school letter grade as a result of students with SGP in the two prior years (ADE, 2013b) In contrast, ASBCS does not use three year pooling for SGP. That Framework does, however, require a minimum of 10 students with data to be rated for that current year on any measure. The ASBCS framework uses a bottom 25% SGP of enrolled students at an elementary or middle alternative charter school as a measure of its Growth indicator. ADE’s Alt A-F does not.

Improvement

ADE calculates Improvement for elementary and middle alternative schools. ASBCS does not. ADE’s calculation of Improvement includes valid test records from the two most recent test administrations at any Arizona school. In the ASBCS Academic Framework’s calculation for high school students, students must be enrolled at the same school for both of the compared assessments. Improvement in the Academic Framework measures the percentage of non-proficient high school students who improve at least one performance level. In the state

metric, students at the “Meets Standard” AIMS performance level are given the opportunity to move to “Exceeds Standard (ASBCS, 2014).

Proficiency

Both the Alt A-F model and the Academic Framework include Proficiency, percent passing the AIMS. Both use the “better of” test scores for high school students because students are given the opportunity to re-test after their first attempt to pass as 10th graders in the Spring test administration. ADE combines the Math and Reading percent passing into one score. In contrast, the ASBCS Framework splits out Math and Reading results. Further, the ASBCS Academic Framework includes results for sub-groups; English Language Learners, Free and Reduced Lunch eligible students, and students receiving Special Education.

Graduation Rate and Academic Persistence

Both Academic Persistence and Graduation Rate are additional points in the ADE Alt A-F model. The Arizona State Board for Charter Schools uses the ADE calculation for Graduation Rate, yet places it within the Framework and weights it differently. ASBCS calculates Academic Persistence slightly differently, then places it within the Framework and weights it differently.

ADE's Alt A - F	Indicator Measure	ASBCS Academic Framework for Alt Schools (minimum of 10 for rating per measure)
30%	Proficiency	30%
30% Simple average of Math & Reading	% passing state- mandated exam (AIMS)	20% Math and Reading
		10% Subgroups English Language Learner, Free & Reduced Lunch, Special Education
70% (SGP + Improvement)	Growth	30% (SGP & Improvement)
35%	SGP	30% - Elementary & Middle Schools 15% - K-12 Schools 5% - High Schools 20% SGP of students in Bottom 25% of students - Elementary & Middle Schools 25% for K-12 schools*
35% All grade levels	Improvement	25% high school only
NA	A-F Letter Grade	5%
<i>(Not Component of FY12 & 13 models)</i>	College & Career Readiness	35%
additional points	HS Graduation Rate	15%
additional points	Academic Persistence	20%
additional points**	ELL Reclassification	not included

* An Alternative K-12 School will be evaluated for both "SGP of Bottom 25%" for its Elementary and Middle School Students and "Improvement" for its High School Students. The 25% weighting will be divided equally between the two measures and within each measure divided equally between math and reading.

** Minimum of 10 students

FIGURE 5. A comparison of Arizona's two accountability systems for alternative schools

Results of Alternative School Labeling

Arizona Department of Education’s Alternative A-F Labels

ADE issued Alt A-F labels for FY 12 and FY 13. The bar graphs in Figures 6 and 7 show the labels in terms of number of schools labeled and percentage.

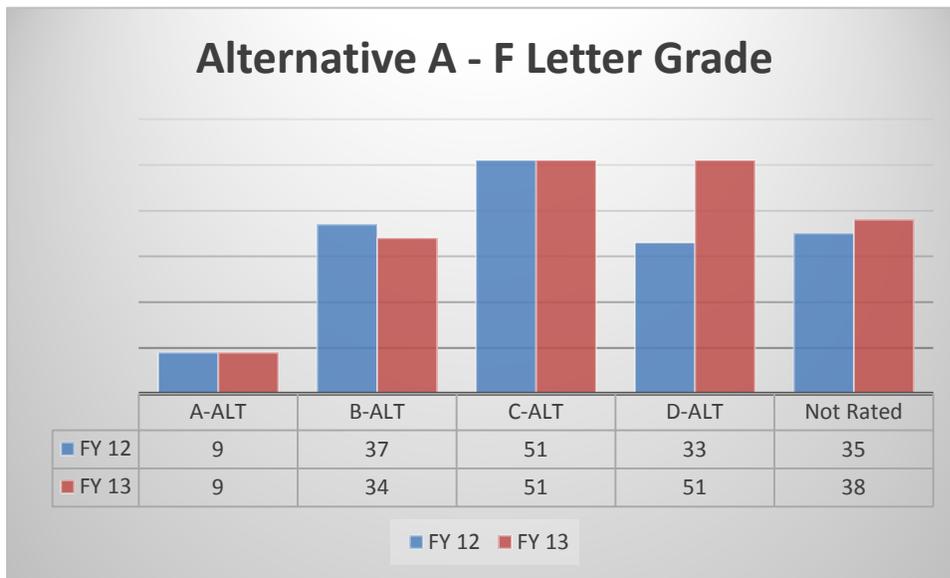


FIGURE 6. 2012 and 2013 ADE Alternative A – F letter grades by number of schools

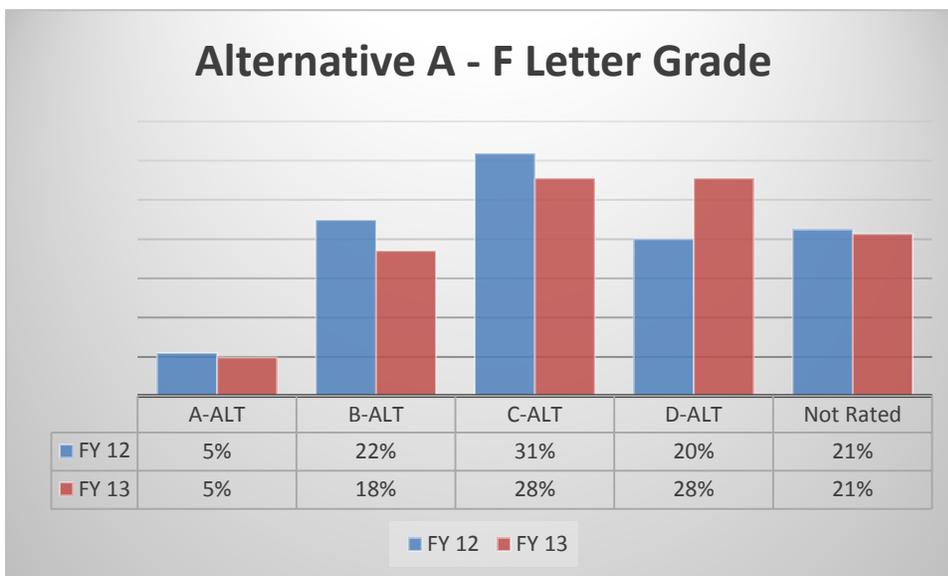


FIGURE 7. 2012 and 2013 ADE Alternative A – F letter grades by percentage of alternative schools

ADE published letter grades for 165 alternative schools in 2012 and 184 in 2013. Several factors including school closures, alternative schools becoming an alternative education program at another district school, and schools converting from traditional to alternative status contributed to the difference in number of alternative schools between those two years. Alt A-F uses a distribution scale when applying letter grades. ADE calculates the points earned by all alternative schools in a certain year. Schools that had points at or above one and one-half standard deviation above the mean for alternative schools in that year were labeled A-Alt, schools with scores between one-half ($\frac{1}{2}$) and one and one-half ($1\frac{1}{2}$) standard deviation above the mean were labeled B-Alt, C-Alts were one half of a standard deviation above and below the mean, alternative schools one-half ($\frac{1}{2}$) a standard deviation below the mean or lower were labeled D-Alt. Figure 8 from the 2013 ADE Technical Manual (p. 39) illustrates the distribution scale. (Please note that there is a typo on the B-Alt arrow.)

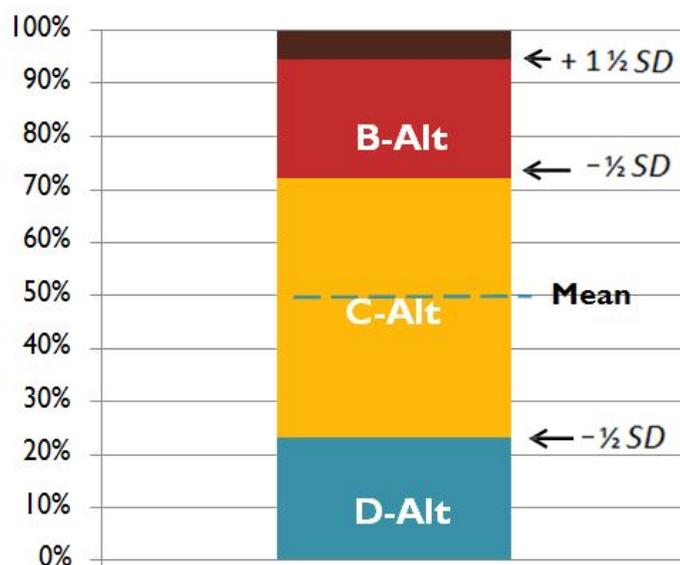


FIGURE 8. *Distribution scale used for alternative schools by Arizona Department of Education*

Source: Arizona Department of Education's 2013 Technical Manual

As ADE states in its 2013 Technical Manual, “Letter grades issued in 2012 also utilized this distribution scale, therefore, the approximate percentage of A-ALT, B-ALT, C-ALT, and D-ALT schools remained relatively consistent from 2012 to 2013” (p. 39).

The “cut points” for alternative school letter grades changed from 2012 to 2013 because the mean for all alternative schools increased from 121 points in 2012 to 125 points in 2013. The standard deviation remained almost the same: 30.5 in 2012 and 31.2 in 2013. Table 4 presents the scales.

Table 4

Arizona Department of Education’s Alternative School Distribution Scale, 2012 and 2013

<u>Year</u>	<u>A-Alt</u>	<u>B-Alt</u>	<u>C-Alt</u>	<u>D-Alt</u>
2012	200-167	166-132	131-97	96-0
2013	200-171	170-140	139-109	108-0

The Arizona State Board for Charter Schools has issued 2012 and 2013 academic performance dashboards for the alternative charter schools that it authorizes. Again, bar graphs present results, both by number and percentage.

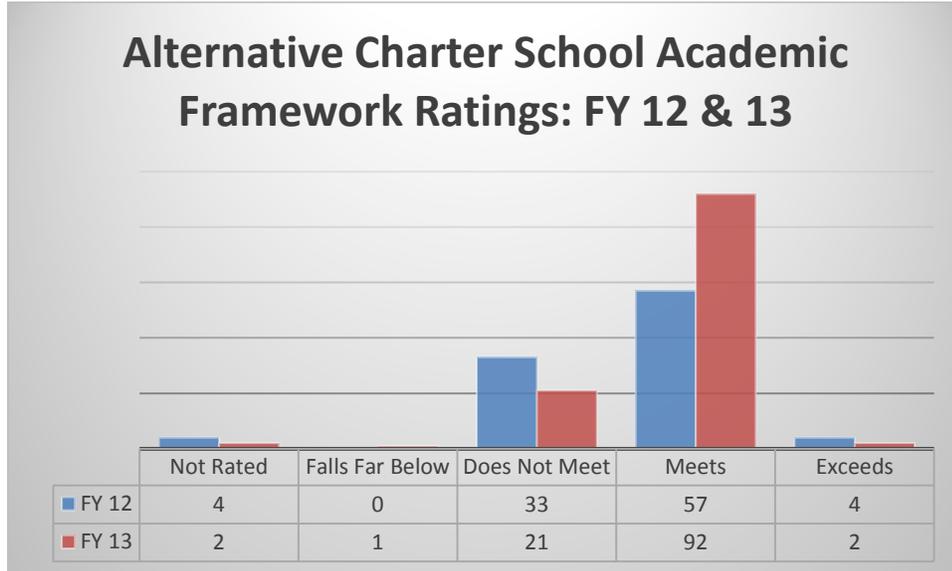


FIGURE 9. 2012 and 2013 academic rating for alternative charters by number of schools

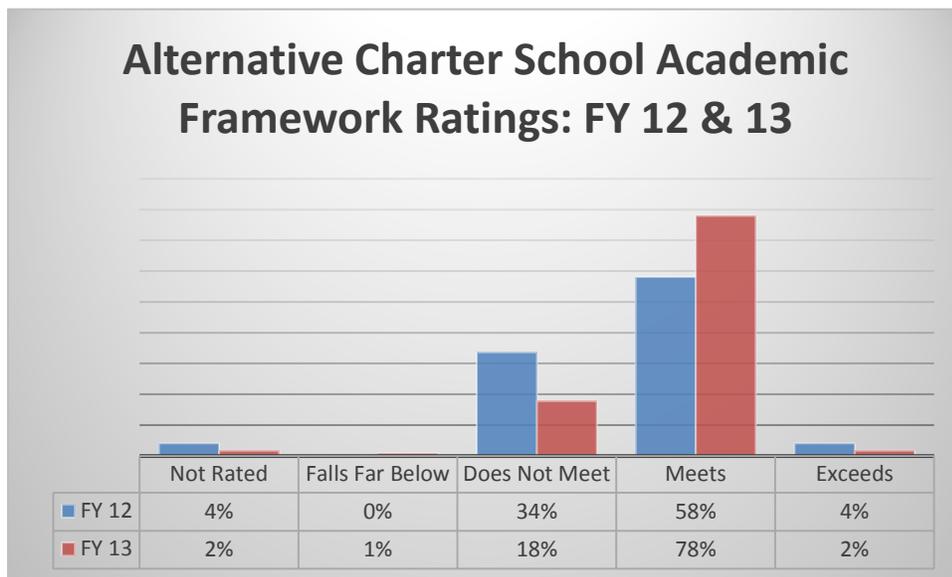


FIGURE 10. 2012 and 2013 academic rating for alternative charters by percentage of schools

Findings show that schools are labeled differently by these two alternative schools accountability frameworks. In 2013, 80% of the alternative charter schools meet or exceeded the Academic Framework for Alternative Schools while less than a quarter of alternative schools received Alt A's and Alt B's.

A correlation coefficient was calculated for each year, 2012 and 2013, of these labels.

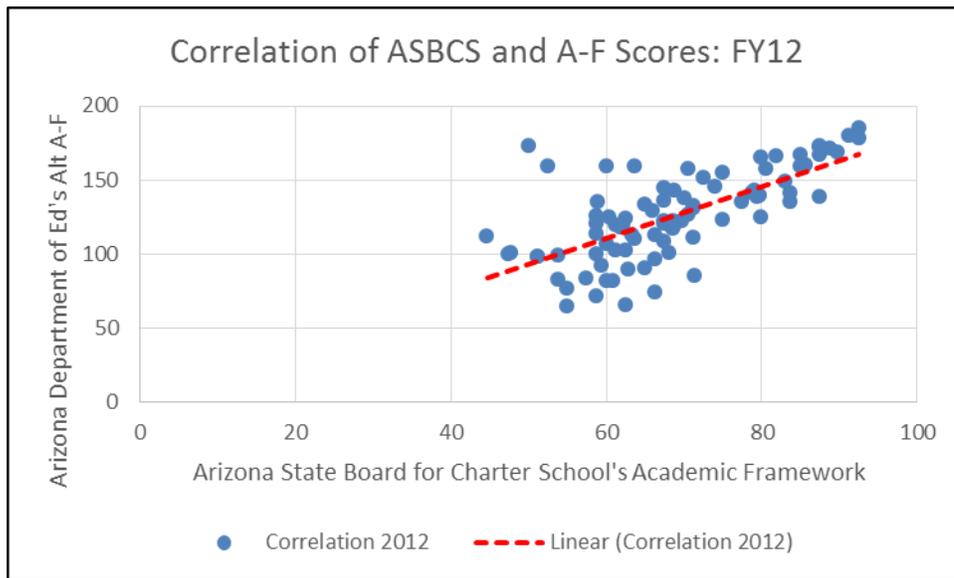


FIGURE 11. *Scatterplot of 2012 Correlation of Arizona Department of Education's Alternative A-F and Arizona State Board for Charter Schools Academic Framework*

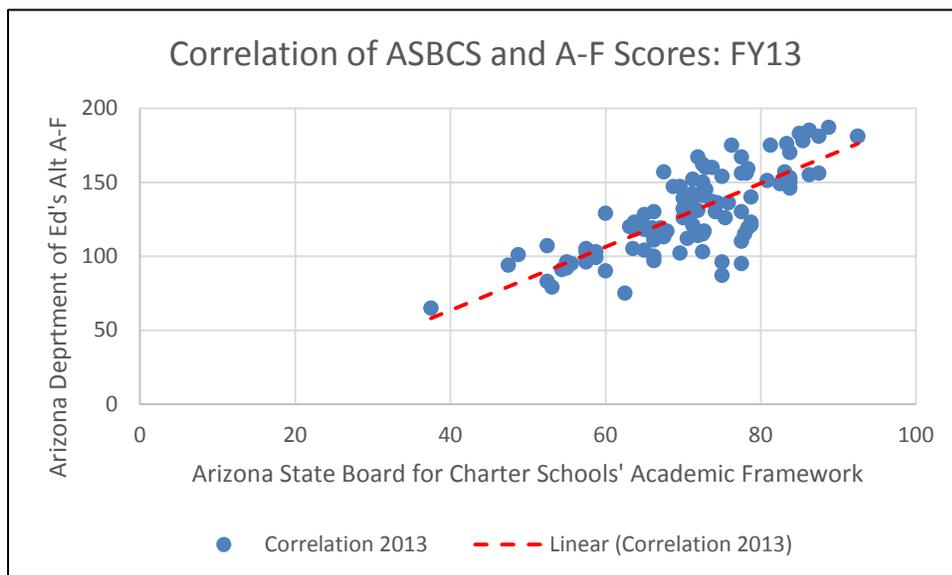


FIGURE 12. *Scatterplot of 2013 correlation of Arizona Department of Education's Alternative A-F and Arizona State Board for Charter Schools Academic Framework*

The Pearson r for 2012 is 0.68 and 2013 is 0.78. Correlations are strong between the two accountability labeling systems.

Substantiated Conclusions

The impact of labeling using a distribution scale may adversely affect decisions about school quality when an A-Alt or B-Alt label is considered to be the indication of a “high quality” school. Only alternative schools one-half ($1/2$) a standard deviation or more above the mean for all Arizona alternative schools are labeled with an A-Alt or Alt-B by ADE’s letter grading system. Does that mean that only about a quarter of Arizona’s alternative schools are “quality” schools, or is this more a statistical consequence of using a distribution scale? In contrast, the ASBCS Academic Framework for Alternative Schools identifies expectations for alternative schools. Even though “Meeting Expectations” is relative to the performance of all Arizona alternative schools including accommodation district schools and district alternative schools, on some measures, e.g. percent passing, SGP, targets are set for other measures, e.g. Improvement, Academic Persistence, and Graduation. In 2013, the difference between the percentages of charter alternative schools that “met & exceeded” the Framework, eighty (80) percent, is a stark contrast to the twenty-three (23) percent of all Arizona alternative schools that are labeled A-Alt and B-Alt. In that same year, there were 119 alternative charter schools of the 184 alternative schools in Arizona, almost $2/3$. Most of those alternative schools “met” the Academic Framework, yet the majority was labeled “C-Alt.”

Discussion

Contributing factors to the contrast between the two accountability systems include the weighting in the two models and the more detailed analysis found in the AZ State Charter School

Board's Academic Framework.

The innovative measures of alternative school accountability, Improvement and Academic Persistence, illustrate the impact that weighting can have on school labels. Improvement is one-half, 35%, of the Growth component in Alt A-F; however, as stated in ADE's 2013 Technical Manual, "When no students at the school were eligible for improvement, the growth scored was made up entirely by the pooled SGP measure" (p.35). It would be possible for a school to not have current year SGP, but still have a pooled SGP score for a few students in the two previous years. Such a school would still have a Growth component score in Alt A-F, and Growth is 70% of the model. Does that result in appropriate current year labeling for that alternative school? Further, since Alt A-F used a distribution scale, the letter grades for all alternative schools in the state could be impacted.

In contrast, the AZ State Board for Charter School's Academic Framework does not use Improvement as a measure for elementary and middle schools. Improvement is a measure of the Growth indicator for high schools and weighted 25%. The expectation targets for "meeting" this measure are set and do not change from year to year.

Academic Persistence is an innovative measure used in both academic accountability systems. Academic Persistence is three (3) additional points in the Alt A-F 200 point model. In contrast, Academic Persistence is 15% for elementary, middle, or K-12 alternative charter schools and 20% for alternative charter high schools evaluated by the AZ State Board for Charter Schools Academic Framework. As a policy-value decision, the Arizona State Board of Education should revisit the placement of Academic Persistence in the alternative school model. Alternative schools are making a valuable contribution to Arizona society by providing students with an education that encourages them to remain enrolled in a public school. Alternative

schools with academically persistent students may be one of the solutions to the state's and the U.S.'s dropout problem.

Upcoming Changes

Multiple changes are coming to alternative school accountability in Arizona. In late February 2014, Arizona's State Board of Education approved a revamped alternative school definition and process for alternative school status. Outcome data on the impact of the revised definition and process will not be available until the summer of 2014. That will be an area for further research. In addition, the Arizona Department of Education is proposing revisions to the Alt A-F model such as moving graduation rate inside the model as part of a College and Career Readiness Index. Such action will set precedent for moving a component that currently is designated as "additional points" to a component within the model. Just as graduation rate, in some form, will become a weighted component within Alt A-F, Academic Persistence should be a component within the model. Alternative schools are advocating that the Arizona State Board of Education set some targets within the model, rather than using a distribution scale for the entire model each year. When the Arizona Department of Education changes certain components of its Alt A-F model, some measures within the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools' Academic Framework will need revision. There will be a need for additional research on the new configuration of both models in the upcoming years.

Scholarly Significance of the Study

This study furthers the limited research currently available for making informed policy decisions on alternative education accountability. Appropriate accountability for alternative

education campuses is currently being discussed in various forums (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2013; National Association for Charter School Authorizers, 2011 & 2013). The Center for Student Achievement has called for more implementation of the innovative measures, Academic Persistence and Improvement, in all of Arizona's school accountability models (Aportela & Lackzo-Kerr, 2013). This inquiry furthers the limited body of research and scholarship about alternative school accountability in the United States with its analysis of Arizona's alternative school accountability systems, is an attempt to clarify the two accountabilities through comparison and contrast, and suggests some areas for further research and evidence-based policy decisions regarding more appropriate accountability for alternative schools.

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Addendum

During the session at the American Educational Research Association meeting, the chair asked, ‘Can you show a break-down of how the alternative schools that received both “labels,” the Department of Education’s A – F and the State Board for Charter Schools’ Academic Framework, fared?’

The figures below present that data for both fiscal years. Please note that the percentages are percentages of alternative charter schools that received **both** (my emphasis) labels. These numbers and percentages are not the same as the numbers and percentages presented in Figures 9 and 10 because this is a subset of the schools reported in those figures.

ADE A-F Letter Grade	AZ State BD Charter Schools' Academic Framework			
	Falls Far Below	Does Not Meet	Meets	Exceeds
A-ALT			4	4
B-ALT		3	25	
C-ALT		18	19	
D-ALT		11	4	
ADE A-F Letter Grade	AZ State BD Charter Schools' Academic Framework			
	Falls Far Below	Does Not Meet	Meets	Exceeds
A-ALT	0%	0%	4%	4%
B-ALT	0%	3%	28%	0%
C-ALT	0%	20%	21%	0%
D-ALT	0%	12%	4%	0%

FIGURE 13. *Alternative charter schools with both labels, an Arizona Department of Education letter grade and Arizona State Board for Charter Schools’ academic framework rating, in fiscal year 2012, by numbers and percentages*

ADE A-F Letter Grade	AZ State BD Charter Schools' Academic Framework			
	Falls Far Below	Does Not Meet	Meets	Exceeds
A-ALT			5	2
B-ALT			28	
C-ALT		1	41	
D-ALT	1	17	13	
ADE A-F Letter Grade	AZ State BD Charter Schools' Academic Framework			
	Falls Far Below	Does Not Meet	Meets	Exceeds
A-ALT	0%	0%	5%	2%
B-ALT	0%	0%	26%	0%
C-ALT	0%	1%	38%	0%
D-ALT	1%	16%	12%	0%

FIGURE 14. *Alternative charter schools receiving both labels, an Arizona Department of Education letter grade and Arizona State Board for Charter Schools' academic framework rating, in fiscal year 2013 by numbers and percentages*