
THE Center for Education Reform



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RESULTS FROM CER'S ANNUAL SURVEY
OF AMERICA'S CHARTER SCHOOLS



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THE CENTER FOR EDUCATION REFORM
Washington, DC

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CHARTER SCHOOLS 2002: RESULTS FROM CER'S ANNUAL SURVEY OF AMERICA'S CHARTER SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

The Center for Education Reform (CER) is pleased to present the key findings of its most recent nationwide survey of charter schools, including data compiled from charter schools operating in the 2001–2002 school year. The responses represent 481 of the more than 2,357 charters operating as of September 2001 in 37 states and the District of Columbia and indicate a response rate of twenty percent.

CER asked the charter schools general questions about their educational programs and operations, the tests they give, and the populations they serve.

Their responses stand in stark contrast to assertions by charter school opponents, and paint a picture of a diverse and vibrant system of charter schools that are held accountable by both traditional and non-traditional means. The results — and the actions of the schools — implicitly and explicitly reject the assertions of charter school opponents who fear their growth. Judging from the results, charters are accountable, educate underserved students, and provide innovative opportunities children and parents are unable to receive in their local traditional public school.

Yet, charters continue struggling to overcome obstacles not in the path of traditional public schools. Charter schools are typically required to operate with less funding than traditional public schools and, in many cases, have to finance their capital costs for facilities out of the same per pupil expenditure — an obstacle not confronted by their traditional public school brethren.

Despite unrelenting opposition, charter schools continue to develop, continue to thrive and, most importantly, continue to serve the children they educate by providing a more individualized instruction meeting each child's needs. Charter schools' success is evident in both student achievement and community response, with increasing examples of success by students who were not previously successful in traditional public schools. Nearly 70 percent of charter schools have waiting lists.

THE SURVEY'S KEY FINDINGS INCLUDE:

CHARTER SCHOOLS ARE ACCOUNTABLE

Ninety-eight percent of charter schools report administering at least one standardized test, including state tests in those states that have them, and are held to the same standards for those tests as traditional public schools, and even more so: If a charter school fails to meet the terms of its charter, unlike traditional public schools, it can be closed.



CHARTERS EDUCATE UNDERSERVED STUDENTS

The data reveal that charters serve students who largely are underserved in the traditional public school environment: at-risk students, minority students, and low-income students. Traditional public schools do not provide the specialized attention and tailored programming that charters offer these students. Charters also are increasingly targeting students at the ends of the instructional spectrum who are being failed by a “one-size-fits-all” education system: Gifted and Talented students, teen parents, expelled and court-adjudicated youth, and non-English speaking children.



SMALL CHARTER SCHOOLS PROVIDE WHAT PARENTS WANT

Average student enrollment in traditional public schools is 539 — more than twice the average charter school enrollment of 242. More than 69 percent of charter schools have a waiting list and, demonstrating demand by parents, the average waiting list for a charter school has skyrocketed to 166 students, or 68 percent of the average school’s enrollment.



CHARTER SCHOOLS PROVIDE INNOVATIVE CHOICES

Charter opponents argue that charters are not exhibiting innovative instructional techniques. Yet, more than a quarter of charter schools say they are using the “Core Knowledge” and/or “Direct Instruction” curriculum in their schools — far more than in traditional public schools. The range of instructional programs is also growing, with charters now beginning to offer such programs as Expeditionary Learning and Online courses.

Finally, the size of such schools and classes are significantly smaller than in traditional public schools, providing a closer, more personalized instructional relationship between the school, the teacher and the student.



STUDENTS RECEIVE MORE INSTRUCTIONAL TIME

Providing more instructional time with the right kind of curriculum can have a profound effect on at-risk students but is rarely done by traditional public schools, which are bound by district work and bargaining agreements. The added flexibility afforded charter schools means that 43 percent are able to offer either or both an extended school day or an extended school year.



CHARTER SCHOOLS DO MORE WITH LESS

Survey respondents reported that their per-pupil cost averaged \$4,507 — far less than the traditional public school's expenditure of more than \$7,000 per pupil. But charter schools face additional burdens: The average amount charters actually *receive* is only \$4,346. Respondents report that about four percent of their budget is provided from private donors.



FACILITIES CHALLENGES ARE A LEADING IMPEDIMENT

Asked an open-ended question about their school's greatest challenge, more than one-third of respondents reported some aspect of facilities challenges: Either unable to find a permanent facility, unable to repair the one they have, or spending huge levels of funding to rent the facility they are in. Indeed, charter schools report that nearly 15 percent of their budget is spent on capital (facilities) expenses, an expense traditional public schools do not include in their per pupil costs which typically include only operating expenses.



MULTIPLE CHARTERING AUTHORITIES LEAD TO MORE CHARTERS

A majority of charter schools are approved by an agency other than the local school board. Local school boards, however, are more likely to grant charters when state laws permit multiple authorizers or when there is a strong appeals process. Only eight percent of charter schools are in the 12 states requiring the approval of local school boards, while 92 percent are located in states with multiple chartering authorities or a strong appeals process.



KEY FINDINGS

CHARTER SCHOOLS ARE ACCOUNTABLE

While many critics suggest that charters are not accountable, the data show otherwise: charter schools answer to the public and to their authorizers for student achievement. Although charter critics frequently view “accountability” only through the lens of state law, charter schools typically promise a

certain level of achievement in the body of their charter agreement.

Ninety-eight percent of charter schools reported administering at least one standardized test. Anecdotal information in the appendix of this report also provides test results of schools surveyed.

Figure 1: Charter School Testing Requirements

Nearly all charter schools use standardized tests

	2001	2002
Charter schools that administer at least one Standardized test	97%	98%
Require a state-specific test	73%	57%
Require a Stanford 9	42%	50%
Require the Iowa Test of Basic Skills	18%	11%
Require the California Test of Basic Skills	5%	3%
Require the California Achievement Test	5%	4%
Require the Terra Nova	8%	10%
Require another standardized test	33%	38%

CHARTER SCHOOLS EDUCATE UNDERSERVED STUDENTS

The schools surveyed confirm recent research: Charter schools frequently structure their curriculum, operations and instruction to serve children that are traditionally underserved by the

district school systems, such as at-risk, minority and low-income students.

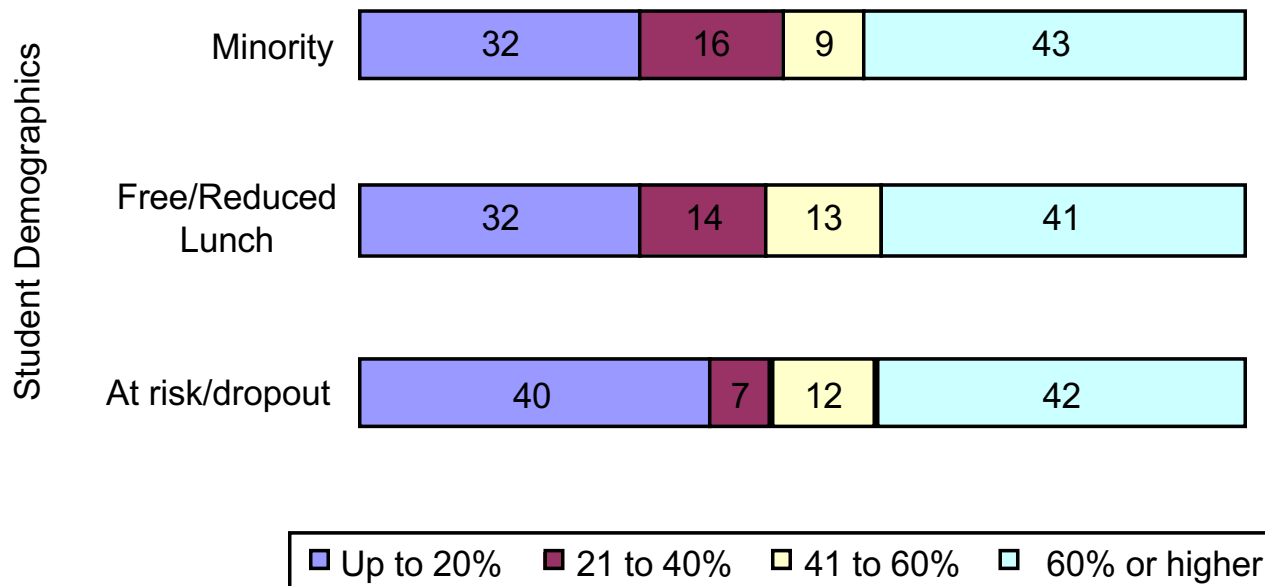
Middle-class majority students also benefit from charter schools, particu-

larly those who are not well-served by traditional public schools. Middle-class majority students who have not been successful in traditional public schools may gravitate towards a charter school specifically because these schools offer a better path to success. Over the last year, the percentage of charters identifying “gifted and talented” students as a target population to be served has risen from 10 percent to 27 percent, suggesting the difficulty traditional public schools have in providing education using a “one-size-fits-all” system.

Indeed, charter schools seem to better address the needs of students at both ends of the educational performance continuum: Eighteen percent of charters indicate they view teen parents as a target population to be served, up from 12 percent in last year’s survey and 12 percent target disabled students, up from 8 percent last year. In addition, 10 percent of charters target expelled youth, 11 percent target court-adjudicated youth, and nearly a quarter target English as a Second Language students.

Figure 2: Student Populations

Percentage of charter schools serving selected populations



Example: 43 percent of charter schools report serving minority populations of more than 60 percent

SMALL SCHOOLS PROVIDE WHAT PARENTS WANT

Research shows that smaller schools lead to higher student achievement. Charter schools deliver the smaller size that produces results — and that parents want. Most charter schools are relatively small, with an average of 242 students, while the average enrollment in traditional public schools is more than twice as high, or 539. While a few charter schools serve larger populations, only about 12 percent of charter schools have more than 500 students.

More than two-thirds of charter schools (69 percent) have long waiting lists, illustrating strong parental demand, and the lines are growing longer. Despite a decrease in the average waiting list last year to 112 students, the number has skyrocketed this year to an average waiting list of 166 students, or

68 percent of the average charter school enrollment.

In 1998, CER predicted that the increasing number of charter schools and the competition they would inspire would result in shorter waiting lists. For several years, this proved true as charter school waiting lists dropped from an average of 141 students to 112.

It may well be that this year's increase in student waiting lists is an anomaly. But it is equally or more likely the case that the demand for charter alternatives is now again outpacing the ability of charters to form and grow in the face of increased government restraint, political pressure and resistance by leaders of the education establishment.

Figure 3: Charter School Waiting Lists

Large waiting lists demonstrate high demand

	1998-99	2000-01	2001-02
Average enrollment	253	258	242
% of schools with waiting lists	67%	63%	69%
Average number of students On waiting list	141	112	166

CHARTER SCHOOLS PROVIDE INNOVATIVE CHOICES

Charter schools provide multiple curriculum options, responding to the demand for better and

more focused curricula that meets the needs of each school's distinct population.

Even charter critics such as the American Federation of Teachers admit that “charter schools use education programs that are not offered in their host districts.” Respondents to the 2002 survey bear that contention out, offering a range of learning methodologies, from E.D. Hirsch’s Core Knowledge Curriculum to Expeditionary Learning to Online learning.

Most charter schools choose a specialized teaching strategy — one the school’s operators believe will best meet students’ needs. The curriculum programs offered by charter schools

vary considerably. Some, for example, focus on specific disciplines (such as math and science or the arts), while others are built around students’ future plans (college preparation or school-to-work).

While comparable data for all public schools is unavailable, anecdotal evidence suggests that charter schools specialize more than traditional public schools overall. District public schools are less likely to specialize because the instructional methods and curricula for the entire district are usually centralized.

Figure 4: Curriculum/Instructional Focus

Charter schools use specialized teaching strategies

	2001-02
Core Knowledge	18%
College Prep	13%
Science/Math/Tech	12%
Thematic Instruction	10%
Direct Instruction	8%
Back to Basics	8%
Constructivist	6%
Arts	5%
Outcome-based Education	5%
Home/Independent Study	4%
School-to-Work	4%
Bilingual/Foreign Language	3%
GED/HS Completion	3%
Montessori	3%
Expeditionary Learning	3%
Virtual/Cyber/Online	2%
Waldorf	<1%
International Baccalaureate	<1%

Figures add to more than 100 due to rounding.

CHARTER SCHOOLS PROVIDE MORE INSTRUCTIONAL TIME

Perhaps the most innovative, yet simple, value provided by charter schools is increased instructional time for their students. Few traditional public schools have stretched their hours beyond a traditional school year of 180 days or so and a standardized 6.5 hours per day.

Charters, able to make more innovative use of resources, provide additional instructional time for their students — students who customarily are in desperate need of additional help.

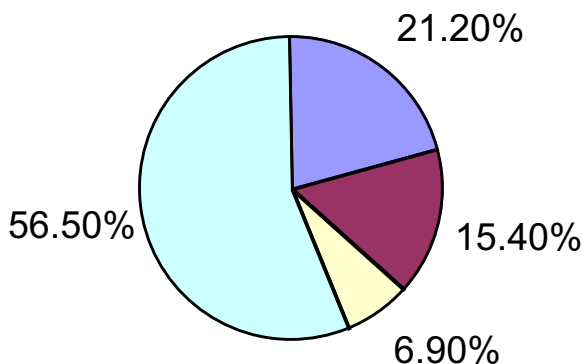
Forty-three percent of survey respondents go beyond the “typical school year” and “typical school day:” 21

percent offer an extended school day *and* an extended school year; 15 percent offer only an extended school day; and seven percent offer an extended school year only.

This is echoed by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics, which asked schools if they offered “Extended day *or* before-school *or* after-school daycare programs. While it would be inappropriate to confuse daycare with an instructional component, it must be noted that nearly 63 percent of charters offer students such additional time in school, while only 46 percent of traditional public schools do so.

Figure 5: Instructional Time

Charter Schools Provide More Instruction



- Offer extended school day and extended school year:
- Offer extended school day, but not extended school year:
- Offer extended school year, but not extended school day:
- Traditional school day and year:

CHARTER SCHOOLS DO MORE WITH LESS

Survey respondents report that their per-pupil cost averaged \$4,507 versus the average traditional school cost of more than \$7,000 per pupil reported by the National Center for Education Statistics. Charter schools also face additional burdens: Respondents report receiving only \$4,346 per pupil, and also report that about four percent of their budget must be provided from private donors.

Finally, they report that nearly 15 percent of their annual budget is spent

on capital, or facilities, expenses. This category is typically not included in a traditional public school's per pupil expenses because it is amortized into the parent system's capital budget.

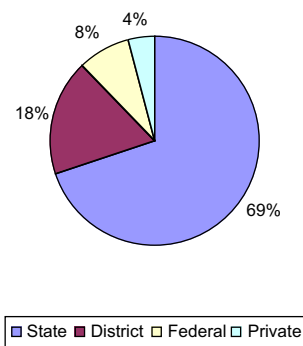
Charter schools, then, start off with fewer instructional dollars, have to raise part of it from private contributors, and in many cases are forced to slice off even more to pay for rental, renovations, or a mortgage expense traditional public schools have picked up by their school district.

Figure 6: Finances

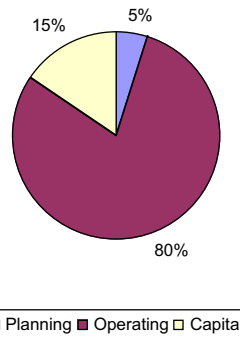
Charter Schools Do More With Less

Average Cost Per Pupil:	\$4,507
Average Revenue Per Pupil:	\$4,346

Sources of Revenue for Charter Schools:



Budget Allocations for Charter Schools:



MULTIPLE CHARTERING AUTHORITIES LEAD TO MORE CHARTERS

A review of who grants charters illustrates the impact of different state charter laws. Overall, agencies other than local school boards authorize more charter schools: 56 percent of charters are granted by authorities other than local school boards. Other findings from the data on charter schools in 2002:

- ⚙️ Only 8 percent of charter schools are in the 12 states that require local school boards to approve charter school applications, with 92 percent in the remaining 26 states. In other words, states with multiple authorizers have 11 times more charter schools than states requiring local school board approval.
- ⚙️ Arizona, California, Michigan and Texas, which allow for multiple chartering authorities or have a strong appeals process, have half of all charter schools in the United States.
- ⚙️ States requiring local school board approval of charter schools have an average 16.2 charters per state. States with multiple chartering authorities or a strong appeals process have an average 83.2 charters per state.

Figure 7: Percentage of Charters Approved by Various Authorities

	1998-99	2000-01	2001-02
Local school boards	43%	43%	44%
State Boards of Education	35%	37%	29%
Universities/colleges	13%	8%	9%
Other state chartering bodies	9%	7%	12%
Other*	2%	5%	6%

* Most “other” responses either listed county offices of education, the mayor’s office, or did not specify.

ACADEMIC SUCCESS AND CHALLENGES

Perhaps even more valuable than the quantifiable data are the personal responses charter schools offered to CER's open-ended questions. No issue has so bedeviled the reputation of charter schools as the charge that there is no evidence of academic achievement among students attending charter schools.

In fact, even though charter schools typically educate students performing substantially below grade level, objective surveys and reports continue to show academic success among charter school students outpacing that of their cohorts in traditional public schools (for more information, see *What the Research Reveals About Charter Schools*, available from The Center for Education Reform). These indications are borne out by responses to this survey, where they report strong academic improvement and successes.

Charter schools reported a range of achievements, including gains in reading and math performances; test scores higher than district, state, or comparable school scores; increased parental involvement; higher attendance and fewer discipline problems. Examples of specific and quantifiable successes include the following:

- ☀ “Reading, writing, math at or above grade level for all students. About 25% of students are above grade level in reading and math.” **(Village Charter School, Anchorage, AK)**
- ☀ “One-hundred percent high school passing rate on AIMS reading and math tests. Eighth grade math AIMS scores were second best in Arizona.” **(Basis School, Inc., Tucson, AZ)**
- ☀ “Increased SAT9 reading scores by 78%, Math 15%, Language 55% from 1997-2001.” **(Challenge Charter School, Glendale, AZ)**
- ☀ “One thousand graduates since 1995. Over \$500,000 in scholarships; 64% go on to four year colleges, 10% to two-year, 10% into military, and 10% to workforce.” **(Gateway Community High School, Phoenix, AZ)**
- ☀ “Top 20% of all high schools and districts for all standardized testing. Last year, we ranked #5 in the entire state vs. all high schools, including charters designed for gifted IQ students in the AIMS reading test.” **(New School for the Arts, Scottsdale, AZ)**
- ☀ “Highest SAT 9 test scores, 7-12, of any public school of any size in Maricopa County.” **(Tempe Preparatory Academy, Tempe, AZ)**
- ☀ “Our standardized test scores (SAT-9) have consistently risen and our academic performance index scores have been 200% of the state's expectations.” **(Academy for Academic Excellence, Apple Valley, CA)**

- ⚙️ “Overall student achievement gain in every one of eight years. 1999 to 2000 doubled growth target; 2000 to 2001 was 3.5 times the growth target.” (**Fenton Avenue Charter School, Lake View Terrace, CA**)
- ⚙️ “Oglethorpe’s 8th graders outscored all other schools in the state’s 8th grade writing test. Ninety-three percent of our 8th graders scored “good” or “very good.” (**Oglethorpe Academy, Savannah, GA**)
- ⚙️ “Huge growth on last year’s SAT-9 (80 points).” (**Keys to Learning Charter School, Keyes, CA**)
- ⚙️ “All 18 graduates have completed two courses at Massachusetts community college prior to graduation with grades of C or better. Of the 15 grades issued this fall, all were B or better.” (**Champion Charter School, Brockton, MA**)
- ⚙️ “One-hundred percent of our 3rd graders were proficient in CSAP this year.” (**Challenges, Choices and Images Literacy and Technology Learning Center, Aurora, CO**)
- ⚙️ “We received the state ‘Golden Apple Award’ for achievement on the MEAP state assessment test.” (**Chatfield School, Lapeer, MI and Pansophia Academy, Coldwater, MI**)
- ⚙️ “Average reading gain of 5.9% and math gain of 4.5% on Stanford 9 (Fall to Spring). Sixty-three percent of students made gains beyond grade level on SAT-9 in reading (Fall to Spring). Increase of 12.1% of students reading at grade level as indicated by diagnostic reading assessment results.” (**Capital City Public Charter School, Washington, DC**)
- ⚙️ “We went from approximately 60% reading below grade level to 46% in just our first year.” (**Metro Charter Academy, Romulus, MI**)
- ⚙️ “Last year in FCAT scores, we ranked highest in the county in grades 3,6,and 8 and no lower than the top 10 (out of 69 schools) in all other grades.” (**Lake Eola Charter School, Orlando, FL**)
- ⚙️ “All grade level scores on Terra Nova test are above the 50th percentile.” (**New Branches School, Grand Rapids, MI**)
- ⚙️ “Eighty-two percent of all IEP goals have been met over the past three years, and 20% of our autistic students have been mainstreamed to regular class.” (**Princeton House, Orlando, FL**)
- ⚙️ “Baseline scores in math and reading increased on average 15% last year.” (**El Colegio Charter School, Minneapolis, MN**)
- ⚙️ “Iowa Test of Basic Skills scores indicate that student performance improved from below average in Fall to above average in Spring 2001.” (**Family Academy, Roseville, MN**)

- ⚙️ “Exemplary status in the 2001-2002 school year on the state test. NO achievement gaps for high school students.” (**Rocky Mount Charter Public School, Battleboro, NC**)
- ⚙️ “Excellent PSAT scores: Our junior class average was 1150. The Rutherford county graduating class senior SAT average is 936.” (**Thomas Jefferson Classical Academy, Mooresboro, NC**)
- ⚙️ “Students gain 1-2 academic years in reading levels as a result of our guided reading program.” (**Jersey City Community Charter School, Jersey City, NJ**)
- ⚙️ “Highest Terra Nova Scores Santa Fe.” (**Monte Del Sol Charter School, Santa Fe, NM**)
- ⚙️ “We’re in our first year and 20% of our students were drop-outs who have dropped back in.” (**Nuestros Valores Charter School, Albuquerque, NM**)
- ⚙️ “PIAT measures 1.5 growth in student achievement in one school year.” (**Odyssey Charter School of Nevada, Las Vegas, NV**)
- ⚙️ “Increased SAT scores 50-100 points higher. Eighty-five percent passing rate on first attempt of the English Regents Examination.” (**John V. Lindsay Wildcat Academy Charter School, New York, NY**)
- ⚙️ “Seventy-five percent of students taking AP tests score 3 or higher; SAT at or above 1020; ACT at or above 22.” (**Tulsa School of Arts and Sciences, Tulsa, OK**)
- ⚙️ “One hundred percent achievement on state math problem-solving and writing tests; 96% on state multiple choice test; 94% on state reading test.” (**Three Rivers Charter School, West Linn, OR**)
- ⚙️ “Average reading scores increased 1.7 years for every year in school.” (**Community Academy of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA**)
- ⚙️ “We have just completed our first year. However, our SAT-9 scores were in the 70-80% rank for the district.” (**New Foundations Charter School, Philadelphia, PA**)
- ⚙️ “On 5th grade state tests, out of 300 schools we were #1 in math, #4 in reading and in 8th grade, we were #4 in math and #8 in reading.” (**Philadelphia Academy Charter School, Philadelphia, PA**)
- ⚙️ “Our 5th graders are doing the exact same math as local 7th grade honor students.” (**Cedars International Academy, Austin, TX**)
- ⚙️ “From 16.7% passing the TAAS in 1998, to 48% passing in 2000-2001.” (**Eagle Advantage, Dallas, TX**)
- ⚙️ “We’ve improved math TAAS scores by 20% in one year!” (**Higgs, Carter, King Gifted and Talented Charter Academy, San Antonio, TX**)

CHALLENGES

The greatest challenges facing charter schools are facilities and funding issues. Asked an open-ended question about their school's greatest challenge, more than one-third of respondents *volunteered* some aspect of facilities challenges: either unable to find a permanent facility, unable to repair the one they have, or spending

huge levels of funding to rent the facility they are in.

Nearly a quarter of respondents, 24 percent, called “funding issues” — aside and apart from those connected with facilities — their top concern. This is no surprise, given the significantly reduced funding on which most charter schools survive.

NOTES ON SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Not all schools responded to all questions. For each question, percentages are based on total responses to that particular question.

For some questions, total responses

may add to more than 100 percent, either because schools gave more than one answer to each question, or due to rounding.