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# 2019 MODIFIED COUNT REPORT

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BY: JAMISON WHITE

No exact definition of what constitutes a “school” exists. Because federal and state educational agencies use different definitions for schools, this lack of standardization can be problematic when accounting for schools in data systems and maintaining consistent data across time. For those interested in gaining a better understanding of the education landscape, these inconsistencies pose a problem, particularly in the counting of charter schools. A single record of a school (typically represented as a row or unique identification number in a given dataset) is not necessarily a single school. That means comparing or combining federal and state datasets without properly understanding, and ideally rectifying, these discrepancies can lead to inaccurate counts of charter school openings, closures and other important metrics. This white paper articulates a model developed by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (National Alliance) for delineating and classifying records. While this system helps to accurately count schools, it does not affect the number of students because all traditional public school records count towards traditional public school students and charter records count towards charter students.

## RECORDS VS. SCHOOLS: POSSIBLE TYPES OF RECORDS

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Not all individual records that appear in state or federal data files are schools, which creates a persistent challenge educational researchers must overcome. The National Alliance reviewed all public education records from the federal Common Core of Data (CCD) and state data files for the 2005-06 through 2018-19 school years and identified four different types of records. These record types form the foundation of our new school classification system and apply to both schools operated by traditional public schools and public charter schools.

- 1. MAIN SITE:** A main site represents what many would typically refer to as a public school. Main sites appear, for all intents and purposes, to be standard educational facilities or entities that serves students in any combination of grades PK-12.
- 2. CAMPUS:** A campus appears to have an association with a main site but is not a school itself. This indication of an association may stem from similar names, websites, and/or addresses, etc. For charter schools, campuses typically serve students in grade levels complementary to those of their main site. For example, the main site may serve students in grades K-3 and the campus serves students in grades 4-6. They may exist either in the same building as the associated main site, perhaps on different floors, or within a mile of the main site. Because facilities pose a serious challenge to charter schools<sup>1</sup>, the National Alliance established a one-mile rule to capture schools that may split up grade levels due to lack of physical space.

Some schools offer different programs in the same building. For example, a vocational charter school might offer multiple tracks to the same student body but report each track separately to their state agency. Even though the grades are not compatible in these instances, one or more records may count as a campus. In these cases, there is a consistent and reasonable pipeline of students attending the campus and the main site. We determine which of two or more associated records is the main site and which is the campus by the year a record first

opened. For example, if a middle school serving students in grades 6-8 opened in 2000 and then expands to serve grades 9-12 in 2007, the high school record (grades 9-12) would count as a campus. In cases where the National Alliance lacks enough information to discern which record came first, we designate the record with the most students as the main site. For traditional public schools, the National Alliance considers a record a campus only when the record shares a location with a main site. Traditional public schools often have multiple sending districts, or student pipelines between schools, so the National Alliance determined the one-mile rule did not apply in these cases.

3. **HOLDER RECORD:** Holder records are not schools, but rather entities that hold the enrollment for more than one main site. Typically, these records occur in places where networks of charter schools aggregate enrollment for separate main sites within their network when they report their data to their state agencies. They appear in datasets to look like a main site, but typically have an unusually large number of students. In most cases the main sites that we know exist are missing from the dataset. These records must have more than one associated main site with no, or only partial, enrollment.
4. **PROGRAM:** Program records operate at the district or state level and may or may not permit charter school students to participate. Programs often serve students with specific needs or interests. Examples of these include career technical colleges or supplementary support for students requiring specialized educational services.

## THE MODIFIED COUNT SYSTEM

The National Alliance's Modified Count System establishes fourteen classifications for records based on characteristics such as the type of record (main site, campus, holder, or program), presence of existing enrollment data, and identification provided by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) ID.<sup>2</sup> These classifications determine whether a record counts as an official charter school in the Modified Count System. The National Alliance uses these nominal labels to describe a record. Figure 1 depicts the process for classifying a given record.

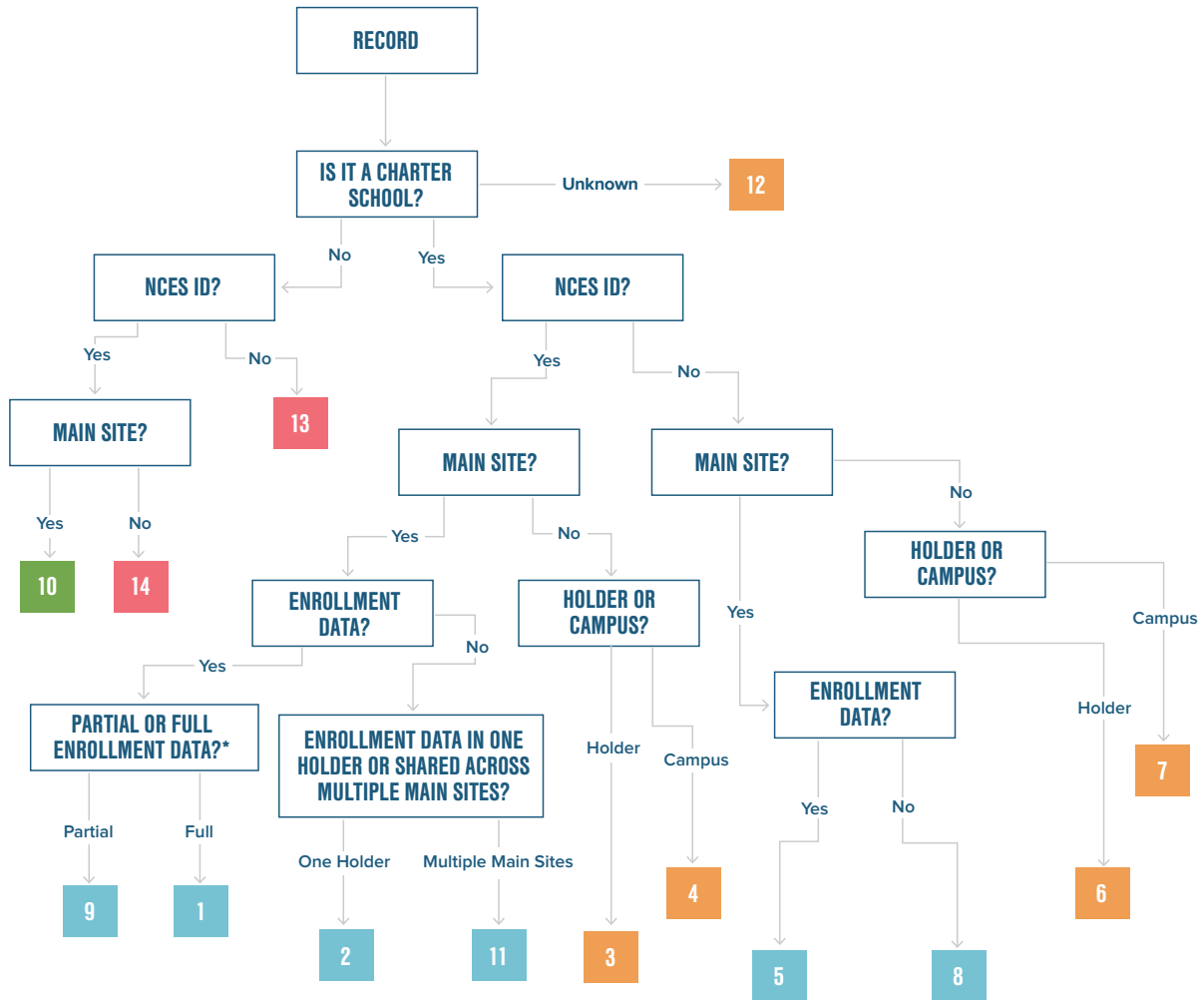
1. **A main site that counts as an official charter school.** The record has federally reported CCD enrollment data and an official NCES ID.
2. **A main site that counts as an official charter school.** The federal government does not report enrollment data in CCD for these records, although there is an official NCES ID. Enrollment for such records is typically aggregated at the holder level.
3. **A holder that does not count as an official charter school.** The federal government reports aggregated enrollment data in CCD for multiple main sites using this record, and the record has an official NCES ID.
4. **A campus that does not count as an official charter school.** The federal government reports enrollment data in CCD enrollment data, and the record has an official NCES ID.
5. **A main site that counts as an official charter school.** The federal government does not report enrollment data in CCD enrollment data, and the record has no official NCES ID. However, the record does have enrollment data reported in the state file.
6. **A holder that does not count as an official charter school.** The federal government does not report enrollment data in CCD, and the record has no official NCES ID. However, the record does have aggregated enrollment data reported in the state file.
7. **A campus that does not count as an official charter school.** The federal government does not report enrollment in CCD for these records, and there is not an official NCES ID. These records have enrollment, but only the state files report on these records.
8. **A main site that counts as an official charter school.** The federal government does not report enrollment data in CCD for these records, and there is not an official NCES ID. These records also do not have enrollment data that appear in state files. The National Alliance typically uses this record type to capture charter schools we know to exist, but do not appear in other sources. We know these schools exist when the school claims

additional main sites. After investigating to confirm they are in operation, the National Alliance adds them to the NAPCS Database of Schools. In these cases, enrollment for the main site is typically aggregated at the holder level.

- 9. *A main site that counts as an official charter school.*** The federal government reports partial enrollment data in CCD for these records, with some enrollment captured in a charter holder record. These records have NCES IDs.
- 10. *A main site that counts as an official traditional public school.*** NCES reports enrollment data in CCD and provides them with an official NCES ID.
- 11. *A main site that counts as an official charter school.*** The federal government does not report enrollment data in CCD for these records, and there is not an official NCES ID. These records also do not have enrollment data that appear in state files. Their enrollment is instead split between two or more main site records in the CCD.
- 12. *The National Alliance is unable to appropriately categorize these records.*** These records often appear as schools but are so new that we cannot yet classify them. We do not count them as schools because we are unable to confirm whether they are truly in operation. Once enough information becomes available, we convert them to the appropriate Modified Count.
- 13. *These programs do not count as schools but may still have enrollment.*** Typically, these occur only at the state or district level. They may or may not serve charter school students, but the National Alliance does not count them as charter schools.
- 14. *A traditional public school campus record that does not count as an official traditional public school.*** The federal government reports enrollment data in CCD for the record, and there is an official NCES ID. This record shares a location with its associated main site.

The flowchart below illustrates the logic used when assigning modified counts to records. The NAPCS maintains a detailed record of charter schools by working closely with state partners, authorizers, and state education agencies. Once we establish that a school is a charter school, we determine whether the federal government has an NCES ID for the school. After this, we look for evidence that the school is a main site by mapping the physical addresses, associated sites, and confirming with the school's online records. Lastly, we look at whether the enrollment captured in the record belongs to a single school, multiple schools, or contains only partial enrollment. Using this process, we establish the 14 modified counts used to determine how many charter schools exist in the U.S. as well as calculating district, state, and national market shares.

FIGURE 1.



- Not counted in National Alliance’s official count of charter schools
- Counted in National Alliance’s official count of charter schools
- Not counted in National Alliance’s official count of traditional public schools
- Counted in National Alliance’s official count of traditional public schools

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>[https://www.publiccharters.org/sites/default/files/documents/2018-03/FINAL%20Strengthening%20Federal%20Investment%20in%20Charter%20School%20Facilities%20\\_0.pdf](https://www.publiccharters.org/sites/default/files/documents/2018-03/FINAL%20Strengthening%20Federal%20Investment%20in%20Charter%20School%20Facilities%20_0.pdf)

<sup>2</sup><https://www.publiccharters.org/our-work/publications/2019-national-center-education-statistics-id-report>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.publiccharters.org/our-work/research-and-data/database-charter-schools>

