

The turnover rate for students, teachers, and administrators in charter schools is much higher than regular public schools

A Michigan study found KIPP turnover from grade 6 to grade 8 to be 40%. In Los Angeles charter schools teacher turnover was found to be 3 times higher than regular public schools. And a recent study by the University of Washington found very high administrative turnover and pointed out that, in general, charters have no plan for addressing this problem.

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Study Stings KIPP on Attrition Rates

By **Mary Ann Zehr**

KIPP charter middle schools enroll a significantly higher proportion of African-American students than the local school districts they draw from, but **40 percent of the black males they enroll leave between grades 6 and 8, says a new nationwide study** by researchers at Western Michigan University.

"The dropout rate for African-American males is really shocking," said Gary J. Miron, a professor of evaluation, measurement, and research at the university, in Kalamazoo, and the lead researcher for the study. "Kipp is doing a great job of educating students who persist, but not all who come."

With 99 charter schools across the country, most of which serve grades 5 to 8, the **Knowledge Is**

Power Program network has built a national reputation for success in enabling low-income minority students to do well academically. And some studies show that KIPP charter schools have succeeded in significantly narrowing race-based and income-based achievement gaps between students over

time. While not disputing that track record, the new study attempts to probe some of the more unexplored factors that might play into KIPP's success.

It concludes, for instance, that KIPP schools are considerably better funded on a per-pupil basis than their surrounding school districts. The KIPP schools received, on average, \$18,500 per pupil in 2007-08, about \$6,500 more per student than the average for other schools in the same districts, according to the researchers' analysis of federal 990 tax forms filed by schools reporting both public and private sources of funding. The study reports that nearly \$5,800 of that per-pupil amount is private donations and grants.

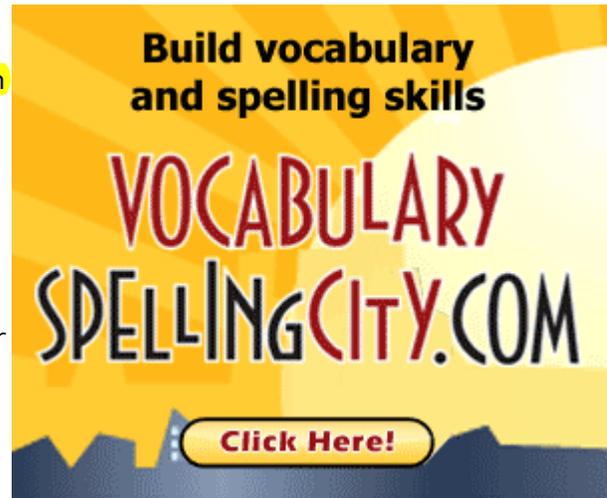
Mr. Miron said the "\$6,500 cost advantage" raises questions about the sustainability of the KIPP model.

The study also faults KIPP for not serving more students who are still learning English or who have disabilities.

"The limited range of students that KIPP serves, its inability to serve all students who enter, and its dependence on local traditional public schools to receive and serve

the droves of students who leave, all speak loudly to the limitations of this model," the report says.

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Luis A. Huerta, an associate professor of public policy and education at Teachers College, Columbia University, praised the study for exploring indicators of KIPP's operations other than student achievement, which, while important, doesn't tell the whole story, he said.

"If we can start speaking about these more nuanced layers, and move beyond this discussion of student achievement, we tend to get a real picture," he said. "Here we have schools receiving upwards to \$6,000 or more than traditional schools, and that's not even accounting for the fact they have fewer services than traditional schools, yet the gains they've shown in student achievement are quite modest." Mr. Huerta is a faculty associate of the National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, which had a hand in distributing the study but did not take part in the research.



The study came in for criticism from KIPP officials, as well as from two other researchers not involved in it. They questioned its methodology and said that while Mr. Miron is asking the right questions about KIPP schools, he hasn't provided adequate evidence to answer them.

"We see this report as having significant shortcomings in the methodologies and reject the core conclusions the report is making," said Steve Mancini, the public-affairs director for the San Francisco-based KIPP network, which was started in 1994.

Methods Differ

The study by the Western Michigan researchers used the federal Common Core of Data as its primary source. The researchers were able to obtain data from 2005-06 to 2008-09 for 60 KIPP schools across the country. The KIPP schools were compared with averages for other, more-traditional schools in the same districts. Besides the 990 forms, the researchers drew financial data on KIPP schools from the same federal database, which had financial data for 25 of those schools.

Robin Lake, the associate director of the Center on Reinventing Public Education, at the University of Washington in Seattle, was one of the scholars who questioned the study led by Mr. Miron.

"It seems he's trying to explain away the KIPP effect rather than explain it," she said. "More work needs to be done to get real answers."

"The main point to make is the kind of data they are looking at is quite different from the kind of data we've been looking at," said Brian P. Gill, a senior fellow for the Princeton, N.J.-based Mathematica Policy Research and a co-author of a study of 22 KIPP middle schools released last June. That study was commissioned by KIPP.

Mr. Gill said that Mathematica based its conclusions, including a finding that attrition of students from KIPP schools is about the same as from neighboring regular public schools, on data from individual students, not on aggregate data sets, as Mr. Miron's study has done.

The study led by Mr. Miron found that approximately 15 percent of students disappear each year from the KIPP grade cohorts, compared with 3 percent per year in each grade in the local traditional school districts. Mr. Miron said that finding doesn't contradict Mathematica's finding that attrition rates are comparable between KIPP schools and local district schools on average, because his research team compared only KIPP "districts"—the cluster of kipp schools in a particular district—and the rest of the schools in districts as a whole, not individual schools with schools.

Mr. Mancini, Ms. Lake, and Mr. Gill share the view that the comparison groups used in the Western Michigan study don't provide reliable information about student attrition. It's not appropriate, they contend, to make conclusions about attrition by comparing the proportion of students who leave a KIPP district with the proportion of students who leave the entire surrounding school district, which might have hundreds of schools.

"You want apples-to-apples comparisons. This is like apples to watermelons," said Ms. Lake.

Unexplored Issue

Mr. Miron said that the Mathematica approach to determining student attrition is "superior" to his. But his study explores an issue that he said Mathematica hadn't addressed: How does the fact that KIPP schools tend not to replace students that leave, particularly in the upper grades, affect attrition?

"The low-performing students are leaving KIPP schools, but they are still in the public school sector," Mr. Miron said.

Mr. Gill said Mr. Miron's study doesn't account for how grade retention, a hallmark of the KIPP model, may account for some of the shrinkage in cohorts of students moving from 6th to 8th grade.

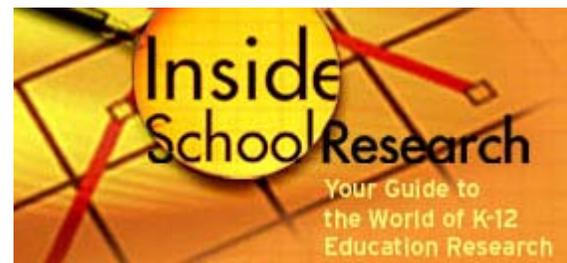
The Western Michigan study doesn't challenge KIPP's positive student outcomes. It says that the nonprofit network's claims that its schools improve students' test scores at a faster rate than regular public schools are backed by "rigorous and well-documented studies," such as Mathematica's.

Mike Wright, who oversees KIPP's network growth and sustainability, characterized the report's findings on the financing of KIPP's schools as misleading.

He focused on the finding that KIPP schools receive nearly \$5,800 more per pupil from private donations than do their surrounding school districts. One problem, Mr. Wright said, is that the finding is based on a sample of 11 KIPP districts that isn't representative of all KIPP schools. (Mr. Miron said he used those 11 districts because they were the only ones that reported public revenues on the 990 tax forms.)

Also, Mr. Wright said of the study's authors, "they are including everything under the kitchen sink, whether starting a school from scratch or investing in facilities" in the figure for private per

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pupil funding. He contends it's a "misrepresentation" to imply that KIPP schools are overflowing with resources, when, unlike regular public schools, they are often left on their own to pay for buildings.

Mr. Wright contends that the average funding advantage from private sources for KIPP schools in comparison with their local school districts is closer to \$2,500 per pupil.

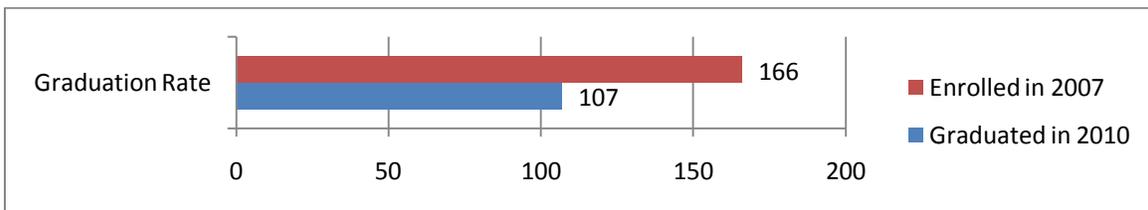
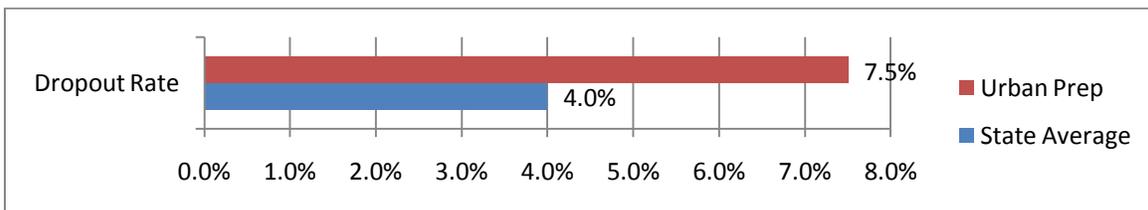
Mr. Huerta, however, said Mr. Miron's methodology is strong, even though there are "complications in trying to dig out some of this information."

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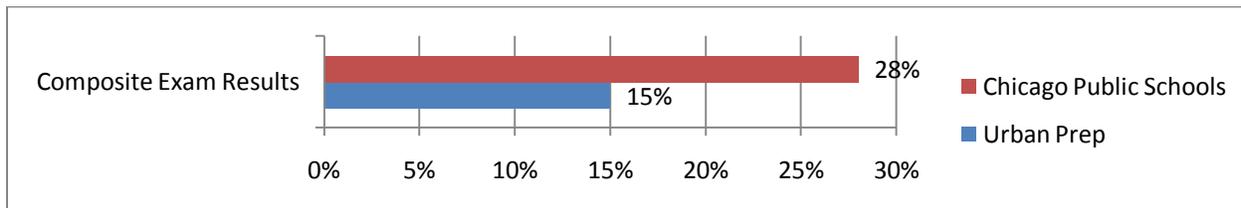
The Poster Child of Charter Schools

Behind the Pretty Picture are the REAL NUMBERS!

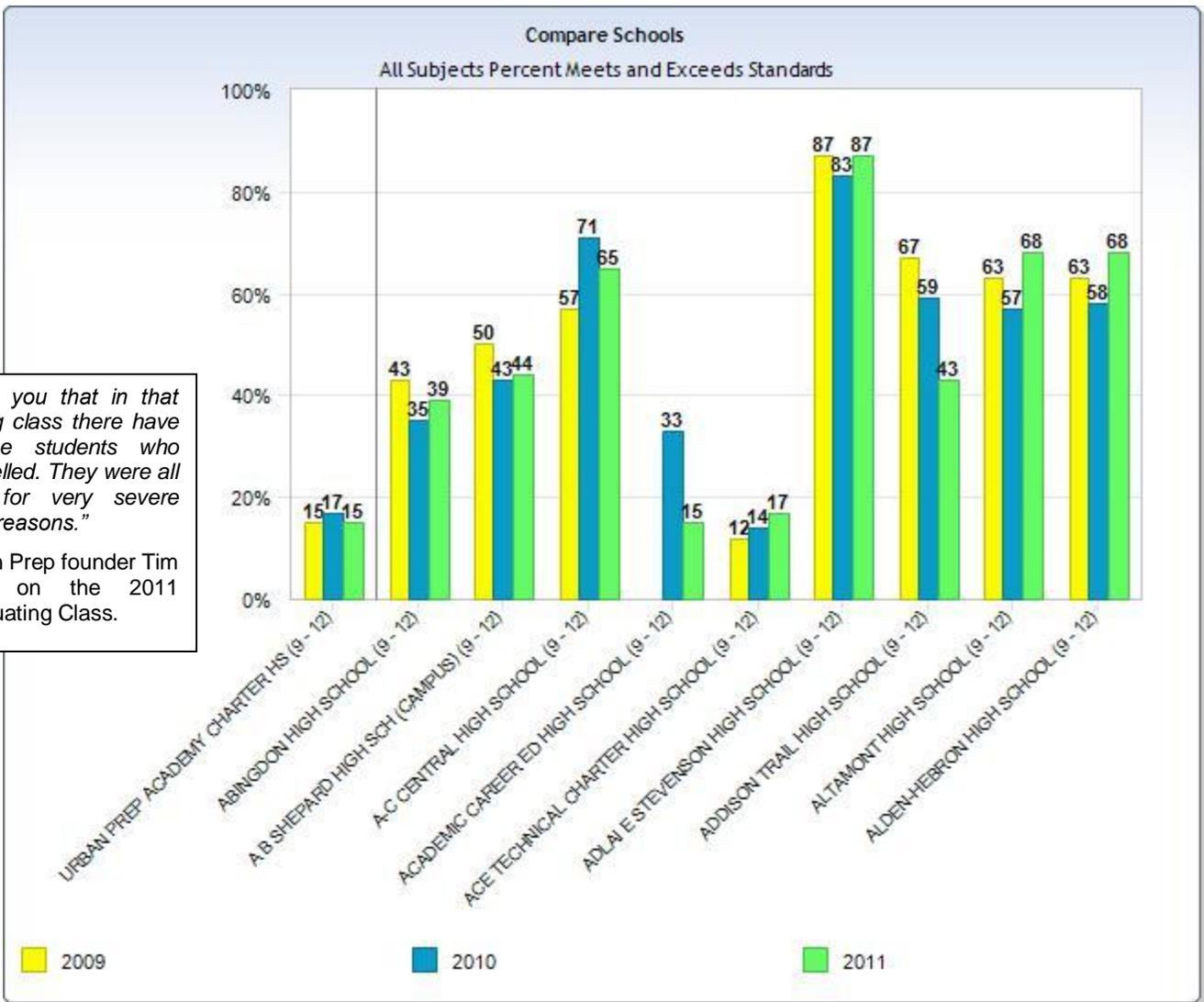


"According to the Illinois Interactive School Report Card, there were 166 freshmen enrolled in 2007, Urban Prep's first year. Of these original freshmen, the Tribune reports that 107 are graduating seniors. This yields an overall **school graduation rate of 64%**, or nearly **6 points lower than the average district rate of 69.8%**.

With these new figures, the overall graduation rate at Urban Prep goes down to 57%. So, it begins to look more and more as though Urban Prep's real "accomplishment" is refusing to graduate any senior who has not been accepted into college." - Julie Woestehoff, Chicago Examiner, July 9, 2010

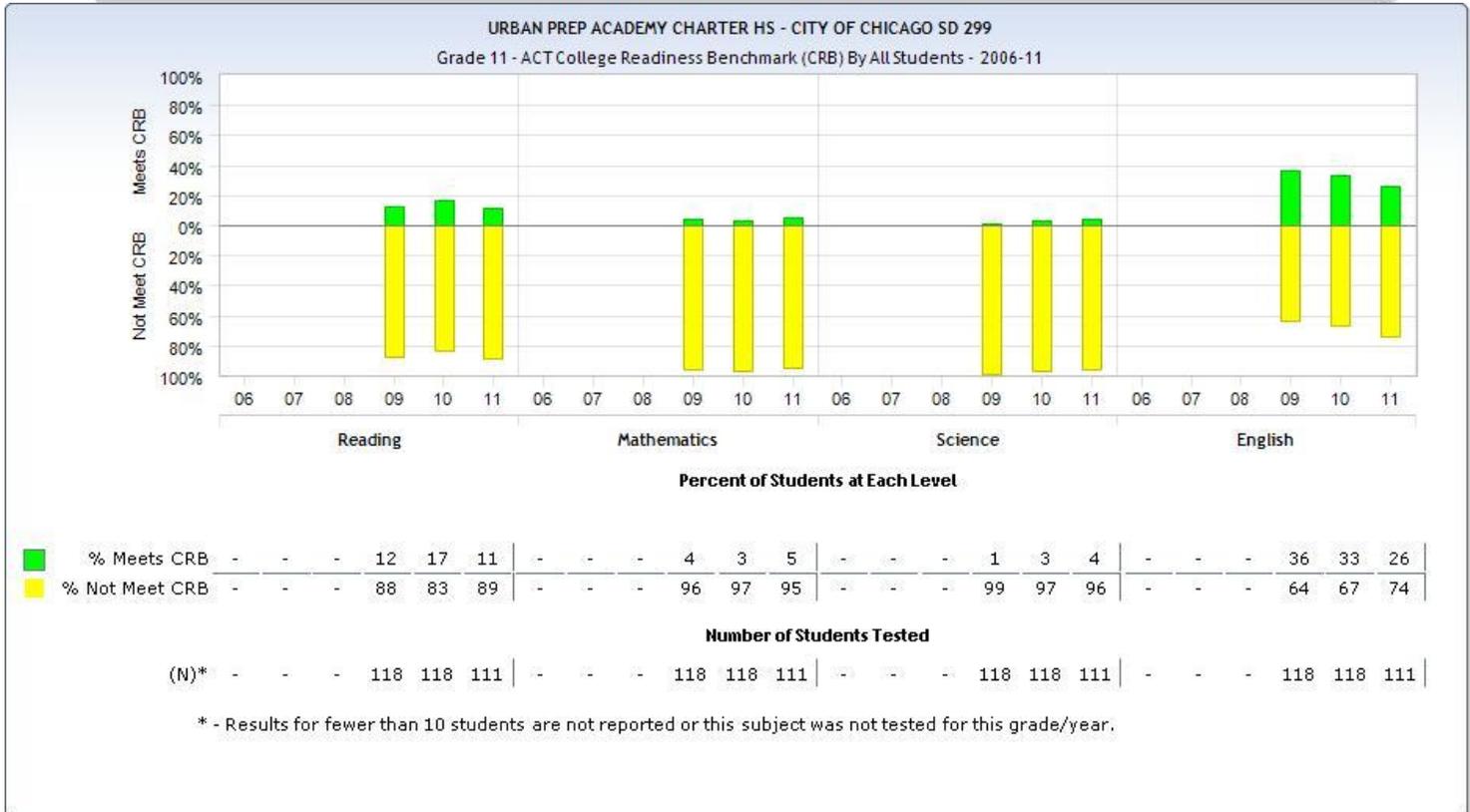


Urban Prep Charter School By the Numbers



"I will tell you that in that graduating class there have been nine students who were expelled. They were all expelled for very severe discipline reasons."

- Urban Prep founder Tim King on the 2011 Graduating Class.



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L.A. NOW

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA -- THIS JUST IN

Los Angeles charter schools have high teacher turnover

July 19, 2011 | 6:16 pm

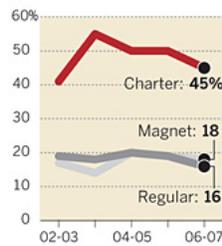
Local charter schools serving middle and high school students are losing about half their teachers every year, according to a study of the Los Angeles Unified School District released Tuesday. The rate of turnover is nearly three times that of other public schools, although they also are seeing high rates of departures.

Faculty turnover

Teachers are leaving Los Angeles Unified charter middle schools and charter high schools at rates far exceeding other schools.

Percent of teachers who did not return the following year

■ Charter schools
■ Magnet schools
■ Regular schools



Note: Most recent data available
 Sources: UC Berkeley PACE Center
 KHANG NGUYEN Los Angeles Times

The picture is different for students, although less conclusive: If they attend a charter school, they are more likely to remain there than students in a traditional public school. Magnet schools are even better at retaining students.

The conclusions are based on data from the Los Angeles Unified School District as part of two companion UC Berkeley studies -- one on teachers and the other on students.

The findings about teachers are especially noteworthy, said study co-author Bruce Fuller.

"Earlier research shows that student achievement rests in part on strong, sustained relationships with teachers," Fuller said. "High teacher turnover rates, at the eye-opening levels we discovered, are worrisome."

This research does not address why teachers left or how this affected students. Many charters have posted strong results on state tests.

Charters are independently operated schools exempt from some rules that govern traditional schools, including union work rules. Magnets are special programs initially designed to promote voluntary integration; teachers at magnets work under standard district rules.

The California Charter Schools Assn. said the studies examine important issues but questioned whether their findings derive from a true cross-section of charters. L.A. Unified has more charter schools than any school district in the country, about 10.5% of total enrollment in the nation's second-largest school system.

The researchers said the data on instructors is broadly representative because nearly all charters report teacher data to L.A. Unified or the state. The findings on students are somewhat less representative, because fewer charters report that information.

In the 2007-08 school year, the most recent in the six-year study, 45% of charter secondary teachers-- those in middle and high schools -- had exited before the next school year. The range of annual departures was 41% to 55% over that period. The range for other public schools was 14% to 23% over that period.

Charters fared better on the study of student enrollment. For the 2007-08 school year, about 2% of students left a magnet school, about 4% left a charter school, about 5% left a newly constructed school and about 6% left all other schools. These are not dropout rates, but rather an indication of what percent of students left a particular school for any reason.

One purpose of the study was to see if L.A. Unified's \$20-billion new school construction program reduced student departures. Over the six years of the study, student turnover was slightly lower overall in the new schools.

The studies were supported with \$110,000 in grants from the New York City-based Ford Foundation, the Menlo Park-based Hewlett Foundation and the Spencer Foundation in Chicago. L.A. Unified contributed staff resources and data.

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-- Howard Blume

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You're Leaving?

SUCCESSION AND SUSTAINABILITY IN CHARTER SCHOOLS

NOVEMBER 2010

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

Christine Campbell

Inside Charter Schools

An initiative of the National Charter School Research Project

National Charter School Research Project

Center on Reinventing Public Education
University of Washington

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center on **reinventing** public education

The National Charter School Research Project (NCSRP) brings rigor, evidence, and balance to the national charter school debate.

NCSRP seeks to facilitate the fair assessment of the value-added effects of U.S. charter schools and to provide the charter school and broader public education communities with research and information for ongoing improvement.

NCSRP:

- ✓ Identifies high-priority research questions.
- ✓ Conducts and commissions original research to fill gaps in current knowledge or to illuminate existing debates.
- ✓ Helps policymakers and the general public interpret charter school research.

The Project is an initiative of the Center on Reinventing Public Education.

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Executive Summary

Seventy-one percent of charter school leaders surveyed for this study say they expect to leave their schools within five years. For the nation's 5,000 charter schools, this raises important questions. Who will be ready to take over? How will the school maintain its instructional program and culture from leader to leader? How does a school survive founder transitions? Where will new leaders come from and how can they be ready to lead existing schools?

The Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) at the University of Washington spent four years studying charter school teachers and leaders; CRPE's survey of 400 charter school leader respondents and fieldwork in 24 charter schools in California, Hawaii, and Texas has yielded important insights into these questions and the future of maturing charter schools.

CRPE's research finds that many charter schools are unprepared when it comes to leadership turnover. Only half of the charter school leaders surveyed for this study reported having succession plans in place, and many of those plans are weak. Though most school leaders affiliated with charter management organizations (CMOs) reported that their school had a succession plan, there was some confusion as to who would make final decisions—school leaders or CMO leaders. For the few schools with strong plans, two elements were common: the school leaders (all with prior business experience) had taken charge of future plans, and these schools were not in the midst of crisis.

This report concludes with important steps charter schools can take to stabilize a school and better position it to choose the best possible leader. Specifically:

- Charter schools can learn about effective succession management strategies from the nonprofit sector.
- Governing boards need to own one of their most important duties: recruiting and selecting school leaders.
- Authorizers should request strategic plans and emergency leadership replacement plans as part of the application and renewal process.
- Current school leaders need to mentor next-in-line leaders and leadership team members.
- Leaders should consider succession management—an emergency replacement plan, a strategic plan, and strategic development of leadership capacities organization-wide.