

Charters perform worse than regular public schools

Study after study has found that charters do worse or no better than the public schools they replace. In fact, Stanford University found that the more charters there are in a state, the more likely the state is to be going down in state-by-state comparisons.

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NEW STANFORD REPORT FINDS SERIOUS QUALITY CHALLENGE IN NATIONAL CHARTER SCHOOL SECTOR

*Report Recognizes Robust Demand, Supply and Exceptional Charters, Faults Quality Controls,
Authorizers and Charter Caps*

Stanford, CA – A new report issued today by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University found that there is a wide variance in the quality of the nation's several thousand charter schools with, in the aggregate, students in charter schools not faring as well as students in traditional public schools.

While the report recognized a robust national demand for more charter schools from parents and local communities, it found that **17 percent of charter schools reported academic gains that were significantly better than traditional public schools, while 37 percent of charter schools showed gains that were worse than their traditional public school counterparts, with 46 percent of charter schools demonstrating no significant difference.**

The report found that the academic success of students in charter schools was affected by the individual state policy environment. States with caps limiting the number of charter schools reported significantly lower academic results than states without caps limiting charter growth. States that have the presence of multiple charter school authorizers also reported lower academic results than states with fewer authorizers in place. Finally, states with charter legislation allowing for appeals of previously denied charter school applications saw a small but significant increase in student performance.

The Stanford report, entitled, "*Multiple Choice: Charter School Performance in 16 States,*" is the first detailed national assessment of charter school impacts since its longitudinal, student-level analysis covers more than 70 percent of the nation's students attending charter schools. The peer-reviewed analysis looks at student achievement growth on state achievement tests in both reading and math with controls for student demographics and eligibility for program support such as free or reduced-price lunch and special education. The analysis includes the most current student achievement data from 15 states and the District of Columbia and gauges whether students who attend charter schools fare better than if they would have attended a traditional public school.

“The issue of quality is the most pressing problem that the charter school movement faces,” said Dr. Margaret Raymond, director of CREDO at Stanford University. “The charter school movement continues to work hard to remove barriers to charter school entry into the market, making notable strides to level the playing field and improve access to facilities funding, but now it needs to equally focus on removing the barriers to exit, which means closing underperforming schools.”

The report found several key positive findings regarding the academic performance of students attending charter schools. For students that are low income, charter schools had a larger and more positive effect than for similar students in traditional public schools. English Language Learner students also reported significantly better gains in charter schools, while special education students showed similar results to their traditional public school peers.

The report also found that students do better in charter schools over time. While first year charter school students on average experienced a decline in learning, students in their second and third years in charter schools saw a significant reversal, experiencing positive achievement gains.

The report found that achievement results varied by states that reported individual data. States with reading and math gains that were significantly higher for charter school students than would have occurred in traditional schools included: Arkansas, Colorado (Denver), Illinois (Chicago), Louisiana and Missouri.

States with reading and math gains that were either mixed or were not different than their peers in the traditional public school system included: California, the District of Columbia, Georgia and North Carolina.

States with reading and math gains that were significantly below their peers in the traditional public school system included: Arizona, Florida, Minnesota, New Mexico, Ohio and Texas.

"If the supporters of charter schools fail to address the quality challenge, they run the risk of having it addressed for them," said Dr. Raymond. "If the charter school movement is to flourish, a deliberate and sustained effort to increase the proportion of high quality schools is essential. The replication of successful charter school models is one important element of this effort. On the other side of the equation, however, authorizers, charter school advocates and policymakers must be willing and able to fulfill their end of the original charter school bargain, which is accountability in exchange for flexibility."

To download a copy of the full report and executive summary, visit: <http://credo.stanford.edu>

About CREDO at Stanford University

CREDO at Stanford University was established to improve empirical evidence about education reform and student performance at the primary and secondary levels. CREDO at Stanford University supports education organizations and policymakers in using reliable research and program evaluation to assess the performance of education initiatives. CREDO's valuable insight helps educators and policymakers strengthen their focus on the results from innovative programs, curricula, policies or accountability practices. <http://credo.stanford.edu>

EDUCATION WEEK

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Study Finds Charter Networks Give No Clear Edge on Results

Student test scores similar to regular schools'

By **Nirvi Shah**

A new national study on the effectiveness of networks that operate charter schools finds overall that their middle school students' test scores in reading, mathematics, science, and social studies aren't significantly better than those of students in regular public schools.

The average results varied widely: Students in some charter networks managed three years of growth in two years; in others, students tested a year behind grade level after a year or two in the program.

The findings from the research group **Mathematica and the Center on Reinventing Public Education** at the University of Washington Bothell underscore the point that being run by a charter-management organization, or CMO, isn't a predictor of an individual school's or student's success, and that CMOs cannot be lumped together as being effective or ineffective. Previous studies have shown the same about individual charters.

"I don't think there's any doubt some of the CMOs have done a great job," said Thomas Toch, a Washington writer and policy expert who writes extensively about CMOs. "But it doesn't mean that every CMO is going to be successful. That's the clear message here. It suggests just how hard creating good new schools is, and how hard it is to scale networks with even very good schools."

The study made public last week is part of a long-running project by Mathematica of Princeton, N.J., and the Center on Reinventing Public Education. It involved 40 CMOs with 292 schools in 14 states; all the management groups were nonprofits that controlled at least four schools and had at least four schools open in fall 2007.

The researchers focused on charter-management organizations to explore whether that model could be effective for scaling up the successes of individual charter schools. Charters are publicly funded but free of many rules governing regular public schools.

CMOs exist in part to address the unevenness in quality from charter to charter, said Robin Lake, the associate director of the Center on Reinventing Public Education. "There was a real question about, 'Are CMOs helping to improve the quality of charters overall?' " And the answer, she said, is that they haven't had a significant positive effect as a group.

The study also found that some practices associated with charter schools run by management organizations were particularly effective. Comprehensive behavior policies—including zero-

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tolerance, specific behavior codes with rewards and sanctions, and "contracts" with students or their parents about behavior—were identified as having a positive effect on students' math and reading scores.

Also, charter-management organizations that provide intensive coaching of teachers, including frequent reviews of lesson plans and observation, appeared to boost student achievement.

Researchers also explored how quickly those organizations grew, whom the schools served, the resources they used, and what influenced their growth.

The report does not name the networks involved in the study. They were guaranteed anonymity for participating.

One finding from the 3½ -year-long project is that the CMOs serve a disproportionately large number of black, Hispanic, and low-income students—even more so than the districts in which they operate—but fewer students with disabilities and English-language learners.

The study was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Walton Family Foundation, with project-management assistance from the nonprofit NewSchools Venture Fund, which invests in charter schools and other educational innovations. (Gates also provides support for organizational capacity-building to Editorial Projects in Education, the nonprofit publisher of *Education Week*.)

Nationwide, about 130 CMOs serve some 250,000 students. They account for the operation of about one in five of the 5,000 charter schools in the country, an increase from 12 percent in 1999.

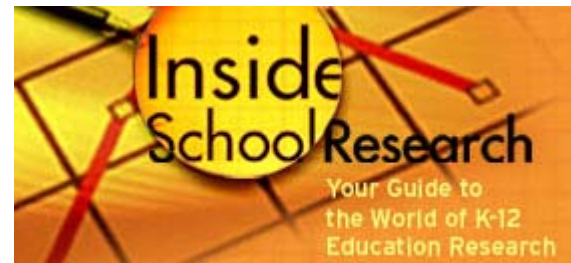
Joshua Haimson of Mathematica, the project director of the CMO studies, said examining the work of CMOs "allows us to answer two important questions: To what extent have CMOs been effective at expanding educational models, and how have they done that?"

Looking Under the Hood

To gauge charter networks' success at promoting student achievement, the researchers compared their students' performance with that of students at nearby district-run schools, and in some cases, with independently run charters. The researchers looked at test-score gains for individual students from a year before they entered the CMO schools to up to three years later and compared them with data from students who resembled them in nearby districts.

Of the 40 CMOs in the study, data from 22 were complete enough to be used in this portion of the report. Two years after enrolling, students at 11 of the 22 did significantly better in math while a third did significantly worse. In 10, students experienced positive effects in reading, while at six, there were negative results.

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Because some CMOs were able to advance students three grade levels in two years, their methods have the potential to close achievement gaps, Mr. Haimson said. Larger networks of charter schools generally did better at improving student achievement than smaller ones.

In addition to behavior policy and teacher coaching, the researchers examined features often found in network charter schools, including their use of additional instructional time, performance-based pay for teachers, and frequent formative assessments.

At first, additional time offered at some CMO-run schools appeared to influence student performance, but digging deeper, the researchers determined it was the teacher coaching and behavior policies that were the actual drivers, Mr. Haimson said.



Schoolwide behavior strategies by some CMO schools include setting behavior standards and signed responsibility agreements, but schools also said they had more flexibility than district principals in defining the details of all behavior policies.

Teacher coaching included more-frequent observation of teachers and more feedback to teachers from those observations, as well as frequent reviews of teachers' lesson plans. CMO schools were more likely than nearby public school systems to base teachers' pay on student test scores and observations than on seniority and education.

While behavior policy and teacher coaching emerged as definitive ways to improve achievement, the other practices shouldn't be discounted, said Ms. Lake. Nor should those strategies be considered surefire.

"The takeaway shouldn't be, if you just plug in a good behavior policy, you're going to see good results," Ms. Lake said.

The study also looked at how much CMOs spend per student compared with regular schools. Spending in the charters studied ranged from \$5,000 to \$20,000 per student a year, including public and private money.

The mixed results lead to a larger conclusion about school reform, said Mr. Toch, also a former reporter and editor for *Education Week* in the 1980s. "CMOs as a strategy are only one piece of the school improvement puzzle," he said. "I don't think we can expect to see thousands of truly game-changing schools from the CMO movement," even though some such networks have shown success.



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Grade shock: Regular schools top charters

By YOAV GONEN Education Reporter

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City charters fell harder.

Traditional public schools bested the city's charter schools on annual report-card grades -- scoring 10 points higher on average on a 100-point scale, new data shows.

The city's more than 1,000 public elementary and middle schools averaged a B on their so-called "progress reports," which assign letter grades to schools based largely on how much students improve on state math and reading tests in a given year.

By comparison, the city's 60 charter schools that received letter grades this year averaged a C+.

"This means that either the strategy Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor [Joel] Klein have touted so often for school reform -- the creation of more charter schools -- isn't working, or that the entire progress-report methodology, which relies almost completely on standardized test scores, is flawed," said United Federation of Teachers President Michael Mulgrew.

His union's UFT Charter School in Brooklyn was among the 70 percent of traditional public and charter schools to see their grades plummet after the state raised the passing bar on math and reading tests this summer.

Charter-school supporters said those adjustments -- along with changes in the way school grades were calculated -- might explain the lackluster ratings of charters.

"Obviously, with the inconsistency and shift in how the grades are actually arrived at, it's hard to know what to make of these grades," said James Merriman, CEO of the New York City Charter Schools Center. "Nonetheless, it is one data point that I certainly would expect charter leaders -- particularly those in schools that did not get good grades -- to look at and figure out why that is."

The overall damage -- which saw 49 schools hit with a D grade and eight branded with a dreaded F out of the 1,140 schools graded this year -- would have been much worse if city officials hadn't set a limit on how far grades could drop.

That policy, which limited a school's downfall to two letter grades, buoyed 110 schools that otherwise would have been slapped with D's or F's, according to Department of Education data.

"In a year like this where there are a lot of changes happening, we just don't think it's fair to see a school go from an A to an F," said Deputy Chancellor for Accountability Shael Suransky. "If a school goes from A to a C, that's a big wakeup call for that school, and they need to really pick up their game."

Last year, after state test scores surged to unprecedented heights, a whopping 97 percent of elementary and middle schools got A's or B's.

It was in part those off-the-charts results that sparked this year's change in the passing mark on state tests.

Schools with consecutive years of C's, D's or F's run the risk of being shut down.

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Study Finds No Clear Edge for Charter Schools

By Lesli A. Maxwell

Students who won lotteries to attend charter middle schools performed, on average, no better in mathematics and reading than their peers who lost out in the random admissions process and enrolled in nearby regular public schools, according to a national study released today. [Back to Story](#)

The **federally commissioned study**, involving 2,330 students who applied to 36 charter middle schools in 15 states, represents the first large-scale randomized trial of the effectiveness of charter schools across several states and rural, suburban, and urban locales. The charter schools in the sample conducted random lotteries for admissions, so that only chance determined who attended.

The study, conducted by **Mathematica Policy Research, of Princeton, N.J.**, also concludes that the lottery winners did no better, on average, than the lottery losers on non-academic outcomes such as behavior and attendance.

The findings on academic performance echo, in part, those of researchers at Stanford University, whose 2009 nonrandomized, multistate **study of charter schools** sparked fierce debate when they concluded that, in general, most charters were producing similar or worse achievement results for students than traditional public schools were. ("**Study Casts Doubt on Charter School Results**," June 15, 2009.)

The Mathematica authors add context to the new study's findings, however, by exploring when charters seem to work best, and for which students. They found, for instance, that the charter middle schools serving the most economically disadvantaged students—especially those in urban areas—were more successful than their counterparts serving higher-achieving, more affluent students in producing gains in mathematics.

That finding is similar to that of a **recent study** of 22 middle schools operated by the Knowledge Is Power Program, or KIPP, the nation's largest charter-management organization. ("**KIPP Middle Schools Found to Spur Learning Gains**," June 22, 2010.) That study, also conducted by Mathematica, found that the KIPP students—most of whom were also poor and were members of ethnic- and racial-minority groups—outperformed their peers in regular public schools.

For other student subgroups—those defined by race, ethnicity, and gender—the new study found that the charters made no significant impacts on achievement.

Research Caveats

People involved in the new study cautioned, though, against drawing any sweeping conclusions from it about the overall impact of charter schools on student achievement.

"There's a wide variation in both math and reading impacts, as well as other measures," said Marsha Silverberg, who oversaw the study as a project officer at the Institute of Education Sciences, the research arm of the U.S. Department of Education.

"Generally, we found that these charter schools were more effective for more low-income, lower-achieving students," Ms. Silverberg said, "and less effective for higher-income, higher-achieving students."

"We are not suggesting that charter schools serving lower-income and lower-achieving students would always be more effective," she said, "but that they were more effective than the traditional public schools around them."

The most positive overall impact that all of the charter schools in the study produced, was on the satisfaction levels expressed by parents and students. Parents whose children had won lotteries to attend charters were 33 percent more likely to say the schools were excellent than parents whose children lost the lotteries and attended regular public schools.

The new study comes out on the same day that charter leaders and advocates will be gathering for an annual national conference in Chicago and follows closely on the heels of the KIPP study, which was released last week.

Heated History

Debate over the impact of the nation's 5,000 charter schools, which are publicly financed but largely autonomous, has been heightened over the past year with calls from President Barack Obama and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to expand and replicate charters that have succeeded in raising achievement among the poorest students.

That debate grew more heated after the 2009 release of the multistate study from Stanford, which was produced by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes, or CREDO. ("**Scholars Spar Over Research Methods Used to Evaluate Charters**," October 14, 2009.) It was followed by findings of another Stanford researcher, Caroline M. Hoxby, who concluded the opposite. In her study, which also used lotteries to randomly assign students to either control or experimental schools, Ms. Hoxby found that charter schools in New York City were having positive impacts on student achievement.

"This is not going to settle the debate," Jeffrey R. Henig, an education professor at Teachers College, Columbia University, said of the new study. "There are a lot of folks on both sides who are pretty committed to keeping the debate alive on these terms, but I think on the



overall balance scale, this study adds weight to the side that is suggesting that simply talking about charters versus noncharters is a distraction. There needs to be much more nuance."

The new study included only charter middle schools that had been in operation for at least two years, which Mr. Henig said would undermine past arguments from charter advocates who have said conclusions about the schools' effectiveness shouldn't be drawn until they have had a chance to mature.

Margaret E. Raymond, the director of CREDO and the lead author of the study that it released last year, said the results of this new study are "not surprising."

"This is another layer of evidence that points to the wide variations in the charter school community and highlights, once again, that policy and context really matter," she said. "I think what we really have to do now is get under the hood and find out more about how charters differ and why they differ. We are really just at the front gates of a large body of research that needs to be done."

Researchers involved in the new study declined to disclose the states and communities where the studied schools are located, citing rules about anonymity for individual schools in federal research.

On average, though, the charter middle schools in the study enrolled a lower percentage of students who are eligible for free and reduced-price school meals than charters nationally, and served smaller percentages of students scoring below proficiency levels on state exams than their national peers.

Also, the percentage of African-American students who attended the charter middle schools in the study were smaller when compared with charters nationally.

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