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Attending Texas Charter Schools Hurt Students' Future Wages, Study Finds

By Arianna Prothero on August 19, 2016 10:48 AM | [1 Comment](#)

Texas charter schools on average have a negative effect on students' future earnings, according to a [new working paper by two economists](#).

Although attending a "no excuse" charter school, which the study describes as having stricter rules, uniforms, and longer school days and years, leads to higher test scores and four-year college enrollment, it has no meaningful effect on earnings.

Other types of charter schools, however, stumble on all three measures: hurting test scores, four-year college enrollment, and earnings.

These findings are almost the opposite of another study of Florida charter school students released in April [from Mathematica Policy Research](#). It found that attending a charter school had little impact on test scores, but students went on to earn higher salaries than their peers in district schools.

Both studies found that [charter school graduates were more likely to stay in college](#).

And they agreed on another point: there's a lack of research on the long-term effects of attending a charter school and more needs to be done.

The researchers for this most recent study in Texas, Will S. Dobbie of Princeton University and Roland G. Fryer, Jr. of Harvard University, propose several potential causes for the results they found. Among them, they speculate that although math and English are important to raising standardized test scores, subjects such as art and history may be equally important to success in the workforce. Too much focus in "no excuse" charter schools, which serve mostly low-income minority students, on the former subjects at the expense of the latter may be what's depressing charter student wages later in life.

"Much more troubling, it seems, is the possibility that what it takes to increase achievement among the poor in charter schools deprives them of other skills that are important for labor markets," the researchers write.

This is a working paper from the National Bureau of Economic Research, which means it has not been peer-reviewed. The researchers used data from the Texas Education Research Center which includes records from the Texas Education Agency, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and the Texas Workforce Commission, allowing the researchers to track students from kindergarten, through college, and in to the workforce.

The researchers compared students who had attended the same non-charter elementary schools, but separate middle or high schools. The oldest group of students included in the study graduated high school in the 2005-06 school year.

The researchers point out there are a couple of limitations to their research. Among them, they could not use random, school admission lottery data, which helps control for selection bias, nor employment data from outside Texas. So if a student moved outside the state for work, they would not be captured in the data. The researchers do not believe that either of those limitations significantly affected their findings.

You can dig into the paper's findings and full methodology here: "[Charter Schools and Labor Market Outcomes](#)."

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