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SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA -- THIS JUST IN

Los Angeles charter schools have high teacher turnover

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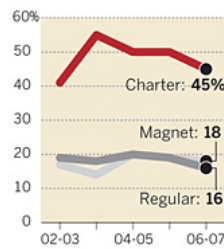
Local charter schools serving middle and high school students are losing about half their teachers every year, according to a study of the Los Angeles Unified School District released Tuesday. The rate of turnover is nearly three times that of other public schools, although they also are seeing high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