

## **Most Charter Schools Still No More Effective than Traditional Public Schools**

While charter schools are more effective than they were in 2009, their performance is not much different than the traditional public schools (TPS) their students would have attended according to a new [study](#) conducted by the [Center for Research and Education Outcomes at Stanford University](#) (CREDO). The study updates their [2009 report](#) which found that 83 percent of charter schools were no more effective than the TPSs. The current study not only examines the most recent data on charter schools but also includes 11 states that were not included in the 2009 study to bring the total to 27 states. It is important to note while only half the states are represented in the study, they enroll 95 percent of all charter schools students making the findings nationally representative.

### **Key Findings**

#### ***Charter schools are overall more effective than they were in 2009***

- In math, charter school students now make similar achievement gains as they would have had they attended their local traditional public school (TPS). This is an improvement over 2009 where charter school students lost 22 day of learning each year.
- In reading, charter school students gained an additional 8 days of learning each year compared to a loss of 7 days each year in 2009.
- Charter schools had a greater impact on the learning gains of disadvantaged students than TPSs.
  - o In particular, Black and Hispanic students in poverty made much greater gains in charter schools than if they attended their local TPS as do Hispanic English Language Learners.
  - o On the other hand, white students make greater gains if they attend their local TPS rather than a charter school.

#### ***The vast majority of charter schools are no more effective than Traditional Public Schools***

- In *math*, students in 71 percent of charter schools were no more effective than TPSs.
  - o Students in 31 percent of charter schools made less achievement gains than if they attended their local TPS.
  - o Students in 29 percent of charter schools made greater achievement gains than if they attended their local TPS
- In *reading* students in 75 percent of charter schools were no more effective than TPSs.
  - o Students in 19 percent of charter schools made less achievement gains than if they attended their local TPS.
  - o Students in 25 percent of charter schools made greater achievement gains than if they attended their local TPS.

***The effectiveness of charter schools varies significantly from state to state***

- In 12 states, students in charter schools made greater achievement gains in *math* than if they attended their local TPS. While in 13 states charter school students made fewer achievement gains in math than if they attended their local TPS. In two states there was no difference.
  - o Charter schools in New York City, Rhode Island and Washington, DC had the greatest positive impact by increasing student learning by 94, 108, and 101 days respectively.
  - o On the other hand, states such as Ohio, Utah, and Nevada had negative impacts by decreasing student learning by 43, 43, and 137 days respectively.
- In 16 states, students in charter schools made greater achievement gains in reading than if they attended their local TPS. While in 8 states charter school students made fewer achievement gains in *reading* than if they attended their local TPS. In three states there was no difference.
  - o Charter schools in Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Washington, DC had the greatest positive impact by increasing student learning by of 86, 86, and 72 days respectively.
  - o On the other hand, states such as Arizona, Arkansas, Nevada, Oregon, and Texas had negative impacts by decreasing student learning by 22, 22, 108, 22, and 22 days respectively.
- In 11 states students in charter schools made greater gains than if they attended their local TPS in both math and reading.
  - o Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, Update New York, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Washington, DC.

## **Conclusion**

The CREDO study is by far the most comprehensive and rigorous study of our nation's charter schools. It may appear the study provides conflicting results by finding on-average charter schools are more effective than traditional public schools (TPS) where at the same time finding that the vast majority of charter schools are no more effective than the TPSs. However, this is likely due to a small proportion of highly effective charter schools that serve a large number of poor and minority students, particularly, at the middle school level which pulls up the overall charter school average. These are the areas where charter schools have the greatest impact which strongly suggests that charter schools are most effective when they located in areas serve a large number of disadvantaged students.

Furthermore, it is important to point out that while charter schools have shown improvement since 2009, it does not necessarily mean that existing charter schools are getting better. In fact, CREDO suggests that a major reason for the charter school improvement is due to the closing of ineffective charter schools rather than improving the charter schools that already exist. However,



the study points out that newer charter schools tend to not be as effective as existing charter schools which suggests that opening more charter schools may have a detrimental impact on overall charter school performance.

While charter schools did show improvement in terms of increasing their average achievement and increasing the proportion of charter schools outperforming traditional public schools, the evidence shows that the charter schools typically perform similarly to traditional public schools.

#### **Related information from the Center for Public Education**

For more information on charter schools, check out the Center for Public Education's [Charter Schools: Finding out the facts](#) and [Searching for the Reality of Virtual Schools](#).

*This summary was prepared by Jim Hull, Senior Policy Analyst for NSBA's [Center for Public Education](#).*