PERFORMANCE INCENTIVES IN CHARTER SCHOOLS PRODUCING SIGNIFICANT RESULTS IN READING WITH MINIMAL INVESTMENT

Performance incentives in charter schools paying off in reading

STANFORD, CA—Reward systems using incentives such as concert tickets or mp3 players are found to have stable and positive impacts on reading achievement according to Paying for A’s, a new report released today by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University.

“Educators using reward programs are often met with skepticism,” said Margaret Raymond, director of CREDO. “Until now, the degree to which reward programs improve student academic achievement had not been examined. We hope the lessons gleaned from this analysis will prove useful as incentive programs continue to grow and expand around the nation.”

Due to the operating flexibility that charter schools are allowed under the law, student incentive programs have widespread practice in charter schools across the country.

Paying for A’s surveyed a sample of nearly 200 charter schools in 17 states and examined the effects of incentive programs on student academic achievement gains in a quarter of them.

The analysis showed that reward programs produced consistent and positive results across grades on state achievement tests in reading, adding 4 percentile points to the average student’s performance each year the student participated in a rewards program. No impact was evident in math performance.

The report further refined what features of reward systems are significant in creating positive gains and found that design and consistency matter. The analysis found that when reward programs are strongly supported by school personnel, their effectiveness increases student academic gains by 5 percentile points. More consistent and frequent reinforcement of student behavior produced an increase of 6 percentile points. In addition, reward systems were found to produce gains that are equivalent in size and additive to those gains realized from schools participating in charter school networks or Charter Management Organizations (CMOs).

“The results from this report provide reasons for optimism about the potential for reward systems,” said Margaret Raymond, director of CREDO. “Incentive programs may not be a silver bullet, but they appear to be a brass one.”
About CREDO
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 supports education organizations and policymakers to use 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