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CREDO AT STANFORD UNIVERSITY UNVEILS NATIONAL ‘CHARTER SCHOOL GROWTH AND REPLICATION’ STUDY

Nation’s Top Charter School Analyst Finds That Early Decisions In School Development Are Critical

Washington, DC – A new report released today by Stanford University’s Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) found that charter schools, as they age or replicate into networks, are very likely to continue the patterns and performance set by their early years of operation, and that for most charter schools their ultimate success or failure can be predicted by year three of a school’s life.

CREDO at Stanford University extends its study of charter school effectiveness with the release today of its much-anticipated *Charter School Growth and Replication* study at a news conference at the National Press Club in Washington, DC.

“This report’s findings challenge the conventional wisdom that a young underperforming school will improve if given time. Our research shows that if you start wobbling, chances are you’ll stay wobbling,” said Dr. Margaret Raymond, CREDO’s director and the study’s lead author. “Similarly, if a school is successful in producing strong academic progress from the start, our analysis shows it will remain a strong and successful school.”

“We have solid evidence that high quality is possible from the outset,” Dr. Raymond said. “Since the study also shows that the majority of charter management organizations produce consistent quality through their portfolios – regardless of the actual level of quality – policy makers will want to assure that charter schools that replicate have proven models of success.”

In *Charter School Growth and Replication*, CREDO undertook an unprecedented scientific examination that analyzed charter schools throughout their lifecycle, from their launch through their fifth year, then through initial replication and finally as operators grew into charter management organizations with multiple schools.

The study shows that charter schools have varying quality in their early years that carries through as they mature. The report demonstrates that charter schools are capable of attaining high levels of performance at the outset, disproving the notion of a universal rocky start-up period. Those charter schools that eventually grow into charter management organizations carry forward their initial levels of performance, which highlights the need for diligence in choosing which charter schools are encouraged to expand into networks.

“We found that the majority of new charter schools reach an initial level of performance, reflected in student academic progress that is largely predictive of later quality. With these findings, we hope to eliminate the



conventional wisdom that schools can outgrow a shaky start or that ‘all schools struggle’ in their early years,” Dr. Raymond said. “Further, if schools replicate and expand, the chances are strong that each organization's new schools will have the same performance – for better or worse – as the founding school.”

The two-volume CREDO report, released during National School Choice Week, provides two interconnected views of charter schools. The first volume ("Growth") follows thousands of charter schools from their inception through five years of operations. The volume is descriptive in nature and identifies the performance trajectories in the early years. The volume ends with the transition of some charter schools as they begin to grow their organization to multiple schools. Volume Two ("Replication") analyzed 167 charter management organizations (CMO), and their 1,372 schools. The study employs the "virtual twin" approach, known as the Virtual Control Record (VCR) to investigate the performance of CMOs, looking at their impacts on student learning and also on the impact of further growth and replication on the overall performance of the CMO.

In addition, CREDO analyzed the impact on student learning in charter schools that are affiliated with Education Management Organizations (EMOs). Thirty-eight different EMOs with 410 schools were included in this analysis.

Other findings of note:

- In the aggregate, CMOs perform about the same as traditional public schools (TPS), but the aggregate masks the more interesting and important story of the distribution of performance around the average.
- CMOs were shown to have stronger learning gains for many students groups, compared to TPS and slightly better than what occurs in independent charter schools. Impacts for minority students in poverty are especially significant.
- The majority of charter management organizations create new schools that perform at the same level as their existing portfolios. Across CMOs, the range of quality within the portfolios is consistent regardless of the absolute level of quality that they attain.
- As with CMOs, the individual EMO portfolios demonstrate a range of performance around the group average. On average, however, EMOs appear to outperform the TPS local markets in a consistent fashion for students of color and for students with the specific education challenges associated with poverty, Special Education or being an English language learner. These findings suggest that EMOs both can and do provide positive education options for students.

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

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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>