

CREDO Responds to Responsive Education Solutions

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Responsive Education Solutions has expressed concern about the findings from CREDO's latest study Charter School Growth and Replication, Vol II (CGAR). Their concerns focused on four primary areas:

1. Other measures of Responsive Education Solutions have shown them to be high performing. Why didn't CREDO's?
2. They report discrepancies in the counts of schools included in the reports.
3. The Virtual Control Record method employed by CREDO is inadequate to measure their students (claim of exceptionality).
4. CREDO claims that Responsive Education Students are losing ground.

We will address each of these concerns in order.

Responsive Ed Critique #1: Other measures of Responsive Education Solutions have shown them to be high performing. Why didn't CREDO's?

Responsive Education Solutions cites several examples of the academic performance of their students:

- 2010 Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) under No Child Left Behind
- 2010 Texas school accountability ratings
- Accreditation by AdvancED

CREDO's Reply: The first weakness with this critique is that it is comparing apples and oranges. The evaluation conducted by CREDO was based on student academic growth in math and reading. The accountability and AYP measures are based on achievement. In fact, the dependence on achievement over growth has been a major criticism of AYP.

While growth and achievement are not the same, Responsive Ed has chosen to use a single year's AYP to justify their stance. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) provides AYP information by districts http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/ayp/index_multi.html. This data shows that during our study data window several Responsive Ed schools missed meeting AYP in 2006, 2007, and 2008. Further in 2011 and 2012, Responsive Ed schools missed AYP. In 2012 <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/ayp/2012/distcampfinal12.pdf> Responsive Ed's elementary and middle school charter management organization (CMO), Texas College Preparatory Academies (TX district #221801) is on Stage 1 of Texas School Improvement. Responsive Ed's high school CMO, Premier High Schools (TX district #072801) is on Stage 3 of Texas School Improvement.

Responsive Ed also cites their schools' Texas school accountability ratings, another measure strongly based on achievement, as evidence of their high performance. Responsive Ed correctly states that "100% of Responsive Ed's dropout recovery and prevention schools earned the highest possible academic rating given by the Texas Education Agency." This is true, but as alternative education campuses there are only three ratings available to them: AEA Academically Acceptable, AEA Academically Unacceptable, or AEA Not Rated. Responsive Ed's dropout recovery and prevention schools received AEA Academically Acceptable ratings.

Responsive Ed Critique #2: There were discrepancies in the counts of schools included in the reports.

CREDO's Reply: After reviewing the data we provided to Responsive Education, they replied that they found the data to be confusing. The examples which they cited were that the number of schools in the network as listed in Appendix A of the CGAR Volume II did not match with the list of schools with matches included in the data we provided. The numbers Responsive Education was referring to did not match each other because they are counts of two different items: 1. the number of schools in the CMO in 2010 as reported by TEA (included in Appendix A) and 2. number and identification of schools with student data points included in the study (provided to Responsive Ed by CREDO). The total number of schools in a network was given in the study to allow readers to gauge the size of the full network as many networks contain schools with only untested grades or schools which were too new to have their test data included in our study as we require two years of test data to compute growth. CREDO pointed out the explanation of the tables from our study to which Responsive Education's representative replied, "I understand the table." We hope the additional information presented here provide an additional measure of clarity.

Responsive Ed Critique #3: The Virtual Control Record method employed by CREDO is inadequate to measure their students (claim of exceptionality).

CREDO's reply: CREDO executed additional analyses to address Responsive Education's concerns that CREDO's results would not be robust in relation to Responsive Education Solutions schools due to the high number of at-risk students enrolled in Responsive Education schools. To address these issues, CREDO undertook additional data analysis to determine if the argument put forth by Responsive Education was valid and the match used in the CGAR study might in fact be invalid for Responsive Ed's unique situation.

It is CREDO's understanding that Responsive Education's first concern centered on the percentage of students attending Responsive Education schools that were matched with a virtual control record and thus included in the CREDO analysis. To this end CREDO gathered the specific match data for Responsive Education schools from the data set and compared them to the enrollment numbers reported in the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Common Core of Data (CCD).

The data window for the study covered five testing periods from the 2005-06 school year through 2009-10 school year. The 2006 testing period (2005-06 school year) was used as a base year only. The data window included four growth periods, one for each testing period of 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010. As the data for the CGAR study was based on growth, Texas students could potentially be included in the CGAR data set if they were in 4th through 11th grades in the spring of the testing year. Based on the CCD enrollment records for Responsive Ed schools during our data window and the number of students in CREDO's data set, we found that 66% of Responsive Ed's students were matched with virtual twins and included in the CGAR study in math. CREDO has found in previous studies that a 66% match rate with thousands of students is adequate to properly estimate the performance of a school or in this case a system of schools. Further, many of these students had multiple observations within the data set.

CREDO understood Responsive Education’s second concern to be that many of Responsive Education’s students were classified as at-risk; therefore, CREDO’s matches even if made would not be a valid virtual twin for their students. To address this concern, CREDO investigated the definition and rates of at-risk students in Texas.

Table 1

Percentage of At-Risk Student Enrollment, 2006-2010:

Year	RES	TX
2010	64%	47%
2009	73%	48%
2008	78%	48%
2007	86%	48%
2006	87%	49%

The table above shows the percentage of at-risk students enrolled in Responsive Ed and the aggregate for all Texas schools according to data from TEA. While it is true that Responsive Ed enrolls a considerably higher percentage of at-risk students, it is not true that the percentage of at-risk students in other schools is so low as to make impossible an adequate match sample for Responsive Ed students. According to the Texas Education Code – Section 29.081, students may be classified as being at risk for a variety of reasons. Based on this list, it is CREDO’s opinion that our matching process will accurately and adequately match most at risk students. Section 19.081 (d) defines which students are classified as “at-risk of dropping out of school”. The most likely event on this list to occur is having low academic performance on the state assessment instrument. CREDO’s matching system matches students based on their score on the state assessment in the match year among other characteristics. This means that a charter student who is at-risk due to low scores will be matched with students with a similarly low score on the assessment and thus a similar at-risk status. Another common qualifier for at-risk status in Texas is being identified as an English language learner. Again, our matching system takes this student characteristic into account when matching students.

It is correct that CREDO does not have variables for every student characteristic which could identify a student as at-risk. For example, CREDO does not have a pregnancy/parent variable in our data set. However, the theory of match processes is that the match year test score is representative of not only the student’s intelligence but also the other characteristics which impact the student’s academic success such as academic history, home life, motivation, etc. While two students with the same pre-year test score may not be 100% identical in every aspect of their lives, the various factors in their lives have affected them in such a way as to generate equivalent results. While it is correct that some of Responsive Education’s students may be dealing with issues not faced by the average student, Responsive Education’s students are not being matched to average students. Responsive Education Students are being compared to other students with their own issues which make those students academic equals to the Responsive Education students.

Responsive Ed Critique #4: CREDO claims that Responsive Education Students are losing ground.

CREDO's Reply: Responsive Ed misrepresents what the CREDO study says about their students. CREDO did not say that Responsive Ed students are losing ground, as Responsive Ed suggests. CREDO asserts that the learning gains of Responsive Ed students are not as strong as their local peers. Nor does CREDO say that Responsive Ed schools are not providing worthwhile, beneficial services to their students. The CGAR study was not measuring Responsive Ed's ability to encourage a student to remain in school and graduate or any other of the admirable goals which are part of the Responsive Ed system. Those factors are outside of the scope of the CGAR study.

The CGAR study also recommended that schools should not be evaluated on just one single measure, not even ours. The performance of a school should be based on a preponderance of evidence from multiple areas of the school's many responsibilities. The purpose of studies such as CGAR is to contribute to the pool of research detailed but specific evidence which can then be used collectively with other details to allow students, parents, charter authorizers, education agencies, and members of the public to properly evaluate for themselves the performance of individual schools and education organizations.

Final recommendations: It is understandable that the results from CREDO are unsatisfying to Responsive Education Solutions. However, after reviewing and evaluating the critiques they brought forth, CREDO stands behind our methodology and our results. We contend there is adequate evidence that our evaluation meets the high standards of academic quality and integrity expected of a rigorous research organization.