



Contact: Kelly Davis (866) 955-9450 x 318

kdavis@communicationworks.com

Meg Cotter Mazzola (202) 441-1287

mcotter@stanford.edu

Charter Schools Make Gains, According to 26-State Study

STANFORD, Calif.—June 25, 2013—A new, independent national study finds improvement in the overall performance of charter schools, driven in part by the presence of more high-performing charters and closure of underperforming charter schools.

The *National Charter School Study 2013*, released today by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University, is an update and expansion of CREDO's [2009 landmark 16-state study](#), *Multiple Choice*, the first study to take a comprehensive look at the impact of charter schools on student performance. The 2009 study found a wide variance in quality among charter schools, with students in charter schools not faring as well in the aggregate as those attending traditional public schools.

The *National Charter School Study 2013* looks at performance of students in charter schools in 26 states and New York City, which is treated separately as the city differs dramatically from the rest of the state. In those states (and New York City), charter school students now have greater learning gains in reading than their peers in traditional public schools. Traditional public schools and charter schools have equivalent learning gains in mathematics.

In the aggregate, charter school students in the 26 states in the new study gained an additional 8 days of learning each year in reading beyond their local peers in traditional public schools. The 2009 study found a loss of 7 days each year in reading among the students in the 16 states. In mathematics, charter school students in 2009 posted 22 fewer days of learning than their traditional public school counterparts; today there exists no significant difference in days of learning.

The 2013 CREDO study finds that charters in the original 16 states have made modest progress in raising student performance in both reading and mathematics, caused in part by the closure of 8 percent of the charters in those states in the intervening years since the 2009 report as well as declining performance in the comparison traditional public schools over the same period.

Across the charter schools in the 26 states studied, 25 percent have significantly stronger learning gains in reading than their traditional school counterparts, while 56 percent showed no significant difference and 19 percent of charter schools have significantly weaker learning gains. In mathematics, 29 percent of charter schools showed student learning gains that were significantly stronger than their traditional public school peers', while 40 percent were not significantly different and 31 percent were significantly weaker.

"The results reveal that the charter school sector is getting better on average and that charter schools are benefiting low-income, disadvantaged, and special education students," says Dr. Margaret Raymond, director of [CREDO at Stanford University](#). "As welcome as these changes are, more work remains to be done to ensure that all charter schools provide their students high-quality education."

CREDO at Stanford University is the nation's foremost independent analyst of charter school effectiveness. The 26-state study is the most comprehensive study ever conducted of charter school performance, comprised of records from more than 1.5 million charter students.

Charter schools now serve approximately 4 percent of the nation's public school students, with more than 2.3 million students in more than 6,000 schools in 41 states, an 80 percent increase in enrollment since the 2009 report.

The peer-reviewed analysis is based on a matched comparison study of student achievement growth on state achievement tests in both reading and math with controls for student demographics and eligibility for program support, including free-and-reduced-priced lunch, special education, and other factors. The analysis includes student achievement growth data from the 2005-06 school year through the 2010-11 school year and gauges whether students who attend charter schools would have done better if they had enrolled in a traditional public school they otherwise were eligible to attend.

According to the 26-state study:

- Students in poverty, black students, and those who are English language learners (ELL) gain significantly more days of learning each year in both reading and math compared to their traditional public school peers. Performance differences between charter school students and their traditional public school peers were especially strong among black and Hispanic students in poverty and Hispanic students who are ELL in both reading and math.
- Charter school enrollment has grown among students who are in poverty, black students, and Hispanic students.
- The 11 new states added marginally to the mathematics gains seen since the 2009 study, but more so to gains in reading.

Improvements Since 2009 Study of 16 States

States where charter student academic growth was higher in reading than that of peer traditional public school students include California, Colorado (Denver), District of Columbia, Illinois (Chicago), Louisiana and Massachusetts. States where charter school student growth was lower in reading than their traditional public school peers include Florida, Minnesota, New Mexico and Texas. Schools that opened in the original 16 states since the 2009 study have higher proportions of students in poverty and more Hispanic students than seen in the original report.

Even More Diligence Needed

The report urges policymakers to raise performance and accountability standards for charter schools and to hold them to the higher standards. It calls on charter school authorizers and others to "get smart from the start" by being even more discerning about which organizations are allowed to form a charter school. The entire field needs to build its evidence base about "what plans, what models, what personnel attributes, and what internal systems provide the appropriate signals that lead to high-performing schools," the report says.

The report also says that authorizers should continue to close low-performing schools. Absent a robust evidence base, shutting down these schools remains "the strongest tool available to ensure quality across the sector for the time being."

To obtain a copy of the methodology, executive summary, and 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 results from innovative programs, curricula, policies, or accountability practices. <http://credo.stanford.edu>

About the 2013 National Charter School Study

The National Charter School Study is based on an analysis of student data from Arkansas, Arizona, California, Colorado, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, New York City, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, and Utah. Together, these states educate more than 95 percent of the nation's charter school students.