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CHARTER SCHOOLS IN NORTH CAROLINA PERFORM SIGNIFICANTLY BETTER THAN THEIR TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOL PEERS IN READING

Performance Significantly Lower in Math

Stanford, CA – A new report issued today by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University found that there is a wide variance in the quality of the nation’s several thousand charter schools with, in the aggregate, students in charter schools not faring as well as students in traditional public schools.

While the report recognized a robust national demand for more charter schools from parents and local communities, it found that 17 percent of charter schools reported academic gains that were significantly better than traditional public schools, while 37 percent of charter schools showed gains that were worse than their traditional public school counterparts, with 46 percent of charter schools demonstrating no significant difference.

The report found that the academic success of students in charter schools was affected by the individual state policy environment. States with caps limiting the number of charter schools reported significantly lower academic results than states without caps limiting charter growth. States that have the presence of multiple charter school authorizers also reported lower academic results than states with fewer authorizers in place. Finally, states with charter legislation allowing for appeals of previously denied charter school applications saw a small but significant increase in student performance.

The Stanford report, entitled, “*Multiple Choice: Charter School Performance in 16 States,*” is the first detailed national assessment of charter school impacts since its longitudinal, student-level analysis covers more than 70 percent of the nation’s students attending charter schools. The analysis looks at student achievement growth on state achievement tests in both reading and math with controls for student demographics and eligibility for program support such as free or reduced-price lunch and special education. The analysis includes the most current student achievement data from 15 states and the District of Columbia and gauges whether students who attend charter schools fare better than if they would have attended a traditional public school.

“The issue of quality is the most pressing problem that the charter school movement faces,” said Dr. Margaret Raymond, director of CREDO at Stanford University. “The charter school movement continues to work hard to remove barriers to charter school entry into the market, making notable strides to level the playing field and improve access to facilities funding, but now it needs to equally focus on removing the barriers to exit, which means closing underperforming schools.”

North Carolina

A supplemental report, with an in-depth examination of the results for charter schools in North Carolina found that reading gains were significantly higher and math gains significantly lower in charter school students compared to their traditional public school peers. For students that are low income, charter schools had a larger and more positive effect on reading and no difference in math compared to their traditional public school peers. African-American students performed significantly below their traditional public school counterparts in math, with no discernable difference in reading.

The results also suggest that new charter school students in North Carolina do about the same in reading and have an initial loss of learning in math compared to their counterparts in traditional public schools. In subsequent years, charter school students show no significantly different or better gains in reading and math from charter school attendance compared to their counterparts in traditional public schools.

Overall State Results

The report found that achievement results varied by states that reported individual data. States with reading and math gains that were significantly higher for charter school students than would have occurred in traditional schools included: Arkansas, Colorado (Denver), Illinois (Chicago), Louisiana and Missouri.

States with reading and math gains that were either mixed or were not different than their peers in the traditional public school system included: California, the District of Columbia, Georgia and North Carolina.

States with reading and math gains that were significantly below their peers in the traditional public school system included: Arizona, Florida, Minnesota, New Mexico, Ohio and Texas.

"If the supporters of charter schools fail to address the quality challenge, they run the risk of having it addressed for them," said Dr. Raymond. "If the charter school movement is to flourish, a deliberate and sustained effort to increase the proportion of high quality schools is essential. The replication of successful charter school models is one important element of this effort. On the other side of the equation, however, authorizers, charter school advocates and policymakers must be willing and able to fulfill their end of the original charter school bargain, which is accountability in exchange for flexibility."

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

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>

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