

Charter School Toolkit

This toolkit is intended to help local media better understand charter schools in Mississippi.

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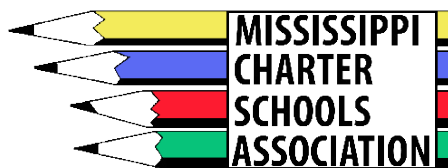
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Mississippi First is a non-partisan, nonprofit organization specializing in education policy research and advocacy. The mission of Mississippi First is to champion transformative policy solutions ensuring educational excellence for every Mississippi child.



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The Mississippi Charter Schools Association drives the development and growth of high-quality public charter schools through school support, advocacy, and outreach. MCSA envisions that every student in Mississippi will have access to a globally competitive public education.

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INTRODUCTION

MISSISSIPPI'S CHARTER SCHOOLS—REINVENTING PUBLIC EDUCATION

Charter schools are public schools. They are funded through the same per-pupil funding formulas used for traditional public schools and subject to the same state and federal accountability (standardized tests, accountability “grades,” etc.). One key difference is that charter public schools most often operate independently from local school boards. With greater autonomy, charter school principals enjoy greater flexibility in managing the school budget, making staff changes, setting the academic curriculum, and extending the amount of instructional time. High-performing charters have used this flexibility to produce innovative practices that have resulted in amazing success. In exchange for greater autonomy, charter schools are charged with more accountability for student success. Charter schools must meet specific performance goals in order to avoid being closed down. Unlike a traditional public school, the authorizer board can revoke a school’s charter, forcing a school to close its doors, because it is not making the academic gains promised in the charter school application.

Charter schools can serve as a model for statewide reforms in public education policy. They can also serve as quality educational options for children and families, particularly those in low-performing districts. Although efforts to turn around our lowest-performing schools must continue with urgency, parents should be able to access a more immediate public option for providing their kids with a quality education.

Mississippi First, in partnership with the Mississippi Charter School Association, has put together this toolkit to help local media better understand charter schools in Mississippi.

To learn more about charter schools in Mississippi, visit our website www.mississippifirst.org.

WHAT IS A CHARTER SCHOOL?

Charter schools are public schools. Charter schools get their name from the contract--or charter--that the school signs with the government entity that is allowed to create charter schools, called an authorizer. The charter describes the rights and responsibilities of the school and contains goals for the school's academic and financial performance. If the goals outlined in the charter contract are reached, the school may continue to operate. If the goals are not reached, the school can be closed by its authorizer. In exchange for that accountability, the schools are freed from many state and local regulations regarding their budgets, schedules, curricula, etc. A typical charter lasts for a term of five years and may be renewed at the end of the term.

There are two types of charter schools: start-up schools and conversion schools.

- **Start-up schools** – Most charter schools (90%) are start-up schools, meaning schools that are opening their doors for the first time.
- **Conversion schools** – Conversion charter schools are traditional public schools that have been converted to charter schools.

Like traditional public schools, charter schools

- administer the same state tests and are rated under the same system as a traditional public schools.
- must accept all students who apply, unless there is not enough room, in which case they randomly draw names for admission.
- are subject to the same restrictions on teaching religious doctrine as traditional public schools.
- may not discriminate on the basis of race, creed, color, sex, disability or other categories, including academic or athletic ability.
- are subject to civil rights, health, and safety laws.
- cannot charge tuition.
- are subject to an independent audit of their finances.

No students or teachers are assigned to charter schools by a school district. Parents choose to enroll their children, and teachers choose whether to apply for employment.

For more information about charter schools in Mississippi, see the section entitled, *The Mississippi Public Charter Schools Act of 2013*.

BACKGROUND

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CHARTER SCHOOLS IN MISSISSIPPI

Charter schools were first established in Minnesota in 1991. In 1997, the Mississippi Legislature passed its first charter school law. HB 1672 allowed existing public schools to qualify for charter status on a pilot program basis. Only one school in the state--Hayes Cooper Center, an elementary school in Merigold--was converted to a charter school under the law. Hayes Cooper has always operated as a traditional magnet school, even after its brief conversion to a charter school in 1997. Since conversion did not provide Hayes Cooper with additional benefits in terms of autonomy or funding, the school stopped calling itself a charter school less than a year after it "converted" and refers to itself only as a magnet school. Nonetheless, the National Center for Education Statistics cited Hayes Cooper as Mississippi's sole charter school for years. In 2009, the law expired before any additional charter schools were created.

By 2009, 41 states, including the District of Columbia, had charter school laws. In 2010, the Legislature passed the *Conversion Charter Schools & New-Start Schools Act*. Among other flaws, this law stated that charter schools could only be created by converting traditional public schools that were deemed "failing" for three consecutive years. Schools became eligible for its provisions in the 2012-2013 school year since the law's three-year timeline began with data from the 2010-2011 school year. No charter schools were created in Mississippi with the passage of this legislation.

In 2012, the Legislature considered three new charter school bills: Senate Bill 2401 (Sen. Tollison), House Bill 888 (Rep. Moore), and House Bill 1152 (Rep. Moore). Senate Bill 2401 passed the Senate but died in the House Education Committee. House Bill 888 passed House Education but was not considered on the House floor before the deadline. In a last effort, the Senate amended House Bill 1152 to include the text of Senate Bill 2401 but the bill died in conference.

After all of the charter school bills died in the 2012 session, advocates formed the Mississippi Public Charter Schools Coalition. This coalition included many long-time charter school supporters such as Mississippi First, the National Alliance of Public Charter Schools, the Mississippi Center for Public Policy, and the Black Alliance for Educational Options. The purpose of the Coalition was to increase public understanding of charter schools to support passage of a charter school law.

The Coalition and charter school champions in the Legislature again sought a charter school law in 2013. Senator Tollison authored Senate Bill 2189, but it died on the House floor. Through the work of the Coalition and legislative champions such as Lt. Governor Tate Reeves, Senator Tollison, Representative Moore, Representative Busby, and Speaker Gunn, House Bill 369 eventually passed in both the House and Senate. Governor Bryant signed the bill into law on April 17, 2013.

BACKGROUND

THE MISSISSIPPI PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS ACT OF 2013

The charter school law adopted by the Mississippi State Legislature in 2013 allows for the creation of both start-up and conversion charter schools. The *Mississippi Public Charter Schools Act of 2013* defines public charter schools as public schools that include, but are not limited to, the following characteristics:

- have autonomy over decisions including finance, personnel, scheduling, curriculum, and instruction
- are governed by an independent governing board
- are nonprofit organizations
- do not charge tuition

The law also requires the Authorizer Board to receive a majority vote from the local school board in order to authorize a public charter school in districts with an “A,” “B,” or “C” rating.

In Mississippi, charter schools **CANNOT**

- **be private schools** converted into charter schools. Only existing public schools are eligible to convert to charter status.
- **be virtual charter schools.** Charter schools may utilize online courses, just as traditional public schools may now do.
- **be governed or operated by for-profit companies.**

Under Mississippi law, a public charter school’s enrollment of “underserved students” must be at least 80% of that in the school district in which the charter school is located. The law defines “underserved student” as a student who qualifies for free lunch under the federal school lunch program and/or has an individualized education plan (a student with special educational needs).

The law requires public charter schools to agree to performance guidelines within their contract including, but not limited to

- student academic proficiency and growth;
- attendance;
- postsecondary readiness for high schools; and
- financial performance and sustainability.

The law states that public charter schools’ contracts will be revoked if the charter schools are rated “F” for 3 consecutive years, unless the charter schools demonstrate “exceptional circumstances” as determined by the Authorizer Board. It exempts at most 25 percent of teachers in a public charter school from being state certified when the initial charter application is approved; all teachers are required to have completed an alternative teacher certification within 3 years. Under federal law, every teacher and administrator must hold a college degree and demonstrate competency in the subject they will be teaching, such as passing the Praxis. The *Education Employment Procedures Law* does not apply to charter school employees. Charter school employees are not eligible to participate in PERS, but charter schools may offer their own retirement and benefits plans. Lastly, the law requires the State Department of Education to pay the public charter schools an amount for each student equal to the share the department would pay the school district in which the student resides.

BACKGROUND

MISSISSIPPI CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZING BOARD (MCSAB)

The MCSAB is responsible for authorizing and supervising charter schools in Mississippi. The Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board (MCSAB) evaluates the qualifications of charter school applicants, approves qualified applications, and oversees the schools to ensure they fulfill the provisions of the charter contracts. The MCSAB can only approve up to 15 applications each year. As of June 2, 2014, only one school has been authorized to open in Fall 2015. The Board is made up of 7 appointees: 3 by the Governor, 3 by the Lt. Governor, and 1 by the Superintendent of Education. Appointments are made with advice and consent of Senate. In addition, a new executive director, Marian Schutte, was named in October 2014.

The current members of the Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board are

- **Tommie Cardin (Chairman)** – Attorney, former president of the Clinton School Board (3-year term)
- **Dr. Bonita Coleman-Potter** – Superintendent of the Ocean Springs School District (3-year term)
- **Krystal Cormack** – Educator and Teach For America Delta Corps Alum (4-year term)
- **Dr. Karen Elam** – Businesswoman, former professor of nutrition and food science (3-year term)
- **Johnny Franklin** – Former Education Advisor for Gov. Haley Barbour (4-year term)
- **Chris Wilson** – Realtor, former President of the Mississippi Association of Realtors (4-year term)
- **Dr. Carey Wright** – State Superintendent of Education (2-year term)

BACKGROUND

APPLICANTS FROM ROUND 1, MARCH 2014

In early 2014, the Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board (MCSAB) issued a request for letters of intent from prospective charter school applicants. [Thirty-one letters of intent](#) were received. Of those thirty-one letters of intent, eight groups submitted applications in March. After a completeness and eligibility check, three of the applicants were invited to move on to the final stage in the process. The final three applicants were [Reimagine Prep](#) in Jackson, [Phoenix Early College Charter School](#) in Natchez, and [Inspire STEM + Arts Scholars Academy](#) in Columbus. These three applicants were evaluated on the quality of their applications, a capacity interview, and a public hearing in the community in which the school would be located. The MCSAB voted on each group's application on June 2, 2014.

APPROVED CHARTER SCHOOLS AS OF JUNE 2014

As of June 2, 2014, the MCSAB has approved one charter school. The Board unanimously approved Reimagine Prep's charter from a final pool of three applicants. Reimagine Prep will operate in South Jackson. Slated to welcome students in August 2015, Reimagine Prep plans on initially serving 110 fifth grade students in the 2015-2016 school year. Each subsequent year, the school will bring in an additional grade until all grades 5-8 are served at a capacity of 440 students. Reimagine Prep will be a part of RePublic Charter Schools, a charter management organization based out of Nashville, TN. RePublic Charter Schools currently operates two middle schools in Nashville, Nashville Prep and Liberty Collegiate Academy. Together they are the highest-performing charter schools for growth in Tennessee, consistently outscoring other top public schools in the Metro Nashville area.

APPLICANTS FROM ROUND 2, SEPTEMBER 2014

In the spring of 2014, the MCSAB issued a second request for letters of intent from prospective charter school applicants. [Ten letters of intent](#) were filed. The MCSAB will approve or deny applications from this round no later than December 5, 2014. To view the most up-to-date rulings on charter school applicants, visit the MCSAB [website](#).

FAQ

1. What is a charter school?

Charter schools are public schools. They are funded through the same per-pupil funding formulas used for traditional public schools and subject to the same state and federal accountability. One key difference is that charter public schools most often operate independently from local school boards. With greater autonomy, charter school principals enjoy greater flexibility in managing the school budget, making staff changes, setting the academic curriculum, and extending the amount of instructional time. Charter schools must meet specific performance goals in order to avoid being closed down.

2. Who can start a charter?

Charter schools in Mississippi will operate as nonprofit organizations. Any nonprofit can apply for a charter school. Some charter schools are operated by charter management organizations (CMOs) that have a contract with the local board of directors. CMOs are nonprofit entities that manage two or more charter schools. CMOs often provide back-office functions like accounting, but some provide a wider range of services, including hiring, professional development, data analysis, public relations, and leadership training/development. While some states allow for-profit entities to open and/or operate charter schools, Mississippi's charter law strictly prohibits for-profit charters.

3. What are the main types of charter schools?

- **Conversion:** Existing public schools can convert to charter status in all school districts. However, school boards in districts rated A, B, or C may veto the approval of an application for a charter school that would be located in their district. They will only be open to students who live in the district where the charter school is located.
- **Start-up:** In a start-up, only students from that district can attend the school. In a conversion, students zoned from the original school have lottery preference. Any leftover spots are open to students outside that zone but still in the district.

Mississippi private schools are prohibited from converting to charter schools. Virtual schools are not allowed under the law. Charter schools may utilize online courses, just as traditional public schools may now do.

4. Do charter schools have admission policies?

Charter schools must have a fair and open admission process, conducting outreach and recruitment to all segments of the community they serve. They are public schools, and therefore they cannot "choose" which students attend. The legislation specifically notes that charter schools cannot limit admission based on ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, income level, disabling condition, proficiency in the English language, or academic or athletic ability. Charter school students are admitted on a first-come, first-served basis or by lottery when applicants exceed available slots. If a charter school has a lottery admission process, a charter school must give an enrollment preference to students enrolled in the charter school during the preceding school year and to siblings of students already enrolled in the charter school. An enrollment preference for returning students excludes those students from entering into a lottery. Like other public schools, charter schools are required by federal law to be nonsectarian (nonreligious) and nondiscriminatory in admission and employment practices.

FAQ

5. Can a charter school be single-gender or serve a focused population of students?

Yes. According to the law, a charter school whose mission is “focused on serving students with disabilities, students of the same gender, students who pose such severe disciplinary problems that they warrant a specific educational program, or students who are at risk of academic failure” can apply for a charter in Mississippi. However, schools may not have admission policies, meaning they may not restrict admission to their school based on characteristics such as race, disability, or academic status. A school may be designed to support students with an autism spectrum disorder but it may not require a student to pass a test proving the student has an autism spectrum disorder as a requirement of admission. The one exception to this rule is for single-gender schools. Under federal and state law, charter schools may be single-gender if and only if they apply for that status at the time of their charter application and are approved. A co-ed school may not impose quotas based on gender after opening.

6. Who authorizes charter schools?

The Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board (MCSAB) evaluates the qualifications of charter school applicants, approves qualified applications, and oversees the schools to ensure they fulfill the provisions of the charter contracts. The Authorizer Board is made up of 7 appointees: 3 by the Governor, 3 by the Lt. Governor, and 1 by the Superintendent of Education. Appointments are made with advice and consent of Senate. MCSAB is a statewide, independent board that is the only agency in Mississippi charged with authorizing and monitoring the performance of charter schools. MCSAB requires each applicant to submit a detailed application regarding school culture; the leadership, governance, and operational structure of the school; the educational plan; and the financial plan of the school. Once the MCSAB enters into a contract with a charter school’s governing board, the MCSAB holds the charter school accountable through yearly academic and financial reviews and decides to renew or non-renew the charter school every five years.

7. How are charter schools funded?

Funding follows the child to a public charter school in much the same way funding follows the child to a traditional public school.

(In Mississippi charter schools receive per pupil local funding except for local taxes devoted to paying off school bonds and certain other local obligations.) All charter schools in Mississippi will be nonprofit organizations that are governed by a local board of directors made up of educators, community people, and parents. Because of a charter school’s nonprofit status, they can also fundraise.

8. Do charter schools take money from public schools?

Charter schools are public schools. When a student leaves a public school to attend a charter school the money paid to educate that child moves to the charter school. However, the reality is that public charter schools will have access to less money than traditional public schools. Typically, public charter schools receive only a portion of local tax dollars per-pupil and do not receive facilities dollars. Public charter schools also cannot ask the county commissioners, boards of supervisors, or city councils for tax increases to fill budget holes. Therefore, public charter schools will have to be more efficient while also meeting their goals and benchmarks. It is no secret that school districts in Mississippi are cash-strapped, which is all the more reason to ensure that taxpayer money funds student learning that produces increased achievement results – often found in the public charter school environment.

FAQ

9. Are there any charter schools open in Mississippi?

No. The first charter school authorized under the *Mississippi Public Charter School Act of 2013* will open in 2015 in Jackson. It is called [Reimagine Prep](#).

10. Do charter schools work?

Research shows that charter schools in many areas of the country often outperform traditional public schools. To learn more about charter school research, visit our "Research on Charter Schools" section.

11. What happens if a charter schools fails?

When a charter school fails, the school loses its charter and must close. When a charter enters into a contract with the Authorizer Board, they are given both academic and financial performance goals. After four years of operation, the Authorizer Board will issue a comprehensive review of the charter school's success in meeting goals. The schools will lose its charter and must close if the school fails this review.

According to the law, "A charter must be revoked or not renewed if the authorizer determines the school has substantially violated the terms of the charter, including violating the law, mismanaging funds, or making insufficient progress toward its goals. The school can appeal a revocation or non-renewal, but only to the Authorizing Board itself. However, if a school is rated F at the end of the charter term, the charter is not to be renewed."

MYTHS

MYTHS ABOUT PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

Created by the Mississippi Coalition for Public Charter Schools, 2013

Myth #1: Public charter school legislation will fund private academies and religious schools.

Truth #1: Given Mississippi's history, it is imperative that no educational reform turn the clock back on *Brown v. Board of Education*. Mississippi's public charter school law includes specific language prohibiting private schools from converting to charter status. Public charter schools must adhere to the same federal statutes that prevent all public schools – traditional and charter – from making enrollment decisions that discriminate on any demographic basis or religious affiliation. Additionally, the legislation for Mississippi will require student demographics of a public charter school to closely reflect the demographics of students in the district. Furthermore, charter applicants must undergo a rigorous authorization process that would reject any application that establishes white-flight public charter schools or plans to teach religious doctrine. Through this extremely rigorous authorization process, only well-intentioned, high-quality school proposals will be approved.

Myth #2: Public charter schools will select (cherry-pick) the best students and take those most likely to succeed away from their lower-performing classmates.

Truth #2: Unlike magnet schools, which typically limit admission based on academic or other performance criteria, public charter schools are open to all students. Public charter schools will have a fair and open admissions process, conducting outreach and recruitment to all subgroups of the community they serve. If a public charter school is over enrolled at a grade level, a lottery process will ensure the random admission of students, and student ability will not be considered. Nationally, research shows that charters typically serve low-income students and those students who have not been served well by their traditional public schools.

Myth #3: Public charter schools will divert already very limited funds, time, and energy away from traditional public schools.

Truth #3: All public schools – traditional and charter – are funded based on their average daily attendance. If a student leaves a traditional public school for another public school, traditional or charter, that student's per-pupil funding follows him or her to the new public school. The reality is that public charter schools will have access to less money than traditional public schools. Typically, public charter schools receive only a portion of local tax dollars per pupil and do not receive facilities dollars. Public charter schools also cannot ask the county commissioners, boards of supervisors, or city councils for tax increases to fill budget holes. Therefore, public charter schools will have to be more efficient while also meeting their goals and benchmarks. It is no secret that school districts in Mississippi are cash-strapped, which is all the more reason to ensure that taxpayer money funds student learning that produces increased achievement results – often found in the public charter school environment.

MYTHS

Myth #4: Public charter schools will have poor hiring standards, meaning teachers will not be required to be certified.

Truth #4: Teacher quality is the most critical, classroom-based factor in raising student achievement. Mississippi requires 100 percent of the teachers in a charter school to have a bachelor's degree and have proven competence in the field they are teaching. The rigorous authorization process that public charter schools applicants undergo will require them to describe their staffing plans prior to authorization. Applicants will be rejected if they do not ensure a highly qualified teacher in each classroom. With such strict accountability and standards to meet, public charter schools will have a strong incentive to hire only the most effective teachers for their classrooms. When an applicant is filling out their school plan for the Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board they are required to include plans for developing non-certified teachers.

Myth #5: Public charter schools will lack accountability and oversight.

Truth #5: Public charter schools are given freedom to innovate with their administrative policies and instructional time so that the academic needs of each child are met. In exchange for that freedom, a public charter school is held to a high standard of achievement and accountability. A public charter school is accountable to the authorizing entity to produce specific academic results and to implement sound fiscal practices, which would both be identified in their charter. Additionally, they are required to report their progress periodically to several groups: the authorizing entity that grants the charter, the parents who choose the school, and the taxpayers that fund it. The authorizer that grants the charter may request more frequent reports and may take action against the school if the situation calls for it.

Myth #6: Public charter schools will refuse students who require special education services.

Truth #6: As with all public schools, charter schools must abide by federal regulations prohibiting the schools from refusing students because they require special education services. The proposed legislation in Mississippi will require that a public charter school's student demographics – of which students who receive special education services are included – generally mirror the demographics of students in the district. Additionally, public charter schools are expected to meet the demands of all individual education plans.

Myth #7: For-profit companies and “fly by night” organizations will be able to open public charter schools.

Truth #7: No for-profit entity will be allowed to operate a public charter school in Mississippi. Only charter management organizations or independent charter operators – all nonprofits – will be allowed to operate a public charter school in Mississippi. Also, an exhaustive application process for all potential public charter school operators will ensure that no one who is granted a charter will be a “fly-by-night” operation or a company that prioritizes profits ahead of student achievement and well-being. First of all, the person or group must form a nonprofit corporation specifically organized to operate a public charter school, and they must obtain tax-exempt status from the Internal Revenue Service. This process in itself will weed out those who illegally discriminate and others who are not willing to do the due diligence necessary to ensure a well-conceived operating plan. Other aspects of the application process, including review of the application by the authorizing entity, require enough work and research to provide reasonable assurance that no inappropriate person or group will be granted a charter.

RESEARCH

RESEARCH ON CHARTER SCHOOLS

There have been multiple research studies conducted to evaluate the impact of charter schools. The study designs range from large-scale national studies spanning several cities and states to studies examining a small network of schools. Below, we have summarized the findings from the most widely cited and high-quality research studies on charter schools.

The Stanford Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO)

National Charter School Study 2013

<http://credo.stanford.edu/documents/NCSS%202013%20Final%20Draft.pdf>

Charter schools across the country vary immensely depending on state legislation, authorizing practices, and populations served. The Stanford CREDO study captures the performance of charter schools across the nation on average compared to traditional public schools. The first results were published in 2009, and the most recent data was published in 2013. The study now includes charter schools in 27 states and the District of Columbia, representing over 95% of charter school students. It uses student gains on standardized assessments in reading and math to measure charter school performance, and it controls for factors such as socioeconomic status, language proficiency, participation in special education, and race by using a matched comparison study design. In the study, each charter school student was paired with a virtual twin from his local traditional public school that closely matched him according to the aforementioned factors. In doing this, the study is able to deliver results on whether students in charter schools fared better than they would have in their local traditional public school.

The CREDO study concluded that black students in poverty and Hispanic English language learners made the most learning gains in both reading and math, and they were significantly better off in charter schools than their peers in traditional public schools with similar backgrounds. Black students experienced a statistically significant growth equivalent to nearly 6 additional school weeks of instruction in reading and over 7 additional school weeks of instruction in math annually. On average, Hispanic students enrolled in charter schools as English language learners experienced growth equivalent to 10 additional school weeks of instruction in reading and over 8 additional school weeks of instruction in math per year. Overall, students living in poverty across all races experienced statistically significant growth in reading and math equating to approximately 14 and 22 additional instructional days each year, respectively.

CREDO also publishes individual state and city evaluations of charter schools.

RESEARCH

Mathematica Policy Research

Working Paper: Charter High Schools' Effects on Long-Term Attainment and Earnings

http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/pdfs/education/charter_long-term_wp.pdf

Beyond elementary and secondary test scores, charter schools have also had a positive impact on college attendance rates. According to the Mathematica Policy Research Working Paper entitled "Charter High Schools' Effects on Long-Term Attainment and Earnings," students attending charter high schools in Florida and Chicago were 7-15 percent more likely to graduate from high school on time and 8-10 percent more likely to enroll in college compared to their peers in traditional public high schools. Beyond looking at postsecondary enrollment, the study also examined how the students who graduated from charter high schools performed in the workforce after earning their college degree. Although data was only available from Florida, the study revealed that charter school graduates earned an average of 12.7 percent more than the maximum earnings of their peers who attended traditional public high schools. This statistically significant amount is groundbreaking because many of the charter high schools in Florida were not found to have significant increases in test scores compared to traditional public high schools. While research into what methods are employed by charter schools to increase their graduates' earnings has not yet been conducted, this study points to differences in instruction at charter schools that have long-lasting effects beyond test scores.

RAND Corporation

Charter Schools in Eight States: Effects on Achievement, Attainment, Integration, and Competition

http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG869.pdf

The RAND study set out to answer questions regarding the impact of charter schools on surrounding traditional public schools (TPS) and inform the debate among pro- and anti-charter camps about whether charter schools spur competition among TPS and improve the public school system or if they undermine their performance by draining high performing students causing overall harm to education systems. In this study, the researchers examined the characteristics of students transferring to charter schools and used longitudinal student-level data from eight states to determine if charter schools are skimming off the highest-achieving students from TPS. They found that the prior test scores of students transferring into charter schools were near or below local averages in every geographic location included in the study. They also found that transfers to charter schools do not contribute to increased segregation as the racial composition of charter schools entered by transferring students was similar to that of the traditional public school from which the students came.

The RAND study also assessed whether the competition created by the establishment of a charter school sector produces positive or negative effects on the achievement of students who remain in traditional public schools. Using 2 proxies for competitive pressure: distance to the nearest charter school from a traditional public school and the number of charter schools within 2.5 miles of a TPS, the researchers examined the growth of student achievement in traditional public schools as charter competition increases. They found that the existence of charter schools do not have a negative impact on the test scores of students in nearby traditional public schools.

RESEARCH

Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE)

A Meta-Analysis of the Literature on the Effect of Charter Schools on Student Achievement.

<http://www.crpe.org/publications/meta-analysis-literature-effect-charter-schools-student-achievement>

The Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) works with University of California-San Diego economists Julian R. Betts and Y. Emily Tang to regularly examine all the existing research on charter schools and answer the question, “Do charter schools work?” The researchers point out that, taken together, the body of evidence supporting the effectiveness of charter schools is not conclusive. However, the research that yields the most unbiased and valid results uses two superior study designs. The first approach compares students who are identical in background but one won a seat at the charter school through a lottery and the other did not. This approach controls for factors that may contribute to academic success associated with families who choose to register for the lottery. The second approach (value-added modeling) takes in consideration the student’s past academic history and follows them over time. Using only studies with one of these two designs, Betts and Tang compared the results of charter schools to traditional public schools. Their 2014 findings showed that charter schools as a whole produced results that were equal to or, in many cases, better than their district-run counterparts. Specifically, charter schools outperform traditional public schools in math; African-American students in charter schools generally outperform those attending traditional public schools; at-risk subgroups fare just as well in charter schools as they do in traditional public schools; and location plays a large role in charter school effectiveness.

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