

---

Embargoed until June 29 at 10 a.m. EDT

**Contacts:**

Tracy Dell'Angela  
(202) 219-1412 (work)  
(202) 525-8853 (cellular)

## **New report on charter middle schools reveals wide variation in student achievement**

### ***Average charter achievement no better than traditional public schools***

Charter middle schools popular enough to hold admission lotteries are, on average, no more successful than nearby traditional public schools in boosting student achievement, behavior, and attendance, according to a new evaluation released today by the Institute of Education Sciences.

However, charter schools vary widely -- some are more effective and others less effective than nearby traditional public schools. Those located in large urban areas and those serving disadvantaged students are the most successful.

“This study adds to a growing body of evidence on this important policy issue,” said IES Director John Easton. “We examined academic progress, but we also dug deeper to try to understand more about the variability of charter school outcomes and why some are more or less effective than traditional public schools.”

*The Evaluation of the Impact of Charter Schools* —the first large scale randomized trial of the effectiveness of charter schools in multiple states and types of communities—was conducted with 2,330 students who applied to 36 charter middle schools that held lotteries for admission. The study was directed by the National Center for Education Evaluation within IES and conducted by Mathematica Policy Research and its partners.

The study focuses on students who attended charter middle schools, usually grades 5 through 8, and who attended a school in operation two years or more. These schools had to be popular enough to have a lottery because that allowed researchers to compare two similar groups of students, one offered admission to the charter they applied to and one not offered admission.

On average, the participating charter middle schools served more advantaged students than other charter middle schools nationally. The study charter schools had lower numbers of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (44 percent to 62 percent nationally) and smaller percentages of students below proficiency on state assessments when they applied to the charter school (34 percent versus 49 percent in math). Additionally, fewer African-American students attended the study charter schools than other charter schools nationally (16 percent versus 29 percent).

In each charter school, impacts were estimated by comparing average achievement outcomes among lottery winners with those of lottery losers over the 2 years following the lottery. Researchers compared performance on state math and reading tests, but because the tests varied by grade and from state to state, the scores were converted to a comparable scale.

The study also used school records and student and parent surveys to examine other outcomes—including effort in schools, behavior, and attitudes, as well as parental involvement and satisfaction.

Similar studies that covered a wide span of states or districts also found that, on average, charter schools did not positively impact student achievement, but that the academic impact of charters varied widely. Other lottery-based studies have also shown that charter schools in large urban areas serving significant populations of disadvantaged students have been successful in improving student achievement.

The key findings include:

- **On average, study charter schools did not have a statistically significant impact on student achievement.** However, the averages mask wide variation across the charter schools in how well their lottery winners performed relative to the lottery losers, who typically went back to their neighborhood schools.
- **Study charter schools did not significantly affect most other outcomes examined, except for parent and student satisfaction.** These outcomes included absences, suspensions, and other measures of performance, as well as survey-based measures of effort in school, student well-being, behavior and attitudes, and parental involvement. However, lottery winners were 12 percentage points more likely and their parents were 33 percentage points more likely to say they were more satisfied with their schools than lottery losers.
- **Study charter schools were more effective for lower-income and lower-achieving students and less effective for higher-income and higher-achieving students.** On average, lottery winners with initial low test scores and lottery winners from low-income families benefitted academically from admission to charter schools (in math) while their more advantaged counterparts did not. However, there were no significant differences in charter school impacts for other student subgroups—such as those defined by race, ethnicity, and gender.
- **The variation in student achievement impacts among charter schools may be related to certain school characteristics.** Charter schools in large urban areas, those serving more lower-income or more lower-achieving students produced positive impacts on student math scores relative to other nearby school options. Charter schools outside of large urban areas, those serving fewer low-income students, and those serving higher-achieving students had negative impacts on test scores. Less negative impacts were found in smaller charter schools and those more likely to use ability grouping.