

Charter Schools

In this March 2005 book, authors Martin Carnoy, Rebecca Jacobsen, Lawrence Mishel, and Richard Rothstein examine the research evidence on the performance of charter schools and how they compare to regular public schools, in thirteen states. Following are key findings:

Student Population	On average, charter students are not more disadvantaged than students in regular public schools. Yet, charter student achievement is not any higher.
<i>Share of socio-economically disadvantaged students served</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Regular public schools have a greater share of low-income black, white, and Hispanic students than charter schools. This suggests that comparison of test scores between charter and public schools – if controlled only for race and ethnicity, but not income level - is biased in favor of charters, because they have a <i>more advantaged</i> population among each racial group.❖ About 76% of black students in regular public schools are low-income, while only 68% of black students in charter schools are low-income. (This includes only students who took the fourth grade NAEP math exam and who reported on free and reduced-price lunch eligibility.)❖ Hispanic students in charter schools are no more disadvantaged than Hispanic students in regular public schools, refuting the view of charter proponents that charters enroll the “disadvantaged of the disadvantaged.”❖ In all 13 states studied, charter schools tended to have fewer minority or disadvantaged children than those in public schools, as seen in Colorado, for example. There, more than half of charter students are in schools with the smallest proportion of minority and lunch-eligible students. Only a third of public students attended such schools.❖ In California charter schools, 38% of 6th-8th graders are socioeconomically disadvantaged; for all state schools, that figure is 51%.
<i>Achievement of disadvantaged students</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ An analysis of California found that socioeconomically disadvantaged Asian-origin and Latino students in charter schools had composite test scores (literacy, mathematics, science and social studies) that were about 4-5% lower than their counterparts in public primary schools.❖ A study of the 30 charter schools that had been formed in the District of Columbia by 1999-2000 shows that across schools categorized by the socio-economic level of students, charter schools had a much higher proportion of students than regular DC public schools scoring in the lowest category (below basic) on the SAT 9 exam in the spring of 2000.

Testing and Performance	Charter schools average performance is no higher than that of public schools.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ In Florida, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Texas, test scores from charter schools older than three years are still no higher than in public schools. ❖ In an analysis of fourth grade test scores in all 13 states, charter school students have the same or lower scores than other public school students in nearly every demographic category. The scores of low-income black students are lower in charter schools in both math and reading. ❖ On two different tests used in Illinois, charter school students' absolute achievement levels averaged about the same or lower than those of students in comparable regular public schools from 1998-2001. ❖ In Michigan, three studies using different methodologies found largely lower test score levels in charter elementary and middle schools than in comparable regular public schools. ❖ In the Bronx KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) charter schools, a greater proportion of entering fourth graders passed the New York state reading test than was the case for nearby public elementary schools. (One comparison found a 42%-25% difference, respectively.) This advantage is significant because it has been asserted that KIPP students enter with the same preparation as public school students but still manage much higher test scores. ❖ In North Carolina, students who had attended both regular public and charter schools made much lower achievement gains when in a charter school. ❖ The most positive results for charter schools were found in Arizona, where charter students in the early grades made more rapid gains. These results have not been found in other states.
Charter Advocates' Claims	Some charter advocates claim positive returns from typical charter school traits such as liberation from unions and regulations, and they insist accountability is stronger and competition with public schools produces results. These claims are not supported by the research evidence.
<i>Freedom from bureaucracy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Charters' freedom from regulation allows them to hire less qualified teachers. In communities sampled by the federal government's Schools and Staffing Survey, only 72% of charter teachers were certified, compared to 93% of regular public teachers.
<i>Are charters more accountable?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Charter schools are rarely closed for poor academic performance. A Center for Education Reform analysis shows that of 154 charter schools that closed in in 2002, less than 1% did so for academic reasons (even when that analysis was adjusted by the authors to include only charters three years or older). ❖ The U.S. Education Department found more than half of surveyed authorizers reported having difficulty closing a charter school that was failing.
<i>Competition effects on public schools?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ A Michigan study on the competition effect of the presence of a charter school in a district found that effect was negligible on fourth and fifth grade public school scores over a three-year period, with the exception of some small positive effects detected for fifth grade scores only. ❖ Researchers found no competition effects of charter schools in North Carolina. ❖ A study in Florida found positive effects on public school performance when the number of charter schools nearby was greater.
Request an Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Call Nancy Coleman, Stephaan Harris, or Karen Conner at 202-775-8810. Or email your request to news@epinet.org.