

Do charter schools get better academic results than public schools?

No. The charter school sector does not get better academic results than public schools and often performs worse. Charters sometimes appear to do better because they can control the types of students they choose to serve.

This is why

Charter schools are not “better” than public schools. The significant body of research on charters shows they generally do no better and often do worse than traditional public schools.

Charter schools are not a “pathway out of poverty.” There’s no evidence charters produce better long-term outcomes for students.

Charter schools can appear to outperform public schools when they don’t enroll the same types of students. Because charters tend to serve far fewer students with disabilities and fewer who don’t speak English as their first language, they can appear to be higher performing. Many charters do not “backfill” when students leave or take older students.

Charter schools keep only the students they want. Through various methods, charter schools shed their most problematic students who must then return to local public schools that accept all students.

“High-performing” charter schools are an illusion.

Even the best performing charter schools can trace some or all of their advantages to differences in the students they teach. They do not have to take any student like public schools do—regardless of space, grade or time of the year.

Look at the facts

The most rigorous and most expensive study of charter school performance commissioned by the **US Department of Education** found no overall positive effect for charter schools.¹ Studies that purport to have found urban charters produce higher academic outcomes—cleverly phrased as differences in “days of learning”—for African American and Latino students in urban communities rely on questionable methodology.²

A recent study of charter schools in **Texas** found charters overall have no positive impact on test scores and have a negative impact on earnings later in life.³

Charter schools nationally serve far fewer students with disabilities—0% to 7%—and these are children with milder disabilities. The 2011 national average for public schools was 13%. The disabled students who do enroll in charter schools tend to have disabilities that are less severe and less costly to remediate than those of students in district schools.⁴

A study in **New York** found English language learners (ELLs) are consistently underrepresented in charter schools.⁵ A national analysis of charter schools operated by education management companies found only 4.4% of the students in these schools were classified as ELL.⁵

One of the most acclaimed charter school chains, KIPP, gets some of its great results from substantially higher levels of attrition than do their local school districts. A national study found 40% of the African American male students leave KIPP

schools between grades 6 and 8. Overall a higher proportion of African American students than other ethnic groups leave the KIPP schools, and girls are much more likely to remain in the KIPP schools across all ethnic groups.⁶

WHAT PRIVATIZERS BELIEVE	WHAT WE BELIEVE
Charter schools are better than public schools.	Charter schools are not better than public schools but do have the enrollment flexibility to appear to do better.
Charter schools are popular because they're better than public schools.	Charter schools are popular because they have better marketing than public schools.
Charter schools give parents more options for their children.	Charter schools have more options to serve the students they want.
We need more high-performing charter schools.	We need high quality, well financed public schools that serve all students.

Bottom Line

Despite the advantages charter school have to selectively enroll students, concentrate instruction on teaching to the test, and push out students who pose the most challenging academic and behavior problems, these schools still do not out-perform public schools. Instead of expanding the number of these schools, we should ensure families have access to public schools nearby that are adequately resourced to serve the existing student population in the community. Integrating neighborhoods, fully funding public schools, lowering class size, and using research will increase the achievement of all American students.

¹ "The evaluation of charter school impacts: Final report (NCEE 2010-4029)," Gleason, P., Clark, M., Tuttle, C. C., and Dwyer, E.; Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, 2010.

² "Problems with CREDO's Charter School Research: Understanding the Issues," William J. Mathis and Andrew Maul, National Education Policy Center, 2015.

³ "Charter Schools and Labor Market Outcomes," Will S. Dobbie and Roland G. Fryer, Jr., NBER Working Paper No. 22502, August 2016.

³ "Charters Should Be Expected to Serve All Kinds of Students," Miron, G., Education Next, 14(4). Fall, 2014.

⁴ "Review of Separating Fact & Fiction," Gary Miron, William Mathis, and Kevin Welner, National Education Policy Center, 2015.

⁵ "Are ELL Students Underrepresented in Charter Schools? Demographic Trends in New York City, 2006-2008," Jack Buckley & Carolyn Sattin-Bajaj, Journal of School Choice International Research and Reform, Volume 5, 2011 - Issue 1.

⁶ "What makes KIPP work? A study of student characteristics, attrition and school finance," Miron, G., Urschel, J. L., & Saxton, N., Teachers College, NY: National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education and Western Michigan University, MI, 2011.

