

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 engage in policies and practices that 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. Others do not offer free or reduced-priced lunch or ask for parental donations.

Charter schools keep only the students they want. Through various methods, like frequent suspensions and grade level retention, 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 publics 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. Studies that purport to have found urban charters produce higher academic outcomes—cleverly phrased as differences in “days of learning”—for Black and Latinx students in urban communities **rely on questionable methodology.**

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.

A study in **New York** found English language learners (ELLs) are **consistently underrepresented** in charter schools. 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.

A nationwide analysis of 935 high schools with four-year graduation rates of less than 50% found that 54% of those are charter schools—equal to one-quarter of all U.S. charter high schools. Many of these charter high schools have had chronically low graduation rates below 50% since 2010-11.

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 Black male





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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.

National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) found no measurable differences in average reading and mathematics scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) between charter school and public school students at the fourth- and eighth-grade level.

A 2019 report from the U.S. Department of Education’s

WHAT PRIVATIZERS BELIEVE	WHAT WE BELIEVE
Charter schools are popular because they’re 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 give parents more options for their children.	Charter schools are popular because they have better marketing than public schools.
We need more high-performing charter schools.	Charter schools have more options to serve the students they want by capping enrollment and other practices.
	We need high quality, well financed public schools that serve all students.

Bottom Line

The research is clear--charter schools, on average, do no better than public schools and some do worse. Practices such as not offering transportation or free lunch, and asking for parental donations help mold student bodies. 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-based practices will increase the achievement of all American students.