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Education and the Workforce Committee

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Introduction

Chairman Bean, Ranking Member Bonamici, and other members of the Committee, Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

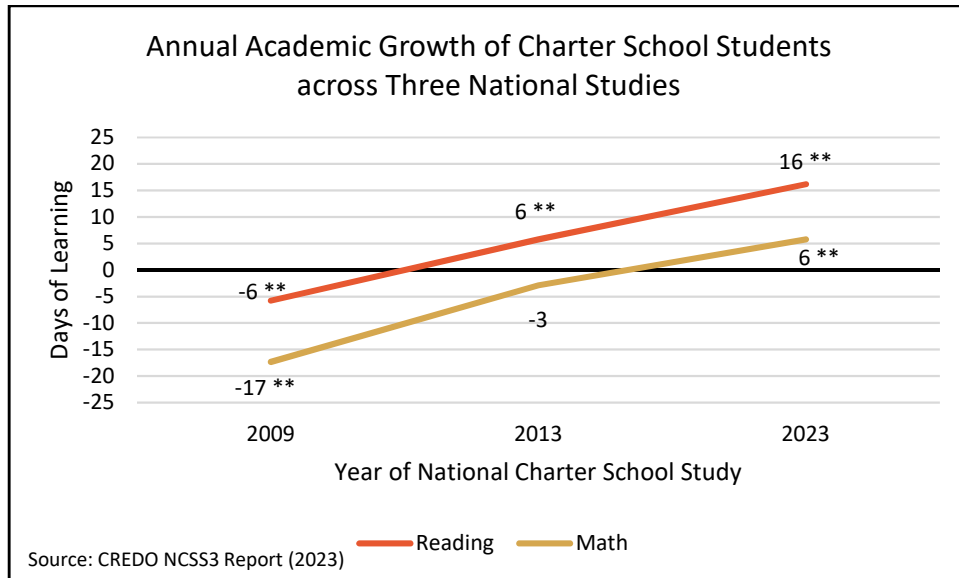
I am Margaret Raymond, Director of the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO), at the Hoover Institution of Stanford University. I am joined today by Dr. Won Fy Lee, a lead analyst of the study I will discuss today.

Over two decades, CREDO completed [three national studies](#) of academic progress in charter schools compared to carefully selected comparison students in nearby district schools, in partnership with 29 states and the District of Columbia. [Figure 1 shows the results from each study.]

Charter School Student Performance

By the time I saw the results of our third analysis in 2023, we had waited 10 years to solve a mystery. But to tell you more, I need to frame the results in the context of the prior two studies. Our 2009 study showed charter students learning less than their district peers in both reading and math by a statistically significant amount. Using a comparison standard of 180 days of learning in the typical 180-day district school year, charter students had 174 days’ learning in reading and 163 days in math. In 2013, the second study showed improvement across the sector, posting a positive advantage of 6 extra days of learning in Reading compared to their peers in district schools and breaking even with them in Math.

Figure 1



As everyone knows, two points make a line but they do not make a trend, so the latest results were keenly anticipated. Findings showed charter school students had 16 more days of learning in a school year in Reading and six additional days of learning in Math than similar peers in local district schools. Both comparisons were statistically significant. I will return to the trend across the three studies later.

Good results for charter school students were even more pronounced for urban students, Black and Hispanic students, low-income students, and students served by charter school networks. For each of these groups, attending charter schools led to more learning in a year’s time compared to peers in adjacent district schools.

Not all results of the National Charter School Study III are positive. The learning of rural charter school students is not strong. Special Education students in charter schools also lag the learning of their peers in district schools.

While the comparative progress of Black and Hispanic charter school students is positive compared to their district counterparts, all these students learn substantially less than white students. Targeted improvement would benefit these students.

Charter School Networks

The study revealed insights about charter school networks, often called charter management organizations or CMO’s. The average student in a charter school network gained more than a month of extra learning compared to their district counterparts. Moreover, charter school networks do not sacrifice learning as they replicate and scale.

Gap-Busting Schools

The final set of results I want to mention are the so-called Gap-Busting Schools. We looked for charter schools that had above- average achievement in their respective states. Of these, we tagged schools with learning for minority or poverty students that was at least as strong as their white or non-poverty charter school classmates. We found hundreds of schools who met the criteria we set – in fact, over 1000 where Hispanic students exceeded the progress of their White classmates. Moreover, we found dozens of charter networks able to produce these impressive results across their entire network.

Implications

The implications from the National Charter School Study III are important and timely. Millions of charter students have been well served, adding to their education progress and life outcomes. The charter school community also delivered many examples of successful schools and showed that scaling successful models is common. These examples hold promise for adding more charter schools and for fulfilling their charge to be laboratories of new – and now proven – ideas.

The long-term trend of the three studies shows what legislators like this committee can do: devise policy levers to create good outcomes. Charter school laws pair flexibility – the protected option for schools to try new things – and accountability – at least a credible threat of sanction or closure if they underperform. These forces produce incentives for Continuous Improvements that are readily apparent in the data we studied. We see thousands of schools getting a little better each year, which explains the upward trend line. The insight is welcome considering the general state of schools coming out of the pandemic.

I will conclude with the idea that there are untapped opportunities to export successful models to other schools and for other laws to use similar incentives to prompt further improvements in our public school system.