

What Works Clearinghouse



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WWC Quick Review of the Manuscript “Paying for A’s: An Early Exploration of Student Reward and Incentive Programs in Charter Schools”†

What is this study about?

This study examined whether offering student reward and incentive programs in charter schools affects academic achievement.

The study was based on a survey of 186 charter schools in 17 states. It excluded schools that had been in operation for less than two years, as well as those that did not enroll students in the 4th grade or higher.

Data on incentive programs were drawn from a survey of charter school principals. The study also used data on reading and math test scores from state education agencies covering the school years 2004-05 to 2006-07.

The study measured effects by comparing changes in average grade-level test scores in schools that had incentive programs to changes in schools that did not have incentive programs.

What Student Reward and Incentive Programs Were Studied?

Reward and incentive programs in charter schools

Programs that aim to improve student outcomes, such as behavior, attendance, or academic performance

Student incentives include items from the school store, tickets to social events, cash, and other rewards and prizes

WWC Rating

The research described in this manuscript is not consistent with WWC evidence standards

Cautions: The study compared grade-level average test score gains in charter schools that have student incentive programs to gains in charter schools that did not have these programs. The study does not provide evidence that these two groups were initially equivalent. Although the study’s analytical methods adjust for some of the differences in school characteristics, it is possible that there were differences between the two groups that were not accounted for and these differences could have influenced test score gains. For example, schools that offer incentive programs may have more resources than those that do not or be more likely to implement other strategies for improving test scores. For these reasons, differences between the two groups of schools cannot be attributed with confidence to the effect of incentive programs.

What did the study author report?

The study found that charter schools that offer student reward and incentive programs had higher gains in reading test scores than charter schools that did not offer these programs. The study found no difference in math test score gains.

The WWC does not consider these results conclusive because there is no evidence that the research groups were initially equivalent. The results may reflect differences in the study schools that are not related to incentive programs.

†“Paying for A’s: An Early Exploration of Student Reward and Incentive Programs in Charter Schools.” Margaret Raymond. Center for Research on Educational Outcomes (CREDO), Stanford University, April 2008.