

REL Southwest Ask A REL Response

Charter Schools

September 2018

Question:

What are strategies for managing charter school expansion?

Response:

Thank you for the question you submitted to our REL Reference Desk. We have prepared the following memo with research references to help answer your question. For each reference, we provide an abstract, excerpt, or summary written by the study's author or publisher. Following an established Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest research protocol, we conducted a search for research reports as well as descriptive study articles on strategies for managing charter school expansion.

We have not evaluated the quality of references and the resources provided in this response. We offer them only for your reference. Also, we searched the references in the response from the most commonly used resources of research, but they are not comprehensive, and other relevant references and resources may exist. References provided are listed in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance. We do not include sources that are not freely available to the requestor.

Research References

Baker, B. D., Libby, K., & Wiley, K. (2015). Charter school expansion and within district equity: Confluence or conflict? *Education Finance and Policy*, 10(3), 423–465. Retrieved from <https://schoolfinance101.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/baker-libby-wiley-charterswsf-feb2013.pdf>

From the abstract: “This article explores whether two popular policy initiatives are compatible or conflicting strategies for enhancing educational equality in diverse large urban centers. These two initiatives are (1) charter school expansion and (2) improvement of resource equity across urban public school systems through policies often referred to as weighted student funding formulas. In this article, we focus on New York and Houston, two cities where districts have adopted initiatives to improve equity of the distribution of school site funding and have concurrently experienced significant expansion of charter schooling. We find that charter schools have the tendency to amplify student population differences across schools by disability, language, and low income

status, and that charter schools' access to financial resources varies widely. Nevertheless, we find that in very large urban districts like New York City, where charter market share remains small, the overall effects of charters on system-wide inequity remain small.”

Nichols-Barrer, I., Gleason, P., Tuttle, C., Coen, T., & Knechtel, V. (2016, March). *Do charter school networks deflate as they expand? Trends in the impacts of KIPP schools during a period of rapid growth in the KIPP network*. Paper presented at the Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness (SREE) Spring 2016 Conference. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED567594>

From the ERIC abstract: “The Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) is a national network of public charter schools whose stated mission is to help underserved students enroll in and graduate from college. As of 2014-2015 the network included 162 elementary, middle, and high schools serving 59,495 students. Questions remain, however, about the ability of charter school networks like KIPP to remain effective as they expand and serve larger numbers of students. In this paper, the authors present estimates of the impacts of KIPP middle schools during a period in which the network greatly expanded. In particular, they measure KIPP impacts between 2005 and 2014, a period in which the number of schools in the network increased from 40 to 140. They aim to explore whether there is any evidence of an increase, decline, or stability in KIPP impacts over this period and the extent to which variation in network-wide impacts is driven by changes to the composition of the network versus changes over time in the effectiveness of existing schools. The paper focuses on 37 KIPP middle schools open during the 2005-2014 period in 14 KIPP regions and 11 states. The study sample included a treatment group of students who entered a KIPP school for the first time in grade 5 or grade 6, and a matched comparison group of students in the same school districts who did not attend KIPP. In total, a sample of 20,312 treatment students and 20,312 matched comparison students were analyzed. The study relied on a matched comparison group design that used "nearest neighbor" matching to identify a similar comparison student for each treatment student entering a KIPP middle school in grade 5 or grade 6. Once the matched comparison group was identified, impacts were estimated using ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions that control for any remaining baseline differences between KIPP students and comparison students. The authors used de-identified, longitudinally-linked student-level data from jurisdictions (states or districts) hosting at least one KIPP school and able to provide student-level records at the time of data collection. The study results suggest that KIPP middle schools continued to produce positive impacts on student achievement outcomes even as the organization faced the pressures of growth in terms of student recruitment, hiring new principals and teachers, and managing turnover in the network's workforce over time.”

Pearson, S., McKoy, J. H., & Kingsland, N. (2015). How many charter schools is just right? *Education Next*, 15(3), 56–62. Retrieved from https://www.educationnext.org/files/ednext_XV_3_forum.pdf

From the introduction: “In dozens of U.S. cities, more than one in five students now attend charter schools. Charter school expansion has fueled an increasingly energetic discussion among advocates: How large a share of urban schools should be charters? Is

the ideal New Orleans, where nearly all public schools are charter schools? Or does that create demands on charters to become more and more like the district schools they're replacing, potentially undermining the premise of charter schooling? Is it better for a charter sector to coexist with a substantially traditional school district, as is the case in Washington, D.C.? In this forum, arguing for the two-sector model are Scott Pearson and Skip McKoy. Pearson is executive director and McKoy is the chairman of the District of Columbia Public Charter School Board. Making the case for an all-charter system is Neerav Kingsland, former CEO of New Schools for New Orleans and now a consultant who works to support charter expansion.”

Toner, M. (2017). *Better together: Ensuring quality district schools in times of charter growth and declining enrollment center on reinventing public education*. Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED576670>

From the ERIC abstract: “Across the country, many large school districts have seen flat or declining enrollments in recent years, including in places where there's been concurrent growth in charter schools. The result has been a growing perception that charter expansion is coming at the expense of the health of traditional school districts—a perception that, even if unfounded, has contributed to tensions between charter schools, districts, and in some cases, the public. These tensions challenge the original charter school narrative that presumed that the sector's growth and the competitive pressures it engenders would improve conditions for all students—those in charter schools and those who remain in traditional district schools. And while there are examples of districts that have improved their schools in the face of charter growth, there are many more cities where this has not happened. Though districts labor under rigidities in law, habit, and thinking, they remain responsible for providing a quality education and buffering children from the effects of changes in funding, enrollment, and student needs. The fact that some have adapted well to declines in enrollment that began as long as 45 years ago means that districts are not helpless. However, it is also necessary to ask whether the charter community—charter management organizations (CMOs) and other charter school operators, teachers and parents, pro-charter elected officials, philanthropies, funders, and other advocates—can and should act more proactively to protect students in district-run schools. This paper explores both sides' responsibility: what should districts be expected to do, and how should the charter community act to prevent harm to children in district-run schools? It breaks the big issues about responsibility into five more manageable questions: (1) Is the growth of charter schools really contributing to the destabilization of district finances, and thus their ability to effectively educate?; (2) What can districts do to maintain school quality despite loss of enrollment?; (3) Do charter schools bear at least some responsibility to prevent the reduction of school quality for children remaining in district-run schools?; (4) Could the charter community help to support the transition from district monopoly status, and if so, under what conditions?; and (5) Should the charter sector and its supporters embrace a broader measure of success for reform: the well-being of all students? As a starting point to addressing these challenging and controversial questions, more than two dozen policymakers, practitioners, researchers, and advocates took part in a January 2017 convening hosted by the Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE). The group included charter leaders and supporters, and state and

school district leaders who have grappled with the consequences of rapid charter growth. The day-long convening featured broad-ranging, often frank conversations about the challenges that traditional school districts face and the role that the charter sector could possibly play in helping address them. While the discussion was not intended to set consensus or a course of action for the sector, the acknowledgement of the issue, the potential solutions, and the tensions that were surfaced were an important first step. This paper surfaces the themes, tensions, and areas of consensus these experienced individuals and analysts believe are critical to untangling the knots of this complex and critical challenge. It is the hope that this is the beginning of a productive conversation that could ultimately benefit all of America's students, whether served by district or charter schools.”

Additional Organization to Consult

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement, Charter Schools Program – <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oii/csp/index.html>

From the website: “The Charter Schools Program provides money to create new high-quality public charter schools, as well as to disseminate information about ones with a proven track record. Federal funds are also available to replicate and expand successful schools; help charter schools find suitable facilities; reward high-quality charter schools that form exemplary collaborations with the non-chartered public school sector; and invest in national activities and initiatives that support charter schools.”

Charter School Program State Education Agencies (SEA) – <https://innovation.ed.gov/what-we-do/charter-schools/charter-school-program-state-educational-agencies-sea/>

From the program description: “The Secretary awards grants to SEAs on a competitive basis to enable them to conduct charter school programs in their States. SEAs use their CSP funds to award subgrants to non-SEA eligible applicants in their State. These subgrants are used for two primary purposes: (1) planning, program design, and initial implementation of new charter schools; and (2) dissemination of information, including best practices, by charter schools open at least three consecutive years with demonstrated success in several areas, as specified by statute.”

Charter Schools Program Grants for Replication and Expansion of High-Quality Charter Schools – <https://innovation.ed.gov/what-we-do/charter-schools/charter-schools-program-grants-for-replications-and-expansion-of-high-quality-charter-schools/>

From the program description: “Through CSP Grants to Charter Management Organizations for the Replication and Expansion of High-Quality Charter Schools (CFDA number 84.282M) (also referred to as Charter Management Organization, or CMO, grants), the Department provides funds to *charter management organizations (CMOs)* on a competitive basis to enable them to *replicate or expand one or more high-quality charter schools*. Grant funds may be used to expand the enrollment of one or

more existing *high-quality charter schools*, or to *replicate* one or more new charter schools that are based on an existing, *high-quality charter school model*.”

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- Managing charter school expansion
- Charter school expansion

Databases and Resources

We searched [ERIC](#) for relevant, peer-reviewed research references. ERIC is a free online library of more than 1.6 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). Additionally, we searched the [What Works Clearinghouse](#).

Reference Search and Selection Criteria

When we were searching and reviewing resources, we considered the following criteria:

- *Date of the publication*: References and resources published from 2003 to present, were included in the search and review.
- *Search priorities of reference sources*: Search priority is given to study reports, briefs, and other documents that are published and/or reviewed by IES and other federal or federally funded organizations, academic databases, including ERIC, EBSCO databases, JSTOR database, PsychInfo, PsychArticle, and Google Scholar.
- *Methodology*: The following methodological priorities/considerations were given in the review and selection of the references: (a) study types—randomized control trials, quasi-experiments, correlational studies, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, mixed methods analyses, and so forth; (b) target population, samples (representativeness of the target population, sample size, volunteered or randomly selected, and so forth), study duration, and so forth; and (c) limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, and so forth.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by stakeholders in the Southwest Region (Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest at AIR. This memorandum was prepared by REL Southwest under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-91990018C0002, administered by AIR. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.