

What Works Clearinghouse



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WWC Quick Review of the Report “The Evaluation of Charter School Impacts: Final Report”^{1,2}

What is this study about?

The study examined the effect of being offered enrollment at a charter middle school on student achievement and behaviors.

The study analyzed data from two cohorts of more than 2,100 students in 29 sites across 15 states between 2005 and 2008. Enrollment offers at each charter school were granted by lottery.

The study compared outcomes of students who were offered enrollment in each charter school with those of students who were not selected in the lottery and, as a result, typically attended traditional public schools. The authors measured effects at each school after one and two years, and then averaged these findings across schools to receive an overall impact estimate.

Student achievement was measured using state-level reading and math assessments that were standardized to ensure comparability across states. Other outcomes were obtained from school administrative records and from student and parent surveys.

WWC Rating

The research described in this report meets WWC evidence standards

Strengths: The study is a well-implemented randomized controlled trial.

Features of the Study’s Charter Schools

Charter schools are public schools run by private organizations. They are often released from many state and district regulations, including ones on staffing, curriculum, and budgeting.

This study’s charter schools admitted students between 4th and 7th grades, had been operating for at least two years, and received more applicants than they could accommodate. They had been around longer and served more advantaged students than other charter middle schools nationally; but they were similar to other charter middle schools regarding their location, size, per-student revenues, and teacher qualifications.

What did the study find?

On average, students admitted to charter middle schools through the lottery scored no differently on math and reading assessments than students not offered admission. These program impacts varied widely across study sites; some had positive outcomes and some had negative outcomes.

The authors also found no significant overall effects on attendance, grade promotion, or student conduct.

When comparing student and parent satisfaction, however, the authors reported consistent statistically significant positive results for students offered a spot in the charter schools.

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

² Absence of conflict of interest: This study was conducted by staff from Mathematica Policy Research, which operates the WWC. For this reason, no Mathematica staff participated in the study’s review.

Quick reviews examine evidence published in a study (supplemented, if necessary, by information from author queries) to assess whether that study’s design meets WWC evidence standards. Quick reviews rely on the effect sizes and significance levels reported by study authors. The WWC rating applies only to the summarized results, and not necessarily to all results presented in the study.