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LITERATURE REVIEW: CHARTER SCHOOLS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Two percent of the nation's students and 0.3 percent of Kansas students are currently enrolled in charter schools. A recent Gallup Poll showed that while public support for charter schools has increased each year and is now at 49 percent, 72 percent of the public is against charter schools if they result in decreased funding for regular public schools.

Research on the effectiveness of charter schools is confounded by the significant amount of advocacy research that has not been vetted by external experts and by pronounced methodological difficulties. Randomized assignment of subjects to treatment and control groups and longitudinal measures—the best method for eliminating alternative explanations of results—is rare in educational research, including research about charter school effects. Student groups compared to one another frequently should not have been compared because of the way samples have been selected, pre-existing differences in such things as ability and motivation, differences in attrition rates, and lack of pretreatment measures. Thus, the results of many studies cannot be replicated or generalized to other populations; and it is difficult, if not impossible, to know if charter school attendance or some other factor caused any differences in results.

Charter schools are also very diverse. The student at a charter school focused on foreign language immersion receives very different instruction from the student in a charter school focused on dropout prevention, yet many studies aggregate the achievement results for all students in charter schools. Failure to control for differing curricula, instructional methods, and design differences further confounds results.

New research consortia promise better quality research in the future. In addition, states are building student information systems that will allow them to study the effects of

education programs. Until such research is available, policy makers will be limited to making decisions based on conflicting evidence.

Research suggests some factors for increasing the likelihood that a charter school will be successful: a state's charter school law (adequate provisions for autonomy and accountability and at least as much money as other schools for operations and facilities); allowing a mixture of conversion and start up charter schools; and ensuring that the needed knowledge, resources, and skills are provided to the charter school. In addition, RAND presents a number of recommendations for those considering charter schools, including:

- Require that all participating schools practice open admissions
- Target specific students, especially those most in need
- Provide generous funding, including supplemental funding, for students with special needs
- Avoid over-regulation
- Give public schools the autonomy they need to perform in a competitive educational market
- Enforce requirements for student achievement testing
- Impose consequences on schools that do not perform at acceptable levels
- Develop a statewide student-level record system that can track the performance of individual students and allow needed program evaluation/research
- Disseminate information to parents about mission, values, curriculum, and outcomes of each school
- Create multiple chartering authorities
- Actively inform parents about schools and school effectiveness
- Assess state curriculum standards
- Expose students to peers from variety of backgrounds

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LITERATURE REVIEW: CHARTER SCHOOLS

BACKGROUND FOR STUDY

This review of the charter school research was requested by Mr. Bob Corkins, Commissioner of Education, Kansas State Department of Education. The purpose of the study is to aid members of the Kansas State Board of Education in their policy deliberations.

An exhaustive review of the charter school literature was beyond the scope of this study. Due to time restraints, access to the literature was limited to Internet sources and the Kansas State Library collections. Literature selection was based upon: (1) scientifically based research guidelines in education, as outlined by the Scientifically Based Research Seminar, February 2, 2002, under the sponsorship of the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, U.S. Department of Education; and (2) timeliness. Articles were limited to those published between 2000 and 2005.

DEFINITIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF CHARTER SCHOOLS

Charter schools are public schools of choice that receive public funds based on the number of students who attend. They are most often proposed as a method to offer students and parents increased educational choice within the public school system. They differ from regular public schools in that--

- Admission is by choice
- There is market accountability: that is, they survive only if they attract students
- They are often more autonomous and free of government regulation than regular public schools

The number of charter schools is limited in 27 states by legislative caps. In designing charter schools, states differ in the amount schools receive per student and whether that

amount comes solely from the state, the degree to which state regulations can be waived, and the number of support services (e.g., transportation, leadership, facilities modifications) offered to the charter schools (Levin & Belfield, 2005). Schools obtain charters only with the approval and oversight of their local school district or other state agency. (See Appendix C.) Charter schools generally proliferate more rapidly in states where local school districts are not the exclusive sponsors (RAND, 2001). By September 2004, after about 15 years in existence, almost one million children were enrolled in 3,300 charter schools in 40 states. Just six states account for 62 percent of charter schools and 63 percent of charter school students: Arizona, California, Florida, Michigan, Ohio, and Texas. Charter schools serve the most significant share of total students in Washington, D.C., Delaware, and Colorado.

Nationally, charter schools serve a larger proportion of minority and low-income students than other public schools, probably because they are three times more likely than other schools to be located in big cities. (They demographically match the districts to which they belong.) However, the student makeup differs from one state to another. Charter schools represent 3 percent of all public schools and 2 percent of public school enrollments.

Kansas has 0.3 percent of its students in charter schools. Table 1 in Appendix B shows the demographic makeup of different types of schools in Kansas and the nation. In the Kansas data, one can see how difficult it is to make summary statements about charter schools: the primary school charters serve mainly rural and small town populations that are predominantly white and female, while many of the high school charters are alternative schools serving much higher proportions of lower-income and male students.

Aggregating the student assessment data from all Kansas charters dilutes the achievement levels of the primary charter schools, and obscures the lower test performance of the high risk secondary students. The very different populations being served become less visible in the aggregate data (compare Table 1, Appendix B to Table 5). Because comparisons based on aggregates of charter and public schools serving very different populations are problematic, background characteristics should be accounted for in statistical models so that the school's influence on student results can be discerned in the data. Otherwise, even when one limits comparisons to superficially similar groups of students (see Tables 2 and 3), one may arrive at false conclusions.

Charters have significant freedom of action, but the schools must prove that they are effective. They often offer more intimate learning environments and give parents options and grade configurations not otherwise available (e.g., K-8 or K-12). In states that only allow local school boards to approve charters, 22 percent are conversion charter schools. That is, they existed as schools before they became charters. In other states, 6 percent are conversions. A policy question often debated by states when establishing charter schools is whether to only allow proven entities to open charters, which may limit innovation, or allow almost any entity to open them and then close the schools that are unsuccessful (Ziebarth, Celio, Lake, & Rainey, 2005). States that have decided to adopt the 'close unsuccessful schools' option have found it difficult to close under-performing charters because they are often popular with parents for reasons that have nothing to do with achievement (Ziebarth & Wohlstetter, 2005).

Kansas has adopted a fairly restrictive charter law (RAND, 2001). Facts about Kansas charters include:

- Early adopter of charter laws – 1994
- Local school boards are the sole authorizers
- Private schools cannot convert to charter schools
- Charter schools may not be operated by for-profit companies
- Certified teachers must be hired
- Exemptions from state and district regulations must be negotiated and specified in the charter
- Student body must reflect the racial and socioeconomic makeup of the local district
- No startup funding available

PUBLIC VIEWS ON CHARTER SCHOOLS

According to the *37th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools* (2005), 24 percent of respondents assign an A or B to the nation's schools and 48 percent assign an A or B to the schools in their communities. About 69 percent of parents assign an A or B to the school their oldest child attends. The percent of respondents who favor charter schools has risen from 42 percent in 2000 to 49 percent in 2005. Eighty percent think that charter schools should be accountable to the state in the same way that regular public schools are. Only 28 percent of the respondents said that they would favor charter schools in their community if that meant reducing the amount of funds for regular public schools. The Gallup Poll findings were in line with what was found in the literature search. The number of charter schools has increased from a handful less than 15 years ago to over 3,000 in 2004. The number grew faster in 2004 than in any of the previous four years (Ziebarth et al., 2005).

There are multiple expectations for public education, according to Levin & Belfield (2005) and RAND (2001), and some expectations are in direct conflict with others. For example, initiatives for more choice with fewer restrictions can interfere with initiatives to provide greater equity. The major expectations are as follows:

1. Freedom of Choice (Choice) – private benefits of education and the liberty to ensure that schools are chosen that are consistent with family preferences.

- Broad definition of education
- Minimal regulation of curriculum, admissions, and other dimensions of school operations
- Comparative information about school choices available to families
- Adequate system of transportation

2. Productive Efficiency (Academic achievement) – Maximization of educational results for any given resource constraint.

3. Equity (Access) – Quest for fairness in access to educational opportunities, resources, and outcomes.

- Equality in access, resources, and educational outcomes
- Schools required to choose some portion of students by lottery, if there are more applicants than openings

4. Social Cohesion (Civic Socialization) – Provision of a common educational experience that will orient all students to grow to adulthood as full participants in the social, political, and economic institutions of our society.

- All students exposed to peers from a variety of backgrounds
- Common elements in curriculum including the possibility of engaging in community service

The research reviewed speaks to how well different types of educational institutions are meeting one or more of these expectations.

CHALLENGES WITH EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Research on charter schools has been limited and confusing. The National Charter School Research Project (NCSRP) was recently formed by a consortium of foundations to better formulate a research agenda for charter schools. However, the Project is too new to have made a difference to date.

One of the challenges associated with the interpretation of any study is that it is difficult for a researcher to ignore personal beliefs and report findings objectively. Decisions about how to report data and about what data to report are often influenced by ideology, consciously or not. When studies are funded and/or conducted by

organizations that have taken a strong stance for or against a particular idea, their position of advocacy needs to be taken into consideration when interpreting the studies. Examples of organizations with stated and advocated positions on charter schools issues are: The Manhattan Institute, The CATO Institute, The American Federation of Teachers, and People for the American Way.

William Howell's 2002 essay reiterates the aforementioned caution by pointing out in his review of seven prominent researchers that "in searching for consensus, these reviews only underscore how much disagreement lingers." Howell's review begins with Stanford University education professor Martin Carnoy's position of interjecting balance into a literature written by researchers who openly support school choice. Duke University economist Helen Ladd contends that the evidence thus far on academic achievement in school choice programs is at best "preliminary" and "does not support the claims of improving education." A middle position is assumed by the lengthy RAND study. Addressing the limitations of the existing empirical research, the RAND report finds that charter schools have achieved isolated and modest gains. Cautiously positive reviews are identified by Brookings Institute scholars Isabel Sawhill and Shannon Smith. Clear performance gains and an overall optimistic conclusion of the research are presented by Paul Teske and Mary Schneider of State University of New York at Stony Brook. Lastly, Jay Greene's findings are uniformly positive. As Howell points out, "while each reviewer and researcher can claim objectivity, they fail because the act of assigning meaning to facts is unavoidably subjective."

Another challenge with charter school research involves the absence of any clear identification of curricular or instructional differences or similarities existing between the

traditional schools and charter schools. While several studies established more equitable comparisons between groups (matched levels of free and reduced lunch eligible students, matched levels of ethnicity) no evidence of matched curricular or instructional comparisons between traditional schools and charter schools was found.

Using aggregates for all charter and all other public schools tends to mask any real differences, as can be seen in the results from Kansas charter schools. In Appendix B, Tables 2 and 3, Kansas' primary-school charters have very high proficiency levels and are very similar in student test results to other public schools. In Table 4, charter high schools show dramatically lower assessment results—as we would expect, given the preponderance of alternative high schools among them. But when the results of all charters—primary as well as secondary—are aggregated in Table 6, the data suggest that in general, reading results in charters are slightly lower than those in other public schools, while math results are somewhat better in charters, especially for females and students with disabilities. These are deceptive conclusions because we are not comparing schools with similar missions, curricula, or designs.

Finally, research design issues present a challenge. It is nearly impossible to have randomized design in any educational research, so it is very difficult to tell if two groups are comparable. There are seldom universal academic measures that are taken by students before the beginning of charter school attendance and then periodically after enrollment. Many students in the United States are very transient, and mobility isn't random. Even when it is possible to initially create a fairly randomized design, it is nearly impossible to keep groups similar over time. Students in charter schools are not representative of students in general. Therefore, their results cannot be generalized to the

total student population. For these reasons, almost all comparisons of students and schools are imperfect and employ complicated statistical tools: tools that can be used to have the same numbers support both positive and negative conclusions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Initially, a total of 85 articles, essays, studies, reviews, and text pertaining to school choice were examined for this literature review. Essays, position papers, and summaries were deleted from further review. Selection criteria for the documents included in this review were guided by the following: (1) identifiable features of scientifically based research and (2) recency of the material[1]. Equally important was an adherence to a balanced representation of the results and interpretations of the data. A full bibliography is listed in the back of this report.

When starting its research, the National Charter School Research Project (NCSRP) looked at findings from other researchers. It discovered that the American Federation of Teachers and Economic Policy Institute concluded that the available findings on charter schools were negative, while the Charter School Leadership Council drew the opposite conclusion; and that each group had excluded some studies from their analyses for various reasons. NCSRP found references related to 41 recent studies (26 in one state) on charter schools. In doing its review, NCSRP was unable to find one of the studies and excluded five others because they were meta-analyses. Results of the NCSRP review were that, whatever the research method used, there are some positive and some negative results. The 35 qualifying studies were described as follows:

[1] At the request of the State Board of Education, studies related solely to vouchers were also removed.

Results of charter school achievement studies done since 2000

Direction of result	Mean-to-mean comparisons, no controls	Multivariable analysis	Regression analysis, randomization, multi-year student scores	Total
Positive	4	3	8	15
Neutral/mixed	4	0	6	10
Negative	5	2	3	10

The reviews done by the Planning and Research Team will be listed in the same order: Positive, neutral/mixed, negative. All reviews are summarized in alphabetical order by authors name in Appendix A.

Positive

In a December 2004 study, Hoxby compared the percentage of charter school students in 3rd through 5th grade performing at or above proficient on state examinations in math and reading to the percentage of other public school students performing at the same levels. Ninety-nine percent of students attending charter schools were included in the study. Hoxby found that students in charter schools did have higher percentages of proficient students for both math and reading, and further that charter schools are more effective the longer they are in operation and the higher the percentage of per-pupil funding they receive. She also noted that no statistically significant differences were found in the proficiency levels of charter school and public school students in Kansas. (See Kansas proficiency comparisons in Appendix B.) Hoxby mentioned three major limitations to the study. First, there were no pretest measures to show how students attending charter schools had performed before enrolling in the charter schools, making it unclear whether attendance at the charter school or some other factor (such as parental involvement in education or prior achievement) is behind the difference in test scores. Second, Hoxby matched the charter schools to public schools based mainly on

geographic location. Since students are often bussed from long distances to attend charter schools, assuming that the students at the schools would otherwise be attending the nearest public school might not be accurate. Finally, the study excluded results from charter schools that target at-risk or gifted students, but made no effort to exclude results from students in the regular public schools that may be at-risk or gifted.

A study by Hoxby and Rockoff (November 2004) used "lotteried out" students as a control group for the "lotteried in" students in the largest charter school system in the United States: Chicago. The authors mentioned many problems with evaluating charters, including the fact that they are so heterogeneous. An evaluation of any charter school only generalizes to others with similar management and student populations. Identifying a good comparison group is also problematic. Students may apply because they are already doing badly, they are exceptionally able, they are average but their public school is below average, parents want to intervene in a positive way, or parents are motivated to intervene in a dysfunctional way. Although using "lotteried in" and "lotteried out" students is like randomized design, students who are "lotteried out" may choose to attend somewhere else or be admitted later and those who are "lotteried in" may never show up. Charter schools may have different effects depending on when a student enrolls, how long a student stays, and how long the school has been in existence. Many students apply for charter school in kindergarten, so they have no prior achievement that can be included in the analyses.

To control as many variables as possible, charter schools studied were young but not new start ups and students in charter and regular public schools were matched as closely as possible. For students who applied in kindergarten through grade five, the

study found positive and statistically significant improvement in math test scores of 6 to 7 points. There was no effect on students who applied in grades six through eight. For reading in the early grades, charter school effects were positive by 5 to 6 percentile points.

Greene, Forster, & Winters (2003) reported that charter schools outperformed regular schools in math tests by .08 standard deviations and in reading by .04 standard deviations when compared nationally. Limitations of the study included the absence of pretest measures to show how students attending charter schools had performed before enrolling in the charter schools, the matching of charter schools to public schools based mainly on geographic location, and the exclusion of results from charter schools that target at-risk or gifted students without the effort to remove results from similar student groups in the regular public schools.

Neutral/Mixed

Interviews of teachers in the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) charter schools in the Bronx, Washington, D.C., and Houston indicated that teachers referred students to KIPP who were more able than their peers; and that teachers thought that the most motivated and educationally sophisticated parents were those likely to take the initiative to pull children out of the public school and enroll in KIPP at the end of 4th grade. Teachers said they tended to talk with very supportive parents and with intact families about enrolling their students in KIPP. Thus, KIPP's success may have more to do with the students and families enrolled in the program than with the quality of the program (Carnoy, Jacobsen, Mishel, and Rothstein, 2005).

Cullen, Jacob & Levitt (2005) used a quasi-experimental design with a somewhat random selection of students ("lotteried in" vs. "lotteried out" students) in Chicago public magnet schools. Comparisons were made between 8th grade lottery winners and lottery losers. Scores of achievement and graduation rates were obtained for these students when they were in grades 9-12. Ordinary least squares regression analysis was used to test group differences. Students who won lotteries to high achieving schools had marginally increased reading scores at 10th grade. For students who won lotteries to value added schools, there were marginally improved English scores at 9th grade and significantly increased geometry scores at 10th grade. Students who won lotteries to highly popular choice schools made significant reading score gains in 10th grade. Within school types there were no differences in graduation rates; however, when school types were pooled there were significantly fewer lottery-winning students who graduated or remained in the Chicago public school system. Limitations to the randomization in the study included the following: students who lost the lottery were sometimes able to enroll in their school of choice through a different program; students could be accepted into a different school of choice after not being selected into a school using a lottery; and students could apply to multiple schools using lotteries and subsequently win the lottery at more than one school during a school year.

Cohort analyses by Miron (2005), examining test score data for the same groups over time, showed that students in charter schools outperformed students in the public school district hosting the charter school on the Connecticut Mastery Test. However, trend analyses comparing consecutive groups of different students at the same grade level on the Connecticut Academic Performance Test showed host districts with higher

average scores than charter schools. Limitations of the study included the inability to track individual students over time, the newness of the charter schools involved, the lack of true longitudinal measures, the small sample sizes, and the inherent differences between the charter schools and the public schools chosen for comparisons.

Based on a multi-dimensional approach--including a principals' survey, case studies, and analysis of secondary data sources in California's charter school system—Zimmer, et al. of RAND (2003) found that charter students are more likely to be African American, less likely to be Hispanic or Asian, and less likely to be special education students than other public school students. Students performed comparably on most state examinations. Charter schools reported having more control, used fewer resources per student, had more class time devoted to non-core subjects, and had less experienced staff than did comparable public schools.

Solmon, Paark, & Garcia (2001) used longitudinal data from the years 1997-1999, as opposed to cross-sectional data, in their study of charter schools. Comparable student groups between charter schools and traditional public schools were achieved by "blocking." The specifics involved in the "blocking" process included student scores on the Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition (SAT9), reading and math quartiles, grade level, and traditional public school of attendance. The statewide sample size from grades 3-12 was 102,724: 13.6 percent from charter schools. The first strategy used to evaluate the effectiveness of charter school attendance was an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). The second strategy introduced both fixed and random effects panel models. There was not significant improvement in reading for charter school students compared to public school students during the first year of charter school attendance. Mathematics results

showed a significant disadvantage for charter school students during the first year. For the second and third years of charter school attendance there were significant gains in reading but no significant gains in math when compared to regular public school students.

Negative

The National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) analysis of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) data showed that students attending charter schools had about the same achievement levels as other public school children. Charter school students generally scored lower in each disaggregated group, but not significantly lower. The researchers found negative impacts of enrolling in a charter school that were substantially larger than the negative impacts of changing schools or making the transition from elementary school to junior high. Negative effects were larger for new charter schools. However, negative effects were statistically significant even after five years of operation.

Hanushek, Kain, Rivkin, & Branch (2005) followed four consecutive cohorts for the period 1996 to 2002, focusing on student achievement gains in grades 4 through 7. For each cohort there were more than 200,000 students in over 3,000 public schools including over 200 charter schools. The criteria referenced were the math and reading tests of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), which were transformed into standardized scores. Student demographics including ethnicity, gender, and subsidized school lunch eligibility were included in the analyses as were charter school years in operation. A series of linear probability models were used to estimate parental decisions involving exiting charter and regular schools. Student achievement results during the initial start-up years (1-3) of charter schools were lower than those in regular public

schools. After 4 years of operation, student scores in charter schools were the same as or slightly above (although not significantly above) those in other public schools.

An individual level panel data set was used by Bifulco & Ladd (2004) to evaluate the impact of charter schools in North Carolina on the math and reading performance of students in grades 4 through 8. Student level fixed-effects models together with auxiliary analysis were used. Individual student level panels were assembled for five cohorts of students: third graders in 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, and 2000. Students within each cohort were followed through the eighth grade. The average cohort size was 99,727. The number of students observed who spent at least one year in a charter school was 8,745. Only students who had three or more observations (assessments) could be included because the research design requires gains observed at least once in a charter school and at least once in a traditional public school. The design was possible because North Carolina has been testing all students in grades 3-8 in math and reading since 1992-93 and students have unique identifiers that allow researchers to follow them over time. Charter school students' gains were nearly .10 standard deviations smaller in reading and .16 standard deviations smaller in math than gains those same students had when enrolled in regular public schools.

CONCLUSIONS

As this review shows, the research conducted on charter schools is inconclusive. We are left with two main questions: (1) What research is needed to find better answers to policy questions? (2) Is any information available from the research conducted so far that can help Kansas provide successful charter schools?

Additional Research Needs

As with any complex issue, the need for additional and ongoing research on charter schools is crucial. In addition to continued research on the effectiveness of charter schools in terms of student achievement, for example, expanded studies dealing with charter school autonomy, innovation, accountability, and relationship to traditional school change are necessary to more fully understand the potential and limits of the charter school idea. The Thomas B. Fordham Institute has developed a charter school typology consisting of 10 charter school types and 55 sub-types. Given the extensive range of charter school types and targeted student populations served within these schools, research into the unique and specific issues of each type holds important promise for stakeholders at all levels.

Good research designs are critical to learning more about the impact of any education initiative, but they are limited by the difficulty of randomization, the variety of achievement measures used, student attrition, and design drift. Every study reviewed for this paper had substantial limitations. Longitudinal field trials with randomized designs are the strongest studies, but even these studies should be vetted by independent scholars to minimize researcher bias. Student background characteristics are very complex and aren't adequately represented by race, school lunch status, and gender. Better variables are needed, and they should be included in the analyses simultaneously. Growth scores are fairer estimates of school effectiveness than point-in-time scores, but attrition must be carefully monitored to ensure the students for whom multiple scores are not available do not significantly differ from the students that remain in the study. The instruments that are the sources of the scores must be comparable. Schools and programs that are new or

transitioning and students who transition from one school to another generally have a period of time in which achievement gains are not as great. Therefore, transitions should be included as variables. Finally, consider the goals, curricula, and grade configurations of schools when doing analyses and match schools with like schools.

Each of the aforementioned research considerations is applicable to a deeper understanding of the viability of charter schools in Kansas. As evidenced by the review of the research presented in this document, the absence of easily generalizable findings and the inconsistency of the results place even higher demand upon investigating the complexities of the issues within the context of Kansas.

Characteristics of Successful Programs

Whether or not charter schools are successful seems to depend on a state's charter school law (adequate provisions for autonomy and accountability and at least as much money as other schools for operations and facilities); whether the charter school is a conversion or start-up school (conversions might contain the same staff and problems as before); and efforts to ensure that the needed knowledge, resources, and skills will be provided to the charter school. Sufficient time is needed to hire new leaders and staff, engage students and parents and community members in the planning, and make improvements to buildings. It is very difficult to close a charter school after it has been opened, even if it is not performing well, since many are very popular with parents. It is much better to carefully plan, support, and closely monitor charter schools to help them be successful than to allow many to open and then close those that don't live up to their promise (Ziebarth & Wohlstetter, 2005).

The goals of the education system seen throughout the literature are choice, efficiency, equity, and social cohesion. Often, when one of the goals becomes a priority, another of the goals becomes more difficult to achieve. How might policymakers (a) maximize the likelihood that charter schools will be academically and financially successful, (b) maximize the likelihood that systemic effects on non-choosers will not be negative, (c) ensure that a substantial number of autonomous schools will be available for all students, and (d) ensure that students become responsible citizens? The best way to ensure all of these is to "develop new methods for evaluating education outcomes and to assemble high-quality evidence on the long-term programmatic effects of different programs, serving different populations, in different geographic settings" (Howell, 2002). Based on the evidence currently available, RAND presents a number of recommendations for those considering charter schools. The recommendations have been placed under the four goals of education mentioned previously in this report.

- Equity
  - Require that all participating schools practice open admissions and lottery systems (if there are more applicants than slots available)
  - Target specific students, especially those most in need
  - Provide generous funding, including supplemental funding, for students with special needs
- Efficiency
  - Do not expect charter programs to create substantial savings if they are to provide high-quality choices to a substantial number of children
  - Avoid over-regulation
  - Give public schools the autonomy they need to perform in a competitive educational market
  - Enforce requirements for student achievement testing
  - Impose consequences on schools that do not perform at acceptable levels
  - Develop a statewide student-level record system that can track the performance of individual students and allow needed program evaluation/research
- Choice
  - Disseminate information to parents about mission, values, curriculum, and outcomes of each school

    - Create multiple chartering authorities
    - Actively inform parents about schools and school effectiveness
- Social Cohesion
    - Assess state curriculum standards
    - Expose students to peers from variety of backgrounds

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APPENDIX A

CHARTER SCHOOL RESEARCH SUMMARY TABLE

CHARTER SCHOOL RESEARCH SUMMARY TABLE

Authors	Title of Study	Type of Study	Questions Addressed	Direction of Findings
Bifulco & Ladd, 2004	The Impacts of Charter Schools on Student Achievement: Evidence from North Carolina	Quasi-experimental value added study, using individual panel data (3rd graders in 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, & 2000) & controlling for student transitions between schools	Do students who attend charter schools make larger achievement gains, on average, than they would have in the absence of charter schools? Do students who attend traditional public schools located near charter schools, and thus subject to competition from charter schools, make larger achievement gains than they would have in the absence of charter schools?	Charter school students' gains are nearly .10 standard deviations smaller in reading and .16 standard deviations smaller in math than gains those same students had when enrolled in public schools; results for students in new charter schools are more negative A little more than 1 percent of students are lost to charter schools; charter school competition slightly reduces student reading test score gains in schools located within 2.5 miles of a charter school and has no effect on gains in schools located between 2.5 and 10 miles; there are no sig. differences in math
Carnoy, Jacobsen, Mishel, and Rothstein, 2005	The Charter School Dust-Up: Examining the Evidence on Enrollment and Achievement	Qualitative study using teacher interview data	What types of students do teachers refer to Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP)?	Teachers in the Bronx, Washington, D.C., and Houston refer students to KIPP who are more able than their peers; they tended to talk with very supportive parents and with intact families about enrolling their students in KIPP; thus, KIPPs success may have more to do with the students and families enrolled in the program than with the quality of the program

Authors	Title of Study	Type of Study	Questions Addressed	Direction of Findings
Cullen, Jacob & Levitt, 2005	The Effect of School Choice on Student Outcomes: Evidence from Randomized Lotteries	Quasi-experimental using lottery random selection into Chicago public magnet schools; comparisons between students who were lottery winners and lottery losers in grade 8; ordinary least squares regression analysis used to test group differences	Do students who choose to apply to lottery schools with higher average achievement scores and less violence score better on school performance measures? Do students who choose to apply to value added lottery schools score better on school performance measures? Do students who choose to apply to high popularity lottery schools score better on school performance measures?	No significant differences in reading, English, and math at 9th grade; marginal ($p < .10$) support for reading at 10th grade; no significant differences at end of 4 years for graduation Marginal ($p < .10$) support for English in 9th grade; significant ($p < .05$) results for geometry at 10th grade; no significant differences at end of 4 years for graduation No significant differences in achievement at 9th grade; significant ($p < .05$) support for reading scores at 10th grade; no significant differences at end of 4 years for graduation For all types of schools combined lottery winners do not graduate or leave the Chicago public school system at higher rates than do non-lottery winners (significant at $p < .05$)
Gill, Timpane, Ross, & Brewer (RAND), 2001	Rhetoric versus Reality: What We Know and What We Need To Know about Vouchers and Charter Schools	Literature Review/Meta-Analysis	How effective are voucher and charter programs overall? Will vouchers/charters promote the academic skills, knowledge, and attainment of their students?	Empirical evidence not conclusive -Small-scale, experimental privately funded voucher programs targeted to low-income students suggest a modest achievement benefit

Authors	Title of Study	Type of Study	Questions Addressed	Direction of Findings
				for African-American students after one to two years in voucher schools; other racial/ethnic students have not benefited from or been harmed by vouchers -Charter school performance improves after the first year of operation; however, studies do not suggest that charter school achievement outcomes are dramatically different than that of conventional public schools
			What do voucher/charter parents think of their children's schools?	Parental satisfaction levels are high in virtually all voucher and charter programs studied, although they decline slightly in the second year; satisfaction remains substantially higher than those of public-school comparison groups
			Are voucher/charter programs available to those who presently lack such options, notably low-income (frequently nonwhite) residents of inner cities? Do they provide any options for students with special needs?	Programs explicitly designed with income qualifications have succeeded in placing low-income, low-achieving, and minority students in voucher schools; in most choice programs, students with disabilities and students with poorly educated parents are somewhat underrepresented; education tax subsidy programs are disproportionately used by middle- and upper-income families

Authors	Title of Study	Type of Study	Questions Addressed	Direction of Findings
			Do vouchers/charters increase or reduce the racial and economic integration of students?	Targeted voucher programs may modestly increase racial integration; on average, charter schools have racial/ethnic distributions that fall within the range of distributions of local public schools; in some states, however, many charter schools serve racially homogeneous populations
			Do vouchers/charters contribute to the socialization of responsible, tolerant, democratically active citizens?	There is virtually no empirical evidence about the civic socialization effects of voucher and charter schools
Greene, Forster, & Winters, 2003	Apples to Apples: An Evaluation of Charter Schools Serving General Student Populations	Comparison of test score improvements in eleven states over a one-year period	Do charter schools serving "untargeted" populations outperform regular public schools serving the general student population?	Charter schools outperform regular schools in math tests by .08 standard deviations and in reading by .04 standard deviations
Hanushek, Kain, Rivkin, & Branch, 2005	Charter School Quality and Parental Decision Making with School Choice	Quasi-experimental value added study, using individual panel data	On average are charter schools better or worse than regular public schools in raising achievement?	Student achievement results during the initial start-up years (1-3) of charter schools are lower than those in regular public schools; after 4 years scores same as or slightly above (although not significantly above) those of public schools
			Are some charter schools better than others in raising student achievement?	Variation of quality of charter schools is similar to that in the public school sector
			Do parents who select a charter	Charter schools with lower

Authors	Title of Study	Type of Study	Questions Addressed	Direction of Findings
			school tend to remove children if the quality is low?	quality have higher exit rates than low quality public schools
Hoxby, 2004	Achievement in Charter Schools and Regular Public Schools in the United States: Understanding the Difference	Statistical comparison of state assessment scores for 99% of charter school students nationwide compared to students in nearby public schools with similar racial/ethnic and economic populations	How do students attending charter schools perform on state proficiency examinations compared to students in regular public schools?	Higher percentage of charter school students perform at or above proficient on state exams than public school students; however, because there is no pretest measure showing how the charter school students performed before attending charter schools, there is no way to know if higher performance is due to charter school attendance or due to some other preexisting difference. Students in charter schools who had been in operation longer had higher proficiency levels than students in newer charter schools
Hoxby & Rockoff, 2004	The Impact of Charter Schools on Student Achievement	Quasi-experimental, using lotteried-in and lotteried-out students as comparison groups to achieve some randomization; regression analysis controlling for grade entry, age of charter school, and time in charter school effects; point in time assessment with	How does the achievement of Chicago public school students in charter schools compare to the achievement of other Chicago public school children? How do charter schools affect the student population of the regular public schools?	Positive and statistically significant reading and math score improvement for charter school K-5 students Charters draw students who are more likely to be Hispanic and bilingual than average CPS students, but otherwise they are typical of the CPS population

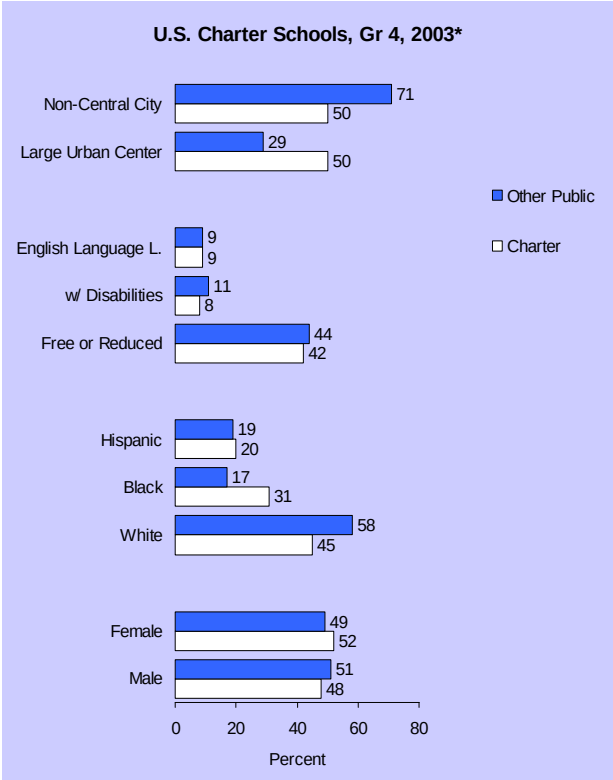
Authors	Title of Study	Type of Study	Questions Addressed	Direction of Findings
		prior test results included in analysis, if available		
Miron, 2005	Evaluating the Performance of Charter Schools in Connecticut	Trend analysis comparing consecutive groups of different students at same grade level; Cohort analysis examining test score data for same group over time	What are the performance gains made by charter school students on standardized tests relative to gains made by traditional public school students?	Cohort comparisons show charter schools outperforming the comparison host district on the Connecticut Mastery Test; trend data from the Connecticut Academic Performance Test showed host districts with higher average scores than charter schools
Solmon, Paark, & Garcia, 2001	Does Charter School Attendance Improve Test Scores? The Arizona Results	Matched group comparison with three-year longitudinal study	Does attendance in a charter schools improve test scores?	Results on reading assessments indicate no significant improvement during 1st year of charter school attendance compared to traditional schools; significant improvement in reading results are gained by 2nd & 3rd year of attendance for charter students. Mathematics results show significant disadvantage in 1st year of charter attendance; no significant difference in 2nd & 3rd years of attendance
Zimmer, Buddin, Chau, Faley, Gill, Guarino, Hamilton, Krop, McCaffrey, Sandler, Brewer (2003)	Charter School Operations and Performance: Evidence from California	Multi-dimensional approach including principals' survey, case studies, and analysis of secondary data sources	What population of students attend charter schools? Is student achievement higher in charter schools than in	Charter students are more likely to be African American and less likely to be Hispanic or Asian, and also have fewer special education students Charter schools generally have comparable or slightly

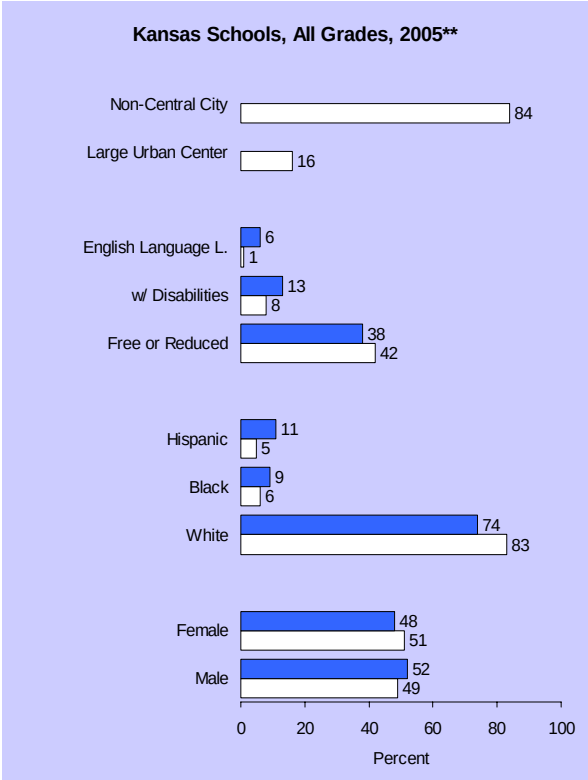
Authors	Title of Study	Type of Study	Questions Addressed	Direction of Findings
			conventional public schools?	lower test scores than do conventional public schools
			What oversight and support do the chartering authorities provide?	Charter schools report greater control than conventional public schools over decision making
			How do charter schools differ from conventional public schools in terms of their operation including finances, academic environment, and staffing?	Charter schools are not homogenous; thus there is no single charter school effect; charter schools use fewer resources per student, have more class time in non-core subjects, and have less experienced staff than public schools

APPENDIX B

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Table 1: Who Attends Charter Schools?





*Source: U.S. Dept. of Education, NAEP 2003 Grade 4, Mathematics Charter School Pilot Study. All percentages rounded to nearest whole number. Weighted samples of 3,238 charter students and 188,201 other public school students.

**Source: Kansas Dept. of Education, 2005 enrollment data, Principal's Building Reports. Urban classifications of Kansas public schools unavailable. There were 1,361 charter students and 448,961 other public school students.

Data Observations:

- Compared to national charters, Kansas charters are largely based in small towns and rural communities and have few African-American or Hispanic students.
- In both the national and Kansas samples, there are fewer students with disabilities and fewer boys in charter schools.

Table 2: How Well Do Charter School Students Do on Assessments?

Reading Assessment Results, Charters vs. Other Publics
Grade 4 (NAEP data) & Grade 5 (Kansas data)

	NAEP* % Basic or Above		Kansas** % Proficient or Above	
	Charters	Other Publics	Charters	Other Publics
All Students	58	62	79	78
Male	55	58	76	78
Female	60	65	83	79
White	73	74	80	82
Black	37	39	**	62
Hispanic	45	43	none	67
Free or Reduced	39	45	63	69
Non-Poor	72	76	87	85
w/ Disabilities	N/A	N/A	**	60
ELL	N/A	N/A	none	67

*Source: U.S. Dept. of Education, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2003 Grade 4, Reading Charter School Pilot Study. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

**Source: Kansas Dept of Education, 2005 State Reading Assessments, Grade 5. For charter schools, the number of African-American as well as Students with Disabilities with valid assessments were less than 10, so these cells were suppressed to protect student confidentiality. There were no Hispanic or ELL students tested.

Table 3

Math Assessment Results, Charters vs. Other Publics

NAEP & Kansas data

	NAEP* % Basic or Above		Kansas** % Proficient or Above	
	Charters	Other Publics	Charters	Other Publics
All Students	69	76	88	86
Male	69	77	91	86
Female	68	75	87	85
White	84	87	88	90
Black	51	54	**	70
Hispanic	58	62	**	72
Free or Reduced	53	62	87	78
Non-Poor	81	88	90	91
w/ Disabilities	N/A	N/A	**	75
ELL	N/A	N/A	none	64

*Source: U.S. Dept. of Education, NAEP 2003 Grade 4, Math Charter School Pilot Study. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

**Source: Kansas Dept of Education, 2005 State Math Assessments, Grade 4. For charter schools, the number of African-Americans, Students with Disabilities, and Hispanics with valid assessments were less than 10, so these cells were suppressed to protect student confidentiality. There were no ELL students tested in the charter schools.

Table 4
Kansas High School Assessment Results,
Charters vs. Other Publics

	Reading* % Proficient or Above		Math* % Proficient or Above	
	Charters	Other Publics	Charters	Other Publics
All Students	35	65	32	52
Male	35	63	24	54
Female	35	67	45	51
White	33	69	32	58
Black	**	37	**	23
Hispanic	**	47	**	26
Free or Reduced	40	49	42	33
Non-Poor	30	70	25	60
w/ Disabilities	none	35	**	26
ELL	none	52	none	13

*Source: Kansas Dept of Education, 2005 State Assessments. For charter schools, the number of African-Americans, Students with Disabilities, and Hispanics with valid assessments were less than 10, so these cells were suppressed with ** to protect student confidentiality. There were no ELL students tested in the charter schools.

Data Observations:

- Disaggregated by grade, the number of Kansas charter-school students is very small. Therefore, even small changes in the populations served, or in charter-school designs, could result in large changes in assessment results.

- The Kansas charter results, like those of the regular public schools, show good results in the early grades, and markedly worse results in the high school grades. This seems to be best explained by the differences in the charter schools' missions: a high-proportion of charter high schools are alternative schools serving at-risk students. The differences in demographics can be seen in the table below.

Table 5

Kansas Charter Schools' Demographics:

Primary Differs from Secondary

	4th Grade, Percentages		10th Grade, Percentages	
	Charters	Other Publics	Charters	Other Publics
Mobile Students	1	5	73	5
Not Tested	0	0	0	0
Male	41	51	57	52
Female	59	49	43	48
White	94	74	70	79
Black	1	8	13	7
Hispanic	1	12	3	8
Free or Reduced	38	41	47	29
Non-Poor	62	59	53	71
w/ Disabilities	12	14	7	11
ELL	0	7	0	2

Source: Kansas Dept of Education, 2005 State Math Assessments. Percentages are based on students eligible for state assessments. All have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Data Observations:

- Kansas primary charter students have a higher proportion of white students—by 20 points—and of females—by 10 points—than regular public schools.

- Charter secondary schools serve a radically different population, with a male majority of 57 percent and a much higher proportion of low-income students: 18 points higher than the regular public schools.

- Mobile students—students who enter school after September 20th—also illustrate the change in populations served by primary and secondary charter schools. Fourth-grade charter school students—with only 1 percent registering late—are more stable than those in the regular public schools. Since mobile students do not count in proficiency calculations for adequate yearly progress, our current accountability system cannot evaluate the academic performance of alternative schools accurately.

Table 6

Kansas Assessment Results, Charters vs. Other Publics

Data Aggregated Across All Grades

	Reading* % Proficient or Above		Math* % Proficient or Above	
	Charters	Other Publics	Charters	Other Publics
All Students	70	74	72	69
Male	71	72	67	70
Female	70	76	78	68
White	74	78	76	74
Black	**	55	**	46
Hispanic	**	61	**	52
Free or Reduced	58	63	70	57
Non-Poor	78	79	74	76
w/ Disabilities	57	51	69	51
ELL	none	63	**	47

*Source: Kansas Dept of Education, 2005 State Assessments. For charter schools, the African-Americans, Hispanics, and in math, English Language Learners, with valid assessments were less than 10, so these cells were suppressed with ** to protect student confidentiality. In reading, there were no ELL students tested in the charter schools.

Data Observations:

- Aggregating all charter data obscures the high-level performance of the primary-school charters (see Tables 2 and 3) and the dramatically lower performance of secondary charter schools. The charter high schools are predominantly alternative schools serving high-risk students. An analysis of their performance, at a minimum, would require matching with comparative student populations and statistical techniques that control for the influence of background characteristics.

NAEP Survey Data

As part of its recent study of charter schools,[2] the U.S. Department of Education researchers surveyed the principals of the 150 charter schools participating in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). They were then able to link the survey results with student results on NAEP assessments. While the data is based on a relatively small and diverse sample and must be interpreted with caution, some of the survey responses may inform questions before the Board:

Does student performance differ by charter-school oversight?

charter-granting authority	% of students tested	% at Basic or Above
school district	49	65
state board of ed	27	52
university	15	45
state charter-granting agency	6	60

On all charts, basic or above should be lower case

Does student performance differ by charter-school focus?

program focus	% of students tested	% at Basic or Above
comprehensive curriculum	59	56
specialized curriculum	24	59
specialized ed philosophy	5	53
specialized values	11	63

Foreign language immersion or math-science focus would be examples of specialized curricula; Montessori or open schools of specialized educational philosophies; religious or character-focused of specialized values.

Does student performance differ by charter-school independence?

	% of students tested	% at Basic or Above
part of a school district	55	64
stand-alone	45	52

[2] U.S. Dept of Education, Institute of Education Sciences (2005) *America's Charter Schools: Results from the NAEP 2003 Pilot Study*, (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics) NCES 2005-456. Copies of the report can be downloaded at: http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/studies/charter/ . Copies of the survey can be downloaded at http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/studies/charter/results.asp .

APPENDIX C

CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZERS/SPONSERS[3]

[3] In addition to sponsors, ECS has collected data (by state) on waivers, state policies, and funding for charter schools. The information is available at http://mb2.ecs.org/reports/Report.aspx?id=113.

Charter School Authorizers/Sponsors

At the present time, 40 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico have enacted charter school laws, so this database only contains information for them. It does not contain any information for the 10 states that have not enacted charter school laws.

	Who can approve charter schools?
Alaska : Charter Schools	Both the local school board and the state board of education must approve application.
Arizona : Charter Schools	Local school board, the state board of education or the state board for charter schools.
Arkansas : Charter Schools	For both conversion and open enrollment charter schools, both the local school board and the state board of education must approve the application.
California : Charter Schools	Local school board or county board of education. The state board of education may approve charter schools operating in multiple sites throughout the state. If all sites are within a given county, however, the petition for the charter must go to the county board.
Colorado : Charter Schools	A charter school applicant may submit an application to the local school board or, if the school district in which the charter school is to be located has not retained exclusive authority to authorize charter schools from the state board of education, to the state charter school institute. The state board of education automatically grants exclusive authority to authorize charter schools to: school districts where the total pupil enrollment is less than 3,000 pupils; school districts where the percentage of pupils who are eligible for free or reduced-cost lunch and who enrolled in charter schools authorized by the school district is greater than the percentage that is one percentage point below the overall percentage of pupils eligible for free or reduced-cost lunch who are enrolled in the school district; or school districts that annually certify to the state board of education that the total number of students enrolled in charter schools authorized by the school district, or the maximum number of students allowed to be enrolled pursuant to charter school contracts entered into by the school district, whichever is greater, divided by the district pupil enrollment for that budget year and reflected as a percentage, exceeds by more than three percentage points the percentage of students enrolled in charter schools statewide.
Connecticut : Charter Schools	Local charter schools must be approved by the local or regional board of education and the state board of education. State charter schools must be approved by the state board of education.
Delaware : Charter Schools	For conversions, local school boards. For start-ups, local school boards or the state secretary of education and the state board of education.
District of Columbia : Charter Schools	District of Columbia Board of Education and the District of Columbia Public Charter School Board.
Florida : Charter Schools	Local school boards. Also, state universities may grant a charter to a lab school and community college district boards of trustees may grant a charter to a charter technical career center.
Georgia : Charter Schools	Both the local school board and the state board of education must approve application.

Hawaii : Charter Schools	State board of education, upon recommendation of the new century charter school review panel.
Idaho : Charter Schools	Only local school boards may approve conversion charter schools. Local school boards and the state public charter school commission may approve start-up charter schools.
Illinois : Charter Schools	Local school boards. Also, a local school board shall, whenever petitioned to do so by 5% or more of the voters of a school district or districts identified in a charter school proposal, order submitted to the voters thereof at a regularly scheduled election the question of whether a new charter school shall be established. If the majority of voters approve the referendum, the state board of education shall enter into a contract with the charter school.
Indiana : Charter Schools	Local school boards, public universities that offer a four-year baccalaureate degree or persons assigned under the direction of the university's board (although a university may not sponsor a charter school in Marion County until after June 30, 2005), or the mayor of Indianapolis, upon approval of a majority of the members of the city's legislative body. Also, before granting a charter under which more than 50% of the students in a district will attend a charter school, a local school board must receive the approval of the state department of education.
Iowa : Charter Schools	Both the local school board and the state board of education must approve a charter application.
Kansas : Charter Schools	Both the local school board and the state board of education must approve a charter application.
Louisiana : Charter Schools	Local school boards and the state board of education.
Maryland : Charter Schools	Local school boards. However, under certain conditions specified in the state's charter school law, the state board of education can approve the restructuring of a public school as a charter school.
Massachusetts : Charter Schools	For commonwealth charter schools, the state board of education. For Horace Mann charter schools, the local school board, local teachers union and state board of education.
Michigan : Charter Schools	Local school boards, intermediate school boards, community colleges or state public universities, all subject to state board of education review for compliance with law.
Minnesota : Charter Schools	Local school boards, intermediate school boards, cooperatives, nonprofit organizations, public postsecondary institutions or private colleges, all subject to approval by the state commissioner of education.
Mississippi : Charter Schools	Both the local school board and the state department of education must approve application.
Missouri : Charter Schools	The Kansas City and St. Louis school boards, a community college in the Kansas City and St. Louis school districts or a public four-year college or university located in the Kansas City and St. Louis school districts or in a county adjacent to the county in which the districts are located with an approved teacher education program that meets regional or national standards of accreditation. If a charter is approved by a sponsor, it is submitted to the state board of education, which may disapprove the granting of the charter within a specified time period.
Nevada : Charter Schools	A local school board may apply to the state department of education for authorization to sponsor charter schools within the school district. A local school board's application must be approved by the state department of education before the local school board may sponsor a charter school. A charter school

	application must be approved by the state department of education and a local school board. A charter school that is formed exclusively to serve special education students must be approved by the state board of education.
New Hampshire : Charter Schools	In one route, the local school board and the state department of education must approve the application. In a second route, in place between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2013, only the state board of education must approve the application.
New Jersey : Charter Schools	The state commissioner of education.
New Mexico : Charter Schools	Local school boards.
New York : Charter Schools	Local school boards and the Chancellor of the New York City Public Schools may approve conversions and start-ups. The State University of New York board of trustees and the State Board of Regents may approve start-ups. The New York State Board of Regents must also approve any charter application approved by another entity.
North Carolina : Charter Schools	Local school boards, the University of North Carolina or the state board of education. Charter schools approved by local school boards and the University of North Carolina must also be approved by the state board of education.
Ohio : Charter Schools	For conversion charter schools, local school boards. For start-up charter schools in "big eight" school districts, "academic emergency" school districts, "academic watch" school districts and school districts that are part of the pilot project area: local school boards; boards of joint vocational school districts; boards of educational service centers; state universities, as approved by the state department of education; federally tax-exempt entities, as approved by the state department of education; or, when another authorizer fails to comply with its obligation as a sponsor, the state department of education.
Oklahoma : Charter Schools	Charter schools shall only be sponsored by a school district or an area vocational-technical school district in districts with an average daily membership of 5,000 or more and which all or part of the school district is located in a county having more than 500,000 residents or in a county which is contiguous with a county having more than 500,000 residents, provided no charter school shall be chartered in School District I029 in County No. 14 and School District I027 in County No. 9.
Oregon : Charter Schools	Local school boards.
Pennsylvania : Charter Schools	Local school boards. Two or more local school boards may grant regional charters.
Puerto Rico : Charter Schools	Education Reform Institute.
Rhode Island : Charter Schools	State board of regents, after charter school has been approved by local school board or state commissioner of elementary and secondary education.
South Carolina : Charter Schools	An applicant must first submit an application to the state-level charter school advisory committee, who determines whether the application is in compliance. If so, the application is forwarded to the local school board, who then determines whether or not to approve the application.
Tennessee : Charter Schools	Local school boards.
Texas : Charter Schools	Local school boards for school district-approved charters. State board of education for open-enrollment charters.

Utah : Charter Schools	Local school boards and the state charter school board, subject to state board of education approval.
Virginia : Charter Schools	Local school board. Two or more local school boards can sponsor a regional charter school.
Wisconsin : Charter Schools	Outside of Milwaukee, local school boards. In addition, the University of Wisconsin-Parkside may sponsor one charter school. In Milwaukee, the local school board, city of Milwaukee, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee or Milwaukee Area Technical College.
Wyoming : Charter Schools	Local school boards.

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Regarding level playing field:

Evaluation of the Public Charter Schools Program: Final Report

Charter schools are public schools that operate under a contract (or "charter"). The expectation is that these schools meet the terms of their charter or face closure by their authorizing bodies. As public schools, charter schools must also meet the accountability requirements of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB).

Federal support for charter schools began in 1995 with the authorization of the Public Charter Schools Program (PCSP), administered by the U.S. Department of Education (ED). The PCSP funds the state grant program discussed in this report, supports charter school research and demonstration programs and underwrites national charter school conferences.

The charter school sector includes a diverse array of schools categorized as newly created or converted from previous status as public or private schools. Although these schools are subject to the terms of an individual state's charter school legislation, all charter school laws require that a designated body--the charter school authorizer--hold a school accountable for particular outcomes through the school's individualized contract. Further, flexibility (freedom from many policies and regulations affecting traditional public schools) and autonomy (control over decisions) are central to this educational reform. This is the basic context in which the charter school movement has evolved and in which the PCSP operates.

Based on three years of data (collected in school years 1999-2000, 2000-01 and 2001-02), the national evaluation of the PCSP found that:

- PCSP money is the most prevalent source of start-up funding available to charter schools. Nearly two-thirds have received federal PCSP funds during their start-up phase. Charter schools primarily use PCSP funds to purchase technology and curricular and instructional materials, as well as to fund professional development activities.

- Charter schools are more likely to serve minority and low-income students than traditional public schools but less likely to serve students in special education.
- Charter schools, by design, have greater autonomy over their curriculums, budgets, educational philosophies, and teaching staff than do traditional public schools. Because some state charter school laws allow schools flexibility in hiring practices, charter schools as an overall group are less likely than traditional public schools to employ teachers meeting state certification standards.
- Charter schools rarely face formal sanctions (revocation or nonrenewal). Furthermore, authorizing bodies impose sanctions on charter schools because of problems related to compliance with regulations and school finances rather than student performance. Authorizers have difficulty closing schools that are having problems.
- During the time period examined by this study, little difference exists between the accountability requirements for charter schools and traditional public schools.

Charter schools do not automatically have flexibility with respect to complying with state and federal regulations and often share authority over key decisions with their authorizers. Only 37 percent of charter school states automatically allow waivers of state regulations for charter schools. More commonly, charter schools must request specific waivers from the state. Few states (less than five) exempted charter schools from student assessment requirements in 2001-02.

In theory, charter schools enjoy flexibility or school-level control over key decisions not available to the typical school in exchange for accountability for specified outcomes. In reality, the autonomy of charter schools is limited by state policies, as well as by relationships with authorizers, education management organizations (EMOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs). Only 37 percent of states with charter schools granted them automatic waivers from state policies and regulations in 2001-02, but 54 percent waived regulations on selected policies or allowed charter schools to request waivers on a case-by-case basis. Nine percent did not permit any waivers to charter schools.

Charter schools frequently share their school-level authority with one or more other entities. Schools were most likely to report sharing control with their authorizers. Some school directors reported sharing authority with EMOs or CBOs. Authorizers determine which schools to charter, monitor progress and performance and decide whether or not to renew the charter at the end of its term. However, more than half of all authorizers reported difficulty in closing a school that is having problems. In addition, the charter contract, with its tailored outcomes, may have diminished importance in the current high-stakes accountability environment. The charter school accountability process involves three phases: the application process, the monitoring process, and the implementation of sanctions (if needed).

- During the application process, authorizing bodies screen applications, denying charters because of problems relating to, for example, proposed instructional strategies, governance procedures, accountability provisions, and business plans.
- The monitoring process occurs after authorizers have awarded charters to planning groups. Authorizers and states reserve legal authority to monitor charter schools, but other entities are also involved, resulting in a complex system of

accountability. Charter schools reported being monitored by their authorizers, governing boards, states and, in some cases, EMOs or CBOs. They reported that they are most accountable to their own governing boards.

Authorizers have developed monitoring procedures and determined criteria for applying interventions or sanctions with little specific guidance from state charter school legislation. Authorizers reported monitoring nearly all of their schools on: compliance with federal or state regulations; student achievement results; enrollment numbers; financial record keeping and viability; and special education services.

Finally, authorizing bodies have the authority to implement formal or informal sanctions against a school that fails to meet the terms of its charter. Results from the survey of authorizers show that few authorizers had implemented formal sanctions: only 4 percent of authorizers had not renewed a school's charter and 6 percent had revoked a charter as of 2001-02. (We are unable to compare these rates with the proportion of traditional public schools that have been sanctioned through closure or reconstitution.) Informal and less severe sanctions, such as written notification of concerns, were more common. Formal and informal sanctions were usually associated with problems relating to compliance with state and federal regulations and school finances.

Authorizers report facing a wide range of challenges in sponsoring and providing support to charter schools, including inadequate financial or human resources. More important, more than half of authorizers report difficulty closing a school that is having problems--a key responsibility of authorizers in this educational reform.

In the early years of the charter school movement's development, charter schools--at least theoretically--were more accountable for outcomes than other schools, by virtue of the terms of a charter contract. More recently, however, states have implemented reporting systems to track school inputs in addition to outcomes for all public schools. Little difference now exists between state reporting requirements for charter schools and those for traditional public schools.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Under Secretary, Evaluation of the Public Charter Schools Program: Final Report, Washington, D.C., 2004.