

THE Center for Education Reform



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For Immediate Release
May 31, 2006

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STUDY REVEALS PROBLEMS IN MEASURING CHARTER SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT

Washington, D.C., May 31, 2006 – A study released today by the University of Washington National Charter School Research Project Center on Reinventing Public Education provides a detailed analysis of recent research conducted on charter school achievement versus test results in conventional schools.

The report, titled *Key Issues In Studying Charter Schools and Achievement: A Review And Suggestions For National Guidelines*, is a product of the Charter School Achievement Consensus Panel, consisting of researchers in sociology, economics, psychometrics, and political science. The report looks at the various types of achievement data and draws strong conclusions finding the majority of studies are seriously flawed because of the types of achievement data they review.

Two factors that must be considered, according to the researchers, are how well the methods eliminated extraneous factors such as differences in students' race and income and whether the schools studied represent all charter schools and charter school students or just an isolated subset of either the schools themselves or the students who attend them.

The report outlines five key methods of researching charter achievement, and discusses the strengths and weaknesses of each. "Studies using one-year snapshots of achievement cannot have high internal validity, no matter how large a database they draw from or how carefully the analysis is done," the report states.

Of the five methods discussed in the study, only two, tracking the same students before they enter a charter school and after, and tracking demographically similar sets of students, possibly even students denied access to a charter school because of space limitations with those who

were successfully admitted, to determine value-added achievement over multiple years, adequately offer an accurate comparison.

“This report reinforces what the experts have been saying for years,” said Jeanne Allen, President of The Center For Education Reform in Washington, DC. “You can’t take an apples to oranges comparison and extrapolate it across every charter school in America and say this group is outperforming that one.

“The most accurate way to measure charter student achievement is to take a benchmark of students test scores as they enter the charter school, and then chart their progress over time,” said Allen. “First you have to see where they are coming from, then compare that to students from similar socio-economic backgrounds and see which children progress at a faster rate.”

The researchers also argue that making assessments of charter school performance also requires analysts to consider other factors that influence achievement including the grade configuration of a school (which often differs in charters), how long the school has been open, who authorizes and under what circumstances.

“Everyone wants to know how charter schools are performing,” says Paul Hill, Chair of the Charter School Achievement Consensus Panel, “but largely because of inadequate data we aren’t learning what we need to know from existing research.”

The study is available on the National Charter School Research Project at www.ncsrp.org [http://www.ncsrp.org/cs/csr/print/csr_docs/pubs/achieve_wp.htm] or on the Center For Education Reform website at www.edreform.com.

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