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WHAT THE RESEARCH REVEALS ABOUT CHARTER SCHOOLS

Are charter schools successful? That seems to be the focus of most analysts involved in education reform, and yet many conclusions are drawn from limited or selected data. The Center for Education Reform has analyzed the existing research universe and identified 65 actual research-based studies that draw mainly objective conclusions based on evaluation of data. There are as many as a hundred more reports and analyses that also help paint a picture of a growing reform, yet as these reports tend to be more opinionated and subjective — both pro and con — they were not used for this compendium.

It is important to note, however, that the body of data, research, and analyses done in the charter school arena is disproportionately larger than what exists for other comparable reform efforts. The question “what do we know about charter schools?” has a simple answer: Plenty.

It is true that evidence of student achievement is only now starting to build. Without years of baseline data in place and available, observers have had to wait until various state assessments took root in some places, or where there are three or more years of standardized tests for nearly identical groups of children. States like Arizona are collecting data so that soon it will be possible to track the same student wherever he or she goes. But until every state can offer a better set of data, we will have to look to limited sets of information for comparability.

That said, the data does show evidence of charter school success.

Literally hundreds of policy papers, studies articles, and analyses have been conducted of the charter school phenomenon, an educational innovation that has skyrocketed from just one school in 1992 to more than 2400 schools in place for the 2001-2002 school year.

Contained in this report are the 65 objective, research-based studies offering a critique of charter schools. The conclusion of the overwhelming majority (61) of these papers is that charter schools have been innovative, accountable, and successful and have created both opportunities for the children who attend them and a “ripple” effect on traditional public schools within their jurisdiction.



THE STUDIES

2001

- 1) **U.S. Department of Education: Challenge and Opportunity: The Impact of Charter Schools on School Districts (John Ericson and Debra Silverman, RPP International): June 2001**

Findings: Charters do affect how school districts behave, confirming the “ripple effect” theory of charters. More than half of the school districts became more customer service oriented, increasing the frequency of their communications with parents as a result of competition from charter schools. As a result of charter school growth, most districts implemented new educational programs, made changes in educational structures in district schools, or created new schools with programs that were similar to the local charter schools. After examining 49 districts with the highest critical mass of charters in five states, concludes that districts do make positive changes in their educational services and district operations as a result of charter schools.

- 2) **Navigating Newly Chartered Waters: An Analysis of Texas Charter School Performance (Timothy Gronberg and Dennis Jansen, Texas Public Policy Foundation): May 2001**

Findings: Continuing students in charter schools have greater improvement in their Texas Assessment of Academic Skills test scores in both reading and math than do continuing students in traditional public schools. At-risk charters are performing well and have a positive value-added effect relative to traditional public schools. Students moving into a charter, however, often exhibit a first-year drop in Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test scores. Charter schools serve larger percentages of black students and at-risk students than do traditional public schools, and the study also notes that charter schools are cost efficient and achieve a given level of student performance at a lower expenditure per student than a comparable traditional public school district.

- 3) **A Study of Charter School Accountability (Paul Hill, Robin Lake, and Mary Beth Celio, Center on Reinventing Public Education, Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs, University of Washington): April 2001**

Findings: Although charter schools experience start-up periods of confusion, operators quickly learn to maintain the confidence of authorizers, families, teachers and donors in order to focus on providing quality instruction. Concludes that conventional school district offices concentrate on detailed compliance-oriented oversight, rather than performance-based oversight. Agencies unaccustomed to working with individual

schools sometimes deal with charters “by the book” more severely than they treat conventional public schools.

4) The State of Charter Schools in Colorado, 1999-2000: The Characteristics, Status and Performance Record of Colorado Charter Schools (Colorado Department of Education): March 2001

Findings: More than 90 percent of the charter schools use more than one assessment tool to measure different dimensions of student learning. The average score of the charter schools on the Colorado Student Assessment Program exceeded the state average by a significant margin, and also exceeded the scores in “matched” public schools. Charters’ student population is nearly as racially diverse as the state’s public school enrollment. Most charter schools offer a program that serves students continuously from elementary through middle school, from middle school through secondary school, or throughout K-12. Forty-two percent of charters enroll 200 students or less, and the schools offer a diverse array of education programs and instructional approaches.

5) Does Charter School Attendance Improve Test Scores? The Arizona Results (Lewis Solmon, David Garcia, Kern Paark, The Goldwater Institute): March 2001

Findings: Concludes that the longer a student attends a charter school, the greater the academic gains, with no similar result in district school students. Charter students generally are making greater gains in reading and about the same gains in math. Concludes that mobility within the charter sector is usually better than stability in a district school. Notes that charters do not “cream” the best students, and that charter school students started with lower average test scores in math and reading, were more likely to be classified as special education, were less likely to be gifted, and were more likely to be white and to speak English. Study looked at 40,000 to 60,000 students who spent one to three years in charter schools or who have been in comparable district schools. Analysis controls for race, gender, grade level, number of days absent, Limited English Proficiency (LEP), years in the district, and gifted/special education identification.

6) Illinois Charter School Annual Report (Illinois State Board of Education): January 2001

Findings: Academically, some charters are doing better than similar grades in their home school district; but not all are exceeding district scores. Parental satisfaction is very high. The report concludes that charter schools have been successful for the students they serve and that, although they have been in existence for only a brief period of time, they are serving as seeds of change in their local communities.

2000

7) Annual Charter School Report for Georgia, 1999-2000 School Year (Georgia Department of Education): October 2000

Findings: Academic performance at the 20 schools operating for at least three years shows slightly better performance between 1997 to 2000. Eight schools showed stable or increased achievement on all tests, three schools showed decreasing achievement over the same time period and results at the remaining schools were mixed. Charters in Georgia served a smaller proportion of minority and socio-economically disadvantaged students than did the state. The participation rate of students with Limited English Proficiency was similar to the state, while the gifted and talented and special education rates grew higher than the state.

8) Autonomy in Exchange for Accountability: An Initial Study of Pennsylvania Charter Schools (Gary Miron and Christopher Nelson, The Evaluation Center, Western Michigan University): October 2000

Findings: The proportion of low income students enrolled in charter schools is roughly comparable to host districts, and charters enroll a significantly higher proportion of nonwhite students (80 percent) than host districts (57 percent). Parents choose charter schools mainly because of the perceived quality of instruction, dissatisfaction with the previous school or the charter's academic reputation. Half the schools require parent volunteerism, and 25 percent of parents report that they volunteer more than three hours per month. Curricular innovations in charter schools often come in the form of a focus on a particular ethnic or cultural perspective, social and vocational skills, or a form of individualized instructional plan for all students. As a group, schools for which there is data outgained their host districts by 86 points (on a 600-point scale).

9) Innovations in Charter Schools: A Summary of Innovative or Unique Aspects of Michigan Charter Schools (Kim Reynolds, The Evaluation Center, Western Michigan University): July 2000

Findings: Charter schools are to some extent innovative, since many have taken traditional practices or new practices and recombined them to fit their particular needs. Marketing is an innovation in accountability, and charters are now accountable for accommodating parents' requests. Charter schools have had some influence on the district public schools, prompting traditional public schools to create additional thematic schools focused on a particular educational philosophy – most prevalently the expansion of back-to-basics and Core Knowledge schools.

10) An Evaluation of the Michigan Charter School Initiative: Performance, Accountability, and Impact (Jerry Horn and Gary Miron, The Evaluation Center, Western Michigan University): July 2000

Findings: Competition from charter schools appears to have spurred districts to offer new services. Parents are not transferring their children back and forth between charters and traditional public schools, with charter school growth coming mostly from kindergarten students and those who did not previously attend traditional public schools. The charter school initiative has provided additional choices and options for parents and children. In elementary school, on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program tests, charters open for five years both outgained and had higher maximum scores than host districts on 4th grade reading, while science rates outscored the host district. A school-by-school comparison of individual charters and their host districts reveals many charters significantly outgained their host districts. Because of the nature

of many charter high schools (i.e., serving at-risk students), a direct comparison with the host district's high school was deemed inappropriate.

11) Texas Open-Enrollment Charter Schools, Third Year Evaluation: March and July 2000

Findings: In comparing Texas charter schools with traditional public schools, charters contain higher percentages of African-Americans (33 percent vs. 14 percent), Hispanics (43 percent vs. 39 percent), and economically disadvantaged children (52.6 percent vs. 48.5 percent). More recently opened charters tend to serve a higher proportion of African-American, Hispanic, and special education populations than those opened longer. More than half of charter school students, most of which were at risk of dropping out, passed all TAAS tests given, with at least 67 percent passing at least one. The percentage of at-risk students in charter schools passing all TAAS tests increased by 15.9 points vs. a 5.2 point increase for all state students.

12) Does Charter School Competition Improve Traditional Public Schools? (Paul Teske, Mark Schneider, Jack Buckley and Sara Clark, SUNY-Stony Brook): June 2000

Findings: Charter competition has not induced large changes in district-wide operations, despite significant numbers of students leaving districts schools for charter schools, because state policymakers have created a cushion to alleviate any financial effect of departing students on districts. States provide resources to districts to "prop them up." Despite the mitigated effects of competition, however, the authors found widespread evidence of school officials responding to charters, especially where superintendents were already pre-disposed toward reform of their operations. Faced with competition from charter schools, principals do adopt more innovations at their schools. This study also finds that charters are more consumer-friendly, treat parents better than traditional public schools, and may be evolving as substitute for private schools.

13) Initial Study of Pennsylvania Charter Schools (Western Michigan University, Gary Miron, The Evaluation Center): Spring 2000

Findings: A complete survey of staff, student, and parents in Pennsylvania charters for school year 1998-99. This survey finds that 82 percent of charter teachers are certified (Pennsylvania law requires at least 75 percent), that they are well qualified, attrition is low, and attitudes toward facilities and salaries are mixed. Enrollment of boys and girls is even, minorities (mainly African-Americans) make up 75 percent of charter enrollments, most of who had previously been in traditional public school, and parents tended to choose these schools in search of something better. Parents of charter students are not the privileged, with an even split between single and two parent homes, and only 32 percent holding college degrees.

14) A Report on Philadelphia Charter Schools: Facing Challenges, Forging Solutions, (Drexel University/Foundations): May 2000

Findings: This study examines what helps or hinders charters, finding that the lack of funding, unclear policies, and local district tensions impede charters negatively while community support and thorough communication helps charters succeed.

15) Community Schools in Ohio: First Year Implementation Report (Ohio Legislative Office of Legislative Oversight): March 2000

Findings: Based on the experience of the first 15 Ohio charter or “community” schools, the report finds that most charter operators started their schools in response to deficiencies in traditional public schools, but start-up obstacles affected their first year in operation, including difficulty getting start-up money, finding facilities, and recruiting experienced teachers. Community schools enroll a higher proportion of minority and poor students and have attendance rates that compare favorably.

16) U.S. Department of Education: National Study of Charter Schools, Fourth Year Report: January 2000

Findings: Describes various operational details and effects of charter schools as of the 1998-99 year. Documents high waiting list at 7 of 10 charters, and confirms that only four percent of all charters have closed down. Median student-teacher ratio slightly below traditional public schools at 16 students per teacher, most charter schools are small. Nationwide, students in charter schools have similar demographic characteristics to students in all public schools. However, charter schools in some states serve significantly higher percentages of minority or economically disadvantaged students. White students make up about 48 percent of charter school enrollment in 1998 compared to about 59 percent of public school enrollment in 97-98. Charters enroll slightly higher percentages of poorer children, and nearly identical numbers of LEP students. Reported percentages of children with disabilities is about three percent less than traditional schools at eight percent on average, and 9 out of 10 charters are held accountable for student achievement, compliance with regulations, student attendance.

17) Colorado Charter Schools Evaluation Study: The Characteristics, Status and Performance Record of Colorado Charter Schools (Colorado Department of Education): January 2000

Findings: A review of successes and failures of Colorado charter schools in the 1998-99 school year. Finds that performance of charters on state assessment is stronger than sponsoring district averages and when compared to other socio-economically similar traditional schools. Most charters were meeting or exceeding the goals set out in their contract and level of parental involvement, waiting lists, satisfaction were all high. Charters are diverse in size, philosophy, and program, but student populations enrolled in charter schools did not reflect same diversity as in the state as a whole.

1999

18) Massachusetts Charter School Profiles, 1998-99 School Year (Massachusetts Charter School Resource Center): December 1999

Findings: A yearly review of the status of charter schools that analyzes demographics, such as the fact that 43 percent of charter school students are racial or ethnic minorities compared with 23 percent on average in the state. Thirty-eight percent of charter school students are from low-income families compared to a state average of 26 percent, and demand continues to exceed supply, with a ratio of 5.1 interested applicants for every

one slot. In May 1998, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tested proficiency of students in fourth, eighth and tenth grade in several core areas. Statewide averages fell in the “need for improvement area” but some charters showed promise. On average, charter school students scored about five points higher than students in host districts, including one charter (Francis W. Parker Charter) which had the third highest combined score among state high schools.

19) Making a Choice, Making a Difference? An Evaluation of Charter Schools in the District of Columbia (Jeffrey Henig, Michele Moser, Thomas Holyoke and Natalie Lacireno-Paquet, The Center for Washington Area Studies, The George Washington University): November, 1999

Findings: Charter schools in the District of Columbia have found an eager clientele, now having one out of every 10 or 11 students in DC. Charters offer a smaller size and more intimate setting, are not creaming the top pool of applicants, and most offer a special emphasis or theme to distinguish themselves from traditional public schools. The charter school concept in many respects represents an extension of ongoing District efforts to reform education through decentralization and choice. Parents are drawn to charter schools by good and caring teachers, and open and supportive attitude toward children and their families, and an emphasis on achievement. There is a lack of support and personnel in the Board of Education to address charters’ questions and concerns, leading to tension and outright hostility.

20) First Annual Arizona Charter School Parent Satisfaction Survey (Arizona: Human Resources Policy Corporation, Lewis Solmon): October 1999

Findings: Surveys of 13,812 parents of charter schools statistically analyzed provides insights into parent attitudes from 1999. Thirty-one percent of parents rated their school an A+ in terms of quality and 35 percent rated their schools an ‘A’. Only 14 percent rated their schools a C, D or F. The survey results indicate that fewer parents rated their previous school as an A, suggesting that charters are largely attracting dissatisfied parents. A high percentage (72 percent) of parents said they would reenroll their child in the charter school.

21) School Choice Policies in Michigan: The Rules Matter (David Arsen, David Plank and Gary Sykes, Michigan State University): October 1999

Findings: Michigan’s school choice policies (including public school choice) have had limited impact on enrollments in most districts. Innovations adopted in charters tend to be “add-ons,” such as all-day kindergarten. Along with oversight from chartering agents, the market is the primary instrument of charter accountability. If charters do not satisfy constituents, the schools will not survive. Some traditional public school responses to charters are competitive, and districts have added programs and increased marketing to make themselves more attractive to parents and students. Many charters target parents who prefer schools featuring specific ethnic or values orientations.

22) Competition in Education: A 1999 Update of School Choice in Massachusetts (Susan L. Aud, George Mason University): September 1999

Findings: Compares the effects of public school choice and charters on racial and ethnic make-up of Massachusetts school districts, as well as the effects on district budgets. Found that charter schools have a higher percentage of non-white students than the state average (48 percent vs. 22 percent), that the highest percentage of transfers to charter schools came from minority districts and that the transfers themselves are over-representative of minorities. Those districts with the highest concentration of minorities experienced a greater balance of racial composition after the charter school program was enacted. Of the 12 districts experiencing the greatest losses of students (and funding) to charter schools as a percentage of enrollment, the largest losses were not concentrated in the highest poverty districts.

23) Competition and Collaboration: How Connecticut Charter Schools Relate to Their Neighborhood Districts (Institute for Responsive Education, Roblyn Anderson Brigham and Jennifer Nahas): September 1999

Findings: Connecticut's charter school law mitigates competition to protect traditional school districts from change. Most lines of communication between charters and peer district schools are in the non-educational areas (with the exception of special education) such as transportation, recruitment, food services, and extra-curricular activities.

24) U.S. Department of Education: Third Year Report: May 1999

Findings: Most charter schools have about the same percentage of white students as their district average. More than 70 percent of charter schools are within 20 percent of their district's racial/ethnic make-up; 16 percent had a significantly higher percentage of students of color and 12 percent had a significantly lower percentage. Charter schools generally mirror the state's racial composition. However, charter schools in 14 of the 24 charter states enrolled a considerably higher percentage of non-white students than do other public schools, in some cases resulting from provisions in state law that target charters to serve disadvantaged students. Charter schools serve a significantly higher proportion of economically disadvantaged students compared to all public schools.

25) Arizona Charter School Progress Evaluation (Morrison Institute for Public Policy at Arizona State University, Lori A. Mulholland): March 1999

Findings: As part of ongoing evaluation of Arizona charters called for by the State Department of Education, this study analyzes charter school progress to date and found that standardized test scores met or exceeded those of traditional public schools, and that the key reasons for student transfer to charters is that they were not doing well or were unhappy at their former school. Teachers are the best feature of charters according to parents and students, as well as school size, class size and attitudes toward parents.

26) Evaluation of the Michigan Public School Academy Initiative (Western Michigan University, Jerry Horn and Gary Miron, The Evaluation Center): February 1999

Findings: Charters (Public School Academies in Michigan) are diverse in their offerings and have forced more accountability on traditional public schools. Discusses some

reasons for PSA closures but notes the ability of charter families to vote with their feet. Several challenges include lack of start-up funds, access to facilities, special education, and various legal issues relating to charter school operations.

27) Does the Public Sector Competition Stimulate Innovation: The Competitive Impacts of Arizona Charter Schools on Traditional Public Schools (Scott Millman, Frederick Hess, Robert Maranto, James Madison University): February 1999

Findings: School choice impacts traditional districts in desirable ways. Arizona school districts have responded to competition with slight to moderate changes in district and school level behaviors in the “leadership” dimensions (i.e., promoting experimentation in teaching, consulting with staff, following through on initiatives and new programs, providing for all-day kindergarten, promoting teacher professional development). In Arizona, competition appears to have produced changes primarily in more troubled school districts. The impact of competition depends partly on financial incentives, state-level maintenance and operations subsidies.

28) Michigan’s Charter School Initiative: From Theory to Practice (Public Sector Consultants, Inc. and MAXIMUS, Inc. for the Michigan Department of Education): February 1999

Findings: The most common response of the surrounding district to a charter school opening within its boundaries has been to extend kindergarten to all day. The business side of school operations overwhelms some, but at most schools this early turmoil abates after a year or two of operation. “Creaming” occurs only rarely and many parents report that their children had been having difficulty in their former, traditional school. The percentage of minorities in the study-area charter schools is higher than in both the state as a whole (68 percent vs. 14 percent) and the traditional public school districts in which the charter schools are located (66 percent vs. 54 percent). Although starting at a lower point due to the “at- risk” nature of their student population, the improvement in MEAP (Michigan Educational Assessment Program) test scores among charters is greater than among a comparison group of traditional schools.

29) The Colorado Charter Schools Evaluation Study (Colorado Department of Education and the Center for Human Investment Policy at The University of Colorado, Denver): January 1999

Findings: Confirms high rate of parental satisfaction and finds that when comparing specific performance of charters to near-identical public schools, over 75 percent of charters outperformed the scores to their sponsoring district. Charter schools make up only 2 percent of Colorado public schools, but a full 20 percent of Colorado “schools of excellence” are charter schools.

1998

30) Texas Open Enrollment Charter Schools: Year Two Evaluation for Texas State Board of Education: December 1998

Findings: Eleven of nineteen schools classified as “at-risk” school because of intention to serve primarily at-risk students. Charter schools enroll higher percentages of Hispanic and African-American students and lower percentages of Anglo students than traditional public schools. African-American students are evenly distributed among at-risk and non-at-risk schools; Hispanics more likely in at-risk schools; Anglos more likely at non-at-risk schools. Parents of students attending at-risk charters are of lower socioeconomic status, and aspirations for their children are lower. The most important factors to parents are educational quality of schools and lower class sizes. Public school officials reported minimal effects from charter schools in terms of funding, student or teacher attrition, parental involvement and programmatic changes. A majority of the schools in this study exist to serve students at risk of dropping out. Charter students performed at lower levels on TAAS than traditional students did; 40 percent of schools have acceptable or higher rating compared with 91 percent of Texas public schools in general. Three charters outperformed the state average.

31) The Massachusetts Charter School Initiative: Expanding the Possibilities of Public Education (Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Education): December 1998

Findings: More than half the Massachusetts charter schools serve predominantly disadvantaged / at-risk youth; more than half are open longer than the state minimum of days and hours, and more than 70 percent provide before- or after-school programs. The percentage of students who are language minority is 20 percent vs. a state average of 13 percent; the percentage representing ethnic minorities is 48 percent vs. a state average of 22 percent; the percentage from low-income households is 40 percent vs. a state average of 25 percent. The academic performance of students entering charter schools has been at or below district and national averages. After several years, the test results for students in charter schools are promising, with many schools showing significant academic gains.

32) An Evaluation, Charter School Program, State of Wisconsin (Legislative Audit Bureau): December 1998

Findings: A review of the 18 charter schools operating during the ‘97-98 school year as required by law. School districts benefit from charter law in several ways, including flexible use of teachers, new programs, and innovations that would not have been developed had there not been a charter. Racial disparities existed in several schools in which the percentage of minorities did not reflect that of the district, but that is explained by first-come, first-serve enrollment policies that have since been changed. In terms of achievement, charter school test results indicate that charter school students score higher, on average, than other district students and that attendance and suspension rate suggest positive correlations. Contains policy recommendations designed to reduce tensions between charters and school districts are made.

33) The Findings and Implications of Increased Flexibility and Accountability: An Evaluation of Charter Schools in Los Angeles Unified School District (WestEd Policy & University of Southern California): August 1998

Findings: Motivations vary among those seeking a charter from decision-making control to the desire for neighborhood schools. Charters are found to maintain or slightly

improve student performance as compared to similar non-charter schools, and were as good or better at retaining students than non-charter schools. Parents and teachers report high levels of satisfaction and collegiality, and both have much involvement in decision making and opportunities to participate.

34) U.S. Department of Education: National Study of Charter Schools: Second Year Study: August 1998

Findings: Charter schools have an estimated median enrollment of 150 students vs. other public schools in charter states that have an estimated median enrollment of 500. Sixty-two percent of charter schools were newly created, 25 percent were pre-existing public schools and 13 percent pre-existing private schools that converted. Sixty percent of charter schools are similar to school districts on student racial/ethnic and income level characteristics, but about a third are more likely to serve students of color and low-income students.

35) Innovation and Massachusetts Charter Schools for the Massachusetts Department of Education (Rosenblum Brigham Associates): July 1998

Findings: Many innovations, special features, or non-traditional practices can be found in charter schools, the most prevalent of which seem to be attention to the development of character, citizenship, respect for self and others, and positive school climate. Rather than specific practices being innovative, it is the integration of such practices around a central vision. A sense of competition and even hostility towards charters prevents many traditional school districts from taking advantage of these innovations.

36) New Jersey Charter Schools: The First Year, 1997-98 (New Jersey Institute for School Innovation and Teachers College, Columbia University, Pearl Rock Kane): June 1998

Findings: Finds charter schools (first 13 studied) provide more parental involvement, more community awareness, and involvement, and have teachers and administrators who work longer hours than district counterparts and demonstrate higher level of job satisfaction.

37) Minnesota Charter Schools Evaluation Final Report (Minnesota State Board of Education and University of Minnesota Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, CAREI): May 1998

Findings: Charter schools tend to enroll greater concentrations of students of color than host school districts. An estimated 25 percent of students attending charters have a disability with an active Individual Education Plan (IEP) vs. an average 15 percent in host districts and 47 percent are eligible for free or reduced lunch (vs. an average 29 percent in host districts). Approximately 10 percent of charter school students are limited English proficient (vs. 5 percent in host districts). Of the schools reporting reading and math standardized test data, 50 percent reported have a higher percentage of students scoring above the national mean in spring 1997 than in spring 1996 on the math tests. Fifty percent also had a higher percentage of students scoring above the national mean on the reading tests. When the 1997 results from those charter schools with students eligible to participate in the Minnesota basic graduation tests in reading and math are compared with surrounding districts, 71 percent report higher percentages passing the reading test and 43 percent report higher percentages passing the math test – despite the fact that these schools are designed for “at-risk” students.

38) Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE): How Are School Districts Responding to Charter Laws and Charter Schools: April 1998

Findings: This examination of how traditional school districts respond to charter schools reports that almost half have felt strong or moderate impact, and effects on about 25 percent of districts to charter schools includes increasing public relations, changing educational offerings and other noticeable changes in programs.

39) Making a Difference? Charter Schools, Evaluation and Student Performance (Center for School Change): March 1998

Findings: Charter schools in this preliminary report are meeting accountability requirements and student achievement in 20 schools is summarized, along with student behavior, attitudes, parental involvement and school climate, all of which are positive indicators.

40) 1997 Colorado Charter Schools Evaluation Study (Prepared by the Clayton Foundation for the Colorado Department of Education): January 1998

Findings: Colorado charter schools are serving students of color, students who are educationally disadvantaged by poverty and students who are eligible for special education services. As a group, students attending charter schools in the evaluation study performed better than the statewide average on the state 4th grade reading and writing assessment.

1997

41) Texas Open Enrollment Charter Schools: Year One Evaluation for Texas State Board of Education: December 1997

Findings: Overview of 20 Texas charters in operation as of September, 1997. Survey shows “white-flight” and “bright-flight” are myths. Texas charter schools do not take the best students, and 72 percent of those attending open-enrollment schools are classified as “at-risk.” Seven charters are dropout recovery schools; 11 are specifically designed to meet the needs of “at-risk students,” and 80 percent of students enrolled in charter schools are minorities, compared with 53 percent in traditional district schools. Eleven schools have waiting lists. Smaller classes, innovative delivery systems, IEPs and creative curricula are all indications of success.

42) Evaluation of Charter School Effectiveness (SRI International for Legislative Analyst’s Office of the State of California): December 1997

Findings: Overall, charter schools have an ethnic composition, served percentages of low-income, special education, and limited English proficiency students similar to the state average. Charter school teacher starting salaries are slightly higher than the public schools statewide average.

43) Charter Schools in Action Final Report (The Hudson Institute): July 1997

Findings: Book that consolidates previous reports from 1996. Charter schools are diverse, with 63 percent of students being minority group members (1996). Eighty-one percent of students previously enrolled in public schools, eight percent private, two percent home-schooled, and four percent had dropped out (1996). Approximately 70 percent of schools pay “comparable” salaries to most or all of their teachers (1996). Families and teachers seek out charters primarily for educational reasons (1997). Satisfaction levels are highest for all groups when it comes to educational matters such as curriculum, teaching, or class size (1997). More than half of the students are eligible for free/reduced lunches, one in five has limited English proficiency, and almost one in five has a disability or learning problem (1996).

44) Test Results from Massachusetts Charter Schools: A Preliminary Study (Massachusetts Department of Education): June 1997

Findings: In general, the academic performance of students entering charter schools was at or below district or national averages. The early preliminary test results for charter schools are promising. Six out of the eight schools for which test data are available are making academic gains. The most dramatic gains came from SABIS International Charter School, where students were performing below grade level when the school was a traditional public school. Seven months after conversion status, students had progressed, on average, 1.5 grade equivalent levels and were performing at or above grade level in grades 2, 4, 6, and 7 and only slightly below grade level in grades 3 and 5.

45) A Study of Charter Schools: First Year Report 1997 (U.S. Department of Education and RPP and CAREI): May 1997

Findings: Reviewed 252 charters in existence in January, 1996. Variations among state laws determine charter’s progress. Schools are drivers; no “typical” charter school. Charter schools, on average, have a racial composition similar to statewide averages or have larger portion of minorities. No signs of discriminatory practices or “creaming.” Michigan, Minnesota, and Massachusetts enrolled higher percentage of students of color than conventional public schools, and approximately same proportion of low-income students as traditional public schools (although some enroll drastically more). Difficult time accessing Title I funds – two-thirds of schools are eligible, but only 47 percent receive funding.

46) The Colorado Charter Schools Evaluation (Colorado Department of Education and The Center for Human Investment Policy at the University of Colorado, Denver): March 1997

Findings: Fourteen schools operating for at least a year. Average enrollment smaller than public school counterparts. Six charter schools met or exceeded a significant portion of their performance goals and are making further progress; five schools met or exceeded some of their performance goals and making further progress. Nine schools received 80-85 percent of district Per Pupil Operating Revenue; on average all charter schools spend 82.5 percent on student specific expenditures, 17.5 percent on rent, utilities, maintenance, transportation, etc.

47) Going it Alone: A Study of Massachusetts Charter Schools (Institute for Responsive Education and Northeastern University): March 1997

Findings: High degree of satisfaction: students feel challenged, teachers feel empowered, parents are content. Parents are happy with the welcoming atmosphere at charter schools and are satisfied with academic attention, largely through IEPs their children receive. Governance is the most significant challenge (time, climate and culture, financial issues are major obstacles).

48) Evidence on School Choice: What we Learn from the Traditional Forms of School Choice in the U.S. (Harvard University, Caroline Hoxby): 1997

Findings: Public schools react to competition by offering better schooling and reducing costs. Increased competition results in significant improvements in student test scores, educational attainments, and wages. Parents with greater choice are more involved in their child's schooling and prefer a higher standard of achievement for both their children (academic achievement) and their chosen school (standards and discipline).

1996 AND PRIOR

49) Minnesota Charter Schools Evaluation: Interim Report and Research Report (University of Minnesota, CAREI): December 1996

Findings: Examines characteristics of 16 Minnesota charter schools operating for at least one year. Minnesota charters are largely start-ups with class sizes smaller than traditional Minnesota public schools. Charter schools have a larger percentage of African-American, Hispanic, Native American and Asian students than traditional school counterparts, and also higher percentages of students with disabilities, LEP and free/reduced lunch. Parental and staff satisfaction is higher at charter schools than at traditional schools. More than 50 percent of parents report that their children have improved in both academics and social skills since enrolling in charter schools.

50) How Well are Charter Schools Serving Urban and Minority Students? (ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, Wendy Schwarz, NY, NY): November 1996

Findings: Charters attract urban students, but not the most vulnerable minority and disadvantaged students. Charters also attract dedicated and talented teachers, but teacher compensation is often not competitive with traditional public school salaries.

51) Surveys of Parents and Teachers (The Goldwater Institute): April, August 1996

Findings: Teacher Survey: Twenty percent of Arizona charters operate on a year-round calendar; average student population is 187 students, with an average student/teacher ratio of 22:1; 80 percent of teachers have experience outside teaching, with largest part formerly in management positions in the private sector. Fifty-seven percent of teachers have accountability components in their contracts, unlike most Arizona districts. Parent Survey: Children who attend charter schools are not high academic performers. Forty-nine percent of parents were "very satisfied with their child's last school, and 51 percent "very dissatisfied" or "dissatisfied". Main reason parents left former schools to

charter was “curriculum/school theme”, followed closely by “teacher attitude” and “class size.”

52) The Massachusetts Charter School Initiative (Massachusetts Department of Education): July 1996

Findings: Overview of how charter schools operate in Massachusetts (i.e., serve public using public funds; operate independently of union work rules, collective bargaining agreements and conventional school management structure; mission driven; community based; etc.)

53) Massachusetts Charter School Profiles 1996-97 (Pioneer Institute): July 1996

Findings: Profiles 26 charter schools. Reveals that charters do not skim economic or academic “cream;” almost 60 percent of charter schools located in urban areas, with high percentage of minorities, low socio-economic and ESL students; 90 percent of students rate teachers as excellent or good; and 96 percent of parents rate enthusiasm, commitment and quality of staff as excellent or good.

54) Charter Schools: Initial Findings (Education Commission of the States): March 1996

Findings: Reviews data from five states. Notes growing number of charters trying to create a “one-room schoolhouse” effect by serving a broad range of students within a given school. 12 percent are K-12. On average, charter schools exceed the state public school percentages among African-Americans (18 percent vs. 7 percent) and Native American (5 percent vs. 2 percent). Reports examples of academic achievement by students in charter schools, despite the focus of most such schools on “at-risk” students.

55) The Charter Movement Education Reform School by School (Little Hoover Commission for the State of California): March 1996

Findings: Academic results are not yet clear, but schools can be judged on partial success of several criteria (based on on-site inspections of 26 schools). Criteria included progress on test scores and other pupil assessment tools, effective fiscal prudence, variety of academic innovations, increased focus on low-achieving students, and avoidance of discrimination. Generally, the findings and recommendations revolved around governance and legal issues.

56) A Profile of California’s Charter Schools 1994-95 (San Diego Chamber of Commerce): March 1996

Findings: Analyzes 44 of the 62 charters then operating and finds positive demographics and student test results from the California Test of Basic Skills. as well as obstacles. Charter schools are small, and larger ones broke up students into “clusters.” Sixteen operate outside classroom environment, with several “home-based” or “independent study programs.” Majority of student population is racial/ethnic minorities. Charters must demonstrate student progress or face revocation or non-renewal. California has seen its charters increase in daily student attendance, innovative facilities arrangements, and high level of community support (corporations, community groups, and

cooperative arrangements with universities). Major problems facing charter schools include legal challenges (labor relation issues), conflict with district on financial matters, state funding issues, vague legal status of charters and liability concerns.

57) The First 20 Texas Open-Enrollment Charter Schools (University of Texas, J.R. Llanes and Marsha Marchbanks): 1996

Findings: Sixty percent of approved charter schools anticipate that they will serve the same percentage of special education students enrolled in the local public schools. Twenty-two percent of charters believe their special education enrollment will be higher than the local rate. The average charter school is addressing basic educational needs. Fifteen percent of charter schools are specializing in serving students who have dropped out of the public schools system. While some charters promise new approaches, most of the first twenty are traditional in their overall educational plan.

58) Freedom and Innovation California's Charter Schools (U.S. Department of Education and WestEd): November 1995

Findings: Reports findings from a second survey of California's charter schools and from a survey of charter school teachers and non-charter school administrators. Examines varying levels of autonomy found in California's participation.

59) Charter Schools, What Are They Up To?, 1995 Survey (Education Commission of the States and Joe Nathan): August 1995

Findings: Covers seven states, representing (at that time) 80 percent of authorized charter schools outside California, and 45 percent of those in California. Most are small. Sixty-seven percent are designed to serve cross-section of students; "integrated interdisciplinary curriculum" was most popular academic focus. Lack of start-up funds, finances and facilities most cited obstacles.

60) GAO: Charter Schools: A New Model for Public Schools Provides Opportunities and Challenges, A Report to Congress: January 1995

Findings: An early report reviewing the first charter schools in existence, their autonomy, methods by which they are held accountable and challenges for federal education programs. Points out that charter schools' instructional programs reflect diversity and innovation, including innovative approaches such as multiage grouping and thematic instruction.

61) Vision and Reality: A First Year Look at California's Charter Schools: 1994-95 (U.S. Department of Education and WestEd, Marcella R. Dianda & Ronald G. Corwin)

Findings: Written after California's first year of charter school operation, reviews why California had chartered less than half the number of schools authorized by that state's charter school law. Greatest burdens identified were accountability provisions, lack of assistance and start-up funds, ambiguous laws concerning autonomy, lack of promotion on the part of the school district, unappealing prospect of board control, and lack of interest. Concludes that the continued resistance of districts to allow charter schools

independence warrants on-going attention, as does the higher number of obstacles faced in developing urban charter schools.

Major Analyses with Critical Conclusions

62) Ethnic Segregation in Arizona Charter Schools (University of New Hampshire, Casey Cobb and Gene V. Glass, Arizona State University): January 1999

Findings: Examines issue of stratification along ethnic and class lines. Claims that charter schools are disproportionately white but these claims are not justified by the statistics/data provided.

63) Beyond the Rhetoric of Charter School Reform: A Study of 10 California School Districts (University of California, Los Angeles, Amy Stuart Wells): December 1998

Findings: Evaluates 17 charter schools and concludes that advocates' claims are not justified by observations. Says charters are not accountable for student achievement, that their racial/ethnic requirements have not been enforced, that charters and traditional public schools do not learn from one another.

64) Charting a New Course: Fact and Fiction about Charter Schools (National School Boards Association, Thomas Good, Jennifer Braden): Fall 2000

Findings: After a review of existing literature, the authors conclude that there is no evidence that charters achieve any academic progress, are accountable or are diverse, and that policymakers should pursue changes to make charters fall more in line with existing public school requirements.

65) Broken Promises: Charter Schools in Texas (Jessica Whitt, Texas Freedom Network Education Fund): September, 2000

Findings: The passing rate for economically disadvantaged high school students in charter schools is significantly lower than the passing rate for similarly defined students in traditional public schools. At-risk charter students are becoming decreasingly satisfied with their schools, whereas non-at-risk students' satisfaction is holding even. Contends that charter schools are not held financially accountable when schools are closed or have their charter revoked, or are discovered to have inflated enrollment numbers. A lack of accountability also exists with un-elected charter school boards and nepotism on boards and with boards' hiring practices.

Other analyses with credible, positive findings but not research per se:

- School Choice in the Real World, Lessons from Arizona Charter Schools, 1999 (Editor, Bryan Hassel) – Finds that the “rapid spread of charters had an unexpected, overwhelming impact on Arizona education” and charter school competition has forced traditional public schools to improve communication with parents, change curriculum, advertise, open magnet schools.

- A Charter School Survey: Parents, Teachers, and Principals Speak Out, Pacific Research Institute, Patricia Riley, February 2000 – This work finds student populations in California's charters schools mirror demographic and socio-economic characteristics of traditional district schools

OTHER CHARTER SCHOOL RESOURCES FROM THE CENTER FOR EDUCATION REFORM

THE CHARTER SCHOOL WORKBOOK: YOUR ROADMAP TO THE CHARTER SCHOOL MOVEMENT

The workbook looks at where the charter school movement is – state-by-state – and where it's headed. It's chock full of comprehensive but user-friendly information on charter school issues from legislation and research, to school successes and obstacles, to how-to and where-to-go.

THE 2001 NATIONAL CHARTER SCHOOL DIRECTORY

This comprehensive directory of America's charter schools provides a listing of schools that includes school addresses, telephone numbers and contact names, enrollment figures, grades served, date opened, and a brief synopsis of each school's philosophy and educational mission. Also includes the latest statistics, state by state, on schools, enrollment, and grades served, as well as other helpful appendices and resources.

CHARTER SCHOOLS TODAY: CHANGING THE FACE OF AMERICAN EDUCATION

This report captures a vivid snapshot of the charter schools movement in the United States. Less than a decade after the first charter school opened its doors, 1,674 charter schools now not only provide a very popular alternative to traditional public schools, but are having a dramatic impact on other competing schools in the communities where they have been established.

CHARTER SCHOOL LAWS ACROSS THE STATES

CER's annual ranking of all the charter school laws in existence around the nation, from the strongest to the weakest. Includes 32-point profiles of each state's law.

CHARTER CLOSURES: THE OPPORTUNITY FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

Far from being an indictment of charter schools, closures provide real contractual accountability, which is all too often missing at many traditional public schools. Includes nationwide data.

CHARTER SCHOOL BROCHURE

Brochure offering general information about charter schools. Defines charter schools and discusses whether or not they work.

SOLVING THE CHARTER SCHOOL FINANCING CONUNDRUM

Provides advice and models to policy makers, community leaders and reformers who want to help charter operators, so many of whom have struggled against tremendous financial odds, to create a place where children can succeed and thrive academically.

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