

What Works Clearinghouse



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WWC Quick Review of the Report “Charter School Performance in New York City”¹

What is this study about?

The study examined the effect of charter school attendance on annual student achievement growth in math and reading.

The study analyzed data from a large sample of students in grades three through eight in New York City between 2003 and 2009.

The authors matched charter school students to similar students attending traditional public schools based on test scores and demographic characteristics. Eighty-five percent of charter school students were successfully matched.

The study examined changes in students’ standardized reading and math test scores from one school year to the next. Effects were estimated by comparing the test score changes of charter school students to those of matched students attending traditional public schools.

How was the Comparison Group Selected?

For each of the 49 charter schools, a list of traditional public schools attended by their students in the previous year was compiled.

All students who had attended one of the traditional public schools on the list in the previous year were identified.

These students were matched to charter school students on test scores in the previous year, special education status, subsidized lunch status, and demographic characteristics.

A “virtual twin” record was created for each charter school student by averaging the outcomes of all traditional public school students to whom they were matched.

WWC Rating

The research described in this report is consistent with WWC evidence standards with reservations

Strengths: The study matched charter school students to similar students in traditional public schools using demographic and academic characteristics.

Cautions: Although the study matched charter school students to traditional public school students based on observed demographic characteristics and test scores, unobserved differences between the two groups may remain. In particular, the types of students who decide to attend charter schools may differ from the types that do not in unobserved ways, such as motivation, that may also influence student achievement. In addition, it is unclear whether the students and schools examined in the study’s school-level comparisons were initially equivalent; therefore, the results of this analysis are not reported in this quick review.

What did the study authors report?

The study found that charter school student achievement growth was significantly higher than the achievement growth of comparison students—0.12 standard deviations higher in math and 0.06 standard deviations higher in reading. This is equivalent to an increase of about five scale score points in math and two scale score points in reading.

The WWC has reservations about these results because charter school students may have been different from traditional public school students in ways not controlled for in the analysis.

¹ Center for Research on Education Outcomes. (January 2010). *Charter school performance in New York City*. Stanford, CA: Author. Details on methodology can be found in: Center for Research on Education Outcomes. (June 2009). *Multiple choice: Charter school performance in 16 states*. Stanford, CA: Author.