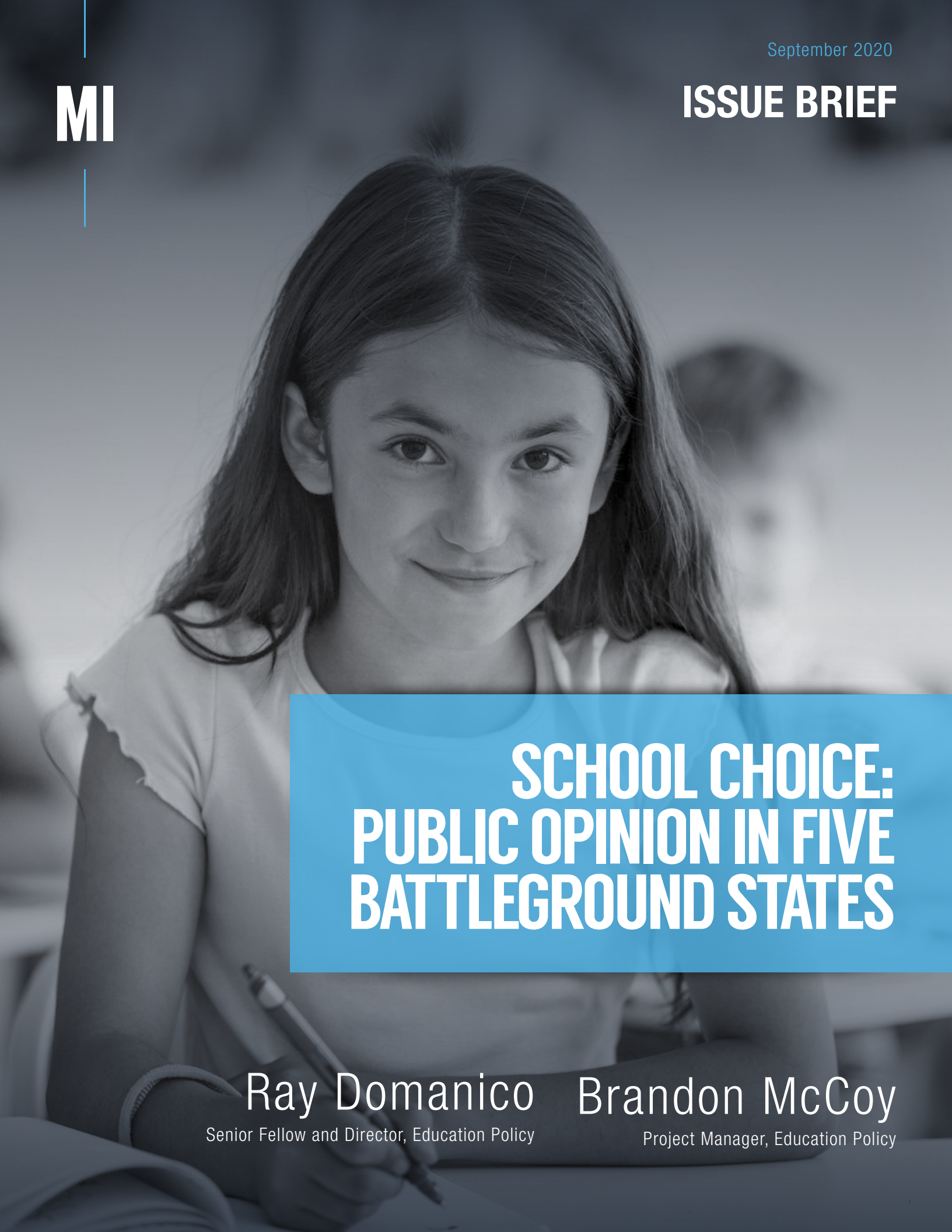


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MI

ISSUE BRIEF



**SCHOOL CHOICE:  
PUBLIC OPINION IN FIVE  
BATTLEGROUND STATES**

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## Executive Summary

The Manhattan Institute commissioned Rasmussen Reports to include nine questions related to school choice and charter schools in their late August–early September polling of likely voters in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Wisconsin, Michigan, and North Carolina. Among these states, 46%–52% of the respondents said that they believe that giving parents the right to choose their children’s school *raises the overall quality of K–12 education for students*; 18%–20% believe that it lowers educational quality. Black respondents were more likely to believe that school choice raises educational quality.

Between 66% and 70% of all respondents supported the concept of *publicly funded K–12 school choice*. This support was higher among black respondents in all states but North Carolina.

Between 51% and 62% of all respondents supported *state funding of charter schools as an alternative to traditional local district-managed public schools*. This support was higher for black respondents in all states and ranged from 58% to 67%.

Across the five states, actual enrollment in charter schools accounts for 7.3% of all students in charter and district-managed public schools. In Michigan, 9.6% of public school students attend charters; in Wisconsin, 4.9% do. Across the five states, 17.3% of black public school students attend charters, over 3.8 times the rate of white students. In four of the surveyed states, black students are the group most likely to enroll in charters. In North Carolina, the number of white students enrolled in charters is slightly higher than that of black students. In Michigan, 27% of black public school students attend charters; in Pennsylvania, 23% of black students in public schools attend charters.

National research indicates that urban charter schools achieve significantly higher levels of growth in math and reading than their district school peers. This is particularly true for lower-income children of color and those with special needs. Charters in nonurban areas, and those operating as virtual schools, do not show this advantage.



## Background

Has the public turned against charter schools and school choice in recent years, after the tremendous growth of charters across the country in the first 15 years of the century?<sup>1</sup> Under President Obama, the Democratic Party was committed to the growth of charter schools as a means of expanding educational opportunities to traditionally underserved communities.<sup>2</sup> This year's Democratic Party platform, however, calls for increased scrutiny of charter schools:

Democrats believe that education is a public good and should not be saddled with a private profit motive, which is why we will ban for-profit private charter businesses from receiving federal funding. And we recognize the need for more stringent guardrails to ensure charter schools are good stewards of federal education funds. We support measures to increase accountability for charter schools, including by requiring all charter schools to meet the same standards of transparency as traditional public schools, including with regard to civil rights protections, racial equity, admissions practices, disciplinary procedures, and school finances. We will call for conditioning federal funding for new, expanded charter schools or for charter school renewals on a district's review of whether the charter will systematically underserve the neediest students.<sup>3</sup>

The Republican Party has not released a detailed platform for the coming election, but Republican members of Congress and the Trump administration have supported school choice in various forms, particularly during discussions of COVID relief aid packages. While the administration has given a high priority to forms of school choice that include public support of private and religious schools, it has not proposed any significant expansion of federal regulation of existing or new charter schools.<sup>4</sup>

In August, the Manhattan Institute contracted with Rasmussen Reports to survey public opinion in five states about school choice policies generally, as well as charter schools specifically. Working with MI, Rasmussen crafted nine questions that were added to the organization's regular polling of likely voters for presidential and senatorial races in Pennsylvania, Ohio, North Carolina, Michigan, and Wisconsin. This paper will discuss five key questions from those surveys and place the results in the context of what we know about charter schools and choice in these states and nationwide. A **companion report**, being released by Rasmussen Reports, presents detailed results of all nine education-related questions from the surveys conducted between August 25 and September 10, 2020.

## Public Attitudes Toward School Choice and Charter Schools

Among the likely voters surveyed, there was little support for the notion that school choice is harmful to education in grades K–12. Across the five states, 46%–52% of respondents said that they believed that giving parents the right to choose their children's school *raises the overall quality of K–12 education for students* (see the questions and responses in **Figure 1**). Conversely, 18%–20% believe that it lowers educational quality. Among black respondents, 43%–57% believed that parental choice improves educational quality (Ohio was at the lower band of that range). In all states but Ohio, black respondents were less likely to believe that parental choice lowers educational quality than was the general population.

The survey asked individuals to express their support for *the concept of publicly funded K–12 school choice*. Of all respondents, 66%–70% either strongly or somewhat supported this concept. At 65%–77%, support for publicly funded school choice was higher among blacks.

Between 51% and 62% of respondents either strongly support or somewhat support *state funding of charter schools as an alternative to traditional district-managed public schools*; 29%–39% of respondents were somewhat opposed or strongly opposed to such funding. In each state, support for state funding of charter schools was higher among black respondents; 58%–67% favored it, while 21%–34% were opposed.

Few respondents reported that they believed that their state gave parents too much choice when deciding where their children would attend school; 8%–11% of all respondents felt this way, with 4%–11% of blacks feeling this way. Among blacks, Michigan was the outlier, with 11% reporting that they thought parents were given too much choice. Between 29% and 39% of all respondents reported that they believed that their state gave parents too little school choice, with North Carolina being the outlier, at 39%. Between 34% and 45% of black respondents reported that they felt parents were given too little choice, with Pennsylvania schools being the outlier, at 45%.

As another measure of interest in school choice, we asked individuals who reported having school-age children at home what type of school they would choose if they had the choice. In each state, the plurality of respondents said that they would choose a district-managed public school. There was a strong interest in private schools, with 14%–22% selecting this option; 10%–15% reported that they would choose a religious school, and 10%–19% said that they would choose a publicly funded charter school.

There are two important caveats for these responses. Because the survey asked this question only of individuals with school-age children at home, the sample was much smaller and contains a higher margin of error. Also, the options for private and religious schools did not describe them as publicly funded, so these results cannot be viewed as a measure of support for public funding of private and religious schools. In all states but North Carolina, black respondents were less likely to say that they would choose a district-managed public school, but here the sample was quite small and difficult to interpret.

FIGURE 1.

### MI-Rasmussen Survey Questions and Responses (% from all and black respondents)

Does giving parents the right to choose the school that their child attends raise or lower the overall quality of K–12 education for students?

	Pennsylvania		Ohio		Wisconsin		Michigan		North Carolina	
	All	Black	All	Black	All	Black	All	Black	All	Black
Raise	49%	57%	49%	43%	46%	53%	49%	57%	49%	43%
Lower	19%	10%	18%	19%	20%	18%	19%	10%	18%	19%
Neither	19%	17%	20%	23%	22%	17%	19%	17%	20%	23%
Not Sure	13%	16%	12%	15%	12%	12%	13%	16%	12%	15%

Does your state give parents too much, too little, or the right amount of choice when deciding where their children will attend school?

	Pennsylvania		Ohio		Wisconsin		Michigan		North Carolina	
	All	Black	All	Black	All	Black	All	Black	All	Black
Too Much	8%	4%	9%	6%	11%	7%	10%	11%	8%	9%
Too Little	37%	45%	30%	40%	29%	40%	29%	34%	39%	39%
Right Amount	38%	30%	39%	31%	42%	34%	39%	33%	34%	35%
Not Sure	18%	22%	22%	23%	18%	19%	23%	22%	19%	17%



Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the concept of publicly funded K–12 school choice?

	Pennsylvania		Ohio		Wisconsin		Michigan		North Carolina	
	All	Black	All	Black	All	Black	All	Black	All	Black
Strongly Support	40%	45%	37%	41%	38%	45%	41%	48%	40%	38%
Somewhat Support	26%	32%	32%	31%	28%	32%	27%	29%	30%	27%
Somewhat Oppose	13%	9%	12%	10%	14%	15%	11%	7%	12%	12%
Strongly Oppose	11%	9%	10%	12%	12%	4%	12%	6%	10%	11%
Not Sure	10%	6%	9%	6%	7%	3%	10%	10%	9%	11%

Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose state funding of charter schools as an alternative to traditional local district-managed public schools?

	Pennsylvania		Ohio		Wisconsin		Michigan		North Carolina	
	All	Black	All	Black	All	Black	All	Black	All	Black
Strongly Support	28%	28%	22%	23%	27%	36%	25%	24%	30%	32%
Somewhat Support	30%	38%	30%	35%	28%	31%	26%	36%	32%	31%
Somewhat Oppose	15%	12%	18%	13%	16%	12%	16%	17%	14%	13%
Strongly Oppose	17%	10%	17%	17%	19%	9%	23%	17%	15%	14%
Not Sure	10%	12%	12%	12%	10%	11%	10%	6%	9%	11%

If you had the choice, what type of school would you choose to assure your child had the best education: a district-managed local public school; a private school; a religious school; home school; or some other type of school? *(asked only of those with school-age children at home)*

SCHOOL TYPE	Pennsylvania		Ohio		Wisconsin		Michigan		North Carolina	
	All	Black	All	Black	All	Black	All	Black	All	Black
District-Managed	38%	38%	46%	35%	48%	25%	44%	35%	36%	37%
Local Charter	15%	15%	10%	15%	15%	31%	12%	19%	19%	21%
Private	22%	22%	18%	26%	14%	22%	18%	20%	21%	21%
Religious	15%	15%	15%	15%	14%	11%	14%	14%	10%	8%
Home School	4%	4%	5%	4%	4%	5%	5%	6%	7%	6%
Other	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	2%
Not Sure	5%	5%	5%	5%	4%	5%	6%	7%	5%	6%

In all questions, the margin of error for all respondents is +/-3%. For black respondents, it is +/-7% in North Carolina; +/- 8% in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Michigan; and +/-10% in Wisconsin.

## Profiles of School Choice in the Five Survey States

Overall, 7.4 million students in the states we surveyed attend public schools (**Figure 2**). The vast majority, 92.7%, attend district-managed schools. Overall, 7.3% of public school students attended charter schools, ranging from 4.9% in Wisconsin to 9.6% in Michigan. Considering only the charter sector across the five states, black students are the most likely to be enrolled; 17.3% of them attend, more than 3.8 times the rate of white students. The only state of the five in which black students were not the most likely to use charters was North Carolina, where they were edged out by whites, 7.4% to 6.7%. In Michigan, 27% of black students in public schools attend charters; in Pennsylvania, 23% do. White students are the least likely (4.5%) to attend charters. Among Hispanics, 8.1% of students are enrolled in charters, as are 6.7% of Asians.

FIGURE 2.

### Student Enrollment in Publicly Funded Schools, 2017–18

SCHOOL TYPE	Five Survey States					
	Total	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other
Total Public School Enrollment	7,361,872	4,682,795	1,281,542	788,770	244,833	363,932
Charter Enrollment	540,307	211,680	221,555	63,986	16,334	26,752
Percentage of Each Racial Group Enrolled in Charters	7.3%	4.5%	17.3%	8.1%	6.7%	7.4%

SCHOOL TYPE	Pennsylvania					
	Total	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other
Charter Enrollment	137,712	45,403	59,150	23,112	3,962	6,085
Charter Enrollment by Race (%)	—	33.0%	43.0%	16.8%	2.9%	4.4%
Non-Charter Enrollment	1,589,097	1,091,202	194,230	174,454	63,303	65,908
Total Public School Enrollment	1,726,809	1,136,605	253,380	197,566	67,265	71,993
Percentage of Each Racial Group Enrolled in Charters	8.0%	4.0%	23.3%	11.7%	5.9%	8.5%

SCHOOL TYPE	Ohio					
	Total	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other
Charter Enrollment	113,162	42,425	53,153	9,008	1,162	7,414
Charter Enrollment by Race (%)	—	37.5%	47.0%	8.0%	1.0%	6.6%
Non-Charter Enrollment	1,591,237	1,149,197	230,003	88,299	39,682	84,056
Total Public School Enrollment	1,704,399	1,191,622	283,156	97,307	40,844	91,470
Percentage of Each Racial Group Enrolled in Charters	6.6%	3.6%	18.8%	9.3%	2.8%	8.1%

SCHOOL TYPE	Michigan					
	Total	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other
Charter Enrollment	145,948	47,641	73,767	13,481	5,055	6,004
Charter Enrollment by Race (%)	—	32.6%	50.5%	9.2%	3.5%	4.1%
Non-Charter Enrollment	1,370,450	956,133	198,585	105,660	45,780	64,292
Total Public School Enrollment	1,516,398	1,003,774	272,352	119,141	50,835	70,296
Percentage of Each Racial Group Enrolled in Charters	9.6%	4.7%	27.1%	11.3%	9.9%	8.5%

SCHOOL TYPE	Wisconsin					
	Total	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other
Charter Enrollment	42,499	20,810	9,136	8,345	2,491	1,717
Charter Enrollment by Race (%)	—	49.0%	21.5%	19.6%	5.9%	4.0%
Non-Charter Enrollment	818,254	580,441	69,876	95,091	31,689	41,157
Total Public School Enrollment	860,753	601,251	79,012	103,436	34,180	42,874
Percentage of Each Racial Group Enrolled in Charters	4.9%	3.5%	11.6%	8.1%	7.3%	4.0%

SCHOOL TYPE	North Carolina					
	Total	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other
Charter Enrollment	100,986	55,401	26,349	10,040	3,664	5,532
Charter Enrollment by Race (%)	—	54.9%	26.1%	9.9%	3.6%	5.5%
Non-Charter Enrollment	1,452,527	694,142	367,293	261,280	48,045	81,767
Total Public School Enrollment	1,553,513	749,543	393,642	271,320	51,709	87,299
Percentage of Each Racial Group Enrolled in Charters	6.5%	7.4%	6.7%	3.7%	7.1%	6.3%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey," 2017–18 version1a; "State Nonfiscal Public Elementary/Secondary Education Survey," 2017–18 version1a



## The Effectiveness of Charter Schools

It is difficult to make blanket statements on the relative performance of charter and district-run public schools. Student performance varies in both sectors, and the characteristics of students attending individual schools differ as well. Many district-managed schools in higher-income suburbs are models of effectiveness, serving as ready pipelines to elite and selective universities. It would be unfair to compare either charter or district-run schools serving lower-income communities with these schools. At the same time, even though charters tend to admit students through random lotteries when they are over-subscribed, concerns remain about the alleged cream-skimming of students most likely to succeed. The best research studies control for the demographic differences in student populations. These studies are complicated to conduct; but fortunately, some point us to an understanding of the relative performance of charter schools, compared with public schools managed by districts.

In 2015, the Center for Research on Education Options (CREDO) at Stanford University published a study of charter school performance in 41 urban areas.<sup>5</sup> It concluded that “urban charter schools in the aggregate provide significantly higher levels of annual growth in both math and reading compared with their TPS [traditional public school] peers.” The researchers interpreted their statistical findings to mean that “charter students [are] receiving the equivalent of roughly 40 days of additional learning per year in math and 28 additional days of learning per year in reading.” This does not mean that charter schools have longer annual schedules, though some do. Rather, the test-score advantage associated with charter school attendance was the equivalent of what the average student would learn in those numbers of days.

The 2015 CREDO study also found that “learning gains for charter school students are larger by significant amounts for black, Hispanic, low-income, and special education students in both math and reading.” The achievement advantages for students who were in two of these subgroups (black and special education) were quite large, amounting to “months of additional learning per year.”

This study of urban areas followed one that CREDO published in 2009, one that examined charter school performance in 16 states across the country.<sup>6</sup> This earlier study had much more sobering results for charter supporters and is often quoted by charter opponents. It found: “Charter school students on average see a decrease in their academic growth in reading of .01 standard deviations compared with their traditional school peers. In math, their learning lags by .03 standard deviations on average. While the magnitude of these effects is small, they are both statistically significant.” The report further found significant variability across states in terms of the charter school effect.

In January of this year, Boston University’s Marcus Winters employed a randomization procedure in the unified application system used for charters as well as district schools in Newark, New Jersey, in order to replicate a randomized control study on the impact of charters. His study, published by the Manhattan Institute (where he is a senior fellow), found a strong impact of charter school attendance.<sup>7</sup> It found that:

Enrolling in a Newark participating charter school leads to large improvements in a student’s math and English language arts (ELA) test scores, on average. Students appear to maintain these positive test-score effects over time. The magnitude of the impact from attending a Newark participating charter school is comparable with that found in previous research on charters in Boston and Denver. To place the result into context, attending a Newark participating charter school has a larger effect than 80% of other educational interventions that have been recently studied using an experimental design.

Winters also examined the contention that the growth of charter schools harms the performance of surrounding district-run schools. In June 2020, his Manhattan Institute study examined the impact of charter school growth on district schools across the country.<sup>8</sup> His assessment:

Using school-level test-score data across the United States made available by Stanford Education Data Archive (SEDA), I show that there is a very small but positive relationship between the proportion of students within a geographic district who attend a charter school as of 2009 and the test-score growth for students enrolled in the traditional public schools in the same district over the next seven years.

Winters’s report does not assess causality; rather, it concludes that “the general pattern of test-score outcomes over this period is simply not consistent with the claim that charter school exposure for a meaningful period of time produces declines in the performance of traditional public schools.”

All the CREDO studies found variability in charter school performance that tended to mute the differences between charters and district-managed schools. In other words, within the charter sector, as with the traditional district sector, there are high and low performers. This is clear in the performance of charter schools within the five states in which we asked Rasmussen to survey public opinion about charters. We did not select these states based on the performance of their charter schools. Rather, in a national election year, these critical states are likely to draw the attention of both political parties as well as the national media. The performance of charters in each of these states is mixed, with performance varying by urban vs. rural location; and by type of school—virtual vs. brick-and-mortar. Performance varies within those categories as well.

## Research on Charters in the Five Survey States

### *Pennsylvania*

In 2019, CREDO published a report on charter school performance in Pennsylvania.<sup>9</sup> It showed that a typical charter school student in a year achieves similar gains in reading and weaker gains in math, compared with what the student would have produced in a traditional public school (TPS). CREDO estimates that a typical charter school student in Pennsylvania experiences the equivalent of 30 fewer days of learning in math, compared with a student in a traditional school setting.

However, a deeper analysis of the results reveals that Pennsylvania’s charter school landscape is defined by notable bright spots and failures. Urban charter school students exhibit growth in reading equivalent to 35 more days of learning, compared with urban TPS counterparts. Black charter school students experienced a statistically significant increase in learning gains (24 more days) in reading, compared with black TPS students.

CREDO also analyzed the difference in learning experiences in brick-and-mortar versus online charters. Brick-and-mortar charter schools had a statistically significant positive impact on students’ reading growth, while online charters depressed students’ learning in reading and math. Students in online charters had learning gaps equivalent to 106 fewer days in reading and 118 fewer days in math, compared with TPS students. Because the enrollment in online charters was roughly a quarter of the charter sector in the state at the time the study was published, the online sector is likely weighing down the results of Pennsylvania charter schools.

### *Ohio*

Online charter schools are often the biggest blemish academically in a state’s charter school system, and Ohio’s charter sector follows this trend. A 2016 report published by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute details that while Ohio’s virtual charter schools were growing faster than all other public education sectors in terms of enrollment, their students performed significantly worse on state standardized tests, even after controlling for prior achievement.<sup>10</sup> The effects were particularly profound regarding math achievement. Students in online math courses were far less likely to take advanced math courses and far more likely to enroll in remedial math classes. State data also show that while 24% of all face-to-face math courses are advanced, only 6% of online math courses fall under the same category.

When compared with district schools, brick-and-mortar charters in Ohio have a positive effect on students in grades 4–8 and a mixed effect on high school students.

One feature of the charter school sector is its ability and willingness to close low-performing schools. In 2005, the Ohio General Assembly passed a law requiring all charter schools that continually fell below a year-to-year performance threshold to close. A 2016 study (by professors at the University of Oklahoma and Ohio State) estimates the causal effects of school closures on student achievement.<sup>11</sup> Two years after low-performing charter schools face mandatory closure (three years after a school is informed that it will be required to close), students from closed schools scored 0.2–0.3 standard deviations higher in reading and math than students from schools who just score above the performance mark mandating closure. These results suggest that accountability measures should be combined with school choice to guarantee that children have access to high-quality schools.

## Michigan

A 2019 study by professors at Oakland University used longitudinal data from 2003 to 2012 to determine whether Michigan charter schools outperformed traditional public schools on standardized testing.<sup>12</sup> Unlike those in most other states, charters in the Wolverine State are largely managed by for-profit education management organizations. The researchers analyzed reading and math pass rates on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) in 4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grades, and pass rates on the Michigan Merit Examination (MME) among 11<sup>th</sup> graders. In all grades and subjects, charter schools early in the study period lagged far behind traditional public schools. The initial disparity in pass rates, depending on grade and subject, was generally 6–14 percentage points. However, by 2012, charters had largely caught up to traditional public schools in all grades, nearly eliminating achievement differences. Improvements in the charter sector during 2003–12 could be due to the closure of ineffective charters, or the ability of charters to be more creative and adaptive in their approaches. However, the researchers conclude that their results infer that charters in Michigan “do no harm” to student outcomes, rather than provide substantive improvements.

An earlier study by CREDO cast a different light on Michigan charters.<sup>13</sup> Researchers used data from the 2005–06 to the 2010–11 school years to determine whether students who attend charter schools make significantly more learning gains than they would in traditional public schools. Using a Virtual Control Record method to compare learning gains made by students in charter schools with learning gains made by a synthesized “twin” in a traditional public school setting, they found that Michigan charter schools have a significantly positive effect on reading and math gains among black students, Hispanic students, and students who have repeated grades.<sup>14</sup> While charter schools in Michigan are largely concentrated in urban settings, urban as well as rural charter schools have a significant, positive effect on learning gains in both math and reading. The charter sector’s impact on a student’s achievement grows as a student stays in a charter school—students in their fourth and fifth years of attendance see larger gains in math and reading, compared with students in their first year.

## Wisconsin

A 2012 study published by the University of Arkansas compared four-year achievement gains between Milwaukee independent charter school students and students in the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) district.<sup>15</sup> The researchers took a sample of students who were enrolled in one of Milwaukee’s independent charters in 2006, and matched them to an MPS sample, controlling for variables such as race, free-lunch status, and prior achievement. Previous research showed little to no differences in achievement gains in math and reading between charter and district schools after one and two years, but a clear advantage emerged for charters in the third year. The study, however, concluded that while four-year achievement gains are positive for students in independent charter schools, the results do not maintain statistical significance between those in charters and MPS students.

One promising takeaway for charters is that charter schools outperformed their public school counterparts among “stayers”—students who remained in *either* the charter or district sector throughout the period studied. Stayers in charter schools, on average, significantly outpaced stayers in the MPS in reading and math gains, by approximately three-tenths and four-tenths of a standard deviation, respectively. This indicates that long-term exposure to the charter sector in Milwaukee has a large effect on student achievement.

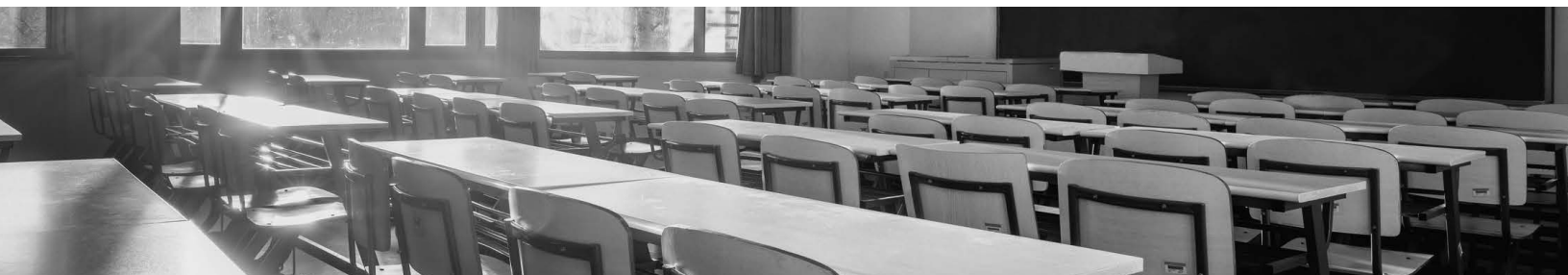
Additionally, that study revealed that students in conversion charters—schools that were once private but converted to charter schools—consistently outpaced MPS students in reading. While these advantages might be due to the selectivity of the private school before conversion, the gains realized by conversion charters but not realized by non-conversion charters may also be attributed to the schools’ prior experience in operation and not having to undergo a “start-up” phase like traditional charter schools.

A 2019 study from the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty found that certain types of charter schools in Wisconsin outperformed their local traditional district schools on state examinations of math and English Language Arts (ELA).<sup>16</sup> In Milwaukee, “non-instrumentality” charters (under district control, but with nonunionized teachers hired by the school, not the district) outperformed MPS by 13 points in math and 12 points in ELA; independent charters (no district control) outperformed the district schools by 8 points in math. Further, charters authorized by the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee outperformed MPS by 8 points in ELA and 10 points in math.

## *North Carolina*

In 2015, researchers at Duke University published a study on the evolution of the charter school sector in North Carolina.<sup>17</sup> The paper delved into the timeline of how charter schools have shifted demographically and academically. The researchers note that charter schools in the Tarheel State initially contained a disproportionately high percentage of black students; but over time, minority shares of charter enrollment declined and the percentage of white students surpassed the percentage of white students in traditional public schools. In addition, during 1998–2014, the percentage of students in predominantly white charters nearly doubled, from 24.2% to 47.1%.

The researchers also note that student achievement has gradually improved in North Carolina charter schools over time. From 1999 to 2003, charter schools lagged in learning gains for both reading and math. More recently, they began to surpass traditional public schools, which remained stagnant. By 2012, charter schools had exceeded the average achievement gains in reading and math in traditional public schools. Moreover, the variation in average student performance across charter schools also declined over time, now matching the variation observed in traditional public schools. Despite the initial positive results, the researchers explain that the positive trend should be interpreted with caution. While they attribute this growth to a departure of low-performing schools and an entrance of better-performing models, they also infer that growth occurred because of the enrollment of more academically motivated students in charter schools. New entrants into charter schools, on average, had 20% fewer absences than those who remained in traditional public schools. Moreover, when analyzing student achievement using student fixed effects, they conclude that charter schools in North Carolina overall are no better at raising achievement levels than traditional public schools.



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Education (ED), National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Facts, Charter Schools.
- <sup>2</sup> Frederick M. Hess and Matthew Rice, “Democrats’ Obama-to-Sanders Shift on Charter Schooling,” *The Hill*, Feb. 24, 2020.
- <sup>3</sup> 2020 Democratic Party Platform, July 27, 2020, p. 68.
- <sup>4</sup> Evie Blad, “Trump Pushes Tax Break to Promote School Choice in State of the Union Address,” *Education Week*, Feb. 4, 2020; ED, “Trump Administration Announces \$85 Million to Support Disadvantaged Students in Nation’s Capital Attending K–12 Private Schools of Their Choice,” July 22, 2020.
- <sup>5</sup> Center for Research on Education Options (CREDO), Stanford University, “Urban Charter School Study Report on 41 Regions 2015.”
- <sup>6</sup> CREDO, “Multiple Choice: Charter School Performance in 16 States,” June 2009.
- <sup>7</sup> Marcus A. Winters, “Charter Schools in Newark: The Effect on Student Test Scores,” Manhattan Institute, January 2020. See also Winters, “The Effect of Attending a Charter School in Newark, New Jersey on Student Test Scores,” Boston University, January 2020.
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- <sup>10</sup> June Ahn, “Enrollment and Achievement in Ohio’s Virtual Charter Schools,” Thomas B. Fordham Institute, August 2016.
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- <sup>12</sup> Kevin J. Murphy and Oded Izraeli, “Do Charter School Students Outperform Public School Students on Standardized Tests in Michigan?” *Social Science Quarterly* 100, no. 6 (October 2019): 2277–2301.
- <sup>13</sup> CREDO, “Charter School Performance in Michigan,” Jan. 11, 2013.
- <sup>14</sup> The difference between the 2013 CREDO study and the 2019 Murphy/Izraeli study is that CREDO measured the effects of charters on student learning gains, while Murphy/Izraeli measured proficiency rates across schools/districts. Additionally, the period in the CREDO study began in the academic year 2005–06 instead of 2002–03.
- <sup>15</sup> John F. Witte et al., “Milwaukee Independent Charter Schools Study: Final Report on Four-Year Achievement Gains,” University of Arkansas—Fayetteville, School Choice Demonstration Project, Feb. 1, 2012.
- <sup>16</sup> Will Flanders, “Apples to Apples: The Definitive Look at School Test Scores in Milwaukee and Wisconsin for 2019,” Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty, June 6, 2019.
- <sup>17</sup> Helen F. Ladd, Charles T. Clotfelter, and John B. Holbein, “The Growing Segmentation of the Charter School Sector in North Carolina,” NBER Working Paper 21078, April 2015.

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