



## PRESS RELEASE

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### NEW STUDY: INCONCLUSIVE AT BEST *Previous Research Counters Brookings Findings*

(Washington, D.C. 9/3/02) "Estimating charter school performance" and averaging the test scores of all students at each of 376 charter schools (regardless of grade level or entry year into the charter) a research study done for the Brookings Institution says that charter schools score below traditional public schools but cautions that "...with the data at hand, it is impossible to tell whether charter school test scores reflect the quality of education at the schools."

The study collected data from charters in operation since at least 1999 in 10 states where the same achievement test had been administered all three years through 2001.

The sum of their findings is that charters score lower than regular public schools on achievement tests. There's no evidence as to why, but researchers offer that one plausible explanation is that "charters attract large numbers of students who are struggling academically in public schools before ever setting foot on a charter school campus."

In fact, the researchers concurred with previous findings that charters serve a higher proportion of black students (23% vs. 17% nationally) and Hispanic students (18% vs. 15%). About 25% of the schools studied were new in 1999.

But when the report's conclusions are put up against other research, a much different picture emerges. Using the recent California State University study as well as research done on 60,000 Arizona students, to name just two, found charters are indeed attracting a lower-than-low performing student, and that they cause achievement increases in students who have been in a charter at least two years.

This research points to a major flaw in the Brookings study: that the report ignores the abundance of research that actually tracks student performance. Moreover, they can ultimately conclude nothing about achievement because they don't know the rate at which charter students progress from year to year.

"In the future, with state tests now mandated, it will be easier to follow achievement from school to school and student to student," said CER president Jeanne Allen.

"Because charters together do not have a firm baseline of data that allows them to be compared to all other traditional public schools across states, such comparisons are really meaningless."

Another shortcoming of the study is that the rigor of the tests used in each state where charters were assessed varies greatly. Massachusetts achievement tests are considered more rigorous than Pennsylvania, for example. What is expected in Florida is different than what is expected in Michigan, and so forth.

"It's critical to study charters and look for conclusions about achievement," added Allen. "But researchers must not operate in a vacuum."

More information about the charter school research in general and additional, specific conclusions about the Brookings report can be found at <http://www.edreform.com>.

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*The Center for Education Reform is a national, independent, non-profit advocacy organization providing support and guidance to individuals, community and civic groups, policymakers and others who are working to bring fundamental reforms to their schools. For further information, please call (202) 822-9000 or visit our website at <http://edreform.com>.*