

THE Center for Education Reform



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EMBARGOED
December 15, 2004 at 10:00 a.m.

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HOPE IN THE NATION'S CHARTER SCHOOLS

*Commentary on the National Assessment of Educational Progress
2003 Charter School Pilot Study*

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Today's report by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is a somber reminder of the challenges that continue to face public education in this country, with only a third of all fourth graders making the grade in reading and math, and far less than that among minority kids.

But among these grim statistics, we can find hope in the nation's charter schools. The report finds that in the race for student achievement, charter school students are in a statistically dead-even tie with conventional public school students, despite the fact that charter school students receive less funding, are twice as likely to be African American and live in a central city and attend schools that have been operating for only a handful of years.

What the study does not examine is what impact charter schools have on individual student progress. When a child is struggling in a conventional public school and switches to a charter school, is she then on the fast track to progress? The answer is a definitive yes.

But the NAEP report does not tell us that – it can't. It is only a snapshot in time and does not explore student progress from year to year. Fortunately, there are a number of highly credible research studies out there that do examine student achievement gains over time. This research reveals that that charter school students are making progress at rates much faster than conventional public school students – and the longer children are in charter schools, the more dramatic that progress is.

(more)

National Research At-A-Glance:

- A 2003 national report by the **Brookings Institution** shows that test scores at charter schools are “rising sharply” and out-gaining conventional public schools. Brookings also found that charter schools are succeeding at greater rates, while an increasing number of conventional public schools are being added to lists of failing schools.
- A 2004 report commissioned by the **U.S. Department of Education** found that charter schools are smaller than conventional public schools and serve a disproportionate *and* increasing number of poor and minority students.
- A **Harvard University** study by Professor Caroline Hoxby, released yesterday, finds that charter school students are more likely to be proficient in reading and math than students in neighboring conventional public schools. The greatest achievement gains can be seen among African American, Hispanic, and low-income students.

Charter schools that have been open for significant periods of time boast even higher achievement rates. Harvard found that charter schools that have been operating for more than 5 years outpace conventional public schools by as much as 15 percent.

- **NAEP data** released this summer – albeit only a snapshot – revealed that fourth-grade students in Arizona and California charters outperform their conventional public school counterparts in reading and those in Colorado outperform them in math. *Note that one third of all charter schools operate in California and Arizona.*

State Research At-A-Glance:

- **Arizona** charter school students outperform their counterparts in conventional public schools. The longer a child is in a charter school, the better he or she performs, according to a study of 60,000 students in Arizona.
- In **California**, charter schools produce stronger student achievement among low-income students than conventional public schools by a margin of nearly 5 percent.
- According to the University of Wisconsin at Madison, **Wisconsin's** charter schools are doing better than conventional public schools based on the results of state tests in 4th grade and 8th grade for two academic years.
- In **Michigan**, charters showed greater gains than the statewide average in all but one of 10 grades and subjects on the 2003 Michigan Assessment of Educational Progress (MEAP) test.
- Sixty percent of urban charter schools in **Massachusetts** outperformed comparable conventional public schools on the 2003 MCAS exams.

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