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## THE NEW YORK TIMES EDITORIAL USES FAULTY DATA TO SLAM CHARTER SCHOOLS

*The New York Times* in an Editorial today erroneously reported the results of a more than one - year-old study that has been widely discredited by the academic community and valid achievement data. The *Times* cites “proof” of charter school failure based upon data provided by Western Michigan University’s Evaluation Center.

In addition, the *Times* jumps far beyond what is reported in the study, to generalize that the charter school movement has been “discredited.”

The Center for Education Reform offers the following facts and data to refute today’s editorial.

### ***Another Black Eye For The Gray Lady***

- This is the third time *The New York Times* has chosen to use a discredited study, which fails to accurately compare apples to apples, to draw sweeping conclusions about charter school achievement.
- *The New York Times* uses reports from Western Michigan University’s Evaluation Center that have been discredited by the U.S. Government Accountability Office and the Brookings Institution and which vary in age from 1-6 years old.
- The *Times* fails to mention that charter public schools are accepting children from the most dismally failing traditional schools, and often have to work twice as long to get them up to standard levels of proficiency.
- The *Times* also concludes that for-profit charter school operators have the worst achievement record, a fact that has been refuted by last month’s study released by the American Institutes For Research that determined Edison schools had a modestly superior performance while there was a lack of sufficient data to determine the performance of other for-profit operators.
- The *Times* editorial called for more regulation of charter schools to correct lagging achievement. However, a strong charter school law is one that prevents local districts and authorizers from over-regulating and interfering with a charter school. This is the very concept that makes charters successful, and which Miron says leads to their failure.
- Today, 40 states and the District of Columbia have charter school laws in place. Of those laws, 21 laws are considered strong, according to [CER’s](#) latest rankings; 20 laws are considered weak.



- There is a [direct correlation between strong laws and successful charter schools](#). Of those states with strong laws, 65 percent showed positive achievement gains last year; of the weak states, only two demonstrated the same level of progress.
- 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 2003 national report by the Brookings Institution shows that test scores at charter schools are “rising sharply” and out-gaining conventional schools.
- A December 2004 Harvard University study finds that charter school students are more likely to be proficient in reading and math than students in neighboring conventional schools. The greatest achievement gains can be seen among African American, Hispanic, or 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 schools by as much as 15 percent.

### ***Charter School Achievement***

- *The New York Times* editorial specifically mentions Michigan achievement but provides no substantiating data. According to the *Times* “getting a handle on the problem is going to be difficult for states like Michigan, which has become a textbook example of how sloppily administered charter programs can harm students and undermine faith in both the chartering process and public education in general.” But statistics exist that refute that claim.
- Michigan’s charter high schools are making faster progress toward meeting state standards than other public schools. This is based on the MEAP (MI Education Assessment Program) scores that show that students in charter high schools are gaining faster in math, reading, science, and social studies.
- 38.1% of seniors in charter schools met state standards on the 2004 MEAP math tests, up 2.7% from 2003, compared with 30.7% of urban schools, which were up just .2% from 2003.
- State test results from the fall of 2005 show that, as a group, students in schools authorized by Central Michigan University outperformed students in the Host Districts in all four core subjects. When the data for the four subjects is disaggregated to show the performance of Black and Hispanic students, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students, those in schools authorized by CMU again outperformed students in the Host Districts in 15 of the 16 categories. The 16th was a tie.
- Where public school students are often expected to do poorly, they usually do. The state test results for urban districts bear this out. Schools authorized by CMU across the state, from Detroit to Benton Harbor to Flint, which are serving particularly high percentages of economically disadvantaged students (75% and above) are beating the odds. Students in

these schools are outperforming their local districts by a very wide margin as well as producing results above the state average.

- In 2005, some schools authorized by CMU -- such as Holly Academy and Walden Green Academy -- have already reached the NCLB goal of 100% Math and Reading proficiency by 2014 with entire grades of students.
- CMU has been consistently collecting standardized test data (Scantron's Performance Series) for three years that clearly shows that students entering charter public schools, on average, are performing below grade level in reading and math. This data also clearly indicates that students who have stayed at the same charter school for three or more years are catching up. To date, results for approximately 9,000 students in grades 4 through 8 have been analyzed. In reading, students in grades 5, 7 and 8 are at or above the 50th percentile nationally after 3 or more years in the schools chartered by CMU and students in all grades are catching up. In math, on average students in their first year perform below the 25th percentile while the average for students who have been enrolled for three or more years, in all the grades, is between the 25 and 50th percentile. The data show a clear and compelling pattern that the longer the students are at schools authorized by CMU the better they perform in math and reading.
- **CMU charter school demographics:**  
58 charters, 70 buildings, 27,000 students.  
65% of the students are minority, which does not include a large population of Arabic students.  
58% qualify for free/reduced price lunch.  
9% of the students are special education.

### ***From a GAO report on the Gary Miron studies referenced in the Times***

“Weaknesses included inadequate controls for differences between the students in charter schools and their host districts, no consideration of attrition rates, and the likelihood that analyses were often based on a small number of students.”

### ***Charter Schools Have Dual Accountability***

Unlike traditional public schools, no one is forced to attend a charter school, but new charter schools are opening every day and they still have waiting lists. If they fail to perform, parents stop coming or pull their children out and the schools close. Additionally, because of the NCLB, charters must meet the same accountability standards as regular public schools. If they fail to perform, they can have their charter revoked or not renewed and the school closes. This dual accountability—market forces and reporting requirements—ensures that charters do perform well or they are closed. No one is closing conventional public schools that are failing students across the country. Instead, parents who can afford it are sending their children to private schools, and disadvantaged children find new life in charter schools.