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This document summarizes:

Budding, Richard and Zimmer, Ron. "Student Achievement in Charter Schools: A Complex Picture." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* No. 2. 2005: 351-371.

Few management, education, or government reform issues today command as much attention as the discussion about whether charter schools produce results. Yet, just like traditional public schools, charter schools come in many varieties.

Budding and Zimmer, in "Student Achievement in Charter Schools," look at performance differences in four types of charter schools: conversion and classroom; conversion and non-classroom; startup and classroom; and startup and non-classroom. While the authors do not provide answers for how to build a successful charter school, they do open the door to further research into the differences between the four types of charter schools and traditional public schools.

First, they examine charter schools that previously existed as public schools, and typically use the same facilities and retain the previous faculty and student body. The motivation for starting conversion schools often comes from a desire to reduce bureaucracy from the district and/or to get away from the mandated curriculum. Startup schools, on the other hand, require a new building, new faculty, and new students. The motivation behind this type of charter school typically comes from an attempt to create a more holistic approach to education through changing curriculum, instruction, governance, and the overall mission of the school. Each category is then separated by whether the schools "require attendance of its pupils be at the school site under direct supervision and control of a qualified teaching employee of the school for at least 80 percent of the required instructional time."

Despite the difficulties with examining performance in charter schools versus public schools, the authors arrived at numerous conclusions about each type of school by using test scores as a common measure of performance. According to their results, conversion schools have a small positive effect on reading, and startup schools have a negative effect on reading and math as compared with conventional public schools. When the authors separated the schools into classroom and non-classroom, the results become clearer. The conversion/classroom schools showed a statistically significant, but small, positive effect on reading and a negative effect on math. The conversion/non-classroom schools showed a larger negative effect on both subject areas. The startup/classroom schools showed no significant difference as compared with traditional public schools. The startup/non-classroom performed the worst, with large negative effects in both subject areas. These results show the increased negative effect of non-classroom-based charter schools on standardized test performance. However, the reason behind these results is not clear without further analysis into the school and the makeup of the student body.

The authors also look at the change in performance in charter schools over time. These results show that newer charter schools often perform better than more mature ones. This might be because newer schools can learn from the mistakes of older schools.

State policy makers can use this study as a tool for strategizing about charter schools locally. For example, because of the negative performance in non-classroom schools, policy makers may approach these schools with caution. They may also be interested in the data that suggests that new charter schools sometimes outperform older ones. This suggests that principals of newer schools should perhaps meet regularly with principals of older schools in order for them to learn from each other. The primary purpose of this article, however, is to open the door to further research into effective educational strategies.