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Education News from EPRU/EPIC: ACHIEVEMENT FALLS SHORT IN CHARTER SCHOOLS

Education Policy Research Unit (EPRU) at ASU
Education and the Public Interest Center (EPIC) at CU-Boulder

******NEWS RELEASE--FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE******

ACHIEVEMENT FALLS SHORT IN CHARTER SCHOOLS

Study focusing on six Great Lakes states finds traditional public schools do better, but charters are closing the gap

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TEMPE, Ariz and BOULDER, Colo. (June 5, 2007) — A new study of student achievement in charter schools in six Great Lakes states finds that as a group they perform less well than comparable traditional public schools. The study also finds, however, that charter schools are improving over time and closing the gap between themselves and traditional public schools.

The study, “Evaluating the Impact of Charter Schools on Student Achievement: A Longitudinal Look at the Great Lakes States,” was conducted by Gary Miron, Chris Coryn and Dawn Mackety. The three scholars are affiliated with The Evaluation Center at Western Michigan University. The study was jointly published by the Education Policy Research Unit (EPRU) at Arizona State University and the Education and the Public Interest Center (EPIC) at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

The study looked at charter schools in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin. Miron and his colleagues tracked test performance for math and reading over five years. Sophisticated statistical analyses based on state-wide data sets were used to create comparisons with demographically similar traditional public schools.

The study’s primary finding is that 60 percent of the comparisons drawn between charter and traditional public schools favored the traditional public schools. But the authors have also found important differences among states, some of which offer hope that charter school performance may catch up to the performance of other public schools. They note,

for instance, examples of “successful charter schools [that] are consistently performing better than expected.”

The researchers also identified differences among states, in terms of current charter school performance and of improvements in the charter school sector over time. “Lowest performance appears in the states with the newest charter school initiatives, Indiana and Ohio. Illinois has the highest relative results, perhaps because some 15 percent of its charter schools have closed since 2000; when poor performing schools close, aggregate results for remaining schools rise.” But, Miron and his colleagues write, while Indiana and Ohio “have the lowest current results, over time their charter schools are making relatively large improvements,” the researchers write. These two state’s improvement has been greater than states with the longest-standing charter school laws -- Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan.

The study’s focus on academic achievement in charter schools reflects the current national commitment to demanding high and ever-improving test scores. The authors conclude, “If the charter school reform is to serve as a lever for change, it must demonstrate accountability: overall, charter schools should outperform similar district schools on standardized tests. Aside from recent advancements in Illinois, charter schools reforms in the Great Lakes Region, have so far failed to meet this key expectation.”

Find Gary Miron’s report, “Evaluating the Impact of Charter Schools on Student Achievement: A Longitudinal Look at the Great Lakes States,” on the web at: <http://epsl.asu.edu/epru/documents/EPSTL-0706-236-EPRU.pdf>

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