

Aidan M. Levinson

Professor Reginald Wells

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Policy Memo

I. Research Question

- Do charter schools provide their students with achievement levels that are equal to or greater than the public school option? If so, what conditions allow for that to occur?

II. Executive Summary

- Among the many issues that our education system faces today, is the growing disparity between public and charter schools, felt to varying degrees and in various ways depending on the location. Charter schools were created to begin with to offer a more specialized alternative to the public option in hopes that it would yield better results. The argument for the keeping of charter schools in today's environment is that they are highly specialized as well as more innovative and responsive to students than the public option (Bettinger, 2005, p. 133). Using quantitative analysis of student achievement data based on test scores Bettinger finds that in Michigan's school system in fact do not improve student achievement rates, but lowers them (Bettinger, 2005, p. 145). That being said, though, there are areas where charter schools do indeed present a better option: "Most intriguing, attending a charter school means attending a better-performing school in high-poverty areas but a lower performing school in low-poverty areas. Yet even in the best case the positive effect of attending a charter school only slightly

offsets the disadvantages of black and Hispanic students” (Logan et. al., 2016).

The problem here, essentially, is that there are multiple levels of inequality between the two systems and can expand depending on which location both exist in. The rules and regulations regarding these systems change depending on that.

III. Background

- Charter schools are organizations sanctioned by the state government that are allowed to skirt certain educational regulations in order to develop a better alternative to public schools (Bettinger). Specifically, most of the inequity developed between these systems stems from how tax dollars are legally obligated to be sent to charter schools out of the public school fund for them to be able to operate. Because of the funding drawn from public schools it allows charter schools to not have to do as much budgeting as public schools.
- What is evident, though, is that there are situations where charter schools do actually perform well and provide a decent alternative to a public school, namely urban environments where the public schools are underperforming. The charter schools are able to fill a void when the public schools are having issues. In non-urban environments, charter schools are bound to have issues when reviewing historical trends. Using quantitative analysis of student achievement data based on test scores Bettinger finds that in Michigan’s school system in fact do not improve student achievement rates, but lowers them (Bettinger, 2005, p. 145). There does not seem to be a universal coordinated effort across the country to close the gap by providing adequate funding to both systems, public and charter.

IV. Key Stakeholders

- State and Federal Government Officials
 - Lawmakers (i.e. elected officials, state Department of Education leaders, policy analysts, etc.) need to ensure that students have an equal opportunity to have a quality education in either system. They need to ensure that there is a common standard in each part of the educational process in each system as well.
- Public School Leaders
 - Public school leaders would benefit from a more equitable funding system to better the relationship between them and charter schools. As long as they have the resources to operate on a level playing field they can be successful.
- Charter School Leaders
 - Charter school leaders should be ready to have more reliance put on them for how to be funded. They can be successful with the amount of private money they receive and slowly move away from drawing funds from public schools.
- Students & Families
 - In the end, students and their families are the ones feeling the impact the most of an inequitable system. They deserve an education no matter what situation they are in that allows for equity and a full education to get the start that everyone deserves.

V. Appraisal of Past Solutions

- The original intentions of state governments across America to create charter schools were truly developed with good intent. Though that is true, charter schools have contributed to the development of many of the disparities our country's school system faces today.
- When charter competition is in full effect: "overall charter school competition has had a negative impact on student achievement in Michigan's traditional public schools. The effect is small or negligible in the short-run, but becomes more substantial in the medium- and long-run," indicating a more systemic issue (Ni, 2009, p. 580).
- Charter reform on the state level has been minimal and has not had a major impact when tried. Thanks to political influence, changes and reform can be stopped at the request of powerful voices which add another major dimension that can blow up solutions even after they are implemented.

VI. Project Plan

- After reviewing this disparity between the two education systems, I have concluded that my project plan should focus on the success of established organizations that work on these issues. I intend to bring my plan to fruition through fundraisers to support these organizations in order to close the gap between public and charter schools.

VII. Conclusion

- In conclusion, there is a strong disparity between public and charter schools in most places across the country. What it most likely comes down to after hearing from stakeholders in this relationship is that it has to do with funding inequities.

Given the pervasiveness of this issue and how it already has a foothold across the country, it would make the most impact to have our project focus on established organizations and efforts combating this problem.