

Charter versus District Schools and Student Achievement: Implications for School Leaders

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Abstract : There is a preponderance of information regarding the overall effectiveness of charter schools and their ability to increase academic achievement compared to traditional district schools. Most research on the topic is focused on comparing long and short-term outcomes, academic achievement in mathematics and reading, and locale (i.e., urban, v. Rural). While the lingering unanswered questions regarding effectiveness continue to loom for school leaders, data on charter schools suggests that enrollment increases by 10% annually and that charter schools educate more than 2 million U.S. students across 40 states each year. Given the increasing share of U.S. students educated in charter schools, it is important to better understand possible differences in student achievement defined in multiple ways for students in charter schools and for those in Independent School District (ISD) settings in the state of Texas. Data were retrieved from the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) repository that includes data organized annually and available on the TEA website. Specific data points and definitions of achievement were based on characterizations of achievement found in the relevant literature. Specific data points include but were not limited to graduation rate, student performance on standardized testing, and teacher-related factors such as experience and longevity in the district. Initial findings indicate some similarities with the current literature on long-term student achievement in English/Language Arts; however, the findings differ substantially from other recent research related to long-term student achievement in social studies. There are a number of interesting findings also related to differences between achievement for students in charters and ISDs and within different types of charter schools in Texas. In addition to findings, implications for leadership in different settings will be explored.

Keywords : charter schools, ISDs, student achievement, implications for PK-12 school leadership

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