What Makes Schools Work? Lessons from the National Center on School Choice

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Guiding Framework

School Type
- Charter/TPS

School Conditions
- Principal leadership
- Teacher hiring and qualifications
- Organizational conditions

Classroom Conditions & Instruction

Achievement Gains

School Context
Research Questions

- Do principals in charter and traditional public schools report differences in their leadership practices and teacher hiring behavior?
- What do we know about the labor market for teachers in charter schools?
- How do instructional practices and conditions differ between charter and traditional public schools?
- What are the mathematics and reading gains of charter school students compared with students in traditional public schools?
Analytic Sample

- 98 schools with principal and teacher surveys, linked student achievement data
  - 1,959 teachers
  - 16,757 students
- Schools located in 8 states
  - CPS and TPS matched by state, geographic proximity, grade level configuration, student demographics
- Charter schools by affiliation with a management organization
  - One national organization (BEST Academy)
  - Affiliations with other management organizations
  - No affiliation
How Do Principals Spend Their Time?

• Overall, charter and TPS principals spend their time on roughly similar types of tasks.
  – Most of their time is on routine management tasks
  – Charter principals spend somewhat less time on instructional leadership

• There is variation by charter school affiliation
  – Principals in charter schools with a management organization spend more time on instructional leadership than principals in non-affiliated charter schools.
  – They also have less of a job focus on choice-related tasks such as securing a facility, recruiting students/parents, working with governance board.
What Do Principals Care About When Hiring Teachers?

Most important:
- Compassion for students
- Certification
- Team Player
- Enthusiasm
- Agreement with school mission/vision
- Ability to produce gains in student achievement
- Strong pedagogical skills
- Ability to work with at-risk students

Least important:
- Graduate of prestigious university
- Alumni of TFA, Teaching Fellows, etc.
- Previous work experience outside of teaching
- Shared racial/ethnic background or language with students or parents
- Previous teaching experience
Principals in Charter and Traditional Public Schools Prefer to Hire Teachers with Similar Characteristics

• They also report a similar amount of their job is focused on hiring teachers.

• Charter school principals:
  – Place *greater* importance on hiring teachers that are willing to take on extra duties
  – Place *less* importance on the ability to work with at-risk students or produce student achievement gains

• Principal preferences are driven mostly by student composition and teacher experience level in the school, not school type
Mixed Evidence About Whether Teachers Want to Teach in Charter Schools

• Varies by charter school affiliation and teacher preferences.
What Do Teachers Want in Schools Where They Work?

• All teachers: supportive principal, like-minded educators, autonomy over teaching, agree with school mission, positive reputation

• BEST Academy teachers have preferences similar to TPS teachers

• Compared to TPS teachers, teachers in other charter schools report:
  – a lower preference for having a supportive principal, positive reputation, and job security
  – a greater preference for agreeing with the school mission and autonomy over teaching
What Do We Know About Charter School Teachers?

• Less likely to be certified or have a master’s degree
• Are less experienced
  – One-third of CPS teachers are in first three years of teaching
• Charter schools have higher teacher turnover
• Are slightly more likely to have come to teaching from another career
  – But this varies greatly by charter affiliation
• Mixed evidence about whether they went to more selective colleges
Instructional Conditions

• In the aggregate, charter school teachers have greater academic press than teachers in TPS.
  – Increased focus on student achievement
  – Stronger instructional coherence
  – More time on task

• This is driven mostly by teachers in BEST Academy schools.

• Charter school teachers also report greater levels of professional community.
Asking About Mathematics Instruction

- What topics do teachers cover?
- What types of expectations do teachers have for students?

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<th>Memorize &amp; Recall</th>
<th>Perform Procedure</th>
<th>Demonstrate Understanding</th>
<th>Analyze, Prove, Generalize</th>
<th>Solve non-routine problem</th>
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Charter and TPS Teachers Have Largely Similar Instruction

• Teachers in charter and traditional public schools cover a similar number of topics at similar breadth and depth.

• Charter schools in the aggregate expect similar levels of cognitive complexity in student work.

• But there are differences by charter school affiliation.
  – Teachers in BEST Academy schools and those with no affiliation spent relatively more time on tasks that involved students performing procedures and less time on tasks that involved solving non-routine problems.
  – BEST Academy teachers also spent more time expecting students to memorize and recall basic facts.
Similar Achievement Gains

- Overall, charter and TPS have similar student achievement gains in math and reading.
- Again, there is variation by charter school affiliation.
  - Some evidence of slightly larger achievement gains in BEST Academy schools in reading.
Conclusions

- In the aggregate, charter and traditional public schools are more alike than they are different.
- There is variation within the charter and traditional public school sectors.
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