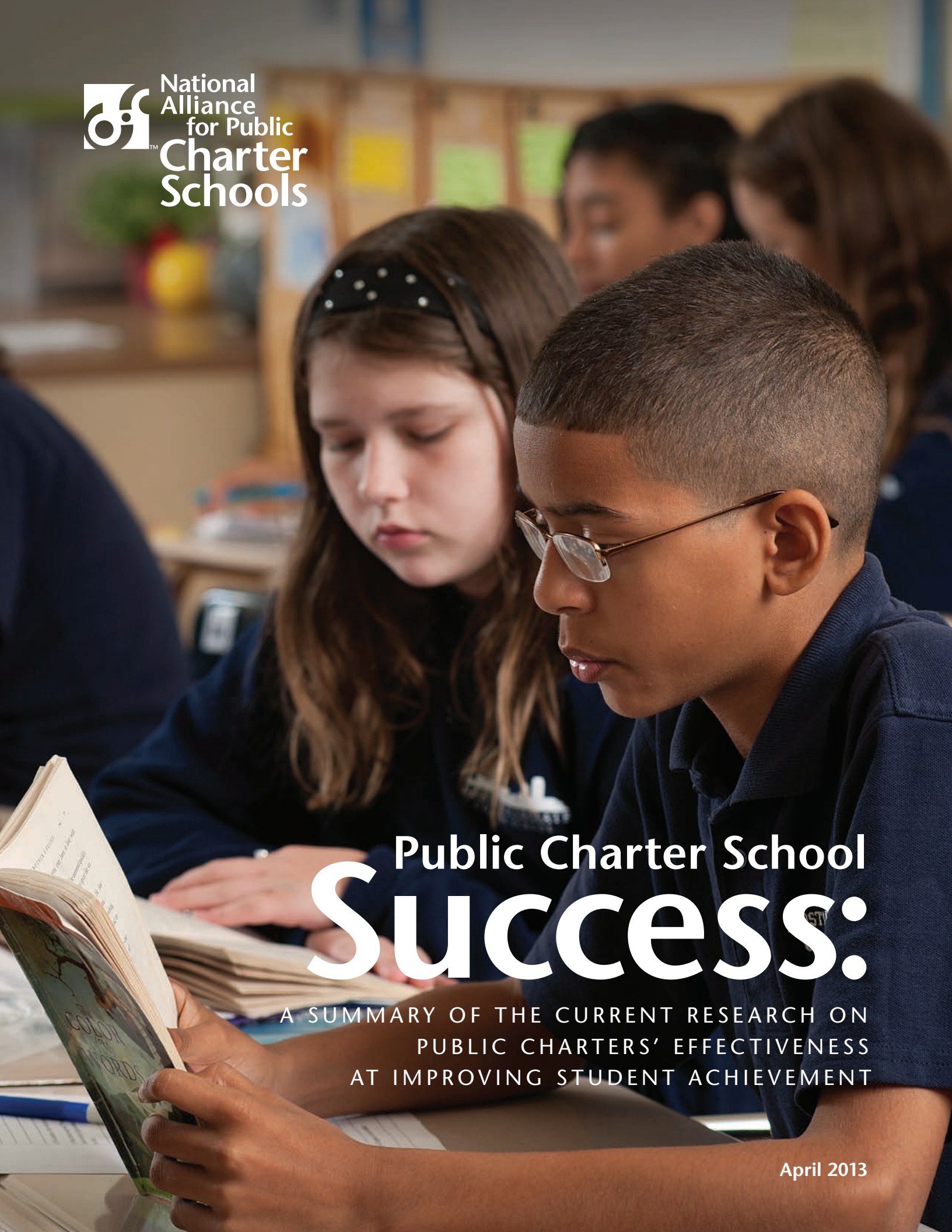

National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

# Public Charter School Success:

## A SUMMARY OF THE CURRENT RESEARCH ON PUBLIC CHARTERS' EFFECTIVENESS AT IMPROVING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

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# INTRODUCTION

The ultimate sign of any school's success and the indicator by which all others are measured is student academic performance. The question of whether public charter schools have had a positive impact on student performance has been front and center since the first public charter school opened in 1992. To date, there have been numerous studies that examine the academic performance of students who attend public charter schools (for a review of charter school studies from 2010 and earlier, see the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools report, *Measuring Charter Performance: A Review of Public Charter School Achievement Studies*). The large number of studies reflects significant interest in understanding whether charter schools provide high-quality educational experiences to students.

In 2011, the Center for Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) released a report, *The Effect of Charter Schools on Student Achievement: A Meta-Analysis of the Literature*, which aggregated results from the performance studies conducted that used the best data and the most sophisticated research techniques to examine public charter schools. The report showed public charter schools were overall outperforming comparable traditional public schools, with the strongest positive effects in elementary school reading and middle school math. Moreover, the magnitude of the positive charter school effect sizes was relatively large when compared with other school reform efforts, such as reducing class size.

Since the 2010 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools review of charter school studies and the 2011 CRPE meta-analysis of high-quality charter school research reports were published, there have been a number of new, high-quality studies of public charter schools published. This report provides summaries of the new studies released since 2010. The public charter school student performance studies examined in this report are studies that use longitudinal student-level data to examine public charter schools across the country, from national studies on charter management organizations (CMOs) and the KIPP model, to studies in different states and cities, including Florida, Indiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, New York City, Utah, Washington, D.C. and Wisconsin.

The new studies published since 2010 show positive results for students who attend public charter schools compared with traditional public schools. Three national studies and ten studies from major regions across the country since 2010 found positive academic performance results for students in public charter schools compared to their traditional public school peers, suggesting a strong upward trend among new studies in the effect of public charter schools on student performance. Since 2010, just one study that used longitudinal student-level data found neutral or negative results looking at public charter schools in the state of Utah.

The new studies, combined with the aggregated results from the 2011 CRPE meta-analysis, provide evidence that many public charter schools are providing excellent learning opportunities for students. As the public charter sector matures, charter school leaders, authorizers and charter support organizations are increasingly focusing their attention on school quality. The achievement studies suggest that the focus on quality is producing results. To ensure that public charter schools continue to perform well, additional research should concentrate on the policy, operational and instructional conditions that produce high-performing public charter schools.

# A REVIEW OF THE CURRENT RESEARCH: 2013

## National Study of KIPP Public Charter Schools, 2013

Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) middle schools nationwide have significant and substantial positive impacts on student achievement in the four core academic subjects: reading, math, science and social studies, according to a report released in February 2013.

The report found that KIPP middle schools have positive and statistically significant impacts on student achievement across all years and all subject areas examined. In each of the four subjects studied, KIPP schools produced achievement gains large enough to have a substantial impact on student outcomes:

- **Math**: Three years after enrollment, the estimated impact of KIPP instruction on math achievement is equivalent to moving a student from the 44th to the 58th percentile of the school district's distribution. This represents 11 months of additional learning growth over and above what the student would have learned in three years without KIPP.
- **Reading**: Three years after enrollment, the estimated impact in reading is equivalent to moving a student from the 46th to the 55th percentile, representing eight months of additional learning growth over and above what the student would have learned in three years without KIPP.
- **Science**: Three to four years after enrollment, the estimated impact in science is equivalent to moving a student from the 36th to the 49th percentile, representing 14 months of additional learning growth over and above what the student would have learned in that time without KIPP.
- **Social Studies**: Three to four years after enrollment, the estimated impact in social studies is equivalent to moving a student from the 39th to the 49th percentile, representing 11 months of additional learning growth over and above what the student would have learned in that time without KIPP.

Source: "KIPP Middle Schools: Impacts on Achievement and Other Outcomes," Mathematica Policy Research (February 2013).

## National Study of Public Charter Schools and CMOs, 2013

A report released in January 2013 looking at charter management organizations (CMOs) and individual charters nationwide found that public charter schools, as they age or replicate into networks, are very likely to continue the patterns and performance set by their early years of operation, and that for most charter schools their ultimate success or failure can be predicted by year three of a school's life.

This analysis found that, on average, students who attended CMOs for four years, have stronger achievement growth than traditional public school students and non-CMO charter students in both reading and math.

Additionally, this study found that public charter schools posted superior results with historically disadvantaged student populations. The study found that in nearly every category and subject area, CMOs and non-CMOs outperformed traditional public schools for the following student populations: Black, Hispanic, high-poverty, English language learners and special education.

The study also showed that all public charter schools – CMOs and non-CMOs – have varying quality in their early years that carries through as they mature. The report demonstrates that public charter schools are capable of attaining high levels of performance at the outset, disproving the notion of a universal rocky start-up period.

Source: "Charter School Growth and Replication," Center for Research on Education Outcomes at Stanford University (January 2013).

## Florida, 2013

A report released in March 2013 showed that public charter school students outperform their traditional public school counterparts in math, science and reading on state assessments.

According to the achievement report, in Florida, public charter schools had a higher percentage of students scoring at grade level or higher on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) reading test than traditional schools at the elementary, middle and high school levels. Public charter schools also had a higher percentage of students scoring at grade level or higher on the FCAT math test in the elementary and middle school grades.

Importantly, these findings held true for African-American, Hispanic and low-income students as well as English-language learners. Additionally, the achievement gap was narrowed for public charter school students in the 18 comparisons studied between white students and minority students in reading, math and science.

Source: "Student Achievement in Florida's Charter Schools: A Comparison of the Performance of Charter School Students with Traditional Public School Students," Florida Department of Education (March 2013).

## Massachusetts, 2013

A report released in February 2013 found that the typical student in a Massachusetts public charter school gains more learning in a year than his or her peer in a district public school, amounting to about one and a half more months of learning per year in reading and two and a half more months of learning per year in math.

The study included an analysis of Boston public charter schools, finding that the gains for a typical student in a Boston charter – about 13 percent of the state's charter students – were even more pronounced, equating to more than twelve months of additional learning per year in reading and thirteen months greater progress in math. At the school level, 83 percent of Boston charter schools have significantly more positive learning gains than their district school counterparts in reading and math, and no Boston charter schools were found to have significantly lower learning gains.

Source: "Charter School Performance in Massachusetts," Center for Research on Education Outcomes at Stanford University (February 2013).


## New York City, 2013

A report released in February 2013 found that the typical student in a New York City public charter school gains more learning in a year than his or her peer in a district public school, amounting to about one more month of learning in reading and five more months of learning in math.

Student performance in Harlem public charter schools was also considered. The results for the typical student in a Harlem public charter school – approximately 25 percent of the city's charter students – were even more pronounced in math, on average gaining seven more months than his or her peer in a district public school, but less than a full additional month in reading.

This study added two years of performance data to a 2010 study, which also found that public charter school students in New York City outperformed students in traditional public schools.

Source: "Charter School Performance in New York City," Center for Research on Education Outcomes at Stanford University (February 2013).

## Michigan, 2013

A report released in January 2013 found that the typical student in a Michigan charter school gains more learning in a year than his or her peer in a district public school, amounting to about an additional two months of learning in reading and math. The results for the typical student in a Detroit public charter school (27 percent of the state's charter students) were even more pronounced, on average gaining nearly three months achievement for each year attending a charter school.

The analysis found that at the school level, on average, thirty-five percent of the charter schools have significantly more positive learning gains compared to their district school counterparts in reading, while only two percent of charter schools had significantly lower learning gains. In math, forty-two percent of the charter schools studied outperformed their district school counterparts, with only six percent performing worse.

Source: "Charter School Performance in Michigan," Center for Research on Education Outcomes at Stanford University (January 2013).

# A REVIEW OF THE CURRENT RESEARCH: 2012

A 2012 analysis looking at public charter management organizations (CMOs) across the country found that some, although not all, CMOs substantially boosted students' chances of graduating from high school and enrolling in postsecondary education compared to traditional district public schools.

## National Study of Public Charter Schools and CMOs, 2012

An analysis released in January 2012 by the Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) and Mathematica Policy Research looking at charter management organizations (CMOs) found that some, although not all, CMOs substantially boosted students' chances of graduating from high school and enrolling in postsecondary education compared to traditional district public schools.

The study examined academic impacts, as measured by state assessments, at 22 CMOs with four or more middle schools open by 2007. Estimates on student performance in individual CMOs are more often positive than negative. Two years after students enrolled in the 22 CMOs covered by the impact analysis, 11 CMOs produced significantly positive impacts in math and 10 CMOs produced significantly positive impacts in reading.

Source: "Charter-School Management Organizations Diverse Strategies and Diverse Student Impacts," The Center on Reinventing Public Education and Mathematica Policy Research (January 2012).

## Indiana, 2012

A report released in December 2012 found that the typical student in an Indiana charter school gains more learning in a year than his or her district school peer, amounting to about an additional month and a half of learning in reading and math. The results for the typical student in an Indianapolis charter school were more pronounced, equating to two months of additional learning and reading and nearly three months in math.

The analysis found that at the Indiana school level, 18 percent of the charter schools have significantly more positive learning gains than their traditional district school counterparts in reading, while eight percent of charter schools have significantly lower learning gains. In math, 23 percent of the charter schools studied outperform their traditional district school counterparts and 42 percent perform worse.

This report follows a study released in 2011, which also found that reading and math gains for public charter school students in Indiana were significantly better compared to their traditional public school peers.

Source: "Charter School Performance in Indiana," Center for Research on Education Outcomes at Stanford University (December 2012).

## New Jersey, 2012

A report released in November 2012 found that students in New Jersey public charter public schools on average made larger learning gains in both reading and math compared to their traditional district school peers.

Studying five years of data, from 2007-2011, and six tested grades (3-8), this report found that New Jersey charter school students on average gain an additional two months of learning per year in reading and an additional three months of learning per year in math compared to their peers in district public schools.

A significant finding came from the results of the urban charter schools in the state. Students enrolled in urban charter schools in New Jersey learn significantly more in both math and reading compared to their traditional public school peers. In fact, charter students in Newark gain an additional seven and a half months in reading per year and nine months per year in math compared to their traditional public school counterparts.

Source: "Charter School Performance in New Jersey," Center for Research on Education Outcomes at Stanford University (November 2012).

## Utah, 2012

A report released in August 2012 examined student achievement and demographics in public charter schools in Utah compared to traditional public schools. This report found that the performance of Utah's charter school sector was held back by the "low effectiveness and high student mobility" of newly-established charter schools.

The report also found that when charter schools gain more experience, they become as effective as traditional public schools, and in some cases more effective than traditional public schools.

Source: "Twice Considered: Charter Schools and Student Achievement in Utah," National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education (August 2012).

## Wisconsin, 2012

A paper showed that public charter schools in Milwaukee, Wisconsin appeared to have no significant effect on student achievement. However, this paper found that this average effect masks important heterogeneity in the effectiveness of public charter schools across different types of charter schools.

It found that public charter schools with higher autonomy from school districts in terms of financial budget, academic program and hiring decisions, are more effective and that students in these types of charter schools read at a grade level higher than similar students who attend traditional public schools.

Source: "Do Charter Schools Improve Student Achievement?" Abt Associates (May 2012).

# A REVIEW OF THE CURRENT RESEARCH: 2011

In Massachusetts, it is estimated that one year in an urban lottery public charter middle school boosted student scores dramatically, by 0.34 standard deviations in math and 0.14 standard deviations in English.

## Massachusetts, 2011

A working paper released in August 2011 found that urban public charter schools in Massachusetts were most effective at boosting student achievement for non-white and underserved student populations. This paper also found that while over-subscribed urban charter schools that admit students by lottery have produced the largest improvement in student achievement, non-urban charter schools are uniformly ineffective in raising measured achievement.

The authors estimated that one year in an urban lottery public charter middle school boosted student scores dramatically, by 0.34 standard deviations in math and 0.14 standard deviations in English. In contrast, non-urban charter schools appear to degrade performance. Although, as the authors noted, "…most non-urban students do reasonably well in any case."

Source: "Explaining Charter School Effectiveness," The National Bureau of Economic Research (August 2011).

## Wisconsin, 2011

A March 2011 study that looked at the effectiveness of Milwaukee's public charter schools in promoting student achievement growth found that public charter school students outperformed traditional public school students in both reading and math.

In looking at three years of student achievement growth, this study cited a clear pattern of positive public charter school effects growing over time. The study found little consistent evidence of differences in achievement gains between public charter and traditional public school students after one year. The second year growth was stronger for public charters in some models and for some tests, but not for others. However, after three years, a sizable public charter school advantage was apparent in all of the analyses.

Additionally, the analyses indicate that after three years, public charter schools appeared to have the greatest positive impact on students at the lower end of the achievement distribution.

Source: "Milwaukee Independent Charter Schools Study: Report on Two- and Three-Year Achievement Gains," School Choice Demonstration Project, University of Arkansas (March 2011).

# A REVIEW OF THE CURRENT RESEARCH: 2010

On average, students in Washington, D.C. who attended public charter schools scored 15 and 16 percent of a standard deviation better in reading and math respectively.

## Washington, D.C., 2010

A working paper released in December 2010 examined the public school choice environment in the District of Columbia and the effects of independent public schools on the achievement levels of students who exercise this type of school choice. This paper found that students who attend public charter schools significantly outperform similar students who attend in-boundary district public schools in both reading and math tests.

Additionally, when considering residential proximity along with school choice, this paper found that student achievement was even stronger. On average, students who attended public charter schools scored 15 and 16 percent of the standard deviation better in reading and math respectively.

Source: "Public School Choice and Student Achievement in the District of Columbia," National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (December 2010).


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