

Charter school practices in Michigan similar to public schools

December 2 2016, by Julie Monteiro De Castro



Credit: University of Michigan

A new study by the University of Michigan's Education Policy Initiative shows Michigan's charter schools follow similar practices as the traditional public schools that their students would otherwise attend.

As Betsy DeVos—one of the pioneers of charter school development in Michigan—is poised to shape school choice throughout the country, the survey provides an unprecedented look at how the two sectors compare.

The Michigan School Practices Survey, conducted by U-M researchers Susan Dynarski, Brian Jacob and Mahima Mahadevan, measured the different approaches taken by charters and other [public schools](#) in the state. It is part of a larger project, still in process, studying differences in [student performance](#) across sectors. The survey was conducted in 2013 to align with the data used in the student performance study.

The survey asked school leaders about their approaches to supporting and evaluating teachers; admitting, teaching and disciplining students; and the involvement of administrators and parents in school life.

"We were surprised to find few differences in the practices of charter and traditional public schools in Michigan," said Susan Dynarski, U-M professor of education and public policy. "Research in Boston and New York found [charter schools](#) had longer school days and years, and tended to follow a set of 'no excuses' practices."

Subsequent research has linked these practices to better student performance.

- Charters in Boston have longer school years and days than traditional public schools, thereby providing many more hours of instruction. Charters in Michigan do not.
- Charters in Boston and New York stand out for using a 'no excuses' approach, characterized by high expectations and high supports for students. Charters in Michigan are not much more likely than other public schools to use this approach. On average, charter schools report using 4.8 of 10 'no excuses' policies, while their peers in traditional public schools reported using 4.2.

The survey did identify one key difference between the two sectors in Michigan: the amount of autonomy given principals.

School leaders in charters report having more control over personnel decisions (83 percent of charter school principals make final teacher hiring selections, but only 53 percent of public school principals do the same) and choosing the curriculum their school uses (45 percent of charter principals say they can choose their curriculum, while 16 percent of public school leaders have such authority).

Charter governance in Michigan is quite different from that in Massachusetts. In Michigan, public colleges authorize and oversee charter schools, with the state department of education playing a relatively narrow role compared to other states' agencies. Most Michigan charter schools are run by for-profit companies, while none are in Massachusetts.

The researchers are not only studying these schools' practices, but also their effects. In ongoing work, the Education Policy Institute at U-M's Ford School of Public Policy will examine the differences in student achievement across charter and traditional public schools in the state.

Provided by University of Michigan

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