Inside Online Charter Schools
A Report of the National Study of Online Charter Schools

Media Call and Webinar

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Online charter school sector is young and under-studied

- Instructional approach is innovative, consistent with one of the purposes of charter laws
- Critics have questioned effectiveness of online charters
- Few rigorous studies of operations or effects
- We present results from the first national study of operations of online charter schools
Principal survey responses illuminate operations of online charter schools across the country

• Sought to survey principals in all online charters, which are:
  – Public charter schools
  – Serving *full-time* students
  – Delivering instruction entirely online

• Received responses from 68 percent of schools

• Survey findings supplemented with data from public sources (U.S. Department of Education)
About 200 online charter schools are operating, serving 200k students

- More than half serve elementary and middle grades as well as high school
- Sector dominated by a few schools serving >1000 students each
- 57 percent of schools are affiliated with management organizations
White students overrepresented, Hispanic students underrepresented

• English learners very underrepresented (0.4 percent)
• Students with disabilities represented in similar numbers as in conventional public schools (14 percent)
Independent study is most-frequently-used instructional approach

- One-third of schools rely exclusively on self-paced courses
- Very few online schools use lectures frequently at any grade level
Students in typical online charter schools receive 3 to 6 hours per week of synchronous (live) instructional time

- Time for median student (as opposed to median school) is 5 hours in elementary and middle grades, 6 hours in high school
- One-on-one instructional support time is 45-60 minutes per week
Online charter schools have substantially higher student-teacher ratios than other public schools.
Student engagement is the biggest challenge facing online charter schools

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Most online charter schools have substantial expectations of parents

Percentage of online charter schools expecting parents to play particular roles

- Actively participate in the student's instruction:
  - 4th grade: 78%
  - 7th grade: 56%
  - High school: 43%

- Participate in parent training sessions:
  - 4th grade: 80%
  - 7th grade: 70%
  - High school: 64%

Legend:
- Red: 4th grade
- Orange: 7th grade
- Maroon: High school
Key conclusions

• Online schooling creates both constraints and opportunities for delivering instruction

• Independent study is the dominant mode of learning, with much less synchronous (live) instructional time than in conventional schools

• Online charter schools expect much of parents

• Parental support may be necessary to keep students engaged—the biggest challenge for online charters
  – Challenge of student engagement is inherent in online instruction
  – But lean staffing and limited live contact hours may exacerbate the challenge and make it difficult to solve
For More Information

• Read the full report and the fact sheet

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