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CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON EDUCATION OUTCOMES

**CHARTER SCHOOLS:
THE FOREST AND THE TREES**

**2019 International School Choice and
Reform Conference**

Bottom Line

- The hunt continues for school improvement.
- Modest improvements for charter schools masks large differences across distribution.
- Important lessons about innovation arise from the variation we see.
- The policy framework of “flexibility for accountability” provides the conditions for steady improvement of schools over time.
 - Performance trumps tax status.
- Early work suggests policy framework may be causal.

The Evidence Over Time

On average, charter school sector has improved

Study	Year of Publication	Years Studied	Scope of Study	Charter Effect Reading	Charter Effect Math
National Charter School Study	2009	2004-2005 to 2007-2008	16 States + DC	-7 **	-21 **
National Charter School Study II	2013	2008-2009 to 2010-2011	25 States + DC	7 **	0.0
Urban Charter School Study	2015	2007-2008 to 2010-2011	41 Urban Areas	28 **	38 **

Charter Management Organizations

The performance at the average

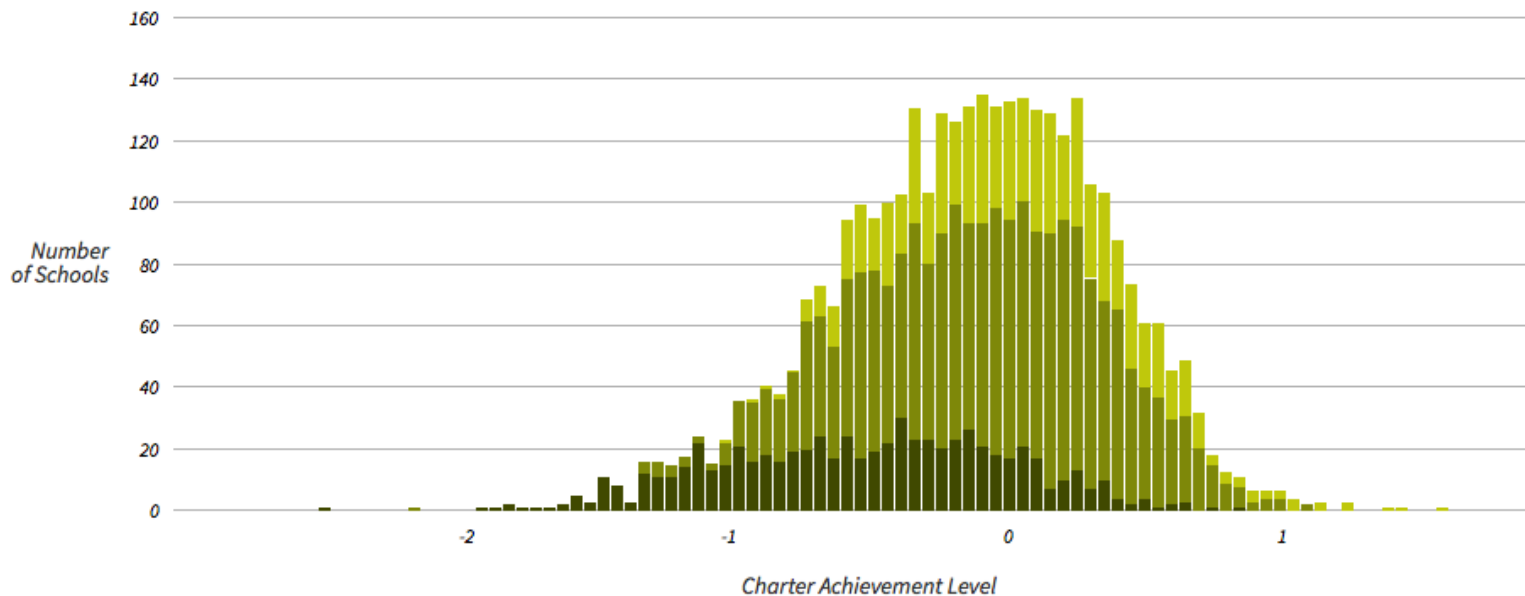
Study	Year of Publication	Years Studied	Scope of Study	Charter Effect – Reading	Charter Effect – Math
Charter Growth and Replication	2013	2006-2007 to 2010-2011	23 States + DC	35 ** 30**	-35 ** 18**
Charter Management Organizations	2017	2012-2013 to 2014-2015	26 States + DC	17 ** 24*	17 ** -12 n.s.

Sources of Real Differences

- State policy environments matter
 - MA, NJ, NY, TX strong; CA neutral; AZ, N
- Community density – labor markets
 - Urban results strong; others not so much
- Organizational structures
 - CMOs student outcomes stronger than local district's
 - CMOs also stronger than indie charter schools
- These factors pull the all-in average into subgroup averages

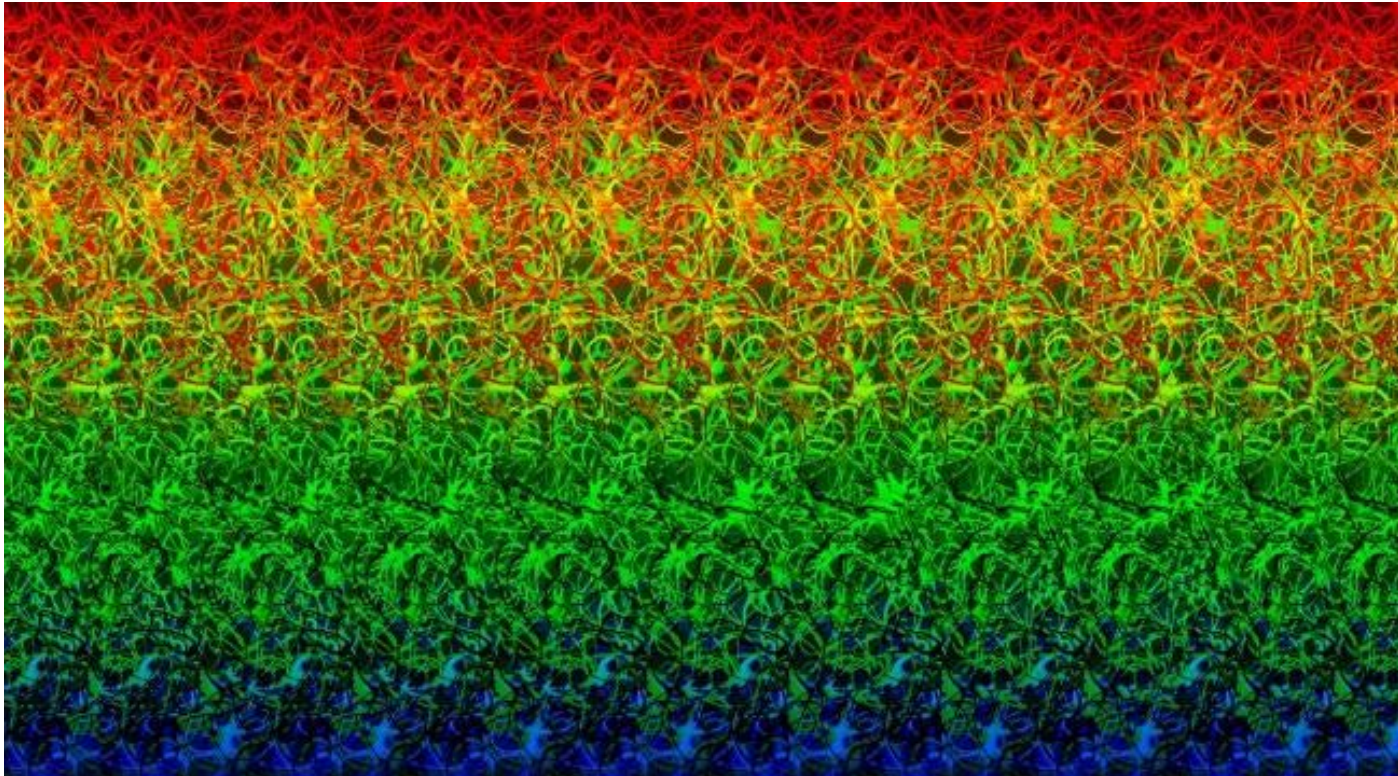
The Distribution is a Bigger Story

We array every charter by their achievement level.



Significantly Better No Significant Difference Significantly Worse

Stereograms and Headaches

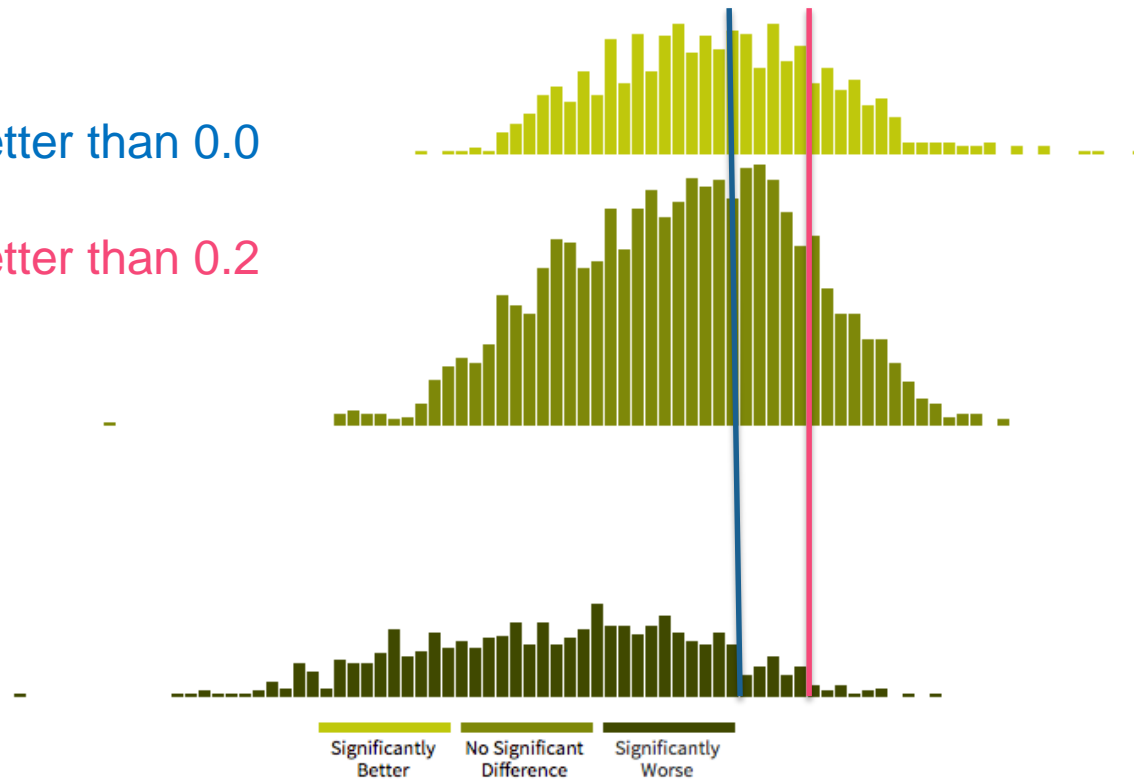


Hidden In the Forest...

At every level of achievement, charter schools can be better, worse, or no different than their local market.

553 schools better than 0.0

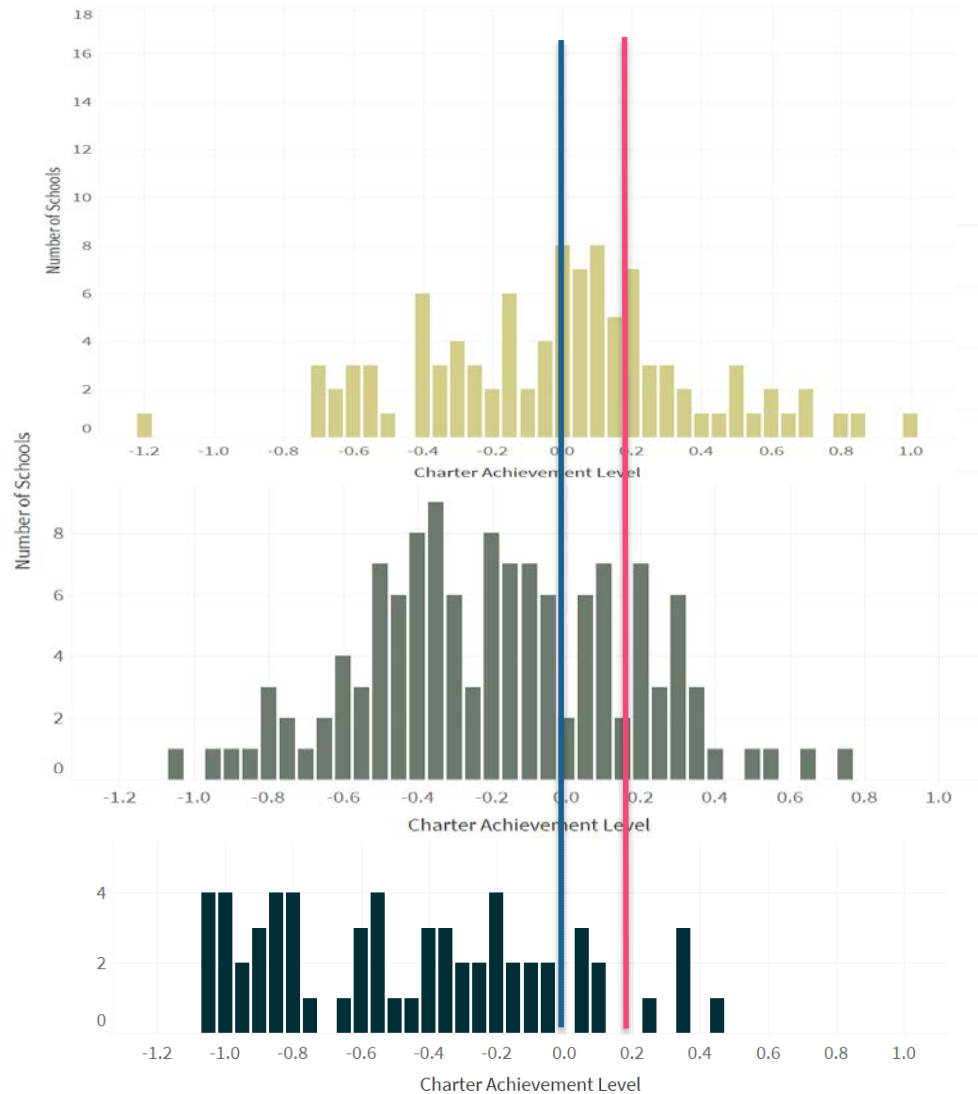
367 schools better than 0.2



High Quality Can Be Scaled

57 networks better than 0.0

32 networks better than 0.2



New Thinking

- Charter schools the largest improvement program to date
- Authorizers make bets
- Everybody tries their best
- The distribution is the result
- The price of getting the high flyers is the rest
- The “accountability” piece is critical and not yet fully functional.

New Thinking from the Trees

- Instead of searching for the “silver bullet” maybe we should instead be looking for the “silver policy” – charters as innovation labs.
- The charter framework creates a portfolio of results.
- If all parts of the system work, it creates an upward cycle.
- Lots of models possible.

New Thinking from the Trees

- Nothing inherently “charter” about “flexibility for accountability”
- District teachers and leaders could opt for the same deal
 - Indianapolis and Tennessee Innovation programs.
 - Evidence suggests these schools improve.
- Several states are considering adoption.
- Early evidence suggests policy framework may be causal.



Questions?