

No Stanford University Study Saying “Charters Make the Grade,” As Reported by Times-Picayune

Dr. Barbara Ferguson, Board Chair and Attorney
Research on Reforms, March 2011

Research on Reforms is a nonprofit foundation, dedicated to improving New Orleans public schools through research. See www.researchonreforms.org or email: bferguson@researchonreforms.org.

The Times-Picayune headline on March 19, 2011 read, “*Charters Make the Grade, Study Says*,” but Stanford University’s CREDO center had not released a study on charter schools since 2009, and that study was very controversial. The article said that “New Schools for New Orleans (NSNO) commissioned the study,” but what they actually did was to hire Stanford’s CREDO center to analyze charter test results. Because of the prestige associated with Stanford University, reporting that it conducted a study, when it did not, is misleading.

One of Stanford University’s research centers, CREDO (Center for Research on Education Outcomes), conducted a study on charter schools in 2009ⁱ, which was challenged by other Stanford faculty.ⁱⁱ For the study, CREDO partnered with 15 states and the District of Columbia to consolidate longitudinal student-level achievement data for the purpose of creating a national pooled analysis of the impact of charter schooling on student learning gains.

New Schools for New Orleans hired CREDO as the evaluator for its i3 grant.ⁱⁱⁱ As required by federal grants, evaluators are hired to assess effectiveness, and in this case, to also provide NSNO with a decision tool to determine which charter schools are eligible to apply for the NSNO grant funds.

For the analysis, New Schools for New Orleans provided CREDO with lists of charter schools, in which those with admission requirements were distinguished from those with open enrollment and no academic exit criteria.^{iv} Warren Easton Senior High School was on the list as being open enrollment, with no academic exit criteria. However, the school has academic exit criteria, which states that “any student who does not earn at least a 1.5 GPA for the yearly average may be excluded the next school year.”^v When contacted with this information, New Schools for New Orleans admitted that it mistakenly listed this incorrectly.^{vi}

The debate over the best governance model, whether charter or traditional, must be honest and without mistakes.^{vii} The children and youth of New Orleans have already been the pawns of an education experiment now lasting over five years.

There is no doubt that cities as diverse as New Orleans need some selective admission schools. But, Stanford University needs to know which failing schools are being chartered to actually turn around failing performance, and which selective schools are being chartered, just for a

governance change, since they already have the authority to not admit or remove failing students. In “not admitting or removing failing students” test scores will be higher, but that practice cannot be said to be an innovative education strategy to reform failing schools.

Endnotes:

ⁱ “Multiple Choice: Charter School Performance in 16 States,” 2009 CREDO (Center for Research on Education Outcomes), Stanford University, <http://credo.stanford.edu>

ⁱⁱ “A Statistical Mistake in the CREDO Study of Charter Schools,” Caroline Hoxby, October 2009. Read CREDO’s response at <http://credo.stanford.edu>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Michael Stone, Investment Partner, NSNO, March 23, 2011; Times-Picayune, March 19, 2011

^{iv} [http://researchonreforms.org/html/commentary/researchpapers/i3EligibleEffectSizes-](http://researchonreforms.org/html/commentary/researchpapers/i3EligibleEffectSizes-OpenEnrollmentCharterSchools-2011and2012Application.pdf)

[OpenEnrollmentCharterSchools-2011and2012Application.pdf](http://researchonreforms.org/html/commentary/researchpapers/i3EligibleEffectSizes-OpenEnrollmentCharterSchools-2011and2012Application.pdf)

^v Warren Easton Senior High School, Student Handbook, 2009-10, Page 11.

^{vi} Michael Stone, NSNO, March 23, 2011

^{vii} Many, including this writer, referred to the Stanford “study” because it was so written in the Times-Picayune, until investigation showed otherwise.