



## Newsire - January 31, 2006

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**Vol. 8, No. 5 CHARTER SCHOOLS REFUTABLE RESEARCH.** Data and research on public charter schools keeps accumulating, but how and what to conclude remains the subject of much disagreement among a wide variety of researchers. Last week, a study of public, public charter and private school achievement in 4th and 8th grade was released. After allegedly using what the [New York Times](#) called "advanced sophisticated techniques" to level out demographic differences, Christopher Lubienski and Sarah Theule Lubienski of the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana concluded that conventional public school students outperform all others. Public charter students are overwhelmingly represented in urban areas while conventional public school students are more likely to be represented in suburbs. Prominent researchers have argued that the variables used by the Illinois study were inadequate. Says Harvard Economist Caroline Hoxby, "The study by the Lubienskis uses Hierarchical Linear Modeling, which is nothing more than a way of comparing public schools to charter schools to private schools, controlling for some crude variables. This type of analysis has not been used by serious researchers for some time because it is grossly inadequate for making causal statements such as 'public schools do better' or 'Catholic schools do worse.' Only methods that guarantee apples-to-apples comparisons, such as randomization, produce results that can be taken seriously." **A BETTER METHOD.** What is the point of comparing apples and oranges? The Lubienski and Lubienski study does just that, forcing charter schools and private schools into the same category as public schools by using subjective variables. When using more accurate comparisons like matching or randomized studies, charter schools and private schools are shown to have far greater achievement than public schools. In a matching study, the achievement of a charter school or private school is matched with that of a nearby public school. An equally accurate method, randomization, takes a random sampling of charter schools and public schools for comparison. This kind of [scientific education research, which has been done by Harvard researcher Caroline Hoxby](#), consistently produces the conclusion that charter schools and private schools out perform public schools. **REAL DATA.** While the Illinois study was making the media rounds, new data was released that contradicts their conclusions. A new 2005 survey from the [National Center for Education Statistics](#) shows that charter schools open longer have higher math and reading scores than the national average. While the Lubienski and Lubienski study is just a snapshot of achievement and doesn't take progress into account, this survey reveals that students in the nation's oldest charter schools are a full 12 points ahead of their conventional school counterparts. Those results are also echoed in schools that are given more autonomy from the educational bureaucracy. The data also contradicts the study's assessment of demographics, revealing that, despite being eligible, 45 percent of non-participating charter schools choose not to participate in the federal Free & Reduced Lunch program, due mainly to administrative factors that make the program difficult to maneuver and obtain funds for. That data supports what dozens of previous studies have shown, that charter schools serve more disadvantaged students. **FROM THE STATES STATE OF THE STATES.** With the education content of tonight's State of the Union address up in the air, governors around the country continued their addresses with Governor Linda Lingle of Hawaii leading the push for education reform.

- **Hawaii:** Governor Linda Lingle asked the state Legislature for \$17.9 million in additional funding for charter schools and called for a lift on the current cap on charter schools to allow seven new schools to open.
- **New Mexico:** Governor Bill Richardson ignored structural changes, but instead talked of his state's efforts to improve teacher quality, expand access to Pre-Kindergarten, build schools in high growth areas, and the importance of modernizing schools. He also spoke about the need for accountability and teacher pay increases and what he calls New Mexico's "glaring weakness" - the lack of parental involvement.
- **Utah:** Money factored prominently in the address of Governor Jon Huntsman, who proposed an increase in the amount of money provided for each student in otherwise fiscally conservative Utah. He notes that some



students are struggling with the fundamentals of literacy and numeracy and proposes a seven million dollar voluntary, all-day kindergarten program. He did also talk about the need to "expand on the success of [Utah's] many public charter schools."

- **Wisconsin:** Governor Jim Doyle was duplicitous in calling for an increase in the cap of students allowed into the state's successful Milwaukee school choice program, while placing more restrictions on the private schools that accept students from the program. Doyle also says he wants to make a third year of math and science mandatory for high school graduation.

LEGISLATIVE ROUND-UP. The movement to expand charter school opportunities seems to be spreading across the country from New York, but some efforts are wolves in charter clothing:

- **Arizona:** Governor Janet Napolitano vetoed two school tax credit bills that would have provided scholarships for English-language learners to attend private schools.
- **Illinois:** Recently introduced bill SB2979 would remove geographical restrictions on where charter schools may operate but leave the charter school cap at 60 statewide.
- **Kansas:** A bill currently before the Education Committee inserts language that requires charter school students to be funded with the same portion of local funds that would typically follow a student.
- **South Carolina:** [Bill H3010 to establish a Carolina Public Charter School District](#) - a bureaucratic new authorizer that will not guarantee full funding to the charters it approves - was approved by the Senate, despite warnings from the state's charter school community that it would do more harm than good.
- **Maine:** Even after several changes, the bill that would create the first charter schools in Maine faces a majority opposition. The Education and Cultural Affairs Committee voted against the bill Thursday, 7-5, which would have paved the way for 20 new charter schools serving students that have disengaged from the conventional public school system.

*In Other News* EXCELLENT SCHOOLS. Building Excellent Schools, a Boston-based national non-profit, is looking for fellowship candidates. The 12-month, full-time training program prepares the right individual to design and open academically excellent urban charter schools. BES is looking for "high-capacity individual that are deeply committed to fundamentally changing urban education." Complete an online nomination form or learn more at [www.buildingexcellentschools.org](http://www.buildingexcellentschools.org).

