Charter Management Organizations (CMOs), non-profit organizations that operate multiple charter schools, have been expanding rapidly over the past decade and now serve substantial numbers of students, a large fraction of which come from low income and minority families. The variation across CMOs in their management strategies and educational practices is wide. CMOs vary in their size and growth rates, the amount of time they allocate for instruction, how they coach teachers and approach teacher evaluation, and whether they ask teachers to use specific instructional models, student assessments, or behavior strategies. The National Study of CMO Effectiveness is the first rigorous national evaluation of CMO impacts. This presentation will summarize the findings from the study related to (1) the diverse CMO management strategies and practices and (2) the extent to which they are associated with impacts on student achievement.

To examine CMO policies and practices, the study conducted surveys of CMO headquarters staff, principals, and teachers. The principal survey, which was the primary data source used to develop measures of practices in CMO schools and assess differences in CMO and district practices, included 221 principals across 36 CMOs as well as 171 principals in nearby district schools. We found significant differences between CMO schools and district schools on a number of practices, on average, and we also found significant variation among CMOs on these practices.

Our analysis of CMO impacts on student achievement combines experimental methods making use of CMO admission lotteries and quasi-experimental methods using matched comparison groups. To gauge the reliability of the quasi-experimental impact estimates, they are benchmarked against the experimental estimates in the same CMO schools. The quasi-experimental methods are then applied to a larger number of CMO schools including those where it is not possible to implement a randomized experimental design. We find that CMOs vary widely in their impacts on students’ reading and math achievement (as well as in their impacts on science achievement, social studies achievement, high-school graduation, and college entry).

Using regression models, we examine whether the differences between CMO and district practices are associated with math and reading impacts. To be sure, the associations we observe between impacts and specific CMO practices might not indicate a causal effect of the practices, but examining associations of practices with impacts is the necessary first step toward identifying promising practices. Findings from these correlational analyses indicate that CMOs with intensive coaching of teachers and comprehensive school-wide behavior policies tend to have larger impacts on students.