



VIEWPOINT

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A Roadmap for Improving Ohio's Public Schools

By: Matthew Carr

Summary

The Buckeye Institute has recently released a new study examining the factors most commonly thought to affect student achievement. Some of the results conform to the common wisdom about making Ohio's schools better. But other results find that widely held beliefs about what is best for students may be leading to policies that are ineffective and a costly waste of scarce education resources.

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The Buckeye Institute has recently released a new study examining the factors most commonly thought to affect student achievement. Some of the results conform to the common wisdom about making Ohio's schools better. But other results find that widely held beliefs about what is best for students may be leading to policies that are ineffective and a costly waste of scarce education resources.

There are five policies or factors our study found that consistently improve student achievement in Ohio's traditional public schools:

1. *Teacher competency is what matters most.* Having a 'highly qualified' teacher, as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act, in every classroom will do more to improve academic achievement than getting teachers with more experience or additional formal education.
2. *Programs to increase attendance* clearly have a strong effect on student achievement.
3. *Money matters but only when spent in the classroom.* Administrative spending does not raise student achievement. Raising the total amount of revenue for schools does not raise student achievement. Classroom spending does. It's not about putting more money into the system, it's about making sure that the money currently spent gets into the classroom.
4. *Reducing class sizes is not an effective policy alternative.* Intuitive and attractive as it may seem, the facts simply do not bear it out as an effective policy.
5. *Student mobility among traditional public schools is a serious obstacle to academic achievement.* Not surprisingly, a stable home may be one of the most important inputs for the chances of academic success for any student.



Knowing which policies actually have an effect on student achievement provides a solid foundation for future reforms.

Source: Corbis

This study also breaks new ground by analyzing the factors that influence student performance in charter schools.

By assessing whether the policies that affect achievement in traditional public schools are similar to those that affect achievement in charter schools, we have been able to determine to what degree these two public institutions are similar.

Our analysis found that charter schools are in fact a substantially different educational institution where different factors matter to student success.

The implications of these results for future charter school policies are significant and dramatic. Given the uniqueness and diversity of individual charter schools, education policymakers should:

1. Avoid adopting one-size-fits-all approaches to charter schools. What works in one charter school is unlikely to have the same effect, and could negatively impact, another charter school;
2. Avoid adopting reforms that emphasize *inputs* into the education process. Mandating standards such as uniform class size, curricula, or credentialing teachers is likely to be counterproductive in these schools;
3. Focus accountability on *outcomes* and *performance*. In the end, what matters most is whether charter school students are educated and perform well. They should be judged and held accountable primarily on performance, not whether their administration, organization, or teaching mimic traditional public schools, statewide curriculum standards, or even other charter schools.

Knowing which education policies and practices have proven to be effective is a good start. But this should not stop parents and policymakers from continuing to come up with new and innovative ways to make Ohio's entire education system better. Hopefully the results of this new study will provide a roadmap to guide these continued reforms.

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(Matthew Carr is the Education Policy Director at the Buckeye Institute for Public Policy Solutions, a research and educational institute located in Columbus, Ohio. More information on educational issues is available at www.buckeyeinstitute.org. Permission to reprint in whole or in part is hereby granted, provided the author and his affiliation are cited.)

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spent in the classroom***

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