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Full report available at www.policymattersohio.org/KRA-L2009.htm

Study finds that students entering magnets and charters are more prepared Kindergarten test shows lower scores for those starting at urban district schools

Kindergartners entering charter and magnet schools in Ohio's urban school districts performed significantly better on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment-Literacy (KRA-L) than did students in district neighborhood or "default" schools, according to this Policy Matters Ohio study of 2008 KRA-L scores.

The study found that charters located in seven urban districts averaged nearly 8 percent higher on the KRA-L than did district schools. When district magnet schools were not included in the district average, charters scored more than 10 percent higher than default schools while magnets scored more than 18 percent higher than default schools. Statistical testing showed that these differences are significant.

"It appears that charters and magnets get a head start in terms of student preparedness, but recent research shows that charters are not producing better results on state tests when compared to traditional public schools," said Piet van Lier, report author and researcher at Policy Matters Ohio. "Our findings are particularly relevant to Ohio's charter debate – if they are getting better-prepared students and producing equal or lower achievement, then charters should be scaled back, not expanded."

The report also analyzed district-level differences among school types for schools located in Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton and Toledo. With the exception of Dayton, these districts followed a similar pattern: magnets posted higher average scores for entering students than charters, and charters posted higher averages than default schools. Dayton charters scored slightly higher than district magnets. (Data for Canton and Youngstown were included in the aggregate analysis, but did not have enough schools for district-level calculations. Akron did not provide school-level averages and so was not included in this study.)

A separate analysis found an association between KRA-L scores and Ohio Achievement Test scores in 3rd-grade reading and math, suggesting that schools enrolling students who do better on the KRA-L also post higher OAT scores. A study by another organization found correlations between KRA-L scores and income level, documented preschool experience and 3rd-grade scores in Cincinnati.

The KRA-L is a screening tool that assesses oral language, rhyming, letter identification and alliteration. The assessment is intended to help target instruction appropriately depending on children's literacy skills when they enter kindergarten. Because educators administer it at the start of the school year, instruction offered by a school does not affect children's scores. It is required for all children enrolling in public kindergarten in Ohio.

