**Can Successful Schools Replicate? Scaling Up Boston’s Charter Sector**

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**Link:** [http://seii.mit.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/SEII-Discussion-Paper-2016.06-Cohodes-Setren-Walters-updated-2018.pdf](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=http-3A__seii.mit.edu_wp-2Dcontent_uploads_2016_10_SEII-2DDiscussion-2DPaper-2D2016.06-2DCohodes-2DSetren-2DWalters-2Dupdated-2D2018.pdf&d=DwMFaQ&c=lDF7oMaPKXpkYvev9V-fVahWL0QWnGCCAfCDz1Bns_w&r=pYsrmwtoomM1jkp0bjuNLax-65rChjNcg5oPA0fEFPc&m=aJj3JrfPAkGmKQbB4123d1NMzddc6j8G3aMc6WWmqTo&s=3lPlKAGi6-WU1bShF1w4GeygOO1AQMw046n-OdgdRmc&e=)

# Key Findings

In 2010, Massachusetts raised the state's cap on the share of funding dedicated to charter school tuition payments in low-performing districts, including Boston. The state labeled charter operators with track records of success “proven providers” and permitted their growth in low-performing districts through expanding existing campuses or opening new schools. As a result, the number of charter schools in Boston increased from 16 to 32 between 2010 and 2014.

We use randomized charter school admissions lottery records to study changes in the effectiveness of Boston's charter middle school sector during this period of rapid expansion. Results indicate that policymakers selected more effective schools for expansion: Proven providers produced larger effects than other charter schools before the reform. Despite a doubling of the share of students in charter schools, proven providers and other existing charters maintained their effectiveness after the charter expansion.

Estimates for expansion charters show that new campuses generate achievement gains comparable to those of their parent schools. Moreover, expansion charters produce these large impacts while enrolling students that appear more representative of the general Boston population than students at other charters. Together, the estimates for new and existing schools imply an increase in overall charter effectiveness despite the substantial growth in charter market share after the 2010 reform.

# Research Questions

* Did policymakers designate the most effective charter schools as proven providers?
* Did expansion campuses successfully replicate the effectiveness of their parent campuses? If so, why was replication successful?

# Data

This analysis uses charter school lottery records from spring 2004 to 2013, matched to administrative data on students’ enrollment, demographics, special needs status, and test scores. The charter school records include 14 out of the 15 charter schools operating in Boston at that time that enrolled students beginning in 5th or 6th grade, covering 94% of charter school enrollment in these types of schools in 2013–14. We consider schools proven providers if the state gave the charter school proven provider status, and we consider them expansion charters if they opened after the 2010 law went into effect. We refer to charter schools that do not fit into either of these two categories as “other charters.”

# Research Methods

We use charter school lottery records, matched to state administrative data with demographics and test scores, to compare students who were offered a seat in a charter school lottery to those who were not, adjusting for charter attendance. We estimate effects of attending the different types of charter schools (proven providers, expansion charters, and other charters) both before and after the 2010 law change.

# Detailed Results

**Did policymakers designate the most effective charter schools as proven providers?**

Before charter school expansion, a year of attendance at a charter school that would eventually be designated a proven provider increased test scores by 0.33 standard deviations per year in math and 0.14 standard deviations per year in English/language arts (ELA). The respective per year impacts for other charters were 0.18 in math and 0.09 in English. The difference between proven providers and other charters is statistically significant in math but not in English. This implies that policymakers successfully identified schools with larger academic gains to serve as proven providers.

**Did expansion campuses successfully replicate the effectiveness of their parent campuses?**

After charter school expansion, replicate campuses had large statistically significant impacts on math and ELA, similar in magnitude to those in proven provider campuses. Specifically, the causal effect of attending an expansion campus is 0.32 standard deviations per year in math and 0.23 standard deviations per year in English. In the period after charter school expansion, proven providers continued to generate gains of similar magnitude to those they produced in the period prior to expansion. Other charter schools again had smaller test score effects than proven providers, but generated significant test score gains. Generally, students who have test scores below the Boston average when they apply to Boston charter schools experience the largest charter test score gains.

**Why was replication successful?**

A qualitative analysis of organizational practices during expansion and a quantitative analysis of variation in teacher value-added indicate that charter schools use a highly standardized model that limits variation in practices across schools and classrooms. This standardized approach may play an important role in the portability of charter effectiveness to new campuses.

# Implications for Policy and Practice

The state effectively identified the most successful charter school models as proven providers. During a period of rapid expansion that doubled the share of students in charter schools, proven providers in Boston sustained large impacts on student test scores and replicated their effectiveness at expansion campuses. Policies like the proven provider law, which use past success as a criterion for expansion or replication, may be powerful tools to help interventions maintain effectiveness when they serve communities at larger scale.