

No Excuses charter schools associated with greater gains in math and literacy than traditional public schools



U.S. Air Force photo
Airman 1st Class Shelby Kay-Fantozzi)

No Excuses charter schools are associated with larger math and literacy achievement gains for their students than their public school peers

What is the aim of this review?

This Campbell systematic review examines the effects of No Excuses charter schools on students' math and literacy achievement gains compared to similar students in public schools. The review summarizes evidence from 18 studies, including 5 randomized controlled trials and 13 quasi-experimental studies.

The No Excuses charter school model focuses heavily on high academic expectations, rigid and consistent discipline, extended instructional time, intensive teacher training, and increased parental involvement. This review examines the effect of No Excuses charter schools on math and literacy achievement. On average, No Excuses charter schools are associated with greater student gains on standardized measures of math and literacy achievement when compared to traditional public schools—with higher gains for math.

What did the review study?

Students from low socio-economic backgrounds or traditionally disadvantaged groups often underperform their peers on standardized tests of math and literacy achievement. This “achievement gap” is associated with negative education and career outcomes—both short-term and long-term. No Excuses charter schools are intended to reduce this gap and improve the achievement gains of traditionally disenfranchised groups.

For the purposes of this review, No Excuses charter schools are those charter schools that highlight the importance of high academic expectations for all students, rigid discipline enforcement, extended time in school, intensive teacher training, and parental involvement.

This review examines whether No Excuses charter schools are associated with greater achievement gains in math and literacy compared to the achievement gains of similar students enrolled in traditional public schools.

What studies are included?

This review includes studies that evaluate the effects of No Excuses charter schools on students' literacy and math achievement gains. It includes 18 studies conducted in the United States spanning from 1990-2015.



How up-to-date is this review?

The review authors searched for studies through June 2016.

What is the Campbell Collaboration?

The Campbell Collaboration is an international, voluntary, non-profit research network that publishes systematic reviews. We summarise and evaluate the quality of evidence about programmes in the social and behavioural sciences. Our aim is to help people make better choices and better policy decisions.

About this summary

This summary was prepared by the study authors based on their Campbell Systematic Review 2017:9 ‘‘No Excuses’’ Charter Schools for Increasing Math and Literacy Achievement in Primary and Secondary Education: A Systematic Review’ by Sarah Krowka, Alexandria Hadd, Robert Marx (10.4703/csr.2017.9). The summary was redesigned and proofread by Tanya Kristiansen (Campbell Collaboration). Financial support from the American Institutes for Research for the production of this summary is gratefully acknowledged.



What are the main results in this review?

No Excuses charter schools, on average, produced larger math and literacy achievement gains for their students than their public school peers—with higher gains for math. These benefits increase for three years, at which point the achievement gains stabilized or returned to lower gains.

What do the findings in this review mean?

No Excuses charter schools may help underperforming students make larger achievement gains in math and literacy, more so than at traditional public schools. Additional research is needed to examine the effects of this intervention while accounting for significant issues related to sample bias and to determine the scalability of the model.

What are the limitations in interpretation of this review?

Readers should take caution when interpreting this review due to several limitations. First, studies were inconsistent in reporting (or failed to report) important sample characteristics such as percentage of students receiving special education services, number of students exiting or expelled after enrollment etc., severely limiting interpretation of the equality of comparison groups and factors impacting differences in outcomes. Second, follow-up years suggest a sustained significant effect on both math and literacy achievement. However, these results must be interpreted with caution as the number of samples decreased substantially at follow-up years with just one study accounting for the majority of the samples. Third, studies included in this review did not report data indicating the degree to which each characteristic of No Excuses charter schools was implemented, prohibiting the interpretation of the presence, absence, or dosage of the individual characteristics of No Excuses charter schools. Fourth, only five of the 18 included studies employed random assignment, limiting interpretation of the equality of the comparison groups due to the small number in independent samples using random assignment. Fifth, a large number of the included studies examine the effects of the schools of a specific charter management organization: Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP). Though informative, the results of this review cannot be considered generalizable to all No Excuses charter schools. Finally, most studies measured effects with only one, annual standardized achievement measure.