



Smart Charter School Policy: Lessons from Research

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The Goals of Charter Schooling: Escape or Reform?

Many early charter schools started as escape valve for dissatisfied teachers, parents

- better public school opportunities for students previously ill-served
- alternatives to low-performing schools
- pet schools for community groups, educators

• Ultimate aim for many is transformation: A redefined public school system that is

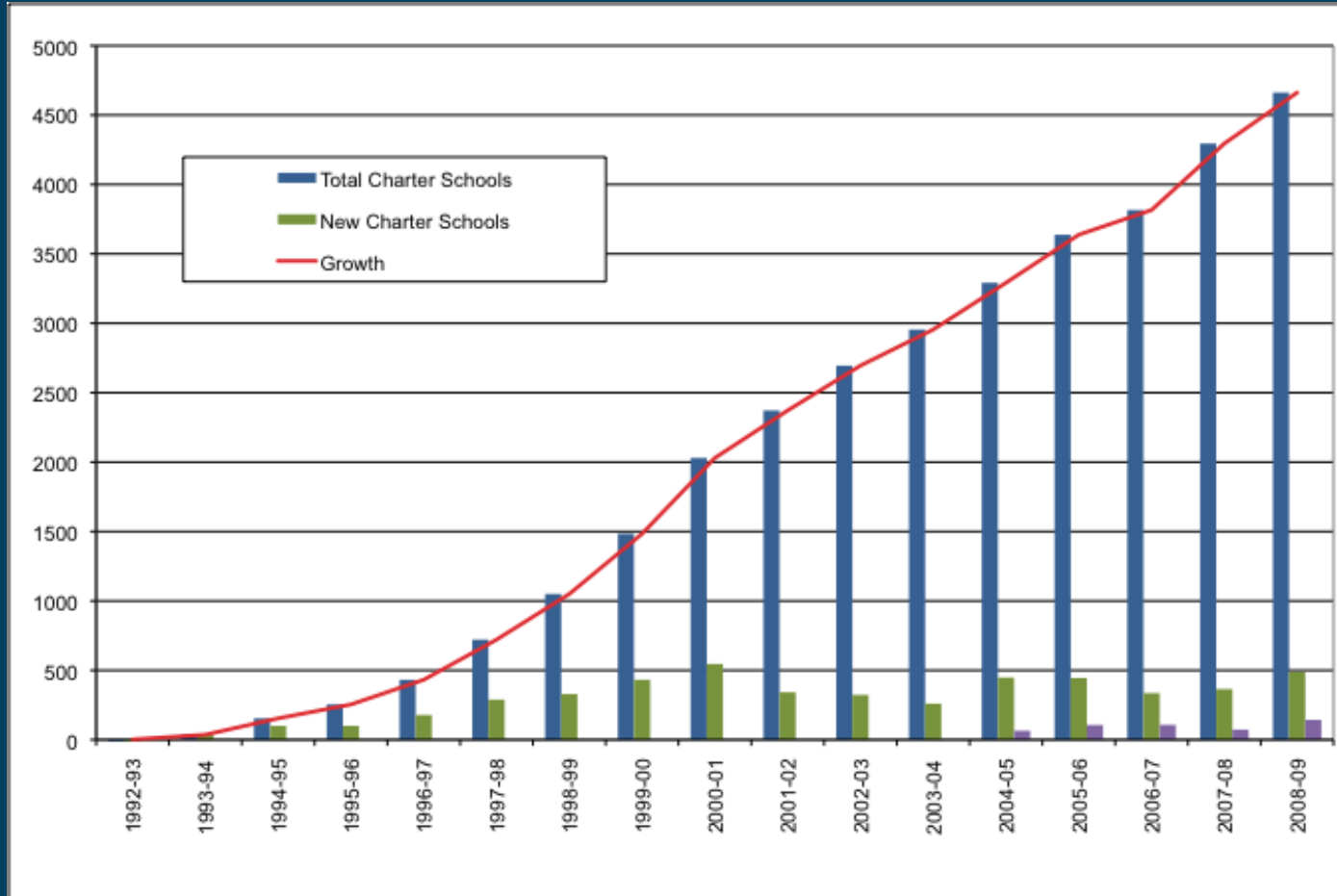
- obsessed with high performance
- able to adapt to changing needs via innovation and replication
- responsive to family needs/preferences

Charter Schools as Transformation

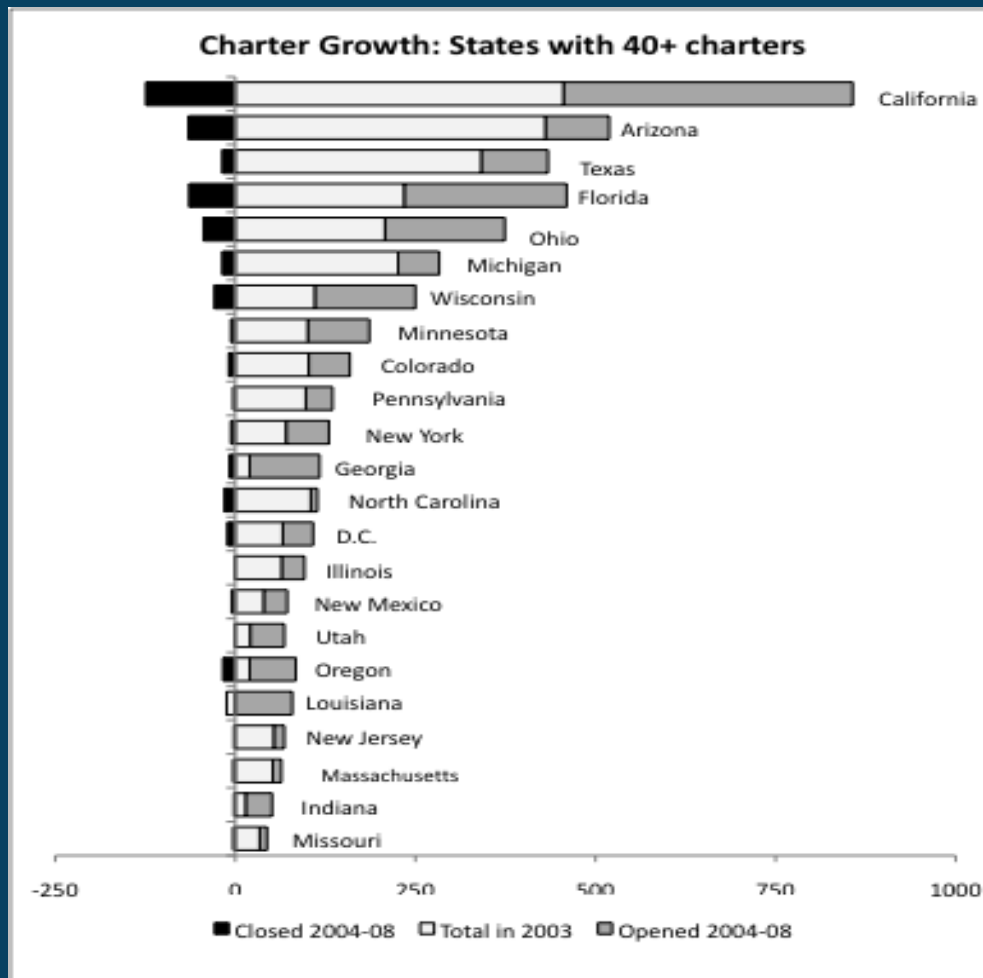
HOPEs	FEARS
Innovations for breakthrough results	Creaming, increased segregation
Entrepreneurial teachers, leaders	Lack of accountability
Accountability for results (perform or die)	Loss of school district funding, control
Proliferation of successful models	
Pressure on districts to compete	

Nationally, Charter Schools Growth Shows No Sign of Slowing

National Charter School Growth 1992-2009



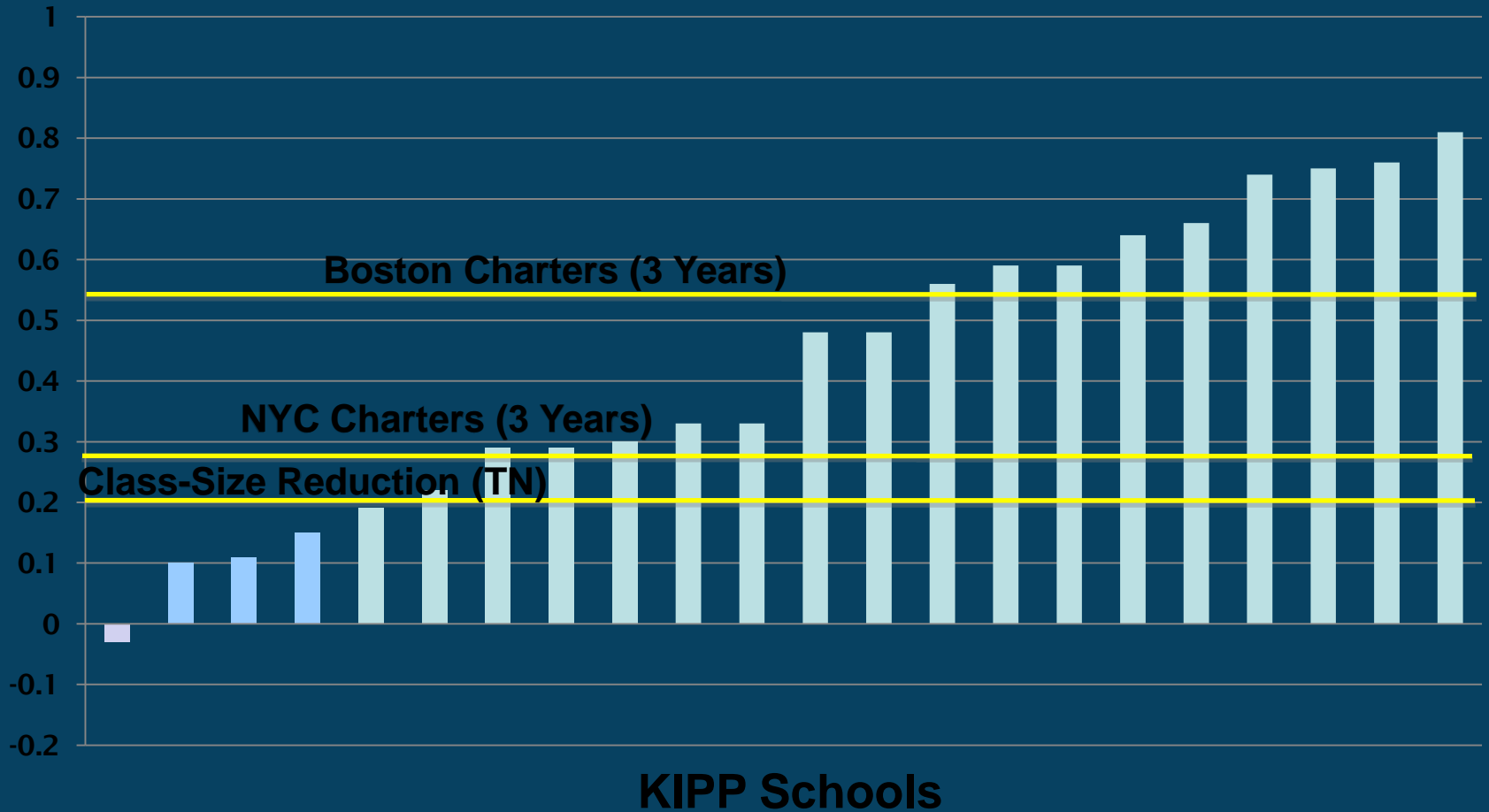
California Drives Much of National Charter Growth



What We Know About Student Outcomes

- Charter school outcomes vary by school and place
 - Puts a premium on selecting, predicting, closing
- Low income students benefit most
- Charters in some cities (e.g., New York City, Boston, Chicago) are consistently effective
- Charter high schools can affect graduation and college-going rates
- Too many studies use bad methods
 - The better the method and data, the better charters look

Size of KIPP Impacts in Math after Three Years



What We Know About How Charter Schools Become Effective

- It takes time but progress should be evident in first year
- Schools need to start with, not grope toward, an instructional approach
- Leadership stability and building a core teaching staff are key
 - But schools can be designed to manage some turnover
- Outside assistance (via CMOs, associations, etc.) can help school heads focus on instruction, assessment, climate
- No school can be good with a bad governing board

What We Know About Other Outcomes

- Little evidence that charters systematically “cream” the best students
 - Nationally, charters serve higher proportions of minority students (58% in charters vs. 45% in district schools)
- Districts are beginning to respond to charter competition, but most still treat charters as anomalies or don’t feel the enrollment loss
- Accountability depends entirely on actions of the government agencies that sponsor and oversee charters

Key Charter Policy Challenges

- Cap policies are based on politics and desire to protect districts, not evidence of success
- Poor authorizing and oversight are too often ignored or tolerated
- Funding often inequitable, lack of investment in support infrastructure

Smart Cap Policy Options

- Exempt proven models from cap limitations
- Allow high quality sponsors/authorizers a greater share of charters
- Build in “transformation” aid, not “impact” aid, to hardest hit districts

Smart Authorizing Policy Options

- Hold authorizers accountable for results via
 - Transparent performance reporting, performance audits
 - Access to national best practices
 - Disincentives for poor authorizing, incentives for high quality oversight

Smart Charter Resource Policy Options

- Ensure that students have access to all resources to which they are entitled, including grant funds
- Support diverse ways to help charter schools develop economies of scale
 - CMOs, networks, back office providers
 - Special education co-ops
 - Specialized human capital training programs



For the latest research and analysis on charter schools,
please visit the National Charter School Research
Project website:

www.ncsrp.org

Most Studies Focus On Individual States Or Districts. Many “Low Quality”.

The Geographic Scope of Studies and Quality Rankings for the Research Methods Adopted
in Research Produced Between 2001 and 2006

