The purpose of this study was to determine whether students attending charter schools did better, or worse, than students attending traditional public schools, over a five-year time period, in a Midwestern state. Thirty-one urban school districts affiliated with a middle cities education association, and corresponding charter schools, located within these Midwestern school districts, were selected to participate in this study. This study utilized a quasi-experimental research design and was supported by the earlier research of Dr. Gary Miron and Dr. Jerry Horn from Western Michigan University (Miron & Horn, 2000; Miron & Horn, 2002; Miron, 2005) and Dr. Scott Imberman from the University of Houston (Imberman, 2007; Imberman, 2011).

To conduct this study, data were collected from 145,183 students that attended 772 buildings in 31 school districts that served K-8 students in traditional Midwestern public schools, along with data from 46,480 students attending the corresponding 88 charter schools located within these middle cities school districts. This Midwestern state’s department of education provided data for third through eighth grade students attending the identified traditional school districts, and the corresponding charter schools, during the 2008 to 2012 school years.
Four research hypotheses were tested based upon the identified purposes of study. Comparisons were made between charter schools and contiguous district schools across a number of variables including ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, attendance, and performance on this Midwestern state’s mathematics and reading assessment measures. A t-test was used to determine whether statistically significant differences existed between the two comparison cohorts. In addition, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to determine whether ethnicity, gender, and SES influenced the differences between the performances of students in the two comparison cohorts.

Findings in this study indicated that students having transferred to charter schools from traditional middle cities school districts performed significantly poorer in mathematics and reading, coupled with having lower attendance rates, over a period of three consecutive years after having transferred. In the fourth year, however, charter school students out performed, and had better attendance rates, than students attending traditional middle cities schools. Additionally, this study also found that ethnicity and poverty level influenced student performance when students transferred to a charter school. Gender, on the other hand, had little or no influence on student performance after having transferred to a charter school.

The study concluded by providing four recommendations to guide future studies. Of major importance is the need to replicate the study by increasing the sample size of the population that educates students attending traditional and contiguous charter schools. This method should increase the precision of statistical estimates of the population of students that transferred from urban schools to attend contiguous charter schools.