

## **UK and USC researchers analyze impact of charter school performance amid the pandemic**

Researchers at the University of Kentucky and University of Southern California have examined how students in Tennessee charter schools fared academically during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Their findings – comparing test scores from Tennessee’s charter school students to those in traditional public schools – are posted at <https://bit.ly/charter-covid>.

The analysis, conducted by Adam Kho, Ph.D., assistant professor in the UK College of Education [Department of Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation](#), Ron Zimmer, Ph.D., professor and director of the [UK Martin School of Public Policy and Administration](#), and Shelby Smith, a University of Southern California doctoral candidate, found that both groups of students performed similarly during the pandemic. However, in the years following, charter school students outperformed similar traditional public school peers.

Tennessee has more than 100 charter schools, serving 4.4 percent of the state’s students. Most of the state’s charter schools are in two large urban areas, Nashville and Memphis, both of which include schools authorized by the local district and the state. The most significant academic gains in the years following the pandemic were observed among charter students in the broader Nashville region.

Zimmer noted that previous research on the impact of school choice policies has yielded mixed results regarding the effectiveness of charter schools.

“Nearly all that research was conducted before the pandemic, leaving a gap in understanding how charter schools adapted and performed during and after that period,” Zimmer said. “Our findings provide new insights into the performance of charter schools during and after the pandemic.”

Given the widespread learning loss experienced by students nationwide during the pandemic, the researchers believe their study can serve as a springboard for highlighting valuable lessons from the charter sector – with particular attention given to examining what post-pandemic learning looked like in charter schools located in the broader Nashville region.

“Further research is needed to examine specific practices of high-performing charter schools post-pandemic,” Kho said. “Understanding what drove these results could inform strategies for improving student outcomes broadly, which we hope to do in upcoming work.”

To access the full data analysis, visit <https://bit.ly/charter-covid>.