

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-106268](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Enrollment in charter schools that received CSP grants grew from 213,576 to 1,380,530 students from school years 2006-07 to 2020-21. Education awarded CSP grants to help open new and expand existing charter schools. As with other public schools, charter schools are monitored and regulated at the state or local level.

House Report 116-450 includes a provision for GAO to report on student enrollment trends in CSP grant-recipient charter schools. This report examines (1) enrollment growth at new charter schools that received CSP grants compared to those that did not for 2006–2020 (the most recent available), and (2) enrollment differences in student subpopulations for charter schools receiving such grants compared to other charter and traditional public schools for 2011–2015 (the most recent available that could be matched). GAO reviewed the three main CSP grants intended to open or expand charter schools: CSP State Educational Agencies/State Entities, CSP Charter Management Organizations, and CSP Non-State Educational Agencies/Developers.

GAO conducted a multivariate statistical analysis to match CSP-grant recipient charter schools with similar non-CSP charter schools to compare enrollment growth. GAO conducted another statistical analysis to compare student subpopulation enrollment differences among CSP grant-recipient schools, non-CSP charter schools, and traditional public schools. GAO reviewed relevant federal laws, regulations, and documents and interviewed federal officials. GAO incorporated technical comments from Education as appropriate.

View [GAO-23-106268](#). For more information, contact Jacqueline M. Nowicki at (617) 788-0580 or nowickij@gao.gov.

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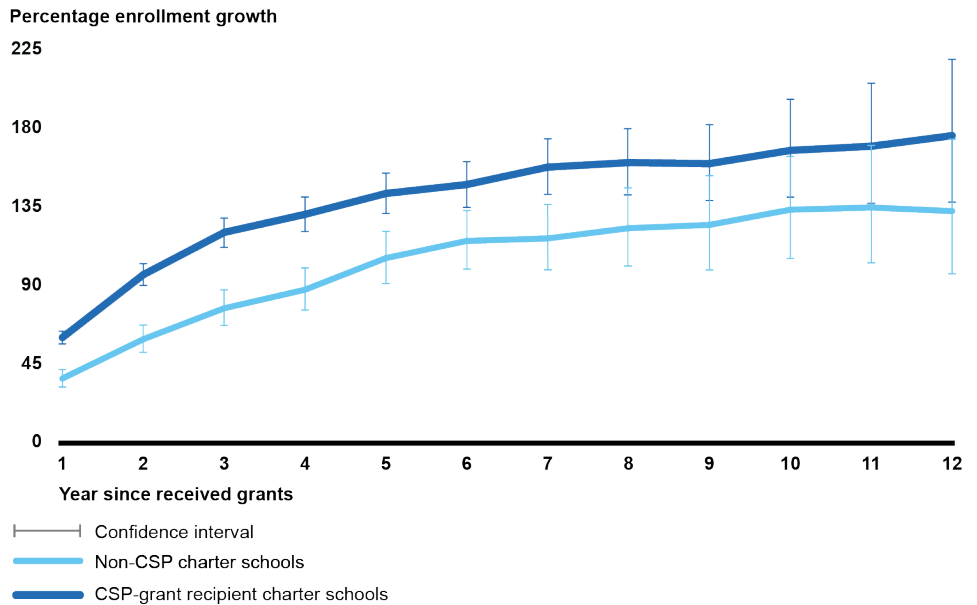
K-12 EDUCATION

New Charter Schools Receiving Grants to Open Grew Faster Than Peers

What GAO Found

The Department of Education Charter Schools Program (CSP) provides grants to open or expand charter schools. Charter schools are publicly funded, semi-autonomous schools of choice. GAO found that charter schools that received CSP grants generally had higher enrollment growth compared to similar charter schools that did not receive grants (see figure). Specifically, GAO’s analysis found about 1.3 to 1.6 times higher enrollment growth, on average, for CSP grant-recipient charter schools within 12 years after receiving the grant. Enrollment growth was higher among middle schools, urban schools, and schools with higher proportions of non-White or low-income students.

Student Enrollment Growth 12 Years after Receiving Charter Schools Program (CSP) Grants Compared to Similar Non-Recipient Charter Schools



Source: GAO matched comparison analysis of the Department of Education’s CSP awards data and school-level characteristics from the Common Core of Data. | [GAO-23-106268](#)

Note: GAO examined data for selected charter schools that received a CSP grant to open or expand in 2006–2020 and matched them to similar, non-CSP charter schools. Over this 14-year period, the maximum period of time GAO could assess enrollment growth was 12 years. Error bars display the 95 percent confidence interval for estimates.

GAO’s analysis found that, compared to traditional public schools, charter schools—whether they received CSP funding or not—enrolled smaller percentages of students with disabilities designated as receiving services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Researchers have identified potential factors that may contribute to enrollment patterns. For example, students with disabilities and parents may already be connected to programs in traditional public schools. According to researchers, charter schools may use practices that discourage students with disabilities from applying.