Charters without Lotteries: Testing Turnarounds in Boston and New Orleans

Atila Abdulkadiroğlu Josh Angrist Peter Hull Parag A. Pathak*

September 2014

Abstract

Lottery estimates suggest that urban, "No Excuses" charter schools in Massachusetts and New York boost student achievement. However, estimates for students applying to oversubscribed schools need not reflect charter effects for students who haven't applied. This paper reports estimates of the effect of charter school attendance on students who attend charters created through takeovers in Boston and New Orleans. Takeovers occur when traditional public schools are designated for closure and re-opened as in-district charters. Students enrolled in the schools designated for closure are "grandfathered in" to the new schools; they are guaranteed a seat. We use this fact to construct instrumental variables estimates of the effects of takeover attendance: the grandfathering instrument compares students at schools designated for takeover with students who appear similar at baseline, and who were attending similar schools that have not yet been closed. The results result show takeover students enjoy charter-induced achievement gains as large or larger than the estimates generated by lottery instruments. These results suggest that charter schools are no less effective for students enrolled passively than for students who seek out and apply for a charter seat.

*Abdulkadiroglu: Department of Economics, Duke University, email: atila.abdulkadiroglu@duke.edu. Angrist: Department of Economics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and NBER, email: angrist@mit.edu. Hull: Department of Economics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, email: hull@mit.edu. Pathak: Department of Economics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and NBER, email: ppathak@mit.edu.