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## **Charter schools edge traditional schools on safety**

Charter schools are “quieter and less disruptive” than traditional public schools serving similar students, according to an analysis published today.

“It’s not entirely clear whether charter schools are safer and more orderly due to the students they serve or because of actions by the schools’ leaders,” said Robin Lake, director of the National Charter School Research Project (NCSRP), based at the University of Washington’s Center on Reinventing Public Education.

“We believe it could be both,” Lake added. “Student and parent preferences for a safe and orderly environment coupled with the flexibility of charter school administrators and teachers to enforce standards likely drive these results.”

The issue is discussed in “Safety and Order in Charter and Traditional Public Schools,” a chapter in NCSRP’s new report, *Hopes, Fears, & Reality: A Balanced Look at American Charter Schools in 2007*.

The chapter, co-authored by Paul Hill, examines teacher reports of serious threats to persons or property. While both charter and traditional public schools experience safety and behavioral problems, fewer problems are reported by teachers at charter schools.

The 2007 NCSRP report, edited by Lake, is the third in an annual series focusing on what’s going on in charter schools, how well they are doing, and what can be learned from their experience—now 15 years—of providing an alternative to traditional district-run public schools.

Another chapter, co-authored by Dan Goldhaber and NCSRP researchers, says that while charter schools are experimenting somewhat with teacher compensation, they could do a lot more given their wide-ranging flexibility around staffing and budgets. To encourage more experimentation, the chapter calls for states to lift requirements that impose existing salary schedules specified in union contracts. Otherwise, charter school personnel practices may look a lot more traditional than advocates had once hoped.

Other chapters in this year’s report focus on:

- *The National Charter School Landscape in 2007*: This chapter shows that the number of charter schools continues to grow, but at a slightly slower pace than in previous years. The analysis also sheds light on charter schools' educational programs and teacher work life.
- *Charter School Governance*: Joanna Smith, Priscilla Wohlstetter, and Dominic Brewer find that while charter schools are producing some notable innovations, the movement as a whole still employs fairly traditional governance models. The chapter concludes with recommendations for ways to encourage greater experimentation and dissemination of effective governance practices.
- *Building a Pipeline of New School Leaders*: Attracting new charter school leaders in both quantity and quality is an emerging challenge. This chapter contains insights from an interview with Jonathan Schnur, co-founder of New Leaders for New Schools, and recommendations for cities interested in attracting high-quality leaders.
- *Smart Charter School Caps*: In the final chapter, Education Sector's Andrew Rotherham looks at problems stemming from state caps that limit the number of charter schools and proposes revising caps policies in a way that "promises to sensibly manage the growth of charter schools, while fostering public school quality overall."

The report will be released on December 5 at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. The full text is available online at [www.ncsrp.org](http://www.ncsrp.org).

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The National Charter School Research Project was established at the University of Washington's Center on Reinventing Public Education in the fall of 2004 with funding from a consortium of foundations.