



EDUCATION

How Charter Schools Affect Student Outcomes

The Debate Over Charter Schools Continues

Proponents predict

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- increased innovation
- improved student achievement
- healthy competitive pressure for traditional public schools

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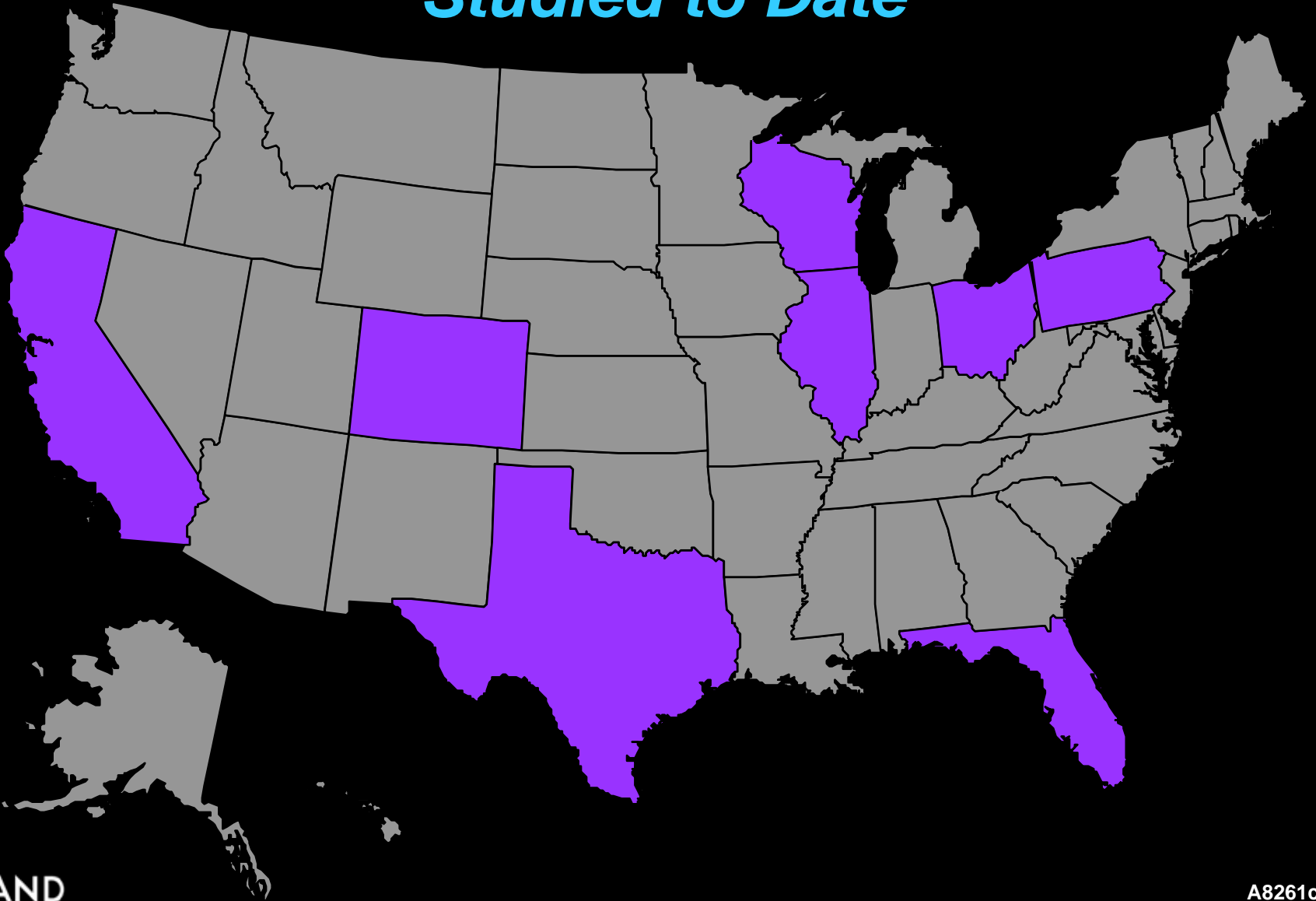
Opponents predict

- increased racial/ethnic stratification that leads to white enclaves
- skimming the best students from traditional public schools
- reduced resources for traditional public schools
- no improvement in student achievement

RAND Addresses the Debate by Answering These Questions

- **What kinds of students transfer to charter schools?**
- **How do charter schools affect test scores for students who transfer from traditional public schools to charter schools?**
- **How does attending a charter high school affect the probability of graduating and entering college?**
- **How does the introduction of charter schools affect test scores of students in nearby traditional public schools?**

Our Sample of Charter Schools Is the Largest Studied to Date



We Collected Data that Allowed Us to Analyze Our Research Questions

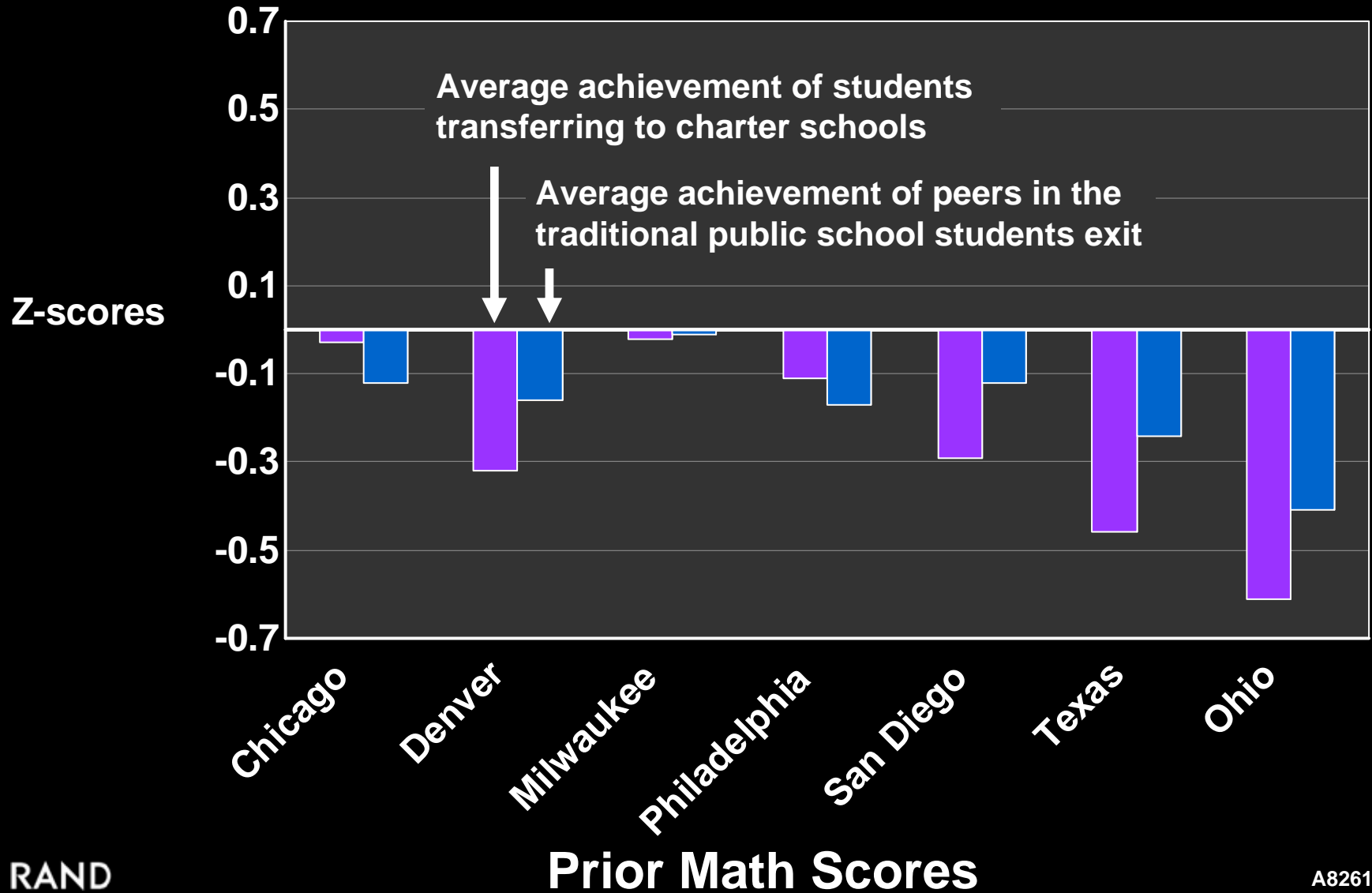
- **Longitudinal student-level test score and demographic data from locations in eight states**
 - **Whether the student attended a charter school for each grade across years**
 - **Student demographic characteristics and test scores over time**
- **K-12 and college enrollment data in Chicago and Florida**
 - **Whether the student graduated from high school and attended college**

RAND Expanded the Research Base by Answering These Questions

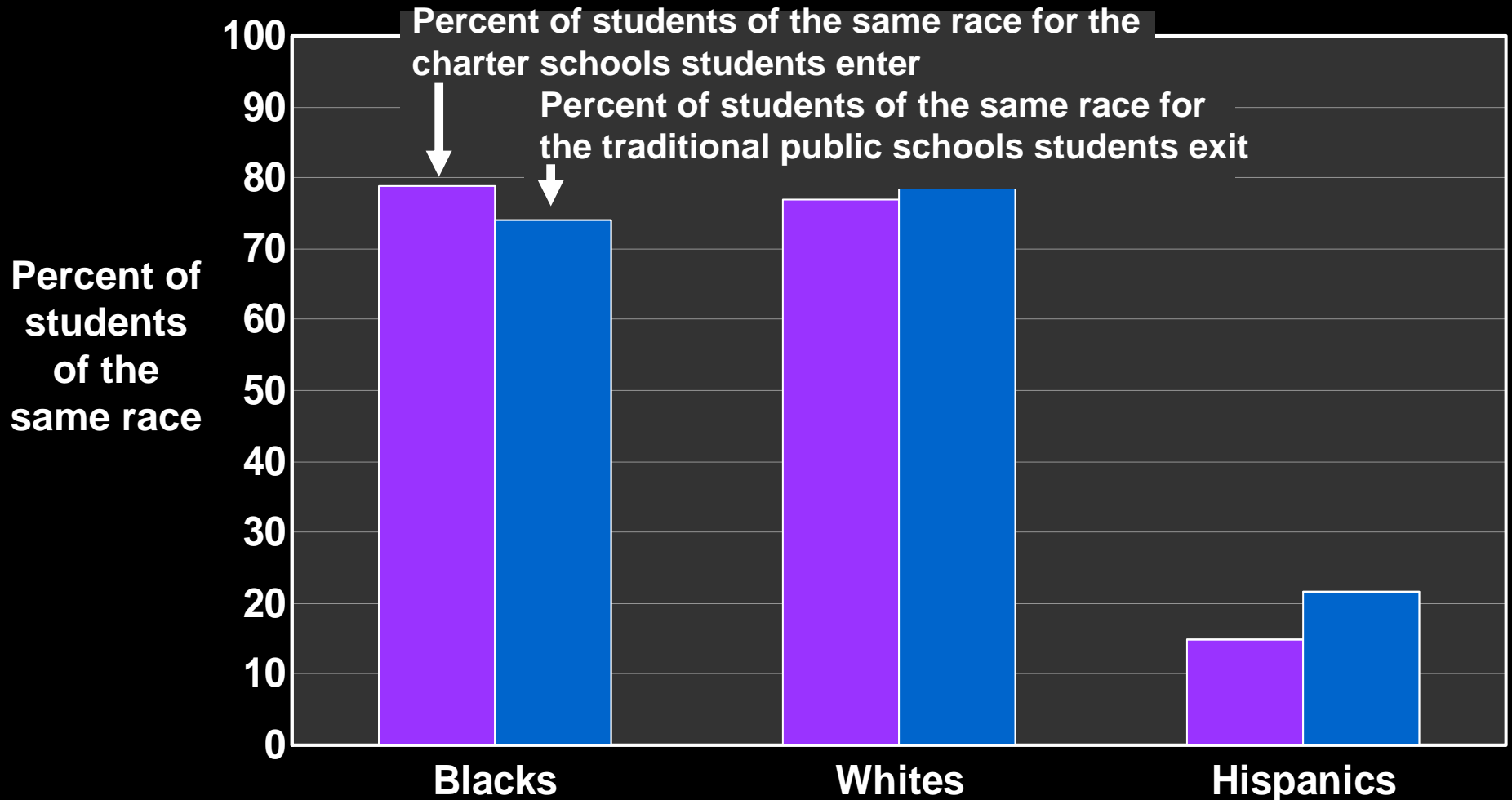


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We Found No Evidence That Charter Schools Are Skimming the Best Students



Ohio Students Who Transfer to Charter Schools Go to Schools with Similar Racial/Ethnic Mix



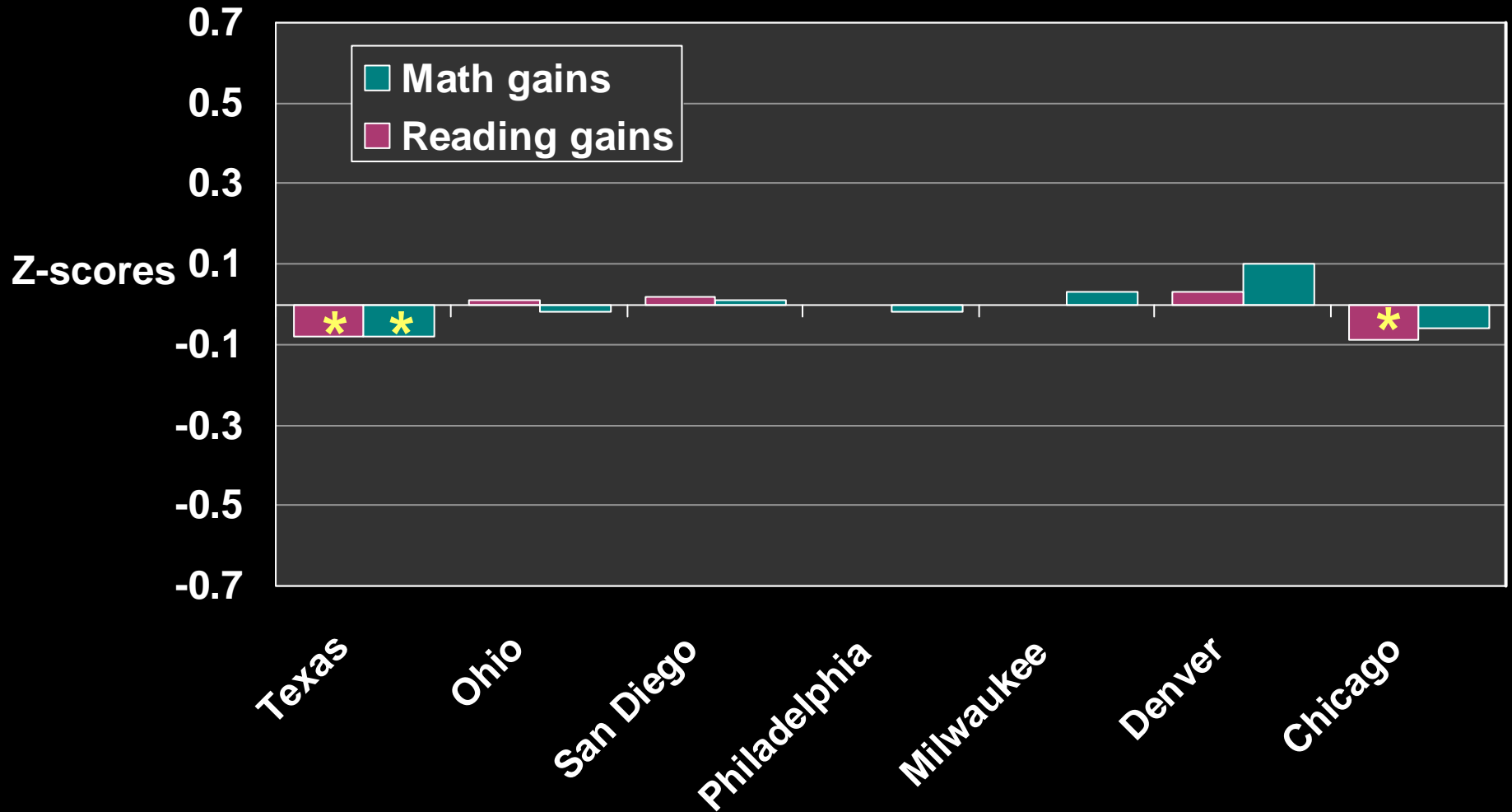
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We Had to Control for Possible Differences Between Charter School and Traditional Public School Students

- **Charter school students may differ from students who remain in traditional public schools**
 - **Possibly more motivated or have more involved parents**
 - **May choose to transfer to a charter school because they have not performed well in traditional public school**
- **To examine achievement test scores, we control for these differences by comparing students to themselves in each setting**
 - **Compare the achievement gains while attending a traditional public school to the gains while attending charter schools**
- **We cannot do a similar analysis for elementary students, so we focused on achievement gains in charter middle and high schools**

Results Suggest that Charter School Achievement Gains Are on Par With Traditional Public Schools



* Indicates statistical significance at 5 percent level.


However, Charter School Test Scores Tend to Vary More

- **We created an estimate of the achievement effect for every individual charter and traditional public school**
- **Then, we examined whether there was greater variation in the performance of charter schools than traditional public schools**
- **In most locations, charter schools vary slightly more in performance**
 - **However, Ohio charter schools had substantially greater variation than traditional public schools**
- **The performance of Ohio classroom-based charter schools is on par with Ohio traditional public schools, while Ohio virtual schools lagged behind**

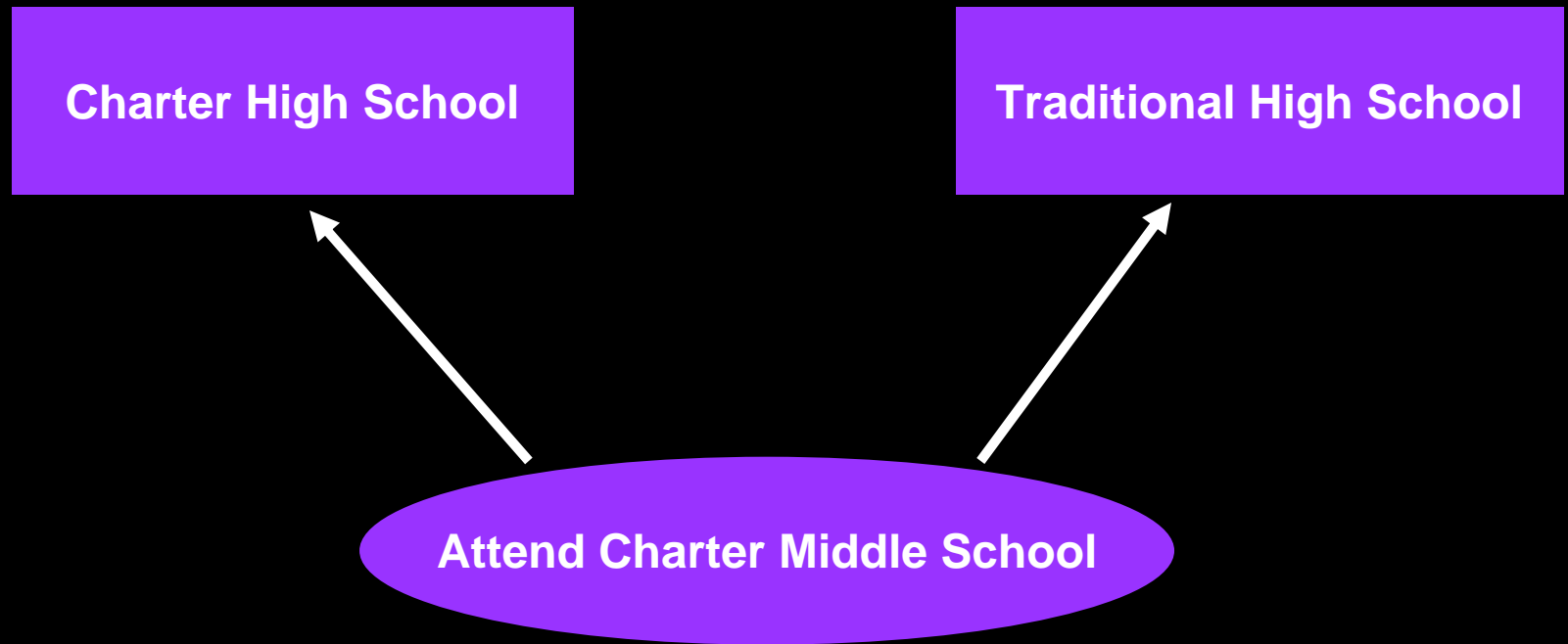
The Variation Among Charter Schools Suggests Policy Options for Improving Test Scores

- **Policymakers could improve the overall performance of charters by introducing policies to prevent the opening of poorly designed charter schools**
- **States and districts could more vigilantly close charter schools that are not performing well**

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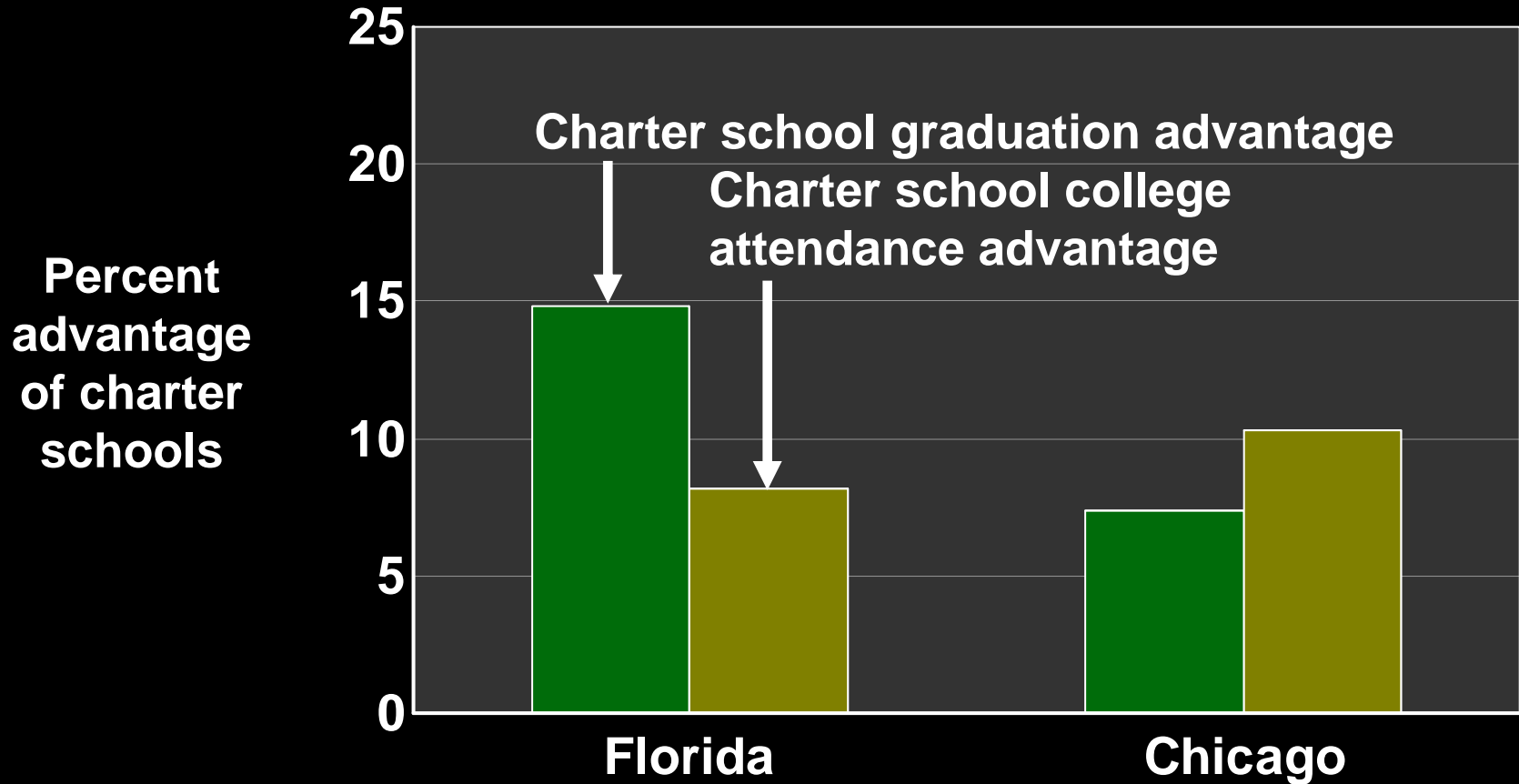
- **What kinds of students transfer to charter schools?**
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To Compare Outcomes, We Had to Deal with Differences Between Those Attending Charters and Traditional Public Schools



We also controlled for observable differences such as race/ethnicity, gender, poverty status, and 8th grade test scores

The Findings Suggest Charter School Attendance Is Associated with Higher Graduation and College Attendance Rate



All students attended charter middle schools

Charter School Attendance Is Associated with a Higher Likelihood of Graduating High School and Attending College

- **The results suggest that among students who attend charter middle school, those who went on to charter high schools were**
 - **7 to 15 percentage points more likely to graduate high school**
 - **8 to 10 percentage points more likely to attend college**
- **These results are promising and suggest that researchers need to go beyond test scores in analyzing outcomes**
- **However, further research is needed to determine whether these results are true with a broader population and larger set of locations**

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We Examined Whether Charter Schools Have an Effect on Nearby Traditional Public Schools

- **Do the achievement gains of students in traditional public schools change over time when there are charter schools nearby?**
- **Does the number of number of nearby charter schools (within 2.5 miles) affect the achievement gains of students in traditional public schools?**
- **We found almost no evidence that charter school presence affected traditional public school students' performance**
 - **Except for one in Texas, but the positive effect was very small**

These Results Address Some of the Central Issues of the Debate

- **Little evidence that charters cream skim the best students or substantially affect the racial or ethnic mix of students**
- **On average, transferring to a charter school does not improve students' test scores**
- **Attending a charter high school appears to increase the likelihood of graduating and attending college, but further research is needed to verify these results with a broader population of students**
- **The introduction of charter schools generally did not produce competitive effects in nearby traditional public schools**

This Research Suggests Possible Policy Actions

- **Investigate reasons behind poor performance in some charter schools and put policies in place to remove those that perform poorly**
- **Work across states to identify best practices and disseminate them to foster more successful charters**
- **Consider measures other than test scores, such as graduation rates and college attendance, to measure school performance**

