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Here's the Rofes study.

A Study of
Eight States
and the District
of Columbia

How are school districts responding to charter laws and charter schools?

Policy Analysis for California Education

Eric Rofes, Investigator; April 1998

Preface

This report provides findings from a study titled "How Are School Districts Responding to Charter Laws and Charter Schools?" This research aimed to identify: (1) the impact of charter schools on school districts; (2) the ways school districts had responded; and (3) whether districts had experienced systemic change as a result of charter laws and the opening of charter schools.

The study was conducted in 1997, six years into the nation's experiment with charter schools. It focused on eight states and the District of Columbia and included case studies of 25 school districts affected by charter schools. This research was funded by The Saint Paul Foundation and was hosted by Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), an independent research unit of the University of California at Berkeley. The study's investigator was Eric Rofes.

Highlights

Overview

- This study is the first published empirical research aimed at documenting the effects of charter school laws and the opening of charter schools on public school districts. The overall effects are a result of complex interactions between the impact of charter laws and charter schools on a district and the responses by that district. The study's goal was to examine the impact, analyze ways in which school districts were responding or not responding, and assess the overall effects of this new reform initiative.

Charter Impact

- This study revealed the following primary impacts: (1) the loss of students and often an accompanying loss of financing; (2) the loss of a particular kind of student to niche-focused charter schools; (3) the departure of significant numbers of disgruntled parents; (4) shifts in staff morale; (5) the redistribution of some central office administrators' time and increased challenges predicting student enrollment and planning grade-level placement.
- Of the 25 case-study districts in this research study, almost half (12 or 48%) had experienced either strong (five or 20%) or moderate (seven or 28%) impact from charter schools and slightly more than half (13 or 52%) had experienced either no impact (nine or 36%) or mild impact (four or 16%). Large urban districts had experienced significantly less impact from charters than rural, suburban, and small urban districts.



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District Response

- Typically, school districts had not responded with swift, dramatic improvements at the time of this study. The majority of districts had gone about business-as-usual and responded to charters slowly and in small ways. Almost one quarter of the districts studied (24%) had responded energetically to the advent of charters and significantly altered their educational programs.
- Charter laws and charter schools stimulated certain kinds of changes and bring about certain kinds of effects and not others in traditional public schools and school districts. Several moderate- and high-response districts had made changes in their educational offerings as a result of charters.
- Certain innovations hypothesized by the study's investigator had rarely occurred: few superintendents, principals, and teachers in district schools were thinking of charter schools as educational laboratories or were attempting to transfer pedagogical innovations from charters to the district schools; districts were still building large school facilities and were rarely creating smaller schools; the large urban districts studied rarely had responded in meaningful ways to charter laws and charter schools.

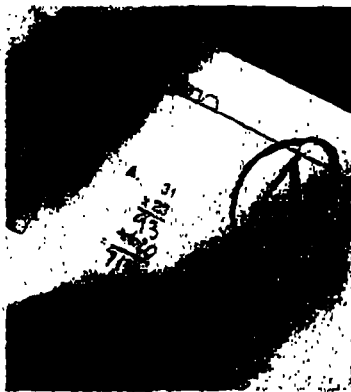
Analysis

- The districts in this study which had experienced high levels of impact usually exhibited responses to charters, though not necessarily at a high level; districts which had experienced low levels of impact generally exhibited low levels of response or no response at all.
- Districts which exhibited the greatest response to charters had not necessarily experienced high levels of impact; other factors appeared to account for the response. Districts which exhibited the lowest response to charters generally had experienced no, low, or moderate impact.
- A variety of factors other than the nature and degree of impact seemed to contribute to school district response to charters, including the overall ecology of school choice in the district, student performance, a critical mass of charters in the area, community awareness of charters, and district leadership.
- Charter laws and charter schools may have contributed to statewide reform efforts that had no formal connection to charters, such as new systems of school accountability, drives for site-based management, and changes in school financing practices.

Background

From 1991 through 1997, 29 states and the District of Columbia approved legislation that allows for the formation of charter schools. Charter laws vary from state to state and charter schools vary widely even within states. Essentially charters are schools formed by parents, teachers, and/or community members who collaboratively determine the school's structure, mission, and curricular focus. Depending on the state law, they are granted a charter by local school districts, state or county boards of education, public universities, or other official bodies deemed appropriate as charter sponsors. Charter laws essentially allow entities other than the school district to start and operate a public school. This usually occurs with approval of the local school board but half the states with charter laws also allow some other public body to sponsor charters.

Charter schools are provided with public financing, are usually freed from many state and district laws and regulations, and are governed by the terms and conditions set forth in their charter. In exchange for freedom from many formal regulations, the charter generally commits the school to specific student outcomes and various other objectives. The school is



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granted a charter for a specific term—often five years—and may apply for renewal, at which point the chartering body assesses the school's success in meeting its objectives.

Advocates have argued that charter schools will improve public education in the United States in a variety of ways: (1) by providing quality educational programs and improved academic achievement for the students in the charter school; (2) by offering families the opportunity to exercise educational choice within public education; (3) by generating innovative pedagogical methods which district schools may then adopt; (4) by providing district school boards with an opportunity to create new and different schools; (5) by creating incentives for district boards to improve their schools and school districts.

Since 1993, a variety of research efforts have been directed towards charter laws and charter schools. Almost all of these studies have focused on the charter school: investigating school characteristics, student populations, student achievement, and organizational dynamics.¹ Perhaps because the initiative has been in a start-up phase, only a few researchers have examined emerging relationships between charter schools and other public schools or the dynamics created within school districts once charters have been proposed or developed in the area.²

Research Questions and Approach

This study focused entirely on ways charter schools and the development of charter legislation may have affected neighboring school districts and addressed the following questions:

- Are charter schools having an impact on public school districts? If so, what kinds of impacts are occurring in school districts and at what level of intensity are these impacts being experienced? How are these impacts affecting the climates and cultures of nearby schools and school districts? How are they affecting the communities in which charters are situated?
- What have districts done differently from what they would have had charter schools not entered the picture? What has changed in their delivery of educational services?
- What factors spur traditional public schools and school districts to respond to charter laws and charter schools in ways that bring about improved educational opportunities for students who are not attending charter schools? If the effect of charter laws is to cause innovation, through what mechanisms does this occur?

To answer these questions, this study examined the ways school districts have experienced and responded to the development of charter laws and charter schools. The study focused on 25 school districts in eight states (Arizona, California, Colorado, Georgia, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin) and the District of Columbia. States were selected that had at least two years experience with charter schools. An attempt was made to include states with restrictive laws which generally allow only school districts to serve as the charter's sponsor (California, Georgia, Wisconsin) as well as non-restrictive laws which provide for more than one chartering authority (Arizona, Colorado, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, and the District of Columbia). The study deliberately included a random mix of urban, rural, and suburban districts in which charter schools were situated.

Over 200 interviews were conducted for this study, primarily with district superintendents and central office administrators, principals and teachers in traditional public schools, and charter school administrators, founders, and advocates. People with national and statewide perspectives, including representatives of unions and school employee associations, public officials, directors of charter school resource centers, journalists, and public policy analysts, were also interviewed. Face-to-face interviews were held with over 75% of the informants in this study; the remaining interviews occurred during telephone conversations and through correspondence by letter and e-mail. A range of documents from school districts, individual charter and traditional public schools, local communities, and state departments of education were collected and analyzed as well as an extensive collection of newspaper articles focused on charter schools.

This study focused on the interaction between school districts and charter schools and examined the impact of charters on school districts, the responses of school districts to charter laws and charter schools, and the overall effects or repercussions of charter school laws on school districts. The primary unit of analysis was the school district because it is the district that almost always has the power to determine whether or not changes occur in its schools. The purpose of the study was to advance understanding of how districts have been affected by and responded to this initiative. This study did not choose the charter school as the unit of analysis and did not examine the impact of school districts on charters and the responses of charters to school district action. These topics, however worthy of examination, were outside the purview of this narrowly focused research effort.

A number of issues emerged during this project that bear on the study's findings. First, it was not unusual for different informants to provide different explanations for how specific changes or educational innovations came to be. Educational change is multi-factorial and emerges out of a rich social, cultural, and political context. No attempt was made to prove causation in this study; thus, specific innovations are linked to charters in this report only when district officials or school personnel from traditional public schools explicitly acknowledged the linkage. Furthermore, the various impacts of charter schools on school districts during these early years of this reform initiative often elicited strong reactions and polarized debates. Throughout this report, quotations from interviews serve to exemplify key perspectives raised by several informants. The quotations were selected because they articulate an important and common viewpoint in a succinct and powerful manner.

Second, this research observed policy effects at a fairly early stage in the dynamics which charter laws and charter schools may generate. The fieldwork for this study was conducted during 1997 and the first few months of 1998 and the findings reflect the status of district

responses at this particular time. While the eight states studied and the District of Columbia have distinct charter school laws, during the time period of this study changes occurred regularly which affected the research findings. Since the period studied, additional states have been considering and approving charter legislation. States with laws have been changing them in various ways. Charter impacts and district responses vary not only geographically but also over time. This study examined one particular cross-section of time in a frequently shifting and evolving process.

Third, the states and school districts in this study frequently offered a variety of programs involving public school choice (intra-district and inter-district enrollment, post-secondary options, magnet schools, vouchers, and others). In districts with a rich menu of public school-choice options, informants were asked to distinguish which shifts or innovations were triggered or influenced primarily by charters. Nevertheless, it was often difficult to untangle the differing options and attribute specific changes in public education solely to charter schools, the focus of this study.

Fourth, this study focused on only 25 school districts. While the investigator hoped a random selection of 25 school districts would prove representative of the range of effects emerging out of this initiative, the size of the sample meant that, in any single state, only a few districts affected by charters were studied. Hence this report is limited in its scope. Interviews with individuals with state-wide perspectives were included in an attempt to broaden the study's frame of reference and distinguish between dynamics that were typical and those that were highly unusual. While media and policy-oriented discourses about charter schools frequently seize on extreme examples or exceptional cases of individual charter schools "destroying" or "single-handedly reviving" public education, such a focus was not the intent of this study. The aim of this research project was to determine what typically had been experienced by districts following the appearance of charter laws and the opening of charter schools.

What impact are charters having on school districts?

Finding #1: The impact of charters on school districts was manifested in five primary ways: (a) the loss of students and often an accompanying loss of financing; (b) the loss of a particular kind of student to niche-focused charter schools; (c) the departure of significant numbers of disgruntled parents; (d) shifts in staff morale; (e) the redistribution of some central office administrators' time and increased challenges predicting student enrollment and planning grade-level placement.

(a) Loss of Students and Financing

A significant number of school districts had lost financing as students opted to attend charter schools. Many of the superintendents, principals and teachers interviewed in this study were confused, misinformed, or uninformed about whether their schools had lost financing or how much financing had been lost to charters.

Shifts in financing are at the core of many of the most contentious debates about charter schools and, in every state studied, viewpoints differed—often dramatically—about fiscal changes occurring due to charters. The limited nature of this research project did not allow for the kinds of analysis that would have determined actual dollars redistributed due to charters or resolve opposing viewpoints about the shift of financing from traditional public schools to charters. The disparate formulas utilized state by state in financing public schools make studying the finances surrounding charter school initiatives extremely challenging. Other researchers are studying the complicated paths of financing charter schools and their findings will greatly inform our understandings of the effects charters are having on school districts.

This study examined perceptions of financing shifts experienced by individual public schools and school districts. Transcripts of the interviews and an examination of district documents revealed that fourteen of the districts in this study



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showed no significant signs of having lost financing to charter schools. These districts experienced no "felt-loss" in financing. In 11 districts, some financing was lost and in five of these districts, administrative personnel asserted their district had experienced significant losses in financing. This suggests that, at the point in the development of this reform initiative during which the study took place, such examples may be the exception rather than the rule.

One of the most interesting findings, however, was that school financing is so complicated that often high-level public school officials, including principals and superintendents, did not have a grasp on how charters had been affecting their fiscal resources. One Minnesota district's superintendent insisted they had experienced a financial loss but was unable to cite program, personnel, or other cuts caused by the loss. In one Colorado district, the superintendent asserted that financing had been lost at the middle school level, but neither the middle school principal nor a middle school teacher interviewed believed the school had lost financing.

In one Massachusetts district, the principal and teacher interviewed insisted financing had been lost to charters and identified programs that had suffered or been cut. The charter school director cited a figure for how much money had been lost by the local public school district. Yet the superintendent insisted no financing had been lost and that the state had fully reimbursed his district for the allocations that had been directed to the charter school. When asked to explain why, if financing had not been lost, staff in the district thought it had, the superintendent replied:

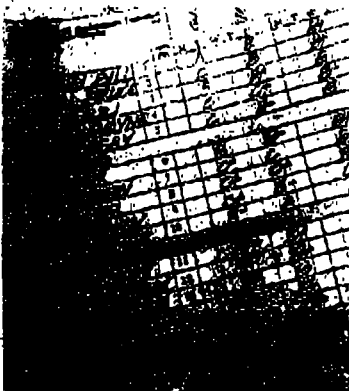
I'd suggest that perhaps typically the Legislature's found a way to leave the extreme rhetoric hanging out there and create a reality that's almost 180 degrees the other way. Because, in fact, we haven't lost a nickel. The Legislature has found ways to supplement our state aid... I get paid to understand the nuances of not only public policy but institutional culture. Whenever I've met with the school's faculty, I've certainly been straightforward in any comments about the charter school, but I have also been willing to emphasize those aspects that help create a culture of pride that was lacking five years ago... If that means that we do some tub thumping without exaggerating or distorting, but simply exploit the competitive intention of the legislature in creating charter schools, well so be it.

Some districts lost students and financing to charter schools but did not experience a "felt-loss" because departing students were replaced by incoming students who were part of a rapidly growing school-age population. For instance, Denver lost some financing to charters but this was more than compensated for by a rising student population in the area. Queen Creek, Arizona, a rural district east of Phoenix which was rapidly being converted to suburban status, lost students and financing as students left for a local charter, but this loss was balanced by an influx of an equal number of students whose families had recently settled in the area.

Districts that had experienced a "felt-loss" in financing due to charters had coped in a variety of ways. Holland, Michigan, lost over \$1 million and put off capital purchases and improvements but did not fire any staff members or eliminate positions. The loss here was felt most acutely in terms of tidiness and the condition of the buildings and grounds. Grand Rapids, Michigan, lost about \$12 million of their \$190 million budget and the district subsequently considered a bond issue to improve that district's infrastructure. Mesa, Arizona, the largest district in that state, lost approximately 2,000 students to charters from the 70,000 in their school district, that resulted in a loss of between \$5 and \$6 million out of a noncapital budget of about \$240 million. The district's finance director explained,

Our district is one where we staff our schools based upon a formula which is determined by the number of students. So, in essence, we're also staffing for 2,000 fewer students, so it's not like we lost \$5 to \$6 million in revenue and we haven't lost any expense along with it. We have lost some [expense].

The "felt-loss" was often greatest in small and rural districts that may have had difficulty maintaining the basic infrastructure of the district if a significant portion of students entered local charter schools. One comment which typified several informants' concerns was offered by a leader of a statewide association of school administrators. He explained the financing impact this way:



The "felt-loss" was often greatest in small and rural districts that may have had difficulty maintaining the basic infrastructure of the district.

The differential impact of a charter school on a budget of a small district is far greater than it is in some of the larger districts. And it has the net effect where the charter school kids and parents take away more than their fair share and leave the rest of the kids with less resources to spend...There's a basic infrastructure that you have to maintain to serve the balance of the kids. Just because 30 kids leave doesn't necessarily mean that you've lost a teacher, doesn't necessarily mean that the cost of the building is any less or the cost of the utilities is any less.

Some principals and teachers expressed concerns that after the "count day," the day in the school year when heads are counted and money is allocated per pupil, disaffected students re-enrolled in the district from charter schools. Hence several charters received financing for students who were being served in the district schools. Likewise, some charter school administrators felt that they were required to educate without financing students flowing into charters after "count day." While these matters appeared to be of critical importance in a few circumstances where significant numbers of students were involved, such concerns were not widespread and rarely were expressed when only a few students were transferred after count day.

(b) Loss of Particular Kinds of Students

Staff members in more than one-third (36%) of the public school districts studied expressed concerns about losing particular kinds of students to charter schools. Because charter schools are diverse and aim to serve various kinds of students, there was little uniformity in responses on this topic. Concerns clustered in several different areas:

Do niche schools lead to segregation? Several participants in this study expressed concern that charters focused on a particular kind of student (for example, African-Americans, deaf students, or schools for "at-risk" children) would increase segregation and leave the district schools with a less diverse student population.

Are charter schools attracting the smarter students and more academically-engaged parents? While studies have shown that most charters do not "cream" and that charters draw students with a wide range of academic abilities,³ several people interviewed from traditional public schools expressed anxiety about charters becoming elite institutions. One superintendent said, "We are losing the parents who are really interested in teaching and learning."

Are charter schools becoming "dumping grounds" for students the traditional public schools do not want to serve? It is difficult to understand how this fear arose in some of the same districts where concerns were expressed about charters attracting smarter students. If charter schools in the area served "at-risk" students or students with a history of disciplinary problems, a few informants expressed concerns that personnel in traditional public schools might have counseled this population into the charter schools.

While many subjects interviewed were aware of studies that show charters serving large numbers of students of color and poor/low-income students, several expressed concern that charters may be increasing the segregation of particular kinds of students.⁴

(c) The Departure of Disgruntled Parents

One unexpected finding of this research was that both school district employees and charter school leaders were aware that charters often attract families with a long history of complaints against the local school district and students who have had disciplinary problems in the traditional public schools. A superintendent from Massachusetts put it this way:

Let me overgeneralize grossly...there's probably a quarter of your parents who are actively pleased with a school system, a quarter who gripe, and 50% in the middle who are just complacent, they'll take whatever you give them. There's no question that the creation of the charter school skimmed off the loudest of our grippers, and gave us a relative breathing space to begin

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district school.*



to turn one of our schools around. I mean I've joked on occasion that it's like turning an oil tanker around in a small harbor—there's not a lot of space to do it and the ship's not terribly maneuverable. If they'd been part of the mix at the same time, it would have been more difficult.

A former school board member in Arizona described one district's response to the formation of the charter:

The district was glad—or the bureaucracy of the district was glad, I should say—to see these guys were shuffling off to Buffalo and leaving them alone. And I've heard that echoed by a number of school board members. It gets rid of our malcontents. Let them go get charters. Who cares? They're out of our face, and we can work at building our community schools and educating the 98% of the kids that still want to be there.

An advocate for charter schools in Colorado believed some districts support charters because disgruntled families leave:

This is taking care of those pain-in-the-ass parents or that pain-in-the-ass part of our district, or those artay parents that we've been hearing from for fifteen years now. Now they're happy because they've got their school.

It should surprise no one that many of the disgruntled families quickly became disillusioned with the charter school and returned to the traditional public school district. One Massachusetts superintendent reported that, by the charter's third year, most of its founders, who had previously been quite critical of the district middle school, had returned their children to the district schools. While one Colorado principal experienced the "return grippers" as less vocal and agitated than previously, other principals and teachers saw them as just as vocal in their complaints as they had been before they left for the charter school. One charter school founder observed, "You get five or six charter schools where these disgruntled parents are happy and then the overall school district isn't under attack. District personnel see it as a way to get some steam out of the system." He believed an exodus of grippers into charter schools ultimately might prove detrimental to traditional public schools because they will have lost a key constituency agitating for school improvement.

Thus both charter schools and traditional public schools may become trapped in a dynamic whereby disgruntled parents, a diverse and influential group, may shuttle back and forth between the charter and the district school. Districts may find themselves losing articulate voices which kept school personnel alert and responsive and charters may become overwhelmed by the agitation stirred up by these families. While this dynamic rarely finds its way into discussions of charter/district relations, it has emerged from this study as a significant area of impact.

(d) Staff Morale

The formation of charter schools often had a significant impact on the morale of teachers and other personnel in local school districts. Some teachers in traditional public schools who were interviewed for this study acknowledged feeling significant added pressure to produce strong educational results. Accompanying this pressure in many cases were pronounced changes in morale among school district personnel. Informants from more than a quarter of the districts studied mentioned that the opening of charter schools in a local area was perceived by teachers and other school personnel as "a slap in the face" or a commentary on their failings. Charters had an impact on the pride people felt in their work.

One Minnesota teacher explained that the formation of a charter near her school, was one of the many factors that has added pressure to the job: "Teaching has become increasingly stressful. Part of it is because I think there are many educators in this building that feel like we want to do a good job, we've tried to do a good job, and we interpret the charter school as 'You weren't doing a good job, therefore we had to found a new school.' There are increasing pressures."

An educator and union leader in Colorado spoke of the "affective impact" of the charter debates:

Public school teachers have been attacked so much in the past ten years, and so when there's this element out there of "We might take over your school..." there's that affective impact... Teachers sit back and say, "I haven't had the money. I've got too many special ed. kids. I have too many severe needs kids. I don't have textbooks. I don't have time. And you're telling me I don't do a good job and you're gonna take my tax dollars and put them someplace else and do a better job?"

A central administrator in the Grand Rapids, Michigan, public schools noticed shifts in educators' morale during the process of approving and opening a nearby charter school:

There's definitely a psychological effect. It's a morale issue in terms of the staff. At first they have some initial fear: Is the government out to destroy public schools? Then there's an urgency, people recognizing we're in a competitive market. When you visit a staff room in a building located near a charter school, you sense an immediate change in psychology: now we're in competition with the charter. We have to market our schools.

Sometimes educators experienced the arrival of charters as a powerful statement, not about their own performance, but about the performance of a district with which they have long felt frustrated. One principal in Arizona commented,

The perception on the part of many teachers—it would be hard to speak for all of them—is that it's not a slap against them, it's a slap against the system, and the system doesn't work for them either.

A few of the traditional school personnel interviewed spoke of improved levels of morale within their schools once staff members realized that their offerings equaled or exceeded the offerings of the charter school. One Massachusetts principal spoke of initially feeling that the charter was a comment on her ability to create a safe and educationally-challenging organization. Once students began returning to her school from the charter, she felt "affirmed," as if the entire chartering process had proven the value of her school in the public arena and enhanced her district's collective pride.

Staff morale is a key area which districts might monitor closely during the period following the opening of nearby charter schools. Whether personnel working within traditional public schools understand the charter as a harsh statement judging their work or as an affirming sign from the many families who continue to enroll their children in the district school, district administrators and school principals should anticipate and plan for shifts in morale as charters gain momentum.

(e) Redistribution of Administrative Time

Charters have presented challenges to administrative planning in local school districts and placed additional demands on central office personnel, resulting in a redistribution of time for some central office administrators, particularly in states where charter school financing and administrative record-keeping have been funneled through the district.

Many charter school advocates seemed unaware of ways the administrative energies of district personnel had been consumed by charters. Charter school staff members frequently believed that the introduction of public school choice through charters did little to impact the administrative management of a district. While this tended to be true for states where charters were constituted as separate legal entities and were fiscally and administratively independent of the district, in other circumstances planning and time allocation had been affected by charters.

Educators from public school districts generally agreed on the range of planning issues that had been complicated by public school choice and charters. Many informants discussed difficulties dealing with returnees to the district. Here the issues ranged from the match between the knowledge-level expected by the traditional public school and that of the charter school, which made grade-placement difficult; to teacher allocation processes that were expected to proceed without specific information on how many students at each grade level would

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be attending charters; to planning for the appropriate number of books or musical instruments without knowing how many students would be in the district school.

District personnel were not always clear what grade placements they should assign charter school students returning to the district schools. Lansing, Michigan, administrators had experienced difficulty predicting student enrollment. Financial managers in the Mesa, Arizona, schools discussed difficulty planning a budget and estimating numbers:

Charters make planning harder. Historically, we always had problems, because you never know how many people moved in exactly during the summer, how many moved out, how many went to private schools, how many decided to go to home schooling. So you always were estimating and sometimes guessing exactly what it was going to be. Charter schools just make that estimating and guessing a little harder because you have another variable you have to plan on.

Similar sentiments were echoed by district personnel in Groton-Dunstable, Massachusetts. A traditional public school in Madison, Wisconsin, was inundated with students leaving the charter school well after the school year had started and had to struggle with issues of teacher allocation, equipment needs, and different disciplinary standards between the charter and the traditional public school. A Massachusetts charter school principal discussed problems trying to place children in the traditional high schools in their area without knowing the match between the schools' curricula. Traditional public school personnel in almost all of the states studied indicated that they found themselves dealing with placement problems related to students returning to the district after a year or two in a charter school.

School district central office personnel gave varying answers when asked how much time charter schools took up in their work week. Generally, districts that had approved charters and served as the administrative and financing conduit for charter schools spent more time on charter business than districts located in states where most of the chartering went on through non-district bodies. Most personnel agreed that the bulk of time spent on charters occurred during the start-up phase and, once a district had created new systems for the charters, much less energy needed to be directed towards them. Districts seemed to spend time mostly on the application and approval process for chartering, participating in legislative lobbying related to charters, and in helping charters meet their obligation to serving special education students.

Several administrators in public school districts complained of the time lost to charters, particularly when charters were located in their districts but were chartered by an outside body. Two administrators expressed concern that when a charter school experiences organizational crisis, local district personnel often have to deal with the fall-out: students exiting the charters and returning to the district schools, public relations management, and crisis intervention. One district superintendent's staff consistently fielded phone calls complaining about the behavior of charter school students and the appearance of the building and grounds of the charter school even though the charter operated independently of her district's authority.

Finding #2: Of the 25 case-study districts in this research study, almost half (12 or 48%) experienced either strong (five or 20%) or moderate (seven or 28%) impact from charter schools and slightly more than half (13 or 52%) experienced either no impact (nine or 36%) or mild impact (four or 16%). Within a single state, the type and level of impact varied widely from school district to school district and often districts studied within a single state exhibited dramatically different types and levels of impact.

A key finding that emerged from this research is that most of the districts did not show signs of strong material impact from the arrival of charter schools in their area. Of the 25 districts studied, nine exhibited no impact, four showed mild impact, seven showed moderate impact and five districts exhibited strong impact. When superintendents, principals, and teachers were asked if their schools and school districts would be different were the charter school not in the picture, most indicated there would be no difference or there would be only minor differences. Less than half the informants cited significant impact from charter schools.

The impacts on districts were analyzed in this study and placed in four categories: no impact, mild impact, moderate impact, and strong impact. Districts which were categorized as exhibiting strong levels of impact had experienced significant "felt-loss" of students to char-

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rer schools along with the "felt-loss" of significant financing. These districts also had experienced at least two of the following four impacts: loss of particular kinds of students, departure of disgruntled parents, staff morale shifts, and the redistribution of administrative time. Districts which were categorized as experiencing moderate impact were characterized as having experienced a moderate loss of students and funding to charters and at least two of the four impacts. Districts which were categorized as experiencing no impact or a mild impact were characterized as having experienced either no loss of students and funding to charters or very little loss, and may have experienced up to two of the four impacts.

A variety of factors contributed to the limited impact of charters in some areas: some charters in their early years were not able to develop effective programs and experienced a protracted period of internal turmoil; some of the districts studied were high-performing districts and the charters which formed in their areas were small, alternative programs, attracting primarily special education students; in at least one state, Georgia, charters were seen as a way to improve an existing school but not as a way to influence the workings of the non-charter public schools in the area.

The impact of charters on local school districts was determined in large part by the local context in which public education was being offered and the quantity, quality, and size of local charter schools. Thus attempts to generalize about an entire state are of limited value. Such efforts are complicated further by differences between the impact of charters on rural, suburban, and urban schools, driven in large part by their different social, cultural, and economic characteristics.

Finding '3: The impact of charter laws and charter schools on large urban districts was less than on rural, suburban, and small urban districts.

Small cities, suburbs, and rural areas such as Grand Rapids, Michigan; San Carlos, California; Queen Creek, Arizona; Adams County, Colorado; Holland, Michigan; LeSueur, Minnesota; and Lansing, Michigan had experienced significant impact from charter schools at the time of this study. Cities such as Minneapolis, San Diego, Atlanta, Tucson, Milwaukee, Washington, D.C. and Denver had not appear greatly affected by charter schools.

The passage of charter legislation clearly spurred the Boston Public Schools and the Boston Teachers Union to create that city's "pilot school" program. Despite the contentious discourse about charter schools in Massachusetts, charters seemed to have had little impact on public schools in Boston that were not pilot schools. Tucson's first charter schools had primarily served as alternative programs for drop-outs and, while the district looked on them favorably, no major impact on the district had been felt. While an assistant to the superintendent in Minneapolis acknowledged the potential of the district to use charters strategically in reform efforts, he asserted that there "isn't anything different about any of the charters" that would offer new knowledge to the district. The major contribution that he believed charters were making to his district involved assisting the district in dealing with enrollment that was rising 1,000 students each year:

In a sense, for us, the charter school has helped in a system-wide view of being able to meet the educational needs of families...We would've had to build another school...It funnels off students...200 kids here, 200 kids there—great. Because that's two more buildings that we don't build at this point or have to find the land to do it on. We're building three more buildings in the next two years.

Several factors contributed to the limited impact felt in large urban centers: (1) most of the urban districts studied were experiencing increasing school-age populations; (2) most of these large urban districts contained only a few charter schools; (3) charter schools had existed in these districts for periods ranging from two to five years and more time might be needed for urban districts to feel an impact from charters; (4) research suggests that reforming large urban districts is a great challenge compared with reforming smaller districts with less weighty bureaucratic structures;⁵ (5) several of these urban districts already had in place plans for school restructuring and educational reform and viewed charters as a distraction from their efforts.

If advocates intend charter schools to spur significant reforms in school districts that need to improve student achievement, they might develop specific strategies for targeting large urban



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relations efforts.*

school districts. State policymakers in Illinois, Wisconsin, Ohio, and Missouri have crafted charter laws which strategically target low-performing urban centers. By targeting their reform efforts on the districts which are most in need of improvement, these states may see diminished opposition to charter proposals.

How are school districts responding to charter laws and charter schools?

Finding #4: Typically, school districts had not responded with swift, dramatic improvements, as of the time of this study. The majority of districts had gone about business-as-usual and responded to charters slowly and in small ways. Almost one quarter of the districts studied (24%) had responded energetically to the advent of charters and significantly altered their educational programs.

School district responses analyzed in this study were placed into three general categories. Districts which exhibited high levels of response were categorized by significant changes in district educational programs, emulation of aspects of the charter school model, and chartering of schools on the district's initiative. Districts which exhibited moderate levels of response were categorized by moderate, circumscribed changes in the district's educational programs, emulation of superficial aspects of the charter school model, and neutrality towards the chartering of district schools. Districts which exhibited low levels of response were categorized by little or no program changes in response to charters, resistance to using any models piloted in charter schools, refusal to support charter applications, and efforts to eliminate the charter law.

While categories of high, moderate, and low responsiveness have been utilized here, it is important to note that there may have been important reasons why some districts had made few program changes due to charters: some districts in this study had already offered excellent educational options before the arrival of charter schools; some charters had not been successful in creating models worthy of emulation and other charters replicated programs already offered by district schools; some districts opposed charters, not because they resisted reform, but because they believed the state's financing arrangements for charters were not fair; in some districts the impacts from charters had been negligible or at such a low level that they had not appeared likely to trigger significant response.

Placing districts in these categories required extensive analysis of the district's context and activities in response to charters. For example, where does one place the Denver Public Schools, a district which, at the time of this study, only recently had initiated its own charter but for several years had opposed chartering schools and remained a large, urban district offering no other evidence of responding to charters strategically? Denver was classified as exhibiting "low" responsiveness. Where does one place Boston, a district which initiated a pilot school program (its own in-district charters) now comprising almost a dozen schools, yet had not shown any other responses to charters? Boston was classified as exhibiting "moderate" responsiveness. The Adams County School District #12 in Colorado had chartered numerous schools as part of its broader reform strategy, responded to parent requests for more back-to-basics programs, and created stronger thematic programs in its traditional schools. Adams County #12 was classified as exhibiting "high" responsiveness. In this study, six of the districts (24%) were classified as "high" response districts, another six (24%) were classified as "moderate" response districts, and 13 districts (52%) were classified as "low" response districts.

The majority of districts in this study (13 out of 25 or 52%) fell into the low responsiveness category. Low responsiveness status does not imply failure. The Stillwater Independent School District in Minnesota had not responded aggressively to charters because they already had strong, successful reform programs in place in district schools and the charter school situated in their district had evolved into an alternative program for students who were not finding success in the traditional schools. Other districts in this category, particularly large urban districts such as San Diego, Milwaukee, and Washington, D.C., might have benefited from the strategic use of chartering but had not done so at the time of this study.

Six of the 25 districts (24%) studied were categorized as districts of moderate response. This category includes Mesa, Arizona, a high-performing district which had experienced significant numbers of students opting out of district schools for charters. Mesa's moderate response

had included the opening of additional back-to-basic district schools and an aggressive public relations effort promoting their schools. Likewise, Grand Rapids, Michigan, has been placed in this category as it had stepped up its public relations work, opened an environmental education-focused school, and was planning additional thematic schools, partly in response to charters.

Six of the 25 districts (24%) had been classified as districts with high responsiveness to charters. These districts were sites where the charter school initiative had played a major role in driving stepped-up reform efforts. This category includes the Cartersville and Barrow County Schools in Georgia, San Carlos, California, and Adams County #12, Colorado, districts where reform-minded superintendents have seized on the state's charter law and used it as a key strategic part of reform efforts. It also includes the Nauset Regional School District in Massachusetts where the formation of a local charter served as a catalyst for improving the district's middle school and Phoenix, Arizona, the only major city which offered evidence of strong response to charter schools (see page 20).

Finding #5: Several districts classified as having low or moderate responsiveness had made a significant effort to improve public relations and had begun to aggressively market their schools to the public.

Informants in 19 of the 25 (76%) districts studied felt that the local media had given excessive attention and/or uncritical coverage to charter schools. A number of charter school leaders corroborated this perspective. One state official in Massachusetts succinctly articulated the feelings of many public school personnel:

I understand the frustration. You're working hard as a teacher, principal, or superintendent, feeling like you're finally getting some things done and doing interesting things and, for the life of you, you can't get a good story out of the newspaper because they're always writing about the charter school... doing some of the same things you're

doing, but just getting all the publicity for it. I think that's the way people in Boston sometimes feel, like "If I see one more story about City on a Hill I'll scream."

Some school districts had devoted additional resources to marketing and advertising. Others had become more aggressive in public relations and outreach. Superintendents, other central office personnel, and principals spoke frequently of stepping up efforts to accommodate parents and being receptive to their concerns. Many acknowledged that public school choice policies had made districts beef up their public relations efforts. Principals in traditional public schools in several districts spoke about marketing becoming an increasing part of their jobs and occupying a greater percentage of their time.

Five of the 25 districts studied had made efforts to go beyond an increased receptivity to input from the community and the parents of children in the schools. These districts had begun active public relations campaigns to recruit and retain families in response to charters and other choice mechanisms. In Arizona, the Mesa Public Schools had begun a highly visible advertising campaign in local newspapers and the Queen Creek Unified School District began to market their schools at the local movie theater. In Michigan, the Grand Rapids schools were the focus of an advertising campaign on television and the district had begun to train administrators in public relations and marketing.

The Holland, Michigan, public school district had increased its public relations function, hired a full-time communications director, and sent letters to families at the local charter school explaining how they could re-enroll in the public school district. The superintendent of the Hartland Consolidated Schools in Michigan also had sent a letter to families departing for charter schools, asking for "constructive suggestions" that would be turned into "a plan of action to improve the Hartland Consolidated Schools."

These examples suggest that school district responses to charters may be motivated by a broad range of intentions. Some districts clearly were attempting to

counter the departure of students from their schools into nearby charters; others seemed to be responding to the new rules created by the emerging marketplace of public school choice. If public school choice continues to expand, this is one area which merits ongoing review and analysis.

Finding #6: Several moderate- and high-response districts had made changes in their educational offerings as a result of charters. These changes included opening schools organized around a specific philosophy or theme, creating "add-on" programs such as an after-school program or all-day kindergarten, and offering more diverse activities or curricular resources.

Journalistic accounts of charter schools frequently included anecdotes about new educational programs that have been offered through school districts as a result of the competition introduced by charter schools. This study investigated such anecdotes to determine the precise relationship such innovations have had to charter schools.

To date, charters have served to encourage some districts to create additional thematic schools focused on a particular educational philosophy. Most prevalent have been the expansion of back-to-basics and core knowledge schools within public school districts as a result of similarly themed charters drawing families away from the district. Adams County #12 in Colorado had opened additional in-district fundamental programs after two fundamental charters attracted hundreds of students from the district. New core-knowledge schools were opened by several Colorado districts after the Jefferson Academy charter school had opened and drew hundreds of students from nearby districts. Mesa, Arizona, which had pioneered fundamental schools for over a dozen years, increased its number of these schools, in part due to the expansion of similar programs in their district through chartering.

In other areas, charters spurred school districts to create additional schools focused on particular themes. The Grand Rapids Public Schools in Michigan developed an environmental

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sciences middle school program after similarly-focused charter schools had opened in the area. The Boston Public Schools took their pilot school proposal off the back burner and put it on a fast track only after charter legislation had been approved in Massachusetts. They opened almost a dozen schools with concentrations ranging from the arts, allied health sciences, drop-out prevention, science and math to multiculturalism. Boston's superintendent referred to these pilots as "in-district charter schools."

In Madison, Wisconsin, school department leadership used the state's charter law to create a middle school focused on technology and individualized programming to serve that city's African-American population that had lost its neighborhood middle school in the 1970s. The Rochester, Minnesota, public schools approved an in-district Montessori program only after interested families had begun considering forming a charter school. Charter laws throughout the nation have spurred a revival of the alternative educational programs popular in the 1960s and 70s, and expanded open classroom, Montessori, Waldorf-type programs, and developmental-focused pedagogies within public schooling.

All-day kindergarten is now offered in school districts such as Lansing, Michigan, and Mesa, Arizona, as a result of local charters attracting families seeking such programs. An after-school program was created in the public schools in Williamsburg, Massachusetts, after local charters had attracted families seeking such programs. The superintendent of the LeSueur-Henderson, Minnesota, public schools discussed ways the process of debating and approving a charter school in his rural district had served as an impetus to efforts to reform the district schools and increase project-based activities, block scheduling, and computer-focused learning experiences. He said,

I think the charter school's been helpful to us in a number of intriguing ways—subtle, more subtle than anything. It has been helpful in that the very existence of the charter has challenged our larger system to take a look at more innovative approaches to learning and teaching. And in the second year of the charter school, we implemented a four-period day at the high school, that really changed how we utilize time...I think the fact that the Board voted to sponsor the charter helped create more of a sense of urgency, that—yes, we must change.

After a charter school in Orleans, Massachusetts, had purchased vans to transport students to a wide range of community-based activities, the local high school decided to also purchase vans and expand their community-based programming. The district's middle school was considering acquiring vans at the time of this study.

Finding #7: Certain innovations and changes in school districts and traditional public schools hypothesized by the study's investigator had rarely occurred: Few superintendents, principals, and teachers in district schools were thinking of charter schools as educational laboratories or attempting to transfer pedagogical innovations from charters to the district schools; districts were still building large school facilities and were rarely creating smaller schools; the large urban districts studied rarely had responded in meaningful ways to charter laws and charter schools.

One of the unexpected findings of this research was that school districts at the time of the study had rarely taken innovations in teaching or learning produced by charter schools and put them to use in district schools. The majority of subjects interviewed from traditional public schools and school districts—as well as many of the informants from charter schools—acknowledged that charters rarely had been utilized by school districts as laboratories for pedagogical innovation. Some believed charters may offer innovations in governance, accountability, and assessment rather than pedagogical innovations. One teacher questioned whether any schools have adequate systems which encourage the transfer of knowledge and pedagogical innovation.

In a speech at the first national charter school conference sponsored by the Department of Education, Secretary of Education Richard Riley applauded a charter school in Minneapolis for functioning as a laboratory and producing new knowledges for the local schools. Yet the director of this same school, interviewed for this study several weeks before the secretary's speech, expressed frustration that there had been "no investment from the larger district" in transferring knowledge gained from the school. He insisted:



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I've learned that there's no pay-back for trying to convince someone they should do something I think is better...They know where we are. If they want to learn, they can learn. We had three of the superintendents visit and they're all very positive and impressed. But when I did say, "Well, if you want the partnership with us, I'm willing to do that..."

This charter founder felt that the district administrators were simply inattentive to educational innovations and hence unable to benefit from the methods or programs developed in his school. Yet a central administrator in the same district seemed to question the work of the charter and insisted,

We're not going to create another school like that. Kids are getting special education and we have some questions about what it is that they actually are doing. They have a well-done program. Well, we already have similar curriculum in other schools. So we have not responded in that sense.

For charters to function as educational laboratories for traditional public schools and experiments with new methods of teaching and learning, two things are needed: the charter must be able to produce new knowledges and the district must be open to transferring the innovations produced by the charter to the district schools. At the time of this study, several factors served as barriers to districts making use of charters as educational laboratories: (1) many charters were in their first few years of operation and had not had the time to fully develop their pedagogical offerings; (2) during the early years of operation, most charter school personnel did not have time to share lessons learned with people from outside their school; likewise many teachers and principals in traditional public schools had little time to visit the classrooms in their own school, let alone in a nearby charter school; (3) in many areas, charter schools and the traditional public schools either had no relationship with one another or maintained a hostile relationship that precluded sharing pedagogical learnings between the two; (4) some charter schools conceptualized their mission as fulfilling the educational needs of their students and did not feel drawn toward transforming other schools' classroom practices; (5) many charter schools were located in school districts that already offered excellent and highly-rated programs and district personnel believed they would have little to learn from a charter school; (6) some district leaders insisted the charters were only replicating programs already in place in the district schools and a "we already do that" mentality precluded districts from learning from charters.

One rural district in this study exemplified the problem of transfer of knowledge among and between charter and traditional schools. The administrator for the charter believed no local teachers had visited the school because

they have not seen it as being meaningful and relevant...As recently as a year ago the new principal took it to his faculty leadership team and discussed getting involved with us and they said, "We don't consider that education."

Yet when a teacher in the local traditional school was asked why she had never visited, she insisted at first, "There was a lot of animosity..." and then explained, "I wouldn't just have a day where I would say I can go down there...but I could certainly go down there in a prep period." In a subsequent communication she attempted to understand the barriers that had kept her from considering the school as a laboratory for educational innovations:

One of the things I remembered was the feeling on the part of the faculty that those supporting the charter were not saying it was 'an experiment for innovative educational practices'—instead they said it was necessary because the high school was, in part, failing. It was not perceived by us as a lab school and I did not get the impression from our school board that they saw it that way.

This informant felt that the charter school had formed its identity in opposition to the district high school and had criticized the work of that school's faculty. This led her to assume a defensive posture that served as a barrier to visiting the charter. Charter schools in the study that had recruited families and increased their own stature by criticizing, demeaning,

Informants from districts that had coexisted with charters for three to five years displayed an attitude characterized by considerably less hostility and suspicion than those with charter experience of a shorter duration.



or outright trashing the local traditional public schools, frequently found themselves unable to create comfortable working relationships to share pedagogical insights or oversee student transitions in and out of the charter school.

Districts may be more willing to transfer innovations produced by charter schools to traditional public schools when the charters have been initiated or approved by district leadership. Ironically, this tended to occur less frequently in states where so-called 'strong' or non-restrictive laws, providing for sponsors other than the district board, were in place. In such states many of these charter schools may have a contentious relationship with the district, at least during their first years of operation; this does not promote mutual exchange. Yet the presence of the alternative sponsor may lead to the development of particularly unique educational programs which should be considered as a model for traditional public schools.

Denver Public Schools had recently opened its own charter school that some believed was intended to serve a laboratory function, but no significant exchange had occurred between the district and the other charter school located within its boundaries. Likewise several districts in California, including the San Carlos Public Schools, had initiated charter schools precisely for this experimental and laboratory function. Boston's City on a Hill charter school recently had been awarded a federal grant which was expected to bring about a formal collaboration between charter and district teachers.

Finding #8: An analysis of the 25 case studies in this report suggests district response to charters evolves over time and that there may be distinct stages in the development of charter schools, which offer specific opportunities for district response.

Responses from districts to charter schools were rarely quick, discrete, or isolated from the rich mix of changes regularly experienced by school districts. The majority of districts in this study could be understood as having gone through three stages of response to charter schools, which can be characterized in the following ways:

- (1) The period stretching from the initial proposal of charter legislation through passage and the founding stages of the first charters: This was often a time when intense internal debate occurred among school personnel, parents, and political leadership; it was frequently a time of exaggerated claims on the part of charter advocates and opponents alike. Impacts on the school district during this period were primarily focused on attitudes and the climate of the district and its schools. If the charter school in formation was founded in opposition to the traditional public schools, it was common for districts to take on a defensive posture at this time.
- (2) The period from when charters open their doors through their early years of operation. This was a period when some school districts began to make specific changes in response to charters: they may have begun or stepped up marketing efforts, considered add-on programs, curricular expansion, and expanded hours in an attempt to minimize the loss of students to the charter. This was likely to have been a time of heightened conflict within local communities as districts responded in various ways to shifts in financing. These shifts were usually felt most intensely during the first year a charter school was open, when a specific student cohort departed en masse from the traditional public schools for the charter. This was also a time when charter founders were busy creating their school and initiating educational programs; they had little time for involvements outside of their school.
- (3) The period when charters attain some stable institutional presence in relation to the local districts. Conflicts abated at this time and the district and charter moved toward a point of equilibrium and mutual respect. Districts experienced students re-entering the traditional public schools from the charter by this time. Claims predicting the 'devastation' of the school system had been proven to be exaggerations; and charters had passed the honeymoon period when they were idealistically characterized and their weaknesses and failings had been acknowledged. An acceptance settled in regarding changes that had occurred in the way public education was organized, and the hostility that some districts and charters had directed towards each other began to lessen.

Informants from school districts that had coexisted with charters for three to five years displayed an attitude towards charters characterized by considerably less hostility and suspicion than those with charter experience of a shorter duration. Several superintendents and central office administrators spoke of reaching an accommodation with charters and working more cooperatively with them after having had survived "the big hit" of the first year's exodus of students.

Finding 'g: The climates and cultures of nearby traditional public schools, school districts and communities almost always had changed following the appearance of charter schools in their midst, but not in a single, predictable manner.

Advocates for charter schools often assert that the introduction of public school choice and new educational options will infuse school districts and personnel with a fresh spirit of energetic competition. Once the district's monopoly on public education is ended, this argument goes, the weighty bureaucracies that constitute large school districts in the United States begin to flex and become consumer-friendly. By transforming public schooling into an educational marketplace, districts and schools are forced to continually reform themselves in order to maintain steady participation by local families.

This study affirmed that attitudinal, climatic and cultural shifts occur within school districts due to the introduction of charter laws, charter schools and other types of public school choice. However, the data suggest a complicated pattern of responses in public schools and school districts where the impact of charters and the response of districts are tightly braided together. While increased responsiveness and attention to student outcomes were part of many schools' responses, several other impacts and responses emerged from the data including increased pressure and stress on teachers and principals; cycles of hostility, vilification, and conflict occurring within school districts and local communities; and a loss of or increase in morale of traditional school teachers. Within the school districts affected by charter schools that were studied, a number of different changes had been occurring that frequently appear contradictory or paradoxical.

Varying levels of conflict occurred within and between various constituencies when charter schools were formed. Charters formed in cooperation with district schools or initiated by school district leadership experienced less hostility than those formed as a critical reaction to the district schools. Charters were not always the focus of contentious debate within local communities. In several districts studied, charters were proposed, accepted, and created without significant conflict arising. This tended to occur when the charter offered a program for at-risk students or other students with special needs, when it was situated in a well-funded, heavily-resourced district, or when it was formed in cooperation with the school district.

In Tucson, Arizona, where the earliest charters were designed to "attract students who are disillusioned with the regular public schools," teachers freely had referred appropriate students to the charter school. The principal of a local high school insisted,

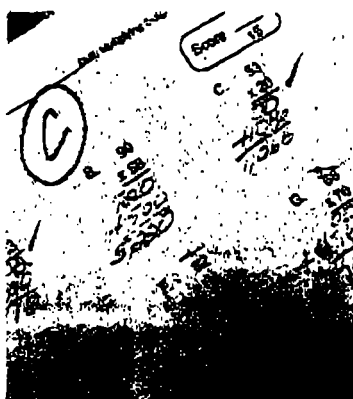
We don't feel competitive. We think it's having a positive effect on our population because of the type of students that are attracted to the charter schools in Tucson.

In Stillwater, Minnesota, a charter school served at-risk students who had not succeeded in the traditional high schools, and teachers seemed to feel little conflict about the school. In Dillon, Colorado, one seventh grade teacher commented on "a huge difference" in her school once the charter opened:

There was a segment of our population that was gone. They were kids that took a lot of teacher time. They were kids—not to say all the kids there were like this—but there was a good portion of kids who I would say had emotional and behavioral problems...It made the school calmer, easier to teach. We didn't have nearly as many behavioral problems, when those kinds of kids weren't here.

A teacher in Adams County #12, Colorado, expressed his satisfaction at having a charter school for gifted and talented students share a school building with a district middle school:

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within local
communities.*



*This research suggests
the existence of a
relationship between
level of impact and
district response to
charter schools.*

I feel it is a big kudo for the gifted and talented charter school to be here, because we get an influx of different things going on in the building. So I'm kind of happy they're here.

Yet in other places the proposal, debate, acceptance, and appearance of charters had sparked great conflict within schools and local communities. This appeared common in rural areas where a single charter school could enroll a significant portion of students from the small local district. One Colorado teacher noticed powerful hostility suffusing the community during the formative stages of a charter forming in her rural district:

At the very beginning there was a lot of animosity and resentment about the charter's beginning... people took it personally because it felt like the school board was saying to us, "You're not good enough, so we're gonna allow this charter school to start." Since then, there's been virtually no communication between the charter and our school.

The formation of a charter school in Queen Creek, Arizona, a rural district in the East Valley of Phoenix resulted in great divisiveness in the local community. One staff member insisted, "The community just totally split in half. Neighbors quit talking to neighbors. Friends quit talking to each other." Another observed,

I've found great division in the community. I've found that teachers who have been here any length of time are very resentful of the type of advertising the charter is doing and the type of comments that are made about the traditional public schools. Teachers resent the fact that we are being discussed as a below-average school, a school that doesn't teach anything. We even had a person who said that all Spanish-speaking children were sent home at noon. Complete jaleahoods were brought out about the school. And we were resentful of that.

A fourth grade teacher in the district added, "The community has been divided, badly divided, to the point of being nasty to each other, not speaking to each other."

In one Massachusetts district, teachers who had accepted jobs in the new charter school before they finished their work for the year in a district school experienced hostility from their former colleagues. One principal in this district described children no longer talking to other children and parents not permitting their children to play with friends whose families had taken the other side in the charter school debates. A sixth grade teacher who was an activist in the union opposing charter schools found that her long-time teaching partner had accepted a position in a local charter school:

I was kind of devastated last year when my own teaching partner left me. She is now at the charter school. She never told me. I heard about it from the principal... I just couldn't imagine somebody that I'd taught with every day for seven or eight years submitting her letter of resignation.

One charter school principal in Michigan shared stories he had heard from the parents who send their children to his school. He believed animosity became strongest when parents' friends "were teachers in a traditional public school and in the teacher union's ranks. That's where I'd say sentiment is strongest against charter schools by far. In Michigan it's particularly strong because we're such a union state." He saw much divisiveness among parents' peer groups.

Charter school founders and school district personnel all have choices to make about the kinds of relationship they would like to see established between the charter school and the district. Some charter school founders interviewed for this study felt as if they had sacrificed the integrity and autonomy of their school in order to "buy" the support of the district or the union and avoid ill-feelings. While most of the charter schools that had begun with contentious relationships to local school districts found the relationship improving after two or three years of operation, a few of the districts in this study had maintained tense and uncooperative relationships with charter schools for over three years.

Under what circumstances do school districts respond to charter laws and charter schools by accelerating school improvement efforts?

Finding #10: The districts in this study which had experienced high levels of impact usually exhibited responses to charters, though not necessarily at a high level; districts which had experienced low levels of impact generally exhibited low levels of response or no response at all.

Personnel in several school districts that were studied had not felt particular pressure to improve their schools due to the development of charter schools. Most of these cases were highly-acclaimed school districts that were well-resourced and well-respected in local communities. Hence in seeking to determine factors that allow charters to function strategically to spark improvement in district schools, it is important to acknowledge that some public school districts in which charters were located had already succeeded in developing strong, successful educational offerings while others were well on the road to successful school improvement before charters were initiated.

This research suggests the existence of a relationship between level of impact and district response to charter schools. There was a correlation between some of the levels or kinds of impact experienced by school districts and the levels or kinds of response by the district. Additional research is needed to fully understand this complex relationship. While it was clear that districts which had experienced heavy impact from charters showed some response, this was often a moderate response, rather than a strong one. Occasionally the response focused on improved public relations rather than substantive changes in educational programs. The districts which had not experienced significant impact from charters tended to offer little or no response.

There were also some observable relationships between the nature of impact and the nature of response. This was most pronounced when thematic charters formed and offered educational

programs which district schools had not offered or offered to a limited extent, resulting in turning away families seeking such options. District schools often responded by offering a similar type of program, although sometimes in a somewhat muted form compared to that of the charter school. Districts which had experienced strong impacts from charters generally responded in ways which included improved public relations and stronger communication with parents.

Finding #11: A variety of factors other than the nature and degree of impact seemed to contribute to school district response to charters, including the overall ecology of school choice in the district, student performance, a critical mass of charters in the area, community awareness of charters, and district leadership. Districts which exhibited a high level of responsiveness to charters usually had reform-minded leaders who seized on charters as a strategic tool to step up reforms in their districts.

This study considered factors which resulted in traditional public schools and school districts responding to charters in ways that resulted in improved educational opportunities for the students who were not attending charter schools. While some theorists have suggested that an economic loss (the loss of financing) is the incentive needed for school districts to engage earnestly in reform efforts, this study uncovered a range of additional factors driving public school reform within school districts:

(a) The Overall Ecology of School Choice

Charters were not the only public school-choice option available in most of the states studied. Sometimes a combination of choice options had served to motivate district personnel into more expeditious reform efforts. In states such as Minnesota, Massachusetts, Michigan, and Colorado, it was difficult for informants to distinguish between the effects of varying choice options. The cumulative effect of several distinct, interrelated choice options seemed to drive several district-wide reform efforts.

(b) Student Performance

Student performance on standardized tests had contributed to district response to charters in several ways. Superintendents, principals, and teachers from high-performing districts tended to discount the impact of charters and often appeared committed to preventing controversies surrounding charters from distracting them from their already well-proven efforts. Charters in these districts often had been motivated by families seeking smaller school settings or specific educational alternatives. During the time of this study, two districts located in different states had received disappointing test results and personnel in these districts worried that the combined effect of the test results and the charter schools would result in drastic changes to the workings of the district. Clearly overall student achievement in a district played an important role in spurring or stifling response to charters.

(c) Enrollment Levels

The departure of significant numbers of students to charter schools was clearly a factor motivating intensified reform efforts for several of the school districts in this study. Ranging from dozens, to hundreds, to thousands of students, the "felt-loss" of students was usually tied to a loss of financing. Few subjects interviewed for this study disagreed that financial losses might spur a district to reform, yet some felt personal pride was as great a motivating factor. The loss of students was understood to result in a loss of pride for the superintendent or principal, who would then respond in a spirit of competition to win back the students and the financing.

A major factor mitigating the responsiveness of the districts studied involved rising school-age populations. Even though districts may have lost several hundred students to charters, if they were seeing an influx of new students to their area, this served to off-set the charter-related loss and minimize the "felt-loss" of financing. Several superintendents interviewed spoke supportively of charters. One Arizona superintendent described frantically trying to build new



Several
superintendents
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aggressively improve
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Most did not.



schools to meet the rising demand and argued that charters "siphoned off" students in a helpful way.

(d) A Critical Mass of Charter Schools

One or two small charter schools in large urban districts did not seem to significantly spur reform throughout the district. Yet the same number of schools in small, rural districts might have had a major effect on the district's operations. Clearly the "critical mass" necessary to have a felt-impact on a district is related to district size. Several subjects thought that a specific level of market density was necessary to jolt school districts into action. Additional research in varying locations and contexts might aim to understand what constitutes a critical mass of charters that would prove capable of igniting reform energies within districts.

(e) Media Attention and Community Awareness of the Charter Effort

It became clear throughout this study that media coverage surrounding the development of charter schools often had had a crucial impact on the ways in which school district personnel responded to the charter. There did not seem to be a simple, predictable pattern of response, but several superintendents and principals indicated that they had felt compelled to respond aggressively when the level of discourse concerning charters became significant in their communities. If a charter school had been formed in a district, yet had received little media attention and the local community had been uninformed of its presence, it was less likely to have inspired response from the local district than if its formation had been accompanied by significant public debate.

(f) Charter Policies Which Allow For Multiple Sponsors of Charter Schools

States which had policies that provided for the chartering of new schools only through the local district showed significantly less evidence of reform effects from the development of charter schools than did states which allowed for multiple sponsors. While district officials frequently saw laws which allowed for multiple sponsors as undermining their authority and ability to oversee educational improvement in their district, the sites in this study where greatest effects were occurring were almost entirely in states with policies which allow for multiple sponsors. District personnel on at least five occasions in this study acknowledged—sometimes begrudgingly—that charters had served to "jump-start" their efforts at reform. While they initially had opposed charters and the chartering had been accomplished outside their authority, they felt that district schools ultimately had benefited from the dynamics introduced by the charter school.

(g) District and School Leadership

When informants were asked "What brings about positive reforms within public education?" the leadership of the district and of individual schools was frequently cited. Several superintendents, central office administrators, and principals saw charter legislation as an opportunity to aggressively move forward efforts to improve district schools. Most did not. In one district, the leadership of the state superintendent of schools was cited as well. This study uncovered several districts where the superintendent and/or school committee had taken aggressive leadership to reform schools in order to head off efforts to open charter schools. In addition to the economic losses resulting from students enrolling in charters, reform-minded leadership was cited most frequently as key to the improvement of public schools.

During the design phase of this study, several researchers argued that leaders and employees of public school districts interviewed would not credit charter schools for increasing efforts at reform and would attribute improvements and innovations to other sources. The data indicated otherwise. School superintendents, central office administrators, principals and teachers frequently credited charter schools, or the debates surrounding charter schools, with motivating more earnest efforts at school reform.

Several school districts in the suburbs of Denver, Colorado, were the sites of significant reform initiatives linked to charters. A principal of a middle school in Adams County #12 said,

I'm a person who believes that a little competition for the public school system wouldn't be a bad thing, as long as it's fair and not destructive in nature...I think having charter schools that are within the umbrella of the public school system—that sort of screens out the ideologic aspects to a large degree—is a good way to go. It's a nice compromise...So I think the more choices and options we have for people, the better, as long as we keep the playing field even. The charter school has given teachers the idea that there is another system. We need to make sure that our product, if you will, our service, is as sterling and as polished as possible because people could turn to another way of doing this.

One urban district in this study illustrated that the opening of charter schools can serve as a catalyst for significant response on the part of a large urban district. In the Phoenix Union High School District in Arizona, district leadership had initiated aggressive reform efforts in response to charter schools. A deputy superintendent in the district said,

I think if charter legislation didn't come about—I've been here seven years, and we pretty much look today as we did seven years ago, as we did several years before that. But I can guarantee that next fall schools will look different. There will be different sized schools, there will be different configurations. We will have a year-round school. We do have a block scheduled school this year and that may not be a result of competition, but it's a result of delivering a better product. And I think that whole product, results-driven effort to redesign schools was heightened and then moved more quickly because of the competition from charter schools.

The superintendent of the Nauset Regional School District in Massachusetts spoke at length about using the new charter school that had been initiated in his district as part of a strategy to reform the district's middle school. He argued that the charter initiative could benefit his district if it spurred administrators and teachers to greater responsiveness and if it motivated school personnel to regularly rethink and re-envision their work. In Georgia, where the charter school initiative is part of the state's School Improvement Program, educational leaders in the Bartow County School District used the charter process "as a means that would allow them to improve education for children and get parents more involved." The superintendent of the district who facilitated the move towards chartering said,

My job and the system level staff's jobs will turn more and more into being a support base. We will function in a way that will support more of what the schools are doing, instead of generating stuff at the system level. It will be developed at the school level. We at the system level will serve to support the school. I see it changing more from a dictatorial role to a facilitator role. We help facilitate what they want to make happen.

Seven of the district's 10 elementary schools had become charters and the other three were in process, as were the district's middle schools and high school.

Finding #12: Informants disagreed about whether creating a competitive environment for districts leads to school improvement. Some believed it does. Others saw competition as harmful and believed educators prefer collaboration and are motivated by the needs of students or personal pride in their work rather than competition over enrollment, awards, or reputation.

When superintendents, teachers and principals were asked to list factors that motivate school personnel to create quality learning environments for students, two contrasting perspectives emerged. One viewpoint saw competition as a powerful and helpful force that keeps people on their toes and inspires a striving towards excellence. A superintendent from Georgia succinctly captured this perspective:

Competition is good for the public school system just like it's good for business...It's good for the kids and keeps everyone on their toes. It works against being lethargic and unresponsive.

A Massachusetts superintendent exemplified the view that competition is necessary for the healthy functioning of schools when he argued:

*Informants disagreed
about whether
creating a competitive
environment for
districts leads to
school improvement.*

*I think we're beginning to see some healthy benefit from the competition. The day after the charter school was announced, I walked into an administrators' meeting, tossed on the table a copy of David Halberstam's *The Reckoning*, and said, "Who do you want to be—Honda or General Motors?" That metaphor has played itself out. Our middle school, which is the school at which the charter school is aimed, was by any rational standard the least successful school in the district...Its test scores were mediocre...It had a faculty that was defensive and complacent...*

The charter school was a wake-up call, like it or not. The fact is that the parents of more than 100 kids said, "We want our kids out..." Charter schools served notice to everybody that complacency wasn't an option...With no competition, people show up to work, do what they consider to be their jobs, go home feeling tired, satisfied, fulfilled—you pick it. The unfortunate reality perhaps is that the competition forced us to look in a mirror and ask who we were, who we wanted to be, why these people had chosen to leave us, and what we were gonna do about it.

Some charter schools were founded out of an adversarial relationship with the district schools; this adversarial relationship was often felt acutely by educators working in the district. In describing various relationships charter schools have had with district schools in Colorado, one superintendent said,

I think sometimes it feels contentious and I think sometimes they have been bred of adversity. Ours was bred of adversity. People who were very unhappy with the middle school founded the charter. So their earlier public relations was "We're gonna set this up because the middle school stinks!" This was very broad-based, harmful. Oh, it did not feel good. It did not feel good.

Another superintendent interviewed believed competition is destructive and felt that educators are motivated by factors such as pride and a commitment to educating the child. A social studies teacher in a traditional school in Tucson insisted,

I don't think we need the pressure at this school. We have extremely dedicated teachers. And I resent the attitude that change has to come from without, by competition, and that people who aren't certified—and I think in charter schools you don't have to have certification—that they're going to be able to make more of a difference than public school teachers. I think it's a fallacy. What drives us as teachers is love of our students. Concern for their future, the future of our city or our nation.

Another fifth grade teacher in Denver echoed these sentiments:

I don't do my job based on thinking I have a competitor. I do it based on knowing that the child needs to grow up and have a good education to get somewhere. That's what motivates me.

While it was unclear whether creating a competitive environment for a school district always promoted positive changes or encouraged an array of changes where the good outweighed the bad, the informants in this study, including traditional public school superintendents, district personnel, and principals, spoke thoughtfully and occasionally passionately about this topic. Many saw public school choice as one catalyst for school improvement in their districts.

Finding #13: This research suggests charter schools may have contributed to statewide reform efforts that have no formal connection to charters.

One charter school founder wondered whether Minnesota's site-based management initiative hadn't been spurred by the success locally which charter schools have had as site-based managed organizations. When asked why she thought the initiative had been related to charters, she responded,

Well it seems to follow on the heels and it's always a negotiating chip: rather than push for more for charters, why don't we do more within the system? And if charters can do that, then why can't we do it within the system? So it's there to pose questions to people. I think that's one of the intangible things that you'd have to track through legislative testimony to see how many times that's the gambit.

The deputy superintendent of an Arizona school district credited charter schools with improving that state's financing process for all public schools and loosening regulations surrounding teacher certification:

Same-year funding's been talked about for years, but if it wasn't for charter schools—the state superintendent, she's the one who decides how we're going to do the funding, pointed this out to the legislature as unfair...So they changed the law which closed the loophole...State licensure for teaching is also changing. Since the charter school law was put in, it's easier to become certified because the charter schools, they don't have to certify in our state.

Other informants wondered whether the current expanded use of reconstitution of failing schools and the creation of stronger systems of school accountability in their areas could be attributed in part to charter schools' trailblazing in these areas.

Finding #14: Advocates and opponents of charter legislation and many of the state policy-makers interviewed for this study often inaccurately characterized the overall effects which charter schools have had on school districts.

People involved in the contentious political debates surrounding charter schools frequently misrepresented the impact which charter schools have had on public school districts. Charter school movement activists, union leaders, representatives of education groups, administrators in state departments of education, and elected officials often made claims about how school districts had been affected by charters and presented compelling examples which fit their ideological beliefs. Yet when evidence was sought to substantiate these claims, a different picture often emerged.

This misrepresentation took several forms: the use of anecdotal information focused on outstanding charters or charter school failures to encourage people to mistake statistical outliers for typical cases; the denial or exaggeration of the number of students opting out of district schools or financing lost by some districts; a tendency to attribute all changes occurring in districts to charters when other, independent dynamics may have served as the primary impetus.

Few informants appeared to engage in willful misrepresentation or deliberately altered facts to fit their arguments. More commonly, the pressures of the political debate seemed to motivate people to reduce complexity, exaggerate impact, or simplistically characterize dynamic and multi-faceted processes.

Endnotes

1 Some of the more interesting studies in this category include, Corwin, R. and Flaherty, J. (Eds.). (1995 November). *Freedom and Innovation in California's Charter Schools*. Los Alamitos, CA: Southwest Regional Laboratory; Wohlstetter, P., Wenning, R. and Briggs, K. (1995 December). "Charter Schools in the United States: The Question of Autonomy," *Educational Policy*, 9(4), 331-358; Vergari, S. and Mintrom, M. (1996 September). *Charter School Laws Across the United States—1996 Edition*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University's Institute for Public Policy and Social Research; American Federation of Teachers. (1996). *Charter School Laws: Do They Measure Up?* Washington, D.C.: American Federation of Teachers; Wohlstetter, P. and Griffin, N. (1997, September). *First Lessons: Charter Schools as Learning Communities*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education, Consortium for Policy Research in Education.

2 The federally-funded multi-year charter school study will be investigating effects on districts during its second and third year. See *A Study of Charter Schools: First Year Report*. (May 1997). Washington, D.C.: U. S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. See also Nathan, J. (1996). *Charter Schools: Creating Hope and Opportunity for American Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass; also Vanourek, G., Mahno, B., Finn, C., and Bierlein, L. (1997 July). *The Educational Impact of Charter Schools*. Washington, D.C.: Hudson Institute. Amy Stuart Wells and colleagues at UCLA have been studying California charter schools in the context of local school districts and will be releasing their findings later in 1998. See also *Charters in Our Midst: The Impact of Charter Schools on School Districts*. (1997). Oak Brook, IL: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory.

3 *A Study of Charter Schools: First Year Report*. (May 1997). Washington, D.C.: U. S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. See also Vanourek, G., Mahno, B., Finn, C., and Bierlein, L. (June 1997) *Charter Schools in Action*. Washington, D.C.: The Hudson Institute.

4 Ibid.

5 Cuban, L. (1993). *How Teachers Taught: Constancy and Change in American Classrooms, 1880-1990*. New York: Teachers College Press; Tyack, D. (1974). *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press; Tyack, D. and Cuban, L. (1993). *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press; Sarason, S. (1996). *Revolutionizing The Culture of the School and The Problem of Change*. New York: Teachers College Press

The pressures of the political debate seemed to motivate people to reduce complexity, exaggerate impact, or simplistically characterize dynamic and multi-faceted processes.



Policy Recommendations

One aim of this research study was to develop recommendations for policymakers to consider as they confront legislative proposals regarding charter laws and charter schools. Several recommendations emerge from an analysis of the data:

Recommendation #1: Policymakers crafting charter school laws should clarify the legislation's aims regarding the overall effect on school districts. If spurring overall district reform is the intent behind charter laws, policymakers should consider both these laws' impact on school districts and the districts' response. Policies aimed at achieving a critical mass of charters in a particular area and efforts which garner significant media attention for charters may result in heightened impact on districts; policies created to allow more than one entity to sponsor charters may result in increased response from districts.

Recommendation #2: The leadership of professional associations of superintendents and school board members should step up efforts to educate their members about charters, respond to their concerns, and allow them to discuss charters with peers who are successfully utilizing charter laws as part of an overall reform strategy. Because this study suggests that superintendents and school board members play pivotal roles in determining the district's response to charters, these interest groups must receive considerable education and opportunity to debate charter laws.

Recommendation #3: Policymakers should seriously consider ways to ensure that urban educators, charter school advocates, union activists, and other leaders of reform efforts engage in collaborative efforts to develop an urban strategy for charter schools which encourages charters to contribute energetically to overall systemic improvement and spurs district responsiveness to charters.

Recommendation #4: Policymakers should ensure that evaluations of the state's charter policy include a detailed assessment of impact, response, and overall effects on districts. While statewide evaluations of charter policies should assess student achievement and evaluate overall school performance in the state's charter schools, resources should be devoted periodically to an assessment of how school districts may be changing in the aftermath of this reform initiative.

Recommendation #5: Researchers assessing the effects of charters on school districts should recognize that systemic change rarely occurs swiftly and dramatically and avoid imposing inappropriate expectations and unrealistic time frames on the charter/district dynamic. Long-term ethnographic studies of the effects of charter schools on school districts should be initiated. Special attention should be devoted to locations where charter policies are inspiring reform and resulting in improved student achievement in the district schools. Such studies might ask: What kinds of charter laws and what kinds of charter schools spur systemic change? What specific conditions, factors, and dynamics are necessary to allow charters to trigger district-wide improvements?

Recommendation #6: District superintendents, central administration personnel, principals, and school board members should redesign their planning processes for an era of increased public school choice. New systems, schedules, and processes might improve budgeting and planning for capital improvements, enrollment levels, and personnel shifts and allow districts to anticipate changes brought about by school choice options.

Recommendation #7: If policymakers create charter laws with the intention of districts transferring pedagogical innovations from the charters to traditional public schools, they should examine carefully ways in which charter laws may polarize constituencies which are intended to work collaboratively. They should analyze the impact charter laws are having on school districts—particularly in the areas of financing, redistribution of administrative time, student placement concerns, and the loss of particular kinds of students to niche-focused charters—and work with districts to plan for these and other changes. Policymakers should be aware of a possible dilemma here: Creating policies which allow for sponsors besides the local district may produce more innovative schools yet may encourage a polarization among educators which precludes mutual exchange.

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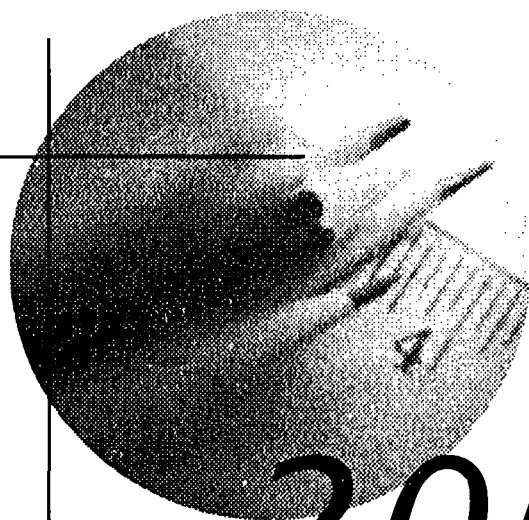
The

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2000

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Tables and figures in this book that do not include source information are taken from the surveys and site visits conducted in the National Study of Charter Schools.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
ABOUT THIS REPORT	5
A. STATES AND CHARTER SCHOOLS	9
1. The Expanding Charter School Movement	10
2. State Charter Legislation	12
3. Newly Created and Pre-existing Charter Schools	14
B. BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF CHARTER SCHOOLS	17
4. Enrollment by State	18
5. School Size	20
6. Grade Level Configuration	22
7. Student to Teacher Ratio	24
8. Computers for Instruction	26
C. STUDENTS OF CHARTER SCHOOLS	29
9. Student Racial/Ethnic Composition	30
10. School Racial/Ethnic Distribution	32
11. Student Eligibility for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch	34
12. Students with Disabilities	36
13. Limited English Proficient Students	38
D. STARTING, IMPLEMENTING, AND BEING ACCOUNTABLE	41
14. Why Charter Schools are Started	42
15. Implementation Challenges	44
16. Autonomy and Control	46
17. Autonomy and Choice of Service Providers	48
18. External Accountability and Monitoring	50
19. External Accountability and Reporting	52
20. Accountability and Student Assessment	54
APPENDIX	56

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Charter schools are public schools that come into existence through a contract with either a state agency or a local school board. The charter—or contract—establishes the framework within which the school operates and provides public support for the school for a specified period of time. The school's charter gives the school autonomy over its operation and frees the school from regulations that other public schools must follow. In exchange for the flexibility afforded by the charter, the schools are held accountable for achieving the goals set out in the charter including improving student performance.

This Fourth-Year Report of the National Study of Charter Schools provides descriptive information on charter schools that were operating in the 1998–99 school year. Additional reports of the National Study address broad policy issues concerning the charter school movement and its potential effects on America's system of public education.

Growth Trends: The number of states with charter legislation and the number of charter schools continued to expand in 1999.

- During the 1999 legislative session, three states—New York, Oklahoma, and Oregon—passed charter legislation, bringing the total number of jurisdictions with charter laws to 36 states and the District of Columbia. Charter laws have not remained static. Several states amended their charter laws during the 1999 legislative session. One state increased the number of charters that can be granted; two states that previously only allowed pre-existing public schools authorized newly created charter schools; two states expanded the number of agencies allowed to grant charters; and several states adjusted their charter school financing mechanisms.
- Of the 36 states and the District of Columbia with charter laws, 30 states and the District of Columbia had operational charter schools as of September 1999. Three of the 31 jurisdictions first opened charter schools in September 1999. Twenty-eight jurisdictions had operational charter schools at the time of our Spring 1999 survey. Nevada had only one operational charter school in Spring 1999 and that school did not respond to the survey, therefore, the school-level data reported here rely on responses from schools in 27 states.

- An additional 421 charter schools opened in 1999, bringing the total to 1,484 charter schools in operation in 31 states and the District of Columbia as of September 1999. Including multiple branches of a school operating under the same charter, the total number of charter school sites operating was 1,605 as of September 1999.

- The demand for charter schools remains high—7 of 10 charter schools reported that they have a waiting list. This percentage is the same as reported for 1997–98.

- Twenty-seven charter schools closed during the 1998–99 school year. Since the first charter school opened in 1992, a total of 59 charter schools—nearly 4 percent of all charter schools that have ever opened—have closed.

- The number of students in charter schools increased in the 1998–99 school year by nearly 90,000, bringing the total to more than 250,000 students. This total represents 0.8 percent of all public school students in the 27 states with open charter schools as of the 1998–99 school year.

Characteristics of Charter Schools: Most charter schools are newly created, small schools.

- Most charter schools are small schools—the median enrollment in all charter school sites is 137 students per school, whereas all public schools in the charter states had a median enrollment of about 475 students. This is similar to the median charter school size of 132 reported for 1998–99.
- Nearly half of the charter schools have a grade configuration that deviates from the traditional elementary, middle, high school configuration. In 1998–99, one-quarter of the charter schools spanned K–8, K–12, or were ungraded compared to less than one-tenth of all public schools.
- Seven of 10 charter schools are newly created schools. Schools that opened in the 1998–99 school year continued the trend from previous years that most schools opening in the year were newly created. Newly created charter schools, with a median enrollment of 128 students, are smaller, on average, than converted pre-existing public schools.

- Eleven of the 36 states with charter laws allow private schools to convert to charter schools. The District of Columbia also allows private schools to convert to charter status. Ten percent of all charter schools were private schools prior to their conversion to charter status.

- The median student to teacher ratio for charter schools, 16 students per teacher, was slightly lower than the ratio for all public schools—17.2.

- About two-thirds of charter schools had a student to computer ratio of fewer than 10 students per computer. About two-thirds of all schools with computers used for instruction had computers in 75 percent of their classrooms.

Students of Charter Schools: Nationwide, students in charter schools have similar demographic characteristics to students in all public schools. However, charter schools in some states serve significantly higher percentages of minority or economically disadvantaged students.

- White students made up about 48 percent of charter school enrollment in 1998 compared to about 59 percent of public school enrollment in 1997–98. The percentage of white students in charter schools is slightly lower than reported in 1997–98

- Charter schools in several states—Connecticut, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Texas—enroll a much higher percentage of students of color than all public schools in those states. Charter schools in Alaska, California, and Georgia serve a higher proportion of white students than do all public schools in those states.

- Nearly 7 of 10 charter schools have a student racial/ethnic composition that is similar to their surrounding district. About 17 percent of charter schools serve a higher percentage of students of color than their surrounding district while about 14 percent have a lower percentage of students of color.

- Charter schools enroll a slightly higher percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch than do all public schools in the 27 charter states.

- The estimated percentage of limited English proficient (LEP) students in charter schools is about 10 percent, which is about the same as for all public schools in the 27 charter states. The percentage of LEP students is about the same as reported for 1997–98.

- Without regard to differences across states, the reported percentage of students with disabilities at charter schools is about 8 percent, which is lower than the 11 percent for all public schools in these states.

The Founding of Charter Schools: Most charter schools seek to realize an alternative vision of schooling.

- Nearly two-thirds of newly created charter schools seek to realize an alternative vision of schooling, and an additional one-quarter of newly created schools were founded primarily to serve a special target population of students. More than one-third of pre-existing public schools report that they converted to charter status in order to gain autonomy from district and state regulations.

- Nearly 4 of 10 charter schools that were previously private schools converted to charter status to realize an alternative vision of education.

Challenges Implementing Charter Schools: Practically all charter schools have had to overcome obstacles during their development. Many of the obstacles have to do with resource limitations.

- Most charter schools continue to cite resource limitations—either lack of start-up funds or inadequate operating funds—as serious challenges to their implementation.

- Newly created charter schools were more likely to cite resource limitations as a major difficulty than pre-existing charter schools.

- A much lower percentage of charter schools that first opened in the 1998–99 school year report that start up funding was a major difficulty. For schools that opened in 1998–99 school year, 39 percent cited start up funds as a limitation, down from 59 percent for schools that opened in 1997–98 school year. The reduction is likely to reflect support from the federal charter school start up funding program.

- About 4 of 10 charter schools that were pre-existing public schools reported that state or local board opposition or regulations presented obstacles to their school's implementation. About 1 in 5 schools that were formerly public indicated that they had difficulty with teacher unions or collective bargaining agreements. Fewer than 1 of 20 charter schools reported implementation difficulty due to federal regulations.

Autonomy and Accountability: Charter schools have considerable autonomy. They are also held accountable to provide financial and student achievement reports to different constituencies.

- The majority of charter schools reported they had primary control over most areas critical to school operations, including purchasing, hiring, scheduling, and curriculum. Slightly fewer charter schools reported that they had control over student admissions, student assessment, and budget. Compared to newly created charter schools, a lower proportion of pre-existing public schools said they had primary control in every category of control.
- Most charter schools provide one or more non-instructional services (e.g., health services, social services, and before and after school care). Newly created charter schools that provided services were about equally likely to provide the services themselves or to make arrangements for an outside provider. In contrast, about 6 of 10 pre-existing charter schools rely on districts to provide services. Pre-existing private schools were equally likely to provide services themselves and use an outside provider.

- More than 9 of 10 charter schools were monitored for accountability in terms of school finances; nearly 9 of 10 for student achievement and for compliance with regulations; more than 8 of 10 for student attendance; and more than 6 of 10 for instructional practices. Each of these represent an increase in the percentage of schools reporting monitoring in these areas in 1996–97.

- The 27 charter states differ greatly in how they approach accountability, with some following a “centralized” state agency approach, others a “market-driven” approach, and still others a “district-based” approach that relies on local accountability within a framework of state testing.

- More than 70 percent of charter schools (based on a selected sample of schools) said they made reports during the 1997–98 school year for accountability purposes to one or more constituencies, including their chartering agency, school governing board, state department of education, parents, the community, or private funders.

- More than 9 of 10 charter schools used student achievement tests, augmented by other measures of student performance and school success, to make reports to their chartering agency, the school's governing board, and/or parents. More than one-third of charter schools used at least seven measures of school performance, including standardized tests and other measures of student achievement, parent and student surveys, and behavioral indicators.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

The National Study of Charter Schools (the Study) is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education as authorized by the 1994 amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The Study is a 4-year research program to document and analyze the charter school movement.

THE STUDY'S FOCUS

The Study addresses three major research questions:

- How have charter schools been implemented?
- Under what conditions, if any, have they improved student achievement?
- What impact have they had on public education?

Drawing from research evidence, the Study also asks broad policy questions:

- What models of education have charter schools developed that can be used by other public schools?
- What lessons can be learned from the charter school experience for public education, and what implications should be drawn for state and national policy?
- How might charter schools evolve in the coming decade?

THE STUDY'S RESEARCH APPROACH

The Study's research consists of (1) annual phone surveys of all charter schools; (2) repeated field visits to a sample of charter schools and their surrounding districts; (3) the administration of student achievement tests over time at a sample of charter schools; (4) the administration of teacher surveys to teachers in all field visit sites; (5) analyses across states of charter laws, state agency rulings and procedures, court rulings, and education policies; and (6) an examination of how charter school legislation and the existence of charter schools have affected school districts.

This Report, the fourth annual report from the Study, presents findings that focus on describing how charter schools are being implemented. Other Study reports address the remaining questions listed above. This Report in particular provides concise summaries of data that describe selected characteristics of charter schools in comparison, wherever possible, to other public schools.

Section A begins with an overview of the charter movement. It describes the growth of charter schools, paying particular attention to the differences across the charter states in terms of the number of charter schools and when they became operational. Since charter school legislation is unique to each state, we summarize key characteristics of the charter laws by state.

Section B summarizes basic characteristics of charter schools compared to other public schools. School characteristics included in this section are school size, grade level configuration, student to teacher ratio, and student to computer ratio.

Section C focuses on student demographic features of charter schools compared to other public schools. This section briefly describes the racial/ethnic composition of the schools, and the percentages of students that are low income, have disabilities, or have limited proficiency in English.

Section D reviews data on several issues that are central to understanding how charter schools may operate differently from other public schools. These issues include the reasons why charter schools were started, challenges they have encountered during implementation, the autonomy they have for making critical decisions, and the ways in which they may be held accountable.

THE REPORT'S DATA

The findings presented in this Report rely on four waves of telephone surveys to all cooperating charter schools that were open between the 1995-96 and 1998-99 school years, visits to 91 field sites across the country, and extensive analysis of state charter laws.

In the first year of a school's involvement in the study, a school administrator was asked to respond to a new charter school telephone survey. In each subsequent year, the school administrator was asked to respond to a follow-up telephone survey. For the first wave of data collection (Spring 1996), 252 charter schools had opened prior to or during the 1995-96 school year. These schools were asked to respond to the new school survey in 1996 and follow-up surveys in 1997, 1998, and 1999. For the second wave of data collection (Spring 1997), 178 additional charter schools had opened and were asked to respond to the new school survey in 1997 and the follow-up surveys in 1988 and 1999. For the third wave of data collection (Spring 1998), 284 additional charter schools had opened and were asked to respond to the new school survey in 1998 and the follow-up survey in 1999. For the fourth wave of data collection (Spring 1999), an additional 401 charter schools had opened and were asked to respond to the new school survey in 1999. Survey response rates ranged from 78 to 91 percent. The number of charter schools surveyed and the number that responded are included in the table below.

In general, this Report relies on the most recent information available but also draws from a range of years (1996-99). Unless otherwise noted, all charter school data presented in this report is drawn from the annual telephone survey data. Where possible, 1999 data are used. If we did not have data from a 1999 survey, the information is taken from previous surveys, the most recent of the 1998, 1997, or 1996 surveys. For a small number of questions, we asked for information

only on selected surveys. In some cases, we only asked a question on the initial survey and not the follow-up survey. In those cases, we report the responses for all operating charter schools at the time of their first survey. In other cases, we only asked the question on a follow-up survey. When we report on data gathered only on a selected survey, we refer to a selected sample of schools. Responses for questions asked only on the 1998 and 1999 follow-up survey represent 87 percent of available charter schools (534 schools of a possible 614 responded).

It should be noted that for tables in the Report that present data by state, we have omitted states where three or fewer charter schools responded to the survey in order to protect school confidentiality. We make an exception to this rule in reporting school enrollment data and in reporting data on the charter creation status. In addition, state-level data from states that have fewer than 10 charter schools may not be meaningful and should be interpreted with caution. It is also the case that some individual school data may be incomplete if specific survey items were not answered. All figures and tables report the total number of responses on which the findings are based.

For some tables in the Report, data other than the telephone survey were gathered. To estimate charter school enrollment, we supplemented our telephone survey data with information from other sources. We drew on state sources in California, Colorado, the District of Columbia, Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, and Pennsylvania to include 1998-99 enrollment data for 36 missing schools in those states. The number of charter schools represented by these data is 1,011, which is 94 percent of our estimate of the 1,078 charter schools in operation during 1998-99. Enrollment for schools with multiple branches was summed across all branches.

¹ The Study's definition of a charter school is a school operating under state charter legislation. This definition excludes from the Study some charter-like schools. We have opted to exclude single state-sponsored specialty schools (e.g., state schools for the arts, or schools for low-incidence special education students) even if they operate pursuant to the terms of a state-granted or charter-like contract. We have also excluded some states that do not have formal charter legislation but have policies that create schools that share some charter-like characteristics (Puerto Rico).

Some tables in this Report provide comparison information about all public schools in the 27 states with operating charter schools. (For the purposes of the remainder of this Report, we refer to the District of Columbia as a "state.") Public school data come from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data Survey 1997-98. These data refer to all public schools (including charter schools) in the 27 charter states. For

public school information on racial demographics, 1,177 schools or 2.1 percent of all 56,640 public schools reported racial information that was considered invalid because it did not match the total enrollment information. An additional 714 public schools did not report ethnicity data. The ethnicity tables are therefore calculated on the basis of 54,749 public schools. In all cases, we drew on the best comparative data available.

Number of Charter Schools in the National Telephone Survey

		Schools opened prior to or during the 1995-1996 school year	Additional schools as of the 1996-1997 school year	Additional schools as of the 1997-1998 school year	Additional schools as of the 1998-1999 school year	Total as of September, 1999
		1996	1997	1998	1999	
New charter school survey	Asked¹	252	178	284	401	1115
	Answered	230	153	246	369	998 ²
First follow- up survey	Asked	X	228	149	240	617
	Answered	X	178	118	203	499
Second follow- up survey	Asked	X	X	224	145	369
	Answered	X	X	175	114	289
Third follow- up survey	Asked	X	X	X	215	215
	Answered	X	X	X	171	171

² This number does not reflect schools that opened during a particular year, but the number of schools surveyed. Schools may have been surveyed for the first time in a year later than they first opened because they were either non-respondents in a previous survey year or we were unable to identify them as an operational charter school in the school year in which they opened.

³ This number includes 23 schools that were closed as of the 1998-1999 school year; 12 from the first wave of data collection (schools opened prior to the 1995-96 school year), 6 from the second wave of data collection (schools opened as of the 1996-97 school year), and 5 from the third wave of data collection (schools opened as of the 1997-98 school year). The 59 charter schools that have closed among all charter schools include schools that closed before the Study began, schools that did not respond to the telephone survey, and schools that closed in their first year before the Study was able to survey them. For the 1999 survey, an additional 60 schools were surveyed that had not responded to previous new school surveys.

A. STATES AND CHARTER SCHOOLS

THE EXPANDING CHARTER SCHOOL MOVEMENT	10
STATE CHARTER LEGISLATURE	12
NEWLY CREATED AND PRE-EXISTING CHARTER SCHOOLS	14

THE EXPANDING CHARTER SCHOOL MOVEMENT

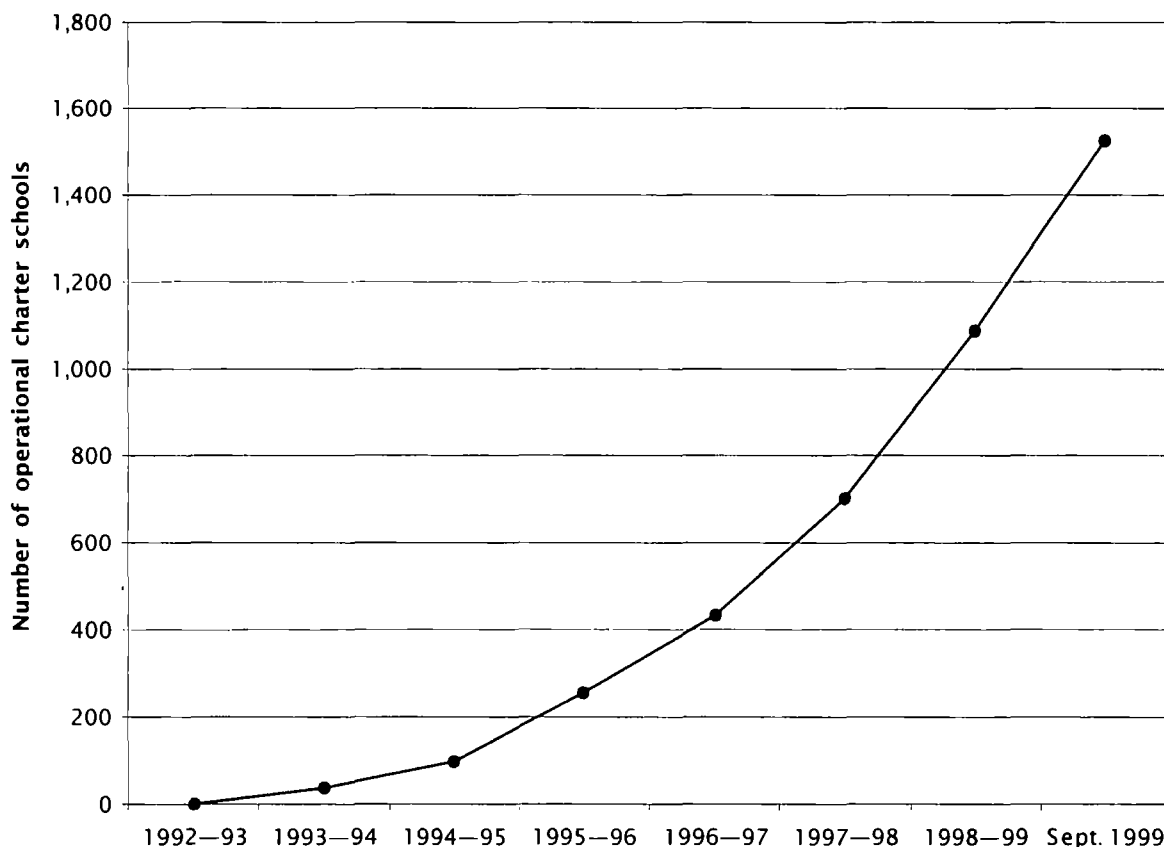
Charter schools have spread rapidly across the country since the first two charter schools opened in 1992. The number of states with charter legislation continues to rise, as does the number of charter schools. State laws differ, but all grant charter schools some degree of autonomy over their educational programs and operations in exchange for greater accountability for student outcomes.

- As of September 1999, 36 states and the District of Columbia had passed charter legislation and charter schools were in operation in 32 states. Three states—New York, Oklahoma, and Oregon—enacted charter legislation in the 1998–99 legislative session.
- As of September 1999, more than 1,400 charter schools were in operation. Counting “branch schools” in Arizona, in which similar instructional programs are operated at several school sites under one charter, there were more than 1,600 charter school sites in operation.
- Continuing the trend, the largest yearly increase in the number of charter schools came in the most recent year, with 421 new schools opened as of September, 1999. This growth in the number of charter schools was

driven in part by large increases in several states. In Texas, 64 new schools opened in fall of 1999, while California had 56 new schools open. Charter schools continued to be concentrated in a small number of states: 50 percent of charter schools were located in Arizona, California, Michigan, and Texas.

- By the beginning of the 1999–2000 school year, 59 charter schools, nearly 4 percent of all charter schools ever opened, had closed. The largest number of closures, 16 schools, came in Arizona, also the state with the largest number of charter schools. The closure rate in Arizona is slightly larger than the national average with more than 6 percent of schools closing.

Estimated Number of Operational Charter Schools, by Year



States with Charter Legislation by Year Passed as of September 1999

1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Minnesota	California	Colorado Georgia Massachusetts Michigan New Mexico Wisconsin	Arizona Hawaii Kansas	Alaska Arkansas Delaware New Hampshire Louisiana Rhode Island Wyoming	Connecticut District of Col. Florida Illinois New Jersey North Carolina South Carolina Texas	Mississippi Nevada Ohio Pennsylvania	Idaho Missouri Utah Virginia	New York Oklahoma Oregon

Estimated Number of Charter Schools in Operation as of September 1999, by State

	Number of charter schools starting in the year							Total schools closed as of Sept. 1999 ¹	New schools as of Sept. 1999	Total schools operating Sept. 1999
	1992-93	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98 ²	1998-99			
Total	2	34	64	154	178	289	401	59	421	1,484
Minnesota	2	5	7	3	3	8	12	3	17	54
California		28	36	30	21	19	29	9	56	210 ✓
Colorado		1	13	10	8	19	10	1	8	68
Michigan			2	41	33	36	24	5	15	146
New Mexico			4	0	1	0	0	3	1	3
Wisconsin			2	3	6	7	12	1	11	40
Arizona				47	58	45	44	16	44	222 ✓
Georgia				3	9	9	7	1	4	31
Hawaii				2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Massachusetts				15	7	3	10	1	5	39
Alaska					2	13	2	1	2	18
Delaware					2	1	1	0	1	5
District of Col.					2	1	17	2	10	28 ✓
Florida					5	28	42	4	38	109 ✓
Illinois					1	7	6	1	7	20
Louisiana					3	3	5	0	7	18 ✓
Texas					17	21	71	5	64	168 ✓
Connecticut						12	4	1	2	17
Kansas						1	14	0	0	15 ✓
New Jersey						13	17	0	19	49 ✓
North Carolina						34	26	5	23	78 ✓
Pennsylvania						6	25	0	17	48 ✓
Rhode Island						1	1	0	0	2
South Carolina						2	3	0	5	10
Idaho							2	0	6	8
Mississippi							1	0	0	1
Nevada							1	0	0	1
Ohio							15	0	31	46
New York									5	5
Missouri									15	15
Utah									6	6
Oklahoma									2	2

NOTE: The Study reports the number of charters given to individual entities, though some charters may use space within another school or be connected to another school by another arrangement. The number of charters shown above does not include the total number of school sites operating under a charter. Some charters, particularly in Arizona, run similar programs in several sites. In those cases, the Study only counts the charter once. Several charters in California were awarded to districts or complexes of schools. Since previously each school within the group was a separate school, the Study counts each school as a separate charter school. Taking into account multiple school sites operating under a single charter (121), the Study estimates that the total number of school sites operating under charters was 1,605 (1,484+121) as of September 1999.

SOURCE: The Study contacted officials at each state department of education and supplemented their information from a variety of sources, including the Common Core of Data Survey (1997-98), charter school directories, and state charter school resource centers.

¹ The column "Total schools closed as of Sept. 1999" reflects the cumulative number of charter schools closed since 1992.

² The number of schools that opened in the 1998-99 school year is slightly different for some states than the number of schools reported as of September 1998. The 1998-99 column includes several schools that opened later in the 1998-99 school year.

STATE CHARTER LEGISLATION

Charter schools are a state phenomenon. Each piece of legislation grows from a state context and the laws create differences in the types and number of charter schools opened in each state, the level of freedom afforded charter schools, and the amount of accountability required of the schools.

- **Who can grant charters:** The number and types of agencies allowed to grant charters differ by state. In 14 states, only the local board can grant charters and in 8 of those states, the decision of the local board can be appealed to a higher authority. In seven states, some state level agency (usually the State Board of Education) is the only charter granting agency. In the remaining 16 states, multiple agencies are authorized to grant charters—usually local boards and a state body. In five states with multiple charter granting agencies, universities (IHEs) also can grant charters.

- **Charter creation status:** Charter schools can either be newly created or can be schools that were previously district public schools or private schools. Each of the 37 states with charter legislation allows pre-existing public schools to convert to charter status. All states except Mississippi allow newly created schools. Legislation in 10 states allows private schools to convert directly to

charter status, while an additional 3 states allow private schools to become charters under specific conditions.

- **Number of charter schools allowed:** Thirteen of the 37 charter states do not limit the number of charter schools allowed to open in the state. Two states (Texas and Nevada) place some limit on the number of charter schools but do not limit the number of schools that enroll at-risk students. The remaining 22 states either limit the total number of schools in the state, the number allowed by district, or the number allowed per year.

- **Duration of charter term:** Charter schools are established as limited-term contracts—at the end of the contract period, the charter must be renewed. Charter terms range between 3 and 5 years in 31 states. Arizona and the District of Columbia have the longest charter terms—15 years although both states require a review at the end of 5 years.

Key Dimensions of Charter Legislation, by State

State	Who can grant charter	Charter creation status			Number of charter schools allowed	Duration of charter term (years)
		Newly created	Pre-existing public	Pre-existing private		
Alaska	Local boards	Yes	Yes	No	30	Up to 5
Arizona	Local boards, State board, and State charter board	Yes	Yes	Yes	No limit	15
Arkansas	State board	Yes	Yes	No	No limit	3
California	Local boards + appeals	Yes	Yes	No	100 annually	5
Colorado	Local boards + appeals	Yes	Yes	No	No limit	5
Connecticut	State board	Yes	Yes	No	24	5
Delaware	Local boards for conversions and State Board for newly created	Yes	Yes	No	No limit	3
District of Col.	Local boards, State board, and State charter board + appeals	Yes	Yes	Yes	20 annually	15
Florida	Local boards + appeals	Yes	Yes	No ¹	Other limits ²	3
Georgia	State board	Yes	Yes	No	No limit	5
Hawaii	State board	Yes	Yes	No	25	4
Idaho	Local boards + appeals	Yes	Yes	No	60 ¹	Up to 5
Illinois	Local boards with State board review + appeals	Yes	Yes	No ⁴	45	3-5
Kansas	Local boards	Yes	Yes	No	15	3
Louisiana	Local boards and State board + appeals	Yes	Yes	No	42	5

2. State Charter Legislation

State	Who can grant charter	Charter creation status			Number of charter schools allowed	Duration of charter term (years)
		Newly created	Pre-existing public	Pre-existing private		
Massachusetts	Local boards for conversions and State board for newly created	Yes	Yes	No	50	5
Michigan	Local boards and IHEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	No limit	Up to 10
Minnesota	Local boards and IHEs + appeals	Yes	Yes	Yes	No limit	3
Mississippi	Local boards and State board	No	Yes	No	6	4 to 6
Missouri	Local boards, IHEs, and community colleges ¹	Yes	Yes	Yes	Other limits ⁶	5-10
Nevada	Both Local boards and State board	Yes	Yes	No	Other limits ⁷	3
New Hampshire	Local boards + appeals	Yes	Yes	No	10 annually ⁸	5
New Jersey	State Commissioner	Yes	Yes	No	135 ⁹	4
New Mexico	Local boards and State board	Yes	Yes	No	20 annually ¹⁰	5
New York	Local boards, state board, SUNY board of trustees	Yes	Yes	No	100 new; unlimited public conversion	5
North Carolina	Local boards, State board, and IHEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	100	5
Ohio	Local boards and State board	Yes	Yes	No	No limit	Up to 5
Oklahoma	Local boards + appeals	Yes	Yes	No	Other limits ¹¹	3
Oregon	Local boards and State board	Yes	Yes	No	Other limits ¹²	Up to 5
Pennsylvania	Local boards	Yes	Yes	Yes	No limit	3 to 5
Rhode Island	State board	Yes	Yes	No	20	Up to 5
South Carolina	Local boards + appeals	Yes	Yes	Yes	No limit	3
Texas	Local boards for conversions and State board for newly created	Yes	Yes	Yes	No limit ¹³	Specified in charter
Utah	State board	Yes	Yes	No	8	3
Virginia	Local boards	Yes	Yes	No	2 per district	3
Wisconsin	Local boards	Yes	Yes	Yes ¹⁴	No limit	Up to 5
Wyoming	Local boards	Yes	Yes	No	No limit	Up to 5

¹ Although Florida's legislation does not allow private schools to apply directly for charter status, the state allows private schools to convert to charter status if they disband, reincorporate as a new organization with a new board, and enroll students in a public lottery.

² While Florida's legislation does not specify a statewide limit on the number of charter schools, the legislation does restrict the number of charters granted in each district based on district size. The effective cap for the state is 974 schools.

³ Illinois' legislation stipulates that a private school must cease operation as a private school before applying for charter status.

⁴ Idaho's legislation limits the annual number of new charters to 12 with a statewide limit of 60.

⁵ Missouri's legislation limits charter schools to St. Louis and Kansas City with those districts, colleges and universities, and community colleges authorized to grant charters only in St. Louis and Kansas City.

⁶ Missouri's legislation states that no more than 5 percent of the buildings used for instruction in a district may be converted to charter schools.

⁷ Nevada's legislation limits the number of charters granted in each district based on district size, creating an effective cap of about 17 schools, with an exception for schools focusing on at-risk students.

⁸ New Hampshire's legislation allows 10 new charters annually until the year 2000.

⁹ Charter legislation in New Jersey requires a legislative review (including a review of the number of charter schools allowed) in 2000.

¹⁰ New Mexico's legislation allows up to 20 new schools annually up to a maximum of 100 schools.

¹¹ Oklahoma's legislation only allows charter schools in districts enrolling 5,000 or more students.

¹² Oregon's legislation limits charter school enrollment to 10 percent of the total number of students enrolled in public schools in the district.

¹³ Texas' legislation does not limit campus charters (schools that were previously district public schools) but limits open-enrollment charters (newly created schools or previously private schools) to 100 with no limit for charters serving at-risk students.

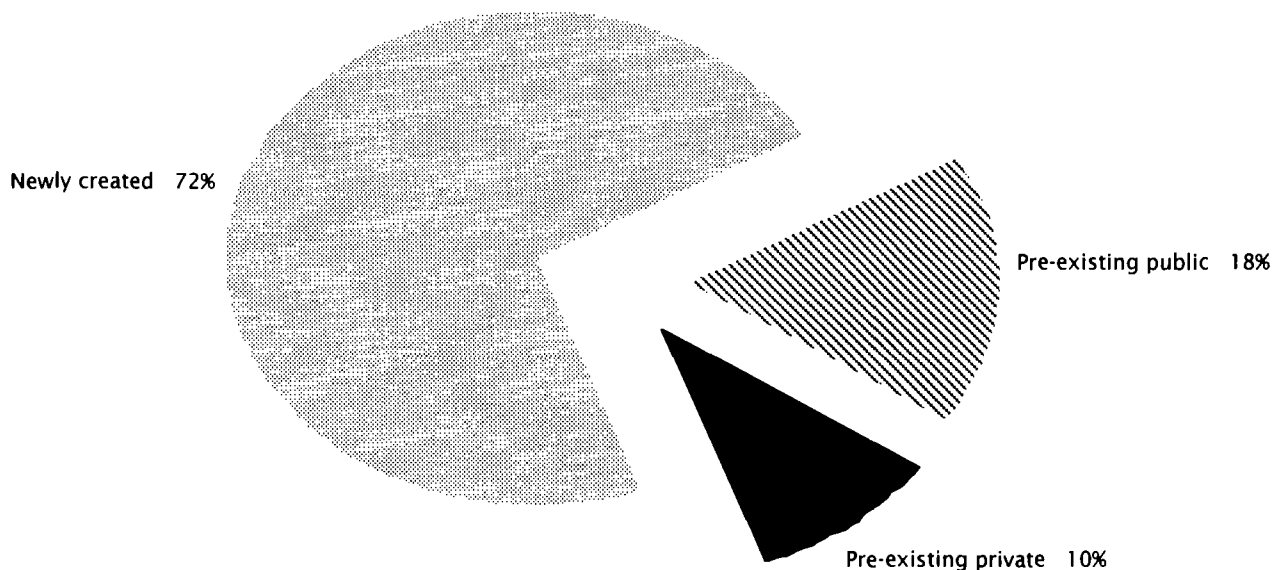
¹⁴ Wisconsin's legislation allows the conversion of private schools only in Milwaukee.

NEWLY CREATED AND PRE-EXISTING CHARTER SCHOOLS

Charter school legislation allows charter schools to be created in several different ways. Groups of parents, teachers, and community members can start newly created schools. In addition, public and private schools may be able to convert to charter school status. Because the types of authorized charter schools vary state by state, characteristics of charter schools often differ from one state to another. Some states have many charter schools that were pre-existing public schools, while in other states there are few.

- As of the 1998–99 school year, 72 percent of all charter schools were newly created schools. An additional 18 percent had been pre-existing public schools before becoming charter schools, while 10 percent had been pre-existing private schools.
- Newly created schools continued to make up the majority of charter schools created in each year. Pre-existing public schools, which constituted 44 percent of all charter schools opened in the 1994–95 school year or earlier, constituted only 15 percent of charter schools opened in the 1998–99 school year. This decline in the percentage of charter schools that converted from pre-existing public schools was due in part to the fact that 37 percent of charter schools that were pre-existing public schools were located in California and converted in the first years that California had a charter school law.
- Legislation in the 27 states with operating charter schools in 1998–99 permits the conversion of existing public schools to charter schools. In 26 of these states, state charter legislation allows the creation of new charter schools as well. Twelve states permit pre-existing private schools to become charter schools, although some states require that the private schools disband and reconstitute themselves before applying for a charter or limit the geographic areas in which private schools may convert to become charter schools.

Estimated Percentage of Charter Schools, by Creation Status



NOTE: These data are based on responses from all 975 open charter schools that responded to the survey. Although Nevada had one open charter school as of the 1998–99 school year, that school did not respond to the survey.

3. Newly Created and Pre-existing Charter Schools

Estimated Number and Percentage of Newly Created and Pre-existing Charter Schools, by Year of School Opening

	Number of charter schools	Newly created	Pre-existing public	Pre-existing private
Total in 1998-99	975	704	173	98
% of Total		72.2	17.7	10.1
Percentage of schools (%)				
Opened 1994-95 or earlier	94	53.2	43.6	3.2
Opened 1995-96	145	64.1	20.7	15.2
Opened 1996-97	171	66.7	17.5	15.8
Opened 1997-98	252	82.5	9.9	7.5
Opened 1998-99	313	76.4	15.0	8.6

Estimated Number and Percentages of Charter Schools, by Creation Status and State¹

	Total	Newly created		Pre-existing public		Pre-existing private	
	All schools	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total	975	704	72.2	173	17.7	98	10.1
Alaska	16	16	100.0	0	0.0	NA	NA
Arizona	166	119	71.7	18	10.8	29	17.5
California	149	85	57.0	64	43.0	NA	NA
Colorado	59	52	88.1	6	10.2	1 ²	1.7
Connecticut	16	16	100.0	0	0.0	NA	NA
Delaware	4	4	100.0	0	0.0	NA	NA
District of Columbia	15	10	66.7	3	20.0	2	13.3
Florida	65	58	89.2	2	3.1	5 ³	7.7
Georgia ⁴	25	2	8.0	23	92.0	NA	NA
Hawaii	2	0	0.0	2	100.0	NA	NA
Idaho	2	1	50.0	1	50.0	NA	NA
Illinois	12	9	75.0	1	8.3	2 ⁵	16.7
Kansas	15	7	46.7	7	46.7	1 ⁶	6.7
Louisiana	11	8	72.7	3	27.3	NA	NA
Massachusetts	34	30	88.2	4	11.8	NA	NA
Michigan	124	90	72.6	8	6.5	26	21.0
Minnesota	37	31	83.8	4	10.8	2	5.4
Mississippi	1	NA	NA	1	100.0	NA	NA
New Jersey	26	26	100.0	0	0.0	NA	NA
New Mexico	5	NA ⁷	NA	5	100.0	NA	NA
North Carolina	52	43	82.7	2	3.8	7	13.5
Ohio	7	7	100.0	0	0.0	NA	NA
Pennsylvania	23	19	82.6	0	0.0	4	17.4
Rhode Island	2	1	50.0	1	50.0	NA	NA
South Carolina	4	2	50.0	2	50.0	0	0.0
Texas	77	52	67.5	9	11.7	16	20.8
Wisconsin	26	16	61.5	7	26.9	3 ⁸	11.5

NOTE: These data are based on responses from all 975 open charter schools that responded to the survey.

¹ NA indicates that the state's legislation did not allow for that type of charter school when the schools that responded to our survey received their charters. Several states have since changed their laws to allow more types of charter schools.

² Colorado does not allow private schools to become charter schools, but one charter school was a pre-existing program for adjudicated youth.

³ Although Florida's law does not allow private schools to apply directly to become charter schools, private schools may disband, reincorporate as new organizations with new boards, and apply for charters if they agree to enroll students through a public lottery.

⁴ The original charter laws in Georgia, New Mexico, and Arkansas did not permit newly created charter schools, but legislative changes in 1998-99 have resulted in laws that now allow newly created charter schools.

⁵ Illinois charter legislation stipulates that a private school must cease operation as a private school before applying for charter status.

⁶ Kansas law does not allow private schools to become charter schools. We are still clarifying the status of one school that reported it was previously a private school.

⁷ New Mexico legislation was amended in 1999 to allow newly created schools, but this change was too early for newly created schools to be surveyed for this report.

⁸ Wisconsin's law allows for the conversion of private schools only in Milwaukee.

B. BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF CHARTER SCHOOLS

ENROLLMENT BY STATE	18
SCHOOL SIZE	20
GRADE-LEVEL CONFIGURATION	22
STUDENT TO TEACHER RATIO	24
COMPUTERS FOR INSTRUCTION	26

B. BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF CHARTER SCHOOLS

ENROLLMENT BY STATE

As in past years, charter schools enrolled a relatively small percentage of public school students nationwide. Only three states had 2 percent or more of their public school enrollment in charter schools, with the District of Columbia enrolling the greatest percentage of students in charter schools. However, the number of students enrolled in charter schools continued to grow, with California charter schools continuing to enroll the greatest number of students. As the number of charter schools increases and student enrollment in charter schools expands, their potential impact on public education also increases.

- In 1998–99, the Study estimated that charter school enrollment totaled 252,009 in the 27 states with open charter schools. This enrollment was 0.8 percent of all students in public schools in the 27 charter states.
- With 73,905 students in charter schools, California had the most charter school students of any state. More than half of all charter school students (52 percent) are enrolled in charter schools in three states: Arizona, California, and Michigan.
- The District of Columbia, with an estimated 3,364 students enrolled in charter schools, had more than 4 percent of its public school students enrolled in charter schools, the highest percentage of public school students enrolled in charter schools in all 27 charter states. Arizona had 4 percent of their public school students enrolled in charter schools, while Colorado had 2 percent.
- The percentage of public school students enrolled in charter schools increased in all 27 charter states in the 1998–99 school year as compared to the 1997–98 school year.

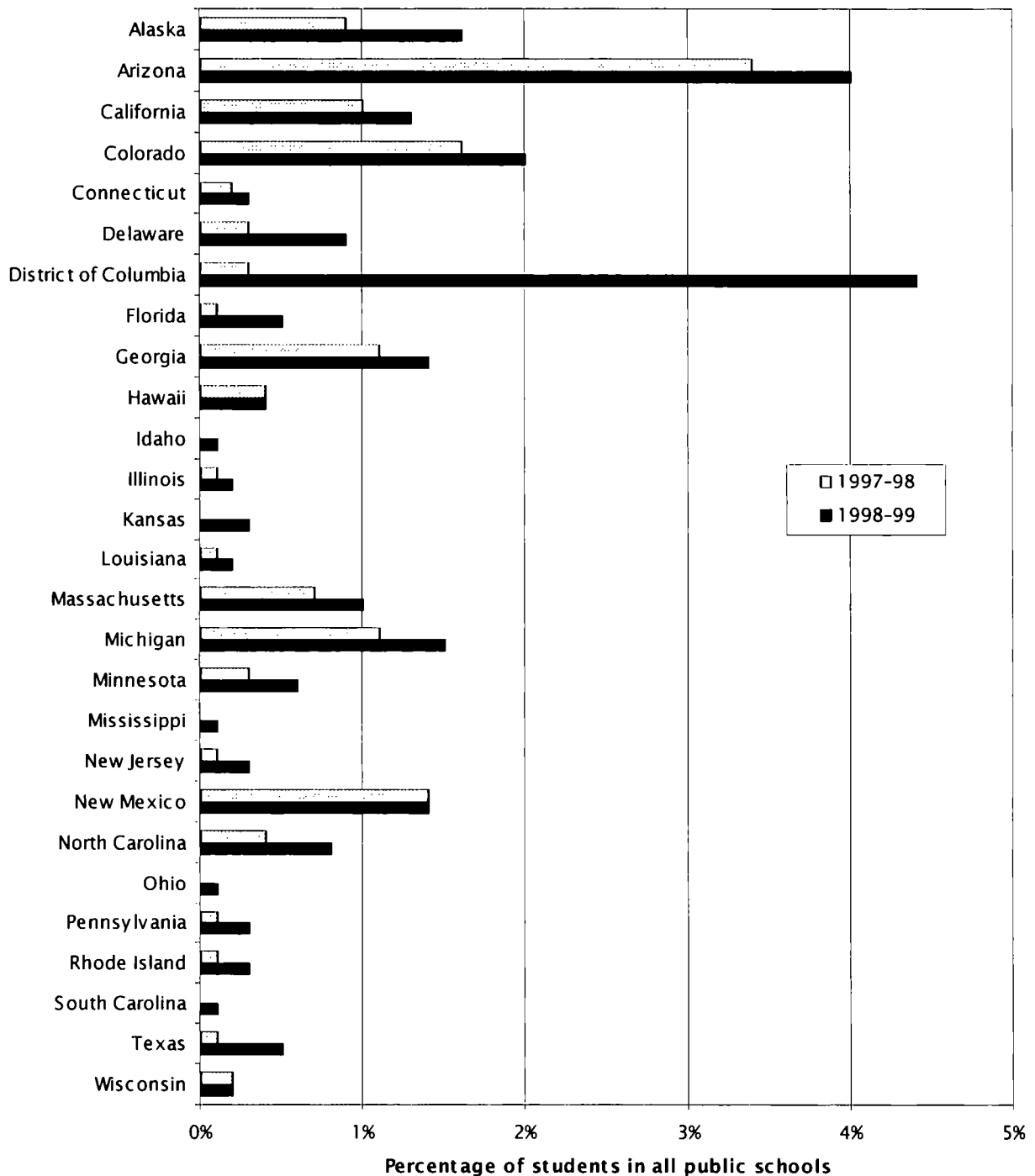
Estimated Enrollment in Charter Schools and All Public Schools in the 27 Charter States

State	Charter school enrollment, 1998–99	All public school enrollment, Fall 1997	% of public school students who are in charter schools
Total	252,009	31,526,771	0.8
Alaska	2,047	132,122	1.6
Arizona	32,209	815,388	4.0
California	73,905	5,728,341	1.3
Colorado	13,911	687,167	2.0
Connecticut	1,613	535,162	0.3
Delaware	988	111,960	0.9
District of Columbia	3,364	77,111	4.4
Florida	10,561	2,294,001	0.5
Georgia	18,611	1,375,980	1.4
Hawaii	790	189,887	0.4
Idaho	57	244,341	0.1
Illinois	3,333	2,008,519	0.2
Kansas	1,545	468,687	0.3
Louisiana	1,589	776,305	0.2
Massachusetts	9,673	949,006	1.0
Michigan	25,294	1,686,760	1.5
Minnesota	4,670	851,772	0.6
Mississippi	340	507,776	0.1
New Jersey	4,001	1,249,910	0.3
New Mexico	4,601	331,673	1.4
North Carolina	9,513	1,236,063	0.8
Ohio	2,509	1,871,195	0.1
Pennsylvania	5,474	1,815,151	0.3
Rhode Island	397	153,321	0.3
South Carolina	364	650,755	0.1
Texas	18,590	3,896,638	0.5
Wisconsin	2,060	881,780	0.2

NOTE: Charter school enrollment includes data for 1,010 charter schools and is based on responses from all 975 open charter schools that responded to the survey, supplemented with data from state departments of education.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data Survey, 1997–98.

Charter School Enrollment as a Percentage of Public School Enrollment, by State¹



¹ We do not have 1998-99 data for Idaho, Mississippi, and Ohio because their charter schools were not open at the time of our 1998-99 survey. In 1997-98, the number of students enrolled in South Carolina charter schools was too small to register on the scale.

SCHOOL SIZE

As in past years, charter schools continued to be small schools. In fact, a high percentage of charter schools enrolled fewer than 200 students. Newly created charter schools especially continued to enroll, on average, fewer students than other public schools. This tendency towards small school size may reflect a desire on the part of charter school founders and parents for structuring their schools in a way that enables them to provide intimate, nurturing school communities.

- Charter schools tend to enroll, on average, fewer students than all public schools. During the 1998–99 school year, the median number of students in charter schools was 137, compared to a median of 475 in all public schools.
- Similar to data reported in previous years, in 1998–99 more than 3 times as many charter schools as compared to other public schools enrolled fewer than 200 students (65 percent and 17 percent respectively). Nearly 4 times as many charter schools as compared to other public schools enrolled fewer than 100 students (35 percent and 9 percent respectively).
- Newly created charter schools were especially likely to be smaller schools than other public schools, with a median enrollment of 128. Charter schools that were pre-existing public schools had a median enrollment of 368, much closer to the median enrollment of all public schools.
- Only 8 percent of charter schools enrolled more than 600 students, as opposed to 35 percent of all public schools. And only 1 percent of charter schools enrolled more than 1,000 students, as compared to 11 percent of all public schools.
- Few newly created schools enrolled large numbers of students, with only 10 schools, slightly more than 1 percent, enrolling more than 1,000. Pre-existing public and all public schools each had approximately 10 percent of their schools enrolling more than 1,000 students. Since the Study's last report, the median size of newly created charter schools increased from 111 to 128.

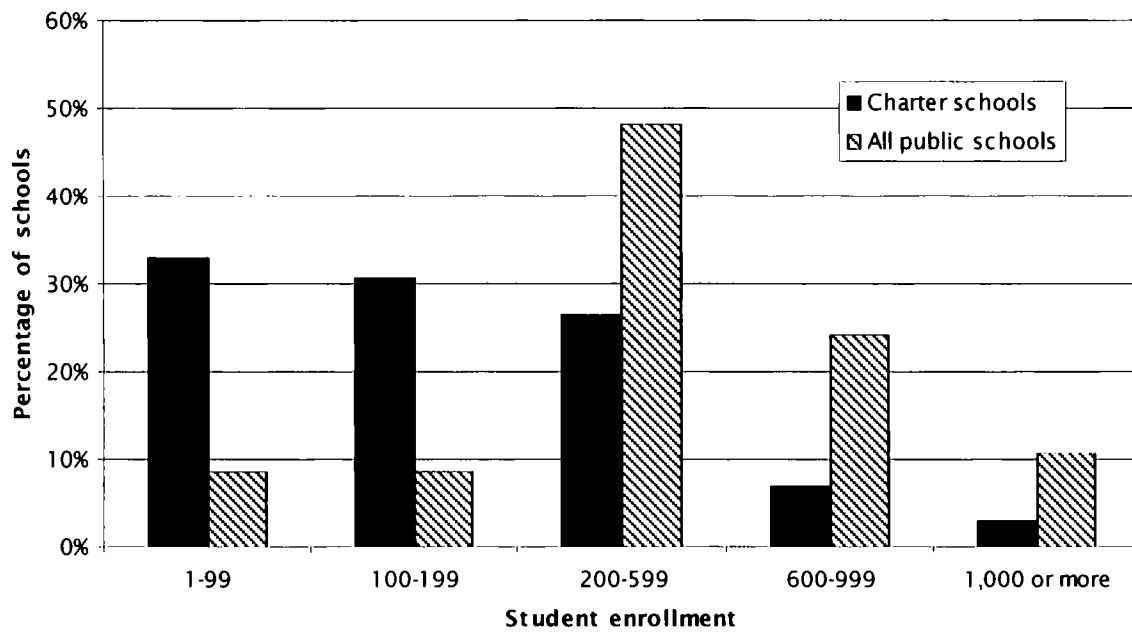
Estimated School Size for Charter Schools and All Public Schools in the 27 Charter States

	All public schools	Charter school sites	Charter School Creation Status		
			Newly created	Pre-existing public	Pre-existing private
Number of schools	56,640	1,046	704	173	98
Median number of students	475	137	128	368	159
School Enrollment Range	% of schools				
1–99	8.6	34.8	36.5	19.1	32.7
100–199	8.6	30.4	32.5	19.7	35.7
200–599	48.2	25.6	26.1	27.2	28.6
600–999	24.2	6.4	3.4	23.7	2.0
1,000 or more	10.6	1.2	1.4	10.4	1.0

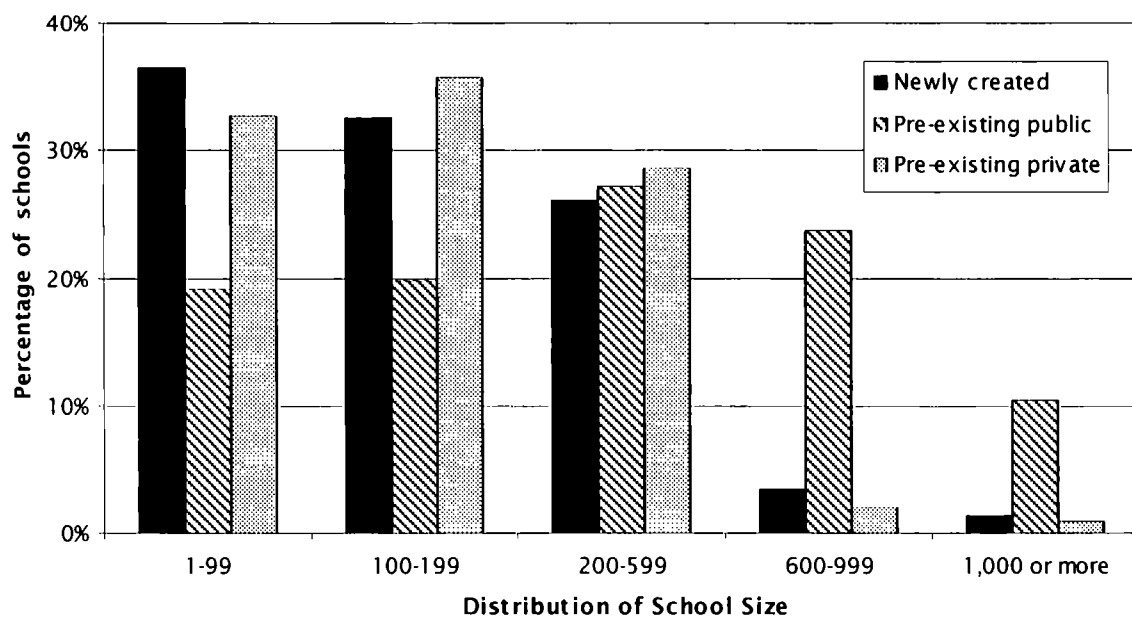
NOTE: The third column called "Charter school sites" includes data for 1,046 charter schools and is based on 2 sources of data: (1) responses from 1,010 open charter schools and individual branches that responded to the survey and (2) enrollment data for 36 charter schools from state-level sources. The percentages in columns 4, 5, and 6 for the different types of charter schools includes data on all 975 charter schools that responded to the survey; we were unable to obtain information on charter school creation status for the 36 charter schools for whom enrollment data was obtained from state-level sources.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data Survey, 1997–98.

Estimated Distribution of School Size for Charter Schools and All Public Schools



Estimated Distribution of School Size for Newly Created and Pre-existing Charter Schools



B. BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF CHARTER SCHOOLS

GRADE LEVEL CONFIGURATION

State charter laws give charter developers the freedom to choose the grade structure and age range of the students their schools will serve. A large number of charter schools have chosen to reduce the number of transitions from school to school by keeping their students at the same school for an extended period of time. At least twice as many charter schools as compared to all public schools served students in K-8, K-12, or ungraded grade spans. In addition, the vast majority of charter schools that reported "other" grade configurations served students in at least two of the traditional elementary, middle, and high school grade configurations.

- In 1998–99, about one-half (52 percent) of all charter schools were structured according to a traditional grade-level configuration of elementary, middle, or high school as compared to more than three-fourths (78 percent) of all public schools in the 27 charter states (in 1997–98).
- In comparison to other public schools, almost 3 times as many charter schools spanned kindergarten through 8th grade (16 percent), almost 4 times as many charter schools spanned kindergarten through 12th grade (8 percent), almost twice as many charter schools spanned the middle-high grades (10 percent), and over twice as many charter schools had "other" grade configurations (5 percent).
- The highest percentage of both charter and other public schools were elementary schools—but nearly twice as many other public schools were elementary (47 percent) as compared to charter schools (25 percent).
- The high school grade configuration was the only one with approximately equal percentages in both charter (17 percent) and other public schools (15 percent). Pre-existing public charter schools were more likely to be high schools (23 percent) than were either newly created (16 percent) or pre-existing private charter schools (10 percent). Charter schools that were pre-existing private or newly created were more likely to serve primary, K–8, K–12, and other grade levels than were pre-existing public schools.

Estimated Grade Level Distribution for Charter Schools and All Public Schools in the 27 Charter States¹

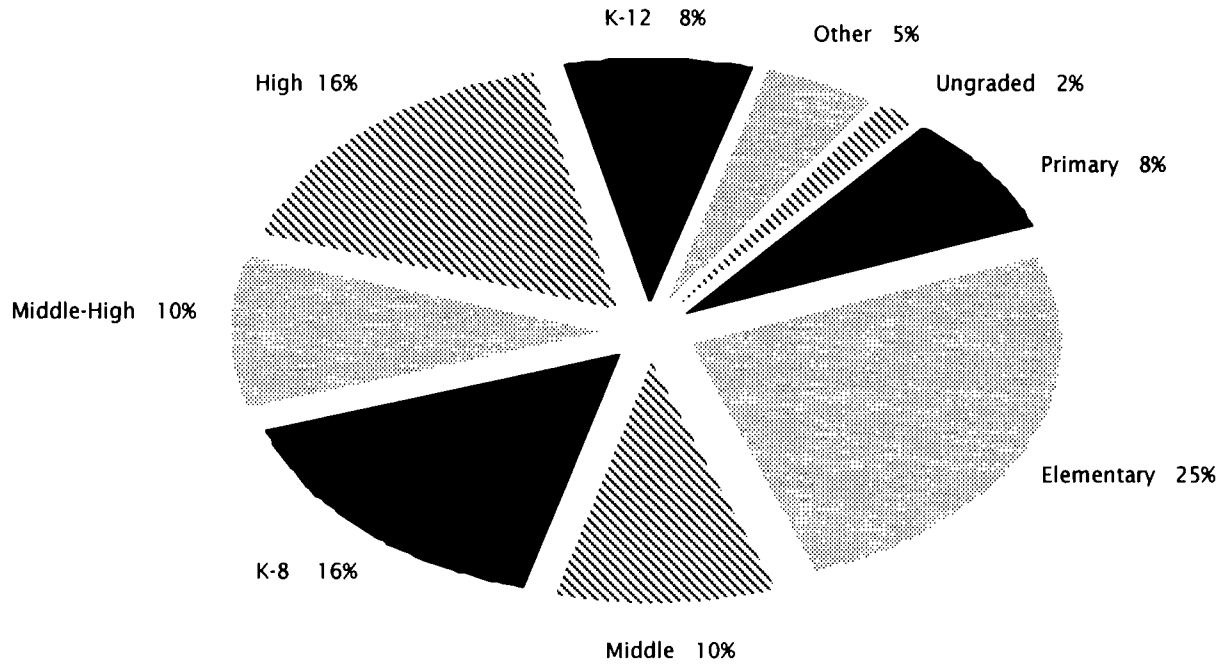
Number of schools	All public schools 56,640	Charter schools 975	Charter School Creation Status		
			Newly created	Pre-existing public	Pre-existing private
			704	173	98
			% of schools		
Primary	6.0	8.0	8.2	4.6	12.2
Elementary	46.9	25.2	23.2	35.8	21.4
Middle	15.2	9.7	11.5	8.1	0.0
K-8	5.6	15.7	15.8	9.8	25.5
Middle-high	5.7	9.9	9.8	9.8	11.2
High	15.4	16.6	16.1	22.5	10.2
K-12	2.3	8.0	8.0	5.2	13.3
Other	2.2	5.0	5.8	1.7	5.1
Ungraded	0.8	1.7	1.7	2.3	1.0

NOTE: These data are based on responses from all 975 open charter schools that responded to the survey.

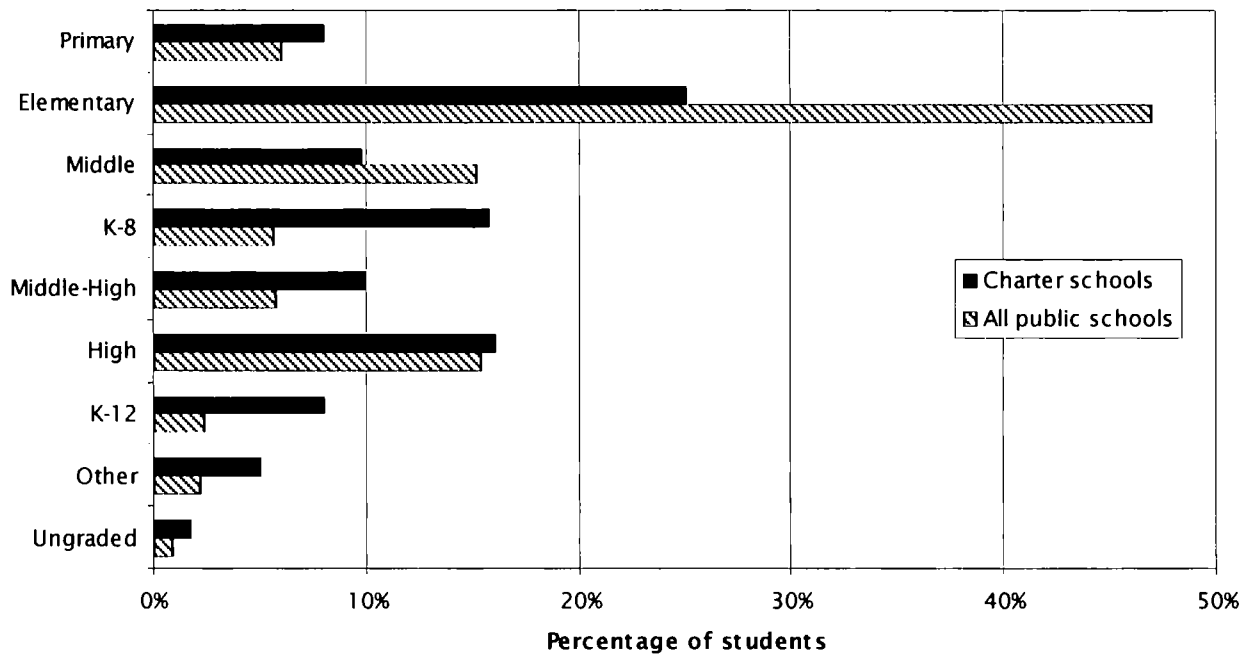
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data Survey, 1997–98.

¹ Grade levels are defined as follows: Primary includes only grades K–3; Elementary includes any of grades K–3 and at least one of grades 4–6; Middle includes any of grades 5–8 and no grades K–4 or 9–12; K–8 includes any of grades K–1, and any of grades 4–6 and any of grades 7–8 and no grades 9–12; Middle-high includes any of grades 6–8 and any of grades 9–12 and no grades K–5; High includes any of grades 9–12 and no grades K–8; K–12 includes any of grades K–3 and any of grades 4–6 and any of grades 7–8 and any of grades 9–12; Other includes all other grade breakdowns; Ungraded indicates that no grade levels are used at the school.

Estimated Grade Level Distribution for Charter Schools



Estimated Grade Level Distribution for Charter Schools and All Public Schools in the 27 Charter States



STUDENT TO TEACHER RATIO

Many charter school developers reported that they created their schools in part to provide smaller classes and that parents often chose their schools because their class sizes were low. Using a common approximation of class size—the student to teacher ratio—we found that class sizes were slightly smaller, on average, in charter schools than in other public schools, although there was variation across schools with different grade configurations. Charter school class sizes varied more than class sizes in other public schools. Class sizes at charter schools were likely to be smaller when compared to other public schools at schools that served younger students. Charter schools that served high-school students tended to have class sizes that were the same or larger than other public schools.

- In 1998–99, most charter schools had a slightly lower teacher to student ratio than did all public schools in the 27 charter states (in 1997–98). The median student to teacher ratio for charter schools was 16.0 as compared to 17.2 for all public schools.
- The difference between charter and all public schools in the median teacher to student teacher ratio was about two students per teacher at the primary, K–12, and “other” grade levels. The gap was less than one at the elementary, K–8, middle, middle-high, and high school levels.
- The most noticeable difference between the charter school and the all public school median student to teacher ratio was at the ungraded schools, with ungraded charter schools having a much higher student to teacher ratio, 18.8 students per teacher, as compared to 8.8 students per teacher in other public schools.
- A higher proportion of all public schools had student to teacher ratios in the mid-range (16–20 students per teacher), while charter schools were more likely to have both smaller and larger class sizes. Some cases of high student to teacher ratios for charter schools—especially at the high school level—may reflect the school’s use of non-traditional educational approaches such as self-paced computer assisted instruction and distance learning.

Student to Teacher Ratio for Charter Schools and all Public Schools in the 27 Charter States¹

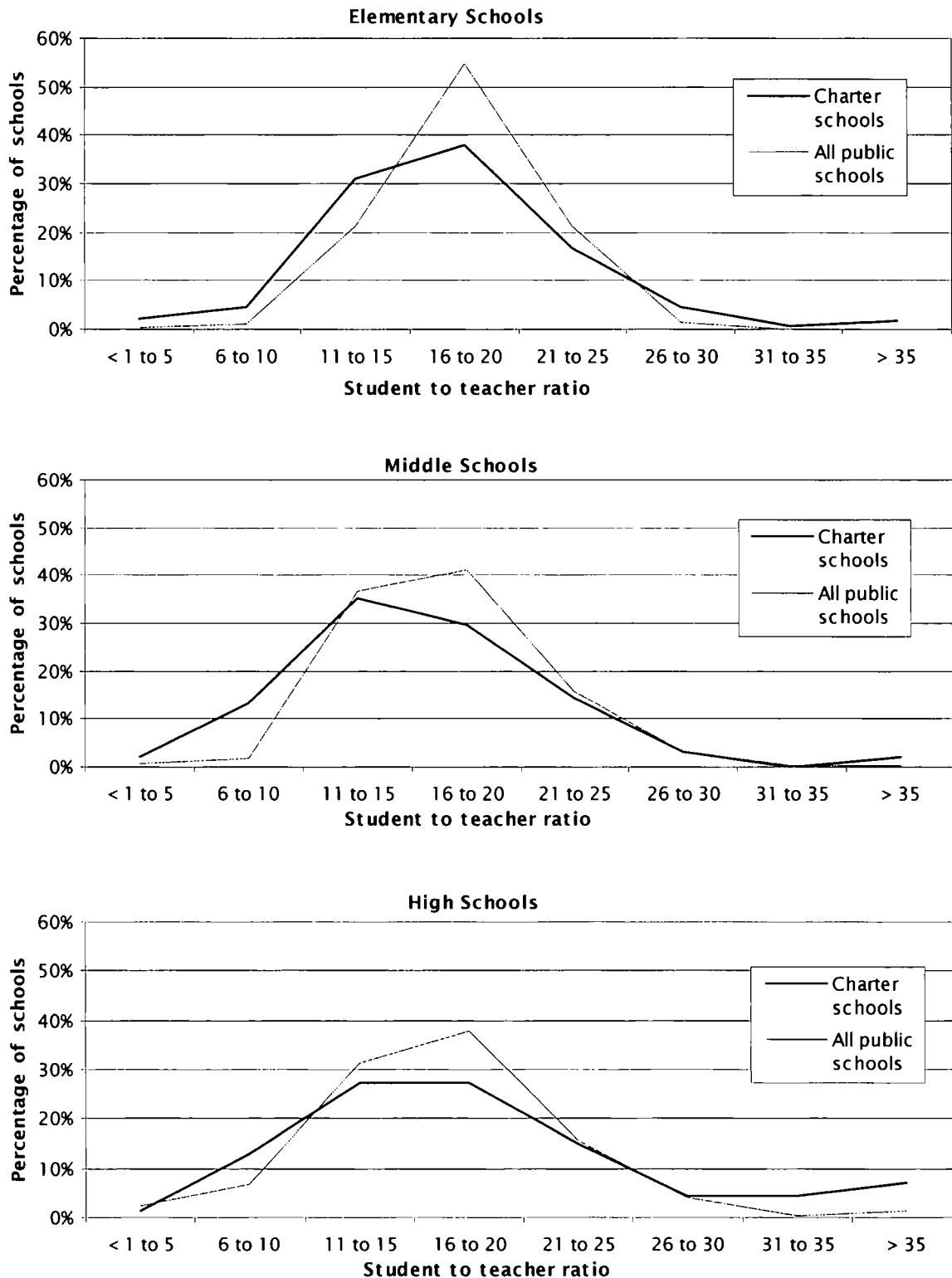
	Charter schools		All public schools	
	Number of schools	Median student-teacher ratio	Number of schools	Median student-teacher ratio
Total	945	16.0	51,505	17.2
Primary	77	15.8	2,880	17.6
Elementary	238	17.1	24,596	17.8
K-8	151	16.3	2,985	17.0
Middle	91	15.4	8,015	16.4
Middle-high	95	15.0	2,532	14.9
High	154	16.4	7,859	16.5
K-12	73	15.0	1,179	13.1
Other	49	14.6	1,097	16.1
Ungraded	17	18.8	362	8.8

NOTE: These data are based on responses from 945 of the 975 open charter schools that responded to the survey. Of the missing 30 schools, 20 did not respond to the relevant survey questions and 10 which reported zero instructional staff were removed from the computation.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data Survey, 1997–98.

¹ We were able to obtain all public schools data on the number of students and the number of classroom teachers by school. Similarly, most of the charter schools (828 out of 945) provided information on number of full-time equivalent teachers, including regular classroom teachers, special area or resource teachers, and long-term substitutes. This number of teachers excludes instructional aides. Because of differing survey questions from year to year, the remaining 117 schools that did not complete a 1999 survey were asked to provide information on instructional staff, including certified classroom teachers, noncertified classroom teachers, resource teachers, certified special education teachers, and other instructional staff (excluding instructional aides). The definition of number of classroom teachers will therefore vary somewhat according to the year in which the school responded.

Estimated Percentage of Instructional Staff in Charter Schools and All Public Schools in the 27 Charter States



COMPUTERS FOR INSTRUCTION

Computers are essential tools in today's technological workplaces. One way in which schools can help prepare their students for the future is to provide significant exposure to computers at an early age. The varied nature of each school's educational vision in combination with often limited finances may determine the extent to which schools view technology as a priority. Most charter school classrooms were equipped with computers for instruction, student-computer ratios were low, and the majority of computers were capable of running advanced applications. These findings are similar to the findings reported last year, although this year there was a decrease in the percentage of schools reporting no classrooms with computers used for instruction.

- Averaging across schools, the estimated mean student to computer ratio in charter schools was 8.9 students per computer, which was slightly lower than the estimated average (10.0 students per computer) for all public schools in 1996-97.¹ Two-thirds of our sample of charter schools had a student to computer ratio of fewer than 10 students per computer and almost one-third had student to computer ratios of less than 5 students per computer. Of the charter schools that reported having computers, the estimated median student to computer ratio was 6.2 students per computer.
- Of those charter schools that used computers for instruction, nearly two-thirds (66 percent) had at least three-quarters of their computers capable of running multimedia applications. Only a small proportion of charter schools (6 percent) did not have any computers capable of running advanced applications.
- The majority of charter schools made student use of computers a part of classroom instruction—96 percent of charter schools had classrooms equipped with computers. Approximately two-thirds (67 percent) of these charter schools had computers available for instruction in more than three-quarters of their classrooms. Only 13 percent of the schools with computers available for student instruction had no classrooms with computers.

Estimated Student to Computer Ratio for a Selected Sample of Charter Schools

Total in sample	# of schools	921	% of schools
1 to less than 5	277		30.1
5 to less than 10	332		36.0
10 or more	275		29.9
0 computers used for instruction	37		4.0

Estimated Percentage of Charter Schools Using Computers in their Classrooms and Percentage of Computers Capable of Running Multimedia Applications

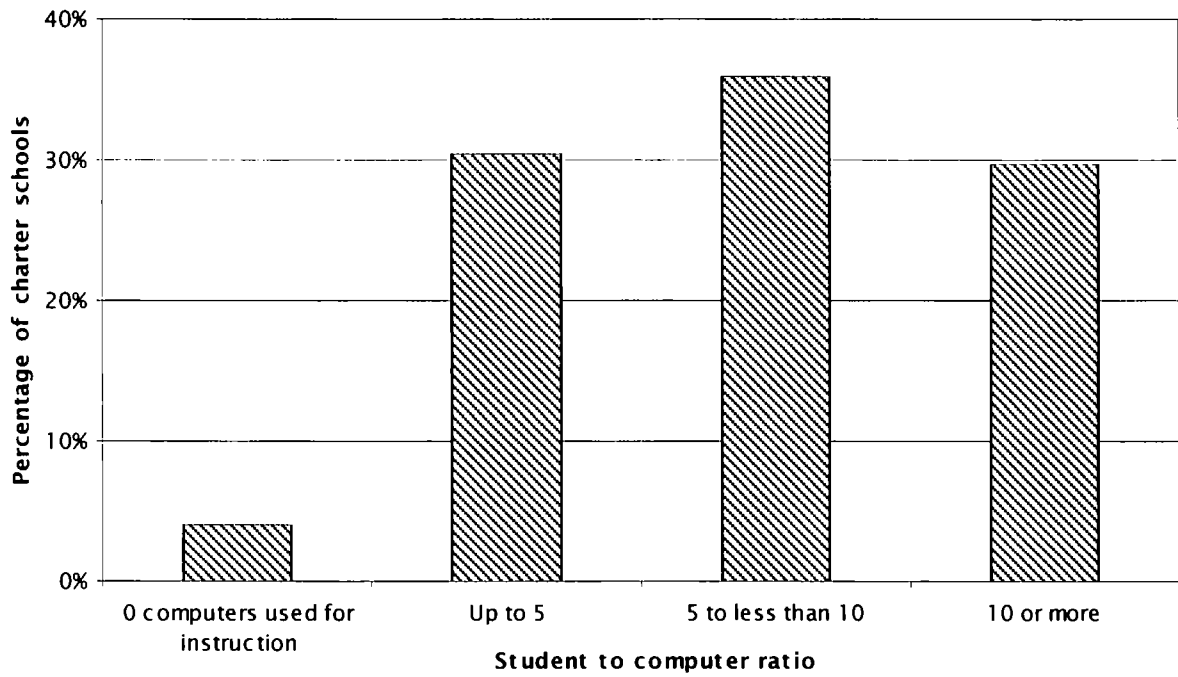
Total in sample	Charter schools that have the following proportion of			
	Classrooms with computers used for instruction		Computers with multimedia capacity ¹	
	# of schools	% of schools	# of schools	% of schools
	882		876	
None	116	13.2	49	5.6
Up to one-quarter	77	8.7	80	9.1
One-quarter to one-half	66	7.5	105	12.0
One-half to three-quarters	33	3.7	68	7.8
Three-quarters to all	590	66.9	574	65.5

NOTE: These data are based on responses from 921 of the 975 open charter schools that responded to the survey and provided information on computers for instruction (4 schools were excluded because their student to computer ratios were too high to be considered valid). The second table relies on the 888 open charter schools that reported they had at least one computer. In columns 2 and 3, 6 schools did not report on percent of classrooms with computers, and in columns 4 and 5, 12 schools did not report on the percentage of multimedia computers.

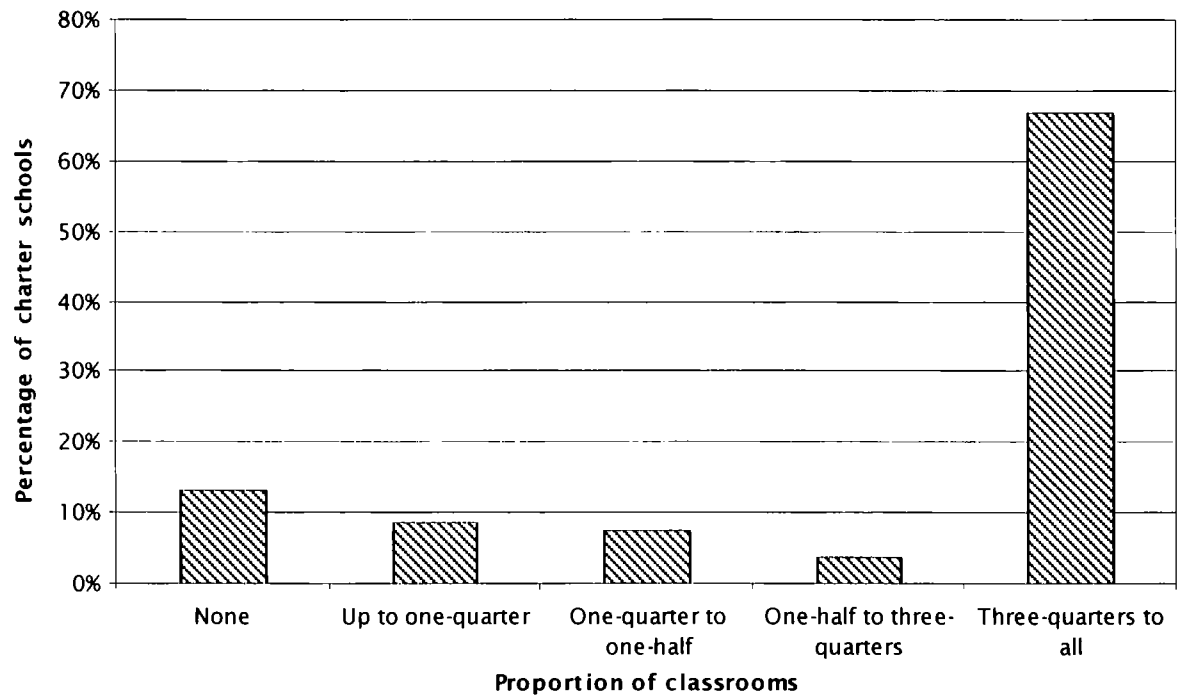
¹ Computers and Classrooms: The Status of Technology in U.S. High Schools. May 1997, Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service, Policy Information Center. This average represents all 50 states.

² The distribution of schools with multimedia or advanced capacity is similar across charter schools without regard to the number of computers at the school with one exception, schools with 10 or fewer computers are less likely to have multimedia capacity than schools with more than 10.

Estimated Student to Computer Ratio for a Selected Sample of Charter Schools



Estimated Percentage of Classrooms in Charter Schools with Computers Used for Instruction



C. STUDENTS OF CHARTER SCHOOLS

STUDENT RACIAL/ETHNIC COMPOSITION	30
SCHOOL RACIAL/ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION	32
STUDENT ELIGIBILITY FOR FREE AND REDUCED-PRICE LUNCH	34
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES	36
LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT STUDENTS	38

STUDENT RACIAL/ETHNIC COMPOSITION

Critics and advocates alike have feared that charter schools would primarily serve white students. This has not turned out to be the case. Overall, charter schools enrolled a larger percentage of students of color than all public schools in the states with open charter schools. Over the last 3 years, the percentage of white students served by charter schools has slightly declined. At the local level, most charter schools had about the same proportion of white students (within 20 percent) as their surrounding districts.

- In 1998–99, using the total number of students as the base for calculation, charter schools enrolled approximately 11 percent fewer white students than all public schools (48 percent versus 59 percent) in the 27 charter states (in 1997–98). Charter schools were more likely than all public schools to serve black students (almost 24 percent versus 17 percent) and Hispanic students (21 percent versus 18 percent).
- In order to examine the racial/ethnic variability across schools, we also calculated the average of the schools' racial/ethnic percentages. On average, charter schools enrolled a significantly lower percentage of white students (50 percent versus 63 percent) and a much larger percentage of black students (27 percent versus 17 percent) than all public schools in the 27 charter states.
- The percentage of white students in charter schools declined from 52 percent in the 1996–97 school year to about 48 percent in the 1998–99 school year.
- Sixty-nine percent of charter schools were within 20 percent of their surrounding district's percentage of nonwhite students, while almost 18 percent had a distinctly higher percentage of students of color than their surrounding district. Approximately 14 percent of schools had a lower percentage of students of color than their surrounding district.

Racial/Ethnic Composition of Charter School Students Compared to All Public School Students in the 27 Charter States

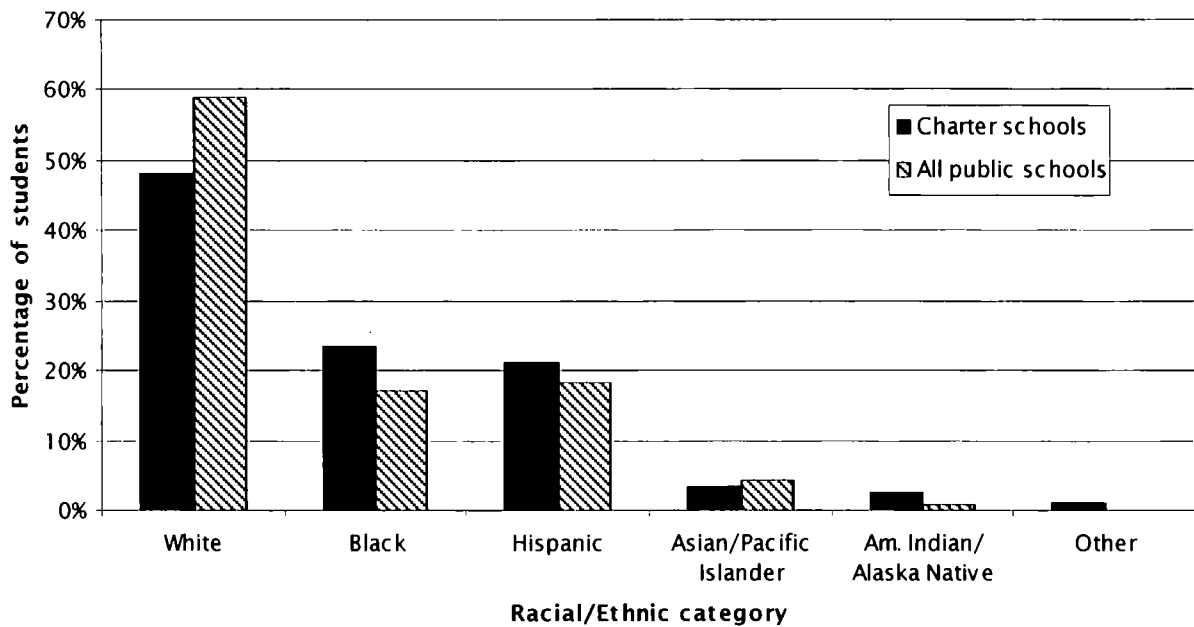
Racial/ethnic categories	Students				Schools	
	# of students in category		% of students in category		Average of school % of students in racial category	
	Charter schools	All public schools	Charter schools	All public schools	Charter schools	All public schools
Total Number	230,299	30,689,016			927	54,749
White, not of Hispanic origin	110,434	18,102,767	48.2	59.0	50.0	62.7
Black, not of Hispanic origin	53,926	5,289,814	23.5	17.2	26.8	16.6
Hispanic	48,352	5,657,976	21.1	18.4	16.2	15.8
Asian or Pacific Islander	7,687	1,354,509	3.4	4.4	2.4	3.4
American Indian or Alaska Native	5,976	283,950	2.6	1.0	3.8	1.5
Other ¹	2,712	NA	1.2	NA	0.9	NA

NOTE: The data for the table on this page are based on responses from 927 of the 975 open charter schools that responded to the survey. The 927 schools were those with valid racial data; that is, schools where the number of students in the racial/ethnic categories was equal to the total student enrollment reported. The data comparing charter student racial/ethnic composition to their surrounding districts on the facing page are based on responses from 924 of the 975 open charter schools that responded to our survey and where the relevant district could be identified.

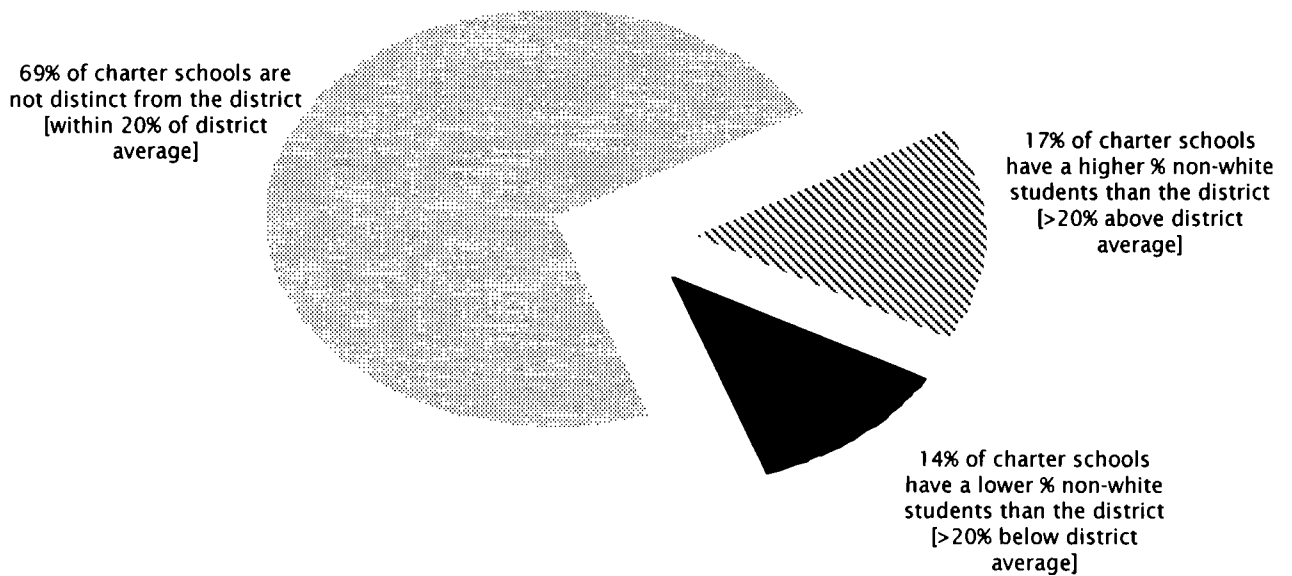
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data Survey, 1997–98.

¹ The National Center for Education Statistics does not report an "other" racial category.

Charter School Enrollment by Race Compared to Public School Enrollment in the 27 Charter States



Student Racial Composition of Charter Schools Compared to their Surrounding Districts²



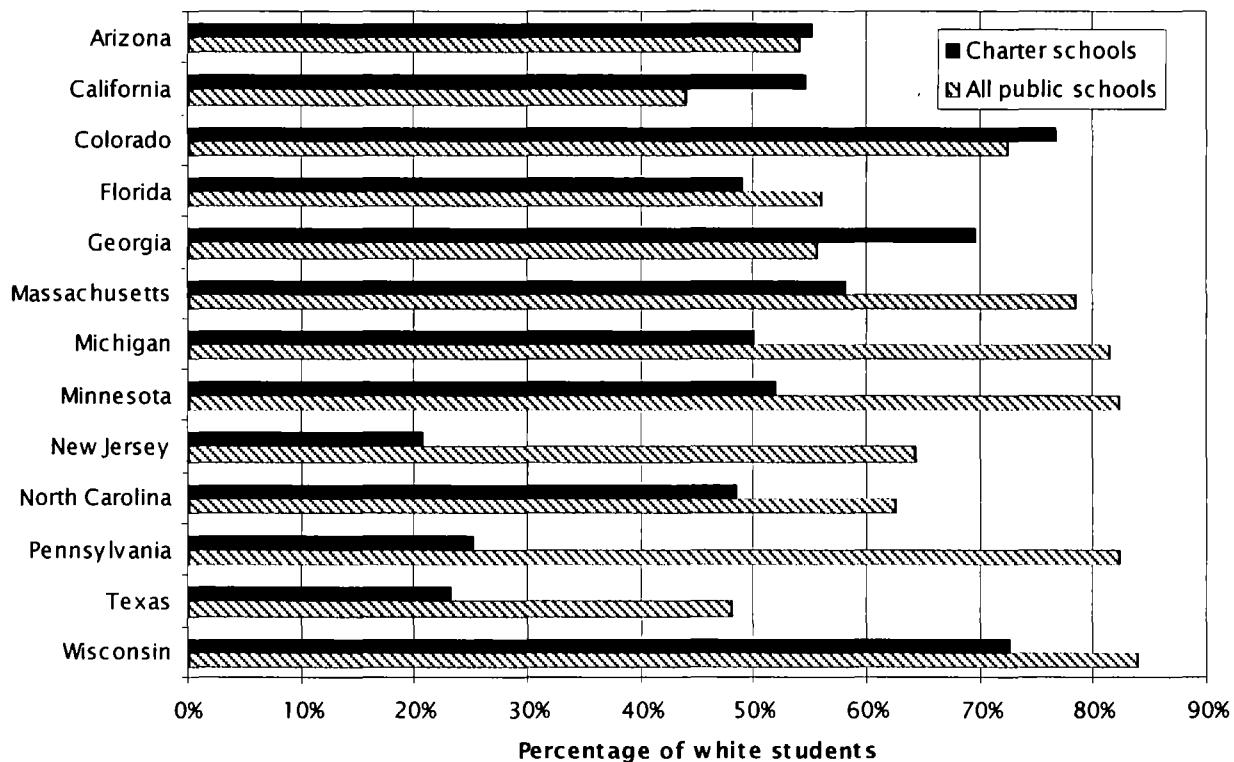
² In general, we relied on schools to report their surrounding district when they responded to the survey. In a few cases where schools did not report district information, we were able to match charter schools and districts by zip code using the 1997-98 Common Core of Data Survey.

STUDENT RACIAL/ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION

The racial/ethnic composition of students in both charter schools and all public schools varies greatly by state. In most states, the racial/ethnic distribution of charter schools did not mirror the distribution in all public schools. Charter schools in approximately three-fifths of the charter states enrolled a higher percentage of nonwhite students than all public schools in those states. In slightly less than one-fifth of the charter states, charter schools enrolled a lower percentage of nonwhite students.

- In 1998–99, charter schools in 19 states enrolled an equal or greater percentage (by at least 5 percent) of nonwhite students than all public schools in those states (in 1997–98).
- In 14 states, the percentage of nonwhite students enrolled in charter schools was higher (by at least 5 percent) than the percentage of nonwhite students in all public schools. Charter schools in 6 of the 13 states that had 20 or more charter schools—Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Texas—enrolled at least 20 percent more nonwhite students than all public schools in those states.
- In six states, charter schools and all public schools served approximately the same percentage of nonwhite students (within 5 percent). Two of these states (Arizona and Colorado) had more than 20 charter schools.
- Charter schools in four states enrolled fewer nonwhite students (by at least 5 percent) than all public schools in those states. In 2 of the 13 states that had more than 20 charter schools—California and Georgia—charter schools enrolled at least 10 percent fewer nonwhite students than all public schools in those states.
- For students of color, the distribution of black students in charter schools showed the greatest variation in comparison to all public schools. Charter schools in 15 states enrolled a higher percentage of black students (by at least 5 percent) than all public schools in those states. Charter schools enrolled lower percentages of black students (by at least 5 percent) than all public schools in three states.

Estimated Average of School Racial Percentages across Charter Schools and All Public Schools in States with more than 20 Charter Schools



Estimated Average of School Racial Percentages Across Charter Schools and All Public Schools

State		# of schools	% White	% Black	% Hispanic	% Asian/ Pac. Is.	% Am.Indian Alaska Native	% Other ¹
Alaska	charter	13	70.7	2.6	2.6	1.6	22.4	0.1
	all public	497	46.9	2.5	1.7	2.7	46.3	
Arizona	charter	155	55.1	7.8	23.4	1.3	12.1	0.4
	all public	1,385	54.0	4.5	31.3	1.5	8.7	
California	charter	143	54.5	10.8	26.6	4.4	2.5	1.1
	all public	8,177	44.0	8.4	36.4	9.7	1.5	
Colorado	charter	57	76.6	6.0	14.0	2.0	0.9	0.4
	all public	1,497	72.4	4.5	19.8	2.1	1.3	
Connecticut	charter	16	32.5	45.0	21.0	1.0	0.5	0.0
	all public	1,058	71.4	14.3	11.8	2.3	0.3	
District of Columbia	charter	14	1.0	74.3	19.9	3.6	0.0	1.3
	all public	170	4.9	86.5	7.1	1.5	0.1	
Delaware	charter	4	56.2	39.0	2.6	2.2	0.0	0.0
	all public	185	60.4	32.7	5.1	1.7	0.2	
Florida	charter	60	48.8	40.3	9.6	0.5	0.2	0.6
	all public	2,877	56.0	28.6	13.8	1.4	0.3	
Georgia	charter	25	69.6	23.4	3.4	2.1	0.2	1.3
	all public	1,823	55.6	39.6	3.0	1.5	0.1	
Illinois	charter	11	8.6	67.0	23.2	1.0	0.1	0.1
	all public	4,228	69.4	19.0	9.3	2.2	0.1	
Kansas	charter	14	90.2	1.2	6.4	0.5	1.4	0.4
	all public	1,451	85.1	6.5	6.0	1.3	1.1	
Louisiana	charter	10	25.0	72.4	0.4	0.7	1.2	0.3
	all public	1,476	49.4	47.9	1.1	1.0	0.7	
Massachusetts	charter	32	58.0	20.1	13.8	2.0	1.1	4.2
	all public	1,830	78.4	8.7	9.0	3.8	0.2	
Michigan	charter	121	50.0	41.4	4.6	0.8	2.1	1.1
	all public	3,139	81.3	12.7	3.3	1.5	1.3	
Minnesota	charter	37	51.9	26.7	3.4	10.3	7.0	0.7
	all public	1,553	82.2	7.2	3.0	4.5	3.1	
New Jersey	charter	21	20.6	62.1	13.5	3.3	0.1	0.4
	all public	2,313	64.3	17.7	12.5	5.3	0.2	
New Mexico	charter	5	35.3	2.1	56.8	1.3	4.5	0.0
	all public	743	36.7	2.1	49.3	0.8	11.2	
North Carolina	charter	51	48.4	47.3	1.6	0.6	1.3	0.8
	all public	1,753	62.4	31.8	2.6	1.4	1.6	
Ohio	charter	7	44.1	49.8	1.0	0.0	0.0	5.2
	all public	3,842	83.6	14.0	1.4	0.9	0.1	
Pennsylvania	charter	22	25.1	59.1	13.8	1.8	0.0	0.1
	all public	3,113	82.3	12.9	3.2	1.5	0.1	
South Carolina	charter	4	23.1	72.3	0.0	0.0	4.6	0.0
	all public	1,026	52.3	45.9	1.0	0.7	0.2	
Texas	charter	72	23.1	33.9	39.5	2.5	0.4	0.6
	all public	7,062	48.0	13.9	36.3	1.6	0.3	
Wisconsin	charter	26	72.6	16.0	2.7	2.8	5.3	0.7
	all public	2,112	83.3	8.8	3.2	2.6	1.5	

NOTE: These data are based on responses from 927 of the 975 open charter schools that responded to the survey. Of the 927 schools, 7 schools in 4 states (Hawaii, Idaho, Mississippi, and Rhode Island) are not displayed in the table because each state has 3 or fewer charter schools which provided information on racial/ethnic distribution and percentages are not meaningful. All schools in this chart have valid racial data; that is, schools where the number of students in the racial/ethnic categories was equal to the total student enrollment reported.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data Survey, 1997-98.

¹ The National Center for Education Statistics does not report an "other" racial category.

STUDENT ELIGIBILITY FOR FREE OR REDUCED-PRICE LUNCH

Students' eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch under the National School Lunch program is a common measure of economic disadvantage. Over the last 2 years, the percentage of eligible charter school students has increased. In contrast to last year when charter schools served a slightly lower percentage of economically disadvantaged students than all public schools in the 27 charter states, this year charter schools served a slightly higher percentage.

- In 1998–99, charter schools served a slightly higher percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch than all public schools (in 1994–95) in the 27 charter states (39 percent versus 37 percent).
- The percentage of eligible charter students ranged from 4 percent in Alaska to 95 percent in South Carolina. This variation was much greater than in all public schools in the 27 charter states, which ranged from almost 23 percent in Connecticut to 60 percent in the District of Columbia.
- In six of the charter states—Alaska, California, Colorado, Delaware, Georgia, and New Mexico—the percentage of eligible students was at least 10 points lower in charter schools than in all public schools.
- The percentage of eligible students was at least 10 points higher in charter than in all public schools in 11 of the charter states: Connecticut, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Texas.
- In Michigan and California, the percentage of eligible students charter schools and all public schools enrolled was within 10 points last year. This year, charters in Michigan served at least 10 percent more and charters in California served at least 10 percent fewer eligible students than all public schools in those states. In Michigan, recently opened schools have higher percentages of eligible students and in California recently opened schools have lower percentages of eligible students, especially in newly created schools.

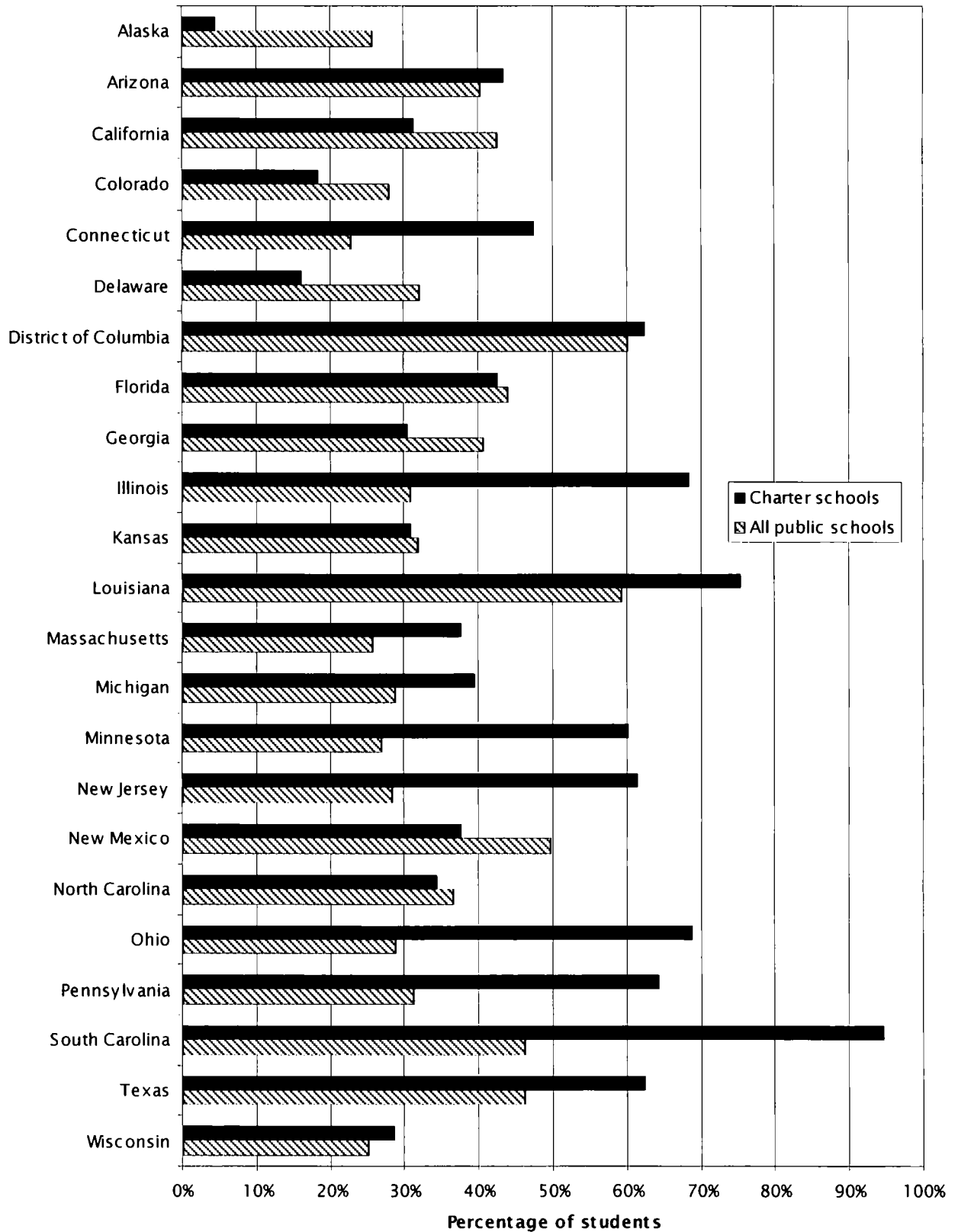
Estimated Number of Students Eligible for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch in the 27 Charter States

Total	Charter schools (1998–99)		All public schools (1994–95)	
	# eligible students	% of all students	# eligible students	% of all students
	94,246	38.7	11,016,537	37.3
Alaska	88	4.3	32,340	25.7
Arizona	13,915	43.2	284,357	40.1
California	22,691	31.1	2,257,008	42.4
Colorado	2,522	18.2	174,023	27.8
Connecticut	764	47.4	113,221	22.8
Delaware	157	15.9	33,738	32.0
District of Columbia	1,733	62.3	48,370	60.0
Florida	3,803	42.4	895,510	43.9
Georgia	5,638	30.3	501,824	40.6
Illinois	2,275	68.3	583,238	30.8
Kansas	476	30.8	145,115	31.7
Louisiana	1,197	75.3	474,608	59.3
Massachusetts	3,620	37.4	225,110	25.6
Michigan	9,937	39.3	459,747	28.7
Minnesota	2,807	60.1	217,376	26.8
New Jersey	2,449	61.2	326,022	28.3
New Mexico	1,724	37.5	159,740	49.6
North Carolina	2,721	34.3	413,729	36.5
Ohio	713	68.6	518,635	28.7
Pennsylvania	2,208	64.1	541,793	31.1
South Carolina	344	94.5	297,560	46.2
Texas	11,561	62.2	1,662,900	46.1
Wisconsin	585	28.4	210,011	24.9

NOTE: These data are based on responses from 847 of the 975 open charter schools that responded to the survey. Of the 847 schools, 7 schools in 4 states (Hawaii, Idaho, Mississippi, and Rhode Island) are not displayed in the table because each state has 3 or fewer charter schools that provided information about this question and percentages are not meaningful. The "Total" row includes data from all 27 of the charter states.

SOURCE: The numerator (eligibility counts by state) was drawn from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services, Program Information Division, for 1994–95, the last year eligibility was published for just public schools. The denominator was drawn from the 1998 *Digest of Education Statistics*, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (1993 data), to obtain data from a year close to the numerator.

Percentage of Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch in Charter Schools and All Public Schools



STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Like all public schools, charter schools are required to provide access and services to students with disabilities. Over the last 3 years, charter schools have served a slightly lower proportion of students with disabilities than all public schools in the charter states, and this finding continued to be true this year. Across states, the percentage of students with disabilities served by charter schools continued to vary significantly, in part because a higher proportion of charter schools in some states were specifically designed to serve this population of students.

- In 1998–99, charter schools enrolled 3 percent fewer students with disabilities than all public schools (8 percent versus 11 percent) in the 27 charter states (in 1997–98).
- The percentage of students with disabilities in charter schools and all public schools was within 5 percent in most states. Ohio was the only state where the percentage of students with disabilities was at least 5 points higher in charter schools than in all public schools. The percentage of students with disabilities was at least 5 points lower in charter schools than in all public schools in six states: Alaska, Connecticut, Delaware, Louisiana, Michigan, and New Jersey.
- The percentage of students with disabilities varied more from state to state for charter than for all public schools in the 27 charter states. The percentage of charter students with disabilities ranged from 5 percent in Delaware and Louisiana to 18 percent in Florida. In comparison, the percentage of students with disabilities in all public schools in the 27 charter states ranged from 9 percent in Arizona to 16 percent in Massachusetts.
- Last year, the numbers of student with disabilities in charter schools versus all public schools was more than 10 percent higher in Florida and more than 10 percent lower in New Jersey. These differences decreased to 4 percent in Florida and 8 percent in New Jersey this year.

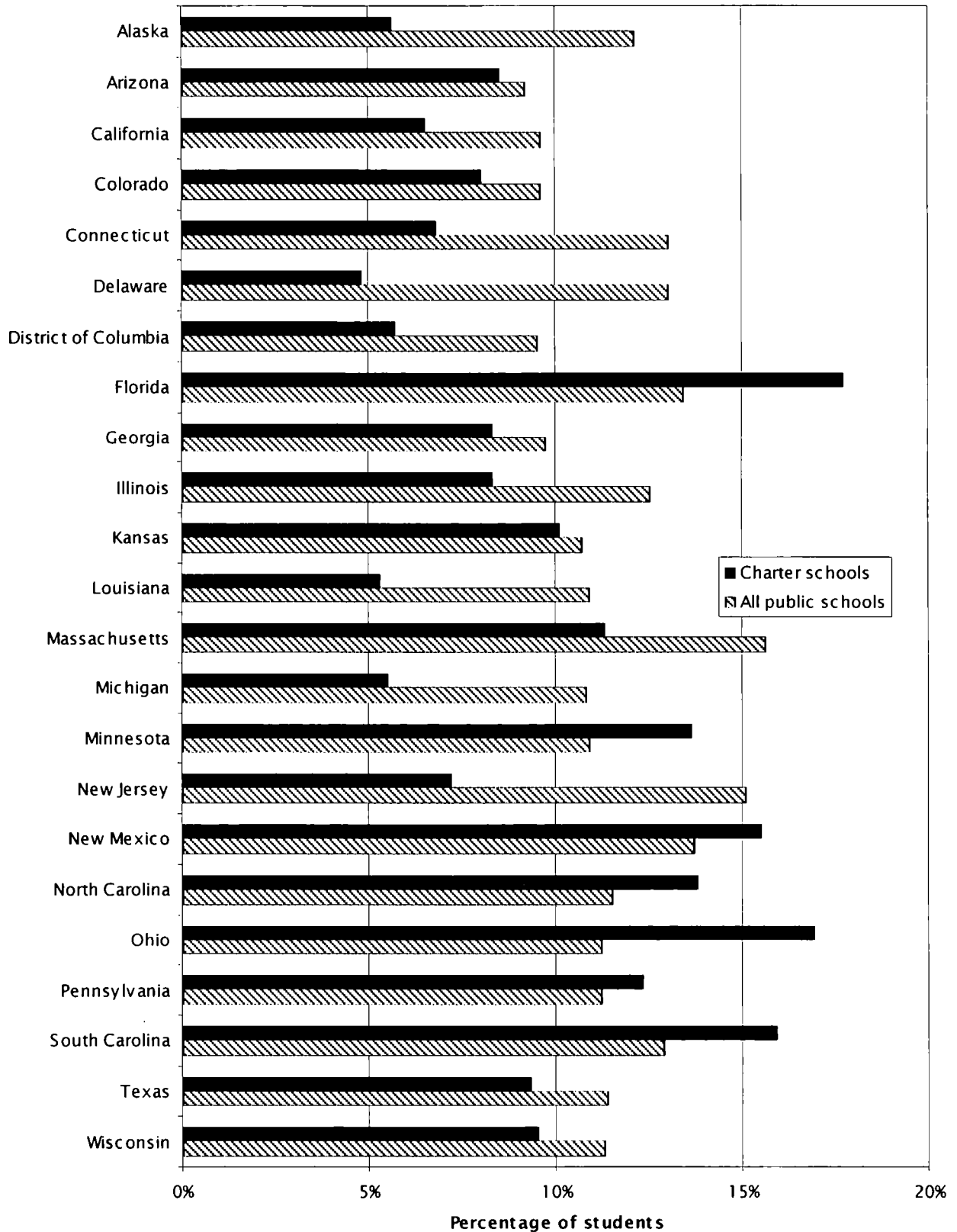
Estimated Number and Percentage of Students with Disabilities in the 27 Charter States

	Charter schools (1998–99)		All public schools (1997–98)	
	# of students	% of students	# of students	% of students
Total	20,571	8.4	3,552,784	11.3
Alaska	114	5.6	16,005	12.1
Arizona	2,744	8.5	75,240	9.2
California	4,681	6.4	547,309	9.6
Colorado	1,114	8.0	65,734	9.6
Connecticut	109	6.8	69,352	13.0
Delaware	47	4.8	14,559	13.0
District of Columbia	159	5.7	7,292	9.5
Florida	1,588	17.7	307,149	13.4
Georgia	1,551	8.3	133,347	9.7
Illinois	276	8.3	250,193	12.5
Kansas	156	10.1	50,027	10.7
Louisiana	84	5.3	84,690	10.9
Massachusetts	1,096	11.3	148,364	15.6
Michigan	1,394	5.5	181,678	10.8
Minnesota	634	13.6	92,966	10.9
New Jersey	289	7.2	189,219	15.1
New Mexico	713	15.5	15,319	13.7
North Carolina	1,095	13.8	142,628	11.5
Ohio	176	16.9	208,954	11.2
Pennsylvania	423	12.3	202,655	11.2
South Carolina	58	15.9	84,223	12.9
Texas	1,745	9.4	443,341	11.4
Wisconsin	195	9.5	100,027	11.3

NOTE: These data are based on 931 of the 975 open charter schools that responded to the survey and reported numbers of students with disabilities. Of the 931 schools in the table, 7 schools in 4 states (Hawaii, Idaho, Mississippi, and Rhode Island) are not displayed because each state has 3 or fewer charter schools which provided information about students with disabilities and percentages are not meaningful. The "Total" row includes data from all 27 of the charter states.

SOURCE: The numerator (number of students served under IDEA) was drawn from the *Twenty-First Annual Report to Congress of the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, U.S. Department of Education, (forthcoming). The denominator (enrollment in the 27 charter states) was drawn from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data Survey, 1997–98.

Estimated Percentage of Students with Disabilities in Charter Schools and All Public Schools



LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT STUDENTS

The percentage of limited English proficient (LEP) students served by charter schools and all public schools was approximately the same; however, the number of LEP students in charter schools and all public schools varied considerably by state. Over the past 3 years, the percentage of LEP students enrolled in charter schools in all charter states has declined as more charter schools have opened in states with lower concentrations of LEP students.

- Charter schools (in 1998–99) and all public schools in the 27 charter states (in 1996–97) both served approximately 10 percent limited English proficient (LEP) students.
- The percentage of LEP students in charter schools varied widely across states. The states with very low or very high percentages of LEP students in charter schools were also the states with very small or very large numbers of LEP students overall.
- In 17 states, charter schools served approximately the same number of LEP students (within 5 percent) as all public schools in those states. Charter schools in three states—Alaska, Colorado, and Florida—served a lower percentage of LEP students than all public schools in those states (by at least 5 percent). In Minnesota and the District of Columbia, charter schools served a higher percentage of LEP students (by at least 5 percent) compared to all public schools in those states.
- The percentage of LEP students enrolled in charter schools declined from almost 13 percent in the 1996–97 school year to 10 percent in the 1998–99 school year.

Estimated Number and Percentage of LEP Students in Charter Schools and All Public Schools in the 27 Charter States

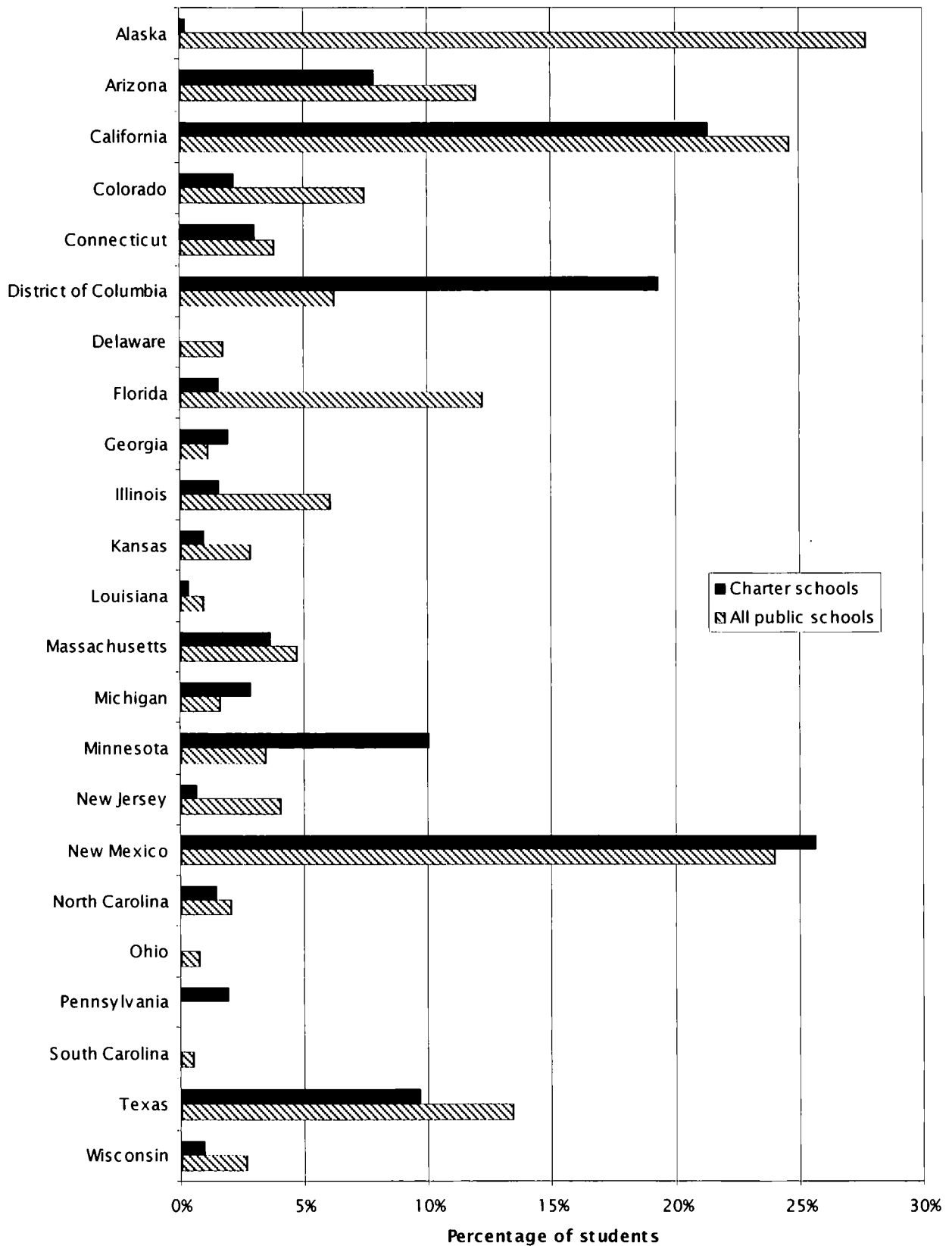
State	Estimated LEP students			
	Charter schools (1998–99)		All public schools (1996–97) ¹	
	# of students	% of students	# of students	% of students
Total	24,248	9.9	2,841,177	9.8
Alaska	4	0.2	34,942	27.7
Arizona	2,511	7.8	93,528	11.9
California	15,563	21.3	1,381,393	24.6
Colorado	298	2.1	24,675	7.4
Connecticut	49	3.0	19,819	3.8
District of Columbia	536	19.3	4,911	6.2
Delaware	0	0.0	1,928	1.7
Florida	135	1.5	288,603	12.2
Georgia	353	1.9	14,339	1.1
Illinois	51	1.5	118,246	6.0
Kansas	14	0.9	12,843	2.8
Louisiana	5	0.3	6,494	0.9
Massachusetts	344	3.6	44,394	4.7
Michigan	703	2.8	25,988	1.6
Minnesota	468	10.0	28,237	3.4
New Jersey	25	0.6	49,300	4.0
New Mexico	1,178	25.6	78,107	24.0
North Carolina	110	1.4	24,771	2.0
Ohio	0	0.0	12,391	0.7
Pennsylvania	67	1.9	NA	NA
South Carolina	0	0.0	3,202	0.5
Texas	1,778	9.6	513,634	13.4
Wisconsin	18	0.9	23,270	2.6

NOTE: These data are based on all 975 open charter schools that responded to the survey. Of the 975 schools, 7 schools from 4 states (Hawaii, Idaho, Mississippi, and Rhode Island) are not displayed in the table because each state has fewer than 3 charter schools which provided information about LEP students and the percentages are not meaningful. The "Total" row includes data from all 27 charter states. For each state, the percentage of LEP students is computed by dividing the number of LEP students by the total number of enrolled students.

SOURCE: Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs, Summary Report of the Survey of the States' Limited English Proficient Students and Available Educational Programs and Services 1996–97: Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1998.

¹ The total excludes data from the state of Pennsylvania, which did not report information on LEP students for all public schools.

Estimated Number and Percentage of LEP Students in Charter Schools and All Public Schools



D. STARTING, IMPLEMENTING, AND BEING ACCOUNTABLE

WHY CHARTER SCHOOLS ARE STARTED	42
IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES	44
AUTONOMY AND CONTROL	46
AUTONOMY AND CHOICE OF SERVICE PROVIDERS	48
EXTERNAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND MONITORING	50
EXTERNAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND REPORTING	52
ACCOUNTABILITY AND STUDENT ASSESSMENT	54

WHY CHARTER SCHOOLS ARE STARTED

Educators, parents, and community leaders found charter schools for a variety of reasons. Regardless of creation status, the primary motivation for founding a charter school was to seek an alternative vision of schooling that could not be realized in the traditional public school system. Newly created schools, in particular, reported on alternative curriculum and instructional approaches and a vision for the organizational climate they wished to create. While vision was also an important founding reason for public and private conversion schools, many pre-existing public schools converted to charter status in order to gain increased autonomy, while many pre-existing private schools sought to attain stable funding and attract students to their educational approach. Increasingly, newly created and pre-existing charter schools are being founded to serve a special population of students. About one in four charter schools established their charter to serve a special population of students, often students considered "at-risk."

- Realizing an alternative vision for schooling was the most important reason for founding charter schools—three-quarters (75 percent) of charter schools cited vision among other reasons for founding and 59 percent of charter schools were founded primarily to realize an alternative vision for schooling.
- More charter schools opening in 1998–99 than those founded prior to 1998 were founded to serve a special population of students. In 1998–99, 28 percent of charter schools were founded with the primary motivation to serve a special population of students as compared to 19 percent of all charter schools founded prior to 1998.
- Regardless of creation status, the primary reason for founding charter schools was to realize an alternative vision for schooling. However, a greater percentage of newly created than pre-existing public or private

schools were founded primarily to realize an alternative vision for schooling. About two-thirds of newly created charter schools were founded primarily to realize an alternative vision for schooling (64 percent) whereas less than one-half of pre-existing public schools (44 percent) or pre-existing private schools (39 percent) were founded primarily to realize an alternative vision.

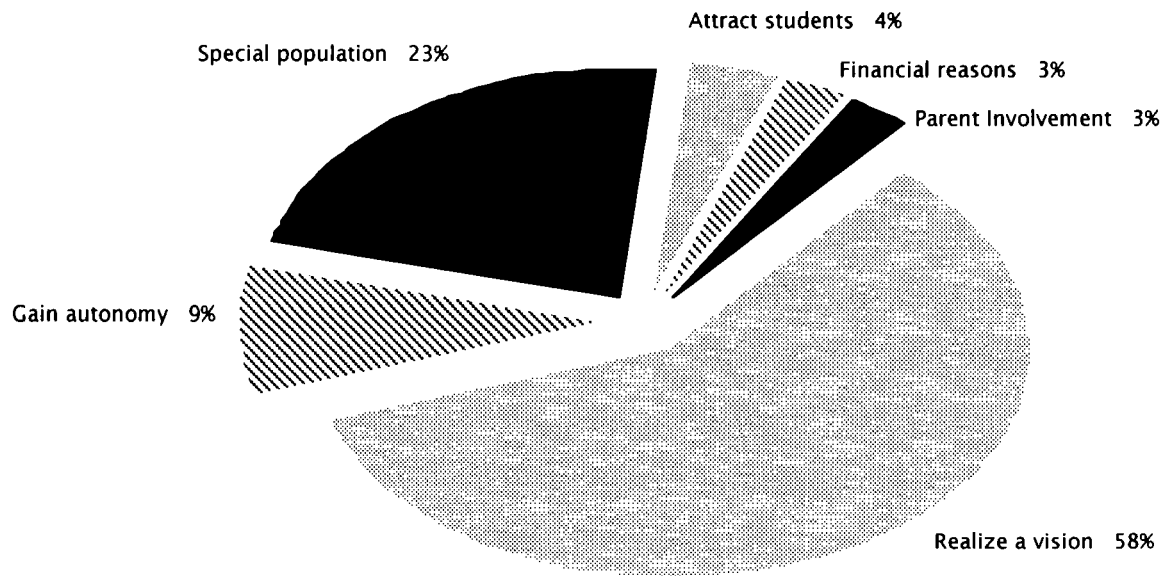
- Other important reasons for founding were dependent on creation status. Approximately one-quarter (26 percent) of the newly created schools were founded primarily to serve a special population. Pre-existing public schools were founded to gain autonomy from state or district regulation (35 percent), or to serve a special population (11 percent). Pre-existing private schools converted to charter to serve a special population (21 percent), to attract students (19 percent), or for financial reasons (16 percent).

Estimated Percentage of Charter Schools by Reasons for Founding

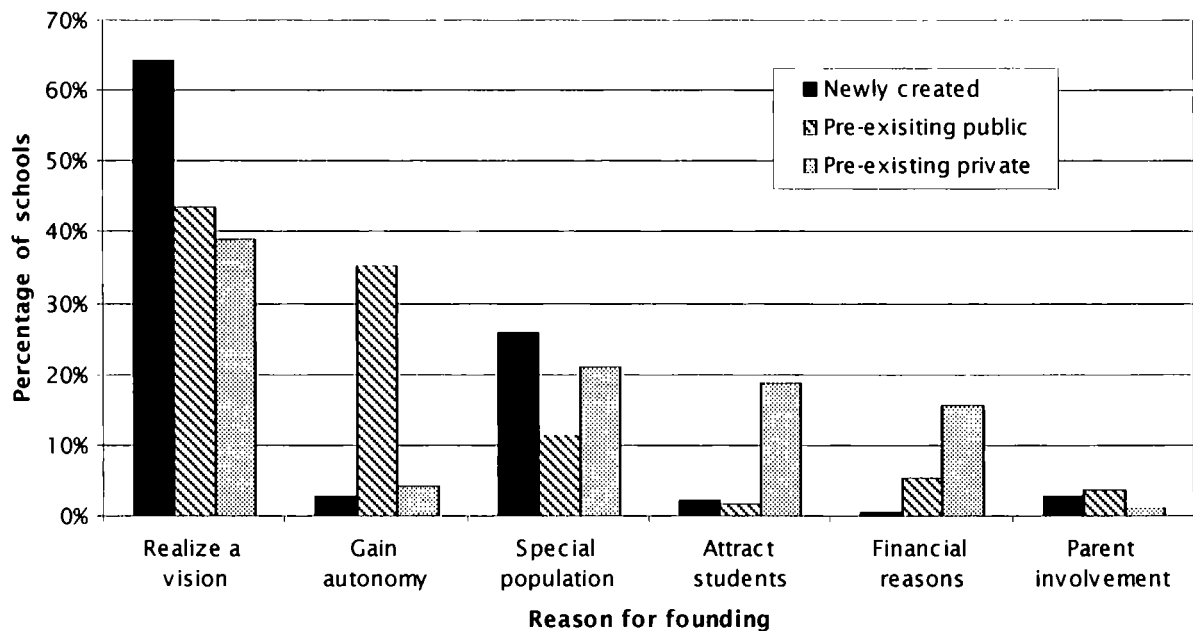
Reason for founding charter school	Percentage that cited each reason	Percentage that cited <i>most</i> important reason by charter school creation status			
	Total	Total	Newly created	Pre-existing public	Pre-existing private
Number of schools	971	946	688	168	90
	Percentage of schools (%)				
Realize an alternative vision	75.2	59.0	64.4	43.5	38.9
Gain autonomy/flexibility	16.8	8.6	2.9	34.5	4.4
Serve special population	30.4	22.8	25.9	11.3	21.1
Attract students	9.1	3.8	2.3	1.8	18.9
Financial reasons	7.5	3.0	0.7	5.4	15.6
Parent involvement	8.9	2.7	2.8	3.6	1.1

NOTE: These data are based on responses from 971 of the 975 open charter schools that responded to the survey. Schools were asked about their reasons for founding the first time they were surveyed. For data reported in column 2 above, schools were asked the reason for founding their schools and they could reply with more than one reason. For data reported in columns 3 through 6 above, schools were asked to choose one of the named reasons as the primary reason for founding their school; these data are based on responses from 946 of the 971 charter schools because 29 schools did not choose a primary reason—11 gave no response and 18 cited more than one primary reason for founding. The data presented in columns 4 through 6 represent the percentage of the total number of each type of school and includes responses from 168 out of 173 open pre-existing public schools, 90 out of 98 open pre-existing private schools, and 688 out of 704 open newly created schools.

Percentage of Charter Schools by Most Important Reason for Founding



Percentage of Newly Created versus Pre-existing Charter Schools by Most Important Reason for Founding



IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

Charter schools face significant challenges as they get underway and as they continue to implement their programs. We asked a knowledgeable individual at each charter school to rate the difficulty of overcoming each barrier in a list of possible barriers to implementation. Financial difficulties continued to be among the largest challenges that charter schools faced, although there has been a marked decline over time in the percentage of schools facing problems with start-up funding.

- In 1998–99, the most frequent barriers charter schools faced during implementation were lack of start-up and operating funds (49 and 37 percent respectively), lack of planning time (35 percent), and inadequate facilities (32 percent).
- Schools first surveyed in 1998–99 were less likely to face start-up funding difficulties than were schools first surveyed in earlier years, decreasing from 59 percent in 1996 to 39 percent in 1999. This finding likely reflects increased federal start-up funding for charter schools and that some states are providing charter school start-up funds. Schools surveyed more recently were more likely to face difficulties with hiring staff than schools in previous years. This finding may reflect the nationwide teacher shortage.
- Newly created schools were more likely than pre-existing schools to face difficulties with inadequate operating funds, lack of planning time, inadequate facilities, internal conflicts, school administration and management, teacher turnover, community opposition, and communication with parents.
- Pre-existing private and newly created charter schools were more likely than pre-existing public schools to face difficulties from lack of start up funds, health and safety regulations, and teacher burnout.
- Charter schools that converted from public status were similar to newly created charter schools in that they were more likely than pre-existing private schools to find state or local board opposition, district resistance or regulations, and hiring staff to be difficult barriers.
- Similar to last year, pre-existing private schools that converted to charter status were more likely than newly created or pre-existing public schools to report difficulties with state department of education resistance and teacher certification requirements.

Estimated Percentage of Charter Schools Reporting Difficulties in Implementing Their Charter¹

	Total (%)	Newly created (%)	Pre-existing public (%)	Pre-existing private (%)
Lack of start up funds	48.5	53.7	26.5	49.4
Inadequate operating funds	37.4	40.4	27.0	33.3
Lack of planning time	34.5	37.4	28.0	23.9
Inadequate facilities	32.0	35.4	21.5	24.4
State or local board opposition	20.0	20.4	21.0	14.1
District resistance or regulations	18.2	19.0	19.3	9.8
State dept. of education resistance	12.3	11.3	13.9	17.4
Internal processes or conflicts	11.9	13.1	8.6	8.7
School administration and management	10.7	12.4	6.3	5.5
Health and safety regulations	10.5	11.9	3.0	13.0
Hiring staff	10.3	10.6	10.9	6.5
Teacher burnout	9.4	10.6	3.8	9.1
Accountability requirements	8.2	8.2	7.4	9.8
Lack of parental support	8.2	8.4	7.6	7.3
Union or bargaining unit opposition	7.8	7.5	9.7	6.6
Teacher certification requirements	6.2	6.0	4.8	9.8
Teacher turnover	5.7	6.6	3.8	1.9
Collective bargaining agreements	5.4	4.2	12.9	1.1
Community opposition	4.6	5.9	1.8	0.0
Communication with parents	4.5	5.3	2.5	1.8
Federal regulations	4.4	4.5	4.9	3.3

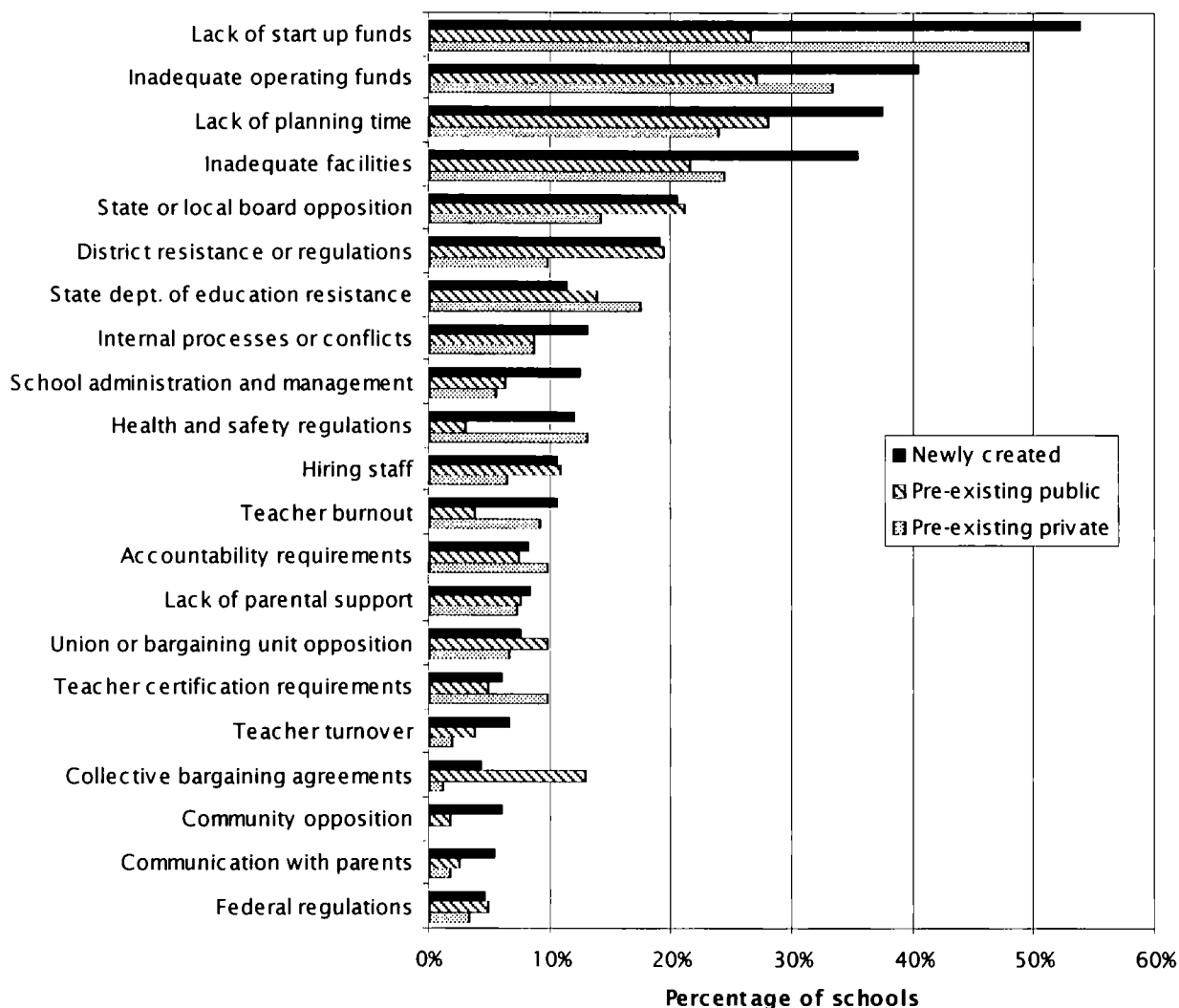
NOTE: These data are drawn from questions asked only in the new school surveys and are based on responses from a range of 927 to 955 open charter schools that provided information on these questions. Five questions—on administration and school management, teacher burnout, teacher turnover, lack of parental support, and communication with parents—were asked only on the 1997 and 1999 new schools surveys, resulting in fewer responses to these questions overall (511 to 514 schools).

¹ We asked schools to rate the difficulty of each barrier on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being not at all difficult and 5 being very difficult. The percentages in these tables and the figure on the facing page represent the percentages of schools that rated each barrier difficult or very difficult.

Estimated Percentage of Charter Schools Reporting Selected Difficulties in Implementing Their Charters, by Year of Charter Survey

	Total	1996 New Schools Survey ²	1997 New Schools Survey	1998 New Schools Survey	1999 New Schools Survey
Percentage of schools (%)					
Lack of start up funds	48.5	58.8	54.9	51.0	39.1
Inadequate operating funds	37.4	36.3	47.1	42.0	31.7
Lack of planning time	34.5	40.0	33.6	36.9	30.2
Inadequate facilities	32.0	34.8	43.4	32.6	26.2
State or local board opposition	20.0	23.6	19.2	17.3	19.9
District resistance or regulations	18.2	17.3	16.8	22.2	16.6
State dept. of education resistance	12.3	19.3	7.5	11.9	10.7
Internal processes or conflicts	11.9	18.9	17.1	8.5	8.2
Health and safety regulations	10.5	9.4	12.2	13.1	8.7
Hiring staff	10.3	10.0	5.4	9.2	13.1

Estimated Percentage of Charter Schools Reporting Difficulties In Implementing Their Charter, by Creation Status



² These data are drawn from the first charter school survey. In some cases, we were unable to identify and survey charter schools in their first year of operation, but were able to later identify them and administer a "new school" survey. In these few cases, survey responses would not represent the first year of school operation, during which implementation difficulties may be greatest.

AUTONOMY AND CONTROL

The increased level of autonomy called for by the charter concept enables educators, parents, or community members to create schools that are alternatives to-and for-the current public system. Charter schools are afforded flexibility to make independent decisions and set policy about both educational and management issues, though some school decisions may be constrained either by provisions of the state's charter legislation or by decisions and practices implemented by their charter granting agency. Most charter schools felt they had considerable autonomy over decisions and policy affecting most areas of education and management, except over student admissions policies. More newly created than pre-existing public or private schools felt they had primary control over decisions about educational and management issues-pre-existing public schools felt they had the least autonomy.

- In 1998–99, most charter schools had primary control or authority over their administrative operations including: the budget (73 percent), purchase of supplies and equipment (88 percent), and hiring of teaching staff (88 percent). In addition, most charter schools had primary control over the operation of their education program, including: the daily and yearly schedule (95 percent), curriculum (83 percent), discipline (87 percent), calendar (77 percent), and student assessment policies (72 percent). A lower percentage of schools reported that they had primary control over their student admissions policies (59 percent).
- In cases where charter schools did not have control, primary authority rested with either the district, the charter-granting agency, or with another source.
- Charter schools that converted from private status had a pattern of autonomy similar to newly created schools in the areas of hiring teaching staff, establishing curriculum, and determining the calendar. Pre-existing public schools had less control than both newly created and pre-existing private schools in all areas of decision making and policy setting, including curriculum, assessment, discipline, calendar, admissions, budget, and daily schedule.

Estimated Percentage of Charter Schools by Source of Primary Control for Various School Decisions and Operations

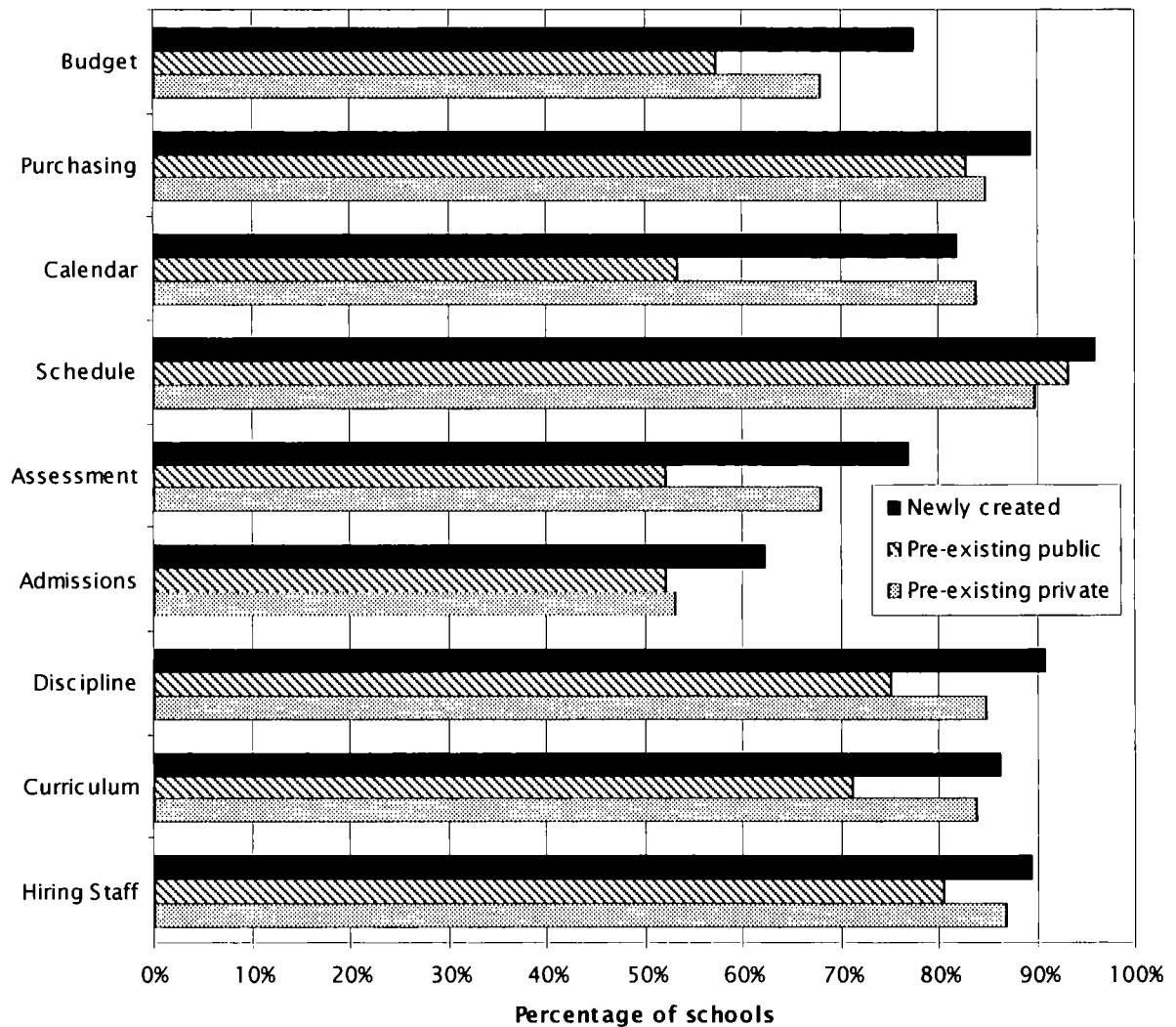
Area of control	Source of primary control			
	School	District/charter granting agency	Both	Other
	Percentage of schools (%)			
Budget	72.9	19.4	0.3	7.4
Purchase of supplies/equipment	87.7	7.6	0.2	4.5
School calendar	76.8	19.6	0.1	3.5
Daily schedule	94.8	2.9	0.2	2.2
Student assessment policies	71.5	19.7	0.6	8.2
Student admissions policies	59.4	27.8	0.7	12.0
Student discipline	87.3	9.0	0.1	3.6
Establishment of curriculum	83.2	11.3	0.2	5.3
Hiring of teaching staff	87.5	7.4	0.3	4.8

NOTE: These data are based on responses from between 972 and 975 of the 975 open charter schools that responded to the survey. Schools were asked to rate each of these items separately, resulting in the range of responses. Up to three schools answered "don't know" for certain items. Most responses in the "other" category include the management company, the state legislature, and parents. The data presented in columns 3 through 5 of the table on the facing page represent the percentage of the total number of each type of school and includes responses from 173 open pre-existing public schools, 98 open pre-existing private schools, and between 702 and 704 open newly created schools (some newly created schools responded "don't know").

Estimated Percentage of Charter Schools with Primary Control by Creation Status

Area of control	Percentage of schools with primary control (%)	Charter school creation status		
		Newly created (%)	Pre-existing public (%)	Pre-existing private (%)
Budget	72.9	77.4	57.2	68.0
Purchase of supplies/equipment	87.7	89.3	82.7	84.7
School calendar	76.8	81.6	53.2	83.7
Daily schedule	94.8	95.9	93.1	89.8
Student assessment policies	71.5	76.8	52.0	68.0
Student admissions policies	59.4	62.2	52.0	53.1
Student discipline	87.3	90.6	75.1	84.7
Establishment of curriculum	83.2	86.1	71.1	83.7
Hiring of teaching staff	87.5	89.3	80.3	86.7

Estimated Percentage of Newly Created and Pre-existing Charter Schools with Control over Various School Decisions and Operations

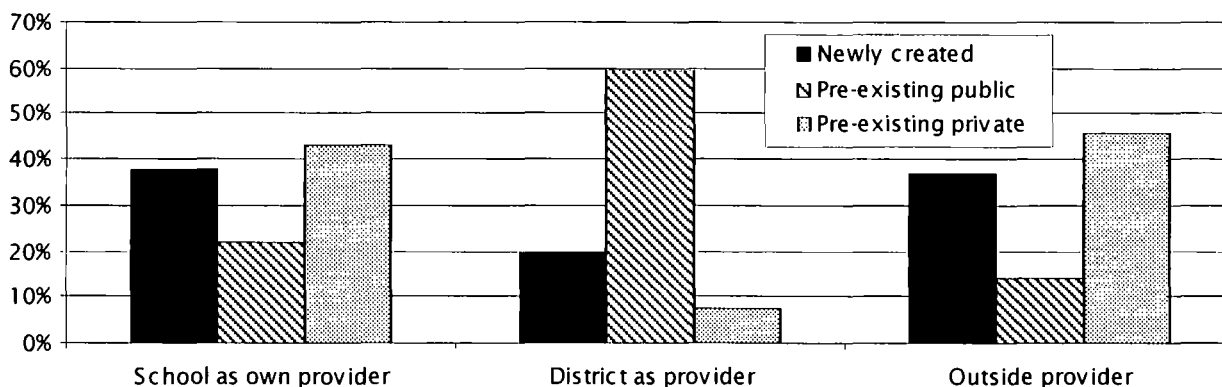


AUTONOMY AND CHOICE OF SERVICE PROVIDERS

The autonomy afforded by charter law allows charter schools not only to choose whether or not they provide certain services but also to choose the service provider. On average, an almost equal number of charter schools provided the services themselves through staff or volunteers, purchased services from the district, or acquired services from an outside provider. Newly created and pre-existing private schools differed from pre-existing public schools in the service providers used. Pre-existing public schools were more likely to use the district whereas newly created and pre-existing private schools were more likely to provide the service themselves or to rely on an outside provider. Fewer schools in 1998-99 than in previous years shared the responsibility of providing services with either the district or another provider.

- Averaging across all service areas in 1998-99, more than one-third of charter schools provided services themselves (36 percent), about one-third of charter schools used only an outside provider (34 percent), and slightly more than one-quarter of schools used the district as the sole service provider (26 percent). Newly created and pre-existing private schools were much more likely to provide services themselves or to secure services from an outside provider whereas pre-existing public schools were most likely to retain the district as the service provider.
- In 1998-99, nearly every charter school offered special education testing (97 percent) and special education services (95 percent). In addition, the majority of charter schools offered one or more noneducational services to their students—more than four-fifths of the schools had social and/or health services (82 percent each), nearly three-quarters had before and after school care (72 percent) and/or food services (71 percent), two-thirds offered transportation (66 percent), and over one-half had athletic programs (54 percent).
- Charter school staff most often provided such noneducational services as before- and after-school care (65 percent), athletic programs (63 percent), and special education services (39 percent). Charter schools most often acquired transportation (42 percent) and food programs (39 percent) from districts and purchased special education testing (36 percent) and social services (42 percent) from an outside provider. When charter schools provided health services, a nearly equal percentage of the services were provided by the school (35 percent), the district (29 percent), or an outside provider (33 percent).
- Charter schools most often provided such administrative services as purchasing (57 percent) and custodial (45 percent) services. Charter schools most often purchased payroll (46 percent), accounting (38 percent), insurance (53 percent), and legal services (54 percent) from an outside provider. The most frequent provider of building maintenance was split between an outside provider (39 percent) and the school (36 percent).

Average Percentage of Schools Selecting a Given Service Provider by Creation Status



NOTE: These data are based on responses from 974 of the 975 open charter schools that responded to the survey for most items. These questions were asked only in the first year of administration of the new school survey. The question about building maintenance was not asked in the first year of our survey, therefore, the data for that category is based on 756 out of 757 open charter schools. The questions about athletic programs, special education testing, and special education services were included only in the 1999 new survey upon the request of the U.S. Department of Education departmental reviewers, therefore, data for these questions rely on 369 open charter schools that responded in 1999 to the new survey. This exhibit represents unweighted averages across all service areas. Unweighted averages are used so as to not inflate the average for services that are more commonly provided. The numbers in each of the "Total" rows do not add to 100% across the columns because respondents were also offered "Both" as a response option.

Percentage of Charter Schools that Offer Services by Provider and Creation Status

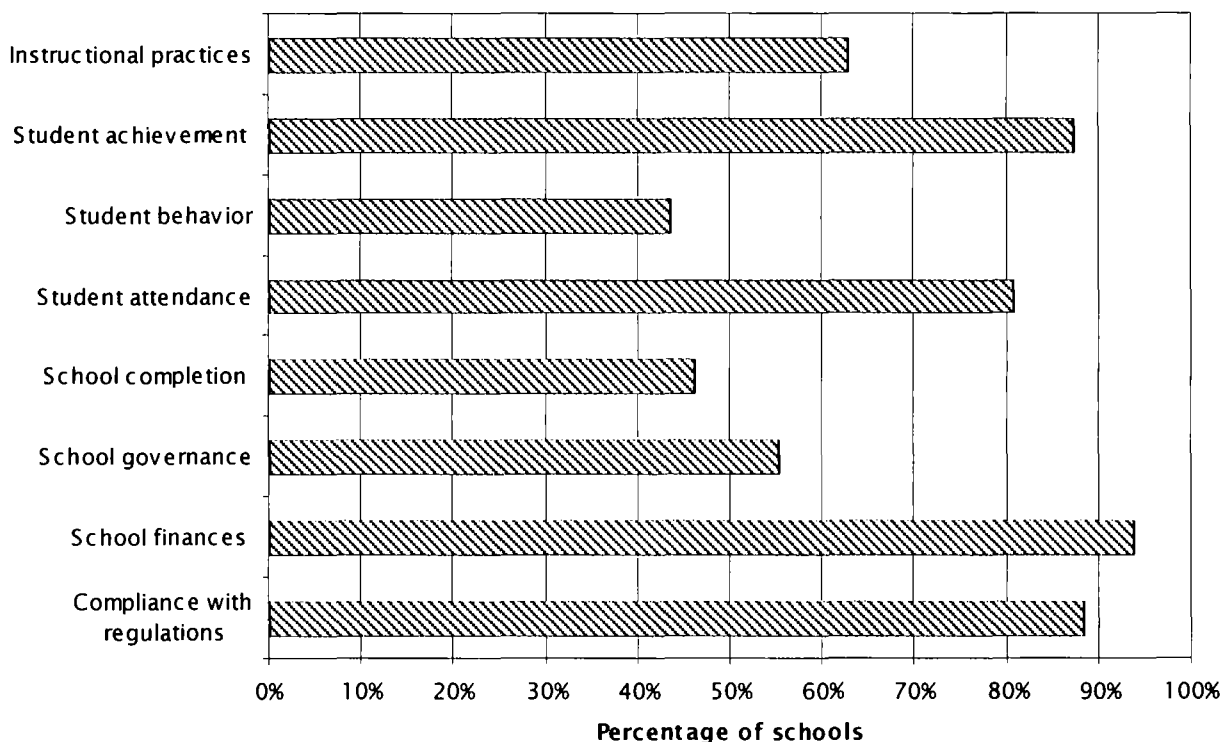
Services provided in charter schools (percentage of schools with services)	Charter creation status Average of all services	Percentage of schools (%) with services provided solely by		
		School as provider 35.5	District as provider 25.6	Outside provider 33.7
	Newly created	37.9	19.7	37.0
	Pre-existing public	21.8	59.3	13.9
	Pre-existing private	43.3	7.5	45.9
Payroll (100.0%)	Total % across all types	21.3	29.9	45.6
	Newly created	22.6	22.9	50.9
	Pre-existing public	8.1	71.7	18.5
	Pre-existing private	34.7	6.1	55.1
Accounting (100.0%)	Total % across all types	31.8	22.4	37.7
	Newly created	34.8	16.4	41.7
	Pre-existing public	19.7	58.4	11.6
	Pre-existing private	32.7	3.1	56.1
Insurance (99.7%)	Total % across all types	18.0	26.6	52.8
	Newly created	18.7	20.0	58.6
	Pre-existing public	11.0	67.4	18.6
	Pre-existing private	25.5	2.0	71.4
Purchasing (99.9%)	Total % across all types	56.7	21.2	15.7
	Newly created	61.7	15.5	17.1
	Pre-existing public	26.6	54.3	8.1
	Pre-existing private	74.2	3.1	19.6
Custodial (97.8)	Total % across all types	44.8	19.2	33.4
	Newly created	46.3	13.1	37.7
	Pre-existing public	33.7	52.3	12.2
	Pre-existing private	54.2	3.1	40.6
Building maintenance (96.8%)	Total % across all types	36.3	19.4	38.7
	Newly created	38.2	12.8	43.2
	Pre-existing public	21.7	63.2	11.3
	Pre-existing private	43.7	5.6	45.1
Legal services (95.0%)	Total % across all types	18.1	24.0	54.1
	Newly created	18.7	18.1	59.0
	Pre-existing public	11.3	59.5	24.4
	Pre-existing private	25.8	1.1	73.0
Health services (81.7%)	Total % across all types	35.6	29.4	32.7
	Newly created	39.2	22.8	35.3
	Pre-existing public	19.5	63.6	14.9
	Pre-existing private	41.1	8.2	49.3
Social services (82.2%)	Total % across all types	26.2	24.3	42.0
	Newly created	26.9	19.9	45.8
	Pre-existing public	20.3	49.7	22.9
	Pre-existing private	34.2	6.6	53.9
Before/after school care (72.3%)	Total % across all types	65.1	9.9	19.2
	Newly created	69.7	5.1	19.9
	Pre-existing public	48.2	30.7	10.2
	Pre-existing private	64.6	3.8	30.4
Food programs (70.7%)	Total % across all types	23.4	38.9	32.4
	Newly created	23.2	33.4	38.0
	Pre-existing public	12.8	67.6	14.9
	Pre-existing private	51.6	14.5	32.3
Transportation (65.5%)	Total % across all types	27.3	41.5	26.7
	Newly created	31.1	34.2	29.3
	Pre-existing public	14.2	75.2	10.6
	Pre-existing private	32.7	16.4	49.1
Athletic programs (53.9%)	Total % across all types	63.3	16.6	16.6
	Newly created	67.4	11.3	18.4
	Pre-existing public	44.1	44.1	5.9
	Pre-existing private	66.7	8.3	20.8
Special education testing (96.7%)	Total % across all types	25.5	31.9	35.9
	Newly created	28.3	26.5	38.2
	Pre-existing public	12.7	67.3	14.5
	Pre-existing private	23.3	16.7	53.3
Special education services (94.6%)	Total % across all types	39.0	28.7	21.8
	Newly created	41.7	22.9	22.6
	Pre-existing public	22.2	64.8	9.3
	Pre-existing private	44.8	13.8	37.9

EXTERNAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND MONITORING

In exchange for freedom from state regulations (except those related to health, safety, and nondiscrimination) charter schools are to be held accountable for school and student outcomes. In order to determine whether and how schools are held accountable, the Study asked schools about the external monitoring they underwent during the past school year. State legislation and regulatory practices differ greatly across states, and charter schools reported varying amounts of external monitoring as well as variation in which areas were monitored.

- In 1998–99, charter schools in a selected sample most frequently reported monitoring in the areas of school finances (94 percent), compliance with state or federal regulations (88 percent), student achievement (87 percent), and student attendance (81 percent).
- Across states, there was greater variance for some areas of monitoring than for others. While a large proportion of schools in most states reported monitoring on student achievement and school finances, there was far greater variance among the states in other areas, such as student behavior and school governance.
- In those categories in which there was greater variance, patterns emerged among states. While more than 80 percent of charter schools in Louisiana reported monitoring of instructional practices, student behavior, or school governance, the proportion of schools reporting monitoring was below 55 percent in each of those areas in Florida, Minnesota, North Carolina, and Wisconsin.
- In the five states in which there was only one charter-granting agency, a pattern also emerged. Connecticut, Georgia, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New Mexico all had high proportions (above 75 percent) of schools reporting monitoring of instructional practices and moderate to high proportions (greater than 50 percent) of schools reporting monitoring in the area of school governance.

Estimated Percentage of Charter Schools that are Externally Monitored on Accountability Measures



Percentage of a Selected Sample of Charter Schools Who Reported External Monitoring¹

	Number of schools in sample	Instructional practices	Student achievement	Student behavior	Student attendance
Percentage of schools (%)					
Total	531	62.7	87.2	43.6	80.8
Alaska	11	72.7	80.0	45.5	54.5
Arizona	105	58.1	85.7	36.5	81.0
California	98	60.2	85.7	43.9	83.7
Colorado	44	63.6	97.7	61.4	81.8
Connecticut	7	85.7	75.0	37.5	75.0
Florida	28	39.3	92.9	53.6	85.7
Georgia	16	81.3	100.0	68.8	81.3
Illinois	5	80.0	100.0	40.0	100.0
Louisiana	6	100.0	100.0	83.3	83.3
Massachusetts	21	85.7	81.0	23.8	76.2
Michigan	82	70.7	81.5	35.0	74.1
Minnesota	22	45.5	77.3	31.8	77.3
New Jersey	5	100.0	80.0	20.0	60.0
New Mexico	4	75.0	100.0	75.0	100.0
North Carolina	23	47.8	87.0	26.1	87.0
Pennsylvania	4	75.0	50.0	0.0	75.0
Texas	27	66.7	96.3	66.7	92.6
Wisconsin	14	42.9	93.3	40.0	80.0
	Number of schools in sample	Compliance with regulations	School governance	School finances	School completion ²
Percentage of schools (%)					
Total	531	88.3	55.1	93.8	46.1
Alaska	11	100.0	50.0	100.0	(3) 100.0
Arizona	105	85.7	51.9	94.3	(79) 58.2
California	98	85.7	51.5	88.7	(68) 39.7
Colorado	44	83.3	40.9	93.2	(30) 36.7
Connecticut	7	100.0	87.5	100.0	(2) 50.0
Florida	28	96.4	35.7	100.0	(3) 66.7
Georgia	16	81.3	75.0	93.8	(5) 40.0
Illinois	5	80.0	60.0	100.0	(2) 50.0
Louisiana	6	100.0	83.3	100.0	(2) 100.0
Massachusetts	21	90.5	85.7	100.0	(13) 15.4
Michigan	82	90.1	70.4	97.5	(44) 29.5
Minnesota	22	81.8	22.7	90.9	(15) 26.7
New Jersey	5	100.0	60.0	100.0	NA ³
New Mexico	4	100.0	50.0	100.0	(4) 50.0
North Carolina	23	87.0	50.0	100.0	(3) 66.7
Pennsylvania	4	100.0	25.0	100.0	(3) 100.0
Texas	27	96.3	63.0	81.5	(16) 62.5
Wisconsin	14	86.7	53.3	86.7	(11) 63.6

NOTE: We asked this question only on the 1998 and 1999 follow-up surveys administered to schools not in their first year of operation, resulting in responses from 531 charter schools, referred to as a selected sample in the text. The percentages in the table show the number of schools that reported monitoring during the year in each area divided by the total number of schools in each state. Of the 531 schools, 9 schools in 6 states (Delaware, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Kansas, Rhode Island, and South Carolina) are not displayed in the table because each state has 3 or fewer schools which provided information on this question and the percentages are not meaningful. The "Total" row includes data from all 27 of the charter states.

¹ The number of schools responding varied across the individual areas of monitoring. The number of schools reported in column 2 represents the largest number of schools responding to any one area.

² Responses on school completion are based on 308 responses because the question was only posed to middle and high schools. The number of responses for each state is displayed in parentheses before the proportion of schools reporting monitoring.

³ New Jersey did not have any middle or high schools answering the 1998 or 1999 follow-up survey.

EXTERNAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND REPORTING

Charter laws afford charter schools increased autonomy and require accountability measures. Charter schools report about the school's progress toward its goals to a variety of key constituent groups. Reporting requirements differ by state and by individual charter school. Nearly every charter school in a selected sample reported or planned to report on the school's progress toward its goals to its charter granting agency, school governing board, and parents in the 1998-99 school year.

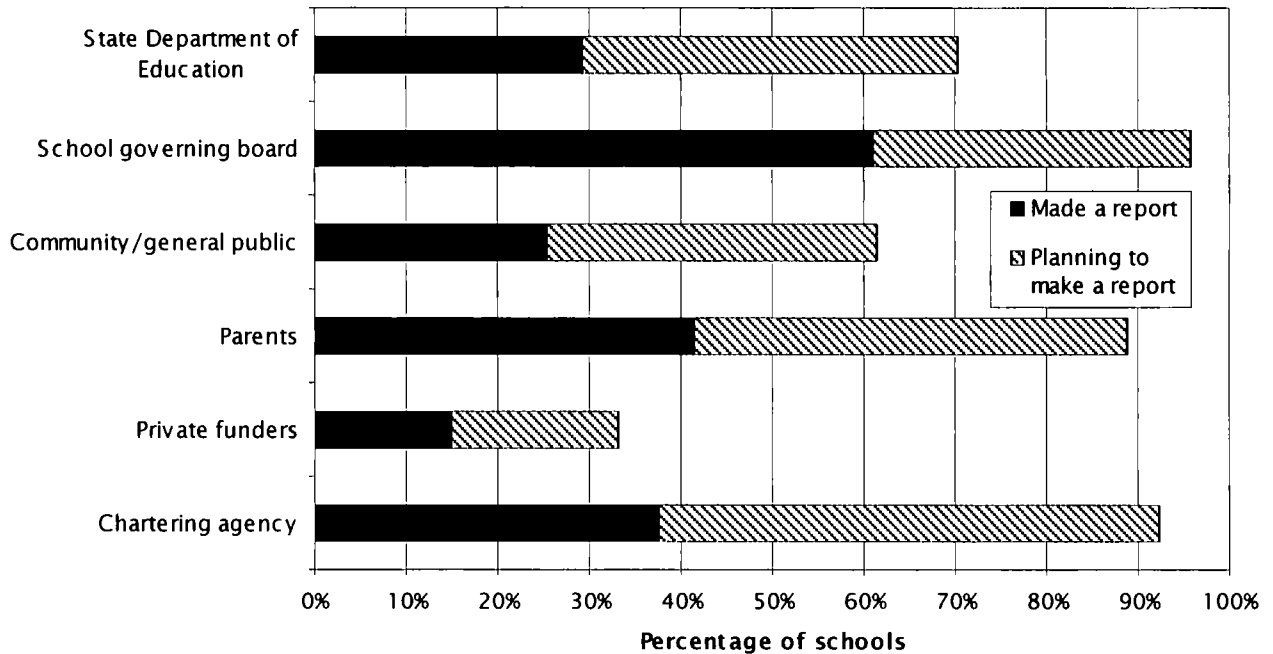
- In 1998-99, the majority of charter schools open for at least 1 year at the time of our survey said they made or were planning to make a report on the school's progress toward its goals to key constituent groups: the school's governing board (96 percent), their chartering agency (92 percent), and parents (89 percent).
- Nearly all charter schools (99 percent) made or were planning to make a report to at least one of the key constituency groups and 81 percent of charter schools made or were planning to make a report to all three key constituent groups.
- The pattern of reporting progress toward goals to other key constituents varied across states. For example, in New Jersey, no charter schools made or planned to make a report to the community or general public, while in Louisiana, all the charter schools made or planned to make a report to this group. The range for states with charter schools that reported or planned to report to private funders was between 7 and 60 percent.
- State Departments of Education represent a key reporting agency in some states' charter laws. In every state except California, at least two-thirds of schools had made a report or planned to make a report to the State Department of Education. Every charter school in Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, New Jersey, New Mexico, and Pennsylvania made a report or planned to make a report to the State Department of Education. At least 80 percent of schools in Connecticut, Georgia, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, and Texas made or planned to make a report to their State Department of Education.
- More than 40 percent of charter schools made or were planning to make a report to all five key constituent groups (chartering agency, parents, community/general public, school governing board, and State Department of Education), not including private funders. At least three-quarters of schools in Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, and Louisiana made a report or planned to make a report to the five key constituent groups. At least one-half of charter schools in Alaska, Florida, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin made or were planning to make a report to these five key groups.

Estimated Percentage of a Selected Sample of Schools Reporting Progress Toward Goals to Their Reporting Agencies

	Made a report	Planning to make a report	Not made or planning to make a report	Don't know	Not applicable
	Percentage of schools (%)				
Chartering agency	37.3	54.9	6.6	0.4	0.9
Private funders	14.8	18.2	32.8	3.9	30.3
Parents	41.2	47.6	9.2	0.6	1.5
Community/ general public	25.3	36.0	31.5	1.9	5.4
School governing board	60.9	34.8	3.7	0.0	0.6
State dept. of education, not chartering agency	29.2	41.0	22.5	1.9	5.4

NOTE: This question appeared only on the 1998 and 1999 follow up surveys, resulting in responses from 534 open charter schools, referred to in the text and tables as a selected sample. The results reflect the most recent school responses, equaling 488 charter schools that responded to the 1999 follow-up survey and 46 charter schools that responded to the 1998 but not the 1999 follow-up survey. On the facing page, the percentages in the table show the number of schools that reported or plan to report progress in each area divided by the total number of schools in each state that responded to the 1998 or 1999 follow-up survey. The number of schools in the last column reflects the number of schools that responded to the 1998 or 1999 follow-up survey, not necessarily the total number of schools in that state. Of the 534, 9 schools in 6 states (District of Columbia, Delaware, Hawaii, Kansas, Rhode Island, and Pennsylvania) are not displayed in the table because each state has 3 or fewer schools that provided information about external accountability and reporting and the percentages are not meaningful. The "Total" row includes data from all 27 of the charter states.

Percentage of a Selected Sample of Charter Schools That Made a Report or were Planning to Make a Report by Reporting Agency



Percentage of a Selected Sample of Charter Schools That Have Reported or Plan to Report on School Goals by State

	Reporting Agency							Number of schools
	Chartering agency	Private funders	Parents	Community/General public	School governing board	State DOE	Report to 5 constituents	
	Percentage of schools (%)							
Total	92.1	32.9	88.8	61.2	95.7	70.2	44.0	534
Alaska	72.7	18.2	90.9	72.7	90.9	72.7	63.6	11
Arizona	93.3	29.7	89.4	62.5	96.2	78.6	46.5	105
California	89.7	20.2	90.8	55.2	95.9	26.0	17.9	98
Colorado	95.5	48.8	95.5	68.2	97.7	64.3	45.2	44
Connecticut	100.0	50.0	87.5	85.7	100.0	87.5	85.7	8
Florida	96.4	21.4	85.7	67.9	96.4	100.0	53.6	28
Georgia	100.0	31.3	82.4	82.4	100.0	94.1	82.4	17
Illinois	100.0	60.0	100.0	80.0	100.0	100.0	80.0	5
Louisiana	100.0	33.3	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	6
Massachusetts	100.0	57.1	100.0	76.2	90.5	81.0	61.9	21
Michigan	97.6	42.5	93.8	65.4	100.0	81.3	55.1	82
Minnesota	90.9	42.9	90.9	63.6	95.5	95.5	50.0	22
New Jersey	80.0	40.0	60.0	0.0	80.0	100.0	0.0	5
New Mexico	100.0	25.0	75.0	25.0	100.0	100.0	25.0	4
North Carolina	69.6	30.4	78.3	39.1	91.3	82.6	30.4	23
Pennsylvania	100.0	75.0	25.0	25.0	100.0	100.0	25.0	4
Texas	85.2	48.1	88.9	51.9	96.3	84.6	34.6	27
Wisconsin	93.3	6.7	73.3	80.0	73.3	78.6	50.0	15

ACCOUNTABILITY AND STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Charter schools are held accountable for the achievement of their students. Some charter legislation speaks specifically of improving student achievement as a goal for charter schools; nearly every charter school used standardized assessments to measure student achievement and most used other nonstandardized assessments as well. More than one-third of the charter schools used seven or more different types of assessments to measure student achievement and gauge progress toward school goals.

- Typically, schools use the results of standardized tests for accountability purposes. In 1998–99, nearly every charter school used standardized assessments of student achievement (96 percent), though a higher percentage of charter schools used norm-referenced assessments (86 percent) than criterion-referenced assessments (62 percent).
- The results in 1998–99 are similar to prior years' results showing that assessment methods are generally consistent across newly created and pre-existing schools. The assessment methods with the most variation (about 10 percent)—performance assessments, parent satisfaction surveys, student interviews or surveys, and behavioral indicators—were used by a greater percentage of pre-existing public than newly created or pre-existing private schools.
- The majority of charter schools also used nonstandardized assessments. Charter schools measured student achievement through student demonstrations of their work (89 percent), student portfolios (81 percent), and performance assessments (74 percent). Charter schools used parent surveys (83 percent), behavioral indicators (76 percent), and student surveys (71 percent) to measure progress toward other school goals.
- The use of assessments was generally consistent across states. In every state except Ohio, at least 70 percent of charter schools used five or more methods of assessing student achievement and progress toward school goals. Every school in Kansas used at least five of the seven types of assessments.
- Over one-third (34 percent) of charter schools used all seven types of assessment to measure student achievement and progress toward other school goals. This pattern varied by type of charter school with a higher percentage of pre-existing public schools (45 percent) than newly created (32 percent) or pre-existing private (29 percent) using seven different methods of assessment.

Estimated Percentage of Schools Using Various Assessment Methods

Type of assessment	Percentage of schools (%)	Charter school creation status		
		Newly created (%)	Pre-existing public (%)	Pre-existing private (%)
Standardized assessments	96.4	96.3	97.1	95.9
Criterion-referenced assessments	62.1	61.5	61.8	66.7
Norm-referenced assessments	86.2	84.9	88.8	91.4
Performance assessments	73.5	71.4	82.7	72.4
Student portfolios	81.4	82.0	80.3	79.6
Student demonstrations of their work	89.0	89.9	84.4	90.8
Parent satisfaction surveys	82.5	82.1	86.7	77.6
Student interviews or surveys	71.2	69.0	79.8	71.4
Behavioral indicators	75.6	74.3	83.2	71.4

NOTE: These tables draw on all 975 open charter schools that responded to the survey. These items have been asked on both the new and follow-up surveys and the results reflect the most recent school responses. In 1999, 857 schools answered the new or follow-up survey and 118 schools' responses are drawn from 1998 results. Standardized assessments refer to either norm-referenced or criterion-referenced assessments. The more specific questions about whether the standardized assessments were criterion-referenced or norm-referenced were asked about only in 1999, and data are based on responses from 857 open charter schools.

Across-State Comparison of Estimated Percentage of Schools Using Various Assessments

States with 4 or more schools (Number of schools)	Standardized assessments (%)	Criterion-referenced assessments (%)	Norm-referenced assessments (%)	Performance assessments (%)	Student portfolios (%)	Student demonstrations of their work (%)	Parent satisfaction surveys (%)	Student interviews or surveys (%)	Behavioral indicators (%)	Use at least 5 methods (%)
Total percentage	91.8	62.1	86.2	73.4	81.5	89.1	82.4	71.3	75.7	82.0
Alaska (16)	100.0	46.7	100.0	68.8	81.3	93.8	75.0	75.0	37.5	75.0
Arizona (166)	98.2	73.9	95.5	80.1	85.5	93.4	75.9	63.9	72.3	83.2
California (149)	96.6	62.3	91.0	79.9	91.3	87.2	87.2	77.9	74.5	86.6
Colorado (59)	98.3	73.1	94.2	79.7	72.9	88.1	84.7	57.6	83.1	78.0
Connecticut (16)	93.8	53.8	76.9	50.0	87.5	93.8	81.3	75.0	81.3	81.2
Delaware (4)	100.0	100.0	75.0	100.0	50.0	75.0	100.0	75.0	100.0	75.0
District of Col. (15)	93.3	66.7	93.3	66.7	100.0	86.7	60.0	60.0	86.7	86.6
Florida (65)	96.9	55.6	88.9	73.8	87.7	87.7	75.4	63.1	69.2	80.0
Georgia (25)	100.0	33.3	100.0	80.0	84.0	100.0	96.0	84.0	76.0	92.0
Illinois (12)	100.0	75.0	100.0	83.3	66.7	83.3	75.0	75.0	83.3	83.3
Kansas (15)	100.0	73.3	73.3	93.3	86.7	100.0	86.7	100.0	80.0	100.0
Louisiana (11)	100.0	81.8	81.8	81.8	72.7	81.8	90.9	72.7	90.9	91.9
Massachusetts (34)	100.0	62.1	89.7	70.6	79.4	82.4	91.2	61.8	79.4	85.3
Michigan (124)	95.2	59.2	83.7	66.1	72.6	90.3	82.3	70.2	73.4	79.0
Minnesota (37)	94.6	66.7	84.8	78.4	81.1	89.2	91.9	83.8	78.4	83.8
New Jersey (26)	84.6	40.0	76.0	61.5	76.9	84.6	96.2	80.8	88.5	80.8
New Mexico (5)	100.0	60.0	40.0	80.0	60.0	100.0	60.0	100.0	100.0	80.0
North Carolina (52)	98.1	45.8	64.6	65.4	69.2	82.7	82.7	67.3	67.3	71.2
Ohio (7)	85.7	71.4	71.4	42.9	85.7	85.7	57.1	71.4	71.4	57.2
Pennsylvania (23)	95.7	43.5	73.9	78.3	82.6	95.7	78.3	73.9	73.9	91.4
South Carolina (4)	100.0	25.0	100.0	75.0	50.0	75.0	75.0	75.0	75.0	75.0
Texas (77)	97.4	69.3	82.7	64.9	77.9	88.3	83.1	74.0	80.5	81.8
Wisconsin (26)	80.8	62.5	62.5	57.7	88.5	80.8	88.5	84.6	84.6	73.1

Percentage of Schools Using Multiple Assessment Methods

Number of different assessments used ¹	Percentage of schools (%)	Charter school creation status		
		Newly created (%)	Pre-existing public (%)	Pre-existing private (%)
One to three	5.9	5.8	4.6	9.1
Four to six	60.1	62.2	50.3	62.2
Seven	33.8	32.0	44.5	28.6

¹ The multiple assessment methods in this table and the preceding table refer to the seven different types of assessment common to the new and follow-up surveys including standardized assessments, performance assessments, student portfolios, student demonstrations, parent surveys, student interviews or surveys, and behavioral indicators.

APPENDIX: RESPONSE RATE BY STATE

Column 2 in the table below shows the total number of survey responses on any one of the seven administered surveys by state. The total number of charter schools in column 3 reflects the number of charter schools open at the time of the 1999 survey administration.

State	Survey Responses	Total Charter Schools	Percent Response (%)
Alaska	16	17	94
Arizona	166	180	92
California	151	154	98
Colorado	59	60	98
Connecticut	16	16	100
Delaware	4	4	100
District of Columbia	15	19	79
Florida	65	72	90
Georgia	25	27	93
Hawaii	2	2	100
Idaho	2	2	100
Illinois	12	13	92
Kansas	15	15	100
Louisiana	11	11	100
Massachusetts	34	34	100
Michigan	124	131	95
Minnesota	37	38	97
Mississippi	1	1	100
North Carolina	52	56	93
New Jersey	26	30	87
New Mexico	5	5	100
Ohio	7	15	47
Pennsylvania	23	31	74
Rhode Island	2	2	100
South Carolina	4	5	80
Texas	78	109	72
Wisconsin	26	29	90

The 1999 Florida Statutes

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EDUCATION - Functions of State Educational Agencies

229.0537 Opportunity Scholarship Program.--

(1) FINDINGS AND INTENT.--The purpose of this section is to provide enhanced opportunity for students in this state to gain the knowledge and skills necessary for postsecondary education, a technical education, or the world of work. The Legislature recognizes that the voters of the State of Florida, in the November 1998 general election, amended s. 1, Art. IX of the Florida Constitution so as to make education a paramount duty of the state. The Legislature finds that the State Constitution requires the state to provide the opportunity to obtain a high-quality education. The Legislature further finds that a student should not be compelled, against the wishes of the student's parent or guardian, to remain in a school found by the state to be failing for 2 years in a 4-year period. The Legislature shall make available opportunity scholarships in order to give parents and guardians the opportunity for their children to attend a public school that is performing satisfactorily or to attend an eligible private school when the parent or guardian chooses to apply the equivalent of the public education funds generated by his or her child to the cost of tuition in the eligible private school as provided in paragraph (6)(a). Eligibility of a private school shall include the control and accountability requirements that, coupled with the exercise of parental choice, are reasonably necessary to secure the educational public purpose, as delineated in subsection (4).

(2) OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP ELIGIBILITY.--A public school student's parent or guardian may request and receive from the state an opportunity scholarship for the child to enroll in and attend a private school in accordance with the provisions of this section if:

(a) By assigned school attendance area or by special assignment, the student has spent the prior school year in attendance at a public school that has been designated pursuant to s. 229.57 as performance grade category "F," failing to make adequate progress, and that has had two school years in a 4-year period of such low performance, and the student's attendance occurred during a school year in which such designation was in effect; or the parent or guardian of a student who has been in attendance elsewhere in the public school system or who is entering kindergarten or first grade has been notified that the student has been assigned to such school for the next school year;

(b) The parent or guardian has obtained acceptance for admission of the student to a private school eligible for the program pursuant to subsection (4), and has notified the Department of Education and the school district of the request for an opportunity scholarship no later than July 1 of the first year in which the student intends to use the scholarship.

The provisions of this section shall not apply to a student who is enrolled in a school operating for the purpose of providing educational services to youth in Department of Juvenile Justice commitment programs. For purposes of continuity of educational choice, the opportunity scholarship shall remain in force until the student returns to a public school or, if the student chooses to attend a private school the highest grade of which is grade 8, until the student matriculates to high school and the public high school to which the student is assigned is an

accredited school with a performance grade category designation of "C" or better. However, at any time upon reasonable notice to the Department of Education and the school district, the student's parent or guardian may remove the student from the private school and place the student in a public school, as provided in subparagraph (3)(a)2.

(3) SCHOOL DISTRICT OBLIGATIONS.--

(a) A school district shall, for each student enrolled in or assigned to a school that has been designated as performance grade category "F" for 2 school years in a 4-year period:

1. Timely notify the parent or guardian of the student as soon as such designation is made of all options available pursuant to this section; and

2. Offer that student's parent or guardian an opportunity to enroll the student in the public school within the district that has been designated by the state pursuant to s. 229.57 as a school performing higher than that in which the student is currently enrolled or to which the student has been assigned, but not less than performance grade category "C." For purposes of identifying higher performing public schools eligible for parental choice for the 1999-2000 school year, school performance grade category designations for the 1998-1999 school year shall be the equivalent of the corresponding performance level I-V specified in state board rule at the time this act becomes a law. Levels I through V shall correspond to school performance grade categories "F" through "A," respectively. The parent or guardian is not required to accept this offer in lieu of requesting a state opportunity scholarship to a private school. The opportunity to continue attending the higher performing public school shall remain in force until the student graduates from high school.

(b) The parent or guardian of a student enrolled in or assigned to a school that has been designated performance grade category "F" for 2 school years in a 4-year period may choose as an alternative to enroll the student in and transport the student to a higher-performing public school that has available space in an adjacent school district, and that school district shall accept the student and report the student for purposes of the district's funding pursuant to the Florida Education Finance Program.

(c) For students in the district who are participating in the state Opportunity Scholarship Program, the district shall provide locations and times to take all statewide assessments required pursuant to s. 229.57.

(d) Students with disabilities who are eligible to receive services from the school district under federal or state law, and who participate in this program, remain eligible to receive services from the school district as provided by federal or state law.

(e) If for any reason a qualified private school is not available for the student or if the parent or guardian chooses to request that the student be enrolled in the higher performing public school, rather than choosing to request the state opportunity scholarship, transportation costs to the higher performing public school shall be the responsibility of the school district. The district may utilize state categorical transportation funds or state-appropriated public school choice incentive funds for this purpose.

(4) PRIVATE SCHOOL ELIGIBILITY.--To be eligible to participate in the opportunity scholarship program, a private school must be a Florida private

school, may be sectarian or nonsectarian, and must:

(a) Demonstrate fiscal soundness by being in operation for one school year or provide the Department of Education with a statement by a certified public accountant confirming that the private school desiring to participate is insured and the owner or owners have sufficient capital or credit to operate the school for the upcoming year serving the number of students anticipated with expected revenues from tuition and other sources that may be reasonably expected. In lieu of such a statement, a surety bond or letter of credit for the amount equal to the opportunity scholarship funds for any quarter may be filed with the department.

(b) Except for the first year of implementation, notify the Department of Education and the school district in whose service area the school is located of its intent to participate in the program under this section by May 1 of the school year preceding the school year in which it intends to participate. The notice shall specify the grade levels and services that the private school has available for the opportunity scholarship program.

(c) Comply with the antidiscrimination provisions of 42 U.S.C. s. 2000d.

(d) Meet state and local health and safety laws and codes.

(e) Accept scholarship students on an entirely random and religious-neutral basis without regard to the student's past academic history; however, the private school may give preference in accepting applications to siblings of students who have already been accepted on a random and religious-neutral basis.

(f) Be subject to the instruction, curriculum, and attendance criteria adopted by an appropriate nonpublic school accrediting body and be academically accountable to the parent or guardian for meeting the educational needs of the student. The private school must furnish a school profile which includes student performance.

(g) Employ or contract with teachers who hold a baccalaureate or higher degree, or have at least 3 years of teaching experience in public or private schools, or have special skills, knowledge, or expertise that qualifies them to provide instruction in subjects taught.

(h) Comply with all state statutes relating to private schools.

(i) Accept as full tuition and fees the amount provided by the state for each student.

(j) Agree not to compel any student attending the private school on an opportunity scholarship to profess a specific ideological belief, to pray, or to worship.

(k) Adhere to the tenets of its published disciplinary procedures prior to the expulsion of any opportunity scholarship student.

(5) OBLIGATION OF PROGRAM PARTICIPATION.--

(a) Any student participating in the opportunity scholarship program must remain in attendance throughout the school year, unless excused by the school for illness or other good cause, and must comply fully with the school's code of conduct.

(b) The parent or guardian of each student participating in the opportunity scholarship program must comply fully with the private school's parental involvement requirements, unless excused by the school for illness or other good cause.

(c) The parent or guardian shall ensure that the student participating in the opportunity scholarship program takes all statewide assessments required pursuant to s. 229.57.

(d) A participant who fails to comply with this subsection shall forfeit the opportunity scholarship.

(6) OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP FUNDING AND PAYMENT.--

(a)1. The maximum opportunity scholarship granted for an eligible student shall be a calculated amount equivalent to the base student allocation multiplied by the appropriate cost factor for the educational program that would have been provided for the student in the district school to which he or she was assigned, multiplied by the district cost differential. In addition, the calculated amount shall include the per-student share of instructional materials funding, technology funding, and other categorical funds as provided for this purpose in the General Appropriations Act. The amount of the opportunity scholarship shall be the calculated amount or the amount of the private school's tuition and fees, whichever is less. Fees eligible shall include textbook fees, lab fees, and other fees related to instruction, including transportation. The district shall report all students who are attending a private school under this program. The students attending private schools on opportunity scholarships shall be reported separately from those students reported for purposes of the Florida Education Finance Program. The public or private school that provides services to students with disabilities shall receive the weighted funding for such services at the appropriate funding level consistent with the provisions of s. 236.025.

2. For purposes of calculating the opportunity scholarship, a student will be eligible for the amount of the appropriate basic cost factor if:

a. The student currently participates in a Group I program funded at the basic cost factor and is not subsequently identified as having a disability; or

b. The student currently participates in a Group II program and the parent has chosen a private school that does not provide the additional services funded by the Group II program.

3. Following annual notification on July 1 of the number of participants, the Department of Education shall transfer from each school district's appropriated funds the calculated amount from the Florida Education Finance Program and authorized categorical accounts to a separate account for the Opportunity Scholarship Program for quarterly disbursement to the parents or guardians of participating students.

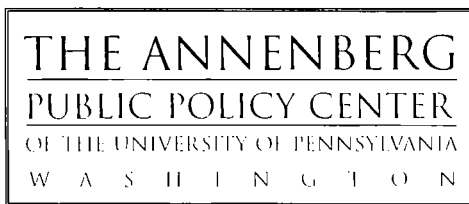
(b) Upon proper documentation reviewed and approved by the Department of Education, the Comptroller shall make opportunity scholarship payments in four equal amounts no later than September 1, November 1, February 1, and April 1 of each academic year in which the opportunity scholarship is in force. The initial payment shall be made after Department of Education verification of admission acceptance, and subsequent payments shall be made upon verification of continued enrollment and attendance at the private school. Payment must be by individual warrant made payable to the student's parent or guardian and mailed

by the Department of Education to the private school of the parent's or guardian's choice, and the parent or guardian shall restrictively endorse the warrant to the private school.

(7) **LIABILITY.**--No liability shall arise on the part of the state based on any grant or use of an opportunity scholarship.

(8) **RULES.**--The State Board of Education may adopt rules pursuant to ss. 120.536(1) and 120.54 to implement the provisions of this section. Rules shall include penalties for noncompliance with subsections (3) and (5). However, the inclusion of eligible private schools within options available to Florida public school students does not expand the regulatory authority of the state, its officers, or any school district to impose any additional regulation of private schools beyond those reasonably necessary to enforce requirements expressly set forth in this section.

History.--s. 2, ch. 99-398.

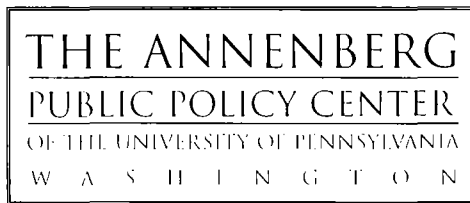


SCHOOL VOUCHERS: BREAKING THE STALEMATE
A new kind of dialogue

Annenberg Public Policy Center, University of Pennsylvania
Tuesday, February 29, 2000 -- 9 am to 12 noon, National Press Club, Holeman Room,
Washington, DC

Preliminary program outline

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 9 - 9:05 | Welcome – Lorie Slass, Washington Director, Annenberg Public Policy Center. |
| 9:05-9:15 | Breaking the logjam for inner city kids – Matt Miller, Annenberg Public Policy Center Senior Fellow. Author, “A Bold Experiment to Fix City Schools,” <i>The Atlantic Monthly</i> , July 1999 |
| 9:15-10:30 | <i>Panel One: Fresh Voices – The Pro-Voucher Left, The Pro-Equity Right</i>
-Jack Coons, Emeritus Professor of Law, UC Berkeley
-Lisa Graham Keegan, Republican Superintendent of Education for the state of Arizona
-T. Willard Fair, President of the Urban League, Miami |
| 10:30-10:45 | Break |
| 10:45-12 | <i>Is a Grand Bargain Between Left and Right Possible?</i>
<i>(I.e., Take several big cities, raise spending 20%, but only via voucher program; other options)</i>
-Sandra Feldman, President, American Federation of Teachers
-Lamar Alexander, former Secretary of Education in the Bush Administration
-Clint Bolick, Institute for Justice
-Andy Rotherham, Special Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy |
| 12 noon | Brief wrap up - next steps |



SCHOOL VOUCHERS: BREAKING THE STALEMATE

LAMAR ALEXANDER was Secretary of Education under President George Bush, where he spearheaded an effort to enact voucher test at the federal level called the G.I. Bill for Kids. The plan would have spent \$500 million in new federal dollars to give the parents of half a million low-and middle-income children each a \$1,000 voucher to use at the schools of their choice. Alexander is also the former Governor of Tennessee and a two-time candidate for President.

CLINT BOLICK is vice president and director of litigation at the Institute for Justice, which he co-founded in 1991. Bolick is a leader in the litigation effort to defend school choice programs, and recently won a landmark ruling in the Wisconsin Supreme Court upholding the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. He has also successfully defended school choice programs before the state supreme courts of Arizona and Ohio and is currently defending choice programs in Florida and Illinois..

JOHN E. COONS, Emeritus Professor of Law, UC Berkeley, has spearheaded constitutional challenges to school finance inequity since the 1960s and has called for progressively designed vouchers as part of the answer to that problem. Professor Coons has coauthored several books on the issue of school choice, including Private Wealth and Public Education, Education by Choice, Scholarships for Children, and, most recently, Making School Choice Work for all Families (1999).

T. WILLIARD FAIR is President and Chief Executive Officer of the Urban League of Greater Miami and a vocal supporter of the Florida voucher program. He has contributed articles to the *Miami Herald*, *Miami Magazine*, and *Tropic Magazine*, has hosted both radio and television programs, and is listed in *Who's Who Among Black Americans*.

SANDRA FELDMAN is president of the million member American Federation of Teachers and an outspoken critic of voucher programs. Prior to joining AFT, Feldman was president of the United Federation of Teachers in New York City, the largest union local in the United States. She has been appointed to numerous commissions and task forces tackling educational, economic, child-welfare, labor and other social issues. Feldman was selected as one of New York City's "75 Most Influential Women" by *Crain's New York Business*.

LISA GRAHAM KEEGAN is the Superintendent of Education for the state of Arizona. She has called the property tax basis for school finance is unfair, and argues that conservatives need to support financial equity in exchange for choice. She has also has presided over growth in charter schools in Arizona. Keegan formerly chaired the Education Committee in the Arizona House of Representatives, authoring much of the reform legislation she now oversees. In 1999, she was presented with the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation Award for Leadership in Educational Choice.

MATT MILLER is a senior fellow at the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. Recently Matt authored an article for the Atlantic Monthly entitled "A Bold Experiment to Fix City Schools." Miller is a nationally syndicated columnist, and contributor to the New Republic, the Atlantic Monthly, among others. He is also a commentator for National Public Radio's "Morning Edition" and co-host of the political talk show "Left Right and Center" on KCRW-FM in Santa Monica.

ANDREW ROTHERHAM is the Special Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy. He coordinates education policy activities at the White House, leads the White House Domestic Policy Council education team, and advises President Clinton on educational issues. Rotherham works with policymakers in academia, government, and the non-profit sector to develop and advance policy initiatives aimed at raising standards and student achievement, increasing accountability in education, and increasing flexibility and innovation in public schools.



Hugh B. Price
President
National Urban League

***The Aim of Education Standards:
Victors, Not Victims***

*The National Press Club Newsmakers Luncheon
Washington, DC
December 10, 1999*

I am deeply honored to address the Newsmakers Luncheon of the National Press Club. When I was growing up in Washington, DC in the early 1950s, I dreamt of becoming a major league baseball player, never a newsmaker. World War II seemed like yesterday. The New Millennium was a distant abstraction. Now the imminence of these epoch events in our lives has been reversed.

A brave new world of opportunity awaits African Americans, provided our youngsters are adequately prepared. This was a banner year for our people. We saw not one, but four Jackie Robinsons finally smash the corporate glass ceiling – Frank Raines at Fannie Mae, Lloyd Ward at Maytag, Barry Rand at Avis and, soon, Ken Chenault at American Express.

The voracious labor market has driven our jobless rate down to record levels. Out-of-wedlock births reached a forty-year low. Our youngsters are completing high school at the same rate as whites.

That's the base of impressive accomplishment upon which we can build. And build we must because the skills needed to succeed in the century ahead will be more sophisticated than ever before. Like it or not, capitalism today is unforgiving and shows little mercy for laggards – be they nations, ethnic groups or regions of the world.

High Stakes/Huge Mistakes

America's determination to prevail in the global economic game provides the impetus for the widespread effort to impose higher academic standards on school systems and students. The impulse is perfectly understandable. But the execution thus far has been thoughtless and heartless toward low-income and minority children.

Over the last decade and a half, urban schools in search of the Holy Grail of high achievement have experimented with everything from top-down to bottom-up reform. Now states and districts are trying "tough love" – loftier academic standards and high stakes tests.

The National Urban League does not fear holding our children to high academic expectations. We know from research and practical experience in real schools that our children can achieve on par with other children. Professor Linda Darling-Hammond of Stanford documented this fact in her important book, *The Right to Learn*.

But to have a fair shot at succeeding, the education our children receive must be on par as well. That is precisely the problem with the "tough love" approach that many states have implemented with carefree abandon.

At the National Education Summit three years ago, I asked whether the governors and corporate leaders who were so obsessed back then with tougher standards and high stakes tests, intended to focus as well on what it takes to help children meet the higher expectations.

My question literally was ruled out of order. Now the chickens are coming home to roost. States thought they could raise the bar without investing in extra instruction and better teaching. School systems were browbeaten into imposing higher standards even though they knew their schools weren't up to the task.

When the 1999 National Education Summit convened this fall, some governors confessed that they hadn't yet invested in the training programs for teachers and the intensified instruction needed to enable youngsters to meet the loftier standards. One big-city superintendent told me just last week that his district can't keep its math teachers out of the clutches of computer companies. How on earth are his students supposed to meet a tougher math standard?

At the risk of proclaiming "I told you so," states and urban districts today face an educational and political fiasco that they should have seen coming:

- In New York City, 77 percent of 8th graders failed to meet the state's math standard. Sixty-five percent missed the mark in English.
- The LA Unified School District probably won't end social promotion as planned because 40 percent of its pupils would be held back, including two-thirds of its 8th graders.
- Even though Massachusetts has just lowered its passing grade, estimates are that 80 percent of Latinos and blacks, not to mention 40 percent of whites and Asian Americans still won't qualify to graduate from high school.

As a result, school districts are facing withering criticism from enraged parents and the prospect of overcrowded schools stuffed to the closets and kitchens with repeaters.

So they are reassessing their unswerving commitment to tougher standards. As Jerome Murphy of Harvard observes, "Backpedaling is smart when you are heading over a cliff."

And none too soon, I hasten to add, because study after study shows that tough love often backfires. Holding students back "...actually contributes to greater academic failure, higher levels of dropping out, and greater behavioral difficulties."

So the big push to end social promotion is a day late and a dollar short. The truth is that school systems have been holding youngsters back for years. The imposition of high standards should be guided by sound pedagogical practice, not reckless political expediency.

There's no way to educate urban children on the cheap. States and school districts must invest in quality pre-school and K-12 education up front, instead of imposing flashy quick fixes that frequently do more harm than good.

Having criticized the implementation process, let me be clear about where we stand on standards themselves. We don't advocate abandoning standards.

Use them as a diagnostic tool to gauge where schools and children are versus where we want them to be. Use them to craft and require aggressive school improvement plans. Use the standards to hold the grown-ups accountable before we start picking on the children.

Rev. Jesse Jackson has sparked an important debate about zero tolerance in meting out school discipline. Zero tolerance flows two ways. Violent and disruptive behavior undermine school safety in the near term. Lousy education can destroy hope for an entire lifetime.

So to those who are infatuated with zero tolerance, I say it's also time for:

- Zero tolerance for politicians whose appropriations for public education don't match their pious pronouncements about high-standards and tough love;
- Zero tolerance for school boards that preside year after year over low-performing schools;
- Zero tolerance for principals who run schools that chronically perform below par; and
- Zero tolerance for teachers who lack the qualifications and the belief in our youngsters' abilities to lift them to high levels of achievement.

It's time to cease and desist imposing high stakes consequences on kids until states and school districts demonstrate convincingly that they have a credible game plan in place to boost student achievement.

I implore the press to look past the catchy slogans. Ask hard questions of the politicians and educators who espouse high standards and high stakes tests. For instance:

- Exactly what is their game plan and timetable to help low-income and minority children clear the higher bar?
- What instructional strategy do they intend to institute? Is it substantiated by evidence? How long does experience indicate it will take to make a difference?
- Is a year-round supplemental strategy in place, such as after-school tutorials and Saturday academies?
- Is there a concrete plan to provide every child with a qualified teacher? How long, realistically, will this take?
- Is high quality professional development for principals and teachers also in place?
- Are no-nonsense mechanisms in place to hold the educators and administrators accountable for the success or failure of their pupils?
- Have the state and school district firmly committed the multi-year funding needed to implement these strategies aimed at boosting student achievement?

For the sake of the children, don't let the adults who pay lip service to high standards off the hook. It's reckless to barrel further down the path of high standards and high stakes tests without a coherent plan to improve the caliber of education that youngsters receive before holding them strictly accountable.

It's downright cruel -- and counterproductive -- to dash the dreams of youngsters who've finally climbed aboard the education train and are finishing high school at a record clip.

Real-World Standards

The rush to impose high standards begs the question of where they should be pegged to begin with. I was startled to hear one governor at this fall's National Education Summit confess that in the haste to get tough, his state had given less thought than it should have to the actual content of the standards.

In the latest issue of the National Urban League's *The State of Black America*, we noted that high stakes tests seldom reflect the skills needed to succeed in the labor market or move on to the next tier of higher education, much less what's actually taught in school.

High stakes tests shouldn't resemble Harvard entrance exams, encyclopedia trivia contests or bell-curved tests that overplay the significance of small differences in test scores.

It isn't anti-intellectual to acknowledge the reality that many Americans never obtain college degrees. What's the point of placing the bar for graduation so high that it denies high school diplomas to conscientious youngsters who nevertheless aren't college bound?

What's the point of writing off future truck drivers, deliverymen, short order cooks, chefs, train conductors, newsstand operators, construction workers and artisans as unworthy of high school diplomas?

Kate Maloy of the University of Pittsburgh put it best:

"The purpose of every school...is to educate children for what lies ahead of them — further education for some, jobs for most, citizenship, somewhere, for all."

Standards and tests should serve, not distort, this fundamental objective of public education.

Our Achievement Campaign

I'm proud to report that the National Urban League movement is doing its part to spread the gospel that "Achievement Matters". In partnership with the Congress of National Black Churches and two dozen sororities, fraternities and civic groups, we've launched the Campaign for African-American Achievement.

Together we've designated September as Achievement Month. Last September 19th, more than 50,000 youngsters and parents participated in our events nationwide to celebrate children who are doing the right thing and striving to do well in school.

A year ago, CNBC and the League launched a national achievers society for youngsters who excel in school. I think of it as our national achievement gang, complete with its own rituals and regalia.

Already we've inducted more than 5,000 academic stars and challenged them to spread the gospel to their siblings and buddies that achievement is cool.

In Columbia SC, the Urban League joined forces with State Farm Insurance Company to stage an SAT awareness rally. Can you imagine a more boring subject? If you had asked me, I'd have said teenagers would avoid this event like the plague.

J. T. McLawhorn, our CEO in Columbia, originally hoped to attract a couple hundred kids to the rally. Guess what? Seven hundred showed up. Why? Because they also know achievement is cool and because they're determined to get into college.

So our message that "Achievement Matters" is spreading. But we have lots more work ahead. We've called upon our churches, civic clubs, sororities and fraternities to make certain that the children in their own flock are squarely on the achievement page.

We want parents and caregivers to insist that their children are taught by qualified teachers and take challenging courses. We will preach our gospel of achievement until it permeates the consciousness of every parent, caregiver and child in our community.

The Folly of Vouchers

I recognize that parents who are fed up with lousy public schools find vouchers alluring. Their impatience is perfectly understandable. I cannot fault them for seeking the best for their children.

But that doesn't make vouchers a sound public policy. For starters, the evidence on whether vouchers actually improve academic achievement is mixed.

Advocates of vouchers argue that competition is healthy for public schools. But the rules of competition are rigged against them. Private and parochial schools enjoy decisive advantages over public schools when it comes to admissions and discipline.

What's more, public schools must report their results. Non-public schools do not. In fact, in my state they fiercely oppose the effort to require their students to pass the New York State Regents exam in order to graduate.

How cynical it would be if, in the name of education accountability, we allowed vouchers and education savings accounts to shift precious public resources to nonpublic schools that are unaccountable for their academic results.

The Goal: Successful Schools, Not "Systemic" Reform

Declaring that vouchers are misguided public policy isn't tantamount to saying that the performance of urban public schools is satisfactory. Since 95 percent of our youngsters attend public schools, what's urgently needed is radical reform that structures public education so that its sole raison d'être is student success. So that, as the Army would say, urban schools can be all that they can be.

To be fair, some school districts are reporting gains in reading and math scores. That's welcome news because it helps restore confidence in urban schools. But inching ahead won't prepare our children adequately for the unforgiving world that awaits them after graduation from high school.

After a generation of urban school reform, we know there are hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of high performing schools serving poor and minority youngsters all across the country. According to the Education Trust, many of these schools even outshine their suburban counterparts on state exams.

I agree with New York State Education Commissioner, Rick Mills, who says there are enough examples of highly successful urban schools so that there's no longer any acceptable excuse for school failure.

Yet try as big-city school boards and administrators might, few if any urban districts can honestly claim that they educate the vast majority of their kids remotely up to their potential.

The scope and pace of progress is unacceptable and the reform prescriptions in vogue these days are too feeble for the task ahead.

Although educators clearly know how to create schools that enable low-income and minority youngsters to achieve at very high levels, no one has figured out how to create successful urban school systems.

So it's time to stop trying to reform public school "systems" per se. I say we concentrate instead on creating successful public schools throughout the system.

According to the legendary public school educator Anthony Alvarado, the sole focus of the educational enterprise should be student learning. Everything else, he argues, is "details." "A typical educational system is so top-heavy with details that learning can suffocate under the tonnage."

The thrust of federal, state and local education policy from this day forward should be to remove the tonnage so that educators can practice their profession and children can realize their academic potential.

Here is the National Urban League's reform agenda aimed at transforming all urban schools into high performing schools:

1. Assert no-nonsense state leadership – and responsibility

Urban and rural children are caught in an unconscionable trap between lofty standards and lousy schools. I say the trap is unconstitutional as well. Why? Because it's the states that set the standards. It's the states that bear ultimate responsibility for low-performing public schools. It's the states that tolerate stark differences along ethnic and socioeconomic lines in school facilities, academic tracking and teacher quality.

States claim they cannot afford to invest more in urban and rural schools. That's baloney. They are squandering billions of dollars annually to incarcerate thousands of nonviolent offenders who aren't a menace to anyone.

Conventional wisdom holds that public education is a local responsibility. I don't buy that argument either. Chances are that children raised on farms in Idaho will manufacture Saturn automobiles in Tennessee. Youngsters reared in Chattanooga will become investment bankers on Wall Street.

Society has a compelling interest in the quality of America's high school graduates that justifies aggressive leadership by states and by the federal government.

No longer should poor and minority children be held hostage to communities with low tax bases, weak commitments to quality education, and skinflint taxpayers who oppose providing adequate support for local schools.

No longer should the untapped potential of our young people be stunted by unqualified teachers, outdated books, overcrowded classrooms and crumbling facilities.

Having imposed high standards on all children, the states now have the moral, financial and legal obligation to guarantee high quality education for every child.

2. Professionalize the teaching profession

The hidden scandal behind those lousy test scores is the poor quality of teachers in many urban schools. After all, as one state education official said: "Students cannot learn what teachers don't know."

Thousands of eminently qualified and highly motivated teachers do a marvelous job in urban schools. But the undeniable reality is that in New York City, for instance, the schools with the lowest scores on the state exams have the highest percentage of uncertified teachers.

These schools also have more teachers who barely made it past the state certification exams. Compounding the problem is the fact that surrounding suburbs pay starting teachers 25 percent more.

Given the projected shortage of principals and teachers due to retirement, plus the urgent need to increase teacher quality in urban and rural schools serving low-income children, the compensation offered education must be improved dramatically in order to create a strong demand for these jobs.

One thing that would help is to increase salaries to levels comparable with other professions. If education truly is as important to society as we say, why not offer young graduates with masters' degrees the same initial salaries as young MBAs, attorneys and engineers? Since most urban and rural districts are strapped financially, the federal and state governments should take the lead in financing the economic incentives needed to attract stronger educators to these school districts.

The critically important quid pro quo for paying educators like real professionals is that they in turn must relinquish those contract-based protections that other professionals do not enjoy. I speak of the time-clock mindset, tenure, seniority, overtime, guaranteed class size, length of class periods and other provisions that severely impede the ability of principals to run their schools in the best interests of children.

Unions should be allowed to bargain district-wide, indeed state-wide, over issues like salaries and fringe benefits. But, subject to appropriate oversight and input from faculty, principals should make key personnel decisions, such as whom to hire and for how long, as well as the standards for measuring staff performance and the consequences if they fall short.

It isn't realistic politically to expect local school boards to redefine the scope of union agreements this radically. So if governors and state legislators truly are the engines of school improvement that they claim to be, they should muster the political courage to grant school-based officials the authority they need to run their schools in the best interests of the children, not the adults.

3. *Challenging courses for all*

When I was growing up, the teachers in my schools focused on educating a small proportion of pupils well. The economy needed a few managers and lots of laborers and factory workers. As a matter of equity and economic necessity, we expect all students today to meet lofty standards.

Yet our school systems are mired in obsolete and elitist thinking about which students are capable of achieving at high levels. It's as though deep in their hearts, they believe the thoroughly discredited thesis of that borderline racist book, *The Bell Curve*.

How can black and Latino children possibly meet exacting academic standards when they're systemically excluded from rigorous courses geared to those standards?

According to the Education Trust, high scoring white and Asian students are twice as likely as high scoring black and Latino youngsters to be assigned to college prep courses. Those miserable test results in New York City have served also to expose the widespread pattern of tracking young minority children into basic and special education courses.

School districts must cease these discriminatory educational practices towards African-American and other children of color. Washington should withhold federal assistance from school systems that:

- track African-American and other children of color into dead-end, non-college preparatory courses;
- place disproportionate numbers of such youngsters in special education classes; and
- hold back disproportionate numbers of such children.

4. *"Charterize" all urban schools*

Successful urban schools typically are led by highly motivated principals and teachers who are on a mission. They set high standards for themselves and their students. They do not shun accountability. In fact, they relish it and use it to stay on course.

Many of these educators are mavericks who spend much of their time fending off central office bureaucrats who try to stifle their creativity. These high performing educators cherish their autonomy and flourish because of it.

Every school should enjoy this combination of autonomy and accountability. In my view, that's the essence of charter schools, when they work the way they should. Of course, some charter schools have been launched by well-meaning amateurs and aren't held accountable. That's not what I'm talking about.

I believe existing urban schools should be treated like charter schools. Liberate them from the stifling central office bureaucracy and give them the latitude to operate the way independent secular schools do.

Under the scenario I propose, each school would be overseen by a governing board comprised, say, of local business and community leaders, educators and alumni who view student success as its paramount mission.

The school would be run by a principal, or headmaster, hired by the board. The principal would serve at the pleasure of the board, subject to due process. The principal in turn would assemble the faculty, who would serve at the pleasure of the principal and board, subject again to due process.

The local superintendent would grant each school a revocable contract – or charter -- to operate for ten to fifteen years. The school would be accountable for seeing that, say, 75 percent of its students meet the state's real-world proficiency standards.

If the school meets this standard, it retains its charter, which can be renewed. If the pass rate falls below this threshold, the school would be placed on a watch list and required to come up with an improvement plan.

If after a reasonable period it fails to boost its performance, then the charter can be revoked. In effect, this means that the governing board and faculty responsible for operating the educational enterprise in that building can be replaced, if need be, with a new team. If the school is a hopeless cause because, for instance, it's just too big to work, the facility itself can be shuttered permanently.

Given the public nature of the school, pupils should be chosen via a mix of self-selection (application) and lottery. This will prevent the creation of what are perceived as "loser" schools that are filled with students who weren't chosen by some other school.

The state would allocate an annual amount to each school based on its enrollment. The allocation formula should be sufficiently generous to guarantee small classes, modern facilities and equipment, sufficient supplies, and abundant high quality professional development.

Once each school's allocation is set, the actual utilization should be left entirely to the board and professional staff of each school. In other words, schools should be accountable for how many students they graduate, not for how many gallons of paint they purchase.

5. *The 21st century superintendent – accountability, not operations*

Local school boards and central administrators operate their school systems today. As such they may represent a major source of the "tonnage" that overwhelms the schools.

To cite Anthony Alvarado again, his experience indicates that urban youngsters can learn at high levels. But, as he cautions, "It takes time, continuity, concentration of focus."

Rare is the urban school board – elected or appointed -- that would be considered an asset to the educational process from the perspective of poor and minority children. Superintendents come and go so quickly that they seldom leave a lasting mark, much less a favorable one.

Revolving door school superintendents, ongoing rhetorical battles between mayors and superintendents, mayoral use of fiscal support to hold school boards hostage – all contribute chaos and confusion, instead of continuity and concentration, to the educational enterprise. Our children and our community are the victims.

There's a saying in our community that "if you aren't part of the solution, you are part of the problem." School boards should become obsessed with raising student achievement, or else step out of the way.

The principal role of the local school superintendent going forward should be accountability instead of operations. In other words, the school superintendent should be responsible for awarding -- and revoking -- the charters and reporting to the public on whether the individual schools meet their targets.

Given the state's dominant role in ensuring education quality, the local school superintendents should be responsible and ultimately accountable to the state education agency. The superintendent in turn can be assisted by a local board of advisors, chosen by the superintendent and drawn from such sectors as parents, business, organized labor, the religious community, higher education and community organizations.

Let me conclude by recalling that back in the 1800s, homesteading gave the least among us a big lift by giving them 40 acres and a mule. We urgently need a national commitment to the 21st century equivalent of homesteading for America's children who are languishing behind in urban and rural communities. We need what one economist aptly calls "40 Acres and a Sheepskin."

President Clinton appropriately reminds us that there are New Markets in struggling inner cities and rural communities of this country whose economic potential remains untapped.

These communities are home as well to a vast New Market of eager yet underdeveloped human capital, namely the children who live there. The solution to America's acute shortage of qualified workers is right under our nose in these very same communities.

If only America would muster the will and allocate the resources to educate these youngsters to their fullest potential, we could funnel millions of well-prepared workers into the labor force.

This requires that politicians and educators use lofty academic standards to create a new generation of victors instead of victims. For a demographer said the other day, children are 18 percent of the American population, but 100 percent of its future. That is why we Urban Leaguers say: **Our Children = Our Destiny.**

Thank you.