North Carolina
Charter School Evaluation Report

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Submitted to the State Board of Education
November 2001

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Acknowledgements

The *North Carolina Charter School Evaluation Report* is the result of the work of many people. The charter school evaluation was conducted under a contract with the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. The Principal Investigators for the evaluation were Dr. George Noblit, professor in the School of Education, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) and Dr. Dickson Corbett, independent educational researcher, Malvern, Pennsylvania. Dr. Corbett was formerly with Research for Better Schools. Dr. Noblit served from the beginning of the contract in 1998-99. Dr. Corbett joined the team at the beginning of the 2000-01 school year.

Several graduate and post-graduate students at UNC-CH worked on the quantitative portions of this evaluation. They include Dr. Anne D'Agostino, Amy Anderson, Sarah Heinemeier, and Amy Germuth. Faculty members from various institutions contributed to qualitative data collection and analysis, including Dr. Paul Bitting (North Carolina State University), Dr. Kathleen Brown (University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill), Dr. Gretchen Givens (George Mason University), Dr. Paula Groves (Washington State University), Dr. Martha Hudson (University of North Carolina-Greensboro), Dr. William Johnston (North Carolina State University), Dr. Rita O'Sullivan (University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill), and Dr. Jeff Passe (University of North Carolina-Charlotte). Dr. Paula Groves also provided assistance with coordination of the project early on in the process.

The contractors at UNC-CH convened an external advisory group in the last year of the evaluation that met twice and received interim draft reports. This advisory group consisted of three people: Dr. Bryan Hassel, Public Impact, Charlotte, NC; Dr. Sue Hamann, SERVE Regional Lab, Greensboro, NC; and Dr. Beryl Nelson, RPP International, Emeryville, CA. Dr. Beryl Nelson was unable to make the meetings, but was sent copies of the draft reports for feedback. Drs. Hassel and Hamann were especially helpful in making suggestions about issues that needed to be addressed, analyses that should be run or examined differently, and conclusions that emerged.

Dr. Corbett crafted the Synthesis (Part I) that summarizes and pulls together each of the separate reports. It is designed to highlight the key points of the separate evaluation analyses. It also focuses on the policy tensions and policy issues that evolved from this evaluation and are likely to be of interest to state policy makers in the Department of Public Instruction, the State Board of Education and the General Assembly.

At the Department of Public Instruction, Drs. Bradley McMillen and Carolyn Cobb assisted in completing the report. Dr. McMillen was the primary contact with the contract evaluators, providing them with existing data available in the department, and helping them understand and use the data. He also served as a case study team leader for four charter school site visits. In some cases Dr. McMillen ran additional data analyses and wrote some of the final results. Drs. Cobb and McMillen also provided extensive editing and final formatting for the report.

Part I

Synthesis Report

for the North Carolina

Charter School Evaluation

Synthesis Report for the North Carolina Charter School Evaluation

Introduction

Charter schools were first initiated in North Carolina in the 1997-98 school year. The authorizing legislation also directed the State Board of Education (SBE) to evaluate this approach. This legislation, along with subsequent amendments, specified that the SBE "shall review and evaluate the educational effectiveness of the charter school approach ... and the effect of charter schools on the public schools in the local school administrative unit in which the schools are located." After an initial evaluation of charter schools in the first inaugural year (1997-98), the SBE recommended that a longer evaluation be conducted. The new evaluation was contracted to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and started work in the 1999-2000 school year. By January 1, 2002 the SBE is to report its "recommendations to modify, expand, or terminate that approach. The board shall base its recommendations predominantly on the following information: (1) the current and projected impact of charter schools on the delivery of services by the public schools; (2) student academic progress in the charter schools as measured, where available, against the academic year immediately preceding the first academic year of the charter schools' operation; (3) best practices resulting from charter school operations; and (4) other information the State Board considers appropriate" (G.S. 155C-238.281(c)).

An evaluation team consisting of staff from both the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) collected information to assist the SBE in achieving its charge. The team used multiple methods of data collection. These included: obtaining, organizing, and conducting analyses with existing student and school data collected by the state; designing and administering surveys of charter school parents and charter school directors; conducting case studies of a subset of charter schools that had demonstrated different levels of student achievement and served families of varying demographic backgrounds; and carrying out interviews with DPI personnel responsible for working with charter schools.

Drawing on analyses of these data, the evaluation team prepared a series of reports. These covered: the characteristics of charter schools, the impact of charter schools on LEAs and DPI, the perceptions of charter school directors about their institutions' operation, the perceptions of LEA and charter school personnel about the impact charters have on other public schools, charter school parents' perceptions of their children's schools, case studies of charter schools' implementation experiences, and analyses of student achievement patterns in both charter and other public schools. Following the SBE's deliberations about the results, the reports will be available on DPI's web site, and the reader of this report should refer to them (http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/evaluation) for greater detail and data about the issues contained herein.

This report is a synthesis of those more detailed documents and is organized into four major sections. The first section describes the collection of charter schools that have opened in North Carolina. These descriptions indicate that, as is the case with public schools in general, charter schools vary considerably among themselves in terms of demographics, organization, curriculum, and school mission. These differences make it difficult to speak of these schools as if they were a single entity. This section also identifies important ways in which charter schools

are different from most other public schools. They are smaller, experience greater student turnover than their local public school counterparts, and struggle more with finding adequate facilities.

The second section examines each of the three primary evaluation purposes in turn: innovation, impact, and achievement. The data show that the primary **innovation** among charter schools is their small school and class size and that many of the benefits that staff, students, and parents attribute to their schools stem from this one characteristic. These people said that extra help, personal attention, and flexible instructional arrangements were all possible because of the low numbers of staff and students involved. Given the ways in which most charters were started, it should not be surprising to find that significant parental involvement is also characteristic of these schools. In addition, charter schools experiment with alternative forms of leadership, partially because of a need to combine several roles into a single position and partially to break the mold of traditional patterns of operating schools. Instructionally, charter school directors said that their staff used an array of teaching strategies not unlike what one would expect to find in most public schools. Case study observations confirmed that most charter school classrooms resembled other public schools' in terms of instructional content and delivery.

For the most part, evaluation respondents felt that charter schools have had little **impact** on their host LEAs, certainly less than staff of either type of schools initially imagined would be the case. In fact, the relationship between the two entities is typified by infrequent interaction, and the interactions that they do have mostly concern financial matters. Indeed, it is in the area of finances that LEAs say they have felt the biggest effect of charter schools' presence. Otherwise the two parties report few tensions. Instead of competing with other public schools for students, charter schools – and their LEAs – seem to be establishing niches in which the charters serve students who, for a variety of reasons, were not thriving in their regular placements.

Student **achievement** among charter schools follows patterns widely seen in regular public schools: Charter schools serving a greater proportion of high socio-economic status families tend to have higher levels of achievement. Overall, however, charter schools generally wrestle with coming up with strategies to close the troubling achievement gap that confronts most American schools. When compared to public schools, charter schools as a group do not demonstrate better performance; in fact, their students tend to trail those in other public schools, even though their students as a group appear to have exhibited higher achievement scores prior to entering the charter schools.

The third section of the report underscores even more the complexities of understanding the implementation and impact of charter schools. Charter school staff continually confront several tensions that may constrain their pursuit of their original intentions. For example, while smallness yields many benefits, it also limits charters' ability to fund their programs and facilities to the extent staff feel is necessary. Thus, staff struggle with creatively balancing enrollment and revenue. They also worry about balancing innovation with accountability. The schools appear to be reluctant to stray dramatically from traditional classroom practice for fear of jeopardizing short-term results on statewide tests. Thus, practical considerations and original purposes often bump into one another.

The fourth, and final, section of this synthesis report poses a list of policy questions that the SBE should consider in making its final recommendations to the legislature.

- If smallness is the primary feature that makes charter schools attractive, what additional provisions in the law are necessary to support this, and what are the implications for the state in extending this innovative practice to regular public schools?
- Should the state assume more responsibility for helping charter schools address their facility needs and, if so, what forms should that responsibility take?
- Should charter schools continue to be held to demonstrating their progress according to the state accountability system? If not, what other options might be feasible?
- What resources does it take to ensure that charter schools become high-performing, and what are the implications of this for providing resources to regular public schools?
- What are the implications of expanding the number of charter schools, especially in terms of causing funding decreases in LEAs (particularly smaller ones), engendering innovation in public schools, placing greater demands on agencies that offer technical assistance to charter schools, and straining DPI resources to provide guidance and assistance?
- Are charter schools adequately serving exceptional children? Are there opportunities for collaboration in this area with LEAs?

Charter School Characteristics

Two important points emerged from the evaluation's data collection efforts with respect to charter schools' characteristics. First, these schools are not necessarily similar to one another, just as public schools vary considerably across the state. Second, charter schools also differ in several significant ways from regular public schools, particularly in terms of school and class size, student body composition, and teacher certification and experience.

Variation Within Charter Schools

The data from the evaluation indicate that charter schools in North Carolina are not a uniform entity, and any generalization about them masks the complexity of their experiences. Whether the issue is enrollment, types of students served, teachers' credentials, or school mission, one could find schools along a rather wide continuum of possibilities. For example, while charter schools as a group are small (with 78% enrolling fewer than 200 students in 1999-2000), their size varies from 21[1] to 768 students. They do, however, appear to be trending larger, with a decreasing percentage of the charters enrolling 100 or fewer students each of the three years studied. Perhaps concomitant to this development, fewer charter schools currently report having waiting lists compared to previous years.

[1] Several charter schools have received waivers from the minimum number of students due to the at-risk nature of their student population (i.e., incarcerated youth, abused/neglected children).

Similarly, charter schools vary in terms of the students they serve. For instance, the non-White student population across the buildings ranges from nearly zero to 100 percent, and the average percent of male students enrolled in charters extends from just under 50 percent to over 90 percent.

Charter schools reflect the full complement of possibilities with regard to teacher certification, from several schools having no North Carolina-licensed teachers to a couple that have 100 percent of their teachers holding required credentials. Charter school legislation requires 75 percent of teachers in K-5 charter schools and 50 percent of teachers in 6-12 charter schools to be licensed. Although 56 percent of all charter school teachers were licensed, only 26 percent of schools serving grades K-5 meet or exceed their required licensure level while 72 percent of schools serving grades 6-12 meet or exceed their required licensure level. Some of those charter school teachers who are not certified in North Carolina, however, are either pursuing certification or may be certified in another state. Some charter school staff question whether the legislation specifically requires North Carolina licensure, or just licensure regardless of the state in which it is held.

Charter schools use a variety of forms of organization, instructional strategies, and curriculum. While nearly 75 percent of them reported providing after-school programs, there was decidedly less uniformity among them on having before-school programs, summer school, or multiage classrooms, with no more than half the schools using these organizational arrangements. Only a handful of schools opted for any of the various block schedules, year-round calendars, or independent study.

Charter school teachers, according to their school directors and classroom observations, drew upon a repertoire of instructional strategies that would be common in many schools; what varied was how many of these strategies the schools' directors felt educators in their buildings used regularly. The most striking similarity among charters was their adherence to the North Carolina Standard Course of Study. Nearly every school reported having this as the basis for its curriculum, possibly the result of being required to use North Carolina's state tests.

These within-group differences should not be surprising, perhaps, given that charter schools also vary tremendously in terms of their primary reasons for existence. While the reasons cited most often by charter school directors for creating their schools were "to realize an educational vision," "to encourage parental involvement," and "to have more autonomy," the schools were quite diverse as reflected in their distinctive missions. These included one or more of the following: challenging gifted students; assisting students having difficulty in traditional public schools; maintaining small class and/or school size; facilitating individualized instruction; enhancing local control; providing arts-enriched or multiple intelligence-enhanced academic opportunities; increasing academic and/or behavioral discipline; returning to "the basics;" incorporating research-based instructional models or curricula; and/or attending to cultural enrichment. Charter school developers believed that their distinctive missions allowed them to offer a better alternative for students inadequately served in traditional public schools.

Comparisons of Charter Schools and Public Schools

Charters are more likely than other public schools to mix grade levels across traditional definitions of elementary, middle, and high schools. Despite the fact that many of the schools serve a wide range of grades, overall they are smaller than public schools. Nevertheless, they experience considerably more turnover within their student populations, even among those charters that do not serve an institutional clientele for whom successful treatment means as short a stay as possible. The primary reasons directors gave as to why most students left were discipline, transportation problems, the school's program did not meet student needs, and the school's environment was too structured.

Some of this turnover can be attributed to the fact that over a third of the charter schools intentionally serve special populations of students. There are four types of students typically targeted, with some schools educating more than one type: 1) at-risk (e.g., academically at-risk, abused, dropouts, incarcerated), 2) economically disadvantaged students, 3) students who are academically gifted and/or college-bound, and 4) students with special needs or disabilities. Since 1998, the biggest increase was in the percentage of schools that mentioned a focus on at-risk students and the biggest decrease was in special education.

Generally, North Carolina charter schools tend to follow the national trend of enrolling a higher percentage of Black students than is the case in public schools. The percentage of Black students in charter schools (48% in 1999-2000) is disproportionately higher than both the percentage of Black students in public schools statewide (31%) and the percentage enrolled in LEAs that have charter schools in their attendance areas (36%). Moreover, the percentages of non-Whites tend to be higher in charter schools than their local education agencies (LEAs). The charter school average percent of male students was approximately 55 percent as compared to the state average of 51 percent.

Overall a smaller percentage of exceptional children were served in charter schools than in all NC schools. Although the percentage of children identified as speech-language impaired is very near the 3 percent served in all public schools, the average percent of disabled students across all charter schools hovers around 10 percent compared to a state average of over 13 percent. Still, the number of schools with more than the state average of disabled students increased from 20 in 1999 to 29 in 2000.

Organizationally, charter school class sizes are substantially lower than other North Carolina public schools. These figures have been increasing over the last three years in public schools and now class size averages 21 students. Over the same period of time, charter schools experienced a decrease in average class size from 16 to 15 students per classroom.

The experience of the charter school teachers lags that of public school teachers. The average number of years of teaching experience for public school teachers has remained steady over three years (at slightly more than 13 years) and the average for charter school teachers has decreased slightly each year, from 9.1 years to 8.5 years.

Finally, the majority of all funds expended by charter schools are for employee salaries and benefits, most of which goes to teachers (although the percentage of funds spent on salaries and benefits is much higher in other public schools). This is followed in terms of

percent of budget by purchased services required for the daily operation of the school, which includes rent. The legislation, of course, requires that public funds not be spent on purchasing or building facilities – a stipulation that dramatically separates charter funding arrangements from public schools.

Innovation, Impact, and Achievement

The evaluation was charged with examining the status of innovative practices among charter schools, their level of impact on LEAs, and their effects on student achievement. This section of this synthesis report looks at each of these three issues in turn.

Innovation

At this point in time the primary innovation that charter schools have demonstrated has been smaller schools and, most importantly, smaller classes within those buildings. The schools also maintain relatively high levels of parental involvement. To a lesser degree, the schools have experimented with alternative forms of school leadership and have attempted to personalize instruction. With respect to actual instructional practices, charters seem little different from other public schools.

Smaller schools. Clearly, charter school staff, parents, and supporters desire to have institutions with fewer students. They often spoke in interviews of the importance of "personalizing" education, a characteristic they felt was rarely found in other public schools. This feature is one that is currently prominent in national reform models as well. Efforts to create schools within schools and small learning communities in buildings are both directed at making it possible for several adults in a building to get to know a group of students very well, thereby devising instructional approaches that better suit students' needs and catching on earlier to problems students may be having. North Carolina's charter schools are attempting to demonstrate the value of schoolwide intimacy.

Smaller classes. As noted earlier, charter classes – on the average – tend to be substantially smaller than other public school classes. A charter school student summarized this primary hallmark of charter schools as compared to public schools by saying: "We have smaller classes. There's not much more to it than that." From the case study visits, it was clear that most members believed that numerous educational advantages accrued from this practice. Students felt like they were known, which increased their sense of belonging in the schools; teachers and staff believed they were able to develop better relationships with their students, in addition to individualizing instruction to meet each child's unique needs; and parents believed their children could not "fall through the cracks" in a small school setting and were pleased with the attention their children received. Thus, the language of family was common in many of the charter schools, sometimes explicitly reflected in mission statements or school pledges, often implicit in the language staff, students and parents used to describe the school.

Parental involvement. Several factors have combined to make charter schools places where parents are more likely to be visibly active in their children's education, including parents' being instrumental in the schools' creation, the schools' expressed focus on special student populations, and the need for parents to be proactive in enrolling their children in the schools.

While comparisons with parental involvement in public schools are difficult to make, the charter directors' assessments of the level of this involvement would undoubtedly make many principals envious, with at least half of them indicating that over 75 percent of their parents played a substantial role in their children's education.

Alternative forms of leadership. A few of the charter schools visited were attempting to use different models of school leadership. For example, a collective of teachers (in lieu of a principal) was responsible for day-to-day operations in one school; two other schools divided leadership responsibilities between two deans or directors. The teachers in the majority of the 16 schools indicated that they felt empowered to participate in the decision-making of their schools, and credited their leadership with allowing them the autonomy to teach with limited interference in the classroom.

Personalized instruction. As mentioned above, small school and class size, according to teachers and students, greatly increased the likelihood that students would encounter personalized instruction. Roughly half of the charter schools visited discussed their ability to intervene immediately when a student struggled – through individualized in-class instruction facilitated by fewer students to manage in a classroom room and/or through tutorials (for remediation or acceleration) offered in addition to classroom instruction (e.g., before or after school; tutorial periods during school; Saturday workshops). At least two schools operated with full inclusion of special needs children, using learning coaches or student aides to assist with instruction. Over half of the schools went beyond traditional assessments and end-of-grade testing and included portfolio assessments.

Instructional practices. Instructional strategies and curriculum models that directors reported using tended to be relatively common. The most prevalent instructional strategies were hands-on learning and use of manipulatives, cooperative learning and group activities, and integration of content across subject areas and thematic teaching – practices frequently found in elementary schools and increasingly so in middle schools throughout the state and nation. Likewise, nearly every charter school reported using the North Carolina Standard Course of Study as the primary basis for its curriculum, often in conjunction with another curricula approach such as Core Knowledge, Character Education, Saxon Math, and Direct Instruction.

Impact of Charter Schools on LEAs

Over time, charter schools experienced varying levels of school district support. Most case study schools reported "satisfactory" relationships with their districts, although these were not necessarily characterized by frequent interaction and support. Several of these schools were pleased to report a "thawing" in previously chilly relationships as district concerns about charter schools (e.g., taking away money and/or the best students and teachers from the district) were said to be waning over time. Forms of negative interaction included perceived interference with facility acquisition; lawsuits challenging district funding; exclusion of charter school students from local athletic competitions and charter school staff from district professional development opportunities; and one director expressing the belief that districts were using charter schools as "dumping grounds" for the students they could not handle.

In general, charter school directors felt that there had been a decrease in interactions over time while LEA personnel said there had been an increase. However, the majority of

respondents from both groups acknowledged that the amount of contact between them was limited. The primary reason for interaction cited by both charter schools and LEAs was financial. Other reasons for interactions most often mentioned by charter schools were dealing with student records, exceptional children's situations, and necessary services, such as food service and transportation. Interestingly, charter schools said that they rarely interacted with LEA staff about curriculum matters whereas the LEAs said that this was the third most frequent reason for contact, after finance and exceptional children. Over time, charter schools' satisfaction with their relationships with LEAs appears to have increased. On the other hand, LEAs seem less satisfied.

LEAs in general appear to have lowered their expectations about the level of impact of having charter schools in their communities. This suggests some of the anxiety that existed before charters opened about possible negative impacts from charters may have been alleviated or may have failed to materialize. The biggest impacts (both in terms of what was expected and what was actually experienced by LEAs as a result of charter schools) were financial rather than programmatic. More than half of charters and LEAs agreed that there had been virtually no overall impact on their school districts as a result of charter schools. It is likely, however, that impact is mitigated by the fact that the number of charter schools statewide is capped at 100.

For those indicating an impact, there appeared to be little agreement between charter schools and LEAs. They differed most in their opinions about financial impacts, where only 42 percent of charter schools compared to 78 percent of LEAs thought there had been an impact. Charter school staff felt that their institutions were too small to have any repercussions in this area while nearly half of the LEAs said that because of financial losses, there had been a negative impact on their exceptional children program, transportation, and hiring teachers.

The impact of the charter school legislation to date on services provided may have been felt more at the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) than in school districts. Indeed, DPI staff who are most involved with charter schools noted that many charter schools had limited knowledge about operating a school, which required DPI to provide a great deal of technical assistance. Additionally, they said that in some ways a charter school is technically considered to be a separate LEA, adding an additional 100 LEAs to the existing 117 in North Carolina. Among the staff's suggestions were not raising the charter school cap at this time, raising the cap but changing the accountability and/or monitoring requirements, and providing DPI with additional resources in order to serve the additional schools if the cap were raised.

Achievement

Generally, charter school students under-perform other public school students on End-of-Grade (EOG) tests in reading and mathematics. For example, when one examines performance for each of the four years charter schools have been in existence, students in charter schools were less likely than students in other public schools to score at or above grade level in either subject area. This is consistent for both White and Black students for all 4 years. In addition, the gap between the two groups of students in charter schools in both reading and mathematics achievement is larger than in other public schools, even though it did shrink in 2000-01 after expanding during previous years. In other public schools, this gap has been approximately the same size each of the last 4 years.

At the school level, variation in performance across years within each of North Carolina's state accountability system categories is greater for charter schools, at least in part due to new schools being added each year and smaller total numbers. With the exception of charter schools from 1998 to 1999, the percentage of schools showing *Exemplary Growth* has decreased each of the four years for both charter and other public schools, with the latter showing an approximately 60 percent decrease in the percentage of schools showing *Exemplary Growth* and the former having roughly a 50 percent decrease. On the other hand, other public schools increased in the percentage of schools showing *Expected Growth* (almost double) to 35.4 percent in 2001, while charter schools increased until 2000 and then dropped in 2001 to 9.0 percent. *No Recognition* schools (called Adequate Performance schools in 1998) also increased steadily each year for other public schools; charter schools in this category have increased since 1999. This is the category with the largest percentage of schools for both groups in 2001 (about 40 percent for other public schools and 55 percent for charters). Charters continue each year to have a higher percentage of their schools in the *Low Performing* designation. Seventeen percent of them fell into this category in 2001 as opposed to less than one percent for other public schools.

Thus, the achievement analyses indicate that students in charter schools on average perform less well than their other public school peers. A word of caution should be noted, however. All charter and other public school students for whom achievement data were available were placed into their particular school categories and analyzed without respect to all the potentially mediating differences noted above in this report that occur within both groups of schools, such as student demographics, attendance, and types of instruction experienced. While charter school students appear to demonstrate smaller achievement gains than their public school peers, it is important to note that this is not true in all charter schools. Indeed, as with all public schools, some charter schools had extremely high results and some extremely low.

These wide variations in performance render any analyses that combine all charter schools together for the purpose of making comparisons largely unhelpful in estimating the "effects" of charter schools on student achievement. The circumstances of charter schools vary dramatically and the interaction between the contexts within which charter schools operate and their educational program tremendously affects their performance. The following section tries to highlight some of the issues that complicate the daily operation of charter schools.

Tensions in Operating Charter Schools

Running through the case study data were several **tensions** that the schools continuously faced. These tensions, at the moment at least, were not so much actual dilemmas that forced charter school staff to choose between one or another less-than-optimal choices, but rather suspicions or fears that – in the absence of some change in the charter landscape – the tensions would grow into such dilemmas. There were four of these:

The first tension was between remaining small or expanding to garner more financial resources (size versus money). The cost of maintaining a small educational community, however, was a persistent worry for charter schools during the first years. At this

point, these schools have chosen to "do without" rather than sacrifice such an important expressed value. This is not to suggest that an increased budget through increased enrollment would solve financial challenges, but charter schools often have a "break-even" enrollment figure they must meet to make their existing budgets work.

The second tension was between meeting the legislative charge for innovative practice or meeting the accountability for performance as measured on standardized tests (freedom versus control). Thus, charter schools had to figure out how to balance the freedom to pursue their distinctive missions with the controls put in place under the same legislation. Given that schools must follow the ABCs or an equally rigorous accountability program (which most schools felt was not a viable option because of the costs of establishing a comparable assessment system), schools felt hindered from deviating too far from the North Carolina Standard Course of Study. In fact, faculty and administrators in at least one-third of the case study schools indicated that they felt limited in their ability to offer a dramatically different or especially innovative type of educational program when faced with the of end-of-grade and end-of-course standardized tests. This tension was especially felt among those schools whose distinctive missions included serving at-risk children and/or those "children no one else wants."

The third tension – related to the second – was between serving traditionally low-performing students and needing to perform well on statewide tests (equity versus performance). This tension seemed to be felt differently by schools with different resources and forms of capital (i.e., financial, social, cultural). At least four case study schools visited in 2000-2001 observed that their very survival depended on test results, especially given the complex interdependence of enrollment and resources, i.e., enrollment depended on reputation and reputation depended, at least partially, on test scores. Schools challenged the ability of standardized tests to accurately reflect the growth and learning taking place in their classrooms, especially among more disadvantaged students. The freedom to be innovative had little significance to these schools as survival was related to having their children perform well on the tests. Other schools, however, were less concerned about this issue because their performance has always been high on the ABCs, leaving them more free to experiment.

The fourth tension was between believing that the choice to educate under-served students would constrain access to resources and believing that substantial supplemental resources would accrue to serving traditionally high performing students (equity and access versus capital and accountability). Differential resources between well-funded and struggling schools were immediately visible during school visits: laptops for every student in one school's classroom versus no textbooks – or very few – in another (driven by financial necessity rather than pedagogical choice); an abundance of materials at the classroom level versus limited supplies school-wide. Those schools educating students with traditionally lower levels of achievement seemed to struggle most with obtaining the supplemental financial resources necessary to maintaining and growing their educational programs. Of course, procurement of and satisfaction with an adequate facility continued to be among charter schools' most pressing concerns in this regard. The percentage of charter school directors citing this difficulty increased from 68% in 1999 to 79% in 2000. School staff repeatedly expressed frustration with charter school legislation limiting the allocation of state resources for facilities. For some schools, tensions related to resources also spilled into instruction as staff felt that student performance was limited by inadequate financial resources.

Policy Questions

The above discussions do little to simplify the debate about the educational value of charter schools. Like other public schools, these new organizations serve a variety of students and communities with varying resources and with mixed results. Some charter school students, staff , and parents (and some public school officials) believe that their institutions have found niches that the regular public schools have been unable to serve adequately, for whatever reasons. The type and size of these pockets of students needing improved service are different from community to community, which further confounds gross comparisons between charters and public schools. The evaluation data, therefore, raise more questions than they answer about the direction of state policy in this area. This section highlights several of the questions that need to be addressed at this juncture of the charter school legislative initiative.

1. If smallness is the primary feature that makes charter schools attractive, what additional provisions in the law are necessary to support this, and what are the implications for the state in extending this innovative practice to regular public schools?

Despite the lack of corresponding improvements in achievement scores, the charter schools have demonstrated concretely what case studies on class and school size indicates is true: Substantial reductions in class size do appear to have significant educational benefits, especially in terms of more personalized instruction in the classroom, extra help that is targeted at an individual's specific needs rather than a group's general needs, and being known by nearly all of the adults in the building. Importantly, the class size research shows that these benefits are most apparent in classrooms of 15 students or less. With the average class size in public schools at 21, it is not hard to see why some previously frustrated students (and their parents) say that they are thriving in their new settings. Charters are achieving this level of service on what most would say are "shoestring" budgets, just as other public schools would argue that they are operating the smallest schools and classes they can with the resources they have available. Essentially, then, the primary innovation emerging from charter schools runs headlong into the question of funding. As charters try to move from temporary facilities to permanent ones, will they have to sacrifice their "calling card"? And, as other public schools try to learn from the experiences of the charter schools in their communities, will they remain hamstrung in making the single most compelling improvement the charters have demonstrated?

2. Should the state assume more responsibility for helping charter schools address their facility needs and, if so, what forms should that responsibility take?

It is clear that many of the charter schools operate in less than optimal physical settings. Improving facilities now consumes much of the schools' planning for the future. At the moment, these efforts are directed at obtaining additional grants and conducting private fundraising. The schools fortunate enough to have connected with wealthy individuals and corporations appear to be much further along in resolving their facility concerns. This means, of course, that many of the current disparities in public school facilities between wealthy and less wealthy communities are being (and likely will continue to be) recapitulated within the

charter school movement. Given the hand-in-hand relationship between wealth and student achievement, the question arises whether charter schools will be in a position to do anything to break the strong relationship between students' socioeconomic status and their performance in schools, as long as the schools they attend have unequal access to resources.

3. What resources does it take to ensure that charter schools become high-performing, and what are the implications of this for providing resources to other public schools?

This, of course, is the primary policy question facing education in general. If, in fact, it is unacceptable to have wide disparities in achievement among various student populations and it is desirable for all children to achieve at high levels, what type of commitment is needed from the state to ensure that these two valued ends are attained? It is unclear exactly what resources are needed and how they should be used. Indeed, one could ask that if the benefits of more personalized instruction were as strong as charter staff claim, then why are these benefits not showing up in their achievement patterns, either in terms of overall performance or in closing the achievement gap? Likewise, a similar question about the visibility of purported benefits could be raised about other programmatic elements used in the majority of the charters, such as after-school activities. The most probable answer at this point is that charter schools are not that much different instructionally from public schools and that, therefore, one should not expect them, as a group, to have pointed the way in effectively allocating resources to yield high performance for all students any more clearly than other public schools have. A reasonable intermediate step might be to examine more closely those charter schools that have demonstrated early achievement success.

4. Are charter schools adequately serving exceptional children? Are there opportunities for collaboration with LEAs?

Many charter school supporters tout their institutions as being places where students who were not surviving and/or not thriving in the public schools can find a place to learn in a situation better-suited to their strengths. Early concerns that charter schools might become havens primarily for gifted students who were not challenged enough elsewhere have not been realized. If anything, there appears to be a tendency – encouraged by both LEAs and charter schools – for students who either have been or possibly should be labeled with designations other than "gifted" to be referred to the charters. The fact that the numbers of exceptional children in charter schools seem to be declining may be misleading in some ways. For example, parents sometimes do not wish their children to have special education "labels" and thus move them to charter schools to avoid this assignment. Others move their children to charter schools temporarily in hopes of giving them a stronger academic base from which to succeed back in the public schools. Thus, the data are rather uncertain with respect to charter schools and their service to exceptional children.

Still, it is clear that in some instances LEAs and charter schools are beginning to informally stake out a relationship in which the charter schools use their small size to advantage in working with students who need extra help, sometimes for a limited period of time and sometimes longer. It is worth considering what the benefits might be of encouraging more

formal arrangements in this regard between the two entities, e.g., in terms of other public schools providing additional resources to the charter schools in return for the charters taking on students requiring more assistance than an average per student allocation would cover.

5. Should charter schools continue to be held to demonstrating their progress according to the state accountability system? If charter schools are to be experiments in education and market-driven, should they be free of the requirements to follow the state's ABCs Accountability Model – and, concomitantly the North Carolina Standard Course of Study – in lieu of another approach to accountability?

Other than school size, class size and, perhaps, parental involvement, charter schools look instructionally similar to public schools. Charter schools in general follow the same North Carolina Standard Course of Study and charter teachers rely on the same mix of teaching practices that charter students would likely encounter in their regular placements. Charter school staff attribute much of this to their need to perform well on the state's accountability measures. They fear that lower performance will automatically brand their institutions as ineffective and taint their image in the public's eye, even if they pursue missions for which the state measures are not particularly well-suited. The research on high-stakes testing is fairly clear on the constraints that educators feel in determining what educational practices they should use, and – again – the experiences of the charter schools in North Carolina mirror what others have found to be true in education nationally. So far, the costs associated with devising an equally stringent set of accountability measures better-suited to their purposes have prevented any of the charter schools from breaking free of such constraints. This situation poses a tension for policymakers: Does the interest in creating innovation-rich schools supersede the interest in requiring the schools to demonstrate their effectiveness on current state accountability measures? Can acceptable alternative accountability measures be found?

6. What are the implications of expanding the number of charter schools, especially in terms of causing funding decreases in LEAs (particularly smaller ones), engendering innovation in public schools, offering technical assistance to charter schools, and straining DPI resources to provide guidance and assistance?

One could argue that the modest impact of charter schools on public schools stems from the fact that most LEAs only have a couple of such institutions within their boundaries, and, thus, charter schools do not present much of a challenge to the local educational marketplace. Overall, over half of the state's LEAs have no charter schools at all within their attendance boundaries. On the other hand, one has to consider what the implications of increasing the number of charter schools would be, given the above findings on innovation, impact, and achievement. For one, there would be a financial impact, both on the LEAs and DPI. LEAs argue that their costs do not drop commensurate with the per capita dollars that follow a child to a charter school. Smaller LEAs in particular may find it difficult to maintain their current level of service to remaining students. Given the DPI staff's analogy of a charter school being equivalent to an LEA, it is not hard to see the potential for an exponential increase in demands on DPI's resources. A similar effect would likely ensue for all technical assistance providers in the state.

Most important to consider, however, is what the educational gains might be in increasing the number of charter schools. Given the lack of a demonstrated, overall improvement in student achievement relative to public schools and the primary "added value" of charter schools stemming from small size, one would be hard-pressed to say that more charter schools would, or should, stimulate greater innovation in the public schools. Indeed, it may be that the most important issue for the SBE to consider is whether it should recommend that increased resources should be provided to LEAs so that they too can enjoy the benefits that accrue to small schools and classes.

Part II

Selected Characteristics of North Carolina Charter Schools, Students, and Teachers: 1998, 1999, 2000

Executive Summary
Selected Characteristics of North Carolina Charter Schools, Programs, Students, and Teachers: 1998, 1999, 2000

This report is intended to provide certain descriptive and, where possible, comparative information for charter schools in North Carolina. The information for the report was gathered from data collected by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.

Number of Schools

A total of 108 charter schools have actually opened their doors in North Carolina since the inception of charter school legislation. Thirteen of those schools (12%) have closed, primarily because of low student enrollment or financial problems. As of the 2000-01 school year, there are 95 charters open and operating in 47 counties across the state

Size, Grade Configuration, and Student Attrition

More charter schools than other public schools serve mixed-grades, such as elementary/middle, middle/high, and K-12. Charter schools also have much smaller student populations than other public schools, with 78% enrolling a total of 200 or fewer students. They have substantially smaller class sizes and student-teacher ratios compared to other North Carolina public schools. However, a comparison over three years indicates that student attrition in charters is significantly higher than other public schools.

Expenditures

The majority of charter school expenditures during each year have gone toward salaries and benefits. However, charters spend a smaller percentage of their funds on salaries and benefits than other public schools. Charters spend more money than other public schools on purchased services and instructional equipment. Per-pupil expenditures overall in charter schools were lower than that of the LEAs in which they reside during 1997-98 and 1998-99, but were slightly higher than their host LEAs in 1999-2000.

Student Characteristics

Although the number of students enrolling in charters has risen each year, charter schools still serve only about 1% of the total public school population in North Carolina. When charter schools first opened, there was concern that some resegregation of schools might occur. Overall, there are fewer White and more Black and Hispanic students in charter schools than other public schools both nationally and in North Carolina. Compared to other public schools, charters overall are more ethnically homogeneous. However, most charters do fall within their local LEA range as mandated by law.

The average percentage of male students attending charter schools in NC continues to be about 4% higher than in other public schools. The schools with the highest percentage of male students often focus on alternative programs. This has also been found for other evaluations of alternative learning programs serving at-risk students (NCDPI, 2000a).

Charter schools continue to serve fewer students with disabilities than other public schools. However, schools in which more than 20% of the student population consists of students with disabilities doubled from 6 in 1998-99 to 12 in 1999-2000.

Teacher Experience and Licensure

The average years of teaching experience for public school teachers licensed to teach in North Carolina has remained steady over three years and the average for North Carolina-licensed charter school teachers has decreased slightly from 9.1 years to 8.5 years. Additionally, charter school legislation requires 75% of teachers in K-5 charter schools and 50% of teachers in 6-12 charter schools to be licensed. Overall, 56% of charter school teachers were licensed, with only 26% of K-5 schools meeting or exceeding the 75% level and 72% of 6-12 schools meeting or exceeding the 50% licensure level. Some charter school teachers may hold licenses from other states or be in the process of obtaining licensure. Also, some charter school personnel maintain that the legislation specifying licensure does not explicitly require *North Carolina* licensure.

Selected Characteristics of North Carolina Charter Schools, Students, and Teachers: 1998, 1999, 2000

Introduction

This report is part a three-year evaluation of North Carolina (NC) charter schools, the first of which opened their doors in the 1997-98 school year. It is intended to provide a comparison of descriptive information from 1997-98 (designated as 1998), 1998-99 (designated as 1999), and 1999-00 (designated as 2000) about certain school, student, and teacher characteristics. Where possible, comparisons are made between charter schools and other public schools in the state, as well as to data from the fourth year of the national study of charter schools (RPP International, 2000), which reports data up through the 1998-99 school year for charter schools nationwide. The North Carolina data used for this report were drawn primarily from extant data sources at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI).

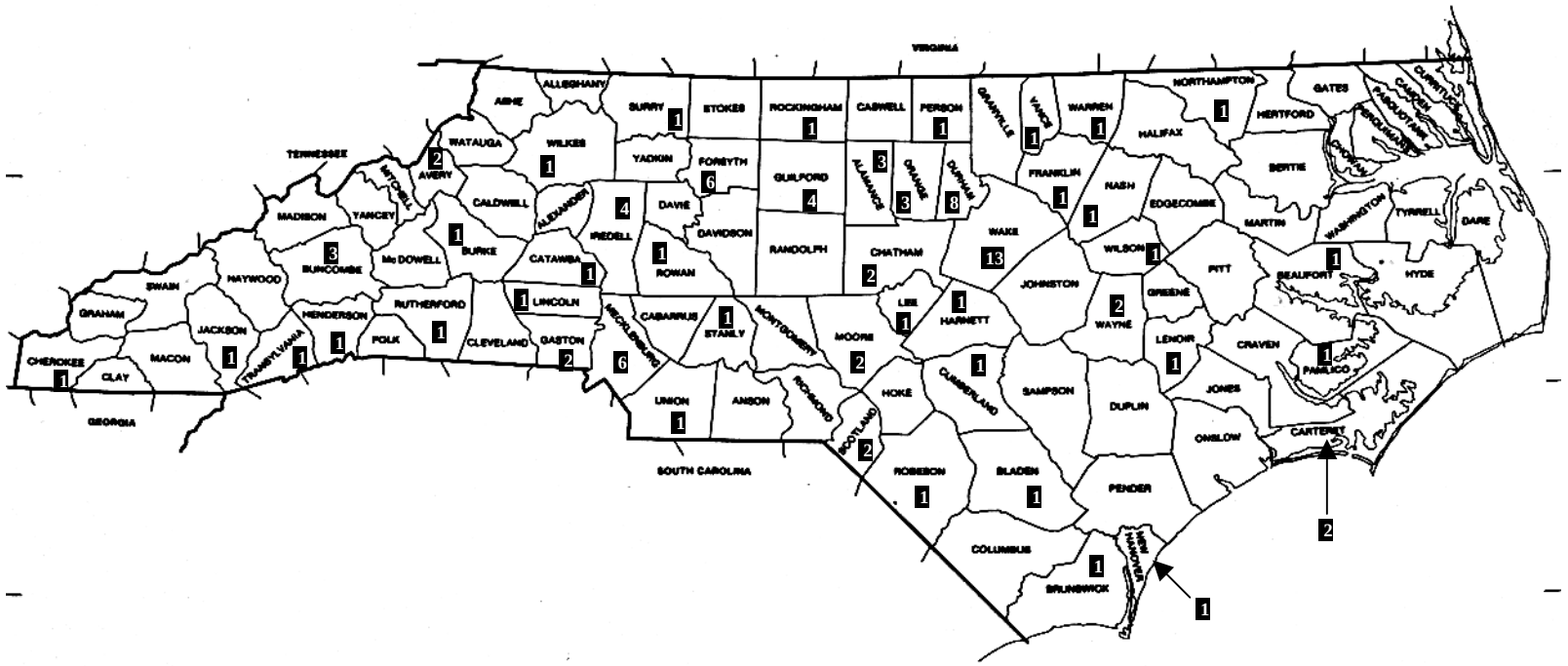
Selected School Characteristics

Openings. Charter schools first opened in North Carolina in the Fall of 1997. That first cohort consisted of 34 schools. An additional 27 schools opened in the Fall of 1998, 22 more opened in the Fall of 1999, 15 opened in Fall 2000, and 10 more in Fall 2001. The vast majority of the charters that have opened in North Carolina have been newly-started schools (86%), with only 13 (12%) converting from private school status and only 2 (2%) being converted public schools. Nationally, 72% of charters are newly started schools, with 18% converting from public status and 10% converting from private (RPP International, 2000). As of the 2001-02 school year, 95 charter schools were actually in operation across the state in 47 counties. Figure 1 shows the distribution of charter schools statewide as of 2001-02.

Closings. As of the 2001-02 school year, 13 charter schools (12% of those that have opened) have closed for various reasons. Nationally, only about 4% of charter schools have closed for any reason (RPP International, 2000). Seven (54%) of the charters that have closed in North Carolina had their charters revoked by the state, while the other 6 relinquished their charters voluntarily. Six of the 7 revocations occurred with schools that opened in the Fall of 1997, and 5 of the 6 relinquishments occurred with schools opening in the Fall of 1998. All of the closings (both revocations and relinquishments) that have taken place to date have involved schools opening in the Fall of 1998 or earlier. The most common reasons for these closings were either business/financial problems or low student enrollment (Figure 2).

Withdrawals. In addition to the 13 closings, 9 other charter schools have received final approval by the North Carolina State Board of Education only to withdraw their applications before actually opening. The primary reasons cited for these withdrawals were either incomplete planning (6 schools), unresolved legal issues (2 schools), or low student enrollment (1 school). One of these charters that withdrew its initial application, however, eventually opened two years later.

Figure 1. Map of North Carolina with 95 Charter Schools by County, 2001-02 School Year

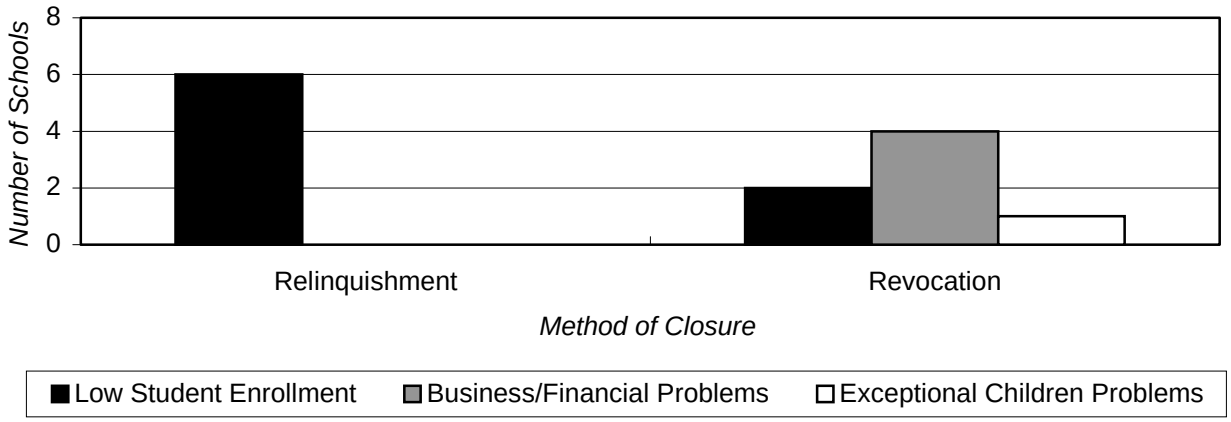


Number of Charter Schools by County:

Alamance	3	Cherokee	1	Jackson	1	Pamlico	1	Union	1
Avery	2	Cumberland	1	Lee	1	Person	1	Vance	1
Beaufort	1	Durham	8	Lenoir	1	Robeson	1	Wake	13
Bladen	1	Forsyth	6	Lincoln	1	Rockingham	1	Warren	1
Brunswick	1	Franklin	1	Mecklenburg	6	Rowan	1	Wayne	2
Buncombe	3	Gaston	2	Moore	2	Rutherford	1	Wilkes	1
Burke	1	Guilford	4	Nash	1	Scotland	2	Wilson	1
Carteret	2	Harnett	1	New Hanover	1	Stanly	1		
Catawba	1	Henderson	1	Northampton	1	Surry	1		
Chatham	2	Iredell	4	Orange	3	Transylvania	1		

Note: Three additional schools (1 in Durham, 1 in Guilford, and 1 in Mecklenburg) were approved to open in 2001, but they are now not scheduled to open until the Fall of 2002.

Figure 2. Reasons for North Carolina Charter School Closures

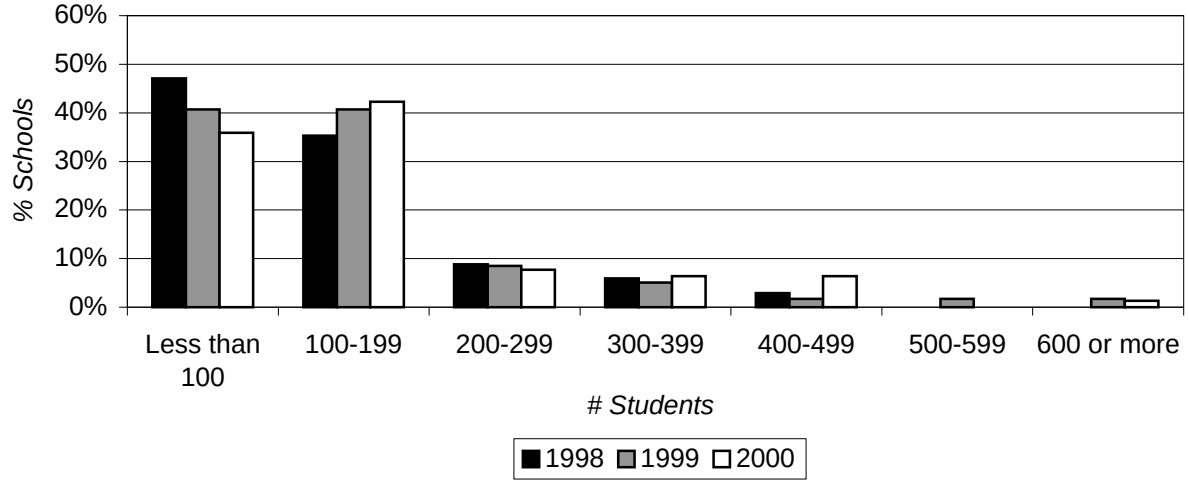


Charter School Size

Although charter schools continue to be relatively small, with 78% serving fewer than 200 students in 2000, they appear to be growing in size. Figure 3 shows the number of students enrolled by percentage of all charter schools for 1998, 1999, and 2000. As shown, the percentage of schools that enrolled fewer than 100 students decreased over that time span while the percentage enrolling larger numbers increased. The median size of charter schools has correspondingly increased from 101 in 1997-98 to 112 in 1998-99 and 147 in 1999-00. The median number of students per charter school nationwide was 137 in 1998-99, with 65% of charters across the country enrolling less than 200 students (RPP International, 2000).

The trend toward larger size is also evident within individual schools. For the charters opening in 1997-98 that were still operating in 1999-00, the number of students enrolled in 1998 ranged from 25 to 481 (median=114); in 1999, enrollment increased to a range of 28 to 679 (median=128); and in 2000, enrolled ranged from 21 to 768 (median=155). If this trend continues, it is possible that charters will begin to lose one of their hallmarks - "smallness."

Figure 3. Size of North Carolina Charter Schools: 1998, 1999, 2000



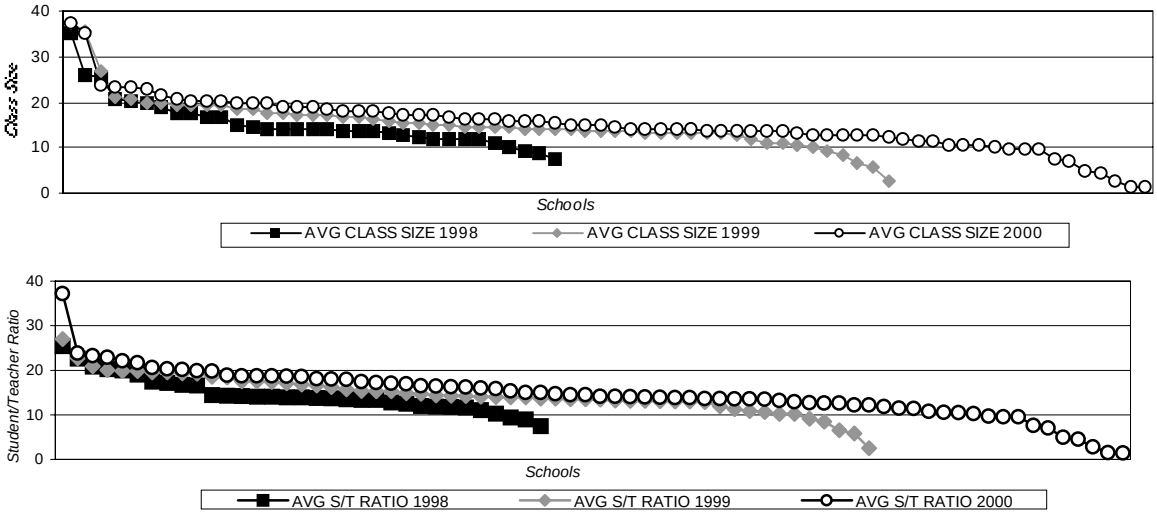
Note. Figures based on first month membership each year.

Class Size and Student:Teacher Ratio

For this analysis, class size was computed by dividing the average daily student membership by the number of instructional classes. Student:teacher ratio was computed by dividing the number of students in the class by the number of teachers working with those classes. Thus, student/teacher ratio may be slightly lower than class size.

Figure 4 shows the range in average class size and student:teacher ratios for all NC charter schools in 1998, 1999, and 2000. Charter school class size and student:teacher ratios are substantially lower than other NC public schools for all three years. From 1998 to 2000, NC public schools saw an increase in both average class size (from 18 to 21) and average student:teacher ratio (from 18:1 to 21:1). Over the same period, charter schools experienced a decrease in average class size (from 16 to 15) and average student:teacher ratio (from 16:1 to 15:1). For the 27 charters opening in 1997-98 that were still open in 2000, the average class size had the same decrease across the three years as all charters combined (from 16 to 15), but student:teacher ratios for those schools decreased from 15:1 to 14:1. Nationally, the median student:teacher ratio in charter schools in 1998-99 was 16:1 (RPP International, 2000).

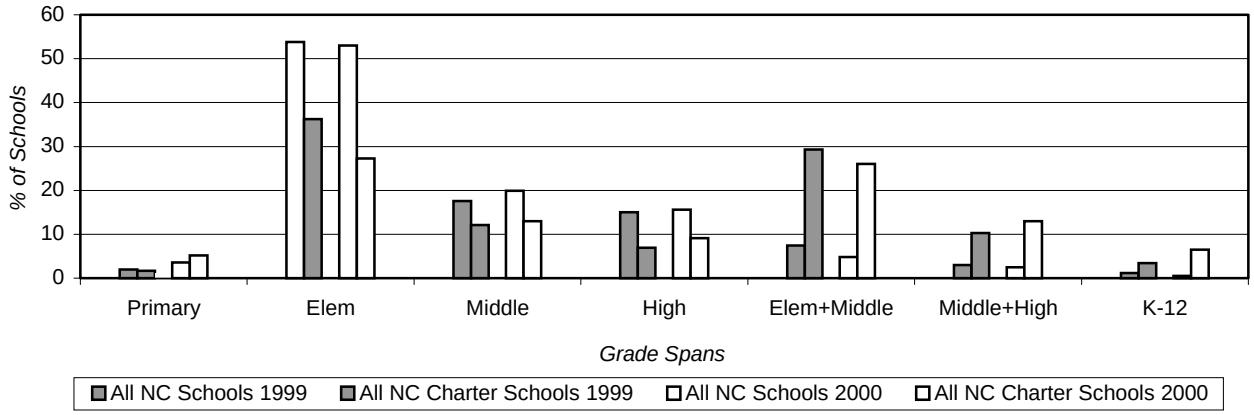
Figure 4. Average Class Sizes and Student:Teacher Ratios for North Carolina Charter Schools: 1998, 1999, 2000



School Grade Level Configurations

As shown in Figure 5, the majority of charters and other NC public schools serve the elementary grades, but there is an increasing trend among all schools to serve middle and high school students. Note that a relatively large percentage of charter schools mix the elementary and middle grades. Charters also are more likely than other public schools to mix grade levels across other traditional definitions of middle and high school.

Figure 5. Grade Level Types for All NC Public Schools and Charter Schools, 1999, 2000



Student Attrition

Because charter schools are schools of choice, one might expect that students will enter and leave charter schools at a faster rate than would be seen in the other public schools. Data from an annual survey of all North Carolina charter school directors (see Director's Survey Report) indicate that both the number and percentage of students leaving charter schools for reasons other than graduation decreased between 1999 and 2000.

Since similar data on this measure were not available for other public schools for comparison on this indicator, however, information from DPI databases was used to construct a comparison of attrition between charter and other public schools. School-level enrollment and membership data were drawn from DPI Principal's Monthly Report databases for the 9th month of the school year to create a ratio statistic. This statistic was defined as *the total number of students in membership during the 9th month of the school year* divided by *the total number of enrollments and incoming transfers gained throughout the year*[2]. Thus, a school that lost no students (via transfers or dropouts) during that year would have a value of 1 for this statistic, indicating that 100% of the students that came to the school that year stayed through the end of the school year. Schools that lost students (via transfers or dropouts, regardless of whether those students later returned) would have values below 1. The farther this statistic drops below 1, the more attrition the school is experiencing during the school year. It should be noted that this statistic reflects only within-year attrition, not attrition from one year to the next.

Using this statistic, charters were compared to all other public schools for the 1997-98, 1998-99, and 1999-2000 school years. The result of this comparison showed that charters experienced more within-year student attrition than other public schools each year[3]. The results are also consistent with the aforementioned survey data collected from charter school directors in that attrition in charters has decreased slightly between 1998 and 2000. As of the 1999-2000 school year, approximately 78% of students enrolling in and transferring to charters stayed through the end of the year, compared to 75% in 1997-98 (Table 1).

[2] Students who died during the school year and early graduates were not included in this number.
[3] John Baker Charter School (which serves incarcerated youth) and all hospital schools were not included in these analyses because the populations they serve cause them to have extraordinarily high turnover. However, even with those schools included, the results of the analysis do not differ substantively.

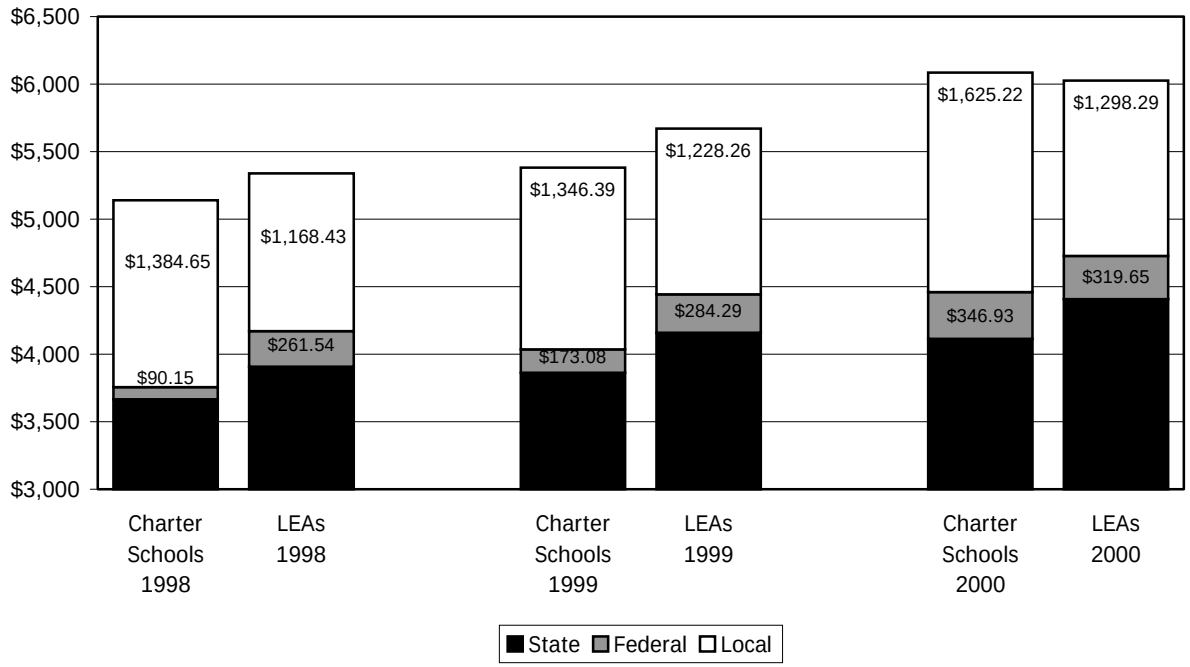
Table 1. Ratio of 9th Month Membership to Total Enrollments and Incoming Transfers Gained During the School Year: 1998, 1999, 2000

School Year	Charters	Other Public Schools
1997-98	.75	.87
1998-99	.74	.88
1999-00	.78	.88

Charter School Expenditures

Per-pupil expenditures. Per-pupil expenditures have been increasing in recent years across the state. The average per-pupil expenditures of charter schools were approximately $200 (1998) and $300 (1999) less than the average of their host LEAs[4] (Figure 6). In 2000, however, charters spent about $60 more per student than their host LEAs.

Figure 6. Per-pupil Expenditures for Charter Schools and the LEAs in Which They Were Located by Source of Funds: 1998, 1999, 2000



Note: Because a number of charter schools do not offer lunch service, child nutrition expenditures are not included in these figures. Data taken from the North Carolina Statistical Profile (NCDPI, 1999; 2000b; 2001).

[4] Because per-pupil expenditure data are collected and reported by DPI in the form of LEA averages, the per-pupil expenditure figures reported here actually represent an average of the LEA averages, not averages of individual schools, except in the case of charter schools, since they are officially considered to be both a school and an LEA for state purposes.

Expenditures by budget category. One area in which charter schools have more flexibility than other public schools in North Carolina is in making decisions about how to spend their allotted funds each year. For example, charter schools are not bound by the state's teacher salary schedule, which sets base teacher salaries in non-charter schools based on licensure level and years of experience.

Table 2 details the distribution of expenditures for charter and other public schools in North Carolina for each year charter schools have operated in the state (up to 2000). Charter schools appear to spend a greater proportion of their available funds on purchased services and instructional equipment, and less on salaries and benefits compared to other public schools. The difference between charters and other public schools in the area of purchased services is due in large part to the fact that most charter schools have to purchase or rent their buildings, and that they often contract out for services that other schools provide internally (see Part III of this report for data on service provision by source in charter schools).

Table 2. Percent of Expenditures by Budget Category, Charter and Other Public Schools in NC: 1998, 1999, 2000

Budget Category	1997-98		1998-99		1999-00	
	CS	Other	CS	Other	CS	Other
Salaries & Benefits	53.29	81.23	58.24	81.42	59.39	82.09
Purchased Services	28.26	6.79	23.27	6.82	24.03	6.53
Supplies & Materials	8.41	7.99	8.31	7.67	7.49	7.68
Instructional Equipment	7.38	2.08	5.33	2.12	4.88	1.69
Other	2.66	1.91	4.85	1.97	4.21	2.01
Total	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**

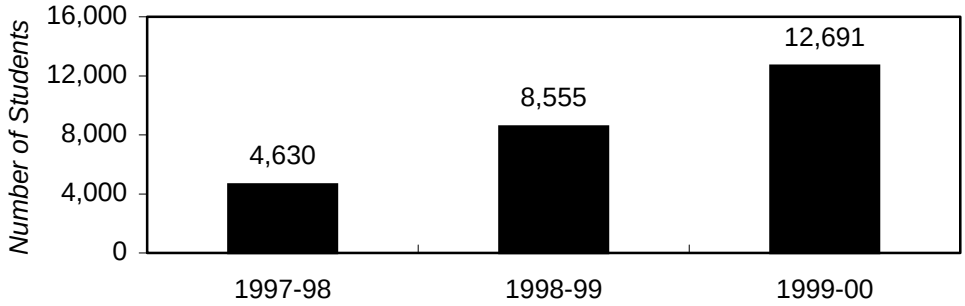
Note: Figures include all state, federal, and local funds, and were calculated from data reported in the North Carolina Statistical Profile (NCDPI, 1999; 2000b; 2001).

Selected Student Characteristics

Numbers of Students

As the number of charter schools has grown, the number of students served by those schools has grown accordingly. However, charter school students still account for only about 1% of the state's public school population, which is identical to the percent of public school students nationwide who are enrolled in charters (RPP International, 2000). Figure 7 shows the number of students attending NC charter schools by year.

Figure 7. Number of Students in NC Charter Schools: 1998, 1999, 2000

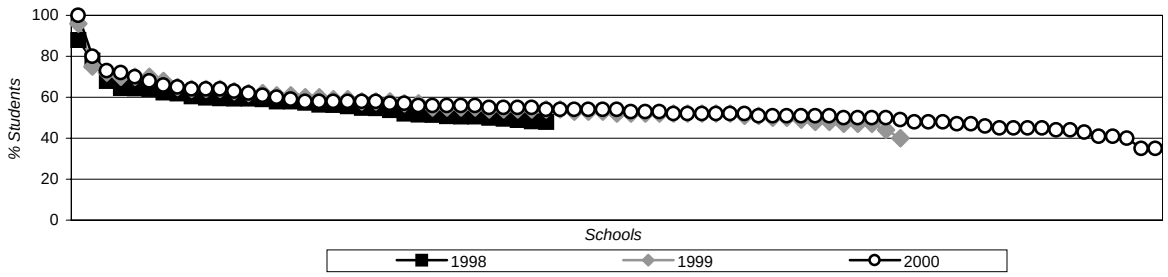


Note: Data based on first month membership each year.

Gender

Figure 8 shows the percent of male students in each charter school for 1998, 1999 and 2000. In 1998 and 2000, the average percent of male students enrolled in charters ranged from 48% to 88%, and in 1999, the range was from 40.5% to 96.4%. The charter school average percent for male students was approximately 55% across all three years compared to the state average of 51%. Additionally, the majority of charter schools had male enrollments falling between 50% and 65% in all three years. Thus, there were slightly more male students in charter schools than other public schools for this period.

Figure 8. Percent of Male Students for Each NC Charter School: 1998, 1999, 2000



Ethnicity

The national charter school study has found that charter schools have not become disproportionately white as once was feared. In fact, there are fewer White and more Black and Hispanic students in charter schools than in all of the public schools in the 27 charter states (RPP International, 2000).

It appears that North Carolina charter schools follow the same trend. Figure 9 shows the 1999 and 2000 percentages of students by ethnicity for all North Carolina charter schools, all other North Carolina public schools, all LEAs with charter schools, and the national charter school figures for 1999. Although there has been little change overall from one year to the next, the percentages of Black and White students enrolled in charter schools continue to be substantially higher than in other ethnic categories. Additionally, Black students are over-represented in charters relative to the statewide public school population, while White and Hispanic students are under-represented. Relative to the charter schools nationally, North Carolina charter schools enroll more Black and fewer Hispanic students.

Figure 9. Percent of Students by Ethnicity in NC Charter Schools, All NC Schools, NC LEAs with Charter Schools, and All U. S. Charter Schools

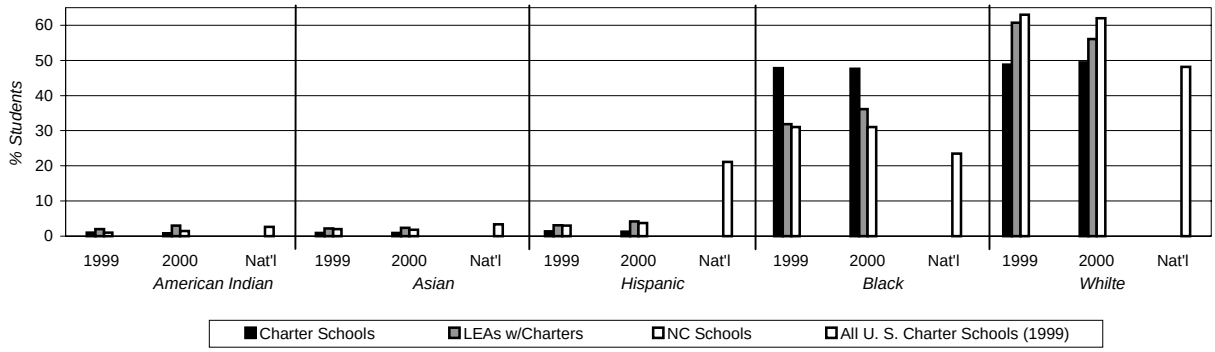
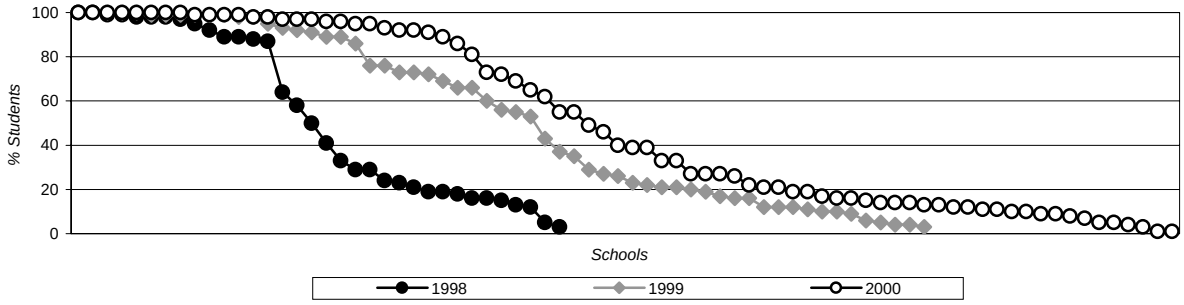


Figure 10 shows the variation in the percent of non-White students across charters, in 1998, 1999 and 2000. Variation across charter schools for non-White students is quite large, ranging from 3-100% in 1998 and 1999 and 1-100% in 2000.

Figure 10. Percent of Non-White Students in Each NC Charter School: 1998, 1999, 2000



Although the range of non-White student percentages in charter schools is wide, it appears in Figure 10 that many schools are clustered at the high and low ends of the continuum. Table 3 takes another look at this distribution, with accompanying trend data for other public schools from 1992 to 2000. These data indicate that since charter schools first opened in NC, the percentage of charters that are "high-minority" (i.e., schools where White students account for less than 25% of the student body) has been approximately 4 times higher than among other public schools. It should also be noted, however, that the percentage of North Carolina schools overall that fit this description has been growing steadily over time. In addition, charter schools are less likely to be represented among the more "ethnically-diverse" schools (i.e., where White students account for 25-74% of the total student population).

Table 3. Percentage of Charter and Other Public Schools in NC by Percentage of White Students in Membership

Year	0-24% White		25-49% White		50-74% White		75-100% White		Number of Other / CS
	Other	CS	Other	CS	Other	CS	Other	CS	
1992-93	6.8	---	18.0	---	33.6	---	41.6	---	1,936 / 0
1993-94	7.3	---	18.2	---	33.6	---	40.9	---	1,945 / 0
1994-95	7.6	---	19.5	---	33.0	---	39.8	---	1,954 / 0
1995-96	8.3	---	19.9	---	32.5	---	39.4	---	1,969 / 0
1996-97	9.0	---	21.4	---	30.8	---	38.8	---	1,991 / 0
1997-98	10.0	41.2	20.9	5.9	31.1	14.7	38.0	38.2	2,009 / 34
1998-99	10.6	37.3	21.7	15.3	30.4	11.9	37.3	35.6	2,031 / 59
1999-00	11.6	39.0	21.8	10.4	29.8	13.0	36.8	37.7	2,062 / 77

Note. Data taken from first month membership counts each year. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

By law, North Carolina charter schools are required to have a student population that is not outside the range of the schools in their local LEA in terms of student ethnicity. Table 4 contains the percent of non-White students in charter schools as they relate to their local LEA ranges in 2000. It also includes the same data for charter schools from 1999 for comparison. These data show that charter schools generally (64%) fall within the range of the percentages of non-White students found in the schools within the local LEA. In addition, 7 other charters (9%) are outside their local LEA range by less than 1%. However, there are more than twice as many charters above the LEA range (20 schools) as below (8 schools).

Table 4. Percent of Non-White Students in Charter Schools in 1999 and 2000 Compared to LEA Averages and Ranges in 2000

Charter School	Percent of Non-White Students			
	1999 Charter %	2000 Charter %	2000 LEA Average %	2000 LEA School % Range
Charter Schools Higher than the LEA Range in 2000 (n=20)				
Laurinburg Charter (Scotland)	100.0	100.0	58.5	39.1 – 88.6
Omuteko Gwamaziima (Durham)	---	100.0	65.9	21.4 – 99.7
Quality Education Academy (Forsyth)	98.2	100.0	45.0	13.3 – 99.6
Carter G. Woodson School of Challenge (Forsyth)	100.0	100.0	45.0	13.3 – 99.6
East Winston Primary (Forsyth)	100.0	100.0	45.0	13.3 – 99.6

Charter School (cont.)	Percent of Non-White Students			
	1999 Charter %	2000 Charter %	2000 LEA Average %	2000 LEA School % Range
SPARC Academy (Wake)	100.0	100.0	35.3	11.6 – 78.2
Success Academy (Durham)	---	100.0	65.9	21.4 – 99.7
Healthy Start Academy (Durham)	99.7	99.8	65.9	21.4 – 99.7
Right Step Academy (Pitt)	98.6	98.0	54.2	21.5 – 78.5
Harnett Early Childhood (Harnett)	98.3	97.7	38.5	25.9 – 67.3
Stanley Community Outreach (Stanley)	---	97.0	22.8	1.2 – 71.7
Baker Charter HS (Wake)	85.7	96.9	35.3	11.6 – 78.2
Highland Charter (Gaston)	89.4	95.5	23.6	3.9 – 74.5
Sankore School (Wake)	93.3	94.7	35.3	11.6 – 78.2
PHASE Academy (New Hanover)	77.1	89.3	34.6	2.2 – 64.8
Provisions Academy (Lee)	---	88.6	42.8	31.4 – 65.4
NE Raleigh Charter Academy (Wake)	---	81.3	35.3	11.6 – 78.2
Village Charter (Chapel Hill/Carrboro)	42.6	51.5	30.7	22.9 – 51.4
Grandfather Academy (Avery)	19.5	33.3	1.7	0 – 5.9
Crossnore Academy (Avery)	---	21.4	1.7	0 – 5.9
Charter Schools Within the LEA Range in 2000 (n=49)				
Children's Academy (Lenoir)	99.2	99.3	54.6	22.0 – 99.3
Dillard Academy (Wayne)	99.1	99.2	50.0	13.2 – 99.2
LIFT Academy (Forsyth)	99.4	98.9	45.0	13.3 – 99.6
Maureen Joy Charter (Durham)	98.5	98.8	65.9	21.4 – 99.7
Sallie B Howard (Wilson)	99.3	98.8	59.2	20.2 – 99.5
Sugar Creek Charter (Mecklenburg)	---	96.2	51.7	5.7 – 99.1
Carter Community (Durham)	92.0	95.4	65.9	21.4 – 99.7
Wayne Technical Academy (Wayne)	---	93.3	50.0	13.2 – 99.2
Imani Institute (Guilford)	90.6	91.7	48.2	6.4 – 98.4
Rowan Academy (Rowan)	---	90.6	27.2	6.4 – 98.4
Research Triangle Charter (Durham)	---	86.0	65.9	21.4 – 99.7
CIS Academy (Robeson)	76.2	81.3	77.7	28.4 – 99.5
Turning Point Academy (Durham)	73.5	97.3	65.9	21.4 – 99.7
Kennedy Charter (Mecklenburg)	65.5	73.0	51.7	5.7 – 99.1
Rocky Mount Charter (Nash)	72.2	72.2	58.6	21.9 – 99.7
Community Charter School (Mecklenburg)	67.0	68.5	51.7	5.7 – 99.1
Laurinburg Homework (Scotland)	---	68.2	58.5	39.1 – 88.6
Oma's Inc Charter (New Hanover)	---	61.4	56.3	8.3 – 98.8
Kestrel Heights (Durham)	53.2	55.0	65.9	21.4 – 99.7
Forsyth Academy (Forsyth)	---	53.3	45.0	13.3 – 99.6
Downtown Middle School (Forsyth)	34.3	48.8	45.0	13.3 – 99.6
STARS Charter (Moore)	---	40.1	31.1	9.6 – 58.1
Francine Delany New School (Asheville)	36.8	39.0	48.7	39.0 – 85.7
Engelmann Art/Science (Catawba)	55.7	38.3	16.9	7.4 – 61.8
Lakeside School (Alamance)	55.6	33.3	34.8	8.4 – 73.1
MAST (Moore)	29.1	27.4	31.1	9.6 – 58.1
Woods Charter (Chatham)	39.0	27.3	36.8	7.3 – 77.5
Sterling Montessori (Wake)	25.7	26.4	35.3	11.6 – 78.2
Exploris (Wake)	18.7	20.9	35.3	11.6 – 78.2
East Wake Academy (Wake)	16.2	20.4	35.3	11.6 – 78.2
Chatham Charter (Chatham)	23.1	19.5	36.8	7.3 – 77.5
Magellan (Wake)	16.9	18.0	35.3	11.6 – 78.2
Evergreen Community Charter (Buncombe)	---	16.6	10.5	.3 – 37.9
American Renaissance Middle (Iredell)	20.8	15.3	25.3	3.8 – 66.4
Greensboro Academy (Guilford)	---	15.3	48.2	6.4 – 98.4

Charter School (cont.)	Percent of Non-White Students			
	1999 Charter %	2000 Charter %	2000 LEA Average %	2000 LEA School % Range
Cape Lookout HS (Carteret)	22.6	14.3	14.4	0 – 34.4
Developmental Day (Iredell)	---	14.3	25.3	3.8 – 66.4
Thomas Jefferson (Rutherford)	---	12.7	19.2	1.5 – 61.0
Raleigh Charter High School (Wake)	---	12.2	35.3	11.6 – 78.2
Brevard Academy (Transylvania)	10.7	10.9	9.0	3.8 – 66.4
American Renaissance (Iredell)	20.8	10.7	25.3	3.8 – 66.4
Mountain Community School (Henderson)	---	10.3	14.0	3.5 - 53.7
The Learning Center (Cherokee)	11.4	10.3	5.7	1.3 - 13.6
River Mill Charter (Alamance)	9.6	10.0	34.8	8.4 - 73.1
New Century Charter (Orange)	20.4	9.6	27.8	5.9 - 41.8
Elizabeth Grinton (Wilkes)	10.3	8.5	50.0	0.3 – 41.4
Bridges Charter (Wilkes)*	9.1	7.3	50.0	0.3 – 41.4
ABCs (Wilkes)	26.6	2.7	50.0	0.3 – 41.4
Tiller School (Carteret)	4.0	1.1	14.4	0 - 34.4
Charter Schools Below the LEA Range in 2000 (n=8)				
Vance Charter School (Vance)	---	26.5	68.2	46.3 - 98.3
Arapahoe Charter (Pamlico)	16.3	16.4	36.7	34.1 - 40.4
Orange County Charter (Orange)	11.2	10.3	27.8	17.1 - 40.8
Lincoln Charter (Lincoln)	11.7	9.2	16.4	17.1 - 40.8
Franklin Academy (Wake)	5.4	4.8	35.3	11.6 - 78.2
Quest Academy (Wake)	---	4.0	35.3	11.6 - 78.2
Lake Norman Charter (Mecklenburg)	3.8	5.1	51.7	5.7 – 99.1
Summit Charter (Jackson)	3.0	1.3	13.1	1.5 - 49.6

Note: Data taken from first month membership counts each year. LEA averages & ranges did not differ significantly from 1999 to 2000, thus 2000 data are used for comparison.

* - Bridges Charter was located in Surry County during the 1998-99 school year.

Exceptional Children

Figure 11 shows the overall percentages for 1999 and 2000 of exceptional children for charter schools as compared to the state. As both figures show, overall a smaller percentage of exceptional children were served in charter schools than in all NC schools. Between 1999 and 2000, the percentage of children identified as speech-language impaired served in charter schools increased from 1.8% to 2.7%, while the percentage of students classified as Other Health Impaired (OH) decreased from 1.3% to .7%. See Appendix A for a count of exceptional students by category for each charter school.

Figure 11. Percent of Exceptional Children in for All NC Schools and NC Charter Schools: 1999, 2000

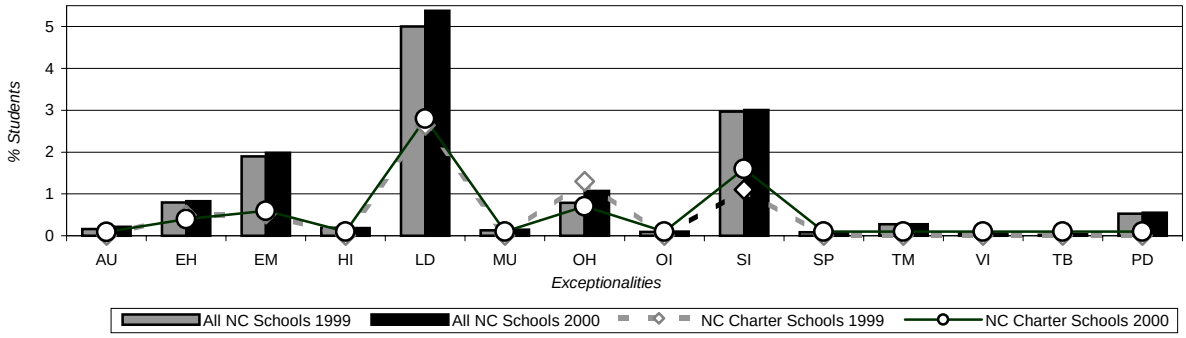
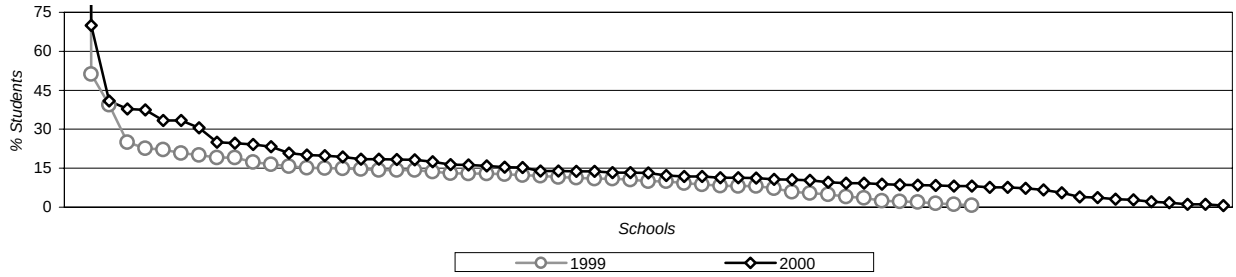


Figure 12 shows the variation in the percent of the charter schools' populations that were comprised of exceptional children for 1999 and 2000. The average percent of exceptional children across all charter schools was 9.3 in 1999 and 10.6 in 2000 and the state averages were 13.4 in 1999 and 13.8 in 2000. Charter schools nationally also enroll a smaller percentage of exceptional children (8.4% in 1998-99) than other public schools (11.3%; RPP International, 2000).

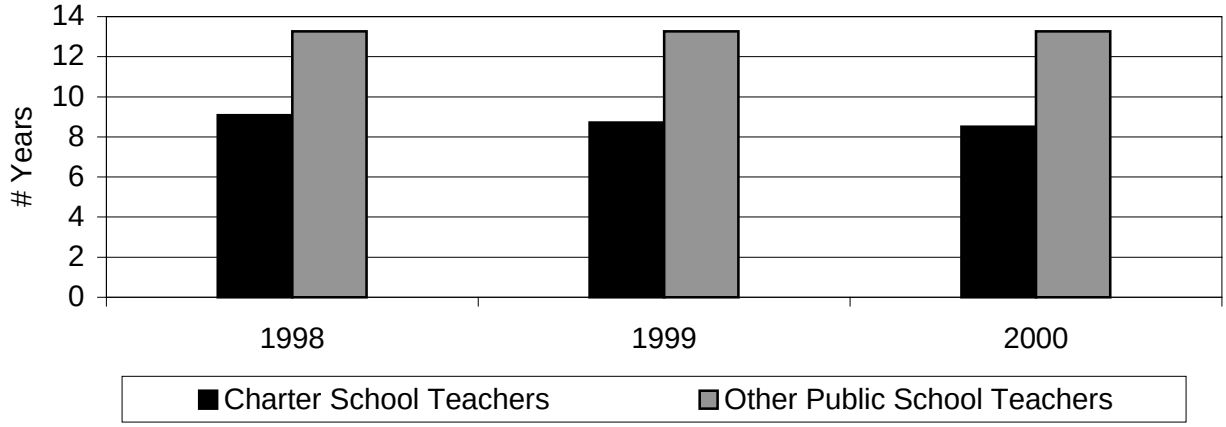
Figure 12. Percent of Exceptional Children in NC Charter Schools: 1999, 2000



Teacher Experience and Licensure

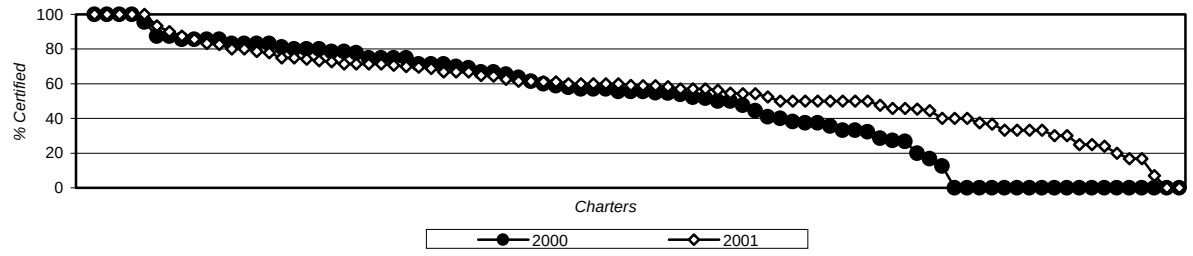
Figure 13 shows that the average number of years of teaching experience for public school teachers holding a NC license has remained steady between 1998 and 2000, while the average for charter school teachers holding a NC license has decreased slightly each year, from 9.1 years to 8.5 years. Because many teachers in charter schools are unlicensed or hold licenses from other states, the averages presented for charter school teachers may not be as accurate as those for other public school teachers.

Figure 13. Average Years of Teaching Experience for Charter School Teachers and Other NC Public School Teachers: 1998, 1999, 2000



Charter school legislation requires 75% of teachers in K-5 charter schools and 50% of teachers in 6-12 charter schools to be licensed. Figure 14 contains information regarding NC teacher licensure status in 2000 and 2001. Although 56% of all charter school teachers were licensed to teach in NC, only 26% of schools serving grades K-5 meet or exceed the 75% level while 72% of schools serving grades 6-12 meet or exceed the 50% level.

Figure 14. Charter School NC Teacher Licensure Status by Percent: 2000, 2001



Appendix A
Students in Membership Being Served by Exceptional Children Programs: 1999, 2000

AU Autistic
DB Deaf/Blind
EH Emotionally Handicapped
EM Educable Mentally Handicapped
HI Hearing Impaired
LD Specific Learning Disabled
MU Multi-Handicapped
OH Other Health Impaired
OI Orthopedically Impaired
SI Speech-Language Impaired
SP Severely/Profoundly Mentally Handicapped
TM Trainable Mentally Handicapped
VI Visually Impaired
PD Preschool Developmentally Delayed

1998-99

NAME	AU	EH	EM	HI	LD	MU	OH	OI	SI	SP	TM	VI	TB	PD	TOTAL
LAKESIDE SCHOOL	0	4	2	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9
RIVER MILL	3	6	0	1	26	0	7	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	50
GRANDFATHER ACADEMY	0	9	3	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	21
F DELANY NEW SCH FOR	0	1	2	0	4	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	12
NGUZO SABA CHARTER	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	6
CAPE LOOKOUT MARINE	0	3	1	0	10	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16
TILLER SCHOOL	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	11
ENGELMANN SCH OF ART	0	2	1	0	3	0	2	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	13
CHATHAM CHARTER	0	0	0	0	6	0	2	1	7	0	0	1	0	0	17
THE LEARNING CENTER	0	0	1	0	6	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	10
MAUREEN JOY CHARTER	0	1	4	0	1	0	1	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	17
CARTER COMMUNITY CHA	1	5	2	1	3	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	17
KESTREL HEIGHTS SCH	0	1	0	0	12	0	5	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	19
TURNING POINT ACADEM	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
LIFT ACADEMY	0	0	5	0	4	0	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	13
QUALITY EDUCATION AC	1	0	3	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
DOWNTOWN MIDDLE	0	0	1	0	42	0	6	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	54
C G WOODSON SCH OF C	0	6	1	0	6	0	2	0	3	0	0	1	1	0	20
EAST WINSTON PRIMARY	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
HIGHLAND KINDERGARTE	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
IMANI INSTITUTE CHAR	0	0	1	0	12	0	5	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	20
HARNETT EARLY CHILDHOOD	0	1	1	0	6	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	9
AMERICAN RENAISSANCE	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
SUMMIT CHARTER	0	1	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	6
CHILDREN'S VILLAGE A	0	3	1	0	1	0	0	0	18	0	0	0	0	0	23
COMMUNITY CHARTER SC	1	0	0	0	8	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	13
LAKE NORMAN CHARTER	0	0	0	0	11	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13
MAST SCHOOL	0	0	0	0	8	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	11
ROCKY MOUNT CHARTER	1	0	6	0	2	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	13
PHASE ACADEMY OF JAC	0	0	5	0	3	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	11
ORANGE COUNTY CHARTER	0	1	1	0	6	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	11
VILLAGE CHARTER	0	1	0	0	10	0	5	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	22
NEW CENTURY SCHOOL	0	3	0	0	4	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
ARAPAHOE CHARTER	1	1	8	0	13	0	2	0	5	0	2	0	0	0	32
RIGHT STEP ACADEMY	0	2	7	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
CIS ACADEMY	0	1	1	0	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13
BRIDGES CHARTER SCHOOL	0	0	4	1	27	0	3	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	39
BREVARD ACADEMY	1	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
EXPLORIS	0	0	0	1	12	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	17
BAKER CHARTER HIGH	0	3	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
MAGELLAN CHARTER	0	0	0	0	23	0	14	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	42
STERLING MONTESSORI	0	0	2	0	14	0	1	0	5	0	1	0	0	1	24
FRANKLIN ACADEMY	0	0	1	0	4	0	0	0	19	0	0	0	0	1	25
EAST WAKE ACADEMY	0	3	1	1	21	0	5	0	4	0	0	0	1	1	37
SANKORE SCHOOL	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
BRIGHT HORIZONS ACAD	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	8
DILLARD ACADEMY	0	0	0	0	4	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	8
ELIZABETH GRINTON (a.k.a. UCAN)	0	2	1	0	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
ABCS	0	0	0	0	5	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	7
SALLIE B HOWARD SCHO	0	5	7	1	4	0	1	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	28
TOTAL	**9**	**71**	**74**	**6**	**373**	**1**	**84**	**6**	**154**	**1**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**6**	**794**

1999-00

NAME	AU	EH	EM	HI	LD	MU	OH	OI	SI	SP	TM	VI	TB	PD	TOTAL
LAKESIDE SCHOOL	0	4	2	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
RIVER MILL CHARTER	5	3	2	0	26	0	9	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	49
GRANDFATHER ACADEMY	0	4	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
CROSSNORE ACADEMY	0	1	2	0	6	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	3	14
EVERGREEN COMMUNITY CHAR	0	2	1	0	11	0	3	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	22
F DELANY NEW SCH FOR CHI	0	0	3	0	6	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	13
CAPE LOOKOUT MARINE SCI	0	3	2	0	21	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	27
TILLER SCHOOL	1	0	0	0	9	0	1	1	4	0	0	0	0	1	17
ENGELMANN SCH OF ART & S	1	5	0	0	9	0	1	0	11	0	0	0	0	0	27
CHATHAM CHARTER	0	2	0	0	3	0	2	1	9	0	0	1	0	0	18
WOODS CHARTER	0	2	1	0	6	0	3	0	4	0	0	0	1	0	17
THE LEARNING CENTER	0	0	1	0	11	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	16
OMA'S INC CHARTER	0	2	2	0	3	0	1	3	4	0	0	0	0	0	15
MAUREEN JOY CHARTER	0	4	6	0	7	0	4	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	28
HEALTHY START ACADEMY															
CARTER COMMUNITY CHARTER	1	8	5	0	8	2	7	1	0	0	2	1	0	0	35
KESTREL HEIGHTS SCH	0	1	0	0	14	0	4	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	22
TURNING POINT ACADEMY															
OMUTEKO GWAMAZIIMA	0	0	0	1	3	0	2	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	15
RESEARCH TRIANGLE CHARTE															
SUCCESS ACADEMY	0	0	1	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
LIFT ACADEMY	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
QUALITY EDUCATION ACADEM	0	1	1	0	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
DOWNTOWN MIDDLE	0	1	2	0	43	0	6	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	57
C G WOODSON SCH OF CHALL	0	5	3	0	6	0	2	0	5	0	1	1	0	0	23
EAST WINSTON PRIMARY															
FORSYTH ACADEMIES	0	1	3	0	6	0	4	0	17	0	0	0	0	0	31
HIGHLAND CHARTER															
IMANI INSTITUTE CHARTER	0	3	1	0	8	0	8	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	24
GREENSBORO ACADEMY	1	0	0	0	8	0	3	0	19	0	0	0	0	1	32
HARNETT EARLY CHILDHOOD	0	0	2	0	3	0	0	0	28	0	0	0	0	0	33
THE MOUNTAIN COMMUNITY S	1	0	1	0	1	2	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	10
AMERICAN RENAISSANCE CHA	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
AMERICAN RENAISSANCE MID	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
DEVELOPMENTAL DAY SCHOOL	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	11	0	0	0	1	15
SUMMIT CHARTER	0	0	0	0	9	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	13
PROVISIONS ACADEMY	0	2	3	0	7	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15
CHILDREN'S VILLAGE ACADE	0	3	5	0	6	0	1	0	40	0	0	0	0	2	57
LINCOLN CHARTER	0	1	0	0	6	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	8
COMMUNITY CHARTER SCHOOL	0	0	1	0	9	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	14
SUGAR CREEK CHARTER															
KENNEDY CHARTER	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
LAKE NORMAN CHARTER	0	0	0	0	21	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	24
MAST SCHOOL	0	0	1	0	6	0	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	12
SANDHILLS THEATRE ARTS R	1	0	1	0	4	0	3	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	13
ROCKY MOUNT CHARTER	1	0	22	0	19	0	0	0	17	0	1	0	0	2	62
PHASE ACADEMY OF JACKSON	0	1	5	0	7	0	1	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	20
ORANGE COUNTY CHARTER	0	0	0	0	16	0	3	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	22
NEW CENTURY CHARTER SCHO	1	1	0	0	5	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9
VILLAGE CHARTER	0	2	0	0	15	0	12	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	37
ARAPAHOE CHARTER SCHOOL	2	2	9	0	18	0	1	0	11	0	0	0	0	0	43
RIGHT STEP ACADEMY	0	2	11	0	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	17
CIS ACADEMY	0	0	6	0	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20
ROWAN ACADEMY	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
THOMAS JEFFERSON CLASS A	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
LAURINBURG CHARTER															
THE LAURINBURG HOMEWORK															
STANLY CMTY OUTREACH CHA	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	5
BREVARD ACADEMY	1	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	6
VANCE CHARTER SCHOOL	1	0	1	0	5	0	1	0	5	0	0	0	0	1	14
EXPLORIS	0	0	0	1	24	0	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	31

1999-00 (continued)

NAME	AU	EH	EM	HI	LD	MU	OH	OI	SI	SP	TM	VI	TB	PD	TOTAL
BAKER CHARTER HIGH	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
MAGELLAN CHARTER	0	0	0	1	29	0	8	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	44
STERLING MONTESSORI ACAD	0	0	3	0	12	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	3	24
FRANKLIN ACADEMY	0	1	3	0	18	0	6	0	26	0	0	0	0	0	54
EAST WAKE ACADEMY	0	0	1	1	19	0	7	0	7	0	1	0	0	1	37
SANKORE SCHOOL	0	1	0	0	4	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
SPARC ACADEMY	0	1	3	0	6	0	0	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	16
RALEIGH CHARTER HIGH															
NE RALEIGH CHARTER ACADE															
QUEST ACADEMY	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
BRIGHT HORIZONS ACADEMY															
DILLARD ACADEMY	0	0	0	0	3	0	2	0	4	0	0	0	0	1	10
WAYNE TECHNICAL ACADEMY															
ELIZABETH GRINTON (a.k.a. UCAN)	0	0	1	0	10	0	5	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	18
ABCS															
BRIDGES CHARTER SCHOOL	0	2	4	0	23	0	6	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	45
SALLIE B HOWARD SCHOOL	0	5	5	0	8	0	1	0	19	0	0	0	0	2	40
TOTAL	**18**	**79**	**129**	**4**	**573**	**6**	**142**	**12**	**338**	**11**	**6**	**4**	**1**	**19**	**1342**

Note. Blank rows for schools indicate that those schools did not report these data to DPI for that particular school year.

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Part III

Survey of

North Carolina

Charter School Directors:

1998, 1999, 2000

Executive Summary:
Survey of North Carolina Charter School Directors: 1998, 1999, 2000

During the summers of 1998, 1999, and 2000, charter school directors were surveyed to gather information about: (1) why their schools were created, (2) specific aspects about their programming and services, and (3) their accomplishments and barriers. The survey was changed between 1998 and 1999, so some information contained in this report is for 1999 and 2000 and some is for 1998, 1999, and 2000. In some cases, data are presented for the 27 schools that opened in 1997 and remained in operation through 2000.

School Origins and Characteristics

Charter school administrations have seen some turnover since opening in 1997-98, with 41% saying that they were not the first directors/principals in their schools. Thirty-six percent of charter school directors indicated that their schools were created to serve special student populations. These populations include students who are at-risk as well as students who are academically gifted. At-risk populations include those who are sexually or physically abused, incarcerated, or academically at-risk. Over time, the number of charter schools that reported waiting lists for admission has declined, and the number of students leaving charters for reasons other than graduation is also reported to have decreased.

Organization, Curriculum and Instruction

Charter school directors reported using a variety of organizational strategies within each school. The most common strategy reported over all three years was after-school programs. The use of a variety of instructional strategies and curriculum models commonly found in other public schools was also reported by most charter schools. The most common instructional strategies reported were hands-on learning and use of manipulatives, cooperative learning and group activities, and integration of content across subject areas and thematic teaching. In 2000, there was an increase in the use of hands-on activities, thematic teaching, and whole class instruction, and a decrease in other strategies.

The large majority of charter schools reported using the North Carolina Standard Course of Study in 1999 and 2000, which was an increase from 1998. This is perhaps because of an increased focus on standardized testing and ABCs accountability. However, schools also reported integrating a variety of other curriculum models into their programs, most often citing Character Education or Core Knowledge.

Charters also report fewer technology resources than other public schools. The student-to-computer ratio in charter schools in 2000 was 12 to 1, whereas the statewide figure for all public schools in 2000 was 4 to 1.

Parent Involvement

Although charter schools continue to report a great deal of parent involvement, there has been a decrease in the percentage of directors who said that at least 75% of their parents were actively involved in their children's learning. All schools, however, continue to offer a

variety of opportunities for parent involvement. Mechanisms for reporting student progress to parents have changed markedly over time, away from testing results and specific work products to report cards, conferences and notes or other less formal communications.

Governance and Operations

Charter schools continue to seek additional funds for facilities as well as daily operating expenses, with directors reporting that some money came from grants or other awards, donations, and loans. To more efficiently deal with these expenses, charter schools overall have increased their use of outside providers for some administrative activities.

The majority of the schools (65% in 1999 and 75% in 2000) had 10 or fewer board members. From 1998 to 2000 there was an increase in the percentage of schools including community members, business representatives, and local school district staff. There also was a decrease in schools that included positions for principals/directors and other staff.

Technical Assistance and Barriers to Operation

Charter schools reported receiving technical assistance from a variety of sources in 1999 and 2000, both from within the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction as well as other sources. The helpfulness of these sources as rated by charter school directors varied widely by year and by source.

Charter school directors also rated a variety of factors as being barriers to successful school implementation and operation. The specific factors rated as most problematic by directors focused primarily on financial needs, issues related to finding and hiring licensed teachers, transporting students, and meeting ABCs accountability requirements.

Survey of North Carolina Charter School Directors: 1998, 1999, 2000

Introduction

A survey was developed and distributed in the summer of 1998 to the directors of all 34 charter schools in existence at that time, and again in the summers of 1999 and 2000 to all open charter schools (52 schools in 1999 and 73 in 2000). Response rates were at or near 100 percent each year. The survey gathered information about a variety of topics, including:

- reasons the schools were created;
- specific aspects of programming and services;
- schools' accomplishments to date; and
- barriers to successful implementation.

Some of the items on the survey were changed between the 1998 and 1999 administrations, so some of the information contained in this report pertains only to 1999 and 2000 and some to 1998, 1999, and 2000. Although charter school directors responded to the survey each year, the respondents for any one school may have been different from year to year due to turnover in directors.

In addition to the year-by-year analyses that make up the bulk of this report, analyses were also done of the responses over time for the 27 charter schools that were in operation during all three years in an effort to examine possible changes over time in directors' responses. The results of these analyses, as well as national comparison data where available, are embedded throughout the report of the year-by-year analyses.

School and Organizational Characteristics

History and Mission

In 2000, paralleling results in 1998 and 1999, the reason cited most often by directors for creating a charter school was "to realize an educational vision" (25%). This was followed by "to encourage parental involvement" (14%) and "to have more autonomy" (8%). Survey data from charter schools nationwide also indicate that realizing an alternative vision for school (75%) is the most common reason for starting a charter school (RPP International, 2000). Ninety-six percent of directors stated that their missions remained unchanged since first approved by the State Board of Education and 85% said their comprehensive marketing plans also remained the same.

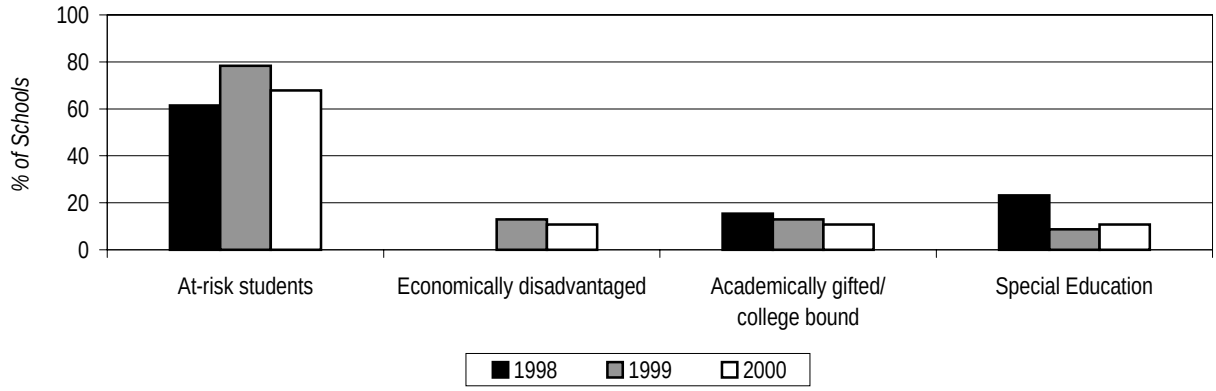
Administratively, the 27 charter schools that opened in 1997-98 and were still operating in 2000 have continued to retain their original directors at the same rate as other charter schools starting up in later years. Fifty-nine percent (59%) of the directors reported that they were the original directors. For the schools that *did* have a change of directors, however, more reported multiple changes in directorship, with the highest number in 1999 being 3 previous directors and the highest in 2000 being 5 previous directors.

Nature of the Student Population

Targeted groups. Each year, charter school directors were asked whether their school was designed to serve a particular population of students. A number of charter school directors said their schools were designed to serve specific populations (25% in 1998, 42% in 1999, and 36% 2000). For the 27 charter schools that opened in 1997-98 and remained open in 1999-00, 44% of directors said their schools were designed to serve special populations of students. Thus, the majority of charter schools did not report trying to target or serve a specific population of students.

Of those schools that reportedly targeted specific populations, four types of students were identified (Figure 1), with some schools targeting more than one type of student: 1) at-risk (e.g., academically at-risk, abused, dropouts, teen mothers, incarcerated), 2) economically disadvantaged students, 3) students who are academically gifted and/or college-bound, and 4) students with special needs or disabilities. Since 1998, the percentage of schools that reported focusing on at-risk students was highest and the biggest decrease was in schools focusing special education students.

Figure 1. Most Common Populations Targeted by Charter Schools: 1998, 1999, 2000



NOTE: Percentages are based only on the number of schools that reported targeting a particular student population.

Marketing. Charter school directors indicated that there was little change from 1998 to 2000 in the ways that they try to attract a diverse population of students. In 2000, the majority of respondents (63%) said they advertised in newspapers or on radio to attract students. These advertisements were often placed in "ethnic" newspapers, community newspapers or newsletters, and/or announced on local radio stations. Many of the advertisements and announcements were offered in both Spanish and English. About one-third (39%) of respondents also used flyers and targeted mailings to local churches, libraries, homes, or daycare centers to attract a diverse population. Others said they had partnerships with community groups or offered informational meetings in locations where community groups gather (36%) or they recruited by word-of-mouth or referrals (19%).

Waiting lists. Compared to the first year, fewer charter schools (down from 64% in 1998 to 52% in 1999 and 2000) reported having waiting lists in 2000. About 97% of waiting lists in all years had 200 or fewer students and 85% have 50 or fewer. Among the 27 charters

open all three years, the percentage of schools with waiting lists decreased slightly between 1998 and 2000 (from 67% to 59%), with about 75% of the lists having 50 or fewer students.

Student attrition. The number of students who were reported by directors as leaving charter schools (for reasons other than graduation) decreased for all schools between 1999 and 2000, from an average of 21 (range of 0 to 140) to 16 (range of 0 to 89). The percentage of students leaving also declined between 1999 and 2000 from an average of 16% (range of 0% to 114%) to 12% (range of 0% to 75%).

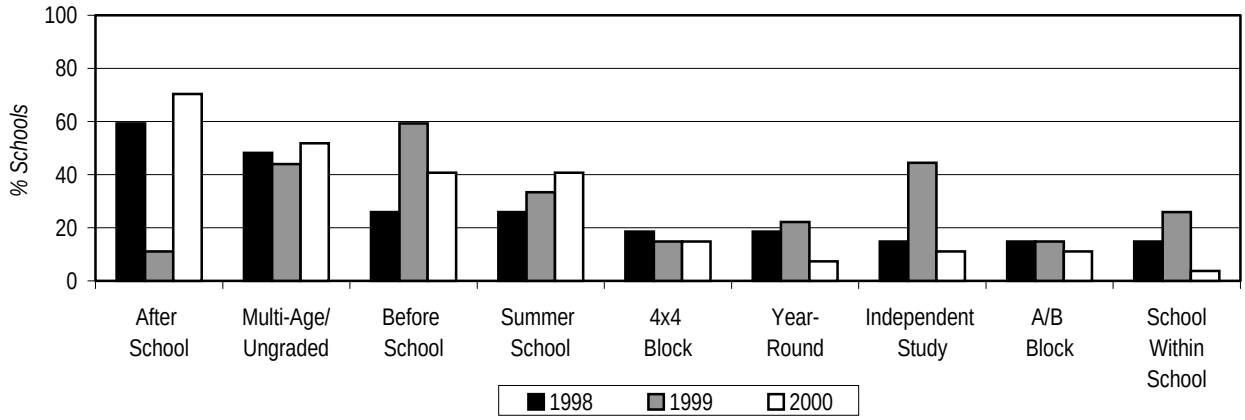
For the 27 schools open in all three years, attrition reported in 1999 was a mean of 19 (range of 3 to 140) and a mean percentage of 10% (range of 0% to 30%). In 2000, mean student attrition was 9 (range of 0 to 31) and the mean percentage was 7% (range of 0% to 21%). It appears, therefore, that attrition decreased the longer the schools were in operation.

In addition to the number of students who left each year, directors were also asked about the *reasons* why those students left. A lack of extracurricular activities (41%) and lack of opportunity for parent involvement (33%) were the most often cited reasons for leaving in 1999, followed by the school's program not meeting student needs (30%). Discipline problems (42%) and transportation problems (41%) were cited most often in 2000, followed by the school's environment being too structured (29%). Nine schools, three of which were new schools in 2000, did not supply information in the 2000 survey regarding students who left for reasons other than graduation or moving away. Additional data on student attrition in charters compared to other public schools is reported in Part II of this report.

Organizational Strategies/Academic Structures

Charter school directors reported using as few as 1 to as many as 10 different organizational/academic strategies for their schools. As shown in Figure 2, the most common strategy reported was after-school programs, followed by multi-age/ungraded structures, and before school programs. An increase in summer school is reported for each year, while year-round schedules decreased notably between 1999 and 2000. The responses and trends were virtually identical for the 27 inaugural schools in operation during all three years.

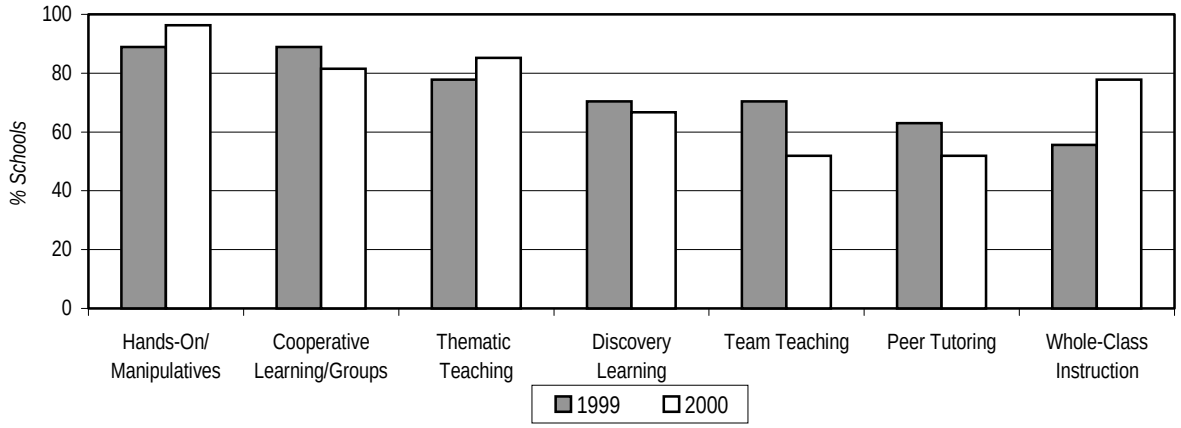
Figure 2. Organizational Strategies Used By All Charter Schools: 1998, 1999, 2000



Program Characteristics

Instructional strategies and curriculum models. Directors reported that their schools were using many different instructional strategies and curriculum models. Figure 3 shows that the most common instructional strategies reported were hands-on learning/use of manipulatives, cooperative learning/group activities, and thematic teaching. Additionally, in 2000, there was a notable increase in the use of whole-class instruction, a smaller increase in hands-on activities and thematic teaching, and a slight decrease in the prevalence of other strategies. The findings were nearly identical for the 27 schools in operation over all three years and indicate little change over time.

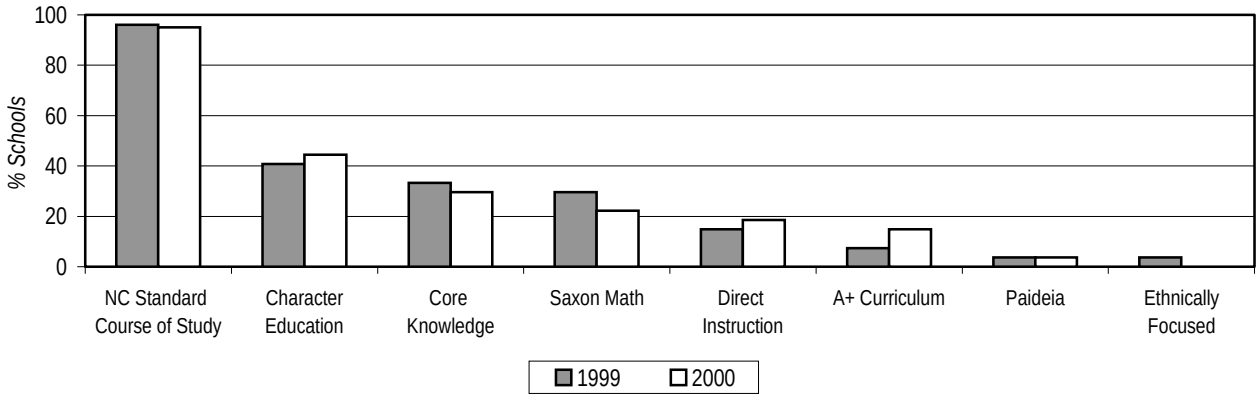
Figure 3: Instructional Strategies Used by Charter Schools: 1999, 2000



Note: This information was not collected in the 1998 survey.

The vast majority of charter schools reported using the North Carolina Standard Course of Study in 1999 (96%) and 2000 (95%) (see Figure 4). A number of other curricula appeared to be used concurrently (i.e., character education, Core Knowledge, and Saxon Math). There was no difference between the data for all schools and for the 27 inaugural schools.

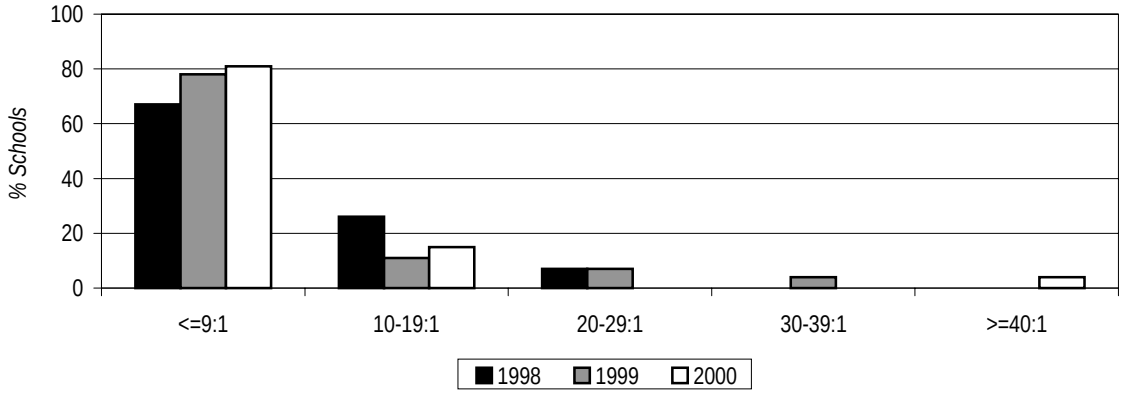
Figure 4. Curriculum Models Used By All Charter Schools: 1999, 2000



Note: This information was not collected in the 1998 survey.

Technology. There has been a great deal of variation in the number of computers available in charter schools for student instruction. The student:computer ratio for charter schools overall has remained relatively steady at 12:1 from 1998-2000. The corresponding statewide ratio, however, is approximately 4:1. Charter schools nationally have a student:computer ratio of approximately 9:1 (RPP International, 2000). For the 27 charter schools open in all three years, the average student:computer ratio has decreased (i.e., improved) from 12:1 to 10:1. Figure 5 shows that across all charter schools for each year, the majority reported student:computer ratios below 10:1.

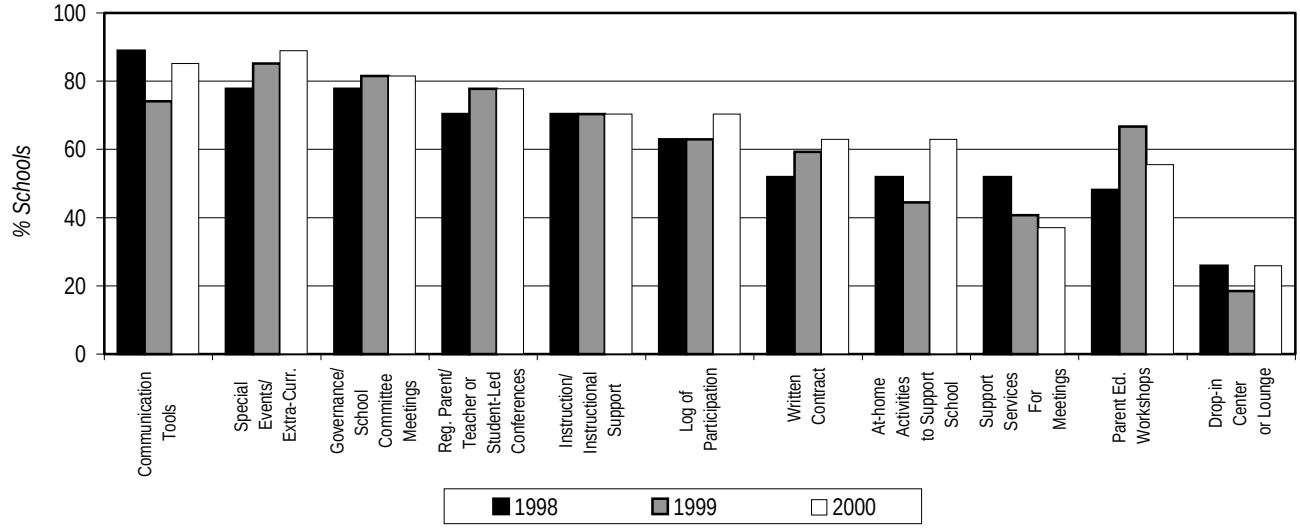
Figure 5. Student:Computer Ratios in All Charter Schools: 1998, 1999, 2000



Parent Involvement

Overall, there was little difference from one year to the next in the parent involvement opportunities offered by charters. As shown in Figure 6, schools continued to provide a variety of opportunities for parent involvement, with "extra-curricular activities/special events," "communication tools (newsletters, etc.)," and "governance" being the most common.

Figure 6. Parent Involvement Opportunities in Charter Schools: 1998, 1999, 2000



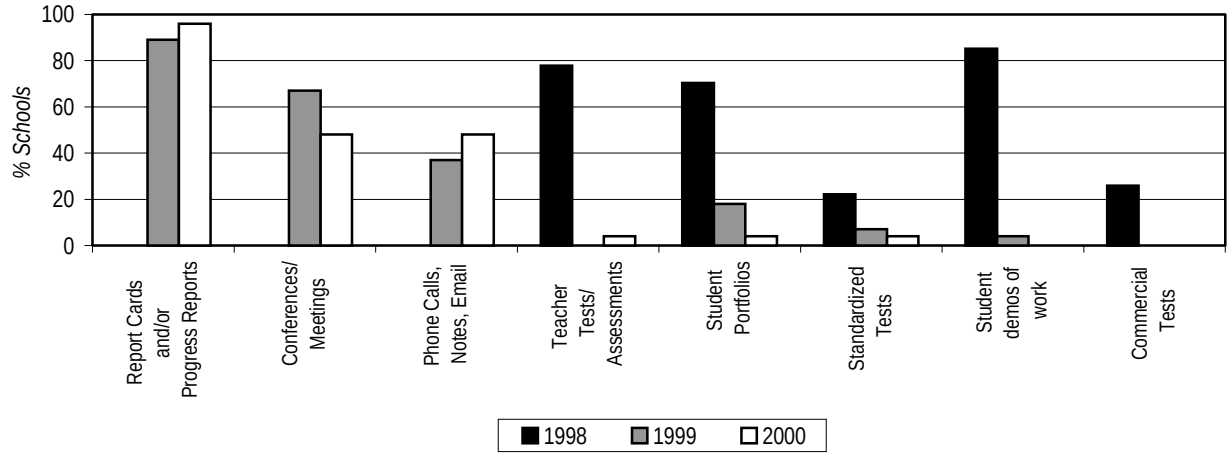
Although regular opportunities continue to be provided for parent involvement in charter schools, the percentage of directors estimating that at least three-fourths of their parents were actively involved in their child's learning decreased from 61% in 1998 to 49% in 2000. Additionally, the majority of the schools (66% in 1999 and 62% in 2000) held fewer than 10 parent meetings per year, and directors reported that typical parent attendance at these meetings fell from an average of 62% in 1999 to 47% in 2000.

For the 27 inaugural schools, the percentage of directors who said that at least three-fourths of parents were actively involved in their child's learning remained about half from 1998 to 2000 (48% to 52%). Further, directors indicated that parent attendance at meetings also increased from an average of 46% in 1999 to 51% in 2000. Thus, the overall decrease in parent attendance would appear to come from charter schools started in 1998-99 or later.

Reporting Student Progress to Parents

Charter schools appear to use a variety of methods to report their students' progress to parents. The number of different methods used across all schools for reporting student progress has increased from about 6 in 1998 to 12 in 2000. There was a substantial decrease in the use of standardized test scores, portfolios, and work samples to report to parents on student achievement since 1998, both for new charters and for the 27 schools that opened in 1997-98. In addition, directors increasingly report using report cards, informal parent contact (phone calls or notes), and conferences or meetings to inform parents of student progress.

Figure 7. Most Common Methods of Reporting Student Progress to Parents: 1998, 1999, and 2000



Governance and Operations

Financial and Operational Characteristics

There was virtually no change from 1999 to 2000 with respect to sources of funds (other than state) used for daily operations, with 79% of directors reporting that they received grants or other awards, 62% received donations, and 20% received loans. Although 81-90% of the schools reported that they were eligible for federal funds, only 9% applied for them in 1999 and only 33% applied in 2000. The most common reasons for not applying for these funds were the amount of paper work involved (relative to the amount of money that would actually be gained) and a lack of staff and/or time to complete the applications.

Table 1 contains a list of operational and support activities that are provided by most other public schools and the percentage of charter schools that reported that they also provided the services. There was a slight decrease from 1998 to 2000 in the percentage of charter schools that provided social work, food, and transportation services, but little change in services otherwise. Most charter schools provided special education services and special education testing/assessments.

Table 1. Percent of Charter Schools Providing Specific Services

	1998	1999	2000
Administrative Services			
Payroll	100	100	100
Budget/accounting	97	100	100
Insurance	97	98	100
Purchasing	100	100	100
Custodial services	97	100	100
Legal services	94	94	96
Services Provided to Students			
Special education testing/assessment	N/A	96	97
Special education services	N/A	98	97
Counseling/Psychological Services	94	88	92
Before/after-school programs	82	81	82
Health service/nurse	79	86	81
Food services	85	84	75
Transportation	85	86	75
Social work services	76	65	70

Note: Information labeled “N/A” was not collected in the 1998 survey.

Table 2 contains information regarding the provider of services for the charter schools. Note that the order of services is listed by the extent to which charter schools provided the services themselves in 2000. Most services are provided by a combination of outside sources and in-house staff, with purchasing noted as the only service for which outside providers constitute less than 10%. The patterns of service provision in North Carolina charter schools, in terms of both the types of services offered and the provider, are very similar to what is reported

by charter schools nationally (RPP International, 2000), although charters in North Carolina are less likely than charters nationally to rely on their local school district for any type of service.

Since 1998, more than half of charter schools have provided their own budget and accounting, purchasing, transportation, custodial, special education testing, and special education services; but outside providers were used for these services as well. In-house provision of purchasing, custodial, and insurance has generally increased over time. Reliance on outside providers for payroll, legal services, counseling/psychological services, and to a lesser extent food services and social work services, has increased across the three years.

Charter schools also tend to rely on outside providers for services rather than local school districts. The primary area in which charter schools did use the services of their local schools districts was in the provision of food services (approximately 15% each year). Generally, charter schools rely on means other than their school districts for transporting students to and from school, with only about 6% contracting with their LEAs for transportation in 2000. Schools often used more than one method of transportation, but the most common means reported in 2000 was parent carpool (65%), followed by school-owned buses (46%).

Table 2. Percent of Charter Schools Providing Services by Type of Provider

	Service Provider								
	Charter School			Local School District			Outside Provider		
	1998	1999	2000	1998	1999	2000	1998	1999	2000
Administrative Services									
Purchasing	76	96	93	0	0	0	18	10	8
Budget/accounting	65	58	66	0	2	0	39	58	55
Custodial services	58	69	66	0	0	1	42	31	41
Payroll	61	48	44	0	2	0	39	50	60
Insurance	18	29	23	3	0	0	73	71	79
Legal services	30	22	7	3	4	0	67	74	88
Services Provided to Students									
Special education services	N/A	88	81	N/A	2	0	N/A	27	47
Special ed. testing/assessment	N/A	58	60	N/A	2	0	N/A	56	68
Transportation	64	56	55	0	6	3	30	41	33
Before/after-school programs	46	67	49	0	0	0	30	33	30
Health service/nurse	33	34	42	0	0	3	42	66	40
Social work services	36	30	25	0	6	3	36	64	44
Food services	27	33	22	15	16	14	48	51	52
Counseling/Psychological Services	30	29	19	0	0	1	67	75	81

Note: Totals across rows for a given year may exceed 100%, as some schools use multiple providers for some services. Information labeled "N/A" was not collected in the 1998 survey.

The majority of charter schools (92%) in 1999 and 2000 were not affiliated with an education management organization (EMO). Of the 8% that were operated by an EMO, 25% received business services only from the EMO, 50% were operated entirely by the EMO, and 25% received other non-educational management services from the EMO.

Boards of Directors

Table 3 shows the percentage of schools that included different types of individuals on their boards and range of people who served in those positions in 1998, 1999, and 2000. In general, from 1998 to 2000 there was an increase in the percentage of schools including community members, business representatives, and local school district staff on their boards. There also was a decrease in schools that included positions for principals/directors and staff. From 1998 to 1999, there was a jump in the number of parents serving on boards, but this decreased again in 2000 to a level similar to that of 1998. Only one school included a student on its board in 1998 and 1999, but this increased to four in 2000. The low number of students is likely due in part to the fact that most charters serve the elementary and middle grades.

In general, across all three years, there was little change in the typical number of charter school board members. The majority of the schools (65% in 1999 and 75% in 2000) had 10 or fewer board members. In addition, in 1999 and 2000, 34% of charter school directors stated that training for their board members would have been beneficial, but fewer than half of that percentage reported that their boards had received any training.

Table 3. Representatives on Charter School Boards

Type of Board Position	Percent of Schools Having at Least One Member			Range of People in this Position on the Board		
	1998	1999	2000	1998	1999	2000
Parents	75.8	80.8	74.0	1-9	1-12	1-14
Community members	63.6	78.8	78.1	1-7 *(21 for 1 school)*	1-9 *(20 for 1 school)*	1-12 *(24 for 1 school)*
Director/Principal	60.1	48.1	42.5	1 *(3 for 1 school)*	1-3	1-2
Business representatives	39.4	44.2	42.5	1-8	1-11 *(20 for 1 school)*	1-11 *(18 for 1 school)*
Teachers in Charter	30.3	28.8	28.8	1-7	1-5	1-5
University faculty	24.2	19.2	21.9	1-3	1-3	1-3
Local school district staff	9.1	5.8	11.0	1-4	1-2	1-3
Students	3.0	1.9	5.5	1	1	1-4
Staff	15.1	0	0	1-2 *(20 for 1 school)*	0	0
Other	24.2	25.0	16.4	1-8	1-9	1-10

Table 4 shows that there has been virtually no change in the ethnic representation on charter school boards between 1999 and 2000. The majority of charter school board members were either White and/or Black, and only one school included an Asian board member.

Table 4. Ethnicity of Charter School Board Members by Percent and Range

	Percent of Boards Having at Least One Member		Range Serving on the Board	
	1999	2000	1999	2000
White	88.5	86.6	1-22	1-22
Black	80.8	79.1	1-12	1-12
Hispanic	9.6	3.2	1-3	1-9
American Indian	5.8	4.5	1-2	1-4
Multi-Racial	5.8	4.5	1-2	1-2
Asian	3.8	3.0	1	1
Other	0.0	3.0	0	1-2

Note: This information was not collected in the 1998 survey.

Facilities

In 1999 and 2000, the majority of charter school directors (89% and 82%, respectively) stated that they rented their facilities from someone other than their LEA. With the exception of one school whose building was donated, the remaining schools either purchased their buildings or rented from their LEAs for free or a nominal fee.

The most commonly reported barrier to acquiring school facilities was funding. More troubling was that the percentage of charter school directors citing this difficulty increased from 68% in 1999 to 79% in 2000. This was followed by slightly less than one-fourth (25% in 1999 and 28% in 2000) who mentioned difficulties finding appropriate space or the need to renovate space. Eighty-two percent of directors in 1999 and 85% in 2000 said that they still occupied the same facilities as when they first opened. Reasons for changes in location were due either to growth or that the original buildings were meant to be temporary. Two schools had moved due to hurricane damage.

Technical Assistance Received

In an effort to gather information about the quality of technical assistance services provided to charter schools, directors were presented with a list of potential assistance providers. The directors were asked first if they used the services of each source, and then to rate the helpfulness of each source that they had used. The ratings were made using a scale of 1 to 5, with ratings defined as: of 1 = *not helpful*, 2 = *slightly helpful*, 3 = *moderately helpful*, 4 = *quite helpful*, and 5 = *very helpful*. For ease of comparison, responses with scores of 2 and 3 were eliminated and responses with scores of 4 and 5 were combined in Table 5 as *very helpful*. Table 5 shows the number of schools that reported using each service together with the percent of users who rated the service as *not helpful* or *very helpful*.

In 2000, from 44% to 79% of charter school directors rated various sources of technical assistance from DPI as very helpful. There was a decrease in satisfaction from 1999 to 2000 in

four of the nine DPI service areas rated and an increase in four others. In 2000, between 19% and 80% of charter school directors rated technical assistance provided by groups other than DPI as very helpful. In this case, the level of satisfaction increased for six providers, decreased for five providers, and remained steady (i.e., within 2%) for three providers.

Table 5. Ratings of Technical Assistance Services Received by Charter Schools

	1999			2000		
	# Using Service	% Not Helpful	% Very Helpful	# Using Service	% Not Helpful	% Very Helpful
Services Provided by DPI Offices/Divisions						
Charter School Office	51	0	88	72	1	79
School Business (finance, budgets, federal programs, salary administration)	44	2	70	70	6	78
Human Resource Management/Licensure	47	23	26	67	4	44
Exceptional Children	43	5	67	66	10	55
Accountability Services/RACs	43	0	81	65	6	76
School Support (transportation, nutrition)	30	13	57	43	4	62
Educational Technologies	20	40	30	39	17	44
Instructional Services	35	11	49	37	10	44
School Improvement	25	20	44	34	22	44
Services Provided by Other Groups						
LEA personnel	46	26	37	70	18	44
Other charter schools	46	2	56	68	3	66
CPA/auditor	43	5	81	64	8	72
University/college faculty	34	21	35	61	19	50
Exceptional children consultants (therapists, psychologists, etc.)	42	7	74	58	3	76
NC Charter School League	29	21	34	46	12	50
Charter School Resource Center	52	4	58	46	13	40
Program-specific trainers (Core Knowledge, Direct Instruction, etc.)	30	13	77	45	4	80
NC Charter School Association	36	11	33	42	14	34
I.R.S.	27	26	37	33	33	36
Self Help Credit Union	19	37	32	23	32	40
SERVE (Southeastern Regional Vision for Education	23	30	57	22	21	42
Management consultants	21	38	52	21	10	36
Public School Forum	12	58	25	14	31	19

Note: This information was not collected in the 1998 survey. Percentages are based only on the schools who reported using those services.

It should be noted that some of these providers were used more often than others and that the satisfaction ratings may reflect few or many schools. In no instance was a provider (either DPI or other) indicated as being used by more than half the schools.

Barriers

In addition to being asked about sources of assistance, charter school directors were also asked to rate the difficulty in overcoming specific barriers. These ratings were made using a scale of 1 to 5, with a score of 1 meaning *not at all difficult*, 2 meaning *slightly difficult*, 3 meaning *somewhat or moderately difficult*, 4 meaning *quite difficult*, and 5 meaning *most difficult*. For ease of comparison, responses with scores of 2 and 3 were eliminated and responses with scores of 4 and 5 were combined in Table 6.

The most common barriers to successful operation in both 1999 and 2000 were related to staffing (difficulties finding staff, difficulties meeting licensure procedures, etc.), inadequate finances, difficulties transporting students, and lacking sufficient planning time. The barriers cited most often by North Carolina charter schools parallel those reported by charter schools nationally. Charter schools across the U. S. indicate that lack of funds for startup and daily operation, lack of planning time, and inadequate facilities are the most common barriers to successful implementation of their charters (RPP International, 2000).

There were also some notable changes between 1999 and 2000. Compared to 1999, more charter school directors in 2000 indicated difficulty with finding adequate funding for ongoing operations and teacher salaries, meeting ABCs accountability requirements, obtaining parent support, and communicating with their boards of Directors. During that same time period, there was also a decrease in concerns about transportation, meeting licensure procedures, and particularly LEA central office resistance.

Table 6. Charter Schools' Level of Difficulty in Overcoming Barriers By Percent

	1999			2000		
	# Responses	Not Difficult	Very Difficult	# Responses	Not Difficult	Very Difficult
Inadequate finances for ongoing operations	51	16%	39%	68	23%	45%
Paying staff adequately	51	27%	31%	70	31%	39%
Finding licensed staff	52	17%	42%	70	14%	37%
Providing transportation for students	51	25%	45%	68	35%	36%
Meeting NC teacher licensure procedures	51	18%	47%	70	20%	36%
Developing beginning induction program/ individual growth plans for new teachers	50	24%	36%	69	17%	36%
Meeting ABCs Accountability requirements	51	27%	25%	70	20%	35%
Lack of planning time	51	20%	39%	68	29%	35%
Local board of education opposition	52	35%	32%	68	36%	32%
Inadequate facilities	52	23%	33%	69	30%	30%
Developing licensure renewal plan/individual growth plans for experienced teachers	51	22%	27%	70	21%	28%
Lack of parent support	51	37%	16%	69	32%	20%
LEA central office resistance	50	28%	34%	67	37%	19%
Complying with DPI procedures	51	20%	22%	68	25%	19%
Teacher turnover	51	35%	18%	70	38%	18%
Teacher burnout	51	31%	22%	69	36%	17%
Complying with federal regulations	52	42%	8%	70	45%	11%
Administration/management of daily operations	51	31%	14%	69	33%	10%
Dealing w/internal processes/conflicts in school	51	45%	6%	67	38%	9%
Communicating w/school's board of directors	51	69%	0%	68	75%	9%
Communication with parents	51	31%	6%	70	48%	8%
Community opposition	51	59%	8%	69	61%	7%
Complying with health and safety regulations	51	51%	4%	70	65%	6%

References

RPP International. (2000). National study of charter schools: Fourth-year report. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Part IV

A Comparison of Achievement Among Charter and Other Public School Students in North Carolina: 1998 - 2001

A Comparison of Achievement Among Charter and Other Public School Students in North Carolina: 1998-2001

Introduction

In order to address the issue of student achievement in charter schools in North Carolina, the Charter School Evaluation Team, with the assistance of North Carolina Department of Public Instruction staff, compiled several datasets containing student achievement data for North Carolina public school students in grades 3-8. Among other items, these datasets contained End-of-Grade (EOG) test scores for all tested students in grades 3-8 in both charter and other public schools in North Carolina for the 1997-98, 1998-99, and 1999-2000 school years, as well as information regarding gender, ethnicity, and parent education level for those students. Selected data for 2000-2001 ABCs Accountability results were available at the time this report was written, and those results were incorporated in the analyses for which those data were available.

Four sets of analyses were conducted. The first set of analyses focused on both student- and school-level results, while the second primarily addressed student-level performance. Sets three and four looked exclusively at school-level results.

The first set of analyses examined at an aggregate level the percentage of charter and other public school students scoring at or above grade level (i.e., at or above Achievement Level III) on their EOG tests in reading and mathematics during the 1997-98, 1998-99, 1999-2000 and 2000-01 school years. These analyses looked at charter school students versus other public school students overall and by ethnicity. This section also presents data on the percentage of students scoring at or above Achievement Level III (grade level) over time within cohorts[5] of charter schools through 1999-2000. The second set of analyses was conducted using longitudinal data on a subset of students over a three-year period. The purpose of these analyses was to examine the growth in achievement over time of individual students in charter schools versus other public school students over the same time period.

The third set of analyses looked at the ABCs Accountability results for charter schools compared to other public schools for school years 1997-98 through 2000-2001. Finally, in a fourth analysis, profiles of three top-performing schools and three lower-performing schools are presented to illustrate the wide variation in performance among the charter schools. Taken together, these four sets of analyses represent an attempt to characterize similarities and differences in achievement and achievement trends between charter school students and students in other public schools during the first three years (and to a more limited extent, the first four years) of charter school operation in North Carolina.

[5] "Cohort" in this context refers to the group of schools that opened each fall since charters have been in existence in North Carolina. The first cohort of schools, therefore, is the set of schools that opened in the Fall of the 1997-98 school year.

Outcomes of Interest

Student-level performance was the focus of the first two sets of analyses. Achievement data for individual students in the first set of analyses consisted of the attained Achievement Levels of all tested students in grades 3-8 during the four school years (1997-98 through 2000-01) for which data were available. In the second set, EOG scale scores were used as the outcome variable. The third set of analyses - the ABCs Accountability results across four years (1997-98 through 2000-2001) - utilized the percentage of schools in each of the ABCs categories to compare charter schools to other public schools. The fourth set utilized the attained Achievement Levels of students within a set of high versus low performing schools over time.

Analysis Methods

For the first set of analyses, percentages of students scoring at or above Level III on EOG tests were calculated by cohort, type of school, year, subject area, and ethnicity. Data from all North Carolina public school students taking EOG tests were used.

For the second set of analyses, mean EOG scale scores are reported for a group of charter school students and a corresponding group of other public school students who participated in EOG testing each year between 1996-97 and 1999-2000. This analysis involved the construction of a data file containing testing information for all NC public school students who (a) took EOG tests each year from 1996-97 through 1999-2000; (b) remained in the same school (either charter or other public) each year between 1997-98 and 1999-2000; and (c) who were not retained at any point during the time period of interest. This data file was constructed by merging EOG testing databases from each of the aforementioned school years, linking students via their social security numbers (or other student ID numbers). All North Carolina public school students in grades 3 through 8 who satisfied the three criteria above were included in this analysis.

Data for from the 1996-97 school year is presented as well for these students in order to describe their achievement in the year prior to the advent of charter schools. Therefore, these analyses show the growth of a group of charter school students, from the year before they entered charter schools through their third year in a charter, along with the growth of a corresponding group of public school students who never attended a charter school.

For the third set of analyses, ABCs results are reported for each year that charter schools have operated in North Carolina - 1997-98 through 2000-01. Results for charter schools are contrasted with those of other public schools. Results are also presented for the first cohort of charters (those charters opening in the Fall of the 1997-98 school year that remained open through 1999-2000) to describe how those schools have performed over time. In the fourth set of analyses, three top performing schools and three lowest performing schools are profiled to illustrate the wide-ranging performance among charter schools.

Results - Analysis Set 1

Table 1 details the characteristics of all tested students in Grades 3-8 during the 1997-98, 1998-99, 1999-2000 and 2000-01 school years, broken down by type of school. Compared to students in other public schools, charter school students taking EOG tests during those four years were more likely to be male and Black, less likely to be White, and tended to have parents with higher levels of education.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of charter and other public school students taking EOG tests, 1997-98 through 2000-01

1997-98							
School Type	Gender		Ethnicity			Parent Education Level	
	Male	Female	White	Black	Other	High School or Less	Some College or more
Charter	53.9% *(n=1433)*	46.0% *(n=1224)*	55.7% *(n=1482)*	38.8% *(n=1032)*	5.3% *(n=142)*	30.4% *(n=809)*	57.4% *(n=1526)*
Other Public	51.1% *(n=295365)*	48.9% *(n=282865)*	63.7% *(n=368499)*	29.8% *(n=172344)*	6.5% *(n=37341)*	55.6% *(n=321717)*	43.3% *(n=250445)*
1998-99							
School Type	Gender		Ethnicity			Parent Education Level	
	Male	Female	White	Black	Other	High School or Less	Some College or more
Charter	54.3% *(n=1809)*	45.7% *(n=1523)*	55.5% *(n=1849)*	39.0% *(n=1300)*	5.5% *(n=183)*	36.5% *(n=1215)*	51.0% *(n=1699)*
Other Public	50.3% *(n=268370)*	49.7% *(n=264939)*	64.9% *(n=345869)*	29.2% *(n=155475)*	6.0% *(n=31961)*	49.6% *(n=264393)*	40.7% *(n=217064)*
1999-00							
School Type	Gender		Ethnicity			Parent Education Level	
	Male	Female	White	Black	Other	High School or Less	Some College or more
Charter	51.4% *(n=2749)*	48.6% *(n=2596)*	54.9% *(n=2934)*	41.5% *(n=2218)*	3.6% *(n=193)*	30.6% *(n=1636)*	64.6% *(n=3453)*
Other Public	50.5% *(n=270080)*	49.5% *(n=265048)*	64.2% *(n=343706)*	29.9% *(n=160261)*	5.8% *(n=31159)*	49.7% *(n=265770)*	49.2% *(n=263430)*
2000-01							
School Type	Gender		Ethnicity			Parent Education Level	
	Male	Female	White	Black	Other	High School or Less	Some College or more
Charter	51.2% *(n=4149)*	48.8% *(n=3947)*	57.3% *(n=4637)*	35.9% *(n=2906)*	6.8% *(n=553)*	32.3% *(n=2617)*	58.5% *(n=4734)*
Other Public	51.1% *(n=315841)*	49.5% *(n=301644)*	60.5% *(n=373586)*	30.3% *(n=186892)*	9.2% *(n=57007)*	54.6% *(n=337327)*	44.2% *(n=272668)*

Note. Percentages for the parent education level groups do not add to 100 because data were not available on this attribute for all students.

Table 2 indicates the percent of students in grades 3-8 in both charter and other public schools who scored at or above grade level (i.e., Achievement Level III) on EOG tests during the four years for which charter schools have been in existence in North Carolina. Results are broken down by school year, subject area, and school type, and they indicate that students in

charter schools were less likely than students in other public schools to score at or above grade level in either subject area. This was consistent for all ethnic groups for all 4 years.

In addition, the achievement gap between Black and White students in charter schools in both reading and mathematics was larger in 1998-99 than in 1997-98, and even larger in 1999-2000. In 2000-01, however, the gap in charter schools receded to levels closer to those of 1997-98 and 1998-99 (Table 2). In other public schools, the achievement gap in reading and mathematics has been approximately the same size each year, and it has been consistently smaller than the gap in charter schools. White students in charter schools have lagged behind White students in other public schools each year, but their performance has improved each year. The percentage of Black students scoring at or above Level III in charter schools decreased in each of the first three years of charter operation, then rose again in 2000-01, both in the absolute sense and relative to all other student groups in both subject areas.

Table 2. Percent of students scoring at or above Level III on EOGs by school type, ethnicity and subject area

1997-98				
	Reading		Mathematics	
	Charter	Public	Charter	Public
White	80.0%	80.5%	79.8%	85.3%
Black	50.0%	55.2%	49.0%	61.0%
1998-99				
	Reading		Mathematics	
	Charter	Public	Charter	Public
White	80.9%	83.7%	83.3%	87.7%
Black	50.9%	58.8%	47.7%	64.1%
1999-00				
	Reading		Mathematics	
	Charter	Public	Charter	Public
White	82.8%	84.4%	85.3%	88.4%
Black	45.4%	59.0%	43.3%	65.2%
2000-01				
	Reading		Mathematics	
	Charter	Public	Charter	Public
White	84.8%	85.7%	86.4%	89.4%
Black	50.4%	60.9%	50.5%	67.0%

Note. Data are only presented by ethnicity for White and Black students because they comprise nearly all (97%) of the charter school population.

School Cohort Analysis

In addition to analyzing data for all charter school students each year, further analyses were conducted looking at the same outcomes for each cohort of charter schools. Data for students from each cohort of schools are given in Table 3. Cohorts 97, 98, and 99 are schools that (a) opened in the Fall of each of those years and (b) were still operating through the 1999-2000 school year. The two remaining cohorts for which data are reported represent charter

schools that opened in 1997 but later closed (97-A), while schools coded as cohort 98-A opened in 1998 and later closed. Data for all other public schools for each year are presented for comparison purposes.

As was found in the overall analysis in Table 2, charter school students were less likely to score at or above grade level on EOG tests than other public school students in both subject areas. Among charter school students, trends over time varied by cohort. The cohort 97 schools (schools open from 1997-98 through 1999-2000) showed a second-year increase in both reading and mathematics scores, but the percent of students scoring at or above Level III in those schools then dropped in 1999-2000. Students in the cohort 98 schools, similar to the cohort 97 schools, scored slightly higher in their second year of operation than in the first. Charter schools that have closed (cohorts 97-A and 98-A) had significantly fewer students scoring at or above grade level than those charters that remained open through 1999-2000.

It should be mentioned that these “cohorts” are cohorts of charter schools, not students. Therefore, these data do not represent the same exact groups of students from year to year. They represent the same charter schools, but a certain number of their students will leave or graduate each year and others will come in. Therefore, these data speak to the performance of specific groups of schools over time, not the performance of specific students over time.

Table 3. Percent of students at or above grade level by school cohort and subject area

Cohort	Total # Schools	Reading			Mathematics		
		1997-98	1998-99	1999-00	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00
97	27	67.7 (23 schools)	73.2 (18 schools)	67.9 (27 schools)	66.4 (23 schools)	77.0 (18 schools)	70.5 (27 schools)
98	17		67.5 (17 schools)	69.7 (17 schools)		64.5 (17 schools)	69.1 (17 schools)
99	17			62.6 (17 schools)			61.5 (17 schools)
97-A	7	57.1 (7 schools)	37.2 (3 schools)	34.0 (1 school)	44.0 (7 schools)	46.9 (3 schools)	34.0 (1 school)
98-A	4		57.1 (4 schools)	54.3 (3 schools)		45.8 (4 schools)	45.2 (3 schools)
All Other Public Schools		66.0 (1663 schools)	75.6 (1566 schools)	76.0 (1703 schools)	69.0 (1663 schools	80.3 (1566 schools)	80.8 (1703 schools)

Note: For cohorts 97, 98 and 99, not all schools had tested students every year. Therefore, their data may be based on fewer than the indicated number of schools for some years. For cohorts 97-A and 98-A, their data is based on fewer schools each year as schools gradually closed.

Results - Analysis Set 2

One of the limitations of the approaches used in the first set of analyses reported here is that they do not reveal any information about the performance of particular students over time. In order to gain a clearer picture of the growth in achievement over time of individual students in charter schools, a longitudinal database was created which contained testing records from all charter and other public school students in North Carolina in grades 3 through 8 who: (a) Had four years' worth of EOG test data (1996-97 through 1999-2000); (b) remained in the same school during the three-year period from 1997-98 through 1999-00; and (c) were not retained between 1996-97 and 1999-2000. Multiple EOG testing databases were merged to create this longitudinal database, using students' social security numbers (or other ID numbers), grade levels, and school codes. This database allowed the research team to examine how individual students' achievement patterns change over time in charter schools and other public schools. However, it should be noted that these students represent only students who have remained in the same school over time, not the total enrollment of all students across the three years. Thus, they may not be similar to students who came and left or who entered those schools at a later time.

In total, 747 charter school students and 170,839 students from other public schools were identified who met the three criteria listed above. All tested students in North Carolina public schools in grades 3 through 8 were included in this database as long as they satisfied those three criteria. Although the two resulting groups of students were comparable with respect to gender, students in the charter group were more likely to be Black (33% versus 26%). In addition, students in the charter school group were more likely to have parents with at least some education beyond high school (69% versus 44%). These differences are basically proportional to those shown earlier for the entire population of tested students (Table 1).

Charter Schools Represented

Students in the charter school group were drawn from 23 of the 27 schools that opened in 1997-98 and remained open through 1999-2000. Because these analyses focused on students who had been in the same charter school for three consecutive years from 1997-98 through 1999-2000, the charter school students are, by necessity, drawn entirely from schools opening in the 1997-98 school year. Rocky Mount Charter School, Magellan Charter School, Downtown Middle Charter School and Arapahoe Charter School had the most students represented (145, 133, 114 and 83, respectively). These four schools alone accounted for 64% of the charter school students in the group. Exploris Middle School and Sallie B. Howard Charter School each had between 30 and 40 students included in this group as well, while Chatham Charter School, Summit Charter School, and Francine Delaney New School for Children had between 20 and 30 students each. The remaining 14 schools had 20 or fewer students included. Students in the other public schools group were drawn from hundreds of schools across the state.

Tables 4 and 5 show the average EOG scale scores by subject area for eight separate cohorts[6] of students - four charter school cohorts and four cohorts from other public schools. The four charter school cohorts consist of students who were tested in 1996-97 in a non-charter

[6] Unlike in the school-level achievement analyses presented earlier, here the term "cohort" does mean the same students tested multiple times over a period of years.

public school in North Carolina (i.e., prior to enrolling in charter school) and subsequently were tested in a charter school for the next 3 years. The four other public school cohorts consist of students who were tested each year between 1996-97 and 1999-2000 in other (i.e., non-charter) public schools. The four cohorts in each type of school are defined as follows:

- Students taking Grade 3 Pretests in the Fall of 97, Grade 3 EOGs in Spring 98, Grade 4 EOGs in Spring 99, and Grade 5 EOGs in Spring 2000;
- Students taking Grade 3 EOGs in Spring 97, Grade 4 EOGs in Spring 98, Grade 5 EOGs in Spring 99, and Grade 6 EOGs in Spring 2000;
- Students taking Grade 4 EOGs in Spring 97, Grade 5 EOGs in Spring 98, Grade 6 EOGs in Spring 99, and Grade 7 EOGs in Spring 2000; and
- Students taking Grade 5 EOGs in Spring 97, Grade 6 EOGs in Spring 98, Grade 7 EOGs in Spring 99, and Grade 8 EOGs in Spring 2000.

It should be noted that the number of students in one of these four cohorts is not proportional to the other three. This is largely due to the fact that students in other public schools in the third cohort listed above (covering grades 4 through 7) cover a range of grades that is likely to involve a transition from an elementary school to a middle school. Therefore, because of the requirement that all students in the sample be in the same school from 1997-98 through 1999-2000, many of the students who would otherwise have been included in that cohort were excluded, leaving fewer students in that cohort for other public schools group.

Overall Longitudinal Results

With the exception of the youngest cohort, the group of students entering charter schools during the 1997-98 school year had higher prior achievement scores (from 1996-97) than the other public school students in both subject areas. However, over the next three years, those charter school students tended to lose ground to their peers in other public schools (Tables 4 & 5). This was true at all grade levels in both subject areas; however, the growth differences between the two groups of students in each case were relatively small, typically only 1-2 scale score points over the three-year span.

Table 4. Charter and Public school EOG scale score averages by grade level - Reading

Grade Level	Baseline Year	Charter	Charter	Charter	Baseline Year	Other Public School	Other Public School	Other Public School
	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00
3 (pretest)	136.6 *(n=153)*				138.6 *(n=56361)*			
3	146.8 *(n=167)*	142.3			145.2 *(n=55527)*	146.9		
4	151.1 *(n=190)*	150.5	146.9		148.9 *(n=11683)*	150.2	150.4	
5	157.7 *(n=237)*	154.9	155.0	152.3	153.8 *(n=47268)*	154.4	155.0	156.1
6		160.2	157.8	157.5		156.9	157.5	157.2
7			163.3	161.2			160.9	160.4
8				166.0				163.4

Table 5. Charter and Public school EOG scale score averages by grade level - Mathematics

Grade Level	Baseline Year	Charter	Charter	Charter	Baseline Year	Other Public School	Other Public School	Other Public School
	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00
3 (pretest)	129.3 *(n=153)*				131.2 *(n=56361)*			
3	145.6 *(n=167)*	136.6			144.3 *(n=55527)*	143.9		
4	151.4 *(n=190)*	151.9	147.7		150.1 *(n=11683)*	152.7	153.5	
5	161.7 *(n=237)*	155.5	159.5	155.5	157.5 *(n=47268)*	157.9	160.3	160.6
6		168.0	163.8	166.4		165.0	166.0	166.5
7			175.6	171.5			172.2	171.9
8				180.3				176.7

Longitudinal Results by Ethnicity

Tables 6 through 9 include the average EOG scale scores for these same students disaggregated by ethnicity (White or Black). Students whose ethnicity was neither White nor Black were not included in these tables due to very small numbers in the charter school group.

The picture when the data are disaggregated by ethnicity looks very similar to the overall data in Tables 4 and 5. More often than not, the charter school students (both Black and White) started out with higher levels of achievement than their other public school peers before entering charter schools. However, charter school students of both ethnicities (regardless of whether they as a group were higher or lower-achieving prior to enrolling in a charter) did not make the same amount of progress as their peers in other public schools between 1997-98 and 1999-2000. This discrepancy is consistent for both White and Black students in reading as well as for Black students in mathematics. In reading, these growth differences were small, however, typically amounting to only 1-2 scale score points in each cohort over the three-year period (Tables 6 & 7). In mathematics, the growth differences between the Black charter school students and their peers in other public schools were somewhat larger (ranging from 2.5 to 6 points, depending on the cohort; Table 9). Overall, the White charter school students largely kept pace with their peers in other public schools in mathematics over the three-year period, with specific trends varying by cohort (Table 8).

Achievement Gaps

Looking within each type of school, these data also allow for an inspection of the achievement gap and whether its nature varies between the charter school sample and the other public school sample.

In reading, the achievement gaps in the baseline year between Black and White students varied by grade level cohort, but overall the group that entered charter schools in 1997-98 had a slightly larger gap to begin with than the group of other public school students (Tables 6 & 7). In neither type of school did this gap grow or shrink significantly after the baseline year - the differences that existed in 1996-97 between White and Black students in both types of schools largely remained constant through 1999-2000.

The achievement gaps in mathematics in the baseline year also varied by grade level cohort, and were again slightly larger in the charter school group (Tables 8 & 9). Over the next three years, the mathematics gaps within both the charter and other public school groups got larger in most case; however, it grew at a faster rate among the charter school students. The gap in mathematics achievement among the other public school cohorts grew by between 0.7 and 2.2 points, while among the charter school cohorts the gap grew by between 0.7 and 7.7 points.

Table 6. Charter and Public school EOG scale score averages by grade level: White students, Reading

Grade Level	Baseline Year	Charter	Charter	Charter	Baseline Year	Other Public School	Other Public School	Other Public School
	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00
3 (pretest)	138.6 *(n=71)*				140.0 *(n=39210)*			
3	150.0 *(n=103)*	144.7			147.1 *(n=38650)*	148.7		
4	154.1 *(n=124)*	153.8	149.8		150.7 *(n=8304)*	152.1	152.3	
5	159.4 *(n=178)*	157.9	158.1	155.4	155.5 *(n=32995)*	156.1	156.7	157.8
6		161.9	161.3	160.9		158.6	159.2	159.3
7			164.9	163.9			162.4	162.1
8				167.9				165.0

Table 7. Charter and Public school EOG scale score averages by grade level: Black students, Reading

Grade Level	Baseline Year	Charter	Charter	Charter	Baseline Year	Other Public School	Other Public School	Other Public School
	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00
3 (pretest)	134.8 *(n=77)*				135.1 *(n=14637)*			
3	141.3 *(n=61)*	140.3			140.6 *(n=14609)*	142.3		
4	144.7 *(n=59)*	144.6	144.4		144.5 *(n=2546)*	145.5	145.7	
5	152.1 *(n=52)*	148.4	149.6	149.5	149.6 *(n=12370)*	150.1	150.9	151.6
6		154.4	150.1	151.6		152.4	153.4	152.2
7			158.1	155.3			156.9	156.1
8				160.3				159.4

Table 8. Charter and Public school EOG scale score averages by grade level: White students, Mathematics

Grade Level	Baseline Year	Charter	Charter	Charter	Baseline Year	Other Public School	Other Public School	Other Public School
	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00
3 (pretest)	132.2 *(n=71)*				132.6 *(n=39210)*			
3	149.2 *(n=103)*	142.0			146.5 *(n=38650)*	146.1		
4	155.3 *(n=124)*	157.5	152.7		152.2 *(n=8304)*	154.9	155.6	
5	163.5 *(n=178)*	159.4	165.3	161.1	159.6 *(n=32995)*	159.8	162.4	162.6
6		170.2	167.8	172.7		167.1	167.9	168.9
7			177.7	175.6			174.4	174.1
8				183.0				179.2

Table 9. Charter and Public school EOG scale score averages by grade level: Black students, Mathematics

Grade Level	Baseline Year	Charter	Charter	Charter	Baseline Year	Other Public School	Other Public School	Other Public School
	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00
3 (pretest)	126.8 *(n=77)*				127.6 *(n=14637)*			
3	139.6 *(n=61)*	131.5			138.6 *(n=14609)*	138.3		
4	143.0 *(n=59)*	142.1	143.3		144.6 *(n=2546)*	147.1	148.1	
5	155.5 *(n=52)*	147.1	149.7	150.1	152.2 *(n=12370)*	152.5	155.2	155.4
6		160.8	154.9	155.4		159.5	160.7	160.3
7			168.6	162.6			166.4	165.7
8				171.5				170.2

Results - Analysis Set 3

Analysis Set 3 compares and contrasts results from North Carolina's ABCs Accountability Model for charter schools and other public schools. The ABCs Accountability Model is a school-based accountability program, implemented in 1996-97 for K-8 schools and in 1997-98 for high schools. In 1999 the two models were combined into one comprehensive ABCs model for elementary, middle and high schools. Various elements have been added and fine-tuned in the intervening years. The ABCs accountability program includes both growth and absolute performance (proficiency) standards for each elementary, middle, and high school in the state. End-of-grade (EOG) and End-of-course (EOC) test results and other selected components are used to measure the schools' growth from the previous year as well as performance. Performance is measured as a proficiency standard on these tests and refers to "at or above Achievement Level III" (often informally referred to as "at/above grade level").

Four primary designations comprise the ABCs accountability results. Schools that attain their exemplary growth standard or target (roughly 10% above expected growth) are designated as *Exemplary Growth Schools*. Those schools that meet their expected growth standard are designated as *Expected Growth Schools*. Staff in both the exemplary and expected growth status schools receive differential incentive bonuses. Schools that do not meet their expected growth target and have fewer than half of their students who score at Achievement Level III receive the designation of *Low-Performing Schools*. The fourth primary ABCs category is that of *No Recognition Schools* - schools that do not meet growth expectations but have at least 50 percent of their students (including a standard error measure) at Achievement Level III.

Two of the additional designations that schools can receive include *School of Excellence* and *School of Distinction.* A *School of Excellence* is a school that made expected growth and has at least 90% of its students' scores at or above Achievement Level III. A *School of Distinction* is one that has at least 80% of its students' scores at or above Achievement Level III irrespective of growth (but does not qualify as a *School of Excellence*). More information about the ABCs Accountability Program can be found in the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's Report Card for the ABCs of Public Education, Volume I: 2000-2001 Growth and Performance of Public Schools in North Carolina on the Department's web site (http://www.ncpublicschools.org).

Table 10 shows the ABCs accountability model results for four years - 1998, 1999, 2000, and 2001 - by categories for school performance based on a combination of growth (using mean scale scores) and absolute performance (using percent proficient). Charter schools and other public schools (omitting alternative schools) are shown, as well as the combined results. The numbers of schools in the table may not match the total number of schools - especially for charter schools in their first year of operation, because EOG or EOC test scores must be available for each student included for the current and previous year. Schools without sufficient data were not included in the ABCs results.

Table 10. 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001[1] ABCs Results for Charter Schools and the State: Percent of Schools by Category

ABCs Categories	All North Carolina Schools[2]				Charter Schools				Other Public Schools			
	1998[3] (n=1660)	1999 (n=1975)	2000 (n=2048)	2001 (n=2087)	1998 (n=24)	1999 (n=40)	2000 (n=70)	2001 (n=78)	1998 (n=1637)	1999 (n=1935)	2000 (n=1978)	2001 (n=2009)
Exemplary Growth	64.9	58.4	45.7	24.1	12.5	37.5	24.3	19.2	65.7	58.9	46.4	24.3
Expected Growth	18.4	23.0	23.5	34.4	8.3	10.0	12.9	9.0	18.6	23.3	23.9	35.4
No Recognition	15.7	17.5	28.8	40.1	50.0	37.5	38.6	55.1	15.2	17.5	28.4	39.5
Low Performing	0.9	0.7	2.1	1.4	29.2	15.0	24.3	16.7	0.5	0.4	1.3	0.8
Excellence*	1.4	2.4	3.5	8.2	8.3	5.0	4.3	6.4	1.3	2.4	3.5	8.3
Distinction**	17.5	20.6	24.1	30.1	25.3	15.0	14.3	20.5	17.5	20.7	25.2	31.0

[1] As of October 4, 2001.
[2] Includes Charter Schools plus all Other Public Schools, with the exception of Alternative Schools.
[3] The 1998 ABCs data presented here includes only schools with grades 3-8, as reflected in the first Charter School Evaluation. It was the first year for high schools in the ABCs Accountability Model and they were handled differently that year.
* Excellence = 90% or more students at grade level and made at least expected growth
** Distinction = 80% or more students at grade level
Note: The numbers of schools in this table is lower than the actual number of schools in the state, because some schools are not included in the ABCs Program each year for a variety of reasons. Also, Alternative Schools are not included.

Typically, variation in performance across years within each ABCs category is greater for charter schools, at least in part due to new schools being added each year and smaller total numbers. With the exception of charter schools from 1998 to 1999, the percentage of schools showing *Exemplary Growth* has decreased each of the four years for both charter and other public schools (OPS). OPS had approximately a 60 percent decrease in the percentage of schools showing *Exemplary Growth*, while charters showed roughly a 50 percent decrease. On the other hand, OPS increased in the percentage of schools showing *Expected Growth* (almost double) to 35.4% in 2001, while charter schools increased until 2000 and then dropped in 2001 to 9.0%. *No Recognition* schools (called Adequate Performance schools in 1998) also increased steadily each year for OPS, largely due to the drop in *Exemplary Growth*. *No Recognition* charter schools also have increased since 1999, reflecting a decrease in all other ABCs categories. This is the category with the largest percentage of schools for both groups in 2001 (about 40% for OPS and 55% for charters). Charters continue each year to have a higher percentage of their schools in the *Low Performing* designation than OPS, with almost 17% for 2001 compared to less than one percent for OPS.

The percentage of OPS having *Schools of Distinction* (80+% proficient) or *Excellence* (90+% proficient) designations increased steadily each year. In 2001, almost one-third (31%) of the OPS were *Schools of Distinction* and 8.3% were *Schools of Excellence*. Charter schools, as in other categories, varied more over time - typically dipping in 1999 and 2000 - with a somewhat smaller percentage of schools in each designation than OPS in 2001 (20.5% Distinction; 6.4% Excellence).

Overall, the amount of growth based on the ABCs categories appears to have slowed for all public schools, including charters. This pattern is also consistent with the picture portrayed by cohort performance over time for charter schools. Table 11 compares ABCs results for the 20 charter schools that were open and had ABCs results for all 4 years between 1997-98 and 2000-01. Generally, the performance of this group of charter schools improved from 1997-98 to 1998-99, slipped back in 1999-00, and then improved slightly in 2000-01. This is largely consistent with the trend for all charter schools over that same period (Table 10). Notably, the two charters that were Schools of Excellence were the same two schools each year.

Table 11. Percent of Schools by ABCs Category: Charter Schools Open From 1997-98 Through 2000-01

ABCs Category	Results for 20 Charters Open from 1997-98 Through 2000-01			
	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01
Exemplary Growth	15	50	25	30
Expected Growth	10	15	15	15
No Recognition	50	30	50	55
Low Performing	25	5	10	0
Excellence *	10	10	10	10
Distinction **	15	15	20	20

* Excellence = 90% or more students at grade level and made at least expected growth

** Distinction = 80% or more students at grade level

Note: This table only includes those charter schools that had ABCs results available for all 4 years.

Results - Analysis Set 4

Although the previous analyses all point toward lower achievement in charter schools, it must be understood that aggregating achievement results across multiple schools masks the wide variation in achievement between different schools. Analysis Set 3 provides some evidence of this, by showing the representation of charter schools in all categories of the ABCs Accountability Program. Although average measures of achievement do not compare favorably with other public schools in most cases, there are charter schools whose students are achieving at levels to rival even the most successful public schools in the state. There are also charters whose students demonstrate exceptionally low levels of achievement. The purpose of this analysis is to further illustrate the wide variation in achievement demonstrated by individual charters so that the performances of certain charter schools on the state's tests are not entirely obfuscated by aggregation and averages.

The wide variation in the performance of charter schools in the ABCs Accountability Program can be seen in the distribution of their performance composite scores. Thirteen percent of charter schools in 1999-2000 had performance composites below 25. An additional 31 percent had composites between 25 and 50. An additional 32 percent of charters had performance composites between 50 and 75, with the remaining 24 percent having performance composites above 75. Tables 12 and 13 contrast levels of achievement among the top-performing charter schools (labeled 1, 2, and 3) in the state and three of the lower-performing charter schools (A, B, and C), as indicated by the number of students scoring at or above grade level on EOG tests between 1997-98 and 1999-2000. Table 12 includes the percentage of students at or above grade level in the entire school while Table 13 disaggregates the same information by ethnicity.

The schools chosen for comparison were purposefully selected to represent schools that had either high numbers or low numbers of students at or above grade level. Characteristics of the schools included in the high-performing category are as follows: Schools 1 and 3 serve both elementary and middle school students while School 2 only serves students in the middle grades. The minority populations of these three schools average about 15-20% and have increased yearly along with their overall enrollments. The schools categorized as low-performing include an elementary school (School A), a school serving both elementary and middle grade students (School B), and a school that only serves students in the middle grades (School C). The minority populations in these schools are much higher than those of the high-performing schools (98-100%).

Table 12. Percentage of students at or above grade level on EOG tests by school

School	Reading			Mathematics		
	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00
1	54.3% *(n=38)*	57.0% *(n=49)*	71.8% *(n=61)*	58.6% *(n=41)*	74.4% *(n=64)*	89.5% *(n=77)*
2	98.1% *(n=51)*	97.8% *(n=91)*	95.4% *(n=145)*	98.1% *(n=52)*	96.8% *(n=90)*	93.4% *(n=142)*
3	97.2% *(n=279)*	97.7% *(n=294)*	97.7% *(n=296)*	97.2% *(n=279)*	98.7% *(n=297)*	99.3% *(n=301)*
A	33.3% *(n=8)*	21.3% *(n=10)*	22.7% *(n=17)*	20.8% *(n=5)*	34.0% *(n=16)*	39.5% *(n=30)*
B	36.3% *(n=41)*	40.2% *(n=37)*	41.6% *(n=37)*	39.5% *(n=45)*	41.3% *(n=38)*	48.9% *(n=43)*
C	23.7% *(n=14)*	18.4% *(n=7)*	35.4% *(n=17)*	16.9% *(n=10)*	23.7% *(n=9)*	33.3% *(n=16)*

Table 13. Percentage of students at or above grade level on EOG tests by ethnicity

1997-98

	Reading						Mathematics					
School	**1**	**2**	**3**	**A**	**B**	**C**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**A**	**B**	**C**
White	55.4% *(n=31)*	100% *(n=43)*	98.8% *(n=247)*				60.7% *(n=34)*	97.7% *(n=43)*	98.4% *(n=24)*			
Black	50.0% *(n=4)*	85.7% *(n=6)*	79.2% *(n=19)*	30.4% *(n=7)*	35.8% *(n=39)*	22.8% *(n=13)*		100% *(n=7)*	83.3% *(n=20)*	21.7% *(n=5)*	39.1% *(n=43)*	15.8% *(n=9)*

1998-99

	Reading						Mathematics					
School	**1**	**2**	**3**	**A**	**B**	**C**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**A**	**B**	**C**
White	60.9% *(n=42)*	100% *(n=76)*	99.2% *(n=253)*				75.4% *(n=52)*	98.7% *(n=75)*	99.2% *(n=253)*			
Black	27.3% *(n=3)*	81.8% *(n=9)*	81.0% *(n=17)*	21.7% *(n=10)*	40.2% *(n=37)*	18.4% *(n=7)*	72.7% *(n=8)*	81.8% *(n=9)*	95.2% *(n=20)*	34.0% *(n=16)*	41.3% *(n=38)*	23.7% *(n=9)*

1999-00

	Reading						Mathematics					
School	**1**	**2**	**3**	**A**	**B**	**C**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**A**	**B**	**C**
White	72.5% *(n=50)*	97.6% *(n=120)*	98.4% *(n=247)*				90.0% *(n=63)*	95.9% *(n=118)*	99.6% *(n=250)*			
Black	60% *(n=6)*	91% *(n=20)*	89.3% *(n=25)*	21.6% *(n=16)*	41.6% *(n=37)*	35.6% *(n=16)*	80.0% *(n=8)*	77.3% *(n=17)*	96.4% *(n=27)*	38.7% *(n=29)*	48.9% *(n=43)*	33.3% *(n=15)*

Note. Blank cells indicate that no students from that ethnic group were tested at that school that year. Students of other ethnic backgrounds are not included in this table due to their limited presence in these schools.

Summary and Cautionary Notes

Overall, the various school- and student-level analyses reported here indicate that students in charter schools on average perform less well than their public school peers. This difference is slightly more pronounced for Black charter school students, particularly in mathematics, despite an upward trend in their overall performance in 2000-01. White students in charter schools, in terms of both absolute performance and growth over time (at least for a select group of students – see Analysis Set 2), demonstrate performance that is very similar to that of White students in other public schools. Although many of the same trends evident in charter schools are also found in other public schools to one degree or another, these specific findings do stand out. Analysis Sets 3 and 4, however, clearly illustrate the extremes in terms of achievement that can be found among the state's charter schools. The use of overall aggregate achievement statistics masks the wide variability demonstrated by individual charter schools. Significant variability in achievement from charter school to charter school also makes it difficult to reach a "blanket" conclusion about the overall success of North Carolina's charter schools in raising student achievement.

In addition to the issue of school-to-school variation among charters, a second limitation of these analyses stem from the fact that students are not randomly assigned to charter schools. This, in conjunction with the fact that students in charter schools differ substantially from students in other public schools on most demographic indicators (Table 1) make it very difficult to determine whether the observed differences in student performance between charters and other public schools are due to "real" differences between charters and other schools, differences between the groups of students who attend those schools, a combination of the two, and/or any number of other unmeasured factors.

It is also important to note that our student-level analyses are specific to the group of students for whom we have data. The analyses of student-level data were limited to EOG scores, largely because of the very small number of charters that enroll students in grades 9-12. Therefore the student-level analyses here do not address achievement of high school students, nor of students below grade 3. In addition, the longitudinal data presented in Analysis Set 2 represent a limited subset of students: Students who took EOG tests in four consecutive years and who did not switch schools between 1997-98 and 1999-2000 were the only ones eligible for inclusion in the analysis. This meant that students in NC public schools in grades 2, 3, 4, or 5 during the 1996-97 school year, who then stayed in the same school for the following three years (without being retained) were the only students that could possibly have been in longitudinal sample. These restrictions were necessary in order to accurately measure progress over an extended period of time, and to rule out the possible effects of student mobility on the results. However, the tradeoff is that the sample was then constituted of a specific group of students with certain characteristics. The extent to which those results can therefore be generalized to the larger population is unknown.

In addition to the student-level analyses presented in Analysis Sets 1 and 2, other more statistically sophisticated analyses were also attempted throughout the course of this study. These analyses attempted to control for prior achievement and some of the demographic differences between charter and other public school students so that a "cleaner" examination of differences in achievement between students in the two types of schools could be examined. However, due to a variety of statistical problems with this approach (the relatively small number

of charter school students compared to students in other public schools, the aforementioned variability in achievement between different charter schools, and the complex relationships among various variables for which the researchers were trying to control, to name a few), these analyses were not pursued further, as their results would have been neither reliable nor accurate.

In the absence of a true experiment, where students could be randomly assigned to either a charter school or a non-charter school for a period of several years, the question "Do charter schools raise student achievement?" cannot really be answered. What the analyses in this report do tell us is that overall, students in grades 3 through 8 in North Carolina charter schools demonstrate lower overall achievement on EOG tests than their peers in other public schools, and that this difference is more pronounced for Black students, especially in mathematics. What the analyses do not tell us is whether attending a charter school actually causes students to score any worse (or any better) than they would if they had attended a non-charter school.

Part V

Impact of North Carolina Charter Schools on Local School Districts and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction: 1998, 2000

Executive Summary: Impact of North Carolina Charter Schools on Local Schools Districts and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction: 1998, 2000

In Spring 2000, 58 charter school directors and 37 LEAs responded to a survey about the impact of charter schools on their local school districts. This survey was originally conducted during the first year of the statewide evaluation with the 30 charter schools open in 1998 and the 24 LEAs in which they were located. Separate analyses of responses based on LEA size and enrollment trends as well as charter schools and LEAs responding in both years found no differences in responses over time.

Interactions and Relationships

The majority of charter schools and LEAs agreed that contact between them was limited, with the nature of the most of the interactions being around finance issues. Most also indicated that they were relatively satisfied with the quality of the interactions. However, with regard to the overall quality of their relationships, charter schools appear to be more satisfied than in the past, while LEAs seem to be somewhat less satisfied.

Impact on School Districts

With the exception of finances, the majority of charter schools and LEAs agreed that there had been little, if any, effect on their school districts as a result of charter schools. Both LEAs and charters agreed that this was, likely in part, because there were "too few of them to make a difference." The main point of disagreement was related to financial issues, with more LEAs (78%) than charter schools (42%) stating a belief that there had been a negative financial impact. In the other areas where they did agree that there was an impact, charters and LEAs tended to disagree about what those impacts were.

Impact on Diversity

Fewer than half of charter schools and LEAs said they had observed changes in any area of diversity in their school districts. However, both charter schools and LEAs indicated their belief that the biggest issue of concern with regard to school diversity was in the area of ethnicity. Some expressed their concern with the number of Black students who have left and continue to leave public schools for charters.

General Impact

The majority of charter schools and LEAs indicated a belief that there had been little impact on school districts in general, although charter schools appear to report there had been more than the LEAs did. The major change reported by charter schools was an increase in schools of choice created by the existence of the charter schools.

Impact on Divisions within North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

Charter schools are provided the same services as traditional public schools, including resources, training, and ongoing support. Inexperienced staff and high turnover among charter schools contributed to frustrations with quality and continuity of training for charter school personnel. Divisions expressed concerns about sufficient staffing at DPI to adequately serve existing numbers of charter and public schools and were reluctant to see the numbers of charter schools increase without additional resources or the consideration of greater flexibility for charters.

Impact of North Carolina Charter Schools on Local School Districts and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction: 1998, 2000

As part of the larger evaluation study initiated by the state of North Carolina, the first survey about the impact of charter schools on local school districts was completed in 1998 (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI), 1998). The design of the survey was based on the findings of other studies documenting the effects of charter schools on public school districts. This report presents the results of a follow-up survey conducted during 2000, with comparisons to 1998. In addition, interviews were conducted with several staff members within the various NCDPI divisions that work with charter schools in the Spring of 2001 to assess the impact of charter schools on the NCDPI.

Methodology

In 1998, the North Carolina Charter School Evaluation Advisory Team identified elements of likely impact, based on information collected in other regions of the United States. This information was used to develop and administer two telephone survey protocols: one for charter school directors and one for local education agencies (LEAs) that had charter schools located in their attendance areas. Based on results gathered in 1998, the surveys were revised and administered again in 2000. Likert scales and open-ended questions were used to gather information about:

- the extent of contact and the quality of the relationships between the charter schools and LEAs;
- the extent to which LEAs had expected and/or experienced impacts on the distribution of students, programs, parent concerns, administrative time, loss of teachers and teaching assistants, and financial impacts;
- impacts on LEA diversity, focusing on ethnicity, at-risk groups, special education students, academically gifted students, and economically disadvantaged students; and
- opinions about LEAs' greatest issues of concern with regard to their experiences and diversity.

In Spring 2000, charter school directors and LEA superintendents were mailed a copy of the survey to give them an opportunity to think about the questions and were told that someone would contact them by phone. Individuals who preferred not to participate in phone interviews were asked to respond by mail or fax.

Of the 80 charter schools in the state at the time the survey was conducted, 11 either were not yet open or were no longer in operation, reducing the possible number of respondents to 69. Of the 69, three refused to participate (Orange County Charter, East Wake Academy, and Quest Academy) and eight did not respond to or return telephone calls (Provisions Academy, Laurinburg Homework Center, Arapahoe Charter, Healthy Start, LIFT Academy, Lakeside School, Forsyth Academies, and The Learning Center), resulting in a final charter school response rate of 84% (n=58). Of the 39 LEAs with charter schools in their areas, two (Orange, Nash) did not respond to telephone calls, resulting in a final LEA response rate of 95% (n=37). For comparison, in 1998 the number of charter schools responding was 30 (100%) and the number of LEAs responding was 24 (100%).

Analyses indicated no variation in responses over time for the LEAs and charter schools that participated in the surveys in both 1998 and 2000. Therefore, results reported here simply include all responses for 2000. Additional analyses showed no differences in LEA survey responses based on LEA size or enrollment trends (e.g., increasing versus decreasing), even though these two factors were shown to be related to perceived charter school impact in a national study (RPP International, 2001).

In addition to the survey of charter school directors and LEA superintendents, interviews were conducted with representatives of six divisions and offices within the NCDPI during the Summer of 2001 to assess the impact of charter schools on the department. These divisions and offices included the Accountability Division, the Office of Charter Schools, the Exceptional Children Division, the Financial and Business Services Division, the Instructional Services Division, and the Licensure Section. Interviews were conducted to understand the kinds of work those divisions did for charter schools; the time and cost estimates this work required; the trade-offs necessitated by work divisions did for charter schools; the likely impact that lifting the charter school cap (which currently stands at 100 schools) would have for these divisions; and suggestions for modifying charter school legislation.

Caveats

There are two important caveats to keep in mind as you read this report. First, this report relies exclusively on the opinions of the staff of charter schools, LEAs, and the NCDPI. Respondents often reported data to advance their particular perspectives rather than only depicting the current situations. Therefore, it must be remembered that these data represent opinions as opposed to concrete measures of actual impact.

Second, in important ways, the 100-school cap limits the impact charters as a whole can have on other public schools. There are simply not enough schools to generate a competitive market in many LEAs. In large districts, growth in student populations negate any loss of students from LEAs and, thus, reduces potential impact.

Results

Interactions

Charter school directors and LEA representatives were asked about the overall extent of contact between charter schools and LEA representatives. Table 1 provides the frequencies for each response category and compares the responses from 2000 to those in 1998.

In general, between 1998 and 2000, charter schools indicated a decrease in interactions while LEAs said there was an increase. The majority of both groups, however, indicated that the amount of contact between them continued to be limited.

Respondents who said they had no contact with one another (7 charters and 4 LEAs) were asked to explain the reasons for their responses and whether they thought the lack of contact was acceptable. Four of the seven charter schools indicated that they tried to initiate contact but the LEAs did not respond to them and two of the four LEAs said that the charter schools refused contact with them. Two charter schools and one LEA having no contact stated that they were not concerned about the lack of contact with one another.

Table 1. Reported Level of Contact between Charter Schools and LEAs

Type of Contact	1998		2000	
	CS (n=30)	LEA (n=24)	CS (n=55)	LEA (n=33)
No Contact	0%	25%	12%	11%
Limited Contact	70%	58%	59%	62%
Moderate Contact	27%	12%	21%	11%
Great Deal of Contact	3%	4%	3%	5%

Charter schools and LEAs indicating at least some level of contact with each other in 2000 were then asked to specify how often, on average, those interactions occurred. As shown in Table 2, about two-thirds of the 48 charter schools estimated that their contacts with LEAs occurred on either a daily, weekly, or monthly basis, while LEAs indicated less frequent contact overall. The slightly lower level of contact indicated by LEAs may result from the individual respondents' lack of knowledge about all levels of LEA-charter contact, contacts that cover several charter schools in one LEA, or one-way contacts.

Table 2. Frequency of Interactions Between Charter Schools and LEAs

Frequency	2000	
	CS (n=48)	LEA (n=29)
Daily, Weekly, or Monthly	64%	38%
1 to 4 Times per Year	23%	41%
Don't Know	12%	21%

LEA and charter school respondents who indicated contact also were asked follow-up questions about the nature of their interactions with one another. The most common reason for interaction cited by both charter schools (60%) and LEAs (63%) was financial. Other commonly cited reasons for interactions are included in Table 3.

Table 3. Reasons for Interactions Between Charter Schools and LEAs

Reason	2000	
	CS (n=54)	LEA (n=30)
Financial	60%	63%
Student records	26%	3%
Exceptional children or special education	24%	33%
Food services	19%	3%
Transportation	15%	7%
Instructional/curriculum/program	6%	27%

Note. Number of respondents in Table 3 is larger than in Table 2, because some respondents answered this question even though they had indicated "No Contact" (Table 1).

Charter schools and LEAs reporting contact were also asked to rate their level of satisfaction with their interactions and to explain the reasons for their ratings. Although 48 charter schools indicated that they had some contact with LEAs in 2000, Table 4 includes ratings from five charter schools that are based on interactions they had in the past. The reason for the discrepancy is related to problems that those five charter schools said started in 1998 and resulted in the charter schools discontinuing their interactions with LEAs in 2000. These five schools asked that their ratings be included in this report.

As shown in Table 4, the majority of charter schools and LEAs indicated some level of satisfaction with their interactions, even when they were limited. In explaining the reasons for their ratings, it is worth noting that some comments were similar across all categories of satisfaction. For example, although nine charter schools commented that their relationships with LEAs were "cordial but less than supportive", some said these relationships were satisfactory while others said they were not. Thirteen percent of charter schools suggested some "hostility in their relationships" with LEAs. Sixty-four percent of LEA comments tended to agree that relationships with charter schools were "cordial but cool".

Table 4. Quality of Interactions between LEAs and Charter Schools

Degree of Satisfaction	2000	
	CS (n=48)	LEAs (n=26)
Very Satisfied	12%	8%
Satisfied or Somewhat Satisfied	53%	43%
Not Satisfied	26%	19%

Note. 3 LEAs did not respond to this question.

Quality of Relationships

Charter school directors and LEAs were asked to rate the quality of their overall relationships with one another. Over time, charter schools' satisfaction with their relationships with LEAs appears to have increased. The percentage of charter schools rating their relationships with LEAs as excellent or good *increased* from 1998 to 2000. Comments made by six new charter schools, however, suggest that new problems have developed and four ongoing charter schools said that some "existing animosity has continued to fester." Three charter schools said that their relationships with LEAs had improved since 1998 (Table 5).

On the other hand, LEAs overall seem *less* satisfied in 2000 than in 1998 with the quality of their relationships with charter schools. Additional comments from 73% of LEAs expressed concern about infrequent contact with charter schools as an indicator of the quality of their relationships, and 16% said there was some continued hostility in their interactions since 1998. A note of concern is the increase in the numbers of both charter schools and LEAs that refused to respond to this question in 2000.

Table 5. Quality of Relationship between LEAs and Charter Schools

Perceived Quality of Relationship	1998		2000	
	CS (n=30)	LEA (n=24)	CS (n=51)	LEA (n=29)
Excellent or Good	40%	50%	45%	32%
Fair or Poor	57%	38%	43%	46%
No Response	3%	12%	12%	22%

About half of charter schools (50%) indicated that they had a specific contact person in their LEA and 46% of LEAs indicated that they had a specific contact in the charter(s) in their area. This represents an increase from 1998 for charter schools and a decrease for LEAs (Table 6).

Table 6. Charter Schools and LEAs with Specific Contact Person

Contact?	1998		2000	
	CS (n=30)	LEA (n=24)	CS (n=55)	LEA (n=37)
Yes	43%	62%	50%	46%
No	53%	38%	45%	43%

Impact on School Districts

In 1998, both charter schools and LEAs were asked to indicate the *expected* impact of charter schools on their districts as well as the *actual* impact observed (i.e., what they had actually experienced). Charter school directors, however, stated that they could not really respond to a question about expected impact. Therefore, only LEAs were asked about expected impact in 2000, but both charters and LEAs were asked about actual impact by indicating

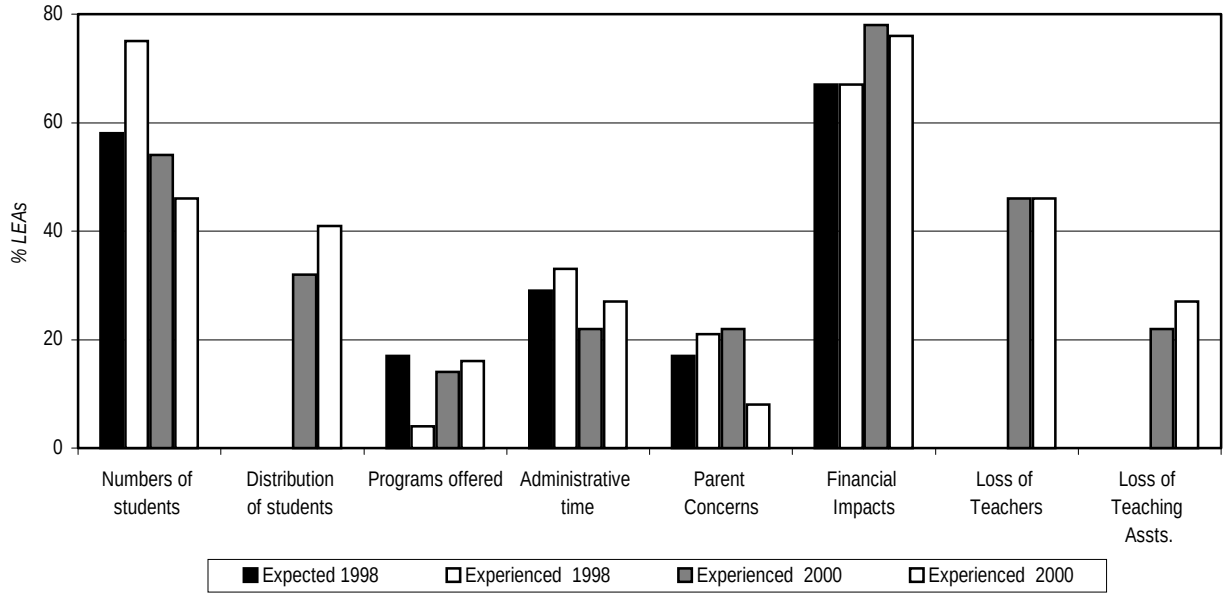
whether there had been *no change*, a *moderate change*, or a *great deal of change* in their LEAs in a variety of areas.

LEA responses. Figure 1 shows a comparison of LEAs' expectations and experiences from 1998, as well as for 2000. Note that in 2000, the question concerning the numbers and distribution of students across grade levels was separated into two questions and there were two new questions asked regarding the loss of teachers and teaching assistants. In reviewing Figure 1, note that only one LEA indicated a belief that there had been a great deal of change in each area. In addition, non-response rates were relatively high for all areas except financial, ranging from 14% to 30%. Finally, follow-up questions discovered that more than half of both charters and LEAs agreed that there had been virtually no real impact on school districts as a result of the presence of charter schools outside the financial area.

Although the expectation was slightly greater than what respondents actually experienced in 2000, the most common impact reported by both charter schools and LEAs was financial. Overall, LEAs experienced slightly less impact than they expected in 2000 with regard to the numbers of students enrolled across different grade levels and LEAs' responsiveness to parent concerns.

On the other hand, LEAs experienced slightly more actual impact than they expected in how students were distributed across grade levels, the number of programs LEAs offered, the amount of administrative time spent working with charters, and the loss of teaching assistants to charters. With the exception of the critical issue of finances, however, open-ended responses from 30% of LEAs indicated a belief that the actual impact overall of charter schools, either expected or experienced, was still minimal and insignificant. With regard to financial issues, the majority (54%) of the LEAs responding to this item indicated moderate impact and 21% indicated a great deal of impact.

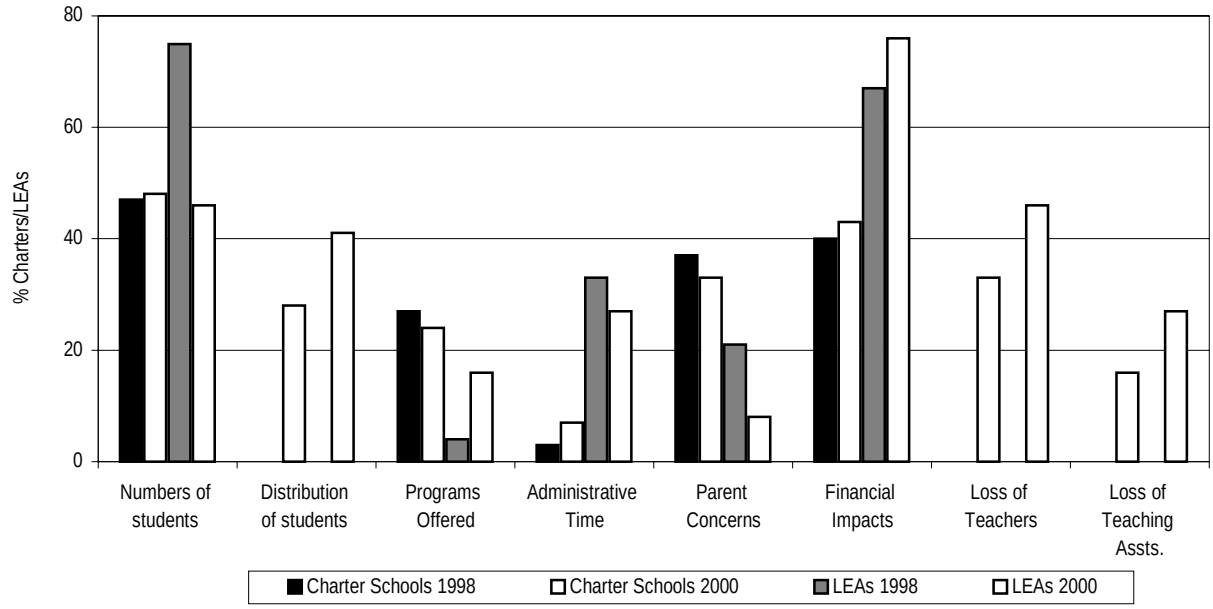
Figure 1. LEAs' Expected and Experienced Impact on School Districts as a Result of Charter Schools



Note. Items regarding distribution of students, loss of teachers, and loss of teaching assistants not asked in 1998.

Charter responses. Charter school directors were asked to indicate the extent to which they thought their local districts had actually experienced impact to date as a result of the presence of charter schools. Figure 2 shows charter school responses compared to the LEA responses from Figure 1, as well as a comparison to charter school responses from 1998 where possible. Note again that in 2000, the numbers and distribution of students were separated into two different questions. Importantly, there also was a relatively large percentage of non-responses from charter schools to these items, ranging from 22% to 55%. The low response rate may suggest that charter schools do not know what their impact has been on LEAs.

Figure 2. Charter Schools and LEAs Indicating School District Impacts Experienced as a Result of Charter Schools by Percent



Note. Items regarding distribution of students, loss of teachers, and loss of teaching assistants not asked in 1998.

In general, charters were more likely to cite "positive" impacts of charters on LEAs (e.g., increased LEA responsiveness to parent concerns, more programs offered), while LEAs were more likely to cite "negative" impacts (e.g., increased administrative time, loss of staff, loss of funds). As shown in Figure 2, for those charters and LEAs that *did* indicate some impact, there appeared to be little overall consensus between them within the areas of impact. Charters and LEAs differed most in their opinions about financial impacts, where 42% of charter schools compared to 76% of LEAs thought there had been an impact, with almost half of those LEAs expressing serious concerns. When asked about the kinds of financial impacts experienced, LEAs indicated a much stronger belief than charter schools that because of financial losses, there had been a negative impact with respect to exceptional children, transportation, and hiring teachers. On the other hand, charters cited their beliefs that charter schools are so small that, in most cases, LEAs should experience little impact.

Charter school directors and LEAs were also asked what they thought were the greatest issues of concern that their LEAs were experiencing. Most (55%) of the charter school directors said they believed the LEAs' major concern was financial, 22% believed it was the academic

competition provided by the charter schools, and 14% said they thought the greatest concern was the loss of good students who "are defecting to the charter schools." The two major concerns cited by LEAs were a belief that there had been negative financial impacts on the school districts (43%) and a lack of accountability for charter schools (39%). LEAs cited their perception of less stringent academic accountability standards for charter schools, resulting in a negative impact on student learning outcomes and performance. Since almost all charters, however, participate in the state's accountability program, it is unclear how their academic accountability would be less than for any other public school. Sixteen percent of LEAs also commented, without being specific, on the negative impact of charters on exceptional children and the weak working relationships between the LEAs and charter schools.

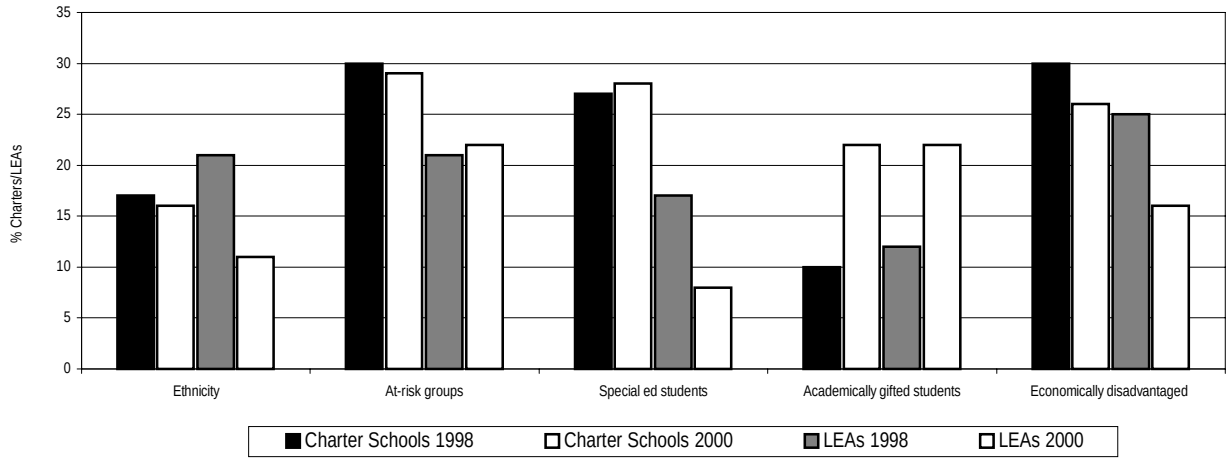
Impact on Diversity

Charter school and LEA representatives were asked to rate the degree of impact, if any, they had observed in student diversity in the school districts as a result of charter schools. Specifically, they were asked about: ethnicity, at-risk groups, special education groups, academically gifted students, and economically disadvantaged students. The percentages of non-responses increased for these items in 2000 for both charter schools (from 20% to 36%) and LEAs (from 5% to 11%). Interestingly, the percentage of charter schools who believed there had been an impact increased from 1998 to 2000 for all five areas of diversity, but the percentage of LEAs who thought there had been an impact decreased for three areas—ethnicity, special education, and economically disadvantaged students.

Fewer than half of both charter schools and LEAs that responded said they observed impacts on any area of diversity in school districts as a result of charter schools (Figure 3). More LEAs than charters indicated a belief that there was a negative impact regarding ethnicity as "demonstrated by increasing segregation." The area of greatest disagreement about the impact of charter schools dealt with special education students, with charters being more likely to cite increased services and opportunities for that population. The area of greatest agreement was with respect to increased programs for at-risk groups. The greatest change from 1998 to 2000 was the increase for both charter schools and LEAs who said they had seen impact on school district diversity of academically gifted students.

When asked for explanations of their ratings, 11% of LEAs and 36% of charter schools said that charter schools have served a larger number of at-risk and economically disadvantaged students. Fourteen percent of LEAs said that charters target academically gifted students and 11% (Durham, Chatham, Vance, Lincoln) cited what they thought to be "white flight." Nineteen percent of charter schools mentioned their focus on special education, 16% said they offered challenging curriculums that academically gifted students could not get in the public schools, and 9% (including charters from Durham, Mecklenburg, Wayne, and Transylvania) talked about the high number of minority students choosing charter schools.

Figure 3. Charter Schools and LEAs Reporting Impact on School District Diversity



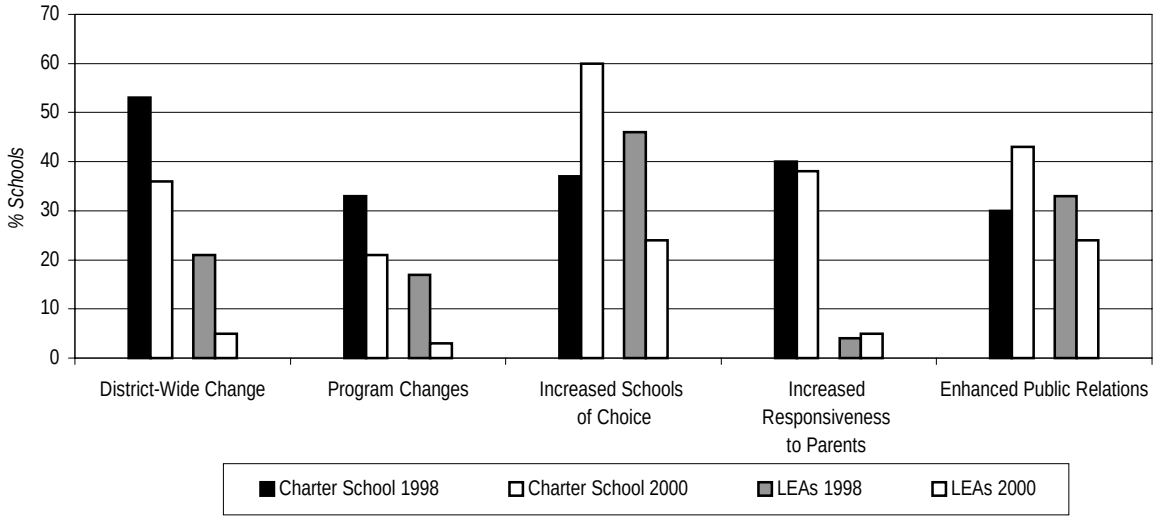
Charter schools and LEAs were asked what they believed to be the biggest issue their districts have experienced with regard to school diversity as it relates to charter schools. The most often mentioned issue of concern of both charter schools (27%) and LEAs (27%) with regard to diversity that districts have faced was related to ethnicity. Specifically, charter schools cited their beliefs that Black students are leaving public schools to attend charters, the lack of teacher diversity in public schools, and issues around the growing Latino/Hispanic populations that must be served.

On the other hand, some LEAs mentioned their beliefs that the number of minorities in charter schools could negatively impact the desegregation of schools. Others said that charter schools do not serve minorities at all or expressed concern that charter schools do not represent the population of their communities.

General Impact

Charter schools and LEAs were asked for their opinions about the general impact on five areas that charter schools had on their local school districts: 1) charter schools as a vehicle for district-wide change, 2) program changes, 3) increase in schools of choice, 4) increased responsiveness to parent concerns, and 5) enhanced public relations and media coverage. Figure 4 shows the percentage of charters and LEAs that perceived impact in each of these five areas for 1998 and 2000.

Figure 4. Charter Schools and LEAs Indicating Impact on their School Districts



Overall, charters appeared to believe that they had more impact than did LEAs. There were similar changes in the responses of both charters and LEAs from 1998 to 2000 with regard to district-wide change and program changes as a result of charter schools, with both groups of respondents less likely to indicate impact in these areas in 2000. Of particular interest is that in 2000, 36% of charter schools and 5% of LEAs indicated that charters have had an impact on district-wide change. In explaining their ratings, 17 charters and one LEA said they believed that the impact may not be noticeable yet, but traditional public schools are re-examining their practices and policies with regard to students and instruction as a result of charter schools. Although the numbers of charters and LEAs citing this impact still represent a minority, it does suggest that charters may be serving as vehicles for change in a few locations.

With regard to program changes, more charter schools than LEAs indicated a belief that there had been impact as a result of charter schools. When asked for explanations of their ratings, all charter schools responding said that they thought many LEAs were starting to look for ways to better serve their students and have introduced new programs into their curriculums. One LEA commented that an assignment plan proposal was made to give students choices similar to those offered by the charter schools.

From 1998 to 2000, there was an increase in charter schools and a decrease in LEAs saying that there had been an increase in schools of choice in their districts as a result of charter schools. All six LEAs who offered explanations for their responses said that there has been an increase in schools of choice but not as a result of charter schools. Twenty-three charter schools said that the increase in schools of choice is evident simply by their existence. Another indicated that there were now more magnet school opportunities in their district but not necessarily as a result of charter schools.

There also was an increase in charters and a decrease in LEAs who stated that school districts had enhanced public relations and increased media coverage due to the presence of charters. Two charter schools said that the focus of the LEAs had been to “negatively publicize charter schools” and two others said that there had been an effort by LEAs to “mask their

[other public schools'] actual performance by manipulating statistics." Two other charter schools and four LEAs said that their districts had always focused on public relations and any increase was not as a result of charter schools.

With regard to increased responsiveness to parent concerns, 38% of charter schools (a slight decrease in 2000) and 5% of LEAs (a slight increase in 2000) agreed that charter schools had an impact in that area. One comment made by charter schools, however, indicated the impact could have been as a result of having a new superintendent in their local LEA.

Impact on Offices within the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

Although it was not a direct focus of the legislative parameters for the evaluation, in conducting the study it became apparent that charters may also have been impacting services and operations at the NCDPI. In order to assess the impact of charter schools on various services within the NCDPI, interviews were conducted with Division Directors or other key informants from each division in the agency. As reported by various representatives (Accountability, the Office of Charter Schools, Exceptional Children, Financial and Business Services, Instructional Services, and Licensure) all divisions provided charter schools with the same services provided to traditional public schools. Differences existed, however, in how divisions were structured to handle charter schools, in communication processes between the division and charter schools, and in the resources divisions dedicated to charter schools. Some divisions had personnel designated to work specifically with charter schools (e.g., Accountability, Exceptional Children, Business Services) while others absorbed charter school work among all staff (e.g., Licensure, Instructional Services).

Divisions reported providing charter schools with **resources** (e.g., copies of the NC Standard Course of Study; Charter School Survival Guide to Business Services and financial management software; Licensure Handbook); **training** sessions on an ongoing or case-by-case basis (e.g., Exceptional Children Federal Grant applications training; ABCs testing procedures training); and **significant staff support** (e.g., scanning/scoring ABCs tests; Charter Schools Office support and communication; frequent phone calls and drop-in visits). Divisions often corresponded with charter schools through Charter School Office mailings. Some divisions used the internet/DPI website to share information with charter schools (e.g., Instructional Services provided access to curriculum materials and/or support documents online; Exceptional Children put all grant applications/documents on the website and are in the process of adding a learning module so charter schools can do training online).

All divisions expressed concern that because some charter schools had a lot to learn about running a school, they required a lot of attention. The educational, financial, and/or administrative expertise of charter school personnel was said to vary widely, requiring extensive work to bring many schools to a basic level of understanding about procedures. Many expressed the belief that working with charter schools was like adding an additional 100 LEAs to the existing 117 in North Carolina:

> Each charter school, although it may only have 150-200 kids, is a school system and requires all the same type of support that an LEA of 10,000 would require. So you have 100 additional school systems. Instead of supporting 117, there are 217 LEAs that we have to support.

Additionally, high turnover among charter school personnel and/or not working consistently with the same staff person often necessitated repeated and/or multiple training sessions for the same school on the same topic. Divisions found that there was little continuity of charter school representation from one training session to the next. Both charter school and DPI staff acknowledged that charter school personnel "wear many hats," so that often there was no clear line of authority or system of checks and balances to ensure that correct information was disseminated throughout the school. Divisions cannot rely on district-level personnel to disseminate information to charter school staff as they can with traditional LEAs.

When divisions were able to include charter school staff with traditional public school personnel in training sessions, it minimized the amount of extra time charter schools required. Given, however, the different skill levels and lack of continuity and availability among charter school representatives, most divisions reported adding multiple sessions to their training calendars in an effort to accommodate. The high levels of accountability and/or legislatively mandated tasks required by Business Services, Exceptional Children and the ABCs/Accountability Division necessitated more intense direct service by these divisions in particular.

None of the divisions had a method for disaggregating the amount of work they did with and for charter schools. Most, however, expressed concern that the demands of working with charter schools exceeded the capacity of their current staff. Accountability, Exceptional Children, and Business Services, for example, each submitted a budget proposal for the 2001-2002 academic year for additional staff to work with charter schools. Most divisions indicated that charter schools required a lot of individualized attention.

Many divisions expressed concern that LEAs were not receiving levels of attention received before the advent of charter schools. When charter schools have qualified and stable personnel who know what they need to do and attend all the meetings, trainings, and professional development opportunities, etc., very little suffered in terms of service to charter school students, teachers and families or in terms of service to traditional public schools. This scenario, however, seemed to be rather rare.

All divisions expressed concern that the charter school cap not be lifted at this point, indicating that to do so would present a significant hardship for their division. Most feared that the quality of work provided to all schools would suffer as a result of more charter schools. In addition, Exceptional Children, for example, was concerned that many charter schools were noncompliant with federal legislation (and have been for several years) regarding special services for disabled children.

A diversity of opinions was offered by DPI staff about potential modifications to the charter school legislation. Suggestions ranged from complete deregulation of charter schools, allowing parents and students to "*vote with their feet*;" to having charters operate as schools

within LEAs to take advantage of LEAs' expertise; to making sure that charter applicants have a more thorough understanding of their obligations before receiving approval, perhaps spending a year in extensive training and preparation before opening. Assuming financial obligations to the state were met, several DPI staff favored further deregulating charter schools in regard to accountability and testing:

> Allow charter schools... to select whatever tests/instruments they need in order to provide parents the information they need to decide if they want to send their children to those charter schools." Another divisional representative offered: "One of the big questions that needs to be looked at is whether or not the state... can say 'for purposes of accountability, we will let the market system drive [charter schools], we will allow them to select whatever tests they feel best reflect what they're doing. It will be up to the parents in those schools to determine whether or not the school is really doing a good job."

Charter school funding was also targeted for modification. One divisional representative expressed concern that current funding patterns drawing charter school funds from across all state categorical dollars had an unfair impact on some departments. Another was concerned that legislation did not account for the necessary fixed costs of both charter schools and traditional public schools (e.g., transportation, electricity). Further modifications were suggested to charter schools' permissible growth percentage (limiting growth to 10% per year with state board approval to minimize a charter school's financial impact on its LEA), and to current guidelines for terminating charters (to limit the state's liability).

While divisional representatives were supportive of charter schools and admired the work they were doing on behalf of children in North Carolina, they were equally concerned that current legislation and/or policies did not adequately anticipate the amount of additional time and energy charter schools would require. General consensus was expressed that charter schools would benefit from more training and planning time prior to opening and that DPI would benefit from more staff dedicated to working with charter schools.

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Part VI

Case Study

Cross-Site Analysis

Executive Summary:
Case Study Cross-Site Analysis

North Carolina charter schools developed through the efforts of individuals concerned about better educational alternatives for children, the needs of students inadequately served in other public schools, and the challenge posed by changes in community schools. Supported by legislative encouragement for innovation, those involved in charter schools most often point to innovative curricula and instruction, small class and school size, and distinctive missions as distinguishing characteristics. Pedagogical innovation, however, seems less the hallmark of charter schools than small school and class size. Charter schools face an ongoing struggle to forge an identity consistent with their initial mission; they are challenged by the complexity of charter school student enrollment, limited resources, charter implementation difficulties, and the high demands placed on the staff members of new and developing schools.

Charter schools must work with the needs of their student populations and oftentimes the curricular vision and direction anticipated for the school does not fit with the reality of the students who enroll. Charter schools have demonstrated flexibility in adapting their missions to better serve their students. Charter schools are adept at maximizing limited resources. Many charter schools are beneficiaries of successful community partnerships, and many have tapped into local, state and national organizations for additional financial support, although several schools struggle with limited budgets and a lack of supplemental financial resources. Adequate facilities present a challenge for charter schools as buildings often require extensive upgrades to accommodate a school setting. Schools often choose to sacrifice cafeterias, media centers and gymnasium/recreation spaces to maximize classroom space. Managing growth is a persistent concern for charter schools as demand frequently exceeds capacity. Transportation is another challenge; student transportation is heavily dependent on parent carpools at most charter schools.

Charter schools depend on committed staff and parents. Charter school directors are imaginative and creative leaders, adept at maximizing staff and parent talents. Teachers and administrators are given enthusiastic support from students and parents as being instrumental to charter schools' success. Teachers appreciate small school and class size and the opportunities for more curricular autonomy in charter schools. Working in North Carolina's charter schools requires immense flexibility as staff are often required to "wear many hats" and work many long hours. While strong parent involvement has been a significant contribution in charter schools, parent participation tends to taper after the critical first year. Charter schools have also had to manage turnover among board members, staff and students. Additionally, most charter schools would like to develop a more cooperative relationship with their LEA.

Charter school practices that show promise for education in North Carolina include small school and small class size, the possibility for innovative curricula and instruction, the creative use of resources, and a willingness to develop alternative assessment practices. Small school and class size benefits the entire charter school community. Students and their parents appreciate the chance for individualized attention and instruction, and teachers appreciate the opportunity to develop creative curricula to assist students at all levels. Small class and school size also allow charter schools to develop a school culture that facilitates their distinctive mission and that focuses on caring relationships between faculty, students, and parents.

Case Study Cross-Site Analysis

Introduction

Charter school site visits were an integral component of the North Carolina Charter School Evaluation Plan. Charter school visits between 1997 and 2001 yielded valuable case study information for understanding the experiences of charter school students, staff and parents during the initial years of North Carolina's development of charter schools. Evaluation teams visited 30 charter schools over the course of the evaluation; ten schools received two visits while two schools received visits three consecutive years.

Charter schools were visited during the 1997-1998, 1999-2000, and 2000-2001 academic years. The case studies generated for each of these years examined: (1) the purposes/mission of the schools; (2) charter implementation issues; (3) school resources; (4) promising practices of charter schools; (5) lessons learned; (6) changes in charter schools over time; and (7) charter schools' hopes for the future. This report contains a cross-case analysis of common themes and differences across charter schools visited as part of the evaluation, as well as their changes over time.

Evaluation teams conducted case studies using standard case study methodology. Teams consisted of an experienced university researcher/faculty member, a graduate student researcher, and, when possible, representatives from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and/or other charter schools. Team members participated in a brief training/orientation session prior to case study visits. During two-day school visits, team members collected documents; observed classroom instruction and other school activities; and interviewed teachers, students, parents, school directors/principals, and board members. Teams took extensive notes and discussed their ideas and interpretations; team leaders then drafted case study reports of the individual schools. Teams also participated in a follow-up group discussion to share observations from case study visits.

Case study samples were selected to represent the diversity of charter schools in North Carolina. The primary focus – and thus sample – for each evaluation year may have shifted slightly, but each sample sought to represent varieties of location and size of community (i.e., urban, rural; regions of state), as well as mission, grade level served, and length of operation of charter schools. Schools chosen in 1997-1998 (n=10) represented the diverse stories of schools in their first year of operation; the 1999-2000 sample (n=16) represented the diversity of schools in different implementation stages (year one, two or three); the 2000-2001 schools added variability in levels of achievement over time to the sample (including schools with consistently high achievement, schools with consistently lower achievement, schools whose achievement has varied from year-to-year, and schools whose targeted populations represent at-risk students with traditionally lower levels of achievement).

An important preliminary lesson learned in this research is that **charter schools in North Carolina are not a uniform entity and any generalization masks the complexity** of their experiences. Charter schools serve a variety of purposes for a variety of stakeholders (including students, staff, and parents) and attempts to describe themes found among 30 charter schools necessarily mutes the complex and compelling story each charter school has to tell.

Running through the following discussion are several **tensions** that the schools continuously faced. These include:

- the decision to remain small *versus* expansion for more financial resources (size versus money);
- the need to meet the legislative charge for innovative practice *versus* meeting accountability for performance as measured on standardized tests (freedom versus control);
- the desire to serve traditionally low performing students *versus* the need to perform well on ABCs tests (equity versus performance);
- differential access to capital: schools working with students believed to be underserved in traditional public schools as beneficiaries of fewer supplemental resources *versus* schools educating traditionally high performing students as beneficiaries of substantial supplemental resources (equity and access versus capital and accountability).

Not all schools experienced all these tensions. Some tensions were felt more acutely based on the resources of the school, highlighting the fact that charter schools with greater access to financial, social and cultural capital experienced fewer tensions.

Purposes / Missions

As found during the first charter school case study visits and borne out in subsequent years, charter schools vary widely with regard to their distinctive missions (e.g., "one-room school house," vocational education, global education, back-to-basics), but the reasons for starting charter schools are generally represented in four basic purposes:

1. To **offer a better educational alternative** for students and the community characterized by small class and school size, and a distinctive mission.
2. To **serve a population inadequately served** in other public schools, including (among others) at-risk, Black and gifted students.
3. To **provide community schools,** addressing closings, reassignment, or growth among district schools.
4. To **encourage economic development**, using the schools to help revitalize neighborhoods and/or change student expectations.

The first two purposes are consistent for all charter schools visited while a few schools were additionally motivated by the third and/or fourth purpose. Concerned parents and/or educators frequently developed these charter schools **as a reaction to** conditions in local public schools, with the belief that the charter school could offer a better alternative by following the vision set forth in their distinctive missions.

Charter schools visited since 1997 were quite diverse as reflected in their **distinctive missions**. Focus areas for these schools included one or more of the following: challenging gifted students; assisting students having difficulty in traditional public schools; maintaining small class and/or school size; facilitating individualized instruction; enhancing local control (teacher, parent, community); providing arts-enriched or multiple intelligence-enhanced

academic opportunities; increasing academic and/or behavioral discipline; returning to "the basics;" incorporating educational models or curricula enhanced by research (e.g., Direct Instruction, Paideia); and/or attending to cultural enrichment. Charter school developers believed that a distinctive mission allowed them to fulfill the purposes of offering a better alternative for students inadequately served in traditional public schools, sometimes providing community or economic development in the process.

Common to the missions of these charter schools – and what they believe distinguishes them from traditional public schools – is **a commitment to small school and class size and the concomitant by-products of smallness: exemplary and individualized instruction and meaningful teacher-student relationships.**

> [We] like the small atmosphere of our community school. You know where your kids are coming from... you know what's going on in their lives and it helps you to understand.... When you have a school this size, you can think of individuals.

Without exception, the charter schools cited smallness and a commitment to low student-teacher ratios (in general, a student-teacher ratio of approximately 15:1) as a hallmark of their mission to serve students and their families.

> If a child walks down the hall, you can call that child by name and say "Good morning, John," or if a new child comes to the school we make a point of finding out what that child's name is.... You can't do that if you've got 600 or 700 or 800 kids... you just can't... and it makes a big difference.

All members of the charter school community felt the advantages of maintaining small school and class size. Students felt like they belonged because they were known; teachers and staff believed they were able to develop better relationships with their students in addition to individualizing instruction to meet each child's unique needs; and parents believed their children could not "fall through the cracks" in a small school setting and were pleased with the attention their child received. Thus the **language of family** was common in many of the charter schools, sometimes explicitly reflected in mission statements or school pledges, often implicit in the language staff, students and parents used to describe the school.

Critical to charter school success has been **creating a shared mission**, one that members of the charter school community readily expressed when asked to talk about their school. Staff, students, board members and parents at these charter schools were able to articulate characteristics that made their charter school unique – be it a specialized curriculum, population served, or more intangible spirit – often contrasting the charter school with the traditional public school from which they came: "*It's smaller here. You know everybody and everybody knows you so well.*" Even if all the details of the mission were not yet fully developed (e.g., innovative curriculum or pedagogy, shared leadership), participants knew that those elements were part of the vision for the school and expected that they would be developed over time.

While most believed that, with time, they were circling ever closer to realizing the mission articulated in their charter applications, charter school administrators talked of **delayed implementation of components of their mission** in the midst of start-up challenges:

"[The] charter may be three years old, but this is the first year that it really got started in the right direction as a school." Staff indicated, for example, delaying the addition of extra-curricular activities to their program (e.g., mentoring of students by community members, sports programs, student internships and/or community service opportunities) as they focused on the academic core of their mission. Charter schools learned that it takes a tremendous amount of time and energy to open a school, but that a shared vision helps maintain focus through the often tumultuous first years.

The cost of maintaining a small educational community, however, was a persistent tension for charter schools during the first years. The **tension many charter schools felt to increase enrollments in order to increase revenues** through the per pupil allotments given under current legislation has persisted since the first year of the evaluation. At this point, these schools have chosen to "do without" rather than sacrifice such an important expressed value. (As discussed later in the Resources section, growth also creates challenges with regard to facilities). This is not to suggest that an increased budget through increased enrollment would solve financial challenges, but charter schools often have a "break-even" enrollment figure needed to cover operating costs.

Services that charter schools regularly chose to do without – services generally taken for granted in traditional public schools – included bus transportation, food service and cafeterias, library and media center facilities and/or resources, science labs, athletic teams, and student textbooks. Less obvious taken-for-granted elements charter schools did without included administrative support staff to manage required paperwork, tax waivers on gasoline purchases (transportation), and participation in district staff development opportunities. The paradox, of course, is that charter schools were often developed to escape bureaucratic school districts and yet there are times when elements of that bureaucracy are missed. The question also remains as to the degree to which doing without transportation or food service, for example, created **tensions related to accessibility** of charter schools for less advantaged families.

Within the charter school community, for example, parents, students and staff believed better access exists between and among participants than is found in traditional public schools. Parents were pleased with the access they had to teachers in the small school setting and credited greater school satisfaction and greater commitment to the school to this access. On the other hand, access from *without* remains in question. Lack of transportation and/or food service in some schools could have conceivably resulted in access limitations for less advantaged students and their families. This notion may also be related to the fact that some parents report that they chose to enroll their child(ren) in the charter school to escape increasingly diverse student populations and/or regular public schools challenged with behavioral problems.

An additional tension that emerged for charter schools was **how to balance the freedom to pursue individualized missions and unique educational opportunities offered under charter school legislation with the controls put in place under the same legislation**. School administrators expressed this tension most often when discussing the charge for innovation called for in the charter school legislation ("... a system of charter schools to provide opportunities for teachers, parents, pupils, and community members to establish and maintain schools ... as a method to accomplish ... the following: (1) Improve student learning; (2) Increase learning opportunities for all students, with special emphasis on

expanded learning experiences for students who are identified as at risk of academic failure or academically gifted; (3) Encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods..." NCGS 115C-238.29) while at the same time feeling constrained by the ABCs Accountability system. Given that schools must follow the ABCs or an equally rigorous accountability program (the latter of which is not really a viable option for most schools), schools felt hindered from deviating too far from the North Carolina Standard Course of Study. As one case study observes: "*As suggested by the meaning of standardization, the focus is now on sameness not uniqueness."* Faculty and administrators in at least one-third of the schools indicated that they felt limited in their ability to offer a dramatically different or especially innovative type of educational program when faced with the spectre of end-of-grade and end-of-course standardized tests.

This tension was especially felt among those schools whose distinctive mission included serving at-risk children and/or those "*children no one else wants*." Among the sample of schools visited this year, these children are generally those who have struggled most with achievement. One case study summarized the tension experienced by a charter school representing this category:

> The staff emphasized [students' individual growth] as their primary criterion for success, although they feel like they have to do well on the state's accountability system to avoid criticism for being ineffective. The [staff focus on students' individual growth] means that staff want to see students advance from where they are when they arrive at the school without their being compared to some absolute standard such as grade-level performance.

Given that this school served at-risk children, staff were more concerned that individual children experienced personal success rather than a specific score measured on end-of-course tests.

This **freedom-control tension also seems to be felt differently by schools with different resources and forms of capital** (i.e., financial, social, cultural). At least four schools visited in 2000-2001 observed that their very survival depended on ABCs test results, especially given the complex interdependence of enrollment and resources: enrollment depends on reputation, and reputation – it was feared – depends on test scores. A charter school director observed:

> ...It [end-of-grade-testing] is constantly there, in our peripheral vision. Our charter, our reputation is at stake, and we're very aware of it. It doesn't drive our curriculum, or what we do, but we're certainly aware of it. And we're certainly aware of the need, public relations-wise, to keep improving and keep our scores up.

Schools challenged the ability of standardized tests to accurately reflect the growth and learning taking place in their classrooms, especially among more disadvantaged students. The freedom to be innovative had little significance to these schools as survival was related to having their children perform well on the ABCs. A teacher shared:

> I think with a charter school, there is a lot of concern with public perception... and when something is in the newspaper that shows a drop [in test scores], that bothers [the administration] because our survival depends on enrollment... this is a school of choice, and if the perception of the community is that we're substandard, then the parents won't come here.

Other schools, however, were less concerned about this issue because their performance has always been high on the ABCs.

Charter schools' common cause is to be different with respect to traditional public schools, and the charter schools visited believed that their distinctive missions, small class size and individualized attention made them different. One teacher said:

> It's our job to make sure these kids are learning and making progress. If kids fall behind, we tutor and give them individualized attention. If kids move ahead quickly, we make sure that they get moved to a higher level. We do whatever it takes to make sure that they take steps forward instead of backwards. I think the worst thing is for a child to stay at the same place and never feel challenged. We make sure all the students are challenged, but can also achieve success.

These charter schools shared a set of purposes for starting the school; belief in small school and class size; and a commitment to serving a population believed to be in need of more, better or different attention than that received in traditional public schools. These schools were different as to the particular focus area of their distinctive missions and their different focus was reflected in the populations they served. While the majority of these schools experienced tensions related to maintaining small class size and pursuing innovative practice, the degree to which the tension was experienced often depended on the schools' access to resources.

Implementation Issues

As expressed in previous case study reports conducted for this evaluation, **few charter schools have been immune to the turbulence inherent in opening a school.** Schools with greater financial and/or social capital (e.g., in the form of grants, donations or expansive community support) as well as conversion schools may have faced somewhat less turmoil, but even these schools experienced unexpected challenges. This discussion of relevant implementation issues (facilities, transportation, district/community issues, and staff turnover) reflects changes over time as charter schools have sought to provide a quality educational experience for students and their families.

Procurement of and satisfaction with an adequate facility continues to be among charter schools' most pressing concerns. Even though charter schools believe they are getting closer to realizing the mission set forth in their charter, frustrations with facilities persist. A charter school director observed:

> Among the things... vital to the survival of charter schools is a building.... From my experience with charter schools, the building can be a maker or breaker

> simply because in the first three years they struggle with where the school is to be located.... They have a charter but don't have a building, and they can't get funds until they get students. If they don't have a building they can't get students.

Of the charter schools visited, **all reported some degree of dissatisfaction with current facilities**, including crowded classroom conditions; inadequate or nonexistent space for physical education, media centers, science and computer labs, or cafeterias; no room for growth; physically unappealing or cumbersome locations (e.g., former strip mall sites); costly and/or frequent repairs and renovations to older buildings; and multiple locations (e.g., "campuses" separated by almost one mile). At least four schools opened in temporary locations until their permanent site could be located and one school is in its fifth location in three years. Schools expressed frustration with charter school legislation limiting the allocation of state resources for facilities; legislation limiting charter approvals to a maximum of five years also was said to affect schools' ability to secure low-interest, long-term loans. This is an area where differential access to capital has impacted charter schools, as some schools have benefited from generous benefactors (e.g., individuals or external funding sources) that have allowed them to secure quality facilities, while others continue to struggle.

As the schools struggled to implement their curricula, many found that they were **not able to fully implement their original curricular plans** because of the varied academic levels of their student population. In the absence of selective admissions policies, charter schools must work with the skills and abilities of the student population they enroll. For some schools, the curricular vision anticipated for the school did not fit with the reality of their diverse student population. Some schools that focused on an accelerated curriculum, for example, found many students unprepared for the rigorous course of study proposed by the school. One teacher in a first year school acknowledged this:

> We really wanted to focus on the part of the Standard Course of Study that is advanced, AG, and AP. I think that this will be the only year we will offer 'standard' anything. That is because we got our students, and you have to do what you can with them. In the future, we will be advanced and above.

Additionally, charter schools often found that parents enrolled students with a history of difficult behavioral or achievement issues in other public schools, in the hopes of finding a better fit for their child. While the smaller environment at many charter schools did prove successful for many of these students, this required that many schools needed to compromise their initial curricular focus.

Transportation challenges, cited by charter school personnel and parents as an issue during each year of the charter school site visits, are an issue that most schools have chosen to resolve by not providing transportation. Most schools relied on parent carpools for getting children to and from school as well as for field trips. A minority of schools made arrangements with their districts for transportation, but at a cost. As previously mentioned, lack of transportation raises the issue of charter school accessibility to all community members.

Over time, charter schools experienced **varying levels of school district support**. Three of the 16 schools visited during 2000-2001 reported continued positive district support

that started with assistance writing the charter application (it is interesting to note that one of these schools served students who are among the highest achieving while two served primarily low-achieving students). Most schools visited reported *satisfactory* relationships with their districts although these were not necessarily *positive* relationships characterized by frequent interaction and support. Several of these schools were pleased to report a "thawing" in previously chilly relationships as district concerns about charter schools (e.g., taking away money and/or the best students and teachers from the district) were said to be waning over time.

At least four schools visited during 2000-2001, however, reported negative relationships with their LEA. Forms of negative interaction included perceived interference with facility acquisition, lawsuits challenging district funding, and exclusion of charter school students from local athletic competitions and charter school staff from district professional development opportunities. One director expressed the belief that districts were using charter schools as "dumping grounds" for the students they could not handle:

> We have a mission, but people in the traditional public school have somehow given us a mission to take their tired and poor, their humble masses yearning to be free, and that's not what our mission was. Our mission was to teach these students, not be the dumping ground.

This school did include serving at-risk students in their mission, but they were concerned that traditional public schools were referring a variety of challenged students – especially those they could not manage – to charter schools.

Media attention has largely improved with time although charter schools, like traditional public schools, feel the heat of media scrutiny when test results are released. As stated previously, however, the heat may be experienced more intensely for charter schools as many perceived that their survival was tied to test performance.

Charter schools have either experienced **somewhat more personnel stability over time or have adjusted to the "significant turnover in leadership and teachers"** (Noblit, 1998, p. 5) reported in the first cross-site analysis. Among boards and/or school directors, high turnover characterized the first years, in some cases due to the fact that opening a school was harder than anticipated. In other cases, boards and principals/directors disagreed about the degree of oversight a board should exercise versus the degree of autonomy a director should have in operating the school. One director shared that "*there was major upheaval with the board… either the founding board survives or [the director] survives*." While this was not the experience of all schools that underwent leadership turnover, conflicting visions of leadership usually played a role.

Charter school administrators attributed teacher turnover to the fact that they employed many new and/or unlicensed teachers unprepared for the demands of the profession. To address the challenges faced by inexperienced teachers, several of these charter schools implemented reward-based programs under which more experienced teachers served as leaders (and, in a few cases, mentored new teachers) and in exchange they were compensated at a higher salary. One school hired a retired veteran teacher as an administrative assistant to mentor teachers and another school had a cadre of retired teachers mentoring new teachers.

Four schools with either specialized curricular programs (e.g., Direct Instruction, Multiple Intelligences,) or unique leadership structures have experienced staff turnover that they associated with greater commitment required by the curriculum or decision-making procedures. They did not necessarily view the turnover as negative, however, but rather as necessary for assembling a staff that was committed to the kind of instruction their distinctive mission promised.

Different expectations for **parent involvement** is an additional charter implementation issue that emerged over time. Many charter schools opened with the expectation that parents would volunteer a certain amount of time (measured weekly, monthly, or yearly) to the charter school and in some cases requested that parents sign a contract committing to that obligation. While schools reported strong parental support, they found that significant volunteer time tapered off after the first year. Only one school indicated that they still required parents to sign a Student/Parent Enrollment Contract. Schools varied as to the nature of volunteer work performed by parents. Opportunities ranged from lunch duty to assisting with field trips to classroom and/or office assistance. One school has tapped into the growing community of retired senior citizens in their area and had a "grandparents" volunteer program.

Charter schools continue to grapple with issues related to charter implementation, facilities in particular. Stories of quick turnaround times between charter approval and school opening (in addition to those that opened in temporary locations), and family and staff work crews pitching in to get buildings ready have become part of the folklore at these charter schools. This practice, however, creates the possibility that schools might overlook necessary or even required (in the case of special needs students) services that must be in place, potentially compromising student learning.

Resources

Charter schools, like traditional public schools, struggle to provide optimal learning experiences in the face of limited resources, and the schools visited for these case studies were no exception. Among their greatest resources, these charter schools cited strong faculty, supportive families and/or communities, and for some schools, outside funding.

One of the resources cited by charter schools was a **caring and dedicated faculty** willing to do "whatever it takes" in and around the school, from participating on committees to driving buses to "scrubbing toilets." Teachers are charged with maximizing the advantages of small classrooms and both students and teachers interviewed were very pleased with the commitment to stay small. Typical comments included: "*It's smaller here. You know everybody and everybody knows you*" (middle school student); "*I like the smallness, I'm not lost here*" (elementary student); and *"[the] staff is devoutly committed to the benefits of smallness and uncompromising in their willingness to work closely with individual students in whatever ways necessary"* (high school staff member).

Tension, however, manifests itself as **teachers charged with facilitating individualized attention and instruction were also called on to "wear many hats,"** raising questions about the sustainability of this commitment. While many teachers interviewed were proud of their contributions to the development of a new school, many of these teachers

also reported putting in many extra hours at night and on weekends: *"We're more tired from a day of this than from physical labor. That is the way all of us are. We are all crazy people!"* As previously noted, some teacher turnover was attributed to the demanding nature of teaching in a charter school. At least two schools have addressed this issue by rewarding their veteran teachers with higher salaries, seeming to acknowledge that turnover may be a by-product of their program.

A few schools were successful at supplementing state allotments with donations and/or grants. At least three schools visited had operating budgets ranging from $1 million to $1.5 million. As discussed previously, however, the **acquisition and distribution of resources were a tremendous source of tension for most charter schools**. Four schools reported generous benefactors among their founding board members, directors, parents, or community members, yet this financial assistance often required securing loans at personal risk. The majority of the schools continued to struggle with how to allocate scarce resources and obtain supplemental resources as the decision to maintain small class and school size, while discussed as critical to charter school success, also necessitated difficult decisions with regard to finances.

Differential resources between well-funded and struggling schools were immediately visible during school visits: laptops for every student in one school's classroom versus no textbooks – or very few – in another (driven by financial necessity rather than pedagogical choice); an abundance of materials at the classroom level versus limited supplies school-wide. Once again, those schools educating students with traditionally lower levels of achievement seem to struggle most with obtaining supplemental financial resources.

For some schools, tensions related to resources also spilled into instruction as performance was believed to be limited by financial resources:

> Even though as charters we're supposed to have this freedom to be innovative, I think that's a myth. I think we're under the same mandates, generally, as the public schools, but we don't have all the resources they have, certainly not [with respect to] capital expenses.

Schools felt constrained from the freedom to pursue innovative practice by the financial struggle for survival exacerbated by working with low performing students.

Supportive families are a resource for most charter schools. Whether volunteer time was required or requested, schools benefited from the time parents and other community members gave to the school. Parents attributed some of their comfort in volunteering to the small size of the charter school community, but of the charter school parents interviewed, many were quick to point out that their decision to send children to a charter school demonstrated that they were "*parents who care*." The targeted population for some charter schools precluded substantial parent involvement (e.g., youth offenders, students removed from their homes). Another parent stated that charter schools attracted "*families who love their children,*" seeming to view charter school attendance as a value statement rather than a form of school choice. The tension between choice and access is raised again given that for some families, school choice is a privilege to which they do not have access.

Promising Practices

A charter school student summarized the marker of charter school practice as reported in research and borne out in school visits: *"We have smaller classes. There's not much more to it than that."* While small size is not a guarantee of achievement or survival for a charter school, it can serve to facilitate creating the kind of community envisioned in charter applications. At least two schools defined smallness *as* their innovative practice as they distinguished their small class size – and the possibilities for individualized attention and instruction that resulted – from the traditional public schools in their communities.

Given the tensions that surrounded adequate resources among charter schools, a few charter schools had success in obtaining **funds from outside sources**. At times these took the form of donations from community benefactors (individuals and/or businesses); at times additional funds were obtained through successful grant writing. Ironically, the schools with the greatest access to financial, social and cultural resources were among the few to receive significant capital contributions from outside sources.

Taking advantage of community connections was another promising practice cited by charter schools, especially in light of limited resources. For example, at least four of the case study charter schools had established close links with local colleges or community colleges. As previously mentioned, the majority of these charter schools made good use of parent or community volunteers as well.

A few of the charter schools visited were attempting to **use different models of school leadership**. For example, a collective of teachers (in lieu of a principal) was responsible for day-to-day operations in one school; two other schools divided leadership responsibilities between two deans or directors. The teachers in the majority of the schools indicated that they felt empowered to participate in the decision-making of their schools, and credited their leadership with allowing them the autonomy to teach with limited interference in the classroom.

Given the commitment to small class size, students in these charter schools benefited from **personalized instruction**. Roughly half of the charter schools visited discussed their ability to intervene immediately when a student struggled – through individualized in-class instruction facilitated by fewer students to manage in a classroom room, or through tutorials (for remediation or acceleration) offered in addition to classroom instruction (e.g., before or after school; tutorial periods during school; Saturday workshops). At least two schools operated with full inclusion of special needs children, using learning coaches or student aides to assist with instruction. Some schools went beyond traditional assessments and end-of-grade testing and included portfolio assessments.

School Outcomes/Lessons Learned

For the 30 charter schools visited since 1997, the story that emerges is one of smallness. The **advantages of small class and school size** outweighed the possible benefits of increasing enrollments to obtain more money through per pupil allotments, and all schools attributed their success to this feature.

An important lesson learned, although retrospectively, is that **it takes a considerable amount of time to open a charter school.** Schools may wear the saga of their opening like a badge of honor, but what suffered when a school moved several times in the first year or when the school was not prepared (from a legally-required services standpoint) for special needs students that may have enrolled? The 1998 charter school cross-case report predicted that "In subsequent years, it will be possible to determine the lessons of charter schools independent of the conditions under which they were implemented" (Noblit, p. 2). Based on 2000-2001 school visits, charter schools in their third and fourth years of operation have yet to reach that point as implementation issues continue to challenge these charter schools.

As mentioned previously, some charter schools felt **limited in their ability to be innovative given the need to perform well on end-of-grade and end-of-course tests**. While not all schools identified this tension, it was frequently raised when asked about innovative practices in the schools. Small class and school size and individualized instruction were often cited as markers of charter school innovation, generally offered as a comparison to traditional public schools. Based on classroom observations during charter school visits, instruction and curriculum were found to be relatively traditional in nature. The pressure these charter schools felt to perform well on end-of-grade tests seemed to have limited their comfort with departing from traditional forms of instruction and evaluation. A few exceptions stand out. One school was on the cutting edge of incorporating project-based, experiential, and cooperative learning strategies; and at least four schools supplemented ABCs testing with portfolio assessments.

Charter school staff members and parents expressed **concern that many charter implementation decisions were tied to their long-term survival**. Several charter schools discussed the tensions associated with implementing the vision set forth in the charter, believing that survival was tenuous from year-to-year and depended on a variety of factors including resources (state funds through per pupil allotments as well as additional grant funding and/or donations), enrollment, and increasingly, test scores. These factors (resources, enrollment, achievement) were closely linked for these schools with, for example, the perception that test scores were tied to the amount and nature of supplemental resources schools could garner above the per pupil state allotment (i.e., higher achieving schools with greater access to additional funds; schools serving at-risk students struggled to supplement per pupil allotments). Several schools also felt challenged to meet state expectations for achievement given the skills of the students they targeted and/or enrolled.

While many charter schools opened or were chosen by teachers and families to escape the perception that traditional public schools were focusing too much on testing, few were able to ignore the impact these factors may have on their future.

> My frustration sometimes comes when there is so much to do with so little. We get students who are way below level but are accountable to the test. We are getting ready to do what we said we would never do: teach to the test. I feel like we're conforming. But what else can we do? If we want to stay alive, we have to play by their rules.

A few schools challenged the notion that "teaching to the test" was a necessary requirement under the ABCs Accountability program, suggesting that good curricular and pedagogical choices precluded the need to focus on standardized tests. This sentiment was heard among the few schools serving the highest achieving students. The perception exists that survival is a greater concern for less privileged charter schools, while more privileged charter schools (i.e., those with more financial, social or cultural capital) could afford the luxury of knowing that the students and families they enrolled were more advantaged in relation to resources and student achievement.

The issue of school choice also was discussed in relationship to different levels of perceived privilege among charter schools. Concern was expressed, for example, that for families with privilege and/or children of higher achievement, the choice to attend a charter school was a relatively safe one backed by the knowledge that these families could comfortably choose to send their child to another charter school, to a private school, or even back to their community public school if the charter option did not work out. Less “successful” students, however, felt that they had less choice with regards to where they might go should their charter school not survive. For these children and their families, the charter school represented a “last resort,” and the school’s survival had deep significance. This is not to suggest that achievement and privilege go hand-in-hand but rather to reflect the perception that choice is a relative term.

Changes Over Time

The implementation issues and promising practices highlighted in this report represent visits to 30 case study schools including schools that have been in operation from one to four years. While it is too soon to determine significant changes in charter schools over time, it is possible however, to identify a number of themes, issues and adjustments many charter schools have made relative to their years in operation. **Table 1** offers a visual matrix of the changes and adjustments experienced by charter schools during their first years of operation in North Carolina. Because most charter schools are very contextually specific and experience a number of changes based on their local situations, it is difficult to map out the “challenges and changes” that encompass all of the issues and adjustments charter schools have made. Table 1 is only a general snapshot of the issues many schools have experienced.

Table 1: Challenges and Changes in North Carolina Charter Schools

	Challenges	Changes
Schools in Their First Year of Operation	• Growth and student turnover • Student population needs • Facilities (readiness, renovations) • Transportation • District support	• Curriculum modifications • Schedule modifications
Schools in Their Second Year of Operation	• Growth and student turnover • Faculty/leadership personality and vision conflicts	• Schedule modifications • Board and faculty turnover • Facility renovations and changes • Improved LEA and community relations
Schools in Their Third Year of Operation	• Student population growth • Decreased parental involvement	• Added grade levels • Targeted parental help • Faculty/leadership turnover • Refinement of mission and curriculum
Schools in Their Fourth Year of Operation	• Tensions related to size, performance, equity • Charter renewal process	• Gradual addition of extra-curricular programs • Good schools getting better; challenged schools continue to struggle

If anything, the case study schools visited demonstrate that charter schools are **constantly in the process of making adjustments and modifications to create better learning environments for their students**. All of the schools, regardless of years of operation, experience student growth, leadership and faculty turnover, and curriculum changes. As the schools gain more experience, they place much more emphasis on "fine tuning" their missions with curriculum and allowing themselves time to reach their ultimate goals. Unfortunately, all of the schools visited experienced marked decreases in parental involvement and volunteerism over time.

While "successful" charter schools (as measured by ABCs data, student enrollment, and access to capital, for example) continue to maintain or improve achievement, charter schools with fewer advantages (for example, in terms of access to capital, student academic achievement, and community support) continue to face challenges with seemingly fewer avenues for recourse. These challenged schools enroll students already at-risk and are expected to bring them quickly to grade level; at the same time they enjoy fewer financial benefits from community and/or business benefactors. These challenges appear magnified given that these schools believe they are educating students poorly served in traditional public schools – students with few choices should the charter school choice prove unsuccessful.

Hopes for the Future

The most basic hope for the future expressed by these charter schools was to be able to **continue to operate and offer their unique educational opportunities** (especially poignant for fourth and third-year schools facing the charter renewal process). These schools were anxious to prove that their approach, expressed in their distinctive mission, worked. For some, the focus was on **improving and refining what was already in place**, "*shoring up the base.*" For others, this hope for the future was expressed in the language of survival.

A **better facility** is included among the hopes charter schools expressed for the future. In some cases this hope took the form of a new building; in other cases this hope took the form of upgrades to existing facilities (e.g., space for physical education or media services). The hope for improved facilities was often tied to the hope of offering expanded extra-curricular opportunities for students (e.g., a sports program or after-school clubs) or more services for their families (e.g., pre-K programs; expansion to high school).

Many charter schools expressed the **hope that legislation might be changed** to alter funding and/or assessment requirements for charter schools. In the area of funding, the hope was for changes that would allow charter schools to allot greater resources to facilities and services. Such a change would ease the tension many charter schools experienced in honoring their commitment to small class size.

In the area of testing, the hope was for **changes in the requirements** regarding charter school participation in the ABCs Accountability program. Many charter schools felt constrained in their ability to offer a different and innovative alternative to traditional public schools when their survival was perceived to be tied to performance on end-of-grade tests. Allowing charter schools greater freedom to pursue their educational missions might ease the tension charter schools felt to perform for survival. In the absence of such changes, charter schools hoped for time to implement their vision in order to realize anticipated better performance on standardized tests. Many charter schools felt the tension of trying to educate and bring to grade level students who were previously unsuccessful in traditional public schools.

These hopes indicate that the case study schools believe that their vision and mission for educating students provides a promising environment for students to thrive academically, personally and socially. They believe that their schools, with their distinctive missions, fill a void that is found in traditional public schools. A parent in one charter school feels this void is finally filled: *"We left public schools ten years ago and have done private and home-schooling because the curriculum in public school has really narrowed. We came back to public schools this year because this school meets our standard of curriculum."*

Part VII

North Carolina Charter School

Parent/Guardian Survey:

2001

North Carolina Charter School Parent/Guardian Survey, 2001

Introduction

Demand for alternative types of schooling in North Carolina has been met in several ways: alternative programs within schools, magnet programs, private or parochial programs, and home schools are examples. As of the 1997-1998 school year, public charter schools provide another alternative for parental choice in schooling. This report summarizes results of a parent/guardian (hereafter described as "parent") survey implemented in an effort to start understanding the foundations of parents' interest and investment in charter schools.

Methodology

Sixteen North Carolina charter schools that served as case study schools in the 2000-01 school year were chosen to participate in the study. The schools are listed in Table 1, along with their location, year opened, grades served, recent enrollment and the percentage of their parents who responded to the survey. Researchers contacted representatives from each school and received cooperation through either parent address lists or willingness to disseminate surveys through the school. In sum, 2,500 surveys were printed and mailed in the Spring of 2001, either to school representatives for dissemination or directly to parents, depending on how the schools preferred to handle the distribution. The number of surveys mailed was based upon each school's report of the total number of unique families whose child(ren) attended the school. Families with more than one child attending a school were provided with only one survey.

For schools whose surveys were not returned in a timely manner, follow-up phone calls were made by researchers as well as by the Office of Charter Schools within the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. An initial response of 422 completed surveys (17% response rate overall) obtained from the Spring 2001 mailing was augmented by a second mailing to seven schools that had low response rates. This second mailing took place in the Fall of 2001. Two low-response schools (John H. Baker and Lakeside) were not included in this second mailing due to low probability of increasing the initial return rate. This second mailing increased the total number of parent respondents to 501 (20% response rate). For the 7 schools that were resurveyed in the Fall of 2001, if they improved upon their response rate from the Spring of 2001, their Spring data were discarded and replaced by the Fall data. Otherwise, the Spring data were kept for analysis purposes. Given the low overall response rate, these results should be viewed as a preliminary understanding rather than as a conclusive view of parent opinions. Respondents also may reflect a particular type of parent and may not be typical of all parents of charter school students.

Table 1: North Carolina Charter Schools Included in Parent Survey

School	Location (City)	Yr. Opened	Grade Level	# Surveys Sent	# Surveys Returned	Response Rate	Percent of Total Sample
American Renaissance Charter School	Statesville	1998	6-8	173	31	18%	6%
Arapahoe Charter School	Arapahoe	1997	K-8	283	22	8%	4%
John H. Baker, Jr. High School	Raleigh	1997	9-12	25	0	0%	0%
Chatham Charter School	Siler City	1997	K-8	150	62	41%	12%
Downtown Middle School	Winston-Salem	1997	5-7	540	28	5%	6%
East Wake Academy	Zebulon	1998	K-9	480	60	13%	12%
Exploris Middle School	Raleigh	1997	6-8	168	42	25%	8%
Francine Delaney New School for Children	Asheville	1997	K-5	112	71	63%	14%
Franklin Academy	Wake Forest	1998	K-5	550	70	13%	14%
Kestrel Heights School	Durham	1998	6-9	160	24	15%	5%
Lakeside School	Elon College	1997	6-12	65	0	0%	0%
Mountain Community School	Hendersonville	1999	K-6	115	47	41%	9%
Omuteko Gwamaziima	Durham	1999	K-12	100	0	0%	0%
SPARC Academy	Raleigh	1998	K-8	200	15	8%	3%
Village Charter School	Chapel Hill	1997	K-6	216	0	0%	0%
Wayne County Technical Academy	Goldsboro	1999	9-12	200	29	15%	6%

Characteristics of Parent Respondents and Their Children

The first set of questions on the survey (See Appendix A for a copy of the survey) asked parents a number of questions about their children and about the schools attended by their children. These data are presented here largely to describe the sample of respondents.

Grade level and sibling attendance. Parents were asked to provide the grade levels in which their child(ren) were enrolled in the charter school. Respondents had as many as four children enrolled, although most had only one or two. Roughly two-thirds of the survey respondents had children enrolled in charters at the elementary (K-5) level (Table 2). This is not surprising given that most charter schools serve those grade levels. Thirty-one percent of respondents also said they had at least one other school-aged child that attended another school.

Table 2: Grade Levels of Children of Parent Respondents

Child One			Child Two			Child Three			Child Four		
	n	%		n	%		n	%		n	%
K-5	297	61%	**K-5**	107	67%	**K-5**	22	69%	**K-5**	3	43%
6-12	193	39%	**6-12**	52	33%	**6-12**	10	31%	**6-12**	4	57%

Prior schooling. Slightly more than half of respondents' children had attended traditional public schools prior to the charter school (Table 3). An additional 25% either didn't attend school (too young, etc.) or in the case of the "other" category, attended daycare or preschool programs.

Table 3: Types of schools children attended prior to the charter school

Response	n	%
Traditional public school	287	57%
Private School	33	7%
Home school	22	4%
Church-related or parochial school	17	3%
Did not attend school	82	16%
Other*	44	9%
No Response	16	3%

* - Most commonly preschool, daycare, prekindergarten, etc.

The majority of respondents whose children had attended another school prior to enrolling in a charter school indicated that their children were performing either at or above average in their previous schools (Table 4). These results suggest that responding parents did not necessarily choose charter schools because their children had been performing poorly in other settings.

Table 4: Parent Ratings of their Children's Academic Performance Prior to Attending a Charter School

Response	n	%
Average	157	40%
Above Average	158	40%
Below Average	68	17%
No Response	10	3%

Note: Respondents whose children did not attend another school prior to the charter not included.

Respondents' Ratings of Selected School Characteristics

Parents in the 16 sampled schools were also asked to provide information about certain aspects of the charter schools their children attended. These data included information about the school's mission, volunteer opportunities, and whether they had experienced any specific problems with the school.

School's fidelity to mission. Parents were asked to what extent the charter school that their child(ren) attended was following its mission. The vast majority of respondents believed their charter school was following its stated mission well or very well (Table 5).

Table 5: Ratings of Extent to which Charter School is Following its Mission

Response	n	%
Very Well	298	60%
Well	150	30%
Fair	20	4%
Not Very Well	9	2%
Poor	5	1%
No Response	11	2%
Don't Know	8	2%

Despite agreement that these charter schools were largely adhering to their missions, respondents did identify some problem areas (Table 6). While the largest percentage of respondents did not respond to this question, the remaining respondents indicated lack of extracurricular activities as the greatest problem followed by lack of (or inadequate) lunch programs and problems with transportation.

Table 6: Items that are a problem for you or your child at this charter school

Response	n	%
Few or no extracurricular activities	112	22%
Other*	75	15%
Lunch	55	11%
Transportation	50	10%
Support services	40	8%
Teacher qualifications	10	2%
No response	159	32%

* Responses in the 'other' category were extremely varied. The most common were: lack of after and before school care and tutoring; physical congestion at the school; lack of elective programs and sports; and lack of adequate facilities.

Volunteer activities. Sixty percent of respondents said that their schools required them to volunteer at least some time at the school, with 77% reporting that they did so in some capacity. The most common methods of volunteering cited were instructional support and monitoring activities (Table 7). Additionally, many respondents reported efforts to maintain the school's buildings and environment through donations of resources, time, and skills.

Table 7: Common Parent Volunteer Activities at Charter Schools

Response	n	%
Instructional Support	228	46%
Other*	214	43%
Lunch Duty	128	26%
Car Duty	102	20%
Playground Monitor	20	4%

* Included field trip chaperone, grounds work, physical maintenance, office work, etc.

Reasons Parents Choose Charter Schools

The majority of the survey was devoted to two primary sets of questions. The first asked parents to select from a list of 25 possible reasons why they might have decided to enroll their child in the charter school he/she currently attends. Respondents rated each of those 25 reasons as *very important, somewhat important,* or *not at all important* to their decision to enroll their child. For presentation purposes, these 25 items are grouped into six categories: Academics and educational quality; school environment; mission, vision and leadership; engagement; and physical environment. Data are reported as the percentage of respondents who rated each reason as either *very* or *somewhat important.*

Academics and educational quality. The vast majority of respondents considered placing importance on academics either *very* or *somewhat important* (Figure 1). Additionally, the academic reputation of the school was important to a majority of respondents. The majority also believed increased motivation for learning was important. Respondents placed further emphasis on the ability of their children to learn more in charter schools. Not all parents felt that choosing a charter was necessary because of past failures or disappointments in previous schools. Rather, teaching methods, involvement in a new educational program, and access to computers and technology were viewed as more important reasons for choosing the school. In sum, responses to these items present a picture of parents wanting their children to be in an educationally challenging environment where they might realize higher achievement.

School environment. Another pertinent consideration for parents is the environment of the school. This can include varying factors from homogeneous racial or ethnic culture and safety to the size of the school. A third of respondents considered racial or ethnic homogeneity an important factor in choosing their charter school (Figure 2). Higher percentages, however, were attracted because of the small school size (87%) and small class size (92%). Additionally, a high percentage of respondents considered safety an important factor in their choice. Combining these results with those concerning academics and educational quality, respondents are demonstrating concern for their children's learning environments. Respondents did not demonstrate overwhelming concern for cultural factors; rather, the learning environment seems to be the emphasis.

Mission, vision, and leadership. The survey also asked about the importance of the school's vision and leadership style on parents' decisions. Results indicate that increased individual attention for students was a principal factor in choosing a charter school (Figure 3) - a response consistent with the desire for smaller classes and schools. Many of the most commonly cited factors in this section, in fact, may have less to do with choosing schools with specific missions or visions than with a desire for academic benefits. This again confirms the importance of achievement to parents in choosing their charter schools.

A similar concern was voiced regarding the school's ability to serve children with special needs. Many respondents found this factor important to their decision. It is unclear, however, whether respondents interpreted this to mean children who are eligible for special education services under federal law, or just the particular needs of their individual children.

Leadership style, responsibility, and school policies were also important. Respondents rated better leadership and management capabilities as important to their decision. This does not mean that parents were displeased with leadership at other schools. Rather, it implies that parents consider this an important component of the charter school they selected. A majority of respondents also felt it was important for the school to assume responsibility for the academic success of the students. A majority also felt discipline and communication were important in their decisions to choose charter schools.

Figure 1. Academics and Educational Quality

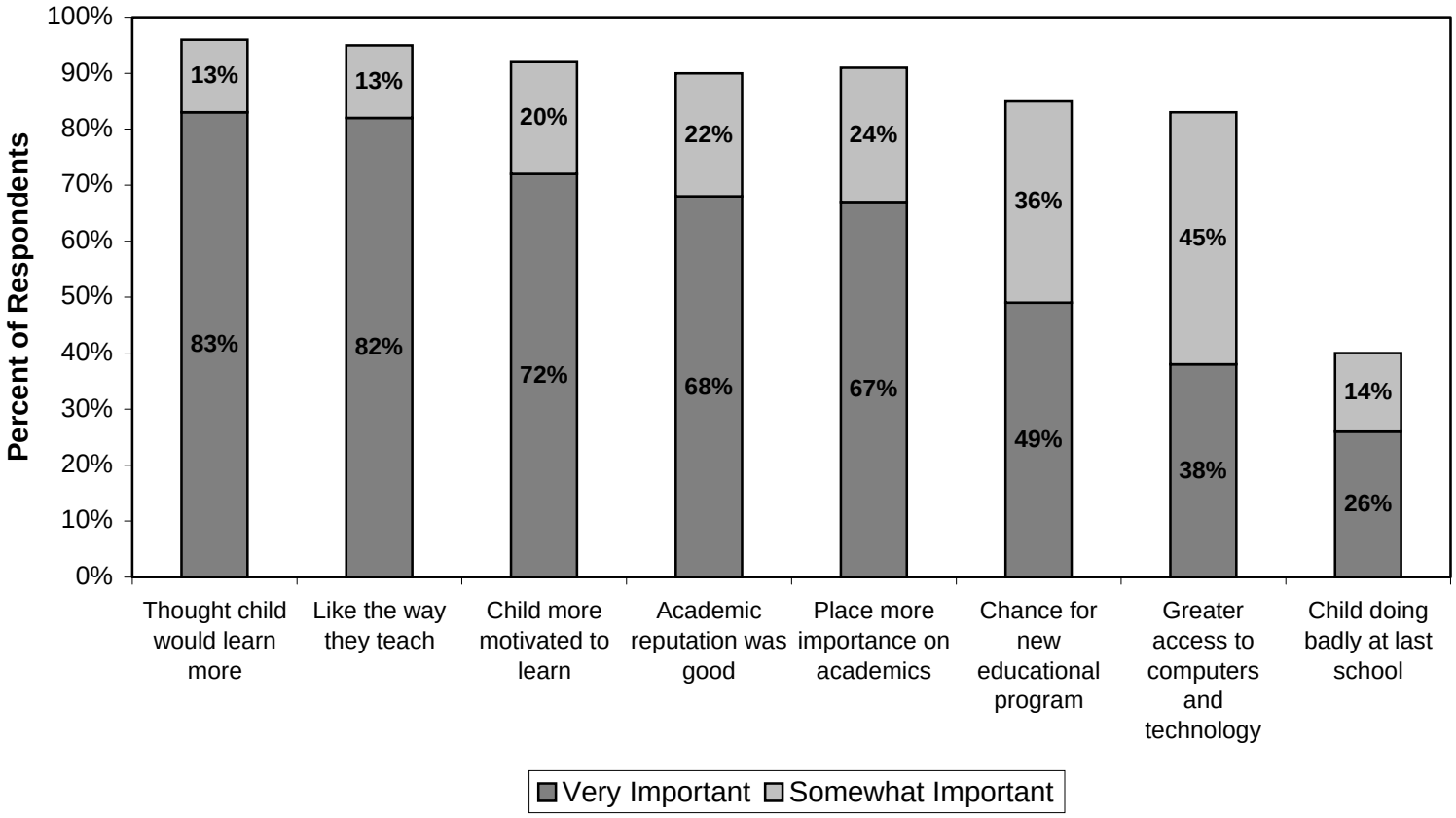


Figure 2. School Environment

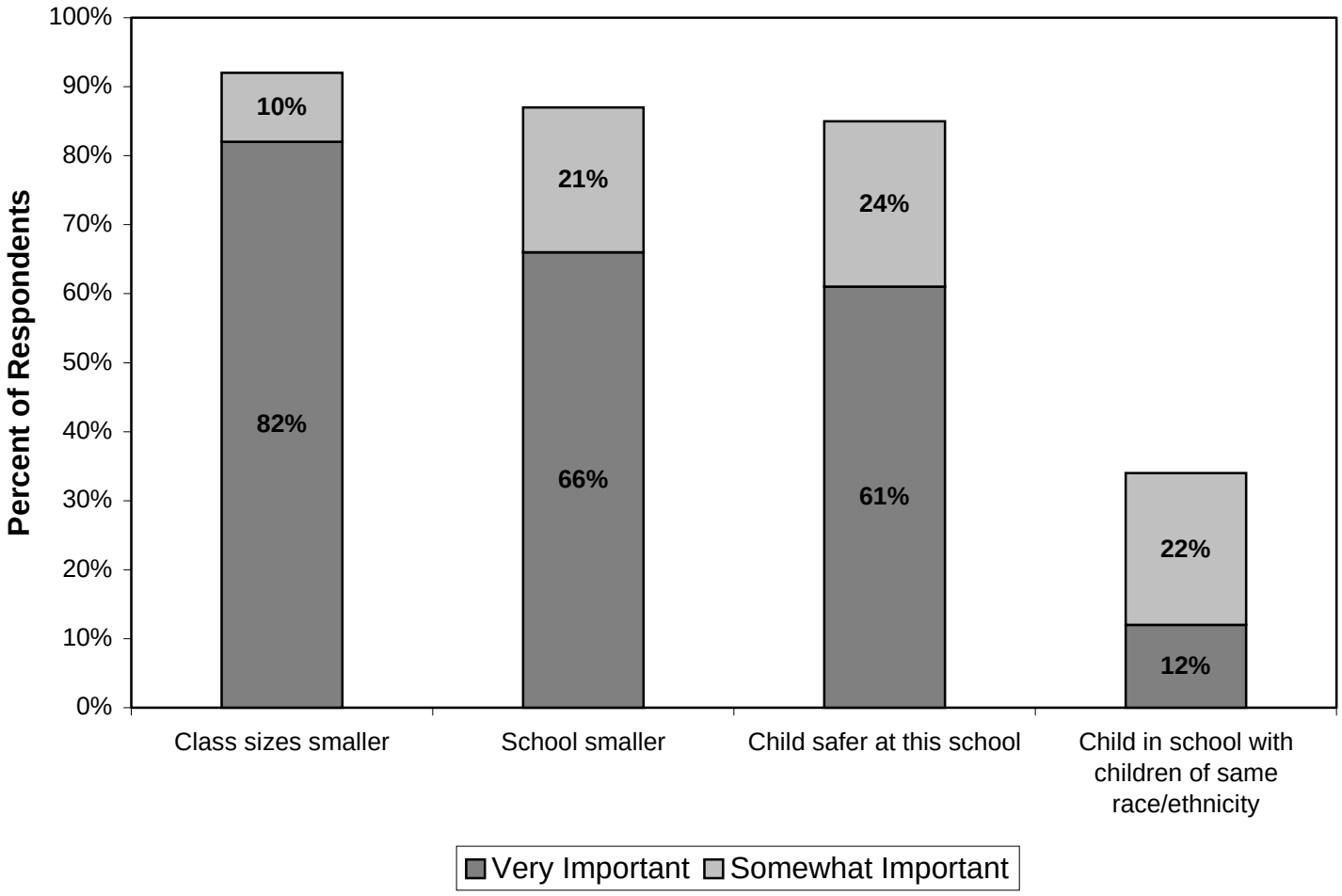
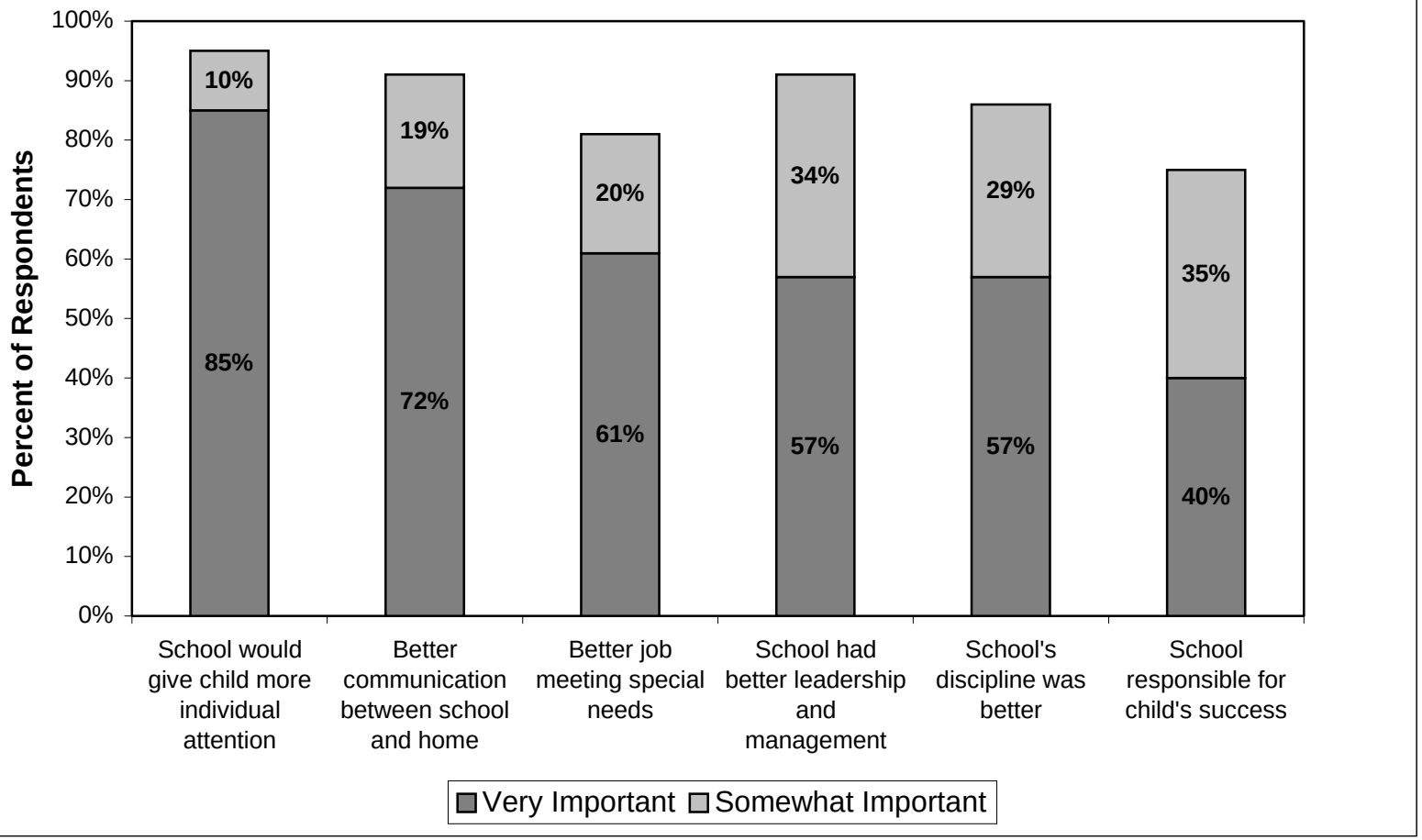


Figure 3. Mission, Vision, and Leadership



Engagement. Items in this area focused on the ability of either parents or students to take part in school activities and decision-making. Participation is considered a fundamental component of the engagement process. In this section, respondents rated the important of engagement to their decision. A majority of respondents believed volunteering and engaging in activities and involvement in decision-making were important to their decision to choose charter schools (Figure 4). However, the level of importance is lower than for previous areas reported. Additionally, for a majority of respondents, the belief that their child(ren) would be happier in the charter school was important in their decision. For a smaller percentage of respondents, the child's desire to attend the school was also an important factor.

Physical environment. Charter schools generally lack the resources to have sophisticated physical environments. With some exceptions, charter schools often exist in non-traditional settings such as trailers and church basements. How important is location and physical setting to parents? A majority of respondents believed that the convenience of the school's location was important to their decision (Figure 5). A smaller percentage of respondents felt that having a nicer building and better equipment was important to their choosing the charter school.

Reasons Parents Choose Charter Schools - Summary

At least 50% of respondents listed the following factors as "very" important to their decision to attend a charter school (Figure 6). This list represents those factors that are most influential to respondents. The percentage of respondents who said those factors were not at all important to their decision is given for comparison. Conversely, there are some factors that many respondents agreed were "not at all" important. The factors that at least 20% of respondents believed were not at all important are given in Figure 7. The only factor for which a majority of responding parents agreed was "not at all" important was having their children in a school with other students of the same ethnicity.

Figure 4. Engagement

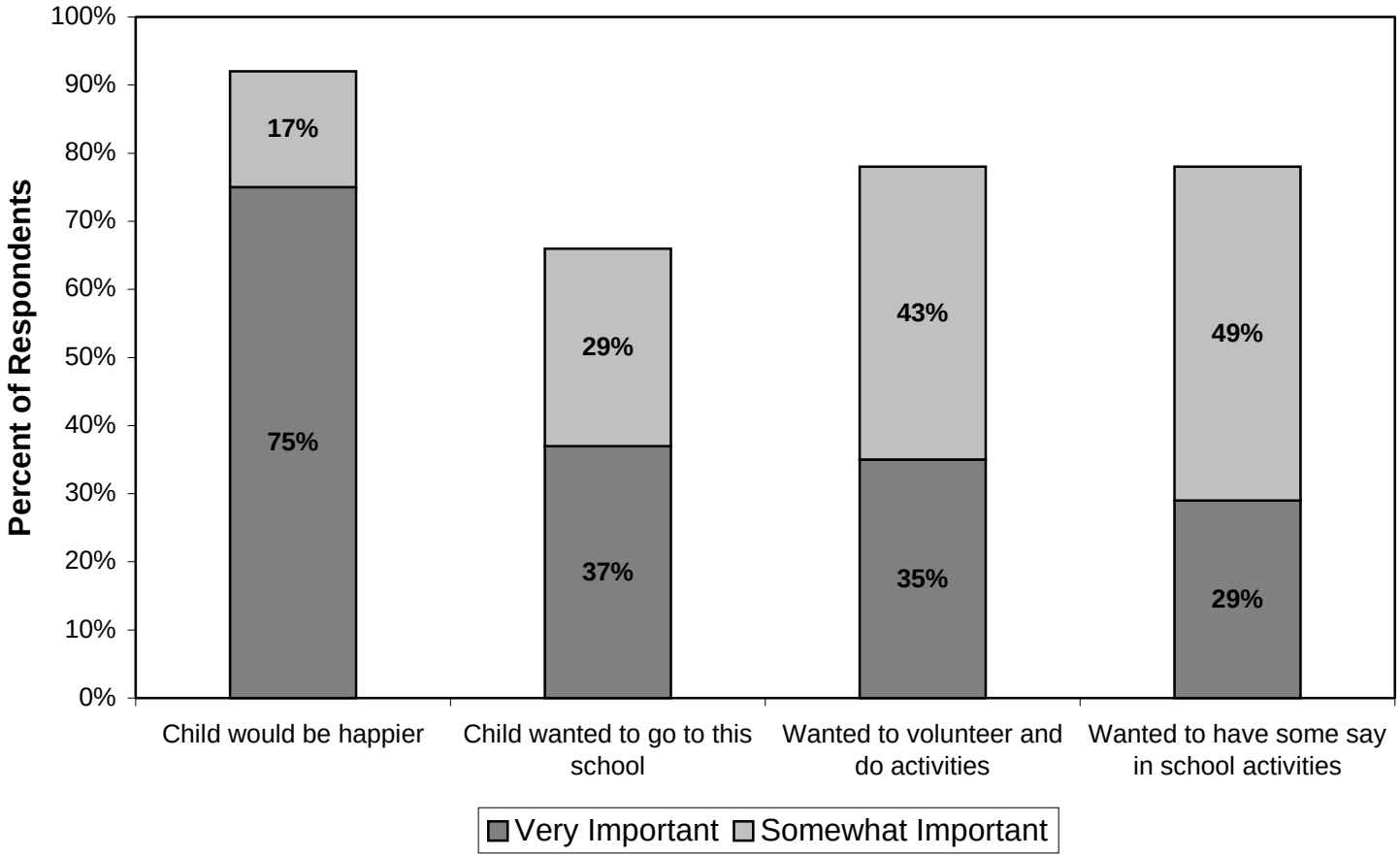
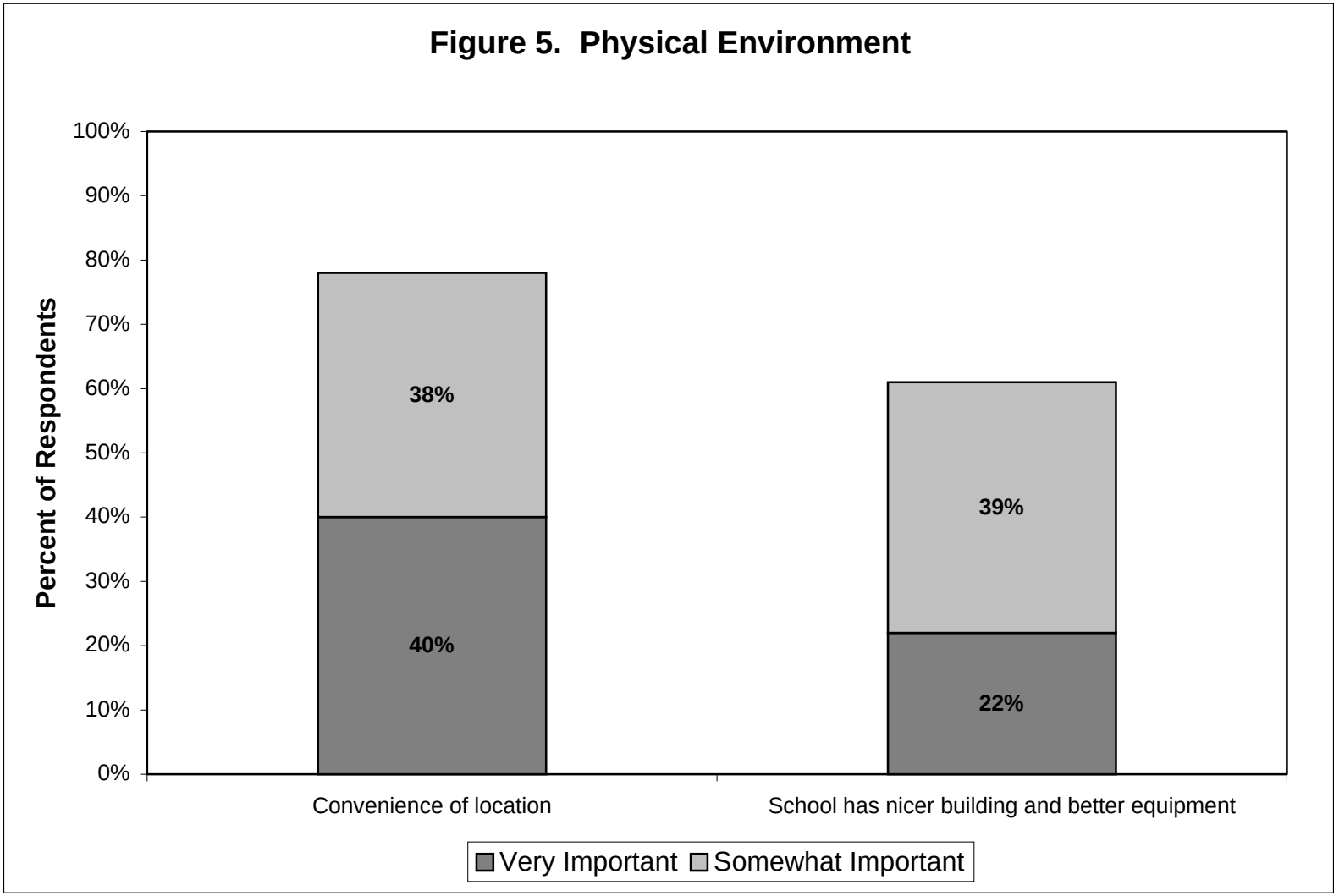


Figure 5. Physical Environment



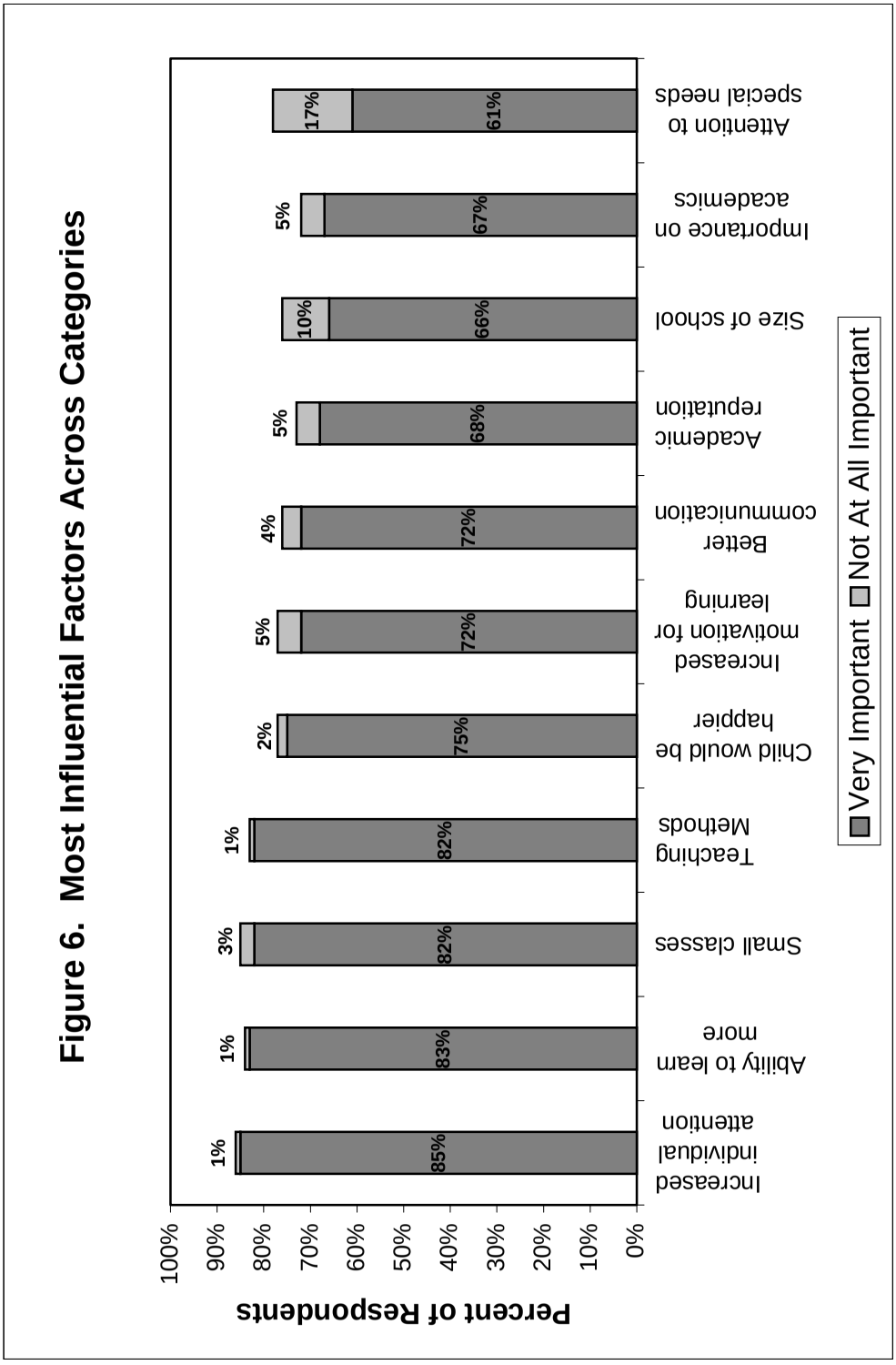
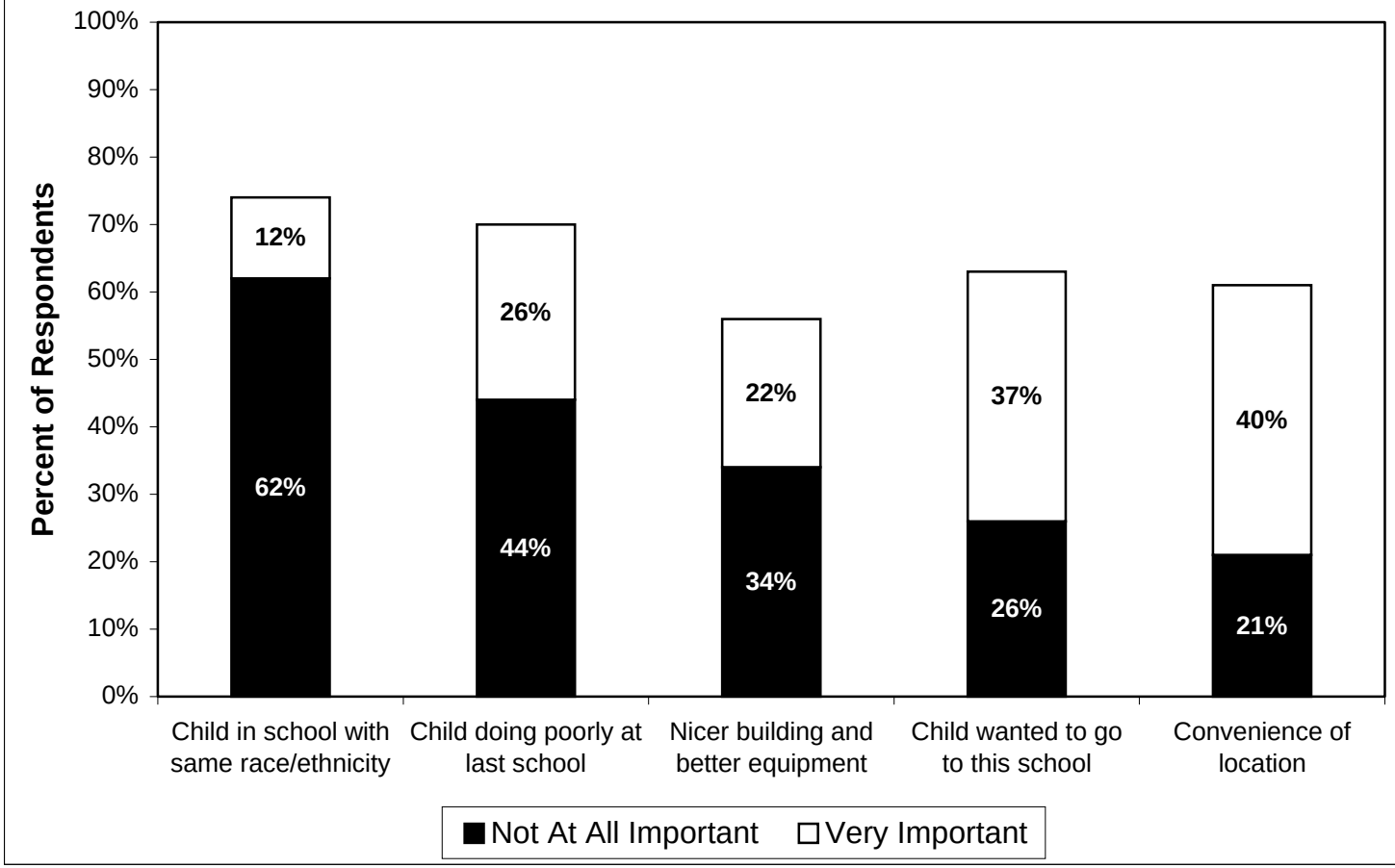


Figure 6. Most Influential Factors Across Categories
Percent of Respondents
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
Very Important
Not At All Important
Increased individual attention
1%
85%
Ability to learn more
1%
83%
Small classes
3%
82%
Teaching Methods
1%
82%
Child would be happier
2%
75%
Increased motivation for learning
5%
72%
Better communication
4%
72%
Academic reputation
5%
68%
Size of school
10%
66%
Importance on academics
5%
67%
Attention to special needs
17%
61%

Figure 7. Least Influential Factors



Are Parents Satisfied With Their Experiences?

In addition to identifying factors that were important in decision-making, parents were also given the chance to identify whether those same things were actually problematic since their child has been attending the school. Tables 8-12 give the results of this analysis, focusing mainly on problems that were cited by at least 10% of respondents. Factors are grouped in the same categories as in the previous section. Overall, the percentage of responding parents who perceived factors to be problematic was quite low.

Academic and educational quality. At least 10% of respondents identified access to computers and technology, teaching methods, their child's ability to learn more, and their child's motivation to learn as factors that had become problems at their charter school (Table 8). For comparison (refer to Figure 1), 38% of respondents believed access to computers and technology to be very important to their decision, 82% believed teaching methods to be very important, 83% believed ability to learn more to be very important, and 72% believed motivation to be very important in making the decision to choose charter schools.

Table 8. Problems - Academic and Educational Quality

	Yes	No	Don't Know	No Response
Computers and other technology	12%	74%	3%	4%
Like the way they teach	11%	75%	2%	4%
Child would learn more	11%	75%	3%	4%
Child more motivated to learn	10%	77%	2%	4%
More importance on academics	8%	77%	5%	4%
Child doing badly at last school	7%	72%	5%	6%
Academic reputation	6%	73%	7%	4%
New kind of educational program	6%	80%	4%	4%

School environment. In comparison to Academic and Educational Quality, even fewer respondents (less than 10%) cited problems with the school environment (Table 9). Few parents were dissatisfied with the size of the school and of classes, the safety of the school, or the diversity of students attending the school.

Table 9. Problems - School Environment

	Yes	No	Don't Know	No Response
Class sizes are smaller	7%	81%	2%	4%
Child would be safer	6%	80%	3%	4%
School is smaller	5%	83%	1%	4%
Other children same race/culture	4%	79%	4%	4%

Mission, vision, and leadership. Some respondents reported that leadership and communication are problematic at their schools (Table 10). For comparison, 57% of respondents believed leadership to be very important in their decision while 72% of respondents believed communication to be very important in choosing their charter school.

Table 10. Problems - Mission, Vision, and Leadership

	Yes	No	Don't Know	No Response
Better communication	14%	72%	3%	4%
Better leadership and management	13%	71%	6%	4%
School's discipline is better	9%	72%	7%	4%
More individual attention	9%	78%	2%	4%
Better job meeting special needs	8%	75%	6%	4%
Responsible for child's success	6%	77%	4%	5%

Engagement. Ten percent of respondents believed that their child(ren)'s happiness at the charter was a problem (Table 11). This was a factor 75% of respondents reported as very important in their decision-making.

Table 11. Problems - Engagement

	Yes	No	Don't Know	No Response
Thought child would be happier	10%	76%	2%	4%
Wanted to volunteer	7%	80%	3%	4%
Child wanted to go to this school	6%	78%	2%	5%
To have say in activities	5%	81%	4%	4%

Physical environment. Some respondents believed that the physical facilities and equipment were problems at their charter school (Table 21). In contrast, 22% of respondents reported that this was a very important factor in their decision-making.

Table 12. Problems - Physical Environment

	Yes	No	Don't Know	No Response
Nice building and better equipment	16%	70%	4%	4%
Convenience of location	5%	86%	6%	3%

Are Parents Satisfied With Their Experiences? - Summary

Although no more than 16% of parents cited any one of the factors on the survey as being problematic at their school, the factors cited most often had to do with the quality of the building and equipment (including computers and technology), communication, and leadership. Interestingly, the one aspect of the schools that was cited most often as a problem (nice building and better equipment) was ranked by parents as the *least* important factor in choosing the school (Figure 7). However, some of the academic factors that were among the most important reasons why parents chose charter schools were cited as problematic by between 8 and 11 percent of the respondents. This implies that at least some parents might not be getting what they expected from the schools in terms of academics.

Parent Satisfaction: Open-Ended Questions

In addition to asking parents about specific aspects of the school in terms of their expectations and experiences, the last three questions on the survey asked parents to discuss a) the thing that they liked most about the school; b) what they liked least about the school; and c) whether they had any other comments or suggestions. Researchers grouped responses to these questions into categories to determine the major themes (if any) that seemed to characterize parents' answers to these questions. These findings for each of the three questions are described in this section.

Liked most. The overwhelming majority of responses to the question about what parents liked best about their charters indicated had to do with the schools' **small school and class size** and the benefits associated with smallness. Small school size was credited with improved **interaction and communication** between parents and staff; better school **safety**; and a **community** atmosphere at the school. **Individualized instruction and attention**, and improved **discipline** were cited as primary benefits of small class size.

Parents liked that children felt a **sense of belonging** in these small schools, enhancing the child's self-esteem and independence. They indicated that these charter schools provided a **caring environment** and that teachers and administrators were **accessible, responsive, and flexible**. Parents also appreciated opportunities for **involvement** in the school and participation in their child's education.

Some parents were also pleased with the **quality of instruction** offered in these charter schools. Opportunities for **curricular integration** as well as **tutoring** – either remedial or accelerated – were liked by parents. **Uniforms** were also frequently cited as an element of the charter school experience appreciated by parents at those charter schools.

Liked least. The range of responses for elements least liked about charter schools was greater than for elements liked most and, in some cases, can be viewed as elements over which charter schools have greater control versus less control (e.g., resources, facilities). Given that some of these elements were also cited as factors other parents *liked most* about charter schools points to variations in levels of communication, organization and resources, for example, *among* charter schools and/or diverse perceptions of parents.

Elements least liked by parents over which these charter schools have more control include **poor communication, lack of diversity, disorganization, lack of curricular creativity, inadequate teacher qualifications, and lack of discipline**. Parents at some of these schools disliked the **academic focus** of the school, citing lack of rigor, lack of traditional grading methods, and lack of gifted programs. Parents also did not like the **high turnover rates** among teachers and/or administrators at some of these schools.

Some parents also identified **inadequate facilities and activities** as elements that they did not like about their school. **Sports, music, foreign language, theatre, and after-school programs** also were listed **as missing or inadequate**. Other "dislikes" related to the fact that their schools did **not offer** transportation, adequate food service, technology, or playgrounds. Parents also cited **inadequate funding from the state and poor support from the local school district** as elements they did not like about these charter schools.

Other comments/suggestions. When invited to offer other comments or suggestions about charter schools, parents generally reinforced the elements they did and did not like about their charter school. Parents who were dissatisfied with elements of their charter school experience called for better discipline, improved communication between teachers and parents, and better teacher qualifications.

Many parents used this opportunity to praise their charter school and charter schools in general. They made suggestions for improving their school, including more extracurricular activities, better food service, and more opportunities for gifted students. Many parents also were looking to the future and hoping that their charter school would offer high school in time for their child. Parents also called for increased funding for charter schools.

Limitations of the Study: What This Survey Does Not Tell Us

The current parent satisfaction survey focuses on a limited sample of parents in their present situation. This is not a survey of why parents chose to leave their past schools. Rather, this survey seeks to find out what was important for parents in making the decision to choose charter schools and problems they might be encountering in their experiences within these schools. While it is tempting to assume the implication that charter schools are what public schools are not, it is important to maintain the focus and intention of this survey. Any inferences back to traditional public schools are tenuous and would require further study.

The survey was mailed with the cooperation of schools to current parents. The results therefore do not provide information from parents who have left charter schools. This is an important population to survey but was unfortunately outside the scope of the current project.

One final note of caution: A relatively small number of charter school parents responded to this survey from a specific non-random sample of schools (only 20% of the parents in the 16 schools surveyed). This low rate of response necessitates caution when using this data to create generalizations of the larger charter school parent population. Although the responses here do characterize the opinions of over 500 charter school parents in those schools, they cannot be taken to be representative of all parents in those 16 schools, nor can they be said to represent all charter school parents in North Carolina.

APPENDIX A

NC Charter School Parent/Guardian Survey

Instructions:
Please use a pencil or black pen.
Fill in the circles completely.
If you make changes, please erase cleanly.

1. What grade level is your child or children in at this charter school?

Child 1		Child 2		Child 3		Child 4	
O Kinder	O 6th	O Kinder	O 6th	O Kinder	O 6th	O Kinder	O 6th
O 1st	O 7th	O 1st	O 7th	O 1st	O 7th	O 1st	O 7th
O 2nd	O 8th	O 2nd	O 8th	O 2nd	O 8th	O 2nd	O 8th
O 3rd	O 9th	O 3rd	O 9th	O 3rd	O 9th	O 3rd	O 9th
O 4th	O 10th	O 4th	O 10th	O 4th	O 10th	O 4th	O 10th
O 5th	O 11th	O 5th	O 11th	O 5th	O 11th	O 5th	O 11th
	O 12th		O 12th		O 12th		O 12th

2. Do you have other school-age children that do not attend this charter school? O Yes O No

If you have more than one child going to this school, please think about the child who has been at this school for the longest time when you answer the rest of the questions on this survey. If more than one child was attending this school at the same time, think about the oldest child.

3. How well did your child do in school before attending a charter school? O Above Average O Average O Below Average

4. How well do you think the school is following its mission?

O Very Well
O Well
O Poor
O Not very well
O Fair
O Don't Know

5. What kind of school did your child attend last before this charter school?

O Traditional public school
O Church-related or parochial school
O Did not attend school
O Private School
O Home School
O Other (please specify) _____

6a. Does this school require parents to volunteer to work at the school? O Yes O No

6b. Do you volunteer at this school? O Yes O No

6c. What types of volunteer work are offered at this charter school?

O Lunch Duty
O Playground Monitor
O Other (please specify) _____
O Car Duty
O Instructional Support

7. Please fill in the circles for each of the following items that are a problem for you or your child at this school. (Mark all that apply)

O Lunch
O Transportation
O No or limited extracurricular activities
O Teacher qualifications
O Support services (e.g., counseling, school nurse, speech therapist)
O Other (please specify) _____

8. First, think about why you wanted your child to go to this school. Then in the section called "*Importance to Decision*" rate whether each item was Very Important, Somewhat Important, or Not At All Important to your decision. Next, think about what has actually happened since your child started here. Then go to the section called "*Problem Areas*" and for each item select Yes if it is or has become a problem, No if it is not or has not become a problem, or Don't Know if you don't know if it is a problem.

	Importance to Decision			Problem Areas		
	Not At All Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important	Yes	No	Don't Know
The convenience of the location.	O	O	O	O	O	O
I wanted the chance to be involved in a new kind of educational program.	O	O	O	O	O	O
They place more importance on academics.	O	O	O	O	O	O
The academic reputation of this school was good.	O	O	O	O	O	O
I liked the way they teach at this school.	O	O	O	O	O	O
The school would give my child more individual attention.	O	O	O	O	O	O
This school's discipline was better.	O	O	O	O	O	O
This school would do a better job of meeting my child's special needs.	O	O	O	O	O	O
I wanted my child to be in school with other children of the same race or culture.	O	O	O	O	O	O
I wanted to be able to have some say in the activities in the school.	O	O	O	O	O	O
I thought this school had better leadership and management.	O	O	O	O	O	O
My child was doing badly at his/her last school.	O	O	O	O	O	O
My child wanted to go to this school.	O	O	O	O	O	O
This school is smaller.	O	O	O	O	O	O
Class sizes are smaller at this school.	O	O	O	O	O	O
This school has a nicer building and better equipment.	O	O	O	O	O	O
I thought my child would be safer at this school.	O	O	O	O	O	O
I thought communication between school and home would be better.	O	O	O	O	O	O
I wanted to volunteer and do other activities at the school.	O	O	O	O	O	O
My child would be able to use computers and other technologies more.	O	O	O	O	O	O
The school would be responsible for my child's success.	O	O	O	O	O	O
My child would be more motivated to learn.	O	O	O	O	O	O
I thought my child would learn more.	O	O	O	O	O	O
I thought my child would be happier at this school.	O	O	O	O	O	O
Other (please specify: _____)	O	O	O	O	O	O

9. What, if anything, do you like most about this school?

10. What, if anything, do you like the least about this school?

11. Do you have any other comments or suggestions?

Part VIII

A Review of the

Literature on Charter Schools

A Review of the Literature on Charter Schools

Introduction

As a public school reform initiative, charter schools have experienced tremendous growth in the United States since the first charter school opened in Minnesota in 1992 (Bierlein, 1997; RPP International, 2000). Important to remember in any review of the literature on charter schools is that efforts to generalize across charter schools in a district, a state, or the nation mask the complexity and unique experiences of each charter school as an individual reform effort in a particular context and community. Contributing factors to the uniqueness of each charter school include charter school legislation that varies from state-to-state given the distinctive state context and political process of each state (RPP International, 2000), and the unique dreams and visions of charter school developers.

Approaching a ten-year anniversary on the education reform landscape, charter schools have been the subject of intense scrutiny as advocates and critics seek justification for arguments in favor of or against charter schools, and researchers seek understanding of the effects of charter schools in the education community. Some caution that it is still too early to paint a representative picture of the charter school experience, but the existing literature on charter schools does permit a better understanding of the charter school reform initiative.

Following a description of general characteristics and types of charter schools, this review of the literature will look at indicators of charter school success, accountability in charter schools, the impact of charter schools on traditional public schools, the presence of innovative practices in charter schools, and enrollment in charter schools of students of color and exceptional children. The review will conclude with recommendations for future study with respect to charter schools.

What emerges is a story of contingencies, for most measures of charter schools – from type of school to mission, from achievement to impact on other schools – depend on the perspective of the observer: "It all depends on who's inside and what their aims and practices are" (Gordon, 2001, p. 3).

Overview of Charter Schools

Brief History

Charter schools first opened in the United States in 1992, and more than 2000 charter schools operated in 36 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico during the 2000-2001 school year (Center for Education Reform, 2000b; DOE News, 2001; Kelly, 2001). Charter schools are public schools of choice. In exchange for autonomy from state and district bureaucratic requirements, charter schools are expected to offer greater accountability for student performance (Hassel, 2001; Wohlstetter & Griffin, 1998; Fuller, 2000). Innovative and challenging educational practices are expected by-products of freedom from traditional public school requirements. The competitive educational market generated by charter schools is expected to improve education for all students as traditional public schools step up to compete with charter school innovations and/or learn from charter school practices.

Advocates of charter schools appreciate the choice charter schools offer and point to innovative teaching and practices, improved student performance, and less bureaucracy as hallmarks of charter schools (Kelly, 2001). Viteritti (1999) discusses charter schools in the context of school choice and says:

> [It] is apparent that discussions of the merits of school choice operate on two different levels. As intellectuals engage in esoteric discourse on the abstractions of distributive justice, market dynamics, religious liberty, and civil society, the poor understand on a more visceral level that it is their children who are trapped in inferior schools (p. 11).

Sounding similar to Viteritti, Fuller (2000) outlines several paradoxes related to the potential of charter schools to change education. First, there is tension between the democratic *possibilities* of charter schools versus the effectiveness of methods chosen to implement the reform: Is the educational program sound? The second tension comes from the possibility that greater inequality will result from this perceived democratic reform if the underlying causes of inequality among traditional schools go unexamined in the development of charter schools.

Hassel (1999) describes the stance of charter school critics and detractors who express concern that

> [Charter] schools will cream off the best and most motivated students... that they will become bastions of race and class segregation; that exempt from rules, they will engage in actions that other schools' rules are designed to prevent, like discrimination, mistreatment of handicapped children, financial misconduct, ... that they will siphon off energy and resources that could be devoted to improving other public schools; or that they will serve too few students to make a difference (Hassel, 1999, p. 8).

Given the youth of the charter school movement, questions related to many of the hopes, expectations and fears for charter schools will remain unanswered and unanswerable for several years.

General Characteristics

General characteristics of charter schools are small school and class size, with more than 60% of charter schools enrolling fewer than 200 students (Hassel, 1999). The median number of students in charter schools during 1998-1999 was 137 (compared with 475 in traditional public schools (RPP International, 2000). The average student-teacher ratio in charter schools is 16:1 as compared to 17.2:1 in other public schools (RPP International, 2000).

Charter schools generally serve student populations very similar to those in their states (RPP International, 2000; Hassel, 1999), yet many states serve higher percentages of students of color and/or economically disadvantaged children (Center for Education Reform, 2000b; Hassel, 1999; RPP International, 2000; RPP International, 1999). Almost 65% of charter schools are new schools, while 25% are conversions of public schools and 13% conversions of private schools (Hassel, 1999).

Legislation

Bierlein (1997) identified legislative specifications impacting the development of charter schools in a state that include decisions about who can grant charters (e.g., district versus state level approval or some combination of the two); who can develop charters; how charter schools are to be funded (e.g., directly from the state versus through the district) and if districts are to be compensated for loss of students to charter schools; how student performance is measured (e.g., through state accountability standards versus school-chosen measures); degree of fiscal and/or legal autonomy; and how many charter schools the state will approve. "Strong" statutes with few limitations are expected to produce a successful charter school system.

State charter school legislation also differs by emphasis on educating "at-risk" students, with several states specifying a desire to provide better alternatives for students not well-served in traditional public schools (Center for Education Reform, 2000b). The language of innovation is another characteristic often embedded in state statutes on charter schools.

Why Charter Schools?

Reasons cited by developers for chartering schools include dissatisfaction with traditional public schools and/or the desire to develop a unique educational experience: "the primary motivation for founding a charter school [is] to seek an alternative vision of schooling that could not be realized in the traditional public school system" (RPP International, 2000, p. 42).

Types of Charter Schools

Common histories and general characteristics paint an overall picture of charter schools, but there remain many other ways to categorize charter schools. Types of charter schools can be categorized by mission, by affiliation with a particular curriculum or curriculum reform movement, by origin, by community, and by grade configuration. These categories are not to be understood as mutually exclusive, but rather as multiple ways of describing types of charter schools envisioned by developers.

By Mission or Students Served

The unique vision of the charter school developer(s) is generally expressed in the specific mission of the charter school. In their study of charter schools in Massachusetts, California and Minnesota, Wohlstetter & Griffin (1998) identified the development of a strong and clear mission as an indicator or "building block" of future success for a charter school, for when a mission is clear and specific "the school is better able to translate its mission into practice" (p. 5).

A mission may describe a philosophical approach to education, for example, back-to-basics or moral education. A mission may describe a curricular focus. Examples include: academic challenge (e.g., International Baccalaureate program or increased Advance Placement options); culture-centered focus (e.g., Afrocentrism, Native American or global focus); vocational education; subject focus (e.g., math, science); or technology focus. A mission may also describe the type of student targeted by the charter school, often at risk populations in

keeping with legislative emphases in many states. Medler and Nathan (1995) found that approximately half of all charter schools in the U.S. serve primarily at-risk youth.

By Curriculum or Affiliation with Reform

A mission statement may identify a charter school's particular curricular focus, but another way of describing these schools is to examine the typology of curricula or national reform models used to identify charter schools. In a report for the US Department of Education, Fiore, Harwell, Blackorby and Finnigan (2000) identified several formal curriculum models and curricular emphases. Curricular models prescribed or recommended by national organizations when a charter school affiliates with the reform include Coalition of Essential Schools, Comer Schools, Core Knowledge, Direct Instruction, Montessori, and Paideia. Curricular emphases include arts immersion, Afrocentric education, back-to-basics, college preparatory, life skills, values education, and vocational education (Fiore et al., 2000).

By Origin

Charter schools can also be categorized by origin: is it a new charter school or a conversion school from a private or public school? Seventy-two percent of all charter schools were new schools in the 1998-1999 school year (RPP International, 2000). Was the school developed by a for-profit management company (e.g., Edison) or by a group of concerned parents? Additionally, a few states allow homeschoolers to develop charter schools (Finn, Bierlein & Manno, 1997).

By Community

Charter schools are located in all types of communities: rural, suburban and urban. Manno (2001) reports that in 1996-1997, 51% of charter schools were located in large cities and their suburban fringes; 25% were located in midsize cites and their suburban fringe; and 23% were located in towns and rural areas. During the same period of time, 32% of charter school students attended schools in large cities (compared to 19% of traditional school students). Five percent of charter school students attended rural charter schools compared to 11% of traditional public school students. The median school size of charter schools in large cities (consistent with other charter schools) was 137 students, compared to 625 students in traditional urban public schools.

By Configuration

Charter schools are not limited by the typical grade-level divisions found among traditional public schools (i.e., elementary, middle and high schools) even though about one-half follow this structure (RPP International, 2000). Although the highest percentage of charter schools (and traditional public schools) were elementary schools, charters use K-8, K-12, or ungraded configurations twice as often as traditional public schools (RPP International, 2000).

Again, these categories are not mutually exclusive, so a particular charter school may be described as a back-to-basics K-8 school for students seeking an academically challenging curriculum based on Direct Instruction or as an Afrocentric K-12 school affiliated with the Comer Schools reform. What is important for one stakeholder may be secondary for another in terms

of selecting or granting a charter school. The same may be said with measures of charter school success.

Indicators of Charter School Success

Just as charter schools can be differentially described as unique organizations by many different stakeholders, definitions of success are also contingent on who defines and measures success: a supportive key stakeholder? An opponent of charter schools? A charter-granting entity? A prospective family? This review will look at charter school success from the perspective of individual school development success, school academic success, and charter school political success.

Development Success

That charter schools operate at all in the United States is seen as an indicator of success for advocates of charter schools. Given the well-documented challenges involved in opening a charter school – from completing the charter application to securing funds and a facility to hiring staff and developing a program and curriculum consistent with the mission – opening doors to students is perceived as a success (Finn et al, 1997; RPP International, 2000).

Leadership. Strong leadership is cited as a marker of charter school success (Wohlstetter & Griffin, 1998), often characterized by an "outlaw mentality" and entrepreneurial spirit (p. 19). Leadership outlaws (as well as more traditional leaders) – who generally become either board members or school directors once schools open – seek to rectify deficiencies in traditional public schools through the development of charter schools.

Clear mission. As state previously, a clear mission has been identified as a marker for future charter school success as it gives direction to a school's program and curriculum (Wohlstetter & Griffin, 1998; Nathan, 1996a).

Parent involvement. Given the market model for charter schools wherein parents and students "vote with their feet," charter schools have learned that success can depend on parent involvement (Bierlein, 1997). A related benefit of small school size is the cultivation a "family feeling" among participants (Bierlein, 1997, pp. 54-55).

Resources. Medler and Nathan (1995) found that obtaining start-up funds for facilities was one of the greatest challenges for charter schools. Finn, Bierlein and Manno (1996) supported this finding: "Without doubt, the absence of capital funding, access to conventional school facilities, and start-up money to cover initial equipment, planning, etc. is the heaviest cross charter schools bear today" (p. 4). Charter schools that are able to develop ties in the community also find that additional contributions facilitate success.

Academic Success

Teachers. Faculty involvement from the earliest planning stages is cited by Nathan (1996a) as beneficial for a strong charter school. Nathan goes on to add that "thousands of educators are coming forward who want to work with youngsters" (p. 167) and that their

willingness to put their jobs on the line demonstrates their commitment to student success. Teachers are instrumental in establishing a climate of clear academic expectations, safety, and individualized instruction. Additionally, "charter schools are attracting terrific, often unconventional teachers, who fulfill many other functions within the schools" (Finn, 1996, p. 4). The risk of teacher willingness to fulfill other functions is that s/he may burn out given all the needs of new charter schools.

Teachers themselves indicate that charter schools are successful given the positive climate of freedom and flexibility for teaching in which they are often given increased decision-making opportunities (Bierlein, 1997).

Political Success

State policymakers are included among the key stakeholders seeking indicators for charter school success. Hassel (1999) and Bierlein (1997) each discuss the stances lawmakers from both major political parties in the U.S. assume in relation to charter schools. Republicans support charter schools and believe them to be successful because they support the free market and competition in the education market place, they operate with fewer regulations, and they require accountability in exchange for state funding.

Many Democrats also support charter schools and believe them successful because they offer new options while adhering to core values of public schooling (e.g., nonselective, no tuition, nonreligious; Hassel, 1999). Charter schools also offer the potential for community empowerment as they allow for the development of local schools to serve local needs. Further critical appeal lies in the possibility of decentralizing traditional – often understood as imperial – education policies and practices (Fuller, 2000). On the other hand, democratic concerns with potential equity issues and the presence of union opposition continue to make charter schools a contested issue within the Democratic Party (Bierlein, 1997).

Thus Hassel (1999) indicates that one element contributing to charter school success is that they

> appear to sidestep two of the long-standing barriers to improvement in American public education. The first of these is politics. U.S. public schools are battlegrounds on which political interests and factions fight for advantage.... The second barrier is the practical difficulty of making reform work in public school systems.... Even within school districts, system leaders often find it difficult to make reform happen in classrooms. Charter schools seem like a reform that can get around both of those obstacles. (p. 2)

Each political party finds values that support their platforms within charter schools, and the small size of charter schools allows them to more easily enact reform.

Lack of Success

While many charter schools have yet to reach the typical five-year renewal process, RPP International (2000) found that approximately 4% of charter schools have closed since the first charter school opened in 1992. Wohlstetter and Griffin (1998) cited financial, administrative or

ethical violations as reasons for charter school closings in Massachusetts, California and Minnesota, while a few schools were sanctioned for under-performance. They found that "the myth of greater accountability for charter schools far exceeded the reality" (pp. 14-15), and further stated that the greatest relationship of accountability for charter schools was between the school and the local community, especially parents and students.

Accountability standards and legislative requirements determine procedures for charter renewal or revocation. Finn et al. (1997) indicate that there are three criteria generally established for holding charter schools accountable: (1) progress on the school's own goals; (2) fiscal management of state funds; and (3) general probity or honesty.

RPP International (2000) found that 90% of charter schools also reported being monitored for student achievement. Yet Hassel (1999) indicates that it is still unclear how charter schools will be held accountable for academic performance given that charter schools have (and, it can be argued, are celebrated for) unique missions and often serve special populations, while at the same time states have standards and testing programs. This remains an area for further review.

Charter school success remains somewhat individualistic and must be determined by each school based on their unique mission. Success is contingent on many factors: who develops and runs the school, who enrolls in the school, the curriculum offered, state guidelines, and the aims and practices of those involved (Gordon, 2001). Other indices of success including achievement and equity are addressed below.

Accountability

As indicated in the previous section on charter school success, one measure of success is the degree and nature of charter school accountability. An oft-cited appeal of the charter school reform movement is that schools are accountable for improved student performance in exchange for increased freedom from most other state education policies and procedures (Bierlein, 1997). In their study of 150 charter schools in six states (AZ, MA, MO, GA, MA, MI), the Center on Reinventing Public Education (2001) pointed out that charter schools face the ultimate form of accountability given that legislation bases continued existence on performance. In earlier research, Finn et al. (1996), however, found that charter laws "are stronger in theory than practice when it comes to accountability and evaluation" (p. 6), and more recent research points out that only 4% of charter schools have closed since 1992 (RPP International, 2000).

In addition, charter schools are accountable to a public empowered to vote with its feet and leave charter schools if expectations are not met. Key findings related to accountability by the Center on Reinventing Public Education (2001) include:

- A focus on quality instruction is the best means of sustaining confidence among stakeholders.
- Efforts to maintain internal accountability standards (e.g., student, teacher and parent satisfaction) take precedent in the day-to-day operations of charter schools.

- Charter schools are challenged to divide accountability responsibilities between boards and charter school staff members.
- Charter schools require a shift in thinking among charter-granting organizations from a compliance model to a performance model.

Impact On and Response of Other Schools

RPP International's report: *Challenge and Opportunity: The Impact of Charter Schools on School Districts* (2001), is a study of 49 districts in five states (AZ, CA, CO, MA, MI). They found that "every district in our sample reported impacts from charter schools and made changes in district operations, in the district educational system, or in both areas" (p. 1) in response to charter schools.

Kelly (2001) reviews and details Rofes' (1998) continuum of district responses to charter schools drawn from a seven-year, eight-state study of more than 25 districts. The three stages of response to charter schools are:

1) *Hostility*. Districts try to prevent or obstruct the development of charter schools. Avenues of resistance may include attacks in the media; legal recourse to prevent or slow charter school development; intimidation of teachers in the district; and/or interference with facilities.
2) *Districts Respond*. Districts implement changes designed to compete with charter schools in an effort to lure back students and their families. Efforts have included addition of all-day kindergarten and/or after-school programs; opening magnet school(s) in the district with curriculum similar to that of the local charter school; and increased public relations efforts.
3) *Equilibrium*. Charters become a fixture in the district and equilibrium is established. While Rofes (1998) described this period as uneasy peace, it is characterized by an end of open hostility and a move toward greater mutual respect between charter schools and districts.

Finn et al. (1996) found that

> [t]hough local superintendents and school boards are most frequently hostile to charter schools, some find promise in them because of the student needs they meet, especially for at-risk youngsters; the competitive stimulus they provide; the desirability of educational alternatives; and the possibility of innovating under the charter law in ways that cannot be done under regular statutes (p. 4).

Although districts initially respond with hostility, they often find that initial fears prove unfounded and move in the direction of improved relationships. These findings are in keeping with charter school impacts as reported by district representatives (RPP International, 2001).

RPP International (2001) found that the impact of charter schools on districts, and districts' subsequent response, is contingent on several factors including the size of the district, enrollment trends in the district, and who is empowered to grant charters in the district. State

funding patterns for charters and districts also affect the relationship between charters and districts.

The size of the district can have a mediating or aggravating effect on charter school reception (RPP International, 2001). Some districts were large enough not to feel the loss of students to charter schools while smaller districts experienced greater impact when students left for charter schools (Kelly, 2001).

The impact of charter schools on districts is also contingent on who is authorized to grant charters under state legislation. Some states maintain the charter approval process at the state level (e.g., MA); other states allow only local districts to approve charters (e.g., AK, GA, KS, WI); and yet other states (e.g., AZ, MI, MN, NJ, NC) allow charter approval at more that one level (Nathan, 1996a). RPP International (2001) found that districts who could not choose to grant charters were more likely to report negative budget impact, increased marketing and customer service efforts, new education programs, and/or new specialty schools within the district. In districts where they were the only ones empowered to grant charters (e.g., CA, CO), the district was more likely to report no impact on district budgets and little impact on central office procedures, perhaps because they were more likely to approve charters with little potential to disrupt district procedures (RPP International, 2001).

Local enrollment trends were also found to be influential on districts' perceptions of impact by charter schools (RPP International, 2001). Districts with declining enrollment were more likely to report negative impacts from charter schools (including layoffs or downsizing; increased class size; closed schools). Districts with increasing enrollments reported no impact and some were glad to have charter schools pick up students from burgeoning enrollments due to immigration and the "baby boom echo" (Kelly, 2001, p. 2).

Charter school funding policies established in state legislation can also affect the relationship between charter schools and districts. The perceived threat to district success as a result of charter schools is due to per-pupil allotments that follow students from district to charter school. Some states (e.g., MA) mitigate the effect of charter schools in the district by compensating districts for students lost to charter schools (Kelly, 2001). Other districts, however, feel the negative impact of charter schools when charter approval happens too late to adjust district budgets. RPP International (2001) summarized their findings on impact as follows:

> The conclusions from this exploratory examination are that districts do make changes in their educational services and district operations as a result of charter schools, and that these changes are influenced by enrollments, financial conditions, and the nature of the granting agency. The rapidly increasing number of charter schools and the tendency for districts to respond by making operational and educational change suggests that charter schools can impact the public school system (p. 3).

One specific positive impact anticipated in legislation and among charter school advocates is the ability of charter schools to serve as learning laboratories and share innovative practices with traditional public schools. The following section reviews the literature on innovative practices in charter schools.

Innovative Practices

The issue of innovation in charter schools is often contested terrain. Legislative expectations of innovative practice emerging from charter school legislation are interpreted – and often are intended – to mean innovative *instructional* practices. In the absence of evidence to support those expectations, innovation is frequently reinterpreted to mean innovative *operational or organizational* practices among charter schools in the literature. Finally, the innovation is expected to spread from charter schools to traditional public schools. According to Hassel (2001)

> The association of charter schools with innovation has two sources. First, charter school programs are themselves regarded as an innovative *policy*. ...[T]hey are undoubtedly "something new" in American education.... Second, one of the core purposes of charter school programs is to produce innovations in the *practice* of schooling. In theory at least, charter school programs are both an innovative policy and an innovation-producing policy (pp. 68-69).

Similar to indicators of charter school success, the *existence* of charter schools can be offered as evidence of innovative education policy. Hassel (2001) outlines features that distinguish charter schools' innovative policies: charter schools have significant autonomy over the content and process of education, the organization and hiring practices of the school, and how they allocate resources; the charter-granting organizations hold schools accountable for results (similar to districts and state boards of education), but unlike public schools, charter schools face closure for failing to meet expectations. Finally, the market metaphor for education implicates *all* schools as choice and competition introduced by charter schools become a part of the larger educational landscape.

Literature on charter schools also points to innovative organizational and operational practices of charter schools. For example, Wohlstetter and Griffin (1998) observed that charter schools are learning from what they are doing and have the ability to make changes in response to stakeholder feedback. Fiore et al. (2000) described innovative policies related to transportation and location used to improve student attendance. Fiore et al. (2000) and Finn et al. (1996) also attributed the provision of services unavailable in the district and the use of methods unique to the local context if not unique in the larger education landscape to charter school innovation.

The Center for Education Reform (2000a) surveyed 305 charter schools and found that 58% of charter schools reported a traditional curricular focus (e.g., Core Knowledge, Direct Instruction) similar to methods found in many public schools**.** And based on data collected in Arizona, Stout and Garn (2001) found that: "the rhetoric of curricular innovation is much more interesting than the reality in Arizona" (p. 170). Wong and Shen (2001), in a study of charter in California, Texas, and Michigan further found that "the hypothesis that charter schools will be educational laboratories...is difficult to support because it is not clear that the 'experiments' being undertaken...are actually working, i.e. improving student achievement" (p. 31).

Hassel (2001) indicates that the emergence of charter schools with innovative practice remains a possibility, but that charter schools are constrained by polices that limit departure

from educational norms (e.g., accountability), by market demand (i.e., many families favor a traditional approach), and by finances (i.e., limited resources prevent innovation). Opfer (2001) goes further in indicating that traditional and longstanding education policies (e.g., assessment) "discipline and normalize" charter schools, inhibiting them from trying truly unique programs (p. 210).

Bastions of Segregation?

As stated in the introduction, an early fear about charter schools was that they would cream off the best and brightest students from traditional public schools, leaving traditional public schools with less money and increased numbers of at-risk children to educate, presumably children of color. While the construction of this argument demonstrates the degree of marginalization of students of color in the U.S., fears that charter schools would promote racial and class-based segregation appear to be unrealized.

Demographic data collected by RPP International as part of the Fourth Year Report on the State of Charter Schools (2000) indicates that charter school demographics are similar to characteristics of all public schools and that "some states serve significantly higher percentages of minority students" (p. 2). Included among those states are New Jersey, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Texas. While nationwide and statewide aggregated data indicate that charter schools attract and serve students of color, one study looking at school-level demographics in three states did find that ethnic groups in charters "are clustered and polarized heavily according to student achievement" (Wong & Shen, 2001, p. 31).

Charter schools serve a slightly lower percentage of students with disabilities than traditional public schools: 8% in charter schools compared to 11% in traditional public schools (RPP International, 2000). Mirroring reasons cited by many families for choosing charter schools, Fiore et al. (2000) found that parents of children with disabilities enroll children in charter schools because they like the distinctive mission and positive characteristics of the charter school and because of negative experiences in traditional public schools.

A student's disability status can be challenging to determine given that records are slow to follow students from traditional public schools and that parents sometimes conceal their child's disability status (Fiore et al., 2000). Parents did not report being counseled out of attending charter schools, but interviews for the study were with students and parents currently enrolled in charter schools. Staff at some schools, however, reported counseling some students with disabilities away from charter schools due to concerns about the school's ability to meet the needs of students with some disabilities.

Many charter schools in Fiore et al.'s sample of 32 schools from 15 states reported using the inclusion model for children with disabilities, either out of preference or necessity due to limited resources. The individualized instruction characteristic of charter schools favors children with disabilities, and some parents indicated that this personalized instruction compensated for any lack of special education services in charter schools. Finn et al. (1996) found that "many disabled youngsters in charter schools are being educated in ways that do not conform to the formal procedures and classifications of U.S. special education, yet such children appear to be well-served and they and their parents are pleased" (p. 6).

Recommendations for Future Study

A charter school's first years are often full of challenges. Given that many charter schools have now learned from these challenges *and* the importance of developing a strong and clear mission for the success of a charter school, states would benefit from an examination of their charter granting procedures and the development of a stronger application process. Wohlstetter and Griffin (1998) recommend requiring prospective charters to provide more information on their mission, instructional plan, professional development opportunities and accountability plan. There is "pressure to create something in a short amount of time" (p. 9). Kelly (2001) concurs and recommends slowing down the process to allow for more thoughtful development of the charter.

Charter granting organizations also need to provide clarification of charter school accountability procedures and performance standards, as well as the impact of these procedures and standards on charter renewal processes. States need to give careful consideration to the ability of standardized tests to measure the effectiveness of charter school programs, especially given the high numbers of at-risk children in charter schools.

While data exists about the nature of charter school impacts on the district level, the literature revealed no comprehensive understanding of the impact of charter schools at the state level among charter-granting organizations and state boards of education. In order to fully measure the impact of charter schools on the traditional public schools, a better understanding is required of the nature and amount of work done on behalf of charter schools by state-level education personnel.

Finally, considerable attention needs to be directed to understanding the possible presence of the achievement gap among charter school students. This issue is masked by different state-level standards of accountability and reporting as well as complex formulas for computing achievement data. To insure that charter schools benefit all students, serious attention must be given to this critical issue.

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