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Sarah C. McKenzie

University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

Gary W. Ritter

University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

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Integration in the Little Rock Area: Part 3 Where Do Students Move?

School integration has been a contentious policy issue in Little Rock since the 1950s. Recent charter expansions have raised questions about the current level of integration in public schools (charter and traditional) in the Little Rock Area. As part of our series on integration in Little Rock, this brief examines the differences in school-level demographics and academics between the schools students leave and the schools these students enter.

Introduction

In this brief, we address the question of whether, when students decide to transfer between sectors, they move to schools with student populations that are more or less similar to them. For example, we ask whether white students are more likely to transfer to schools with higher concentrations of white students, or whether students eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL) students are more likely to transfer to schools with higher concentrations of FRL-eligible students.

In our [first brief examining integration in Little Rock](#), we presented the changing demographics of the Little Rock School District (LRSD), the Little Rock Metro Area (LRSD, North LRSD, and Pulaski County Special School District), and Little Rock charters (Academics Plus, College Prep Academy, Covenant Keepers, eStem, Exalt Academy, Flightline Upper Academy, Jacksonville Lighthouse, Lisa Academy, Lisa Academy North, Little Rock Prep, Premier High, Quest High, and SI-Atech High). In our second brief, we examined the demographics of students who chose to switch between sectors and how their demographics compared to the sector they exit. We also examined how the academic performance of students who transferred between school sectors compared to the average performance of the school that they exited.

This Brief

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In the brief, we take the comparisons a step further. Instead of asking if students are moving to schools more like them, we assess the extent to which students are moving between school with different student demographics. Demographic comparisons are measured as the difference in percentage of students in a particular group between the schools. If students enter a school with a higher concentration of black students than the school they left, we characterize this as a positive change in the percent black of the student body. If students enter a school with a lower concentration of FRL students than the school they left, we characterize this as a negative change in the percent FRL.

We apply the same analysis to academic performance by determining whether students tend to transfer into schools with better, worse, or about equal academic performance. Each school's average academic performance is the weighted average standardized score on state math, literacy, and science exams. Student scores are standardized across the state population of test takers, within year, grade, and subject to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. Such scores, called Z scores, allow for the comparison of scores across subjects, grades, and years. Students performing above the state average will have a positive Z score, and students performing below the state average will have a negative Z score. Similarly, schools where students, on average, perform above the state performance will have a positive Z score, while schools with students that perform, on average, below the state average will have a negative Z score.

By comparing the Z scores of the schools, we can see if students are switching to higher or lower performing schools, or to schools that are about the same as the school that they exited.

- Over **10,000** students transferred between Traditional Public Schools (TPSs) and charters in the Little Rock area in the past six years.
- All students moving into charters from TPSs enter schools with a **lower concentration of FRL** students.
- All students moving into TPSs from charters enter schools with a **higher concentration of FRL** students.
- There is **no evidence** that students transfer into schools with higher concentrations of students of the same race.
- Overall, students move into schools with **similar academic performance** as the schools that they exited. There is no clear pattern of differences in academic performance between the schools students transfer between.

From Little Rock School District to Area Charters

Table 1 illustrates the changes experienced by the students who switched from LRSD to area charters in each year examined. We present the change in the percent of black, white, and FRL students from their old school to their new school, and the change in average academic performance from their old school to their new school.

Black Students

The top panel in Table 1 shows the difference between the LRSD schools that the 1,733 black students transferred out of and the area charters that they transferred into. The top row (row 1) shows the difference in the percentage of black students enrolled at the TPS and charter. Negative numbers indicate that the student transferred into a charter school where black students comprised a smaller share of the student body, while positive numbers indicate that the student transferred into a charter school where black students comprised a greater share of the student body than they had at the traditional public school (TPS) they left. The change was not consistent over time. In 2009, black students transferred into charter schools where (on average) black students comprised a 3.1 percentage point smaller share of the student body than they had in the school they left. For example, if a black student was enrolled in an LRSD school with 100 students, and 50 of those students were black, then on average in 2009 they would have transferred into a charter of 100 students where only about 47 were black. In 2010, however, this dynamic was reversed, and black students on average transferred into charters where the share of black students enrolled was 3.6 percentage points higher than it had been in the TPS they exited. In 2011-2014, black students transferring from LRSD to area charters entered schools where the share of black students enrolled was less than the share of black students enrolled at the school they exited. In 2011, the difference was 10.3 percentage points, the largest difference in the years examined. The difference was similar in 2014, when black students transferred into charters where on average black students comprised a 9.1 percentage point smaller share of the student body than they had in the TPS students exited.

We also examine the difference in the concentration of students receiving free or reduced price lunch (FRL) between the TPSs black students exited and the area charters black students entered between 2009 and 2014. As can be seen in row 2, in all years, black students tended to transfer into charters with a smaller share of students receiving FRL than there had been in the

TPSs they exited. This difference was over 10 percentage points between 2009 and 2013, and dropped to just below 7 percentage points in 2014. In other words, if a black student transferred from a TPS of 100 students in 2014 where 60 students received FRL and entered a charter school of 100 students, about 53 of the students at the charter would receive free or reduced price lunch.

Finally, we examine the change in school academic performance experienced by black students transferring from LRSD schools to area charters over this time. As can be seen in row 3, the difference in academic achievement was slight in all years examined. In 2009 and 2010 black students transferred into charters that on average performed 1/10 of a standard deviation above the TPSs the students exited, while in 2011 and 2012 the academic performance was unchanged between the TPS and charter. In 2013 black students entered charters that on average were performing 0.2 standard deviations below the TPSs they exited, while in 2014 that difference again disappeared. There is no clear pattern of academic differences between the charters black students entered and the TPSs black students exited over this time.

White Students

We next examine the changes in demographics and academics experienced by the 523 white students transferring from schools in LRSD to area charters. The second panel of Table 1 summarizes these changes. In row 4, we see the average change in the percent of white students in the student body between the TPSs students exited and the charters students entered over this time. There is considerable variation between years in the differences between TPSs and charters. In 2009, white students entered charters where on average white students represented a 6 percentage point larger share of the student body than they had in the TPSs students exited. In 2010-2013, white students entered charters where on average white students represented a slightly smaller share of the student body than they had in the schools students exited. In 2014, however, this trend reversed itself, and white students on average entered charters where the percent of white students in the student body was 8.4 percentage points higher.

Similar to changes in FRL concentration experienced by black students transferring from LRSD schools to charters from 2009 to 2014, white students in all years transferred into charters that enrolled a substantially lower percentage of FRL students than had the LRSD schools white students exited. As can be seen in row 5, the difference was well over 10 percentage points in all years.

Table 1: Differences in School Demographics and Academic Performance for Students Moving from Little Rock School District to Area Charter Schools, 2010-2015

	Row	School Demographics	Move 2009	Move 2010	Move 2011	Move 2012	Move 2013	Move 2014
Black Students (Total n=1,733)	1	Change in % Black	-3.1	3.6	-10.3	-8.1	-3.1	-9.1
	2	Change in % FRL	-10.1	-15.5	-17.9	-18.7	-14.4	-6.7
	3	Change in Avg. Z (test score)	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	-0.2	0.0
White Students (Total n=523)	4	Change in % White	6.2	-2.1	-1.5	-1.0	-2.7	8.4
	5	Change in % FRL	-20.6	-18.4	-15.0	-18.2	-12.9	-22.2
	6	Change in Avg. Z (test score)	0.2	0.0	-0.1	0.0	-0.1	-0.2
FRL Students (Total n=1,662)	7	Change in % White	1.7	-2.4	3.7	2.2	0.0	4.5
	8	Change in % FRL	-12.1	-15.7	-16.6	-18.7	-15.5	0.3
	9	Change in Avg. Z (test score)	0.1	0.1	-0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0

Finally, we examine the change in academic performance experienced by white students transferring from LRSD schools to area charters between 2009 and 2014. The differences are negligible in all years, and there is no clear pattern of white students consistently transferring into schools that are higher or lower performing than the LRSD TPSs that they exited.

FRL Students

The bottom panel of Table 1 presents the demographic and academic changes experienced by the 1,662 FRL students transferring from LRSD schools to area charters in 2009 through 2014. Row 7 shows the difference in the share of white students enrolled at the charter versus the TPS, where negative values indicate that the charter had a smaller share of white students than the TPS, and positive values indicate that the charter had a larger share of white students than the TPS. The differences in the racial composition between the TPSs FRL students exited and the charters FRL students entered were slight in all years examined, but tended to be slightly positive, indicating that FRL students transferred from LRSD into charters with a larger share of white students in the student body. In 2014, FRL students transferred into charters where white students on average comprised a 4.5 percentage point greater share than they had in the TPSs students exited.

Row 8 shows the change in the concentration of FRL students between the TPSs FRL students exited and the charters they entered. In the first 5 years of our analysis, FRL students entered charters where a substantially smaller share of the student body received FRL than in the TPSs students exited. In 2014, however, this difference was virtually gone, with FRL students transferring into charters with virtually the same percentage of FRL students in the study body.

Finally, we examine the academic difference between the TPSs FRL students exited and the area charters they entered between 2009 and 2014. As with black and white students, the differences are negligible. There is no evidence that FRL students consistently entered charter schools that were performing at a higher or lower level than the LRSD schools that they exited

From Area Charters to Little Rock School District

Table 2 presents the changes in school-level demographics and academics experienced by students transferring from LR Area charters into LRSD schools.

Black Students

The top three rows of Table 2 show the changes experienced by the 981 black students transferring from Little Rock Area charters to LRSD schools between 2009 and 2014. In all years except 2011, students transferred into TPSs with a larger share of black students than there had been in the charters students exited. However, the differences have been slight in the last three years, with black students moving from charters into LRSD schools with a similar racial composition.

The second row in Table 2 shows the difference in the share of students receiving FRL between the charters black students exited and the TPSs they entered between 2009 and 2014. In all years black students entered schools with a substantially greater concentration of FRL students than had been enrolled in the school they exited. The charters black students exited served a more economically advantaged student population than did the TPSs black students entered.

The third row shows the difference in academic achievement between the charters black students exited and the LRSD schools black students entered from 2009 to 2014. There isn't a clear pattern of black students moving into higher or lower performing schools. In 2009 and 2011, black students transferred into TPSs that on average were slightly worse academically than the charters students exited, while in 2010 and 2012-2014 black students transferred into schools that were slightly higher performing.

White Students

The middle panel of Table 2 shows the changes in school-level demographics and academic performance between the charters that 274 white students exited and the LRSD schools they entered between 2009 and 2014. In all years except 2010, white students entered TPSs that enrolled a smaller percentage of white students than had the charters students exited. In 2010, white students moved between schools with virtually the same racial composition.

As with black students, white students consistently transferred into TPSs with a greater share of FRL students than had been enrolled in the charters white students exited. These changes were substantial, and well over 10 percentage points in all 6 years examined.

Row 6 shows the academic differences between the charters white students exited and the TPSs they entered between 2009 and 2014. In 2009 and 2010, white students entered TPSs with

Table 2: Differences in School Demographics and Academic Performance for Students Moving from Area Little Rock Area Charter Schools to Little Rock School District, 2010-2015

	Row	School Demographics	Move 2009	Move 2010	Move 2011	Move 2012	Move 2013	Move 2014
Black Students (Total n=981)	1	Change in % Black	13.7	7.0	-9.2	2.2	2.8	1.3
	2	Change in % FRL	24.6	9.6	10.0	9.7	7.0	9.3
	3	Change in Avg. Z (test score)	-0.2	0.2	-0.1	0.1	0.1	0.3
White Students (Total n=274)	4	Change in % White	-10.5	1.4	-3.0	-12.6	-6.0	-4.0
	5	Change in % FRL	20.3	17.9	15.2	20.3	13.1	19.4
	6	Change in Avg. Z (test score)	-0.4	-0.3	0.0	-0.1	0.0	0.0
FRL Students (Total n=852)	7	Change in % White	-13.8	-3.3	4.1	2.5	-0.5	3.4
	8	Change in % FRL	26.7	8.8	10.3	8.7	11.3	7.6
	9	Change in Avg. Z (test score)	-0.3	0.0	-0.1	0.1	0.1	0.4

test scores that were 0.3-0.4 standard deviations worse than the charter schools they exited, but in all other years there was virtually no difference in academic achievement between the schools white students exited and entered.

FRL Students

Rows 7-9 show the school-level changes experienced by 852 FRL students transferring from charters to LRSD schools between 2009 and 2014. Row 7 shows the change in the percent of white students in the student body between the charters the FRL students left and the TPSs they entered. There is no consistent pattern of demographic change between charters and TPSs. In 2009, 2010, and 2013 FRL students transferred into TPSs with a smaller share of white students, while in 2011 and 2014 they transferred into TPSs with a larger share of white students. However, in all years except 2009, these difference were slight.

FRL students transferring from charters to LRSD schools consistently transferred into schools with a greater concentration of FRL students. This difference was substantial in each of the six years examined, and was generally around 10 percentage points.

There is no clear pattern of academic differences between the charter schools FRL students exited and the LRSD schools they entered from 2009 to 2014. In 2009, FRL students entered schools that were slightly worse academically than the charters they exited, while in 2014 FRL students entered TPSs that were slightly better academically than the charters they exited. Between 2010 and 2013, however, there was no difference in academic performance between the schools students exited and entered.

From Little Rock Metro to Area Charters

We now broaden our focus to the Little Rock Metro Area as a whole, which includes LRSD, PCSSD and NLRSD. We are still interested in the differences in demographics and academic performance between the schools students choose to exit and enter. Table 3 presents the school level differences between the LR Metro Area TPSs students exited and the area charters they entered between 2009 and 2014.

Black Students

The top panel of Table 2 shows the differences in school demographics and academic performance between the LR Metro TPSs black students exited and the area charters they entered between 2009 and 2014. The first row shows the difference in the share of black students enrolled in the study body. In all years except 2010, black students transferred into charters where on average black students comprised a smaller share of the student body than they had in the TPSs students exited. However, the magnitude of the difference is not consistent over time. In 2014, black students transferred into charters where black students represented a 6 percentage point smaller share of the student body than they had in the TPSs students exited.

The second row of Table 2 shows the difference in the percentage of FRL students enrolled in the charters black students entered compared to the TPSs black students exited. In all years, black students entered charters with a substantially lower concentration of FRL students.

The third row of Table 2 shows the academic differences experienced by students transferring from Little Rock Metro Area TPSs into area charters in the six years examined. There is no clear pattern of academic differences between the TPSs students exited and the charters they entered, and in all years the differences are less than 0.1 standard deviations.

White Students

Rows 4-6 show the difference between the TPSs white students exit and the charters they enter. Row 4 shows the demographic differences between the TPSs white students left and the charters they transferred into. There is no clear pattern of significant differences in racial composition between the sectors. In 2009, 2011, and 2014, white students moved into charters where on average white students comprised a larger share of the student body than they had in the TPSs they exited, while in 2010, 2011, and 2013 the opposite was true. Between 2009 and 2013 the difference was slight, although in 2014 white students transferred into charters where on average the share of white students was 6 percentage points greater than it had been in the TPSs they exited.

Row 5 indicates that white students consistently transferred into charters with a substantially smaller share of FRL students than had been enrolled in the TPSs white students exited. In 2014, 69% of LR Metro Area TPS students received FRL; a white student transferring from an average TPS entered a charter where about 50% of the students were receiving FRL.

Table 3: Differences in School Demographics and Academic Performance for Students Moving from Little Rock Metro Traditional Public Schools and Area Charter Schools, 2010-2015

	Row	School Demographics	Move 2009	Move 2010	Move 2011	Move 2012	Move 2013	Move 2014
Black Students (Total n=3,011)	1	Change in % Black	-2.7	5.7	-6.2	-4.0	-0.3	-6.2
	2	Change in % FRL	-15.2	-13.6	-15.3	-13.8	-11.2	-7.8
	3	Change in Avg. Z (test score)	0.1	0.1	-0.1	-0.0	-0.0	0.0
White Students (Total n=1,548)	4	Change in % White	3.8	-0.9	-1.1	1.2	-2.2	6.0
	5	Change in % FRL	-20.2	-17.4	-16.8	-13.8	-14.0	-19.4
	6	Change in Avg. Z (test score)	0.1	0.0	-0.0	0.1	0.1	-0.0
FRL Students (Total n=2,956)	7	Change in % White	0.9	-4.9	0.9	-0.5	-3.8	2.2
	8	Change in % FRL	-17.5	-14.8	-16.0	-14.5	-12.3	-5.9
	9	Change in Avg. Z (test score)	0.1	0.1	-0.0	-0.0	0.0	0.1

Finally, row 6 indicates that there is no substantial difference in the academic performance of the TPSs white students exited and the charters they entered between 2009 and 2014 in the Little Rock Metro Area.

FRL Students

The bottom three rows of Table 2 show the differences in demographics and academics between the TPSs FRL students exited and the area charters they entered between 2009 and 2014. Row 7 indicates that there was no substantial difference in the percent of white students in the student body between the TPSs they exited and the charters they entered during this time.

Row 8 indicates that, similar to changes experienced by black and white students, FRL students transferred into charters with a substantially lower share of FRL students than had been enrolled in the TPSs FRL students exited, although the difference appears to be decreasing slightly over time.

Row 9 indicates that there was no substantial difference in academic performance between the Little Rock Metro Area TPSs FRL students exited and the charters they entered during this time.

From Area Charters to Little Rock Metro

We last look at the demographic and academic differences between the Little Rock area charters that students exited and the Little Rock Metro TPSs they entered between 2009 and 2014. Table 4 illustrates these differences.

Black Students

The first row of Table 4 shows the differences in the percent of the student body that is black between the area charters that 1,650 black students exited and the Little Rock Metro Area TPSs that black students entered during this time. There is no consistent pattern of black students entering schools with a higher or lower concentration of black students, and from 2012-2014 the difference in racial composition has been negligible.

Row 2 indicates that black students consistently transfer into Little Rock Metro Area TPSs with a higher concentration of FRL students than had been in the charters black students exited between 2009 and 2014.

Row 3 indicates that in 4 of the 6 years examined, there was no substantial difference in the academic performance of the charters black students exited and the TPSs they entered during this time. However, in 2009 black students entered TPSs that were slightly lower performing than the charters they exited, while in 2014 black students entered TPSs that were slightly higher performing than the charters they exited.

White Students

Row 4 indicates that white students tended to transfer into TPSs where white students comprised a substantially smaller share of the student body than they had in the charters 758 white students exited in all years examined. In 2014, about 29% of students in LR Metro Area TPSs were white; if a white student had transferred from an average TPS to a charter, about 22% of students in the charter would have been white.

Consistent with the pattern we've observed throughout this brief, row 5 indicates that white students transferring to TPSs from charters entered schools where a much higher percentage of the student body received FRL. In 2014, the difference was just over 15 percentage points.

Finally, row 6 shows the differences in academic performance between the charters white students exited and the TPSs they entered during these 6 years. In all years white students entered TPSs that performed worse academically than the charters white students exited; this difference was about 0.1 standard deviations in most years examined. In 2014, white students entered TPSs that were just under 0.2 standard deviations worse academically than the charters they exited.

FRL Students

The last three rows of Table 4 show the differences in demographics and academic performance between the charters 1,430 FRL students exited and the Little Rock Metro Area TPSs they entered between 2009 and 2014. Row 7 shows no consistent pattern in the difference between the percent of white students enrolled in the charters FRL students exited and the TPSs they entered during this time. In 2009 and 2010, FRL students entered TPSs with a smaller share of white students than in the charters they exited, while in 2011-2014 FRL students entered TPSs with a greater share of white students than had been enrolled in the charters they exited. In 2014, FRL students entered TPSs where white students represented about 6 percentage points more of the student body than in the charters they exited.

Table 4: Differences in School Demographics and Academic Performance for Students Moving from Area Charter Schools to Little Rock Metro Traditional Public Schools, 2010-2015

	Row	School Demographics	Move 2009	Move 2010	Move 2011	Move 2012	Move 2013	Move 2014
Black Students (Total n=1,650)	1	Change in % Black	10.5	3.4	-12.8	0.5	-1.2	-1.9
	2	Change in % FRL	23.5	9.8	6.1	9.7	4.6	6.1
	3	Change in Average Z	-0.2	0.0	-0.0	0.1	0.1	0.2
White Students (Total n=758)	4	Change in % White	-11.3	-7.9	-5.2	-7.0	-7.5	-5.8
	5	Change in % FRL	21.4	21.3	15.8	15.8	13.5	15.1
	6	Change in Average Z	-0.3	-0.1	-0.0	-0.1	-0.1	-0.2
FRL Students (Total n=1,430)	7	Change in % White	-9.3	-1.4	8.6	4.2	3.2	6.2
	8	Change in % FRL	24.1	10.9	6.7	9.1	8.4	5.3
	9	Change in Average Z	-0.2	0.0	-0.0	0.1	0.1	0.3



For more information about this Policy Brief and other education issues in Arkansas contact us:

Office for Education Policy
211 Grad Ed Building
Fayetteville, AR 72701
Phone: (479) 575-3773
Fax: (479) 575-3196
oep@uark.edu

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Row 8 continues the pattern that we've observed throughout this brief—when students transferred from charters to TPSs between 2009 and 2014, the percent of FRL students in the student body increased. In 2009, FRL students transferred into TPSs where the share of FRL students was 24 percentage points greater than it had been in the charters students exited, while in 2014 that difference had shrunk to about 5 percentage points.

Finally, we can examine the difference in academic performance between the charters FRL students exited and the LR Metro TPSs they entered during this time. The differences were not substantial between 2010 and 2013. In 2009, FRL students entered TPSs that were 0.2 standard deviations worse than the charters they exited, while in 2014 FRL students entered TPSs that were about 0.3 standard deviations better than the charters they had exited. Overall, however, the schools that FRL students exited had academic performance similar to the schools that they entered.

Conclusion

Table 5 presents a visual summary of the results of the analyses presented in this brief. The only consistent and striking pattern is the difference in the concentration of students receiving free or reduced price lunch between TPSs and charters students transferred between from 2009 and 2014. All students from LRSD and the Little Rock Metro Area entering charters moved into schools serving a substantially more economically advantaged population than the schools they exited. Conversely, all students exiting area charters and entering TPSs in LRSD and the Little Rock Metro Area moved into schools serving a substantially less economically advantaged student body. In 2014-15, for example, 47% of charter students were FRL, while 69% of LR Metro Area students were FRL, indicating the difference in economic advantage between the sectors.

There is no consistent pattern of differences in the racial composition between charters and TPSs students transferred between during the 6 years examined, although black students moving to area charters tended to be moving into schools with lower percentages of black students and white students transferring to charters from LR Metro TPSs tended to transfer into schools with higher percentages of white students. There is also no pattern of differences in the academic performance of the TPSs and charters that students transferred between during this time.

We have not yet addressed the question of whether student moves are helping to integrate or segregate the Little Rock Metro Area school system. Our next brief in this series will examine the current level of integration in Little Rock Metro Area schools, and our final brief will examine whether individual student moves serve to further integrate the system.

Table 5: Overall Patterns of Differences in School Demographics and Academic Performance for Students Moving between Sectors, 2010-2015

School Demographics		TO CHARTERS		TO TPSs	
		LRSD to Charter	LR Metro to Charter	Charter to LRSD	Charter to LR Metro
Black Students (Total n= 7,375)	Change in % Black	↓	↓	█	█
	Change in % FRL	↑	↑	↑	↑
	Change in Average Z	█	█	↑	█
White Students (Total n= 3,103)	Change in % White	█	↑	█	↓
	Change in % FRL	↓	↓	↑	↑
	Change in Average Z	█	█	█	█
FRL Students (Total n= 6,900)	Change in % White	█	█	█	↑
	Change in % FRL	↓	↓	↑	↑
	Change in Average Z	█	█	█	█

↑ = Increased overall ↓ = Decreased overall █ = No Change/ No Consistent Pattern

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