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Charter Schools in an Arena of Competitive Educational Reforms: An Analysis of the 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey

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Abstract

Accountability, choice, equity, and social cohesion are core parts of the public debates over the charter school movement. To examine these important issues, we utilize the 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey to estimate the possible charter effect on public and private schools. Analyses of charter, public, and private schools suggest that they may co-exist in a competitive education system because each type of school demonstrates different advantages that present potentially attractive conditions for children. The charter movement has changed the landscape of competitive education reform in the United States. It is premature, however, to claim that the charter movement has created a resounding positive effect on both public and private schools.

Introduction

Charter schools are a unique American experiment in privatizing public schools and are part of a larger debate over the relative efficacy of public and private schools (Levin, 2001). Charter schools are public schools that enjoy statutory exemptions from select state and local rules and regulations (Gruber, Wiley, Broughman, Strizek, and Burian-Fitzgerald, 2002). It is estimated that over 2000 charter schools operate in the United States, indicating a very rapid rate of growth in the decade since the first such school was established (Center for Education Reform [CER], 2000; Vergari, 2002). Despite their limited numbers (perhaps 2% of all public schools), proponents of charter schools claim that their influence forces public schools to move in the direction of greater accountability and market-driven school reform (CER, 2000; Hassel, 1999). This study provides an initial description of charter schools to begin to assess the potential of the charter movement to reform education on a large scale through competition.

Like other educational reforms, the charter movement is the subject of public debate. The proponents of charter schools view the movement as having the potential to transform American public education (Finn, Manno, and Vanourek, 2000; CER, 2000). Free from the scrutiny and needless regulation imposed by the public education bureaucracy, they argue, charter schools are sources of inspiration and innovation for a failing system. On the other hand, charter opponents suggest that the vast majority of parents are satisfied with their children's public schools, and counter that privatizing public schools through charters compromises social cohesion and undermines the core values of public education in a democracy (Ascher, Fruchter, and Berne,

1996). Researchers have suggested that studies taking empirical approaches are needed to evaluate the effects of charter schools, particularly in light of their short history and the limited research on their impact (Brouillette, 2002; Fowler, 2003; Hassel, 1999; Levin, 2001; Maranto, Milliman, Hess, and Gresham, 1999).

To examine the potential of charter schools in competitive educational reforms as part of a larger privatization movement, this study adopted two related assumptions that are consistent with market views of educational reform. First, charter schools may affect other schools by providing attractive initial conditions on the supply side for clients, drawing these clients away from public schools and forcing them to examine their practices and conditions. These conditions include attractive staffing, innovative curricula and instruction, and the availability of educational technology among others. Second, using the logic of market-driven innovation, when students and parents are pleased with their experiences in charter schools, they create pressure for comparable improvements in other schools. Both attractive initial conditions and student/family satisfaction with charters, therefore, may be variables that influence public education reform independent of measures of student achievement.

To date, much of the research into charter schools uses standardized tests to assess success or failure (Martinez and Little, 2002), but the underlying staffing and school conditions on the supply side are largely neglected, even though these factors are likely to influence student and parent choice in a competitive education marketplace. School staffing and other school conditions and resources can be treated as possible predictors of student outcomes, including achievement. The *1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey* (SASS) provides a series of cross sectional snapshots of the kinds of conditions that may attract families to educational options embodied in the charter movement.

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Debate over the Charter Movement

The charter school movement stems from several possible sources. First, three waves of expansion in mass public education and large scale public sector growth during the twentieth century have resulted in questions about the effectiveness and efficiency of public education and other government programs (Murphy, 1996; Lin, Sweet, and Anisef, 2003). The charter movement is just one recent attempt in two decades of efforts to counter public sector expansion with private, market solutions. The word "privatization" first appeared in the dictionary in 1983 (Murphy, 1996), the same year as the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, the landmark report often linked to school reform efforts in the last part of the twentieth century. In the ensuing twenty years, school privatization emerged as a key element in to reform efforts. Second, is an erosion of public support for schools as demonstrated by the growing unwillingness of tax payers to support public schools. Educational leaders struggle to justify increasing spending even in times of fiscal crisis that threaten to close local schools. Third, parents' dissatisfaction with public education is said to be a major factor in the creation of charter schools (Kane and Lauricella, 2001). Accountability and student learning achievement are the key issues underlying parents' concerns. Lastly, to proponents of privatization, charter schools represent a compromise in the renewal of education (Finn et al., 2000). Charter schools operate as "quasi-public schools," straddling the boundary between the public and private realms (Vergari, 2002, p.2). There is a prevailing view that schools need to be fixed in ways that do not expand the public sector or increase public funding, even if the resulting system compromises the public/private division of schooling. This, at least partly, explains why charter reform has bipartisan support in Washington.

As a movement that represents different things to different people, it remains an open question whether the charter movement can keep its promises. Public debates over the charter school movement concentrate on a few important issues. These include school accountability, student choice, equality, and social cohesion (Levin, 2001, p. 9). According to Vergari's assessment, the charter movement appears to hold more long-term significance than the typical fad in education reforms, and long waiting lists for student admissions show evidence of citizen demand for options in public education. Despite evidence that school choice in all its forms is not a passing fad, the pool of empirical research is not well-balanced in terms of the issues it addresses or the objectivity that researchers bring to it (Fowler, 2003).

Research Design

A large proportion of the research explores the charter movement either from the demand side in terms of student and parent satisfaction or in terms of broader policy perspectives that contrast free market solutions with concerns about social stratification (Finn, et al.; Fowler, 2003; Levin,

2001; Martinez and Little, 2002; Vergari, 2002). Few studies systematically investigate supply side attractors, using a national sample of representative data on school staffing and other resources across public and private sectors. By exploring these conditions and comparing charters with both public and private schools, this study makes an initial effort in this direction.

Data from the *1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Surveys (SASS)*¹ were analyzed to compare charters to both public and private schools. The *SASS* includes surveys of districts, schools, teachers, and principals under four types of school control: public, private, charter, and Indian². *SASS* investigates a broad range of educational issues, such as school safety, class size, district budgets, teachers' salaries, and the quality of instructional programs and school libraries (Gruber, et al., 2002). In this study, school resources, accountability, student choice, parental involvement, equity between student groups, evidence of innovative curriculum and instruction, and the quality of teachers and principals were selected for analysis as supply side conditions with the potential to attract students and families. Evidence on how charters compare to other public and private schools might suggest whether 10 years of charter reform has affected the broader educational system.

Sample descriptions of all *SASS* surveys used in this study are provided in Table 1. The *SASS* samples are randomly drawn. The un-weighted case numbers in the table are the respondents who actually participated in the survey. To use these samples to represent the whole country, the U.S. Census Bureau weights each case according to its characteristics. The weighted samples used here represent 111,958 schools, 3,451,315 teachers, and 110,021 principals across the country. Among three types of schools, almost 75% were public, less than 1% charter, and 24.3% private, and the number of principals roughly matched the number of schools. Almost 87% of the teachers worked in public schools, 0.5% in charter schools, and 13% in private schools³. Overall, charter schools were still a very small fraction of the education system in contrast to public and private schools.

As described earlier, the first assumption guiding the study is that charters may affect public schools when they provide attractive initial conditions for clients. These conditions include the quality of school resources, teachers, and principals, as well as schools' successes at developing into learning communities through building equality and parental involvement. The second assumption of this study is that charters could have a positive effect on public schools when students and parents believe they are appropriately served. To investigate these effects, we compare public, charter, and private schools. Within each school type, we compare and juxtapose three types of potentially attractive initial conditions: the quality of school resources, teachers, and principals. In some cases, data that were unavailable at the school level were found in the school district survey which was then used in the analysis.

Results

Comparisons are drawn from 10 related but distinct surveys. Our study of charter school effects is based on data for School Resources (Table 2); School Levels and Locations (Table 3); Accountability (Table 4); Social Responsibility (Table 5); Student Choice (Table 6); Parental Involvement (Table 7); Curriculum and Instruction (Table 8); Quality of Teachers (Tables 9 and 10); and Quality of Principals (Table 11).

School Resources

Table 2 shows that public schools have an advantage of scale efficiency over charter and private schools. Public schools served 89.1% of the nation's student population, charter schools 0.5% and private schools 10.4%. The aver-

age public school size (539) was more than twice that of both charter (264) and private schools (211). In terms of average number of pupils in each class, private schools had the smallest classes (18.8); public (23.6) and charter (23.1) schools had similar average class sizes.

Teacher-student ratio largely reflects the real cost of schooling. Charter schools showed the highest ratio (17.4), and thus the lowest costs; private schools had the lowest ratio (13.2), with public schools (15.6) in the middle. This high teacher-student ratio may partly explain why charter schools can operate more economically than public schools. Computer and internet access are significant school resources. Information technology over the few past decades has changed school operations, and parents increasingly demand that schools be well-equipped with computer technology (Tapscott, 1998). Public schools had the lowest ra-

Table 1

Sample Description of 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey

Name of Survey	Number of cases		
	Un-weighted	Weighted	Percentage
Districts			
Public school districts	4,690	14,505	100.0
Schools			
Public schools	8,432	83,725	74.8
Public charter schools	870	1,010	0.9
Private schools	2,611	27,223	24.3
Teachers			
Public school teachers	42,086	2,984,781	86.5
Public charter school teachers	2,847	17,477	0.5
Private school teachers	7,098	449,057	13.0
Principals			
Public school principals	8,524	82,802	75.3
Public charter school principals	891	988	0.9
Private school principals	2,734	26,231	23.8

Source: Schools and Staffing Survey, 1999-2000: Overview of the Data for Public, Private, Public Charter Elementary and Secondary Schools. NCES

Table 2

School Basic Information

Characteristics	School Type		
	Public	Charter	Private
Total Students			
Percent	89.1%	0.5%	10.4%
Number of cases	45,099,506	266,721	5,262,848
Size			
Average school size	539	264	211
Average class size**	23.6	23.1	18.8
Ratio			
Estimated student-teacher ratio	15.6	17.4	13.2
Number of students per computer	6.5	7.2	9.7
Number of students per internet access	39.4	29.3	59.2
Schooling Length			
School day-hours	6.2	6.3	6.3
Days of school year	179*	180	181

*Data from district survey

**Data From teachers' survey

tio of number of students per computer (6.5) in contrast to charter (7.2) and private (9.7) schools, which is a clear advantage for public schools. On the other hand, charter schools had the lowest ratio of number of students per internet access (29.3), followed by public (39.4) and private (59.2) schools. This charter school advantage may be due to their relative novelty, which, as compared to schools in older facilities, has made it easier for them to build technology infrastructure.

Charter and private schools had slightly longer school days (6.3 hours school day) than public schools (6.2 hours school day). Private schools had the longest school year (181 days), followed by charter schools (180 days) and public schools (179 days). As a supply side condition, parents who seek school success for their children may seek to expand the amount of schooling children receive. The amount of time in school is already expanding as schools respond to

parental pressures by offering four-year-old kindergarten for the first time and expanding both four and five-year-old kindergarten to full days. Reform pressures in this direction can be seen in the 1990s expansion of summer school and year-round schooling. The United States has the shortest school year in the developed world as well, creating a subtle pressure as test scores between the U.S. and others are compared (deMarrais and LeCompte, 1999). Be that as it may, as of the 1999-2000 academic year, differences among the three school types studied here were trivial—one day per year and six minutes per day on average.

In brief, public schools are in an advantaged position in scale, resources such as class size, and show some strength in educational technology. But public schools do less well than charters (but better than privates) in access to the internet and might face some competition in length of the school day and year.

Table 3
School Levels and Locations

Characteristics		School Type		
		Public	Charter	Private
School Levels				
Elementary	Percent	71.5	58.0	60.8
	Number of cases	59,900	586	16,562
Secondary	Percent	24.7	23.2	9.5
	Number of cases	20,651	235	2,583
Combined	Percent	3.8	18.8	29.7
	Number of cases	3,174	190	8,078
Urbanicity of school				
Large or mid-size central city	Percent	23.7	53.1	42.4
	Number of cases	19,858	537	11,534
Urban fringe of large or mid-size city	Percent	44.7	32.0	39.9
	Number of cases	37,462	324	10,860
Small town/rural	Percent	31.5	14.8	17.7
	Number of cases	26,405	150	4,829

*Data from district survey

**Data From teachers' survey

Table 4
Accountability

Outcomes Reported	School Type		
	Public ** %	Charter * %	Private * %
Standardized Tests Reporting Rate			
Test results from standardized assessment	97.8	86.4	***
SAT/ACT	79.4	23.6	***
Attendance/ Demographics Reporting Rate			
Attendance	94.4	83.0	***
Dropout rate	87.1	45.3	***
Demographics	66.9	56.1	***
Graduation Rate	85.6	44.1	***
Reported Outcomes			
Percentage graduated last year (grade 12)	87.8	76.8	97.5
Percentage to 4 year college	35.3	18.4	55.6
Percentage to 2 year college	21.7	25.0	16.1
Percentage to tech school	9.1	10.1	7.4

*Includes 71 charter schools that have no performance report

**Data from district survey

***Data not available

School Levels and Locations

Public schools assume the major responsibility to nurture the youngest children by maintaining separate schools for them (see Table 3). Public schools were generally configured as either elementary (71.5%) or secondary schools (24.7%) and very few (3.8%) combined elementary and secondary schools. In contrast, private schools had the largest percentage of combined schools (29.7%), with charter school in the middle (18.8%).

Large proportions of the charter (53.1%) and private (42.4%) schools were located in large or middle-sized central cities. Public schools were more often located in small towns and rural areas (31.5%), as compared to private (17.7%) and charter (14.8%) schools. The public schools were the largest in size and the most far reaching, serving small town and rural areas, while charter and private schools were largely in urban settings. Geographic differences represented variations on the supply side, leaving rural populations with few choices other than the local public school. If there is to be a charter effect on public schools, such geographical barriers will have to be overcome.

Accountability

Accountability is a puzzle for the charter movement, which some view as its Achilles heel. Others fear that accountability measures will lead to the demise of charter schools (Finn, et al., 2000, p.127). This fear is rooted in the fact that many accountability measures listed in Table 4 are part of the charter exemptions. It is debatable whether these accountability measures are valid as proxies for student learning, but the reality is that all education reforms will be eventually examined using some form of accountability, and several of these, such as high school graduation, are important in their own right (Ascher, et al, 1996; Hassel, 1999; Levin, 2001; Murphy, 1996). If parents value these accountability outcomes, then accountability can serve as a reasonable supply side indicator of a charter effect on public schools.

Table 4 suggests that charter schools in the survey were less accountable than public schools; they were less likely to report school outcomes. For instance, public schools (97.8%) were more likely than charter schools (86.4%) to report the results from national, state, or local standardized tests. Less than one in four (23.6%) of the charter schools reported SAT or ACT scores, while almost eighty percent (79.4%) of the public schools were required to do so. In 1999-2000, public schools were more likely to report attendance rates (94.4%) than charter schools (83.0%); similar differences appeared in the reporting of dropout rates (87.1% vs. 45.3%) and demographics (66.9% vs. 56.1%). Graduation and college entrance rates are important indicators of accountability. Using the SASS, less than half (44.1%) of the charter schools reported graduation rates to policy makers, while almost nine out of ten (85.6%) public schools were required to report them.

When the three school types report their outcomes, and we can make comparisons, the charter schools did least well by most measures. For those schools that included grade 12, the graduation rate was 97.5% for private schools, 87.8% for public schools and 76.8% for charter schools. After high school graduation, 55.6% of the private school graduates went on to four-year colleges, but only 18.4% of the charter and 35.3% public school graduates did so. One in four (25%) charter school graduates went to two-year colleges. By contrast, 16.1% of the private and 21.7% of the public school graduates went to such institutions. The percentages of graduates who went on to technical schools and colleges among three types of schools did not differ significantly.

These findings are noteworthy. Contrary to the claim made by Center for Education Reform (2000), public charter schools were less accountable than public schools, at least by the accountability factors demonstrated in Table 4. If the charter movement cannot adequately address the issues of accountability, and if this is indeed a supply side issue for students and parents, we would anticipate a reverse ripple effect favoring public schools which have well-developed accountability systems that allow comparisons. It would be an ironic confirmation of market theory if excellence in accountability in the public sector put pressure on private and charter schools to improve. The notably lower charter school graduation and four-year college attendance rates suggest that students and parents seeking supply side information to inform school choice may need information that is often unavailable under charter exemptions. In fact, both graduation and college matriculation were substantially higher for public schools when geographic and related socio-economic factors are not controlled. The poor showing of charters in this regard may be partially attributable to their predominantly urban locations, suggesting that they are not unlike urban public schools in terms of the challenges they must address. Multivariate analyses would be required to determine this.

Social Responsibility

Equality of opportunity is one of the highest principles of our democracy, in which education plays an intended role as an equalizer (Dewey, 1966; Fuller, 2003; Spring, 2000a; Vergari, 2002). One of the advantages of the charter movement is that public schools on the warning lists can be converted to charter schools (CER, 2003). Proponents observe that charter schools provide students from lower-income families or/and minority backgrounds with educational options that were previously available only to affluent families able to pay private school tuition or the expense of residing in neighborhoods with good public schools (Vergari, 2002, p.13; Finn et al., 2000, pp.160-64). Charter school movement reformers publicly advocate social responsibility and equality (CER, 2000). Race, social class, special education needs demonstrated students with Individualized Education Programs (IEP) and Limited English Proficiency (LEP) were used here to measure how different types of schools deal with the issue of equality.

Table 5 reveals that slightly over half of the charter school student population (50.3%) was minority in contrast to 32.6% in public and 25.1% in private schools. Among minority students, almost three in ten students in charter schools (27.1%) were black, while 15.5% in public and 12.5% in private schools students shared the same racial background. In addition, charter schools included 17.5% Hispanics in the student body, whereas public and private schools had 12.3% and 8.6% respectively. The fact that more than half of the charter school students were minority, including high proportions of Hispanics and Blacks, presents challenges to the charter movement.

Title I data is as one means of exploring the challenges of poverty in schools of all types. Almost three in ten charter school students (29.2%) came from a family background of poverty, while public (20.5%) and private (19.0%) had fewer students served by Title I programs. By contrast, public schools had the highest percentage of special education students (12.8%), followed by charter (11.3%) and private (7.1%) schools. Public schools attracted more immigrant students (5.6%) than charter (4.9%) or private (0.9%) schools as measured by percentages of LEP students. Finally, charter schools had magnet programs⁴ twice as often as public schools, which may attract the attention of the larger community.

Charter schools show extraordinary strengths in confronting and potentially dealing with issues of social equality. The previous discussion on accountability is largely focused on horizontal comparisons, such as comparing absolute graduation rates, college admissions, or standardized test results. A fair assessment of school performance should be based on vertical comparisons, that is, comparisons controlling for variables that influence academic outcomes. In other words, if charter schools are able to add more value to students' education than other schools and demonstrate this value-added effect, then the charter movement could have a positive influence the education system.

Student Choice

Student choice is one of the selling points promoted by the charter movement (CER, 2003); charter schools free students from public school residence requirements. The SASS data make it clear that the admissions process played a critical role as a gatekeeper to select "qualified" students in all three school types. We examine school admissions practices as reflections of their relative openness to student choice.

Table 6 suggests that most private schools had admission requirements (66.6%), followed by charter (26.3%) and public (13.2%) schools. Among schools with admissions requirements, public schools paid more attention to students'

Table 5
Equality

Issues	School Type		
	Public %	Charter %	Private %
Minority students	32.6	50.3	25.1
Student Composition by Race*			
White	67.4	49.7	74.9
Black	15.5	27.1	12.5
Hispanic	12.3	17.5	8.6
Indian	1.9	3.6	0.6
Asian/PI	2.8	2.2	3.4
Schools have magnet program	6.5	12.6	*
Ratio of total students and student served by Title I	20.5	29.2	19.0
Percent of students with an IEP	12.8	11.3	7.1
Percent of students with LEP	5.6	4.9	0.9

*Total may not equal to 100% because of rounding.

Table 6
Student Choice

Admission Practice	School Type		
	Public %	Charter %	Private %
Admission requirements	13.2	26.3	66.6
Admission-special needs*	57.1	41.4	33.4
Admission-academic record*	56.0	31.8	76.4
Admission-recommendation*	35.3	42.7	60.1
Admission-interview*	30.0	73.8	85.5
Admission-special talents*	20.7	11.6	18.6
Admission-standardized test*	17.3	11.6	42.1
Admission test*	10.5	12.7	47.5

* Among those schools which have admission requirements.

special needs (57.1%) than either charter (41.4%) or private (33.4%) schools. Over seven in ten (76.4%) private schools with admissions requirements used academic records, and slightly over one in two (56.0%) public schools and more than three in ten (31.8%) charter schools did so. Over 60% of the private schools used recommendations, but just 42.7% of the charter and 35.3% of the public schools required these. Interviews were the most often used requirement by both private (85.5%) and charter (73.8%) schools, but only 30% of the public schools used them as part of the admissions process. Charter schools paid the least attention to special talent (11.6%), and public schools the most (20.7%), with private schools in between (18.6%). Charter schools used standardized tests least (11.6%), followed by public (17.3%) and private (42.1%) schools. Almost half (47.5%) of the private schools used admissions tests, while slightly over one in ten charter (12.7%) and public (10.5%) schools did.

For each school type, these differing admissions profiles suggest distinctive missions. For public schools, service to all students in the community is required, so the admissions process is largely a matter of internal school selection based on special education service delivery in the district. For private schools, the choice is chiefly theirs, not the students'. For charters, the commitment to choice and the ability to avoid many public school regulations place them in a middle ground. These data on charters suggest a variety of admissions procedures that match local goals and contexts are developing in the movement that may be useful in demonstrating a "value-added" effect of charter education in a system where they must balance goals of equity and achievement. One concern has been the ability of charter schools to select the most readily educated students, leaving the most challenging students in the public system. As Tables 3 and 5 show, however, urban ethnic and linguistic minorities and low socio-economic-status (SES) students do attend charter schools. These data suggest that students can choose charter schools even where admissions processes could potentially exclude them. Charters may seek to avoid high needs students without necessarily applying elite se-

lection criteria (Lacireno-Paquet, Holyoke, Moser, and Henig, 2002). Local context and differences in control and governance are almost certainly factors in how admissions are used, and this merits further exploration (Fowler, 2003).

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement is an issue that has played an important role in the development of the charter movement (CER, 2003; Vergari, 2002). Some charter schools were initiated by parents dissatisfied with public schools (Brouillette, 2002, pp. 225-230). Parental involvement has also been a selling point by charter proponents, and charter schools must reach out to bring students in. Most charter schools in California (75%), for example, required parents to sign a school involvement contract when enrolling a student (Vergari, 2002, p. 49). Table 7 shows that all three types of schools sought open communication with parents and communities in general. Public schools relied most heavily on open house activities to communicate with parents (94.7%), followed by charter (93.1%) and private (88.5%) schools. There was no significant difference among three types of schools in terms of holding teacher-parent conferences.

Beyond school-parent communication, public (67.6%) and charter (65.5%) schools were more likely than private (35.7%) schools to invite parents to participate in school instructional decisions. School governance was perhaps the most significant distinction between charter and other types of schools. Over six in ten of the charter schools (63.0%) required a school-parent contract, but almost half of the public (49.6%) and private (47.2%) schools had the same requirement. Slightly over half (50.1%) of the charter schools invited parents to participate in budget decisions, whereas 44.9% of the public and 36.4% of the private schools had the same policy. Over three quarters of the charter schools had parent governance bodies, and slightly less than sixty percent (59.2%) of the public and 40.9% of the private schools shared the same policy. Volunteerism was one of the most popular means for parental involvement in all three

Table 7
Parental Involvement

Activities	School Type		
	Public %	Charter %	Private %
Communication			
Open house	94.7	93.1	88.5
Parent-teacher conferences	88.4	87.2	88.1
Instruction			
Parent-instructional issues	67.6	65.5	35.7
Governance			
School-parent contract	49.6	63.0	47.2
Parent-governance	59.2	75.1	40.9
Parent-budget decisions	44.9	50.1	36.4
Role of Parent Volunteers			
Use of parent volunteers	87.7	88.9	83.4
Requirement for parent volunteers	*	39.7	*

*Data not available

types of schools. There was no significant difference in terms of accepting or perhaps encouraging parent volunteers among three types of schools. Almost four in ten (39.7%) charter schools required parents to volunteer, however.

Curriculum and Instruction

Curriculum is related to the questions of what and how values, knowledge, and skills are taught in schools (Spring, 2002b). The *SASS* does not provide data that would allow an analysis of core curriculum and instructional practices as these might vary between the three types of schools. Yet information about how schooling is structured and what supplementary or special interest programs each type makes available provides an opportunity to understand distinctive curricular features in each setting as potential supply side attractors. Based on survey responses about curricular and instructional arrangements (see Table 8), we found that private schools (86.3%) were the most rigid in terms of using the same instructional cycle for all students, followed by charter (78.3%) and public (58.7%) schools. Charter schools (54.9%) were more likely than private (28.5%) and public (19.5%) schools to use new instructional approaches in their programs. In addition, charter schools (58.3%) were more likely to use block scheduling for extended instruction than either public (42.8%) or private (33.6%) schools. Bobo, de Kanter, Pederson, Noeth, and Weinig (2000) suggest that after school programs enhance student safety and achievement. Table 8 shows that charter schools lead the way on before/after school enrichment programs (60.3%), followed by public (54.1%) and private (43.3%) schools.

In terms of schools dealing with students' different needs, public schools (70.2%) dedicated more resources to inter-session or summer school for students who needed extra assistance to meet academic expectations than did charter (53.1%) and private (40.3%) schools. Public schools (68.5%) were also more likely to have gifted and talented programs, followed by charter (32.3%) and private (13.5%) schools. It seemed that public schools paid more attention to using their relatively rich resources to individualize instruction for those who were behind as well as gifted and talented students, while charter schools (31.8%) were more willing to assist students with academic advancement or acceleration during the inter session or summer school than public (27.3%) and private (23.2%) schools. Public (48.6%) and charter (45.6%) schools had more programs for students with discipline problems than private schools (15.8%). Charter schools (18.5%) were more likely to provide Advanced Placement (AP) courses than public (14.6%) and private (14.1%) schools. This is interesting given that charter graduates have lower rates of attendance at four-year colleges and universities.

Career education is one objective of schooling. Public schools (39.3%) were more likely to offer healthcare programs than either charter (25.8%) or private (17.3%) schools. However, private schools (52.6%) were more likely to offer daycare programs than charter (48.5%) or public (37.2%) schools. Programs in technology preparation and career academies were not especially popular in any of the three types of schools. Public schools showed a higher percentage (12.9%) of tech preparation programs than charter (9.1%) and private (2.2%) schools. Charter schools (13.2%) had

Table 8
Curriculum

Content	School Type		
	Public %	Charter %	Private %
Curricular Arrangements			
Do all students attend on the same cycle?	58.7	78.3	86.3
Before/after school enrichment	54.1	60.3	43.3
Block class scheduling for extended instruction	42.8	58.3	36.6
Program with instructional approach*	19.5	54.9	28.5
Supplementary Programs			
Academic inter-sessions or summer school activities**	70.2	53.1	40.3
Program-talented/gifted	68.5	32.2	18.0
Program-students w/discipline problems	48.6	45.6	15.8
Academic inter-sessions or summer school activities***	27.3	31.8	23.2
Programs-advanced placement courses (AP)	14.6	18.5	14.1
Career Education Programs			
Programs-healthcare	39.3	25.8	17.3
Programs-daycare	37.2	48.5	52.6
Programs-tech-prep	12.9	9.1	2.2
Programs-Career academy	6.4	13.2	1.4
International Interest Programs			
Program-foreign language	12.7	13.6	13.5
Program-International baccalaureate (IB)	.06	1.2	0.6
Support Home schooling (yes)	*	14.1	3.7

* among the schools which have magnet programs.

** for students needing extra assistance to meet academic expectations

*** for students seeking academic advancement or acceleration

higher percentage of career academy programs than public (6.4%) and private (1.4%) schools. In brief, career education was not a priority in any of the three school types. However, public schools took the lead in health education, private schools emphasized childcare education, and charter schools had a slightly higher percentage of career academy programs. International education was largely ignored by American P12 education in all three types of schools. Foreign language programs were offered in nearly 13% of all schools, and International Baccalaureate education was offered in only about 1%. Since both home schooling and charter school reforms are products of dissatisfaction with public education (Ayers, 1994), the greater willingness of charter schools to accommodate home schooling (14.1%) when compared to private schools (3.7%) is not surprising. Neither public nor private schools offered any appreciable level of support for home schooling.

Quality of Teachers

Teacher quality has been consistently demonstrated to be a primary factor in student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1997), and few market mechanisms have the potential to affect the success of charter schools more than the recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers. As Table 9 reveals, only 0.6% of public schools did not require full certification in hiring, whereas 6.8% of charter schools, and 18.8% of private schools did not do so. Public schools regulated hiring practices more than the other two school types with 81.5% requiring full certification for newly hired teachers, while only 51.8% of the charter schools and 38.9% of the private schools had this requirement. Although almost half of the charter schools did not require full certification in hiring (48.2%), 41.5% of them still used it. Most of the private schools did not require full certification

Table 9
Teacher's Hiring Practice, Salary and Benefit

Teacher's Hiring Practice, Salary and Benefit	School Type		
	Public	Charter	Private
Teacher Hiring-Full Certification			
Not used	0.6	6.8	18.8
Used but not required	17.9	41.5	42.4
Required	81.5	51.8	38.9
Teacher Hiring-Teacher Ed Program			
Not used	8.4	15.5	27.5
Used but not required	21.4	34.1	33.7
Required	70.2	50.3	38.8
Teacher Hiring-State Skills Test			
Not used	28.4	28.3	53.7
Used but not required	7.7	24.4	24.7
Required	63.9	47.3	21.6
Teacher Hiring-State Subject Test			
Not used	35.2	37.2	58.1
Used but not required	10.5	27.6	25.5
Required	54.3	35.2	16.4
Teacher Contract Period			
9 months	36.4	13.9	19.8
9 1/2 months	16.4	11.5	10.0
10 months	35.9	43.9	48.2
11 months	0.2	5.5	1.1
12 months	11.0	25.2	20.9
Salary			
Salary schedule (%)	96.3	62.2	65.9
Bachelor with no experience	\$25,888	\$26,977	\$20,302
Bachelor with 10 years experience	\$34,009	\$34,264	\$25,359
Masters with no experience	\$28,285	\$30,083	\$22,473
Masters plus 30 credits	\$29,812	\$31,191	\$23,177
Masters plus 20 years experience	\$44,006	\$41,881	\$31,303
Highest step on schedule	\$48,728	\$46,314	\$34,348
Benefits (%)			
Benefit rate for teachers	24.9	20.2	23.3
General medical (yes)	96.0	96.7	76.9
Dental insurance	77.7	80.7	53.9
Group life insurance	75.8	68.9	51.1
Union Status			
Teachers union agreement	69.8	14.4	*

(61.1%), but 42.4% of them used it. Even when full certification was not required, a significant proportion of the charter and private schools still used certification as a criterion in hiring.

Over 70% of public schools required graduation from teacher education programs for new teachers, but only 50% of charter schools and 39% of the private schools had such a requirement. While many charter schools and private schools did not require graduation from teacher education for all teachers, 34% of charter schools and 38% of private schools still used the requirement as a hiring criterion.

Over sixty percent (63.9%) of the public schools required state skills tests for hiring, while 47.3% of the charter and 21.6% of the private schools required them. However, charter schools actually have used the state skills tests (47.3% required plus 24.4% used) as much as public schools (63.9% required plus 7.7% used). Over half (54.3%) of the public schools required state subject tests for new hires, while 35.2% of the charter and 16.4% of the private schools required doing so. As with trends in other hiring requirements, charter schools actually followed public schools very closely. In brief, public schools were more regulated in terms of hiring practices, but most charter and private schools still used full certification as a hiring requirement.

The majority of teachers had either nine or ten month contracts. Charter schools had the longest contract period, with one of four teachers (25.2%) contracted for twelve months. Over one in five teachers in private schools and slightly over one in ten teachers in public schools had a simi-

lar contract period. Almost all (96.3%) public schools used salary schedules, and 65.9% of the private and 62.2% of the charter schools used pay schedules as well. Charter schools were likely to pay more to new teachers who had bachelors (\$26,977) or masters (\$30,083) degrees without teaching experience, in contrast to public (Bachelors \$25,888; Masters \$28,258) and private (Bachelors \$20,302; Masters \$22,473) schools. By comparison, public schools paid experienced teachers who had reached the highest step on the salary schedule more (\$48,728) than charter (\$46,314) and private (\$34,348) schools. Public schools also provided the best overall benefit rate (24.9%), followed by private schools (23.3%), and charter schools (20.2%). Benefits, such as medical, dental, and life insurance were comparable between public and charter schools. Private schools normally provided fewer benefits than public and charter schools.

For many years teacher unions have been singled out by critics as the greatest impediment to implementing real reform in schools (CER, 2003). Since almost seven in ten (69.8%) of the teachers in public schools were union members, criticizing unions is often tantamount to criticizing public schools. In contrast, only 14.4% of the teachers in charter schools had union agreements. But, the emergence of unions in even 14.4% of charters may be evidence of a reverse ripple effect of public on charter schools.

The information in Table 9 mainly depicts employer-employee relations, while Table 10 more directly assesses the quality of teachers. Demographically, charter school teachers were slightly younger than the teachers in both public and private schools. Charter schools not only had the

Table 10
Profile of Teachers

Profile	School Type		
	Public	Charter	Private
Demographics			
Average age	42.3	37.4	42.0
Minority teachers (%)	14.6	26.7	15.4
Gender			
Male	25.1	25.7	23.9
Female	74.9	74.3	76.1
Attrition 2000-2001 (%)			
Stayer- teaching in same school	85.0	70.8	80.3
Mover- teaching in another school	7.3	12.3	7.1
Leaver- leaving teaching profession	7.7	16.9	12.6
Attacked (%)			
Never attacked	90.5	92.7	96.3
Attacked, but not in past 12 months	5.3	2.4	1.5
Attacked in past 12 months	4.2	4.9	2.2
Employment			
Total teaching experience (years)	14.8	7.3	12.5
Total hours per week, school activities	48.05	48.93	46.25
Had a job outside education? (%)	0.9	4.0	3.1
Educational Attainment (%)			
Has a bachelor's degree?	99.3	96.9	92.7
Has a master's degree?	46.6	30.4	36.5
Has a PhD/EDD/professional degree?	0.7	1.2	1.8

highest percentage of minority students but also the highest percentage of minority teachers (26.7) in contrast to private (15.4%) and public (14.6%) schools. About 75% of all school teachers were female, and gender differences were not significant among the three school types.

Public schools had the highest teacher retention rate (85%), while charter schools had the lowest (70.8%), and private schools were in between (80.3%). Charter schools had a relatively high percentage (16.9%) of teachers who left the profession altogether. Instability in the teaching staff may threaten the smooth development of charter movement. Over 90% of the teachers in all schools had never been attacked, which indicated that schools appeared to be generally safe places to work. However, teachers in public schools were slightly more likely to be attacked than those in charter and private schools. Public school teachers tended to have more teaching experience (14.8 years) than both private (12.5 years) and charter (7.3 years) schools. Charter school teachers had the longest work hours per week (48.93 hours), followed by public (48.05 hours) and private (46.25 hours) schools. Charter school teachers were also more likely to have jobs outside of school (4%) than private (3.1%) and public (0.9) schools.

Public school teachers generally had higher levels of educational attainment than those in charter and private schools. Almost one hundred percent (99.3%) of the teachers in public schools had a bachelor's degree, followed by charter (96.9%) and private (92.7%) schools. Almost half (46.6%) of the teachers in public schools had masters degrees, while 36.5% of the teachers in private schools and 30.4% of the teachers in charter schools had the same level of education. A small proportion of the teachers in the three types of schools even had PhD/EdD or professional degrees. Mass graduate education apparently has made advanced degrees in education a regular part of the landscape for teachers in all three types of schools.

Quality of Principals

The quality of principals and the vision of the principals are important for school improvement (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992; Lyman, 2001). The quality of school principals may also be a supply side factor in student and parent choice to attend charter schools, particularly given the role that a school principal can play in community relations (Fullan, 2001). Because charter schools face challenges to their success (Brouillette, 2002), building level leadership would logically play a significant role.

There were no significant age differences among school principals, and since many charter schools opened quite recently, the years experience as principal by school type is not a meaningful comparison. However, in terms of average years of total principal experience, public schools ranked first (9 years), private schools second (8.7 years), and charter schools third (6.9 years). Principals tended overall to be experienced teachers. On average, private school principals had over 14.5 years teaching experience, slightly higher than

principals in public (14 years) and charter schools (12.1 years). Males were the majority of the public school principals (64.3%), while females were the majority in both charter and private schools. Over nine out of ten principals (92.0%) in private schools were white, compared to 87.1% in public schools and 76.9% in charter schools.

A principal's vision for the school plays an important role in school operations (Ashby and Krug, 1998). When ask about their number one goal, public school principals ranked basic literacy the highest (27.8%), followed by charter schools (25.6%) and private schools (21.8%). Academic excellence was ranked in similar ways among all three types of school principals (private 27.9%, charter 24.2%, and public schools 24.1%). Principals in public schools ranked students' work habits the highest (20.7%), followed by private schools (20.0%) and charter schools (19.6%). Charter school principals placed slightly greater emphasis on personal growth (13.9%) than private (13.4%) and public (11.2%) schools. In terms of human relationship skills, almost nine percent (8.7%) principals in public schools ranked it as their primary goal, while 7.1% of principals in charter and 4.9% principals in private schools did so. Moral values and occupational skills overall were not ranked highly as principals' primary goals, but principals in private schools ranked moral values higher (10.3%) than principals in charter schools (4.4%) and public schools (3.1%). Occupational/vocational skills were not really on private principals' agendas (1.8%), but 4.5% of the principals in public schools and 5.2% of the principals in charter ranked these skills as their number one goal in schools. The overall picture is one in which school type makes only modest differences in how principals rank their goals.

Educational attainment is another measure of the quality of principals. In general, a principal needs a credential higher than a bachelor's degree, but the largest discrepancy was observed in private and charter schools. It was reported that 54.3% of the principals in public schools, 51% in private schools, and 45.1% in charter schools had a masters degree. Requirements for principals in a so called "credential society" (Collins, 1979) include a graduate degree: 17.7% of the charter school principals had doctorates or specialist degrees, while 10.1% in public schools, and 8.5% in private schools had the same certificates. Private schools had the most principals with bachelor's degrees (23.6%), and charter schools ranked second (17.7%). Public schools had the fewest bachelor-level principals (1.6%). No principals in public schools had less than a bachelor's degree, but 7.1% of the principals in private schools had associate's degree, and 6% of them had no post-secondary degree. Just 1.7% of the charter school principals belonged in this category.

In brief, although certification and education requirements are common exemptions for charter schools, they share with private schools an apparent reliance on these familiar markers for the quality of both teachers and administrators. One explanation may be their supply side appeal of these markers.

Discussion

Analyses of three types of schools suggest that they may coexist in the competitive education reform arena, because each type of school has different advantages to students and parents seeking to exercise educational choice. While broad national averages undoubtedly conceal much local variation, several trends are clear. For example, concerning school resources that are potential attractors of students and parents, public schools have great advantages in size and wider geographic penetration compared to charter and private schools. However, charter and private schools have slightly longer school days and years, and they offer more before/after school enrichment programs. In short, the supply side attractors in each school type vary and draw different clients, but these choices have genuine limitations as well.

By most of our measures, public schools are more accountable than both charter and private schools. In one of the most striking results of the initial data analyses reveal that charter schools have produced far fewer high school graduates than either public or private schools. Yet charter schools offer more AP courses than public or private schools, which suggests that staff, students, and parents have the expectation that charter students will succeed in higher education. This misalignment of intentions and results suggests

the potential benefit for further scrutiny. If market forces are to have their promised effects, this kind of comparative data is necessary for students and families to be truly market-savvy in a system that increasingly stresses accountability as a key to education reform.

Overall, charter schools are relatively free from accountability reporting of test scores and attendance and graduation rates and are noticeably distinct from public schools in this regard. But accountability has been and will likely continue to be the number one measure of any school reforms. In fact, parents may learn to demand more accountability measures in the wake of very public mandates like the 2002 *No Child Left Behind* legislation. Our findings suggest a need for further research into charters that considers different local contexts and missions, state and local policy environments, and the potential for a dynamic, reciprocal impact between charter, public, and private schools.

In terms of equity, charter schools have higher rates of minority students than both public and private schools, and have a higher ratio of students who are served by Title I, suggesting a commitment to equity as well as a challenge. By contrast, using IEP, LEP, and other measures of equity, it is clear that public schools more than charter and private schools provide educational opportunity to difficult-to-serve students. Admission requirements are considered an indica-

Table 11
Profile of Principals

Profile	School Type		
	Public	Charter	Private
Experience			
Total teaching experience in years	14.0	12.1	14.5
Total principal experience in years	9.0	6.9	8.7
Years as principal in this school	4.9	2.3	6.3
Demographics			
Average Age	49.3	48.3	49.9
Gender			
Male (%)	64.3	46.0	45.4
Female (%)	35.7	54.0	54.6
Ethnicity (%)			
White	87.1	76.9	92.0
Black	11.3	19.6	6.1
Asian	0.8	1.9	2.0
Native	0.8	1.6	0.6
Principals' Three Most Important Goals (Multiple Responses %)			
Basic literacy	27.8	25.6	21.8
Academic excellence	24.1	24.2	27.9
Work habit	20.7	19.6	20.0
Personal growth	11.2	13.9	13.4
Human relations skills	8.7	7.1	4.9
Occupational/ vocational skills	4.5	5.2	1.8
Moral values	3.1	4.4	10.3
Highest Educational Attainment (%)			
Master's degree	54.3	45.1	51.0
Education specialist/professional diploma	33.9	17.9	9.9
Doctorate or first professional degree	10.1	17.7	8.5
Bachelor's degree	1.6	17.7	23.6
Associate's degree	0.0	0.7	1.1
Do not have a degree	0.0	1.0	6.0

tion of student and parent choice. A few charter schools have admission requirements, making them much more open than private schools, but much less so than public schools.

There are no significant differences with regard to parental involvement, between public and charter schools, although both are slightly higher than private schools. However, a large proportion of the charter schools have parent governance and school-parent contracts.

In terms of curriculum and instruction, the distinctive missions of public, private, and charter schools can be seen in variations of what is identified as the primary goal for the school, commitment to programs for learning differences, remediation and enrichment, and career and international education programs. Public schools also are more flexible in school semester cycle and reallocate more resources to summer school than charter and private schools. Charter schools, in contrast, are more likely to offer innovative instructional approaches than other two types of schools.

Teacher quality as indicated by educational attainment, experience, and state test performance, indicates variation among different types of schools, but also indicates that charters and privates may hire certified teachers from teacher education programs even when they are not required to do so. Graduate education for teachers is most common in public schools, but only slightly less so in charters and private schools. Of particular interest is the stronger presence of minority teachers in charter schools. Given the urban nature of these schools and the number of minority and Title I students they educate, this appears to be a strength for these schools. Teachers in charter schools, especially those having bachelor's degrees without experience are paid somewhat better than the teachers in public and private schools, while they receive similar benefits, such as medical and dental plans. Yet charter school teachers are most likely to leave the profession. It may be that instructional innovation, the hands-on governance arrangements, and other factors that typify charters present special challenges to novice teachers even as the charter system attracts them with higher starting salaries. New teachers may burn themselves out trying new practices in highly interactive environments in which parents are particularly engaged. In contrast, the preference for rewarding the upper end of the pay scale in public schools may increase stability in the teacher workforce but reduce innovation.

Indicators of principal quality parallel the teacher quality indicators. Charters and privates tend have more female principals, and principals from the three different settings have somewhat different visions about what matters most in their schools. If charter schools are indeed more innovative than public schools, the clarity of the principal's vision as well as their ability to take steps towards implementing that vision is probably a significant factor in student and parent choice and is a particular challenge in light of parent involvement.

Conclusion

The charter school movement is "quasi privatization." It likely gains support from politicians and the public in part because it is a compromise that satisfies some in both the privatization and public camps, at least for the moment. As charter schools develop in both common and idiosyncratic ways, they will become relatively more private or relatively more public, especially as local entities supported by parent choice and volunteer support. The tensions inherent in the compromise may not be sustainable (Wells, 2002), and these data suggest that public schools still have some normative influence on charters in such areas as resources, instructional time and class size, accountability, social equity, student choice, parental involvement, curriculum, and the quality of teachers and principals. But the variations between charters and others suggest ripple effects might operate in multiple directions among schools.

Our analyses suggest that charter schools have demonstrated the potential to address some important issues related to public dissatisfaction with current public schools. Not subject to some regulations, charter schools are able to target a large proportion of minority students and students from disadvantaged families, to offer relatively higher salary for inexperienced teachers, to attract higher parent involvement, and to offer programs with innovative instructional approaches. The charter movement has changed the landscape of the competitive education reform in the United States. However, claiming that the charter movement has created a resounding positive effect on both public and private schools is not supported by the data reviewed in this study. The promises of accountability and of reforms driven by student achievement are far from met. The charter movement still has far to go before it is a serious challenge to public and private schools.

Footnotes

¹ SASS is sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). It has been conducted four times in school years 1987–88, 1990–91, 1993–94, and 1999–2000. The unrestricted data set of SASS is used in this research.

² Indian schools are not considered in this analysis.

³ Percentages of schools and teachers are different because public schools are larger on average than charter and private schools (see Table 2).

⁴ A magnet program offers enhancements such as special curricular themes or methods of instruction to attract students from outside their normal attendance area (SASS 1999-2000).

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