

Charter Schools
Presentation for
North Carolina Policy Watch

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Three conclusions from my previous research on NC Charter schools

(with Robert Bifulco, based on data through 2002)

1. Charter schools increase racial segregation

Reason: black families choose charter schools that are blacker and white families choose schools that are whiter than the traditional public schools (TPS) they otherwise would have attended.

Black switchers – 53 % black in TPS to 70 % in charters

White switchers – 70 % white in TPS to 82 % in charters

2. Charter schools reduce student achievement on average

Average achievement down in math relative to what it would have been in TPS

-- for white switchers (-0.126 s.d.)

-- and even more for black switchers

especially for blacks who made racially segregating moves (-0.225 s.d.)

(Based on careful modeling using student level data for students we observed in both a traditional public school and in a charter school)

3. Charters increase the black white achievement gap

Reasons

- Blacks are overrepresented in charter schools (In 2002, blacks were 40% percent of the charter school population and 31% of the traditional public school population)
- And blacks do even less well in charter schools (relative to how they would have performed in TPS) than do white students.

Current situation in NC

- Racial breakdown

K-8 charters

52 % white

36 % black

7 % Hispanic

All charters

62 % white

27 % black

6 % Hispanic

But individual schools are very segregated

37 schools more than 80% white

26 schools less than 20% white

Very few charter schools between 40 and 60 percent white.

Charters serve smaller proportions of low income children (and other needy children)

North Carolina (2008/09 data)

Traditional public schools: 43.1% FRPL

Charter schools: 24.2% FRPL

Durham (7 charter schools) (2007/08 data)

Durham public schools: 53.7%* FRPL

Durham charter schools: 31.9% FRPL

* 60.8% in 2010/2011

Stronger DPI efforts to promote the success of new charter schools

- One year planning period
- Assistance from DPI during that period
- Oversight from DPI during the first few years of operation

But 8 DPI employees in 2008, only 3 now.

Where to go from here in NC?

Two main choices

1. Expand charters cautiously and keep them on the fringe of the education system
2. Expand charters significantly

My strong preference: expand cautiously

Reflects the observation that the education system generates public as well as private benefits. Dramatic expansion of charter schools would privilege the private interest over the public interest.

Evidence of public interest: We fund k-12 education publicly and we make it compulsory

Also based on my observations in New Zealand which has the equivalent of a whole county of charter schools.

Specific reasons for keeping charters on the fringe of the system

- To maintain the quality of charters
 - Requires accountability, oversight and support
 - Requires strong charter school leadership
 - Requires strong, well trained governing boards
- To facilitate innovation
 - Desirable to take some risks, but with assurance that students have a school to return to
 - If too many charter schools, regulation will return
- To facilitate capital planning
- To avoid the emergence of charter school bureaucracies
- To avoid the resegregation of NC schools