
**MEMORANDUM ON CHARTER SCHOOL MYTHS:
“CREAMING” THE BEST STUDENTS & “PUSHING OUT” THE WORST**

TO: RON HUBERMAN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
BARBARA EASON-WATKINS, CHIEF EDUCATION OFFICER **DATE:** 12/10/09

FROM: ALEXIS GAGNE
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SUBJECT: RE: ACTION ITEM #343 (OFFICE OF NEW SCHOOLS PM SESSION) —PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS
TRANSFERING OUT OF NON-TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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GOAL OF ANALYSIS

The goal of this analysis is to find out conclusively if Charter and Contract schools (referred to as **Charters** in this report) are:

1. “Creaming” the best students (i.e. have higher achieving incoming students);
2. “Pushing out” their worst students (i.e. have disproportionate transfers among low-achievers).

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

This memorandum is the result of a thorough analysis of CPS data from SY09 and SY10. The bullets presented below are, on average, accurate patterns of charter school enrollment and mobility; however, these patterns may not hold for each individual school.

- **Achievement of students transferring from traditional CPS schools into charter schools:**
 - Incoming 9th Graders who transferred from traditional to charter schools are slightly lower achieving than their traditional school peers¹.
 - CPS students in other tested grades (3rd-8th, 10th, 11th) who transfer from traditional to charter schools are neither higher nor lower achieving than their peers.

Takeaway: Charter schools do not admit (“cream”) disproportionately higher achieving students.

While students’ levels of achievement are similar between students who enter traditional and charter schools, we do not address the important personal or familial differences that strongly affect student outcomes (i.e. intrinsic motivation and parental involvement).

- **Achievement of students transferring out of their charter schools:**
 - Students transfer out of charter schools at a slightly higher rate than they do traditional CPS schools.
 - The achievement level of all students who transfer out of a CPS school is lower than their non-transferring peer, regardless of whether the student leaves a charter or a traditional CPS school.
 - Students with lower academic achievement relative to their peers are less likely to transfer from Charter Schools than from traditional CPS schools.

Takeaway: Charter schools are no more likely to “push out” low-performing students than traditional CPS schools.

¹ The word peers in this memorandum will be used to refer to students coming from the same school.

ANALYSIS:

Part 1: Achievement Levels of Incoming Students

In 2009, the RAND Corporation published a paper titled *Achievement and Attainment in Chicago Charter Schools* that looked at, among other things, the achievement level of students going from regular schools to charter schools. They looked at students who switched to Chicago charter schools between 1997-1998 and 2006-2007 in grades 1 through 12 – excluding students who had to move because they had reached the terminal grade of their existing schools.

Their results showed that students transferring from traditional public schools to charter schools had, on average, statistically significantly higher ISAT/ITBS scores than their peers who had stayed in traditional public schools. While their ISAT/ITBS scores were statistically significantly higher, however, they are only higher by 0.11 standard deviations on average, which is a marginally small number representing approximately 3 ISAT scale points (3-4 percentiles).

TABLE 1: ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL OF INCOMING CHARTER SCHOOL STUDENTS 2007-2008
Average Prior Math and Reading Scores of Charter Movers and Other Students at the TPSs That They Leave

Average Prior Score	Overall	Black Students	Hispanic Students	White Students
Math, movers	-0.03	-0.05	0.06	0.30
Math, TPS peers	-0.12	-0.17	0.03	0.36
Math, difference between movers and TPS peers	0.09*	0.12*	0.03	-0.06
Reading, movers	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.35
Reading, TPS peers	-0.09	-0.12	-0.03	0.36
Reading, difference between movers and TPS peers	0.11*	0.13*	0.05	-0.01

NOTE: * Indicates that the difference is significant at the 5-percent level.

Source: *Achievement and Attainment in Chicago Charter Schools*, RAND Corporation, 2009

We repeated this analysis using the 2008-2009 achievement level of current charter schools students. For our analysis, however, we included students who had to move because they had reached the terminal grade of their existing schools since we were especially interested in incoming 9th graders. Therefore, we took students who are in charter schools in 2009-2010 and were in traditional public schools in 2008-2009 and compared their standardized test scores in 2008-2009 to their 2008-2009 school averages. Here the word *peer* will be used to refer to students coming from the same school. Depending on the student's grade level, ISAT, Explore, PLAN or PSAE was used.

The results show us that 9th graders currently in charter schools were actually statistically significantly lower achieving than their peers according to their 8th grade ISAT scores. The difference is again very slight, however, charter schools 9th graders had an 8th grade ISAT score that was on average .09 standard deviation lower than their peers which represents approximately 2-3 ISAT scale score point. The difference is higher among African Americans, where it is .13 standard deviations.

For grades other than 9th, students who went from a traditional public schools to a charter school between last year and this year had test scores the previous year that were not statistically significantly different from their peers. This conclusion is true even if we remove Youth Connections Charter School from the analysis.

After removing YCCS, a large multi-campus alternative charter school, from the analysis, we find that students who went from traditional public schools to charter schools that are in a grade other than 9th are not statistically different from their peers staying in traditional public schools.

Table 2: Achievement level of incoming charter school students 2009-2010

	Overall	Black Students	Hispanic Students	White Students
Difference between movers and peers - 9th graders	-.09*	-.13*	-.01	-.07
Difference between movers and peers - Non 9th graders	-.02	-.02	-.08*	.17
Difference between movers and peers - Non 9th graders (without YCCS)	.04	.05	-.01	.37*

NOTE: * Indicates that the difference is statistically significant at the 5% level

Part 2: A closer look at students transferring out of charter schools

In this part of the analysis, we looked at how many students stayed at the same school from last school year to this school year both at charter schools and at traditional public schools. We then analyzed whether students who did not stay at a charter schools between last year and this year had different achievement levels from those who stayed.

To do this, we took an active student list from November 2009 and compared it to an active student list in November 2010. We then calculated how many students were at the same school both years and which ones were not. Two sets of analysis were conducted, the first including dropouts and transfers out of CPS and the second excluding them. Students who were at the highest grade offered by their school in 2008-2009 were taken out of the analysis.

TABLE 3: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS AT THE SAME SCHOOL IN NOVEMBER 2009 AND NOVEMBER 2010

	Charter Schools	Traditional Public Schools
(1) Student re-enrollment Nov. 2009 to Nov. 2010 (Including Dropouts and Out of CPS Transfers)		
OVERALL	74%	80%
African American	71%	74%
Hispanic	82%	84%
White	76%	87%
(2) Student re-enrollment Nov. 2009 to Nov. 2010 (Excluding Dropouts and Out of CPS Transfers)		
OVERALL	85%	88%
African American	82%	83%
Hispanic	90%	90%
White	92%	95%

Table 3 shows what percentage of students remained at the same school from last year to this year. The results show us that 6% fewer charter schools students stayed at the same school between last year and this year than traditional public schools students (3% when excluding Dropouts and out of CPS transfers). Both of these differences are statistically significant. Also, if we look at the breakdown by race, we see that the

difference in rates between charters and traditional public schools is above 1% only for White students if Dropouts and Out of CPS Transfers are excluded.

We next compared the achievement level of students who did not stay at the same schools between last year and this year to their *peers* who did. Again, the word *peer* is used to refer to students from the same school in 2008-2009 and again, depending on the student’s grade level, the ISAT, Explore, PLAN or PSAE was used to measure achievement. We used a logistic regression model to test whether differences in achievement levels were statistically significant. We again did this analysis with and without dropouts and out of CPS Transfers and separately for different grade levels and the results did not change significantly.

TABLE 4: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS AT THE SAME SCHOOL IN NOVEMBER 2009 AND NOVEMBER 2010

Average number of Standard Deviation from Mean	Non-traditional public schools Overall	Non-traditional public schools African American	Non-traditional public schools Hispanic	Non-traditional public schools White	Traditional public schools	Traditional public schools African American	Traditional public schools Hispanic	Traditional public schools White
Stayers	.01*	-.02	.03*	.20*	.01*	-.03*	.00	.12
Movers	-.04*	-.06*	-.03*	.53*	-.09*	-.12*	-.1	.19
Difference	.05*	.05*	.07*	-.34*	.1*	.09*	.1	.7

NOTE: * Indicates that the difference is statistically significant at the 5% level

Table 4 illustrates that students leaving charter schools are on average lower achieving than their *peers* who stay at the same school by .05 standard deviations. It shows, however, that students leaving traditional public schools are on average lower achieving than their *peers* by .1 standard deviations. The difference between .05 and .1 is statistically significant. Thus, having lower academic achievement relative to your peers had less impact on your likelihood of leaving a charter school than a traditional public school.

FURTHER QUESTIONS

This study is not the definitive work on charter schools in CPS. While this analysis has shown substantial evidence challenging two commonly-held beliefs about charter schools in general, many questions remain. Specifically:

- Do the conclusions contained in this analysis hold for each charter school within CPS? Is there evidence that certain schools are “creaming” the best students and “pushing out” their worst?
- Could charter schools “push out” kids based upon other characteristics (i.e. behavior, attendance)? Are these other student characteristics more predictive of student mobility in charter schools?