



POLICY REPORT

Ten Years of Excellence

*Why Charter Schools Are Good
for North Carolina*

TERRY STOOPS
MAY 2007

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For many years, charter-school research has almost exclusively focused on the issue of academic performance. While this issue deserves attention, research indicates that parents choose charter schools based, not on one factor, but on a number of factors related to the schools' social and academic environments. Thus, it is essential to shift the debate about the expansion of charter schools in North Carolina from a singular focus on testing to a consideration of the total learning environment preferred and chosen by parents. The increasing demand for charter schools in North Carolina is a testament to the schools' success in offering parents many of the qualities that they look for in a school. It is also a glimpse into the power of educational choice, which provides parents the kind of options that best meets the needs of their child.

North Carolina's charter schools have low average school and class sizes, innovative curricula and instructional approaches, few disciplinary problems, and student performance comparable to district schools. These factors combine to create a learning environment valued by parents and children alike. In particular, minority parents throughout North Carolina have embraced charter schools to take advantage of the schools' superior learning environments. In fact, a higher percentage of African-American students attend the state's charter schools (34.6 percent) than district schools (31.4 percent).

According to survey research, parents who choose charter schools say that school size and class size are the most attractive quality of charter schools, especially when compared to the district school assigned to their child. The parents' perception about charter school size and class size is consistent with state data, which shows that charter schools typically have smaller schools and classes than comparable district schools. The median charter school has 243 fewer students than district schools with similar grade ranges. Charter schools have identical average class sizes as district schools in grades 1-3, but lower average class sizes in kindergarten and grades 4-8.

A majority of charter-school parents says that curriculum was an important factor in their decision to

choose a charter school over a district school. According to the state's charter-school law, one of the main purposes of having charter schools in North Carolina is to "[e]ncourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods," thereby providing "parents and students with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system." North Carolina's charter schools deliver a variety of curricular and instructional approaches, including Direct Instruction, the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP), Communities in Schools, Expeditionary Learning, the Core Knowledge Sequence, the Montessori method, and the Paideia program. Over the past ten years, charter schools have introduced some of the best, research-based educational innovations into North Carolina's beleaguered public school system.

In addition, charter schools have far fewer disciplinary problems than district schools. For the 2005-06 school year, male students in district schools averaged 3.1 short-term suspensions for every ten students, while male students in charter schools averaged 1.0 suspension for every ten students. Over the past five years, rates of short-term suspensions among charter schools have been consistently lower than in district schools.

Nationwide, charter schools' academic performance meets or exceeds the performance of district schools, but critics charge that the academic quality of North Carolina's charter schools lags behind other schools. Upon review, quantitative studies of North Carolina charter-school performance show that the academic performance of the average charter school is roughly the same as an average district school. In addition, qualitative research articles — particularly those that claim that North Carolina's charter schools exhibit racist or authoritarian tendencies — are conceptually flawed studies offering little useful information.

State legislators must expand and strengthen North Carolina's system of charter schools by removing the statutory cap of 100 schools, easing the regulatory burden placed upon the state's charter schools, and ensuring that all charter schools have adequate resources.

INTRODUCTION

Charter schools are tuition-free public schools that have more freedom than a traditional public school but are required to meet certain state regulations, like participate in the state testing program. Charter schools have existed in North Carolina for 10 years, and statewide charter school enrollment has grown to approximately 30,000 students, increasing by approximately 50 percent over the last five years. The state has reached its statutory limit of 100 charter schools, meaning that state officials can approve new charter schools only to replace ones that have closed.¹

Demand for charter-school seats in North Carolina continues to grow. For the 2007-08 school year, a preliminary report showed that charter schools were forced to place over 5,200 children on waiting lists.² Some North Carolina charter schools were overwhelmed with applications, and state restrictions on enrollment growth prevent individual charter schools from meeting the demand. For example, Raleigh Charter High School, ranked the 53rd best public high school in the nation by *Newsweek* magazine, had 705 applications for 79 open slots.³ Franklin Academy Charter School in Wake Forest had 1,524 applications for 101 open slots.⁴ The new Pine Lake Preparatory charter school in Mooresville received more than 2,500 applications for, at most, 1,200 slots.⁵ To fill these slots, charter schools had to select students at random using a lottery, as mandated by state law.

Public support for charter schools in North Carolina and across the nation remains strong. Recent nationwide polls and studies show strong support for charter schools, and the percentage of parents in favor of charter schools continues to increase.

- The Center for Education Reform estimates that nationwide nearly 400 new charter schools will open for the 2006-07 school year, an 11 percent increase from the year before. Nationwide, there are approximately 4,000 charter schools serving 1.2 million students.⁶
- A 2006 Phi Delta Kappa poll found that

public approval of charter schools has climbed from 42 percent in 2000 to 53 percent in 2006. Public disapproval of charter school has declined by 13 percentage points in just six years, from 47 percent in 2000 to 34 percent in 2006.⁷

- The May 2006 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools poll found that 55 percent of parents surveyed said they would be interested in enrolling their child in a charter school. In addition, 74 percent of respondents would favor expanding charter schools; 39 percent strongly favored charter school expansion.⁸

In addition, polls conducted in North Carolina show that a majority of likely voters supports charter schools to give parents more educational options. The public also believes that charter schools are a viable way to reduce North Carolina's multi-billion-dollar school facilities needs.⁹ Because charter schools receive no state or local funds for capital needs, they can reduce expenditures on school construction, while quickly and efficiently providing seats to growing school systems.¹⁰

- A July 2006 John William Pope Civitas Institute poll found that 59 percent of North Carolinians would like to see the cap of 100 charter schools removed as a way to give parents more choices and ease the state's school construction burden. Nineteen percent were opposed to removing the cap and 22 percent were unsure.¹¹
- A May 2006 *News & Observer*/WRAL poll found that 59 percent of likely Wake County voters favor increasing the number of charter schools or offering vouchers to parents whose children attend private schools. Thirty-four percent opposed the idea, and 7 percent were unsure.¹²
- An April 2006 poll by the John Locke Foundation found that a vast majority of Wake County voters agreed that charter schools were an effective way to build district-school

seating capacity. According to the poll, 65 percent favored additional charter schools for Wake County and 26 percent opposed that idea.¹³

- A January 2006 Civitas Institute poll found that 52 percent of North Carolinians would be more likely to support a candidate for political office if he or she supported legislation to increase the number of charter schools. Around 27 percent were less likely, and 21 percent of respondents were either unsure or indifferent.¹⁴
- A July 2005 Civitas Institute poll found that 52 percent of North Carolinians surveyed supported and 34 percent opposed charter schools.¹⁵

WHY DO PARENTS CHOOSE CHARTER SCHOOLS?

In “The North Carolina Charter School Choice: Selection Factors and Parental Decision-Making” (2005), Michael Fedewa, Superintendent of Schools for the Catholic Diocese of Raleigh, investigated the many factors that parents consider when they make the decision to send their child to a charter school.¹⁶ In general, parents responded that features of the learning environment created by charter schools is much more attractive than the district school assigned to their child.

On the question of why parents choose a particular charter school for their children, Fedewa reports that “Over 75 percent of responding parents indicated that school size was an important reason when selecting a charter school for their children.”¹⁷ Likewise, a question asking parents to compare their child’s current charter school with the school the child would otherwise be attending revealed that parents perceived school size and class size to be better in charter schools than district schools.¹⁸

The parents’ perception about charter school size and class size is consistent with state data, which shows that charter schools typically have smaller schools and classes than district schools. For the 2005-06 school year, only 20 of the 99 charter schools had student enrollment numbers

that exceeded state averages (see Table 1, following pages). The median charter school had 243 fewer students than their district school counterparts.¹⁹

Moreover, many charter schools have been able to maintain lower-than-average student enrollment figures despite years of growth. Of the 26 charter schools that have been in operation for ten years, 22 schools have student enrollments below state averages. Thus, only four charter schools opened in 1997 have student enrollments that exceed the state average for a district school with comparative grade levels.

There is an overwhelming amount of evidence that shows that extracurricular participation and parental involvement are greater in small schools. Kathleen Cotton’s “New Small Learning Communities: Findings from Recent Literature” (2001) identified at least six studies conducted between 1997 and 2001 concluding that parent involvement and satisfaction increase in smaller schools.²⁰ Moreover, in a previous assessment of research studies, Cotton found sixteen studies between 1964 and 1996 that show an increase in extracurricular activities in small schools compared to larger schools.²¹ The reason is simple. Smaller schools, like charter schools, provide more opportunities for participation by parents and students.²²

Charter schools are exempt from the state’s class-size requirements. Nevertheless, charter schools instinctively keep class sizes low. Charters have identical class sizes as district schools in grades 1-3 but lower class sizes in kindergarten and grades 4-8 (see Figure 1, page 8).²³ Smaller class sizes in the middle school grades may provide an advantage to students who attend charter schools, as struggling students begin to fall behind at this stage of their schooling.²⁴ Smaller classes may also contribute to parents’ observation that students receive more individualized attention and extra help in a charter school than the district school the child would otherwise attend.²⁵

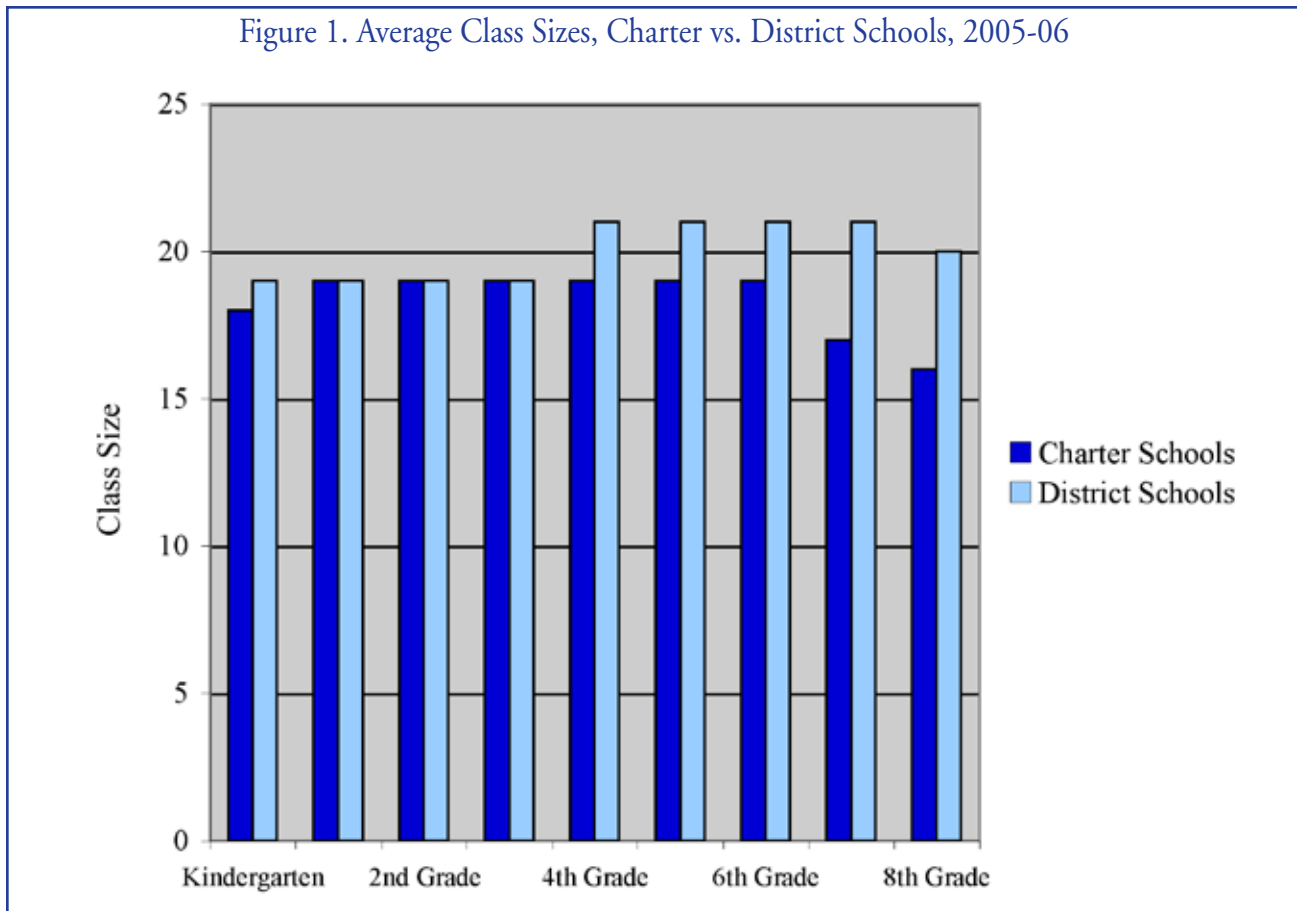
These averages hide the fact that some charter schools have class sizes of 10 to 14 students. Brevard Academy in Transylvania County and the Success Institute in Iredell County, for example, maintain lower than average class sizes from

Table 1. Charter School Size vs. Average District School Size, 2005-06

<i>Charter School</i>	<i>Year Opened</i>	<i>School Size</i>	<i>State Average for Comparable School</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Alpha Academy	2000	87	679	-592
American Renaissance Charter School	1998	299	505	-206
American Renaissance Middle School	1999	175	679	-504
Ann Atwater Community School	2002	29	156	-127
Arapahoe Charter School	1997	351	446	-95
ArtSpace Charter School	2001	287	446	-159
Arts Based Elementary	2002	239	505	-266
Bethany Community Middle School	2000	95	679	-584
Bethel Hill Charter School	2000	350	505	-155
Brevard Academy	1998	212	446	-234
Bridges Charter School	1997	146	446	-300
Cape Fear Center for Inquiry	2000	315	446	-131
Cape Lookout Marine Science High School	1998	136	1004	-868
Carolina International School	2004	367	446	-79
Carter Community School	1998	140	446	-306
Casa Esperanza Montessori School	2003	233	505	-272
Charter Day School	2000	594	505	89
Chatham Charter School	1997	271	446	-175
Children's Community School	2004	407	505	-98
CIS Academy	1997	93	679	-586
Clover Garden	2001	381	156	225
Community Partners High School	2000	98	1004	-906
Crosscreek Charter School	2001	246	446	-200
Crossnore Academy	1999	86	156	-70
Crossroads Charter High School	2001	172	1004	-832
Dillard Academy	1998	105	505	-400
East Wake Academy	1998	717	156	561
Evergreen Community Charter School	1999	370	446	-76
Exploris Middle School	1997	180	679	-499
Forsyth Academies	1999	669	446	223
Francine Delany New School for Children	1997	143	446	-303
Gaston College Preparatory School	2001	359	446	-87
Grandfather Academy	1997	38	156	-118
Gray Stone Day School	2002	210	1004	-794
Greensboro Academy	1999	719	446	273
Guilford Preparatory Academy	2001	221	446	-225
Haliwa-Saponi Tribal School	2000	152	446	-294
Healthy Start Academy Charter School	1997	326	446	-120
Highland Charter Public School	1997	95	505	-410
Hope Elementary School	2001	90	505	-415
Imani Institute	1998	133	679	-546
John H. Baker, Jr., High School	1997	64	1004	-940
Kennedy School	1998	94	196	-102
Kestrel Heights School	1998	181	196	-15
Kinston Charter Academy	2004	277	505	-228
Lake Norman Charter School	1998	630	679	-49
Lakeside School	1997	22	196	-174
Laurinburg Charter School	1998	91	1004	-913
Learning Center	1997	72	505	-433

<i>Charter School</i>	<i>Year Opened</i>	<i>School Size</i>	<i>State Average for Comparable School</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Lincoln Charter School	1998	661	156	505
Magellan Charter School	1997	333	446	-113
Maureen Joy Charter School	1997	200	505	-305
Metrolina Regional Scholars Academy	2000	156	446	-290
Millennium Charter Academy	2000	271	505	-234
Mountain Discovery Charter School	2002	116	446	-330
New Century School	1998	78	1004	-926
Omuteko Gwamaziima	1999	65	446	-381
Orange Charter School	1997	178	446	-268
PACE Academy	2004	103	1004	-901
Phoenix Academy	2000	347	446	-99
Piedmont Community School	2000	630	446	184
PreEminent Charter School	2000	591	446	145
Provisions Academy	1999	76	196	-120
Quality Education Academy	1997	153	446	-293
Queen's Grant Community Schools	2002	720	446	274
Quest Academy	1999	131	446	-315
Raleigh Charter High School	1999	496	1004	-508
Research Triangle Charter Academy	1999	722	446	276
River Mill Academy	1998	451	156	295
Rocky Mount Preparatory School	1997	809	156	653
Rowan Academy	1999	15	505	-490
Sallie B. Howard School	1997	662	446	216
Sandhills Theatre Arts Renaissance School	1999	157	505	-348
Socrates Academy	2005	N/A	N/A	N/A
SPARC Academy	1998	173	446	-273
Sterling Montessori Academy	1997	548	446	102
Success Institute	2000	92	446	-354
Sugar Creek Charter School	1999	539	446	93
Summit Charter School	1997	163	446	-283
The Academy of Moore County	1997	138	679	-541
The Carter G. Woodson School of Challenge	1997	330	156	174
The Central Park School for Children	2004	221	505	-284
The Children's Village Academy	1997	115	505	-390
The Community Charter School	1997	98	505	-407
The Downtown Middle School	1997	358	679	-321
The Franklin Academy	1998	979	156	823
The Laurinburg Homework Center Charter School	1999	97	1004	-907
The Mountain Community School	1999	159	446	-287
The New Dimensions School	2001	79	505	-426
Thomas Jefferson Classical Academy	1999	395	196	199
Tiller School	1998	194	446	-252
Torchlight Academy	1999	198	505	-307
Two Rivers Community School	2005	77	156	-79
Union Academy	2000	673	446	227
Vance Charter School	1999	383	446	-63
Visions Charter School	1997	37	505	-468
Washington Montessori	2000	262	446	-184
Woods Charter School	1998	222	156	66

Figure 1. Average Class Sizes, Charter vs. District Schools, 2005-06



kindergarten through eighth grade.²⁶ Most other charter schools have one or more grades that have lower class sizes than state averages.

Fedewa's research does not link school-size and class-size preferences to parental attitudes about the perceived academic or social effects of a more intimate learning environment. Nevertheless, one theme that clearly emerges from Fedewa's study is that parents who choose charter schools value their school's total educational environment. As such, it is likely that parents value smaller school and class sizes for a number of reasons, including individualized attention and support, greater opportunities for participation in extracurricular activities, and an increased sense of community and safety. Thus, the fact that there is no consistent evidence that smaller class sizes increase student performance would likely have little influence on parents' decision to choose a charter school with small classes.²⁷

In addition, the specialized curriculum that many charter schools offer also appeals to parents

(see Table 2). Fedewa found that 62 percent of charter-school parents believed that curriculum was important in their decision to choose a charter school over a district school.²⁸ Indeed, the legislation approving charter schools says that one of the purposes of having charter schools is to "[e]ncourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods" thereby providing "parents and students with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system."²⁹ Parents welcome the diverse curriculum and instructional methods offered by the state's charter schools.

Finally, charter schools have far fewer disciplinary problems than district schools. Fedewa asked parents to compare their child's current charter school with the school the child would otherwise attend. Parents are more satisfied with the discipline policies in charter schools than district schools. According to the survey research, 61.4 percent of respondents said that charter schools

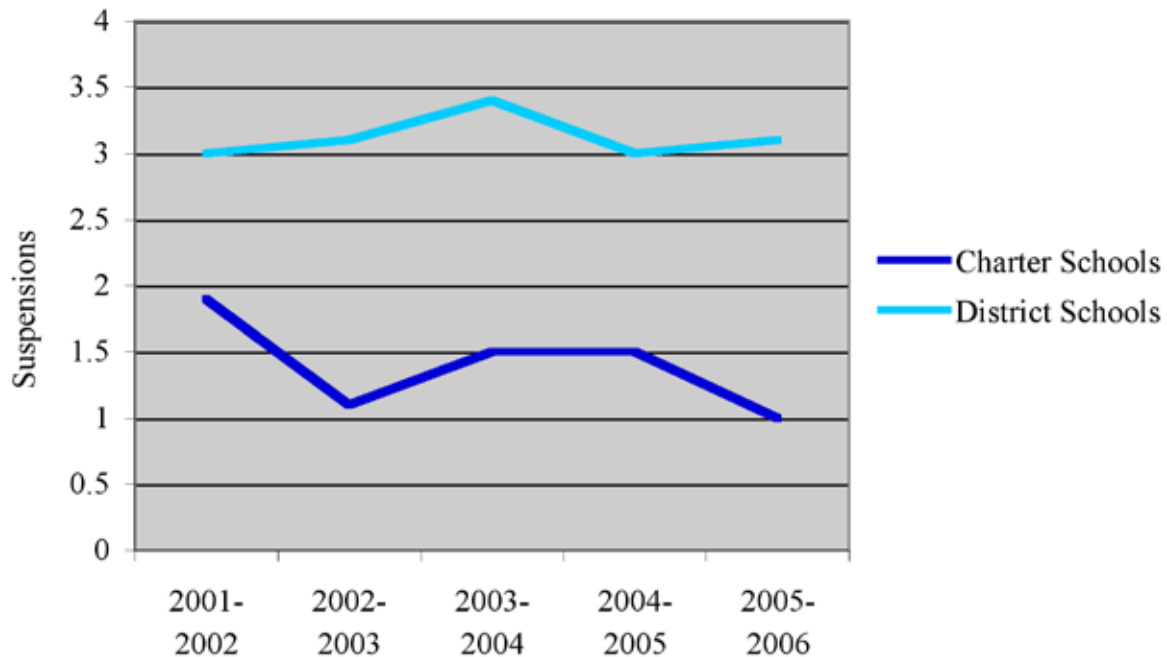
Table 2. Examples of Curricula and Instructional Methods Used by Charter Schools

<i>Charter School</i>	<i>Curricula</i>
ArtSpace Charter School	Teaches core content subjects through the arts
Cape Lookout Marine Science High School	Focuses on marine science
Charter Day School	Uses Direct Instruction (DI) to teach a classical curriculum espousing the values of traditional Western civilization
CIS Academy	Serves at-risk students through the Communities In Schools (CIS) program
Crossnore Academy	Offers a stable, emotionally supportive educational environment for children who are academically delayed
Gaston College Preparatory School	Uses the principles of the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP)
Grandfather Academy	Provides special educational opportunities for students who have been estranged by emotional, sexual, or other abuse
Guilford Preparatory Academy	Integrates Spanish language into the curriculum as a core subject
Haliwa-Saponi Tribal School	Serves the Haliwa-Saponi, a state-recognized Native American tribe in eastern North Carolina
Kennedy School	Serves the needs of abused, abandoned and troubled adolescents
Kestrel Heights Charter School	Uses principles of Paideia education
New Century Charter High School	Participates in river stewardship projects, environmental science research, and canoeing classes
Metrolina Regional Scholars Academy	Serves highly gifted students
Omuteko Gwamaziima	Provides a community based education by teaching about African and African-American heritage
PreEminent Charter School	Uses the Hirsch Core Knowledge Sequence curriculum
Sandhills Theatre Arts Renaissance School	Offers a well-rounded, arts-infused education
Summit Charter School	Based on the philosophy of Ernest Boyer as described in “The Basic School”
The Franklin Academy	Teaches a rigorous core curriculum using Direct Instruction (DI)
Two Rivers Community School	Uses an Expeditionary Learning (EL) model of instruction
Washington Montessori Schools	Uses Montessori instructional methods

have more discipline than district schools, 31.9 percent said that charter and district schools were similar in this area, and only 6.7 percent felt that district schools were safer than charter schools. Similarly, 61.4 percent of parents reported that charter schools are safer than district schools and 28.9 believed that they were equally safe. Overall, charter-school parents in North Carolina find that their schools are safer and more structured learning environments than the district school the child would otherwise attend.³⁰

Again, data released by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NC DPI) support parents' perception of the superior safety and disciplinary environment of charter schools. NC DPI's 2005-06 Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions revealed that short-term suspensions in charter schools decreased by 30 percent from 2004-05 to 2005-06.³¹ Specifically, short-term suspensions received by black students in charter schools decreased 34.3 percent, and suspensions received by white students decreased 19.9 percent.

Figure 2. Short-Term Suspension Rates for Male Students, Charter vs. District Schools, (Per 10 Enrolled Students), 2001-06



Among district schools, short-term suspensions in district schools increased 4.3 percent from last year. Short-term suspensions received by black students in district schools increased 2.0 percent, and suspensions received by white students increased 3.9 percent over the same period.³²

For the 2005-06 school year, male students in district schools averaged 3.1 short-term suspensions for every ten students, while male students in charter schools averaged 1.0 suspension for every ten students (see Figure 2).³³ Rates of short-term suspensions among charter schools have been consistently lower than in district schools.

CHARTER SCHOOLS AND MINORITY FAMILIES

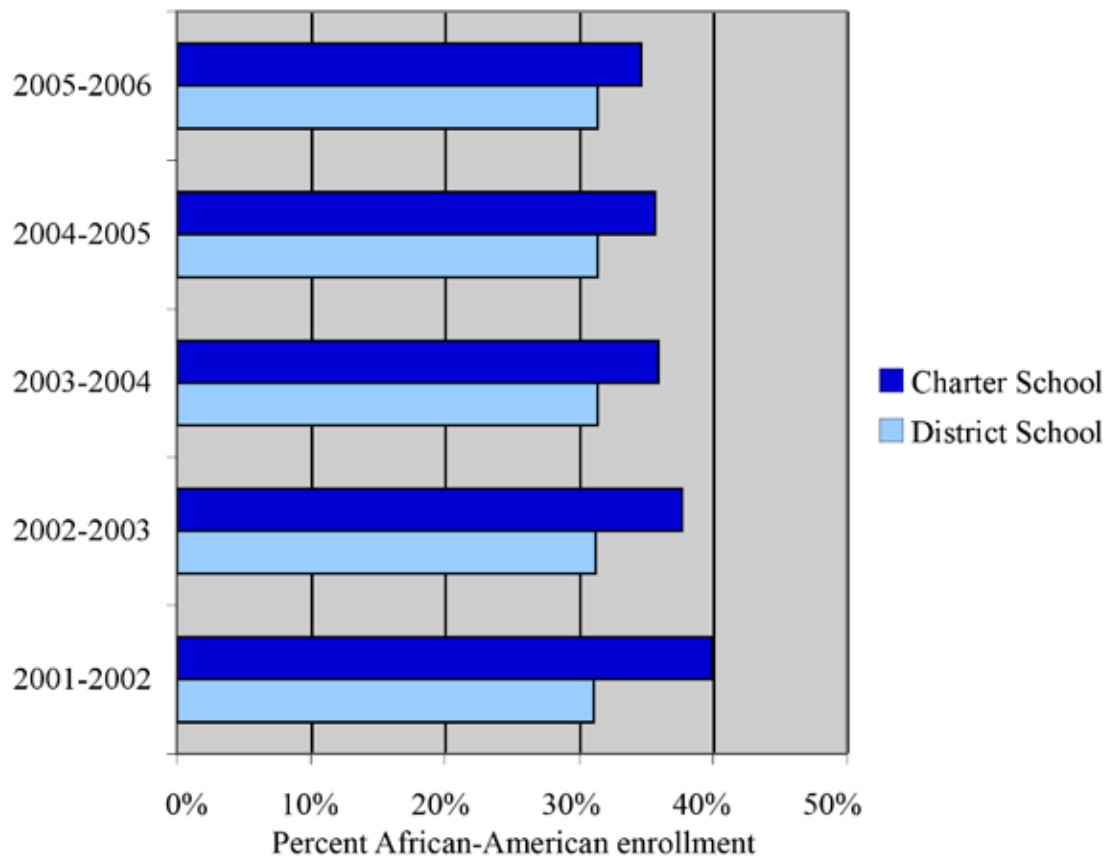
Over the last ten years, minority parents have enthusiastically sought the charter-school option for their children. Currently, district schools serve a slightly higher percentage of minority students than charter schools. As a percentage of the total students population, 43.4 percent of children in district schools are minority students, while charter schools serve a minority population of 41.0 percent. Only recently, specifically during the 2004-

05 school year, did district schools surpass charter schools in the percentage of minority students served. For the first seven years of their existence, charter schools served a higher percentage of minority students than district schools. What caused the shift?³⁴

First, the fast growth of the Hispanic population in North Carolina shifted the percentages in favor of the district schools. A small percentage of Hispanic families have opted for charter schools. Thus, the overall percentage of minority students in district schools has increased faster than charter schools did. Over the last five years, there has been a 72 percent increase in the number of Hispanic students in district schools, adding over 48,000 students to school district rolls.³⁵

As a percentage of all students in district schools, Hispanic students have increased from 5.3 percent to 8.4 percent in the last five years. As a percentage of all students in charter schools, Hispanic students have increased from 2.1 percent to 3.5 percent in the last five years. If Hispanic students are removed from the equation, charter schools still hold a slight advantage over district

Figure 3. Percentage of Black Students Enrolled, Charter vs. District Schools, 2001-06



schools in the number of minority students they serve as a percentage of the whole.³⁶

Second, in the last five years charter schools have opened in counties that have relatively small minority-student populations. Examples include the counties of New Hanover (minority population of 36 percent), Rockingham (33 percent), Orange (31 percent), Cabarrus (29 percent), Gaston (29 percent), Brunswick (29 percent), Union (28 percent), Iredell (27 percent), Swain (27 percent), Stanly (25 percent), Burke (23 percent), Surry (18 percent), Buncombe (17 percent), and Watauga (6 percent) counties.³⁷ As more charter schools opened in areas where the student populations are predominately white, the overall percentage of minority students served by charter schools fell. This is consistent with state enrollment data showing that the beginning of small, yearly declines in charters' minority enrollment started during a period of charter school expansion five years ago.

It is important to note that the State Board of Education did not purposefully approve charter schools in counties with fewer minorities. Instead, it was an effort by the State Board of Education to approve charter schools in counties that did not have a charter school at the time. In an effort to be geographically diverse, the State Board of Education inadvertently made them less racially diverse. Given this fact, the changing racial demographics of charter schools is not a sufficient reason to restrict their growth by retaining the cap of 100 schools. In fact, one important reason to eliminate the cap is to provide more opportunities for black and Hispanic students to attend charter schools that best meet the needs of their families and respective communities.

Despite the slightly lower percentage of minority students, charter schools serve a higher percentage of African-American students than district schools. Charter schools serve a student population

that is 34.6 percent black, while district schools have a black population of 31.4 percent (see Figure 3).³⁸ Like the percentage of minority students, the percentage of black students that attend charter schools has declined slightly because the State Board of Education has approved new charter schools in counties with relatively small minority student populations.

Part of the reason for black flight is that African-American students have been ill served in district schools. According to NC DPI, only 60 percent of black students graduate in four years.³⁹ Furthermore, achievement scores for black students are consistently lower than the state average. In their End of Grade reading and mathematics composite test scores for grades 3 through 8, only 40 percent of black students had a “proficient” score, and only 37 percent of black males had a proficient score. Over 73 percent of white students had a proficient score, and overall, 61 percent of students statewide earned a proficient score on the same tests.⁴⁰ The performance of black students on federal tests is just as regrettable. Among 4th graders, 34 percent of black students lack basic math skills, while 59 percent of black students lack basic reading skills. By the 8th grade, 47 percent of black students lack basic math skills, and 51 percent of black students lack basic reading skills.⁴¹

While graduation rates and test scores are important factors that determine why African American parents have chosen charter schools for their children, they may not be the most important factors that explain black flight to charter schools. Research indicates that factors related to learning conditions, particularly schools and class size, are more important considerations to parents who choose a charter school over the district school assigned to them.

In his research, Michael Fedewa also conducted a statistical analysis to determine if there was a relationship between his initial findings and three independent variables: race, parental income, and parent education level. This analysis found that minority parents placed more value on administrative factors than white parents. These factors included the school’s sports program, extracurricular

activities, technology, facilities, transportation, and food service.

In addition, Fedewa discovered that minority parents place a higher value on academic/instructional factors than other parents. Academic and instructional factors included curriculum, quality of the school administrators, opportunities for parents to participate, schools expectation of parents, quality of teachers, and academic standards. Student-centered factors, including school size, class size, individualized attention, and school accessibility, could not be differentiated by race, education level, and income.

As described above, charter schools provide greater curricular options because the small size of the average charter school opens up greater opportunities for parental involvement and extracurricular activities for students. Further research is required to identify specific reasons why minority parents in North Carolina have chosen to send their children to charter schools. For now, it is most accurate to say that all parents choose charter schools because they are small schools and have small class sizes. These two factors create a learning environment that parents value. Minority parents, in particular, value the administrative and instructional environment that results from small schools and small class sizes. Given the success of charter-school efforts to create the kind of learning environment preferred by minority parents, additional charter schools would continue to draw large numbers of minority parents to them.

QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE STUDIES OF NORTH CAROLINA CHARTER SCHOOLS

While it is admirable that the state’s charter schools maintain small school sizes and low class sizes, a number of critics charge that the academic quality of North Carolina’s charter schools lags behind other schools. The following discussion will compare the apparent achievement gap between students who attend North Carolina’s charter schools and students attending the state’s district schools or charter schools in other states. Put simply, there is no conclusive quantitative evidence that North Carolina charter-school students

lag behind their counterparts in district schools or other charter schools elsewhere.

In addition, a handful of qualitative studies have focused on North Carolina's charter schools and most have concluded that they are inadequate or even harmful. Some academic researchers contend that charter schools engage in authoritarian and racist practices that oppress teachers, students, and minority families. A brief analysis of two representative qualitative studies is also presented below. In general, qualitative research articles, particularly those that claim that North Carolina's charter schools exhibit racist or authoritarian tendencies, are conceptually flawed studies that offer little insight.

THE ACHIEVEMENT QUESTION

Nationwide, charter-school performance meets or exceeds the performance of district schools. According to Bryan C. Hassel and Michelle Godard Terrell, a vast majority of research studies, particularly those that look at change over time in student or school performance, conclude that charter school performance is comparable or better than district schools.⁴² Hassel and Terrell analyzed 33 studies that assess charter-school performance over time and found:

- Sixteen find that overall gains in charter schools were larger than gains in other public schools.
- Seven find charter schools' gains higher in certain significant categories of schools, such as elementary schools, high schools, or schools serving at-risk students.
- Six find comparable gains in charter and traditional public schools.
- Four find that charter schools' overall gains lagged behind.
- Twelve of the 33 studies examine whether individual charter schools improve their performance with age (e.g., after overcoming start-up challenges). Of these, nine find that as charter schools mature, they improve; two

find no significant differences between older and younger charter schools; and one finds that older charter schools perform less well.⁴³

While Hassel and Terrell find that we need better research on charter school achievement, preliminary research findings suggest that charter schools are a reform worth continuing, refining, and expanding.

Despite the generally positive news about charter-school performance, a study released by the National Center for Educational Statistics in August 2006 heightened the debate about the comparative performance of charter and district schools.⁴⁴ This study was a follow-up to a 2003 NCES study that concluded that charter and district school students with the same racial/ethnic background performed equally well on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading and mathematics tests.⁴⁵ The 2006 update came to a different conclusion. This study found that, after adjusting for student characteristics, district schools are outperforming charter schools in reading and mathematics on NAEP exams. The study also found that charter schools not affiliated with a public school district scored significantly lower on average than public charter schools. To opponents of charter schools, the 2006 study suggested that district schools are improving, or the quality of charter schools is declining, or both.

Yet, the 2006 study included some important caveats. First, researchers noted, "the data are obtained from an observational study rather than a randomized experiment, so the estimated effects should not be interpreted in terms of causal relationships."⁴⁶ In other words, charter schools are not necessarily *producing* lower-performing students. It is likely that some parents enrolled their under-performing child in a charter school to escape a district school learning environment that did not adequately serve the needs of their child. Students' low performance could be a remnant from a mediocre public school education.

Researchers had a second major concern closely related to the first. "[S]tudents currently enrolled in charter schools have spent different

amounts of time in one or more such schools.”⁴⁷ Children who spend more time in a charter school, or even in a district school, will likely perform better than those who recently transferred to the school will. Unfortunately, the research model was unable to control for the length of time that students attended the charter school, and thus it is possible that the students’ adjustment period causes a temporary decline in performance that is erased in subsequent years at the school.

One of the earliest studies of North Carolina charter schools was the “North Carolina Charter School Evaluation Report” (2001).⁴⁸ Researchers George W. Noblit and Corbett Dickson found that charter schools lost ground over time, but differences between charter and district school performance was small. In comparing charter and district schools, Noblit and Dickson found charter-school students had a lower level of proficiency on state tests than their counterparts did in district schools. The authors also found that charter schools had a larger achievement gap between white and minority students. Considering that charter-school legislation passed four years prior and the sample was small, the only enduring insight of this study is that the implementation of charter schools in North Carolina was challenging.

As part of a nationwide study of charter schools, “Apples to Apples: An Evaluation of Charter Schools Serving General Student Populations” (2003) by Manhattan Institute researchers Jay P. Greene, Greg Forster, and Marcus A. Winters assessed charter school performance in individual states.⁴⁹ They found that “North Carolina results were the weakest of the five states for which we report separate results.”⁵⁰ Although the outcome was disappointing, they point out that the results were inconclusive because differences between charter and tradition schools were not statistically significant. In other words, charter-school performance in North Carolina was indistinguishable from the performance of district schools.

In an study encompassing 99% of all students in elementary charter schools nationwide, Harvard University professor Caroline Hoxby’s study “Achievement in Charter Schools and Regular

Public Schools in the United States: Understanding the Differences” (2004) concluded that charter students were 5.2 percent more likely to be proficient in reading and were 3.2 percent more likely to be proficient in math on their state’s exams.⁵¹ In addition, the longer a charter school was in operation, the greater the advantage the charter school student had over the student in the district school closest to the charter school. Hoxby also found that charter schools in areas with a high percentage of poor or Hispanic students outperformed the neighboring district school. In general, charter schools were performing much better than district schools on a number of key measures.

Hoxby’s evaluation of charter schools in North Carolina was less favorable. She said, “North Carolina stands out as the only state in which charter students are statistically significantly less likely to be proficient in both reading and math. The North Carolina charter school disadvantage is 4 percent in both subjects.”⁵²

In “Reassessing North Carolina’s Charter Schools: A Note on Caroline Hoxby’s Findings” (2005), Craig M. Newmark, an economics professor at North Carolina State University, pointed out that Hoxby did not account for important differences between the student populations of charter and district schools in North Carolina.⁵³ In particular, Hoxby failed to factor in the higher fraction of gifted students in public schools. She also used a sample that included charter schools, but no district schools, that served at-risk students. When accounting for these differences, Newmark found that there was *no statistically significant difference* between North Carolina charter school and district school performance.

The most quoted study of charter school performance in North Carolina is Robert Bifulco and Helen F. Ladd’s “The Impacts of Charter Schools on Student Achievement: Evidence from North Carolina” (2004).⁵⁴ Bifulco, professor at the University of Connecticut, and Ladd, professor at Duke University, concluded that achievement gains in charter schools were smaller than those in district schools, even in schools that have been in operation longer. Furthermore, they argue that

competition from charter schools did not improve performance at district schools.

Another report by Newmark, “Another Look at the Effect of Charter Schools on Student Test Scores in North Carolina” (2005), found several shortcomings in Bifulco and Ladd’s study.⁵⁵ According to Newmark, Bifulco and Ladd failed to take into account student characteristics like gifted students, were unwilling to distinguish between charter schools serving at-risk students and regular charter schools, and were reluctant to acknowledge that their statistical model could not account for some of the differences between charter and district schools. Interestingly, Newmark questioned whether charter schools have the same motivation to increase state test scores as their district school counterparts do. As reform-minded schools, charter schools may not emphasize state tests, providing an advantage to public schools that Bifulco and Ladd could not account for in their study.

One important study shifts the debate by arguing that charter schools actually improve student performance in nearby district schools. Researchers from UNC, the University of South Florida, and East Carolina University found that competition from charter schools raised the performance of nearby district schools substantially.⁵⁶ In “Does School Choice Increase School Quality?” (2003), George M. Holmes, Jeff Desimone, and Nicholas G. Rupp concluded that charter-school competition raised the performance of students at district schools who were at or near the cutoff score for grade-level proficiency. The authors concluded that school choice is a more cost-effective alternative than lowering class size. Lowering class size increased student performance by 0.36 percentage points, while school choice increased student performance by 1.0 percentage point.

A RACIST INSTITUTION?

Perhaps the most unusual study of North Carolina’s charter schools was Luis Urrieta Jr.’s “Heritage Charter School: A Case of Conservative Local White Activism Through a Postmodern Framework.”⁵⁷ Based on a qualitative case study of one charter school in North Carolina, Urrieta, a

professor of education at the University of Colorado, argues that white activists in a rural North Carolina community used appeals to history, choice, community, and social identity to maintain a charter school that is guilty of *de facto* segregation. According to the author, this was not just an educational problem but was a social problem, as “predominantly white charter schools display characteristics that are revealing of a systemically racist and classist society.”⁵⁸ Put simply, the pseudonymous Heritage Charter School was an example of the way that local communities, mostly conservatives in those communities, use charter schools to accumulate wealth and cultural capital that will perpetuate the oppression of minority communities.

Urrieta based his conclusion on what he believed to be the school’s exclusionary admissions practices. While he is aware that admissions policies to maintain an all-white school are illegal, Urrieta does not acknowledge that charter schools in North Carolina are required to use a lottery system to ensure fair admissions. He also discounts the schools’ successful effort to recruit minority students, suggesting that this effort was a ruse. Urrieta’s belief that charter schools like Heritage are able to “exclude or effectively ‘select’ non-White students” does not hold up, especially when one considers the large number of minority students that continue to choose charter schools. As mentioned above, the percentage of minority students that attend charter schools is only slightly lower than district schools, while the proportion of African-American students is higher in charter schools than district schools.

AN AUTHORITARIAN INSTITUTION?

“The Charter School Initiative as a Case of Back to the Future” by Amy L. Anderson, a doctoral student in education at UNC Chapel Hill, conducts a qualitative study of a North Carolina charter school to argue that “[c]harter schools can be seen as a response to contemporary cultural shifts in this country.”⁵⁹ The cultural shift features a “new consumerism” that emphasizes market philosophy and a “neo-conservative orientation” that

emphasizes a traditional, “back to basics” approach to education. The charter school’s corporation model suppresses the freedom of faculty and staff who learn to take orders from the top.

In the end, those who believe that market principles can improve public education, according to Anderson, are exploiting the charter school movement to “take schools back to a future that reinscribes traditional neo-conservative principles.”⁶⁰ Anderson suggests that the wealthy, as well as “neo-conservatives,” use charter schools to further their own social and political goals, while creating schools “crafted in the Wal-Mart image.” In sum, Anderson believes that charter schools perpetuate the corporate model in education and erode equality, social justice, and freedom.

Anderson draws upon an academic theory, the “postmodern paradox,” which argues that charter schools create more losers than winners. The postmodern paradox was formulated out of a qualitative study of a handful of charter schools in California, and a number of academic theorists have generalized the model for use elsewhere.⁶¹ For Anderson, the losers were the faculty, staff, and students of the North Carolina charter school who unknowingly suffered, but did not object to, the corporate model. The winners are “neo-conservatives” that further their goal of introducing corporate and consumer-oriented principles into the public education system. According to these theorists, charter schools, as a product of the postmodern paradox, exacerbate inequalities and limit the state’s ability to cultivate diversity, multiculturalism, and racial integration within the government school system.⁶²

Anderson concludes that corporate and consumer-oriented principles “have questionable merit for children in an increasingly multicultural world.”⁶³ Unfortunately, she is caught in a paradox of her own making. The deterministic nature of the postmodern paradox, being the inevitable product of globalization and the triumph of capitalism, explains why Anderson cannot recommend the abolition of the charter schools or greater state intervention to correct the injustices that charter schools wreak on teachers, parents, and children.

Instead, Anderson timidly concludes that corporate and consumer principles have “questionable value,” a sentiment that applies to her research as well.

QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH STUDIES: A CONCLUSION

The quantitative research on charter-school performance in North Carolina is inconclusive. At worst, the academic performance of the average charter school is equal to that of an average district school. Unfortunately, researchers have yet to address the many methodological concerns present in studies of charter schools and student performance, but we have not heard the last of this issue. Researchers will continue to focus on North Carolina’s charter schools, especially because opponents of charter schools use North Carolina as an example of the supposed failure of the charter-school model. As charter-school research becomes more rigorous, we can more accurately compare student performance between charter and district schools.

As for the qualitative research, Urrieta and Anderson’s articles fall into the category of theory-laden scholarship that, in the words of Frederick Hess of the American Enterprise Institute and Laura LoGerfo of the Urban Institute, “promotes narrow values,” and “spouts incomprehensible nonsense.”⁶⁴ Hess and LoGerfo point out that this kind of scholarship ignores important questions of student performance and the achievement gap. As Hess and LoGerfo say,

*Given the challenges facing our schools, and the fact that most of these researchers are supported and employed by [or attend] public institutions, it might make sense for educational researchers to devote attention to analyzing public policy, improving teaching and learning, and addressing the practical concerns of parents and teachers.*⁶⁵

It is difficult to imagine that Urrieta and Anderson’s articles further any of these important goals. Instead, both qualitative studies use fashionable theories to cater to their leftist colleagues by reaffirming the values they already share.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Charter schools have been an integral part of North Carolina's system of public schools for 10 years, but restrictive and outdated laws and regulations hinder their ability to make further contributions to our public school system. Lawmakers and state education officials must work to strengthen our system of charter schools by implementing the following reform measures:

1. Remove the statutory limit of 100 charter schools to satisfy the public's demand for more educational options.
2. Allow charter schools that demonstrate academic and financial success to franchise themselves, thereby meeting the demand for seats without undertaking the time-consuming application and approval process.
3. Demand that the General Assembly give parents an "Education Bill of Rights" that attaches funding to the student and gives parents the right to send their children to any public, charter, or private school in the state.
4. Authorize charter schools to use a norm-referenced test, such as the Stanford 10 or the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, in lieu of state end-of-grade and end-of-course tests.
5. Remove the requirement that charter schools have 75% of charter school teachers in elementary school licensed and 50% in middle and high school teachers licensed.
6. Permit counties to contribute to their charter schools' capital needs.
7. Reconfigure the distribution formula for the North Carolina Education Lottery, allowing lottery money to flow proportionately to children in charter schools.
8. Require that additional charter-school regulations be approved by a majority of the boards of directors of all existing charter schools.

As institutions of excellence, innovation, and choice, charter schools must be allowed to flourish in every county in North Carolina. Unfortunately, charter school laws and regulations fail to distribute this opportunity equally to thousands of parents and children across the state. For the 2006-07 school year, only 48 out of 115 school systems will have a charter school in operation. In eastern North Carolina, 28 counties share nine charter schools. Even worse, there are no charter schools in the fourteen counties in the northeastern corner of the state.

If the North Carolina Constitution truly grants citizens a "general and uniform" system of public education, then it must also guarantee the right of all parents to choose a charter school for their child.⁶⁶

NOTES

1. Several bills have been introduced in the 2007 legislative session to raise or remove the charter school cap. They include HB 30, "Raise the Cap on Charter Schools"; HB 252, "Remove the Cap on the Number of Charter Schools"; HB 416, "Remove the Cap on the Number of Charter Schools"; SB 39, "Raise the Cap on Charter Schools"; and SB 591, "Raise the Cap on the Number of Charter Schools."
2. North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NC DPI), "Charter School Waiting List, 2007," March 2007.
3. Michael Biesecker, "Students' fate rides on luck of the draw," *The News & Observer (N&O)*, Raleigh, March 11, 2007, www.newsobserver.com/146/story/552233.html.
4. Dale Gibson, "Luddy's school makes case for more charters," *Triangle Business Journal*, Feb. 16, 2007.
5. Lena Warmack, "2,500 Apply to New School," *The Charlotte Observer*, April 4, 2007, www.charlotte.com/115/story/74039.html.
6. The Center for Education Reform, "National Charter School Data: New School Estimates 2006-2007," September 2006, www.edreform.com.
7. Phi Delta Kappa, "The 38th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools," September 2006, www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kpollpdf.htm.
8. National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, "Poll Finds Broad Support for Public Charter Schools," May 2, 2006, www.publiccharters.org/content/article/detail/1041.
9. The "2005-06 Public Schools Facility Needs

Assessment,” published by NC DPI, estimated that North Carolina has \$9.8 billion in school facilities needs over the next five years. This includes \$4.3 billion for new schools, \$2.3 billion for additions, \$2.2 billion for renovations, \$761 million for furniture and equipment, and \$194 million for land.

10. See Sanera, Michael, “Buildings Don’t Teach Students: North Carolina Should Concentrate on What Goes on Inside the Buildings,” John Locke Foundation *Spotlight* No. 311, Feb. 27, 2007, www.johnlocke.org/spotlights/display_story.html?id=160.

11. John William Pope Civitas Institute, “July 2006 Decision Maker Poll,” 2006, jwpcivitasinstitute.org/keylinks/polls.html.

12. “*News & Observer* and WRAL-TV Poll,” May 2006, www.newsobserver.com/102/story/439243.html.

13. John Locke Foundation, “Wake Voters Reject Bonds That Raise Taxes,” April 26, 2006, www.johnlocke.org/press_releases/display_story.html?id=147.

14. John William Pope Civitas Institute, “January 2006 Decision Maker Poll,” 2006, jwpcivitasinstitute.org/keylinks/polls.html.

15. John William Pope Civitas Institute, “July 2005 Decision Maker Poll,” 2005, jwpcivitasinstitute.org/keylinks/polls.html.

16. Fedewa, Michael J. “The North Carolina Charter School Choice: Selection Factors and Parental Decision Making.” Ph.D. Dissertation, North Carolina State University, 2005.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 54-57.

19. Office of the Governor, State of North Carolina, “North Carolina School Report Cards,” March 2007, www.ncreportcards.org/src. Note: State average for a comparable school is the number of students in schools with similar grade ranges.

20. Cotton, Kathleen, “New Small Learning Communities: Findings from Recent Literature,” Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2001.

21. Cotton, Kathleen. “School Size, School Climate, and Student Performance,” Close-Up Report #20, Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1996.

22. Fedewa, pp. 54-57. Fedewa found that a majority of respondents found charter schools to have more parental involvement than the district schools their children would otherwise attend. Around 60 percent of parents found charter schools to have more parental involvement, while 34 percent found no difference between the charter school and district school in this area. Only 6 percent of parents found more parental involvement in a district school than their charter school of choice.

23. Office of the Governor, State of North Carolina, “North Carolina School Report Cards,” February 2007, www.ncreportcards.org/src. These averages do not include class sizes for Sterling Montessori Charter School, because the Report Cards do not account for combined classes.

24. NC DPI, Middle Grades Task Force, “Last Best Chance 2004: Educating Young Adolescents in the 21st Century,” Fall 2004.

25. Fedewa, pp. 54-57. Fedewa reported that 74.2 percent of respondents said that students receive more individualized attention from teachers in a charter school than the district school the child would otherwise attend. Only 18.8 percent said it was the same, and 7 percent said that the district school was better at providing individualized attention than the district school. Parents find individualized attention to be one of the most important features of charter school. In fact, 81.7 percent of parents said it was a very important factor in their decision to choose a charter school, which is closely related to the 72 percent who said that class size was a very important factor. See Fedewa, pp. 49-50.

26. See “North Carolina School Report Cards” at www.ncreportcards.org/src for the respective school.

27. Stoops, Terry, “Honey, I Shrunk the Class!: How Reducing Class Size Fails to Raise Student Achievement,” John Locke Foundation *Spotlight* No. 276, Jan. 10, 2006, www.johnlocke.org/spotlights/display_story.html?id=123. See also Eric A. Hanushek, “The Evidence on Class Size,” Occasional Paper Number 98-1, W. Allen Wallis Institute of Political Economy, University of Rochester, February 1998.

28. Fedewa, pp. 49-50. In a rating of charter school features that are important to parents, 76 percent responded that curriculum was a very important factor.

29. North Carolina General Statutes, Chapter 115C-238.29A, Part 6A. “Charter Schools,” www.ncga.state.nc.us/gascripts/Statutes/StatutesTOC.pl, accessed March 2007.

30. Fedewa, pp. 54-56.

31. NC DPI, “Annual Study of Suspensions and Expulsions, 2005-2006,” April 2007. The format of the report makes comparisons between district and charter schools difficult. Only short-term suspensions are used because the study inadequately reports long-term suspensions and expulsions for charter schools. “Because the numbers of charter school suspensions and expulsions are relatively small, some graphs and tables depicted for LEAs in previous sections are not reproduced for charter schools. Specifically, some data regarding multiple long-term suspensions and rates of long-term suspensions and expulsions are not included due to small counts” (p. 37).

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-13 and 37-41.

33. Only male student rates are reported here because suspension rates among males, in both charter and district

schools, are much higher than rates among females.

34. Calculations based on data from NC DPI, “North Carolina Public Schools Statistical Profile 2006,” author, pp. 15-17.

35. Calculations based on data from NC DPI, “North Carolina Public Schools Statistical Profiles [2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006].” See “Pupils in Membership by Race and Sex” table for each publication.

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Op. cit.*, note 34, pp. 15-17.

38. *Ibid.*

39. NC DPI, “Cohort Graduation Rate,” www.dpi.state.nc.us/newsroom/news/2006-07/20070228-01, Feb. 28, 2007.

40. NC DPI, “Disaggregated State, School System (LEA) and School Performance Data for 2004-2006,” disag.ncpublicschools.org/2006, accessed March 2006.

41. National Center for Education Statistics, “North Carolina’s Results on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP),” www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/policies/naep/2, accessed Jan. 2007.

42. Hassel, Bryan C. and Terrell, Michelle Godard, “Charter School Achievement: What We Know, 3rd Edition” National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, October 2006.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

44. Braun, Henry; Jenkins, Frank; and Grigg, Wendy; “A Closer Look at Charter Schools Using Hierarchical Linear Modeling,” (NCES 2006-460), U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2006.

45. National Center for Education Statistics, “America’s Charter Schools: Results From the NAEP 2003 Pilot Study,” (NCES 2005-456), U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Washington, D.C., 2004.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 5 – 6.

48. Noblit, George and Corbett, Dickson, “North Carolina Charter School Evaluation Report,” NC DPI and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2001.

49. Greene, Jay P.; Forster, Greg; and Winters, Marcus A.; “Apples to Apples: An Evaluation of Charter Schools Serving General Student Populations,” Manhattan Institute Education *Working Paper*, July 2003, www.manhattan-institute.org/html/ewp_01.htm.

50. *Ibid.*

51. Hoxby, Caroline M., “Achievement in Charter Schools and Regular Public Schools in the United States:

Understanding the Differences,” National Bureau of Economic Research, December 2004.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

53. Newmark, Craig, “Reassessing North Carolina’s Charter Schools: A Note on Caroline Hoxby’s Findings,” John Locke Foundation *Policy Report*, July 18, 2005, www.johnlocke.org/policy_reports/display_story.html?id=58.

54. Bifulco, Robert and Ladd, Helen F., “The Impacts of Charter Schools on Student Achievement: Evidence From North Carolina,” Chapel Hill, NC: Terry Sanford Institute of Policy, Working Papers Series SAN04-01, 2004.

55. Newmark, Craig, “Another Look at the Effect of Charter Schools on Student Test Scores in North Carolina,” John Locke Foundation Policy Report, April 11, 2005, www.johnlocke.org/policy_reports/display_story.html?id=56.

56. Holmes, George M.; DeSimone, Jeffrey; and Rupp, Nicholas G.; “Does School Choice Increase School Quality?” National Bureau of Economic Research, *Working Paper* No. W9683, May 2003, ssrn.com/abstract=406055.

57. Urrieta Jr., Luis, “Heritage Charter School: A Case of Conservative Local White Activism through a Postmodern Framework,” *Educational Foundations*, Vol. 19, Nos. 1-2, pp. 13-31, Winter-Spring 2005.

58. *Ibid.*

59. Anderson Amy L., “The Charter School Initiative as a Case of Back to the Future,” *Educational Foundations*, Vol. 19, Nos. 1-2, pp. 33-50, Winter-Spring 2005.

60. *Ibid.*

61. Wells, Amy Stuart; Lopez, A.; Scott, J.; and Holme, J.J.; “Charter Schools as Postmodern Paradox: Rethinking Social Stratification in an Age of Deregulate School Choice,” *Harvard Educational Review*, 69(2), 172-204, 1999.

62. Even if this conclusion is valid, however, one cannot generalize a qualitative study of one charter school to all others.

63. Anderson, p. 49.

64. Frederick Hess and Laura LoGerfo, “HessLo Blog,” hesslo.blogspot.com/2006/04/hesslo.html, Monday, April 10, 2006. This was observed at the 2006 American Educational Research Association (AERA) meeting.

65. *Ibid.*

66. See the North Carolina Constitution, Article IX, Section 2, Part 1: “Uniform system of schools. (1) General and uniform system: term. The General Assembly shall provide by taxation and otherwise for a general and uniform system of free public schools, which shall be maintained at least nine months in every year, and wherein equal opportunities shall be provided for all students.”

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*“To prejudge other men’s notions
before we have looked into them
is not to show their darkness
but to put out our own eyes.”*

JOHN LOCKE (1632–1704)

Author, *Two Treatises of Government* and
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