TO: Mary Ann Blankenship, Mary Ruble

FR: Chelsea Fannin

RE: Charter Schools

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**WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS:**

* Students:
  + Demographics:
    - Boston Charter Study-- compared with Traditional Public Schools (Kathleen J. Skinner)
      * Overserving African Americans
        + (C- 60%, TPSs-39%)
      * Underserving Hispanics and other minorities
        + (C-24%, TPSs- 38%)
      * Serving higher percentage of students ineligible for free/reduced lunch (richest)
        + (C- 30%, TPSs-26%)
      * Serving higher percentage of students eligible for reduced lunch (poor)
        + (C- 18%, TPSs- 9%)
      * Serving much lower percentage of students on free lunch (poorest)
        + (C-52%, TPSs-65%)
      * Underserving special education students: those they are serving have mild disabilities and can function in a classroom with regular education students
      * Virtually no English Language Learners (ELL)
    - Government Accountability Office (Stephanie Banchero)
      * Charters not enrolling as high a portion of special education students as TPSs despite law to take almost all disabled students wishing to enroll
        + (C- 8.2%, TPSs-11.2%)
  + Barriers:
    - Students *selected* through a lottery system, but students *accepted* based on parent/student visits, interviews, parental behavior contracts, acceptance of rigid discipline codes, etc. (Kathleen J. Skinner)
      * Parent Commitment Contract:
        + Provide my child with several hours of homework time, check that homework is completed, and limit TV and other distractions
        + Ensure my child arrives on time and in uniform every day child is healthy
        + Make arrangements so my child can remain at school for an extra hour on weeknights and on Saturday mornings if necessary
        + Monitor child’s progress and return weekly progress reports
        + Interact professionally with staff by responding promptly to any questions and concerns
        + Provide instructional materials for my child
        + Support school by making arrangements if my child receives out-of-school suspension
        + Agree to volunteer at least once a year
    - Applications: (School District of Philadelphia)
      * Extremely long
      * Online only
      * Only available 1 day
      * Not in all languages
      * Requiring very sensitive information (test scores, U.S. citizenship status, discipline records, household income, sexual orientation, etc.)
      * Requiring numerous references
        + EX: 3 references with one religious or community member
  + Achievement:
    - Massachusetts: (Kathleen J. Skinner)
      * ELL: no benefit
      * Special Education: significant loss in math, no improvement in reading
      * Poverty: significant gains in math, but no improvement in reading
    - Stanford University Charter Study: (Kathleen J. Skinner)
      * **17** percent of Charters outperform TPSs
      * **37** percent of Charter students have significantly poorer achievement
      * **45** percent of Charter students are performing equal to or lower than TPSs
    - Overall: (Strengthening Charter School Policies)
      * Underperforming Charter Schools outnumber excelling Charter Schools **2:1**
  + Attrition: (Kathleen J. Skinner)
    - Push Factors: practices used by schools to push students toward the door; school policies, climate or structure that alienates and/or frustrates students so they end up leaving before graduation
      * *Attendance policy*: *if student absent (excused or unexcused) more than 6.5% of year, which is approximately 12 days, then student must repeat grade*
    - Drop Out Factories: schools in which **60 percent or fewer** freshman graduate in four years
    - For every **five** freshman there are only **two** remaining by the time enter senior year, compared with **5-4 in TPSs**
    - Over time the majority of students who won lottery of admission leave and are not being replaced by students on the waiting list
    - Studies indicate that behavioral and academic disengagement are the leading causes *within the control of the school* that lead to students leaving
* Teachers: (Gary Miron)
  + Qualifications:
    - No requirement that Charter School teachers be certified
    - Generally Charter School teachers have fewer years experience
    - Very different hiring practices
  + Retention: Not a lot of research in this area--
    - Charters and private schools lose teachers at higher rate
      * (C- 25%; TPSs-14%)
      * Teachers more likely to teach for a few years and leave profession
      * Charters more common in urban areas, which tend to have less qualified teachers and less desirable teaching conditions, leading to higher turnover
  + Working Conditions:
    - Class size similar to TPSs
    - Stronger sense of community
    - More autonomy
    - Less influence in school governance
    - Less satisfied with physical facilities
    - Critical of instructional planning time
    - Longer hours and longer year
    - Less protection
    - Salary:
      * Varies
      * Generally less since not required to follow the minimum salary schedule
      * More flexibility with pay
* Schools & Communities: (Gary Miron, unless noted otherwise)
  + Presumptions: though little evidence to support--
    - Students will shift from lower to higher productivity schools raising the entire education systems efficiency
    - Re-sorting of students will generate peer effects on student achievement
    - TPSs will respond in particular ways
  + Charter Schools are dividing communities
    - Attracting motivated students, funding and effective teachers
      * Diverting public funds away from TPSs
      * Costing more in taxes
  + Education Management Organizations (EMOs) & Charter Management Organizations (CMOs):
    - EMOs: for profit entities
    - CMOs: nonprofit entities
      * KIPP, Achievement First, Uncommon Schools, etc.
    - Neither have local ties to community
    - Local contexts not taken into account
  + Parents choose schools for a variety of reasons even though they do not always have correct/complete information
    - Location
    - Extra Curricular Activities
    - Disciplinary Policies
    - Test Scores
  + Charter School Marketing Strategies (Julie F. Mead)
    - Charters advising parents that school is “not a good fit” for their special education or ELL student, “counseling out” disabled students
    - Marketing only to a specific segment of population, discouraging/scaring off other segments
* Goals: (Gary Miron)
  + “Innovation:”
    - In the beginning--
      * Move away from a “one size fits all” public education model by...
      * Introducing healthy competition, which would...
      * Lead to forced “innovation” across the board thereby...
      * Providing an alternative to families who could not afford private school and that would...
      * Result in higher achievement for all students
    - In practice--
      * Innovative employment practices, marketing strategies, and application procedures
        + Cyber Schools: innovative delivery mechanism, though not necessarily innovative content
      * Not innovative in teaching methods or classroom practices
      * Pressure to conform and “teach the test”
    - Innovations need to be replicable with some mechanism to facilitate the spread of the practice
      * Policy borrowing an issue (have to look at local contexts, etc.)
    - Other Innovations-- “choice” is an important concept for parents, still need alternatives
      * Magnet Programs
      * Intra/Inter District choice plans
* Funding: (Bruce D. Baker et al.)
  + Great Lakes Study:
    - Compares the spending of Charter Schools with the TPSs the children would have attended in New York, Ohio and Texas
    - Accounts for differences in grade levels, and total enrollment
    - Acknowledges that TPSs and Charters do not operate the same way, and cannot be adequately compared
    - Also acknowledges discrepancy in data (inflated statistics, etc.)
      * Funding Mechanisms:
        + Public Subsidies--

Direct: state provides funding for independent charters

Indirect: state money goes to host district, which is then passed on to the charters

* + - * + Private Contributions--

Varies widely

Directly to charters

Local school districts also receive private contributions, although on a much smaller scale

* + - * Findings:
        + New York:

Outspend similar district schools per pupil by 5-30%

Per pupil spending differences in Middle Schools associated with differences in special education population

* + - * + Ohio:

Spends 10-30% less per pupil than similar district schools

Charters serve relatively more economically disadvantaged students, but concentrated in poorer urban areas of state

Appears that Charters receive fewer private contributions

* + - * + Texas:

Outspend similar district schools per pupil by

5-30%

* Also serve relatively more economically disadvantaged students, and located in poorer urban areas of state
* Variation in funding formulas, recently changed
* Elementary charters tend to spend less
* Overall:
* Charters enroll fewer students than TPSs
* Smaller schools tend to spend more per pupil
* Higher poverty schools are spending on average only slightly more than those with lower poverty
* Schools with higher number of children with disabilities are spending more per pupil
* Per pupil spending is inequitable and unpredictable

**WHAT OTHER STATES ARE DOING:**

* Alabama:
  + One of the most vocal states opposed to charter schools
  + Many legislators from both parties have expressed doubt after learning more about charter schools
  + Many school districts in Alabama have passed resolutions declaring opposition to charter schools
  + AEA emphasizing the negative impact charter schools would have on the large rural population
  + Survey: conducted by AEA of 574 likely voters--
    - First questions based on voters knowledge at the time:
      * **49%** believed they did not know enough about charter schools to vote
      * **35 %** supported charter schools
      * **16%** opposed
    - Second set of questions based on voters knowledge after reading impartial information on charter schools:
      * **12%** still believed they did not know enough to make an informed decision
      * **39%** supported
      * **49%** of voters opposed charter schools
    - Questions asked:
      * Lack of certification requirements
      * Diverting public school funds
      * Admission policies
      * Lack of accountability
      * Less responsive to the community
      * Anyone can apply to make charter school
      * Not required to pay minimum salary schedule
      * Potential for legal problems
      * More autonomy
* Montana:
  + Vocal opposition from education unions
* Nebraska:
  + Chair of Education Committee opposes
  + “Focus Schools” (state supported magnet schools instead of charters)
* North Dakota:
  + Vocal opposition from education unions
  + President’s message in publication, etc.
* South Dakota:
  + Demand for Charters lower than in other states as the TPSs perform well
  + The only push for Charters is coming from Native American population since tend to struggle in TPSs
* West Virginia:
  + “Teacher led innovation zones”
* Washington:
  + Repealed charter school legislation 5 years ago, but new legislation proposed regularly
  + Voters have rejected charter schools numerous times (referendums)
  + Research in Washington indicates that charter school and public school failures are largely explained by non-school factors (family income)
  + Testimony from former charter school teachers
  + Informing the public through radio and television advertisements in various languages
  + Other “school choice” options such as an extended day model in certain districts
* Vermont:
  + No information, but does not seem to be a real concern yet

**WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS:**

* Educating the Public: (Gary Miron, unless noted otherwise)
  + Negative Research:
    - Indicating that Charters perform similarly or worse than TPSs
      * EX: states with permissive laws and lots of charters are less likely to see positive results (OH, MI, AZ, TX) (Charter Schools Proceed Deliberately)
  + Mixed Research:
    - Either large gains/losses in some charter schools are offset by losses/gains in other charter schools yielding mixed achievement impact OR...
    - Achievement impact is consistent across charters, but a very small impact
  + No research:
    - Suburban areas
    - Rural areas
  + Weak research:
    - Public debate has focused on invalidated research
      * EX: number of students that have dropped out are not included in graduation rates/college acceptance rates in Boston
  + Scandals: (Strengthening Charter School Policies)
    - Especially with cyber schools
    - Inflated Statistics
      * EX: TX misreported Charter information and cost public $9 million in tax dollars
  + Competition:
    - Education is not comparable to the market
    - TPSs are not improving
  + Other:
    - “Charter Schools are experiments, parents are taking a risk”
    - Education historians caution that “classroom practice”-technical core of the educational enterprise- is the area most resistant to change
    - Lax oversight (Charter Schools Proceed Deliberately)
* Other Options:
  + Legal Ramifications: (Gary Miron, unless noted otherwise)
    - Religion Clause
      * Separation of church & state issues (private school conversions)
    - Discrimination & Due Process
    - Education Clause
      * Generally unsuccessful with Charters, but successful with voucher programs
    - Special Education
      * Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
    - Statutory Construction

* + - Adopt set of rebuttable legal presumptions that trigger greater scrutiny and accountability (Julie F. Mead)
  + Legislative Changes: (Strengthening Charter School Policies & Charter Schools Proceed Deliberately, unless noted otherwise)
    - Caps
    - Limited duration
      * 5 years
    - Clear renewal and revocation procedures (Julie F. Mead)
      * Renewals denied where attrition rate matches or exceeds TPS (Kathleen J. Skinner)
      * Procedures should reflect commitment to equal opportunity education
    - Oversight by educational organizations
    - State audits
    - Subject to greater scrutiny and accountability:
      * Health/safety
      * Public records/open meetings
      * Licensure/certification
      * Financing
      * Labor relations
      * Civil Rights
      * Student Assessment
* Application process: (Strengthening Charter School Policies & Charter Schools Proceed Deliberately, unless noted otherwise)
* Initially: require potential charters to-- (Julie F. Mead)
* Provide detailed recruitment plans targeting diverse student applicant pool
* Address local contextual factors
* Develop disciplinary codes with a focus on positive interventions and support (prevent push out strategies)
* Transparency:
* Public hearings before charter granted
* Publish student attrition rates by demographics
* Charters not granted:
* Private for profit entities
* Home schools
* Cyber schools
* Private school conversions
* Charters only granted if proposal offers an educational experience that is qualitatively different from what is already offered
* No diversion of resources:
* School board has option of denying application that could financially harm the school district
* Districts not required to provide extra funding for start up charter
* Access:
* Must provide access to all students
* Students should not be involuntarily assigned
* Employment must be voluntary
* Require that Charters fill vacancies with those on waiting list
  + Cooperation: (Strengthening Charter School Policies)
    - * Charters, TPSs and private schools working together
      * Hostile political climate does not foster trust
      * Start with teachers
  + Decentralization and deregulatory reforms in TPSs (Strengthening Charter School Policies)

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