

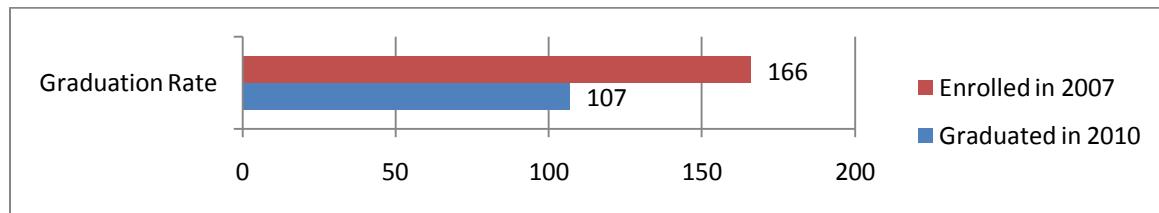
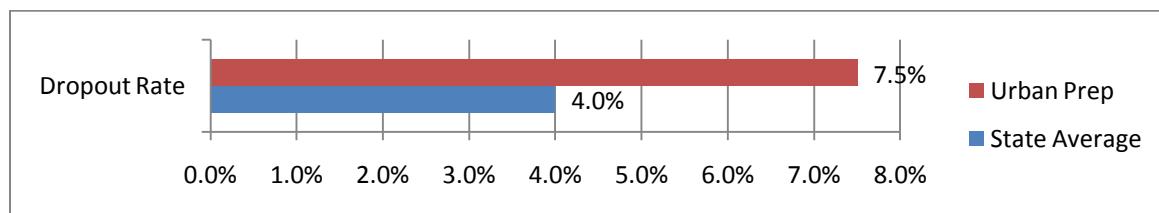
Charter schools kick out kids who don't perform well

Charters claim to accept all students, but they expel students who perform poorly and intentionally screen out special needs students by requiring parents of special needs students to sign waivers saying they understand that the charter school will not provide special education services for their child. And yet charter schools still perform worse than regular public schools who accept the students being exited from these charter schools.



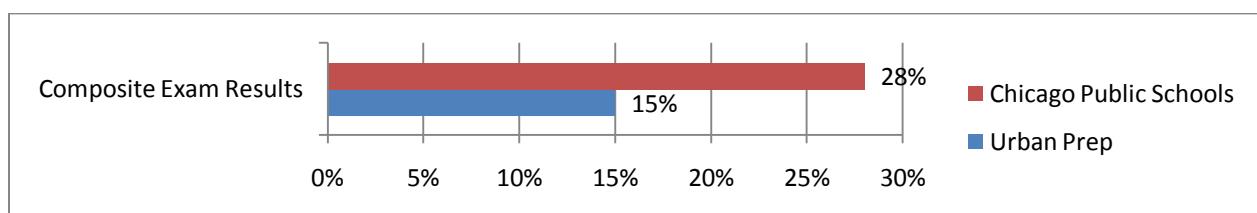
The Poster Child of Charter Schools

Behind the Pretty Picture are the REAL NUMBERS!



“According to the Illinois Interactive School Report Card, there were 166 freshmen enrolled in 2007, Urban Prep’s first year. Of these original freshmen, the Tribune reports that 107 are graduating seniors. This yields an overall school graduation rate of 64%, or nearly 6 points lower than the average district rate of 69.8%.

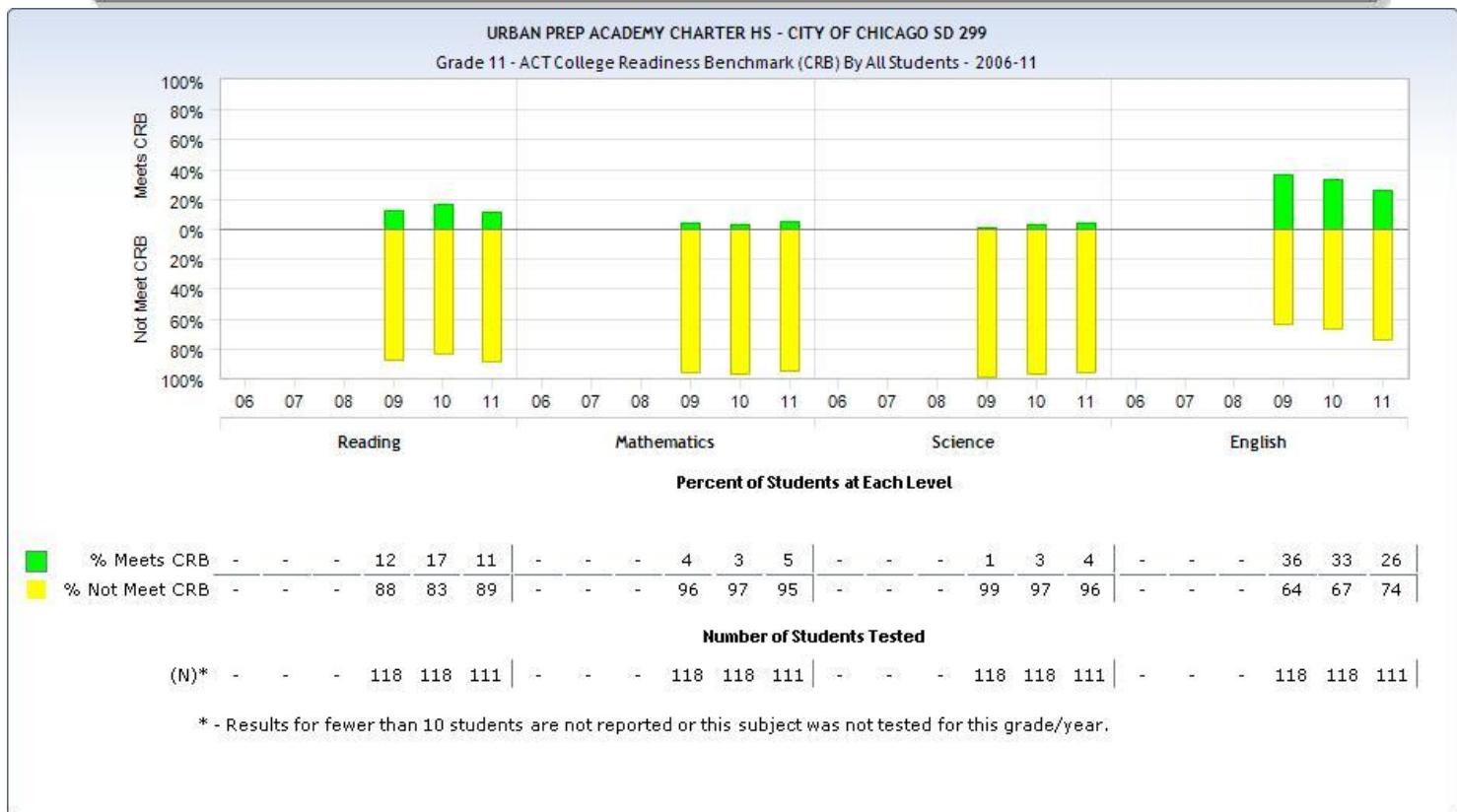
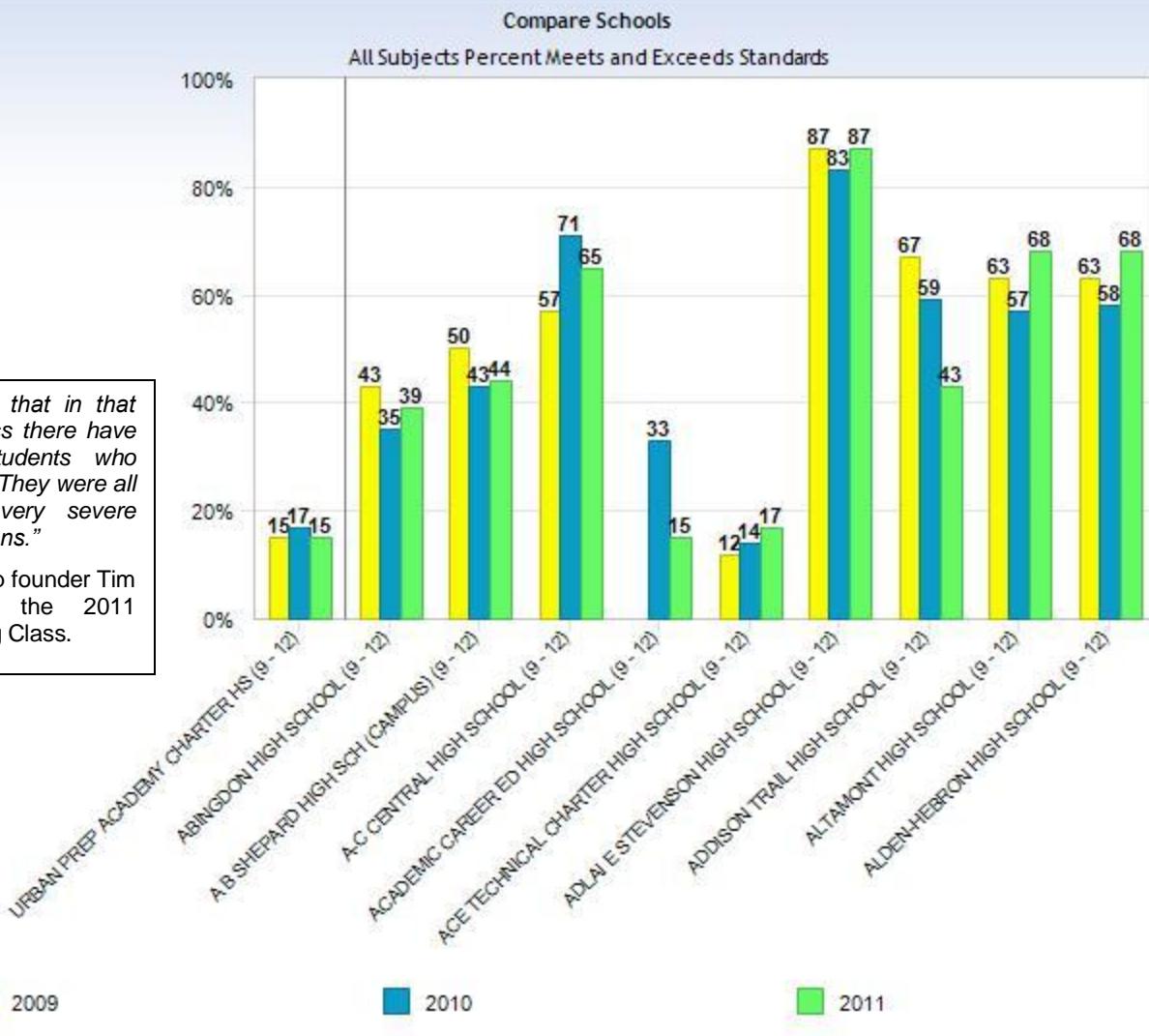
With these new figures, the overall graduation rate at Urban Prep goes down to 57%. So, it begins to look more and more as though Urban Prep’s real “accomplishment” is refusing to graduate any senior who has not been accepted into college.” - Julie Woesthoff, Chicago Examiner, July 9, 2010



Urban Prep Charter School By the Numbers

"I will tell you that in that graduating class there have been nine students who were expelled. They were all expelled for very severe discipline reasons."

- Urban Prep founder Tim King on the 2011 Graduating Class.



EDUCATION WEEK

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Study Stings KIPP on Attrition Rates

By Mary Ann Zehr

KIPP charter middle schools enroll a significantly higher proportion of African-American students than the local school districts they draw from, but 40 percent of the black males they enroll leave between grades 6 and 8, says a new nationwide study by researchers at Western Michigan University.

"The dropout rate for African-American males is really shocking," said Gary J. Miron, a professor of evaluation, measurement, and research at the university, in Kalamazoo, and the lead researcher for the study. "Kipp is doing a great job of educating students who persist, but not all who come."

With 99 charter schools across the country, most of which serve grades 5 to 8, the **Knowledge Is**

Power Program network has built a national reputation for success in enabling low-income minority students to do well academically. And some studies show that KIPP charter schools have succeeded in significantly narrowing race-based and income-based achievement gaps between students over

time. While not disputing that track record, the new study attempts to probe some of the more unexplored factors that might play into KIPP's success.

It concludes, for instance, that KIPP schools are considerably better funded on a per-pupil basis than their surrounding school districts. The KIPP schools received, on average, \$18,500 per pupil in 2007-08, about \$6,500 more per student than the average for other schools in the same districts, according to the researchers' analysis of federal 990 tax forms filed by schools reporting both public and private sources of funding. The study reports that nearly \$5,800 of that per-pupil amount is private donations and grants.

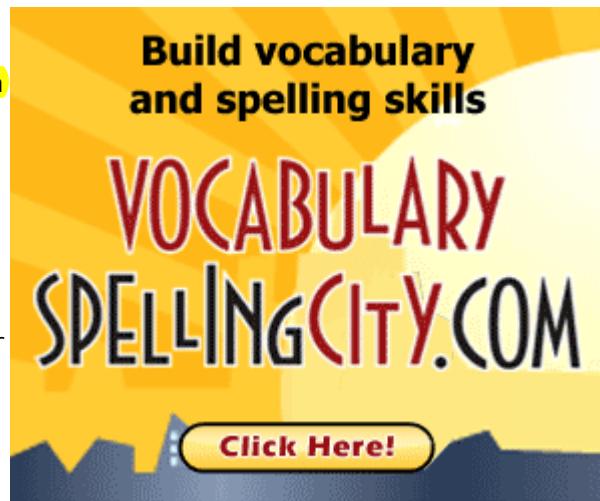
Mr. Miron said the "\$6,500 cost advantage" raises questions about the sustainability of the KIPP model.

The study also faults KIPP for not serving more students who are still learning English or who have disabilities.

"The limited range of students that KIPP serves, its inability to serve all students who enter, and its dependence on local traditional public schools to receive and serve

the droves of students who leave, all speak loudly to the limitations of this model," the report says.

[Back to Story](#)



Luis A. Huerta, an associate professor of public policy and education at Teachers College, Columbia University, praised the study for exploring indicators of KIPP's operations other than student achievement, which, while important, doesn't tell the whole story, he said.

"If we can start speaking about these more nuanced layers, and move beyond this discussion of student achievement, we tend to get a real picture," he said. "Here we have schools receiving upwards to \$6,000 or more than traditional schools, and that's not even accounting for the fact they have fewer services than traditional schools, yet the gains they've shown in student achievement are quite modest." Mr. Huerta is a faculty associate of the National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, which had a hand in distributing the study but did not take part in the research.



The study came in for criticism from KIPP officials, as well as from two other researchers not involved in it. They questioned its methodology and said that while Mr. Miron is asking the right questions about KIPP schools, he hasn't provided adequate evidence to answer them.

"We see this report as having significant shortcomings in the methodologies and reject the core conclusions the report is making," said Steve Mancini, the public-affairs director for the San Francisco-based KIPP network, which was started in 1994.

Methods Differ

The study by the Western Michigan researchers used the federal Common Core of Data as its primary source. The researchers were able to obtain data from 2005-06 to 2008-09 for 60 KIPP schools across the country. The KIPP schools were compared with averages for other, more-traditional schools in the same districts. Besides the 990 forms, the researchers drew financial data on KIPP schools from the same federal database, which had financial data for 25 of those schools.

Robin Lake, the associate director of the Center on Reinventing Public Education, at the University of Washington in Seattle, was one of the scholars who questioned the study led by Mr. Miron.

"It seems he's trying to explain away the KIPP effect rather than explain it," she said. "More work needs to be done to get real answers."

"The main point to make is the kind of data they are looking at is quite different from the kind of data we've been looking at," said Brian P. Gill, a senior fellow for the Princeton, N.J.-based Mathematica Policy Research and a co-author of a study of 22 KIPP middle schools released last June. That study was commissioned by KIPP.

Mr. Gill said that Mathematica based its conclusions, including a finding that attrition of students from KIPP schools is about the same as from neighboring regular public schools, on data from individual students, not on aggregate data sets, as Mr. Miron's study has done.

The study led by Mr. Miron found that approximately 15 percent of students disappear each year from the KIPP grade cohorts, compared with 3 percent per year in each grade in the local traditional school districts. Mr. Miron said that finding doesn't contradict Mathematica's finding that attrition rates are comparable between KIPP schools and local district schools on average, because his research team compared only KIPP "districts"—the cluster of kipp schools in a particular district—and the rest of the schools in districts as a whole, not individual schools with schools.

Mr. Mancini, Ms. Lake, and Mr. Gill share the view that the comparison groups used in the Western Michigan study don't provide reliable information about student attrition. It's not appropriate, they contend, to make conclusions about attrition by comparing the proportion of students who leave a KIPP district with the proportion of students who leave the entire surrounding school district, which might have hundreds of schools.

"You want apples-to-apples comparisons. This is like apples to watermelons," said Ms. Lake.

Unexplored Issue

Mr. Miron said that the Mathematica approach to determining student attrition is "superior" to his. But his study explores an issue that he said Mathematica hadn't addressed: How does the fact that KIPP schools tend not to replace students that leave, particularly in the upper grades, affect attrition?

"The low-performing students are leaving KIPP schools, but they are still in the public school sector," Mr. Miron said.

Mr. Gill said Mr. Miron's study doesn't account for how grade retention, a hallmark of the KIPP model, may account for some of the shrinkage in cohorts of students moving from 6th to 8th grade.

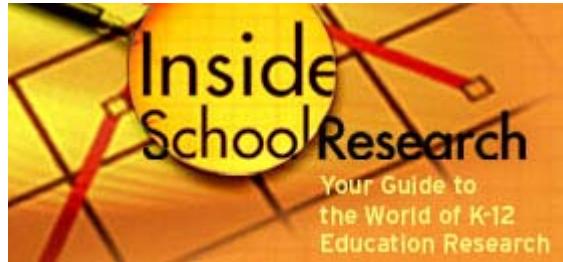
The Western Michigan study doesn't challenge KIPP's positive student outcomes. It says that the nonprofit network's claims that its schools improve students' test scores at a faster rate than regular public schools are backed by "rigorous and well-documented studies," such as Mathematica's.

Mike Wright, who oversees KIPP's network growth and sustainability, characterized the report's findings on the financing of KIPP's schools as misleading.

He focused on the finding that KIPP schools receive nearly \$5,800 more per pupil from private donations than do their surrounding school districts. One problem, Mr. Wright said, is that the finding is based on a sample of 11 KIPP districts that isn't representative of all KIPP schools. (Mr. Miron said he used those 11 districts because they were the only ones that reported public revenues on the 990 tax forms.)

Also, Mr. Wright said of the study's authors, "they are including everything under the kitchen sink, whether starting a school from scratch or investing in facilities" in the figure for private per

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pupil funding. He contends it's a "misrepresentation" to imply that KIPP schools are overflowing with resources, when, unlike regular public schools, they are often left on their own to pay for buildings.

Mr. Wright contends that the average funding advantage from private sources for KIPP schools in comparison with their local school districts is closer to \$2,500 per pupil.

Mr. Huerta, however, said Mr. Miron's methodology is strong, even though there are "complications in trying to dig out some of this information."

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July 10, 2011

Message From a Charter School: Thrive or Transfer

By MICHAEL WINERIP

In 2008, when Katherine Sprowal's son, Matthew, was selected in a lottery to attend the **Harlem Success Academy 3 charter school**, she was thrilled. "I felt like we were getting the best private school, and we didn't have to pay for it," she recalled.

And so, when **Eva S. Moskowitz**, the former city councilwoman who operates seven Success charter schools in Harlem and the Bronx, asked Ms. Sprowal to be in a promotional video, she was happy to be included.

Matthew is bright but can be disruptive and easily distracted. It was not a natural fit for the Success charters, which are known for discipline and long school days. From Day 1 of kindergarten, Ms. Sprowal said, he was punished for acting out.

"They kept him after school to practice walking in the hallway," she said.

Several times, she was called to pick him up early, she said, and in his third week he was suspended three days for bothering other children.

In Matthew's three years of preschool, Ms. Sprowal said, he had never missed time for behavior problems. "After only 12 days in your school," she wrote the principal, "you have assessed and concluded that our son is defective and will not meet your school criteria."

Five days later, Ms. Sprowal got an e-mail from Ms. Moskowitz that she took as a veiled message to leave. "Am not familiar with the issue," Ms. Moskowitz wrote, "but it is extremely important that children feel successful and a nine-hour day with more than 23 children (and that's our small class size!) where they are constantly being asked to focus and concentrate can overwhelm children and be a bad environment."

The next week, the school psychologist evaluated Matthew and concluded he would be better suited elsewhere: "He may need a smaller classroom than his current school has available."

By then, Matthew was throwing up most mornings and asking his mother if he was going to be fired from school. Worn down, Ms. Sprowal requested help finding her son another school, and Success officials were delighted to refer him to Public School 75 on the Upper West Side.

At that point, Ms. Sprowal had come to believe her son was so difficult that she was lucky anyone would take him. She wrote several e-mails thanking Ms. Moskowitz, saying she hoped that Matthew would someday be well-behaved enough to return to her “phenomenal” school.

Three years later, looking back, Ms. Sprowal said she felt her son had been done an injustice. Matthew, who has had a diagnosis of an attention disorder, has thrived at P.S. 75. His second-grade teachers, Johanny Lopez and Chanté Martindale, have taught him many ways to calm himself, including stepping into the hallway for an exercise break. His report card last month was all 3s and 4s, the top marks; the teachers commented, “Matthew is a sweet boy who is a joy to have in the classroom.”

Matthew’s story raises perhaps the most critical question in the debate about charter schools: do they cherry-pick students, if not by gaming the admissions process, then by counseling out children who might be more expensive or difficult to educate — and who could bring down their test scores, graduation rates and safety records?

Kim Sweet, director of [Advocates for Children](#) of New York, said she had heard many such stories. “When we look at our cases where children are sent away from schools because of disabilities,” she said, “there are a disproportionate number of calls about charter schools.”

There is no more tenacious champion of charters than Ms. Moskowitz, whose students earn top test scores and who has plans to build a chain of 40 schools. She saw Matthew’s experience in a far different light, as her spokeswoman, Jenny Sedlis, explained in two voluminous e-mails totaling 5,701 words.

“We helped place him in a school that would better suit his needs,” Ms. Sedlis wrote. “His success today confirms the correctness of his placement. I believe that 100 percent of the time we were acting in Matthew’s best interest and that the end result benefited him and benefited P.S. 75, which now has a child excelling.”

Ms. Sedlis denied that Matthew had been suspended, and said he was not disciplined when he was kept after school.

“Practicing walking through the halls is the opposite of a punishment,” she wrote. “Just as in math, when a child does not get a concept, we re-teach. We don’t let the child fail. We ensure he gets it. We take the same approach with behavior. If a child is struggling, we re-teach. This is an example of when the school went out of its way to help Matthew be successful.”

Ms. Sedlis noted that two Success board members were leaders of well-respected special-education schools, Donna Kennedy of [Gillen Brewer](#) and Scott Gaynor of the [Stephen Gaynor School](#).

She also offered counterexamples, like Iris Ayala, whose 6-year-old son, Alexander, has an attention disorder and speech problem but has thrived at a Success school.

Ms. Ayala said Alexander often acted up, running out of the classroom. But the school gave him special-education help, she said, and now he is reading above grade level. “I love the school,” Ms. Ayala said.

Alex or Matthew — whose experience is more emblematic? You would think data could help shed light here.

Indeed, Ms. Sedlis cited figures from the city [Education Department's Web site](#) showing that the attrition rate is lower at the Harlem Success schools than at traditional public schools in the same district.

On the other hand, every traditional public school that is housed with a Success charter has more special-education children as well as students for whom English is the second language, according to numbers posted on city and [state](#) Web sites. At Success 3, the school Matthew attended, 10 percent are in special education and 2 percent are English language learners, according to the [publicly available data](#); Mosaic Prep Academy, a district school that shares its building, has 23 percent in special education and 13 percent learning English as a second language.

But Ms. Sedlis said that the Web sites were wrong, and that 7.6 percent of students at Success 3 had limited English. “It is imperative that you not use incorrect data,” she wrote. “It is a complex system and I will walk you through it and produce voluminous documentation.”

Even if not a single number on the Education Department’s Web sites can be trusted, there is one indisputable fact: The traditional public schools handle the most severely disabled children, which Success charters do not serve. At Mosaic Prep, 58 percent of the special-education students — 46 children — are those requiring the “most restrictive environment” and are in classrooms of their own. At Success charters, the special-education children are classified as needing the “least restrictive environment” and are mainstreamed, though two of the charters will add classes strictly for special-education students in September.

Ms. Moskowitz has enormous political clout, and without my asking, Laura Rodriguez, a deputy chancellor, sent an e-mail saying the Success charters were getting better about special education. “Harlem Success has made a real commitment to improving services for students with disabilities,” she wrote, “and we’ll continue working with them to enroll and serve even more of these students moving forward.”

Serving children with special needs lowers test scores. At P.S. 75, Matthew’s new school, 17 percent are in special education, and for 17 percent, English is a second language. In 2009, 76 percent of the school’s general education students were proficient in language arts. But when special-education scores were factored in, proficiency dropped to 69 percent.

Still, Robert O’Brien, who has been principal there for 14 years, says the most gratifying part of his work is with the children who lower his test scores.

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The Miami Herald

Posted on Fri, Dec. 16, 2011

Charter schools enrolling low number of poor students

By Kathleen McGrory and Scott Hiaasen

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Carl Juste / Miami Herald Staff

Charter School at Waterstone in Homestead

The Charter School at Waterstone looms behind a manned guardhouse in an exclusive community in Homestead. With a palm-lined walkway leading to its cool-blue buildings, the school stands apart from the closest alternative: Campbell Drive K-8 Center, the 35-year-old traditional public school down the road.

The students are different, too.

At Waterstone, about 32 percent of students in 2010 qualified for free or reduced-price lunches, an indicator of poverty, according to data from the National Center for Education Statistics. At Campbell Drive, about two miles away, 93 percent of the students qualified.

The trend is evident across Miami-Dade County, where overall, the number of poor children enrolled in charter schools is disproportionately low compared to traditional public schools — an advantage for the charter schools, given that poverty correlates with poor academic performance. Charter schools in Miami-Dade also enroll a smaller share of black students than traditional public schools, according to federal data. In traditional public schools, one-third of children are black, compared to one-fifth of children in charter schools.

The imbalances persist despite local, state and federal rules aimed at promoting open access to charter schools and preventing discrimination. The Waterstone school, for example, is open to all Miami-Dade students under its contract with the school district, while giving preference to students who live within four miles of the school — an area that includes Campbell Drive K-8.

Charter schools, which receive public tax dollars but are run by independent boards, say they do not handpick which students they enroll. Most say they rely on random admissions lotteries.

And in Broward County, the charter school demographics more closely reflect the traditional public schools.

"Charter schools serve the neighborhood kids," said Robert Haag, president of the Florida Consortium of Public Charter Schools, a lobbying and support organization.

In Miami-Dade, however, the charter school industry has followed a growth strategy that has amplified the disparities. Much of the growth in charter schools has been in the county's western and southern suburbs rather than the inner city — in part because of the housing boom of the 2000s. Moreover, some schools have adopted outreach strategies that target high-achieving students and children who live in affluent neighborhoods.

Florida school districts are not required to monitor charter schools' admissions lotteries or marketing methods, and they seldom do — even with millions of dollars in taxpayer money on the line. But in

2009, Miami-Dade school district researchers looking at enrollment patterns found that the Mater and Doral academies, two popular charter school networks managed by the same company, had admitted a disproportionately high percentage of advanced students. The findings raised the possibility "that specific students were targeted in some way," according to the report.

The school district never pursued the numbers further, and the two school networks denied the accusations.

As charter schools expand their reach, the issue remains a topic of national debate.

"There are questions about whether these schools truly are open to serving everyone," said Erica Frankenberg, an assistant professor at Pennsylvania State University who studies charter schools.

Charters step in

In its early days, the charter school movement promised to empower parents in low-income communities by providing alternatives to struggling public schools. In 1996, the state's first charter school, Liberty City Charter School, accomplished that goal.

But early critics worried charter schools would become exclusive academies accessible only to well-to-do families. In fact, many members of the Legislative Black Caucus voted against the original proposal because it did not require charter schools to provide transportation for students, to help poorer families.

There are some safeguards in place. Like traditional schools, charter schools are subject to federal anti-discrimination laws. State law also requires charter schools to reflect the "racial and ethnic balance" of their communities.

"We expect our charter schools to have open enrollment to represent the communities they serve," said Adam Miller, who oversees charter schools for the state Department of Education. "They cannot pick and choose based on race and ethnicity."

In Broward County, the charter schools have a slightly larger proportion of low-income and black students than the traditional public schools, federal data show. Broward school district officials say there is a growing number of small, independent charter schools in Caribbean and African-American neighborhoods.

In Miami-Dade, however, Hispanic students are overrepresented, according to the 2010 figures from the National Center for Education Statistics, the most recent available for all public schools.

In the largest charter school networks — the Mater, Doral, Somerset and Pinecrest academies — 90 percent of the students enrolled in 2010 were Hispanic, federal records show, compared to 58 percent in the public school system. These school networks are all managed by Academica, Florida's largest charter school operator.

Miami-Dade charter schools also enrolled a smaller share of poor students: 54 percent, compared to 74 percent in traditional public schools.

"In Florida, there aren't as many charter schools that have been really successful in going and serving high free- and reduced-price lunch populations compared to some other states," said Kevin Hall, CEO of the Colorado-based Charter School Growth Fund, which recently committed \$10 million to help Florida charter schools expand into low-income communities.

In 2010, of the 83 charter schools open in Miami-Dade, more than two dozen had poverty rates more than 30 percentage points lower than the closest traditional public school, a Herald analysis found.

The poverty gap was particularly noticeable in South Dade, where the Charter School at Waterstone is located.

Numbers disputed

Mike Strader, president of the company that manages Waterstone, insisted that the federal poverty data were inaccurate, and said his school actually serves far more impoverished students than the numbers reflect. He said 73 percent of children at the school this year receive free or reduced-price lunches. However, Miami-Dade school district records show that 35 percent of Waterstone's students are currently receiving free or reduced-price lunch benefits. The district keeps close tabs on which charter school students are eligible, because it disburses federal funds for school lunches.

Students targeted?

In 2009, a Miami-Dade school district study of middle-schoolers found that while black students and poor students were less likely to transfer to charter schools, those who were classified as gifted or had earned high marks on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Tests were more likely to choose charter schools.

The report also found that advanced students were nearly twice as likely to transfer to schools in the Mater and Doral networks of schools as to continue in their home schools.

"It is unlikely that the effects seen for these particular schools can be explained by direct marketing techniques, which are typically ineffective, given that these effects are not seen in other charter schools," the report concluded. "This raises the possibility that specific students were targeted in some way."

Fernando Zulueta, the CEO of Academica — the firm that manages the two networks of schools — said neither one targets certain classes of students. "My philosophy is to let everyone in and you can do amazing work with these kids," he said.

Zulueta said more high-performing children may wind up at Mater and Doral because their parents are better informed about choice options. He criticized the findings of the district's middle-school study, saying they reflected parent dissatisfaction with the traditional public schools, not recruitment practices.

Recruitment practices can, however, help shape a population of students.

Henry Rose, who sits on the executive board of the Florida Consortium of Public Charter Schools, said marketing is an important part of the equation. Student recruitment is frequently discussed at charter school governing board meetings, minutes show.

"You have to figure out what your market is," Rose said. "Do you want to appeal to kids who are struggling? How far outside of the neighborhood do you want to go? How are you going to reach those parents?"

Florida charter schools are expected to "reach out to the community," said Miller, of the state education department.

Some charter operators do. Haag, the consortium president who is also superintendent of the Charter Schools of Excellence network of schools in Broward County, said he places advertisements on public buses and in neighborhood churches. "I've tried every way to reach out to African-American students," he said.

Some South Florida schools avidly court parents in affluent neighborhoods, sending recruitment fliers to homes in high-income ZIP codes. Two charter schools in Coral Gables and South Miami held an invitation-only information session at the posh Biltmore Hotel last year, parents said.

Often, a charter school's best marketing device is a good reputation and high FCAT scores, said Jonathan Hage, president of Charter Schools USA, one of the region's largest charter school management companies.

But for both charter schools and traditional public schools, poverty is linked to low test scores — creating a potential incentive for charter schools to avoid these students.

Most charter schools say they encourage all students to apply and that they admit students based on the results of a random lottery.

State law does not require any oversight of the lotteries, and the Miami-Dade school district has never sought information detailing which students apply to charter schools and which ones get in. Some charter schools contacted by The Miami Herald provided incomplete records, or said their application and lottery records for prior years had been discarded.

While no South Florida schools have been formally accused of excluding children, there have been problems elsewhere: Last July, the Academic Leadership Charter School in New York City was put on probation after hundreds of children were left out of the admissions lottery. One year earlier, an Albany, N.Y., charter school screened out children who had low test scores or learning disabilities.

In Florida, state and federal rules bar charter schools from giving preference to students except in narrow circumstances. For example, nearly all charter schools in South Florida give preference to the children of employees and the siblings of current students. Those run by municipalities can also give preference to residents.

Some schools, however, have created their own rules.

Coral Reef Montessori gives preference to children who have previous Montessori experience, principal Lucy Canzoneri-Golden said. (Many of those children graduate from the pre-kindergarten Golden operates on the same campus, she said.) But Coral Reef's charter — its contract with the school district — says nothing about any preference for prior Montessori experience.

Some schools have created "articulation agreements" with other charter schools, giving preference to students as they advance from one charter school to another. Nothing prohibits a Florida charter school from having a relationship with another school, but the process is frowned upon by federal education officials. The guidelines for receiving federal grant money say charter schools receiving federal start-up grants are not allowed to give preference to students from "affiliated" schools.

Location, location

The location of a charter school also plays an important role in dictating its racial and socioeconomic makeup.

In Miami-Dade, charter schools have proliferated primarily in the suburbs, while inner-city and black communities have remained largely neglected. Last year, one in four traditional public schools were in a neighborhood where at least one-third of the residents were black, a Herald analysis found. But only one in seven charter schools were in a neighborhood with a similar makeup.

Of the charter schools that have closed in Miami-Dade County, 20 out of 30 were in predominantly black neighborhoods.

Experts say charter schools in the inner-city face unique challenges.

Katrina Wilson-Davis, who served as founding principal of the Liberty City Charter School, said finding a building for a school in the urban core can be difficult. There's also the challenge of trying to balance a school's budget in a low-income community.

"Our parents cannot give us money to supplement our budget," Wilson-Davis said. "Our parents don't have the time to volunteer in the office every day. We have to pay for everything."

Despite solid academic performance, Liberty City Charter School closed in 2008, after falling more than \$1 million in debt.

As for transportation — a concern for black lawmakers in 1996 — records show it is provided by only 40 percent of Miami-Dade charter schools.

Haag, the consortium president, said he "strongly" encourages charter schools to provide transportation for their students. "Buses remove the barriers," he said.

State Rep. Dwight Bullard, a Miami Democrat who sits on the House Education Committee, said charter schools have a responsibility to serve all children. "From a moral standpoint, they should be investing their time, energy and efforts into communities that need the most help," he said.

To that end, the state education department and the Charter School Growth Fund recently rolled out a \$30 million fund to help high-performing schools expand into high-poverty neighborhoods.

"We've made it a priority over the last year to incentivize our highest-quality operators to go into our highest-poverty areas," said Miller, the state charter schools director.

Efforts to increase diversity have taken hold in individual schools, too. Keys Gate Charter School and Keys Gate Charter High in Homestead, for example, sent out mailers to homes within a 10-mile radius of the school in hopes of attracting students from across South Dade. The two schools also placed advertisements countywide.

The strategy is working, Keys Gate officials said. This year, 64 percent of students qualified for free or reduced-price lunches, up from about 54 percent the year before.

"The diversity has increased beyond the neighborhood," said Hage, whose company manages the schools. "It is more and more reflective of the city and beyond."