

GUIDING THE CHOICE:
COMPARING THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF A CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL
AND PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL IN SACRAMENTO

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Abstract
of
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The expansion of charter schools, fueled largely by school choice advocates, has provided many prospective students families with access to alternatives from their traditional public school options. However, comparisons of academic performance between the two school structures often yields mixed results. This is particularly true amongst schools in urban settings. In Sacramento, California, a study of an academic comparison between a charter high school and traditional public high school was conducted. Data utilized within the study was sourced from statewide assessment data from the 2016-2017 school year. Analysis of the results indicated that the charter high

school provided students with a greater educational opportunity than the traditional public high school in this urban setting.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

School choice proponents often contest that public schools provide better educational outcomes only when they are made autonomous (Finnigan, 2007). These theorists believe that traditional public school administration has become a bureaucracy hampered by local and state governments (Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). Lubienski (2003) claims that the market-style implications brought about by consumer choice and competition between schools to provide the best product will lead to innovations that will ultimately increase academic achievement. Charter schools have quickly emerged as a preferred tool for reformers seeking to enact systemic change in this way. The proliferation of charter schools is believed to have led to an increase in competition within educational markets. Such competition will theoretically benefit the consumers as they have expanded access to better educational products. Yet for others, a business-minded approach to educational reform can be outright chilling. It can be troubling to think of a family with school-aged children as a detached consumer and educational institutions as mere service providers. But in today's United States, this is a burgeoning reality. A growing number of stakeholders want to see improved performance and efficiency in their neighborhood school.

Many of these educational reformers have failed to realize that successful economic strategies do not readily translate into successful education policies. Certainly, there is evidence of charter schools that have done a remarkable job in improving student

performance (Hung, Badejo, & Bennett, 2014; Sahin, Almus, & Willson, 2017). But similar to businesses in the marketplace, some charter schools can fail as a result of poor fiscal management or an inability to meet customer (i.e. student) demands (Schwenkenberg & VanderHoff, 2015). The consequences of that failure are far-reaching. For the students who attended failed schools, opportunities for enhanced cognitive development were marred by a lack of stimulation and guidance. Those students are rendered developmentally disadvantaged as compared to the rest of their peer group (Schwenkenberg & VanderHoff, 2015). Such business-minded inequity needs to be guarded against.

Throughout the country, patterns of success and failure can be found within both traditional public school and charter school systems. Examples of high-performing schools abound just as do examples of underperforming schools. The problem lies in the inability of academic literature to definitively determine whether or not access to school choice can reliably improve the academic performance of students. This study sought to bring clarity to our understanding of school choice and how it has affected different learning communities. Specifically, the study compared the academic performances of a charter high school and a traditional public high school in an effort to further understand and assess the impact of school choice. In doing so, the goal of this study is to educate student families about the merits of school choice and to objectively evaluate the degree of competition that may or may not exist between the two school systems. Where competition does exist, student families are to be informed of how it might play to their

advantage or disadvantage. The study focused its efforts on comparing the performance of a highly publicized charter high school and a traditional public high school by utilizing performance data accrued during the 2016-2017 school year.

Background of the Problem

Many traditional public schools have long struggled to meet the educational demands of all their students. There has been an ongoing disconnect in accessibility to a quality education for students from high-poverty and/or high-minority areas that has persisted since at least the 1960s (Toson, 2013). These student groups have consistently performed at academic levels that are significantly lower than their whiter and wealthier peers. Traditional public schools are often blamed for the disproportionate gains made by different student groups. With fiscal resources heavily committed to paying unionized teachers, repairing dilapidated facilities, and administrative salaries, public school funding is stretched thin and is minimally responsive to making the necessary improvements (Linick & Lubienski, 2013). In many urban school districts, these scenarios have been particularly amplified (Orfield & Luce, 2016; Toson, 2013; Winters, 2012).

A host of student families and educators have concluded that their choices for accessing a quality education are severely limited. Likeminded reformers have begun to make concerted efforts at local and state government levels to liberate schools from overregulation in an attempt to sever the perceived monopolistic control of public education institutions (Lubienski, 2003). Expanded school choice policies, they believe,

would enable students to leave the public schools that they are typically bound to based on their attendance area. In leaving those schools, students could more easily relocate to a nearby higher performing school (Rabovsky, 2011). Theoretically, expanded school choice policies would generate competition between traditional public schools as they try to attract and retain students and their associated tax dollars required for educating them (Winters, 2012). But for these reformers, measuring these outcomes have been inconsistent.

A watershed moment for school choice advocates arrived in 1991. It was in that year that Minnesota became the first state to approve legislation that made allowances for a new type of school that could be made eligible to receive public funding (Stetson, 2013). These new schools, dubbed charter schools, would be publicly funded schools that would operate outside the purview of local education agencies. The flexible organizational structures inherent in charter schools were exactly what school choice advocates were looking for. Charter schools would operate as autonomous educational institutions that are operated by individuals, groups of parent activist groups, or education management organizations (Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). Once the charter was secure, these highly flexible schools would be able to compete against traditional public schools for students and increased funding. In what has been described as an effect of market theory, Lubienski (2003) observed that the inability of traditional public schools to innovate resulted in the ability of consumer preferences to push providers towards offering incentives for potential students and staff to participate in their offerings. A vital

prerequisite for staying competitive in these emergent education-based marketplaces is to increase and maintain respectable levels of student performance.

But as years passed and data accrued, it became apparent that charter schools produce mixed results when it comes to increases in student achievement. In some urban school districts, student performance skyrocketed, particularly for high-poverty and/or high-minority areas (Angrist, Dynarski, Kane, Pathak, & Walters, 2010; Hoxby & Murarka, 2008). In other districts, competition between schools never occurred as many charter schools failed to provide student families with a better alternative to the higher performing traditional public school (Chingos & West, 2015; Orfield & Luce, 2016). School choice advocates thus found themselves in a precarious position. Data made it increasingly difficult for their market theory ideologies to hold true uniformly. Opponents of school choice aggressively attacked the deeds of charter schools and claimed that they absorbed already limited resources. Rather than split funding, opponents of school choice advocated for increased resources to be redirected back to traditional public schools to ease their strain (Finnigan, 2007). After all, a significant majority of students have remained in traditional public schools (Zimmer & Buddin, 2009).

In Sacramento, California, an intense and highly documented contest between school choice advocates and opponents erupted when the city's oldest high school faced a state takeover. In 2003, Sacramento High School had failed to make adequate yearly progress for too long ("School board OKs", 2003). Students at the school were

performing at catastrophically poor levels (Fortune, 2003). Rather than embrace the takeover by the state department of education, the Sacramento City Unified School District moved to shut down Sacramento High School and reopen it as a charter school (“School board OKs”, 2003). Dramatic debates and accusations plagued the city in the aftermath. But as the years passed, Sacramento Charter High School began to show dramatic improvements in academic performance, particularly in graduation rates (“Sac High turnaround”, 2009). The city's oldest and largest traditional public high school, C.K McClatchy, stood to feel the competitive pressures of the new and improved Sacramento Charter High School and currently competes for students as both schools are less than two miles apart. The implications of school choice policies in Sacramento are yet to be critically evaluated given that a comparison of the academic performance of these two schools has yet to be conducted.

School choice and access to charter schools have gained widespread appeal throughout the American educational climate. But surges and retreats in policy support come and go with each presidential administration (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The available academic literature has clearly and repeatedly articulated that school choice and charter schools are inconsistent in their ability to deliver on what is promised. Yet instances where charter schools do provide student families with better alternatives exist and thus a more promising future cannot be discounted.

Statement of the Research Problem

Access to school choice does not guarantee student families access to high performing schools. Research has shown that school choice merely expands the educational offerings provided to student families (Finnigan, 2007; Linick & Lubienski, 2013; Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). In some instances, charter schools significantly outperform their traditional public school counterparts. In others, traditional public schools remain the most beneficial choice. It has been difficult for student families to discern which schools demonstrate the greatest potential for student learning.

For student families who live in the Sacramento City Unified School District, there may be uncertainty about whether or not Sacramento Charter High School will better educate a child than the traditional public high school that is C.K. McClatchy. If parents opt to exercise their school choice right, they should firmly understand the implications of the decision within the local learning environment. The clear and concise analysis of the academic performances of the two high schools provided here makes available to parents eager to explore their options an objective presentation of the facts.

Purpose of the Study

This study operated within an Action Research Design. Action research designs are systematic procedures carried out by educators as they seek to collect information about how educational settings operate and how they may be improved upon (Creswell, 2015). This design utilized quantitative data methods to compare the performance of two separate public learning institutions. Specifically, Participatory Action Research (PAR)

was utilized as the main form of inquiry. PAR carries a more social and community orientation and places a strong emphasis on research that functions as a force for societal change or reflection (Creswell, 2015). Further, still, PAR strives to secure the open involvement of participants by collaborating as consensual partners and engaging participants as equals to promote their well-being (Creswell, 2015).

This study aimed to provide student families living within the Sacramento City Unified School District attendance area with an objective analysis that compared the academic performance of Sacramento Charter High School to that of the traditional public high school, C.K. McClatchy. The primary purpose was to definitively determine which local high school is more capable of providing a student with the opportunity to perform at the highest level based on academic achievement data. The data utilized was accrued during the 2016-2017 school year. The secondary purposes of this study were to identify which school is better equipped at instructing students in different core content areas. For example, at the conclusion of the study, it will be possible to determine which school yields greater results for student scores in curricular areas like Mathematics and English Language Arts.

Though school choice has been a divisive issue, this research design sought to credit and criticize all parties objectively and fairly based on factual evidence. The data that was analyzed when measuring the performance of each school site was derived from the results of the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress or CAASPP and School Accountability Report Card or SARC. The CAASPP system

assesses academic achievement in the content areas of Science, English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Spanish Language Arts (California Department of Education, 2018g). Although there is great variation in the design of SARC, they generally begin with a profile that provides background information about the school and its students. The profile usually summarizes the school's mission, goals, and accomplishments (CDE, 2018a). All schools that receive public funding are required to submit and distribute a SARC (CDE, 2018a). Quantitative data are readily available when reviewing these resources.

Proposed Research Questions

- R1. How does the academic performance of Sacramento's largest traditional public high school compare to the academic performance Sacramento's largest charter high school during the 2016-2017 academic school year?
- R2. In what content areas did the traditional public high school outperform the charter high school?
- R3. In what content areas did the charter high school outperform the traditional public high school?

Theoretical Framework

School choice is an educational theory that suggests student families need to retain their power as educational consumers to protect the best interests of their child. The belief is that by giving student families the right to exit failing schools and take their

tax dollars with them, competition will occur within the public school systems as schools maneuver to secure the funding associated with educating the mobile student (Lubienski, 2003). Supportive policies range from allowing students to transfer from their neighborhood school to some other school outside their residential area to policies that provide tuition vouchers for students to exit the public school system completely (Rabovsky, 2011). Activists who support the theory strongly encourage choice, autonomy, and competition within public schools as these principles are believed to increase flexibility and innovation (Lubienski, 2003). For them, traditional public schools have been weighed down by bureaucracy. But on the whole, school choice has experienced mixed support throughout the United States due to inconsistencies between theory and practice. That is to say, the execution of school choice policies has not always led to the results originally promised.

Charter schools are a heavily used resource by school choice advocates as they search for new educational institutions that allow them to experiment with their ideas. Charter schools are typically developed by advocacy groups or education management organizations who are required to uphold the merits of their charter/contract that is developed in conjunction with a local education agency (Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). Charter schools, like traditional public schools, receive public funding but are restricted to far fewer rules, regulations, and laws that include staffing, curriculum, and budget decisions (Sahin, Almus, & Willson, 2017). In many urban school districts, students have struggled to learn at an adequate rate. Competition to provide for students in those

districts has become increasingly contentious as more and more students are siphoned off into more attractively structured charter schools (Winters, 2012). Though capable of great flexibility and ingenuity, many charter schools struggle to provide a better alternative to the neighborhood's traditional public school.

School choice and charter school advocates have made bold claims pertaining to the merits of their intertwined educational philosophy. At its core, the theory set forth suggests that school autonomy will yield more effective innovation and change. Finnigan (2007) describes public school autonomy as a means for permitting schools to do things that had not been feasible or allowed. Schools that operate free of bureaucratic obstacles will be able to focus more resources and attention on the academic performance of students. This, in turn, will lead to an increase in the performance of those students (Fritz, 2016). In some instances, this divisive theoretical framework can be supported by qualitative and quantitative evidence. But in many other instances, school choice arguments and charter school agendas fall flat. When evaluated closely, the theory of school choice is capable of producing mixed results at best.

In Sacramento, California, school choice advocates and their opponents were locked in a heated debate surrounding efforts to shut down a failing traditional public high school before reopening it as a charter school. With scant data, the school district moved ahead with the plans at the time. This study sought to determine whether or not Sacramento Charter High School does a better job of educating its students than the nearby traditional public high school of C.K. McClatchy.

Definition of Terms

Attendance Area

Residential area that a specific school serves. School-aged children who live within the attendance boundaries for a local school are considered to be members of the local school's attendance area. (Schwenkenberg & VanderHoff, 2015).

Charter School

Independently operated public school that is generally designed on the belief that it will expand access to learning opportunities for all students. These schools are publicly funded at the local, state, and federal levels and are free for students to attend (Hung et al., 2014).

Educational Management Organization or EMO

A private, for-profit company that contracts with local school districts and charter schools to operate public schools. Typically, EMO's run charter schools. Supporters of these organizations suggest that choice, profit-seeking, and expertise encourage innovation which will translate into increased student achievement (Toson, 2013).

Market Theory

The individual and/or family choices that are thought to best reflect the preferences of the choosers rather than reflect the dictates of a bureaucracy. When a local bureaucracy, such as a school, fails to satisfy the needs of its consumers, such as student

families, then those consumers have a right or responsibility to seek out satisfaction for their educational preferences elsewhere (Lubienski, 2003).

Race to the Top or RttT

A national education-based initiative proposed by President Barack Obama in 2009. The program offered states the opportunity to apply for part of a \$4 billion resource pool in exchange for a commitment to restructuring their educational systems in an effort to ensure that every student will graduate college and career ready. The program encouraged states to develop and/or expand upon effective and promising educational practices that supported the needs of local education communities (Howell & Magazinnik, 2017).

School Choice

A policy in education that supports the right of student families to retain control over educational placement decisions. Advocates argue that greater school choice will reduce a perceived monopolization within public schools and force schools to compete for student enrollment. This competition will push schools to become more efficient and produce better educational outcomes for student families (Zimmer & Buddin, 2009).

Stakeholder

An individual or group with an educationally related interest in the success of an organization in fulfilling its mission. This includes but is not limited to parents, students,

guardians, educators, administrators, advocates, and elected officials (Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005).

Traditional Public School

Publicly funded educational institutions that educate students between grades kindergarten to twelve. Traditional public schools most often take the form of an elementary school, middle school, or high school. Tuition for all students is free of charge as public funds are dedicated to providing services for each child. Traditional public school is operated under the authority of a school district and/or local education agency. These schools are made accountable by strictly adhering to all state and federal education standards (Orfield & Lane, 2016; Winters, 2012).

Assumptions

The following assumptions contributed to the premise of this study and reflect what this researcher trusts that the readership will embrace as true:

1. The demographics of each participating school's enrollment will not be similar in relationship to varieties of races, ethnicities, special education students, socioeconomic status, etc.
2. All students were adequately prepared to participate in all statewide assessments.
3. Instructional practices were generally similar among participating schools with instances of slight variation.
4. Statewide assessments were administered in adherence to California state requirements.

5. The data provided by the California Department of Education and each school site has been properly vetted to reflect accuracy and credibility.

Justification

This study is likely to benefit educational professions by building upon the literature that has compared and contrasted the academic performances of students who attend a charter school and/or a traditional public school. The outcomes will either confirm or contest many of the arguments set forth in academic literature.

On a local level, this study is intended to provide student families living within the Sacramento City Unified School District with an objective analysis of two different high schools and potential placement implications. For parents curious about their school choice options and its effects, this study sought to provide further clarity in guiding their decisions for their child's education.

Limitations

The following limitations contribute to identifying the boundaries of this study and what it does not intend to accomplish.

1. The conclusions found within this study will pertain only to the school sites present in the study. Generalizations about the performances of charter schools and traditional public schools not present in this study are not encouraged.
2. The data utilized in this study is limited to the results of statewide assessments and school site reporting for the 2016-2017 school year.

3. The conclusions derived from the data does not seek to assess the use of specific instructional strategies.
4. The social climate of each school site varies and may have impacted student performance on each assessment.
5. Teacher preparation and professional development opportunities are likely to have varied at each participating school site.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

For decades, stakeholders have fought to effect positive changes in education within their local learning community (Orfield & Luce, 2016; Rabovsky, 2011; Zimmer & Buddin, 2009). Many students in those communities have been trapped in cycles of underperformance and overrepresentation in less than stellar academic achievement categories. Giving students and their families an opportunity to attend a charter school has become an increasingly popular alternative to being forced to attend a low-performing traditional public school. As Finnigan (2007) observes, charter schools represent a broader movement in public education towards accountability, representing a change in focus from performance inputs towards performance outcomes. Rather than feign gratification for the increased allocation of resources to traditional public schools, a variety of educational stakeholders are adopting a simple results-oriented approach to educational reform. Those in favor of charter schools argue that a host of traditional public schools have buckled under the weight of the heavy educational bureaucracy that governs them (Fritz, 2016). For these advocates, traditional schools have been unable to respond to the unique needs of their students. Reduced academic performance within those schools is often the unfortunate byproduct.

To counteract these measures, educational reformers have increasingly trumpeted the need for expanded school choice. School choice refers to the various school district policies that allow students to transfer out of schools to which they normally would be

assigned based on residence (Rabovsky, 2001). This might include the right to attend a higher performing public school, an autonomous charter school, or potentially make allowance for the use of vouchers to pay for tuition at a private school. Lubienski (2003) shared that advocates for school choice are frequently lured to its perceived ability to promote market-style competition between schools. Such competition would theoretically translate into better student achievement, more options for parents, and innovative ways for educating diverse student populations as schools vie to draw consumers (Lubienski, 2003). In recent years, federal legislation prompted by No Child Left Behind and initiatives like Race to the Top have further codified these sentiments (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

This chapter sought to explore the academic literature associated with the charter school movement and evaluate the academic performance of both charter and traditional public high schools. Specifically, an exploration of the evolution of school choice and the charter school movement on the national level was conducted. A detailed analysis of high-performing and low-performing charter high schools followed in an effort to bring attention to the common traits of those schools. An explanation of the School Academic Report Card was also provided as it details how the California Department of Education measures both charter and traditional public high school performance. The chapter concludes by providing a history of the two urban high schools, one charter, and one public, in Sacramento that were employed for comparison in this study.

Understanding School Choice and Market Theory

Although the Constitution and Bill of Rights do not declare it explicitly, the right to a free and appropriate public education is understood to be a fundamental right for all Americans (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Traditional public schools are provided with financial resources from the federal, state, and local levels in order to fulfill that obligation. Unfortunately, the allocation of these resources is often disproportionate. Toson (2013) observed that the unfair disbursement of these resources dramatically reduces the quality of education for poor students in general and students of color in particular. Although the American public has known for decades that education must be drastically different and more impactful for families living in poverty, little effective change has taken place. Many of the country's public school districts are plagued by poor student performance.

Achievement gaps are more prolific in urban school districts. In Chicago, one of the nation's largest urban areas, the right to access a public education has been inconsistent. Reports of poor academic performance by students in the city have plagued national headlines. As recent as 2012, four in ten children in the city's public school system failed to graduate with a high school diploma (Zero Sum Games, 2012). Student families and educators alike have denounced such poor achievement gains as a violation of educational equity.

Stakeholders frustrated with the consistently poor performance of high-need public schools have increasingly voiced their support for measures that free them from

such lowly environments. Chief among those measures has been the ability to exercise school choice. Rabovsky (2011) concisely described school choice as a general policy that allows student families to exit their failing school, take their tax funds required to educate the student, and re-enroll into a preferred school of choice.

Stakeholders that support school choice savor the perceived ability of the policy to cultivate competition between schools as they jockey for the financial resources attached to students. Such reformers believe that the market-style mechanisms inherent in consumer choice and competition between schools will lead to diverse and innovative approaches for increasing student achievement (Lubienski, 2003). That is to say, school choice is intended to prompt schools into providing its consumers, in this case, student families, with an educational opportunity that cannot be beaten by a competitor, which would be represented by the next closest public education institution. Student families then reap the benefit of competitive school reforms that imply a greater potential for their child's educational gain. As Lubienski (2003) observes, many educational reformers turn to school choice and the subsequent competition amongst schools as a means for fostering entrepreneurial innovations that would otherwise be absent from underperforming traditional public schools.

In a seminal study conducted by Hoxby (2000) designed to assess whether competition between public school's benefits students, it was determined that urban areas with increased access to school choice tend to have more productive schools. Hoxby (2000) hypothesized that residential choices ultimately determine the quality of a public

education. Specifically, the study sought to demonstrate how the general properties of school choice are helpful for thinking about school-based reforms. The study focused on large metropolitan areas within nine Census regions with specific attention given to school enrollment, demographics, and school achievement within those areas. The study found that choice raises school productivity by simultaneously raising achievement and lowering spending. Spending can be lowered as a result of higher performing students improving the achievement of a school without any additional cost outside of the funds already allocated to educating the child. As high-performing and low-performing students move about, schools might experience a net gain in their achievement statistics due to the presence of new students. The effects on productivity, student achievement, and per-pupil spending are substantial in size (generally one quarter to one-half of standard deviation) if one considers the potential of school choice as a policy (Hoxby, 2000). Though complex in nature, Hoxby's study found that in some instances, school choice does encourage some local schools to improve their educational offerings in an effort to attract students (2000).

The ability to exercise school choice is not strictly motivated by the desire to attend a high-performing school. In a study carried out by Rabovsky (2001) that was intent on researching the impact of school choice on school quality, evidence showed that there are other reasons for exercising school choice which does not always adhere to what is often stated in the literature. In this study, school choice took the form of intradistrict transfers. Intradistrict transfers carry provisions that utilize market forces of competition

within public schools. Rabovsky (2011) explored whether claims made by proponents of school choice could be validated against the claims made by critics of school choice in Tulsa, Oklahoma school districts. Quantitative data was utilized to assess the academic performance index (API) test scores in an effort to measure increased performance in school quality. Qualitative data was gathered through interviews with school administrators from three of Tulsa's underperforming high schools. The findings of the study supported claims made by advocates that academic performance strongly influences transfer decisions made by some student families and has a positive influence on net transfers. Interestingly, for student families who transferred out of a school, Rabovsky (2011) found that concerns about personal disciplinary problems were a primary motivator. These student families were encouraged to transfer out of schools where high rates of suspension and student behavioral issues manifested. Administrator interviews revealed that transferring to a new school often equated to a new start for these students (Rabovsky, 2011).

While school choice does appear to have the ability to promote competition between some schools, a controversial byproduct is frequently addressed in the associated literature. School choice has the tragic potential to increase racial segregation in public schools located in communities with high minority or poverty concentrations (Rabovsky, 2011). Opponents of school choice consider heightened segregation in urban districts to be an asymptomatic threat that occurs when school choice is allowed to thrive (Lubienski, 2003; Rabovsky, 2011; Saporito, 2003; Wilkerson, 2017). Some research has

shown that minorities are likely to be attracted to school choice because they have been continuously disadvantaged within the traditional public school system (Rabovsky, 2011; Saporito, 2003; Wilkerson, 2017). But the heavy presence of minorities in these same settings has also encouraged a "white flight" of sorts from traditional public schools (Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). Many urban school districts have witnessed the demoralizing effects of watching local educational institutions deteriorate as a result of student departures.

An urban center that has experienced the impact of school choice upon the demographics of its school district has been Philadelphia. Saporito (2003) conducted a study aimed at focusing directly on the effects school choice has had on school segregation. The study sought to (1) deepen the understanding of the link between individual choices and race and economic segregation in the school choice context; (2) to explore whether the choice patterns of individuals are based upon the desire of advantaged groups to avoid members of perceived lower-status race and class groups; (3) to investigate whether patterns that appear to result from race-based and class-based choices actually reflect the effort of families to seek safe, high-quality schools; and (4) to examine the link between choice and segregation while accounting for school district policies that prevent some families from realizing their choices (Saporito, 2003, p. 182). The participants of the study were all students within the school district while applications for magnet and charter school programs provided the foundation for data accumulation.

The results of Saporito's (2003) exhaustive study appear to validate much of what school choice opponents have been expressing as it pertains to educational segregation. For example, in urban public schools in Philadelphia, it was found that white students are much more likely than non-white students to leave neighborhood school zones with higher percentages of non-white students. This resulted in an increased presence of non-white students in neighborhood public schools (Saporito, 2003). More concerning are the attempts to leave neighborhood schools among wealthier white students increased as the percentage of non-whites in the area increased. Such evidence suggests that some student families are actively seeking the opportunity to leave racially diverse educational settings. Where this is the case, public schools do in fact experience a form of segregation as white student families seek to flee the underperforming yet diverse neighborhood school. The ability to exercise school choice has made that possible.

The educational climate of the present day has not been friendly to opponents of school choice and their fears of its continued threat of school segregation. In 2017, President Donald Trump appointed Betsy DeVos to serve as his administration's Secretary of Education (Wilkerson, 2017). DeVos is a staunch supporter of school choice and the perceived effect market-style competition can have upon public schools. In her hometown of Holland, Michigan, school choice policies are implemented extensively. Research conducted by Wilkerson (2017) explored the performance of public schools in the Holland School District, the effects of school segregation and school policy are plainly visible. Wilkerson (2017) found that the school district has been in a

prolonged state of decline since the implementation of school choice. For example, in 2000 the district had 15 school buildings. It has since been reduced to eight. Many student families have opted out of the neighborhood schools in order to attend a charter school a little over a mile away. Due to that flight of students, Holland school district's white student enrollment has fallen 60 percent from the year when school choice policies were approved around the turn of the century. Today, whites constitute 49 percent of school-age children living in the district, but only 38 percent of the school population (Wilkerson, 2017). Conversely, nearby charter school enrollment numbers have made gains in the same categories where Holland school district has experienced losses.

While school choice has become a hotly contested issue, it is likely to remain an educational policy that will influence American public school systems for the foreseeable future. A primary benefactor of school choice initiatives has been charter school communities. These school systems, eager to serve a variety of students for a variety of reasons, play a critical role in the market-style competition that occurs between public schools vying to provide local youth with enhanced educational opportunities. Understanding the progression of the charter school movement is therefore essential.

The Charter School Movement

In the year 1990, no state had yet drafted legislation that allowed for the operation of charter schools. By the year 2000 however, 37 states had charter school legislation in their records (Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). This rapid increase had been attributed to the consequences of traditional public schools failing to enact measurable change,

particularly in urban school districts. The explosion of charter school acceptance and expansion, fueled primarily by school choice advocates, has since spread to all corners the United States. A growing number of educational stakeholders have voiced their dismay over the lack of improvement many traditional public schools have made both environmentally and academically (Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). In 1991, Minnesota served as the epicenter for charter school legislation. Stetson (2013) observed that many parents and educators in Minnesota were starved for a new type of school where more innovative and seemingly more effective instructional practices could be utilized. Many traditional public schools were struggling to meet the educational needs of their students. The new charter schools would be allowed to operate as public schools that are free to attend, publicly funded, and within the state educational system. However, charter schools would not be forced to enroll students based on where they lived and would be privately managed by an organization cleared to secure a charter (Stetson, 2013). With its simple and attractive foundation, charter school principles quickly evolved into a movement.

The political implications stemming from charter schools and the functions they serve have led to heated debates from a wide variety of educational stakeholders. Republican lawmakers tend to support the charter school movement because they assume that a straightforward voucher plan will not pass in their state (Fritz, 2016; Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005; Smarick, 2010). Instead, parents are empowered to utilize the public money given to charter schools as a means to freely exercise their educational decisions.

A common point of attack for conservative lawmakers hoping to enact change has been the amount of bureaucracy that seems to plague traditional public schools. The organizational structure of such schools and their unionized teachers frequently results in confrontation and stalemate (Fritz, 2016). Teacher associations can create friction with educational reformers for fear that the managerial autonomy granted to charter schools might erode the collective strength of the teaching profession (Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). The managers of a charter school are not bound to the rigid union rules that appear to prevent good teachers from being hired and bad teachers from being fired (Fritz, 2016). The ability to remove or avoid such factors might increase the likelihood of charter school innovation.

There is strong support for the charter school movement in liberal camps as well. Democrats in state governments often view charter schools as a way of leveling the playing field for underserved and underrepresented students by providing those families with school choices while avoiding more extreme educational reform measures (Lubienski, 2003; Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). Parents and teachers are often viewed as the stakeholders that know how to serve students best. Allowing those stakeholders to experiment with and target the underserved through charter school programs might provide a beneficial alternative to the status quo (Finnigan, 2007). Through autonomy, it is perceived, comes more flexibility for utilizing resources given the school.

The resulting legislation that began to appear in state government houses throughout the 1990s and early 2000s maintained a similar form and enjoyed mixed

support. In a study that followed the development of charter school policy and its diffusion across the country, Renzulli and Roscigno (2005) looked for commonalities in state charter school laws. In securing their independence from most state and local education regulations, charter schools are generally required to strictly uphold the mandates of their charter/contracts with sponsoring school boards or risk being shut down (Lubienski, 2003; Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). These types of schools are typically developed and managed by local activist groups or educational management organizations. In expected fashion, as touted in market-based educational reforms, neighboring states began to compete with one another as they introduced and revised more progressive or protectionist charter school legislation. For example, Minnesota adopted legislation that paved the way for charter school development in 1991. By 1993, a total of nine states had formalized similar charter school legislation. In 1995, charter school legislation blossomed into 18 states including the highly populated states of California and Texas. By 1999, the trend for adopting charter school legislation had spread to 32 states including the populous states of New York, Florida, Illinois, and Pennsylvania (Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). Many states had sought to recruit industry in the form of highly qualified teachers and invited families to migrate into local neighborhoods with strong school offerings (Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). The study ultimately found that states that passed strong charter school legislation were more likely to actually create charter schools and increase their visibility and thus prompt economic

growth (Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). In many states, support from local government structures is what made their successes viable.

Despite the perceived blessing of autonomy, charter school development and management can be highly complex. Many different groups are eligible to apply to a state for a charter. Educational management organizations (EMOs) have emerged as some of the most energetic agents of change within the charter school movement. Toson (2013) describes EMOs as private, for-profit companies that partner with public school boards to operate charter schools. Some reformers are cold to the idea of a for-profit enterprise managing a public school. But EMO advocates are quick to point out that school choice, profit-seeking, and expertise in education will drive many EMOs to innovate and increase student achievement (Toson, 2013). Though scant, there is evidence that suggests that a for-profit mindset in education can yield positive results.

In a study designed to explore the benefits associated with for-profit schooling, the research sought to demonstrate that "EMOs benefit American education by (a) giving a quality educational option for families living in urban areas or low socioeconomic status neighborhoods... (b) governing schools that are free from bureaucratic control, and (c) showing significant achievement gains" (Toson, 2013 p. 660). In urban school districts, many EMOs have thrived as traditional public schools have struggled to cope with increased demands and strained resources. EMOs have entered that educational market with a disposition for maintaining high-quality schools so that already tight resources and capital are not lost due to dissatisfied customers, which in this case are

represented by parents and students. The need for profit maintenance, as Toson (2013) argues, pushes EMOs to provide effective innovation that serves the dynamic learning needs of their consumers. Through charter schools, EMOs seek to correct and profit from the performance gaps that have resulted from the poor service delivery provided through overburdened traditional public schools.

The factors contributing to the charter school movement eventually captured the attention of policy-makers in Washington D.C. After observing how states packaged charter schools as a viable option for parents to exercise school choice, the federal government replicated the strategy and included provisions to expand and strengthen charter school offerings nationwide as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was signed into law (Dee & Jacob, 2011). When NCLB passed in 2001, provisions were included that guaranteed charter school eligibility for federal funding on the same basis as other public schools but would be bound by the same accountability requirements (Boundy & Weckstein, 2011). Such affirmation by the federal government sent waves through the charter school movement. While maintaining their separation from local educational authorities, charter schools would not be exempted from federal education law requirements by virtue of their charter if they received federal funds (Boundy & Weckstein, 2011). Put another way, charter schools were granted access to additional funding from the federal government pending the ability of those schools to adhere to federal education requirements. Many charter schools readily complied with the

additional federal oversight because federal funding would assist them in drastically expanding their operations.

With market-style competition between schools in full swing during the Bush Administration, the subsequent Obama Administration liked what it saw. In 2009, under the aegis of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, a series of education policies collectively dubbed Race to the Top (RttT) sought to intensify competition among the states by attaching large financial incentives (Howell & Magazinnik, 2017). Under RttT, state applicants competed for a share of the \$4.35 billion offered by the Department of Education in the form of competitive grants on the basis of their demonstrated willingness to adopt progressive education policies (Howell & Magazinnik, 2017). The Obama Administration made clear its intent to fiscally support school districts with agendas that supported those of the charter school movement (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

In a study that sought to evaluate the effects of the Race to the Top initiative, Howell and Magazinnik (2017) relied upon four key data points to measure its impact: (1) a nationally representative survey of state legislators, (2) an analysis of State of the State speeches, (3) an analysis of state applications to the competitions themselves, and finally, (4) an inventory of state policy making trends in a range of education policies that were awarded under the competition. The study found that the testimonies of state legislators demonstrated that RttT was indeed taken into serious consideration by a host of states. In the aftermath of RttT, states aggressively enacted progressive educational

policies that were explicitly rewarded under the competition. Two states, in particular, earned significant increases in funding as a result of their participation in the Race to the Top initiative. Tennessee and Delaware were awarded roughly \$500 million and \$120 million from the federal grant. That amounted to 10.0 and 5.7 percent gains in the two respective states' budgets for K-12 education for 2010 (Howell & Magazinnik, 2017). The study of Howell and Magazinnik found that a total of 11 of the states who applied along with Washington, D.C. were awarded increased funding at various levels for their participation in the program. In utilizing primarily qualitative data, the study found that RttT largely achieved its goal of promoting competition between states to improve the delivery of their educational systems and make reforms.

In the twilight years of his administration, President Obama released an Executive Summary of his Race to the Top initiative. Arne Duncan, then serving as the Secretary of Education, declared that RttT had "...offered unprecedented resources - \$4 billion - to states that committed to reshaping their education systems and ensuring every student would graduate college-ready and career-ready (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, p. IV)." The Obama Administration attempted to reduce the achievement gap that exists between student groups by identifying and rewarding effective school systems involved in a similar pursuit. In the Executive Summary, the U.S. Department of Education (2015) reiterated that the initiative was originally created to (1) establish high learning standards aligned with college and career readiness instructional practices; (2) develop and support effective teachers and leaders; (3) utilize data systems and instructional

technology to inform instruction; and (4) turn around low-performing schools. Despite its clearly stated goals, measuring the ability of RttT to accomplish what it set out to do has proven difficult outside of qualitative studies.

One of the chief purposes of the Executive Summary offered in November 2015 was to bring attention to the promising effects of change supported by quantitative data. In one instance, when looking at the change in graduation rates between the 2010-2011 and 2013-2014 school years for the 11 states that applied for funding, moderate increases were detected. The graduation rates among black students rose from 65% to 69.5% for a net gain of 4.5%. Similarly, Hispanic student graduation rates rose from 65.9% to 70.6% for a net gain of 4.7%. For economically disadvantaged students, graduation rates rose from 67.1% to 71.1% for an increase of 4% for all students in that category (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, p. IX). Each participating state was fiscally rewarded for the educational gains made in areas such as this.

With hard data to support its efforts, the Obama Administration hoped to expand the Race to the Top program and broaden its reach to entice more states to participate. In response to that push, many states turned to charter schools as a tool that would allow them to streamline educational improvements. In California, 104 charter schools were added to the state's school roster while 50,000 student families remained on a waiting list to get into one in 2013 ("Popularity of Charter", 2013). In its early stages, California had applied to receive some of the funding provided by the Race to the Top initiative but did not make it beyond the first phase. By expanding upon its educational offerings and

supporting reform efforts, California indicated that it too wanted to make educational gains for its underserved students. But as the Obama Administration gave way to the Trump administration, Race to the Top policies and initiatives have been discontinued for the time being.

Despite many of the educational reforms taken up by schools, whether prompted by participation in initiatives like Race to the Top or otherwise, intervention efforts still often fail to fix what they set out to do. This is particularly true in urban-school settings. In what has been dubbed the *Turnaround Fallacy*, Smarick (2010) notes that applied strategies for education reform often fail to improve the lowest performing schools. In California for example, the state targeted the bottom 20% of schools based on school performance so that they may receive interventions similar to those supported by RttT. Smarick (2010) found that after three years of reform and training, only 11% of those schools were able to make adequate progress. Boosting administrative leadership and collecting student data are activities that have been identified in many improved schools but have been difficult to replicate. Smarick (2010) contests that there simply is not enough reliable information in the literature to explain what interventions are the most successful in effecting change. What often occurs in traditional public schools is experimentation rather than outright reform. To combat this, Smarick (2010) suggests that chronically underperforming schools should simply be allowed to shut down and reopened as a charter school. Through the charter model, schools would theoretically no longer be tethered to school districts with continuously high prospects for failure.

Smarick makes the point that the threat of closure would prompt more aggressive attempts at school reform and closures would make room for appropriate personnel and curricular replacement (2010). In an extreme example of market-style competition amongst schools, those that fail to adopt must be allowed to fade away.

What often does make charter schools successful is their ability to function with autonomy. Such administrative freedom is believed to enable the school to better respond to the needs of the students being served within its walls. In a study by Stetson (2013) that sought to identify the common traits of successful charter schools in the United States, the research examined the success stories of five high-performing charter school networks around the country. The popular Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) and the California-based ASPIRE program was among those examined. Stetson (2013) observed that high expectations for behavior and academic achievement were established at the point of entry for all charter school students. Contracts are often utilized as a tool for establishing a disciplined learning environment. Extended learning time in the form of longer school days, weekend classes, and summer school sessions were also noted as contributors to the successes of these charter schools. Stetson (2013) indicated that a driving factor behind the success of each charter school examined was the intensive teacher training regimens and competitive pay/rewards educators at these sites are exposed to. It appears that the market-style environment of competition amongst schools has been transposed into teachers hiring pools. Clearly, the intent is to prompt teachers

into cultivating high-performing classrooms where students can excel. Teachers that produce the best results are likely to be rewarded accordingly.

Charter school theory and success stories have captured the attention of a wide variety of educational reformers and policymakers. When viewed in practice, however, the autonomy and market-style reforms associated with charter schools are left somewhat hamstrung. Finnigan (2007) employed a mixed methods approach to a series of case studies in an effort to comprehensively assess the degree of autonomy charter schools actually have and what factors might be inhibiting them. Among her findings, Finnigan (2007) observed that not all charter schools are wholly exempt from state education regulations and that exemption varies between the states. For example, a total of 61% of charter schools across the nation were exempted from maintaining stringent teacher hiring and firing policies. Only half of those school's received waivers for policies such as teacher certification requirements and teacher salaries that are coupled with pay schedules. With regards to statewide accountability requirements, both traditional public schools and charter schools are still largely required to participate. Curricular decisions were similarly influenced by state mandates and expectations for student achievement (Finnigan, 2007). While educational management organizations advance the creation of charter schools, many choose to manage their school brands tightly. Finnigan (2007) found that while some charter schools enjoy being freed from government bureaucracy, many more charter schools share their authority with their authorizers to make decisions over topics like daily bell schedules, purchasing, and staff hiring. In many ways, school

autonomy was greatly reduced in charter schools tied to statewide assessments. Those charter schools are bound to provide instructional content that makes it possible for each charter school student to participate in each assessment successfully.

When exploring the degree of autonomy within charter schools, Finnigan (2007) found that many charter schools were not likely to have control over their own spending budget and curricula. For example, Finnigan (2007) observed that 59% of charter schools involved reported having full authority of their instructional materials whereas 39% shared authority with their charter authorizer, and 2% had no authority. Education Management Organizations, often functioning as charter authorizers, are keen on maintaining their academic approach and brand as they strive to replicate their success and strengthen their reputations where they operate. As many states and by extension, charter school networks sought to secure funding through programs such as RttT the requirements for providing educational services that came with that funding influenced charter school operations greatly (Finnigan, 2007). It appears that the price for whatever degree of autonomy that a charter school can muster is increased accountability.

Although many charter schools are able to act separately from their traditional public school counterparts, many are held to the same standards of academic performance so as to ensure students have equitable access to an education.

Tracking School Performance

The ability of a charter school to support students in making academic achievement gains varies drastically. The Knowledge Is Power Program, or KIPP is one

of the largest charter school networks within the country. KIPP schools operate within a uniform framework and target low income and minority students in large urban areas who have historically been underserved (Angrist et al., 2010). In a quantitative quasi-experimental case study that assessed KIPP Academy Lynn in Massachusetts, researchers sought to determine whether such a large charter school network was capable of minimizing racial achievement gaps at a local level (Angrist et al., 2010). Like many other KIPP network schools, the Angrist study found that KIPP Lynn's educational delivery model is carried out primarily by non-unionized graduates from the Teach for America program who work contract hours that extend from 7:30 am to 5:00 pm. The fifth-grade student demographic for the KIPP Lynn school is 57% Hispanic and 24% black followed by white and Asian student groups (Angrist et al., 2010). As of 2018, approximately 70% of the KIPP Lynn Academy is comprised of Hispanic students (KIPP Academy Lynn KAL, 2018). The study examined how the educational delivery model of KIPP Lynn responded to statewide performance assessments. The comparison occurred between students who won the admissions lottery to enroll in KIPP Lynn to those students that had been denied. Study estimates found that students who attended KIPP Lynn made independent gains of .35 in math and .12 in ELA within a standard deviation over their non-attending counterparts within the course of a school year. Lottery winners achieved at .4 standard deviation higher than lottery losers in math alone (Angrist et al., 2010). The unique structure of KIPP Lynn and its ability to deliver upon its educational program has had a significant impact on the high-minority communities that it serves.

Though a single school within a much larger network, KIPP Lynn is an example of a charter school that has been able to outperform nearby traditional public schools.

The Harmony Public Schools (HPS) system is the largest such charter network in Texas and is the second largest in the nation (Sahin, Almus, & Willson, 2017). HPS is a STEM-focused charter school network comprised of 48 schools that serve more than 30,000 students across Texas' metropolitan areas. Quantitative research compared the performance of 32 traditional public high schools to the 12 high schools within the HPS system for the 2010-2013 timeframe based on state test performance (Sahin, Almus, & Willson, 2017). The curricular areas assessed included math, science, and reading. The independent variables of the study included school status whereas the dependent variables were comprised of student test scores in the curricular areas measured by the statewide assessment. Findings indicated that the performance results of 9th graders in mathematics were higher for HPS students in all years between 2010 and 2013. HPS students outperformed traditional public high school students in reading during those years as well. In science, HPS students outperformed traditional public high school students in 2011 and 2013 with scores that were statistically significant. While such results may not be entirely surprising considering that HPS is STEM-centric, this charter school network in Texas has demonstrated that academic performance can be greater amongst charter school students than traditional public high school students.

Research conducted by Hoxby and Murarka (2008) sought to evaluate the academic performance of the 60 charter schools in operation in New York City from the

2000-2001 to 2005-2006 school year time frame. Data were acquired from the New York City Department of Education for the demographic information and testing performance of students between grades three and eight. Participants were divided into groups of students who applied to and won the admissions lottery and a group of students that applied to and lost the admissions lottery (Hoxby & Murarka, 2008). The researchers were resolved to discern who it was that was applying to charter schools in New York City and how those students fared academically against their peers who remained in traditional public schools. The study found that applicants are twice as likely to be black (64 percent vs. 32 percent) and less likely to be white or Asian (7 percent versus 28 percent) (Hoxby & Murarka, 2008, p. 56). Part of the reason for such over-representation is due to the fact that many of the charter schools under scrutiny are located within neighborhoods where black student families represent a significant majority (Hoxby, 2000; Hoxby & Murarka, 2008) Nevertheless, Hoxby and Murarka (2008) determined that New York City charter schools raise the math achievement of their students by .09 standard score and reading achievement by .04 standard score in relation to their traditional public school peers. Stated plainly, New York City charter school students recover 12 percent of the distance from failing to proficient in math and 3.5 percent of the distance from failing to proficient in reading relative to peers who remained in a traditional public school (Hoxby & Murarka, 2008). Evidence such as this suggests that charter schools in New York City have been able to provide some of their students with a competitive advantage over other students in traditional public high

school settings. Such positive effects have contributed significantly to closing the achievement gap that exists between student groups.

Results from statewide assessments are often the primary metric for measuring the success of a school's educational delivery. Student achievement is not typically viewed through the lenses of student motivation and program perception. Research exists however that sought to identify correlations between the instructional practices, learning activities, learner motivations, and the perceptions of how learning occurs at a secondary charter school in Texas that serves at-risk youth (Hung et al., 2014). Because the school serves many students who have dropped out of a traditional public school yet somehow still maintains an 80% graduation rate, the study was intended to determine what this charter school was doing different (Hung et al., 2014). The qualitative case study accumulated data through interviews with administrators, teachers, and students at the school. The study found that administrators at the site largely attributed the schools' success to its ability to provide instructional opportunities that were clearly aligned with the mission of the school. Those opportunities were heavily influenced by rigorous professional development training. Teachers perceived the success of the school as the result of being allowed to utilize wide-ranging instructional approaches to meet the educational needs of their students. For example, teachers enjoyed having the privilege to teach students through a direct instruction format or the use of online computer curriculum before responding to student needs as they arose. Students felt that they were encouraged to be successful because of the unique structure of the school. Specifically,

students shared that they enjoyed having the opportunity to choose to participate in the morning or afternoon block sessions in order to get their learning done for the day. At this particular charter school, students were afforded the opportunity to attend a morning session or afternoon session for four hours and attend a tutorial for additional support alternatively. This flexibility, as cited by the students, enabled them to hold down jobs or support the unique needs of their families more conveniently. For many student families and educators, charter schools can be a promising alternative to traditional public schools. Flexibility in schedules and teacher instructional practices appear to increase educational equity for some at-risk students.

In many cities and states, charter schools have been a mixed blessing to the market theory of education. Though dedicated to providing student families with access to school choice, many charter schools are unable to provide a better performing alternative.

Arizona has long been at the forefront of the charter school movement. The state is committed to exercising market theory principles in its public education environment by way of increased charter school offerings. Research has shown that “in the 2012–2013 school year, 13.3% of Arizona students attended charter schools, almost 3 times the national average of 4.6% and more than any other state” (Chingos & West, 2015, p. 120). Researchers Chingos and West (2015) endeavored to generate a comprehensive study of the effectiveness of Arizona charter schools relative to traditional public schools in raising student achievement as measured by high-stakes assessments for middle-school

aged students. Data were acquired from the Arizona Department of Education after Chingos and West requested the information in the form of student demographics, test scores, school enrollment, and details related to different charter school programs between 2007 and 2012. Utilizing an observational method to compare student groups, the researchers Chingos and West (2015) began their study by identifying academic performance baselines for students based upon Arizona Institute to Measure Standards or AIMS test results (Accountability & Research, 2018). Findings revealed that each year spent in a charter middle school in Arizona reduced overall student achievement in math by roughly 2% of a standard deviation. Additionally, no significant difference between charter and traditional public high school students in reading or writing performance was observed. This suggests that autonomy amongst school managers does not consistently guarantee access to high-performing schools. On a micro level, the study found that charter schools in urban settings outperformed charter schools in rural and suburban settings. In those regions, attending a charter middle school is estimated to reduce achievement in both math and reading by roughly 3% of a standard deviation (Chingos & West, 2015). Charter schools thus appear to provide urban student families with expanded educational options where competition plays into their favor. Regrettably, Chingos and West (2015) found underperforming charter schools in the countryside as is in the case of Arizona to provide student families with lackluster alternatives.

In Illinois, charter schools have exploded onto the scene in recent years. This might be unsurprising when considering that former Secretary of Education, Arne

Duncan, and former President, Barack Obama, hail from the state. These two individuals were chief architects of the Race to the Top initiative that expanded charter school development and support nationwide. Their efforts were particularly concentrated in Chicago. Research conducted by Orfield and Luce (2016) found that charter school enrollment in the Chicago Public School District increased tenfold between 2000-2014 before capping at 140 active charter campuses today. Specifically, charter enrollment ballooned from 5,400 to 54,795. Alternately, traditional public high school enrollment declined 20% from 426,700 to 341,465 (Illinois State Board of Education, 2016). Data attesting to the academic performance of these charter schools have been scant thus motivating this further exploration. The study that followed compared the academic performance of charter school students to traditional public school students for 2012-2013 and 2013-2014. The collected data included the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) scores for grades three to eight, student growth, graduation rates, and averaged ACT scores. Orfield and Luce's research revealed that only 25% of the charter schools in Chicago were not single race schools and every single campus was attended by more than 80% non-white students. Such numbers suggest that the Chicago Public School District is struggling to overcome a new form of segregation in its schools (2016). Academically, the study found that charter schools in Chicago consistently underperform traditional public schools in all of the assessed categories. For example, pass rates for low-income students in charter schools exhibit shortfalls of up to 20% in Chicago when compared to their traditional public school peers. Due to the culmination of the findings

in their study, Orfield and Luce (2016) went so far as to suggest that the Chicago Public School District should refrain from granting additional charters until quality control measures and stricter regulations can be adapted to stem the tide of poor performance in the city's active yet floundering charter schools. While many charter schools have served the nation's large cities well, this study shows that they have also struggled to provide its students with equitable access to education.

Market Theory in Action

Winters (2012) found that charter school competition and school choice have the potential to directly impact the performance of traditional public schools given the view that both institutions compete for the resources associated with each student. Traditional public school achievement records stand to decline as students transfer to the more seemingly competitive local charter school. Research conducted by Winters assessed the impact student transfers to charter schools had on the academic achievement of traditional public schools that served students in New York City between the 2005-2006 and 2008-2009 school years (2012). Winters' study evaluated the demographic information and test scores for third to eighth-grade students between the proposed time-frame in search of trends. Interestingly, results showed that traditional public schools that lose students to charter schools are minimally affected by the losses and demonstrate academic gains in some instances. For example, Hispanic students who remain in public school were found to benefit significantly in math (Winters, 2012). In looking at English Language Arts test scores, both African-American and Hispanic students benefited from

charter school competition as well. While causes for these gains are not entirely certain, one potential cause for the increase in minority student performance could be the increased attention those students receive after their peers' transfer elsewhere. While traditional public schools may benefit from the transfer of students to charter schools in some instances, Winters (2012) has not condoned improving school performance by removing the low-performing students from the final tally as was evidenced.

Market theory and reformers in education frequently advance the notion that competition between schools will prompt schools to become more innovative as they strive to improve student outcomes (Preston, Goldring, Berends, & Cannata, 2012). In reviewing literature however, it becomes clear that quantifying innovation has been challenging to establish. What types of policies and organizational procedures can be deemed innovative have remained elusive. Curious researchers conducted a study intent on determining the levels and types of innovations that exist in charter and traditional public schools to assess how they differ from one another within local district contexts (Preston et al., 2012). In doing so, the researches were eager to discern whether one school type was more innovative than the other and in what ways. Qualitative data for the study were secured through the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) from 2007-2008. The measures taken to determine the degree of innovation include school staffing policies, academic support services, school organizational structures, and governance. In direct contrast to what market theory and educational reformers often promote, findings indicated that charter schools are generally no more innovative than traditional public

schools (Preston et al., 2012). For example, tutoring services provided through a charter school is one of the unique tools utilized to provide an enhanced educational experience. This study found that 57.6% of traditional public schools offer tutoring services as compared to 58.8% of charter schools (Preston et al., 2012). Interestingly, after delving deeply into a support services analysis provided by the schools in the sample, researchers Preston et al. (2012) found that only 47.4% of charter schools offered career technical education (CTE) internships whereas 70.4% of traditional public schools did. The clearest innovative difference between traditional and public schools identified had to do with teacher staffing and compensation. For instance, researchers noted that 32.1% of charter schools report providing teachers with merit pay for increased student achievement whereas only 18.7% of public schools could do the same (Preston et al., 2012). Within this comprehensive study, researchers appear to have countered much of what market theorists and many educational reformers have claimed with regards to the merits of innovation prompted by school choice. It would be prudent to note, however, that many of the nation's most successful charter schools have established themselves as such because of their ability to provide services and alternatives in localities that are uniquely lacking (Angrist et al., 2010; Linnick & Lubienski, 2013; Stetson, 2013).

Supporters of educational market theory trust that charter school autonomy will raise academic achievement within the school and simultaneously exert healthy pressure on nearby traditional public schools to improve their own achievement (Zimmer & Buddin, 2009). In California, charter schools have grown at a rapid pace and measuring

their impact on traditional public schools has been a hugely controversial point of interest. Researchers Zimmer and Buddin (2009) sought to determine whether or not charter school competition within the state was actually improving the performance of traditional public schools. Two sample groups were established for the study that compared the results of a survey given to school administrators and student performance scores on the Stanford 9 norming samples for reading and math test scores. One sample group was comprised of 245 random traditional public school sites chosen statewide. The other sample group was comprised of six school districts of varying sizes. Principals in both samples were asked questions that sought to capture the degree of competition that the administrators felt was brought on by the increased presence of charter schools. Zimmer and Buddin's (2009) findings showed that in the statewide group, only about 11% of principals had revised their instructional practices to a minor extent because of the influence of charter schools. Fewer than 10% said that they had adapted their employment and compensation policies. Within the six-district sample, however, 25% shared that they had tweaked instructional practices or professional development offerings in direct response to the presence of charter schools. A potential reason for the spike in the response rate could be due to the notion that the six-sample group contained large urban school districts. Charter schools often focus their attention and resources in such settings. When reviewing academic achievement scores, researchers Zimmer and Buddin found little evidence that charter schools were affecting achievement in public schools in either sample group (2009). Some evidence suggests that traditional

elementary schools that were located within a 2.5-mile range of a charter school experienced some competitive effects in the form of losing some students to the charter. This might have resulted in higher scores for the traditional elementary score in reading and mathematics. While proximity between a charter school and traditional public schools might encourage some competition, the degree of competition does not appear to have as significant an impact as reformers frequently suggest. While some schools do adjust parts of their educational delivery model, systematic overhauls are far from certain in California.

According to market theory, competition from charter schools should be utilized as a mechanism for increasing school efficiency. Students should be able to leave inefficient traditional public schools until the school is eventually forced to close due to a lack of students (Schwenkenberg & VanderHoff, 2015). For New Jersey, the competition between traditional public schools and charter schools to provide for students has been fierce. New Jersey has some of the country's top performing charter school systems but also has a charter fail rate that is near twice the national average. In a study that sought to understand why charter schools fail in that state, researchers Schwenkenberg and VanderHoff, (2015) found that a rigorous evaluation process held charter schools much more accountable in New Jersey than in other states. This has led to an improved educational service delivery model. The data set utilized for the study contained charter school observations and achievement scores on state assessments between 2000-2013 from 111 charter schools. Findings by Schwenkenberg and VanderHoff (2015) indicated

that the primary factors that New Jersey relied upon for closing down underperforming charter schools were test scores and expenditure decisions. For example, the study found that a \$100 increase in per-student spending reduced the likelihood that a charter school would be closed by 3% when compared to charter schools who did not invest as much. But for every \$100 spent on support expenditures (i.e. tutoring, counseling, etc.) the probability for school failure increased by 6%. As weak charter schools closed, those remaining were able to strengthen or correct their model by adopting the best practices for retaining student growth and performance on statewide assessments. Consequently, the surviving charter schools have applied significant pressure on the traditional public school to compete. Enrollment data utilized for the study showed that enrollment declined for poorly performing traditional public schools in urban districts with low graduation rates whereas enrollment data for charter schools in those areas trended upwards significantly. For example, in Newark, the presence of charter schools increased from nine to 23 whereas 15 traditional public schools were closed between 2001 and 2013 (Schwenkenberg & Vanderhoff, 2015). Clearly, student families trapped in these underperforming schools were eager to relocate to the higher performing charter school alternatives. In New Jersey, the competition between charter schools and traditional public schools has provided school choice advocates with some credible evidence detailing the merits of promoting competition within educational markets.

When a charter school fails to meet the academic standards set forth by the state they operate in, they often run the risk of closure. Market forces in education dictate that

the lowest performing schools should be closed as a result of their inability to compete with other high-quality educational programs. Ohio is a state that, after years of lacking in oversight, has enacted a strict automatic closure law aimed at shutting down chronically poor-performing charter schools. Research by Carlson and Lavertu (2016) examined the impact charter school closure and reassignment had on the academic achievement of students who attended the under-performing charter school when they were notified of the closure. The automatic charter school closure law in Ohio goes into effect when a charter school's academic achievement fails to meet minimum education standards in three out of four consecutive years (Carlson & Lavertu, 2016). Between 2008 and 2012, Carlson and Lavertu reported that 23 charter schools were designated for closure due to consistently poor performance (2016). Data for the study contained information pertaining to the closure of 18 elementary and middle schools serving grades four to eight, as student achievement data were available for multiple consecutive years before and after the closure of these schools (Carlson & Lavertu, 2016). Findings showed that students whose schools were identified for mandatory closure experienced average achievement gains between 0.2 and 0.3 standard deviations by the third year after closure identification (2016). Such gains are largely attributed to the perception that those students participated in a more effective educational delivery model once placed in new and higher-performing schools. In a textbook example of market forces in action, the weaker educational program failed to provide adequate services and the stronger educational program absorbed the consumers impacted by that failure. Students then

benefitted from the improved educational delivery at the higher performing charter school.

Research has shown that the ability of a charter school to place competitive pressure upon traditional public schools has been mixed. In states like California, charter schools have had a minimal impact on the daily operations and policies adopted by the majority of traditional public schools. In states like New Jersey, which are much more densely populated within a confined geographic area, charter schools have pushed many traditional public schools to compete for students. In a study that sought to determine how charter schools ultimately do and do not bring about change in traditional public schools, researchers Linick and Lubienski, found that charter schools have a limited impact (2013). The study explored both internal and external factors that influence the degree of competitive pressure traditional public schools might feel by more diversified education markets. Before they can be perceived as a competitive threat, research showed that charter schools need to demonstrate increased rates of enrollment within the local school district. Specifically, charter schools need to demonstrate at least a 6% student enrollment rate (Linick & Lubienski, 2013). At that point, local public school and district officials will need to decide as to whether or not they feel a need to respond to the increased presence of charter schools. Linick and Lubienski (2013) claim that market competition will only be realized if the traditional public school or district responds by (a) passively responding to and working with the charter school, (b) competing with the charter by making adjustments to academic quality and employing

marketing strategies, or (c) creating policy barriers for the charter school operation. Findings in this study showed that short term and medium term exposure to charter schools had a minimum impact on the traditional public schools' perception of competition. It was only after periods of long exposure where charter schools yielded high test scores and student enrollment figures that traditional public schools felt a need to compete (Linick & Lubienski, 2013). In many ways, the educational market theory is correct in its assumption that increased competition between schools will lead to increased academic program quality. Yet the research has shown that the degree of competition that exists between charter schools and traditional public schools is wholly conditional on the ability of the charter school to prompt a response out of the traditional public school.

Understanding California's School Academic Report Card and Statewide Assessment

In November 1988, California voters passed Proposition 98, also known as *The Classroom Instructional Improvement and Accountability Act*. This ballot initiative provided California's public schools with a stable source of funding. In exchange for that funding, all public schools in California are required annually to prepare a School Academic Report Card (SARC) (CDE, 2018a). SARCs are designed to provide the general public with important information about each publicly funded school and to communicate a school's progress in achieving its goals (CDE, 2018a). In essence, SARCs function as an accountability measure to demonstrate to the public that their tax dollars are not being wasted on chronically underperforming schools.

The CAASPP tracks student progress towards Common Core standards in English language arts, mathematics, and science for grades 3-8 and grade 11 for California. Student scores place them in four different categories that indicate whether or not academic performance showed: standard exceeded, standard met, standard nearly met, and/or standard not met. Data from the assessment is used to inform the public and stakeholders about the academic performance of local schools (CDE, 2018g).

The California Department of Education utilizes its annual SARC reports as an opportunity to relay data to the public on multiple measures. Chief among those measures for each traditional public and charter school are demographic data, school safety, and climate information, academic data, completion rates, class sizes, staffing information, curricular descriptions, and fiscal data (2018). This information is often incorporated into the decision-making processes of parents to determine where they would like to enroll their child. Additionally, school reform advocates might turn to the data found on SARC's to pressure local education agencies into improving the performance of the schools within its educational area.

A focal point of each annual SARC is the portion dedicated to tracking student performance on statewide assessments. In California, 2015 marked the beginning for a brand new statewide assessment system titled the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress or CAASPP ("State schools chief Torlakson" 2015, para. 1). Tom Torlakson, California Superintendent of Public Instruction, declared that the new assessment system would be administered to about 3.2 million students in Spring 2015 to

measure their progress in learning towards more rigorous academic standards intent on preparing them to become more college and career ready (“State schools chief Torlakson” 2015, para. 2). The CAASPP tracks student progress towards Common Core standards in English language arts and mathematics for grades 3-8 and grade 11. Student scores place them in four different categories that indicate whether or not academic performance showed: standard exceeded, standard met, standard nearly met, and/or standard not met (CDE, 2018g). In the first year of testing, 44% of all students met or exceeded ELA standards and 33% met or exceeded mathematics standards (“State schools chief Torlakson” 2015, para. 11). Information that is used to determine whether or not a school is chronically underperforming can easily be found utilizing a schools SARC.

School Choice and the Revival of Sacramento High School

A particularly well documented and high-profile episode between school choice advocates and traditional public high school bureaucrats unfolded in Sacramento, CA. In 2003, Sacramento High School, the second oldest high school west of the Mississippi River, faced a state-mandated takeover after years of poor academic performance as measured by annual yearly progress metrics (“The Reinvention”, 2002). Sacramento High School was a traditional public school that served the highly diverse Oak Park neighborhood. At its lowest point, data indicated that only two out of ten Sacramento High school students could read grade-level material. Less than 50% of the student body was able to achieve proficient scores in basic math skills assessments. Remarkably, 86%

of the students who graduated from Sacramento High were ineligible to attend college at the California State University level. Perhaps the most alarming, 52% of the students enrolled at Sacramento High School in 2003 had at least one grade of a “D” or lower on their report card (Fortune, 2003). Such chronic failure had plagued the neighborhood for years and the time had come for drastic action prompted by the state’s department of education.

When the Sacramento City Unified School District School Board of Trustees convened in early 2003, it was eager to craft a plan of action for Sacramento High School in an effort to prevent the looming state take over. It was at that time that Kevin Johnson, an Oak Park native, and former NBA player, emerged with a proposal to shut down Sacramento High School and reopen it as a charter school (“School board OKs”, 2003). Johnson had previously organized his St. HOPE revitalization group which aimed to bring much needed resources to the area, especially as it pertained to the education of Oak Park area youth. With his team assembled, Johnson declared to the SCUSD board members that large comprehensive high schools simply do not work. He and his St. HOPE team proposed to restructure Sacramento High School into a collection of small learning communities made up of 500 students, each with a different focus (“School board OKs”, 2003). The St. HOPE run school would have a school president dedicated to overseeing the business side of things. The principal, of which Sacramento High has had many, would be free to focus on much needed educational changes on items like curriculum and teaching methods (“School board OKs”, 2003). St. HOPE and Kevin

Johnson believed that only through a radical transformation into a charter school could Sacramento High better serve its student population.

The community's response to St. HOPE's proposal to shut down and then turn around Sacramento High School was hotly contested. In early March 2003, the SCUSD board members moved to vote on the proposal set forth by Kevin Johnson and St. HOPE. At that board meeting, angry outbursts from parents and community leaders opposed to the transition contributed to the discontent shown by members of the local teacher union ("School board OKs", 2003). Many questioned the experience of Johnson and his organization's ability to take charge over a public high school that was in a critical state. Statements made by a representative of St. Hope which promised "new life, new energy, and new visions" for Sacramento High were taken as veiled threats for ridding the school of its teachers ("School board OKs", 2003). Nevertheless, as pressure from the state takeover mounted, the SCUSD board members moved to vote on the petition. In a 4-1-2 vote, with two board members abstaining, the St. HOPE petition won its approval for a five-year probationary period. Sacramento High School would be shut down and reopened as a charter school in Fall 2003 ("School board OKs", 2003).

The initial blowback from the passage of the charter school petition was fierce. For the SCUSD board members who voted for passage of the charter school petition, threats of recall were issued boisterously (Bailey, 2003). Opposition parties railed against SCUSD for failing to acknowledge its prior inability to provide then Sacramento High School with support for its experienced faculty, aging school infrastructure,

inadequate supplies, and what one reporter described as a “revolving-door parade of principals (Bailey, 2003). The SCUSD seemingly chose to reauthorize a brand new school rather than evaluate its own resource allocation and take responsibility for its failure to accommodate the high school in the years leading up to the charter proposal. An audit conducted by the California state government confirmed as much. In May 2003, the audit found that the school district failed to provide appropriate leadership, support for the basic needs of the school faculty, and provide for the basic needs of students in the form of quality textbooks (Bailey, 2003). In the wake of the vote, the educational staff of Sacramento High, particularly the teachers, moved on to different opportunities within the district leaving the new Sacramento High School in dire need of qualified educators (Bailey, 2003).

As time passed and sentiments cooled, new data for the performance of Sacramento Charter High School slowly started to emerge. In February 2004, 68% of the sophomores passed the mathematics section of the California High School Exit Exam. This represented an 18% increase from the year before. The sophomores demonstrated a 66% pass rate on the English Language Arts section. This represented a 3% gain from the year before (“Sac high scores”, 2004). In a single school year, students in the Oak Park neighborhood had the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) publish its accreditation report on Sacramento Charter High School (“Sac high scores”, 2004). In Spring 2004, the findings were more than favorable for the St. HOPE organization. The WASC report complimented St. HOPE for its ability to (1)

reconstitute the school with a clear mission and small school model; (2) support faculty, leadership, and staff for providing high quality education; (3) and extend student learning time so that students can earn up to 80 credits per year via after-school tutoring (“Sac high scores”, 2004). In what amounted to a vindication of the vision that was so vehemently contested the year before, Kevin John and his St. HOPE organization were quick to utilize these findings and commendations as resources for furthering the Sacramento Charter High School agenda.

A hugely pivotal year in the burgeoning lifespan of the St. HOPE organization came during the winter of 2007-2008. It was at that time that the probationary charter granted to Sacramento Charter High School by the SCUSD Board of Trustees came up for renewal. The environment for the board meeting meant to evaluate the new charter proposition stood in stark contrast to the board meetings that occurred five years prior (Harvey, 2007). A brief glimpse at the performance data of the students at the school clearly explains the reason for the change of tone. The graduation rate for the new Sacramento High had hovered steadily at 80%. That represented a 50% increase from the 2003 graduation rates. The cause of such a dramatically positive increase was largely attributed to the unique structural features being implemented on the charter campus. For example, teachers at Sacramento Charter High School now ran an advisory group for the same 11 students throughout the school year to check-in and monitor student progress (Harvey, 2007). The school implemented a series of themed academics (e.g. business concentration, journalism concentration, etc.), block scheduling, mandatory community

service hours, required teacher participation in extracurricular activities, and the implementation of school uniforms to mitigate issues associated with gang affiliation (Harvey, 2007). The Oak Park community thoroughly appreciated the improvements that had been made to the educational experience of the children who were able to attend the school. It comes without much surprise that the SCUSD board members voted to approve the charter's renewal by a vote count of 6-1 (Harvey, 2007). Thanks to its relatively high-performing student population, Sacramento Charter High School would be in operation for another five years.

Yet the lauded successes of Sacramento Charter High School have frequently been tempered by the challenges associated with maintaining consistent enrollment. While student achievement data has risen consistently, overall enrollment has declined just the same (Rosenhall, 2005). In as early as July 2005, Sacramento Charter High School was serving 1,303 students. That was 500 fewer students than enrolled just three years prior (Rosenhall, 2005). For any school, such a drop is significant. A SCUSD board member was pressed for an answer to describe the enrollment drop-off before sharing that Sacramento Charter High School relied solely on recruitment to fill its classrooms and hallways. Once it was converted to a charter, the high school lost access to automatic feeder schools. SCUSD established new attendance boundaries so that students would be redirected to nearby Rosemont, Hiram Johnson, or McClatchy high school. These are the traditional public schools that compete with Sacramento Charter High School for students (Rosenhall, 2005).

By Spring 2008, enrollment challenges for Sacramento Charter High School had only been compounded. The SCUSD had been doing a poor job of advertising the open enrollment availability of the charter high school through its available channels. For example, when glancing at the schools that could be found on the SCUSD website, there was no mention or linkage to Sacramento Charter High School (“Report on Local”, 2008). It appeared that the school district had been quick to point out turnaround achievement data but slow to help draw future students to the school.

Enrollment issues for Sacramento High came to a head at the end of 2010. It was at that time officials from St. HOPE lobbied a complaint against the SCUSD accusing its board of restricting Sacramento Charter High School’s access to middle school student families (Gutierrez, 2010). Low enrollment was the direct consequence of that restriction. Some SCUSD board members fired back by claiming that it was not the responsibility of the district to push students towards Sacramento High because it was now a charter school (Gutierrez, 2010). Charter schools operate as independent entities. Those members indicated that steering future students towards the high school would not be in the best interest of the district. The new SCUSD Superintendent went so far as to state that the district receives its funding based on student enrollment and would lose money to St. HOPE for every pupil that chose to enroll there (Gutierrez, 2010). By now, it had become clear that Sacramento Charter High School was doing great things in service of its student population. But SCUSD had no plans for allowing the school to

establish itself much further in gaining consumers within the tightening local education market.

Despite its enrollment battles with the SCUSD, Sacramento Charter High School's student achievement data skyrocketed. Based on California's Academic Performance Index, 2009 was the year the Sacramento Charter High ranked in the top 10% of schools with a similar demographic, that being high poverty and high minority ("Sac High turnaround", 2009). The school had demonstrated remarkable progress in a host of critical performance areas. For example, more 70% of the graduating class for 2009 had been accepted to a four-year university ("Sac High turnaround", 2009). What is more, nearly 75% of 10th graders passed California's high school exit exam ("Sac High turnaround", 2009). With enrollment hoping to hold steady, Sacramento Charter High School appears to have been hitting its stride.

When the Obama Administration made available an influx of financial grants through the Race to the Top initiative, Sacramento Charter High School was well positioned. By late 2009, the four-year drop-out rate had decreased from 9.4% to 3.7%. Such an accomplishment is to be lauded for a school whose 952 students are 91% minority students and 69% of whom receive free or reduced lunches (Lambert, 2009). With \$400 million earmarked for high performing charter schools, St. HOPE was eager to apply for the additional funding and expand its educational operations. Such financial gains might have assisted in offsetting potential losses due to the ongoing enrollment conflicts.

Charter renewal for St. HOPE's high school was due for a vote for a third time in April 2012. By the time of the vote, Sacramento Charter High School was in the strongest position it had ever been in. The school had grown much nearer to the California Department of Education's recommended threshold for student performance. The charter school earned a ranking of ten out of ten from the California Department of Education when its student performance and education model was compared to similar high schools within the state. The 2012 graduating class was accepted into four-year colleges at an astounding rate of 84% ("St. HOPE schools", 2012). Despite the intense relationship with SCUSD, St. HOPE was able to have its charter renewed for another five years.

The Identity of C.K. McClatchy High School

When Sacramento High School shut down and emerged as a charter school, C.K. McClatchy High School became the oldest traditional public school in Sacramento. Built in 1937, CKM was the result of a Public Works Administration project prompted by the passing of New Deal era legislation. Built on 30 acres, the structure of C.K. McClatchy High captured many pieces of common construction projects carried out by the Public Works Administration. In 2002, the school was officially listed on the National Register of Historic Places. C.K. McClatchy High School's attendance area is roughly bounded by the American River (north), the Sacramento River (west), Highway 99 (east), and 47th Avenue (south). During the 2017-2018 school year, 2,285 students attended the high school ("History of C.K. McClatchy High School," n.d., para. 1).

For the 2017-2018 school year C.K. McClatchy High School will be educating 2,299 students on its more than 70 year-old campus. Of that population, 58% receive free/reduced lunches. This indicates that much of the population contains dramatically varying socioeconomic status' (CDE, 2018b). In 2005, C.K. McClatchy High School earned California Distinguished School honors ("Nine Schools in Sacramento," 2005).

Conclusion

In broad terms, school choice and the principles of market theory suggest that the invitation of competition within school districts benefits student families as schools strive to attract enrollment. Ideally, the best schools will grow while the weakest will fade. The introduction of charter school models and its rapid expansion has certainly provided some student families with a viable alternative to underperforming traditional public schools. But charter schools cannot be universally regarded as the better choice. Literature has shown that academic achievement rates between traditional public schools and charter schools vary considerably from district to district. In Sacramento, California, a hotly contested charter school transformation occurred with the intent to provide neighborhood students with a better educational alternative to the nearby traditional public high school.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

The research methodology utilized for the comparison of achievement data from a charter high school and a traditional public high school was quantitative. This comparison study examined the statewide assessment results of two high schools located in a large urban school district in Sacramento, California during the 2016-2017 school year. The quantitative data used in this study were harvested from the School Accountability Report Card (SARC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium results for Sacramento Charter High School and C.K. McClatchy High School. Demographic data was relied upon as a tool for comparing the academic performance of each school in terms of race, ethnicity, ability, and socioeconomic status. The primary purpose was to definitively determine which local high school is more capable of providing a student with the opportunity to perform at the highest level based on academic achievement data. The secondary purposes of this study were to identify which school is better equipped at instructing students in different core content areas.

This study operated within an Action Research Design. Action research designs are systematic procedures carried out by educators as they seek to collect information about how educational settings operate and how they may be improved upon (Creswell, 2015). This design utilized quantitative data methods to compare the performance of two separate public learning institutions. Specifically, Participatory Action Research (PAR)

was utilized as the main form of inquiry. PAR carries a more social and community orientation and places a strong emphasis on research that functions as a force for societal change or reflection (Creswell, 2015). Further, still, PAR strives to secure the open involvement of participants by collaborating as conscientious partners and engaging participants as equals to promote their well-being (Creswell, 2015). From this research design, this researcher strove to identify the academic areas in which a charter high school's and traditional public high school's structure are most effective.

The resources necessary for conducting this research included a thorough literature review, assessment data from the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium portion of the CAASPP, demographic and performance data contained within the SARC's of participant schools, and visual aids.

The use of descriptive statistics within this Action Research design assisted in analyzing the accrued data sets. In conducting a descriptive analysis with this data the research sought to understand how varied the statewide academic assessments results are and where one score may relate in comparison to others (Creswell, 2015). The statewide assessment data utilized in this comparison study provided mean scale scores for students who participated in the SBAC assessment during the 2016-2017 school year.

Standardized assessment scores in reading, writing, and math from a traditional public high school were compared to the same scores tendered from a charter high school.

Descriptive statistics supported the research in indicating general tendencies in the data, the spread of achievement scores, and assisted in describing the independent, dependent,

and/or control variables (Creswell, 2015). In analyzing the data, the research sought to confirm or disprove the proposed hypotheses. In conducting this research, the educational efficacy of a charter high school and a traditional public high school in a large urban setting were determined. The assessment data for each school is unbiased information as it was collected and analyzed by the outside source that is the California Department of Education.

Target Population

The data gathered for this research occurred at the school-wide level. The target population were students who attended a charter high school and a traditional public high school during the 2016-2017 administration of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium portion of the CAASPP in Sacramento, California. This charter high school and traditional public high school were targeted for a variety of reasons. Sacramento Charter High School students represented students who left or opted out of larger traditional public high school populations for a smaller school setting that operates within the charter school framework where there is less regulation, at least theoretically. C.K. McClatchy High School students represented students who learn within a large traditional public high school system and participate in a highly regulated educational environment.

The target population relied upon for this study consisted of all the students enrolled at Sacramento Charter High School and C.K. McClatchy High School. A target population is a group of individuals with a common defining characteristic that can be identified within a study (Creswell, 2015). For the sake of this study, the defining

characteristic of this target population is that each student was enrolled in a publicly funded high school in Sacramento, California during the 2016-2017 school year.

Sacramento Charter High School reported that the total enrollment of students during that school year peaked at 902 students for grades 9-12. In looking at enrollment data by ethnicity, it is prudent to note that 61.4% of the student population was African-American and 24.2% Hispanic or Latino (CDE, 2018c). C.K. McClatchy High School reported that the total enrollment of students during that school year was 2,303 for grades 9-12. Enrollment data by ethnicity showed that the white student population was 24.4%, the African American population was 8.6%, the Asian population was 15.8%, and the Hispanic or Latino population was 41.6% (CDE, 2018c).

The sample population included all of the 11th grade students at Sacramento Charter High School and C. K. McClatchy High School who were eligible to take the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium statewide assessment during the 2016-2017 school year. A sample population represents a subgroup of the target population that intends to be studied for generalizing about the overall target population (Creswell, 2015). The total sample population totaled 713 students. Sacramento Charter High School reported that out of the 193 students enrolled, 187 students tested and 185 student scores were taken into consideration (CDE, 2018e). C.K. McClatchy High School reported that out of the 520 students enrolled, 515 were tested and 514 student scores were taken into consideration (CDE, 2018d).

Sampling Procedure

This study utilized nonprobability sampling procedures. Nonprobability sampling was used because the individuals selected for the study were available and convenient for the purposes of the study (Creswell, 2015). Specifically, convenience sampling was relied upon as it allowed this researcher to select participants that were available to be studied (Creswell, 2015). Through such sampling it was possible to calculate descriptive statistics on these samples and compare them to one another in an effort to make substantiated inferences. The quantitative data necessary for carrying out this study was readily available within the databases maintained by the California Department of Education.

Operationalization of Variables

A variable is a characteristic or attribute of an individual or organization that researchers can measure or observe and that varies among individuals or organizations studied (Creswell, 2015). A variable is a characteristic of finding what can vary and be expressed in values that vary. In a quantitative study such as this one, the most important variable is the dependent variable. A dependent variable is an attribute or characteristic that is dependent on or influenced by the independent variable. They are most often recognized as the outcome, criterion, or consequence variables (Creswell, 2015). The dependent variables identified in this study included student achievement scores on the statewide assessment and the organizational structure of each high school.

An independent variable is an attribute or characteristic that influences or affects an outcome or dependent variable (Creswell, 2015). These variables are often identified as factors, treatments, and/or determinants. The primary independent variable utilized within this study were the academic content standards that were taught in both participating high school and assessed through the SBAC assessment given to eleventh graders. All publicly funded schools are required to teach content that aligns with a collection of agreed upon federal and state adopted curriculum standards (CDE, 2018a). Included among the independent variables are demographic attributes such as socioeconomic status, ability level, race, and ethnicity (Creswell, 2015).

Data Collection Procedures

Prior to collecting the aggregated quantitative data used here, an analysis of traditional public high schools and charter high schools that operate within the Sacramento City Unified School District was conducted. A review of the district map revealed the locations, grade levels, and demographics of nine independent charter schools that operated during the 2016-2017 school year (SCUSD, 2018). Of those schools, Sacramento Charter High School was chosen as a focus for this study. The factors leading to this selection included: appreciation for the rich heritage of this local institution, the controversy associated with its transition from a traditional public school to a charter school, the availability of credible data provided from the California Department of Education, and student population size. The decision to designate C.K. McClatchy High School as the representative traditional public high school was similarly

influenced. More importantly, Sacramento Charter High School and C.K McClatchy High School are situated within two miles of one another. This suggests that the two schools are likely to compete for enrollment within a very tight attendance area. Taking this into consideration, a parent/guardian living within this attendance area might feel encouraged to weigh the costs and benefits associated with enrolling their child in either one of these very different schools.

The assessment data collected from each school site represents the performance of eleventh grade students on the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) statewide assessment. This is California's current measure for assessing the proficiency of high schools in the areas of English Language Arts literacy, writing, listening, research/inquiry. The SBAC also determines student proficiency in the mathematical areas of problem solving, data analysis, and reasoning (CDE, 2018g).

Student scores for the SBAC are stored electronically within a database accessible to the general public through the California Department of Education. Student achievement scores can be separated categorically into sections based upon ethnicity, economic status, parent education level, disability, English language proficiency, etc. Scores for students at both Sacramento Charter High School and C.K. McClatchy High School can be manipulated to populate these categories (CDE, 2018f). Student scores on this statewide assessment for the 2016-2017 school year were used in order to conduct various descriptive analyses to indicate general tendencies in the data, identify the spread

of scores, and conduct a comparison of how scores within one subcategory were indicative of student performance at the subject schools (Creswell, 2018).

Data Analysis Procedures

The California Department of Education prepares an annual analysis of each publicly funded school's results on the SBAC assessment. High school students are required to participate in the assessment as a condition of their receipt of public funding. Academic progress on the SBAC is often considered validation for public expenditure. In an effort to promote accountability among publicly funded institutions, the California Department of Education seeks to provide the general public with regular access to academic performance data (CDE, 2018a). In essence, the public is afforded the right to get a sense of what their tax dollars are going to. Poor academic performance might indicate to the public that funding is being misallocated or under-utilized.

Descriptive statistics were utilized within this study as it allowed this researcher to summarize overall tendencies in the data. The approach strives to provide an understanding as to why the achievement scores between Sacramento Charter High School and C.K. McClatchy High School might have varied and where they stand in comparison to one another (Creswell, 2015). The measures of central tendency, expressed within as average/mean score values, operated as summary numbers that represent different scoring values in the final distribution of scores as tendered by the California Department of Education (Creswell, 2015). When assessing SBAC achievement data, the sum of scale scores for students with valid scores in the selected

entity (i.e., state, county, district, school, or student group) is divided by the number of tests with valid scores and expressed for the public through a presentation of tables (CDE, 2018f).

The mean scale scoring range for the English Language Arts/Literacy content ranges from a minimum scale score of 2299 to a maximum scale score of 2795. Table 1 indicates the tiered achievement scale score ranges within the minimum and maximum scale score range. Student achievement scores between 2299-2492 indicates Standard Not Met. Achievement scores between 2493-2582 indicates Standard Nearly Met. Achievement scores between 2583-2681 indicates Standard Met. Lastly, achievement scores between 2682-2795 indicates Standard Exceeded (CDE, 2018g).

Table 1. English Language Arts/Literacy Scale Score Ranges

Grade	Min Scale Score	Max Scale Score	Achievement Level Scale Score Range for Standard Not Met	Achievement Level Scale Score Range for Standard Nearly Met	Achievement Level Scale Score Range for Standard Met	Achievement Level Scale Score Range for Standard Exceeded
11	2299	2795	2299–2492	2493–2582	2583–2681	2682–2795

*Data are from the California Department of Education, 2018g.

Table 2. Mathematics Scale Score Ranges

Grade	Min Scale Score	Max Scale Score	Achievement Level Scale Score Range for Standard Not Met	Achievement Level Scale Score Range for Standard Nearly Met	Achievement Level Scale Score Range for Standard Met	Achievement Level Scale Score Range for Standard Exceeded
11	2280	2862	2280–2542	2543–2627	2628–2717	2718–2862

*Data are from the California Department of Education, 2018g.

The mean scale scoring range for the Mathematics content ranges from a minimum scale score of 2280 to a maximum scale score of 2862. Table 2 indicates the tiered achievement scale score ranges within the minimum and maximum scale score range. Student achievement scores between 2280-2542 indicates Standard Not Met. Achievement scores between 2543-2627 indicates Standard Nearly Met. Achievement scores between 2628-2717 indicates Standard Met. Lastly, achievement scores between 2718-2862 indicates Standard Exceeded (CDE, 2018g). It is from these scoring ranges that the California Department of Education determines the academic achievement level of its publicly funded schools.

Measures of variability are also provided within the annual SBAC assessment score reports. The distribution of student scores allows inquirers to observe how dispersed scores are and discern the full range of their variance (Creswell, 2015). For this study, variance indicates the dispersion of academic achievement scores into four different achievement levels. These achievement levels, also considered levels of

proficiency, are labeled as standard exceeded, standard met, standard nearly met, and standard not met (CDE, 2018g).

Table 3. English Language Arts/Literacy Achievement Level Descriptors for the SBAC

Grade	Standard Exceeded	Standard Met	Standard Nearly Met	Standard Not Met
11 th	The student has exceeded the achievement standard and demonstrates the knowledge and skills in English language arts/literacy needed for likely success in entry-level, credit-bearing college coursework after high school.	The student has met the achievement standard and demonstrates progress toward mastery of the knowledge and skills in English language arts/literacy needed for likely success in entry-level, credit-bearing college coursework after completing high school.	The student has nearly met the achievement standard and may require further development to demonstrate the knowledge and skills in English language arts/literacy needed for likely success in entry-level, credit-bearing college coursework after high school.	The student has not met the achievement standard and needs substantial improvement to demonstrate the knowledge and skills in English language arts/literacy needed for likely success in entry-level, credit-bearing college coursework after high school.

*Data are from the California Department of Education, 2018g.

Table 4. Mathematics Area Achievement Level Descriptors

Grade	Standard Exceeded	Standard Met	Standard Nearly Met	Standard Not Met
11 th	The student has exceeded the achievement standard and demonstrates the knowledge and skills in mathematics needed for likely success in entry-level, credit-bearing college coursework after high school.	The student has met the achievement standard and demonstrates progress toward mastery of the knowledge and skills in mathematics needed for likely success in entry-level, credit-bearing college coursework after high school.	The student has nearly met the achievement standard and may require further development to demonstrate the knowledge and skills in mathematics needed for likely success in entry-level, credit-bearing college coursework after high school.	The student has not met the achievement standard and needs substantial improvement to demonstrate the knowledge and skills in mathematics needed for likely success in entry-level, credit-bearing college coursework after high school.

*Data are from the California Department of Education, 2018g.

In an attempt to make SBAC scores more consumable, the California Department of Education set out to describe the implications of what it means for a student who scored within a certain tiered mean scale scoring range. Table 3 and Table 4 indicate what placement in each achievement tier means. For students who scored in the Standard Not Met tier, it signals that the student is significantly deficient in skills development for that content area. Intensive remedial instruction is needed to bring the student out of that

tier. For students who scored in the Standard Nearly Met tier, it signals that the student is close to successfully participating in college preparatory courses but still needs targeted instruction. For students scoring in the Standard Met and Standard Exceeded tiers, scores indicate that they are likely to succeed and benefit from participation in college track courses (CDE, 2018g).

Internal Validity

Threats to internal validity occur when inferences about whether the covariation between a presumed treatment variable and the outcome struggles to reflect a causal relationship (Creswell, 2015). Historical threats have been mitigated because the data gathered for this assessment are only two years old. Additionally, students participate in the SBAC probe over the course of a school week. Each student participates in the same assessment and activities within that span and outside events are not likely to influence the results of the probe. Instrumentation was reliable because the administration of the statewide assessment does not change during the course to the test-taking process. Students might gain experience with the testing format but the change in assessment content makes it difficult for scores to be adversely affected. Procedures are largely streamlined and standardized for each participating student and thus yields reliable data (Creswell, 2015).

External Validity

Threats to external validity exist when the ability to draw correct inferences from the sample data to other persons, settings, variables, and measures are jeopardized. To

overcome such threats, strong research designs that promote random assignment, a description of subjects, and the ability to replicate the study are encouraged (Creswell, 2015). This particular study can be replicated in any setting where traditional public schools and charter schools are assessed on the same California state standards. The data trove available within the California Department of Education data files render the replication of this study design feasible and highly encourages others to scrutinize the academic performance of publicly funded schools within the state.

Protection of Human Subjects

In accordance with the policies and procedures set forth by the University Institutional Review Board at Sacramento State University, the risk level associated with this research project was deemed exempt. The human subject review board indicated that this research activity did not require further review by the committee. Research projects that do not involve: (a) interaction or intervention with people, AND (b) obtaining private, individually identifiable information about living individuals are not required to be reviewed. The application for review was submitted September 16, 2018.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this quantitative study was to compare and contrast the academic performance of students who attended a charter high school to those of students who attended a traditional public high school within a large urban district for the 2016-2017 school year. The need for this study emerged after a thorough investigation of the literature yielded mixed results when describing the ability of a charter school to academically outperform a traditional public school and vice versa (Chingos & West, 2015; Finnigan, 2007; Hoxby & Murarka, 2008; Lubienski, 2003). Charter schools have grown exponentially within California and have become increasingly popular for student families seeking to exercise greater school choice (Rabovsky, 2011). This study attempts to bring clarity to that discussion for two high schools operating within the Sacramento City Unified School District.

Overall Findings

C.K. McClatchy High School Enrollment Figures

The sample size for this analysis was comprised of students from C.K. McClatchy High School and Sacramento Charter High School in Sacramento, California. As shown in Table 5, a total of 2,303 students were enrolled at C.K. McClatchy during the 2016-2017 school year. Of those students, 41.6% were Hispanic or Latino, 24.4% were white, 15.8% were Asian, and 8.6% were African American among others (CDE, 2018b). This traditional public high school serviced 618 Freshman, 576 Sophomores, 555 Juniors, and

534 Seniors. When enrollment numbers are categorized into prominent subgroups as shown in Table 6, 268 students are English Learners, 16 are foster youth, 20 are homeless youth, 209 are students with disabilities, and 1,365 are socioeconomically disadvantaged (CDE, 2018b).

Table 5. C.K. McClatchy High School Enrollment by Ethnicity and Grade 2016-2017

Ethnicity	Total	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
African American	199	46	57	40	54
American Indian or Alaska Native	18	8	4	2	4
Asian	363	75	95	91	100
Filipino	25	7	6	1	11
Hispanic or Latino	959	279	237	234	199
Pacific Islander	42	15	10	12	5
White	561	152	131	142	132
Two or More Races	136	36	36	33	29
Total	2,303	618	576	555	534

*Data are from the California Department of Education, 2018b.

Table 6. C.K. McClatchy High School Enrollment by Subgroup 2016-2017

Subgroup	Enrollment
English Learners	268
Foster Youth	16
Homeless Youth	20
Students with Disabilities	209
Socioeconomically Disadvantaged	1,365
All Student	2,303

*Data are from the California Department of Education, 2018b.

Sacramento Charter High School Enrollment Figures

A total of 902 students were enrolled at Sacramento Charter High School during the 2016-2017 school year as evidenced in Table 7 (CDE, 2018c). Of those students, 61.4% were African American, 24.2% were Hispanic or Latino, 9.9% were two or more races, 2% were white, and 1.3% were Asian among others. This charter high school serviced 256 Freshman, 277 Sophomores, 221 Juniors, and 148 Seniors (CDE, 2018c). When enrollment numbers are categorized into prominent subgroups as displayed in Table 8, a total of 27 students are English Learners, 2 are foster youth, 9 are homeless youth, 115 are students with disabilities, and 661 are socioeconomically disadvantaged (CDE, 2018c).

Table 7. Sacramento Charter High School Enrollment by Ethnicity and Grade 2016-2017

Ethnicity	Total	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
African American	554	157	174	126	97
American Indian or Alaska Native	5	2	3	0	0
Asian	12	5	4	3	0
Filipino	3	1	1	1	0
Hispanic or Latino	218	57	72	59	30
Pacific Islander	3	2	0	1	0
White	18	8	1	5	4
Two or More Races	89	24	22	26	17
Total	902	256	277	221	148

*Data are from the California Department of Education, 2018c.

Table 8. Sacramento Charter High School Enrollment by Subgroup 2016-2017

Subgroup	Enrollment
English Learners	27
Foster Youth	2
Homeless Youth	9
Students with Disabilities	115
Socioeconomically Disadvantaged	661
All Student	902

*Data are from the California Department of Education, 2018c.

Attendance Areas

C.K. McClatchy High School is a traditional public school that serves a large attendance area. The attendance area is roughly bounded by the American River (north), the Sacramento River (west), Highway 99 (east), and 47th Avenue (south). Downtown Sacramento is included within this attendance area and is densely populated (SCUSD, 2018). As a result, the high school services a large diversity of students. C.K McClatchy High is mandated by the state to provide all students with access to a free and appropriate public education within its attendance area.

Sacramento Charter High School, on the other hand, does not have a defined attendance area. The school is approximately two miles away from C.K McClatchy and thus competes for enrollment among the same pool of students (SCUSD, 2018). Because the school operates within the charter model, it is not required to service students within the immediate neighborhood. Sacramento Charter High School is required to hold a

lottery to determine enrollment if the amount of students attempting to enroll exceeds the availability of seats (Boundy & Weckstein, 2011). Based on the demographic data found here, this high school is clearly dedicated to educating minority students.

Overall Academic Achievement Scores

The aggregated data from the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium administered to the 11th grade students at C.K. McClatchy High School and Sacramento Charter High School for the 2016-2017 school year reveal overall trends in student achievement. The academic content areas assessed were English Language Arts and Mathematics.

Table 9. Overall Achievement Level Distribution in ELA/Literacy for 2017

Achievement Level	C.K. McClatchy High	Sacramento Charter High
Mean Scale Score	2582.2	2609.3
Standard Exceeded: Level 4	25.29%	27.03%
Standard Met: Level 3	28.02%	37.84%
Standard Nearly Met: Level 2	20.43%	21.08%
Standard Not Met: Level 1	26.26%	14.05%

*Data are from the California Department of Education, 2018f.

The percentage of students at each achievement level is calculated by dividing the number of students at that achievement level by the total number of students with scores in 2017 for the subject area (CDE, 2018f). Table 9 indicates the mean scale score for students and what percentage scored in each achievement tier. In comparing the overall

achievement results in English Language Arts for both high schools, a greater percentage of students at Sacramento Charter High School scored in the Standard Exceeded level of distribution than students at C.K. McClatchy High School. The difference in performance at this achievement level was 1.74%. A statistically significant greater percentage of Sacramento Charter High students achieved at the Standard Met level of distribution than did students at C.K. McClatchy High. The difference in performance at this achievement level was nearly 10%. In both of these desired levels of academic achievement distribution, the charter school outperformed the traditional public school.

An examination into the achievement levels of distribution that are below state standard are often indicators of how successful or how ineffective schools are at educating students within core content areas (Orfield & Luce, 2016). A total of 21.08% of students assessed at Sacramento Charter High scored at the Standard Nearly Met achievement level of distribution as opposed to the 20.43% of students from C.K. McClatchy High as evidenced in Table 9. The difference in performance at this level was a negligible .65%. At the Standard Not Met distribution level of academic achievement, 26.26% of the students assessed at C.K. McClatchy High performed at this level whereas 14.05% of the students at Sacramento Charter High performed at this achievement level. A statistically significant difference of 12.21% in level of achievement can be observed in favor of Sacramento Charter High at this interval from Table 9. In this instance, it appeared as though Sacramento Charter High School did a more adequate job at

educating its students in English Language Arts/Literacy than did C.K. McClatchy High School.

Table 10. Overall Achievement Level Distribution in Mathematics for 2017

Achievement Level	C.K. McClatchy High	Sacramento Charter High
Mean Scale Score	2573.3	2548.1
Standard Exceeded: Level 4	10.7%	1.60%
Standard Met: Level 3	23.74%	21.39%
Standard Nearly Met: Level 2	23.74%	28.88%
Standard Not Met: Level 1	41.83%	48.13%

*Data are from the California Department of Education, 2018f.

In comparing the overall achievement results in mathematics for both high schools, a statistically significant greater percentage of students at C.K. McClatchy High performed at the Standard Exceeded level than did students at Sacramento Charter High School as can be observed by Table 10. The difference in percentage of students performing at this level was 9.1%. At the Standard Met achievement level, 23.74% of the students at C.K. McClatchy High performed at this level compared to 21.39% of the students at Sacramento Charter High. It appears that in this instance, Table 10 indicated that C.K. McClatchy is far more apt at educating students in a manner that allows them to perform at an achievement level in mathematics that meets or exceeds California State Standards.

At C.K. McClatchy High 23.74% of the students assessed performed at the Standard Nearly Met distribution level whereas 28.88% of the students at Sacramento Charter High did. This is a statistical difference of 5.14%. A total of 41.83% of the students at C.K. McClatchy and 48.13% of the students at Sacramento Charter High performed at the Standard not met interval. Tragically, 65.57% of the students at C.K. McClatchy High and 77.01% of the students at Sacramento Charter High assessed on the SBAC in 2017 were unable to achieve at a proficient level of mathematics. Table 10 revealed that the students assessed at the traditional public high school performed at an achievement level approximately 11% more proficient in mathematics than at the charter high school. The overall results for the Mathematics content assessment indicates that C.K. McClatchy High School outperformed the students at Sacramento Charter High if only slightly.

Specific Findings

Because C.K McClatchy High and Sacramento Charter High occupy a highly urbanized demographic area in Sacramento, the diversity of each school's student population demands attention. A holistic comparison of the academic performance of students at both sites would take into account the academic achievement levels of traditionally underserved populations. This particular study endeavored to compare the academic performance of economically disadvantaged students, the performance of students with different ethnicities, and the performance of students with a disability.

Ideally, the best placement for these students in terms of traditional public school or charter school will be discerned.

Table 11. Economically Disadvantaged Achievement Level Distribution ELA/Literacy 2017

Achievement Level	C.K. McClatchy High	Sacramento Charter High
Mean Scale Score	2546.6	2604.9
Standard Exceeded: Level 4	16.49%	25.40%
Standard Met: Level 3	23.66%	35.71%
Standard Nearly Met: Level 2	23.30%	23.02%
Standard Not Met: Level 1	36.56%	15.87%

*Data are from the California Department of Education, 2018f.

In the English Language Arts/Literacy assessment area made available in Table 11, Sacramento Charter High had a greater percentage of economically disadvantaged students perform at the Standard Exceeded achievement level than students at C.K. McClatchy High. A statistically significant difference in achievement of 8.91% was observed. Similarly, more of these students were able to meet the standard for this assessment area at Sacramento Charter High than at C.K. McClatchy. At this level of achievement distribution, a statistically significant difference of more than 12% was discovered. More than 59% of the economically disadvantaged students at C.K. McClatchy were unable to meet the state standard for academic achievement in English Language Arts/Literacy whereas only roughly 39% of the students at Sacramento Charter High were unable to. This is a 20% discrepancy in student performance for this demographic subgroup between the charter high school and the traditional public school.

According to the data provided in Table 11, economically disadvantaged students are likely to fare better when receiving English Language Arts/Literacy instruction at Sacramento Charter High than at C.K. McClatchy High.

Table 12. Economically Disadvantaged Achievement Level Distribution in Math 2017

Achievement Level	C.K. McClatchy High	Sacramento Charter High
Mean Scale Score	2541.1	2548.2
Standard Exceeded: Level 4	4.64%	1.57%
Standard Met: Level 3	18.57%	22.83%
Standard Nearly Met: Level 2	23.21%	26.77%
Standard Not Met: Level 1	53.57%	48.82%

*Data are from the California Department of Education, 2018f.

In the Mathematics assessment area, more economically disadvantaged students at C.K. McClatchy High performed at the Standard Exceeded achievement level than at Sacramento Charter High by a difference of 3.07% as detailed in Table 12. However, more of these students at Sacramento Charter High were able to perform at the Standard Met level than at C.K. McClatchy High. The difference in performance at this level between the two schools was 4.26%. A total of 76.78% of the economically disadvantaged students at C.K. McClatchy High were unable to perform at an academic achievement level that met the California state standard for mathematics. Similarly, 75.59% of the economically disadvantaged students at Sacramento Charter High were unable to do the same. Clearly, Table 12 brings attention to the inability of these two schools to service the educational needs in the mathematics content area is concerning.

What is more, since this assessment evaluates to proficiency of 11th grade students, fears surrounding the ability of these students to meet graduation requirements are bound to manifest.

Table 13. Black or African American Achievement Level Distribution in ELA/Literacy 2017

Achievement Level	C.K. McClatchy High	Sacramento Charter High
Mean Scale Score	2539.3	2608.4
Standard Exceeded: Level 4	12.50%	27.03%
Standard Met: Level 3	15.63%	37.84%
Standard Nearly Met: Level 2	40.63%	18.92%
Standard Not Met: Level 1	31.25%	16.22%

*Data are from the California Department of Education, 2018f.

The academic performance of Black or African American students in the English Language Arts/Literacy content area favored Sacramento Charter High at each level of achievement as indicated in Table 13. A total of 27.03% of these students at Sacramento Charter High performed at the Standard Exceeded achievement level as opposed to just 12.5% of these students at C.K McClatchy High. A statistically significant difference of 14.53% exists between the two sites at this level of achievement. Still more profound, 37.84% of the Black or African American students at Sacramento High performed at the Standard Met achievement level whereas only 15.63% of the student from the same subgroup did at C.K. McClatchy High. A statistically significant difference of 22.21% was observed. At the traditional public school, 71.88% of Black or African American students were unable to meet the state standard for this content area in 2017. At the

charter high school, only 35.22% of these students were assessed below the state standard in comparison. Table 13 demonstrated the unique ability of Sacramento Charter High School to provide better educational opportunities for these students in the English Language Arts/Literacy content areas. In this statistical area, it is prudent to note that Sacramento Charter High serves a higher population of Black or African American students in proportion to C.K McClatchy High.

Table 14. Black or African American Achievement Level Distribution in Math for 2017

Achievement Level	C.K. McClatchy High	Sacramento Charter High
Mean Scale Score	2515.2	2549.2
Standard Exceeded: Level 4	6.25%	1.79%
Standard Met: Level 3	3.13%	22.32%
Standard Nearly Met: Level 2	25%	27.68%
Standard Not Met: Level 1	65.63%	48.21%

*Data are from the California Department of Education, 2018f.

The academic performance of Black or African American students in the Mathematics content area favored C.K McClatchy High rather than Sacramento Charter High at the Standard Exceeded achievement level by 4.46% as evidenced in Table 14. Alternately, Sacramento Charter High School students outperformed C.K. McClatchy students within this subgroup at the Standard Met achievement level by a statistically significant difference of 19.19%. Alarming, more than 90% of the Black or African American students at C.K McClatchy High were unable to meet the mathematics standards for the state of California in 2017. At Sacramento Charter High, 75.89% of

these students failed to meet the same standard. Both schools are dramatically underperforming in their ability to teach mathematics to this minority group.

Table 15. Hispanic or Latino Achievement Level Distribution in ELA/Literacy 2017

Achievement Level	C.K. McClatchy High	Sacramento Charter High
Mean Scale Score	2550.2	2596.2
Standard Exceeded: Level 4	12.90%	18.37%
Standard Met: Level 3	28.11%	44.9%
Standard Nearly Met: Level 2	25.35%	24.49%
Standard Not Met: Level 1	33.64%	12.24%

*Data are from the California Department of Education, 2018f.

Table 15 captures how the academic performance of Hispanic or Latino students in the English Language Arts/Literacy content area favored Sacramento Charter High at each level of achievement. The difference between students performing at the Standard Exceeded level was 5.47%. Students from this subgroup at Sacramento Charter High outperformed similar students from C.K. McClatchy by a statistically significant 16.79% at the Standard Met achievement level. Nearly 59% of the Hispanic or Latino students at C.K. McClatchy failed to meet the state standard for English Language Arts/Literacy proficiency. This stands in stark contrast to the 36.73% of Hispanic or Latino students who failed to meet the same standard at Sacramento Charter High. For Hispanic or Latino families, the statistics made available in Table 15 prove that Sacramento Charter High is much more capable of providing an educational benefit when teaching this content area.

Table 16. Hispanic or Latino Achievement Level Distribution in Math for 2017

Achievement Level	C.K. McClatchy High	Sacramento Charter High
Mean Scale Score	2533.7	2529.3
Standard Exceeded: Level 4	3.23%	2.04%
Standard Met: Level 3	17.05%	16.33%
Standard Nearly Met: Level 2	24.88%	28.57%
Standard Not Met: Level 1	54.84%	53.06%

*Data are from the California Department of Education, 2018f.

Both school sites struggled to educate Hispanic or Latino students in mathematical content areas during the 2016-2017 school year as demonstrated in Table 16. Only 20.28% of these students at C.K. McClatchy High and 18.37% of these students at Sacramento Charter High demonstrated an ability to meet state standards. A total of 79.72% of the students at C.K. McClatchy High and 81.63% of the students at Sacramento Charter High were unable to meet the state standard for mathematical achievement. Both high school sites face significant challenges in their attempts to provide Hispanic or Latino students with access to a meaningful mathematical education.

Table 17. Students with Disability Achievement Level Distribution ELA/Literacy 2017

Achievement Level	C.K. McClatchy High	Sacramento Charter High
Mean Scale Score	2448.9	N/A
Standard Exceeded: Level 4	2.44%	*
Standard Met: Level 3	7.32%	*
Standard Nearly Met: Level 2	12.20%	*
Standard Not Met: Level 1	78.05%	*

*Data are from the California Department of Education, 2018f.

Table 18. Students with Disability Achievement Level Distribution in Mathematics 2017

Achievement Level	C.K. McClatchy High	Sacramento Charter High
Mean Scale Score	2426.2	N/A
Standard Exceeded: Level 4	0.00%	*
Standard Met: Level 3	2.38%	*
Standard Nearly Met: Level 2	4.76%	*
Standard Not Met: Level 1	92.86%	*

*Data are from the California Department of Education, 2018f.

One of the most prominent subgroupings of students found within the California Department of Education's SBAC achievement level scores are those with a disability. Such students have been chronically underserved in public education systems. Table 17 shows that at C.K. McClatchy High, only 9.76% of the student with a disability met the state standard for academic achievement in English Language Arts/Literacy. Table 18 indicates that a marginal 2.38% of students with a disability were able to meet the state

standard for mathematics. A total of 90.25% of these students were unable to meet the standard for English Language Arts/Literacy. Worse still, 97.62% of students with a disability at C.K. McClatchy High were unable to meet the state standard for achievement in mathematics. Clearly, this traditional public school is in dire need of intervention when it comes to educating its students with a disability.

It is important to note that Sacramento Charter High School reported to the Department of Education that it serviced 115 students with a disability in 2017. However, the SBAC test results for that school year lacked any academic achievement data for these students (CDE, 2018f). Therefore, critical information regarding the academic performance of students with a disability for Sacramento Charter High is absent from Table 17 and Table 18. Typically, charter schools are required to support the participation of students with a disability in statewide assessments (Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). Without this information, it is difficult for the families of a student with a disability to make an informed decision about the educational opportunities provided by these two schools. The absence of scoring for this subgroup for students at Sacramento Charter High School is highly suspect.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

R1: How does the academic performance of Sacramento's largest traditional public high school compare to the academic performance of Sacramento's largest charter high school during the 2016-2017 academic school year?

Hypothesis 1: There is no difference between the academic performance of Sacramento's largest traditional public high school and the academic performance of Sacramento's largest charter high school during the 2016-2017 academic school year.

R2: In what content areas did the traditional public high school outperform the charter high school?

Hypothesis 2: Student achievement is higher in academic content areas for students in the largest traditional public high school system when compared to students in the largest charter high school system in Sacramento.

R3: In what content areas did the charter high school outperform the traditional public high school?

Hypothesis 3: Student achievement is higher in academic content areas for students in the largest charter high school system when compared to students in the largest traditional public high school system in Sacramento.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

Introduction

This study sought to determine whether a charter high school or a traditional public high school within an urban school district provided students with a greater opportunity to attain a high level of academic achievement. Student families are increasingly motivated to exercise their school choice rights in an attempt to provide their children with access to the brightest future possible. Many traditional public schools have failed to educate their most vulnerable students. As a result, charter schools have emerged as a viable replacement (Hung et al., 2014).

In an attempt to inform student families of their schooling options in Sacramento, California, the academic achievement levels of students at C.K McClatchy High were compared to the academic achievement levels of students at Sacramento Charter High during the 2016-2017 school year. Quantitative statewide assessment data were collected to evaluate the proficiency levels of students in the English Language Arts and Mathematics content areas. The data was retrieved from the California Department of Education archives that contain academic achievement scores secured through the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium test administered to 11th graders annually.

The research questions that fueled this study were established to assist in determining the effectiveness of each high school in educating its students. Those research questions were:

R1: How does the academic performance of Sacramento's largest traditional public high school compare to the academic performance of Sacramento's largest charter high school during the 2016-2017 academic school year?

R2: In what content areas did the traditional public high school outperform the charter high school?

R3: In what content areas did the charter high school outperform the traditional public high school?

Discussion of the Results

Academic Performance of Economically Disadvantaged Students

For students who are identified as being economically disadvantaged, Sacramento Charter High was more successful at providing an education in the English Language Arts content area as presented in Table 11. An impressive difference of 20.95% was determined between what Sacramento Charter High could provide when compared to C.K. McClatchy High. Remarkably, 59.86% of the economically disadvantaged students at C.K. McClatchy were unable to meet the state standard for English Language Arts/Literacy. In this instance, a charter high school was more effective than a traditional public high school in educating students.

Both C.K. McClatchy High and Sacramento Charter High are horribly inadequate at teaching mathematics to economically disadvantaged students. These two sites failed to properly educate 76.78% and 75.59% of their students respectively as demonstrated in

Table 12. In this instance, choosing between a charter school or traditional public school does not translate to much of a difference in terms of educational opportunity. Student families seeking to provide their child with increased access to a quality education are tragically denied that access when weighing their choice between these two schools.

Academic Performance of Black or African American Students

For students who are identified as being Black or African American, Sacramento Charter High significantly outperformed C.K. McClatchy High in teaching English Language Arts content. Table 13 brought attention to the disparity in achievement for these students in this content area as it registered an incredible 41.74% range if difference. A total of 71.88% of the African American students at C.K McClatchy High are underperforming in English Language Arts.

Sacramento Charter High students outperformed C.K. McClatchy High students in mathematics by a respectable 14.74% as demonstrated in Table 14. Upon close inspection, it might be heartbreaking for some to discover that 90.63% of the Black or African American students at a traditional public high school failed to meet the state standard for mathematics. Sacramento Charter High also had a shockingly high rate of failure in this area at 75.89% but benefits from this comparison. For student families with a Black or African American student, Sacramento Charter High is likely to function as the better educational choice.

Academic Performance of Hispanic or Latino Students

For students who are identified as being Hispanic or Latino, Table 15 showed that Sacramento Charter High was more successful than C.K. McClatchy High at providing instruction in the English Language Arts content area. A promising 63.27% of these students were able to meet the standard at the charter school as opposed to 41.01% of the students at the traditional public school. A disparity of 22.26% is likely to draw significant attention from inquiring student families.

When looking at student achievement in mathematics on Table 16, it was C.K. McClatchy that proved more competent in providing instruction by 5.44% over Sacramento Charter High. However, both school sites failed to educate more than 75% of their Hispanic or Latino students in this content area. Student families with a Hispanic or Latino student are likely to find Sacramento Charter High to be the more beneficial educational placement though the performance data for that site strongly suggests a need for dramatic improvement and/or intervention.

Academic Performance of Students with a Disability

For student families who have a student with a disability, comparing the academic performance of C.K. McClatchy High to Sacramento Charter High is difficult given the lack of data available in the California Department of Education's archives. There is ample data available to determine the ability of C.K. McClatchy High to educate a child with a disability, no matter how disturbing. But Sacramento Charter High has no data available for these parents. This presents a challenging situation for those student

families because deciding upon a child's educational options with limited information can have serious implications. With such limited information it is difficult to discern and assert any possible trends between the two school sites.

Hypotheses Confirmation

Hypothesis 1: There is no difference between the academic performance of Sacramento's largest traditional public high school and the academic performance of Sacramento's largest charter high school during the 2016-2017 academic school year.

Hypothesis 2: Student achievement is higher in academic content areas for students in the largest traditional public high school system when compared to students in the largest charter high school system in Sacramento.

Hypothesis 3: Student achievement is higher in academic content areas for students in the largest charter high school system when compared to students in the largest traditional public high school system in Sacramento.

In reviewing the proposed hypotheses to the research questions posed in this study, the results of this study proved that the charter high school is a more viable educational option. Hypothesis One was proven when looking at the academic achievement scores of economically disadvantaged students who failed to meet state standards in mathematics and Hispanic or Latino students who failed to meet state standards in mathematics subgroupings. Hypothesis Two was proven when looking only at the academic achievement scores of Hispanic or Latino students in meeting the state standard for mathematics subgrouping. Hypothesis 3 was proven when looking at the

academic achievement scores for economically disadvantaged students for English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics, Black or African American students in English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics, and Hispanic or Latino students in English Language Arts/Literacy subgroupings.

When looking at overall student achievement data on the SBAC, Sacramento Charter High School performed better in the English Language Arts/Literacy content area while C.K. McClatchy High School performed better in the Mathematics content area for the 2016-2017 school year.

Discussion of Results Related to the Literature

The findings of this study largely support the theory that charter schools are more likely to experience increased academic achievement than traditional public schools in an urban setting (Angrist et al., 2010; Stetson, 2013). Limited prior research and this study have demonstrated that charter schools in large urban districts that serve disadvantaged students are more likely to perform better than disadvantaged students at a traditional public school (Bundy & Weckstein, 2011; Chingos & West, 2015; Toson, 2013). The data provided here made available in the form of tables containing overall student achievement and the achievement of select student subgroups serves as evidence.

Recommendations for Future Research

This researcher recommends that this study be expanded upon and conducted on a larger scale. This can be done by incorporating all of the traditional public high schools and charter high schools within the entire Sacramento City Unified School District.

Through such an expanded and comprehensive study, student families can make educational decisions and exercise their right to school choice with all of the academic achievement data for high schools within the district on hand. This research suggests that a charter school provides the best educational opportunity in this specific urban setting, but the sentiment may be reversed when more data and more schooling options are considered in contrast. The SBAC assessment data provides stable and reliable information and a broader synthesis would prove beneficial.

A study that attempts to identify the factors that enabled Sacramento Charter High to outperform C.K McClatchy High from an academic standpoint is also warranted. In doing so, student families would be informed about the education model and environment their student will be exposed to. It would be informative for student families to understand the impact that factors such as scheduling has upon student performance. School culture and access to educational support services might also play a role. Perhaps more importantly, such a study could provide insight into instructional and curricular differences between the school sites. If these influences can be identified, perhaps they can be duplicated and more students can benefit from them.

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