

Do charter schools “cream skim” students and increase racial-ethnic segregation?

Ron Zimmer, Michigan State University

Brian Gill and Kevin Booker, Mathematica Policy Research

Stephane Lavertu and John Witte, University of Wisconsin

Funding provided by Bill and Melinda Gates,
Joyce, and William Penn Foundations

The Debate Over Charter Schools Continues

Proponents argue they provide important benefits

- Expanded educational choices for students
- Increased innovation
- Improved student achievement
- Healthy competitive pressure for traditional public schools

Opponents argue they pose serious risks

- Reduced resources for traditional public schools
- Will not improve student achievement
- Increase racial/ethnic stratification and lead to white enclaves
- Skimming the best students from traditional public schools

This Research Focuses on Whether Charter Schools Cream Skim Good Students and Create Greater Racial/Ethnic Segregation

- Do charter schools cream skim good students?
- Do charter schools create greater racial/ethnic segregation?
- Are the answers to these questions related to the policy environments in which charter schools operate?

Few Studies have Used Longitudinal Data to Examine Whether Charter Schools Are Creating Greater Racial/Ethnic Segregation

- Many studies have compared the average racial/ethnic makeup of charter schools relative to the average racial/ethnic of their district or state
- This does not account for the fact that charter schools are not randomly distributed across a district or state and are unlikely to be racially/ethnically representative of a district or state
- Previous research by Bifulco and Ladd (2007) in NC used longitudinal data and showed that, on average, African American students were transferring to charter schools with a higher share of African American students

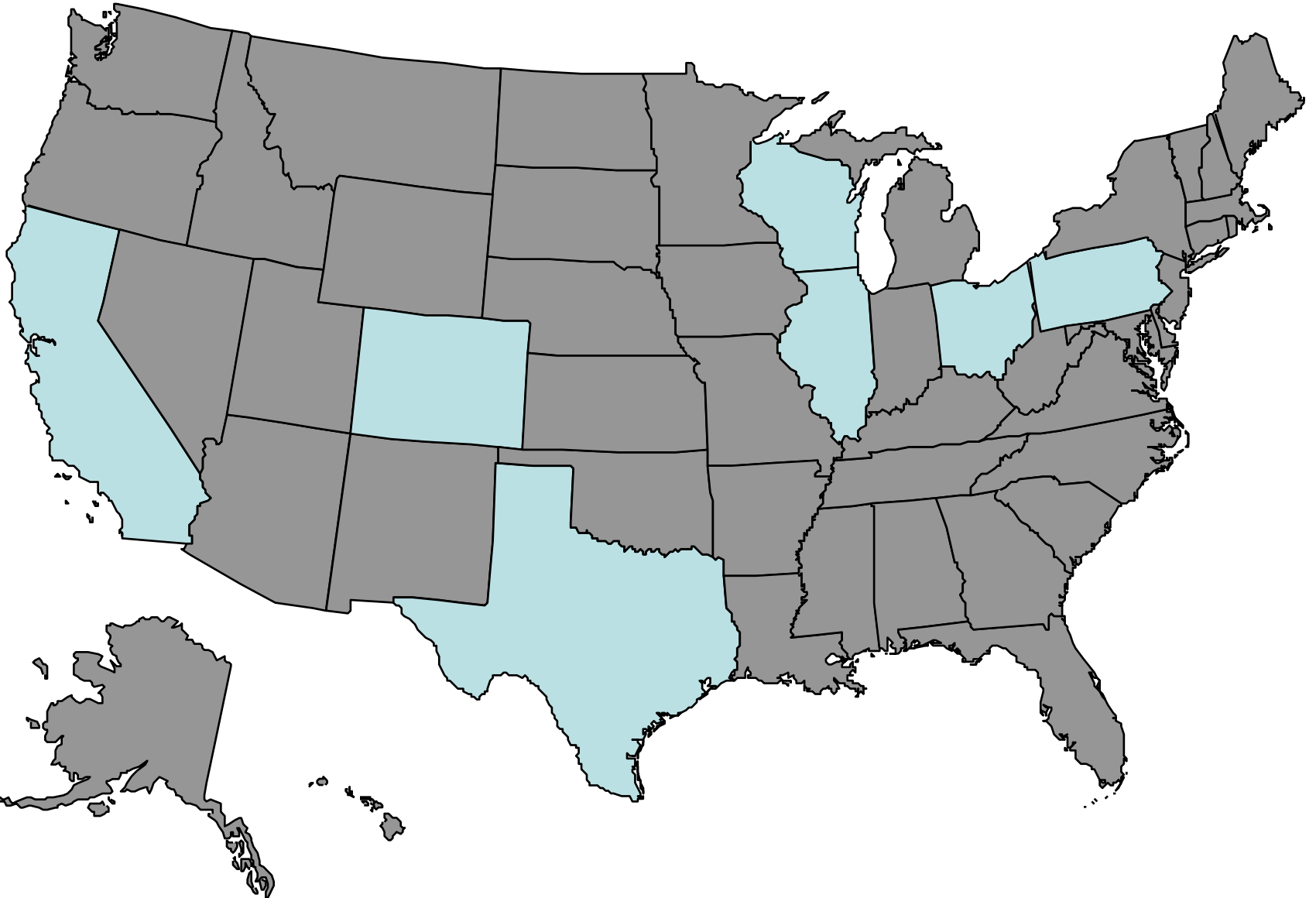
Almost No Studies have Even Examined Whether Charter Schools Are Cream Skimming the Best Students

- Booker, Zimmer, and Buddin (2005) examined the issue in CA and TX using longitudinal data and found little evidence that charter schools are cream skimming the best students

We Collected Data that Allowed Us to Track Students' Movement Over Time

- Longitudinal student-level test score and demographic data from locations representing seven states
- The data provided important information
 - Whether the student attended a charter school for each grade across years
 - Student demographic characteristics and test scores over time

Examined Charter Schools in Seven Different States

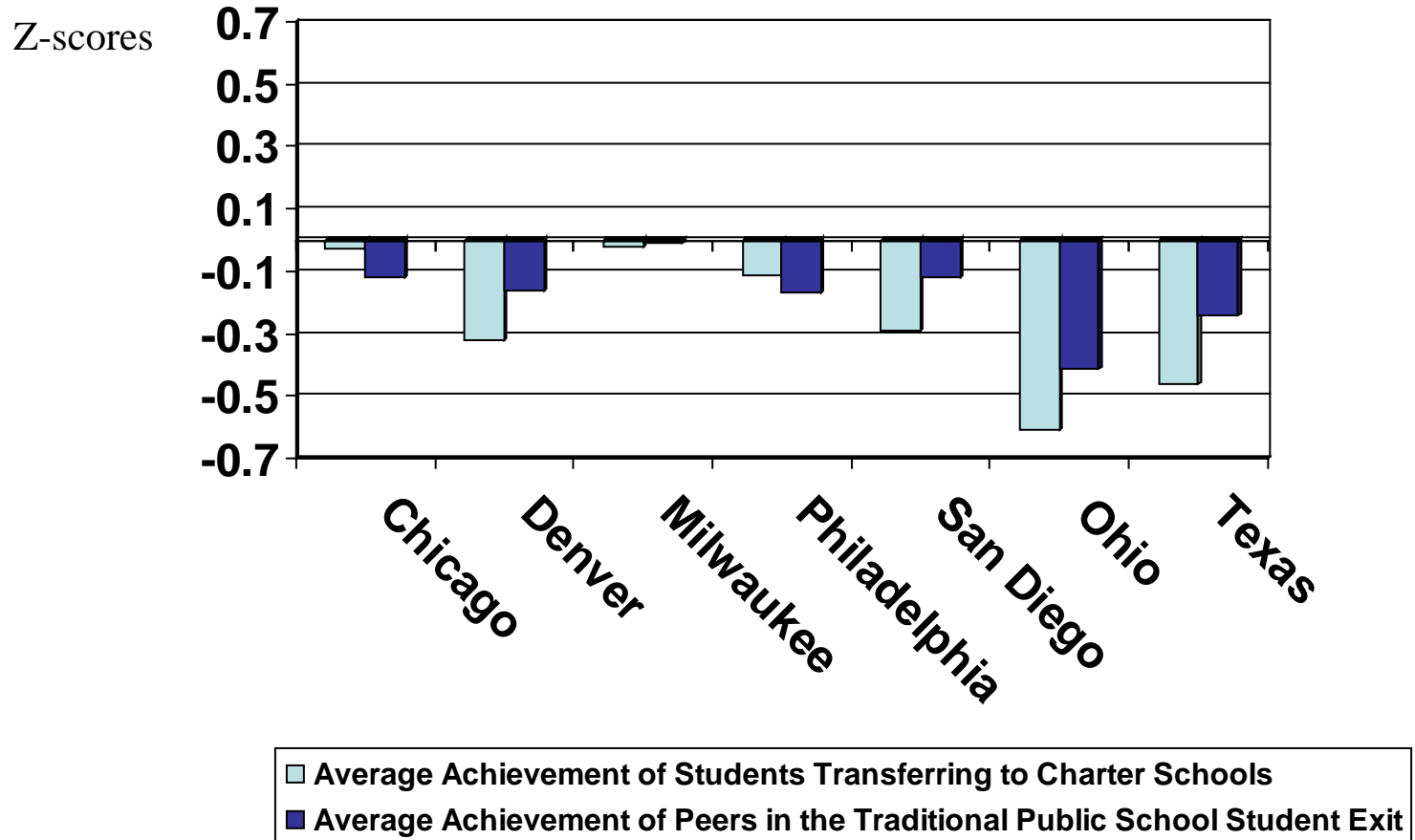


Compare Test Scores of Students Exiting Traditional Public Schools for Charter Schools to the Test Scores of Students in These Same Traditional Public Schools

- Because types of tests and scaling varied across locations, we standardized test scores using z-scores
 - Mean of zero and standard deviation of one
- Test scores below zero are below district-wide or state-wide averages (depending on locations) and the opposite is true for above average test scores
- Examine whether the student leaving a traditional public school for a charter school had higher or lower test scores than peers in the traditional public schools
- The analysis has the limitation that it does not include students entering charter schools in kindergarten
- We do not include high schools in some locations

No Systematic Evidence Charter Schools Are Cream Skimming the Best Students

Prior Math Scores



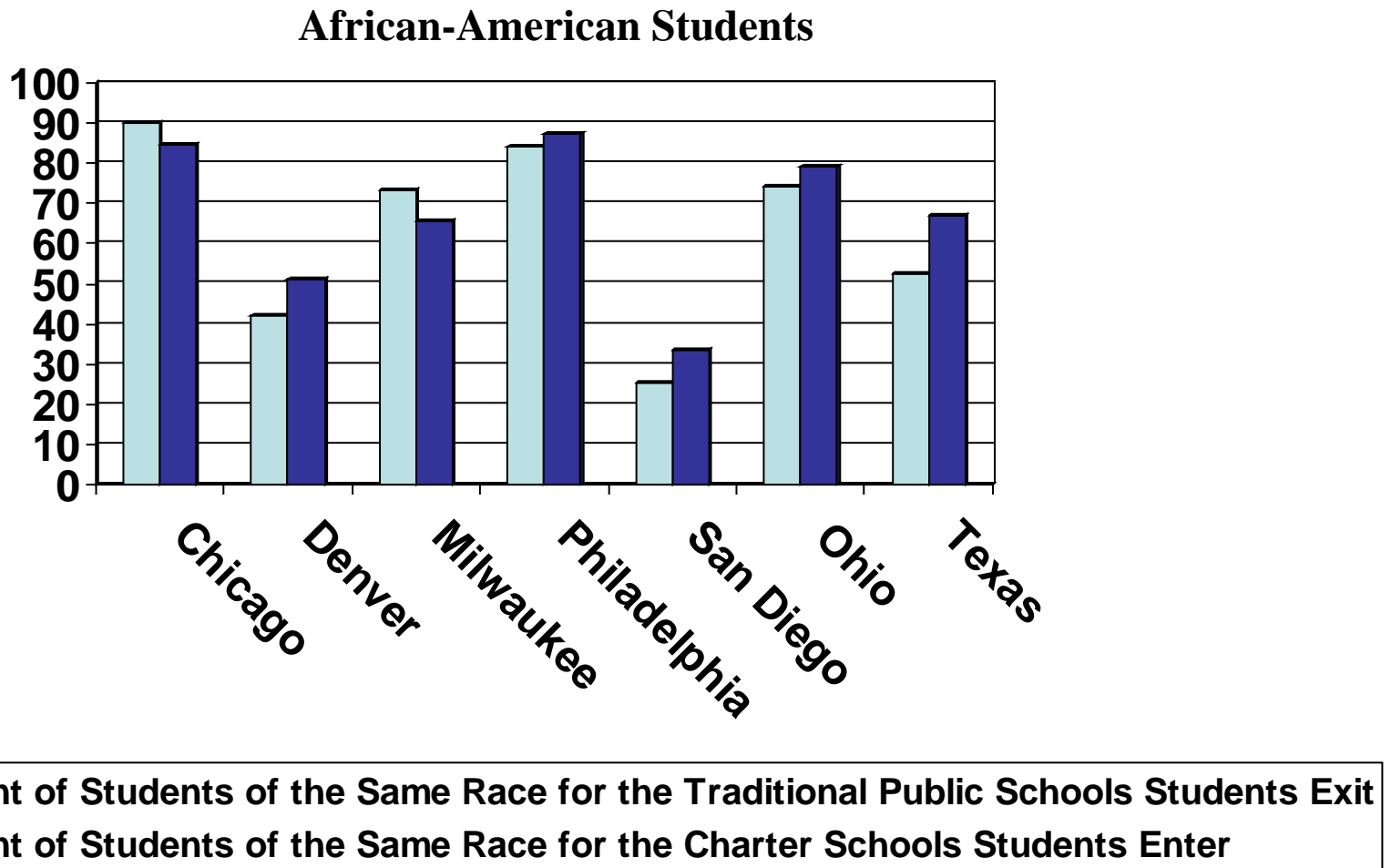
Results are similar for Reading Scores

Compare Racial/Ethnic Makeup of Schools Students Exit Relative to the Racial/Ethnic Makeup for Charter Schools Students Enter

- For each race/ethnicity, we compare the percentage of students of the same race/ethnicity in the traditional public school a student exits relative to the percentage of students of the same race/ethnicity in the charter schools students enter
- Again, the analysis has the limitation that it does not include students entering charter schools in kindergarten
- In addition, we do not have high schools in some locations

In Five out of Seven Locations, African American Students who Transfer to Charter Schools Transfer to Schools with Slightly Higher Percentage of African American Students

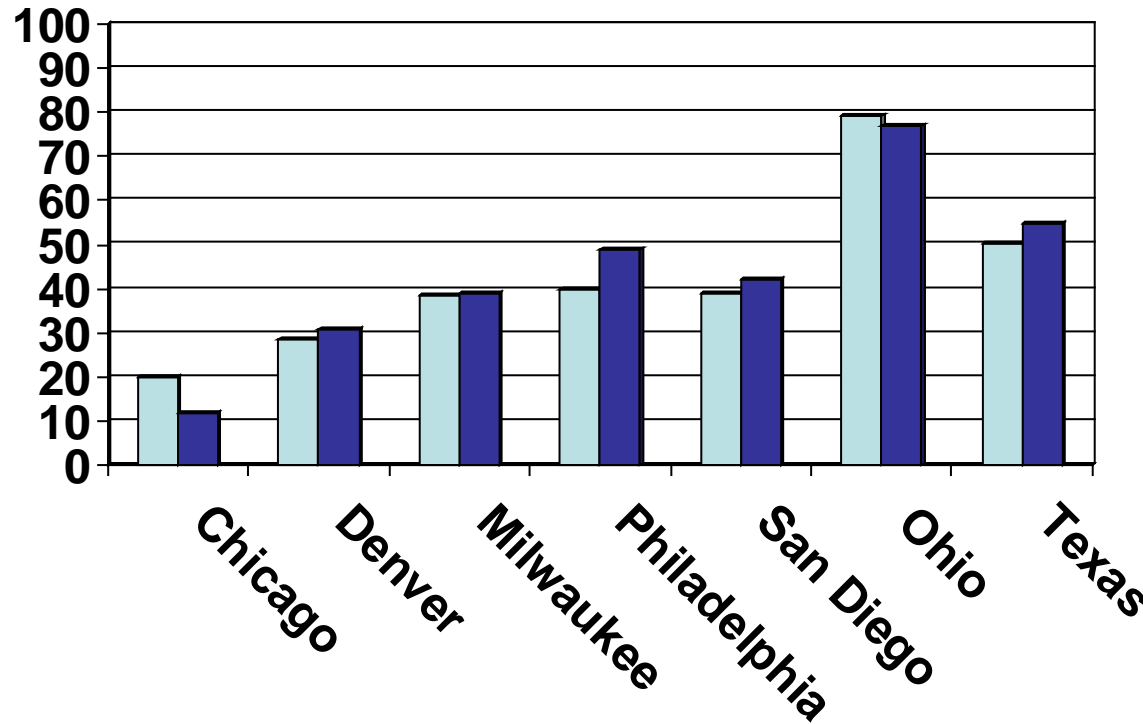
Only one location is the difference more than 10 percent



In Five out of Seven Locations, White Students who Transfer to Charter Schools Transfer to Schools with Slightly Higher Percentage of White Students

In no location is the increase greater than 10 percent

White Students

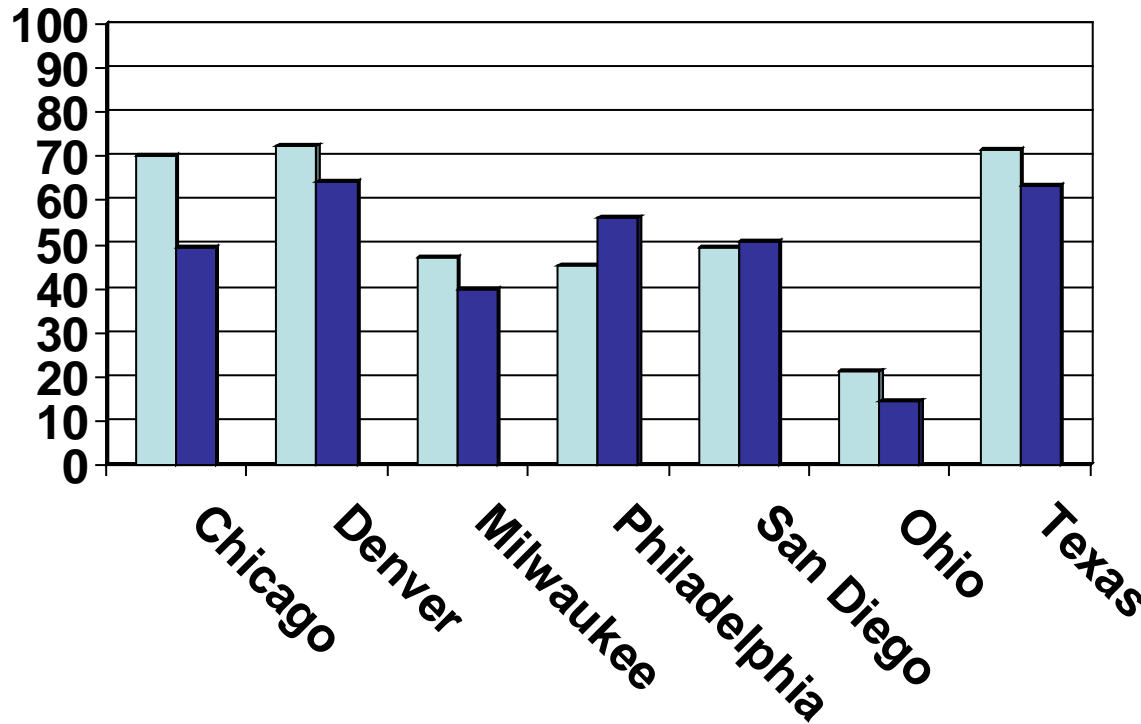


Legend:
■ Percent of Students of the Same Race for the Traditional Public Schools Students Exit
■ Percent of Students of the Same Race for the Charter Schools Students Enter

In Two out of Seven Locations, Hispanic Students who Transfer to Charter Schools Transfer to Schools with Slightly Higher Percentage of Hispanic Students

Only one location is the increase more than 10 percent

Hispanic Students



Legend:
■ Percent of Students of the Same Race for the Traditional Public Schools Students Exit
■ Percent of Students of the Same Race for the Charter Schools Students Enter

Are the Variation in the Outcomes We Observe Related to the Policy Environment in Which Charter Schools Operate?

- We used the following policy categories to look for variation in policy environments across locations
 - types of charter authorizers
 - types of charter schools,
 - transportation,
 - enrollment requirements,
 - at-risk provision,
 - other choice programs within the location
- We look up the policies across these locations using information on the Center for Education Reform's website
- Because there is limited sample of locations, the analysis is purely descriptive in hopes of gaining insights

No Patterns Emerged in the Examination

- We found no systematic relationships between policies and variations in results across the locations
 - For instance, while charter schools in Ohio and Texas are both attracting below average students, only Ohio requires transportation
 - Similarly, while both Chicago and Texas have provisions favoring charter schools focused on at-risk students, Texas charter schools are attracting students with below average test scores, while Chicago charter schools are not. In addition, students transferring to Chicago charter schools transfer to schools with a smaller share of their own race, which is only true for Hispanics in Texas

Conclusions

- We find little evidence that charter schools are systematically creating greater segregation or cream skimming the best students
- No significant patterns emerged between variations in outcomes and charter policy environments across locations
 - However, difficult to derive definitive conclusions with only seven locations