Choice Points

With movies such as *The Lottery* and *Waiting for Superman* drawing public attention to education reform, charter schools have become a hot topic. Therefore, the work being done here at the Choice Center is more important than ever.

To capitalize on this attention, NCSC is using new types of media to distribute our research and reach out to more people. One of the ways we are doing this is by publishing research briefs. You can read about some of these briefs on pages 3-4 of this newsletter. The full briefs are available on the website.

To further disseminate these briefs and all of our publications, we also redesigned our website. The new website features a searchable database of all our publications and use of new social media.

Choice Center researchers have also been busy discussing and presenting their research finding at various conferences, including the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Annual Meeting, the Institute of Education Sciences’ (IES) Annual Research Conference and the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) Conference. More information about their involvement is available on page three.

School choice has also made headlines recently. *Education Next* released its annual poll on education and found growing support for charter schools among the general public. Five years after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, 61% of public school students now attend charter schools. Charter schools continue to increase in number nationally as well, with Race to the Top serving to spark reforms in charter school laws.
Choice Connections

Instructional Conditions in Charter Schools and Students’ Mathematics Achievement Gains

This study examined student achievement gains of elementary students in charter and traditional public schools and how these changes in achievement relate to the school’s organizational and instructional structure. Additional data was collected through surveys from teachers and principals in the sample schools to allow the researchers to go beyond just evaluating student achievement. They were particularly interested in the way in which teacher academic press for learning and in-school organizing enabling conditions effect student achievement.

The researchers, Mark Berends, Ellen Goldring, Marc Stein, and Xiu Cravens, found that there was no significant difference in academic achievement gains between students in the sample who attend charter schools and those who attend traditional public schools. Secondly, in schools with higher reported instructional innovation, students had lower achievement gains than those students in schools where teachers reported less innovation. These findings support the claim that while individual schools exist where innovation and success are happening, the scale-up of such schools continues to be challenging.

Find the research brief at: http://www.vanderbilt.edu/schoolchoice/documents/brief_conditions_achievementgains.pdf

Charter Schools and the Teacher Job Search in Michigan

This study explored how new elementary school teachers decide whether to apply to charter schools when they begin looking for a job through a labor market segmentation framework. The study collected responses from new graduates of teacher education programs as they entered the job market, applied for teaching jobs and decided where to work.

The study author, Marisa Cannata, used surveys and interviews to investigate why new teachers decide to apply—or not to apply—to charter schools. She conducted a longitudinal survey of 160 applicants and more detailed interviews of a subset of 27 prospective teachers at several schools. The findings were surprising. A substantial number of applicants gave the same considerations to charter schools as they do to traditional public schools.

The study produced several interesting findings:
- Few prospective teachers give the same consideration to charter schools as they do to traditional public schools.
- Teachers’ personal and professional networks, familiarity with charter schools, and preference for working in urban schools influenced job applicants’ openness to working in charter schools.

To read the brief, go to www.vanderbilt.edu/schoolchoice/documents/briefs/brief_teacher_job_search.pdf

Choosing Indianapolis Charter Schools: Espoused Versus Revealed Academic Preferences

Why do parents choose to move their children to a particular charter school? What does this choice reveal about their understanding of available school choice options? These are the questions this research brief aimed to answer.

Marc Stein, Ellen Goldring, and Xiu Cravens surveyed parents about why they chose a specific charter school and compared those explanations with characteristics of both the school they chose and the one they left. The findings were surprising. A majority of surveyed parents (63%) indicated that academic quality and/or focus were the top priorities in their decision, especially if they considered their child’s previous school average or below. But that preference wasn’t evident in many of the actual moves. About equal numbers of students moved to schools with worse academic records than the ones they left as moved to schools that were higher performing from ones with lower academic showings.

Academic performance was measured by test scores and whether a school met federal AYP standards under No Child Left Behind.

What explains the disparities between intentions and actions? It may be that parents wanted to give a response that would present them in a favorable light or that academic quality has different meaning to parents than the researchers. Parents might have been thinking of a school’s overall reputation, which could cover a range of factors from its safety record to class sizes to test scores.

Read more at http://www.vanderbilt.edu/schoolchoice/search/publication.php?id=46
Choice Connections

Teacher Turnover in Charter Schools

Are teachers in charter schools more likely than those in traditional public schools to leave their job or the profession? If so, why? These are the questions this research seeks to answer.

David Stuit and Thomas M. Smith used data from the Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS) and the Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS) to examine differences in teacher turnover between charter schools and traditional public schools. They were also interested in how differences in teacher characteristics, school organizational conditions, and contextual factors such as demographics explain the difference in teacher turnover and used the TFS to analyze teachers reasons for leaving schools or leaving the profession.

The study came to some important conclusions. Stuit and Smith found that teachers in charter schools are more likely to leave the profession and to switch schools than their public school counterparts. One important reason for this is dissatisfaction with working conditions among charter school teachers. Within the charter segment, attrition is likely lower in charters converted from traditional public schools than start-ups. Teacher characteristics may explain much of the observed differences. For example, charter teachers are less likely to have state certification and more likely to be part-time. Both of these factors have been found to contribute to higher turnover rates. Charter school also experience significantly higher levels of involuntary attrition. This may be due to multiple factors such as a charter school’s ability to replace under-performing teachers.

More details can be found in the full brief at: http://www.vanderbilt.edu/schoolchoice/documents/briefs/brief_stuit_smith_ncspe.pdf

Research featured in AERA Annual Meeting Session and at Other Conferences

NCSC researchers have been actively sharing their research through participation in the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Annual Meeting, the Institute of Education Sciences’ (IES) Annual Research Conference and the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) Conference.

The American Educational Research Association (AERA) held their Annual Meeting in April in Denver, Colorado. At this meeting several Choice Center researchers papers were featured in the session Does School Choice Matter? An Examination of Classroom Instruction, Alignment to Standards and Assessments, and Professional Development chaired by Andrew Porter.

Mathematics Instruction: Depth and Cognitive Complexity Among Charter, Magnet, Private and Traditional Public Schools by Mark Berends, Marisa A. Cannata, Roberto V. Peñaloza, John L. Smithsonian and Marc L. Stein was presented by Mark Berends. This paper investigates how teachers’ instructional practices in math differ between school types.

Marc Stein presented Alignment of Mathematics Instruction to Standards and Assessments: Examining Differences Among Schools of Choice and Traditional Public Schools authored by Mark Berends, Marisa A. Cannata, Marc Stein, Roberto V. Peñaloza, and John L. Smithsonian. The researchers in this study sought to answer the following research questions: How do teachers’ instructional practices in math align to state content standards and assessments? Does this alignment differ in schools of choice as compared to traditional public schools?

The final paper in this session, Professional Development and Instruction Across Charter, Magnet, Private, and Traditional Public Schools by Marisa A. Cannata, Mark Berends, and Roberto V. Peñaloza, was presented by Marisa Cannata. What is the relationship between instruction and teachers’ professional development and when does professional development change teacher practice? Does this vary by school type? These questions are addressed in this paper.

In addition, Choice Center researcher Bettie Teasley also presented work on the impact of No Child Left Behind.

In June, a team from NCSC presented on the finding from the Opening the Black Box Project at the IES Annual Research Conference in Washington, D.C. The project is conducting ongoing investigation into which practices and conditions in schools are most associated with positive student achievement gains by linking responses to principal and teacher surveys about their schools to test scores of their students.

At UCEA, Choice Center researchers Ellen Goldring, Marisa Cannata, Courtney Preston, Madeline Mavrogordato, and Mark Berends presented work on charter schools and innovation, teacher turnover in charter schools, and the redefinition of teachers’ roles and responsibilities in charter schools.
Choice in the News

Public Perception about Education and School Choice
An Education Next-Program on Education Policy and Governance survey investigated public perception of different aspects of education, including school choice. When asked to grade the country’s schools, more than 25% of respondents gave them a “D” or “F” but 65% gave their local schools an “A” or “B”. Charter school support among the general public was measured at 44% while just 19% of respondents expressed opposition. Only 39% of teachers supported charters and 36% opposed them.

New Orleans Schools: 5 years after Hurricane Katrina
Public school enrollment in New Orleans has climbed back to over half of the pre-Katrina enrollment with similar demographics. Charter schools were a main component of Louisiana’s education recovery plan. In 2009, more than 61% of the students were enrolled in charter schools. The number of schools classified as academically unacceptable has dropped from 64% in 2005 to 42% in 2009. Overall, students in New Orleans are improving at a faster rate than the state average on state tests.

Study Finds KIPP Middle School Students Score Higher than Peers
Mathematica Policy Research released a study on 22 Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) middle schools. KIPP is a national network of charter schools. The study compared KIPP students’ test scores with those of local public school students. KIPP student populations were found to have higher concentrations of poverty and minority students but lower percentages of special education and limited English proficient students. For the majority of KIPP schools, test scores showed a statistically significant positive impact in reading and math.

Race to the Top Prompts Changes in State Charter Laws
Race to the Top (RttT), the competitive grant process from the Department of Education, led to many changes in state education laws, even in states that did not ultimately receive funding. Multiple states increased or eliminated caps on charter schools as well as eliminating barriers to charter expansion. Changes were also broadly made in teacher quality and evaluations.