

## Discussion and Conclusions

### Distribution and Enrollment

As can be seen from the information provided above, charter schools tend to be located in predominantly urban areas. The three exceptions are the Child Development Center of the Hamptons Charter School in Wainscott, the Roosevelt Children's Academy Charter School in Roosevelt, and the Riverhead Charter School located in Riverhead. All three are communities on Long Island.

The charter schools also tend to attract a predominantly minority student population. For example, the Troy City School District reported that for the 2001-02 school year, 64.7 percent of its student population was White, 25.8 percent was Black, and 7.1 percent was Hispanic. In contrast, for the same year, the Ark Charter School reported that its student body was 9.3 percent White, 51.1 percent Black, and 39.6 percent Hispanic. For the same school year, the Albany City School District<sup>1</sup> reported that 27.1 percent of its student body was White, 62.1 percent was Black, and 7.8 percent was Hispanic, while the New Covenant Charter School reported that 1.0 percent of its student body was White, 94.9 percent was Black, and 3.1 percent was Hispanic. The Riverhead Central School District reported that 63.3 percent of its student body was White, 27.7 percent was Black, and 7.4 percent was Hispanic. In contrast, the Riverhead Charter School reported that 20.8 percent of its student body was White, 66.7 percent was Black, and 10.2 percent was Hispanic.

While the student population of charter schools in New York State has remained fairly evenly balanced between boys and girls, the ethnic distribution is about two-thirds Black and about one-sixth each Hispanic and White. The dominance of Black students in the charter school population has remained steady at two-thirds over the past three years, while the proportions of Hispanic and White students have become more similar during that period. The ethnic distribution of students in charter schools contrasts with the student population in public schools statewide. Statewide, White students represent a majority (55 percent for the most recent year information is available), with Black and Hispanic students representing 20 and 18 percent, respectively. Thus, the Hispanic population in charter schools is similar to the general population, while Blacks are over-represented in charter schools and Whites are under-represented.

If the ethnic representation of students in charter schools is compared to the distribution of students in public schools in New York City and the large city districts, Black students remain over-represented in charter schools (two-thirds in charter schools vs. 37 percent in the large cities). For the large cities, Hispanic students represent 36 percent of the public school population (vs. 16 percent for charter schools statewide). The population of White students in charter schools (15 percent) closely reflects the White student population in the large cities (16 percent).

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<sup>1</sup> All district data are taken from *New York State of Learning. A Report to the Governor and the Legislature on the Educational Status of the State's Schools. Statistical Profiles of Public School Districts.* June 2002.

Of 20 charter schools operating in their third or fourth year, 10 show increases in the percent of enrollment of female students, 3 show increases in the percent of enrollment of male students, 7 show increases in the percent of enrollment of Black students, and 5 show increases in the percent of enrollment of Hispanic students.

Of 13 charter schools operating in their second year and submitting enrollment data, 7 show increases in the percent of enrollment of female students, 1 shows an increase in the percent of enrollment of male students, 4 show increases in the percent of enrollment of Black students, 2 show increases in the percent of enrollment of Hispanic students, and 3 show increases in the percent of enrollment of White students.

Overall, 17 of 34 charter schools show increases in the percent of enrollment of female students, 4 show increases in the percent of enrollment of male students, 11 show increases in the percent of enrollment of Black students, 7 show increases in the percent of enrollment of Hispanic students, and 3 show increases in the percent of enrollment of White students.

Only six charter schools operating report less than 50 percent of their student body as Black and/or Hispanic.

In the 2000-01 school year, the charter schools reported a total of 468 English language learners, with 78 being enrolled in grades K-6 and the remaining 390 students enrolled in grades 7-12. In 2001-02, they reported a total of 147 English language learners, with 108 enrolled in grades K-6 and the remaining 39 students enrolled in grades 7-12. In the 2002-03 school year, the charter schools reported a total of 207 English language learners, with 173 enrolled in grade K-6 and the remaining 34 students enrolled in grades 7-12. The decline in enrollment of English language learners is attributable primarily to International Charter High School at LaGuardia Community College, whose enrollment consisted exclusively of English language learners, surrendering its charter at the end of the 2000-01 school year.

When compared with their districts of location, the data also show that charter schools tend to attract more students who receive free or reduced lunch. For example, for the 2001-02 school year, the Troy City School District reported that 56.9 percent of the students were eligible for free or reduced lunch, while the Ark Charter School reported that 95.9 percent of its students were eligible. For the same year, the Albany City School District reported that 67.2 percent of its students were eligible for free or reduced lunch, while the New Covenant Charter School reported that 76.2 percent of its students were so eligible. The Riverhead Central School District reported that 41.9 percent of its student population was eligible for free or reduced lunch during the 2001-02 school year, while the Riverhead Charter School reported that 67.1 percent of its student population was so eligible. In the large cities, the distribution of students by free or reduced lunch is relatively comparable.

Table 1

**Number of Charter Schools by  
Percent of Pupils from Families on Public Welfare**

Percent of Pupils from Families on Public Welfare	School Year			
	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03
0		1		1
1-10		1	2	1
11-20		2	5	4
21-30		2	1	2
31-40	1	3	2	5
41-50	1	1	1	3
51-60		1	5	4
61-70		5	5	9
71-80	3	4	3	1
81-90		2	7	7
91-100				

The data reported in Table 1 above indicate that for each year in which charter schools have been operating in New York State, more than 50 percent of the charter schools have served student populations in which over 50 percent of students were from families receiving welfare. The students who attend charter schools typically do not represent affluent families.

Table 2

**Charter School Student Enrollment by  
Students with Disabilities and Free/Reduced Lunch**

School Year	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03
Enrollment	1,698	5,699	8,093	10,577
Students with Disabilities	**	318	751	896
Percent Students with Disabilities	**	6.1*	9.4*	8.5
Students Receiving Free/Reduced Lunch	1,363	3,774	5,942	7,829
Percent Students Receiving Free/Reduced Lunch	80.2	72.9*	74.7*	74.0

\*Enrollment adjusted for calculation because of incomplete data submissions.

\*\*Charter schools operating in 1999-00 did not submit information on students with disabilities.

A second indicator of the economic backgrounds of students in New York's charter schools is the percent of students receiving free or reduced lunch at their charter schools. Over four years, about three-fourths of the students in charter schools have received free or reduced lunch. See Table 2 above.

Regarding students with disabilities, statewide data for Fall 2000 show that over 11 percent of students received special education, a percentage that had been increasing over the past two decades but has leveled off. In charter schools, students with disabilities have represented a lower percentage, ranging from approximately six to nine percent over the last three years.

Thus, charter schools in New York State tend to attract minority and poverty-level students to a greater degree than is represented in the schools' districts of location. Though the percent of charter school students with disabilities has fluctuated over the three years for which there are data, it is still below that seen in the districts.

### Student Academic Performance

In 1999-2000, the first year that charter schools began to operate in New York State, only one charter school had students in grade 4 or grade 8, grades in which required New York State assessments are administered. In each subsequent year, the number of operating charter schools with 4<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade students has increased, and the number of charter schools reporting results on State assessments in ELA and math has increased. When the grade 4 and 8 assessments were introduced, the Department established four levels of performance for each assessment. Level 1 represents very little proficiency in the State Learning Standards; Level 2 represents partial proficiency; Level 3 represents proficiency; and Level 4 represents advanced proficiency. Using these levels, a performance index is calculated for each school and for each district. The performance index is calculated by summing the percent of tested students scoring at Levels 2 through 4 and the percent scoring at Levels 3 and 4. Consequently, for each charter school that administers State assessments, a performance index is calculated. Each school's performance index is expected to meet or exceed the State standard. The State standards established for the past four school years are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3

<b>Year</b>	<b>State Standard</b>
1999-2000	140
2000-2001	140
2001-2002	145
2002-2003	150

During the 2002-03 school year, 38 charter schools were in operation. Of these, 28 had students in either grade 4 or grade 8 (or both), grades in which New York State assessments are administered. Of the 28 charter schools eligible to administer State assessments, all of them reported results for 2002-03 for either ELA or mathematics.

### English Language Arts

Regarding performance on the State ELA assessments, the charter schools and the districts (including community school districts in New York City) in which they are located have not generally achieved levels of student academic success at or above the State standards established for the four years in which charter schools have been operating.

Table 4

**Charter Schools and Districts of Location Meeting or Exceeding State Standards**

Year	State Standard	ELA 4				ELA 8			
		Charter Schools		Districts of Location		Charter Schools		Districts of Location	
		Number	Number at or above Standard	Number	Number at or above Standard	Number	Number at or above Standard	Number	Number at or above Standard
1999-00	140	1	0	1	0	0	NA	0	NA
2000-01	140	7	1	6	0	4	1	3	0
2001-02	145	16	2	11	3	5	1	4	0
2002-03	150	22	8	14	5	10	2	9	1

As Table 4 above reveals, in the first three years that charter schools were in operation, no more than two charter schools achieved the State standard. In the fourth year of charter schools, eight schools met or exceeded the State standard for 4<sup>th</sup> grade. That represents not only an increase in charter schools demonstrating academic success, but the increase occurred even though the State standard had been raised above the level required previously.

The academic performance of charter schools can also be compared to that of districts with respect to progress toward the State standard. While it is true that the majority of charter schools and the districts of their location have not yet demonstrated student achievement at the level of the State standard, in the 2002-2003 school year charter schools have made gains toward that standard. Of 15 charter schools for which grade 4 ELA data are available for both the 2001-02 and 2002-03 school years, 14 showed gains in their performance indices, with the average gain being over 30 points. For the 11 districts in which those charter schools are located, 9 showed gains in their performance index, with average gains of 8 points. In contrast, for the 7 charter schools that reported achievement data in 2000-01 and 2001-02, their average gain on the performance index was less than 2 points, with the districts showing an average gain of 7 points for the same period. Thus, the pattern of gains in the districts housing charter schools has remained steady over the past two years, while the results for the charter schools have improved substantially in 2002-03. See also Table 4 in Appendix A.

Results on the ELA 8 assessments show that of the 4 charter schools reporting data for 2001-02 and 2002-03, all made gains on the performance index, with the average gain being 15 points. For the 3 districts of location, all showed declines in performance, with the average loss being 5 points. The same 4 charter schools had reported data for 2000-01, with only 1 of the 4 registering a gain against the State standard (average gain 0.25 points) in 2001-02. For the 3 districts, all made gains from 2000-01 to 2001-02, averaging 8 points. The 2002-03 school year was a year in which the districts where charter schools are located showed performance declines in contrast to previous gains. It also seems worthy of note that the charter school gains on the ELA

8 assessment for 2002-03 run counter to a general pattern of decline in the districts. See also Table 5 in Appendix A.

### Mathematics

Regarding performance on the State math assessments, prior to the 2002-03 school year, the charter schools and the districts (including community school districts in New York City) in which they are located have not generally achieved levels of student academic success at or above the established State standard. However, in the 2002-03 school year, that pattern changed for grade 4 math results in both the charter schools and the districts in which they are located.

Table 5

#### **Charter Schools and Districts of Location Meeting or Exceeding State Standards**

Year	State Standard	Math 4				Math 8			
		Charter Schools		Districts of Location		Charter Schools		Districts of Location	
		Number	Number at or Above State Standard	Number	Number at or Above State Standard	Number	Number at or Above State Standard	Number	Number at or Above State Standard
1999-00	140	1	0	1	0	0	NA	0	NA
2000-01	140	7	1	6	2	4	1	3	0
2001-02	145	16	4	15	6	5	1	4	0
2002-03	150	23	12	15	11	10	2	9	1

As Table 5 above reveals, in the first three years that charter schools were in operation, no more than 4 charter schools achieved the State's standard. In the fourth year of charter schools, 12 schools - more than half of the charter schools administering the State assessments - met or exceeded the State standard for 4<sup>th</sup> grade mathematics. That represents not only an increase in charter schools demonstrating academic success, but the increase occurred even though the State standard had been raised above the level required previously. For the same school year, district results on the grade 4 mathematics assessment also improved, with 11 of 15 districts exceeding the State standard.

To pursue the comparison further, of 15 charter schools for which grade 4 math data are available for both the 2001-02 and 2002-03 school years, 13 showed gains in their performance indices, with the average gain over 33 points. For the 11 districts in which those charter schools are located, all showed gains in their performance index, with average gains of 16 points. In contrast, for the 6 charter schools that reported achievement data in 2000-01 and 2001-02, their average gain on the State performance index was slightly more than 3 points, with the 5 districts of location showing an average loss of 0.2 of a point for the same period. Thus, while the pattern of gains in both the charter schools and the districts housing them has improved during the past year, the

rate of improvement for the charter schools has exceeded that of the districts. See also Table 6 in Appendix A.

Results on the grade 8 mathematics assessment show that, of the 5 charter schools reporting data for 2001-02 and 2002-03, 4 made gains on the performance index, with an average gain of 26 points. Of the 4 districts of location, 2 showed gains in performance, with an average gain of 9 points. Four of those charter schools had reported data for 2000-01, with none of the 4 registering gains against the State performance index (average loss of 11 points) in 2001-02. For the 3 districts of location, all had made gains from 2000-01 to 2001-02, averaging 12 points. The 2002-03 school year was a year in which the performance of districts where charter schools are located was mixed. See also Table 7 in Appendix A.

### Highest and Lowest Performing Charter Schools

In the 2000-01 school year, the highest and lowest performing schools relative to the State assessments were as follows (note that this was the first year of operation for each charter school):

- Grade 4 ELA:  
South Buffalo Charter School (Buffalo), 56.5 percent of students at or above Level 3  
Harbor Science and Arts Charter School (NYC CSD#4), 16.7 percent of students at or above Level 3
- Grade 4 math:  
Renaissance Charter School (NYC CSD#30), 60.0 percent of students at or above Level 3  
REACH Charter School (NYC CSD#1), 5.9 percent of students at or above Level 3
- Grade 8 ELA:  
KIPP Academy Charter School (NYC CSD#7), 64.2 percent of students at or above Level 3  
Charter School of Science and Technology (Rochester) and Rochester Leadership Academy Charter School (Rochester) both with 12.5 percent of students at or above Level 3
- Grade 8 math:  
KIPP Academy Charter School (NYC CSD#7), 72.7 percent of students at or above Level 3  
Charter School of Science and Technology (Rochester), 10.5 percent of students at or above Level 3

During the 2000-01 school year, the REACH Charter School (New York City) was designated as being furthest from State standards.

In the 2001-02 school year, the highest and lowest performing schools relative to the State assessments were as follows:

- Grade 4 ELA:

South Buffalo Charter School (Buffalo), 64.0 percent of students at or above Level 3

Ark Community Charter School (Troy), 9.1 percent of students at or above Level 3 (first year of operation)

- Grade 4 math:  
Renaissance Charter School (NYC CSD#30), 82.6 percent of students at or above Level 3  
Sisulu Children's Charter School (NYC CSD#5), 4.5 percent of students at or above Level 3
- Grade 8 ELA:  
KIPP Academy Charter School (NYC CSD#7), 61.5 percent of students at or above Level 3  
REACH Charter School (NYC CSD#1), no students at or above Level 3.
- Grade 8 math:  
KIPP Academy Charter School (NYC CSD#7), 61.5 percent of students at or above Level 3  
REACH Charter School (NYC CSD#1), no students at or above Level 3

In the 2001-02 school year, the Ark Community Charter School (Troy), the Charter School for Science and Technology (Rochester), the Rochester Leadership Academy Charter School (Rochester), the Sisulu Children's Charter School (NYC CSD#5), and the Stepping Stone Academy Charter School (Buffalo) were designated as being furthest from State standards.

For the 2002-03 school year, the highest and lowest performing charter schools relative to the State assessments are as follows:

- Grade 4 ELA:  
Beginning with Children Charter School (NYC CSD#14), 85.8 percent of students at or above Level 3  
Southside Academy Charter School (Syracuse), no students at or above Level 3 (first year of operation)
- Grade 4 Math:  
Renaissance Charter School (NYC CSD#30), 95.6 percent of students at or above Level 3  
King Center Charter School (Buffalo), 26.3 percent of students at or above Level 3
- Grade 8 ELA:  
KIPP Academy Charter School (NYC CSD#7), 71.9 percent of students at or above Level 3  
John V. Lindsay Wildcat Academy Charter School (NYC CSD#2), no students at or above Level 3
- Grade 8 Math:  
KIPP Academy Charter School (NYC CSD#7), 78.9 percent of students at or above Level 3

John V. Lindsay Wildcat Academy Charter School (NYC CSD#2), no students at or above Level 3

In 2002-03, the New Covenant Charter School (Albany) and the John V. Lindsay Wildcat Academy Charter School (NYC CSD#2) were designated as being furthest from State standards.

### **Summary and Analysis of Charter School Performance on State Assessments**

Charter schools can be divided into three groups according to their academic performance on the 2003 State assessments in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics: high-performing schools that exceeded the State standard in ELA and mathematics; adequately performing schools that exceeded the State standard in grade 4 mathematics and were within 20 points of the standard in grade 4 ELA; and low-performing schools that performed far (i.e., more than 20 points) from the State standard.

The high-performing schools include seven with grade 4 enrollment, one with grade 8 enrollment, and one with enrollment in both grades. These schools can be found in New York City and in districts across the State from Long Island to Buffalo. Some of the schools opened for the first time in the 2003-04 school year, while some had been operating for two or three years.

Adequately performing schools include four schools with grade 4 enrollment. One of these schools is in New York City. Two of these schools opened in 2002-03.

Low-performing schools include eight with grade 4 enrollment, six schools with grade 8 enrollment, and two schools with enrollment in grades 4 and 8. Two schools that were low-performing in grade 8 were high-performing in grade 4. Schools in this category had been open from one to four years.

While the performance of charter schools reporting data for both 2001-02 and 2002-03 improved during that time, the number of years that a school has been operating does not predict performance. Some schools which have been operating for three or four years continue to be low-performing, while other schools, newly opened in 2002-03, performed above the State standard.

When comparing charter school performance with that of the district of location, it is important to remember that the student population in the charter school may not be representative of the student population of the district. Some charter schools may draw from the lowest-performing district schools. On the other hand, data in a previous section showed that, on average, charter schools enroll a mostly minority and economically-disadvantaged population, and also generally enroll a smaller percentage of students with disabilities and limited English proficiency than do the districts of location. Further, the students with disabilities that charter schools enroll are unlikely to have severe disabilities.

The table below shows the performance of general-education students and students with disabilities in charter schools, in New York City, and in other districts where charter schools are located. The only assessment on which general-education students in charter schools outperformed those in districts of location was the grade 8 ELA. On that test, a larger percentage of general-education students in charter schools than in districts of location outside New York City were proficient (scored at Level 3 or 4). The performance of students with disabilities in charter schools and districts of location was more comparable, with charter schools frequently performing as well or better than districts of location. Students with disabilities, however, represented a smaller percentage of tested students in charter schools than districts of location. See Table 6 below.

Table 6

**Comparison Among Charter Schools, the New York City Public Schools and Other Districts of Location on the Performance of General-Education Students and Students with Disabilities**

Subject	Category	General Education			Students with Disabilities		
		Number Tested	% Levels 2+3+4	% Levels 3+4	Number Tested	% Levels 2+3+4	% Levels 3+4
Grade 4 ELA	Charter Schools	970	90.0%	47.3%	92	70.7%	16.3%
	New York City	64,817	95.4	58.2	9,758	62.2	15.3
	Other Districts	8,547	93.7	51.7	1,815	66.1	17.1
Grade 4 Math	Charter Schools	967	90.3	58.9	90	81.1	34.4
	New York City	69,576	95.0	72.4	9,979	67.2	32.0
	Other Districts	8,906	95.2	69.3	1,952	80.1	42.8
Grade 8 ELA	Charter Schools	451	88.7	35.0	31	45.2	3.2
	New York City	61,156	91.2	37.3	10,212	48.0	3.5
	Other Districts	7,985	89.6	29.9	1,944	49.6	4.3
Grade 8 Math	Charter Schools	507	69.6	26.6	33	33.3	15.2
	New York City	65,979	78.3	39.0	10,093	30.8	5.0
	Other Districts	8,015	75.2	32.8	1,869	44.4	11.0

Note: "Other Districts" included in this analysis were Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Albany, Schenectady, Troy, Roosevelt, Kenmore-Tonawanda, Wainscott and Riverhead.

Table 7 below compares the percent of tested students with disabilities in charter schools and districts of location. Several charter schools did not report any test scores

for students with disabilities, including some of the highest performing schools: Rochester Leadership Academy Charter School, Genesee Community Charter School, Roosevelt Children's Academy Charter School, KIPP Academy Charter School, Bronx Preparatory Charter School, Harriet Tubman Charter School, and the International Charter School of Schenectady. Harbor Science and Arts Charter School and the Renaissance Charter School reported no 4<sup>th</sup> grade test results for students with disabilities.

Table 7

**Comparison Among Charter Schools, the New York City Public Schools and Other Districts of Location on the Percentage of All Tested Students Who Were Disabled**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Grade 4 ELA</b>	Charter Schools	8.7
	New York City	13.1
	Other Districts	17.5
<b>Grade 4 Math</b>	Charter Schools	8.5
	New York City	12.5
	Other Districts	18.0
<b>Grade 8 ELA</b>	Charter Schools	6.4
	New York City	14.3
	Other Districts	19.6
<b>Grade 8 Math</b>	Charter Schools	6.1
	New York City	13.3
	Other Districts	18.9

**Caution**

The 2002-03 math and ELA results on the State assessments show that students in charter schools increased their achievement compared to previous years. In addition to increased rates of gain, the numbers of charter schools showing gains also increased. Some of the charter schools achieved results that compared well to the districts in which they are located. Six of 24 charter schools with students in grade 4 and 7 of 10 charter schools with students in grade 8 achieved performance indices in math higher than those of their districts of location. In ELA, 9 out of 23 charter schools with 4<sup>th</sup> graders and 6 out of 10 with eighth graders achieved performance indices higher than their districts of location.

While these results seem to be encouraging, they should be viewed with some caution. Most charter schools have not existed long enough to have sufficient data to

support conclusions or predictions. The 2002-03 results may mark the beginning of a continuing trend of improvement and even success for charter schools, but they may also be an anomaly. It is too soon to tell. For example, some of the charter schools had very few tested students, and in such populations the performance of one or two students can completely alter the general pattern without providing a sure foundation for the prediction of future results. Likewise, just as the large gains in performance exhibited by some of the charter schools could not have been predicted on the basis of results from previous years, it is not possible to predict that similar leaps will continue. A few of the charter schools that made large gains in performance are still far below the State performance indices, and it is not possible to forecast either a continuation of improvement or the rate of improvement.

Whether improvements in charter school performance in 2002-03 may be explained by the increasing effectiveness over time of the charter schools' approaches to education cannot yet be known. Some of the schools had just opened, and others had exhibited inconsistency of results in previous years. What may have changed, or what may yet change, cannot be forecast. The first opportunity to consider explanations of charter school performance will occur when the first applications for renewal of charters are submitted. Then the schools will have to provide explanations to account for their results, and reviewers will be able to weigh alternative explanatory hypotheses.

### Other Standardized Assessments

Not all charter schools serve grades in which State assessments are given. Those charter schools (as well as those that do give the State assessments) use a variety of other standardized assessments by which they purport to measure students' academic progress.

Of the 32 charter schools operating as of the 2001-02 school year, 15 submitted student performance data on standardized assessments. The data illustrate the difficulty of determining the educational effectiveness of charter schools, a frequently noted difficulty.<sup>1</sup> The 15 schools reported using 13 different standardized assessments. This in itself would not necessarily represent a barrier to interpretation; for instance, if the schools reported results using the same metric (percentile, normal curve equivalent [NCE], grade equivalent, etc.), then patterns could be discovered. But the 15 schools employed no fewer than 8 distinct ways of expressing student results on the 13 different assessments. In addition, some of the schools change metrics from one year to the next, thus rendering interpretation dubious. Most vexing of all, 4 charter schools that all reported results in terms of a metric called "qualitative level and % attaining" use multiple forms of expression within the metric. One school expressed results in terms of decimals, then switched the next year to whole numbers. Another used percentages at 4 defined categories (advanced, proficient, etc.). One merely reported percent above and below grade level. The last used two sets of standards; one is not explained, and the other involved four categories not employed by any of the other 4 schools.

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<sup>1</sup> Sandra Vergari, ed., *The Charter School Landscape* (Pittsburgh: U Pittsburgh Press, 2002, p. 269) provides a recent example.

Combining these difficulties with the fact that the 15 schools manifest eight different combinations of grades in their initial year of operation (with six subsequent changes in grade combinations) virtually dooms any attempt to derive helpful interpretations.

These variations in type of assessment, metric, and expression within metric limit analysis to observing that of 15 charter schools submitting data on standardized assessments, 6 had data yielding possible interpretations. None of the data were comparative data between or among schools. No charter school claimed to have data on standardized assessments that could predict performance on State assessments.

One charter school reported Fall-Spring results in the 2000-01 school year as percentiles. Kindergarten students gained 1 percentile on the New York City English Language Assessment Battery, while students in 1<sup>st</sup> grade gained 7.5 percentiles. Two issues make interpretation problematic. The first is that the number of students for whom data were reported was 6 for kindergarten and 4 for 1<sup>st</sup> grade. Such a small sample does not support generalization. The second issue is that the percentiles in both grades were very low: 8 for kindergarten, increasing to 9, and 4 for 1<sup>st</sup> grade, increasing to 11. Changes in the light of such initially low levels are of little significance.

In a second charter school, results for students in grades 1 through 3 showed declines, on the average of 5 NCEs, in both reading and math on the Stanford 9. These results represented one year of schooling.

A third charter school reported Fall to Spring results on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), showing an increase of 4.5 NCEs in reading and a decrease of 2.8 NCEs in math for kindergarten; for 1<sup>st</sup> grade, results in reading showed a decrease of 0.9 NCEs, and results in math showed an increase of 0.7 NCEs. However, the accuracy of these results is questionable because the school's report seems to miscalculate the results in reading.

In a fourth charter school, two problems confound interpretation of results. In the first place, though the school reported its results over three years, it changed the metric in which it expressed those results. Thus, the first year's data cannot be used as a baseline for interpretation of the second year's data. Between its second and third years, the school reported gains on the ITBS - Core Total in grades 2, 6, and 7 and a decline in grade 1. The other problem with interpretation of results is that for the 2000-01 school year, the number of students reported in grade 6 for a Fall testing was 61 fewer than for the corresponding Spring testing. This discrepancy undercuts the credibility of the other data reported by the school.

A fifth charter school is unique in reporting cohort data (data on the same group of students) over two years. Expressed in NCEs, for two grades there were modest increases and for two other grades slight decreases. Overall, the change is negligible.

Finally, one school reported results in Language and Math for three grades from Spring to Spring on the ITBS. Expressed in a very unusual metric (percent above the

50<sup>th</sup> percentile), the results vary widely, with large gains in language for grade three offset by declines in math for grades one and two.

Overall, the student performance data from the administration of standardized assessments other than the State tests leave the question of charter schools' academic effectiveness unresolved. Indeed, the data can hardly be said even to address the question of academic effectiveness. Partly this is a result of charter schools not communicating, for example, about the standardized tests they elected to purchase and administer. Partly it is a result of a similar lack of communication about the metrics the charter schools selected and reported. But another aspect of the problem of deriving meaningful generalizations based on data from standardized tests is that the charter schools have not made an effective effort to organize and present their data to make the case for their academic effectiveness.

To date, inferences regarding the academic performance of charter schools depend on data collected from the administration of the grade 4 and 8 State ELA and math assessments. These are the only assessments that are comparable longitudinally.

### Fiscal Impact

Overall impact upon a district's budget depends upon the number of resident students attending a charter school, the total amount paid to the charter school, and the size of the district's own budget. Although New York City hosts most of the charter schools, the overall impact upon its budget has been negligible. The Albany City School District seems to have consistently had one of the higher levels of impact. In 1999-2000 (the first year in which charter schools operated in New York State), the overall fiscal impact in Albany was 2.76 percent. In 2000-01, the Roosevelt Union Free School District showed the highest level of impact (3.05 percent), but the Albany City School District also had an impact of 2.53 percent. In the 2001-02 school year, the impact in Albany was 4.40 percent (once again the highest in the State), and was 5.00 percent in 2002-03 (the highest was 5.30 percent in the Lackawanna City School District).

Both State Education Law<sup>2</sup> and Regulations<sup>3</sup> of the Commissioner of Education describe the method by which charter schools are financed. In short, districts must make six substantially equal installments beginning on the first business day of July and every two months thereafter. The payments equal 100 percent of the AEP, which is calculated by the Department. The districts must also pay directly to the charter school any State or federal aid attributed to a resident student with a disability attending the charter school in proportion to the level of services for each such student that the charter school provides, directly or indirectly. If a district refuses to pay monies owed the charter school, the Department will certify the amount in arrears to the State Comptroller, who will then deduct the amount owed from the district's State aid and send it instead to the charter school. To date, only two school districts (the Longwood

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<sup>2</sup> §2856 of the Education Law

<sup>3</sup> Commissioner's Regulation 119.1

Central School District and the Riverhead Central School District) have consistently refused to pay the amounts owed, although their superintendents have stated that they will begin paying starting with the 2003-04 school year. Other than the deduction of State aid, there is no penalty to a district for refusing to make payments to a charter school.

Most districts<sup>4</sup> report little financial and/or programmatic impact from having students attend charter schools. Most of the concerns are raised in districts with the largest number of students *per capita* attending charter schools (e.g., Albany City School District, Buffalo City School District). Both the Albany and Buffalo school districts have consistently reported that teaching staff had to be terminated, and Buffalo has further reported that administrators and teacher aides have also been terminated. It should be noted, however, that an ongoing fiscal crisis within the Buffalo City School District not related to the establishment of charter schools has heavily contributed to the need to terminate staff and otherwise re-organize.

Other consistent issues that have arisen are the increased amount of time that administrators must spend on charter school-related matters, and the need to add clerical staff to handle charter school tasks. Since students from all over the district (as opposed to all of them coming from one school building) enroll in charter schools, the districts often find that they are unable to reasonably consolidate classes and/or programs, in order to compensate for the lost revenue. One district (Syracuse) did report that some overcrowding had been alleviated by children leaving the district to attend a charter school. In no instance did a district report that enrollment in any remedial programs or special education programs decreased as a result of children attending a charter school.

In conclusion, the following can be said about the charter school approach thus far in New York State:

1. charter schools tend to attract higher percentages of minority students than is seen in the district of location;
2. charter schools tend to attract more students in poverty than is seen in the district of location, as determined by the percent of students receiving free or reduced lunch, or who report receiving public welfare;
3. charter schools tend to serve fewer students with disabilities and English language learners than do the districts of location;
4. student results on State assessments tend to be very low in the first year;
5. student results on State assessments showed substantial increases by the 2002-03 school year;
6. a higher percent of charter schools met the State standard for the 2002-03 grade 8 ELA and math exams than did the districts of location;
7. a higher percent of districts of location met the State standard for the 2002-03 grade 4 math exam than did charter schools;

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<sup>4</sup> See the appendix in the appropriate year's *Annual Report to the Governor, the Temporary President of the Senate, the Speaker of the Assembly and the Board of Regents on the Status of Charter Schools in New York State*.

8. the percent of charter schools and districts of location meeting the State standard for the 2002-03 grade 4 ELA is comparable;
9. other standardized assessment data reported by the charter schools is nearly unusable when trying to ascertain if students are actually making academic progress; and
10. charter school authorizers take accountability seriously, as evidenced by the revocation of charters, the surrender of charters, and placing charter schools on probation for violations of the charter and/or applicable law or regulation.