



The Civil Rights Project

Proyecto Derechos Civiles

Press Release:

New Report Explains that Charter Schools' Political Success is a Civil Rights Failure

Contact: Jamal Simmons: (202) 262-5058, jsimmons@rabengroup.com

Los Angeles—February 4, 2010— Today, the Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles at UCLA issued "**Choice Without Equity: Charter School Segregation and the Need for Civil Rights Standards,**" a nationwide report based on an analysis of Federal government data and an examination of charter schools in 40 states and the District of Columbia, along with several dozen metropolitan areas with large enrollments of charters. The report found that charter schools continue to stratify students by race, class, and possibly language, and are more racially isolated than traditional public schools in virtually every state and large metropolitan area in the country.

"President Barack Obama just delivered his budget to the U.S. Congress which increases both incentives and resources to create more charter schools," Erica Frankenberg, co-author of the report said. "This report should be considered in evaluating new federal incentives to states that encourage the expansion of charter schools, such as the Race to the Top initiative."

The study's key findings suggest that charter schools, particularly those in the western United States are havens for white re-segregation from public schools; requirements for providing essential equity data to the federal government go unmet across the nation; and magnet schools are overlooked, in spite of showing greater levels of integration and academic achievement than charters.

"The charter movement has flourished in a period of retreat on civil rights," stated UCLA Professor Gary Orfield, co-director of the Civil Rights Project. "The vision of a successfully integrated society - one that carries real opportunities for historically excluded groups of students to enter the mainstream - ought to be a defining characteristic of charter schools. Federal policy should make this a condition for charter school support and should support other choice programs which pursue this goal."

The study offers several recommendations for restoring equity provisions and integration in charter schools, including establishing new guidance and reporting requirements by the Federal government; federal funding opportunities for magnet schools, which have a documented legacy of reducing racial isolation and improving student outcomes; and incorporating some features of magnet schools into charter schools. The report also recommends heightened enforcement of existing state-level legislation with specific provisions regarding diversity in charter schools, and monitoring patterns of charter school enrollment and attrition, focusing particularly on reporting the demographic information of charter school students on low-income and ELL characteristics.

The Obama Administration has promoted charter schools as a central component of educational reform. In two major funding programs, with billions of dollars at stake, the Education Department is giving priority to states and districts committed to quickly expanding the number of charter schools. In addition, the Administration's budget request for charter schools for fiscal year 2010 increased nearly 20 percent over the prior year's funding level.

Even before this recent push, the enrollment of charter schools has nearly tripled since 2000-01, and states previously serving no charter school students now enroll tens of thousands. While the number and size of charter schools is increasing, charter school enrollment presently accounts for only 2.5 percent of all public school students.

Based on a review of prior studies, the report indicates charter schools currently render no real net academic gain for students. With little evidence reported by charter schools on student graduation rates - an important academic goal of any school - studies on academic achievement of charter students offer mixed conclusions, and provide scant data on important topics such as student attrition rates.

While more than one million students attend charter schools, enrollment remains concentrated in a handful of states. Federal pressure to create more charter schools guarantees the proliferation of charter schools nationwide. The report discloses that although vibrantly diverse charter schools exist, they are not reflective of the majority and charter school trends vary substantially across different regions:

Latinos are under-enrolled in charters in some Western states where they comprise the largest share of students; five of the six states with the largest shares of Latino students are states in which Latinos are under-enrolled in charter schools. Also, a dozen states report a majority of Latino charter students attend intensely segregated minority schools. Nearly 80 percent of Latino charter school students in Texas, for example, are in schools that have 90-100 percent minority student populations.

Although in national totals white students are under-enrolled in charter schools, patterns in the U.S. West, where traditional public schools are the most racially diverse, show an over-enrollment of white students: whites comprise 44 percent of students in traditional public schools in the West, yet charter schools in that region report 49 percent of students as white. In some states and metropolitan areas, white segregation is higher in charter schools despite the fact that overall charters enroll fewer white students. These trends suggest charters contribute to white flight in the two most racially diverse regions in the U.S.

Charters attract a higher percentage of black students than traditional public schools, in part because they tend to be located in urban areas. While segregation for blacks among all public schools has increased over the last two decades, black students in charters are far more likely than their traditional public school counterparts to be educated in intensely segregated settings. Fully 70 percent of all black charter students attend schools that have student populations that are 90-100 percent racial and ethnic minorities, nearly twice the rate of traditional public schools. Also, more than 40 percent of black charter school students are in schools that have 99-100 percent minority student populations.

In the industrial Midwest, more students enroll in charter schools compared to other regions, and Midwestern charter programs display high concentrations of black students; of students enrolled in Midwest charter schools in 2007 - 08, 51 percent were identified as black, 37 percent white, and 8 percent Latino. Among students enrolled in traditional public schools in Midwestern states for that same year, 74 percent were identified as white, 14 percent black, and 8 percent Latino.

Major gaps in multiple federal data sources make it difficult to answer basic, fundamental questions about the extent to which charter schools enroll, concentrate, and graduate low-income students and English language learners (ELLs). Approximately one in four charter schools do not report data on low-income students or information on ELLs. Federal data on charter schools in California, arguably the country's most significant gateway for immigrants, describe just *seven* ELL students attending its state charter programs.

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Download the report, "[Choice without Equity: Charter School Segregation and the Need for Civil Rights Standards](#)," by E. Frankenberg, G. Siegel-Hawley, and J. Wang

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