

Assessing the Accessibility of Bergen County Charter Schools

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ABSTRACT

Charter schools are a relatively new and controversial form of public education. They are publicly funded but operated by independent groups; so, despite being held to the same standards as traditional public schools, they have more autonomy over curriculum and design as they do not operate within local school districts. One of the key requirements of public schools is that they are open and accessible to all students. Some worry that in the case of charter schools, selectivity in their enrollment processes means this requirement is not adequately met. In an effort to add to the existing research on charter school accessibility and publicness, this study seeks to understand if inequitable accessibility is an inherent issue to the charter school model. Using a convergent (QUAN+QUAL) mixed method study I examine Bergen County's three charter schools by coding for a possible presence of enrollment shaping in their student demographics and approaches to access in school operations. This study adds to the existing understanding of charter school accessibility by providing a local and in-depth analysis of the charter schools located in one county. The findings of this study suggest that charter schools are inherently inequitably accessible, however that this issue can potentially be mitigated through intentional steps to broaden access to disadvantaged student groups. As these results are confined to Bergen County, I suggest that future studies be conducted between different states, assessing for correlation between state charter school policy and individual school approaches to equity and access.

Introduction

The school choice movement in education has gained much attention in recent years. A 2020 survey of likely Democrat voters revealed that 81% of voters favor school choice as an expansion of the public school system (Benenson Strategy Group, 2019). The movement is based on the belief that families, regardless of socioeconomic status or other factors, should have the option and freedom to choose a school which best meets their student's needs, rather than submit automatically to a local public district. Charter schools have emerged as a popular solution to providing school choice. Since charter schools first appeared in 1991, they have surfaced in almost all 50 states and Washington DC, now enrolling about 10% of all American public school students (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2018). This rapid growth has called for much investigation to determine how they fit into the American Education System.

Charter schools are publicly funded through taxes, but privately run, oftentimes by non-profit groups and other entities, outside of a local district's board of education. This means that they have more autonomy over curriculum and design than traditional public schools which operate within larger districts (New Jersey Department of Education Office of Charter Schools [NJDOE Charter Schools], 2021) (Lubienski, 2013). Their proponents believe this independence provides families with a variety of schools from which they can choose the one that best suits their child. However, opponents are concerned that choice may be exercised on both ends—they worry that charter schools may be selective with the students they enroll. This process is called enrollment shaping, and it may appear in various ways: “cream-skimming,” where schools seek out particular types of students (high performing, fluent in English,

etc.), and “cropping-out,” where schools exclude students from enrollment (those with behavioral difficulties, disabilities, etc.) (Lacireno-Paquet et al., 2002) (Zimmer & Guarino, 2013).

Charter schools are defined as “open to all students from the charter’s district or region of residence on a space-available basis” (NJDOE Charter Schools, 2021). However, the presence of enrollment shaping and exclusivity in charter schools would obstruct this assurance. Thus, enrollment shaping raises concerns regarding its limitations on the opportunities available to millions of American students. Additionally, by undermining the accessibility of charter schools—a central requirement of public schools—enrollment shaping calls into question their legitimacy as a form of public education (Lubienski, 2013). Therefore, these concerns have led me to investigate whether inequitable accessibility is inherent to the charter school model. I explored this inquiry locally in Bergen County, New Jersey, by asking the question: are Bergen County charter schools equitably accessible to all students?

To address my research question, I first studied the existing body of literature on charter school accessibility. Previous research conducted on this topic largely investigates charter schools on a broad scale. Therefore, there are fewer studies being conducted on this subject on a local level, and a lack of study of this subject in Bergen County, New Jersey. I used a convergent (QUAN+QUAL) mixed method design to explore the potential presence of enrollment shaping in any data form it may appear. By evaluating whether charter schools in Bergen County are equitably accessible, this research will add to the existing understanding of charter school accessibility as a whole, and to the discussion of defining their publicness.

Literature Review

In this literature review, four major works consider the potential for inequitable accessibility to be a shortcoming of charter schools and speak to the implications of this possibility. Professor of Education Policy, Christopher Lubienski (2013), establishes characteristics that when met, allow a school to be considered public: “(a) access for all; (b) taxpayer funding, and (c) public ownership, administration, and accountability through government entities” (p.5). In his definition, Lubienski makes note that public schools must adhere to these guidelines not only in principle or form, but also in their function. In the case of charter schools, opponents fear the latter may not always be met. While charter schools put more authority in the hands of parents and local communities than traditional public schools, arguably making them more public, concerns raised over selectivity in charter school enrollments compromise their adherence to Lubienski’s first condition: access for all. This selectivity can manifest as “cream-skimming” certain “desirable” students, or as “cropping-out” “undesirable” ones (Lubienski, 2013) (Mommandi & Welner, 2018). In both cases, charter schools place different values on students based on their backgrounds, shaping their enrollment accordingly for financial or other incentives (Welner, 2021). Regardless of approach, if enrollment shaping is occurring charter schools cannot be considered accessible to all, and therefore public.

Jay Matthews, education columnist at The Washington Post and author of *Work Hard. Be Nice* on the KIPP Charter School Network, argues that charter schools are open to all. He attributes this to blind lottery style enrollments which are conducted when the number of applicants to a school outweighs the number of available seats. In theory this unbiased enrollment process keeps schools from picking desirable students or rejecting undesirable ones.

However, Professor Kevin G. Welner, of the School of Education at the University of Colorado at Boulder, and his PhD associate, Wagma Mommandi, argue that enrollment shaping extends beyond what lottery admissions can prevent. Through a 2-year qualitative study, they identified 14 specific ways they observed schools to shape student populations prior to, during, and after enrollment. While some methods such as the way a school markets itself, or location do not directly bar certain students from getting into a given school, various methods serve as deterrents which, when used in unison, have great impact on which students apply to schools or remain in them.

Returning to Matthews, he argues that because school lotteries are unbiased, the character of a school itself holds greater influence over which students apply or remain enrolled. Other proponents of school choice take this similar view, seeing that specialized schools create a diverse menu of options where parents can choose the school which best fits their child’s needs (Renzulli & Evans, 2014). However, Welner and Mommandi would argue this

becomes an issue when schools market themselves toward a particular student type, such as being extremely academically rigorous, because it deters students who see themselves as outside of that group from applying. Therefore, the influences Matthew's frames as a part of charter school's individuality, Welner and Mommandi argue negatively impact the accessibility of schools.

Additionally, school choice skeptics fear that the system favors children who have parents who are attuned to and able to navigate application and enrollment processes. Lubienski (2013) writes that "families making school choices tend to be more educated, place greater value on education, and exhibit other indicators of relative social advantage, even if they lack substantial material wealth" (p. 8). Welner and Mommandi found that charter schools can capitalize on this opportunity gap in numerous ways such as placing special terms on applications like mandatory school visits and requiring parent volunteerism. These in turn exclude those whose parents do not have the time or resources to fulfill these requirements, thus stratifying student opportunities "on the basis of their parents' efficacy in working the system" (Welner & Strauss, 2021). Therefore, particular families are more equipped than others to exercise their right to school choice, and charter schools' approaches to access appear to have the power to widen this gap.

Given the examples of enrollment shaping practices found, Welner and Mommandi (2018) also speak to the motivations behind these practices. They argue that charter schools are incentivized to shape enrollment because "success for a charter school depends on an ongoing public perception as a successful school within a test-based accountability system," (p. 2). Thus, they enroll students they believe will perform best, generally those with high test scores and fluency in English; and additionally, or alternatively restrict access to students they believe will hurt their scores, like English Language Learners, economically disadvantaged students, or students with disabilities.

Further, the goals of individual schools add to or detract from this blanket incentive, shaping how different schools approach access. Dr Natalie Lacireno-Paquet et al. speak to these differences. They categorize charter schools into two main categories: those guided by social justice efforts and those guided by market incentives. Their study on DC charter schools revealed that student demographics are highly varied between these types. For example, they found the percentage of special education students to be almost halved in market-oriented schools. Their findings suggest that the differing missions of charter schools shape their incentives to broaden or restrict access, shaping student populations according to their goals. Therefore, charter school's autonomy not only diversifies them in terms of school mission and curriculum design, but also in their approaches to equity and accessibility (Lacireno-Paquet et al., 2002). Their distinctions between types of charter schools provide deeper insight into how, why, and which schools employ methods, like Welner and Mommandi's, to shape enrollment.

While the pieces cited offer context to the expectations of public education models and speak to the importance of analyzing the functioning accessibility of charter schools, there is a lack of study zeroing in on charter schools within small regions and counties. Therefore, my proposed gap is to assess the accessibility of charter schools in Bergen County, New Jersey. Studies conducted on the national level like Mommandi and Welner's (2018) are limited as "they do not allow for quantification" and from them there can be "no attempt to determine how many charter schools use a given approach" (p. 4). Taking a local view of accessibility may remedy these limitations, as it will enable me to study a smaller sample of schools, but with a more in-depth view. With this I can study the schools in context of New Jersey specific legislation, and in comparison, to the other charter schools in the county. Additionally, if this local approach is replicated in other areas, synthesizing these findings may allow for quantification of this issue at the national level. This also will allow for comparisons to be drawn between approaches to access in different areas. The goal of my research is to provide an understanding of charter school approaches to equity and accessibility in Bergen County, as a part of a larger discussion in defining charter schools' publicness and role in the American education system.

Initial Hypotheses

In developing my research design, I did have some initial hypotheses. First, I hypothesized that I would find traces of enrollment shaping, such as examples of the practices observed by Welner and Mommandi being used. I also expected

that as Lacireno-Paquet and her colleagues found in their study, I would observe approaches to access varying between the independent schools I was studying. This would depend on their school missions and how they are incentivized to either broaden or shape enrollment.

Method and Research Process

To test these hypotheses and closely assess the schools I planned to study, I knew I would need to consider both quantitative and qualitative data. This led me to conduct my research through a convergent design mixed method study. A mixed method approach is most helpful to my research because it allows me to triangulate different subcategories of data (Leedy et al., 2021). My convergent study had a QUAL+QUAN structure, meaning that I gave similar weight to both qualitative and quantitative data, which I gathered within the same general period. This aligns with my research question because it allows me to find evidence for or against the presence of enrollment shaping in any form it may appear: quantitatively through enrollment demographics or qualitatively through school practices.

Quantitative Process

First, I conducted a comparative analysis of student demographics for each of the charter schools and the traditional public districts they are nearest to. I studied the years 2010 through 2020. I compared the charter schools to these public districts because according to the Charter School Program Act Of 1995, N.J.S.A. 18A:36A-8(e), “The admission policy of the charter school shall, to the maximum extent practicable, seek the enrollment of a cross section of the community's school age population including racial and academic factors.” If charter school enrollments reflect those of their communities, this may be correlated with successful strategies in broadening access. Whereas if the demographics are inconsistent, this may be linked to access restriction.

Qualitative Process

To provide context to these quantitative findings, I also conducted a two-part qualitative data gathering process to understand the operations of the schools I studied. This consisted of interviews with school administrators, and a content analysis of school materials from each of the Bergen County charter schools.

I met with school administrators to understand their perspective on access within their school missions. To work with human participants, I received approval by an Internal Review Board, and I formulated and sent out IRB consent forms to each of my participants, receiving written informed consent to my study. A limitation to acknowledge here is that as enrollment shaping is frowned upon, I did not expect school administrators to be forthcoming with any unethical practices they may employ. That being said, I still decided to conduct these interviews to gauge the school administrator's attention to building equitable access. Controlling for this limitation, I chose to back up interview findings with a larger qualitative coding of school materials to analyze school operations. These included their annual performance reports, school websites, parent and student handbooks, application and enrollment forms, and other materials. In this and the interview step, I used Wagma and Momandi's Table 5.1: Fourteen Approaches That Charter Schools Use to Structure Student Enrollment as a framework to code for practices contributing to inequitable access in the schools I observed (Mommandi & Welner, 2018, p. 65-67).

Limitations

Before discussing my findings, it is important to understand them in the context of my research limitations. My primary limitation was time. The studies I observed were conducted over the course of one or more years whereas my timeline consisted of about 7 months. If I were allotted more time, I could assess changes in the school's approaches

to access over the course of multiple years and evaluate their possible effects. A second limitation was connections to parent interviewees. I hoped to interview parents of both students admitted to or turned away from each school. This would provide me with better insight into the enrollment processes from a first-hand perspective. However, I was unable to source these interviewees in an unbiased way. Lastly my findings were limited as one of the schools I studied, School C, did not respond to my request for an interview. This was an obstacle to my research as it narrowed the scope of my understanding of the school's operations from an administrative perspective.

Research Findings

Bergen County has 3 charter schools. In discussing my findings, I will refer to them as schools A, B, and C. In referring to their adjacent public districts, I will use District A, B, and C, respectively.

Qualitative Findings

My qualitative findings are summarized below in Table 1. In the pre-enrollment stage, I studied how each of the school's locations, means of marketing, and description and designs appeared to influence their accessibility. In this stage I found that the schools portrayed and positioned themselves in a location to be inclusive and open to all.

In terms of location, schools B and C are in middle-income level areas, falling within range of the Bergen County median household income of \$104,623 according to US 2021 Census Data. School A is located in a lower income city, with a median household income of \$64,242. Therefore, the schools are not positioned in communities of economic status high above the median of Bergen County, which can be interpreted as a method of cream-skimming economically advantaged students. Further, bussing is provided by the local public districts for each school, therefore transportation should not deter farther distance families, or working parents from applying.

The marketing tactics used by the schools to advertise their enrollment information were carried out in public spaces, making the information available to all. Examples of this are School A's use of billboards on major roads and bench advertisements. This also extends to the use of social media and brochure placements in community centers like preschools and grocery stores, which all the schools utilized.

The description and designs of the schools shared similar goals which were nonspecific to any student type. School mission statements used broad and inclusive language, commonly centering around the importance of fostering diversity and developing student's critical thinking skills. These messages were relayed through interviews with administrators and reinforced in several locations on the school websites and in their Annual Reports. These school websites were easily navigable and available for translation to at least English and Spanish.

During the enrollment period, I coded for examples of schools shaping enrollment through steering, denial of services, illegal and dicey practices, conditions placed on enrollment, required volunteerism, and conditions in applications. My findings did not include traces of these practices being used. In regard to the first and third of these practices, I found that the Bergen County schools did not deter enrollment based on special student needs. They state in clear terms that all types of students are encouraged to apply and advertised services such as support for students with disabilities and English Language Learners and free and reduced-price lunch programs. While the schools encourage parental involvement, volunteerism is not required. School C also lays out in their Parent Involvement Policy that an annual evaluation of their policy will be conducted which includes "identifying barriers to greater participation by parents in parental involvement activities (with particular attention to parents who are economically disadvantaged, are disabled, have limited English proficiency, have limited literacy, or are of any racial or ethnic minority background)" (District Wide Parent Involvement Policy, 2012). Lastly there were no terms placed on enrollment or applications at any of the observed schools. This means that families can apply with no mandatory school visit, entrance exams, or other special requirements; and if admitted they may enroll with no subject tests or special fees. These lacks

of special terms were clearly addressed in the application and enrollment sections of the school websites. The application itself is similar for each school. They are available in English and Spanish and contain only the same basic information needed to enroll in a traditional public district. They can be completed online, in person, or mailed or faxed in, eliminating bias based on internet access. Additionally, a part of the enrollment process is the school's use of a weighted lottery. Because the schools typically receive more applicants than seats available, accepted students are picked out of a blind lottery. Adding weight to this lottery is allowed by the State of New Jersey in attempts to broaden access to disadvantaged student groups. These students may receive 3 units in the lottery to every 2 for other applicants. Schools A and B use this weighted lottery system, School C does not.

In the post enrollment period, enrollment shaping may present itself through practices to “push out” students deemed undesirable to the school. This can occur through counseling out students, failing to backfill student attrition, including extra charges, and strict disciplinary measures leading to frequent suspensions and expulsions. As I was limited by my lack of connections to parent interviewees of the school, I was unable to retrieve first-hand information related to the schools attempting to counsel out families by offering them other school alternatives. However, as the schools I observed had very low rates of student attrition, this suggests this may not be the case. Additionally, I found there to be insignificant numbers of out of school suspensions, and no observed expulsions in the three schools in the years I observed. In the event there is student attrition however, the schools do have backfill policies which extend into or around January. This means that the seat of a student who exits the school up until this point will be replaced by the next name from the waiting list of the last enrollment period.

Quantitative Findings

Qualitatively, I have not found sufficient evidence of enrollment shaping in the schools, however my quantitative findings are not as consistent. After comparing the average percentages across the years I obtained data for, I found that the charter schools only partly reflect the demographics of their larger public districts. The racial and ethnic group enrollments for each school and district can be seen below in figures 1, 2, and 3. While these enrollment rates are roughly similar between charter schools and their nearest public districts, enrollment of special student groups appears to be lacking. These results can be found below in figures 4, 5, and 6. Beginning with School A, an average 5% of its student population is made up of those with disabilities, compared to District A at 18%, almost 4 times this amount. Additionally, the district houses almost double the average percentage of English language learners. In School B, the average percentage of economically disadvantaged students is 15%, compared to District B's average of 38% making this a 23% deficit. Lastly, while District C has an average enrollment percentage of 12% for English language learners, Charter School C has no representation of these students. The District also doubles the School's average percentage of students with disabilities with 14% compared to 7%, respectively.

Overall, for economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English language learners, none of the 3 charter schools had higher average percentage enrollments compared to their communities. However, I did find some of these gaps to be more drastic in earlier years and trending closer together in more recent years. These trends are summarized below in figures 7, 8, and 9. An exception to my findings is that in the 2014-15 school year, Charter School C surpassed the enrollment percentage of District C for economically disadvantaged students. This year was an outlier in my data, and a possible explanation for it is perhaps a difference in how student demographic data was collected or reported in this year by the school or district compared to other years.

Table 1. Summary of Qualitative Findings, using Welner and Mommandi’s “Table 5.1: Fourteen Approaches” as a Framework (Mommandi & Welner, 2018, p. 65-67).

| Enrollment Shaping Method | Observations Within Bergen County Charter Schools (A, B, C) | Applicable Examples and Quotations from School Materials |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| Pre-Enrollment | | |
| Location | Bussing transportation provided by local public districts | “bussing is available based on distance from the school” (B) |
| Marketing | Public marketing Ex. social media, billboards, bench advertisements, distribution of brochures in community spaces (grocery stores, preschools) | |
| Description and Design | Nonspecific to any student type Broad, inclusive language All similarly focus on fostering diversity and critical thinking skills | “...nurturing, caring, and child-centered classroom environment” (A) “Students will develop and demonstrate an understanding and appreciation for cultural diversity and the perspectives of others” (B) |
| During Enrollment | | |
| Steering | Encouraged application of all families Denied considering any student background factors | “All children from New Jersey are welcome to apply... [School B] accepts all students irrespective of race, religion, ethnicity, disability or academic performance” (B) |
| Denial of Services | Advertisement of special student services | “Students that have been identified as having limited English proficiency will receive additional academic support to help them reach their full potential” (C) |
| Illegal and Dicey Practices | N/A | “the school staff do not have the ability to manipulate or adjust the lottery outcome” (B) |
| Conditions on Enrollment | N/A | |
| Required Volunteerism | N/A | |
| Conditions on Application | Advertised lack of any conditions on application and simple application process Use of weighted lottery in Schools A and B | “It takes only 3 minutes to apply!” (A) “Any family who can provide evidence of ONE of the following economically disadvantaged criteria will receive a weight of three unites in the lottery to two for other students (3:2)” (B) |
| Post Enrollment | | |
| Counselling Out | N/A | |
| Not Backfilling Student Attrition | All adhere to backfill policies Next name on most recent waitlist selected in the event a student exits | |
| Charges | N/A | |
| Discipline and Punishment | Standard disciplinary measures Low rates of suspensions at every school and no observed expulsions in years studied | Ex.) out-of-school suspension received after 5 offenses, expulsion following multiple suspensions (A) |

Average Enrollments by Racial and Ethnic Groups (A)

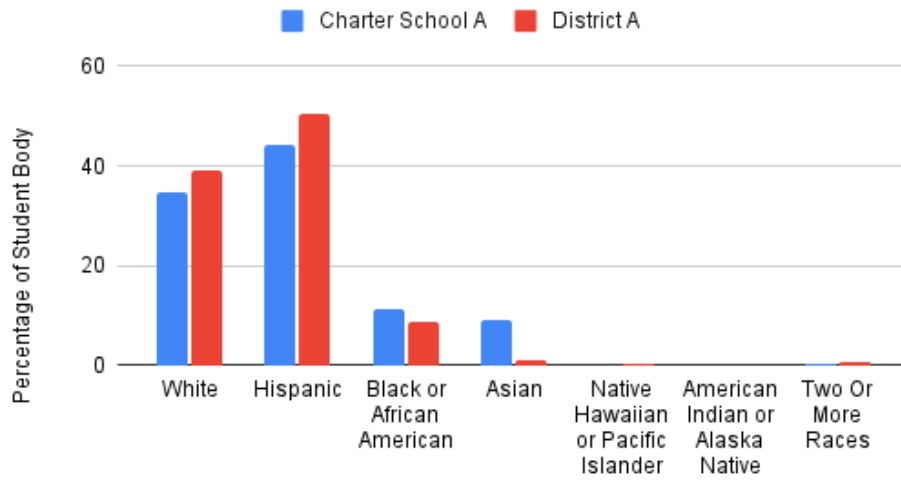


Figure 1. Average Enrollments by Racial & Ethnic Groups for Charter School A & District A

Average Enrollments by Racial and Ethnic Groups (B)

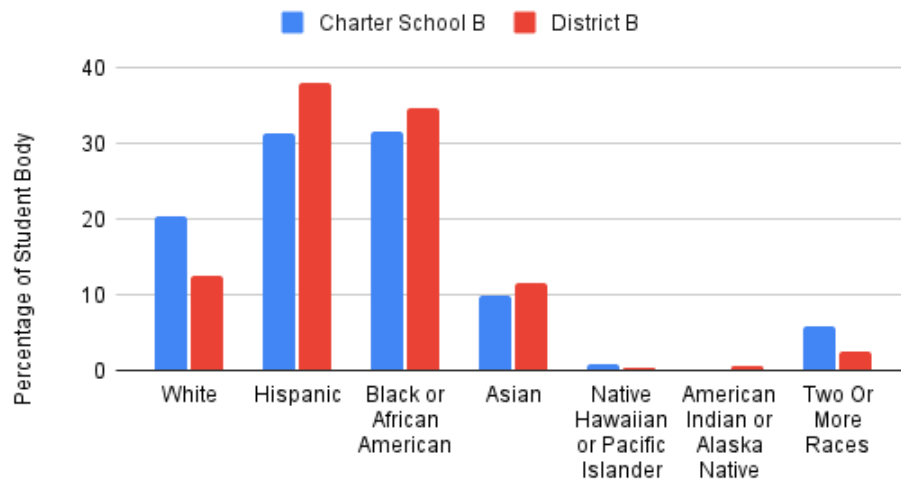


Figure 2. Average Enrollments by Racial & Ethnic Groups for Charter School B & District B

Average Enrollments by Racial and Ethnic Group (C)

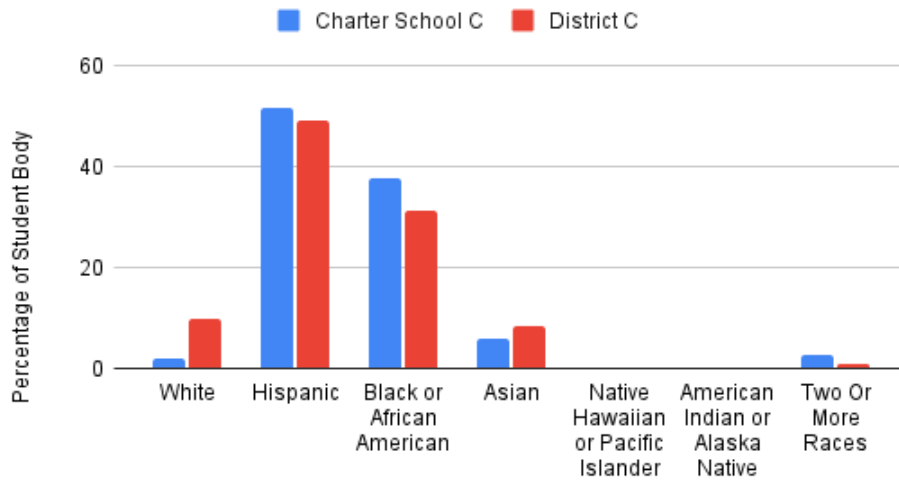


Figure 3. Average Enrollments by Racial & Ethnic Groups for Charter School C & District C

Average Enrollment by Student Group (A)

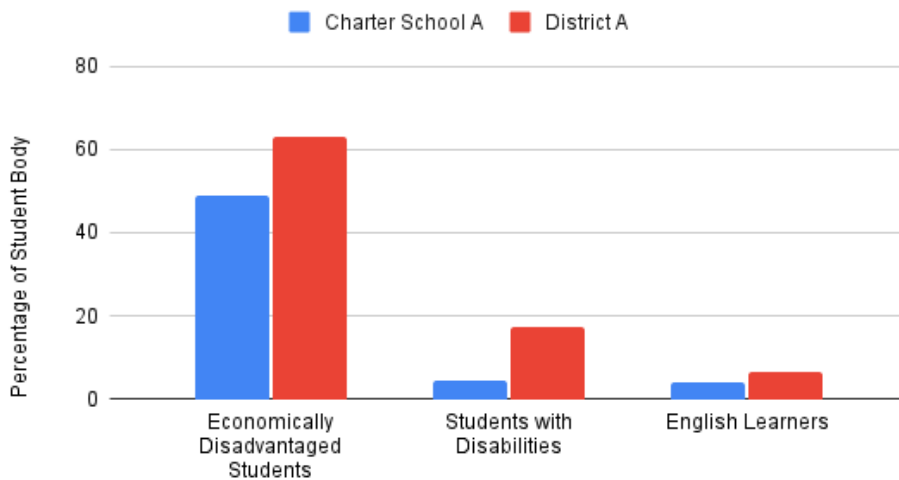


Figure 4. Average Enrollment by Student Group for Charter School A & District A

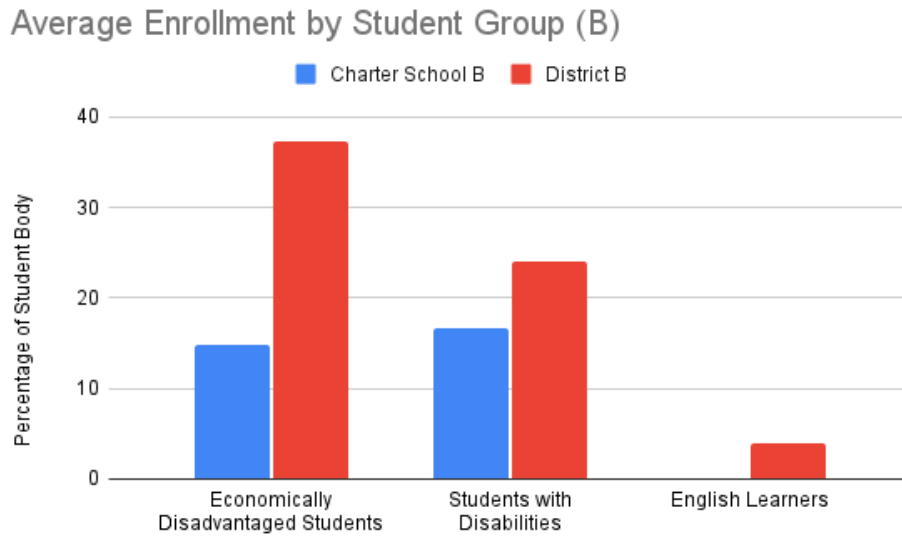


Figure 5. Average Enrollment by Student Group for Charter School B & District B

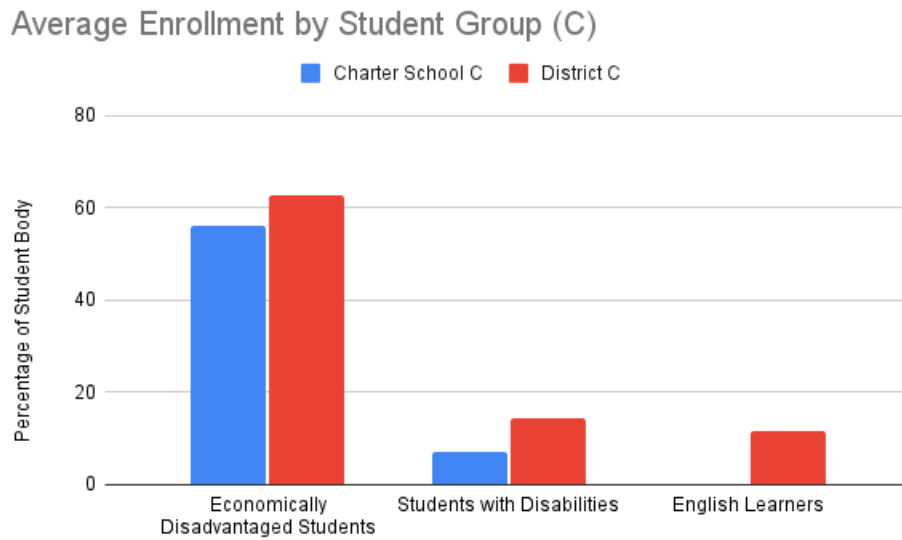


Figure 6. Average Enrollment by Student Group for Charter School C & District

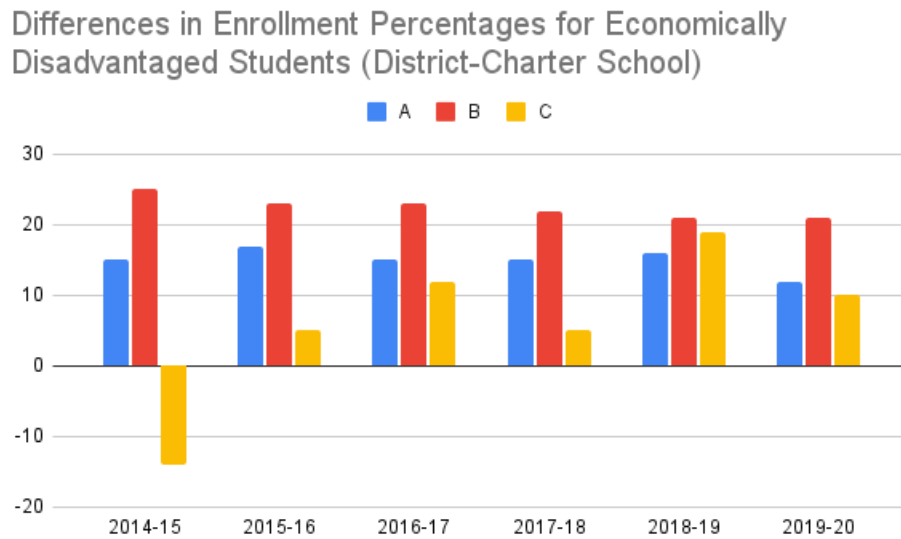


Figure 7. Differences in Enrollment Percentages for Economically Disadvantaged Students in Public Districts A, B, & C and Charter Schools A, B, & C, respectively

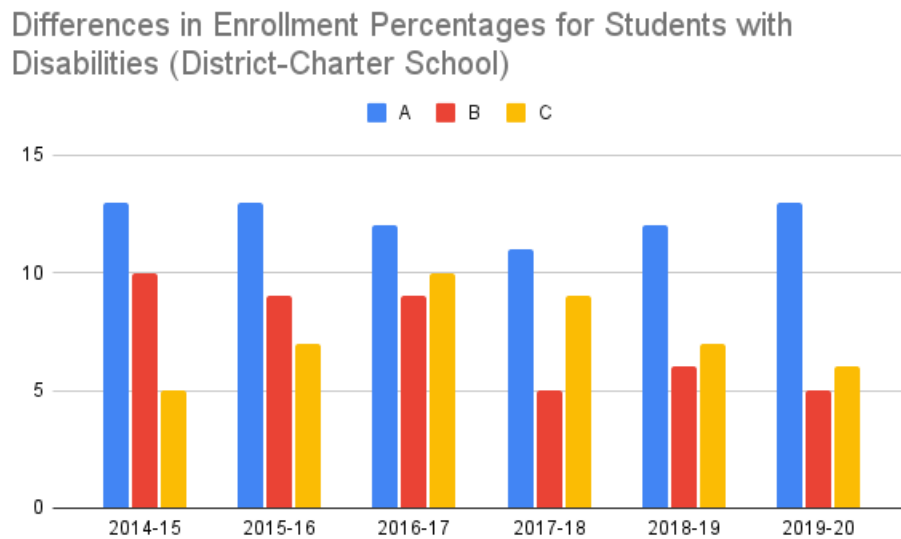


Figure 8. Differences in Enrollment Percentages for Students with Disabilities in Public Districts A, B, & C and Charter Schools A, B, & C, respectively

Differences in Enrollment Percentages for English Language Learners (District-Charter School)

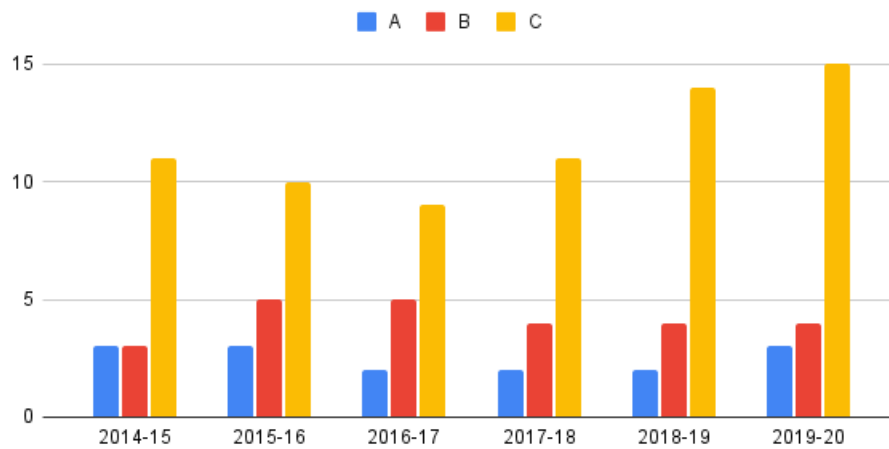


Figure 9. Differences in Enrollment Percentages for English Language Learners in Public Districts A, B, & C and Charter Schools A, B, & C, respectively.

Discussion

In synthesizing my research, I have found that while there do not appear to be overt displays of charter school enrollment shaping occurring, student demographics remain inconsistent between charter schools and their communities. This comes from my quantitative findings which display discrepancies between the enrollments of the two; which are most extreme in the charter school’s comparatively lower percentages of students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, and English Language Learners. These findings may indicate that accessibility to charter schools varies between student groups, corroborating concerns held by those who fear charter schools are not accessible to all. However, I have not found sufficient evidence to say that this is due to charter school approaches to equity and access, as my qualitative research has not uncovered overt signs of schools attempting to obstruct accessibility.

In my qualitative analysis, I did not find school operations in alignment with Welner and Mommandi’s 14 observed methods of enrollment shaping. Rather I found that schools A, B, and C, all adhered not only to the New Jersey Department of Education Office of Charter Schools’ requirements for equity and access, but additionally implemented several recommendations of the department’s list. These recommendations are non-required ways that charter schools can make attempts to broaden accessibility to disadvantaged student groups. Implementation of these recommendations suggest that the schools prioritize providing equitable accessibility. Examples of the schools attempting to broaden access include public advertising of enrollment periods, encouraged application of all student groups, and Charter schools A and B’s implementations of weighted lotteries. Additionally, their advertisement of no special terms placed on applications and enrollment also may serve to broaden access by mitigating potential hesitations from parents of special student groups when applying. In speaking with charter school administrators, I found them to be aware of the issue that inequitable accessibility poses, and to be intentional about addressing the issue. These intentions are supported by the operations of the schools themselves.

Taking into consideration the efforts of these charter schools to broaden access, in combination with student demographics still varying between the schools and their communities, these findings suggest that charter schools are not inherently equitably accessible to all students. This aligns with the assumption that schools of choice in general may be inequitable to students because school choice tends to be exercised most heavily by socially advantaged fam-

ilies (Lubienski, 2013). Further, my findings suggest that individual charter schools have influence over their accessibility. This can be used to restrict access, as with the schools Welner and Mommandi observed, or to broaden access, as the Bergen County schools appear to have made attempts to. As I have found some of the gaps in student demographics between charter schools and their districts to be decreasing over time, this may point to these efforts working; however, as these results are inconsistent between different student groups, and correlation does not indicate causation, this may be better tested with further research.

With my research I intended to investigate whether inequitable accessibility poses an inherent issue to charter schools in Bergen County, New Jersey. My findings suggest that this may be the case as the student demographics of the schools I observed consistently underrepresented various student groups. However, I also found the schools I observed to be active participants in attempts to broaden their accessibility, therefore suggesting that inequitable accessibility is an issue that may be mitigated.

I began my research with various hypotheses. My first, that I would find examples of enrollment shaping as Welner and Mommandi found, was unsupported by my findings. With this hypothesis I had assumed I would be coding only for red flags of access restriction, when my findings included various green flags of access broadening techniques. These included weighted lotteries, multiple translations of websites and applications, and inclusive marketing. My second hypothesis, that I would find different approaches to access between the schools, was supported in part. While School C does not use the same weighted lottery systems of schools A and B, the schools did appear to have similar approaches to access overall. These similarities support my hypothesis, considering their similar approaches may be correlated with their similar missions of promoting diversity and inclusion, and lack of any corporate involvement.

Conclusions and Future Directions

I have concluded that equitable access is not built into the schools I observed in Bergen County; but also, that the schools have made attempts to mitigate this issue. Returning to my research goal, I hoped to evaluate through a local lens the accessibility of charter schools. Because access for all is a key characteristic of public schools, I hoped that this research would assess charter schools' publicness, adding to the discussion of how they fit into the American education system.

Therefore, the implications of my research lie in what it means for student opportunity and for future education policy making. As I have concluded that charter schools are not inherently equitably accessible, this raises questions for policy makers regarding if the school model should be considered a viable option of public education. If it is decided they should remain public, further questions may be raised to explore legislation which may mitigate access restriction and inequity and promote access broadening. However, because my findings are specific to Bergen County, New Jersey, this issue remains a point of research in other regions.

This leads me to suggest for future study that a comparative analysis be conducted between different states. This would be to assess for a correlation between level of state accountability standards and individual charter school approaches to access within those states. This type of comparative correlational research could provide insight to what types of state charter school policy are associated most highly with access broadening and access restricting practices of independent schools.

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