

Fall 12-18-2015

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Kathryn M. Beaumont

The College at Brockport, kbeaumont012@gmail.com

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Rochester City School District Charter Schools: Decreasing the Achievement Gap?

Kathryn M. Beaumont

The College at Brockport

A thesis project submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of the State University of New York College at Brockport. In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education – Adolescent Mathematics

Introduction

It is important to continue seeking ways to minimize the achievement gaps within the public schools in the United States. One method of minimizing the achievement gap between different socioeconomic statuses is to implement reform strategies for students in urban school districts. One such approach is to create charter schools within urban school districts. Charter schools, unlike traditional public schools, have more autonomy within their schools as well as when answering to higher-education authorizers. Moreover, charter schools are structured to give all members, teachers, students, parents, and administrators, more input into the control of the school (Wohlstetter, Wenning, & Briggs, 1995).

For legislative purposes, a “Charter School” has been defined as any school that is approved to operate as a public school from a charter school authorizer (Allen, Consoletti, & Kerwin, 2012). New York State (NYS) passed charter legislation in 1998 and currently ranks as the sixth largest of the United States 43 charter legislations. In NYS, there are three different sources that can approve a charter: school boards, the state board of education (New York Board of Regents), or the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (SUNY). At the state level, charter schools typically receive a blanket waiver from most public school rules and regulations, which allows for the charter schools to personalize their practices to meet the needs of their student body. However, at the local level, charter schools may have restrictions and regulations imposed on them by the public school district in which the charter school resides (Zgainer & Kerwin, 2015).

At the heart of any school is the teachers. Charter schools attract teachers for two main reasons: (1) to become active members in the administration management of the school and (2) to have an increased amount of flexibility within their classroom. Ted Kolderie (1990), a charter

school idealist, believed that in order to increase student knowledge and participation in the classroom, the teacher first needs to feel empowered. Encouraging teachers to participate in the design and structuring of a charter school allows for teachers to have a stronger connection to the school; raising the level of academic achievement standards within their personal classrooms. Secondly, the structure of the state legislation for charter schools allows for teachers to use nontraditional instructional methods and curriculum. Giving a teacher creative freedom to design and implement curriculum in any manner they see fit for the benefit of their students enhances both student learning and teacher enticement (Wohlsetter et al., 1995).

The benefit of teacher freedom and creativity when designing and teaching lessons is enticing, the authorizers of the charter school have certain expectations that need to be met. Such as (a) an increased amount of student learning and achievement comparably speaking to the public school that the child would be otherwise attending; (b) an increased learning opportunity for all students with an emphasis of excelling those from a low-socioeconomic family and/or a learning disability; (c) encouragement of administrators, teachers and students to test out new educational methods; (d) create new professional opportunities for teachers, administrators and other school personal which generally do not exist in the community public school; (e) provide the parents and students with a diverse amount of educational opportunities both within the school day and outside of the school day; and (f) allowing for the school to be held accountable by performance-based accountability measures allowing all students to meet and/or increase student achievement results (“S 2850,” 2014, p. 3).

Charter schools, unlike traditional public schools, have more freedom to design their school curriculum and rules to meet the needs of their student body. This thesis offers an insight into the effectiveness of charter schools in NYS by comparing graduation rates and performance on state

assessments against those of the traditional public schools located in Rochester, NY. The goal of this thesis was to determine whether charter schools in the area were achieving their goal and minimizing the achievement gap.

Literature Review

Imperative Charter School Information

How does one start a charter school in New York State? *Application.* Relatively speaking, anyone who resides within the community where the charter school would be established may complete an application for a charter school; teachers, parents, school administrators, community members, or any combination. In order to have the application processed through a charter entity (New York State Board of Regents, SUNY, or the board of education of the school district in which the charter school will reside), the application must include:

1. A mission statement for the charter school, along with an educational description, about how this charter school will differ from other charter schools and traditional public schools in the area;
2. Student achievement goals and ways in which the charter school plans to assess;
3. Establishment, continuance and contingency of the board members and their duties;
4. Admission policies for students;
5. Detailed proposed fiscal budget with justification for ensuring longevity;
6. Procedures for budget auditing annually;
7. Internal procedures for hiring teachers and other school personal including the necessary qualifications each person shall hold;

8. Actions and relations for student disciplinary proceedings;
9. Number of students to attend, including maximum occupancy;
10. Information pertaining to the facilities, including but not limited to: location of the school, means of transportation for students, external facilities for sports and recreational events, location for commencement services;
11. The name of the proposed charter school, which must include the words “Charter School;”
12. The grade levels and associated ages of the students whom shall be attending;
13. Background information on all proposed board members;
14. Proposed school calendar year, which at a minimum must have the same amount of instructional times as the public school system;
15. Types and amounts of insurance coverage;
16. The term of the proposed charter, which cannot exceed five years;
17. Evidence of community support;
18. Description of the health and food services that will be provided to the students;
19. Ways in which students with disabilities will be served to be in compliance with all federal laws;
20. Detailed procedures to be followed in the case of the closure or dissolution of the charter school;
21. Requirements for students to receive a diploma;
22. A code of ethics to be followed by all personnel;
23. Description of residential facilities, if any; and

24. Any other information pertaining to the issuance of the charter school required by the charter entity (“S 2851,” 2014, p.4-5).

Review of Application. The charter entity is allowed to terminate any charter school application unless they find that: (a) the outlined charter school meets the needs of the application process as well as any rules and regulations set out by the government; (b) the applicant can demonstrate that they have the resources and means to effectively and efficiently run the charter school; (c) approving the application will lead to an increase in student learning and achievements for the targeted student demographics; (d) in the base year of the charter school if there is more than five percent of students attending the charter school compared to the base year of the public school, the charter school would need to provide significant information to establish the educational benefit to the students or the charter school needs to receive consent from the school district where those students would be attending.

A charter entity is not required to approve any charter application. Moreover, they have the right to require a charter applicant to modify their application as needed until the charter entity feels it would best serve the community and the educational careers of the students attending the charter school.

Prior to issuance, the charter school applicant is subject to a fingerprint test as well as a state and federal background check. The charter entity has the right to investigate any criminal records against the application. If the charter entity is unsatisfied with a charter applicant’s criminal record, they have the authority to terminate the charter application (“S 2851,” 2014, p.6).

Issuance. Upon approval of the application, the applicant and the charter entity have five days to finalize the means in which the charter school will be organized and operated. Both parties will examine the application as well as any rules and regulations pertinent to the establishment of the charter school. At the end of the five days, the application and supporting documents must be submitted to the Board of Regents for a final approval and issuance of the charter school.

Upon receipt of the information from the applicant and the charter entity, The Board of Regents has ninety days to approve the received charter and documents and issue the charter school to the applicant or return the proposed charter to the applicant and the charter entity with comments and recommendations to be amended. The process of submitting documents to The Board of Regents and approval or “denial” may occur as many times as necessary until the Board of Regents approves the charter school. However, at any time in the review process the Board of Regents has the right to deny an application for a charter; the applicant will receive in writing the reasons for the denial (“S 2852,” 2014, p.7-11).

What steps are needed to ensure the longevity of the charter school? *General*

Requirements. A charter school is held to the same health and safety, civil rights and student assessment requirements as other public schools. However, the charter school is not held to the same local, state and national laws pertaining to education. Mainly, the charter school has different rules and regulations pertaining to school personal and students.

As per the charter and the application approved by the Board of Regents, the charter school is allowed to design its educational programs to meet the needs of its students’ demographics. Even though the charter schools and the teachers within these schools have the creative freedom to use nontraditional methods to engage students, the students are required to

take the same regents examinations as the students in a public school. Additionally, the granting of diplomas should coincide with the policies in procedures outlined in the charter as well as the local rules and regulations pertaining to receiving a diploma in a traditional public school (“S 2854,” 2014, p.18).

Admissions and Enrollment. Admission of students in a charter school follows generally accepted principles, such as no student can be denied entry to the charter school for their religious beliefs, race, gender, intellectual ability, athletic ability or other trivial factors. There are a few exceptions to this rule; single-sex charter schools, charter schools specifically established to increase educational opportunities for at-risk students, or charter schools with a heightened focus on improving the academic opportunities for students with disabilities and English Language Learners. Moreover, the charter school cannot charge their students tuition or fees for acceptance or enrollment to the school (“S 2854,” 2014, p.18).

Students who wish to attend a charter school need to complete an application that has been created by the charter school’s Board of Trustees. Any child deemed qualified to attend a public school shall be allowed to attend a charter school as long as the following conditions are met: the student’s application is submitted and completed, in full, to the charter school by April 1st each year and the charter school is not at enrollment capacity as per their charter agreement.

A student, along with his/her parents, has the right to withdraw from the charter school at any time and enroll in their designated traditional public school (“S 2854,” 2014, p.19).

School Personnel. Employees of the charter school, teachers and staff, are considered to be employees of the charter school not employees of the local school district in which the charter school is located. The Board of Trustees may employ with contracts as many teachers,

administrators, and support staff as necessary. Teachers employed by the charter school shall be certified in alignment with state regulations and local school district policies; however, a charter school may employ: (1) uncertified teachers with at least three years of classroom experience; (2) tenured or tenure track college faculty; (3) individuals with two years of satisfactory recommendations through the Teach for America program; (4) individuals who possess exceptional business, professional, artistic, athletic or military experience. However, the teachers described in (1) through (4) above cannot compose more than thirty percent of the charter school's teaching staff, or five teachers, whichever is less ("S 2854," 2014, p.19).

In alignment with state regulations, the Board of Trustees of the charter school shall require a criminal history check and fingerprinting check for all employees of the charter school. If a potential school personnel fails either component, the charter school has the legality to offer the position to another candidate. Moreover, if a school employee commits a crime while employed by the charter school depending on the nature of the crime and legal charges posed against the employee, the charter school has the means for termination ("S 2854," 2014, p.20).

Organization. In order to run effectively and efficiently, under New York State regulations, a charter school is considered to be an "independent and autonomous public school." The charter entity and the Board of Regents are to be the higher-education officials which have the authority to supervise and monitor the charter school. Under this regulation, the charter school is granted the same exemptions as other public schools, including but not limited to: taxation, fees, assessments for special education and property. To ensure the functionality and academic achievement of the charter school, the charter entity and the Board of Regents are allowed to visit the charter school at any time. Moreover, the charter school is legally required to

share any legal documents, and other evidence, with the visiting higher-education officials as requested.

At the charter school level, the Board of Trustees have the final authority over the charter school. They have the right to make decisions pertaining to operation of the school, policies regarding all student academic achievements and financial limitations (“S 2853,” 2014, p.12).

Facilities. The decision of where to locate the charter school is up to the applicant. A charter school may be placed within a current public school, private building, in a public location or any other location deemed suitable by the charter entity. A charter school may own, lease or rent its location (“S 2854,” 2014, p.13-16).

Renewal. In order for a charter school to be renewed, for three, four or five years, the charter school must submit a renewal application to the charter entity that approved their charter. The renewal application must be submitted at least six months prior to the expiration of the charter school. A renewal application must include: (a) a report showing the student progress and/or achievements as planned per the original charter application agreement; (b) a detailed financial statement allowing the charter entity to compare the funds of the charter school in question to that of other charter schools and the public school system; (c) copies of the charter school’s annual report cards and financial documents; (d) indications that the parents and students are satisfied with the educational opportunities presented to them; (e) a plan detailing how the charter school plans to meet and/or exceed the quota for students with disabilities, English Language Learners and students who are allowed to receive free/reduced lunch (“S 2857,” 2014, p.27-28).

Termination. The charter entity may terminate a charter for any of the following reasons: (a) when a charter school's student assessment levels fall below that of which the commissioner of education would revoke the registration of a public traditional school; (b) when student achievement has not shown growth over the preceding three years; (c) serious violations of the law occurred within the charter school; (d) public employment determines that the charter school has been discriminating against employees; (e) repeated failure to meet enrollment and retention needs of students with disabilities or English Language Learners.

The Board of Trustees must receive a notice from the charter entity or Board of Regents revoking their charter with at least thirty days' notice. The notice must include the reasons for revocation. The charter school then has a minimum of thirty days to address problems associated with the reasons for revocation and dispute the reasons for revocation so that the charter school can remain open.

Any individual may present a violation complaint against the charter school to the Board of Trustees. After the hearing, the Board of Trustees, the individual, or any other person may determine if the complaint was adequately addressed or they may present the complaint to the charter entity. At this point, the charter entity will review the complaint in full and determine whether or not the complaint provides grounds for termination of the charter school ("S 2855," 2014, p.23).

Financing. A charter school cannot charge their students tuition or fees for admission/enrollment. In order to support the students attending the charter school, the traditional public school in which the student would attend if not enrolled at the charter school must allocate the per pupil funding from NYS to the charter school. Any funds needed to support a student with an individualized education plan (IEP) is supported through the district in which

the charter school resides. Since students attending charter schools are legally required to receive the same treatments and resources as a student whom attends public school, the charter school may arrange to have services completed by the same personnel within the school district, by the charter school directly, or contract to a third party (“S 2856,” 2014, p.24-26).

No Child Left Behind Act

The achievement gap in the classroom between socioeconomic statuses has been around for decades. However, it was not significantly mainstreamed until President George W. Bush and the Bush Administration enacted the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). The purpose of the NCLB Act is to make sure that all children, no matter of ethnicity or socioeconomic status, have a fair and equal opportunity to obtain a high-quality education. Therefore in order to measure the school district’s ability to meet the needs of the students attending their district, this law placed an increased importance on state assessments with a focus on English, mathematics and science. (“Title I,” 2014).

Charter schools were established well before the enactment of the NCLB Act and have been scrutinized since their creation. People are constantly wondering whether (a) they are decreasing the achievement gap and (b) how they actually operate. This unknown stigma about charter schools results in the community basing the majority of their decisions about charter schools effectiveness on test scores (Kelly & Loveless, 2012). However, with so many traditional public schools failing to adequately meet the needs of their students per the NCLB act, charter schools have started to bring an edge of competition to the educational atmosphere. “Education is the civil rights issue of this century. Equal access to public education has been gained. But what is the value of access to a failing school? We need to shake up failed school

bureaucracies with competition. Empower parents with choice,” John McCain during his acceptance speech before the Republican National Convention (Arsen & NI, 2011).

Charter School Enrollment

Empowering parents with choice leads to high enrollment rates in charter schools. Across the United States, many African American families are choosing to enroll their children in charter schools; as a result, the number of African American children enrolled in charter schools is twice the amount of African American children enrolled in traditional public schools. There are two possible explanations for this significant increase in charter school enrollment rates (a) the majority of charter schools created are located in urban areas serving students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds; and (b) the allurements of teacher freedom to educate the students in a new-dimension which can target the focus areas of English and mathematics. In many urban areas charter schools mainly serve African American students, which allows for faculty and staff to target the needs, academically, socially, and/or financially, of their student population. Hence, the educational experience of the student tends to be significantly richer than that if they attended a traditional public school (Almond, 2012).

One way the U.S. has sought to minimize the mathematical achievement gap has been through yearly state assessments. As a result, the Robert Noyce scholarship program was created to draw talented mathematics and science students into teaching by providing money for college with the commitment that they will teach in high-need classrooms. Thus, many teachers end up working at charter schools (Paul & Validya, 2014). Increasing the amount of highly knowledgeable mathematical people within a charter school supporting students’ growth.

One way the U.S. has sought to minimize the achievement gap has been through yearly state and national assessments. As a result the Robert Noyce scholarship program was created to

draw talented mathematics and science students into teaching by providing money for college with the commitment that they will teach in high-need classrooms. Thus, many teachers end up working at charter schools (Paul & Validya, 2014). Increasing the amount of highly knowledgeable mathematical people within a charter school supporting students' mathematical and science needs.

Method

Rochester, NY

According to New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo, during the 2014-2015 school year there were 698 school districts in New York. Throughout those school districts were 4,530 public and charter schools servicing 2.7 million students. Table 1 gives an insight into the demographics of the student population being taught in RCSD as well as New York State ("The State of New York's Failing Schools 2015 Report," 2015).

Comparing the statistical information of NYS against that of RCSD as presented in Table 1 you can see that there is a significant discrepancy between the two student populations (ethnicity) as well as the socioeconomic component (other groups). The first major discrepancy between the entire NYS student population versus the students being taught in Rochester is the White and African American culture. The majority of the students being taught in NYS are White, 46% and their second largest ethnicity is African American at 18%. Whereas in Rochester, the primary ethnicity being taught is African American at 60.1% versus the White at 10.2% which is actually their third largest ethnicity.

Comparing the other groups, we see that the Rochester students and the students across NYS are relatively similar in Limited English Proficiency, 10% to 8%, and Students with Disabilities, 16.5% to 16%. However, the second major discrepancy between the two

demographics is the amount of students whom are classified as economically disadvantaged. 84% of the students serviced in Rochester are considered to be economically disadvantage versus the NYS average of 53%.

Table 1

NYS and RCSD Student Demographics by Percentage

		Percentage	
		New York State	RCSD
Ethnicity	African American	18%	60.1%
	Hispanic or Latino	25%	25.6%
	White	46%	10.2%
	Asian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific	9%	4.1%
	Islander		
	American Indian or Alaska Native	1%	
	Multiracial	1%	
Other Groups	Limited English Proficient Students	8%	10%
	Students with Disabilities	16%	16.5%
	Economically Disadvantaged Students*	53%	84%

**Students/families participating in economic assistance programs*

The demographics and the socioeconomic status of the students in Rochester, NY are perfect candidates for charter schools. As referenced in the Charter School Enrollment section of the literature review, charter schools tend to be located within urban communities whose students are struggling academically, which precisely describes the RCSD community. Therefore, in order to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of charter schools at targeting the achievement

gap, the information collected from the charter schools in Rochester, NY will be compared against the information collected from the traditional public schools apart of RCSD.

The demographics and the socioeconomic status of the students in Rochester, NY are perfect candidates for charter schools. As referenced in the Charter School Enrollment section of the literature review, charter schools tend to be located within urban communities whose students are struggling academically, which precisely describes the RCSD community. Therefore, in order to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of charter schools at targeting the achievement gap, the information collected from the charter schools in Rochester, NY will be compared against the information collected from the traditional public schools apart of RCSD.

Criteria for Selection

The following three schools are considered traditional public schools located in Rochester, NY: East High School, School 41 – Kodak Park and School of the Arts. The data reported from these three varying traditional public schools located in the RCSD will be compared against the following three charter schools located in the RCSD: Genesee Community Charter School, Rochester Academy Charter School and Urban Choice Charter School.

The key criteria for selecting the six schools were that they had a New York State Annual Report Card from 2010-11 or later. Secondly, they were selected for their varying ages in service to students as well as the grades taught. Including elementary and secondary schools helps to gain a better insight into the entire academic career of a student residing in the Rochester City School District.

Traditional Public Schools Located in Rochester, NY

The Rochester City School District's Core Beliefs include six key sections: What We Believe, We Will Establish a Culture in Which..., Our Priorities, We Commit to Do These Well, What Makes These Possible and What We Measure. In the What We Believe section, the RCSD focuses on the fact that all students can learn with the commitment of time and hard work as well as stability from friends, families and the school district helps students engage. Also, under the What We Measure section, the RCSD focuses on student achievement and growth and graduation rates ("Core Beliefs," n.d). These key concepts should transcend each of the following three schools that will be compared for the traditional public schools component.

East High School. The current principal of East High School is Mr. Anibal Soler, Jr. Under his direction, the mission of the school is to make sure that every student who graduates from East is ready for college or a career. They believe that having one of the city's largest student body that it is their responsibility to make sure that their students are equipped with the necessary skills to excel outside of the classroom to live a successful life ("Upper School," n.d.).

School 41 – Kodak Park. The current assistant principal of School 41 – Kodak Park is Ms. Cynthia Ragus. The mission statement of the elementary school is as follows, "Our Mission is to deliver an instructional program that is uncompromising regarding academic excellence" ("Kodak Park," n.d.). Additionally, the school encourages their students to abide by their "Kodak 5," which are Kindness, On Task, Do the Right Thing, Act Safe and Keep your Cool ("Administration", n.d.).

School of the Arts (SOTA). The current principal of SOTA is Brenda Pacheco. SOTA differs from the other two traditional public schools located in Rochester, NY for their emphasis on Fine Arts. The students whom attend SOTA are expected to complete a full academic course

as well as a fine arts sequence from one of six tracks: creative writing, dance, drama, music, visual arts, and theatre technology. Their mission statement grasps the mindset of the school, “Our Mission is Student Success... Academic, Artistic and Humanistic!” (“School Profile,” n.d.).

Charter Schools Located in Rochester, NY

There are currently eleven operating charter schools located in RCSD. Table 2 provides a list of all charter schools, the number of years they have been running and the authorizing entity. Of the eleven charter schools located in RCSD, the following three charter schools were selected on the amount of information available to the public, specifically their New York State Annual Report Card. Listed in order from oldest to newest: Genesee Community Charter School (15 years in service), Urban Choice Charter School (11 years in service), and Rochester Academy Charter School (8 years in service).

Table 2

Charter Schools Located in RCSD

Charter School Name	Number of Years in Operation	Authorizer
Eugenio Maria de Hostos Charter School	16	SUNY BoT
Genesee Community Charter School	15	Board of Regents
PUC Achieve Charter School	2	SUNY BoT
Rochester Academy Charter School	8	Board of Regents
Rochester Career Mentoring Charter School	4	Board of Regents
True North Rochester Preparatory Charter School	10	SUNY BoT
True North Rochester Preparatory Charter-School West Campus	5	SUNY BoT
University Preparatory Charter School for Young Men	6	SUNY BoT
Urban Choice Charter School	11	Board of Regents
Vertus Charter School	2	Board of Regents
Young Women’s College Prep Charter School of Rochester	4	Board of Regents

Genesee Community Charter School. The Genesee Community Charter School (GCCS) is currently located at the Rochester Museum & Science Center; the school leader is Lisa Wing. The mission statement of GCCS focuses on providing their students with rich and rigorous educational experiences as well as developing a responsibility to respect their culture and community (“GCCS Mission Statement,” n.d.).

Rochester Academy Charter School. Rochester Academy Charter School first opened their doors in 2008 as Rochester’s first charter high school. Mehmet Demirtas is the current principal where he is encouraging his students and staff to “value the partnerships that power

excellence in education.” Currently, the school is placing an increased emphasis on their students’ mathematics and science skills (“Message from the Principal,” n.d.).

Urban Choice Charter School. Urban Choice Charter School is located on the grounds of St. John the Evangelist church. Their vision is to redefine urban education by providing their students with a safe, supportive and intellectual environment. The key ideology of their school is relationships; relationships between students and teachers as well as the relationships between the families and the school. The school currently has two principals, Nicole Berg, K-4 and Vicki Gouveia, 5-8 (“Urban Choice Charter School,” n.d.).

Findings

A major component believed to be linked to the achievement gap is student demographic factors such as ethnicity and economic status. Table 3 provides the percentage for the six schools’ student population ethnicity as well as other student classifications.

Table 3

RCSD Student Demographics by Percentage

		Traditional Public Schools			Charter Schools		
		East	School 41	SOTA	Genesee	Rochester	Urban
Ethnicity	African American	55	60	50	18	80	65
	Hispanic or Latino	30	22	22	9	8	20
	White	9	15	25	68	3	9
	American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0	1	0	1	0
	Multiracial	0	0	0	3	3	6
	Limited English Proficient Students	20	4	2	1	8	0
Other Groups	Students with Disabilities	25	14	10	--	--	--
	Economically Disadvantaged Students*	89	94	73	13	65	67

In addition to students’ ethnicities and other classifications, a key component to understanding the student population of a school is the enrollment rate per grade. Table 4 breaks down the number of students enrolled in each grade as well as the total enrollment for the school. As mentioned prior, each of the six schools were selected for their varying grades offered to students. Likewise, elementary enrollment numbers tend to be smaller than enrollment numbers for secondary buildings.

Table 4

NYS School Report Card: Student Enrollment by Grade

	Traditional Public Schools			Charter Schools		
	East	School 41	SOTA	Genesee	Rochester	Urban
Pre-K		13		0		0
Kindergarten		94		31		39
1 st Grade		126		32		43
2 nd Grade	Grades	86	Grades	31	Grades	44
3 rd Grade	not	78	not	31	not	46
4 th Grade	offered	68	offered	32	offered	45
5 th Grade		83		30		45
6 th Grade		69		16		44
7 th Grade	231		200		57	44
8 th Grade	290		196		66	43
9 th Grade	524	Grades	221	Grades	54	
10 th Grade	277	not	201	not	53	Grades
11 th Grade	196	offered	168	offered	30	not
12 th Grade	213		157		25	offered
Total Enrollment	1,731	617	1,143	203	285	393

Graduation rates and the types of diplomas students receive are a key factor in determining the effectiveness of a school. Table 4 presents the number of graduates and the types of diplomas the graduates received, according to the school’s NYS Report Card. (School 41 – Kodak Park, Genesee Community Charter School and Urban Choice Charter School are not presented in the table since they do not offer 12th grade.) Comparing the number of students enrolled from Table 3 with the number of total graduates from Table 4, East High School had 42

twelfth graders not receive a diploma. Likewise, SOTA had a total of 32 students and Rochester Academy Charter School had 3 students who did not graduate.

In order to receive a Regents Diploma in NYS, each student needs to score a 65 or better on the following Regents Exams: (1) Comprehensive English; (2) Mathematics (any one); (3) Global History; (4) US History; (5) Science (any one); and (6) Language other than English; as well as meet certain class requirements (“Regents Requirements,” n.d.). Table 4 also provides the number of graduates who received a Regents Diploma. Table 5 gives a detailed look at the number of students taking each Regent Exam, percentage of students receiving a 65 (passing) and the percentage of students receiving a score of 85. Even though Urban Choice Charter School does not have a high school, they allow their 8th graders to take the Living Environment Regents Exam; a course usually offered to 9th graders.

Table 5

NYS School Report Card: High School Graduates

	Traditional Public Schools				Charter Schools	
	East		SOTA		Rochester	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Graduates	171	-	189	-	22	-
Receiving a Regents Diploma	106	62	162	86	22	100

Table 6

NYS School Report Card: Regent Scores

	Traditional Public Schools						Charter Schools					
	East			SOTA			Rochester			Urban		
	Total Tested	% of students scoring at or above (all students):		Total Tested	% of students scoring at or above (all students):		Total Tested	% of students scoring at or above (all students):		Total Tested	% of students scoring at or above (all students):	
	#	65	85	#	65	85	#	65	85	#	65	85
Comprehensive English	567	58	6	206	90	30	26	81	15	0	-	-
Integrated Algebra	635	35	0	220	73	6	105	53	0	3	0	0
Geometry	145	41	2	218	58	9	24	21	0	0	-	-
Algebra 2/Trigonometry	68	12	1	127	50	6	4	0	0	0	-	-
Global History and Geography	358	37	4	258	64	16	68	41	3	0	-	-
US History and Government	436	38	5	199	77	30	25	56	16	0	-	-
Living Environment	245	55	5	194	86	19	84	37	1	11	100	36
Physical Setting - Earth Science	208	39	4	178	67	18	44	66	7	-	-	-

Physical Setting - Chemistry	62	16	2	113	74	4	0	-	-	0	-	-
Physical Setting - Physics	5	40	0	35	77	26	8	50	0	0	0	0

As noted in the literature review, the enactment of the NCLB Act increased the amount of state and national assessments. In NYS, students in grades three through eight take an English and mathematics assessment each year. The students' scores are used as an indicator to determine potentially failing schools. Unlike Regent Exams, a low score on the 3rd-8th Grade assessments do not withhold a student from continuing onto the next grade. Table 5 compares the percentage of students scoring a 3 or above for each school.

Table 7

NYS School Report Card: Academic Performance on State Assessments (Percentage of Students Scoring 3 or Above)

	Traditional Public Schools			Charter Schools		
	East	School 41	SOTA	Genesee	Rochester	Urban
	Mathematics					
3 rd Grade	N/A	2%	N/A	84%	---	69%
4 th Grade	N/A	3%	N/A	66%	---	46%
5 th Grade	N/A	2%	N/A	80%	---	37%
6 th Grade	N/A	2%	N/A	88%	---	44%
7 th Grade	1%	N/A	19%	N/A	33%	33%
8 th Grade	0%	N/A	13%	N/A	41%	28%
	ELA					
3 rd Grade	N/A	5%	N/A	90%	---	56%
4 th Grade	N/A	2%	N/A	75%	---	39%
5 th Grade	N/A	5%	N/A	60%	---	35%
6 th Grade	N/A	3%	N/A	81%	---	38%
7 th Grade	1%	N/A	25%	---	15%	24%
8 th Grade	2%	N/A	17%	---	23%	12%

Discussion, Summary, and Reflections

Of the six schools selected, the data collected on the Genesee Community Charter School does not fit the demographic of the students being taught in RCSD; majority of the students attending their school are White and only 13% of their student population is classified as economically disadvantaged. The other five schools are a well representation of the data collected about the RCSD as compared to the NYS averages in Table 1.

The 3rd-8th Grade ELA and mathematic assessments are exceptional indications used to represent how a school is performing academically. The four assessments available for East High School, are 7th and 8th Grade ELA and mathematics (Table 7). The percentage of students receiving a 3 or higher on those exams were between 0-2%. This is noteworthy recognizing that 521 students are enrolled in seventh and eighth grade. Likewise, of the eight assessments available for School 41-Kodak Park, the percentage of students' receiving a 3 or higher are between 2-5%. On the other hand, the third traditional public school SOTA has numbers for four assessments, all of which the percentage of students passing vary between 17-25%. All three traditional public schools have passing percentages significantly lower than the charter schools. Genesee Community Charter School averages 78% for the eight assessment scores available. Hence, students attending a charter school in RCSD are significantly outperforming students attending a traditional public school on 3rd-8th state assessments.

Due to the varying degree of the schools being compared, it is hard to compare graduation rates. Of the five schools being compared only three are secondary schools, East High School, SOTA and Rochester Academy Charter School. However, comparing the number of students enrolled in twelfth grade and then the graduation rates, Rochester Academy Charter School has a graduation rate of 88%, whereas East High School only has an 80% graduation rate. To gain a more in-depth comparison of the students' graduation these secondary schools, the types of diplomas should be considered. East High School only has 62% of its graduates receiving a Regents Diploma versus Rochester Academy Charter School at 100%.

The demographics of the students attending RCSD are the ideal case to compare the academic impact of traditional public schools versus charter schools. Not only are the student demographics significantly different than the state average but the main ethnicity of the students

being taught are African American. This combination is almost the sole purpose why educators create charter schools: to reach students in an urban community and increase their academic achievements. Thus, after comparing three traditional public schools of varying status and three charter schools all located in RCSD, the numbers conclude that these charter schools are producing superior state assessment scores, students reaching a score of 85 on Regent Exams, graduation rates, and graduates receiving a Regents Diploma, excluding the outlier charter school. The final conclusion to this secondary comparative analysis is yes, the charter schools located in the Rochester City School District are indeed minimizing the achievement gap.

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