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ABSTRACT

This final report discusses the outcomes of a study that examined how charter school developers have used the opportunities provided by their charters to serve students with disabilities. Between March 1998 and June 1999, 32 public charter schools in 15 states were visited and 151 parents of students with disabilities, 196 teachers, and 164 students were contacted. Findings from the study indicate: (1) parents of students with disabilities at more than half of the schools identified dissatisfaction with their child's previous non-charter school as a reason for enrolling their child in the charter school; (2) enrollment of students with more significant disabilities is relatively rare; (3) rather than excluding students with disabilities, some charter schools specifically target these students and other at-risk learners; (4) most charter schools identify new students with disabilities as the need arises; (5) most schools use the term "inclusion" to describe their approach to serving students with disabilities; and (6) most students with disabilities are well integrated into the overall life of the school. The appendix includes excerpts of charter school operators' legal responsibilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act as amended in 1997 and the Charter School Expansion Act of 1998. (CR)

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FINAL REPORT

2000

Office of Educational Research and Improvement
U.S. Department of Education
Washington, D.C.

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Prepared for:

Office of Educational Research and Improvement
U.S. Department of Education
Washington, D.C.

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U.S. Department of Education Statement

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This study was not intended to measure compliance by public charter schools with applicable federal requirements for educating students with disabilities. The limited documentation in this report of ways in which students with disabilities were excluded from, or poorly served while attending, public charter schools may indicate violations of federal law. However, such determinations were beyond the scope of this study.

In addition, great care must be taken regarding the possible policy implications of this study. First, the data collection for this study was conducted prior to the effective date of the federal regulations implementing Part B of the IDEA, which include specific provisions regarding students with disabilities attending charter schools. The relevant regulations are set out in Appendix A to this study. In addition, in May 2000, the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights published a set of questions and answers regarding the application of federal civil rights laws to public charter schools that includes several questions about the education of children with disabilities. This document is available by contacting the Office for Civil Rights or by visiting their web site at **http://ed.gov/offices/OCR/ocrprod.html**

Contents

List of Tables

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Charter Schools and Students with Disabilities: A National Study

INTRODUCTION

The overarching purpose of this study of public charter schools and students with disabilities was to examine how charter school developers have used the opportunities provided by their charters to serve students with disabilities. Between March 1998 and June 1999, teams of researchers from Westat, SRI International, and Research Triangle Institute visited 32 public charter schools in 15 states. On these visits, we talked with 151 parents of students with disabilities, 196 teachers, and 164 students with disabilities, in addition to one or more administrators for each school. Five primary research questions guided this study, providing the structure for the protocols used for conducting interviews and reviewing records and providing the organization for analyzing cross-site findings:

1. Why have parents chosen to enroll their children with disabilities in a charter school?
2. In what ways do charter schools serve children with disabilities?
3. What student outcome goals have charter schools and parents set?
4. How do charter schools assess student outcomes?
5. How successful have charter schools been in meeting their outcome goals and parents' outcome expectations for students with disabilities?

This report summarizes the data collection and the analysis and reports significant findings.[1] Part I outlines the procedures followed in selecting and visiting schools and analyzing the collected data. Part II is an overview of the schools visited and a general summary of school characteristics. Part III focuses more specifically on students with disabilities and summarizes findings in five sections that correspond to the five primary research questions. Part IV provides conclusions based on the overall data available to date. The Appendix includes excerpts, prepared by the U.S. Department of Education, of charter school operators' legal responsibilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act as amended in 1997 and the Charter School Expansion Act of 1998.

[1] The study was not intended to measure compliance by public charter schools with federal requirements for educating students with disabilities—such determinations were beyond the scope of this study.

PART I – DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The first part of this report briefly describes the procedures used to select schools to visit, to collect data on-site, and to analyze the collected data.

Site Selection

The descriptive focus of the study and a limit on the number of site visits that we were able to conduct required selection of a purposive sample of schools. We based sample selection on variables that define important characteristics of charter schools and drew the sample from the population of 335 charter schools that were surveyed in 1997 by the National Study of Charter Schools.[2] The National Study data set was the most comprehensive source of information about charter schools. We chose five selection variables that our review of previous research suggested may influence how charter schools are able to serve students with disabilities. For each variable, we established categories with ranges of expression of the variable, based on data available from the National Study. The variables were, in order of priority, (1) proportion of students with disabilities enrolled, (2) federal public charter school grant recipient status, (3) level of operational autonomy based on the extent of the schools' control over admissions and budgets, (4) grade levels served, and (5) geographic region.

We classified the 335 charter schools according to the multiple categories for the five variables. This process sorted schools into a matrix of cells, with each cell defined by a set of unique charter school characteristics. With the variables prioritized as noted above, we were able to select cells that included schools with the desired characteristics. Within each selected cell were multiple schools, from which we randomly selected the schools in our sample. We selected an initial group of 28 schools in this way. In the second year of the study, we chose the remaining four schools in a still more deliberate manner. We selected schools that were more recently opened (and thus not part of the 1997 National Study survey) or that reflected characteristics that were not adequately represented in the first 28 schools we visited. The total sample of 32 schools was distributed through 15 states.

Table 1 shows the distribution of the selection variable categories for the schools we visited and for the total population of charter schools for the 1996-97 school year, which was the population from which the initial sample was drawn. We replaced eight of the first 28 schools that we selected. A few schools refused to participate, mostly because of logistical concerns about the time of the school year planned for the visit, the availability of staff to meet with researchers, or the school's participation in other research efforts. We dropped several schools from the sample because they required additional steps for their school's internal review process or simply because they did not respond to telephone calls or written correspondence. Although we replaced the eight schools by randomly selecting a substitute from a pool of schools with similar characteristics, we do not know how the replaced schools compare in other ways to the visited schools. Thus lack of access to some schools affects the findings in ways that are not clear.

[2] RPP International & University of Minnesota. (1997). *A study of charter schools: First -year report.* Emeryville, CA: Authors.

Table 1. Distribution of selection variables in population of charter schools and Westat sample.

Selection Variables	All charter schools (1996-97)* N=335	Schools in final Westat sample* N=32
Proportion of students with disabilities		
• 0-5%	41.2%	28.1%
• 6-15%	39.4%	43.8%
• 16-100%	12.5%	28.1%
• Unknown	6.9%	0.0%
Federal charter school grant support		
• Yes	41.2%	81.2%
• No	55.5%	18.8%
• Unknown	3.3%	0.0%
Level of Autonomy		
• Controls admissions and budget	46.3%	56.3%
• Controls admissions or budget	38.5%	31.3%
• Controls neither	14.3%	6.3%
• Unknown	0.9%	6.3%
Grade Level		
• Primarily preschool–grade 5	36.4%	50.0%
• Primarily grade 6–grade 12	31.6%	34.4%
• Ranging from preschool–grade 12	25.4%	12.5%
• Ungraded	6.6%	3.1%

* Data derived from the database for the second round of the National Study of Charter Schools (Berman, Nelson, Ericson, Perry, & Silverman, 1998)

The sampling procedures ensured that we would visit some schools that serve a significant proportion of students with disabilities, defined as students receiving services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.[3] Overall, 11.7 percent of the students in the visited schools were labeled as special education students. Other students with disabilities were enrolled in some of the visited schools but were not labeled or receiving special education services, as explained in Part III of this report. With the exception of a school for students with autism, the great majority of special education students in the visited schools were individuals with learning disabilities, behavior disorders, or mild cognitive disabilities. Therefore, this report focuses mainly on students with mild disabilities. The term "mild" distinguishes these students from students with low-incidence or more significant disabilities. ***Table 2*** provides additional characteristics of the visited schools with comparable data for the total population of charter schools for the 1997-98 school year, which was the first year for site visits.

[3] The study focused on students with disabilities who qualify for services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Because not all students with disabilities qualify under Part B, and because not all respondents were familiar with federal disability laws, some respondents focused on other students with disabilities.

Table 2. Characteristics of charter schools in the total population and the Westat sample.

Charter school characteristic	All charter schools (1997-98)* N=619		Schools in final Westat sample N=32	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
School type				
• New	434	70.1%	24	75.0%
• Public school conversion	120	19.4%	6	18.8%
• Private school conversion	65	10.5%	2	6.2%
Opening data				
• Opened 1994-95 or earlier	98	15.8%	7	21.9%
• Opened 1995-96	143	23.1%	9	28.1%
• Opened 1996-97	163	26.2%	12	37.5%
• Opened 1997-98	215	34.7%	1	3.1%
• Opened 1998-99	NA	---	3	9.4%
Enrollment size				
• 1-99	225	36.4%	6	18.8%
• 100-199	185	29.8%	13	40.6%
• 200-599	146	23.6%	11	34.4%
• 600-999	44	7.1%	2	6.2%
• 1000 or more	19	3.1%	0	0.0%
Student race/ethnicity	(N=138,935)		(N=6,765**)	
• White, not of Hispanic origin	71,943	51.8%	4,791	68.9%
• Black, not of Hispanic origin	26,393	19.0%	744	10.8%
• Hispanic	28,554	20.6%	957	16.5%
• Asian or Pacific Islander	5,157	3.7%	94	1.3%
• American Indian or Alaska Native	5,310	3.8%	149	2.1%

* Data from the report of the third round of the National Study of Charter Schools (Berman, Nelson, Perry, Silverman, Solomon, & Kamprath, 1999).

** In total, 7,476 students were enrolled in the visited schools; 6,765 is the number of students for whom race/ethnicity information was available.

The sampling strategy employed for this study ensured that the visited schools reflect the wide variety of ways charter schools are serving students with disabilities. We can therefore report with confidence on the broad range of conditions under which charter schools operate, the assortment of challenges charter school operators and their clients encounter, and the ways they address these challenges. The findings provide a broad and valid picture of how charter schools in general are serving students with disabilities. The sampling strategy does not allow us to make specific, proportional generalizations to the total population of charter schools. Because we did not randomly select the schools we visited, we cannot estimate the number or relative proportion of all charter schools operating like those schools. Similarly, we can draw only the broadest conclusions about the strength of a particular finding. For example, when parents of students with disabilities at more than a third of the visited schools told us that they enrolled their child in the charter school because of the small school and class size, we

can presume that this reason for enrollment is common at charter schools. And when parents at only one of the visited schools said they enrolled their child because they knew and liked the principal, we presume that this situation is rare at charter schools. We do not, however, report that parents at a specific percent of all charter schools enroll their children for these reasons.

Site Visit Procedures

At most schools, a two-person team spent two days on-site, conducting observations, reviewing student and school records, and interviewing staff, parents, and students. A set of five protocols guided data collection, although all interviews were open-ended. Site visitors prepared for visits by reading charters and other reports sent by school operators, modifying the protocols to reflect extant data and the expected on-site respondents, and reviewing information on the host state's charter school law. Interviews with the school spokesperson (usually the principal or director) took approximately 1½ hours. We conducted group interviews (focus groups) with teachers, parents of students with disabilities, and students with disabilities or other at-risk learners. The teacher and parent interviews lasted approximately two hours. We limited student group interviews to one class period or no more than one hour. The reviews of individual student records and the interviews with students were conducted only with written parent permission.

We relied on charter school administrators for the scheduling of interviews, the selection of interviewees, and other arrangements. This reliance on a school official created the possibility that we would only have contact with individuals having positive experiences with the school. To counter this possibility for parents of students with disabilities, we specifically asked administrators to invite parents to talk with us who were not totally satisfied with the school. Most parent focus groups did include individuals who voiced criticisms of the school. At a few schools where the participants in the parent group were overwhelmingly positive, we asked administrators for the names of parents of students with disabilities who had withdrawn their child from the school. We talked to these parents by phone after the site visits and included their comments in the analysis with those of the other parents.

A few schools that agreed to our visit were not forthcoming with information or access to staff, parents, or students. Therefore, we did not always have information to review before the visit and, once on-site, we discovered that a few administrators had made inadequate arrangements, and others limited our observations. At one school, the administrator declined to arrange for parent or student interviews and would not give us names of parents, although he did not tell us this until we were on-site. At the same school, the administrator declined to give us a copy of the charter. He said giving out the charter was against their board's policy because others had copied their charter and opened up competing schools. (We were able to obtain a copy of the charter from the state.) In another school, the principal would not agree to the visit until we agreed to omit the review of student records. In other schools, despite the efforts of administrators, only one or two parents or a small number of teachers showed up for interviews.

The preponderance of schools were exceptionally open and made their facilities, staff, parents, students, and records available to us with few restrictions. Most charter school operators, and the parents and students who are their clients, are quite proud of their accomplishments and more than willing to show off what they are doing. In fact, some do so with missionary zeal. Given the descriptive nature of the study, where we are not drawing inferences from the sample about the characteristics of all charter schools, the threats to the validity of the findings posed by the refusing schools are not highly significant. The purpose was to determine the range of how charter schools function in relation to students with disabilities, not to determine how specific ways of operating are proportionally represented in the total population of charter schools.

Data Analysis

We followed a multi-step data summarization and reduction process to analyze the data collected on-site. Following each visit, the site visitors wrote a narrative description of the school. This working document provided an overview of the school. It was organized under the five primary research questions and summarized the main responses across the various types of respondents. Next, for every protocol, the site visit team created a list of responses to each interview question by each respondent or group of respondents. We entered these 6,136 unique responses into a relational database that allowed us to sort responses by question, school, respondent type, content, and other categories of interest. To reduce the combined data to a more manageable volume, we sorted responses by interview question and respondent type and then coded and tabulated common responses. We prepared summaries for each respondent type for each question. From these summaries we prepared tables and descriptive text.

In preparing this report, we relied on the tables and text developed from the relational database, the individual site visit summaries, and the documents collected before and during the site visits. Using these sources, we systematically addressed the five primary research questions and each research subquestion. In writing the report, we further reduced the data by summarizing and by culling the findings to present the most notable and significant ideas, without eliminating important information.

An important consideration in analyzing the data was how to tally duplicate responses from the same respondent types at the same school. Take as an example the situation where three parents participating in a group interview said that they made the decision to enroll their child in the charter school without input from the child, two parents said they left the decision completely up to the child, and a sixth parent said she made the decision jointly with her child. We could have tallied these responses as three for parent decision, two for child decision, and one for joint decision. We chose, however, to make the school the unit of analysis rather than the individual respondent and, in coding and tallying the responses, we tallied one parent decision, one child decision, and one joint decision. Thus we coded three responses from that school, not six. We realize that this strategy, focusing on the untabulated occurrence of a response at a school, provides no indication of the strength of the response within a school. Given the descriptive nature of the study and that neither the schools nor the respondents were selected randomly, we believe this was the best strategy for capturing the range of responses and avoiding the danger to validity that would occur if we assumed that we had a true measure of the strength of a response.

We did consider the magnitude of responses across schools. But even so, we have chosen not to report the actual number or percentage of schools where a response occurred. Our reasoning, again, is that without a representative sample, it is potentially misleading to highlight the magnitude of a response in the sample of schools we visited, which we believe percentages would do. Such reporting might imply that a given response is similarly strong in the total population of charter schools. We do in some situations, however, report on the approximate fraction of the visited schools where a given response occurred. We believe this procedure for analysis and reporting is consistent with the descriptive purpose of the study, giving the reader a sense of the relative strength of responses within the purposive sample without implying proportionality for the entire population of charter schools.

PART II – OVERVIEW OF VISITED SCHOOLS

Consistent with a key tenet of the charter school movement, each school we visited had distinctive characteristics that defined the school and differentiated it from its local public school counterparts. As the sections below describe, charter schools can best be understood as products of their local settings, as fluid entities that are likely to continue to evolve, and as institutions that are unique by virtue of facilities, curriculum and instruction, staffing, or the students they serve. For the 32 schools, the variety across important school characteristics was remarkable. This part of the report describes the schools according to key issues and characteristics, which provides an overview of the schools and provides the context for how the schools serve students with disabilities. Part III addresses students with disabilities more specifically.

The description of the schools in the sections below emphasizes their uniqueness. But in contrast to the diversity, many of the 32 schools had significant characteristics in common. To illustrate, five students participating in a focus group at a high school described their school in terms that with slight modifications would apply to many of the schools we visited:

> This is a small school that's made for everybody. It's based on one-on-one learning. You're more self-dependent, self-paced. You get more help. Classrooms are smaller. You get what you need for your high school diploma, and you don't have to take extra or unnecessary classes. You pick what you feel is helpful to you. The day is short. You can pick your own hours. Teachers are helpful. They help out with jobs, help you get into college, help you with a tutor. Teachers and counselors want you to succeed. And they make themselves available. They care.

Extra help from teachers, small size, low student-teacher ratios, flexibility, a focused curriculum, and caring staff are characteristics of nearly all the schools we visited, according to students, parents, and staff. But not all the schools' common characteristics are positive. Although student-teacher ratios were low, many school administrators reported having problems finding and keeping qualified staff. Cramped classrooms were common. Only a few of the visited schools had adequate libraries or adequate stocks of materials for students to use for projects. Transportation was a challenge at most of the schools. The following sections touch on the positive and negative characteristics that together distinguish charter schools.

Localism

As the charter school movement has gained momentum and spread across the country, there has been a natural tendency for researchers and policymakers to seek to evaluate the significance of charters from a macro perspective. This approach, while necessary and valuable, insufficiently recognizes the important local character of many individual charter schools. Our visits to charter schools underscored the importance of understanding the local context out of which individual charter schools emerge in order to understand their significance, as well as the outcomes they are able to achieve. Some of the findings are most interesting when viewed in relation to charter schools' responses to the local public education environment.

The majority of charter schools we visited were created in response to one of two features of the local public education environment. First, several charter schools were started as the next steps in an evolution of district reform or innovation initiatives. For example, several conversion charter schools had previously implemented site-based management or other types of systemic reform efforts. In these cases, charter status complemented and built upon these previous reform efforts. Second, many charter school founders created schools intended to provide a new educational option either not present, or of insufficient quality, in local public schools. This "market niche" analogy has many different curricular and instructional faces, as we describe in the Curriculum and Instruction section below. In each of these cases, the charter schools reported that they were filling a void by providing services that were unavailable elsewhere in the local public schools.

One of the most compelling arguments for charter schools is that market mechanisms and accountability will produce creativity and innovation that will generate results. We found charter schools to be innovative in several ways relative to local circumstances. Although we did not observe approaches to teaching and learning that could not be found in other public schools, we found instances of curricular or instructional approaches that, according to staff and parents, were not available at public schools in the immediate geographical area, as noted in the previous paragraph. Thus, their innovation was in a local rather than an absolute sense.

We also found innovations in areas other than curriculum and instruction that may contribute to student success as well. For example, students cannot reap educational benefits unless they are physically present in schools, and we found that student attendance and transportation created problems and opportunities that charter schools handled in innovative ways. Perhaps the most striking example was the intentional location of a charter school at the center of a minority community on the grounds of a defunct parochial school. Attending the regular public school required that students spend 90 minutes per day in transit. Enrollment in the charter school reduced high levels of absenteeism for many students. Another charter school purchased a fleet of school buses in order to bring students to and from school from a radius of over 20 miles. This gave parents in a wide geographical area the ability to choose such a school for their child. In contrast, another charter school required that parents bring students to school and pick them up every day. This was a strategic arrangement to boost attendance while creating opportunities for staff and parents to interact with one another more frequently and supporting the school's goals of parent involvement. In each of these cases, charter schools were able to develop an innovative solution to a local problem.

Evolution

We found numerous examples of schools in transition, especially during the first years of operation. Although the overall mission of these schools usually remained unchanged, the approaches the schools took had evolved and, in many schools we visited, were continuing to evolve. The following examples provide a flavor of the types of changes that were occurring at many of the visited schools:

- A K-12 school began with three instructional tracks: entrepreneurial, technological, and equestrian. The first director came into conflict with the board because he attempted to instill a religious focus and left shortly after the school opened. The second director shifted the school to focus on the core principles of reading, writing, and math. He believed that, although students enjoyed the three original programs, it was at the expense of literacy. He dropped the equestrian program entirely and de-emphasized the entrepreneurial program.
- In the spirit of the open-classroom philosophy outlined in the school's charter, a drop-out recovery high school opened with classroom walls that did not extend to the ceiling. By the time

of our visit two years after opening, the teachers had filled in the space between the tops of the walls and the ceiling with posterboard and drapes to provide more traditional privacy. At the same school, an on-site preschool originally designed to serve the children of the school's students had become a program for at-risk children from the community whose parents were not affiliated with the charter school.

- At start-up, an elementary/middle school used Direct Instruction as the method for teaching core academic classes. The teachers quickly became frustrated with the rigidity of the approach, and its use was discontinued after the first year, except with remedial reading instruction. The school maintained a highly structured, but less programmed, approach to instruction.
- A K-12 school began as a "hands-on learning place where classrooms were noisy and [students] were learning by doing." Parents complained, feeling that the students had too much free time, and the school evolved toward more traditional learning and a back-to-the-basics theme.
- The original purpose of a school for at-risk teenagers was to provide an interim educational opportunity for temporarily expelled students. Because of limited opportunities for its students to return to traditional schools, the charter school refocused its efforts toward trying to graduate students.

Facilities

Charter school developers find space where they can. Modular classrooms are common. Auditoriums, gymnasiums, and cafeterias are rare. The schools we visited were located on busy streets, in the middle of farm fields, in strip malls, and in office buildings. A few schools were located in elegant, older school buildings purchased or leased from a district. One school was in a new facility, which had all the features of a modern school building and was specifically designed to accommodate the school's instructional approach. Two schools were located in leased space provided by a church. Two schools we visited had more than one campus—one used a former public school building as an elementary and middle school and taught high school students in the classrooms of a regional university; another had three separate locations within three regular public schools. One large conversion elementary provided a strong contrast to the norm. It operated in a beautifully groomed, 10-year-old brick building that included a gymnasium, cafeteria, library, and computer room. Every classroom had a television and VCR mounted on the wall and networked to a central studio.

Most commonly, the schools were housed in converted facilities designed for other purposes and renovated, to a greater or lesser extent, to accommodate classrooms and students. The following is a list of some of the former uses of the charter school facilities we visited:

- funeral parlor
- garage and motor pool building
- Moose lodge
- youth camp
- day care center
- textile mill
- insurance agency
- restaurant supply center
- hardware store
- parsonage

The visiting research teams did not fully evaluate accessibility for individuals with disabilities but did note the presence or absence of ramps and the availability of appropriately equipped restrooms. Approximately two-thirds of the visited schools were at least marginally accessible, meaning that no obvious physical barriers were present and one or more restrooms were at least partially equipped for individuals using wheelchairs. Only a few of these schools were designed or remodeled so that they were fully accessible and would meet current new-construction standards. Approximately a third of the visited schools were inaccessible or so limited in their accessibility that they would not be able to serve students in wheelchairs.

Curriculum and Instruction

As with facilities, the charter schools' curriculum and instruction varied greatly. Administrators in approximately half of the visited schools reported that the school curriculum was the same as or similar to the curriculum of the state or district. In some of these schools, covering the state curriculum was viewed as necessary because the students were required to take state tests, and test results were part of the school's accountability plan or were publicized by the state or district. In some schools, meeting state or district curriculum requirements was necessary for students to meet graduation standards. Administrators in many schools that followed a state or district curriculum reported bolstering that curriculum through a special emphasis or supplement. Others emphasized the strength of their teaching methods in delivering the curriculum.

Some schools adopted national models that prescribe or influence curriculum and instruction, including the following:

- Coalition of Essential Schools
- Comer
- Core Knowledge
- Direct Instruction
- Waldorf
- Montessori
- Paideia
- Reggio Emilia

At some schools, these models supplemented or supported the state or district curriculum. In other schools, these models provided the curriculum. In either case, the models were prominent in the schools' literature and in conversations with staff, and the schools using these approaches had invested in staff training and specialized materials. We did not examine the integrity of the application of the models.

In addition to the more formal models listed above, many schools had a particular curriculum emphasis. These emphases, all of which are familiar in some form to curriculum experts, were adapted by the school founders or the staff and had unique expressions at the schools. Often, they had evolved in response to the demands of educating the enrolled students. Examples of these curriculum emphases, broadly defined, include the following:

- arts immersion
- Afrocentric education
- back-to-basics
- college preparatory
- life skills

- values/moral education
- vocational education

Whether the charter schools embraced traditional or unique curricula, we found great variety in the instructional approaches they used. Some schools looked like stereotypical public schools, with classrooms arranged by age and grade level and teachers leading whole or small group instruction centered on textbooks. Many, however, used alternative instructional approaches that the staff described as follows:

- bilingual education
- computer assisted instruction
- constructivist, experiential, or hands-on learning
- cooperative learning
- diagnostic/prescriptive instruction
- interdisciplinary instruction
- multiple intelligences instruction
- multisensory/multimodal instruction
- peer tutoring
- project-based learning
- student-paced/independent learning
- thematic instruction

Within the framework of the various instructional approaches, some schools used individual learning plans for every student.

The picture of the visited schools becomes more complex, and more diverse, when considering other unique features related to curriculum and instruction. At a number of schools, major components of curriculum or instruction were structured differently than in traditional public schools. The following examples are illustrative:

- A school provides two academic tracks for students age 14 and over who have failed in regular school—one track seeks to prepare students to re-enter 9th grade at their regular high school and the other prepares students for the GED.
- A high school has a flexible schedule, double sessions (e.g., 8:00-noon, 1:00-5:00), and a self-paced, individualized program that allows some students to accelerate their progress and other students to progress at a slower, more comfortable pace and have the opportunity to hold jobs and remain in school.
- An elementary/middle school provides instruction in English and Spanish at every grade level. Students spend mornings in core subjects taught in their dominant language and afternoons in dual-language classes for project-based learning.
- A grade 6-12 school that emphasizes hands-on learning concludes each school year with an experiential learning period. Students must write up a formal request that outlines goals and objectives for a project they choose. Most students complete individual projects, lasting one to four weeks, such as job-shadowing. Some travel to places like Mexico and England to participate in study groups.
- An elementary school implemented a peer mediation and ethics program, developed by the school's director, in addition to its core academic program. The program was designed to help students develop skills in the areas of responsibility, respect, conflict resolution, and tolerance.

The school also requires students to wear uniforms and has a flag raising ceremony each week to teach patriotism.

- A high school, affiliated with a youth center, requires all students to take both basic construction and keyboarding classes, regardless of whether the students are work or college bound. Students who participate in the work program go to school for one week and then are employed for a week with contractors in the field.

Staffing and Leadership

As noted previously, in contrast to their differences, charter schools we visited had in common smaller class size and lower student-teacher ratios than are usually found in other public schools. Staff emphasized the importance of their relationships both with students and parents. By almost all reports, the lower student-teacher ratios allowed for greater individual attention and greater individualization of instruction for all students.

Teacher and other staff qualifications at the schools were varied. The extent to which staff were certified was related to both the state's charter school law and the school's own requirements. Many states do not require charter school staff to meet state certification requirements. At some schools, all professional staff met certification requirements that would allow them to teach at any public school in the state or district. Other schools employed no certified staff, employed only staff who held provisional or out-of-state certification, or employed staff who taught out-of-field. Most typically, staff at a school had mixed qualifications.

Almost all of the visited schools had a traditional governance structure, whereby a charter school board had legal responsibility for the school but left school management up to a principal or director, who served at the discretion of the board. The principal or director provided on-site leadership to teachers and other staff who had varying degrees of input into the day-to-day running of the school. The board stepped in if a crisis developed or a new administrator needed to be hired. At a few schools, the principal was appointed by the superintendent or the board of the sponsoring school district, rather than by a charter school board.

A couple of exceptions to the norm of traditional governance are noteworthy. A K-12 conversion school had no administrator and was governed by an inclusive site-based management committee. Operating decisions were made in weekly site-based meetings, where all adult members of the school community could participate: teachers, librarian, teacher assistants, janitors, cook, secretary, and parents. The school staff took turns leading the meetings. Under the charter, a board had contractual responsibility for the school, but the board's role had diminished over the years. In another school, a private management company assumed the school's management and business functions after it had accumulated excessive debt. The management company became the employer for all school employees with the exception of the principal who remained employed by the school's board. The management company also made recommendations about the ways to restructure the school and its delivery of services.

Students

Approximately half the visited schools targeted specific student populations. Most of these were secondary programs that targeted at-risk students. These students included individuals who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out or who are adjudicated, pregnant, parenting, or expelled. Other target populations included disadvantaged and Spanish-speaking children and youth. One elementary school

was designed for children with autism or developmental delays with autistic features. Another targeted children with learning disabilities, although not exclusively. In general, the schools that focused on a target population did not attract other types of students.

Most of the schools that did not target specific student populations attempted to attract students by offering a special curriculum, a specific type of instruction, or a particular educational philosophy. The most obvious examples were the schools that offer established programs such as Montessori, Waldorf, or Paideia. As described previously, schools also offered a variety of alternative instructional approaches, such as project-based learning, hands-on learning, or bilingual education, or a specific curriculum emphasis such as arts immersion or Afrocentric education. Additionally, one of the visited schools promoted itself as a more traditional alternative to the local public schools. It offered a back-to-basics curriculum, teacher-directed instruction, and stronger discipline. In contrast, some of the visited schools promoted their open education philosophy as an alternative to overly structured public schools. The schools that offered special curriculum, instruction, or philosophy and those that targeted specific student populations were not mutually exclusive. In fact, most of the schools targeting specific populations tried to attract students by offering alternative instruction.

Three schools that did not target specific student populations were public school conversions, which essentially served students from their original attendance areas. One applied for charter status when it was scheduled to be closed by the district due to decreased enrollment. The school's spokesperson told us, "We're a small community already, and, without a school, we'd lose more than just a school." A fourth school, cited above in the Localism section, drew students in a similar manner. It opened in the facilities formerly occupied by a parochial school in a minority community and attracts students who walk to school as an alternative to attending a district school almost an hour's bus ride away.

A number of the schools found that their educational approach attracted in particular at-risk learners or students with disabilities. For example, the founders of a school we visited that uses the Paideia principles and has a focus on the performing and studio arts expected to attract students interested in the arts as well as those who were at-risk for dropping out. During the school's first year, enrollment included arts-oriented students and at-risk learners. Over time, many arts-oriented students left, and at-risk students enrolled at faster than anticipated rates. At another school, which did not have a target population, staff reported that they do not tend to draw average students but attract students who do not fit into the regular public schools—students who are either high or low achieving. At many schools, staff talked about students in their population who they thought had unidentified disabilities. Some complained that their standard instructional approach did not work with these or other students with learning problems or that a need to focus on discipline detracted from achievement.

PART III – FINDINGS REGARDING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

For this part of the report, we have organized the findings under headings corresponding to the primary research questions. Each of the five questions had multiple subquestions, which are reflected in the subsection headings below. All primary research questions and most subquestions were addressed through multiple sources, including the individuals we interviewed and the records we reviewed prior to and during site visits.

As described in Part I, in analyzing the collected data, we focused primarily on the absolute occurrence of a response at a school, as opposed to the frequency of that response within a school. For some questions, we report on the approximate fraction of the visited schools where a given response occurred. In other cases, we simply refer to responses occurring at "a few" or "several" schools. In reading this part of the report, two cautions are necessary. First, a common response across the schools was not necessarily a common response within the schools. That is, we may have recorded a similar response from at least one parent at nearly all the visited schools, but that response was not necessarily frequent within each of those schools. In fact, when parents provided contradictory responses during the parent group interview, we counted both responses from that school. This analytical procedure is consistent with the descriptive purpose of the study and our efforts to document the range, as opposed to the absolute magnitude, of responses.

The second caution is that generalizing the magnitude of findings from this study to the total population of charter schools is inappropriate. That is, responses that were common or rare at the schools we visited are not necessarily correspondingly common or rare for all charter schools. Again, the descriptive purpose of the study did not require that we make inferences about the strength of responses for the total population. Instead, the study required that we describe the range of responses applicable to the total population. The purposive sampling and the data collection procedures we used allow us to do that with confidence.

Why Parents Enroll Their Children with Disabilities in Charter Schools

Parents reported a variety of reasons for enrolling their children with disabilities in charter schools. Most fall into two categories: positive characteristics of the charter school and negative experiences with the previous non-charter school. ***Table 3*** presents the reasons for enrollment, as reported by parents and administrators, sorted where appropriate under the two categories.

Parents of students with disabilities at more than half the visited schools identified dissatisfaction with their child's previous non-charter school as a reason for enrolling their child in the charter school. Dissatisfaction with the school in general or with the special education program in particular was cited more frequently than any other reason for transferring a child. When parents were more specific, they expressed dissatisfaction with the teachers at the previous school, they said their child was struggling academically or socially, or they said the previous school had a poor reputation. One parent said of her child's previous school, "They give up on you." Another parent said that the special education program in her child's previous school was a "glorified babysitting service." Many parents noted that switching their child to the charter school was a difficult decision because the school was new and did not have a track record. Yet they thought that the charter school had to be better than the previous situation. One

parent was nearly equally disparaging of the charter school and her child's previous school, referring to the charter school as "the lesser of two evils."

Table 3. Reasons parents of students with disabilities enroll their children in charter schools, as reported by parents and administrators.

Reasons for Enrollment	Parents	Administrators
Positive characteristics of the charter school		
• Small school and class size	✓	✓
• Curriculum focus or instructional approach	✓	✓
• Staff attitudes/experience/qualifications	✓	✓
• Reputation of charter school	✓	✓
• Safe, community-like environment	✓	✓
• Individualized instruction/attention	✓	✓
• Special education service delivery model, instruction, and related services	✓	✓
• Convenient location	✓	✓
• High expectations for students	✓	✓
Negative experiences with non-charter school		
• General dissatisfaction with previous non-charter school	✓	✓
• Dissatisfaction with special education services at previous non-charter school	✓	✓
• Dissatisfaction with teachers at previous non-charter school	✓	
• Child was struggling academically or socially in previous school	✓	
• Large class size in previous non-charter school	✓	
• Poor reputation of public schools	✓	
Other		
• Fresh start/need for a change	✓	✓
• Student referred by administration or staff of previous school or by court official	✓	✓
• Child wanted to attend the charter school	✓	✓

As Table 3 shows, parents of students with disabilities also described a variety of positive characteristics of the charter school that made enrollment there attractive. At more than a third of the schools, parents mentioned the charter school's small size or the small size of its classes. A special curriculum focus or instructional approach, the quality of the staff, the school's positive reputation, and the safety of a community-like environment were each cited by parents at approximately a fourth of the visited schools.

Administrators' perceptions of the reasons parents enroll their children in charter schools were quite similar to what parents reported. Smaller school or class size, a particular curriculum or instructional approach, and improved special education services were common responses from administrators to the question of why parents of children with disabilities enroll their children in the charter school. Administrators were more likely than parents to attribute parents' motivation to the

attractive features of the charter school rather than negative experiences with previous schools. Interestingly, administrators at more than a third of the visited schools cited their special education services as a reason parents enroll their children, but parents at less than half as many schools identified this reason.

Student Attitudes Toward Enrolling in a Charter School

Students at approximately a third of the schools stated that they had made the decision to attend the charter school or that they made the decision together with their parents, and students at almost two-thirds of the visited schools reported that their parent or guardian had made the decision or that they had not been involved in the decision at all. At least one parent at more than half of the visited schools reported that their child had a choice in whether to attend the charter school. Parents at some of those schools reported that while their child had a choice, they strongly encouraged or influenced that decision. Parents at approximately a fourth of the schools, most of whom had elementary-aged children, stated that their child did not participate in the decision or did not have a choice as to whether to attend the charter school.

Regardless of their role in the decision, most students we interviewed said they wanted to transfer to the charter school. Students at most of the high schools we visited wanted to attend the charter school to increase their chances of academic success and, in some cases, to have a chance to graduate. Students at some schools reported not liking their previous non-charter school, and a few admitted having been expelled or having dropped out from their previous school. Other reasons for wanting to attend the charter school included the small size of the school or small class size and the special programs, incentives, or schedules that the charter school offered that were not offered at other schools. Some students stated reasons relating to friends attending the charter schools or a high comfort level with peers at the charter school. ***Table 4*** summarizes the chief reasons students did or did not want to enroll in a charter school.

Table 4. Reasons students did or did not want to attend the charter school, as reported by students.

Reasons students wanted to enroll at the charter school

- Increase opportunities for academic success
- Increase chances of graduating
- Disliked previous school
- Expelled or dropped out from previous school
- Charter school's small school and class size
- Special programs at the charter school
- Incentives or schedules at the charter school
- Be with friends or similar peers

Reasons students did not want to enroll at the charter school

- Leaving friends at previous school
- Negative reputation of charter school or its students
- Lack of extracurricular activities at charter school

Although students at some charter schools reported wanting to attend the school because of friendships, students more often stated they did not want to attend the charter school because they did not want to leave their friends at their previous school. Other students did not want to attend the charter school because of the negative reputation the school had in the community. Some students reported thinking that the charter school was for slow learners. Another reason for children not wanting to attend the charter school was the lack of sports or other extracurricular activities.

Parents corroborated the reasons that their child wanted to attend the charter school, some emphasizing their child's dislike of the previous school and others pointing to the unique programs and activities offered at the charter school. Other reasons identified by parents included children wanting a fresh start and liking the general environment or facilities of the charter school. Parents had little to say about reasons the children did not want to attend.

Pre-admission Counseling Related to Disability

Slightly less than half the visited schools routinely provided an orientation for parents or students prior to admissions decisions, according to administrators and parents. Only a few of these schools had a pre-admission orientation or counseling process specifically for parents considering enrolling their children with disabilities. Although rare, administrators at a few schools reported that they always have an interview with the parent or student with a disability to determine if the school can meet that student's needs.

Whether or not they conduct a pre-decision interview, administrators at approximately a fourth of the visited schools said that they were unable to serve certain types of students with disabilities and that they discouraged parents of some students with disabilities from enrolling their children in the charter school. The administrators asserted various reasons for discouraging a student's enrollment, mostly based on a lack of fit between the curriculum or instruction and a student's needs. We did not determine the extent to which administrators might also discourage enrollment by nondisabled students who they believed are not a good fit for their school. Most administrators saw "counseling out" as a process that is in the student's best interest. For example, an administrator in a school where two-thirds of the students have mild disabilities reported that if she feels the school lacks the services a student needs, she informs the parents because she wants the child to be placed in the best possible environment.

Usually, counseling out occurred informally during initial meetings with the parents and students, but a few schools had more formal or direct approaches for discouraging certain students from enrolling. For example, one school reported that its charter states that the school is unable to meet the needs of students with severe emotional and behavioral difficulties, and that this was also stated during initial interviews if necessary. Another school required parents to sign a *Waiver of Responsibility* acknowledging "that they [the charter school] are not equipped, nor do they offer, special education services." An administrator at still another charter school that enrolled three students with autism reported that she "had to be brutally honest" with the parent who wanted to enroll her child who was in a wheelchair and required catheterization. The director explained to this parent that the other three students had exhausted the school's financial resources, and the school simply could not afford to provide a large amount of assistance to another student. In another school, the principal indicated that they would accept any student and contract for any needed services. But, he explained, in the case of students with significant disabilities who needed self-contained placements, the charter school would contract with the local district to provide that service at a local public school. Thus, for those students, the charter school was not a true alternative.

In contrast to the discouraging reception administrators reported they gave parents of some students with disabilities, parents at only three schools reported that staff attempted to dissuade them from

enrolling at the school because of their child's disability. And at more than half of the visited schools, parents said that they were encouraged to enroll their child with a disability or that the charter school staff did not focus on the child's disability when discussing enrollment. It is important to note that the parents interviewed were parents of students who were or had been enrolled in the charter school. The research team did not seek out parents who chose not to enroll their child at a school or whose child had been turned down by the school. The number of parents who have been counseled out of the visited schools is not known.

Interestingly, in some schools, staff expressed antagonism toward special education but encouraged enrollment of students with disabilities. The most striking example was the school that asked parents to sign the special education waiver described above. The principal's attitude toward special education was summed up when she responded to questions about special education services with the rhetorical question, "How much time do we want teachers doing paperwork?" Yet, according to parents of students with mild disabilities whose children were attending the school, neither the principal nor the other staff at this school discouraged them from enrolling their child. On the contrary, parents described the staff as quite welcoming and as expressing confidence that they could work with all children. And in interviews during the site visit, the principal and other staff consistently expressed their willingness and even eagerness to work with students with mild disabilities who, they said, had been badly served by traditional schooling and by special education.

How Charter Schools Serve Students With Disabilities

Students with disabilities were served in charter schools in each of the 15 states visited. Staff at some of the schools reported that, in starting a new charter school, they focused on special education only after other program elements were in place or after the enrollment of a student with a disability. As a result, a few of these schools did not develop a special education program until the second or third year. The delays resulted from the difficulty of starting a school, confusion about a charter school's responsibilities for students with disabilities, or negative attitudes toward special education. For example, an administrator at one school explained that in the school's first year, state officials told the school's board that they did not have to provide special education services. The school was not notified of a change in the state agency's advice to charter schools regarding special education until state officials raised concerns about the school's lack of services during an audit. As a result, the school was just developing a special education program at the time of our visit during its third year of operation.

A few of the visited schools operated without a special education program. At these schools, staff reported that they did not label or identify students with disabilities and did not have any specific services in place for them. Administrators contended that they were doing a good job with all students, and that testing and labeling would not improve a student's education in any way. They pointed to certain features of their programs, including small class size and individualized instruction, as reasons they were able to serve these students effectively. One administrator said, "Because of the nature of the [charter school's] program, it doesn't make sense to screen for special education." Another administrator reported that they trained teachers to meet all students' needs so that the students do not have to be labeled. This same administrator also said that the school had "done a lot of special education things," but they did not call it special education. As the following sections show, these attitudes were not typical. Most of the charter schools we visited had programs in place for identifying and providing special instruction to students with disabilities.

An important factor in serving some students with disabilities is accessibility. As noted previously, approximately a third of the visited schools were not accessible. The lack of accessibility is a clear obstacle to enrollment by students with physical disabilities. No charter school staff reported

turning away a prospective student because he or she was in a wheelchair, but the study did not examine whether prospective applicants have declined to apply to a charter school after seeing the facility.

Identifying Students with Disabilities

Administrators reported that they usually find out about students who come to their charter school with an individualized education program (IEP) from parents or through records from the student's previous school. Obtaining this information can, however, be problematic. Some schools asked on their application or registration form whether the student had an IEP or received special education services at the previous school. But parents may not say anything about a child's disability because they want to avoid having their child labeled. According to administrators, this lack of forthrightness is found among some parents who apply to the charter school specifically because they want their child to have a fresh start. Many administrators also reported that acquiring the previous school records can be a lengthy process, often taking several months. The administrator at one school, in its third year of operation, said that they had only recently learned that they needed to send the previous school a release of information form, signed by a parent, in order to receive all of a student's records, including any special education records.

Procedures for identifying students with disabilities who enrolled in the charter school without an IEP were varied. But at most of the visited schools that provided special education services, staff described identification and IEP procedures that were consistent with practice in the state or local district. The procedures usually included teacher observation, prereferral interventions, and referral to a special educator or psychologist for testing if the interventions were not successful. Staff at more than a third of the visited schools reported that, after testing, a charter school team determined the student's eligibility for special education services. This team typically was made up of the administrator, a general education teacher, a special education teacher, a psychologist, the parent, and possibly others. Some charter schools contracted with a private company or an educational consultant to carry out the testing and, in a few cases, determine eligibility. Some schools referred students to their resident school district for evaluation.

Parents at almost every visited school reported more positive experiences with the identification and IEP processes at the charter school than they had at previous non-charter schools. For example, some parents said that their child's previous school was reluctant to test the child for disabilities or waited to provide services until the child had lost both confidence and interest in school. Additional comments indicated that the parents felt more a part of the IEP process at the charter school and that the IEP was written to meet the individual needs of the child. A few parents stated that the process is no different than it had been in the previous school, and parents at a few charter schools were negative about the school's IEP process. One parent indicated that her child's IEP had not been reviewed upon enrollment in the charter school. A parent at another charter school said, "You'll be lucky to get what's on the IEP."

Instructional Setting

Teachers and administrators at most of the visited schools reported that they used the "inclusion model" in delivering instruction to students with disabilities. Staff at approximately a fourth of the visited schools reported full inclusion for all students with disabilities. But the extent and even the definition of inclusion varied, and sometimes an administrator and teachers from the same school reported conflicting information. For example, at one school, the administrator touted their full inclusion program, while a teacher explained that, as part of inclusion, students requiring additional help are pulled out for instruction in a resource room. At some schools, inclusion simply meant that students with disabilities were in a general education classroom for some part of the day.

Half of the schools offering full inclusion to all students did so because it was their pedagogical preference, and they used their special education resources to support inclusion. At these schools, all students with disabilities were included in the general education classroom all day, every day, and that was where they received any needed assistance from a special education teacher or assistant. At the other half of these full inclusion schools, however, inclusion was the only option because financial constraints had led to a decision not to employ a special educator or because the staff believed it was inappropriate to label students with disabilities.

At one school, full inclusion was practiced in the primary grades and a pullout program was provided for middle and high school students with IEPs. At other visited schools, staff emphasized that pullout was minimal, or on an as-needed basis, and that students were out of the regular classroom for less time than was the case at their previous school. At one school, teachers maintained that in-class and pullout support were available for all students, regardless of disability status. Three schools, not counting the one we visited that exclusively served students with autism, had self-contained classrooms for students with significant disabilities. One of these schools delivered most instruction in the self-contained setting, and another pursued a strategy where students spent considerable time in general education classes with the support of aides. The third had a self-contained classroom for prekindergarten only and provided various types of settings, including full inclusion and pullout, for students enrolled in K-6.

According to data provided by the visited schools, most had at least one special education teacher. A few schools also reported having special education paraprofessionals available to work with students with IEPs. Most administrators reported that general education teachers provided some or all of the instruction for students with disabilities.

General education teachers at a few schools underscored their collaboration with the special education teacher at their school or with a special education consultant who made regular visits. A teacher at one school spoke of a "cooperative venture" between the general education and special education teacher. Another classroom teacher explained that the special education teacher helped her to modify the curriculum for students with disabilities. Teachers at other schools reported that there was not much assistance from the special education personnel. One teacher said that students with disabilities were included in the general education classroom, but that the special education teacher and assistant rarely provided the support to those students as they should. The teacher explained that the special education personnel at her school were focused almost exclusively on testing and identifying special education students, writing IEPs, and completing paperwork, rather than providing academic instruction.

Instruction

Administrator and teacher descriptions of academic instruction for students with disabilities were consonant. Teachers generally reported that they practiced instructional methods that were adopted schoolwide. At nearly half the visited schools, teachers spoke of individualizing instruction for students with disabilities, and at many of these schools, individualization was described as the norm for all students. Some teachers reported grouping students with and without disabilities together for instruction. Teachers at almost half the visited schools described using multiple modalities, such as presenting information both orally and in writing, to teach certain concepts or information. Some teachers stated that they often used computers to help students understand or master information. Others reported an emphasis on hands-on instruction or the use of peer tutoring. Teachers also described the use of specific instructional approaches that are consistent with their school's curriculum, such as methods associated with Direct Instruction or Waldorf.

The parents we interviewed tended to be knowledgeable about the instructional approach their school used and, in general, were positive about the instructional services their child with a disability was

receiving. Parents at many schools could describe the school's curriculum, especially where a distinctive curriculum such as Montessori was in place. Parents at some schools were familiar with specific instructional techniques and, at least in some cases, these techniques attracted the parents to the school. For example, one parent said that the charter school taught reading using phonics, which was not the practice in other local public schools. Another stated the math curriculum was "very repetitious," which she viewed positively. Parents at several schools praised the school's no-homework policy.

At approximately a third of the visited schools, parents of students with disabilities highlighted the individualized attention their child received at their charter school. Several parents specifically referred to the value of an approach that did not expect all children to learn at the same pace. One parent described this as allowing each student to work where he or she is developmentally without trying to "hurry things along." Another parent emphasized that, unlike the previously attended public school, the charter school "had a plan" to address his child's needs.

Related Services

Most administrators reported offering related services, as needed, to students with disabilities. Almost half of the visited schools were providing speech therapy, and more than a third were providing occupational therapy. Counseling and physical therapy were less common. The school we visited for students with autism employed two full-time certified behavior specialists who acted as consultants to the teachers and worked with individual students. At some schools, staff or parents talked about better coordination of services, compared to traditional public schools. One teacher commented, "We have everyone working together on the same thing. The same plan is followed. Everyone communicates."

Although most administrators said they would arrange for services as the need arose, administrators at a few schools reported that they did not provide related services. Parents at approximately a fourth of the schools said that the charter school offered no or few related services, even when needed. One parent reported that she paid to have her son receive needed physical therapy, which is on his IEP but not provided by the school. She is not bothered by the lack of services: "There are some things that are not available here. We have an understanding that I can provide these privately. I'm willing to provide."

Only a few of the visited schools had a related service provider on staff. At most of the schools that were providing related services at the time of our visit, these services were provided by contracted employees. At other schools, related services were provided by a sponsoring district or by the district of residence for the student being served.

Transportation

Transportation issues at most of the charter schools we visited were the same for students with and without disabilities, according to staff and parents of students with disabilities. Approximately half the schools provided no transportation to any students. Where transportation was not provided, administrators reported that parents drove their children or the students took the city bus. At a few schools, students were within walking distance.

At two schools, transportation was provided only for students with disabilities. In contrast, a few schools that operated their own buses did not provide transportation for students with significant disabilities who required accommodations. One of these schools reimbursed a parent for driving her child with a disability. Another school that had buses did not provide an attendant that would enable three students with significant disabilities to ride. A parent of one of these students explained that the inconvenience was outweighed by what the school offered: "For my child, transportation is a big

problem. It involves two hours a day of driving. But I would drive four hours a day to know my child was safe and happy." Parents at a few other schools also said that they were not bothered by the lack of free transportation. Several parents indicated they had not been comfortable with their child riding the bus at the previous school anyway. One parent of a child with a disability said that a parent gives up the right to transportation when they enroll their child in a charter school.

Interestingly, transportation is central to accomplishing some charter schools' missions. As described previously in the Localism section, one school eliminated a long bus ride for community children and thereby increased attendance and involvement. Another school required parents to drop off and pick up their children to promote opportunities for interaction between staff and families.

Overview of Differences Between Charter and Non-Charter Schools

Based on responses from parents, staff, and students with disabilities to a number of questions, we can describe how charter school communities view themselves in relation to traditional public schools. Parents talked about differences between the charter school and other public schools when they explained why they enrolled their child. Other questions to parents and similar questions to administrators and teachers specifically asked how the charter school's services to students with disabilities differed from services at previously attended schools. Questions to students asked what made it easier or harder for them to do well at the charter school, compared to their previous school. Respondents used these questions to highlight important differences, instructional and otherwise, between their charter school and previously attended non-charter schools. ***Table 5*** shows the differences according to the various respondents, organized as gains and losses.

Parents' perspectives on differences. In discussing what attracted them to the charter school and in response to other questions, parents of students with disabilities readily identified important differences between their child's charter school and previous non-charter schools their child had attended. Not surprising, the attractiveness of a special curriculum or instructional approach were identified by parents at the schools that offer highly distinctive programs, such as Core Knowledge, Waldorf, or Montessori. Parents also noted important, but less prominent curriculum or instruction differences, such as arts-infusion or an emphasis on hands-on learning. Overall, parents at approximately a third of the visited schools described their charter school's special curriculum focus or instructional approach as something gained.

Individualized instruction was cited as a charter school gain by parents of students with disabilities at more than a fourth of the visited schools. This gain was the difference most commonly cited across all respondents. As noted previously in this report, at some schools individualized instruction is the norm, not a special feature of instruction for students with disabilities. Although parents of students with disabilities did not see family and parent involvement as an area of significant gain at the charter school, at many schools parents cited communication between the staff and parents as an area of gain.

Parents' reports regarding differences in special education per se were mixed. At only a few charter schools did parents say that the special education instruction was better. At approximately the same number of schools, parents said their child lost special education services at the charter school. Parents did not, however, identify the lack of pullout programs or self-contained special education classrooms as a charter school loss, although administrators at a few schools highlighted these differences. Parents also did not mention a lack of special education personnel at charter schools as a loss, but teachers did.

Table 5. Differences between charter schools and previously-attended non-charter schools, as reported by parents, charter school staff, and students.

Differences	Parents	Administrators	Teachers	Students
Areas of Gain				
• Individualized instruction	✓	✓	✓	✓
• Caring teachers and better relationships between students and teachers	✓	✓	✓	✓
• High academic standards, high achievement expectations, and more challenging curriculum	✓	✓	✓	✓
• Special education services in general	✓	✓	✓	✓
• Related services (under special education)	✓	✓		
• Small school and classes	✓	✓	✓	✓
• Inclusion	✓	✓	✓	
• Special curriculum focus or instructional approach	✓	✓		
• Collaboration among teachers and related services providers			✓	
• Family and parent involvement			✓	
• Communication between school and parents	✓			
Areas of Loss				
• Extracurricular activities (sports, band, etc.)	✓	✓	✓	✓
• Curriculum components/academic courses	✓	✓	✓	
• Related services (under special education)	✓	✓	✓	
• Facilities (library, gym, etc.)	✓			✓
• High academic standards	✓			✓
• Transportation	✓	✓		
• Special education services in general	✓		✓	
• Pullout or resource programs in special education		✓		
• Self-contained special education classroom		✓		
• Trained or certified special education personnel			✓	
• Special classes (music, art, gym, etc.)	✓			

Most parents at most visited schools reported that their child had no need for related services and had not been receiving related services at the previous school. Parents at approximately a fourth of the visited schools reported that their child was not receiving the related services at the charter school that had been provided at the previous school, which shows as an area of loss in Table 5. In contrast, parents at about the same number of schools reported that their child received all the related services at the charter school that were provided at the previous non-charter school or reported that no related services had been available at the previous school anyway. Parents at a few charter schools said their child was receiving the same but higher quality related services than at their previous school, which shows as an area of gain in Table 5.

High academic standards or a more challenging curriculum was mentioned as a gain by parents of students with disabilities at more than a fourth of the visited schools. In some cases, this perception was specific to their own child, whom a parent perceived as unchallenged or neglected in the previous school because of a disability. In most cases, however, parents were speaking to the overall program of the school. One parent noted that the curriculum at the charter school was similar to the previous school's, but at the charter school the students really had to learn the material: "They can't just get by." Parents at a few of the visited schools said that academic standards were lower at the charter school than at their previous public school. Thus high academic standards appear both as an area of gain and an area of loss in Table 5.

Some parents said that while desirable programs, such as extracurricular activities, had been lost by attending the charter school, in many cases their child was not involved in these programs anyway because of behavior or academic problems. One parent said she would "gladly do without these things" because the charter school offered so much more. At least one parent at almost half of the visited schools reported that, overall, nothing had been lost.

Administrators' perspectives on differences. Administrators' reports of the areas of gain were similar to parents'. At approximately a third of the visited schools, administrators reported that their school offered a curriculum focus or instructional approach that was not available in non-charter schools in their locale. At approximately a fourth of the schools, administrators cited individualized instruction as something gained by attendance at their charter school. Also at approximately a fourth of the schools, administrators said they offered better or more special education and related services than did previously attended schools. Small class size was also named as a gain by nearly a fourth of administrators.

On the other hand, administrators also identified services or programs that were available to students with disabilities at previously attended schools that were not available in their charter school. Administrators at approximately a fourth of the visited schools reported that the non-charter schools offered more related services or better services. Also at approximately a fourth of the schools, administrators said that previously attended schools offered instruction in content areas that were not available in their charter school, or that the non-charter schools had more academic resources in general, including vocational classes and certain elective classes. In a few schools, administrators noted that previously attended schools offered their special education students pullout or resource programs, which were not available at their charter school. Some of these administrators also reported that their charter schools did not offer self-contained special education classrooms. A few administrators mentioned that the previously attended schools offered more extracurricular activities.

Teachers' perspectives on differences. Teachers' responses to questions about differences between their charter schools and previously attended schools focused mostly on the positive features of the charter schools. Teachers at more than a third of the visited schools reported that their charter school offered more individualized instruction than the schools their students previously attended. At more than a fourth of the schools, teachers stated that their charter school was more inclusive than previous schools.

Teachers at a few schools said that the staff at their charter school held higher expectations for students with disabilities than did staff at previous schools. A few teachers noted that there was more collaboration among the teachers and related service providers at their charter school. Other gains mentioned by teachers at a few schools included smaller class size and greater family and parent involvement.

Although their main focus was on what students gained by enrolling in the charter school, teachers also identified areas where the previously attended school offered more than their school. They cited extracurricular activities and some academic courses or curriculum components. They also spoke of the losses of special education and related services and the charter school's relative lack of trained special education personnel. One teacher stated that at other schools, students with disabilities would "at least get the hours on the IEP." In contrast to these losses related to special education, a few teachers provided negative anecdotes of the services offered at regular public schools. For example, one teacher reported that at the school where she previously taught and where some of her current students previously attended, a special education student was expected to just "sit and color" all day long, and other special education students sat in the back of the class and received no attention at all. A teacher at another school said that their speech therapist had recently come from a non-charter school where her "small groups" consisted of 15-18 students.

Students' perspectives on differences. Some students at approximately three quarters of the visited schools reported that the teachers at their charter school were more caring and were more committed to student success than were the teachers at non-charter schools they attended previously. Many students also said that the teachers at the charter school made school fun. To highlight the contrast with the school she previously attended, one student said teachers at that school "didn't care" and that she was "just a zero in the grade book." Another, a 10th grader, said of her previous school, "you can always get by with a D if you don't act out and rock the boat." At almost half of the schools, students reported that the charter school's smaller class size or school size made it easier to do well. Students at approximately a third of the schools said that the individualized and self-paced instruction was a gain compared to the school they previously attended, although a few students saw the initiative required in self-paced instruction as a burden. Students at approximately a fourth of the schools reported that friends at the charter school enhanced their success. Students at a few schools also said that the charter school had better resources, materials, or facilities; they were academically more challenged than at their previous non-charter school; and the charter school offered a better special education program.

Students at a few of the visited schools said they were less challenged academically than they had been at their previous non-charter school. Students at almost a third of the schools cited the charter school's facilities, resources, and materials as being poorer than at previously attended schools. At a few schools, students said the charter school lacked extracurricular activities.

Outcome Goals for Students

Asked to state the charter school's most important goals for students with disabilities, administrators, teachers, and parents identified goals that can be classified into two broad categories: goals related to academic achievement, and goals related to interpersonal or life skills. These goals are summarized in ***Table 6***. Interpersonal or life skills goals were more frequently cited by all respondents than academic goals. In some cases, respondents were specific about the goals they had for students with disabilities. But more commonly, responses to questions about goals were broad or vague. For example, an administrator cited as a goal "to help students with disabilities reach their highest potential and achieve their dreams." Another said her school's goal was "to help students be the best they can be." Similarly, a

teacher stated a goal of students recognizing and building on their individual strengths. Only teachers mentioned individual IEP goals as particularly relevant for students with disabilities.

Parents cited outcome goals for their children that were similar to those identified by teachers and administrators. In fact, parents at more than two-thirds of the schools said that the charter school's goals for their child were consistent with their own goals for their child. Two parents said they had come to adopt the school's goals for their child. At a few schools, parents expressed dissatisfaction with the school's goals for their child, suggesting that their child was not receiving enough academic instruction.

Table 6. Goals for students with disabilities, as reported by parents and charter school staff.

Goals	Parents	Administrators	Teachers
Academic achievement			
• Improve academically	✓	✓	✓
• Obtain a quality education	✓	✓	✓
• Graduate or move on to next level	✓	✓	✓
• Become lifelong learner	✓	✓	
• Meet goals on individual IEPs			✓
Interpersonal or life skills			
• Improve behavior and social skills	✓	✓	✓
• Gain skills to function independently	✓	✓	✓
• Increase self-confidence/self-esteem	✓	✓	✓
• Become contributing member of society	✓	✓	
• Reach their potential/be successful	✓	✓	✓
• Learn to establish and prioritize own goals			✓

Asked to describe the goals their parents have for them at school, students' responses focused heavily on academic goals. Students at approximately a third of the schools said their parents would like them to earn better grades and improve their academic performance. Students at nearly as many of the secondary schools said their parents wanted them to graduate with a diploma. Students also reported that their parents wanted them to improve their social relations with other students and do their best and be happy.

Differences Between Goals for Students With and Without Disabilities

At more than three-quarters of the visited schools, teachers and administrators asserted that the goals for students with and without disabilities were the same. At a few of these schools, a teacher or an administrator qualified this assertion with the explanation that goals were individualized for every student. Thus goals may differ to the extent that they differ for every child, with every student held to the standard of working to the best of his or her ability.

A few teachers and administrators, however, described differences between the outcome goals for students with and without disabilities. Teachers at a few schools, for example, explained that the goals for students with disabilities were often adopted from the child's IEP. One teacher stated that "there is more focus on affective areas with the special education students." Teachers also reported that goals for students with disabilities were sometimes modified according to the ability level of the child. At a few schools, administrators explained that students with disabilities had certain goals that do not apply to students without disabilities; examples included goals related to personal hygiene and coping skills. Administrators at two schools also mentioned that standards of behavior sometimes differ for students with and without disabilities. One described less rigid school attendance standards for students with disabilities, while another explained that students with disabilities were given more chances before being disciplined for problem behavior.

Assessment of Student Outcomes

Teachers and administrators at the visited schools reported a variety of methods for assessing outcomes for all students. ***Table 7*** presents a list of these methods. With a couple of exceptions, the list would apply to most public schools. But the specific application or relative importance of the different techniques makes some of the charter schools distinct in comparison to non-charter schools in their areas. At more than half the visited schools, staff reported using either traditional report cards with grades or narrative progress reports to regularly document student achievement. Some schools used criterion-based checklists without grades to report progress.

Standardized tests were used at almost all the visited schools. Often, the charter school students took the same standardized tests as other public school students in their state or district. In some schools, achievement goals based on standardized tests were part of the school's accountability plan. At one charter school, the director said she did not have any problem with the statewide achievement test, arguing that if students were improving the test would indicate their progress. Overall, however, few of the visited schools emphasized standardized test scores. A teacher with a high percentage of students with disabilities said, "I'd be depressed if I only used standardized tests to assess."

Table 7. Student assessment methods in charter schools, as reported by staff.

- Standardized tests
- Progress reports/report cards
- Portfolio assessment
- Teacher-made tests and quizzes
- Commercial tests and quizzes
- IEP goals and objectives
- Teacher observation
- Student self-evaluation/student conferences
- Behavior/social skills assessment
- Parent observation and assessment

In most schools, staff asserted that they had better ways to assess students. These better ways included progress reports, portfolio assessment, teacher-made tests, teacher observations, student self-evaluation, and parent assessment. Use of portfolio assessment was reported by staff in approximately a third of the visited schools. Staff at a few schools said that outcome measures were individualized for each student or that students were not compared to each other during evaluation but were compared to their own previous work. At some schools, staff were vague about assessment. Teachers reported that they "keep data" or that students must show that they had acquired specific skills in each class. When pressed about measurement, they talked about teacher observation or teacher-made tests. One teacher, who was clearly an exception in her own school, said, "I don't evaluate by test. If they have a smile on their face, I've done my job."

Differences Between Assessment for Students With and Without Disabilities

Staff at more than half the visited schools reported that outcome measures were no different for students with and without disabilities. As noted previously, staff at a few schools used individualized outcome measurement for all students. At some schools, staff reported using the IEP as an outcome measure for students with disabilities, in addition to the school's standard measures. Teachers at a few schools reported that they used lower standards when evaluating students with disabilities. One of these teachers said she does so even though she feels this "may be a disservice." No administrators reported that their school used lower standards for any students.

Teachers and administrators at most schools reported on numerous accommodations provided or available for students with disabilities during testing. The reported accommodations were those typically found in non-charter schools, including untimed or extended-time testing, shortened tests, separate settings for testing, oral presentation of tests, and oral responding. At some schools, staff indicated that accommodations were only provided if stated on a student's IEP. At other schools, staff said that accommodations were based on need and were available for every student, not just those with disabilities. One teacher listed state-approved accommodations for students with disabilities, then said that accommodations are actually for all students who need them, not just students with IEPs or Section 504 plans.[4] Similarly, an administrator at another school reported that accommodations were based on need, not disability status. A few administrators stated that accommodations were not provided. Interestingly, one administrator reported that the school had "not felt the need to do this," but teachers at the school reported use of some accommodations for students with disabilities.

The Success of Charter Schools with Students with Disabilities

Although charter school staff could list outcome measures they used, only one of the 32 schools we visited, a large conversion elementary school with close ties to its sponsoring district, could provide outcome data for students with disabilities. In fact, few schools had compiled outcome data for any of their students. And except for the one conversion school, those that had compiled data for all students had not disaggregated the data for students with disabilities. Some of the visited schools were in their first year of operation and had not yet had the opportunity to develop databases of student outcomes. Most, however, had not looked systematically at data or rigorously addressed their charter's accountability plan. These schools relied on anecdotes for evidence of success. Thus anecdotal evidence is what we can report in regard to the success of charter schools in serving students with disabilities.

[4] Plans developed under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended.

Anecdotal Evidence of Success

Administrators at nearly two-thirds of the visited schools and teachers at approximately half reported confidently that their school had been successful in assisting students with disabilities achieve the goals the school had set for them. For example, when asked how successful they had been with students with disabilities, one administrator said, "Tremendously successful—I think we've done a dynamic job." Another said, "Here students get the opportunity to shine—the program allows them to be successful." And another said simply, "Special needs students are doing great." One administrator said that his charter school was such a good place for students with disabilities that some of these students did not need "the level of special education that they had had in the public schools." A teacher from one school said the school was very successful in meeting the needs of students with disabilities because "we want them to be successful, so we do whatever is needed for them to be a success." An administrator explained that students with disabilities were provided a modified curriculum, and with that curriculum they "did very well, and in some cases, they were off the chart." Another indicated that they were more successful with students with disabilities than nondisabled students because "we *have* to spend time with them."

Parents of students with disabilities reported, even more strongly than teachers and administrators, that the charter schools were successful in meeting their goals for their child. Parents at approximately three-fourths of the visited schools described areas of significant growth, including academic, behavioral, and social. One parent said, "If I was one of the people who founded the charter school, it couldn't be any better than it is now, and I'm hard to please!" Another parent was so pleased with the impact of the charter school that he said the positive outcomes went beyond those he saw in his child: "This school has not only saved our child, but also our family." Still another was so impressed with the results she had observed in her two children with disabilities, she said, "I could go on and on, this has been such a gift for both of them."

Parents enumerated indicators of their charter school's success. At approximately half the visited schools, parents reported that success was evident by their children's improved academic performance and better grades, that their children's behavior and attitude had improved, and that they had noticed an increase in their children's self-esteem and motivation since attending the charter school. In the words of one parent, "I used to have to drag him out of bed to go to school and scream at him to do homework. Now, he gets ready by himself and reads for fun." At almost every visited school, parents reported that their children liked attending the charter school. Other indicators of the school's success with students with disabilities noted by parents were the children's improved social relations and the positive comments received from teachers.

Students also reported on successes they had had since enrolling in a charter school. Students at more than half the schools reported that their grades had improved and that they were learning new skills and gaining knowledge. One student reported that he was "testing out of classes left and right." Another student at a dropout prevention school said that he had made three years of academic progress in just one year. Students at a few schools noted that they had improved their interpersonal skills and were making new friends. Other successes reported by students were improved self-confidence and success in extracurricular activities. A student at one school had experienced so much success at his charter school that he stated, "Where the public school brought me down, this charter school has fixed in one year."

Some Limits to Success

Not all students with disabilities were doing well at all the charter schools we visited, according to respondents. At least one respondent at approximately one-third of the visited schools spoke of the lack of success for some students with disabilities. One administrator said, "I still see some students

struggling," and another stated that while the social and emotional needs of students with disabilities had been met, the school had not been as successful in helping them to become independent learners. Still another said, "Reality is that regular students are better served than special education students." And another commented that while all students were showing growth, the students with disabilities were not achieving at the same rate as students without disabilities. A teacher from one school stated that she felt the school was successful with only 40 to 50 percent of the students with disabilities, and another teacher said of her school, "I question sometimes whether or not we're giving them all they need—it depends on the child." Parents and the students with disabilities themselves at a few schools stated that the students had experienced no success at the charter school.

Because respondents' conclusions regarding the success of students with disabilities are based on anecdotal evidence, their accuracy is difficult to evaluate. The balanced statements of many respondents likely depict the situation most accurately at many schools. For example, an administrator stated that students with disabilities "are doing as much as they are able to do," but they were not showing as much growth as students without disabilities. Similarly, another administrator said that students with disabilities did not perform "quite as well as other students, but they do acceptably well." A teacher stated that the outcomes "appear to be the same," but pointed out that the curriculum had been modified for students with disabilities. Another teacher said that while students with and without disabilities had positive outcomes, students with disabilities would do even better if "there was more academic support." Parents at about a fourth of the schools reported that the school had been successful meeting some but not all of their goals. At a few schools, parents explained that the school was not meeting some type of academic need, but that the school had been successful in other areas. At several schools, teachers said that they were doing a much better job than other public schools in meeting the needs of special education students, but they wanted to do even better. One teacher's comment sums up the thoughts expressed by many teachers about their success with students with disabilities: "There's always room for improvement."

Integration

One noteworthy sign of a school's success at serving students with disabilities is how well those students are integrated into the overall life of the school. Administrators and teachers at nearly all the visited schools reported that students with disabilities were fully integrated. At one school that had a high percentage of students with disabilities, a teacher said, "They [students with disabilities] are the life of the school." Interestingly, at a few schools, teachers reported that they kept the disability status of students confidential from other students. At only one school did a teacher depict the status of students with disabilities negatively: "[The] only problem is students with disabilities are picked on because they are lower on the pecking order." An administrator at another school stated that students with disabilities were not as well integrated as they should be.

At the majority of visited schools, students with disabilities themselves responded positively to the question of whether they felt they were a part of the charter school. They said they felt accepted by peers and staff. They reported better relationships with other students and with staff than at their previous school. They typically described staff as more helpful and accepting. At a few schools, students indicated that they did not feel accepted at the charter school or that they felt more a part of their previous school. Several students said that they felt more accepted at their previous school. Only one student stated that he got more attention at his previous school.

Facilitators of Success

In this section and the next, we report the replies to direct questions about factors that facilitated or impeded the success of students with disabilities at the charter schools. We asked respondents to

identify factors internal to the school and in the external community. Not surprising, many of the factors that facilitated or impeded success were also identified as differences between the charter schools and the schools students previously attended, which we highlighted earlier in the report. (See Table 5.)

Table 8 summarizes the factors facilitating student success. Caring and dedicated teachers was the factor cited most often by all respondents. At approximately three-fourths of the visited schools, one or more students said that the teachers at the charter school contributed to their achievement because of their caring and their investment in the students' success. One student said dramatically that the teachers at his previous middle school "probably didn't care if you were dead in the hall—they'd step right over you." Students defined caring teachers as friendly and respectful of students as individuals. At most schools, administrators corroborated that teachers were an important facilitating factor. Administrators referred to teachers' commitment to their schools and students and their willingness to "go that extra mile" as factors that helped students with disabilities succeed. Teachers at many schools also reported that it is

Table 8. Factors that facilitate success for charter school students with disabilities, as reported by parents, charter school staff, and students.

Facilitating Factors	Parents	Administrators	Teachers	Students
Internal				
• Caring and dedicated teachers	✓	✓	✓	✓
• Special curriculum focus or instructional approach	✓	✓	✓	
• Small class size	✓	✓	✓	✓
• High level of parent involvement		✓	✓	
• Positive parent-staff relationships	✓			
• Effective discipline	✓	✓		✓
• Individualized instruction	✓	✓	✓	✓
• Self-paced instruction		✓		✓
• Special activities				✓
• Safe environment	✓	✓	✓	
• Acceptance of students with disabilities	✓	✓	✓	
• Social relations/friendships among students	✓			✓
• Resources/materials/facilities	✓		✓	✓
• Challenging academics				✓
• Easy academics				✓
• Special education services			✓	✓
• Schedule	✓			✓
• Rule flexibility	✓			✓
External				
• Availability of educational resources in the community	✓	✓	✓	
• Good relationship with local district and/or community		✓	✓	

their dedication to their jobs and their concern and care for their students that helped students perform well. Echoing the sentiment of the student quoted above, a teacher at a different school explained, "They know we care about them—at the regular high school they were just another chair."

At most of the visited schools, parents of students with disabilities also credited their child's achievement to the teachers' dedication, commitment, and caring. Many parents spoke of the importance of the personal relationships that develop between teachers and students, emphasizing how these relationships positively affected student performance. Some parents also reported that their own relationships with teachers at the charter school had made it easier for their child to succeed academically. Open lines of communication between teachers and parents, and more parent involvement in the life of the school in general, helped students achieve.

Administrators, teachers, and parents also reported that the classroom environment and instructional approaches of the charter schools contributed to student achievement. Various respondents pointed out that small school and class size facilitated achievement by giving students an opportunity for more individualized attention, allowing students to progress at their own pace, allowing teachers to tailor their lessons to the individual needs of the students, and encouraging positive social and working relationships among teachers and students. In addition to individualized instruction, teachers and administrators at various schools described other classroom instructional strategies that helped students learn. These strategies, which were each found at only a few of the visited schools, included peer tutoring, thematic instruction, multi-age classrooms, arts-infused instruction, dual language programs, flexible grouping, and an emphasis on hands-on, activity-based learning.

At nearly half the schools, students reported that special activities at their charter school, such a science fairs, field trips, and gardening, facilitated their success. At more than a third of the schools, students reported that their achievement was enhanced by the small class size or the overall small size of the school. Students at slightly less than a third of the schools noted that individualized or self-paced instruction facilitated their successes. At a few schools, students cited the helpfulness of hands-on or interactive instruction or of direct instruction. One student praised her school's self-paced learning program by saying, "You learn for yourself, not because someone is telling you to. If you don't work, it's your own loss." At a few schools, at least one student commented that success came easier at the charter school because the school was less challenging academically.

Barriers to Success

Table 9 summarizes the factors respondents cited that impeded the success of students with disabilities. Administrators and teachers at almost half the visited schools cited lack of funds as one of the most significant barriers to student achievement. They named several types of services their schools were unable to provide, such as tutoring, computer instruction, and transportation. Furthermore, the lack of financial resources limited their schools' ability to buy basic equipment, such as overhead projectors, and basic supplies and materials, such as textbooks, computers, standardized tests, and books on tape, that would improve the achievement of students with disabilities. Staff also described classroom space limitations, lack of playground, and divided campuses as obstacles to student success.

Related to funding, administrators at approximately a fourth and teachers at more than a third of the visited schools identified understaffing and a high teacher turnover rate as problems impeding student success. Administrators at several schools said that they were having a difficult time finding qualified special education personnel within their budgets. Teachers at various schools described the need for counselors, teaching assistants, and qualified special education teachers. In addition to making it difficult for teachers to meet the needs of their students, one teacher explained that understaffing also contributed to job stress by allowing fewer teacher breaks and increasing the demands placed on each teacher.

Table 9. Factors that impede success for charter school students with disabilities, as reported by parents, charter school staff, and students.

Impeding Factors	Parents	Administrators	Teachers	Students
Internal				
• Limited funding or other resources	✓	✓	✓	✓
• Understaffing/lack of qualified staff/high turnover	✓	✓	✓	
• Students' family situations		✓	✓	
• Poor facilities	✓	✓	✓	✓
• Lack of parent involvement		✓	✓	
• Students' behavior and attitude		✓	✓	
• Lack of extracurricular activities	✓		✓	✓
• Instructional approach	✓		✓	✓
• Curriculum limitations	✓			
• Challenging academics				✓
External				
• Poor relationship with local district and/or community	✓	✓	✓	

Although teachers or administrators in a few schools said the charter school's relationship with the local education agency and the surrounding community contributed to students' success at the school, at approximately a third of the visited schools this relationship was cited as an impediment to success. Administrators reported that their school had a negative reputation with the local district or in the community because it was a different kind of school, because it served at-risk students, and because charter schools were viewed as draining resources and "stealing" students from regular schools. One administrator said that this reputation compromised students' chances of future employment, and another reported that the negative public perception of the school hurt enrollment. Several teachers explained that the poor relationship between the district and charter school made their job more difficult and resulted in delays in coordinated services, especially for students with disabilities.

Parents of students with disabilities responded similarly to administrators and teachers when asked to identify factors at the charter school that impeded success, but they identified factors at a frequency that was approximately half that of staff. Thus, at a few schools, parents mentioned lack of funds, limited resources, and poor facilities. They listed several specific examples of needed resources, including computers, internet connections, classroom space, and materials for adaptive and vocational classes. Parents at some schools also mentioned lack of extracurricular activities and a limited curriculum as constraints on their child's educational experience. They would have liked for their child to have an opportunity to participate in foreign language classes, sports teams and clubs, and vocational education classes.

Students at approximately a third of the visited schools also mentioned limited resources or poor facilities as factors that make it difficult for them to do well in their charter schools. Students provided detailed descriptions of the ways in which their facilities and other resources were lacking. Unclean restroom or shower facilities, playgrounds without grass, too few textbooks, and cramped classroom environments were a few of the examples they provided. Students at many schools cited the lunch program, particularly the lack or poor quality of hot lunches. At a few schools, students stated that the charter school was too challenging academically or that the self-directed learning required too much initiative. Students at a few schools also said that the small number of class offerings or the lack of extracurricular activities made it harder for them to do well. Other factors mentioned by students included too few staff or poorly qualified staff, too many distractions in the classroom, and a school environment that was too competitive.

PART IV – CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions presented here emerged from a close examination of a purposive sample of 32 charter schools in 15 states and from a review of other studies that have focused on charter schools and students with disabilities. Consistent with the purpose of the current study and the sampling strategy used, the conclusions are descriptive and do not identify the specific proportion of charter schools that operate in a given way. They paint an accurate picture of the range of practice in charter schools with regard to serving students with disabilities, but they do not necessarily reflect the proportions of characteristics in the total population of charter schools.

The conclusions are divided into two sections. The first section provides a few general conclusions regarding charter schools. Conclusions in the second section focus on students with disabilities in charter schools and are grouped under a few important topics.

General Conclusions About Charter Schools

- Every charter school has its story. Schools are rich and varied in vision, mission, and history.

- Despite their varied characteristics, charter schools are not hotbeds of pedagogical innovation. In particular, charter schools' approaches to curriculum and instruction are not unique, original, or cutting edge when viewed in the national context.

- Charter schools do represent innovation when viewed in their local contexts. Most charter schools have developed in response to local needs and to solve local problems. The academic approaches charter school developers use are often innovative in the locales where they use them.

- Charter schools also offer innovation when viewed outside the lens of curriculum and instruction. Charter schools are innovative in staffing, scheduling, program focus, and strategies that engage students in the school environment.

- Charter schools have varying approaches to attracting students. Some target specific populations, such as students at risk of dropping out of school or Spanish speakers. Other schools offer a special curriculum, a specific type of instruction, a particular educational philosophy, or a convenient location. Some conversion charter schools continue to serve mainly students in their original attendance area.

- Charter schools are not necessarily operating as described in their charters. Schools evolve in response to a variety of bureaucratic, fiscal, instructional, and management realities. Some of the evolution also occurs as schools adjust to the student population that actually enrolls, as opposed to the population anticipated when the charter was written.

- At most charter schools, staff emphasize the importance of their relationships both with students and parents. These relationships are facilitated by low student-teacher ratios that allow teachers to spend more time with students and their parents.

- Charter schools generally have traditional governance structures. Charter school boards hire, and then delegate most management to, a principal or director. Other staff have varying degrees of input into the day-to-day running of the school.

- Charter school developers find space where they can, and that space, often designed for other purposes, is sometimes less than fully adequate as a school facility. Some facilities are not fully accessible for all individuals with disabilities.

- Charter schools are monitoring student progress, but they are relying mostly on statewide standardized testing programs in which they are required to participate. Many schools do not systematically measure student academic outcomes. Although many charter schools pay attention to student social and affective issues, they do not assess these as outcomes.

Conclusions Related to Students with Disabilities

Enrollment Decisions

- Throughout the nation, parents are enrolling their children with mild disabilities in charter schools. This enrollment occurs even in schools that do not offer special education services, provide individualized education programs (IEPs), or provide due process protections for those students.

- Charter school enrollment of students with more significant disabilities is relatively rare, except in schools specifically designed for these students.

- Parents of students with disabilities enroll their child in a charter school for a combination of reasons related to attractive features of the charter school and negative experiences with the previously attended school. Dissatisfaction with a previous school is the more potent influence. This dissatisfaction may relate to the school in general or specifically to special education services.

- Few charter schools offer specific orientation for parents of prospective students with disabilities.

Attitudes Toward Special Education and Students with Disabilities

- When they began their charter schools, a few operators believed that they were exempt from special education rules and regulations. Consequently, they did not educate themselves initially about providing services for students with disabilities. This situation has largely changed, and charter school operators are at least broadly knowledgeable regarding their responsibilities under federal and state law.

- Whether or not they are aware of special education law, staff at some charter schools "counsel" parents of some students with disabilities against enrolling in the charter school. Staff give various reasons for discouraging certain applicants, including lack of fit between the student's needs and the school's curriculum or instructional approach, concern about behavior problems, an inadequate student-staff ratio, or lack of needed related services.

- Rather than excluding students with disabilities, some charter schools specifically target these students and other at-risk learners. Others attract these students because of their curriculum or instructional approach or because of parent dissatisfaction with the regular public schools in the area. Some charter schools are enrolling more students with disabilities and other at-risk learners than the developers had expected or intended to serve.

Identifying Students with Disabilities

- Determining a student's disability status at enrollment can be problematic, particularly when a charter school operates as an independent district. Parents are not always forthright in informing the charter school about a child's disability status. And, in some cases, unless the charter school makes a specific request with an authorizing parent signature, previous schools decline to release special education records or to inform the charter school that such records exist.

- Most charter schools identify new students with disabilities as the need arises. In doing so, they follow standard procedures consistent with practice in their state or district. Staff from a student's home district or the district where the charter school is located are sometimes involved in identification decisions.

- Parents at some schools report greater responsiveness at the charter school, compared to previous schools, to their requests for testing to determine a disability.

- A few charter schools, including schools that freely admit students with mild disabilities, do not label or identify students with disabilities and do not have any specific services in place for these students. Staff explain these practices by asserting that they do a good job with all students, and that testing and labeling would not improve a student's education in any way, or by pointing to certain features of their programs that allow them to serve students with disabilities effectively without special education. This situation leaves some students with disabilities unidentified in charter schools and leaves their parents unaware of the procedural safeguards provided by state and federal special education laws.

Academic and Related Services

- Most charter schools use the term "inclusion" to describe their approach to serving students with disabilities. In some schools, inclusion is a pedagogical preference, while in others it occurs because of a financial decision not to employ a special educator. Regardless of the motive, the use of the term inclusion varies across schools, and even within schools, and does not necessarily mean students with disabilities are instructed exclusively in general education classrooms.

- Few charter schools offer special education instruction per se that is any better than the special education instruction students received at previously attended schools, according to parents and charter school staff.

- By almost all accounts, students with and without disabilities receive more individualized attention at the charter school than they did at their previous school. Often, this attention is described by parents and staff as an effective substitute for special education services or a reason for a reduced need for special education services.

- Although IEPs for students with disabilities are de-emphasized at many charter schools and nonexistent at some, where they are used, parents generally feel more involved in the IEP process

than they did at the previous school. Some parents also report that their child's IEP is more individualized at the charter school.

- Most students with disabilities attending charter schools are well integrated into the overall life of the school, both academically and socially.

- A full range of related services are offered at some charter schools, and administrators generally report that they will arrange for services if and when they are needed. Services are usually provided by contract employees, although a sponsoring district or a student's resident district sometimes provides these services.

- Some schools with clear needs provide no or few related services, usually for financial reasons. Parents at some of these schools accept responsibility for providing these services independently.

Assessment and Accountability

- Charter schools generally use assessment methods similar to those found in other public schools. Testing accommodations for students with disabilities are those typically used in other public schools, including untimed administration, fewer items, separate settings, and oral presentation or responding.

- Although students with disabilities generally participate in standardized testing programs at their charter schools, few schools report their scores distinctly from general education students' scores or emphasize their scores in assessing individual student outcomes. Instead, they rely on progress reports, portfolios, teacher-made tests, student self-evaluation, and other informal measures.

- Although accountability is a central feature of charters, most schools have little data to document the impact of their program on students with disabilities. Few schools have looked systematically at data for any of their students, even when such an examination of data is described in their accountability plan. The schools rely on anecdotal evidence of success.

Evidence of Student Success

- Staff at most charter schools report that their goals are the same for students with and without disabilities, although some of these staff admit that their goals, though similar, are more modest for students with disabilities.

- At least informally, parents and staff at many charter schools place a special emphasis on interpersonal, attitudinal, or life skills goals for students with disabilities.

- Based on anecdotal evidence, administrators and other staff at most charter schools believe they are successful in assisting students with disabilities to achieve the goals the school has set for them.

- At some schools, staff report academic gains for students with disabilities but say that these gains are not as great as the gains made by peers without disabilities.

- Parents and students with disabilities themselves are even more confident about the students' success at the charter school. They report improvements in academic performance, behavior, attitude, self-esteem, and motivation and are able to articulate differences between the charter

school and previously attended schools. These reports are a "customer satisfaction" indicator of charter school success.

Factors Affecting Student Success

- Caring and dedicated teachers, who communicate openly with students and parents, are widely viewed as the chief facilitators of success for students with disabilities at charter schools and as a feature that distinguishes the charter schools from other public schools. Small school and class size, individualized instruction, specific instructional approaches, and high academic standards are additional beneficial features that are cited frequently by parents, staff, and students.

- The lack of adequate funding is a significant barrier to the success of students with disabilities at some charter schools. Staff and parents blame funding levels for less than adequate staffing, services, transportation, supplies, and materials.

- Strained relationships between charter schools and local districts are often cited as an impediment to the success of students with disabilities. In some situations, communication and coordination of any kind are extremely limited.

- Charter schools often lack extracurricular activities (such as sports, clubs, or band) and specific academic courses (such as foreign languages or laboratory sciences) that are available at other public schools. Some students with disabilities and their parents say they miss these activities and courses. Others report that the students were not involved in these at their previous school anyway due to behavioral or academic problems.

- Transportation is a challenge at many charter schools. Many offer no transportation to any students. Others offer transportation only to students with significant disabilities. Some charter schools that offer transportation to the general population do not provide specialized transportation to those students with disabilities who need it.

APPENDIX

Excerpts of Charter School Operators' Legal Responsibilities Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act As Amended in 1997 and the Charter School Expansion Act of 1998

Excerpts of Charter School Operators' Legal Responsibilities Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act As Amended in 1997 and the Charter School Expansion Act of 1998

Prepared by the U.S. Department of Education[1]

Provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997

Sec. 611. Authorization; Allotment; Use of Funds; Authorization of Appropriations [20 USC 1411]

(f) *State-Level Activities.--*

(4)(A) *Subgrants to local educational agencies for capacity-building and improvement.--* In any fiscal year in which the percentage increase in the State's allocation under this section exceeds the rate of inflation (as measured by the percentage increase, if any, from the preceding fiscal year in the Consumer Price Index For All Urban Consumers, published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the Department of Labor), each State shall reserve, from its allocation under this section, the amount described in subparagraph (B) to make subgrants to local educational agencies, unless that amount is less than $100,000, to assist them in providing direct services and in making systemic change to improve results for children with disabilities through one or more of the following:

(i) Direct services, including alternative programming for children who have been expelled from school, and services for children in correctional facilities, children enrolled in State-operated or State-supported schools, and children in charter schools.

(ii) Addressing needs or carrying out improvement strategies identified in the State's Improvement Plan under subpart 1 of part D.

(iii) Adopting promising practices, materials, and technology, based on knowledge derived from education research and other sources.

(iv) Establishing, expanding, or implementing interagency agreements and arrangements between local educational agencies and other agencies or organizations concerning the provision of services to children with disabilities and their families.

(v) Increasing cooperative problem-solving between parents and school personnel and promoting the use of alternative dispute resolution.

Sec. 612. State Eligibility. [20 USC 1412]

(a) *In General.*--A State is eligible for assistance under this part for a fiscal year if the State demonstrates to the satisfaction of the Secretary that the State has in effect policies and procedures to ensure that it meets each of the following conditions:

(21) *State advisory panel.--*

(A) *In general.*--The State has established and maintains an advisory panel for the purpose of providing policy guidance with respect to special education and related services for children with disabilities in the State.

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[1] In May 2000, the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights published a set of questions and answers regarding the application of federal civil rights laws to public charter schools, that includes several questions about the education of children with disabilities. This document is available by contacting the Office for Civil Rights or by visiting their web site at **http://ed.gov/offices/OCR/ocrprod.html**

(B) *Membership.*--Such advisory panel shall consist of members appointed by the Governor, or any other official authorized under State law to make such appointments, that is representative of the State population and that is composed of individuals involved in, or concerned with, the education of children with disabilities, including--

(i) parents of children with disabilities;

(ii) individuals with disabilities;

(iii) teachers;

(iv) representatives of institutions of higher education that prepare special education and related services personnel;

(v) State and local education officials;

(vi) administrators of programs for children with disabilities;

(vii) representatives of other State agencies involved in the financing or delivery of related services to children with disabilities;

(viii) representatives of private schools and public charter schools;

(ix) at least one representative of a vocational, community, or business organization concerned with the provision of transition services to children with disabilities; and

(x) representatives from the State juvenile and adult corrections agencies.

(C) *Special rule.*--A majority of the members of the panel shall be individuals with disabilities or parents of children with disabilities.

(D) *Duties.*--The advisory panel shall--

(i) advise the State educational agency of unmet needs within the State in the education of children with disabilities;

(ii) comment publicly on any rules or regulations proposed by the State regarding the education of children with disabilities;

(iii) advise the State educational agency in developing evaluations and reporting on data to the Secretary under section 618;

(iv) advise the State educational agency in developing corrective action plans to address findings identified in Federal monitoring reports under this part; and

(v) advise the State educational agency in developing and implementing policies relating to the coordination of services for children with disabilities.

Sec. 613. Local Educational Agency Eligibility. [20 USC 1413]

(a) *In General.*--A local educational agency is eligible for assistance under this part for a fiscal year if such agency demonstrates to the satisfaction of the State educational agency that it meets each of the following conditions:

(1) Consistency with state policies.--The local educational agency, in providing for the education of children with disabilities within its jurisdiction, has in effect policies, procedures, and programs that are consistent with the State policies and procedures established under section 612.

(5) Treatment of charter schools and their students.--In carrying out this part with respect to charter schools that are public schools of the local educational agency, the local educational agency--

(A) serves children with disabilities attending those schools in the same manner as it serves children with disabilities in its other schools; and

(B) provides funds under this part to those schools in the same manner as it provides those funds to its other schools.

(e) *Joint Establishment of Eligibility.*--

(1) *Joint establishment.*--

(B) *Charter school exception.*--A State educational agency may not require a charter school that is a local educational agency to jointly establish its eligibility under subparagraph (A) unless it is explicitly permitted to do so under the State's charter school statute.

Sec. 300.2 Applicability of this part to State, local, and private agencies.
(a) *States.* This part applies to each State that receives payments under Part B of the Act.
(b) *Public agencies within the State.* The provisions of this part --

(1) Apply to all political subdivisions of the State that are involved in the education of children with disabilities, including –

(i) The State educational agency (SEA);

(ii) Local educational agencies (LEAs), educational service agencies (ESAs), and public charter schools that are not otherwise included as LEAs or ESAs and are not a school of an LEA or ESA;

(iii) Other State agencies and schools (such as Departments of Mental Health and Welfare and State schools for children with deafness or children with blindness); and

(iv) State and local juvenile and adult correctional facilities; and

(2) Are binding on each public agency in the State that provides special education and related services to children with disabilities, regardless of whether that agency is receiving funds under Part B.
(c) *Private schools and facilities.* Each public agency in the State is responsible for ensuring that the rights and protections under Part B of the Act are given to children with disabilities--

(1) Referred to or placed in private schools and facilities by that public agency; or

(2) Placed in private schools by their parents under the provisions of Sec. 300.403(c).
(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1412)

Sec. 300.18 Local educational agency.
(a) As used in this part, the term local educational agency means a public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within a State for either administrative control or direction of, or to perform a service function for, public elementary or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision of a State, or for a combination of school districts or counties as are recognized in a State as an administrative agency for its public elementary or secondary schools.
(b) The term includes--

(1) An educational service agency, as defined in Sec. 300.10;

(2) Any other public institution or agency having administrative control and direction of a public elementary or secondary school, including a public charter school that is established as an LEA under State law; and

(3) An elementary or secondary school funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and not subject to the jurisdiction of any SEA other than the Bureau of Indian Affairs, but only to the extent that the inclusion makes the school eligible for programs for which specific eligibility is not provided to the school in another provision of law and the school does not have a student population that is smaller than the student population of the LEA receiving assistance under this Act with the smallest student population.
(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1401(15))

Sec. 300.20 Parent.
(a) *General.* As used in this part, the term parent means--

(1) A natural or adoptive parent of a child;

(2) A guardian but not the State if the child is a ward of the State;

(3) A person acting in the place of a parent (such as a grandparent or stepparent with whom the child lives, or a person who is legally responsible for the child's welfare); or

(4) A surrogate parent who has been appointed in accordance with Sec. 300.515.

(b) *Foster parent.* Unless State law prohibits a foster parent from acting as a parent, a State may allow a foster parent to act as a parent under Part B of the Act if--

(1) The natural parents' authority to make educational decisions on the child's behalf has been extinguished under State law; and

(2) The foster parent-- (i) Has an ongoing, long-term parental relationship with the child; (ii) Is willing to make the educational decisions required of parents under the Act; and (iii) Has no interest that would conflict with the interests of the child.

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1401(19))

Sec. 300.24 Related services.

(a) **General**. As used in this part, the term **related services** means transportation and such developmental, corrective, and other supportive services as are required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education, and includes speech-language pathology and audiology services, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, recreation, including therapeutic recreation, early identification and assessment of disabilities in children, counseling services, including rehabilitation counseling, orientation and mobility services, and medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes. The term also includes school health services, social work services in schools, and parent counseling and training.

(b) **Individual terms defined**. The terms used in this definition are defined as follows:...

(15) **Transportation** includes-

(i) Travel to and from school and between schools;

(ii) Travel in and around school buildings; and

(iii) Specialized equipment (such as special or adapted buses, lifts, and ramps), if required to provide special transportation for a child with a disability.

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1401(22))

Sec. 300.220 Consistency with State policies.

(a) *General.* The LEA, in providing for the education of children with disabilities within its jurisdiction, must have in effect policies, procedures, and programs that are consistent with the State policies and procedures established under Secs. 300.121-300.156.

(b) *Policies on file with SEA.* The LEA must have on file with the SEA the policies and procedures described in paragraph (a) of this section.

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1413(a)(1))

Sec. 300.241 Treatment of charter schools and their students.

The LEA must have on file with the SEA information to demonstrate that in carrying out this part with respect to charter schools that are public schools of the LEA, the LEA will--

(a) Serve children with disabilities attending those schools in the same manner as it serves children with disabilities in its other schools; and

(b) Provide funds under Part B of the Act to those schools in the same manner as it provides those funds to its other schools.

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1413(a)(5))

Sec. 300.312 Children with disabilities in public charter schools.

(a) Children with disabilities who attend public charter schools and their parents retain all rights under this part.

(b) If the public charter school is an LEA, consistent with Sec. 300.17, that receives funding under Secs. 300.711-300.714, that charter school is responsible for ensuring that the requirements of this part are met, unless State law assigns that responsibility to some other entity.

(c) If the public charter school is a school of an LEA that receives funding under Secs. 300.711-300.714 and includes other public schools --

(1) The LEA is responsible for ensuring that the requirements of this part are met, unless State law assigns that responsibility to some other entity; and

(2) The LEA must meet the requirements of Sec. 300.241.
(d)(1) If the public charter school is not an LEA receiving funding under Secs. 300.711-300.714, or a school that is part of an LEA receiving funding under Secs. 300.711-300.714, the SEA is responsible for ensuring that the requirements of this part are met.

(2) Paragraph (d)(1) of this section does not preclude a State from assigning initial responsibility for ensuring the requirements of this part are met to another entity; however, the SEA must maintain the ultimate responsibility for ensuring compliance with this part, consistent with Sec. 300.600.
(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1413(a)(5))

Sec. 300.220 Consistency with State policies.
(a) *General.* The LEA, in providing for the education of children with disabilities within its jurisdiction, must have in effect policies, procedures, and programs that are consistent with the State policies and procedures established under Secs. 300.121-300.156.
(b) *Policies on file with SEA.* The LEA must have on file with the SEA the policies and procedures described in paragraph (a) of this section.
(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1413(a)(1))

Sec. 300.622 Subgrants to LEAs for capacity-building and improvement.
In any fiscal year in which the percentage increase in the State's allocation under 611 of the Act exceeds the rate of inflation (as measured by the percentage increase, if any, from the preceding fiscal year in the Consumer Price Index For All Urban Consumers, published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the Department of Labor), each State shall reserve, from its allocation under 611 of the Act, the amount described in §300.623 to make subgrants to LEAs, unless that amount is less than $100,000, to assist them in providing direct services and in making systemic change to improve results for children with disabilities through one or more of the following:
(a) Direct services, including alternative programming for children who have been expelled from school, and services for children in correctional facilities, children enrolled in State-operated or State-supported schools, and children in charter schools.
(b) Addressing needs or carrying out improvement strategies identified in the State's Improvement Plan under subpart 1 of Part D of the Act.
(c) Adopting promising practices, materials, and technology, based on knowledge derived from education research and other sources.
(d) Establishing, expanding, or implementing interagency agreements and arrangements between LEAs and other agencies or organizations concerning the provision of services to children with disabilities and their families.
(e) Increasing cooperative problem-solving between parents and school personnel and promoting the use of alternative dispute resolution.
(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1411(f)(4)(A))

Sec. 300.651 Membership.
(a) *General.* The membership of the State advisory panel must consist of members appointed by the Governor, or any other official authorized under State law to make these appointments, that is representative of the State population and that is composed of individuals involved in, or concerned with the education of children with disabilities, including--

(1) Parents of children with disabilities;

(2) Individuals with disabilities;

(3) Teachers;

(4) Representatives of institutions of higher education that prepare special education and related services personnel;

(5) State and local education officials;

(6) Administrators of programs for children with disabilities;

(7) Representatives of other State agencies involved in the financing or delivery of related services to children with disabilities;

(8) Representatives of private schools and public charter schools;

(9) At least one representative of a vocational, community, or business organization concerned with the provision of transition services to children with disabilities; and

(10) Representatives from the State juvenile and adult corrections agencies.

(b) *Special rule.* A majority of the members of the panel must be individuals with disabilities or parents of children with disabilities.

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(21)(B) and (C))

Charter School Expansion Act of 1998

Section 10310, Definitions [20 U.S.C.8066]

As used in this part:

(1) The term "charter school" means a public school that--

(A) in accordance with a specific State statute authorizing the granting of charters to schools, is exempted from significant State or local rules that inhibit the flexible operation and management of public schools, but not from any rules relating to the other requirements of this paragraph;

(B) is created by a developer as a public school, or is adapted by a developer from an existing public school, and operates under public supervision and direction;

(C) operates in pursuit of a specific set of educational objectives determined by the school's developer and agreed to by the authorized public chartering agency;

(D) provides a program of elementary or secondary education, or both;

(E) is nonsectarian in its programs, admissions policies, employment practices, and all other operations, and is not affiliated with a sectarian school or religious institution;

(F) does not charge tuition;

(G) complies with the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act;

(H) is a school to which parents choose to send their children, and that admits students on the basis of a lottery, if more students apply for admission than can be accommodated;

Section 10308, Records Transfer

State educational agencies and local educational agencies, to the extent practicable, shall ensure that a student's records and, if applicable, a student's individualized education program, as defined in section 602(11) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1401(11)), are transferred to a charter school upon the transfer of the student to the charter school, and to another public school upon the transfer of the student from a charter school to another public school, in accordance with applicable State law.

Section 10309, Paperwork Reduction

To the extent practicable, the Secretary and each authorized public chartering agency shall ensure that implementation of this part results in a minimum of paperwork for any eligible, applicant, or charter school.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
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