

Abstract Title Page

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Title: Does Charter Status Determine Preferences? Comparing the Hiring Preferences of Charter and Traditional Public School Principals

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Abstract Body

Limit 5 pages single spaced.

Background / Context:

Description of prior research and its intellectual context.

As the most important resource for student learning, the academic success of any school depends on high quality teachers providing high quality instruction. Charter schools generally have more flexibility and fewer constraints in term of school-level decision-making than traditional public schools, particularly around teacher hiring (Podgursky, 2008). They are also often under more pressure to prove their effectiveness than traditional public schools, as charter authorizers have the option of revoking charters and charter schools need to attract parents and students. Charter schools also have the flexibility to design schools around a focused mission, which may impact the type of teachers they want to hire (Hassel, 1999; Manno, Finn, Bierlin, & Vanourek, 1998; Wohlsetter & Griffin, 1998). Although some research exists on recruitment practices and staffing practices (e.g., compensation) in charter schools, we know nothing about whether the increased flexibility and pressure that charter school principals experience results in charter school principals having preferences for hiring different types of teachers.

Purpose / Objective / Research Question / Focus of Study:

Description of the focus of the research.

This paper compares principals' preferences for teacher characteristics across charter and traditional public schools. Although teacher labor markets are receiving more attention from educational researchers, we know little about how principals and school districts make hiring decisions, and virtually nothing about hiring in charter schools. This paper answers the following questions: How do charter principals' reported teacher hiring preferences differ from those of principals of traditional public schools? To what extent do principals' preferences and hiring practices vary by other principal and school characteristics? To what extent are hiring preferences related to student achievement gains?

Setting:

Description of the research location.

The data come from surveys of teachers in charter, magnet, private, and regular public schools. The schools are located in urban, suburban, and rural contexts across 24 states. The schools all participate in the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) assessment program and student achievement data in mathematics, reading, and language usage come from NWEA assessments.

NWEA administers state-aligned, computerized adaptive assessments in *both the fall and spring* of each academic year in reading, language usage, and mathematics. These assessments reference a single, cross-grade, and equal-interval scale developed using Item Response Theory methodology (Hambleton, 1989; Ingebo, 1997; Lord, 1980). The RIT scale is based on strong measurement theory, and is designed to measure student growth in achievement over time. NWEA research provides evidence that the scales have been extremely stable over twenty years (Kingsbury, 2003; Northwest Evaluation Association, 2002, 2003).

Population / Participants / Subjects:

Description of the participants in the study: who, how many, key features or characteristics.

The data come from a final sample of 118 principals in charter and traditional public schools, with a response rate of 78 percent. Surveys were collected from principals in a sample of matched pairs of choice schools and regular public schools. All charter schools in the NWEA were invited to participate in the study. Traditional public schools were matched to charter schools based upon grade range, racial-ethnic and socioeconomic composition, initial achievement scores, and proximity. Within these 118 schools (59 charter and 59 traditional public), our analyses focus on a student sample of over 20,000 students across all grade levels.

Student achievement data come from the NWEA assessments in reading, language usage, and mathematics and also includes student demographic characteristics. The longitudinal nature of the achievement data allow for analyzing both achievement status and growth.

Intervention / Program / Practice:

Description of the intervention, program or practice, including details of administration and duration.

Charter and traditional public schools; principal preferences and characteristics as measured by a teacher survey; student achievement from NWEA assessments

Research Design:

Description of research design (e.g., qualitative case study, quasi-experimental design, secondary analysis, analytic essay, randomized field trial).

Statistical Survey, Quasi-experimental, Statistical Modeling

Data Collection and Analysis:

Description of the methods for collecting and analyzing data.

We first analyze survey data, reporting descriptive statistics for the overall sample and comparing charter and traditional public schools. In addition to reporting descriptive differences, we model variation across schools in principals' focus on hiring and hiring preferences using regression analysis. We model principals' focus on hiring and hiring preferences for teacher characteristics as a function of school type (charter versus traditional public), controlling for principal demographic characteristics and school-level variables. For example, principal's focus on hiring is modeled as a function of school type, mean teacher experience in the school, length of principal tenure in the school, school size, and whether the school added a grade level. Preferences for particular teacher characteristics in hiring are modeled as a function of school type, school average student achievement gain, principal tenure, and school demographic characteristics.

Findings / Results:

Description of the main findings with specific details.

Preliminary analyses indicate that, despite expectations that competitive pressures and flexibility that characterize the environment in which charter school principals work, principal hiring preferences are largely similar across charter and traditional public schools. Charter principals do place more importance on whether a prospective teacher agrees with their school's mission, the teacher's previous teaching experience, and on a teacher's willingness to take on additional responsibilities, and less importance to whether the teacher is certified. However charter and traditional school principals have similar preferences for teachers who are able to contribute to student learning gains, graduated from selective colleges, can work with at-risk students, and participated in alternative certification programs. There is no relationship between hiring preferences and student achievement gains.

There is some descriptive evidence that charter school principals report more focus on teacher hiring than their traditional public school counterparts, although this finding appears to be driven by the fact that charter schools have teachers with fewer years of experience, and

thus higher attrition, causing the principal to spend more time on hiring to replace existing teachers.

Conclusions:

Description of conclusions, recommendations, and limitations based on findings.

This paper provides the first comparison of principals' preferences for teacher characteristics across traditional public and charter schools. Understanding how charter principals' preferences differ from those of public school principals contributes to scholarship on both teacher labor markets and charter schools. One of the first studies of teacher hiring in charter schools, this paper explores whether charter school flexibility and accountability leads to innovations in hiring practices.

Appendices

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Appendix A. References

References are to be in APA version 6 format.

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