National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

ISSUE BRIEF

May 2012
publiccharters.org

A Mission to Serve: How Public Charter Schools Are Designed to Meet the Diverse Demands of Our Communities

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Introduction

The public charter school movement has grown rapidly in the 20 years since the first public charter school opened in 1992, with over 5,600 schools now serving more than two million students. One of the most exceptional developments within the first two decades of the movement has been the rise of high performing public charter schools with missions intently focused on educating students from traditionally underserved communities. Given that the demographics of these communities are often homogenous, it is no surprise the demographics of these schools are that way as well. In fact, the student populations at these public charter schools usually mirror the populations in nearby district schools.[1]

While much media attention rightly has been given to these schools, the past decade or so also has seen a noteworthy rise in high performing public charter schools with missions intentionally designed to serve racially and economically integrated student populations. These schools are utilizing their autonomy to achieve a diverse student population through location-based strategies, recruitment efforts and enrollment processes.

Perhaps most notably, a growing number of cities—and the parents and educators in them—are welcoming *both* types of public charter school models for their respective (and in some cases unprecedented) contributions to raising student achievement, particularly for students who have previously struggled in school. This brief will showcase this development in three of these cities: Denver, Washington, D.C., and San Diego.

Looking at high performing public charter schools that are consciously designed to serve their students—whether in homogenous or diverse environments—underscores that public charter schools can accommodate both models and, in the process, provide more high quality options to our nation's students.

Using Weighted Lotteries to Achieve a Diverse Student Population

A weighted lottery is a mechanism used by several high achieving public charter schools to create diverse student populations. The weighting of specific student attributes—such as free and reduced price lunch (FRL) eligibility—gives a statistical advantage to certain students and ensures that the students reflect the school's mission. It also gives school leaders a way to maintain student diversity as neighborhoods and school programs undergo transitions.

Despite the effectiveness of a weighted lottery in creating a diverse student population, there are significant legal restrictions on its use. At the federal level, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) establishes that public charter schools must use a single lottery if oversubscribed,[2] and the federal Charter Schools Program's (CSP) non-regulatory guidance prohibits the use of weighted lotteries unless required to comply with 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, the equal protection clause of the Constitution, or applicable state law or required to enroll students exercising their Title I choice options under ESEA.[3]

Given the federal statutory and policy barriers, public charter schools that use weighted lotteries to achieve their missions are ineligible for approximately $600,000 in startup funds through the CSP. The federal government must change its policies so these schools may apply for and receive CSP funds. The proposed statutory action below would remove the barrier to using weighted lotteries. However, since the statutory fix likely will not be made until ESEA is reauthorized, the suggested changes to the non-regulatory guidance represent an intermediary step that should be taken.

Statutory: The U.S. Congress should amend the definition of "charter school" in ESEA to permit random selection procedures. Currently, the law defines a "charter school" as one that, among other characteristics, enrolls students through a "random selection process." To date, that process has been interpreted by federal agencies to permit only a single, non-weighted lottery. By amending the language to allow multiple or weighted lotteries, public charter schools that strive to innovate by building diverse student populations would be able to conduct weighted lotteries to achieve the "blend" of students set forth in their missions.

Non-Regulatory Guidance: The U.S. Secretary of Education should create a waiver process that allows charter applicants building diverse student populations to request permission to conduct a weighted lottery. The inquiring school should bear the burden of explaining: its mission, its recruitment and enrollment practices; its belief that a weighted lottery is the best, most narrowly tailored way to achieve its mission; its employee recruitment and hiring practices; and its community outreach. This type of fact-specific, "totality of the circumstances" review is not overly burdensome for the applicant or overly cumbersome for the Secretary's consideration.

Public Charter Schools in Action: High Performing Models Designed to Serve Their Communities

A school's student population is a reflection of the community it serves, and the school leader and school governing board can design a school to draw students from the immediate area or from multiple areas. The following section looks at pairings of high performing school models in Denver, Washington, D.C., and San Diego. Each of the schools employs dramatically different recruitment models to implement their respective missions, but all are posting extraordinary academic results for their students.

Denver

Denver is home to two of the highest performing public charter school networks in Colorado: West Denver Prep (WDP) and Denver School of Science and Technology (DSST) Public Schools. Through rigorous curricula, a commitment to strong school culture, and an absolute focus on academic achievement, both school models have yielded incredible academic growth for their students. In fact, when Denver Public Schools (DPS) published the list of schools that showed the greatest amount of student growth in 2010-2011, seven of the top eight schools were either WDP or DSST schools.

The school models differ in their founding philosophies and the subsequent execution of their respective school missions. Both schools prioritize academics, but each targets a unique student population. WDP schools intentionally seek to serve largely low income families; DSST, by contrast, strives to offer a socioeconomically integrated model serving roughly 50 percent low income families.

West Denver Prep

School Mission: *Success for every student. Through a demanding education of high standards, structure and accountability, West Denver Prep prepares students for educational success from middle school through college.*[4]

Attracting a Student Population

West Denver Preparatory Charter School (WDP) was founded by Denver native Chris Gibbons to address the achievement gap in west Denver public schools. A majority of students in west Denver, many of whom are students of color from low income families, leave the eighth grade significantly behind in math, reading and writing, and continue to struggle with these skills in high school. West Denver Prep was established to change this situation by providing a rigorous, college-preparatory option for students and families.

West Denver Prep currently operates four middle schools, each serving grades 6-8, in southwest and north Denver. Based on its impressive academic performance, WDP has gained national partners that have pledged financial support to enable further expansion of the network. During School Year (SY) 2011-2012, the four West Denver Prep schools served an aggregated student population that is:

- 96 percent students of color
- 91 percent free or reduced-price lunch (FRL) eligible
- 38 percent are English language learners (ELL)

West Denver Prep's average student attrition rate is below 5 percent.

For the two campuses in southwest Denver, West Denver Prep relies heavily on door-to-door recruitment to overcome issues of access and to ensure the neighborhood residents are aware of the schools' academic programs. As DPS implements a centralized open enrollment model for all public schools in Denver (both charter and traditional) beginning in SY 2012-2013, residential preferences likely will be added to West Denver Prep's lottery to better enable each campus's enrollment to reflect the community in which it is located.

Addressing Charges Head-On

According to Gibbons, it is almost impossible for a public charter school to not fall victim to one of two charges: "creaming" or resegregation. If a public charter school selects students with diversity in mind, some argue that it is "creaming" the best students. Conversely, when the West Denver Prep middle schools in north Denver piloted a program to share an attendance zone with a DPS middle school, it eliminated the "creaming" charge, since both the DPS middle school and the West Denver Prep schools were drawing from the same student population. However, as a result, the school serves a homogenous student population, which can lead to charges of resegregation. While serving the community in which the school is located aligns with West Denver Prep's core values, Gibbons notes that if the charter school does not select students with diversity in mind, then homogenous student populations will exist since they mirror the neighborhood characteristics.

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West Denver Prep

Year Founded:
- Charter approved in November 2005
- First middle school opened in August 2006

Number of Schools:
- Four middle schools in SY 2011-2012

Number of Students:
- 1,110 students in grades 6-8 in SY 2011-2012

Weighted Lottery: No

Growth Plans:
- WDP network plans to expand to a total of 12 schools serving 4,000 students in grades 6-12.
- WDP ultimately will operate four school clusters, each made of two middle schools and one high school in neighborhoods of high need around the Denver metro area.
- When all schools are at full capacity, the WDP network will enroll an estimated 10 percent of the secondary school population in the Denver metro area, dramatically increasing the number of low income students prepared for college.

Impact on Student Achievement:
- The network is home to four of the top seven public schools in Denver on the DPS School Performance Framework and to the highest performing school in state for academic growth as measured by the Colorado Growth Model.

DSST Public Schools

School Mission: *DSST Public Schools transforms urban public education by eliminating educational inequity and preparing all students for success in college and the 21st century.*[5]

A Mission Based on Student Achievement and Diversity

DSST is a growing network of public charter schools with a mission founded upon a commitment to building fully integrated schools. Each DSST school's selection process has unique lottery preferences based on free and reduced priced lunch status and neighborhood residence to create a diverse student population.

DSST began with a high school on the campus of the former Stapleton Airport and then expanded to include grades 6-8. All DSST schools offer a rigorous liberal arts curriculum with a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) focus. For the last five years, 100 percent of DSST graduates have been accepted to four-year colleges or universities. Last year, DSST: Stapleton Middle School was not only one of the highest performing schools in Denver, but also was one of just 18 public charter schools from across the country to be honored by the New Leaders for New Schools' Effective Practice Incentive Community (EPIC) program for accomplishing breakthrough student achievement gains. In the first year of operation, DSST: Green Valley Ranch Middle School was the highest performing middle school in Denver, based on the district's school performance framework.

DSST network demographics include:

- 53 percent FRL eligible
- 43 percent Hispanic
- 28 percent African American
- 21 percent Caucasian
- 5 percent Mixed race/other
- 4 percent Asian

DSST's student attrition rate is below 10 percent and DSST: Stapleton ranks among the top five schools in Colorado for having the lowest number of students requiring remedial courses in college (approximately 11 percent).

Opportunities to Increase Access to Quality Schools

The Denver Public Schools's transition to a centralized open enrollment process for all public schools in Denver has created a great opportunity for DSST to become an option for more Denver families. Using a common application through this model,[6] parents submit ranked enrollment requests (indicating their top choices) for all schools within DPS (both district-run and independently operated public charter schools). For SY 2012-2013, there were 3,700 applications for DPS schools, and 1,500 of those applications indicated a DSST school as their #1 preference.

To meet high parental demand, DSST recently opened four more schools: DSST: Green Valley Ranch Middle and High Schools opened in 2010; DSST: Cole Middle School opened in 2011; and DSST: College View is opening in 2012. Each school's lottery preferences are modified based on the location of the school. DSST seeks to enroll a student population that reflects the diversity of the neighborhood in which the school resides. DSST is fortunate to have a strong partnership with DPS—and as a result, four of six schools are in facilities leased from the district.

DSST Public Schools

Year Founded:

- Charter approved in November 2001
- First high school opened in August 2004

Number of Schools:

- Five in SY 2011-2012

Number of Students:

- 1,400 in DSST Public Schools for SY 2011-2012

Weighted Lottery:

- Mixed. Each campus holds a lottery; some are weighted and some are not.

Growth Plans:

- In June 2009, DSST Public Schools was formed to manage a network of Denver public charter schools based on the DSST model.
- DSST Public Schools was granted charters to open four additional campuses, with middle and high schools on each campus.
- Moving forward, a new school will open each fall until five additional DSST campuses are open.

Impact on Student Achievement:

- 100 percent of DSST high school graduates have been accepted to a four-year college, beginning with its first class of graduates in 2008.
- DSST is widely considered to be one of the leading open-enrollment STEM school networks in the U.S.

DSST has been authorized to open two additional middle schools and three more high schools. Given that DSST's enrollment lottery is weighted at most campuses, only one DSST school is eligible to receive funds through the federal Charter School Program grants. DSST has raised $21 million in private funds to meet its expansion goals.

The school model used to create a high quality educational option for students—whether a neighborhood-based school serving a racially and/or economically homogenous student population or a city-wide school serving a racially and economically diverse student population—should be left for school leaders and governing boards to design and for students and their families to choose.

The Resegregation Debate

For years, research has documented growing racial isolation across the nation and in most large school districts,[7] as well as in states without public charter schools.[8] Such increases in segregation are primarily due to changes in desegregation jurisprudence and demographic shifts.

Many public charter school founders have placed themselves in the thick of these well established trends through their strategic decisions to open schools in underserved neighborhoods—that is, neighborhoods with high concentrations of low income students of color and low performing district schools—to help close the nation's persistent academic achievement gaps. As a result, public charter schools across the nation enroll a greater percentage than traditional public schools of low income students (46 percent versus 41 percent[9]), Black and Latino students (27 percent versus 15 percent, and 26 percent versus 22 percent, respectively[10]), and students who perform lower on standardized tests before transferring to public charter schools.[11]

Recently, some academics have begun to attribute resegregation in our country's public education system to these public charter school founders. To pin such a major charge on a set of public charter schools enrolling less than four percent of the nation's public school students misses the mark. Even more problematic is that this charge is based on faulty analyses comparing public charter schools to traditional public schools at the state and metropolitan statistical area levels—comparisons that mask the fact that, more often than not, public charter school enrollment looks remarkably similar to traditional public school enrollment in the same districts and neighborhoods.[12]

For example, in one recent analysis,[13] comparisons of public charter schools and traditional public schools in two states, Illinois and Missouri, show a wide disparity in the percentage of white students enrolled, as well as a large difference in the percentage of Black and Latino students enrolled in highly segregated schools. The analysis uses the data to suggest that public charter schools in Illinois and Missouri are making the public schools more intensely segregated. However, the state-level comparisons do not account for the fact that public charter schools are allowed only to serve students in two urban areas in Missouri—Kansas City and St. Louis—and are located primarily in Chicago in Illinois (91 percent of students enrolled in public charter schools in Illinois attend schools located in Chicago). In both of these examples, the demographic make-up of traditional public schools in the school districts of the big cities is much closer to the composition of public charter schools than critics would have the public believe (see Appendix A).

What's almost always missing from these recent analyses of racial stratification in public charter and traditional public schools is how demographic trends impact student performance—which should be the key question. Since research shows public charter schools outperform traditional public schools in urban areas,[14] our collective focus should be on supporting these high performing public schools as part of larger efforts to improve public education, rather than laying misguided blame on public charter schools for a system-wide phenomenon.

Washington, D.C.

Washington, D.C. has become an epicenter of the public charter school movement. As of SY 2010-2011, 39 percent of all public school students attended a public charter school in D.C., which is the second largest public charter school market share in the nation.[15] As in many cities across the country, for D.C. students, the quality of traditional public education options varies greatly depending on zip code. However, due to the compact size of the city, public charter schools can theoretically draw students from both inside and outside the immediate school neighborhood. Two public charter schools in the following case studies demonstrate the apex of academic achievement among D.C. public charter schools. Neither school uses a weighted lottery system, but instead relies on location-based strategies to reach its desired student population.

Each of the schools employs dramatically different recruitment models to implement their respective missions, but all are posting extraordinary academic results for their students.

Achievement Prep

School Mission: *Achievement Prep prepares students in grades four through eight to excel as high achieving scholars and leaders in high school, college and beyond.*[16]

A Place-Based Mission

Achievement Prep is located in Ward 8, one of the most underserved communities in southeast Washington, D.C. Founder and Head of School, Shantelle Wright, intentionally located the school in this neighborhood to fulfill its mission of providing a high quality public school option to the families in the immediate area—a high poverty and historically African American community.

The student population of this school is:
- 100 percent African American
- 86 percent FRL eligible

The attrition rate for this college preparatory school has averaged about 15 percent.

The college preparatory setup of the school includes a school day that is two hours longer and a school year that is 15 days longer than traditional public schools in the D.C. school system. Achievement Prep includes character education that stresses DREAM values (determination, respect, enthusiasm, accountability, and mastery).

Building a Community within the Neighborhood

To ensure it is serving the families living near the Achievement Prep campus, the school, while open to all District residents, focuses its recruitment strategies within a two- to five-mile radius of the school. The school's outreach consists of mass mailings, door-to-door campaigns, open houses, and placing ads on buses that travel on routes near the school. Despite these efforts, Achievement Prep's most valued recruitment tool is positive word of mouth from current parents and other community members who have embraced and supported the school.

In its initial years, Achievement Prep (now in its fourth year of operation) had to overcome neighborhood residents' loyalty to the traditional district schools (which many of them had attended) in order to attract students. The fact that Achievement Prep is housed in a district school facility that was closed due to under enrollment did not help this obstacle. But as the school proved its academic results and built trust in the community through its direct outreach and face-to-face student recruitment strategies, applications steadily increased and the school has become a staple of the community.

When talking about building her student base, Wright notes that parents appreciate having a high performing public school option in the neighborhood instead of busing their children to the other side of town—a commute that can take over an hour—to access better school options. While racial diversity does not exist at Achievement Prep, Wright says that diversity comes in many forms. Her students, while 100 percent African American, are diverse in home and life experiences, and Achievement Prep is a place where everyone is respected and welcomed. Wright acknowledges that having more racial diversity among the student population would be nice, but that change would need to be reflective of shifts within the broader community surrounding the school. While it would be a red flag if a school located in a diverse community only attracted students of color, that is not the case at Achievement Prep. Wright states that the homogenous student population proudly reflects the neighborhood surrounding the school, and at Achievement Prep they are making high academic gains, often outperforming their peers from more affluent areas of the District. For the leadership at the school, accountability for their students' performance is the bottom line.

Achievement Prep

Year Founded:
- Opened for SY 2008-2009

Number of Schools:
- One

Number of Students:
- 210 students in grades 4-8 in SY 2011-2012

Weighted Lottery: No

Growth Plans:
- Proposes to move down to kindergarten in 2013-2014 – and eventually serve students in grades K-8 at full grade configuration.

Impact on Student Achievement:
- On the 2011 standardized tests (DC-CAS), 60 percent of Achievement Prep scholars scored proficient or advanced in reading, and 87 percent scored proficient or advanced in math.
- Ranked in Tier 1 for meeting standards of high performance in the D.C. Public Charter School Board's Performance Management Framework.
- Recipient of 2011 EPIC Award–Silver Gain Status.

E.L. Haynes Public Charter School

School Mission: *Every E.L. Haynes student of every race, socioeconomic status, and home language will reach high levels of academic achievement and be prepared to succeed at the college of his or her choice. Every E.L. Haynes student will be adept at mathematical reasoning, will use scientific methods effectively to frame and solve problems, and will develop the lifelong skills needed to be successful individuals, active community members, and responsible citizens.*[17]

Diversity by Design

E.L. Haynes, a year-round school serving grades pre-school through nine, with plans to grow through grade 12, is based on a mission that encompasses racial, socioeconomic and home language diversity. The school founders felt it was imperative to create a school that addressed the low graduation rates and lack of college readiness achieved in D.C. schools, and set out to demonstrate that students from all backgrounds could succeed academically—and close the achievement gap within a single school. Located in a central neighborhood that is accessible by the city's public bus and subway systems, the school is able to attract families of various ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds from every ward in D.C. The SY 2010-2011 student population at E.L. Haynes is extremely diverse:

- 54 percent African American
- 31 percent Hispanic
- 12 percent Caucasian
- 3 percent Asian/Pacific Islander
- 70 percent FRL eligible
- 16 percent ELL

The student attrition rate is less than 10 percent.

However, maintaining a diverse student population requires consistent effort. As the school has grown its academic track record, more affluent families with young children hoping to stay in D.C. to raise their families are applying for the lottery. In 2012, E.L. Haynes received over 2,000 applications; 700 of those were for only 40 seats in pre-school and pre-kindergarten. As a result, the elementary program at E.L. Haynes has a lower FRL rate than the older grades.

E.L. Haynes does not administer a weighted lottery, even though it would aid in maintaining the school founders' goal of mirroring D.C.'s demographics (i.e., serving 65 percent or more of students of color who are FRL eligible). The legal permissibility of operating a weighted lottery remains unclear under D.C. statute; and, the denial of CSP start-up funds would have restricted dramatically the school's opening and initial operation. As a result, the school's board of trustees has not previously and is not now considering instituting a weighted lottery at this time.

Instead, the school creates a diverse student population by ensuring a diverse lottery pool through deliberate recruitment efforts. While E.L. Haynes provides ample information about the school on its website and at frequent open houses for families, the staff members focus their outreach and recruitment in non-English speaking and low income communities throughout the city to make sure families not yet aware of E.L. Haynes learn that it is a choice for their children. Ultimately, E.L. Haynes seeks to demonstrate that a high performing school can be non-preferential with its student population, reflecting and cultivating the Jeffersonian ideal of a diverse yet unified community.

Data-Driven Academic Results

The rigorous academic programming at the school builds on a year-round instructional delivery model to maximize learning time. In addition to the mandated 1,200 hours of education that a typical D.C. student receives, E.L. Haynes students have access to an additional 1,000 hours of acceleration and enrichment activities through before-school, after-school, and eight weeks of intersession programming. Every student who qualifies for FRL can attend these additional hours free of charge.

The staff at E.L. Haynes relies on the rigorous use of data to drive continuous improvement. Through ongoing student assessment and data-driven instruction, E.L. Haynes tracks and promotes growth for every one of its students, including all the disaggregated reporting subgroups designated by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Critics of schools with diverse student populations have charged that affluent, white students "carry" the lower performing groups and claim this phenomenon is masked by reporting aggregated student performance data. However, E.L. Haynes's regular analysis of each student's assessment data monitors, nurtures and ultimately confirms the high academic performance of each subgroup represented in its student population. This culture of data-driven decision-making is critical for the school to achieve its ultimate goal of having every student prepared to major in any degree at the college of his or her choice upon graduation from E.L. Haynes.

E.L. Haynes Public Charter School

Year Founded:
- Opened in SY 2004-2005

Number of Schools: One
- Georgia Avenue Campus houses the upper elementary (3rd–5th) and middle school (6th–8th) programs
- Kansas Avenue Campus houses the early childhood program (PS–2nd) and high school

Number of Students:
- 800 students in pre-school-9th grade in SY 2011-2012

Weighted Lottery: No

Growth Plans:
- The school is adding a grade each year to serve 1,100 students through 12th grade.

Impact on Student Achievement:
- In 2011, 77 percent of students scored proficient or advanced in math on the DC-CAS and 65 percent scored proficient or advanced in reading; eighth graders scored 90 percent proficient or advanced in math and 76 percent proficient or advanced in reading.
- Ranked in Tier 1 for meeting standards of high performance in the D.C. Public Charter School Board's Performance Management Framework.

…the incredible academic and character impact both these public charter schools have had on their graduates has ensured their programs continue to receive the necessary funding.

San Diego

Families residing in the greater San Diego area have access to two high quality public charter school models that have unique missions for their students. Both schools have enrollment preferences in the admission process. The Preuss School is designed to serve only students from low income backgrounds who will be first-generation college students. This model results in a student population that is 100 percent low income and predominantly of color. In contrast, High Tech High, which was granted a statewide charter enabling it to grow into a network of K-12 schools, employs a weighted lottery using an algorithm that gives preference to multiple factors, including residential zip code, to create a diverse student population.

The admission methods used by the Preuss School and High Tech High disqualify them from federal startup funding through CSP. Accordingly, both public charter schools have engaged in extensive fundraising efforts to grow and sustain their schools. Notably, through their financial outreach, both schools have created an extensive and dedicated network of supporters. And the incredible academic and character impact both these public charter schools have had on their graduates has ensured their programs continue to receive the necessary funding.

Preuss School UCSD

School Mission: *The mission of the Preuss School is to improve educational practices and provide an intensive college preparatory school for low income student populations, which are historically underrepresented on the campuses of the University of California.*[18]

A Mission to Serve First-Generation College-Bound Students

The Preuss School began when a group of faculty from the University of California San Diego (UCSD) began brainstorming the best way to increase the number of students in the university who come from low income or under-represented groups. The faculty group approached the UCSD Chancellor and requested a public charter school for students in grades 6-12 be built and run by the university.

The Chancellor believed it was the mission of a land-grant university to find ways to better prepare young students for admission and success at UCSD, so he brought the public charter school proposal before the faculty senate. It was agreed the university could run the school if the founding group could find the money to build the school's campus and run it with financial self-sufficiency.

The resulting Preuss School UCSD, named for the donors that largely financed the new school facility, is an intensive college preparatory academic program specifically designed to serve only students from low income backgrounds who will be first-generation college students.

Mission Accomplishments

The SY 2011-2012 student population at Preuss School is as follows:
- 67 percent Hispanic
- 11 percent African American
- 19 percent Asian/Indo-Chinese
- 3 percent Caucasian/Other
- 100 percent are FRL eligible

The attrition rate for grades 9-12 is between six and eight percent.

Principal Scott Barton feels the key to the school's success is setting high expectations and giving students access to a rigorous curriculum. There is no tracking

system; if an Advanced Placement course is offered, everyone in the grade takes it. The school also offers a longer school year and intensive supports, including over 100 tutors from UCSD available for after-school and weekend tutoring. Barton notes the Preuss School's culture of success becomes ingrained in its students; even those who leave the Preuss School to attend other district high schools still graduate and many go on to college.

The school has demonstrated tremendous academic success. In June 2011, the Preuss School UCSD was named the nation's top "Miracle High School" by *Newsweek* magazine.[19] The Preuss School was given the No. 1 spot among what the magazine calls "transformative schools." The Preuss School also placed 34th in the overall national ranking for high schools in the United States. In the class of 2011, 95 percent of the graduates have been admitted to a four-year college or university and have attracted over $2 million in private scholarships and grants.

Preuss School UCSD

Year Founded:
- The school opened for grades 6-8 in SY 1999-2000

Number of Schools:
- One

Number of Students:
- 815 students in grades 6-12 in SY 2011-2012

Weighted Lottery: No

Growth Plans: No

Impact on Student Achievement:
- In June 2011, the Preuss School UCSD was named the nation's top "miracle high school" by Newsweek magazine.
- 95 percent of the class of 2011 has been accepted to a four-year college or university.

High Tech High

School Mission: *High Tech High's mission is to develop and support innovative public schools where all students develop the academic, workplace, and citizenship skills for postsecondary success.*[20]

Constructing a Weighted Lottery

High Tech High (HTH) began as a single public charter high school in 2000 and has grown into a network of 11 schools in the San Diego region serving grades K-12. Every HTH school in the network strives to "serve a student body that mirrors the ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of the local community."[21]

To achieve this goal, HTH uses a weighted lottery run by zip code clustering. HTH has found zip codes are a reliable indicator of socioeconomic status (SES). Therefore, unlike many other schools running weighted lotteries, HTH doesn't factor FRL eligibility into its lottery. Larry Rosenstock, Founding Principal and CEO of HTH, observes that since zip codes are a federally assigned number and also are used in federal census data collection, they comprise an immunized SES proxy that yields a more accurate sense of the school community's neighborhoods of residence than do typical attendance zones. Using zip codes also helped HTH avoid legal trouble, since California state law (Prop. 209) prohibits public institutions from using race or ethnicity in decision-making.

Despite the degree of control afforded by using a weighted lottery, Rosenstock notes it is difficult to achieve the right initial balance of SES/ethnic background, and it is even harder to remediate an imbalance in the future. So he emphasizes that the initial lottery weighting and preferences must be carefully devised. For instance, the initial HTH class attracted more male applicants to the STEM curriculum, so a female gender preference was added to the lottery. When enrolling the second class, there were an equal number of male and female applicants, so the school adjusted its preferences and no longer used gender-based weighting in the selection lottery.

Rewards

High Tech High serves an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse population:
- 65 percent students of color
- 38 percent FRL eligible

HTH has an attrition rate of less than 5 percent.

Recognizing a weighted lottery alone could not build student diversity, HTH locates its school buildings to attract and maintain a diverse community. Specifically, since San Diego's downtown residents do not skew significantly toward one ethnic group and since downtown is accessible to families living outside the immediate area, HTH campuses are sited in the center of town.

The attention to attracting a diverse student population also has supported the school's focus on STEM subjects. High Tech High originally was conceived by a group of 40 civic and high tech industry leaders in San Diego, assembled by the Economic Development Corporation and the Business Roundtable, to meet the challenge of finding qualified individuals for the high tech work force. In particular, members were concerned about the "digital divide" that resulted in low numbers of women and ethnic minority groups entering the fields of math, science, and engineering. Currently, about 35 percent of HTH graduates are first-generation college students, and over 30 percent of

HTH alumni enter math or science fields (vs. a 17 percent national rate). The school boasts both a 100 percent graduation rate and a 100 percent college acceptance rate.

High Tech High

Year Founded:
- Original High Tech High opened in SY 2000-2001
- Statewide Benefit Charter approved in 2006

Number of Schools:
- Network of 11 schools in SY 2011-2012 (five high, four middle, and two elementary schools)

Number of Students:
- 4,569 students in grades K-12 in SY 2011-2012

Weighted Lottery: Yes

Growth Plans:
- Receipt of Statewide Benefit Charter enables 10 additional HTH campuses.

Impact on Student Achievement:
- 100 percent of HTH's graduates have been admitted to college, with approximately 80 percent admitted to four-year programs.

Conclusion

There is not one way to close the achievement gap, nor is there one school model that does it better than all the rest. To conclude otherwise oversimplifies the relentless hard work it takes to build strong school culture, engage and inspire families and communities, and nurture high performing students. By providing a variety of innovative models, public charter schools are emphasizing the importance of offering high quality choices to empower students and families to access the type of school, environment, curriculum, culture, and academic opportunities desired.

In the end, the school model used to create a high quality educational option for students—whether a neighborhood-based school serving a racially and/or economically homogenous student population or a city-wide school serving a racially and economically diverse student population—should be left for school leaders and governing boards to design and for students and their families to choose. In all cases, what matters most is both simple and clear: providing high quality public education to public charter school students.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Anna Nicotera at NAPCS for her significant contributions in developing this paper. We owe a particular debt of gratitude to the school leaders who took time out of their tremendously packed days to share insight, provide feedback, teach us their innovations, and inspire us to think creatively and expansively:
- Chris Gibbons and Camille Howells, West Denver Prep (westdenverprep.org)
- Christine Nelson and Bill Kurtz, DSST (dsstpublicschools.org)
- Jennie Niles, E.L. Haynes (elhaynes.org)
- Josh Densen, Bricolage Academy (bricolageacademy.wordpress.com)
- Kriste Dragon, Citizens of the World Charter School (www.citizensoftheworld.org)
- Larry Rosenstock, High Tech High (hightechhigh.org)
- Scott Barton, Preuss School UCSD (preuss.ucsd.edu)
- Shantelle Wright, Achievement Prep (aprepacademy.org)

By providing a variety of innovative models, public charter schools are emphasizing the importance of offering high quality choices to empower students and families to access the type of school, environment, curriculum, culture, and academic opportunities desired.

Appendix A

Percentage of Students Enrolled in Illinois and Missouri, by Racial/Ethnic Group, 2010-2011

		White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other
Illinois						
State	CPS	4.4%	60.0%	32.3%	1.2%	2.1%
	TPS	52.3%	17.6%	22.6%	4.2%	3.4%
Chicago	CPS	2.0%	61.0%	34.6%	0.8%	1.6%
	TPS	8.6%	42.7%	43.6%	3.2%	1.8%
Missouri						
State	CPS	10.0%	78.2%	9.7%	1.3%	0.2%
	TPS	76.1%	15.7%	4.4%	1.9%	1.9%
Kansas City	CPS	8.6%	73.1%	16.0%	1.8%	0.1%
	TPS	8.9%	66.5%	21.8%	2.5%	0.2%
St. Louis	CPS	11.2%	82.8%	4.0%	0.8%	0.2%
	TPS	12.8%	81.1%	3.4%	2.2%	0.2%

Note: CPS means charter public school; TPS means traditional public school.

Source: Source: National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. (2011). Public charter schools dashboard. Washington, DC: Author.

1. Zimmer, Ron, Brian Gill, Kevin Booker, Stephane Lavertu, Tim R. Sass, & John White. (2009). *Charter schools in eight states: Effects on achievement, attainment, integration, and competition.* Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.
2. Section 5210 of ESEA Part B, Subpart 1, defines a charter school as a school "that admits students on the basis of *a lottery*, (emphasis added) if more students apply for admission than can be accommodated [.]" The Office of General Counsel has interpreted the phrase "a lottery" to require a single, non-weighted lottery.
3. Specifically, Section E-3 of the federal non-regulatory CSP Guidance, revised in April 2011, addresses the question of weighted lotteries:

   E-3. Are weighted lotteries permissible?

   Weighted lotteries (lotteries that give preference to one set of students over another) are *permitted only when they are necessary to comply* (emphasis added) with 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, the equal protection clause of the Constitution, or applicable State law.

   In addition, a charter school may weight its lottery *in favor of students seeking to change schools under the public school choice provisions of Title I,* (emphasis added) part A of the ESEA for the limited purpose of providing greater choice to students covered by those provisions. For example, a charter school could provide each student seeking a transfer under title I with two or more chances to win the lottery, while all other students would have only one chance to win. 20 U.S.C. 7221i(1)(H).
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