

CHARTER SCHOOL SUCCESS OR

SELECTIVE OUT-MIGRATION OF LOW-ACHIEVERS?

EFFECTS OF ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT



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# CHARTER SCHOOL SUCCESS OR SELECTIVE OUT-MIGRATION OF LOW-ACHIEVERS? EFFECTS OF ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT<sup>1</sup>

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1 Term of Art found in “The Boston Foundation Report”



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Boston's "high-performing" Commonwealth charter schools appear to be contributing to a two-track educational system that is segregating students based on language proficiency, special education status and poverty. The result is that Commonwealth charter schools appear to be operating largely as publicly funded private schools.

While students may be selected through a lottery system, actual application and acceptance appears to be predicated on such practices as participating in parent or student school visits and pre-lottery interviews, parental behavior contracts and acceptance of rigid discipline codes.

In addition, the claims of high performance appear to result from significant student attrition resulting from the use of "pushout" strategies based on student academic and/or behavioral performance. The promoting power of these schools puts them in the category of "dropout factories."

This study provides policymakers with answers to two key questions:

## **1. WHO IS ACTUALLY BEING SERVED – AND NOT SERVED – BY BOSTON CHARTER SCHOOLS?**

Despite claims made in a recent report by The Boston Foundation that charter school lotteries give all potential students an equal chance to attend, the enrollment data do not reflect the diversity of students in the Boston Public Schools. An analysis of the demographic characteristics of Boston charters in general, but more specifically the "high-performing" charter schools identified in three recent reports (referred to here as Boston Charter Report Schools, or BCRS), identify a student population that includes:

- Virtually no limited English proficient students.
- Lower percentages of special education students than the Boston Public Schools. Of the special education students enrolled in BCRS, there are
  - Almost exclusively special education students with mild learning disabilities whose needs are addressed through full inclusion in regular education classrooms.
  - Virtually no students with moderate learning disabilities whose needs are addressed through partial inclusion in regular education classrooms and instruction in substantially separate classrooms.
  - Virtually no special education students with severe learning disabilities whose learning needs are met in substantially separate classrooms.
- Significantly lower percentages of the poorest students, those receiving free lunch, than the Boston Public Schools.
- Twice the percentage of less poor students, those eligible for reduced-price lunch, than the Boston Public Schools.
- A higher percentage of students ineligible for either free or reduced-price lunch than the Boston Public Schools.

## **2. WHAT ARE THE ODDS OF A STUDENT ENTERING A HIGH-PERFORMING CHARTER SCHOOL SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETING THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM OFFERED?**

Boston's Commonwealth charter schools have significantly weak "promoting power," that is, the number of seniors is routinely below 60 percent of the freshmen enrolled four years earlier. Looking at it another way, for every five freshmen enrolled in Boston's charter high schools in the fall of 2008 there were only two seniors: Senior enrollment was 42 percent of freshmen enrollment. In contrast, for every five freshmen enrolled in the Boston Public Schools that fall there were four seniors: Senior enrollment was 81 percent of freshmen enrollment.

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan recently described "dropout factories" as schools where "two out of five of their freshmen are not enrolled at the start of their senior year."<sup>2</sup> By this standard, all of the Boston charter high schools and middle-high schools are "dropout factories."

Claims of high performance on the part of some of these schools appear to be the result of significant student attrition. One measure of success used by all BCRS is Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) performance. However, the lauded results represent the performance of a fraction of the entering students who remain in the school's upper grades. Struggling students – those not making the grade because of academic performance and/or behavioral issues – leave.

The excessively high student attrition rates at these schools are described in the report by The Boston Foundation as "selective attrition" and "selective out-migration of low achievers." In other words, over the course of time, the majority of students who have "won" the lottery and gained admission to these charter schools leave and for the most part are not replaced by students on the waiting list.

At the same time, a second measure of success claimed by BCRS is that all or most students are accepted to four-year colleges. There is no admission that these claims are based on less than the full complement of enrolled students. For example, the claim by MATCH Charter School that 99 percent of its graduates are accepted to four-year colleges is misleading. In the first six graduating classes, no more than 136 students out of 367 entering students completed the curriculum.<sup>3</sup> At this rate, only 37 percent of students entering have been accepted in four-year colleges as MATCH seniors, a number that is no better than that of most urban high schools, and significantly worse than the Boston Public Schools.

We have no idea what happened to the 50 percent of students who didn't make it through these charter schools, but we could hazard a guess that MCAS performance and college-sending rates for the traditional public schools would also be much higher if schools could establish requirements that encourage weaker students to leave. They cannot, nor should they, but charter schools can and do. This alone may be enough to explain any differences in MCAS scores and college acceptance rates, where they exist.

Policymakers should refuse to approve charters for schools that systematically accept large numbers of students in their entry year, fail to replace students who leave with those on the waiting list and appear to exclude students based on first language and disability status.

## QUESTIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

1. Should charter schools be a vehicle for creating a discriminatory two-tiered educational system that sorts students by disability, language and poverty status so that only district schools are serving the neediest students?
2. Should charter schools be allowed to “funnel” students through their grades by accepting large numbers of students in the entry year and then implementing strategies that systematically reduce the ranks of those who fail to meet the academic or behavioral norms of the school?
3. Should charter schools be allowed to report they have waiting lists after they have admitted their full complement of students during the entry year if they have no intention of admitting students in subsequent years even if their enrollment declines?

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, we recommend changes to charter school statutes and regulations in three broad areas: Integrity, Transparency and Equity. If charter schools are public schools, then they must be held to the same acceptance and enrollment standards as district schools.

Furthermore, given that promoting power and student attrition issues at charter schools are significant and the “selective out-migration of low-achievers” may be contributing to claims of charter school success, these schools must be accountable not only to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) but to the local school district’s decision makers, municipal leaders, and taxpayers. To that end, charter schools should be subject to a local approval process to prevent such schools from opening over the objections of the local taxpayers who must fund them and the local school committee charged with providing all students within the district with a high-quality public education.

### Integrity:

1. Discrimination should not be permitted in any form. Charter schools should be required to fairly serve all students, including special needs children, English language learners, low-income students and those at risk of dropping out.
2. Application to a Commonwealth charter school may not be based on parental or student interviews.
3. Acceptance to a Commonwealth charter school may not be based on parental contracts, student contracts or other practices designed to exclude students who may not fit prior to or after the lottery.

### Transparency:

1. The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) must deny renewal of a charter to schools where student attrition rates match or exceed the dropout rates in the district schools.
2. Commonwealth charter schools must be required to fill vacancies with students from the waiting list at any time during the school year or at any grade level for which a vacant seat is available.
3. If no waiting list exists or if no students on the waiting list are willing to transfer, then the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education should consider amending the charter to reduce the number of students allowed at the school.
4. Commonwealth charter schools must provide on an annual basis to the sending school district superintendent, student demographic data filed with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education regarding the actual number of students in each grade by race, gender, language, special needs, and poverty status.
5. Commonwealth charter schools must report on an annual basis to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and to the sending school district superintendent the actual number of students who exited the school by race, gender, language, special needs and poverty status and the specific reason for each departure.
6. Commonwealth charter schools must report on an annual basis all assets and the amount and source of all non-tuition funding.
7. Commonwealth charter schools must report on an annual basis all executive compensation packages to school managers and administrators and compensation to board members.

### Equity:

1. Commonwealth charter schools must provide all students with an education addressing the learning standards of all seven Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.
2. Commonwealth charter schools may not counsel out or push out students based on either minor behavior infractions or poor academic performance.
3. New charters and charter renewals must be approved by a majority of the school committee in the host district. For regional charters, a majority of sending districts' school committees must approve a new charter or a renewal.

## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The research for this study has raised issues about charter school practices that could be the basis of further study to better inform policymakers about the practices within charter schools and their effect on district schools include:

1. The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education has raised the issue of teacher attrition at Commonwealth charter schools, and research studies have indicated that teacher attrition in charters may be over 200 percent higher than that in traditional public schools. What are the causes and costs of high teacher attrition in charter schools?
2. Given the high rates of student attrition in these schools, what happens to those who leave Commonwealth charter schools? How are “peer effects” changed within the school as a result of their leaving?
3. The enabling charter school legislation clearly indicates that charter schools are to be “innovative” in their instructional practices.<sup>4</sup> As a consequence of this research, it has become apparent that instruction tends to be dominated by the old practice of whole class instruction that is teacher-centered and teacher-led – most often referred to in the pedagogical research as “direct instruction” advocated by Sigmund Engelmann in the 1960s.<sup>5</sup> An area for further study could focus on the effects of direct instruction on student attrition: are students leaving charter schools because this instructional approach does not address their individual learning needs?



## INTRODUCTION

The availability of federal Race to the Top funds to assist low-performing schools has led to a frenzy of legislative activity about charter schools and other forms of non-traditional public schools. Recent statements by U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan have focused attention on the charter school caps that currently exist under many state statutes, including those in Massachusetts. However, Duncan has been clear in his speeches that he is not necessarily in favor of charter schools, but rather good schools, regardless of their governance structure.

The Massachusetts charter school statute limits the number of schools that may be established, the net school spending that may be diverted and the number of students statewide that may enroll. However, recent analyses of these limits by Citizens for Public Schools<sup>6</sup> find:

1. Net School Spending: Virtually no community is at the 9 percent net school spending limit (e.g., 740 more students in Boston, 200+ in Cambridge and 800+ in Brockton could still go to charters under the existing cap). For 2009-2010, 17 school districts are at or near the district cap; none of the Commonwealth's largest school districts is on this list.<sup>7</sup>
2. Number of Charters: Currently there are 54 Commonwealth charter schools, and the limit is 72; there are seven Horace Mann charter schools, and the limit is 48.
3. Student Enrollment: The law limits statewide total charter school student enrollment to 4 percent of all students. Nearly one million students attend Massachusetts public schools, so 37,240 may be enrolled in charters. Current enrollment is 23,000.

On July 17, 2009, Governor Deval Patrick filed two pieces of legislation. First is the so-called "smart cap," which would allow the 9 percent district cap in high-poverty, low-performing districts to be raised to 18 percent. However, charter schools may face certain restrictions that their advocates appear to oppose. Second is the readiness schools bill, which, as filed, creates a top-down process for "voluntary" conversion of existing schools into something akin to Boston pilot schools, an in-district charter-like model. Boston Mayor Thomas Menino also filed a bill that creates a top-down process for identifying underperforming schools and turning them into in-district charter schools.

On August 5, 2009, two ballot question petitions were filed with the Attorney General that would remove the charter school caps altogether and allow for-profit companies to become charter school operators.<sup>8</sup> The questions are supported by former Board of Education Chairperson James Peyser, who now works for the pro-charter venture philanthropy firm New School Ventures, and the Massachusetts Public Charter School Association.

The Patrick administration appears to be using the Race to the Top funding as the reason for filing its bills. The Menino bill appears to be related to the mayor's re-election bid. The Peyser ballot questions appear to be a reaction to the restrictions in the "smart cap" bill and the current authority of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) to disapprove new charters.

Against this backdrop of proposed legislation and ballot questions, it must be acknowledged that charter school families represent a small but well-organized subset of those served by publicly funded schools.

However, there is no universal demand for charter schools. Shen and Wong (2006) analyzed a series of studies related to the political impact of charter school legislation and found that suburbanites may create barriers to the expansion of charter schools because they fear that public schools are undermined; they tend to favor charter school laws that allow for local school committee approval over state approval. Illinois has such a law; however, the Massachusetts charter law vests all charter approval decisions in the gubernatorially appointed BESE. The authors also found that urban African-American parents view charter schools with skepticism because they see this alternative system as taking money out of district schools attended by the majority of their children.<sup>9</sup>

Prior to enacting any changes in legislation related to charter schools or rules related to non-traditional public schools, policymakers should fully understand the impact of these schools on both the students who attend and those who do not. Questions about the populations served and the significant student attrition at charter schools must be answered.

Pressure from pro-charter advocates and the U.S. Department of Education has led to calls for elected leaders to “lift the caps.” Before the drumbeat becomes too loud and the rhetoric drifts away from reality, this study seeks to provide policymakers with answers to two key questions:

1. Who is actually being served – and not served – by Boston charter schools?
2. What are the odds of a student entering a charter school successfully completing the academic program offered?

## METHODOLOGY

To answer the first question, this study focuses on enrollment demographics available through the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) Web site. Comparisons are made between charter schools located in the city of Boston only and the Boston Public Schools. Three student sets of subgroup data are analyzed: English language learners, special education students based on the instructional program needed, and low-income students based on free lunch, reduced-price lunch and ineligibility for Free or Reduced Price Lunch (FPRL).

To answer the second question, the study looks at student attrition in Boston charters and the effect on student MCAS performance and other measures of success. Enrollment data available through the DESE Web site form the basis of this analysis. Charter attrition is analyzed between 2000 and 2009 and compared with attrition in the Boston Public Schools.

Student attrition was determined by the number of students enrolled in each grade as noted in the mandatory report to the DESE filed each October. “Attrition” is the difference between the number of students enrolled and those who enrolled in the acceptance year - a “head count” method using aggregate numbers. Actual students were not tracked. Virtually none of these BCRS replace students in the upper grades, but if they did, the attrition rates would actually be higher than those estimated here.<sup>10</sup>

This study looks at three separate school cohorts: Boston Public Schools, Boston’s Commonwealth charter schools in general, and seven “high-performing” Boston charter schools, each of which was identified in *The Boston Foundation* (TBF) report; four were also identified in the *Charter School Association* (CSA) report and *American Enterprise Institute* (AEI) report [referred to here collectively as the Boston Charter Report Schools (BCRS); each report is discussed below.

While some students residing in Boston attend charter schools outside the city, this study looks only at those charters located within the city limits. In fact, of the

BCRS cited in the three reports, all but two – KIPP Academy in Lynn in the *AEI report* and the Community Day Charter School in Lawrence in the *CSA report* – are located in Boston.

## **MASSACHUSETTS CHARTER SCHOOLS**

The Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 (MERA) established Commonwealth charter schools. The first charter schools opened in 1994. In 1997, the Legislature amended the statute to establish Horace Mann charter schools. According to M.G.L. Chapter 71, Section 89, the statutory purpose of charter schools is to:<sup>11</sup>

1. Stimulate the development of innovative programs within public education.
2. Provide opportunities for innovative learning and assessment.
3. Provide greater options in choosing schools within and outside students' school districts.
4. Provide teachers a vehicle for establishing schools with alternative, innovative methods of educational instruction, school structure and management.
5. Encourage performance-based educational programs.
6. Hold teachers and school administrators accountable for students' educational outcomes.
7. Provide models for replication in other public schools.

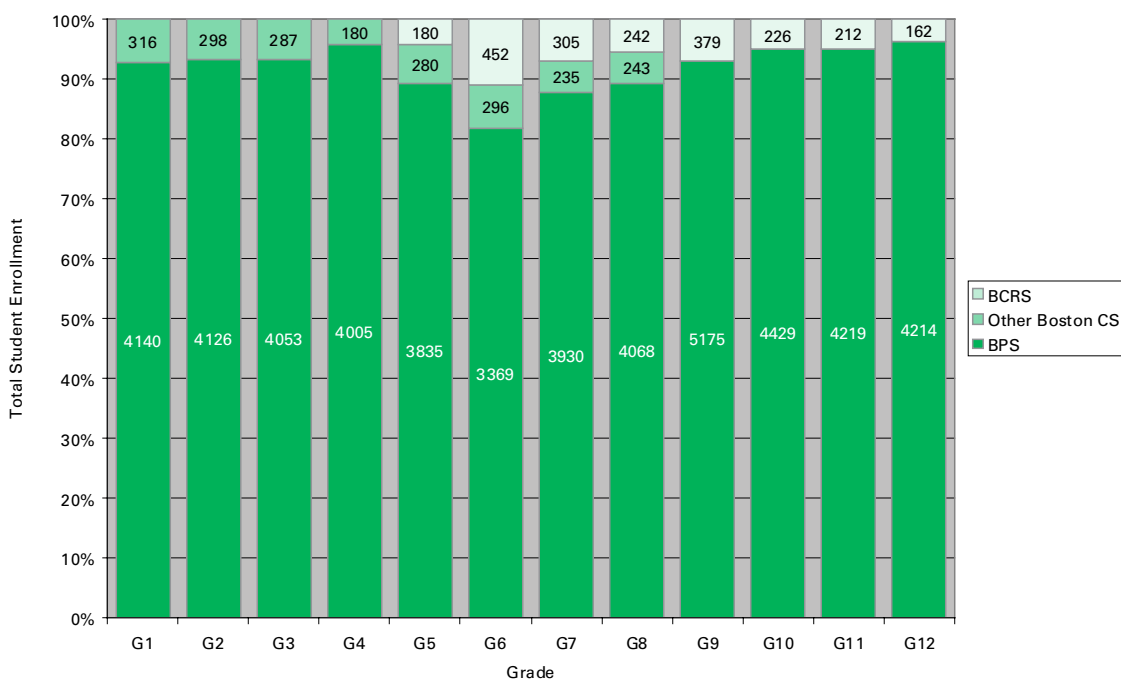
A Commonwealth Charter School (CCS) is a publicly funded school governed by a board of trustees and operates independently of any school committee under a five-year charter granted by the BESE. There is no governance role for the local school committee. A CCS has the freedom to organize around a core mission, curriculum, theme, and/or teaching method and to control its own budget and staff. A CCS must attract students and produce positive results within five years or its charter may not be renewed. For each student enrolled, the school receives tuition from the state equal to a per-pupil amount calculated by the DESE, which then deducts the same amount from the sending school district's state aid. Charter schools are eligible to receive federal and state grant funds and may apply for private grants and receive contributions.<sup>12</sup> In 2008-09, there were 54 charter schools, with an approximate enrollment of 24,100; the cap is 72.<sup>13</sup>

A Horace Mann Charter School (HMCS) is a public school operated under a charter collaboratively developed and approved by the local school committee and the teachers association. Like a CCS, an HMCS is organized around a core mission, curriculum or theme. In some cases, innovative practices have been accomplished through negotiated waivers to the collective bargaining agreement and/or school district policies. The charter is granted by the BESE. A board of trustees independent of the school committee operates and manages the day-to-day activities of the school.<sup>14</sup> In 2008-09, there were 7 Horace Mann schools with an approximate enrollment of 2,200; the cap is 48.<sup>15</sup> While Horace Mann schools are listed as separate school districts by the DESE, they are part of local school districts.

## **ENROLLMENT IN BOSTON CHARTER AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

In 2008-09, 7.9 percent of Boston students were enrolled in Commonwealth charter schools located in the city of Boston.<sup>16</sup> As Figure 1 illustrates, the Boston Public Schools' enrollment in grades 1-12 is generally between 3,800 and 4,200. The lowest enrollment is in grade 6 at 3,369 which coincides with the highest enrollment in charter schools. The highest enrollment is in grade 9 at 5,175 which coincides with students leaving private and parochial elementary schools for BPS high schools.

FIGURE 1: 2008-09 ENROLLMENT IN BOSTON CHARTER AND BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS.



Charter middle schools enroll a higher percentage of students by grade than either elementary or high schools: grade 6 has the highest charter enrollment at 18.2 percent, followed by 12.1 percent in grade 7 and 11.7 percent in grades 5 and 8. The lowest percentage of total enrollment in charters is grade 12 at 3.7 percent (162 students), followed by grade 4 at 4.3 percent and grades 11 and 10 at 4.8 and 4.9 percent, respectively.

### STANFORD UNIVERSITY CHARTER SCHOOL STUDY

In July 2009, Stanford University's Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) released the results of a large-scale 16-state study of charter school achievement; Massachusetts is one of the states included. Across all states, the researchers found that only 17 percent of charter school students outperform comparable students in traditional public schools (TPS), while 37 percent of charter school students had significantly poorer achievement, and 45 percent performed equal to or a bit lower than TPS.<sup>17</sup>

The results of the CREDO Massachusetts report found that, statewide, in the aggregate, charter school students do the same in reading and better in mathematics as students in TPS: charter schools are not creating different results for students compared to their peers from TPS in reading; and charter school attendance has a positive effect in math for students whose initial test scores were either very low or very high, but not for students scoring in the middle.<sup>18</sup> For the three subgroups that are the focus on this study, CREDO found that:

- English language learners saw no learning benefit in either reading or mathematics from attendance at a charter school.
- Special education students in charter schools had a statistically significant learning loss in mathematics and had no learning benefit in reading.
- Students in poverty had a statistically significant gain in mathematics and had no learning benefit in reading.

## BOSTON CHARTER SCHOOL REPORTS

Two recent reports and one book supported through grants awarded by charter school advocates looked at “high-performing” Boston charters.

- The 2009 report, *Informing the Debate: Comparing Boston’s Charter, Pilot and Traditional Schools*,<sup>19</sup> was funded by The Boston Foundation, a proponent of charter schools and lifting existing caps [referred to here as TBF report].
- The 2008 report, *Success at Scale in Charter Schooling*, was issued by the American Enterprise Institute, a free-market organization supporting charter schools [referred to here as the AEI report].<sup>20</sup>
- The book *Inside Urban Charter Schools: Promising Practices and Strategies in Five High-Performing Schools*<sup>21</sup> was funded by the G.W. Bush administration’s U.S. Department of Education as part of the Keeping the Promise: The Massachusetts Charter School Dissemination and Replication Project, designed by the Massachusetts Public Charter School Association (MPCSA) [referred to here as the CSA report].<sup>22</sup>

*TBF report* included the Academy of the Pacific Rim, Boston Collegiate, MATCH, Roxbury Preparatory, Boston Preparatory, City on a Hill, and Codman Academy; the *CSA and AEI reports* also cited the first four schools; the *AEI report* also cited Edward Brooke and Excel Academy. In this paper, the seven *TBF report* schools are characterized as Boston Charter Reports Schools (BCRS).

## THE BOSTON FOUNDATION REPORT

*TBF report* used a quantitative analysis of MCAS scores based on those students who were accepted at charter schools (“winners”) and applicants who were not accepted and went to the Boston Public Schools (“losers”). While the study has “observational” and “lottery” cohorts, it is the latter upon which the high-performance claims are based.

However, the quasi-random assignment methodology used should concern policymakers and others. *TBF report* indicates that the lottery schools were identified by including “only schools and years in which the demand for seats exceeds the supply and for which historical lottery records are available and complete.” The authors argue that by using students who applied to the school and comparing the lottery “winners” to the “losers,” students were “randomly assigned” to the charter or district school. Miron (2009) warns of *TBF report* that “the results cannot validly be generalized to less-popular charter schools,” because of the reliance on a small sample of schools with waiting lists that willingly participate in such a study.<sup>23</sup>

Miron (2009) reports that “charter school waiting lists are often insufficient for the construction of a randomized experiment. In many cases, such lists are out of date or contain an accumulation of names over a number of years. In the most extreme cases, these lists cannot be produced for review when requested and may not exist.” He continues, “Using the waiting lists to simulate random assignment first requires a review and audit of the waiting lists, and greater efforts must be made to identify and track students who do not assume a place at the charter school or who choose not to return to their traditional public school.”<sup>24</sup> There is no evidence in *TBF report* that such a review and audit occurred.

FIGURE 2: WAITING LISTS FOR BOSTON COMMONWEALTH CS: 2001-2009

	01-02	02-03	03-04	04-05	05-06	06-07	07-08	08-09
Academy of the Pacific Rim	296	510	363	484	172	159	284	308
Boston Collegiate	469	544	691	773	923	1095	510	1417
Boston Preparatory				64	98	150	189	169
Boston Renaissance	1109	1627	2015	1695	1172	831	605	531
City On A Hill	174	147	225	317	300	331	643	479
Codman Academy	29	22	27	43	12	30	67	57
Conservatory Lab	204	300	287	357	450	472	538	911
Edward Brooke		65	84	101	155	115	429	729
Excel Academy				27	43	56	205	168
Frederick Douglass	43	33	29	93	19			
MATCH	220	256	300	300	300	489	576	780
Neighborhood House	1216	1298	1864	2021	2252	1761	2063	1805
Roxbury Charter High School				118				
Roxbury Preparatory	50	182	70	70	69	78	56	100
Smith Leadership Academy			63	0	71	73	74	63
Uphams Corner			52	17	62	103	43	

Source: [http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/charter/1\\_Pre\\_Enroll.html](http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/charter/1_Pre_Enroll.html). Charter school pre-enrollment, 2001-2009.

According to public records obtained from charter schools, DESE data and the Auditor of the Commonwealth,<sup>25</sup> all Boston charters report having waiting lists. As Figure 2 illustrates, virtually every Boston charter school reports having a waiting list in every year of operation; hence the “demand for seats exceeds the supply” would appear to include all charters. Waiting lists are maintained by the schools; totals are provided to the DESE. Associate Commissioner Jeff Wulfson states, “I’m sure there are a lot of duplicates (parents who have signed up for more than one school), since it doesn’t cost anything to apply, and parents don’t have to make a commitment until school starts. There’s really no reliable way to measure how ‘serious’ any application is.”<sup>26</sup>

Waiting lists have also been used by charter school advocates to argue that caps should be lifted.<sup>27</sup> However, the *CSA report* finds charters enroll students only in the entry year. If students cannot get into the school after a certain point, is there actually a waiting list?<sup>28</sup> For example, while 57 students are on the Codman Academy waiting list found on the DESE Web site, in response to a Public Records Request, the school indicated a waiting list of only six for grade 9. The same holds true for the Academy of the Pacific Rim. Of the 308 students on the DESE posted waiting list, 84 – or 17 percent – are for grade 5.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to the school having a waiting list, *TBF report* authors used an additional metric of historical records. The resulting high-performance claims were made for the whole school based on the number of students for whom “historical records were available and complete”: a middle school sample for 2002-2006 representing 953 of the 3,022 applicants (31.5 percent) and a high school sample for 2002-2006 representing 1,480 of the 3,570 applicants (41.5 percent) for these schools.<sup>30</sup>

As a result of these methods for selecting schools, *TBF report* eliminates all elementary and 75 percent of middle charter schools. One hundred percent of the middle-high and high school charter schools were included (see Figure 3). It could be that only schools with “good historical records” are “high-performing”; if so, the connection between school record-keeping and student performance on standardized tests may be a subject for further study.

**FIGURE 3: GRADE LEVELS BOSTON COMMONWEALTH CHARTER SCHOOLS**

	<b>Boston Charter Schools*</b>	<b>Boston CS in Lottery Study</b>	<b>Percent in Lottery Study</b>
Elementary : PK/K-5, 6 or 8	4	0	0%
Middle: 5 or 6-8	4	1	25%
Middle/High: 5 or 6 –12**	3	3	100%
High: 9-12	3	3	100%

\* This excludes Benjamin Banneker CS in Cambridge and Prospect Hill CS in Somerville, even though some Boston students attend these schools.  
 \*\* Includes Boston Preparatory CS, grades 6-10.

**THE CHARTER SCHOOL ASSOCIATION REPORT**

The *CSA report* provides a qualitative look at four BCRS and one charter in Lawrence.<sup>31</sup> The four selection criteria were the school being located in a district within the top 10 percent for the highest proportion of students in poverty; significantly outscoring the home district on MCAS in both the aggregate and for the low-income subgroup; achieving Adequate Yearly Progress in 2006; and receiving at least one charter renewal from the DESE.

The *CSA report* finds that the four BCRS have a cohesive mission and focus with high “buy-in” by staff, parents and students. These schools have embraced doing well on MCAS as their primary instructional and academic goal. Each school is presented through a case study that outlines the school day, teacher characteristics, teaching and learning methods used, and assessment practices. While the schools are mission-driven, the story that is told is of adults strictly adhering to their mission regardless of the effect on students who may not be capable of or willing to commit fully to the school’s academic and behavioral demands.

The *CSA report* describes teacher-centered and controlled instruction; lessons focus on the lowest levels of Benjamin Bloom’s taxonomy – such as the acquisition of knowledge and skills rather than higher order skills such as application and evaluation of knowledge and skills – and rigid disciplinary structures.

**THE AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE REPORT**

The *AEI report* focuses on “gap-closing” schools in which “one broad approach, frequently called ‘no excuses’ schooling, appears to dominate.” The schools “steadfastly reject explanations from any quarter for low achievement.”

The *AEI report* schools were identified by using the “exit year” 2007 MCAS results. The sum of the percentages of students scoring above 240 (proficient or advanced) in English language arts and mathematics was averaged to create one metric: the composite percentage of students in the highest two scoring categories. The “exit year” was the final tested year in the school; for example, in a grade 5-8 school, only grade 8 results were used.

The *AEI report* states that all six schools outperform the Boston Public Schools while serving a student population that is demographically “very similar to the Boston Public Schools” based on poverty and the composite African-American and

Hispanic populations.<sup>32</sup> In 2008-09, 60 percent of the students in Boston charter schools were African-American (39 percent of Boston Public Schools) and 24 percent were Hispanic (38 percent in BPS).

The 14 dimensions of these “no excuses” schools include: small school size, large class size, selective teacher hiring, teacher-led whole class direct instruction, lessons aligned to state standards, pro-testing, highly disciplined school environment, little educational technology, expanded learning time, accountability for results, schools of choice for teachers and students, parent contracts, empowered school leaders, and no unions. According to the *AEI report*, four of the five schools that are also included in *TBF report* exhibit all of these dimensions. MATCH exhibits 11 of the 14, but not teacher-led instruction, large class sizes or little use of education technology.

## ADVANCING THE PRO-CHARTER MESSAGE

Diane Ravitch, a former George H.W. Bush administration education official, notes that “because of a brilliant media campaign by charter school organizations, there is a widespread impression that any charter school is better than any public school. This is not true.”<sup>33</sup> She cites both performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress and the Stanford CREDO study to conclude that “if a struggling public school is replaced by a new charter school, the odds are that the charter school will be no better and possibly worse.”

Charter school advocates have offered the conclusions presented in *TBF report* in support of an expansion of charter schools in Massachusetts. Paul Grogan, president of The Boston Foundation, used the release of the report to call for Governor Patrick and the Legislature to lift the caps. MCPSA notes on its Web page that the “Harvard/MIT study [*TBF report*] shows Boston charters significantly outperform pilot and traditional district schools.”<sup>34</sup> The widely publicized study, called “groundbreaking” in a number of media outlets and on free-market organizations’ Web sites, has been cited by editorial writers around the Commonwealth in calling for a lifting of the cap.<sup>35</sup> Even the MassInc report *Incomplete Grade: Massachusetts Education Reform at 15*, which focused exclusively on school finance, drew the disconnected conclusion that the caps should be lifted. By the time that critical reviews or explanations of this report could be shared, the news was old.<sup>36</sup>

Jeffrey Henig of Columbia University in his analysis of the uses and abuses of research to advance the charter school debate, states that foundations are sophisticated in their selection of researchers and/or institutions that they can trust “to produce studies that will be useful to them” (p.169). The Boston Foundation has long supported pilot schools and more recently has become an advocate for charter schools. Henig finds that foundation-supported research can have a large impact on the public debate. “In the charter school and school choice arena, this has played out most advantageously for the conservative foundations with a strong advocacy mission” (p.172). While The Boston Foundation does not appear to have a “conservative” label, its position has increasingly become pro-charter and has been aligned with the conservative, market-driven movement (Shen and Wong, 2006).

Again, Henig notes that foundations often advance the findings of their sponsored research which is often “aggressively disseminated, often repackaged by professionals in communications and public relations, and given a sharp, clear and consistent policy message” (p. 173). *TBF report* was issued on January 6, 2009. On the same date, Nelson Smith, CEO of the National Association of Public Charter Schools, stated, “Given today’s news, we call on Governor Patrick and legislators, in the strongest possible terms, to lift the caps on public charter schools this coming legislative session.”<sup>37</sup>

A disciplined message strategy was implemented to disseminate the findings that included David Trueblood, a spokesperson for The Boston Foundation, stating, "I think we were really impressed with how well charters came through. We'd like to see the cap removed, and we'd like to see more charters."<sup>38</sup> This was followed by a January 7th op-ed in *The Boston Globe* by columnist Scot Lehigh, a charter school advocate.<sup>39</sup> On January 8th, New England Cable News aired a segment entitled "State of Education: Boston's pilot and charter schools"; the program was sponsored by The Boston Foundation and featured its president, Paul Grogan, and Thomas Kane, the spokesperson for *TBF report*.<sup>40</sup>

In contrast, the *CSA report* received less notice and little publicity, perhaps because, notwithstanding the positive title, the later chapters are critical of the actual teaching and learning in these schools. The conclusions drawn by the authors raise questions about the limiting effect of school coherence solely focused on performance on a state standardized test. The authors state, "It is not surprising that these five schools have taken a relatively similar test-aware approach to their work. However, by embracing such approaches, are these schools, and other like-minded charters, living up to their mandate to 'renew public education'? Are they fundamentally changing American education, or are they (perhaps unwittingly) players in an educational testing system that some call a 'sucker's game'" (p. 230). The authors conclude by asking, "Is it proper for government to support schools that explicitly and exclusively focus on college and college success? Is this an appropriate use of public funds when the state constitution guarantees all students the right to a publicly funded education, even if they do not aspire to college? By developing a reputation for nonnegotiable academic standards, are these schools excluding certain students or segments of the population?" (p. 230).



## Question One:

### *Who is actually being served – and not served – by Boston Charter Schools?*

#### **BOSTON'S COMMONWEALTH CHARTER SCHOOLS STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS**

Boston has 14 Commonwealth charter schools: independent public schools separate from the Boston Public Schools.<sup>41</sup> Figure 4 indicates the name and grade range at each school, the percentages of students who are limited English proficient (LEP), receive special education services (SPED) or are eligible for free and reduced price lunch (FRPL) as the measure of poverty.

Charter school proponents argue that they serve students “similar” to those in the public school district. Closer examination of these numbers illustrates that Boston charters in general and the BCRS are less likely to serve a diverse student population based on language proficiency, special needs category, and level of poverty. While race is not a subject of this study, Boston charter schools over-serve African-American students and under-serve Hispanics: in 2008-09, 60 percent of the students in Boston charter schools were African-American (39 percent of Boston Public Schools) and 24 percent were Hispanic (38 percent in BPS).

**FIGURE 4: STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS – PERCENT OF ENROLLMENT**

	Grades	LEP	SPED	FRPL
<b>STATE</b>		<b>5.9</b>	<b>17.1</b>	<b>30.7</b>
<b>BOSTON</b>		<b>18.9</b>	<b>20.5</b>	<b>74.3</b>
<b>BOSTON CHARTER SCHOOLS</b>		<b>1.9</b>	<b>14.9</b>	<b>70.6</b>
1. Academy of Pacific Rim – T,C,A	5-12	0.8	13.9	52.3
2. Boston Renaissance	K-6	3.7	9.6	75.5
3. Boston Collegiate – T,C,A	5-12	0.0	17.2	41.2
4. Boston Preparatory – T	6-10	0.0	15.8	76.4
5. City on a Hill – T	9-12	0.7	13.1	76.5
6. Codman Academy – T	9-12	0.9	29.3	67.2
7. Conservatory Lab	K-5	9.6	11.1	72.6
8. Edward Brooke – A	K-8	1.0	10.1	71.3
9. Excel Academy – A	5-8	3.8	11.4	67.3
10. MATCH Charter – T,C,A	6; 9-12	0.0	9.4	77.9
11. Neighborhood House	PK-8	1.5	12.0	77.8
12. Roxbury Preparatory – T,C,A	6-8	2.2	8.3	72.6
13. Smith Leadership	6-8	0.0	17.0	75.6
14. Uphams Corner	5-8	2.9	30.8	84.3

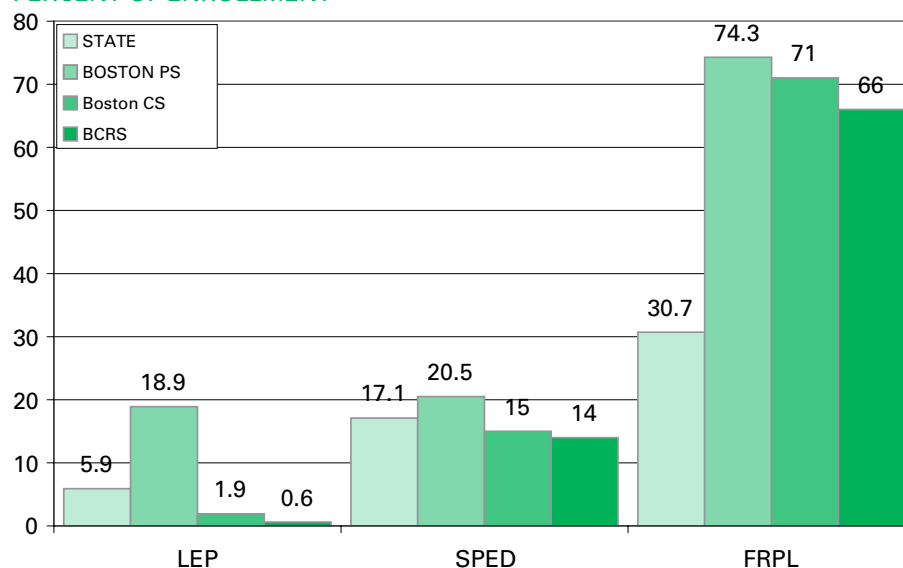
**Enrollment Codes** Enrollment Codes (from DESE 2008-09 school & district data):

LEP – Limited English Proficient; SPED – Special Education; FRPL = Free and Reduced Price Lunch (measure of poverty).

*T = The Boston Foundation schools; C = Charter School Association schools;*

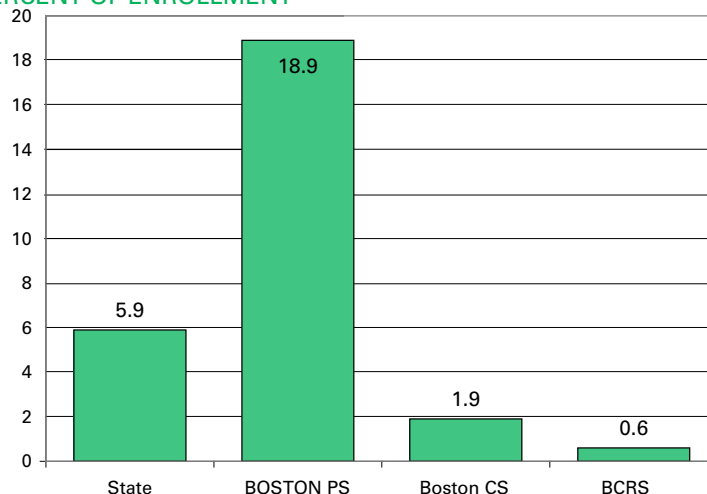
*A = American Enterprise Institute schools.*

**FIGURE 5: STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS: STATE, BOSTON PS, BOSTON CS, BCRS – PERCENT OF ENROLLMENT**



As Figure 5 illustrates, the broad enrollment data for categorical student populations suggest that Boston charters in general and BCRS enroll a substantially smaller percentage of LEP students, a somewhat smaller percentage of SPED students, and a similar percentage of FRPL students compared to the Boston Public Schools. However, looking at averages can be deceiving; a closer examination of these numbers reveals a more discrepant enrollment pattern. Henig (2008) in his analysis of charter school research found that charters are providing a vehicle to resegregate urban schools based on special needs, language, and poverty status.

**FIGURE 6: STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS: LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY – PERCENT OF ENROLLMENT**



LEP students are a challenged segment of the school-aged population – children who must learn a second language and most often adapt to a new culture and cultural norms in order to be academically successful. Once they have mastered English language skills, they are no longer categorized as LEP; the subgroup always consists of students who have limited or no English language skills. The Boston charters serve virtually no LEP students (see Figure 6).

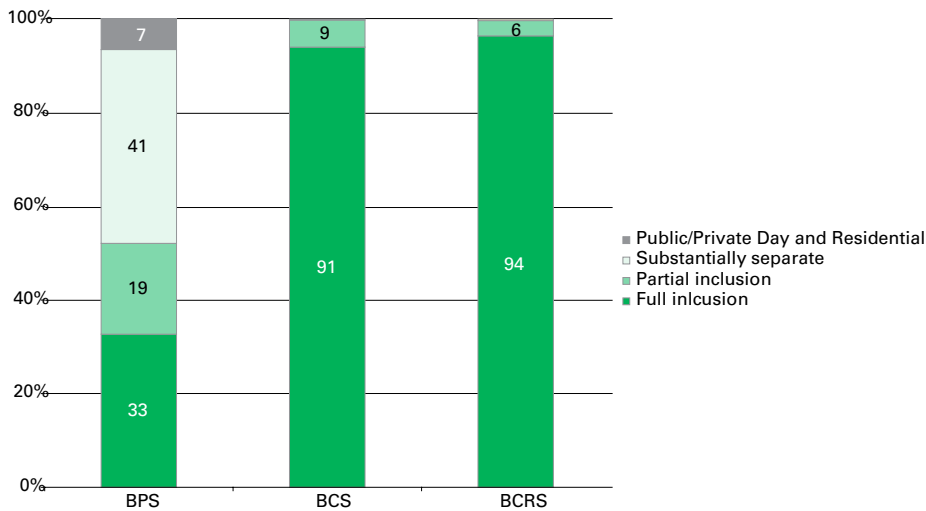
**Finding: In 2007-2008, 19 percent of the students in the Boston Public Schools were designated as LEP. Only 2 percent of those in all Boston charters and less than 1 percent of BCRS were LEP.**

In general, Boston charters serve a smaller percentage of SPED students compared to the Boston Public Schools, although the gap is not as wide as the enrollment of LEP students. Twenty percent of Boston public school students are on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), compared to 15 percent of all Boston charter school students, and 14 percent in BCRS (see Figure 5).

However, the aggregate percentage of all SPED students does not adequately highlight the differences between Boston Public Schools and charters. Students on IEPs educated within a school district fall into three categories: full inclusion, partial inclusion and substantially separate. Inclusion is the practice of educating all children in the same classroom, including children with physical, mental and developmental disabilities. Inclusion classes often require a special assistant to the classroom teacher. Full inclusion students typically have mild learning disabilities while those in substantially separate classrooms have the most severe disabilities. According to the DESE<sup>42</sup>, students are categorized as:

- *Full inclusion* if the special education services outside the general education classroom consume less than 21 percent of total instructional time.
- *Partial inclusion* when special education services outside the general education classroom are between 21 percent and 60 percent of total instructional time.
- *Substantially separate* if special education services outside the general education classroom consume more than 60 percent of total instructional time.

**FIGURE 7: SPECIAL EDUCATION CATEGORIES: BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, BOSTON CHARTERS, BOSTON CHARTER REPORT SCHOOLS – PERCENT OF ENROLLMENT**



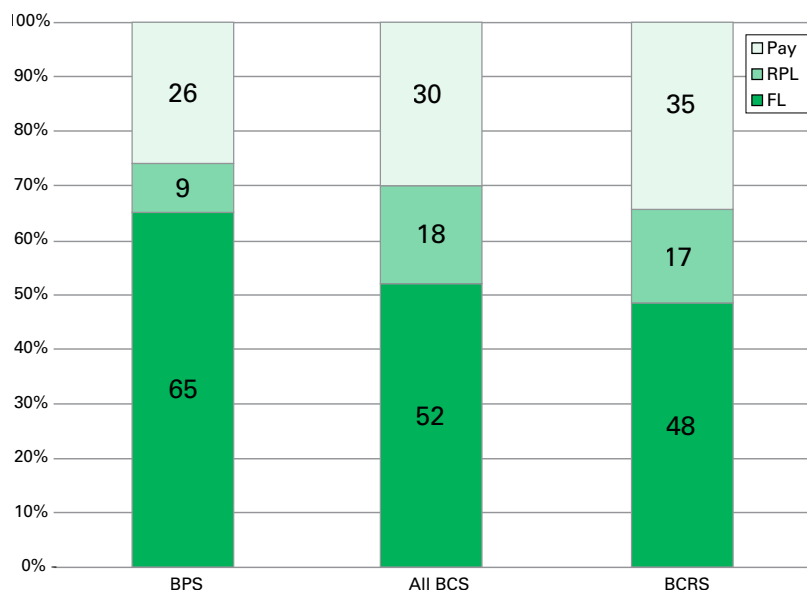
Miron and Nelson found that district schools enroll three times the number of special needs students as charters. In addition, they report that charter schools tend to serve only students with mild disabilities and none with multiple or severe disabilities.<sup>43</sup> These national findings are mirrored in the analysis of BCRS. Henig (2008) states, “Some charter schools are quite open in suggesting that families with children who have severe disabilities might be better served in the traditional system, where the resources for supporting them are more substantial. Meeting the needs of seriously disabled children is much more difficult and expensive than attending those with mild disabilities, so to the degree this is the case, it suggests the possibility of a significant imbalance that is understated by comparisons that do not distinguish among disabilities or their severity and type” (p.100).

BCRS enroll those students with mild disabilities in their student populations. As Figure 7 illustrates, the percentage of Boston Public Schools SPED students in full inclusion programs is 33 percent, while that of all Boston charters is 91 percent and that of the BCRS is 94 percent: 100 percent of SPED students in five BCRS are full inclusion. Only Codman and Boston Collegiate report partial inclusion students. The largest group of SPED students in the BPS are those in substantially separate classrooms: 41 percent versus about 3 percent in charters.

**Finding: These data clearly illustrates that Boston charter schools serve SPED students with significantly fewer and less severe learning disabilities than the Boston Public Schools.**

Free and reduced price lunch (FRPL) is the generally accepted measure of poverty. The 2008-09 free lunch eligibility is 185 percent of the federal poverty guidelines: for a family of four, an annual household income less than \$27,560. The reduced price lunch eligibility is 130 percent of federal poverty guidelines: for a family of four, less than \$39,220.<sup>44</sup> All other students are presumed ineligible for FRPL.

**FIGURE 8: MEASURES OF POVERTY – PERCENT OF ENROLLMENT**



In looking at measures of student poverty more closely, it becomes apparent that the BCRS are serving a significantly different population (see Figure 8, compares the percentage of students receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch and those paying for lunch, in the Boston public schools, all Boston charter schools, and Boston Charter Reports Schools.). Sixty-five percent of the students in the Boston Public Schools are eligible for free lunch; 48 percent of the students in BCRS are free lunch eligible – an almost 20 point differential. Only 9 percent of Boston Public School students are eligible for reduced-priced lunch – indicating less poverty in the home – while charters have double the percentage of reduced price lunch students. One-quarter of the students in the Boston Public Schools versus one-third in Boston charters and BCRS are ineligible for FRPL.

**Finding: As these data clearly illustrate, 65 percent of the students attending Boston Public Schools live in the poorest households compared to 48 percent in BCRS. Boston charters in general and BCRS specifically enroll students less poor than those in the Boston Public Schools.**



## Question Two:

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### *What are the odds of a student entering a high-performing charter school successfully completing the academic program offered?*

The notion of “buy-in” on the part of both students and parents appears to be essential for both acceptance to and continuation at BCRS. The *CSA report* states, “While by law this lottery procedure does not permit schools to handpick their students, the process promotes buy-in from parents and students, as parents must know about a charter school, decide to enter the lottery, complete the necessary paperwork, and then participate in the lottery process” (p.164). Recently, there has been a spate of articles and op-ed columns about the characteristics of those who send their children to charters that support this notion of the engaged parent.

#### **PARENT CONTRACTS**

Ravitch (2009) states that “Charters tend to draw the most motivated students and families away from the traditional public schools because of the application process.”<sup>42</sup> Sizer and Wood (2008) report that, “Schools also screen students by making demands upon a child’s family in order to be admitted. Insisting that families sign a ‘commitment form’ or ‘contract’ to commit time or financial resources to the school only exacerbates the current inequities in our system of public education. While parent involvement is important in any child’s education, such a requirement ensures that some schools serve only those children from the most intact and financially favored families” (p. 9). They go on to say that issues of access lead to charges of “creaming” the most supported students toward charters: that is, those who can attend recruitment meetings, participate in site visits, and communicate with other parents about school choices. They warn that “charters become one more way in which we sort the haves from the have-nots in our schools” (p.11).

The *CSA report* states that the Academy of the Pacific Rim, Boston Collegiate, MATCH and Roxbury Prep all require family contracts that “specify particular actions a family must take to uphold its responsibilities.” The *AEI report* includes parent contracts as one of the elements of the “no excuses” model, stating that “schools establish clear expectations for parents, including getting their child to school on time.”

At Boston Preparatory, the parent must agree to the contract as a condition of enrollment. It states, “Recognizing that this mission is only attainable when families, students, and the school work together, we assume the following responsibilities:

- Provide my child with several hours of time every night to complete homework, and check that his/her homework is completed. Limit television and other distractions.
- Ensure that my child arrives at school before 8:00 AM, in uniform, every day of the school year that he or she is healthy.
- Make arrangements so that my child can remain at Boston Preparatory Charter Public School for an extra hour on weeknights and on Saturday mornings, if required to do so.
- Monitor my child’s academic progress by reviewing and returning weekly progress reports sent from the school, promptly returning the family reply form.
- Interact professionally with school staff, responding promptly to school questions and concerns.

- Provide my child with instructional materials including pens, pencils, and paper.
- Support the Boston Preparatory Charter Public School Code of Conduct, including making arrangements if my child receives an out-of-school suspension.”<sup>45</sup>

The Boston Collegiate requires that the parent sign a Family Accountability Contract, which, “describes important responsibilities and school expectations that families accept once they choose to enroll at this school.

“Keep in mind that all the items below are drawn directly from our Handbook. We know that the choice you made in coming here is a precious one and we want to make sure that you have a full and clear understanding of your responsibilities.”<sup>46</sup> The contract, which must be signed by the student, parent, advisor and principal, outlines 31 actions in seven broad areas: attendance, homework, code of conduct, promotion policies, student dress policy, student lunch, and family support. Examples include:

- I understand that if my child is absent more than 6.5% of his/her school year, he/she will have to repeat his/her current grade. For a typical 190-day school year, this would mean that if a student is absent **with or without excuse** for more than 12 days of the school year, that student will fail all of his/her classes for the year and will need to repeat his/her current grade.
- I understand that if my child comes to school out of uniform, he/she may not be permitted to attend class, may need to wait for the appropriate dress to be brought in from home, and may receive a demerit or an automatic detention to be served that day.
- I agree to volunteer at least once during the school year.

While public schools must accept all students arriving at the door, regardless of the ability or the willingness of parents to work with the school in helping to educate the child, BCRS appear to be applying private school parental behaviors as a condition of student attendance. Parents who are willing and able to volunteer, or come to school when a uniform is missing, or provide students with a quiet study area free of distractions, may be more likely to send their children to one of these schools. However, parents with children who have such chronic illnesses as asthma may choose not to send a child to the Boston Collegiate, where, after 12 absences, the child must repeat the grade. We know that grade retention often leads to students dropping out of school.

So there is actually a “lottery with hurdles” at some charters. The application of such parental contracts represents a sorting mechanism to ensure that only those families able and committed to addressing each of the contractual elements above apply for or accept admission to the school.

**Finding: BCRS require that parents sign contracts as a condition of their child’s attending the school. Contracts may outline a few overarching responsibilities or include a detailed list of specific actions with consequences attached. Only parents willing and able to accept these conditions will accept admission to the school. Public schools educate all students regardless of parental engagement or involvement.**

## DISCIPLINE AND ATTRITION

One element of the “no excuses” model that BCRS appear to have embraced is the use of in-school and out-of-school suspensions as a means of disciplining students who violate a school’s code of conduct.

Hammond (2007) reports that, “Being suspended often or expelled [from school] significantly increases the likelihood that a student will drop out. Policies that increase the likelihood of these consequences will increase the number of students put at risk for dropout.”<sup>49</sup> In this meta-analysis of 21 studies of dropout problems and preventions, the authors found that behavioral and academic disengagement are leading causes within the control of the school that lead to students leaving. Discipline problems resulting in either suspension or expulsion, especially in middle and high school, have consistently been linked to dropping out of school. Often, students misbehave due to lack of engagement with academic work that is too challenging. They report that schools may be pressured to exclude misbehaving students because of accountability mandates: “Schools may systematically ‘discharge’ or exclude disruptive and misbehaving students from school.”

The *AEI* report supports these findings. The author cites MATCH stating, “Why do they leave? The number one reason is ‘It’s too hard.’... The number two reason kids chose to leave our school is ‘I don’t like the rules.’”<sup>50</sup>

Sizer and Wood (2008) warn that there is a “potential danger that charters will have the ability to ‘push out’ students or families they do not like, similar to what happens in private schools and specialized public schools” (p. 13).

Students who are suspended tend to have higher absenteeism and fall behind their peers academically. They become frustrated because they are unable to catch up with those who have remained in school, so the suspension is compounded by the resulting absenteeism and failure to learn missed schoolwork. Some of the practices articulated in the *CSR* and *AEI reports* could be defined as “push” factors: that is, practices used by schools to push students toward the door. As a result, BCRS dropouts might be more accurately described as “pushouts.”

The National Dropout Prevention Center states, “Push factors emanate from something about schools themselves, such as policies or the school’s climate or structure that alienate and/or frustrate students so they end up leaving before graduation. For example, some school policies that may exacerbate problems include giving failing grades after a certain number of absences, frequent use of suspensions and expulsions for misbehavior, and grade retention. These practices may slowly alienate students, causing them to disengage and later drop out.”<sup>51</sup>

According to the DESE, the definition of in-school and out-of-school suspension rate for the academic year is:<sup>52</sup>

- **In-School Suspension Rate (ISSP):** The percentage of enrolled students who received one or more in-school suspensions.
- **Out-of-School Suspension Rate (OSSP):** The percentage of enrolled students who received one or more out-of-school suspensions.

Generally, students assigned to in-school suspension attend school but are isolated from their peers and are given schoolwork to accomplish under the direction of an adult supervisor – a teacher or paraprofessional – that is then returned to the teacher. Students assigned out-of-school suspension are not allowed on the school grounds. They may be assigned schoolwork to complete during the suspension. However, they receive no assistance from school personnel in completing the work. In other cases, the suspended student must make up all work upon returning to school. Students with special needs may have additional assistance provided during either ISSP or OSSP depending upon the conditions of the IEP.

FIGURE 9: IN AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS, 2007-08, MASSACHUSETTS, BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AND BOSTON CHARTER REPORTS SCHOOLS

	ISSP	OSSP	Total ISSP & OSSP
<b>Massachusetts</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>6.2</b>	<b>9.8</b>
<b>Boston Public Schools</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>8.8</b>
Academy of Pacific Rim	10.8	28.4	39.2
Boston Collegiate	13.3	10.2	23.5
Boston Preparatory	18.6	58.4	77.0
City on a Hill	1.1	54.3	55.4
Codman Academy	0.0	0.0	0.0
MATCH	2.7	3.2	5.9
Roxbury Preparatory	0.0	57.6	57.6
<b>Average – BCRS</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>30.3</b>	<b>36.9</b>

*School Indicator Codes (from DESE 2006-07 school & district data): ISSP = In School Suspension; OSSP = Out of School Suspension. Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, School and District Profiles.*

Figure 9 compares the ISSP and OSSP rates for the BCRS with the Boston Public Schools and Massachusetts data for 2007-08, the last year available.<sup>53</sup>

The Boston Public Schools report virtually no use of ISSP. Statewide the rate is almost 4 percent, and Boston’s is one-tenth of 1 percent. Six of the BCRS are below the state average; four appear not to use ISSP. However, three BCRS use ISSP well in excess of the state average:

- Academy of Pacific Rim: 3.0 times.
- Boston Collegiate: 3.5 times.
- Boston Preparatory: 5.2 times.

Boston Public Schools have an 8.7 percent OSSP rate, greater than the statewide rate of 6.2 percent. Only Codman Academy has no OSSP rate. Only MATCH is below the state and Boston rates. All other BCRS have rates in excess of Boston’s – and some are astoundingly high.

- Academy of Pacific Rim: 3.3 time BPS.
- Boston Collegiate: 1.2 times BPS.
- Boston Preparatory: 6.7 times BPS.
- City on a Hill: 6.2 times BPS.
- Roxbury Preparatory: 6.6 times BPS.

**Finding: BCRS are using ISSP and OSSP well in excess of both the Boston Public Schools and Massachusetts public schools in general. In all but three schools, more than 25 percent of the student body is suspended at least once during the academic year; in three schools, that rises to above 50 percent, and, in one school, more than 75 percent of the students were suspended at least once during the year.**

## STUDENT ATTRITION AND MEASURES OF SUCCESS

What is the connection between excluding students from instruction through ISSP and OSSP and the high rates of student attrition, especially at the grades 9-12 levels? There are excessively high student attrition rates at each of these schools: *TBF report* defines this practice as “selective attrition” (p. 19) and “selective out-migration of low achievers” (p. 37). In other words, over the course of time, students who have won the lottery and gained admission to these charter schools leave and, for the most part, are not replaced by students on the waiting list. At the same time, the schools report that all or most students pass MCAS or are accepted to four-year colleges without indicating that these claims are based on less than the full complement of accepted students.

In his report about Boston charters with a “no excuses model,” Wilson (2008) states that beyond the lottery, another way these schools “might select their students, however unwittingly, is by failing to fill vacated seats. Student attrition policies in charter schools have as yet received little attention, but are comparatively easy to study and could have potent effects.”<sup>54</sup> He goes on,

*District schools must, at least in principle, enroll any student at any time regardless of grade. Little is as yet known about the attrition policies of No Excuses schools, but some schools and networks quietly acknowledge that it is their policy not to fill empty seats midyear or above a certain grade. If some students leave because they are struggling academically in the program or are unwilling to meet the program’s unusual demands, the policy may yield a positive selection effect, such that average test scores and college acceptance rates are higher than they would be if those struggling students remained enrolled. Further, keeping vacated seats unfilled relieves the school of incorporating new students who have not benefited from the program in prior years and are likely to perform at levels below their classmates (p. 18).*

As will be seen below, these BCRS do employ vacated seats as an exclusion method after the initial lottery is complete.

*TBF report* and the *AEI report* use performance on MCAS as the sole determinant of identifying “successful” schools. The *CSA report* notes that the four Boston charters it studied have embraced performing well on MCAS as their primary goal. The *CSA report* identifies a second measure of success as students successfully entering a good high school in the case of middle schools or acceptance at a four-year college for high schools. Each of the seven schools is discussed briefly below.

As a point of comparison, according to the DESE, Boston Public School students report the following after-graduation plans: 50 percent go on to four-year public or private college; 15 percent to public community college; and 3 percent to other post-secondary education.

In 2008, 91 percent of BPS students passed the grade 10 ELA MCAS; 56 percent scored in the Advanced/Proficient categories. Those passing included 67 percent in the SPED subgroup and 73 percent of LEP students. In the same year, 84 percent passed the grade 10 Math MCAS; 59 percent scored in Advanced/Proficient. Fifty-two percent in the SPED subgroup and 73 percent in LEP group passed.

On the 2008 grade 8 ELA MCAS, 85 percent of students passed and 59 percent scored Advanced/Proficient. Fifty-seven percent of SPED students passed along with 51 percent of LEP students. On the grade 8 Math MCAS, 60 percent passed and 34 percent scored in Advanced/Proficient. Those passing included 33 percent in the SPED subgroup and 43 percent in LEP.<sup>56</sup>

## DROPOUT FACTORIES

A study conducted by Johns Hopkins University in 2004 and replicated in 2007 coined the phrase “dropout factory,” which Secretary Duncan is now using as a metric for determining schools that should be forced to close. Schools where 40 percent or more of freshmen fail to make it to Grade 12 in time are dropout factories.<sup>57</sup> Because there is no uniform graduation rate metric used nationally, Balfanz and Legters, the study’s authors, created a “promoting power” metric that can be used to gauge whether a school’s students are making it to graduation on time. Promoting power is determined by dividing the number of students in grade 12 by the number of students who entered in the class in grade 9. For example, for a school’s class of 2009,

$$\text{Promoting Power} = \frac{\# \text{ of students in grade 12 in 2008-09}}{\# \text{ of students in grade 9 in 2005-06}}$$

The Associated Press (2008) reported that Massachusetts had 22 schools labeled as dropout factories.<sup>58</sup> This designation was based on school information from 2004-2006. In citing this story, *The Boston Globe* reported that MATCH was “designated among roughly 10 percent of public schools nationwide that are ‘dropout factories,’ where 60 percent or fewer freshman graduate in four years. One Boston high school made that list.” The article went on to state, “Approximately 25 percent or 14 members of the senior class have defected to the Boston public schools – a system to which MATCH was designed to be a serious alternative.”<sup>59</sup> Snowdon International High School was the only Boston public school on the dropout factory list.

By contrast, the Boston Public Schools do a significantly better job of ensuring that students successfully move from grade 9 to grade 12 in a timely fashion. Three Boston high schools are used here as points of comparison: Boston Latin School, a grade 7-12 exam school; Brighton High School, a district school that accepted the MATCH leavers according to *The Globe* article; and Fenway High School, a pilot school. As the numbers illustrate, at least Brighton and Fenway accept students after grade 9, since the promoting power is over 100 percent in at least one year at each school. None of these schools could be labeled dropout factories.

- At Boston Latin School, the promoting power for the Classes of 2004-2009 respectively were: 86 percent, 80 percent, 83 percent, 84 percent, 85 percent and 89 percent.
- At Brighton High School, they were: 65 percent, 62 percent, 74 percent, 78 percent, 86 percent, and 101 percent.
- At Fenway High School, they were: 96 percent, 81 percent, 87 percent, 120 percent, 97 percent, and 93 percent.

What the analysis of student attrition below illustrates, however, is that MATCH is not an outlier in this regard. All of the BCRS schools that include grades 9-12 can fairly be labeled “dropout factories” with low promoting power.

## CHARTER HIGH SCHOOLS

### City on a Hill

City on a Hill began registering students in all grades; however, since 2001, the number of students accepted into each ninth grade class has ranged from a low of 57 to a high of 118 (see Figure 10). The school's charter allows an enrollment of 280 students.

The average attrition over the classes that spent four full years at the school, the classes of 2004-2009, is 56 percent, ranges from a high of 68 percent in 2004 to a low of 33 percent in 2007.

FIGURE 10: CITY ON A HILL: STUDENT ATTRITION 2000-2009

Grad. Class	Entry Year	Gr.9	Gr.10	Gr. 11	Gr.12	Promoting Power
2001	2000				33	N/A
2002	2000			49	48	N/A
2003	2000		63	46	40	64%
2004	2000	57	56	47	38	68%
2005	2001	72	61	51	27	38%
2006	2002	110	93	52	45	41%
2007	2003	66	39	32	22	33%
2008	2004	118	85	55	48	41%
2009	2005	107	76	58	46	43%
2010	2006	115	90	67		N/A
2011	2007	86	62			N/A
2012	2008	99				N/A
<b>Average Grade Enrollment</b>		82	69	51	39	
<b>Average Percentage of Enrollment</b>		<b>34%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>16%</b>	

Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

According to the school's Web site,<sup>60</sup> "In 2006, 95% of students passed the math section of the MCAS on their first try while 96% passed the English section on their first try. Most of these students had entered ninth grade at City on a Hill having failed at least one of their eighth grade MCAS exams."

In 2004, 118 students were admitted to the class of 2008. At the beginning of grade 10, the year that MCAS is administered, 85 students were enrolled, or 72 percent of the entry year students. Only 79 of those sophomores took the grade 10 MCAS. So, the percentage of students who passed the ELA and Math MCAS on their first try was 65 percent of the entry year students.

In addition, City on a Hill states on its Web site, "100% of City on a Hill graduates of the class of 2007 were admitted to college." Yet, as Figure 10 indicates, only 22 students were left at the school at the beginning of their senior year; two-thirds who entered in grade 9 were gone. The Web site states, "For the past nine years, every graduate of City on a Hill has been accepted into college." From 2000-2009, 975 students have enrolled at City on a Hill and 347 were enrolled at the beginning of grade 12. So no more than 36 percent of the students who began this school in grade 9 could have gone on to college – not the 100 percent that the Web site appears to imply.

### Codman Academy

Codman Academy is the smallest of *TBF report* charters with an average enrollment of 105. The school's charter allows a student enrollment of 120. The average student attrition over the five classes that have completed is 44 percent (see Figure 11).

FIGURE 11: CODMAN ACADEMY: STUDENT ATTRITION 2001-2009

Grad. Class	Entry Year	Gr. 9	Gr.10	Gr. 11	Gr.12	Promoting Power
2005	2001	33	25	20	20	60%
2006	2002	35	29	21	19	54%
2007	2003	32	30	23	19	59%
2008	2004	34	27	15	13	38%
2009	2005	38	38	28	27	71%
2010	2006	40	40	24		N/A
2011	2007	39	25			N/A
2012	2008	40				N/A
<b>Average Grade Enrollment</b>		<b>32</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>20</b>	
<b>Average Percentage of Enrollment</b>		<b>31%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>19%</b>	

Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

The Codman Academy Web site<sup>61</sup> states, "100% of our graduates have been accepted to college and 75% are currently enrolled in higher education." However, on average only 56 percent of the students accepted are enrolled at the beginning of grade 12: from a low of 38 percent for the class of 2008 to a high of 71 percent for the class of 2009. The highest number of accepted students who may have gone on to higher education is 98, or 57 percent of the students accepted into grade 9 between 2001 and 2005. This is significantly lower than the 100 percent claimed on the school's Web site.

### MATCH

Like other charters, MATCH began with grade 9 in its inaugural year and added a grade each year as the initial class progressed to grade 12. The school's initial charter allowed for a student enrollment of 220. In the 2008-09, grade 6 was added; the charter enrollment cap was increased to 500.

The *CSA report* indicates that a measure of success for MATCH is that 99 percent of its graduates have received acceptance letters from four-year colleges. In addition, it reports that in 2006-07 all of its 10th graders scored above 240 on the Math MCAS, and 85 percent scored above 240 on ELA MCAS.<sup>62</sup>

However, in looking at the enrollment of MATCH over its history, it becomes clear that there is a serious student attrition problem. On average, a student entering MATCH in the ninth grade has a 40 percent chance of graduating from MATCH four years later: the percentage of students completing the curriculum ranges from a high of 48 percent for the class of 2008 to a low of 35 percent for the class of 2004 (see Figure 12).

The statement that 99 percent of its graduates are accepted at four-year colleges is misleading. In the first six classes (2004-2009) a maximum of 136 students out of 367 who entered the school in grade 9 would have graduated.<sup>63</sup> At this rate, only 37

FIGURE 12: MATCH: STUDENT ATTRITION 2000-2009

Grad. Class	Entry Year	Gr.6	Gr.9	Gr.10	Gr. 11	Gr.12	Promoting Power
2004	2000		78	54	32	27	35%
2005	2001		65	50	38	28	43%
2006	2002		79	56	24	18	23%
2007	2003		49	38	25	20	41%
2008	2004		96	72	54	46	48%
2009	2005		72	61	46	34	47%
2010	2006		72	57	49		N/A
2011	2007		73	42			N/A
2012	2008		94				N/A
2015	2008	89					
<b>Average Grade Enrollment</b>		89	75	54	35	29	
<b>Average Percentage of Enrollment</b>			39%	28%	18%	15%	
			32%	27%	19%	12%	10%

Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

percent of entering students have been accepted in four-year colleges as MATCH seniors – a number that is actually lower than those of most urban high schools and significantly below that of the Boston Public Schools.

Likewise, the statement that 100 percent of 10th graders achieved a 240 score or better on the 2007 MCAS clearly did not include all of the students accepted into the school as freshmen. This is the class of 2009: 72 students entered in the ninth grade; 61 – or 85 percent – were still in the school at the beginning of the 10th grade; only 46 – or 64 percent – took MCAS. So the percentage achieving a score of 240 or better is 64 percent of the entering 9th graders.

### CHARTER MIDDLE-HIGH SCHOOLS

Generally, middle school students do not drop out of school: there are no high-stakes tests, no college acceptance issues, and, for the most part, they are under 16 and must attend school. So the student attrition rates should not be high during grades 5-8. The promoting power for these schools is computed by dividing the highest grade by the entry grade.

#### Academy of the Pacific Rim

The Academy of the Pacific Rim currently enrolls students in grades 5-12. During the inaugural year, student enrollment was limited to grades 6-10; the school added grade 11 in its second year and grade 12 in its third year. Grade 5 was added in 2007-08. As Figure 10 illustrates, beginning in the 2000-01 school year, the school accepts between 77 and 84 students into the entry year. Since its opening, three classes (2007, 2008 and 2009) have completed grades 6-12 at the Academy of the Pacific Rim.

Two “elements of success” cited in the *CSA report* include MCAS performance and college-sending rates, indicating that 100 percent of the 2005-06 10th graders passed MCAS on their first attempt and that 92 percent of the graduates enrolled in college.<sup>64</sup>

So what do these indicators of success actually mean? Student attrition is significant: between 36 percent and 42 percent of the students accepted into the school as sixth-graders are enrolled in October of their senior year. As Figure 13 illustrates, with few exceptions, each year fewer students are enrolled in the higher grade.

FIGURE 13: ACADEMY OF THE PACIFIC RIM CS: STUDENT ATTRITION 2001-2009

Grad. Class	Entry Year	Gr. 5	Gr.6	Gr.7	Gr.8	Gr.9	Gr.10	Gr. 11	Gr.12	Promoting Power
2003	2001						15	11	11	N/A
2004	2001					38	28	24	22	58%
2005	2001				48	43	28	27	27	56%
2006	2001			59	42	35	31	25	22	37%
2007	2001		82	83	49	42	30	29	30	37%
2008	2001		83	65	59	50	46	41	35	42%
2009	2002		82	69	53	40	41	35	34	42%
2010	2003		77	71	64	53	41	36		47%
2011	2004		77	70	66	55	49			N/A
2012	2005		81	76	65	62				N/A
2013	2006		81	75	54					N/A
2014	2007		84	74						N/A
2015	2008	82	82							N/A
2016	2008	83								N/A
<b>Average Grade Enrollment</b>		83	81	71	56	48	34	29	26	
<b>Average Percentage of Enrollment</b>		19%	19%	17%	13%	11%	8%	7%	6%	

Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

By June 2006, a maximum of 82 students may have graduated from the Academy of the Pacific Rim (the numbers may be less than the October enrollment for senior year; they are not larger). So of the 160 students who enrolled and could have completed grade 12 by June 2006, 75 have gone on to college, or 47 percent of initial enrollees. It appears that the school has a lower college-sending rate than the Boston Public Schools.

As to 2006 MCAS performance, 83 students enrolled in the class of 2008; 46 students remained in October of their sophomore year and 44 took MCAS that spring. So 55 percent of those starting at the school passed MCAS on their first attempt. In the same year, 85 percent of BPS students passed the ELA MCAS and 78 percent passed the Math MCAS.

### Boston Collegiate

Boston Collegiate accepted students into grades 9-12 during its inaugural year and has added a grade in each subsequent year to its current enrollment of about 400 students in grades 5-12.

According to the *CSA report*, Boston Collegiate “is the only public school in Massachusetts where all tenth-graders passed the math and English portions of the MCAS from 2003-2006.” In addition, every graduate has been accepted to a four-year college. However, the *CSA report* also states, “relatively few students leave Boston Collegiate along the way.” Given that they lose approximately half their students over four years – anywhere from 45 percent to 64 percent – it is unclear how the authors could state that “relatively few students leave.”

FIGURE 14: BOSTON COLLEGIATE CS: STUDENT ATTRITION 2000-2009

Grad. Class	Entry Year	Gr. 5	Gr.6	Gr.7	Gr.8	Gr.9	Gr.10	Gr. 11	Gr.12	Promoting Power
2004	2000					33	30	22	18	55%
2005	2000				42	33	26	26	20	48%
2006	2000			43	45	25	20	17	17	40%
2007	2000		40	43	49	33	22	22	15	38%
2008	2000	42	44	44	44	37	24	19	15	36%
2009	2001	43	46	49	44	39	30	25	21	49%
2010	2002	65	68	66	57	50	39	36		55%
2011	2003	88	88	66	60	41	31			N/A
2012	2004	66	66	60	65	52				N/A
2013	2005	90	88	67	67					N/A
2014	2006	72	72	71						N/A
2015	2007	88	89							N/A
2016	2008	97								N/A
<b>Average Grade Enrollment</b>		<b>72</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>18</b>	
<b>Average Percentage of Enrollment</b>		<b>20%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>5%</b>	

Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

The school brags on its Web site, “Boston Collegiate is the only public school in the state where 100% of tenth grade students have passed the mathematics MCAS for six consecutive years. Boston Collegiate students have outperformed their peers in Boston and Massachusetts year after year. In 2008, BCCS 10th graders **ranked #1 in the state** on the math MCAS for the second time in three years. We are the **only district in the state** that scored 100% ‘Advanced’ or ‘Proficient’ on the 10th grade math MCAS.”<sup>65</sup>

As Figure 14 indicates, a significant number of students have left this school over the years. Students in the first six graduating classes had a 44 percent chance of completing grade 12 (from a low of 35 percent to a high of 55 percent).

What does it mean to say 100 percent of the 10th graders received an MCAS score of 220 or above from 2004-2008. On average, 55 percent (42-67 percent) of the entry-year students took the grade 10 MCAS; 92 out of the 167 enrolled in the entry year remained at the beginning of grade 10, and 84 remained at the beginning of grade 11.

As Figure 15 illustrates, for the Class of 2008, 35 students scored in the Advanced/Proficient (A/P) MCAS categories – 84 percent of the 42 students when they were tested in grade 6 math. Two years later, 45 students in the class of 2008 were tested:

FIGURE 15: BOSTON COLLEGIATE CHARTER SCHOOL MATH GRADES 6, 8, AND 10 MCAS PERFORMANCE FOR CLASSES OF 2008-2010.

Class of	Grade 6 Math					Grade 8 Math					Grade 10 Math				
	Adv/Prof		NI/Fail		Total	Adv/Prof		NI/Fail		Total	Adv/Prof		NI/Fail		Total
	#	%	#	%		#	%	#	%		#	%	#	%	
2008	35	84	7	16	42	18	40	27	60	45	23	100	0	0	23
2009	27	60	18	40	45	22	51	21	49	43	26	89	3	11	29
2010	28	43	38	60	66	20	36	36	64	56	37	100	0	0	37

Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, School and District Profiles, Assessment.

18, or 40 percent, were in A/P. The same class two years later in grade 10 had 100 percent scoring in A/P – however, only 23 students were tested. What happened to the 19 students who left and where did they score in grade 6 and grade 8 MCAS tests?

For the Classes of 2009 and 2010, the story appears to be similar. Student performance drops in the A/P categories between grade 6 and 8 and improves dramatically in grade 10. The Class of 2009 had 27 students, 60 percent, of its students in A/P in grade 6; this dropped to 21 students, 51 percent, in grade 8, with approximately the same number of students tested. Then, in grade 10, 89 percent of the students scored in A/P; however, only 26 students were in this category, and 16 students were gone from the class. So the 27 students in grade 6 represented 60 percent of the students tested, and the 26 students in grade 10 represented 89 percent of those tested because of the high student attrition.

For the Class of 2010, 28 students, 43 percent of the tested students, were A/P in grade 6; 20, or 36 percent, in grade 8, and 37, or 100 percent, in grade 10. Of the 66 students who were initially tested in 2004, 37 were tested in 2008. It would appear that 29 students who left the school may have been the low scorers.

As to every graduate up through the class of 2007 being accepted at a four-year college, 70 of the 158 students enrolled remained in October of their senior year. Thus, only 44 percent of students who enrolled in Boston Collegiate were accepted into college as seniors. As noted above, 50 percent of BPS students are accepted at four-year colleges.

We have no idea what happened to the 56 percent of students who didn't make it through all four years, but we could hazard a guess that college-sending rates for the traditional public schools would also be much higher if school districts could establish requirements that encourage weaker students to leave. They cannot; charter schools can. This alone may be enough to explain any differences in MCAS scores and college acceptance rates, where they exist.

### Boston Preparatory

Boston Preparatory opened in 2005 and, like other charters, has grown its enrollment adding a grade each year. It will expand to its full grade enrollment with the class of 2011. For each incoming class, between 93 and 118 students are accepted. According to the school's Web site, "We opened in the fall of 2004 with 110 6th graders. At full capacity, we will serve 350 6th-12th graders. Currently, we serve 290 6th-10th graders. In a short time, BPCPS has succeeded in replicating systems from other high-performing schools which have led to remarkable student achievement."<sup>66</sup> What the school appears to have replicated is a serious student attrition problem and claiming success based on percentages rather than actual numbers of students served.

FIGURE 16: BOSTON PREPARATORY: STUDENT ATTRITION 2005-2009

Grad. Class	Entry Year	Gr.6	Gr.7	Gr.8	Gr.9	Gr.10	Promoting Power*
2011	2004	106	53	39	20	17	16%
2012	2005	94	69	44	32		34%
2013	2006	102	87	63			N/A
2014	2007	118	87				N/A
2015	2008	93					N/A
<b>Average Grade Enrollment</b>		103	74	67	26	17	
<b>Average Percentage of Enrollment</b>		36%	26%	23%	9%	6%	

Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

\* This school has not yet reached its full complement of grades. Promoting Power only for first two cohorts who have made it to the 9th grade.

As Figure 16 illustrates, the student attrition for the first class is an incredible 84 percent. Only 34 percent of the class of 2010 remained in October 2008. This raises the question of the value of having any school with such a high attrition rate continuing to exist. If these schools do have a “funnel” effect, then Boston Preparatory is the most glaring example of this practice.

FIGURE 17: BOSTON PREPARATORY MATH GRADES 6, 7 AND 8 MCAS PERFORMANCE FOR CLASSES OF 2011 AND 2012

Grad Class of	Grade 6 Math					Grade 7 Math					Grade 8 Math				
	Adv/Prof		NI/Fail		Total	Adv/Prof		NI/Fail		Total	Adv/Prof		NI/Fail		Total
	#	%	#	%		#	%	#	%		#	%	#	%	
2011	44	50	44	50	88	42	64	23	36	65	40	93	3	7	43
2012	54	56	42	44	96	29	59	20	41	49	32	84	6	16	38

Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, School and District Profiles, Assessment.

The Boston Preparatory Web site touts student performance on MCAS as an example of academic achievement. Again, the use of percentages over raw numbers tells a different story (Figure 17).

Boston Preparatory displays charts on its Web site comparing its MCAS performance to that of the Boston Public Schools and the Commonwealth; each indicates that the school’s performance is higher than either the state or the BPS. In 2005, 88 students in the Class of 2011 took the grade 6 math MCAS and 50 percent scored in Advanced/Proficient. The same class a year later had 42 students score in A/P – two **less** than the previous year; however, because 23 students were no longer in the school, 64 percent were reported in the A/P categories. The same class in grade 8 had 40 students in A/P – two **less** than the previous year; again, another 22 students were no longer at the school, so the 40 A/P students now represent 93 percent of those remaining. It would be a fair assumption that the low-achievers left the school.

The same holds true for the Class of 2012. As 6th graders, 54 students were in A/P, or 56 percent of those tested; in grade 7, 29 students equaled 59 percent, and in grade 8, 32 students equaled 84 percent. Over the three years, only 39 percent of the students who enrolled were still present – in the middle school grades; 54 students had left the class, and the school still has four more years of its program. Who will be left?

## CHARTER MIDDLE SCHOOL

### Roxbury Preparatory

Roxbury Prep is a grade 6-8 middle school serving about 200 students. The *CSA report* defines measures of success at Roxbury Prep: MCAS performance and high school graduation. Figure 18 illustrates that the school's attrition rate over the three years averages 25 percent.

FIGURE 18: ROXBURY PREPARATORY: STUDENT ATTRITION 2000-2009

Grad. Class	Entry Year	Gr.6	Gr.7	Gr.8	Promoting Power
2003	2000	68	48	46	68%
2004	2001	66	58	51	77%
2005	2002	72	60	51	71%
2006	2003	68	65	54	79%
2007	2004	74	65	50	68%
2008	2005	76	68	51	71%
2009	2006	73	71	58	80%
2010	2007	76	73		N/A
2011	2008	99			N/A
<b>Average Grade Enrollment</b>		75	64	52	
<b>Average Percentage of Enrollment</b>		39%	34%	27%	

Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

FIGURE 19: MCAS PERFORMANCE – ROXBURY PREP CLASS OF 2006

	Advanced		Proficient		Needs Improvement		Fail/Warn	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Gr. 6 Math (72 students)	13	18	28	39	28	39	3	4
Gr. 8 Math( 52 students)	14	27	33	63	5	10	0	0
Gr. 7 ELA – 60 students	5	8	44	73	11	18	0	0
Gr. 8 ELA – 52 students	3	6	44	85	5	10	0	0

Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

The *CSA report* focused on the MCAS performance of the 2006 8th graders, reporting the results in percentages of students who scored advanced/proficient. Indeed, the percentages are impressive. However, a closer examination of the class performance based on the actual number of students in each scoring category demonstrates how the use of percentages can be deceiving.

In 2004, 72 students in the Class of 2006 took the grade 6 MCAS math test; 52 students took the 2006 test. As Figure 19 illustrates, one more student scored in Advanced and five more in Proficient in grade 8. However, the loss of 20 students from grade 6 to grade 8 allows the scores of these six students to increase the percentage from 57 percent to 90 percent. The same holds for ELA: 60 students took the test in 2005 and 52 in 2006. The same number of students scored in Proficient, and two fewer students achieved Advanced, yet the loss of eight students allowed the percentage in these two categories to jump from 81 percent to 91 percent – even though the number of students who actually improved went down.

**Finding: BCRS appear to do no better than BPS, despite fact that BPS is educating ALL students who walk through schoolhouse doors regardless of language, special needs status, level of poverty, or whether they “fit” in. BPS retains 81 percent of its 9th graders versus 49 percent for charter schools.**

## FINDINGS

This study sought to provide policymakers with answers to two key questions. First, who is actually being served – and not served – by Boston charters?

An analysis of the demographic characteristics of charter school students tells us that Boston charters identified as “high-performing” are leading to segregation by language, disability, and poverty status within the broad public system.

1. Virtually no English language learners are educated in these schools. Almost 20 percent of the Boston public school students are categorized as ELLs, while less than 1 percent of charter school students are so identified.
2. BCRS serve lower percentages of special education students than the Boston Public Schools. Almost all BCRS students with special needs have mild learning disabilities that may be addressed through full inclusion in a regular education classroom. Virtually no special education students with severe learning disabilities whose learning needs must be addressed in substantially separate classrooms attend BCRS.
3. BCRS have a significantly lower percentage of the poorest students – those receiving free lunch – and a higher percentage of those either receiving reduced price lunch or are ineligible for FRPL.

Second, what are the odds of a student entering a charter school successfully completing the academic program offered?

To answer this question, a number of factors were explored beyond the simple use of a lottery to select students: parental contracts that impose private school behaviors, codes of conduct that discipline students for the “small stuff” lead to excessive in- and out-of-school suspensions, and selective attrition of those students who appear not to be performing well on MCAS.

1. While district schools must accept all students arriving at the door, regardless of the ability or the willingness of parents to work with the school in helping to educate the child, BCRS appear to be applying private school parental behaviors as a condition of student attendance. Parents who are willing and able to volunteer, or come to school when a uniform is missing, or to provide students with a quiet study area free of distractions, may be more likely to send their child to one of these schools. However, parents with children who have such chronic illnesses as asthma may choose not to send their child to a school where even health-related excused absences may result in the child repeating the grade.
2. District schools educate all students, regardless of parental engagement or involvement. BCRS require that parents sign contracts as a condition of their child’s attendance. Contracts may outline a few overarching responsibilities or include detailed lists of specific actions with consequences attached. The application of such parental contracts represents a sorting mechanism to ensure that only those families who can commit to addressing each of the contractual elements apply for or accept admission to the school.

3. District schools had in- and out-of-school suspension rates of about 9 percent in 2007-08. In all but three BCRS, more than 25 percent of the student body was suspended at least once during the academic year; in three schools, the suspension rates rose to above 50 percent, and, in one school, to more than 75 percent of the students were suspended at least once.
4. What the application of a “no excuses” discipline model has promoted is a “funnel” effect in BCRS. To date, 5,329 students have enrolled in the BCRS. In that time, of the 2,433 who could have completed the academic program to graduation from grade 5 or 12, 1,239 have been enrolled at the beginning of the final year. Forty-nine percent of the students initially enrolled in these BCRS are gone before completing the school’s academic program.
5. *TBF report* defines this as “selective attrition” and “selective out-migration of low achievers.” In other words, over the course of time, students who have won the lottery and gained admission to these charter schools leave and, for the most part, are not replaced by students on the waiting list. At the same time, the schools report that all or most students pass MCAS or are accepted to four-year colleges, without indicating that these claims are based on only those students who remain.
6. We have no idea what happened to the nearly 50 percent of students who didn’t make it through these charter schools, but we could hazard a guess that MCAS performance and college-sending rates for the district schools would also be much higher if schools could establish requirements that encourage weaker students to leave. They cannot, nor should they, but charter schools can and do. This alone may be enough to explain any differences in MCAS scores and college acceptance rates, where they exist.

## CONCLUSIONS

As policymakers wrestle with the idea of raising the cap on charter schools, they should consider the negative effects that BCRS have on their students.

First, charter schools are not educating the same students as district schools. It appears on the surface that they are teaching a similar group of students; however, as illustrated here, when the data are disaggregated by type of special need or level of poverty, the story is quite different.

Second, what happens to those students who “win the lottery” but fail to make it to the finish line? We know that failure in school is a leading cause of dropping out; these schools appear to be practicing “pushout” strategies and can fairly be labeled “dropout factories.” But where are the students pushed to and for what particular infraction? It appears that those who are part of this “selective out-migration of low achievers” are those who find the work too difficult or the rules too strict, as the MATCH director indicated in the *AEI report*.

### Questions for Policymakers

1. Should charter schools be a vehicle for creating a discriminatory two-tiered educational system that sorts students by disability, language and poverty status so that only district schools are serving the neediest students?
2. Should charter schools be allowed to “funnel” students through their grades by accepting large numbers of students in the entry year and then implementing strategies that systematically reduce the ranks of those who fail to meet the academic or behavioral norms of the school?

3. Should charter schools be allowed to report they have waiting lists after they have admitted their full complement of students during the entry year if they have no intention of admitting students in subsequent years even if their enrollment declines?

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, charter school statutes and regulations should be changed in three broad areas: Integrity, Transparency and Equity. If charter schools are public schools, then they must be held to the same acceptance and enrollment standards as district schools.

Furthermore, given that promoting power and student attrition at charter schools are significant and the “selective out-migration of low-achievers” may be contributing to claims of charter school success, these schools must be accountable not only to the DESE but to the local school district’s decision makers, municipal leaders, and taxpayers. To that end, charter schools should be subject to a local approval process to prevent such schools from opening over the objections of the local taxpayers who must fund them and the local school committee charged with providing all students within the district with a high-quality public education.

### Integrity:

1. Discrimination should not be permitted in any form. Charter schools should be required to fairly serve all students, including special needs children, English language learners, low-income students and those at risk of dropping out.
2. Application to a Commonwealth charter school may not be based on parental or student interviews.
3. Acceptance to a Commonwealth charter school may not be based on parental contracts, student contracts or other practices designed to exclude students who may not fit prior to or after the lottery.

### Transparency:

1. The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education must deny renewal of a charter to schools where student attrition rates match or exceed the dropout rates in the district schools.
2. Commonwealth charter schools must be required to fill vacancies with students from the waiting list at any time during the school year or at any grade level for which a vacant seat is available.
3. If no waiting list exists or if no students on the waiting list are willing to transfer, then the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education should consider amending the charter to reduce the number of students allowed at the school.
4. Commonwealth charter schools must provide on an annual basis to the sending school district superintendent student demographic data filed with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education regarding the actual number of students in each grade by race, gender, language, special needs, and poverty status.
5. Commonwealth charter schools must report on an annual basis to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and to the sending school district superintendent the actual number of students who exited the school by race, gender, language, special needs and poverty status and the specific reason for each departure.

6. Commonwealth charter schools must report on an annual basis all assets and the amount and source of all non-tuition funding.
7. Commonwealth Charter Schools must report on an annual basis all executive compensation packages to school managers and administrators and compensation to board members.

#### Equity:

1. Commonwealth charter schools must provide all students with an education addressing the learning standards of all seven Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.
2. Commonwealth charter schools may not counsel out or push out students based on either minor behavior infractions or poor academic performance.
3. New charters and charter renewals must be approved by a majority of the school committee in the host district. For regional charters, a majority of sending districts' school committees must approve a new charter or a renewal.

#### QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The research for this study raised issues about charter school practices that could be the basis of further study to better inform policymakers about the practices within charter schools and their effect on district schools. They include:

1. The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education has raised the issue of teacher attrition at Commonwealth Charter Schools, and research studies have indicated that teacher attrition in charters may be over 200 percent higher than that in district schools. What are the causes and costs of high teacher attrition in charter schools?
2. What happens to the larger number of students who leave Commonwealth charter schools? How are "peer effects" changed within the school as a result of their leaving?
3. The enabling charter school legislation clearly indicates that charter schools are to be "innovative" in their instructional practices.<sup>67</sup> As a consequence of this research, it has become apparent that teaching tends to be dominated by the old practice of whole class instruction that is teacher-centered and teacher-led – most often referred to in the pedagogical research as "direct instruction" and advocated by Sigmund Engelmann in the 1960s.<sup>68</sup> An area for further study could focus on the effects of direct instruction on student attrition: are students leaving charter schools because this instructional approach does not address their individual learning needs?

## Endnotes

- 1 See Abdulkadiroglu et. al., page 37, column 2.
- 2 Duncan, A. 2009. Start over: turnarounds should be the first option for low-performing schools. Education Week, June 17, 2009.
- 3 The number completing could be lower as these numbers are based on October 1 reports to the DESE and do not include those students who left during the academic year.
- 4 See Merseth, 2009, and Wilson, 2008, for a detailed explanation of the instructional practices used in the BCRS identified in this study.
- 5 Adams & Engelmann, 1996.
- 6 Segal, M. 2009.
- 7 For 2009-10 the following districts are at their pre-enrollment limit: Chesterfield-Goshen, Edgartown, Erving, Florida, Hancock, Hawlemont, Holyoke, Leverett, Malden, Oak Bluffs, Pelham, Petersham, Provincetown, Rowe, Savoy, Tisbury and Up-Island. DESE Memorandum, 2009-2010 Pre-Enrollment, Significant Expansion, and NSS Near-Cap Information and Deadlines, February 10, 2009, Retrieved online on June 26, 2009, at [http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/charter/charter\\_cap09.html](http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/charter/charter_cap09.html)
- 8 Vaznis, 2009.
- 9 Shen & Wong, 2006.
- 10 In a communication to charter school leaders, the DESE states, "As seats become available, charter schools should enroll students from its [sic] waiting list, some of whom may have been previously skipped, if a particular sending district is no longer on this 'near cap' list." Street, M. 2005, Memorandum: Managing charter school enrollment and the net school spending cap. November 7, 2005. Retrieved online on May 5, 2009 at [http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/charter/charter\\_cap.html](http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/charter/charter_cap.html)
- 11 MGL, Ch.71, Sec.89; DESE, 2009c.
- 12 Massachusetts Charter Schools Questions and Answers, available at [www.doe.mass.edu/charter/qanda.html](http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/qanda.html)
- 13 DESE, 2009b.
- 14 Source of information: [www.doe.mass.edu/charter/reports/2002/enroll.xls](http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/reports/2002/enroll.xls)
- 15 DESE, 2009b.
- 16 This study excludes Commonwealth charter schools that are not located in Boston that may enroll students from Boston, such as Prospect Hill Academy in Somerville or Benjamin Banneker in Cambridge.
- 17 CREDO, 2009a.
- 18 Massachusetts is one of the 16 states, but no data appear in the final report. According to M. Raymond of Stanford, "Our original data access agreement with Mass DOE permitted us to include their student level data in our national model but not release any state-specific results. That decision was recently reversed and you can now see how the charter schools in MA performed." Personal communication, July 13, 2009.
- 19 Abdulkadiroglu, et. al. 2009.
- 20 Wilson, 2008.
- 21 Merseth, et. al. 2009.
- 22 It should be noted that Kane also includes the Boston public schools Health Careers Academy which is a Horace Mann CS and that Merseth also includes the Lawrence Community Day which is not located in Boston, but Lawrence, MA. As a result, neither of these schools will be discussed here.
- 23 Miron 2009a and 2009b.
- 24 Miron 2009.
- 25 Auditor Report, 2009.
- 26 Personal communication, J. Wulfson, October 9, 2008.
- 27 On August 7, 2009, *The Boston Globe* embedded waiting list information from the MPCSA on its Web site as a sidebar to Vaznis' column on the charter school ballot question.
- 28 Boston Collegiate CS does not accept students after grade 8. Personal communication with school, June 26, 2009.
- 29 Results from charter schools through a public record request for waiting list information.
- 30 See Table A.I, page 42, for exclusion decision points and numbers.
- 31 This report also includes a charter school in Lawrence which is not discussed here because it lies outside the city of Boston.

- 32 Adding African-American and Hispanic student populations together occurs in other reports. Yet, closer examination finds the same practice: a significantly larger percentage of African-American students are in the charter schools (57.7 percent in Boston CS versus 39.3 percent in Boston public schools) and a significantly smaller percentage of Hispanic students (25.8 percent in Boston CS versus 36.7 percent in Boston public schools). The reason for combining these two populations is unclear.
- 33 Ravitch, 2009.
- 34 MPCSA Web site, [www.masscharterschools.org/](http://www.masscharterschools.org/), posted as of May 5, 2009. Similarly reported at U.S. Charter Schools at [www.uscharterschools.org/cs/r/view/uscs\\_rs/2491](http://www.uscharterschools.org/cs/r/view/uscs_rs/2491), and the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools at [www.publiccharters.org/node/656](http://www.publiccharters.org/node/656), which called for raising the current limits. In addition, free market organizations hailed the results: The Heartland Institute at [www.heartland.org/policybot/results/24795/Mass\\_Charter\\_Schools\\_Outperform\\_Their\\_Peers.html](http://www.heartland.org/policybot/results/24795/Mass_Charter_Schools_Outperform_Their_Peers.html), the American Enterprise Institute at [www.aei.org/publications/pubID.29571/pub\\_detail.asp](http://www.aei.org/publications/pubID.29571/pub_detail.asp)
- 35 A sample includes, Mathews, J. Trends: charter vs. pilot schools. The Washington Post, February 13, 2009, at [voices.washingtonpost.com/class-struggle/2009/02/battle\\_of\\_boston\\_charter\\_vs\\_pi.html](http://voices.washingtonpost.com/class-struggle/2009/02/battle_of_boston_charter_vs_pi.html); Education Week, Study evaluates Boston charters, January 21, 2009, [www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/01/21/18report-b2.h28.html?r=1380929822](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/01/21/18report-b2.h28.html?r=1380929822)
- 36 MassInc (2009)
- 37 See Smith comments on TBF report at NAPCS Web site, retrieved on August 17, 2009 at <http://www.publiccharters.org/node/656>. The statement was then picked up and distributed by Reuters, retrieved on August 17, 2009 at <http://www.reuters.com/article/pressRelease/idUS185004+06-Jan-2009+PRN20090106>
- 38 Mass. Charter Schools Outperform Their Peers, Comments to the Heartland Institute, a self-proclaimed advocate of free-market solutions, retrieved August 17, 2009 at [http://www.heartland.org/publications/school%20reform/article/24795/Mass\\_Charter\\_Schools\\_Outperform\\_Their\\_Peers.html](http://www.heartland.org/publications/school%20reform/article/24795/Mass_Charter_Schools_Outperform_Their_Peers.html)
- 39 Lehigh, 2009. Questioning study findings may provoke sharp responses from charter school media advocates. In preparation for this study a number of Public Records Request were issued to charter schools across the Commonwealth asking for information that all public schools must have on hand such as teacher licenses, educational background, and compensation. Requests were also filed about waiting lists, in part because the DESE admitted that there was no oversight and perhaps no integrity to the lists which have been used in the media to make the case for “lifting the caps.” This prompted a blurb on The Boston Globe op-ed page by Scott Lehigh, a pro-charter staff writer: **Schools: Research with an agenda.** The Massachusetts Teachers Association has long been a determined foe of Commonwealth charter schools. No surprise there: The innovative charters regularly turn in impressive academic results - and they are non-unionized. But why has the MTA filed public records requests for the waiting lists at the state’s Commonwealth charters? “We are doing research . . . as part of our preparation for the debate over nontraditional schools,” says MTA spokesman Bob Duffy. Hmmm. Research done by the state’s largest teachers union into the non-unionized schools it opposes. That’s a “research” effort whose results it will be best to take with a grain – actually make that a full shaker – of salt. [Boston Globe, November 16, 2008]
- 40 See State of Education: Boston’s pilot and charter schools, retrieved on August 17, 2009 at <http://www.necn.com/Boston/Business/2009/01/08/State-of-Education-Bostons/1231462113.html>
- 41 Some reports split schools such as the Academy of the Pacific Rim in two: middle school for grades 6-8 and high school for grades 9-12. However, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education lists such schools as one entity: a grade 6-12 school. The DESE designation is used in this study.
- 42 See DESE Changes to SIMS for 2007-08 School Year at [www.doe.mass.edu/infoservices/data/sims/fy08changes.html?section=section\\_2](http://www.doe.mass.edu/infoservices/data/sims/fy08changes.html?section=section_2)
- 43 Miron and Nelson, 2002.
- 44 Federal Register /Vol. 73, No. 69 /Wednesday, April 9, 2008 /Notices, retrieved online on June 8, 2009, at [www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/notices/iegs/IEGs08-09.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/notices/iegs/IEGs08-09.pdf)
- 45 Boston Preparatory Charter School Web site; 7.21.09
- 46 BCCS Family Accountability Contract, 2009.
- 47 MATCH, 2009.
- 48 Boston public schools code of conduct.
- 49 Hammond, et. al., 2007
- 50 Wilson, 2008, p. 19.
- 51 Hammond, et. al., 2007.
- 52 <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/help/data.aspx>

53 2007-08 was not an outlier year with regard to ISSP and OSSP. In 2006-07, the numbers were equally high.

**IN AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS, 2006-07, MASSACHUSETTS, BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AND BOSTON CHARTER REPORT SCHOOLS**

	ISSP	OSSP	Total ISSP & OSSP
<b>Massachusetts</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>9.0</b>
<b>Boston Public Schools</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>8.2</b>	<b>8.5</b>
Academy of Pacific Rim	28.9	22.4	51.3
Boston Collegiate	13.5	12.4	25.9
Boston Preparatory	13.3	57.6	70.9
City on a Hill	11.9	71.3	83.2
Codman Academy	0.0	0.0	0.0
Edward Brooke	0.0	26.6	26.6
Excel Academy	0.0	18.0	18.0
MATCH	4.3	4.3	8.6
Roxbury Preparatory	0.0	61.8	61.8
<b>Average – BCRS</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>30.4</b>	<b>38.5</b>

54 Wilson, 2008.

55 DESE school and district profiles: Boston – <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/student.aspx?orgcode=00350000&orgtypecode=5&leftNavId=307&>

56 DESE School and district profiles: <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/general.aspx?topNavId=1&orgcode=00350000&orgtypecode=5&>

57 Zudkerbrod, 2007. Viadero, 2004.

58 22 MA high schools on “dropout factory” list, retrieved August 17, 2009 at <http://www.wbz.com/pages/1147212.php?>

59 Vaznis, 2008.

60 City on a Hill Web site, retrieved on August 12, 2009 at <http://www.cityonahill.org/results.php>

61 Codman Academy Web site, retrieved on August 12, 2008 at [http://codmanacademy.org/main/index.php?module=pagemaster&PAGE\\_user\\_op=view\\_page&PAGE\\_id=5&MMN\\_position=4:4](http://codmanacademy.org/main/index.php?module=pagemaster&PAGE_user_op=view_page&PAGE_id=5&MMN_position=4:4)

62 These same statistics are found on the MATCH Web site, retrieved on August 12, 2008 at <http://www.matcheschool.org/about/results.htm>

63 The number completing could be lower as these numbers are based on October 1 reports to the DESE and do not include those students who left during the academic year.

64 The same statistics are found on the Academy of the Pacific Rim Web site, retrieved on August 13, 2009 at [http://www.pacrim.org/test\\_scores.htm](http://www.pacrim.org/test_scores.htm)

65 Boston Collegiate Charter School Web site, retrieved August 13, 2009 at <http://www.bostoncollegiate.org/aboutUs/ourResults.php>

66 Boston Preparatory Charter School Web site, retrieved August 13, 2009 at [http://www.bostonprep.org/school\\_overview.html](http://www.bostonprep.org/school_overview.html)

67 See Merseth, 2009, and Wilson, 2008, for a detailed explanation of the instructional practices used in the BCRS identified in this study.

68 Adams & Engelmann, 1996.

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## **ABOUT THE MASSACHUSETTS TEACHERS ASSOCIATION**

The Massachusetts Teachers Association is a member-driven organization, governed by democratic principles that accepts and supports the interdependence of professionalism and unionism. The MTA promotes the use of its members' collective power to advance their professional and economic interests. The MTA is committed to human and civil rights and advocates for quality public education in which lifelong learning and innovation flourish. The MTA is the 107,000-member state affiliate of the National Education Association.

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