School Choice and Innovation: Investigating Mechanisms in Charter Schools

Chair: Marisa Cannata

Discussant: Doug Harris and Julian Betts

First choice section: Education Policy
Second choice section: School and classroom-based educational practices

Justification:

School choice advocates argue that providing schools with greater autonomy should result in more innovative educational practices. Central to this argument is that autonomy and accountability will produce organizational innovations that promote curriculum, instruction, and learning, which in turn will lead to better student outcomes (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Walberg & Bast, 2003). As Lubienski (2003) states, "choice, competition, and innovation are cast as the necessary vehicles for advancing academic outcomes" (p. 397). Free from the constraints of district hiring procedures, CS should also be innovative in their teacher hiring practices.

Yet, current research has not examined this issue in depth. Are CS more innovative than TPS? In what ways? How does this innovation impact student learning? Much of the existing research on charter schools explores the overall effect of school choice on student achievement. However, researchers have called for more examination of how educational mechanisms vary by school type (Betts et al., 2006; Hess & Loveless, 2005; Zimmer et al., 2003). In theory, CS may attract high quality teachers and alter the roles of principals and teachers (Hausman & Goldring, 2001; Chubb and Moe, 1990). Other research suggests that in-school conditions that are positively associated with student achievement and instruction, such as teacher professional learning communities, may be more prevalent in CS than TPS (Goldring & Cravens, 2008).

This symposium investigates multiple domains in which CS may be innovative and explores how and why CS and TPS differ in terms of teacher hiring, academic programs, organizational practices, and instructional practices. Exploring how practices vary between and within different school types (Betts et al., 2006; Hess & Loveless, 2005; Zimmer et al., 2003) will enable us to understand not just whether—but also how—charter schools influence student learning. Indeed, these papers also examine the impact of innovation in these domains to student achievement gains. The papers address the following questions: 1) How do principals’ teacher hiring preferences vary between charter and traditional public schools? 2) What
practices constitute innovation in various local and state contexts, and do levels and types of innovation differ between charter and traditional public schools?  3) How are achievement gains in traditional public schools and charter schools mediated by extended learning time? 4) What is the relationship between ability grouping, instructional practices, and achievement in charter and traditional public schools?
Title: Does Charter Status Determine Preferences? Comparing the Hiring Preferences of Charter and Traditional Public School Principals

Author(s): Marisa Cannata and Mimi Engel
Abstract Body

Limit 5 pages single spaced.

Background / Context:
Description of prior research and its intellectual context.

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

Purpose / Objective / Research Question / Focus of Study:
Description of the focus of the research.

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

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

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

**Population / Participants / Subjects:**
Description of the participants in the study: who, how many, key features or characteristics.

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

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

**Intervention / Program / Practice:**
Description of the intervention, program or practice, including details of administration and duration.

Charter and traditional public schools; principal preferences and characteristics as measured by a teacher survey; student achievement from NWEA assessments
Research Design:
Description of research design (e.g., qualitative case study, quasi-experimental design, secondary analysis, analytic essay, randomized field trial).

Statistical Survey, Quasi-experimental, Statistical Modeling

Data Collection and Analysis:
Description of the methods for collecting and analyzing data.

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

Findings / Results:
Description of the main findings with specific details.

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

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

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

This paper provides the first comparison of principals’ preferences for teacher characteristics across traditional public and charter schools. Understanding how charter principals’ preferences differ from those of public school principals contributes to scholarship on both teacher labor markets and charter schools. One of the first studies of teacher hiring in charter schools, this paper explores whether charter school flexibility and accountability leads to innovations in hiring practices.
Appendices
Not included in page count.

Appendix A. References
References are to be in APA version 6 format.


Title:

Choosing More School: Extended Time Policies and Student Achievement across Seasons in Charter and Traditional Public Schools

Authors:

Marc L. Stein and Bess A. Rose

Johns Hopkins University
Abstract Body

Limit 5 pages single spaced.

Background / Context:

Description of prior research and its intellectual context.

Extended learning or instructional time can take many forms: it can be provided by schools themselves, in the form of longer school days, longer school years, or separate summer programs; this extra time can consist of longer time given to the same subjects, time for additional subjects that would not otherwise have been taught, or different instructional methods that are intended to teach the same material in new ways (e.g., experiential learning, “hands-on” learning, small-group or one-on-one tutoring).

Research suggests that the extension of learning time for students during the school day, school year and over the course of the summer can be effective (e.g., Cooper, Charlton, Valentine, & Muhlenbruck, 2000; Cooper, Valentine, Charlton, & Melson, 2003; Grossman et al., 2002). As a recent review demonstrates, there is some evidence that extended day and year policies may have a positive effect on student academic achievement, especially for low-income, minority, or low-achieving students (Patall, Cooper, & Allen, 2010). Similarly, studies of the impact of after-school programs suggest that out-of-school time programs help boost academic achievement, although the evidence is clearer for at-risk students (Lauer, 2006; Fashola, 1998), as well as social-emotional outcomes (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). Summer programs appear to be particularly effective for students from low-income families. Extended time policies may be especially important given research that has documented inequalities between students in achievement growth during the school year and summer (e.g., Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2001; Downey, von Hippel, & Broh, 2004; Heyns, 1987; Stein, 2010).

Charter schools may be particularly well-suited to provide effective extended learning time. The policy argument for charter schools is that increased levels of autonomy and flexibility should allow charters to operate more innovatively than traditional public schools (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Although findings from research into the relative effectiveness of charter schools on student achievement have been widely debated (e.g., Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2009; Gleason, Clark, Tuttle, & Dwoyer, 2010; Hoxby, Murarka, & Kang, 2009), evidence of the degree to which charter schools actually implement practices that can be expected to improve student academic performance, and the relative impact of these practices on student achievement, is lacking (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003; Zimmer & Buddin, 2007; Berends, Goldring, Stein, & Cravens, 2010). Prior studies have examined a variety of instructional and organizational school characteristics, including teacher- and school-level supports for teaching and learning (Berends et al., 2010); efficiency (Carpenter & Noller, 2010); teacher attitudes and school climate (McDonald, Ross, Bol, & McSparrin-Gallagher, 2007) and working conditions for teachers (Malloy & Wohlstettern, 2003).
Notable examples of charter schools that purport to implement longer school days or years include the Edison model (Gill et al., 2007) and the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) (David, Woodworth, Grant, Guha, Lopez-Torkos, & Young, 2006). Results from prior studies that examine the implementation of extended instructional time in charter schools as a whole are mixed. Hamilton’s (2003) and Zimmer and Buddin’s (2007) studies of principals in California found that charter schools have longer instructional days than traditional public schools, although Zimmer and Buddin found this was only at the middle and high school levels, not elementary. The 2010 charter school evaluation conducted by IES found that charter lottery winners attended schools that had longer school days than those attended by lottery losers (7.2 hours versus 6.7 hours), but this study included only middle schools and study schools were not necessarily representative of charter schools nationally (Gleason, Clark, Tuttle, & Dwoyer, 2010).

**Purpose / Objective / Research Question / Focus of Study:**
*Description of the focus of the research.*

This paper looks at the potential mediating effects of extended time policies in a sample of traditional public schools and schools of choice on student achievement in reading and mathematics during the school year and over the summer. We ask the following research questions:

1. Do charter schools in the sample exhibit greater usage of extended time policies than a matched sample of traditional public schools?
2. Do extended time policies have positive influences on student achievement growth in mathematics and reading during the school year and summer time?

**Setting:**
*Description of the research location.*

Data for this study was collected from a sample of traditional public and charter schools that partner with the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) for interim achievement testing administration and services. Schools in our analysis sample are located across 6 states and a range of inner city, suburban and rural locals.

**Population / Participants / Subjects:**
*Description of the participants in the study: who, how many, key features or characteristics.*
The analysis sample for this paper includes 30 charter schools and 30 matched traditional public schools. Matches were based on the range of grades served, racial and socioeconomic demographics of the student population and proximity.

From the 60 schools we are able to locate 10,971 unique students with 29,690 unique testing events in reading and 29,986 in mathematics across the three testing points (Fall 2007, Spring 2008, Fall 2008).

**Intervention / Program / Practice:**
*Description of the intervention, program or practice, including details of administration and duration.*

This study examines the usage of extended time practices and policies that are extant in the sample of traditional public and charter schools as reported by school principals. Principals were instructed to indicate with either a yes or no if their school used any of the following strategies regarding time during the 2007-2008 school year: *mandatory or voluntary* [emphasis on survey] before-school, after-school or weekend tutorial instructional programs for students, *mandatory or voluntary* summer school or tutorial programs, and year-round instructional calendar.

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

Survey, quantitative, quasi-experimental

**Data Collection and Analysis:**
*Description of the methods for collecting and analyzing data.*

Data were obtained by the National Center on School Choice (NCSC) from the Growth Research Database, maintained by the Northwest Evaluation Association, and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Common Core of Data (CCD). The NCSC administered principal surveys in the 2007-2008 school year. School data collected from the principals was linked to testing records for all students in those schools in grades 2 – 5 from the fall of 2007 to the fall of 2008 for a total of three test points. This panel allows for the estimation of separate school year and summer learning growth slopes.
For this analysis a series of three-level hierarchical linear growth models are specified that will account for the nesting of student testing events in students, which are in turn nested in schools. This methodological approach allows for the comparison of achievement growth rates during the summer season with those during the school year. This design also allows for the examination of the effect of school-level extended time policies on both seasonal growth rates.

Findings / Results:
Description of the main findings with specific details.

Preliminary results indicate that the reported usage of any of the extended time policies that we examined does not statistically depend on school sector. Table 1 provides a breakdown of extended time usage policies by sector. Very few schools, regardless of sector, indicate that they use mandatory extended time policies during the school year or summer and very few schools operate on a year round calendar. A large majority of elementary schools in both sectors report offering voluntary tutorial instructional programs during the school year and during the summer time.

Examination of the pattern of extended time program offerings (see Table 2) show that the majority of schools offer only voluntary extended time programs during the school year and the summer (Pattern 1), very few schools offer no extended time programs (Pattern 4) and conversely none offer all extended time programs. With respect to school sector, Table 2 does not illustrate any clear differentiation in the mix of offerings between charters and traditional public schools.

Estimates from preliminary models show the expected pattern of summer slide in student achievement growth in reading and mathematics during the summer that has been documented in other research (e.g., Alexander et al., 2001; Downey et al., 2004; Stein, 2010). During the school year only voluntary tutorials were estimated to have a statistically significant positive influence on student achievement growth in mathematics but not in reading. Year round schooling was estimated to have a small negative influence on student growth rates in both mathematics and reading net of student and school characteristics. However students in year round schools are exposed to the negative effects of the summer on average four and a half less weeks than students in traditionally calendared schools. Therefore even though growth is slower, the net influence of year round schooling on achievement growth over the course of a full year is greater than in traditionally calendared schools. Estimates of summer time growth indicate a possible negative influence of mandatory summer school on reading achievement growth but no statistically significant influence on mathematics growth whereas estimates of voluntary summer school indicate a potentially large positive influence in mathematics but none in reading.
Conclusions:

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

This study looks at the question of whether charter schools are more innovative in their provision of extended time policies than a matched set of traditional public schools. At least in this sample of schools we do not find evidence that charters are more or less innovative than traditional public schools as the pattern and level of usage of these policies appear to be similar in both sectors. This finding brings up a limitation of this study in that conclusions can only be drawn about this particular sample of schools and cannot speak to innovation in charter schools as a whole. Preliminary estimates on the relationships between extended time policies point to two conclusions. First, at least in this sample, it appears that the provision of voluntary extended time programs may be more effective than mandatory programs. Second, the policy with the clearest influence on student growth rates in both subjects is a year round instructional calendar. While estimated growth rates are lower during the school year than in traditionally calendared schools, the net effect of a longer school year is that students are exposed to the summer for a shorter period of time and therefore experience a smaller summer set back in achievement, leading to them returning to school in the following year at a higher level than peers in traditionally calendared school years.
Appendices

Not included in page count.

Appendix A. References

References are to be in APA version 6 format.


## Appendix B. Tables and Figures

*Not included in page count.*

Table 1: Extended time programs by school sector†

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†percentage given in parentheses
‡p-value of two-sided Fischer’s exact test
Table 2: Pattern of extended time program offerings

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Title: Ability Grouping, Classroom Instruction, and Students’ Mathematics Gains in Charter and Traditional Public Schools

Author(s): Mark Berends & Kristi Donaldson (University of Notre Dame)
Background / Context:

*Description of prior research and its intellectual context.*

“Tracking”—assigning students to different curricular programs purportedly based on their interest and academic achievement—remains controversial in educational policy. Even though it has given way to subject-by-subject ability grouping, tracking remains widespread in the US and in many other countries (Gamoran, 2010; Lucas, 1994).

According to its proponents, tracking is an effective response to students’ diverse academic needs, allowing teachers to adapt their instructional approaches accordingly. Critics, however, argue that tracking has harmful consequences. For instance, separating students according to social and economic characteristics contradicts many important social goals of schools (Oakes, 2005; Oakes et al., 1992). In addition, it may cause students in non-academic tracks to receive inferior educational resources and low-quality instruction (Gamoran et al. 1995; Oakes 2005). In his recent review of international research on tracking, Gamoran (2010: 15) summarizes, "Ultimately, how students are arranged matters less than the instruction they encounter, so bringing together research on tracking with research on teaching offers the most useful way to continue to shed light on this topic of continuing interest."

One organizational attribute of schools that may further innovation in uses of ability grouping and the instruction among different groups is whether or not the school is a charter or traditional public school. The argument for charter schools is that they will foster more innovative instructional practices (e.g., Chubb & Moe, 1983; Walberg & Bast, 2003). This it is advantageous to examine ability grouping and instructional differences among school types that are theoretically argued differ to further our understanding of instructional stratification within and between schools.

Purpose / Objective / Research Question / Focus of Study:

*Description of the focus of the research.*

In this paper, we examine differences between school types in the uses of ability grouping, instructional differences, and relationship of ability grouping to student mathematics achievement. Specifically, we address the following questions with teacher reports of students' mathematics placement in middle school:

- Does the use of ability grouping differ between charter and traditional public schools?
- What is the relationship between ability group placement and students' mathematics achievement gains?
• Are there differences in instructional quality among students in different ability groups and by school type?

Setting:
Description of the research location.

The data come from surveys of teachers in charter and traditional public schools, located in urban, suburban, and rural contexts across 24 states. The schools all participate in the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) assessment program and student achievement data in mathematics come from NWEA assessments. The data come from the What Makes Schools Work project to examine organization and instructional conditions in different types of schools.

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

In spring 2009, we invited teachers in 146 participating charter and traditional public schools to complete online the Surveys of the Enacted Curriculum (SEC) (Porter, 2002). Traditional public schools were matched to charter schools based upon grade range, racial-ethnic and socioeconomic composition, initial achievement scores, and proximity. Our response rate for the SEC was 63 percent. Because participating mathematics teachers selected the students they teach in a target class, we could link teachers to the students' NWEA mathematics gains. Our sample includes 16,501 students nested in 1,071 mathematics teachers' classrooms nested in 146 schools. Student achievement in mathematics is based on the spring 2008, fall 2008, and spring 2009 vertically equated scores to examine gains and growth among students in different classrooms and school types (Kingsbury, 2003; Northwest Evaluation Association, 2002, 2003).

Intervention / Program / Practice:
Description of the intervention, program or practice, including details of administration and duration.

The intervention focuses on differences in charter and traditional public schools; the student ability grouping based on teacher designation of the student’s mathematics class; content of mathematics instruction, cognitive complexity of tasks when covering the instruction, and pedagogical practices measured by Survey of Enacted Curriculum administered to teachers (Porter, 2002); student achievement from NWEA assessments

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

Statistical Survey, Quasi-experimental, Statistical Modeling
Data Collection and Analysis:

*Description of the methods for collecting and analyzing data.*

Our analytic approach uses descriptive analyses to describe ability grouping in mathematics and the instructional differences among groups (high, middle, low, and mixed) in charter and traditional public schools. We rely on multi-level models that take advantage of the nested structure of the data with students nested in classrooms nested in schools. Student demographic measures, prior achievement, and achievement growth are measured at the student level. Ability grouping, instructional measures from the SEC, and other classroom characteristics are measured at the classroom level. School type and school demographic variables are measured at the school level.

Findings / Results:

*Description of the main findings with specific details.*

Our findings reveal significant differences in the use of ability grouping in charter (CPS) and traditional public schools (TPS). For example, a greater percentage of CPS students are placed in both high ability groups (17% compared with 12% TPS students) and lower ability groups (20% compared with 13% TPS). Fewer CPS students are in mixed ability groups (20% compared with 51% TPS). Moreover, CPS student gains in each group were larger than those of TPS students in similar groups, and the gains of students in the high ability group were greater than those in the low ability group, contributing to increasing inequality over the school year. Few instructional differences among groups and between CPS and TPS teachers were significantly different, although further analyses are necessary.

Conclusions:

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

Understanding the various forms of grouping students for instruction is important for addressing issues of inequality that has been observed by researchers. Although instruction did not mediate the effects of ability grouping on achievement, the differences observed between CPS and TPS schools in uses of grouping require further research.
Appendices
Not included in page count.

Appendix A. References
References are to be in APA version 6 format.


Newmann, F. M., King, M. B., & Youngs, P. (2000). Professional development that addresses


Title: Much Ado About Nothing? Innovation in Charter Schools

Author(s): Courtney Preston, Ellen Goldring, Mark Berends, Marisa Cannata
Abstract

Background / Context:

Description of prior research and its intellectual context.

A key argument for charter schools pertains to the notion that school choice will spur innovation and differentiation among schools. School personnel are free to innovate because they are able to use professional autonomy to make decisions. In fact in many cases the language of innovation and professional autonomy is rooted in charter school legislation. Malloy and Wohlstetter (2003) report that most charter school laws include the desire to “facilitate innovative teaching” (p.220). Lubienski (2003) notes, "choice, competition, and innovation are cast as the necessary vehicles for advancing academic outcomes" (p. 397). However, we have limited evidence about whether or to what extent competition and choice spur innovation in schools. Research supporting or refuting the idea that school choice leads to more innovative instructional practices is either nonexistent or mixed (Gill et al., 2007; Lubienski, 2003).

This paper compares innovation across two school types: traditional public schools and charter schools. We develop a notion of innovativeness in terms of local structures, dynamics, and context (Lubienski, 2003; Mowery and Rosenberg, 2000; Traill and Grunert, 1997). We submit that practices cannot be deemed innovative in an absolute sense, but innovations must be considered in terms of their relative prevalence in a local and state context.

Defining innovation is complicated as innovation in one context may not be innovation in another. Mowery and Rosenberg (2000) further define that innovation must include local structures and dynamics, considering the context of the innovation. Lubienski (2003) describes the education analogue to these concepts in his dimensions of the nature of innovative practice: “the distinctive nature of the practice” and “appearance of innovation in a local context” (p 408). The deviations between charter schools and traditional public schools in the same district are used in this paper to measure the contextual level of innovation. The outcomes we measure are therefore not innovative in the “brand new” sense of the term, but they may not be prevalent or standard practice in traditional public schools, either. Therefore, we measure innovation in terms of how innovative a practice is relative to its local and state context.

Purpose / Objective / Research Question / Focus of Study:

Description of the focus of the research.

The purpose of this paper is to develop a framework for measuring innovation in charter schools. We ask two questions,
1. What practices constitute innovation in various local and state contexts?
2. Do levels and types of innovation differ between charter schools and traditional public schools?

Setting:  
*Description of the research location.*

Our sample frame includes traditional public schools from the Schools and Staffing Survey and charter schools from our Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) database in 103 school districts in 11 states.

Population / Participants / Subjects:  
*Description of the participants in the study: who, how many, key features or characteristics.*

As part of a larger study of school choice, the schools for our study were selected from the set of schools with which NWEA had partnered to monitor student achievement through the administration of computerized adaptive tests in math, reading and language arts every spring and fall of the school year. As of the spring of 2006, approximately 270 were identified as charter schools. About 51.79% of the charter schools agreed to participate in the study.

Intervention / Program / Practice:  
*Description of the intervention, program or practice, including details of administration and duration.*

Principals of the charter schools that agreed to participate were asked to fill out online, confidential questionnaires. The research project survey, called NWEA What Makes Schools Work (WMSW) survey of principals is a comprehensive survey geared toward understanding a wide set of areas in comparing traditional public schools and charter schools, including such topics as hiring practices, job focus, school organization, professional development, teacher pay structures, parental involvement, and curriculum foci, and instructional practices.

Research Design:  
*Description of research design (e.g., qualitative case study, quasi-experimental design, secondary analysis, analytic essay, randomized field trial).*
To provide local context for the charter schools to determine the extent to which the charter schools are innovative in relation to other schools in their locales, we linked schools in our sample to traditional public schools in the same district from the 2007-08 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) (NCES) using NCES district identifiers. Because we define practices as innovative relative to their local context, we chose the SASS to provide this context. It is a nationally representative survey, providing a stratified systemic sample of schools and giving a picture of what practices are in use at both the school and district levels.

**Data Collection and Analysis:**
*Description of the methods for collecting and analyzing data.*

Measures of innovation are taken from NWEA principal surveys. To obtain additional local and state contexts for comparison, we developed a database from principal questionnaire of the nationally representative 2007-08 SASS (NCES). We matched items from the principal surveys from our sample of charter schools to similar items from the SASS in order to observe differences in the implementation of innovative practices. Following arguments for innovation in charter schools, measures of innovation from both the WMSW survey and 2007-08 include the extent to which practices and policies are implemented that are innovative in regard to instructional strategies, curriculum materials, student assessment, and parental contact and involvement. Examples of items include, such looping and flexible hiring policies.

We calculate the difference in frequency of innovations within the local context for each charter and its matched district traditional public schools in our sample. We measure differential innovativeness in two contexts: between the charter schools and their contexts and charter schools and traditional public schools in the aggregate. For example, if the local district does not have policies or programs about extended school days, and the matched charter schools do, this would be considered "innovative." Therefore, having an extended day policy may be innovative in one local context but not in another context where this practice is more widespread.

**Findings / Results:**
*Description of the main findings with specific details.*

The innovations we examine relate primarily to the instructional experiences of students in classrooms and schools since we hypothesize that those innovations closest to the instructional core are likely to be related to student achievement gains. Preliminary results suggest limited innovation differences between charter and traditional public schools on average, with more variation when locale and state context are taken into account. Practices where we find the most evidence of innovation in
charter schools include awarding tenure and providing academic support services to students such as voluntary tutoring. Overall, as predicted by institutional theory, schools in a given choice set appear to have similar programs and practices.

**Conclusions:**
*Description of conclusions, recommendations, and limitations based on findings.*

Based on our findings, we conclude that while charter schools on the whole may engage in innovative practices more often than traditional public schools, within their local context, they do not fulfill their promise of innovation. We do not have data that provides information on which school employed a practice first, therefore we cannot fully examine the impact charter schools may have had on the diffusion of innovative practice within their local context, but the results support a diffusion of innovation notion supported by institutional theory.
Appendices

Not included in page count.

Appendix A. References

References are to be in APA version 6 format.


