



HOW CHARTER SCHOOLS MAY BE EXACERBATING THE TEACHER SHORTAGE



Students are less likely to graduate from traditional teacher preparation programs when they attend colleges in areas with higher enrollments of charter school students.

So finds research released last week by the National Center for Research on Education Access and Choice (REACH), which is directed by NEPC Fellow Douglas Harris of Tulane, who co-authored the study with Mary Penn, also of Tulane.

Drawing upon nearly three decades of federal data on 290 school districts with at least one commuter college nearby, Harris and Penn use difference-in-differences methods to attempt to isolate the effect of charter school entry into a geographic area. They find that an increase of 10 percent in a district's charter school enrollment is associated with a 13.5 to 15.2 percent decrease in the number of graduates of traditional, university-based teacher preparation programs in the community. They also find that these college-enrollment patterns are "most apparent in elementary, special education, and math education degrees." Charter schools tend to hire more teachers prepared through alternative paths to certification and therefore relatively fewer graduates of traditional teacher preparation programs.

These college enrollment patterns, Harris and Penn write, are "consistent with the fact that charter schools mostly serve elementary grades, express interest in subject matter experts (e.g., math majors), and are less likely to assign students to special education."

Larger charter school enrollments were also associated with bigger decreases in the number of Black (versus White) graduates of traditional teacher preparation programs. The impact

of charter school enrollment on the number of traditional teacher-ed graduates also appeared to be bigger in urban than in non-urban areas.

In recent years, the share of teachers who have graduated from traditional, university-based preparation programs has declined, falling by 20 percent between 2007 and 2016. Today, about 20 percent of classroom teachers graduated from alternative programs, which are often based outside of institutions of higher education and may take less time to complete. The number of graduates of nontraditional programs has not made up for the decline in graduates of traditional programs, contributing to ongoing shortages, especially in certain regions and fields.

Decreases in the number and share of traditionally prepared teachers are of potential concern despite the fact that, to date, research has not identified differences in the quality of graduates from traditional versus nontraditional programs, Harris and Penn suggest. However, they add,

[t]hese studies do not appear to reflect the growing online and for-profit preparation programs or the fact that traditionally prepared teachers stay longer once they enter the classroom. This is important given the harmful effects of teacher turnover on schools and students.

NEPC Resources on Teacher Education, Quality and Professional Development

This newsletter is made possible in part by support provided by the Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice: <http://www.greatlakescenter.org>

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