

PACE CHARTER REPORT FLAWED

A national report entitled *Charter Schools and Inequality: National Disparities in Funding, Teacher Quality, and Student Support* from Public Analysis for California Education (PACE), offers a distorted view of charter schools.

The authors argue that charters may reinforce the achievement gap but offer no data to support the charge. In fact, charter data exist that show just the opposite.

The report's four main points are misleading and unfounded:

- 1) Title I funding: The authors suggest that charter schools don't seek out enough money. According to the report, 43% of charter students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, compared to 39% in traditional public schools. Only 4.5% of all charter students receive this funding. The authors say, this hurts *instructional support* but they give no evidence that these funds have any impact on achievement. The authors theorize that not receiving these funds might either be a function of poor management, "tight-fisted school boards," or both but there is no acknowledgement that often there is a deliberate effort to deny charters these funds.
- 2) Teacher Credentials: The report criticizes charters for having proportionately fewer credentialed teachers than traditional public schools. In reality there is no correlation between quality teaching and traditional credentials. There is evidence that teacher content-knowledge directly affects student achievement but the study does not mention this.
- 3) Racial Segregation: The authors' claim that there is a disproportionate number of African American students (80%) in charter schools compared to 54% in traditional public schools. They don't acknowledge the fact that predominantly minority charter schools are clustered in the inner cities, where there are large numbers of failing schools. The charter schools in inner cities do mirror the ethnic composition of the districts in which they operate. Minority enrollment in charter schools is a point to celebrate because typically students of color and poor students do not have access to good schools.

The authors ignore the fact that a higher percentage of students of color enroll in charter schools because the traditional public schools have failed to serve them or pay attention to their educational needs. Parents choose to send their children to these schools – and children who are being well-served in traditional public schools don't leave them.

- 4) Poor Services for the Learning Disabled: This fourth point in the study charges that charter schools underserve LD students. We know, however, that many students typically are over-identified as LD in traditional public schools and many parents prefer that their children NOT be labeled LD.

The report cites other “problems” such as class size and alleged lack of “innovative or specialized” curricula offered by private management companies. Once again, there is no data to support these claims. Ultimately, the most important observation to be made about the report is that it has nothing to say about whether or not students in charter schools are making gains in achievement..

The Pace report urges political action that the Bush Administration halt or slow down the approval of an additional \$753 million next year to expand charter schools and voucher experiments. Charter advocates can agree that charters do not get their fair share of federal funds. The authors should admonish traditional public school systems to stop blocking federal support for charters.