An exploratory investigation of charter schools and special education

Kimberly Mulligan
Rowan University

Follow this and additional works at: https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd

Part of the Disability and Equity in Education Commons

Let us know how access to this document benefits you - share your thoughts on our feedback form.

Recommended Citation
https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd/1052

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Rowan Digital Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Rowan Digital Works. For more information, please contact LibraryTheses@rowan.edu.
AN EXPLORATORY INVESTIGATION OF CHARTER SCHOOLS AND SPECIAL EDUCATION

by

Kimberly Mulligan

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Arts in Learning Disabilities of The Graduate School at Rowan University April 25, 2005

Approved by

Professor

Date Approved may 9, 2005

2005 Kimberly Mulligan
The purpose of this investigation was to determine how well charter schools are able to comply with the many laws in special education. All of the charter schools in both Atlantic and Camden counties were sent surveys that asked various questions about their programs in special education. The surveys addressed special education class size, proper teacher certification, different classifications, placement, and services offered. Each school was asked to answer the questions on the survey to the best of their knowledge about their school. The results of the surveys were then collected and charted in graph form in order to compare the six schools and the findings. The results were displayed in five separate graphs and one narrative. The first chart shows the population of each school and the percentage of special needs students attending the school. The second chart displays the amount of teachers working with the special needs students and how many are certified. The next chart shows the types of classifications in each school. The next chart displays the different placement options that each school offers. The last chart shows the different grade levels for the students in special education in that particular school. The charts show that each of the charter schools are working towards compliance
with the laws of special education. The charter schools have established sound foundations with each of their programs, but they still need to implement more placement options, fully certified teachers, and more individualized services.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for Study</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of Study</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions of Terms</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disparate Visions</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Implementation Handbook</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An AFT Review of Charter Schools</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey Administrative Code: Special Education</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter School Laws- All Over the Map</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Ed. Rules Posing Problems</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method of Sample Selection</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection and Method of Analysis</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 ANALYSIS OF THE DATA</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

Table 1: Total Enrollment in Sample Charter Schools and Percentage Eligible for Special Education Classes

Table 2: Teacher Certification

Table 3: Classifications in Each School

Table 4: Placement for Students

Table 5: Grade Levels for Special Needs Students
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

“Charter schools are free, public schools serving thousands of New Jersey families as an alternative to district schools, providing voice and choice in public education(www.njcpsa.org/, 2004)” This quote appears on the opening page of the New Jersey Charter Public School Association Website. It suggests that charter schools throughout the state of New Jersey are a safe and effective alternative to public education for all children. For many students and their parents, charter schools are the optimal choice since they provide an alternative approach to learning that is very important for some students. However, there is one group of students that one would question whether or not they are best served at a charter school. These students are those who require special education programs because of a learning disability, a behavior disorder, or one of the other 14 categories of disability listed in Individuals with Disabilities Education Act(IDEA).

The initial concept of a charter school was introduced in Washington D.C. by Albert Shanker, President of the American Federation of Teachers. At a conference in 1988, Shanker put forth the idea of a school where “the teachers or parents with teachers, could develop a new curriculum or teaching strategy to improve both instruction and student learning” (American Federation of Teachers, 2004).
Shanker also hoped that these schools would influence the way that other schools delivered their educational services. Currently, there are 2,100 charter schools, serving over 500,000 students in 37 states and the District of Columbia (American Federation of Teachers, 2004). Advocates of the charter school movement maintain that these schools will:

1. Encourage innovation
2. Be more accountable than other public schools
3. Expand public school choice for all
4. Act as a catalyst for improvement of the public system

Some would say that Shanker’s vision has come to fruition, but still many would argue that charter schools are not the appropriate vehicle to service all students with many different needs. Questions of accountability, funding, quality of teachers, and various other questions plague the charter school vision and leave many experts asking whether they are a viable alternative to a public education. Advocates for special needs students question whether these schools are an effective choice for children with disabilities. Charter schools are innovative new educational entities, allowed to individualize and create new modes of instruction which is juxtaposed to the highly structured and regulated system of special education.

Need for Study

Because of the large number of students identified as having special needs, charter schools must begin to examine their programs to make sure that these students will be properly serviced when they enter the school. Approximately 3 million
students in the United States are eligible for special education(www.educationnews.org/commentaries_and_reports_archives8.html). It is important that charter schools be held accountable for the types of services they provide to all of these students who may attend their school.

Special needs students who enter charter schools have individualized educational plans (IEP’s) that require a myriad of services and accommodations that may be difficult for charter schools to provide. Since many parents of special needs students are expecting charter schools to provide their child with an education, it is important that they are held to the same standards as the public schools. This paper will seek to obtain information as to whether or not the charter schools in the South Jersey area are accommodating the special needs of the students who attend them.

Value of Study

This study is significant for a variety of reasons; first, the questions posed in this study is unique in the South Jersey area; second, the results will provide data regarding how well the charter schools in our area are progressing towards the goals of No Child Left Behind. It is important that schools be held accountable using the same standards as public schools.

Also, this study is important because it will allow charter schools to compare their progress in enrolling children with special needs. This could be an opportunity for the schools to learn from each other’s programs and if necessary to revise their
own. It could also foster a working relationship between the schools in order to share resources in related areas.

Finally this study is significant in that it allows other professionals to examine charter schools within the context of new data. Since the charter school is a relatively recent educational idea, few studies have been completed in relation to them. Since parents are choosing charter schools as a place for their students with special needs, it is important that everyone knows what types of services and programs they have available. With the increasing numbers of students with special needs, charter schools are a viable option to parents other than the public schools. The programs that they are able to offer need to be assessed as to whether they are meeting the needs of children eligible for special education as set forth in state and federal regulations.

Research Questions

This study will seek answer the following questions related to charter schools and the special education services they provide.

Research Question 1: What is the total enrollment of each charter school?
Research Question 2: How many students are classified as special needs students in each school?
Research Question 3: How many teachers are currently working with special needs students?
Research Question 4: Are all of the teachers working with special needs students properly certified?
Research Question 5: What are the various classifications that your students fall under?
Research Question 6: Are any of the students attending out-of-district schools?
Research Question 7: What types of facilities are available to the special needs students?
Research Question 8: How many special needs students are at each grade level?

Definitions of Terms
The following terms have specialized meanings within the context of this study.

1. Special education means specifically designed instruction at no cost to the parents to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities (New Jersey Administrative Code, 2003).

2. Charter school refers only to the public or governmental entities created under state laws to exist as autonomous school districts or separate components within existing school districts. They are subject to federal civil rights laws and they must comply with federal requirements relevant to serving students with disabilities. (Ahearn, Eileen, 1999).

3. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA, is a federal law that guarantees a free, appropriate public education is made available to students with
disabilities and provide funding to assist states to implement its requirement (Ahearn, 1999).

4. LRE is also known as the least restrictive environment a child can be placed in (New Jersey Administrative Code, 2003).

5. FAPE is also known as a free, appropriate public education. The school districts must provide all students with an education that is free, appropriate to their abilities and in a public environment. (Ahearn, 1999).

6. No Child Left Behind is a standards based reform movement. It was signed into law by President Bush on January 8, 2002 and is designed to improve results for all students, even those with special needs. Schools must show progress with all students on a yearly basis. If a school does not show progress, both the parents and schools qualify for help. Schools can qualify for extra funding and technical assistance. Parents are also given new options- including the option of sending their children to higher achieving public schools. They may even receive supplemental educational services such as private tutoring for their children (Boehner, John 2003).

7. SEA is an acronym for state education agency (Rhim, Lauren and McLaughlin, Margaret, 2000).

8. LEA is an acronym for the local education agency (Rhim, Lauren and McLaughlin, Margaret, 2000).

Limitations

There are certain limitations that are unavoidable and must be considered when interpreting and generalizing the results of this study. First, the sample will be
limited to South Jersey. The practices at the charter schools in the Atlantic County area and in the city of Camden, may not be a representative sample of charter schools throughout New Jersey or the United States.

A second limitation is the potential for a poor rate of return of the surveys that are sent out. Some schools may not return the surveys promptly or even at all. If the surveys are completed via a telephone interview, some schools may not report accurate information since documentation will not be required. The schools may also intentionally leave out information that could make them appear to be out of compliance with state statutes. Responses to the surveys represent a self report and may not be accurate since no documentation is required.

Since most of the schools are in poor, urban areas, the problem of students who are constantly moving from school to school can also affect the surveys. Since many students will transfer at least once in a school year, the number of special needs students in a school can change often. The transfer process can take a considerable amount of time and student records can take even longer to become available. If a school does not have the appropriate records, it may not know that a child is a special needs student.
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Charter schools have caused much controversy and discussion over the last 10 years. There have been numerous research activities and publications regarding laws, policies and regulations in regards to charter schools and their operation. The merging of charter schools and special education has sparked debate and the search for empirical data on both sides of the issue. The following is a review of key articles, journals, and reports that discuss various aspects of charter schools and special education.

Disparate Visions

A comprehensive report completed by Rhim and McLaughlin (2000) illustrates the problems faced by charter schools when dealing with special education. Since 8% of the charter school population is considered eligible for special education, the schools have major issues facing them in regards to policies and procedures that must be followed (United States Department of Education, 1999). Due to their small size, charter schools often have low enrollment, smaller staffs, and limited resources may be disproportionately affected by the high cost of servicing special needs students (Rhim and McLaughlin, 2000). Public schools also face this daunting problem.
A qualitative research project entitled Project SEARCH was conducted Rhim and McLaughlin over a 3 year period to investigate charter schools and special education. Its purpose was to clarify information about the evolution and implementation of special education policy in charter schools. The study looked at 15 states across the country and the District of Columbia and examined the schools and their policies in regards to 6 key areas, including staffing, charter granting, enrollment, facilities, laws, and funding.

The first area examined was that of state charter laws. These laws are individual pieces of legislation crafted by state legislatures which refer to the authorization of charter schools, goals and objectives, funding, policies, and procedures. Each state has the right to establish their own guides on charter schools but they must not discriminate against any potential students. All of the states in the study have general nondiscrimination policies, but their language is very different. In states like California and Colorado, there is specific language in the charter laws that requires that all charters target students labeled “at-risk” or “academically low achieving”. In other states like New Jersey, state requires that charter schools must reflect the diversity of their local community (Rhim, McLaughlin, 2000).

The second area examined is the charter granting process. States generally ask the charter schools to outline their program, structure, population, admissions policies, assessment plans, and fiscal plans prior to opening. Charter schools are often overwhelmed with all of the programs and policies needed to start their school, they often overlook the servicing of special needs students and all that it will require. The
outlines that are required by the states try to be comprehensive, but often fail in certain areas. Within this outline, only 9 out of the 15 states ask how the charter schools plan to deal with special education. Out of the 9 states, the specificity levels vary greatly. In New Jersey, a charter school is asked to describe how it plans on meeting the needs of students with educational disabilities in accordance with federal and state regulations (New Jersey Charter School Application, 1999, pg18). However in states such as Minnesota, an outline describing the special education program is required by the charter school before opening (Rhim, McLaughlin, 2000).

Another area that the study examines is the charter school’s admissions and enrollment policies. According to state laws, charter schools must make assurances that they will not discriminate in their admissions policies. According to the Director of the Charter School Resource Center

The problem with charters and special education is that they are like yin and yang. Charters are built on the notion that small schools offering focused programs are good for all students but special education is driven by the belief that all public schools should provide access to all students. All charters can’t really be all things to all students-this is the challenge (Ahearn, 1998).

All the states in the study are wrestling with how to blend the disparate vision of charter schools and special education. They are struggling with the problems of enrolling students with disabilities. Even though some charter schools tend to avoid special needs students, they do sometimes admit students with milder disabilities rather than those with emotional disturbance or severe learning disabilities (Rhim, McLaughlin, 2000). Some respondents report that charter schools are enrolling students
with disabilities without formally identifying them or developing IEPs. Still others state that parents who enroll their children sometimes choose not to share the fact that their child is classified with the charter school.

The next area looks at the operational issues that charter schools may have in dealing with special needs students. Charter schools must deal with concerns in the areas of staffing, facilities, and technical assistance.

The staffing in charter schools has 3 main problems. The first problem is that many charter schools do not pay well. The second problem is that the future of these schools is not always definite and good teachers are insecure about leaving their public schools. The last problem is that special education teachers in charter schools must wear many hats that would otherwise be spread out among the larger districts. Teachers often find it difficult to deal with these 3 major issues when working in a charter school (Rhim, McLaughlin, 2000). In regards to special education teacher certification, it is required by federal law, IDEA that “the personnel necessary to carry out this part (special education) are appropriately and adequately prepared and trained” [20 U.S. Chapter 33, Section 141(15)(A)].

Within the area of facilities, charter schools do not seem to have many problems. This is not an issue since all public schools are required to comply with the American Disabilities Act in regards to health and safety laws prior to opening. The one problem that the charter schools have is in regards to adequate space for their pull-out programs. Since charter schools start out small, they lack the space that is
appropriate when operating a pull-out program for special needs students (Rhim, McLaughlin, 2000).

The last area of concern in their operation is technical assistance. When a charter school starts their program, many states offer technical assistance to these schools to help them manage the special education problems that may arise. Half of the states in the survey have hired special education consultants to assist charter schools before their opening and continue to assist them as they operate. Since the area of special education is very regulated, these consultants assist the schools with the policies and responsibilities that the charter schools have and direct them to resources that can help them within their local district. States also hold conferences throughout the year that can also offer guidance to the schools. Unfortunately, this study found that these workshops have poor attendance rates and often go unused (Rhim, McLaughlin, 2000).

Another area examined in the study was that of financing the charter school special education program. Public school special education is funded at the federal, state, and local level. These schools must report various information to receive this funding. Charter schools must also report the same information in order to receive those same funds. One major issue that must be reported is how many children in the school have IEP’s. Some of the newer charter schools are unable to do this because they have just opened. They must wait until the following year to report, thus, they
must wait for the funding. Still other charter schools are just not accurately reporting this information which is affecting their funding as well.

The last area under examination is that of accountability. Charter schools must be held accountable and display the performance of their students just as the public schools are required to do. State informants in this study reported that accountability of charter schools in reference to student performance are unclear in their policies (Rhim, McLaughlin, 2000). The students in the states this study examined must take the same state assessments as their public schools counterparts. However, the states are taking different approaches to compliance monitoring of charter schools and special education. Across the sample study there is a lack of clear policies and follow-up regarding the monitoring of students in special education programs in charter schools.

This report that is supported by the United States Department of Education was conducted to examine major areas of concern that charter schools encounter when dealing with special education. Some of the areas are being addressed while others still need additional scrutiny. The focus of this study was to examine how states and local districts are working with their charter schools to navigate the special education laws and build better relationships among the two entities.

An Implementation Handbook

In a report written by Cheryl M. Lange, PhD, the United States Department of Education established the guidelines for charter schools in dealing with special
education. Special education laws and legislation are reviewed as well as any important issues that may arise in regards to special education. It is also designed to direct the programming of charter schools and affect how students are serviced.

Once a charter school is approved for opening, the directors have several issues to consider in dealing with the implementation of special education. According to Lange(1997), the schools have to consider several key areas before beginning their program.

The first decision that should be made is how will the charters mission statement align with the special needs students. Viewing special education within the context of the charter school’s mission will help define the special education delivery model and may move the whole school toward a more innovative model of educational delivery(Lange, 1997). The following are two questions that operators should ask themselves at this beginning stage:

- Are opportunities available for students with disabilities to receive services within the innovative model available for students without disabilities?
- Can charter schools use their independent status to create innovative models of special education service delivery within the scope of IDEA?

The charter schools then have to examine how they will identify and serve the needs of students with disabilities. It is important that the schools have a process in place for the identification of students with special needs and also a provision of the services that are contained in the IEP’s of the students(Lange, 1997). The schools must state who is responsible for identification, how students will be evaluated, and how the
school will deal with an IEP written by another school. It is imperative that the school have the answers to these questions in order to keep their program running.

The school must also identify who will be servicing the students with disabilities. Charter school personnel should seek the best advice to determine responsibility of service delivery and have a plan for providing service (Lange, 1997). The schools need to identify who will be assessing students, will funding be available for the assessments, where will the service take place, and who is responsible for delivering special education and related services. It is also important that the charter schools have specially trained and certified special education teachers. These certified professionals can often answer questions pertaining to special education law and policies that other staff are unable to. IDEA delineates the necessity of a person knowledgeable about the student’s disability or in a suspected disability in order to properly service the child (Lange, 1999).

Funding is another major issue in special education. It is important that the charter schools learn and understand how special education funds are allocated to schools and districts. Payment of special education funds usually involves considerable documentation of services, personnel and related services (Lange, 1997). These funds are intended to be used in meeting the needs of federal and state education requirements.

This handbook was designed to help new charter schools navigate the laws of special education. It is an outline of the major issues that the new schools must address.
An AFT Review of Charter Schools

The American Federation of Teachers released a report in June of 1999 to provide an update on the status of charter schools in our country. In this report, charter schools are analyzed and critiqued in several different areas. The report details whether charter schools are living up to their bright claims and it details emerging issues regarding the proliferation of these schools. For the purpose of this review, only areas that are pertinent to special education will be discussed. The report categorizes the information by state and reveals which states have met or exceeded certain criteria set forth by the AFT (American Federation of Teachers, 1999). This criteria, they feel, will strengthen the public schools and not harm them.

New Jersey charter schools have been compared to all other states that have charter schools on the basis of the following criteria. The areas are teacher certification and state assessment. In New Jersey, all teachers at charter schools must be certified in the areas that they teach. The charter schools must also meet all state standards, must use the same assessments as public schools, and must be approved by both the state and local school district (AFT, 1999).
In addressing the area of special education, the AFT report states several confounding reasons why charter schools are not able to properly service special needs students.

- A Hudson Institute study noted that special needs students are underrepresented in charter schools.
- Many charter schools avoid admitting students with special needs.
- The third-year report of the National Charter School Study indicated that 8% of the students in charter schools have disabilities while the comparable figure for all public schools is 11%.
- Small schools with fewer resources find it difficult to provide appropriate services. Even the larger charter schools have difficulty providing the legally required level of service to special needs students.
- The Boston Renaissance charter school operated by the Edison Project was found to be out of compliance with IDEA regulations. The school agreed to comply with IDEA service provisions and increase their services.

The AFT states that it will remain committed to supporting the charter school movement if they continue to do the following things. Be open to all types of students, create new professional opportunities for staff, and, most importantly, find effective ways to help students reach the state’s high standards. However, the AFT will oppose any charter schools that do not hold students to the state’s high standards, that selectively admit students, and who hide academic information from the public (AFT, 1999).

New Jersey Administrative Code: Special Education

Since the main focus of this study is the state of New Jersey, it is important to note the laws that are in place in regards to charter schools and special education. Not all states have specific laws that pertain to charter schools specifically. However, New
Jersey has three main laws that refer to charter schools and special education. These laws are taken from the New Jersey Administrative Code:

- Students with disabilities- a charter school shall provide an enrolled student with educational disabilities with a FAPE (free, appropriate, public education) in accordance with IDEA Part B.
- Teacher certification- all classroom teachers, principals, and professional support staff employed by the board of trustees of a charter school shall hold appropriate NJ certification in accordance with NJAC 6:11-3.1.
- School funding- a district board of education shall pay to a charter school the following categorical aids in the amount that the district board of education receives in that categorical aid program which is the attributable to a resident student enrolled in that charter school if that charter school student is receiving appropriate categorical services. 1. Special education 2. ESL

According New Jersey state code, charter schools must follow the same regulations that their public school counterparts do.

Charter School Laws-All Over the Map

According to Sue Steelman Bragato, the executive director of the California Network of Educational Charters based in California, “Special ed is definitely in the top 10 concerns of charter schools. At this point, without some more guidance from our education department and the U.S. Education Department, it’s really tough to define what charters have to do as opposed to what they are doing now.” This feeling of inadequate guidance in reference to special education is an important issue addressed in an article written for Education Weekly.

In this article, the charter schools seem to find the area of special education to be confusing and that they need guidance from other education departments in order to
understand the laws. They also find that some states are following the federal laws, but others are not. For example, states such as Arizona and Michigan allow charter schools to hire uncertified teachers. But state special education rules often require that disabled students be served by teachers or others with specific credentials (Education Week, 1997).

Students with disabilities are covered by 3 major federal laws, IDEA, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. In addition to those laws, they are covered under rules set forth by individual states. These state laws were on the books long before the concept of charter schools ever arrived. This intersection of laws and ideas can be quite confusing for anyone (Ed. Week, 1997). And, since many traditional public schools continue to struggle with special education more than 20 years after IDEA was passed, the fact that charter schools face confusion is no surprise, experts say (Ed. Week, 1997).

Special Ed. Rules Posing Problems

Eric Premack, director of the Charter Schools Project at the Institute for Educational Reform has summed up charter schools and special education this way, “square peg, round hole”. In this same article, he stated that the question of special education has been overwhelming to charter schools.

“Everyone’s scratching their heads about this” states Yvette Melendez Theisfield, a consultant in the Connecticut Department of Education. She goes on to
say that every charter school conference she attends now has a special education seminar, but no real answers (Education Week, Feb 1997). The charter schools are required to service children with special needs, but are not sure how.

Special Education is a highly regulated entity with specific laws on student identification, student evaluation, funding, and teacher qualification. It is difficult for the schools to follow and understand all of these qualifications. Many charter schools operate on a shoestring budget and lack the financial and administrative support of a district behind them. This often results in a loss of funding or problems with parents in due process hearings since their child was not properly serviced (Ed. Week, Feb 1997).

Since the charter school movement is growing rapidly along with the special education population, some changes are being made. Some states like Arizona are now offering seminars, how-to workshops, and are being more diligent at the charter application process (Ed Week, Feb 1997). This preemptive strike will help both new schools and the ones already in existence. In other states, special education experts are now helping to craft the charter school plan before they even apply for their official charter. This leads to less confusion, since most problems are cleared up at the beginning, before the schools even enters any children. If the charter schools receive the guidance that they need, the area of special education may become a little clearer to those in charge.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY AND REVIEW

Population

The charter schools in this study are located in two areas of southern New Jersey which include in the city of Camden and the four cities within Atlantic County. Camden, New Jersey is a large, urban community located in southern New Jersey directly across the Delaware River from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The 2000 census showed that the city's total population was 79,904 with approximately 24,177 households and 17,431 families residing in the city. The racial makeup of the city is 16.84% White, 53.5% Black or African American, 0.54% Native American, 2.45% Asian, 0.07% Pacific Islander, 22.83% from other races and 3.92% from two or more races (http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Camden%2C_New_Jersey, 2004). The median family income for a household in the city is $23,421, and the median income for a family is $24,612 with a per capita income of $9,815. A high poverty rate exists in Camden with 35.5% of the population and 32.8% of families living below the poverty line. Of the entire population, 45.5% are under the age of 18 and 23.8% age 65 and older are living below the poverty line (http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Camden%2C_New_Jersey, 2004).
Atlantic County is located in the southeastern area of New Jersey. The 2000 census indicated the total population for the county was 252,552. The racial makeup of the county is 68.36% White, 17.63% Black or African American, 0.26% Native American, 5.06% Asian, 0.05% Pacific Islander, 6.06% from other races and 2.58% from two or more races. Of the total population, 12.17% are Hispanic or Latino (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantic_County,_New_Jersey).

The median income for a household in Atlantic County is $43,933, and the median income for a family is $51,710. The per capita income for the county is $21,034. Poverty rates are high with 10.50% of the population and 7.60% of families are living below the poverty line. Of the total population, 12.80% of those under the age of 18 and 10.50% of those 65 and older are living below the poverty line (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantic_County,_New_Jersey).

Within Atlantic County, two of the charter schools are in the city of Pleasantville. According to the 2000 census, the total population of the city was 19,012. The racial makeup of the city is primarily African American at 57.70% while 25.01% of the population is white. Another large ethnic group is Hispanic or Latin American with 21.87% of the population. The median income for a household in Pleasantville is $36,913 while the median family income is $40,016. The per capita income for the city is $17,668 and 15.8% of the population and 12.2% of families are
Atlantic City is another area of Atlantic County where a charter school is located. Atlantic City is located on Absecon Island, just off the coast of New Jersey. The 2000 census shows it’s total population is 40,517. The racial makeup of the city consists primarily of White, 26.68%, Black or African American, 44.16%, and Hispanic or Latin American, 24.95%. The median income for a household in Atlantic City is $26,969 and the median family income for a family is $31,997. The per capita income for the city is $15,402 and 23.6% of the population and 19.1% of families are living below the poverty line.

Galloway Township is also located in Atlantic County and the 2000 census shows a total population of 31,209. The primary racial makeup of the township is 77.16% White, 9.80% African American, 6.16% Hispanic or Latino. The median income for a household is $51,592, and the median income for a family is $57,156. The per capita income is $21,048, and 6.6% of the population and 4.4% of families are living below the poverty line.

Somers Point is located in the eastern part of Atlantic County, southwest of Atlantic City. The 2000 census shows it’s total population was 11,614. The racial makeup of the city is primarily White, 85.66%, African American, 7.01% and 5.99%,...
Hispanic or Latino. The median income for a household is $42,222, and the median income for a family is $51,868. The per capita income for the city is $22,229 and 7.0% of the population and 5.0% of families are living below the poverty line (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somers_Point%2C_NewJersey).

All of the Charter schools in this study are located in the cities described above. Most of the students who attend the charter schools live in the same city as the charter school they attend. The only charter school that accepts students from outside of their city is the school in Somers Point which accepts students from the entire southern New Jersey area.

Method of Sample Selection

All of the special education directors of South Jersey charter schools described in the previous section were asked to participate in this study. The schools represent a convenience sample since they are located in the southern New Jersey area. The sample represents all of the charter schools in the city of Camden and in Atlantic County.

Data Collection and Method of Analysis

A survey instrument designed to answer the research questions posed in Chapter I was mailed to ten schools on November 10, 2004. A cover letter was included and consisted of a brief introduction as to the research being conducted, the
rationale behind the study, a description of the instrument being used and a summary of how the data would be collected and interpreted.

It was requested that the surveys be returned by November 24, 2004. The survey is contained in Appendix A and the cover letter is contained in Appendix B. The directions were for the director to answer the questions to the best of their ability and in relation to their particular school. Responses from each school will be tabulated and presented in tabular format which will provide an overall glance of any patterns that may emerge. The data contained in these charts will then be used to answer each of the research questions posed in Chapter I.
Chapter 4

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Results

The results of this study are presented in a format that answers the research questions listed in Chapter I. Eight research questions are answered in this study. The questions are discussed sequentially and the data pertaining to these questions are presented in the form of discussions and charts.

Question 1: How many students currently attend your school?

Question 2: How many students have IEPs in your school?

As indicated in Figure 1, the five schools range in overall enrollment from 250 to 663. The highest percentage of special education pupils are enrolled in School B that has 14% of its population eligible for special education. Research questions one and two can be answered by inspection of Figure 1. The chart displays the total enrollment of each charter school (A), the amount of students who are receiving special education services in each school (B), and the percent of the total population of each school that is special education.
Table 1: Total Enrollment in Sample Charter Schools and Percentage Eligible for Special Education Classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Total Enrollment (A)</th>
<th>Eligible Sp Ed. (B)</th>
<th>% of Population (C)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>663</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg.</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 3: How many teachers are currently working with special needs students?

Question 4: How many teachers are certified special education teachers?

Research questions three and four can be answered by inspection of Figure 2. This chart displays the teachers who are working as special education teachers (A), teachers are certified special education (B), teachers who have more than one certification (C), and the number of teachers who are being emergency certified (D). School C is a high school and is the only school that is entirely inclusive. Note that all teachers in the school work with the special needs students.
Table 2: Teacher Certification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sch</th>
<th>work w/SE(A)</th>
<th>Cert.(B)</th>
<th>Multi(C)</th>
<th>Emer(D)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: What types of classifications are in your school?

Research question five can be answered by inspection of Figure 3. This chart displays the placements that are available to each special needs student in each school. They are RR (resource room), SC (self-contained), IC (in-class support), Incl (inclusion), and IC/RR (in-class support and resource room).

Table 3: Classifications in Each School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sch</th>
<th>RR</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>IC</th>
<th>Incl</th>
<th>IC/RR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>2(6%)</td>
<td>2(6%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27(87%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>35(100%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>13(68%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15(78%)</td>
<td>19(100%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>8(8%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>38(82%)</td>
<td>46(100%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>20(100%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 6: Are students able to attend schools that are out of district?
Research question six does not require a Table since only two schools responded. School A responded that two of it's students are currently attending special needs out-of-district schools. School D responded that two of it's students are currently attending out-of-district, special needs schools.

Question 7: What types of facilities are available to special needs students?

Research Question number seven can be answered by inspection of Figure 4. This chart displays the information about what type of facilities are available to the special needs students. The placements are as follows: RR (resource room), SC (self-contained), CA (classroom aide), BM (behavior modification), and other.

Table 4: Placements for Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sch</th>
<th>RR</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>CA</th>
<th>BM</th>
<th>other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 8: How many students are at each grade level?

Research question number eight can be answered by inspection of Figure 5. Figure 5 shows the number of students who are receiving service at various grade levels.
Table 5: Grade Levels for Special Needs Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sch</th>
<th>K-2</th>
<th>3-6</th>
<th>7-8</th>
<th>HS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Five

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, AND DISCUSSION

Summary

This study was designed to determine the ability of six southern New Jersey charter schools to service the needs of students who have been identified as special needs. A survey was mailed to each of the charter schools in the southern New Jersey. The surveys included questions about school size and population, teacher certification, program offerings, placement options, and grade levels. Each school was asked to answer the questions on the survey to the best of their knowledge about their school. The results of the surveys were then collected and charted in graph form in order to compare the six schools and the findings. The results were displayed in five separate graphs and one narrative. The first chart shows the population of each school and the percentage of special needs students attending the school. The second chart displays the amount of teachers working with the special needs students and how many are certified. The next chart shows the types of classifications in each school. The next chart displays the different placement options that each school offers. The last chart shows the different grade levels for the students in special education in that particular school. The charts show that each of the charter schools are working towards compliance with the laws of special education. The charter schools have established
sound foundations with each of their programs, but they still need to implement more placement options, fully certified teachers, and more individualized services.

Findings

Chart 1 included the total population of each school, the amount of students who are special needs, and the percentage of special needs students within each school. The average total population of each school was 357, while the average amount of special needs students was 30 per school. The overall average percent of special needs students was 8% of the total population of each school.

Chart 2 displays information about the amount of teachers who are currently working with special needs students and the types of certifications they have. On average, there were at least two fully certified Teacher of the Handicap teachers who work with the students in each school. In four out of the six schools, at least one teacher is multi-certified. In one school, two out of the three teachers are currently teaching with emergency special education certifications.

Charts 3 and 4 displays information about the types of classifications and placements that are in each school. In all of the schools, the resource room is utilized by each school for all of the children. The next two placements that were the most utilized was inclusion and in-class support. The least utilized placement was self-contained which is only used by one school for two of their students. Another placement option was an out of district placement which only two schools use.
In each of those schools only two of their students are currently attending out of district placements.

In chart 5, the grade levels for all of the special needs students are discussed. The majority of the students fall within the 3-6 grade levels, while the smallest amount are in the K-2 grade levels. One school is a high school therefore their population falls within the 9-12 grade levels.

Discussion

The results of this study present the appearance that the charter schools in southern New Jersey are working towards meeting the goals set forth by IDEA. Each of the schools have established programs that are working to meet the needs of all the students who are classified as special needs. The percent of the school population that is receiving special education services is less than 10% in all of the schools except for one, which is ideal under New Jersey’s requirements. All of the schools offer each student at least two forms of placement in various special needs settings, except for one. Finally, at least half of the teachers who are currently working with the special needs students in each school are certified special education teachers.

The special education programs in each of the charter schools do, however, have areas that need to be improved. Although many of the schools offer at least two placement options, self-contained is not offered in five out of six of the schools.
surveyed. Another issue could be the lack of program alternatives in the one high school surveyed which only offers a inclusive setting for all of it’s students.

After examining the surveys and completing the research, the charter schools in southern New Jersey are working towards compliance with the laws under IDEA. They are offering many parents an option to public education in the state. With the advent of new laws concerning special education, charter schools will have to adapt and change along with the public schools in the state.

For further studies, a more extensive review of more recent literature on charter schools is needed to see how well charter schools have done in the last ten years. Since the charter schools are a relatively new entity, more in depth research should be done over time to see their true impact on education. Finally, the laws of special education are constantly changing which will force charter schools to change as well. A further, more on going study may be needed to fully examine their impact.
References


