

## CHARTER SCHOOLS' STATUS IN THE 1999-2000 SCHOOLS AND STAFFING SURVEY

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### I. Introduction

Charter schools are a relatively recent phenomenon in elementary/secondary education. The first charter schools appeared during the 1992-93 school year. By the 1998-99 school year, the total number of charter schools had grown to over 1,000 schools. The exact number at any particular point in time is not easily defined – a point which will be explored later in this paper. Prior to the 1999-2000 Round of the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), charter schools had not been included in SASS. For the 1999-2000 round of SASS, it was decided by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to include all charter schools in the survey. Thus, the data cited in this paper are from a census of charter schools that were identified by various sources as being authorized to hold a charter.

**Definition of a charter school.** A charter school is defined as an institution which provides educational services under the authority of a charter granted to the institution by the state or another charter issuing authority authorized by state legislation, exempting the school from certain local rules and regulations. Schools referred to as charter schools in this paper are sometimes termed “public charter” schools since they are publicly funded. A charter school may be a newly founded school or it may have converted from a pre-existing public or private school. In addition, a few schools supported by the Bureau of Indian Affairs have obtained charters.

The guiding philosophy behind the charter school movement is that schools provided with a greater degree of independence with respect to how they operate will have the opportunity to innovate and excel in ways that traditional public schools cannot. Public charter schools are granted this autonomy over the educational process in exchange for standards of accountability that are outlined in their charters.

**Schools and Staffing Survey.** The Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) has been conducted three times previous to the 1999-2000 round of data collection – 1987-88, 1990-91, and 1993-94. Schools

are the primary sampling unit and selected schools are interviewed along with their associated principal, library media center, and school district. Within each school, a list of teachers is obtained and a sample is selected. Prior to 1999-2000, schools were selected from three frames – public, private, and BIA. The introduction of charter schools in the 1999-2000 SASS added a fourth frame.

### II. Charter Schools in SASS

A list of charter schools was obtained from the United States Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) as described in *The State of Charter Schools* (2000). The list was used in conjunction with a 4-year longitudinal National Study of Charter Schools, a survey conducted by telephone. The list that the Census Bureau obtained from OERI contained 1,198 school records. Of these, a review of the names and addresses revealed 76 records that appeared to be duplicates of other charter school records. As a result, 1,122 charter schools were included in the 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Surveys data collection effort.

Before the sampling process could be completed, unduplication with the other sampling frames needed to take place. The public school sampling frame, the Common Core of Data, was known to include some charter schools. Some charter schools were also believed to be Bureau of Indian Affairs-funded schools. Unduplication with the public and BIA frames was conducted based on name, address, telephone number, and grade range. Eight BIA schools and 714 public schools were found on the charter school frame. These schools were removed from the public and BIA school frames, respectively, and kept with the charter schools so as to ensure that they received charter school questionnaires. The charter school questionnaires contained questions about conditions unique to the charter school environment. No attempt was made to unduplicate with the private school frame. It was felt the potential for overlap between private and charter schools would have little impact on the SASS private school sample.

The number determined to be a census for charter schools in operation prior to or at some point during

<sup>1</sup> This paper reports the results of research and analysis undertaken by Census Bureau staff. It has undergone a Census Bureau review more limited in scope than that given to official Census Bureau publications. This report is released to inform interested parties of ongoing research and to encourage discussion of work in progress.

<sup>2</sup> This paper is intended to promote the exchange of ideas among researchers and policy makers. The views expressed in it are part of ongoing research and analysis and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Education

the school year 1998-99 and still in operation in 1999-2000, 1,122, was somewhat controversial. The number of charter schools in the 1998-99 school year was perceived to be higher since the school count sometimes includes every campus of every charter school. In addition, the SASS was actually administered in the field during the 1999-2000 school year, when an additional 500-600 charter schools were opened (school births). The SASS was constrained to using the older frame for budgetary and logistical reasons. Thus, the SASS charter school totals are really a measure of the number of charter schools opened prior to or at some during the 1998-99 school year and still operating in the 1999-2000 school year.

### III. SASS Data Collection

School questionnaires were mailed to charter schools in September 1999. The school questionnaires had a series of screener questions designed to ascertain whether the school was eligible for the Public Charter School Survey. The questions asked, “Is this a school?”, “Is this a public charter school?”, “Is this school in operation?”, “Does this school teach students in grades 1 through 12 or equivalent?”. Answering “no” to any one of these questions made the school out-of-scope. Any charter schools classified as out-of-scope because the respondent for the school said that the school was not charter were called back by Census Bureau staff to verify the respondent understood what was meant by “charter school”. Of the 1,122 schools originally in the data collection, 112 (10.0%) were ultimately classified as out-of-scope. This count was unexpectedly high given the frame was taken from another study conducted in the previous year.

For schools determined to be in-scope, school, principal, library, and teacher questionnaires were administered as described in the survey literature as can be found at <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass>. Questionnaire data were collected and processed and resulted in a final survey estimate of 1,010 public charter schools.

### IV. Reasons for Out-of-Scope Classification

Table 1 presents a breakdown of the number of out-of-scope charter schools by the disposition, which is the reason for being classified as out-of-scope. As can be seen from Table 1, the most common out-of-scope reasons are the school is closed or is not currently a charter school. Our conjecture is that closed schools are probably schools that had previously been founded as charter schools and

subsequently closed. Schools wrongly classified are probably former public schools that had converted or been planning to convert to charter and are no longer charter, so have reverted to public schools. Taken together, these two categories account for 65% of the out-of-scope records. Some of these schools responding to SASS have similar names and addresses to charter schools, so they may have been confused with charter schools in the development of the OERI frame. The next most prevalent reason, duplicate – at 13%, occur primarily in Arizona, where the incidence of charter schools with multiple campuses is quite common. Records marked as “not being schools” may either be offices for organizations that operate charter schools or may represent charter schools that never opened. Schools not offering grades 1-12 seemed to have opened with the intention of only teaching kindergarten or pre-kindergarten.

What can be taken from this is that even though the out-of-scope rate is high, there do seem to be reasonable explanations for how school records can become out-of-scope with respect to charter school status. In particular, since the list frame came from the National Study of Charter Schools which is a different survey with different collection methodologies and in-scope school definitions, it may not really be surprising that discrepancies occur.

### V. Comparison of Other Sources of Charter School Data

Another question that could be asked given our low number of currently operating charter schools relates to the coverage of the frame that was used. To do so, we could compare our frame with two other known sources of charter school lists. The first is the *National Charter School Directory* – 2000, published by The Center for Education Reform, a national advocacy group for educational reform. This directory lists 1,182 charter schools believed to be have been opened as of the 1998-99 school year. It lists 64 of these schools described as having been closed due to mismanagement or other accountability questions, and further states that there are additional charter schools that voluntarily closed or had their charter rescinded before they opened, yielding an estimate of fewer than 1,118 charter schools from the 1998-99 school year that were still open in the 1999-2000 school year. Based on this information, it would seem that the 1,010 in-scope charter schools in SASS seems a bit low but not unrealistic.

The second possible alternative source of charter schools is a self reporting web site-

<http://www.uscharterschools.org/>. This web site allows charter schools to voluntarily include themselves in a listing of charter schools and to provide information about the objectives of the school and how it operates. However, since this site relies on self-report, charter school coverage is likely to have some gaps.

In order to draw some conclusions about the coverage of the SASS charter school frame, we have undertaken a record-by-record comparison of our frame against these other two sources. School records were compared based on name, address, phone number, grade range, and year operation began.

Table 2 details the results of this investigation. This table simply displays the results of the comparison of the lists. From what we know about charter schools in the frame used for SASS, some of the school records not found in SASS would have been classified as out-of-scope if they had been subjected to the SASS data collection procedures. What we do not know is whether schools missing from the frame used for SASS would have been in- or out-of-scope in the SASS public charter school survey.

From Table 2, it appears that the SASS frame included about 87% of all known charter schools. One possible avenue at this point in determining the coverage of the SASS frame would have been to employ some type of capture-recapture methodology to these matching results to try to estimate the total number of charter schools in the country. We do not attempt to do that here primarily because the authors are not fully aware of the exact methodology of how each list was constructed. Thus, we can make no reasonable assumption with respect to the independence of the sources.

If the source lists are not independently constructed, the total number of charter schools could be higher than it would appear from these counts. Also, as we mentioned earlier, if the schools not appearing in the SASS frame have an inordinate propensity to be out-of-scope, the true coverage of the SASS frame could be higher than it would appear.

## VI. Charter Schools in the 2003-2004 SASS

The next round of the Schools and Staffing Surveys is scheduled for data collection during the 2003-2004 school year. Charter schools will again be included. Given the large number of charter schools that are expected to exist as of the 2002-2003 school year

when the charter school frame for SASS will be constructed, it appears a sample of charter schools will be included in SASS.

As mentioned previously, the 1997-98 Common Core of Data (CCD) included 714 of 1122 charter schools in the sampling frame (64%). This was deemed unacceptably low at the time. An initial review of the 2000-2001 CCD, however, revealed that CCD now appears to have good coverage of charter schools in nearly all states. So, we recommend that SASS use the CCD as the basis for developing the charter school sampling frame. The CCD can be supplemented using lists from either of the two other known sources (CES or uscharterschools). We believe the CCD still has rather poor coverage in at least one state. Also, given processing lags, the CCD that is available for use in SASS is always from two years prior. Given the rapid growth in the number of charter schools, a supplementation from another source would provide representation of newer charter schools.

As a next step, we plan to evaluate the 2000-2001 Common Core of Data using a list of charter schools from the Center for Education Reform that covers the 2000-2001 school year. This should give us a more definitive evaluation of the coverage of the CCD as well as establishing methodology for supplementing the CCD in future charter school frame construction. Given the anticipated quality of the charter school frame for the 2003-2004 SASS, we are fairly confident that we can ensure the survey has good coverage of charter schools.

### References:

- Dale, A. (Ed.). 2000. National Charter School Directory 2000, Sixth Edition. Washington, DC: The Center for Education Reform.
- Nelson, B. et al. 2000, "The State of Charter Schools 2000: National Study of Charter Schools, Fourth Year Report," Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education.

Table 1: Final disposition code for public charter school determined to be out-of-scope for SASS

Disposition	Frequency	Description
Only post –secondary or K/PK	4	Does not teacher any of grades 1-12 or equivalent
Wrong classification	27	School was not currently charter - charter revoked, or never completed the chartering process
Not a school	11	School never opened, school record indicated is an administrative unit only
School closed	46	School is not operating in the 1999-2000 school year
Duplicate	15	Single school with multiple campuses
Other	9	Not classified above or disposition code not assigned
Total	112	

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey, Public charter school file.

Table 2 – State-by-State Comparison of the Charter School Frame Used for SASS with the Center for Education Reform (CER) directory and U.S. Charter Schools website

State	SASS Schools matching to CER	SASS Schools not matching to CER	CER schools not matching to SASS	Uscharterschools.org schools not appearing elsewhere
Alaska	15	2	0	0
Arizona	228	23	36	8
California	140	2	19	11
Colorado	59	1	0	5
Connecticut	14	2	0	0
Delaware	4	0	0	0
Dist of Columbia	17	1	1	0
Florida	67	5	10	0
Georgia	26	1	2	0
Hawaii	2	0	0	0
Idaho	2	0	0	0
Illinois	7	5	7	0
Kansas	15	0	0	0
Louisiana	10	1	0	0
Massachusetts	34	0	0	0
Michigan	137	2	2	3
Minnesota	35	1	10	0
Mississippi	1	0	0	0
Nevada	1	0	0	0
New Jersey	30	0	0	0
New Mexico	2	3	0	0
North Carolina	51	7	0	0
Ohio	14	0	1	0
Pennsylvania	28	3	2	1
Rhode Island	2	0	0	0
South Carolina	3	2	0	0
Texas	81	7	30	6
Wisconsin	27	2	10	0
TOTAL U.S.	1052	70	130	34

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey, Public charter school File; Center for Education Reform, *National Charter School Directory – 2000*; *uscharterschools.org*