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**Schools Without Diversity:  
Education Management Organizations,  
Charter Schools, and the  
Demographic Stratification  
of the American School System**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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## *Executive Summary*

Whether charter schools will increase segregation in schools and, ultimately, in society is an important and hotly contested question. Charter proponents point to the high enrollments of minority and economically disadvantaged pupils in charter schools, compare them with overall state enrollment percentages, and contend that charter schools are integrative. Opponents explain these enrollment levels by noting the high minority and poverty concentrations in the urban areas where charter schools are centered. They quote other research suggesting that the schools exacerbate existing segregation.

Gary Miron, Jessica Urschel, William Mathis, and Elana Tornquist examine this issue using a national data base of schools operated by Education Management Organizations (EMOs), 95% of which are charter schools. The study explores whether these EMO-operated charter schools integrate or segregate students by four key demographic characteristics: ethnic/minority classification, socioeconomic status, disabling condition and English language facility.

The database was created from a variety of sources, including the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Common Core of Data and the For-Profit and Nonprofit Annual Profiles of Education Management Organizations published by the Commercialism in Education Research Unit (CERU). In total, the authors were able to gather data on 968 schools, which comprised 89% of schools operated by EMOs in 2006-2007. Longitudinal datasets were constructed that included two additional years—2000-2001 and 2003-2004—which allowed the authors to track segregation/integration trends over time. Demographic characteristics on each charter school were compared with those same characteristics from the sending public school district.

Descriptive comparisons were made using means and were tested by analyses of variance. To measure segregation, however, data aggregated to mean scores misleads by hiding important differences. Accordingly, the distribution of the scores required examination. Cut-scores were established representing various degrees of segregation along a five-point scale from highly segregative to highly integrative.

Five primary findings were reached:

- Charter schools operated by EMOs tend to be strongly racial segregative for both minority and majority students as compared with the composition of the sending district. Only one-fourth of the charter schools had a composition relatively similar to that of the sending district.
- For economically challenged students, EMO-operated charter schools more strongly segregate students than do their respective local districts. The student population is pushed out to the extremes. Most charter schools were divided into either very segregative high-income schools or very segregative low-income

schools. Between 70% and 73% of the schools were in the extreme categories of the scale, depending on the comparison.

- EMO-operated schools consistently enrolled a lower proportion of special education children than their home district. Past research has shown that charter schools have less capacity for special education children. Thus, parents tended to select away (or were counseled away) from charter schools. A small group of charter schools focused on special needs children and were, consequently, highly segregative in this regard.
- English Language Learners (ELL) were also consistently underrepresented in charter schools in every comparison. While one-third of the EMO schools had an ELL population similar to the sending district, the distribution was highly skewed, with well over half the EMO schools being segregated.
- When examined for the years 2001 to 2007, the composition of the charter schools trended closer to the public school district for each of the four demographic groups examined. However, this phenomenon was an artifact of balancing extremes. For both for-profit and nonprofit EMOs, the segregation patterns of 2000-2001 were virtually identical to those in 2006-2007. Consequently, a pattern of segregation attributable to EMO-operated schools is being maintained.

Looking specifically at racial segregation, both White flight and minority flight are evidenced in charter schools. Compounding the effects of the nation's highly segregated neighborhoods, policy makers must consider the economic, social and ethnic segregative effects of charter schools along with potential segregation that may be driven by other forms of school choice.

Given that educational equality, whether financial or programmatic, has not occurred in this nation, the perpetuation of educational policies that have the effect of further dividing society is troubling and calls for rectification.