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School Choice: Evidence and Recommendations





Teacher Qualifications and Work Environments Across School Types

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Executive Summary

The academic success of any school depends on the instruction provided by high quality teachers. Yet the impact of school choice on teachers and teaching has received less attention than other components of school operations. This brief addresses that lack by reviewing teacher quality in choice schools and differences in work environments across school types. It also includes the scant information available about what impact school choice may have upon the teacher labor market.

Findings, broken out by types of schools, are based on a review of relevant research as well as original analyses of the 2003-2004 Schools and Staff Survey published by the National Center for Education Statistics. Both the existing literature and the new analyses find differences in the qualifications of teachers across private, charter, and public schools. Among private schools, Catholic school teachers appear most similar to teachers in traditional public schools. There are some differences in the qualifications of teachers in public choice schools, but they are not consistent. While choice schools tend to have more teachers who graduated from more selective colleges and fewer teachers who graduated from less selective colleges, they also have more inexperienced teachers.

Private school teachers are the most satisfied with their jobs, despite having the lowest salaries. This may be partially due to the finding that they also have smaller class sizes and work fewer hours. Contrary to expectations, charter schools have class sizes similar to those in traditional public schools. Overall, the analysis suggests that teachers in forms of public school choice and in traditional public schools have similar work environments.

There is limited evidence that charter schools use different hiring practices than public schools, although the extent to which these differences may contribute to qualification differences is unknown. The little that is known about what impact school choice has upon the teacher labor market suggests that public schools do not experience competition for high quality teachers, and they make few changes in staffing policies as a result. Although charter and private schools lose teachers at higher rates than public schools, there is no strong evidence about the place of choice schools in teacher career patterns.

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Based on these findings, it is strongly recommended that extensive additional research be conducted to fill the many existing knowledge gaps exposed in this study, especially regarding the question of how school choice affects the overall teacher labor market.

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Introduction

Teachers are vital to any school: academic success depends on high quality teachers providing high quality instruction. Indeed, teachers are the most important school resource for student learning.¹ Yet the impact of school choice on teachers and teaching has received less attention than other components of school operations. This brief reviews what is known about teacher quality across types of schools and the impact of school choice on teachers' qualifications and work environments; it includes as well the little that is known about the impact of choice on the teaching labor market.

Because increasing school choice creates options for teachers as well as students, teacher qualifications and work environments might be expected to differ across school types. Traditionally, large districts serve as the single employer of teachers within a particular geographical area.² Teachers who want to work in a particular community have generally had to work for a certain district, which typically has had centralized hiring, staffing, and compensation policies. With little or no competition for teachers, many districts have had few incentives to create enticing work environments. However, increasing numbers of private schools and charter schools have increased the number of potential employers for whom teachers may work, introducing a competitive environment for traditional public school districts. Moreover, the employment options that choice schools present may vary not only in such practical criteria as salary but also in such areas as commitment to a particular educational philosophy or curriculum. Overall, choice schools may appeal to teachers on a variety of factors. Creating more schools of choice could thus alter dynamics in the teacher labor market.

The presence of various types of schools does not necessarily mean that they are competing for the same pool of teachers, however. Choice schools may differ in their teaching forces because of teacher characteristics or school characteristics, or both. Additionally, hiring practices in choice schools may differ, also contributing to a differentiated teaching force.

This brief explores the question of how the increasing growth of school choice has affected the teaching force to date. Specifically, this research asks:

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- *How do teacher qualifications compare across schools of choice and traditional public schools?* In answer to this question, information is provided across school types on teachers' certification status, educational level, selectivity of undergraduate college, and experience. Relevant data came from both existing research and original analyses.
- *Are schools of choice creating attractive work environments for teachers?* In answer to this question, both the results of recent research and new analyses offer a sketch of how teacher community, autonomy and influence, salary, and working conditions vary across traditional public schools and choice schools.

To the extent possible given scant existing research, this paper also explores whether hiring practices appear to differ in public, private and charter schools and whether choice has affected the teaching force in terms of attrition, retention, and competition.

Methods and Data Sources

Findings reported below are based on both a review of the existing literature on teachers in choice schools and on original analyses using the 2003-2004 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS).³ SASS is administered by the National Center for Education Statistics and is the largest national sample of teachers available. The 2003-2004 SASS surveyed 43,244 public and charter school teachers and 7,979 private school teachers, as well as their schools, principals, and districts.⁴ The SASS sample includes teachers from every state and so can provide representative estimates at both the state and national levels. When school and district information is linked to the teacher survey, a rich set of contextual variables is available for comparison of teacher characteristics across settings.

More specifically, the analysis compares descriptive statistics of teacher qualification measures (certification, advanced degrees, teaching experience, and college selectivity) and work environments (salary, class size, hours worked, and overall satisfaction) using the SASS data.⁵ Analyses are presented for all teachers in the SASS as well as for a subpopulation of teachers in urban schools. The distinction between groups is significant because schools of choice are clustered in urban areas, which tend to have less qualified teachers and less desirable working conditions.

One indicator of teacher quality used in this analysis is college selectivity because teachers with high general ability, as measured by high test scores, are more effective at raising student achievement.⁶ The selectivity of the college from which a teacher graduated is a common indicator of general ability.⁷ This analysis uses the selectivity rating of a teacher's undergraduate college, which is based on average test scores and other indicators of those admitted to the college, in Barron's Profile of American Colleges. Colleges labeled "highly competitive" or "most

competitive” are considered highly selective in this analysis, while those labeled “less competitive” or “noncompetitive” are considered least selective. Colleges labeled “very competitive” or “competitive” are considered moderately competitive. Only the percentages who went to highly selective or least selective colleges are shown in the tables due to space considerations. Teachers who went to “special” schools, such as art colleges, that were not given a competitiveness rating were excluded from this analysis.

The definitions of other qualifications and work environment indicators in this analysis appear in the appendix, while definitions of the various types of choice schools appear below.

Types of School Choice

As types of school choice proliferate, clarifying terminology becomes a challenge. Existing literature on teachers in choice schools employs varied terms and inconsistent definitions for different types of schools. Some existing research uses fine-grained distinctions in its categories (as in the distinction between private independent day and boarding schools) while other studies use much more general categories. For these reasons, it is necessary to clarify terms employed in this study. The following paragraphs, then, describe and define the terms used in discussing choice schools; they also explore why teacher qualifications and work structures in choice schools may differ from those in traditional public schools.

A major characteristic of many choice schools is that they are private rather than public. In this study, the general term *private school* refers to all private schools.⁸ Among private school teachers, distinctions are made among those teaching in *Catholic schools*, in *other religious private schools*, or in *non-religious private schools*.⁹ While all private schools share some similarities, there are reasons to consider each of these categories separately. All private schools may hire non-certified teachers, and they are free from district and state oversight. All also have freedom to define their goals and philosophy, possibly creating more enticing work environments. Perhaps most importantly, in addition to being exempt from state teacher certification requirements, private schools are also exempt from NCLB mandates for Highly Qualified Teachers. Thus, private schools are not constrained by state or federal policy about whom they can hire.

On other measures, however, private schools may differ significantly among themselves. Many Catholic schools have a diocesan board or other governing hierarchy that supervises their operations, so that they lack the autonomy of many other private schools. In addition, because the mission of Catholic and other religious schools is tied to religious affiliations, these schools may attract or hire teachers from a pool of applicants somewhat different from the pool for non-religious private

schools. Another variance among private schools is participation in voucher programs. Unfortunately, the SASS data do not discriminate between private schools that do and do not accept voucher students. While some inferences about voucher schools may be made by examining the characteristics of private school teachers, it is not possible to directly compare voucher and non-voucher private schools.

The term *charter school* refers to public charter schools.¹⁰ When evidence on distinctions among charter schools (such as start-up or conversion schools) is available, differences are noted. A start-up charter school is a school that was newly created, while a conversion charter school is a school that previously operated as a traditional public or private school before converting to a charter school. Teacher qualifications and work environments in charter schools may be affected by greater flexibility in staffing policies. Moreover, charters may also design a school around a particular mission, creating the possibility that they will attract a different pool of teacher applicants. Further, charter schools usually have no collectively bargained contracts or other teacher union agreements, which may also influence teacher work environments and school staffing policies.

An important distinction among charters is that some are linked to home schooling, as reflected in the categories *charter schools with a home school focus* and *charter schools without a home school focus*.¹¹ Non-classroom-based charters offer some information about teacher qualifications and work environments associated with home schooling, about which little is known generally. However, for the purposes of this study, it is important to note that the data available pertain only to the teachers who oversee home-schooled students—it does not indicate the qualifications of the person/s directly providing instruction. (While 11 states require that a certified teacher supervise home-schooled students or approve their curriculum,¹² most of the instruction for home-schooled students is actually provided by non-school personnel, such as a parent. Nine states place requirements on the parent, usually to have a high school diploma or equivalent.) It is also important to note that many home-schooled students are not enrolled in charter schools but are supervised or sponsored by a public school district, and so their experience is not reflected here. Also clouding the picture is that many charters are cyber or virtual schools rather than traditional home-based schools. Given these variations, data presented in this study—which apply only to school-based personnel in charter schools—should not be considered an indication of the quality of instruction provided to all home-schooled students.

The terms *public school* and *public school choice* refer to any district-run, non-charter, public schools and choices; included here are magnet schools, open enrollment districts, interdistrict choice plans, and traditional public schools. Such an inclusive definition was necessary because earlier research rarely provides enough detail to determine whether these forms of public school choice were excluded from

comparison groups designated “public schools.” While charter schools are also publicly funded schools and are thus a form of school choice within the public sector, they are separately categorized and discussed because their operations and governance tend to be significantly different from that of the other schools grouped here.

The term *magnet school* refers to a public school that has a school-wide magnet program or that has a special program emphasis. Two characteristics of magnet schools may produce differences in their teacher qualifications and work environments. First, magnet schools often receive extra money from federal programs or foundations, which may help provide more resources or otherwise improve working conditions. Second, the special emphasis of a magnet school may serve as a unique attractor for high quality teachers or high quality principals, who then contribute to a positive school culture and foster a strong professional community. However, while magnet schools may thus have higher quality teachers self-select into them, their specialized focus may also repel teachers who do not agree with the mission. Thus, creating a new magnet program in an existing school or district may lead to teacher turnover. Because magnet school teachers remain part of the public school teaching force, other elements of the magnet school work environment may be less variable: a district may use the same salary schedule, union contracts, and staffing policies across all of its schools, including magnets.

Open enrollment districts have a public school choice program that allows students to attend either their assigned school or another school in the same district. *Interdistrict choice programs* either allow their students to attend schools in other districts at no cost or allow students from other districts to attend their district at no cost. The competition for students induced by open enrollment or interdistrict choice may spur schools to focus on attracting and retaining high quality teachers. However, staffing practices in these districts and programs remain similar to those in traditional public schools because the districts retain a traditional governance structure. Indeed, some districts participate in open enrollment or interdistrict choice only because of state mandates.

The term *traditional public schools* refers to public schools offering no choice options. That is, the term refers to public schools that are neither charter nor magnet, in districts offering neither open enrollment nor interdistrict choice.

How do teacher qualifications compare across schools of choice and traditional public schools?

Certification and Education

Previous literature indicates differences in the certification and education of teachers across private schools. Public schools have the most certified teachers (nearly all), followed by Catholic schools and then by

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other private schools.¹³ Catholic elementary teachers are less likely to have a master's degree than public elementary teachers, but there is no such difference between Catholic and public secondary teachers.¹⁴ A study focusing on magnet high schools, however, found that magnet school teachers have more education than Catholic school teachers.¹⁵ Teachers in independent private schools, however, are more likely to have a master's degree than public school teachers.¹⁶ An exception to this generality appeared in the Cleveland voucher program, where an evaluation found that public schools and participating private schools had equal numbers of certified teachers, but that the private school teachers had less education.¹⁷

Table 1 – Percent teachers with certification or at least a master's degree

School type	All schools			Urban schools only		
	Certified	Master's degree	N	Certified	Master's degree	N
<i>Private (all)</i>	48.4%**	35.3%**	7,979	47.6%**	38.7%**	2,949
Private, Catholic	66.2*	35.6*	2,884	62.3*	37.9*	1,203
Private, other religious	37.2*	29.1*	3,727	36.2*	32.1*	1,188
Private, non-religious	43.7*	45.6	1,368	43.3*	50.2	558
<i>Charter (all)</i>	75.2**	32.9**	1,066	71.9**	33.1**	#
Charter, no home-school focus	74.7*	33.6*	999	71.6*	33.2*	597
Charter, home-school focus	81.7*	24.0*	67	#	#	#
<i>Public non-charter (all)</i>	95.8	48.3	42,178	94.6	49.1	#
Magnet	94.1	51.4	2,241	92.8	54.1	1,293
Public, open enrollment	97.4*	47.0	1,731	97.2	46.9	732
Public, interdistrict choice	97.3	52.0	483	#	#	#
Traditional public	95.9	48.1	37,723	94.7	48.3	8,255

Note: Original analysis by the author using the 2003-04 Schools and Staffing Survey.

Estimates are not shown due to small sample size in subpopulation.

* Statistically significant difference from “traditional public” schools.

** Statistically significant difference from “Public non-charter (all)” schools.

Existing literature also finds that charter schools have fewer certified teachers and less educated teachers than public schools,¹⁸ although the relative number of certified teachers varies among charter

schools. Conversion charter schools have more certified teachers than start-up charters.¹⁹ Among non-classroom-based charter schools, home-study schools have certified teacher rates similar to those in public schools; however, other non-classroom-based charter schools have fewer certified teachers.²⁰ The percentage of teachers with a master's degree also varies among charter schools, with some charter schools having high rates of teachers with advanced degrees and others having very few such teachers.²¹

The original analyses reveal that teachers in traditional public schools and in public choice schools have similar levels of certification and education (see Table 1, preceding). There is some evidence that teachers in districts with open enrollment are more likely to be certified than teachers in districts without open enrollment, although the difference is small. Teachers in private and charter schools, however, are much less likely to have certification or a master's degree than teachers in traditional public schools. This is also true when the sample is restricted only to urban schools. Charter schools, however, have more certified teachers than private schools. Interestingly, teachers in non-religious private schools are equally as likely as teachers in traditional public schools to have a master's degree. This may reflect the presence of highly educated teachers in private independent schools noted in existing literature.²²

With the exception of the rates of certification among charter schools with a home-schooling focus, these findings are consistent with the existing literature. A previous study on home-study charter schools in California found they have rates of certified teachers similar to those in public schools. While the new analyses presented here indicate charter schools with a home-schooling focus have relatively high rates of certified teachers, they still have fewer than traditional public schools. The difference may be due to differing regulations around home schooling and charter schools. Eleven states require at least some of their home-schooled students to be supervised by a certified teacher, leading to high rates of teacher certification in these states. In other states, charter schools with a home-schooling focus may be caught between regulations governing home schooling and those governing charter schools. Many home-schooling focused charter schools may be virtual or cyber schools. For example, Wisconsin does not require students in a home-based educational program to be instructed by a certified teacher.²³ Yet a recent court ruling found that instruction provided through a home-based virtual school under parent supervision violates teacher licensure requirements.²⁴

Teaching Experience

Previous research has consistently found that charter school teachers have fewer years of experience than their peers in public schools.²⁵ Although many charter schools are new schools, the average years of experience of charter school teachers has stayed constant over

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time.²⁶ Further, teachers in home-study-based charter schools have years of experience similar to those for teachers in other charter schools.²⁷ While little is known about the relative experience of magnet teachers and traditional public school teachers, there is evidence to suggest that teachers in multi-focus magnet schools are more experienced than teachers in single-focus magnet schools.²⁸ When making comparisons between private and public school teachers, Catholic school teachers have less experience than public school teachers, and non-Catholic private school teachers have even fewer years of experience than Catholic school teachers.²⁹

Table 2 – Average years of total teaching experience and percentage of teachers with more than three years of experience

School type	All schools		Urban schools only	
	Total experience	Teachers with more than 3 years experience	Total experience	Teachers with more than 3 years
<i>Private (all)</i>	12.6**	77.6%**	13.2	80.1%
Private, Catholic	14.2	80.8*	14.1	81.4
Private, other religious	11.6*	75.4*	12.4	78.3
Private, non-religious	12.2*	76.9*	12.9	80.9
<i>Charter (all)</i>	7.8**	63.4**	7.8**	62.1**
Charter, no home-school focus	7.7*	62.3*	7.8*	62*
Charter, home-school focus	8.4*	77.3	#	#
<i>Public non-charter (all)</i>	14.3	84.5	13.7	82.2
Magnet	13.1*	82.1	13.2	80.4
Public, open enrollment	15.0	85.6	15.1	83
Public, interdistrict choice	17.4*	89.4	#	#
Traditional public	14.3	84.5	13.6	82.4

Note: Original analysis by the author using the 2003-04 Schools and Staffing Survey.

Estimates are not shown due to small sample size in subpopulation.

* Statistically significant difference from “traditional public” schools.

** Statistically significant difference from “Public non-charter (all)” schools.

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According to the SASS data, teachers in charter schools, both with and without a home-schooling focus, have the fewest years of teaching experience across charter, private, and public schools (see Table 2). Charter schools without a home-schooling focus have the fewest experienced teachers. Among forms of public school choice, there is some evidence that teachers in magnet schools have less experience and teachers in districts that participate in interdistrict choice have more experience, but these differences disappear when the sample is restricted to urban schools. Catholic schools have teachers with similar average years of experience as traditional public schools, but slightly fewer teachers with more than three years of experience. This may occur if Catholic teachers have many teachers in their first three years and many quite experienced teachers, with fewer teachers with a moderate amount of experience. Teachers in non-Catholic and non-religious private schools are less likely to be experienced teachers than teachers in traditional public schools, but these differences are not present when the sample is restricted to urban schools. Within urban schools, only non-home-school charter schools have fewer experienced teachers than traditional public schools.

College Selectivity

The existing literature on the types of colleges from which teachers graduate indicates that generally, teachers in private schools and charter schools come from more selective colleges.³⁰ This is particularly true of teachers in private independent schools. Catholic school teachers, however, graduated from undergraduate colleges of similar selectivity as those attended by public school teachers.³¹

Table 3 reports original analyses that indicate notable differences in the selectivity of colleges from which teachers across various forms of school choice graduated. Teachers in non-religious private schools are most likely to have graduated from highly selective colleges and the least likely to have graduated from less selective colleges. This is true among all schools and among schools in urban areas only. Teachers in non-Catholic private schools and charter schools are more likely to have graduated from highly selective colleges than teachers in traditional public schools. When the sample is restricted to schools in urban areas, the difference between charter and public school teachers is no longer statistically significant, but remains relatively large. Catholic school teachers and teachers in traditional public schools are similar in terms of the selectivity of the colleges from which they graduated. Among public choice schools, teachers in magnet schools were more likely to graduate from highly selective colleges, and teachers in districts with interdistrict choice less likely to do so. Among urban schools, teachers in districts with open enrollment are the most likely to come from less selective colleges, and teachers in non-religious private schools the least likely to do so.

Table 3 – Percentage of teachers who graduated from highly selective and less selective colleges

School type	All schools		Urban schools only	
	Highly selective college	Less selective college	Highly selective college	Less selective college
<i>Private (all)</i>	15.6%**	20.2%**	17.5%**	19.2%**
Private, Catholic	8.6	23.9	9.8	22.9
Private, other religious	14.8*	20.9*	18.6*	19.7
Private, non religious	26.5*	14.0*	27.9*	13.1*
<i>Charter (all)</i>	14.7%**	18.4%**	15.4	21.6
Charter, no home-school focus	14.5*	18.7*	15.4	21.2
Charter, home-school focus	17.3*	15.1	#	#
<i>Public non-charter (all)</i>	8.7	25.2	10.5	26.1
Magnet	12.8*	23.8	14.5	26.7
Public, open enrollment	8.9	32.1	8.8	40.6*
Public, interdistrict choice	2.8*	20.2	#	#
Traditional public	8.5	25.0	10.0	24.9

Note: Original analysis by the author using the 2003-04 Schools and Staffing Survey.

Estimates are not shown due to small sample size in subpopulation.

* Statistically significant difference from “traditional public” schools.

** Statistically significant difference from “Public non-charter (all)” schools.

Are schools of choice creating attractive work environments for teachers?

Working Conditions

One way schools of choice offer a unique work environment is by focusing on a particular school mission. As public schools must serve a diverse constituency, they are less able to define a specific school focus. Many charter schools, for example, cater to a specific educational niche and attract teachers who want to serve that niche. Indeed, studies of charter school teachers find they value the mutual selection process of school choice and want to work in a school that shares their goals or has like-minded colleagues.³² Likewise, Catholic school teachers are often

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drawn to their schools because of an interest in the school's religious mission.³³

Teachers may also be attracted to schools of choice because of the greater sense of community and collegiality than is found in traditional public schools. There is some evidence that charter, private, and magnet schools have higher levels of professional community than traditional public schools,³⁴ and that charters in particular attract teachers who want to work in an innovative atmosphere with a strong professional culture.³⁵ Other studies, however, have found more mixed results for the collegiality within choice schools³⁶—which may be due to the lack of time for collaboration in some choice schools.³⁷ Although charter schools have slightly higher levels of professional community than public schools, in-school processes that lead to strong communities are similar in charter and public schools.³⁸

Many forms of school choice, including private, charter, and magnet schools, give teachers more autonomy and independence within their classrooms.³⁹ This is not true for all schools of choice, however. Two studies of teachers in charter and public schools in Colorado find conflicting results in terms of the relative autonomy charter school teachers experience.⁴⁰

There is mixed evidence about whether choice schools also offer teachers more influence in the school-wide arena. Charter schools, private schools, and single-focus magnet school involve teachers in school-wide decision-making and curriculum.⁴¹ Other studies, however, have found that teachers in charter and deregulated public schools did not necessarily have more influence on school governance and policy than their peers in traditional public schools.⁴² Further, some studies have found charter school teachers actually have less influence over school-wide decisions than public school teachers.⁴³

Working conditions vary among different types of schools as well as among schools in the same sector.⁴⁴ Private schools consistently have smaller classes compared to public schools,⁴⁵ with the exception of private schools participating in Cleveland's private school voucher program, which had larger classes than the public schools.⁴⁶ Evidence concerning relative class size in charter and public schools is mixed,⁴⁷ perhaps because of differences between grade levels. One report suggests that charter schools have smaller elementary classes than public schools, but similar or larger class sizes in high schools.⁴⁸ The relative class size in magnet schools compared to non-magnet public schools also varies depending on the grade levels in the school.⁴⁹ Non-classroom-based charter schools appear to have the largest student-teacher ratio, but teachers report spending an average of only 4.5 hours per month with each student.⁵⁰

Besides class size, other working conditions vary among sectors. For example, charter teachers report greater dissatisfaction with the physical facilities than teachers in public schools.⁵¹ Staff firing policies in

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charter schools may be very informal, and teachers may be unable to initiate grievance procedures on such important staffing concerns as being paid on time.⁵² Charter school teachers are attracted to charter schools because they have safe environments, but they are typically critical of the amount of instructional materials or planning time provided.⁵³ Teachers in choice schools also work longer hours and have longer school years.⁵⁴ Particularly in private independent schools, teachers work long hours with many non-instructional duties.⁵⁵

Table 4 – Average class size and average hours worked per week

School type	Class size, self-contained teachers	Class size, departmentalized teachers	Hours worked per week
<i>Private (all)</i>	17.5**	18.7**	48.0**
Private, Catholic	21.6*	23.1*	49.6*
Private, other religious	15.9*	17.6*	46.1*
Private, non religious	14.9*	14.9*	49.2*
<i>Charter (all)</i>	20.0	21.3**	51.0
Charter, no home-school focus	20.2	21.2*	51.7
Charter, home-school focus	18.3	21.5	41.2*
<i>Public non-charter (all)</i>	20.3	24.7	51.6
Magnet	20.5	25.4	51.0
Public, open enrollment	20.6	27.3*	50.8
Public, interdistrict choice	19.4	22.1*	51.8
Traditional public	20.3	24.6	51.7

Note: Original analysis by the author using the 2003-04 Schools and Staffing Survey.

* Statistically significant difference from “traditional public” schools.

** Statistically significant difference from “Public non-charter (all)” schools.

The original analyses using the SASS data indicate that there are few differences in the working conditions of teachers among forms of public school choice (see Table 4). The only difference is that teachers with departmentalized instruction (usually secondary school teachers) in districts with open enrollment have larger classes while teachers in interdistrict choice districts have smaller classes. There are no differences in class size for teachers with self-contained classes (usually elementary teachers) among forms of public school choice.

More differences appear, however, in the working conditions of private and charter school teachers as compared to those of traditional public school teachers. Departmentalized teachers in charter schools and

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private schools have smaller class sizes than traditional public school teachers. Charter school teachers in self-contained classes have similar class sizes as their peers in traditional public schools, while Catholic school teachers have slightly larger classes and other private school teachers have smaller classes. In contrast to previous research findings on teachers in private independent schools, this analysis finds that teachers in private schools also work fewer hours per week than traditional public school teachers. Teachers in charter schools with a home-schooling focus work the fewest hours per week, perhaps because they spend less time instructing students.⁵⁶

Salary and Satisfaction

Salaries also vary among the different types of schools.

Table 5 – Average school-related earnings

School type	All teachers	First year teachers	Teachers with 10-15 years experience
<i>Private (all)</i>	\$30,307**	\$22,976**	\$30,262**
Private, Catholic	30,970*	23,987*	30,294*
Private, other religious	25,948*	19,328*	26,013*
Private, non religious	36,930*	28,910*	37,438*
<i>Charter (all)</i>	37,136**	30,514**	43,326
Charter, no home-school focus	37,378*	31,079	43,207
Charter, home-school focus	34,069*	#	#
<i>Public non-charter (all)</i>	45,643	33,395	45,399
Magnet	46,534	35,814	47,593
Public, open enrollment	48,007	33,303	48,337
Public, interdistrict choice	46,581	#	43,506
Traditional public	45,471	33,250	45,114

Note: Original analysis by the author using the 2003-04 Schools and Staffing Survey.

Estimates are not shown due to small sample size in subpopulation.

* Statistically significant difference from “traditional public” schools.

** Statistically significant difference from “Public non-charter (all)” schools.

Charter school teachers earn less than their peers in public schools with similar credentials and experience.⁵⁷ Although charter schools are less likely than districts to use a standard salary schedule, their salary structures are still quite similar to districts’, with education and experience being the largest contributors to a teacher’s salary.⁵⁸ Other research

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suggests that charter schools have more flexibility to adjust to market conditions in the competition for teachers.⁵⁹ Within the charter school sector, salaries and benefits may vary. Charter schools that converted from existing schools spend more per pupil on teacher salaries and benefits than newly created schools.⁶⁰ However, newly created charter schools are more likely than conversion charters to provide bonuses for teachers in certain subject areas or for teachers with National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) certification.⁶¹ Private school teachers earn the lowest salaries⁶² and teachers in public schools cite pay and benefits as the reason they are not working in private schools.⁶³

Table 6 – Average overall satisfaction

School type	Overall satisfaction ¹
<i>Private (all)</i>	3.7**
Private, Catholic	3.7*
Private, other religious	3.7*
Private, non religious	3.6*
<i>Charter (all)</i>	3.4
Charter, no home-school focus	3.4
Charter, home-school focus	3.7
<i>Public non-charter (all)</i>	3.5
Magnet	3.4
Public, open enrollment	3.5
Public, interdistrict choice	3.6
Traditional public	3.5

Note: Original analysis by the author using the 2003-04 Schools and Staffing Survey.

* Statistically significant difference from “traditional public” schools.

** Statistically significant difference from “Public non-charter (all)” schools.

¹ Overall satisfaction is the extent to which a teacher agreed (on a one-to-four scale) with the statement “I am generally satisfied with being a teacher at this school.” 1=Strongly disagree; 4=Strongly agree.

The original analyses show that teachers in charter and private schools earn lower salaries than do traditional public school teachers. However, average salaries mask differences due to real salary gaps and differences due to teacher experience levels.⁶⁴ As indicated above, charter and private school teachers also have less experience; thus it is not surprising that they earn lower salaries. It is more appropriate to compare the average salaries of teachers with common qualifications across school types. Among first year teachers, private school teachers continue to earn substantially lower salaries than public school teachers. There is some evidence that first year charter school teachers also earn lower salaries, but the difference is smaller. Among experienced teachers, charter school teachers earn salaries similar to those of public school teachers, while

private school salaries continue to lag behind. There is considerable variation in salaries among types of private schools, with teachers in non-religious private schools earning about \$9,000-\$11,000 more than teachers in non-Catholic religious private schools.⁶⁵

Overall, the existing literature indicates teachers across all schools appear satisfied with their school environments.⁶⁶ This may be due to self-selection as teachers seek out types of schools that can provide what they want.⁶⁷ Charter school teachers are satisfied with many aspects of their school, including their relationships with their colleagues, the professional environment, and the educational philosophy of their schools, but are dissatisfied with the facilities, the relationships with the district and union, and the lack of grievance procedures.⁶⁸

Despite lower salaries, teachers in private schools report higher levels of overall satisfaction than their peers in traditional public schools, perhaps because of smaller class size or shorter hours evident in the SASS data.⁶⁹ Charter school teachers appear equally satisfied with their jobs as traditional public school teachers. As with other findings, there are few differences among forms of public school choice.

Do schools of choice use different hiring practices than traditional public schools?

Schools of choice and traditional public schools may use different hiring practices and so may recruit different teaching personnel. Overall, there is little research on the hiring practices of school leaders in choice schools, although some studies have compared charter and public school hiring processes and personnel practices. Charter school teachers are more likely than public school teachers to have had an interview at the school before they were hired; however, that interview tended to be only with the principal.⁷⁰ Charter school teachers also submitted a broader range of materials in their applications,⁷¹ and charter school principals were willing to hire uncertified teachers if they had other desired attributes.⁷² That willingness is somewhat surprising given the mandate for Highly Qualified Teachers in NCLB for both charter and public schools. Private schools, on the other hand, do not have such hiring restrictions, which may explain the finding that fewer private school teachers are certified.

What is the impact of increasing school choice on the teacher labor market?

Teacher Attrition and Retention

Previous research suggests that charter schools have higher attrition than public schools.⁷³ The high turnover rate may be a function of high dismissal rates, as charter schools dismiss a higher proportion of

teachers than both public and private schools.⁷⁴ Private school teachers also have higher attrition than public schools, perhaps because they are more likely to plan on teaching for only a few years.⁷⁵

There is mixed evidence about the fluidity of teachers' movement between school types when they move to new schools. Some evidence suggests that teachers are open to moving between schools of choice and a public school. Two-thirds of teachers in private independent schools would consider working in a public school, and one-third began their careers in a public school before moving to an independent school.⁷⁶ Teachers in public schools, however, were most likely to have spent their whole career in a public school, even though they considered teaching in a private school.⁷⁷ One study of teacher mobility in Florida found that teachers in both charter and public schools who move are more likely to move to a public school.⁷⁸ In Ohio, however, teachers who leave charter schools appear more likely to quit teaching altogether rather than move to another school.⁷⁹

The Impact of School Choice on Traditional Public Schools

As schools of choice increasingly compete with traditional public schools for teachers, the teacher labor market might be affected. To date, however, there is little research on this important issue. Some evidence suggests that more private school competition for teachers results in higher teacher salaries and teachers who are more effective at raising student test scores.⁸⁰ Additionally, a study of teacher mobility between charter and public schools found that the pattern of movement between sectors leads to lower quality teachers in public schools and higher quality in charter schools, the apparent result of the lower quality teachers in charter schools being likely to move to public schools.⁸¹ Yet, school choice appears to have had little impact on district hiring and staffing practices. One study found that less than 5% of public school principals said that the introduction of charter schools impaired their ability to recruit or retain teachers or affected their teacher compensation structure.⁸² Similarly, only 6% of public school principals said they changed their staffing policies due to charter school competition.⁸³

Discussion

Both the existing literature and these original analyses find differences in the qualifications of teachers across private, charter, and public schools. Among private schools, Catholic school teachers appear most similar to teachers in traditional public schools, while the evidence on the qualifications of teachers in magnet, interdistrict and intradistrict choice schools is mixed. There are some differences among the qualifications of teachers in public school choice, but they do not tell a consistent story.

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Determining whether schools of choice have higher or lower quality teachers than traditional public schools requires specifying criteria for quality. The most consistent criteria in the literature include having at least three years of experience and high general ability. Even on only these two measures, the relative quality of teachers in choice schools is unclear. While choice schools do tend to have more teachers who graduated from more selective colleges, and fewer teachers from less selective colleges, they also have more inexperienced teachers.

What explains these differences? One possible explanation is that choice schools, free from restrictions on teacher certification and hiring, attract a different pool of applicants. Individuals who graduated from highly selective colleges and want to teach may find themselves unable to obtain jobs in public schools without state certification; therefore, they apply to private schools. Another explanation is that private and charter school principals actively recruit and hire teachers from more selective colleges, altering the characteristics of their teaching force regardless of the composition of the applicant pool. That Catholic school teachers look more like public school teachers may point to the importance of hiring preferences. Like all private schools, Catholic schools are legally free to hire uncertified teachers. That they hire certified teachers from less selective colleges may reflect their hiring preferences or practices, which prioritize other teacher characteristics.

In terms of working conditions, private school teachers are the most satisfied with their jobs, despite having the lowest salaries. This may be partially due to the finding in this analysis that they also have smaller class sizes and work fewer hours. Contrary to expectations, charter schools have class sizes similar to those in traditional public schools. Overall, the analysis suggests that teachers in forms of public school choice and in traditional public schools have similar work environments.

There is limited evidence that charter schools use different hiring practices than public schools, although the extent to which these differences contribute to the qualification differences is not known. There is also little known about how school choice may be affecting the teacher labor market. The evidence that does exist indicates that public schools do not experience competition for high quality teachers and make few changes in staffing policies as a result. Although charter and private schools lose teachers at higher rates than public schools, there is no strong evidence about the place of schools of choice in teacher career patterns.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The literature review revealed several gaps in existing research on teachers and teaching in schools of choice. First, there is little research on how hiring practices may differ among school types or on whether the differences evident in teacher qualifications are due to teacher or school decisions. While there are a few studies of hiring and staffing practices in

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charter and public schools, a better understanding of how private and magnet schools select staff can promote a better understanding of school staffing across school types. Second, there is little evidence on whether competition from school choice affects the overall dynamics of the labor market. The research that does exist focuses on how competition affects salaries.

In addition, the amount of research across choice schools varies, with a great deal of recent research on charter schools and limited research on private schools, home schooling, magnet schools and programs, and other forms of public school choice. There is especially sparse research on teachers in home schools or cyber schools. Because most home-school instruction is provided by non-school personnel, no evidence on the relative quality of such instruction is available. There is similarly sparse information about the qualifications and work environment of teachers in private voucher schools. Most evaluations of publicly funded voucher programs focus on student achievement results, not on the internal school operations. An analysis of the instructional quality in private voucher schools as compared to that in public schools would provide better insight into achievement results.

These gaps point to future areas of research on teachers in choice schools. Additional work on how school choice is affecting the labor market could help to tease out whether differences in teacher composition across school types are due to teachers self-selecting into different types of schools or to different hiring practices across school types. For example, do principals in choice schools use different hiring criteria or processes? Do similar types of teachers apply to schools in multiple sectors? Do forms of public school choice have unique staffing structures in their districts? The relative amount and type of movement of teachers between schools of choice and traditional public schools can illuminate variations in teacher career patterns across school types as well as the degree of segmentation in the teacher labor market.

More work is also needed on teachers' motivations for choosing to work in a particular type of school. Given the variation in working conditions and salary across school types, it is probable that teachers select into schools with the work environments they most value. Public school teachers, for example, may come from a pool of applicants who value the high salary and job security a public school provides. Private school teachers, on the other hand, may come from a pool of applicants who are willing to trade a lower salary for a shorter workday and a school that shares their vision for education. It is not clear if teachers would be willing to move between school types if they would still be able to get either the working conditions or salary they want.

Finally, research on the extent to which increasing competition for teachers leads traditional public school districts or private schools to change existing staffing policies or hiring practices is also needed. Teachers are central to the operations and educational success of all

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schools. If school choice is to have a competitive effect on traditional public schools, then that should become apparent in school operations. While there are many potential changes a school or district could make, altering the teaching force and the work that teachers do is a potentially powerful method of responding to competitive pressures from choice schools. Understanding the impact of school choice on traditional public schools requires examining how school choice affects teachers, teaching, and the teacher labor market.

Based on these findings, it is strongly recommended that extensive additional research be conducted to fill the many existing knowledge gaps exposed in this study, especially regarding the question of how school choice affects the overall teacher labor market.

***.Appendix: Measures of Teacher Qualifications
and Work Environments***

Using teacher qualifications as indicators of teacher quality is problematic, as few qualifications are consistently linked to student performance. While teacher quality is an important component of student achievement, it is hard to isolate the effects of observed characteristics.⁸⁴ Despite this limitation, some qualifications are commonly used as indicators of quality. The common indicators employed in this study include teacher certification, educational level, years of experience, and college selectivity.

Teacher certification is an important measure as it is required of all public school teachers. In this analysis, teachers are considered certified if they have a regular, probationary, or provisional certificate in their state, regardless of whether it was acquired through an alternative route or not. Teachers with temporary or emergency certificates are not considered certified because the Highly Qualified Teacher provision of the No Child Left Behind Act does not include emergency certifications as Highly Qualified and because teachers with less than full certification have lower performing students.⁸⁵ Teacher educational level indicates whether the teacher has a master's degree or more.

The years of experience criteria include the total years of full or part-time teaching the teacher has accrued, in public or private schools. The percentage of teachers in their first three years of teaching is included because some research suggests that teachers become more effective in their first three years.⁸⁶

The measures of work environments include salary, class size, hours worked per week, and overall satisfaction. Teacher salary is the total school-related earnings during the regular school year. It is the sum of academic year base teaching salary, additional compensation earned for additional activities such as coaching or tutoring, and other income from school sources such as a merit pay bonus or state supplement. It does not include salary from teaching summer school or working in a non-school job. Gaps in average teacher salaries between school types may exist even if all schools offer similar salaries to teachers with similar qualifications, because teaching qualifications vary among schools. For this reason, salaries are also compared for teachers with similar experience levels.

The average class size for teachers is reported separately for teachers in self-contained or departmentalized settings. A self-contained setting refers to teachers who instruct the same group of students most of the day in multiple subjects, most commonly in elementary schools. A departmentalized setting refers to teachers who have several classes of different students throughout the day. Departmentalized instruction is most prominent in secondary schools, where, for example, a math teacher may instruct five different groups of students in algebra during one day. For self-contained teachers, the class size is the number of students the

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teacher reported in an assigned class. For departmentalized teachers, the class size is the average of the number of students the teacher reported across all assigned classes.

The hours worked per week is a teacher-reported variable that indicates the total hours spent on teaching and other school-related activities during a typical full week. Overall satisfaction is the extent to which a teacher agreed (on a one-to-four scale) with the statement “I am generally satisfied with being a teacher at this school.”

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- ³ The existing literature was identified by a search of electronic databases using a combination of keywords that identified the school type and teacher qualification or work environment. The references of the identified literature were also reviewed to identify additional relevant studies. Articles in scholarly journals, policy reports, and state evaluations were included. To be included in the literature reviewed, previous studies must have made some effort to either compare different forms of school choice or compare a type of school choice to a public school. Reports that presented data on one school type without making comparisons were not included.
- ⁴ SASS uses a complex sampling design with teachers clustered within schools. Sampling weights are used to produce nationally representative estimates for the population of public and private school teachers.
- ⁵ Chi-square tests were used to test the distribution of categorical measures among school types. Comparisons of means were used to analyze the differences for continuous variables. In the analyses teachers in all private and all charter schools were compared with teachers in all public non-charter schools. In the detailed analyses, teachers in each type of school choice are compared to teachers in traditional public schools. An alpha level of .05 was chosen so that only differences where there is less than a 5% probability that the difference occurred by chance are noted as statistically significant. Because multiple comparisons are made for each variable (i.e., the educational level of traditional public school teachers is compared to both private and charter school teachers), a Bonferroni adjustment was made to limit the possibility of Type I errors.
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- ¹¹ Charter schools with a home-school focus are those charter schools that indicated that more than 2 percent of their students are home-schooled students. This cut-off point was chosen because the

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distribution of percentage of home-schooled students indicated that 77% of charter schools had 2% or less of their students in a home school.

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