

RUNNING HEAD: Special Education

SPECIAL EDUCATION IN CHARTER SCHOOLS

By

KELI KRUGER

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The Department of Professional Education Faculty

Northwest Missouri State University Missouri

Department of Professional Education

College of Education and Human Services

Maryville, MO 64468

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine if charter schools have the ability to successfully provide services to students with disabilities. Charter schools are required by state laws to offer all special education services that allow the students to receive a free and appropriate public education. The study groups selected for this study were six randomly selected charter schools and six randomly selected public schools. Through an interview process school administrators responded to questions relating to special education in their district. MAP/EOC data was also collected from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to make a comparison of student achievement in both charter and traditional public schools. After compiling data and reviewing previously researched topics it is found that charter schools are able to provide all services that the State of Missouri requires all schools to deliver. It was also found that charter school students with disabilities have higher success rates on MAP/EOC examinations.

INTRODUCTION

Background, Issues and Concerns

Charter schools were introduced in the late 1980's as a form of educational advancement. They are a form of public schools that have different rules and regulations than traditional public schools. Each charter school must agree to a contract which lists specifics of the educational program that it uses to educate the students.

In 1997, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) included charter schools in its amendments. These amendments stated that charter schools must provide the same services to its students with disabilities as traditional public schools do. There are still some doubts that these schools are the best place for students with disabilities. Studies show that charter schools are not as equip to provide the needed services as traditional public schools are. Some issues and concerns include a lack of assistive technology, an under educated staff, as well as limited testing supplies. Many ask if charter schools provide enough services; they believe this is a big reason that parents choose to send their students with disabilities to traditional public schools, rather than charter schools.

Practice Under Investigation

The practice under investigation will be how special education services in charter schools differ from services in traditional public schools. There will be an investigation to see if there is a link between the amount of students with disabilities being serviced in charter schools and the services provided. Area income will also be taken into consideration when compared to the number of students who receive special education services.

School Policy to be Informed by Study

Charter schools are not known for their special education services. This might be a result of not having to follow all of the same rules as public schools or maybe because they simply do not have a high volume of students with disabilities. Regardless of the amount of students with disabilities, all schools should have an outline of how services would be provided if and when they needed to provide them. This being said, charter schools should also have funds set aside in their budget so they can provide all the services that students would need to succeed. The data from this study could inform administration at charter schools about the importance of having a plan in place and a spot in their budget to provide the services that are needed.

Conceptual Underpinning

All school districts have similarities and differences. Some perform at a higher level while others find it difficult to educate their students. Charter schools, like traditional public schools must follow a set of rules set forth by the government. These rules state that all schools must provide services to students with disabilities. What the rules do not talk about is how the school districts must provide the services. This is a major reason why there is a low student with disabilities to charter school ratio.

It has been said that the majority of charter schools lack the onsite resources to provide special education services to their students. While numerous traditional public schools hire district wide staff members to provide therapies and educational support for their students, charter schools have to outsource their staff. Charter schools simply do not have a high enough enrollment of special needs students to justify hiring additional full time staff members to provide daily services. As a result the special education teachers who come in a few times a

week to deliver services are not as invested as full time teachers who are with the students on a daily basis.

Statement of the Problem

Charter schools are not equipped to provide special education services; as a result there is a low number of students with disabilities enrolled in charter schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine if charter schools are able to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Research Question(s)

RQ#1: Is there a significant difference in the number of service providers to serve students with disabilities who attend charter schools as compared to traditional public schools?

RQ #2: Is there a significant difference in special education student achievement between charter schools compared to traditional public schools?

Null Hypothesizes

Ho#1: There is not a significant difference in the number of service providers to serve students with disabilities who attend charter schools as compared to traditional public schools.

Ho#2: There is not a significant difference in special education student achievement between charter schools compared to traditional public schools.

Anticipated Benefits of the Study

To have a clearer understanding of how charter schools provide services to students with disabilities. As well as, to determine if students with disabilities benefit from attending charter schools.

Definition of Terms

Charter schools- a form of public school, funded by the people, which is created by a group that must run their school by a slightly different set of rules than traditional public schools.

DESE- Department of Elementary and Secondary Education who oversees all areas of education in the state of Missouri.

FAPE- Free and Appropriate Public Education is a right given to all children, FAPE is a part of the Rehabilitation act of 1973.

IDEA- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, passed in 1975, and revised several times throughout the years to ensure that all students with disabilities are able to receive a free appropriate public education.

IEP- Individualized Education Plan, created for each student who qualifies for special education services.

NCLB- No Child Left Behind is a federal law that passed in 2001, it revised standards for public education.

Summary

A study was conducted to find if there was a significant difference between special education services provided in charter schools verses traditional public schools. If the T-test shows a significant difference between charter schools and traditional public education services, then charter schools will need to create a better developed plan to provide these services to students with disabilities. After the study is completed, charter schools can also determine what they are doing differently from traditional public schools and how they can adjust their service plan to better fit the needs of their students.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Are charter schools the best schools for students with disabilities? This question has been asked countless times by the researchers, teachers, and parents. Parents want to know that their children are receiving the assistance they need. Teachers question their ability to provide the correct services to their students. Researchers set out to find the truth in order to help parents and teachers make the correct decisions. As a result there have been numerous studies conducted on this topic over the years.

When any child becomes old enough to attend school all parents have a difficult decision to make. This decision becomes even harder when they have a student who requires additional assistance from special educators. Do they send their student to a traditional public school, a charter school, or do they homeschool? Having a choice gives them the freedom to pick the best fit for their student. While traditional public schools offer consistency, homeschooling offers freedom to explore educational opportunities but it also puts limits on parental independence. “Charter schools are often small and may offer distinctive curricula” (Estes, 2003, pp.213) which can make them more appealing to the parent.

Parents who have students with disabilities have to go a step further when researching. This research allows them to determine if their student will receive the services they need to succeed in school. Mary Bailey Estes interviewed parents of students with disabilities to find their three major concerns when looking into different schools for their children. She found that parents fear discrimination against their student, a lack of experienced teachers, and limited funding which prevents charter schools from buying or completing all additional testing and assistive technology for the students who need it (Estes, 2004, pp. 257-258).

All of these concerns are valid it is important to remember that “charter schools are required to adhere to all federal civil rights laws, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)” (Rhim & McLaughlin, 2007, pp.3). Under this law all services must be provided to students with disabilities. These services include speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and academic services. All services are the same ones offered in traditional public schools and should be provided to any student who requires them.

While charter schools do not have to abide by traditional district rules they must follow several state and federal laws that pertain to education. Unfortunately not all laws are clear when it comes to special education. In fact several questions have been asked about what roles charter schools and local districts will take when serving students who have special needs. “Charter schools and local districts are struggling to negotiate who is responsible for areas such as assessment and evaluation of students referred to special education, development of IEPs, actual provision of services, how funds flow to charter schools and ultimate accountability for the delivery of a free appropriate public education (FAPE)” (Rhim & McLaughin, 2001, pp.377). Both charter schools and local districts must work together to decide who is responsible for what role and most importantly how they will be able to best support their students.

In comparison to traditional public schools, charter schools must address all special education issues including: “antidiscrimination language, Section 504, provision of special education services, each schools mission, legal status for purposes of special education, special education finance, and accountability” (Rhim, Ahearn, & Lange, 2007, pp.54). When all of these topics were researched by Lauren Rhim, Eileen Ahearn, and Cheryl Lange it was found that most charter schools struggle to educate students with disabilities in the accordance with the policies and procedures set forth by IDEA. That being said, all charter schools involved in the research

process did in fact provide appropriate services to students with disabilities (Rhim, Ahearn, & Lange, 2007, pp.50-63).

What is the real difference between charter schools and traditional public schools? That question can be answered in many different ways. Responses include anything from services provided to academic studies. What it really boils down to are the teachers. There are both pros and cons to working in every school. To find out more Xin Wei, Deepa Patel, and Viki M. Young created a survey that enquired about “working conditions in schools, daily instruction, student engagement, job satisfaction, and teacher evaluation” (Wei, Patel, & Young, 2014, pp.4). They found that teachers who work in charter schools have a more supportive teaching environment. These teachers also feel more responsible for student learning and have higher expectations of students, which leads to higher levels of student engagement in the classroom. Traditional public schools provide more opportunities for professional development, give their teachers ample time to collaborate with their colleagues, and have an impartial evaluation system than charter schools. Teachers play a huge role in student achievement. Their ability to be affective in the classroom depends upon the atmosphere and philosophy of the school who employs them (Wei, Patel, & Young, 2014, pp.20).

According to Mary Bailey Estes, most charter school teachers feel that they do not have the “expertise in special services” (Estes, 2003, pp. 454) to serve students with special needs. Not only do the majority of charter schools have an underqualified staff to provide special education services, they also lack the funding to purchase tools and technology that are used by students with disabilities daily. Most charter schools are enrolling students with disabilities, but they are not always providing the students with the education that they deserve.

Consequently, achievement for students with disabilities links to the teachers and schools ability to provide the services that allows their student show growth. “Public schools are under tremendous pressure to show consistent improvement in academic achievement for all students, including those with disabilities” (Drame, 2010, pp. 379). This pressure stems from the No Child Left Behind legislation. Students are required to complete examinations at the end of each school year to determine student growth as well as teacher worth. When students score in the top range the schools are rewarded based on the percent of students who score in the proficient group. This method is unfair and inappropriate to use when determining the growth of students with disabilities because it is impossible to show how much progress a student has made that year. That being said, there is not a current method to accurately measure progress for the state in a way that is similar to standardized testing.

There has been some concern regarding academic standing of students who transfer from traditional public schools to charter schools. Parents and teachers fear that when a student transfers to a new school their grades will reflect the different teaching methods, not always in a positive way. A group of researchers, David Garcia, Lee McIlroy, and Rebecca Barber, conducted a study to determine if students who enter charter schools are at an academic advantage. The Ninth Edition Stanford Achievement Test scores were gathered and compared to the scores of multiple student academic transitions. Two of these transitional situations include students who transfer to new traditional public school districts and those who stay in their school districts throughout their academic career. The researchers found that “students who transferred into charter schools had the lowest level of academic achievement compared to any other educational transition” (Garcia, McIlroy, & Barber, 2008, pp.207). As a result students who are

entering charter schools must be placed in a grade level that best fits their academic maturity instead of their current grade level.

Although students cannot always be placed in their current grade level there have been studies conducted to compare achievement between students who attend traditional public school and charter schools. Researchers Mark Berends, Ellen Goldring, Marc Stein, and Xiu Cravens examine the differences between student mathematic gains in charter schools versus traditional public schools. The instructional decisions of the teachers in both types of schools were also taken into consideration when the data was gathered. It was found that there are “no significant differences” (Berends, Goldring, Stein, & Cravens, 2010, pp. 327) in the mathematic achievement of students who attend charter schools or traditional public schools. Provided that teachers continue to focus on academic achievement, their students should continue to make gains no matter what school they are attending.

Are charter schools the best schools for students with disabilities? Nobody can truly answer that question because it depends on each individual case. Over the years charter schools have and “continue to grow” (Estes, 2009, pp.216) in both population and quality. Like any form of school, charter schools have their strengths and weaknesses. Fortunately for all students’ researchers, teachers, and parents have identified issues that need to be addressed in order for students with disabilities to receive the services they require to be successful in the school setting. As time continues to pass these issues will be addressed and improvements will be made so that the school can advance their student’s academic success.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

An interview was conducted with six charter school administrators and six public school administrators to see if there is a significant difference between the special education services provided by charter schools and those provide by traditional public schools. A copy of the interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

The independent variable being studied are the traditional public schools and charter schools who provide special education services. The dependent variable being studied are the responses of the charter school and traditional public school administrators who were interviewed.

Study Group Description

In this study, six charter school administrators and six public school administrators were interviewed to determine their ability to provide special education services to their students from Kindergarten to 12th grades.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

Data has been collected from six charter schools and six public schools in Missouri. This data was collected through interviews with charter school and public school administrators as well as the DESE website.

Statistical Analysis Methods

The majority of this research will be analyzed using the T-test Analysis Method. This method is used to determine if there is difference between the services provided in charter schools and in public schools by comparing the services that are provided in each school. It will also compare the male and female student's informal and formal testing scores.

FINDINGS

A T-test was used to evaluate the administrative interviews concerning whether or not services provided in charter schools and public schools are different by comparing the percentage of staff members who are special education teachers. It was also used to determine the difference in achievement of students who qualify for special education services. The following information, graphs, and charts will show collected data and findings based on the information obtained from six charter school administrators and six public school administrators.

t-Test Analysis Results for Question 1:

Is there a significant difference in the number of service providers to serve students with disabilities who attend charter schools as compared to traditional public schools?

Figure 1

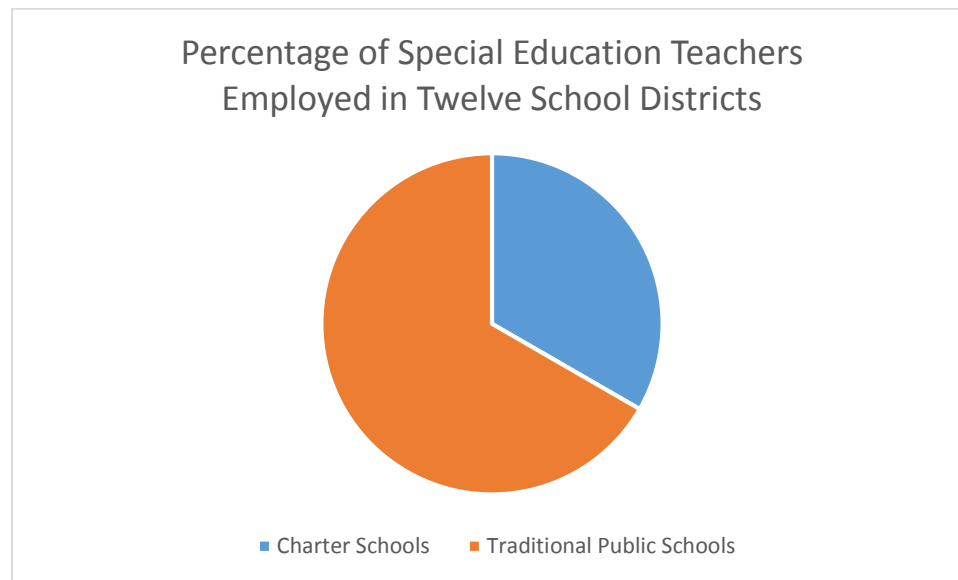
Source	Mean	Mean D	t-test	df	p-value
Charter Schools (n=6)	6.17				
Traditional Public Schools (n=6)	12.33	-6.17	-3.73	10	0.004

Note: Significant when $p \leq 0.05$

Twelve randomly selected charter schools and traditional public school districts were divided into two groups to determine if there was a significant difference in the number of special education service providers employed in the district. The data collected from all twelve school administrators contains the percentage of special educators employed in each district. The mean of charter schools was 6.17 and the mean for traditional public schools was 12.33. The Mean D, the difference between the two groups was -6.17, while the t-test was -3.73 and the df was 10. The null hypothesis states that there is not a significant difference in the number of

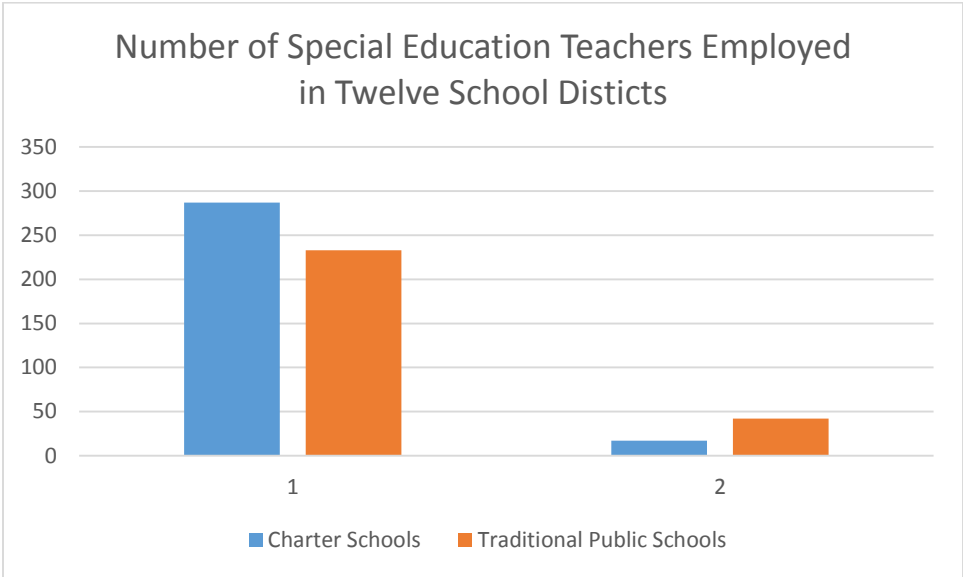
service providers to serve students with disabilities who attend charter schools as compared to public schools. This null is rejected because the p-value of 0.004 is less than the alpha level of 0.25. This means that there is a significant difference in full time special educators employed in charter schools and in traditional public schools. Traditional public schools employ more full time special education teachers than charter schools. Approximately 18% of the facility members employed in traditional public schools are special education providers while only 5% of charter school educators are considered special education teachers.

Figure 2



The mean of charter school special education teachers was 6.17. This number is considerably lower than the 12.33 mean of traditional public school special education teachers. One reason for the large difference between the means is that charter schools contract with companies, such as the Miriam Learning Center, to provide services that the school district cannot provide. The findings show that traditional public schools employ 37% more full time special education teachers than charter schools.

Figure 3



Out of the 287 teachers employed at six Missouri charter schools only 17 are special education teachers. The six traditional public schools employ 233 teachers but 42 of them are special education services providers. Although the charter schools employ 54 more teachers in their districts the traditional public schools employ 25 more special education teachers.

t-Test Analysis Results for Question 2:

Is there a significant difference in special education student achievement between charter schools compared to traditional public schools?

Special Education Communication Arts MAP/EOC Scores

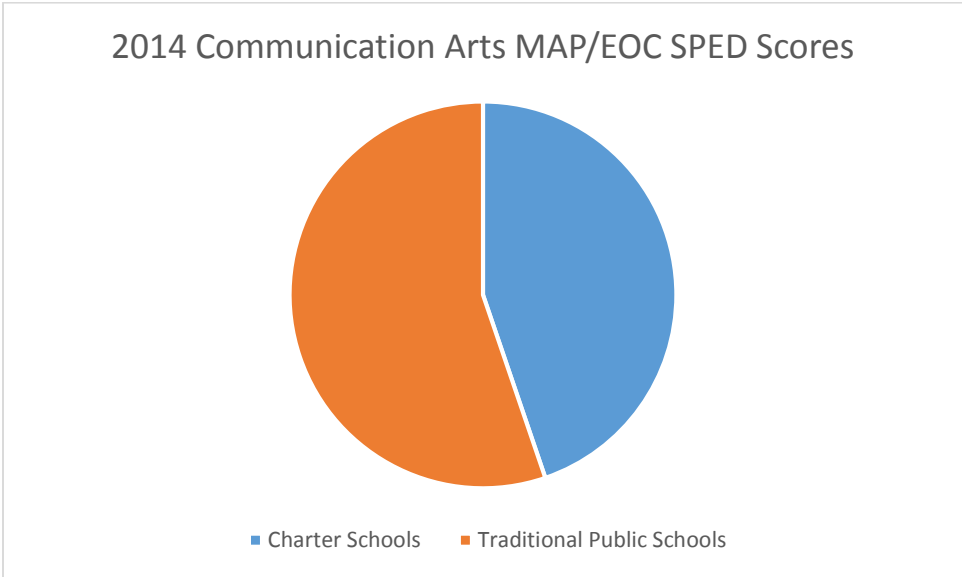
Figure 4

Source	Mean	Mean D	t-test	df	p-value
Charter School SPED					
Communication Arts					
MAP/EOC Scores (n=6)	5				
Traditional Public					
School SPED					
Communication Arts					
MAP/EOC Scores (n=6)	6.17	-1.17	-0.28	10	0.78

Note: Significant when $p \leq 0.25$

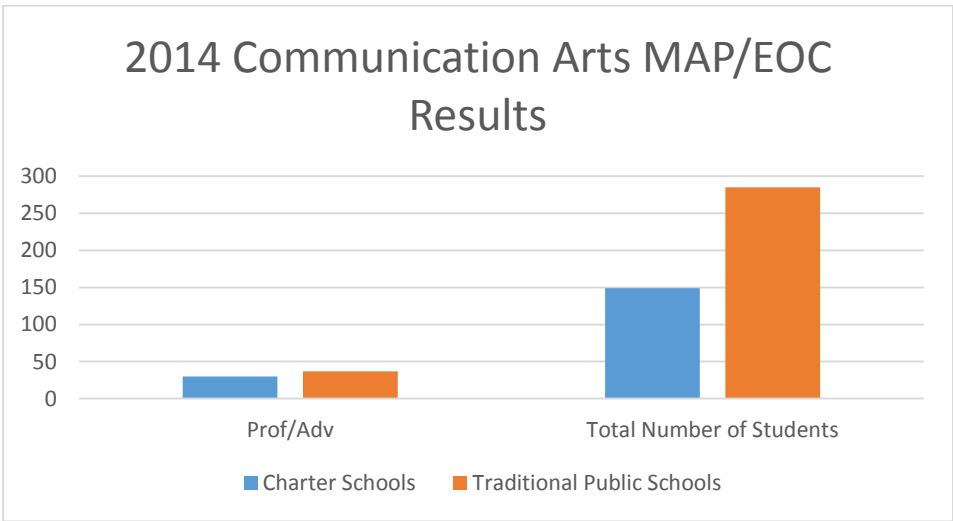
The independent variable was SPED Communication Arts Map/EOC Scores. Twelve randomly selected school districts were divided into 2 groups, charter schools and traditional public schools. There were 6 schools in each group. The mean score for the charter schools was 5 while the mean score for traditional public schools was 6.17. The difference of the mean score (Mean D) was -1.17. The t-test was -0.28 and the degrees of freedom, df, was 10. The null hypothesis states: There is not a significant difference in special education student achievement between charter schools compared to traditional public schools. This null is not rejected because the p-value 0.78 is greater than the alpha level of 0.25. This means that there is not a significant difference in communication arts MAP/EOC scores in charter and traditional public school districts. See Figure 5 and Figure 6 for additional MAP/EOC communication arts score information.

Figure 5



The mean of charter school students with disabilities’ communication arts MAP/EOC proficient and advanced scores in 2014 was 5. The mean of traditional public school students with disabilities’ communication arts MAP/EOC proficient and advanced scores in 2014 was 6.17. This means that more students who receive special education services in traditional public schools scored higher in the area of communication arts than the students who attend charter schools.

Figure 6



There are four areas in which a student can score on the MAP/EOC exam. Their score is based on the number of questions the student answered correctly. The four areas are: below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced. 30 out of 149 students with disabilities in charter schools scored in the top two areas of proficient and advanced. 37 out of 285 students with disabilities in traditional public schools scored in the proficient and advanced areas. This means that 20% of students receiving special education services in charter schools met the state standards while only 13% of students receiving special education services in traditional public schools scored in the upper two levels.

Special Education Math MAP/EOC Scores

Figure 7

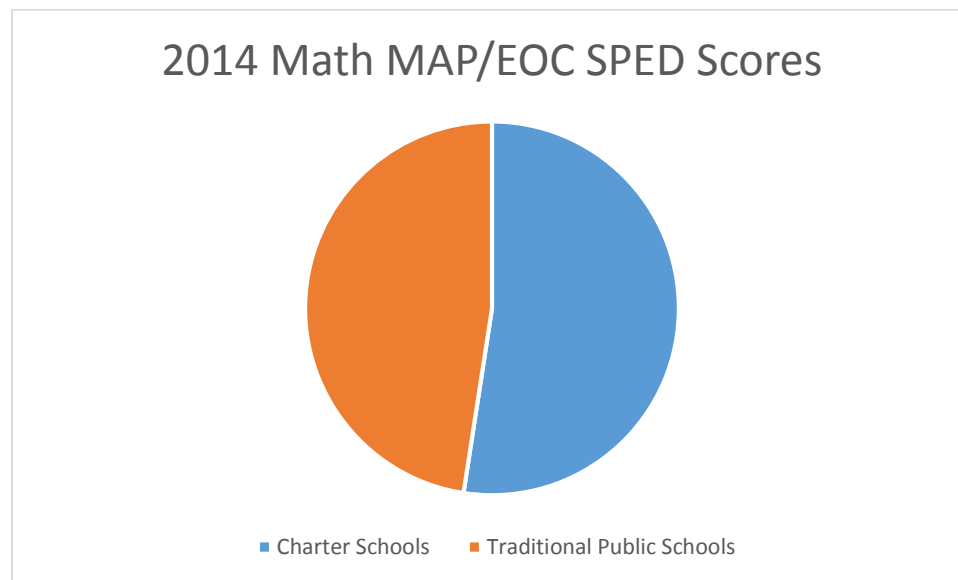
Source	Mean	Mean D	t-test	df	p-value
Charter School SPED Math MAP/EOC Scores (n=6)	7.17				
Traditional Public School SPED Math MAP/EOC Scores (n=6)	6.5	0.67	0.12	10	0.91

Note: Significant when $p \leq 0.25$

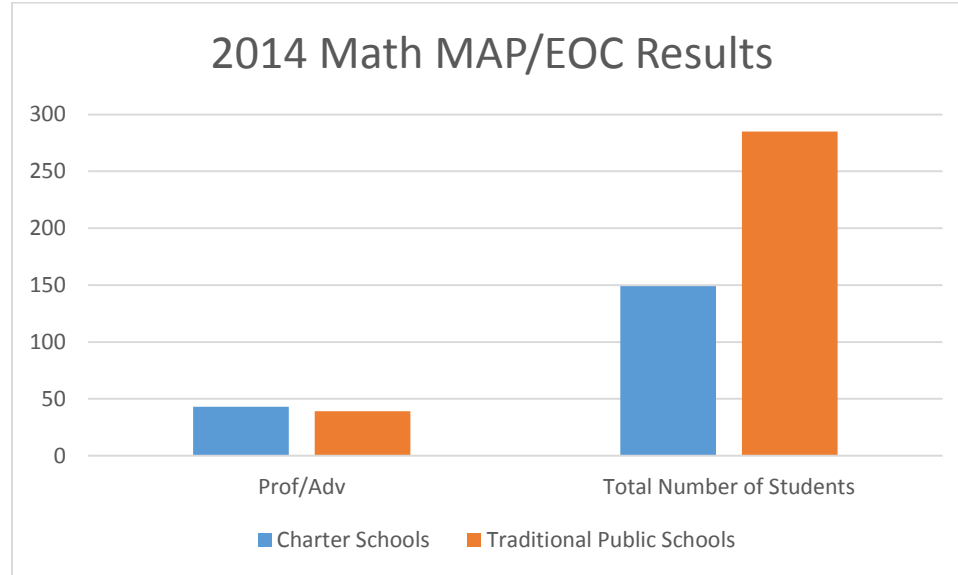
The independent variable was SPED Math Map/EOC Scores. Twelve randomly selected school districts were divided into 2 groups, 6 charter schools and 6 traditional public schools. The mean of charter school SPED Math MAP/EOC Scores was 7.17 while the mean of Traditional Public School SPED Math MAP/EOC was 6.5. The Mean D, or difference between the two means, is 0.67. The t-test showed a 0.12 and the degree of freedom, df, was 10. The null

hypothesis was: There is not a significant difference in special education student achievement between charter schools compared to traditional public schools. This null is not rejected because the p-value 0.91 is greater than the alpha level of 0.25. This means that there is not a significant difference in math MAP/EOC scores in charter and traditional public school districts. See Figure 8 and Figure 9 for additional MAP/EOC communication arts score information.

Figure 8



The mean of charter school students with disabilities math MAP/EOC proficient and advanced test scores in 2014 was 7.17. The mean of traditional public school students with disabilities' communication arts MAP/EOC proficient and advanced scores in 2014 was 6.5. This means that more charter school students with disabilities scored higher in the area of math than the students from traditional public schools.

Figure 9

There are four areas in which a student can score on the MAP/EOC exam. Their score is based on the number of questions the student answered correctly. The four areas are: below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced. 43 out of 149 students with disabilities in charter schools scored in the top two areas of proficient and advanced. 39 out of 285 students with disabilities in traditional public schools scored in the proficient and advanced areas. This means that 28% of students receiving special education services in charter schools met the state standards while only 14% of students receiving special education services in traditional public schools scored in the upper two levels.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusions reported from the completed study show that charter schools have fewer students with disabilities as well as fewer full time special education teachers on staff.

Traditional public schools are able to provide more services throughout the district simply because there are a wider variety of therapists and special education teachers employed on site.

The six charter schools used in this study only have a combined 149 students with IEPs while the six traditional public schools have a combined 285 students receiving services.

The expectation from the beginning of the research that there is not a significant difference in the number of service providers to serve students with disabilities who attend charter schools as compared to traditional public schools turned out to be false. There are 25 fewer special education service providers in charter schools than in traditional public schools. It must be taken into consideration that there are also 136 fewer students receiving services in charter schools than in traditional public schools.

The hypothesis that students with disabilities who attend charter schools are more likely to receive the services that they need to succeed in school based on 2014 MAP/EOC scores also turned out to be false. Charter school students with disabilities scored 7% higher on the communication arts section of the MAP/EOC exam and 14% higher in the math sections of the MAP/EOC exam than the students with disabilities in traditional public schools did. Traditional public schools had more students in the proficient and advanced areas of the communication arts section of the MAP/EOC exam but because there is a larger number of students who are receiving special education assistance they have a much lower percentage of students scoring in that area. More charter school students scored higher in the math section of the MAP/EOC exam than traditional public school students did.

It appears that although charter schools have fewer resources on site they have enough support for students with disabilities. This is proven by looking at the 2014 MAP/EOC exam results. While the results are not as the researcher expected the data shows that just because there are fewer special education staff and students with disabilities in charter schools it does not mean that the students are less prepared nor are the staff less invested or qualified than the students and staff in traditional public schools.

After concluding this study the researcher has several recommendations for future studies that could be conducted. The DESE website has several years' worth of MAP/EOC data that could be collected and compared to the current and future data. This would prove if charter schools can and will maintain a higher percentage of proficient and advanced students than traditional public schools. The data from the MAP/EOC exams could be broken into male and female scores. This will show how both male and females from charter schools and traditional public schools perform. It will also display more student achievement information from charter and traditional public schools. A study of all teachers across the state of Missouri could be conducted to give the data a broader scope. This would cause less bias because more charter and traditional public schools would be involved.

This information is vitally important for student success in all schools. It is also extremely significant in all parents decision making process. If the information is not gathered and presented then teachers cannot adapt to fit the needs of their students and parents cannot make an informed decision about their child's education. The world revolves around the children of today because they are tomorrow's future.

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APPENDIX A

The following questions were used to determine differences between charter schools and traditional public schools. Twelve administrators took part in the interview. Six of the twelve administrators were employed by charter schools and the additional six by traditional public schools. The questions include:

1. How many students are enrolled in this district on average?
2. On average how many students with disabilities are enrolled in this district?
3. How many teachers are employed in the district?
 - a. How many full time special education teachers are employed in the district?
4. How much does this district know and understand about zero reject, the foundation of IDEA that ensures that an education cannot be denied because of a disability?
5. What is this districts take on least restrictive environment?
6. What is the protocol when students are referred for special education services?
7. Do you have someone assigned to test students for special education qualification in your district?
8. Is someone in charge of creating Individualized Education Plans (IEP)?
9. To what extent are students with disabilities served in this district?
 - a. What services are provided?
10. Who implements services to students with disabilities?
11. How do students with disabilities compare to their same grade level peers in the area of academic achievement?
 - a. Formal testing and informal testing.