National Summit on Education Reform 2013
Strategy Session V: Choice in Education

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There is nothing illogical about a belief that schools, if well-operated, can raise lower-class achievement without investing in health, social, early childhood, after-school, and summer programs. But while the belief is not illogical, it is implausible, and the many claims made about instructional heroes or methods that close that gap are, upon examination, unfounded.” –Richard Rothstein (2004)

“They select from the top of the ability distribution those lower class children with innate intelligence, well-motivated parents, or their own personal drives, and give these children educations they can use to succeed in life.” –Richard Rothstein (2004)

“This analysis by no means diminishes the accomplishments of Boston’s top charter schools…but it leaves open the question of how to educate the neediest students and which schools will do so.” –Diane Ravitch (2010)

These comments raise three concerns:
1. Selection bias in charter/non-charter comparisons
2. Access for special needs groups
3. Impact in these groups
Are charters effective for special education students?

**SAT Composite Scores**
Lottery Estimates for Non-Special Education and Special Education

Source: SEII report prepared for The Boston Foundation Charter Schools and the Road to College Readiness, 2013
DEBATE
- Are charters effective?

CHALLENGE
- Students attending charters may differ in unobserved ways

OUR APPROACH
- Lottery-generated admissions offers allow us to control for applicant’s baseline characteristics, both measured and unmeasured. We follow all applicants, including those who drop out or transfer.

CAVEATS
- We can only assess applicants to oversubscribed schools where admissions are determined by random lottery
- We must look at schools and cohorts where records are complete and clean
One of the most important questions in education research is whether the gains from interventions for which we see short-term success can be sustained.

This report explores long-term outcomes.
Impressive results
Average 100 point increase in composite SAT scores

Source: SEII report prepared for The Boston Foundation
Charter Schools and the Road to College Readiness, 2013
And more impressive results
Significant bump in 4-year college enrollment

**Lottery Estimates of the Effects of Boston Charter Attendance**

![Bar chart showing percent enrolled at different levels of education for traditional public students and charter students.](image)

**NOTE**: Solid bars indicate statistically significant differences.
Summary of SEII’s most recent findings on Boston charter high schools

- Charters boost short- and medium-term achievement
  - MCAS-based competency, state college scholarships, and shift student scores into Proficient and Advanced categories
  - AP test taking increases sharply, with modest score gains
  - Impressive SAT gains
  - Large gains for special education students

- Early evidence on college
  - No overall enrollment gain
  - Shift to four-year colleges at the expense of two-year colleges
  - It remains to be seen whether this ultimately yields increased post-secondary attainment
Research context in Massachusetts and looking ahead

- State and district cooperation
  - Longstanding partnerships, since 2007
- Collaborative research environment with charters
  - School visits welcomed
- We're currently extending our research to NOLA and Denver, with hopes to expand to other states and cities in the near future

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