



# Project Intersect: Special Education in the Charter School Sector

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# Session Overview

- Research summary
  - Surveys
  - California analyses
- Resources and tools
- Questions and answers

# Project Intersect Overview

- ❑ Four-year national study of special education in the charter sector funded by a grant from the U. S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)
- ❑ Began in 2003
- ❑ Directed by researchers at the University of Maryland in cooperation with the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) and Lange Consultants



# Research Questions

- ❑ How does state charter school legislation, including the authorization and appeal process, influence access to special education and related services?
- ❑ How do children with disabilities access special education and related services in charter schools?
- ❑ To what extent are charter schools accessing technical assistance and/or an existing or newly developed infrastructure to assist them build capacity related to special education?

# Project Intersect Methodology

- ❑ Six sources of data:
  - Legislative Review (41 states )
  - State Directors Of Special Education (39 states)
  - State Charter School Officials (33 states)
  - Survey of Charter School Authorizers (452 authorizers)
  - Survey of Charter School Operators (355 schools)
  - In-depth analysis of special education in California charter schools in collaboration with CDE (270 schools)
  
- ❑ All publications posted on Project website:  
[www.education.umd.edu/EDSP/ProjectIntersect/presentations.html](http://www.education.umd.edu/EDSP/ProjectIntersect/presentations.html)

# Key Findings: Legislative Influence

- ❑ Charter schools may be considered to be another school within a local school district (i.e., an LEA) or they can exist as a separate LEA; state law determines, roughly 40/60 split
- ❑ The most important implication of a charter school's legal identity involves responsibility for special education (i.e., who "owns ultimate responsibility" for a student with a disability)?
- ❑ Charter school laws generally do not require applicants to submit detailed information about plan to educate students with disabilities
- ❑ Charter school authorizers are not requiring charter applicants to provide a great deal of detail regarding special education prior to authorization
- ❑ Special education accountability largely driven by authorizer policy/practice associated with renewal
  - 68% of authorizers require charter school operators to report data regarding special education as part of the charter renewal process
  - 57% of the schools reported that they had been formally monitored by the state for compliance with IDEA.
  - 9% reported that their school had been the subject of a special education complaint. Number of complaints ranged from 1 to 3

# Key Findings: Access

- ❑ Average size-309 students per school, minimum enrollment was 10 students, maximum was 3,656
- ❑ Average of 50% of students enrolled in charter schools qualify for free and reduced priced meals
- ❑ 10.57% of students enrolled in charter schools have an IEP (12.1% national average) minimum 0% and maximum was 100%, average per school is 13.1%
- ❑ 8.5% of students with IEPs were characterized as having a severe disability
- ❑ 1.60% have Section 504 plans
- ❑ 3% of charter schools were developed primarily or entirely for students with disabilities

# Key Findings: Access

- Counseling out remains a concern
- Steps taken when school personnel believe enrollment in their charter school is not an appropriate placement for a student with a disability:
  - 57.2% (203) convene an IEP meeting;
  - 43.7% (155) advise parents that another school may offer more appropriate services;
  - 14.4% (51) reported “other;”
  - 5.6% (20) do nothing,
  - 3.1% (11) inform parents that their child cannot enroll in the school due to the disability, and;
  - 1.1% (4) reported that they did not know what they do.

# Key Findings: Access

## □ Least Restrictive Environment

- 73% of the students with disabilities were being educated 80% or more of the time in the general education classroom
- 17% were in the general education classroom 40-79% of the time
- 10% were in the general education classroom 0-39% of the time
- < 1% were being educated outside of the charter school in more restrictive settings.

# Key Findings: Technical Assistance

- ❑ Surveys documented multiple challenges at both the policy and implementation level associated with providing special education and related services in charter schools.  
*Top 5:*
  - ❑ having adequate funds to provide special education services (58%)
  - ❑ NCLB requirements related to students with disabilities (55%)
  - ❑ obtaining IEP files from sending schools (52%)
  - ❑ finding qualified special education teachers (52%)
  - ❑ finding qualified related services personnel (7%)
- ❑ Authorizers are actively engaged in providing special education in charter schools both by actual provision of services and provision of technical assistance
- ❑ A variety of organizations are providing charter schools with assistance with the ongoing provision of special education and related services. In order of prevalence:
  - authorizers (districts, states, charter boards, colleges/universities, and “others”)
  - individual consultants
  - charter school associations or resource centers
  - state education agencies
  - intermediate education agencies or units
  - local education agencies that are not authorizers
- Most current special education “infrastructures” are components of the traditional state public education systems (i.e., state education agency, intermediate district, or local education agency).



# California Charter School Study

- Study of student enrollment, service provision, and outcome data from California charter schools in collaboration with CDE
- 270 charter schools
- 2003-2004
- Multiple general and special education databases created by the California Department of Education (CDE) based on data reported by schools and districts

# California Charter School Findings

- 270 charter schools enrolled a total of 9,023 (7.42%) students with disabilities out of a total enrollment of 121,657
- Traditional California public schools enrolled a total of 6,177,117 students in kindergarten through 12th grade, including ungraded elementary and secondary schools, and 627,168 (10.15%) students eligible for special education
- Traditional public schools enrolled a greater proportion of students identified as having mental retardation (6% v. 2%), speech or language impairment (22% v. 20%), and emotional disturbance (4% v. 3%).
- Children in the categories of multiple disabilities, autism, orthopedic impairment, visual impairment, hard of hearing, and traumatic brain injury also enrolled in traditional public schools at a higher proportion but the difference was < 1% point
- Charter schools enrolled a larger proportion of students in the categories of specific learning disability (61% v. 55%) and deaf (2% v. 1%), as well as a larger proportion of children with other health impairments, but difference was < 1% point
- Traditional and charter schools reported enrolling the same proportion of students identified as deaf-blind, <1%.

# California LRE Findings

Charter schools are serving:

- more students outside the regular classroom 0-20% (71% v. 51%) than traditional public schools and
- fewer students outside the regular classroom 21-60% (11% v. 22%) and 61-100% (16% v. 25%).
- Charter schools enrolled a greater percentage of their students with disabilities in separate public day schools than traditional public schools(2.6% v. 1.3%)
- None of the charter schools in our CA analysis enrolled students with disabilities in separate private day schools, residential public or private, or private schools.

# California Service Provision

- Traditional public schools provided:
  - more special day classes than charter schools (28% versus 15%)
  - more language and speech (37% versus 32%)
  - more adapted physical education services (5% versus 2%)
  - more transportation (6% versus 4%)
  - more special day class in non-public schools (2% versus <1%)
  - more vocational education training (2% versus <1%)
  
- Charter schools in our analyses provided:
  - more resource specialist programs (56% versus 46%),
  - more individual and small group instruction (9% versus 2%),
  - more assistive technology (6% versus 1%)
  - more transition services (7% versus 4%)
  - more non-intensive school-based programs (4% versus 3%)

# California Aggregate Academic Performance Findings

- Spring 2004, 4.7 million students enrolled in grades 2-11 took the CSTs
- Overall, a greater percentage of traditional public schools made AYP (60% v. 55%) and they scored higher on the CA Academic Performance Index (API): (696 v. 648)
- Few children with disabilities attained proficiency in either English or mathematics.
- More students with disabilities in charter schools achieved “Proficient” and “Advanced” compared to their peers in traditional public schools in English language arts (13.73% compared to 9.96%) and mathematics (14.40% compared to 13.23%)
- Study limitations noted (i.e., not random, point-in-time analysis)

# Summary and Discussion Points

- ❑ *State charter policies related to authorizing and renewal need to be more specific with respect to responsibilities associated with IDEA and LEA status*
- ❑ *Charter schools are educating students with disabilities but not at the same proportion as traditional public schools*
- ❑ *Charter schools are serving more students in the general education classroom but data do not provide insight into whether these placements are appropriate*
- ❑ *Charter schools are providing a variety of services and placements but not the most restrictive*

# Summary and Discussion Points

- ❑ *Charter schools are relying on authorizes and emerging support network for TA and ongoing provision of special education (i.e., infrastructure)*
- ❑ *In California, students with disabilities enrolled in charter schools appear to be outperforming their peers in traditional public schools*
- ❑ *Charter schools are struggling with many of the same issues as traditional public schools but due to their small size and lack of technical knowledge, the challenges may have a greater impact upon service provision*
- ❑ *Additional research required regarding access, service provision, and outcomes over time.*

# Resources and Tools

- ❑ SPEDTACS website

*<http://www.nasdse.org/projects.cfm?pageprojectid=12>*

- ❑ Project Intersect

*<http://www.education.umd.edu/Depts/EDSP/ProjectIntersect/>*

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