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ABSTRACT

This report presents findings from a survey of charter school operators regarding educating students with disabilities in charter schools. It is the seventh and final report produced by Project Intersect, a national study of special education in the charter sector. The first charter school opened more than a dozen years ago, yet research to date offers limited insight into how these schools are educating a traditionally underserved population—students with disabilities. In an era in which public entities are being urged to privatize and embrace market forces such as choice and competition, discerning whether charter schools are providing opportunities to students eligible for special education services is of significant public interest because it is one indicator of whether these schools are addressing their fundamentally public mission. Our survey documented that despite the challenges associated with providing special education, charter schools do enroll children with disabilities and a support network has emerged to help these schools build capacity and provide special education and related services. However, data regarding counseling out and somewhat untested accountability require additional inquiry because they raise questions about whether some charter schools are fulfilling their full complement of responsibilities associated with educating students with disabilities.

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INTRODUCTION

Charter schools represent a relatively new but growing and high-profile component of the public education sector. Yet, while the first charter school opened more than a dozen years ago, the research on these schools offers limited insight into how they are educating a traditionally underserved population—students with disabilities. In an era in which public entities are being urged to privatize, discerning whether charter schools are providing opportunities to all students is of significant public interest because it is an indicator of whether these schools are addressing their public mission.

This report presents findings from a national survey of charter school operators regarding policies and practices related to educating students with disabilities. The survey was conducted under the auspices of Project Intersect, a national research study developed to expand the existing base of knowledge regarding special education in charter schools. The Project Intersect research team conducted multiple national surveys of key stakeholders (i.e., state policy leaders, authorizers, and operators) to quantify data previously documented in a limited number of states.¹

The Charter School Concept

Charter schools operate under authority of a state charter statute that exempts the schools from specific state or local regulations (Finnigan et al., 2004). The core tenet of the charter school concept is that, once granted autonomy in return for accountability associated with renewable charter contracts and parental choice, charter schools will use their autonomy to create successful learning environments (Kolderie, 1990; Nathan, 1996). Charter schools operate under a charter or contract granted by an authorizer. Authorizers are specifically designated state charter laws and are typically local school districts, state education agencies, special appointed chartering boards, colleges or universities, or nonprofit organizations (Rhim, Lange, Ahearn, & McLaughlin, 2007).

While charter schools are heterogeneous in large part due to the unique features of state charter school laws, nationwide they share two constant traits: They represent a new and evolving organizational governance structure

¹ For more information about Project Intersect and to view copies of previously released reports, please see <http://www.education.umd.edu/EDSP/ProjectIntersect/index.html>.

within the public sector, and they are public schools of choice that are required to offer open enrollment and comply with all federal statutes, including those pertaining to educating students with disabilities.

The education of children with disabilities is subject to three federal laws: the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), most recently amended in 2004; Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act; and Title II of the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). Of particular import are the civil rights embodied in the IDEA, which requires that all students with a disability are to be provided a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Section 504 and the ADA are antidiscrimination laws that guarantee children with disabilities access to education and entitle them to reasonable accommodations within the schools to obtain access. Among individual states, a great deal of variability exists in the interpretation of federal special education policies, including the criteria used to identify students as eligible to receive these additional services. This report focuses primarily on issues associated with complying with the IDEA.

The IDEA and the regulations developed to help states implement it provide federal financial assistance to state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) to support provision of special education and related services to eligible children with disabilities. States receiving IDEA funds must follow all of IDEA's procedures, including those for an evaluation to determine if students are eligible for special education and the additional requirements for subsequent services and reevaluation. The core elements of IDEA that dictate how special education is delivered to students with disabilities are the individualized education program (IEP) team and the constructs of FAPE and LRE.

The IEP team is made up of professionals and parents who arrange for the child's evaluation, determine eligibility, decide on the individualized special education and related services for the child, and write the IEP that defines specific services to be provided and then reviewed at least annually. IEPs address issues such as but not limited to measurable annual goals, how the child will be included in state and district assessments, and how the child will access the general education curriculum in order to meet state standards (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act [IDEA], 2004).

The IDEA dictates that students with disabilities are entitled to FAPE, which consists of an appropriate education in accordance with the student's unique education needs and is to be provided at no cost to parents. LRE refers to where a student with a disability is educated and dictates that the setting must either be in a general education classroom or in the least restrictive

setting possible given the child's unique education requirements. School districts must offer students with disabilities a continuum of placements that range from full time in a regular classroom to full time in a special setting; students are entitled to be placed in the setting that will meet their individual needs while removing them as little as possible from the regular classroom. In addition, students with disabilities are entitled to supplemental aids and services to facilitate participation in regular education.

The IDEA prescribes that states are responsible for providing FAPE and LRE, and the states in turn delegate this responsibility to local districts and, by extension, to individual schools. However, charter schools represent a new form of public school not previously envisioned. To address the new schools, the IDEA dictates that a charter school that is *its own LEA* is responsible for ensuring that IDEA requirements are met unless state law assigns that responsibility to some other entity. If a charter school is a school *of an LEA* that receives IDEA funding, the LEA is responsible for ensuring that the requirements are met, unless state law assigns that responsibility to some other entity (IDEA, 2004). However, the state is ultimately responsible for providing federal and state special education funds and monitoring the implementation of the IDEA in all local districts.

The IDEA also dictates that students who enroll in charter schools retain the rights afforded by IDEA, including the right to access federal funds available through IDEA Part B to support special education. Based on the Congressional appropriation, states are granted funds to support special education and related services. The vast majority of funding for special education comes from state (approximately 45%) and local (approximately 46%) dollars. While special education is mandated by the federal government, federal dollars comprise only about 10% of the cost of services (Parrish et al., 2003). State funding formulas for special education differ, but the IDEA requires that states use formulas that do not offer financial incentives to place children in more restrictive educational settings. In general, charter schools receive their special education funding directly from the state or through an LEA or other intermediate entity. Due to the differences among individual states' special education funding formulas and charter school laws, the manner that charter schools receive their state and local allocations varies notably (Ahearn, Lange, Rhim, & McLaughlin, 2001).

Theoretical Framework

The theory driving our research is that fulfilling the obligations of federal statutes pertaining to educating students with disabilities is one indicator of the degree to which charter schools are successfully completing their

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fundamentally public mission. For the purpose of our research, we narrowly define a charter school's public mission as its obligation to fulfill basic civil rights afforded by federal statutes. Embedded in our broader quest regarding public mission is a more specific analysis of how charter schools are navigating federal requirements related to educating students with disabilities, and specifically, how these schools are building special education capacity and an identification of the infrastructures they are using.

Having the capacity to implement special education consistently can be a challenge for all public schools. It can be particularly challenging for smaller school districts and charters schools with somewhat limited resources. The rules and regulations associated with ensuring compliance with federal and state special education laws require that educational institutions must be knowledgeable about the laws, have the resources available to provide the agreed-upon services, and have qualified personnel who can implement special education according to plan. Research has documented that charter schools frequently struggle to address the unique learning requirements of students with disabilities and, in particular, to amass the capacity required to address the administrative, organizational, programmatic, fiscal, and legal responsibilities associated with fulfilling their responsibilities stemming from the IDEA (Ahearn et al., 2001; Rhim et al., 2007).

To address issues related to special education capacity, charter schools either need to build internal systems and structures, or they must construct or affiliate with an external structure (i.e., a special education infrastructure). The concept of a special education infrastructure originated from research on special education in charter schools that identified a deficit of capacity in the evolving charter sector (Ahearn et al., 2001). We define *special education infrastructure* as an organization or strategy that provides a charter school with access to qualified special education instructional staff and professional development, curriculum material for students and teachers, administrative support (including legal counsel), and organizational resources.

Building on the developing literature about special education in the charter sector (Ahearn et al., 2001; Fiore, Harwell, Blackorby, & Finnegan, 2000; Guarino & Chau, 2003; Heubert, 1997; Lange, 1997; McKinney, 1996; McLaughlin & Henderson, 1998; O'Neill, Wenning, & Giovannetti, 2002), our research was driven by four broad research questions:

1. What types of charter schools are being created?
2. Who is enrolling in charter schools?
3. How are charter schools serving and being held accountable for educating students with disabilities?

4. How are charter schools building their capacity related to students with disabilities?

In aggregate, our study documents the status of special education in the charter sector and offers new insight into whether charter schools are enrolling students with disabilities and how these schools are building capacity to provide the services these students require.

METHODOLOGY

We conducted a survey of charter school operators to collect data from charter schools that were operating during the 2003–2004 academic year. Charter school operators are key stakeholders in the charter school movement and thus, their insight regarding special education issues is a critical component of the larger analysis of special education in this sector.

Survey Development

Building on the four central study questions, we developed a forced-choice response survey containing 38 items. Prior to launching the survey, we conducted an opportunistic pilot survey of 10 operators located in two geographically dispersed states. Based on feedback from the pilot participants, we adjusted four questions and slightly modified the survey format to clarify the questions.

Survey Sampling Methodology

Our survey sample consisted of a stratified random sample of charter school operators. We drew the random sample from the universe ($N = 2,940$) of charter schools that were operating during the 2003–2004 academic year. We developed the population of charter schools by combining a list purchased from Market Data Retrieval and cross-referencing the list with the schools published in the Center for Education Reform's annual *Charter School Directory* and information published on state and district websites regarding charter schools. Obtaining accurate information about charter schools was difficult. In contrast to traditional public schools, charter schools frequently open in temporary facilities and then move as they grow or become able to secure more permanent facilities. Furthermore, charter schools are more likely to close, whether by the school's choice or by decision of the authorizer. Our

population list represented a compilation of the best information we could find despite these difficulties.

We stratified our sample according to the legal identity of charter schools as dictated by state charter school laws. Our decision to stratify by legal status stems from prior research that documented that this characteristic defines charter schools' roles and responsibilities related to special education (Ahearn et al., 2001; Heubert, 1997). The stratification consisted of two steps. During the first step, we coded all states with charter schools into three categories according to what the state charter law said about the schools' legal status:

- category 1—states where charter schools are LEAs,
- category 2—states where charter schools are part of an LEA, and
- category 3—states where charter schools are given the choice to determine their legal status as category 1 or 2, meaning that schools in such states may be either (Ahearn, Rhim, Lange, & McLaughlin, 2005).

With the goal of obtaining responses from 341 schools in order to have a random probability sample from which we could generalize, we over-sampled by 100% and aimed to survey a total of 682 charter schools. Having separated the 39 states with operating charter schools into the three categories, our second step was to draw a random sample from each category. Due to rounding, we ended up with a sample of 683 rather than 682. Our final stratified sample reflected the proportion of schools in each of the three categories (category 1 = 355 schools, category 2 = 314 schools and category 3 = 14 schools).

Survey Procedures

We initially conducted the survey using a paper-and-pencil format. Following the recommendations of Dillman (2000), we mailed an introductory presurvey letter, multiple copies of the survey, and multiple reminder e-mails followed by personal phone calls. All participants were offered a token incentive of a single dollar to participate.

We mailed the survey to 683 schools we had identified as charter schools. The sample was subsequently reduced to 643 because 40 of the schools in the initial sample (1) were later determined not to be charter schools, (2) had incorrect addresses that we could not correct, or (3) turned out to be closed.

A total of 303 charter school operators responded to the paper-and-pencil survey. As part of the survey follow-up, non-respondents were sent an online version of the survey. Fifty-two operators responded to the electronic version of the survey for a grand total of 355 respondents (55%).

Our response rate met our initial requirement related to a random probability sample (i.e., > 341 respondents). However, the response rate raised questions regarding potential bias associated with non-respondents. An analysis of the respondents versus non-respondents did not reveal any significant differences between the two populations according to the characteristics of either legal identity or metro status (i.e., urban, suburban, or rural), which were the only two traits for which we had information on the entire population of charter schools and that we hypothesized might be relevant.

As an additional test of bias, we analyzed the early responders and the late responders to discern whether there were any significant differences according to key characteristics. Comparing early responders with late (i.e., potentially resistant) responders who only responded after multiple and increasingly personalized follow-up is one method of assessing potential non-responder bias (Henry, 1990). The characteristics analyzed were legal identity, type of authorizer, duration of operation, total enrollment, and enrollment of students with disabilities. These analyses did not reveal any significant differences between the early and late responders. Nevertheless, a potential limitation of the survey is non-respondent bias.

Respondent Analyses

To verify that the individuals who responded to the survey held the appropriate position and had the years of experience that we assumed would qualify them to answer the questions, we asked each respondent to report his or her title and number of years employed at the charter school. The majority of the respondents (87%) were either principals, vice principals, or equivalent administrators; 6% were special education administrators, 4% were general or special education teachers; and the remaining 3% were charter school board members or “other.” Experience working at the charter school ranged from less than a year to 13 years with a mean of 5 years ($SD = 2.626$). Ninety percent of the respondents had at least one year of experience at the school. Based on these analyses, we concluded that the individuals who completed the survey were in a professional position and had adequate experience to answer the questions accurately.

FINDINGS

This report presents a descriptive analysis of the survey data. Our findings are presented according to the four research questions noted above.

Charter School Characteristics

Charter schools may differ according to what entity granted the charter (i.e., the authorizer), the duration of operation, type of school (i.e., start-up or conversion, brick-and-mortar or cyber, or focused on a special population), and legal identity. The following sections present our findings regarding these characteristics.

Authorizer

State charter school laws dictate what entities are legally sanctioned to grant charters to applicants. In general, authorizers may be LEAs, SEAs, college and universities, special charter granting agencies, or not-for-profits. Reflecting the trends documented by other national studies of charter schools (Finnigan et al., 2004), 50% of the charter schools in our sample were granted by LEAs, 28% were granted by SEAs, 10% were granted by a special charter granting agency, 9% were granted by a college or university, and 3% were granted by not-for profit or “other” entities.

Duration of Operation

The first charter school opened in Minnesota in 1992, and since that time, the charter sector has experienced annual, and at times rapid, growth. As of fall 2006, approximately 1.1 million students were enrolled in 3,943 charter schools across the country (Center for Education Reform, 2006). On average, the charter schools in our sample have been operating for 6 years, with a minimum of 1 year operating experience and a maximum of 13 years ($SD = 2.470$).

Type of School

Within the charter sector, schools may differ according to a number of characteristics. We asked the charter operators to report whether their school was a new start-up or a conversion school, whether the school delivered its curriculum in a traditional school or cyber/virtual environment, whether the

school was designed primarily or entirely to educate students with disabilities or students who were expelled, and to define the legal identity of the school.

Most charter schools are newly created schools (78%) although small percentages are conversions from public (13%) or private (6%) schools. Three percent of our sample described themselves as “other,” including less than 1% that previously operated as Bureau of Indian Affairs Schools. The majority of charter schools are brick-and-mortar schools (92%), although 9% of all the schools in the sample offer their curriculum by means of a cyber, virtual, or independent-study format. Students enrolled in these cyber schools typically receive their instruction from parents (i.e., the home-schooling model), computer-based instruction, or teacher-directed distance-learning (Guarino, 2005).

Within the sample, there were nine (3%) charter schools designed to serve primarily students with disabilities. We also asked the charter operators to indicate whether their entire school was designed for students who had been suspended or expelled, who had dropped out, or who had been referred to specialized services due to behavioral or adjustment problems. Twenty-three schools (7%) reported that they focus on this particular population of students.

A key characteristic that differentiates charter schools is their legal identity where they are either their own LEA or part of an LEA (Rhim, Ahearn, & Lange, in press). Most (57%) of the responding charter schools defined themselves as LEAs, 38% defined themselves as part of an LEA, and 5% either did not know or described themselves as “other.” This finding reflects in part our stratified sampling technique but also documents how charter school operators identified their schools in terms of legal identity and relationship to a local district.

Charter School Enrollment

We asked the charter schools in our sample to provide data regarding what grades they offer and the total number and ethnic breakdown of students who enrolled in their school during the 2003–2004 academic year. Respondents were also asked to report what percentage of students enrolled in their schools qualified for free and reduced-price meals, as well as the total number of students with IEPs, students with disabilities characterized as severe, and students with Section 504 plans.^{2 3}

² For the purposes of the survey, we defined a “severe” disability as one of the following: severe autism, deaf-blindness, severe developmental delay, severe emotional disturbance, severe hearing impairment or deafness, severe mental retardation, multiple disabilities, severe orthopedic impairment, traumatic brain injury, or severe visual impairments or blindness.

Grade configurations. Charter schools offer traditional and nontraditional grade configurations. However, unlike most traditional public schools, the grade configurations offered by charter schools are not static, given that many add a new grade each year as the oldest cohort of students advances. Within our sample, 33% of the schools offer traditional elementary grades, 6% traditional middle school grades, and 22% traditional high school grades; 16% offer K–8, 13% offer K–12, 8% offer 6–12, and the remaining 3% offer an “other” configuration.⁴

Enrollment. The charter schools in our survey sample reported enrolling a total of 106,953 students, with a mean of 309 students per school. The minimum enrollment was 10 students and the maximum was 3,656 ($SD = 368.279$).

Reported as an average percentage of their total population, the charter schools in our sample are enrolling 51% Caucasian, 28% African American, 21% Hispanic, 5% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 4% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 2% “other” students.⁵ As a percentage of total enrollment, students qualifying for free or reduced-price meals ranged from 0% to 100% with a mean of 50% ($SD = 32.871$).

The schools in our sample enrolled a total of 11,310 students with disabilities, with a mean of 33, a minimum of 0, and a maximum of 466 students per school ($SD = 45.537$). Analyzed according to percentage of the total school population in our sample, students with disabilities comprise 10.57% of the population (i.e., 11,310 out of 106,953 students). Analyzed as a percentage of total enrollment *per school* that reported both total student enrollment and special education enrollment, the mean percentage of students with disabilities is 13.14%, with a minimum of 0% and a maximum of 100% ($SD = 15.265$). The difference between the percentage of the total sample population and the mean percentage per school is due to outliers (i.e., very large and very small schools and schools that reported 0% or 100% students with disabilities). When the schools that identified themselves as primarily for

³ Section 504 plans are the written documents used to specify what accommodations a student with a disability is to be provided in a public school under the auspices of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Under Section 504, a recipient of federal funds “that operates a public elementary or secondary education program” must provide a free, appropriate public education to students with disabilities. Section 504 is broader than IDEA and essentially confers the same entitlement to services for students with disabilities, although there are no funds available under 504 as there are under IDEA (Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 93-112, § 504).

⁴ The percentage amounts to more than 100% due to rounding.

⁵ These percentages do not add up to 100% because they represent the average enrollment of each ethnic group in each school in the sample as opposed to the percentage of the total population. Not all schools reported that they enrolled each of these ethnic groups.

students with disabilities ($n = 9$) were removed from the analyses, the mean percentage of students with disabilities per school decreased to 11.2%. According to the most recent data from the U.S. Department of Education (2007), students with disabilities between the ages of 6-17 who receive services under IDEA represent 11.67% of the public school population nationwide.

The schools in the sample reported that they enroll a total of 1,302 students identified as having a severe disability, with a mean of 3.82 students per school ($SD = 26.188$). As a percentage of the total number of students with an IEP, 11.5% of those students were identified as having a severe disability, and the percentage by school ranged from 0% to 100% ($SD = 19.750$) (see Table 1). When we removed the schools designed to serve students with disabilities, the percentage of students identified as having a severe disabilities decreased to 10.3%.

TABLE 1: TOTAL ENROLLMENT, ENROLLMENT OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, AND STUDENTS IDENTIFIED AS HAVING A SEVERE DISABILITY

	Total Student Enrollment	Students With IEPs	Students With IEPs Identified as Having a Severe Disability	Section 504
Mean	309.11	32.97	3.82	3.93
Standard Deviation	368.279	45.537	26.188	6.823
Minimum	10	0	0	0
Maximum	3,656	466	466	53
Sum	106,953	11,310	1,302	1,316

Source: Project Intersect, Survey of Charter School Operators, 2005

Children with disabilities may receive specialized services and supports under the auspices of IDEA and/or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Section 504 is broader than IDEA and essentially confers the same entitlement to services for students with disabilities. Section 504 plans are the written documents used to specify what accommodations a student with a disability is to be provided in a public school under the auspices of Section 504. The charter schools in our sample reported that they enrolled a total of 1,316 students with Section 504 plans. The number of students with Section

504 plans ranged from 0 to 53, with a mean of 3.93 students per school ($SD = 6.823$). Considered as a percentage of the total population of schools in the sample, students with 504 plans represent 1.2% of the population but the percentage by school ranged from 0% to 22.5% ($SD = 2.883$).

Charter School Policies, Procedures, and Accountability for Educating Students With Disabilities

The survey contained a series of questions related to special education policies and procedures that we developed to document the current status of particular practices related to IDEA. The survey questions focused on legal responsibility, LRE, IEPs, appropriate placement, personnel, finance, and accountability.

Legal Responsibility

As noted previously, 57% of the charter schools in the sample identified themselves as a legally independent LEA, and 38% identified themselves as part of an LEA. To discern whether legal identity translates to legal responsibility for providing special education and related services, we asked the charter operators to describe their legal responsibility. In our sample, 62% reported that their school has “total legal responsibility” related to special education, 29% reported that they “share legal responsibility,” 3% reported that they have “no legal responsibility,” and the remaining 6% reported that they either “do not know” or their responsibility was “other.”

Least Restrictive Environment

The IDEA requires state departments of education to report to the U.S. Department of Education (ED) data regarding the environments, also referred to as *educational settings*, where students with disabilities receive their special education and related services. Categories of placements include being outside of a regular education classroom (a) 0–20% of the school day, (b) 21–60% of the school day, and (c) 61–100% of the school day; (d) having public or private separate day classes; (e) placement in public or private residential facilities; and (f) being homebound or in a hospital. We asked the charter school operators to report how many of their students with disabilities are educated in the following instructional settings: all (100%), most (80–99%), some (40–79%), little or no (0–39%) amount of time in the general education classroom, or no instructional time in the charter school (e.g., public or private separate day or residential school).

Reported as a percentage of the total population of students in our sample, 39% of the students were being educated 100% of the time in the general

education classroom, 34% were in the general education classroom 80–99% of the time, 17% were in the general education classroom 40–79% of the time, 10% were in the general education classroom 0–39% of the time and less than 1% were being educated outside of the charter school in more restrictive settings. Table 2 presents a summary of the survey data and comparable national data.

TABLE 2: LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT

School Type	Percentage of School Day in General Education Classroom				No (0%) Instructional Time at the Charter School
	100% of the school day	80-99% of the school day	40-79% of the school day	0-39% of the school day	(e.g., Public or Private Separate Day Classes, Public or Private Residential Facilities, Homebound/Hospital)
Charter School*	39%	34%	17%	10%	< 1%

*Source: Project Intersect, Survey of Charter School Operators, 2005

IEP Practices

The IEP is the primary means schools use to document and manage the specialized services students with disabilities require to access the general education curriculum. The IDEA dictates specific policies and procedures related to developing, maintaining, and evaluating IEPs on specific schedules. We asked the charter school operators to report (a) how they determine that a child has an IEP, (b) whether convening an IEP meeting is standard procedure when a child with a disability enrolls in their school for the first time, and (c) what steps are taken when charter school personnel perceive that the school is not an appropriate placement for a student with a disability.

Identifying existing IEPs. Previous research has documented that charter schools frequently struggle to obtain student records or accurate information regarding existing IEPs for new students (Ahearn et al., 2001; Rhim, Lange, Ahearn, & McLaughlin, 2005). We asked charter operators to report the most common way that their teachers or administrators learn that a child has an IEP. In order of frequency, charter school personnel learn about students’ IEPs by responses on enrollment forms (47%), students’ records (35%), information volunteered by parents (10%), other means (4%), teacher or staff inquiries (3%), or student interviews (1%).

IEP meetings. Anecdotal evidence indicates that there is ambiguity in the field regarding whether enrollment in a charter school constitutes a change of

In order of frequency, charter school personnel learn about students’ IEPs by

- *responses on enrollment forms (47%),*
- *students’ records (35%),*
- *information volunteered by parents (10%),*
- *other means (4%),*
- *teacher or staff inquiries (3%), or*
- *student interviews (1%).*

In order of frequency, survey respondents reported that they take the following steps when school personnel believe that enrollment in the charter school is not appropriate for a student with a disability:

- *convene an IEP meeting (57%),*
- *advise parents that another school may offer more appropriate services (44%),*
- *“other” (14%),*
- *do nothing (6%),*
- *inform parents that their child cannot enroll in the school due to his or her disability (3%), or*
- *do not know (1%).*

a student’s placement that requires a change on an IEP. The IDEA dictates specific policies and procedures related to altering IEPs that center on convening a meeting of the IEP team. We asked charter operators whether it is standard practice to have an IEP meeting for all new students with disabilities who have an existing IEP. Seventy-three percent of the schools reported that such a meeting is standard practice, 21% reported that it is not, 6% reported “other,” and < 1% reported that they did not know.

Appropriate Placement

Fear that charter schools are “counseling out” students with disabilities has been the focus of much discussion and debate (e.g., Ahearn et al., 2001; Fiore et al., 2000; McKinney, 1996; McLaughlin & Henderson, 1998; Miron & Nelson 2002; Wells et al., 1998). The term *counseling out* refers to the practice of advising children with a disability, or their parents, that they cannot or should not attend a particular school. However, much of the discussion regarding counseling out is based on anecdotes and outliers that are difficult to verify. We asked the charter school operators what steps are taken when school personnel believe that enrollment in the charter school is not appropriate for a student with a disability. In order of frequency, survey respondents reported that they convene an IEP meeting (57%); advise parents that another school may offer more appropriate services (44%); “other” (14%); do nothing (6%); inform parents that their child cannot enroll in the school due to his or her disability (3%); or do not know (1%). Under the category of “other” responses, the charter school personnel reported a variety of practices represented by the following select quotations: “advise parents we’ll do our best,” “confer with parents to explore options,” “we do not deny enrollment,” “contact the local school district,” “we never tell parents this, we would be sued,” “tell them our physical limitations (no room),” “try to work with the district to find appropriate placement,” and “meet with parents to discuss concerns and options.”

Special Education Personnel

Our previous surveys documented that hiring special education and related services personnel can be a continuing challenge for charter schools (Lange, Rhim, Ahearn, & McLaughlin, 2005; Rhim et al., 2005). We asked the charter operators to report how many full- and part-time special education teachers, related staff, and paraprofessionals they employed during the 2003–2004 school year.

Full-time personnel. The charter schools in our sample reported employing an average of 2 full-time special education teachers, with a minimum of 0 and

a maximum of 65 ($SD = 5.354$). Examined as a ratio of teachers to students with disabilities, the charter schools in our sample that employed full-time special education teachers reported that on average, they maintain a 20:1 student to full-time special education teacher ratio, with a range of student to teacher ratios of 113:1 to 1:1 ($SD = 15.313$).

The schools employ an average of 1 full-time related services personnel, with a range of 0 to 20 per school ($SD = 2.248$). The average ratio of students with disabilities to full-time related services personnel in schools that reported that they employed these professionals was 29:1, with a range of 170:1 to 0.5:1 ($SD = 31.662$).

In terms of full-time paraprofessionals, the schools in the sample employed an average of 2, with a range of 0 to 60 per school ($SD = 5.354$). As a mean ratio of students with disabilities to full-time paraprofessionals, the charter schools that reported that they employ full-time paraprofessionals maintain a 21:1 ratio, and across all the schools surveyed, the range of ratios was 104:1 to 0.5:1 ($SD = 21.578$) (see Table 3).

TABLE 3: FULL-TIME PERSONNEL TOTAL AND RATIOS

	Teachers	Student/ Teacher Ratio	Related Services Personnel (RSP)	Student/RSP Ratio	Para- professionals	Student/ Para- professional Ratio
N	324	232	257	105	274	133
Valid						
Mean	2.00	20:1	1.06	29:1	1.94	21:1
SD	5.354	15.313	2.248	31.662	5.354	21.578
Min.	0	1:1	0	0.5:1	0	0.5:1
Max.	65	113:1	20	170:1	60	104:1
Sum	646	--	273	--	531	--

Source: Project Intersect, Survey of Charter School Operators, 2005

Part-time personnel. The charter schools in the sample reported employing an average of 1 part-time special education teacher, with a range of 0 to 75 ($SD = 4.862$). Examined as a ratio of teachers to students with disabilities, the charter schools in our sample that reported that they employed at least one full-time special education teacher said that on average they maintain a 22:1 student to part-time special education teacher ratio, with a range of 200:1 to 1:1 ($SD = 27.886$).

The schools employ an average of 2 part-time related services personnel, with a range of 0 to 30 per school ($SD = 2.377$). The average ratio of students

with disabilities to part-time related services personnel in schools that reported employing these professionals was 21:1, with a range of 317:1 to 1:1 ($SD = 35.392$).

The schools in the sample employ an average of 0.73 paraprofessionals, with a range of 0 to 9 paraprofessionals per school ($SD = 1.375$). As a mean ratio of students with disabilities to part-time paraprofessionals, the charter schools that reported employing these professionals maintain a 21:1 ratio, and across all the schools, the range of ratios was 100:1 to 1:1 ($SD = 20.736$) (see Table 4).

TABLE 4: PART-TIME TOTALS AND RATIOS

	Teachers	Student/ Teacher Ratio	Related Services Personnel (RSP)	Student/ RSP Ratio	Para- professionals	Student/ Para- professional Ratio
N	243	106	300	213	245	96
Valid						
Mean	0.95	22:1	1.84	21:1	0.73	21:1
SD	4.862	27.886	2.377	35.392	1.375	20.736
Min.	0	1:1	0	1:1	0	1:1
Max.	75	200:1	30	317:1	9	100:1
Sum	232	--	554		179	--

Source: Project Intersect, Survey of Charter School Operators, 2005

Special Education Finance

To date, only limited data have been collected regarding special education funding in charter schools, and the work that has been conducted raises questions regarding the degree that charter schools are accessing their portion of special education dollars (Ahearn et al., 2001; Nelson, Muir, & Down, 2000). We asked the charter school operators to report how they receive both their federal and state special education dollars.

Federal special education dollars to charter schools. Reflecting unique state funding formulas and charter school laws that designate the legal identity of charter schools, we hypothesized that the manner charter schools receive their federal special education dollars would range from receiving funds directly from the state to receiving services in lieu of funding. In order of frequency, our respondents reported that federal special education dollars go directly from the state to the charter school (35%); to the district, which retains the money and provides services (19%); through the local district to

the charter, with the district retaining a set percentage (14%); or through the local district to the charter, with the charter receiving the full allocation (8%). Seventeen percent of the respondents reported that they did not know how federal dollars flow to their charter and 8% indicated some “other” policy. For the schools that reported that their district retains a specific percentage of their federal special education dollars (n=22), the mean percentage retained was 21%, and the range was from 3% to 100% ($SD = 23.404$).

State special education dollars to charter schools. In order of frequency, charter school personnel reported that state special education funds flow directly from the state to the charter school (35%); flow to the LEA, which provides services to students in the charter school (21%); flow through the LEA to the charter, with the LEA retaining a set percent of the funds (17%); or flow through the LEA to the charter, with the charter receiving the full allocation (7%). Fifteen percent of the respondents reported that they did not know how state special education dollars flow, and 5% report that their funds flow an “other” way. For the schools that reported that the local district retains a set percentage of their state special education dollars (n=35), the mean amount was 20%, and the range was from 2% to 100% ($SD = 25.028$).

Special Education and Charter School Accountability

Accountability for academic outcomes is one of the core tenets of the charter school concept (Kolderie, 1990; Nathan, 1996). However, it is unclear to what degree authorizers or states are holding individual charter schools accountable for educating students with disabilities. We asked the charter school operators to report whether special education is part of the renewal process, how authorizers monitor the academic performance of students with disabilities, and how the state monitors charter schools for compliance with IDEA.

Special education and the charter school renewal process. A charter is essentially a performance contract wherein an applicant and an authorizer outline the goals of the school and the consequences for not fulfilling these goals. The charter renewal process is the juncture at which authorizers presumably review a school’s accomplishments and determine whether to allow the school to continue to operate. Within our sample, 68% of the respondents reported that their special education program is a required component of the renewal process, 20% reported that it is not a requirement, and 12% reported that they did not know whether it was a requirement.

Authorizer monitoring of academic performance of students with disabilities. Besides the renewal process, authorizers may use other means to assess the academic performance of students with disabilities. The survey

Within our sample, 68% of the respondents reported that their special education program is a required component of the renewal process.

Thirty-one respondents (9%) reported their school had been the subject of a special education complaint.

permitted the respondents to select multiple methods of assessing performance. In order of frequency, charter school personnel reported that their authorizers monitor requirements associated with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation (62%), review annual reports (58%), conduct site visits to review students' records (54%), and conduct standard state special education audits (49%).

State monitoring of compliance with IDEA rules and regulations. States have established policies and procedures related to monitoring school districts and individual schools for compliance with IDEA. Yet, prior research documented ambiguity associated with how states include charter schools in these monitoring procedures (Ahearn et al., 2001; Ahearn et al., 2005). We invited the survey respondents to identify how their state monitors compliance with IDEA, and they could select multiple means. In order of frequency, the survey respondents reported that their school is included in monitoring of the district by the state in the same way as other schools in the district (45%); that the SEA monitors the school directly as it does all local districts (45%); or that the SEA has developed distinct special education monitoring procedures for charter schools (11%). Eleven percent of our respondents reported that they did not know how their state monitors their school for compliance with IDEA. When asked whether the state had conducted a monitoring visit of their charter school, 57% of the respondents indicated yes, 35% indicated no, and 8% indicated that they did not know.

Formal Complaints

To ascertain whether the challenges reportedly experienced by charter schools related to special education rise to the level of formal complaints, we asked the charter school operators whether during the past three years their school had been the subject of a formal complaint to the state related to special education. Thirty-one respondents (9%) reported their school had been the subject of a special education complaint. For the schools that had been the subject of such a complaint, the number of complaints ranged from 1 to 3, and a mean of 1.32 ($SD = 0.557$). In order of frequency, the top five areas of complaints identified were (1) provision of special education instruction, (2) due process, (3) discipline, (4) suspension and expulsion, and (5) provision of related services.

Building Charter School Capacity Related to Special Education

While special education has been documented to be a challenge for charter schools, we know from previous research that states and districts are offering support and charter schools are reaching out to existing support mechanisms

as well as creating new support systems to build their capacity to provide special education (Rhim et al., 2005; Rhim et al., 2007). We asked the charter school operators first to identify what aspects of special education are challenging and then to report who is assisting them with the ongoing provision of special education and related services, what services they are receiving, and what entities are giving them technical assistance and training.

Challenges Associated With Special Education in Charter Schools

Based on prior research (Ahearn et al., 2001; Fiore et al., 2000; Miron & Nelson, 2002; O’Neill et al., 2001) and the broader literature about challenges associated with educating students with disabilities (McDonnell, McLaughlin, & Morrison 1997; U.S. Department of Education, 2005), we constructed a list of special education related issues that we hypothesized might be challenges to charter schools. We asked operators to categorize the issues as an “ongoing challenge,” “a challenge primarily during start-up,” or “not a challenge” (see Table 5).

In order of frequency, the top four special education related challenges that more than 50% of our survey respondents identified as continuing challenges were having adequate funds to provide special education services (58%), NCLB requirements related to students with disabilities (55%), obtaining IEP files from sending schools (52%), and finding qualified special education teachers (52%).

The charter school operators classified far fewer issues as challenges primarily during the start-up phase. In order of frequency, the top four challenges during start-up were knowing special education laws and regulations (24%), understanding special education finance (15%), finding qualified special education teachers (9%), and working with the LEA or other special education provider (8%).

When asked to identify other “additional challenges,” 34 operators identified a variety of issues; including a number of operators who expounded upon the information already noted in the forced-choice-response question related to challenges. In total, 19 operators specified challenges related to funding, 12 identified challenges related to delivery of special education and related services, 8 identified personnel challenges, and 5 identified challenges associated with upholding federal laws. For more specific details, see Appendix A.

The top four challenges that more than 50% of our survey respondents identified as continuing challenges were

- *having adequate funds to provide special education services (58%),*
- *NCLB requirements related to students with disabilities (55%),*
- *obtaining IEP files from sending schools (52%), and*
- *finding qualified special education teachers (52%).*

TABLE 5: SPECIAL EDUCATION CHALLENGES: CONTINUING AND PRIMARILY DURING START-UP

Type of Challenge	Continuing	Primarily During Start-up	Not a Challenge
Having adequate funds to provide special education services	58.3%	7.6%	33%
NCLB requirements related to students with disabilities	54.8%	2.7%	39%
Obtaining IEP files from sending schools	51.8%	5.1%	41%
Finding qualified special education teachers	51.7%	9.2%	38%
Finding qualified related services personnel	46.5%	4.9%	47%
Modifying the school's core curriculum for students with disabilities	35.8%	3.1%	60%
Understanding monitoring and compliance requirements	34.7%	5.5%	59%
Understanding special education finance	34.2%	15.2%	48%
Knowing special education laws and regulations	34.1%	23.7%	41%
Providing services for students with low-incidence disabilities	30.8%	1.9%	56%
Working with parents of children with disabilities	27.9%	3.0%	68%
Student evaluations and reevaluations	25.7%	2.7%	70%
Implementing the IDEA discipline procedures	25.6%	2.8%	67%
Working with the LEA or other special education provider	25.5%	8.2%	60%
Providing professional development for special education teachers	21.9%	3.0%	73%
Reporting special education data to the state	19.6%	1.8%	77%
Following due process procedures	19.1%	5.8%	71%
Implementing the IEP	18.7%	3.6%	77%
Providing an accessible facility	15.8%	3.6%	79%
Providing transportation for students with disabilities	15.1%	2.3%	75%

Source: Project Intersect, Survey of Charter School Operators, 2005

Organizations/Strategies to Assist With Ongoing Provision of Special Education

A key concept that drove Project Intersect was the hypothesis that charter schools are affiliating with or creating “special education infrastructures” to build their capacity to provide special education and related services (Rhim et al., 2006). We asked survey participants to identify the organizations or strategies that their school uses to help with the ongoing provision of special education and related services, and we asked them to identify what services they are obtaining from these entities. In order of frequency, the six most common sources of assistance were charter authorizers (62%), individual consultants (45%), charter school associations or resource centers (36%),⁶ SEAs (25%), intermediate education agencies or units (16%), and LEAs (12%). Other organizations that we hypothesized might provide ongoing special education and related services, but were identified by fewer than 10% of survey respondents were local nonprofits that provide special education services (9%), special education cooperatives for charter schools (9%), education management organizations (7%),⁷ and risk-pools (<1%).⁸

In order of frequency, charter operators reported that the aforementioned organizations provide them with professional development (62%), staffing of related services personnel (49%), administrative support (47%), staffing assistance for credentialed special education teachers (39%), legal counsel (30%), and financial consulting and management (17%). An additional 9% of the operators reported that they obtain “other” services from the entities that help them with providing special education and related services.

Training and Technical Assistance

Training and technical assistance refer to activities developed to assist a charter school to build knowledge and, consequently, capacity. We asked the charter school operators whether they have obtained training and technical

⁶ A charter school association is typically a membership organization that is supported by member dues or private foundation grants. A charter school resource center is similar to an association, but resource centers are not membership organizations and receive most of their financial support from private foundation grants or fees for services. While each association or center is unique, they typically play an advocacy role in their state.

⁷ An education management organization (EMO) is a company that specializes in whole-school or program-specific management. The term is somewhat ambiguous but it may include for-profit as well as not-for-profit entities.

⁸ A risk pool is analogous to an insurance policy wherein charter schools pay a per-pupil fee for all their students to an external entity or pool that the school can then draw upon to purchase services for any of their students who require special education and related services.

assistance related to special education and, specifically, to document who required or offered the support and report what types of training they accessed prior to opening the school and during the 2003–2004 academic year.

The survey revealed that multiple organizations are offering and/or requiring special education–related technical assistance, but some organizations require rather than simply offer the technical assistance. In order of frequency, the charter school operators reported that SEAs (22%), authorizers (20%) and education management organizations (16%) are the most likely to require training (see Table 6).

Notable proportions of charter operators reported that multiple organizations are offering special education training opportunities. Local nonprofits, charter school resource centers, charter school associations, and individual consultants were identified by more than 90% of the charter school operators as sources of special education technical assistance.

TABLE 6: ORGANIZATIONS REQUIRING OR OFFERING TRAINING RELATED TO SPECIAL EDUCATION

Organizations	Requiring	Offering
SEA	21.8%	55.2%
Authorizer	19.7%	50.0%
Education Management Organization	15.6%	75.0%
LEA	11.8%	80.4%
Special Education Cooperative For Charter Schools	7.3%	75.6%
Intermediate Education Agency or Unit	6.8%	82.2%
Individual Consultants	5.3%	91.0%
Charter School Resource Center	4.7%	92.9%
Charter School Association	3.1%	91.4%
Local Nonprofit	0.0%	96.9%

Source: Project Intersect Survey of Charter School Operators (2005)

Special education training is being offered before schools open for business and once schools are operating. In order of frequency, the charter operators reported that they received training in the following areas prior to opening: introducing disability laws (55%), providing special education services (55%), establishing eligibility and the IEP process (55%), special education monitoring and compliance (52%), reporting data to the state (41%), and funding special education (38%).

Once charter schools open, it appears that they have additional opportunities for special education training. In order of frequency the charter operators reported that during the 2003–2004 academic year, school personnel received training in the following areas: providing special education services (75%), establishing eligibility and the IEP process (73%), special education monitoring and compliance (72%), introducing disability laws (70%), reporting data to the state (58%), and funding special education (40%).

Our data indicate that charter schools are educating students with disabilities, although the proportion is less than the national average (i.e., 10.57% of students in charter schools compared to 12.1% in all public schools nationwide).

SUMMARY

In conducting our survey, we sought broadly to assess whether charter schools are enrolling and educating students with disabilities as an indicator of whether these new and evolving public schools are fulfilling their fundamentally public mission and, specifically, to document how these schools are building capacity to educate students with disabilities. We found that most charter schools are new start-ups granted by local districts, and they aim to attract a general, as opposed to specialized, student population (e.g., primarily or entirely students with disabilities or students with behavior/discipline problems). Charter schools offer a variety of grade configurations, including some nontraditional (i.e., K–6, K–8, and K–12), they are generally small (i.e., an average of 309 students), and on average have been operating for at least six years.

Our data indicate that charter schools are educating students with disabilities, although the proportion is less than the national average (i.e., 10.57% of students in charter schools compared to 11.67% in all public schools nationwide). Charter schools are enrolling a diverse student population according to age, race, and socioeconomic status, and they are enrolling students with severe disabilities (i.e., 3.8% of the students with disabilities).

The majority of the charter schools in our sample are operating as independent LEAs (57%) and retaining total responsibility for providing special education services (62%). Charter schools are educating students with

disabilities in a variety of settings, but the majority of their students with disabilities (73%) are spending the majority (i.e., 80% or more) of their instructional time in general education classrooms. Based on the most recent data reported by the U.S. Department of Education, charter schools are educating more of their students in the general education classroom (73% versus 50%). Yet, our survey data do not document whether charter schools are attracting more students who can succeed in the general education classroom or if they are moving students into less restrictive environments than their traditional public school peers. See Table 7.

TABLE 7: LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT IN CHARTER AND TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

School Type	Percentage of School Day Outside of General Education Classroom				No (0%) Instructional Time at the Charter School		
	0% of the school day	1–20% of the school day	21–60% of the school day	61–100% of the school day	Public or Private Separate Day Classes	Public or Private Residential Facilities	Homebound/Hospital
Charter School*	39%	34%	17%	10%	< 1%		
All Schools**	50%		28%	19%	3%	<1%	< 1%

*Source: *Project Intersect, Survey of Charter School Operators, 2005*

**Source: *U.S. Department of Education (2007). 27th Annual report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA, Table 2-2*

The charter operators reported taking a relatively proactive position regarding reviewing IEPs for newly enrolled students. They rely primarily on charter enrollment forms and student records to learn that a child has a disability. Many charter schools (57%) defer to the IEP when they are concerned about whether their school is an appropriate placement for students with disabilities, but 44% reported that they advise parents that a different school would be a better option, and 3% reported that they tell parents that their child cannot enroll due to the child’s disability—an unequivocal violation of the rights afforded by the IDEA.

Charter schools are employing a variety of full- and part-time special education professionals, but the student to teacher ratios documented by the survey reveal that in some instances, these professionals appear to be managing a relatively large caseload of students (e.g., 113 students with disabilities to 1 full-time special education teacher). Charter schools are

accessing their federal and special education dollars, and the most common path is for the charter school to receive the money directly from the state. However, a roughly equal number of schools reported that their district retains some or all of the special education funds and provides services, thereby potentially limiting the charter schools' control of the funds or services.

Most authorizers (68%) require charter school operators to report data regarding special education as part of the charter renewal process, but 20% of the schools noted that special education is not a part of the process. Besides the renewal process, authorizers assess the performance of students with disabilities using the requirements of NCLB, annual reports, site visits, and state audits. States are including charter schools in their monitoring activities, and 57% of the schools reported that they had been formally monitored by the state for compliance with the IDEA.

Charter schools reported multiple ongoing challenges associated with special education, but these challenges do not appear to rise to the level of formal complaints; just 9% of the schools in our sample have been the subject of a formal complaint to the state. Finally, a variety of organizations (i.e., authorizers, consultants, LEAs, and SEAs) are assisting charter schools with the ongoing provision of special education and related services and are offering or requiring technical assistance and training related to special education. In aggregate, the results of our survey confirm and quantify the status of particular aspects of special education in charter schools, but the data raise more questions than they answer.

DISCUSSION

In conducting the study, we sought to examine enrollment and education of students with disabilities as an indicator of whether charter schools are fulfilling their mission as public schools, and thereafter to document the strategies that charter schools are relying on to build their capacity related to special education. Provision of special education and related services is a civil right for students with disabilities afforded by multiple federal statutes. As public schools, charter schools are required to abide by federal statutes, including the IDEA, and we proposed that compliance with the IDEA is one indicator of charter schools' ability to fulfill their public mission. To assess that compliance, we examined data regarding whom charter schools are enrolling and what specific special education-related policies and procedures are in place.

We conducted a survey of a stratified random sample of charter schools nationwide that were operating during the 2003–2004 academic year. While our response rate was high enough that we could generalize from our results, our findings may be limited due to non-respondent bias. Furthermore, the nature of our data (i.e., self-reported by personnel who may have a vested interest in protecting the school) must be taken into account when considering the survey results.

Our initial findings based on the enrollment data and findings related to IEP policies and procedures and educational settings indicate that charter schools are educating students with disabilities. However, the fact that charter schools are enrolling *fewer* students with disabilities than traditional public schools, and in some instances advising students with disabilities that other placements may be better when students attempt to enroll, is problematic and requires a more in-depth examination of specific charter school policies and practices. While relatively unnuanced, our findings regarding enrollment indicate that charters are at least partially fulfilling their public mission related to open enrollment.

In contrast to earlier qualitative research that documented a lack of awareness and basic capacity to provide special education services (Ahearn et al., 2001; Fiore et al., 1998; McLaughlin & Henderson, 1998), our survey revealed multiple indicators beyond basic enrollment data showing that charter schools are, at a minimum, aware of their responsibilities related to IDEA. For instance, the majority of the charter schools (73%) reported that it is standard practice to have an IEP meeting upon enrollment for all students that have existing IEPs. This finding appears to indicate that most charter schools or their authorizers understand the importance of the IEP and are taking a proactive role to ensure that the IEP is up-to-date when a child enrolls. Our data do not reveal whether the IEP meetings lead to changes in the type of special education or related services delivered or the quality of the IEP but rather, reflect a previously undocumented practice indicative of the import of the IEP. The data regarding full- and part-time personnel confirm that charter schools are hiring specialized personnel, although the range of ratios appears to indicate that some special education personnel may be spread very thinly across school populations.

In terms of building capacity, while charter schools identified multiple challenges related to special education, there appear to be support networks available to help them. The networks are providing technical assistance and training, and various entities are involved with the ongoing provision of special education and related services. Yet, we cannot evaluate the quality or quantity of the external support or whether it translates to high-quality

services for students with disabilities. Furthermore, it is unknown if the assistance is charter-school specific (i.e., relevant to their unique governance arrangement and position within the broader public school structure).

It appears that authorizers and states are using multiple means (e.g., NCLB requirements, site visits, and audits) to hold charter schools accountable for the services they provide to students with disabilities. More than half of the charter schools surveyed reported that they had undergone a state special education monitoring and compliance review, and few (9%) of the schools had been the subject of a formal special education complaint. In aggregate, our findings appear to indicate that while there are notable exceptions, charter schools are relatively aware of their obligations stemming from the IDEA and are implementing a variety of practices designed to fulfill those obligations. However, our findings are far from conclusive and more data need to be collected to assess both the quality and quantity of services provided to students with disabilities who enroll in charter schools.

There appear to be ample opportunities for technical assistance and training, but it is unclear if the support is helping the charter schools address their most common continuing challenges. For instance, some of the challenges reflect issues that are not easily addressed because they are systemic rather than technical challenges (e.g., a national shortage of qualified special education teachers and inadequate funds). Furthermore, the challenges documented appear to reveal that charter schools are struggling with the same issues that stymie traditional public schools. For instance, lack of adequate funds, NCLB requirements, and hiring qualified personnel are arguably not charter-school-specific challenges but rather, nearly universal challenges for public schools. More in-depth research is required to discern whether charter schools are facing unique challenges related to special education, or whether the challenges simply reflect areas where all public schools struggle to fulfill their responsibilities related to educating students with disabilities. In fact, states and authorizers may not need to strive to develop unique solutions for charter schools given that the challenges are universal to public schools.

Finally, while one of the oft-touted goals of charter schools is innovation, the special education infrastructures that charter schools are using to help with the ongoing provision of special education are predominantly components of the traditional public school system (i.e., authorizers, SEAs, intermediate education agencies, and LEAs) as opposed to anything new or groundbreaking. With the exception of the charter schools resource/association category, few charter operators are affiliating with or creating new special education infrastructures such as cooperatives or risk-pools.

In conclusion, the defining bargain of charter schools is autonomy in exchange for accountability. State charter laws establish the parameters of the autonomy, and this autonomy defines the degree to which charter schools function outside of the traditional public school sphere. Yet, charter schools are required to abide by all federal laws, including those pertaining to students with disabilities. Prior research found that neophyte charter school operators frequently struggle to discern their responsibilities related to special education. As charter operators strive to fulfill their obligations associated with IDEA and NCLB, they face the significant challenge of helping students with disabilities to access and excel in this sector. This national survey of charter school operators provides quantifiable data regarding the students that charter schools are enrolling and how the schools are developing the organizational capacity to educate students with disabilities. Given the current emphasis on market-based reforms such as charter schools and privatization embedded in NCLB, documenting how charter schools educate students with disabilities; arguably a key public policy issue, contributes to a more sophisticated discussion of the merits of charter schools and whether they are fulfilling their core responsibility as public schools: to serve the public.

CONCLUSION

The first charter school opened more than a dozen years ago, yet research to date on these schools offers limited insight into how they are educating a traditionally underserved population—students with disabilities. In an era in which public entities are being urged to privatize and embrace market forces such as choice and competition, discerning whether charter schools are providing opportunities to students eligible for special education services is of significant public interest because it is one indicator of whether these schools are addressing their fundamentally public mission.

The Project Intersect national survey of charter school operators regarding policies and practices related to educating students with disabilities documented that while charter schools are facing challenges associated with providing special education, they are enrolling children with disabilities and there is a support network emerging to help charter schools build capacity and provide special education and related services. However, data regarding counseling out and somewhat untested accountability require additional inquiry because they raise questions about whether some charter schools are fulfilling their full complement of responsibilities associated with educating students with disabilities.

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**APPENDIX A: SURVEY
QUESTIONS AND DATA TABLES**

1. Which of the following best describes your role in the charter school?

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Director/Principal or equivalent	285	81.4%
	Special education director/supervisor	22	6.3%
	Vice principal/assistant director or equivalent	19	5.4%
	Special education teacher	11	3.1%
	Other	6	1.7%
	Board member	4	1.1%
	General education teacher	3	0.9%
	Total	350	100.0%
	Missing	5	

2. Who granted the current charter?

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	A school district	175	50.3%
	The state board of education	98	28.2%
	A postsecondary institution (college or university)	32	9.2%
	A charter-granting agency (appointed chartering board)	34	9.8%
	Nonprofit organization	6	1.7%
	Other	3	0.9%
	Total	348	100%
	Missing	7	

3. Approximately how long have you been working at the charter school? (Select one)

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Less than 1 year	36	10.3%
	1 year	20	5.7%
	2 years	54	15.4%
	3 years	55	15.7%
	4 years	56	16.0%
	5 years	39	11.1%
	6 years	30	8.6%
	7 years	25	7.1%
	8 years	18	5.1%
	9 years	5	1.4%
	10 years	5	1.4%
	11 years	3	.9%
	12 years or more	4	1.1%
	Total	350	100.0%
	Missing	5	

4. Is the charter school a newly created school or a preexisting school?

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	A newly created school	276	78.4%
	A preexisting public school	44	12.5%
	A preexisting Indian/Bureau of Indian Affairs school	2	0.6%
	A preexisting private school	22	6.3%
	Other	8	2.3%
	Total	352	100%
	Missing	3	

5. Is this school a cyber/virtual charter school?

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes ⁹	29	8.5%
	No	313	91.5%
	Total	342	100%
	Missing	13	

6. What is the legal identity of your charter school?

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Legally independent local education agency	197	57.4%
	Part of a local education agency	130	37.7%
	Do not know	6	1.7%
	Other	11	3.2%
	Total	345	100.0%
	Missing	10	

7. In what year did this school start providing instruction as a public charter school? (Enter the 4-digit year or “do not know”)

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1992	2	0.6%
	1993	1	0.3%
	1994	11	3.2%
	1995	9	2.6%
	1996	29	8.5%
	1997	31	9.1%
	1998	35	10.3%
	1999	52	15.2%
	2000	47	13.8%
	2001	51	15.2%
	2002	42	12.3%
	2003	30	8.8%
	2004	1	0.3%
	Total	341	100%
	Missing	14	

⁹ This figure includes schools characterized as “independent study” schools in California, which includes home school instruction.

8. During the 2003–2004 school year, approximately what percentage of your student population qualified for free or reduced meals? (Enter a percentage zero or greater or “do not know”)

N	Valid	302
	Missing	53
Mean		50.47%
Std. Error of Mean		1.891
Median		50.00%
Mode		0(a)%
Std. Deviation		32.871%
Minimum		0%
Maximum		100%

a: Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown.

9a. What grades were offered in this school in the 2003–2004 school year? (Select all that apply)

	Frequency	Percent
Pre-K	53	14.9%
Kindergarten	204	57.5%
First grade	210	59.2%
Second grade	210	59.2%
Third grade	211	59.4%
Fourth grade	205	57.7%
Fifth grade	195	54.9%
Sixth grade	187	52.7%
Seventh grade	165	46.5%
Eighth grade	154	43.4%
Ninth grade	146	41.1%
Tenth grade	146	41.2%
Eleventh grade	139	40.3%
Twelfth grade	132	38.4%
Ungraded	11	3.1%

9b. Grade Categories

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Elementary (Pre-K through 5th Grade)	117	33.0%
	Middle School (6–8)	20	5.6%
	High School (9–12)	79	22.3%
	Combined— Elementary and Middle	56	15.8%
	Combined—Elementary, Middle, and High School	46	13.0%
	Combined— Middle and High School	28	7.9%
	Other configuration	9	2.5%
	Total	355	100.0%

10. Approximately how many students were enrolled in your school at the end of the 2003–2004 school year? (Enter the student enrollment zero or greater or “do not know”)

N	Valid	346
	Missing	9
	Mean	309.11
	Std. Error of Mean	19.799
	Median	198.50
	Mode	160(a)
	Std. Deviation	368.279
	Minimum	10
	Maximum	3,656
	Sum	106,953

a: Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown.

11. At the end of the 2003–2004 school year, what was the approximate percent of total K–12 enrollment for each ethnic group? (Enter the percentage of students zero or greater for each ethnic group, or “do not know”)

		Hispanic	White	Black	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian or Pacific Islander	Other
N	Valid	290	300	297	179	210	126
	Missing	65	55	58	176	145	229
Mean		21.30%	51.22%	28.49%	4.91%	3.76%	2.33%
Std. Error of Mean		1.654	2.052	2.020	1.337	0.503	0.374
Median		7.00%	57.50%	10.00%	1.00%	2.00%	1.00%
Mode		1%	2%	1%	0%	1%	0%
Std. Deviation		28.171	35.547	34.819	17.887	7.294	4.194
Minimum		0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Maximum		100%	100%	100%	100%	58%	34%

12a. Approximately how many of the students enrolled in K–12th grade during the 2003–2004 school year had an IEP (Individualized Education Program) because they have a disability (i.e., eligible for special education student services)? (Enter the number of students zero or greater or “do not know”)

		Approximate Number of Students With IEPs Because They Have a Disability	% of Total Student Population With IEPs ¹⁰
N	Valid	343	336
	Missing	12	19
Mean		32.97	13.1352
Std. Error of Mean		2.459	0.83280
Median		19.00	9.3754
Mode		12	10.00
Std. Deviation		45.537	15.26543
Minimum		0	0.00
Maximum		466	100.00
Sum		11,310	-

¹⁰ Difference in valid responses is due to the fact that seven of the respondents indicated how many students have IEPs but did not indicate total enrollment to allow for calculation of a percentage.

12b. Percentage of Total Population With an IEP (*Minus Schools That Reported That They Were Designed Primarily to Serve Students With Disabilities*)

		% of Total Population With an IEP
N	Valid	326
	Missing	18
Mean		11.1951
Std. Error of Mean		0.49352
Median		9.2131
Mode		0.00(a)
Std. Deviation		8.91074
Minimum		0.00
Maximum		69.24
Sum		3,649.60

a: Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown.

13. Of the students enrolled in this school during the 2003–2004 school year, approximately how many of the students with IEPs had severe disabilities (i.e., severe autism, deaf-blindness, severe developmental delay, severe emotional disturbance, severe hearing impairment or deafness, severe mental retardation, multiple disabilities, severe orthopedic impairment, traumatic brain injury, or severe visual impairments or blindness)? (*Enter the number of students zero or greater or “do not know”*)

		Number of Students During 2003–2004 With a Severe Disability	% of Total Student Population With an IEP Identified As Having a Severe Disability ¹¹
N	Valid	341	335
	Missing	14	20
Mean		3.82	8.51%
Std. Error of Mean		1.418	1.07907
Median		0.00	0.00%
Mode		0	0.00%
Std. Deviation		26.188	19.750%
Minimum		0	0.00%
Maximum		466	100.00%
Sum		1,302	-

¹¹ Difference in valid responses is due to the fact that six of the respondents indicated how many students are identified as having a severe disability but did not indicate total enrollment to allow for calculation of a percentage.

14. Approximately how many of the students enrolled in K–12th grade during the 2003–2004 school year had a Section 504 plan because they have special needs requiring modifications to instruction or facilities? (Enter the number of students zero or greater, or “do not know”)

		Number of Students Who Had a Section 504 Plan Because They Have Special Needs	Percentage of Total Student Population With 504 Plans ¹²
N	Valid	335	332
	Missing	20	23
	Mean	3.93	1.6030%
	Std. Error of Mean	0.373	0.15827
	Median	2.00	0.6126%
	Mode	0	0.00%
	Std. Deviation	6.823	2.88382
	Minimum	0	0.00%
	Maximum	53	22.50%
	Sum	1,316	

¹² Difference in valid responses is due to the fact that three of the respondents indicated how many students have 504 plans but did not indicate total enrollment to allow for calculation of a percentage.

15. In the 2003–2004 school year, approximately how many of your students with IEPs were in each of the following instructional settings? (Enter the number of students zero or greater in each setting, or “do not know”)

		All (100%) of Instructional Time in Regular Classroom	Most (80–99%) of Instructional Time in a Regular Classroom	Some (40–79%) of Instructional Time in a Regular Classroom	Little or No (0–39%) of Instructional Time in a Regular Classroom	No (0%) of Instructional Time at the Charter School
N	Valid	203	188	133	113	100
	Missing	152	167	222	242	255
	Mean	16.98	15.88	11.22	7.96	0.06
	Std. Error of Mean	1.776	1.471	2.275	2.494	0.024
	Median	8.00	10.00	2.00	.00	0.00
	Mode	0	0	0	0	0
	Std. Deviation	25.305	20.174	26.235	26.513	0.239
	Minimum	0	0	0	0	0
	Maximum	190	140	234	226	1
	Sum	3,447	2,986	1,492	899	6
<hr/>						
	<i>% of Students With Disabilities Educated in Each Category</i>	39%	34%	17%	10%	< 1%

16. Was your school designed to serve primarily students with disabilities (i.e., 50% or more of the student population has an IEP)? (Select one)

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Yes	9	2.5%
	No	340	96.3%
	Do not know	4	1.1%
	Total	353	100.0%
Missing	System	2	
Total		355	

17. Is this entire school specifically for students who have been suspended or expelled, who have dropped out, or who have been referred for behavioral or adjustment problems? (Select one)

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Yes	23	6.5%
	No	330	93.2%
	Do not know	1	0.3%
	Total	354	100.0%
Missing	System	1	
Total		355	

18. Which of the following statements most accurately describes your charter school's legal responsibility for providing special education and related services to students with disabilities attending your charter school? (Select one)

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Our school has total legal responsibility	217	62.2%
	Our school has shared legal responsibility	101	28.9%
	Our school has no legal responsibility	9	2.6%
	Do not know	11	3.2%
	Other	11	3.2%
	Total	349	100.0%
Missing	System	6	
Total		355	

19. Which of the following is the most common way your charter school teachers or administrators learn that a child has an existing Individualized Education Program (IEP)? (Select one)

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Required response on enrollment forms	165	46.6%
	Information volunteered by parents	35	9.9%
	Teacher/staff inquiry	12	3.4%
	Student interview	4	1.1%
	Student records	125	35.3%
	Other	13	3.7%
	Total	354	100.0%
Missing	System	1	
Total		355	

20. Is it standard practice in your charter school to convene an IEP meeting for all newly enrolled students with disabilities who have an existing IEP? (Select one)

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Yes	256	72.9%
	No	72	20.5%
	Do not know	2	0.6%
	Other, please specify	21	6.0%
	Total	351	100.0%
Missing	System	4	
Total		355	

21. What steps are taken when school personnel believe enrollment in your charter school is not an appropriate placement for a student with a disability? (Select all that apply)

	Valid Percent (Frequency)
Inform parents that their child cannot enroll in the school due to the disability	3.1% (11)
Advise parents that another school may offer more appropriate services	43.7% (155)
Convene an IEP meeting	57.2% (203)
Nothing	5.6% (20)
Do not know	1.1% (4)
Other	14.4% (51)

22a. During the 2003–2004 school year, how many of the following full-time personnel delivered special education and related services in your school? Personnel who play more than one role and itinerant staff should be counted in question 23 as part-time for each role. (Enter the number of full-time personnel zero or greater for each personnel type)

		Special Education Teachers	Special Education Related Staff	Special Education Paraprofessionals, Including Teacher Aides
N	Valid	324	257	274
	Missing	31	98	81
Mean		2.00	1.06	1.94
Std. Error of Mean		0.29743	0.14026	0.32346
Median		1.00	0.00	0.00
Mode		1	0	0
Std. Deviation		5.354	2.248	5.354
Minimum		0	0	0
Maximum		65	20	60
Sum		646	273	531

22b. Full-Time Personnel Ratios: Students to Special Education Professional

		Special Education Teacher: Student Ratio	Special Education Related Services: Student Ratio	Special Education Paraprofessional: Student Ratio
N	Valid	232	105	133
	Missing	123	250	222
Mean		19.8280	29.3968	20.8263
Std. Error of Mean		1.005	3.090	1.871
Median		16.0000	18.0000	13.0000
Mode		15.00	5.00(a)	10.00(a)
Std. Deviation		15.31388	31.66210	21.57812
Minimum		1.00	0.50	0.50
Maximum		113.00	170.00	104.00

a: Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown.

23a. During the 2003–2004 school year, how many of the following part-time personnel delivered special education and related services in your school? Personnel who play more than one role and itinerant staff should be counted as part-time for each role. (Enter the number of part-time personnel)

		Special Education Teachers	Special Education Related Staff	Special Education Paraprofessionals, Including Teacher Aides
N	Valid	243	300	245
	Missing	112	55	110
Mean		0.953	1.846	0.731
Std. Error of Mean		0.312	0.137	0.088
Median		0.0000	1.0000	0.0000
Mode		0.00	0.00	0.00
Std. Deviation		4.862	2.378	1.375
Minimum		0	0	0
Maximum		75.00	30.00	9.00
Sum		231.50	553.81	179.00

23b. Part-Time Personnel Ratios: Students to Special Education Professional

		Special Education Teacher: Student Ratio	Special Education Related Services: Student Ratio	Special Education Paraprofessional: Student Ratio
N	Valid	106	213	96
	Missing	249	142	259
Mean		22.0284	20.6085	20.6160
Std. Error of Mean		2.709	2.421	2.116
Median		14.0000	10.0000	14.9000
Mode		10.00(a)	4.00	25.00
Std. Deviation		27.88600	35.33649	20.73606
Minimum		1.00	0.00	1.00
Maximum		200.00	316.67	100.00

a: Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown.

24. What organizations/strategies is your school utilizing to assist with the ongoing provision of special education and related services? (Select all that apply)

Organization/Strategy	Valid Percent (Frequency)
Authorizer	62.1% (220)
Individual consultants	44.8% (159)
State education agency	24.5% (87)
Charter school association	22.9% (81)
Intermediate education agency or unit	15.5% (55)
Charter school resource center	14.9% (53)
Local education agency	12.4% (44)
Local nonprofit that provides special education services	8.7% (31)
Special education cooperative for charter schools	8.5% (30)
Education management organization	7.0% (25)
Do not know	2.8% (9)
Risk-pooling	0.3% (1)
Other	10.7% (38)

25. What services related to special education do you receive from the organizations listed above? (Select all that apply)

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Professional development	221	62.3%
Staffing of related services personnel	175	49.3%
Administrative support	165	46.5%
Staffing assistance for credentialed special education teachers	138	39.0%
Legal counsel	108	30.4%
Financial consulting/management	60	16.9%
Other	31	8.7%

26. Based on your experience, to what extent are the following areas a challenge for your charter school? (Select one response for each area)

	Challenge Primarily During Start-up	Continuing Challenge	Not a Challenge	Do Not Know
	Valid Percent (Frequency)	Valid Percent (Frequency)	Valid Percent (Frequency)	Valid Percent (Frequency)
Having adequate funds to provide special education services	7.6% (25)	58.3% (193)	33.2% (110)	0.6% (2)
Obtaining IEP files from sending school	5.1% (17)	51.8% (172)	40.7% (135)	0.9% (3)
Finding qualified special education teachers	9.2% (30)	51.7% (169)	37.6% (123)	1.2% (4)
Finding qualified related service personnel	4.9% (16)	46.5% (151)	47.1% (153)	1.2% (4)
Knowing special education laws & regulations	23.7% (79)	34.1% (114)	41.0% (137)	0.9% (3)
Understanding special education finance	15.2% (50)	34.2% (113)	48.2% (159)	2.1% (7)
Providing professional development for special education teachers	3.0% (10)	21.9% (72)	72.9% (240)	1.8% (6)
Working with LEA or other special education provider	8.2% (27)	25.5% (84)	60.3% (199)	4.8% (16)
Following due process procedures	5.8% (19)	19.1% (63)	71.1% (234)	3.0% (10)
Implementing the IEP	3.6% (12)	18.7% (62)	76.7% (254)	0.9% (3)
Working with parents of children with disabilities	3.0% (10)	27.9% (92)	68.2% (225)	0.6% (2)
Implementing the IDEA discipline procedures	2.8% (9)	25.6% (83)	66.7% (216)	4.6% (15)
Understanding monitoring and compliance requirements	5.5% (18)	34.7% (113)	59.2% (193)	0.6% (2)
Providing an accessible facility	3.6% (12)	15.8% (52)	79.3% (261)	1.2% (4)

(Question 26 data table, continued from previous page)

	Challenge Primarily During Start-up	Continuing Challenge	Not a Challenge	Do Not Know
	Valid Percent (Frequency)	Valid Percent (Frequency)	Valid Percent (Frequency)	Valid Percent (Frequency)
Providing transportation for students with disabilities	2.3% (7)	15.1% (47)	75.2% (234)	7.4% (23)
Modifying the school's core curriculum for students with disabilities	3.1% (10)	35.8% (116)	60.2% (195)	0.6% (2)
Providing services for students with low incidence disabilities	1.9% (6)	30.8% (95)	55.5% (171)	11.4% (35)
NCLB requirements related to students with disabilities	2.7% (9)	54.8% (181)	39.1% (129)	3.0% (10)
Student evaluations and reevaluations	2.7% (9)	25.7% (85)	70.4% (233)	1.2% (4)
Reporting special education data to the state	1.8% (6)	19.6% (64)	77.0% (251)	1.5% (5)

27. Please list any additional challenges.*

Federal Rules and Regulations
NCLB
Keeping up with changing state and federal mandates
Knowing when bilingual education is appropriate for special education, bilingual, or limited English students
Required assessment (CAPA) under NCLB for severely handicapped children needs to be reevaluated. Educational teams need to make educational decisions, not legislators.
Financial
Adequate funding
Funding for books and materials for students with disabilities
Funding has been difficult due to our enrollment being low the first year.
Funding to adequately serve students
Coming up with a good model for financial requirements with district

(Question 27 data table, continued)

County is not receptive to charter schools, unwilling to provide resources or share information. Parents are not forthright about degree of disability when enrolling students and by law we cannot refuse admission even if we do not have the resources needed.
Having enough special education support for learners
IDEA funding
Need additional funding to provide increased services
Money is our longest challenge. Not enough money to work in a school that will accommodate our budget and size for the programs laid out by our charter.
Lack of funding for facilities
Providing community-based education for students with autism is very expensive. Many of our students present complex psychological, behavioral, social, communication, and medical needs. Tuition covers approximately only 75% of the total costs.
The SELPA takes a huge percentage off the top of our funds for regionalized supports we never can access. (\$156,000 annually) despite this, we still operate without encroaching on general funds.
Trying to keep up with the rising costs is the greatest challenge.
Funding, increasing enrollment
Resolving the conflicts that arise among staff members with competing interests
Having authorizer adhere to charter school expectations (behavior, procedures, staff, uniforms)
Special education position allocations, inadequate and inequitable per-pupil funding, facility challenges (no funding for facilities), advertising vacancies for special education positions, receiving communications regarding special education trainings and events
Lack of sufficient financial resources is the source of the majority of our challenges.
Funds and services—working amicably with our sponsoring district for our fair share of special education. As long as special education funding is not provided directly, the battle between the charter school and the district will continue, related to encroachment costs.
Personnel Issues
As a charter school, our resource-teacher openings tend to be filled only after all the other schools. Last year we were assigned a teacher who was difficult to work with and had a reputation to match. Our needs seem to be met last.
Attitude of non-charter schools/personnel to charters in this state
Lack of personnel to write grants

(Question 27 data table, continued from previous page)

Professional development of regular education teachers to implement modifications and accommodations—mindset changes, regular education teachers’ concerns, appropriateness of instruction, and need to make responsible inclusion work.
Day-to-day integration and strategies to collaborate with teachers who may or may not wish to understand collaborate with special education teacher
Having teachers trained in assessment programs to have current and valuable scores
Finding staff is difficult with the teacher shortage so acute in Florida
Convincing parents that cyber is not for their child
Providing Special Education and Related Services
LEA is responsible for special education services. Has only begun providing records and initial service in the last 60 days.
No level 5 services available at current site.
Other districts referring families with severe needs to look into our school. This sets up huge costs for our sponsoring district and us.
Our increasing special education population is a continuing challenge. We are a college-prep performing arts school with 160 students. We have 30 IEP students, and if this number continues to grow, our mission and focus might shift.
Getting parents to be involved in their child’s IEP
Perception that we do not accept students with disabilities
Providing academic support for all students within the school day
Remoteness of the school related to services
Large numbers of incoming students who are very, very late in their reevaluations, necessitating immediate testing by us
Sharing information with other charter schools to get assistance. Keeping up with the differences in requirements for charter schools vs. public schools. Handling various responsibilities without all of the prerequisite skills.
Teaching high school curriculum to students whose literacy and numeracy is below 5th grade
The disproportionate amount of time spent on special education reports.

**Responses are clustered into broad categories and reflect duplicate responses (i.e., respondent identified the issue to be a challenge in Question 26 and expounded upon the challenge in Question 27)*

28. What organizations are requiring and/or offering training related to special education? (Select all that apply)

Organization	Requiring	Offering	Requiring and Offering
	Valid Percent (Frequency)	Valid Percent (Frequency)	Valid Percent (Frequency)
Authorizer	19.7% (35)	50.0% (89)	30.3% (54)
Charter school association	3.1% (4)	91.4% (117)	5.5% (7)
Charter school resource center	4.7% (4)	92.9% (79)	2.4% (2)
Education management organization	15.6% (5)	75.0% (24)	9.4% (2)
Individual consultants	5.3% (7)	91.0% (121)	3.8% (5)
Intermediate education agency or unit	6.8% (5)	82.2% (60)	11.0% (8)
Local education agency	11.8% (6)	80.4% (41)	7.8% (4)
Local nonprofit	0% (0)	96.9% (31)	3.1% (1)
Special education cooperative for charter schools	7.3% (3)	75.6% (31)	17.1% (7)
State education agency	21.8% (36)	55.2% (91)	23.0% (38)
Other	33.3% (5)	33.3% (5)	33.3% (5)

29. Did you or other school personnel receive training in any of the following areas prior to opening your charter school? (Select one response for each area)

Training Areas	Yes	No	Do Not Know	Total
	Valid Percent (Frequency)	Valid Percent (Frequency)	Valid Percent (Frequency)	Valid Percent (Frequency)
Introducing disability laws	55.0% (180)	24.5% (80)	20.5% (67)	100.0% (327)
Establishing eligibility and the IEP process	54.6% (178)	25.2% (82)	20.2% (66)	100.0% (326)
Providing special education services	54.9% (178)	24.7% (80)	20.4% (66)	100.0% (324)
Special education monitoring and compliance	51.9% (167)	27.3% (88)	20.8% (67)	100.0% (322)
Funding special education	37.5% (121)	39.3% (127)	23.2% (75)	100.0% (323)
Reporting data to the state	41.2% (133)	37.8% (122)	21.1% (68)	100.0% (323)

30. Did you or other school personnel receive training in any of the following areas during the 2003–2004 school year? (Select one response for each area)

Training Areas	Yes	No	Do Not Know
	Valid Percent (Frequency)	Valid Percent (Frequency)	Valid Percent (Frequency)
Introducing disability laws	70.1% (227)	22.2% (72)	7.7% (25)
Establishing eligibility and the IEP process	72.7% (237)	20.6% (67)	6.7% (22)
Providing special education services	75.3% (244)	18.8% (61)	5.9% (19)
Special education monitoring and compliance	72.4% (236)	21.5% (70)	6.1% (20)
Funding special education	40.3% (129)	48.4% (155)	11.3% (36)
Reporting data to the state	57.7% (187)	34.6% (112)	7.7% (25)

31a. How do federal (Part B) special education dollars flow to your charter school? (Select one)

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Federal special education dollars flow from the state to my charter school	110	34.7%
	Federal special education dollars flow to the LEA; the LEA retains the full amount and provides services	59	18.6%
	Federal special education dollars flow through the LEA; the charter school receives the full amount	26	8.2%
	Federal special education dollars flow through the LEA; the LEA retains a set percentage	44	13.9%
	Do not know	54	17.0%
	Other	24	7.6%
	Total	317	100.0%
Missing	System	38	
	Total	355	

31b. If the LEA retains federal IDEA funds, what percentage do they retain?

N	Valid	22
	Missing	333
Mean		20.63%
Std. Error of Mean		4.990
Median		5.63%
Mode		5%
Std. Deviation		23.404
Minimum		3%
Maximum		100%

32a. How do state special education dollars flow to charter schools?
(Select one)

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	State special education dollars flow directly to my charter school	113	35.2%
	State special education dollars flow to the LEA; the LEA provides special education	68	21.2%
	State special education dollars flow through the LEA and charter school receives the full amount	23	7.2%
	State special education dollars flow through the LEA; the LEA retains a percentage	54	16.8%
	Do not know	48	15.0%
	Other	15	4.7%
	Total	321	100.0%
Missing	System	34	
Total		355	

32b. If the LEA retains state IDEA funds, what percentage do they retain?

N	Valid	35
	Missing	320
Mean		20.23%
Std. Error of Mean		4.231
Median		5.00%
Mode		5%
Std. Deviation		25.028
Minimum		2%
Maximum		100%

33. Is a review of your school's special education program a required component of your authorizer's charter school renewal process? (Select one)

Valid	Yes	223	68.2%
	No	66	20.2%
	Do not know	38	11.6%
	Total	327	100.0%
Missing	System	28	
Total		355	

34. Besides the renewal process, how does your authorizer monitor the academic performance of students with disabilities enrolled in your charter school? (Select all that apply)

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Site visits to review student records	190	53.5%
	Annual reports	205	57.7%
	Requirements associated with NCLB	219	61.7%
	Standard state special education audits	172	48.5%
	Do not know	16	4.5%

35. How does the state monitor your school for compliance with IDEA rules and regulations? (Select all that apply)

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	The SEA monitors our school directly as it does all local districts	160	45.1%
	The SEA has developed distinct special education monitoring procedures for charter schools	39	11.0%
	Our school is included in the monitoring of the district by the state the same as other schools in the district	158	44.5%
	Do not know	40	11.3%
	Other	6	1.7%

36. To your knowledge, has your school had a monitoring site visit or record review from the state related to special education compliance? (Select one)

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Yes	194	57.1%
	No	120	35.3%
	Do not know	26	7.6%
	Total	340	100.0%
Missing	System	15	
Total		355	

37a. In the past three years, has your charter school been the subject of formal complaint to the state education agency (SEA) (e.g., State Department of Education) related to special education? (If Yes, please specify how many, or select one other response)

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	No	291	84.8%
	Do not know	21	6.1%
	Yes, please specify how many	31	9.0%
	Total	343	100.0%
Missing	System	12	
Total		355	

37b. Number of Complaints Per School That Reported Receiving a Complaint

N	Valid	25
	Missing	330
Mean		1.32
Std. Error of Mean		0.111
Median		1.00
Mode		1
Std. Deviation		0.557
Minimum		1
Maximum		3
Sum		33

38. If your answer to the previous question was Yes, in what areas were the complaints? (Select all that apply)

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Denial of access to the charter school	1	0.3%
Provision of special education instruction	10	2.8%
Due process	7	2.0%
Discipline, suspension, expulsion	7	2.0%
Provision of related services	4	1.1%
Other	4	1.1%
Do not know	3	0.8%
Accessibility of charter school facilities	1	0.3%
Placement/LRE	1	0.3%
Eligibility for special education and related services	1	0.3%
Qualifications of special education teachers	1	0.3%