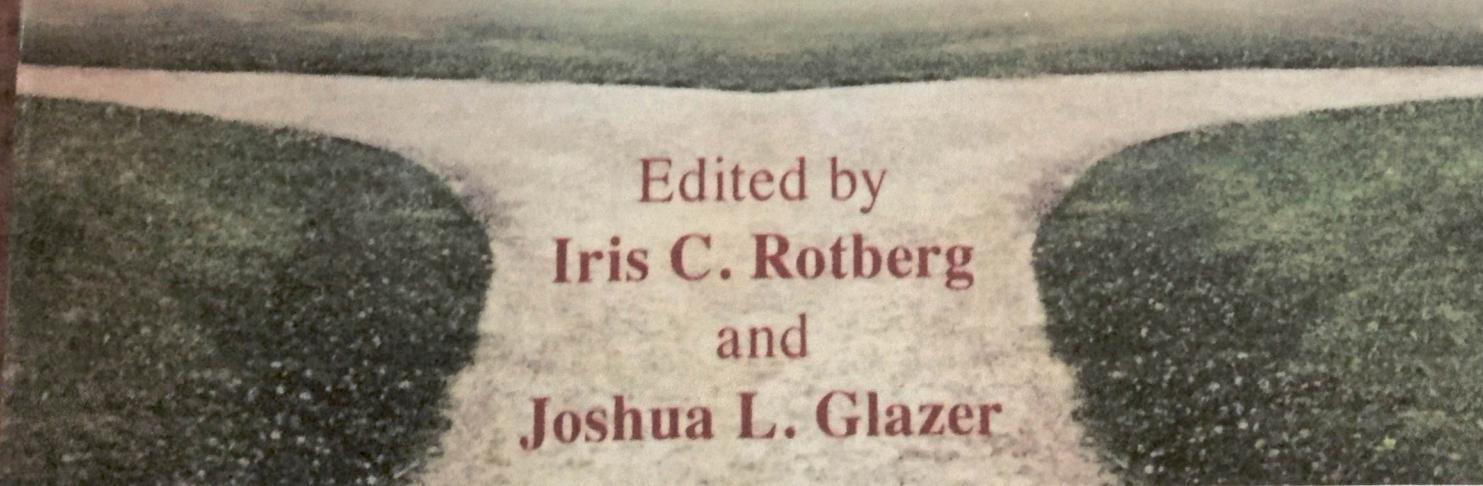


Choosing Charters

BETTER SCHOOLS

or

MORE SEGREGATION?



Edited by
Iris C. Rotberg
and
Joshua L. Glazer

Choosing Charters

Better Schools or More Segregation?

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*For Maya, Sam, Eva, Madeline, Tess, Emma, Quinn, and Hayden,
who perhaps decades from now will know how this saga turns out.*

—I.C.R.

*For my parents, Mickey and Penina,
first teachers to whom I owe my love of education.*

—J.L.G.

The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men gang aft agley.

—Robert Burns

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Setting the Stage

Iris C. Rotberg and Joshua L. Glazer

Speak the speech . . . trippingly on the tongue. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hands thus, but use all gently, for in the very torrent, tempest, . . . whirlwind of passion, you might acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. . . . Be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor.

—William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

No issue in education better exemplifies the tensions in achieving a just education system than the struggle to integrate U.S. schools. The 60th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 2014 was a reminder of the limited progress that has been made since the Brown decision ended *de jure* segregation. Although statements by political leaders honored the Brown decision, little was said about the role of federal and state policies in the expansion of charter schools and the impact of those policies on segregation.

Advocates have long held that charter schools coupled with the competitive pressures of the market would lead to the development of schools more focused on the needs of students, increased innovation, and greater efficiency. The extent to which this has happened is highly contested in the current research literature, as is the evidence on whether students who attend charter schools perform better than those in traditional public schools.

What does seem clear, however, is that the growth of charter schools has had social consequences that go beyond test scores. The expansion of charter schools since their beginning in 1992 has helped to transform the U.S. educational landscape. The extent of these changes has been remarkable. Beyond the more than 3 million students that currently learn in charter schools, the charter movement has given rise to new breeds of organizations, new forms of district management, new philanthropic priorities, and a new political discourse about education. Along with these changes has come a new set of questions that are of great importance for policymakers, researchers, and the public.

A primary concern, of course, is whether charter schools lead to better educational outcomes and, if so, for whom and under what conditions. But salient questions go beyond the effects on student learning outcomes. Other areas of concern include how charter schools (and school choice generally) shape the private and public goals of education, the impact on integration along racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines, the underrepresentation of students with disabilities and English-language learners, the role of religion in publicly funded schools, the prospect for increased racial and ethnic segregation in currently integrated school districts, the challenges faced by charter schools that have full responsibility for operating district schools, and other topics that lie at the intersection of education, politics, and social policy.

Moreover, it is argued that the growth of charter schools and charter school networks has increased the fragmentation of the education system and made it more difficult to integrate schools. Ironically, as some state leaders have attempted to bring educational and organizational coherence to state and local systems, the expansion of charter schools may be further splintering an already fractured system. This issue is often overlooked in the debate about the effectiveness of charter schools. The consequences are particularly apparent in high-poverty urban districts, which have experienced the greatest growth in charter schools.

This book brings together authors who represent different perspectives to assess the policy implications of the expansion of charter schools and charter school networks. The chapters analyze the link between charter schools and segregation and describe how segregation plays out in different situations and in different ways: by race, ethnicity, and income; by disability and language-minority status; by culture, language, and religion; by instructional programs designed specifically for low-income and minority students; and by the challenges faced by charter schools in guaranteeing students the civil rights and other legal protections required under federal laws. In addressing these issues, the book moves beyond the simplistic question of whether charter schools work to explore broader questions about the purposes of education and the role of public policy in shaping the educational agenda. The book was completed during the first year of the Trump administration, and many of the issues discussed are directly relevant to the administration's policies as well as to public policy more generally.

Part I sets the context for the book. Jeffrey Henig discusses the expansion of charter schools in the context of broader changes in education policy and argues that charter schools have thrived in part because they are aligned with these changes. James Harvey describes the impact of concentrated poverty and segregation on educational opportunities and questions whether the focus on charter schools provides an effective response to these underlying problems.

The book's second part, "Choices," focuses on the impact of the growth of charter schools and charter management organizations. Iris Rotberg introduces this section with an overview of how the expansion of charter schools in high-poverty urban districts exacerbates segregation, increases resource inequalities, and leads to different instructional methods in high-poverty schools as compared

schools attended by affluent students. Wagma Mommandi and Kevin Welner focus on the incentives that have led many charter schools to limit access and diversity, as well as on positive steps taken by others to encourage open access. Gordon Lafer describes the financial incentives that have encouraged some charter schools to rely on "blended learning" instructional methods and shows the implications of these methods for educational equity. Joshua Glazer, Diane Massell, and Matthew Malone report on a study of the Tennessee Achievement School District, which shows the challenges faced by charter school operators who have become responsible for the functions typically performed by school districts. Roslyn Mickelson, Jason Giersch, Amy Hawn Nelson, and Martha Bottia report on a study of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, which concludes that the threat that middle-class white parents would leave the traditional public schools to enroll in charter schools has discouraged the adoption of desegregation plans. Adam Gamoran and Cristina M. Fernandez review the research literature and find that although the achievement effects of charter schools vary highly across the nation, the effects for some charter schools in high-poverty urban districts are more consistently positive. Brenda Shum describes the problems faced by charter schools in guaranteeing the civil rights and other legal protections afforded students under federal laws. Suzanne Eckes, Nina Buchanan, and Robert Fox discuss the constitutional issues that charter schools raise with respect to the separation of church and state and give examples of cases in which these issues have been considered. Jennifer Ayscue and Erica Frankenberg conclude Part II with an analysis of how school choice plans that incorporate diversity goals might further integration by breaking the link between school and neighborhood segregation.

Henry Levin leads off Part III, "Education in a Pluralistic Society," with an analysis of how the current shift from public to private purposes of education threatens to undermine the goal of democratic preparation. Janelle Scott analyzes the popular assertion that "education is the last remaining civil right to be secured and that charter schools and school choice policies are the most powerful manifestation of that right." The concluding chapter gives an overview of the main issues discussed in the book and describes the various forms that segregation takes, their compounding effects, and their educational and social consequences.