

11-2-2016

Integration in the Little Rock Area, Part 2: Disproportionalities Among Student Movers

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Citation

McKenzie, S. C., & Ritter, G. W. (2016). Integration in the Little Rock Area, Part 2: Disproportionalities Among Student Movers. *Policy Briefs*. Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/oebrief/9>

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- About **2%** of LRSD students move to charters annually.
- About **6%** of LRSD students move to other school districts annually.
- About **6%** of LRSD students leave Arkansas' public system entirely each year, excluding those who graduate.
- Students who switch between TPSs and charters generally are **academically similar** to other students in the school that they left.
- Black students are slightly **underrepresented** in transfers from TPSs to charters.
- FRL students were **underrepresented** among students transferring from TPSs to charters.
- Black and FRL students were **underrepresented** among students exiting the public school system.

Integration in the Little Rock Area: Part 2 *Disproportionalities Among Student Movers*

School integration has been a contentious policy issue in Little Rock since the 1950s. Recent charter expansions have raised questions about the current level of integration in public schools (charter and traditional) in the Little Rock Area. As part of our series on integration in Little Rock, this brief examines the demographics and academic performance of students switching between public school sectors, and disproportionate representation of certain students among sector switchers.

Introduction

In this brief, we examine students who choose to transfer between traditional public schools and public charter schools in the Little Rock area. We compare the demographic characteristics of those who switch to the demographics of the public system as a whole. We also compare students' academic achievement to the school they leave. In this way, we can examine whether movers are disproportionately likely to belong to a particular demographic group, and whether students who switch sectors are more likely to be high performing, low performing, or on par with their peers.

This Brief

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When we examine racial integration in this brief, we focus on black and white students. We understand that the representation of Asian American, Native American, Latino/a, multiracial, and other students of color are of interest to many, and are important subjects of future study. We focus here on black and white students for the sake of brevity and because they represent the majority of students in the Little Rock area school system.

The data used in this analysis are from the Arkansas Department of Education, and racial indicators come from paperwork submitted by parents when students first enroll at a school. More in-depth information about the data and analyses can be found in the Arkansas Education Report.

Table 1 presents student demographics by sector and location in the Little Rock area for 2008-09 through 2014-15. LRSD represents students enrolled in the Little Rock School District, while LR Metro includes LRSD students as well as students enrolled

Table 1: Demographics of Little Rock Area Students, by Public School Sector, 2008-09 to 2014-15

		2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
% Black	LRSD	68%	68%	67%	67%	66%	66%	66%
	LR Metro	58%	58%	57%	57%	57%	57%	57%
	Charter	40%	40%	46%	46%	47%	47%	46%
% White	LRSD	22%	22%	21%	20%	19%	19%	18%
	LR Metro	34%	33%	32%	32%	31%	30%	29%
	Charter	47%	47%	40%	40%	38%	37%	37%
% FRL	LRSD	65%	70%	70%	71%	72%	63%*	75%
	LR Metro	62%	65%	66%	65%	67%	61%*	69%
	Charter	32%	35%	40%	44%	46%	46%	47%

*Note: While 2013-14 %FRL values are surprisingly low for LRSD and, therefore, LR Metro, these values were reported by the ADE Data Center.

in Pulaski County Special School District (PCSSD) and North Little Rock School District (NLRSD). Charter includes students enrolled in public charter schools in the Little Rock area: Academics Plus, College Prep Academy, Covenant Keepers, eStem, Exalt Academy, Flightline Upper Academy, Jacksonville Lighthouse, Lisa Academy, Lisa Academy North, Little Rock Prep, Premier High, Quest High, and SIAtch High. It is important to remember that Charter schools differ from traditional public schools because students are not required to live in a certain geographic area to enroll. Even though a charter may be located within the boundary for a particular school district, all students are eligible to attend.

Table 1 highlights the changing enrollment in the LR Metro Area public schools; decreasing white enrollment, and increasing percentages of students eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch (FRL) in TPSs and charters. Black enrollment has been consistent in TPSs and increasing in charters. For more information about the changes over time in enrollment in the Little Rock area, refer to the first policy brief in our series or the full Arkansas Education Report. The earlier brief and table 1 are the foundation for the following analyses, in which we compare the demographics of students switching between sectors to the demographics of the sector they left. Table 1 is the reference to determine how representative students who switch are of the sector as a whole, or if particular groups of students are over- or under-represented.

We also examine the academic performance of students who switch sectors compared to the school that they exited. Academic performance is measured as a student's average standardized score on state math, literacy, and science exams. The academic performance of the school the student is exiting is measured by the weighted average standardized score on the same exams. Scores are standardized across the state population of test takers, within year, grade, and subject to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. Such scores, called Z scores, enable the comparison of scores across subjects, grades, and years. Students performing above the state average will have a positive score, and students performing below the state average will have a negative score. Similarly, schools where students, on average, perform above the state performance will have a positive score, while schools with students that perform, on average, below the state average will have a negative score. By comparing the scores of the students to the schools they are exiting, we can determine if students who are switching are academically higher (indicated by positive Assessment diff values), lower (indicated by negative Assessment values) or about the same (indicated by Assessment values near 0) as students at the school that they exited.

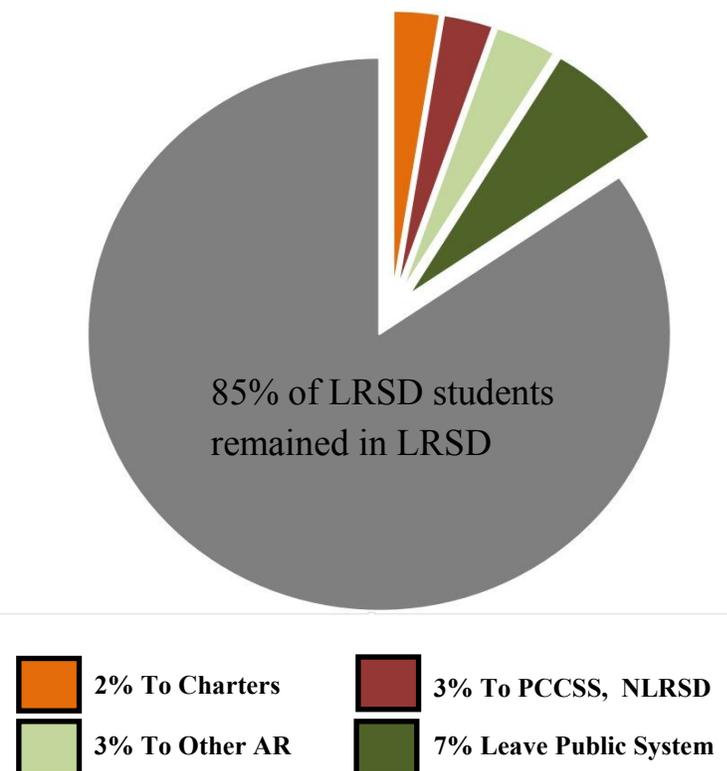
We examine the demographics and academic performance for students exiting LRSD, LR Metro and Charter schools in the Little Rock area to identify if certain types of students are exiting more than would be expected based on enrollment.

Students Exiting Little Rock School District

Figure 1 illustrates LRSD student movement between the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school years. Students who graduated are excluded from the calculations, and the patterns are representative of all years examined. As shown in the pie chart, 85% of students enrolled in LRSD in fall 2013 remained in LRSD in fall 2014. Students transferring from LRSD to charters represented the smallest share of student switchers, at 2% of the LRSD student body. Six percent (6%) of students from LRSD transferred to other public school districts in the state, with 3% attending other TPSs in the Little Rock Metro area and 3% moving to other districts throughout the state. At 7%, the largest group of students leaving LRSD were those who left the public school system entirely. These students left for private school, homeschool, schools in another state, no school (dropped out). Students could also have passed away or been incarcerated.

Table 2 outlines the demographics, socio-economic status and academic performance of LRSD students overall and of students transferring out of LRSD for other schooling options. Socio-economic status is measured by Free and Reduced Lunch eligibility (FRL), and academic performance is measured by the average standardized exam score in math, reading, and science. We include the information for LRSD overall to allow examination of disproportionate representation of students among transfers.

Figure 1: LRSD Student Enrollment Decisions, 2013-14 to 2014-15



LRSD to Charters

We begin by examining student transfers from the Little Rock School District (LRSD) to charters in the Little Rock area. As can be seen in Table 2, in 2009 about 68% of LRSD students were black, while only about 58% of students moving from LRSD to charters were black. This means that black students were underrepresented among student switchers by 10 percentage points in 2009. In 2012, however, black students were slightly overrepresented among students transferring to charters from LRSD. Over the years examined, black students were underrepresented in LRSD transferring to charters by about 3 percentage points.

White students were proportionately represented among students moving from LRSD to area charters. Across the seven years examined, 20% of LRSD students were white, as were 19% of students moving from LRSD to charters.

FRL students have been underrepresented among students transferring to charters from LRSD in all years examined. In 2009, FRL students were underrepresented among students switching from LRSD to charters by over 7 percentage points. In 2014, 75% of LRSD students were on FRL, as were 65% of students transferring from LRSD to charters. Over the years examined, FRL students were underrepresented by about 8 percentage points across all years of analysis.

Table 2: Demographic and Academic Information for Students Exiting Little Rock School District, 2009-2014

		Move 2009	Move 2014	Total Movers 2009-2014
All LRSD	<i>N</i>	25,760	25,078	177,520
	% Black	68%	66%	67%
	% White	22%	18%	20%
	% FRL	65%	75%	69%
LRSD to Charter	<i>N</i>	310	562	2,710
	% Black	58%	61%	64%
	% White	26%	19%	19%
	% FRL	58%	65%	61%
	Assessment diff	0.12	-0.04	0.03
LRSD to Other LR Metro	<i>N</i>	891	754	4,874
	% Black	81%	79%	80%
	% White	16%	15%	15%
	% FRL	72%	79%	75%
	Assessment diff	-0.22	-0.19	-0.20
LRSD to Other AR Public	<i>N</i>	612	604	3,886
	% Black	60%	64%	62%
	% White	22%	19%	21%
	% FRL	75%	79%	77%
	Assessment diff	0.02	-0.05	0.01
LRSD to Out-of-system	<i>N</i>	1,689	1,484	9,482
	% Black	62%	55%	59%
	% White	24%	26%	27%
	% FRL	62%	54%	64%
	Assessment diff	-0.05	-0.02	0.03

Students switching from LRSD to charters tend to perform at about the same level as the students who remain in the school they exited. We compare student switchers' average standardized exam score in math, reading, and science with the school's standardized exam scores in math, reading, and science for all years examined. Overall, students switching from LRSD to charters scored slightly above the rest of their school before they transferred to a charter (0.03 standard deviations).

LRSD to Other LR Metro (NLRSD, PCSSD)

Black students were consistently overrepresented among students switching to NLRSD or PCSSD by over ten percentage points. In 2009, 68% of LRSD students were black, as were 81% of students transferring from LRSD to North Little Rock (NLRSD) or Pulaski County Special School Districts (PCSSD). Over the years examined, black students were overrepresented in LRSD transferring to other LR Metro school districts by about 13 percentage points.

White students were slightly underrepresented among students moving from LRSD to other TPSs in the Little Rock Metro area. Across all years examined, 20% of LRSD students were white, while 15% of students moving from LRSD to NLRSD or PCSSD were white.

FRL students were overrepresented by 6 percentage points among students transferring to LR Metro from LRSD. In most years, the difference was small, although there was a large gap of 18 percentage points in 2013-14, perhaps an impact of unusually low FRL rates in LRSD.

Students switching from LRSD to other traditional public school districts in the LR Metro Area performed slightly below their peers, on average scoring 0.20 standard deviations below their school on a combined math, reading, and literacy score for the years examined.

LRSD to Other Arkansas Public Schools

Many students exit LRSD and transfer to another public school outside of the Little Rock Metro area. Although black students are underrepresented by 5 points over the years examined, the representation of black students among switchers going from LRSD to other areas of the state has increased over time.

White students were proportionately represented among students moving from LRSD to other areas of the state in the years examined.

The share of FRL students transferring from LRSD to other public schools in the state was 8 percentage points larger than we would have expected given the demographics of LRSD in that year.

Academically, student switchers in this group are about on par with their peers, scoring virtually identically to their school's average on a combined measure of math, reading, and science scores.

LRSD to Out-of-System (Largest Group)

Students in this group have either moved out-of-state, gone to a private school, begun homeschooling, been incarcerated, or passed away. Black students were underrepresented among this group of students by 8 percentage points over the years examined. The share of black students switching from LRSD to out of the state’s public school options was substantially lower than we would have expected given their share of the LRSD student body.

White students were slightly overrepresented among students leaving the Arkansas public school system from LRSD. Across all years examined, 20% of LRSD students were white, while 27% of students leaving the Arkansas public school system were white.

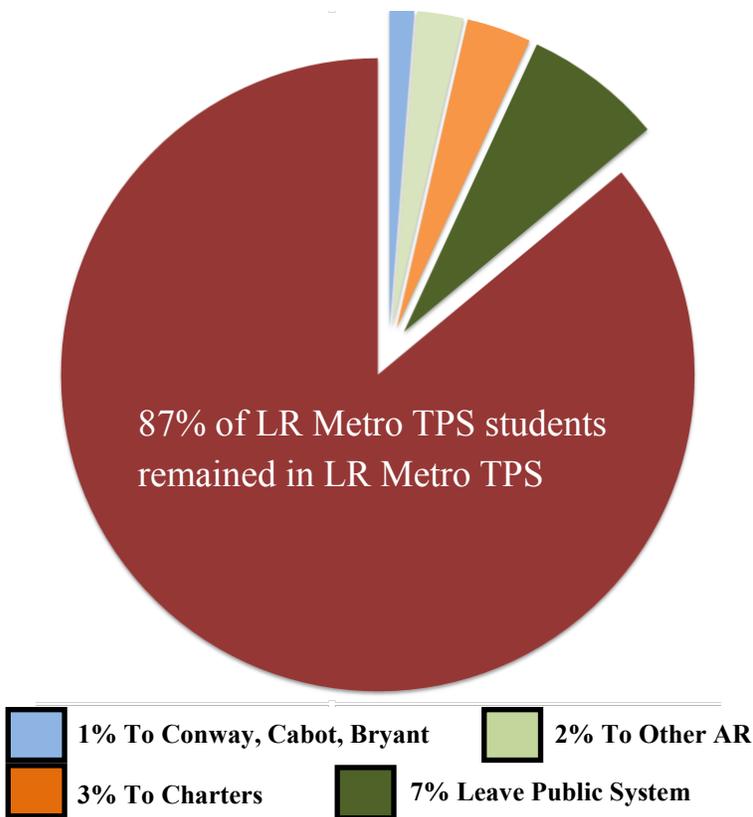
FRL students were also generally underrepresented among students in this group, although the gap was smaller for FRL students than for black students. In FRL students were underrepresented by over 20 percentage points.

Academically, students switching out of the system were average achievers in the schools they left. Across all years, switchers were on average performing about 0.03 standard deviations above the rest of their school when they chose to leave.

Students Exiting Little Rock Metro TPSs

Figure 2 shows the enrollment choices made by students who attended any of the three Little Rock Metro area TPSs (LRSD, NLRSD, and PCSSD) between the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school years, identified as Movers 2014. If students move between the TPSs, for example LRSD and PCSSD, we identify them as a Stay in LR Metro do not switch sector so are Students who graduated are excluded from the calculations, and the patterns are representative of all years examined. Again, the vast majority of students stay in

Figure 2: LR Metro Traditional Public School Student Enrollment Decisions, 2013-14 to 2014-15



TPSs—about 87% of students in this case. Only 3% of students transfer from LR Metro Area TPSs to charters, while 7% of students leave LR Metro Area TPSs and exit Arkansas’ public school system completely.

Table 3 illustrates the outlines the demographics, socio-economic status and academic performance of students transferring out of the LR Metro Area (LRSD, NLRSD, and PCSSD). We also see how switchers from the LR Metro Area compare to the LR Metro demographics and achievement overall. Students leaving the LR Metro Area for surrounding districts or for options outside the Arkansas public school system were racially and socioeconomically similar to switchers overall, but students switching from LR Metro Area TPSs to charters or other schools in the state were more likely to be black or qualify for FRL.

LR Metro to Charters

There is no clear pattern in the representation of black students among switchers from the LR Metro Area to charters over this time. In some years black students are overrepresented and in others they are underrepresented. On average for the years examined, however, black students are equally represented in those switching from LR Metro Area TPSs to charters.

White students were proportionately represented among students transferring from Little Rock Metro Area TPSs to charters over the years examined.

Table 3: Demographic and Academic Information for Students Exiting Little Rock Metro TPSs, 2009-2014

		Move 2009	Move 2014	Total Movers 2009-2014
All LR Metro	N	53,261	51,881	365,965
	% Black	58%	57%	57%
	% White	34%	29%	31%
	% FRL	62%	61%	64%
LR Metro to Charter	N	778	1,066	5,365
	% Black	50%	53%	56%
	% White	39%	28%	29%
	% FRL	50%	58%	55%
	Assessment diff	0.20	-0.01	0.03
LR Metro to Conway, Cabot, Bryant	N	518	578	3,498
	% Black	26%	38%	35%
	% White	63%	53%	57%
	% FRL	59%	67%	62%
	Assessment diff	0.06	0.07	0.08
LR Metro to Other AR Public	N	1,053	1,091	6,625
	% Black	48%	46%	46%
	% White	34%	32%	33%
	% FRL	74%	78%	76%
	Assessment diff	-0.02	-0.04	-0.04
LR Metro to Out-of-system	N	3,742	3,279	21,124
	% Black	52%	47%	49%
	% White	36%	36%	37%
	% FRL	57%	55%	59%
	Assessment diff	-0.07	0.00	-0.02

FRL students were consistently and substantially underrepresented among students switching from LR Metro Area TPSs to charters in this time. In 2009, FRL students were underrepresented by about 15 percentage points, and were still underrepresented by over 11 percentage points in 2014.

Students transferring from LR Metro Area TPSs to charters over this time were achieving at their school’s average before they left. In 2009, students transferring to charters scored 0.20 standard deviations above their peers, while in 2014 they slightly underperformed relative to their peers. Overall, switchers were an average 0.03 standard deviations above their school’s performance.

LR Metro to Surrounding Districts

In 2009, 58% of students in LR Metro Area TPSs were black, but only 26% of students transferring from LR Metro Area TPSs to surrounding districts (Conway, Cabot, Bryant) in that year were black. Black students were underrepresented among this group of students by 32 percentage points. This gap decreased slightly over time, but remains substantial.

White students were highly overrepresented among students transferring from Little Rock Metro Area TPSs to surrounding districts. Across the years examined, 31% of Little Rock Metro Area TPS students were white, while 57% of students transferring to Bryant, Cabot, or Conway were white.

FRL students were overrepresented among students switching from LR Metro Area TPSs to surrounding districts in the years examined, but not as significantly as black students. In 2010, FRL students were underrepresented by 6 percentage points, while in 2014 FRL students were underrepresented by just 2 percentage points.

Students switching to public schools around the LR Metro Area were academically similar to their peers when they left. Across the years examined, students leaving LR Metro Area TPSs for Bryan, Cabot, or Conway scored 0.08 standard deviations above their peers.

LR Metro to Other Arkansas Public Schools

Black students were consistently underrepresented among students transferring from LR Metro Area TPSs to public schools in the state away from Little Rock by around 10 percentage points in each of the years examined year.

White students were generally proportionately represented among students transferring from LR Metro Area TPSs to other public schools in the state across all years examined.

FRL students were overrepresented among students transferring to other areas of the state from LR Metro Area TPSs. In 2009, 74% of students moving elsewhere in the state received FRL, while 65% of students in LR Metro Area TPSs were on FRL. In 2014, that gap decreased slightly to about 10 percentage points.

Students switching to public schools in other areas of the state were performing at their school’s average when they chose to switch sectors. On average, across all years examined, students leaving LR Metro Area TPSs for other public schools in the state were 0.04 standard deviations below their peers, an insubstantial difference.

LR Metro to Out-of-System (Largest Group)

Similar to what we saw when considering students coming from LRSD, black students were underrepresented by about 6 percentage points among students exiting the ArkansasAR public school system entirely in 2009. In 2014, black students were underrepresented by just over 10 percentage points.

Across all years examined, white students were overrepresented among students exiting the Arkansas public school system completely from Little Rock Metro Area TPSs by 6 percentage points.

FRL students were consistently underrepresented among this group of switchers, but the gap varied over time. In 2009, FRL students were underrepresented by 8 percentage points, while in 2013 FRL students were proportionately represented among students exiting the Arkansas public school system entirely from the LR Metro Area. In 2014, however, this discrepancy shot up, with FRL students 13 percentage points underrepresented among student switchers from LR Metro Area TPSs to options outside of the Arkansas public school system.

Academically, students leaving the LR Metro Area for educational options beyond the Arkansas public school system were roughly on par with their peers in the school they exited. Switchers were 0.02 standard deviations below their school average across all years examined.

Students Exiting Charter Schools

Figure 3 presents the enrollment choices that students in Little Rock area charter schools made between the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school years. About 79% of students remained in LR charters in 2014-15, while about 5% transferred to LRSD. A large share—8%—left the Arkansas public school system completely.

Figure 3: LR Area Charter Student Enrollment Decisions, 2013-14 to 2014-15

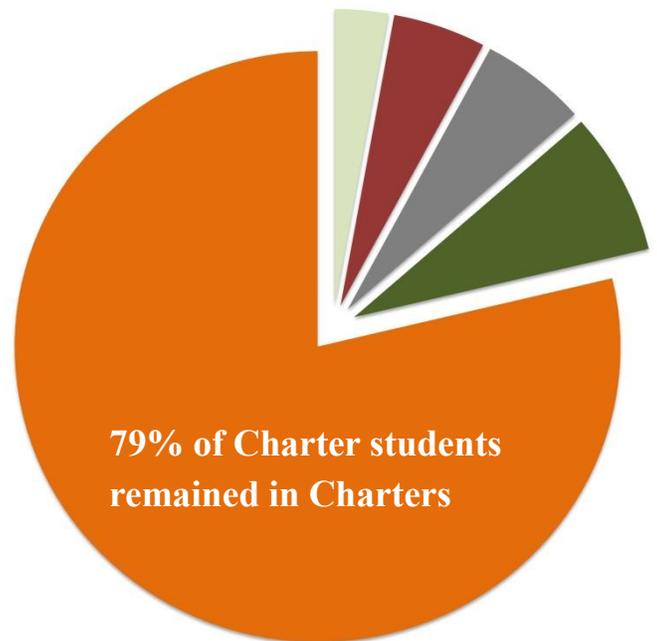


Table 4 presents the demographics of students who chose to leave LR area charter schools for various other options, including LRSD and LR Metro Area TPSs. We compare these demographics to the demographics of the charter sector as a whole to determine whether particular demographic groups were over- or underrepresented among switchers. We also compare students switching from LR charters to all movers during this time. Students switching from charters to LRSD and LR Metro Area TPSs were more likely to be black than all movers, while students switching from charters to other areas of the state or out of the Arkansas public school system completely were less likely to be black. Students leaving charters for other options in the state or options beyond the public school system were also less likely to receive FRL. Students leaving charters for LR Metro Area TPSs received free or reduced price lunch at the same rate as all movers, while students switching from charters to LRSD were more likely to receive FRL.

Charters to LRSD

Black students were highly overrepresented among students transferring from charters to LRSD in each of the years examined. In 2009, black students were overrepresented among students switching from charters to LRSD by over 18 percentage points, and in 2011 black students were overrepresented by a substantial 26 percentage points. In 2014, this gap remained high at over 23 percentage points.

Table 4: Demographic and Academic Information for Students Exiting Little Rock Area Charters, 2009-2014

		Move 2009	Move 2014	Total Movers 2009-2014
All Charter	<i>N</i>	2,119	5,084	28,761
	% Black	40%	47%	45%
	% White	47%	37%	37%
	% FRL	32%	46%	43%
Charter to LRSD	<i>N</i>	168	274	1,489
	% Black	58%	69%	66%
	% White	32%	14%	18%
	% FRL	54%	63%	57%
	Assessment diff	-0.15	0.08	-0.11
Charter to LR Metro	<i>N</i>	296	513	2,716
	% Black	56%	63%	61%
	% White	37%	24%	28%
	% FRL	46%	58%	53%
	Assessment diff	-0.24	-0.04	-0.16
Charter to Other AR Public	<i>N</i>	43	137	613
	% Black	16%	33%	33%
	% White	79%	53%	57%
	% FRL	37%	52%	45%
	Assessment diff	-0.02	0.03	0.01
Charter to Out-of-system	<i>N</i>	183	375	1,759
	% Black	32%	38%	41%
	% White	47%	41%	40%
	% FRL	22%	51%	47%
	Assessment diff	-0.07	0.16	0.02

White students were consistently underrepresented among students moving from Little Rock charters to LRSD in all years examined, generally by over 20 percentage points. Across the years examined, 40% of charter students were white, but only 18% of students transferring from charters to LRSD were white.

FRL students were also highly overrepresented among students moving from charters to LRSD in the years examined. FRL students were overrepresented among switchers by 8 percentage points in 2013, and in all other years were overrepresented by over 10 percentage points among students switching from charters to LRSD.

Academically, students switching from charters to LRSD were performing slightly below their peers in the year they decided to move. Across the years examined, students switching from charters to LRSD scored 0.11 standard deviations below their peers.

Charters to LR Metro

The patterns among students switching from charters to TPSs in the LR Metro Area are similar to those among students switching from charters to LRSD. In all years except 2010, black students were overrepresented among switchers by 14-19 percentage points. In 2010, black students were overrepresented by 3 percentage points.

White students were underrepresented among students leaving charters for Little Rock Metro Area TPSs in each year examined, typically by over 10 percentage points. Across all years examined, white students were underrepresented by 12 percentage points.

FRL students were also overrepresented among students transferring to TPSs in the LR Metro Area. FRL students comprised a disproportionately higher share of switchers than charter enrollees by 5-11 percentage points in each of the years examined in this analysis.

Academically, switchers were slightly below their peers, performing about 0.16 standard deviations below their peers across the years examined.

Charters to Other Arkansas Public

Black students were underrepresented among students switching to other public school options out of the LR area charters in the years examined. In 2009, black students were underrepresented among students leaving the LR area for school by 24 percentage points. In 2015, that disproportionality had decreased by almost half, with black students underrepresented by 13 percentage points.

White students were consistently overrepresented among students leaving Little Rock charters for other public districts in the state. Across all years examined, 57% of students moving from charters to other areas of the state were white, despite only 40% of charter students being white.

FRL students were close to proportionately represented among students leaving charters for other public options in the state, and were overrepresented among switchers by 2 percentage points in 2010 and less than 1 percentage point in 2013. In 2014, however, FRL students were overrepresented in this group by 5 percentage points.

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Students switching from area charters to other parts of the state were academically similar to their peers in the years examined. Across all years, switchers were on average just 0.02 standard deviations above their peers.

Charters to Out-of-System (Largest Group)

Black students were generally underrepresented among students leaving the Arkansas public school system altogether in the years examined, although the differences range from less than 1 percentage in 2013 to 11 percentage points in 2010. In 2014, black students were underrepresented by 8 percentage points among this group.

There is no consistent pattern of over- or under- representation of white students transferring from Little Rock charters to options outside the Arkansas public school system. Across the years examined, 40% of charter students were white, and 40% of students leaving the state public school system from charters were white.

FRL students were underrepresented among students exiting the Arkansas public school system from LR charters in 2009-2011, but were overrepresented among this group from 2012-2014. The gap ranged from less than 1 percentage point in 2010 from area charters to almost 14 percentage points in 2009.

Academically, students exiting the system entirely on average performed as well as their school, although in 2014 switchers were 0.16 standard deviations above their school on a combined measure of math, reading, and science.

Conclusion

The distribution of student movement in the Little Rock area school system was striking. Although a small percentage of students are leaving traditional public schools for area charters, a much larger percentage are leaving for non-public school options and for other traditional public schools. For example, an average of 6% of the LRSD student body leaves the state system entirely, and an additional 6% enroll in its student public schools in other areas of the state. Changes in enrollment and demographics in LRSD are driven more by the 12% of students leaving LRSD for these options than by the 2% of students leaving LRSD for charters.

Students who switch schools tend to be average performers compared to the school they are leaving. However, students who transfer from LR Metro Area TPSs to surrounding districts, and students who leave charters for either LRSD or LR Metro Area TPSs tend to score below their school peers.

Overall, black students were slightly underrepresented among students switching to charters from LRSD or LR Metro Area TPSs, but overrepresented among students making the opposite switch from charter to TPS. Black students from LRSD were disproportionately overrepresented among students transferring to other traditional public school districts in the Little Rock Metro Area, but black students from the metro area as a whole were underrepresented among students who transfer out of the system to nearby districts. Black students were underrepresented among students leaving Arkansas' school system completely.

Students eligible for Free/Reduced lunch were underrepresented among those transferring to charters from TPSs, but overrepresented among those switching from charters to TPSs. FRL students from LR Metro were overrepresented among those switching to other school systems in the state, although not to the ones nearest geographically. FRL students were underrepresented among TPS students who choose to leave the school system entirely, although FRL students from charters were slightly overrepresented. We do not yet know, however, whether these moves had an integrative or segregative impact on the LR system, because we are not taking into account the demographic composition of the school (not sector) each student is leaving and entering.

To continue our series on integration in the Little Rock school system, read our policy briefs on how voluntary student moves affect school-level measures of achievement and demographics, and whether voluntary student moves have an integrative or segregative impact on the schools affected. Also, be sure to read our blog discussing the challenges of studying integration in schools.