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Updated Analysis of Racial Segregation in Pulaski County Charter and Traditional Public Schools

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**UPDATED ANALYSIS OF RACIAL SEGREGATION IN PULASKI
COUNTY CHARTER AND TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

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May 27, 2010

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Executive Summary.....	2
II. Introduction	4
III. Key Questions: Methods & Results	6
1) What are the general demographic characteristics of charter schools as compared to those of the Little Rock School District?	6
2) Are charter schools in Pulaski County more or less segregated than traditional public schools in the Little Rock School District?	8
3) Where do students transferring to charter schools come from, and what are the racial and economic characteristics of these students?	12
4) What impact do transfers to charter schools from the LRSD have on the level of segregation in the Little Rock traditional public school in which these students were previously enrolled?.....	15
5) Are students transferring to charter schools entering into more or less segregated school environments?.....	19
IV. Conclusions.....	26

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this report, we aim to provide a detailed overview of the level of segregation in both charter schools and traditional public schools in the Little Rock School District (LRSD) to provide some context for the types of school environments students experience on a daily basis. We also look at how charter schools in Pulaski County impact the level of integration or segregation in traditional public schools (TPS) in the County, as well as whether or not students entering charter schools are entering into more racially balanced school environments.

While many of the above questions were addressed in our first report released on September 28, 2009, titled “An Analysis of the Impact of Charter Schools on Desegregation Efforts in Little Rock, Arkansas”,¹ we now have access to an additional year of data (2009-10), during which time two new charter schools opened. Thus, we can see if trends that we observed in our first report continue to occur.

The following five questions guided our analyses for this report, and are followed by the conclusions that we obtained from these analyses:

1. *What are the general demographic characteristics of charter schools as compared to those of the Little Rock School District?*
 - Charter schools have shown significant growth in enrollment since 2004-05; conversely, the LRSD total enrollment has remained relatively stable in that same time period.
 - Students enrolled in charter schools are more white than students in the LRSD and Pulaski County TPS (41.8% in charters, 21.8% in LRSD, and 33.0% in Pulaski County TPS). While there are more black students than white students in charter schools, when compared to the LRSD and Pulaski County TPS there are less black students (44.8% in charters, 68.0% in LRSD, and 58.4% in Pulaski County TPS). However, the overall racial composition of charter schools reflects more equal proportions of black and white students than LRSD and Pulaski County schools.
 - There are fewer economically disadvantaged (as measured by FRL eligibility) students in charter schools (38.0%) than in the comparison Pulaski County TPS (63.3%).
2. *Are charter schools in Pulaski County more or less segregated (racially and economically) than traditional public schools in the Little Rock School District?*
 - More black students in charter schools attend school in a hyper-segregated black environment (20.4% in charters and 10.7% in LRSD TPS). Conversely, more minority students in LRSD TPS attend school in a hyper-segregated minority environment (28.8% in charters and 52.4% in LRSD TPS).
 - 26.4% of LRSD students eligible for FRL attend school in hyper-segregated FRL environments compared to none of the charter students.
 - Neither charter schools nor LRSD TPS have racial compositions that are similar to that of Pulaski County. Both differ by roughly 20 percentage points in the percentage of minority students. However, LRSD TPS are more similar with regard to the percentage of students in Pulaski County eligible for FRL.
 - More students in charter schools are enrolled in integrated school environments (40.4%) than their LRSD TPS peers (26.3%).

¹ To access our previous report, please visit the following link:
http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/AER/6_3_An_Analysis_of_the_Impact_of_Charter_Schools_on_Desegregation_Efforts_in_Little_Rock_Arkansas.pdf

3. *Where do students transferring to charter schools come from, and what are the racial and economic characteristics of these students?*
 - Since 2005-06, 31% of students who transferred to charter schools came from the LRSD. The rest were students from other TPS, private schools, other states, or home-schoolers.
 - There are more black students transferring to charters than white students. But when compared to their LRSD peers, students who transferred to charter schools are more white (28.2% in charters, 21.8% in LRSD) and less black (59.8% in charters, 68.0% in LRSD).
 - Similarly, 52.3% of students transferring to charters are eligible for FRL, compared to 68.1% of LRSD students.
 - However, in the past two school years, the percentage of charter transfers eligible for FRL has been 52.2% and 52.3% respectively. This percentage has increased from 16.9% in 2005-06.

4. *What impact do transfers to charter schools from the Little Rock School District have on the level of segregation in the Little Rock traditional public schools in which these students were previously enrolled?*
 - Overall, white students transferring from the LRSD to charter schools tend to leave LRSD TPS that have an above-average percentage of white students. As a result, these transfers likely have a positive impact on the racial balance of the exited LRSD TPS.
 - Similarly, more black students leave schools with above-average percentages of black students; again, it is likely that these transfers overall have a positive impact on the racial balance of the LRSD TPS.
 - Overall, 44.1% of the charter transfers from 2006-07 to 2009-10 involved black students leaving disproportionately black schools or white students leaving disproportionately white schools; 38.3% of the transfers were from schools that were integrated. Thus, it seems reasonable to conclude that the transfers to charters are having a neutral, or even a positive effect on racial integration in LRSD TPS.
 - FRL students also primarily leave LRSD TPS with high percentages of FRL students. These transfers likely have a positive impact on the level of economic integration in the LRSD TPS.

5. *Are students transferring to charter schools entering into more or less segregated school environments?*
 - White students enter into charter schools that have a higher percentage of white students than their previous schools (37.4% to 40.4% in 2009-10); however, the charter schools they entered had a more equal proportion of white and black students.
 - Black students transfer into charter schools with a lower percentage of black students than the LRSD TPS in which they were previously enrolled (70.7% to 67.1% in 2009-10).
 - However, these differences are quite small. Students who transfer to charter schools attend schools that have racial compositions similar to those of the schools they left.
 - All students, both FRL and non-FRL, are more likely to enter into charter schools with substantially fewer FRL students.

II. INTRODUCTION

In September of 2009, the Office for Education Policy (OEP) released a report titled “An Analysis of Charter Schools on Desegregation Efforts in Little Rock, Arkansas.” In this report, we presented data from the 2005 to 2009 schools years for students who transferred to open-enrollment charter schools in Pulaski County from the Little Rock School District (LRSD). The aim of this report was to show what impacts – if any – these transfers were having on the desegregation efforts of the LRSD. The motivation for this report was an ongoing legal debate about how charter schools impact desegregation, in which critics of charter schools argued that these schools lead to greater segregation, whereas charter proponents suggested that there was no necessary link between charters and segregation.

The analysis we used was appropriate because we looked at school-level segregation and at individual student transfers to charter schools, as opposed to looking at the overall racial composition in charter schools as compared to that in traditional public schools. Looking at these student-level transfers (as opposed to the aggregate student characteristics) was optimal, as we were able to quantify and categorize whether or not these transfers were having a harmful or beneficial effect on racial integration in the LRSD.

The primary conclusions derived from our analyses included:

- Neither charter schools nor traditional public schools in the LRSD are particularly well integrated relative to the Pulaski County average (which includes the Little Rock, North Little Rock, and Pulaski County Special School Districts). Overall, there are integrated and segregated charter schools, and the same is true for LRSD traditional public schools.
- However, the student transfers from LRSD to charter schools in Pulaski County actually appear to be helping the LRSD become more racially balanced.
- In other words, more white students are leaving traditional public schools with an above-average white population than traditional public schools with an above-average minority population (thus, there are very few examples of so-called “white flight”). At the same time, minority students generally exit traditional public schools with above-average minority populations as opposed to traditional public schools with a large population of white students. Thus, with both white and minority student transfers, the traditional public schools are actually becoming less segregated as a result of these transfers.

In this report then, we seek to expand on our previous analyses to provide a better understanding of how charter schools impact not only the level of integration/segregation in the schools in which these students were previously enrolled, but also whether or not the students entering charter schools are entering into more racially balanced school environments. We also aim to provide a detailed overview of the level of segregation in both charter schools and traditional public schools in the LRSD to provide some context for the types of school environments students experience on a daily basis. As such, the following five questions will guide our analyses for this updated report:

1. What are the general demographic characteristics of charter schools as compared to those of the Little Rock School District?
2. Are charter schools in Pulaski County more or less segregated than traditional public schools in the Little Rock School District?

3. Where do students transferring to charter schools come from, and what are the racial and economic characteristics of these students?
4. What impact do transfers to charter schools from the Little Rock School District have on the level of segregation in the Little Rock traditional public schools in which these students were previously enrolled?
5. Are students transferring to charter schools entering into more or less segregated school environments? That is, here we ask how the transfers change the racial environments for the students who transfer.

While many of the above questions were addressed in our first report, we now have access to an additional year of data (2009-10), during which time two new charter schools opened. Thus, we can see if trends that we observed in our first report continue to occur. Further, the data we use in this report come from a larger dataset than we had access to in our first set of analyses. For example, in the first report, our data limited us to only look at students in grades 2-9. However, with this updated data, we can now track students in grades 1-12, which will provide a more comprehensive overview of how these transfers impact levels of segregation. For this reason, some of the analyses from the first report which we replicate here may show slightly different numbers; this is due to the larger sample of students in our new dataset.² While the conclusions drawn in this report are unchanged from our previous report (as we will show), we believe that these new figures provide a better picture of the true levels of segregation and integration in Pulaski County schools.

Throughout this report, we will begin each section by asking one of the aforementioned research questions about racial segregation and charter schools. Following each question will be a brief analysis of relevant data, followed by conclusions that can be drawn from these analyses. We will conclude this report with a summary of all our findings, as well as a brief discussion of the implications of our findings.

² Additionally, some of our reported numbers, including total enrollments for districts, differ from those provided by the Arkansas Department of Education; this is because our dataset does not include preschool and kindergarten. However, our new dataset does include 91% of all students enrolled in charter schools during the 2009-10 year (2,902 charter students in our dataset compared to 3,179 reported by the Arkansas Department of Education).

III. KEY QUESTIONS: METHODS & RESULTS

1) What are the general demographic characteristics of charter schools as compared to those of the Little Rock School District?

In this section, we present the general characteristics of charter schools serving Pulaski County and traditional public schools (TPS) in the LRSD. In our first table (Table 1), we show how enrollment has changed in charter schools and the LRSD since 2004-05, and compare the percentage of students enrolled in charter schools to the LRSD total enrollment. These trends show that since 2004-05, charter school enrollment has steadily increased, with noticeable increases in enrollment occurring since 2008-09 (which coincided with the opening of seven new charter schools). During that same time period, the LRSD increased in enrollment in 2006-07 and 2007-08, but its current enrollment is approximately the same as it was in 2004-05. As a result, the total charter enrollment compared to the LRSD total enrollment has increased from 1.6% of the TPS enrollment in 2004-05, to 13.4% as of the current academic year.³ The total charter enrollment of 2,902 in 2009-10 compared to the student population in all of Pulaski County (44,815 students in 2009-10) represents 6.5% of the total Pulaski County enrollment.⁴

Also included in Table 1 is the number of students that transferred from the LRSD to charter schools in Pulaski County since 2004-05 (something we will explore in greater detail in the section dealing with our third research question). We have included this information here to provide context for how many students actually leave the LRSD each year. As we noted earlier, claims have been made that charter schools are impeding the LRSD's desegregation efforts; thus, we believe it is reasonable to show that the percentage of LRSD students that transfer to charter schools is actually quite small as compared to the total enrollment of the LRSD (0.4% in 2004-05 and 1.2% in 2009-10).

³ Comparing the total enrollment of charter schools to the enrollment of the LRSD does provide some context for how charter schools are growing in relation to the LRSD. However, it should be noted that the charter schools in Pulaski County draw students from the North Little Rock and Pulaski County Special School Districts as well. Thus, while charter enrollment is 13.4% of the LRSD enrollment, that does not mean that charter schools enroll 13.4% of LRSD students.

⁴ For this paper, when we refer to students in Pulaski County traditional public schools, we are referring to students in the Little Rock, North Little Rock, and Pulaski County Special School Districts.

Table 1: Charter School Demographics, 2004-05 to 2009-10⁵

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
Total LRSD Enrollment	21,740	21,896	23,826	24,005	22,484	21,618
Total Charter Enrollment	356	444	692	909	2,259	2,902
# of New Charter Students	256	259	367	422	1,589	1,293
# of Students from the LRSD	82	83	103	176	586	266
% of Charter Students transferring from the LRSD	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.7%	2.6%	1.2%
# of New Charter Schools	2	0	0	1	5	2
# of Total Charter Schools	4	4	4	5	10	12
Total Pulaski County Enrollment	45,055	45,271	48,511	49,974	46,584	44,815
% of Charter Students divided by Pulaski County Enrollment	0.8%	1.0%	1.4%	1.8%	4.8%	6.5%

In Table 2, we present racial and economic (free and reduced lunch status (FRL)) demographics for the two most recent school years for three different sectors: charter schools, the TPS in the LRSD, and the TPS in the three school districts in Pulaski County. Overall, charter students do tend to be more white and less black than the LRSD and Pulaski County. Further, there are fewer economically disadvantaged (as measured by FRL eligibility) students in charter schools than in the comparison TPS. However, it is worth noting that while the charter schools are more white and less black, these schools overall have a more equal proportion of black and white students than do the traditional public schools in the LRSD and Pulaski County.

Table 2: Comparison of Charter, LRSD, and Pulaski County Student Demographics, 2008-09 & 2009-10

	2008-09			2009-10		
	Charter	LRSD	Pulaski County*	Charter	LRSD	Pulaski County*
# of Students	2,259	22,484	46,584	2,902	21,618	44,815
% White	40.9%	21.9%	33.5%	41.8%	21.8%	33.0%
% Black	46.9%	68.6%	58.6%	44.8%	68.0%	58.4%
% FRL	39.2%	62.6%	60.9%	38.0%	68.1%	63.3%

*Recall, when we reference Pulaski County, we are referring to the Little Rock, North Little Rock, and Pulaski County Special School Districts

⁵ The Arkansas Virtual Academies are not included in this table, or any subsequent tables in our analyses. The reason for this is that while these charter schools do have a home office in Little Rock, they actually draw a student body from across the state. Thus, we do not view these schools as Pulaski County charter schools.

Conclusions:

- Charter schools have shown significant growth in enrollment since 2004-05; conversely, the LRSD total enrollment has remained relatively stable in that same time period.
- Students enrolled in charter schools are more white than students in the LRSD and Pulaski County TPS (41.8% in charters, 21.8% in LRSD, and 33.0% in Pulaski County TPS). While there are more black students than white students in charter schools, when compared to the LRSD and Pulaski County TPS there are less black students (44.8% in charters, 68.0% in LRSD, and 58.4% in Pulaski County TPS). However, the overall racial composition of charter schools reflects more equal proportions of black and white students than LRSD and Pulaski County schools.
- There are fewer economically disadvantaged (as measured by FRL eligibility) students in charter schools (38.0%) than in the comparison Pulaski County TPS (63.3%).

While these aggregate comparisons again provide an idea of how charter schools compare to area traditional public schools, they do not tell us anything about integration or segregation within individual schools. For example, if charter schools overall were 50% white, it is difficult to draw any conclusions about racial integration from this number. In this situation, there could be six segregated schools that were 100% white, and six other segregated schools that were 100% black, which results in the schools overall being 50% white. Conversely, all twelve schools could be perfectly integrated at 50% and 50% black. Thus, in the sections that follow, we examine data on school-by-school basis, and we consider students that transferred to charters so that we can better understand the relative levels of economic and racial segregation in public charter schools.

Moreover, although charter schools have, for example, fewer FRL students as a percentage of total enrollment, charter students exit from public schools in Pulaski County and from private schools, home schools, etc. Thus, to understand which students are transferring into charters (and assessing the extent to which they are similar to TPS students), we must focus only on those that left TPS in Pulaski County, as we do in the sections that follow.

2) Are charter schools in Pulaski County more or less segregated than traditional public schools in the Little Rock School District?

While Table 2 does provide a general overview of the racial balance of charter schools and TPS in Pulaski County (PC), it does not show whether or not individual schools are racially balanced. As such, because this report benefits from school-level and student-level data, we can begin to ascertain the level of segregation/integration in individual schools in both the charter and traditional public sector.

Before we present the results of this analysis, it seems important to reiterate a previous point from our first report on the impact of charter schools on segregation.⁶ There are certainly charter schools in Pulaski County that are segregated, but there are also segregated LRSD TPS as well. For example, Dreamland Academy (a charter school located in Little Rock) is 90.6% black; similarly, Stephens Elementary (a LRSD TPS) is 95.7% black. Both sectors also have schools that have similar proportions of black and white students; eStem Elementary Charter School is 49.9% black and 40.7% white, while Mann Magnet Middle School is 50.7% black and 40.1% white. Simply put, there are examples of both integrated and segregated schools in each sector.

⁶ To access the previous report, please use the following link:

http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/AER/6_3_An_Analysis_of_the_Impact_of_Charter_Schools_on_Desegregation_Efforts_in_Little_Rock_Arkansas.pdf

This, in fact, is the problem with the public discussion of this question. Critics of charter schools are certainly able to identify a charter school or two with student enrollments that are either disproportionately white or black. However, what this sort of discussion neglects is that there are, of course, many examples of TPS that are also disproportionately black or white. Thus, the more important policy question here is whether or not charter schools, overall, are systematically more segregated or integrated than TPS, and how these schools are influencing segregation in TPS in Pulaski County.

This question was in fact raised in a recent legal filing by the LRSD, in which the district alleges that some existing charter schools “promised” in the charter applications to serve a certain demographic makeup and have not lived up to those promises. This report does not address this question as we do not attempt to look at single examples. Rather, our goal in this analysis is to consider, in a systematic and comprehensive way, the question of how the opening of charter schools in Pulaski County has influenced the level of segregation that Little Rock students face. This, we believe, is the relevant policy question. To address this question, we conduct analyses aimed at three broad questions:

- What is the level of racial segregation that exists in public charter schools in Pulaski County as compared to that which exists in the traditional public schools in the LRSD?
- How have the student transfers from LRSD TPS to charters affected the racial composition in the LRSD TPS that the exiting students previously attended? By addressing this question, we can observe whether or not these students leaving contribute to increased segregation in the exiting LRSD TPS.
- Have the students transferring from LRSD TPS to charters entered more integrated or more segregated school environments? This question allows us to determine if these transfers have a beneficial impact on the transferring student.

Thus, in this section, we begin to explore in a more systematic way the racial balance that students experience in charter and traditional public schools to determine the extent to which these school environments are integrated or segregated.

First, in Table 3, we compare the number and percentage of students in charter schools and LRSD TPS that attend school in a hyper-segregated environment. For these purposes, a school is considered hyper-segregated if one racial or economic group represents 90% or more of the entire student population.⁷ For example, Stephens Elementary (a LRSD TPS) is 95.7% black, so this school would be classified as hyper-segregated black and hyper-segregated minority. Similarly, Little Rock Preparatory Academy (an open-enrollment charter) is 96.9% minority, making it a hyper-segregated minority school. In total, 21 of the 46 total LRSD TPS were considered hyper-segregated (with regard to race) in 2009-10, compared to 4 of the 15 charter schools.⁸

For these purposes, we look only at, for example, how many black students attend schools that are hyper-segregated black (similarly for white, minority, and poor students). In this way, we can determine the extent to which students attend school in environments in which 90% or more of the student body is similar to them. Or, in other words, schools in which these students are not exposed to any type of racial

⁷ There is no agreed upon definition of hyper-segregation. We chose 90% here because a recent, widely disseminated report from the Civil Rights Project used this criterion in defining hyper-segregation. This report can be found at the following link: <http://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/news/pressreleases/CRP-Choices-Without-Equity-report.pdf>

⁸ Of the 21 hyper-segregated LRSD TPS, 5 were hyper-segregated black, and all 21 were hyper-segregated minority (since a school would necessarily have to be hyper-segregated minority if it were hyper-segregated black). Further, of the 4 hyper-segregated charter schools, all 4 were hyper-segregated minority and 3 were hyper-segregated black. None of the charter schools or LRSD TPS were hyper-segregated white.

or economic diversity. In this case, there were no hyper-segregated white charter schools or LRSD TPS, so we restrict this comparison to only black, minority, and high/low poverty (as measured by FRL eligibility) students. This comparison shows that black students in charter schools do tend to enroll in charter schools that are more hyper-segregated black than their peers in LRSD TPS (20.4% for black charter students compared to 10.7% of black LRSD students). However, the percentage of minority students enrolled in hyper-segregated minority schools is much greater in LRSD TPS, where over half (52.4%) of LRSD minority students are enrolled in hyper-segregated minority schools, compared to 28.8% of charter students. Further, 26.4% of FRL-eligible students in the LRSD attend school in hyper-segregated high-poverty environments, compared to 0% of charter students.

Table 3: Percentage of Race & Poverty-Specific Charter and LRSD Students in Hyper-Segregated Schools, 2009-10

	Hyper-Segregated White (90%+)	Hyper-Segregated Black (90%+)	Hyper-Segregated Minority (90%+)	Hyper-Segregated High-Poverty (90%+)	Hyper-Segregated Low-Poverty (90%+)
Charter Students					
<i># of Students in Hyper-Seg.</i>	0	265	486	0	0
<i>Total # of Students</i>	1,214	1,300	1,688	1,103	1,799
<i>% of Students in Hyper-Seg.</i>	0.0%	20.4%	28.8%	0.0%	0.0%
LRSD Students					
<i># of Students in Hyper-Seg.</i>	0	1,578	8,863	3,889	56
<i>Total # of Students</i>	4,706	14,709	16,912	14,718	6,900
<i>% of Students in Hyper-Seg.</i>	0.0%	10.7%	52.4%	26.4%	0.8%

In addition to identifying the number and types of students enrolled in hyper-segregated schools, we also looked at how closely, on average, schools in both the TPS and charter sectors reflected the overall racial and economic composition of PC. In this case, we looked specifically at how far charter schools and LRSD TPS deviated from the overall percentage of minority and FRL-eligible students in PC. The rationale for using the PC average as our benchmark, as opposed to, for instance, the Little Rock percent minority or FRL, is because charter schools are able to draw students without school boundary restrictions. As a result, many of the students enrolled in charter schools come not only from LRSD TPS, but also from schools in North Little Rock School District (NLRSD) and Pulaski County Special School District (PCSSD). Thus, we choose to define schools as racially integrated based on the extent to which their students “look like” their peers throughout the wider community. Thus, it seems appropriate to use the overall County average as our measure of comparison, instead of the LRSD average, even though many of these charter schools are actually located in Little Rock.⁹

In practice, then, to consider the relative integration of schools, we compared the percentage of minority students within each school to that within Pulaski County (67% minority in 2009-10). Charter students,

⁹ Moreover, because residential boundaries are often drawn such that economic segregation naturally results (e.g. inner cities are often home to more disadvantaged individuals while suburbs often house the more affluent), we did not want to categorize a school as integrated if it simply “mirrored” municipal areas that were themselves heavily segregated.

on average, enrolled in schools that were 19.1% different than the overall composition of PC. Similarly, students in LRSD TPS enrolled in schools that were 20.6% different than the percentage of minority students in PC (see Table 4). Students in LR TPS were more likely to be enrolled in schools that served above average numbers of minority students, while students in charters were more likely to be in schools that served below average numbers of minority students.

Table 4: Average Distance from the Pulaski County % Minority Average for Charter and LRSD Students, 2009-10

	Charter Students	LRSD Students
Overall Absolute Distance from the Pulaski County Minority Average	± 19.1%	± 20.6%
Number of Students Above the Pulaski County Average	503	14,454
Average Distance for Students Above the Pulaski County Average	+29.6%	+23.8%
Number of Students Below the Pulaski County Average	2,399	7,164
Average Distance for Students Below the Pulaski County Average	-16.9%	-14.2%

*The Pulaski County percent minority in 2009-10 was 67.0%

When we compared the average absolute difference for charter and LRSD students to the PC FRL average, we found that charter students, on average, enrolled in schools that were further away from the PC average as compared to LRSD students, 31.1% to 22.1% respectively (see Table 5). Again, students in LRSD TPS were more likely to be enrolled in schools that served above average numbers of FRL students, while students in charters were more likely to be in schools that served below average numbers of FRL students.

Table 5: Average Distance from the Pulaski County % FRL Average for Charter and LRSD Students, 2009-10

	Charter Students	LRSD Students
Overall Absolute Distance from the Pulaski County FRL Average	± 31.1%	± 22.1%
Number of Students Above the Pulaski County Average	475	14,164
Average Distance for Students Above the Pulaski County Average	+17.8%	+20.5%
Number of Students Below the Pulaski County Average	2,427	7,454
Average Distance for Students Below the Pulaski County Average	-33.7%	-25.1%

*The Pulaski County percent FRL in 2009-10 was 63.3%

For our final comparison of the racial composition of the different schools, we looked at the percentage of students enrolled in integrated schools. Conceptually, we consider a school racially integrated if the racial composition of the school is similar to that of the broader community; as we have indicated above, we use Pulaski County as our proxy for the broader community. For these purposes, we have defined a school as being “integrated” if the percentage of minority students in the school fell within +/- 10% of the PC average. Recall the percentage of minority students in PC at the start of the 2009-10 school year was 67.0%; in this case, any school that had a percentage of minority students between 57.0% and 77.0% was considered integrated. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 6, and show that a higher percentage of charter students attend school in an integrated environment as compared to their LRSD TPS peers. In 2009-10, 40.4% of charter students were enrolled in integrated schools, compared to 26.3% of LRSD students.

Table 6: Percent of Charter and LRSD Students in Integrated Schools (+/- 10% County Avg.), 2009-10

	Charter Students	LRSD Students
# of Students in Integrated Schools (57.0%-77.0% Minority)	1,172	5,683
Total # of Students	2,902	21,618
% of Students in Integrated Schools	40.4%	26.3%

Conclusions:

- More black students in charter schools attend school in a hyper-segregated black environment (20.4% in charters and 10.7% in LRSD TPS). Conversely, more minority students in LRSD TPS attend school in a hyper-segregated minority environment (28.8% in charters and 52.4% in LRSD TPS).
- 26.4% of LRSD students eligible for FRL attend school in hyper-segregated FRL environments compared to none of the charter students.
- Neither charter schools nor LRSD TPS have racial compositions that are similar to that of Pulaski County. Both differ by roughly 20 percentage points in the percentage of minority students. However, LRSD TPS are more similar with regard to the percentage of students in Pulaski County eligible for FRL.
- More students in charter schools are enrolled in integrated school environments (40.4%) than their LRSD TPS peers (26.3%).
- Overall, the story is mixed. By some measures TPS schools are better integrated while charter schools are better integrated by other measures.

3) Where do students transferring to charter schools come from, and what are the racial and economic characteristics of these students?

In the previous two sections, we have looked at the school-by-school characteristics of charter schools and TPS in PC, and we found no clear patterns. That is, charter schools were more likely to be hyper-

segregated black than were LRSD TPS, but LRSD TPS were more likely to be hyper-segregated minority. However, in this section (and the section that follows), we can provide some insight into the question of how these charter transfers affected the demographics of the LRSD TPS that the students left. We do this by looking at the characteristics of individual students who transfer to charter schools.

These analyses are important, as we can begin to determine what types of students in recent years have made the choice to enroll in a charter school. In this way, we can carefully consider some of the criticisms often leveled at charter schools, such as the possibility that charter schools are havens for “white flight” or are only enrolling the most affluent students.

To begin these analyses, we determined the different types and locations of schools from which charter students transferred. In Table 7, we present this information for the current and previous school year, as well as for all transfers since the 2005-06 school year, denoting the percentage of students coming from each school type. Overall, approximately one-third of the first-year charter transfers were students who were not previously enrolled in Arkansas public schools. Thus, these students were either home-schooled, enrolled in private schools, or moved from schools outside of Arkansas. Further, approximately one-quarter of first-year charter students came from TPS in the NLRSD or PCSSD. Students previously enrolled in TPS in the LRSD accounted for 36.9% (586 students) of the charter transfers in 2008-09, and 20.6% (266 students) of transfers in 2009-10.¹⁰

Perhaps the key conclusion to be drawn from these figures, in the context of the current debate, is that fewer than half (and fewer than a third in 2009-10) of the charter students come from TPS in the LRSD. Thus, it is very important when considering the impact of charters on LRSD that we focus only on these students and not on the entire enrollment of Pulaski County charters. To put the LRSD transfers numbers into perspective, as we noted earlier, the total number of students who transferred out of the LRSD represents 2.6% and 1.2% of the total LRSD enrollment for the 2008-09 and 2009-10 school year respectively.

¹⁰ The larger percentage of LRSD transfers in 2008-09 is likely a result of four new charter schools that opened in Little Rock during that school year: eStem Elementary, eStem Middle School, eStem High School, and Covenant Keepers College Preparatory Charter.

Table 7: Number and Type of First-Year Pulaski County Charter Enrollments, 2008-09 & 2009-10

	2008-09	2009-10	2005-06 to 2009-10
Enrollments from the LRSD	586	266	1,296
<i>% of Transfers</i>	36.9%	20.6%	31.0%
Enrollments from NLRSD or PCCSD	397	366	1,033
<i>% of Transfers</i>	25.0%	28.3%	24.7%
Enrollments from other charter schools	54	157	230
<i>% of Transfers</i>	3.4%	12.1%	5.5%
Enrollments from other AR public schools	31	14	103
<i>% of Transfers</i>	2.0%	1.1%	2.5%
Out of state, private school, home school, etc.	521	490	1,524
<i>% of Transfers</i>	32.8%	37.9%	36.4%
Total Charter Transfers	1,589	1,293	4,186

Because much of the ongoing debate focuses on the relationship between charter schools and the LRSD, we now look more closely at the charter students who transferred from the LRSD. The demographics for students that transferred from the LRSD to charter schools in 2008-09 and 2009-10 are presented in Table 8. For both school years, students who transferred were, on average, more white and less black than the overall student population in the LRSD. These transferring students were also less likely to be eligible for FRL than were their LRSD peers.

With regard to the FRL percentage for students transferring to charters, it is worth noting several differences between this report and our previous report on this topic. First, in the previous report, we listed the FRL percentage for transferring students in 2008-09 as 44.0% compared to 52.2% in this report. The reason for this difference is due to us using a more complete dataset (encompassing more grades) than we were able to access for our previous report.¹¹ Thus, it seems reasonable to conclude that the percentages presented here are more accurate than those previously reported.

Moreover, while students who initially enrolled in charter schools were considerably more affluent than their LRSD peers (likely due to the location of charter schools at the time), trends over the last three academic years suggest that charter schools now enroll equal proportions of FRL eligible and non-eligible students.

¹¹ For this report, our dataset includes students in grades K-12, compared to only grades 2-9 in our previous report.

Table 8: Demographics of Students Transferring from the LRSD to Charter Schools, 2008-09 & 2009-10

	2008-09		2009-10	
	Charter Transfers	LRSD	Charter Transfers	LRSD
Number of Students	586	22,484	266	21,618
% White	31.2%	21.9%	28.2%	21.8%
% Black	60.8%	68.6%	59.8%	68.0%
% FRL	52.2%	62.6%	52.3%	68.1%

Conclusions:

- Since 2005-06, 31% of students who transferred to charter schools came from the LRSD. The rest were students from other TPS, private schools, other states, or home-schoolers.
- There are more black students transferring to charters than white students. But when compared to their LRSD peers, students who transferred to charter schools are more white (28.2% in charters, 21.8% in LRSD) and less black (59.8% in charters, 68.0% in LRSD).
- Similarly, 52.3% of students transferring to charters are eligible for FRL, compared to 68.1% of LRSD students.
- However, in the past two school years, the percentage of charter transfers eligible for FRL has been 52.2% and 52.3% respectively. This percentage has increased from 16.9% in 2005-06.

4) What impact do transfers to charter schools from the LRSD have on the level of segregation in the Little Rock traditional public school in which these students were previously enrolled?

In this section, we attempt to look at the impact these charter schools have on the desegregation efforts of the LRSD. As noted earlier, there are a number of vocal critics of charter schools who have suggested that charters may be negatively affecting the racial and economic balance of TPS in the LRSD. The theory behind this position is that charter schools draw the white and affluent students from the LRSD, which leaves the remaining traditional public schools highly segregated with poor and minority students. Obviously, if this were occurring, this would certainly be cause for concern, if the perceived benefit of charter schools for a small percentage of students were having a detrimental impact on the educational opportunities for the remaining majority of students.

To that end, we first identified all students in our dataset who transferred to charter schools from the LRSD during the past four academic years. For both white and black students, we then identified which transfers would likely have a positive effect on the racial balance of the exiting LRSD TPS, those transfers that would have no effect, and those transfers that would have a harmful effect on the exiting TPS and the remaining students in the school.

Of course, the “devil” in the details here revolves around how we define positive effects, harmful effects, and null effects. Our strategy is to categorize transfers as beneficial if they move the racial composition of

the TPS closer to the LRSD average. For these purposes, we identified beneficial transfers as those, for example, where a white student left a school with an above-average white population – in this situation, the white student leaving the TPS results in a school environment that has a lower percentage of white students (thus bringing it closer to the LRSD average). Conversely, a harmful transfer would be one where a white student left a school with a below-average percentage of white students – in this situation, the white student leaving necessarily leaves the school more segregated non-white. A transfer that would have no impact – either harmful or beneficial – would be when a student transfers from a school that is already integrated, as the impact of a student leaving an integrated school on the racial balance of the exiting school is likely going to be minimal.¹²

In any event, regardless of how we define the transfers, we do believe it is worthwhile to describe the types of schools from which the charter students transfer. Thus, in Table 9, we show the types of transfers to charter schools from the LRSD that occurred from the 2006-07 to the 2009-10 school year. For white students, across all years, the majority of transfers that occurred were ones where the white student left a school with an above-average percentage of white students. As a result, these student transfers actually helped make the school look more like the district as a whole with respect to the percentage of white students.¹³ Further, across all years, the incidence of white students transferring out of schools that were predominately non-white (i.e. “white flight”) was virtually non-existent. While there is some concern over any white students leaving the district, this is less important when these students leave disproportionately white TPS. Moreover, the number of white transfers is quite small. For example, at the start of the 2009-10 school year, there were 5,644 white students in the district, only 71 of whom transferred to charters (or 1.3% of the total population of white students).

The percentage of black students leaving above-average black schools (transfers that are beneficial for the integration of the LRSD TPS) has also exceeded the percentage of transfers from below-average black schools (transfers that are harmful to the exited school) for each of the past four school years, though to a lesser degree than white student transfers. Further, the percentage of black student transfers compared to white student transfers has increased from 51.7% of the total transfers in 2006-07 to 68.4% in the current school year. This rise in black student transfers shows that black students have increasingly taken advantage of the opportunity to transfer to charter schools compared to their white student peers. A summary of all white and black student transfers to charter schools from the LRSD is presented in Table 10.

¹² For the purposes of this report, we have defined a school as being “integrated” if the percentage of black/white students in the school falls within +/- 10% of the LRSD average. A school then would have an above-average or below-average percentage of black/white students if it exceeded our 10% boundary. For example, the LRSD was 21.7% white and 68.5% black in 2008-09. When looking specifically at transfers of white students, a school with 11.7%-31.7% white students would be defined as an integrated school, with a percentage of white students greater than 31.7% considered an above-average white school, and less than 11.7% considered a below-average white school.

¹³ It certainly could be argued that simply looking like the district as a whole (i.e. 21.7% white) does not necessarily equate to being integrated. Rather, it might be ideal if all schools had a racial balance that was equally comprised of the various racial groups. However, because of the overall racial composition of the district, achieving some ideal (say, 50%-50%, or 33%-33%-33%) balance is impossible. Thus, based on the overall numbers of white and non-white students in the district, we would instead argue that the ideal composition of each individual school is one that reflects the overall racial composition of the district or of the County.

Table 9: Impact of Student Transfers to Charter Schools from the LRSD on the LRSD TPS, 2006-07 to 2009-10

Type of Transfers	2006-07		2007-08		2008-09		2009-10	
	# of Students	% of Transfers	# of Students	% of Transfers	# of Students	% of Transfers	# of Students	% of Transfers
White Students Leaving:								
<i>Above-Avg. White Schools</i>	31	34.8%	32	22.5%	88	17.7%	48	21.4%
<i>Integrated Schools*</i>	9	10.1%	13	9.2%	74	14.9%	21	9.4%
<i>Below-Avg. White Schools</i>	3	3.4%	1	0.7%	11	2.2%	2	0.9%
Black Students Leaving:								
<i>Above-Avg. Black Schools</i>	18	20.2%	33	23.2%	104	20.9%	66	29.5%
<i>Integrated Schools*</i>	13	14.6%	43	30.3%	141	28.3%	51	22.8%
<i>Below-Avg. Black Schools</i>	15	16.9%	20	14.1%	80	16.1%	36	16.1%
Total Transfers	89		142		498		224	

*Integrated is defined as within +/- 10% of the LRSD average

Table 10: Summary of Overall Impact of Student Transfers to Charter Schools from the LRSD on the Racial Demographics of LRSD TPS, 2006-07 to 2009-10

Type of Transfers	2006-07 to 2009-10	
	# of Students	% of Transfers
White Students Leaving:		
<i>Above-Avg. White Schools</i>	199	20.9%
<i>Integrated Schools</i>	117	12.3%
<i>Below-Avg. White Schools</i>	17	1.8%
Black Students Leaving:		
<i>Above-Avg. Black Schools</i>	221	23.2%
<i>Integrated Schools</i>	248	26.0%
<i>Below-Avg. Black Schools</i>	151	15.8%
Total Transfers	953	

It is also important to consider the socioeconomic characteristics of students leaving the LRSD and transferring to charter schools, and what effect these transfers have on the economic balance of the LRSD TPS. To do this, we looked at individual student transfers from the LRSD in a manner similar to our analysis of race-specific transfers. For both FRL eligible and non-eligible students, we looked at transfers where FRL students left high poverty schools (or non-FRL students left low poverty schools), transfers from integrated schools (as defined by +/- 10% of the LRSD FRL average), and transfers by FRL students from low poverty schools (or non-FRL students from high poverty schools).

Transfers of the first type would be beneficial to the exiting LRSD TPS, as an FRL student leaving a high poverty school (one comprised of a majority of FRL eligible students) would necessarily bring that school closer to the district average (similarly with non-FRL students leaving low poverty schools). Conversely, transfers by FRL students from low poverty schools or non-FRL students from high poverty schools would leave the exiting LRSD TPS more economically segregated.

In Table 11, we show the types of transfers that occurred by FRL and non-FRL students from 2006-07 to 2009-10. This analysis shows different trends for FRL and non-FRL students. For example, the majority of the transfers each year by FRL students (with the exception of 2006-07 to a small degree) were transfers from high poverty schools. As a result, these transfers actually have a beneficial impact on the LRSD TPS – these schools are less economically segregated as a result of FRL student transfers.

However, for non-FRL students, there were no transfers that we would categorize as beneficial to the LRSD TPS. For these students, the overwhelming majority of these transfers were from schools that were economically integrated; as we noted before, transfers from integrated schools are not likely going to have a significant impact – positive or negative – on the exiting LRSD TPS. A summary of all FRL and non-FRL student transfers from the LRSD to charter schools since 2006-07 is presented in Table 12.

Table 11: Impact of Student Transfers to Charter Schools from the LRSD on the LRSD TPS (by FRL Status), 2006-07 to 2009-10

Type of Transfers	2006-07		2007-08		2008-09		2009-10	
	# of Students	% of Trans.	# of Students	% of Tran.	# of Students	% of Trans.	# of Students	% of Trans.
FRL Students Leaving:								
<i>High Poverty Schools</i>	9	8.7%	56	34.8%	145	26.7%	75	29.3%
<i>Integrated Schools*</i>	11	10.7%	15	9.3%	101	18.6%	41	16.0%
<i>Low Poverty Schools</i>	5	4.9%	9	5.6%	35	6.4%	16	6.3%
Non-FRL Students Leaving:								
<i>Low Poverty Schools</i>	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<i>Integrated Schools*</i>	64	62.1%	66	41.0%	214	39.4%	114	44.5%
<i>High Poverty Schools</i>	14	13.6%	15	9.3%	48	8.8%	10	3.9%
Total Transfers	103		161		543		256	

*Integrated is defined as within +/- 10% of the LRSD average

Table 12: Summary of Overall Impact of Student Transfers to Charter Schools from the LRSD on the FRL Percentage of LRSD TPS, 2006-07 to 2009-10

Type of Transfers	2006-07 to 2009-10	
	# of Students	% of Transfers
FRL Students Leaving:		
<i>High Poverty Schools</i>	285	26.8%
<i>Integrated Schools*</i>	168	15.8%
<i>Low Poverty Schools</i>	65	6.1%
Non-FRL Students Leaving:		
<i>Low Poverty Schools</i>	0	0.0%
<i>Integrated Schools*</i>	458	43.1%
<i>High Poverty Schools</i>	87	8.2%
Total Transfers	1,063	

Conclusions:

- Overall, white students transferring from the LRSD to charter schools tend to leave LRSD TPS that have an above-average percentage of white students. As a result, these transfers likely have a positive impact on the racial balance of the exited LRSD TPS.
- Similarly, more black students leave schools with above-average percentages of black students; again, it is likely that these transfers overall have a positive impact on the racial balance of the LRSD TPS.
- Overall, 44.1% of the charter transfers from 2006-07 to 2009-10 involved black students leaving disproportionately black schools or white students leaving disproportionately white schools; 38.3% of the transfers were from schools that were integrated. Thus, it seems reasonable to conclude that the transfers to charters are having a neutral, or even a positive effect on racial integration in LRSD TPS.
- FRL students also primarily leave LRSD TPS with high percentages of FRL students. These transfers likely have a positive impact on the level of economic integration in the LRSD TPS.

5) Are students transferring to charter schools entering into more or less segregated school environments?

In the prior section, we considered how the transfers influenced the racial and economic environments of the students remaining in the LRSD TPS. Here, we ask how the transfers change the environments for the students who transfer to charter schools. Simply put, we ask: Do the students who transfer to charters enter into schools that were more or less segregated than the schools they left?

To address this question, we categorized all student transfers (including black, white, FRL, and non-FRL students) based on the characteristics of the LRSD TPS in which they were previously enrolled and the

charter school into which they moved. In this way, we can determine if these students moved to environments that were more or less integrated than their previous school.

In Table 13, we show the types of transfers that occurred for white students over the past four academic years. In this table, we group these transfers first by the characteristics of the LRSD TPS in which they were previously enrolled (above-average white schools, integrated schools, and below-average white schools) as well as the characteristics of the charter schools to which they transferred (above-average white or below-average white). Here again, we define above-average or below-average based on the demographics of the LRSD for each school year. Further, we also include at the bottom of Table 13 how many transfers resulted in the student entering a school closer to the LRSD average (more integrated), and how many transfers moved the student away from the LRSD average (more segregated).

As Table 13 shows, nearly all of the white students that left above-average white LRSD TPS over the last four years have also entered into above-average white charters (194 such transfers since 2006-07). Because these students were already in segregated white schools, there is no resulting positive or negative effect on these students: they moved from a segregated environment to a segregated environment, or an environment that was no different than their prior school. White students transferring from integrated LRSD TPS to charter schools also entered into predominately white schools in the majority of instances (109 since 2006-07); these transfers are likely less beneficial for the students, since they are moving into more segregated school environments. Overall there were very few white student transfers from below-average white schools, but these students generally also entered into above-average white schools.

Table 13: Impact of White Student Transfers to Charter Schools from the LRSD on the Transferring White Student, 2006-07 to 2009-10

Types of Transfers	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	Total
Transfers from Above-Avg. White Schools:					
<i>To Above-Avg. White Schools</i>	31	32	83	48	198
<i>To Below-Avg. White Schools</i>	0	0	1	0	1
Transfers from Integrated Schools:					
<i>To Above-Avg. White Schools</i>	9	12	68	20	113
<i>To Below-Avg. White Schools</i>	0	1	2	1	4
Transfers from Below-Avg. White Schools:					
<i>To Above-Avg. White Schools</i>	3	1	9	1	15
<i>To Below-Avg. White Schools</i>	0	0	1	1	2

In Table 14, we present a summary of black student transfers from LRSD TPS to charters using the same criteria outlined in the prior table. For these students, there is more variation in the demographic characteristic for the types of charter environments they enter. For example, since 2006-07, black students who leave schools with an above-average population of black students entered into more below-average black schools than above-average black schools (125 and 96 transfers respectively). As was the case with white students, there is no impact – positive or negative – for the students that leave above-average black schools and enter into above-average black schools; the peer environments are the same. However, for the 125 students that transferred to below-average black schools, these students are experiencing new peer environments. While it is difficult to say if this is beneficial for the students, these are instances where

students are moving from schools where they are the segregated majority, and entering into a school with more students from different racial backgrounds.

Black students who leave integrated schools enter into above-average (128 transfers) and below-average black schools (120 transfers) at approximately the same rate. Further, the majority of students leaving below-average black LRSD TPS enter into charter schools that similarly have a below-average black population.

Table 14: Impact of Black Student Transfers to Charter Schools from the LRSD on the Transferring Black Student, 2006-07 to 2009-10

Types of Transfers	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	Total
Transfers from Above-Avg. Black Schools:					
<i>To Above-Avg. Black Schools</i>	0	25	29	42	96
<i>To Below-Avg. Black Schools</i>	18	8	75	24	125
Transfers from Integrated Schools:					
<i>To Above-Avg. Black Schools</i>	0	38	55	35	128
<i>To Below-Avg. Black Schools</i>	13	5	86	16	120
Transfers from Below-Avg. Black Schools:					
<i>To Above-Avg. Black Schools</i>	0	7	9	10	26
<i>To Below-Avg. Black Schools</i>	15	13	71	26	125

In Tables 15 and 16, we look at these same types of transfers for FRL and non-FRL students. First, for FRL students transferring from high poverty LRSD TPS (above average percentage of FRL students when compared to the LRSD average), we again see variation in the demographic characteristics of the charter schools to which these students transfer. For example, 177 of students transferring from high poverty schools entered into charter schools that also had a high percentage of FRL students. Conversely, 108 FRL students leaving high poverty LRSD TPS entered into low poverty charter schools. In the former example, there was no difference in the school environments with regard to poverty, so there was likely no positive or negative impact of the transfer. However, in the latter example, these students moved into environments that were less segregated with regard to poverty; it seems reasonable to conclude that these students benefitted from transferring to a charter school.

FRL students in both economically integrated and low poverty LRSD TPS primarily transferred into low poverty charter schools. Overall, more of the student transfers (309 to 209) resulted in FRL students entering into charter schools with a percentage of FRL students further away from the LRSD average.

For non-FRL students (Table 16), regardless of the demographics of the LRSD TPS they left (whether it was a high poverty, low poverty, or integrated school) the majority of these students entered into charter schools with low percentages of FRL students.

Table 15: Impact of FRL Student Transfers to Charter Schools from the LRSD on the Transferring FRL Student, 2006-07 to 2009-10

Types of Transfers	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	Total
Transfers from High Poverty Schools:					
<i>To High Poverty Schools</i>	0	48	70	59	177
<i>To Low Poverty Schools</i>	9	8	75	16	108
Transfers from Econ. Integrated Schools:					
<i>To High Poverty Schools</i>	0	9	17	12	38
<i>To Low Poverty Schools</i>	11	6	84	29	130
Transfers from Low Poverty Schools:					
<i>To High Poverty Schools</i>	0	3	1	6	10
<i>To Low Poverty Schools</i>	5	6	34	10	55

Table 16: Impact of Non-FRL Student Transfers to Charter Schools from the LRSD on the Transferring Non-FRL Student, 2006-07 to 2009-10

Types of Transfers	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	Total
Transfers from High Poverty Schools:					
<i>To High Poverty Schools</i>	0	10	9	6	25
<i>To Low Poverty Schools</i>	14	5	39	4	62
Transfers from Econ. Integrated Schools:					
<i>To High Poverty Schools</i>	0	0	5	3	8
<i>To Low Poverty Schools</i>	23	22	122	53	220
Transfers from Low Poverty Schools:					
<i>To High Poverty Schools</i>	0	1	2	1	4
<i>To Low Poverty Schools</i>	41	43	85	57	226

Finally, to summarize what we presented in the previous four tables, we look at the actual demographics of the charter schools to which these students transfer, as well as the LRSD TPS they left (see Table 17 and Table 18). For these purposes, we looked at the racial composition of current and previous schools separately for black, white, and minority students, as well as the economic composition of schools for FRL and non-FRL students. In this way, we were able to compare the demographics of the new charter school to the exited LRSD TPS, to determine if a student's new school environment is more or less integrated with respect to race and poverty status than his or her previous school.

Overall, in the current and previous school year, black students transferring from the LRSD to charters entered into school environments that had a lower percentage of black students (and consequently, more white students) than their previous school. In other words, black students transferred into charter schools

with a more equal balance of white and black peers than their previous school. The same is true for all minority students; the school they transferred into had a more equitable balance of white and minority students than the LRSD TPS they left, though less pronounced in the 2009-10 school year.¹⁴

For white students transferring to charter schools, we see the opposite occurring: white students tend to transfer into charter schools with a lower percentage of black/minority students and a greater percentage of white students. However, this is not necessarily indicative of a move into a racially isolated all-white environment. In fact, the distribution of white and minority students in the charter schools into which white students move was actually more evenly distributed than the LRSD TPS they previously attended. For example, in 2008-09 white students left LRSD TPS that were 35.3% white and 64.7% minority, and entered into charter schools that were 40.9% white and 59.1% minority. It is also important to note, that each of these changes are less than 10 percentage points.

Table 17: Charter and LRSD Peer Environments for Charter Movers, by Racial and Ethnic Background of Student (%), 2008-09 & 2009-10¹⁵

	2008-09			2009-10		
	Black Students	White Students	Minority Students	Black Students	White Students	Minority Students
Charter school that black students attend	61.5%	28.5%	71.6%	67.1%	19.7%	80.3%
LR school that black students attended	70.2%	19.6%	80.4%	70.7%	17.4%	82.6%
Difference	-8.7%	8.9%	-8.8%	-3.6%	2.3%	-2.3%
Charter school that white students attend	47.8%	40.9%	59.1%	40.3%	40.4%	59.6%
LR school that white students attended	56.2%	35.3%	64.7%	53.9%	37.4%	62.6%
Difference	-8.4%	5.6%	-5.6%	-13.6%	3.0%	-3.0%
Charter school that minority students attend	59.9%	29.0%	71.0%	62.2%	22.1%	77.9%
LR school that minority students attended	69.2%	20.4%	79.6%	69.2%	19.1%	80.9%
Difference	-9.3%	8.6%	-8.6%	-7.0%	3.0%	-3.0%

With regard to FRL eligible students, the charter schools into which these students entered in both 2008-09 and 2009-10 had a lower percentage of FRL students than the LRSD TPS in which they were previously enrolled (and, conversely, a higher percentage of non-FRL students). For example, in 2009-10,

¹⁴ The analyses conducted in these final two tables were also used in a recent report by the RAND Corporation, in which they looked at, among other things, the levels of segregation in charter schools and TPS in eight metropolitan areas across the United States. Because their research is well-respected on this topic, it seemed appropriate here to conduct similar analyses. To access this report, please see the following link: http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG869.pdf

¹⁵ In Tables 17 and 18, we are only looking at students transfers. Thus, the charter school demographics are for the school in which the student is currently enrolled, and the LRSD school demographics are from the school in which the student was enrolled during the year prior (before transferring to the charter school).

these students left schools with an FRL population of 74.3%, and entered into charter schools with an FRL population of 61.4%. In other words, FRL students, on average, are moving into schools with lower levels of poverty than their previous school.

Non-FRL eligible students in both academic years also moved into schools with lower levels of poverty, on average, as compared to their previous LRSD TPS. However, in this case, these students moved from schools with a percentage of non-FRL students of 47.5% in 2009-10, and entered into charter schools with 67.9% non-FRL students. By comparison, their new charter school enrolled a student body comprised of 32.1% FRL students, compared to 52.5% in their previous LRSD TPS. Thus, these non-FRL students moved from schools with a low level of poverty and moved into charter schools with lower levels of poverty as measured by FRL eligibility.

Table 18: Charter and LRSD Peer Environments for Charter Movers, by FRL Eligibility of Student (%), 2008-09 & 2009-10

	2008-09		2009-10	
	FRL Students	Non-FRL Students	FRL Students	Non-FRL Students
Charter school that FRL students attend	51.0%	49.0%	61.4%	38.6%
LR school that FRL students attended	72.0%	28.0%	74.3%	25.7%
Difference	-21.0%	21.0%	-12.9%	12.9%
Charter school that non-FRL students attend	36.8%	63.2%	32.1%	67.9%
LR school that non-FRL students attended	56.1%	43.9%	52.5%	47.5%
Difference	-19.3%	19.3%	-20.4%	20.4%

Conclusions:

- White students tend to enter into charter schools with more white students.
 - White students enter into charter schools that have a higher percentage of white students than their previous schools (35.3% to 40.9% in 2008-09, 37.4% to 40.4% in 2009-10); however, the charter schools they entered had a more equal proportion of white and black students.
- Black students are more likely to move into charter schools with fewer black students.
 - Black students transfer into charter schools with a lower percentage of black students than the LRSD TPS in which they were previously enrolled (70.2% to 61.5% in 2008-09, 70.7% to 67.1% in 2009-10).

- However, as table 17 shows, these differences are quite small; none of the differences exceed ten percentage points. Thus, students who transfer to charter schools attend schools that have racial characteristics similar to the schools they left.
- All students, both FRL and non-FRL, are more likely to enter into charter schools with substantially fewer FRL students.
 - FRL students, on average, enroll in charter schools with a lower percentage of FRL students than their previous LRSD TPS (72.0% to 51.0% in 2008-09, 74.3% to 61.4% in 2009-10). Non-FRL students transfer from LRSD TPS with low levels of FRL students and enter into charter schools with fewer FRL students (56.1% to 36.8% in 2008-09, 52.5% to 32.1% in 2009-10).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this report, we have presented information about how charter schools in Pulaski County compare to traditional public schools in Little Rock and Pulaski County. We have also shown the levels of integration/hyper-segregation that students in each sector experience, and identified how transfers from the LRSD to charter schools have impacted the integration efforts of the district. Finally, we concluded with the question of how these transfers to charter schools impact the transferring students.

In summary, there are several key points that should be highlighted from our analyses. First, the policy question that this report addresses involves the ongoing debate over whether charter schools were impeding the desegregation efforts of the LRSD. The first piece of relevant data that we present on this question is simple but nonetheless important – very few students actually leave the LRSD each year for charter schools. For example, in 2004-05, 0.4% of the students in the LRSD transferred to charter schools, compared to 1.2% of the LRSD student population in the current school year. Further, the students that transfer from the LRSD to charter schools are becoming increasingly more black and comprised of more FRL students. It is difficult to imagine that this small number of diverse students leaving the LRSD are having the negative impact on the desegregation efforts of the entire district.

In fact, when we looked only at students who left the LRSD for charters, specifically at how their leaving impacted the racial composition of the exiting school, we actually found that the majority of these transfers are enhancing the levels of racial integration for the traditional public schools from which they transferred. This is because the majority of transfers involved black students leaving predominately black schools, white students leaving predominately white schools, or FRL students leaving high poverty schools. In all of these cases, the student transfers help the exiting school because the LRSD TPS is left less segregated as a result of these student transfers.

We also did not find a disproportionate number of student transfers that would be of concern to the LRSD, such as only white students fleeing the blackest schools (“white flight”) or only the most affluent students leaving the poorest schools. If we had found that only these types of transfers were occurring, there would certainly be cause for concern. However, these types of transfers were actually quite infrequent when compared to the majority of beneficial transfers that have occurred since 2004-05. Thus, here again, we can find no evidence that the charter schools are having a negative impact on the racial balance of the LRSD.

Further, as we noted in Tables 17 and 18, the types of peer environments into which these students are transferring actually have a more equitable racial and economic balance than the Little Rock schools in which they were previously enrolled. Black students transfer to charter schools that are less black, minority students transfer to schools with fewer minority students, and FRL students attend schools with lower levels of poverty. For each of these student groups, the transfer has a positive impact on the student – they attend schools in more diverse environments than what they were exposed to previously.

While white students do attend schools that have more white students and less black students, the charter schools they enter are comprised of more equal percentages of white and black students. And non-FRL students certainly do attend school with fewer FRL students when they transfer to charter schools, but as we note in Table 16, many of them were not in high poverty schools in the first place.

Thus, in the end, we believe that the impact of charter schools on the racial balance of the LRSD is quite insignificant due to the small number of students that leave, but if there were any impact at all, it would likely be one that is actually beneficial for the LRSD.

In closing, it seems important to note that in Pulaski County, approximately 6% of the students choose to attend a charter school, whereas the remaining 94% are *compelled* to attend traditional public schools in the area. More often than not, the students attending these traditional public schools experience segregation as a direct result of the neighborhoods in which they live. If the LRSD is truly concerned with segregation within its boundaries, perhaps these schools are where it should begin to address this problem.

To that end, one of the ways the LRSD has sought to improve racial balance is through the use of magnet schools, which were created to encourage voluntary inter-district transfers and provide academic benefits through special programs. These magnets, however, have been in existence for many years and have not been able to change the fact that most Little Rock students, before and after the authorization of a few charters around Pulaski County, attend schools in heavily racially segregated environments. It is our view that placing restrictions on the charter schools will not do anything to address this problem, but could well limit the educational options that are currently afforded to students in Little Rock. And, given that the charter option is being increasingly taken up by minority students and economically disadvantaged students, it would seem counter to the spirit of any reasonable desegregation agreement to restrict the availability of charter schools to Little Rock families and students.