

Chapter 9

The Economic and Social Equity Challenges in Addressing Charter Schools in New York City

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ABSTRACT

Given the recent change in administration in New York City, this chapter examines Mayor De Blasio's position on the charter school debate. Because charter schools are housed in public facilities, this issue reflects both political and market matters. This chapter will reveal the economic and social equity issues affecting the co-locations of charter and traditional schools. As public administrators, the New York City Department of Education and Mayor de Blasio are responsible for providing students with the opportunity for sound basic education under the New York State Constitution- both traditional and chartered. Examining the impact of the relationships between government and private stakeholders will draw attention on how two school systems co-exist with distinct governance: one publicly funded and governed and the other publicly funded and privately governed.

INTRODUCTION

The charter school reform has gained successful attention from the political and market arenas in New York City more than any other educational reform. There are several historical interpretations of the history and political involvement of the charter school reform (Lake and Hill, 2002, and Hassel, 1999). However, the impact and implications of the political and market involvements have not been studied as much. Charter schools are at the heart of the debate around accountability because they are one of the least understood phenomena in American education (Hill, Lake, O'Toole & Celio, 2002). In New York

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City, there are currently 197 out of 209 in New York State (New York City Department of Education). Charter enrollment has doubled three times since 2000.

As the number of charter schools continue to increase, so too have the amount of political and market agendas running them. While the numbers of stakeholder and their dollars have increased, the actual available space for charter schools has decreased. As a result, co-location has occurred. A co-location means that a charter, which is operated by a private board of directors, gets public space in a public school. In her blog, Diane Ravich (2013) stated that:

...the public school has to surrender “empty” rooms that were previously used for art, music, resource rooms for special education, and any other space that is not considered a classroom. The regular public schools—attended by 94% of all public school children, must be overcrowded to make room for the charters. Because the charters are heavily subsidized by private funding, they typically renovate the space (not good enough for them), and their students have the latest and best of everything.

These, among other oversights, have been challenges now faced by new mayor, Bill de Blasio’s and his position on charter schools. Prior to becoming the mayor, de Blasio’s position on co-location was contradictory to former Mayor Bloomberg. Bloomberg, believed that closing or scaling down large schools and increasing the number of small schools will help increase student performance. His tactic was to create a number of small schools; which were co-located within large school buildings. de Blasio’s examination of the co-location’s impact was careless and based on unreliable information about building utilization, that the city had not sufficiently engaged affected communities in its decision-making process for co-location, and that co-location has created inequitable and substandard learning environments for affected students (see, e.g., De Blasio & the Alliance for Quality Education, 2010; New York Coalition for Educational Justice, 2010; Solomon, 2013).

These privately run and government-funded schools have gained so much privatized attention and resources attention and yet, are sharing overcrowded school facilities with traditional schools. Exploring the affects co-location has had on New York City students leads to question Mayor de Blasio’s next steps in improving our educational system.

CHARTER SCHOOLS

In short, charter schools are publicly funded schools that are allowed substantial autonomy in curriculum and governance in return for greater accountability (Buckley and Schneider, 2007). Charter schools are public schools. Like district public schools, they are funded according to enrollment (also called average daily attendance, or ADA), and receive funding from the district and the state according to the number of students attending. The ways and amounts at which charters are funded compared to their district counterparts differ dramatically within an individual state and even within individual communities within a state. Nationwide, on average, charter schools are funded at 61 percent of their district counterparts, averaging \$7,612 per pupil compared to \$10,441 per pupil at conventional district public schools (Center for Education Reform, 2012).

Unlike traditional district schools, most charter schools do not receive funding to cover the cost of securing a facility. Charter schools that are “converted” from traditional public schools begin with established capital, namely the school and its facilities, but many newly started charters struggle to come

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