

# One Newark: Choosing “Great” Schools, or Merely Segregated Ones?

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## **Executive Summary**

This brief provides a preliminary analysis of the potentially segregative effects of One Newark, the school choice plan implemented by the Newark Public Schools (NPS) in 2014. School choices appear to be influenced by ratings assigned by NPS; however, these ratings are correlated to student population characteristics, such as race and economic status. Newark families, therefore, may be choosing schools – inadvertently or otherwise – that are more segregated.

“Popular” schools under One Newark – the ones chosen most often by families – enroll fewer students eligible for the federal free-lunch program, a proxy measure of economic disadvantage. Popular charter schools also enroll relatively large proportions of black students compared to all of the city’s publicly-funded schools, even as popular district schools enroll relatively small proportions.

While popular schools show better performance on statewide assessments, their “growth” scores, which are intended to take into account differences in student populations, are more mixed. Because test scores are correlated to student population characteristics, families that choose higher-performing schools under One Newark may be selecting schools that are more segregated.

There are notable differences between popular district and popular charter schools: the popular charters have higher suspension rates and more inexperienced teachers than the

popular district schools. Whether families are aware of these discrepancies is unknown.

Although the limited data released by NPS is inadequate for a full analysis, I find these results to be sufficient evidence to warrant the release of the full set of One Newark application data.

## **Background**

One Newark is a universal enrollment system, managed by the Newark Public Schools (NPS), which allows families to choose from a menu of both district and charter schools. With only a few exceptions, all charter schools within the Newark city limits are part of the One Newark plan.

In the One Newark application, NPS included a rating for each school, designating it “Great,” “On The Move,” or “Falling Behind.” As I have previously explained, the ratings have less to do with school effectiveness than with student demographics: “Great” schools have, on average, fewer free lunch-eligible students, fewer students with special education needs, fewer boys, and fewer black students.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Weber, M.A. (2014). “Buyer Beware: One Newark and the Market For Lemons.” NJ Education Policy Forum. <https://njedpolicy.wordpress.com/2014/05/23/buyer-beware-one-newark-and-the-market-for-lemons/>

**Table 1: One Newark Popularity**

School	Pct. First Choice	Pct. Any Choice	One Newark Rating
Phillip's Academy Charter School*	6%	26%	n/a
Marion P. Thomas Charter School*	2%	18%	"On The Move"
Ann Street School	5%	13%	"Great"
North Star Academy Charter Schools of Newark*	25%	50%	"Great"
First Avenue School	5%	13%	"Great"
TEAM Academy Charter School*	17%	40%	"Great"
Lafayette Street School	2%	11%	"Great"
Wilson Avenue School	2%	-	"On The Move"
Ridge Street School	2%	-	"Great"
Oliver Street School	3%	-	"Great"
Newark Legacy Charter School*	-	16%	n/a
University Heights Charter School*	-	15%	"Falling Behind"
Lady Liberty Academy Charter School*	-	16%	"On The Move"

\* *Charter School*

On April 15, 2015, NPS released limited data on which schools were most popular under the One Newark system.<sup>2</sup> In its presentation, "One Newark Enrolls: Year One Review,"<sup>3</sup> NPS uses two criteria to judge a school's popularity: whether the school is a first choice, and whether it is one of the eight possible choices a family could have made on the One Newark application.

Table 1 shows NPS's data on these schools; the top ten schools under each criterion are listed. Seven schools are popular by either criterion; six appear on only one of the two lists. The table also includes the rating given to each school by NPS in the One Newark application.

<sup>2</sup> Mooney, J. (2015) "One Newark' Reorganization Kicks Off Second Year, Learning From The First." *NJ Spotlight*.

<http://www.njspotlight.com/stories/15/04/14/one-newark-reorganization-kicks-off-second-year-learning-from-the-first/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://assets.njspotlight.com/assets/15/0414/2319>

State Superintendent Cami Anderson hails these results in the accompanying news story:

*"We have worked hard over the past year to implement the changes needed to ensure equity throughout the district, and this is an exciting step for all schools in Newark and for Newark families," Anderson said in announcing the second-year numbers.<sup>4</sup>*

The presentation makes clear that "equity," as defined by Anderson and NPS, includes "the equal representation of students with disabilities across all schools." Stakeholders, however, may also be concerned as to the distribution of other student and school characteristics across the district.

For example: does One Newark affect how students who are in economic

<sup>4</sup> Mooney, *ibid.*

disadvantage are concentrated within particular schools? Are students of a particular race more likely to choose certain schools over others, leading to racial concentrations over and above those found in Newark's neighborhood schools? How are teacher characteristics distributed among popular and not-popular schools?

Issues of segregation and resource equity are at the core of the current policy debate about charter school proliferation. Studies have shown that charter schools often engage in patterns of racial and socio-economic segregation.<sup>5</sup> Both Baker's analysis of federal data<sup>6</sup> and my analysis of state-level data with Sass Rubin<sup>7</sup> find that that Newark's charter schools serve a substantially different student population than is found in the NPS schools.

Other studies suggest that student population characteristics may affect the choices families make when enrolling their children in charter schools. Both Garcia (2007)<sup>8</sup> and Weiher & Tedin (2002)<sup>9</sup> find charter school choosers enter schools that are more racially segregated than the schools they leave. Renzulli

(2006)<sup>10</sup> finds that districts that have racially segregated populations of students tend to have more black students enrolled in charter schools, potentially leading to greater segregation in the district as a whole. None of these studies, however, consider the effects of a universal enrollment system like One Newark on patterns of segregation.

Oluwole (2015)<sup>11</sup> notes that current New Jersey law requires that the Commissioner of Education assess the "segregative effect" of charter schools on their host school districts. Whether segregation by race alone is the basis for this assessment is an issue that continues to be debated. The Education Law Center recently filed comments<sup>12</sup> arguing that segregation by socio-economic status and other factors should be considered when assessing the impact of charter school enrollments.

No matter the legal justification, an analysis of the segregative effects of One Newark is in the interests of all stakeholders. However, since NPS did not release a complete set of data, it is impossible to fully explore the correlations between a school's popularity under One Newark and its student and school characteristics.

<sup>5</sup> Frankenberg, E., Siegel-Hawley, G., Wang, J. (2011) "Choice without equity: Charter school segregation." *Educational Policy Analysis Archives*, 19 (1). <http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/779>

<sup>6</sup> Baker, B.D. (2015). "Research Note: Resource Equity & Student Sorting Across Newark District & Charter Schools." NJ Education Policy Forum. <https://njedpolicy.wordpress.com/2015/01/13/research-note-resource-equity-student-sorting-across-newark-district-charter-schools/>

<sup>7</sup> Weber, M.A. & Sass Rubin, J. (2014) "New Jersey Charter Schools: A Data Driven View, Part I — Enrollments and Student Demographics." <http://www.saveourschoolsnj.org/nj-charter-school-data/>

<sup>8</sup> Garcia, D.R. (2007). "The Impact of School Choice on Racial Segregation in Charter Schools." *Educational Policy*.

<sup>9</sup> Weiher, G.R & Tedin, K.L. (2002). "Does Choice Lead to Racially Distinctive Schools? Charter Schools and Household Preferences." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, (21) 1, 79–92.

<sup>10</sup> Renzulli, L.A. (2006). "District Segregation, Race Legislation, and Black Enrollment in Charter Schools." *Social Science Quarterly* (87) 3, 618-637.

<sup>11</sup> Oluwole, J. O. (2015). "New Jersey Charter School Law, Race and Equal Protection" NJ Education Policy Forum. <https://njedpolicy.wordpress.com/2015/01/13/new-jersey-charter-school-law-race-and-equal-protection/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.edlawcenter.org/news/archives/other-issues/elc-calls-on-state-to-assess-effect-of-nj-charters-on-segregation-and-school-funding.html>

Figure 1

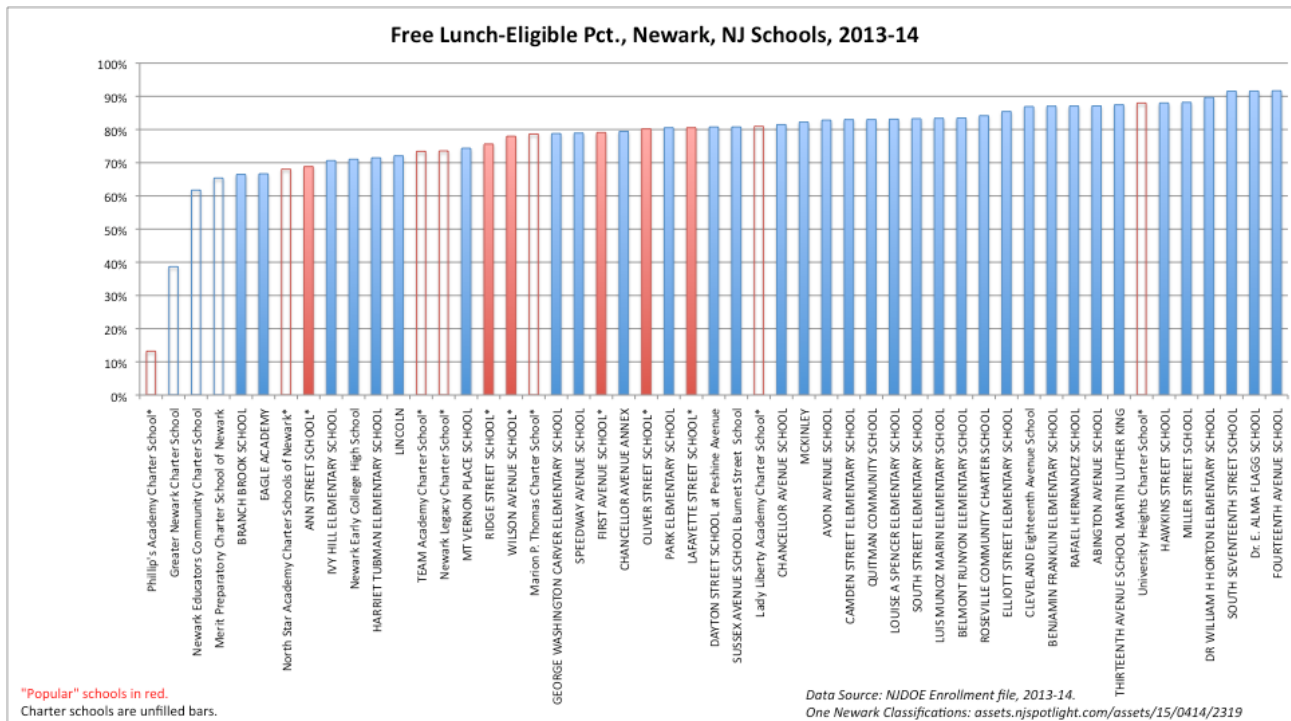
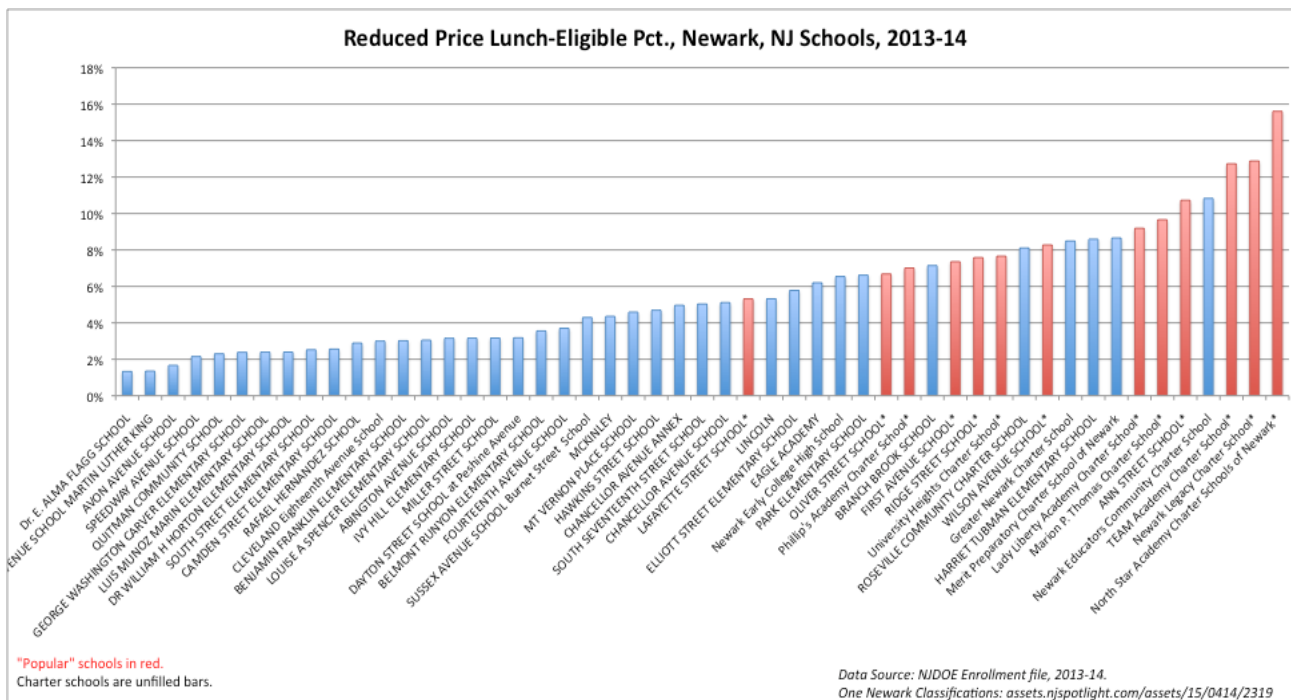


Figure 2



We can, however, use publicly available data to examine the demographics and other features of One Newark's "popular" schools as a preliminary exercise to help determine if further study of the system's effects on patterns of segregation is warranted.

In this brief, I compare the 13 popular schools under One Newark with the other schools, both charter and district, within the city. Understand that the schools within this group vary in "popularity"; again, there is not enough data available for an analysis that takes into account this variation.<sup>13</sup>

The popular schools listed in NPS's presentation are K-8 schools.<sup>14</sup> To allow for meaningful comparisons, I only include schools in this analysis that have enrollments where at least 50 percent of the student population is in grades K to 8. This excludes several high schools that also serve Grades 7 and 8. The popular schools in the charts below are marked in red; charter schools are unfilled bars. Charter schools not listed in the One Newark application are excluded from this analysis.

### **Economic Disadvantage Characteristics**

Figure 1 shows the percentage of students eligible for the federal free lunch (FL) program at each school. Families whose income is at or below 130% of the poverty line qualify for the free lunch program. 11 of the 13 popular schools are below the median in this proxy measure of economic disadvantage.

Families eligible for reduced price lunch (RPL) have incomes between 130 and 185

percent of the poverty line. As both Baker<sup>15</sup> and I<sup>16</sup> have previously noted, in a district such as Newark where the vast majority of students qualify for either free or reduced price lunches, RPL is a marker of *relative* economic advantage. Figure 2 shows that all popular schools are above the median in RPL percentages.

### **Racial Characteristics**

Figure 3 shows the percentage of black students for each school in the comparison group. There are 18 schools in this group that are at least moderately integrated, defined here as having black students comprise between 20 and 80 percent of the student body. None of these schools are "popular" under One Newark.

There is a notable split between the popular district and popular charter schools here. The seven popular charters all have populations where black students are 80 percent or more of the student body. The six popular district schools, however, have less than 12 percent black students. These schools are located in the North and East Wards, which have higher proportions of white and Hispanic residents than other parts of the city.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> We would need to have some measure of *every* school's "popularity" to conduct this analysis; this data is not currently available.

<sup>14</sup> The presentation does have a high school section; however, the schools listed in that section are simply a repeat of the list of "popular" K-8 schools.

<sup>15</sup> Baker, B.D. (2013). "A Poverty of Thinking about Poverty Measures in New Jersey School Finance." NJ Education Policy Forum.

<https://niedpolicy.wordpress.com/2013/07/18/a-poverty-of-thinking-about-poverty-measures-in-new-jersey-school-finance/>

<sup>16</sup> Weber & Sass Rubin (2014), *ibid*.

<sup>17</sup> Barr, J.M. "Introduction to Newark" (PowerPoint presentation). Retrieved 4/20/15 from: <http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jimbarr/newark/pp/FactsNewark.ppt>

Figure 3

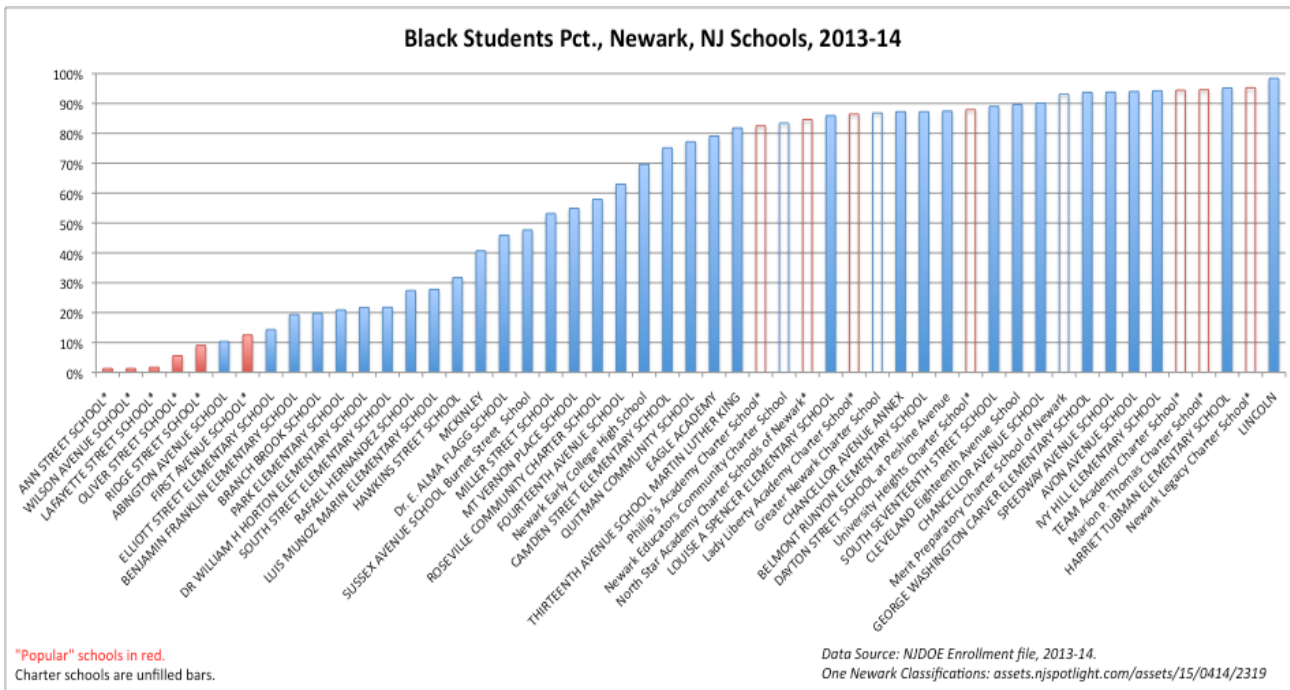
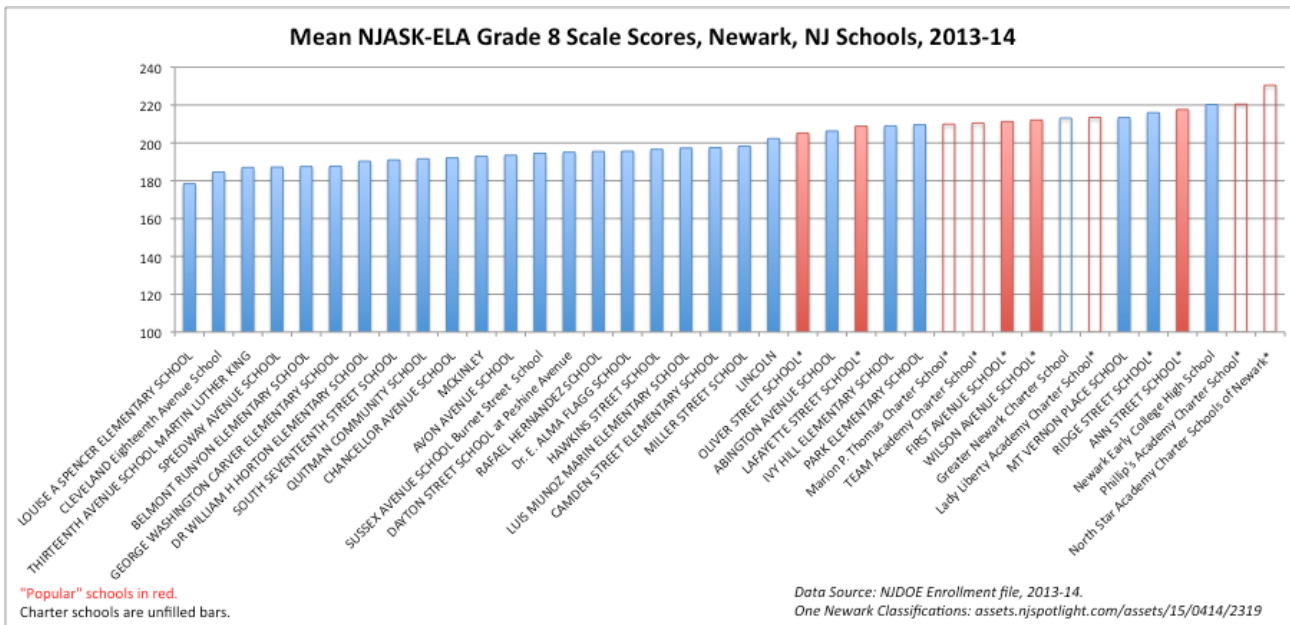


Figure 4



### **Academic Profiles**

Mean scale scores on the NJASK English Language Arts (ELA) test for Grade 8 are given for the comparison group in Figure 4. Popular schools clearly score higher on state tests; this trend holds for other grade levels as well.

But these measures have been shown to correlate strongly with student characteristics, particularly with measures of economic disadvantage.<sup>18</sup> In explaining their methodology for rating schools under One Newark, NPS claims to use both absolute performance on tests and “growth” measures, which attempt to take into account the “starting points” of students when measuring their gains or losses on tests.

In truth, these growth measures are biased. Baker (2014)<sup>19</sup> has shown that New Jersey’s “Student Growth Percentiles” (SGPs) are correlated to scale scores on statewide assessments; in other words, if a school has high test scores, it is more likely to have high growth scores. SGPs also correlate to student characteristics such as FL percentage and the percentage of particular special education students enrolled.

This said, SGPs are less biased than absolute test scores, and can be useful in determining if a school is relatively effective at achieving test score gains (if other inputs are held constant<sup>20</sup>). Figure 5 shows the mean SGPs

(mSGPs) for schools in the comparison group. While popular schools were clustered at the top of the distribution in scale scores, here the schools are spread out. In short: while popular schools have high test scores, their growth measures are much more mixed.

Given this difference, it seems likely that families choose schools based on absolute test performance more than on growth measures. Again, since these scores correlate strongly with student characteristics, the demographics of a school may be influencing the selections families make.

### **School Characteristics**

The suspension rates for the popular schools are shown in Figure 6. Again, there is a notable difference between popular district and charter schools: charter schools have much higher suspension rates on average than NPS schools.

Included in this graph are the percentages of black students at each school. Notice that the popular charter schools, with their higher suspension rates, have much higher percentages of black students than the popular district schools. The disproportionate use of school suspensions on black students has been well-documented in research literature.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> For example: in Newark for 2014, the percentage of a school’s RPL population explains 60 percent of the variation in mean Grade 8 ELA scale scores.

<sup>19</sup> Baker, B.D. (2014). “Research Note: On Teacher Effect vs. Other Stuff in New Jersey’s Growth Percentiles.” NJ Education Policy Forum. <https://njedpolicy.wordpress.com/2014/06/02/research-note-on-teacher-effect-vs-other-stuff-in-new-jerseys-growth-percentiles/>

<sup>20</sup> Baker, B.D. (2014). “Research Note: On Student Growth & the Productivity of New Jersey Charter Schools.” NJ Education Policy Forum.

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<https://njedpolicy.wordpress.com/2014/10/31/research-note-on-student-growth-the-productivity-of-new-jersey-charter-schools/>

<sup>21</sup> Wallace, J.M. et.al. (2008). “Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Differences in School Discipline among U.S. High School Students: 1991-2005” NIH Public Access.

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2678799/pdf/nihms50094.pdf>

Krezmien, M.P. et.al. (2006). “Suspension, Race, and Disability: Analysis of Statewide Practices and Reporting.” *Journal Of Emotional And Behavioral Disorders*, 14 (4); 217–226.

Figure 5

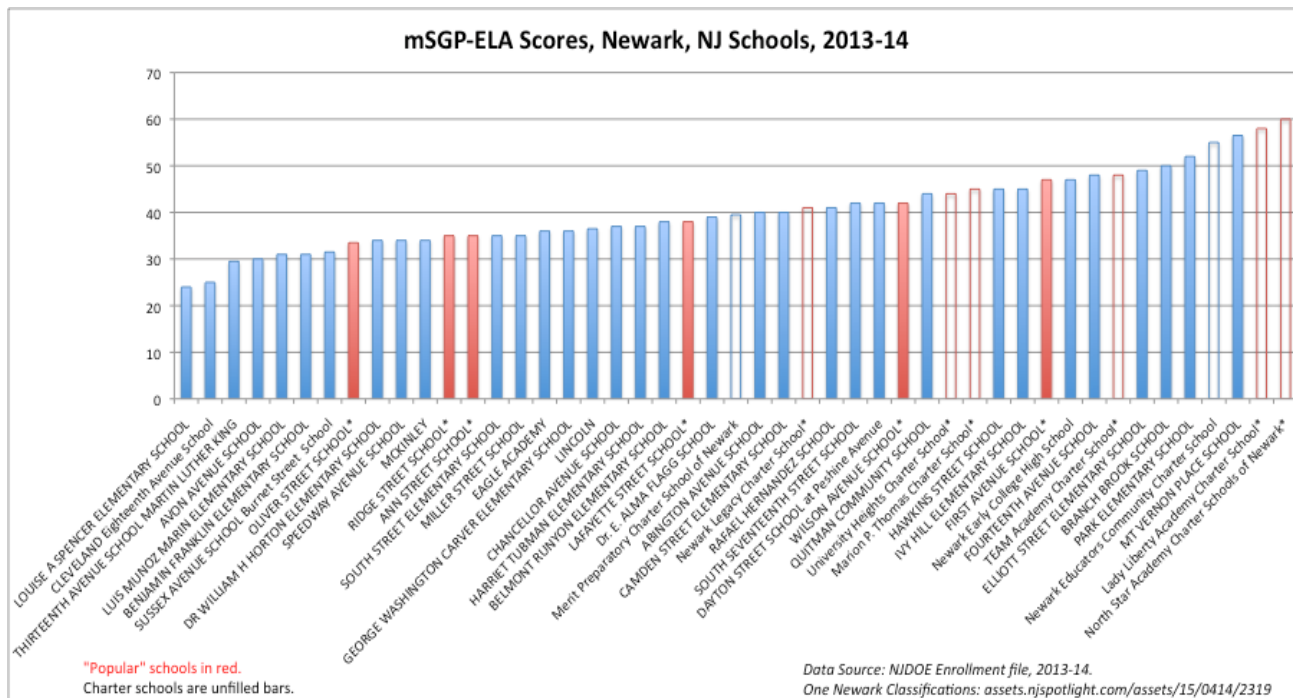
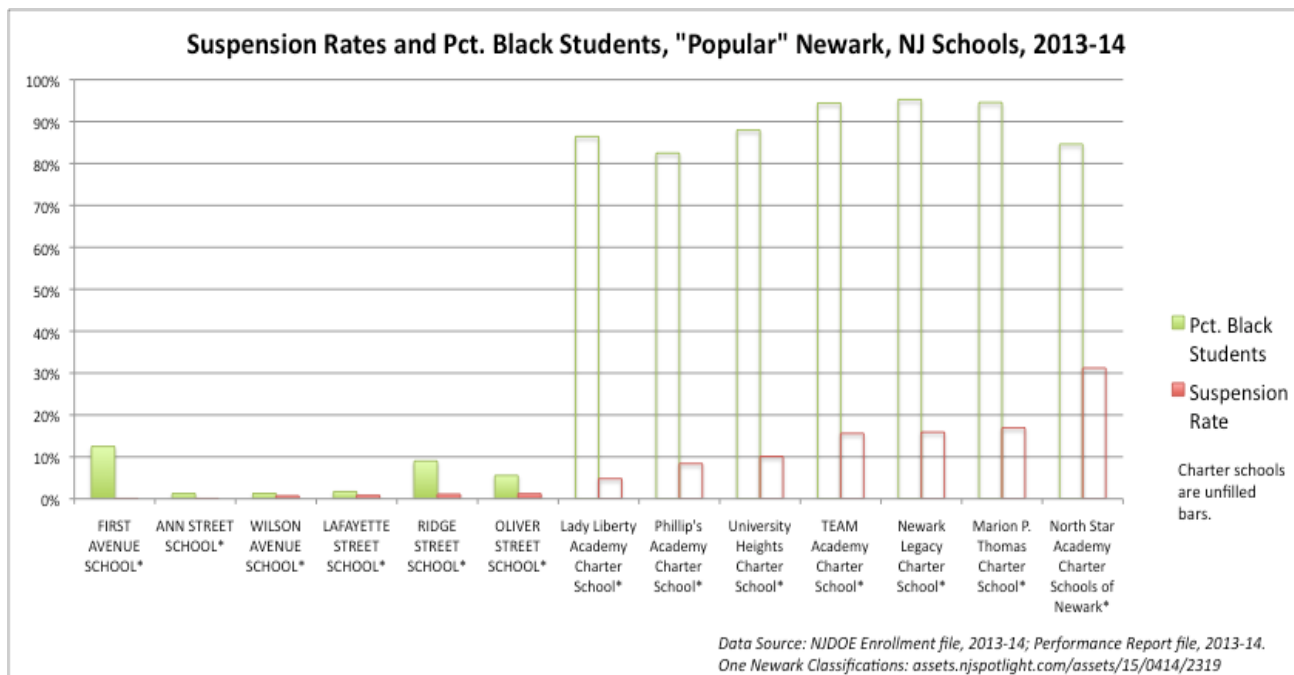


Figure 6





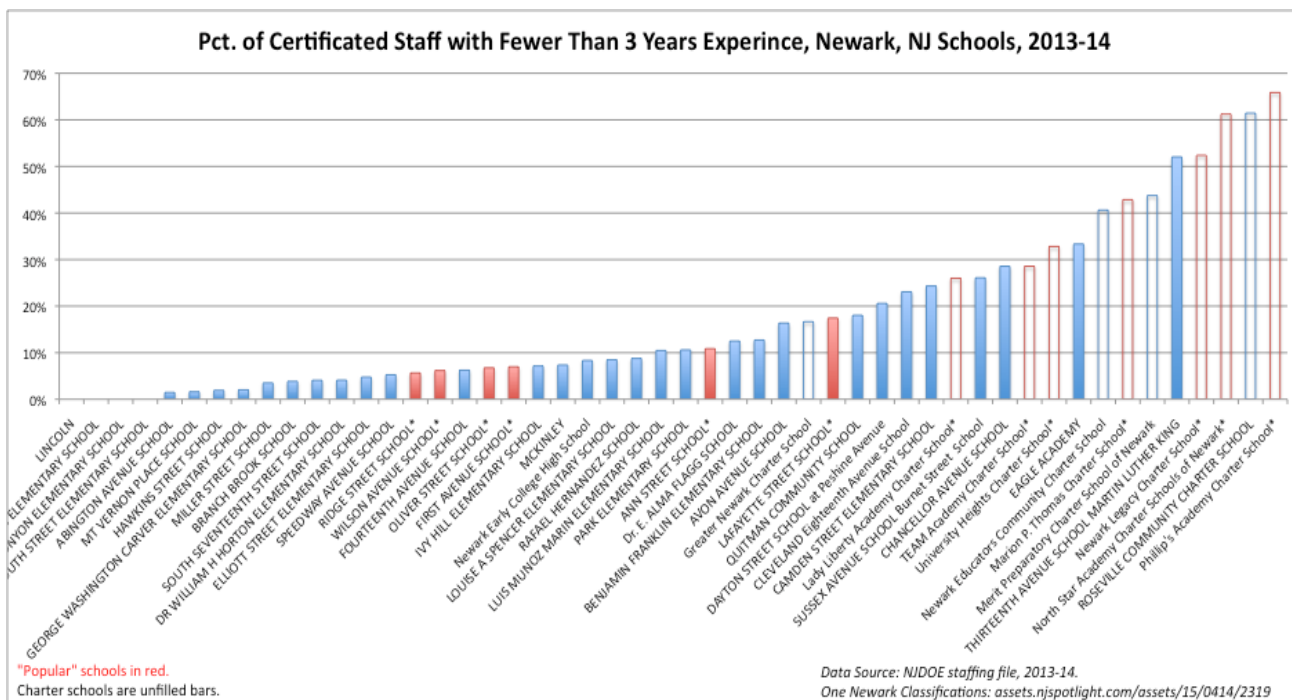
The “popular” charters under One Newark appear to adhere to this pattern. Particularly notable is North Star Academy CS, the most “popular” school and the school with the highest suspension rate by far in our comparison group.

In all popular charter schools, at least 25% of the staff have less than three years of experience. At North Star, the most popular school and a charter, 61% of the staff are relatively inexperienced.<sup>23</sup>

Figure 7 shows the percentage of teachers at each school with less than three years of experience. There is a research consensus that teachers gain most in effectiveness during their first few years of teaching<sup>22</sup>; schools with relatively high numbers of inexperienced teachers are likely denying their students access to as many effective educators.

These comparisons raise some critical questions. Do the families of black students who choose “popular” charters know these schools have high suspension rates and many inexperienced teachers? If so, do they find these to be desirable features, or do they see them as a “price to pay” for attending a charter school with high test scores and a lower concentration of economically disadvantaged students?

Figure 7



<sup>22</sup> <http://parentsacrossamerica.org/how-teaching-experience-makes-a-difference/>

<sup>23</sup> Phillip’s Academy is a “converted” private school; its staff may have significant experience teaching in a private setting but little experience teaching in a publicly-funded charter. See: <http://www.njspolight.com/stories/13/07/22/new-charter-school-looks-hopefully-to-the-future-cherishes-and-strives-to-preserve-its-past/>

### Discussion and Policy Recommendations

Once again: this is a preliminary, descriptive analysis. Without more precise data on individual students' choices, their family backgrounds and location of residence, it is not possible to show definitive correlations between a school's popularity under One Newark and its school or student characteristics. That said, this analysis does reveal interesting patterns:

- Popular schools tend to have lower concentrations of FL students, and higher concentrations of RPL students.
- Popular charter schools serve majority black student populations; popular NPS schools, in contrast, serve minority black populations. No popular school has even a moderately racially integrated student body.
- Popular schools perform comparatively well on statewide assessments. However, popular schools are not uniformly high performing when judged by growth measures.
- Popular district schools tend to have relatively low suspension rates and smaller proportions of inexperienced staff. Popular charter schools, however, have high suspension rates and large proportions of inexperienced staff.

It is important to note that we do not know if the families making choices under One Newark are aware of these patterns. Parents choosing, for example, a popular charter school may not be aware that the staff has less experience or a higher suspension rate than a not-popular school.

But the trends outlined here are more than enough evidence to warrant further study of One Newark's choice system. Specific questions to be addressed include:

- Do families see test score outcomes as proxy measures of student body characteristics?
- Are specific charter schools more popular with the families of black students, while specific district schools are more popular with the families of non-black students?
- Are families aware of growth measures, staff experience, suspension rates, and other school characteristics when they make their choices? Would this information affect their choices?
- How much influence do the NPS school ratings have on families' choices?

The questions require study over and above the analysis of data gathered in the administration of One Newark. Nonetheless, a complete release of the One Newark data would be an important first step in addressing these issues. To that end, NPS should release as full a set of data regarding One Newark applications as soon as possible.

Ideally, this data set would link every student to their demographic profile and locale (as designated by zip code) as well to all of the choices they and their families made under One Newark. If this is not feasible, NPS should, at the very least, release the complete list of preferred choices for each school, numbered 1 to 8, based on the One Newark application. This would allow for a more comprehensive analysis of the effects of One Newark on student sorting throughout the city.

One Newark is a unique experiment: the first universal enrollment system in New Jersey, and one of the first such systems in the nation.<sup>24</sup> It would be irresponsible to continue the program, or implement it in other cities, without first studying its potentially segregative

<sup>24</sup>[http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/charterschoice/2014/11/report\\_detroit\\_should\\_setup\\_one-stop\\_shop\\_to\\_enroll\\_district\\_charter\\_students.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/charterschoice/2014/11/report_detroit_should_setup_one-stop_shop_to_enroll_district_charter_students.html)

effects. The release of a comprehensive set of One Newark application data is absolutely necessary before the program is allowed to expand.