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EFP Takeaways

A Descriptive Analysis of Cream Skimming and Pushout in Choice versus Traditional Public Schools

Background

One of the controversies surrounding charter schools is whether these schools either “cream skim” high-performing students from traditional public schools or “pushout” low-achieving students or students with discipline histories. Similar effects may appear for school choice entities managed by districts, such as magnet and open enrollment programs. Adam Kho, Ron Zimmer, and Andrew McEachin use data from North Carolina and Tennessee to explore whether there is evidence consistent with these selective enrollment practices. Their work is published in vol 17 issue 1 of *EFP*.

The Study

The authors use longitudinal statewide data from North Carolina and Tennessee that range from 2010-11 to 2014-15. They use data on student achievement and discipline records as proxies for incentives school may have to either “cream skin” or “pushout.” By examining entrance and exit patterns of students, the authors test the claims around “cream skinning” and “pushout.”

For more details:

- View the [full issue](#).
- See the [full article in *Education Finance and Policy*](#).
- [Sign up here to receive future *EFP Takeaways*](#).
- Summary of:
Kho, A., Zimmer, R., & McEachin, A. (2022). A Descriptive Analysis of Cream Skimming and Pushout in Choice versus Traditional Public Schools. *Education Finance and Policy*, 17 (1): 160-187.

Findings

The authors find no evidence to suggest that charter schools, traditional public schools, or open enrollment schools in school choice programs are cream skinning higher-performing students. For magnet schools, however, results are markedly different: the highest-performing students are up to 18% more likely to enter magnets than low-performing students. Given the design, academic requirements, and recruiting practices of magnet schools, the result is expected, but does suggest that magnets drain some high-performing students from traditional public schools.

To assess the question of pushout, the authors compare exit rates of high- and low-performing students. They find that exit rates for low-performing students are particularly high in charter schools when considering students’ discipline records. In particular, Tennessee students who had been suspended or expelled were 23 percentage points more likely to exit charter schools than students who had not been suspended or expelled. In North Carolina, suspended/expelled students were 15 percentage points more likely to exit charter schools.

Finally, while some have raised concerns that students may be pushed out near accountability test dates, the authors find no evidence consistent with this claim.