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The Impacts of Charter Schools on Traditional Public School Districts: Lessons for Mississippi

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**THE IMPACTS OF CHARTER SCHOOLS ON
TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS:
LESSONS FOR MISSISSIPPI**

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

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Abstract

Charter schools are a fast-growing trend in alternative education policy across the United States. As of the 2015-16 school year, seven percent of public schools were charter schools. Between the 2000-01 and the 2015-16 school years, the total number of charter schools across the United States increased by approximately 350 percent. In some states, up to nine percent of students are enrolled in a charter school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). In 2013, Mississippi signed into law the *Mississippi Charter Schools Act of 2013*, allowing for charter schools to enter the field of public education in the state. The aim of the study is to predict the long-term, overall impact of charter schools on traditional public school districts in Mississippi by examining similar districts to those in Mississippi with established charter schools, identifying trends in those districts, and assessing whether or not similar impacts likely would be felt in Mississippi's traditional public school districts. This qualitative study interviews traditional public school district and charter school officials in Jackson, Mississippi and Clarksdale, Mississippi as well as officials from similar districts across the country in which charter schools have been present longer. The findings of this study reveal that the long-term, overall impact of charter schools in Mississippi remains open, but largely can be shaped by public policy that (1) encourages communication between charter school and traditional public school officials; (2) (when establishing new charter schools) accounts for the number and enrollment in traditional public school districts from which the charter school would likely draw its students; and (3) promotes charter schools that

begin at early grade-levels, prior to a student's entrance into the traditional public school system.

Abbreviations

Clarksdale Collegiate	Clarksdale Collegiate Public Charter School
CMO	Charter Management Organization
CMSD	Clarksdale Municipal School District
CRS	Colorado River Schools
ELL	English Language Learner
E-Stem	E-Stem Public Charter Schools
FRPL	Free and Reduced Price Lunch
HISD	Hudson Independent School District
IEP	Individualized Education Program
JPS	Jackson Public Schools
LISA Academy	LISA Academy Public Charter Schools
LRSD	Little Rock School District
MCSAB	Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board
Midtown	Midtown Public Charter School
Mohave Accelerated	Mohave Accelerated Schools
Pineywoods	Pineywoods Community Academy
TPS	Tacoma Public Schools

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The charter school movement began in 1974 when Ray Buddle, a professor at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, came up with the idea in an essay titled “Education by Charter.” The first official charter school legislation was passed in 1991 by the Minnesota state legislature, with the first charter school opening the following year in St. Paul. California was the next state to allow charter schools (“History of Charter Schools,” 2014). Since their inception in 1991, forty-four states and the District of Columbia have enacted legislation allowing for the creation of charter schools (Wixon, 2018).

Charter schools were created to act as an alternative to traditional public schools. Charter school laws vary from state to state but all charter schools share some common characteristics. While they are still considered public schools, they differ from *traditional* public schools, as they are independent, but government supported. Charter-authorizing entities grant charters to an independent entity (such as a group of parents or non-profit organization), allowing it to establish a school. Charter schools must abide by certain federal and state regulations; however, they are granted more autonomy than traditional public schools in order to allow them to be a true alternative (What Are Public Charter Schools?, n.d.). Charter schools are both supported and funded by the government, but, due to systematic structures in state education funding, usually receive less public funding than traditional public schools (Batdorff et al., 2014). Charter schools, and the statutes by which they must abide, vary from state to state, which in combination with their independent status, results in many different kinds of charter schools. However, because charter schools are still public schools, they must be open to all students, not

charge tuition, and not have distinctive acceptance requirements (What Are Public Charter Schools?, n.d.).

Many charter schools have a specific curricular focus, the most common being college preparatory (approximately 30% of charter schools). Another eight percent of charter schools focus on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Other charter schools (approx. 16%) focus on Core Knowledge, an educational approach which stresses a deeper understanding of core subject areas. Newer charter schools focus on innovative educational techniques such as blended learning (approx. 6%) and virtual or online learning (approx. 2%) (Rebarber, & Zgainer, 2014). Charter schools also tend to be smaller, with an average enrollment of 372 compared the average traditional public school enrollment of 478 (“Charter Schools,” 2011).

The state of Mississippi first passed charter school legislation in 1997 that allowed for already-existing traditional public schools to petition the Mississippi Department of Education and their respective local school boards to be converted to charter schools. The Hayes Cooper Center in Marigold, MS was the only traditional public school that underwent this conversion process, but due to lack of additional benefits, it soon dropped its charter status. The Hayes Cooper Center is considered Mississippi’s first charter school; however, some argue that it was just a mere title and it was “never a true charter school in the accepted understanding of the term” (Mississippi First, 2017). With no other schools petitioning for charter status, this law was allowed to expire in 2009.

One year later, Mississippi passed another charter school law known as the *Conversion Charter School Act of 2010*. In contrast to previous legislation, the 2010 Act not only allowed for conversions, but had provisions for “school take-overs” by the state Department of Education if a school received failing grades for three consecutive years. However, no traditional public schools went through the conversion process, which led to the repeal of the act before any take-overs could occur. There were no new charter schools in the state of Mississippi resulting from *Conversion Charter Schools Act of 2010* (Mississippi First, 2017).

In April 2013, after two failed attempts, Mississippi passed its current charter school law. The *Mississippi Public Charter School Act of 2013* establishes charter schools as public schools that (1) have autonomy over decisions including finance, personnel, scheduling, curriculum, and instruction; (2) are governed by an independent governing board; (3) are nonprofit organizations; and (4) do not charge tuition. The act allows for new charter schools as well as conversion charter schools (public schools that are converted into charter schools). Private schools, however, cannot convert to charter schools (Mississippi First, 2017).

The purposes of charter schools in the state of Mississippi, according to the 2013 Act, are as follows:

(a) To improve student learning by creating high-quality schools with high standards for student performance;

- (b) To close achievement gaps between high-performing and low-performing groups of public school students;*
- (c) To increase high-quality educational opportunities within the public education system for all students, especially those with a likelihood of academic failure;*
- (d) To create new professional opportunities for teachers, school administrators and other school personnel which allow them to have a direct voice in the operation of their schools;*
- (e) To encourage the use of different, high-quality models of teaching, governing, scheduling and other aspects of schooling which meet a variety of student needs;*
- (f) To allow public schools freedom and flexibility in exchange for exceptional levels of results driven accountability;*
- (g) To provide students, parents, community members and 260 local entities with expanded opportunities for involvement in the public education system; and *
- (h) To encourage the replication of successful charter schools.*

(Mississippi Charter Schools Act of 2013, Lines 242-264)

While different states' laws allow for a variety of charter school authorizers, the Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board (MCSAB) is the only entity in the state of Mississippi that can authorize charter schools. The MSCAB is also (and solely) responsible for reviewing charter applications, approving or rejecting applications, entering into charter contracts, overseeing charter schools, renewing charters, and

revoking charter contracts (Mississippi Charter Schools Act of 2013, 1972, Lines 278-283, 325-330).

In Mississippi, all school districts are given accountability ratings of ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’, ‘D’, or ‘F’ (Mississippi Department of Education, n.d.). In order to be established in an ‘A’, ‘B’, or ‘C’ district, a charter school must be approved by the local school board. Charter schools must serve at least 80% of underserved students in the traditional public school district in which the charter school is located¹ (Mississippi Charter Schools Act of 2013, 1972). As of spring 2019, there are five charter schools in operation in Mississippi (four in Jackson and one in Clarksdale) (Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board, n.d.).

While nearly all states have adopted charter school policies, much remains unknown about charter schools. The overall educational impact of charter schools is inconclusive. Whether traditional public schools are adopting successful charter school practices remains inconclusive. The overall district response to charter schools varies significantly. Much of the existing literature assesses the impact of charter schools in four areas: (1) on students, (2) on teachers, (3) on budget & finances, and (4) on operations. I am largely basing my research on a 2001 study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education which concluded that charter schools have a significant impact on the

¹ According to Mississippi law, a charter school’s enrollment of underserved students must collectively reflect that of the traditional public school district in which the charter school is located. Specifically charter schools must enroll underserved students in proportional amounts to that of the traditional public school district in which the charter school is located, at or above 80%. An underserved student is defined as any student participating in the Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program (FRPL) or special education programs.

traditional public school district in which they are located. I'm using their findings in conjunction with more recent literature to investigate the impact of charter schools on traditional public school districts in Mississippi, particularly in the long-term.

The purpose of this research is to look deeper into charter schools, particularly those in Mississippi, and clear up ambiguities surrounding the impact of charter schools on traditional public schools at the district-level. Additionally, this research may be used by states to inform charter school policy, by districts to employ an informed response, by charter school authorizers to make informed decisions, and by charter schools to better navigate their relationship with the traditional public school district.

I found comparable districts to Jackson and Clarksdale (based on factors relevant to charter school impact according to literature) with more well-established charter schools. I then interviewed charter school and traditional public school district officials from each comparison district to determine any impact of charter schools on the traditional public school district. My research indicates the present impact of charter schools on traditional public school districts varies significantly between those in Jackson and Clarksdale. In the short-term present, charter schools have a negative overall impact on the traditional public school district in Clarksdale and do not have a significant overall impact on the traditional public school district in Jackson; however, the overall long-term impact remains inconclusive for both districts and can be highly influenced by school leaders, district leaders, and policymakers. Charter school policy that minimizes negative traditional public school impact (1) encourages communication between charter school and traditional public school officials; (2) (when establishing new charter schools)

accounts for the number and enrollment in traditional public school districts from which the charter school would likely draw its students; and (3) promotes charter schools that begin at early grade levels, prior to a student's entrance into the traditional public school system.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

As charter schools are becoming a more commonplace option in American education, scholars have published an increasing number of studies. Most of this research pertains to effectiveness, asking questions along the lines of “Do charter schools work?” However, policy does not exist in a vacuum. When viewing charter schools as an alternative choice in education policy, it is important to consider their impact on traditional public schools and districts. Much of the current research on charter schools focuses on charter schools in-and-of themselves, and some compare charter schools to traditional public schools. There is only a small body of research centered around the relationship between charter schools and the traditional public school district. Current literature divides impacts charter schools can have on traditional public school districts into three categories: (1) on students; (2) on teachers; and (3) on education, operations, and budget. Known factors that contribute to impact are the size and enrollment trends of the district, and the charter authorizing entity.

According to a 2005 study on the location of charter schools, school districts that have more diverse populations, in terms of race and adult education, are more likely to have charter schools. Furthermore, in districts with diverse populations, the number of private schools is strongly correlated with the number of charter schools (Glomm et al., 2005). The authors of the study further write that “charter schools can satisfy the demand of horizontal differentiation in places where populations are heterogeneous. Prior to charter school legislation, private schools were the only way to satisfy this demand. Since

private schools are very costly, they might only appeal to rich households and might not be able to satisfy heterogeneous demand on a large scale” (Glomm et al., 2005, p. 456).

Charter schools are primarily located in urban areas, with suburban and rural charter schools making up a much smaller concentration. Although about one-third of public schools in the United States are rural, only 16% of charter schools are rural. To further put it into perspective, 85% of rural charter schools are located in the rural-fringe (less than 5 miles from an urbanized area and less than 2.5 miles from an urban cluster) (Epple et al., 2015). The location of a charter school is an important factor in determining its impact on the traditional public school district because the location of a district significantly affects other district characteristics. For example, when examining the characteristics of rural schools, it’s important to consider that “schools on the rural fringe have easier access to the economic resources, cultural institutions, and talent pools available in their neighboring cities, while schools in distant and remote locales need to be more self-reliant and creative in their efforts to deliver high quality education” (Stuit & Doan, 2012, p. 4).

The current data and literature concerning the effects of charter schools on the performance of traditional public schools is decidedly mixed. However, the dominant findings show no significant effects of charter schools on student performance in traditional public schools (Gill, 2016).

Some studies have shown positive effects. Tim R. Sass conducted a study that found “whether measured by the presence of nearby charter schools, the number of competing charters, or the enrollment share garnered by charter schools, charter school

competition is associated with higher math and unchanged reading scores in traditional public schools” (Sass, 2006, p. 119-120).

Many studies have shown no effects. Eric P. Bettinger finds in a 2004 study that “There is no robust, significant evidence that test scores increase or decrease in neighboring [traditional] public schools as the number of charter [schools] increases” (Bettinger, 2005, p.145). In a 2006 study, Robert Bifulco and Helen. F. Ladd find “the effects of charter school competition on the achievement of students in traditional public schools appear to be negligible” (Bifulco & Ladd, 2006, p. 88).

In contrast, some studies have found negative effects on traditional public school students as a result of charter schools. A study conducted by Yongmei Ni in 2009 finds that “overall charter school competition has had a negative impact on student achievement in Michigan’s traditional public schools. The effect is small or negligible in the short-run, but becomes more substantial in the medium- and long-run” (Ni, 2009, p. 580)

It is important to note that each of the studies referenced in this section was conducted in a different state. Therefore, they serve only to demonstrate particular instances of the impact of charter schools and it would be inaccurate to extrapolate their individual findings to charter schools as a whole across the nation. However, Brian P. Gill reported that of the eleven prominent studies measuring student performance,

“Six studies found some evidence of positive effects, four found no effects, and one found negative effects. Breaking the results out by locations, in six cases that

encompass five cities and states, there is evidence that charter schools produce (small) positive effects on the achievement of students in nearby public schools. In nine other cases, encompassing eight cities and states and one nationwide sample, charter schools have been found to have no effect on students in nearby district schools, positive or negative. The literature has only a single case—involving a single school district—in which charter schools have been found to have negative effects on the achievement of students in nearby district schools” (Gill, 2016).

The studies Gill includes make up a large portion of the current literature on the subject; however, it is important to note that the studies varied in methodology which is why he compares their overall findings rather than their specific data or results. The 2009 study conducted by Yongmei Ni was not included in Gill’s meta-analysis.

A 2011 study by C. Kirabo Jackson analyzed the impact of increased school competition on teachers in traditional public schools. To determine this impact, Jackson compares “the change in outcomes within schools after charter entry to the change in outcomes within schools that face no changes in charter entry over the same time period” (Jackson, 2011, p. 3). To measure these changes, Jackson uses the following data points: (1) the likelihood that a teacher leaves the traditional public school where they are currently employed, (2) the overall quality of the individual teachers at the traditional public schools, (3) the number of teachers that are newly hired at the traditional public school, and (4) the pay of the traditional public school teachers. Concerning his results, Jackson writes:

“I find that teachers moving from [traditional public schools] to charter schools have below-average qualifications, but contrary to common belief, schools that face increased charter school competition do not experience any long-run increases in teacher turnover. [These results] suggest that charter schools merely provide alternative employment for less effective teachers who would have left traditional public schools absent charter entry. I do however find evidence of competitive supply-side pressure, such that schools that face charter entry experience declines in the number of new teachers hired. I also find that schools that face charter entry increase teacher pay indicative of a demand-side response to better attract and retain teachers. Consistent with these being the results of competitive pressure, I find that these effects are more pronounced in difficult-to-staff schools. I also found evidence of very slight declines in teacher quality associated with charter entry at these difficult to staff schools” (Jackson, 2011, p. 22).

Overall, the results of this study demonstrate that there are few long-run effects of increased competition from a new charter school on the teacher labor market for the traditional public school system, except in the case of difficult-to-staff schools. It is important to note that Jackson defines “difficult to staff schools” as those that are low-income and high-minority, which would apply to many traditional public school districts in Mississippi. However, just because the direct effect on teacher labor markets is negligible, it does not mean indirect effects are necessarily nonexistent. For example, increases in teacher pay may lead to decreases in funding in other areas. As such, this

study's findings must be limited to teacher labor markets and not any other aspects of traditional public schools, such as school operations or student performance.

The U.S. Department of Education conducted a study in 2001 to measure the impact of charter schools on traditional public school districts. Of the forty-nine districts sampled, every single one reported changes in district operations or district education (or both). Over half of the districts in this study perceived the impact of charter schools to be negative, pointing to changes in their budget. Furthermore, nearly half of the districts also reported operational changes such as “becoming more customer service oriented, increasing their marketing and public relations efforts, or increasing the frequency of their communication with parents” (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, p. 1). Charter schools also became a greater subject of interest for districts and districts began monitoring charter school enrollment and test scores. Last, the report finds that districts made educational changes as a result of charter schools including the “[implementation of] new educational programs, ...changes in educational structures in district schools, and/or [the creation of] new schools with programs that were similar to those in the local charter schools” (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, p. 2). This study identified two factors associated with charter schools' on traditional public schools and traditional public schools' response: the charter granting agency and enrollment trends. Districts that were not the charter granting entity and did not have safeguards written into legislation reported greater impacts than districts with charter granting authority. Districts with stable or declining enrollments all reported that charter schools negatively impacted their budget as well as a greater impact on their education and operations. Districts with

increasing enrollments were more likely to report no impact on their budget as well as fewer changes to education and operations. Overall, this report suggests that charter schools impact traditional public school districts to a large extent (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). It is important to consider that this report was published in 2001, and since then, charter schools have become increasingly more prevalent, more data is available about charter schools, and the general population has a greater familiarity with charter schools.

A more recent study conducted through the Economic Policy Institute concludes there is an overwhelmingly negative impact on traditional public school districts from the growth of charter schools. Bruce D. Baker reports that his findings demonstrate “charter expansion may increase inequity, introduce inefficiencies and redundancies, compromise financial stability, and introduce other objectionable distortions to the system that impede delivery of an equitable distribution of excellent or at least adequate education to all children” (Baker, 2016, p. i). Baker warns strongly against charter school expansion and the public funding of charter school expansion programs, particularly on the federal level (Baker, 2016).

Changes in enrollment trends due to charter schools can have a notable effect on district budgets. Richard Buddin suggests that charter schools draw significant numbers of students from private schools, requiring more public money to be spent on students who otherwise would not be enrolled in public school. Buddin writes that “public revenue growth may not keep pace with public enrollments, and districts may face pressures to reduce educational services” (Buddin, 2012, p. 24). Buddin also notes that more parents

enrolling their children in public schools many lead to increased advocacy for public education financing, potentially resulting in positive impacts on the budget of traditional public schools (Buddin, 2012).

The overall findings on the impact of charter schools on traditional public school districts is decidedly inconclusive. Because the literature assesses the impact of charter schools in four areas (students, teachers, budget & finances, and operations), I will assess the impact in terms of the same four categories. I will also use information about charter school location and factors relevant to the impact to select comparison districts and create a set of interview questions for school and district officials.

Chapter 3: Methodology

For my thesis research, I sought to use factors and variables identified through current literature to predict the overall impact of charter schools on traditional public schools in Mississippi. To do so, I conducted a cross-case study comparison. As such, the research consisted of multiple case studies. I looked at two districts in Mississippi with a current charter school presence.² The two Mississippi districts studied are Jackson Public Schools (JPS) in Jackson and the Clarksdale Municipal School District (CMSD) in Clarksdale. I compared each of these two districts with similar districts across the United States that have more well-established charter schools.³ Clarksdale, MS and the selection of relative comparison districts are classified as “Sample 1”. Jackson, MS and the selection of relative comparison districts are classified as “Sample 2”.

When selecting comparison districts, I first ruled out states that have charter school laws highly dissimilar to Mississippi’s, particularly on the basis of charter authorizing entity. Next, because the literature suggests that size of the district is the greatest determinant of the charter schools’ impact, I selected comparison districts primarily based on size (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Next, I accounted for various characteristics, such as racial demographics, socioeconomic characteristics, and specific student populations, and selected districts closest to the Mississippi districts’ populations.

² At the time of this study, Jackson and Clarksdale are the only cities in Mississippi that have a charter school(s) in operation and there were no additional charter schools approved by MCSAB in any other city in Mississippi.

³ One comparison district included in this study, Hudson Independent School District, is adjacent to an well-established charter school. See footnote 4.

Figure 3.1 outlines selected data from both the Mississippi districts and their comparison districts in both samples.

Figure 3.1 School District Comparison Data (2017-18)							
		Total Enrollment	Student/Teacher Ratio	ELL Students	IEP Students	Total Revenue	Total Revenue Per Student
Sample 1	Clarksdale Municipal School District	2,812	13.88	12	302	\$29,523,000	\$9,478
	Colorado River Schools	2,865	19.83	101	351	\$22,649,000	\$7,448
	Hudson Independent School District	2,782	14.4	183	213	\$26,905,000	\$9,685
Sample 2	Jackson Public Schools	28,019	15.59	114	2,496	\$276,914,000	\$9,391
	Tacoma Public Schools	29,323	17.99	2,686	3,904	\$392,075,000	\$13,442
	Little Rock School District	24,797	12.94	2,855	3,178	\$358,480,000	\$14,276

(National Center for Education Statistics, 2019)

To gather my data, my plan was to conduct semi-structured interviews with school administrators from charter schools and district officials from traditional public school districts. I generated a list of questions based on those asked in similar research studies, particularly the U.S. Department of Education’s 2001 study “Challenge and Opportunity: the Impact of Charter Schools on School Districts,” and impact variables identified in other studies. I took notes during the interviews. I contacted the schools and districts largely via email initially and over the phone to follow-up. For some districts, I made in-person visits. All the interviews were conducted in-person or over the phone to ensure my ability to ask follow-up questions. I did not record the interviews to help the subjects feel more comfortable and provide more honest and forthcoming responses. Additionally,

I kept identifying information confidential about the officials I interviewed to further insure genuine responses. Once I had completed the interview process, I examined my notes to determine trends and themes. I next combined that information with other information I obtained concerning the district. I then applied the entirety of the comparison cases to their respective Mississippi school district. Because the traditional public school districts and charter schools (rather than the officials or students) were the subjects of my research, my study did not require Institutional Review Board approval.

The interview questions can found in Appendix A & B (pg. 56-58).

I examined outside information and data trends to compare with the interview information I gathered. For example, if a traditional public school district official claimed that fewer children are attending the local high school, I sought out data to verify their claim. This secondary data was more corroborative than informative in purpose. I sought data from public sources or through the interviewees; I did not collect any secondary data first hand. Overall, this study is qualitative in nature.

Chapter 4: Results

I planned to interview officials from both the charter school and the traditional public school district in each selected community. In Sample 1, I planned to interview charter school and traditional public school district officials in Clarksdale as well as in four other comparison districts across the United States. For various reasons (further outlined in the limitations section), I was only able to interview a school official from Clarksdale Collegiate Public Charter School, district officials from Clarksdale Municipal School District, a district official from Colorado River Schools, and a district official from Hudson Independent School District. In Sample 2, I planned to interview charter school and traditional public school district officials in Jackson as well as in five other comparison districts across the United States. For various reasons (further outlined in the limitations section), I was only able to interview a district official from Jackson Public Schools, a school official from Midtown Public Charter School, a district official from Tacoma Public Schools, a school official from E-Stem Public Charter Schools, and a school official from LISA Academy Public Charter Schools.

Figure 4.1 Sample 1 (Clarksdale, Mississippi) Interview Respondents			
	Clarksdale, MS	Bullhead City, AZ	Hudson, Texas
Traditional Public School District	Clarksdale Municipal School District (CMSD)	Colorado River Schools (CRS)	Hudson Independent School District (HISD)
Charter School	Clarkdale Collegiate Public Charter School (Clarksdale Collegiate)		

Figure 4.2 Sample 2 (Jackson, Mississippi) Interview Respondents			
	Jackson, MS	Tacoma, WA	Little Rock, AR
Traditional Public School District	Jackson Public Schools (JPS)	Tacoma Public Schools (TPS)	
Charter School	Midtown Public Charter School (Midtown)		E-Stem Public Charter Schools (E-Stem) LISA Academy Public Charter Schools (LISA Academy)

The results of this research are presented in the form of summarized interviews.

The interviews themselves were kept confidential to facilitate more honest responses

from the subjects. As such, no names of individuals or specific titles are mentioned in this study. Besides the information about the districts themselves, all the information provided is from the interview; therefore, some claims may be made that are factually inaccurate or misleading. Such claims were included in the study to maintain its authenticity as well as to present the beliefs of the school or district. When calculating the number of schools within a district or geographic region, pre-k programs and community colleges are not counted.

Sample 1: Clarksdale Mississippi

Clarksdale, Mississippi

There are two traditional public school districts in Clarksdale. Clarksdale Municipal School District (CMSD) serves families within approximate city limits and Coahoma County Schools serves families within the county (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019a). Clarksdale has one charter school, Clarksdale Collegiate Public Charter School, that opened in July 2018 (Clarksdale Collegiate, 2018). There are currently three private schools in Clarksdale and one additional private school in Coahoma County (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019b).

Figure 4.3 Clarksdale, Mississippi Enrollment Data			
	Grades served (2018-19)	Total Enrollment (2018-19)	Total Enrollment in Overlapping Grades (2018-19)
CMSD	Pre-K* - 12	2342	526
Clarksdale Collegiate	K - 2	146	146
*K = Kindergarten (Mississippi Department of Education, 2019)			

Clarksdale Municipal School District- Interview, October 25, 2018

When asked about the impact of Clarksdale Collegiate, CMSD officials said they would not know the true impact until January 2019, when the district must provide the charter school with per pupil funding. District officials, however, did discuss the perceived impact from the charter school opening. CMSD has lost students and a teacher to the charter school. Officials mentioned increased competition in hiring teachers due to the presence of the charter school. The charter schools is viewed by the district as a new district coming in and competing with CMSD. There is no relationship between CMSD and Clarksdale Collegiate.

District officials largely emphasized the increased flexibility charter schools have, giving them an unfair advantage over the district. Additionally, district officials were displeased with the lack of communication concerning Clarksdale Collegiate from the school as well as from the state.

Clarksdale Collegiate Public Charter School- Interview, October 25, 2018

When asked about Clarksdale Collegiate relationship with the district, the school official informed me there was no relationship beyond that of sharing students' files or possibly purchasing buildings. The school official noted that is was too early to assess any impact on CMSD or any other traditional public school district.

Hudson, Texas⁴

Hudson, Texas is a town just southwest of Lufkin. The town is served by one traditional public school district, Hudson Independent School District (HISD). There are no charter schools within HISD proper; however, there is one less than five miles away in nearby Lufkin (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019a). Pineywoods Community Academy has an enrollment of 1037 (2016-2017 academic year) and has been in operation since the 1999-2000 academic year (Pineywoods Community Academy, n.d.). There are two private schools in Lufkin and one additional private school in Angelina County, but none in Hudson (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019b).

Figure 4.4 Hudson, Texas Enrollment Data			
	Grades served (2016-17)	Total Enrollment (2016-17)	Total Enrollment in Overlapping Grades (2016-17)
HISD	Pre-K* - 12	2,838	2,838
Pineywoods	Pre-K - 12	1,037	1,037

***K = Kindergarten
(Texas Education Agency, 2019 ; Pineywoods Community Academy, n.d.)**

⁴ I included Hudson Independent School District in my study because there are few districts that are sufficiently comparable to Clarksdale and of the proximity of Pineywoods Community Academy to HISD still potentially allows for a significant impact.

Hudson Independent School District- Interview, October 18, 2018

When asked about a nearby charter school, a district official at HISD said Pineywoods was not a concern of the district. Only thirty-nine students residing within HISD attend the charter school, a statistic that is down from the past four years. The charter school doesn't have a significant financial impact on district. According to the district official, Pineywoods doesn't have any impact on HISD student demographics, teachers, budgeting, or operations. The financial impact is not significant due to the fact that many of the students who attend the charter school began their education in the charter school.

The district official said that there is no relationship between HISD and Pineywoods. He concludes it is the district's success that makes the charter school less of a relevant entity.

Bullhead City, Arizona

Bullhead City is a small city in Arizona on the border of Nevada and California. Bullhead City Elementary School District serves as the traditional public school district at the elementary level and Colorado River Union High School District at the high school level. The two traditional public school districts combined are known as Colorado River Schools (CRS) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019a). There is one charter school in Bullhead City, and it has been in operation since 2001 (Mohave Accelerated,

2018). There are no private schools in Bullhead City (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019b).

Figure 4.5 Bullhead City, Arizona Enrollment Data			
	Grades served (2017-18)	Total Enrollment (2017-18)	Total Enrollment in Overlapping Grades (2017-18)
CRS	Pre-K* - 12	4,618	4,598
Mohave Accelerated	K - 12	875	875
*K = Kindergarten (Arizona Department of Education, n.d.)			

Colorado River Schools- Interview. November 1, 2018

When asked about Mohave Accelerated, a CRS official said the the charter school has had a significant impact on the district. The charter school has caused the overall percentage of children with learning disabilities (students with an IEP) attending CRS to increase. District enrollment has decreased in part due to the charter school and in part to a declining overall population. Each year, one or two teachers leave CRS for the charter school. The charter school has a significant impact on district finances since so many kids

are leaving. The overall relationship between the CRS and Mohave Accelerated is professional, and really only exists in terms of competing in athletics and the transaction of students' files.

Sample 2: Jackson, Mississippi

Jackson, Mississippi

Jackson is the capital and most populous city in Mississippi (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). The community is served by Jackson Public Schools (JPS) as its traditional public school district. JPS is the largest traditional public school district in the state as well as the only urban school district (Jackson State University, n.d.). As of the 2018-19 school year, there are four charter schools in operation in Jackson (Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board, n.d.). There are twenty-five private schools in the Jackson metropolitan area (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019b).

Figure 4.6 Jackson, Mississippi Enrollment Data			
	Grades served (2018-19)	Total Enrollment (2018-19)	Total Enrollment in Overlapping Grades (2018-19)
JPS	Pre-K* - 12	23,935	10,398
Midtown	5 - 8	264	264
All Charter Schools	K - 1; 5 - 8	1,461	1,461
*K = Kindergarten (Mississippi Department of Education, 2019)			

Jackson Public Schools, Interview, November 8, 2018

The charter schools in Jackson have caused a decrease in JPS enrollment. There has not been significant impact on JPS demographics or the academic performance of its students due to the charter schools. Initially, some teachers left the district to teach at the charter schools, but that trend has become less prevalent in more recent years. The decrease in district enrollment has had a large impact on district finances. Loss of both funding and enrollment caused the district to reduce the number of administrative positions. The charter schools have led JPS to close and consolidate schools. JPS has also raised teacher pay and began offering signing bonuses to teachers in order to compete with the charter schools. The district official mentioned she heard rumors of charter schools across the state engaging in fraudulent practices. Overall, the relationship between JPS and the charter schools within the district was described as acrimonious. However, there have been recent strides amongst charter school and district leaders to examine how they could co-exist more harmoniously.

Midtown Public Charter School- Interview, January 23, 2019

When asked about the school's relationship with JPS, the school official described it as solely a working one; files are exchanged and financial interactions occur. There is currently no collaboration between Midtown and JPS due to the belief that charter schools are stealing from the district. The Charter Management Organization (CMO) operating Midtown is a community organization that works closely with JPS in some of

its other program areas, but not with the charter school. However, the school official shared her desire for future collaboration, particularly in the areas of curriculum and professional development. She also mentioned that Midtown would be willing to share any of their successful practices with JPS. Many of the students who attend Midtown, especially in the beginning, are students who struggled in JPS. Midtown noted they had smaller class sizes, allowing them to implement programs different than those offered at JPS. The school official noted that there is a general fear that charter school would “skim the top” of the students in the traditional public school district; however, such was not the case at Midtown. The Midtown official was aware that charter schools in Jackson financially impact JPS; however, noted that the loss of funds may force JPS to look more creatively at their budget. In terms of teachers, those who teach at Midtown come from a mixture of JPS and other schools / districts. Midtown struggles with hiring teachers in the same way many other traditional public schools and districts in Mississippi do.

Tacoma, Washington

Tacoma, Washington is largely served by Tacoma Public Schools as the city’s traditional public school district, but parts of the community feed into the nearby districts of Fife Public Schools and Franklin Pierce Schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019a). As of the 2018-19 school year, there are three charter schools in operation in Tacoma (What are Charter Schools?, n.d.). Additionally, Tacoma is home to twenty-one private schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019b).

Figure 4.7 Tacoma, Washington Enrollment Data			
	Grades served (2018-19)	Total Enrollment (2018-19)	Total Enrollment in Overlapping Grades (2018-19)
TPS	Pre-K* - 12	30,215	28,670
Total Charter Schools	K - 12	576	576
*K = Kindergarten (State of Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2019)			

Tacoma Public Schools- Interview, October 11, 2018

When asked about TPS’s relationship with charter schools, the district official said that the relationship is cordial, particularly at the superintendent-level. He noted little overall impact on the district from charter schools. Charter schools have not had a significant impact on enrollment in the district, as some of the students attending charter schools reside outside of TPS boundaries. There has been no impact on teachers, the teacher hiring process, or staffing patterns due to charter schools. TPS has not lost any teachers to charter schools and he noted that TPS pays teachers better than the charter schools. The official strongly believed that because TPS is such a big district, the effects of charter schools are negligible. The district official noted that there has been increased funding and efforts on the district-level allocated towards communicating the more

innovative aspects of TPS schools; however, he was unclear if these changes were the result of charter schools.

Little Rock, Arkansas

Little Rock is located in central Arkansas and is the state’s capital city. Little Rock is largely served by Little Rock Public School District as the traditional public school district, but is also served by the North Little Rock School District and the Pulaski County Special District (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019a). As of the 2018-19 school year, there are seven charter schools located within LRSD and five more located in nearby districts (Charter Schools, n.d.). There are twenty-seven private schools in Little Rock (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019b).

Figure 4.8 Little Rock, Arkansas Enrollment Data			
	Grades served (2018-19)	Total Enrollment (2018-19)	Total Enrollment in Overlapping Grades (2018-19)
LRSD	K* - 12	21,595	21,595
E-Stem	K - 12	3,070	3,070
LISA Academy	K - 12	2,218	2,218
*K = Kindergarten (Arkansas Department of Education, 2019)			

E-Stem Public Charter Schools- Interview, October 11, 2018

When asked about their relationship with LRSD, the E-Stem official said that the relationship was not good. E-Stem leaders have approached LRSD leaders looking for issues on which they might be able to collaborate, but the district has not reciprocated. The school official notes that most of the population in Little Rock is either supportive of traditional public schools and not of charter schools, or vice versa. Such polarization on the issue of charter schools had led to an absence of rational and objective discussion about charter school policy in Little Rock. The school official told of a fairly recent instance where E-Stem was attempting to grow and was met with active hostility from the district. E-Stem has studied where its students come from and only about half attended or would have attended LRSD schools. LRSD has seen a recent decrease in enrollment, while E-Stem has seen a significant increase in enrollment. Many minority and disadvantaged families have begun to show an interest in E-Stem. The school has a 68% combined Black and Hispanic population and half the school population qualifies for Free and Reduced Priced Lunch (FRPL). In turn, LRSD has seen a decrease in disadvantaged students and has lost some federal funding as a result.

In terms of an impact on the district, the school official noted that district had begun to adopt a calendar similar to that E-Stem's (longer school year with more breaks) as well as made some curriculum changes based on that of E-Stem's. However, the official noted that the district would never acknowledge such changes as originating from E-Stem. In terms of teachers, the E-Stem official said that about half of the teachers when E-Stem first opened came from LRSD, but now the number of LRSD teachers moving to

E-Stem is minimal. E-Stem uses a different teacher pay scale than LRSD and many teachers, especially more experienced ones, get paid more by the district. There are also teacher unions in LRSD but not in E-Stem. Lastly, the school official believed that E-Stem has a particularly dysfunctional relationship with the traditional public school district that other charter schools in Little Rock do not seem to have.

LISA Academy Public Charter Schools- Interview, October 18, 2018

When asked to characterize the relationship between LISA Academy and LRSD, a LISA Academy official noted there was controversy between the district and the charter school; however, there have been recent strides to improve the relationship. Leaders from the district and LISA Academy have made plans to tour each other's schools and share best practices. Much of the controversy between the LRSD and charter schools have been a result of misunderstanding and misperceptions about charter schools, but both groups are trying to clear that up and work together. For example, many at the district believe charter schools are taking the best and the brightest students; however, such beliefs are not supported by data. The school official mentioned that charter schools helped make evident issues that the district needed to address. In terms of an impact on the district, the LISA Academy official saw no changes in district curriculum due to charter schools; however, the charter school has shared curriculum and programs with districts other than LRSD. LISA Academy is a system of schools that stretches beyond LRSD and their relationships with their respective traditional public school district are fairly similar across all of its schools. The official went on to say that much of the charter school

push-back came from the public and teachers' unions rather than from the district. Lastly, the school official discussed the decline in district enrollment. She mentioned that many are quick to believe it's the result of charter schools, when data shows that it is more due to people moving out of the district.

Limitations

It is important to keep in mind several limitations concerning the methodology of this study, the most salient being the sample size. Many of the traditional public school districts and charter schools I sought to study did not respond or did not wish to be interviewed. This unresponsiveness was due to the sensitive nature of the subject, time constraints, and institutional processes. While discretion and confidentiality were promised, some officials still felt uncomfortable discussing their relationship with the charter school or the traditional public school district. Officials not wishing to be interviewed could signify a negative or strained relationship between the two entities; however, there is not evidence to support this claim. Second, time constraints played into officials not wishing to be interviewed. Many officials, particularly at the charter schools, expressed not having the time in their schedule to hold an interview. Lastly, certain institutional processes made interviewing some traditional public school districts impossible. Some districts required that have a doctoral degree in order to include them in this research. Others required submission of the research through a review process that would extend beyond the timeline for this study.

The second key limitation is a significant portion of the findings are derived from charter school or traditional public school district officials. While these individuals are the foremost experts on the relationship between the charter school and the traditional public school district in a given community, some of their responses or the information they provide may not be empirically accurate.

The final key limitation is that in many instances, not every possible actor was interviewed. I was either only able to interview the traditional public school district or the charter school in some communities. Due to the scale of this study, I was not able to interview every traditional public school district from which the charter school could draw students. Also, for reasons I noted above, I did not interview every charter school in each community, foregoing the possibility that different charter schools could have a different relationship or impact on the traditional public school district.

Chapter 5: Analysis, Discussion & Policy Recommendations

The results of this study revealed the unique nature of each charter school and traditional public school district as well as the unique challenges each charter school and traditional public school district faces. To that effect, drawing a generalized conclusion about the overall relationship between charter schools and traditional public school districts is not beneficial in understanding of the present relationship nor in shaping future education policy. However, a nuanced approach to understanding the relationship between charter schools and traditional public school districts can be helpful in shaping smaller policy components.

Figure 3 aggregates the responses of the interviews with school and district officials in Sample 1. Impacts were classified as positive, slightly positive, negative, slightly negative, or none. If the official did not provide a response that answered the question, it is noted on figure 3 as “n/a”. While the classification of the impact may be the same on the chart, it does not indicate that the impact itself is equal.

Figure 5.1
Sample 1 (Clarksdale, Mississippi) Analysis

	Clarksdale Municipal School District	Clarksdale Collegiate	Colorado River Schools	Hudson Independent School District
Students	District enrollment	n/a	negative	none
	Demographic make-up of the student body	none	negative	none
	Academic performance of district students	n/a	n/a	none
Teachers	District teacher retention	n/a	negative	none
	Teacher hiring process	n/a	slightly positive	none
	Staffing patterns	none	none	none
Finances	District budget	n/a	negative	none
	Allocation of funds	n/a	slightly negative	none
Operations	Educational changes at the district level	n/a	n/a	none
	Operational changes at the district level	n/a	n/a	none
	Changes at the district level relating to teachers	n/a	slightly positive	none
	Facilities	n/a	n/a	none
	Does the district keep track of charter school data (enrollment, performance, etc..)?	no	no	no

Figure 4 aggregates the responses of the interviews with school and district officials in Sample 2. Impacts were classified as positive, slightly positive, negative, slightly negative, or none. If the official did not provide an response that answered the question, it is noted on figure 3 as “n/a”. While the classification of the impact may be the same on the chart, it does not indicate that the impact itself is equal. Classifications of responses of E-Stem and LISA Academy officials represent schools located within the same traditional public school district.

Figure 5.2
Sample 2 (Jackson, Mississippi) Analysis

	JPS	Midtown	TPS	E-Stem	LISA
District enrollment	negative	n/a	none	negative	none
Demographic make-up of the student body	none	positive	none	slightly positive	none
Academic performance of district students	none	n/a	n/a	n/a	none
District teacher retention	slightly negative	none	none	slightly negative	n/a
Teacher hiring process	none	none	none	n/a	n/a
Staffing patterns	slightly negative	n/a	none	n/a	n/a
District budget	negative	positive	none	none	n/a
Allocation of funds	n/a	positive	none	none	n/a
Educational changes at the district level	n/a	n/a	none	positive	slightly positive
Operational changes at the district level	none	n/a	slightly positive	positive	positive
Changes at the district level relating to teachers	positive	n/a	none	n/a	n/a
Facilities	negative	n/a	n/a	n/a	slightly positive
Does the district keep track of charter school data (enrollment, performance, etc..)?	yes	n/a	no	yes	n/a

In Sample 1, the results indicate that charter schools have a negative impact overall on the traditional public school district in which they are located. However, in Sample 2, the results indicate less of an overall negative impact. This finding is in line with literature saying size of the traditional public school district is one of the largest influencers of charter school impact. Across both samples, decreases student enrollment due to charter schools have less of an impact on the traditional public school district when the district has a larger student population or there are more districts from which the charter schools can draw students. The number of teachers leaving the traditional public school district to teach at a charter school located within that district generally is significant during the charter school's formative years, but decreases over time. Much of what drives teachers leaving the traditional public school district is greater flexibility in certification requirements for charter schools. In districts where hiring teachers is more challenging, charter schools overall neither improve nor worsen the situation.

As funding for traditional public school districts is tied to student enrollment, the impact of charter schools on traditional public school district finances follows the same trends as student enrollment. In some instances, charter schools leading to a lower overall budget for their corresponding traditional public school district forces the district to allocate money more effectively; however, such was not the case in every district.

Operationally, charter schools appear to have little impact on the traditional public school district in Sample 1, but have an overall positive impact in Sample 2. These positive impacts come in the form of increases in teacher pay, more frequent parental communication, and the adoption of successful practices and programs.

In both samples, the relationship between charter schools and the traditional public school district was largely non-existent. If any contact occurred between the two entities, it was to exchange information. In a notable number of cases, however, the relationship was fairly acrimonious. While there is little direct collaboration between the charter schools and the traditional public school districts in either sample, some officials have begun to collaborate or hope to collaborate. In the districts where this is the case, the relationship was more positive as a result. Furthermore, some traditional public school districts and charter schools from both samples expressed their desire for increased communication, believing if this occurred, the relationship might become more positive.

Results of this study indicate that the net impact of charter schools on traditional public school districts in the long term could vary significantly both in communities like Jackson and like Clarksdale. As such, it is important to ensure that such impact is positive or, at minimum, not negative. Policymakers should consider the following points when crafting future charter school policy in Mississippi:

1. Increased communication. The Mississippi Department of Education should ensure that leaders from charter schools and traditional public school districts meet semi-frequently. Such meetings will encourage collaboration and prevent misinformation from influencing positions.
2. When approving new charter schools, particularly in communities similar to Clarksdale, the MCSAB should consider the number of traditional public districts and schools from which the new charter school could potentially draw students. Doing so can lead to a decreased burden on a single district.

3. When approving new charter schools, particularly in communities similar to Clarksdale, the MCSAB should consider the grade-level at which the charter school would begin enrolling students. Students who attend a charter school at their start of their career in public education will not cause the traditional public school district any actual lost funds, only the loss of potential funds. This consideration will assist the traditional public school district in budgeting more appropriately.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Since public education was first established in Mississippi, it has been riddled with inequality, underfunding, academic underperformance, and countless other issues. In turn, policymakers have sought ways to fix the problems that plague the state's public education system. One of those solutions came in 2013 with the passage of the *Mississippi Public Charter School Act of 2013*, allowing for charter schools in state of Mississippi. Since Mississippi's first charter school under this Act opened in 2015, the state is beginning to see the short-term impacts on the education system as a whole, particularly on the traditional public school districts in which the charter schools are located.

This study examines the short-term impact of charter schools on traditional public school districts in Mississippi and analyzes the long-term impact of charter schools on traditional public school districts across the United States in an effort to predict the long-term overall impact of charter schools on traditional public school districts in Mississippi.

Two districts in Mississippi were studied, Clarksdale and Jackson, since those districts have established charter schools. The findings of this study reveal that the impact of charter schools on traditional public school districts in both communities can vary significantly and can largely be shaped by individuals and public policy.

Some avenues for further research include a more narrowly focused study that examines a specific impact charter schools may have on traditional public school

districts. Additional research could also use a similar methodology to investigate the relationship between charter school and private schools or a subset of traditional public schools (eg. magnet schools, virtual public schools, etc...). Ultimately, as more charter school legislation is being considered across the nation, it is important that more research is conducted to better understand the role charter schools play in education in the United States

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Appendix A

Interview Questions for Traditional Public School Districts

- How have charter schools affected students in the district?
 - Have charter schools affected district enrollment
 - Have charter schools affected the demographic make-up of the student body in the district?
 - Has the academic performance of district students changed with the establishment of charter schools?
- How have charter schools affected teachers in the district?
 - Has there been an impact on teacher retention in the district due to the implementation of charter schools?
 - Has there been an impact on the hiring process for new teachers in the district due to charter schools?
 - Have there been any district staffing pattern changes due to the implementation of charter schools?
- How have charter schools affected finances in the district?
 - Has there been an impact on the district budget due to the establishment of charter schools?
 - Would you characterize this impact as positive, negative, or neither?
 - Have there been any changes to the way the district allocates its money due to the establishment of charter schools?

- How has the charter school affected district operations?
 - Does the district keep track of charter school data?
 - Enrollment, performance, etc..
 - Have there been any changes at the district level in terms of the students' education due to the establishment of charter schools?
 - Have there been any changes at the district level in terms of operations due to the establishment of charter schools?
 - Have there been any changes at the district level relating to teachers due to the establishment of charter schools?
 - Have there been any other effects on district operations?
 - Has there been an impact on district facilities due to charter schools?
- How would you characterize your relationship with the charter school in your district?
- What are some actual manifestations of this relationship?
- Do you have any data or statistics to corroborate the information provided?

Appendix B

Interview Questions for Charter Schools

- How would you characterize your relationship with the traditional public school district in which you are located
- What are some actual manifestations of this relationship?
- Have you impacted the district since you were established, with regards to students?
- Have you impacted the district since you were established, with regards to teachers?
- Have you financially impacted the district since you were established?
- Have you impacted the district since you were established, with regards to district operations?
- Have you in any other way impacted the district since you were established?
- Do you have any data or statistics to corroborate the information provided?