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## **Maine's Charter School Law: Predicted Impacts on Waynflete School Enrollment**

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Kelsey Robinov

Capstone Research Report

Maine's Charter School Law: Predicted Impacts on Waynflete School Enrollment

May 13, 2014

Faculty Advisor: Lisa Morris

## **Introduction**

In September 2011 the State of Maine passed LD 1553 and became the 41<sup>st</sup> state in the nation to enact public charter school legislation. Charters took effect in Maine after July 1, 2012. Charter schools are publically funded schools that are privately run – often by a board of trustees – and operate outside of many state rules and regulations. These schools are evaluated on proposed outcomes outlined in their charter as opposed to adhering to strict pedagogical, curricular, and management guidelines. “Each charter is responsible for meeting statewide accountability standards, but they have more flexibility than traditional public schools (TPSs) in managing day-to-day operations” (Buddin 2012).

Extensive research has been done on the quality of charter schools and their impact on student achievement “Most research has focused on whether charters improve student test scores, whether charter competition improves achievement at nearby TPSs, whether charters increase the isolation of racial/ethnic groups, or whether charters attract students of high ability of high socioeconomic status” (Buddin 2012). Charter schools are funded by a “money follows the child” policy – state dollars that would go to the public school per pupil follow each student who attends a charter school, effectively reducing the public school’s budget and arguably draining resources and engaged, motivated students who choose to attend charter schools instead (Chakrabarti 2011).

Independent schools, however, also represent stakeholders in this education policy issue. Private, independent schools operate by charging tuition to families and also solicit private donations and grants. Receiving no state or federal monetary support, independent schools are not subject to the rules and regulations that accompany such funding. These schools offer an important option for families seeking small class sizes, religious teaching, or alternative pedagogical methods. However, this school choice is expensive for families. In Southern Maine’s Cumberland County, only one in twelve families can afford to send even one child to a private school that charges tuition comparable to Waynflete School, putting increasing pressure on these private

institutions to grow financial aid capacity in order to help families who otherwise could not afford a private school education. With increasing costs driving tuition higher and with the recent economic declines, private schools have seen a decrease in applicants in recent years and a sharp increase in financial aid need for families who do apply.

While charter schools represent an effort to improve public school education, they also represent a possible threat to private school enrollment. As stated in a 2010 staff report on the subject by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York "...private schools represent a vital and salient segment of the education sector, and any policy that affects enrollment in these schools has the potential to significantly impact overall education outcomes, including student achievement" (Chakrabarti 2010). If charter schools draw students from the private sector to the public school system in a significant number, it may result in an increased burden on taxpayers as educating students that were previously paying privately becomes a public responsibility. A significant increase in the number of students moving from private to public schools would require increased educational spending. This would require tax increases, cuts in other areas of spending, or a possible decrease in education services. (Buddin 2012).

In the 42 states that now have charter school law in 2014 the markets for school choice vary widely. "Understanding under what conditions states pass laws favorable to charters and under what conditions charter school participation is likely to be high will help to identify locations where school choice plans are likely to present a meaningful alternative to traditional public schools and where they are likely to remain small." (Stoddard 2006). Charter schools are changing private and public school enrollment patterns across the country, and it is important to examine the possible impacts that Maine's recent charter school law will have on its private school enrollment.

## **Aims of Study**

The aim of this study is to predict the impacts of Maine's recently enacted charter school law on the enrollment at Waynflete School, a private co-educational day school in Portland, Maine. National data on current public and private school enrollment trends were examined, as well as existing data on the effects of charter schools on enrollments at these schools. The intent at looking at this data will be to determine what, if any, factors can predict in what areas charter schools are likely to flourish and pull students from private schools in significant numbers and to compare the characteristics of these areas to Portland, Maine.

The second part of the study was a survey of Deans of Admission in northern New England to garner the opinions of experts in the field in regards to how charter schools versus private schools are meeting the needs of families in their market. In particular, the study addressed specific questions regarding enrollment competition in the areas in which they draw their students, their expert opinion regarding the threats and benefits of charter schools, programming differences between their private school and competing charter schools, and the type of students drawn to charter schools.<sup>1</sup>

## **Background and Review of Literature**

Maine's southern coastal Cumberland County is the most populated in the state and the county with the most per capita income. This is reflected in the number of students educated in private schools in this area. Cumberland County has a school age population of 0 to 17 years of 58,502. Of that population, nearly 7,200 students (12%) attend private schools. Only one in twelve families in Cumberland County can currently afford to send a child to private school. Over the next five years, based upon data from the National Association of Independent Schools, the percent of Cumberland County households with children age 0 to 17 years is expected to decrease by over 14 percent, further shrinking the pool of private school applicants (NAIS 2011).

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<sup>1</sup> In the initial stages of this study, the survey instrument asked respondents for specific aggregate data over a five year period. The questions sought to determine the number of the schools' applicants and students that left to attend charter schools. By assuming that charters schools posed a direct threat to these schools, and requesting data that schools did not necessarily track, the initial survey was not feasible.

Waynflete School has been in operation in Maine's largest city of Portland since 1898. Originally an all-girls grammar school, it has been a co-educational pre-kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade school since the 1960s. Waynflete has 570 students representing over 30 communities and is located in the West End of Portland, a peninsula within the city limits. Tuition for a full day student – Waynflete has no boarders – runs from \$22,000 per year in 1st grade up to \$27,000 for a 12<sup>th</sup> grader. As an independent school, 83% of its revenue comes from tuition, the remainder from fundraising and endowment income. Waynflete has an endowment of \$23,000,000, five percent per year of which is used to offset operating costs, including financial aid. Waynflete's financial aid budget for students is over \$3 million per year and represents over 25 percent of its operating budget (Waynflete 2014).

Maine has approved its first charter schools and currently has five in operation throughout the State. One, Baxter Academy of Technology and Science, in Portland – opened in September 2013 and is directly in Waynflete School's draw area for enrollment. Baxter Academy opened in 2013 with a freshman class of 130 students coming from 20 towns. In the fall of 2014, the school will add a sophomore class and admit 120 additional freshmen. They will continue to add a junior and senior class over the following two years until the high school is fully enrolled. According to their website, Baxter Academy is a rigorous, college-preparatory high school promoting student ownership of learning through curriculum focused specifically on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) (Baxter 2014).

Maine's current charter school legislation would allow a total of ten approved charter schools to operate in the State. The first charter school in the U.S. opened 23 years ago in 1991 in Minnesota. Since then, they have spread rapidly across the 41 states that have enacted charter school legislation. Currently, there are more than 6,000 operating in the United States, serving more than 2 million children (MACS 2014). It should be noted that the strength of the movements and the quality of the charters in each state vary significantly (Chakrabarti 2010). This variance has been the focus of extensive research over the past two decades. However

– as stated above - the vast majority of empirical research has focused on charter school student achievement. Recently, more research has been done on the effects of charter schools on enrollment patterns and the market mechanisms that drive them.

Before any state can open a charter school, it must have a state charter school law. Charter school laws across the states are not consistent, and it is important to take this into account when analyzing their effects on public and private school enrollment. Some state laws are created which are flexible and accommodating to the creation of charter schools, while others are limiting and restrictive. States are given scores by the Center for Education Reform (CER), with higher grades going to those who pass laws that are favorable to charter schools. “States are given high grades if there are few restrictions on starting a charter school, the number of charter schools is uncapped in the state, charters are granted by multiple entities (i.e. not just school districts) and charters receive comparable per student funding to traditional public schools” (Buddin 2012).

According to the CER grading system, the best charter schools laws – those most supportive of these schools - do not limit the number of charter schools that can operate in a state, nor do they limit the number of students that can attend. The CER also grades highly states that allow a number of entities to authorize a charter school, rather than leaving that power to one entity, especially the local school board. Charter laws that make charter schools exempt from most school district laws and regulations are considered strong, as well as those that allow charter schools to have control over their finances and receive the same funding as public schools.

Maine has received a grade of C- by the CER, and thus is not considered to have strong charter laws which are accommodating to charter schools. The state received 4 points out of 15 for independent authorizers. Charter schools in Maine are approved by local schools boards or by the State Charter School Commission. There is no appeal process for declined applications – the applicants must revise their application and resubmit it for reconsideration. Maine law received 3 points out of 10 for number of schools allowed. Maine has a cap on the number of schools that the Commission can approve and the number of students they may enroll. The

Commission may open ten schools in ten years, although local districts do not have a limit. School districts can authorize an unlimited number of charter schools in their local district, although charter schools once opened in Maine cannot enroll more than ten percent of the local school districts for the first three years they are in operation. (CER 2014)

Maine received a CER score of 10 out of 15 for operational autonomy. At the state level, charter schools in Maine have a blanket waiver from most rules and regulations of public schools and they are also free from many local rules and regulations as well. The Department of Education oversees both the Commission that approves charter schools and manages the charter processes, which the CER views as a possible conflict. Maine received 7 out of 15 for equity of funding, and -1 for implementation points. Funds to support charter schools pass from the state and districts to the charter schools. Per pupil funding is decreased from the public school rate by a 3 percent authorization fee and a 1 percent district fee. Additionally, there is no funding in Maine for facilities for charter schools – each charter must privately raise funds for their physical spaces and for the maintenance of these spaces. Maine lost a point for accountability and smoothness of implementation of the newly enacted charter school legislation. Overall, Maine ranks 28<sup>th</sup> out of 42 on the CER scorecard. Maine is not a state that has constructed laws overly welcoming and accommodating to charter schools (CER 2014).

A policy analysis by the CATO institute, “The Impact of Charter Schools on Public and Private School Enrollments” from August 2012 focuses on examining the changes in enrollment patterns across different types of schools across the United States with a particular emphasis on the growing charter school sector. This study utilized data from the Private School Universe Survey and the Common Core of Data which is maintained by the National Center for Education Studies. By merging data from these two sources, the study examined enrollment patterns across traditional public schools and charter schools across the country, as well as religious and nonsectarian private schools. The study controlled for the socioeconomic, demographic, and economic conditions that vary over time, as well as any state-specific effect.



This study resulted in some important conclusions. Between 2000 and 2008, K-12 overall enrollment grew by about 1.1 percent. Although the share of students in public schools grew from 89.5 to 90.8 percent during this period, the largest growth was in charter schools which grew at a rate of 17 percent. The share of private school enrollment declined during the same period from 10.5 percent to 9.2 percent. So while traditional public school and charter school enrollments grew, private school enrollments declined. Over the past ten years, the share of public school enrollment that has been attributed to charter schools has grown from 1.0 percent to 3.7 percent. Buddin also notes that although charter schools are most likely to have their greatest effects on public and private schools educating students in similar grade levels, the success of charters in these areas may lead to groups forming charter schools that offer other grades as well (Buddin 2012).

As well as analyzing overall enrollment patterns, the Buddin study examined whether charter school competition differed based on the urbanization of the districts. The study found that “private school enrollments are much more sensitive to charters in urban districts and in districts with large urban populations than in non-urban districts” (Buddin 2012). The study found overall that charter schools draw 8 percent of their elementary students from private schools and 11 percent of middle and high school students. However, in highly urban districts, private schools contribute 32, 34, and 15 percent to charter school elementary, middle, and high schools respectively. The authors note that urban areas “have greater population diversity, higher poverty rates, and smaller population growth than non-urban areas” (Buddin 2012), and suggest that their results support the hypothesis that charter schools fulfill different educational demands in urban than in non-urban areas. Other studies discussed later in this paper address these different demands.

The Buddin study also found that “charters are drawing more students from private schools in areas with stronger charter laws (as defined by CER)” (Buddin 2012). Although the authors are unable to isolate if this difference is due to specific characteristics of the laws themselves, they note that states are likely to enact strong

laws that support the growth of charter schools in states where there is considerable public support for school choice and charter enrollment.

A study by Glomm, Harris and Lo states that “Charter schools represent one part of the larger movement toward parental choice in the U.S. school system. The intention of these programs is to use market mechanisms to improve school efficiency and innovation” (Glomm 2005). The authors tested their theory that the number of charter schools entering a district depended upon how well the characteristics of the existing schools matched parent preferences. Using data from Michigan and California, the study regressed the number charter schools in each school district based upon the characteristics of the parents and public schools in the same districts. The study found that more charter schools existed in areas that are ethnically diverse, had many private schools, and a high amount of special education expenditures (Glomm 2005).

Glomm et al explain that the populations in racially diverse areas may have very disparate needs and preferences which the public school may not be addressing, leading to the creation of a charter school. The authors expand the definition of diversity to include level of income equality and adult education attainment. These groups may also want their children to be in a school with others from their own like group. Parents with a high education attainment may desire to improve school districts and the education that their children are receiving more than parents with no college education. Parents with a college degree may also be more likely to work within the system to enact change and create a charter school.

Charter schools may enter areas with many private schools because they offer many similar benefits without charging tuition and the market for alternative education is established. The authors state that in these areas “instead of providing competition, charters may simply shift resources to students who previously went to private schools” (Glomm 2005). The authors also explain that districts with a high amount of special education expenditures may need to use their resources for this population and therefore programs for gifted students may suffer, creating a market for a charter school serving this need. Charter schools have fewer “pull out” programs

for children with special needs so enrolling them in charter schools may enable their parents to mainstream them (Glomm 2005).

In their 2006 study “The Political Economy of School Choice,” Stoddard and Corcoran used a panel of demographic, financial and school performance data to examine support for charter schools at the state and local levels. The dual approach to this study examined why some states support strong charter laws while some do not, and – conditionally on state support of charter law – which districts in a state are likely to see more growth in charter enrollment and why. Their research suggests that “growing population heterogeneity and income inequality – in addition to low student outcomes – are associated with greater support for charter schools” (Stoddard 2006). They found that “states with growing income inequality and a rising fraction of Hispanics were more likely to pass charter laws and pass stronger laws. At the local level, districts with a high or increasing number of blacks, a high or increasing percentage of college educated adults, and with growing income inequality” experienced a larger percentage of students in charter schools than other districts.

These effects explained a large portion of the changes in charter school enrollment in the Stoddard study. The authors also found that at the state level, poor performance on the SAT motivated states to create charter laws and create strong laws. At the local level, there is some evidence that systematically low student achievement also fuels growth of charter schools (Stoddard 2006). The Glomm study found that “vertical differences (quality) of public schools does not appear to play a significant role” in charter school enrollment (Glomm 2005).

Two longitudinal studies examine how charter schools have affected private school enrollment, both focusing on data in the State of Michigan. Michigan was one of the first states to enact charter school legislation, and has experienced a widespread growth in the number of charters since its inception in 1993 - from 33 charter schools educating 4,449 students in 1995-96 to 202 charter schools and 64,103 students in

2001-02. The charter school laws in Michigan have been ranked as one of the strongest and most accommodating by the Center for Educational Reform (Chakrabarti 2010)

The conclusions of both Michigan studies indicate that charter schools result in a statistically significant reduction in private school enrollment, although the size of the effect differed between studies. The study done by Chakrabarti and Roy for the Federal Reserve Bank of New York in 2010 reports that the effect of charter schools on private school enrollment – though significant – is modest. The researchers found that an additional charter school in near vicinity (within 2 miles) of a private school decreased private school enrollment by 1.19% each year. A second study done by Toma et al (2006) reported that approximately 20 percent of the students who enroll in charter schools in Michigan were previously enrolled in private schools, while the remaining 80 percent came from public schools.

## **Method**

A review of existing research on school enrollment trends in the United States was undertaken, with attention particularly paid to the demographics of enrollment changes due to charter school location. The demographics were then compared to the demographics of the location of Waynflete School in Portland, Maine, so that comparisons and predictions of enrollment change could be made based on Maine's new charter school legislation. A review of charter school laws across the states according to the Center for Education Reform (CER) was also completed. Finally, a survey of Deans of Admission in New England was done to determine the education market trends that they have experienced in their school draw areas, all of which have existing charter school laws.

A sample of 17 Deans of Admission in New England was invited to take part in the study including Lynne Breen, the Dean of Admission at Waynflete School. This was a convenience sample and was created by using the National Association of Independent School (NAIS) database. All schools comparable to Waynflete in

New England states that allow charter schools were chosen for the study. These included schools in all New England states except for Vermont which does not have charter school legislation and utilizes a voucher system. A voucher is a funding certificate issued by the state government which parents may use pay or partially pay for their child to attend a public or private school of their choice. The 17 schools included in the study were co-educational, non-sectarian day schools that offered education through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Some of the schools in the survey began at Preschool or Kindergarten, others at 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

Seven Deans of Admission from New England independent day schools responded. The schools represented include: The Pingree School in South Hamilton, MA, 9-12 grade, tuition \$36,100; the Rocky Hill School, East Greenwich, RI, Pre-K-12<sup>th</sup> Grade, tuition \$30,400; Cape Cod Academy, Osterville, MA, K-12<sup>th</sup> grade, tuition \$24,500; Beaver County Day School, Brookline, MA, 6-12 grade, tuition \$39,950; Thayer Academy, Braintree, MA, 6-12<sup>th</sup> grade, tuition \$38,600, and Waynflete School, Portland, ME, Pre-K-12<sup>th</sup> grade, tuition \$27,000. One respondent did not indicate their school affiliation.

The survey instrument was comprised of 12 questions. Respondents were contacted through email and data collection was compiled and summarized using Survey Monkey. The survey asked questions that were designed to ascertain the biggest competitors in the schools' current markets, how long charters have existed in their draw areas, and what threats and/or benefits charter schools have brought to their communities. In addition, the survey asked what if any changes in programming or marketing their schools have been motivated to implement due to the existence of charter schools in their draw area. Following scale questions regarding the interest that families might have in school qualities and program enhancements charter schools often can or cannot offer, the survey then asked for adjectives that described the respondents' schools, the charter schools in their draw area, and the kind of student the respondents envision being drawn to a charter school.

## **Findings**

Results of this survey indicate that charter schools do offer many of the qualities of education that parents seek in private school education: small class size, specialized curriculum, and quality academics. They offer these with no large tuition bill attached. However, the literature reviewed and the surveys from the Deans of Admission in seven New England private schools indicate that there are other important factors that may determine the overall affect of a nearby charter school on private and public school enrollment. Looking at these factors, along with the results of the survey, in terms of the demographics of Portland, Maine where Waynflete School is located helped determine the possible impacts of Maine's charter school law on enrollment at Waynflete and other private schools in the Portland area.

The literature reviewed gives a national view of the impact of charter schools on public and private school enrollment. The CATO institute study indicates that private school enrollment is much more sensitive to charter schools in urban districts (Buddin 2012). Portland, Maine – though Maine's largest city – is a relatively small urban center and has a population of only 66,000. Cumberland County, in which Portland is located, has a population of just over a quarter million people. This is compared to Portland's largest urban neighbor, Boston, which has a population of 636,000.

The same study indicates that charter schools are drawing more students from private schools in states that have strong charter school laws and a high grade from the CER or the Center for Education Reform. Maine charter school law received a grade of C- from this organization – “Concerns include a cap on the number of charter schools initially allowed in Maine and the funding available to them.” (MacMillan 2012). Flexibility in charter school law – according to this study – is often characteristic of a state with more interest in school choice and charter enrollment. Maine's charter school law ranks particularly low in the areas of number of authorizers, number of schools allowed, and funding which indicates a weak support of the existence of charter schools and a lack of fiscal investment in those that do exist.

Research by both Glomm et al (2001) and Stoddard and Corcoran (2006) found that charter school enrollment was higher in areas that had increased diversity – this definition of diversity including ethnicity, income, and educational attainment differences. Districts tend to have more charter school enrollment when they contained a higher percentage of blacks, more and increasing income inequality, and a higher percentage of adults with a college education. The Glomm study did not find evidence that the quality of public schools in a district had a significant impact on charter school enrollment although Stoddard found some evidence that systematically low student performance did fuel the growth of charter schools in the district.

Portland ranks in the bottom 25 out of 366 metropolitan areas (over 50,000 people) in a recent Brown University study on racial and cultural diversity (Long 2012). According to the U.S. Census, in 2010 blacks made up 7.1% of the Portland population, compared to 13% nationally. This compares to the black population in Portland of 2.6% in 2000, so it is increasing although still well below the national average (U.S. Census 2011). The Gini coefficient is a common measure of inequality or variance, and is typically used to measure income inequality. A Gini coefficient of 0 would indicate no inequality, while a coefficient of 1 indicates complete inequality. Cumberland County, in which Portland, Maine resides, had a 2012 Gini coefficient of income inequality of .452 – this is the 65<sup>th</sup> percentile in the U.S. indicating that 65% of the most populous counties in the U.S. have lower income inequality, while 35% have higher income inequality. The U.S. has an overall Gini coefficient of .469, with states ranging from .419 to .532. Maine ranks 20<sup>th</sup> lowest with a score of .437 (Propublica 2014).

In both Glomm and Stoddard studies, they found that another factor to consider in evaluating the emergence of charter schools in an area is the educational attainment of its adult population. For the Portland population that is 25 years or older, 44.6% have a Bachelor's degree or higher. This compares to the national average of 28.5% and the Maine average that is closer to the national average at 27.3% (U.S. Census). This

would indicate that Portland parents would have an increased interest in student achievement and would tend to support charter schools in their district.

Performance at Portland Public Schools is varied. The Maine Department of Education recently gave all schools in the State a report card using the Maine School Performance Grading System. Of the 15 Portland schools, seven received a grade of C and three received a grade of D, two of these being Portland and Deering High Schools. Two schools received a grade of A, one of B, and two received an F – these were the East End Elementary School and Hall Elementary School (Maine DOE 2013). Waynflete School draws from over 30 communities – with Baxter Academy drawing from 20 - and the student performance in most is high, with drop out rates very low. This is especially true for the towns of Yarmouth, Falmouth, Cape Elizabeth, Cumberland and Scarborough. The fact that the Portland area is not a large, densely urban district allows Waynflete and any charter schools in the area to serve a substantial number of students from these outlying areas. As stated in the Buddin study, the level of urban density is a significant predictor of charter school growth, with more dense urban environments experiencing a higher rate of growth in charter schools.

The seven responding Deans of Admission to the distributed survey supplied their expert opinion of the school market in which they compete for students. Six of the seven respondents indicated that in their current market, charter schools are not their number one competitor – they answered that other private schools or public schools were their primary competition. Two of the respondents indicated that second to private or public schools, charter schools represented their competition for students. For those schools that compete with a charter school or schools at all for their applicant pool, five of the six responded that 10% or less of the students applying to their school were also applying to a charter school. One of the six indicated that greater than 15% were doing so.

When independent schools compete with charter schools for students, it is often necessary for the independent school to highlight elements of their program and/or change their marketing to respond to the threat



to their market that the charter school represents. Six of the seven private schools that responded indicated that they had highlighted an element of their program in response to programs that were being promoted by a nearby charter school. The programs they highlighted include: science and math, independent curriculum, experiential learning, IB (international baccalaureate) program, the addition of a high school, and the strength of their academic programs. Three of the seven schools indicated that they had not altered their marketing efforts in response to a competing charter school, but the remaining four responded that they had done so by: increasing overall marketing, emphasizing a comprehensive arts and athletics program, highlighting math and science programs, and in one case working with the middle school charter school to encourage graduates to attend their independent high school.

Charter schools bring with them benefits and also threats and challenges to the existing schools. In terms of benefits, three of the seven responding Deans of Admission indicated that charter schools give the benefit of an option to public school students that might not otherwise be able to afford an alternative education. One responded that the benefit was that charter schools have small class sizes and encourage independent learning, another that charter schools provide superior student support. Finally, one respondent indicated that the main benefit was that charter schools “hit the refresh button on public education; no unions, fresh ideas, reinvigorating the experience.” When asked about threats, this same respondent answered that charters “weaken the public school system base; hurting small, local districts.” The four remaining independent schools that answered the questions of threats posed by charter schools responded that they offer a strong academic program that is tuition free.

Whether marketing a private school or a charter school, it is important to know what your market desires and whether your school fits the bill. The last five questions were designed to question the qualities that charter schools offer that might interest the private school markets in which the respondents work, program enhancements that charters often cannot offer but would appeal to the private school market, adjectives that

would describe the respondents' private schools and the charter schools in their area, and also the type of student that the respondents envision being attracted to a charter school.

When asked which qualities used to describe the benefits of charter schools might interest families in the respondents' markets, all of the respondents answered faculty quality would have great interest, and six of the seven indicated both that no tuition would have great interest, and that a specialized curriculum would hold moderate or great interest. There are several program enhancements that private schools are able to offer that charter schools often cannot offer. Of the seven schools responding, all indicated that music and performing arts would both have moderate or great interest in their market, and six of the seven indicated that athletics hold great interest. Prestige and the availability of academic support were considered of moderate interest to the majority of the respondents, and five indicated that being able to choose among a variety of courses would hold great interest to families in their market.

When asked to choose from a long list of adjectives to describe their private school, all seven of the deans choose the four following: academic, personal, comfortable and warm and six of the seven also choose diverse, friendly, challenging, and supportive. When asked to choose from the same list to describe charter schools, only one adjective was chosen by all of the deans: academic. Three deans indicated they would describe charters as diverse, and three choose the following adjectives: warm, challenging, supportive, and not well known. The overlapping adjectives for both private and charter schools were academic, challenging, supportive, and warm. The deans chose personal friendly to describe private schools but not charters, and not well known to describe charters but not private schools.

Finally, the deans were asked what kind of student they envision being attracted to a charter school. Three indicated that students that were looking for an alternative to a public school education would be interested in a charter school. The remaining four emphasized the strong academic programs and an environment that would benefit an independent, hands-on learner.

## **Conclusions and Limitations**

Portland, Maine, where Waynflete School is located, does not meet the criteria for areas where public and private school enrollments are most affected by the existence of charter schools. According to a review of research of enrollment trends across the United States, the degree to which charter schools draw students from existing schools is dependent in large part upon the demographics of a school's market in which it competes for students, as well as the strength of charter school law enacted in the state. This study did not look at the levels of student achievement at existing charter schools and how that factor impacts enrollment trends. This may be an important factor for Waynflete School if the emerging charter schools in the Portland offer a rigorous academic program that substantially improves student achievement.

Research indicates that on a national level private school enrollment has declined from 2000 to 2008 while enrollment at charter schools has increased substantially. However, charter schools draw significantly more students from private and public schools in densely urban areas, areas with a highly diverse population, and in states where the charter laws are strong. The Portland, Maine area is not a densely urban area. At 66,000 people, Portland is a small city. Neither is Portland highly diverse when considering racial diversity and income diversity. Portland was ranked in the bottom 25 of 366 cities in a study done by Brown University on racial and cultural diversity. Cumberland County, Maine which includes the City of Portland ranks in the 65<sup>th</sup> percentile of 818 largest U.S. counties in terms of income inequality (Propublica 2014).

In terms of diversity of education levels, Portland does have a large percentage of its population 25 years of age or older that hold a Bachelor's degree or a higher degree. Research has indicated that this measure of diversity is positively related to local support of charter schools (Stoddard 2006). A higher percentage of adults with a college degree is associated with higher enrollment in local charter schools. As of 2012, the national average for adults 25 and older with a Bachelor's degree or higher was 28.5 percent, with Maine at 27.3

percent. In comparison, 44.6 percent of Portland's adult population held a college degree of 4 years or greater. This is one indicator that Portland families would support charter schools that opened in its area (U.S. Census 2014).

Strong charter laws as defined by the CER are indicative of a state that welcomes this school choice and creates little impediment to the formation of charter schools. This has shown to have an affect on the impact of charter schools on public and private school enrollment. Maine law received a grade of C- by the Center for Education Reform. (CER 2013). Maine does not fund schools at an equal rate as public schools and does not provide any funding for facilities. Maine has a cap of ten schools on the number that can be approved in ten years, and a cap of 10 percent of local students that can enroll in any one district in the first three years of a charter being in operation. Authorizers of charter schools include local schools districts and the State Charter School Commission, with no appeal process for those declined. If Maine alters its law to be more accommodating to charter schools it may increase the impact of charter schools on private and public school enrollment but data suggests that with the existing legislation the impact will not be dramatic.

The results of a survey of Deans of Admission in New England private schools support that charter schools offer many of the same educational attributes that families find attractive in private schools: small class sizes, specialized curriculum, and a challenging academic program. Charter schools offer this without charging tuition, which for the private schools surveyed averaged \$32,000 per year. If the charter schools that open in the Portland area offer a comparable program to Waynflete School, this financial difference will become ever more important to families.

The deans that responded, however, indicated that their primary competition in their markets is other private schools or public schools. They indicated that there are things that private schools often offer than charter schools often cannot that are important to families in their market – music and performing arts programs, athletics, prestige, and the availability of academic support. In Maine, the fact that charter schools are

given no funding for facilities and reduced funding per pupil as compared to public schools due to a fee for administrative costs, it will be difficult for charter schools in Maine to offer the level of extra programs and prestigious facilities that many private schools like Waynflete are able to offer. Waynflete offers a state-of-the-art performing and visual arts center, several baseball and lacrosse fields, tennis courts, and a crew team as well as an academic support department. These amenities are important to many families and may be a factor in choosing a private school over a charter school if families can afford the tuition or receive sufficient financial aid from the school.

It should be noted that the convenience sample used for the survey was small – seventeen schools – and only seven schools responded. This does not represent an accurate sample of the experience of private schools in New England nor certainly the United States. In addition, religiously affiliated schools have been proportionally more affected by charter schools than have non-sectarian schools (Buddin 2012). This survey did not include any religiously affiliated schools, rather only schools similar to Waynflete School were included.

Waynflete School and other private schools in the Portland area will be affected by the existence of one or more charter schools in the Cumberland County, Maine area. Research has shown that charter schools draw students from both the private and public sectors. Due to the demographics of Southern Maine and the fairly weak charter school legislation in Maine, enrollment at Waynflete School will not be significantly effected by charter schools in its draw area. The effect will also be determined by the strength of the programming at the emerging charter schools and Waynflete's reaction to the threat.

Private schools like Waynflete also need to adjust to a changing marketplace by adapting their programs or highlighting their existing programs that local charter schools offer. Waynflete has begun highlighting and expanding its robotics program and has added a digital literacy program to its curriculum. No longer can quality faculty, small intimate classes and specialized curriculum be enough to sway families that are choosing between standard public school and private school. The competition has increased, but if Waynflete can adjust its

marketing, continues to offer quality enhancements that are not available at charter schools, and make an education at its school as affordable as possible with available financial aid, the impact on its enrollment should not be as significant as for many private schools in other areas of the country.

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