



The Impact of Charter School Saturation on Public School Resources

By

Dr. Amy Catalano, Interim Dean of the School of Education, Professor of Teaching, Learning, and Technology

Dr. Theresa McGinnis, Professor of Specialized Programs in Education

Dr. Marilyn DePietto, Assistant Professor of Teaching, Learning, and Technology

Recently approved legislation has targeted the proliferation of charter schools in high needs districts in New York state. Charter schools are often established in low-income areas in response to a perceived need for school choice. This legislation is targeted to support districts in which there is a saturation of charter schools greater than 20%. In the Village of Hempstead, there is a saturation of 36% resulting in a budget deficit and therefore loss of resources for students remaining in district. In Uniondale there is 13% saturation and in Roosevelt 18% saturation. This study examines the impact of charter school saturation on public school resources. Interviews, focus groups, secondary data analysis, and document analysis were utilized to assess various impacts on schools. This study also examines what happens when charter schools recruit and accept better performing students, leaving district schools with students who have higher needs and fewer resources to serve those needs.

Introduction

Charter schools, or independent public schools funded by tax dollars and donor money, are disproportionately situated in urban contexts serving greater numbers of low income, minoritized students. Suburban charter schools have also proliferated in higher poverty zip codes or towns serving lower percentages of non-Hispanic white people (McCluskey et al., 2025). The Village of Hempstead is one such community with high numbers of socioeconomically disadvantaged families from non-white Hispanic and African American backgrounds that has seen an increase in the numbers of charter schools. Administrator interviews and data in this study also include Roosevelt and Uniondale districts, but the study focuses mainly on Hempstead which experiences the most problematic saturation of charter schools.

Urban contexts, such as New York City, are better able to absorb the impact of charter schools due to the size of the districts, the large number of schools, and the numbers of students.

Hempstead Union Free Public Schools, a smaller district and geographic space, has one high school, one middle school, four elementary schools, and one early childhood center, which feel the impact more directly. Hempstead Village currently has two charters, each of which serve grades K-12 and pulls students from the Hempstead elementary, middle and high schools. Therefore, Hempstead Public Schools are facing a significant loss in student enrollments and a loss in revenue to the charter schools. With the opening of another new charter school scheduled for Fall of 2026, district leaders predict further decline in student populations and school resources. Based on in-depth interviews with administrators, school leaders, program directors, and teachers, the following discussion outlines the impact the financial strains have on academic services including special education programs, staff and support staff, athletics, the arts, and the sciences, as well as grave concerns about teacher stress, student social emotional wellness, and dwindling classroom resources.

Methods

Interviews were conducted with administrators in three school districts. Administrators included superintendents, assistant superintendents, principals, school business managers, and other district-level administrators. Interviewees were asked to provide data to document claims where possible. These interviews focused primarily on the financial impact of payments to charter schools. In addition, a focus group was conducted with teachers from all three districts to assess their perceptions of financial impacts and student issues. New York State Education Department (NYSED) data including test score reports and school report cards were assessed over a multi-year period to track enrollment and performance trends. NYSED data coupled with per pupil expenditure figures were used to conduct a financial analysis in order to determine whether student populations with more needs such as students with disabilities (SWD) and English Language Learners (ELLs) cost the district more to educate.

Enrollment trends

The Hempstead Union Free Public School report card reports the following student demographic composition for the 2023-2024 academic year: 21% Black or African American, 77% Hispanic or Latino, 2% Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, 0% White. Other groups include 45% English Language Learners, 12% Students with Disabilities, 70% Economically Disadvantaged, and 8% Homeless.

Data provided via NYSED and the district shows a steady decrease in enrollment in Hempstead district public schools. In 2016-2017 the district's schools had 8040 students enrolled, while 1376 students were enrolled in charter schools. In 2024-2025 there were 5492 students enrolled in the district's schools, a 32% decrease, and 3351 in the charter schools.

Why do students leave district schools to attend charter schools?

Culture and community perceptions

When students leave the district schools to attend charter schools, districts query students and families about their decisions to leave. In addition to concerns about safety and academic performance, many students who leave are high performers or students with highly engaged parents. Administrators and teachers reported that often, cultural perceptions play a role. Charter schools often require uniforms and immigrant parents see this practice as more formal in schooling. In addition, those parents not familiar with the public school system in the U.S. are solicited by charter schools and given the impression that they have the opportunity to get a private school education at no cost.

To be sure, there are charter schools that offer what public schools cannot in terms of programming, community, and length of instruction. Analysis of publicly available school board meetings about a charter school expansion showed that families who chose to attend charter schools valued the community that they had built. During the meetings, some families described that they were unhappy with their own experiences as students in the district and relished the opportunity to give their children a different education. These parents did not provide examples of these negative experiences.

Newer resources

Another selling point for the charters is their newer buildings. One educator noted, “and when you look at the buildings, they have newer buildings. The newness appeals to the parents. Our school buildings are old” (Interview, 06/10/2025). An administrator questioned the addition of new buildings for charters in Hempstead, she said, “I just don’t understand it. It’s just growing at a rapid pace because we have Evergreen opening up and there’s supposed to be a new school, Diamond, I heard about. I don’t know where they’re going to put it, but the charter schools are finding every nook and cranny. They are knocking down houses to build” (Interview, 06/30/2025).

Length of instructional day

Hempstead public school educators are also aware of the needs of the parents’ daily realities, and that they gravitate to the charters for their extended school days. An administrator noted, “If you are a working parent and your child is in school all day, it works for you. So, we have to compete with that. So, this year we had like ten after school programs. We had Saturday Academy as well.” (Interview, 06/30/2025). However, for the 2025-2026 school year, some of these programs have been cut as a result of decreased enrollment.

Transportation

Transportation and school location may also play a role in families' decisions to leave district schools. Hempstead School District does not provide busing to students. Elementary-aged students go to one of five schools, including the pre-school center, that are near their homes. The middle school is located in the center of Hempstead. However, the location of the HS is located at a distance so great that some parents will pay for an Uber to get their children to school. When queried about the impact of not offering busing most administrators were unsure as to whether there was an impact, although they acknowledged the difficult and dangerous trek to the high school. As noted in a recent analysis by Newsday, traffic crossings by pedestrians in Hempstead Village is particularly dangerous. Eighty-six pedestrians or bicyclists were killed crossing these roads over a 5-year spans, the highest reported in NY State (Martinez & Spangler, October 23, 2025).

Administrators pointed out that the community has never had busing and that the community has not voted to include busing in the budget. However, the district is required to provide busing for students with disabilities within the district if the child's IEP requires transportation. In addition, children attending a charter school are provided busing if they live outside a certain distance from the school. Students in grades K-8 residing more than 2 miles from school, and students in grades 9-12 living more than 3 miles from school are required to receive transportation per state law. Because the charter schools are located further from students' home districts, most students are eligible for transportation. For Hempstead School District the projected transportation cost to charter schools for the 2025-26 school year is \$1,057,561. Roosevelt School district also provided busing costs for 2024-2025 noting that the transportation of one student cost the district more than \$50,000.

Some educators who were interviewed mentioned transportation as one of the aspects of charter schools the Hempstead public schools could not offer. One program director noted, "the lack of school buses and transportation contrasts with charter schools' offerings, especially for working parents who can't be there to pick their children up after school" (Interview, 06/15/2025). In addition to transportation, the longer charter school hours suit the needs of working parents.

Research has shown school-provided transportation has a generally positive effect on certain student outcomes. While transportation eligibility was not found to have a statistically significant impact on student achievement measures, more salient is chronic lateness and absenteeism. In a study of school districts in Michigan, Edwards (2022) found that school bus eligibility increased attendance rates for economically disadvantaged students by 0.63 percentage points, equivalent to roughly one additional day of school in a standard 180-day year. The study also reported that bus eligibility reduced the likelihood of chronic absenteeism—defined as missing more than 10%

of school days—by 3.8 percentage points, representing a 20–25% reduction. Hempstead School District has long struggled with chronic absenteeism and lateness exacerbated by the pandemic and recent immigration policies, where ICE is a regular presence in the community. According to NYSED data Hempstead experienced an absenteeism rate of 40% among its elementary school students and 60% among its secondary students in academic year 2023-2024. Chronic absenteeism is defined as being absent more than 10 days per year.

Charter school recruiting practices

Charter schools often engage in intensive recruitment efforts, highlighting the central role that marketing plays in attracting and retaining students. While charter schools run commercials on television, public schools often do not have the funds to do so. Further, parents and administrators reported that at particular cultural gathering places like eateries and churches, some charter schools will solicit parents of specific cultural groups to attend their school. For example, one charter school recruits largely Caribbean students and employs Caribbean teachers, often paying for their teacher education. Thus, cultural hubs and segregation are facilitated by these recruitment practices. (Focus Group 6/26/25).

There is also a lack of transparency and equity in recruitment practices. Students have reported to teachers that they “took the test for the charter school” (Interview 6/10/2025), a practice which is prohibited by state law. Parents have reported that charter schools cold-call them to recruit, making it sound like they have “won the sweepstakes – like ‘hey congratulations!’” (Focus Group 6/26/25). Additionally, students have reported that upon graduating from one of the charter schools, they are presented with a \$500 check, paid for (but not agreed to) by Hempstead taxpayers. These payments are also confirmed by advertisements posted in media sources. While public school districts must adhere to strict rules about funds in reserves, charter schools do not have these limits, and as a result have tremendous budgets for marketing, advertising, and recruitment, not to mention the buildings that are “shiny and new” (Interview 6/10/2025), and thus more appealing to students and families.

Financial Analysis

All school districts that were assessed for this study, claimed that there was a significant cost to educating increasing numbers of children who move to charter schools. In particular, there is a ‘bucket effect’ in which it is less costly to serve a large group of students in one location than it is to serve the same number of students split up among different units. In some respect this is due to the cost of special services rendered for children with special needs in different locations. Where one therapist can be employed for a group of students, several must be employed for that

same group of students if they are dispersed. To illustrate the change in costs related to rising enrollment shifts to charter schools, both Roosevelt and Hempstead school district provided the analyses which appear in Tables 1 and 2. As these examples illustrate, the gap between budgeted and projected costs can exceed 1 million dollars, a pattern similar across all three districts. As can be seen in Tables 1 and 2, projected costs for charter schools continue to rise. In Hempstead, the increase is projected to cost, overall, 22% more. Further there are shifts in projections versus actual spend. According to the district business manager in Hempstead the 2024-25 projected tuition cost for the Roosevelt Children's Academy (RCA) was \$6,025,080 based on 230 students (projections come from the charter school). The actual tuition paid to RCA was \$3,021,844 due to shifts in enrollment from RCA to another charter school.

Table 1 *Roosevelt School District Projected and Budgeted Cost Analysis*

	2024-2025 Enrollment and Cost		2025-2026 Projected Enrollment and Cost		
Charter School	Students	Cost	Students	Cost	Change
Roosevelt Children's Academy	359	\$7,149,126	403	\$8,883,329	24.26%
The Academy Hempstead	50	\$995,700	50	\$1,102,150	10.69%
The Academy Uniondale	171	\$3,405,294	176	\$3,879,568	13.93%
The Academy Wyandanch	2	\$39,828	2	\$44,086	10.69%
Evergreen	44	\$876,216	51	\$1,124,193	28.30%
Cost per pupil		\$19,914		\$22,043	
Projection 2/1/2025	626	\$ 12,466,164	682	\$15,033,326	20.59%

Table 2 *Hempstead School District Projected and Budgeted Cost Analysis*

	2024-2025 Enrollment and Cost		2025-2026 Projected Enrollment and Cost		
Charter School	Students	Cost	Students	Cost	Change
Roosevelt Children's Academy	230	\$6,025,080	200	\$5,697,200	-5.44%
Academy Charter	2100	\$55,011,600	2550	\$72,639,300	32.04%
Evergreen	987	\$25,855,452	985	\$28,058,710	8.52%
Cost per pupil		\$26,196		\$28,486	8.74%
Projection 2/1/2025	3,317	\$86,892,132	3,735	\$106,395,210	22.45%

Hempstead school district pays one of the highest charter school tuition rates in the state. For 2025-2026 the rate is \$28,486 and for 2024 -2025 the rate was \$26,196. See Table 3 for the growth of tuition over time paid by the three Nassau districts most affected by saturation. NYSED provides the historical and current tuition that all public schools pay. Tuition rates are determined by averaging the prior three years average growth quotients and multiplying that rate by the previous year's basic charter school tuition. Table 4 illustrates the per pupil expenditure (PPE) of each school. 2024-2025 NYSED data shows that charter schools report spending less than the tuition received per student, resulting in a net profit. It is important to point out that over three years (See Table 5) expenses for charter schools have grown by millions. See Table 6 for estimated costs for AY 24-25 including tuition, busing, and special education services. Further, in for the 25-26 school year, Hempstead will be given 29.9 million dollars in Charter Transitional Aid as result of the approved legislation referenced above.

Table 3 *Uniondale, Roosevelt, and Hempstead Tuition paid to Charter School Over Four Years*

District	2025/2026	2024/2025	2023/2024	2022/2023
-----------------	------------------	------------------	------------------	------------------

Uniondale	\$26,090.00	\$24,737.00	\$23,868.00	\$23,045.00
Roosevelt	\$22,043.00	\$19,914.00	\$18,964.00	\$18,572.00
Hempstead	\$28,486.00	\$26,196.00	\$24,505.00	\$22,562.00

Table 4 *Charter and District School Per Pupil Expense (PPE)*

School	2024/2025
Uniondale PPE	\$37,724.00
Roosevelt PPE	\$36,542.00
Hempstead PPE	\$33,217.00
Academy Charter - Uniondale	\$19,460.00
Academy Charter - Hempstead	\$21,360.00
Evergreen	\$18,694.00
Roosevelt Children's Academy	\$12,224.00
Dreams	\$21,692.00

Table 5 *Hempstead Payments to Charter Schools over a three-year period*

	25-26	24-25	23-24
Evergreen	\$28,058,710.00	\$25,855,452.00	\$23,955,592.00
Academy	\$72,639,300.00	\$55,011,600.00	\$46,857,938.00
RCA	\$5,697,200.00	\$6,025,080.00	\$3,258,655.00
BK Dreams/Other	\$56,972.00	\$52,392.00	\$56,530.00
Total Cost	\$106,452,182.00	\$86,944,524.00	\$74,128,715.00
% change	22.44%	17.29%	
Total Enrollment	3737	3319	3025

Table 6 *Example of Total Costs for Hempstead including Busing, Tuition, and Special Education Services.*

	2024-2025
Tuition	\$86,944,524.00
Busing	\$1,000,000

Special Education	\$2,700,000
-------------------	-------------

The Hempstead Union Public Free District is surviving, but under extreme stress. The presence of charters results in additional costs and responsibilities for the staff and educators. In addition to the cost of support services to charter school students, such as occupational therapy, speech therapy and resource room, the district has to invest significant resources in verifying student residency of the students attending the charter schools. This practice includes hiring summer staff to do the verification and conduct home visits to ensure the students are residents of Hempstead. District administrators have reported discrepancies in residency claims, resulting in charter schools billing Hempstead tens of thousands of dollars for students who are not residents.

The Impact of Charter School Expansion on Enrollment and Equity

Analysis of NYSED data shows a shift in enrollment of students with disabilities (SWD) and English language learners (ELL) in the public schools with fewer of these students attending charter schools. As higher performing students leave the public schools to attend area charter schools, the district is left with more students requiring higher needs including SWDs, ELLs, foster children, and students who are without housing (See Table 7).

Table 7 *Hempstead enrollment: Total, SWDs, and ELLs for 2024 (NYSED)*

2024	Total enrollment	% of students with disabilities	% of students classified as ELL	% of students who are homeless
Hempstead	5738	12%	45%	8%
Roosevelt	2884	13%	28%	4%
Uniondale	5756	15%	25%	3%
Academy (Hempstead)	1894	5%	24%	<1%
Academy (Uniondale)	1521	7%	9%	<1%
Academy (Wyandanch)	191	8%	9%	0%

Roosevelt Children's Academy	735	7%	14%	1%
Evergreen	1088	11%	33%	1%

Research has shown expansion of charter schools exacerbates inequities across schools and student populations. Students are being segregated by economic status, race, language proficiency and disability status (Baker, 2016). The Hempstead Union Public Free District is experiencing these inequities. In addition, although charter schools typically report they do not select students, they can aim their marketing strategies at students from particular social and racial backgrounds (Ni, 2012). Thus, there is a practice among charter schools referred to as “cream skimming” or “student sorting” (Baker, 2016; Ni, 2012).

According to one district administrator, “ninety percent of the kids who remain in the Hempstead School District require either special education, are English Language Learners, or have needs not listed under either umbrella, such as students in need of additional support in reading, math or both.” In addition, students classified as homeless or living in foster care also remain in the district, requiring increased support from social workers, psychologists and guidance counselors.

One elementary school administrator believes that the continued saturation of charter schools will ultimately transform the Hempstead Union Free Public School District into a system resembling ‘District 75.’ District 75 refers to districts within the New York City Department of Education, which educate only students with significant behavioral and emotional challenges and extreme learning needs. Based on her years of experience she predicts that the Hempstead Union Free Public Schools will remain as a district, but a district with only the neediest students and students with the greatest learning needs.

As discussed above, there are disproportionately more students with costly special needs left behind in the Hempstead Union Free Public School District. This concentration of students with special learning needs and services can increase the costs of improving outcomes for those students (Baker, 2016). In addition, the Hempstead school district is accruing additional costs to serve students enrolled in the charter schools. These costs include paying for the services of students in need of resource room and occupational therapy interventions.

The Director of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) explains, “we pay a teacher to go into the charter school to provide the resource room” (Interview, 06/10/2025). A former resource room teacher shared, “For ten years, I was a resource room teacher for the charter school for Hempstead Academy, for the residents that live in Hempstead. So, I still worked underneath the Hempstead school district, but at the Hempstead Academy.” (Interview, 06/30/25). She continued, “Hempstead public schools was paying me not the charter school. I work in a public school, and then I’m servicing charter school students. They live in Hempstead, so they have to have these services” (Interview, 06/30/25).

As a new administrator at the elementary school, the former resource room teacher noted some of the disparities she saw in the charter school services for the special needs students, primarily those students who had individualized education plans (IEPs). In her role at the public elementary school, she has students whose IEPs require daily check-ins for behavior differences. These daily check-ins are conducted by herself, or a clinician, such as the social worker or the psychologist. The charter school did not have any clinicians, so she pointed out that they were not meeting the needs legally required by the IEP. She added, “some of the charter school students needed occupational therapy, or physical therapy. Hempstead School District pays for their service providers to go to the charter schools to service the students” (Interview, 06/30/25).

Impact on Faculty, Administrators, and Support Staff

Current loss of Hempstead’s revenue along with projections of more revenue loss for the 2025-2026 academic year due to the opening of another charter school, has caused the district to make cuts to administrative and support staff. One administrator explained, “due to the decrease in enrollment, there has been an excess of staff, and cuts to support staff, which you do need to run a building. We are going from four school administrators to two. These cuts make it harder to provide quality education with larger class sizes and fewer materials” (Interview, 06/10/2025). She added, “the first thing they’re doing is removing the deans for the four elementary schools. The deans are responsible for helping with discipline issues, supporting staff and supporting the assistant principals.” Another administrator noted, “It’s very challenging, because the elementary deans are people who have worked in the district for at the very least thirteen years. The elementary deans have been very beneficial, because we’re seeing so many behaviors and emotional behaviors that we haven’t seen in the past” (Interview, 06/30/2025).

Several administrators discussed how the loss of deans will result in the loss of their new restorative justice programs as well. The elementary dean said restorative justice practices help to target individualized solutions for students instead of using sanctions such as detention or suspension. She explained “we focus on reforming the students’ behavior...so if we saw that the students were very low in ELA, we noticed that when the teacher starts to teach ELA, then that’s when the behavior starts. I try to come and push in and sit next to the student, or provide like, a resource room or try to find ways to restore the behavior. We just want to teach them how they can change that behavior” (Interview, 06/30/2025).

Another layer of support staff for Hempstead students that continues to be cut as a result of decreases in budget due to lower enrollment is the group of staff called interventionists. The district’s dedicated interventionists are certified teachers who either push into classrooms or pull students out for intensive, targeted small group instruction. In 2021, the enrollment in Hempstead school district was 6,341 (NYSED) and approximately 50% of those students needed some kind of academic intervention (Interview, 6/10/2025). Currently, Hempstead has 5,738 students enrolled and still approximately 50% of those students are in need of academic intervention. In 2021, the district employed 30 dedicated interventionists, meaning that each one was responsible for targeted, small group instruction of about 105 students. Due to increasing and harsh budget

constraints, the district has had to cut the number of interventionists to 9 for the upcoming school year. Using 2025 reported enrollment numbers, this indicates that each interventionist is responsible for target, small group instruction for an unfathomable 319 students (Table 8). These students are the ones who need the most support and creative instruction, but they are being served by a dwindling number of educators who are simply stretched too thin.

Table 8 *Change in interventionists serving students in need of additional instruction*

	2021	2025
Interventionists	30	9
Students who need intervention	3170	2869
Interventionist to student ratio	1:105	1:319

Strain on Educators

The educators interviewed feel extreme anxiety caused by the uncertainty in the education landscape, especially with the new Diamond Charter School set to open in the fall of 2025, and the discussion of another one set for the fall of 2026. One program director noted, “look what happened in New Orleans in the era after hurricane Katrina” (Interview 06/10/2025). He was referring to the conversion of the New Orleans public school system to a more than 90% charter system. The result was a “complete displacement and selective repopulation, racially, economically, and geographically of the student and family population of the city” (Baker, 2016, p 17).

The Hempstead public school educators feel there is a need to compete with the charter schools for students, as the charter schools in the Village of Hempstead operate primarily in competition with the Hempstead public schools and not in cooperation with them. Baker (2016) refers to this as a “parasitic model” in which the condition of the public school system is of little concern to the board of directors of the charter school. As part of the competition for students, each interviewee discussed the need for more outreach and marketing to showcase the programs, opportunities and support services available at Hempstead schools. These include programs such as Dual Bilingual Spanish/English programs, Special Education services, Family Engagement Services, Advanced Placement courses, STEAM and their new International Baccalaureate (IB) Program. While understanding the need to market their educational opportunities, they admit they do not have a marketing fund like the charter schools who raise additional revenue through private giving enabling them to market via TV and radio and to do additional outreach in the community at local churches and restaurants.

Academic Inequity and Student Performance

Charter schools promote their programs by citing test scores, grades and graduation rates that are higher than the public school districts'. However, practices like aggressive recruitment and the "pushing out" of students who are not performing well academically introduce confounding variables that make these claims misleading at best. According to many of the administrators interviewed, there is collateral damage on students with higher needs: both those who choose to remain in the district and those who choose to attend charter schools.

Some analyses have suggested that charter schools do not in fact engage in cream-skimming (Winters, 2017). In an analysis of students who remain in Hempstead schools versus ones who leave the district for charter schools, it is notable that there was no significant difference in academic performance, according to historical state test data available through NYSED. However, similar to the results of other researchers who have dug a bit deeper into the movement of students to and from charter schools (Kho et al., 2022), analyses show that the students who are pushed out of charter schools in Hempstead and forced back the district schools are ones who have performed significantly worse on state assessments when compared with both students who remained in charter schools and with students who never left the district. Therefore, while charter schools can indeed say that they do not engage in cream-skimming when soliciting students, they certainly do when determining which students to push out.

Teachers also pointed out the timing of students being sent back to district schools. In many cases, students are deemed to be not a good fit for charter schools right before state tests are administered. It seems significant that students who are underperforming in charter schools are sent back to the district right before the administration of state tests, the measurement tool whose results charter schools highlight to tout their own success. New York State Education Department (NYSED) data shows that since the 2018-2019 school year, Hempstead students who have been sent back to district schools are ones who have performed significantly lower on state exams compared with all students in the district. Absorbing students who require additional services mid-year is also problematic because hiring for teachers is done at the beginning of the year. When students return to Hempstead from charter schools, they return with no academic records. In high school, they have transcripts which show credits, but in elementary and middle school, teachers must assess students individually to determine their academic level and needs so that they can be properly instructed.

In addition to charter schools pushing out students who are not performing well academically, teachers cited students who were sent back to their district because of behavioral issues. In conversations seeking to establish trust and compassion with parents, teachers have heard stories about charter schools retaliating against parents whose children were misbehaving. One teacher relayed a conversation she had with a parent, "The Charter school called CPS because their child was misbehaving or didn't have a uniform... So they're like your child is misbehaving today, please, you need to come and get them. You need to leave work and pick them up. And when they can't do that, they retaliate against the parent" (Focus Group, 6/26/25). The result is that

students who need the most intense behavior intervention end up in the district schools, while the students who are easier to manage behaviorally remain in charter schools.

Schools that offer parent choice, particularly ones that are privately managed and do not have the same oversight as public schools, are indeed within their rights to expel students for fighting, misbehaving, and not achieving high enough grades. However, students who struggle academically, who have special learning needs, who require counseling and intervention to manage behavior, and who need more attention from teachers, social workers, and school administrators also require more time and financial resources from the school district.

The teachers in the focus group pointed out that choice is important for families to make sure their children get what they need, but what is happening in these communities feels more like a competition with one competitor getting the students who need the most support and resources and the other getting the students who need the least, but both competitors getting the same amount of funding per student. “It’s just such an uneven playing field for us to function as educators, as administrators. It’s just not fair” (Focus Group, 6/26/25).

The significant impacts on the district are those students with higher needs that are ‘left in the school’. The district is left with more students, with greater and more expensive needs to support, and with fewer resources. In addition, school report card data shows lower performance of the district over time due to these enrollment shifts (Table 9). There is no evidence to suggest that students are performing better after moving to a charter school. While students who are higher performers are more likely to move to a charter school, due to a variety of factors including parental involvement and solicitation by charter schools led by testing new students, statistical analysis does not support the claim that charter schools better prepare students for state tests.

Table 9 *Student performance on state tests: Percent of all students in grades 3-8 achieving proficient scores on Mathematics and ELA NYS Assessments by year*

		2022		2023		2024	
School	Total	Math	ELA	Math	ELA	Math	ELA
Hempstead	5738	N/A	27%	26%	26%	NA	26%
Roosevelt	2884	N/A	30%	34%	35%	38%	28%
Uniondale	5756	34%	37%	51%	39%	47%	31%
Academy (Hempstead)	1894	75%	58%	73%	69%	54%	67%

Academy (Uniondale)	1521	51%	61%	71%	64%	77%	64%
Academy (Wyandanch)	191	N/A		N/A		N/A	
Roosevelt Children's Academy	735	30%	47%	N/A	36%	39%	47%
Evergreen	1088	36%	56%	43%	45%	43%	42%

Further educator, student, and school climate data from NYSED do not show that students are necessarily being presented with an improved environment when they enroll in charter schools. Data shown below in Table 10 shows absenteeism rates, suspensions, teacher turnover and certification rates. Chronic absenteeism is persistent in all districts, although most notably in district schools. Most salient is that the rate of inexperienced and the number of teachers teaching out of certification area in charter schools is exponentially greater than that of the district schools and the statewide average. Teacher turnover is also significantly higher in charter schools. Suspensions are also higher in charter schools than in district schools.

Table 10 *Educator, Student, and School Climate Data (All numbers are percentages)*

School	Graduation rate	Attendance Rate	Chronic Absenteeism	Suspensions	Teacher Attendance	Teacher Turnover (all teachers)	Teaching out of certification (Statewide avg is 9%)	Inexperienced teachers
Uniondale UFSD	88	90	49.8 (HS only)	3	93	8	1	8
Roosevelt UFSD	79	91	34.4 (HS only)	2	94	13	2	23
Hempstead UFSD	87	85	63.9 (HS only)	5	93	13	2	5
Academy Charter - Uniondale	96	92	37.2 (HS only)	4	97	34	74	39

Academy Charter - Hempstead	93	92	34.9 (HS only)	3	96	31	78	11
Evergreen	64	94	26.9 (HS only)	10	98	36	32	35
Roosevelt Children's Academy	NA	90	42.3	6	95	28	27	68
Dreams	Not reported	72	96.9	5	100	21	50	11

Social-Emotional Strain on Students

Transfer students are another group impacting student demographics and school resources at Hempstead public schools. These are students who are “counseled” out of the charter schools and asked to return to the public schools. The students returning tend to be students with special needs or with disciplinary problems. According to one school leader, “the charter school has decided that they are not the appropriate setting for the child without the parents being able to consent to it.” She further notes, “a lot of times the children who come back to us are like the underperforming students” (Interview, 06/30/25). She also discussed lack of access to correct data on the students, and how the timing of the students’ return is often right before schools give required NY State standardized testing. The underperforming students primarily educated at the charter schools do not become part of the testing data of the charter school but are included in the overall data of the public schools.

In a focus group, teachers from Hempstead, Roosevelt, and Uniondale echoed the concerns and frustrations shared by the interviewed administrators in the district. In their classrooms, they see enrollment dwindling, but class size growing due to fewer staff. They spoke of how dedicated they are to giving their students opportunities in literacy, STEM, the fine arts, and sports, but how their programs are constantly being cut because funding is ever more scarce. They are trained and proficient in supporting students’ social and emotional needs but simply don’t have the time or space to use these practices when the students they serve have more needs with fewer support systems.

Teachers from all three districts passionately lamented students who were expelled from or asked to leave charter schools midyear and sent back to the district schools. “We are really invested in our students from day one and build very strong relationships with them” (Focus Group, 6/26/25). However, when students enter the district midyear, and often close to the end of a school year, time is only one obstacle for school staff to establish relationships with students.

When returning from charter schools, teachers report that both students and parents are angry, hurt, and mistrustful of teachers and administrators in the school. Teachers and social workers are left to “clean up the mess and try to make them feel better” (Focus Group, 6/26/25). The district must then engage in intense counseling and social-emotional learning (SEL) for the affected students and their families. District data shows that in Hempstead alone, 105 students transferred back to the district from charter schools during the 2024-2025 school year, a 133% increase from the previous year.

These public school districts invest tremendous resources in the social and emotional education and wellbeing of their students and prioritize relationships and character growth. This priority is undermined when students return feeling frustrated and rejected from school. The time and resources it takes to rehabilitate students upon their return from being “kicked out because they’re not making the grade” (Focus Group, 6/26/25) are hidden costs to Hempstead, Uniondale, and Roosevelt school districts, where teachers and social workers must make up ground repairing emotional damage because they haven’t been able to establish a relationship with these students from the beginning of the school year.

Hempstead High School must make additional accommodations for the students who are returning from charter schools. According to one member of the high school leadership team, “Students are constantly coming in from the charter schools in the middle of the year, in the middle of the semester. And one of the noticings that I personally had is that they are being kicked out of whatever charter school that they’re in. We’re given no context from the school as to what their rationale is, and then the students are coming here, and they’re under-credited. They don’t have their Regents exams, and they’re underperforming. We are left to basically become an emergency triage service to ready the students up, to get the students to graduate” (Interview, 06/25/25). Students who advanced over the years in a high school charter school but earned no credits are sent back to the district to complete their education. These metrics impact the districts’ profile negatively, but the charter school’s profile positively. Interviews with district level administrators confirmed that this is indeed a phenomenon common among special needs students.

Because charter schools will not take children in 12:1:1 classes, administrators and specialists have noticed a trend of parents denying services for children classified as higher needs so that they will qualify for charter school entry. However, these students end up returning to the school as they do not do well without their prescribed services. They need to then be reevaluated to modify their IEPs again, which costs the district significantly more time and money.

Impact on The Arts, Music, Sciences and Athletic Programs

The Hempstead Union Free Public Schools' educators are proud of their athletic, arts, music and STEAM programs. Despite reduced funding, they continue to provide students with vital and impressive programs in theater, art, music, athletics and STEAM.

For example, the district hosted a STEAM night which brought together all the schools' students pre-K through grade 12 to showcase their projects. The director of STEAM remarked, "I was praying we'd have 100 people come. We had well over 250 people, and it was open to the community. And we noticed that some of the community members, parents, students that were there were actually from some of the surrounding charter schools, and they were amazed at what they saw. They said, wow, we don't do that" (Interview, 06/12/2025). She continued, "The students were the major focus, because we were celebrating the students, that tends to bring the parents out. We said we're celebrating your child and what they've accomplished in the areas of STEAM. And we also had the culinary arts department in the high school provide the food. Students in the choruses performed and there were students playing their instruments" (Interview, 06/12/2025).

Despite the success of the STEAM night, the director noted due to funding cuts, there is difficulty in obtaining necessary science materials. She explained that NY State has made changes to the science curriculum, so she is in the process of revising the districts' curriculum maps. In addition, there have been changes to the Biology Regents exam, and forthcoming will be new assessments for Earth Science. She noted, "Because of the new state standards in science, the labs have changed. And you know, which is very difficult, because when you change the labs, you change the materials. So, we're looking at \$20,000 per content area for the new materials. I'm not sure where the funding for this will be coming from" (Interview, 06/12/2025).

The director of fine arts, music and library media shared the value to students of the arts programs. The programs target the creativity, expressive practices and the students' ability to go beyond the textbook. "I make sure all our students pre-K to grades 12, have the options to join choir, band, orchestra, and make sure our theater productions are a true community event" (Interview, 06/10/2025). He discussed how the arts were impacted by COVID like in many schools, but that "the Hempstead district got hit a little bit harder, and that's also due to financial challenges unique to Hempstead, you know due to charter schools, you know, is a component now of the financial needs" (Interview, 06/10/2025). "Since so many charter schools are housed in Hempstead there were direct impacts, including financial difficulties." He continued, "you know, it's been noted that programs such as music to art, they tend to be always the first subjects to get cut, but they're really the greatest needs for our students, especially the student population served by Hempstead. They need that ability to express their ability to feel welcomed, part of a community, part of a group. You know, which crosses language barriers" (Interview, 06/10/2025).

In addition to financial impacts, he discussed the impact of declining student enrollment. He felt the community was missing the “pride and joy that is felt by a large marching band. Now it’s divided because some of the great music students are going to some of the other charter schools. And so, I feel that diminishes the band greatly” (Interview, 06/10/2025). He also discussed how many students do return to the high school from the charter schools, noting “when the students do come back it’s hard for the music program, because consistency and enrollment is so important (Interview, 06/10/2025).

The athletics program director oversees health and physical education teachers, coaches, and sports at the high school and middle school. He noted, “there is an overall decline in student enrollments and funding for the athletics programs overall.” He felt, “despite the Hempstead public high school having better sports facilities (i.e. a swimming pool, soccer field and lacrosse field) and more participation opportunities than the Charter schools, enrollments have dropped.” He adds that there is a “division of the community due to charter schools, because Hempstead sports teams now compete with Charter Schools’ teams.”

In addition, student athletes return to Hempstead High School from the Charter Schools because they see more opportunities for recruitment to university level teams and for athletic scholarships. As the director of the arts program noted, he agreed that “the transfer students cause disruption on a unity of a team where consistency and teamwork are important” (Interview, 06/10/2025).

Disparities in Oversight and Accountability

This uneven playing field is not limited to the students who attend charter schools and district schools. The focus group teachers voiced deep frustration with an entire system that allows charter schools to operate with significant autonomy and minimal oversight, all while using public funds that are diverted away from their school districts.

In public schools, every dollar spent is tracked, debated, and subject to community approval. School districts must go through established processes to bond for capital improvements, submit to public votes on budgets, and comply with stringent regulations. Participants highlighted the irony that even for basic upgrades—like fixing HVAC systems, or preventing mold, or even putting up a “School Zone” sign after a student was hit by a car—public schools must cut through layers of bureaucracy and often end up with the lowest bidder due to budget constraints.

Meanwhile, charter schools construct new buildings and expand facilities in as little as a year and a half, leveraging reserves and financial mechanisms unavailable to traditional districts—all without public input. Charter schools receive public taxpayer dollars, but those same taxpayers have no say in how the money is used. As one speaker noted, “It’s unreal that you have an entity

that can take public funds and do with it as they please... and those footing the bill have no say” (Focus Group, 6/26/25). The school board of a public school district must be composed of taxpayers in the district. The same is not true for charter schools. “They have no accountability to the families in our community,” explained one teacher (Focus Group, 6/26/2025). The members of the school board do not have to be residents of the district where the school is located and therefore may not have the best interest of that community in mind when making decisions.

Further, there is little oversight on educational quality. While teachers must be certified to teach in charter schools, they are often teaching out of certification and there is a lack of certified special education teachers. According to NYSED, in 2024 73% of teachers at Academy Charter Schools are teaching outside of their certification areas (see Table 10). In addition, while charter schools must accept all applicants and hold a lottery for when there are more applicants than spots open, teachers that we interviewed reported that students had told them they had taken a test to get into a charter school.

Ultimately, the conversations painted a picture of systemic inequity—where public schools are constrained by rules, red tape, and public accountability, while charter schools benefit from public money without public responsibility. The participants acknowledged the value of school choice, but they made clear: choice cannot come at the expense of equity, transparency, and fairness. As one teacher powerfully stated, “Choice should not eliminate accountability” (Focus Group, 6/26/25).

School and Community Fragmentation and Distrust

Teachers in districts affected by charter school saturation report burnout, increased demands, and limited support. With funds constantly decreasing and student needs constantly increasing, teachers are being stretched too thin with no change or solutions in sight. Although teachers and administrators try to protect their students from this systemic burden, students and families can’t help but see that their students are affected. These issues have exacerbated tensions among members of the community. Public school stakeholders feel that charter school saturation contributes to neighborhood instability and fragmentation.

Participants noted that among members of the community, certain charter schools market and advertise to particular demographics, “It causes segregation. It could even cause friction within the community. Green and white versus purple and gold. And you already have that problem in the community. That could exacerbate it” (Focus Group, 6/26/2025). Teachers feel that this practice is divisive and could lead to weakening community cohesion.

Conclusion

The perspectives shared by educators in Hempstead, Roosevelt, and Uniondale reveal a troubling landscape of inequity in funding, oversight, and student support between public school districts and charter schools. While the ideal of school choice is rooted in expanding opportunities for families, the current implementation often shifts disproportionate burdens onto district schools—leaving them with fewer resources, more challenging student needs, and complex social-emotional work that is both urgent and resource-intensive. Charter schools, operating with public funds but without the same level of transparency, accountability, or community representation, enjoy structural advantages that amplify these disparities.

This imbalance not only undermines the academic and social-emotional well-being of students in public schools but also erodes trust within the community. The findings underscore the need for policy reforms that hold all publicly funded schools to consistent standards of accountability, ensure equitable distribution of resources, and require governance structures that reflect and prioritize the interests of the communities served. Without such measures, the promise of educational choice risks devolving into a system of uneven opportunity—one in which fairness is compromised, and the students most in need of stability, care, and high-quality education are left with the least.

Overall, this research points to the need for much more thoughtful examination of charter school expansion in the Hempstead Village community. The smallness of the geographic space and the Hempstead Union Free Public School District is resulting in significant loss of student enrollments and thus, revenue. With the projected opening of two more charters over the next couple of years, the student enrollments could dip below 4000 putting the district below the efficient-scale thresholds for operation (Baker, 2016). In addition, several of the elementary schools are at risk of falling below a student enrollment of 400 students, putting the individual schools at the low end for optimal elementary school size (Baker, 2016).

Baker (2016) asserts, “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” (p. 1). The collateral damage of expanding charter schools in the Village of Hempstead will be the educators, the students, and the Hempstead community. A Hempstead School District administrator stated, “Our appeal is for SUNY to not approve all of the charter schools in such a small area, and to put more resources in our public schools, or at the very least enable us to retain our resources and our students” (Interview, 06/10/2025).

****Charter schools may overbill or bill incorrectly and if schools contest, the state steps in to compel by withholding funding.**

Note: Some figures in this study are based on district provided data and some are based on NYSED publicly available data. At times there are discrepancies between reporting due to mid-year shifts in enrollment and other reporting.

References

- Baker, B. (2016). Exploring the consequences of charter school expansion in U.S. cities. *Economic Policy Institute*, epi.org/109218
- Edwards, D. S. (2022). How does school bus transportation affect student attendance and achievement? Policy Brief. *National Center for Research on Education Access and Choice*. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED622132.pdf>
- Kho, A., Zimmer, R., & McEachin, A. (2022). A descriptive analysis of cream skimming and pushout in choice versus traditional public schools. *Education Finance and Policy*, 17(1), 160-187.
- Martinez, A. & Spangler, N. (October 23, 2025). Hempstead Village pedestrian deaths highlight chronic dangers of walking Long Island's roads. *Newsday*.
<https://www.newsday.com/long-island/transportation/dangerous-roads-pedestrian-deaths-hempstead-coswnhl4>
- McCluskey, M., Narayanan, M. & Milne, E. (2025). Reform for “these” kids: Neoliberal reform, theorized target populations, and spatial justice. *Economic Policy*, pp. 1-35.
- Ni, Y. (2012). The sorting effect of charter schools on student composition in traditional public schools. *Educational Policy*, 26(2), pp. 215-242.
- Winters, M. A. (2017). New York charter schools outperform traditional selective public schools: more evidence that cream-skimming is not driving charters' success. Report 33. *Manhattan Institute for Policy Research*.