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June 21, 2006

Choosing a Charter School in the District of Columbia: Part II (Kevin R. Kosar)

In a [previous column](#), I wrote of the difficulties facing the parent who wants to explore the charter school option generally and in the District of Columbia especially. Since then, I have received some emails from readers that provided helpful suggestions. I also spent a good chunk of time surfing online for resources.

For those who *really* want to get their nose into the DC schooling thicket, the [DC Education Blog](#) provides oodles of links and running commentary of schooling issues.

Meanwhile, parents hunting for charter schools who desire to acquire just enough information to empower them to choose wisely might begin with the website of [Friends of Choice in Urban Schools](#). It offers maps displaying the location of charter schools. These are helpful and can be used in conjunction with the public transportation maps available from the [Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority](#).

The DC Public Charter School Board (DCPCSB) also offers basic information on enrollment procedures and deadlines [here](#). DCPCSB also has a [127-page report](#), which provides student achievement and other data. The Appendix includes further data on the number of children scoring proficiently in reading and mathematics. Unfortunately, the achievement data included is of limited utility. First, the SAT-9 data is norm-referenced; that is, it only measures students against the national average. One can't look at these scores, then, and discern how well students are learning particular content standards. Rather, if one reads that a school has a "mean NCE score in reading" of 39.1, then 39.1 percent of its students are learning as well as the average student in the U.S. Second, the Appendix does not define for the reader what is meant by the figures given for the percentage of students proficient in reading and mathematics (e.g., see p. 70 of the report, which includes two tables with columns labeled "% proficient 2005"). Nevertheless, the scores are useful as a means for getting a crude perception of skills levels of students in individual charter schools. The amount of that acquisition that may be attributed to the schools themselves, of course, cannot be determined from any of the data presented.

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booklet that describes our education standards," then you might reasonably infer that the school is responsive to parents. If, though, you get bounced from one extension to another and cannot find anyone who can help you...well, perhaps you can scratch that school from your list.

Mr. Kosar is the author of Failing Grades: The Federal Politics of Education Standards (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005).

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