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The Quest for More Equitable Schooling: Choice, Charters and Suburban Districts

Abstract

Charter schools - though viewed as being emblematic of urban school reform initiatives – have in recent years also been expanding into suburban districts. This expansion corresponds with significant demographic shifts in suburban communities. Recent research reveals the suburbs of the nation's largest metropolitan areas experienced a 25 percent increase in their poor population (Garr & Kneebone, 2010). These suburban communities are also becoming increasingly more diverse, racially, ethnically and linguistically (Holme, Diem & Welton, 2014). As these demographic shifts occur, how have suburban school communities and the districts that serve them responded? Using interviews, documents reviews and enrollment data, this case study examines the growth and development of charter schools in two small, diverse suburban communities. Findings reveal that these suburban charter schools have adversarial relationships with local school districts; struggle to balance innovation with the pressures of accountability; have student populations that proportionately do not reflect the district's, and are challenged by high administrator and faculty turnover.