

Executive Summary

There is growing awareness of the benefits of teacher diversity, and specifically of students having access to teachers from the same racial or ethnic background. Several studies have shown that children who have at least one same-race teacher in primary school have fewer absences and suspensions, higher test scores, and are more likely to graduate high school and enroll in college.

But to what extent, if any, do the benefits of having a same-race teacher vary by type of school? We simply don't know, as existing research either focuses exclusively on traditional public schools or fails to distinguish among sectors (e.g., traditional public schools, charter schools, and private schools). Knowing whether differences in student-teacher race match exist across sectors could improve how we recruit and develop educators, as how a school is organized and governed might moderate the benefits of having a same-race teacher. Moreover, greater representation of black teachers might help explain the success of many urban charter schools that serve majority black populations, an explanation that has received short shrift in research and policy circles.

Dr. Seth Gershenson, Associate Professor at American University, investigates these and other topics in the current study. Gershenson has conducted several prior studies on teacher demographic representation and extends that research herein by addressing three key questions:

1. Is student-teacher race match more common in traditional public or charter schools?
2. Is the effect of having a same-race teacher larger in traditional public or charter schools?
3. Do sectoral differences in the same-race-teacher effect vary by schools' locale, size, or demographics?

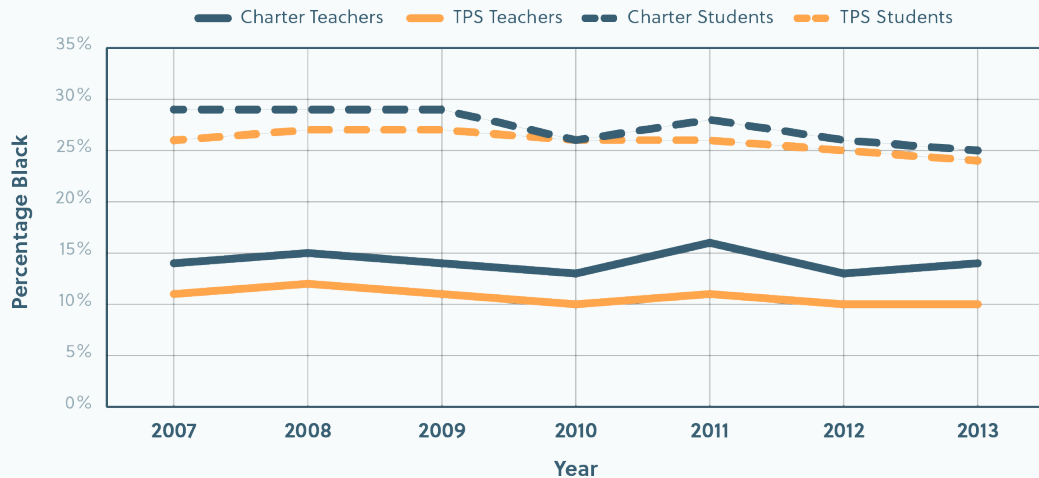
The study was conducted in North Carolina, a state with a diverse demographic and socioeconomic profile. Although we cannot claim that these findings are applicable to all states, North Carolina's public education system generally resembles those of many other large states, and results there tend to align with those that use nationally representative data.

Gershenson analyzed data from self-contained classrooms, grades three to five, in North Carolina from academic years 2006–07 through 2012–13. This information covers all public elementary school students in the state—traditional and charter—and includes demographic information on students and teachers, end-of-grade test scores in math and English language arts (ELA), and basic school information. The seven-year span allows for within-student comparisons and computation of academic growth from year to year.

Because schools vary in the proportion of black teachers on staff and students are not randomly assigned to schools, Gershenson compares students to others in the same grade who attend the same school in the same year, for a total of 1.8 million complete observations. The study yielded five findings, summarized below with a key figure for each.

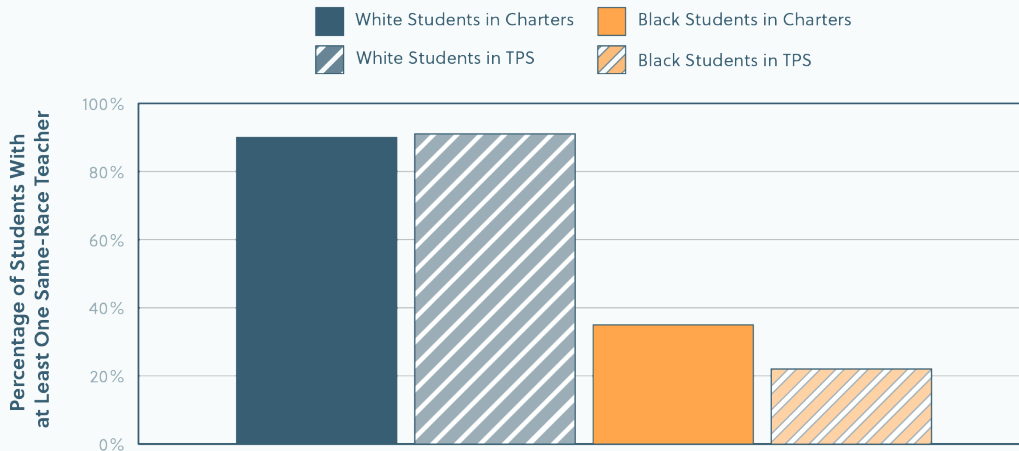
KEY FINDING 1: Traditional public schools and charter schools serve the same proportion of black students, but charter schools have about 35 percent more black teachers.

Figure ES-1. While previously overrepresented in North Carolina’s charter schools, as of 2013, black students are evenly represented in traditional and charter schools, while black teachers are more likely to teach in the latter.



KEY FINDING 2: Black students in charter schools are more than 50 percent (13 percentage points) more likely to have a black teacher than their traditional public school counterparts, but white students are equally likely to have a white teacher across the two sectors.

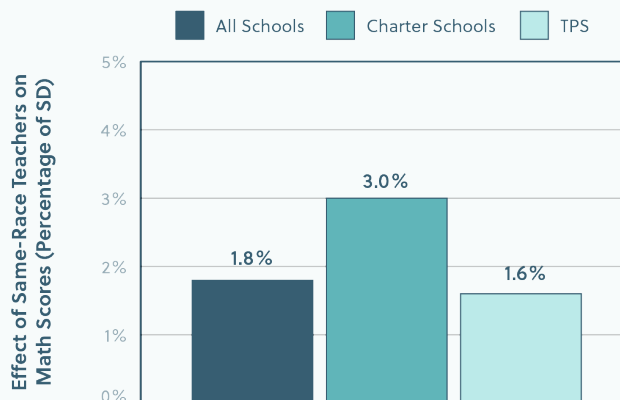
Figure ES-2. Relative to their black peers in traditional public schools, black students in charter schools are significantly more likely to have same-race teachers.



Note: Figure ES-2 is constructed using data from *Appendix A, Table A-2*.

KEY FINDING 3: Race-match effects are nearly twice as large in the charter school sector as in traditional public schools, though these differences are statistically insignificant, likely due to small sample sizes.

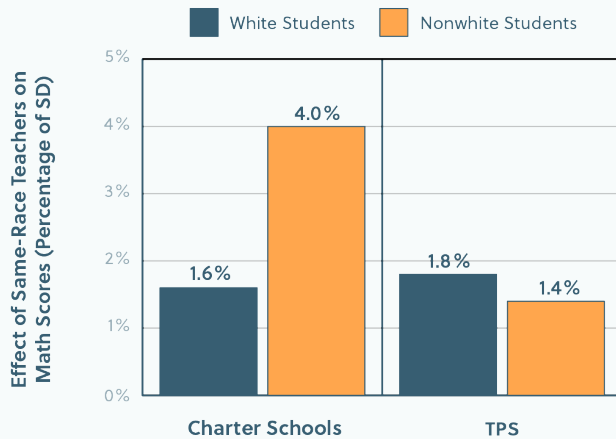
Figure ES-3. Overall, same-race teachers boost math performance by almost 2 percent of a SD, but this effect is larger in charter schools than in traditional public schools.



Note: Figure ES-3 is constructed using data from *Appendix A, Table A-3*. All three effects are statistically significantly different from zero. However, the difference between traditional public schools and charters is not itself statistically significant, likely due to the relatively small sample of charter school students.

KEY FINDING 4: In charter schools, race-match effects are twice as large for nonwhite as for white students, while no such difference exists in traditional public schools.

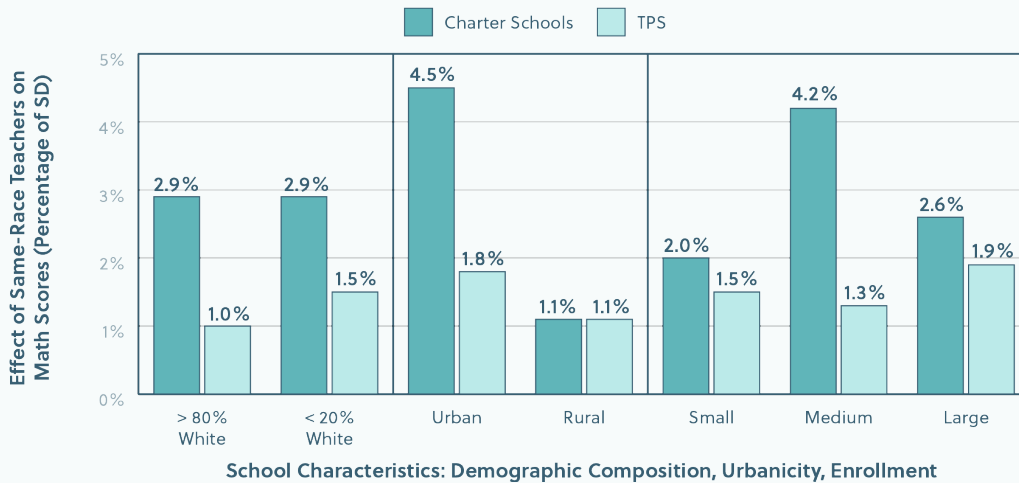
Figure ES-4. In charter schools, the effect of having a same-race teacher on math scores is twice as large for nonwhite as for white students, though no such difference is found in traditional public schools.



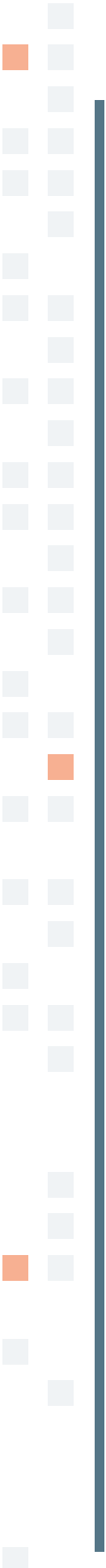
Note: Figure ES-4 is constructed using data from Appendix A, Table A-4. Nonwhite includes students of any race other than white. Pooling nonwhite student groups enabled analyses not possible when examining black students separately. The gap between white and nonwhite students in traditional public schools is not statistically significant.

KEY FINDING 5: Race-match effects are relatively constant across school locales, enrollments, and compositions.

Figure ES-5. Race-match effects exist in both charter schools and traditional public schools, though they're larger in charters, regardless of school demographics, locale, or size.



Note: Figure ES-5 is constructed using data from Appendix A, Table A-6. All of the traditional public school estimates are statistically significantly different from zero. For charters, only the urban locale and medium school size estimates are statistically significantly different from zero. School size equates to the largest third, the middle third, and the smallest third by student enrollment.



Since the effects of having a same-race teacher appear stronger in charter schools than in the district sector—and stronger still for nonwhite students—it’s encouraging that the charter sector has more of these matches between black students and teachers, due largely to having more black teachers in the first place. This is clearly an overlooked dimension of charter effectiveness.

Learning more about these impacts is an area ripe for future research. In the meantime, traditional public schools might seek to emulate their charter school counterparts when it comes to boosting the number of teachers of color they hire, though there remains room for improving teacher diversity, not to mention academic achievement, in both sectors.