

More Charter Schools: A New Obstacle to Racial/Ethnic Diversity in Boston?

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Summary. In the Boston school district, the two largest racial/ethnic student groups are African-Americans (37.9%) and Hispanics (38.1%). Boston charter schools segregate these two groups from one another to a much greater extent than do traditional Boston district schools.

Current patterns of racial/ethnic balance in traditional and charter schools predicts how raising the charter cap will likely impact segregation in the city.

Charters vs. Traditional Public Schools: How 'Balanced' Are Boston Schools?

Any given school may enroll more of African-Americans than Hispanics, or vice versa, and the resulting student body will be more or less balanced. How balanced and diverse are individual schools in Boston?

How to measure balance—the balance ratio. It is useful to define a “balance ratio” to measure the extent of integration of groups at individual schools. This ratio equals the size of the larger group at a school divided by the size of the smaller group. Thus, if a school enrolled 350 African-Americans and 100 Hispanics, its balance ratio would be $350/100 = 3.5$.

What is a “good” balance ratio? 2 or less is a good balance ratio for promoting some degree of interaction between students from different ethnic backgrounds. In a school with a ratio smaller than 2, every pair of students in the larger group who partner to complete a project or to play can be joined by at least one member of the smaller group. The resulting work/play teams can encourage social and academic exchange between both minority student groups and their families.

Traditional public school vs. charter school balance in Boston. Tables 1 and 2 (see the following pages) show the balance ratio for each public school and each charter school in Boston, highlighting in gray schools that have a “good” balance ratio of less than 2. Table 1 reveals that a majority of traditional Boston classrooms (56%) have a good balance. In contrast, Table 2 shows that diversity and balance are comparatively rare in Boston charter classrooms. Boston Commonwealth Charters rarely have ratios smaller than 2, and almost half of them have ratios greater than 3.

While 56% of traditional schools have a “good” balance (defined as a ratio less than 2), only 20% of charters achieve comparable diversity.

Public schools and the commitment to shared experience. Spending on education builds schools, but it also builds and sustains relationships between diverse community groups that might otherwise have few opportunities to interact with one another. The American commitment to public education rests in part on the idea that public schools provide diverse groups with common ground and shared experience. Boston charter schools undermine this commitment by encouraging the segregation of the city's principal racial/ethnic student groups.

Charter schools neglect public school responsibilities. Other evidence suggests that charter schools deter enrollment of students apt to struggle with academics (cf. *Are Charter Schools a Plausible Remedy for the Achievement Gap?*). In combination with the present data, these observations suggest that charter schools neglect a range of important educational responsibilities born by traditional Boston public schools. Legislators might first ensure that these inequities are addressed before endorsing an education “reform” bill that expands the number of charter schools.

Table 1. Balance/Diversity for Traditional Boston Public Schools.

Final column of the table shows the ratio of the larger of two groups (African-American or Hispanic) to the smaller of the two groups for each school (the "balance ratio").

Schools shown in gray have an "good" balance ratio (less than 2).

Table is based on 2008-09 DESE data.

School	African-American		Hispanic		Total	Balance ratio
	N	%	N	%	N	
Traditional Boston District Schools						
Agassiz	89	16.9	419	79.4	528	4.70
Another Course to College	97	43.7	81	36.5	222	1.20
Baldwin	31	18.9	50	30.5	164	1.61
Beethoven	84	29.9	107	38.1	281	1.27
Blackstone	90	15.2	466	78.8	591	5.18
Boston Adult Academy	154	54.4	111	39.2	283	1.39
Boston Arts Academy	167	41.9	131	32.8	399	1.28
Boston Leadership Academy	191	47.4	160	39.7	403	1.19
Boston International HS	33	19.0	117	67.2	174	3.54
Boston Latin	287	11.7	203	8.3	2449	1.41
Boston Latin Academy	481	28.3	280	16.5	1698	1.72
Boston Middle School Academy	9	64.3	4	28.6	14	2.25
Brighton High	497	39.7	643	51.4	1251	1.29
Brook Farm Business & Service Academy	127	37.2	163	47.8	341	1.28
Carter Development Center	14	58.3	6	25.0	24	2.33
Charles H Taylor	415	82.7	64	12.7	502	6.51
Charles Sumner	108	21.3	336	66.4	506	3.12
Charlestown High	432	42.5	301	29.6	1017	1.44
Clarence R. Edwards Middle	98	26.0	156	41.4	377	1.59
Community Academy	50	79.4	12	19.0	63	4.18
Community Academy of Science and Health	289	74.5	84	21.6	388	3.45
Curley K-8 School	141	20.6	402	58.7	685	2.85
Curtis Guild*	6	2.1	235	83.3	282	10.00+
Dante Alighieri	11	8.2	93	69.4	134	8.46
David A Ellis	130	40.9	176	55.3	318	1.35
Dearborn	224	62.9	102	28.7	356	2.19
Dennis C Haley	125	42.5	103	35.0	294	1.21
Donald Mckay*	16	2.3	628	88.3	711	10.00+
Dr. Catherine Ellison-Rosa Parks Early Ed	96	51.3	72	38.5	187	1.33
Dr. William Henderson	85	36.5	25	10.7	233	3.41
ELC-East Zone	72	61.0	39	33.1	118	1.84
ELC-West Zone	30	30.9	42	43.3	97	1.40
East Boston ECC*	5	2.9	134	77	174	10.00+
East Boston High	236	16.3	899	62.2	1445	3.82
Edward Everett	136	47.1	58	20.1	289	2.34
Egleston Comm High School	33	32.4	61	59.8	102	1.85
Elihu Greenwood	214	59.0	130	35.8	363	1.65
Eliot Elementary	42	16.5	101	39.6	255	2.40
Ellis Mendell	68	33.8	126	62.7	201	1.86
Emily A Fifield	247	76.0	54	16.6	325	4.58
Excel HS	146	36.6	81	20.3	399	1.80

Table 1. (cont.)

School	African-American		Hispanic		Total	Balance ratio
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	
Traditional Boston District Schools						
Farragut	96	42.3	98	43.2	227	1.02
Fenway HS	120	41.4	125	43.1	290	1.04
Franklin D Roosevelt	129	35.4	118	32.4	364	1.09
Gardner Pilot Academy	41	12.5	201	61.3	328	4.90
George H Conley	58	29.4	88	44.7	197	1.52
Harbor School	188	72.3	35	13.5	260	5.36
Harvard-Kent	111	24.1	158	34.3	460	1.42
Haynes Early Education Center	75	41.2	87	47.8	182	1.16
Henry Grew	133	55.6	87	36.4	239	1.53
Horace Mann School for the Deaf	41	31.5	48	36.9	130	1.17
Hugh Roe O'Donnell*	9	3.4	189	71.6	264	10.00+
Jackson Mann	252	36.5	246	35.6	691	1.03
James Condon Elem	285	40.4	199	28.2	706	1.43
James J Chittick	213	73.2	69	23.7	291	3.09
James Otis*	9	2.9	233	74.7	312	10.00+
James P Timilty Middle	267	41.5	327	50.8	644	1.22
James W Hennigan	134	28.0	294	61.4	479	2.19
Jeremiah E Burke High	535	67.6	187	23.6	791	2.86
John D Philbrick	45	30.6	61	41.5	147	1.36
John F Kennedy	72	19.9	280	77.6	361	3.90
John Marshall	364	56.9	229	35.8	640	1.59
John P Holland	319	45.8	228	32.7	697	1.40
John W McCormack	226	38.1	212	35.8	593	1.06
John Winthrop	169	54.3	130	41.8	311	1.30
Joseph J Hurley	55	16.7	224	68.1	329	4.08
Joseph Lee	203	66.1	74	24.1	307	2.74
Joseph P Manning	23	15.8	35	24.0	146	1.52
Joseph P Tynan	123	36.7	86	25.7	335	1.43
Josiah Quincy	98	12.3	104	13.0	797	1.06
Joyce Kilmer	41	10.2	96	23.8	403	2.33
Lee Academy	167	62.5	56	21.0	267	2.98
Lilla G. Frederick Middle School	337	52.7	265	41.4	640	1.27
Lyndon	36	7.0	210	41.1	511	5.87
Lyon K-8	17	13.7	39	31.5	124	2.30
Madison Park High	709	47.2	688	45.8	1503	1.03
Manassah E Bradley	17	5.9	157	54.7	287	9.27
Mario Umama Middle School Academy	57	10.0	394	69.0	571	6.90
Mather	236	41.9	90	16.0	563	2.62
Mattahunt	412	77.0	102	19.1	535	4.03
Maurice J Tobin	103	23.5	314	71.5	439	3.04
Media Communications Technology High	203	56.9	104	29.1	357	1.96
Michael J Perkins	92	44.0	56	26.8	209	1.64
Mission Hill School	71	42.3	50	29.8	168	1.42
Monument High School	166	45.7	92	25.3	363	1.81
Mozart	40	25.3	47	29.7	158	1.17
Nathan Hale	104	58.8	62	35.0	177	1.68
New Mission High School	160	65.6	74	30.3	244	2.17
O W Holmes	140	71.4	40	20.4	196	3.50

Table 1. (cont.)

School	African-American		Hispanic		Total	Balance ratio
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	
Traditional Boston District Schools						
O'Bryant Sch Math/Science	502	39.5	328	25.8	1271	1.53
Odyssey High School	151	42.4	97	27.2	356	1.56
Oliver Hazard Perry	37	14.9	48	19.3	249	1.30
Orchard Gardens	219	33.1	415	62.8	661	1.90
Parkway Academy of Technology and Health	160	51.9	112	36.4	308	1.43
Patrick F Gavin Middle	207	46.6	129	29.1	444	1.60
Patrick J Kennedy*	17	6.6	198	76.4	259	10.00+
Paul Dever	170	35.1	232	47.9	484	1.36
Phineas Bates	139	48.3	100	34.7	288	1.39
Quincy Upper School	122	25.0	57	11.7	488	2.14
Rafael Hernandez*	11	2.7	370	90.7	408	10.00+
Ralph Waldo Emerson	166	73.1	38	16.7	227	4.38
Richard J Murphy	247	28.6	95	11.0	863	2.60
Roger Clap	48	29.6	41	25.3	162	1.17
Samuel Adams	19	7.0	184	67.9	271	9.70
Samuel W Mason	116	57.1	55	27.1	203	2.11
Sarah Greenwood	112	28.9	255	65.9	387	2.28
Snowden Int'l High	169	42.0	144	35.8	402	1.17
Social Justice Academy	195	57.2	124	36.4	341	1.57
The Engineering School	168	50.3	127	38.0	334	1.32
The English High	346	41.0	440	52.2	843	1.27
Thomas J Kenny	131	53.0	42	17.0	247	3.12
Urban Science Academy	157	48.0	123	37.6	327	1.28
Warren-Prescott	54	12.7	115	27.1	425	2.13
Washington Irving Middle	225	35.3	307	48.2	637	1.37
William E Russell	92	25.3	202	55.5	364	2.19
William Ellery Channing	185	58.2	105	33.0	318	1.76
William H Ohrenberger	114	25.8	226	51.1	442	1.98
William McKinley	229	55.3	113	27.3	414	2.03
William Monroe Trotter	267	69.9	91	23.8	382	2.94
Winship Elementary	59	25.7	110	47.8	230	1.86
Wm B Rogers Middle	271	54.0	144	28.7	502	1.88
Young Achievers	201	56.3	125	35.0	357	1.61
Median Boston District Balance ratio						1.84
* Assigned max balance ratio of 10.						

Table 2. Balance/Diversity for Boston Charter Schools.

Final column of table shows the ratio of the larger of two groups at that school (African-American or Hispanic) to the smaller of the two groups (the "balance ratio") for each school.

Rows shown in gray have an "good" balance ratio (less than 2).

Table is based on 2008-09 DESE data, and includes only Boston Commonwealth charter schools.

School	African-American		Hispanic		Total	Balance ratio
	N	%	N	%	N	
Boston Charters						
Excel Academy Charter	17	8.1	146	69.2	211	8.54
Academy Of the Pacific Rim Charter Public	277	58.4	74	15.6	474	3.74
Boston Preparatory Charter Public	206	70.5	64	21.9	292	3.22
Smith Leadership Academy Charter Public	164	87.2	24	12.8	188	6.81
Boston Day and Evening Academy Charter	196	65.1	89	29.6	301	2.20
Edward Brooke Charter	299	75.1	80	20.1	398	3.74
City On A Hill Charter Public	183	66.8	72	26.3	274	2.54
Codman Academy Charter Public	103	88.8	12	10.3	116	8.62
Conservatory Lab Charter	49	36.3	42	31.1	135	1.17
Neighborhood House Charter	197	49.3	78	19.5	400	2.53
Boston Collegiate Charter	124	26.7	45	9.7	464	2.75
MATCH Charter Public High	189	61.4	95	30.8	308	1.99
Boston Renaissance Charter Public	840	68.6	324	26.5	1224	2.59
Roxbury Preparatory Charter	145	63.0	77	33.5	230	1.88
Uphams Corner Charter**	143	83.1	22	12.8	172	6.49
Median Boston Charter Balance ratio						2.75
**School closed by DESE for failure to perform						