

**KEY POINTS ABOUT DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACT OF  
CHARTER SCHOOLS ON RURAL AND SMALL DISTRICTS  
DEVELOPED BY FIFTEEN  
HAMPSHIRE AND FRANKLIN COUNTY SUPERINTENDENTS and  
THE COLLABORATIVE FOR EDUCATIONAL SERVICES – December, 2015**

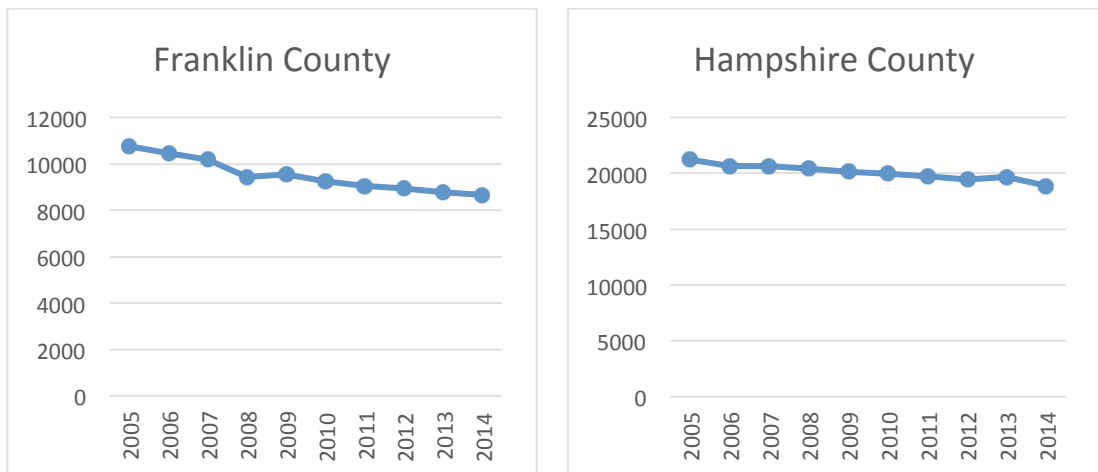
**PURPOSES:**

1. To provide legislators and other interested parties with the data about enrollment trends, charter schools, school choice, private schools, and home schooling in Franklin and Hampshire so that they understand the impacts on districts and can make informed decisions
  
2. To focus on the disproportionate impact of charter schools in rural areas / small school districts and advocate for charter school policies more responsive to the local needs and issues of our districts. These would include policies that limit growth of charter schools in rural areas or near small school districts, that ensure charter schools truly reflect the demographics of sending communities, that mandate charter schools to provide evidence of innovative practices and how they are shared with school districts, and that involve more equitable financial resolutions.

**KEY POINTS:**

1. **POINT 1: Charter schools, school choice, private schools, and home schooling have a disproportionate impact on smaller and rural districts, especially in Franklin, Hampshire (and Berkshire) counties.**
  - a. We have a shrinking number of school-aged children. The following graphs show steady reductions in K-12 students, about 150 per year in Franklin County, 220 per year in Hampshire County. These figures correlate well with US Census estimates for population by age. The Census figures indicate stable overall populations in the two counties but steadily decreasing birth rates, so progressively smaller numbers of children in younger age spans.

**Number of K-12 Students Living In County**  
(attending any public, private, or home school)

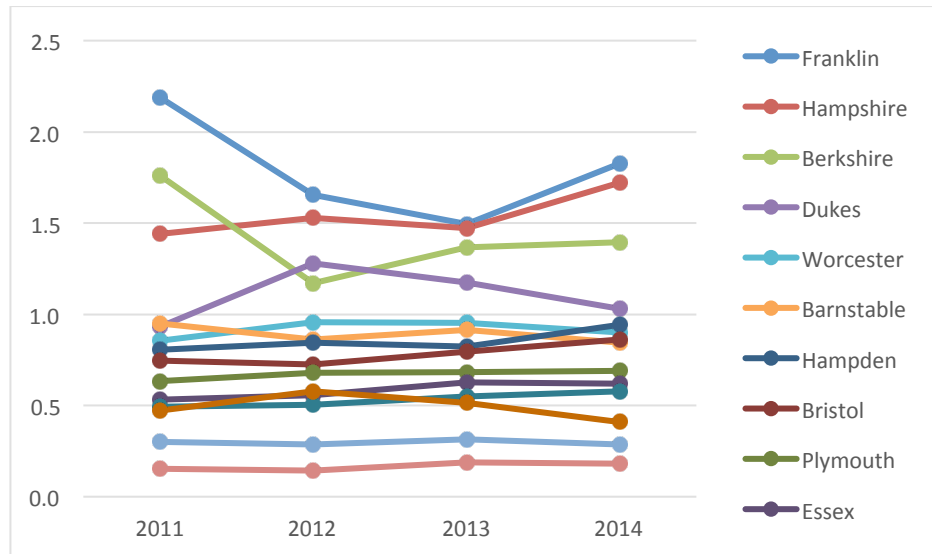


Data from MA Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education, *School Attending Children* tables. Missing data points interpolated at town level. Aberrations in 2008 for Franklin County and 2013 for Hampshire County are probably data collection inconsistencies.

b. We have higher percentages of home schooling and school choice<sup>1</sup> than all other parts of the state.

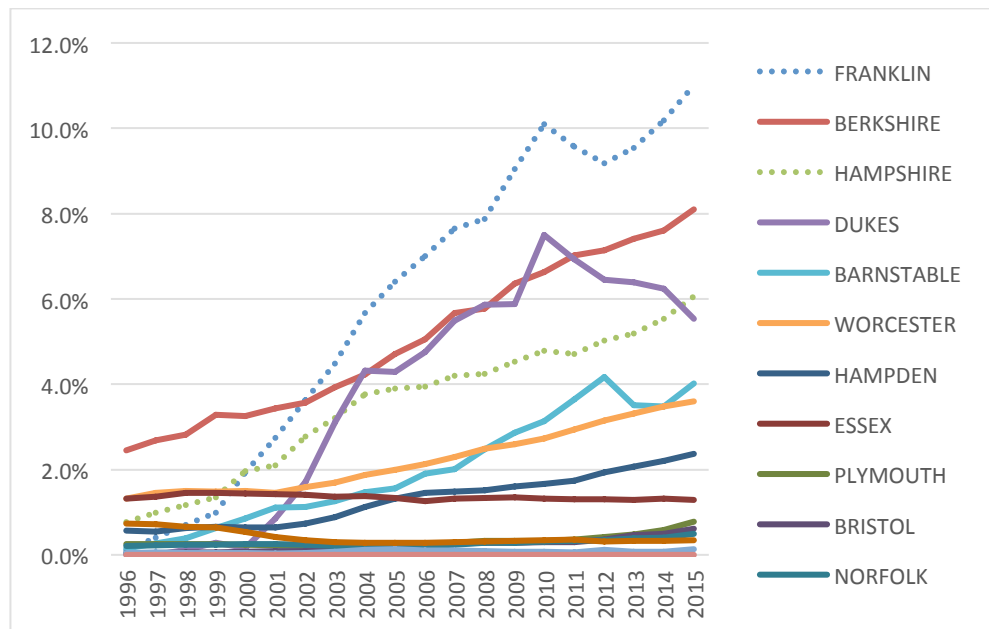
- i. Franklin, Hampshire and Berkshire counties (in that order) lead the state in percentage of school-aged students who are home schooled
- ii. Franklin, Berkshire, and Hampshire counties (in that order) lead the state in the percent of students using school choice.

**Percent of K-12 Students Living in County Who Attend Home School**



Data from MA Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education, *School Attending Children* tables.

**Percent of County Public School Students Exercising School Choice**



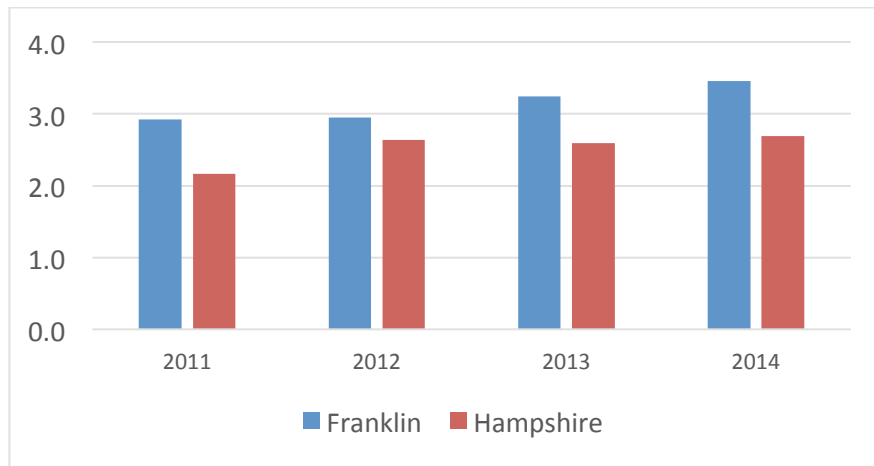
Data from MA Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education, total school choice students sent divided by total enrollment.

<sup>1</sup> School Choice gives a family/student from one school district the choice to enroll in a different school district. School Committees must approve having School Choice for their district. Some, but not full, funding follows the student.

c. We have a similar percentage of students as the rest of the state who are going to charter and private schools, but the impact in a small district is much greater than in a large district (see Point 2). In Franklin and Hampshire Counties, an average of about 3% of students per district attend charter schools. The percent is as high as 7.75% in Cummington and is over 5% in Greenfield, Northampton, Williamsburg, Erving, and Plainfield.

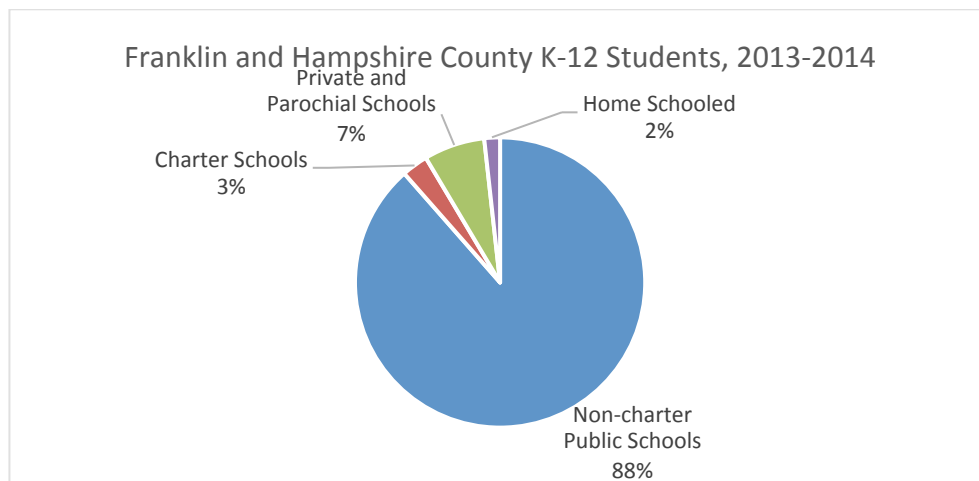
In addition, the percentage of students going to charter and private schools is compounded by the Choice program in existence in most of our schools. Most of the districts in the eastern part of the state agreed to not be Choice districts, lessening the impact of charters and private schools (positively or negatively).

**Percent of All K-12 Students Attending Charter Schools**



Data from MA Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education, *School Attending Children* tables. Missing data points interpolated at town level.

d. Overall, over 12% of students in both Franklin and Hampshire Counties are in charter schools, private schools, parochial schools, or home schooling. This means 88% are attending regular (non-charter) public schools.



**e. Conclusion - Shrinking number of school-aged children + relatively high percentages of available students opting not to attend regular district schools = increasing problem for small schools and districts in terms of serious financial constraints that negatively impact the programs and services public schools are able to offer.**

**2. POINT 2: There is a disproportionate impact of charter schools on small districts**

- a. There is a *disproportionate financial impact*. There is a big difference between a small district absorbing a 5% decrease in funding from a large district absorbing a 5% decrease.
  - i. Many of the school districts in our counties have only one or two schools in a particular town or grade level, so our districts do not have the ability to offset the revenues lost to charter schools by reducing the number of grade-level classrooms or shuttering buildings.
  - ii. This differential impact is similar to a family in poverty being hit by a 5% decrease in income as compared to a wealthy family who has the same 5% decrease.
- b. Charter (and private) schools have a *disproportionate impact on the diversity of the student body* in small and rural districts.
  - i. Charter schools in our region generally serve lower percentages of English Language Learners and students with special needs than the local districts do.
  - ii. Charter schools do not, for the most part, provide transportation. Given the relatively lower population density of our counties, fewer students live within walking distance of a charter school. The result is that children whose families do not have the means to provide transportation are excluded from charter schools located away from population centers.
- c. We need laws and regulations about charter schools that take into account local conditions and are not based solely on what is appropriate for Boston and other urban centers.

- 3. POINT 3: The argument that more charter schools are needed to give parents more choice is only true if parents don't have many choices.** In fact, in addition to the students currently in existing charter schools, 11% of children in Franklin County and 6% of students in Hampshire county currently choice into other districts. We already have "choice on steroids" as one superintendent described it.