

EDUCATION WEEK

Exploring the Link Between Charters And Private School Enrollment Decline

By: Katie Ash - April 9, 2013

A recent working paper written by Stephanie Ewert of the Social, Economic, and Housing Statistics Division at the U.S. Census Bureau analyzes data to uncover possible reasons for the steep decline in private school enrollment over the past decade—and finds that the rise of charter schools may be a contributing factor.

Ewert came to her conclusions by splicing data to see whether private school enrollment trends were affecting certain demographics more than others or certain types of schools more than others. Next, she calculated the correlation coefficient between the decline in private school environment to other factors, such as the growth of charter schools.

Private school enrollment in K-12 students has dropped from 5.4 million students in 2002 to 4.5 million students in 2010 according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey. Ewert suggests that the decline could be due to families' concerns about the lack of affordability of private school, the rise of homeschooling, and the establishment and proliferation of charter schools.

But after crunching the numbers, Ewert came to the conclusion that there is also a statistically significant correlation between the decline in private school enrollment and the growth of charter schools, although more robust research is needed to determine whether it is the cause of the drop in enrollment. It is harder to determine whether homeschooling has played a part in the overall private school enrollment decline, she found. More data is needed to link the two phenomena, she says in the report.

The data also reveal that private school enrollment decline was not triggered by the economic recession, says Ewert.

Ewert used data from the U.S. Census Bureau as well as the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools to conduct the analysis. You can read more about her analysis and her thoughts about the topic at the U.S. Census Bureau's Research Matters blog. She has released the paper independently and its views do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Census Bureau.

Charters schools are an oft-cited reason for the decline in Catholic school enrollment, a subject profiled in this *Education Week* story last year and pointed to in a study by the Cato Institute.