A study of those who made the jump: examining the differences between traditional public school leadership and charter school leadership

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A STUDY OF THOSE WHO MADE THE JUMP: EXAMINING THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND CHARTER SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

by

Sarah G Hale Keuseman

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Educational Policy and Leadership Studies in the Graduate College of The University of Iowa

August 2017

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Liz Hollingworth
This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

Sarah G Hale Keuseman

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Educational Policy and Leadership Studies at the August 2017 graduation.

Thesis Committee:

Liz Hollingworth, Thesis Supervisor

Ain Grooms

Leslie Locke

Katrina Sanders

Don Yarbrough
To the educators who have inspired me as a learner and as a teacher.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Liz Hollingworth, for sticking with me throughout this journey.

My family deserves more thanks than I could ever muster here. My husband’s support allowed me to finish the seemingly endless endeavor of this dissertation, especially when I would have rather been home cuddling my boys. My sister’s listening ear and life coach practice gave me opportunities to talk when it was most needed. My parents, Jack and Susan Hale, gifted me with a love of learning at an early age. I hope this is both adequate and sufficient.
This interpretive, exploratory qualitative study examines the similarities and differences between charter school leadership and traditional public school leadership. Previous research has examined the differences in school leadership in traditional public schools from large-scale, quantitative data (Cravens, Goldring, & Penaloza, 2012; Goff, Mavrogordato, & Goldring, 2012). Though research exists on specific facets of charter schools such as student achievement, there is little research on the needs of charter school leaders and how well-prepared they are for their unique roles (Huerta, 2009; Hughes & Silva, 2013). The purpose of this study is to contribute to the body of knowledge on school leadership by developing an emic description of the relationship between charter school leadership and traditional public school leadership through a qualitative interpretivist study approach.

School leaders in Minnesota who have been heads of school in both independent charter schools and traditional public schools were surveyed, and four were selected for in-depth follow-up interviews. The guiding research questions are: (1) What are the differences between traditional public school leadership and charter school leadership according to school leaders in Minnesota who have been leaders of both types of schools; (2) How do school leaders in Minnesota who have been leaders of both charter schools and traditional public schools experience instructional leadership in the different school organizations; and (3) How do school leadership preparation programs help prepare educators for leadership in charter schools?

Findings from this study indicate that differences in school leadership in traditional public schools and independent charter schools may exist due to organizational
structure, including the expanded scope of school leadership in charter schools. However, some of the differences may be because of school size, as leaders with experience in both types of schools indicated that leading a charter school is similar to leading a small, rural, traditional public school. The findings also examine the structures created to support charter school leadership, and the need for professional community and support. Implications for school leader professional development and school leadership preparation programs are discussed.
PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Research has shown that school leaders have a large impact on student learning. There has been some research on the differences in leadership in traditional public schools as opposed to public charter schools that have shown that leadership practice is different, but it has not determined how or why it is different. This research has also been limited to large-scale surveys and questionnaires that take answers from traditional public school leaders and compare those answers to the answers of public charter school leaders.

This study examines the perspective of school leadership in both traditional public schools and independent public charter schools by talking with school leaders who have lead both types of schools. A questionnaire about leadership practices was emailed to groups of traditional public school leaders, independent charter school leaders, and leaders who had held head roles in both types of schools. In the second part of the study, interviews were conducted with four charter school leaders who had also been administrators in traditional public schools. The study finds that school leadership practices may indeed vary based on the type of school, but also finds that being a principal of a charter school may be similar to being a principal in a small, rural school district. Leaders in charter schools may work to create their own leadership structures to help support the work that they do or share it with teachers or other staff. Also, more support may be needed for leaders of charter schools, both as professional development and in groups of supportive peer relationships.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES ................................................................................................................................. x

LIST OF FIGURES ............................................................................................................................... xii

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .............................................................................................................. 1

  Statement of the Problem .................................................................................................................. 5

  History of Charter Schools ............................................................................................................. 7

  Charter Schools in Minnesota ........................................................................................................ 10

  Purpose of the Study and Research Questions ............................................................................. 13

  Conceptual Framework ..................................................................................................................... 13

  Significance ........................................................................................................................................ 15

  Definition of Terms .......................................................................................................................... 16

    Charter School ............................................................................................................................... 16

    Instructional leadership ................................................................................................................... 17

    Transformational leadership .......................................................................................................... 18

    Moral leadership ............................................................................................................................. 18

    Participative leadership .................................................................................................................. 18

    Managerial leadership .................................................................................................................... 19

    Contingent leadership .................................................................................................................... 19

    Emic Perspective ............................................................................................................................. 19

  Summary ............................................................................................................................................ 20

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .................................................................................................... 21
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exploratory Approach</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of Participants</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampling</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Phase</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Phase</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Considerations</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4: RESULTS</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Participant Descriptions</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcia</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results by Research Question</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 1: Differences in Leadership Practices</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 2: Instructional Leadership</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 3: Leadership Education</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Charter School Questionnaire Leadership Roles ..............................................60
Table 2. Charter School and Traditional Public School Leaders: What leadership role or roles have you held in charter schools?.................................................................61
Table 3. Charter School and Traditional Public School Leaders: “What leadership role or roles have you held in traditional public schools?”...........................................62
Table 4. Phase Two Participant and School Demographics. ........................................63
Table 5. Summary of Data Collection and Analysis.........................................................64
Table 6. Codes, Categories, and Themes Developed......................................................69
Table 7. Individual Case Demographics..........................................................................71
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Number of Charter School Students in the United States, by Year .........................1
Figure 2. Number of Charter Schools in the United States, by Year .................................2
Figure 3. Timeline of Charter School History ......................................................................9
Figure 4. Charter School Research by Topic, adapted from Smith, Wohlstetter, Farrell, and Nayfack (2011), p. 453 .................................................................22
Figure 5. Charter School and Traditional Public School Leaders Years of Experience, by School Type ....................................................................................62
Figure 6. Authority by School Type and Leader Experience ..............................................91
Figure 7. Fundraising by School Type and Leader Experience ...........................................94
Figure 8. Facilities by School Type and Leader Experience ................................................95
Figure 9. Recruiting and Hiring Staff by School Type and Leader Experience ..................96
Figure 10. Monitoring Instructional Improvement by School Type and Leader Experience ...........................................................................................................97
Figure 11. Developing School Improvement Goals by School Type and Leader Experience ...........................................................................................................99
Figure 12. Demonstrating Instructional Practices by School Type and Leader Experience ..............................................................................................................109
Figure 13. Creating Professional Development by School Type and Leader Experience ..............................................................................................................110
Figure 14. Troubleshoot or Support Development of School Improvement Efforts by School Type and Leader Experience .........................................................111
Figure 15. Observing a Teacher by School Type and Leader Experience ..............................112
Figure 16. Examining and Discussing Student Work by School Type and Leader Experience ............................................................................................................113
Figure 17. Examining and Discussing Standardized Test Results by School Type and Leader Experience ......................................................................................114
Figure 18. Monitor Curriculum, by School Type and Leader Experience ............................115
Figure 19. Monitor Classroom Instructional Practices by School Type and Leader Experience
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Since 1991, when the first charter school opened in Minnesota, charter school growth has skyrocketed. In 2004 charter schools accounted for 4% of all public schools, but by 2014 that had increased to 7% of all public schools. Between 2008-2009 and 2013-2014 students enrolled in charter schools rose nationwide by 80 percent (Figure 1), while the number of charter schools in the United States increased by 60 percent (Figure 2). As of 2016 more than 6,700 charter schools operate in 42 states and enroll almost 2.9 million students (https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16_216.20.asp). The total number of schools continues to rise, with charter growth remaining steady at about 6.5 percent from 2009 to 2014 (“The Public Charter Schools Dashboard,” 2014). Perry (2008) estimates that this growth, combined with the charter school leader turnover rate, will require an additional 6,000 to 21,000 new charter school leaders by 2018.

![Number of Charter School Students in the United States, by Year](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_119.00.asp)

*Figure 1. Number of Charter School Students in the United States, by Year*
Charter schools are a part of the educational and political landscape, drawing bipartisan political support. Vergari (2007) classifies the political system of education into two coalitions: traditional and reform. The traditional coalition includes teacher unions, school boards associations, and school administrators’ associations; some personnel in state education departments; schools of education that prepare teachers and school administrators; and interest group allies such as parent-teacher organizations. On the other hand, the reform coalition includes the business community (education outsiders); professors (primarily in the social sciences); U.S. Department of Education personnel; private foundations, think tanks, and education reform interest groups (e.g., Fordham Foundation, American Enterprise Institute, and Center for Education Reform); many governors; and U.S. Presidents beginning with George W. Bush. The reform coalition tends to support charter schools while the traditional coalition tends to oppose them (Vergari, 2007).
Wells, Slayton, and Scott (2002) identify the rise of support for charter schools as part of the increasingly common neoliberal political environment. The authors outline how supporters of charter schools range from “neoconservative members of the religious right to more leftist and progressive educators who seek autonomy from a state-run system to provide viable educational alternatives to students who have not succeeded in the traditional system” (p. 345). These diverse interests have led to wide variation in the charter school laws among states (Wells et al., 2002).

Charter schools have been embraced at the state level, and have also become a rare topic receiving bipartisan support as part of the neoliberal political agenda at the national level (Wells et al., 2002). Federal initiatives have incorporated the advancement of charter schools through programs such as Race to the Top competitive grants through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA, P.L. 111-5), which incentivized policy by offering millions of dollars to states in exchange for embracing policy changes such as lifting caps on the numbers of charter schools. Three consecutive presidents – Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama – have actively supported charter schools, an indicator of federal support for charters.

Hassel (2009) frames the political appeal of charter schools this way:

In politics, charter schools have pressed both Republican and Democratic buttons. Republicans find them appealing because they provide public schools with a limited amount of competition, operate without some of the onerous burdens or regulation, and must produce acceptable educational results as a condition for continued funding. For their part, Democrats like the fact that charter schools
create new options while adhering to the core values of public schooling (they are nonselective in their admissions, tuition-free, and nonreligious). (p. 2)

Meanwhile, education reformers who oppose charter schooling accuse the movement of skimming students, facilities, and resources from traditional public schools (Ravitch, 2010). On the other hand, American popular culture has painted the public school system as “in crisis.” Movies such as Waiting for Superman (Guggenheim, 2011) have heralded charter schools as the savior for the nation’s education woes. Waiting for Superman portrays charter schools as offering public school options to students whose only other choice are neighborhood schools bad enough to be called “dropout factories.” The movie was received with wide popularity, but painted an overly simplistic view of the educational system and offered naïve solutions, emphasizing charter schools as an easy fix (Swalwell & Apple, 2011).

More recently, President Trump’s Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, has reflected the political strength of the school choice movement. Secretary DeVos has a long history of promoting both charter school deregulation and private school vouchers in her home state of Michigan. DeVos’s nomination sparked protests across the country as public education advocates decried her lack of public school experience. Using her personal wealth, Secretary DeVos has been linked to large donations to organizations that advocated lifting the cap on the number of charter schools in Michigan and an unsuccessful campaign to alter the Michigan Constitution to allow private school vouchers (Strauss, 2016). The President’s education agenda also reflected an emphasis on school choice, with a goal to fight for and pass a “School Choice and Education Opportunity Act” within the first 100 days. The plan for the bill included the
“redirection” of education dollars to the public, private, charter, or magnet school of a parent’s choice (Wermund, 2017). As of this writing, the legislation has yet to materialize.

**Statement of the Problem**

Today, almost five percent of the nation’s children attend charter schools (https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgb.asp). As the charter movement continues to grow there is an increasing need to understand further charter school leadership, made more pressing by the important link between school leadership and student learning (Leithwood & Wahlstrom, 2008; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). School leadership is second to only classroom instruction on student achievement and schools that are “in trouble” are where leadership has the greatest impact (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Leithwood & Wahlstrom, 2008).

Despite the connection between leadership and student learning, research examining the similarities and differences in leadership between charter schools and traditional public schools has lagged behind other issues. Ten years after the opening of the first charter school, Dressler (2001) wrote:

… little has been written about the actual day-to-day leadership needs of charter schools in facilitating real change. The role of staff, principals, and teachers has been of nominal interest to date, and there is a paucity of knowledge about staffing in charter schools, particularly the administrative staff. (p. 171)

The bulk of research on charter school issues centers around student and school outcomes according to Smith, Wohlstetter, Farrell, and Nayfack (2011). These authors’ systematic review of charter school research categorizes the history of research on charter schools
into three phases: the first phase of the research examined differences in charter school laws and worked to define charter schools. The second phase examined the issues of accountability and autonomy. The third phase – today’s research – has moved beyond questions of whether charter schools as organizations will survive and examines charter school improvement (Smith et al., 2011). Given the critical relationship between school leadership and school improvement (Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood & Wahlstrom, 2008), charter school leadership falls into this third phase. Out of 323 research articles and reports examined for the Smith et al. (2011) systematic review, only 15 focused on charter school leadership.

The need for understanding charter school leadership is not unique to researchers and leadership preparation practitioners. The Minnesota Association of Charter Schools (MACS) has outlined the importance of understanding leadership in charter schools, identifying the leadership capacity of school administrators as one of the biggest threats to chartering in Minnesota (Piccolo, 2014). Given the critical nature of charter school leadership, the need for understanding the difference between charter school and traditional public school leadership is great.

Despite these assertions, researchers caution against broadly applying findings of the importance of leadership without considering the context of the schooling:

This evidence challenges the wisdom of leadership development initiatives that attempt to be all things to all leaders or refuse to acknowledge differences in leadership practices required by differences in organizational context. Being the principal of a large secondary school, for example, really does require different
capacities than being the principal of a small elementary school. (Leithwood et al., 2004, p. 10)

If the capacities required for leadership in a large high school are different from those required for successfully leading a small elementary school, it is no surprise that the capacities required for leading a charter school are different from those required to successfully lead a traditional public school (Cravens, Goldring, & Penaloza, 2012; Goff, Mavrogordato, & Goldring, 2012; Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Gundlach, 2003).

However, the research has not yet established exactly how or why charter school leadership is different. The studies that have examined the differences in leadership practice between the two school types have largely been large-scale quantitative surveys (e.g. Cravens et al., 2012; Goff et al., 2012). To date, research has not examined the differences from the perspectives of school leaders who have lived experiences of leading both traditional public schools and charter schools. The present study aims to fill this gap in the literature. With an estimated 6,000 to 21,000 new charter school leaders needed by 2018 (Perry, 2008), there is a need for a deep understanding of the differences between charter school leadership and traditional public school leadership.

**History of Charter Schools**

How did charter schools make the fast rise to such a ubiquitous entity in the educational and political systems? Many credit Budde, a former educational administration professor at the University of Massachusetts, with the first mention of the term “chartered school” (Junge, 2012; Wohlstetter, Smith, & Farrell, 2013). Budde used the term in the 1970s and later published the idea (Budde, 1989), proposing that a team of teachers could be chartered by a school district for a term of three to five years to
establish innovative programs or departments within existing schools (Budde, 1996). In the same year, Al Shanker, head of the American Federation of Teachers, began discussing the idea of chartered schools to allow teachers more autonomy in exchange for accountability (Junge, 2012; Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). Shanker publicly advocated for chartered schools in speeches and opinion pieces across the country, calling for a new way to professionalize teachers through charter schools (Junge, 2012). With his vision, school districts would give small groups of teachers the freedom to create autonomous schools within a district to help serve students that might not otherwise be served by traditional schooling. Such plans would include provisions for “faculty decision making, for participative management; team teaching; a way for a teaching team to govern itself…” (Shanker, 1988, p. 12). Using this history, Malloy and Wohlstetter (2003) assert that charter schooling born out of the idea that teachers as professionals who should be actively involved in the creation, management, and leadership of schools.

In contrast, Chubb and Moe (1990) advocated for charters from the perspective of market-based competition. The authors argued that the myriad of educational reforms initiated in the 1980s following the publication of A Nation At Risk (1983) were doomed to fail because the reforms missed the root of the problem, which lay with the institution of public schools. They contended that poor academic performance would only be improved by changing the entire system of schooling. Chubb and Moe’s proposal focused on using charter schools to promote school competition and parental choice as a route to school improvement and academic achievement. This new market-based school system would revolutionize schooling and improve learning as parents chose schools that were the best fit for their students (Chubb & Moe, 1990).
Minnesota passed the first charter school law in 1991, and the first charter school opened in St. Paul in 1992 (Figure 3). California followed Minnesota’s law with a charter school law in 1992, and Wisconsin, Michigan, Colorado, New Mexico, Massachusetts, and New York passed charter school laws in 1993 (Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). Each of these laws created public charter schools in various forms, but all were tuition-free schools that gained increased freedom with increased accountability.

Today, the only states that do not have charter school laws are Kentucky, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, and West Virginia. The public seems supportive of charters: A report by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (2016) found that 78 percent of parents surveyed favored having a charter school open in their neighborhood. Seventy percent of parents surveyed would support a charter school in their neighborhood, and nearly three-quarters said they had favorable opinions of charter schools ("Parent Survey Report," 2016).

![Timeline of Charter School History](image)

*Figure 3. Timeline of Charter School History*

2005). Each of these laws created public charter schools in various forms, but all were tuition-free schools that gained increased freedom with increased accountability.
Charter Schools in Minnesota

Despite Chubb and Moe’s enthusiasm for market-based reform, no charter schools existed as of the 1990 publication. Educators and civic leaders had begun pushing the ideas of chartered schools in Minnesota in 1988, working on creating the nation’s first charter school legislation. Former state legislator Ember Reichgott Junge reflected on the process of creating the first charter school law, insisting that educators and civic leaders were not responding to a crisis in education:

This wasn’t about criticizing the good work that public schools were doing. Instead, it was about stimulating new ways to meet the needs of children and families that the current public schools simply were not meeting… it was about unlocking the creativity of our teachers so they could try new ways of teaching.

(Junge, 2012, p. 58)

The push for legislation in Minnesota was about allowing a group of teachers or educators to open their own school ("Resources on Minnesota Issues: Charter Schools," 2014). The state had already passed laws allowing for Post-Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) program ("Postsecondary Enrollment Options Act," 1985), a dual-enrollment early college program. PSEO, passed in 1985, allowed eleventh- and twelfth-grade students to gain both high school and college credit by enrolling in courses at public and private colleges and public vocational schools at no cost to the student (Junge, 2012). Two years after that, the legislature passed a bill allowing for open enrollment in Minnesota school districts, giving K-12 students the option to attend any public school of their choice if the district had room and the move did not harm integration efforts ("Metropolitan Open Enrollment," 1988). These laws paved the road for passage of
further school choice legislation in Minnesota, and in 1989 and 1990 the state Senate passed legislation to establish charter schools, but the legislation failed to pass in the House (Junge, 2012).

By 1991 charter school legislation had enough votes to pass both the Minnesota House and Senate. The law that passed in 1991 established chartered schools in Minnesota designed to be innovative, accountable, and inclusive (Junge, 2012). Schools could now be created with their own governing boards where licensed teachers employed by the school were required to compose the majority of the school board. These schools were held accountable for performance and were to be closed if outcomes were not achieved. The schools were required to serve all students on a first come, first serve basis or by lot ("Outcome-Based Schools," 1991). The first charter school opened in St. Paul in 1992.

Today, charter schools in Minnesota are considered public schools and operate under many of the same rules and statutes, including open meeting laws and education of students with special education needs. An interested group of parents, teachers, or a school district may choose to start a charter school. A charter school may be authorized by a school board, an intermediate school board, or an education district; certain charitable organizations; a Minnesota private college, a college or university that is part of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system, and the University of Minnesota; a nonprofit corporation; and single-purpose authorizers that are charitable organizations formed solely to operate charter schools. Authorizers are reviewed by the state for accountability purposes every five years. An authorizer may grant an initial contract to a school board for up to five years. The contract must specify program
purpose; student outcomes; admissions requirements; an operating plan; compliance with federal and state laws; ongoing oversight of operational, financial, and academic performance; school evaluation criteria; applicable special education agreements; and a plan for an orderly school closing. The charter school is governed by a school board that may be comprised of a majority of licensed teachers employed by the school, but it is no longer required to do so (Larson, 2011).

Minnesota does have a small, limited number of schools that are part of a larger charter management organization (CMO). However, the state has not seen the same frequency of CMOs as other states. Education Evolving, a Minnesota-based non-partisan organization focusing on teacher leadership and student-centered learning in public schools, explains that Minnesota has seen much slower CMO growth than charter schools nationally. Reasons for the slower growth of CMOs in the state include the small number of Teach for America participants, struggles with securing facilities for new charter schools, and the state’s stricter laws on authorizers and charter school boards all have played into the lack of CMO expansion in Minnesota (Kaput, 2017).

Various schools in the state have struggled with the boundaries between public schooling, cultural-focused niche education, and church/state entanglements. The state’s emphasis on charter schools’ unique educational niche has created charters that are ethnocentric or culturally-oriented. These schools face the specific risk “of integrating religion into cultural study, thereby inviting controversy” (Eckes, Fox, & Buchanan, 2011, p. 86). One well-publicized Minnesota school, Tarek Ibn Ziyad Academy (TIZA) in Inver Grove Heights, was subject to a lawsuit from the ACLU accusing violation of the Establishment Clause that outlines the prohibition of religion in government-sponsored
activities. The school enrolled primarily Muslim students and authorized by the non-profit organization Islamic Relief. The ACLU charged that the school was favoring the Muslim religion over other religions (Eckes et al., 2011).

**Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the body of knowledge on school leadership. Specifically, this study will examine how and why charter school leadership is different from traditional public school leadership in Minnesota. An emic description of these differences will develop by asking those who have lived experiences of both worlds of school leadership: school leaders who have been the heads of both traditional public schools and charter schools. The research questions for this study are:

1) What are the differences between traditional public school leadership and charter school leadership according to school leaders in Minnesota who have been leaders of both types of schools?

2) How do school leaders in Minnesota who have been leaders of both charter schools and traditional public schools experience instructional leadership in the different school organizations?

3) How do school leadership preparation programs help prepare educators for leadership in charter schools?

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study will draw from the scholarship in the field of leadership theory. This study will utilize the framework established by Leithwood and Duke (1999), who reviewed over 700 articles and many foundational texts published over the past 100 years to develop an understanding of the term
leadership. The sample for their study developed from four educational administration journals: *Educational Administration Quarterly*, the *Journal of School Leadership*, the *Journal of Educational Administration*, and *Educational Management and Administration*. The authors identified 121 articles that described leadership theories, literature reviews, empirical reports, and critical analyses. From these articles, the authors defined leadership as an “influence process concerning the choice of goals and the development and implementation of the means for their achievement” (p.67). The review yielded a framework identifying six broad dimensions of leadership: instructional, transformational, moral, participative, managerial, and contingent leadership (Leithwood & Duke, 1999).

The authors present their framework as complex and dynamic domains rather than a hierarchy of leadership dimensions (Leithwood & Duke, 1999). Understanding the six dimensions will help to understand the differences between leading a traditional public school and leading a charter school. The framework developed by Leithwood and Duke (1999) will be used to filter data and frame the findings from the case studies.

In addition to the leadership dimensions developed by Leithwood and Duke (1999), this study will also utilize the conceptual framework for instructional leadership developed by Cravens et al. (2012). Research has determined that instructional leadership plays a key role in school improvement (Hallinger, 2005; Leithwood et al., 2004). Cravens et al. (2012) divided the skills and competencies in instructional leadership into nine essential functions:

1) Demonstrate instructional practices and/or the use of curricular materials.

2) Observe a teacher during classroom instruction.
3) Examine and discuss student work.

4) Examine and discuss standardized test results of students from a teacher’s class.

5) Create and implement staff development.

6) Personally provide staff development.

7) Troubleshoot or support the implementation of school improvement efforts.

8) Monitor the curriculum used in classrooms to see that it reflects the school’s improvement efforts.

9) Monitor classroom instructional practices to see that they reflect the school’s improvement efforts.

The frameworks developed by Leithwood and Duke (1999) and Cravens et al. (2008) will be used for data analysis in this study and to frame the findings. These studies will be elaborated in Chapter 2 and will be used as a priori codes as described in Chapter 3.

**Significance**

The available evidence seems to indicate that not only are charter schools here to stay, but their presence within our schooling system will only continue to increase. Perry (2008) hypothesizes that this extensive growth will require resources to train an additional 6,000 to 21,000 new charter school leaders by 2018. This study has the potential to inform the field of educational leadership about the specific needs and resources needed for charter school leaders. It is critical to understand the unique role of these leaders because leadership is second only to classroom instruction in its impact on student achievement (Leithwood & Wahlstrom, 2008).
Though research exists on specific facets of charter schools such as student achievement, there is little research on the needs of charter school leaders and how well-prepared they are for their unique roles (Huerta, 2009; Hughes & Silva, 2013). The unique needs of charter school leaders have significant implications for educational leadership preparation programs (Blitz, 2011a). Current models emphasizing instructional leadership may not be sufficient to meet the needs of charter school leaders (Leithwood et al., 2004). Given the growing field of charter schools across the country and increased pressures from school reform advocates to increase student achievement, the results from this study have the potential for great impact in leadership education. Because the field of educational leadership understands that the impact of leadership on student learning is significant (Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano et al., 2005), it is important to understand deeply school leadership in charter schools.

**Definition of Terms**

**Charter School**

While the number of charter schools continues to rise, the legislation that establishes their existence varies state-by-state. However, there are some consistent principles that define charter schools. Charters are public schools that operate with more autonomy than traditional public schools in exchange for more accountability. The schools do not charge tuition. Though varied state-by-state, funding is typically received from state and local sources on a per-pupil basis. Also, charter schools typically “separate funding from operation, exchange funding for accountability, involve private providers (nonprofit and for profit), leverage public money with non-public money, and replace the ‘comprehensive’ with a more focused model of schooling” (Deal &
Hentschke, 2004, p. 9). Charter schools are required to meet state and federal guidelines regarding race and religion in education (Eckes et al., 2011).

Many charter schools also have unique organizational structures. More than 50% of charter schools nationwide are their own independent local education agencies (LEAs) rather than part of a traditional public school LEA (A growing movement: America's largest charter school communities, 2012). A charter school may present a more focused model of schooling, with an emphasis on a method of teaching or population of student, but they must be non-sectarian. The charter schools’ more focused model of schooling more closely ties their operations to their unique institutional missions (Blitz, 2011a). All charter schools govern by a model that exchanges accountability for freedom. In return for greater freedom from various regulations, charters are held to higher accountability standards. If the set accountability standards fail to be met, the school may lose the charter that allows it to operate.

For this study, charter schools will be defined by their context in the state of Minnesota: charter schools are tuition-free independent public schools that are open to and welcome all students, regardless of ability or need, and are governed and operated jointly by licensed teachers, parents, and community members.

**Instructional leadership**

Instructional leadership “focuses on the behaviors of teachers as they engage in activities directly affecting the growth of students” (Leithwood & Duke, 1999, p. 47). It encompasses three broad categories of leadership practice: defining the school mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting school climate (Hallinger, 1992).
For this study, instructional leadership will be defined as the activities and behaviors of school leadership that impact the learning of students.

**Transformational leadership**

Transformational leadership “focuses on the commitments and capacities of organizational members” (Leithwood & Duke, 1999, p. 48). Leithwood (1994) divided transformational leadership into seven dimensions: building school vision, establishing school goals, providing intellectual stimulation, offering individualized support, modeling best practices and important organizational values, demonstrating high-performance expectations, creating a productive school culture, and developing structures to foster participation in school decisions. For this study, transformational leadership will be defined as the activities and behaviors of school leadership that work to change and impact the culture of the school.

**Moral leadership**

Moral leadership emphasizes “the values and ethics of the leader, so authority and influence are to be derived from defensible conceptions of what is right or good” (Leithwood & Duke, 1999, p. 50). It may also include concepts of leadership that are normative, political or democratic, and symbolic. It focuses on the nature of relationships and the distribution of power both within and outside of the school (Leithwood & Duke, 1999). For this study, moral leadership will be defined as the activities and behaviors of school leadership that are guided by the desire to do what is right or good.

**Participative leadership**

Leithwood and Duke (1999) conceptualize participative leadership as leadership that “stresses the decision-making processes of the group” (p. 51). It often is associated
with site-based management, “the most fully developed and widely advocated conception of participatory leadership,” and calls for enhanced organizational effectiveness (Leithwood & Duke, 1999, p. 52). For this study, participative leadership will be defined as the activities and behaviors of school leadership that are guided by the desire to include many different constituencies, such as parents, teachers, and students.

**Managerial leadership**

Sometimes referred to as organizational leadership, managerial leadership “focuses on the functions, tasks, or behaviors of the leader” (Leithwood & Duke, 1999, p. 53). Managerial leadership assumes rational behavior from organizational members and often emphasizes that organizational tasks must be done correctly (Leithwood & Duke, 1999). For this study, managerial leadership will be defined as the activities and behaviors of school leadership that center around the management of organizational responsibilities.

**Contingent leadership**

Contingent leadership focuses on “how leaders respond to the unique organizational circumstances or problems that they face” (Leithwood & Duke, 1999, p. 54). It emphasizes that the wide variation of leadership contexts require unique responses and leadership practices. For this study, contingent leadership will be defined as the activities and behaviors of school leadership that shift in response to the situation at hand.

**Emic Perspective**

Merriam (2009) defines the emic perspective as “that of the insider culture” (p. 29), and contrasts it with the etic perspective, or the perspective of the researcher. For
this study, the emic perspective will be defined as the perspective of school leaders who have held leadership positions in both traditional public schools and charter schools.

Summary

The first chapter of this study offers an introduction to the study, its significance, and a statement of the problem. The following chapter will present current research on charter school leadership, delineate the gaps in that research, and explain how this study will aim to bridge some of the gaps in the research. The third chapter will explain the methodology used in this study. In the fourth chapter, the results of the study will be presented. The fifth chapter will discuss implications for further research.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the first charter school law passed in Minnesota in 1991, the number of charter schools across the country has soared. Today 42 states and the District of Columbia have passed laws allowing for charter schools. According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools ("Estimated Numbers of Public Charter Schools and Students, 2013-2014," 2014), over 6,400 charter schools across the United States enrolled over 2.5 million students in the 2013-2014 school year. Though the debate over the effectiveness of charter schools continues (Betts & Tang, 2011), the total number of charter schools and the number of students they enroll continues to increase. This chapter provides an exemplary literature review focusing on key empirical pieces of research (Boote & Beile, 2005) examine the current literature on charter school leadership.

Smith et al. (2011) conducted a systematic review of charter school research and found that the bulk of research centered on student and school outcomes (Figure 4). The authors’ systematic literature review examined peer-reviewed research from 2000-2010 and non-peer reviewed reports from 2007-2010 and categorized the history of research on charter schools into three phases: the first phase of the research examined differences in charter school laws and worked to define charter schools. The second phase examined the issues of accountability and autonomy. The third phase has moved beyond questions of whether charter schools as organizations will survive and examines charter school improvement (Smith et al., 2011). The 323 studies examined represented 237 articles from peer-reviewed journals and 86 research center reports. Out of these studies, 48% used quantitative methods, 43% qualitative methods, and 11% used mixed methods.
Student outcomes (N=49) and charter school laws (N=44) were the most frequently discussed topics. Only 15 studies examined school leadership. The authors called for more studies that examine the “contextual factors that help explain why some charter schools succeed and others do not” (Smith et al., 2011, p. 453).


Despite the increased interest in researching the effects of charter school education on student achievement, there is mixed evidence of success. Betts and Yang (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of studies of charter school academic achievement across the country and found a lack of rigorous studies. The studies examined by the authors used experimental (lottery) or student-based growth methods to examine charter school effects on student achievement. Their analysis purposefully excluded studies that only examined achievement at only one point in time or used successive grades. Other
research that was excluded took a single snapshot of achievement at schools and failed to account for differences in the backgrounds of students. In the limited number of rigorous studies examined the authors found overall effect sizes of the causal impact on charter school attendance on student achievement of 0.02 and 0.05 for elementary school reading and math, respectively. In middle school, the effect size was 0.055 for middle school math. Effects for middle school reading and high school math and reading were not statistically significant (Betts & Tang, 2011). The study was published by the Center for Reinventing Public Education as part of the National Charter School Research Project.

The Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) also publishes reports on charter school achievement ("National Charter School Study," 2013). The 2013 CREDO report found that the average charter school student gained eight days of learning in reading as compared to their traditional public school counterparts. In math, the students performed about the same regardless of the type of school. However, the students had markedly different gains across the 27 states in the study, and the effects were larger for students in schools that had been opened for longer periods of time ("National Charter School Study," 2013). This report opened discussion on whether the age of a charter school may impact student achievement as measured by standardized test scores.

**Overview of Research on School Leadership**

The research on school leadership began far before the advent of the first charter school. This overview is not intended to be a comprehensive survey of school leadership literature, but rather an exemplary review of the literature (Boote & Beile, 2005) focusing on key pieces of research.
Leithwood and Duke (1999) examined a century’s worth of school leadership research and outlined six models of contemporary leadership practice: instructional leadership, transformational leadership, moral leadership, participative leadership, managerial leadership, and contingent leadership. The rise of charter schools has created a new context for school leadership. Since the first charter school opened in 1991, many researchers have studied the importance of school leadership and its impact on schooling (e.g. Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano et al., 2005).

Leithwood et al. (2004) conducted a review of the research on leadership’s impact on student learning and found that not only is leadership such a significant impact on student learning, but it also shows the greatest effect on schools and student learning in the most difficult circumstances. The authors divided these successful leadership practices into three categories: setting directions, developing people, and redesigning the organization. However, they caution that school leaders must take into context the school organization, the school population, and the policy context (Leithwood et al., 2004). A closer look at the literature finds that a school leader has more influence on what happens in a school than any other single person (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Moreover, successful school leaders seem to draw on the same basic repertoire of leadership practices, and these practices are responsive to the school culture and context (Leithwood et al., 2008).

Research on educational leadership has evolved from an emphasis on managerial leadership to transactional leadership (Hallinger, 1992, 2003) and distributed leadership (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). Gronn (2002) framed distributed leadership as a unit of analysis with a broader scope than focused leadership. The distributed
perspective encourages leaders to share responsibilities throughout the organization and focuses on what school leaders do, but also how and why they do it (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). Today, leaders are also exploring the realm of social justice leadership (e.g. Theoharis, 2009). These topics are explored below.

Managerial Leadership

According to Leithwood and Duke (1999), managerial leadership includes “the functions, behaviors, and tasks of the leader and assumes that if these works are carried out competently the work of others in the organization would be facilitated” (p. 53). The tasks of managerial leadership can range from managing the school facility to balancing the political demands of the school. In completing their literature review, they found that many papers conceptualized managerial leadership in a leader-follower structure (Leithwood & Duke, 1999).

Participative and Distributed Leadership

According to Leithwood and Duke (1999), participative leadership “stresses the decision-making processes of the group” (p. 51). In their review of the literature, they determined that participative leadership also encompass group leadership, shared leadership, and teacher leadership (Leithwood & Duke, 1999). The distributive perspective grew from the work of distributed cognition and activity theory, arguing that school leadership is a distributed practice spread out across the social and situational contexts of the school (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001).

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership developed in the early 1980s and has a unique focus on educational leadership, as opposed to constructs such as situational leadership, trait
theories, and contingency theory which were developed to be applied in a broad variety of settings (Hallinger, 2003). Hallinger (2003) explains that the idea evolved out of research on effective schools that found that “strong, directive leadership focused on curriculum and instruction from the principal” was a characteristic of effective elementary schools in high-need urban areas (p. 329). This model of leadership views the school leader as the primary source of knowledge about the development of the school’s educational program (Hallinger, 1992) and focuses on improving the classroom teaching methods as a means for improving the direction of the school (Leithwood et al., 2004).

One model outlines of three dimensions of instructional leadership: defining the school’s mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school-learning climate (Hallinger, 2003). These tasks can be accomplished through direct activities as well as indirect activities such as the creation of school policies and enforcement or the assurance of the inclusion of schoolwide goals at the classroom level (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Murphy (1988) created an expanded model of four dimensions: developing a mission and goals, managing the education production, promoting an academic learning environment, and developing a supportive work environment. Spillane et al. (2004) built upon these ideas, arguing that leadership practices happen when school leadership, followers, and the situation interact with each other.

Though the term has become so broadly practiced and commonly understood that it is essentially institutionalized in the field of educational leadership (Hallinger, 2005), some conceptualize or criticize instructional leadership as a top-down model of leadership (Hallinger, 2003). Other literature has criticized instructional leadership as
“often more a slogan than a well-defined set of leadership practices” (Leithwood et al., 2004, p. 6).

**Transformational Leadership**

Leithwood (1994) argues that even though instructional leadership spent over a decade as the most preferred image of school leadership, it eventually became inadequate. In contrast to instructional leadership, transformational leadership grew out of the school restructuring movement with the idea that those who are closest to students should make decisions about the instructional program (Hallinger, 1992). Transformational leadership is sometimes framed as a contrast to transactional leadership, or leadership that is focused on transactions between management and employees (Bass, 1990). Transformational leadership includes an emphasis on individualized support, sharing goals and vision, intellectual stimulation, culture building, giving rewards, establishing high expectations, and sharing of leadership responsibilities.

Transformational leadership

…focuses on developing the organization’s capacity to innovate. Rather than focusing specifically on direct coordination, control, and supervision of curriculum and instruction, transformational leadership seeks to build the organization’s capacity to select its purposes and to support the development of changes to practices of teaching and learning. (Hallinger, 2003, p. 330)

Hallinger (2003) offers three conceptual differences between instructional leadership and transformational leadership. First, transformational leadership is conceptualized as a shared or distributed model of leadership, whereas instructional leadership can focus on a sole person as the agent of change. Second, transformational leadership is often
contrasted with transactional leadership. Instructional leadership is transactional in that it works to manage and direct members towards a predetermined goal. Third, instructional leadership is theorized as enacting first-order change, directly impacting the quality of the curriculum and instruction delivered to students. In contrast, transformational leadership exhibits second-order change by increasing the capacity of others in the organization to create positive impacts through teaching and learning (Hallinger, 2003). Leithwood et al. (2004) conceptualize the difference between instructional leadership and transformational leadership as the difference between focusing on classroom teachers as the catalyst for effective school change with an instructional leadership outlook and drawing attention to “the array of school and classroom conditions that need to be changed if learning is to improve” (p. 6) with a transformational leadership perspective.

Moral Leadership

Moral leadership practices, according to Leithwood and Duke (1999) include normative, political/democratic, and symbolic practices of leadership. The focus of these behaviors is on what is right or good, and the research on this topic grew significantly in the 1990s. It also focuses on “the nature of the relationships among those within the organization and the distribution of power between stakeholders both inside and outside the organization” (p. 53) and can include leadership described as symbolic, democratic or political (Leithwood & Duke, 1999).

Contingent Leadership

Leithwood and Duke (1999) included literature that discussed different leadership styles and problem-solving leadership skills in their review of contingent leadership. In this model of leadership, a school leader may shift leadership practices or styles of
leadership to fit the situation at hand. They also included craft and reflective views of leadership under the umbrella of contingent leadership (Leithwood & Duke, 1999).

**Social Justice Leadership**

More recently, school leadership research has expanded to include social justice leadership. Theoharis (2007) outlined a theory of social justice leadership that specifically addresses how the differences in issues including race, class, language, ability, gender, and sexual orientation impact the work of school leadership to address and reduce marginalization in schools. He drew from critical theory to build in the idea of social justice leadership and profiled leaders who did the work of leadership for the benefit of marginalized students. His further work identified arrogant humility, passionate leadership, and tenacious commitment to social justice as some of the hallmarks of leadership for social justice (Theoharis, 2008).

**Leadership Practice**

However, these most recent conceptions of school leadership may not be sufficient to fully describe the unique and changing roles of school leaders. Leithwood et al. (2004) caution against relying on “leadership by adjective” (p. 6) movements as theories like instructional leadership and transformational leadership can become slogans for following rather than meaningful and applicable theories for action. The authors consider “distributed leadership” to have evolved beyond meaningful application and to have become more of a slogan than an effective tool for leadership. They believe the misuse of the term has limited the role of leadership to three key functions: setting directions, developing people, and redesigning the organization (Leithwood et al., 2004).
Hallinger (2003) concurs that contemporary conceptions of leadership have become less useful and more of a popularity contest: “Leadership models in education are subject to the same faddism that is apparent in other areas of education. Today’s favourite brand is soon replaced by another” (p.330). Leithwood et al. (2004) caution those preparing educational leaders about the challenges of choosing a specific type of leadership to emphasize: “We need to be developing leadership with large repertoires of practices and the capacity to choose from that repertoire as needed, not leaders trained in the delivery of one ‘ideal’ set of practices” (p. 6).

**Charter school leadership**

**Who are charter school leaders?**

Vickers (2014) used nationally representative Schools and Staffing Survey data from the National Center for Education Statistics to examine the differences between charter school leaders and traditional public school leaders at the national level. He found charter school leaders more likely to be minorities, females, and have less professional preparation than traditional public school leaders. In addition to the demographic differences between charter school leaders and traditional public school leaders, Vickers found that charter school leaders tended to have more positive conceptions of their positions, work longer days, and feel like they had more power than traditional public school leaders. The charter school leaders also perceived to have more influence over curriculum and staffing issues (Vickers, 2014).

Campbell and Gross (2008) collected survey data from charter school leaders in six states and interviewed charter school leaders at 24 schools in California, Hawaii, and Texas. The authors found that the key differences between charter school leaders and
traditional public school leaders involved experience, age, and length of tenure in the leadership position. Charter school leaders tended to be younger, have less administrative experience, and have led a school for two years or less. They also found that 80% of charter school leaders surveyed held a degree in education, and 60% of charter school leaders were currently or had been state-certified principals.

In addition to the demographic differences between charter school leaders and traditional public school leaders, charter leaders can come to their positions through circuitous routes. Deal and Hentschke (2004) conducted a qualitative study of thirteen charter school creator-leaders and found that charter school founders were often “accidental leaders” (p. xii). Many had been in other leadership positions in fields like business or the military before their charter schools opened. These leaders did not initially intend to become leaders of charter schools but rather slipped into the leadership roles in the schools they had been working to create. Because these leaders did not expect to adopt these roles, the authors posited that the leaders might be less prepared to deal with the daily demands of leading a charter school (Deal & Hentschke, 2004).

**Organizational Structure of Charter Schools**

In addition to the demographic differences of charter school leaders, researchers believe that the tasks and challenges charter school leaders face differ from those that face traditional public school leaders (Blitz, 2011a; Campbell & Grubb, 2008; Farmer-Hinton, 2006; Goff et al., 2012; Griffin & Wohlstetter, 2001). Some of those differences stem from organizational or structural differences. Some of the organizational differences between charter schools and traditional public schools that impact leadership
include lack of district structure, the age of school, dependency on a mission, isomorphic challenges, accountability pressures, and student recruitment and retention.

**Lack of district structure.** Because of their organizational structure, most charter schools do not have the traditional district structure to rely on, especially independent charter schools that are not affiliated with a charter management organization (CMO) or an educational management organization (EMO). These independent charter schools lack the administrative support typically provided by a central office (Blitz, 2011a; Campbell & Grubb, 2008; Goff et al., 2012) thus may lack the centralized resources for tasks such as hiring, fiscal management, and human resources. Portin et al. (2003) explain:

> Traditional public school leaders are profoundly affected by the actions of superintendents, district-wide school boards, and central offices. The actions of these groups are, in turn, influenced by federal, state, county, or city government policies and by collective bargaining agreements. While charter and independent school leaders are not immune from external influence, their schools’ lean governance structure (generally built around boards of trustees) sets them apart from the weight of a larger system. And though charter and independent schools must be licensed by the state, and abide by basic state, city, and county regulations, they are less directly affected by those parties. (p. 31)

Campbell and Grubb (2008) conducted a survey of charter school directors in three Midwest states (Illinois, Ohio, and Wisconsin) in conjunction with the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. The researchers found the essential tasks of a charter school leader amplified in some charter schools because of lack of support staff
with abilities to do tasks like fundraising and school finance, meaning that school leaders had to assume responsibilities for these tasks (Campbell & Grubb, 2008).

**Challenges associated with new schools.** Some of the unique needs of charter school leaders are based on the age of the school. School leaders who are working in charter schools that are just opening face unique challenges of building a school from the ground up. Farmer-Hinton (2006) conducted a multi-year case study of a recently chartered college preparatory high school. While many charter schools face many of the same challenges as traditional public schools such as staff turnover, financial pressures, and adherence to the school mission, “recently chartered schools have the additional pressures of managing the trials and errors of starting a new school while also creating and sustaining an abstract, innovative concept that stakeholders (and staff) left regular schools hoping to find,” the author wrote (Farmer-Hinton, 2006, p. 1216). Leaders in new schools have responsibilities that may include everything from acquiring or renovating facilities, procuring equipment, textbooks, and curriculum, to hiring staff and recruiting students (Portin et al., 2003). These challenges are not limited to schools that are newly opened, either. School leaders in other charter schools face unique challenges as well. “Many charter schools are still ramping up, trying to get stable facilities and funding, keeping an eye on test scores and figuring out how best to educate their students, all of which distracts school leaders” (Campbell, 2010, p. 2).

Griffin and Wohlstetter (2001) conducted an exploratory qualitative study of 17 charter schools in three states and found similar challenges for charter school leaders in start-up schools: “It is very hard work to both design and operate a charter school and keep the focus on teaching and learning” (p. 338-339). The authors found three key
challenges to developing these new institutions from scratch: developing an instructional/curricular program, developing a meaningful accountability system, and developing leadership/management systems. These challenges were often faced within a compressed time frame as the school was starting up. The authors found that the start-up schools often began with decentralized leadership rejecting the typical hierarchical school leadership systems, but as the schools grow and continue to add more stakeholders, this approach seemed to become less practical. In many of the start-up schools developing the organizational structure was a dynamic process, but the ability of charter school leaders to develop a balanced leadership structure that favored both inclusivity and the need for structured organizational processes was hampered by leaders’ lack of professional knowledge and experience in organizational management (Griffin & Wohlstetter, 2001).

Horn’s (2009) qualitative study investigating the development and sustaining of eight Minnesota charter schools found that the role of a leader in a start-up school gave new challenges to these leaders. The dissertation developed a model of the three stages a charter school moves through as it ages: start-up, growth, and maturity with leadership, resources, and governance at the core of each stage. With the start-up stage, in particular, Horn found that

Charter school founders are creator-leaders, and therefore distinctly different from a traditional school administrator. In addition to the multifaceted set of skills from education, finance and organizational design, a strong vision and sense of mission are needed. Complex interpersonal dynamics must be managed since a
founder will need a core working group at the very beginning of the process. (Horn, 2009, p. 13)

Additionally, Horn emphasized the importance of starting a charter school with multi-skilled leaders who used a collaborative style of leadership, implemented fiscally conservative policies, and were dedicated to the school’s mission.

**Mission-Dependent.** Each charter school is dependent upon its unique mission that creates its identity as a charter school (Blitz, 2011a; Campbell & Grubb, 2008; Farmer-Hinton, 2006). Though a school’s academic program may range from structured scripted instruction to student-led project based learning, it is the specific mission that makes each school unique in the wider market of schools. Parents are likely to choose a charter school based on that school’s specific mission. Campbell (2010) goes as far as to assert, “Charter schools rise or fall based on fidelity to their mission” (p. 3). Charter school leaders are responsible for not only staying true to the school’s mission, but also for creating an instructional program built upon the mission (Griffin & Wohlstetter, 2001). “Charter school leaders are the keepers and promoters of this mission, and finding the right person to lead the school is one of the most crucial decisions a school will face” (Campbell, 2010, p. 3). Finding the right fit for a school leader to realize these goals becomes a critical task for organizational success.

Once the leader is found to lead the school based on its mission, the leader can face accountability pressures related to its mission-based focus. Blitz (2011b) interviewed 35 charter school leaders and school community members regarding the accountability pressures that were faced in leading the school. He framed the accountability pressures in two categories: market-based and performance-based
accountability. The role of market-based accountability is closely linked to the school’s mission, he found.

…the art of adhering to the school’s mission, the art of what distinguishes a school, becomes more prominent in market-based accountability in examining school leader practice not only to ensure a high-quality learning environment but to retain families by meeting their demands and adhering to the mission. A school’s mission is inextricably linked to market principles when taking into consideration school leadership. (Blitz, 2011b, p. 7)

The author goes on to frame this style of leadership as “mission-driven instructional leadership” and calls for further research on the impact of autonomy on charter school leadership (Blitz, 2011b).

Farmer-Hinton’s (2006) multi-year case study of a newly chartered school details the challenges one school faced in securing facilities and the pressure to make the school look like a “real school” (p. 1226). Leaders must work to stay true to the special characteristics that make the charter school different from traditional public schools while facing pressures from outside forces to conform to traditional conceptions of public schooling. The author found that logistical constraints and staff turnover made achieving the school’s mission more difficult (Farmer-Hinton, 2006).

Isomorphic Challenges

Despite charter schools’ difference in organizational structure from traditional public schools, they still face pressures of institutionalization to conform to the norm. It is the specific mission of each charter school that makes it unique, yet these schools face isomorphic pressures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) to conform to traditional models of
schooling that make carrying out the mission more challenging (Huerta, 2009; Huerta &
Zuckerman, 2009). Though charter schools offer an element of autonomy not typically
found in the institutional environments of traditional public schools because most do not
rely on the traditional district structure, they still face pressures to conform to the norm.

Huerta (2009) defines isomorphism as a concept “that addresses how
organizations that are responsive to an institutional environment evolve and interact
within an environment that defines or prescribes the normatively accepted practices of
organizations” (p. 245). His qualitative case study examined one charter school’s efforts
to create new organizational structures and new teaching and learning strategies.
However, the school faced isomorphic challenges that made it difficult to do so.

Presumably, the decentralized and autonomous nature of charter schools allows
them to operate free from rule-based bureaucratic controls to challenge and
redefine institutional classifications and definitions. Yet ironically, the challenge
for charter schools to create new definitions of schooling may be insurmountable
because the very classifications that have resulted from bureaucratic controls are
those that define effective and legitimate schooling. (Huerta, 2009, p. 245)

These pressures can create unique challenges for charter school leaders, including
proving the burden of organizational legitimacy independent of institutionalized
definitions of effectiveness and the struggle of operating in a closed system relying on the
technical core after rejecting the bureaucratic systems of traditional school organizations
(Huerta, 2009).

Farmer-Hinton’s (2006) qualitative case study also discusses the challenges of
establishing organizational legitimacy. The study found that the charter school leaders
were concerned about facilities because they felt that without better facilities the school’s credibility with the community would diminish. The study also detailed the challenges faced in dealing with teacher and administrative turnover. Faced with this turnover, the school leader spoke of the struggles faced to avoid looking like a “dying school.”

**Accountability Pressures**

In the post-No Child Left Behind era of accountability, all school leaders face increasing pressures. Principals are active players in negotiating federal policy and assessment and accountability mandates (Koyama, 2013) and the pressures of state and federal policies impact local leadership in ways that are unprecedented (Leithwood, 2001). School leaders have been left to design their own organizational structures to enact school change because of external accountability pressures (Spillane & Kenney, 2012).

However, these accountability pressures gain an extra dimension in charter schools (Blitz, 2011b; Campbell & Grubb, 2008; Griffin & Wohlstetter, 2001). Charter schools face additional accountability pressures because they run the risk of loss of the charter contract and school closure if specific goals are not met. Also, there can be public perception issues of being perceived as an under-performing school (Farmer-Hinton, 2006). Organizations such as charter schools that challenge institutionalized conceptions of effective schooling may be perceived as ineffective and risk their legitimacy (Huerta, 2009). Charter school leaders must act as mediators of these policies to mitigate these risks (Gawlik, 2015).
Student recruitment and retention

Charter school funding is typically allocated on a per-pupil basis tied to enrollment (Maloney, Batdorff, May, & Terrell, 2013). Like many traditional public school systems (e.g. Detroit or Kansas City), student enrollment numbers can be a make-or-break issue for charter schools. Charter school leaders are often faced with tasks such as recruiting students (Bickmore & Dowell, 2015; Farmer-Hinton, 2006) and are more likely to identify responding to parental and community expectations as critical issues than traditional public school leaders (Portin et al., 2003). The issue of student recruitment is especially important in cases where the school’s mission targets a specific population such as students from a specific geographic community or students who have a certain background. Once the students have been recruited and admitted to the school, charter school leaders need to work to retain those students (Bain & Mohrweis, 2011; Campbell & Grubb, 2008).

Organizational Supports

Charter schools also face differences in organizational supports from their traditional public school counterparts. These differences include funding, facilities, hiring and retention of both leaders and teachers, public relations, and policy churn.

**Funding.** Because charter schools are typically funded through enrollment, larger enrollments mean more revenue for the school to implement programs and hire staff. Campbell and Gross’s (2008) survey of charter school leaders found that 37% of charter school leaders surveyed found raising funds or managing finances to be an issue. Researchers from Ball State University conducted a study of charter school financing in 24 states and found that the average disparity between traditional public schools and
charter schools was 19.2%, or $2,247 per pupil. The chief reason for the disparity was charter schools’ lack of access to local and capital funding (Batdorff, Maloney, & May, 2010). A more recent report analyzed school funding trends in Denver, Milwaukee, Newark, NJ, Washington, D.C., and the Los Angeles Unified School District and found that charter school students in these cities received approximately $4,000 less a year than students at traditional public schools (Maloney et al., 2013). This disparity in funding creates challenges for charter school leaders.

This lack of access to funding is particularly pertinent to leaders in newer charter schools. Traditional public schools that have been open for years frequently have a cushion regarding finances from access to build-up reserves or fund balances. The Government Finance Officers recommends a two-month balance of revenues or expenditures (Gauthier, 2009). Different states have different policies, but as an example, Illinois only gives its highest Financial Profile score to districts that have at least three months reserved (Jacoby, 2011). Minnesota state law requires districts to maintain reserve accounts for a variety of revenue sources and programs. In the Fiscal Year 2008, Minnesota school districts held a total of $874.5 million of general fund unreserved fund balances, which was equal to $1,082 per pupil unit served ("Statement on School District Fund Balances," 2010).

A new charter school without access to those reserves will be more vulnerable to changes in state policies or economic downturns. Also, these leaders are often faced with funding issues arising from finding and securing facilities for the school. Ascher, Cole, Harris, and Echazarreta (2004) interviewed 100 representatives from public schools in fourteen states and the District of Columbia and found that charter schools often initially
incur debt due to making leasehold improvements on rented space, and later due to financing the purchase of land and/or a facility, or due to constructing or renovating a building. A detailed examination discovered that charter schools in the study spent an average of 20-25 percent of instructional revenue on repaying loans and bonds, even though financiers typically agree that charter schools should not commit more than 12-15 percent of per pupil revenue to debt service (Ascher et al., 2004). In a traditional public school, issues such as these would often be managed at the district level, but in a charter school system, it is often the building leader who is responsible.

Facilities. Several studies have revealed that facility issues are a pressing topic for charter school leaders (Bain & Mohrweis, 2011; Campbell & Grubb, 2008; Farmer-Hinton, 2006; Griffin & Wohlstetter, 2001; Huerta, 2009). Different states have different regulations regarding charter school facilities. For example, in Minnesota, state law stipulates that charter schools not be allowed to directly own the school buildings they use and must lease the space from an outside organization. In other states, charter schools compete with traditional public schools for facilities, sometimes sharing buildings with traditional public schools as in New York City (Ravitch, 2010). In a 2014 study, the Educational Facilities Financing Center found that of 43 states with charter school laws only sixteen provided additional per pupil funding specifically for facilities (Abraham, Gunderson, Berry, Chae, & Balboni, 2014).

Research finds that facility management is a pressing issue for charter school leaders. Campbell and Gross (2008) surveyed 401 charter school leaders from six states including California, Hawaii, Texas, North Carolina, Rhode Island, and Arizona. The study found that 39% of charter school leaders found acquiring or managing facilities to
be a serious issue. In another study comprising of 100 interviews with representatives of a wide range of charter school stakeholders detailed examination found that charter schools typically used a significant portion of their per-pupil funding on leading, renovation, construction, purchasing, and maintenance of their facilities (Ascher et al., 2004). Charter school leaders are often faced with leading these financing issues as opposed to a traditional school district where a central office might handle facilities issues instead of the school building leader.

**Hiring and Retention of Charter School Leaders.** Because the charter school leader must serve as the torch-bearer for a school’s mission and programming, finding the right fit for a school leader is particularly important (Blitz, 2011a; Campbell, 2010). Not only are charter school leaders difficult to place in a job, but they are also difficult to retain once hired. This issue of retention is important to note as the unplanned departure of school leaders is one of the most common sources of a school’s failure to progress (Leithwood et al., 2008) and charter school leaders tend to turn over more frequently than leaders of traditional public schools (Sun & Ni, 2015).

Campbell’s (2010) survey found that 71% of leaders said they planned on staying in their jobs for five years or less. Though the rate of turnover from traditional public school leaders is similar to the rate of turnover of charter school leaders, the impact is potentially greater in charter school leadership turnover because of the importance of leading and guiding a charter school’s unique mission. Independent charter schools also often lack the pool of ready candidates that a larger district might have in reserve waiting for promotion. To make the matter even more pressing, only half of the schools surveyed had a succession plan in place to use as a guideline for continuing smooth operation if the
leader did depart. Many of the school leaders in this study were too focused on ramping up the school’s facilities, funding, and academic programs to effectively engage in future or strategic planning. Turnover and lack of planning increases a charter school’s vulnerability as leaders are so closely tied to the mission that when a leader departs the school can be sent into an identity crisis and expose organizational weaknesses that have long gone unnoticed or unattended (Campbell, 2010).

**Hiring and Retention of Charter School Faculty.** Because charter school leaders often lack the support of a larger district organizational structure, they are often missing assistance in recruiting and hiring qualified faculty and staff (Campbell & Grubb, 2008; Farmer-Hinton, 2006). To make matters more difficult, finding teachers who believe in and support the charter school’s specific mission and goals is a particularly pressing task (Roch & Pitts, 2012). In their survey, Campbell and Gross (2008) found that 36% of charter school leaders found that attracting qualified teachers was a significant challenge.

Nationwide data show that charter school teachers tend to be graduates of more selective colleges than teachers in traditional public schools (Baker & Dickerson, 2006). The study matched 59 charter schools with 59 traditional public schools and compared survey results about who was teaching in those schools. The comparison revealed that charter teachers are less likely to be experienced, to have a degree in education, and to have certification. Teachers in independent charter schools were more likely than teachers in traditional public schools and charter schools affiliated with a CMO to say that they made an active choice to work at their school (Cannata & Penaloza, 2012).
Cannata and Engel (2012) found that charter school principals reported more of a focus on hiring than traditional public school principals. The study surveyed 89 principals in seven states, with charter school principals matched to traditional public school principals. The principals valued similar characteristics in their hiring process, with the exception that charter school leaders perceived agreement with the school’s mission or vision higher than traditional public school principals, echoing the findings of Roch and Pitts (2012). Charter school leaders also ranked teacher commitment to stay at the school, willingness to take on extra duties, and previous teaching experience as more important to hiring than traditional public school principals. Charter school principals were also more likely to have higher turnover rates amongst their staff (Cannata & Engel, 2012).

Public Relations and Policy Churn. The political environment that charter schools operate in is subject to shifts and changes as policy changes from the national level to the local level (Campbell & Grubb, 2008). Proponents argue that charter schools provide innovative educational environments and access to quality schooling while opponents argue that charter schools skim funding and students from traditional public schools (Ravitch, 2010). Principals are active players in negotiating federal policy (Koyama, 2013), and state laws can also greatly impact charter school operations. For example, the 2013 legislative session in Maine saw the introduction of 26 anti-charter bills that aimed to cut charter funding, enact moratoriums on charter growth, and politicize the charter approval process. Though some of the bills passed the legislature, they were vetoed by the governor ("Delivering on the Dream: Annual Report," 2013). These political environments impact the work of charter school leaders, adding tasks like
lobbying, networking, and activism aimed at “protecting” the policies that impact their school (Campbell, 2010).

In addition to the external political environments, charter school leaders must manage varying internal institutional environments in different ways from traditional public school leaders. A superintendent is likely to be the liaison between the district and the school board in a traditional educational system, but in a charter school, it is often the building leader who is the liaison between the governing board and the school (Bain & Mohrweis, 2011; Campbell & Grubb, 2008). In addition to managing the school board, charter school leaders need to engage and manage parents as stakeholders within the organization (Griffin & Wohlstetter, 2001). One of the founding concepts of charter schools was parental engagement (Junge, 2012), and many charter schools have continued to take this mission to heart. Some schools require hours of parental community service or have parents sign contracts pledging to support their children’s educational goals (Ravitch, 2010). Even in cases where this requirement does not exist, charter schools are schools of choice and this requires some level of parental engagement for student enrollment as parents who are not happy with the school’s services might be more likely to transfer their student out of the charter school to a competing school (Bifulco & Ladd, 2006).

Summary

In summary, research has shown that charter school leaders are different from traditional public school leaders (Campbell, 2010; Campbell & Gross, 2008; Deal & Hentschke, 2004; Vickers, 2014). Not only are the leaders different, but the organizational structures of the schools create different institutional environments for
leadership (Blitz, 2011a, 2011b; Campbell & Grubb, 2008; Cannata & Engel, 2012; Farmer-Hinton, 2006; Griffin & Wohlstetter, 2001; Horn, 2009; Huerta, 2009; Huerta & Zuckerman, 2009). The next section will examine how these differences impact leadership theory and practice in charter schools.

**Leadership Theory and Practice in Charter Schools**

In addition to differences described above, several studies have examined the similarities and differences in leadership practices in charter schools and traditional public schools (Cravens et al., 2012; Goff et al., 2012; Portin et al., 2003; Vickers, 2014). Bloomfield (2013) conducted a qualitative study of four charter school principals with the goal of better understanding charter school leadership. He analyzed data following Leithwood and Duke’s (1999) framework of leadership (instructional, transformational, moral, participative, managerial, and contingent). The study found that charter school leaders depended most on contingent leadership as a guide for the other five dimensions of leadership (Bloomfield, 2013). However, his study did not examine the similarities and differences between charter school leadership and traditional public school leadership, but rather only drew conclusions about charter school leadership practice.

Portin, et. al. (2003) conducted a qualitative study of principals, assistant principals, and teachers in 21 traditional public schools, charter schools, magnet schools, independent schools, contract schools, and private schools across four states. The authors divided the key functions of school leadership into seven categories: instructional leadership, cultural leadership, managerial leadership, human resource leadership, strategic leadership, external development leadership, and micropolitical leadership. The study concluded that charter school leaders were more focused on organizational survival
than leaders at other public schools. The same study found that charter school leaders and leaders of other schools with governance structures that offered more “freedom of action,” (p. 32) were more likely to distribute their leadership throughout the organization than traditional public school leaders. In fact, the more autonomous the school, the more likely the school leader was to share leadership tasks across the gamut of leadership functions, especially the realms of cultural, managerial, and internal development leadership (Portin et al., 2003).

**Instructional Leadership**

Portin et al. (2003)’s examination of instructional leadership found that 92% of private and entrepreneurial (private, religious, charter, and magnet) schools distributed instructional leadership functions, but only 75% of traditional public schools were distributing instructional leadership functions. However, the study did not parse out the differences amongst the groups of entrepreneurial schools, so it is difficult to understand just how instructional leadership differs in charter schools as compared to traditional public schools from this study.

Cravens et al. (2012) examined instructional leadership practice in charter schools using survey data from charter, magnet, private, and traditional public school principals collected in 2007-2008. Schools of choice (charter, magnet, and private) were matched with similar traditional public schools for comparison. The research found that charter school leaders were more likely than their matched traditional public school leaders to focus on managerial tasks such as dealing with facilities and faculty, human resources duties like recruiting and hiring faculty, and developing school improvement goals. However, the authors did not find any differences in time spent on instructional
leadership tasks when comparing choice school leaders and traditional public school leaders. In addition to comparing matched choice and traditional public schools, the authors also examined the differences between the various types of choice schools. They found that leaders at independent charter schools had a lesser focus on instructional leadership than those leaders at charter schools affiliated with an Educational Management Organization (EMO) or Charter Management Organization (CMO), and hypothesized that the differences might be due to organizational structure as affiliated schools had the support of an overseeing organization (Cravens et al., 2012).

Goff et al. (2012) analyzed survey data from charter, magnet, private, and traditional public school principals collected in 2007-2008 and discovered that charter school leaders self-reported significantly fewer instructional leadership tasks than leaders at traditional public schools. Charter leaders affiliated with an EMO or CMO reported higher levels of instructional leadership than independent charter school leaders. The authors of this study had hypothesized that charter school leaders would report lower levels of instructional leadership due to teacher characteristics. These characteristics included higher college selectivity of teachers and higher levels of teacher preference (alignment with school mission, preference for teaching autonomy and innovative instructional strategies, coherence of the instructional program, and the importance of principal support), but instead they found these factors to be irrelevant in their impact on principal instructional leadership actions (Goff et al., 2012).

**Conclusion**

This review of the literature has brought together different factors impacting the practice of charter school leadership. While many of the skills and competencies of
charter school leaders are the same as those required of traditional public school principals, there are differences between these leaders. “What sets the job apart from the traditional public school principalship is that charter school leaders operate without a safety net—no local district supplies teachers or facilities in a pinch, and funding and laws can change abruptly” (Campbell & Grubb, 2008, p. 28). Researchers have written about the differences in the lack of district structure (Blitz, 2011a), the age of the school (Campbell, 2010; Farmer-Hinton, 2006; Griffin & Wohlstetter, 2001; Horn, 2009), the mission-dependent nature of leading charter schools (Blitz, 2011a; Campbell & Grubb, 2008; Farmer-Hinton, 2006), the isomorphic challenges (Huerta, 2009; Huerta & Zuckerman, 2009), and the challenges of student recruitment and retention (Bain & Mohrweis, 2011; Farmer-Hinton, 2006; Portin et al., 2003). Surprisingly few studies applied school leadership theory to charter school leadership practice (Bloomfield, 2013; Cravens et al., 2012; Goff et al., 2012; Portin et al., 2003). These studies have concluded that charter school leaders use more contingent leadership than other styles of leadership (Bloomfield, 2013). When compared to traditional public school leaders, charter leaders are more likely to distribute leadership (Portin et al., 2003), more focused on managerial tasks (Cravens et al., 2012), and are less likely to be engaged in instructional leadership tasks (Goff et al., 2012). However, the studies are not clear as to why these differences exist.

The three studies that examine the leadership practices of traditional public school leaders as compared to charter school leaders (Cravens et al., 2012; Goff et al., 2012; Portin et al., 2003) have relied on large-scale, quantitative data. The literature lacks an emic description of the differences in leadership practices between traditional public
school leaders and charter school leaders from the people who have lived the experiences
of leading both a traditional public school and a charter school. It is this gap that this
study aims to fill.

The next chapter will describe the methods used in this study.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Chapter Three discusses the methods used in this study. The chapter begins with a discussion of the purpose of the study and then explores the study design and the data collection and analysis techniques used. The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What are the differences between traditional public school leadership and charter school leadership according to school leaders in Minnesota who have been leaders of both types of schools?,
2. How do school leaders in Minnesota who have been leaders of both charter schools and traditional public schools experience instructional leadership in the different school organizations?, and
3. How do school leadership preparation programs help prepare educators for leadership in charter schools?

Overview of Research Methods

This study examined the perspectives of school leadership practice from school leaders in traditional public schools, school leaders in charter schools, and those school leaders who had been in a leadership position in both types of schools. The first exploratory phase of the study sent an email questionnaire to participants in each of these groups. The questionnaire examined leaders’ perspectives on school leadership tasks and instructional leadership practices. The second phase of the study consisted of interviews with four school leaders who had been in leadership positions at both types of schools.

Qualitative Approach

This study employed an interpretive qualitative approach. The primary purpose of qualitative research is to know more about a phenomenon and is most appropriate when a researcher is trying to describe, understand, or interpret some phenomena.
It “assumes that reality is socially constructed, that is, there is no single, observable reality” (Merriam, 2009, p. 8), but rather multiple realities that are context-bound and subjective as seen by the multiple participants of a study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Lichtman, 2014; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2010, 2014). Qualitative research often engages a constructivist approach that frames reality as constructed by the researcher through the process of data collection and reflective analysis (Lichtman, 2014; Merriam, 2009). Others conceptualize the qualitative outlook as an interpretivist orientation to research, as opposed to a realist perspective that might assume the existence of a single reality (Yin, 2014). In this study, the constructs of interpretive qualitative research were applied to understand the multiple perspectives on school leadership from the perspectives of those who have led traditional public schools, charter schools, and those who have transitioned from leading traditional public schools to leading charter schools. These multiple perspectives work to build an understanding of the differences in school leadership practices in traditional public schools and charter schools.

Merriam (2009) describes a qualitative researcher as one who is “interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p.5). The interpretive qualitative methods used in this study allow for an emic description of the differences between charter school leadership and traditional public school leadership to emerge from examining the lived experiences of school leaders who have led both types of schools. Previous studies that have compared the two settings for leadership practice have largely employed large-scale, quantitative methods and etic descriptions (e.g. Cravens et al.,
This makes the post-positivism (Lichtman, 2014) or naturalist (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) paradigms, closely associated with qualitative research, particularly suited for filling the gap in research and further examining the differences and similarities in charter school and traditional public school leadership. This study uses interpretive qualitative methods to understand school leaders’ experiences of leading both traditional public schools and charter schools, how the leaders have interpreted their experiences, and how they construct the differences between leading both types of schools.

**Exploratory Approach**

Stebbins (2001) argues that researchers need to be unequivocally clear about the nature of their research and that the qualitative research label can be further refined as to qualitative-exploratory in a study such as this. He argues that

… exploration is the preferred methodological approach under at least three conditions: when a group, process, activity, or situation has received little or no systematic empirical scrutiny, has been largely examined using prediction and control rather than flexibility and open-mindedness, or has grown to maturity along the continuum… but has changed so much along the way that it begs to be explored anew. (Stebbins, 2001, p. 8)

Reiter (2013) contrasts the deductive nature of confirmatory research with the inductive nature of exploratory research. The danger of confirmatory research, he argues, is that the deductive approach can gloss over the “situatedness” of such research and overlook crucial assumptions. He likens it to “throwing the baby out with the bathwater” (p. 7). In
contrast, “…exploratory research offers a way to save the baby by admitting, up front, that the kind of knowledge it is able to achieve is partial and tentative” (p.8).

Stebbins (2001) describes the process of exploration in the social sciences as “a distinctive way of conducting science—a scientific process—a special methodological approach (as contrasted with confirmation), and a pervasive personal orientation of the explorer” (p. 3). Arguing that exploratory research is “primarily inductive” and confirmatory research is “primarily deductive” (p. 7), Stebbins (2001) finds more nuances in the deductive and inductive processes of research than Reiter (2013).

Stebbins (2001) also outlines methodological approaches to exploratory research, which he argues often uses primarily qualitative methods. Furthermore, he concludes that the qualitative nature of exploratory research can be “…augmented where possible and desirable with descriptive statistics as indexes, percentages, and frequency distributions” (Stebbins, 2001, p. 6). This study augments its primarily qualitative methods with descriptive statistics about leadership practice from leaders in traditional public schools, charter schools, and leaders who have led both types of schools.

Chapter Two of this dissertation outlines the paucity of research comparing school leadership in traditional public schools and school leadership in charter schools — particularly research that examines those differences from an emic perspective examining the lived experiences of school leaders who have led both types of schools. This study used data collection methods including traditional qualitative methods such as interviews designed to understand school leaders’ experiences. These data were augmented with descriptive statistics from the surveys administered to leaders of charter schools, leaders of traditional public schools, and school leaders who had led both types of schools.
Given the absence of research and lack of understanding about the experiences of those school leaders who have transitioned from traditional public school leadership to charter school leadership, this study employs a qualitative-exploratory approach.

**Setting**

Charter schools vary greatly by state because the structure and function of charter schools are dependent upon the specific state laws under which they are established. Each of the forty-two states and the District of Columbia that have established charter schools have unique laws and regulations. While this study could have sampled from multiple states and work towards a broad generalization, instead this study sampled school leaders from just one state. There are limitations and rewards to such an approach, as Smith et al. (2011) outlines.

The challenge is in preventing the mis-generalization of highly contextualized research, on the one hand (e.g., what works for charter schools in Arizona may not work for charter schools in Colorado), or, on the other hand, the over-generalization of national trend data that did not take context into account. (Smith et al., 2011, pp. 13-14)

To avoid problems of mis-generalization, this study used a narrow sampling approach and defined the context using data from only one state, Minnesota. Previous research on the differences in leadership practices in charter schools and traditional public schools has utilized national data that may have missed important contextualized factors through the broad sampling approach.

Minnesota was chosen for this study as the state’s charter school law has achieved top rankings year after year from the Center for Education Reform’s ("Measuring up to
the Model: A Ranking of State Charter School Laws," 2014) rankings of state charter school laws, ranking number two in the nation in 2014 and 2015. The state was also the first in the nation to pass a charter school law in 1991, giving charters in Minnesota the longest history in the country. Furthermore, the high number of charter schools in Minnesota — 155 at the time of the study — provides a larger population from which to draw participants. Also, the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools (MACS) has outlined the importance of understanding leadership in charter schools, identifying the leadership capacity of school administrators as one of the biggest threats to chartering in Minnesota (Piccolo, 2014).

Charter school leaders in Minnesota are not required to obtain state licensure to lead a charter school, neither as a school leader nor as a licensed teacher. However, classroom teachers in Minnesota charter schools are required to hold state licensure. In contrast to charter school leader requirements, leaders for traditional public schools are required to hold administrative licensure through Minnesota Statutes 122A.14 and 122A.27. Initial administrative licensure for traditional public school leaders is probationary and spans two years. Following one year of successful employment as an administrator, a licensee may apply for a five-year license with the signature of a superintendent or personnel officer. Each five-year license renewal must be submitted with 125 clock hours of professional development. These stipulations are not placed on charter school leaders. However, all participants for this study held administrative licensure, given their experience and background includes leadership in a traditional public school, where licensure is required.
Selection of Participants

This study used both random and purposeful approaches to sampling participants for this study. A random sampling approach was used to identify participants for the electronic mail survey, while a purposeful sampling approach was to identify participants for the other parts this study. Merriam (2009) describes purposeful sampling as “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 77).

Criteria

The first phase of the study worked with three different populations of school leaders: those leading charter schools at the time of the study, those leading traditional public schools, and school leaders who had held leadership positions in both charter schools and traditional public schools. The first two populations, school leaders currently leading charter schools and school leaders currently leading traditional public schools, were identified through publicly available databases from the Minnesota Department of Education. Database searching led to 158 individuals identified as potential participants for charter school leaders and 1,956 individuals identified as traditional public school leader potential participants. The potential participants were currently employed as a leader at either a charter school or at a traditional public school.

The third pool of potential participants were derived from the publicly available lists of charter school leaders published by the state department of education, as well as the list of charter school leaders from the state charter school association. From these databases, I surveyed internet sources, including LinkedIn and biographies on school websites, to identify those charter school leaders whose employment history also
included leadership positions within traditional public schools. Preliminary inquiries yielded 34 potential participants who had been leaders of both types of schools. I also submitted an inquiry to the executive director of the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools seeking information on school leaders who might fit my criteria but did not receive a response.

The second phase of the study pulled from the third pool of potential participants, those who had been leaders at both traditional public schools and charter schools.

**Sampling**

**First Phase.** The first phase of this study involved a questionnaire sent via electronic mail to various public school leaders in Minnesota. Because this study used primarily interpretive, exploratory qualitative methods, the first phase used non-probability sampling. Merriam (2009) explains that “Since generalization in a statistical sense is not a goal of qualitative research, probabilistic sampling is not necessary” (p.77) in qualitative research. Had the goal of this study been to generate theories that explain the population of traditional public school leaders’ views on charter school leadership or vice versa, as a large-scale quantitative study might seek to do, it would have been appropriate to sample the entire population of traditional public school leaders in Minnesota or the entire population of charter school leaders in Minnesota. Instead, a purposive sampling approach was used, identifying a sample that was not representative of the larger population of charter school leaders in Minnesota or traditional public school leaders in Minnesota.

For the first phase of the study, I gathered the contact information for charter school leaders (N=158) and the traditional public school leaders (N=1956) from
databases publicly available from the Minnesota Department of Education. A random number generator was used to select 34 participants from each of these lists. The charter school leader and traditional public school leaders that were selected were sent the online questionnaire, the first phase of the study. The entire population of 34 school leaders with experience in both types of schools was also sent the online questionnaire. Participants of all three questionnaires were sent a follow-up reminder email two weeks after the first email invitation.

**Traditional Public School Leaders.** Eight participants responded to the questionnaire emailed to a random sample of traditional public school leaders in the state, a response rate of 24%. The participants represented two men and six women with a range of 1 to 20 years of experience as a principal, with an average of 7.875 years of experience. All the participants held state-issued school administrator licenses, and none of the participants had held leadership positions in charter schools. Most (N=6) held master’s degrees, while one held an EdS degree and one held a Ph.D.

**Charter School Leaders.** Leaders of charter schools were also asked to complete the questionnaire. The survey was sent to 34 randomly selected charter school leaders from across the state. Seven participants responded to the survey request for a response rate of 21%. One respondent answered that they had also been in a leadership position in a traditional public school; that participant’s responses were omitted from the questionnaire data set. This created an effective response rate of 18%.

Participants held a variety of roles in charter schools (Table 1) and had held their current role from three years to 23 years, with an average tenure of nine years. Sixty percent of the participants identified as female (N=4) and 40% identified as male (N=2).
Three participants held state-issued principal licenses. One held a Master’s degree in school leadership or administration, one held a Master’s of Public Administration in Nonprofit Governance and Management degree, one held a Master’s degree (non-specified), one had a Specialist degree, and one had completed the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools leadership training. One participant did not answer the question.

Table 1. Charter School Questionnaire Leadership Roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director of Financial Operations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Director, Assistant Director</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director and Executive Director</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Charter School and Traditional Public School Leaders. Eleven school leaders responded to the email survey sent to school leaders who had been leaders of both types of schools, a response rate of 32%. The respondents, both men (N=5) and women (N=6) held positions in charter schools ranging from assistant director to middle school principal (Table 2).
These leaders had held their charter school leadership positions for an average of five years, ranging from less than one year to twelve years. They held a variety of traditional public school leadership positions (Table 3) for an average of 9.73 years, ranging from one to 32 years. Only two of the eleven respondents had held charter school leadership positions longer than traditional public school leadership positions (Figure 5).

All respondents from this first-phase survey held state-issued principal licensure. Six of the respondents held a Master’s degree in Educational Leadership or Administration. The remaining five respondents held other certifications, including Ph.D. (N=2), EdS (N=1), or other licensing and higher education (N=2).
Table 3. Charter School and Traditional Public School Leaders: “What leadership role or roles have you held in traditional public schools?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coordinator, Director</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal, District Leadership, Assistant</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Learning Center Principal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary Principal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5. Charter School and Traditional Public School Leaders Years of Experience, by School Type
Second Phase. The second phase of the study utilized a criterion approach to identify school leaders who have been leaders of both traditional public schools and charter schools and were interested in consenting to participating in the one-on-one interviews. These participants were selected by the researcher to arrive at a diverse group based on school location (Minneapolis/St. Paul, seven-county Twin Cities Metropolitan Region, rural), gender, and level of students taught. Identified potential participants were contacted via email asking for participation in the study. Four participants consented to participate in the interview phase, two women and two men (Table 4).

Table 4. Phase Two Participant and School Demographics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of School Leader</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Charter School Level</th>
<th>Charter School Location</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>School Title I Funding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marcia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1154</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>934</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Names are pseudonyms.

Data Collection

Data for the first phase of this study were collected through an electronic mail survey. In the second phase of the study, data were collected through phone interviews conducted by the author with study participants. The following section details this process (see Error! Reference source not found.).
Table 5. Summary of Data Collection and Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical Framework</th>
<th>Data were collected according to the instructional leadership framework developed by Cravens et al. (2012). Other topics included those identified by the literature on charter school leadership, including authority, fundraising, facilities, and recruiting and hiring faculty and staff.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview Protocol</td>
<td>Telephone interviews were conducted with four participants, lasting approximately 60 minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergent Themes</td>
<td>Three themes emerged: Size, Structure, Support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First Phase

This study began with an electronic mail message sent to potential participants with school leadership experience in traditional public schools, charter schools, and experience in both types of schools. The asked for participation in the study and potential participants given a link to an anonymous online survey. The survey was administered using the Qualtrics program in April 2015. The initial contact message was followed up two weeks following the first email with a second email reminding potential participants about the survey. The survey asked participants to identify demographic information including gender, leadership experience, educational background, and professional licensure status. In addition to demographic information, the survey posed questions to discover information about their leadership experience and practice (See Appendix A). Topics for the questions were derived from the literature on charter school leadership, including questions about authority, fundraising (Campbell & Gross, 2008), facilities (Bain & Mohrweis, 2011; Campbell & Grubb, 2008; Farmer-Hinton, 2006; Griffin & Wohlstetter, 2001; Huerta & Zuckerman, 2009), recruiting and hiring faculty and staff.
instructional leadership as conceptualized by Cravens et al. (2012). The participants had two weeks to complete the survey and completion was estimated to take approximately 20 minutes.

**Second Phase**

The second phase of the study used semi-structured interviews to further understand the differences between charter school leadership and leadership in traditional public schools. Potential participants were contacted via email asking for participation in the study. Four participants agreed to join the study. These participants participated in semi-structured interviews with the researcher via the telephone in the summer of 2015. These interviews were a primary source of data for this study. The semi-structured interview used a guide to discover specific data from participants but in a more flexible manner than a highly structured or standardized interview (Merriam, 2009). Interviews were conducted on the telephone by the researcher with each of the participants (See Appendix B). The research questions and guiding interview questions are provided below.

1) Research Question 1: What are the differences between traditional public school leadership and charter school leadership according to school leaders in Minnesota who have been leaders of both types of schools?
   a. Interview Question 1: What are the administrative demands of your current role?
   b. Interview Question 2: What are the instructional demands of your current role?
c. Interview Question 3: What were the administrative demands of your previous leadership role?

d. Interview Question 4: What were the instructional demands of your previous leadership role?

e. Interview Question 5: What are the strengths and challenges of leading a charter school?

f. Interview Question 6: What are the strengths and challenges of leading a traditional public school?

2) Research Question 2: How do school leaders in Minnesota who have been leaders of both charter schools and traditional public schools experience instructional leadership in the different school organizations?

a. Interview Question 7: What is your role as an instructional leader in a charter school as compared to your role as an instructional leader in a traditional public school?

b. Interview Question 8: Does instructional leadership look different in a traditional public school vs. a charter school?

c. Interview Question 9: What kinds of structures have you built to support instructional leadership in the schools you’ve led?

3) Research Question 3: How do school leadership preparation programs help prepare educators for leadership in charter schools?

a. Interview Question 10: How did your leadership preparation program prepare you for leading a charter school?
Interview data were transcribed by an outside party. The researcher verified the outside transcriptions. To support validity claims, the interview transcripts were then submitted to participants for member checks (Merriam, 2009).

**Data Analysis**

Each transcript and questionnaire open response was divided or chunked into sections based on the topic discussed. Merriam (2009) advises that each unit of datum is a “potential answer or part of an answer” to the question asked in the study (p. 176). Once the data were chunked into units, each unit was entered into Microsoft Excel.

Each section was given an initial, open code. Miles and Huberman (1994) define a code as a tag or label “for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (p. 56). Thirteen codes were developed and used during this stage (Table 6).

Once the data had all been assigned an initial open code, data were grouped into categories based on the open code assigned. Merriam (2009) calls this process analytical coding. Eight categories were developed. After this round of coding, the data was revisited using a priori codes, specifically the six categories of leadership concepts developed by Leithwood and Duke (1999) and the nine facets of instructional leadership developed by Cravens et al. (2012). The a priori codes allowed me to compare my data to the extant literature.

Following this stage, the chunked sections of data were printed and analyzed again. Reviewing the data once again allowed for further grouping together of similar topics, this time umbrella themes to emerge. Another analysis of the data determined that after consolidation and regrouping no further consolidation could be conducted
without losing some of the important contexts. Three themes emerged out of this process: size, structure, and support. This constant revisiting of the data allowed me to develop my sense-making process to lend an understanding of the cases at hand. (See Appendix C.)

The findings are presented as a detailed description of each school leader interviewed in a format that highlights the individual participant, followed by an analysis approach that allows the data to form abstractions across the participants and develop a rich description of the experiences of school leaders who transitioned from traditional public school leadership to charter school leadership.

**Ethical Considerations**

This study complied with all Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines from the University of Iowa. Through this process, I worked to minimize risks to each participant. Each participant went through a standard protocol of informed consent. Each participant could exit the study at any time. I took care to maintain the security of all data, including interview recordings and transcripts, were securely stored. Each participant and the schools in which they had worked were given pseudonyms to protect their identity. Specific information regarding the location of the schools and the curricular focus were withheld to protect their identity.
Merriam (2009) asserts that researcher critical self-reflection is essential for understanding the researcher’s relationship to an ethical qualitative study. The

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Open Codes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>A Priori 1 (Leithwood &amp; Duke, 1999)</th>
<th>A Priori 2 (Cravens et al., 2012)</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Board</td>
<td>Structure (St)</td>
<td>Contingent (C)</td>
<td>Demonstrating Instructional Practice (DIP)</td>
<td>Size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>Culture (Cu)</td>
<td>Instructional (I)</td>
<td>Creating Professional Development (CPD)</td>
<td>Structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Education (Ed)</td>
<td>Transformational (T)</td>
<td>Observing Teachers (OT)</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Rise to Place (RP)</td>
<td>Moral (M)</td>
<td>Personally Providing Professional Development (PD)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Instructional (I)</td>
<td>Participative (P)</td>
<td>Examine and Discuss Student Work (SW)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegiality</td>
<td>Selection (Se)</td>
<td>Managerial (M)</td>
<td>School Improvement Efforts (SIE)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>Responsibilities (R)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Discussing Standardized Test Results (STR)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional</td>
<td>Authority (A)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Monitoring Curriculum (MC)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Selection Responsibilities Authority</td>
<td></td>
<td>Monitoring Classroom Instruction (MCI)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Codes, Categories, and Themes Developed
clarification of “assumptions, experiences, worldview, and theoretical orientation to the study… allows the reader to understand better how the individual researcher might have arrived at the particular interpretation of the data” (p.219). To this extent, I aim to outline my positionality statement in Appendix D.

**Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the research methods used in this study. This interpretive, exploratory qualitative asked three research questions guided by the literature on charter school leadership. School leaders interviewed for this study were selected for their leadership experience, and four school leaders with leadership experience in both traditional public schools and charter schools were selected for further interviews. The analysis took place with the coding and synthesis of the data collected. The following chapter will examine the results of this study.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to develop an emic description of the differences in school leadership in charter schools and traditional public schools by exploring the experiences of school leaders who have held leadership positions in both types of schools in the state of Minnesota. The study used exploratory-qualitative methods to examine participants’ experiences. The guiding research questions are: (1) What are the differences between traditional public school leadership and charter school leadership according to school leaders in Minnesota who have been leaders of both types of schools?, (2) How do school leaders in Minnesota who have been leaders of both charter schools and traditional public schools experience instructional leadership in the different school organizations?, and (3) How do school leadership preparation programs help prepare educators for leadership in charter schools? This chapter will present the results of this study.

First, the results of the individual cases will be presented, followed by cross-case analysis and exploration of themes.

Table 7. Individual Case Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Number of Licensed Teachers</th>
<th>Free or Reduced Lunch</th>
<th>Students of Color</th>
<th>Students in Special Education</th>
<th>Title I Funding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marcia</td>
<td>River Academy</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>1154</td>
<td>66.05</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Socrates Prep</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>934</td>
<td>47.24</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Oak Lake</td>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>Greenville</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>13.38</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Individual Participant Descriptions

The following section will discuss the interviews conducted with charter school leaders who had also been leaders of traditional public schools. The four participants were selected with consideration to school demographics (Table 7) and gender identity.

Marcia

Marcia is the middle school principal of a large, suburban, K-12 charter school, River Academy. The school, operating for 11 years at the time of the study, first opened as a K-7 school and expanded to its current size, now educating almost 1200 students with a waiting list of nearly 500 students. The school’s curriculum maintains a focus on college preparatory education and has been labeled a “reward” school by the state department of education, meaning it falls into the top 15% of schools receiving Title I funding in the state based on a variety of measures, including proficiency, growth, achievement gap reduction, and graduation rates. River Academy’s middle school has achieved this top rating each of the last five years.

Marcia began her teaching career as a math teacher thirty-three years ago. Working on a masters’ degree in home economics, a principal in a school where she was subbing encouraged her to explore school leadership: “He said, ‘Marcia, what are you doing? You’re gonna be working at a furniture store with a master’s degree ‘cause there isn’t going to be any jobs or positions available in this right now. And have you thought about administration?’” (Interview 6/16/15). After finishing her six-year education administration degree, Marcia proceeded to work as an assistant principal for about ten years in large, suburban districts. Her first principal position was as a principal of a rural
combined middle school and high school (grades 6-12) for eight years. At this point, she decided to take a break from education and enter the real estate business. When the real estate market crashed in the mid-2000s, she returned to educational leadership as an assistant principal at a large, suburban, junior high school in a traditional public school district. It was from this position that she transitioned into charter school leadership as the middle school principal at River Academy.

As the middle school principal, Marcia is responsible for about 360 students in grades 6-8 and about 25 staff members. The school’s administration is comprised of an executive director, principals at the elementary, middle and upper school levels; chief financial officer; college counselor; activities director; human resources manager; school nurse; facilities director; development director; technology manager; front office manager; office managers at the elementary, middle, and upper school offices; special education coordinator; special education director; receptionist; business office associate; and food services manager.

The school board is an eleven-member board, comprised of five parents, four licensed teachers employed by the school, and two community members at large. It utilizes a Carver Policy Governance model, a structure of board governance that specifically limits the role of the school board to organizational purposes as opposed to day-to-day issues (http://www.policygovernance.com/model.html).

David

David is the Executive Director at Socrates Prep, a large, urban K-12 charter with a focus on science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education. Open for twelve years, the school enrolls over 900 students but has a waiting list of over 1,000
names. The school did not receive Title I funding, thus it was not allocated an accountability rating from the state department of education. However, the school met federal Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals in math and attendance in years 2011 through 2014. Reading AYP goals were met in years 2012-2014.

David started teaching speech, theater, debate, and English when he was 21 years old in a rural high school. In his first few years at the high school, all the teachers were assigned supervisory duties. Noticing that the school’s principal was overwhelmed without an assistant principal, David offered to work in the office and help with student discipline and parental communication during the hours he was assigned to supervise study halls. After a few years of helping, the principal retired and notified the school board of his retirement right before the start of the school year. “…[he] called the board chair and said. ‘I’ve decided to retire. There’s not enough time to do a full hire for you; I’d suggest you hire David as your high school principal… and that was the start of a 21-year stint as the principal of Rural High School” (Interview 6/12/15). Once David’s children had graduated high school he accepted a position as Assistant Superintendent of a mid-size district with three high schools, 10,000 students, and 800 teachers. After five years working at that school district, he left to become Superintendent of a similarly sized district, where he led for six years before retiring. After retiring, a colleague at the State Association of School Administrators contacted David and asked if he would be interested in a year-long position at Socrates Prep. David was just finishing that year-long experience at Socrates Prep when he was interviewed. He has a master’s degree in secondary school administration and a 6th-year specialist degree in school leadership.
Socrates Prep employs an Executive Director, Upper School and Lower School Principals, Business Manager, Director of Student Services, Athletic Director, and Director of College Counseling on the school’s leadership team. In addition to these leadership roles, the school also has support roles as Athletic Director, Business Manager, Assistant Business Manager, Director of Enrollment and Communications, Director of Operations, District Administrative Assistant, Lunch Coordinator, Maintenance, Assistant Maintenance, two Office Managers, Project Manager, Student Activities Manager, and Student Services Administrative Assistant.

The school board is an eleven-member board comprised of at least two licensed teachers employed at the school and at least one interested community member. The school board’s bylaws stipulate that the remaining directors shall be parents/legal guardians of students enrolled in the school. The bylaws also create non-voting positions for a representative of the school’s PTO and a representative of the school’s student government. The school’s founders are listed as ex-officio members of the board on the school website. In the 2014-2015 school year, the board was comprised of three licensed teachers employed by the school, seven parents, and two community members.

David’s role as Executive Director was a one-year interim position. The Upper School Principal left in 2015, and the Lower School Principal did not return for the 2015-2016 school year. Staff retention sat at 71.9% for the 2014-2015 school year.

Karen

Karen is the Director at Oak Lake Academy, an urban charter school serving students in grades 6-12. The school’s curricular focus grew out of a variety of ideas, including single-gender classrooms, individualized learning, and outdoor education. The
school has been open for two years and enrolled 268 students at the time of the study. The school did not meet federal AYP goals in reading and math in 2014, the only year available. Attendance goals were not set for Oak Lake in 2014 as it was the school’s first year of operation.

Karen’s education started as an undergraduate psychology major. After getting a master’s degree focusing on learning disabilities, she became an instructor at a Midwestern land grant university while working on her doctorate in school psychology. She worked for eleven years as a psychoeducational specialist at a foundation. Once her family moved to Minnesota, she began working part-time at an alternative learning center, teaching special education and eventually acquiring some administrative duties. Pushed out after a restructuring, she got her administrative license and started as the coordinator for an alternative learning center (ALC) that was a cooperative in an intermediate district comprised of seven rural school districts, where she stayed for three years. Leaving the intermediate district, Karen took a position as the director at a charter school focused on student wellness that had three suburban campuses. After two or three years at the school, she switched to a suburban charter school focused on the performing arts. Four years after starting at the performing arts charter school, Karen left the school to lead Oak Lake Academy in its second year of operation.

Karen stepped into the leadership role at Oak Lake during a time of transition for the school. The school had planned on being located on the grounds of a state-owned campus of historical buildings, but at the last minute was unable to occupy the buildings due to infrastructure and funding issues. The school then set up modular classrooms on the campus for grades 7-9, while the sixth grade held class in buildings at a nearby state
Karen explained that the fallout from the facility issues created havoc during the school’s first year:

By February, [the founding director] resigned and said, “we’re closing the school.” The school board and the teachers said, “Whoa, wait a minute. You can’t do that. That’s not your call.” [Laughter] We will work for the school until the spring, and that’s what they did. So they kept the school running and just real committed parents and teachers, school board. And then in July, they brought me in, and I had been ready to retire, but this was too good to pass up. [Laughter] … So, I came in last July and so this past year, we found our stability, and we’re growing, and we have a new building in St. Paul and we’re moving in Friday. So it’s quite a story. (Interview 6/23/15)

A press release from the school explained that the school still hoped to utilize the state-owned historical buildings eventually, but “the political nature of the project and the funding that is required for such an undertaking have slowed the timeline for possible renovations.” Karen’s role as director at Oak Lake included working on developing stability for the school’s physical location and classrooms.

In addition to Karen’s role as director, the school employs a school social worker, a dean of students, and a special education director. A curriculum, instruction, and assessment team works on integrating math instruction into classroom teaching.

The eight-person school board is the school’s founding board, which means that the members have been appointed rather than elected. The school will transition to an elected school board in 2016. The founding board is comprised of two parents of
students attending the school, one licensed teacher employed by the school, and five community members.

Mike

Mike is the Director at Greenville Community School, a K-12 rural charter school that opened in the fall of 2000. The school started as a K-8 school and added an online high school in the fall of 2014. The school receives Title I funding and employs a staff of 29, with approximately 15 of those staff as licensed teachers. Greenville enrolls 173 students and has a growing enrollment waitlist, according to Mike. The school has a curricular focus on environmental studies and particularly prides itself on its small size. Classrooms are capped at 19 students. The school met federal accountability AYP goals in reading, math, and attendance in years 2011 through 2014. The 2014-2015 school year was the first year in three years that the school did not achieve “reward” status from the state department of education. The school’s annual report attributed the falling test scores to changes in enrollment, the addition of high school students, and technical and organizational issues during testing including the loss of internet service. The school began a strategic planning process in the summer of 2014.

Mike started teaching 9th-grade health 31 years ago. During that time, he went back to school and got his master’s degree in counseling psychology and administration after his principal gave him the advice to work towards administration from a counseling route. After seven years of teaching health, Mike took a school counselor position at the same school. From there, he transitioned to a counselor job at a mid-sized district. After sixteen years in that district, he was offered a high school principalship at a small consolidated high school, where he led for three years. Returning to the mid-sized
district at the middle school level, he assumed the roles of assistant principal, athletic
director, and eventually community education director at the district level. Interested in
pursuing superintendencies, he pursued and was offered a position as the executive
director of a regional school cooperative offering contract services, risk management, and
technology solutions to schools and other non-profits. “I have had the opportunity to do
just about everything but drive the bus and serve lunch,” he says, adding, “…although [at
Greenville] I do serve lunch, and in the past, as part of my coaching, I did drive the bus to
[cross country ski] practices. So, in reality, the only thing I haven’t done is cook the
food” (Interview 6/16/15). Mike is now entering his third year at Greenville Charter
School after two and a half years at the service cooperative.

Mike expressed that he felt the various roles he had held in education had helped
him in his current role at Greenville:

I think my career has been pretty unique because I really feel qualified to talk to
teachers about what it’s like to be to be a classroom teacher and I understand the
frustrations and challenges of a school counselor, and I’ve come to realize the
importance of the community ed director role when it comes to public relations…. And being a building principal and all the work that goes into the scheduling or
dealing with staff dynamics and parents and students. It’s given me a perspective
where I feel that I can relate to educators of all types as having done the work.

(Interview 6/16/15)

Greenville is governed by an eight-person school board, comprised of one
community member, three parent members, and four teacher members. Mike
acknowledges the delicate balance that the school board plays in leading the school.
“I’ve been fortunate with the board that I have right now [in] that they do not micromanage,” says Mike.

They ask a lot of questions… they are a board that really does want to understand.

It’s not a rubber stamp board, in fact, if anything I’ve had to encourage our board to say, ‘You don’t all have to agree a hundred percent on everything that comes in front of you. It’s okay to vote no. It’s okay not to be unanimous.’ (Interview 6/16/15)

Greenville participates in the state’s Q-Comp program and through that has designated two lead teachers, one at the elementary level and one at the secondary level. They also utilize committees to assist in running the school, including curriculum, staff development, finance, insurance, and student success. Most of the committees are chaired by teachers, and the director sits on the committees as a member. Some committees also have board members sitting on the committee. Mike feels like the structure offers many opportunities for teachers to share leadership in the administration of school business.

The school’s administrative staff consists of two office staff, one building and grounds staff member, one high school dean of students, and one director. The school contracts with outside organizations for business management, food service, and student transport. Mike’s contract is an at-will contract, and his position is directly supervised by and reviewed annually by the school board.

**Results by Research Question**

The discussion of results will be organized according to the study’s research questions. First, the differences in leadership practices in traditional public schools and
charter schools will be discussed. Next, the differences in instructional leadership will be discussed. Lastly, the preparation in received from leadership education programs will be discussed.

**Research Question 1: Differences in Leadership Practices**

The first research question guiding this study was: What are the differences between traditional public school leadership and charter school leadership according to school leaders in Minnesota who have been leaders of both types of schools?

As the data from both the questionnaires and interviews were analyzed, themes began to emerge. These included size, structure, and support. The following section identifies and explores those themes.

**The Impact of Organizational Size**

Participants who had been leaders in both charter schools and traditional public schools frequently mentioned the size of the school as a contributing factor in determining the leadership skills and capacities that were required to do their jobs. “I think the size of the school makes a big difference,” said Mike (Interview 6/16/15). Marcia remarked, “Big districts have a whole lot more hoops to jump through to get anything done” (Interview 6/16/15).

David believed that the practice of leadership changed with the size of the school system. “My observation has been the smaller the organization, the more…the easier it is to have each employee take responsibility and feel ownership,” he explained (Interview 6/12/15).

If you are one of 70 kindergarten teachers, I think sometimes your product moving on to the next grade level, the next building, the next district can get lost.
When you are one of three kindergarten teachers and your product’s gonna be in the same building, your student, your former students, are gonna be in the same building and they’re going to be two doors down by one of the colleagues you’ve worked with for years, your motivation to pass on a quality product. The ability for the administrators to monitor three or four kindergarten classes versus say we’ve got a handle on 70 kindergarten classes, you know, vastly different. And so I’m personally of the opinion that size and sometimes the smaller helps with accountability. The disadvantage would be sometimes you’re not able to afford all the positions, supervision, that you would like. But what I observed in each of the smaller schools that I’ve been at is a higher degree of collegiality and a higher degree of ownership of responsibility by almost all employees. (Interview 6/12/15)

He went on to caution that he felt there was a certain size that allowed for a critical mass achieving the goals of the school while maintaining functionality.

I end up being a fan of the smallest, functional size. And when I say functional size, it’s just a reference to overhead. You can’t provide a building, grade levels, and teachers when you reach a certain point where you don’t have critical mass.

And so charter schools face a dilemma of finding a size that can be self-supporting and yet small enough to be individualizing. (Interview 6/12/15)

Mike had strong thoughts about the scope of the work he encountered in leading a small charter school. “I think the closest approximation a [traditional] public school system would have to a charter public school is that my role can be considered a
superintendent and yet I’m called on to do many more things than what a school superintendent would be required to do,” he said (Interview 6/16/15).

In most cases in a larger [traditional public] school district, there is a Director of Curriculum. There is a Director of Transportation and the Director of Food Service, and you can go down the list. And in a setting like ours, it’s all under one hat. To me that’s very unique [and] also very exciting for me to be able to do all of these things I’ve done in the past rolled into one position. But I think that’s part of the uniqueness of charter schools and one of the things that remains so intriguing to me is how we’re working to do things differently, charter by charter. (Interview (6/16/15)

This larger focus of his work impacted his day-to-day responsibilities. Whereas each of his roles in the traditional public school system had been focused on certain tasks – as assistant principal he was focused on student behavior, as principal it was the more severe student behavior and staff issues, and as a community education director he was focused on programming – as the sole administrator he worked on an array of issues as they arose.

Here it becomes whatever walks in the door. So if I have a parent who has a concern, I’m the one they come to regardless if it’s a dynamic between the student and the teacher. Whether it’s something that happened on the playground or whatever else, it comes to me in the same way that the two boys who were fighting over the football during recess. And teachers who may have frustrations about students or parents or co-workers, I get it all. And so that’s the biggest
difference [in administrative demands in charter school leadership]. (Interview 6/16/15)

Mike likened his role in instructional leadership at a charter school to a producer of professional development as opposed to his days in traditional public school leadership where he was more of a consumer of others’ content, due to the smaller structure of the charter school. “When I was an assistant principal, I had very little to do with the curriculum and professional development,” he said.

It was very much about student discipline and maybe some scheduling. When I was a high school principal, the district had a curriculum coordinator, and so my responsibility was to follow the directives. [I was] working with a district curriculum committee of course but under the direction of someone else making sure that our school was implementing… I don’t want to say what was being handed to us, but what was decided maybe at a level above me and [someone] was making sure that I followed through with the district curriculum plan. I wasn’t directly responsible for development of that model. (Interview 6/16/15)

Mike contrasted that to his work at Greenville, where there was no curriculum coordinator, and he was actively involved and setting the course of the curriculum. He was working on building a curriculum review cycle and aligning it with the technology review cycle so he could connect it with the yearly budgeting that was also his responsibility.

The size of the school system might have been a bigger factor than the type of school (charter or traditional public school) in some cases. Marcia’s traditional public school experience ran the gamut from large, suburban junior and senior high schools to
small, rural, K-12 schools. She reflected that in autonomy, authority, work with finances, and developing school improvement goals were similar in her small school experience to her charter school experience, and found similarities in her work at River Academy to the work she did in the small, rural school district where she was principal. Marcia reflected that she felt that change was easier to enact at River Academy as opposed to the large, suburban schools where she had worked. In the large districts, “the amount of people that you need to go through to get anything [curriculum change] done is huge and a really, really different process,” she said. She believed it was the level of autonomy offered by smaller schools that allowed her to lead instruction in the way she wanted to. “I can decide something or we can decide something at our division meeting in the morning and be doing it possibly by the afternoon pretty easily,” she explained (Interview 6/16/15). However, the same was true at the small, rural school she had led.

In a rural K-12 school, I pretty much had the same autonomy as I do here. So, as long as my superintendent is okay with what I was doing and my school board didn’t have any major objections and rarely would they question what I was choosing to do, we could very quickly make decisions as a staff and march with it, and we can do that here too… I would really compare my experience at a small rural school district to what I have now as being similar in resources and job duties that I have. So I think anybody that’s in a small K-12 school or at a charter school, they’re facing a lot of the same issues. (Interview 6/16/15)

Marcia also credited the size of school for impacting the scope of her work as a school administrator. She found that in the smaller schools where she had worked, duties increased to other areas that might not be traditionally the realm of a principal, such as
testing, data reporting, or Title I issues. In her work at River Academy, she was responsible for each of those areas, just as she had been in the rural districts where she had worked.

Small sizes came with their challenges, too, however. “…sometimes you’re not able to afford all the positions, supervision, that you would like,” explained David (Interview 6/12/15). Mike echoed the thought: “[because of the small size of Greenville] we don’t have that second administrator to rely on for some of those day-to-day issues, student issues, whatever else” (Interview 6/16/15). In Marcia’s case, the issue had to do with funding and student enrollment. “…in the rural, upstate district or charter school you really have to think about what the market is going to bear… even in small rural districts, you can only tax so much… you have to use what you got well” (Interview 6/16/15).

The different charter schools Karen had led all struggled with creating their best possible administrative structure, she said. However, she cautioned about the challenges of creating a leadership structure that could be sustainably supported by a small school:

But the danger is when you start splitting [administrative duties] up, you end up with too many administrators for a small school. And then you’re actually taking resources away from the students. So you don’t want to do that either. You know, like any school, I suppose it’s a balancing act. But because you don’t have the large student body, you have to be careful where you use your staffing resources. (Interview 6/23/15)
The Impact of Charter School Structure

Leaders seemed to work to create a structure to support their visions despite the constraints of size. Some of the structural changes that impacted their work had to do with the organizational structure of the charter school itself as a school of choice. Marcia found that organizational management comprised a large amount of her daily work at River Academy. “My job is to make sure the day runs smoothly for everybody,” she said (Interview 6/16/15). However, she said that her days were different from her work in leadership at traditional public schools because of the different culture of being a school of choice.

Because we’re a college preparatory… school and because we have kids who like to learn and I have very few discipline problems here compared to some of the other places I’ve worked, I do get to spend more of my time on curriculum and instruction kinds of things than I have necessarily been able to do in the past. Because obviously when you have less suspension type of situations coming up you know, that can wreck the rest of your day very quickly no matter what you had planned. So I would say that has been huge here… And part of it is because this is a very unique charter school. Because I know plenty of people who have worked in both and crossover experiences here and not every school is like [River Academy] either. So I think that has been the huge difference is that my job here is different because of what we do and the kinds of kids and parents that we have involved here and the kind of staff members that I’m getting here. (Interview 6/16/15)
Marcia seemed to credit the same unique cultural aspects of being a school of choice for impacting the work she did as an instructional leader. Because she did not have to spend time doing more managerial work with student behavior problems, she felt like she had more time to do tasks like classroom observations and walk-throughs. “I have less discipline things to do here, so I would have more time to do pop-in visits here than I have necessarily had in especially the bigger districts” (Interview 6/16/15).

David also emphasized the role that having a school-of-choice structure played on his leadership behaviors. “It’s a niche school in the regard that it is very open and very candid about its degree of rigor,” he said. Because of that, it has attracted a certain type of student and family. “Socrates was a well-kept secret for about four or five years, and they continued to invite university professors, doctors, and lawyers’ kids and really did a nice job of building a clientele of extremely educationally supportive parents and high expectations” (Interview 6/12/15). He did caution though that the school had to maintain the equal access opportunities of a public charter school, and reminded that the waiting list of about 1,000 students reflected the school’s openness to enrollment. David emphasized the role of school choice in defining his leadership practice at Socrates Prep. As one of over 60 charter schools in the metropolitan area, the pull to successfully create an identity for the school that drew students and parents to enroll was strong. He felt that this pull was stronger in an urban area:

The challenge for all charters in [the state] is to be attractive so that kids want to go to your school. Now that’s a worthy goal for absolutely any school but if you’re in central or rural [parts of the state], and you are the only school district within 30 miles, I have to say that there’s not quite the incentive to make sure
you’re attractive to parents and students as there is when you’re in the metro area of several million residents, and you’re one of over 60 charters. And so it stimulates a public relations campaign. It stimulates an excellence campaign. We’re very, very far from the only show in town and so to get a waiting list that’s a thousand kids that want to be [here], yeah, it takes maintaining a great reputation, stellar test scores, and an environment that parents trust and feel like are safe. (Interview 6/12/15)

David felt that this push for market attractiveness was one of the differences between the administrative work of leading a charter school as opposed to the work required in leading a traditional public school. “Student count drives the wheel,” he explained. [In a traditional public school] there’s not as much time and energy spent on being public relations oriented or being in a constant communication mode… it’s all school choice [for charter schools], and so parents have to make a specific effort to select outside of their geographically assigned school district. So the charter challenge is to maintain that communication, that public relations. (Interview 6/12/15)

David continued to emphasize the niche aspect of Socrates Prep as he talked about his practice of leadership at the charter school. By law, the school is required to teach to the academic standards outlined by the state, but he viewed the instructional leadership role in a charter school as going above and beyond a traditional public school’s approach as they worked to emphasize the niche of STEM education at the school. “We’re going to hit the basic education that every public school’s required to do, but we’re gonna go over and above that and do it in a method that involves STEM education,” he described. “We
have to stay with the basic requirements for the state, and then we exceed them by putting in our niche effort.” He even went so far as to describe the work as doing “double duty.” However, David didn’t think that this double duty was particularly unique to charter schools. He hypothesized that a traditional public school that had a curricular focus such as a language immersion school would have the same increased focus.

**Scope of work.** The structure of the charter schools led to differences in the scope of the work for these leaders. Many seemed to feel that the charter school role was an increased scope of work. One respondent to the questionnaire that targeted leaders with experience in both types of schools commented:

In the charter setting, I wear many hats and need to manage all sectors. In the traditional setting, I had access to specialists who managed the many niches so that I didn't have to. (For instance, in the charter school setting I have to keep a hand in the food services area whereas in the traditional setting I would rely on the food service director to give me updates).

Another responded, “The charter school leader is a combination superintendent, transportation director, and principal. The time spent on facilities, operations, transportation in addition to working with families and teachers and students is a tall order.” Another echoed, “In a charter school, there's a need to take on more "hats" as there aren't resources accessible like there are in a traditional public school.” One respondent who was an assistant director at a charter school commented, “At a charter school, when the role says, ‘Assistant Director’ it's more like a building principal along with HR, finance, communications, and curriculum.”
Authority. Questionnaire respondents seemed to agree that school leaders might have less authority as leaders of a traditional public school, with 46% of school leaders with experience in both traditional public schools and charter schools saying they felt they had more authority in their charter school leadership experience (Figure 6), Mike commented on the increased authority he saw, saying “There’s a level of authority that I’m enjoying [at Greenville] that wasn’t in place in other positions.” He went on to explain, “There’s less separation between administration and staff than I experienced in other settings. We’re all right here, all kind of working together” (Interview 6/16/15). Karen discussed the level of authority she felt as a school leader as relational to the size of the organization where she was working. “The bigger the district you’re in, the less authority you have to make a decision” (Interview 6/23/15).
She went on to explain, “I have more autonomy [in a charter school] and possibly less authority… especially with the teacher-led [school] board. One of the questionnaire respondents with both traditional public school and charter school experience commented

As a charter school director, I am able to both propose and implement policies, systems, and structures to support effective teaching and learning. As a traditional public school principal, I was required to implement policies, systems, and structures that were determined by others. (Interview 6/23/15)

However, another questionnaire respondent commented about a feeling of decreased authority in charter schools as compared to experience in traditional public schools, “In the charter school in which I work, it is expected that teachers will take on a leadership role in most things; authority is shared, and it's difficult to create a plan for the school.”

Karen described the differences between her work in traditional public schools and the leadership work she did in charter schools as “night and day.” She discussed the leadership work at charter schools as being more autonomous and self-directed than her building leadership in traditional public school systems.

As a traditional administrator the one thing you’re not, you’re administering the budget, but you’re not involved as much in actually setting it and making those kinds of decisions. Like we have to make some major cuts, you know, that comes down from the top to you as a principal. But you don’t have the responsibility of going…it’s kind of like all in line here. So the way it would work in a traditional district is the board would meet and the superintendent would talk to the board, and by that point, principals may or may not be in on it, and they would say,
“we’re really over extended. We have to make some cuts. Let’s decide where we’re gonna make ‘em. We need to make them in staffing because that’s the biggest area of expenditures.” And then they would go to the principals and say you gotta make some cuts. But then the principal has to decide where to make those cuts in staffing. But the principal would not necessarily be in it from the ground up. Whereas in a charter school, there’s only you and the board, so all of those decisions you’re in on making those decisions, and you’re in on having to enforce it, all in one. That’s the biggest difference, you know, if we were in a traditional school, I would not be…I may be involved in the decisions of the building, but I would not be out finding operations and negotiating deals. That would be the superintendent or maybe somebody even under him… [as a charter school leader] you just gotta do it all. (Interview 6/23/15)

Not only was Karen’s role as a charter school leader more autonomous and more self-directed than her traditional public school leadership roles, but she also had more authority to make the operations decisions, including budget cuts and negotiating deals with faculty, staff, and contractors.

Mike expressed enjoyment with the role he played at Greenville, particularly the autonomy he has as the leader of a small charter school.

One of the things I really enjoy in this role compared to what I’ve had in the past is, even though we have an authorizer to answer to, even though we have the Department of Education to answer to or a board, there’s a level of autonomy that I’m enjoying that wasn’t in place in other positions… I like the fact that by design we really are supposed to think differently about school leadership or about how
we educate kids or how we structure a day. I’m always encouraging the staff that just because we’ve done it a certain way doesn’t mean we have to continue. We are free to revamp our daily schedule if we want to. And so I really enjoy being in a position to be able to have those kinds of conversations because that wasn’t the case before. (Interview 6/16/15)

He contrasted that with his work at traditional public schools, where he felt that he was constrained by some of the organizational structures, particularly teacher unions.

![Fundraising by School Type and Leader Experience](image)

*Figure 7. Fundraising by School Type and Leader Experience*

**Fundraising.** The structure of charter schools impacted fundraising as well. School leaders with only traditional public school experience concurred with those who had only charter school leadership experience and those respondents who had school leadership experiences in both charter schools and traditional public schools (Figure 7).

All three groups seemed to concur that leaders in charter schools would spend more time on fundraising. Marcia explained that at the variety of schools she has worked at, there
were always fundraising efforts underway. In the traditional public school setting the schools had the ability to use a levy or a referendum to raise additional funds, but even those efforts took “a ton of time to help get out that message out with your teachers and your community and your students.” In the larger charter school, she worked at there was a staff member responsible for assisting with the fundraising and budgeting of funds, so she was not directly responsible for those tasks.

**Facilities.** The charter school structure impacted charter school leaders’ time spent on managerial leadership, particularly facilities management. When asked if they believed they would spend more time on facilities issues in the different types of schools, questionnaire respondents from all three groups seemed to concur that school leaders would spend more time on facilities issues in charter school leadership positions or about

![Facilities by School Type and Leader Experience](image)

*Figure 8. Facilities by School Type and Leader Experience*
the same amount of time in a charter school leadership role as in a traditional public school leadership role (Figure 8).

Karen’s struggles as Oak Lake worked to find permanent facilities were clear. In her leadership role in the traditional public school, the school changed buildings, and she explained that she was told she was moving and that the movers were selected and she should have the teachers box up their materials as moving day approached. At Oak Lake moved the role was much different. “Here in charter world, I’m doing that [selecting movers, boxing up materials, moving phone lines, etc.]” (Interview 6/23/15). Mike, however, likened his work on facilities as a charter school leader to about the same as he had done when he was a high school principal. He explained that you always need to make sure that “the bathrooms are clean and stuff like that.”

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**Figure 9.** Recruiting and Hiring Staff by School Type and Leader Experience

**Recruiting and Hiring Staff.** When asked if they believed they would spend more time recruiting and hiring staff in a traditional public school, a charter school, or
about the same, leaders of traditional public schools seemed to concur with charter school leaders that school leaders in traditional public schools and leaders in charter schools would spend about the same amount of time recruiting and hiring staff (Figure 9).

However, 55% of leaders with experience in both types of schools said that they spent more time recruiting and hiring staff in charter schools than they did in traditional public schools. Forty-five percent of leaders with dual experience said they spent about the same amount of time recruiting and hiring.

**Monitoring Instructional Improvement.** Traditional public school leaders seemed to think that school leaders would spend equal amounts of time monitoring instructional improvement in traditional public schools as in charter schools when asked if they believed they would spend more time monitoring instructional improvement in the different school types (Figure 10). Thirty-eight percent of traditional public school
respondents felt that leaders of traditional public schools would spend more time monitoring instructional improvement. However, none of the charter school leaders or leaders with experience in both types of schools felt that traditional public school leaders would spend more time monitoring instructional improvement. School leaders with experience in both types of schools seemed to slightly favor charter school leadership in regards to time spent monitoring instructional improvement, with 55% reporting they spent more time monitoring instructional improvement in charter schools and 45% reporting they felt the time spent was about equal in each role.

Mike explained that he did not get to do as much monitoring of instructional improvement as he would like to. At the same time, he explained, he was in classrooms a lot “actually digging in with staff.” He also commented on the level of trust he felt with his staff, saying, “I don’t feel like I have to be looking over their shoulder, making sure that they’re getting to everything because they’re a conscientious enough group that they’re just making it happen” (Interview 6/16/15).

**Developing School Improvement Goals.** Leaders in traditional public schools concurred with leaders with dual experience that the time spent developing school improvement goals was about the same in both types of schools when asked in which school type they believed they would spend more time developing school improvement goals (Figure 11). However, the margin was much closer among leaders with dual experience as 55% of respondents thought the amount of time spent developing school improvement goals was the same in both types of schools while 45% thought that they spent more time on the task in charter school leadership positions than they did in traditional public school leadership positions. School leaders with only charter school
leadership experience seemed to think they would spend more time on the task in charter school roles.

![Figure 11. Developing School Improvement Goals by School Type and Leader Experience](image)

Created Structures. Some of the leaders interviewed created new organizational structures to support the increased scope of work that they found in charter schools. Marcia, Karen, and Mike all relied on the state’s Q-Comp teacher leadership program to help them create a structure that supported instructional leadership in their small charter schools. Each of the leaders found their individual ways to leverage the state’s program to their school’s advantage. Greenville’s participation in Q-Comp allowed Mike to delegate some responsibility for professional development to two lead teachers. Karen turned over more managerial responsibilities like hiring to teachers through Q-Comp so she could engage in more instructional leadership tasks such as classroom visits.
Marcia’s school structured the program so that teachers could take over staff development and teacher observations.

Karen spoke at length about her charter school leadership experiences and what administrative structures worked and didn’t in various schools. Her previous charter schools had hired someone to fulfill a vice principal-type of position. At Oak Lake, she had a dean of students and special education person who fulfilled that role to help take some of the work off of Karen’s shoulders. “She does a lot of the student stuff so that I’m not doing the discipline and all of that and that makes an enormous difference.”

Karen also noted that in her various charter school leadership positions she noticed that the teachers seemed to take on more responsibility in their roles as charter schools, and that seemed to change the nature of her leadership. “You just have to work it out, so it becomes almost a different model of leadership altogether once you do that” (Interview 6/23/15).

One of Karen’s previous charter schools was a multi-site school that she said struggled with leadership structure. “One year there was a counselor at each site,” she explained.

And one year they tried sharing it and then the next year that didn’t work. So they said ‘Well, the counselor should be in charge’; that didn’t work. And then they said ‘Well, no, the educator should be in charge’; that didn’t work. So you know, there was a failure to work through an effective model in that program and there was nothing out there to use. They had to build their own [model]. And they struggled. They struggled a lot. (Interview 6/23/15)
At the second charter school, she led, the school eventually created a structure that included a director of operations, a director of curriculum, a director of behavior, and a director of development. The director of operations was the “buck stops here guy,” she said. However, she noted that the school could afford a deep administrative structure because everyone took a cut in pay.

Karen struggled to create a structure that supported instructional leadership.

“…the thing that happens when you’re in a charter school environment… the teachers take on more responsibility,” she said. In her previous charter leadership post, the school had experimented with different structures, but the faculty found it difficult to find the right structure for the organization. “They struggled, they struggled a lot [with finding the right leadership structure for the school],” she lamented. In the end, when she left her post as director the school ended up dividing the roles of director of operations, director of behavior, and director of curriculum and instruction to different teachers in the school. However, that structure had its own limitations as increasing the size of the administration increased the number of positions that required higher pay for more work. She explained, “One of the reasons they could do it was because everybody cut their pay” (Interview 6/23/15).

The school participated in the Q-Comp program, and Karen has worked to integrate teacher leadership into the school culture through that program. She explained:

…here’s the other thing that I think happens when you’re in a charter school environment. The teachers take on more responsibility. And fortunately, they really like that. [Laughter]. And that’s a good thing. You just have to work it
out, so it becomes, I’m thinking, it becomes almost a different model of leadership altogether once you do that. (Interview 6/23/15)

She was working with the staff on a collaborative attempt at teacher evaluations and hiring of new faculty. However, she highlighted some of the challenges she faced in leading a school with increased teacher leadership and ownership: “It is a challenge for me because it’s a lot of very strong-willed people. So the challenge is to keep everybody focused on the same thing and you know, not the sniping on anybody else… But you know that happens everywhere” (Interview 6/23/15). Karen went on to elaborate on the challenges in leadership she faced in trying to facilitate this collaborative culture:

We are valuing collaboration with teachers, and so we’re still working that out. And that goes on and on. It has to go through every staff meeting, every day we’re struggling with how do we do that most effectively. And how do we relate both projects to standards and how do we connect that to the parents and stakeholders. And who collaborates with whom? Do I say okay everybody has to collaborate, so I’m making some assignments? [Laughter] Or do we let people just kind of say, “oh let’s do that.” It is, and that brings some intense conversations, I won’t lie to you. But I honestly think it’s good. I think it’s good. There are strong feelings. And they need to be heard. So I think right now, at my growth as an administrator, I’m learning how to at this late stage, how to give that leadership over to the teachers and how to facilitate that rather than come down from on high. I mean, I think in a traditional administration—it’s good that you’re making me think of these things—you do have things that come down.
The focus this year is going to be on da, da, da, da, and everybody has to do that.

(I Interview 6/23/15).

Karen was working on giving the staff more authority in issues like hiring, and she struggled to balance her opinion as an administrator with her desire to let the staff lead the process. “They’ve put together a really good process for hiring. But I think they’ll tire out soon because they want to interview everybody that drops off a resume [Laughter]” (Interview 6/23/15).

**Lack of Union Structure.** A few of the leaders discussed the differences in leading an unionized staff in a traditional public school as opposed to a charter school with at-will contracted staff. Marcia credited the school of choice aspect as bringing about differences for her faculty at River Academy.

…and one of the biggest differences, I see, and the thing I most advocate for is that we are not a union. We are an at will employer. So you’re here because you want to be and I have the ability to say you know, after an improvement plan or whatever and it’s been you know, 30 or 45 days or whatever you’re done. And so it would be so frustrating for me as a principal to be seeing mediocre people who weren’t necessarily even in love with teaching anymore being able to stay in a job while you had to automatically get rid of the new, young person who was really working hard and who wanted to be a teacher more than anything. So that difference is huge. And I think the number one thing that allows us to do what we do well is the fact that we’re not tied into anybody needs to stay here if you’re not on board with what we do. (Interview 6/16/15)
Mike also felt constrained by teacher unions in his traditional public school experience. “Probably the biggest issue I wrestled with was the idea of having to negotiate with a union or decisions that I felt were in the best interest of kids. Things very quickly become a union matter.” He contrasted that to the position at Greenville, where he felt that in contrast, the staff worked “pretty heavily from a position of trust” (Interview 6/16/15).

The Impact of Personal and Professional Support

Karen and Marcia particularly found challenges in developing professional support communities in their roles as charter school leaders, challenges that they had not faced in their traditional public school leadership roles. Karen expressed the challenges of being a lone administrator in a small charter school, particularly regarding receiving professional support and guidance.

…one of the challenges for a charter school administrator – that’s a big challenge – is you don’t have a lot of people you can go do. In a traditional school, you have a kind of a cadre of administrators that you can talk to and get support from. (Interview 6/23/15)

She felt like she could not get this support from her school board, either. In her opinion, the board would say “’What’s going on? I don’t know… You know Karen will take care of it.’” She explained that she was at every board meeting, writing the agendas for the meeting, and preparing any presentations. “Usually, the people on the board don’t know what the charter school laws are, and you’re the one that’s educating them on that” (Interview 6/23/15). The board’s over-reliance on Karen as the school director seemed to increase her feelings of professional isolation.
Another structural leadership difference Karen found was in school board relationships. Karen found that board relations were a new task that she had to work on when she transitioned to leading charter schools. In her work at the intermediate district, she talked about her relationship with the board:

We had seven districts, so the board is more a place for the superintendent of the district would come in and just say here’s what we’re doing and da, da, da, da. And there was never any real contentious talk at all because people were just happy that their district was represented and all these nasty kids were being taken care of. They didn’t really care. I never went to a board meeting unless I had a presentation to make. I was not invited. I mean I could have gone, I suppose, but why would I? So there was a distance between them and me. And but if something came up, then I had that authority behind me to back me up. And nothing really did come up, but I had the support. (Interview 6/23/15)

That changed when she transitioned to leading charter schools:

In a charter school, if you have a board you’re at every board meeting. You’re writing the agendas for the board meeting. You don’t have a vote, but you’re making sure that everything that needs to be presented is. Usually, the people on the board don’t know what the charter school laws are, and you’re the one that’s educating them on that. (Interview 6/23/15)

She also was challenged by the unique structure of charter school boards. Two of the previous charters she had led were run by school boards that were comprised of a teacher majority, meaning that the teachers she supervised as a school leader were supervising her in their roles as school board members. “To me, that’s just so backward,”
she said. “That doesn’t make sense. So they have a large influence on the board, which
the teachers like and the administrators generally struggle with that. I do” (Interview 6/23/15).

Mike also discussed the additional work he had to do in preparing his school board to do the high-level work of the school board. Mike discussed the work that he is had to do as school director to get the board to the point where they are successfully navigating the balance between micromanaging and rubber stamping:

…what has happened in the past is the board meetings would be four hours long, and so I’ve tried to feed the board as much information on the front end when the board packet comes out with notes from me … sometimes even to say, ‘Here’s my recommendation for you.’ So then we can try to focus on the areas where I really do need board input on things like a strategic plan, our facility needs, and things like that. Because those are the things, I need to be spending more time with the board on than ‘okay here’s this new policy that we need to enact’ and spend a great deal of time breaking down sentence-by-sentence some of these things that really aren’t necessary. Or day-to-day or week-to-week decisions that are better off left for the staff to work out. (Interview 6/16/15)

He did feel that this extra work he had done with the board had been successful, however, and the school was about to begin a strategic planning process with the school board.

Marcia found a lack of professional support and community happened after she transitioned to charter school leadership. “That’s the one thing I see that’s very different in charter schools than in traditional,” she lamented. In traditional public school leadership, she felt she had a cadre of peers who she could always call to ask a question
or get support. “In traditional… there was a lot more opportunities for principals to work together and schools to work together. The charter networking piece has not really fallen into place yet.” She participated in the state association for principals for networking purposes but said that she still felt like an “outsider” when she went to the meetings. “There are very few charter school leaders that are participating in those professional organization kinds of things that provide that networking base.” River Academy’s sponsoring organization hosts occasional networking events, but Marcia found that the small group of about ten leaders did not compare to the large networking group of about 2,000 members in the statewide organization. When asked her about the state charter school organization and possible networking opportunities with that group, she said that political realities and structural challenges prevented that organization from being a good fit for her desire for professional community. “…we pretty much found that we outgrew them and they weren’t necessarily able to help us a lot with some of our things than some of the other charters are at this point” (Interview 6/23/15).

**Research Question 2: Instructional Leadership**

The second research question guiding this study was: How do school leaders in Minnesota who have been leaders of both charter schools and traditional public schools experience instructional leadership in the different school organizations? This section will discuss the results of this study’s findings on instructional leadership. Overall, school leaders who had leadership experience in both traditional public schools and charter schools seemed to think the amount of time spent on instructional leadership tasks were about the same in both types of schools. The majority found that they spent about the same amount of time in both types of schools demonstrating instructional practices,
creating professional development, observing teachers, personally providing professional
development, discussing student work, discussing standardized test results, monitoring
curriculum, and monitoring classroom instructional practices.

Participants had various views of instructional leadership practices. Karen
expressed the struggle of time to do instructional leadership. “I actually wish I had more
time to do instructional leadership than I do,” she said. “…in order to keep the school
running and doing all of the operations, you’re kind of the one doing everything”
(Interview 6/23/15). David framed the instructional leadership work he was tasked with
in a charter school as “double duty.” He explained it through the lens of the curricular
niche or mission that charter schools are required occupy in Minnesota.

…The double duty is making sure we deliver all the state-mandated curriculum
and that we either exceed that or we deliver it in a model that reinforces the
mission. And so there’s definitely more work than let’s just do professional
development on best practices related to reading readiness by third grade. Our
extra step is what that will look like when taught in the STEM manner.

(Interview 6/12/15)

However, he did not think that this role would be unique to charter schools, but
broadened it out to any school with a unique curricular focus. He likened it to the
foreign-language immersion schools that he worked with in his previous traditional
public school district.
Demonstrating Instructional Practices

All three groups of school leaders indicated they believed that leaders in both types of schools would spend about the same amount of time demonstrating instructional practices (Figure 12). Two-thirds of charter school leaders thought leaders in both types of schools would spend the same amount of time demonstrating instructional practices while 62.5% of traditional public school leaders believed it would be about the same. Sixty-four percent of leaders from both types of schools said the demands on time were the same for demonstrating instructional practice. Some from each group of participants believed that charter school leaders would spend more time demonstrating instructional practices.

Figure 12. Demonstrating Instructional Practices by School Type and Leader Experience
Creating professional development

When asked if they would spend more time creating professional development in a traditional public school, charter school, or about the same, most questionnaire participants agreed that the time spent creating professional development would be about the same in both types of schools (Figure 13). Half of charter school leaders and 62.5% of traditional public school leaders said the time spent creating professional development would be the same in charter schools and traditional public schools. Among the school leaders who had held leadership positions in both types of schools, 55% said the demands were the same. Thirty-six percent of those leaders reported that they spent more time creating professional development in charter school leadership positions, while 9% reported spending more time in traditional public school leadership.

Figure 13. Creating Professional Development by School Type and Leader Experience
Mike talked about the “scattered” feeling about professional development that he had in his experiences in traditional public schools. In the two years he had been the school leader at Greenville he launched an effort to standardize the system of professional development, working on Marzano protocols. He felt that this initiative gave him more time with professional development than he had had in his traditional public school experience, commenting, “In the past, where I would have been, maybe the consumer of the work of someone else, now I’m pushing a certain direction which is different from what I’ve done in the past” (Interview 6/16/15). He was also working on bringing a uniform and common professional development to the faculty, embedding common language and common frameworks of instruction to the professional development.

![Figure 14](image-url)  
*Figure 14. Troubleshoot or Support Development of School Improvement Efforts by School Type and Leader Experience*
**Troubleshoot or support implementation of school improvement efforts**

Participants responding to the email questionnaire appeared to think that the amount of time spent troubleshooting or supporting implementation of school improvement efforts was the same at both traditional public schools and at charter schools, though charter school leaders were split, with 50% believing that the time spent would be the same in both types of schools and 50% believing that charter school leaders would spend more time troubleshooting or supporting implementation of school improvement efforts (Figure 14).

![Graph showing the amount of time school leaders believe they would spend observing teachers as a leader in a traditional public school, a charter school, or the same.](image)

*Figure 15. Observing a Teacher by School Type and Leader Experience*

**Observing a teacher during classroom instruction**

When asked about the amount of time school leaders believed they would spend observing a teacher during classroom instruction at the various school types, many
leaders agreed that the amount of time school leaders spent observing a teacher during classroom instruction would be about the same in both types of schools (Figure 15).

Sixty-two percent of traditional public school leaders and 43% of charter school leaders indicated that they felt the time spent observing teachers would be the same. An even larger percentage – 82% – of school leaders who had held leadership positions in both types of schools indicated that they felt they spent the same amount of time observing a teacher during classroom instruction.

Karen expressed her frustration at not having enough time to spend with teachers in classrooms in her leadership role at Oak Lake. “If I get comments on my evaluations, it’s usually ‘not enough time in the classroom.’” She went on to explain, “Not enough time with staff and it’s true. It’s true” (Interview 6/23/15).

![Figure 16. Examining and Discussing Student Work by School Type and Leader Experience](image-url)
Examine and discuss student work

Leaders from traditional public schools (62.5%), charter schools (83%), and those who have led both types of schools (73%) concurred that the amount of time spent examining and discussing student work would be about the same in both types of schools (Figure 16).

Examine and discuss standardized test results from a teacher’s class

Though most charter school leaders and traditional public school leaders believed that the amount of time spent examining and discussing standardized test results from a teacher’s class would be the same in both types of schools, school leaders who had experience in both types of schools found that they spent more time on this task in charter schools than in traditional public schools (Figure 17). This was one of the few areas where leaders who had experience in both types of schools reported that the amount of...
time spent on a specific instructional leadership task was not about the same in both types of schools.

![Image of bar chart]

**Figure 18.** Monitor Curriculum, by School Type and Leader Experience

**Monitor curriculum to see that it reflects school improvement goals**

Both traditional public school leaders and leaders who had experience in both types of schools seemed to think that the amount of time a school leader spent on monitoring curriculum to see that it reflects school improvement goals was the same in both charter schools and traditional public schools (Figure 18). Charter school leaders, however, were evenly split whether leaders in charter schools would spend more time on this facet of instructional leadership or whether it would be the same in both types of schools. One questionnaire respondent who had leadership experiences in both types of schools explained, “we have the same standards to reach [in charter schools and traditional public schools],” while another echoed, “[Leadership in traditional public
schools and charter schools is] extremely similar because of federal and state accountability measures.”

**Monitor classroom instructional practices to see that they reflect school improvement efforts**

Karen expressed her frustration at not being able to be a stronger instructional leader in her charter school experience, particularly in her practice of directly monitoring classroom instructional practices:

I actually wish I had more time to do instructional leadership than I do. I think that for me at least, that has been the problem. Because in order to keep school running and doing all operations really, you know, you’re kind of the one doing everything. And so, when it comes to actually sitting in the classroom, that’s probably, if I get comments on my evaluations, it’s usually not enough time in the classroom. Not enough time with you know staff and it’s true. It’s true.

(Interview 6/23/15)

In the first phase of the study, most traditional public school leaders and leaders who had experience in leading both traditional public schools and charter schools indicated on the questionnaire that they felt the time spent monitoring classroom instructional practices to see that they reflect school improvement efforts was about the same in both traditional public schools and charter schools (Figure 19). Charter school leaders, however, were equally split between, with half of respondents indicating charter school leaders would spend more time on this task and half indicating they believed the demands would be about the same in both types of schools.
Research Question 3: Leadership Education

The third research question guiding this study was: How do school leadership preparation programs help prepare educators for leadership in charter schools? The following section will discuss this study’s findings about leadership education preparation.

Contingent Leadership

The participants in this study who had been leaders of both charter schools and traditional public schools felt that their training and licensure benefitted them in their roles as charter school leaders. “For me,” said Karen, “I think [licensure] was very, very important… I tell people it makes all the difference in the world.” She discussed one
activity in her leadership preparation program that emphasized the importance of contingent leadership in charter school leadership that stood out in her memory:

One of the best things they did was they had a live, they had a simulation, and I forget what they called it, principal simulation or something, and we all walked in, and it was a full day. And they just had a ton of activities. You had a desk full of stuff that you had to get through. You had an interview with a recalcitrant teacher. You had an angry parent. You had to do a quick two-minute video for the TV station… and I remember getting done with that and thinking, “This is ridiculous. Nobody could work like that,” but that’s what it’s like. (Interview 6/23/15)

She acknowledged, though, that the university where she completed her principal preparation program was also a charter school authorizer in Minnesota, so she wondered if they might have included more contingent leadership activities even though the program was not directed at charter school leaders.

**Managerial Leadership**

Participants also discussed the importance of coursework and training on various managerial leadership tasks. David discussed finance and marketing.

I never encountered any instruction in getting my degrees and in getting my renewal units in anything related to charter school finance. And so one of the things that’s difficult is to find both business managers and administrators that have a good base in what are the differences between most public schools with a geographic district versus a charter school. So that’s kind of a biggie. More and more teacher prep and administrator prep institutions are trying to impress the
value of public relations, communications, parent involvement but that’s really minimal. (Interview 6/12/15)

A respondent to the questionnaire echoed the need for managerial leadership training, highlighting the need for finance and legal training as particularly applicable to their role as a charter school leader. Mike talked about the differences in training needed to negotiate union contracts in traditional public schools versus at-will contracts in charter schools.

Marcia said that not having a licensed school leader leading a charter school was simply “asking for trouble.” She explained:

I wouldn’t think that I would be qualified to walk into Target and say ‘Okay, I’m gonna start a new division here and trust me, I can handle this.’ I think it’s harder for somebody who has never been involved in a school at all to understand the nuances of what has to happen. (Interview 6/16/15)

She indicated that the authorizer that worked with River Academy seemed to be moving in the direction of requiring the school leaders of their charter schools to obtain administrative licensure.

Respondents to the questionnaire had similar comments. “My training was effective in preparing me for both positions, but both have required extensive on-the-job training as well. My training and work as a scientist prior to my education training was effective in preparing me for data-driven instruction,” commented one leader with experience leading both types of schools. However, some of the participants were not so sure that licensure should be mandatory for charter school leaders. Mike explained,
On one hand, I think it’s wonderful that they opened up the leadership to someone who maybe has a skill set but not a lot of licensure and I think that’s good. The flip side of it though is to suggest that you don’t really need it, it’s not a good thing because you do. You need to have some training on school administration, regardless of if you are in a private school somewhere or a district public school or a charter public school. (Interview 6/16/15)

Minnesota does require licensure for teachers in public charter schools, and Mike commented about the oddity of requiring licensure for teachers but not for school administrators. “That’s the one surprising thing to me that we require licensure of the teachers and we do not require licensure or some type of formalized training for charter school directors.” Another questionnaire respondent commented, “I hold an administrative license for Principal K-12 and feel that all school leaders, including charters, should conform.”

**Conclusion**

This chapter reported the results of this study, organized by research question. The next chapter, Chapter Five, will discuss those results and the implications for professional development and professional development. Chapter Five will also discuss the limitations of this study and the recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

This study focused on examining the practices of charter school leadership and traditional public school leadership through an interpretive, exploratory qualitative approach. The study aims to fill a gap in the literature by examining school leadership from the emic perspective of the lived experiences of school leaders who have led both traditional public schools and charter schools. The research questions guiding this study were: (1) What are the differences between traditional public school leadership and charter school leadership according to school leaders in Minnesota who have been leaders of both types of schools?, (2) How do school leaders in Minnesota who have been leaders of both charter schools and traditional public schools experience instructional leadership in the different school organizations?, and (3) How do school leadership preparation programs help prepare educators for leadership in charter schools?

Prior research on school leadership in charter schools has focused on the lack of district structure (Blitz, 2011a), the age of the school (Campbell, 2010; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Farmer-Hinton, 2006; Griffin & Wohlstetter, 2001; Horn, 2009), the mission-dependent nature of leading charter schools (Blitz, 2011a; Campbell & Grubb, 2008; Farmer-Hinton, 2006), the isomorphic challenges (Huerta, 2009; Huerta & Zuckerman, 2009), and the challenges of student recruitment and retention (Bain & Mohrweis, 2011; Farmer-Hinton, 2006; Portin et al., 2003). However, few studies applied school leadership theory to charter school leadership practice (Bloomfield, 2013; Cravens et al., 2012; Goff et al., 2012; Portin et al., 2003). These studies have concluded that charter school leaders use more contingent leadership than
other styles of leadership (Bloomfield, 2013). When compared to traditional public school leaders, charter leaders are more likely to distribute leadership (Portin et al., 2003), more focused on managerial tasks (Cravens et al., 2012), and are less likely to be engaged in instructional leadership tasks (Goff et al., 2012). Despite these studies, the research is not clear as to why these differences in leadership exist.

Cravens et al. (2012) and Goff et al. (2012) used large-scale, quantitative survey data comparing results from leaders in traditional public schools to results from leaders in charter schools to reach their findings. Portin et al. (2003) used qualitative methodology to examine how leadership roles differed in different types of schools in four cities across four states. However, the Portin et al. (2003) examined instructional leadership differences from a wider lens of entrepreneurial schools (charter, magnet, religious, and private) and compared that to traditional public school leadership.

The study found that leaders who have experience in leading both traditional public schools and charter schools in Minnesota found that differences existed in the structure of the schools that impacted their leadership behaviors. The participants expressed that at times the size of their school organizations may have been responsible for some of those differences more so than the organizational type (traditional public school vs. charter). The participants also expressed a need for more professional support in their charter school leadership roles. When examining instructional leadership practices addressed in the second research question, How do school leaders in Minnesota who have been leaders of both charter schools and traditional public schools experience instructional leadership in the different school organizations?, this study found that sometimes charter school leaders felt as if they were doing “double-duty” because of the
unique instructional themes of their charter schools. When asked to compare instructional leadership in the two types of schools using the facets developed by Cravens et al. (2012), participants with experience in both traditional public schools and charter schools outlined more similarities than differences, except discussing student standardized test results. In addressing the last research question, How do school leadership preparation programs help prepare educators for leadership in charter schools?, participants identified the need to address more contingent leadership and managerial leadership topics in leadership preparation programs.

The evidence adds an emic approach to examining the context of school leadership in perspective to leadership in traditional public schools and charter schools. The findings from this study suggest several similarities and differences in the leadership practices used in both traditional public school leadership and charter school leadership. The findings also illustrate the potential impact of school organization size on leadership practice. School leaders with experience in both types of school organizations indicated more similarities in leadership practice than previous studies have found (e.g. Cravens et al., 2012; Goff et al., 2012; Portin et al., 2003), and indicated that these similarities might have more to with school organization size than type of school. Also, the findings illustrate the differences of the scope of the work in charter schools and the organizational structures that leaders created to help support the scope of the work. These findings can be used to (1) guide the development of school leader preparation programs that work to meet the unique needs of charter school leaders, (2) direct development of professional development programs for charter school leaders, and (3)
offer direction for future research examining the work of school leaders in both charter schools and traditional public schools.

The remainder of Chapter 5 will discuss the implications of the findings presented in Chapter 4. The chapter will conclude with implications for further research.

**Implications of Findings**

This study uniquely focuses on the lived experiences of school leaders who have led both traditional public schools and charter schools in Minnesota. This research aimed to explore the development of an emic description of the differences in school leadership in both types of schools. Two implications of this research deserve discussion: implications for professional development and support for charter school leaders, implications for principal preparation programs.

**Implications for Professional Development and Support**

The results of this study indicate implications for school leader professional development, including the need for further professional development and support for practicing charter school leaders. Few studies have examined the importance of principal professional development (Grisson & Harrington, 2010), much less the role of principal or administrator professional development in charter schools. Research has indicated a lack of professional development opportunities for school leaders in small, rural school districts, however (Preston, Jakubiec, & Koymans, 2013). Preston et al. (2013) found that rural leaders have unique needs for professional development that include school-community relationships, financial management, and English Language Learners (ELL) program leadership. Because the participants in this study indicated that the leadership requirements of being at the helm of a charter school were similar to their experiences
leading small, rural traditional public schools, there may be overlap in professional development needs.

In Minnesota, the charter school organization and structure in Minnesota means that each school is its own school district, and it seems at times, an island onto itself. School leaders who had experienced the structure and support of working within a traditional public school district indicated that support is missing from the role of the charter school leader. Cravens et al. (2012) find that charter school leaders in schools with more organizational supports (such as a charter management organization or educational management organization that support a network of schools) can allocate more time to instructional and school development practices. In independent charter schools, such as those in Minnesota, the lack of overarching organizational supports may be specifically challenging for the professional growth of school leaders and administrators. Opportunities do exist for professional development for charter school leaders through various professional organizations and state departments of education, but the options are limited.

Though professional organizations exist in Minnesota for principals at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, there is no professional organization for charter school leaders. The Minnesota Association of Charter Schools has established bi-annual regional charter school administrator/director meetings. National charter school organizations such as the Charter Schools Development Center, based in California, offer leadership development opportunities for charter school leaders including networking and summer boot camps. In another example of charter school leader professional development, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction has held an annual
Charter School Leader Institute with sessions specifically focused on charter school leadership (http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/docs/charterschools/profdev/institute/institute-booklet.pdf). However, each of these opportunities come with a price tag and given the tight financial situations of both charter schools (Batdorff et al., 2010; Campbell & Gross, 2008; Maloney et al., 2013) and small, rural schools (Preston et al., 2013) it may be difficult for charter school leaders to access these options. Charter school leaders may find the price tag to these professional development opportunities a barrier to participation.

Opportunities are ripe for the organization of this underserved population, whether it be divisions within the existing professional organizations or the creation of a new organization uniquely created to offer charter school leader professional development. Other possibilities for professional networking for charter school leaders might include university-based professional development or peer-to-peer networking. Given that research has indicated the strength of formal professional mentoring for school administrator professional development (Grissom & Harrington, 2010), and Preston et al. (2013) found a lack of mentorship programs for small, rural school leaders, perhaps a formal mentorship program might be specifically useful for the professional growth of charter school leaders as well as small, rural school leaders.

**Instructional Leadership and Size.** In addition to this study’s findings regarding the lack of professional support for charter school leaders in Minnesota, this study also found similarities in leadership between small traditional public school systems and charter schools. Instructional leadership in traditional public schools and charter schools was similar in both types of organizations based on the experience of
participants who had led both types of school structures. Given this study’s findings, perhaps a mentorship program that would work to pair school leaders based on school size might also be a worthwhile option for professional development.

Another opportunity for peer-to-peer connections and mentorship would be between “mission-driven” schools such as charter schools with curricular niches and magnet schools with specific curricular foci. Likened the “double-duty” of instructional leadership in schools with a curricular niche mentioned by one participant in the study, leaders of charter schools and magnet schools have responsibilities to monitor the traditional forms of instructional leadership while also maintaining the mission-based specific learning. This dual instructional focus in charter schools and magnet schools is worth exploring. Connections or mentorship programs between leaders of these two types of schools might also benefit charter school leader professional development.

**Implications for Principal Preparation Programs**

Though charter school leader licensure is not required in many states (including Minnesota), Campbell and Grubb (2008) found that 80% of charter school leaders had a degree in education and 80% of charter leaders had taken courses in educational leadership. The same study identified 13 leadership preparation programs that were working to address the needs of preparing school leaders specifically for leadership in charter schools. These programs required core coursework in areas such as leadership skills; personnel (recruiting, hiring, evaluation, discipline) and labor relations; charter school law and legal issues; charter school financial management fundamentals; special education; academic accountability (defining and measuring student performance); facilities management; and charter renewal (Campbell & Grubb, 2008).
A brief internet search reveals that the options for charter school leader development programs have exploded since the publication of the 2008 Campbell and Grubb study. Universities ranging from Loyola Marymount University to Ball State University have established Masters level programs in charter school leadership. At the same time, Charter Management Organizations (CMOs) have also started up “grow-your-own” school leader programs. Achievement First, a charter school network operating schools in Connecticut, New York, and Rhode Island, operates a Residency Program for School Leadership in its Connecticut schools that enables graduates of the program an alternative route to leadership certification in that state. The KIPP School Leadership program offers different tracks for aspiring school leaders, including those who will be opening and leading a new KIPP school, those aspiring to lead an existing KIPP school, and assistant principals aspiring to move into the principal role.

**Instructional Leadership.** Though prior research has found mixed results about the use of instructional leadership in charter schools as compared to traditional public schools (Cravens et al., 2012; Goff et al., 2012), this study found that when school leaders who had been in leadership roles at both independent charter schools and traditional public schools were questioned about time spent on instructional leadership tasks they indicated that the demands were largely the same at both types of schools. The exception to this was the amount of time spent discussing standardized test results. Interviews with leaders who had led both types of schools suggested that the reasoning behind this could be because of the size of the school, or the requirement for charter schools in Minnesota to have a unique or specific curricular focus, creating a “dual-focus” for instructional leadership tasks.
Principal preparation programs can utilize these findings in a variety of ways. This study’s participants reported that charter school leaders are spending more time discussing student standardized test results than traditional public school leaders. However, the gap in assessment education for school leaders has been established (Earl & Fullan, 2003; Militello, Gajda, & Bowers, 2009; Stiggins, 2001). Militello et al. (2009) found that almost 80% of building leaders said that managing assessments and data were an important part of the school leadership role, but only 10% reported that their leadership preparation programs had well prepared them for those tasks. When school leaders fail to grasp the important concepts behind standardized tests and classroom assessment, the consequences can include poor decision making and ineffective instruction, making students suffer (Stiggins, 2001). School leadership preparation programs could address these issues and better prepare charter school leaders by providing quality coursework in assessment education. Coursework in assessment should be required for licensure programs to better prepare school leaders and encourage the use of data-informed decision making.

In addition to required coursework on assessment topics, school leadership preparation programs can help develop learning activities and outcomes that help school leaders understand the demands of having a particular curricular focus like the charter schools in this study. An emphasis on mission-driven leadership will help not only charter school leaders, but also school leaders of magnet schools, independent schools, or other schools with a unique curricular mission.

**Contingent and Managerial Leadership.** Participants in this study identified a need for more preparation in the areas of contingent and managerial leadership.
Leadership preparation programs may act on these findings by increasing coursework, simulations, or field experiences that focus on the capacities that are needed to rapidly shift from task to task in the daily work of school leadership. Preparation programs may also choose to evaluate offerings in managerial leadership topics such as school finance and contract negotiation.

**Small Schools.** One theme identified in this study was the correlation of leading a small, rural traditional public school to leading a small, independent charter school regardless of geographic location. In Minnesota, charter schools range in size from 23 to 2863 students. The average charter school enrolls 297 students, while the median has an enrollment of 196 students. Seventy percent of those schools are located within the Twin Cities metropolitan area ("A Primer on Minnesota Charter Schools," 2016). While most Minnesota charter schools are not located in rural areas, their enrollment numbers tend to be quite small. By comparison, the Anoka-Hennepin School District, one of Minnesota’s largest districts, enrolls over 38,000 students (http://www.ahschools.us/domain/74). In 2010-2011 school size in Minnesota ranged from student enrollments of 1 to 3,262, with an average enrollment of 416 students (https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/pesschools09/tables/table_05.asp), over double the size of the median charter school.

Research on small school leadership is limited. Rural schools are not necessarily synonymous with small schools, however often the definitions of rural coincide with the size of the community in which the schools are located (Preston et al., 2013). In their review of the literature on rural schools, Preston et al. (2013) define rural as a school community with a population of 10,000 or fewer. Because charter schools in Minnesota...
lack geographical boundaries, it is difficult to align them with community size, but the student population of charter schools in the state is much more likely to be close to small, rural school student populations.

Principal preparation programs can utilize these findings by seeking out applicable research to small, rural schools. Field study experiences may be expanded to include rural, suburban, and urban schools. Additional coursework in school and community relationships may benefit not only rural school leaders but also charter school leaders. Attention may be paid to seeking out supportive, mentoring relationships.

Limitations of the Study

This study examined the lived experiences of school leaders in Minnesota who had leadership experience in both traditional public schools and charter schools. However, the nature of this interpretive, exploratory qualitative study created some limitations. The participants who had leadership experiences in both types of schools all had first experienced leadership in traditional public schools and then transitioned to leadership in a charter school. The voices of potential participants who first experienced leadership in a charter school and then transitioned to leadership in a traditional public school were not captured in this study, so it is unknown if their experiences would echo the experiences of those participants in this study.

Also, the study is limited to school leaders in Minnesota. Because charter school laws – and thus charter schools themselves – can vary dramatically from state to state, the nature of charter school leadership is likely to vary from state to state in those varying contexts and organizational structures. Additionally, two out of the four school leaders interviewed were leading charter schools that were designed for high achieving students.
Minnesota charter schools enroll a larger percentage of students receiving Free and Reduced Lunch (55% vs. statewide average 38%), a larger percentage of Limited English Proficiency students (20% vs. statewide average 8%), and a larger percentage of minority students (53% vs. statewide average 29%) ("A Primer on Minnesota Charter Schools," 2016) thus the schools these leaders worked at may not have been indicative of charter schools as a whole in the state.

These limitations could be addressed with an expanded multiple case study, examining the perspectives of school leaders with various backgrounds and charter school contexts. Also, more purposeful sampling could help address these limitations.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Because of the exploratory nature of this study, the findings from this study have only scratched the surface of what there is to know about the differences in school leadership in charter schools and how it compares with school leadership in traditional public schools. An expanded multiple case study might include leaders with different organizational transition histories.

In addition to conducting an expanded multiple case study, other opportunities for further research exist. The primary goal of further research would be to understand the similarities and differences in leading public charter schools and traditional public schools. The findings in Chapter 4 discuss the scope and skills required for school leadership in both types of schools. This dissertation begins to develop an emic perspective of school leadership and builds off the etic similarities and differences in leadership in charter schools and traditional public schools of Goff et al. (2012) and Cravens et al. (2012). Research could address the following topics:
• How do the experiences of school leaders who have transitioned from leadership in charter schools to leadership in traditional public schools compare to the leaders in this study? Because this study was limited from leaders who transitioned from traditional public schools to charter schools, it is unclear if those transitioning the opposite direction would have similar experiences.

• How do traditional public school leaders and charter school leaders view their work and the work of those who are in the other organizational structure? The results of this study indicate that there may be more similarities in leadership practice than previously thought according to school leaders who have held both leadership positions in both charter and traditional public schools. Further research could expand on the small number of participants in the emailed questionnaire in this study to see how the various groups perceive leadership practice in schools that are not like their own.

• Expand the geographical area to see how the organizational structure of charter schools that varies state-by-state can impact leadership practice. Minnesota’s charter school law has clear limitations and structure for the organization of charter schools and has been consistently ranked among the top charter school laws by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools ("Measuring up to the Model: A Ranking of State Charter School Laws," 2014).
• Cravens et al. (2012) developed scales for both choice-related tasks and traditional-related tasks in school leadership. Further research could use these scales to survey school leaders with leadership experience in both types of schools to compare their experience with these types of tasks in both types of organizations.

• Given the findings regarding school size, it would be interesting to explore the rise of scale-up activities in charter schools. Because Minnesota does not allow out-of-state operators to start or run charter schools, none of the schools in this study were part of EMOs or CMOs. Would participation in an umbrella organization such as this change the leadership in the eyes of school leaders with experience in both traditional public schools and charter schools? Does the economy of scale offered by umbrella organizations impact leadership?

• How are existing school leadership preparation programs addressing the unique needs of charter school leaders? Higher education institutions such as Loyola Marymount University, Ball State University, and UCLA have begun offering programs, courses, and certificates that are specific to the needs of charter school leaders.

• Many of the leaders interviewed in this study used created structures such as the state’s Q-Comp program to help support and distribute leadership functions within their schools. Future research could explore this further. How do charter school leaders create structures to support the work of a
charter school leader? How do charter school teachers assume shared leadership duties in small charter schools?

**Conclusion**

With the dramatic rise in charter school numbers and enrollment, the need to more deeply understand school leadership in charter schools only increases. Given the political climate and the bi-partisan appeal of charter schools the numbers of needed charter school leaders is likely to rise, perhaps even exceeding the prediction of Perry (2008) of an additional 6,000 to 21,000 new charter school leaders needed by 2018. Because leadership is second to only classroom instruction in its impact on student achievement (Leithwood & Wahlstrom, 2008), it is critical to understand the unique roles of these leaders.

The purpose of this study was to develop an emic description of school leadership in charter schools as compared to school leadership in traditional public schools based on the experiences of school leaders who held leadership positions in both types of schools. The findings outlined similarities in instructional leadership practices between the two types of schools while highlighting the similarities between leadership in charter schools and small, rural school leadership. The findings fill in gaps in the research by beginning to explore the qualitative side of the differences in school leadership in charter schools and traditional public schools. Prior research has examined the differences from a quantitative perspective (Cravens et al., 2012; Goff et al., 2012) and this study adds a qualitative perspective to the research.
APPENDIX A

EMAIL QUESTIONNAIRE

We invite you to participate in a research study being conducted by investigators from The University of Iowa. The purpose of the study is to learn about the similarities and differences between charter school leadership and traditional public school leadership.

If you agree to participate, we would like you to complete the following survey. You are free to skip any questions that you prefer not to answer. It will take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

We will not collect your name or any identifying information about you, unless you want to be contacted for possible future studies that will be conducted by the researcher. If you do not leave contact information, it will not be possible to link you to your responses on the survey.

Taking part in this research study is completely voluntary. If you do not wish to participate in this study, simply exit the survey now.

If you have questions about the rights of research subjects, please contact the Human Subjects Office, 105 Hardin Library for the Health Sciences, 600 Newton Rd, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52242-1098, (319) 335-6564, or e-mail irb@uiowa.edu.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this research study.

Charter School Leadership Questionnaire

Q1 Have you held a leadership position within a charter school?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

Q3 What leadership role or roles?

Q4 How long have you held that role?

☐ Less than 1 year (1)
Q2 Have you held a leadership position within a traditional public school?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q5 What leadership role or roles?

Q6 How long did you hold that leadership role in the traditional public schools?

- Less than 1 year (1)
- 1 Year (2)
- 2 Years (3)
- 3 Years (4)
- 4 Years (5)
- 5 Years (6)
- More than 5 years (if so, please indicate how long) (7) ____________________
Q7 Do you hold a state-issued principal license?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q8 What kinds of leadership education or training have you completed?

- Masters in Educational Leadership or Administration (1)
- Master’s Degree, but not in leadership or administration (2)
- MACS training (3)
- Other (4)
- None (5)

Q9 What is your gender?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)

Q10 What is your age?

- 25 - 30 (1)
- 31 - 35 (2)
- 36 - 40 (3)
- 41 - 45 (4)
- 46 - 50 (5)
- 51 - 55 (6)
Q11 As a school leader, in which role do you feel like you spent more time doing the following activities?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Charter School Leadership Role (1)</th>
<th>About the Same (2)</th>
<th>Traditional Public School Leadership Role (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundraising</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing facilities</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring instructional improvement</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruiting and hiring teachers</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q12 As a school leader, in which role did you feel you did spend more time doing the following activities?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demonstrate instructional practices and/or the use of curricular materials (1)</th>
<th>Charter School Leadership Role (1)</th>
<th>About the Same (2)</th>
<th>Traditional Public School Leadership Role (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observe a teacher during classroom instruction (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examine and discuss student work (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Action 1</td>
<td>Action 2</td>
<td>Action 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examine and discuss standardized test results of students from a teacher's class (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create and implement staff development (5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personally provide staff development (6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troubleshoot or support the implementation of school improvement efforts (7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor the curriculum used in classrooms to see that it reflects the school's</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q13 How would you describe the similarities and differences between charter school leadership and traditional public school leadership based on your experience?

Q14 How has your training and education prepared you for leadership in both charter schools and traditional public schools?

Q15 This study is looking for individuals who would be willing to participate in follow-up interviews about the similarities and differences between charter school leadership and traditional public school leadership. If you would be willing to participate in a one-hour interview scheduled at your convenience, please leave your contact information below.
I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study that aims to examine the differences and similarities between charter school leadership and traditional public school leadership. The field of leadership education has little information about the differences in leadership roles in these different organizations, and this study is attempting to fill that gap.

You have been invited to be in this study because you have been in a leadership position in both a charter school and a traditional public school.

If you agree to participate, you would spend approximately one hour in a phone interview with the researcher. We will ask about your experiences as a school leader in both charter schools and traditional public schools. You will be free to not answer any questions you would prefer not to answer. The interview will be recorded.

You would also be asked identify documents that represent your leadership style in the school, such as a strategic plan or mission statement and send these to the researcher.

After the interviews the researcher will send a hard copy of the transcript to you to make sure that the transcript is correct.

Taking part in this research study is completely voluntary. If you decide not to be in this study, or if you stop participating at any time, you won’t be penalized or lose any benefits for which you otherwise qualify.
If you wish to participate, please reply to this e-mail. I will send one more email attempting to contact you if you do not respond to this email. If you do not wish to participate in this study or be contacted again, simply reply to this email with the words, “No thank you.”

If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Sarah Hale Keuseman at 612-756-0915. If you have questions about the rights of research participants, please contact the Human Participants Office, 105 Hardin Library for the Health Sciences, 600 Newton Rd, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52242-1098, (319) 335-6564, or e-mail irb@uiowa.edu.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Sarah Hale Keuseman
Doctoral Candidate, Educational Leadership
University of Iowa

- Can you please briefly describe your background and the path you took to the leadership position you have today?
  - Educational background
  - Experience teaching
  - Rise to leadership position
  - Your race
  - Your age
  - Your gender
• What are the administrative demands of your current role?
• What are the instructional demands of your current role?
• What were the administrative demands of your previous leadership role?
• What were the instructional demands of your previous leadership role?
• What are the strengths and challenges of leading a charter school?
• What are the strengths and challenges of leading a traditional public school?
• What is your role as an instructional leader in a charter school as compared to your role as an instructional leader in a traditional public school?
• Does instructional leadership look different in a traditional public school vs. a charter school?
• What kinds of structures have you built to support instructional leadership in the schools you’ve led?
• How did your leadership preparation program prepare you for leading a charter school?
## APPENDIX C

### CODING EXAMPLES AND EXCERPTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Code</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>A Priori Code 1</th>
<th>A Priori Code 2</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Excerpt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Co</td>
<td>St</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>SIE</td>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Well that [school improvement goals] we do as a staff and I don’t think there’s a lot different there either, except you know again, I would…it depends on how you do it. How I do it is that it’s collaborative no matter what. So we will be doing that with the teachers and the staff. And the board sometimes. We’re doing a board retreat in July. And I would probably do that in the other schools as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>St</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Size</td>
<td>So I end up being a fan of the smallest, functional size. And when I say functional size, it’s just a reference to overhead. You can’t provide a building, grade levels, and teachers when you reach a certain point where you don’t have critical mass. And so charter schools face a dilemma of finding size that can be self-supporting and yet small enough to be individualizing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co</td>
<td>St</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>And they get public schools because most of them attended one. But the charter thing is still, it’s kind of a mystery for a lot of folks. So I think that, you know, when you say you work for a school district, people seem to understand that.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D

POSITIONALITY STATEMENT

Working with youth is something that has simply always been a part of what I do; it feels as if it is a part of who I am. I started teaching art classes to elementary students in an after-school program when I was in high school. I was one of those rare college students who came to college knowing my major and continued with my art education studies through graduation. I spent my college summers teaching arts and crafts and leading extended wilderness trips with middle school and high school girls. I loved the ability to take girls out in the wilderness and watch them grow physically, mentally, and emotionally as they encountered new experiences.

When it came time to find a job, however, I grew increasingly terrified that I would get a job teaching art in a school somewhere and 40 years would pass in the blink of an eye, and it would be time to retire. Instead of jumping into an art teacher position I found a year-long graduate internship that had me teaching environmental and outdoor education to grades 4-12 to school groups at a residential environmental learning center. It was a wonderful experience in teaching outdoors in a beautiful place, but teaching duties rotated and I would only teach students for three-hour-long classes. Each morning and afternoon I had a new class of new faces, and I desperately missed building the bonds with young people that I was used to from my summers of wilderness trip leading.

When the year at the residential environmental learning center ended, I found a job teaching in what seemed like an ideal situation: a brand-new urban charter school that used arts and Native American culture to focus teaching and learning for middle school and high school students. I was hired as a teacher-leader to not only teach art but also
support leadership tasks within the school’s collaborative leadership structure. I showed up at the school having finished an intense summer of wilderness travel, spending 55 days canoeing with six high-school-aged girls from Saskatchewan to the coast of Hudson Bay. I found that the school had not even secured a building from which to hold classes and school was to start in five days. We spent the first two weeks of school holding classes in teepees and rooms at a state park and eventually found a storefront near most of the students’ homes to call the school’s permanent home.

That year was an intense learning experience for me. The organizational structure of the charter school was highly unstructured. The needs of my students were extreme, and I felt as if I was getting a crash-course in the deep historical pain of Native American culture combined with the modern, urban needs of inner city youth. My white, suburban, privileged experiences were painfully obvious as I walked with my students as they experienced addiction, sexual assault, homelessness, and the challenge of integrating their historic culture with modern life. The lack of traditional organizational culture made helping students cope with these hurts more difficult for me. In the school’s shared leadership model, I was the teacher-leader responsible for data reporting to the state and the school’s lunch program. I spent the first half of the year with the school’s Sam’s Club card buying prepared foods that the students could make and eat in our storefront where the only sink in the entire building was in the unisex bathroom. I wondered if it was my privileged, white perspective that craved more stability but knew that as a member of that charter school board there should be more leadership than a twice-a-year meeting. I felt like I was in crisis much of that year. At the same time, I was honored to be welcomed as a part of the Native American culture in a way I knew I would never
have the opportunity to otherwise. At the end of the school year, I submitted my letter of resignation with an overwhelming feeling of relief. The charter school closed three years later.

I often say that that year of teaching made it necessary for me to take the next two years off teaching. I worked as a program director at a YMCA camp in the spring and summers and substitute taught in the falls and winters. Somehow, when a position was posted for another art teacher at start-up charter school focused on the arts and project-based learning I decided to apply.

I often feel like it was fate that led me to another charter school. I still felt scarred by my previous experience. Yet here I was, headed to another start-up charter. The summer before the school opened there was a crisis of leadership with the founding team as the director sparred with the teachers, ending with the school board not only firing the director but also filing a court order to stop her from contacting students’ families to try to convince them to leave the school. I figured, hey, at least the school had a building where we could hold classes. That year the school was led by a team of four teachers. It was wild and crazy, but I felt like we were working as a team to educate students in a wonderful, progressive way that I had not felt at my first charter school. When year two rolled around, I signed on for another year and joined the school board as a teacher member. The school still utilized a teacher-leader model of shared decision making, but it also hired a director from the teaching ranks to be the main point person for school leadership issues.

Working at that second charter school was a wonderfully intense experience that included so much more than teaching. I worked with the faculty and staff to build
curriculum, policies, and culture, often putting in 12-14 hour days. I spent four years on the school board, learning and doing the high-level leadership of public schooling. As a mentor teacher through the school’s teacher leader program, I coordinated teacher evaluations and professional development. Starting a school from scratch with a team of educators passionate about working together to do what’s best for kids was an experience that is difficult to describe or replicate. I am truly grateful for that intense and beautiful time but knew that when my then-fiancée got a job in Iowa, it was time for me to move on.

Iowa was a whole new educational experience for me. Until I arrived here I had not realized the radically different structures of charter schools state-by-state. With Minnesota’s long history of charter schools, they felt (for the most part) accepted and common to me. In Iowa, it felt like even my fellow graduate students were not sure what charter schools were. Attending conferences in the field of school leadership I was taken aback at the lack of attention to school leadership in charter schools and how leading an organization like a charter school might be different from school leadership in traditional public schools.

These experiences – especially teaching, leading, and learning in what I sometimes oversimplify as a “bad” charter school and a “good” charter school – have led me here, to this dissertation study.
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A sobering look at what Betsy DeVos did to education in Michigan and what she might do as secretary of education.


