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California Charter School Closures: Perspectives and Advice from Nine Former Charter School Directors

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CALIFORNIA CHARTER SCHOOL CLOSURES: PERSPECTIVES AND ADVICE FROM NINE FORMER CHARTER SCHOOL DIRECTORS

by

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ABSTRACT

Charter schools have been categorized as "everyone's reform" (Bracey, 2004); they are a type of public school, first established in 1992, that normally has fewer restrictions than most public schools and that serves a student body that, in many circumstances, has consciously opted to attend the school. Charter schools have promised high student achievement and program options that would create healthy competition in the American educational market. Currently, in California alone, there are approximately 800 active charter schools that serve more than 340,000 pupils.

As we close in on nearly twenty years of charter school reform, many charter schools could be considered successful. Every year, however, some have their charters either revoked or not renewed due to a variety of reasons including deficiencies in academic programming, poor student achievement, or improper fiscal mismanagement. According to the California Department of Education (2010), twenty-five percent of the 1,152 charter schools that have opened in California since 1992 have closed permanently, with more than forty closings due to charter revocation. To date, however, there has been very little research on charter school closures.

This qualitative study attempted to (a) determine which types of California charter schools have closed, (b) discover the reasons the schools' former leaders give for the closures, as well as compare official reasons for closure with the schools' former leaders stated reasons for closure, and (c) solicit any advice the former leaders would offer others wanting to begin, or continue to successfully operate, a charter school.

Reasons the former directors gave for their schools' closures included: (a) conflict with their sponsoring agent, (b) a negative relationship with their superintendent, (c)

problems with facilities, (d) financial problems, (e) working ineffectively with a business partner, and (f) perceived unethical behavior by a business partner. Advice offered by these directors included the importance of securing and controlling finances at the site level, developing and maintaining collaborative relationships with sponsoring agents, beginning a charter school with a specific vision, not allowing a business entity to operate a charter school, and maintaining a high level of energy and enthusiasm.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wonderful husband, Jim, and my amazing children, Harrison and Delaney. Their sacrifice, unending support, and unconditional love have allowed me to reach my goals and realize my dreams.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Bracey (2004) has categorized charter schools as "everyone's reform." This statement suggests that a diverse constituency—everyone from those who supported the "alternative school" movement of the 1970s to those who support vouchers to politicians, parents, and educators of varied philosophical and pedagogical persuasions—has embraced the potential charter school solution to our nation's educational problems.

Charter schools are a type of public school, a type that was first established in 1992. They are typically started by educators, parents, or some other organized group, sponsored by a state or local school board, and governed by a charter that creates autonomy at the school level and independence in the educational choices for teachers, parents, and students.

Charter schools, in fact, were designed to provide more freedom for educators and parents who felt that their current set of educational choices was highly constrained. In exchange for this new-found freedom, charter school operators are given responsibility for improving student achievement and insuring proper fiscal management. In fact, charter schools have the same requirements as other schools under the Federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2008. This act, in part, requires schools to achieve "Adequate Yearly Progress" (AYP) toward specified targeted increases in standardized test scores. Charter schools are expected to meet either the goals set forth in their charter, or the AYP goals set by NCLB, whichever are more rigorous. If a school, whether a regular public school or a charter school, does not meet the minimum AYP requirements, a possible consequence is reorganization of that school, including replacing faculty and

administrators. Additionally, students in schools (including charter schools) that are not meeting or exceeding AYP goals may receive supplemental services and the choice to opt out of the school they attend and move to another school within the district (Hill and Guin, 2003). Ironically, if traditional public schools do not meet their AYP goals, one of the state's suggested remedies is to convert them into charter schools.

As we close in on nearly twenty years of charter school reform, many charter schools could be considered successful (Hill & Lake, 2002; Hoxby, 2004; Edwards et. al., 2009). However, there are charter schools that have either closed or have had their charters revoked by the agency that sponsored them in the first place. The charter community, as well as the public school community at large, can learn tremendous amounts of valuable information through quantitative and qualitative analysis of these closed charter schools.

Background to the Study

As has already been noted above, charter schools are public schools that are overseen by charter authorizers and supported, financially and/or in other ways, by official sponsors. Charter schools are guided by a charter petition which outlines the purpose, vision, and mission of the school. Manno, Vanourek and Finn (2000) describe charter schools as organizations that offer us insight into what a revitalized and more responsible public education system might look like.

Minnesota passed the first charter school law in 1991, and the first United States charter school opened in that state in 1992. California soon followed, passing charter school law in 1992. There are currently more than 3,500 charter schools operating nationwide; these schools serve over one million students.

In California alone, there are approximately 800 active charter schools with more than 340,000 pupils. Within this group of California charter schools, Wells, Lopez, Scott, and Holme (1999) found that California charter schools generally fit into six categories: a) urban, ethnocentric, and grassroots charters, b) home schooling/independent study programs, c) charter schools founded by charismatic educational leaders, d) teacher-led charters, e) parent-led charters, and finally, f) entrepreneur initiated charters. These categories will be explained in greater detail in Chapter Two.

The reasons for the initial and continued infusion of charter schools into the California educational system in particular are summarized by the Excellence in Public Education Facilities Department (CA) as follows:

> Public charter schools offer an important and timely public school option to address the challenges facing our traditional education system. Charter schools are an exciting and high-potential alternative for the following reasons:
>
> 1) Most efforts to reform high-need public schools in California have failed. Charter schools provide parents the opportunity to offer real input in their child's education.
>
> 2) Charter schools give educators freedom to try new strategies to inspire student achievement.
>
> 3) Charter schools, less encumbered by the bureaucratic barriers that face other public schools, have the potential to spark system-wide change.
>
> Charter schools are schools of choice for many children and their families.

Charter school advocates and opponents alike are also interested in whether or not charter schools have had an impact on the current educational system. The logic, here, is

simple: Since charter schools are public schools, the act of sharing their successes and failures has the potential to improve the achievement of students in traditional public schools.

Of course, not all charter schools are successful. Every year a substantial number of charter schools have their charters either revoked or not renewed. According to Gary Larson from the California Charter Schools Association, about eight percent of charter schools either close voluntarily or are forced to shut down by their districts due to issues such as mismanagement or lack of facilities (Gao, 2006). At the very least, the closure of charter schools provides a potential learning opportunity; often, more can be learned from failure than success. The lessons learned from studying the reasons behind charter school closures should be useful both to those who want to start other charter schools and also those within the existing educational system who want to develop a deeper understanding of schools and the problems within them.

Statement of the Problem

Unfortunately, up to this point, there has been very little research on charter schools that have closed. We do know that some charter schools are closing, either because they have had their charters revoked or not renewed by their charter authorizer, or as a result of a self-initiated process. According to the California Department of Education (2010), twenty-five percent of the 1,152 charter schools that have opened in California since 1992 have closed permanently, with more than forty closings due to charter revocation.

We also know that, historically, the main reasons leading to charter school closures have been faulty management or deficiencies in academic programming

(Vergari, 1999). The U.S. Department of Education, for example, indicates that "failure to meet student achievement goals and expectations" is one of the most frequent reasons that charters are revoked. The achievement goal issue can be more complex for charter schools than for traditional public schools. Although the California Charter Act of 1992 holds schools accountable for meeting student outcomes, some charter schools may conceivably meet the academic goals set forth in their charter but fail according to the standards specified in the NCLB Act.

Whatever the reasons are for charter schools' closures, the literature available does not clearly specify which types of charters are closing, nor does the research fully describe terms, such as "faulty management" or "deficiencies in the academic program." The opinions and advice of those involved with the closed schools—for example, administrators, directors and/or principals—have not been explored in any systematic way. As a result, it is not clear what suggested precautionary measures leaders of other charter schools might undertake to avoid shutting the doors of their charter schools.

According to the National Study of Charter Schools conducted by the U. S. Department of Education (1998), charter schools that have been forced— or that have decided on their own— to close, represent a very small proportion of the number of schools granted charters. A study conducted in 2002 by The Center for Educational Reform found, once again, that the number of closures was relatively small when compared to the growing number of charter schools that have been created. Unfortunately, neither study explored the reasons for closure from the perspective of the administrators that worked at those particular schools. Consequently, there is a need to study charter schools that have closed and why closures have occurred, so that those

interested in opening charter schools in the future may learn from their colleagues' unique experiences.

Additionally, as noted above, traditional public schools that have failed in the eyes of the federal government may convert to charter school status under the regulations *ofNCLB.* Those involved in this transitional process may also benefit from the lessons learned by those who have been a part of a charter school closure.

Purpose of the Study

This study, therefore, attempted to discover the internal and external reason(s) the schools' former leaders give for the closures, investigate what (if anything) those administrators involved feel could have prevented closure, and explore the advice they would give to current and future charter school leaders. Schools categorized as employing home schooling/independent study programs were initially excluded from this study, since the focus of the study is on charter schools in physical locations that are more reflective of typical educational settings; however, two schools were miscategorized within closure documentation, and I did not clearly understand their hybrid nature (a combination of independent study and onsite student/teacher meetings) until the qualitative interviews occurred. Charter schools identified by the U.S. Department of Education as "abandoned," "inactive," or "withdrawn" are also not included in this study. These identifiers are unpacked more fully in Chapter Three of this study.

The following questions were the initial guide for this dissertation study:

1) Using the Wells, Lopez, Scott, and Holme (1999) typology, which types of California charter schools have closed?

2) What are the reasons for the school closure?
    a) What was the official legal reason for closure?
    b) What reasons do administrators give for the school closing?
3) In retrospect, what, if anything, do the administrators of closed charter schools believe could have been done (through training, education, or other means) to prevent the school from closing?
4) What information do the administrators feel would be helpful to those wanting to open charter schools in the future?

The study, however, changed as data were collected. The explanation of the evolution of the study is addressed further in Chapter Three. This study now addresses the following two research questions:

1) What are the reasons former charter school leaders give for the closure of their schools?
2) What advice do these former charter school leaders offer to those who are interested in starting or continuing a charter school?

Significance of the Study

In addition to assisting those who are interested in starting and/or maintaining charter school status, this study impacts those involved in traditional public schools due to the requirements of NCLB. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2010), children who attend schools that are identified as needing improvement have the opportunity to attend charter schools within their district. Results of this study can influence how traditional public school management can improve their practices so that they can meet the federal goals set forth for them. Additionally, schools that remain in the

"needs improvement" category according to NCLB for more than three years are subject to corrective action and restructuring (including a takeover or complete reorganization of the school), which includes converting a school to charter school status. The results of this dissertation study may be of help to those who find themselves converting from traditional public school to charter school status. Finally, the information gathered from this study can assist those colleges and universities that are considering or currently operating charter school development programs. The conclusions from this study could guide curriculum development and impact the incorporation of certain key elements into college programs that will help train successful charter school operators and employees.

Overview of Subsequent Chapters

Chapter Two situates this study in the context of current charter school literature by organizing the literature into categories which are helpful in analyzing and evaluating charter school performance, successes, and closures. Chapter Three describes the original research design, the problems that arose with that design, and the methods that were employed in the re-designed study. Chapter Four presents the case studies that were constructed from the interview data, as well as cross-case analysis which generated themes across some of the case studies. The final chapter focuses on the issues that emerged when looking across the nine cases, discusses implications for policy and practice, and considers the implications of this study for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This dissertation study will examine charter schools that have closed with an eye toward beginning to understand the issues mentioned in the previous chapter. Before describing the methods that will be used in this examination, however, the existing literature will be reviewed. The review will be organized around the following topics: characteristics of charter schools, charter schools' impact on the existing educational system, measures of success and achievement, and charter school problems/ reasons for failure.

Characteristics of Charter Schools

Typologies

According to Wells, Lopez, Scott, and Holme (1999), there are six categories of charter schools:

(a). Urban/Ethnocentric/Grassroots: these schools are born out of frustration with an educational system that does not address a particular group's history, needs, or experiences.

(b). Home school/independent study: These schools attract a wide variety of families who have the freedom to spend time with their children and who range from conservative to liberal.

(c). Charters founded by charismatic educational leaders: Schools in this category are founded on a desire for more curricular, pedagogical, and/or fiscal autonomy from the local school district.

(d). Teacher-led charters: Schools in this category are more focused on instructional programs and also tend to be conversion schools (schools that had previously been traditional public schools).

(e). Parent-led charters: These charter schools have a core of extremely involved parents who work with educators to move toward writing policies and procedures for the charter.

(f). Entrepreneur-initiated charters: These schools are typically in urban areas and tend to serve at-risk populations.

Although the use of the categories developed in the above-mentioned study is appropriate for this dissertation since Wells et. al. developed the typology exclusively utilizing California charter schools, it is important to take note of searches for other typologies and other attempts to categorize charter schools. Carpenter (2005), for instance, found that charter schools in Arizona, California, Florida, Michigan, and Texas fell into five categories: traditional, progressive, vocational, general and alternative delivery. As defined in the aforementioned study, traditional charter schools "stress high standards in academics and behavior, rigorous classes, lots of homework, and other earmarks of a back-to-basics approach" (p. 3). Progressive charter schools focus on holistic learning and emphasize "student-centered, hands-on, project-based, and cooperative" (p. 4) activities. Vocational charter schools focus on practicality and work-study programs that give students real life experiences in their education. General charter schools in no way look any different than other traditional public schools in the district in which they reside. These schools tended to be conversion charter schools—schools that converted from a traditional public school to a charter school for a variety of reasons.

Finally, alternative delivery charter schools include home study and/or virtual, online classroom approaches to teaching and learning.

Another study categorized charter schools by their founding organizations or organizers (Henig, Holyoke, Brown, & Lacireno-Paquet, 2005). The general categories generated from this multiple state study were mission-oriented and market-oriented schools. Little evidence was found to document variations across the two categories. Results of this study indicated that "external environment and core educational tasks may impose similar patterns of behavior on charter schools regardless of their differing organizational roots" (p. 37).

Measures of Success and Achievement

It can be argued that charter schools were invented, partially, to create greater accountability in public school education (Manno and Finn, 1998). Student achievement is invariably linked to accountability, which in turn affects the success or failure of a charter school. This section will review literature on accountability, student achievement, and factors that influence student achievement within the charter school movement.

Accountability

According to Griffin and Wohlstetter (2001), charter school accountability is "the process by which authorizers of charter schools and other stakeholders, such as parents and students, ensure that charter schools meet their goals" (p. 348). Accountability has been found to be the most challenging issue surrounding charter schools in existence for at least five years (Manno, Finn, and Vanourek, 2000). The United States Department of Education, in fact, indicates that "the failure to meet student achievement goals and expectations" as one of the three most frequently cited reasons that charters are revoked.

Because charter schools have more freedom, they are also seen as having a greater responsibility and greater accountability. As public schools, charter schools are accountable for, primarily, the use of their funds and student achievement. If anything, accountability pressures are greater in charter schools than in regular schools because the price for that freedom from rules and regulations is accountability and results (Bracey, 2005; Griffin and Wohlstetter, 2001).

The California Charter Act of 1992 holds charter schools accountable for meeting measurable student outcomes (such as California standardized tests and the California High School Exit Exam). Charter schools in California must participate in the same state-wide testing as non-charter public schools and are required to meet their Annual Yearly Progress under the stipulations of NCLB.

California charter school law provides a method of switching from rule-based (certain things must be done) to performance-based (results are what matter) accountability systems (Edwards et. al., 2009). Charter schools in California may utilize assessment tools other than state tests—e.g., various forms of performance-based assessment—as part of the school's own instructional program to determine whether or not there is student growth in academic achievement.

Some charter school supporters point to the closure of charter schools as evidence that the charter concept works. By this, they mean that charter schools are being held accountable and will be closed if they do not succeed on a variety of levels (U. S. Department of Education, 1998).

The examination of charter schools suggests another kind of accountability to which charter schools are subject. As eluded to earlier, charter schools have the potential

to serve as labs for the rest of the educational community (Adelman, 2000). Research conducted by Bohte (2004) suggests that charter schools may promote systemic improvements in public education. A legitimate question, therefore, is: Have charter schools lived up to the expectation that they will stimulate change in the existing educational system?

A number of studies conclude that charter schools *modestly* influence overall performance improvements for students enrolled in comparable traditional public schools (Bohte, 2004; Zimmer et. al., 2003; Manno et. al., 2000). In a report entitled, *"Charter Schools: Still Making Waves"*, The Center for Education Reform (2005) states that the presence of charter schools in a district does appear to help bring about stronger performance gains for students enrolled in traditional public schools in the same district or geographic area. For example, a study done by Hoxby in 2001 demonstrated that traditional public schools in Arizona and Michigan that had charter schools in close proximity showed greater scores in math and/or reading than traditional public schools that did not have charters within their areas. Although the finding may seem positive for charter schools, it is unclear whether or not selection bias was taken into account; in other words, parents or caregivers who choose to send their children to charter schools seem to be well-informed, know their options for educational choices, and typically intend to send their children to a particular charter school.

On the other hand, some charter schools maintain their neighborhood school status. In these cases, parents simply send their child to the charter school because it is the local school their child would have attended whether or not the school was charter. What is clear, however, is that charter schools, in at least some cases, create a market-like

environment that offer parents and students the ability to leave under-performing schools and attend more innovative and less bureaucratic educational settings.

In theory, charter schools commit themselves to educational outcomes through charter contracts. Each charter school contract is a compact that binds the school to certain student outcomes and a system of accountability in exchange for state funds. As mentioned earlier, states relieve charter schools from certain state laws and regulations in exchange for charter petitions and agreements that outline specific outcomes. Educational plans and precise educational goals for students must be articulated in the charter, along with the means to achieve the defined end (Mead & Green, 2001).

Charter schools are also held accountable by presenting their progress to their chartering agency (generally every five years, depending on the terms of the state's charter school laws) in order to renew their charter school status. Charter school laws from state to state typically require three specific criteria (Griffin & Wohlstetter, 2001; Finn, Bierlein & Manno, 1996):

(a). Reasonable progress on meeting each school's own goals for its students.

(b). Standards of fiscal management concerning the proper use of funds.

(c). General probity and avoidance of scandal.

How these criteria are measured as well as the definitions of terms such as "reasonable," "proper use of funds," and "scandal" are unclear and vary from state to state and district to district.

Although there are some similar (albeit general) requirements that all charter schools are accountable for, one factor is certain: charter schools must be held

responsible for producing high student performance. The next subtopic reviews some of the key literature on the topic of student achievement.

Student Achievement

This section is divided into two topics. First, I will discuss the comparisons made between the student achievement in charter and non-charter schools. Second, I will introduce and analyze the literature regarding the use of standardized testing to measure student achievement in charter schools.

Comparisons between charter and non-charter schools. Current research demonstrates inconsistency and contradictory findings with respect to whether or not charter schools are more effective than traditional schools in promoting higher student achievement (Slovacek, et. al., 2002; Hill & Lake, 2002; Manno, 2001). For example, in February 2002, the *Boston Herald* reported that many charter schools were outperforming schools in their home districts. *The San Joaquin Record* (February 2006) also detailed the above-average Academic Performance Index scores of three local area charter schools. Conversely, *Newsweek* (July 2002) and *The New York Times* (August 2006) noted that recent reports on charter schools reflect that charters are not fulfilling all of their promises of better educational performance.

Hill and Lake (2002) compared test scores between charter schools and traditional public schools in ten states. The socioeconomic status and race of students were controlled in establishing comparison groups. Additionally, test scores were weighted to reflect school size. The study's findings indicated that, while Colorado charter schools had outperformed their non-charter public school counterparts at a statistically significant level, the charter schools in the other states had not.

Another study conducted by Carolyn Hoxby of Harvard University (2004) compared fourth grade students' reading and math proficiency in charter schools and traditional public schools in the same neighborhoods. Hoxby compared elementary charter schools with traditional elementary neighborhood schools that had similar student populations. In the study by Hoxby, charter students generally outperformed their peers in states where charter schools are well-established. There is a potential problem with the design of Hoxby's study, however. Although charter schools and traditional public schools may share neighborhoods, their student populations may be slightly to dramatically different due to enrollment procedures, even if charter schools use lotteries as the author suggests. Many times, the families that "opt in" to charter schools are well-informed and select the charter school carefully. Additionally, this study only looked at fourth grade standardized test scores, although the study included ninety-nine percent of elementary charter schools.

A logistic regression study that controlled for school characteristics and was conducted by researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (2004) concluded that in all but one eighth grade level cohort, "charter schools are better than traditional public schools at insuring that students achieve the proficient level of performance" (p. 26). As mentioned with the Hoxby study, this study does not seem to have been controlled for selection bias and, consequently, for selection effects.

Finally, another study reported by the Charter School Development Center in 2003 suggests that charter school performance may increase with time. The study found California charter schools open for five or more years outperformed all California traditional public schools; however, California charter schools open for less than five

years fell behind all California traditional public schools *and* California charter schools open for five or more years. This report utilized standardized test scores (the California Standards Test and California High School Exit Exam) to compare the groups of schools. According to this study, over 60% of charter schools did not receive API growth scores, and 40% did not receive base scores. The only two comparison categories in this study were "all public schools" and "active charter schools," with the "active charter schools" separated into those open for more than five years and those open less than five years. As has been the case with most studies that compare student achievement in traditional public schools with student achievement in charter schools, selection bias could be a factor in this study and could possibly impact student performance.

Since 1997, there have been eight Federal reports on charter schools issued by the U. S. Department of Education. These reports generally have concluded that charter schools are performing below traditional public schools. For example, in the 2004 *Evaluation of the Public Charter School Program*, charter schools in five states cited in the report were less likely to meet the state performance standards than the traditional public schools. The reasons for the underperformance are unclear, however, and are not addressed in the report.

Additionally, the American Federation of Teachers reported poor charter school performance in their 2004 *Charter School Achievement on the 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress.* According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), students in charter schools had lower achievement in grades four and eight compared to traditional public school students. Additionally, there were less charter school students performing at the "at or above Basic" and "at or above Proficient" levels

as compared to traditional public school peers. As with other studies, the two comparison categories were "charter" and "other public". Furthermore, the only measurement utilized was standardized test scores.

In 2009, EdSource published a Performance Update on California charter schools. After adjusting for differences in student demographics, such as average parent education, special program participation (e.g., Free and Reduced Lunch, English Language Learner programs, and Special Education), and student ethnicity, three key conclusions were found:

(a). Charter high school students scored moderately higher on standardized tests than their non-charter high school peers in English, but lower in math.

(b). Charter middle school students outscored their non-charter school counterparts on standardized tests.

(c). Students in charter elementary schools scored lower on standardized tests than students in non-charter elementary schools.

Once again, the only measurement utilized was standardized test scores, and selection bias could contribute to students' performance on standardized tests.

Current literature is often unclear as to how or to what degree charter schools are measured, and whether or not they are more successful than their traditional public school counterparts. Scarce are longitudinal studies that truly compare similar charter schools. Evidence as to whether or not charter schools cause increased academic achievement is limited. Additionally, new charter schools will challenge old ways of thinking, and will question current methods of learning and performance; charter schools introduce the possibility of evaluating schools using a different scale (Kolderie, 2005).

However, since the use of standardized tests to measure student achievement is so universally accepted and, more often than not, required, the following section will specifically discuss the use of standardized testing to determine student achievement in the charter school setting.

Standardized testing. According to Griffin and Wohlstetter (2001), the majority of charter schools still use standardized tests as the primary means for measuring the success or failure of their programs. Lack of experience, expertise, and time, as well as state and federal mandates, cause charter school operators and teachers to fall back on assessments that are already in existence, even though those assessments may not accurately measure the student population a particular charter school is serving or the unique goals it is pursuing. A lack of proper growth measurement means that many charter schools lack precise operational goals against which their performance can be measured. To add to the ambiguity and confusion, the criteria for charter renewal have yet to be clearly specified in many states (Hess, 2001; Vegari, 1999). The data reported are very much dependent on who is providing the numbers.

Some charters could conceivably meet the goals stated in their charters, but fail when measured solely by standardized test results. This conflict is explained by Manno:

> It's vital for a charter operator to recognize that items like state-wide tests are part of the accountability deal with the state and the charter authorizer. It is naive to design a curriculum that doesn't prepare students to do well on them. Conversely, the chartering authority must realize both on the testing side and when designing other forms of accountability monitoring, that if it wants some school to be truly different—especially if it wants them to serve at-risk youngsters—it has got to be

> imaginative and sensitive in monitoring their performance. There is no simple solution to this dilemma, but a charter accountability compact should be clear about what's expected by the charter authorizer. (Manno, 1999. p. 429)

Using standardized tests as a single indicator of charter school performance is flawed. Standardized tests are not completely accurate if used as an independent measure of success or failure, since these types of tests may not uniformly measure student performance or growth (Agostini, 2003). The problem is often compounded in that charter schools, by design, have their own idiosyncratic goals along with more conventionally accepted ones.

Factors That Influence Student Achievement

There are many factors that impact student achievement. This section will review school culture and the impact of autonomy as two key areas that the literature identifies as influences on the performance of students in charter schools.

School culture. School culture includes a collection of the values, beliefs, and practices shared and exhibited by members of a school organization (Peterson & Deal, 1998; Wagner, 2006). According to Paris (1998), the reality of reform is defined as creating a culture of belief—believing in one's goals and the ability to achieve them. Paris discusses the philosophies behind meeting the standards (i.e. academic achievement) and the creation of charter schools. According to Paris, freeing up professionals to implement innovative strategies will lead to real change. The author sees culture, not necessarily a particular instructional strategy or assessment, as critical.

The idea of school culture is seen again in a 1999 study conducted by Wayson. Wayson suggests that the culture of traditional and charter schools, not the label of the

school, is a primary source of student achievement. The author notes the reasons for the creation of charter schools can be linked to global economic competition, low achievement, poor discipline, private schools' perceived superiority, and declining social values. Charter schools provide more choice for parents, and allow teachers to be more innovative and address student needs more appropriately. It is unclear, however, whether or not it is easier to achieve the culture the author describes in charter schools versus traditional public schools.

Autonomy. Some would argue that autonomy is at the heart of charter school success and positive student achievement. A study conducted by Wohlstetter, Wenning, and Briggs (1995) focused on conditions that are necessary for charter schools to operate autonomously in order to enhance student achievement. The authors evaluated the charter school legislation and levels of autonomy attributed to charter schools in eleven states. Based on the authors' evaluation of the schools, and corresponding charter school law, autonomy is defined as the absence of constraints from external sources, but not complete freedom. The authors conclude that autonomy from higher levels of government, local autonomy (specifying own goals and programs and methods for achieving said goals), and consumer sovereignty all contribute to charter school success.

In his book, *The Charter School Challenge: Avoiding the Pitfalls, Fulfilling the Promise,* Hassel (1999) maintains that "without autonomy, charter schools cannot provide unique educational options for children. They cannot serve as experimental laboratories or lighthouses from which other children can learn" (p. 78). The author's statement is inferred from his conclusions regarding existing charter school research.

Additionally, Stewart (2002) defines the link between charter school autonomy and student achievement:

> Charter schools allow educational designers the freedom to conceive and execute academic programs that must meet specific state standards and criteria but have extreme latitude in the design of methods to reach those standards. Thus, a charter school can be designed based on an educational model that is deemed by the designers to afford the best path for students toward achievement, (p.6)

The author bases her conclusion on a single case study of a charter school in Houston. Although a case study can allow for detailed and often intimate findings, it is difficult to generalize the conclusions.

Charter Schools' Impact on the Existing Educational System

Charter school advocates and opponents alike are interested in whether or not charter schools have an impact on the current educational system. Adelman (2000) discusses the potential of charter schools to serve as labs for the rest of the educational community. Experiments, as Adelman states, do not necessarily succeed or fail; they prove or disprove current instructional practices, school structure, and educational philosophies. Charter schools are public schools, so the act of sharing successes and failures has the potential to improve the achievement of students in traditional public schools.

There are barriers to the sort of sharing that Adelman alludes to, however. Common barriers associated with collaborative efforts between charter schools and traditional public schools include: scarcity of time and resources, type of charter school, and the charter granting agency. Also, there seems to be little collaboration between

leaders of traditional public schools and leaders of charter schools. Sometimes, there are even adversarial relationships that develop between the two. In a January 2010 interview on MSNBC's *Morning Joe,* the president of the American Federation of Teachers commented on the strained relationship between traditional schools and charter schools in the state of New York. The problem, she summarized, is that the system needs to ensure that charter schools are "taking the same kids as all other public schools."

O'Sullivan, Nagle, and Spence (2000) conducted surveys of districts and charter schools in North Carolina to find the impact of charter schools on their local school districts in the first year of charter school existence in that state. Thirty-four charter schools and their twenty-four districts were included. Most districts and their charter schools viewed their relationships as fair or good. Charter school directors saw their schools as instruments of change for their districts. Districts viewed charter schools as having serious financial implications. Districts and charter school personnel saw charters as increasing the number of schools of choice and enhancing district public relations efforts. In conclusion, the perceived impact of charter schools varied: charter school employees viewed their impact as positive, while district employees saw charter school's impact primarily as that of a financial burden.

A comparative study of Colorado teachers found that charter school teachers and traditional public school teachers are more alike than they are different (Bomotti, Ginsber, and Cobb, 2000). The fact that teachers in both settings are more similar than different suggests that charter schools have not excelled in areas of innovation or positive impact as initially envisioned; consequently, the authors conclude that they do not have the sort of positive impact as initially envisioned. In contrast, Rofes (1998) established

that the cultures and climates of nearby traditional public schools almost always changed when a new charter school came into the community, but these changes were not predictable.

Results of a study conducted by Bohte (2004) demonstrated that charter schools contribute to modest overall performance improvements for students enrolled in traditional public schools. Charter schools help bring about stronger performance gains for low-income students enrolled in traditional public schools. Bohte's argument is that charter schools create a market-like environment that offer parents and students the ability to leave under-performing schools and attend more innovative and less bureaucratic educational settings. Bohte believes that charter schools may promote systemic improvements in public education. Conversely, data from a 2002 study by Howe and Betebenner indicated that school choice had not resulted in improved achievement in the district.

Russo and Massucci (1999) found five reasons to support the finding that charter school laws have less impact on large urban districts than in other areas. Most urban districts experience increasing school-aged populations, most large urban districts contain only a few charter schools, more time is needed to study charter school law since most urban charter schools have existed for approximately ten years, urban charter schools are difficult to reform because of their size, and some urban districts viewed charter schools as a distraction. A 2005 study by Gregg Vanourek suggested that charter schools have yet to demonstrate significant impact on the traditional public schools in their areas and/or districts.

Problems with Charter Schools and Reasons for Failure

The development and maintenance of a charter school can be an arduous process which must balance curriculum, finances, marketing, and the daily maintenance of an organization which affects so many children's lives (Nathan, 1996). Along with the growth and responsibility of developing and maintaining a charter school comes the unavoidable need for some charter schools to close.

Closures

This section of the literature review discusses the current number of charter school closures, as well as the legal reasons for the closures, and areas of need for charter schools.

Number of closures. As of February 2010, the Center for Educational Reform reported that six hundred fifty seven charter schools have closed across the nation since 1992. This number represents over twelve percent of all charters ever opened.

Although specific numbers seem to vary, according to the Center for Education Reform web site (2010), of the more than nine hundred and fifty charter schools that have opened since California enacted charter school law in 1992, over one hundred schools (or about eleven percent) have closed. Ninety-five percent of closures occur within five years.

Legal reasons for closures. As of 2001, most charter school closures nationwide were due to fiscal, administrative, or ethical violations, but few had been closed due to under-performance (Griffin & Wohlstetter, 2001). A 2002 study by the Center for Education Reform (CER) found that out of one hundred ninety-four charter school closures, nine percent were due to facility issues. Of the eighty-four that never opened

after receiving their charter, twenty-seven percent were due to facility issues (for example, failure to secure a physical location or inadequate space). Since various centers and research groups report "closures" differently, there are major discrepancies in the research as to how many charter schools have closed, what types of charter schools have closed, and for what reasons. Manno has reported that, since charter schools first opened, more than two hundred failed (or failing) schools have been closed on fiscal, educational, and organizational grounds (2002).

In 2009, the National Charter Schools Institute published a report by Dr. Brian L. Carpenter regarding charter schools that had closed through 2007. Carpenter focused his study on charter school authorizers. Out of a pool of 878 agencies which authorized charter schools across the nation, 454 responded to his request for information. Of those 454 agencies, 83 stated that they had closed at least one charter school. Interviews were conducted with 52% of those 83 agencies, which represented 100 closed charter schools in nineteen states. This study suggested the following "lessons" we should learn from charter schools that had closed:

(a). Insufficient enrollment is the reason most charters closed.

(b). Sloppy governance was prevalent in schools that closed.

(c). When non-renewal occurred, academic underperformance was the most common reason.

(d). On average, most dissolved charter schools operated less than five years.

(e). More than a fifth of failed schools mismanaged their financial affairs (Carpenter, 2009).

This study did not include some large states (e.g., Arizona) that have a significant number of charter schools. Also, as mentioned earlier, this study focused on the perspectives of charter school authorizers. Charter school authorizers may or may not have a true understanding of the day-to-day activities and procedures that occur at the school once the charter has been authorized. Authorizers may want to see academic growth after a three or five year renewal period, but beyond that, there is variation in their level of involvement on the front lines of charter school operation.

Carpenter also offered suggestions after each "lesson" that was learned. The issue with those suggestions, however, is that they were intended for three groups: charter boards/executives, state associations, and authorizers. There was no mention of suggestions for those who dealt with the operation of the charter schools on a consistent and regular basis. Since "executives" are in the same suggestion category as "charter boards", it is unclear whether executives include personnel such as the directors, administrators, or principals.

Areas of Need

A study done by Griffin and Wohlstetter (2001) utilized focus groups that were comprised of charter school directors/founders, administration, and teachers from Boston, Los Angeles, and Minneapolis. Among other things, the focus groups revealed that there were some difficulties associated with developing coherent instructional programs. These difficulties were caused by vague school missions and the pressure to create something quickly within a short timeframe. Accountability systems were usually created internally, and consequences for poor student performance from one district to another were inconsistent. Finally, this study uncovered that many charter school leaders exhibited a

rebellious attitude, which typically stemmed from challenging the status quo while inside the traditional public school system.

In a significant finding in their research, Griffin and Wohlstetter discovered the following:

> The ability of charter school leaders to create an effective balance oftentimes appeared to be hampered by their lack of professional knowledge and experience in the management area. Few charter school leaders had a strong professional understanding of participative management or high-involvement organizations, further complicating attempts to establish a decentralized system that also was effective, (p. 355)

Three general areas of need surrounding charter schools were revealed in the above-mentioned study: developing an instructional/curricular program, developing a meaningful accountability system, and developing school management/leadership processes. Although these areas were identified, little was mentioned in terms of specific solutions or recommendations to avoid or improve upon areas of need. Additionally, the participants in the focus groups had perspectives that came from their involvement in large, urban school districts.

Manno and Finn (1998) conducted a two-year research project which found many unique problems with charter schools that made it through their first year. These problems included: meager facilities that place stress on the program and frustrate people, signs of burnout, low first year test scores, and pressure to add more than neighboring traditional schools. Again, no attempt was made to offer recommendations or suggestions for how these problems may be solved or minimized. In later research, Finn (2002) adds:

> Schools turn out to be exceedingly complex organizations that must juggle myriad competing pressures. Starting such an institution from scratch is truly daunting. The political compromises that nearly every state has made in its charter law mean that founding a successful charter school entails finding or building a facility, making do with partial funding, and enduring a lot of red tape. (p.93)

A 2002 review by Manno suggests that charter schools face a list of issues that impact their ability to function and maintain their operations, including: local opposition, interest group attacks, and enemies from within. Manno stresses the need for more local and national charter organizations that allow charter school operators, staff, parents, and students to network, become more knowledgeable, and advocate for themselves.

A 1998 UCLA charter school study, conducted by principal investigator Amy Stuart Wells, found that issues surrounding charter schools also included: not being held accountable for academic achievement, need for private resources in order to survive, and dependency on strong, well-connected leaders.

Cobb and Suarez (2000) found that issues faced by North Carolina charter schools also included the need for leaders that had more entrepreneurial and interpersonal skills. This study additionally cited the need to increase salaries in order to attract more experienced, credentialed teachers. It is unclear whether or not those involved in the charter schools would have made the same recommendations as the authors.

Malloy (2000) conducted a case study on a charter high school in North Carolina. Difficulties included implementing instructional strategies that matched the vision of the charter. Another secondary charter school was studied by Passe (2000). The author's conclusion was that in order to overcome extraordinary barriers, charters must be

exceptional in the following areas: cooperation with their school system, leadership, resources, teachers, and curriculum. Areas that the author viewed as needing improvement included: effective and experienced leadership, properly trained teachers who can effectively teach at-risk students, more innovative instructional strategies that addressed students' needs, and curriculum appropriate for students' learning abilities. Again, how charter schools are to approach these issues remains unclear.

Conclusion

The common thread which ties all of the literature together is that the research has been done within the context of charter schools that currently exist, or existed at the time of the study. Any failures that are noted in this literature are shortcomings of charter schools that are still operational. There is a need to examine the implications of charters that have closed, interview those involved in the closure, and learn from their unfortunate failure as a way to improve the charter school movement.

With some exceptions, current research has emphasized the effectiveness of charter schools. Unfortunately, there is a lack of published research that discusses a) which types of charter schools have closed, and b) what advice those involved desire to give to others who want to embark on their own charter school journey. There is also a need to know what skills, experiences, structures, and supports were lacking in charter schools that were forced to close their doors. A proactive approach needs to be taken in the development and sustainability of charter schools, not only for the sake of the students whose families have chosen to enroll their children in charter schools, but also for the growth of our educational system. As part of his interview with *The Plain Dealer*

(Ohio) in March of 2009, President Barack Obama encapsulated the importance of the existence of accountable charter schools:

> We've got to experiment with ways to provide a better education experience for our kids, and some charters are doing outstanding jobs. So the bottom line is to try to create innovation within the public school system that can potentially be scaled up, but also to make sure that we are maintaining very high standards for any charter school that's created.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURES

Although there have been several efforts to list California charter schools that have closed, as well as document the officially articulated reasons for their closures (California Department of Education, 2006; The Center for Educational Reform, 2009; Manno, Finn, and Vanourek, 2000), there has been little, if any, attempt to find underlying causes of the closures. A significant amount of knowledge resides in the administrators and directors of these closed charter schools.

This chapter first summarizes the initial research design which intended to utilize document analysis, quantitative survey results, and qualitative interviews. Second, the implementation difficulties with the quantitative surveys are addressed, along with the need for a shift in the initial research design. Third, a description of the qualitative procedures that became the primary data source for the two newly designed research questions are discussed. Fourth, the data analysis procedures for the two new research questions are outlined. Finally, the delimitations and limitations of the study are reviewed.

Initial Research Design

Initially, this study attempted to employ both qualitative and quantitative research methods to query former administrators as to the underlying reasons for their schools' closures. At the onset of the study, the methods that were scheduled to be used included document analysis, the distribution of a largely quantitative survey, and qualitative interviewing.

Rationale for Participant Selection

Administrators were chosen as the focus of this study over other personnel (such as teachers and other charter employees), parents, or community members because of the direct and influential role that charter school administrators/directors held during their tenure in a charter school. According to a finding in a 1998 UCLA Charter School Study led by Amy Stuart Wells, charter schools depend on leaders who are powerful and have influential connections. According to the same study, it is common for charter school administrators or directors to have been directly involved in the chartering process of their school, which would provide them with a valuable perspective in understanding the circumstances surrounding the school's closure. Some of the respondents did assist in developing their charter schools and writing the charter proposals; others were hired shortly after the charters had been approved by the sponsoring district or county office of education.

Additionally, administrators were good candidates for this study because of the practical need for one point-of-contact for a school that has already been closed and because the point-of-contact selected should be comparable from site to site. As a former charter school administrator, I also believe that administrators have the opportunity to observe a wide range of perspectives at their school sites, including the viewpoints of parents, teachers, students, and the chartering agency, which makes their knowledge valuable and diverse.

Administrators of schools labeled as "abandoned," "inactive," or "withdrawn" were not contacted because these schools (or potential schools): a) were vacated without formal closure procedures, b) had charters that were approved, but did not secure a

student population due to an issue such as a lack of facility, or c) had approved charters, or charters that were in the approval process, but were withdrawn from the process by the submitter(s). These types of schools were not categorized under the four legal reasons listed in California Charter School Law, which include: a) violation of the standards set forth in the school's charter, b) fiscal mismanagement, c) failure to meet outcomes for student achievement specified in school's charter, or d) violation of any provision of law (California Education Code Section 47607(c)). Therefore, these three types of categories for failed charter schools did not fit the criterion established for the study.

Document Analysis

Miller (1997), as cited in Patton (2002), argues that documents are "socially constructed realities that warrant study in their own right" (p. 498). The analysis of documents provided information to determine the official, legal reason why the school was not given charter renewal or was revoked. Written rationale for the closure of the school provided me with some of the historical and contextual information I needed in order to proceed with, and attempt to triangulate, the qualitative interviews. Since this piece of data collection was utilized in order to answer the revised research questions, a more detailed discussion of document analysis will occur later in the chapter.

Locating Survey Participants

I initially attempted to contact the entire population of approximately one hundred thirty-nine former California charter school administrators/directors (through the 2004/2005 school year) via email to complete a twenty question survey (See Appendix B) regarding their experiences with a charter school closure or revocation. For the purposes of this study, administrators were those that held the title of "director,"

"principal," or other title that signaled that they were the formal leader of the school. Since there is some discrepancy among available lists of closed and revoked charters, my primary source for locating administrators was through the list generated by the California Department of Education (CDE) Web site.

Survey Design

A survey was initially used to gather a portion of the data for this study. A twenty question self-administered survey was developed that generated ideas regarding the relationships that charter administrators had with their personnel and their chartering agency, as well as information regarding their preparedness, or lack thereof, for leading a charter school. An online survey program (Survey Monkey) was utilized in order to allow easy access and clear design for those participating in this research study.

Qualitative Interview Design

The study moved from a mixed-methodology structure to an almost exclusively qualitative one (the limited survey data that I was able to gather were used to identify interviewees and also to help triangulate interview data); therefore, the primary method of data collection became qualitative interviews. The qualitative interview design that was used merits its own section, and is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Implementation Processes and Difficulties

Unfortunately, I was unable to fully execute the methods intended to be used in the initial design of the study. Issues that arose with document analysis are discussed below, even though I was still able to use outside sources to triangulate some interview data. This section also outlines the fatal problems that occurred with the quantitative surveys.

Document Analysis

Document analysis did provide information regarding documented legal reasons for charter school closures. A closure list from a 2009 report by The Center for Educational Reform documents official reasons for some charter school closures. Missing or more recent closure information was provided by board minutes from the sponsoring district or county office of education, or closure lists available through the California Department of Education. Newspaper articles also served to triangulate data. Documents were located on the Internet, and phone calls and e-mail correspondence (primarily with county offices of education and school districts) were used to locate additional information.

There are, however, some discrepancies and inaccuracies in the documents that list charter school closures which made it difficult to locate consistent information. For example, two schools that had not been labeled solely as a home school/independent study program became the focus of qualitative interviews. I was unaware of the nature of the schools (which were more of a "hybrid" model: partially a home school program and partially an on-site program) until I conducted the qualitative interviews. Although I chose to include those two schools because of the valuable information generated through the interview, the confusion could have been avoided had the charter school closure lists been more accurate and reliable.

Surveys

Surveys were designed with the intent to collect former charter school administrators' opinions regarding the closures of the schools, but there were significant problems with this component of the study's original design.

An introductory letter accompanied each e-mail request for participation in the study (See Appendix A). Surveys were sent out multiple times, and many e-mail addresses were no longer valid. Internet searches were used to try to locate potential respondents, but the further back a school had closed, the more difficult it became to locate certain individuals. Contacting districts to locate individuals also proved to be futile. As district personnel changed, connections to past schools and former administrators became more removed and often were non-existent.

I was only able to secure responses from fourteen percent of this sample, which produced ungeneralizable data. The small response rate did not lend itself to any significant data analysis; therefore, the results of the surveys are not presented within the framework of this study. There may be mention of survey responses, however, within the context of each individual qualitative case study if the information is relevant and enhances the data generated from the qualitative interviews.

Although not enough data were generated through survey responses to fulfill the initial quantitative portion of this study, the information obtained from the surveys helped to establish relevant and meaningful background information for the qualitative interviews. Those surveys that were returned did play a key role in locating and securing qualitative interview participants.

I attempted to contact twelve of the twenty survey respondents for a qualitative interview based on their expressed interest in further participation in the study. One survey respondent expressed interest in being contacted, but did not return phone calls; another respondent did not return emails; a third gave an inaccurate phone number. In total, nine interviews were conducted.

Research Questions

As mentioned in Chapter One, this research study initially contained the following research questions:

5) Using the Wells, Lopez, Scott, and Holme (1999) typology, which types of California charter schools have closed?
6) What are the reasons for the school closure?
    a) What was the official legal reason for closure?
    b) What reasons do administrators give for the school closing?
7) In retrospect, what, if anything, do the administrators of closed charter schools believe could have been done (through training, education, or other means) to prevent the school from closing?
8) What information do the administrators feel would be helpful to those wanting to open charter schools in the future?

Due to the lack of data generated through the quantitative surveys, this study now focuses solely on the following research questions:

3) What are the reasons former charter school leaders give for the closure of their schools?
4) What advice do these former charter school leaders offer to those who are interested in starting or continuing a charter school?

Qualitative Interview Procedures

Due to the evolution of this study to a purely qualitative research design, the qualitative interviews have become the cornerstone of the data collection and analysis. The information gathered from these interviews generated the heartiest and most

meaningful data, which gave a contextually grounded description of the opinions and advice of former charter school administrators. The interview data described both former charter school directors' perceptions of the schools they had attempted to lead, why the contexts they once led no longer exist, and the lessons they learned and can pass on to others wishing to start and/or lead a charter school.

The primary method of data collection used in this study was topical interviewing, which is interviewing that focuses more on a program, issue, or process than on people's lives (Glesne, 1999). In other words, I was not concerned whether or not the interviewees' actions or inactions personally contributed to the closure of the schools, although it is quite possible that the formal leader may have contributed, directly or indirectly, to the closure. Instead, my interest focused on perceptions about the reasons regarding why the schools closed, and, more importantly, the interviewees' opinions of what could have prevented the closures, as well as what advice they had for those wanting to open charter schools in the future.

Preliminary Study

A preliminary study was conducted to explore why one particular California charter school was closed and what those involved felt could have been done to prevent the closure. This study suggested that there was a potential to gather interesting information about charter schools that have closed. This sort of information would not be found in simple lists that give us names of schools and the legal reasons for closure.

Two interviews were conducted in my preliminary study to gather information on a charter school in California that closed in 2003. Since the school had no formal "principal" as a contact, I interviewed two people: the charter school liaison employed by

the local school district, whose responsibility included "keeping track" of the school's progress, and the business administrator employed by the charter school. Although the qualitative data from the preliminary study provided interesting results, the type of participant changed for the purposes of this dissertation study, as described earlier in this chapter.

The results of the preliminary study suggested that answers to both the knowledge and opinion questions present in the interview guide could be obtained within a forty-five to sixty minute time frame. Some interviews that transpired as part of the actual dissertation study lasted two hours. The preliminary study also suggested that there may be a distinct difference between the legal reason for one charter school's closure and the reasons given by administration and other personnel, which seemed to be the circumstance in many of the case studies profiled in this dissertation study.

Protocol for Qualitative Interviews

Purpose and use of the interview guide. Interviews conducted as part of this study employed an interview guide. Patton (2002) describes an interview guide as a "list of questions or issues that are to be explored in the course of an interview. An interview guide is prepared to ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each person interviewed" (p. 343). By utilizing this method of interviewing, I was able to discover the causes for the closure of the charter schools while exploring other questions by using probes that were designed to prompt the interviewee to clarify and explain both the knowledge and opinions he or she is providing (Patton, 2002).

The interview guide strategy can also be seen in terms of a continuum which ranges from conversational to structured. Patton (2002) clarifies this point by stating that

"the interviewer remains free to build a conversation within a particular subject area, to word questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversational style but with the focus on a particular subject that has been predetermined" (p. 343). The majority of the interviews in this study were conversational in nature and required some probing questions.

Procedures before the interviews. The location and time for the interview was established by the interviewee and me, with emphasis on convenience for the interviewee. Interview locations ranged from the interviewee's home, to local coffee shops, to current work sites, to one phone interview. Once the interviewee was chosen and verbally agreed to be interviewed, I went over the informed consent form with them and ask them to sign it (See Appendix C). All agreed and signed the informed consent form.

Procedures during the interviews. I began by granting each interviewee the chance to visually represent his or her experiences by completing a timeline. I explained to each interviewee that he or she could highlight major events that led up to, and possibly contributed to, the closure of the charter school. None of the interviewees chose to complete a timeline. Most were eager to tell their story and began sharing information before any formal questions were asked.

Each interviewee had the opportunity to tell me about his or her experiences with their charter school (see Appendix D). These initial conversations reflected Spradley's (1979) "grand tour questions," which give respondents the opportunity to verbally take the interviewer through a place, a time period, or a sequence of events or activities (Glesne, 1999). Knowledge questions, as described by Patton (2002), allowed me to

understand how informed the interviewees were about their particular charter school closure, not charter school closures in general. The answers to the opinion questions assisted me in understanding what the respondents thought about some experience or issue (Patton, 2002), in particular, the closure of their school.

Interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. The one telephone interview was held on a speaker phone, audio-recorded, and transcribed as well. Field notes were taken in order to recall physical and environmental occurrences throughout the interview. As noted by Patton (2002), field notes help to clarify information or devise new questions, assist in finding quotes in later data analysis, ensure that the interviews are moving in a desirable direction, and they are useful for back-up in case the tape recorder fails.

As a token of appreciation and an acknowledgement of the value of the respondent's time, the nine individuals who participated in the interview process each received a twenty-five dollar gift card to Barnes and Noble bookstore.

Procedures immediately following the interviews. After each interview, I "compared the data actually obtained in the interview to the data desired as specified in the guide in order to begin planning for the next interview" (Patton, 2002, p. 421) by answering the following questions in my field notes:

> Where did the interview occur? Under what conditions? How did the interviewee react to questions? How well do I think I did asking questions? How was the rapport? Did I find out what I really wanted to find out in the interview? If not, what was the problem? (Patton, 2002, p. 384)

I also personally transcribed each interview as close to the time of the actual interview as possible.

Triangulation

The qualitative interviews became much more expansive in terms of generating information than previously intended at the onset of the study. The interviews were initially intended to be secondary to the quantitative survey results. Because of the original design of the study, there was no plan to triangulate the qualitative data produced by the former administrators' interviews with additional qualitative interviews conducted with additional people familiar with the schools' closures, such as parents, teachers, or other pertinent individuals associated with the schools. Therefore, there was no within-case triangulation. There was, however, some additional data support collected through document analysis. The survey responses given by the interviewees prior to the interviews also allowed for analysis of consistencies, or inconsistencies, between their survey responses and interview responses. Additionally, there were some interesting shared themes that developed through cross-case analysis that reflected strong commonalities across the closures that were documented in this study.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the qualitative data is organized around the two newly developed research questions.

Research Question One: What Are the Reasons Former Charter School Leaders Give For the Closure of Their Schools?

As was noted in the discussion of data collection procedures, the legal reasons for closure were secured through the use of a list compiled in 2009 by the Center for

Education Reform (CER). This is the primary document in finding official charter school closure information since the organization is credible and the charter school closure information is well-organized. The current California Department of Education (CDE) web site (or direct contact of CDE) served to supplement any missing information from the CER report.

The interview data were coded based on the interview questions. Interview transcripts and corresponding field notes were read through and initial coding took place based on themes that emerged from the data. Subsequent analysis of the data identified an emergence of themes that occurred consistently, as well as compelling ideas that may have been established in only one case study. Although the interview data were not linked to attempt to create cause and effect relationships, I searched for commonalities by using the same codes and looking for similar themes across all of the interviews.

As mentioned above, instead of trying to find cause and effect relationships within each interview, I looked for a holistic picture that assisted in understanding a charter school closure within a specific context (Patton, 2002). The specific context is reflected in each set of interview data representing a closed charter school.

The findings are presented through nine individual case studies and cross-case analysis. Each interview was coded based on the interview questions and themes that emerge through the interpretation and analysis of the interview responses. The interviewees' responses are integrated into matrices that allow the comparison of answers for each of the interview questions. My hope is that I have developed a clearer, holistic picture of why some charter schools in California have closed, while understanding the essential nature of a particular set of charter schools in a specific context (Patton, 2002).

Research Question Two: What Advice Do These Former Charter School Leaders Offer to Those Who Are Interested in Starting or Continuing a Charter School?

The second research question was addressed through qualitative conversational interviews with questions outlined in the interview guide (See Appendix C). Although opinion items were present in the survey, and inquired as to whether or not respondents felt they had opinions and/or advice to share, richer and more meaningful data for these specific interview questions were obtained through the qualitative interview process. As noted earlier in this chapter, similarities and differences among administrators' responses were analyzed using initial coding of each interview and the uncovering of the development of themes in the data. After several readings of the interview data, formal themes emerged both within each interview and among the interviews. The techniques of description (staying close to data as originally recorded) and analysis (identifying key factors in the study and relationships among them) were implemented (Glesne, 1999). Therefore, the interviews were compared for commonalities and differences, and each administrator's opinions and advice were shared in both narrative format and through the cross-case analysis matrices format described above.

Delimitations of the Study

As stated previously, this study did not include charter schools labeled as "withdrawn," "abandoned," or "inactive" by the California Department of Education. This is due to the fact that these schools were not closed for the three legal reasons for closure or revocation as stated in the California Charter School Law, and this study specifically targets schools that have been closed or revoked after charter status had been granted.

This study also did not include those charter schools that were labeled as "home school/independent study", although two schools were miscategorized within closure documents, and I did not clearly understand their hybrid nature until the qualitative interviews occurred. The purpose of this research was to focus on charter schools that were more traditional in nature; meaning, schools that looked, from the outside and within their structure, more like traditional public schools. That said, the interviews of the administrators of the "hybrid" schools did offer valuable information.

Limitations of the Study

One obvious limitation to this study that has already been discussed at length was the flaws and failure of the quantitative survey design. There simply was not enough reliable information available to successfully contact former charter school leaders regarding their experiences with the closure of their charter school. Although I did receive twenty responses to the surveys, that was not enough to warrant separate discussion in this dissertation.

Initially, the research design was primarily based on quantitative survey responses, with a secondary emphasis on the qualitative interviews. The interviews were initially intended to triangulate the survey data, along with document analysis. Since the response rate was so low and the quantitative data were not valid, I made a good-faith attempt at triangulating the interview data with as many outside resources as possible, although I was not able to conduct any additional interviews for each case study.

This study was limited to administrators of California charter schools that have closed or have been revoked. Valuable information could also be obtained by interviewing or accessing information from teachers, parents, students, charter sponsors,

and others involved with the closure of a charter school. Additionally, because of the unique demographics, geographic location, and infrastructure of California, beneficial information could be gathered by studying charter school closures and revocations in other states.

There are schools other than charter schools that have been forced to close. Public schools are closed for various reasons, and under No Child Left Behind, it is certain that more schools will close or convert to charter school status in the future. Private schools are also sometimes forced to close their doors. This study clearly limited itself to the area of closed and revoked charter schools. Other schools that have closed may also have their own distinct stories to tell.

Self-report bias may have occurred when interviewing former charter school leaders. Given that there is evidence to suggest that the principal (or person in a similar position) is one of the most influential forces in a charter school, the principals/administrators that participated in this study quite possibly did not fully or accurately report their roles—which could have been significant—in the closure of their own charter school. In fact, the participants may not have fully understood themselves the impact they may have had on their school's closure.

Finally, researcher bias was identified as a potential issue that might impact the study. Since I have only worked in successful charter schools, both as a teacher and administrator, I had to put aside my opinions and experiences so that I could learn the important lessons shared by those who have worked in unsuccessful charter schools.

The following chapter includes nine case studies which were developed after nine separate qualitative interviews.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The purpose of this chapter is to present the study's findings that were generated through qualitative interviews triangulated with data from relevant document analysis and the interviewees' responses to the survey questions. For reasons explained in the previous chapter, the qualitative interview data turned out to be most significant in this study. Hence, the data from each qualitative interview are presented in individual case study format. The interview data are presented in randomly-selected order. All of the data are then used in the following chapter as part of a cross-case analysis organized around the study's research questions.

The Case Studies

Case Study One: "I Was the Charter School"

Sitting in an independent, local coffee shop outside of a major California city, I found myself scanning the faces wondering who I would be interviewing. It was a few minutes past our meeting time, and I wore a name badge so that I could be easily identified. Finally the interviewee's eyes caught my name and we approached each other. After ordering coffee and finding a suitable spot, I asked the interviewee, "Do you want to draw out a timeline of your involvement with the charter school?" The interviewee answered very matter-of-factly, "I was the charter school."

As she had indicated in her responses to the online survey, this interviewee had been a school administrator for less than three years prior to directing the charter school. The interviewee also stated that she possessed a teaching credential, an administrative credential, and a doctoral degree.

The beginning. This charter school, which interview and survey response data suggest should be classified as a Type A charter school (urban/ethnocentric/grassroots) using the typology of charter school categories described in Chapter Two, started out as a result of the denial of a petition to a large urban district to be a "new small autonomous school" (a classification for schools within the district that were granted more freedom to be self-regulated within the district than their district counterpart schools were typically granted.). After the petition was denied, a school board member suggested that the petitioner (the interviewee) look into becoming a charter school. The interviewee attended a charter school workshop and, although the information presented at the workshop seemed overwhelming, the interviewee was convinced that the charter option represented the best strategy for establishing the school she envisioned.

This school started out with an emphasis in constructivism (allowing students' own problems and questions to guide instruction, building on students' strengths and interests) and dual immersion. Dual immersion is a bilingual program that essentially combines native and non-native speakers of two languages to teach both languages simultaneously through academic content and social interaction; the goal is to help students to develop fluency in two languages, their first language and a second language. The initial concept also included having half Latino and half African-American students so that the two cultural groups could learn from each other. According to the petitioner, "We cared about everything. We cared about what food they ate, what snacks they brought, where we got our lunches. We really wanted the place to be as beautiful as possible and that cost us a lot of money."

The interviewee mentioned that the first version of the charter, which was initially for the autonomous small school concept, was "awful and got rejected for very good reasons." The petition was rewritten primarily by the interviewee for consideration for charter school status, and was approved in the spring of 2001. The school opened in the fall of 2002 with 65 students.

At the end of the first year of operation, test scores were very low (according to what the interviewee was told, the lowest in the district); the school had an Academic Performance Index, or API (a numeric index ranging from 200-1000 that indicates the academic performance of a school) of 464 in 2004 with fifty students tested. By 2006, the school had an API of 540 with one hundred three students tested (California Department of Education charter school database). The interviewee had been "fighting the tests for decades and just did not want that to be the focus of the school." Even the interviewee admitted that the decision to, in essence, ignore test until they had to be given —to fail to do any preparation to take them or be sure the school's curricular content was aligned with test content— might have been a bit too idealistic.

The downfall. The interviewee admitted that the school was not doing as much bilingual education or constructivism as promised, and as stated earlier, student test scores were low. The interviewee said, "They [district officials] don't care about constructivism. They don't care about bilingual education, so they were phony-baloneys. The test scores they did care about."

During the school's years of operation, the interviewee was very critical of the local school district superintendent, both privately and through interviews she granted to local newspapers. This interviewee believed the school's charter was revoked after four

years due to her negative relationship with the district's superintendent and her outspoken criticism of the sponsoring district. The interviewee stated that the superintendent used the school's low test scores as an opportunity to "take revenge."

The storyline about the reasons for the school's closing that the interviewee outlined during the interview was consistent with her response to the open-ended survey question: "Please list any reasons other than those offered above as possible contributing factors to your charter school's closure." The interviewee's response to this survey question was as follows:

> We were closed because I was an outspoken critic of the district administrator. The excuse was low test scores, which went up our last year because we did all the cynical things (no teaching, just test prep, opted out our most confused kids, etc.). It is a tragedy for the neighborhood, because we stabilized our corner of the worst part of [our city]. Now it's an empty lot again.

According to the sponsoring school district's Board of Education minutes dated March 2006, the charter was revoked "given the lack of progress made by the school i.e., the test scores are sixty points below any other school in this district. It is not clear which of the standards are being taught through the project based learning process." The motion was made, seconded, and carried by three board members. (Two of the five board members were absent). The Center for Education Reform (2009) also cites "academic" as the reason for closure, with the following explanation: "some of the lowest test scores in the district and students were not making adequate academic progress."

The former director spent the spring of 2006 attempting to appeal the revocation. The interviewee also attempted to find another sponsor to take over the school, but no organization wanted to take on the work of accepting this charter school.

What could have been done differently. An obvious variance that might have led to a different outcome would have been improved test scores, though the director made it clear to me that the school did not want to emphasize test preparation in day-to-day programming. The director also thought that the school could have used more staff that were bilingual, culturally diverse, and trained in constructivist education. In addition, the director believed that, if given the opportunity to make a case for the school in front of the school board, the school would have "won" and the school's charter would not have been revoked. The director believed that the decision to revoke the charter was made independent of the board and was done at the sole discretion of the superintendent. The board members who voted to close the school, from the interviewee's perspective, simply rubber-stamped the superintendent's decision. (Whether or not this analysis of board involvement is correct is another question entirely, one that this study, given its research design, could not answer).

To encourage the interviewee to elaborate on her response, I asked, "What would you have said to them [the school board]?" The interviewee's response was as follows:

> We were doing things that had never been done before. We were giving poor kids of color a kind of prep school education. The kind of education that the kids in the hills get and within a couple of years our test scores would have probably gone up.

To the extent that the interviewee's analysis of what prompted the school's closing—i.e., that low test scores were simply the public reason given for the real reason—was at least somewhat correct, the beginning of the end probably came when the director accused the superintendent of sitting on one hundred eighty thousand dollars in state grant money intended for the charter school. In the spring of 2003, the director was told at a meeting that the money would not be available for another week, so the director went downstairs to the superintendent's office to ask for the money. The director was told by the superintendent's "body guard" (the interviewee's characterization) that he was not available and would not be willing to discuss the issue anytime in the near future. A few days later, the director received a letter from the superintendent's office stating that the director would not be allowed back in the building for a month.

The director then went to the local newspaper which wrote a story from the director's perspective, and that story, in the interviewee's account, at least, is what sealed the fate of this charter school. This article (source removed for confidentiality) supported the claim that the director was banned from school district headquarters (for 30 days) after arguing with the former bodyguard for the superintendent. Also, the article stated that this was the first time in this particular district's history that a charter school had been revoked due to academic reasons.

Advice for others. This director's first piece of advice was to start with a lot of money. ("A million's about right.") The director indicated that a hefty budget was needed "to do whatever it takes to get very poor kids who start out five years behind to catch up with [other] kids."

Additionally, the director felt that a charter needs to have a longer day, a longer year, and better student-to-teacher ratios. The director also alluded to creating a sort of school culture by retaining good teachers who know the students and stay at the school year after year. Another piece of advice was not to allow business people to run charters, but to use them as support. The director recommended "hooking up with or hiring a business person or a business firm." A director should not try to do the business piece alone, according to this interviewee.

Since the closure of this charter school, the director has had the opportunity to visit other charter schools. The director's opinion of successful charter schools is that "they have way more money and they're selective in their population. One way or another, legal or not, they have to be."

One of the director's final statements was the following:

> If I ever did it again, I would do it under somebody else's umbrella, and I would want serious political protection. Serious. As I said, if only we had not been under [the superintendent's] umbrella, I could have persuaded the board [to keep the charter].

Case Study Two: "It Was a Dream Come True With a Nightmare Behind My Head"

I encouraged each interviewee to choose the location of his or her interview; often, the locations selected seemed to reflect the personality of the interviewees. For the second interview being reported here, I met the interviewee at a local restaurant and bar, with somewhat loud country music playing and peanut shells on the floor. The interview, therefore, was very relaxed and casual, and the interviewee seemed eager to share the charter school closure experience.

During the interview, this interviewee confirmed what she had reported on the online survey: she had no experience as an administrator prior to her involvement in the charter school, possessed a doctoral degree and an educational administrative degree, but did not hold a teaching or an administrative credential.

The beginning. This particular charter story began in the 1999/2000 school year. This school wanted to be free of district regulations and fiscal constraints in order to implement a specific vision of education. Because of this emphasis on the personal vision of the director, this school could probably best be classified as a Type C charter school (using the typology discussed in Chapter Two, i.e., a charter school that was founded by a charismatic leader.)

This charter was submitted for approval by the district in 2000. After receiving the initial state planning grant, the director and team of initial petitioners went to Washington, D.C. for a national charter school meeting. After that meeting, the petitioners were informed by their sponsoring agent (the local school district) that one of the requirements necessary for successful approval of their petition was to acquire 350 signatures from parents of potential students. They turned in 600 signatures. The district, as the potential sponsoring agent for this charter school, rejected this first group of signatures. The district felt that too many of the signatures came from people outside of the boundaries of the neighborhood in which the school was to operate. The petitioners and director then submitted a new batch of signatures which was accepted by the district.

The second part of the authorization process, according to this interviewee, was to obtain budget approval. Several proposed budgets were rejected, and the interviewee finally asked the district to create a budget for the charter that district officials would find

acceptable. The district complied. This whole approval process took two years, and during this time, the petitioners were becoming impatient and felt ignored. The interviewee also saw the delay as part of a larger pattern:

> One board member tried to limit the petition to three years. All of the people coming forward, all of the land that we had acquired, people were told that we were not going to receive our petition, and they garnered property that we were supposed to have. It was quite interesting.

Additionally, the director stated, "We found out from the lenders that we were seeking that [the district] was telling them not to invest with us [the charter school] because [the district] was going to take the petition [off the table]." In other words, the district was giving the school's potential lenders the impression that the charter school would never be a secure investment because it would never actually open and, consequently never, generate any income to repay the loans. In essence, the director felt they were being set up for failure before the charter petition was ever even approved.

Eventually, the charter petition was approved in 2002. The charter school did not actually have a physical space for operation until 2004, which the interviewee attributed to obstruction by the district as discussed above. According to the California Department of Education charter school database, the school was given a charter number by the State Board of Education in September of 2003, with an official school start date of August 2005. This former director also indicated that the behaviors described above were not accidental. Indeed, she felt there was intentional collusion and undermining, particularly at the district level. For example, when the director was in the hospital, her secretary called her to let her know a key was available for "the new building". The director and

charter school board members involved in attempting to open the charter school never signed a contract for a new building; therefore, the director assumed someone at the district level forged one of the charter school board member's signatures in order to create a situation where, to the naked eye, the charter school had secured a physical space but no one was moving forward with the process of actually opening the school.

The driving force for opening the charter from the district's perspective, according to this director, was the money that would come from an operational fee that the district would charge the charter school each year. Once the charter school board members and director were given the key to a building that supposedly this charter school's board members did not approve, the charter school was forced to open its doors unprepared and had to begin with only ten students. Within a few weeks there were 40 students, mostly recruited through word of mouth in the community.

This former charter school director felt the school continued to experience district interference even after the charter was approved. This time the director felt her family members, some of whom were involved in the charter school, were being harassed by the district:

> [The district] went after my younger brother who was a three-time soldier of the year over one of the largest military bases in the U.S. They started running for [harassing] him. They started running for [harassing] my sister, a pastor and a long reputation in [the district]. She was very instrumental in getting tennis courts, a playground, all of these things. She didn't even have any children. She had long established relationships with [the district] and could not understand why there was such hostility. Finally [we] realized it's not about hostility, it's about money.

> When you're taking that kind of money out of a district, there's bound to be some whiplash behind it.

Another example of district interference, according to the director, would be abrupt turnover of staff. "We'd hire a teacher and a week later she'd be offered a position in…[a school within the same district]. Okay? That's very interesting." The director felt that an offer like this was arranged by the district because of the hostile relationship that had developed between the charter school and the district.

The closure. The director felt that the district was only concerned with maintaining the income flow that was associated with the administrative fees the district charged to charter schools. These funds helped support the salaries of high-level district employees. These administrative fees and the resulting "loss of revenue" for the charter school, from the director's perspective, was one of the factors that contributed to the charter school's lack of success.

Eventually, however, the district took action to close its supposed "cash cow." According to the director, the district called a "special" meeting in order to revoke the charter and did not want the public there. The director characterized the meeting as follows:

> It was a tedious meeting. I never heard so much undermining before. I really saw then that charter schools are confronted with a whole host of problems. And the problems... you can't get a district to understand the loss of revenue, and revenue is so important because they [school districts] are so top-heavy [i.e., had a large, well-paid central office staff] you know? And they don't want to let go of that top.

According to the interviewee, the district supposedly did not want the meeting audio or video taped; however, the minutes were available on the Board of Education website and were reviewed as part of this study. The documents suggest that, officially, the reason that the district revoked the charter was due to "incomplete curriculum, an unbalanced budget, and an absence of a secured facility" (District Board of Education Special Board Meeting, December 2005). The motion to revoke the charter was passed unanimously.

The interviewee's explanations for the closure are similar to her response regarding the school's closure in her open-ended survey response: "Forged documents, district and city council interference. [The intent of the district was that] we were never supposed to open, just be granted the charter." (Although the city council was referenced in the director's survey response, the city council was not mentioned in the interview. I was unable to acquire information from the interviewee to elaborate on that aspect of her survey response.)

Later, the director and other petitioners appeared before the state board for an appeal but were denied. The director felt that, if the state would have stepped in and enforced "charter school laws" (the interviewee did not specify which ones) properly, there would have been a chance that the charter school could have stayed open. Also, the director believed that the school should not have been held to the Memorandum of Understanding (a type of business agreement arranged by the sponsoring agency and the charter school, which outlines fees to be paid from the charter school to the district as well as expectations for both parties in terms of liability, insurance, etc.) that was developed with the district as a part of the district's agreement to sponsor the charter school, but should have been held accountable to the actual charter petition, and nothing

more. All charter schools have Memorandums of Understanding with their sponsoring agencies and are required to fulfill the responsibilities outlined in the agreement: responsibilities that typically include such things as remaining fiscally solvent and being responsible for student achievement.

The advice. According to this interviewee, the first piece of advice to those who want to begin or maintain a charter is to be vigilant. In other words, "If you are very passionate about [the charter] and you know that it's right, don't let these districts get away with anything."

A second piece of advice was: have good legal council and make sure all documents are signed. Request a response from the district each time a document is submitted and require signatures on all documents and correspondence. The interviewee did not specify "good legal council" as a specific problem within the context of the rest of the interview until she was asked to offer her advice, but she had alluded to issues such as lack of trust and collusion that may have led to her offering this second piece of advice.

Third, the relationship with the person in the oversight position for charter schools at the district level (sometimes referred to as the charter school liaison) is a key participant in insuring a charter school's success, no matter what the school's relationship is with the district in general. Interestingly, this interviewee did not mention the district's charter school liaison in her retrospective comments.

> If I were someone in the process of writing a charter petition and seeking approval, what would this director say to me? This director gave the following advice: I'd say, Sweetie, how much money do you have? How much time do you have? Are you really prepared for a fight? Are you in it for the money, or the

> students? Which one? Are you self-sufficient or are you dependent? If you're self-sufficient, you got a chance. If you're dependent, you ain't got a chance in heck, 'cause they're gonna try and wipe you out blind. Legal councils, accountants, they'll tie you up. So, I'd say watch out for legal and accounting. Curriculum you can buy anywhere. You can buy it all day long. Buy it first. Your first dollars, buy your curriculum.

Case Study Three: "Everything About It Screamed Run From This As Fast As You Can"

This is the one and only interview that was conducted over the phone. I was able to secure a private office and digitally record the interview over speaker phone. This interviewee spent a few minutes asking me some questions regarding my study, including how many interviews I had done, how I chose the interviewees, and whether or not I had a difficult time tracking people down. This interviewee also asked a bit about my doctoral program and wanted to be reassured that the interview would remain confidential so that she would not be anxious about sharing the information about her charter school's closure. After this preliminary conversation, the interviewee indicated that she was comfortable with the protocol and procedures, and we proceeded with the interview.

During our telephone conversation, the interviewee corroborated some basic information that she had reported on the online survey. For example, based on her description of the charter school during the interview, which was nearly identical to her description of the charter in the survey she had filled out prior to the interview, the charter almost certainly was a Category F charter school, i.e., an entrepreneur-initiated charter school. In addition, this interviewee indicated, once again, that she was an

administrator for less than one year prior to directing the charter school. The interviewee completed some graduate school, and had both a teaching credential and an educational administrative credential. She also stated that she was the director of two charter schools at the same time, one Kindergarten through eighth grade (the focus of the interview) and one ninth through twelfth grade.

This is one of two schools in this study that was initially mis-categorized as "traditional" on the CDE charter school data base, when in fact it was a hybrid of independent study and site-based learning. Since this was another charter school contained in this study that was associated with a for-profit business, I chose to include this case study within the dissertation.

The beginning. This K-8 charter school was numbered by the State Board of Education in December of 1999, with an official start date of January 2000; although the interviewee claimed that a marketing campaign for student recruitment began as early as 1997. This school was affiliated with one of the first major for-profit corporations to identify the niche of the home schooling market. According to the former director:

> [The for-profit corporation] identified that they could make a lot of money on the home schooling market and, generally, they were not educators. They started a school. At that time, you could start a school as a non-profit [501(c)(3)]. You didn't have to be chartered through a district.

Documentation from The Center for Education Reform, however, cites an elementary school district as the authorizer of the charter school. It seems that the for-profit corporation was a business partner that had its charter petition authorized with the school district.

This director joined the organization in 1999, after issues with the organization's management of charters arose within the state legislature and elsewhere. There had been various lawsuits over the corporation's oversight that resulted in legislation and changes in the law. According to the director, some of the current charter school laws in the state are a direct result of the problems generated by the corporation associated with this charter school closure.

This corporation created what the interviewee called "sweetheart deals" with schools and districts all over California. The interviewee asserted that the corporation collected approximately 22% of this school's Average Daily Attendance (ADA) monies as overhead fees. She also maintained that the district had a Memorandum of Understanding with the corporation to collect seven percent of the school's revenues. In other words, the school allocated 29% of its budget for the corporation and district combined.

The former director also mentioned that the corporation attempted to create the appearance of a local, grassroots type of charter school and marketed each school as such. The corporation looked for people to run each school site locally. Formerly, each school had been run from a central location. Each site had a local lead teacher, but that person did not have any accountability, they were more or less an "administrative functionary." This interviewee was hired as the "school director" without a lot of power. This interviewee summarizes her role as follows:

> I think the intent was for me to run, what do you call it, interference between [the corporation] and the teacher groups and the districts and all that. I was expected to play nice and go along with the goals of [the corporation] and there were big

> bonuses, you know? They signed me on at 55,000 dollars [annually] and they waived 20,000 in my face for doing a good job, which I should have been making anyway just as the whole salary (laughter)."

The corporate oversight for this charter consisted of a monthly collection of teacher-signed attendance verification papers and students' work samples. According to the interviewee, the corporation did not oversee the day-to-day work of the charter or provide an accounting of expenditures for materials that were purchased with the budgets they were given. "There were rumors of trips to Hawaii that I heard about," she joked.

The closure. According to the director, the reason the school closed was because the corporation held the purse strings and handled finances in an unethical manner. The agreement was that the county would receive the ADA money for this particular charter school (in what is often called a dependent charter relationship) and the county in turn would write a check to the corporation. After receiving the money from the county, the corporation withheld a reserve of one thousand dollars per student; however, the director and the staff were supposedly unaware of this action and were led to believe that the school was going bankrupt: that there was no way the school would be able to "make it" financially.

Once the director became aware that the corporation was withholding reserve money from the school site, she began to think that the school could probably make it through the year without going bankrupt. However, the director shared her reservations in staying at the school:

> I could have chosen to try to work it out but I still had an agreement with the district. The district still wanted seven percent of our ADA. I think I could have

> managed [the corporation] but it felt very yucky. It felt improper. It was ethically wrong. Everything about it screamed run from this as fast as you can, so I participated in the willing closure of that school.
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> The director categorized the reason for the closure as an ethics violation:
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> If [the corporation] had really been dedicated to students and supporting student learning and working toward that, we probably could have made it work. If the district would not have been all about how much money they could get out of charter schools, we could have negotiated. We could have collaborated.

This former director gave a similar response regarding the charter school's closure in her open-ended survey response:

> The school closed due to 1) conflicts of interest by sponsoring district and management company (business corporation); 2) ethical violations around "phony" MOU's that gave away 7% of school revenue to sponsor district; 3) fiscal mismanagement by contracted management company which took up to 22% of school revenue.

In October 2001, the California legislature passed Senate Bill 740 (SB 740) to strengthen the oversight of non-classroom based schools and implement cutbacks in state funding for schools failing to meet specified spending standards (RAND Corporation, 2005). At a district board meeting held to establish funding for the charter school for the following school year, it was determined that the school would receive 70% of the funding they received the previous school year as a direct result of SB 740. According to RAND Corporation's analysis of the bill, "concerns have arisen that the process may have resulted in fiscal instability, an inefficient allocation of resources, and a reduction in

innovation." The charter school closed in 2002, with "financial: inadequate funding" cited as the official reason for closure as documented by The Center for Education Reform (2009).

Advice. This director believes that the day-to-day administrator must have a handle on the budget: "When idealism is in the forefront, you don't have a lot of practical day-to-day knowledge. That will not be helpful. At the same time, that 100% business approach is not student-centered, and that won't work either."

The development of a dynamic school community plus the dedication of the teachers were two items that the interviewee believed were positive attributes of this particular charter school. According to the interviewee, teachers should really be invested in students' success. Teachers should also be involved in the operation of the school knowing what kind of impact their contribution will have. This impact, according to the interviewee, should manifest itself as follows:

> They [the teachers] don't just come to work. They come to work understanding what it takes for the school to survive and what their role in that is. Whether it is to ensure that students make it to STAR testing (California's standardized test that measures students' mastery of the state content standards), or whether it's efficient budget expenditures on their part when they're looking for new materials for their students. I think traditional systems leave teachers out too much. They not only leave them out, but they do not give them credit for the teachers' desire to know what is happening, and to understand what is happening.

Finally, this director thought that, in general, ethics violations need to be eliminated at all costs. Any charter school and its sponsoring agency need to work

together, and not against, one another. Funding needs to be appropriate and delivered accordingly.

Case Study Four: "When a Person Is Anti-Charter, They're Going To Do Anything They Can To Close the Charter Schools Down"

This is one of two interviews that occurred at a school site where the interviewee was currently working. This particular interviewee is now the director of a different charter school in a low-socioeconomic urban area. This interviewee reported having more than nine years experience as a school administrator prior to her experience as a charter school director. She held a doctoral degree and teaching credential, but did not currently hold an educational administrative credential.

The beginning. The interviewee's first charter, which was the topic of our conversation in her new charter school setting, was a middle school/high school model that began in a leased church building in September of 2003. Based on the director's description of the inception of this charter school, this school would most likely be described as a Type A charter school (i.e., urban/ethnocentric/grassroots), as it seems she wanted the school to serve a very specific community's needs.

The school began with approximately 91 students in its first year. The stipulation attached to the charter approval was that there would be a second school site by the end of the second year of operation. By the start of the 2004/2005 school year, the student population grew to over 400.

The interviewee, who was a university professor at the time the charter school began, started the charter school for the following reasons:

> I just wanted to get closer to the community. I had been in the university for a long time and I knew that our community has some very, very, very special needs, and I just felt that I was distanced from them, and I needed to work with my people is really what it amounted to. I was an elementary school teacher and then I had my own private school for seven years. Then I went back to the university, but there was always a longing to have my school again, and this time, because of the expense and all the money you have to pour into it, it was like the best of both worlds to have like a private school with the state funding.

This former director believes the major success of this charter school—a school that closed after only 13 months of operation—was the parent/teacher commitment. The teachers were dedicated to the vision, which was to provide a high quality, private-school type of education to low socioeconomic youth. The parents were committed to the philosophy of the principal and staff, which was, "If education works, it works for all." Parents and community members would volunteer in the charter school's after-school specialty programs such as sewing, cooking, and drama, and would work on the parent council in order to support school fundraising efforts.

The closure. The problem, according to the interviewee, was that the state funding for the school was based on the ADA from the *previous* year. With an ADA based on 91 students, and a school that had over 400 students, the funding to operate on a day-to-day basis was far from adequate. The interviewee approached the county office (the charter's sponsoring agent) with the dilemma and received the following response, "It's not our problem. We're not a lending institution and we're not a loan institution either. So, if you cannot sustain yourself, we're going to close you down."

The interviewee thought the relationship the school had with the county was good until a new superintendent came on board. Word came down that he was very "anti-charter." The director had been told that everything better be kept up at the school site, because, supposedly, the new superintendent was out to shut charter schools down. According to County Board of Education Minutes from October 2004, the superintendent recommended that the Board take action to revoke the charter due to "fiscal insolvency, fiscal mismanagement, and other material violations of the law and/or charter." The motion was moved, seconded, and carried, with five board members voting yes and one board member abstaining. Even though other charters in the county were being forced to "jump through hoops" (the interviewee's characterization) and were struggling with renewals, this director felt that the one major reason this charter closed was lack of financial resources, not fiscal mismanagement as the superintendent had stated during the board meeting. The Center for Education Reform (2009) cites mismanagement as the official reason for closure with an explanation of "fiscal insolvency, fiscal mismanagement, and other material violations of the law and/or charter", which reflects the reasons given by the superintendent and board members at the board meeting. A somewhat different but still complimentary explanation of reasons for the school's closing can be found in the interviewee's open-ended survey response to a question that asked her to elaborate on the closure of her charter school:

> [This charter school] was closed because we 'grew too rapidly' (ADA of 91 in 2003/2004 to 438 in September 2004 and growing). We were deemed fiscally insolvent because we did not have the finances to sustain the rapid student growth of paying for 38 staff, two buildings, etc. The funds that we received [were] for

> the 91 ADA for the previous school year rather than for the current number of students that we had enrolled for the 2004 fall term. These funds could not sustain us until the current ADA funds kicked in around January of 2005. Therefore, [our sponsoring agency] revoked our charter and refused to financially support our school.

The interviewee appealed to the board of directors of the county office of education to keep the school open. The director reported saying the following to the county:

> I know and you know that you can do this if you wanted to but, whatever the reason, you do not want to support the school. When we were first approved by you, it was the best charter [proposal] you had ever read. That's what you said. And now you're gonna close me down?

The interviewee eventually came to the conclusion that "when a [superintendent] is anti-charter they're going to do anything they can to close the charter schools down"; however, in her own admission, the director stated that she knew that "we [the charter school] did not have the funds [to be fiscally solvent]."

Advice. This director's first piece of advice is: in order to start a charter school, one needs a large amount of money. The director also stated that the key to a charter school's success is the teachers, but she quickly added a caveat: "I think one of the downfalls, the disadvantages of charters is that they pay teachers less. We require more so we should pay them more." (Note: This statement may not apply to district-sponsored charters that often are required to use the district's pay scale for teachers.) The director continued to emphasize the importance of teachers by stating the following: "To me, the

greatest investment is to have your teachers on board and creative, excited about educating students and if you have that combination, the school can only go up." The interviewee added that, in hiring teachers, one needs to ask the right interview questions to insure that the teachers are really committed.

Case Study Five: "I Really Feel Like Doors Are Opened and Closed For Me Along the Way, and I Never Had Anything Slammed Shut So Hard"

My fifth interviewee, according to her survey response, had more than nine years of experience as a school administrator prior to her time as director of a charter school. She also held a master's degree, a teaching credential, and an educational administrative credential. My interview with her occurred in a small coffee shop in a beach community on a Sunday afternoon. The interviewee seemed a bit nervous, but once we were able to establish some mutual connection with a local university, the interviewee became more relaxed. As in a number of other interviews, the interviewee became passionate and more willing to share information once we began to move deeper into the story of the charter school she had once directed and which was now closed.

The beginning. This charter school, which qualitative data suggest could be a Type C charter school, or a charter founded by a charismatic educational leader, began in a very rural agricultural area on a ranch. The school initially was a hybrid home school; meaning, students were home schooled four days a week, but met at a site with a teacher one day a week. The owner of the ranch offered the ranch for student use once a week. The idea for using the ranch as a fully functioning school site stemmed from the 4H and science activities students were able to engage in while on the ranch site. However, this particular ranch ended up not being available for full-time school facilities. Fortunately,

there was a ranch across the street that was used as a home for boys. This ranch had an unused 30-acre farm. Then the home for boys "had a change in management" and the new manager, according to the interviewee "turned [out] to be a very visionary-type person, and we started working together on a plan that would put a charter school on the farm."

In 2003, the school received $305,000 in charter school start-up grant money from the state; simultaneously, the boys' ranch began experiencing personnel problems. The state came in and closed the home for boys down, along with the rest of the ranch. Now, the interviewee had $305,000, no school site, and a sponsoring district's school board that was questioning her judgment. The interviewee hired a lawyer to draw up the final charter petition paperwork, which was approved by the local school district.

The interviewee decided to invest some of this start-up money in a grant writer in order to secure funds for the charter school she and the manager of the boys' ranch had begun to envision. The interviewee had attempted grant writing before for specific programs for the hybrid home school, with no success, so she felt it was necessary to enlist the help of a professional in order to increase the chances of receiving additional charter school funding.

Because the interviewee still utilized the ranch as a site for students who were home-schooled to meet with a certified teacher and gain experience working on a ranch, the board of the charter school suggested that the school should share another district site that housed other home school students only a few days a week. This is what the interviewee decided to do.

According to the interviewee, the district superintendent was supportive of the new charter school but did not want any student recruitment to take place due to dwindling numbers in the district. The interviewee recalled the district's position and the charter school's response as follows:

> We were all in this big, huge financial crisis. It would have been a real problem for me to advertise in that community, so what I did with the grant money is I advertised on the radio, in the newspapers, knowing full well that most of the local people don't read the local papers or listen to that radio station [therefore, the charter school would not be in competition with the sponsor school district for pupils]. So we tried to get people from all over the county. So we ended up getting thirty students and we opened on our campus that fall.

The school then opened on a shared school site with access to one classroom and service of one teacher hired by the charter school director. The following school year, the school tried to have kindergarten through eighth grade with two classrooms and two teachers, with students separated by gender. The director had done some research in gender-segregated education and felt strongly that this model would benefit the charter school's student population. By the end of the first semester of the second year of operation, however, things began to go downhill.

Moving toward closure. Although, according to the interviewee, there was "a lot of good stuff happening in the fall," previous advice that she had been given was suddenly beginning to make sense to her. When opening the school, the interviewee had been told not to start with less than 200 students. The interviewee stated that she believed this advice might have been linked to parental involvement. "The gossip lines get fired up

really quick, and if you have any body like that in your school [i. e. a gossip], there's going to be trouble." Parents began to doubt the aptitude of the teachers and the ability of the director, and some parents began to communicate their feelings more forcefully to other parents within the school. The combination of former home school students as well as students placed in the charter school because they were having academic and behavioral problems at previous schools seemed to have contributed to internal chaos which led to the school's closure. One of the school's two teachers quit because there were students at "a lot of different levels." The interviewee added: "We had really low kids and really high kids, and the two teachers were really going crazy trying to do it all."

Finally, two students left the school, and the director couldn't justify having two classrooms and two full-time teachers with such low numbers (under twenty students in each class). So, at the end of the first semester of the second year of operation, the director "dissolved the school and incorporated it into the [school on the shared site] which meets on Tuesdays and Thursdays for math and science." The interviewee told the sponsoring district (which was also the charter school's board of directors) that the school was voluntarily closing due to low enrollment.

One of the problems the interviewee recognized from the start was inconsistent support from the district board, which was the sponsor of the charter. The charter was held up for five months while the board decided whether or not it wanted to accept the $305,000 in state grant money that the interviewee obtained to start the school. In other words (i.e. the words of the former director), "everybody sort of ignored the elephant in the room." According to a charter school closure spreadsheet provided by the Charter School Division of the California Department of Education, this charter school was

officially closed in January of 2006 due to low enrollment, which the interviewee cited as one of a number of actual issues that threatened the continuation of the school.

Another element that could not have been predicted, but that contributed to the closure of the charter school, was the closure of the original ranch site where the school would have initially been located. The interviewee shared the emotions felt when the ranch was closed:

> I really feel like doors are opened and closed for me along the way, and I never had anything slammed shut so hard. The teen ranch had been there for 100 years and when I decide and this other guy decides to do this, bam! It's shut, and I said, okay, somebody's trying to tell me something.

The interviewee gave a somewhat more detailed list of reasons for the school's closing in her response to the open-ended survey item that allowed the sharing of this information. This was the response:

> I worked on the charter plan with a boys' home/foster care facility. We were going to place the charter on the ranch. The ranch had legal problems and closed after 100 years (that had nothing to do with the charter). That meant I had to open on the school site. This meant our students would come from the district. The district was already losing students. We advertised outside of the district to get students.

It seemed as if the director had envisioned the school as a part of this ranch, and that it was difficult for her to separate the physical site of the school with the vision she had for the charter itself, which was environmental, outdoor education. Since the interviewee appeared so disheartened by the closure of the boys' ranch, I believe she felt

the school would have been more successful, and would have remained open, if everything had worked out with the boys' ranch site.

Advice. The first bit of advice this interviewee offered is to begin with as many students as possible. She, in fact, argued that low enrollment is "why so many charter schools want to be in urban areas. You have a lot of kids to draw from. In rural, there is nobody near us. We're out in the boon docks and the people who come are driving from [10 or 20 miles away]." The interviewee also added, "If I were doing it over again, it would take a lot longer and I would have more possible students."

Second, the interviewee said marketing is a factor that needs to be seriously considered when starting a charter school. She also stated, "You can't screen out [undesirable] applicants, but you can make it doubly-hard to get in." The interviewee suggested the completion of a rigorous application process, as well as student and parent interviews, as requirements for being admitted to the school. "You have to have an application process that gets the students that need to be there or belong there, the real determined ones, rather than T don't have anyplace else to go so I'll come to your school' kind of attitude.'"

Furthermore, parents need to understand how you will serve students with special needs, including the strengths and limits of what you can provide to students. The interviewee added one additional piece of advice:

> Just from experience, I would never start with a junior high. We're rethinking how we're doing this right now, and I would make this particular school a K-3 or a K-6 at the beginning, and I'd have two classrooms at each grade level, one boy and one girl.

Case Study Six: "We Basically Gave Up the Charter As Easily As We Got Into It"

This interviewee reported having less than three years experience as a school administrator prior to directing a charter school. He also had a master's degree, a teaching credential, and an educational administrative credential. Due to the parental involvement described by the interviewee, this school would best be described as a Type E, or parent-led charter school, based on the typology found in Chapter Two of this study.

This was the second of two interviews that occurred on a school site where the former charter school administrator currently worked. This interview was conducted in the administrator's office on a middle school site in a very rural area. The interviewee was eager and willing to share information, and consciously attempted to eliminate any potential distractions prior to the start of the interview.

"School of choice" to charter school. The particular district for this school offered students and parents "schools of choice," which are basically schools that parents can choose to send their children instead of their closest neighborhood school. These schools, according to the interviewee, were granted more discretion by the district in terms of decision-making so they could make choices based on families' needs and input. The interviewee described the process of the school first becoming a school of choice as follows:

> Our district approached some of the parents that were key in our district that were raising a lot of issues, doing a lot of different things and said, "How would you like to start your own school in our district?", and the parents just thought, "Wow! What a great idea! What a great opportunity." So a steering committee of seven parents was chosen to draft something. I don't think our school district thought

> that these seven parents would ever get anything off the ground, but they put together all.. .they wanted to do as a school, brought it back to our school district, found that there was enough community interest to fly it, and so then they went about seeking an administrator to kind of be the first employee and help them get that going. I ended up getting kind of talked into applying for that position. So I got the job and worked with these parents prior to starting the school. After the first couple of years we were just a school of choice in the school district.

It was after the second year that the district approached this school of choice, primarily its parents and administrator, and asked them if they would like to apply for charter school status. Those who associated with the school had questions about the advantages and disadvantages of becoming a charter school. The district representatives explained that becoming charter would be beneficial to the district if and when parents from other schools within the district came to them asking why this "school of choice" had programs or materials that were different than other schools in the district. Having the charter school title, in the school district's opinion, would exempt the district from having to justify differences between that particular school and the rest.

Interestingly, the administrator and parents made it clear to the district that they wanted to be a *dependent* charter school. A dependent charter is closely tied financially to the district and the employees would still be employed by the district. The school district would also be their charter sponsor. The interviewee described in more detail why the school wanted to remain closely associated with the district:

> All of us were happy being a part of the [school district] as employees, as everybody. We were funneling our kids into the one high school in the district and

> so we didn't want to lose that connection. We also didn't want to have to fund all of our own other positions, to run a business office, to do benefits, to do all that. So we functioned as a dependent charter. So all of our business stuff was taken care of. The district still paid for our facilities and did the whole bit. It really just allowed us to operate as a school of choice without people being able to hassle us.

This school is the only conversion charter school of this interview group. A conversion charter school is an existing public school that literally converts (staff, building, students, etc.) to charter school status. The interviewee and a steering committee of parents wrote the charter petition. Once the petition was written, seventy-five percent of the current staff chose by vote to convert the school to charter school status. When the petition was approved by the district for the 1997/1998 school year, the interviewee felt that "there was really nothing we were doing any better, any different. We didn't receive in a sense any different funding. All of our funding went to the district and the district then funded us as a school." The interviewee did note, however, that one benefit that they had as a charter school was the ability to choose any curriculum they wanted.

The closure. After the first two years of operating as a charter school, the administrator and parents who were part of the decision making process (referred to as the "steering committee") decided to give up the charter, as stated by the interviewee, "as easily as we got into it." The reason for the closure, according to the interviewee, was because

> we said we were done and not because of any problems, just because sheer operating and budgeting and all that. It became easier to do it as a non-charter

school, and what the school district said is that you guys can continue operating the way you're operating. We'll back you on whatever you say you're doing.

The reason the interviewee gave for closure aligns with his response to the open-ended survey question: "It simply became easier to operate as a district school of choice, rather than a charter school." The official reason documented by the California Department of Education for the closure is listed as "reverted to non-charter status," which is dated August of 2000.

Now that the school is once again considered a "school of choice", the interviewee described the school as operating today "in year thirteen about the same way as [it] did in the first two years without a charter and the years [it was] a charter." The interviewee shared the belief that the school would have still been a charter had it not been for some charters in the state taking advantage of the freedom associated with charters. District administration had told this director that having the school continue as a charter school would cost them (the district) more money, and the director stated that no one, including himself, parents, or teachers, fought to keep the school as a charter school. The director's main concern was curriculum, not how to fund or finance the school. The director fought to maintain the use of certain curriculum his site was able to utilize while operating as a charter school. Since the school was allowed to continue to use that curriculum due to what the director cited as high API scores (the school had an API score of 804 in 1999 according to the CDE data files), he didn't feel the need to hold on to charter school status.

Advice. The interviewee's three areas of advice were: (a) possess a solid reason to start a charter, (b) have energy and enthusiasm, and (c) secure a positive sponsor and/or

district relationship. The first question the interviewee would want to ask someone starting a charter is why the charter petition is being written in the first place. Second, it would be important to "garner the enthusiasm, energy, and support of staff and parents necessary to pull [a charter school] off." Finally, the interviewee offered this advice, most likely due to the positive relationship he had with his sponsoring district:

> Do your homework on the district that you ask to sponsor your charter because you've got to have the support of that district because you could be a little bit at the whim of the district. I mean, they can't just cut you off for no reason at all, but they can make your life miserable in the meantime.

Case Study Seven: "I Started Out With Great Hopes and Just Came Out Completely Disillusioned"

This interviewee's only experience as an administrator was at this particular charter school. The interviewee did not possess an educational administrative credential. She did have a master's degree and a teaching credential.

This interview took place in the interviewee's home in a very rural area of central California. I was welcomed into the interviewee's home on a weekend morning, and we sat at the kitchen table. Although the interview occurred in the interviewee's environment, I sensed that the interviewee was nervous about being interviewed. I did, however, perceive that the interviewee shared information freely as time progressed and became more comfortable as we discussed her version of the closure story.

Although I initially stated that I would exclude independent study charter schools, this school was poorly labeled in the California Department of Education documents I originally analyzed. I did not discover that the school was considered an independent

study school until the qualitative interview was conducted. The school did, however, have classes that met once a week. The school site also had a computer lab, staff that conducted meetings with parents and students, and a special education staff person that worked with students on a regular basis. Based on those descriptors, this school seemed to reflect more of a hybrid program than a strict independent study program. Since the data had been collected and, as it turned out, the school was one of three of my case studies that were operated by a corporation, I have included this interviewee's story here.

The beginning. This charter school began after the local school district agreed to sponsor a charter petition that was submitted by a business organization. The school district was the official sponsor, while the business started and managed the school. Based on this description and the typology listed in Chapter Two of this study, this school could be regarded as a Type F, or entrepreneur-initiated, charter school.

The interviewee opened the charter school office facility in the spring of 2000 as the program director. The interviewee was at the school for a year and a half before it closed at the end of the 2000/2001 school year. From the start, it seems the interviewee and the school tried to break away from the business management who, in the words of the interviewee, "owned us because they started up the school, and we were trying to get away from them and be sponsored by the county office [of education]." The business had control over the budget and money, and the site-based personnel had control over personnel and curriculum.

Initially, the interviewee felt that there was no accountability for student achievement: "When I took over, the school was not run based on California state standards or anything. People were doing what they wanted to do, and that was my goal

to make it more educationally sound." Teacher accountability was also an issue. The interviewee said that the school had to change some policies in order to ensure the following:

> You had to have a credential to be one of our teachers, and we aligned pay to that. Pay was assigned originally to how many students you had. You got paid per student, and so some teachers had 40, 50 students, and how do you manage that many students and manage them well?

The interviewee was "not pleased with [the business entity] because they were taking a million dollars a year in [the school's] state funding for their operating expenses." The interviewee knew that similar schools were giving a certain percentage to their business partners in exchange for specific services, but not the large amount that this particular charter school was paying back to its business sponsor. The interviewee described the amount of money given to the business sponsor as "excessive"; she stated: "I was questioning a lot of things. They basically told me that I was going to be fired or [had to] resign because they didn't like what I was leading the school into: getting in with [another sponsor to negate the business partnership]."

The closure. According to the interviewee, in order to maintain the charter, the school needed "to get into an educational-based, not a business-based" partnership. The interviewee attempted to get the county office of education to sponsor the school. As other alternative sponsors were being sought, the business partner was telling the interviewee and others at the school that they "were in financial difficulty." The interviewee stated, "We had to rely on audits and stuff [provided by the business]. It was

very, very difficult progress and I didn't trust them at all. I did not like them. I did not trust them the more I got to know them."

Because of the controversy surrounding this particular business partner, which also partnered with approximately nine other charter schools across the state, the local school district did not want to be associated with this charter school. In the end, the business organization and the program director dissolved the school and did not seek renewal of its charter.

The interviewee mentioned the push toward a new sponsor in her open-ended survey response as well: "We wanted to be governed by the county rather than the private group that managed the school. [The private group] were charging too much for too few services—question of ethical behavior—on their part."

Additionally, a change in leadership at the district level also contributed, in the eyes of the interviewee, to the downfall of the school:

> There was a change in administration in the district half-way through which changed the whole complexion of the school. The first superintendent was looking at the charter school as bringing in money to the district and he retired. Then the second superintendent looked at charter schools as being problems and not seeing it as a benefit to the district. So the relationship went way downhill when the administration changed.

The interviewee believed that the bottom line reason why the charter closed had to do with "misuse of funds". The interviewee described the end of the charter as follows:

> I think it was maybe a day late and a dollar short. We participated in the charter school conventions and all of that and it was a great thing, but we were coming in

> at the end of the movement and that entrepreneurial thing of having a company running a school, I don't think was a good idea. I think that that was the downfall of the school as well. It had no close connections to a school district and that was a bit of an issue because it had no one saying that this is inappropriate; this isn't how you should do it. They [the business] were trying to get as much money as they could for themselves and do as little as possible that they could for the students. Now I, on the other hand, thought that most of the money should go to the students and not to running the business.

The official reason for closure, which occurred in June of 2002, was "oversight challenges", as recorded by the California Department of Education. This was reiterated in a 2009 national charter school closure list compiled by The Center for Education Reform, which stated mismanagement as the reason for closure, with the following explanation: "leadership poorly managed school operations." It is unclear who was considered "leadership."

Advice. The interviewee felt that more accountability would have allowed the charter school to be more successful. In this interviewee's opinion, there was no accountability from the business partner back to the school for how money was spent. The interviewee shared that there was a School Site Council (SSC), "yet we [the SSC] could make no decisions or anything because there was no knowledge of what our budget was really. We would ask for a detailed budget and we would never get a detailed budget."

This interviewee also suggested that a charter school should always have a "strong tie to a district so that the district would really be a proponent of the school." The

interviewee then listed specific advice for someone wanting to open or maintain a charter school:

> Number one, you have to know where the money is. The money was the big key in the running of [our] school because you can't do things without the funding. I think number two, you have to have solid backing of the district because charter schools have to be sponsored by the district. You have to have a good relationship person right there with the superintendent because if the superintendent isn't pro, it's not going to work. You need to have a goal out there that this is what you want to achieve with this school. Ours was to meet the needs of the population that was not fitting into the regular public schools. [The goal] has to be clear[ly] defined and you have to have a vision of how you're going to meet that. I think you have to start off with the vision: this is who we want to serve and how are we going to serve them best.

On a smaller, more day-to-day scale, the interviewee felt that a successful charter would need to have special education services and support personnel in place. This school did contract independent services for students who required special education support, but it was quite a financial burden on the school. Additionally, a charter school needs a staff that is knowledgeable in standardized test requirements, such as STAR testing and high school graduation requirements. As mentioned previously, this program director sensed a disconnect between the district sponsor and the school itself. Often times mandates and protocol for testing come directly from the district to school sites; therefore, standardized testing was something this school had to tackle on its own. The interviewee also believed that a charter school has to have someone who is "very detail-

oriented": one who can look after records and engage in record-keeping. This would eliminate the dependence a school such as this one would have on a business partner or other organization to maintain records and paperwork. The interviewee commented that "a lot of us in education are global thinkers and we're not into the details of running a business, and it is a business too so you need to be thinking along that line." Also, a charter school needs qualified teachers, and the school needs to be able to pay the teachers the same as any other school in the district so that they want to work for a charter school without being punished financially. This school seemed able to provide equal pay after the pay-per-student salary policy was eliminated.

Finally, the interview ended with the interviewee's reflections on the personal experiences associated with the former charter school:

> I think the vision was great when we started. We had such high hopes and it was so exciting getting it going and stuff and the freedom to be able to do different things in a different way. It was great. I still think there's possibility out there but when I hear 'charter' now I cringe, just because I don't know who's got the control. If it's not the education people, if it's business people, I don't trust them, and it's just the way I was burnt. I started out with great hopes and just came out completely disillusioned.

Case Study Eight: "The Dynamics Were More One of Survival and Not One of the Perfect Place, For Me, Academically"

In this case, a grassroots organization eager to open a school that focused on education aligned with conservation and animal protection was granted approval for a charter school by a school district. This school was given a charter number by the State

Board of Education in January of 2004, as documented by the California Department of Education. Because of the very specific vision of the school's charter, this school could be classified as a Type A charter school (urban/ethnocentric/grassroots).

The interviewee, who at the time was the director of another existing charter school, offered to oversee this charter since the founding organization did not want anything to do with the managerial aspect of the school. The director also had experience both as a classroom teacher and as a manager in a large package delivery business. He also held an administrative credential, a teaching credential, and an M.B.A. Prior to working with this charter school, he had six years of experience as a school administrator.

The beginning. The charter school did not physically open as soon as it was approved due to the lack of a director. Another struggle during the initial charter approval timeline was lack of space. Once there was a director in place, the district asked the director to commit to lease four classrooms for one hundred thousand dollars. The director agreed. At the time both parties made this commitment, however, the school only had one enrolled student: the teacher-principal's child. According to the interviewee, another local charter school was having some problems at the time, and decided to move their students over to his charter school. Because of this migration of students, they began the school year with 10 students and eventually ended up with 23. The charter school was open for one year during the 2005/2006 school year.

As we proceeded into the interview, the interviewee revealed that he was the executive director overseeing a teacher-principal. He also noted that the initial founding organization "fell off the map. We never had contact with them from day one. We took

the charter document and we did the best we could implementing their vision. But they were not involved."

The interviewee also felt that the sponsoring school district was not reasonable in helping the school secure adequate or cost-effective space. The interviewee felt rushed to open the school once the director was in place and the district had leased out its classrooms. He stated, "I think if I had six months, I could have done a very strong marketing effort in a very poor area and would have been able to solidify [enrollees]."

Not seeking renewal. According to the interviewee, the charter was up for renewal in the 2006/2007 school year; however, the director and others associated with the school [i.e. the charter school board]:

> decided not to try to pursue getting it re-approved. It was too big of a bear. We weren't servicing enough kids. It wasn't growing through word of mouth like we would have thought. Facilities were an issue. It was just too difficult to keep going.

Additionally, the interviewee felt that "the theme of the charter was limited in attracting students [and their families] because it had a very liberal flair to it." By no uncertain terms was the charter closed or revoked by the district sponsor. As stated by the interviewee, "The laws that pertain to charter schools: fiscal responsibility, legality, children learning... none of those pieces came into play [in the school's closure]." This statement is supported by the documentation provided by the California Department of Education, which states "lack of facilities" as the formal reason for the school's closure. The Center for Education Reform, however, lists financial as the reason for closure, along with inadequate enrollment. Both can be true, however, since it was financially

impossible to maintain school operations with such a small student population and such a relatively high lease price for classrooms from the district. No other feasible space options were located or secured by the director.

The charter also closed, according to the interviewee, due to lack of enrollment. The interviewee stated that "we told the teacher-principal, if you can't increase the numbers, we have to release these students. We have to make a decision of what [we are] going to do with these kids. There were still twenty-three bodies to take care of."

Although during the interview, multiple reasons were given for the school's closure, the interviewee made the following statement as his open-ended survey response: "Lack of space forced the school to mitigate marketing efforts for new students." The director seemed to feel stuck between a rock and a hard place: the school couldn't continue to lease such expensive classrooms from the district, but on the other hand, he couldn't find comparable space; therefore, he couldn't increase the school's income through student recruitment since he did not know whether or not adequate space would be secured before the start of the next school year.

Throughout the interview, it was clear that the interviewee took responsibility for the lack of a more assertive marketing campaign for the school, as well as the need to hire people that had more experience with kindergarten through sixth grade education. Furthermore, the interviewee felt that more stakeholders from the community should have been involved in order to secure the school's status in the neighborhood and create more of an interest in the school.

Advice. The interviewee elaborated on several key areas that he felt would allow a charter school to exist and thrive. The key areas are: positive attitude, commitment,

fiscal planning, alignment with an organization to secure physical space, and solid guiding principles. This is what he said:

> So to prevent closure, I think first it would have [required an] attitude that there's no way this school is going to close down, and there's someone who's willing to stay up the late nights and put their own house on the line for it to get it open and keep it open. So, first it takes that highly influential point person, or that dedicated point person who has a good reputation. [Secondly], it's staying committed to trying to collaborate with the district that we're here to stay, we're looking for renewal, and then having the growth that demonstrates that this is actually going to work. [Third], someone who is cognizant of the planning piece needs to be involved, which is, when do the monies come in and how long will those monies carry us. [Fourth], align yourself with a church that will give you the one to two year piece with room to grow, where you're not going to have to take stuff down or put up, or if you are, there's a collaborative plan. Space is defined five months before opening. So if you have that I think you're in great shape. That and, [lastly], good guiding principles. You have schools that aren't offering the specific needs that [were] identified prior to opening.

This interviewee also offered a no-nonsense sort of approach to the recommendation of particular personnel in order to help a charter become successful:

> So you always hear, you should have an attorney with your developers, you should have an accountant, the business man, you should have the curriculum person. That's all great. You can have varying levels of that. But you really need a lot of common sense. You need people who understand people.

Since this particular director was essentially running a school with a vision that had already been created, the interviewee mentioned that there needs to be some sort of cohesion between the developers of the school and those who implement the charter. This interviewee also feels that a charter should "offer the niche that the district isn't managing well. Don't go head-to-head [with district strategies that are already in place]." The interviewee knew that this school definitely had a unique vision; however, the commitment and marketability were not present in order to help the school survive.

Case Study Nine: "I'm Still Thinking My Mistake Was Sticking With It"

My ninth interviewee had more than nine years of experience as an educational administrator before becoming the director of a charter school but did not possess a teaching credential or an administrative credential. She declined to answer the question regarding her educational background.

The charter school in this case was started by a pre-apprenticeship training program that focused on the building trades for post-high school students. Due to the fact that this charter school was created to fit a very specific need, this school could be labeled as a Type F, or entrepreneur-initiated charter, based on the typology outlined in Chapter Two. Similar to a previous case study, this school had a business partner who initiated the charter petition, and was sponsored by the county office of education. The interviewee stated that this not-for-profit business organization

> decided to go for a charter school so that they could work with kids ninth through twelfth grade. It was started as a charter school that was going to provide academics and also do the building trades. The kids would enroll with the vocational bent.

The beginning. The charter petition was approved through the local county office of education in 2004. At that time, the interviewee was a consultant with the non-profit corporation involved in writing the charter petition. This corporation also ran post-high school vocational training programs. The interviewee had prior experience working with partnerships between charter schools and corporations. Initially, the charter school lacked the enrollment that had been anticipated, so the school personnel decided to close the school and then reopen the following year. The developers of the charter asked the interviewee if she would be interested in serving as the director of the re-opened school, and she accepted the position. The re-opened school received first-year status again from the California Department of Education (CDE), because CDE felt that the charter school had "acted responsibly in closing" due to the low enrollment. CDE documented the official school start date as September 2005. This account is also reflected in an historical summary of the school, contained in the approval of the charter school's closure, provided by the superintendent at a board meeting in the spring of 2006.

The charter school itself never had its own governing board. The board members of the original post-high school vocational training program, who had no prior experience with charter schools, became the board members for the charter school. The local county office of education sponsored the school officially; however, the corporation that operated the vocational program ran the school on an operational basis.

In January of 2006, the school decided to move to an independent study model. The school maintained an average daily attendance of 105 to 110 students, and, according to the interviewee, "it worked very well. As a matter of fact, it worked better. We had

less incidences with the kids, and they got that one-on-one hour every week with their teacher."

Problems and closure. According to the interviewee, around the 2005/2006 school year, a new superintendent came on board at the county office of education. This superintendent did not originally approve the charter petition and, according to the interviewee, was not supportive of charter schools. In terms of advanced apportionment and funding, the interviewee believed that the county office of education (COE)

> did everything they could [to hinder us]. Things were signed late. Things were held up, lost. We didn't get letters that they said they mailed to us. I mean, just all kinds of things were going on that just really strapped us for money.

Additionally, the interviewee indicated that another problem was that the county office of education "choked us financially. Meantime, the kids were flourishing, but that [positive student achievement] has nothing to do with it." The interviewee suggested that the county office of education withheld funding from the charter school which made it difficult to operate.

There also seems to have been a very negative relationship between the sponsoring agency (the COE) and the charter school that caused the director to feel "hassled". The interviewee believed that the harassment was because the charter school had come upon a "political struggle" between a new superintendent at the COE and the COE's board. The interviewee stated the following:

> The staff from the COE went to all of the school districts that were under them and told their key people, their superintendents and other folks, not to refer any

> kids to our program, and in fact to tell them that it was an invalid program and that they wouldn't get credits and stuff like that.

The decision-making process at the charter school level also seemed to have a negative effect. The interviewee stated that most of the decisions and meetings were between the board of the original vocational school and the COE. "We [at the school site] were told what the decision was. They [the business partner] would come to me for information like, 'What's the enrollment?' and 'What's the ADA?', 'Did you turn in the reports?' That kind of thing." Due to the aftermath of this experience, the interviewee felt that "no charter school should ever be run under a third tier. You [should] have your own board of directors; you [should] have your own governance."

In the end, this interviewee believed that the charter school was closed because:

> [the COE] just didn't want it. They just didn't want a charter school because of the competition and the loss of ADA money. A lot of people will say that the COE doesn't really get ADA. They're a county office of education, but they do. They have community day schools and they have the probation [students] and stuff like that. They do get money for that and those were the kids that we were working with. It's a typical thing with charter schools. That's probably the biggest hurdle is that you are working under your competition. Your competition is over you. If you want to look at it in that respect, I don't think it should be competition. I think that they should work together, and I think with successful charter schools, there is a way to do it.

In her open-ended survey response, the interviewee stated the following: "The charter was approved by the LEA's (Local Education Authority) Board of Trustees, but

administrators did not approve and hindered many processes, including timely funding and administrative assistance." This response reflects part of the negative relationship the interviewee felt existed between the charter school itself, the business organization, and the charter sponsor.

In a review of the minutes of county board of education meeting from the spring of 2006, the non-profit corporation that ran the school notified the county office of education in December 2005 that the school was not financially viable with its current enrollment of approximately 96 students. The corporation recommended that the county office of education close the school no later than the end of the 2005/2006 school year. Also stated in the minutes was the following: "Due to financial difficulties, the school unilaterally changed its program to a 100 percent independent study non-classroom based program in January 2006, which was deemed a violation of the charter." The approval of the closure of the school carried unanimously at the spring 2006 board meeting. One of the board members stated that the "[charter] proposal was [initially] reviewed with a fine toothed comb. It failed because it failed, not because the board didn't do its job."

Advice. One piece of advice that the interviewee felt would make a big difference with charter schools was to make community colleges and four-year colleges an LEA so that they could sponsor charter schools like districts and county offices of education. That way there would be an innate educational focus through the lens of an actual educational institution, unlike the muddled and sometimes self-serving focus of the business entity in this example.

The interviewee also thought that there were three items that must be addressed in

order for a charter to be successful. First, the charter has to be sure that it is going to have a good relationship with their sponsor. Second, the charter needs to be sure that the model of the school is embedded in best practice, and that there are data available to prove that the model does work. The interviewee knew that the vocational training program that existed separate and prior to the charter school was successful, but integrating it into a high school educational setting and eventually an independent study program was new. There was not any data available to establish the viability of transplanting the vocational training program model into a high school setting, and more research could have been done to determine whether or not the model had a chance of being successful. Finally, the charter school should not have what the interviewee calls a "third layer". The interviewee suggested that the governance structure be comprised solely of the board of the charter school and the board of the sponsoring agency. After some reflection, the interviewee also added that community support is important.

Finally, the interviewee summed up her ideas regarding the need for charter schools:

> California doesn't know how many kids they are losing. I can tell you it's more than they're telling, and it's a shame. The kids are not challenged. They're frustrated. You talk to the kids and hear that they're not getting what they need to get and it's not because they're stupid. So we need something. I think charter schools help. It's one tool.

Conclusion

This chapter presented all nine qualitative interviews in case study format. The interview data were triangulated with data from document analysis and the interviewees'

responses on the surveys that were completed prior to the interviews. The following chapter begins with a summary of cross-case findings and then provides suggestions for policy and practice and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to the length of the previous case study descriptions, I have decided to present the results of the cross-case analysis and directly respond to the two research questions at the outset of this chapter. The second part of the chapter discusses study-based recommendations for policymakers and practitioners, as well as recommendations for researchers who will continue the study of the reasons behind charter school closures.

A Summary of Cross-Case Findings

A Methodological Postscript

Before discussing the findings of my research, I must acknowledge once again the flaws with this study. In the study's original design, the major focus was on collecting survey data. The qualitative component was intended to merely add a bit of depth to the survey data from a large sample of former directors of closed charter schools and what they had to say about their closure experiences. Consequently, the plans for the qualitative piece were much more modest than they would have been if the primary focus was on creating qualitative case studies of the charter school closure experience at various sites. There were not plans in this study, for example, to triangulate what the former directors said through interviews with other key stakeholders.

After I discovered that the survey response rate was so low that the survey data did not really contribute very much information, I was forced to make the case studies the centerpiece of my study. Although I attempted to do whatever within-case study triangulation was possible at that point by reviewing board meeting minutes, newspaper

articles (when available), and the interviewee's own survey responses, this triangulation effort was not nearly as detailed or as extensive as it should have been.

Consequently, I must emphasize yet again that the findings reported here, even about the nine schools of focus, must be viewed with considerable caution. The case studies do suggest some intriguing hypotheses about why schools closed and how the likelihood of closure might be minimized; however, the operative word here is *hypotheses.* The findings here must be supported by other studies, including some with substantially larger samples, before any of the findings that are reported here can be viewed as definitive.

Finally, I must conclude with the idea that many "first" studies generate hypotheses from which to develop further study. Although the case studies could have been developed more deeply, the stories from the nine individuals and the cross-case analyses that were generated are valuable and provide both insight and perspectives that have not been explored before.

Cross-case Analysis Results

Before proceeding with my announced organizational strategy, I should note that there were many similarities, as well as some differences, among the qualitative interview responses about the reasons that the interviewed former directors gave for the closure of their charter schools. They also provided both similar and different pieces of advice to others who wanted to start charter schools. These data are summarized in two matrices located in the appendices that support the findings presented below. Appendix E contains a matrix of similar themes reflecting the directors' reasons for closure. Appendix F contains a matrix of similar themes reflecting the directors' advice for others wanting to

start or maintain a charter school. The information contained in these two appendices has been used to answer the study's research questions.

Research Question One: What Are the Reasons Former Charter School Leaders Give for the Closure of Their Schools?

The reasons articulated by former directors. Conflict with the school's sponsoring agent was a reason cited by five of the nine interviewees for school closure. Some interviewees could document multiple examples of this conflict; others had only a single example. The director interviewed for case study nine shared that their school's sponsoring agency, a county office of education, "did everything they could [to hinder us]. Things were signed late. Things were held up, lost. We didn't get letters that they said they mailed to us."

A negative relationship with the district superintendent was a second theme found in the qualitative interviews. Four of the nine interviewees, three of whom also cited conflict with the sponsoring district as a major contributor to the school's closure, felt that the district superintendent was "anti-charter" or "not a charter advocate."

Seven of the charter schools in this study were sponsored by school districts; two were sponsored by county offices of education. Both of the directors of the schools that were sponsored by a county office of education cited conflict with the sponsoring board and a negative relationship with the superintendent as two reasons why they felt their schools had closed.

A third theme, issues with securing or paying for facilities, was discovered in three of the nine interviews. The director of the school in case study five said, "I couldn't have foreseen the closing of the site that [the school] was going to be on. I don't know

how you would guarantee something like that." In each of the three case studies in which facilities were a factor in school closure, there was no mention of a negative relationship with the district superintendent or their sponsoring agency.

A fourth theme, found in five of the nine interviews (see Appendix E), was financial or budgetary issues. For example, these issues ranged from one interviewee claiming to have personally financed the salaries of the teachers ("I took out a second mortgage on my house to pay salaries, which I'm never going to see again"), to charge-backs that sponsoring agents or corporate partners were making to the schools that were deemed excessive by the schools' directors. The following is one director's account:

> I was not pleased with [our corporate partner] because they were taking a million dollars a year in our state funding for their operating expenses. With my research and my background, I know that three or four percent was overhead cost, but not a million dollars. It was excessive.

A fifth theme was an ineffective, and sometimes dysfunctional, relationship between the charter school and a business or corporate partner. This reason was cited in all three of the case studies where there was a business or corporate partner. These partnerships looked different in the three different case studies, although in two of the case studies (three and seven), the directors named the same educational management organization (EMO) as being problematic. In case study three, the for-profit EMO was part of the inception of the school and partnered with the sponsoring district. According to the director, this EMO provided little to no oversight on the charter school's governing board or with day-to-day activities. In case study seven, the director stated the following about the EMO, which was also viewed as problematic by the former director of school

three: "We [the charter school] were accountable to them [the EMO], but there was no back and forth."

The director of the school discussed in case study nine recalled that their business partner was involved as part of the charter school governing board, but seemed to "not understand charter school law. They didn't understand any charter school stuff. They were very removed from the charter school." One common element among these three case studies, however, was that the three interviewees felt that their relationships with their corporate partners were anything but effective.

The sixth and final theme, found in case studies three and seven, was that the schools closed partly because of questionable ethical behavior on the part of the business partner. Here the emphasis goes well beyond simply having an unproductive relationship between the school and the business partner, even though the accusations of unethical behavior often contributed to unsuccessful working relationships. In fact, the ethical lapses described could be construed, at times, as illegal behavior. Both schools that were discussed in these two case studies could be considered entrepreneur-initiated.

The interviewee from case study three stated the following: "I think I could have managed [the business partner], but it felt very yucky. It felt improper. It was ethically wrong." The interviewee from case study seven also recounted that she questioned the decisions and behaviors of the corporation. The corporation, in turn, supposedly told her that she was going to be fired or would have to resign because they didn't like her stirring things up.

A comparison of director's reasons with official reasons for closure. The following matrix compares the documented reason for the closure of each school in this

study with the reason(s) the directors gave for the closure of the school. The school type is also included in order to further examine reasons for closure alongside the characterization of the schools that closed.

Table 1

Discrepancies Between Documented Reasons and Directors' Reasons for Closures

Case study number	Type According to Wells, Lopez, Scott, and Holme (1999) Typology	Documented reason(s) for closure	Reason(s) for closure as stated by directors
1	Urban/Ethnocentric/ Grassroots	Failure to make academic progress	Conflict with sponsoring board; negative relationship with district or COE superintendent; financial/budget issues
2	Founded by charismatic educational leader	Incomplete curriculum, an unbalanced budget, and an absence of a secured facility	Conflict with sponsoring board; issues with facilities

Table 1 (continued)

3	Entrepreneur-initiated	Inadequate funding	Financial/budget issues; ineffective relationship with business partner; unethical behavior by business partner
4	Urban/Ethnocentric/ Grassroots	Fiscal mismanagement	Conflict with sponsoring board; negative relationship with district or COE superintendent; financial/budget issues
5	Founded by charismatic educational leader	Low enrollment	Conflict with sponsoring board; issues with facilities
6	Parent-led	Reverted to non-charter status	Chose to revert to non-charter status

Table 1 (continued)

7	Entrepreneur-initiated	Mismanagement	Negative relationship with district or COE superintendent; financial/budget issues; ineffective relationship with business partner; unethical behavior by business partner
8	Urban/Ethnocentric/ Grassroots	Lack of facilities; inadequate funding	Issues with facilities
9	Entrepreneur-initiated	Financial difficulties; change in program deemed violation of charter	Conflict with sponsoring board; negative relationship with district or COE superintendent; financial/budget issues; ineffective relationship with business partner

One obvious reason for discrepancies between the third and fourth columns of the matrix is that typically there is only one formal documented reason for closure, whereas seven of the nine former directors felt that there were multiple reasons that contributed to their charter school's closure. Their interpretation, in fact, was that the reasons for their schools' closures were too complex to condense into one single reason.

Even with multiple reasons, there are some interesting patterns that can be discerned from reviewing the contents of the matrix. For example, the interviewees in case studies one and four cited the same three reasons for their schools' closures: lack of support from their sponsoring agents' boards, a negative relationship with the district superintendent, and financial or budgetary issues. Both of these schools could be categorized as urban/ethnocentric/grassroots. Additionally, the data in case studies two and five generated the same themes: lack of support from their sponsoring agents' boards, and issues with facilities. These schools were the only two in this study that were considered charters founded by charismatic educational leaders.

Case study six, a parent-led charter school, and case study eight, an urban/ethnocentric/grassroots school, were the only two case studies in which the directors cited a *single* reason for closure. Case study six was also the only school where the official reason was exactly the same as what the director gave for the reason given for closure. This consistency may have something to do with the fact that case study six was this study's only conversion charter school and the only school that reverted back to traditional public school status rather than simply closing the school building doors. The director of this particular school was the only one who came across as apathetic to the

loss of his school's charter status. From his perspective, there was no controversy and no resistance from faculty or teachers to convert back once again to traditional school status.

There was also a close correspondence between the documented and director's reason for closing in case study eight. According to the director associated with case study eight, inadequate facilities were, indeed, the bottom-line cause of the closure. This individual did, however, articulate a number of other contributing variables that played a part in the closure process. These variables included insufficient student enrollment and lack of an aggressive marketing campaign. The director explicitly linked these intervening variables, however, with the school's facilities problems (specifically, the cost of facilities), one of the official reasons found on California Department of Education documentation.

Finally, case studies two, three, four, and nine had *some* overlap between the legal reason for closure and the director's reasons for closure. In case study two, problems with facilities was one of the reasons cited for closure. In case studies three, four, and nine, funding or financial issues were found in both categories of closure data.

If case study six is included, which was the only case study that had an identical official reason and director's reason for closure, five of the nine directors in this study shared, at the very least, some alignment with the official reason(s) for their schools' closures. These schools represented the four different types of charter schools in the Wells et. al. typology discussed in earlier chapters of this study.

On the other hand, four of the directors felt that the official reason(s) given for the closure of their schools were inaccurate at best. The types of charter schools represented were those founded by a charismatic educational leader, entrepreneur-initiated, and

urban/ethnocentric/grassroots. Although this data is not generalizable to other charter schools that have closed given the number of case studies in this study, the idea that some directors feel there is such a discrepancy in closure data is a component that warrants further review and research.

Research Question Two: What Advice Do These Former Charter School Leaders Offer to Those Who Are Interested in Starting or Continuing a Charter School?

In terms of offering advice, there were two themes that surfaced in five different case studies. The first theme, found in case studies one, three, four, seven and eight, was the need to secure and control finances. This particular advice was offered by the directors of all of the schools in this study that could be considered urban/ethnocentric/grassroots, and by two of the directors of schools that could be regarded as entrepreneur-initiated. In hindsight, these directors felt it was imperative to know where money was coming from, where it was going, and who "held the purse strings." The director of case study seven, for example, stated, "You have to know where the money is. The money was the big key in the running of the school because you can't do things without the funding."

A second theme that was found in five of the nine case studies (case studies two, six, seven, eight and nine) involved the perceived need to develop and maintain a collaborative relationship with the charter school's sponsoring agency or the sponsoring agency's superintendent. These schools embody all four of the Wells et. al. types represented in this study. The director of case study six, for example, believed this relationship was important because the charter school could be closed at the "whim" of

the district. Interestingly this school was not closed, according to the director and official documentation, for reasons that reflect an adversarial relationship with its sponsoring district. The director of case study eight also emphasized that "staying committed to trying to collaborate with the district [reinforces that the charter school] is here to stay [and that the school is] looking for renewal."

The third advice theme, which was found in case studies six, seven, eight and nine, was the importance of beginning a charter school with a vision or specific objective. The directors that shared this piece of advice came from the study's only parent-led charter, an urban/ethnocentric/grassroots charter, and two entrepreneur-initiated charters. The director of case study nine (an entrepreneur-initiated charter with a business partnership) noted that this vision or objective should be based on "best practice," and that there should be "data to prove the model."

The directors of case studies one, three, and nine (one urban/ethnocentric/grassroots and two entrepreneur-initiated) also suggested that a business entity should not operate a charter school. Interestingly, case study one was not operated by a business. Nevertheless, the director of case study one stated plainly: "I don't think business people should be running charters. Many are." In a bit of a contradiction, however, this same director also stated that she would recommend "hiring a business person or business firm" to conduct the business aspect of the charter school. One final point about the advice about charters and for-profit business: Case study seven was operated by an EMO, but the former director did not offer the sort of advice that the directors in cases one, three and nine provided.

Another advice-related theme, found in case studies six and eight (parent-led and urban/ethnocentric/grassroots), was the recommendation to maintain a high level of enthusiasm and energy. The interviewee associated with case study eight believed that there needs to be an "attitude that there's no way this school is going to close down. Someone [needs to be willing] to stay up the late nights and put their own house on the line to get [the charter school] open and keep it open."

The director of case study five, a charter school categorized as being founded by a charismatic educational leader, classified her advice under what she believed could have been done differently in order to keep her school open. This director cited the need for a larger student population (low enrollment happened to be the legal reason why the school closed, but it was not one of the reasons she cited for why the school closed). Instead, her advice focused on the need to have a large potential applicant pool. In fact, she stated that she believed access to large numbers of students was the reason many charter schools wanted to be in urban areas, because "you have a lot of kids to draw from."

Although none of the directors suggested "knowing charter school law" as a specific form of advice to give to others, data from four of the case studies reflect that the directors strongly believed that if they were more privy to charter school law, aware of changes in the law, or knew how to enforce the law, their particular schools may still be open today.

The director of case study two, a charter founded by a charismatic educational leader, believed her school would have stayed open if the state would have "enforced charter school rules, because we should not have been held to the memorandum of

understanding [with the sponsoring district]. The charter school law is what should apply. The state wasn't willing to enforce the law in any way."

The director of case study three, an entrepreneur-initiated charter school, shared that her and her staff should have been constantly aware of "the most recent rules, regulations, and laws that are going to impact [the school's] funding."

In case study nine, another entrepreneur-initiated charter school, the director thought that the school's business partner should have exercised its "legal rights" to make the school's sponsoring agent (a county office of education) aware that the business felt that the COE was not fulfilling its responsibilities as an authorizing agent.

Finally, the director of the only parent-led charter school in the study thought that his school would still be a charter school today "if the school district hadn't come to us and said with the new changes in law, you're going to cost us more money as a charter school."

After looking at the data and types of schools associated with each piece of advice, the advice spans across the different types of schools represented in this study from the Wells et. al. typology. There is no single piece of advice that comes from the directors of one particular type of charter school.

When it came to the professional experience and education of the directors included in this study, five had less than three years of administrative experience prior to directing their respective charter schools. The educational backgrounds of these five ranged from "some graduate school" to doctoral degrees. Three directors had more than nine years of experience prior to directing their charter schools: one of these directors had

a bachelor's degree, one had a master's degree, and one had a doctoral degree. One director had approximately six years of experience with a master's degree.

Three of the five directors that recommended the advice of "securing and controlling finances" had less than three years of administrative experience prior to directing their charter schools. Three of the five directors that suggested the importance of "developing and maintaining collaboration and relationships with sponsoring agency" also had been an administrator for less than three years before joining or starting their charter schools. Two of these directors recommended this advice in addition to "securing and controlling finances." The more experienced administrators, however, were still represented in these advice groups.

None of the five advice themes were limited to either the fairly inexperienced directors or the more seasoned directors. This may suggest that the advice generated from these charters' closures can be attributed to the nature of being a charter school (particularly a start-up charter school), and that the closures cannot entirely be ascribed to administrative lack of experience.

Summary

The revised purpose of this study was to 1) ascertain both the legal and director-stated reasons for some California charter school closures and 2) explore what advice administrators of closed charter schools would give to those wanting to open, or continue to operate, a viable charter school. Although this dissertation was initially designed as a mixed-methodology study, the resulting research focused on nine qualitative interviews, which were triangulated with the interviewees' survey responses and document analysis.

In the qualitative interviews, the administrators' stated reasons for the closures fell into six themes: conflict with the sponsoring board, negative relationship with the sponsoring district or COE superintendent, issues with facilities, financial or budgeting issues, ineffective collaboration with a business partner, and questions of ethical behavior by a business partner. Five of the nine interviewees felt their schools closed primarily because of a negative relationship with their charter sponsor, which in all cases was their local district's school board or county office of education. Five of the nine interviews referred to fiscal problems as one of the major reasons for the school's closure. Four of the nine interviewees mentioned that a negative relationship with the superintendent of the district or COE that granted the charter contributed to the school's downfall. Among these three themes, case studies one, four, and nine cited all three as reasons why they felt their schools closed. Case studies one and four could be typed as urban/ethnocentric/grassroots; case nine could be considered entrepreneur-initiated and had a partnership with a business. There seem to be few similarities among the schools and their directors, other than their reasons for closure.

Five of the nine interviewees (case studies one, three, four, seven, and nine) felt that, in order to maintain or open a successful charter school, the administrator needs to have secure control over the finances and budget of the school (see Appendix F). Additionally, five directors (case studies two, six, seven, eight, and nine) also said that the development and maintenance of relationships with the sponsoring agency will positively impact a charter school. Five of nine (case studies one, six, seven, eight, and nine) cited that a charter school director must begin with a vision or specific objective that everyone can rally around. Of these three responses, case studies seven and eight

included all three pieces of advice in their responses. Interestingly enough, these two case studies are different types within the Wells et. al. typology that closed for different reasons.

Recommendations

A study with an n of nine has inevitable limitations that must be acknowledged. On the other hand, such a study can have considerable heuristic value if it highlights issues to consider and hypotheses to test in other situations. This study lends itself to a variety of recommendations for those in the charter school field. Additionally, leaders and school reform enthusiasts in the traditional public school system may also benefit from the results of this study. I have formulated several recommendations after analyzing the data.

Policy and Practice

First, there seems to be a need for a formal support network among *new* charter school directors. Many of the directors in this study lacked an administrative credential, and although this may not have directly contributed to the school closure, the study participants clearly voiced the need for additional support, especially when it came to legal and financial issues, as reported earlier in this chapter. To be sure, there are networks, such as the California Charter School Association, that offer support and advice, but none of the interviewees mentioned those agencies as influential in their tenure as charter school directors. Although the interviewees were not asked specifically about support they received from agencies outside of their sponsoring agencies, two of the former directors mentioned attending a training or workshop designed to support charter school operators prior to opening their respective schools.

There are some associations in the state that sponsor workshops and support for charter schools in general; however, these directors seemed to have needed something more: something specific to their needs and abilities beyond having a passion to serve a particular community, wanting to address the needs of an underserved population of students, or desiring more freedom from district rules and regulations. It is still unclear as to whether or not the existence of CMOs (Charter Management Organizations) as a means of support has any impact on the sustainability of charter schools, particularly schools with new or inexperienced leadership, since they were not mentioned as a component in any of the case studies included in this research. CMOs, according to the Center on Reinventing Public Education (2007), are non-profit organizations that seek to manage charter schools by replicating successful schools in multiple locations.

Under the umbrella of support, each sponsoring agency should provide the charter school with a neutral charter school liaison who is available to help with charter renewal, procedural information, and other operating issues. Many of the directors I interviewed had powerful visions for their schools, but little practical experience.

Businesses or corporations that choose to partner with charter schools, particularly those that are funding sources for the schools, should require their personnel to be trained in areas of charter school law and education in general. In fact, charter schools that are seeking business partners should insist on appropriate preparation for the business so that the elements of charter school law and/or operation are clearly understood.

The following table reflects statements made by each of the three directors whose schools worked with or were managed by a business or educational management

organization (EMO). Since this data comes from directors of charter schools that have closed, the data suggest that there is a need for businesses involved in charter school management or support to become aware of the specificities that come with operating charter schools.

Table 2

Statements by Directors That Reflect the Need for Business or EMO to Know Charter School Law and/or Operation

Case study number	Supporting quote
3	"[The EMO] needed knowledge of how [charter] schools work within the system, how funding happens, what the mechanisms of support are."
7	"The business [EMO] didn't know what they were doing. I think they got in over their heads."
9	"[Our business partner] didn't have a handle on the educational system and how it works. They really didn't understand charter school law at all."

Further Research

The charter school field would benefit from a much more securely triangulated study that utilizes more quantitative data to support qualitative research. Due to the fact

that I asked people to share what could be considered significant failures in their professional lives, I, undoubtedly, should have anticipated with much greater certainty that I would have encountered difficulty collecting responses to the quantitative surveys.

Further research, perhaps, could focus on more recent closures first, so that contact information is more current and accessible. Additionally, more qualitative data are needed to tell the story of charter school closures. This data should come from multiple stakeholders, including parents, students, teachers, and representatives from the sponsoring agencies, as well as former directors.

Because of the problems associated with finding information for this study, it is recommended that a newly created central database be established to collect information on closed charter schools. As a part of the closure process, charter schools would be required to submit a report to this database that would document, among other things, the years of operation, the sponsoring agent, and the documented legal reason for closure. Some organizations have attempted this sort of documentation; however, after a cross-analysis of documents, it was discovered that some schools were present in one document, but not another. Due to the lack of organization of information surrounding charter school closures, any information that can be accessed on one place would be a first step in benefiting the field as a whole.

Conclusion

The unanticipated consequences that resulted from this study will certainly be of some use in the context of future charter school research, particularly when it comes to charter school closures.

This study, in fact, demonstrates how difficult it is to locate individuals for a study regarding an event that already has occurred; it is exponentially more difficult to locate people willing to participate in a study in which they may have contributed to the closure of a school.

When individuals were located, they more than likely shared one side of the charter school closure story, in order to ensure that they did not take sole (or in some cases, any) responsibility for their particular charter school's closure. Even if the former directors knew that their actions had a substantial impact on the closure of the school, they probably would not fully disclose the full account of their own personal failure.

What we do not find in a study of this nature is equally as important as what we do find. Since none of the charter schools examined in this study were considered teacher-led charter schools (according to the Wells, Lopez, Scott, and Holme typology), it would be important to determine whether or not teacher-led charters are more successful than the other typologies of charter schools, or, at the very least, why they might be less likely to close. What, if anything, is different about teacher-led charters?

Conversely, the majority of schools examined in this study were considered charter schools guided by charismatic leaders or schools that were founded to serve a specific population of underserved students (urban/grassroots/ethnocentric). Are these schools just simply more likely to close? Or are the leaders of these schools, because of their personalities, more willing to participate in this sort of study so that their voices are heard?

Charter schools, and those that lead them, are not only dynamic, but they possess the potential to be influential in the realm of school reform. We certainly can learn from

charter schools that thrive; on the other hand we can, and should, continue to learn from those that are less successful as long as there are those who are willing to share their stories in order to have an impact on our educational system.

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Appendix A
Introduction Letter for Quantitative Surveys

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Jennifer Reiter-Cook, and I am a doctoral student at the University of San Diego. I obtained your contact information through a list of closed and revoked charter schools on the California Department of Education website. I would be incredibly grateful if you would be willing to participate in my dissertation study regarding charter schools that have closed. Information from this study will contribute to knowledge in the field of charter schools, especially for those who are interested in becoming charter school sponsors or operators, as well as institutions that are involved in providing professional development for charter school leaders.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time. Data collected prior to withdrawal by the participant will not be used, unless the participant gives permission through writing. Your personal information will be kept confidential.

You can assist by filling out a survey that will be sent to you in one week. This survey will ask your opinion regarding the closure of the school that you managed. The information you provide will help those interested in charter schools by allowing your experiences to be shared. Additionally, there will be no public association between your name and your survey responses.

After the surveys have been collected, I might contact you regarding a follow-up interview. You may choose to participate in the interview or not.

Please respond to this email if you would be willing to complete the survey. If you have any questions, you can reach me at jcook 105(alcox.net or (619) 962-1342. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Appendix B
Charter School Closure Survey

1.1 have read the introductory letter that accompanied the survey link, and agree to voluntarily answer the following 18 survey questions. Yes No

Please answer the following questions about your professional experience and preparation.

2. Prior to administrating at the charter school, how long had you been an administrator?
Less than 1 year 1-3 years 4-6 years 7-9 years More than 9 years

3. What is your educational background?
Bachelor's Degree
Some graduate school
Master's Degree
Doctoral Degree
Other_____

4. Do you hold a teaching credential?
Yes No

5. Do you hold an educational administrative credential?
Yes No

Please respond to the following statements based on your experience with a charter school closure.

6. Loss of facilities led to the closure of the charter school.
Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. Other problems with facilities led to the closure of the charter school.
Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

8. Personnel issues contributed to the closure of my charter school.
Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

9. Lack of trainings and/or professional development opportunities for myself and my staff led to the closure of the charter school.
Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

10. Lack of proper financial management led to the closure of my charter school.
Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

11. Low student enrollment led to the closure of the charter school.
Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

12. Lack of appropriate student achievement led to the closure of my charter school.
Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

13. There was little or no growth in student achievement while the charter school was in existence.
Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

14. There were no ethical violations that led to the closure of the charter school.
Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

15. The charter school operated under principles of fairness and decency.
Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

16. The charter school I worked for closed solely for the legal reasons stated.
Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

17. Analyzing formal closure documents for the school would give a clear and complete picture of the reasons for my charter school's closure.
Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

18.1 have an opinion as to how I would do things differently if I were managing the closed charter school again.
Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

19.1 have advice to give to those who want to begin or work in a charter school.
Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

20. Please list any reasons other than those offered above as possible contributing factors to your charter school's closure. You may also use this space to elaborate on any of your answers to the survey items above.

21. If you would like to be contacted to be interviewed regarding the responses on this survey, please enter your email address and/or phone number below:

Thank you very much for your time in completing this survey.

Appendix C
University of San Diego
Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Jennifer Reiter-Cook, a doctoral student in the Leadership Studies program in the School of Education at the University of San Diego, is conducting research on the closure of charter schools and information that can benefit current and future charter school operators by alerting them to factors that led to the closure of other charter schools.

1. Participants will be interviewed between 45 minutes to one hour per interview, with a maximum of two interviews.
2. Participants will be given a brief background and overview of the study. The researcher will explain the interview process, and ensure each participant have an understanding of their rights as participants in the study.
3. The interview will be conducted at a location that is acceptable to the participant, at a time that will not interfere with the participants' work or other responsibilities.
4. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed.
5. Efforts will be undertaken to ensure confidentiality by keeping data in a locked cabinet or password protected file on the computer, through the use of pseudonyms, and by giving participants an opportunity to review their transcripts and delete material that might identify them, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Data will be destroyed after 5 years, following completion of the dissertation project.
6. Although these efforts will be undertaken to ensure confidentiality, risks of participants being identified by others in the field are possible.
7. Information from this study will contribute to knowledge in the field of charter schools, especially for those who are interested in becoming charter school sponsors or operators, as well as institutions that are involved in providing professional development for charter school leaders.
8. Participation in this study is voluntary. A participant may withdraw from the study at any time. Data collected prior to withdrawal by the participant will not be used, unless the participant gives permission through writing.
9. If a participant has any questions about this study, or activities that occur during the course of this study, he or she may contact Jennifer Reiter-Cook at 619-962-1342 Gcookl05@cox.net), or Dr. Robert Donmoyer at 619-260-7445 (donmoyer@cox.net), the faculty advisor for this study.
10. The information collected will be used to complete class assignments and may also be used in other publications the author writes about the topic of this study.
11. There is no agreement, written or verbal, beyond that which is expressed on this consent form.

I, the undersigned, understand the above conditions and give my consent to my voluntary participation in the research that has been described.

Signature of Interviewee_____ Date_____

Printed Name_____ Address_____
Contact Information: Phone (____)_____
Email

Appendix D
Interview Guide

Knowledge

a) The participant will be given the opportunity to create a timeline regarding their involvement in the charter school through its closure. The guide questions that follow will be used a) if the participant chooses not to participate in the timeline activity or b) if there are gaps in the information presented in the timeline that need to be clarified.

b) What are your experiences in relation to your charter school closure?

- When did you become involved?
- Who else was involved?
- Who was responsible for drafting charter petition?
- What issues/problems, if any, were present from the beginning?
- What strengths were evident?
- Who had significant influence in decision-making processes?

Opinions

a) Leading up to closure: what was going on?

b) Closure of school: why do you feel the school closed? Does this differ from documented reasons?

c) Preventive measures: what could have been done, in your opinion, to keep the school open?

d) Advice: what do others need to know about opening/maintaining a charter school?

Appendix E
Qualitative Interview Cross-Case Analysis Matrix: Reasons for Closure

Case study numbers	Theme generated	Supporting quotes
1,2,4,5,9	Conflict with, or lack of support from, sponsoring board	Interview 1: "I reached out and said I wanted to talk about [the renewal application] prior to the renewal and they never responded." Interview 2: "We found out from the lenders we were seeking that [the sponsoring district] was telling them not to invest with us because they were going to take the petition." "We'd hire a teacher and a week later she'd be offered a position in [a district school]." Interview 4: "The mandate [from the county office of education (COE)] was that we would start school number two by the second

year. We did that, but now how are we going to pay for this? So [the COE] said, 'It's not our problem. We're not a lending institution and we're not a loan institution either so if you cannot sustain yourself, we're going to close you down.'"

Interview 5: "One of the huge [problems] was the board support. I had to wait for five months before they'd say they'd take the [grant] money [from the state]."

Interview 9: The county office of education (COE) "did everything they could [to hinder us]. Things were signed late. Things were held up, lost. We didn't get letters that they said they

		mailed to us."
1,4,7,9	Negative relationship with superintendent	Interview 1: "[The superintendent] came on the spring of our first year. In the fall, we had a big grant and he was sitting on the check, he didn't issue the check." "Our superintendent doesn't talk to people." Interview 4: "Word came to me that [the new county superintendent] was very anti-charter, and I was told to keep everything up because [the superintendent] is out to close [charter] schools down." Interview 7: "There was a change in admin in the district halfway through which changed the whole complexion. The first

		superintendent was looking at the charter school as bringing in money to the district. She retired, and then the second superintendent looked at charter schools as being problems and not seeing it as a benefit to the district, and so the relationship went way downhill when the administration changed." Interview 9: The new superintendent "inherited [the charter school] and didn't want it. He's not a charter school advocate."
2,5,8	Issues with facilities	Interview 2: "[The district] said that we were out of a building, even though we had another building." Interview 5: "I couldn't have foreseen the closing of the

		site that [the school] was going to be on. I don't know how you would guarantee something like that." Interview 8: "If the district didn't drag their feet, and they were more reasonable in finding us space, if they collaborated instead of 'You are on your own'. I couldn't personally make it happen."
1,3,4,7,9	Financial/Budget issues	Interview 1: "I took out a second mortgage on my house to pay salaries, which I'm never going to see again." Interview 3: "The school district was inappropriately collecting high fees from us. The contract [with the business partner] which was around 22/23 percent was excessive."

The business partner "didn't tell us that there was all this money sitting in reserve. Not having any access to the detail, we very much had the impression that we were going bankrupt."

Interview 4: "We were not able to financially maintain the school."

Interview 7: "I was not pleased with the [business running the school] because they were taking a million dollars a year in our state funding for their operating expenses. And with my research and my background, I know that 3 percent, 4 percent was overhead cost, but not a million dollars. It was excessive."

	Interview 9: The county office of education "choked us financially. Meantime, the kids were flourishing, but that has nothing to do with it."
Charter worked ineffectively with business partner	Interview 3: "The oversight was, as far as I could tell, not very much of anything."
	Interview 7: "That entrepreneurial thing of having a company running a school I don't think was a good idea. I think that that was the downfall of the school."
	Interview 9: The business running the charter school "did not understand charter school law. They didn't understand any charter school stuff. They were very removed from the charter

		school."
3,7	Questioned ethical behavior by business partner	Interview 3: "The oversight as far as I can tell was not much of anything. There was no teacher training. There was no oversight of work. There was no verification of what sorts of materials were purchased with the budgets they were given to buy things. There were rumors of trips to Hawaii." "I think I could have managed [the business partner], but it felt very yucky. It felt improper. It was ethically wrong." Interview 7: "I was questioning a lot of things. They basically told me that I was going to be fired or [would have to] resign

		because they didn't like what I was leading the school into getting in with the district."

Appendix F
Qualitative Interview Cross-Case Analysis Matrix: Similar Advice

Interview Numbers	Theme generated	Supporting quotes
1,3,4,7,8	Secure and control finances	Interview 1: "A million

[dollars is] about right."

"A million dollars in the bank. I'm deadly serious about that."

Interview 3: "The people who are directly running the day to day operations [need to] have a handle on the budget."

Interview 4: "If [charter schools] don't have any money, stay out of the business. That's all there is to it."

Interview 7: "You have to know where the money is. The money was the big key in the running of the school because you can't do things without the funding."

"We had a school site council yet we could make no decisions or anything

	because there was no knowledge of what our budget was really."
	Interview 8: "Someone who is cognizant of the planning piece needs to be involved, which is, when do the monies come in and how long will those monies carry us."
Develop and maintain collaboration and relationships with sponsoring agency or other district representative	Interview 2: "It doesn't matter what kind of relationship you may have with the district, it is the relationship with that person at the oversight with the charter school that is really going to be the playing point."
	Interview 6: "You've got to have the support of that district because you could be a little bit at the whim of

that district."

Interview 7: "Strong tie to a district office so that the district was really a proponent of the school, that the district participated in the operation of the school."

"You have to have solid backing of the district because charter schools have to be sponsored by the district. You have to have a good relationship person right there with the superintendent because if the superintendent isn't pro, it's not going to work you."

Interview 8: "It's staying committed to trying to collaborate with the district that we're here to stay, we're looking for renewal,

		and then having the growth that demonstrates that this is actually going to work." Interview 9: "You can have the relationship with the board, the board can approve [the charter], but it's the relationship with [the superintendent and his top staff people]. He can take [items] to the board and get the support."
6, 7, 8, 9	Begin with a vision or specific objective	Interview 6: "My first question [if someone wanted to start a charter school] would be, why?" Interview 7: "You need to have a goal out there that this is what you want to achieve. With this school, ours was to meet the needs of the population that was not fitting in to the regular

	public schools. It has to be clear defined and you have to have a vision of how you're going to meet that."
	Interview 8: "Offer the niche that the district isn't managing well. Don't go head to head."
	Interview 9: "Make sure that the model that you have is best practice. You [need to have] data that proves this model."
Business entity should not operate school	Interview 1: "I don't think business people should be running charters. Many are."
	Interview 3: "A 100% business approach is not student centered and won't work."
	Interview 9: "Make sure you don't have a third layer.

		I highly suggest that it's the charter school and authorizing agency, period."
6,8	Maintain high level of energy/enthusiasm	Interview 6: "If you try and [run the charter] by yourself, there just won't be enough energy to do that and run the school. You need to have a lot of buy in." Interview 8: "I think first it would have been attitude that there's no way this school is going to close down, and there's someone who's willing to stay up the late nights and put their own house on the line to get it open and keep it open."