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ABSTRACT

Problem-based learning (PBL) is an instructional strategy for preparing administrators whose basic unit of instruction is a project. Students are organized into teams and work on these projects to grapple with the problem and to achieve the learning objectives that are embedded in the project. In this PBL project, students design and prepare a proposal for the creation of a charter school. A set of statutes from Minnesota is provided as a sample of a charter-school law for use in the project. Reprints of several articles are provided for students' use in the project. Also included is a paper, "A Profile of the Leadership Needs of Charter School Founders," which reports the first year of a 3-year project to develop a Model Leadership Training Program for Charter School Founders sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. (DFR)

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CHARTER SCHOOLS

INSTRUCTOR EDITION

PHILIP HALLINGER

PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING PROJECT

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ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT
UNIVERSITY OF OREGON



NCREL North Central Regional Educational Laboratory
Oak Brook, Illinois

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1999



ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT
UNIVERSITY OF OREGON



NORTH CENTRAL REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY
OAK BROOK, ILLINOIS

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PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING PROJECTS

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is an instructional strategy for preparing administrators that was developed at Stanford University and later field tested at Vanderbilt University. This unique instructional strategy is fully explicated in *Problem-Based Learning for Administrators* (Edwin M. Bridges with Philip Hallinger, ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, 1992) and *Implementing Problem-Based Learning in Leadership Development* (Edwin M. Bridges and Philip Hallinger, ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, 1995).

The basic unit of instruction in a PBL curriculum is a project. Students are organized into teams and work on these projects to grapple with the problem and to achieve the learning objectives that are embedded in each PBL project. The eight features of each project are discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

1. *An Introduction.* This component introduces the student to the focal problem for the project and provides a rationale for including the problem in the curriculum.

2. *Problem.* Each project is structured around a high impact problem that the administrator is apt to face in the future. A high impact problem is one that has the potential to affect large numbers of people for an extended period. Some of these problems are highly structured, while others are complex, messy, and ill-defined.

3. *Learning objectives.* These objectives, limited in number, signal what knowledge and skills the student is expected to acquire during the project.

4. *Resources.* For each project, the student receives one or more of the following resources: books, articles, videotapes or films, and consultants

(professors or practicing administrators). The specific nature of the resources depends upon the learning objectives and the problem that is the focal point of the project. Students are also encouraged to exploit the resources that exist in their own school districts.

5. *Product specifications.* Each project culminates with some type of performance (for example, oral presentation), product (such as a memo), or both. The specifications spell out what should be included in the performance or the product. To make these projects as realistic as possible, the product specifications are frequently ambiguous. This ambiguity creates some of the risk and uncertainty that are inherent in any project; moreover, the ambiguity affords students with leeway (the amount varies from one project to another) in defining the problem and attacking it.

6. *Guiding questions.* Two types of guiding questions may be provided with the project. One type directs students to key concepts; the other type assists students in thinking through the problem.

7. *Assessment exercises.* Assessment takes several forms. Each project contains a "Talk Back" sheet that invites students to offer suggestions for improving the project. In addition, students are encouraged to prepare an essay that reflects what they have learned during the project.

8. *Time constraints.* Most projects are designed to last from two to five sessions; each session is three hours long. Projects terminate when the learning and product objectives are achieved. The clock is a constant enemy in problem-based learning projects. Team members find themselves con-



tinually struggling with the dilemma that confronts every conscientious manager, namely, how to achieve some reasonably high level of performance within severe time constraints. Managing this dilemma requires participants to make difficult choices and to set priorities (such as family vs. work, quantity vs. quality of output, and learning objectives vs. product objectives). Moreover, the dilemma underscores the need to work efficiently and to adopt time-saving measures.

In addition to these features, the Instructor Edition of every PBL project includes a *Teaching Note*. If you are an instructor, this *Teaching Note* gives you an overview of the project, discusses how you might set the stage for the project, foreshadows issues that might arise during the project, and suggests possible topics that the instructor might raise when giving feedback to students.

If you are interested in learning more about this instructional strategy and other PBL projects, we encourage you to read *Problem-Based Learning for Administrators* and to request additional information from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management.

Should you have any questions or want to share the experiences you had with this project, please phone or write:

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TEACHING NOTE

As frustration mounts over the state of public education, charter schools have emerged as alternative providers of quality education for students. In this PBL project students take advantage of recent charter-school laws to design their own charter school. After careful research, students will prepare a proposal and a plan of action.

In a twenty-minute presentation to a potential sponsor group, PBL participants will highlight the key components of the new school, including the school's mission statement, beliefs about learning, proposed student population, criteria for admission, strategies for achieving racial/ethnic balance, methodologies for program and outcome evaluation; recruitment procedures (and the desired qualifications of personnel); governance structure and management organization; and learning methods to be used.

This project will help participants better understand the steps involved in creating a charter school with an actual state charter law (included in the Resources) as the starting point. Participants will explore the technical and symbolic aspects of leadership through this problem and will hone their persuasive and presentation skills as they attempt to convince their "sponsor" that their proposed school is a worthy investment.

PRIOR TO THE PROBLEM

1. Consider sending some basic reading materials, such as the relevant charter-school law for your state, to participants prior to the project.
2. If you are using this problem as part of a leadership academy or institute, presentations and activities should relate directly to the issues teams will address as they form their charter-school proposals. You may

want to consider inviting one or two people who have been involved in a charter-school startup effort to serve as facilitators or faculty.

3. Identify the individuals who will assist you in facilitating this PBL project. The facilitators can perform such tasks as make presentations to the project groups, help you guide the activities, and serve as sources of information.

4. Provide print resources that the participants will use as they develop their charter-school mission statement, learning objectives, structure, and so forth. A three-ring binder of reprinted articles and chapters from books, for instance, is a helpful resource for PBL groups. The Resources included with this project (which include, by special arrangement with the publisher, a copy of *Charter Schools*, by Joe Nathan) are a useful starting point.

5. Internet access, though not necessary, would be a helpful resource for participants, along with a list of sites that contain charter-school information.

6. Assign participants to groups of no more than six to eight each.

7. One or more groups must serve as the potential sponsor. The sponsor group can either be a fellow PBL team or consist of outside persons. You could assign each PBL team to serve as a sponsor to another team, so that each team performs these dual roles. Members of the potential sponsor group should be able to raise critical questions during the oral presentation.

8. Decide who will generate the questions raised during the presentation: you, the other facilitators, or the sponsor group.

It may be easier and consume less time if you and the other facilitators develop the questions yourselves; however, having the sponsor group do so

would be another learning opportunity that would better prepare them to share their own proposals.

In deciding how to handle the questions for the presentations, PBL facilitators must consider time constraints and the overall learning objectives they hope to address.

DURING THE PROBLEM

1. Assign—or have participants select—roles within their group (team leader, facilitator, recorder, observer, and so forth).
2. Clarify the role of each team. Will they be a group of teachers, a group of principals, or a mixed group? It might also be helpful to specify a role and provide background information for each participant; for example, you could write a profile of each member explaining why she left her former school and decided to participate in developing this charter school.
3. Make sure participants have a copy of the state charter-school law (included in the Reading Materials) that will provide the context for this problem.
4. Encourage groups to outline a work plan for getting the problem completed in the allocated time frame.
5. Highlight resources from the notebook that will help participants as they develop the mission, philosophy, and organizational structure for their charter school.
6. Encourage groups to practice their presentation, with some members perhaps acting as the sponsor group to pose questions to the team.

AFTER THE PROBLEM

The instructor may want to have the team reflect on the following questions:

1. Did the team adequately anticipate questions or issues raised by the sponsor? Are these issues likely to be raised by others? Was the team able to respond to the issues/concerns raised? Why or why not?
2. Was the planning process effective? Why or why not?
3. Are the implementation timelines realistic?
4. Has the team thought about how they will evaluate the effectiveness of their school, not only in terms of student learning but also how well they operate as an organization?
5. Has the team thought about what they have learned and how they will take the knowledge gained through this project back to their schools? (Have you as the organizer built in time for teams to plan how they will use this knowledge?)

MISCELLANEOUS ISSUES

Time is likely to be an issue throughout this problem. One of the main challenges for facilitators is to help teams strike a balance between not taking too long on any particular point and not skimming over issues too lightly.

One way to help teams is to remind them that absolute consensus is not required. It might then be helpful in the feedback session to discuss the time constraint and how the time factor might play out in actually planning to start a charter school.

INTRODUCTION

The United States has created a system of public education that is the envy of much of the world. America's historical commitment to a free public education is the foundation of both its democratic system and economic prosperity. Unfortunately, a wealth of evidence supports the belief that American schools are not performing at an acceptable level. Parents are increasingly dissatisfied with the quality of education being provided for their children. Many teachers are similarly frustrated in their desires to offer the type of education they know could be provided to students.

Unintentionally, the very educational bureaucracy that has been the foundation of American public education is standing in the way of achieving national goals for literacy and citizenship. Educational policymakers, administrators, and teachers' unions have recognized the seriousness of the problems afflicting the nation's schools for at least fifteen years.

This situation has led to an unprecedented series of attempts to reform public schools. Effective schools, effective teaching, teacher leaders, school restructuring, educational technology, magnet schools, schools of choice, school-based management, and privatization all represent significant reforms intended to improve the performance of American schools. Yet, results

continue to disappoint. Even the best-intentioned efforts of the system to reform itself have fallen short in terms of results.

Failure of these reform efforts has led to the emergence of the *charter school* concept. Charter schools seek to inject the entrepreneurial spirit back into education by freeing schools from the bureaucratic restrictions that have accumulated over the years. Charter schools operate within the guidelines of special state laws that allow them to start from scratch to create an educational environment that produces results.

Charter schools are characterized by the diversity that drives their reason for being. In the approximately 800 charter schools operating in the U.S. today, educators are using many and varied approaches to teach students successfully. In this problem-based-learning project, you will be placed in the position of a group of educators seeking to create a charter school. In doing so you will be confronted with the visionary and practical, the educational and the political, and the legal and the fiscal issues involved in starting a school from scratch.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Learners will gain the following knowledge and skills from this project:

1. An understanding of the concept of a charter school.
2. The ability to distinguish the charter school concept from related models such as schools of choice and magnet schools.
3. An awareness of the arguments for and against charter schools.
4. Knowledge of the steps and central issues involved in developing a charter-school plan.
5. The ability to apply lessons learned from other charter schools to the development of a new charter-school proposal.

PROBLEM

Your state has recently passed a law that allows for the creation of charter schools (see the sample law in the Reading Resources). Assume that you are part of a group that wishes to take advantage of this opportunity. Your group has been meeting for several months investigating the possibilities. You have identified a potential sponsor for your school and need to make a presentation. The sponsor expects a written proposal as well as the oral presentation. In response to the product specifications detailed below, prepare a proposal and presentation.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. How do charter schools differ from schools of choice and magnet schools? How is a charter school funded?
2. What are some key assumptions about learning and assessment that you will need to consider as you create a new school?
3. How will you approach building your relationship with the teachers' union?
4. Who will be your target student population? How can you most effectively reach and recruit them?
5. How will you differentiate your school from others in your area? How will you add value beyond that offered in the traditional schools?
6. What will be your management structure?
7. How will you foster continuous learning among your staff?
8. How will you build support among key constituencies for your school? Who are your most likely allies? Who might be unlikely allies with whom you could collaborate?

PRODUCT SPECIFICATIONS

You will prepare the following products consistent with the problem presented above. Use the charter law included in Appendix A and information drawn from the problem as background for preparing a charter-school proposal as delineated below.

1. *Briefly* identify your assumptions:
 - a. What is the nature of the community in which your school will be located (SES, ethnicity, urban/rural, and so forth)?
 - b. Who is your sponsor?
 - c. Who composes the core group of people involved in developing the proposal?
2. Write a three-month work plan that includes the key tasks to be completed as you work toward creating your charter school.
3. Develop a proposal for creating a charter school. Your plan should include the following dimensions:
 - a. A mission statement
 - b. A list of your school's beliefs about learning
 - c. A description of the students you will serve, the admissions criteria you will use, and the steps you will take to achieve racial/ethnic balance within your community
 - d. How the school will evaluate learning
 - e. How you will recruit faculty (list their desired qualifications)
 - f. Governance structure and management organization of the school
 - g. Learning methods to be used, including any that are distinctive
4. Make a twenty-minute presentation to a potential sponsoring body. Your presentation should address key aspects of the proposal as well as any others deemed relevant. Be sure to identify the nature of your audience (that is, the potential sponsor).

RESOURCES

READINGS

Change Implementation

Fullan, Michael. "The School as a Learning Organization." In *Change Forces: Probing the Depths of Educational Reform*. 42-83. London: Falmer Press, 1993. 162 pages. (We were not able to obtain permission from the publisher to reproduce this material in the Reading Materials.)

Charter Schools

"Breaking Away: Charter Schools." *Education Week*, September 25, 1995. (Special supplement available on disk from *Education Week*, Special Reports, 4301 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 250, Washington, DC 20008.)

Jacobson, Linda. "Under the Microscope." *Education Week*, November 6, 1996: 21-23.

Lane, Brett. *A Profile of the Leadership Needs of Charter School Founders*. Portland, Oregon: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, September 1998.

Nathan, Joe. "Creating Charter Schools." In *Charter Schools: Creating Hope and Opportunity for American Education*. 121-66. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1996. (Note: This is the best general resource for information on charter schools.)

Nathan, Joe. "Key Early Lessons." In *Charter Schools: Creating Hope and Opportunity for American Education*. 167-79. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1996. (Note: This is the best general resource for information on charter schools.)

Pearson, Judy. "'Charter Schools for the Community Good' and Other Works of Fiction." *The High School Magazine* 6, 3 (November/December 1998): 4,6,7.

Internet

Because charter schools are still a new phenomenon, information about them is changing rapidly. Some of the best resources are available online. America Online has a live interactive chatroom where you can talk with others about charter school issues. There are also a number of Internet sites with extensive up-to-date information that you can download as desired.

In America Online, go to keyword *charter*. <http://www.aol.com>

<http://www.uscharterschools.org>

The author wishes to thank Associate Professor Claire Smrekar of Peabody College for her helpful suggestions on resources for charter schools.

<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/timely/charters.htm> (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory)

<http://csr.syr.edu> (at Syracuse University)

<http://edreform.com> (Center for Education Reform)

<http://pip.ehhs.cmich.edu/chart> (Central Michigan University)

<http://www.edexcellence.net> (Educational Excellence Network)

<http://www.ascd.org> (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development—on evaluation and assessment)

<http://www.ecs.org> (Education Commission of the States)

<http://www.ftp.nea.org/3cur.htm> (National Education Association)

<http://www.pioneerinstitute.org/csrc/appdi.htm> (Pioneer Institute)

<http://www.aasa.org/FrontBurner/Charters/charter.htm> (American Association of School Administrators)

<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/>(U.S. Department of Education's National Study of Charter Schools)

Other

Charter Law of State. (The charter law of the state of Minnesota is included in the Reading Materials. Alternatively, the instructor may make available a copy of your own state's law.)

**"TALK BACK"
SHEET**

We need your reactions to this problem-based learning project; these will play an important role in our decisions to modify, leave as is, or drop this project. Please let us have your candid reactions to what has occurred. We will take them seriously! Please write your comments on the back of this sheet if necessary.

1. How did you feel about this project when you first read about what it involved?
2. Now that you have completed the project, what are your feelings about it?
3. What did you learn from this project?
4. What effect, if any, is this project likely to have on your behavior in the future?
5. What recommendations would you make for improving this project?

READING MATERIALS

Note to Instructors:

The Resources list at the end of the project description identifies the readings that you will ask students to read. For your convenience, we have assembled these materials on the following pages. If you decide to use Fullan, "The School as a Learning Organization," students will need to purchase the book in which this chapter appears (see Resources).

We have contacted the copyright holders and have paid them any reproduction fees that apply to the inclusion of their materials in this packet. Those fees are included in its cost, which you have already paid.

The Student Edition of this project likewise includes these resource materials, under the same fee-for-reproduction basis.

This does not mean, however, that you or your students have permission to reproduce these materials on your own. If you choose to do so, you will have to obtain permission yourselves from the copyright holders, and pay them the pertinent fees.

You do have our permission to reproduce the "Talk Back" sheet to be handed out after the simulation.

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<i>Charter Schools: Creating Hope and Opportunity for American Educa- tion</i> , by Joe Nathan. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, 1996. A soft-cover edition of this book is included with this PBL project.	

MINNESOTA STATUTES on Formation and Operation of Charter Schools

The following set of statutes from the state of Minnesota provides a sample of a charter-school law for use in this PBL Project. The statutes are reprinted here by permission of the Office of Revisor of Statutes, State of Minnesota. You may also read the statute online at <http://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/stats/120/064.html>.

120.064 Results-oriented charter schools.

Subdivision 1. Purposes.

(a) The purpose of this section is to:

(1) improve pupil learning;

(2) increase learning opportunities for pupils;

(3) encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods;

(4) require the measurement of learning outcomes and create different and innovative forms of measuring outcomes;

(5) establish new forms of accountability for schools; or

(6) create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible

for the learning program at the school site.

(b) This section does not provide a means to keep open a school that otherwise would be closed. Applicants in these circumstances bear the burden of proving that conversion to a charter school fulfills a purpose specified in this subdivision, independent of the school's closing.

Subd. 2. Applicability. This section applies only to charter schools formed and operated under this section.

Subd. 3. Sponsor. A school board, private college, community college, state university, technical college, or the University of Minnesota may sponsor one or more charter schools.

Subd. 4. Formation of school. (a) A sponsor may

authorize one or more licensed teachers under section 125.05, subdivision 1, to operate a charter school subject to approval by the state board of education. If a school board elects not to sponsor a charter school, the applicant may appeal the school board's decision to the state board of education if two members of the school board voted to sponsor the school. If the state board authorizes the school, the state board shall sponsor the school according to this section. The school shall be organized and operated as a cooperative under chapter 308A or nonprofit corporation under chapter 317A.

(b) Before the operators may form and operate a school, the sponsor must file an affidavit with the state board of education stating its

intent to authorize a charter school. The affidavit must state the terms and conditions under which the sponsor would authorize a charter school. The state board must approve or disapprove the sponsor's proposed authorization within 60 days of receipt of the affidavit. Failure to obtain state board approval precludes a sponsor from authorizing the charter school that was the subject of the affidavit.

(c) The operators authorized to organize and operate a school shall hold an election for members of the school's board of directors in a timely manner after the school is operating. Any staff members who are employed at the school, including teachers providing instruction under a contract with a cooperative, and all parents of children enrolled in the school may participate in the election. Licensed teachers employed at the school, including teachers providing instruction under a contract with a cooperative, must be a majority of the members of the board of directors. A provisional board may operate before the election of the school's board of directors. Board of director meetings must comply with section 471.705.

(d) The granting or renewal of a charter by a sponsoring entity shall not be conditioned upon the

bargaining unit status of the employees of the school.

Subd. 4a. Conversion of existing schools. A school board may convert one or more of its existing schools to charter schools under this section if 90 percent of the full-time teachers at the school sign a petition seeking conversion. The conversion must occur at the beginning of an academic year.

Subd. 5. Contract. The sponsor's authorization for a charter school shall be in the form of a written contract signed by the sponsor and the board of directors of the charter school. The contract for a charter school shall be in writing and contain at least the following:

(1) a description of a program that carries out one or more of the purposes in subdivision 1;

(2) specific outcomes pupils are to achieve under subdivision 10;

(3) admission policies and procedures;

(4) management and administration of the school;

(5) requirements and procedures for program and financial audits;

(6) how the school will comply with subdivisions 8, 13, 15, and 21;

(7) assumption of liability by the charter school;

(8) types and amounts of insurance coverage to be

obtained by the charter school; and

(9) the term of the contract, which may be up to three years.

Subd. 6. Repealed, 1993 c 337 s 20

Subd. 7. Public status; exemption from statutes and rules. A charter school is a public school and is part of the state's system of public education. Except as provided in this section, a charter school is exempt from all statutes and rules applicable to a school, a school board, or a school district, although it may elect to comply with one or more provisions of statutes or rules.

Subd. 8. Requirements. (a) A charter school shall meet all applicable state and local health and safety requirements.

(b) A school sponsored by a school board may be located in any district, unless the school board of the district of the proposed location disapproves by written resolution. If such a school board denies a request to locate within its boundaries a charter school sponsored by another school board, the sponsoring school board may appeal to the state board of education. If the state board authorizes the school, the state board shall sponsor the school.

(c) A charter school must be nonsectarian in its pro-

grams, admission policies, employment practices, and all other operations. A sponsor may not authorize a charter school or program that is affiliated with a nonpublic sectarian school or a religious institution.

(d) Charter schools shall not be used as a method of providing education or generating revenue for students who are being home-schooled.

(e) The primary focus of a charter school must be to provide a comprehensive program of instruction for at least one grade or age group from five through 18 years of age. Instruction may be provided to people younger than five years and older than 18 years of age.

(f) A charter school may not charge tuition.

(g) A charter school is subject to and shall comply with chapter 363 and section 126.21.

Act, sections 127.26 to 127.39, and the Minnesota public school fee law, sections 120.71 to 120.76.

(i) A charter school is subject to the same financial audits, audit procedures, and audit requirements as a school district. The audit must be consistent with the requirements of sections 121.904 to 121.917, except to the extent deviations are necessary because of the program at the school. The department of children,

families, and learning, state auditor, or legislative auditor may conduct financial, program, or compliance audits.

(j) A charter school is a school district for the purposes of tort liability under chapter 466.

Subd. 9. Admission requirements. A charter school may limit admission to:

(1) pupils within an age group or grade level;

(2) people who are eligible to participate in the graduation incentives program under section 126.22; or

(3) residents of a specific geographic area where the percentage of the population of non-Caucasian people of that area is greater than the percentage of the non-Caucasian population in the congressional district in which the geographic area is located, and as long as the school reflects the racial and ethnic diversity of the specific area.

A charter school shall enroll an eligible pupil who submits a timely application, unless the number of applications exceeds the capacity of a program, class, grade level, or building. In this case, pupils shall be accepted by lot.

A charter school may not limit admission to pupils on the basis of intellectual ability, measures of achieve-

ment or aptitude, or athletic ability.

Subd. 10. Pupil performance. A charter school must design its programs to at least meet the outcomes adopted by the state board of education for public school students. In the absence of state board requirements, the school must meet the outcomes contained in the contract with the sponsor. The achievement levels of the outcomes contained in the contract may exceed the achievement levels of any outcomes adopted by the state board for public school students.

Subd. 11. Employment and other operating matters. A charter school shall employ or contract with necessary teachers, as defined by section 125.03, subdivision 1, who hold valid licenses to perform the particular service for which they are employed in the school. The school may employ necessary employees who are not required to hold teaching licenses to perform duties other than teaching and may contract for other services. The school may discharge teachers and nonlicensed employees.

The board of directors also shall decide matters related to the operation of the school, including budgeting, curriculum and operating procedures.

Subd. 12. Pupils with a disability. A charter school

must comply with sections 120.03 and 120.17 and rules relating to the education of pupils with a disability as though it were a school district.

Subd. 13. Length of school year. A charter school shall provide instruction each year for at least the number of days required by section 120.101, subdivision 5. It may provide instruction throughout the year according to sections 120.59 to 120.67 or 121.585.

Subd. 14. Reports. A charter school must report at least annually to its sponsor and the state board of education the information required by the sponsor or the state board. The reports are public data under chapter 13.

Subd. 14a. Review and comment. The department shall review and comment on the evaluation, by the chartering school district, of the performance of a charter school before the charter school's contract is renewed. The information from the review and comment shall be reported to the state board of education in a timely manner. Periodically, the state board shall report trends or suggestions based on the evaluation of charter school contracts to the education committees of the state legislature.

Subd. 15. Transportation. (a) By July 1 of each year, a charter school shall notify the district in which

the school is located and the department of children, families, and learning if it will provide transportation for pupils enrolled at the school for the fiscal year.

(b) If a charter school elects to provide transportation for pupils, the transportation shall be provided by the charter school within the district in which the charter school is located. The state shall pay transportation aid to the charter school according to section 124.248, subdivision 1a.

For pupils who reside outside the district in which the charter school is located, the charter school is not required to provide or pay for transportation between the pupil's residence and the border of the district in which the charter school is located. A parent may be reimbursed by the charter school for costs of transportation from the pupil's residence to the border of the district in which the charter school is located if the pupil is from a family whose income is at or below the poverty level, as determined by the federal government. The reimbursement may not exceed the pupil's actual cost of transportation or 15 cents per mile traveled, whichever is less. Reimbursement may not be paid for more than 250 miles per week.

At the time a pupil enrolls in a charter school,

the charter school shall provide the parent or guardian with information regarding the transportation.

(c) If a charter school does not elect to provide transportation, transportation for pupils enrolled at the school shall be provided by the district in which the school is located, according to sections 120.062, subdivision 9, and 123.39, subdivision 6, for a pupil residing in the same district in which the charter school is located. Transportation may be provided by the district in which the school is located, according to sections 120.062, subdivision 9, and 123.39, subdivision 6, for a pupil residing in a different district.

Subd. 16. Leased space. A charter school may lease space from a board eligible to be a sponsor or other public or private nonprofit nonsectarian organization. If a charter school is unable to lease appropriate space from an eligible board or other public or private nonprofit nonsectarian organization, the school may lease space from another nonsectarian organization if the department of children, families, and learning, in consultation with the department of administration, approves the lease. If the school is unable to lease appropriate space from public or private nonsectarian organizations, the school may lease space from a sectarian organization if

the leased space is constructed as a school facility and the department of children, families, and learning, in consultation with the department of administration, approves the lease.

Subd. 17. Initial costs. A sponsor may authorize a charter school before the applicant has secured its space, equipment, facilities, and personnel if the applicant indicates the authority is necessary for it to raise working capital. A sponsor may not authorize a school before the state board of education has approved the authorization.

Subd. 18. Disseminate information. The sponsor, the operators, and the department of children, families, and learning must disseminate information to the public on how to form and operate a charter school and how to utilize the offerings of a charter school. Particular groups to be targeted include low-income families and communities, and students of color.

Subd. 19. Leave to teach in a charter school. If a teacher employed by a school district makes a written request for an extended leave of absence to teach at a charter school, the school district must grant the leave. The school district must grant a leave for any number of years requested by the teacher, and must extend the leave at the

teacher's request. The school district may require that the request for a leave or extension of leave be made up to 90 days before the teacher would otherwise have to report for duty. Except as otherwise provided in this subdivision and except for section 125.60, subdivision 6a, the leave is governed by section 125.60, including, but not limited to, reinstatement, notice of intention to return, seniority, salary, and insurance.

During a leave, the teacher may continue to aggregate benefits and credits in the teachers' retirement association account by paying both the employer and employee contributions based upon the annual salary of the teacher for the last full pay period before the leave began. The retirement association may impose reasonable requirements to efficiently administer this subdivision.

Subd. 20. Collective bargaining. Employees of the board of directors of a charter school may, if otherwise eligible, organize under chapter 179A and comply with its provisions. The board of directors of a charter school is a public employer, for the purposes of chapter 179A, upon formation of one or more bargaining units at the school. Bargaining units at the school shall be separate from any other units within the sponsoring district, except

that bargaining units may remain part of the appropriate unit within the sponsoring district, if the employees of the school, the board of directors of the school, the exclusive representative of the appropriate unit in the sponsoring district, and the board of the sponsoring district agree to include the employees in the appropriate unit of the sponsoring district.

Subd. 20a. Teacher and other employee retirement. (a) Teachers in a charter school shall be public school teachers for the purposes of chapters 354 and 354a.

(b) Except for teachers under paragraph (a), employees in a charter school shall be public employees for the purposes of chapter 353.

Subd. 21. Causes for nonrenewal or termination. (a) The duration of the contract with a sponsor shall be for the term contained in the contract according to subdivision 5. The sponsor may or may not renew a contract at the end of the term for any ground listed in paragraph (b). A sponsor may unilaterally terminate a contract during the term of the contract for any ground listed in paragraph (b). At least 60 days before not renewing or terminating a contract, the sponsor shall notify the board of directors of the charter school of the proposed action in writing. The notice shall state the

grounds for the proposed action in reasonable detail and that the charter school's board of directors may request in writing an informal hearing before the sponsor within 14 days of receiving notice of nonrenewal or termination of the contract. Failure by the board of directors to make a written request for a hearing within the 14-day period shall be treated as acquiescence to the proposed action. Upon receiving a timely written request for a hearing, the sponsor shall give reasonable notice to the charter school's board of directors of the hearing date. The sponsor shall conduct an informal hearing before taking final action. The sponsor shall take final action to renew or not renew a contract by the last day of classes in the school year. If the sponsor is a local school board, the school's board of directors may appeal the sponsor's decision to the state board of education.

(b) A contract may be terminated or not renewed upon any of the following grounds:

(1) failure to meet the requirements for pupil performance contained in the contract;

(2) failure to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management;

(3) for violations of law;
or

(4) other good cause shown.

If a contract is terminated or not renewed, the school shall be dissolved according to the applicable provisions of chapter 308A or 317A.

Subd. 22. Pupil enrollment. If a contract is not renewed or is terminated according to subdivision 21, a pupil who attended the school, siblings of the pupil, or another pupil who resides in the same place as the pupil may enroll in the resident district or may submit an application to a nonresident district according to section 120.062 at any time. Applications and notices required by section 120.062 shall be processed and provided in a prompt manner. The application and notice deadlines in section 120.062 do not apply under these circumstances.

Subd. 23. General authority. The board of directors of a charter school may sue and be sued. The board may not levy taxes or issue bonds.

Subd. 24. Immunity. The state board of education, members of the state board, a sponsor, members of the board of a sponsor in their official capacity, and employees of a sponsor are immune from civil or criminal liability with respect to all activities related to a charter school they approve

or sponsor. The board of directors shall obtain at least the amount of and types of insurance required by the contract, according to subdivision 5.

HIST: 1991 c 265 art 3 s 38; art 9 s 3; 1992 c 499 art 12 s 1; 1993 c 224 art 9 s 12; art 14 s 16; 1994 c 465 art 2 s 1; 1994 c 647 art 9 s 1,2; 1Sp1995 c 3 art 9 s 2; art 16 s 13; 1996 c 412 art 4 s 2; 1Sp1997 c 4 art 5 s 5-9

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UNDER THE MICROSCOPE: ARE STUDENTS LEARNING?

Linda Jacobson

With the number of charter schools across the country approaching 500, it's clear that this particular reform movement won't fade away anytime soon.

Six states passed charter school legislation this year, bringing the total to 25, plus the District of Columbia. And still more states are considering laws that would allow the publicly funded, specially tailored schools, which operate free of many state and local regulations.

But with any new strategy—especially one on which states and the federal government are spending millions of the taxpayers' dollars—come demands to know whether it works.

Now, more than five years after the first charters opened in Minnesota, a growing number of education researchers—led by graduate students hungry for unexplored territory—are setting out to answer that question. Their research likely will have far-reaching implications for the future of the charter movement.

"What we really need to do is take a careful look," said Richard J. Shavelson, the dean of the education school at Stanford University. "I think [charter schools] are an idea that is appealing to the public, but the real issue is whether what goes on in the classroom has substantially changed."

By finding out whether charter schools "work," researchers mean several different things:

Do they educate students better than traditional schools? Do they lure the best students from the public schools, as some

critics claim, or do they welcome all comers, even those with learning disabilities or limited English proficiency? And, perhaps most important, can charters reinvigorate public education by injecting a strong dose of competition into the entire system?

Until recently, many independent researchers at colleges and universities and the major research organizations shied away from the politically charged subject, which has often been linked with vouchers and privatization. The field was left primarily to supporters or critics of the charter movement.

"Tenured, stable academics have by and large kept at a distance," said Eric Rofes, a doctoral student at the University of California, Berkeley, who is doing his dissertation on charters.

Experts say several factors have contributed to the recent interest:

Charter schools have now been around long enough, and there are enough of them up and running, to make accurate research possible.

Some early research has established a foundation of data upon which a broad range of further studies can build.

And, not least of all, money is available. Many states are setting aside portions of the federal grants they receive for charter schools—a total of \$51 million this year—to pay for studies that involve university professors and private research organizations.

The U.S. Department of Education has awarded a \$2.6 million contract for a large-

From *Education Week*, volume 16, number 10, November 6, 1996, pages 21-23. Copyright © 1996, Editorial Projects. Reprinted by permission of *Education Week*. All rights reserved.

scale study billed as the most definitive look at charter schools to date.

A first-year report, to be released in January, will feature results of a national telephone survey of charter school directors that had an unusually high response rate—90 percent—as well as site visits to 42 charter schools.

RPP International, a for-profit research company in Emeryville, Calif., is conducting the research, along with the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis and the Institute for Responsive Education in Boston.

First Steps

Before researchers could begin exploring the larger issues surrounding charter schools, some basic questions needed answering.

Like biologists examining a newly discovered species, early researchers began collecting data on the schools: How big are they? What do they look like? How many are there? What are their common characteristics?

Notable among the early efforts was pioneering work by Louann Bierlein, now Louisiana Gov. Mike Foster's education adviser, who developed a widely used scale for comparing charter school laws based on how much autonomy they give the schools.

The research department for the Minnesota House of Representatives also released an influential early report in 1994 that described the issues raised by charter schools in that state.

Much of this early work sought to capture the movement in its infancy or inform state policymakers on charter school activity.

Of the many other early reports, however, a large number were entangled in the political debate, published by acknowledged

supporters of charter schools or conservative think tanks that strongly support school choice. At the other end of the political spectrum, the two national teachers' unions have also been monitoring developments.

Though much of this work lacked objectivity, experts say some common themes about charter schools emerged.

They tend to be small, particularly schools that start from scratch. The average enrollment in 1995 was 287 students, according to a survey of seven states by Alex Medlar of the Denver-based Education Commission of the States and Joe Nathan of the Center for School Change at the University of Minnesota.

Most are elementary schools, although grade configurations vary widely.

And some studies indicate that they do not seem to be skimming the best and brightest from neighboring traditional schools. Nor are they serving only middle-class white students from the suburbs—in part because some state charter laws give preference to schools designed for at-risk students.

However, equity—one of the most contentious issues surrounding charter schools—will almost certainly remain a central focus of future research.

Another finding common in the early research is widespread agreement that a lack of start-up money cripples charter organizers at the outset, as does the inability to obtain capital funding for a building. Charter schools, in many cases, also receive less money per pupil than traditional schools.

'Vibrant Force'

Given those findings, many charter supporters conclude that charter schools are producing amazing results with comparatively fewer resources.

Charter schools "may be the most vibrant force in American education today," concludes a recent report from the Hudson

Institute, a conservative think tank based in Indianapolis. The report blames what it sees as the education establishment—teachers' unions, school boards, and state bureaucrats—for creating obstacles that could prevent charters from living up to their potential.

"From an educational point of view, it's almost impossible for [charter schools] to fail," said Ms. Bierlein, one of the report's three authors.

Yet many researchers who have observed charters over time note one troubling fact common to many of the schools—that educators often are ill-suited to manage them.

Many charter school operators may be visionaries with commendable ideas for educating children, said Marc Dean Millot, a social scientist in the Washington office of the Santa Monica, Calif.-based RAND Corp. But, he added, they may not have the business, management, and legal expertise necessary to operate what amounts to a small business.

Experts say the next wave of research will look at how well students in charter schools are learning. State-mandated evaluations are under way in Arizona, Colorado, and Minnesota, and Central Michigan University is studying the 40 schools it has chartered in that state.

In fact, a few examples of whether charter schools are meeting their academic goals already exist. A handful of schools—five in Minnesota, one in California, and one in Colorado—have completed their first few years and have had their charters renewed—an indication that they have met the performance goals set for them.

For example, the New Visions School in Minneapolis, which focuses on improving the reading skills of children with learning disabilities, was able to show increases in both vocabulary and reading comprehension scores during its first two years of operation.

Like many issues related to charter schools, however, the achievement question

is far from simple. Researchers say that charters pose serious challenges for anyone trying to measure and catalog them.

No two charters are alike, and there are vastly different expectations for what they can accomplish, said Pat Seppanen, an associate director of the research center at the University of Minnesota.

And if it's tough to study charters by themselves, experts say, it is even harder to compare them with traditional schools.

"We don't just have apples and oranges," Mr. Nathan, a vocal advocate of charter schools, said. "We've got lots of apples, oranges, tangerines, and bananas."

Some charter schools, such as the one that serves only deaf students in Minneapolis, are so different that they defy comparison with other schools. There are also charters for home-schooled students, on-line computer schools, and schools that serve only juveniles who have been convicted of crimes.

And if students in charter schools don't take the same tests as their counterparts in regular schools, as is the case in some states, how can you compare performance?

"It's a tricky thing," said Lori Mulholland, a senior research analyst at the Morrison Institute for Public Policy at Arizona State University in Tempe. "No matter what measure you use, it's going to be criticized."

Target of Criticism

Criticism is something that researchers who have studied charter schools have had to get used to.

"I don't hate charter schools. I don't love charter schools," said Amy Stuart Wells, an assistant professor of education policy at the University of California, Los Angeles. But, she added, "you get blasted if you just raise interesting questions."

Ms. Wells angered charter supporters last year with a paper she presented at an American Educational Research Association

conference in San Francisco. She used census data to conclude that charter schools in three California districts predominantly existed in wealthy neighborhoods where parents had high educational levels.

Poorer communities, she suggested, were possibly being excluded from the movement because they lacked the resources to organize a charter school.

Critics jumped on Ms. Wells' work, arguing that her methods did not always pinpoint the precise location of the schools, and that location often had little to do with whether the schools served low-income or minority students.

Ronald Corwin, a researcher at WestEd in San Francisco, one of 10 federally funded regional education labs, has also felt the heat.

He drew criticism from charter supporters for a study he led in 1995. In it, he asked whether charter schools that require some level of parent participation, such as a certain number of volunteer hours per week, deny admission to children whose parents can't make the commitment.

The issue was "blown out of proportion," Mr. Corwin said in a recent interview, especially since his study concluded that, overall, charter schools were doing a good job of including parents.

Questions of Objectivity

Some observers have already raised concerns about the massive, federally supported study being undertaken by RPP International, because some researchers on the project--notably Mr. Nathan--are strong advocates of charter schools. The research team also includes Wayne Jennings, a charter school organizer in Minnesota, and Eric Premack, the director of the Charter Schools Project at the Institute for Education Reform in Sacramento, Calif., who spends some of his time providing technical assistance to new charter schools.

Joan Buckley, the associate director of the educational issues department at the American Federation of Teachers and a member of an advisory board appointed to oversee the federal study, is concerned that the charter advocates won't be able to view such schools objectively.

"If there is an attempt to not disclose all of the information in the study because they think it will put charter schools in an unfavorable light, I will leave the board," said Ms. Buckley, who is also involved in a charter school research project at the AFT.

She wonders whether the board, a balanced group of charter supporters, union representatives, and highly respected researchers, will have much influence on RPP's work.

Patricia M. Lines, the director of the project at the Education Department, said the subcontractors are not violating the department's ethical standards. And Paul Berman, the president of RPP International, said the company has worked hard to design a neutral study strong enough to withstand the biases of a few members of the team.

Mr. Nathan, he said, is working as an "internal adviser" who understands the advocates' positions and contributes extensive knowledge of the subject. He won't be doing any of the actual research, Mr. Berman said. Mr. Premack and Mr. Jennings, he added, are doing some of the field work, but will not be going to the schools where they have been involved.

In addition to the annual telephone survey and the site visits, which will pick up new schools as they open, the researchers will collect several different measures of achievement, including a curriculum-based, multiple-choice test developed specifically for the study.

The study will compare the achievement of charter school students against national norms and with that of comparable students in traditional public schools. Researchers also expect to answer questions about how charter schools work, how they

affect both public and private schools, and how local, state, and federal policies help or hinder their progress. A final report is due at the end of 1999.

Getting an Inside View

Researchers who have chosen to brave the roiling political waters surrounding charter schools have often found yet another obstacle impeding their work--the educators in those schools.

Researchers say they've often gotten the cold shoulder from administrators who, in many cases, have been pestered from day one with surveys, requests for interviews, and tour groups wandering through the hallways.

Mr. Rofes said he tries to avoid the more high-profile schools. Beryl Nelson, one of the researchers at RPP International, said that she and her colleagues "took some heat" before a few schools in their sample agreed to give the achievement test and open their doors to more visitors.

But in-depth case studies, often used by graduate and doctoral students, are considered vital to understanding charter schools. They often provide the best details and descriptions of what happens in a school: its culture, instructional styles, and the relationships between students, teachers, and parents.

Cindy Grutzik, a doctoral student at the University of California, Los Angeles, spends a couple of days a week in two charter schools, interviewing teachers, attending staff meetings, and observing classrooms. She wants to know whether teachers' experiences are meeting their expectations. Her early results show that most teachers say the change has been difficult but positive.

"It seems that people understand that hard work comes along with this kind of situation," Ms. Grutzik said.

Ms. Grutzik, a former elementary school teacher, said she settled on charter schools

as a research topic because she wanted to see how education policy affects teachers. When interviewing teachers for her study, she asks them about their responsibilities at the school, their relationship with the union, and how their charter school experience compares with past teaching positions.

The evolving relationship between charter school teachers and unions is one topic being examined by the National Education Association, which has hired Ms. Wells to do some of that research.

"The basic question is, what is the changing role of the union, and how does the union need to change to accommodate the kind of autonomy that teachers want?" she said.

Ms. Buckley is one of three AFT staff members involved in a charter school project that will examine a range of issues, including teacher demographics, teacher turnover, student attendance, and mobility. A report is due in July.

Broader Change?

Of course, the crucial question about charter schools is whether they will truly transform public education as a whole. One of the tenets of the charter movement is that the success of the independent schools will force traditional schools to improve and provide more options to avoid losing their students.

Experts say it may take years to answer that question. And, as with many issues surrounding charters, the issue isn't a simple one. Both the wording of state charter laws and decisions school boards and other institutions make when considering charter applications will influence the potential of charter schools for producing broader change, experts say.

Some laws, for example, give preference to proposals for charters aimed at disadvantaged or other at-risk students.

Given that, some observers wonder how charters can spur broader change if they

primarily serve special populations of students that regular schools struggle to educate anyway.

And the fact that in some states, school boards are the only chartering authorities could limit their influence, Ms. Bierlein said. School board members are more likely to grant charters to schools that don't create competition, she argues.

But in states such as Arizona, Massachusetts, and Michigan, where other agencies such as universities and the state board of education are the sponsors, charter schools are beginning to resemble traditional schools, Ms. Bierlein added.

Instead of waiting for someone to test these theories, the Washington-based Center for Education Reform is gathering specific examples of the ways charter schools have made a difference. Jeanne Allen, the president of the organization and a school choice advocate, said the report also will include charter school failures.

It's a Values Thing

As more researchers turn to charter schools, the results of their work will likely influence future political decisions--such as whether to give charter schools money for start-up expenses or facilities.

But ultimately, Mr. Nathan argues, some issues can't be answered with a study.

"I think that research can help us understand what are the best ways to establish these schools and what are the mistakes to avoid," he said. "But I do believe the expansion of choice in public education at the bottom line is a values issue."

For More Information

Here is a list of some early reports on charter schools available in print:

Arizona's Charter Schools: A Survey of Teachers, from the Goldwater Institute, Phoenix, 1996. To order, call (602) 256-7018.

Autonomy, Accountability, and Values of Public Education: A Comparative Assessment of Charter School Statutes Leading to Model Legislation, from the Program on Re-inventing Public Education at the University of Washington, Seattle, 1996. To order, call (206) 685-2214.

Charter Schools: Legislation and Results After Four Years, from the Indiana Education Policy Center, Bloomington, Ind., 1996. To order, call (812) 855-1240.

Charter Schools: What Are They Up To? from the Education Commission of the States, Denver, 1995. A survey of 110 charter schools in seven states. To order, call (303) 299-3692.

Freedom and Innovation in California's Charter Schools, from the Southwest Regional Laboratory, Los Alamitos, Calif., 1995. To order, call (415) 565-3000.

From Paper to Practice: Challenges Facing a California Charter School, from WestEd, San Francisco, 1996. An in-depth report on Harriet Tubman Village School in San Diego. To order, call (415) 565-3085.

Massachusetts Charter School Profiles, from the Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research, Boston, 1996. To order, call (617) 723-2277.

Minnesota Charter Schools: A Research Report, from Research Department of the Minnesota House of Representatives, St. Paul, Minn., 1994. To order, call (612) 296-6753.

National Charter School Directory, from the Center for Education Reform, Washington, 1996. A regularly updated listing of all charter schools, with some basic information on each one. To order, call (202) 822-9000

"Charter Schools for the Common Good," and Other Works of Fiction

With all we hear about the advancement of charter schools, we presume they're changing American education for the better. Not so fast. Before we're swept off our feet, we need to examine the defects of charter thinking and practice—and consider that charter schools are not the solution to all the ailments of America's schools.

BY JUDY PEARSON

Charter school fervor is sweeping the land. In all corners, we hear animated chatter about the steady and rapid increase in their numbers, ample charter renewals as indicators of success, and how great a boon charters have become for American education. Unfortunately, we're so caught up in the frenzy that we don't see the inherent flaws of charter schools and the damage they inflict on American education.

Where's the accountability?

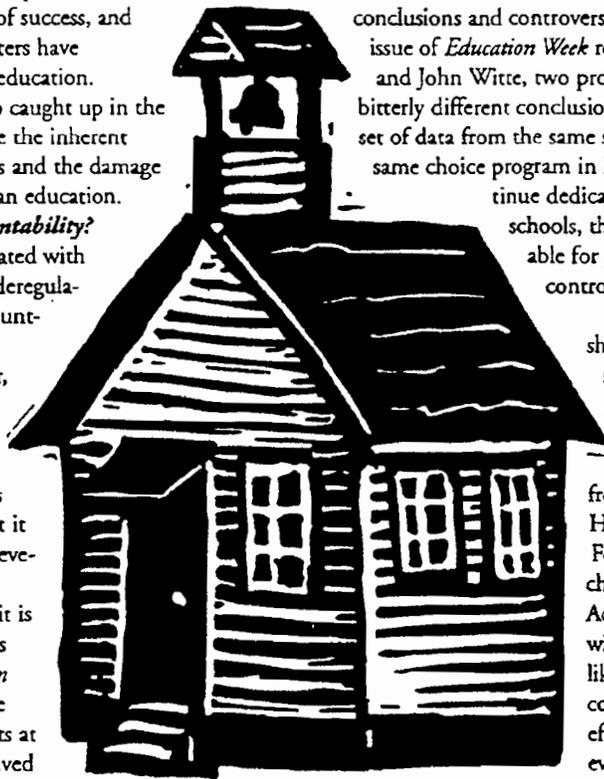
Charter schools originated with the notion of trading deregulation for increased accountability and student achievement. However, the achievement comparison controversy surrounding charter schools has shown us how difficult it is to demonstrate achievement and, as a consequence, how difficult it is to hold charter schools accountable. *Education Week* reported on June 10, 1998, that students at the Community Involved Charter School in

Lakewood, Colo., did not perform well on the standardized test administered at all the other schools in the district. Proponents posit that charter schools' innovative and flexible nature frees them from the

same measurements of achievement applied to comprehensive schools. How else can we draw a comparison? Absent objectivity, even the same data from the same measurement instruments can lead to different conclusions and controversies. The August 5, 1998, issue of *Education Week* reported that Paul Peterson and John Witte, two prominent researchers, came to bitterly different conclusions after analyzing the same set of data from the same students involved in the same choice program in Milwaukee. If we're to continue dedicating public funds to charter schools, they must be held accountable for generating achievement, not controversy.

Who pays? The public should be skeptical when most evaluations are written by proponents of charters or by research that is financed by grants from organizations like the Hudson, Bradley, and Olin Foundations that advocate choice, vouchers, and charters. Accepting these conclusions without question would be like accepting the tobacco companies' studies on the effects of smoking. We need evaluation that is free of bias from both sides.

Whose rules? Despite its "sex appeal," the deregulation in the charter school premise carries its problems as well. We need to consider that rules and regulations are not so bad if they prevent the kinds of deregulated >>



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students—a consequence of charters that research is beginning to reveal.

“Perhaps rules and regulations are not so bad if they also prevent the greater stratification of students—a consequence of charters that research is beginning to reveal.”

described in the April 1998 issue of *U.S. News & World Report*. Perhaps rules and regulations are not so bad if they also prevent the greater stratification of

Who knows? Who chooses? Could the advertising of charter schools in certain communities or in select media or with special vocabularies (code) con-

tribute to who chooses, to the stratification of students? If many parents are struggling with safety issues, to fulfill basic physical needs like food and shelter, or with chemical/alcohol addiction, where does choosing a school fit on their hierarchy of needs? Charters seem to be facilitating a kind of resegregation, and we need to determine whether it's White or Black flight or simply geography. "Economics is all about how people make choices. Sociology is all about why they don't have any choices to make" (Heath 1976).

What's left? What happens to the students and schools left behind? Fewer dollars remain and programs must be cut. The choices of a few reduce the choices for the whole. Those parents who choose to take their children out of their local public school are parents with the necessary information, will, and means to do so. They are also the parents potentially most active and effective in improving their own school. John Dewey had a relevant and provocative observation in *School and Society*: "What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy."

What about democracy? Jefferson urged, "Educate and inform the whole mass of the people." Madison argued that "a publicly supported system of education would counter the monopoly of superior information otherwise enjoyed by the rich." There is a growing concentration of wealth in the hands of fewer people in America and a widening gap between the rich and the poor. If charters, vouchers, and school choice have the potential of dismantling the public school system, then information and power will be concentrated as well. Is this an intended or acknowledged consequence? Not for most of the well-intentioned supporters of school choice programs and not for the parents who paradoxically support school choice but want their local public school kept open. But as Anne Lewis so aptly put it in the June 1998 *Kappan*, while most

parents and citizens would find the break-up of the public school system objectionable, they could find themselves, like a frog put in a pot of cold water that is heated slowly, unable to notice a change until it is too late!

Why charters? Charters are part of the school choice movement that includes open enrollment, tuition tax credits, and vouchers. Proponents traditionally came from the existing private and religious school sector. A decade and a half of school bashing that began with *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 has slowly created a political climate safe for other advocates (beneficiaries like corporations and their politicians) to join forces. Are the public schools really as bad as portrayed in the popular media? Parents believe it. The grades they give the nation's public schools in the annual Gallup polls decline steadily. Ironically, their own public school still gets the same high grades it always did. Is this poll about school quality or media effectiveness? Does familiarity breed accuracy? If most of our local schools are effective and only the "nation's" public schools are failing, where did the crisis come from?

Before anyone concludes that the nation's public schools are so bad that we need charters, they should read the 1993 *Sandia Report* (concluded in 1990, suppressed until 1993), *The Manufactured Crisis* by David Berliner and Bruce Biddle, and *The Truth About America's Schools* by Gerald Bracey. But also read *Savage Inequalities* by Jonathan Kozol. The "crisis" in the nation's schools may be myth, but some schools and communities are in desperate trouble—the kind of trouble that will not be helped by the quick fixes of charter schools.

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DECLARATIONS OF INDEPENDENCE

By Mark Walsh

In a squat city building on a gray autumn day, workers are putting on the finishing touches.

New walls, paint, floors, and furniture have replaced the drab fixtures from the days when the University of Massachusetts held night classes here. And though the renovations aren't complete, hundreds of children have begun their school day in the classrooms the workers have created inside.

In a meeting room on the first floor of the Boston Renaissance Charter School, about 100 people have gathered to celebrate the transformation. For many of them, the rebirth of this structure as one of Massachusetts' first charter schools serves as a perfect symbol of what such schools can do for public education in America: Take a tired, worn-out old structure and pump it full of new life.

The basic charter concept is simple: Allow a group of teachers or other would-be educators to apply for permission to open a school. Give them dollar for dollar what a public school gets for each student but without any strings attached. Free them from the regulations that cripple learning and stifle innovation at so many public schools.

In the four years since the first charter schools opened their doors in Minnesota, 18 other states have passed charter laws in various forms, and 234 of the schools are now up and running around the country.

In many cases, the new independent public schools have invigorated public education and filled parents and teachers with new enthusiasm. Dozens of individual theo-

ries about better teaching or improved school organization are getting a test run.

Charter schools have generated "an impressive level of interest and energy among parents and teachers and, in a strikingly bipartisan way, among elected officials," says Ted Kolderie, an education analyst with the Center for Policy Studies in St. Paul, Minn.

But the movement has never been simply about the schools. If it results in only a few hundred "boutique" schools with innovative ideas, even the movement's strongest backers will call it a failure.

The goal has been to provoke changes in the entire U.S. education system. In this larger context, it remains far less certain that the charter school movement has staying power.

Despite the fanfare that accompanied the early charter laws, it is unclear whether they are strong enough to allow the movement to flourish. And several laws passed recently in other states limit both the number of charter schools and the freedom from regulation that is at the heart of the concept.

Experts on both sides agree that the movement has reached a critical juncture. And many of its leaders say that success or failure now rests with the schools themselves: that it's up to them to produce.

A lot of people here are betting that Boston Renaissance will produce from the scores of parents who have put their children on waiting lists to get in all the way up to Gov. William F. Weld, who has made charter

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schools a focus of his education program.

To come up with the \$400,000 to turn this building into a school took an unusual alliance of public and private agencies: the local foundation that received the charter; a state lending agency; and the Edison Project, the private, for-profit concern that this fall has also taken over the management of three traditional public schools in other states.

Boston Renaissance is unlike any other charter school to date. With more than 600 students in grades kindergarten through 5, it is among the nation's largest. Like other Edison Project schools, it features a longer school day and year and a rigorous curriculum that emphasizes classical academics as well as state-of-the-art computer technology.

In a city where race and education have long been a volatile mix, Renaissance has attracted a diverse student body that reflects the school-age population of Boston: 52 percent black, 25 percent white, 17 percent Hispanic, and 6 percent of Asian descent.

"This is what all schools should be like," Gov. Weld tells the educators, parents, and civic leaders gathered here for the dedication ceremony.

"Years of hot air and, frankly, lukewarm efforts at reform have not done enough to shake up the system," the governor says. "For the same amount of money that leaves some of our children on the economic sidelines, I really believe that Renaissance is going to give children a world-class education."
[Image]

One virtue of charter schools is that no two are alike. Each is tailored to the specific needs of the students, teachers, and the community it serves.

Like the one in Marblehead, Mass. Less than an hour's drive from downtown Boston, the postcard-perfect seaside community won

its independence from nearby Salem in 1648. Its 20,000 residents retain that spirit of individuality today, a spirit that is visible throughout the small charter school they have created in the old Elks lodge on the edge of town.

Indeed, the Marblehead Community Charter Public School seems like a scale model of Yankee independence. Its interdisciplinary curriculum is built around individual learning plans, and New England-style town meetings give each of the school's 137 students a say in how it should be run. When a visitor arrives, students come forward with characteristic gumption to introduce themselves.

The Marblehead school also embodies one of the key principles that parents and students around the country say draws them to charter schools: Small is good.

"Because of smaller classes, kids aren't going to get away with goofing off as easily," says Christina Goodwin, a polite 13-year-old 7th grader who pauses for a moment between classes to answer a visitor's questions.

Behind her, a group of students mops the hallway floor. All the students at the school help out with simple chores: sweeping up, filling the paper-towel holders, taking out the trash.

Debra Hammel, the mother of a 6th grader and a volunteer in the school's front office, says the school's size and approach were a better fit for her son's learning style.

"I love the ownership that the kids take in the school," she says. "It's a real democratic process."

But the notion of a separate, special school didn't fit everyone's notion of where Marblehead ought to be going with its schools. Some residents don't like to see money that would go to the town's traditional public school

system diverted to the charter school.

"It's been said that Marblehead doesn't like change," says Hammel. "It's competition. Where there is competition, there is defensiveness."

Of course, competition is a fundamental element of the charter concept, as with other school choice schemes. It is also one of the chief objections to them.

Many critics argue that charter schools in Massachusetts and elsewhere shift scarce public dollars away from the traditional public schools to untested and potentially detrimental experiments.

"These schools have been in operation for less than three months. Yet, when you talk to some members of the Weld administration, you'd think charters have already cured all the ills of the educational system," says Robert J. Murphy, the president of the Massachusetts Teachers Association. "We still feel innovation can occur within the system," he adds.

In Massachusetts, the legislature sought to cushion the loss of state aid to communities with charter schools by creating a special reimbursement plan. But some districts, like Marblehead, still face a shortfall, and the compensation is designed to last only a few years.

Some parents who helped organize the Marblehead charter school told The Boston Globe that their children were bullied last spring at their regular public schools because of the push for the charter school.

"People are afraid of change," says Karen Corcoran, a leader of the organizers, who has since moved to another community because of the hostility.

Carl Goodman, a lawyer and former town selectman, is leading a legal challenge to the Marblehead charter school and to the state's charter law. He argues that several of

its provisions violate the state constitution's ban on public funding of schools that are not "publicly owned and under the exclusive control" of government agents.

Similar legal attacks have been mounted against charter laws in other states. In Michigan, for example, the state teachers' union led a partially successful challenge to the law and forced the state legislature to rewrite it.

In Colorado, the Denver school board has resisted orders from the state board of education to approve a charter for a school planned by a veteran public school teacher. The dispute is being hashed out in the courts.

In response to Goodman's arguments, the state of Massachusetts argues that charter schools are public and that their leadership boards are public agents.

But Goodman believes that charters not only run afoul of the state constitution but are bad public policy as well. State bureaucrats, he says, are making key decisions about how state education dollars will be spent in local communities.

"Why should the few people who get the ear of a political appointee get a portion of the budget that is otherwise controlled by the elected [town] school committee?" he wonders. "If we are to spend several hundred thousand dollars in our town, perhaps the taxpayers would like a say about it." [Image]

The seeds of the charter school movement were sown in California, says Joe Nathan, the director of the Center for School Change at the University of Minnesota. In the mid-1980s, California educators began debating the idea of freeing teachers to create their own public schools.

In 1991, Minnesota passed the nation's first charter school law. It authorized no more than eight schools statewide and required each to receive the blessing of its local school board.

Nathan, a leading backer of charter schools nationwide, says Minnesota's original law was a badly flawed political compromise that failed to embody the true promise of charters. The legislature has tinkered with it since 1991, and though Nathan says it is better, he believes it is still imperfect.

While the Minnesota law now authorizes as many as 40 charters, only 17 were open this fall. (By contrast, Arizona has 47 schools in operation just a year after its charter law was passed.)

Observers in Minnesota say the relatively low number stems from the requirement that school districts approve charters and the fact that the state offers a variety of other school-choice programs, including open enrollment between districts and a college-enrollment option for some high school students.

Most of Minnesota's charter schools are specialized programs that serve at-risk students or other distinctive groups.

For example, the Metro Deaf School opened in St. Paul in 1993 to emphasize American Sign Language teaching, which a group of parents believed was a method that school districts refused to embrace.

Another charter, the Cedar-Riverside Community School in Minneapolis, opened in 1993 and now operates in a cold-looking high-rise apartment complex where federal Section 8 housing subsidies help pay the rent for most tenants.

In a ground-floor classroom, Austin McGregor is working on a project: a report about the ill health effects of spray paint on young graffiti artists. The lanky 10th grader says that's a big difference from a couple of years ago, when he wasn't working on much of anything at school.

"My grades went from Ds and Fs to a 3.8 average last year," he says. Like many people in this racially diverse, low-income neighbor-

hood, McGregor feels a sense of ownership and involvement in the Cedar-Riverside school—a feeling he never had before.

Residents had complained for years that they had no public school nearby and that the district shuffled their children around the city to help other schools meet desegregation mandates.

The K-10 school has just 72 students, for which it receives about \$3,000 per pupil from the state. It emphasizes interdisciplinary teaching and project-based learning such as McGregor's report on spray paint.

His teacher, Christie Manisto, says some of her students had become involved in "tagging"—slang for spraying graffiti—so she suggested a project they might find interesting.

Across a courtyard and up several floors to a part of the housing complex called the Lighthouse, teacher Trudie Jones has a remarkable view of the Minneapolis skyline from her classroom. She would gladly trade that, however, for some new computers.

The school spends a hefty portion of its budget on rent, and new technology has rendered its computers obsolete, says Jones, who teaches 5th and 6th grades.

Like many charter school educators, Jones believes charters should receive extra funding for their start-up years. Enough money above and beyond the basic per-pupil amounts to put them on a strong financial footing.

"If charter schools are going to stay alive," says Jones, "continuing to do everything on a bare-bones budget is not going to work."

Kathryn Hartman, another teacher, admits that the school could use a few more students to shore up its budget.

"The amount of money we receive from the state is not adequate," she adds, noting that while charter schools receive state per-

pupil expenditures, they don't benefit from the extra revenue districts take in from local taxes. [Image]

As the longest-running charter schools, the ones in Minnesota are also among the most closely watched.

What many observers are looking for are signs that the presence of a charter school, or even the threat of one, is motivating school districts to improve or to implement programs they once resisted.

Charter advocates call them "second order" effects and believe they are one area where the concept has its greatest potential to spur widespread change.

Too often, says Ted Kolderie, analysts of educational change look only at the "first order" effects: the success or failure of the individual schools and the students enrolled in them.

But, he says, "the real purpose of the charter law is to cause the mainline system to change and improve. It would be strange not to evaluate the law in terms of its real purpose."

Already, Kolderie and Joe Nathan can point to several notable examples of charter schools contributing to broader change.

An often-cited example is the St. Paul suburb of Forest Lake, where the district agreed to start a Montessori program in 1993, after a group of parents clamored for a charter school based on the educational method. The Rochester, Minn. district started a similar Montessori program after a private Montessori group asked the school board for a charter.

In Boston, the district and the Boston Teachers Union created a "pilot schools" program in 1994, months after the state enacted its charter law. Teachers can propose new programs as new schools or as schools within existing public schools—a concept

similar to charter schools that many believe the union embraced only because of the new law.

And, in Minnesota, charter advocates say they have been able to measure the effect of the law in human terms.

"Many parents and kids have said their lives have been transformed by this," says Nathan.

Ember Reichgott Junge, a Minnesota state senator who sponsored the original charter school law, believes that changes in it will open the door to more charter schools.

Under one of the new provisions, applicants who have been denied by their local board—but who received at least two "yes" votes—can now appeal to the state board of education for a charter.

"I'm so pleased that other states are improving on the concept," adds Junge.

Proponents say Massachusetts has one of the nation's strongest charter laws, largely because it removes local districts from any role in approving or rejecting charter applications. Instead, the state secretary of education, an appointee of the governor, makes those decisions.

Now that laws are on the books and scores of schools are up and running, the process of measuring how well they're doing begins.

Asked how the success of charter schools will be measured, both individually and in general, Junge says, "The best way to measure the charter law is by the way it has captured the enthusiasm and excitement of parents and educators. This is a true grassroots idea."

But she quickly adds that lawmakers and others will expect a more definitive way to measure them.

So far, evaluation of charter schools has consisted of anecdotal reports and many state-by-state calls to tinker with charter laws to make them better.

The first nationwide survey of charter schools, released last summer by the Education Commission of the States, found a surprising number geared toward children from troubled backgrounds. That contradicts the claims of many critics who once argued that the independent public schools would be tailored to well-off suburban children.

But how is the success or failure of the concept ultimately to be measured?

Several efforts are under way. The U.S. Department of Education has signed a \$2.1 million contract with a consortium of research organizations to conduct a four-year study of charter schools.

The Hudson Institute's Educational Excellence Network has received a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts to examine how charter school laws in seven states have been implemented.

A key principle of charter schools is that if they fail to perform, their government sponsors can pull the plug. In fact, charter advocates say the failure last year of a school in Los Angeles—Edutrain—due to financial mismanagement is a sign that the idea is working.

Bob DeBoer, the director of a Minneapolis charter, the New Visions School, says many charter organizers are initially overwhelmed by the complexity of running what is essentially a small business.

"When you start a charter school, there's no blueprint," says DeBoer, whose K-8 school serves children with reading disabilities and attention-deficit disorder. "It's an immense undertaking."

The New Visions School features several innovative teaching methods. In the "brain gym," for example, hyperactive pupils tumble

around on mats. The school also uses bio-feedback techniques, where students learn to harness their brain power for greater concentration on schoolwork.

The 140-pupil charter school is on more solid financial footing than some others because it is sponsored by a nonprofit organization, A Chance to Grow, that has been around for several years. But that doesn't mean DeBoer can sit back and relax.

"In the end," he says, "charter schools are more accountable than traditional public school closed in Minnesota because it isn't performing."

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LAWS OF THE LAND

By Drew Lindsay

Are charters an idea whose time has come and gone?

In the past four years, the charter school concept has had the makings of a legislative juggernaut.

What was once a hazy educational notion has now become law in 19 states. Democrats and Republicans alike are hot for the idea, and thousands of applicants have put in their bids to open schools under the new laws.

Even teachers' unions and school board associations—some of which spent thousands of dollars to fight charter legislation—are signing on to the concept of publicly funded schools that operate outside most state and district regulations.

"It's a very powerful idea when you look at how quickly it has spread as legislation and how quickly it has gained general acceptance," says Charles B. Zogby, the policy director for Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Ridge, whose charter school legislation is now being debated. "In terms of education reform, how many ideas are there like that?"

The answer, of course, is not many.

But the history of education reform is littered with ideas that shine brightly and reap hosannas from all, only to flame out into a black hole of obscurity. Could charter schools follow a similar trajectory?

"I'd need a crystal ball to answer that," says Chester E. Finn Jr., a fellow at the Hudson Institute and a charter school advocate. "Or maybe the entrails of a goat."

Still, it doesn't take magical foresight to see the weaknesses in the charter school movement that plague it now and pose problems for the future. This year, at least half the state laws passed were watered-down versions of the original concept.

And supporters of the movement say that while the genuine article retains its inherent value, more of the cheap imitations may be on the way. Some recent converts to charter schools, they fear, may be co-opting the idea and pushing bills that embrace the concept in name only.

"There are a number of states that have laws that I would just say, 'Why did you even bother?'" says Peggy Hunter, the president of the Minneapolis-based Charter School Strategies Inc., a nonprofit resource group for charter school advocates.

Also, the charter idea may be losing some of its cachet as fresh, bold reform. Education debate this year in such states as North Carolina, Texas, Pennsylvania, and Michigan focused not on charters but on efforts to decentralize power or create publicly funded tuition vouchers that would allow public school students to attend private schools.

"There is a concern that charters are getting lost in the sexier issues of vouchers and decentralization," says Louann A. Bierlein, the director of the Louisiana Education Policy Research Center at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. "You really don't have a strong constituency behind char-

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ters because it falls in the middle between the two."

As a result, charter advocates enter the second half of the 1990s facing a much different task than the one they confronted at the beginning of the decade. Having proved itself in a sprint, the concept now has to gear up for a marathon.

Catalyst for Change

The charter school idea owes its quick success in part to its close ties to other popular reforms. It is a sister to site-based management, a kissing cousin of public school choice, and an in-law of the idea that school systems improve by "scaling up."

But many lawmakers embrace the concept because it promises to shake up the education system, something they are eager to do more than a decade after the first alarms sounded about the state of education.

"We've had 12 years now, and nothing's improved," says Cooper Snyder, the chairman of the Ohio Senate education committee and the author of a pending charter bill. "We've tried to fix and fix and fix, and nothing has succeeded."

In some states, charter laws have become the catalyst for change that lawmakers envisioned. Massachusetts' 1993 law is said to have spurred Boston school officials and the local teachers' union to create "pilot schools" that operate free from many state and district regulations. Five such schools opened this year.

Even bigger change may lie in store as school boards and teachers' unions—often the sharpest critics of charter schools—adapt to the reality of laws on the books. This summer, the National Education Association announced that it would work with its affiliates in six states—Arizona, California, Colorado, Georgia, Hawaii, and Wisconsin—to

help members who want to create new schools.

The move marked a surprising shift for the affiliates. Many of them were bitter opponents of legislation in their states, saying charter schools would drain funding for traditional schools and leave staff and students unprotected.

While some charter legislation allows schools to operate independently of the local district, nea affiliates will only help members who want to set up schools still tied to the local district. The goal will be to document charter schools' potential as a systemwide reform.

"It's time for us to get into the fray and shape this in a way to show that you can do innovative things within the system just as you can outside it," says Andrea DiLorenzo, the head of the union's charter school initiative.

"It's a turnaround," says Milo J. Cutter, a member of the Minnesota nea affiliate and the head of the City Academy charter school in St. Paul. "It's probably not the earthquake that some people would want, but it's definitely a turnaround."

Strong and Weak Laws

Still, the impressive gains posted by charters so far mask some problems that could stall the reform idea in the years ahead.

Though the concept calls for schools with maximum freedom from state and local control, some of the laws keep the schools tied to the district and state. Worse, these so-called "weak" or "dead" laws make it nearly impossible for applicants to receive a charter. (See "Not All Charter Laws Are Created Equal," page 10.)

Weak laws have plagued the movement from the start, limiting the number of schools that can get off the ground. Fifteen schools

have opened in states with weak laws, while 219 are open in the six states with the strongest laws

Georgia allows an unlimited number of charter schools, but only public school staff members can start them. Only three schools are up and running there. In Kansas, only local school boards can sponsor a school, and no one there has even applied.

In most states with weak laws, bills were watered down in the face of opposition from state teachers' unions and school board associations. These groups argued that charters would drain money from districts and undercut child- and workplace-protection laws.

But charter supporters say the unions and school boards have changed their tactics: Rather than fight charter bills, they are supporting weak ones.

This year, for example, the New Jersey Education Association reversed its stance against charter schools and has backed a bill that cleared the legislature's lower chamber almost unanimously.

That legislation, however, would limit the number of charter schools to no more than three per county and would require schools to hire certified teachers, as required by the collective-bargaining agreements in force in most districts. A bill in the Senate proposes no cap on the number of schools and would afford schools greater hiring freedom from the state, but the union's political clout means some sort of compromise is almost certain before any bill can pass.

The apparent change of heart by teachers' unions and school board groups makes charter advocates worry that any new laws passed will pack little punch.

Five of the eight laws passed so far this year are considered frail. "More of the laws coming in now are pretty weak," says Hunter

of Charter School Strategies. "And that may be because the education establishment is now saying, 'We'll help.'"

New Competition

The 1995 legislative session has also shown that charter schools have stiff new competition from reform ideas whose backers swept into office during last fall's elections.

In Pennsylvania, debate over Gov. Tom Ridge's tuition-voucher plan drowned out discussion of his charter school bill—perhaps one of the strongest proposed this year. And in North Carolina, charter legislation failed to pass as state leaders spent most of their time on a plan to loosen the state reins on schools.

The charter idea is appealing, says Jay Robinson, the newly appointed chairman of North Carolina's board of education, but decentralizing promised to give all the state's 2,000 schools more freedom.

"I see change resulting from charter schools, but I don't see it going as far as we need to go in education," Robinson says. If the decentralization idea succeeds, he adds, "the people who support charters could get everything they're after and more."

A charter bill passed in Texas, but Gov. George W. Bush Jr. believes more change will come from the idea of "home rule" school districts. Home rule, as approved by the legislature, will free districts from most state regulation if residents craft and approve at the ballot box a plan to run their schools.

"I wanted to take the charter concept one step further and allow districts to declare their independence from the state and say, 'We're free to design the schools as we see fit,'" Bush said in an interview this fall.

Unlike a charter law, which allows a few individuals to design schools of their own, the home-rule concept invites entire districts to

hash out their ideas of good education, he said. "I can't see anything better than people coming together to talk about their schools and debate and philosophize about how to run their schools."

In political terms, home-rule districts, decentralization, and vouchers may also have replaced charters as the education reforms that draw national attention and mark a governor as a bold leader.

Ridge's voucher push in Pennsylvania stirred talk that he would be the Republican vice presidential nominee in 1996. Other governors said to be contenders for a spot on the 1996 GOP ticket—Bush, Michigan's John Engler, and California's Pete Wilson—all touted plans to scrap their state's education code.

Engler, who pushed Michigan lawmakers in 1994 to pass one of the nation's strongest charter laws, spoke of charters this year as only the first step toward bigger change: home-rule districts. "I believe that charter schools will be the key to unlocking an education renaissance," he said in a speech at the Harvard graduate school of education this spring.

"But I also understand that charter schools are only the beginning," Engler added. "There must be radical change that reaches every district and every student."

Such rhetoric was aimed at a national audience, says Bill Bryant, the chairman of the Michigan Senate education committee and a frequent ally of the governor. Engler "was playing the game of one-upmanship with Bush and Wilson," he explains. "And part of the game was 'let's rewrite the school code.'"

A Movement Takes Shape

Some supporters dismiss the notion that the charter idea has peaked. Rather, they

say, it is merely shaking out the kinks of early growing pains.

"It's all happened so rapid-fire that we haven't had time to think," says Jeanne Allen, the president of the Washington-based Center for Education Reform and a charter proponent. "Now, we're starting to think."

Advocates are also building a formal, national network to share expertise and resources. "The charter movement has not been a movement until recently," Allen adds. "It's been a disparate group of people in disparate states who didn't even know each other until they met in the parking lot after a conference one day."

Charters will also likely continue to thrive as a fallback for lawmakers pushing decentralization and vouchers.

Both those reforms are a tough sell. Charters, on the other hand, marry deregulation and market-force impulses in a package that is much more politically palatable. In Michigan, Engler is once again pushing a rewrite of the charter law. Legislators this fall are revamping parts of the education code, but the governor's supporters say he now realizes that he doesn't have legislative support for scrapping it all.

The best hope of charter advocates may lie in studies now under way to determine whether the schools deliver the goods promised in terms of academic achievement and systemic change. But given the traditionally short half-lives of education reforms, such good news can't come soon enough.

The national evaluation of charter schools ordered by the U.S. Department of Education, for example, will not offer any data for another two or three years. "By then," worries Isu's Bierlein, "it may be too late."

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AMERICAN VISIONARIES

By Lonnie Harp

When he looks at the empty space in the Sunvalley Plaza, between the denture lab and the doll store, David Gordon sees a high school.

"To me, it looks like a great open campus," he says, thinking of his future students wandering among the bookstore and the movie theaters down the sidewalk. "There are a lot of places kids could go for breaks. And the landlord is willing to renovate."

He is not deterred by the vacant storefront that says America's Music Dinner Theater couldn't make a go of it. Nor is he dissuaded by the notion that, in a struggling shopping center on the outskirts of Mesa, \$4,000 per student may not buy more for him than it does for the local schools.

The state of Arizona is going to give away as many as 50 licenses this year to run a school, and Gordon hopes to get one of them.

The ambitious 29-year-old, a certified social-studies teacher who now works for a credit-card-collection agency, has a plan to help students make noticeable leaps in their achievement. And he is far from alone.

Gordon is one of nearly 100 people who have filed applications in Arizona this year to win a charter school. They all have dreams. And they all need a little of the state's cash to get them rolling.

In many ways, Arizona stands as a unique testing ground for the charter concept. Lawmakers here passed a charter school program in 1994 as unrestrictive as any in the country.

Several states have followed Minnesota's lead and defined who can apply for charters. Others, like Michigan, set limits on how many uncertified teachers can work in the new schools.

In several states like California, Georgia, and Kansas, the schools are not always an independent business.

The Arizona law opens up the application process to the widest range of prospective proprietors and gives charter schools more latitude to operate. But having fewer hoops to jump through has also raised concerns that the "strong" law may produce weak schools.

It's too early to say whether Arizona's law will pay off for Arizona's children. So far, its legacy is the most wide-open marketplace for new school ideas anywhere.

Arizona has approved 47 charter schools, quickly making it a major player among the 19 states with similar laws on the books. The state allows any public agency, individual, or private group to apply to create a school run with state aid and the promise of improved student achievement. Schools that don't show results could lose their charters.

State officials say 23 educators, 13 community organizations, and two groups of parents were among last year's initial charter winners. Thirteen private schools converted to charters.

The Glenmar Montessori School in Flagstaff is using the charter program as an opportunity to expand its existing pre-K-3 program up to the 6th grade. The Intelli-

From "Breaking Away: The Charter School Revolution," *An Education Week Special Report*, November 29, 1995, pages 12-15. Copyright © 1995 Editorial Projects. Reprinted by permission of *Education Week*. All rights reserved.

School in Glendale is a brand-new high school with computer-heavy, self-paced classrooms pointing teenagers toward high-tech jobs.

Fresh Hope

For longer than David Gordon has been alive, William Maxwell has been trying to sell someone on his own notion of schooling. He has approached countless foundations, talked it over with fellow education professors, and explained it again and again to school officials. He once thought he'd found a sponsor in Switzerland, but came up empty. Arizona's charter school law may finally offer his dusty dream fresh hope.

Maxwell's preliminary application for the Global Academy for International Athletics would establish a high school in a yet-to-be-named Arizona city that would serve about two dozen teenagers. But it only skims the surface of what he believes is a revolutionary concept in public schooling.

His plan revolves around a simple idea: Students with a top-notch education turn into adults with top-notch jobs who bring home top-notch paychecks. He wants to supply his students with the best possible education, at whatever it costs. Then, the plan goes, graduates will agree to pay him back for the cost of their schooling—minus the \$4,000 he'll get from the state each year—after they become prosperous adults.

He says he will guarantee each student at his charter school admission into one of the world's 100 best colleges in exchange for what will be a niggling check once they have joined the ranks of the rich and famous.

To get his idea started, Maxwell is focusing on a sports-themed charter school, mostly because he figures that parents who see athletic promise in their children will go to extremes to get them the best training. He freely admits that \$4,000 per student will not buy the world-class education he envisions.

"Four thousand dollars is a poverty sum," he insists. And he realizes that his idea is still at least a little extreme.

"The research is there—if you give a child a first-rate education, the return is phenomenal," says Maxwell, an education professor at the Scottsdale branch of Ottawa University, which has its home base in Kansas. And though he has had little luck with the idea in the three decades since he developed his proposal, Maxwell hasn't given up hope.

"I spent an incredible amount of what little income we had for several years, and nobody was interested," he says. "But now I'm excited. With seed money from the state, this is my one big opportunity."

'Choice and Change'

In many ways, the state charter school office here works more like the Small Business Administration, processing loan applications from enthusiastic entrepreneurs, than an education agency. Everybody walks in with something to sell—which many experts argue is refreshing in itself. The public schools, they say, have been lulled into a trance—and no longer respond to things like the market and their customers and quality. Proponents of competition and deregulation say the dizzying noise of the charter school sales pitches sounds like music.

"We are hearing from a plethora of individuals, and the unifying trend is that everyone wants choice and change," says Robert Mills, a special assistant to the president of Central Michigan University in Mount Pleasant, Mich., and the director of the university's charter school office.

In the past year, CMU has dealt with about 100 applicants and rejected half, granting 46 charters so far. Mills says the applications process usually takes the better part of

a year. CMU officials ask applicants to set up a board of directors, line up at least \$200,000 in start-up funds, and hire a lawyer.

California, which along with Michigan and Arizona is among the most active states in terms of granting charters, recently reached its state-imposed limit on charter schools: an even 100. Observers there say the applicants who didn't make it to a final contract usually underestimated the financial planning involved.

"Most of the people we talk to have a background in education, but the ins and outs of finance are a mystery for a lot of people," says Sue Bragato, the executive director of the California Network of Educational Charters. "We've made it a very difficult thing to do in California."

In Arizona, a charter applicant can apply through the state charter board, which can grant up to 25 charters each year, or the state school board, which can approve an additional 25. Applicants can also seek approval from any school district in the state, although only a handful of the state's charter schools have so far been approved that way. School districts are not limited in the number of charters they can grant.

Applicants must pass a criminal-background check and come out relatively clean on a credit check. They suggest a curriculum, put forward a business plan and budget, outline their house rules, and pay \$32 for a fingerprint check of the school's named sponsor. They must also take an oath that they'll abide by the law's few civil-rights and safety limits and agree to administer state tests. Applications last year ranged from the size of the Tucson Yellow Pages to the thickness of a high school book report.

The entire process is much more inviting and flexible than in Michigan, California, or most any other state.

Proponents of the law see Arizona's freewheeling system as a poster-child for deregulation. Others, in Arizona and elsewhere, wonder what dangers lurk behind that lack of scrutiny. Already, there have been some startling examples.

In California, Americans United for Separation of Church and State recently complained that the Tubman Village School in San Diego stresses the religious teachings of Rudolph Steiner. Steiner, an Austrian occultist, founded a spiritualist society in 1912 that blended Hindu beliefs about reincarnation with Zoroastrianism, an ancient pre-Islamic religion. San Diego school district officials are still investigating the complaint.

In Michigan, the Noah Webster Academy in Ionia raised eyebrows last year with its plan to link home-schooling families via computer. Critics contended that the loose network with families would likely promote religious teaching by the parents. And after winning a charter from the local school district, the academy agreed to pay it a portion of its charter funding as administrative fees. The state never funded the school.

State officials in Arizona have promised to police the charter schools and hold them accountable for student results, but, beyond that, they pledge to maintain a hands-off approach.

That's what worries the state's largest teachers' union. "We support ideas and innovations and teachers being able to make decisions, but there is still the question of the impact on children by what everyone is calling experiments," says Judith Sebastian, the director of educational policy and practice at the Arizona Education Association.

The union has been drawn into the issue because charter schools are not required to hire certified teachers. "There is such a desire at the state level for charter schools to spread and succeed that they

haven't really looked yet at how you protect students from people who are only out to make a name for themselves or promote some philosophy," Sebastian says.

There are, after all, scores of reasons to sell something, as Arizona officials learned last year when they sorted through their first batch of charter school applications. Some people wanted to see how much young children might learn from studying basal readers and intensive phonics, some wanted to push heavy doses of careerism or discipline on teenagers, others were just looking for a new line of work.

Ernest and Delite Gaddie's proposed McGuffey Basic School for K-6 students in Mesa never got off the ground after state officials discovered that until 1991 the couple had run the Mountain States Technical Institute near Phoenix. The trade school, specializing in training heating and cooling technicians and clerical workers, closed abruptly as federal officials were preparing to cite the Gaddies for the school's high student default rate on federal loans.

The Human Resources Academy, a counseling center in Mesa, applied for a charter to open a high school for troubled youths that would contract with the East Valley Youth and Family Support Centers. But after winning approval last May, the charter was denied in June when state officials learned that the state psychologists' board had suspended the license of the East Valley center's president in April after patients filed eight complaints.

The Phoenix Academy of Learning was approved and then scrapped after concerns that it planned to use a textbook written by L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of the controversial Church of Scientology, and intended to send all its teachers to an out-of-state training program.

Despite the rejects, the state has created dozens of new schools. They range from Montessori kindergarten programs to the year-round ungraded sister schools known as EduPrize and EduPreneurship to an ambitious Phoenix high school called Citizen 2000. With its focus on multicultural and international education, Citizen 2000 offers its 7th to 12th graders classes in English, Spanish, French, Hebrew, Japanese, Italian, and Zulu, as well as formal training in ballroom dancing, etiquette, and international protocol.

Improvement Through Change

"Some people perceive this as a way to create a small business, some teachers have said this provides an opportunity to do what they've always wanted to do, and some parents see a chance to seize control of their child's education," says Kathryn Kilroy, the former executive director of state's charter school office.

"If I were a board member," she says, "my first question would be, 'What is your motivation?' Because if you're not focused on pupil achievement and parent and student choice, you're missing what all of this is about."

The underlying thought is that innovation will spark performance—that a \$4,000 check for every kid who signs up, a license to school children without a step-by-step guide, and some state planning money will enable charter schools to boost students past their public school peers.

That is what's written between the lines of David Gordon's business plan for his proposed Global Renaissance Academy of Distinguished Education. "The mission of grade is to provide a superior and vigorous academic program that promotes a humanistic

education where students develop cultural literacy, an appreciation of knowledge (it is power) creativity, responsibility, interactive skills, progressive citizenship values, and cognitive proficiency in areas such as writing, critical thinking, problem analysis, and communication," he writes.

Gordon wasn't happy as a substitute social-studies teacher in Lake Havasu City last year and knows that his collection-agency job amounts to biding time. So he is working 10 to 20 hours each week to write a solid application.

To gain every advantage, he has attended all the workshops the state has offered to help applicants. "I am planning diligently," he says.

He is hoping that after the state's two charter-granting boards judge this year's applications and interview the finalists, he will be among the 50 who get a charter. Then, the real challenge of surviving as a business and turning \$4,000 per student into something educational will begin.

William Maxwell faces a tougher climb. His school must still clear the hurdles of the Arizona law's prohibitions against selective admissions and discrimination based on athletic ability. But he says he will find a way to make his idea a reality through the charter school law. It is a determination that he sees on the faces of most of the people who gather at the charter school orientation sessions he has been attending.

"I detect a kind of archetypal educator mentality of being frustrated by working within the system," Maxwell says. "We are all striking out, some blindly and some wisely, but all of us looking for a new path."

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Charter Schools

By Margaret Hadderman

In seven short years, the U.S. charter-school movement has produced about 800 schools in 29 states and the District of Columbia, enrolling over 100,000 students. Charter schools reflect their founders' varied philosophies, programs, and organizational structures, serve diverse student populations, and are committed to improving public education.

Charter schools are freed of many restrictive rules and regulations. In return, these schools are expected to achieve educational outcomes within a certain period (usually three to five years) or have their charters revoked by sponsors (a local school board, state education agency, or university).

What Explains Charter Schools' Growing Popularity?

Some members of the public are dissatisfied with educational quality and school district bureaucracies (Jenkins and Dow 1996). Today's charter-school initiatives are rooted in the educational reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, from state mandates to improve instruction, to school-based management, school restructuring, and private/public-choice initiatives.

Many people, President Clinton among them, see charter schools, with their emphasis on autonomy and accountability, as a workable political compromise and an alternative to vouchers. The charter approach uses market principles while insisting that schools be nonsectarian and democratic. For founders, starting a brand-new school is an exhausting, yet exhilarating experience that "stirs the creative and adaptive juices of everyone involved" (Ray Budde 1996).

Which States Are Leaders in the Charter-School Movement?

In 1991, Minnesota adopted charter-school legislation to expand a longstanding program of public school choice and to stimulate broader system improvements. Since then, the charter concept has spread to more than half the states.

State laws follow varied sets of key organizing principles based on Ted Kolderie's recommendations for Minnesota, American Federation of Teachers guidelines, and/or federal charter-school legislation (U.S. Department of Education). Principles govern sponsorship, number of schools, regulatory waivers, degree of fiscal/legal autonomy, and performance expectations.

Current laws have been characterized as either strong or weak. Strong-law states mandate considerable autonomy from local labor-management agreements, allow multiple charter-granting agencies, and allocate a level of funding consistent with the statewide per pupil average. Arizona's 1994 law is the strongest, with multiple charter-granting agencies, freedom from local labor contracts, and large numbers of charters permitted.

The vast majority of charter schools (more than 70 percent) are found in states with the strongest laws: Arizona, California, Colorado, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, and North Carolina.

What Progress Have Charter Schools Made?

Evidence on the growth and outcomes of this relatively new movement has started to come in. The U.S. Department of Education's *First Year Report*, part of a four-year national study on charters, is based on interviews of 225 charter schools in 10

states (1997). Charters tend to be small (fewer than 200 students) and represent primarily new schools, though some schools had converted to charter status.

The study found enormous variation among states. Charter schools tended to be somewhat more racially diverse, and to enroll slightly fewer students with special needs and limited-English-proficient students than the average schools in their state. The most common reasons for founding charters were to pursue an educational vision and gain autonomy.

"Charter schools are havens for children who had bad educational experiences elsewhere," according to a Hudson Institute survey of students, teachers, and parents from fifty charters in ten states. More than 60 percent of the parents said charter schools are better than their children's previous schools in terms of teaching quality, individual attention from teachers, curriculum, discipline, parent involvement, and academic standards. Most teachers reported feeling empowered and professionally fulfilled (Vanourek and others 1997).

Nathan points to three other signs of progress:

1. Charter schools in California, Colorado, and Minnesota have had their contracts renewed because they produced measurable achievement gains, including that of students from low-income families.

2. The charter idea has helped stimulate improvement in the broader education system. For example, the Massachusetts charter law permitting applicants to go directly to the state board for a charter helped convince Boston to create its own "Pilot School" program. Minnesota districts, which had refused to create Montessori public schools, did so after frustrated parents began discussing charters.

3. Civil-rights and advocacy groups

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are trying to create charter schools. This includes civil-rights legend Rosa Parks, and groups like the Urban League and ACORN (Association for Community Organizations Reform Now) (Nathan, personal interview).

What Are Some Problems and Challenges Facing Charter Schools?

Nearly all charter schools face implementation obstacles, but newly created schools are most vulnerable. Most new charters are plagued by resource limitations, particularly inadequate startup funds.

Although charter advocates recommend the schools control all per-pupil funds, in reality they rarely receive as much funding as other public schools. They generally lack access to funding for facilities and special program funds distributed on a district basis (Bierlein and Bateman 1996). Sometimes private businesses and foundations, such as the Ameritech Corporation in Michigan and the Annenberg Fund in California, provide support (Jenkins and Dow). Congress and the President allocated \$80 million to support charter-school activities in fiscal year 1998, up from \$51 million in 1997.

Charters sometimes face opposition from local boards, state education agencies, and unions. Many educators are concerned that charter schools might siphon off badly needed funds for regular schools. The American Federation of Teachers urges that charter schools adopt high standards, hire only certified teachers, and maintain teachers' collective-bargaining rights. Also, some charters feel they face unwieldy regulatory barriers.

According to Bierlein and Bateman, the odds are stacked against charter schools. There may be too few strong-law states to make a significant difference. Educators who are motivated enough to create and manage charter schools could easily be burnt out by a process that demands increased accountability while providing little professional assistance.

What Are Some Possible Policy/Practice Directions for Charters?

As more states join the movement, there is increasing speculation about upcoming legislation. In an innovation-diffusion study surveying education policy experts in fifty states, Michael Mintrom and Sandra Vergari (1997) found that charter legislation is more readily considered in states with a policy entrepreneur, poor test scores, Republican legislative control, and proximity to other charter-law states. Legislative enthusiasm, gubernatorial support, interactions with national authorities, and use of permissive charter-law models increase the chances for adopting stronger laws. Seeking union support and using restrictive models presage adoption of weaker laws.

The threat of vouchers, wavering support for public education, and bipartisan support for charters has led some unions to start charters themselves. Several AFT chapters, such as those in Houston and Dallas, have themselves started charters. The National Education Association has allocated \$1.5 million to help members start charter schools. Charters offer teachers a brand of empowerment, employee ownership, and governance that might be enhanced by union assistance (Nathan).

Over two dozen private management companies are scrambling to increase their 10 percent share of a "more hospitable and entrepreneurial market" (Stecklow 1997). Boston-based Advantage Schools Inc. has contracted to run charter schools in New Jersey, Arizona, and North Carolina. The Education Development Corporation was planning in the summer of 1997 to manage nine nonsectarian charter schools in Michigan, using cost-effective measures employed in Christian schools.

Professor Frank Smith, of Columbia University Teachers College, sees the charter-school movement as a chance to involve entire communities in redesigning all schools and converting them to "client-centered, learning cultures" (1997). He favors the Advocacy Center Design process used by

state-appointed Superintendent Laval Wilson to transform four failing New Jersey schools. Building stronger communities via newly designed institutions may prove more productive than charters' typical "free-the-teacher-and-parent" approach.

Charter schools might also benefit by adopting research-based schooling models, such as Accelerated Schools and the Success For All Program, and by emulating successful programs in charter or "grant-maintained" schools in England, Canada, and New Zealand.

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<http://edreform.com>
U.S. Department of Education
<http://www.uscharterschools.org>
Private Site
<http://csr.syr.edu>
AOL Online has an extensive site (keyword is charter)

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**A PROFILE OF THE LEADERSHIP NEEDS OF
CHARTER SCHOOL FOUNDERS**

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September 1998



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Executive Summary

Preface

This executive summary provides an outline of the findings from the first-year report "A Profile of the Leadership Needs of Charter School Founders". The full report documents the research and development undertaken in the first year of a three-year project to develop a Model Leadership Training Program for Charter School Founders sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. The report also provides detailed descriptions and analysis of the numerous leadership needs of charter school founders and the obstacles that charter school founders and leaders face in developing and sustaining successful schools. The general findings from the full report are summarized in the following list which describes the leadership needs of charter school founders.

- Charter school leadership needs can be outlined in five core content areas: Start-up Logistics, Curriculum and Assessment, Governance and Management, Community Relations, and Regulatory Issues. Expertise, or access to expertise, in each of these areas is deemed necessary to successful charter school development.
- Charter school leadership needs vary according to school type (new school, conversion school, small or large), operational status (pre-charter, pre-operational, operational), and founder experience.
- Charter school leadership needs change radically during organizational transitions – the shifts from the pre-operational stage, the operational stage, and the renewal stage. Sustainability may prove to be a greater obstacle to charter school success than start-up obstacles.
- The ability of charter schools, and school leaders, to develop an agreed upon organizational vision, including a governance process and organizational structure, is identified as key to the ongoing success of charter school development.
- The training methods and styles used to communicate information to charter school founders is equally as important, if not more so, than the appropriate training curriculum and materials. Charter school founders are extremely diverse in their learning styles and approaches to learning.

History

Charter schools are incredibly diverse. There are different types of charter schools. They are started for many different reasons; they serve various types of students, and utilize multiple teaching strategies. Charter schools, as publicly-funded schools of choice, are the current offspring of the ongoing struggle among advocates of vouchers, magnet programs, alternative education, and other reform initiatives. Indeed, many educators feel that charter schools, as a mechanism of school choice, represent the best opportunity to radically reform segments of the public school system that are currently failing the students of today.

The basic charter school concept is encompassed in the idea of "autonomy for accountability." Charter schools are public schools that are granted a specific amount of autonomy, determined by state law and/or the specific charter, to make decisions concerning the organizational structure, curriculum, and

educational emphasis of their school. Charter schools are granted waivers from certain regulations that typically bind public schools. In return for this additional autonomy, charter schools are held accountable for the academic achievement of the students in the charter school, and the school faces suspension or closure if accepted performance standards are not met.

The "autonomy for accountability" model of school reform grants a welcome amount of freedom to the founders of charter schools, but it also places a tremendous amount of responsibility on these individuals. Given that the founders of charter schools tend to be small groups (6-10) of parents, teachers, community members, and sometimes administrators, the existing barriers to the formation and operation of a charter school may sometimes appear insurmountable to a group without the diverse knowledge base and technical know-how needed to run a school. What do leaders of charter schools need to know to be successful? Lack of leadership skill in multiple areas threatens the very foundation, and future, of the charter school movement. Developing strong leaders and founders of charter schools is essential to the future success of charter schools and, more importantly, to the academic success of our students. This report attempts to support the development of charter school leaders by identifying exactly what are the barriers to charter school development and what charter school founders need to know to overcome those barriers.

This report identifies the needs of charter founders through ongoing research and training development including:

- Research of current literature and case-studies outlining the multiple obstacles and barriers facing charter school founders. Development of five core content areas of charter school leadership needs.
- Inventory of potential and existing charter schools applying to attend the program-sponsored Charter School Leadership Training Academy.
- Convening of a design team of charter school experts and practitioners to revise and update core content areas.
- Experience of Charter School Training Academy for 48 (12 teams of 4) potential and current charter school operators.

Findings

Core Content Areas

Preliminary research identified five areas of charter school leadership needs. Each of these areas contains specifics that are necessary to successful charter school development. Our ongoing research and development is based on the premise that successful charter school leaders require expertise, or the ability to access expertise, in each of the core content areas.

- **Start-up Logistics.** Charter school founders require expertise in areas such as building an organizational and leadership vision, acquiring a facility, establishing a legal entity, acquiring necessary start-up funds, and numerous other first steps.

- **Curriculum and Assessment.** The ability to develop an academically rigorous curriculum that is true to the school mission and aligned with program and student assessments is a key component of charter school sustainability. Developing appropriate accountability mechanisms is an important leadership ability.
- **Governance and Management.** Charter school founders must develop a stable organization with an accepted governance body and accepted policies guiding both long-range planning and day-to-day operations. Founders should also have expertise, or access to expertise, in developing a sound financial plan that is compatible with school vision and fiscal realities.
- **Community and Public Relations.** Charter school founders should have the ability to deal with controversy, work with the media, and develop positive relationships with interest groups in their community, including the local district, school board, and/or local teachers union.
- **Regulatory Issues.** Charter school founders should be aware of the multitude of federal and state regulations for which all public schools, including charter schools, are accountable. These include special education, health and safety regulations, liability issues, marketing issues, and a host of other state-specific regulations.

Pre-inventory Application

Charter schools that wished to attend a Charter School Training Academy completed a pre-inventory application. The results of the pre-inventory supported and reemphasized the five core content areas. Specifically, respondents to the pre-inventory highlighted five areas of need.

- Developing student and program assessments
- Developing governance policies
- Developing a financial plan
- Obtaining adequate facilities
- Accessing ancillary and external services

In addition to the aforementioned areas of need, the pre-inventory application also demonstrated that leadership needs vary according to year of operation. Operational schools tended to focus on governance issues and student and program assessments while pre-operational schools tended to focus on obtaining facilities and developing a financial plan, or simply locating funding.

Design Team

A design team of eight charter school experts met for 3½ days to provide additional insight into the core content areas and to develop the training for the Charter School Leadership Training Academy. In addition to reemphasizing the core content areas and designing the training Academy, the design team made six distinct contributions to the profile of leadership needs of charter school founders.

- **Difference between pre-operational and operational charter schools.** The design team emphasized the difference in leadership needs in pre-operational and operational charter schools. Specifically, the design team highlighted the organizational and governance obstacles facing charter schools transitioning from the pre-operation to operational stage and from the first couple years of operation to the renewal stage.

- **The need for a strong organizational vision.** The design team stressed the need for all charter schools to have a strong organizational vision that guides both day-to-day operations and long-term planning.
- **The need for an agreed upon organizational structure.** The design team stressed the need for an agreed upon organizational structure. A strong organizational vision, actualized in a specific governance model and/or governing board policies, contributes to organizational sustainability and the ability of a charter school to adapt to changing social, political, and fiscal situations.
- **The need to evaluate the political and community environment (reality check).** Design team members stated that all potential charter school operators should evaluate the political and fiscal realities of starting a charter school before jumping into something that they may not be ready for. Taking into consideration the community context and fiscal realities may help potential charter schools map out a plan of action and survive the first few months of charter school development.
- **Differences in leadership needs based upon type of school (new or conversion).** Design team members stressed that newly-created schools and conversion schools have distinctly different leadership requirements. For instance, new schools typically need help finding a facility, organizing finances, and getting “up and running”. Conversion schools, on the other hand, typically have more trouble with local politics, district regulations, and questions of autonomy.
- **Different types of accountability (fiscal, public, academic).** Design team members felt that potential charter school founders not only need to be aware of the importance of “accountability” in general, but they need to be aware of different types of accountability. Depending on state law and local context, either fiscal, public, or academic accountability may be the measuring stick used to decide the fate of charter schools. Awareness and appreciation of each type of accountability, and how they relate to each other, are important leadership skills.

Leadership Training Academy

The intent of the Leadership Training Academy was to pilot test the training and curriculum designed according to design team specifications and ongoing research. The Training Academy was developed under the premise that there is an important distinction between (1) the curriculum and information charter school founders need, and (2) the actual training methods and strategies used to present this information. Appropriate training is just as much a “leadership need” as are appropriate information and resources. The following findings and recommendations from the Training Academy relate to the dilemma of trying to design training and curriculum for a group of charter school founders with diverse learning styles and approaches.

Training Recommendations

- Training for charter school developers should include access to, and training by, successful current and past charter school founders. Telling of stories and experiences by trainers was important and beneficial to all Academy participants.

- Training sessions should be organized and stay on target. Some sessions should be facilitated and have a set structure which allows for both interaction and direct instruction. Sessions should vary according to content and audience.
- Participant sharing is important. Some sessions, or at least a section of each day, should allow some time for participants to share ideas and experiences.
- Sessions should be diverse in style and methodology. For instance, sessions on program evaluation could be designed to provide concrete examples; or sessions could focus on different types of program evaluations and aim toward provoking critical thought.
- Training sessions focusing on aligning curriculum and assessment and designing program and student evaluation instruments should be emphasized. A variety of teaching strategies and methods could be used in curriculum and assessment sessions.
- The training cohort should be diverse both in ethnicity and perspective.
- State-specific sessions should be designed and utilized. Using state contacts or state representatives to lead these sessions is recommended.

Leadership Needs (Leadership Profile Additions)

In addition to the training requirements listed above, the Training Academy highlighted four additional leadership needs to be included in the final profile of charter school leadership needs.

1. Charter school leaders need high-quality, structured information on aligning curriculum and assessment, and developing student and program assessment instruments and strategies.
2. Charter school leaders need the ability to share experiences with other new charter school developers and learn from each other. Charter school founders need to network.
3. Charter school leaders need the ability to talk with experienced charter school founders and learn about different ways of approaching problems and obstacles.
4. Charter school leaders need to be exposed to new ways of thinking about public education and their own role in improving public education.

The following matrix outlines the profile of leadership needs of charter school founders and leaders as summarized in this executive summary and detailed in the complete report.

A PROFILE OF THE LEADERSHIP NEEDS OF CHARTER SCHOOL FOUNDERS

Introduction

Charter Schools

Charter schools are incredibly diverse. There are different types of charter schools. They are started for many different reasons; they serve various types of students, and utilize multiple teaching strategies. Charter schools, as publicly funded schools of choice, are the current offspring of the ongoing struggle among advocates of vouchers, magnet programs, alternative education, and other reform initiatives. Indeed, many educators feel that charter schools, as a mechanism of school choice, represent the best opportunity to radically reform segments of the public school system that are currently failing the students of today.

Traditional school choice reform initiatives focus on improving the ability of parents and students to attend the school of their choice regardless of socioeconomic level and, to a limited degree, location. Charter schools supplement school choice reforms with two additional forms of choice. First, charter schools grant parents and teachers the ability to create and attend a new school free from most bureaucratic restraints and in accordance with their own vision (new schools). Second, parents and teachers have the ability to transform, or restructure, an existing school to obtain organizational, fiscal and curricular autonomy (conversion schools). Add to this new conception of choice the traditional arguments for choice—increased innovation, competition, accountability, increased alternatives, equity—and it is easy to see that charter schools present an entirely new way of thinking about, implementing, and exercising choice in the public school system. On the downside, charter schools, because of the opportunities they provide, introduce a whole new set of obstacles to successful school development and improved student achievement.

The basic charter school concept is encompassed in the idea of “autonomy for accountability.” Charter schools are public schools that are granted a specific amount of autonomy, determined by state law and/or the specific charter, to make decisions concerning the organizational structure, curriculum, and educational emphasis of their school. Charter schools are granted waivers from certain regulations that typically bind public schools. In return for this additional autonomy, charter schools are held accountable for the academic achievement of the students in the charter school, and the school faces suspension or closure if accepted performance standards are not met.

The “autonomy for accountability” model of school reform grants a welcome amount of freedom to the founders of charter schools, but it also places a tremendous amount of responsibility on these individuals. Given that the founders of charter schools tend to be small groups (6-10) of parents, teachers, community members, and sometimes administrators, the existing barriers to the formation and operation of a charter school may sometimes appear insurmountable to a group

without the diverse knowledge base and technical know-how needed to run a school. What do leaders of charter schools need to know to be successful? Lack of leadership skill in multiple areas threatens the very foundation, and future, of the charter school movement. Developing strong leaders and founders of charter schools is essential to the future success of charter schools and, more importantly, to the academic success of our students. The first step in this process is to identify exactly what are the barriers to charter school development and what do charter school founders need to know to overcome those barriers.

Charter School Leadership

Recent research on charter school development and implementation has done an excellent job describing the multiple pitfalls and barriers which complicate the development of charter schools and many times influence their success or failure. These barriers include the lack of start-up funds and building sites, lack of organizational and financial skills needed for the sustained operation of the school, and policy and regulatory issues such as special education requirements, acquisition of Title I funds, and the hiring of uncertified teachers (RPP International and University of Minnesota, 1997).

These barriers, among others, continue to exist and impede the development of new and existing charter schools. Most of the present and potential charter school founders possess the desire, ingenuity, and passion necessary to develop and sustain a charter school. However, many of these individuals do not possess all of the technical know-how to handle the administrative, financial, and public relations duties which go hand in hand with the development of a charter school. The development and administration of a charter school is not as easy as simply incorporating new or different teaching strategies into the curriculum. The autonomy necessary for innovative teaching requires that founders and leaders of charter schools take on diverse tasks that are not familiar even to some of the most knowledgeable school administrators.

From a broad perspective, the basic difficulty facing charter school founders is a lack of expertise in one or more of the multiple leadership areas needed to set up and administer a school. Each area in which there is a lack of expertise is a barrier to the success of the school. Based on this perspective, the leadership needs of charter school founders include expertise, or the ability to access expertise, in the multiple areas identified as necessary to develop and operate a charter school.¹ The purpose of this report is to provide a detailed description—a profile—of the

¹ Much attention has been placed on charter school leadership framed as "areas of expertise", or specific skills, needed to successfully develop and operate a charter school. A review of the literature and NWREL's experience tends to support this particular view of charter school leadership. However, this perspective discounts the possibility that charter school leadership needs are solely leadership skills as traditionally defined. Distinct from the need to acquire expertise in multiple areas is the ability of a leader (or leaders) to create and sustain a viable organization through a variety of techniques and strategies. The development of traditional leadership skills is touched upon in this report; however, it is noted that traditional leadership skills are only a component of the leadership needs identified in this report. While an argument can be made that development of expertise in multiple areas does not specifically address the leadership needs of charter school founders, NWREL feels that the fundamental nature of charter schools, representing a shift away from the traditional organization structure of public schools, requires the concept of leadership to be expanded to include whatever areas needed to develop a successful charter school.

leadership needs of charter school founders and provide specific recommendations to further guide both the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's (NWREL) own current project and other efforts to develop high quality training, education, and assistance to charter school developers.

This report has six sections. Section one provides a review of the methodology and context that forms the basis for this report. Section two provides a brief review of the current literature which formed the basis for the original core leadership areas and informs our current findings. Section three summarizes the discussions and recommendations of an eight-person expert design team. Section four summarizes findings from a pre-inventory of 40 charter school applicants. Section five summarizes the experiences of the 1998 Charter School Leadership Training Academy and pre- and post-evaluation of Academy participants. Section six summarizes the findings of the report and presents a profile of the leadership needs of charter school founders and leaders.

Section One: Context and Methodology

Context

The research and information collection completed for this report is part of a two-year project to develop a model leadership training program for charter school founders and leaders. The main components for each year of this project are (1) initial research and development of core content areas of leadership needs; (2) identification, pre-inventory, and selection of eligible charter schools to attend a training academy; (3) convening a design team meeting; and (4) development and implementation of training curriculum in a summer academy for 48 charter school founders and leaders. A brief description of this project is provided as context for the remainder of this report.

Preparatory research, completed as part of the original contract submission and revision, outlined five specific *core content areas* of charter school leadership needs. These areas were identified as areas in which charter school founders must have expertise, or access to expertise, in order to successfully develop and implement a charter school. The five core content areas, as presented in Table 1, formed the basis for the refinement and development of the leadership needs of charter school founders and the training curriculum developed to address those needs. The second component of the project was the identification of eligible teams of charter school founders and leaders.² Eligible applicants, identified through state and local charter granting agencies, were asked to complete a pre-inventory as part of the application process (see Appendix A). The pre-inventory findings are summarized in Section three. The third component of the project was the convening of eight charter school practitioners, experts, and researchers for a 3½ day design team meeting (see Appendix B). The purpose of the meeting was to further identify, refine, and develop the core content areas as well as the corresponding training curriculum. The design team recommendations, as presented in Section four, are based upon revision of the original five core content areas. The fourth component of the project is the week-long training academy for the 48 (12 teams of four) charter school founders and leaders. A summary of the experiences of academy participants, as well as results from a pre- and post-evaluation of the academy, is presented in Section five.

Methodology

The findings presented in this report are based upon a comparison and refinement of the original five core content areas developed in the initial stages of the project with the recommendations of the design team, the results of the pre-inventory, the experience at the training academy, and additional research on charter school leadership needs. Multiple methods of comparison were used to avoid the biases inherent in any single comparison.

² State Departments of Education were contacted and asked to send out letters to all eligible planning and operational charter schools. In the event the State could not send out letters, NWREL identified and sent letters to all charter schools in that state.

**Table 1
Initial Core Content Areas**

Content Areas	Topics of Knowledge and Skills
1.0 Start-Up Logistics	1.1 Building a Leadership Vision 1.2 Mission Statement Development 1.3 Formation of Core Founding Group 1.4 Establishment of a Legal Entity 1.5 Acquisition of a Facility 1.6 Availability of Necessary Start-up Funds
2.0 Curriculum Standards and Development	2.1 Development of Academically Rigorous Curriculum True to School Mission 2.2 Consideration of Parent Expectations 2.3 Accountability: Development of Student and School Evaluation to Measure Success 2.4 Alignment of Evaluation with Curriculum and Mission
3.0 Governance/Management	3.1 Formation of Governing Body (Board of Directors) 3.2 Management Structure/Administrative Leadership 3.3 Hiring of Personnel 3.4 Organizational Skills 3.5 Financial Planning/Management
4.0 Public Relations/Media Relations	4.1 Dealing with Controversy 4.2 Dealing with Interest Groups 4.3 Media Relations 4.4 Community Relations
5.0 Regulatory Policy Issues	5.1 Equity in Serving Student Populations 5.2 Special Education Requirements 5.3 Assuring Health and Safety 5.4 Parental Involvement Requirements 5.5 Liability Issues (insurance, etc.) 5.6 State Laws and Regulations 5.7 Contracting for Services 5.8 Types of Charter Schools (for profit, private conversion) 5.9 Marketing the Charter School

The design team recommendations insert expert practitioner knowledge and experience into the development of a set of leadership needs and requirements. Every effort was made to include a diverse sample of charter school experts in the design team (see Appendix B) to ensure that their recommendations would generalize to a variety of charter schools.

The pre-inventory provides a relatively large information base of charter schools in the first year of operation and in the pre-operational stage within the seven-state region³. Every effort was made to invite all eligible charter schools in the seven-state region. The sample obtained is biased by a number of factors. First, we know that all eligible charter schools were not included in the original invitation to apply. Second, only schools that requested applications actually received a pre-inventory. Among schools that requested applications, the completion rate was low (60%). Thus, the pre-inventory is a measurement of the needs of charter schools that (1) were identified, (2) demonstrated a desire to attend a training academy, and (3) completed an application. Charter schools without current difficulties may not have been inclined to apply and thus were not included in the sample. The pre-inventory may tend to overemphasize charter school leadership needs. However, this may very well be the most important population to target for technical assistance—those who need it and are willing to ask for it.

The 1998 Leadership Training Academy gave NWREL staff the opportunity to observe and test a variety of leadership training curriculum and training methods. The results of the Academy experience, detailed in Section five, are derived from a pre- and post-evaluation of all Academy participants, individual session evaluations of all training sessions, trainer input and observation, and NWREL staff observation and recording of all training sessions. Particular attention was placed on the variety of teaching strategies used by trainers, participant perception of the quality of information provided in training sessions and the Academy workbook, and participant reaction to all training sessions and relevant information. The results of the Academy experience highlight the importance of appropriate teaching strategies in training a diverse group of charter school founders and leaders.

The methods used to provide comparison and refinement of the five core content areas are diverse and have a variety of validity biases. However, NWREL feels that the combination of the multiple research techniques (design team, pre-inventory survey, academy evaluation) combined with continuing research of the current literature allows for a relatively comprehensive profile of the leadership needs of charter school founders and leaders.

³ The seven states included in the first year of the project were Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Nevada, and Oregon. States included in the project either have charter school legislation or, in the case of Oregon, have an executive order to create charter schools.

Section Two: Current Research

Based on an extensive review of current literature, the charter symposium conducted by NWREL in November 1996, and analysis of proposed and actual solutions to problems facing charter school founders, five initial core content areas encompassing the vast majority of challenges facing charter school founders were identified. Although barriers to the success of charter schools do vary depending on the context of the specific charter law and the status of the charter school (new school, public conversion, or private conversion), most charter schools do demonstrate a common need for expertise and assistance in five core content areas. Each content area can be thought of as an area of expertise. Leaders in the charter school founding group should have proficiency in these content areas or be willing to hire someone with the required expertise. The original five content areas and topics, as displayed in Table 1 (page 5), served as the basis for design team discussions and revisions, the pre-inventory application, and preliminary academy curriculum development.

The five core content areas were developed with the understanding that charter school experience will produce a vast, dynamic knowledge base of issues and remedies and that refinements would be made throughout the course of the project. The following discussion outlines (1) the preliminary research base for the original five content areas, and (2) recent research leading to revisions and additions to the five core content areas.

Core Content Areas

Start-Up Logistics

Preliminary research into the category of start-up logistics identified six areas of leadership needs: (1) building a leadership vision; (2) mission statement development; (3) formation of core founding group; (4) establishment of a legal entity; (5) facility acquisition; and (6) availability of necessary start-up funds. Current research has supported these initial findings.

Leadership vision and mission development. The impetus for the development of a charter school usually comes from a core group of 6-10 individuals—teachers, parents, community members, and sometimes administrators—who share a common vision of educational improvement. The development of a shared vision and the explicit acceptance of this vision in a mission statement has been identified as one of the most important components of a successful charter school (Millot & Lake, 1996). Most charter school legislation requires a comprehensive mission statement as an integral part of a charter school proposal. The mission statement is the starting point for a comprehensive charter proposal that includes a curriculum, budget, identification of student needs and target population, and program and student assessment. Additionally, a mission statement that incorporates the shared vision of all the charter school founders serves as a framework for curriculum development, evaluation strategies, and the overall academic emphasis of the school.

Core founding group. The membership of the core founding group has been identified as an important component of charter school success and sustainability. Millot points out that the

founding group should seek a diverse membership who have a general knowledge of education with specialized skills and assets in areas such as administration, finance, or law (Millot & Lake, 1996). Members of the core founding group should be aware of the large amount of time and collective effort required to develop a charter school. A core founding group composed of individuals with diverse expertise, who share the same vision, will decrease the need to contract out for the necessary expertise and will increase the potential for success.

Legal entity. The legal status of charter schools varies by state law and the local charter agreement. Some states allow charter schools to form as independent, corporate, or non-profit legal entities. Other states only allow charter schools to exist under district control. The level of autonomy represented in the legal status of a charter school affects issues such as contracting for services, liability, and access to loans and other funds. Additionally, research has demonstrated that schools that obtain legal autonomy from the district have less of a chance of having positive relations with their district (Dianda & Corwin, 1994). In any event, legal status continues to be an area in which charter school founders should have knowledge and experience.

Facility acquisition. The acquisition of a facility to house the charter school and the availability of start-up funds for site development are additional challenges which face potential charter school founders. Federal funds may offset some of the need for start-up funds, although the lack of funds remains a major barrier in many states. The recent national report "A Study of Charter Schools" identified lack of start-up funds, inadequate operating funds, lack of planning time, and inadequate facilities as the four main obstacles to charter school development (RPP International and University of Minnesota, 1997). Close to 60 percent of the charter schools sampled in the RPP national study reported lack of start-up funds as a barrier to success (RPP International and University of Minnesota, 1997). The Hudson Institute's final report also found that fiscal issues, including facility acquisition, continue to hinder charter school development (Finn, Manno, Bierlein, & Vanourek, 1997). Charter school founders need to be aware of the availability of start-up funds, as well as the need to plan and search for a site which meets state and federal health and safety standards. Multiple charter school start-ups have been hindered by unforeseen building repairs and maintenance necessary to meet state and federal health and safety regulations (Nathan, 1996b). When start-up funds are not available, or additional money is needed for building repair, school founders need expertise in the acquisition of loans and/or other potential sources of money. Additionally, charter school founders should be aware of the various technical assistance organizations that can provide much needed assistance during the early stages of development.

Curriculum Standards and Development

Preliminary research into the category of Curriculum Standards and Development found two areas of leadership needs: (1) the ability to develop an academically rigorous curriculum true to the school mission, and (2) development of appropriate student and school performance measures. Current research both supports the initial findings and adds an additional topic, *awareness of curriculum options*, to this core area.

Development of academically rigorous curriculum. The success of charter schools will ultimately be judged by the academic success of the students in the classroom, whatever shape the classroom may take. To this end, the development of an academically rigorous curriculum that holds true to the educational mission of the charter school founders takes on the utmost importance. Charter schools use different teaching strategies, apply alternative staffing patterns, and focus on various core curricula and target populations (Finn, Manno, & Bierlein, 1996; Medler & Nathan, 1995). In order for a charter school to be successful, a curriculum should be developed which stresses high achievement and mirrors the core mission, yet does not jeopardize the charter school's status as a public institution. Charter school leaders need to be capable of developing and integrating an academically rigorous curriculum into the current political state of public education, while remaining true to the expectations of parents and their own vision.

Accountability and evaluation. A second component of curriculum development is the design and administration of a student and school evaluation to measure success. The demonstration of accountability in the form of a school evaluation is an integral part of the charter school contract. Most state charter school laws require that charter schools demonstrate accountability after five years. Recent state-level research evaluations have documented charter school achievement scores in light of charter specific accountability measures (see bibliography for the Colorado Department of Education's *1997 Colorado Charter School Evaluation Study* and the Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research's *Massachusetts Charter School Handbook*). Except for evaluations done by a limited number of states, and a number of privately supported charter school evaluations⁴, there is little, if any, current information on the number of charter schools actively organizing information, in whatever form, to be used for evaluation purposes. The Hudson Institute's final report found that charter schools vary in their awareness of what accountability really means for their school and how to practically implement accountability mechanisms (Finn, Manno, Bierlein, & Vanourek 1997). Historically, most public schools have not been held accountable for results. As a result, real accountability measures are often difficult for teachers and administrators to conceptualize and implement. Charter school experts recommend that an evaluation plan, or a statement of the measures to be used in the evaluation, be incorporated into the charter school proposal or mission statement at the very beginning (Nathan, 1996a; Millot & Lake, 1996). Charter school founders must not underestimate the importance of reliable and clear evaluation standards and approaches.

Many charter schools are using the evaluation process as a strategy to not only find out how their students are doing, but also to find ways to improve staff and student performance (Nathan, 1996a). Familiarity with current standardized tests, as well as the ability to research and design alternative performance assessments highlighting strengths, weaknesses, student or faculty needs, and potential solutions to these problems, is a much needed leadership quality. Charter school founders should also be aware of the availability of outside organizations which specialize in school evaluation, accreditation, and self-study. Although charter school evaluation methods will vary according to different mission statements, curricula, and state regulations, every

⁴ The Education Commission of the States, the Goldwater Institute, the Hudson Institute, and Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research have completed charter school evaluations.

evaluation should contain clear standards for measuring student success and be integrated into the curriculum at an early stage in school development.

Additional findings: Awareness of Curriculum Options

As increasing numbers of community groups, parent groups, and other organizations begin to develop charter schools, awareness and knowledge of existing curriculum options is essential to the development of high quality schools. There is a substantial research base of different types of curriculum innovations, reforms, and back-to-basic curricula that can and is contributing to charter school development (see bibliography for Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's *Catalog of School Reform Models*, 1998). Some charter schools are actively using existing reform models. Seven of the 24 charter schools located in Colorado use the Core Knowledge curriculum derived from the work of E.D. Hirsch. The Charter Friends Network, a national organization working to support charter school development, recently published a guidebook specifically designed to help charter schools access the information contained in the *Catalog of School Reform Models*. Awareness of the many tested and successful school reform models and curricula will benefit charter school leaders in the coming years.

Governance/Management

A variety of external (i.e., funding, political opposition) and internal factors influence the success of charter school governance models. The governance/management core content area focuses primarily on internal factors contributing to success or failure. Preliminary research into the governance/management core content area identified five initial topics of leadership needs: (1) formation of a governing body; (2) management structure and administrative leadership; (3) hiring of personnel; (4) organizational skills; and (5) financial planning and management.

Ongoing review of current research led to reorganization of the five topics and highlighted a number of additional topics. The original topics "formation of a governing body", "management structure and administrative leadership", and "organizational skills" were regrouped under the category "organizational structure". Additional topics in the governance/management core area based on further research include *policy development*, *managing growth*, and *organizational transition*.

Organizational structure. The organization and management of a charter school has been identified as one of the most difficult tasks facing charter school founders and leaders (RPP International, 1997; Finn, Manno, Bierlein, & Vanourek 1997). All organizations have difficulty sustaining themselves, however, new organizations, in this case newly created schools, often face tremendous odds against developing a stable and viable organization (Loveless & Jasin, 1998). A number of charter schools with innovative curriculum, teaching strategies, and evaluation methods have failed or encountered time-consuming reorganization due to lack of expertise with the administrative duties required to run a school (Thomas, 1996). A recent report on Massachusetts charter schools found that governance has been a significant barrier to school success (Weiss, 1997). The recent Colorado *1997 Charter Schools Evaluation Study* found that existing charter school leaders recommended that governing boards undergo board training and

that boards should "define the governance structure thoughtfully, thinking about the balance of representatives among parents, community members, students, and staff (Colorado Department of Education, 1997).

Management and governance structures vary according to the charter mission, the beliefs of individuals in the core founding group, and local context. Although management structures do vary, charter school experts recommend the creation of a board of directors composed mainly of members of the founding group and the delegation of power to an appointed chief executive officer who is solely responsible for the operation of day-to-day activities (California Network of Educational Charters (CANEC), 1997; Millot & Lake, 1996). According to this model of governance, the charter school governing body (i.e., board of directors) sets up all general policy ensuring alignment with school mission while the CEO, or principal, takes responsibility for day-to-day operations. The Colorado *1997 Charter Schools Evaluation Study* recommends that governing bodies focus "...on long-term policy issues and give the director and staff day-to-day management responsibilities" (Colorado Department of Education, 1997). Of course, charter schools are diverse by nature and the management structure of any school will ultimately be defined by the vision and mission of that particular school. Charter school leaders understanding of the importance and need to develop specific administrative structures and policies will contribute to the development and stability of emerging charter schools. Aligning the governance model and the day-to-day management structure with the mission and vision of the school is essential to charter school success.

Hiring personnel. A second area of leadership need is the hiring of quality personnel. Charter school experts stress the need to hire teachers with the same vision as the members of the founding group (Nathan, 1996a). Although there is no hard evidence, a number of charter schools have undergone dramatic staff changes in the first year of operation because of incompatibility or other issues. The Hudson Institute identified staff malfunction as one of the 12 main start-up problems facing charter schools. Lack of time, incomplete reference checks, and lack of attention to mission and curriculum compatibility were cited as major factors in staff problems (Finn, Manno, Bierlein, & Vanourek, 1997). Charter school leaders need to have expertise, or access to expertise, in attracting and hiring quality teachers who share the school's vision.

Financial planning. Charter school leaders need to acquire or have access to the expertise and knowledge needed to develop a stable and accurate budget. Many charter school founding groups, especially in the case of new charter schools, lack the specialized expertise needed to develop and administer a school budget. New charter schools are, in many ways, run like a new business. Expertise is needed, especially in the case of large schools, to keep accurate records and budgets contributing to both economic stability and fiscal accountability. Furthermore, the development of a financially stable budget can serve as a guide for the entire school reflective of the school mission. The need for a solid budget and financial plan cannot be overemphasized. The lack of sound fiscal controls is a major cause of charter revocation.

Additional findings: Policy Development, Managing Growth, Organizational Transition

Policy Development. The development of written policies for decisionmaking at each juncture of the school's development, including an organizational structure to guide day-to-day activities, has been identified as an important component of charter school success. However, much of the information regarding the need for policies and procedures is anecdotal and, in many cases, contradictory. A review of a number of charters reveals that some charter schools have detailed policy handbooks while other schools have only a few written policies. Some charter school guidebooks have extensive instructions on creating policy while others only mention policy development in passing (see bibliography for Colorado Department of Education's 1997 *Colorado Charter School Evaluation Study* and the Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research's *Massachusetts Charter School Handbook*). There is also debate over how extensive policy should be or even if charter schools need to have policy written before they start operations. In any event, the fact that federal law requires written policy on a number of issues and that a variety of charter schools have run into trouble over policy tends to support the need for expertise in policy development.

Managing Growth. Managing growth is one of the new leadership needs that arises in charter schools as they enter their second and third year of operation. The Hudson Institute's final report found that charter schools face three enrollment challenges: (1) not enough students; (2) too many students of a particular group; and (3) increases in the number of students with particular needs (Finn, Manno, Bierlein, & Vanourek, 1997). Add to these challenges the over enrollment in many charter schools, and charter school leaders are faced with new and unfamiliar challenges. Charter school leaders must understand the importance in having policies that guide decisions regarding changes in enrollment patterns. Further, leaders must be aware of the federal and state guidelines that regulate public school enrollment practices. The potential impact of increases or decreases in growth should be thought out at an early stage in charter school development.

Organizational Transition. The transition from the planning stage of charter school development to the operational stage has been a problematic area for charter schools. Charter school founders are frequently unprepared for the transition from the goal-oriented process of creating a charter school to the day-to-day operation of the schools (Thomas, 1996). Loveless and Jasin (1998) report that charter schools are experiencing difficulty making the transition from informal organizations to formal organizations. They suggest that "by adopting protocols for completing critical tasks and by establishing permanent structures for school governance and administration, charters must mature into formal organizations". Weiss (1997), in her study of Massachusetts charter schools, found that "creating a collaborative decisionmaking structure that is also efficient is causing a great deal of stress at several of these schools. The Hudson Institute's final report on charter schools found that governance problems were a major concern for schools in the first year of operation (Finn, Manno, Bierlein, & Vanourek, 1997). The major governance problem, reports the Hudson Institute, is the clash between the founders of the school and the teachers and educators involved in day-to-day activities.

As charter schools move into the operational stage, founding members typically become members of the governing board and stay involved in the school. However, the passion and

vision required to start charter schools are not necessarily the traits needed to manage day-to-day operations. "Zealous parents, in particular, often have difficulty yielding the school's reins to educators" (Finn, Manno, Bierlein, & Vanourek, 1997). Expertise is needed both in the early stages of development to avoid governance problems and micro-management and in the later stages of development as members of the founding group begin to leave the school and the governing body. Permanent and accepted structures and policies must be in place to ensure the stability and sustainability of the charter school.

Public Relations/Media Relations

Preliminary research into the core content area of public and media relations highlighted four main topics of leadership needs: (1) dealing with controversy; (2) dealing with interest groups; (3) working with the media; and (4) community relations. Additional research supported the initial findings and identified two additional topics, *relationships with the district or sponsoring agency* and *marketing the school*.

Dealing with controversy and interest groups. Charter schools are currently a very contentious topic in the media and among different interest groups in society. Charter school proponents take on many forms and claim various political ideologies. Charter school founders need to understand that their school, as a recipient of public funding, will be open to public criticism, scrutiny, and praise. Furthermore, founders will have to learn to deal with controversy from a variety of sources, including local teacher unions, school boards, local community groups, and parents. Loveless and Jasin (1998) report that charter school founders, especially those located in small towns, face two distinct types of political opposition—opposition from the local district and teachers unions, and, surprisingly, opposition from the local community. The recent RPP national study found that pre-existing (conversion) charter schools are particularly challenged by political constraints such as union and school board opposition (RPP International and University of Minnesota, 1997). These controversies are potential sources of anxiety for the founders of the charter school. Excessive controversy within a local community may affect the teaching and administration within the charter school and reflect negatively on the academic achievement of the students.

Community relations and working with the media. Because of political opposition, charter school founders need to learn and identify strategies to gain support and legitimacy both in their community and from local school boards and teacher unions. As the political culture shifts and social opinion concerning charter schools and other forms of school reform changes and becomes more structured, charter schools will need to be prepared to use and work with the media and other public groups to survive and thrive. The Colorado Charter Schools Evaluation Study found "developing strong relationships with parents and the community" to be the number one technical assistance need for operational charter schools (Colorado Department of Education, 1997). Expertise in public and media relations will assist charter school leaders to address the local and national controversy. Additionally, a strong focus on public relations will be useful in forming alliances with community and state stakeholders who can champion future efforts.

Additional Findings: District Relationship and Marketing

Forming a positive, or at the very least, a working relationship with the sponsoring district and/or district in which the charter school is located contributes strongly to successful charter school development. The ability to access a district's personnel services, special education services, or physical plant services can and do remove some of the initial burdens to charter school start-up. Many charter schools specify in their charter that the district will provide X, Y, and Z services for a specified deduction from the student per pupil expenditure (PPE). On the other hand, charter schools have also had problems with districts withholding large portions of the PPE while not providing the appropriate services. In Arizona, some districts attempted to deny credits to students who were transferring to district schools from charter schools (Finn, Manno, Bierlein, & Vanourek, 1997). The ability to negotiate a fair and workable agreement with the district is integral to the success of many charter schools. Loveless and Jasin (1998) report that many charter school founders have experienced substantial difficulties working with district and state level agencies in the areas of special education. Charter school leaders need to develop techniques and means to continue to build upon current relationships with their district office as well as develop new relationships when none currently exist.

Marketing is another area where charter school leaders often experience new obstacles and difficulties. As the Hudson Institute final report found, charter schools are experiencing difficulty both finding students in general and finding and attracting too many students of one group or ethnicity (Finn, Manno, Bierlein, & Vanourek, 1997). Charter school legislation varies from state to state in terms of ethnic and socioeconomic guidelines for charter schools, the ability of charter schools to target certain student populations, and the ability of charter schools to offer specialized curriculum. Many times these requirements run in direct contradiction to the purposes and intent of charter school developers. Many charter school founders purposely offer a specialized curriculum and focus on a specific clientele. However, federal regulations require that marketing strategies must be directed toward all segments of the population and that charter schools cannot exclude any student for any reason. Charter school leaders need to be aware that there is a fine, and many times invisible, line between open recruitment focused on a particular curricular focus and covert, or inadvertent, exclusion of a certain group or ethnicity. As an example, a number of charter schools in North Carolina are running into problems because they serve substantially more African-American students than the district average. These schools face potential closure because North Carolina law stipulates that charter schools must be within a certain percentage of the district average. Understanding of federal guidelines as well as state and local regulations is needed to avoid potentially detrimental situations.

Regulatory Policy Issues

Preliminary research into regulatory issues affecting charter schools identified a number of policy issues. These issues are listed in Table 2. Additional research has supported initial findings and emphasized *special education* and *marketing* as particularly problematic for some charter schools.

Table 2
Regulatory Policy Issues

• Who does the school serve? (Equity)	• Special education
• Can you market your school?	• Liability issues (insurance/risk management)
• Who is hired to teach and administrate?	• Health and safety issues
• How extensively can one contract for private services?	• Parental involvement requirements and parental contracts
• Different types of charter schools (for profit, private conversion)	• Understanding and working with different state legislation and regulations
• Legal issues (public disclosure laws)	• Public accountability (accountable to whom?)

Regulatory issues. In addition to the concrete barriers to success which face present and potential charter school founders, there are also a number of state and federal regulations and policy areas that, if not addressed, might hinder the academic success of students in charter schools. Charter school founders should be fully aware of the potential influence and repercussions that their own decisions about issues such as marketing, admissions, and special education may have in the context of the current debate over education reform. Special education is already an issue that has caused problems for many schools and was subsequently addressed by the Office of Civil Rights. Awareness of policy issues and the multiple barriers to stability and success will contribute to the sustainability of charter schools and the achievement of academic success and high quality teaching.

Other Research Findings

Further review of the current literature on charter schools highlights one main topic that was not specifically addressed in the initial core content areas. The Hudson Institute final report and the *1997 Colorado Charter Schools Evaluation Study* both specifically found that charter school barriers, and the needs of charter school leaders, change substantially through three stages: (1) the planning and pre-operational stage, sometimes split into the planning stage and the start-up stage; (2) the first year of operation; and (3) schools in the second and third year of operation, or the renewal stage. NWREL's observations and data have supported these findings (see Sections three and four). Charter schools go through life cycles which are different and require specific training and information. For example, the *1997 Colorado Charter Schools Evaluation*

Study outlined the differences in the technical assistance needs for charter schools in the application phase, the start-up phase, and the operational phase. According to the Colorado study, schools in the application phase needed legal assistance and advice writing and negotiating the contract (71%) and assistance identifying various governance structures (42%); schools in the start-up phase needed assistance acquiring a facility (54%) and developing training for staff and board members (54%); schools in the operational phase needed assistance developing a relationship with the community and parents (54%), and fiscal issues (46%).

What does this mean for charter school founders and leaders and a “profile” of the leadership needs of these individuals? Are there mutually exclusive skills and needs for those in the planning stage and the operational stage? Are there two different profiles of leadership needs? While there are some obvious differences (i.e., start-up logistics compared to sustainability), we feel that the difference between skills needed in the planning stage versus the operational stage vary more in emphasis rather than actual content. Although there are different skills that are needed at different stages in the development of a charter school—it is not enough to simply give founders the means to start a school if they do not have the means to sustain that school—we feel that most of the skills needed at different stages are contained in the core content areas previously outlined in this report. In other words, the keys to sustainability can be found in the initial formation of a strong organization with a cohesive vision that ties together all components of the school. For example, training to develop a strong organizational structure, a skill needed in the early stages of development, will allow schools to quickly adapt to changes and, if needed, create a new marketing strategy or develop a new assessment plan. Charter school leaders need to have the ability and awareness to shift gears and develop and apply a different set of skills based upon their own local context and particular situation.

Section Three: Pre-Inventory

Methodology

The pre-inventory application (see appendix A) is a three-page questionnaire designed, in addition to serving as an application form, to (1) collect basic demographic and school characteristics information (grades served, ethnic population, type of school, year of operation, etc.), and (2) outline a profile of current charter school resources and areas of need. All schools that received and completed a pre-inventory application requested an application from NWREL. The process used to identify and recruit eligible⁵ charter schools varied by state. In most states, eligible charter schools were identified with assistance from the state department of education charter school contact or liaison. State charter school contacts were notified of our project and asked to send a letter to all eligible charter schools informing them of the availability of the training. This initial letter asked interested charter schools to request a pre-inventory application from NWREL. In states where this process did not result in the expected number of applicants, NWREL, with state department of education approval, identified and sent letters to all eligible applicants. Pre-inventory applications were sent to 76 eligible applicants within the seven-state region. Forty applications were completed and returned. Figure 1 displays the actual number of application requests and submitted applications for the seven states.

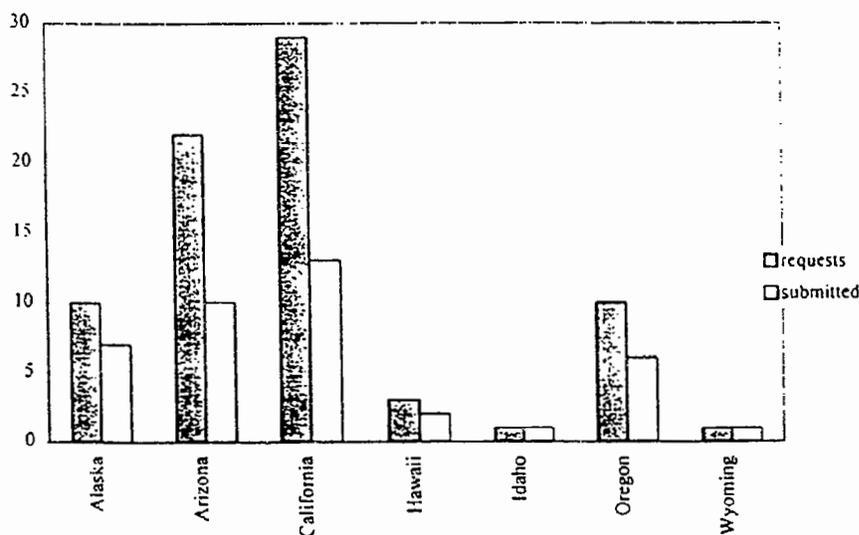


Figure 1
Number of Applications Requested and Submitted

⁵ Eligible applicants were (1) Operational Schools: in the first year of operation (1997-1998 school year); (2) Pre-Operational Schools: with a charter and scheduled to open in the fall of 1998; and (3) Pre-Charter Schools: schools, or groups, currently planning and working to receive a charter from a charter granting agency.

The number of requests and submissions partially reflects the actual number of charter schools in the seven states⁶ and the timing of charter school laws. The relatively high proportion of responses from California and Alaska, when compared to Arizona, may be a result of two factors. First, the Alaska Department of Education was very active in recruiting charter schools to apply and 15 out of the 17 Alaska charter schools were either in the planning stage or in the first year of operation. Second, additional recruitment in California, both through the California Department of Education and the California Network of Educational Charters (CANEC), resulted in submitted applications from six pre-chartered groups/schools.

Demographics

The results of the pre-inventory revealed a diverse pool of applicants in terms of year of operation and grade levels served. However, 34 of the applicants were newly-created schools (see Figure 2) and were unable to provide complete information on ethnicity and poverty levels. Incomplete data on ethnicity and poverty was to be expected considering the number (n=18) of applicants in the pre-charter and/or pre-operational stage. The number of newly created schools is surprising in light of the RPP national study and other studies which found that between 64 and 70 percent of charter schools were newly-created. However, there are a number of possible factors contributing to the disproportionate number of applications from newly-created schools. It may be the case that: (1) newly created schools have a greater need for assistance; (2) the actual proportion of newly created schools is actually much higher than reported in the RPP national study; or (3) NWREL's identification and recruitment process failed to identify conversion schools. Figures 2, 3, and 4 display the number of applications submitted by type of school, year of operation, and grade level served.

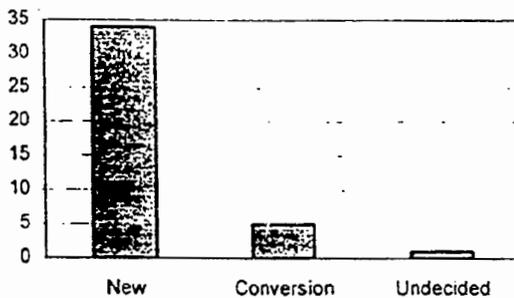


Figure 2. Number of Applications Submitted by Type of School

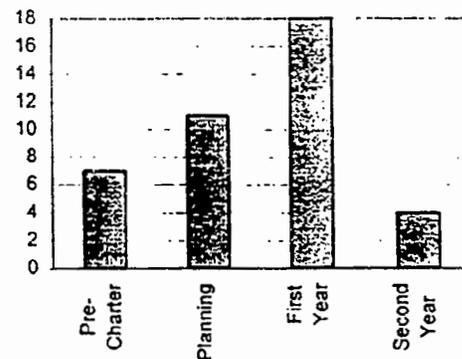


Figure 3. Number of Applications Submitted by Year of Operation

⁶ As of July, 1998, Alaska: 17 schools; Arizona: 235 schools; California: 135 schools; Idaho: 1 school; Hawaii: 3 schools; Oregon: approximately 25 schools; Wyoming: 1 school.

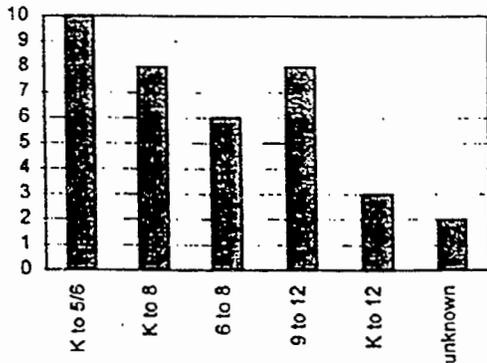


Figure 4. Number of Applications Submitted by Grade Level Served

Results

The pre-inventory application contained four questions specific to the leaderships needs of charter school founders (see Appendix A). Question #4 asked applicants to identify the policies and procedures that they currently had in place and if they wanted additional help developing the specific policies and procedures. Question #5 asked applicants to identify what areas of assistance and/or resources they had already acquired and if they wanted additional help developing or acquiring those resources. Table 3 displays the questions and categories used in questions #4 and #5.

Table 3

Policies and Procedures Does your school have a policy for:	Technical Assistance Does your school have or use:
Hiring/Firing Student Assessment Program Assessment Governance Health and Safety Fiscal Management Daily Operations	Mission Adequate Facilities Accredited Ancillary Services Federal Programs External Resources Financial Plan

Figure 5 and Figure 6 display the findings for questions #4 and #5.

Question #4:

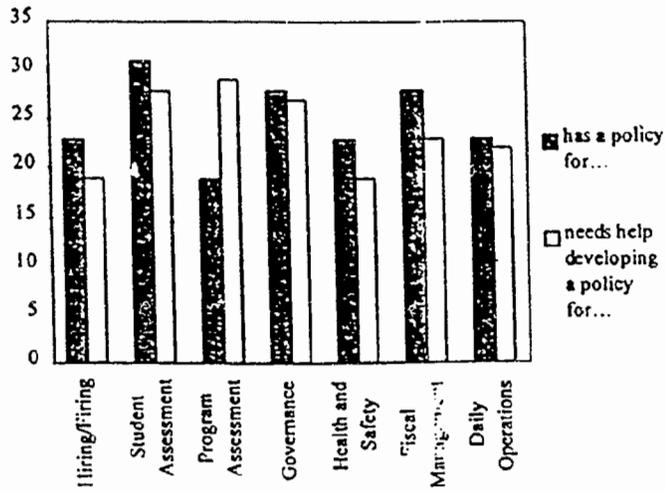


Figure 5. Policies and Procedures Currently in Place

Question #5:

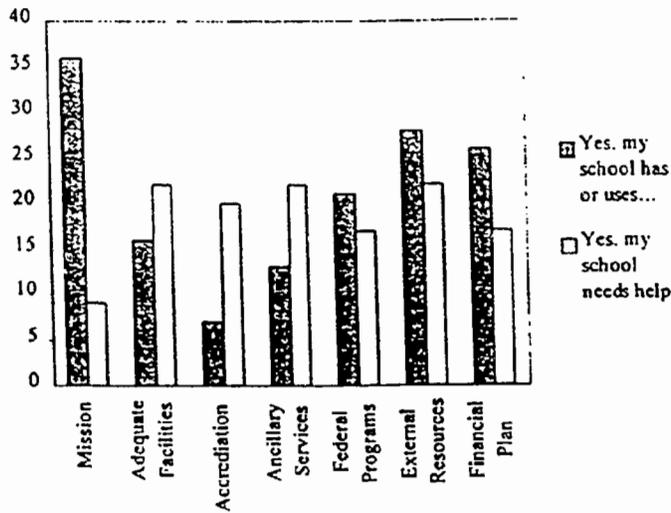


Figure 6. Areas of Assistance/Resources Already Acquired

Question #4

The results from question #4 led to some interesting observations. The number of schools stating that they did have policies for the given categories was relatively constant (average=25; 63% of total). The responses ranged from a high of 31 (78%) for student assessment and a low of 19 (48%) for program assessment. The fact that over 50 percent of the applicants did not have policies and procedures for program assessment indicates that program assessment is a leadership area that should be stressed in charter school training. Additionally, the greatest number of applicants (n=29; 73%) indicated that program assessment was an area they wanted help with.

Other information that was somewhat surprising was the fact that 28 (70%) applicants stated that they would like assistance with student assessment even though 31 (78%) applicants said that they had already developed student assessment policies. Overall, applicants expressed a high level of need for assistance developing policies for all the categories (average=24; 60%). Between 50 and 70 percent of applicants indicated that they need help developing policies in each specific area. Health and safety and personnel policies were the least noted categories of need. Program assessment, student assessment, and governance were the areas where applicants expressed the greatest need, with program assessment taking on particular importance based on the low number of applicants with policies already in place.

Question #5

The range of responses for the given categories in question #5 was significant. Thirty six (90%) out of 40 schools reported having a mission; 28 (70%) schools use external resources, and 26 (65%) schools have an existing financial plan. On the low end, only seven (18%) schools reported being accredited, 13 (33%) schools had access to ancillary services, and 16 (40%) schools had access to adequate facilities. The relatively high number of schools with a mission combined with the low (n=9; 23%) number of schools needing help developing a mission demonstrate that of all the categories, mission development is a low priority. However, the fact that almost one-fourth of all applicants still need help developing a mission indicates that this element must continue to be addressed.

After accounting for mission, the number of applicants indicating that they need help with the given categories was relatively constant at an average of 50 percent. Accessing external resources, ancillary services, and obtaining adequate facilities had the highest response rates (n=22; 55%) while accessing federal programs and developing a financial plan had lower response rates (n=17; 43%). Accreditation and ancillary services were the two areas with the greatest range between the number of schools indicating that they have access to those services and the number of schools that need help accessing those services. Access to adequate facilities was an area that we initially expected to display a greater level of need. In fact, when the school data is disaggregated by year of operation, we find that schools in the pre-charter or pre-operational stage have a much greater level of need in finding adequate facilities. This tells us that facility acquisition remains a concern and that charter school leadership needs do vary according to the stage and level of development. NWREL expects that the RPP national study

will find similar shifts in the barriers and obstacles facing charter schools (see bibliography for RPP International and University of Minnesota first year report of charter schools).

Open-ended questions

In addition to questions #4 and #5, applicants were also given the opportunity to respond in writing through open-ended questions to additional technical assistance concerns and their greatest hurdles in establishing their charter school (question #5 and question #6). Not all of the open-ended responses to question #5 identified specific technical assistance concerns. The responses that focused on specific concerns tended to be focused on problems developing a financial plan, difficulty accessing resources for ancillary services, and problems finding facilities.

The responses to question #6 add credence to the findings of the RPP national study as well as the previous results of the pre-inventory. Sixteen percent of the respondents indicated that finding a facility was the greatest hurdle. Likewise, 16 percent reported that funding (not specified) was the greatest hurdle. Other significant comments focused on compliance with government regulations, developing an organizational structure, developing a curriculum, communicating with the district, and developing a student population.

In general, the findings of the pre-inventory tended to support our initial core content areas. Response to all items on the pre-inventory was high enough to recommend continued focus and attention. Specifically, applicants expressed high levels of leadership needs and concerns in the following areas:

- Developing student assessment
- Developing program assessment
- Developing governance policies
- Developing a financial plan and fiscal management
- Obtaining adequate facilities
- Accessing ancillary services
- Accessing external services

In addition to the aforementioned areas of need, the pre-inventory also demonstrated that leadership needs vary according to year of operation. We also expected leadership needs to vary according to type (conversion or newly-created); however, we did not have the necessary number of applicants to observe any difference.

Section Four: Design Team Recommendations

The recommendations made by the design team were easily the most important and informative information gathered during this project. The design team gave credence to many of the core content areas of which we were initially unsure. More importantly, the design team made numerous additions and suggestions to the core content areas which might not have been added, or emphasized, if not for their input. Specifically, the design team added, or reemphasized, six topics to the core content areas. The six topical areas are:

1. Consideration of the difference between pre-operational and operational charter schools with a focus on the transition leaders must go through during this process
2. Reemphasis on the need for strong organizational vision
3. The need for an agreed upon organizational structure or governing board and written policies to support that organization
4. The need for leaders to do a reality check—check out the political and community environment to see what is really feasible
5. The idea that the leadership needs of charter schools vary by operational status (new schools versus conversion schools)
6. Regard accountability in terms of fiscal accountability, public accountability, and academic accountability

Many of the recommendations made by the design team tended to focus on the actual training of charter school founders rather than their specific leadership needs. For example, the idea that leadership needs vary by operational status tends to have more of an effect on the training emphasis rather than on the specific identification of different leadership needs.

Apart from these six additions, the design team agreed with most of the leadership needs as outlined in the initial core content areas. The design team initially wanted to separate the leadership needs of charter school founders into two distinct categories—pre-operational schools and operational schools. However, after looking at the core content areas and considering the pros and cons of creating two distinct categories, the design team decided that there were certain areas, such as organizational vision and a strong organizational structure, which would be better expressed as part of a continuous learning process rather than as separate categories. Thus, the basic structure of the core content areas was kept the same while additions were made whenever appropriate. The following is discussion of the six main recommendations made by the design team.

Difference Between Pre-operational and Operational (Transition)

One of the very first observations made by the design team was how difficult it was to categorize charter school leadership needs without accounting for differences in the stage of implementation. The design team also emphasized the fact that charter school leaders not only need to know how to open a school, but that they need to know how to sustain the school. In fact, some design team members stated that the obstacles facing charter schools in the renewal process will most likely be greater than start-up difficulties. Design team members advised that many of the core content areas, when applied in training, should have a particular emphasis and focus specific to the level of implementation of the charter school leaders and their schools.

In conjunction with the actual differences in need between pre-operational and operational schools, the design team also highlighted the difficulty many charter school founders have in making the transition from the goal oriented, action filled planning and pre-operational stage to the operational stage of development. Charter school leaders need to understand that there will be a change in responsibilities and duties when the school enters its first year of operation. However, design team discussion found that there is no one best way to adjust to the transition from planning to operation. Some experts warned against micro-management and recommended the formation of multiple committees and policies to structure the school while other members noted that they didn't have many policies and were simultaneously the founders of their school, teachers in the school, administrators, and on the governing board. The lesson learned from this discussion was that no specific recommendation is foolproof; local situations differ and all leaders should be aware that there is a transition and should prepare in some way for that transition.

Need for Strong Organizational Vision

Probably the most emphasized topic during the entire design team meeting was the need for a strong organizational vision that guides and coordinates all aspects of the charter. Design team members emphasized that the vision of the school should guide everything from planning the budget, designing curricula, and recruiting students, to developing a five-year plan, designing the assessment tools, and going through the renewal process. In other words, the ability of charter school leaders to develop, communicate, and integrate a vision throughout the school is essential to the success of the school. Specifically, the design team stated that leaders must be able to build the vision, communicate the vision, keep the vision, and renew the vision. This continuity of vision is what links the leadership needs of leaders in the pre-operational stage and leaders in the operational stage.

Need for an Agreed Upon Organizational Structure (Including Written Policies)

Corresponding to the emphasis on a strong organizational vision, design team members stressed that charter school leaders need to develop a strong organization based upon the vision of the school. Apart from this basic agreement that an organizational structure was needed, design team members differed on the types of governance models to recommend as well as the need for policies to structure the organization. The general discussion in the design team meeting

revolved around two different concepts, or models, of governance. About half the design team, through reference to John Carver's book *Boards That Make a Difference*, stated that charter schools should have a governing board responsible for long-term planning, a variety of committees focusing on different issues and policy development, and a CEO, or principal, responsible for the staff and day-to-day operations. They also recommended that, if possible, the governing board should ask prominent community members to serve on an advisory board.

On the other hand, some of the design team members, mainly from smaller schools, said that their organization simply developed "organically" in the process of developing their school. They did not have multiple committees, numerous policies, or a strict organizational model. In many instances the founders of the school were also the teachers, administrators, and board members. In any event, all design team members felt that the organizational structure should correspond to, and develop out of, the school vision. At this point in charter school development, understanding the importance of a strong organizational structure is more important than prescription of one type, or model of governance. Local context and need should be considered when developing an organizational structure.

Need for a Reality Check—Political and Community Environment

The very first, and probably most important, new contribution to the core content areas was the recommendation that charter school leaders need to do a "reality check" before they begin charter school development. Design team members stated that founders need to scan the political environment, the fiscal environment, and the community environment before they jump right into operating a charter school. Leaders need to ask the question "Is the charter school idea fiscally and politically feasible?" These recommendations were made from direct experience the design team members had in developing their own charter schools.

Many of the design team members felt that if they had really taken a good look at the local context before they had begun development, they would have been able to foresee, and possibly avoid, many of the barriers and obstacles that they faced. Charter school leaders need to find out if there really is money available, or if the community really does need and/or support the school. Awareness of potential adversaries, as well as proponents, before jumping right into battle can be very beneficial. It was also noted that a realistic evaluation of the political and fiscal environment might keep some doomed charter schools from ever opening. In this sense, a reality check has both positive and negative repercussions. While a realistic evaluation of local context might help some leaders avoid obstacles, that same evaluation might also stop some leaders from ever developing a school.

Leadership Needs for Charter Schools Varies by Operational Status

The design team, in discussing the original core content areas, found that there was not enough distinction made between the requirements of conversion schools and newly-created schools. For example, conversion schools often have a financial and organizational structure in place while new schools have to create an entirely new budget and governance structure. Conversion schools are often more concerned with academic achievement rather than realizing a vision. On

the flip side, new schools have to pay particular attention to fiscal barriers and other start-up logistics. To account for differences in leadership needs based on operational status, the design team recommended that the emphasis of training in applicable core content areas be altered to meet the particular needs of the trainees.

Accountability—Academic, Fiscal, and Public

The design team reemphasized the need for charter school leaders to understand the different types of accountability as well as the variety of assessment and evaluation tools used to demonstrate accountability. Specifically, the design team stressed that there are three interrelated types of accountability—academic, fiscal, and public. Each type is important, although it was noted that different types of schools, as well as different state and local contexts, tend to stress academic, fiscal, and public accountability at various levels. The design team agreed that the ability to demonstrate academic accountability was the key to charter school success. However, some of the design team members felt that fiscal accountability was equally important and, at least initially, more problematic for many newly created schools. Inner city conversion schools, on the other hand, felt more pressure to demonstrate academic accountability.

Left somewhat out of the equation was public accountability. While all design team members felt that the “public trust” was very important, it was unclear exactly what it meant to demonstrate public accountability. Some members thought that public accountability was simply a combination of academic and fiscal responsibility. Others felt that charter school leaders should, at all times, be aware that they were using public money and held the public trust. In conclusion, design team members stressed that charter school leaders should be aware that accountability can mean different things in different contexts and that they should be diligent in developing tools to demonstrate accountability at all levels.

Design Team Summary and Final Leadership Profile

The design team recommendations, combined with the results of the pre-inventory, led to the current core content areas listed in Table 4. We feel that these topics are essential to establishing successful charter schools. The key words in italics—next to the topics of knowledge and skills—identify each topic as an original topic, a new topic based on research, or a new topic based on design team recommendations. While we expect that some of these topics will shift in the coming years, this list summarizes the leadership needs of charter school founders and leaders and forms the basis for the training and curriculum. Based on the research and development during the first year of this project, we recommend that, in order to meet the needs of charter school founders, charter school training should cover all of the areas listed below.

Table 4
A Profile of the Leadership Needs of Charter School Founders and Leaders

Content Areas	✓	Topics of Knowledge and Skills
1.0 Start-Up Logistics		1.1 Reality checks (political environment, fiscal feasibility, sustaining energy, relationships) – <i>Design team</i> 1.2 Writing a good application – <i>Design team</i> 1.3 Making things different (resource allocation, power structure, instructional changes) – <i>Design team</i>
		1.4 Building organizational vision (renamed) – <i>Research, Design team</i> 1.5 Formation of core founding group – <i>Original</i> 1.6 Establishment of a legal entity – <i>Original</i> 1.7 Acquisition of a facility – <i>Original</i> 1.8 Availability of necessary start-up financing – <i>Original</i> 1.9 Acquisition of professional services (i.e., legal, accounting) – <i>Original</i> 1.10 Develop a business plan – <i>Design Team, Research</i>
2.0 Curriculum Standards and Assessment Development		2.1 Development of academically rigorous curriculum true to school vision – <i>Original</i> 2.2 Accountability and evaluation: Development of student and school measures of performance – <i>Original</i> 2.3 Curriculum options – <i>Research</i> 2.4 Renewing the charter – <i>Design team</i>
3.0 Governance/ Management		3.1 Organizational structure: governance, management, operations (revised) – <i>Design team</i> 3.2 Personnel issues – <i>Original</i> 3.3 Develop internal policies (finance, personnel, student discipline, child abuse, enrollment, etc.) – <i>Design team</i> 3.4 Evaluation of governing board – <i>Original</i> 3.5 Managing growth – <i>Research</i> 3.6 Liability issues (insurance workers' compensation) – <i>Original</i> 3.7 Contracting for services – <i>Original</i>
4.0 Community Relations: Internal and External		4.1 Dealing with controversy – <i>Original</i> 4.2 Dealing with interest groups – <i>Original</i> 4.3 Media relations – <i>Original</i> 4.4 Community relations – <i>Original</i> 4.5 Relationships with district and/or sponsoring agency – <i>Design Team, Research</i> 4.6 Communicating parent expectations – <i>Design Team, Research</i> 4.7 Marketing the charter school – <i>Design Team, Research</i>
5.0 Regulatory Issues		5.1 Equity in serving student populations – <i>Original</i> 5.2 Special education requirements – <i>Original</i> 5.3 Assuring health and safety – <i>Original</i> 5.4 Individual rights – <i>Original</i> 5.5 Religious issues – <i>Original</i> 5.6 Student records and freedom of information – <i>Original</i> 5.7 Civil rights regulations – <i>Original</i> 5.8 Parental involvement requirements – <i>Original</i> 5.9 State laws and regulations – <i>Original</i> 5.10 Types of charter schools (for profit, private conversion) – <i>Original</i> 5.11 Awareness of legal options – <i>Original</i>