

**TEACHERS', PARENTS', AND STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVE
SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS OF TWO TEXAS URBAN
EXEMPLARY OPEN-ENROLLMENT
CHARTER SCHOOLS**

A Dissertation

by

DeEADRA ALBERT-GREEN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2005

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

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August 2005

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ABSTRACT

Teachers', Parents', and Students' Perceptions of Effective School

Characteristics of Two Texas Urban Exemplary Open-

Enrollment Charter Schools. (August 2005)

DeEadra Albert-Green, B.S., Lamar University;

M.A., Prairie View A&M University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Patricia J. Larke

The primary purpose of this study was to examine how teachers, parents, and students viewed their charter school as effective when effectiveness was defined by the following 11 characteristics: (a) instructional leadership, (b) clear mission, (c) safe and orderly environment, (d) positive school climate, (e) high expectations, (f) frequent monitoring, (g) basic skills, (h) opportunities for learning, (i) parent and community involvement, (j) professional development and (k) teacher involvement.

Two exemplary open-enrollment charter schools in Texas were used in this study. All 24 teacher, parent, and student participants completed a questionnaire that addressed characteristics analyzed for each group. The 72 participants in this quantitative study were randomly chosen to respond to items on the School Effectiveness Questionnaire developed by Baldwin, Freeman, Coney, Fading, and Thomas. Data from the completed questionnaires were reported using descriptive statistics and frequency data. Major research findings for the study were as follows:

1. There was agreement among teachers, parents, and students regarding 5 characteristics. These characteristics were: (a) safe and orderly environment, (b) positive school climate, (c) high student expectations, (d) frequent student assessment, and (e) monitoring of achievement and basic skills.
2. Teachers and parents agreed their school demonstrated effective instructional leadership, a clear and focused mission, and a maximized opportunity for learning. On the other hand, students were uncertain their school provided maximum opportunities for learning.
3. Only parents and students were in agreement concerning the parental involvement in their school. In contrast, teachers were uncertain their school provided parent and community involvement.
4. Teachers were also uncertain their school provided strong professional development and included them in the decision-making process for the school.

DEDICATION

Life is a test that causes you to realize that nothing is insignificant in your life. Even the smallest incident has significance for a person's character. Every day is important and creates an opportunity to grow and develop. I am so appreciative of the following people in my life who have supported me as I continue to learn and grow as an individual.

This entire study is dedicated to my family:

My Family

Gary Green

J. W. Albert

Cloteal Albert

Bettye Grigsby

Sierrah Grigsby

With love,

Forever grateful

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Successful completion of a doctorate degree requires a collaborative effort. I want to acknowledge those essential individuals who gave their unexpendable help to make this degree my reality:

Dr. Patricia J. Larke, my committee chair, who encouraged and pushed me to “rise to the occasion” and uncover strengths in me. Thanks for allowing me to participate in the Aldine Cohort and sharing your wisdom for true teaching, learning, and culture-driven classrooms.

Dr. James McNamara, who shared his valuable time to teach relevant approaches to statistics that extend beyond reporting of data. I will never forget your willingness and availability to teach me.

Dr. Linda Skrla, who communicated advisement through kind words and a willingness to listen, nurture, and support throughout this process. You brought a calm approach that helped me push forward toward my goal.

Dr. Norvella Carter, who contributed her academic rigor and unforgettable exposure to scholars who have obtained academic excellence. You provided excitement along this journey.

Dane Bozeman, my statistics savior, who made learning math fun for the very first time in my life. You created practical examples that were easy to follow.

Marilyn Oliva, who helped me perfect all technical aspects of my writing and present an unblemished final copy. I could not have completed this process without your encouraging words and incredible talent.

A special thanks to Dr. Tony Matthews, my motivating cousin, Dr. Dorothy Rhoda, my incredible understanding boss, and Dr. Robert Childress, my spiritual leader, who inspired me spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually by giving of his time and expertise. There is no way I could have made it through this program without your support.

To the members of the Aldine Cohort, thank you for sharing this journey with me. It has been a tremendous ride. Gig Em!

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Increasingly, educational reformers view charter schools as a way to provide a more effective education to students who are under served by the public school system (Fusarelli, 2002). With education among the electorate's top priorities, the phrase higher standard has become ubiquitous in political campaigns across America (Orfield & Wald, 2000). As a result, many advocates, who are extremely concerned about public schools and teachers lowering their expectations for poor students and students of color, have gravitated to the charter school movement.

In this study, the researcher investigated 11 effective characteristics of exemplary open-enrollment charter schools in Texas. Stakeholders were surveyed using various questionnaires covering the same basic 11 effective characteristics found in public successful schools. These teacher, parent and student stakeholders played an important role in making charter schools into the learning environments today. Charter schools are described as one of the United States' fastest moving reform strategies in American public education (Finn, Bierlein, & Manno, 1996).

Experiencing dramatic growth since the first charter law was passed in Minnesota, in 1991, charter schools have emerged as a viable option for proponents of school choice (Patrick, 1997). According to the Center for Education Reform (2004)

The style and format for this dissertation follow that of *The Journal of Educational Research*.

2,357 charter schools serve 579,880 students. Charter schools have created alternative options in education.

Texas Charter Schools

Charter laws passed in 1995 in Texas expand charter options beyond what has been seen in most other states (Patrick, 1997). Currently, there are 221 charter schools operating in Texas. Six Texas charter schools have more than 400 students, and 75% of charter schools have fewer than 250 students (Clark, 2000). Legislation caused an increase in Texas charter schools in 1997, by allowing the State of Texas to open an unlimited number of charter schools that were specifically designed to serve at-risk students. At least 75% of the students in those schools were former dropouts or classified as students who are at risk of dropping out (Clark, 2000). The percentage of low-performing charter schools has increased from 32% to 44% (Texas Open-Enrollment Charter Schools [TOECS], 2002). The charter school movement's underlying premise is that all children can learn. This idea coincides with the belief that effective schools do not attempt to eliminate the achievement gap that separates poor children from middle-class children: they raise the floor below which nobody falls (Edmonds, 1986).

Introduction of Charter Schools

Based on the notion of Henry Hudson's charter with the East India Company to find a new passage, school district organization expert, Ray Budde, is credited with introducing the ideas of charter schools in the United States (Patrick, 1997). Finn, Manno, and Vanourek (2001) noted that most charter experts agree that the phrase

“charter schools” was first used by the late Albert Shanker, longtime President of the American Federation of Teachers, in a 1988 speech to the National Press Club. After a tough political struggle, Shanker’s proposal became a realization in Minnesota. Ember Reichgott Junge, a Minnesota legislator, made it possible for the nation’s first charter school law to be passed in 1991. Since Minnesota enacted the first charter legislation in 1991, 40 states and the District of Columbia have enacted charter school laws (Weil, 2000). Although charter schools have created diverse learning environments throughout the United States, there is one basic concept that defines all charter schools.

Definition of Charter Schools

Manno, Finn, and Vanourek (2000) define charter schools as independent public schools of choice, freed from rules but accountable for results. Charter schools are public schools that are released from many state education regulations and exist separately from local independent school districts (Clark, 2000). Charter schools are designed and operated by educators, parents, community leaders, educational entrepreneurs and virtually anyone who has an interest in education. The concept is that it is demanding with respect to results but relaxed about the means whereby those results are produced (Manno, Finn, Bierlein, & Vanourek 1998). Patterson (2001) reported while some charter schools may be successful, a lack of oversight has led in some cases to lax standards and to the hiring of unqualified teachers. Accountability is critical for charter schools.

Charter schools have been introduced as a means of revitalizing and improving the effectiveness of public schools. The need for change attained national attention

after the publication of reports such as *A Nation at Risk*, which alleged that the American public school system was in a state of crisis (O'Reilly & Bosetti, 2000). Conservatives and business leaders are drawn to its pledge to improve the accountability of a public school system as well as prepare a more globally competitive workforce (Orfield & Wald, 2000). According to the Texas Open-Enrollment Charter Schools (2002), charter schools are held accountable in very diverse ways based on the state and/or district in which they are located and have much more autonomy than traditional public schools. The higher degree of autonomy in running the school is given in exchange for a greater degree of accountability (Barnes, 1997). One overriding concern for charters in all states is that the schools must comply with state accounting and accountability systems, which typically require sophisticated knowledge and equipment; therefore, the degree of autonomy is still somewhat limited (Patrick, 1997). Most charter schools use standardized test results for accountability purposes.

Evaluation of Charter Schools

Evaluation is critical if the overall effectiveness of charters is to be determined. However, oftentimes, there is no funding for this effort although the process is required by law, such as in the State of Texas (Patrick, 1997). Although charter schools are experiencing successes, there are milestones that cause hindrances within the charter school movement. Failure to receive adequate start-up aid has plagued charter schools (Richard, 2002). Financial difficulties continue to be among the largest challenges that charter schools face (Hicks, 2000). When a charter school experiences severe troubles, it usually faces severe consequences. More specifically, more than 200 failed or failing

schools have been closed on fiscal, educational, and organizational grounds (Manno, 2003).

Source of Funding

Unlike nationally government funded charter schools, such as Great Britain, American charter schools are funded primarily from state and local funds. Finances are an important factor in Texas charter schools. According to the Texas Open-Enrollment Charter Schools (2002), Texas charter schools serve larger proportions of low-income students of color than public schools statewide. Overall, charter schools serving primarily underserved students spend more per student compared to charter schools serving less underserved students. However, several Texas charter schools are successful in spite of these challenges.

The intent of this research was not to defend nor support, but to determine if exemplary open-enrollment charter schools could be evaluated using the same characteristics that were found in effective public schools. Characteristics of effective schools were used in an attempt to acknowledge agreement, uncertainty, and disagreement of continuants in exemplary open-enrollment charter schools.

Statement of the Problem

Public schools have not responded to the demands for better results as quickly as parents and school critics would like so charters have become engines for change (Lewis, 1998). Charter schools have spread rapidly across the country since the first two charter schools opened in 1992 (Hicks, 2000). Proponents say these schools work because they are freed from union rules and district bureaucratic regulations that

hamper traditional public schools and because they can develop innovative curriculums that are designed to meet student-achievement goals set forth in their charters (Price & Hunker, 1998).

As might be expected, parent interest, community characteristics, administrative support, teacher competency, and the resources of time, materials, facility, and staff affect a charter school's assessment implementation (Evans, Stallions, Damianos, & Orfely, 1999). O'Reilly and Bosetti (2000) reported that as a movement or educational reform strategy, charter schools are still in their infancy, struggling to define their place in an ever-changing regulatory environment that governs public education. The limited numbers of studies about charter schools have focused on such issues as the degree of parental satisfaction and student demographics; however, further review of charter schools is needed as related to evaluation (Patrick, 1997).

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to examine how teachers, parents, and students viewed their charter school as effective when effectiveness is defined by 11 characteristics. These characteristics were (a) instructional leadership, (b) clear mission, (c) safe and orderly environment, (d) positive school climate, (e) high expectations, (f) frequent monitoring, (g) basic skills, (h) opportunities for learning, (i) parent and community involvement, (j) professional development, and (k) teacher involvement. Due to the lack of studies generating data from teachers, parents, and

students, it is important to examine how these three groups contribute to the effectiveness of successful exemplary open-enrollment charter schools.

Research Questions

The guiding research question was: What are effective schools' characteristics in an exemplary open-enrollment Texas charter school? Four specific research questions were used to develop the response to this guiding research question.

1. What are the overall perceptions of teachers who reside in two exemplary open-enrollment charter schools examined in this study?
2. What are the overall perceptions of parents whose children are enrolled in two exemplary open-enrollment charter schools explained in this study?
3. What are the overall perceptions of students who are enrolled in two exemplary open-enrollment charter schools examined in this study?
4. Are the overall perceptions of teachers, parents, and students viewed collectively consistent in two exemplary open-enrollment charter schools examined in this study?

Significance of the Study

For several decades, the dominant measure of a school's educational effectiveness has been the standardized test. Research on the measurement of school effectiveness originally focused on using standardized achievement tests. Although standardized tests are still the most common means of assessing how well a school district is doing its job, they do not assess many other pertinent factors (Baldwin, Coney, Fardig, & Thomas, 1993). There is a void in the literature that assesses factors

that directly relate to effective open-enrollment charter schools especially in Texas. According to the Texas Education Agency (2003), only 5 out of 55 Harris County charter schools acquired an exemplary rating for the 2002 school year. Texas adopted its first charter law in 1995.

Theoretical Framework

Manno et al. (1998) completed a two-year study summarizing innovative practices that contribute to the success of charter schools in Arizona, California, Colorado, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Two major categories identified were school organization and parent/community involvement. Parents around the country have expressed frustration with the kind of learning that is taking place in public schools. Some parents believe the type of instruction and the lack of motivation among many of the teachers in these schools have caused frustration for them as well (Weil, 2000). Many students observe that within large, depersonalized, and factory-type schools, their teachers do not care about them or have the confidence that they will learn (Weil, 2000). Producing high expectations, providing opportunities for learning, and parent involvement are three reoccurring themes that teachers, students, and parents believe cause effective schools.

The late Ronald Edmonds's work laid the foundation for effective schools. Noted scholars such as Lawrence Lezotte have popularized the work. Lezotte popularized correlates originally created by the late Ronald Edmonds. Lawrence Lezotte (1991), like Ronald Edmonds, believed that school culture, a safe and orderly environment, home school relations, instructional leadership, a clear and focused

mission, high expectations, frequent monitoring, opportunity to learn, and time on task were correlates of effective schools.

Smith and Andrews (1989) emphasized the crucial role that principals play when they interact daily with teachers. Grandmont (1997) stated that parent involvement is more indicative of a child's success in school than any other factor. Schaps, Lewis, and Watson (1996) recognized how a strong sense of classroom community contributes to many positive student outcomes. Students with a heightened sense of community show significantly greater academic motivation and performance, namely, positive attitudes toward school. There are several characteristics related to effective schools.

Definitions

The following definitions were used for the purpose of this study:

Beliefs: Valued it; believe that it occurred.

Campus-Based Charters: A Texas charter option that is granted by the local school board upon receipt of a petition signed by over half of the teachers and parents of children attending that school (Patrick, 1997).

Charter School: Public schools under contract – called a charter. These contracts, or charters, are granted from a public agency to a group of parents, teachers, school administrators, nonprofit agencies, organizations, or businesses that wish to create an alternative to existing public schools in order to provide choice within the public school system (Weil, 2000).

Educational Leaders: Leaders serving in a supervisory capacity experiencing day-to-day leadership responsibilities and challenges of charter school leaders in an exemplary open-enrollment charter school (Dressler, 2001).

Effectiveness: The proportion of low-income children demonstrating academic mastery is virtually identical to the proportion of middle-class children who do so (Edmonds, 1986).

Exemplary Open-Enrollment Charter School: When a Texas charter school has at least 90% of all students, including each minority group, passing and 1.0% or less for a dropout rate (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2002). The school may operate in school district or non-school district facilities by public or private higher education institutions, non-profit organizations, or governmental entities (Patrick, 1997).

Parents: Adults who have chosen to enroll their children in an exemplary open-enrollment charter school for reasons that generally match the educational philosophies and practices espoused by the schools (Bomotti, 1996).

Perceptions: The basis of all learning. When a person gives meaning to external stimuli or sensations. Meanings are influenced by an individual's experiences that drive people's decisions (*Heritage Dictionary*, 2005).

Teachers: Teachers who are employed in an exemplary open-enrollment charter school and are very or somewhat satisfied with their charter school's educational philosophy, size, fellow teachers, and students (Weil, 2000).

Students: Males and females enrolled in an exemplary charter school serving grades 6-8 (Baldwin et al., 1993).

Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS): A series of criterion-referenced tests with three primary subtests: reading, mathematics, and writing. Students in grades 3-8 and 10 take TAAS reading and mathematics subtests; writing is administered at grades 4, 8, and 10 (Texas Open-Enrollment Charter Schools, 2002).

Texas Education Agency Accountability Ratings: Districts and campuses are evaluated on TAAS results and dropout rates to assign accountability ratings. The four levels of standard ratings are: Exemplary, Recognized, Academically Acceptable, and Academically Unacceptable (Texas Education Agency, 2002).

Assumptions

1. The instrumentation used in this study accurately measured perceptions about effectiveness of an exemplary open-enrollment charter school.
2. The researcher assumed that teachers, parents, and students answered questions honestly.
3. The data collected accurately reflected participants surveyed.

Limitations

1. The population of the study was limited to teachers, parents, and students from two exemplary open-enrollment charter schools in Texas.
2. Findings for this study may not be generalized to any other charter school.

Delimitations

1. This study was delimited to exemplary open-enrollment charter schools in the years 2002-2004 in one geographical area.

Organization of the Study

Chapter I consists of an introduction to the study that includes the statement of the problem, research questions, definitions, assumptions, and limitations. Chapter II provides a review of literature on charter schools and their influence on student achievement. Chapter III describes the research methods and procedures used in the study. Chapter IV contains an elaboration of the findings for the first three research questions and Chapter V provides the findings for the fourth research question that deals with the consistency of perception across the three groups of teachers, parents, and students. An overall conclusion of the study and recommendations for future research is in Chapter VI.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter presents a review of the literature on charter schools. An exploration of the history of charter schools is followed by the ongoing debate over charter schools, children of color attending them, major charter schools, and effective school studies.

Charter schools have redefined the term “public education” since the state of Minnesota passed the nation’s first charter law in 1991, according to Manno et al. (2000). Due to the charter school reform movement rapidly growing throughout the nation, charters make it possible for people to consider a different definition: A public school is any school that is open to the public, paid for by the public, and accountable to public authorities for its results. Price and Hunker (1998) stated that charter schools are supported by federal and local funds but run by private managers.

Dissatisfaction with large-scale urban education in Texas has brought unusual alliance, conservative ideologues, parents of color, and state legislative leaders searching for ways to change the structure of the public school system without totally destroying or abandoning it (Fusarelli, 1999). Charter schools have become America’s backyard greenhouses of pedagogical experimentation and innovation as well as ideological battlegrounds (Hanson-Harding, 2000).

History of Charter Schools

While the charter school movement is part of a 200-year effort to expand opportunity in education, its real experience began in the late 1960s when parents and

innovative educators joined together to design education options for students (Stewart, 2002). One of the most important political occurrences of the 1960s was the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. Not only did passage of the act guarantee African Americans access to public facilities, it empowered the U.S. government to assure compliance with the act by authorizing it to bring suit against any institution or local government body that discriminated (Weil, 2000). These types of government interventions paved the way for other reform movements in American history leading up to the conception of charter schools.

Conception of Charter Schools

Vehement discussions about school curriculum in the 1960s gave birth to the foundation of the multicultural movement. The struggle for universal access changes in the curriculum and the passage of social legislation in the 1960s profoundly changed public education in the United States and gave new currency to progressive calls for a democratic educational purpose that had started with Dewey (Weil, 2000). In the late 1970s, Jimmy Carter established the Department of Education in the White House. Congressional actions beginning in the mid-1970s that allocated funds to create magnet schools and the introduction in the late 1970s of alternative schools introduced choice into public education (Stewart, 2002). The 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk*, once again steered the attention of the American public on education. Proponents of charter schools argued that standardized education could not meet the needs of a student population that was becoming increasingly diverse (Malloy, 2000). Not only were public schools continually perceived as failing and mediocre, the argument now began

to pose the possibility that these public schools would better serve the country's citizens if they were forced to compete with schools that were privatized (Weil, 2000). This kind of public consciousness welcomed the charter school concept.

Ray Budde, an expert on school district organization, is credited with introducing the charter school concept during the late 1980s (Bierlein & Mulholland, 1994). Originally, Ray Budde began exploring the charter idea, as it related to departments within a school, not the actual chartering of an entire school. In 1988, Albert Shanker, former president of the American Federation of Teachers, spoke to the national convention of the American Federation of Teachers proposing that local school boards and unions jointly develop a procedure that would enable teams of teachers and others to submit and implement proposals to set up their own autonomous public schools within their school buildings (Budde, 1996). Minnesota policymakers and citizen groups carried the charter concept to another level. Minnesota became responsible for initiating a nationwide charter school movement. In 1991, the Minnesota legislature passed the nation's first charter school law that allowed parents and others to create new public schools that would be free from most district regulations, contingent upon local school board approval (Osborne, 1999). Stewart (2002) indicates while earlier legislation in Minnesota opened the doors for choice to families, legislation between 1991 and 1995 expanded and refined the concept of charter schools.

The First Charter School

In 1991, Minnesota became the first state to pass charter school legislation. Initially, the law only made provisions for eight charter schools to exist statewide. Local Minnesota school boards were required to approve each charter. Afterwards, the original law was amended to allow 40 charter schools statewide. The state board of education was given the dubious task of authorizing a charter school if a local district did not approve the charter.

Initial Structure

The first charter school began as an independent Montessori school. Michael Dorer directed the Bluffview Montessori School. Mr. Dorer was a schoolteacher who taught for many years in public schools. A modest school tuition fee that caused a disturbance in the Winona, Minnesota, community caused Dorer to investigate other ways to operate the school. Dorer (2002) explained that over the next few years he was approached frequently by parents who wanted to enroll their children in the school but were unable to do so for financial reasons. Dorer felt that a public school program, properly managed, might be the solution to the tuition issue. As a result, he prepared a proposal for the Winona Public Schools. He attempted to satisfy both public and private Montessori programs. He was unsuccessful with his quest; however, all was not lost.

Legislative Approval

During the spring of 1991, a parent in the school whose brother, Steve Morse, was in the Minnesota State Senate approached Dorer to discuss public school plans. He

informed Dorer that the legislature was considering a form of school called charter schools. These schools could represent a possible future for public school Montessori (Dorer, 2002). A skeptical Dorer reviewed the legislation to see if it matched the needs of their school. The charter was written for children older than four years of age. It was presented to the Winona School Board on October 21, 1991. According to Dorer (2002), no other charter had ever been presented, so there was a great deal of excitement. The local media became interested and did a series of reports on the projected effects. He received calls and interviews from National Public Radio and the U.S. Secretary of Education. The last hurdle to pass was receiving a recommendation from the State Board of Education. The meeting with the State Board of Education took place on December 10, 1991. The charter passed unanimously. The school continues to thrive holding the honor as the first charter school created in the United States. Many changes have taken place since the first charter school was created in Minnesota.

Explanations for Change

The United States of America has experienced exceedingly great changes in the 1990s concerning the way children are educated in schools. The American people witnessed one of the most significant and controversial developments in public education: the emergence of the charter school movement (Weil, 2000). Many stakeholders began to envision innovative ways of reinventing American schools. Edmonds (1979) stated that there had never been a time in the life of the American public school when we had not known all we needed to in order to teach all those with

whom we chose to teach. Some people felt the knowledge was not spreading fast enough throughout the United States. Lewis (1998) reported that public schools had not responded to the demands for better results as quickly as parents and school critics would like concerning their educational concerns. One solution came in the form of charter schools.

Definition of Charter Schools

Charter schools are public schools that usually operate independently of local districts. They are granted flexibility in curriculum and freedom from regulations in exchange for improving students' academic performance (Wildavsky, 1999). Charters are attracting considerable attention, especially in urban America where they are looking like a possible alternative for the system itself, creating a new education marketplace for many American communities (Manno, 2001). Moreover, the charter school reform movement has generated heated debate about whether charter schools improve student achievement, particularly in urban schools with large enrollments of at-risk students (Fusarelli, 2002). Both proponents and opponents have generated interesting opinions concerning charter schools.

Support for Charter Schools

Support for charter schools came from a wide array of groups, including (a) conservatives who also support taxpayer-financed vouchers; (b) business leaders who have lost confidence in the effectiveness of nonresponsive, bureaucratic public schools; (c) African American and Hispanic American civic groups; (d) community leaders; and (e) parents searching for ways to reform public education without totally destroying or

abandoning it (Fusarelli, 1999). Also, charter schools have made a grand entrance into American public schools with the support of several persons from the White House to the backyard of individuals giving rise to voices expressing their desires for educating their children.

In 1983, the U.S. Department of Education published a controversial report entitled, *A Nation at Risk*. It emphasized the inadequateness of American students. Former President of the United States, Bill Clinton, called for the establishment of 3,000 charter schools by the year 2000 (Rothstein, Farber, & Corson, 1998). This goal has been achieved and the number of charter schools continues to grow rapidly in 41 states across America. Frankenberg and Lee (2003) reported that many politicians continue to support the rapid growth of charter schools: The No Child Left Behind law provided additional monetary assistance to increase the number of charter schools in states with charter legislation. In fact, while many public schools and districts across the nation are facing substantial budget cuts, President Bush proposed \$700 million in spending for charter schools. Also, during his presidential campaign, Bush promoted his Texas education plan of local control and increased opportunities for parents to remove their children from schools with sub-par academic results (Patterson, 2001). Geiger (1998) indicated that charter schools grew out of the ever-increasing desire for parents to choose the school and program their children's experience.

Underlying Premise

Educators have repeatedly deliberated over ways to reform American schools. Stewart (2002) suggests charter schools can offer the opportunity to design, implement, demonstrate, evaluate, disseminate, and extend specific educational models. The goal of the charter movement is not just to establish schools, but also to help improve the public education system (Nathan, 1996). The experimental models and new ways of disseminating information to students are drawing cards for dissatisfied consumers of traditional public schools. What charter schools offer is a license to educators with a dream. The charter school movement embodies the concepts of competition, choice, accountability, and effective performance (Ravitch, 1997). Those educators' dreams have come to fruition during the last 13 years since the first charter was passed by a legislative body.

Legislative Mandates

In virtually any legislation, the way the law is written will have a significant effect on the way the program is developed. Charter schools are no exception. A common process is noticeable in each state. Weil (2000) explains that each charter school must sign a contract with its charter-granting agency that spells out the academic results the school is expected to achieve throughout the term of the charter. In spite of the commonalities, charter schools come in all shapes and sizes.

Differences of Charter Formations

State legislation makes various provisions concerning the conversion of charter schools. Legislation in 27 states with operating charter schools in 1998-1999 permitted

the conversion of existing public schools to charter schools. In 26 of those states, charter legislation allowed the creation of new charter schools as well. Twelve states permitted pre-existing private schools to become charter schools, although some states required that the private schools disband and reconstitute themselves before applying for a charter or limit the geographic areas in which private schools may convert to become charter schools (Nelson et al., 2000). Charter schools are a state phenomenon because the creation of charter schools may begin differently within each state as well as outside of each state according to the guidelines regulated by its state legislation.

Strong and Weak Laws

Charter schools formed under weaker laws tend to remain a legal part of their school district and pose few serious school finance challenges. Those schools formed under stronger laws, however, are often legally and fiscally autonomous entities (Bierlein & Fulton, 1996). These schools have the most autonomy and claim to be free to experiment with their curriculum. Rebarber (1997) believes that once a state has made the decision to permit a diversity of applicants, as have most states with effective statutes, there is simply no reason to insist on a particular governance structure other than to simply require that providers comply with existing state regulations governing such organizations. The Center for Education Reform (2004) lists Arizona and Minnesota as the two states with the strongest laws while Mississippi and Iowa have the weakest charter laws. Highly specific mandates can be onerous, substantially limiting interest among potential applicants and the potential of charter reforms

(Rebarber, 1997). Another factor limiting applicants from applying for charters is financing.

Charter School Funding

Charter schools do not have access to local district funds levied for capital improvements nor do they have the ability to issue bonds. Most charter schools, therefore, must use a portion of their operating funds to secure, furnish, and maintain facilities (Beirlein & Fulton, 1996). This can become burdensome and overwhelming to charter school leaders opening brand new facilities. Also, capital funding has been acquired through the sale of bonds using the taxing value of the property within a given district. Because charter schools often do not have attendance boundaries, this same mechanism does not apply to them (Beirlein & Fulton, 1996). Failure to receive adequate start-up aid has plagued charter schools in states, though some charter schools also raise private funding for such costs (Richard, 2002). Most charter schools are non-profit organizations. While a non-profit structure appears to have some advantages, such as an ability to raise private donations, there is no reason for a state to mandate or endorse any particular legal structure or legal status (Rebarber, 1997). Several political figures have supported charter schools by financial means.

The Clinton administration set a goal of 3,000 charter schools in 40 states by the year 2002. In 1994, a new federal grant program was implemented to support charter schools as part of the Improving America's Schools Act; however, if charter schools receive money from the federal Public Charter Schools Program, they are required to use a lottery to admit students in the event that there are more applicants

than available slots for the school (Frankenberg & Lee, 2003). Some states have tried more radical means in which to control admittance into charter schools.

Racial Demographics

South Carolina passed a charter school law in 1996 that required charters to match their local school districts' racial demographics within 10%, in an effort to prevent racial segregation. A court struck the law down as unconstitutional in 2000 (Richard, 2002). Of all states with charter school legislation, 19 states have specific racial/ethnic balance enrollment guidelines for their charter schools. Two of the four states with largest enrollment of charter school students, Arizona and Texas have no racial/ethnic guidelines (Frankenberg & Lee, 2003). It is the belief of some, like Weil (2000), that a major desegregation case could be pending because different states embrace different approaches to charter schools.

Teacher Unions

Teacher unions are another major factor influencing charter school legislation. Sixty-eight percent of charter school teachers reported no local union involvement in their schools, with this number mushrooming to 89% in start-up charters. Most state affiliates of the national teacher unions remain adamant in their opposition to strong charter laws (Manno et al., 2000). How charter schools are run, the legislation they operate under, and the accountability demanded of them will all be decided, in part, with the help of the teacher unions (Weil, 2000). Unfortunately, many charter school employees may not have their voice heard due to a lack of enrollment in teacher unions.

Intent of Charter School Legislation

Indeed, the federal government's stance toward charters can fairly be termed schizophrenic. On the one hand, all manner of senior officials routinely take to the bully pulpit to praise charter schools, citing them as examples of educational excellence, innovation, and accountability. On the other hand, the federal government has also placed charters in most of the same regulatory straitjackets it uses for conventional schools (Manno et al., 2000). According to the National Charter School Clearing House (2004), the intention of most charter school legislation is to:

- Increase opportunities for learning and access to quality education for all students.
- Create choice for parents and students within the public school system.
- Provide a system of accountability for results in public education.
- Encourage innovative teaching practices.
- Create new professional opportunities for teachers.
- Encourage community and parent involvement in public education.
- Leverage improved public education broadly.

Although charter schools are new and different, legislative involvement has created revolutionary effects to be noticed concerning the everyday business of charter schools.

Texas Charter Schools

In Texas, a charter school is defined as an autonomous publicly funded entity that operates on the basis of a contract between the group that organizes the school and a sponsor, usually the local school district or state education agency (Fusarelli, 1999).

In 1995, the Texas legislature passed a law that allowed open-enrollment charter schools to operate in Texas. In July 1996, the state board awarded 20 charters. In 1997, the Texas legislature increased the number of open-enrollment charters the state board could approve, bringing the maximum number to 120. The legislature provided for an unlimited number of charter schools specifically designed to serve underserved students. At least 75% of the students in those schools must be former dropouts or classified as students who are at risk of dropping out (Clark, 2000). In 1998-1999, 84 charter schools were operating in Texas. The state spent \$218 million on them. However, only 59% of charter school students passed a state skills exam in the 1998-1999 school year, compared with the state average of 78.4%. In reviewing existing charter schools, the state education agency gave an unacceptable rating to nearly one-fourth of the 103 schools it evaluated (Kauchak, Eggen, & Pearson, 2005). As of March 2000, 140 charter schools were operating. According to the Center for Education Reform (2004), there are presently 241 open-enrollment charter schools operating in Texas.

Students Served by Grade Level

Roughly 48% of charter schools serve secondary students in grades 6 through 12. About 21% serve elementary school students up to grade 5. Eighteen percent are established to serve all grades and 12% are currently organized to serve some other grade configuration (Clark, 2000). The majority of all Texas charter schools serve secondary students. Texas serves 87% of their charter schools students in cities and is one out of five states with the lowest percentage of European American students of

their total charter enrollment (Frankenberg & Lee, 2003). Texas definitely has large children of color populations learning in their institutions.

Texas charter schools have racially distinctive enrollments. Clark (2000) rationalizes that these schools with a distinctive racial makeup may simply be reflecting their geographic location and mission. Texas charter school laws prohibit enrollment discrimination by charter schools. Children of color are represented in proportions that exceed those in traditional public schools.

Effectiveness of Texas Charters

Evaluation is critical if the overall effectiveness of charters is to be determined. However, oftentimes, there is no funding for this effort although the process is required by law, such as in Texas (Patrick, 1997). Texas has had five open-enrollment charter schools revoked by the State Board of Education. Four revocations have been for financial irregularities while 18 Texas charter schools returned their charters. Of the 18 first-generation schools submitting renewal applications, all received charter renewals for a 10-year period (Texas Open-Enrollment Charter Schools, 2002). Texas charter schools have grown increasingly since their inception. In contrast, salaries have not grown with the Texas growth spurt of charter schools.

Texas Charter School Employees

For both administrators and teachers, average salaries are lower in charter schools than in the State of Texas. This may be, in part, accounted for by charter school teachers' relative inexperience (Texas Open-Enrollment Charter Schools, 2002). In 2000, 11% of Texas charter school faculty were not degreed, while less than 1% of

faculty in the traditional public schools were not degreed (Clark, 2000). This is an interesting practice especially since Patrick (1997) concludes that the majority of the open-enrollment charter schools in Texas focus on at-risk students. Obviously, many charter schools are choosing to spend their money on other necessities of the schools.

Texas Charter and Public School Relations

According to Clark (2000), Texas charter schools are more likely to spend resources on plant maintenance and operations and administration than traditional public schools. Most public school district officials do not see charter schools as a threat, and some welcome charter schools as an alternative for students and families who are not succeeding in traditional public school settings. Texas charter schools have evidently taken the charter school movement and characterized it for their own homegrown blend of schools.

Pros and Cons of Charter Schools

Proponents and opponents argue positive and negative factors surrounding the existence of charter schools. It is understandable why charter schools have caught the attention of both proponents and opponents. Since 1991, 40 states have enacted laws allowing for the creation of charter schools. There are now 2,700 schools that serve some 600,000 students in 34 states and the District of Columbia who are enrolling, in some instances, upwards of 17% of all their children in these new institutions (Manno, 2003). The rapid growth of charter schools has intrigued many people and has caused them to wonder why charter schools have become popular so quickly.

Causal Effects for Charter Schools

Opponents of charter schools argue that charters will drain public schools of the best teachers and students and deprive existing public schools of needed funding (Malloy, 2000). Many argue that charter schools are growing nationwide for good reason; traditional public schools are failing some students. Colleges have been forced to offer remedial classes, while businesses must now spend inordinate amounts of time and money on training (Gormley, 1999). Reforms within the education system seemed inevitable.

Student Population

According to Nathan (1996), charters opened up new opportunities for educators frustrated by red tape and resistance to change. Malloy (2000) reports that some opponents are concerned that charters will be used by voucher proponents as a way of creating private schools with public funds. Often private schools attract a homogenous group of students to their schools. Wronkovich (2000) discovered that 7 of 10 charter schools have a student racial/ethnic composition that was similar to surrounding districts. The data contained no evidence that charter schools disproportionately serve European American and economically advantaged students. Critics predicted that charters would skim the ablest and most fortunate kids, but that is not happening. Low-income and children of color are at least as well represented in these schools as in regular public schools, as are youngsters with limited English proficiency (Finn, 2000). Charter schools have a mixed record pertaining to students with disabilities.

Charter schools are serving a variety of students, and recent studies at the national level show that a sizable proportion of students being served in charter schools have disabilities (Lange & Lehr, 2000). Federal law requires charter schools to serve students with disabilities. Regardless of whether charter schools are legally autonomous units, they are bound by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Section 504 prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability by any agency that receives federal financial assistance (McKinney, 1996). The law does not make exceptions for the opportunity of any child in the United States to receive an education.

Parental Insight

Edmonds (1979) explains all children are eminently educable and that the behavior of the school is critical in determining the quality of that education. This phenomenon may explain the findings Sandra Harris found when she conducted a year-long study in Texas and Louisiana charter schools exploring why parents chose charter schools for their children with disabilities.

Harris (2002) reports:

As parents and teachers talked about their charter school experiences, the small size of the classes, and the small size of the school emerged as a central theme that facilitated caring and learning for these children who had experienced failure in the traditional school setting. This feeling of community was enhanced as students perceived that the teachers were nice and helpful. In this small, personal environment, the young people made friends, felt valued and respected, and indicated that learning was occurring. (p. 78)

Parents are drawn to schools that reject a value-neutral, “one size-fits-all” approach to public schooling. Instead, they are seeking schools that resonate with their

particular values and beliefs regarding the goals of education and what constitutes good teaching and learning. They are seeking schools that are safe and caring, that are free from drugs and violence, and that provide a sense of community where their children are accepted and feel they belong (O'Reilly & Bosetti, 2000). Barnes (1997) concludes charter schools strengthen parental commitment to the schools their children attend because parents select a particular school after deciding that it meets their family's needs and because they are assured continued participation in the school's management. Charter school teachers, parents, and students in Michigan are generally satisfied with their school's curricula and instruction, but less satisfied with their schools' resources and facilities (Miron & Nelson, 2002). As a result, although the initial setting of charter schools seems inviting to parents of students with disabilities, several reports indicate that charter schools are not equipped to provide adequate services for these students.

Children With Disabilities

A study conducted by the Education Commission of the States (1995) found that at the time of publication, charter school directors in seven states felt unprepared to accept the challenges of students with disabilities. McKinney (1996) reports during the first six months of charter schools opening in Arizona, parents of children with disabilities filed three separate complaints with Exceptional Student Services. The complaints involved instances where the parent had provided a current Individual Education Plan (IEP) to a charter school after their child was admitted; yet, the school provided no services.

A study conducted in 16 Minnesota charter schools uncovered facts concerning parents of children with disabilities enrolled in charter schools. Although parents reported a higher level of special education service, in general, directors reported that fewer services were available at the charter schools than are traditionally available in public schools (Lange & Lehr, 2000). Parents were very satisfied with their decision to enroll their children in charter schools. Fusarelli (2002) warns this disparity raises serious questions of equity and social justice, particularly insofar as many educators consider “special education” and “Limited English Proficiency” children the most difficult to educate. Highly satisfied charter school parents have caused some new competition between schools of choice and public schools.

Competition Between Charter and Public Schools

Wildavsky (1999) states charter supporters say the competition they provide often helps improve traditional public districts rather than speed their downfall. Soares, Williams, Connor, and Soares (2000) believe the best thing about charter schools is that they encourage innovation. Nathan and Rothstein (1998) believe the charter approach expands options for families who have the fewest options. Opponents of charter schools, on the other hand, argue that competition will not improve public education because schools do not operate as markets do. Funds will be siphoned from already under-funded public schools (Fusarelli, 2002). Charters have attracted some greedy people who put making money before the developmental needs of students. Charter school advocates love the idea that deep-pocketed corporations can start their own schools (Adams, 1999). According to charter proponents, a “good” charter plan is

one that allows maximum flexibility for the schools, but even some of the strongest supporters are beginning to question the wisdom of total free-for-all policies that have led to financial abuses and mediocre standards (Lewis, 1998). The growth of for-profit companies to run publicly funded schools, such as charter schools, has exploded.

Since 1997, more than a dozen firms have sprung up to manage and operate charter schools; and as of the year 2000, for-profit management firms are responsible for teaching some 100,000 students at about 200 schools throughout the country (Weil, 2000). Conversely, charter schools sometimes bring new money into a district by drawing onto district rolls children who would not otherwise be there: dropouts, homeschoolers, private school pupils, and youngsters who live outside the district but choose to enroll in charter schools located in it (Manno, 2001). Charter schools involve federal dollars exchanging hands with people desiring to open facilities with the understanding that the money will be incorporated correctly for the benefit of children. Unfortunately, school boards and states have not always adequately investigated all persons proposing charters.

Standards

While some charter schools may be successful, Patterson (2001) says that a lack of oversight has led in some cases to lax standards and to the hiring of unqualified teachers. This practice may soon change due to a new Title I amendment. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) has presented new Title I requirements on charter schools concerning teacher and paraprofessional qualifications. The U.S. Department of Education (2003) mandates teachers of core academic subjects in

charter schools to meet all requirements that apply to public school teachers, including holding a four-year college degree and demonstrating competence in the subject area in which they teach. Manno et al. (2000) believe since charter schools mean less red tape, teachers can deploy their professional judgment, set their own instructional priorities, select their materials, and engage their students in projects and activities that inspire them. Total autonomy in the classroom provides a tantalizing picture that may or may not benefit students attending charter schools.

Goldhaber (1999) suggests, in his review of empirical evidence of the impact of school choice, early evidence on charter schools tends to confirm neither the greatest hopes of choice proponents nor the greatest fears of choice opponents. They are not the elite organizations that many feared they would be. They offer few dramatic educational strategies and their proportions of low-income students and racial compositions reflect statewide averages. Although advocates of charter schools stress freedom from regulations as a reason for the schools' existence, personnel at the schools can still find their curricula driven by high-stakes state testing (Perreault, 1999). At this point in time, all concerned constituents interested in the issue and those who just do not know, agree there is too little evidence about the efficacy of charter schools and their impact on educational reform (Weil, 2000). In contrast, relationships with charter schools are evident.

The dominant themes of charter schools in practice appear to be the new relationships between parents and the school and the redefinition of the role of the state in the administration of public education (O'Reilly & Bosetti, 2000). Several of these

new-found relationships have developed with minority stakeholders. Their hope in charter schools is evident by the increasing number of children of color enrolling in charter schools across America.

Children of Color in Charter Schools

In six states, the proportion of students of color is higher in the charter schools than in the surrounding public schools (O'Reilly & Bosetti, 2000). Although 41 states have passed charter school laws, Frankenberg and Lee (2003) illustrate, in general, children of color in charter schools are less likely to be in heavily European American schools than children of color in public schools. Several minority people feel positive about the operation of charter schools in their state. Unfortunately, mounting evidence shows that large urban schools are failing to provide a quality education for their students (Fusarelli, 1999). For African Americans who typically have very few options under the current system, the concept of school choice is quite appealing (Conrad, 1994). Some authors like Barnes (1997) believe this is due to the fact that policymakers historically have been unwilling or unable to establish programs that effectively lead to racial integration and educational equality. The school choice movement is a response to this problem. The ongoing debate linking school choice to increased segregation presents the opportune time to examine how the political shift toward such school reforms will affect urban schools (Byndloss, 2001). Charter school legislation presently varies tremendously from state-to-state.

According to Frankenberg and Lee (2003), 70 % of all African American charter school students are in 90-100% charter schools populated with students of

color. European American charter school students are also more likely to be in predominantly and intensely segregated schools with students of color than European American public school students. A higher proportion of African American students attend charter schools with predominantly students of color than public schools in all states except Georgia and Colorado.

The increase in the number of African-centered charter schools suggests that this may be a viable community-based strategy for providing educational alternatives for African American children (Murrell, 1999). Other scholars have expressed their views concerning community-based schools for children of color. Edmonds (1986) discloses that a school that was excellent for African American children would be governed by African Americans. The school would be different in its curriculum because the curriculum would be derived from the needs of the community from which the children come, and it would not fail to describe the intimate interaction between the African American experience and the concept of racism. The underlying assumption driving the charter movement is that we achieve more successful schools only by utilizing the knowledge of all stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and business/community leaders to design and operate them through shared governance (Barnes, 1997). Most people would agree that charter schools were definitely designed to include all stakeholders who play a part in education.

Student Population in Charter Schools

In contrast, some educators speculate whether charter schools are reverting schools back to a time before May 17, 1954, when the *Brown v. Board of Education*

court ruling outlawed racial segregation in American schools. Lin (2001) provides a larger perspective, in that schools serve a relatively small geographic area, not an entire state. When the demographics of a school are compared with the state as a whole, the school may appear to be enrolling a larger percentage of children of color than the state average. Some stakeholders would agree that on a smaller scale, charter schools are mimicking a picture that already exists in public schools. Frankenberg and Lee (2003) conducted a three-year study exploring whether charter schools in states with an enrollment of at least 5,000 students, were more or less segregated than their public school counterparts. Here are some of their findings:

1. Seventy percent of all African American charter school students attend intensely segregated minority schools compared with 34% of African American public school students. In almost every state studied, the average African American charter school student attends school with a higher percentage of African American students and a lower percentage of European American students.
2. Because of the disproportionately high enrollment of children of color in charter schools, European American charter school students go to school, on average, with more non-European American students than European American students in non-charter public schools. However, there are pockets of European American segregation where European American charter school students are as isolated as African American school students.

3. The pattern for Hispanic American segregation is mixed; on the whole, Hispanic American charter school students are less segregated than their African American counterparts.

According to the Office of Educational Research and Improvement's *The State Charter Schools* (4th report) developed by Nelson et al. (2000), on average charter schools enrolled a significantly lower percentage of European American students (50% versus 63%) and a much larger percentage of African American students (27% versus 17%) than public schools in 27 charter states. Charter schools in Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Texas enrolled at least 20% more non-European American students than all public schools in those states. For students of color, the distribution of African American students in charter schools showed the greatest variation in comparison to all public schools.

Segregation Within Schools

Seventy percent of all African American charter school students are in 90-100% minority charter schools. European American charter school students are also more likely to be in predominantly minority and intensely segregated minority schools than European American public school students. The percentage of European American students in such schools, however, is much lower than students of any other race, in both charter and public schools (Frankenberg & Lee, 2003). According to Barnes (1997), African Americans acknowledge that court-ordered integration and other desegregation policies have failed to integrate most urban schools. The cogent lesson

of the failed effort to integrate the nation's schools is that racial desegregation must be completely voluntary in order to realize long-term success.

Hispanic American students are the most segregated from European American students in public schools, but Hispanic American charter students, while still highly segregated from European American students, are less segregated than African American charter students. While Native American public school students are exposed to a higher share of European American students than students of any other minority group in charter schools, Asian American students are more commonly enrolled in European American schools than other minority students. Students are more likely to attend predominantly minority charter schools than predominantly minority public schools. This is especially true for African American students. A higher proportion of African American students attend predominantly minority charter schools than public schools in all except two states, Georgia and Colorado. For Hispanic American students, this is true in all except five states: California, Florida, Arizona, Georgia, and Colorado (Frankenberg & Lee, 2003). More than half of all states with charter school laws have policies that require charter schools to comply with desegregation standards or reflect student racial/ethnic populations in the state (Frankenberg & Lee, 2003). African American and Hispanic American students represent a large portion of the charter school communities in the United States, and charter legislation plays an important role in the schools in which these students have chosen to educate themselves.

Overall Evaluation of Charter Schools

Charter schools remain very popular. The driving force to create a charter school arises from very different individual needs of their children. This type of popularity may cause a little uneasiness between charter and public schools that manifests into competitions among educational entities in the eyes of some educators.

Competition Between Charter and Public Schools

Perreault (1999) informs us of the literature on charter schools as it emphasizes the benefits of competition between various public entities, and there is evidence that local educational agencies (LEA) in the smaller districts did strengthen their programs in response to the new charters. On the other hand, there is also evidence that competition can preclude these entities from working cooperatively in areas such as transportation, staff development, and special services where such efforts might well be fruitful. Most charter schools depend on school districts for transportation and special services that are extremely expensive to support. This type of dependence may cause public school districts to become less cooperative with charter schools. Lack of cooperation seems especially true when charter schools are not concentrating on students with low social capital and might, thus, represent more of a challenge to the LEA's core clientele (Perreault, 1999).

Mainstream students seem to be a target population for public schools to maintain in their buildings and for good reason. A report by Nelson, Rosenberg, and Van Meter (2004) concludes the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) that was signed into law in January 2002 included being restructured as a charter school as one of the

sanctions for public schools that chronically fail to make “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) in achievement. Unlike public schools, charter schools are new on the education scene; therefore, few reports have been provided about their long-term success.

Sustaining Power

Although many reports have not been generated concerning charter schools’ long-term success rate, reports have been provided concerning their ability to sustain. Regarding the stability of charter schools, the Center for Education Reform (2004) has reported that as of December 2000, 86 charter schools had failed – 4% of the number of charter schools opened in the United States. Those are amazing figures considering the fact that there are over 41 chartering states. According to the National Charter School Clearing House (2004), Alabama, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, Washington, and West Virginia are the only states that have not enacted chartering legislation. A growth in the number of students being educated by charter schools has increased over the years.

According to the 2002 Center for Education Reform survey of American’s charter schools, the average student enrollment in charter schools is 242 students, less than half of the traditional public school enrollment (which averages 539 students). Charter schools have experienced tremendous growth since their first inception in 1991. Some of these charter schools had an educational foundation before the government deemed them as charter schools.

Overall Formation of Charter Schools

Charter schools that converted from private status had a pattern of autonomy similar to newly created schools in the areas of hiring teaching staff, establishing curriculum, and determining the calendar. Pre-existing public schools had less control than both newly created and pre-existing private schools in all areas of decision-making and policy setting, including curriculum, assessment, discipline, calendar, admissions, budget, and daily schedule (Nelson et al., 2000). Pre-existing private and newly created charter schools were more likely than pre-existing public schools to face difficulties from lack of start-up funds, health and safety regulations, and teacher burnout (Nelson et al., 2000). Federal money plays an important role in the overall operating function of charter schools.

Overall Funding

Charter schools generally receive lower levels of overall per-pupil operating revenue – \$7,500 versus the traditional public schools’ \$8,200. However, national studies indicate that charter schools typically provide a lower percentage of the more expensive services, such as special education and transportation, than their traditional counterparts reducing charter schools’ operating expenditures. Facilities funding seems to be the primary funding challenge for charter schools since most states do not provide additional funding to charter schools for facilities necessitating the use of operating funds for this purpose. Charter schools tend to receive more federal funding than traditional public schools. In states where charter schools do not receive local tax revenue, the state contribution is higher. President Bush has proposed \$318 million in

federal funds for charter schools in his 2005 budget (Center for Education Reform, 2004). The President is not the only source of financial support for charter schools. The federal government is increasingly becoming one of the major sources of funding for charter schools.

Public Charter Schools Program

A new program entitled, The Public Charter Schools Program, supports the planning, development, and initial implementation of charter schools. Charter schools provide enhanced parental choice and are exempt from many statutory and regulatory requirements. In exchange for increased flexibility, charter schools are held accountable for improving student academic achievement. The objective is to replace rules-based governance with performance-based accountability, thereby stimulating the creativity and commitment of teachers, parents, and citizens (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

Although some states (9 of 26) provide state funding for start-up and planning, for most states, the federal Public Charter School Program fund is the most important source of funding for the start-up and implementation of new charter schools. The main factors that can influence charter schools' funding levels include:

- Receipt of local tax revenue,
- Provision of higher-cost students (e.g., special or vocational education students),
- Amount of federal discretionary grant funds received,
- Transportation requirement and state funding for this service.

Funding continues to be the central focus for charter schools. Charter schools must find creative ways to manage costs and identify additional funding resources.

Teacher Credentials

Charter schools must find a way to make their dollars spread. Lower budgets can force charter schools to rely on inexperienced or unlicensed teachers, an April 2003 study found. After surveying charter school principals and teachers nationwide, professors from three California universities concluded that 48% of teachers in the average charter school lack a teaching certificate, compared with 9% of teachers in the average public school who lack one. Charter schools, like private ones, do not have to hire certified teachers (Kingsbury, 2004). Uncertified teachers are teaching many students in charter schools across the nation.

Achievement Among Children of Color

Student achievement among children of color is generally low. Some opponents want to know if the high enrollment of children of color in open-enrollment charter schools is the cause for the lower achievement of charter schools relative to regular public schools. The National Assessment of Educational Progress' (NAEP) (2005) results suggest it does not. (Note: Results are presented only for grade 4 because the grade 8 NAEP charter school sample does not allow for statistically reliable comparisons by race and ethnicity.)

Compared to their peers in regular public schools, African and Hispanic American charter school students scored lower both in math and reading in grade 4, but the differences were not statistically significant. The high enrollment of children of

color in open-enrollment charter schools does not contribute to open-enrollment charter schools that have been unsuccessful in past years.

Charter schools have become a national phenomenon and are gaining momentum each year due to their ability to provide teachers, parents, and students choices in schools. More charter schools are addressing more diverse teacher, parent, and student communities.

Charter School Studies

Three major open-enrollment charter school studies, focused on the State of Texas, reported findings consistent with the 11 characteristics used in this study. The first study profiled high-performing Texas open-enrollment charter schools and the second study provided an in-depth evaluation of Texas open-enrollment charter schools. Lastly, the third study gave comparisons of Texas open-enrollment charter schools with open-enrollment charter schools located in states other than Texas.

The study profiling high-performing open-enrollment charter schools was conducted in Texas and included research on the two exemplary open-enrollment charter schools examined in this study. Researchers conducted profiles of high-performing open-enrollment charter schools in order to explore different types of innovations and best practices that successful charter schools employ (Shapley, Pieper, Way, & Bush, 2003). Ultimately, 17 administrators, 29 teachers, and 10 board members were interviewed. Researchers also included 26 classroom observations, 9 teacher focus groups involving 48 teachers, and facilitated eight student focus groups including 57 secondary students in grades 6 through 12.

Conclusions from this research identified nine attributes appearing consistently across high-performing open-enrollment charter schools. The attributes were:

- Focused mission guides coherent actions.
- Schools are small, with a developmental grade span.
- School culture supports student success.
- Teachers feel responsible for student learning.
- Students are held responsible and accountable for behavior and learning.
- Attention to prerequisite knowledge and skills lays a foundation for student success.
- Student accomplishments, beyond state-mandated tests, are expected.
- Parents are committed to student academic support.
- Schools have strong organizational supports and community connections.

The second major open-enrollment charter school study conducted (Texas Open-Enrollment Charter Schools, 2002) was a fifth year evaluation of Texas charter schools. The Commissioner of Education designated an impartial organization to conduct an evaluation of open-enrollment charter schools. A survey was developed and given to all open-enrollment charter schools in Texas. In total, 120 directors returned the survey for a 75% response rate; 7,085 students completed student-made surveys and 1,206 parents participated in telephone surveys.

Findings included charter schools ranging from very small to criminal justice schools with over 2,000 secondary students. The report found that open-enrollment charter schools had a variety of target populations, curricula, resources, goals, and

objectives. Mainstreaming students, the use of technology, and individualized learning continued to be the three most prevalent educational practices used. Although the percentage of time the administrators spent on discipline had increased slightly, for teachers, the time decreased. Involvement of parents was a major priority for directors but remained a challenge for open-enrollment charter schools. Overall open-enrollment charter schools had high levels of parental volunteering and participation. Directors of open-enrollment charter schools voiced a need for funds and better facilities.

Open-enrollment charter schools received reasonably strong support from their students. The majority of students were either satisfied or very satisfied with their charter school. Students did not choose to attend the charter school because of its location. Instead, problems in previous schools or because their friends were attending the open-enrollment charter school tended to guide their decisions for enrolling in the schools. In general, open-enrollment charter schools seemed to be meeting the expectations of the students.

Parents chose open-enrollment charter schools for high test scores and teaching of moral values. In rating open-enrollment charter schools and the schools their children previously attended, charter parents rated highly the open-enrollment charter schools. The most satisfied parents were those whose children attended open-enrollment charter schools with a high percentage of at-risk students. Open-enrollment charter school parents were more likely to help with fundraising, volunteer at their children's schools, attend school board meetings, and help make educational program decisions.

The final major study cited was a four-year research venture used to document and analyze the charter movement. This nationally scaled study was sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. Twenty-seven states participated in the study. They included: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, North Carolina, New Jersey, New Mexico, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, and Wisconsin.

Across the board, the median student-to-teacher ratio was 16:1. Connecticut, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Texas enrolled a higher percentage of students of color than all public schools in those states. Charter schools in Alaska, California, and Georgia served a higher proportion of European American students than did all public schools in those states. Nearly two-thirds of newly created open-enrollment charter schools realized an alternative vision of schooling, and one-quarter were founded primarily to serve a special target population of students. The majority of charter schools reported they had primary control over most areas critical to school operations.

Effective School Studies

The late Ronald Edmonds's work laid the foundation for effective schools. He conducted a national research project that identified school populations that had 16% to 99% poor as a portion of their school building. He wanted to know what was there about them that made them effective. The late Ronald Edmonds (1986) discovered the following five institutional characteristics:

- Safe and orderly atmosphere.
- Climate of high expectations.
- Strong instructional leadership.
- Frequent monitoring of pupil progress.
- Opportunity to learn.

Noted scholars such as Lawrence Lezotte have popularized correlates originally created by the late Ronald Edmonds. Lezotte (1991), like Edmonds, believes that school culture, a safe and orderly environment, home school relations, instructional leadership, a clear and focused mission, high expectations, frequent monitoring, opportunity to learn, and time on task are correlates of effective schools. Many scholars agree with Edmonds and Lezotte.

Smith and Andrews (1989) emphasized the crucial role that principals play when they interact daily with teachers. Grandmont (1997) stated that parent involvement is more indicative of a child's success in school than any other factor. This principal in Connecticut conducted an action research study on his campus. The purpose of his study was to entice parents to become involved in their children's school. Grandmont was successful in having approximately 400 parents attend their schools' planned social events. He suggests when planning parent involvement activities, the focus should be on planning events that are fun for teachers, parents, and students.

Schaps et al. (1996) recognized how a strong sense of classroom community contributes to many positive student outcomes. The purpose of their study was to

measure students' sense of classroom community in six elementary schools in a suburban district near San Francisco, California. They discovered students with a heightened sense of community showed significantly greater academic motivation and performance, namely, positive attitudes toward school. Also, a strong sense of classroom community contributed to many positive student outcomes like academic motivation, conflict resolution skills, and an overall satisfaction with their school environment.

Levine and Lezotte (1995) identified six characteristics of schools with unusually high achievement. They derived their findings from a compilation of work from noted scholars. The identified characteristics were:

1. High faculty cohesion and collaboration.
2. An orderly environment.
3. Principals providing abundant support for their teachers.
4. Involvement of parents.
5. Engaged active learning and academic success.
6. Respect for differences in cultures and environments.

Levine and Lezotte (1995) explained that to contribute to school effectiveness, the characteristics listed above must be exhibited on a campus level. Characteristics associated with effective schools should be viewed as prerequisites for attaining effective schools. Families and educators seek out charter schools for primarily educational reasons: high academic standards, small class size, a focus on teaching

innovative approaches to curriculum, and instruction are all reasons shared by teachers, parents, and students who have embraced the charter school movement (Weil, 2000).

Recently, Johnson, Livingston, Schwartz and Slate (2000), identified seven correlates of effective schools from studying rural Vermont teachers. They were: (a) strong leadership (b) safe and orderly environment (c) clearly defined curriculum (d) parental involvement (e) high expectations (f) monitoring student progress, and (g) professional staff development. It appears that most educators and stakeholders continue to view effective schools in similar ways.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The driving idea behind the charter school movement has been allowing schools greater autonomy in exchange for greater accountability (Frankenberg & Lee, 2003). According to the Center for Education Reform (2004), 2,357 charter schools serve 579,880 students. The Texas legislature provided for an unlimited number of charter schools specifically designed to serve underserved students. At least 75% of the students in those schools must be former dropouts or classified as students who are at risk of dropping out (Clark, 2000). In 1998-1999, 59% of charter school students passed a state skills exam in the 1998-1999 school year, compared with the state average of 78.4% (Kauchak et al., 2005). Texas has opened the door for more open-enrollment charter schools to educate underserved children; therefore, a model is needed to serve as a guide for schools. Exemplary open-enrollment charter schools can serve as a guide for all open-enrollment charter schools.

This chapter presents the methods used in this study. It is divided into five parts. The first part reviews the purpose of the study. The second part defines the population of interest. The third part elaborates the characteristics of the measurement instrument used to collect questionnaire data, and the fourth part details the procedures for data collection. Last, the fifth part describes the procedures used in data analysis.

Teachers, parents, and students in this quantitative study were randomly chosen to respond to questionnaires on a 3-point Likert scale pertaining to their particular group. The data from the participants' completed questionnaires were reported using

two basic forms of analyses. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the overall distribution of responses to each item surveyed in this study. The frequency data showed the number and percent of responses from each participant who chose the available response options of agree, uncertain, and disagree. Inferential statistics were not used in this study.

The sum of participant responses to the questions on their survey was grouped to each of the 11 characteristics used in this study. Afterwards, the percentage of all participant responses was provided for an outcome of agree, uncertain, or disagree. The decision rule was created by reporting the greatest percentage of response for the 11 characteristics. The specific methods are described below in this chapter.

Purpose

The primary purpose of this study was to examine how teachers, parents, and students in two exemplary open-enrollment charter schools viewed their charter school as effective when effectiveness was defined by the following 11 characteristics: (a) instructional leadership, (b) clear mission, (c) safe and orderly environment, (d) positive school climate, (e) high expectations, (f) frequent monitoring, (g) basic skills, (h) opportunities for learning, (i) parent and community involvement, (j) professional development, and (k) teacher involvement.

Population

During the time of this study, there were 14 exemplary open-enrollment charter schools in Texas. Five of the 14 exemplary open-enrollment charter schools were located in Harris County. This was more than any other county in the state. The

researcher chose to investigate the exemplary open-enrollment charter schools in Harris County due to the high number of exemplary school ratings located in Harris County. These five schools had grade levels that ranged from pre-kindergarten to twelfth grade. All five exemplary open-enrollment charter schools that were concentrated in Harris County were invited to participate in this study, but only three of the schools agreed to participate in this study. These two were selected because they had similarity in grade levels, in the attainment of their school's charters, and in their calendar schedules. These factors made them conducive for this study.

The population consisted of 24 students enrolled in sixth through eighth grade, 24 English, math, history, and science teachers employed by two Texas exemplary open-enrollment charter schools, and 24 parents associated with one of the two exemplary open-enrollment charter schools used in this study. Total number of participants in this study was 72. All participants were randomly selected to participate in this study. Each school had enrollments over 500 students beginning with prekindergarten students and ranging from fifth to ninth grades. A description for each of the charter schools that was provided by the directors is shared in the next section.

School One

In August 2003, school one had a population of approximately 600 students. The staff included 40 teachers, 5 clerical and support aides, 3 custodians, 2 administrators, 1 nurse, and 5 professional employees who taught dance, karate, and gymnastics. The students, faculty, and parents enjoy a 16:1 student/teacher ratio.

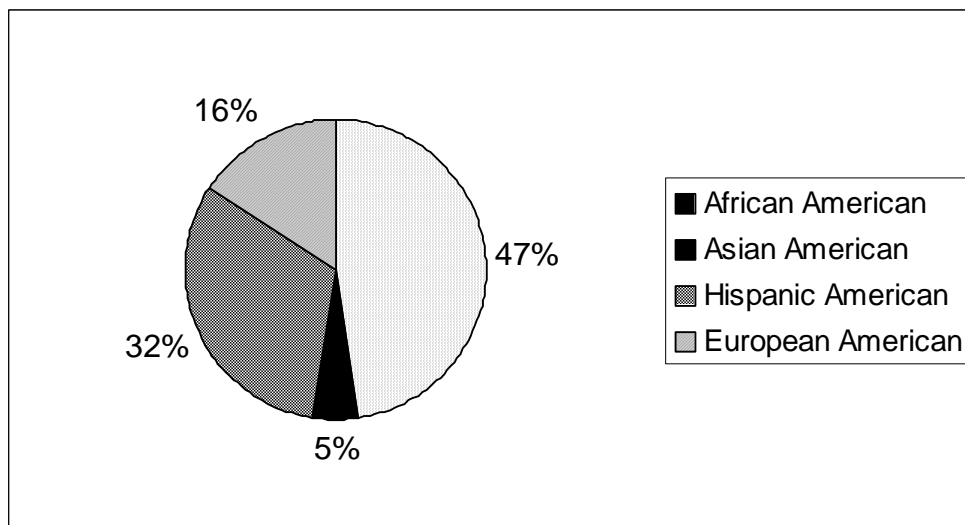
Founders

School one was a dream come true for the two women founders who were public school educators. Collaboration on a business venture gave birth to the idea of opening a public school that offered students and parents a viable alternative to the traditional public exceptional school model.

Inception

After a lengthy application process, the school received a charter to operate from the Texas Education Agency in 1998. As a second-generation open-enrollment charter school, its doors opened five months later with an enrollment of 188 students in grades pre-kindergarten through sixth grade. Figure 3.1 shows the student demographics for school one (D. Merchant, personal communication, May 10, 2005). Classes were held on a 20,000 foot renovated furniture warehouse that was situated in a low socioeconomic area in Texas.

Figure 3.1. Student demographics for exemplary open-enrollment charter school one.



Purpose

The academic program was designed to address the needs of a diverse population. The school provided educational services for students from five Galveston County Independent School Districts. In its efforts to provide an innovative program for educating all children, the school provided parents and students with a meaningful and realistic alternative for choice in public education.

Curriculum

Primary emphasis in the academic curriculum was devoted to the acquisition of essential knowledge and skills that formulated a strong foundation of basic skills. Reading, writing, and mathematics were the cornerstones of the educational program. Additional components addressed self-discipline, civic responsibility, and decision-making.

Parental Involvement

School one believed parental involvement was a key ingredient to the success of the school's educational programs. Parents were active participants in their children's school experiences and were instrumental in developing plans and activities that supported the school's programs. During the inaugural year, parents mounted a book drive that resulted in the purchase of books for the school library. The school has participated in various community activities and has achieved a reputation for its educational program that highlights student achievement and success.

School Mission

The mission of the first school in this study was to provide a quality education to its students through a structured program of basic skills acquisition. The program of activities was designed to prepare students to be productive, valuable members of society while building a strong foundation of knowledge and essential skills.

State Recognition

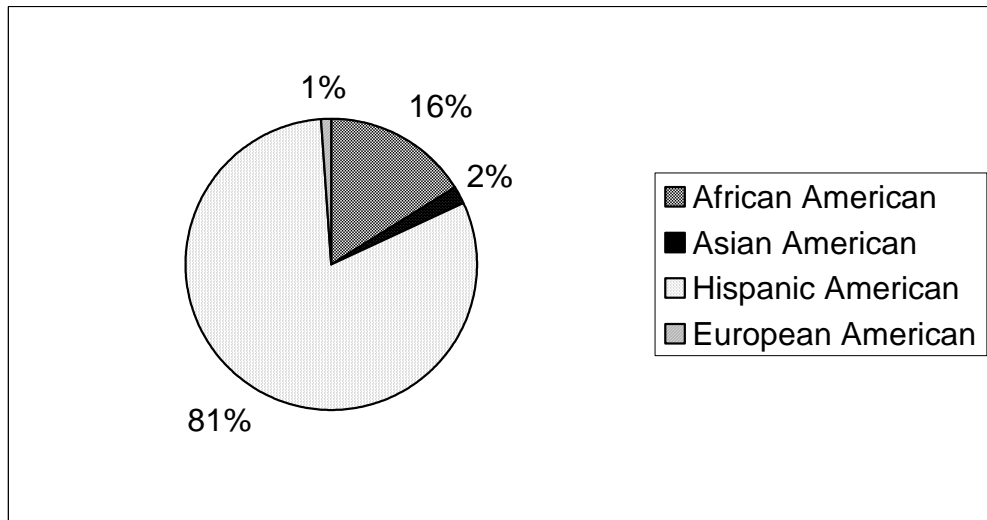
During its 1998 inaugural year, the school received state and local recognition for developing exceptional educational progress and exemplary academic standards. Both parents and students responded favorably to the supportive environment that nurtured student potential and impacted student performance.

Since its opening, the school has expanded to address the academic needs of students in pre-kindergarten through ninth grade. In 2000-2001, the school earned a recognized rating from the Texas Education Agency for student performance on the spring administration of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills. The school continued its stellar achievement by attaining an exemplary rating during the 2001-2002 school years.

School Two

School two has gained recognition since its doors opened in June 1995. During the time of this study, school two served a population of approximately 515 students enrolled in grades pre kindergarten, and fifth through ninth grade. Figure 3.2 describes the student population in school two (C. North, personal communication, May 5, 2005).

Figure 3.2. Student demographics for exemplary open-enrollment charter school two.



Founders

The second school in this study was founded within the Houston Independent School District (HISD) by two former educators. Both graduates of Ivy League colleges, the two teachers decided to try to make a difference after teaching for two years in low-performing schools in impoverished Houston neighborhoods. The main principle was that there were no shortcuts to achieving success in school and in life. Students were expected to work hard for their success in school.

Inception

School two received its public state charter from the Texas Education Agency and operates as a 501(c) (3) non-profit corporation governed by a volunteer Board of Directors. In the beginning, the two men began their operation as a public school program for 50 fifth graders.

Purpose

The school wanted to create an academically rigorous public charter school serving predominantly low-income, children of color. School two originally served students predominantly who lived in homes where English was seldom spoken and few family members completed high school. The founders did not want their students to perceive this as an excuse for not achieving success in school.

Curriculum

School two's successful academic program was designed to engage children and their parents in the educational process. Teachers, parents, and students were required to sign a *Commitment to Excellence Form* that specified attendance from 7:25 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, four hours each Saturday, and one month each summer. This agreement obligated teachers to do whatever it took to help their students learn.

Teachers (a) made home visits to provide homework assistance, (b) helped teach parents methods of academic support, (c) provided transportation to and from school for those students who did not have transportation, and (d) were on call 24 hours, providing for students by utilizing home phone, cellular, and pager numbers. Teachers in this school also responded to a toll-free 1-800 number for student homework questions and emergencies.

Parental Involvement

The agreement obligated parents to reinforce the students' commitment, ensure attendance, and help with two to three hours of homework each evening. Parents were also very active with all school activities.

School Mission

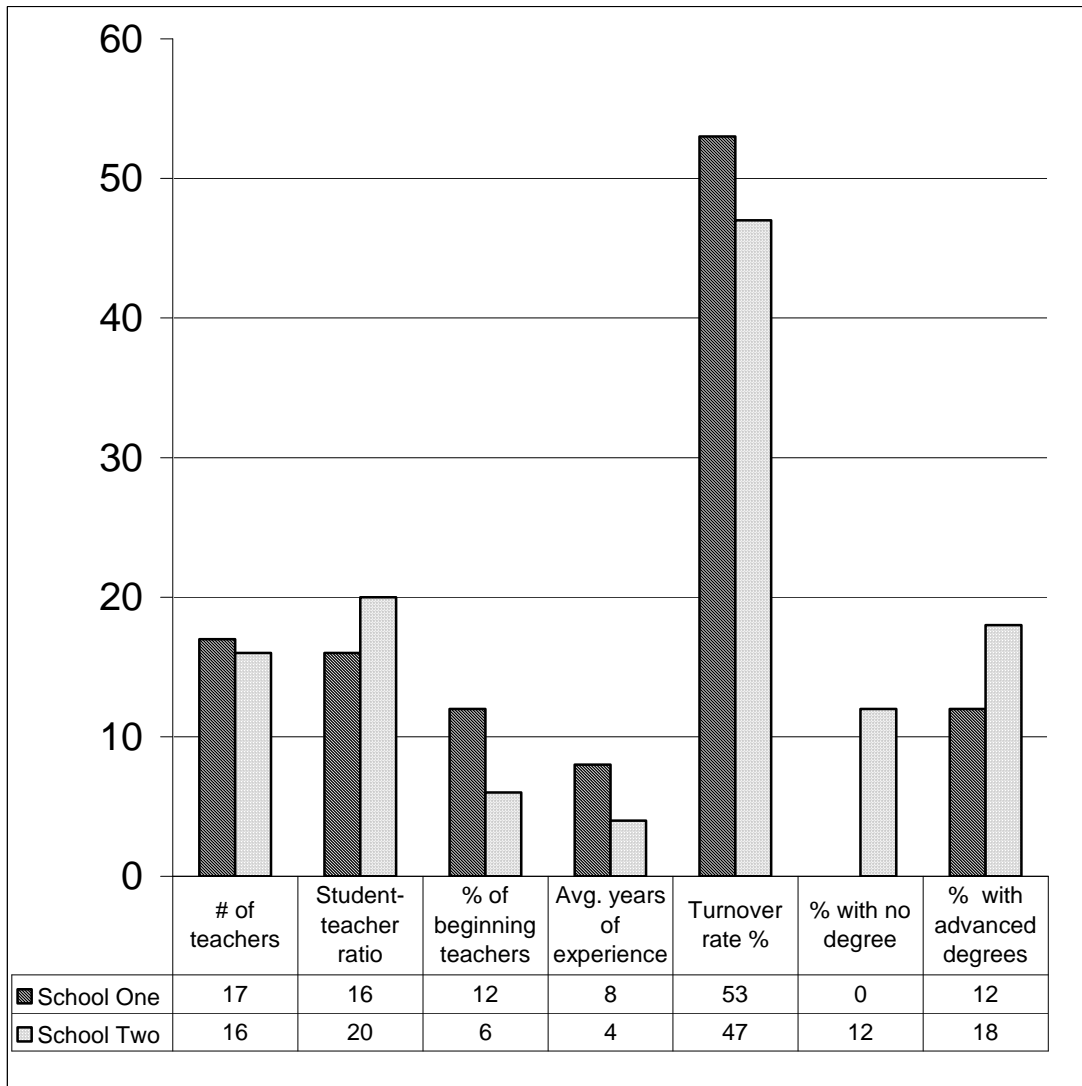
Included in its structure in school two's mission, this school strived to prepare students with the academic skills, intellectual habits, and qualities of character necessary to succeed in high school, college, and beyond the competitive world. This school wanted to groom students for experiences encountered after 12 years of public school education.

State Recognition

Over 99% of all students in school two passed all sections of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test. In math, writing, and science, students earned perfect passing rates of 100% and in reading and social studies, a 99% passing rate was earned school wide. One year after its inception, this school has been recognized by the State of Texas as an exemplary open-enrollment charter school.

A comparative demographic view of both schools revealed a greater number of children of color attending each school. In addition, teachers benefited from a small student teacher ratio but tend to have high turnover rate in both schools (Figure 3.3) (Texas Center for Educational Research, 2003).

Figure 3.3. Teacher demographics for two exemplary open-enrollment charter schools.



Instrumentation

The School Effectiveness Questionnaire developed by Baldwin, Freeman, Coney, Fading, and Thomas (1993) was utilized for the purpose of this study. The School Effectiveness Questionnaire grew out of a project conducted by the Orange County, Florida, School District in 1990. Orange County began its project by

assembling a committee of district-level staff and principals from the various elementary and secondary schools. The committee also included parent and community representatives. The committee agreed upon 11 characteristics of school effectiveness that would be measured in Orange County schools (Baldwin et al., 1993). The committee developed questionnaires for teachers, parents, and students.

Pilot Test of the Instrumentation

The original questionnaires (Appendices A to C) were field-tested using teachers, parents, and students in 10 schools, with all grade levels represented. The results were analyzed and revised based on these data. Afterwards, 30,000 teachers, parents, and students were surveyed with the revised instruments. The student questionnaire was split into two forms: one recommended for elementary and middle school students and one for secondary students (Baldwin et al., 1993). Cronbach's (1951) coefficient alpha was computed on data obtained from the Orange County School District to provide an estimate of the internal consistency reliability for each of the characteristics. The internal consistency reliability for all participants had a range from .77 to .96 (Table 3.1). The questions tested from the instrument were reliable. The high coefficient for each characteristic created questions that were clear with no ambiguity.

Table 3.1. Coefficients Alpha Reliabilities

Characteristics	Teachers	Parents	Students
Effective instructional leadership	.96	.94	*
Clear and focused mission	.96	.95	*
Safe and orderly environment	.96	.95	.77
Positive school climate	.95	.94	.77
High expectations	.96	.95	.80
Frequent assessment/monitoring of student achievement	.96	.94	.78
Emphasis on basic skills	.96	.95	.79
Maximum opportunities for learning	.95	.94	.78
Parent/community involvement	.96	.95	.85
Strong professional development	.96	*	*
Teacher involvement in decision-making	.96	*	*
Entire instrument	.96	.96	.82

For the purpose of this study, the middle school form was utilized for both Texas exemplary open-enrollment charter schools in order to collect data from two separate schools using a sample population similar in both schools. This particular questionnaire provided a reading comprehension level adequate for students enrolled in sixth through eighth grade.

The questionnaires administered to the teachers, parents, and students were consistent with regard to the content analyzed, but some of the questions varied depending on the audience (Table 3.2). For example, teacher questionnaires surveyed all 11 characteristics while parent questionnaires surveyed 9 of the 11 characteristics on the instrument. In contrast, only 7 characteristics were assessed on the students' questionnaires. Surveying varied among teacher, parent, and student questionnaires (Table 3.2) due to the reality that these different audiences would contain various abilities to answer questions about content areas associated with the charter schools.

Table 3.2. Relationship of Statements to Characteristics

Characteristics	Teachers	Parents	Students
Effective instructional leadership	1-8	1-6	*
Clear and focused mission	9-15	7-10	*
Safe and orderly environment	16-20	11-15	1-7
Positive school climate	21-30	16-22	8-14
High expectations	31-35	23-25	15-17
Frequent assessment/monitoring of student achievement	36-41	26-30	18-21
Emphasis on basic skills	42-46	31-32	22-28
Maximum opportunities for learning	47-53	33-38	29-34
Parent/community involvement	54-59	39-44	35-36
Strong professional development	60-65	*	*
Teacher involvement in decision-making	66-70	*	*

Purpose of 11 Characteristics

Baldwin et al. (1993) provided the following definitions of all 11 school effectiveness characteristics. Each characteristic was used as a means of identifying and understanding the perceptions of teachers, parents, and students in the two exemplary open-enrollment charter schools in this study.

Effective Instructional Leadership

The principal is a knowledgeable and effective school administrator who encourages teachers, parents, and students to work together as a team in order to maximize the benefits of the school educational experience. Communication is evident among teachers, parents, and students. The principal is at the forefront in facilitating the development of a high quality instructional program and the monitoring of its implementation (Tables 3.3 & 3.4).

Table 3.3. Teacher Questions to Characteristics for Effective Instructional Leadership

Questions
1. Administrators know school district curriculum
2. Communication is frequent and effective
3. Instructional decisions on input from community
4. Principal involved in instructional process
5. Principal and teachers make instructional effectiveness priority
6. Principal provides improvement of instructional program
7. Administrators fair evaluations of employee
8. Principal encourages teachers in leadership roles
Total Questions: 8

Table 3.4. Parent Questions to Characteristics for Effective Instructional Leadership

Questions

1. Principal provide effective leadership
2. Communication occurs among parents and faculty
3. Decisions about instruction using information from parents
4. Principal and teachers show leadership in quality instruction
5. Principal and teachers make good instruction a priority
6. Principal is an effective leader for improving instruction

Total Questions: 6

Clear and Focused Mission

The mission of the school is articulated throughout the school in a manner that teachers, parents, and students understand. The school's goals, objectives, policies, and procedures, means of assessment, and ways of delivering services are clearly stated (Tables 3.5 & 3.6).

Table 3.5. Teacher Questions to Characteristics for Clear and Focused Mission

Questions

1. School has plan includes goals and objectives
2. School plan developed by teachers and community
3. Social trends are considered in school planning
4. Teachers and students know school's purpose and goal
5. Goals of teachers are consistent with school goals
6. Teachers communicate goals to students
7. School plan revised, monitored and reviewed periodically

Total Questions: 7

Table 3.6. Parent Questions to Characteristics for Clear and Focused Mission

Questions

1. School plan indicates what school is trying to achieve
2. School's plan developed by teachers and parents
3. Parents and students are aware of school purpose and goal
4. Teachers inform students of what they are expected to learn

Total Questions: 4

Safe and Orderly Environment

The environment of the school is favorable for educational experiences (Tables 3.7, 3.8, & 3.9). Teachers can teach and students can learn without concerns for safety or undue infringements upon the instructional process or academic freedom. Everyone is involved and supports the discipline procedures. The buildings are clean.

Table 3.7. Teacher Questions to Characteristics for Safe and Orderly Environment

Questions

1. School conduct rules are taught with other skills
2. Disciplinary procedures are implemented fairly
3. Parents involved and support disciplinary procedures
4. Physical plant is clean and maintained
5. Safety principles are taught and practiced

Total Questions: 5

Table 3.8. Parent Questions to Characteristics for Safe and Orderly Environment

Questions

1. Students informed of expected behavior in school
2. Students are disciplined in a fair and consistent manner
3. Parents are involved and support disciplinary practices
4. School buildings are clean
5. Students are taught to act in safe responsible manner

Total Questions: 5

Table 3.9. Student Questions to Characteristics for Safe and Orderly Environment

Questions

1. I am taught good behavior
2. School conduct rules are fair
3. My parents know the school's rules
4. My parents support the school's rules
5. My school building is clean and everything works
6. I know the school safety rules
7. Teachers and the principal make sure safety rules are obeyed

Total Questions: 7

Positive School Climate

The school climate reflects an ambiance of trust, respect, and caring among administrators, teachers, parents, and students (Tables 3.10, 3.11, & 3.12). Cultural

differences are celebrated and never cause a hindrance in the educational process.

Everyone is recognized for his or her accomplishments.

Table 3.10. Teacher Questions to Characteristics for Positive School Climate

Questions

1. Atmosphere of respect and trust
2. Cultural differences are respected
3. Teachers have positive attitude toward school
4. Students have positive attitude toward school
5. Teacher attendance is high
6. Student attendance is high
7. Teachers are recognized for accomplishments
8. Students are recognized for accomplishments
9. Teachers, students and administrators assume responsibility
10. School facilities contribute to positive school climate

Total Questions: 10

Table 3.11. Parent Questions to Characteristics for Positive School Climate

Questions

1. Atmosphere of respect and trust exists
2. Social and cultural differences are respected
3. Students and teachers have positive attitude toward school
4. Students are recognized for their accomplishments
5. Staff and students work together to keep school clean
6. Students feel the school is a good place to be
7. Teachers consider interests and needs of each student

Total Questions: 7

Table 3.12. Student Questions to Characteristics for Positive School Climate

Questions

1. Teachers and students respect and trust each other
2. I feel I can get help from my teacher
3. My teachers like to teach our class
4. School rewards students and teachers
5. Students and teachers take good care of the school building
6. I feel safe at school
7. I am proud of the way my school looks

Total Questions: 7

High Expectations

All students are expected to learn and behave at high standards. The school ensures that teachers, parents, and students are aware of their respective roles and are knowledgeable of their expectations (Tables 3.13, 3.14, & 3.15).

Table 3.13. Teacher Questions to Characteristics for High Expectations

Questions

1. Classroom learning expectations are high
2. Expectations are communicated to faculty, parents and students
3. All students are expected to work toward high standards
4. Expectations based on knowledge and previous student performance
5. High academic expectations are maintained

Total Questions: 5

Table 3.14. Parent Questions to Characteristics for High Expectations

 Questions

1. Staff set high achievable goals for students
2. Students and parents know what the school expects
3. All students are expected to work toward high standards

Total Questions: 3

Table 3.15. Student Questions to Characteristics for High Expectations

 Questions

1. My teachers expect me to do my best
2. My teachers expect all students to do well
3. My teachers expect me to learn as much as I can

Total Questions: 3

Frequent Assessment/Monitoring of Student Achievement

Student academic progress is measured frequently by an assortment of assessment methods (Tables 3.16, 3.17, & 3.18). The results of these assessments are used to improve the instructional effectiveness of the school. Tracking of student performance is often discussed by teachers, parents, and students and modified to meet the needs of all students.

Table 3.16. Teacher Questions to Characteristics for Frequent Assessment/Monitoring of Student Achievement

Questions

1. Student performance is regularly evaluated
2. Student performance is evaluated in a variety of ways
3. Assessment data improve curriculum
4. Student progress is regularly reported to parents
5. Student data monitored and instruction is modified
6. Students are regularly informed of progress

Total Questions: 6

Table 3.17. Parent Questions to Characteristics for Frequent Assessment/Monitoring of Student Achievement

Questions

1. School keeps track of student's performance
2. Student performance is evaluated in a variety of ways
3. Parents are kept informed of how well children are doing
4. School quickly informs parents when children not doing well
5. Students are kept informed of how well they are doing

Total Questions: 5

Table 3.18. Student Questions to Characteristics for Frequent Assessment/Monitoring of Student Achievement

Questions

1. My teachers keep track of how I am doing in my schoolwork
2. I deserve the grades I get
3. My teachers tell me how I am doing in my schoolwork
4. My teachers send home information about my progress

Total Questions: 4

Emphasis on Basic Skills

The school has defined grade appropriate basic skills within content areas and has set challenging standards for all student achievement (Tables 3.19, 3.20, & 3.21). Critical/higher-order thinking skills such as problem solving are also emphasized. These basic skills are evident in elective subjects as well.

Table 3.19. Teacher Questions to Characteristics for Emphasis on Basic Skills

Questions

1. Basic skills grade appropriate within higher order skills
2. Students are taught to apply basic skills
3. Students are tested from basic knowledge and performance
4. Elective subjects are in school curriculum
5. Integration of basic skills into instruction is monitored

Total Questions: 5

Table 3.20. Parent Questions to Characteristics for Emphasis on Basic Skills

 Questions

1. Students are taught to apply basic skills in reading
2. School provides learning to help students with special needs

Total Questions: 2

Table 3.21. Student Questions to Characteristics for Emphasis on Basic Skills

 Questions

1. The things I learn in reading are important
2. The things I learn in writing are important
3. The things I learn in mathematics are important
4. I enjoy classes in music and art
5. I use what I learn in reading
6. I use what I learn in writing
7. I use what I learn in mathematics

Total Questions: 7

Maximum Opportunities for Learning

School activities are planned so that instructional time is maximized and geared to meet the needs, interests, and abilities of all students (Tables 3.22, 3.23, & 3.24).

Extracurricular and supplemental activities serve to support and enhance the school's instructional agenda. Teachers feel supported by their administrators. Classes are not

interrupted often, so teachers have continuous opportunities to teach their high-interest lessons.

Table 3.22. Teacher Questions to Characteristics for Maximum Opportunities for Learning

Questions

1. Instruction time is used efficiently
2. Classroom disruptions are kept to a minimum
3. Teachers freed from administrative tasks
4. Administration supports teachers with disruptive students
5. School offers extracurricular activities
6. Curriculum is varied
7. Teachers provide students with opportunities for leaning

Total Questions: 7

Table 3.23. Parent Questions to Characteristics for Maximum Opportunities for Learning

Questions

1. Teachers spend as much time as needed on instruction
2. Few disruptions to instruction
3. Field trips are used to support instruction
4. Courses are varied to meet the different needs
5. Students have enough opportunities to learn
6. Teachers are prepared for their teaching field

Total Questions: 6

Table 3.24. Student Questions to Characteristics for Maximum Opportunities for Learning

Questions

1. I have enough time to finish what I work on in class
2. Classes are not interrupted often
3. I often work with other students on class projects
4. I am interested in the subjects I study
5. My textbooks and workbooks help me learn
6. My school has clubs and sports in the afternoon

Total Questions: 6

Parent/Community Involvement

The school actively seeks parent and community input in the development of the school's mission, policies, and procedures (Tables 3.25, 3.26, & 3.27). In addition, parents and community members support the school's curricular and extracurricular activities with resources and services. Parents have a voice developing school policies.

Table 3.25. Teacher Questions to Characteristics for Parent/Community Involvement

Questions

1. Parents actively participate in school policies
2. Parents actively participate in school activities
3. Effective and frequent communication occurs
4. Community resources support instruction
5. Social services from agencies are used effectively
6. Parents are encouraged to support instructional activities

Total Questions: 6

Table 3.26. Parent Questions to Characteristics for Parent/Community Involvement

Questions

1. Parents have a voice in school policies
2. Parents actively participate in school activities
3. Parents and staff share information about students
4. Parents encouraged to support instructional activities
5. Parents have opportunities in development of budget
6. School gives parents news about children accomplishments

Total Questions: 6

Table 3.27. Student Questions to Characteristics for Parent/Community Involvement

Questions

1. My parents are active in school events
2. My parents know what is going on in the school

Total Questions: 2

Strong Professional Development

All teachers are encouraged to improve themselves professionally (Table 3.28). Consequently, teachers are provided with opportunities for enhancing their professional status and becoming more skilled in meeting the needs of teachers, parents, students, community, and themselves. Teachers are able to apply their tailored staff development to meet their individual needs,

Table 3.28. Teacher Questions to Characteristics for Strong Professional Development

Questions

1. Professional development addressed differences
2. Professional development of teachers is tailored to needs
3. Participation in professional development is encouraged
4. Application of professional development is encouraged
5. Teachers are involved in planning and evaluating development
6. teachers strive to maintain and enhance professional status

Total Questions: 6

Teacher Involvement in Decision-Making

Teachers are made a significant component of the school team. They are involved in decisions related to school planning and budgeting and developing the school's mission and goals as well as developing and implementing school policies and procedures (Table 3.29).

Table 3.29. Teacher Questions to Characteristics for Teacher Involvement in Decision-Making

Questions

1. Teachers are involved in planning and budgeting
2. Teachers are involved in developing and reviewing mission
3. Teachers are involved in monitoring school policies
4. Teachers perceive they can influence school decisions
5. Teachers and administrators function as a team

Total Questions: 5

Teacher Questionnaire

Teachers had more questions than both parents and students (Appendix A). See Appendix A for a complete list of the questions. Questions 1 through 8 on the teacher questionnaires addressed effective instructional leadership while questions 9 through 15 questioned the charter schools' clear and focused mission. Safe and orderly environments on the campuses were addressed in questions 16 through 20, and questions 21 through 30 requested responses concerning positive school environments. High expectations were surveyed beginning with questions 31 through 35, and questions 36 through 41 allowed teachers to comment on the frequency of assessments in their schools. The characteristics associated with basic skills were identified in questions 42 through 46, while questions 47 through 53 reviewed maximum opportunities for learning. Questions 54 through 59 dealt with parent and community involvement, and questions 60 through 65 requested responses regarding strong professional development. In conclusion, questions 66 through 70 asked teachers about their involvement in decision-making processes on their charter school campuses.

Parent Questionnaire

The questionnaire administered to parents consisted of 40 questions (Appendix B). Questions 1 through 6 requested the parents to reflect on effective instructional leadership at the charter schools. In addition, questions 7 through 10 dealt with the charter schools' mission. Parents expressed their feelings concerning a safe and orderly environment of the school using questions 11 through 15, while questions 16 through 22 gave parents an opportunity to revisit the school climate. High expectations were

rated on questions 23 through 25, and questions 26 through 30 requested parents to respond to the frequency of assessment of the charter schools. Questions 31 and 32 emphasized a response to basic skills, while parents used questions 33 through 38 to respond to the maximum opportunities provided for learning. Finally, questions 39 through 44 requested parents to comment on the community and their involvement with the charter schools.

Student Questionnaire

Student questionnaires examined similar content using 36 questions (Appendix C). Students used questions 1 through 7 to respond to their safe and orderly environment. Questions 8 through 14 gave students an opportunity to reflect on their school climate, and questions 15 through 17 requested a response regarding high expectations. The frequency of assessments was addressed in questions 18 through 21 and basic skills characteristics were in questions 22 through 28. Questions 29 through 34 asked for comments about opportunities for learning. Lastly, questions 35 and 36 requested students to respond to parent and community involvement in their schools.

Collection of Data

A letter was provided to the director of each school seeking permission to conduct the study on the school grounds and retrieve addresses of parents with students attending the schools (Appendix D). Teachers and parents were informed of the study (Appendix E and F) and provided with teacher consent forms during faculty meetings and in faculty lounges. Parents were informed about the study and given student informed consent letters (Appendix G) during arrival, dismissal, parent meetings, and

in school newsletters. Students were randomly selected on each campus and given student assent forms (Appendix H) to return to a designated employee on each campus.

The School Effectiveness Questionnaires were administered to students and teachers at the exemplary open-enrollment charter schools during classes and teacher conference periods. Parents received their questionnaires by mail, visits to the school, and parent meetings held on each campus.

The procedure for completion of the data collection included several phone calls, emails, and two onsite visits to school one and five onsite visits to school two by the researcher. The first visit allowed the researcher to provide the purpose of the study and an orientation of the questionnaire to each charter school director.

School One Collection of Data

On the first visit, the researcher distributed 24 teacher, parent, and student consent forms for the questionnaires and secured a date for administering questionnaires on the campus. Two weeks after the first campus visit, the researcher collected permission forms from a designated employee on the campus. Administration of the questionnaires was provided to parents, students, and teachers. The participants' names were not included on the questionnaire. Each questionnaire was assigned an identification number for tracking purposes. All participants were informed that questionnaires could be completed in approximately 20 minutes and their answers would remain anonymous. The researcher was present during the administration of the questionnaires of all participants.

School Two Collection of Data

On the first visit, the researcher distributed 24 parent, student, and teacher consent forms for the questionnaires and secured a date for administering questionnaires on the campus. Three weeks after the first campus visit, the researcher submitted 24 teacher, parent and, student consent forms to a designated employee on the campus. The first set of consent forms had been misplaced by the designated employee. One week later, the designated employee randomly administered questionnaires to parents, students, and teachers during arrival, mid-day, and dismissal. The participants' names were not included on the questionnaires. Each questionnaire was assigned an identification number for tracking purposes. The employee designee informed all participants that questionnaires could be completed in approximately 20 minutes and their answers would remain anonymous.

One week after the second campus visit, the researcher collected 27 permission forms and questionnaires from the designated employee. The designated employee had not received 9 of the questionnaires completed from four teachers and five parents. Construction and moving into a new facility caused the researcher to wait two more weeks before collecting the remaining 9 completed questionnaires from the designated employee.

This study used the 11 characteristics from the School Effectiveness Questionnaires as domains for the following groups: teachers, parents, and students. Responses for all groups were reported using descriptive statistics.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were obtained using three surveys from the School Effectiveness Questionnaire and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences program. Results of the study were reported using numerical techniques to report descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages. Tables were used to present the findings.

For the purpose of this study, descriptive statistics were used for reported data included in this study. The data analysis for this quantitative study was undertaken in five steps. These steps are elaborated below:

Step One: Coding the Data

The first steps in data analysis involved (a) creating a coding system for each of the three questionnaires and (b) applying these coding systems to each individual questionnaire. These two tasks were completed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences program.

Responses were notated for each question. All responses to each characteristic were assigned a score by adding the total group of question responses for each participant.

Step Two: Generating the Response Distribution

The SPSS program was then used to create the initial response distributions for each item in the teacher, parent, and student questionnaires. A value was designated as an identifier of the outcomes in SPSS program. For example: “1” was identified as agree, “2” was identified as uncertain, and “3” was identified as disagree.

Step Three: Specifying the Decision Rules

The five-choice scale used in the surveys was collapsed into three outcomes by combining the strongly agree and agree response choices and the disagree and strongly disagree response choices together for each participant. Each response distribution was examined in terms of three possible outcomes. These three outcomes were: agree, uncertain, and disagree. Responses given for each question containing the three outcomes were identified as an analysis of desired information regarding the effectiveness of exemplary open-enrollment charter schools. Applying this specification decision rule created a framework for interpretation. The actual results for this task were documented in three separate appendices. These were Appendix I for the teacher outcome distributions for 11 questionnaire characteristics, Appendix J for parent outcome distributions on 9 questionnaire characteristics, and Appendix K for the student outcome distribution on 7 characteristics. Modal values provided the decision rule for selecting the correct outcome for each questionnaire item. These modal values were an integral part of each table represented in these three appendices.

Step Four: Elaborating the Group Results

Outcome distributions in Appendix I were used in Chapter IV to summarize the findings for the first research question dealing with teacher perspectives. Similarly, outcome distributions in Appendix J were used in Chapter IV to summarize the findings for research question two dealing with parent perspectives. Finally, outcome distributions in Appendix K were used in Chapter IV to summarize findings for research question three.

Step Five: The Comparative Analysis

Evidence presented in Chapter IV for the three groups of interest in this study was combined in Chapter V to answer the fourth and final research question, which involved a comparative analysis of the outcomes for teachers, parents, and students. This comparative analysis was divided into 11 sections with each section focusing on 1 of the 11 characteristics explored in the questionnaires. In more specific terms, 7 comparisons were used to compare teachers, parents, and students. Two comparisons were used to compare just teachers and parents. No comparisons were needed for the final two characteristics, since only teachers were requested to provide responses to the characteristics dealing with teacher professional development and teacher involvement in decision-making.

CHAPTER IV

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

This chapter provides the findings for the first three research questions regarding the perceptions of teachers, parents, and students have about their exemplary open-enrollment charter school. Accordingly, the chapter is divided into three parts with each part providing the response to one of the three research questions.

Research Question One

Research question one states: What are the overall perceptions of teachers who reside in two exemplary open-enrollment charter schools examined in this study?

The trends for research question one, dealing with teachers' perceptions, are given in Table 4.1. Trends for each of the 11 characteristics in the teacher questionnaire described below collectively profile both exemplary open-enrollment charter school teacher responses for the two schools examined in this study.

Agreement

Teachers exhibited agreement with 8 of the 11 characteristics presented in their questionnaire. Specifically, teachers agreed that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school:

- Demonstrated effective instructional leadership;
- Reflected a clear and focused mission;
- Provided a safe and orderly environment;
- Benefited from a positive school climate;
- Exhibited high student expectations;

- Conducted frequent student assessment and monitoring of achievement;
- Emphasized basic skills;
- Provided maximum opportunities for learning.

Table 4.1. Trends for Teacher Responses to 11 Characteristics for Exemplary Open-Enrollment Charter Schools

Characteristics Number and Description	Agree	Trend Uncertain	Disagree
1. Effective instructional leadership	59%		
2. Clear and focused mission	54%		
3. Safe and orderly environment	75%		
4. Positive school climate	71%		
5. High student expectations	87%		
6. Frequent assessment/monitoring of student achievement	83%		
7. Emphasis on basic skills	96%		
8. Maximum opportunities for learning	58%		
9. Parent/community involvement		50%	
10. Strong professional development		58%	
11. Teacher involvement in decision-making		50%	
Total	8	3	0

Note. All 11 characteristics were examined in the teacher sample.

The strongest agreement among teachers occurred with acquisition of basic skills, student expectations, frequent monitoring of student achievement, safe and orderly environment, and a positive school climate (Table 4.2). Agreement among teachers was the weakest concerning strong leadership and a clear and focused mission.

Table 4.2. Rank Order of Teacher Responses to 11 Characteristics for Exemplary Open-Enrollment Charter Schools

Characteristics Number and Description	Agree	Trend Uncertain	Disagree
1. Emphasis on basic skills	96%		
2. High student expectations	87%		
3. Frequent assessment/monitoring of student achievement	83%		
4. Safe and orderly environment	75%		
5. Positive school climate	71%		
6. Effective school leadership	59%		
7. Maximum opportunities for learning	58%		
8. Strong Professional Development		58%	
9. Clear and focused mission	54%		
10. Parent and community involvement		50%	
11. Teacher involvement in decision-making		50%	
Total	8	3	0

Note. All 11 characteristics were examined in the teacher sample.

Uncertainty

Teachers in the sample were uncertain for 3 of the 11 questionnaire characteristics. Specifically, they were uncertain that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school:

- Included parent and community involvement;
- Provided strong professional development;
- Supplied teacher involvement in decision-making in their school.

Obviously, teachers did not feel their exemplary open-enrollment charter school effectively welcomed participation from the surrounding community nor did they involve parents in the school. Manno et al. (2000) illustrated that teachers in open-enrollment charter schools often have total autonomy in their classrooms. According to teachers in this study, strong professional development was not as effective as it could have been for the staff. Decisions made for the school did not include teachers enough in the process in order for them to feel included as a faculty.

In addition, at least 50% or more of the teachers' perceptions were uncertain pertaining to parent and community involvement and their opportunity to contribute in the decision-making process of the school.

Disagreement

Teachers sampled in this study did not display disagreement trends for any of the 11 characteristics examined in the school effectiveness questionnaire. They were in total agreement on all characteristics surveyed on their questionnaire.

Research Question Two

Research question two states: What are the overall perceptions of parents whose children are enrolled in two exemplary open-enrollment charter schools explained in this study?

The trends for research question two documented parents' perceptions. These trends are shown in Table 4.3. Trends for 9 of the 11 characteristics in the parent questionnaire described collectively the exemplary open-enrollment charter school profile for the two schools examined in this study. Of the 11 characteristics, parents were only required to respond to 9. These 9 trends are elaborated below.

Table 4.3. Trends for Parent Responses to 9 Characteristics for Exemplary Open-Enrollment Charter Schools

Characteristics Number and Description	Agree	Trend Uncertain	Disagree
1. Effective instructional leadership	88%		
2. Clear and focused mission	83%		
3. Safe and orderly environment	87%		
4. Positive school climate	79%		
5. High student expectations	96%		
6. Frequent assessment/monitoring of student achievement	87%		
7. Emphasis on basic skills	96%		
8. Maximum opportunities for learning	83%		
9. Parent/community involvement	67%		

Table 4.3 (continued)

Characteristics Number and Description	Agree	Trend Uncertain	Disagree
10. Strong professional development		(not applicable)	
11. Teacher involvement in decision-making		(not applicable)	
Total	9	0	0

Note. Characteristics 10 and 11 were not examined in the parent sample.

Agreement

Parents exhibited agreement for all 9 of the effective school characteristics presented in their questionnaire. Specifically, parents in this study agreed that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school

- Exhibited effective instructional leadership;
- Demonstrated a clear and focused mission;
- Maintained a safe and orderly environment;
- Possessed a positive school climate;
- Enforced high expectations;
- Practiced frequent assessment and monitoring of achievement;
- Provided an emphasis on basic skills;
- Afforded maximum opportunities for learning;
- Yielded parent and community involvement.

Parents seem very content that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school had a clear mission and demonstrated effective leadership by keeping their children safe in a positive high-achieving environment that taught basic skills, challenged students, and conducted frequent assessment of student performance. Opportunities of learning were made available and parents felt involved in the educational process. Barnes (1997) corroborates these findings by indicating that parental commitment is strengthened in charter schools because they seek schools that meet their needs.

Parents strongly perceived their school exhibited basic skills, high student expectations, strong instructional leadership, frequent monitoring, safe and orderly environment, and a maximum opportunity for learning (Table 4.4). The parents' perceptions were not as strong pertaining to a positive school climate and their involvement with the schools.

Uncertainty

Parents in this study displayed no uncertainty trends for any of the 9 characteristics associated in their child's exemplary open-enrollment charter school. They unanimously agreed on all 9 characteristics.

Disagreement

Parent response data in this study did not yield any disagreement trends related to the 9 characteristics addressed in their questionnaires. They agreed on all 9 characteristics on their questionnaire.

Table 4.4. Rank Order of Parent Responses to 9 Characteristics for Exemplary Open-Enrollment Charter Schools

Characteristics Number and Description	Agree	Trend Uncertain	Disagree
1. Emphasis on basic skills	96%		
2. High student expectations	96%		
3. Effective instructional leadership	88%		
4. Frequent assessment/monitoring of student achievement	87%		
5. Safe and orderly environment	87%		
6. Clear and focused mission	83%		
7. Maximum opportunities for learning	83%		
8. Positive school climate	79%		
9. Parent/community involvement	67%		
10. Strong professional development		(not applicable)	
11. Teacher involvement in decision-making		(not applicable)	
Total	9	0	0

Note. Characteristics 10 and 11 were not examined in the parent sample.

Research Question Three

Research question three states: What are the overall perceptions of students who are enrolled in two exemplary open-enrollment charter schools examined in this study?

The trends for research question three related to students' perceptions. These trends are shown in Table 4.5. Trends for 7 of the 11 characteristics assessed in the student questionnaire described collectively the exemplary open-enrollment charter school profile for the two schools examined in this study. Of the 11 characteristics, students were asked to respond to only 7 of them.

Table 4.5. Trends for Student Responses to 7 Characteristics for Exemplary Open-Enrollment Charter Schools

Characteristics Number and Description	Agree	Trend Uncertain	Disagree
1. Effective instructional leadership		(not applicable)	
2. Clear and focused mission		(not applicable)	
3. Safe and orderly environment	92%		
4. Positive school climate	79%		
5. High student expectations	96%		
6. Frequent assessment/monitoring of student achievement	83%		
7. Emphasis on basic skills	92%		
8. Maximum opportunities for learning		50%	
9. Parent/community involvement	83%		
10. Strong professional development		(not applicable)	
11. Teacher involvement in decision-making		(not applicable)	
Total	6	1	0

Note. Characteristics 1, 2, 10, and 11 were not examined in the student sample.

Agreement

Students displayed agreement for 6 of the 7 effective school characteristics presented in their questionnaire. Specifically, students agreed their exemplary open-enrollment charter school

- Maintained a safe and orderly environment;
- Contained a positive school climate;
- Exemplified high expectations;
- Conducted frequent assessment and monitoring of their achievement;
- Placed an emphasis on basic skills;
- Benefited from parent and community involvement.

Harris (2002) explains that small classrooms and school buildings facilitated caring and learning in charter schools for students. The students in this study felt their administrators and teachers created a safe and positive environment for learning. Although basic skills were emphasized, students expressed learning on higher levels and were often monitored by their teachers and parents on their knowledge.

Student responses to the surveys indicated strong feelings of orderly and safe buildings, high expectations to acquire basic skills with teachers and parents monitoring their achievement frequently throughout the school year (Table 4.6).

Uncertainty

There was only one of the effective school characteristics about which students felt uncertain. This uncertainty occurred in the area of the school providing maximum opportunities for learning. It is important to note that 50% of the students felt this way.

Table 4.6. Rank Order of Student Responses to 7 Characteristics for Exemplary Open-Enrollment Charter Schools

Characteristics Number and Description	Agree	Trend Uncertain	Disagree
1. Effective instructional leadership		(not applicable)	
2. Clear and focused mission		(not applicable)	
3. High student expectations	96%		
4. Emphasis on basic skills	92%		
5. Safe and orderly environment	92%		
6. Frequent assessment/monitoring of student achievement	83%		
7. Parent/community involvement	83%		
8. Positive school climate	79%		
9. Maximum opportunities for learning		50%	
10. Strong professional development		(not applicable)	
11. Teacher involvement in decision-making		(not applicable)	
Total	6	1	0

Note. Characteristics 1, 2, 10, and 11 were not examined in the student sample.

Students reported learning basic skills in their classroom. In contrast, they felt they were not able to benefit from all learning opportunities taking place throughout their classroom experiences.

Disagreement

Student responses in this study did not yield any disagreement trends for the 7 characteristics they were asked to evaluate in their questionnaires. They only revealed agreement and uncertainty of the 7 characteristics on their questionnaire.

Summary

This chapter provided findings for the first three research questions. Teachers were not sure parents and the communities were involved in their schools. Their professional development was not strong for most teachers, and they did not feel as if they were involved in the decision-making process for their school. On the other hand, parents seemed very satisfied with all characteristics of their effective school. Lastly, students seemed to question their maximum opportunities of learning in their classrooms.

Examining individually the findings for the teacher, parent, and student samples leads one to ask how the findings for each of the three samples might differ. This is the fourth research question. Findings for this question are addressed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS RESULTS

This chapter provides the findings for the fourth and final research question that dealt with a comparative analysis of the findings for the teacher, parent, and student samples. The fourth research question stated: Are the overall perceptions of teachers, parents, and students viewed collectively consistent in two exemplary open-enrollment charter schools examined in this study? Accordingly, the chapter is divided into 11 parts. Each of these 11 parts provides comparative analysis findings for one of the 11 questionnaire characteristics introduced in the previous chapter.

Effective Instructional Leadership

The first characteristic explored in this study was effective instructional leadership. This characteristic was addressed in both the teacher and parent questionnaires. It was not addressed in the student questionnaire. Table 5.1 provides the comparative analysis findings for the effective instructional leadership outcomes.

Information in Table 5.1 indicates that teachers and parents have identical opinions concerning the instructional effectiveness in their children's open-enrollment charter school. Specifically, both teachers and parents agree that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school provides effective instructional leadership. Students were not sampled for the effective instructional leadership characteristic. Thus, no comparisons can be offered for both students and parents or for students and teachers.

Table 5.1. Comparisons of Teacher and Parent Trends for Effective Instructional Leadership

Sample	Agree	Trend Uncertain	Disagree
Teacher	*		
Parent	*		
Students		(not applicable)	
Total	2	0	0

Clear and Focused Mission

The second characteristic examined in this study was a clear and focused mission. This characteristic was also addressed in both the teacher and parent questionnaires. It was not addressed in the student questionnaire. Table 5.2 illustrates the comparative analysis findings for the clear and focused mission results.

Information in Table 5.2 advocates that teachers and parents have identical views concerning the clear and focused mission in their children's open-enrollment charter school. Specifically, both teachers and parents agree that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school demonstrates a clear and focused mission. Students were not sampled for the clear and focused mission characteristic. Thus, no consequences can be made to students' perceptions on this characteristic.

Table 5.2. Comparisons of Teacher and Parent Trends for Clear and Focused Mission

Sample	Agree	Trend Uncertain	Disagree
Teacher	*		
Parent	*		
Students		(not applicable)	
Total	2	0	0

Safe and Orderly Environment

The third characteristic examined in this study was a safe and orderly environment. This characteristic was analyzed in the teacher, parent, and student questionnaires. Table 5.3 identifies the comparative analysis findings for the safe and orderly environment issue.

Table 5.3. Comparisons of Teacher, Parent, and Student Trends for Safe and Orderly Environment

Sample	Agree	Trend Uncertain	Disagree
Teacher	*		
Parent	*		
Students	*		
Total	3	0	0

Information in Table 5.3 confirms that teachers, parents, and students have identical ideas concerning the safe and orderly environment in their children's open-enrollment charter school. Specifically, teachers, parents, and students agree that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school provides a safe and orderly environment.

Positive School Climate

The fourth characteristic examined in this study was positive school environment. This characteristic was addressed in the teacher, parent, and student questionnaires. Table 5.4 shows the comparative analysis findings for the positive school environment trends.

Table 5.4. Comparisons of Teacher, Parent, and Student Trends for Positive School Environment

Sample	Agree	Trend Uncertain	Disagree
Teacher	*		
Parent	*		
Students	*		
Total	3	0	0

Inspection of Table 5.4 suggests that teachers, parents, and students have the same views concerning the positive school environment in their children's open-enrollment charter school. Specifically, teachers, parents, and students agree that their

exemplary open-enrollment charter school benefits from a positive school environment.

High Expectations

The fifth characteristic examined in this study was high expectations. This characteristic was addressed in all three of the teacher, parent, and student questionnaires. Table 5.5 emphasizes the comparative analysis findings for the high expectations trends.

Table 5.5. Comparisons of Teacher, Parent, and Student Trends for High Expectations

Sample	Agree	Trend Uncertain	Disagree
Teacher	*		
Parent	*		
Students	*		
Total	3	0	0

Information in Table 5.5 indicates that teachers, parents, and students have the same beliefs concerning high expectations in their children's open-enrollment charter school. All of the teachers, parents, and students agree that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school exhibits high expectations.

Frequent Assessment and Monitoring of Student Achievement

The sixth characteristic examined in this study was frequent assessment and monitoring of student achievement. This characteristic was explored in all three of the teacher, parent, and student questionnaires. Table 5.6 elaborates the comparative analysis findings for the frequent assessment and monitoring of student achievement results.

Table 5.6. Comparisons of Teacher, Parent, and Student Trends for Frequent Assessment and Monitoring of Student Achievement

Sample	Agree	Trend Uncertain	Disagree
Teacher	*		
Parent	*		
Students	*		
Total	3	0	0

Information in Table 5.6 captures identical views that teachers, parents, and students have concerning frequent assessment and monitoring of student achievement in their children's open-enrollment charter school. Specifically, teachers, parents, and students in this study agree that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school conducts frequent assessment and monitoring of student achievement.

Emphasis on Basic Skills

The seventh characteristic reviewed in this study was emphasis on basic skills. This characteristic was investigated in all three of the teacher, parent, and student questionnaires. Table 5.7 elaborates the comparative analysis findings for the emphasis on basic skills trends.

Table 5.7. Comparisons of Teacher, Parent, and Student Trends for Emphasis on Basic Skills

Sample	Agree	Trend Uncertain	Disagree
Teacher	*		
Parent	*		
Students	*		
Total	3	0	0

Inspection of Table 5.7 reveals that teachers, parents, and students have identical views concerning the emphasis on basic skills in their children's open-enrollment charter school. In comparative terms, this label indicates that teachers, parents, and students in this study agree that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school maintains an emphasis on basic skills.

Maximum Opportunities for Learning

The eighth characteristic framed in this study was maximum opportunities for learning. This characteristic was also evaluated in the teacher, parent, and student

questionnaires. Table 5.8 highlights the comparative analysis findings for the maximum opportunities for learning results.

Information in Table 5.8 indicates that teachers, parents, and students have different opinions concerning the maximum opportunities for learning in their children's open-enrollment charter school. Specifically, both teachers and parents in this study agree that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school provides maximum opportunities for learning. In contrast, students are uncertain that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school provides maximum opportunities for learning.

Table 5.8. Comparisons of Teacher, Parent, and Student Trends for Maximum Opportunities for Learning

Sample	Agree	Trend Uncertain	Disagree
Teacher	*		
Parent	*		
Students		*	
Total	2	1	0

Parent and Community Involvement

The ninth characteristic published in this study was parent and community involvement. This characteristic was addressed in the teacher, parent, and student

questionnaires. Table 5.9 describes the comparative analysis findings for the parent and community involvement results.

Information in Table 5.9 signifies different views of teachers, parents, and students regarding parent and community involvement in their children's open-enrollment charter school. Specifically, both parents and students in this study agree that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school exhibits parent and community involvement. In contrast, teachers are uncertain that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school has parent and community involvement.

Table 5.9. Comparisons of Teacher, Parent, and Student Trends for Parent and Community Involvement

Sample	Agree	Trend Uncertain	Disagree
Teacher		*	
Parent	*		
Students	*		
Total	2	1	0

Strong Professional Development

The tenth characteristic observed in this study was strong professional development. This characteristic was only explored in the teacher questionnaire. It was not addressed in the parent or student questionnaire. Thus, teacher perceptions cannot

be compared with either parent or student views. Table 5.10 describes the findings for teachers on the strong professional development issue.

Table 5.10 results indicate that teachers are uncertain that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school incorporates strong professional development. Since, parents and students were not sampled for the strong professional development characteristic, no comparisons can be made for these two sample groups.

Table 5.10. Teacher Trends for Strong Professional Development

Sample	Agree	Trend Uncertain	Disagree
Teacher		*	
Parent		(not applicable)	
Students		(not applicable)	
Total	0	1	0

Teacher Involvement in Decision-Making

The eleventh characteristic was the final characteristic explored in this study. This characteristic was teacher involvement in the decision-making. Only teachers interfaced with this characteristic in their questionnaires. The teacher involvement in decision-making characteristic was not explored in the parent or student questionnaires. Table 5.11 elaborates the analysis findings for the teacher involvement in the decision-making results. These Table 5.11 results suggest that teachers are uncertain that their

exemplary open-enrollment charter school includes teacher involvement in decision-making.

Parents and students were not sampled for the teacher involvement in decision-making characteristic. As was the case for the tenth characteristic that addressed the strong professional development concern, no comparative findings can be elaborated for this final characteristic.

Table 5.11. Teacher Trends for Teacher Involvement in Decision-Making

Sample	Agree	Trend Uncertain	Disagree
Teacher		*	
Parent		(not applicable)	
Students		(not applicable)	
Total	0	1	0

Summary

A synthesis of comparative analysis findings across these 11 characteristics yields unique outcome statements. These are elaborated below.

1. Teachers and parents agreed that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school provided effective instructional leadership.
2. Teachers and parents agreed that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school demonstrated a clear and focused mission.

3. Teachers, parents, and students agreed that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school provided a safe and orderly environment.
4. Teachers, parents, and students agreed that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school benefited from a positive school environment.
5. Teachers, parents, and students agreed that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school exhibited high expectations.
6. Teachers, parents, and students agreed that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school conducted frequent assessment and monitoring of student achievement.
7. Teachers, parents, and students agreed that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school maintained an emphasis on basic skills.
8. Teachers and parents agreed that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school provided maximum opportunities for learning. In contrast, students were uncertain that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school provided maximum opportunities for learning.
9. Parents and students agreed that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school exhibited parent and community involvement. In contrast, teachers were uncertain that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school had parent and community involvement.
10. Teachers were uncertain that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school incorporated strong professional development.

11. Teachers were uncertain that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school included teacher involvement in decision-making.

These 11 outcomes will be referenced and discussed again in Chapter VI in the section dealing with conclusions that emerged from this study. The outcomes were derived from the three groups evaluated in this study.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The sixth chapter is divided into four parts. Part one reviews the purpose and research design for this inquiry. Part two focuses on the findings and conclusions that emerged from this investigation. Part three discusses the findings that emerged from data in this study as well as findings already published in the literature. Part four elaborates the recommendations for future research and practice.

Purpose and Design

Purpose of the Study

A review of the related literature indicated that charter schools are often described as the fastest moving reform strategy in American public education. In 1991, the nation's first charter school law passed in Minnesota. The admittance of this type of legislature allowed parents and other interested parties to create new public schools that would be free from most district regulations, contingent upon local school board approval (Osborne, 1999). Several states have enacted charter school laws since Minnesota gave America its first glimpse of charter schools. There are limited numbers of studies about charter schools focusing on parental satisfaction and demographics; however, further review of charter schools is needed as related to evaluation (Patrick, 1997). The need for more research concerning evaluation of effective charter schools prompted the investigation launched in this study on exemplary open-enrollment charter schools.

The primary purpose of this study was to examine how teachers, parents, and students viewed their charter school as effective when effectiveness was defined by the following 11 characteristics: (a) instructional leadership, (b) clear mission, (c) safe and orderly environment, (d) positive school climate, (e) high expectations, (f) frequent monitoring, (g) basic skills, (h) opportunities for learning, (i) parent and community involvement, (j) professional development, and (k) teacher involvement. These 11 characteristics formed the framework of this study.

Research Questions

1. What are the overall perceptions of teachers who reside in two exemplary open-enrollment charter schools examined in this study?
2. What are the overall perceptions of parents whose children are enrolled in two exemplary open-enrollment charter schools explained in this study?
3. What are the overall perceptions of students who are enrolled in two exemplary open-enrollment charter schools examined in this study?
4. Are the overall perceptions of teachers, parents, and students viewed collectively consistent in two exemplary open-enrollment charter schools examined in this study?

Sample Plan

The sample population in this study consisted of teachers, parents, and students at two selected exemplary open-enrollment charter schools in Texas. The two exemplary open-enrollment charter schools were selected because of their exemplary Texas rating scores and the agreement of the directors to volunteer their schools for

participation in the study. The total number of respondents for each sample population was 24 teachers, 24 parents, and 24 students. This resulted in a grand total of 72 participants. Questionnaires were administered to the teachers, parents, and students at their affiliated exemplary open-enrollment charter school.

Questionnaire

The questionnaires administered to the teachers, parents, and students were consistent with regard to the content analyzed, but some of the questions varied depending on the audience. Teacher questionnaires surveyed all 11 characteristics. Parent questionnaires surveyed 9 of the 11 characteristics on the instrument. In contrast, only 7 were assessed on the students' questionnaires. Surveying varied among teacher, parent, and student questionnaires due to the reality that these different audiences would contain various abilities to answer questions about content areas associated with the charter schools.

Findings and Conclusions

The collection of data from the School Effectiveness Questionnaires provided the overall findings for the four research questions elaborated below. The four research questions explored perceptions from teachers, parents, and students participating in this study from the two exemplary open-enrollment charter schools included in this study.

Research Question One

Question one analyzed the perceptions of teachers in two selected exemplary open-enrollment charter schools on 11 characteristics. The trends for teacher responses (Table 4.1) revealed that teachers agreed that their exemplary open-enrollment charter

school was effective concerning 8 of the 11 characteristics, which included effective instructional leadership, a clear and focused mission, a safe and orderly environment, a positive school climate, high student expectations, frequent student assessment and monitoring of achievement, basic skills, and maximum opportunities for learning.

Teacher trends were uncertain for 3 of the 11 questionnaire characteristics. These characteristics included effective parent and community involvement, strong professional development, and teacher involvement in decision-making in their school.

In regards to the strongest to weakest agreement, teachers perceived their schools to teach basic skills, provide high student expectations, conduct frequent assessment and monitoring of their students' achievement, maintain a safe and orderly environment, and benefit from a positive school climate. Most of the teachers in this study were not strongly convinced their schools exemplified strong leadership, maximized their learning, or possessed a clear and focused mission. They definitely were uncertain of the parental and community involvement, professional development, and their participation in the decision-making process in their schools.

Research Question Two

Question two revealed the perceptions of parents in two selected exemplary open-enrollment charter school on 9 of the 11 characteristics. The trends for parent responses (Table 4.3) showed that parents agreed that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school was effective concerning all 9 of the characteristics, which included effective instructional leadership, a clear and focused mission, a safe and orderly environment, a positive school climate, high student expectations, frequent student

assessment and monitoring of achievement, basic skills, maximum opportunities for learning, and parent and community involvement.

Parent trends displayed no uncertainty or disagreement trends for any of the 9 characteristics associated in their children's exemplary open-enrollment charter school. Parents were only surveyed on 9 characteristics in this study.

Although parents reported no uncertainty or disagreement trends, there were some noteworthy indicators that suggest less than strong perceptions about certain characteristics (Table 4.4). Parents, similar to teachers, felt their school exemplified basic skills, contained high student expectations, conducted frequent monitoring and assessment, and benefited from a safe and orderly environment. Also, parents perceived a strong instructional leadership, a clear and focused mission, and maximum opportunities for learning. Perceptions were not as strong for parents in regards to practicing a positive school climate and participating in their school.

Research Question Three

Question three revealed the perceptions of students in two selected exemplary open-enrollment charter school on 7 characteristics. The trends for student responses (Table 4.5) showed that students agreed that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school was effective concerning 6 of the 7 characteristics, which included a safe and orderly environment, a positive school climate, high student expectations, frequent student assessment and monitoring of achievement, basic skills, and parent and community involvement.

Student trends displayed uncertainty regarding maximum opportunities for learning. Students were only surveyed on 7 characteristics in this study.

Similar to teachers and parents, the students surveyed in this study felt safe, perceived their school possessed a positive climate, afforded high expectations, conducted frequent assessment and monitoring of their achievement, and emphasized basic skills (Table 4.6). In addition, students felt their parents were involved with their schools. Although students indicated uncertainty about their maximum opportunities for learning, it is important to note that only 50% were uncertain.

Research Question Four

Teachers and parents in this study agreed on the following two characteristics. They believed their exemplary open-enrollment charter school provided effective instructional leadership and a clear and focused mission.

All three groups of teachers, parents, and students agreed on five distinct characteristics. Those characteristics included that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school provided a safe and orderly environment, benefited from a positive school environment, exhibited high expectations, conducted frequent assessment and monitoring of student achievement, and maintained an emphasis on basic skills.

Teachers and parents in this study also agreed that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school provided maximum opportunities for learning. In contrast, students were uncertain that their exemplary open-enrollment charter schools provided maximum opportunities for learning.

Both parents and students in this study agreed that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school exhibited parent and community involvement. In contrast, teachers were uncertain that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school had effective parent and community involvement.

Teachers were also uncertain about two more characteristics. They felt uncertain that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school incorporated strong professional development and teacher involvement in decision-making.

Conclusions

Specifically, the comparative analysis involving teachers, parents, and students yielded 11 trends. Those trends are listed below.

1. Teachers and parents agreed that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school provided effective instructional leadership.
2. Teachers and parents agreed that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school demonstrated a clear and focused mission.
3. Teachers, parents, and students agreed that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school provided a safe and orderly environment.
4. Teachers, parents, and students agreed that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school benefited from a positive school environment.
5. Teachers, parents, and students agreed that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school exhibited high expectations for student achievement.

6. Teachers, parents, and students agreed that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school conducted frequent assessment and monitoring of student achievement.
7. Teachers, parents, and students agreed that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school maintained an emphasis on basic skills.
8. Teachers and parents agreed that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school provided maximum opportunities for learning. In contrast, students were uncertain that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school provided maximum opportunities for learning.
9. Parents and students agreed that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school exhibited parent and community involvement. In contrast, teachers were uncertain that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school had effective parent and community involvement.
10. Teachers were uncertain that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school incorporated strong professional development.
11. Teachers were uncertain that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school included teacher involvement in decision-making.

Discussions

The third part of this chapter was used to discuss the findings that emerged from this study of two exemplary open-enrollment charter schools with similar findings already published in the literature. An overall discussion was provided in this part as well.

Teachers

The research from this study revealed that teachers were in agreement with 8 of the 11 characteristics on the School Effectiveness Questionnaire. Teachers were 59% in agreement that their exemplary open-enrollment charter schools had effective instructional leadership, 54% had a clear and focused mission, 75% had a safe and orderly environment, 71% had a positive school climate, 87% had high student expectations, 83% had frequent student assessment and monitoring of achievement, 96% basic skills, and 58% maximum opportunities for learning. Teachers were uncertain 50% about their parent and community involvement, 58% concerning a strong professional development, and 50% uncertain about their involvement in decision-making (Appendix I).

Implications

The results of teachers in this study are a common trend among the literature review found in Chapter II. In effective schools, a clearly stated mission exists. This mission is clearly communicated, and it remains at the forefront of the thinking of the entire school staff. (Kauchak et al., 2005). Instructional leadership is essential to the success of a school especially when considering extraneous factors that contribute to the selection of staff in charter schools. The Texas Open-Enrollment Charter Schools (2002) said teachers in charter schools when compared to teachers in public schools have lower salaries and are less experienced in the classroom. As a result, most teachers in charter schools do not have extensive educational backgrounds or extra monetary incentive to teach in Texas charter schools that contain large numbers of at-

risk students. These teachers would need to depend heavily on strong instructional leadership and professional development in which charter schools may or may not be equipped to immediately provide for them. Beirlein and Fulton (1996) point out that most charter schools must use a portion of their operations funds to secure, furnish, and maintain facilities. These financial obligations can become burdensome and time-consuming to charter school leaders, which may take some of their attention away from instructional areas and cause them to pay more of their time and effort toward day-to-day operations of their school.

Parents

The research from this study revealed that parents were in agreement with all of the 9 characteristics surveyed on their School Effectiveness Questionnaire. Parents were 88% in agreement that their exemplary open-enrollment charter schools had effective instructional leadership, 83% had a clear and focused mission, 87% had a safe and orderly environment, 79% had a positive school climate, 96% had high student expectations, 87% had frequent student assessment and monitoring of achievement, 96% basic skills, 83% maximum opportunities for learning, and 67% parent and community involvement (Appendix J).

Implications

The research revealed that parents' agreement is stronger on all 9 characteristics than the teachers in this study. This statement can be traced to the fact that families seek out charter schools for their high academic standards, small class sizes, innovative teaching approaches, and individualized curriculum and instruction. Most parents with

students enrolled in charter schools continue to view their institutions as a positive means of addressing the individual needs of their children (Weil, 2000). They are seeking schools that are safe and caring, that are free from drugs and violence, and that provide a sense of community where their children are accepted and feel they belong (O'Reilly & Bosetti, 2000). One of the most appealing attributes in charter schools is the fact that parents are able to choose a school of their choice.

Students

The research from this study revealed that students were in agreement in 6 of the 7 characteristics surveyed on the School Effectiveness Questionnaire. Students were 92% in agreement that their exemplary open-enrollment charter schools had a safe and orderly environment, 79% had a positive school climate, 96% had high student expectations, 83% had frequent student assessment and monitoring of achievement, 92% basic skills, and 83% parent and community involvement. Students were 50% uncertain about their maximum opportunities for learning (Appendix K).

Implications

Overall, students felt that their exemplary open-enrollment charter school was an effective school. Students were in higher agreement than teachers and parents concerning community and parent involvement. In the review of literature, Grandmont (1997) stated that parent involvement is more indicative of how successful a child is than any other factor in the school. In addition, students with a heightened sense of community show significantly greater academic motivation, performance, and positive attitudes toward school (Schaps et al., 1996). All students in the study indicated their

school exhibited what Barnes (1997) concluded as reoccurring themes of the beliefs that teachers, parents, and students believed caused effective schools. They are producing high expectations, providing opportunities for learning, and parent involvement.

Agreement did vary slightly among teachers, parents, and students surveyed in this study (Tables 4.1, 4.3, & 4.5). There were five reoccurring characteristics that were perceived as the top indicators of an effective school by all three groups investigated in this study. They were exhibiting high student expectations, conducting frequent assessment, maintaining a safe and orderly environment, possessing a positive school climate, and teaching basic skills. All of these characteristics except basic skills were found in the studies by Edmonds, Levine, and Lezotte.

One researcher indicated high expectations, frequent assessment, and a safe and orderly environment as institutional characteristics of effective schools (Edmonds, 1986). The stakeholders in this study agreed that those three characteristics were in exemplary open-enrollment charter schools.

Levine and Lezotte (1995) alluded to positive school climates by stating there should be a respect of differences in culture and environments in effective schools. Teachers, parents, and students in this study agree that a positive school climate was maintained in their exemplary open-enrollment charter school.

The teachers, parents, and students in this study pointed out one key ingredient found in their exemplary open-enrollment charter schools that was not mentioned in any of the three major effective school studies included in the review of literature. All

three groups agreed basic skills were provided in their exemplary open-enrollment charter schools.

One researcher listed parent involvement as a direct relation to a child's success (Grandmont, 1997) and also as one of the correlates that is found in effective schools (Johnson et al., 2000). The participants' perceptions in this study of two exemplary open-enrollment charter schools were not strong regarding parental involvement.

Overall Discussions

My research has lead me to believe that charter schools can perform well and work efficiently to create a school in which learning for all students is maximized (Kauchak et al., 2005). Open-enrollment charter schools can demonstrate effective instructional leadership, reflect a clear and focused mission, provide a safe and orderly environment, benefit from a positive school climate, exhibit high student expectations, conduct frequent student assessment and monitoring of achievement, emphasize basic skills, provide maximum opportunities for learning, include parent and community involvement, provide strong professional development, and supply teacher involvement in decision-making in their school.

The same characteristics that make up effective public schools are the same characteristics that provide the necessary ingredients for effective open-enrollment charter schools. Like public school stakeholders with students enrolled in effective public schools, most teachers, parents, and students were satisfied with their open-enrollment charter school. Overall, stakeholders were generally satisfied with their school's curricula and instruction (Miron & Nelson, 2002). The exemplary open-

enrollment charter school leaders were faced with the delicate balance of satisfying their teachers, parents, students, communities, and government in short, intermittent periods of time.

Implications from this study indicate that open-enrollment charter schools will have to find a way to maximize their students' learning environment, secure highly qualified teachers with competitive salaries, provide useful staff development, and include teachers in more decision-making processes. They must also find ways to satisfy more government regulations.

Recommendations

Experiences gained in this inquiry on exemplary open-enrollment charter schools provided a basis for specifying recommendations for both practice and future research. The recommendations for practice and future research are explained in the paragraphs below.

Recommendation for Practice

Given the empirical findings in this study, it is recommended that the two exemplary open-enrollment charter schools investigated in this study should:

1. Establish more staff involvement with parent and community activities within schools. Most teachers were uncertain about this type of involvement even though parents and students were aware of the activities.
2. Include teachers more in the decision-making process of the school including professional development topics. Most teachers were uncertain they were a part of making decisions for their exemplary open-enrollment

charter school. Teachers were also uncertain they were receiving strong professional development.

Recommendation for Future Research

Researchers who wish to continue the research agenda initiated in this study should consider the following improvements in their research designs:

1. Consider using matched triplicates by replacing the between subjects design used in this study with a within subject design that matches individual students with both their own teachers and parents. Provide a stronger design with tracking evidence for internal operational school structures.
2. Initiate a comparative study that compares low-performing and exemplary open-enrollment middle school level charter schools on the 11 characteristics investigated in this study. This type of study will show what characteristics are indicative of effective schools.
3. Consider replicating the research questions explored in this study in elementary and high school exemplary open-enrollment charter schools. Researchers can discover if exemplary open-enrollment charter schools are consistent and effective across grade levels and schools.
4. Consider replicating this study in other middle school level exemplary open-enrollment charter schools as a means to learn if the findings uncovered in this study actually represent the broader population of all middle school level charter schools that produce high levels of achievement,

reflect excellent student attendance patterns, and have low drop-out rates among their student population.

5. Conduct a qualitative study with the two schools in this study to validate their beliefs in comparison to their school practices. Make sure what they say is actually what is taking place on the campus.

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APPENDIX A
TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire for Teachers

Directions: Please circle a response to the following statements below.

1. Administrators know the school and district curriculum.
Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree
2. Communication between the faculty and administration is frequent and effective.
Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree
3. Instructional decisions for the school are based on input from the community, teachers and administrators.
Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree
4. The principal is involved in the instructional process.
Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree
5. The principal and teachers make instructional effectiveness the highest priority in the school.
Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree
6. The principal provides leadership in the improvement of the instructional program.
Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree
7. Administrators complete fair and meaningful evaluations of each employee.
Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree
8. The principal encourages teachers to participate in leadership roles.
Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree
9. The school has a plan for the year that includes goals and objectives.
Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree
10. The school plan is developed with participation by teachers and community members.
Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

11. Important social trends are considered in school planning.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

12. Teachers and students know the school's purpose and goals.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

13. The goals of teachers are consistent with school and district goals.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

14. Teachers communicate instructional goals to students.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

15. The school plan is revised, monitored and reviewed periodically.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

16. School conduct rules and procedures are taught along with other skills.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

17. Disciplinary procedures are implemented in a fair and consistent manner.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

18. Parents are involved in and support the school's disciplinary procedures.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

19. The physical plant is clean and well maintained.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

20. Appropriate safety principles are taught and practiced.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

21. An atmosphere of respect and trust exists in the school.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

22. Social and cultural differences are respected in the school.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

23. Teachers have a positive attitude toward their school.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

24. Students have a positive attitude toward their school.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

25. Teacher attendance is high.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

26. Student attendance is high.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

27. Teachers are recognized for their accomplishments.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

28. Students are recognized for their accomplishments.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

29. Teachers, students and administrators assume responsibility, as appropriate, for the physical appearance of the school.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

30. The school physical facilities contribute to a positive school climate.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

31. Classroom learning expectations are high, appropriate and achievable.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

32. Expectations are communicated to faculty, support staff, students and parents.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

33. All students, regardless of social or cultural differences, are expected to work toward high standards.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

34. Expectations for students are based on knowledge of students and their previous performance.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

35. High academic expectations are consistently maintained over time.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

36. Student performance is regularly evaluated.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

37. Student performance is evaluated in a variety of ways.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

38. Assessment data are used to improve the school's curriculum.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

39. Student progress is regularly reported to parents.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

40. Student assessment data are monitored and instruction is modified to promote student learning.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

41. Students are regularly informed of their progress.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

42. Basic skills in this school include grade-appropriate skills within content areas, critical/higher order thinking skills and problem solving skills.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

43. Students are taught to apply basic skills.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

44. Students are tested for both basic knowledge and performance capabilities.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

45. Elective subjects are integrated into the school curriculum.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

46. The integration of basic skills development into instruction is consistently monitored.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

47. Instruction time is used efficiently, so that students cover the expected curriculum content with satisfactory understanding and retention.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

48. Classroom disruptions to instruction are kept to a minimum.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

49. Teachers are freed from miscellaneous administrative tasks and duties so they can concentrate on instruction.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

50. The administration supports teachers in matters concerning disruptive students.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

51. The school offers extracurricular and supplemental activities that support instruction.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

52. The curriculum is varied to accommodate needs, interests and abilities of students.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

53. Teachers provide students with opportunities for learning in small group settings.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

54. Parents actively participate in establishing school policies and procedures.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

55. Parents actively participate in school activities.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

56. Effective and frequent communication occurs with parents.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

57. Community resources are used to support the instruction of students.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

58. Social services from available outside agencies are used effectively.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

59. Parents are encouraged to support the instructional activities of the school.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

60. Professional development of teachers addresses the social and cultural differences
in the school.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

61. Professional development of teachers is tailored to the needs of the school.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

62. Participation in professional development activities is encouraged.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

63. The application of professional development activities is encouraged.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

64. Teachers are involved in planning and evaluating professional development activities.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

65. Teachers in this school strive to maintain and enhance their professional status.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

66. Teachers are involved in school planning and budgeting.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

67. Teachers are involved in developing and reviewing the school's mission and goals.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

68. Teachers are involved in monitoring the implementation of school policies and procedures.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

69. Teachers perceive that they can influence school decisions.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

70. Teachers and administrators function as a team.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

APPENDIX B
PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire for Parents

Directions: Please circle a response to the following statements below.

1. The principal and assistant principals know enough about the school to provide effective leadership.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

2. Free and open communication occurs among parents, faculty and administration.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. Decisions about instruction are made using information from parents and the community.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

4. The principal and teachers show leadership in promoting quality instruction.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

5. The principal and teachers make good instruction the most important school priority.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. The principal is an effective leader for improving classroom instruction.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. The school has a written plan that clearly indicates what the school is trying to achieve.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

8. The school's written plan is developed with participation by teachers and parents.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

9. Parents and students are aware of school purposes and goals.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

10. Teachers inform students of what they are expected to learn.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

11. Students are informed of how they are expected to behave in school and at school activities.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

12. Students are disciplined in a fair and consistent manner.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

13. Parents are involved in and support school disciplinary practices.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

14. The school buildings and grounds are clean and well maintained.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

15. Students are taught to act in a safe and responsible manner.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

16. An atmosphere of respect and trust exists in the school.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

17. Social and cultural differences are respected in the school.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

18. Students and teachers have a positive attitude toward school.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

19. Students are recognized for their accomplishments.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

20. School staff members and students work together to keep the school clean and attractive.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

21. Students feel that the school is a good place to be.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

22. The teachers and staff consider the interests and needs of each student.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

23. School staff members set high, but appropriate and achievable, goals for students.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

24. Students and parents know what the school expects of them.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

25. All students, regardless of social or cultural differences, are expected to work toward high standards.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

26. The school keeps track of each student's performance.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

27. Student performance is evaluated in a variety of ways.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

28. Parents are kept informed of how well their children are doing in school.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

29. The school quickly informs parents when their children are not doing well.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

30. Students are kept informed of how well they are doing in school.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

31. Students are taught to apply basic skills and problem solving skills in reading, writing, mathematics, science and social studies.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

32. The school provides learning activities to help students with special needs or interests.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

33. Teachers spend as much time as needed on instruction.
- Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree**
34. There are few disruptions to instruction in the school.
- Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree**
35. Field trips and other activities are used appropriately to support instruction.
- Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree**
36. School courses are varied to meet the different needs, interests and abilities of students.
- Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree**
37. Students have enough opportunities to learn with and from each other.
- Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree**
38. Teachers are adequately prepared for their teaching field.
- Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree**
39. Parents and parent groups have a voice in school policies.
- Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree**
40. Parents and parents groups actively participate in school activities.
- Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree**
41. Parents and school staff members often share information about students' progress and plans.
- Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree**
42. Parents are encouraged to support the instructional activities of the school.
- Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree**
43. Parents have opportunities to get involved in the development of school budgets.
- Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree**
44. The school gives parents news about their children's accomplishments.
- Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree**

APPENDIX C
STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire for Students

Directions: Please circle a response to the following statements below.

1. At my school I am taught good behavior.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

2. School conduct rules are fair.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. My parents know the school's rules.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

4. My parents support the school's rules.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

5. My school building is clean and everything works.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. I know the school safety rules for the bus, playground and classroom.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. The teachers and the principal make sure the safety rules are obeyed.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

8. Teachers and students respect and trust each other at my school.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

9. I feel I can get help from my teacher if I have a problem.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

10. My teachers like to teach our class.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

11. The school rewards students and teachers for the good things they do.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

12. Students and teachers take good care of the school building.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

13. I feel safe at school.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

14. I am proud of the way my school looks.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

15. My teachers expect me to do my best.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

16. My teachers expect all students to do well in school.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

17. My teachers expect me to learn as much as I can.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

18. My teachers keep track of how I am doing in my schoolwork.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

19. I deserve the grades I get.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

20. My teachers tell me how I am doing in my schoolwork.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

21. My teachers send home information about my progress.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

22. The things I learn in reading are important.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

23. The things I learn in writing are important.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

24. The things I learn in mathematics are important.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

25. I enjoy classes in music and art.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

26. I use what I learn in reading.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

27. I use what I learn in writing.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

28. I use what I learn in mathematics.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

29. I have enough time to finish what I work on in class.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

30. Classes are not interrupted often by other people.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

31. I often work with other students on class projects.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

32. I am interested in the subjects I study.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

33. My textbooks and workbooks help me learn.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

34. My school has clubs and sports in the afternoon after school.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

35. My parents are active in school events.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

36. My parents know what is going on in the school.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

APPENDIX D
ADMINISTRATIVE PERMISSION LETTERS

DeEadra Albert – Green
 4001 Fannin Street #4212
 Houston, Texas 77004
 281 220 0177

May 24, 2004

Director
 School One
 Texas

Dear Director:

The purpose of this letter is to seek permission to have your school participate in a research study entitled “Parents, Students and Teachers Perception of Effective Schools Characteristics of Two Texas Urban Exemplary Open-Enrollment Charter Schools.” This study is part of the doctoral dissertation requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Culture at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas. The study is being conducted to examine how students, teachers and parents view their charter school as effective when effectiveness is defined by the following 11 characteristics: (1) instructional leadership (2) clear mission (3) safe and orderly environment (4) positive school climate (5) high expectations (6) frequent monitoring (7) basic skills (8) opportunities for learning (9) parent and community involvement (10) professional development and (11) teachers involvement.

The population involved will include 24 students enrolled in sixth through eighth grade, 24 English, math, history and science teachers and 24 parents associated with exemplary open- enrollment charter schools in Texas. Participants will be asked to complete a questionnaire that will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. The information collected in this study is confidential and names will not be used. Results will be reported by overall numbers and generic student letters in order to guarantee absolute confidentiality.

Thank you for granting permission to complete this study on your campus.

DeEadra Albert – Green, Doctoral Student
 Department of Teaching, Learning and Culture
 Texas A&M University
 College of Education and Human Development

Patricia J. Larke, Advisor
 Department of Teaching, Learning and Culture
 Texas A&M University
 College of Education and Human Development

I have read the above statements and agree to have my school participate in this research study regarding the characteristics related to effective schools in Texas exemplary open-enrollment charter schools.

Director’s Signature
 DeEadra Albert – Green

Date

4001 Fannin Street #4212
Houston, Texas 77004
281 220 0177

June 11, 2004

School Two
Texas

Dear Director:

The purpose of this letter is to seek permission to have your school participate in a research study entitled "Parents, Students and Teachers Perception of Effective Schools Characteristics of Two Texas Urban Exemplary Open-Enrollment Charter Schools." This study is part of the doctoral dissertation requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Culture at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas. The study is being conducted to examine how students, teachers and parents view their charter school as effective when effectiveness is defined by the following 11 characteristics: (1) instructional leadership (2) clear mission (3) safe and orderly environment (4) positive school climate (5) high expectations (6) frequent monitoring (7) basic skills (8) opportunities for learning (9) parent and community involvement (10) professional development and (11) teachers involvement.

The population involved will include 24 students enrolled in sixth through eighth grade, 24 English, math, history and science teachers and 24 parents associated with exemplary open-enrollment charter schools in Texas. Participants will be asked to complete a questionnaire that will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. The information collected in this study is confidential and names will not be used. Results will be reported by overall numbers and generic student letters in order to guarantee absolute confidentiality.

Thank you for granting permission to complete this study on your campus.

DeEadra Albert – Green, Doctoral Student
Department of Teaching, Learning and Culture
Texas A&M University
College of Education and Human Development

Patricia J. Larke, Advisor
Department of Teaching, Learning and Culture
Texas A&M University
College of Education and Human Development

I have read the above statements and agree to have my school participate in this research study regarding the characteristics related to effective schools in Texas exemplary open-enrollment charter schools.

School Director's Signature

Date

APPENDIX E
TEACHER INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
College of Education & Human Development

Teacher Informed Consent

Parents, Students and Teachers Perception of Effective Schools Characteristics of Two Texas Urban Exemplary Open-Enrollment Charter Schools

I am being invited to participate in a research study conducted by DeEadra Albert – Green, a doctoral student in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Culture at Texas A&M University as part of her dissertation. The title is, “Parents, Students and Teachers Perception of Effective Schools Characteristics of Two Texas Urban Exemplary Open-Enrollment Charter Schools.” My participation will involve the completion of a questionnaire. I will be 1 of 24 teachers asked to complete a questionnaire.

- I understand there are no risks involved.
- I understand my participation is voluntary.
- I understand I will be asked to complete a 20-minute questionnaire.
- I understand that non-participation will not have an impact on my job performance and there will be no consequences for not completing a questionnaire.
- I understand that I will not be compensated for participation.
- I understand that there will not be any form of identification of me on the questionnaire.

Dr. Patricia Larke, a professor in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Culture at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas is supervising this study. I may contact Dr. Larke at 979-845-2171 or DeEadra Albert – Green at 281-220-0177 to answer any questions about my participation. The responses will be confidential and no names will be used. Results will be reported by overall numbers and each student will be assigned a letter to guarantee absolute confidentiality.

I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review board-Human Subjects in Research, Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects’ rights, I can contact the Institutional Review Board through Dr. Michael W. Buckley, Director of Compliance, Office of Vice President for Research at 979-458-4067 (mwbuckley@tamu.edu).

I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

Signature of Subject

Date

Signature of Principal Investigator
Doctoral Student
Department of Teaching, Learning
And Culture
Texas A&M University
College of Education and Human Development

APPENDIX F
PARENT INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
College of Education & Human Development

Parent Informed Consent

Parents, Students and Teachers Perception of Effective Schools Characteristics of Two Texas Urban Exemplary Open-Enrollment Charter Schools

I am being invited to participate in a research study conducted by DeEadra Albert – Green, a doctoral student in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Culture at Texas A&M University as part of her dissertation. The title is, “Parents, Students and Teachers Perception of Effective Schools Characteristics of Two Texas Urban Exemplary Open-Enrollment Charter Schools.” My participation will involve the completion of a questionnaire. The questionnaire will be given to one parent per household. I will be 1 of 24 parents asked to complete a questionnaire.

- I understand there are no risks involved.
- I understand my participation is voluntary.
- I understand I will be asked to complete a 20-minute questionnaire.
- I understand that non-participation will not have an impact on my job performance and there will be no consequences for not completing a questionnaire.
- I understand that I will not be compensated for participation.
- I understand that there will not be any form of identification of me on the questionnaire.

Dr. Patricia Larke, a professor in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Culture at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas is supervising this study. I may contact Dr. Larke at 979-845-2171 or DeEadra Albert – Green at 281-220-0177 to answer any questions about my participation. The responses will be confidential and no names will be used. Results will be reported by overall numbers and each student will be assigned a letter to guarantee absolute confidentiality.

I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review board-Human Subjects in Research, Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects’ rights, I can contact the Institutional Review Board through Dr. Michael W. Buckley, Director of Compliance, Office of Vice President for Research at 979-458-4067 (mw Buckley@tam u.edu).

I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

Signature of Subject

Date

Signature of Principal Investigator
Doctoral Student
Department of Teaching, Learning
And Culture
Texas A&M University
College of Education and Human Development

APPENDIX G
PARENT PERMISSION LETTER

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
College of Education & Human Development

Parental Permission Form

Parents, Students and Teachers Perceptions of Effective Schools Characteristics of Two Texas Urban Exemplary Open-Enrollment Charter Schools

I am asking for your child's participation in a research study as part of my dissertation. I am a doctoral student in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Culture at Texas A&M University. The title of my dissertation is, "Parents, Students and Teachers Perceptions of Effective Schools Characteristics of Two Texas Urban Exemplary Open-Enrollment Charter Schools." I am interested in knowing what characteristics on the School Effectiveness Questionnaire can be found in exemplary charter schools.

My child's participation is voluntary. If I agree to my child's participation, he or she will be 1 of 24 students asked to complete a questionnaire.

- I understand there are no risks involved.
- I understand my child's participation is voluntary.
- I understand my child will be asked to complete a 20-minute questionnaire.
- I understand that non-participation will not have an impact on my child's grades and there will be no consequences for not completing a questionnaire.
- I understand that my child will not be compensated for participation.
- I understand that there will not be any form of identification of my child on the questionnaire.

Dr. Patricia Larke, a professor in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Culture at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas is supervising this study. I may contact Dr. Larke at 979-845-2171 or DeEadra Albert – Green at 281-220-0177 to answer any questions about my child's participation. The responses will be confidential and no names will be used. Results will be reported by overall numbers and each student will be assigned a letter to guarantee absolute confidentiality.

I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board-Human Subjects in Research, Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects' rights, I can contact the Institutional Review Board through Dr. Michael W. Buckley, Director of Compliance, Office of Vice President for Research at 979-458-4067 (mwbuckley@tamu.edu).

I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to allow _____ to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

Signature of Parent

Date

Signature of Principal Investigator
Doctoral Student
Department of Teaching, Learning
And Culture
Texas A&M University
College of Education and Human Development

APPENDIX H
STUDENT INFORMED ASSENT LETTER

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
College of Education & Human Development

Student Informed Assent

Parents, Students and Teachers Perception of Effective Schools Characteristics of Two Texas Urban Exemplary Open-Enrollment Charter Schools

I am being invited to participate in a research study conducted by DeEadra Albert – Green, a doctoral student in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Culture at Texas A&M University as part of her dissertation. The title is, “Parents, Students and Teachers Perception of Effective Schools Characteristics of Two Texas Urban Exemplary Open-Enrollment Charter Schools.” My participation will involve the completion of a questionnaire. I will be 1 of 24 students asked to complete a questionnaire.

- I understand there are no risks involved.
- I understand my participation is voluntary.
- I understand I will be asked to complete a 20-minute questionnaire.
- I understand that non-participation will not have an impact on my grades and there will be no consequences for not completing a questionnaire.
- I understand that I will not be given any money for participation.
- I understand that there will not be any form of identification of me on the questionnaire.

Dr. Patricia Larke, a professor in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Culture at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas is supervising this study. I may contact Dr. Larke at 979-845-2171 or DeEadra Albert – Green at 281-220-0177 to answer any questions about my participation. The responses will be confidential and no names will be used. Results will be reported by overall numbers and each student will be assigned a letter to guarantee absolute confidentiality.

I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review board-Human Subjects in Research, Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects’ rights, I can contact the Institutional Review Board through Dr. Michael W. Buckley, Director of Compliance, Office of Vice President for Research at 979-458-4067 (mw Buckley@tam u.edu).

I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

Signature of Subject

Date

Signature of Principal Investigator
Doctoral Student
Department of Teaching, Learning
And Culture
Texas A&M University
College of Education and Human Development

APPENDIX I
TRENDS FOR TEACHER RESPONSES TO 11 CHARACTERISTICS
FOR EXEMPLARY SCHOOLS

Table I. Trends for Teacher Responses to 11 Characteristics for Exemplary Open-Enrollment Charter Schools

Characteristics Number and Description	Agree	Trend Uncertain	Disagree
1. Effective instructional leadership	59%		
2. Clear and focused mission	54%		
3. Safe and orderly environment	75%		
4. Positive school climate	71%		
5. High student expectations	87%		
6. Frequent assessment/monitoring of student achievement	83%		
7. Emphasis on basic skills	96%		
8. Maximum opportunities for learning	58%		
9. Parent/community involvement		50%	
10. Strong professional development		58%	
11. Teacher involvement in decision-making		50%	
Total	8	3	0

Note. All 11 characteristics were examined in the teacher sample.

APPENDIX J
TRENDS FOR PARENT RESPONSES TO NINE CHARACTERISTICS
FOR EXEMPLARY SCHOOLS

Table J. Trends for Parent Responses to 9 Characteristics for Exemplary Open-Enrollment Charter Schools

Characteristics Number and Description	Agree	Trend Uncertain	Disagree
1. Effective instructional leadership	88%		
2. Clear and focused mission	83%		
3. Safe and orderly environment	87%		
4. Positive school climate	79%		
5. High student expectations	96%		
6. Frequent assessment/monitoring of student achievement	87%		
7. Emphasis on basic skills	96%		
8. Maximum opportunities for learning	83%		
9. Parent/community involvement	67%		
10. Strong professional development			
11. Teacher involvement in decision-making			
Total	9	0	0

Note. Characteristics 10 and 11 were not examined in the parent sample.

APPENDIX K
TRENDS FOR STUDENT RESPONSES TO SEVEN CHARACTERISTICS
FOR EXEMPLARY SCHOOLS

Table K. Trends for Student Responses to 7 Characteristics for Exemplary Open-Enrollment Charter Schools

Characteristics Number and Description	Agree	Trend Uncertain	Disagree
1. Effective instructional leadership			
2. Clear and focused mission			
3. Safe and orderly environment	92%		
4. Positive school climate	79%		
5. High student expectations	96%		
6. Frequent assessment/monitoring of student achievement	83%		
7. Emphasis on basic skills	92%		
8. Maximum opportunities for learning		50%	
9. Parent/community involvement	83%		
10. Strong professional development			
11. Teacher involvement in decision-making			
Total	6	1	0

Note. Characteristics 1, 2, 10, and 11 were not examined in the student sample.

VITA

DeEADRA ALBERT-GREEN
4001 Fannin Street #4324
Houston, Texas 77004

EDUCATION

2005	Doctor of Philosophy, Curriculum and Instruction Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas
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CERTIFICATION

2002	Probational Principalship
1997	Professional Counselor
1994	Provisional Secondary Generic Special Education
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EXPERIENCE

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2002-2004	Instructional Leader, Community Education Partners Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas
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This dissertation was typed and edited by Marilyn M. Oliva at Action Ink, Inc.