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Measuring Educational Gains and Setting Consequences: Charter Schooling and the No Child Left Behind Policy

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*Measuring Educational Gains and Setting Consequences:
Charter Schooling and the No Child Left Behind Policy*

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty

of the Graduate Center for Social and Public Policy

McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

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the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

by

Erin Lyttle

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ABSTRACT

The charter school movement and the federal legislation No Child Left Behind (2001) have put a process in motion through which parents and students can opt out of the established public education system. This thesis is an in-depth study of one Pittsburgh charter school within the context of a critique of public education in American history. Empirical data was collected through a triangulated research design, which included interviews, surveys, field observations, and content analysis.

Determining the features of a charter school that make classroom dynamics more or less effective than those in traditional public schools was the original micro-level focus of this research. Making policy recommendations for public school districts in relation with No Child Left Behind emerged as the macro-level focus. This dual focus is intended to increase educators' and policymakers' knowledge about school improvement models, especially in large urban systems.

Measuring Educational Gains and Setting Consequences: Charter Schooling and the No Child Left Behind Policy

This study focuses on the historical aspect of education policy by examining educational patterns of bygone eras – access to education, sources of educational change, and the development of new curriculum and methods of instruction and assessment – and the patterns currently emerging in the charter school movement in the United States. With its roots in the development of the assembly line, America’s system of public education seems to have been “conceived to minimize freedom and micromanage participants – from superintendents to principals to teachers to students – in order to reduce risk and produce a product on a time table” (Neils 2003:3). However, the quality of the product has been under great scrutiny for decades.

United States Secretary of Education Rod Paige recently discussed America’s “two-tiered” system of public education, the nation’s current education crisis. First-tier schools are among “the finest in the world, with outstanding teachers, visionary administrators, and quality resources.” Their students are virtually ensured “wonderful opportunities for further education, economic security, professional rewards, and personal freedom.” However, students in second-tier schools are in an under-performing system. They “come to school but do not become educated” (Paige 2003:1). For this reason, 75-percent of U.S. colleges offered remedial courses in reading, writing, and math in 2000. That year Motorola reported that 80-percent of its applicants failed the employment exam that evaluates English skills at the seventh-grade level and math skills at the fifth-grade level (Franciosi 2001).

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) recently reported, “American students are being rapidly overtaken by students in many other countries” in reading, writing, and math achievement (Paige 2003:2). The report also documents that while the United States spends more money per student than most other OECD countries, the results are modest. Parents and taxpayers are disappointed with the results of their contributions to public education; employers are frustrated with graduates who are “poor” in grammar, math, and work habits; and teachers and administrators, who feel like scapegoats as society’s expectations and problems spill into the classroom, are caught in the crossfire.

Despite numerous policy changes, this trend continues and worsens. The difficulty is devising “plausible policies for improvement of schooling that can command the support of a worried public and the commitment of the educators upon whom reform must rely” (Tyack and Cuban 2001: 31). The charter school movement, which started in the early 1990s and the No Child Left Behind legislation of 2001 are the most recent attempts. Together, they are putting a process in motion through which parents and students can opt out of the established public education system.

The charter school movement counters district monopoly by encouraging the creation of an educational market where the power is returned to the consumer and the product, public education, is improved. No Child Left Behind “mimics some principles that have been important from the start in charter schools – measuring gains and setting consequences” (Chute 2004). U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige (2002) explains that with No Child Left Behind, “For the first time, the federal government will invest in successful public education instead of continuing to fund a failing system” (1). If a

school fails to meet Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) for two consecutive years, parents may transfer their children to a better performing traditional or charter public school within their district. However, many districts do not have enough successful schools for the reform to work. Will charter schools allow the law to work by providing quality options and outlets for parents or will these schools appear on the warning lists as well?

I examined the charter school movement by using various qualitative research methods in a study of one charter school within the traditional public school system in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and within the context of a critique of education in American history. The primary purpose of the research is to increase educators' and policymakers' knowledge about school improvement models, especially in large urban systems.

The following questions guided the research:

- How does the instructional and governance model of the chosen charter school affect the quality of classroom teaching and student learning?
- How are state and local policies assisting or detracting from the school's improvement initiatives?
- Is the charter school movement producing models that counteract problems evident in the history of traditional schooling?
- How does the charter school movement relate to No Child Left Behind?

CRITIQUES IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Education has played a complex and often contradictory role in the American system of democracy, capitalism, and federal politics. It has been argued that education, rather than liberating the masses, has prepared the rank and file for a life of non-creative work in factories and bureaucracies. Others point out that education discriminated

against racial minorities and the poor because of unequal funding and other structural aspects of educational institutions. Finally, others have seen education crumbling under its own bureaucratic ineptitude.

Public education has taken distinct forms throughout American history. Educational developments and critiques are therefore best understood when contextualized historically, with consideration of “how people have judged progress, from what viewpoints, [and] over what spans of time” (Tyack and Cuban 2001:8). The ideas of progress and decline in schooling are political constructs that leaders have used to mobilize and direct social policy. As Stanford University education professors David Tyack and Larry Cuban explain, “Reforming the public schools has long been a favorite way of improving not just education but society” (1995:1). For example, in the 1830s and 1840s, public education was to save society from moral dissolution, and in the 1980s, it was to save the nation from economic decline.

Humanitarian Equalizer or Preparing the Rank and File?

The common school movement in the 1830s and 1840s was a response to social and economic changes associated with the early growth of industrialism, such as the building of factories, increased immigration, and the growth of cities. Under the leadership of Horace Mann, the schools extended a feeling of membership in a common social class to all members of society in order to halt the social class conflict that was intensifying with the growth of modern industry. Common schools mixed the children of “the rich and the poor within the same schoolhouse” and taught them a common set of political beliefs and moral values (Spring 1986:89).

Mann expected common schools to assure all social classes equal access to knowledge; to become the central institution for the maintenance of the social order,

eliminating social unrest, crime, and poverty; and to provide a means for developing human capital that would translate into economic opportunity for all. In this view, schools were meant to reestablish, within an urban context, a sense of community that had been lost with the passing of rural and small-town life. Nurses, health facilities and showers were added to schools to counteract the unsanitary conditions and spread of disease in the growing urban areas. Kindergarten, “a garden of children to be cultivated in the same manner as plants,” was introduced in the 1860’s as a “substitute for the habits of living and moral training formerly taught by the family organization that supposedly had been lost in the slums of the new urban areas” (Spring 1986:160-161).

Until the early 1900s, education was a local affair handled by the people closest to each school. The diversity and autonomy of local schools reflected America’s great heterogeneity (Chubb 1990). By the end of the 19th century, however, the institution designed “to complement a burgeoning factory system increasingly rendering the family inadequate to the task of reproducing the capitalist division of labor” was in need of bureaucratic control (Bowles and Gintis 1976:199).

Progressive Era reformers built a rational system of public schools for the nation as a whole. Promising to make schools pedagogically efficient, equitable, and replicable as the population of children grew in urban areas, the graded schools divided the curriculum into year-long arrangements and sorted students by age and academic proficiency into self-contained classrooms to be instructed by one teacher. Instead of students working at their own pace, strict curriculum and promotional requirements now defined the “normal” student as one who progressed at the pace demanded by the graded

school. Slow students were labeled “organizational deviant[s]” and were not promoted with their cohort (Tyack and Cuban 1995:90).

In contrast to the democratic localism earlier in the century, this growth of centralized control “assured that the dominant values of the school system would be Protestant and middle class” (Spring 1986:108). Some considered this the work of a benign institution attempting to improve the quality of life for all people by responding to the collapse of the family and an influx of immigrants unfamiliar with American life. Others viewed this as evidence that schools had been “brought under the control of the new corporate elite to serve its social and economic interests” (Spring 1986:151).

Social historians have joined Michael Katz in asking “Could a truly humanitarian urge to help have turned so quickly into the dispassionate ethos of red tape and drill?” (Spring 1986:75). Katz portrays the expansion of the public school system as an instrument through which elite groups maintained class and racial differences in society and protected their social positions (Spring 1986). Education accompanied society in its transition to corporate capitalism and consequently, it reflected a strongly upper-class bias (Bowles and Gintis 1976). As economist Roger Babson said in 1914, “However successful organized labor has been in many ways, it has never succeeded in directing the education of its children. Capital still prepares the school books and practically controls the school systems” (Bracey 2002:37).

Factory Model of Education

Scientific management, also known as Taylorism, developed in the early 20th century with the time-and-motion studies of Frederick Taylor. It promised to replace the unsystematic actions of workers, who made their own decisions and rules of thumb for the completion of a task, with a regulated work environment. Strategies for increasing

the efficiency and productivity of industry became a theme of educational administration as well. Efficiency became the yardstick by which every subject of instruction, every item of knowledge, and every classroom practice must be measured and designed. The class lesson plan, “suitable for any type of class size or organization,” allowed the school principal to easily monitor teacher activity classroom instruction (Spring 1986:170).

Educational administrators began to pattern school governance after the organization and values of the modern corporation and factory in order “to scientifically engineer a specialized and cooperative society” (Spring 1986:155-56). They organized and directed a school system that would produce “measured and standardized workers for the labor market, much the same as factories standardized products” (235). In 1913, educational historian Elwood Cubberley commented on the factory model of education.

He described schools as:

factories in which the raw products (children) are to be shaped and fashioned into products to meet the various demands of life. The specifications for manufacturing come from the demands of the twentieth-century civilization, and it is the business of schools to build its pupils to the specifications laid down. This demands good tools, specialized machinery, continuous measurement of production to see it is according to specifications, the elimination of waste in manufacture, and a large variety in the output (Bracey 2002:35-36).

Committed to reforming educational theory and practice, American philosopher and educator John Dewey ([1899] 1976) actively opposed the factory model. He advocated shifting the pedagogical emphasis from the institution back to the student. He called for recognition of individual complexity and the adoption of a student-centered approach, which would be

a change, a revolution, not unlike that introduced by Copernicus when the astronomical center shifted from the earth to the sun. In this case the child becomes the sun about which the appliances of education revolve; he is the center about which they are organized (P. 23).

Dewey ([1903] 1976) also advocated for shifting the administrative structure from a corporate mentality back to democratic control. He explained that

every member of the school system, from the first-grade teacher to the principal of the high school, must have some share in the exercise of educational power. The remedy is not to have one expert dictating educational methods and subject-matter to a body of passive, recipient teachers, but the adoption of intellectual initiative, discussion, and decision throughout the entire school corps (P.232).

This position found additional support when the stock market collapsed in 1929 and Americans from every socioeconomic class lost confidence in the “decades-long assumption that business could provide the solutions to society’s problems” (Murphy and Beck 1995:107). The impulse to emulate business rhetoric in schooling fell out of public favor, and determining the proper leadership structure for the school system became the focus of policy discussions.

Debate over “the one best system” of education revealed a tension between democracy and efficiency. One group of reformers, with Dewey as their spokesman, was attempting to democratize decision-making; another group was working to maintain centralized management for increased efficiency. Scientific management stifled creativity and relied on conformity from students and teachers alike, but it was considered “the key to the efficient use of human resources” (Spring 1986:217).

Did its measurements serve as an objective means for providing equality of opportunity or as a mask for social-class and racial discrimination? This debate is reflected in the long history of racially and economically segregated schools. Schools were successfully producing a labor force, but they were failing to promote social equality.

Separate but Unequal: Racial and Class Segregation

By the early 20th century it was apparent that the common education was no longer common to all people. Students' starting positions were assigned and deliberately staggered. Joel Spring (1986:217) explains that:

In the early days of the common school movement, education was to provide equality of opportunity by giving everyone a common or equal education, after which the race would begin, with everyone competing for places in the social and economic structure. In the twentieth century, the provision for equality of opportunity was made a part of the school system through vocational guidance and a differentiated curriculum...The race for social positions was no longer to be a function of the marketplace but of the scientific selection process in the school instead.

The Supreme Court ruling in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) legalized segregated tax-supported facilities, such as public schools and hospitals, for African-Americans as long as they were equal to those open to white people. "Separate but equal," the creed of the *Plessy* decision, provided constitutional protection for segregation for the next 50 years. In the South, educating African-Americans meant reinforcing "their acceptance of a subservient place in a segregated southern society" (Spring 1986:191). By 1900, expenditure per capita for white students was from four to five times higher than spending for African-American students.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries the relationship between schooling and the development of human capital created a crossroads "between an educational system designed to provide everyone with a common education and an educational system organized to provide everyone with a specific education based on a future social destination" (Spring 1986:197). The school began assigning students to one of a variety of curricula based on an administratively designated future occupation. Vocational education and vocational guidance became "the institutional mechanism for matching students and educational programs with the needs of the labor market" (207). It was

believed these programs would keep America competitive in world markets, but the sorting function of the school came under severe attack during the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s. The dream of equality of opportunity through schooling was seriously questioned.

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (May 17, 1954) was one of five segregation suits to reach the Supreme Court in 1953. Oliver Brown was seeking to void a Kansas law that permitted local segregation of schools. His daughter had been “denied the right to attend a white elementary school within 5 minutes of her home and forced to cross railroad tracks and travel 21 blocks to attend an all-black school” (Spring 1986:297). The Court reversed the *Plessy* decision by concluding, “in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal” (298). The Court ordered the integration of public schools, but results were not immediate.

After the *Brown* decision, the politics of education, “once so predictable that political scientists called school districts ‘closed systems’” erupted in conflicts (Tyack and Cuban 2001: 21). The Court lacked the “machinery for supervising and ensuring the desegregation of vast numbers of segregated school districts” (Spring 1986:299).

Frustrated by the slow pace of school integration, the continuation of other forms of discrimination, and a lack of power at the local and state level, minority groups were forced to take their grievances to the federal government. Federal control of local schools increased, but segregation often remained.

In racially imbalanced schools, high percentages of non-white students corresponded with high percentages of “provisional teachers, those who were fill-ins, had

no tenure, no seniority, no experience, and no obligation to remain” (Kozol 1967: 53). Jonathon Kozol (1967) discovered that sixth grade children in many of these segregated schools were “as much as three years behind the reading levels of children in some of the other sections of the city” (49). He found that teachers awarded factory-model conformity, rather than creativity, in “these kinds of children” (24). Differences in the curriculum and expectations for the college- and non-college-bound student created a class system of education; differences in funding maintained it.

Almost forty years after the decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, Kozol (1991) documented the re-segregation of schools and the disparities in spending between public schools. In *Savage Inequalities: Children in America’s Schools*, Kozol reports many instances in which the “restructuring” of racially segregated schools and districts has meant “little more than moving around the same old furniture within the house of poverty.” The objective of such reform is “a more ‘efficient’ ghetto school or one with greater ‘input’ from the ghetto parents or more ‘choices’ for ghetto children. The fact of ghetto education as a permanent American reality appeared to be accepted.” Kozol discovered an apparently unquestioned “dual society” within America’s public education system (1991:4).

Rather than remedying situations of inequality, “the arcane machinery” (Kozol 1991:54) of the federal policy for financing public education increases the gap between the richest and the poorest schools. Most public schools draw initial funding from local property tax, which depends on the taxable value of homes and local industries; wealthier districts draw upon a larger tax base. According to Kozol, this is “calculated unfairness” (57) in which investment is:

matched to the potential economic value of each person. Future service workers need a different and, presumably, a lower order of investment than the children destined to be corporate executives, physicians, lawyers, and engineers. Future plumbers and future scientists require different schooling – maybe different schools (P. 74-75).

Improving Schools for National Economic and Defense Interests

The federal government responded to Russia's Sputnik with the National Defense Education Act of 1958 (NDEA). This initiated an unprecedented era of federal concern for public education. As a policy statement, the NDEA reinforced the need for improving the quality of America's schools for the sake of national interest. NDEA provided assistance for institutions of higher education to offer student loans and fellowships and for state and local school systems to strengthen instruction in science, mathematics, and vocational education for technical occupations (NCES 2003a). These were the instruments of national defense, the educational prescriptions for keeping the United States economically competitive.

In the 1950s, under the pressure of the technological and scientific race with the Soviet Union, emphasis had been placed on channeling talented youth into institutions of higher education. In the early 1960s, the emphasis shifted back to "providing equality of opportunity as a means of utilizing the poor as human resources" in the national economy (Spring 1986:308).

In *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (1962), Michael Harrington explains that poverty is passed from one generation to the next "because of the increasing difficulty for children of the poor to receive adequate education and job training" (Spring 1986:305). His work focused the attention of President John F. Kennedy on the contradictions of mid-century American prosperity. In 1963, Kennedy commissioned Walter Heller to draw plans for "an invasion of the culture of poverty" (305). Kennedy

was assassinated one month later, and President Lyndon B. Johnson directed Heller to complete his task. The final report in January 1964, “The Problem of Poverty in America” in *The Annual Report of the Council of Economic Advisors*, acknowledged the severely handicapping influence of lack of education. Heller found that “the incidence of poverty drops as educational attainments rise for nonwhites as well as white families at all ages” (305).

President Johnson launched the War on Poverty in his State of the Union Message to Congress on January 8, 1964. Congress responded with the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 (EOA), which introduced Job Corps and Head Start, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), which authorized grants for elementary and secondary school programs for students from low-income families, “designated as educationally deprived” (Spring 1986:307). Commissioner of Education Francis Keppel described President Johnson’s rationale as being similar to that of Archimedes, who “told us many centuries ago: ‘Give me a lever long enough and a fulcrum strong enough and I can move the world.’ Today, at last, we have a prospect of a lever long enough and supported strongly enough to do something for our children of poverty” (308-9). The lever was education; the fulcrum was federal financial assistance.

President Richard Nixon’s policies ran counter to the more liberal policies of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. His “conservative reaction” included a retreat from the War on Poverty, the development of career education, and a renewed emphasis on the power of the educational expert (Spring 1986:314). Nixon’s commissioner of education, Sidney Marland, Jr., believed career education was the answer to student rebellion, delinquency, and unemployment, which were the result of disenchantment

among youth in education systems that lacked specific goals and that did not lead to career opportunities (Spring 1986).

In 1970 Nixon proposed the National Institute of Education to Congress in order to, as Daniel Patrick Moynihan states, “bring ‘big’ science to bear on education.” According to Moynihan, research proved that nothing could be done “to increase achievement among the lower class” and, therefore, such programs were not worth federal funding. He also suggested that rather than spending more money on early education, more resources should be applied to the transition “of the young person leaving the world of school for the world of work” (Spring 1986:319). Moynihan provided the logic for the Nixon administration’s educational retreat, which was in the tradition of the administrative progressives. Funding went to educational experts, and direct concern for the poor diminished.

The presidential elections of 1980 and 1984 were the first in which presidential candidates defined an educational constituency. Promising “deregulation and the abolition of the Department of Education,” Ronald Reagan campaigned as the candidate for citizens concerned about the burden of federal regulations in local schools (Spring 1986:332). The Democrats appealed to teachers’ unions and citizens who favored increased federal aid to local schools. Education was becoming a national issue represented by various constituencies.

The process of linking education to national policies started in the 1950s, when education was an instrument of national defense in the Cold War, and continued in 1964, when education was central to the federal War on Poverty. Therefore, despite promising less federal interference, the Reagan administration issued *A Nation At Risk* (1983)

linking low academic standards with the imbalanced international trade war with Japan and West Germany.

A Nation at Risk reported that America's schools had lost sight of high expectations, the basic purposes of schooling, and the disciplined effort needed to attain them. This explained why American students, in comparison with other industrialized nations, ranked last in seven tests of achievement. The diagnosis was that schools were creating a scientifically and technologically illiterate generation of Americans at a time when the demand for highly skilled workers in new fields was accelerating rapidly. Historically, each generation of Americans had outstripped its parents in education, in literacy, and in economic attainment, but for the first time in American history, the educational skills of one generation were not going to surpass, equal, or even approach, those of their parents.

In order to produce students capable of improving the nation's technology and status in the international trade war, students, parents, and educators had to expect and assist all schools to have genuinely high standards rather than minimum ones. However, given Reagan's platform, the report could not call for federal involvement. A trend toward academic excellence would have to come from state and local school boards implementing a list of reforms that included stricter graduation requirements, more rigorous teacher certification standards, greater reliance on standardized tests of performance, and reformed curriculum (Spring 1986).

Flexibility at the Local Level

Education policy implemented during the administrations of President Bill Clinton and President George W. Bush were not directly linked with national defense or economic policy. Instead, they involved restructuring and rethinking educational

practices. Both President Clinton’s Goals 2000: Educate America Act (1994) and President Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act (2001) recognized education as a national priority but a state and local responsibility. These two laws formalized the national education goals and standards but left the overall approach for attaining them to the state and its local communities.

Rather than issuing new regulations at the federal level, Goals 2000 supported diverse school improvement initiatives at the state and community levels. States that participated in Goals 2000 received grants to help develop, implement, and sustain local education reform efforts. For example, funds in Massachusetts supported the creation of charter schools¹ (U.S. Department of Education 1996). Richard Riley, Secretary of Education in the Clinton administration, recognized that “successful education reform requires a sustained, long-term commitment. With Goals 2000, we are out of the block and rounding the first turn, and we cannot afford to sacrifice the momentum achieved by nearly all the states and hundreds of communities” (Riley 1995:3). The momentum created by strengthening accountability and providing flexibility for school improvement – the major tenets of education policy during Clinton’s administration – has been sustained in the early education policies of the 21st Century.

President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) into law on January 8, 2002. This legislation gives states and school districts unprecedented flexibility in how they spend their federal education funds. Districts can allocate funds for their particular needs and consolidate funds to provide new programs. In return for

¹ President Clinton’s direct involvement in charter school legislation is explained below.

this freedom, the law requires greater accountability for student achievement. Students in each school and district are categorized by subgroups, including race/ethnicity, family income (eligibility for free/reduced lunch), special education, and English proficiency status. To avoid federal sanctions, each subgroup within the school must make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

No Child Left Behind requires states to calculate the annual gains needed for 100% of students to reach academic proficiency by 2014. This statistic, which consequently differs by state, is the standard by which schools demonstrate AYP in math proficiency, reading proficiency, attendance, and graduation rates (Loveless 2003). Schools that fail to meet the standards of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for two consecutive years must give parents the option to transfer their children to a better performing public school within their district. Schools that fail to meet state standards for three years must provide supplemental services, such as free tutoring or after-school programs. Schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress for five years must make dramatic changes in school governance (U.S. Department of Education 2002).

Summary of the Historical Context

The common school reformers of the 19th century spoke of the great promise of common schools for ending poverty, saving democracy, solving social problems, eliminating crime, increasing national prosperity, providing equal opportunity, producing good citizens, and creating an American community. These promises created differing reasons for supporting education and disagreement about which “common values” would reach these goals. Common school reformers promised all things to all people, leaving a legacy that virtually ensured a continual political battle and turmoil over school goals, purposes, and curriculum.

As the system took root, people saw schools as a means for upward mobility and increased personal income. In the 20th century, the school was intended to be an institution increasing the nation's economic productivity, ensuring national defense, and maintaining America's position in international trade. Curriculum changed with America's economic and national security needs. Schools were asked to win the Cold War in the 1950s, to win the War on Poverty in the 1960s, and to solve problems of unemployment in the 1970s. However, these reform efforts have not succeeded in even the fundamental purpose of education – student achievement.

It has been argued that many education reforms, including increasing spending per pupil and resetting academic standards for students and schools alike, have failed, more often than not, because in large systems improvement efforts rarely take the form of restructuring the system. According to Diane Ravitch, U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education under President George Bush, “the pathology of the schools [is] so grave that the only change worth attempting must be of a fundamental, institutional, systemic kind” (2001:53). The current Secretary of Education, Rod Paige, recently echoed this sentiment when he announced, “Our high schools need much more than just tinkering around the edges,” and encouraged teachers “to develop a bold new vision for shaping the way high schools operate” (2003:3).

BUREAUCRACY, MARKETS, AND CHARTER SCHOOLS

Enrollment in private schools and home schooling steadily increased during the 1990s, indicating growing dissatisfaction with the public education system. However, many taxpaying consumers are neither willing nor able to “pay full private tuition on top of their public school tax obligation” (Pozdena 1995:3). These parents must “accept what

the public monopoly supplies” (Chubb and Moe 1990:23). This is the impetus for the current push for abandoning the bureaucratic district in favor of a market system.

Limitations of Bureaucratic Administration and Advantages of an Educational Market

John Chubb and Terry Moe allege that the internal bureaucracy of the public education system discourages “the emergence of coherent, academically ambitious, professionally grounded, team like organizations with strong leadership” (1990:141). Within the bureaucracy, a public school principal is considered a “lower-level manager...with supervisory responsibility for a public agency,” rather than a decision-making, educational leader (56). In addition, a bureaucratic administration inherently requires standardized goals, practices, and curricula to be implemented in large, heterogeneous public school districts. This structure denies public schools of an “effective means of diagnosing their day-to-day failings” (Domanico 1994:21).

Chubb and Moe (1990) identify a school’s degree of freedom from external control as the prerequisite for the emergence of an ambitious academic program, strong educational leadership, and organizational coherence. They describe such autonomy as a measure of the influence of principals – relative to that of superintendents and school boards – in curriculum, instructional, disciplinary, and personnel policy decisions. A comparison of district-bound public schools and autonomous private schools reveals how organizational features and educational outcomes are linked.

In his study of high school achievement, James Coleman concluded that private schools do a better job of educating the typical student because of important differences in their organization. In comparison with public schools, their goals and sense of purpose are more clearly stated and more academically ambitious; their principals are strong, visionary, educational leaders, rather than managers; their teachers are treated as true

professionals who are involved in school decision-making and whose classrooms are less bureaucratic (Chubb 1990). In many public school systems “you have 16 different philosophical viewpoints in one school,” but in most private schools, a vision has been clearly communicated (Fliegel 1990:21).

Similar to the private school experience, performance of a public school within a market system would be stimulated in the “same way that performance is stimulated elsewhere in the economy”– the necessity to survive (Pozdena 1995:3). Instead of being all things to all people, schools of choice attract a specialized segment of the market that supports their mission. They establish goals, practices, and curricula based on local needs, rather imposing an all-purpose, ready-made framework. Seymour Fliegel, deputy superintendent of New York City’s District Four in the 1970s and 1980s, explained that if people had choice in the matter of education, you could walk into any school and find people who “felt they were there because it was the right place for them” (1990:25).

Parallels Between Charter Schools and Historical Antecedents

The roots of the charter school movement are anchored in historical controversies over the purposes of education, educational funding, the role of education in market societies, and social class struggles (Weil 2000). Up close, charter schooling seems to be “a revolutionary change, a policy earthquake, an unprecedented and heretofore unimaginable innovation” that is providing drastic changes in the customary patterns and practices of today’s public school system” (Manno, Finn, and Vanourek 2000: 743). However, they have two time-tested features of American education: community rootedness and resemblance to magnet and alternative schools.

First, charter schools are much like America’s original public schools of the early 19th century in their local autonomy, community ties, accountability to parents, and the

need to generate revenues by attracting and retaining families. Second, they “have cousins in the K-12 family. Their DNA looks much the same under the education microscope as that of magnet schools, site-managed schools, and special focus schools, not to mention private schools and home schools” (Manno et al. 2000:743); the similarities outweigh the differences. Rather than being a revolutionary organizational form, features of the charter school movement can be seen in Mario Fantini’s Madison Area Project (MAP), in the establishment of magnet schools, and in the Manhattan’s controlled choice program of 1974.

Mario Fantini, of the Ford Foundation, advocated for a reformed educational system, in which decision-making would be a process for local, cooperative governance structures. His vision was to “transform the usual standardized, monolithic offering of most public school programs into a broad range of educational options for diverse populations in each school community” (1970:2). The Madison Area Project (MAP) for disadvantaged kids, created in Syracuse, New York in 1962, is a model of his idea.

MAP was unique in its structure as “an organizational change vehicle” (Tyack and Cuban 1995:72) and as “a type of research, development, and training substructure” (71). New practices that proved successful in this substructure would be incorporated into the system at large. The organizers suspected that the problem in education “lay more with the school as an institution than with the learner” (72). During a time when education leaders were trying to deal remedially with problems of the “disadvantaged” population – lagging academic performance, poor motivation, school dropout, and the like – MAP organizers decided “to define an in-house mechanism for updating bureaucratic educational structures” (72).

Many of the MAP efforts foreshadowed the development of charter schools that would not materialize until two decades later. For example, Fantini attempted to “change the school climate from a school plant that calls attention to itself to one that calls attention to the child” (1970:73); change “the school principal as director of policies developed by agents farthest from the learner to a facilitator of policies developed by agents closest to the learner” (80); and change “from an educational enterprise accountable to itself to one that is accountable to the consumer – students, parents, community” (88).

By its final year, MAP students were performing better in academic skill areas, indicating that the problems identified among the “disadvantaged” population were symptoms of schools’ failure to develop educational processes that deal effectively with diverse needs of individual learners and the community served by the school. In addition, MAP’s team planning, urban teacher preparation, and school volunteer programs started operating on a citywide basis. The Madison Area Project revealed that, at best, reform efforts within a monolithic public school system provide “a better *single* choice for a diverse population” (Fantini 1970:90). However, reform of an entire urban school system would require much more. Uniform, remedial measures do “not come to grips with the basic problem in our educational system: *lack of choice*” (90). Fantini’s concluding thoughts foretell the charter philosophy; “A public-schools-of-choice educational system would be judged by results... the more successful model will be demanded, triggering a continuous self-renewing process” (99).

Roots of the charter school movement are also found in government created magnet schools. In the case of *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*

(1971), the Supreme Court ruled that “forced busing” was a legitimate means of achieving school integration, but Nixon promised to reduce this unpopular practice. In 1972, he requested a moratorium on forced student busing, and the courts responded by giving families options and allocating funds for the creation of specialized magnet schools to attract a diverse student body (Nathan 1999). Magnet schools replaced forced busing for integration by offering free choice and an elite education that would reduce the white flight from desegregated school districts.

Educators had already introduced specialized curricula tracks within each school, and now they were establishing specialized schools within each district. By the early 1980s, the Houston public school system was offering “alternative schools for engineering, criminal justice, the petrochemical industry, health sciences, advanced academic work, and creative and performing arts” (Spring 1986:326). Philadelphia was offering a similar range of alternatives plus a program in foreign affairs. Cincinnati was offering alternative schools for computer science, athletics, science and mathematics, and languages. Charter schools echo many of these alternative programs, but unlike magnet schools, they are autonomous institutions. Magnet schools are designed by the public school system and remain under district administration.

The final example of charter school roots is found in Manhattan’s District No. 4 in East Harlem. In 1973 this district had the lowest reading achievement scores of the 32 districts in the city; 15% of the district’s students could read at or above grade level (Domanico 1994). The district responded in 1974 by encouraging “teachers with ideas and initiative to put forward their own proposals” and, with the district’s involvement and consent, form their own schools of choice in this district (Chubb and Moe 1990:212).

This process increased the supply of schools and encouraged the creation of local governance, but it did “not led to the kind of chaos or unfairness that critics of market arrangements invariably predict” (213). The natural dynamics of the market system were more effective than the artificiality of bureaucratic rules.

Although controversy abounds over test-score measures and District 4 longitudinal studies are lacking, student performance seems to have improved and parent involvement appears to be more pronounced than in districts with less well-developed choice plans. In a Manhattan Institute report, Raymond Domanico (1989) reports that students' reading and math scores began climbing after 1974, when the choice program was introduced. By 1998, 62.5% of District 4 students were reading at or above grade level, a figure only 2.5 percentage points below the citywide average. Choice made access more equitable than traditional neighborhood-assignment arrangements, and moreover, choice did not negatively affect the performance of students remaining in neighborhood schools.

Definition and History of Charter Schools

A charter school is a public school licensed within the existing education system but privatized in design and administration. Free of most district and state oversight that governs how traditional public schools operate, charter schools are under contract to achieve certain educational outcomes within a designated timeframe. Each school designs their own governance structure and develops a strategy for meeting the same educational standards as traditional public schools. Rather than a sharp alternative to the traditional public education system, the charter approach represents a policy middle ground between open public school choice and complete privatization through vouchers.

Charter schools have a “hybrid status, responding to market signals yet publicly accountable” (Henig, Holyoke, Lacireno-Paquet, and Moser 2003:44).

Theoretically, the charter approach empowers teachers and parents in the development stage in order meet local needs (Wronkovich 2000). Joe Nathan, one of the founding fathers of the Minnesota charter school legislation, explains that the purpose of the charter school movement is “creation of more accountable public schools and the removal of the ‘exclusive franchise’ that local school boards presently have” (1999:xxvii). This involves creating new public schools and creating fair, thoughtful competition in public education.

In 1985 Minnesota’s Democratic Governor Rudy Perpich proposed school choice programs to create opportunities for families who could not afford to move to a district with better schools and to create controlled competition to stimulate public school improvement. By 1988, the Minnesota legislature had adopted three parts of his proposal – postsecondary enrollment options, options to attend other public schools, and open enrollment legislation. The most notable for this research is the open enrolment legislation (1988) that allowed “K-12 students to apply to attend public schools outside their district, as long as the receiving district [had] room and their transfer [did] not increase racial segregation” (Nathan 1999:59).

That year Ray Budde coined the term “charter school.” His model was the charter between Henry Hudson and the Directors of the East India Company in 1609. This document laid out “the purpose and vision of Hudson’s trip, the risks entailed, what Hudson must do to satisfy accountability requirements, how he [would] be compensated, and the rewards for productivity” (Bracey 2002:67); it forged an agreement between an

explorer and his royal sponsors. Budde envisioned a similar contract between innovative educators and the hierarchical school district. He circulated his idea at a school reform conference in 1988, but the idea did not take root until Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, endorsed the idea at a conference on school improvement in Minnesota.

The charter concept found a core of influential supporters at the conference, including Minnesota's State Senator Ember Reichgott-Junge, who worked to refine the idea of options and school choice. According to Joe Nathan, an initial supporter, open enrollment "had simply opened up opportunity on the demand side," and it was time to open up the supply side by providing different kinds of schools "so the right of choice would be meaningful" (1999:65). Supporters brought their charter school proposal before the 1990 Minnesota legislature. After modifications and synthesis into a larger education bill, the Minnesota legislature passed the first charter law in 1991, thus expanding the state's program of public-school choice and stimulating broader system improvements.

In 1994, President Clinton reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) with the addition of the Federal Charter School Program (FCSP), which provided start-up funds for the creation of charter schools. This legislation provided federal approval of the movement and diverted support and discussion away from the more radical proposals for school vouchers and tuition tax-credits. Charter schools served as a comparatively innocuous compromise in education reform (Cookson and Berger 2002).

In 1998 President Clinton amended the FCSP with the Charter Schools Expansion Act, which increased federal contributions from \$5 million in fiscal year 1995 to \$145 million in fiscal year 2000. This included funds for Title I, special education, and bilingual education. In 1999 he challenged the country to increase the number of charter schools from 1,700 to 3,000 by the year 2002, but this goal was not attained. There were 2,357 charter schools in operation, representing only 2 percent of all public schools in the United States for the 2001-02 school year (Cookson and Berger 2002).

By 1995, 19 states had signed charter school legislation, and from the 1997-98 school year to the 1998-1999 school year, the number of charter schools grew by 65 percent – 473 new schools (Wronkovich 2000). As of 2003 40 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands had signed charter school legislation, and 2,695 charters were serving nearly 685,000 students in 37 states (National Center for Education Statistics 2003). Charter schooling has become an increasingly popular brand of intra-district or public sector choice.

Themes Guiding Charter School Formation

In a 1996 survey, fifty legislators and other individuals who had helped to promote the charter school concept in their states² provided reasons for introducing charter school legislation in states where it was absent. The policy makers' most frequent responses illustrate four common themes driving the movement – humanitarian impulse, ethnic sensitivity, for-profit, and disgruntled parents (Nathan 1999).

Illustrating the first theme, a humanitarian service, the legislators stressed the role of charter schools in increasing the educational opportunities for under-served students

² The legislators were from Arizona, California, Colorado, Delaware, Louisiana, Massachusetts, and Minnesota.

and in creating a more effective organizational structure in existing public schools. Creators of such schools value the ability of charter schools to increase the quality of education available without vouchers. Illustrating the second theme, establishing ethnically sensitive institutions, the legislators stressed the movement's ability to expand the range of public schools available. Public schools that are not constrained by district regulations and design can allow local citizens to keep their culture, history, and values alive in their children's education (Nathan 1999).

Illustrating the third theme, making profit from school governance and curriculum designs, the legislators stressed the opportunity provided for educational entrepreneurs. Education management organizations can be contracted out to hire teachers, provide curriculum, technical assistance in financial or planning matters, and so forth. Illustrating the final theme, a response from visionary parents dissatisfied with the incompetent public school system, the legislators stressed the promise of charter schools to increase overall student achievement and to encourage the existing public education system to improve (Nathan 1999).

Evaluation of Charter Schools: Support and Criticism

Movement supporters claim that charter schools, in spite of small numbers, "are the epicenter of America's most powerful education reform earthquake, and their rumblings are beginning to affect school systems and U.S. education at large" (Wronkovich 2000:6). The power of the design is in abandoning a "factory style" of schools, shifting to local governance, revitalizing community and parental participation, and encouraging involvement of creative, motivated educators. Supporters speaking for poor and minority groups embrace "choice as a crucial means of escaping from the intolerably bad urban schools that the traditional system of fixed boundaries and

assignments forces on them” (Chubb and Moe 1990:207). Charter schools offer a diverse set of students a safe learning environment supervised by educators who are committed to achievement (Finn and Manno 1998).

Charter school advocates do not question the movement’s intention to improve education in America, but they often disagree on how academic achievement is to be raised. Catchwords such as market, innovation, catalyst, and parental choice blur the issues and make over-generalizations about how and why people want to create choice. Within the charter school movement, revolution and reform are two branches of thought about the future of public education (Lane 1999). The matrix of assumptions supplied by these categories forms the basis for current policy alternatives and future policy implications integral to the movement’s success as instructive, positive examples for other schools, rather than as wasteful experiments.

The basic assumption behind charters as revolution is that if given the opportunity, a majority of parents and students in low-performing schools will actively choose to attend another school. This assumption requires charter school policy to guarantee that all parents and students have the means to become “informed and active choosers” who are aware of the importance of education (Lane 1999:19). To ensure real choice, policymakers must also allow for the creation of a substantial number of diverse and high-quality charter schools. This requires guaranteeing resources for groups who wish to create a school.

Plans for education reform seek to alter the organizational relationships between school boards, district offices, superintendents, and principals while keeping the system intact. The basic assumption behind charters as reform is that increased innovation will

contribute to high academic achievement and that choice and accountability will encourage the traditional public school system to incorporate the successful organizational, fiscal, and curriculum innovations developed in charter schools. This requires a policy that enhances communication and collaboration between charter schools and local school districts and establishes mechanisms to transfer innovations to traditional public schools (Lane 1999).

One group of charter advocates defines school choice as a self-contained reform. They believe that choice “has the capacity all by itself to bring about the kind of transformation that, for years, reformers have been seeking to engineer in myriad other ways” (Chubb and Moe 1990:217). Other advocates condemn superficial slogans like “choice works” and recognize that positive effects cannot be attributed to choice alone. As Seymour Fliegel explains, choice can be a catalyst for reform, but “for a catalyst to work, if I remember anything about chemistry, there have to be other elements involved” (1990:22). Such elements include distinctive instructional programs, ambitious expectations and sense of purpose, and a community-level sense of school ownership.

Alex Molnar, a professor of education at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, offers a critical analysis of the charter school movement. He classifies charter school advocates into three groups. Zealots believe that private schools out perform public schools and therefore support market systems. Entrepreneurs use “charter school legislation as an opportunity to turn a profit.” Reformers support increasing parental options and “creative tension;” they have given the movement “its air of mainstream respectability.” The zealots and “profiteers,” who provide most of the movement’s money and political influence, are targets for opposition groups (Molnar 1996a:10).

Molnar illustrates the zealots' oversimplified logic as follows: "remove the regulation and dismantle the bureaucracies, and – voila, a thousand flowers cultivated by unfettered ingenuity, energy, and commitment of parents and teachers will bloom" (1996a:10). If this experiment does not generate a response from the public schools, some movement opponents fear the zealots' next step will be vouchers and total privatization. Molnar is also concerned that if charter schools fail, free-market zealots will "argue that their revolutionary ideas need more time to work... all the while, the desperation of America's poorest children and their families will grow" (1996b:167). An experiment that pulls out 1.2% of the nation's students into a new charter format³ will take too long to generate change in a system as immense and deep-seated as American public education. Some opponents want a more direct means of stimulating competition and change.

Opponents also report a troubling difference between families who actively participate in school choice and those who do not. Because parents are required to seek their own open-enrollment information and visit schools they are considering, the system favors parents with know-how, time, and resources, including access to informal information networks. Therefore, charter schools are seen as an "unassuming partner in a further stratification of society" that will predominantly extract white, privileged students from public schools (Weil 2000:5). Opponents fear that the departure of relatively more advantaged children from neighborhood schools and districts will have an adverse effect on the schools and families left behind.

³ In 2003, there were 2,384 charter schools, serving 1.2% of all students (NCES 2003b).

Despite the fact that most state legislation stipulates that for-profit companies cannot establish charter schools, these “profiteers” remain actively involved in charter school creation and maintenance. Business executives who took the lead in transforming education by creating Educational Management Organizations (EMOs) are finding the fast-growing charter-school movement a hospitable market. Providing expertise in curriculum and management, these companies are taking over for or aiding charter founders who are struggling to keep their schools afloat. However, these organizations often do not include smaller, community-based groups in contracts. In this way, EMOs seem to contradict the basic motivation for charter schools – freedom from bureaucracy (Bracey 2002).

In 1992 entrepreneur Chris Whittle created a network of hundreds of for-profit schools known as Edison Schools Incorporated (ESI). As the name implies, Edison claims that their schools are as superior to the average public school as a light bulb is to a candle. Charters managed by Edison have prescribed governance structures and scripted curriculum. Although teachers may have considerable autonomy, existence of an outside contractor creates a virtual "central office" atypical of other charter schools (Clearinghouse on Educational Management 2002).

Response from Public Schools

Do charter schools successfully pressure the public school system to engage in self-corrective practices and policies? If so, what is the nature of change and what are its implications? These results take longer to determine than a comparison of achievement that considers test scores and graduation rates. The question of self-corrective change is a question of whether or not there is enough pressure to warrant such a response. Public

educators lack an incentive to respond until they no longer have the “exclusive franchise” (Nathan 1999:135).

All districts face the possibility that the competition mechanism may not work as charter-school proponents expect. Districts have a wide range of response modes besides improving their programs. They can use the courts and subsequent legislation to derail or restrict charter schools; employ hostile bureaucratic tactics to delay implementation; respond to fiscal duress by cutting back on popular programs, like art and advanced placement; or peacefully coexist with charter schools.

Bracey (2002) gives the example of a district in Michigan that “coped with the reduced revenue by putting off capital purchases and improvements, sacrificing the tidiness of the school and the condition of the buildings and grounds” (101). If such measures become a common coping mechanism for school districts, the charter approach will come under intense scrutiny. As Franklin Delano Roosevelt said in his Commonwealth Club Address, “individual liberty and individual happiness mean nothing unless both are ordered in the sense that one man’s meat is not another man’s poison” (1932:7).

In other cases, charter schools may serve as safety valves alleviating overcrowding and mitigating disgruntled parents' complaints. Seymour Fliegel notes the ease of creating Beta School, a school for students with disciplinary problems in Manhattan in 1974; “There isn’t a principal in the world who will not support an alternative school that takes the most difficult youngsters away from them” (1990:21). In the same way, charter schools can be advantageous for the district because they will satisfy “all those complaining teachers and all those complaining parents, and put them

together in the same school,” allowing the district schools to continue business as usual (1990:21).

Some districts respond energetically to the advent of charters and significantly alter their educational programs. They provide more back-to-basics programs, create stronger thematic programs in their traditional schools, and increase the frequency of communication with parents. Charter proposals to offer programs lacking in the district are more likely to find approval. Therefore, some public schools are funding add-on programs such as tutoring, after-school programs, and all-day kindergarten to control the number of charter schools (Manno et al. 2000).

Data on Student Achievement in Charter Schools

A deliberate choice must be made in order to attend a charter school and this creates a “selection effect” that limits the ability of analysts to evaluate the effectiveness of charter schooling (Loveless 2003:28). When parents pull their low-achieving children out of regular public schools and send them to charter schools, the selection effect “depresses charter school test scores irrespective of the quality of education charters are providing” (28). In general, charter schools have more ground to make up. That being said, test scores are a starting point in discussing charter schools and academic achievement.

The Brookings Institution recently compared test scores from 569 charter schools, each with three consecutive years of test data, and 25,614 regular public schools in ten states. They determined that 62% of regular public schools with demographic characteristics similar to those of the charter schools have higher test scores than the average charter school (Loveless 2003). The National Education Association (NEA) reports that, despite their popularity and despite the flaws in district schools, charter

schools have not proven to be better than regular public schools. Deanna Duby, a NEA senior policy analyst, points out, “Parent satisfaction doesn’t always reflect whether a school is doing a good job.” (Lee 2001). Other studies suggest the opposite. Colorado’s Department of Education found that charter schools outperformed the state, their authorizing districts, and public schools serving students from similar socioeconomic backgrounds (Fitzgerald 2000).

Students in charter schools in the Brookings study were outperforming students at the same school in the previous year. Their test scores are rising sharply, exceeding gains made by the public schools in the study. Test scores in charter schools lag behind the scores in regular public schools, but charter schools “registered significant gains in test scores from 2000 to 2002” (Loveless 2003:34). An analysis of longitudinal achievement test scores in Arizona concluded that academic gains in reading are greater the longer a student attends a charter school. The data does not show this positive cumulative result in district school students (Solomon, Paark, and Garcia 2001).

History of Pennsylvania Charter Schools

Senate Bill No. 123, Pennsylvania’s charter school legislation passed in June 1997, allowed for the creation of charter schools, established a charter school appeal board, and provided guidelines for payments to charter schools. By allowing community members “to establish and maintain schools that operate independently from the existing school district structure” (General Assembly of Pennsylvania 1997:18), the General Assembly intended the article to

improve pupil learning; increase learning opportunities for all pupils; encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods; create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site; provide parents and pupils with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system; hold the schools

established under this act accountable for meeting measurable academic standards and provide the school with a method to establish accountability systems (P. 18-19).

The local board of school directors evaluates applications based on the following criteria: demonstration of sustainable support for the charter school plan; the capability to provide comprehensive learning experiences to students; and the extent to which it “may serve as a model for other public schools” (General Assembly of Pennsylvania 25). The local board is also responsible for annually assessing “whether each charter school is meeting the goals of its charter and conduct[ing] a comprehensive review prior to granting a five year renewal of the charter” (45). The State allocates planning and start-up funding to applicants depending on the size and special characteristics of the charter school. At the beginning of the 2003-04 school year, Pennsylvania’s ninety-one charter schools were serving 33,656 students.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB), as passed by Congress in 2001, applies to schools that receive federal Title I funding – money used to help low-income students – but “Pennsylvania officials decided that the consequences for poor student performance outlined in No Child Left Behind should apply to all public schools in the state” (Lee 2003a:2). As a result, the list of Pennsylvania schools that fail to make Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) includes a combination of charter and traditional public schools.

METHODOLOGY

Most studies of the charter school movement have based their findings on comparisons of student performance measures in charter and traditional schools, but they have failed to provide in-depth analysis of why charter schools are not performing better. To address this issue, my research is focused on the concerns of teachers and

administrators at one charter school in Pittsburgh. What do they see as the greatest obstacles to learning in this school? Do they believe the school's innovative approach to governance and instruction is filling the void in Pittsburgh's public education system?

Data Collection

After selecting Independent Charter School, the pseudonym assigned to the case study school, I collected data using a triangulated qualitative research design that included interviews, surveys, field observations, and content analysis. The interviewees represent a range of experiences in Pittsburgh Public Schools and activity in current district reform. They include a former public school teacher and principal with 33 years of service in the district; a charter school trustee; the current chief administrator, a high school teacher, and the co-founder of the case study school; a mother of two children in Pittsburgh Public Schools who is active in district parent councils; and the associate director of one of three foundations that recently withdraw funding from the Pittsburgh Public Schools. Three of these individuals served on Mayor Tom Murphy's Commission on Public Education. These in-depth, semi-standardized interviews⁴ were tape-recorded and fully transcribed.

In addition, I had non-standardized interviews with four charter school teachers, observed classroom instruction, and administered a survey to the school's faculty. Twelve completed surveys were returned out of 19, reflecting a response rate of 63%. The respondents averaged 7.9 years in the field of education and 2.7 years at Independent Charter School. They are all currently certified to teach in Pennsylvania or another state

⁴ See Interview Guides in Appendix A.

and are aware of the school's mission statement. However, only 60% feel the school is following the mission well.

The methods also included content analysis of documents and reports that define and evaluate the performance of the charter school and the district; Pittsburgh *Post-Gazette* articles and op-ed pieces after the Mayor's Commission on Education's Report was released on September 23, 2003; and transcribed interviews. For the charter school, the performance-defining documents included the application a school submits to achieve charter status and the state-mandated annual reports. The founding coalition must propose a school design, prove that a charter school is an appropriate means for addressing the district's educational needs, describe the proposed management organization, outline a preliminary start-up and operating budget, and describe the marketing plan, admission policy, and code of conduct. Annual reports provide a public accounting of the school's progress in each area listed above.

The interviews and surveys enhanced the data by providing more details than could be garnered through the analysis of the documents. The documents are the public face of the institutions; interviews and observations provide a look behind the public mask. By identifying themes, insights, and patterns in the interviews, observations, documents, and surveys I was able to compare the interrelationships of the charter school characteristics (such as governance, instructional philosophy, and discipline procedures) with those found in the Pittsburgh public school district. The differences contributed to my analytical insights on how these characteristics impact classroom dynamics and educational outcomes.

Background Information on Independent Charter School

Independent Charter School received the approval of the Pittsburgh Board of Education in 1998 and was the creation of a group of local educators, making it one of the city's original charter schools and one that has developed from a pure formation – a citizens' movement. The school's co-founder had been a teacher in the city schools for five years. When asked about the precipitating events that led to the creation of the school and the need in the district the school was designed to address, he mentioned that many teachers in the public schools have good ideas, but they are “in an environment where they don't really feel like they're going to be successful.” They don't feel like the system is organized in a way that will lead to success for students or teachers. He saw the need for a group of educators “to define a school program that would be able to meet the needs of kids that we saw not being met in the existing options.”

The establishment process “matched perfectly with the intent of the legislature in creating charters. Here's this group of people with strong connections to the school district and teachers in the school district, parents and kids in the school district, community people coming together to create this new organization. There weren't too many schools that came out in that kind of pure way.” The group held weekly meetings to design a curriculum, locate a building, and discuss the logistics of starting a school. These questions proved difficult to answer because, unlike some other charter schools, their citizen group did not have a partner organization. Instead, as a group of educators and community members, they had to spend “a lot of time building our political base in order to get approval.” Status as a freestanding, independent institution “doesn't lead your school to be set up in a way that's ideal for on-going governance in the school.”

In January 2001, “the Pittsburgh Board of Directors voted 8-1 to renew the charter” (Charter Schools Project 2001:2), and the school now serves 220 students and has 19 full-time teachers. Independent Charter School gives preference to students from the City of Pittsburgh and Mt. Oliver, and other students are enrolled only if there is space. Sixty-percent of the students are low-income. Students are issued monthly Port Authority bus passes for transportation to and from school, and they are expected to follow a strict dress code (Potts and Zlatos 2002).

The school was not introduced as an intentional source of competition. As the co-founder explained,

There’s a difference between chartered schools and charter school laws. Charter school laws are designed to spur competition. Individual schools are not. That’s not what’s in the minds of the founders. McDonald’s doesn’t want to create competition for Burger King. They want to run a restaurant. There is competition because of the way it’s set up. But in the case of what we were doing, there really wasn’t competition. I mean here’s one little school with 120 kids in a district of 38,000 children. We were a model; we weren’t competition. That’s where we saw ourselves – as a model.

According their 2002-2003 Annual Report, Independent Charter School’s mission “is to provide every child with the academic competencies, attitudes, and the network of support needed to succeed in life in the city or beyond it.” This is to be accomplished as “all students work toward 100% proficiency” and the school strives “to follow the guidelines set forth in the NCLB Act.”

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Mayor’s Commission on Public Education – a group of local educators, parents, administrators, and the like – recently collected statistics and personal accounts of the current results of and experiences within Pittsburgh’s public school system. The group reported their findings to local citizens in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* and in a

series of public forums. My initial information gathering took place at one such forum and continued with interviews of select Commission members. Their report provides the backdrop for the improvement efforts currently taking place in the city's charter school movement and specifically at Independent Charter School.

The Geography of Pittsburgh's Public School System: A Conversation with the Mayor's Commission on Public Education

In July 2002 three local charitable foundations – the Heinz Endowments, the Pittsburgh Foundation, and the Grable Foundation – informed Pittsburgh Superintendent John Thompson that they had lost confidence in the leadership of Pittsburgh Public Schools and would suspend nearly \$4 million in funding for dozens of district programs until the district developed an agenda for reform and radical change. They cited discord, low morale, decline in leadership, and chaotic decision-making in the city's school board as reasons to withhold funding.

One foundation director explained that “the district was not being accountable for our dollars” and that the foundation did not see much promise in funding the dysfunctional relationship between the school board and the superintendent. The Pittsburgh Public Schools were not reflecting the considerable investment made by the public – foundations and taxpayers alike. Mayor Tom Murphy responded to these criticisms by forming a 38-member Commission on Public Education. Committees were formed to evaluate city schools in terms of student performance, finance, and governance. Their findings reveal a school system plagued by student underachievement, unused funds, and an inability to serve the interests of the districts schoolchildren (Mayor's Commission on Public Education 2003a).

The 2003 Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) data from grades 5, 8, and 11 reveal alarmingly low rates of achievement for Pittsburgh Public School students; 61% cannot do math at grade level and 54% cannot read at grade level. Performance is lower for the 60% of the Pittsburgh Public School students who are from families with income below poverty levels and students who qualify for the federal free and reduced-price lunch program. Of these students, 71% are not proficient in math and 66% cannot read at grade level. The results are even lower for the district's African American students: 75% cannot do math at grade level and 69% cannot read at grade level (Mayor's Commission on Public Education 2003b).

With these scores, it is not surprising that in 2003, two-thirds of Pittsburgh's schools failed to meet the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) mandated by No Child Left Behind and enacted by the state. Only one high school in the district avoided the state warning list. This is despite the low threshold of progress set by the state, which required 35% of students in each school and subgroup to be proficient in math and 45% to be proficient in reading (Mayor's Commission on Public Education 2003a). Not all Pittsburgh public schools are underachieving, but the level of inequality threatens the viability of the entire system. The percentage of students reading at grade level ranges from 91% to 3%. The percentage of students proficient in math ranges from 78% to 0% (Mayor's Commission on Public Education 2003b:13).

While this is the reality of school performance, the environment "lacks the motivating influence for continuous improvement" (Neils 2003:3). In fact, according to one member of the Mayor's Commission, the Pittsburgh Public School system "lost a conference day. We had two a year – one in the fall, one in the spring. With the new

teacher contract we lost the spring one. I think we might be moving backwards.” A former public school teacher rhetorically asked, “When you have 180 kids you have to deal with everyday in a public school, how in the world are you going to make a dent in anybody’s life?” Teachers are not in touch with parents or students.

It is common for performance results such as these to spawn demands for more money in education. However, the Mayor’s Commission found that “the Pittsburgh public schools are rich in resources, but lacking in leadership and focus. The financial consequence of such characteristics is a financially-stable, but high-cost school district” that does not provide a sufficient return on the investment of city taxpayers and foundations (Mayor’s Commission on Public Education 2003a:34). At \$11,651, the district’s per-pupil spending is 39% greater than the median per pupil cost in Pennsylvania. This means, “the Pittsburgh public schools spend \$81,750 more than the Pennsylvania median to educate a class of 25 students” (35).

Pittsburgh teachers also receive a sizeable investment; they “enjoy the highest maximum salary – when adjusted for cost of living – of any of the 100 largest school districts in the nation” (Mayor’s Commission on Public Education 2003a:37). Louis Testoni, office managing partner for Pricewaterhouse Coopers and chairman of the finance subcommittee of the Mayor’s Commission, said, “We are paying an extremely high cost for a disappointing outcome” (Lee 2003b).

Even with such high rates of investment in both students and teachers, the district remains fiscally sound. The district has accumulated a fund balance of more than \$82 million. In Pittsburgh, the undesignated money available to the district is about 17% of the district’s current budget – nearly twice the appropriate balance (Mayor’s

Commission on Public Education 2003a). However, these available funds have not resulted in better student achievement because the school board has lacked a unified focus. Such a school board cannot effectively address the city's critical education issues, and according to one former principal, "many kids have fallen through the cracks because of that."

The school board governing Pittsburgh Public Schools is composed of elected officials who, according to the Mayor's Commission, have based many of their decisions "on the narrow concerns of their constituents and loyalty to their specific neighborhoods, rather than on sound educational policy and the interests of all children and all taxpayers in the Pittsburgh Public School District" (2003a:44). The foundation director explained that in this context,

a district representative may see that it's a financial disaster to keep a school open for 60 students, but they were elected to keep that school open for 60 students. And so even though that might be a financial disaster, with a much too expensive per-pupil school, that person will always vote and play games to keep that school open at the expense of many other students which means that you'll get worse classroom practices at that level.

There is a sense that "If the school board can learn to govern, the students enrolled in the school system can learn to succeed" (Dickerson 2003).

Within the public school system, a principal is a figurehead assigned to a particular school to serve as a site-based manager. A former principal explained that even though "lay people think principals can do anything," public school principals have little autonomy. They are "like the Queen of England. We are a figurehead and that is about it." Unlike public school teachers, principals do not have union representation. When the Queen's hands are tied and she is without a Court, "unless you're an exceptionally strong principal, your morale becomes so low that you aren't able to lead in

the fashion with which you should be leading. Your teachers don't see you as a definitive person who can make decisions.”

Freedom to select faculty members “enables principals to mold their schools to a specific mission, and the characteristics and standards best suited for the educational setting” (Neils 2003:1). However, public school principals lack the freedom that independent school and charter school principals have “to select highly qualified teachers without being bound by bureaucratic processes that require certification” (Neils 2003:1). The district assigns teachers to schools, and this hiring system is often seen as “an obstacle to the employment of bright, creative and talented newcomers to education” (3).

In addition, a system that “protects teachers’ security at the expense of student progress is at odds with sound educational practices” (Neils 2003:3). The district is guilty of this practice. A former principal explained that if she determines a teacher is inept, she must document a case against the teacher for more than a year. In the meantime, the principal tries to counsel the teacher out of the job or assigns an inferior rating. If a teacher receives two consecutive inferior ratings, the district will remove the teacher. All the while, the inept teacher remains in the classroom.

Initial Expectations of Independent Charter School Faculty

Teachers and administrators at Independent Charter School consider five factors “important” or “very important” in their decision to seek employment at Independent Charter School. Sixty-four percent indicated “Parents are committed” and 54.5% indicated that it was “Difficult to find other positions.” Eighty-two percent indicated “Safety at School,” the “Opportunity to work with like-minded educators,” and “Small Class Size.” Many respondents listed additional factors and indicated the lure of the

appealing description. They stated that the “former CAO made it very attractive;” they liked the original founder’s “description of job, duties, students;” the current “CAO made school sound like a dream come true. Too good to be true.” This is understandable given the school’s stated approach for addressing the need for student-teacher and parent-teacher interaction.

The Independent’s charter application explained,

Early each year, a staff person will meet with an individual student and her parent or adult advocate to determine the student’s and family’s educational needs and goals. Teachers will bring to the table what they have learned about the student’s progress toward competency...The parent or adult advocate and the student will bring to the table their own perceptions about past educational achievements, areas of particular joy or frustration for the student in her learning in and out of school, and hopes and goals for the coming year and beyond (P. 25).

This would bring parents, students, and school staff together in “a dynamic partnership that [will] set a course for individual student success” (18). It would also fulfill one major requirement of the Pennsylvania charter school legislation – developing and implementing “strategies for meaningful parent and community involvement” (General Assembly of Pennsylvania 1997:21). However, the school’s co-founder admits that in reality, “We don’t see parents as being super-engaged. The parents chose the school; they signed up, but that doesn’t mean their life is on forward progress and going real well. They’ve got a lot of issues and we try to help them a little bit and try to involve them in positive ways.” The parents are most likely seeking a change or an escape rather than making a commitment to the mission of a charter school.

The school’s appealing description reached into the teachers’ professional development as well. The charter application outlined a faculty design “modeled on the partnerships that characterize medical, legal, and other professional practices” (ii).

“Partners” would be experienced teachers “immersed in the vision of the school” who

take on many of the school's management responsibilities (ii). In this system, "more experienced partners mentor and guide newcomers and young associates [who] can aspire and work toward the goal of earning partnership status" (11). This arrangement would provide an unparalleled level of professional independence for experienced teachers and a route toward professional advancement for those entering the profession. Teachers would be colleagues learning from each other, and accordingly, "one of the best professional development resources for our teachers will be the teacher next door" (35).

Teachers would serve as "principle curriculum planners, the principle decision makers in the assessment and adoption of commercially-produced curriculum materials, and the principle writers of original materials and units" (28). Because all of the teachers would "participate in the development, implementation, and assessment of the overall program and operation of the school" (4), this system would ensure "that the school has the structures in place to allow it to outlive its founding coalition while remaining true to its vision and mission" (9).

Independent Charter School established a modified student-parent-teacher partnership, but according to the chief administrator the school "went toward a more traditional model" for the faculty because the design was "a very idealistic notion." The foundation director summarized the appeal of charter school rhetoric and the disappointment of the reality when he said, "The hope of it all is that these teachers are all together getting to create the school of their dreams – that they're working as a team. Well, it didn't come out like that." As a result, according to one original teacher, after the original administrators of the charter school decided to leave, a search for a head of school resulted in the selection of "a poor choice." After three months in office, the head

of school was asked to resign, and “it was just an awful, awful year” in which lots of teachers left. This teacher, who did not “see the school surviving such radical changes,” returned the public schools because “the new head was not moving us in the direction where we were supposed to be going.” The teacher has since returned to Independent Charter School.

The faculty indicated instruction, class size, the facility, and teacher commitment as strengths of the school and as features of the school that met their expectations. All of the teachers surveyed expected the quality of instruction to be high, and 72.7% report this is their current experience. One teacher explains, “We have longer class periods than any other school, giving us plenty instruction time.” Ninety-one percent of the respondents expected teachers to be autonomous and creative in their classes, and 100% report this is their current experience. All of the respondents expected the school to have small class sizes, and 81.8% report this is their current experience. Eighty-two percent are satisfied or very satisfied with the building and facility. In addition, 91% expected the teachers to be committed to the mission of the school and report this is their current experience.

The school’s chief administrator told me that “Teachers work harder in charter schools. That’s a subjective comment, but that’s what I have seen. They are here on Saturday; they are here after school. If I want to call special staff development days after school, they come. That’s not the way it is in regular public education. You have to get special approval for everything.” This level of dedication appears to be an improvement to the image produced by a former public school principal who could not find teachers who would work the after-school extended-day programs that “were the result of Title I money that you got because your kids functioned below expectations.” However, one

charter school teacher believes that “the lack of union representation forces teachers to be required to do extra jobs and work longer hours without compensation.”

One Independent Charter School teacher explained how the school has “built in what we call learning partnership meetings – every student is assigned a mentor and then that mentor meets with the child’s parents four times a year.” This means that parents “get to know that one adult in the building. So that adult is the key person for that child...someone that they can go to, or someone who’s monitoring them.” As a result, “You cannot hide from us in this school. If you are a student and you don’t want to be in the spotlight or you don’t want anybody to know that you are weak in this or that you didn’t come to school – you need to go somewhere else because we’re going to know.” The school typically has “one math teacher, one science teacher, one English teacher [per division] so we’re teaching the same kids and we’re constantly meeting to talk about what works for him, what works for her.”

According to one teacher, students at Independent Charter School “come to us with huge deficits and we have so much time and ground to make up.” This is where the autonomy of a charter school is useful. The key is responsiveness, or as the school’s co-founder explained, “working closely with families and community to create a school that matches the needs and desires of families there. You pay attention in a way and you respond in a way that’s not typical of large school districts.” He explained that this autonomy and improved response time is “kind of like the difference between an ocean liner and a kayak. Small schools are like kayaks; they can see the wave coming and ocean liners take a long time to change direction.” This means, “If we find that there’s a group of kids that are not learning to read, we don’t go into a three-year planning mode to

select a new reading program.” Instead the school decides “what to do next week to retool.”

This was the case at Independent Charter School. One teacher explained that “within a small amount of time we can make changes. And then if it doesn’t work, then we can regroup again.” If there are problems with scheduling, “we immediately change it.” In terms of grouping kids, “if a teacher says ‘this child and this child can’t be in the same room.’ Fine, it can be taken care of within a day. If you know something’s not working, you can talk to somebody and hopefully make changes that will improve the situation.”

If these respondents offer an accurate assessment, quality learning should be taking place at this school. Why isn’t this charter school effective? Why has this school been on the list of schools failing to make Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), as established by No Child Left Behind, for two years in a row? Some problems stem from the structure of instruction, but most of the problems stem from the students’ and parents’ lack of respect for teacher authority and for the value of education. Two teachers explained that the small size does not matter because discipline is inconsistent and the textbooks are bad.

The Unexpected Experience: Problematic Issues in Instruction and Performance

Nearly 82% of survey respondents expected the students to be eager and motivated to learn. However, 91% report that this is *not* their current experience. Nearly 78% *disagree* or *strongly disagree* with the statement: “I am satisfied with the school’s curriculum.” One teacher summed up the consensus: the curriculum is a “good idea on paper but doesn’t work in reality.” Another expressed, “We keep reinventing the wheel.” The design has increased parent-teacher communication and site-based decision-making,

but the instructional philosophy is no more effective than that found in traditional public schools.

Classroom practices and assessment, as stated in the charter application, rely heavily on “portfolios, projects, and presentations in a variety of rigorous written, oral/musical, and visual forms that demonstrate student mastery more clearly than traditional, multiple-choice standardized tests” (18). This design ensures the “quality and equity of comprehensive learning opportunities for all students” (21) by “allowing students to work at a pace appropriate to her abilities in that particular discipline or activity” (27).

Instead of always giving a test on the information, one teacher explained,

all students have the opportunity to create a product that demonstrates understanding. So it’s a portfolio kind of assessment. Most of it is done right in the classroom. Teachers build in that time to work on the idea for the exhibit, do the research, create the first draft – of course homework may involve editing it or revising, etc. But one of the underlying principles of our school is that we believe that all students can achieve the standards they just may do it at different times. So revision is the piece that I think is unique to our school.

Student portfolios are supposed to be “evaluated against national performance standards with the help of rubrics developed collaboratively among teachers and students” (Charter Schools Project 2001:2). The chief administrator explained that the cover sheet for the student portfolios “lists the standards that the student is responsible for. As students show evidence that they have completed that standard, that standard is checked off, and the test or the exhibit or whatever it is that proves that that student met that standard is attached in that folder. That’s how we monitor the standards and what students are meeting what standards.” However, even with the use of portfolios, one teacher feels, “We do WAY too much standardized testing to prove our worth.”

The chief administrator explained that exhibits are a project in which, at the end of the quarter or the end of a unit, the students “have to use all the standards and everything they’ve learned and create an exhibit that shows that they’ve met the standards.” However one teacher felt this notion was “crap. It’s impossible for an exhibit to show all they learned. They are glorified projects; projects that you find in any school.” I asked whether or not the students are motivated to get their work right the first time, given that they know they can revise it later. One teacher said “no. They know the system. They may not even do it at first. First semester 6th graders try hard, but then they figure out how it works.” In fact in one class of 35 6th graders, 19 had not turned in the exhibit assigned two months earlier.

Grades are assigned according to a rubric: 90-100% earns a 4; 70-89%, a 3; 50-69%, a 2; 10-49%, a 1; and 0-9%, a 0. A score of 2 or above is considered passing. One teacher explained, “50% passing. It’s horrible that we only expect students to reach 50% and still pass.” While charters are free to design the curriculum and grading system however they want, one teacher observed, “but this? This is ridiculous.”

One teacher took the job after being told that students come in June and July if they fail or if they have not read ten books during the academic year. She was looking forward to the smaller group and individual work that could take place at that time. She has since found out that it is really supervised reading, because, as she says, “it’s almost impossible to fail. You can put True for all True/False questions and get 50%, which is passing.” Another teacher explained that even though most of the 6th grade students read at the 4th grade level, “They are smart enough to know if you dumb it down and they are offended. But they can’t do the work otherwise.” Progress cannot be made.

Another problem is with classroom materials. Sixty-four percent of the respondents reported being dissatisfied with resources available for instruction. One teacher made a request; “It would be nice to be provided with more supplies, even pens or dry erase markers. Or even equipment, like a pencil sharpener.” During my visits to the school, I witnessed the amount of instruction time lost while the students tried to find a pencil and a piece of paper. However there were not enough pencils, because as the teacher reminded the students, they borrow them and do not return them. Some students used crayons.

The 6th grade students have math “text books,” but they are basically paperback workbooks that they cannot write in. None of the students in 6th grade social studies have books to take home and one class does not have enough copies for everyone to have one during class. One teacher informed me, “I can’t get textbooks or notebook paper. I have to buy the paper, but the seniors can go to the *Lion King* and we can throw a pizza party every Friday.” This individual also pointed out that few teachers and students wear their school issued identification badge, but the school continues to spend money on them.

The 6th grade science teacher has one copy of a textbook full of experiments that she does not have the solutions or equipment to do. The students do not get a copy of this book. Instead they get a series of “event-based science modules” – a workbook that consists of newspaper articles that are above 6th grade level. The teacher believes that the students “need the basics” and not event-based science.

The Unexpected Experience: Problematic Issues in Discipline and Governance

All of the respondents agreed with the statement, “Lack of student discipline hinders my ability to teach and the opportunity for other students to learn.” All of the respondents disagreed with the statement, “Students respect their teachers.” The teachers

appear to be young, energetic, and persistent, but they cannot control a room when punishment means nothing to the twelve to eighteen students. Detention and in-school suspension seem to be another expected and welcomed part of any day, such as lunch or homeroom. One teacher acknowledged, “Currently charter schools (at least this one) are a dumping ground for public schools to get rid of problem children.”

On one occasion a member of the school’s discipline team was called in to pick up a punished student. He took the opportunity to address the class with the message: “You aren’t doing the things you learned in elementary school: come in and sit down. Learning needs to take place in this classroom. These outbursts have to stop. I should suspend $\frac{3}{4}$ of the class. It’s time. This is not a circus. It’s a classroom. You’ve got to value your education.” This was six months into the school year, but it took four adults in the room – the teacher, disciplinarian, volunteer, and special education teacher – to keep fourteen students quiet, seated, and working. One of the adults commented to another, “it’s constant back and forth banter. The kids have to have the last word. Everything is a joke to them.” One teacher has decided that if he can teach the students how to sit at their desks and how to be a student, then he will feel like he made a difference.

When asked a free response question about the greatest weakness of the school, 54.5% of the survey respondents indicated discipline procedures. One observed, “All ‘non-negotiables’ are negotiable.” Another pointed to the lack of “consistency of behavior/discipline [and] lack of administrative leadership/cooperation.” One teacher does not “always feel supported with my discipline plan.” Another believes the school has a “poor ability to remove students from school who demonstrate no motivation.”

Eighty-eight percent disagreed with the statement, “I am satisfied with the school’s approach to student discipline.” When asked to assess the school’s approach to student discipline teachers said it is “Not very good at all;” “Great idea, but under staffed to be fully effective;” “NOT CONSISTENT!!!;” “Difficult. Sometimes I feel undermined. I don’t have any power that they are scared of. The students really need a lot of discipline. They are tougher than I thought.”

During my visits to the school I witnessed the fact that discipline, as one teacher said, “all depends on the day, the student, and if we are afraid of the parent.” One teacher said that some parents put up a fight when their child gets in trouble and the school knows not to call them. The teacher continued, “If the parents won’t enforce the rules, how can I?” I witnessed a fight in the hall and learned that one of the students involved had been expelled last year but let back in this year for numbers. This illustrates the teacher’s claim that discipline is “VERY INCONSISTENT. Some students get repetitive chances and still continue inappropriate behavior – nothing done.”

While observing an 11th grade math class held in one partitioned corner of the cafeteria, I saw six students in the opposite corner of the cafeteria. These students were tardy and were waiting there until second period, rather than disrupting first period. If the students knew how to enter a classroom respectfully, it would not be a problem to admit the students to first period whenever they arrive. However, the school must keep the students out of the class in order to eliminate the disruption.

Ninety-one percent of the respondents expected the school to have effective leadership and administration. Fifty-six percent report this is not their current experience; they are not satisfied with school governance. One teacher reports, “Lack of

consistency is the school's greatest weakness. Consistency in policies, leadership, academic requirements, and procedures." Another teacher agreed that the school has high standards and expectations for students, but "they aren't always followed through."

Teachers described the school's governance structure as "Inconsistent, whimsical, unknowledgeable," "Changed too often," and "sometimes confusing as to who is in charge – who to go to for what." One teacher who has been at the school for 5 years says, "I do not understand the governance structure of our school." It is possible that the students recognize the leadership inconsistency as well.

Many of the teachers would like greater involvement in steering the school. All of the respondents expected teachers to be able to influence the direction of the school, but half report this is not the current experience. One teacher explained, "Charter schools are definitely a viable form of education. However, they must be run by the educators in the classroom. NOT someone disconnected from the issues in the classroom." Much of the desire to influence the school stems from frustration with the discipline procedures. One teacher shared an experience in which there was a group in her classroom for lunch detention. Because the students were treating it like "a lunch party with the teacher," she threatened in-school suspension. However, when she called in the staff member in charge of discipline, he told the group that he liked them and would not give them in-school suspension. The teacher explained that as a result "I look like I have no authority. That doesn't support me. That doesn't empower me."

According to one teacher, hiring practices at Independent Charter School are enhanced because "we're not a union school." The administration explained, "if there's a pool of candidates, we definitely want the certified teachers, but in an emergency

situation if we have a good candidate, a person that's qualified, we get them regardless of certification." However, another teacher described charter schools as a refuge for new, burned-out, or non-certified teachers; they are either young and cannot get a job elsewhere or old and have bounced from job to job.

This may explain why first year teachers at Independent Charter School, according to the chief administrator, "are on an at-will contract, which means it's day to day. And then afterwards, after they've proven themselves, we'll give them a year at most." One teacher told me "all the teachers are trying to leave. There's no continuity for the kids." This raises the question of how to provide the stability that can take a school through the founding group to a more permanent institution.

Student Progress and School Status

The major differences between a public school and Independent Charter School are class size, personal attention, and teacher commitment, but in many other ways, there is no difference. When asked to comment on the difference between public schools and this charter school, teachers' responses included: "Not much. We had more students, less help, more success" in public schools; "We are not different enough to exist. Public schools have small class sizes and do exhibits; they just call them reports;" "There is no difference in curriculum/class structure;" "This charter school is no different than any other school."

Independent Charter School claims to have abandoned the standardized school day by giving preference to self-paced learning and exhibits. However, they are expecting students to take charge of their education, and that is not happening often. There are smaller classes, but the energy spent on discipline and trying to instill a value for education is extensive and constant. The school is not under district bureaucracy, but

with the equivalent of one Superintendent and two principals within the school, one teacher says, “there are too many chiefs, too many decision-makers, and no communication.”

The ironic result is that this school of choice, appeared on the NCLB “list of schools required to give parents choice to send their children elsewhere” for the 2003-04 academic year (2). State education officials determined that the school had not met state graduation, attendance, reading or math standards. A specific comparison of Independent Charter School’s performance and the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) targets can be found in Table 1, Appendix C.

This status is not unique to this charter school. Four other Pittsburgh charter schools were placed on the warning list – “they will have to give parents the transfer option next year if their performance does not improve” (Lee 2003a:2). The parents at these schools already have the choice to take their children out of these schools. However, their appearance on the federal list of failing and warned schools indicates they are performing no better than other local schools.

Schools in many disadvantaged areas have become resigned to low levels of achievement. However, analysis of the “opportunity gap” reveals that significantly higher achievement levels are possible. The “opportunity gap” refers the difference between the proficiency level at the selected school and the average proficiency of the highest performing schools serving similar or more disadvantaged students. In 2002-03, 70.6% of Independent Charter School’s student population was categorized as disadvantaged. Data on Independent Charter School’s opportunity gap can be found in Table 2, Appendix C. The comparison reveals great potential for improvement.

The developers of Independent Charter School over-promised, and on a broader level, movement advocates oversold the idea of charter schooling. Even if early results are promising for a given school, over time there is a regression toward the mean in student performance, graduation rates, and discipline problems. If the theory behind the charter school movement is sound, but it does not work in practice, it is important to evaluate this charter school within the historical context of education reform. Is it an altruistic, humanitarian reaction against traditional models but one that is so poorly designed that it is fostering the downward educational standards that have been occurring since the 1970s?

The local foundation director explained the discrepancy between the expectations and outcomes of charter schools. He said, “We were a bit naïve with charters. What we liked about them was the flexibility, the lack of rules that were dictated often by unions and administrations, the ability for change, the ability to give choices to parents, and the ability to be innovative.” However, both locally and nationally there is no evidence that charters do a better job than mainstream public schools. It is not that charter schools are worse than pre-existing schools. They are simply no better because charter schools come in varying levels of quality. Results are a very mixed bag. For example, the foundation director explained that in North Carolina, “at one point, the highest performing school in the state was a charter and the lowest performing school in the state was a charter.”

This is because the design of reform does not operate independent of broader societal factors. In the words of one teacher, charter schools “are viable dreams of education reform if the parents ‘buy into it’ as well as the community.” According to the foundation director, the trend of failed reform efforts highlights that “It’s a really difficult

task to change urban systems.” Charter schools face the same societal problems faced by traditional public schools. In many urban settings,

poverty is so overwhelming that [parents’] own life issues get in the way of them being able to be a great advocate for their children’s education. And that unfortunately is such a huge issue, and it’s not fair to put this all on schools. Schools can perform better, but it’s naïve to think that even if we put in a dream system that we’re going to be able to get 80% of kids non-performing up to 80% performing. I think that’s unrealistic unfortunately, given all the poverty issues and all that they must overcome.

There is a wait-and-see approach to determining the impact of charter schools on traditional districts, but if Chubb and Moe are correct in saying that schools “rely on, interact with, and adapt to their environments in order to survive and prosper as organizations,” district schools would have to adapt as charter schools gain popularity (1999:19). Charter schools may not be pulling out enough students to pressure the district, but without their efforts it may take too long to transform public education. The kayaks are doing what they can to turn the ocean liner around, but will the pressure continue?

When we look at societal advancements, the school stands out as a social institution that has seen very little change. The co-founder of Independent Charter School explained this dormancy in education by contrasting it to the rapid progress in aviation:

We just had the 100th anniversary of the Wright Brothers and the first flight, right? And so let’s look at what’s happened in 100 years. We’ve gone from taking off on the sand dune down there to jet planes, landing on the moon, landing on Mars. No one marched on Washington to improve air travel. It was a dynamic. Government was involved with it...but there was a dynamic that pushed improvement. And then look at what’s happened to public education since 1904. We’ve expanded the number of children that are going to high school; we’ve increased the expectation for what schools can do, should do; but we haven’t really retooled in any fundamental way what’s actually going on inside the classroom.

Only recently has the country seen a fundamental change in what is taking place inside the classroom. Forty states have charter school laws and 37 states have operating charter schools. The co-founder asks,

What is it that's resonating? What's driving that? I mean it really is a pretty radical idea – the idea that school districts aren't the only ones that can run public schools; that you can have other organizations providing public education. Is it a deep-seated frustration? Is it an effort to save public education from people that are trying to rip it apart with vouchers?

Charter schooling has consistently gained popularity since its conception.

However, when and if the novelty of charter schools fades away, what will sustain the trend of education reform? The co-founder suggests:

I don't think having all your eggs in one exclusive provider is going to lead to change. There's no incentive other than responding to political pressure, and political pressure goes in waves. It's like, there will be political pressure – there was last year. Well now Patrick Dowd got elected [to the Pittsburgh School Board]. Everybody feels like it's going to be ok now so there's going to be a waning. People are going to pull back and say 'well, things are going to improve.' And maybe they will. Then there will be another change on the school board. People will get upset again. What's the underlying constant force for change? It's not there right now.

The “underlying constant force for change” might be taking shape in No Child Left Behind (NCLB). This law is changing the political dynamic of education by putting a federal process in motion through which people can opt out of the established system. Many districts, however, currently lack the successful schools needed for the reform to work. The law, which “mimics some principles that have been important from the start in charter schools – measuring gains and setting consequences,” will provide the real pressure at the district level because it can shut down schools, and charter schools will allow the law to work by providing quality options and outlets for parents (Chute 2004). In this way, NCLB is driving and justifying the emergence of charter schools. The combination of federal and grassroots efforts are creating a sense of urgency.

Many school districts are responding to the No Child Left Behind federal legislation to sanction failing schools. For Example, Pittsburgh Public Schools have implemented after school tutoring and homework assistance programs funded through Title I funds or district partners; technology-based tutorial programs at Head Start centers and 44 elementary schools; and Reading Works, a software component of Literacy Plus (Thompson and Harris 2002).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Determining the features of a charter school that make its classroom dynamics more or less effective than those in traditional public schools was the original micro-level focus of this research. Making policy recommendations for public school districts in relation with No Child Left Behind emerged as the macro-level focus.

Discipline

Keeping order in the classroom is not a problem unique to this charter school or charter schools in general. This theme emerged in the Mayor's Commission on Public Education (2003a) meetings with district parents as well. Citizens consistently raised the issue of discipline as a concern

that tends to discourage parents from enrolling their children in the Pittsburgh Public Schools. The general feeling expressed was that discipline problems affect both teachers and students, hindering teachers from effectively doing their jobs and distracting students from learning. Citizens reported that teachers have to attend to disruptive children, robbing the rest of the class of valuable learning time (P. 19).

I argue that the overwhelming focus on discipline at Independent Charter School is due in large part to the school's identity as a "last chance," rather than as a challenging academic environment. Early predictions indicated that charter schools, as one teacher

explained, were “going to get the cream of the crop kids” and “ruin public education.”

However, the results in Pittsburgh run counter to this initial prediction.

One of Independent Charter School’s original teachers explained that the students who enrolled during the first academic year

had never been successful anywhere and this was sort of their last hope. And the parents were also saying this kid’s been kicked out of this school, this school, this school; can you help my child? Not that we’re a school for behavior problems, but that’s the kinds of students that took a chance on our school the first year.

The school has not moved far beyond this initial function. It continues to attract students who “aren’t being successful, that need a change, that want more personal attention.” In essence, Pittsburgh charter schools are “getting some of [the district’s] toughest students.”

District students who are doing well – academically, socially, behaviorally – in their current schools are not seeking alternatives, unless the alternative offers a more challenging or specialized curriculum. In the words of one teacher, “The cream of the crop kids are going to do well no matter where they go,” and it is not worth the risk of entering an experimental school. Conversely, students facing academic and behavioral sanctions in their current schools will take advantage of the outlet provided by Pittsburgh charter schools. If this is the function of such schools, they need to be promoted and structured as such.

Change the Authorizing Agent

Because there is not a federally mandated charter school policy, legislation varies from state to state according to the educational and political environments. Strong charter laws mandate considerable autonomy from labor-management agreements, allow multiple charter-granting agencies, and allocate realistic per-pupil funding levels. The

policy problems facing Pittsburgh's charter schools stem from the specifics of Pennsylvania's charter school legislation, which recognizes the local school board as the only charter-granting agency (General Assembly of Pennsylvania 1997).

When asked if charter schools were a viable means of reform, many teachers mentioned problems within Pennsylvania's law. One teacher said that charter schools "are a good idea in theory, however the charter school system in Pennsylvania has been set up to fail. I don't believe that the state wants them to be successful. I believe that the state wants to be able to say that it tried and they didn't work out. I feel that they could be a viable means of education if a better system was in place." Another teacher said, "We are constantly fearing the public school [system] will cut our funding. The public school [system] is constantly looking for a reason to cancel our charter. They don't like competition. I love competition but this one is biased."

Is this a case of history repeating itself? In 1970 President Nixon introduced an Experimental Schools Program in which school districts were invited to propose programs of comprehensive change in order to receive funding (Ravitch 2001). The approach seemed promising, but the proposals were written to please federal officials in order to secure funding. They reflected little of the local interest they were intended to capture. A similar phenomenon is happening in the charter school movement, limiting the diversity of innovation in states mandating approval from the district. Public school bureaucracy generally resists plans motivated by marketplace accountability "because of their potential to threaten a school system's security" (Neils 2003:3). Local districts are frequently reluctant to authorize their own competition.

As a result, the Pittsburgh charter schools do not represent the full range of flexibility theoretically available to charter schools. They are attempts to be better public schools, rather than truly innovative models of education. They focus on providing a “positive learning environment,” a “quality educational environment,” a “dramatically altered traditional learning environment” that will draw upon the “best practices” of instruction to develop “academically accomplished young men and women.” The only exception in Allegheny County is a school providing “work transition instruction to students aged 14-21 with unique cognitive, communication, and sensory challenges, including students with autism spectrum disorders” (Pennsylvania Department of Education 2004:3).

If policymakers want to see a sector of publicly funded autonomous and experimental schools grow substantially, they should not make the shape and size of that sector contingent on the approval of local school boards (Gill, Timpane, Ross, and Brewer 2001). Other states have addressed this issue. Indiana allows the mayor of Indianapolis to grant a charter; Minnesota allows non-profit organizations; New Jersey allows the state commissioner of education; and Arizona allows the state board of education. Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, and Wisconsin allow public state universities to grant a charter (Education Commission of the States 2003).

However, the policy problem is more likely in the district implementation of the law rather than in the state law itself. The number and type of schools approved by local boards vary according to the political environment of the district. Without leaving Pennsylvania, one finds more innovative charter schools in Philadelphia, a city that has

experienced a rapid proliferation of charter schools. Allegheny County has nine charter schools serving 1,530 students while Philadelphia County has 49 charter schools serving 18,853 students (Pennsylvania Department of Education 2004).

Philadelphia charter schools are breaking the mold rather than simply improving the structure of public education. One Philadelphia charter school provides “academic services, medical care, social services and day-care for at-risk, inner-city youth,” while another use a “bilingual, bi-cultural curriculum.” One offers “an African-centered instructional curriculum focusing on high academic standards in order to promote entrepreneurship, with a strong basis in cultural history, character education and empowerment,” while another provides “a solid educational program developed through the study of aerospace and aviation and to develop creative leaders who will not follow a path but who will become trail blazers for the 21st century.” As a final example, one Philadelphia charter school draws on “the work of Paolo Freire in connecting students' learning to family, home, workplace, and community” (Pennsylvania Department of Education 2004).

Multiple Sponsorship

Although the services provided by charter schools may reflect the needs and desires of local consumers, “their viability may depend less on their ability to win over individual education-consumers through the quality of their product than on their ability to play the game of interest politics in multiple public sector venues” (Henig et al. 2003:52). For example, “unlike firms in a more pure form of market enterprise, charter schools cannot convert excess demand into higher prices or greater selectivity” (52).

For this reason, charter school laws should permit more than one organization to sponsor charter schools. Multiple community partnerships would increase the supply of

classroom resources, funds, administrative stability, and so forth. The former administrator of another Pittsburgh charter school acknowledged, “The challenge has been not knowing where we were going to get some of the resources. In the public schools system, all you had to do was pick up the phone.” (Lee 1999).

Independent Charter School “escaped” the over-bureaucratization of the Pittsburgh Public Schools. However, now that the original administration and all but four of the original teachers have been replaced, the school is in need of predictability and standardization. Without a permanent source of sponsorship and identity, the school has become an anomic institution.

Change in Focus

When institutional logics, which define the ends to which behavior should be directed and the means by which the ends are achieved, come into conflict, the institutional structure of society is transformed. Contradictions lead to a struggle over the appropriate logic by which activities should be regulated and over which categories or people they apply (Friedland and Alford 1991). The current education debate is focused on determining the appropriate institutional logic for regulating public education – market or bureaucracy.

However, I conclude that the focus on removing bureaucracy as the institutional logic for education is the oversimplification Molnar discussed: “remove the regulation and dismantle the bureaucracies, and – voila, a thousand flowers cultivated by unfettered ingenuity, energy, and commitment of parents and teachers will bloom” (1996a:10). It takes more than removing district control and inviting the emergence of education consumers. The essential question is not “who should hire the teacher?” or “how many

days should kids be in school each year?” The question is “how does one teacher reach a class of 15 6th graders who do not value education or respect adults?”

Ultimately, it is better in some ways to focus reform efforts on the traditional public school system. The district schools will always have the majority of students. Charters can serve as demonstration projects if approved by agencies other than the local district, and their presence can pressure the public system to increase student achievement. The existing charter schools should stay in operation to continue experimenting with school design and instruction, but only as a means of creating ideas for enhancing the larger education system. In this way, communication and collaboration between charter schools and the district’s public schools would improve both types of institutions. As one teacher expressed, charter schools “would be much more successful if they had support of traditional schools.”

The three local foundations that withdrew funding should put their funds back into the district with specific guidelines and requirements for being accountable for every dollar. Their actions were understandable given that district leadership was not producing a strong report card. However, the federal government is now monitoring district and school performance, and their sanctions will be more influential in education reform than the pressure applied by charter schools.

With the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability law of 2001 the federal government now requires state recognition of achievement gaps among student subgroups. Under the guidelines, if proficiency levels for African-American and low-income students in Pittsburgh⁵ do not improve in future years,

⁵ Refer to the 2003 Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) data in Research Findings.

the entire district is at risk of sanctions. Students will be permitted to transfer to schools outside the district and the state will have the authority to withhold funds, replace staff, establish new curricula, take over some or all of the district's schools, or even abolish or restructure the district (Mayor's Commission on Public Education 2003a:27).

District leadership has both the need and the opportunity to improve the public education system and its effects on Pennsylvania's children. Unlike charter schools, NCLB is acting as a more direct means of stimulating change.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Limitations

Thirty-seven percent of the teachers at the charter school did not complete the survey; their voice is missing in the evaluation of this school's performance and status. The dominant respondent voice was one of disappointment. Was the survey seen as an opportunity to vent frustrations rather than an opportunity to celebrate the school?

The specifics of charter school legislation and the number of charter schools operating per district vary from state to state. Therefore, the findings of this study in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania may not be generalizable to other locations. As previously mentioned, Pittsburgh charter schools do not represent the full range of flexibility offered to charter schools. Because this was a study of one charter school design, in one city, I agree with the teacher who acknowledged, "It is not fair to compare the idea of charter schools to this charter school."

Future Research

In order to understand the real possibilities of the charter school movement the more innovative models of charter schools need to be evaluated. The movement is about using flexibility to learn what is effective in public education today, and Independent Charter School has not taken advantage of this privilege.

Surveying teachers in traditional public schools would also benefit research on the differences between charter and traditional public schools. Comparing the expectations and experiences of faculty members from a variety of school types would provide a more detailed picture of public education in America.

APPENDIX A
Semi-Structured Interview Guides

CHARTER SCHOOL STAFF

Background

1. Describe the precipitating events and district needs in the formation of the charter school.
(Probes: What is the school's mission statement? What is the basis for their formation?)
2. How do you publicize the school?

Governance

1. Describe the school's leadership and governance process.
2. How do the responsibilities and role of administrators in charter schools differ from principals in traditional public schools?
3. How do the responsibilities and role of teachers in charter schools differ from teachers in traditional public schools?
(Probes: In what ways do teachers collaborate? How do you see teacher-teacher interactions to be different at charter schools? And student-teacher interactions?)
4. What is the function of the Board?
5. How do these subunits (CAO, Board, faculty, students, parents) fit together and serve the school's overall objectives?
(Probes: Evaluate the school's organizational stability and how it differs from district schools? How does district governance impact classroom practices and the district's attempts to address the learning needs of the students?)
5. How has the school responded to changing leadership?
6. Charter schools are promoted as being free from the bureaucracy of the school board. How does this school specifically take advantage of that freedom?
(Probe: Are there areas where you do have to report to the school board?)
7. Do you have any partnerships with community organizations? Where do your resources and funds come from?

Academics

1. What is the instructional philosophy?
How is it communicated to teachers? To parents? To students?

2. What is involved in a personalized learning plan, exhibits and portfolios?
(Probes: How do portfolios demonstrate student mastery and proficiency more clearly than traditional tests? How do you balance classroom instruction with students working on these projects?)
3. How does this school encourage and monitor students' progress toward meeting grade-level standards?
4. How do you encourage community and parent engagement?
(Probes: Do you see a difference as far as the role of the parent? Are the students from families where parents are already involved in their education?)

Role in the District

1. Assess the school and district in its current state.
2. How has this charter school affected the local educational environment?
(Probes: Do you see the district or other schools responding to the programs that you are modeling? Is your goal to transform the district? Do you see charter schools raising the standards of school design, administration, and financing in public education?)
3. Describe what you would like to see develop in the future.
4. What recommendations do you have for other charter schools?

MEMBERS OF THE MAYOR'S COMMISSION ON PUBLIC EDUCATION

Background

1. What is your experience in the Pittsburgh Public School System?
2. What was your role in the Mayor's Commission on Education?

Governance

1. Explain the current roles, responsibilities, and interactions of the school board, superintendent, and principal.
(Probes: What would be a principal's interaction with the school board? Does the school board have any mechanism in place to know the specific needs of your school and your students? How has district governance changed over the years? What is the ideal relationship? Is there organizational coherence in the district management of schools?)
2. How does district governance impact classroom practices and dynamics?
(Probe: How does this shape the district's attempts to address the learning needs of the students? Do district decisions and guidelines adequately meet the needs specific to each school?)

3. Can you assess the district in its current state and describe what you would like to see develop in the future?

School Organization

1. In your opinion, what does an ideal school look like?
What rules and policies stand in the way of achieving it?
2. Describe the leadership and governance process within a public school.
How much site-based decision-making (personnel, disciplinary, instructional, and budgetary policy decisions) is allowed in public schools?

The Role of the Community in Improving Education

1. What is the avenue or the motivation for community involvement? H
How can the district bring the parents into the equation?

Charter Schools

1. How has the district responded to the presence of charter schools?
2. The principal and supporting recommendations made by the Mayor's Commission on Education sound like the theory behind the charter school movement. They discuss a school board accountable to the city as a whole, making every school a school of distinction, inviting the participation of parents and the community, linking the schools with diverse resources within the community, and providing extended-day and extended-year programs for students not proficient in reading and math.
Is the city moving to charter school models?
3. Do you feel that charter schools will provide competition within public education?
Other than competition, what variables are missing in the equation of quality education?

APPENDIX B
Teacher Survey

1. Mark the one statement that best corresponds to your current teaching certification status.

- a. I am currently certified to teach in this state.
- b. I am currently certified to teach in another state but not this one.
- c. I am working to obtain certification.
- d. I am not certified and am not currently working to obtain certification.

2. Are you teaching in a subject area in which you are certified to teach? _____

3. How many years, including this year, have you taught at this school? _____

4. How many years of experience have you had in each of these types of schools?

- a. Private School _____
- b. Parochial School _____
- c. Charter School _____
- d. Public School _____
- e. Other (Specify Type and years _____)

5. Are you aware of the school's mission?

- a. Yes
- b. No

If yes, to what extent is the school following the mission?

- a. Very well
- b. Well
- c. Fair
- c. Not very well

6. Rate the importance of the following factors in your decision to seek employment at this school. (NI = Not Important at All, SI = Somewhat Important, NR = Not Relevant, I = Important, VI = Very Important)

- a. More emphasis on academics as opposed to extracurricular activities.
NI SI NR I VI
- b. My interest in being involved in an educational reform effort.
NI SI NR I VI
- c. Academic reputation of this school.
NI SI NR I VI
- d. Parents are committed.
NI SI NR I VI
- e. Safety at school
NI SI NR I VI

- f. Difficult to find other positions.
 NI SI NR I VI
- g. Opportunity to work with like-minded educators.
 NI SI NR I VI
- h. This school has small class sizes.
 NI SI NR I VI
- i. List other factors that motivated you to seek employment at this school.

7. Please rate each of the following statements as to what you expected when you first began working at this school (Initial Expectation) and how you would rate it today (Current Experience).

Circle the appropriate response (T = True, PT = Partly True, DN = Don't Know, PF = Partly False, F = False).

	Initial Expectation					Current Experience				
	T	PT	DN	PF	F	T	PT	DN	PF	F
a. Students will be/are eager and motivated to learn.										
b. The quality of instruction will be/is high.										
c. Students will receive/receive sufficient individual attention.										
d. There will be/is good communication between the school and parents/guardian.										
e. The school will have/has effective leadership and administration.										
f. The school will have/has small class sizes.										

	Initial Expectation					Current Experience				
	T	PT	DN	PF	F	T	PT	DN	PF	F
g. The achievement levels of students will improve/are improving.	T	PT	DN	PF	F	T	PT	DN	PF	F
h. The school will support/is supporting innovative practices.	T	PT	DN	PF	F	T	PT	DN	PF	F
i. Teachers will be/are able to influence the steering and direction of the school.	T	PT	DN	PF	F	T	PT	DN	PF	F
j. There will be/are new professional opportunities for teachers.	T	PT	DN	PF	F	T	PT	DN	PF	F
k. Teachers will be/are committed to the mission of the school.	T	PT	DN	PF	F	T	PT	DN	PF	F
l. Teachers will be/are autonomous and creative in their classes.	T	PT	DN	PF	F	T	PT	DN	PF	F

8. Rate your level of satisfaction with the following aspects of you school. (VD = Very Dissatisfied, D = Dissatisfied, NO = No Opinion, S = Satisfied, VS = Very Satisfied)

a. Relations with the community at large	VD	D	NO	S	VS
b. School mission statement	VD	D	NO	S	VS
c. Ability of the school to fulfill its stated mission	VD	D	NO	S	VS
d. Resources available for instruction	VD	D	NO	S	VS
e. School building and facility	VD	D	NO	S	VS
f. School governance	VD	D	NO	S	VS
g. Administrative leadership of school	VD	D	NO	S	VS
h. Use of flexibility granted to charter schools	VD	D	NO	S	VS

9. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your school? (SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, NO = No Opinion, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree)

a. This school is meeting students' needs that could not be addressed at other local public schools.	SD	D	NO	A	SA
b. The school environment is more conducive to learning than the environment in other local public schools.	SD	D	NO	A	SA
c. Students are safer in this school than other local public schools.	SD	D	NO	A	SA
d. Teachers are disenchanted with what can be accomplished at this school.	SD	D	NO	A	SA
e. Administrators are disenchanted with what can be accomplished at this school.	SD	D	NO	A	SA
f. Teachers are involved in decision making in the school.	SD	D	NO	A	SA
g. The school has sufficient financial resources.	SD	D	NO	A	SA
h. I am satisfied with the school's curriculum.	SD	D	NO	A	SA
i. I think this school has a bright future.	SD	D	NO	A	SA
j. Parents are satisfied with the instruction.	SD	D	NO	A	SA
k. This school has high standards and expectations for students.	SD	D	NO	A	SA
l. Teachers and school leadership are accountable for student achievement/performance.	SD	D	NO	A	SA
m. Students are satisfied with the instruction.	SD	D	NO	A	SA

n. Lack of student discipline hinders my ability to teach and the opportunity for other students to learn.	SD	D	NO	A	SA
o. Teachers have many non-instructional duties.	SD	D	NO	A	SA
p. Students respect their teachers.	SD	D	NO	A	SA
q. I am satisfied with the school's approach to student discipline.	SD	D	NO	A	SA

10. What is the greatest strength of this school?

11. What is the greatest weakness of this school?

12. If you have worked at another public school in the past, what is the biggest difference between that school and the one at which you are currently working?

13. Circle the following characteristics that you *believe* are stronger at your school than at other public schools, whether or not you have taught in other public schools:

- | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| a. School Design | b. Student Achievement |
| c. Curriculum Design | d. Student Discipline |
| e. Quality of Instruction | f. Accountability |
| g. Personal Attention | h. Teacher Empowerment |

14. Please comment on the following topics and compare charter schools to traditional public schools where appropriate.

The school's use of flexibility granted to charter schools:

The school's approach to instruction:

The school's approach to measuring student proficiency:

The school's governance structure:

The school's approach to student discipline:

15. What is your opinion about charter schools? Are they a viable means of education reform? What, if any, doubts do you have about them?

Source: Western Michigan University Evaluation Center (2002).

APPENDIX C
Tables

Table 1. Performance of Independent Charter School Compared to Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) Targets, 2003

Schoolwide Performance	2003	AYP Target	% Below AYP Target
Reading Proficiency (%)	31.7	45	-13.3
Math Proficiency (%)	9.2	35	-25.8
Graduation Rate (%)	50	95	-45
Attendance Rate (%)	88.5	95	-6.5

Source: School Results (2003).

Table 2. Opportunity Gap Between Selected Charter School and Similar Schools

	Independent⁶	Similar Schools⁷	Opportunity Gap
8 th Grade Reading	29	77.6	-48.6%
8 th Grade Math	3.3	59	-55.7%
11 th Grade Reading	36.4	52.6	-16.2%
11 th Grade Math	10	38.1	-28.1%

Source: School Results (2003).

⁶ The percent of proficient and advanced students at Independent Charter School.

⁷ The percent of proficient and advanced students at the highest performing schools serving similar or more disadvantaged students.

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