2020

The Cause and Impact of Charter School Leadership Turnover

Curtis Grant Windham
Bethel University

The Causes and Impact of Charter School Leadership Turnover

Curtis Grant Windham

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of Bethel University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

St. Paul, MN

2020

Approved by

Advisor: Dr. Annette Ziegler

Reader: Dr. Matthew Putz

Reader: Dr. Tracy Reimer

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the causes and impact of charter school leadership turnover. Participants in this study included 10 charter school leaders in the Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota metropolitan area. Data discovered in this study included challenges in the following areas: policy and legal, organizational management, and student and family. Key concepts identified included the benefits of previous leadership experiences, business management experience, which included financial and facility management, and human resources experience. Key challenges identified included support of charter school leader's increased workload, range of skills and previous experience necessary for successful leadership, minimal support systems and lack of centralized district offices, and the personal toll caused by isolation. All data was collected utilizing a qualitative study through individual interviews with participants. Data was synthesized to determine common themes, which represented a minimum ratio of 70% of participants noting the data. Data is limited to the greater Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota metropolitan geographical area.

Acknowledgments

I am deeply indebted to the following:

Spero Academy charter school for giving me the opportunity to lead such an incredible school.

Ms. Donna Piazza, Spero Academy Board Chair. Thank you for supporting this research with such keen insight and interest.

George and Violet Windham, my parents. Thank you for your unwavering support and encouragement during my life's journey. Your belief in me has and will always be a source of strength. Your Godly example has also helped shape and refine my faith, for which I am eternally grateful.

Taylor, Jacob, and Brent, my children. Your support and encouragement have also been a source of inspiration. I love you beyond what words can articulate. My drive has come from your belief in me.

Dawn, my wife. I would not be in this position without you. Your love and support of my educational journey has made this possible. The many long nights you endured and sacrifices you made, which allowed me the opportunity to complete my education, illustrate the selfless love and person you show and are. My love for you is endless.

Bethel University and Dr. Samuel Helgerson, my mentor, friend, and leader. I am eternally grateful for the support and belief you have had in me for many years. I thank you for the opportunity to be a part of the Bethel University Strategic Leadership Department and for your continued encouragement.

Dr. Annette Ziegler, Dr. Tracy Reimer, Dr. Matthew Putz, my advisor and dissertation team. I cannot thank you enough for your support. Your standards for excellence have made me a better person and leader.

The participants in this study. I am eternally grateful for your willingness to share personal challenges and insight. With each reading of this project, I am reminded of your commitment to quality leadership, which ultimately impacts the countless families that look to charter schools to find hope for their children.

The Minnesota Department of Education, and Jennifer Nelson. I am grateful for the partnership that aligned with this study and for your continued patience and support.

Minnesota Association of charter schools, Eugene Piccolo, and Tom DeGree.

Finally, I must thank God. Daily, I strive to live out the example of selflessness you have provide through your Son, Jesus Christ. This work is nothing without the context of looking for ways to find those who are struggling, hurting, and lost, and providing just a glimmer of understanding and hope. I pray that I am a reflection of grace and love, for which I can only give you the honor and credit. Thank you for your grace in my life and for instilling in me the drive to be what you have created me to be. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

Preface

As the executive director of Spero Academy charter school in Minneapolis, Minnesota, I am keenly aware of the challenges of charter school leadership. As I refined my skills in this unique and difficult role, I began to learn of many charter school leaders who faced similar struggles resulting in significant leadership turnover. In my initial review of the causes and impact of these turnovers, I discovered that my previous career experiences and subsequent journey into charter school leadership were quite different, though I also lacked external support and training for the unique expectations placed on charter school leaders. As I identified the skills, experiences, and strengths in my leadership, I also identified missing and needed training and support that could move me from an adequate leader to a strong leader. This personal reflection resulted being able to determine the nature of this study: to better define the causes and impact of charter school leadership turnover. The proposed outcome of this study is to articulate those findings and to define potential means to provide support for individuals in charter school leadership.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction

In 1988, Minnesota's charter school movement began, which resulted in a national flow of expanded school choice options and initiatives. Pipho (1998) wrote:

> Some years back, "choice" was first used to describe open enrollment of students by parents. In Minnesota it first denoted the inter-district choice plan of Gov. Rudy Perpich, a plan that allowed parents more freedom to choose school districts in which they might find programs not offered in their home districts. Within a short time, intra-district choice – choosing the building within a district – came in vogue (p. 261).

By 1998, school choice became so widely accepted that 29 states passed laws allowing for school choice and 33 states approved the new concept of charter schools; more than 1,100 schools nationwide were opened. Additionally, 21 states had various forms of high school postsecondary options (Pipho, 1998). What started as an attempt to allow parents the freedom to find workable alternatives for their students' education culminated in the charter school movement.

While the idea and innovative concept of charter schools allowed for multiple approaches to education, an unintended challenge of the movement became evident with the demands on leadership. Snodgrass (2018) noted that principal turnover was one of the major challenges in traditional public schools; however, the additional leadership demands placed upon charter school directors proved to be an even greater cause of high turnover. Snodgrass (2018) researched the demands directors encountered specific to student performance, school improvement, and the pressures of new policy creations and programs. Charter school directors/principals faced demands not experienced by traditional public school leaders, such as board of directors involvement, fund development , community partnerships that advance the

mission of the school, and other duties that traditional district office staff assume, such as human resources (Snodgrass, 2018). These complex and challenging demands on charter school directors contribute to the subsequent high turnover rates, specifically in the state of Minnesota.

The Minnesota Association of Charter Schools (MACS) gathered recent studies and surveys of charter school directors in Minnesota which showed roughly 15% of all Minnesota charter school directors planned to leave their schools within the next two years (MACS, 2018), though the annual turnover rate among charter school directors is closer to 25%. Fullan (2001) stated, "Principal turnover is concerning because of the pivotal role that principals play and are expected to play in leading school improvement and because of the time research indicates that improvement can take – 5-7 years" (p. 87). The increased workload, expectations, knowledge gap, and school improvement processes are at risk when charter school director turnover is high. Sun and Ni (2016) stated, "Given principals' significant contribution to school effectiveness, a growing number of studies have shown that principal turnover matters for schools' organizational capacity and student learning" (p. 146), thus suggesting that further research into causation, ramifications, and potential resources are needed in the context of charter school leadership, specifically in the state of Minnesota.

Statement of the Problem

The Center for Education Reform (2018) published a study on charter schools, which stated that 44 states nationwide support the charter school movement; the charter school movement continues to grow in the United States. Sun and Ni (2016) conducted a seven-year study in Utah and found an average of 26% of all charter school directors and/or principals resigned from their schools annually. New York shared concern over the high charter school director turnover rate when compared against traditional schools (Sun & Li, 2016):

> The reasons for the disparity in principal turnover between these two school types have not been well explored. Given the importance of principal leadership to student learning, the lack of explanations for the significantly higher turnover rate in charter schools stands as a gap in the literature that should be addressed to advance our understanding of who left from charter schools and the potential impact of this turnover (p. 146).

A report by the Center on Reinventing Public Education (2007), addressed the uniqueness of charter schools and concluded that the distinctive characteristics of charter schools may contribute to the instability in charter school leadership. They found valid concerns over the ramifications of these leadership changes and their disruptive effects on education and student success. Areas of concern included legal and policy understanding, mission and vision continuity, retraining and education in business administration, and community engagement (Center for Education Reform, 2018).

When exploring charter school leadership and the consequences of frequent leadership change, one major area of consideration must be leadership experience and background. The following statistics reported by MACS (2018) outlined the typical paths to charter school leadership:

- 80% of respondents worked as teachers in public schools;
- 17% worked as teachers in the school at which they became the director;
- 27% led a business;
- 34% led a nonprofit corporation.

These percentages support the reality that most charter school leaders have graduated into their leadership roles through both typical and traditional routes that include instruction and academic achievement. However, a large percentage of these leaders appearing to be lacking a

key element: leadership training and experience. The MACS (2018) survey supported this concern by reporting 59% of all responding charter school leaders had been in their role for four years or less, with only 53% having prior leadership roles in either a charter or traditional school.

The challenges of charter schools as educational entities in and of themselves, the lack of experience among charter school leaders, and the negative impact of leadership turnover demonstrate the critical need for more study. To remain healthy and supported by the larger academic community, continued growth in the understanding of charter school leadership is necessary.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how the following factors affect charter school leaders and their decisions to leave their positions: a) policy and legal experience, b) organizational management and leadership experience, and c) student and family interactions. In contrast to roles held by principals in traditional public schools, charter school leaders are faced with a wide range of complex variables that are unique to public charter schools; these variables mandate a more expansive level of leadership experience or expertise (Sun & Li, 2016). This study explored these factors to better understand their influence on charter school leadership turnover.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the policy and legal experience, organizational management and leadership experience, and interpersonal experiences that influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school. Specifically, four research questions were considered.

RQ1: How did policy and legal factors influence a charter school leader's decision to

leave their school?

RQ2: How did organizational management factors influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school?

RQ3: How did student and family factors influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school?

RQ4: What do charter school leaders view as the greatest challenge in charter school leadership?

Significance of This Study

The National charter school Law Ranking & Scorecard (Center for Education Reform, 2018) stated:

> Charter Schools are public schools of choice. The simple and original principle of charter schooling is that charter schools should receive enhanced operational autonomy in exchange for being held strictly accountable for the outcome they promise to achieve. When charter school laws honor this principle, innovative, academically excellent charter schools flourish. In turn, schools that fail to produce strong outcomes close (p. 4).

This study aimed to address the accountability standard by which charter schools are judged. Accountability calls for a better understanding of how to recognize leadership gaps and reasons for disruptive transition, how to analyze the ramifications of disruptive leadership transitions, and determine how to mitigate the disruptions and help leaders develop deeper support systems to prevent and/or aid their schools in times of transition.

The findings of this study may provide clarity regarding the difference in leadership between traditional public school principals and charter school leaders, which is an area that has been designated as a need for further study. Sun and Li (2016) suggested four areas of

differentiated environmental areas for consideration: “Principal characteristics, principal leadership practices, school contexts, and working conditions” (p. 147). Principal characteristics refer to the innate abilities or default personal characteristics of the individual leader. Principal leadership practices reflect more of the leadership styles and individual leader’s characteristics that may impact the organization on all levels. School context encompasses the locale, demographics, school focus, and other factors that help define the objective and climate of the school. Working conditions address the desired internal culture of the school as well as the actual climate.

Li, Sun, and Rorrer (2015) noted that principals in a traditional public school setting were more likely to remain in the education system than charter school leaders were when changing positions. The full understanding of this trend is unknown, but it does suggest that leadership within the charter school environment is by nature more fluid as charter schools are able to attract different leaders and leadership styles. This allows charter school leaders to view their role as more of a “stopping point” (p. 409) rather than as the “stepping stone” (p. 410) that is more typical with traditional school principals.

Li, Sun, and Rorrer’s (2015) findings also indicated the skills held by charter school leaders may lead to non-educational professional opportunities once they exit their leadership roles. Traditional school leadership seemingly attracts and maintains a higher percentage of leaders given that those positions offer a more focused leadership opportunity that cannot be filled from external sources (Campbell, 2010). The pool of leaders in charter schools as compared to traditional schools has a direct correlation with longevity in a leadership role. In 2007-2008, the Center on Reinventing Public Education found that “28% of principals in charter schools left their previous schools, compared to 20% in traditional public schools. In another

survey . . . 71% of 400 charter school leaders indicated that they expected to leave their current jobs within 5 years" (p. 411). These numbers illustrate the differences between traditional school leadership and charter school leadership with regard to tenure and longevity.

When looking at the reasons, ramifications, and resources needed for successful charter schools and their leadership, the significance in the educational field is based on the impact of these issues on student success (Finn, Manno & Wright, 2017; Blitz, 2011). Each issue must be explored within the scope of each director's leadership, as well as in the context of previous experience, organizational management, environmental demands, and personal skills and abilities relative to the different expectations and workloads (Ni, Sun, & Rorrer, 2015).

Definitions

The following definitions are unique to this study.

Charter school:

> In Minnesota, a charter school is a public school created with a unique focus to attract and educate students in a non-traditional manner. All charter schools must have a clearly identified objective that differentiates the school from traditional public schools.

Board of directors:

> A category of leadership unique to a charter school, its board of directors is the governing body of the charter school. The board of directors has the responsibility of policy management/creation, fiduciary oversight, and maintaining a working relationship, management and oversight of the charter school director. A charter school board is responsible for one charter school, which is also its own district. The school may be comprised of multiple campuses, all of which fall under the authority of the same board.

Minnesota Association of Charter Schools (MACS):

A non-profit organization that helps provide advocacy and legislative lobbying support for charter schools; it also provides training opportunities for executive directors and school board members.

Charter school leader:

The executive director is the paid leader of the school. This role is similar to that of the superintendent and/or school principal in a traditional public school.

Authorizer:

A college, university, or recognized organization authorized under Minnesota Statutes section 124D.10, subdivision 3, and Board Policy 3.28, and system procedure 3.28.1, to serve a dual purpose: ensure that a charter school operates within state statutes, and serve as a mediator between the Minnesota Department of Education and the school.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

The organization of the remainder of the study began with a narrowing approach to the literature review. The beginning of the literature review includes data and analysis from charter schools across the entire country and then narrows focus to Minnesota as a point of comparison. The methodology outlines the sources that were used to share narrative information as well as the uniform questions that allowed for synthesis of information and subsequent trend analysis, which were carried into chapter four. Chapter five concludes with a discussion of the findings and implications for potential impact and findings to the research question.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Origins of the Charter School Movement

The origins of the charter school movement can be traced back to the concept of *outcome-based schools,* which began in 1991 (Bierlein & Mulholland, 1994). Soon after, Minnesota became the first state to create legislation affirming the creation of charter schools (Piccalo, 2013). As of 2018, the charter movement had expanded to 44 states having legislation in support of charter schools, with over 7000 schools and almost 3.2 million students enrolled nationwide (National Alliance of Public charter schools, 2018). While the explosion of charter schools is certainly remarkable, so too are the significant number of charter school closures. A study conducted in 2013 showed that between 1992-2013, 6700 charter schools opened, yet 1036 schools closed; 15% being closed for cause (Wilkens, 2013) by the state or other governing body. This means that schools were closed for reasons that included low enrollment, fiscal mismanagement, lack of institutional control, and lack of governance oversight. While charter school closures have had an impact on the public's perception of these non-traditional schools, families have continued to seek this public alternative to education in traditional public school districts (Blitz, 2011).

The appeal of charter schools. Finn, Manno, and Wright (2017), and Blitz (2011) addressed the phenomenal growth of charter schools by focusing on how parents were attracted to the schools when looking for better academic options for their students. Finn et al. noted that charters accounted for the majority of increased numerical growth of all K-12 enrollments between 2006-2017, affirming the total number of students reaching over 3 million students in charters. This growth demonstrated how many parents sought new, creative approaches to education and instructional techniques. Due to charter school autonomy, leaders of charter

schools were able to more readily align with changing feelings toward innovative approaches to education and offer programs that traditional public schools (TPS) struggled to implement by reason of a difficult and tenuous process found in TPS districts (Blitz, 2011). Blitz (2011) also stated:

> As leaders of choice schools, charter school leaders must be consistently cognizant of the school's relationship to current and prospective parents. A charter school's leader works to attract parents whose choice of the school carries significant weight in measuring a charter school's success. What a charter school does to attract parents is critical for sustainability (p. 365).

Consequently, charter school leaders must continue the work of aligning innovative approaches and instruction to meet the climate and desires of parents and the community.

Autonomy and flexibility to create innovative schools attracted parents, which became foundational to the charter school movement. In TPS, innovation was seemingly missing or severely hampered due to the lengthy processes necessary to make changes within a TPS district. Alsbury (2004) addressed this issue by outlining the desired change in many districts as TPS superintendents aspired to bring new approaches and ideas, which were different from previous administration and also "represent(ed) a changing set of community values" (p. 372), but were still met with opposition. Blitz (2011) noted that principals of charter schools readily compared their leadership roles to that of district superintendents but with more autonomy to make innovative decisions and changes; those changes often represent a change in community values and desires.

The imperfections of charter schools. Finn, Manno, and Wright (2017) noted that while many charter schools did very well, a large portion struggled in the area of leadership. The most common area of problematic leadership was that of burnout due to charter schools being run by limited staff, limited or non-existent support from resident districts or charter cooperatives, and/or extremely driven founders that worked to exhaustion trying to ensure school success (Finn et. al, 2017). In addition to burnout, the autonomy of leadership did not ensure "more effective behaviors or practices of instructional leadership" (Gawlik, 2018, p. 543). Gawlik (2018) noted that the foundational elements of charter school leadership meant to provide more creative and effective practices has been limited due to lack of additional administrative support.

Autonomy can also create problems due to the limited oversight in the area of ethics. Karanxha (2013) stated that while unethical acts occur in almost every area of life, the typical educational system not being exempt, it becomes an even greater impediment to the acceptance of the charter movement when autonomy is believed and shared as being the key to educational progress. Unethical practices can and do occur, and with the lack of oversight and autonomy in tow, those acts perpetuate negative feelings toward charter schools.

The Center on Reinventing Public Education (2008) released an opinion that outlined how the simple uniqueness of many charters and their approach/mission/vision can make them vulnerable when leadership changes occur due to trying to attract so-called like-minded individuals who support and understand the goals of the school. The Center on Reinventing Public Education further described this vulnerability by noting how these new ideas create the need for like-minded leadership to navigate through the unique nature of each charter school without losing focus on the mission of the school.

Defining leadership turnover. Given the origins of charters, autonomy, and the challenges that could be present in charter schools, turnover of leadership has become a major challenge to long-term success. Rangel (2018) attempted to define turnover by outlining potential reasons and variations under which leaders departed: not returning to the same school, leaving the principal position altogether, voluntarily transitioning to a new role, involuntarily transferring to a new role, satisfaction levels, personal preferences for leaving without stating another reason, pay scales, better schools (as defined by the leader or community), or retirement. Connotatively, turnover usually carries a negative image; however, this might not always be the case. While "principal characteristics, principal leadership practices, school context, or working conditions" (Sun & Ni, 2016, p. 147) contribute to the act of a leadership change, the fact remains that leadership change is difficult.

Consequences of Leadership Turnover

Wilkens (2013) contended, "The number one reason why schools fail is rotation of leadership" (p. 232). Given the complex challenges inherent in a charter school, instability in leadership is most often detrimental. The challenge facing charter schools as autonomous entities may often add additional obstacles to finding good leadership that aligns with the mission of the school. Kranxha (2013) stated, "The relationship between . . . school districts and the charter school, even during times of success [could still be] contentious and antagonistic" (p. 593). This adds clarity to the leadership challenges in maintaining trust at the board and authorizer levels, even in times of stability. Mitchel (2015) noted that turnover matters tremendously on all levels, including the ability to operate within financial constraints as funding entities may pull away due to instability of leadership.

Leadership, Comparisons, and Preparation

Charter school leadership includes three areas of school oversight: a) the executive director/principal, b) the board of directors, and c) the school's authorizer. While the role of the principal may be easier to clarify, the roles of the other two leadership entities are more challenging to define. Karanxha (2013) defined the principal's role as "those who are directly responsible for managing the schools and serving students and parents" (p. 580). Boards and authorizers have vastly different duties but can create leadership challenges given that their roles are focused on policy and fiduciary matters. It is also their duty to provide governance to the charter school leaders (Finn et al., 2017)

Governance structure – boards and authorizers. Finn et al. (2017) noted that one reason the charter school movement struggles, specifically leadership of charters, is due to the "unanticipated and unresolved problems related to the complexities of its approach to governance, which requires careful coordination among authorizers, boards . . . and school leaders" (p. 63). In looking specifically at the contribution that boards can make to governance struggles, it is important to begin with an understanding of the role of the board. Karanxha (2013) outlined the clear duties that boards are intended to address.

> As a policy setting body, its duties included selecting the school's administrator; ratifying staff recommendation; reviewing and approving the budget; reviewing and approving financial obligations and debt; entering into contractual obligations; overseeing the broad guidelines of the curriculum and charter agreement; ratifying and monitoring any changes in the school charter, acting as a liaison with the community at large; fundraising; developing personnel policies; job descriptions, and management of the operations plan;

ratifying the student code of conduct and disciplinary policy; and strategic planning. (p. 589-590).

Based on this information, daily leadership responsibilities should be assigned to the principal or director. When boards begin to extend their roles to the general operation of the school, the role of the principal becomes less defined, frustrating, and can lead to turnover, and boards who micromanage tend to force good leaders into burnout. Page and Levine (1996) addressed this issue by noting that when boards overstep their clearly defined roles, there is a problem with the school leadership, thus increasing the likelihood of principal turnover. While it is rare to see an authorizer extend this level of crossed-boundary oversight, this issue has occurred.

When charter school boards over-extend their leadership, thus challenging the principal's authority, conflict is likely, including turnover at the board level. Horn and Miron (2000) found that when conflict between boards and principals occurred, the broad-based turnover of board members and weak[end] charter school boards contributed to charter school dysfunction and abrupt leadership exodus. Grady and Bryant (1989) noted, prior to the charter movement school boards on any level could negatively impact and disrupt the educational process by interfering with local leadership, thus leading to even more disruption due to turnover based on frustration from the principal role.

As responsibilities of the principal increase due to the growth of a school, Alsbury (2004) noted that politically motivated turnover also increased. Boards or members of boards would begin to take on more responsibilities, thus negating the leadership of the principal and/or working to remove a principal from leadership due to a real or imagined lack of skills needed to handle the increased workload. Johnston (2000) surmised that it was reasonable for board

interference to grow in this scenario, resulting in concerns over control and subsequent leadership turnover.

Charter principals and superintendents. While local boards of charter schools may in fact create the situations that cause principals to leave, traditional school districts frequently do the same with their superintendents. This provides a comparison of roles and political influence. Alsbury (2004) noted that superintendent turnover was much higher in larger districts with heightened levels of politically motivated challenges, which is similar to the noted increase in board politics when charter schools grow. When considering the leadership responsibilities of a superintendent compared with a charter school principal, the similarities are more pronounced between charter school principals and TPS principals (Alsbury, 2004).

The history and background of charter school principals. Within the charter movement, in the context of the need for quality leadership, Ni, Sun, and Rorrer (2015) outlined the unique comparison between requirements for charter school leadership and TPS leadership. It was noted that the average charter school leader has significantly less experience, especially at their current school, and less educational leadership in general. The average charter school leader is also less likely to hold a master's degree or higher as most charter schools do not require this level of education or an administration license. "Such attributes are often associated with an increased likelihood of turnover because [charter school principals] indicated not only low levels of expertise in educational leadership, but also less investment in the profession" (p. 413). It is reasonable to attribute less education and instructional experiences to the charter school principal turnover issue (Sun & Ni, 2016). Rangel (2018) broke this down further:

- more experience = less likely to leave;
- more education = more likely to change schools, but stay in education;

- less experience = more likely to leave a school;
- less education = more likely to leave the principal profession.

Other related factors to consider, according to Sun and Ni (2016) are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Related Demographic Factors

Charter school	Traditional Public Schools
74.9 White	88% White
Less training, on average, in instruction	More training, on average, in instruction
More business training	Less business training
Less education, on average	More education, on average
Less educational leadership	More educational leadership
Majority with three or less years of educational leadership	Majority have four or more years in educational leadership

While education and experience in instruction and curriculum may present a challenge, the mission of a particular charter school is what draws committed leaders to the school (Campbell, 2010). By engaging the leadership role in an attempt to fulfill a sense of significance, charter leaders tend to challenge the status quo, and even employ a personal goal of fighting against a perceived antiquated system with a seemingly outlaw mentality (Griffin & Wohlstetter, 2001). This initial passion can be a driving factor for positive change; however, it can also lead many to burnout and transition away from a charter school because progress seems lacking (Griffin & Wohlstetter, 2001).

Responsibility comparisons. Background comparisons in education and experience are certainly a point of consideration, numerous other comparisons of actual job responsibilities between charter schools and TPS must also be considered as potentially contributing to burnout.

Comparisons of demands. Research on the responsibilities of charter school leaders is scarce. Review of the research suggested that charter school leadership roles, when compared to TPS principals, found more differences than commonality due to the governance systems, organizational structure, and autonomy (Gawlik, 2018). Finn et al. (2017) noted the disparity of responsibilities by equating charter school leaders to unit managers rather than to traditional educators, based on the wide range of authority and the heavy weight of leadership responsibilities. Murphy and Shiffman (2002) noted the role of the principal in a charter school could be termed as the chief administrator, the obvious title of principal, a director/executive director, a dean, the CEO, or headmaster. Blitz (2011) addressed the comparison to charter school leaders as more of a private school leader or district superintendent on a much smaller scale than a TPS principal given the tasks and roles they assume.

A charter school leader can encompass leadership skills in the creation or start-up of a charter school, while TPS may have district office personnel that specialize in these skill sets. Charter school leaders who are part of a start-up must accomplish tasks that stretch far beyond instructional leadership roles (Bierlein & Mulholland, 1994).

Support and the singularity of leadership. When looking at similarities in school leadership, both TPS and charter school principals do have the power and responsibility of shaping the vision of the school (Campbell, 2010). Vision is different from mission. Vision is how the mission will be carried out, while the mission is the definition of why the school exists.

Within this vision, both charters and TPS must develop methods of engaging parents and students, managing resources, and balancing the internal and external societal climate. While all leaders should be deeply committed to the mission of the school, the added pressures of charter leadership can begin to tear away that mindset, which is more impactful on leaders with less experience (Campbell, 2010). One interesting dynamic is that the higher the salary, the more likely a principal is to stay, regardless of the pressures (Sun & Ni, 2016), in both TPS and charter schools.

Within the available research, it becomes evident that similarities do exist between charter school leaders and TPS leaders, but the added responsibilities of a charter school leader compound the frustration and lead to higher turnover rates. With both roles having instructional demands, the added management roles in charters quickly establish a clear difference in each role (Gawlik, 2018). These additional roles include business management, facility management, human resource coordination, finance management, budgeting, student and staff recruitment, and working with boards and authorizers (Gawlik, 2018).

The literature suggested that this leads to a lack of emotional and professional support for charter school leaders. “Principals leave for many reasons; workload, expensive personal costs related to long hours, local and state policies that limit principal’s decision-making power, and isolation. They suggest that . . . specific solutions are needed to improve retention” (Sage Journals, 2015). Charter school leadership needs the support of teachers, staff, and the governing board to help with the many leadership roles (Campbell, 2010); however, these groups may inherently be unable to help with the emotional needs and sense of isolation. Bierlein and Mulholland (1994) illustrated this point by acknowledging that many teachers or fellow administration team members prefer not to become actively involved in major decisions, which

means the leader must handle the situation(s) alone and remain silent regarding the real need for assistance. There is a fear prevalent in any organization wherein asking for help gives the appearance of weakness, which could, it is feared, lead to dismissal. This fear, which then causes silence and subsequent isolation, will manifest as burnout and ultimately turnover (Bierlein & Mulholland, 1994).

Overwhelming responsibilities. It then becomes necessary to define which of the charter school leader's overwhelming responsibilities are due to the complexities of the role (Gawlik, 2018). The comparison between charter school leaders and superintendents of small districts unveils the shared demand of maintaining the vision of the big picture, while considering the various perspectives of every stakeholder (Blitz, 2011). The consequences of violating this trust or losing respect is not just loss of students, but loss of major revenue, loss of support from the board, and ultimately, burnout/turnover and school closure. When the unique leadership roles and responsibilities are challenged or suspect in a charter school, the ramifications are much greater because they are faster to manifest and culminate in a negative result, and do not allow for the levels of support that a traditional district can provide given the smaller support system inherent in a typical charter school (Blitz, 2011).

Recruiting all levels of stakeholders falls directly on the shoulders of the charter school leader (Ni, Sun & Rorrer, 2015). Thus, any level of dissatisfaction from students, parents, negotiated relationships with vendors, authorizers, or even the board, in addition to teacher turnover or dissatisfaction, and all basic business partnerships can create outcomes that are overwhelming and isolating. "The bottom line is that, while some may view these new tasks as stimulating, others may find implementing charter schools overwhelming. In short, charters are

not for everyone" (Bierlein & Mulholland, 1994, p. 39) given their tendency to have limited emotional and personal support.

Preparation for the job

Passion for the position is not enough to find true success as a charter school leader, and while a good fit is critical, the job can still be difficult because of the uniqueness of each school compared to a TPS (Zehr, 2010). Bierlein and Mulholland (1994) noted this concern early on in the charter movement:

> Expanded decision-making authority, however, presents a serious leadership concern even for those eager to assume such responsibility. Are school personnel adequately prepared to manage what is, essentially, a small business? Perhaps not. Most principals currently focus their energies on instructional activities, not financial and management matters; and most teachers are justifiably hesitant to make personnel or budgetary decisions for which they have no training and that take time away from the classroom (p. 38).

Within this context, passion is simply not enough and must be accompanied with the skills necessary for the position. Areas of expertise, or at least a minimal level experience, should include school facilities, materials, management skills, administration, financial management, fundraising, human resources/capital, and community engagement (Campbell, 2010; Bloomberg, Nathan, & Berman, 2008; Lefebvre & Thomas, 2017). Without these skills, burnout may very well occur as might the possibility of school failure due to being ill-equipped (Lefebvre & Thomas, 2017). Campbell (2010) noted that it is a case where previous experience in these areas does matter. While previous skills are beneficial to the success of a charter school principal, so too are the skills possessed by the charter school board. Bloomberg et al. (2008) identified the

same skills as necessary among board members to help offset the absence of any of these skills within the principal's abilities or background, which in turn decreases burnout and increases sustainability.

Practical experience, skills, and similar skillsets within a charter school board can be enhanced with educational leadership programs (Sun & Ni, 2016). While beneficial, these traditional programs still fall well short of the needed skills to help prevent burnout and turnover. With 74% of charter leaders possessing degrees in a traditional education setting (Campbell, 2010), more business and management training is deemed necessary for charter school leadership. Previous training in education will be beneficial in the areas of instruction and curriculum; however, traditional business-oriented courses as part of a traditional principal licensure program do not fully encompass the demands associated with leading a charter school. Along with limited educational content in charter school leadership, ongoing professional development opportunities and charter specific mentoring programs are rare, which in turn adds to the decrease in the retention rate of charter leaders (Sun & Ni, 2016).

Reviewing this data suggests that on average, charter school leaders have more business training than TPS principals, which helps with the management of a charter school. From the research, charter school leaders have a more extensive educational background than business background (MACS, 2018). While it may appear that business management experience is present in charter schools, a comparison between charter school and TPS Leadership shows around 10-20% of charter school leaders have business management skills or business education compared with 5-10% of TPS principals with the same skills (MACS). The data suggests the perfect leader possessing both management skills and instructional skills is difficult to find leading to higher levels of turnover when compared to TPS principals with a more singular leadership focus.

Struggles Endured by Charter Schools

In analyzing backgrounds and responsibilities, the next point of consideration is to analyze the struggles that come with differences of responsibilities and comparisons, while addressing needed skills in charter school leadership.

Obvious challenges. A lesser noted topic of the cause of charter school leadership struggle may simply be ineptness (Gereluk, 2000). Previously explored topics addressed the needed expertise for success; however, there is a need to consider leaders who assume the role believing they have the necessary skills and background to lead a school. While some leaders may have limited experience, they may still find themselves inept due to minimal knowledge of how to manage staff, or deal with areas such as the legalities of human resources (Campbell, 2010, Gawlik, 2018), or school safety, which requires a working knowledge of city ordinances and public spaces (Campbell, 2010; Gawlik, 2018, Sun & Ni, 2016). Additional factors that may contribute to leadership challenges include collegial school culture, inexperienced teachers who can cause problems and/or simply need more training, and levels of engagement both pro and con within the school community (Hill et at., 2001, Sun & Ni, 2016).

Justification of existence. Another major struggle is a belief that charter schools are bad for education, thus necessitating a constant defense of the school's existence (Colombo, 2016; Maranto, 2004). Colombo (2016) added that the public frustration even includes how some charters are able to circumvent the educational system – the rules and structures under which traditional public schools operate – simply because charters are different, thus justifying their existence. This leads to even more challenges, as opponents believe that charters are actually private schools taking public funds, and subsequently downplay any legitimate accomplishment that a charter may experience (Finn et al., 2017, Maranto, 2004).

Most research on charter schools appears to be highly politicized; it is often difficult to navigate through information due to both advocates and opponents selectively choosing studies and/or data that will enhance or support their polarizing positions (Harvey, 2011). It then becomes easy to validate the frustration of maintaining any sense of worth as a charter school when feeling the consistent downplay of positive contributions to the educational system, thus resulting in stress and burnout (Blitz, 2011).

Accountability demands. Not unique to charter schools is the demand of accountability in educational growth (Ni, Sun, & Rorrer, 2015). Due to the nature of innovative education and alternative learning environments, pressure for accountability is not just on the education of the student, but in the viability of the school in general (Maranto, 2004). Charters can run the risk of becoming stagnant, which in turn lessens the attraction, creating a situation where few students enroll and the viability of the charter school is challenged (Blitz, 2011; Lefebvre & Thomas, 2017). The result is a constant push-pull relationship between innovation to support the concept of innovative education and tracking longitudinal data that supports the viability of the innovative approach.

Recruitment and enrollment. The demand for enrollment in charters is growing with competition amongst unique and innovative schools (Maranto, 2004). When one school finds a niche that attracts students, other similar schools may follow; however, state guidelines of the creation of charter schools outline that a charter is intended to fill a void in educational opportunities, not to replicate successful existing schools. There are exceptions to this practice, which include charter schools that provide a focused special education vision. Some traditional districts within the Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota geographical area have created intermediate schools to handle special education students. Three charter schools in the same area have a

primary focus of special education with a goal of working with students that have either autism spectrum disorder or are deaf, thus somewhat duplicating traditional district schools. With successful recruitment comes the challenge of recruiting a special niche of student demographics, which has created the perception of segregation (Hill & Lake, 2010). McKinney (1996) noted that charter schools cannot enforce any type of eligibility standard, which is an existing misconception that many leaders must defend. Charter schools are public schools and cannot discriminate or deny any student entrance into the school regardless of the focus or vision of the school.

Recruitment of quality staff – school viability. The negative perception of charter schools can lead to further challenges in recruiting quality staff, which in turn impacts school success and viability. Lefebvre and Thomas (2017) addressed this by challenging the ideology of the charter movement as being a place of innovative education which should draw quality teachers. Given the challenges of recruiting high quality teachers who stand in missional alignment with the school, it can be surmised that leaders become disheartened in the hiring process when teacher quality and mission focus are not in sync. This trend may then lead to subpar teachers and accountability concerns, creating a domino effect that hampers the school's ability to attract quality teachers into a less-than-successful environment (Lefebvre & Thomas, 2017).

Unsuccessful recruitment is not the only staffing concern raised by opponents of charter schools. Quality leadership also impacts retention for all teachers (Player, Youngs, Perrone & Grogan, 2017). Additional recruitment issues arise if teachers question the ability of the charter leader to provide leadership that is supportive, visionary, ethical, instructional, and intellectually stimulating; staff turnover may increase. Recruitment in new schools may be especially difficult

because there is limited foundation on which to base the viability of the school to begin with (Ni, Sun, & Rorrer, 2015).

The age and experience levels of staff in charter schools have also created a recruiting challenge. Charters tend to attract newer and younger teachers; younger and less educated staff also fill support positions (e.g., educational assistants or paraprofessionals). Since some of these positions do not require a degree, staff members in those positions add to the challenge of leading less established and educated personnel; some may even be working on their degree while filling these roles. Therefore, to be successful, principals need to have some working knowledge of understanding how to work with this potential challenging population (Gawlik, 2018), while also considering the desire of younger staff to work in more unique mission driven environments.

School characteristics. School characteristics impact charter school leadership engagement and retention. In many elementary schools, retention is higher due to the higher engagement and personal contact between the leader and the rest of the staff, thus providing a more collegial atmosphere (Player et al., 2017). Conversely, charters experience higher turnover than TPS because charters are more mission driven, which increases the difficulty in attracting the right leadership, and keeping quality leadership in place if that mission is challenged or altered (Sun & Ni, 2016). While it may seem that existing staff members could become a recruiting pool for leadership roles, current staff members may find the high costs of time, training, and pressure to be barriers to assuming those roles.

Financial considerations and benefits are also a challenge in retention. Charter school leadership roles are typically paid less than those of TPS (Minnesota Association of Charter Schools, 2018), and most charter schools do not have unions, thus there is no collective

bargaining, which leads to constant fear of job security and/or salary negotiations on an individual basis (Sun & Ni, 2016). Charter schools are able to utilize flexible salary schedules to attract staff; however, leadership or staff can look for better opportunities if continuity of salary is deemed to be unfair or unequal (Sun & Ni, 2016). The challenge for leadership becomes the frustration of attempting to retain staff that are always on the watch for better compensation packages at other schools given the lower and fluid compensation packages typically found in charters. While some charter school staff do choose to stay in the charter school system given their desire to work within the desired missional focus and lack of union control, benefits and compensation comparison with traditional public districts still present a challenge for retention.

While challenges of leadership may lead to turnover, it is important to identify the leading causes of frustration among charter school leaders in Minnesota. The following data outlines the top 10 challenges that Minnesota charter leaders face (MACS, 2018). These challenges are listed from most significant to least significant.

1. Working with the school board of directors
2. Creating academic/career opportunities for graduating students
3. Maintaining focus of school
4. Complying with state and federal law/policy
5. Acquiring or managing facilities
6. Attracting students
7. Raising funds and fiscal management
8. Engaging parents
9. Attracting qualified teachers
10. Other

Comparison of Charter School Leader and Traditional School Leader Tenure

Existing research supports the fact that there are clear differences between Charter leaders and TPS principals. However, one area of similarity between TPS and charters is the relationship between tenure and turnover.

Across the country, principal turnover data varies, although not significantly. From a federal perspective, 28-30% of charter school leaders have been in their position for two years or less, compared with 16-20% of TPS principals (Campbell, 2010; National Center for Education Statistics, 2009) with an annual average of 28.8% turnover (Ni, Sun & Rorrer, 2015). The average stay of a superintendent leading urban districts is roughly three years, a position which has been shown to be comparable in workload to a charter school leader (Johnston, 2000; Mitchel, 2015). This suggests that if the comparison holds, the average charter leader will be in their position between two and three years. Ni, Sun and Rorrer (2015) looked at statistics between 2004-2010 and confirmed this trend, noting that the average tenure of a charter leader is 2.95 years. In Utah, the rate of charter school principal turnover ranged from 14-44% annually, with an average of 26% turnover (Sun & Ni, 2016). While the turnover rate seems to be comparable across the country, the rationale for turnover varies; Campbell (2010) noted an example in which 10% plan to retire annually.

Beyond the initial two to three years, the longevity of tenure also varies as to cause and future plans. Seventy-one percent of charter leaders plan to move within five years of leadership, while "only a handful said they plan to take on a similar position at another charter school" (Campbell, 2010, p.3) despite the challenges that led to burnout in their current school (Center on Reinventing Public Education, 2008). What this suggests is that early in the tenure of a charter school leader, stress quickly causes burnout. Even charter leaders with more experience

encounter the struggles and challenges, which frequently lead to turnover (Center on Reinventing Public Education, 2008).

Data that illustrates high levels of turnover in charter leaders compared to the role of a superintendent demonstrates the continued parallel pattern. Karanxha (2013) noted that one charter school within a larger charter system had six directors in nine years with most of the rationale for turnover based on poor relations with the board and the authorizer. Similarly, Dallas (Texas) Public Schools had six superintendents in nine years, resulting in retention issues in other leadership roles such as the special education director, which experienced four turnovers five years (Johnston, 2000).

Minnesota charter school data. The data collected by the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools (MACS, 2018) provides a state level profile of charter school leaders. Of 164 charter leaders surveyed, 84 responded, indicating input from 51% of total charter school leadership in the following information.

- 88% held a master's degree or higher
- 53% held a valid Minnesota administration license
- 80% have worked as teachers
- The average years of experience leading a charter school: five years
- Average work week: 61 hours
- Highest percent of time spent on duties relating to organizational management
- 53% report at least three additional administrative personnel
- Average time respondents planned to stay at their current job: seven years
- 24% will retire after leaving their current position
- 82% earned their highest degree in education

- 27% led a business prior to joining a charter school
- 34% led a nonprofit organization prior to their charter role
- 59% indicated they would like to spend more time on instructional leadership
- 50% indicated they would like to spend more time on strategic planning
- 43% indicated they would like to spend more time to spend on public relations
- 20% indicated they would like to spend more time to spend on organizational management
- 31% indicated they would like to spend less time on staff, student, family politics
- Passion for the school's mission was the most important reason for taking the job

Impact of Turnover

Wilkins (2013) stated, "Many, though certainly not all charter schools turnover . . . principals as if they were unlimited in supply or infinitely fungible. High turnover rates are certainly notable, because they may diminish supply – beyond what can be sustainably replenished over time" (p. 231). High levels of turnover may suggest that others who may be interested in charter school principal roles simply see the turnover rates and rationale and want no part of the immense responsibility and stress load. Turnover could also be charter school leaders are simply choosing something that is more appealing and less demanding.

Where charter school leaders are going. Charter school leaders typically do not return to TPS in leadership roles because they have limited or lack of necessary credentials, which means "when charter school leaders left, they tended to move to non-principal positions or leave the public school system altogether instead of moving to another school as a principal" (Ni, Sun & Rorrer, 2015, p. 409). The ramifications of this exit are a removal of experience, good or

bad, from the charter system, thus limiting any possibility of learning how to better prepare and support charter Leaders (Ni et al, 2015.).

Charter school leadership positions can also be viewed as a stopping point compared to a TPS principal position that is often viewed as more of a steppingstone to the next higher position (Ni, Sun & Rorrer, 2015, p. 409-410). When a charter leader assumes a leadership role, this position is usually an end point on an educational leadership journey. Data suggests that charter leaders do not go on to other schools, but leave education altogether, thus creating a career stopping point in education. Conversely, most TPS principals go on to other principal roles (Ni et al.), which allows for continuity of information and experience within the district so that learned information can be used to better the TPS system. To keep quality leaders, a charter school works hard to recruit the right fit; however, they must also develop critical and necessary supports to retain leaders and retain the institutional knowledge that will help the singular school grow while also contributing to the entire charter movement. With the added managerial, leadership, instructional, and curriculum demands, finding the perfect person is critical to ensure charter school success in both singular schools and entire charter systems.

Ideas for betterment and future success. In 2015, research into the problem of burnout and turnover found that addressing these issues required an investment in leadership development programs that included building leadership skills and learning how to manage people, both of which are foundational elements in any leadership position. Research by the Data Quality Campaign found the need to provide more focused mentoring programs or mandated peer networks (Sage Journals, 2015). State and local incentives, such as granting sabbaticals, could improve sustainability, continuity, and essential knowledge retention and keep leaders in their schools longer (Campbell, 2010). Leadership development could be extended to teachers

interested in assuming leadership roles in charter schools by providing training opportunities focused solely on leading charter schools (Campbell, 2010). New and powerful ways to provide training and support for charter schools must become the norm, not the exception, due to the public demand for school systems that allow for choice (Harvey, 2011).

The common challenge remains the same: “[throughout] school districts and states and the education system, it is very difficult for educators or providers from outside the schools who are trying to solve particular problems to get the resources they need" (Hess & Perkins-Gough, 2010, p. 14). If states or educational systems cannot or will not provide funds to charters that need resources, training, and support, the turnover cycle is bound to continue. Therefore, it is vital to determine what can be done to curb the trends of charter turnover that is both equitable and workable for all involved.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how the following factors affect charter school leaders and their decisions to leave their positions: a) policy and legal experience, b) organizational management and leadership experience, and c) student and family interactions. In contrast to roles held by principals in traditional public schools, charter school leaders are faced with a wide range of complex variables that are unique to public charter schools; these variables mandate a more expansive level of leadership experience or expertise (Sun & Li, 2016). This study explored these factors to better understand their influence on charter school leadership turnover.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

This study utilized the Path-Goal Theory of Leadership (PGTL) as the theoretical framework. The emphasis of the PGTL is to help define leadership characteristics, including the success of leaders, based on leadership qualities that align with the mission/focus and needs of the organization (House& Mitchell, 1975). In this study, the organization was represented by charter schools, which exist to support a unique mission/focus in public education. Leadership characteristics were evaluated through the exploration of challenges associated with charter school leadership. Within the context of each school's mission, leadership challenges related to policy and legal factors, organizational management factors, student and family factors, and the identification of the greatest challenge in charter school leadership were studied. The results contributed to the exploration of the cause of charter school leadership turnover.

Research Design

"Understanding a phenomenon that has barely been researched requires a qualitative approach that is both adaptive and innovative" (Audet & d'Amboise, 2001, p. 1). A research design style that aligns with this approach is a multisite study. According to Yin (1994), when a multisite study is utilized, sample selections should be chosen based on the information they yield being relatable. All data collected from each site were uniformly secured through a series of questions from a grouping of similar sources; in this case, charter schools. Yin (1994) clarified this approach as one that supports data, which builds confirmation or rebuttal. "Sites should therefore be selected if they are expected to yield similar results (literal replication) or on the contrary, completely opposite results (theoretical replication) according to theory" (p. 6).

A variety of locations of charter schools were included, which represented urban, suburban, young, and older schools. These variables allowed for uniformity of type of schools, while allowing for a variation of answers that were unique to each individual location. This study consisted of 10 schools and provided data that reflects charter schools within the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area in Minnesota.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the policy and legal experience, organizational management and leadership experience, and interpersonal experiences that influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school. Specifically, four research questions were considered.

RQ1: How did policy and legal factors influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school?

RQ2: How did organizational management factors influence a charter school leader's

decision to leave their school?

RQ3: How did student and family factors influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school?

RQ4: What do charter school leaders view as the greatest challenge in charter school leadership?

Protocols

A semi-structured interview process consisted of predetermined questions and clarifying questions if needed. The process of obtaining data was conducted through personal interviews (Merriam, 2009). The interview questions and protocol can be found in Appendix A. The interview protocol was established utilizing the charter school leadership challenges identified in a previous study conducted by the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools (MACS, 2018).

Table 2

Interview Protocol Alignment

Introductory/Participant Description	Tell me about your professional background – education, professional positions, how long you have been serving as the leader at this school.	
Research Question	Charter School Leadership Challenge	Interview Question
RQ1. How did policy and legal factors influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school?	Complying with state and federal law	Please share any challenges you have experienced surrounding state and federal charter school compliance.
RQ1. How did policy and legal factors influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school?	Working with the board	Please share any challenges you have experienced working with the school's board.
RQ2. How did organizational management factors influence a charter school leader's decision to	Raising funds/managing finances	Please share any challenges you have encountered as you identify, secure, and manage

leave their school?		the financial obligations of your school.
RQ2. How did organizational management factors influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school?	Maintaining the focus of school	Have you experienced challenges in maintaining the mission of your school? If so, please explain.
RQ2. How did organizational management factors influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school?	Acquiring or managing facilities	Please share any challenges you have experienced in securing adequate facilities. Please share any challenges associated with the operational management of running your facility.
RQ2. How did organizational management factors influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school?	Attracting qualified teachers	Please share any challenges you have experienced in attracting qualified staff for all positions, with the primary focus on teachers.
RQ3. How did student and family factors influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school?	Engaging parents	Please share any challenges you have experienced with engaging parents to become active in the school. Please share any challenges you have experienced in maintaining parental support of the school.
RQ3. How did student and family factors influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school?	Attracting students	Please share any challenges you have experienced in recruiting students that align with the missional purpose of the school.
RQ3. How did student and family factors influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school?	Creating academic/career opportunities for graduating students	Please share any challenges you have experienced in creating academic or career opportunities for graduating students.

RQ4. What do charter school leaders view as the greatest challenge in charter school leadership?	What do you see as the greatest challenge in charter school leadership?

In summary, all questions served as the primary outline for qualitative, open-ended, conversations with selected charter school leaders. Tracking and follow up questions may have been added, which served as additional information in the summary of the data collection narrative.

Field test. Interview questions were field tested with a retired charter school director, members of multiple departments from the Minnesota Department of Education, and members of a nonprofit special education agency who work with over 70 charter schools in Minnesota. Questions were discussed in person to help with accurate wording of questions, clarity of intent of questions, possible questions to add or remove, and to determine what questions should be used to keep the desired time limitations. Any changes to the interview protocol were documented.

Sampling Design

Data was obtained through interviews of 10 current charter school leaders. A list of authorized charter schools was obtained from the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools. Participants were randomly selected from the list. It was determined that participants represented urban, young and old schools, and novice and experienced charter school leaders.

Setting. The setting for this study varied as each interview was located in a different environment, which included various school locations. Each setting was selected to allow for access to the subject being interviewed. Each interview was conducted in the participant's office or board room to ensure confidentiality and freedom to answer openly. One

interview was conducted in the interviewer's office by request of the charter school leader. The interviews were conducted over a short period of time to help retain consistency of external factors that may have contributed to the results. Variations in the interview process were relative to state requirements, federal requirements, and timing of reports, which may influence emotional responses that were reflective of immediate workload requirements.

Data Collection Procedures

After permission to conduct the study was granted from the dissertation committee members and the Bethel University Institutional Review Board (IRB), all potential interview participants were contacted through email. All confirmed participants were informed of the purpose of the study and how their role as charter school leaders would provide valuable information that could be helpful to charter schools in Minnesota. The informed consent letter (Appendix C) was emailed to all participants and secured prior to the interview meeting. Once the consent letter was received, an agreed upon time and location to conduct the interview was scheduled. Each participant was reminded that the interview process would be approximately 60 minutes or shorter in length. At the time of the interview, the participants were again assured of confidentiality through the deletion of any personally identifiable information, they were also reminded of the use of a transcription service, and that data would be stored in a secure location on the researcher's computer.

An organizational tracking system was created to keep track of notes, documents, and memos created during the collection process. The researcher removed any identifiable information, including any places or names, from the data to ensure confidentiality. Each interview began with an introductory statement outlining the purpose of the study. After the

purpose of the study was shared, permission to begin recording the interview was granted by the participant.

Data Analysis

An interview protocol was developed, which included recording and transcription of the interviews (Creswell, 2014). After the recordings were completed, each interview was submitted to a digital transcription service. Once all interviews were completed and transcribed through the confidential online transcription service, accuracy was evaluated through a comparison of the audio recordings and transcriptions. An accuracy rate of 88-93% was found between recordings and digital transcription. The transcription was edited to ensure all data obtained was free of identifying information, accurately documented, and not impacted by potential researcher bias which may have existed. In order to fully protect privacy, information was altered to eliminate any identifiable information concerning the resident school district or locale. After all transcripts were reviewed for accuracy and confidentiality, all participants received a copy of the transcript to check for accuracy.

Following verification of transcription accuracy, transcripts were compared to the recording again in order to assure accuracy and familiarity with the data and to note potential patterns. Responses were tracked and grouped together based on the four research questions.

The steps used for the final data analysis, largely based on Merriam (2009), were as follows:

1. Open coding: After reviewing the data for each participant, notations were made next to data that was interesting, important, or relevant.

2. Analytical coding: Open codes that were similar were grouped together in order to construct categories. Notes and comments from each of the participants were compared to determine the major categories.
3. Sorting evidence: Data was sorted into the major categories, in alignment with the research questions.
4. Repeated analytic coding and sorting evidence: This process was repeated several times to determine emerging themes.
5. Frequency: Themes were developed when seven or more out of ten participants shared a similar construct.

Trustworthiness of Data

The goal of this research was to present findings from a selection of charter school leaders that defined challenges in charter school leadership. As a qualitative study, the aim was to understand this phenomenon from the participant's perspective, not that of the researcher (Merriam, 2009). Validity strategies were incorporated, including member checking. This was done in order to verify the findings and to confirm that the findings were reflective of the participants' answers.

This study aligned with a study initiated through the Minnesota Department of Education and a federal grant to study charter school leadership challenges and potential support. All information collected through this study will be utilized to further assist the MDE with the federal grant research. Multiple stakeholders aided in the creation of the interview questions to best provide a richer and deeper understanding of the charter school leader's perspective.

Joppe (2000) defined reliability as:

> The extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to as reliability and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable (p. 1).

Within this study, reliability of the results was ensured through multiple modes that included a coding discourse with an experienced qualitative researcher. An outside coder was engaged to ensure uniformity, consistency, and accuracy. Discourse with the outside coder showed an accuracy rate of 88-93% between recorded content and digital transcriptions, and a 100% match of codes. Transcriptions were compared with the initial recording to find discrepancies and any found errors were corrected.

Assumptions and Limitations

This study made the assumption that there is a significant difference between traditional public school principals and charter school leaders in the context of leadership preparation, educational skills, workload, struggles, and eventually turnover rates. While their traditional tasks and daily responsibilities may have similar educational components, there is an assumption that many other tasks, which are non-instructional in nature, are identifiable and suggest greater leadership challenges for charter school leaders. The non-instructional elements of charter school leadership, which require additional training, education, or previous life experience in non-educational capacities, was assumed to be a contributing factor to the turnover and burnout issue raised in this study.

A potential limitation of qualitative methodology stems from the data subjectivity, which can be further defined as perspectives by selected participants. The study may have been negatively impacted by the inability of charter school leaders to adequately identify the causes or

impact potential of circumstances and issues that contribute to burnout. Additional obstacles may have been the willingness, or lack thereof, among the interviewed charter school directors to be transparent about their challenges in an effort to appear knowledgeable, stable in their roles, or due to fear of potentially losing their job by acknowledging personal deficiencies. In an effort to address this particular concern, interviews were conducted in a manner that eliminated the identity of the school or any identifying data. Only the interviewer had access to this data and all participants were assured of anonymity.

An additional limitation of the study was lack of information from previous charter school directors, those who had resigned. There was no current database listing contact information for previous charter school leaders. It must be acknowledged that data from this study was limited to current directors.

Ethical Considerations

The study followed the basic principles outlined in the Belmont Report (1979) of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. The study protected the anonymity of all the participants. During both the data collection and interview process, information was disassociated from the contributing participant. There were potential risks to the participants as a result of participating in the study; therefore, all data was collected with the assurance of confidentiality. This information must remain confidential and unidentifiable to eliminate any possibility of impacting current or potential career roles. Data collected from all sources did not identify schools in any way that might impact their ability to function, recruit, or fulfill their mission/vision.

Ethical issues addressed in this study included researcher bias; reflexivity was used to become more self-aware and monitor potential bias. Given the researcher's passion about the

topic, an awareness of preconceived notions or ideas was kept at the forefront. Data was uniformly gathered and not implied or manipulated.

To avoid research bias, the following protocols were implemented. Research sessions were limited to approximately one hour. Questions were presented sequentially, and uniformly asked of all subjects. Follow up questions were asked only to seek clarity. Interview sessions were uniformly recorded with audio of both researcher and subject. Recordings were viewed by the researcher only to provide protection of desired anonymity.

Positionality. Researcher positionality was also an important factor for consideration (Creswell, 2014). As a current charter school executive director located in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area with almost six years of experience, this researcher holds a special interest in the subject area and the outcomes of the research. The researcher was also working with the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to help determine potential areas of support for charter school directors. Intentional effort to maintain an unbiased approach included use of a previous study's findings for interview questions in order to prevent leading or biased questions and prompts.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to further investigate the factors that influence turnover within charter school leadership in the greater Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area of Minnesota. Participants for this study included 10 current directors, assistant directors, executive directors, and superintendents located in schools of various focus, size, and age. Interviews were conducted individually such that participants could share their personal experiences and not be influenced by other participants. This chapter describes the results of the study and provides an analysis of the research questions and themes, which were developed via an analysis of the data.

Discussion of the Sample

This research study included 10 participants; a total of 15 participants were invited via email to participate. While only one declined, the first 10 participants to respond were selected. The remaining four potential participants were denied participation due to all interview spots being filled. Schools selected for the study included K-8, PreK-12, K-12, and 7-12/K-12 with transition programs, which is reflective of most charter schools in the selected geographical area. Participants included charter school leaders who have been in their positions for three to 25 years, and included current directors who were both founding directors and subsequent directors.

All interviews were conducted in a private setting with only the researcher and participant present. All data was recorded digitally and submitted for digital transcription. Due to the need to protect all participants' identity and confidentiality, a limited amount of personal identifiable information was collected. Each interview was limited to one hour or less and all transcriptions were completed using an online digital transcription service, Scribe.com. A summary of participant data is reflected in Table 3.

Table 3

Data Collection Overview

Title	School Grades	Gender	Interview Date
Executive Director	PreK-12	F	1.24.20
Executive Director	7-12, Transition	F	1.24.20
Director	K-8	M	1.25.20
Assistant Director	K-8	F	1.27.20
Director	K-8	F	1.27.20
Superintendent	K-12, Transition	M	1.29.20
Executive Director	K-12	M	1.31.20
Director	K-8	F	2.4.20
Executive Director	K-8	F	2.5.20
Executive Director	K-8	M	2.6.20

Total participants: 10
Gender: four male, six female
Roles: Eight directors/executive directors, one assistant director, one superintendent

Theme Development

To better understand the various reasons and subsequent ramifications of turnover within charter school leadership, this study focused on exploring factors that influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school. Within this broader question, four specific research questions were identified. The following data outlines each question with themes that are derived from the data collected in each area. Under policy and legal factors, the themes were structure and demands of special education, and volume of compliance related work. Under organizational management factors, the themes were fiscal accountability and reliability, location challenges and facility funding, and teaching staff licensure and competitive compensation. Under student and family factors, the themes were enrollment and lottery challenges, and environmental

changes and future goals. Under the greatest challenges in charter school leadership, themes included varied and substantial workload, range of skills and knowledge, no central office for support, and the personal toll of isolation.

Criteria for theme inclusion. Themes were created based on a minimum of seven out of 10 participants noting challenges in a particular area. All participants were asked the same series of questions with allowance for additional follow up questions to further clarify potential theme development. All answers were coded into defined and focused themes.

Theme introduction. All data were entered into two software programs, Nvivo and Online-Utility.org, for the purpose of coding and sorting data and finding common phrases. The first step in analyzing all data was to compare the digital recording with the transcription, followed by three complete reads of each transcription. Codes of all responses were then aligned with each research question. Individual responses were then open coded to discover interesting or important ideas or comments. Analytical coding was completed to discover common ideas and phrases, which were then grouped together to help define major categories and themes.

Research Question 1: Policy and Legal Factors Influence on a Charter School Leader's Decision to Leave Their School

Structure and demands of special education. The theme of working within the structures and demands of state and federal compliance demonstrated a high degree of challenge for 80% of the participants. Special education was a specific area of frustration. One participant stated, "Special Education (is) an ongoing area of challenge because it's so complex with respect to funding." Another participant said, "Special ed, you don't quite know (or) understand all the rules and you're trying to kind of divide yourself as another director of that program."

Volume of compliance related work. Seventy percent of participants expressed concern regarding knowledge of report requirements and the sheer number of reports needing completion. One participant stated, "The framework in which a charter has to operate is [similar] to the compliance requirements of the large districts." Yet another leader stated, "I think just being a small district, which a charter school is, you still have all of the same reporting requirements to meet everything that a large district [has] except they have 50 people to [accomplish]) that." This theme recognized the same requirements for both traditional public schools and charter schools while also identifying the challenge that charter schools have substantially fewer people to accomplish the same number of reports.

Another participant noted, "Just so many laws that impact what we're supposed to do, it's an incredibly hard (job) keeping track of (all of) them." While the amount of compliance reports was noted as a challenge for all leaders, a secondary challenge for the leader and the board was managing compliance pieces. One participant stated, "(The) board isn't really paying really close attention to legislative and legal changes that impact our school (so) it falls on the director and it's so much to keep track of." Another participant added the statement that boards are also volunteer based, which increases the burden on the school's leader, especially if the board members are new.

Research Question 2: Organizational Management Factors Influence on a Charter School Leader's Decision to Leave Their School

Fiscal accountability and reliability. Fiscal accountability is a factor in all charter schools; however, standards of financial solvency vary from school to school depending on the authorizing contract. In Minnesota, charter schools are required to have an authorizer, which is an entity that ensures a charter school is compliant with state and federal law and monitors

school finances and academic success. Each authorizer also establishes a minimum fund balance that each charter school is required to maintain.

Every participant (100%) noted that schools struggle with funding uncertainties from the Minnesota Department of Education. One participant stated that funding is "incredibly complex accounting, and quite a bit of mystery . . . surrounds some of the decisions and the funding pipelines". This was further reflected in another participant's comments:

> Hold-back money from one fiscal year to the next [is difficult]. If you were a big district and you had a nice fund balance and you could borrow at a very low interest rate and it wasn't anything . . . [but] if you were a charter school . . . you had to figure out how you were going to pay your people to stay on.

Another area of challenge was the manner in which reimbursement costs were paid. One participant noted, "How are you supposed to spend the money in your budget if you don't have it to get reimbursed for it?" Another participant noted, "Special ed payments are way behind and yet special ed programmatic needs that have to be met . . . has been very challenging." One final participant further highlighted the challenges of reimbursements: "It seems like any time they [MDE] want to, they say, 'you're not getting paid,' because of something that oftentimes makes no sense and is not clarified to avoid the halt in funding."

The final challenge in the area of fiscal and financial accountability related to the concerns of charter schools being reliant on state and federal funding without having the ability to raise funds through referendums. A participant stated, "Charter schools seem caught in the cycle where they have to continue to grow and replicate and add students in order to continue to generate enough revenues to build a fund balance or maintain." When a charter school reaches capacity, there is no additional state money to help with other costs that continue to rise. One

participant stated, “I know other charter schools are already getting this, but once we hit our capacity and our funding plateaus, we still have wages and salaries that are going to go up.”

The basic understanding of charter school finances was noted in all participants but was shared as an ongoing “moving target” that required business acumen. A participant stated, “As a charter leader, you have to think with a business mindset and it’s interesting because we’re not really creating a product of any sort. What we’re trying to do is educate kids.” This illustrates the challenge of needing to focus more on the business aspects of running a school rather than the specific needs of students and their education.

Location challenges and facility funding. Nine out of 10 (90%) of the participants noted that charter Schools are finding it increasingly more difficult to locate adequate facilities. Two challenges were evident in the data: finding property in locations/cities that will allow a charter school to operate and adequate facility funding.

Securing property for a charter school requires finding a balance between beginning enrollment, maximum enrollment, and space, while simultaneously juggling the funding for a lease. A participant stated, “Facilities for charters are a significant challenge, finding a facility [and] when you find one, being able to grow . . . [and] to finance renovations.” Comments indicated that charter schools struggle to find a balance between affordable facilities that offer enough space for today’s needs and facilities that offer room for growth without breaking the budget until enrollment increases. This struggle leads to many schools relocating several times during the early years of their existence, which takes time and energy. A participant noted, “Directors should be thinking about the education program and what’s going to happen with the kids instead of running around with real estate brokers trying to find a place to rent with not enough money to rent a nice place.” Securing adequate facilities was defined several ways,

including space requirements, expansion needs or vision, locale, and appropriate educational spaces. A participant stated, “So for my school, the issue came down to are we going to stay in this dump, a strip mall, or are we going to get a building that our school deserves?”

In the context of time requirements to locate adequate facilities, a participant noted, “It was a two-year search [and] we narrowed it down to 30 buildings. At the point of executing a lease, the zoning codes were changed by the city “in an effort to keep the school from securing a building.” Another participant shared a challenge regarding a vacant school: “There were two contingencies on the sale: whoever bought it could not lease it to an educational institution or sell it to anybody that was going to lease it to an educational institution.” They were trying to keep a charter school out of their city. Due to the amount of time required to find a facility, many charter school leaders identified this as the most significant challenge in leadership. One participant shared, “Without question, this is the most difficult thing I had to do. It has taken up more of my professional time than almost anything else, which is crazy.”

In addition to securing a lease, the steps necessary to make many spaces educationally friendly was noted as a challenge. One participant noted, “Everything from finding properties to getting inspection, traffic control studies, all of those things are monumental tasks” for a director or even small administrative team and/or board. The apparent need for experience in real estate and property management was expressed by several participants, and one noted, “I don’t know of anything that can prepare you for this unless you’ve been in the charter world before, you know what you’re getting into, and you’re moving from one turn to another and bringing that history with you.” Another participant stated, “I don’t know of anyone who would walk into the chartering world and be aware of what the challenges are around facilities,” both in securing and managing them.

Teaching staff licensure and competitive compensation. Staff recruitment, specifically recruiting qualified and appropriately licensed teachers, was a common challenge among 70% of participants. While other positions were also mentioned, most participants noted licensure in the teaching staff as the main recruitment challenge. Competitive compensation was the secondary challenge.

One participant stated, "Any time we look for teachers, they typically won't have the skill set that we need to work with our population." This clarification is noted given the unique populations that many charters serve, which are reflective of students that struggle in traditional settings or students who are looking for focused educational practices such as International Baccalaureate, special education, or classical education. As more charter schools are created with unique missions, the lack of education for teachers in those specific areas continues to create challenges in recruitment. A participant noted, "I would say a lot of educational institutions train teachers, as good as they are, still kind of [train in a] traditional [model]. How many programs are out there that are teaching people really innovative [education]?" The participant added, "Are there any programs out there that say, 'We're going to train teachers on how to be teachers in the world of charter schools?'"

When questioned about recruiting teachers who have a working knowledge of the school's unique focus and the need for specific licenses, one participant stated, "Right now, we probably just try to recruit them and then get them in. We do a lot of things up front in the interview process to introduce the educational model." The participant added, "When people are looking for jobs, they kind of nod their heads and say, 'Yes,' because they just want a job." This theme illustrates the challenge that while the appropriate license is most critical, the added challenge of missional alignment can be difficult; it is most often addressed post hire in hopes

that missional alignment can be achieved. Qualified candidates in special education and therapy/counseling appear to be as difficult to find in the context of licensure; however, missional alignment is still a challenge.

Competitive compensation carries significant challenges in recruiting qualified staff. A participant noted that aside from competition from traditional or larger districts, "Teaching is just not an attractive career; the job is immense." Another participant stated, "I mean, 10 years ago, if you advertised for an elementary position, you would get 200 applicants. Now if I get five applications [I'm fortunate]."

Competition between charter schools and traditional public schools (TPS) also begins early in a teacher's career and is not limited solely to tenured or seasoned teachers looking for higher wages. One participant noted that when potential applicants interviewed in the charter school, the atmosphere, which was believed to be better than a TPS, was appealing. However, "if you're making $5000-$10,000 more [annually in a TPS], that's a quality, a huge quality of life difference, especially if you are young." Another participant stated that the difference between their pay compared to the local TPS was closer to $15,000-$20,000. Magnified over several years, this challenge is apparent to most charter schools who cannot compete with traditional districts. Salary is not the only challenge. One participant stated, "They (TPS) pay better, there's unions, so I would say traditional public schools have greater security . . . more resources in terms of professional development and quality of facilities."

Compounding the challenges associated with competitive salaries is the reality that charter schools employ younger teachers who may begin a family. A participant noted that when young teachers apply, many are just happy to get their first job. After a few years, most teachers marry and "leave when their life circumstances change. Perhaps they have a kid or they just

make a sort of family-based decision that they need to go where they're going to get paid more." Added to the stress of teaching and building a new family, as well as educational debt, one participant noted, "It's a thankless job, it doesn't pay very well, for the amount of education you have." Thus, teachers choose to leave for more money and more security.

Research Question 3: Student and Family Factors Influence on a Charter School Leader's Decision to Leave Their School

Enrollment and lottery challenges. The challenge of enrollment requirements was noted by 100% of all participants. Each participant did not focus on the difficulty of actually recruiting students, rather, the types of students necessary to fulfil their vision/focus. An outlier of recruiting students for a start-up charter school was noted, but in the context of uncertainty of their site being ready to open, which led to the loss of several students but was quickly made up after the school was viewed as open and stable.

In Minnesota, all charter schools must enroll students in a lottery system. Minnesota Statute 124E.11(b) states:

> A charter school, including its preschool or prekindergarten program established under section 124E.06, subdivision 3, paragraph (b), shall enroll an eligible pupil who submits a timely application, unless the number of applications exceeds the capacity of a program, class, grade level, or building. In this case, pupils must be accepted by lot. The charter school must develop and publish, including on its website, a lottery policy and process that it must use when accepting pupils by lot. (Office of the Revisor of Statutes, 2019)

This statute articulates the guidelines for enrolling any eligible student based on availability of space unless the four restrictions are applicable (i.e., capacity of program, class, grade level, or building). Charter schools are not allowed to forbid or dissuade enrollment for

students who do not align with the schools' mission/focus. Noting this statute, one participant stated, "I see sometimes families aren't comfortable with [our focus]. We have had more difficulty in making sure that they really understand that and that they're making a good choice." Another participant stated, "We definitely have some families that I see that are not particularly committed in [our focus] and we've had some discussions with them."

The difficulty in maintaining the focus, given the open enrollment law, appears to create a challenge of missional adherence. A participant noted, "So whether they came here for a reason connected to the mission, which is usually not true because they got kicked out of some other school . . . we must take every single kid and try to do our best." This lack of missional awareness then creates a direct challenge to the intent of unique and focused learning environments that support students who struggle in TPS. Due to the lack of student success in TPS and limited alternatives, leaders stated that students are simply looking for a "quality school." One participant stated, "I feel that some come here just because it's the local or closest local school. We have some parents that have no idea what [our focus] is and don't look at it" when determining where to send their student. Another participant even noted, "That's the first time I've actually had to answer this question" regarding the struggle in accepting students that do not align with the missional intent.

Environmental changes and future goals. Creating academic or career opportunities for students graduating from their school programs or from high school was a challenge for 100% of the charter school leaders interviewed. In K-6 or K-8 schools, students, by definition, were enrolled in a school with very unique focus that was created to serve a population of students who either struggled in TPS schools or were looking for a unique learning experience. In K-6 or K-8 charter schools, students become well established in the learning style and

environment; however, at the point of graduating from the school's program, the student and family are challenged with the difficult decision of entering another school with an obviously different focus.

Describing this challenge, a participant stated, "We've tried to connect kids to other programs in the community [to help develop relationships]." Another participant stated, "They will be going to places that are a lot larger than we are, and that's got me worried for opportunities. I don't know exactly what it is going to look like when they get where they're going." This participant further stated, "I'm worried because our kids are coming from a very small nurturing environment and they're going into the main system." The participant noted that students come to his school because they experienced cultural bullying in their previous setting, and now there is concern because they are going back into that environment without the protections and understanding they have become accustomed to.

Two participants noted that students graduating from charter high schools that are mainly focused in special education have created transition programs to help students find success beyond the charter school. However, funding for these programs is limited. Many schools are searching for programs that align with student ability and intent. While many students may want to enroll in college, several others are looking for trade jobs and ways to learn life skills. Both participants noted that programs are difficult to locate with minimal funding sources and available onsite school guidance counselors. One participant shared, "Do we know what each and every one of our graduates will be doing when they graduate and where they're going? The answer is no. So with that, how are we going to get there?"

Research Question 4: Charter School Leaders Perceived Greatest Challenge, which Influence a Charter School Leader's Decision to Leave Their School

Varied and substantial workload. Ninety percent of all participants noted the extreme workload levels that appear to be unique to charter school leadership. While principals in traditional public schools (TPS) have responsibilities of leading a staff, managing curriculum, and working with parents, the level and impact of charter school leadership extends to other business practices and responsibilities that TPS leaders do not face. One participant stated, "Somebody's [has to] carry the world [in my school] and it's a big role." Another participant stated, "It is an impossible skill set. Nobody has this [complete] skill set." While most of the charter school leaders interviewed felt they were somewhat successful, they admitted to the toll it takes to learn and develop specific skills that would enhance the school beyond curriculum and instructional responsibilities, which are common among both TPS and charter school leaders.

Range of skills and knowledge. While the workload is immense, the range of skills and knowledge necessary for a successful leader was noted by 80% of participants. One participant said, "The last school I left, they hired three people to replace me." When reflecting on the amount of work and the skills needed to be successful, a participant stated, "The biggest (challenge) is just living with the inadequacy that I feel most of the time. If you can't live with it, you're going to be gone, and that's going to be much worse for the organization." Another participant stated, "Whatever that phrase is, you kind of have to know how to do so many things but . . . because you're learning all these different types of things, you're not able to be really good at one thing." This statement also highlighted how schools choose their leader and hope the leader will develop other skills to be successful before burnout and turnover occurs.

As noted by several participants, most charter school leadership responsibilities fall on the director alone, which illustrates a key difference between TPS and charter school leaders. A participant noted, "In a district, you (have) a district office with a curriculum director . . . grounds person . . . lunch program person . . . HR person, and you're not trying to do all of those things." The participant later added, "There's not a lot of room for error and there's not somebody who's going to catch it. If you fall, most times, you're just going to be in trouble." A final aspect of the plethora of knowledge required for a charter school leader to be successful is understanding that the position of leadership is more akin to running a business than to being a traditional principal with a full staff. Another participant stated, "I think the biggest thing is it's a business. If I don't have the expertise, that's okay, I just have to find somebody that does."

No central office for support. Charter school leaders carry most of the responsibility for leadership, which inherently leads to the need to find answers to difficult questions that fit the context of charter school operations and leadership; 70% of participants noted this challenge. One participant stated, "There's a tendency to have all of that knowledge and skill in a single person, which I don't think is healthy for a school or at all responsible for succession planning." Another participant noted that positions such as finance managers, directors of specific programs, facilities and property managers, human resources (HR) personnel, and others were all departments led by specialists, as opposed to charter leaders who are expected to have a working knowledge in all of those areas. The result of this theme is, as one participant described, a "chaotic workday, where you have a list of what you want to do that never gets done because you have to be the focal point for most questions and emergencies." This participant also added that due to the lack of peers and true supports, a facade of "keeping it together" was necessary so that the staff did not fear for the security and stability of the school,

let alone the leader. Without a true support staff or district office to fall back on, there is a sense of "loneliness" and "isolation," as noted by one participant, which most certainly leads to burnout.

Personal toll of isolation. The inherent lack of support from a district office, such as a TPS provides, led 80% of participants to note how isolation takes a personal toll on charter school leaders. One participant stated, "We all know that it is a lonely job. You don't have a lot of colleagues to draw on," which leads to frustration and ultimately burnout. Another participant stated, "As the leader of the organization, you have to project poise, calmness, and strength at all times, even when you're taking a major hit." While this issue is not unique to charter schools, two participants noted the fact that no or minimal supports exists to help, counsel, or simply listen with relatable knowledge weighs heavily on charter school leaders, which contributes to burnout.

The ability to identify weak or missing skills is also critically important in charter school leadership. One participant noted, "This is an impossible skill set, and you're pulled in so many directions and through all of that, you have to figure out a way to not beat yourself up about it because it's an impossible skill set." This participant also added that at the end of the day, you just have to "find ways to forget yourself and move on [regarding] things that are going to be inadequate in certain areas for now, and hopefully get to it later."

As leaders wrestled with this theme, one participant noted that without this ability, they have witnessed others close to a "nervous breakdown," especially those early in their leadership tenure. The toll of charter school leadership, for some, has also reached beyond the school. One participant stated, "It's taken a toll on every aspect of my life: my family, my health,

everything." However, this participant also attempted to self-reflect daily in order to find the "blessings" of the day.

Summary table.

Table 4

Research Topic: The Causes and Impact of charter school Leadership Turnover

Research Question	Themes
How did policy and legal factors influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school?	● structure and demands of special education ● volume of compliance related work
How did organizational management factors influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school?	● fiscal accountability and reliability ● location challenges and facility funding ● teaching staff licensure and competitive compensation
How did students and family factors influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school?	● enrollment and lottery challenges ● environmental changes and future goals
What do you see as the greatest challenge in charter school leadership?	● varied and substantial workload ● range of skills and knowledge ● no central office for support ● personal toll of isolation

Conclusion

This chapter reported the coded results of this study, which were organized by the four stated research questions. Chapter five will discuss the defined themes derived from the research as well as the potential outcomes for needed support to enable charter leaders to avoid or minimize burnout. The following chapter will also define the limitations of this research and proposed areas of study for further research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, Recommendations

Overview of this Study

The purpose of this study was to research factors that influence turnover within charter school leadership roles. Ten charter school leaders were selected to contribute to this study. Participants included four males and six females. Six participants were not the original or founding leader of the charter school while four participants were founding leaders. Years of charter school leadership experience ranged from three to 25 years. Interviews were conducted face to face and were recorded digitally, transcribed digitally, coded, and analyzed to determine themes.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the policy and legal experience, organizational management and leadership experience, and interpersonal experiences that influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school. Specifically, four research questions were considered.

RQ1: How did policy and legal factors influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school?

RQ2: How did organizational management factors influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school?

RQ3: How did student and family factors influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school?

RQ4: What do charter school leaders view as the greatest challenge in charter school leadership?

Conclusions of this Study

To understand the intent of this study, one must first understand the differences between charter school leaders and principals of traditional public schools (TPS). Campbell and Gross (2008) stated, "The key differences separating charter school leaders from traditional public-school principals are their experience, age, and length of tenure. NCES data suggested that almost 30% of charter school leaders have led a school for two years or less" (p. 6). This is an important initial delineation of the differences between TPS principals and charter school leaders. The two positions, while similar in areas such as curriculum, instruction, student discipline, and parent engagement, vary greatly in other areas such as workload, the array of skills and knowledge in many areas that are needed to be effective, the lack of a centralized office for support, and the personal toll on leaders due to the overwhelming areas of oversight. When factoring in the lack of experience that many leaders have, as noted by Campbell and Gross (2008), causation for burnout and eventual turnover becomes evident.

While there are similarities in some aspects of TPS and charter school leader roles, the expanded roles and ramifications produce higher levels of turnover in charter school leaders. Campbell and Gross (2008) noted that similar roles are "amplified and extended in the charter context" (p. 9). In looking at the themes drawn from this study, the following conclusions can be made from data that emerged from questions regarding the greatest challenges for charter school leaders.

Varied and substantial workload. Many charter school leaders experience an immense workload of leadership requirements, skills, and knowledge necessary for successful leadership. Goff, Movrogordato, and Goldring (2012) noted that this challenge is also unique among charter schools depending on the organizational structure in each school. When considering the

differences between TPS and charter schools, the differences in organizational structure are magnified even further with the additional workload placed on charter school leaders given the absence of a district office. Research participants noted that charter school leaders work with fewer resources and smaller staffs, yet are expected to meet the same expectations of TPS leaders in reporting and compliance, human resources, instruction, curriculum, parent engagement, and school culture. Consequently, singular charter leaders experience a seemingly insurmountable workload.

In addition to the substantial workload, a struggle to manage that work within the school day – given the many urgent items that arise – often takes away focus and hampers leadership. Hummel (1994) wrote, "Don't let the urgent crowd out the important" (p. 1). Within the demands of charter school leadership, this idea challenges the daily urgent responsibilities that take away from the important aspects of charter school leadership. This is not minimizing the urgent work; however, when other needed tasks are required, the balance that many leaders struggle with is evident.

Range of skills and knowledge. As noted earlier in this study, a study conducted by MACS (2018) resulted in acknowledging 82% of charter school leaders have their highest level in education in the area of education. This supports the findings that the vast majority of charter school leaders are familiar with curriculum and instruction areas but lack significant experience in business practices that are not part of a traditional education degree. When participants were asked the final question in the interview process of outlining the most significant challenge in charter school leadership, 50% of the themes that were derived from this single question revolved around business or leadership experience and inadequate training.

Specifically, participants noted the range of skills and knowledge necessary to be successful, which also included a lack of legal and human resources acumen and any charter-specific training. Legal experience may be mutually lacking among TPS principals and charter school leaders; however, the added layer of a central office for TPS principals allows principals to defer or direct legal concerns to the central office. Charter school leaders must have some working knowledge of the law, or attempt to recruit board members with a legal background, or figure out ways to fund legal assistance with an already limited budget. Human resources (HR) is another area, similar to legal issues, that requires a working knowledge that has legal ramifications. With a central office and staff that specialize in HR, this area of leadership proves to be a significant danger area if done incorrectly. With the acknowledged areas of increased responsibility and expanded arenas of needed knowledge, the lack of a formal system to offer charter-specific training is evident (Bloomfield, 2013; Cravens et al., 2012).

Personal toll of isolation. The concluding theme that evolved from this study was the personal toll that charter school leadership had on the leader. As one participant stated, "I have had to learn how to go home each evening after school and forgive myself for the failings of the day. I simply couldn't get to everything that needed my attention. In those areas I missed, I failed." While many viewed this theme as prioritizing their work, others noted a similar angst and sense of failure. The added struggle of communicating those struggles with the board, for some, became difficult in an effort to avoid being viewed as inept or incapable. Therefore, the struggle of limited support created an imbalance of effort, time, and ability, which took a personal toll on the leader. This struggle was manifested in physical, mental, and emotional struggles of impossible expectations for several of the participants.

Other leaders addressed this topic as a choice but recognized the workload's impact on family dynamics, citing a work week of between 60-80 hours. These leaders recognized the toll this took on their families but expressed this as a choice in order to complete the required responsibilities. Others noted that while they have committed to this role, and understand the toll it has taken on them or their families, they recognize that it is impossible to keep up this level of work; they recognize it will lead to change or burnout sooner than expected. Founding charter school leaders appeared to have more drive to do "whatever it takes," as one participant noted, but also admitted that "someone else will probably need to pick up where I left off soon because while I'm committed, I can't do this forever. I have a family and a life . . . at least I want a life."

No central office for support. The idea of charter schools was to create an environment where teachers could be creative in their approach to educate students that did not necessarily fit into a traditional public school setting. Schools were allowed to have a teacher majority board of directors, which included the absence of a central office. While there are many positives for this approach within charter school education, the missing element of a centralized office for support has proven to be difficult for many leaders. Blitz (2011) stated that prior research noted a lack of district structure being a significant challenge; however, participants expressed a desire for possible professional development opportunities that were specific to charter school leaders to help offset this challenge. While professional development opportunities would be beneficial, other participants noted a need for simple dialogue among charter school leaders where struggles, concepts, and needs could be addressed with those who hold similar roles. Since no centralized office exists, leaving this need up to charter leaders alone has proven difficult due to the workload and time constraints that already exist.

Implications for Practice

Minnesota continues to experience growth in the charter school movement (MACS, 2018). As the founding state of the charter school movement, Minnesota established the innovation of unique educational choices, but funding became an obvious challenge. With every failed charter school comes the acknowledgement that significant amounts of funding are gone as well. From initial startup costs that are funded by both federal and state funds to millions of dollars for facilities and operations expenditures, it is imperative to acknowledge that well-qualified leadership be in place to help maximize impact and intent and minimize risk of failure due to poor leadership, eventual burnout, and high levels of turnover. Each of these factors impacts a school's stability and possible existence.

Implication for charter school specific leadership training and development. The results of this research demonstrated a void in charter school leadership training and development. Charter schools in Minnesota were created to provide teachers the ability to create unique learning environments without a centralized office dictating their activities at base level. However, one of the limitations of this less-controlling structure is the lack of professional development opportunities traditionally offered by centralized or district offices. Charter schools struggle with funding to maintain adequate facilities and staffing and remain competitive. Locating funds to provide professional development is increasingly more difficult. Therefore, if charter schools cannot afford to provide professional development opportunities, leaders are faced with funding their own training or relying on the Minnesota Department of Education for these needs, the latter of which is minimal.

While some states, including Minnesota, do offer some opportunities for professional development, no specific professional development courses are required beyond three training

sessions that all board members are required to attend and charter leaders are encouraged to attend. The responsibility for monitoring the director's personal development lies with the charter school board. It also leaves the responsibility of what, if any, training and personal development should be a mandatory part of accountability beyond the charter school board. Research has shown that the position of a charter school leader is more akin to that of a TPS superintendent (Alsbury, 2004). This means that a broader scope of essential skills is necessary for success in charter school leadership compared to that of TPS principals.

If it is determined that mandatory training and professional development in business and educational leadership are needed, then the decision of who is responsible for creating these programs must be defined. To create a uniform system of training, the logical expectation would be to involve the state and the Department of Education as most, if not all, areas can be addressed by existing departments within MDE.

There are two rationales behind the need for this training. The first rationale is that of shared knowledge and expectations. If mandatory trainings in the areas of business and operations management were created, business education would help leaders address the challenges of their daily responsibilities. The second rationale is to address burnout, which is a direct result of the frustration charter school leaders experience in areas outside of their expertise could be minimized. With more practical experience and training, the reduction of frustration should be a byproduct of increased comfort in these areas.

The secondary rationale for additional training is the retention of experienced leaders. Leadership turnover hinders school progress due to the time required for the new leader to gain the necessary skills to become effective. If this timeframe could be minimized, the result would be more experienced leaders who are less frustrated, more comfortable in their roles, and who

hold their positions longer. Ultimately, additional training would minimize turnover and positively impact charter school leadership.

With the needed areas of training and professional development recognized, the next question is that of requirement. Currently, no training for charter school leaders is mandatory. There are ongoing requirements for professional development; however, the exact areas are not established, only that ongoing professional development by the school's leader occurs and is approved by the board. If specific areas of professional development were to become mandatory, uniformity of expectations and knowledge could be expected among all charter schools. However, there must also be an accountability system established, which could be maintained by MDE or the school's authorizer.

Implications for charter school leadership support. The Minnesota Association of Charter Schools (MACS) sponsors charter school directors' meetings, however, a more informal environment does not exist where charter school leaders can share challenges and ask for guidance or assistance in difficult areas. There is an absence of a centralized office or traditional district office in charter schools. In many district offices, departments exist for TPS leaders to call and ask for guidance or support. There are agencies such as MACS that can be of some assistance, but for daily challenges that impact workload and the personal toll of leadership, there are no supports in place.

One participant in this study stated, "This is a very lonely job." When pressed further, on the emotion behind this thought, the participant noted there is nothing currently in place for charter school leaders to come together to share frustrations. The participant even noted fear of losing their job by sharing challenges and frustrations with their board fears that are taking a toll on them personally for fear of appearing weak or inept. Most leaders who shared a similar

struggle admitted that, ironically, the choice not to share struggles out of fear of losing their job made them more likely to leave because of the personal toll and sense of isolation.

While leadership, business, and educational acumen is important for successful charter school leadership, the ability to rely on a support system is equally important. While many charter school leaders limit sharing struggles with the Board or other administrative staff within their own school to minimize personal risk, there continues to be a need to collaborate with colleagues in like-roles and risks.

The primary rationale for a well defined support system is to allow for open and non-threatening dialogue. As one participant in this research study stated, "It's refreshing to let you see who I really am." While supports exist to help deal with the leadership, business, and instructional areas, there is no structure in place to address other areas that become more personal and have the potential to take a toll on a leader's emotional, personal, mental, or family well-being. As participants in this study stated, they do not have the time to plan or organize a program to address this need, but they would gladly welcome and support such resources. This added level of support would lead to higher levels of understanding relative to the challenges that contribute to turnover, thereby minimizing the impact on the leader's school.

Recommendations for Practitioners

Evaluate the current qualifications and skills necessary for effective charter school leadership. The evaluation for desired qualifications and skills for effective charter school leadership is critical and potentially vastly different from school to school. The specific focus of the school may impact the skills its leader needs. A participant noted that leaders need to be aware of buy in to the school's mission/focus , but even more important is that they understand the unique leadership aspects of the school.

While some professional development opportunities are available, none are mandatory. The rationale for a mandatory system is to first create a uniform approach to identifying and instructing all charter school leaders in areas common to all charter schools, including but not limited to, the areas identified in this study: state and federal compliance, fiscal knowledge and management, property management, business management, legal, human resources, curriculum, instruction, and mission awareness. Optional or elective courses should also be considered in areas such as parent engagement, student enrollment, licensures, benefits, and others. The purpose of the primary training opportunities is to provide a unified basis of understanding that can be monitored by either MDE or the school's authorizer. The training would better prepare leaders for success, as well as potentially minimize the struggles that many charter school leaders face, which contributes to burnout and turnover. It would also minimize the impact on schools that have to spend time and resources recruiting and training new leaders. The secondary result would be more stability for schools and the retention of institutional knowledge in specific schools and the larger charter school community.

Recommendations for Academics

The refined questioning of this study aimed to further analyze previously known factors for the causes of charter school leadership turnover. This study sought to better understand the lived experience and to elicit deep, rich narrative. To further expand research regarding charter school leadership turnover, the following recommendations should be considered.

Expand the geographical area studied. A limitation of this study included a finite geographical region of Minnesota, which was contained to the greater metropolitan area of Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota. Further research beyond an urban area may result in varying levels of the noted challenges and/or unidentified challenges unique to more rural settings. Additional research may be beneficial in other states that support charter schools. Currently, there are 44 states that allow charter schools; however, the definitions of a charter school vary from state to state. In some states, charter schools are private schools, which may impact funding and other business practices that do not reflect the intent of this study. Careful consideration must be given if other states are included in an expanded geographical study to ensure all defined charter schools meet the same qualifications.

Further research the background and experience of charter school leaders. This study did not evaluate the tenure of a charter school leader when identifying the sample or when coding responses. As part of the literature review, tenure was noted; however, this was in the context of the average stay of a charter school leader at a particular school and did not address the question of increased or decreased challenges in relation to tenure. Future study may include tracking challenges that may increase or decrease depending on the length of a leader's tenure.

A more substantive analysis of the background of a charter school leader may provide additional insight into what skills and knowledge aid in a charter school leader's success. If a

more detailed analysis were compiled of business backgrounds compared to educational backgrounds, more recommendations could be made in areas of ongoing training and professional development that offset the challenges.

Further analyze the impact of minimal charter school specific training. Preparation programs for employment in a K-12 educational setting have historically aimed to meet the needs of traditional public schools. Currently, there are no known programs for teachers or administrators in preparation for the demands of a charter school.

Looking specifically at charter school leadership, one participant stated, when thinking about previous experiences and education, “There really is no preparation to working in a charter school.” This participant added, “I do really believe in licensure for administrators because I think that really helps me a lot coming into the position, specifically in compliance and budget issues.” Grissom and Harrington (2010) noted that very few studies have examined the need and importance of school leadership professional development, especially in charter schools. While Minnesota does not currently mandate charter school leaders have an administration license, for many who have taken these courses, there is an acknowledgement that there is at least “minimal information that is applicable, which is better than nothing.”

Concluding Comments

Minnesota continues to experience growth in the charter school movement. As the founding state of the charter school movement, Minnesota is established as the leading innovator of successful and unique educational choices. While charter schools continue to expand, the need for more research on leadership challenges also grows. With every failed charter school comes the acknowledgement that a significant investment has been lost both from a business and operational perspective and from the large and arguably more important area of educating students. To maximize impact and intent, and minimize risk of failure due to poor leadership and high levels of turnover, support is needed to positively impact a school's stability, continued existence, and desired impact.

The original intent of the charter school movement was innovation; however, what appears to still be missing is an innovative approach to quality leadership growth. If leadership needs continue to be ignored, the result will be a continued trend of high levels of frustration, burnout, and ultimately turnover. While leadership turnover does impact the operational aspects of the school, students and families will also be impact by the instability of the school.

The purpose of the study was to explore the factors that influence charter school leadership turnover. These findings will help identify previously unknown aspects of the challenges charter school leaders face and may help minimize burnout and turnover among their ranks.

References

Alsbury, T. L. (2004). Does school board turnover matter? Revisiting critical variables in the dissatisfaction theory of American democracy. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 7*(4), 357-377. doi:10.1080/1360312042000189299

Audet, J., & d'Amboise, G. (2001, June). The multi-site study: An innovative research methodology. In *NSUWorks*. Retrieved from https://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2001&context=tqr

Bierlain, L. A., & Mulholland, L. A. (1994). The promise of charter schools. *Educational Leadership, 52*(1), 34. Retrieved from http://ezproxy.bethel.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=keh&AN=9410062362&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Blitz, M. H. (2011). Market-based and authorizer-based accountability demands and the implications for charter school leadership. *Journal of School Choice, 5*(4), 357-396. doi:10.1080/15582159.2011.624911

Bloomfield, B. D. (2013). *Investigating leadership in charter schools: An examination of the leadership traits of executive directors in successful charter schools.* https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED562942

Bloomberg, L., Nathan, J., & Berman, I. (2008). *Improving charter school leadership*. Washington, DC: National Governors Association Center for Educational Practices.

Campbell, C. (2010). *You're leaving? Succession and sustainability in charter schools.* Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington.

Campbell, C., & Gross, B. (2008, September). Working without a safety net -- How charter school leaders can best survive on the high wire. In *CRPE Reinventing Public Education*.

Retrieved from https://www.crpe.org/publications/working-without-safety-net-how-charter-school-leaders-can-best-survive-high-wire

Center for Education Reform. (2018). *National charter school law rankings & scorecard 2018*. Author. Retrieved from https://a5f2y4y9.stackpathcdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/CER_National-Charter-School-Law-Rankings-and-Scorecard-2018_screen_1-30-19.pdf

Center on Reinventing Public Education. (2007). *Leadership to date, leadership tomorrow: A review of data on charter school directors*. Retrieved October 24, 2019, from https://www.crpe.org/sites/default/files/wp_ncsrp2_ics_jun07_0.pdf

Center on Reinventing Public Education (2008). *The high-wire job of charter school leadership*. Retrieved from: https://www.crpe.org/publications/high-wire-job-charter-school-leadership

Colombo, H. (2016). Charter approval fuels new questions. *Indianapolis Business Journal,* 36(51), 24A. Retrieved from http://ezproxy.bethel.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=keh&AN=112833354&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Cravens, X. C., Goldring, E., & Penaloza, R. (2012). Leadership practice in the context of U.S. school choice reform. *Leadership & Policy in Schools, 11*(4), 452-476. doi:10.1080/15700763.2012.700989

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Finn Jr., C. E., Manno, B. V., & Wright, B. L. (2017). *Improve governance for charters*. Phi Delta Kappan*, 98*(6), 63-69. doi:10.1177/0031721717696481

Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Gereluk, D. (2000). *The charter school collapse: A case study*. A paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Education Research Association, New Orleans, LA.

Gawlik, M. (2018). Instructional leadership and the charter school principal. *School Leadership & Management, 38*(5), 539-565. doi:10.1080/13632434.2018.1439467

Goff, P. T., Mavrogordato, M., & Goldring, E. (2012). Instructional leadership in charter schools: Is there an organizational effect or are leadership practices the result of faculty characteristics and preferences? *Leadership & Policy in Schools, 11*(1), 1-25. doi:10.1080/15700763.2011.611923

Grady, M. L., & Bryant, M. T. (1989). Critical Incidents between Superintendents and School Boards: Implications for Practice. *Planning and changing*, *20*(4), 206-14.

Griffin, N. C., & Wohlstetter, P. (2001). *Building a plane while flying it: Early lessons from developing charter school*s. In Stern, S. S. , Kysilka, M. L. (Eds.) Contemporary Readings in Curriculum. Retrieved from https://books.google.com/books?id=dOvL2UPpAgUC&pg=PA101&lpg=PA101&dq=Griffin,+N.+C.,+and+Wohlstetter,+P.,+(2001),+Building+a+plan+while+flying+it:+Early+lessons+from+developing+charter+schools.+Teachers+College+Record.&source=bl&ots=fvgJVhcEko&sig=ACfU3U0kUSYhkQtdNedmCRE0x-V8cJliIw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjR-ZD_-NTgAhVl9YMKHdY9CxQQ6AEwAXoECAkQAQ#v=onepage&q=Griffin%2C%20N.%20C.%2C%20and%20Wohlstetter%2C%20P.%2C%20(2001)%2C%20Building%20a%20plan%20while%20flying%20it%3A%20Early%20lessons%20from%20developing%20charter%20schools.%20Teachers%20College%20Record.&f=false

Grissom, J. A., & Harrington, J. R. (2010). Investing in administrator efficacy: An examination

of professional development as a tool for enhancing principal effectiveness. *American Journal of Education, 116*(4), 583-612. doi:10.1086/653631

Harvey, J. (2011). Privatization: A drain on public schools. *Educational Leadership, 69*(4), 48-53. Retrieved from http://ezproxy.bethel.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=keh&AN=67664426&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Hess, F. M., & Perkins-Gough, D. (2010). Where are our greenfields? *Educational Leadership, 67*(7), 12-15. Retrieved from http://ezproxy.bethel.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=keh&AN=48972500&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Hill, P., Lake, R., Celio, M. B., Campbell, C., Herdman, P., & Bulkley, K. (2001). *A study of charter school accountability*: *National Charter School accountability study.* Washington, D.C.: Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Hill, P. T., & Lake, R. J. (2010). The charter school catch-22. *Journal of School Choice, 4*(2), 232-235. doi:10.1080/15582159.2010.483925

Horn, J., & Miron, G., (2000). *Evaluation of the Michigan charter school initiative: Performance, accountability, and impact*. Kalamazoo, MI: Evaluation Center, Western Michigan University. Retrieved from http://homepages.wmich.edu/~miron/publics/michigan/Executive_Summary.pdf

House, R. J., & Mitchell, T. R. (1975). *Path-goal theory of leadership.* Retrieved October 20, 2019, from https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a009513.pdf

Hummel, C. (1994). *Tyranny of the urgent*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Johnston, R. C. (2000). Vacuum at the top takes a heavy toll on Dallas schools. *Education Week, 20*(15), 1. Retrieved from http://ezproxy.bethel.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=keh&AN=3923843&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Joppe, M. (2000). *The research process.* Retrieved February 25, 1998, from http://www.ryerson.ca/~mjoppe/rp.htm

Karanxha, Z. (2013). When the "dream" turns into a nightmare: Life and death of Voyager Charter School. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 49*(4), 576-609. doi:10.1177/0013161X12471832

Lefebvre, E. E., & Thomas, M. A. M. (2017). "Shit shows" or "like-minded schools": Charter schools and the neoliberal logic of Teach for America. *Journal of Education Policy, 32*(3), 357-371. doi:10.1080/02680939.2017.1280184

Maranto, R. (2004). *Politics, markets, or both? Comprehensive school choice and district superintendent turnover.* doi:apsa_proceeding_29102.PDF

McKinney, J. R. (1996). Charter schools: A new barrier for children with disabilities. *Educational Leadership, 54*(2), 22. Retrieved from http://ezproxy.bethel.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=keh&AN=9703192669&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Merriam, S. B. (2009). Qualitative research: *A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative Research* (Fourth ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Minnesota Association of Charter Schools (MACS). (2018). *Minnesota's Charter School Leadership Report.* St. Paul, MN: MACS. Retrieved from http://www.mncharterschools.org/utilities/restricted-file.php?ID=6237&strType=download

Mitchell, C. (2015). Turnover at top can leave funders wary. *Education Week, 34*(26), 1-13. Retrieved from http://ezproxy.bethel.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=keh&AN=101903135&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Murphy, J., & Shiffman, D. D. (2002). *Understanding and assessing the charter school movement*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

National Center for Education Statistics (2009). Retrieved from: https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010337.pdf

National Alliance of Public Charter Schools. (2018, March). Estimated public charter school enrollment, 2017-2018. In *Visitpubliccharters.org*. Retrieved February 27, 2019, from https://www.publiccharters.org/sites/default/files/documents/2018-03/FINAL%20Estimated%20Public%20Charter%20School%20Enrollment%2C%20201 7-18.pdf

National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research. (1979). The Belmont Report. In *HHS.gov*. Retrieved from https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/belmont-report/read-the-belmont-report/index.html

Ni, Y., Sun, M., & Rorrer, A. (2015). Principal turnover: Upheaval and uncertainty in charter

schools? *Educational Administration Quarterly, 51*(3), 409-437. doi:10.1177/0013161X14539808

Office of the Revisor of Statutes. (2019). 2019 Minnesota Statutes. In *Office of the Revisor of Statutes*. Retrieved from https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/124E.11

Page, L., & Levine, M. (1996). The pitfalls and triumphs of launching a charter school. *Educational Leadership, 54*(2), 26. Retrieved from http://ezproxy.bethel.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=keh&AN=9703192670&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Patten, M. L. (2014). *Understanding Research Methods* (9th ed.). Glendale, CA: Pyrczak Publishing.

Piccalo, E. (2013, October). Teacher empowerment in the governance of Minnesota's charter schools. In *Minnesota Association of Charter Schools*. Retrieved from http://www.mncharterschools.org/_uls/resources/Teacher_Empowerment_in_the_Governance_of_MN_Charter_Schools.pdf

Pipho, C. (1998). The evolution of school choice. *Phi Delta Kappan, 80*(4), 261. Retrieved from http://ezproxy.bethel.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=keh&AN=1422847&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Player, D., Youngs, P., Perrone, F., & Grogan, E. (2017). How principal leadership and person-job fit are associated with teacher mobility and attrition. *Teaching & Teacher Education, 67*, 330-339. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2017.06.017

Sage Journals. (2015). N.p.: SAGE. Retrieved from https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1076217515568935

Snodgrass, R., V. (2018). A review of the literature on principal turnover. *Review of Educational Research, 88*(1), 87-124. doi:10.3102/0034654317743197

Sun, M., & Ni, Y. (2016). Work environments and labor markets. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 52*(1), 144-183. doi:10.1177/0013161X15616659

Wilkens, C. P. (2013). How to lose your charter. *Journal of School Choice, 7*(2), 225-239. doi:10.1080/15582159.2013.789304

Yin, R. K. (1994). Case study research: Design and methods (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Zehr, M. A. (2010). Study looks at turnover of charter principals. *Education Week, 30*(13), 5. Retrieved from http://ezproxy.bethel.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=keh&AN=55643953&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Appendices

Appendix A – Research Questions

Introductory/Participant Description	Tell me about your professional background – education, professional positions, how long you have been serving as the leader at this school...	
Research Question	Charter School Leadership Challenge	Interview Question
RQ1. How did policy and legal factors influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school?	Complying with state and federal law	Describe your understanding of, and ability to comply with, all state and federal laws surrounding charter school compliance demands.
RQ1. How did policy and legal factors influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school?	Working with board	Describe your working relationship with the school's board.
RQ2. How did organizational management factors influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school?	Raising funds/managing finances	Describe your ability to identify, secure, and manage adequate funding and financial obligations for your school.
RQ2. How did organizational management factors influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school?	Maintaining the focus of school	Describe your ability to maintain the primary mission/vision of your school.
RQ2. How did organizational management factors influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school?	Acquiring or managing facilities	Describe your ability to secure and/or manage adequate facilities that meet the needs of your school.
RQ2. How did organizational management factors influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school?	Attracting qualified teachers	Describe your effectiveness in attracting, securing, and retaining qualified staff that is driven by the mission/vision of your school.

RQ3. How did student and family factors influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school?	Engaging parents	Describe your ability to adequately engage parents for all needs, requests, and communication.
RQ3. How did student and family factors influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school?	Attracting students	Describe your ability to recruit the students that drive the mission of your school.
RQ3. How did student and family factors influence a charter school leader's decision to leave their school?	Creating academic/career opportunities for graduating students	Describe your success in creating academic or career opportunities for graduating students.
Open Ended Question:	What do you see as the greatest challenge in charter school leadership?	

Appendix B – Invitation for Participation

Invitation to Participate in a Research Project on Charter School Leadership Turnover

Dear Sir or Madam,

My name is Curtis (Chipp) Windham and I am a Doctoral Student in the Ed.D Program at Bethel University. I am working on a research project under the supervision of Dr. Annette Ziegler, Dr. Tracy Reimer, and Dr. Matthew Putz.

I am writing to you today to invite you to participate in a study entitled, "The Causes and Impact of Charter School Leadership Turnover." This study aims to investigate how experiential, organizational, and environmental factors influence charter school leadership decisions to leave their position as an Executive Director, or like role.

This study involves one 60-minute interview that will take place in a mutually convenient, safe location. With your consent, interviews will be audio-recorded. Once the recording has been transcribed, the audio-recording will be destroyed.

While this project does involve some professional and emotional risks, care will be taken to protect your identity. This will be done by keeping all responses anonymous and allowing you to request that certain responses not be included in the final project.

You will have the right to end your participation in the study at any time, for any reason, up until January 31, 2020. If you choose to withdraw, all the information you have provided will be destroyed.

All research data, including audio-recordings and any notes will be encrypted. Any hard copies of data (including any handwritten notes or USB keys) will be kept in a locked cabinet at Spero Academy. Research data will only be accessible by the researcher and the research supervisor.

The ethics protocol for this project was reviewed by Bethel University, which provided clearance to carry out the research.

If you have any ethical concerns with the study, please contact Dr. Annette Ziegler, dissertation advisor: annette-ziegler@bethel.edu.

If you would like to participate in this research project, or have any questions, please contact me at 612.770.6913 or at cwindham@spero.academy.

Sincerely,

Curtis G. (Chipp) Windham, MAOL
Doctoral Student

Appendix C **– Participant Confidentially and Consent Agreement**

Participant Confidentiality and Consent Agreement

By signing this confidentiality agreement,

You agree to NOT discuss the comments shared during this interview with anyone after leaving the interview.

In return, all information you provide about yourself will be held in strictest confidence.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please print your name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____