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## Louisiana Charter Schools Leading in High Stakes Testing: Teacher's Perspective on Their Charter Schools' Success

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LOUISIANA CHARTER SCHOOLS LEADING THE DISTRICT  
IN HIGH STAKES TESTING:  
TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON THEIR CHARTER SCHOOL SUCCESSES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
The Department of Education in Curriculum and Instruction

by

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## ABSTRACT

Charter schools allow educators freedom to design and execute innovative curriculum and instruction. The best of educational philosophy is constructive only when it transforms into practice. Today's federal assessment program creates a pressurized educational climate that demands educators respond with systematic improvement of test scores. The purpose of this study is to investigate teacher responses to the question "Why is your charter school leading the district in high stakes testing?" The Louisiana State Evaluation Team has determined that the three charter schools featured in this study have been consistently outperforming their respective districts, and the state, while competing favorably with the nation on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Qualitative rigor was used to code and classify teacher interviews according to the Seven Correlates of Effective Schools. Themes that could not be classified were assigned a site-specific "correlate of effective charter schooling." These new correlates are: autonomy, esprit de corps, teacher dedication, teacher professionalism, and teacher leadership. The first school produced themes representing all Seven Effective School Correlates along with two new correlates: esprit de corps and teacher professionalism. The second and third schools produced all new themes represented by the "correlates of effective charter schooling."

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The school choice movement in Louisiana has evolved into a series of disparate charter schools; most are unique with half receiving independence and about half receiving semi-independence, as the charter granting agency stipulates. The origins of the national choice movement are historically in the many early, individual and isolated efforts made towards school choice, a number of magnet or specialized public schools were already in existence by the 1900s. Among these were Philadelphia's Central High School, Chicago's Lane Technology, Manhattan's New York High School for the Performing Arts, San Francisco's Lowell High School and the Bronx High School of Science in New York. However, although specialized schools existed and many continue to operate up to the present, they did not constitute what would be called a true school-choice movement. The freedom schools, magnet schools and alternative schools that evolved from the 1960s and into the 1970s and 1980s, were the predecessors of today's school choice movement (Kellmayer, 1995).

The choice movement has been and continues to be a change that is aimed at decentralizing power over decision-making at the school building level. Charter schools are no different in this respect. Charter schools are different from the earlier school choice movements because charter schools gain public school status with independent autonomy in exchange for accountability, which usually results in the closing of the school if its performance does not meet the goals set. Each charter school's accountability is determined by its charter and its design and because charter schools are public schools they are measured by the high-stakes testing required of *No Child Left Behind Act* (Skrla & Scheurick, 2004; Wells, 2002).



Charter schools have a newfound locus of control that allows those who are opposed to the current charter school movement to label charter schools as undemocratic because they are a form of privatizing public education. This study focused on three Louisiana charter schools that were performing better than their respective districts and in some cases better than the state and/or nation on standardized test scores.

Hassel (1999) discusses the fact that the emergence and spread of charter schools in the United States was one of the most significant developments in public education in the 1990s. When 1991 began, no state had passed charter school legislation. By the end of 1998, 34 states and the District of Columbia had charter school legislation on the books. As of the 2004 - 2005 school year there are 4,000 charter schools operating in 38 of the 50 states (Center For Educational Reform, 2004). Allowing citizens to start new public schools, or convert existing ones, frees charter schools of some laws and policies while holding them to a higher standard of accountability for learning results. Proponents hope charter school programs will stimulate the formation of promising new educational options for children. In addition, if the state money to attend conventional schools follows the student to charter schools, advocates argue that the programs will place competitive pressure on regular public schools and spur system-wide improvement. Charter schools are meant to serve as on-going, working educational laboratories and centers of innovation which, in turn, will hopefully result in changes to the curriculum and instruction practices in the traditional public school systems.

According to Clinchy (2000), "The creation of charter schools is requiring massive changes in the way our states and local districts are organized and operated. Indeed, these changes add up to a new organizational structure; a new kind of public school system" (p. ix).

Engel (2000) argues privatization, as it applies to public education, rescues parents from traditional educational competition by moving the consumer-producer relationship outside the political arena and advocates of charter schools adhere to the view that this free market approach is far more effective than the clumsy ballot casting for or against elected officials who may or may not represent our real views or do what they've promised, once elected. Democracy in the school system is thus seen as a destructive force vastly inferior to the impersonal operations of the market. Although it has been fashionable, since the downfall of communism, to assert that a market economy and democracy are synonymous is incorrect. Advocates of market models for education make no such claim.

The charter movement as described by Fuller (2000) asserts the point of view that the theory of action underlying charter schools is that they will be more innovative, effective, and accountable than bureaucratically managed traditional public schools. Charters are to be reviewed periodically and evidence of effectiveness brought forward. The assumption is that charter school directors and teachers will be responsive and inventive in advancing preferred ways of and teaching children.

### Louisiana's Educational Experiment

During the 1995 regular legislative session, the Louisiana legislature passed §B 1305 championed by Senator Cecil Picard (Act 192 of 1995). This law launched the charter school pilot program in Louisiana. The design and intention was to create independent public schools managed by parents, teachers, and citizens. Participation in this pilot program was voluntary for school boards, parents, teachers, and students. Louisiana's Charter School Act authorizes

voluntary experimentation by city and parish school boards in providing alternative independent public schools for pupils.

This law provides a framework for such a pilot program as a means for persons with ideas and motivation to participate in the experiment, and as a mechanism by which experimental results can be analyzed, the positive results repeated or replicated, if appropriate, and the negative results identified and eliminated. This charter school law provides a framework for public schools to implement new ideas and adjust their operations depending on the results. (Picard, 2002), (Senate Bill No. 1305, 1995). (Louisiana Legislative Law, pg.18, 1995).

Louisiana charter schools are exempt from some of the rules prevailing over traditional public schools; for example, rules that would prevent the merging of public agencies and businesses to allow fiscal savings. The charter legislation is aimed at increasing the involvement of staff, parents, and students in establishing the school-site management and curriculum. The law also enables charter schools to contract outstanding educators and to provide them with the kind of funds and flexibility to establish and maintain programs, as they deem necessary (Picard, 2002).

### Definitions of Charter Schools in Louisiana

The current Louisiana Charter School Law specifies five types of charters. These Charter Types I, II, III, IV, and V are defined by the charter granting agency. The charter type determines who is accountable for learning outcomes and who is fiscally responsible. Each charter school is evaluated annually by the Louisiana Charter School Evaluation Program. Louisiana has two charter granting agencies. The first is the local district, if rejected at the first level the charter

applicant may apply to the second charter granting agency, which is the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE).

A Type I charter school is a new charter school that is a non-profit organization and the local school board is the chartering authority. Funds to Type I schools flow from the local system to the charter school.

A Type II Charter School is a new start-up school or a conversion of a pre-existing school, also a non-profit organization and the BESE Board is the chartering authority. Type II funding derives from the legislature's general fund, and then flows through the Louisiana Department of Education to the Type II school.

A Type III Charter School is a conversion of a pre-existing school. The chartering authority for a Type III charter is local school board and parents and teachers must approve of the charter. Type III charter schools are funded by their local district.

A Type IV Charter School can be either a conversion of a pre-existing school or a start up-school. The chartering authority for a Type IV charter is the BESE and parents and teachers of the pre-existing school must again approve the conversion. The Type IV applicant must be a local school board and its local, state, and federal funds flow from the local district to the Charter School (Ducote, 2003).

The Type V Charter School is defined as a school that has been labeled academically unacceptable for four continuous years. The purpose of the Type V is to allow the state to take control over schools that have not improved as prescribed by the state accountability system. The BESE advertises for "request for proposals" (the charter) from local universities or other non-profit organizations and funds are directed to the non-profit from the state department of education if a charter is awarded. As of the fall of 2004, only the University of New Orleans has

submitted a Type V proposal and was successfully awarded a charter. The proposal was accepted by the state board of education and the university took over Capdau Middle School, Orleans Parish, which was renamed Capdau Charter School. The charter school opened in August 2004 (Wheat, 2004).

Charters in Louisiana are granted for an initial five-year period and then they may be renewed for another ten years. They are required to meet student achievement, mission accountability and state compliance issues or they simply go out of business. There are five types of Louisiana charter schools. All are organized as non-profit corporations, except the Type IV, which is a district-controlled semi-autonomous charter school. All other charter schools in Louisiana are governed by their own board of directors within the framework of the charter granted.

Louisiana charter schools are free from many laws and regulations that govern traditional public schools while still being held accountable for student achievement, mission accountability and state compliance issues that are non-academic. In Louisiana, charter schools are required by law to have an at-risk population that matches the ratio of at-risk to not at-risk students in the local district or region of service.

This study investigates three Louisiana charter schools that are performing better than their respective districts on standardized test scores; is an attempt to determine the primary contributing factors that account for the respective success of the three case study schools

## Need for Study

The state evaluation team identified the three charter schools in this study as conventional models of curriculum and instructional delivery and all three models of delivery were labeled as worthy of being replicated. They are innovative through their self-governing autonomy.

The schools profiled here include Avoyelles Public Charter School, a Type II charter; Children's Charter School, a Type I charter; and Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School, a Type II charter. There are other Louisiana charter schools that have been identified by the state evaluation team as worthy of replication. Belle Chasse Academy, a Type II charter, is a traditionally modeled delivery system designed for the military community. Jefferson Community School, a Type I charter, is designed to serve expelled junior high students. Lafayette Charter High School, a Type IV charter, features a computer based curriculum delivered twice a day, in the late afternoon and early evening. This study will concentrate exclusively on the three chartered, yet traditional education delivery systems that the state evaluation team deems worthy of replication.

The initial stage of this study underwent steps to identify the successful practices of these charter schools and the contributing factors that each faculty determined were the major reasons for their success. All Louisiana charter schools, including the three Louisiana charter schools in this study, are evaluated in relation to: (1) compliance (legal non-academic); (2) mission accountability; and (3) state accountability (standardized testing).

Louisiana's charter school movement was officially established by law in 1996, and this study of innovative curriculum and instruction models and practices labeled as worthy of replication by the state evaluation team, may provide as basis for improving educational

practices in traditional public schools. By adopting proven practices of the charter schools studied here, as well as examining the “ripple effect” of charter schools defined as when a charter causes a change in the traditional public school system, what now might be termed the Louisiana charter school “experiment”, could very well move into the realm of proven and replicable practices for traditional public schools across the state and possibly the country.

Study of these three leading charter schools promises to reveal the school-communities and specifically, teachers’ responses to the research question “Why is your school leading the district, state and /or competing favorably with the nation in standardized test scores?” By documenting the factors contributing to each school’s success in relation to effective school research, an understanding for school-wide innovation will be outlined for schools and/or school districts interested in raising test scores via the change agent of decentralization. Qualitative data will be coded and classified according to the Seven Correlates of Effective Research (Lezotte, 1982).

The Correlates of Effective Schools was developed when Ron Edmonds, Director of the Center for Urban Studies at Harvard University, refused to accept Coleman’s (1966) report entitled, *Equality of Educational Opportunity* that concluded family background was the determinate factor in public education. Edmonds acknowledged that family background does make a difference in education but educators have the ability to compensate for the disadvantaged. Edmonds was joined by Wilbur Brookover and Larry Lezotte of Michigan State University and they began developing alternative ideas, to oppose Coleman’s report. These ideas resulted in research that developed into the Seven Correlates of Effective Schools (Association For Effective Schools Inc., 1996).

Charter schools in Louisiana are required to use the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) as a pre-test and post-test measure of student gains each year of operation. This study was designed to uncover the contributing factors that have allowed these three Louisiana charter schools to perform better than their respective districts on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). In Louisiana's educational high stakes testing environment, quantitative results such as school-wide and grade-level composite test scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) were used consistently by the Louisiana State Charter School Evaluation Team for the past seven years as recorded by the state evaluation reports by Barr et al (2004; 2005). These three traditional models of education delivery that were selected for this study have been consistently out-scoring their respective districts on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS).

This qualitative study describes the factors that contribute to the respective case school's success in maintaining "leading-the-district" status. In this study leading-the-district status is defined as; standardized grade level test scores from the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). These grade level composite scores from each charter school were compared against the composite scores of the local district, the state and the nation. Qualitative data was amassed in the form of observations, individual interviews and group interviews with the administration, faculty, staff, parents, students, board members, and the school community. The qualitative data from a homogeneous group of teachers at each school was analyzed in relation to the Seven Correlates of Effective Schools for the reasons that account for the case school's success.

Qualitative data drawn from interviews conducted with a homogeneous group of teachers from each school was used to determine the factors that explain why each charter school's standardized test scores were and are leading the district, state and competing favorably with the nation.



The topic that was investigated was the general query: “Why are your school’s standardized test scores leading the district, state and competing favorably with the nation?” The results of documenting the success of the curriculum and instruction of three case schools may wield guidance in the replication of the researched models for schools and/or districts that seek to improve their school vision with a school choice model.

### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine three school communities to determine the contributing factors that account for the schools’ leading in their respective districts, the state and/or the nation in standardized test scores. The focus of the study was to document how each charter school defined the reasons for their respective successes. The documentation of these reasons should enable educators and policy makers to examine factors that contribute to successful charter schools.

Historical support for the scrutiny of charter schools in seeking answers to an often floundering traditional public school system that increasingly fails many populations it must serve are found in Engel (2000) when he states that:

From Jefferson to Mann to Dewey, and especially during the heyday of progressive education, the idea of local control was at the center of educational politics. In their absence, there is no convincing rationale to keep the schools public and social in terms of their governance, finance, and pedagogy. The battleground over the future of charter schools is thus yielded to those who argue that the marketing of education can and should make such determinations. This

ultimately supports a system of privatized schools in an educational free market, linked to a curricular agenda defined by the needs of a capitalist economy and the national-security state associated with it (p. 7).

Furthermore, Good & Braden (2000) define the “public” in public schools by stating “public” really stands for plurality and diversity. America is not a private club defined by one group’s historical hegemony. What we share in common is precisely our respect for difference: that is the secret to our strength as a nation, and it is the key to our democratic education. They make a similar argument for public charter schools this way:

Charter schools create a public. In addition, in creating the right quasi-public, the charter schools contribute toward strengthening the spiritual basis of the American Creed. That is how Jefferson understood it, how Horace Mann understood it, and how John Dewey understood it (p. 8).

Good and Braden (2000) also state that experimentation with charter schools is designed to improve public education in ways that the traditional public schools have not done. However, at present, we still do not have enough information to demonstrate what is working in charter schools. So, before we make massive new investments in charter schools, states should develop procedures for establishing, monitoring, and evaluating charter schools—procedures that will yield information that may lead to the overall improvement of public schools, in general.

In light of Louisiana’s investment in charter schools and the evaluation process that each charter must undergo, this study is important because it defines not only why three charter schools are performing better than traditional public schools on standardized tests; but, it also identifies the contributing factors of each school’s successes in accordance with the Larry Lezotte’s (2001) Seven Correlates of Effective School Research.

The beginnings of Effective School Research was when Ron Edmonds, (1982) from the University of Michigan as was Lezotte, published a paper entitled *Programs of School Improvement: An Overview* in which they wrote that schools may be chiefly answerable for whether or not children perform satisfactorily in school, although the family is probably critical in determining whether or not students flourish in school.

The first task of effective school researchers was to identify existing effective schools. These schools were defined as schools that were successful in educating all students regardless of their socioeconomic status or family background based on standardized test results. Examples of these especially effective schools were found repeatedly in various locations and in both urban and rural communities. After identifying these schools, the common characteristics were identified. Edmonds (1982) found that especially effective schools had strong instructional leadership, a strong sense of mission, demonstrated effective instructional behaviors and that they held high expectations for all students, practiced frequent monitoring of student achievement, and operated in a safe and orderly environment. Out of this research, the Seven Correlates of Effective Schools were derived (Lezotte, 2001). The seven overall categories that Lezotte (1991) assigned to the correlates are as follows: (1) Safe and Orderly Environment, (2) Climate of High Expectations for Success, (3) Instructional Leadership, (4) Clear and Focused Mission, (5) Opportunity to Learn and Student Time on Task, (6) Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress and (7) Home-School Relations.

Louisiana's charter schools were designed to be laboratories of innovation. They would be places where autonomy is intended to expedite school-based freedoms concerning: selection of curriculum and instruction, hiring and firing, and budget decisions. These site-based freedoms would generate innovative teaching and learning practices designed to improve curriculum and

instruction (R.S. 17:3983, Andrews & Rothman 2002; Picard, 2002; & Manno, et al. 2000 p. 741).

Good and Braden (2000) reported that experimentation with charter schools is intended to improve public education in ways the traditional public schools have not improved. From a national standpoint educators do not have enough information to determine what is working in charter schools. Good and Braden (2000) further posits that states must develop procedures for evaluation that will then establish protocols that can yield information which in turn may lead to the improvement of traditional public schools, in general. Since the 1997 - 1998 school year Louisiana has invested in a Charter School Evaluation Program that applies a three pronged effort in charter school evaluations: (1) mission accountability, (2) state compliance and (3) standardized test scores.

This study is designed to begin the process of documenting teacher determined explanations for the successes of three charter schools in Louisiana. This documentation process allows for the fulfillment of Louisiana's charter school law.

### Theoretical Framework of the Study

This theoretical framework begins with a general view of education and knowledge transfer and moves into the locus of control debate in American public education. This locus of control debate was and still is inherent in our democratic society.

In his *Didactica Magna* (1632) Comenius writes:

We venture to promise a Great Didactic, that is to say, the whole art of teaching all things to all men, and indeed of teaching them with certainty, so that the result

cannot fail to follow; further, of teaching them pleasantly, that is to say, without annoyance or aversion on the part of teacher or pupil, but rather with the greatest enjoyment for both; further of teaching them thoroughly, not superficially and showily, but in such a manner as to lead to true knowledge, to gentle morals, and to the deepest piety. Lastly, we wish to prove all this *a priori*, that is to say, from the unalterable nature of the matter itself, drawing off, as from a living source, the constantly flowing runlets, and bringing them together again into one concentrated stream, that we may lay the foundations of the universal art of founding universal schools.

Ben Franklin's (1749) message to the community in his letter, *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania* reflects the same sentiment that is the essence of today's charter school movement when he refers to local support and control at the same time; he specifically uses the term, "charter", in his letter:

The good Education of Youth has been esteemed by wise Men in all Ages, as the surest Foundation of the Happiness both of private Families and of Commonwealths. Almost all Governments have therefore made it a principal Object of their Attention, to establish and endow with proper Revenues, such Seminaries of Learning, as might supply the succeeding Age with Men qualified to serve the Publick with Honour to themselves, and to their Country. The following Hints are offered towards forming a Plan for the Education of the Youth of Pennsylvania, It is propos'd that some Persons of Leisure and publick Spirit apply for a Charter, by which they may be incorporated, with Power to erect an Academy for the Education of Youth, to govern the same, provide Masters,

make Rules, receive Donations, purchase Lands, etc., and to add to their Number, from Time to Time such other Persons as they shall judge suitable.

That the Members of the (charter granting) Corporation make it their Pleasure, and in some Degree their Business, to visit the Academy often, encourage and countenance the Youth, countenance and assist the Masters, and by all Means in their Power advance the Usefulness and Reputation of the Design; that they look on the Students as in some Sort their Children. That a House be provided for the Academy, if not in the Town, not many Miles from it; the Situation high and dry, and if it may be, not far from a River, having a Garden, Orchard, Meadow, and a Field or two (p. 2, 3 Smith, 1997).

School choice was affirmed by the Supreme Court Case of *Pierce v. Society of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary*. The court ruled in 1925 that a compulsory education law requiring all children to attend public school violated the due process clause of the U.S. Constitution. Although the *Pierce* Decision was based on balancing the fundamental religious freedom of the parents against the interest of the state, it secured the place of school choice in American education (Alexander and Alexander, 1985).

In his introduction to *School: The Story of American Public Education* (2001), Tyack explains that early in the nineteenth century, Thomas Jefferson argued that locally controlled public schools were key democratic institutions in two ways. First, by teaching correct political principles to the young, they could nurture virtuous citizens. Equally important, local control gave adult citizens a chance to exercise self-rule. In the twentieth century, John Dewey voiced a similar commitment to education in democracy, through an emphasis on political

socialization and wise collective choices. For these philosophers of democracy, education was a common good, not simply an individual consumer good (Mondale and Patton, 2001).

### John Dewey and the Genesis of Democratic Curriculum Practices

The Progressive Era, with new visions of education, began around the turn of the twentieth century at a time of rapid expansion and continued for the next 50 years. John Dewey represented the more liberal thinking of progressivism, while the more conservative strand arrived largely from the work of Frederick W. Taylor (1911) and Weber (1947). According to Cremin (1988), “[Social] reformers had a more subtle purpose for schooling in mind. They believed education was more effective than politics in achieving long-term societal changes. Because education altered traditional relationships among individuals and groups, some saw it as a form of politics. This education-as-politics metaphor would advance forward more explicitly with Dewey's stance in the Progressive Era (p. 19).

Wincek (1995) states that some progressives rejected the centralized factory metaphor of schooling and suggested its implementation would produce passive citizens ill equipped to participate in democratic life. The view of school as a social institution is a key component of John Dewey, who concentrated his work on articulating relationships between the individual, the community and society (p.20). Longstreet & Shane (1993) note Dewey's child-in-society concept of education recognizes as societies grow more complex children need more formal education to master the complexities of living. One pillar of the grassroots charter school movement is a locally based education system that adjusts to the particular needs of society that

the child is in, because in today's pluralistic society education may be better presented if the diversity of society's cultures is represented by the offerings of public school choices.

### Magnet Schools

The 1960s and early 1970s found most of the reforms grounded in equity as the ripple effect of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* reached the teachers. Reform was piecemeal, but more importantly the shift in direction moved education away from the democratic ideal of excellence to equity. The social fabric of the nation was unsettled by such events as the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Feminist Movement. The repercussions of the 1960s and 1970s and the pursuit of equity resulted in the origins of magnet schools, some of which were created for the reason of racial equality, and alternative schools created to educate students who did not "fit in" the traditional school model.

Smrekar and Goldring (1999) postulated on magnet schools when they wrote that the Supreme Court put a stop to old-fashioned segregation disguised as the freedom of choice in 1968 when it ruled in *Green v. New Kent County* that "freedom of choice" was not sufficient to desegregate the schools (p. 15). Magnet schools allowed for some site-based control and as desegregation moved north and as the nation's affluence grew, school choice became an important component in court orders and plans of the 1970s. Smrekar and Goldring go on to explain that against the backdrop of a cultural debate about public obligations and private choices, there was growing support for a public policy that moves schools beyond the traditional developmental needs of children to a deep involvement with the more entrenched issues of community revitalization, acknowledging a shift from a centrally controlled system to a



decentralized controlled system. Magnet schools typically have some form of site-based autonomy while the local district maintained control of financial and sometimes policy decisions.

### Alternative Schools

In addition to, and often instead of top-level encouragement, grass-roots elements have contributed greatly to the tremendous growth of contemporary alternative schools during 1970s. Broudy (1978) contends that these so-called “grass root schools” include parents, students, and individual classroom teachers, people who typically exercise little influence over the course of educational change (p. 111). Duke (1978) writes about the locus of control concerning alternative schools when he noted that as African-Americans pressed for community control of schools and other institutions affecting their everyday lives, Whites started to echo their sentiments. A raft of new books and articles decried the failure of large, factory-like public schools to deal with the needs of individual students and diverse groups. Bigness was bad. Centralized decision-making signaled a fundamental deviation from the local locus of control mapped out by our nation's forefathers (p. 95).

Melenyzer (1993) writes that teachers in alternative schools need to undergo a fundamental paradigm shift. The shift will enable teachers to become the foci of influence in their classrooms and to understand that regardless of their students' level of dysfunction, they can successfully intervene and help students make cognitive and affective programs. Such a paradigm shift is integral to the process of “empowerment” which is defined as “the opportunity and confidence to act upon one's ideas and to influence the way one performs in one's profession. True (teacher) empowerment leads to increased professionalism as teachers assume

responsibility for an involvement in the decision making process” (p. 3). Alternative schools, just like their predecessors, magnet schools, utilize some site-based autonomy while experiencing the control of the local district in financial and sometime policy control.

Naisbett (1982) writes that centralized structures are crumbling all across America. But, certainly, our society is not falling apart. In fact, the people of this country are rebuilding America from the bottom up into a stronger, more balanced and more diverse society. American culture is decentralizing as well. As we decentralize, we diversify, and tend to stress our differences instead of our similarities. This is what decentralization is all about. America’s industrial machine is probably history’s greatest centralizing force (p. 97). The shifting of the financial locus of control from the center of the government, namely the school board, into the community allows the new public charter schools to meet the local needs of that specific society through autonomy and innovation is a major cornerstone of the charter school movement and the 1990s.

Naisbett (1982) argues that decentralization is America’s natural condition, with centralization emerging only in our recent industrial past. The sheer size of this country alone is certainly one factor favoring decentralization. But perhaps even more importantly, strong central leadership is anathema to democracy. Thomas Jefferson’s statement “the less government the better” is back in fashion to many and certainly where the charter school movement is concerned. It is essential to note that the pull of decentralization extends far beyond politics and geography. It is fundamental to the structuring and the transformation of social relationships and social institutions, including our educational practices (p. 99).

Hassel (1999) writes that charter schools also appear to sidestep the difficulties of implementing reform in the highly centralized American education system; instead of mandating

change in existing schools, policymakers simply invite education entrepreneurs to come forward with new ideas, create a process for selecting the most promising proposals, and institute a system for holding the selected schools accountable for results. If traditional public schools make changes in response to charter programs, they do so in order to compete (p. 5).

In summary, this theoretical framework acknowledges the locus of control argument of education. From 1600s when Comenius first called for universal schools to the 1740s when Ben Franklin used the term charter to describe the local locus of control for public education in the New World through the industrialization period, when America created the “school as factory” metaphor and into Dewey’s Progressive Movement; up to the equity movement of the 1950s and 1960s public education has historically augmented a centrally located education system. This historically centralized system is still very entrenched in today’s educational framework, as well as in today’s social and political framework.

*Brown v The Topeka Board of Education* (1954) created an equity movement in education. A new and more diverse national population, coupled with the social unrest of the 1960s demanded a school choice environment designed for local empowerment. The courts answered with magnets schools. Magnet schools advanced the school choice debate with the local locus of control, and school choice continued through the 1970s with the development of alternative schools. Alternative schools are designed to meet the needs of a more at-risk student population designed for local solutions to local problems. This view of decentralization as re-socialization of a vastly plural and sophisticated society has evolved into this new form of public education called charter schools. The new site-based financial control of public education is represented by Hassel’s 1999 view of decentralized educational policy or charter schooling can improve practices of traditional public schools.

## Research Questions

During the 1970s, the Hudson Institute's examination of the failings of the American educational system developed an evaluation model, which the Louisiana Charter School Evaluation Team used as a model for its original Site Visit Protocol.

The research questions used in this study originated from the culmination of three evaluation graduate school classes, the third being a Practicum in Evaluation. The class work used in this researcher's evaluation practicum modified the Louisiana State Charter School Evaluation Program's Site Visit Protocol, a tool used by the evaluation team to conduct interviews during their day long visits to the school community. The evaluation practicum class work was designed to modify the site visit protocol, a questionnaire designed to interview the entire school community. A focus group interview was conducted with the two experienced education professors from an accredited Louisiana university who along with their research associates, comprise the Louisiana Charter School Evaluation Team. The State Evaluation Team interview and the new Site Visit Protocol were used as a guide to for the formation of the research questions used in the present study.

Louisiana boasts of 17 charter schools. Eight of the schools are alternative models of curriculum and instruction delivery and nine charter schools are designed in the tradition of the grammar school model. The state evaluation team has deemed three of the eight traditionally styled charter schools educational models worthy of replication. This research attends to the study of these three charter schools: Avoyelles Public Charter School, (2) Children's Charter School and (3) Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School.

The main research question that guided this inquiry was: “What are the underlying factors that allowed your school (Avoyelles Public Charter School/Children’s Charter School/Glencoe Charter School) to lead the district, state and compete favorably with the nation in standardized test scores?”

1. What reasons do the faculty and staff give to explain their schools leading status in the district?
2. What is the *declared* philosophy of the individual case school?
3. How does school leadership affect the teaching strategies used in this charter school?
4. How has the founding vision been actualized?
5. What influence has the school's social and political environment had upon the evolving cultures of these schools?

### Statement of Research Problem

The purpose of this investigation was to examine the contributing factors that led to the successes of three charter schools. This investigation was undertaken to answer the following questions, based on an overarching research question that guided both this inquiry and individual interviews: “What are the underlying factors that allowed your school (Avoyelles Public Charter School/Children’s Charter School/Glencoe Charter School) to lead the district, state and compete favorably with the nation in standardized test scores?”

Andrews and Rothman (2002) discuss how successful charter schools create an infrastructure in which schools can thrive, allowing staff members to share their experiences and

knowledge in free flowing creative ways that foster new approaches to problems. By serving as an organization that makes innovation happen, charter schools succeed in helping educators become more effective, and to help education reform succeed.

The local district's approach to school choice may have helpful consequences for public education in general. Good and Braden (2000) provide a somewhat optimistic conclusion for charter schools that states the consequences may be limited to the charter school movement and its positive development. The traditional endorsement of public schools and to a lesser extent of the potential of charter schools is not out of blind allegiance to public schools because educators have to identify and overcome many social and academic problems in a local context, and recommend that some traditional public schools be closed and reopened as a charter school.

### Significance of the Study

One significant aspect of this study is that results of teacher interviews may complement the original Louisiana charter school law by identifying and explaining how three relatively brand new schools that average five years of operation are performing better than their local traditional public schools on standardized tests. It is important to note that most of the traditional public schools are approximately one hundred years old or more. Capitalizing on the charter school experiment may lead to a school change model based on parental choice and site-based autonomy in exchange for a stricter accountability.

This study was significant for the following reasons. There is a heavy weight placed on student achievement in relation to Louisiana's high-stakes assessment model. This study examined the relationships between student test scores, and the school communities'

explanations of their successes. The explanations are classified according to the Seven Correlates of Effective Schools as applied to the individual school's mission. By defining the characteristics and factors that created leading status of the case schools in regard to standardized scores when compared to the district, state and nation; a guide to replication is possible. Replicating successful school models for curriculum and instruction will enable educators to direct needy schools toward a more efficient curriculum and instruction delivery model. At present, no researcher has examined the relationship of Louisiana's charter schools that are leading the district, state and/or competing favorably with national standardized test scores. This study is designed to assess and evaluate the process by which charter schools in Louisiana are performing well enough to create a model or models for traditional public school improvement.

Charter schools are corroborated as an experimental school improvement design that evolved from the school choice movement in the arguments of some of the most prominent supporters of market ideology in education. John Chubb and Terry Moe (1990) explicitly reject democracy as a means of organizing schools. They call for a school choice system based on the "guiding principle" that "public authority must be put to use in creating a system that is almost entirely beyond the reach of public authority" (p. 218) and propose the creation of what is essentially a network of publicly funded state-chartered schools. Chubb and Moe (1990) argue that student academic achievement, their sole criterion for evaluating public education, depends on the institutional environment of the schools. Democratic control, given the nature of public authority, "is essentially coercive" and inevitably leads to bureaucracy. The combined effect of both this type of democracy and bureaucracy is destructive to academic achievement. In their words, "choice is a panacea that can liberate the schools" (p. 217).

The Louisiana charter school experiment was designed to allow education entrepreneurs to be innovative so that autonomy would translate into innovations in the classrooms and advance pedagogy. The charter school movement is designed to move educational decisions away from the democratic arena of politics (school boards) and into the hands of educational entrepreneurs with site based decision making capabilities.

According to Clinchy (2000):

Educators are witnessing the emergence of a quite different response to the perceived educational crisis even as this authoritarian, “top-down” Goals 2000 agenda is being put into place. A smaller but growing “bottom up” movement is aiming at radically democratizing our public school systems through decentralizing the decision-making power in our local school districts down to the level of newly created, small, relatively autonomous but strictly public schools (p. 3- 4).

Fuller (2000) further discusses locus of control:

Educators aim to be informative and provocative, placing the charter movement in historical and political context. We ask whether state-led school reform is a viable alternative to school choice and charter schools. Educators should demonstrate how charter schools deliver on their twin promise: more democratic participation at the grassroots and better schools that teach and help raise children more effectively. If charters cannot demonstrate that they have achieved these things, then this experiment in radically decentralizing public authority will have failed (p. 11).



These three Louisiana charter schools are excelling. This study is designed to discover the contributing factors that define the reasons for the successes of these three Louisiana charter schools that were labeled replicable models by the Louisiana Charter School Evaluation Team.

### Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study the following words/terms are defined:

Autonomy: Autonomy is defined as the director's (principal's) ability to govern the school as seen fit by factors determined in the charter, the board of directors, and the administration, the faculty and combined with anyone involved in the charter school community. Generally speaking, the school is designed as its own Local Education Authority (LEA) in charge of hiring and firing policies, curricula decisions and all other aspects (i.e., physical plant) of operating and maintaining a school. The community charter schools that participated in this study were created to provide freedom from state and local rules, regulations and bureaucracies, but they were forced to either create their own systems to supply the services or to contract with outside firms to get the needed support. All sought support from these outside sources. Thus, some may argue none of the schools in the study were completely autonomous, and this raises the questions of whether complete autonomy is possible (Fox, 2004).

Charter School: A charter school is a publicly funded independent school. Charter school founders, after winning approval of their proposal before a school board, state board of education, a university, or board of regents, can operate autonomously from the state's education code and regulatory strings for three to twenty years depending on the state law. The basic level

of per-pupil spending allocated to regular public schools is also allocated to the new charter school. In most states, charter schools can avoid teachers' unions. The charter school's local board, or corporate office, if run by a firm, hires and fires the principal as well as the teaching staff. A local school district or state education board, depending on state legislation, can grant a charter to a small band of local teachers to break away from the district (these are called conversion charters.) Authorizers can also grant a charter to parents, community activists, or clusters of educators and corporate entrepreneurs. Thus, autonomy is established away from the local public school district (Fuller, 2000; Manno, Finn, and Vancourek 2000; Nathan 1996).

Charter Schools/Louisiana: Charter schools in Louisiana are public schools that are considered semi-independent when the chartering agency is a local school board and independent when the chartering agency is the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE). These are the only two types of charter-granting agencies in Louisiana.

Core Knowledge™: The Core Knowledge™ is an educational reform movement based on the premise that a grade-by-grade core of common learning is necessary to ensure a sound elementary education. This curriculum realignment was started in 1986 by E. D. Hirsch, Jr., Professor Emeritus at the University of Virginia and author of *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (1987) Hirsch (1987) argued that, for the sake of academic excellence, greater fairness, and higher literacy, early schooling should provide a solid, specific, shared core curriculum in order to help children establish strong foundations of knowledge. Core Knowledge™ is an outline of what needs to be taught; teachers are free to decide when and how best to teach the material. Teachers have classroom-autonomy concerning implementation and can use a variety of creative lessons and teaching approaches. Collaboration is commonplace, because sharing ideas and resources is a natural act of teaching.

Direct Instruction®: has evolved from a theory of instruction developed by Siegfried Engelmann of the University of Oregon. Englemann's early works focused on beginning reading, language, and math and were published by Science Research Associates (SRA) in 1968 under the trade name DISTAR® (Direct Instruction System for Teaching and Remediation). Over the past three decades, the original curricula had been combined with the Science Research Associates' (SRA) stories for a reading and writing curriculum.

These lessons are carefully scripted and tightly sequenced. The comprehensive Direct Instruction® model incorporates teacher development and organizational components needed to optimize use of these programs.

Leading Status: The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) contracts with an independent evaluation team comprised of two university education professors and research assistants that evaluates all charter schools in the state. This eight year old evaluation process has developed measures of empirical data and qualitative data used to evaluate the school climate, curriculum and instruction. The systematic site visits as well as the surprise visits have been designed to provide a systematic approach to measuring success of the charter schools. The evaluation method is triangulated with evaluations of: 1) compliance with policies and laws, 2) state accountability measures, and 3) school-level performance standards established by the school's mission goals and objectives. The performance of the case schools have been deemed "very successful" by the state evaluators and two of the three are models for replication and the third school's test scores are fourth out of 63 in the district. All three have been labeled models worthy of replication.

Saxon Math™: Saxon Math is one the nation's best selling and most thoroughly researched skills-based mathematics program for grades K - 12. Saxon's unique pedagogical approach,

based on instruction, practice and assessment distributed across the grade level, incorporates 20 years of research and classroom experience. Saxon Math™ provides daily opportunities for students to develop proficiency in: 1) conceptual understanding, 2) procedural fluency, 3) strategic competence, 4) adaptive reasoning, and 5) productive disposition. These math skills are not clustered in a chapter, but evenly distributed throughout the entire grade level. Each lesson has a review session that is cumulative as are the weekly and monthly students measurements. Saxon Math™ successfully merges these five strands across all grade levels, allowing students to achieve mathematical proficiency and use their math skills in the classroom and in the real world.

### Summary and Overview of the Study

Chapter I reviews the reasoning and the development of the school choice movement with a charter school scrutiny. Louisiana's educational experiment with charter schooling is defined. The need for the study is related to the charter school law. The history of modern day school choice acknowledges magnet and alternative schools Charter school history is acknowledges and charter schools were designed as a means to improve education through public school autonomy. The significance of the study is linked to the charter school law.

In Chapter II, research providing evidence of the impact of the Charter School Movement is discussed. The literature indicates positive evaluations leading to a call for the continuation of the charter school experiment in the name of improving public education. The literature indicates that successful charter schools may be considered for school improvement models. Chapter III provides a discussion of the methodology used in this study. Descriptions of the case school's population, demographics of the faculty and staff, instrumentation used,

protocols and data analysis techniques are included. Chapter IV displays the standardized test scores and a summation of the qualitative data provided by the school-community in relation to coding based on the Seven Correlates of Effective Schools as well as charter school specific coding. Chapter V provides an interpretation of the results, conclusions and recommendations for future research. Implications for replication of the case schools are also discussed.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

The present day school choice movement that is comprised of vouchers and charter schools has its origins in the magnet and alternative schools of yesteryear (Clincy, 2000 & Fuller, 2000). The established school choice movement shows that “charter schools are so diverse and disparate in terms of their quality and viability that it would be misleading to try to generalize about the success or failure of these [new public] ‘schools’ as if they were one entity” (Wells, 2002 p. 2). Charter schools are growing in number and stature by exchanging autonomy for a higher standard of accountability (Clincy, 2000; Fuller, 2000 & Nathan, 1996). These ongoing changes within public schooling combined with the timing of the fourteen year old Charter School Movement has created a body of literature that is, perhaps piecemeal at best, and therefore many of the conclusions and results mostly relate to local or state level information (Peterson & Campbell, 2001; Stulberg, 2004). The lack of congruence in the charter school literature reflects a main component of charter schooling, localized definitions. This lack of congruence is advantageous for the Charter School Movement because it channels educators into examining charter schools with a more focused state-wide view. A muddled view is due to variations in federal and state laws (Deal & Hentschke, 2004; Green, 2005). Few studies involve multi-state comparisons and even fewer are nationally comprehensive. These new public schools have no national format; yet, are governed by: first the individual state law; second, by

the individual school mission; and thirdly, because they are public schools by the No Child Left Behind Act.

The concern for quality education has been a driving force behind all educational movements of choice. This choice movement has created an atmosphere for the Charter School Movement to develop and create the climate for change in the inadequate traditional public school system. It is a belief that with research and evaluation the Charter School Movement may be able to revitalize and improve the entire public school system as it exists today (Fusarelli, 2002; Green, 2001; Manno, Finn & Vanourek, 2000; Nathan, 1996).

Hassel (1999) and Manno, Finn, and Vanourek (2000) write that these improvements, found in charter schools across several parameters, are worth spreading throughout the larger context of all public schools. Charter schools are studied and viewed not merely as the individual successful entities, but rather as educational laboratories; places where experimentation and innovation can be transferred to traditional public schools. This transfer to traditional public schools is labeled the “ripple effect” (Good & Braden, 2000; Hassel, 1999; Maranto, 1999).

Charter schools can effect innovations in public education. Investigating charter schools with an organizational structure that is different from the traditional public school organizational structure may offer a guide to school improvement through site-based autonomy. The charter schools in this study have a more stringent method of accountability than a traditional public school that includes closure for non-performance. Successful charters offer an insight to public school innovation through site-based autonomy in exchange for accountability which can be defined as perform or be closed (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Good & Braden, 2000; Nathan, 1996; Wells, 1999).

Chapter II visits school choice with a national view of American education; the evolution of charter schools from their predecessors, magnet schools, and alternative schools. Voucher programs are defined and discussed and the Charter School Movement is identified along with charter school legislation and minorities in the confines of charter schools on a national and Louisiana level. Next, the publicness of charter schooling is discussed followed by the advantages and disadvantages of charter schooling. Finally, the Correlates of Effective Schools are discussed.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to determine the factors contributing to the leading status of three Louisiana charter schools. The study will define the leading status of the three case schools and investigate the reasons for their successes. The aspects of schooling studied include; curriculum and instruction, how leadership roles are managed and viewed, teacher empowerment, student test scores and performance, and the role of families in the charter school community.

### Charter Schools and High Stakes Testing

Good and Braden (2000) create a setting for researchers and standardized test results:

Those who have studied student achievement in charter and non charter public schools have suggested that is either premature or virtually impossible to compare student performance between charter and non- charter schools because of inadequate research designs or sampling procedures. Further many evaluators lament the fact that achievement comparisons are limited to standardized test. (p. 154)



The growth of the Charter School Movement created a great deal of discussion in the press and in the think tanks and the ivory towers. Much of this work has focused on explaining the charter school concept, characterizing laws, and relating stories of early implementation. The most comprehensive is Nathan's (1996) *Charter Schools* which addresses historical background, arguments for laws, and practical advice for organizers. Hassel (1999) contends that "because the movement is in its infancy, the most sophisticated analysis have primarily examined charter school statutes rather than implementation" (p. 9).

In many cases, charter schools seem to be in the forefront in terms of innovation, accountability and even overall success. In 2000, the Center for Education Reform (CER) conducted a review of all existing research on charter schools, using studies and reports published from the mid-1990s through the fall of 2000. By the end of that review, (CER) had discovered a trend: of the fifty-three studies that met their undisclosed standard(s) for objectivity, the overwhelming majority, fifty, had determined that charter schools were living up to their mandate to be innovative, accountable, and successful.

Gill et al. (2001) performed a meta-analysis of existing research reports for charter schooling. The meta-analysis is not a research study in and of itself. It reports that there is no conclusive evidence (nationally) about the performance of charter schools and that at the very worst they are the same as traditional public schools. Finn, Manno, and Vanourek (2001) and Maranto, Milliman, Hess and Gresham (1999) also reported there is not enough evidence yet for an academic performance conclusion. Moreover, Gill et al. (2001) found substantial evidence that a year or more in a charter school has a discernable positive academic effect on students. Charter schools are also found to generate overwhelming satisfaction among parents, especially compared to their public school counterparts.

The 2003 Center for Educational Reform cumulative report, *What Research Reveals About Charter Schools*, unveils a trend that consistently runs through the 2003 report: charters are doing the job they were designed to do, with practically 90% (88 of the 98) major reports now showing that charter schools are improving education for America's children (Center For Educational Reform, 2003).

Greene, Forster and Winters (2003) compared charter schools with traditional public schools that had similar student populations. The authors hoped to improve on studies that frequently look only at raw achievement data without accounting for student populations. Nationally, they found that charter schools serving "general student population" among schools not targeted to specific groups, out performed the geographically-nearest traditional public schools by about three percentile points in math and two percentile points in reading. In addition, charter students in Texas and Florida significantly outpaced the nearest traditional public schools, by seven to eight percentile cumulative percentile points in Texas and six points in Florida. A large percentage of the nation's charter schools those targeting specific groups of students, were excluded from this analysis in order to compare schools with populations similar to traditional public schools.

Hoxby (2004) compared mostly fourth, and in some cases fifth graders, from charter schools with fourth graders, and in some cases fifth graders, to competing traditional public schools. Hoxby (2004) based her conclusions on data from 99% of all charter school fourth graders for the 2002-2003 or the 2003-2004 school years, whichever year was available. When compared to fourth graders in the nearest traditional public school charter school students are four percent more likely to be proficient in reading and two percent more likely to be proficient in math, on their respective state exams. When charter school students are compared to

traditional public schools with similar demographics, charter school students are five percent more likely to be proficient in reading and three percent more likely to be proficient in math on their respective state tests.

Charter schools that have been in operation longer have a greater proficiency advantage over the matched traditional public schools. Hoxby's (2004) revealed, in reading, the advantage is 2.5% for a charter school that has been in operation for one to four years; 5.2 % for a charter school in operation five to eight years and 10% for a charter schools in operation nine to eleven years. Hoxby's (2004) conclusions suggest charter schools are especially likely to raise the achievement of students who are poor, at-risk or Hispanic.

Allen (2005) writes that the National Assessment of Education Progress (NEAP) Report (2004) is a serious reminder that in traditional public schools only one-third of all fourth graders are making the grade in reading and math, and far less than that for minority students. (NEAP) 2004 reports in the race to raise student achievement charter school students are in a statistical tie with traditional public schools, despite the fact that some charter schools students receive less funding than their traditional public school counterparts.

Good and Braden (2000) and Tyack and Cuban (1995) have noted a trend throughout history that citizens and many policy-makers have expressed deep concern about the performance of public schools. Though they grant that the common public school once served our democratic society well, they argue, "As we move further into an information-driven society we need schools that are fundamentally different from those we and our parents attended. Many Americans have concluded that [traditional] public schools have outlived their usefulness" (Good & Braden, 2000, p. 4).

## Evolution of American Public Schools

The evolution of school choice using charter schools to innovate the traditional public school begins with the earliest development of the common school in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, eventually leading to major developments that became known as the Progressive Era at the beginning of the turn of the century and into the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During World War I, the Great Depression and World War II little changed in education. Then, with the postwar period and into the 1950s education focused on issues of equality. Gradually, due to the climate of radical social, political, and economic changes in the 1960s led to judicial decisions, therefore one may see the creation of schools of choice to include magnet schools and alternative schools. Decentralization developments are the hallmarks of the 1970s and 1980s with regard to school choice which, in turn, heralded the origin of the voucher and Charter School Movements in the 1990s. There is a need to visit this historical evolutionary process of public education in order to fully understand how charter schools developed and how they may continue to contribute to the advancement of American educational reform.

The common school was based on the concept of social need during the industrialization period. Generally speaking, the common school was an imitation of the Latin grammar school from the old world. The curriculum and instructional design of educational pedagogy that comprised the common school became the backbone of educational design which is present today. The Protestant tenets of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century created and encouraged Protestantism as a venue for popular literacy. Thus, a reading, writing and math format of education was established for the wealthy  
(Jorgenson, 1987)

Itzkoff (1976) makes notation of early teacher training:

In the 1840s and 1850s, the tax-supported Common School was gradually established throughout the East and Midwest. At the same time that it introduced a modicum of literacy into the population, it also began to superimpose new social goals. Normal schools were established in various states of the East—Massachusetts, New York, Connecticut—to train teachers beyond the elementary level of literacy with which many of them were previously equipped. The few existing public high schools, if not on a level with the better private secondary academies that channeled their few graduates into the exclusive liberal arts colleges such as Princeton, Harvard, and Yale, at least gave off an aura of expectation of improvement. Throughout the land, there was an appreciation of the meaning of educational standards as established by the various states for the common educational good. (p. 59)

Jorgenson (1987) discusses the nationalization of American education when he wrote generally local politics were motivated to educate the work force needed to fuel the local economy. Education became a national front line political issue with the platform of the Whig Party and the control it wielded. States began to organize educationally in 1860s. This began the practice of state standards; an integral aspect of the government's function in education

Itzkoff discusses the second half of the century and traditional high schools by stating the following:

Secondary schools supported by tax moneys had existed since the 1820s in the larger cities (Boston, New York). But until 1872, the principle was purely a local option. Therefore, a huge gap intervened between the general populace getting an

education in a one-room schoolhouse and that small group of elite in the liberal arts colleges and universities. Until after the Civil War, the secondary school was most likely a private academy.

(p. 61)

Alexander and Alexander (1984) and Itzkoff (1976) elaborate on the social-political-economic climate of the 1870s when they identify the linchpin and one of the mainstays of the movement in public education in America was the 1874 Michigan Supreme Court ruling in the *Stuart v. School District No. 1 of the Village of Kalamazoo* (1874). Unlike most court cases which are known by the plaintiff's name this case became known by the defendants name because the Kalamazoo decision legalizes the states' (village's) right to require a property tax to support free high schools (Lunenburg and Ornstein, 1991, p. 285). Itzkoff (1976) states that "the number of high school students had increased drastically because of the effect of the Kalamazoo Decision of 1874. The rate of increase, from 110,000 in 1874 to 202,963 in 1890, doubling in every decade, was to continue until the 1940s when a leveling off began" (p. 63).

Mondale and Patton (2001) discuss the repercussions of the Kalamazoo verdict and some effects it had on education in America:

State laws concerning compulsory education were tightened. Expansion of support of public schools by state revenues in addition to local taxation became the prelude to greater statewide involvement, such as the establishment of the Board of Regents for New York State in 1891 to determine standards of graduation from high school, curricular synchronization, and other programs that would fit an increasingly mobile society. In addition, the upgrading of teacher

training from normal school education to at least the basic college skills in newly expanded “state teachers colleges” became necessary. (p. 15)

Jorgenson (1987) and Mondale and Patton (2001) discuss the manner in which the political establishment was able to impress its virtues upon the youths by defining the values of educational aims to meet the civic needs of an expanding nation. The all important “locus of control” generally remained local, with a state department overview, until the Industrial Revolution. The Industrial Revolution brought about new social problems and fostered the development of new educational institutions with outside standards that created a centralized education system.

Cremin (1988) and Wincek (1995) that write the new century and the industrial revolution brought about the changes of the political social and economical situation that educators labeled the Progressive Movement. Democratic choices equaling democratic education dominated the Progressive Movement. Education was expected to reflect the collective social choices that stratified the most in the common good. Therefore, Progressivism expanded good citizenship as a way of political life that was to be learned in the nation’s schools. This market of civics was determined by local politics and by the turn of the century the Progressive Education Era focused on the belief that education is more effective than politics at achieving long term social and economic change. The mass production of education or factory model as it became known and the practice of education came under attack by the Dewey educational philosophy and debate that education for democracy and the social progress of the races is best handled by the child in society format (Cremin 1988; Wincek 1995). In the final analysis, the Progressive Movement, even if it did not succeed in remaking the school system, it had an important impact with national consequences. According to Engel, (2000) “Progressivism precipitated an intense

political ideological debate over the purpose and direction of education in relation to the socioeconomic system” (p. 11).

After the Progressive Movement that transpired during the first two decades in the 19th century the nation’s attention was concerned with the post-depression era of the 1930s, and major education movements remained stagnant. Jorgenson (1987) notes that the federal government became the funding source for the Civil Conservation Corps, the National Youth Administration, which were viewed as education funding, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, the Work Progress Administration, and the Federal Surplus Corporation. From the 1920s, through the depression and its ensuing recovery; through World War II and its ensuing recovery; educational pressures for change were essentially minor during the thirty years before 1950. Then social unrest of the 1960s created a political-social-economic environment that witnessed the development of the school choice movement, magnet schools and then alternative schools.

### The United States Department of Education and School Choice

“In the period between 1908 and 1975, more than 130 bills were introduced in the United States House of Representatives to form a Department of Education, but it took additional events to transform Cabinet-level status for education from concept to reality” Stallings, (2002 p.678). In 1979, the movement for a Federal Department of Education gained momentum because in the 1950’s and 1960’s the federal budget for education eclipsed the budgets of other full-fledged departments, and by the 1970s, the idea of an independent, Cabinet-level Department of Education was becoming a realization (Radin & Hawley, 1988 pp. 22 – 23).



The first event was in 1972, the massive National Education Association (NEA) union formed a Political Action Committee (PAC), and in 1975 it joined forces with other unions to form the Labor Coalition Clearinghouse (LCC) for election campaigning. The (LCC), and the (NEA) released, *Needed: A Cabinet Department of Education* in 1975 (Spring, 1988; Stallings, 2002; Stephens, 1983; & Radin & Hawley, 1988). Stickney and Marcus (1984) and Weil (2000) write that the NEA's (PAC)'s most significant step was to endorse a presidential candidate, Democrat Jimmy Carter. This was a first for the NEA. The NEA was no small player, with an average of 4,000 members per Congressional district, President Carter finally honored his campaign obligation by signing the bill into law in 1979, finally ending a struggle of almost 150 years to establish a Cabinet-level Department of Education (Marcus & Stickney, 1990; Mitchell, 2000; & Stallings, 2002).

### *The Beginnings of the United States Department of Education*

President Carter selected Shirley Hufstедler, to be the first Secretary of Education, the former Federal Judge, had by law only six months to get the Department of Education up and running. One set of goals focused on streamlining and strengthening the political workings of the federal-state relationship. A second set of goals reinforced the state level control of education by encouraging the creation of local-level coalitions that identify, promote, and disseminate excellent local "success models" that could work across the country. The third set of goals focused educational equity. (Hufstедler, 1990; Neill, 1980a; and Stallings, 2002)

"With President Carter's loss in the 1980 election, to Republican Ronald Reagan many of Carter's objectives were never attained", (Stallings, 2002, p. 678) and it seemed probable that the

end was near for the Department of Education. Reagan made it transparent that eradicating the Department was one goal of his smaller government ideals. “Secretary Hufstedler barely had time to move into her office when President Carter lost to republican Ronald Reagan in 1980. The new President vowed to do away with Education and appointed Terrel Bell in 1981 to be its Secretary and presumably to oversee its demise” (Stickney and Marcus, 1984 p. 51 – 52). The importance and usefulness of a federal role in education became clearer and Reagan grew more amenable to the idea of preserving the Department of Education (Stallings, 2002). “By the end of Reagan’s term the Department of Education would remain in the Reagan Cabinet and vouchers, in the name of school choice became a national issue” (Wells, 2002 p. 2). Vouchers are tax dollars given to parents to leave the public system and pay tuition at “the school of their choice” be it sectarian or non-sectarian (Weil, 2000 p.111).

Saltman (2000) posits that the socio-economic conditions in 1982 made the second Reagan Administration stymie the growth of school choice (vouchers) because of congressional testimony from American Federation of Teachers, National Education Association, and the National Association of Elementary School Principals, which testified before congress that:

Vouchers would reprivatize our social services, and vouchers were reasoned to the possibility of slipping from public school choice to privatization of school choice. Reagan’s drive for a voucher program was seized upon in the beginning of his second term and began the choice movement. Reagan succeeded in attributing to choice the success of the government mandated magnet schools. He isolated choice from the strong government authority that had successfully used it and he claimed that the market would be better at promoting school choice. Reagan suggested the high quality of the magnet schools was a result of choice and that

school choice would best facilitate competition. Reagan successfully unlinked choice from equity and relinked it to market ideals of efficiency and competition.

(p. 46)

“Reagan-era education policies were rooted in a desire to return to the original intents of the founding fathers with respect to education” (Stallings, 2002, p. 679). Against the background of Reagan’s New Federalism agenda and its sister Economic Recovery Program, which aimed to reduce federal influence and return power to the states (Bell, 1986; Marcus & Stickney, 1990; Weil, 2000).

### *The Department of Education as a National Influence*

Stallings (2002) posits that:

Reagan’s Administration may have secured the continued existence of the Department of Education, but William Bennett, Reagan’s second Secretary of Education secured its fame. During the course of his four years in office, Bennett crisscrossed the country to put education at the forefront of the national consciousness. (p. 679)

Spring (1998) & Stallings, (2002) reported that Bennett was not certain of the need for a Cabinet-level agency for education, but the goal for which Bennett is probably most vividly remembered, were his efforts to introduce the idea of a core curriculum for schools based on Western thought. Mitchell (2000) and Stallings (2002) wrote that in the spring of 1987, before Bennett’s resigned from Education, Congress completed a landmark reauthorization of the Education and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. This legislation significantly

increased federal spending on public schools by providing funding to benefit the at-risk. Federal emphasis shifted from state and local compliance to guidelines concentrating on academic achievement of the at-risk, thereby strengthening the federal presence in state and local educational programs.

Stallings, (2002) discusses a republican campaign strategy when he writes:

Ronald Reagan chose Texas Tech University President Lauro F. Cavazos to succeed William Bennett in 1988. Cavazos was in almost every respect Bennett's polar opposite; his mild demeanor was in direct contrast to Bennett's forceful and sometimes aggressive approach to dealing with Congress and educators. This total change in the character of the Department of Education was interpreted as a calculated attempt to support the campaign image of Vice-President George H. W. Bush, (Bush I) who promised to be the Education President. By the end of the Reagan era, many federal programs did experience heavy budget cuts; even Title I faced \$7 billion in cuts, and funding for special program block grants was reduced by 28 percent over the eight-year period. (p.680)

DeLoughry (1990a) reports that "Once Bush took office three major goals defined Cavazos' Department of Education: (1) generating public support for the national goals; (2) encouraging school-choice rights for parents; and (3) improving and defending the Department's much maligned student loans programs." (p.18). Bush recommended a seven-piece education plan, part of which, recommended rewarding thriving schools, but opponents demanded that the plan concentrate on disadvantaged schools. Bush responded to his critics by participating in the now famous National Governors Association (NGA) Education Summit of 1989 in

Charlottesville, Virginia. (Deloughry, 1989; Hanushek & Raymond, 2002; Stallings, 2002; Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Wells, 2002)

By 1990, the (NGA) had developed a plan with six national education goals toward which the nation should accomplish by the year 2000, the first in a series of similar goals outlined by future Department administrations. Stallings (2002) noted that the six goals advocated by the NGA were: (1) to ensure that all children started school ready to learn, (2) achieve a high school completion rate of 90 percent, (3) improve achievement for all Americans in all basic subjects, (4) make American students first in the world in math and science, (5) ensure that all adults were literate and had access to lifelong learning opportunities; and (6) make all schools safe, disciplined, and drug-free. It is important to recognize that Bush and the (NGA) of Charlottesville called for decentralization of authority and decision –making responsibility to the school site, so that educators are empowered to determine the means for accomplishing them (Hanushek & Raymond, 2002; Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Wells, 2002).

Lamar Alexander, Bush's second Secretary of Education, began office by preparing for recommendations concerning the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965, while simultaneously developing national goals of the (NGA) Education Summit in Charlottesville. To address the Education Summit goals, the Department of Education developed the America 2000 Plan. Within a week of taking office, Alexander presented the White House with a blueprint for national school reform that incorporated the (NGA's) goals as well as some of the ideas he had developed both as governor and as chair of the National Governor's Association (Stallings, 2002 p.680).

In addition to the six goals established by the (NGA), Stallings, (2002) writes:

America 2000 recommended merit pay and alternative certification paths for teachers, a longer school year, improved adult literacy programs, national standards in core subjects and voluntary achievement tests to measure progress in those subjects, and a private industry-supported think-tank. Most controversial, however, were the only two components for which the Federal government was to provide substantial money: creation of 535 New American Schools—one model school per Congressional district, and a call for parental school choice. (pp. 680-681)

Chubb & Moe 1990 profess “The topic of vouchers as school choice became the most controversial aspect of the new plan. Vouchers are politically volatile because they are defined as tax dollars spent by the parent to spend at ‘a school of choice’ albeit a, private or religious school. Thus, vouchers became a political battleground because they encompass privatization of education and entanglement of the church and the state” (p217). “The America 2000 Plan died in the Senate in 1992, but even without federal endorsement, choice, vouchers and charters schools on the state level, experiments sprung up around the country” (Stallings, 2002 p. 681).

### *The Department Plans for the New Century:*

#### *A Shift in Choice Venues*

“The Department of Education had grown steadily since its inception, coordinating over 200 programs by 1993” (p.681), Stallings (2002) continues it had yet to benefit from long term leadership. Clinton chose former South Carolina Governor Richard Riley to be Secretary of

Education, the history of the position implied that he would be Secretary only one Presidential term. Instead, Clinton became the first President to begin and end his eight-year reign with the only one Secretary of Education.

The first article of Clinton's education program was the investigation and execution of a plan to promote universal standards-based education. In 1994, the U.S. Department of Education released a report that documented how much less learning was expected of children in poor schools than in other schools. Wattenberg and Hansel, (2005) remark upon learning standards:

Researchers who analyzed 1988 National Education Longitudinal study and found on average, students with the same knowledge of math earned a "D" if they attended a low poverty school, but earned an "A" if they attended a high-poverty school. In short, the Clinton Administration realized that students in high-poverty schools were held to a lower standard than were their middle class counterparts.

(p. 13)

Stallings (2002) posits that Clinton's Administration hoped to complete the work begun by the governors at former President Bush's Charlottesville conference, at which then-Governor Clinton had been an active participant. This was a continuation of Bush's America 2000 Plan that was championed by Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander. The plan was built around the six goals of the (NGA) Charlottesville conference, plus two new goals included at the insistence of Congress: (7) improve teacher preparation and (8) promote parents' involvement in all aspects of their children's growth. Maranto, Milliman, Hess, and Gresham (1999) and Wells (2002) reported that Clinton, in keeping with the parent choice theme from the (NAG), Charlottesville Conference, called for 3,000 charter schools by 2001.

The result the Clinton Administration's educational agenda was Goals 2000, a systematic reform plan for education that would impose an external policy for standards based reform in education by stipulating what children learn in school, testing their achievement and imposing consequences for levels of learning (Finn, 2002; Hanushek & Raymond, 2002) and unify all of the prior work on introducing standards as part of the national education agenda. The purpose of the Goals 2000 package was threefold:

(1) create national education goals by the year 2000; (2) raise expectations for students, teachers and parents through high standards; and (3) give state and local reform efforts flexibility and backing (Mitchell, 2000; & Stallings, 2002).

Lewis (1991); Mitchell, (2000), and Stallings (2002) noted, In 1994 despite a political battle over national standards of Goals 2000, it endured votes in the House and Senate. Goals 2000 began a most important change in Federal policy away evaluation of program implementation toward a concentration on outcomes and accountability of programs. "Clinton's Secretary of Education, Riley, encouraged multiple measures to gauge educational growth, and standards-based reform became a fixture in the Clinton Administration's and the Department's education philosophy", (Stallings, 2002, p.494) a movement that continued into future administrations.

As a result of the 1993 Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), the Department of Education is required to develop a Strategic Plan on a regular basis. The Clinton Department of Education responded by developing seven priorities based on the President's State of the Union Address. Ten points of his educational plan were listed in the Address and these 10 points were used as a platform on which to build the Department's Strategic Plan for 1997. The 1997 plan was the second such plan; the first was completed in 1994 (Burd, 2000).



Clinton's plan established the importance of school choice, and ensuing budget requirements was the increase in support for charter schools. The spirit of goal-setting and reform continued at the Department through the end of Clinton's term, concluding with a significant budget package that included increases for Title I and over \$1 billion for school buildings (Cooper, 1999; Penning, 1997; Stallings, 2002).

In 2001, Republican control returned to the Presidency with George W. Bush (Bush II). George W. Bush is the son of George H. Bush labeled as Bush I and brother to Florida Governor John Ellis Bush. The Department of Education was under Republican control, but the Republican Party now directing the national education agenda was very different from the post Nixon and Reagan era Republican Party that had fought so hard to block and then eliminate the Department years before. Stallings cites Branch, (2001):

Beginning with Bush I, the Republican Party had added an education plank to its platform; Bush II even called education the most important item on his agenda. In fact, Bush II's first education budget called for an increase over the final budget established by the Clinton White House, which already included the largest single-year increase in education funding. (p. 12)

The Bush II Administration concentrated on closing the achievement gap between whites and minorities; reauthorizing the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and developing a voucher plan to facilitate school choice. The system for implementing these areas of concentration would be heightened accountability through yearly testing and disclosure. Several of these proposals were direct descendants of the policies developed during Bush I's and Clinton's terms (Richard & Sack, 2001; Stallings, 2002). This researcher posits that the common

denominator of the school choice at the federal level may have emerged from the (NAG) Conference in Charlottesville.

Bush II selected Roderick Paige to be the seventh Secretary of Education and to lead the charge to develop and enforce his education policies. Gose (2001) reported that Education under Paige revising the higher education loan program to eliminate problems. Contrary to Democratic fears and some Republican hopefuls, the Department made no move to eliminate the direct-lending program begun by Clinton and advanced by Bush I.

The centerpiece of Bush II 's first Administration and the Department of Education's efforts in 2001 was the development and eventual passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, a long-delayed reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1964 (Bracey, 2004; Finn, 2000; Stallings 2002; Wells, Scott, Lopez, & Holme, 2005). Kiely and Henry (2001) and Stallings (2002) recorded that the four principles of standards based reform underlying the (NCLB) were: (1) stronger accountability for results, (2) increased flexibility with local control, (3) expanded options for parents and students, and (4) dependence on proven teaching methods. The most significant component of the reauthorization plan of NCLB and the most important to the future of federal involvement in local education was the requirement that all states develop challenging state standards measured yearly with state tests, and against a federal target.

Bush II signed NCLB into law in January 2002, less than one year from the day he took office. In exchange for heightened accountability states and districts would receive spending flexibility, a proposal from the first National Governor's Association meeting in Charlottesville. The Bush II Administration pushed aside vouchers as a school choice plan in order to build bipartisan cooperation on the entire law. NCLB introduces parental choice by permitting school

districts to accommodate the transfer of Title I students from persistently declining schools to other traditional public schools or charter schools (Hanushek & Raymond, 2002; Stallings, 2002; Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Weil, 2000; & Wells, 2002).

In November of 2004, after Secretary Paige's resignation, Bush II's second Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, a fellow Texan like Paige, was the first Secretary to be appointed that did not have an advanced degree.

Dobbs, (2004) writes:

Secretary Spellings was a senior policy advisor to President Bush [ II ] who arrived in Washington with the Administrations first inauguration. Spellings' ties to Bush go back to the late 1980s, when he was first considering a run for governor of Texas and she was a lobbyist for the state school boards association. They were introduced by his political adviser, Karl Rove, who felt Bush [ II ], needed some coaching on educational issues. Bush was so impressed that he asked Spellings to become political director of his campaign when he ran for Texas governor in 1994. Secretary Spellings inherited a school choice arena that was well developed before her arrival. Voucher programs are being settled in the courts and charter schools have been growing since their conception.

(p. 34)

### *Federal Funding of School Choice*

In 1994, the federal government amended the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and began allocating funding for charter schools. By 1996, \$17 million

was awarded in the form of grants to 17 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico to support start-up charter schools. Congress increased funding for The Public Charter School Program to 51 million dollars in 1997 (Budget of United States Government, 1997). Funding for the School Choice and Flexibility Program has continued to increase to the 2004 level of 392 million dollars total, (broken down in millions of dollars): (1) Charter School Grants - \$219, (2) Charter School Credit Enhancement - \$37, (3) Voluntary Public School Choice - \$27, (4) Magnet School Assistance - \$109. The 2005 projected funding level is the same as the figures for 2004 and the budget is estimated to increase in 2006 with an additional category (5) Choice Incentive Fund - \$50. Charter school funding by the federal government has increased twenty-fold from 1996 to 2005 (Budget of United States Government, 2006).

### *Voucher Programs as School Choice*

The school choice movement has two components: the Charter School Movement and voucher programs. While charter schools dominate the school choice movement vouchers remain an educational, judicial, and political factor concerning school choice.

Bracey (2002) and Bracey (2004) note that “John Stuart Mill exposed the concept of vouchers in his 1838 essay, *On Liberty*. He did not use the word voucher, but he did profess the reasoning of parental choice to educate with public or private schools and helping to pay the fees for the poorer students.” (p. 149; p. 123) School vouchers first gained notice when University of Chicago economist Milton Friedman published *The Role of Government in Education* (1955). This policy concept offered public funds to families who could be used in any educational

institution public or private. Such “vouchers” would serve to give families increased choice in education (Carnoy & McEwan, 2005; Peterson & Campbell, 2001; Schorr, 2002).

Although an earlier voucher program was funded by the Nixon administration in the 1970s in northern California’s Alum Rock School district the current push for public voucher programs began in Milwaukee in 1990 (Fuller, 2000; Peterson & Campbell, 2001; Stulberg, 2004). Since then, other voucher programs have been legislated in Cleveland, 1996, Florida, 1998, and Washington D.C., 2003. Wisconsin’s Supreme Court has ruled in favor of the public paid for voucher’s use at religious schools (Carnoy & McEwan, 2005; Peterson & Campbell, 2001).

In *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* (2002) the U. S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of a Cleveland voucher when the Court wrote channeling public money to parents who choose among a variety of schooling options, including religious schools, does not violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (Kemerer, 2002).

After the Republican gains in the 2002 national election, the expected onslaught of voucher legislation did not take place. The fiscal crises that many state budgets face limit spending and many states are cutting departments across the board (Bracey, 2002).

The Government Accounting Office (GAO) reported on three voucher programs. (1) The New York City experiment found consistent improvements for African-American students in math and reading. (Note: This program is run with privately funded vouchers). (2) Vouchers in Dayton, Ohio showed no significant improvements in math or reading scores. (3) The Washington D.C. experiment demonstrated positive effects for African-Americans in the second year of the study but these gains disappeared in the third and fourth year of the study (Bracey 2002).

Bracey (2001) and Carnoy and McEwan (2005) posit that educators can state with confidence that none of the experiments with vouchers currently in progress will provide significant evidence for whether or not this form of choice can work on a large scale. The voucher programs available come with many strings attached and the data available on the type of voucher program, be it in Colorado, Charlotte, Dayton, Milwaukee, New York City, or the District of Columbia is extremely scant and conflicting; non-definitive results abound. At present, the voucher movement is raising more questions than it is answering.

Richard (2005) writes although with the *Zelman* decision in 2002, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the inclusion of religious schools in the Cleveland, Ohio voucher program under the U. S. Constitution, certain state constitutions are still interested in state level judiciary action. The Florida Supreme Court case of Governor *John Ellis Bush v. Ruth Holmes* (2005) ruled vouchers unconstitutional because they create separate private systems parallel to and in competition with the free public schools. This decision will impact voucher programs nationwide because 38 states, like Florida, have constitutional restrictions known as Blaine amendments. Viteritte (2001) states that Maine Representative James G. Blaine was a prominent Republican who in 1875 championed keeping money from non-Protestant institutions. Although Blaine's amendment failed in Washington D. C., within one year, 14 states passed Blaine Amendments to prohibit the use of public money for religious purposes. By 1890, 14 years later, 29 out of 42 states had Blaine Amendments.

The Florida Supreme Court judgment of an unconstitutional voucher program in Governor *John Ellis Bush v. Ruth Holmes* (2005) should have wide-ranging effect for the voucher programs nationwide. Florida is the only state with a statewide voucher program and

the first state to bring a voucher case to its Supreme Court. It appears that voucher programs will become a state-by-state legal issue much like that of charter schooling Richard (2005 p. 22).

In today's school choice debate, Maranto et al. (1999) states that there is always the consideration of charter schools versus the implementation of school vouchers for private schools. This is a large issue since charter schools are independent of traditional local school districts, and actually compete for students with traditional public schools. Vouchers are also of economical concern to districts because the economies of scale are affected with each exiting student. It needs to be noted that although schemes proposing vouchers for private schools attract most of the attention in the choice debate, charter schools are far more popular and widespread than voucher programs.

### History of the Charter School Movement

Ironically, after fifty years of intense school reform efforts, there is at best limited agreement on the central purposes of American schools. Good and Braden (2000) continue that despite the consideration that has been intended for charter schools, and at issues regarding the quality of education, there is not even fundamental agreement on the purpose of an education.

Good and Braden summarize this lack of congruency as follows:

Education in this country is striving to seek local, state and national cohesion in both educational theory and in the all important practices in public schools across the nation. Educators might seek a solution to some of these problems by enabling schools of choice; schools that may very well best serve today's specific societal needs, found that in spite of the spate of policy documents on general reform and

school quality (e.g., *A Nation at Risk*); there have been thousands of proposals written by applicants who seek charter school status. Yet, such proposals have done little to clarify the fundamental goals a nation should they pursue. (p. 21)

The term chart is Latin and survived Old and Middle French charte, a graphic map used by sailors. The Latin word Chartaceous means, of the nature of paper, leading to the term Magna Charta (used for many years) or Magna Carta. In 1946 the British government officially adopted the Latin spelling Magna Carta. The great (magna) charter (carta) of 1215 [a written agreement on paper] used by the English barons who forcibly secured from King John a guarantee of personal and political power to the people of England. The agreement put the king under law, thereby limiting his powers (The World Book Dictionary, 1980 p. 344).

Henry Hudson received a charter from the directors of the East Indian Company in 1609. Hudson's document displays; the purpose and vision of the trip, the risk involved, Hudson's accountability requirements, how he will be compensated, and rewarded for producing desired results (Bracey, 2002; 2004; & Henig 1994).

Ben Franklin used the term "charter" in 1749. His letter to the community *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania* reflects the same sentiment that is the essence of today's Charter School Movement when he refers to a "local locus of control" for the schools (Smith, 1997 p. 2).

Fuller, (2000) writes that "today's Charter School Movement may be considered to have begun in the 1960s with the creation of two kinds of "alternative" public schools" (p. 7).

According to Clinchy (2000); and Nathan (1996), these "alternative schools" of the 1960's were modeled on the "open school" and the "integrated-day school" begun in infant programs and primary schools in Great Britain. These were both public and private schools based largely upon



the ideas of Maria Montessori and John Dewey. According to (Duke, 1978) the next type of choice school to evolve from public education in America was the semi-autonomous magnet school, created all across the country in the late 1960s and the 1970s. Magnet schools were a result of the erosion of separate- but-equal movement that took place in the courts cumulating with the Supreme Court decision in

*Green v. Kent County School Board of Virginia* (1968) Alexander and Alexander (1985).

The choice movement continued to develop when changes in demographics accelerated the introduction of schools designed to give the at-risk population an alternative to the traditional public system. Alternative schools began in the late 1970s and continued into the 1980s (Korn, 1991).

### *The Courts and School Choice*

*Pierce v. The Society of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary* (1925) secured school choice in America when an Oregon state law for compulsory public education was overturned and allowed The Society of the Sisters to continue their private school business operations.(Viteritti, 2002). Alexandria and Alexandria (1985) documented this school choice decision of the U. S. Supreme Court. The Court's logic was "the Fourteenth Amendment guaranteed appellees [the Sisters] against the deprivation of their property without due process of law consequent upon the unlawful interference by appellants [Pierce] with the free choice of patrons" (p. 222).

Some proponents and some antagonist of charter schooling wield the legacy of Brown with assessments of school choice reforms (Stulberg, 2004 p.10 – 11). Brown's legacy is race based judicial decisions. In *Gaines v. Canada* (1938) the Supreme Court ruled that the state law

prohibiting blacks from attending the University of Missouri Law School was unconstitutional, since there was no black law school for Gaines to attend (Alexander & Alexander, 1985 p. 408). Under the precedent of *Gains* a lower Texas court ordered that the state set up a law school for blacks. In 1950, Texas Supreme Court Chief Justice Fred Vinson pointed out that the new law school could never be equal in stature. *Sweatt v. University of Texas Law School* (1950), made evident the ill-health of the separate-but-equal doctrine. Limitations on curriculum and faculty, atmosphere and professional development combined to draw serious constitutional attention to the maintenance of separate higher education facilities (Alexander & Alexander, 1985 pp. 408 - 9). It is interesting to note that on the same day that *Sweatt* was handed down, the Supreme Court ruled in *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education* (1950) that if a state could not to establish a separate and subsequently equal facilities for blacks, it could not segregate them within the white school (Alexander & Alexander, 1985 p. 409).

*Gaines* (1938), *McLaurin* (1950), and *Sweatt* (1950), set the judicial precedents for the infamous Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. the Board of Education in Topeka, Kansas* 1954 that determined that separate-but-equal are inherently unequal (Alexander & Alexander, 1985 p.411). *Griffin v. County School Board of Prince Edward County* (1964), advanced the ending of segregation when the Supreme Court ruled the state's closing of public schools and contributing to the support of private segregated schools is unconstitutional (Alexander & Alexander, 1985 p. 417). More specifically, in *Green v. Kent County School Board of Virginia* (1968) the Supreme Court Ruled "State[s] must institute affirmative action where freedom of choice fails to create a unitary system" (Alexander & Alexander, 1985 p. 421). *Green* then became known, in most circles, as the modern day origins of "choice" in public education. (Kluger, 1975; Rossell, 1990; Stulberg, 2004).

Due to the enduring complexities of implementing *Brown* and the ensuing 20 year legal aftermath, i.e. *Brown II*, (1955), when the Supreme Court ruled “with all deliberate speed” (Alexander & Alexander, 1985 p.415) segregation was dismantled by the Supreme Court rulings through 1972 when the court ruled in *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974) that interdistrict integration may be an improper remedy for single district segregation. (Alexander & Alexander, 1985 p.441)

The 1960s and early 1970s found most of the reforms grounded in equity, as the consequences of the Brown decision reached the teachers. Reform was piecemeal, but more importantly equity reform shifted education away from the democratic ideal of excellence to equity. The social fabric of the nation was unsettled by such events as the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Feminist Movement (Cremin, 1988; Ravitch, 1983; Wincek, 1995).

### *The Origins of Magnet Schools*

The 1950s became known as the age of national conservatism. It was during this decade that American education became known for its unresponsiveness to the needs of the post-World War II political-socio-economic climate of the nation. Reform or change of some kind was clearly needed for education (Cremin, 1988; & Rativich, 1983).

A major effect on American education came in the form of equality. The Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. the Board of Education in Topeka, Kansas* (1954) changed the way Americans thought of education both generally and specifically concerning equality. Both

supporters and opponents of charter schooling wield the legacy of Brown in their assessment of school choice reforms (Stulberg, 2004, p.10 – 11).

In 1957, Sputnik created a national urgency with regard to the education of the gifted, and the math and sciences. With this sense of urgency, the government created 66 categorical programs to expedite America's space competition. However, there was still no national philosophy or a national focus with regard to educational standards (Cremin, 1988; Ravitch, 1983; Wincek, 1995).

After the Supreme Court ruled in *Green v. Kent County School Board of Virginia* (1968) Alexander and Alexander (1985) write "the Court held that the board's "freedom of choice" plan was an acceptable plan for desegregation only if it did in fact erase the visages of the past dual system of education" (p. 416). The repercussions of the 1960s and 1970s and the pursuit of equity resulted in the origins of magnet schools, a school designed around a local purpose, some of which were created for the reason of racial equality (Peterson and Campbell, 2001; Weil, 2000) For example, Smreker and Goldring (1999) write "75% of these specialty schools [Magnets] have waiting lists" (p. 134).

One important educational theme to arise out of the magnet school movement was teacher, and parental empowerment. Through Action Research, teachers were seen as decision makers to solve problems they faced. The parent-choice debate brought a grassroots movement dedicated to community needs with decentralization programs (Kellmeyer, 1995; Weil, 2000).

Clinchy (2000) continues by saying that in many ways, the magnet school movement is similar to and overlaps the Progressive Movement. It was founded upon four basic educational assumptions, of which three are the same assumptions of the Progressive Movement. "(1) the enormous cultural diversity makes it educationally unwise to require all students to study one

predetermined educational process; (2) there is no agreement among stakeholders how best to educate the children, (3) the democratic principal of education self determination and (4) the failure of the desegregation through bussing” (p.3 - 4). Magnet schools today are generally district-wide schools with a theme and usually require entrance exams or performances of the arts.

### *The Origin of Alternative Schools*

The alternative schools of the 1970s were created to educate students who did not “fit in” the traditional school model (Stephens & Wood; 1987, Weil, 2000). The social upheaval and the distrust of existing institutions that penetrated American culture in the 1960s and continuing into the 1970s resulted in a more diverse population to educate. Kellmayer, (1995) writes:

It can be deduced that the Alternative School Movement had its origins from a merging of three converging practices: (1) Civil Rights Movement “Freedom Schools”, (2) Student-centered learning philosophy of Rousseau and Dewey which had made its way into the liberal middle class movements of the 1970s, (3) alternative programs which provided different learning environments and structures for the students who did not “fit in” the traditional public school setting. (pp. 3 – 4)

John Dewey’s advances in philosophy led to a child in society approach to education that expanded with the growth of public schools with the magnet school movement and into the alternative school movement. Progressivism revisited education in the 1970s as a concerted effort to apply the pedagogical principles derived from new scientific research in psychology and

the social sciences. It meant tailoring not only to different types of classes but, also to the individual needs of the individual student. As a result of the social commotion of 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, alternative programs began to serve a chronically unsuccessful segment of the student population. This population would later become labeled “at-risk” (Kellymeyer, 1995 p.168). According to Duke (1978) and Korn (1991) the wide spread use of alternative public schools may be ensnared in a muddled debate, but one common denominator in the equation of the origin of alternative schools of the 1970s and 1980s is that they were usually initiated to serve disadvantaged kids.

Kellymeyer (1995) Murphy and Shiffman (2002) Nathan (1996) Tyack and Cuban (1995) and Weil (2000) write that the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) by The National Commission on Excellence in Education addressed the prolonged and consistent discontent that parents have endured concerning the delivery of public education services and created a political-socio-economic climate which became a springboard for the continuation of educational change on a national scale. Parental choice in education became the main characteristic of the decentralizing Reconstructionist Movement of the late 1980s and continuing into the 1990s. The first state law for charter schooling was in Minnesota in 1991. “Choice in education is alive and well with the growth of vouchers and charter schools, albeit they only serve approximately 1% of the population” (Fusarelli, 2002, p. 20).

### *The Charter School Concept*

Hassel (1999) succinctly discusses seven educational movements that were especially important to charter school development: (1) the push for more choice for students: giving every

child a voucher or tax credit that he or she could use to attend any school, public or private; (2) the related idea of competition: breaking school districts' monopoly over the provision of education; (3) school-based management delegating key school decisions to schools and classrooms; (4) the re-practice in schools; and (5) calls for greater accountability for results, (6) setting high academic standards for schools and students and (7) establishing consequences tied to performance (p. 5).

In 1975 Ray Budde, a retired school teacher and visionary first suggested the term charter to local school boards and in 1988, according to (Bracey, 2004; Finn et al. 2000; Hassel, 1999; Murphy & Shiffman, 2002; and Weil 2000) put the concept in writing in a report titled *Education by Charter: Restructuring School Districts* (1988). Budde's model allowed the local school board to grant a "charter" to a group of teachers who would manage to school in exchange for a heightened degree of accountability (Budde, 1975).

In 1985, LEARN, the California Alternative Schools Association proposed to create a community styled alternative to traditional public schools. The concept was for the state legislature to essentially "liberate" teachers by giving them more individual autonomy and empowerment and to give parents authority to establish new community schools. A bill proposing this style of school was defeated by the California Legislature in 988 (Weil, 2000; Norris 1996; Wells, 1999).

Albert Shanker, past president of the American Federation of Teachers brought the term charter into the national spotlight. Shanker was inspired while visiting Holweide Comprehensive School in Cologne, Germany in 1987. According to Shanker's description, Holweide exhibited ideals that the traditional public school system lacked, yet desperately needed. The differences included a flexible schedule, genuine accountability, curricular structure, peer cooperation and

teacher mentoring. Shanker (1988) published *Restructuring Our Schools* in the Peabody Journal of Education (Finn et al., 2000; Nathan, 1996; Weil 2000).

Murphy and Shiffman (2002) declare that Budde was the original charter school visionary but the charter idea was put into the national spotlight with Shanker's leadership position, his speech to the National Press Club in 1988 and his simultaneous article, *Options for the Other Eight Percent* (1988) in The School Administrator for improvements and choices in the traditional education system.

### *The Charter School Concept Matures into State Law*

In 1989, Shanker spoke to the Minnesota legislature and his speech was seriously received. Through the promotion of Democrat State Senator, Ember Reichgott, charter schools were enacted in 1991 in Minnesota. The Minnesota laws were aimed at increasing student achievement and graduation rates. The legislature was encouraging the Department of Education to advance the pedagogical practices through the charter school process. Accountability and results were an integral aspect of the charter school legislation. The target populations for new school design were educators and parents. The intent of the Minnesota law was to allow the charter schools flexibility to design the school they desired. Senator Reichgott and others convinced the legislature to pursue the establishment of up to eight charter schools. The number of charter schools increased to 20 by 1993. The number of charter schools in Minnesota continued to increase and in 1994, there were 35 charter schools in Minnesota (Nathan, 1996). As of 2005, there are 117 charter schools operating in Minnesota (Center for Education Reform, 2005).



It was Ted Kolderie who developed key points to be included in charter schooling: permitting multiple sponsors, making schools accountable for results, and giving charters independence from local collective bargaining agreements (Nathan, 1996 p. 4). Ted Kolderie, a leader in the national charter movement from its beginning who, in 1990, brought all of these ideas together to create the charter school concept. Hassel (1999) and Murphy and Shiffman (2002) document the developments of the present day concept of a public charter school with Kolderie's nine essentials form the core of the charter idea. (1) The school may be organized, owned, and run by any of several parties. (2) The organizers may approach more than one public body for their charter. The school is a legal entity. (3) The school is public, it is nonreligious, does not charge tuition, cannot discriminate or engage in selective admissions, and must follow health and safety laws. (4) The school accepts accountability for the students' academic performance; the school loses its charter if it fails to achieve its goals. (5) The school gets real freedom to change instructional and management practices. (6) The school is a school of choice: no student is required to attend. (7) The state transfers a fair share of school funding from each student's home district to the charter school. (8) Teachers are protected (that is, given leaves of absence to teach in charter schools and remain in the retirement system) and (9) given new opportunities to participate in the design of schools.

In 1992, the California Legislature, led by State Senator Gary Hart, became the nation's second state to pass a charter school law and authorized up to one hundred charter schools (Buechler, 1996).

## Charter School Legislation:

### *A National Time Line*

Charter school legislation has historically been enacted by the individual states. The federal government only passes funding legislation concerning charter schools and because charter schools are public schools they are subject to federal educational legislation. The following list of charter school legislation was taken from (Fusarelli, 2003; Weil 2000) who document a history of charter laws and the Center for Education Reform's Special Report Charter School Laws across the States: Ranking and Scorecard 8<sup>th</sup> Edition (2004).

Michigan was the first state legislature to enact a charter school law in 1991, followed by California in 1992. In 1993, Colorado, Georgia, Maine, Massachusetts, New Mexico, and Wisconsin joined the current school choice movement. In 1994 Arizona, Hawaii, and Kansas passed charter school legislation. 1995 was the year of largest growth with eight states passing charter school legislation: Alaska, Arkansas, Delaware, Louisiana, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Texas, and Wyoming. In 1996, Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, North Carolina, and South Carolina joined the Charter School Movement, with Mississippi, Nevada, Ohio and Pennsylvania, joining in 1997 and Idaho, Missouri, New York, and Utah in 1988. The year 1999 saw Oklahoma and Oregon enact charter school laws along with Indiana in 2001. Tennessee and Iowa joined the Choice Movement in 2002 and Maryland in 2003, bringing the total number of states with charter schools to 40, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. In Washington D. C., nearly one out of ten students attends a charter school and about 30% of the public schools in Arizona are charter schools (Center for Education Reform, 2005). Fusarelli (2003) notes that "All states, except Arizona which has a quarter of the nation's

charter schools, set a limit on the number of charter schools allowed (p. 144). “By early 2004, nearly three thousand charter schools were serving more than 650,000 students across the United States” (Hess & Finn, 2004, p. 1). As of 2005 more than 3,500 charter schools were in operation in 40 of the 50 United States, Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico serving over 1 million students. The Center For Education Reform, (2005) reported that students and parents are happier and more engaged than in their previous public school.

### *The Charter School Movement Matures*

Some common themes that have evolved from the Charter School Movement are: (1) the satisfaction of the parents are overwhelmingly positive when compared to the previous school, (2) that charter schools are contributing to the segregation of the races; the majority of the charter schools serve the urban at-risk students, (3) charter schools are doing what they are supposed to do increase student achievement (Center for Educational Reform Report, 2003; Green, 2001).

In 2003 alone, the number of operating charter schools in the nation has expanded from slightly over 2,000 to nearly 3,000. The body of charter school research that the Center for Educational Reform (CER), a Washington D. C. think tank has determined meets their standard for objectivity, which the (CER) does not publish, has also grown. In 2003 there were a total of 98 reports issued that meet the (CER) objectivity since 1995. This is 45 more than the original report in 1999. It must be noted that the majority of these reports are generated on the state level and few offer a national perspective (Center for Educational Reform Report, 2003).

The 2003 cumulative report *What Research Reveals About Charter Schools* unveils a trend that consistently runs through the report. Charters are doing the job they were designed to

do, with 88 of the 98 major reports that meet the unpublished CER research standards, are now showing that charter schools are improving education for America's children (Center for Educational Reform Report, 2003). In 2004, the Center for Educational Reform documents that there are 2,996 charter schools operating in 40 of the 50 states, as well as in the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico (Center for Education Reform Report, 2004).

The fourteen year old Charter School Movement is growing each year. As of 2005, 40 states and the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico have charter school laws in place and approximately 3,400, or 400 more charter schools than last year are operating across the United States. Charter schools serve close to a million children across the country (Center for Educational Reform Report, 2005). Much like the school choice voucher programs, there are mixed results nationally and in Louisiana for charter schools. Most reports are on the state level and various states have various results.

#### The Choice Debate:

##### Charter Schools versus the Traditional Public Schools

Good and Braden (2000) write that many critics and advocates who generalize about American education choose general arguments due to the tremendous range of how schools function. It is hard to define the average quality of schooling. We have good schools and we have bad schools. The literature acknowledges the enormous variation in American schools, but state that "most have grossly overestimated the more common problem, grossly underestimating the quality of American schooling" (p. 20).

Good and Braden (2000) make the following convincing case for the advantages of public schooling:

The case for the traditional public school has various aspects including (a) many public schools do a good job of educating students; (b) parents of school-age children are generally supportive, especially in non-inner-city settings; (c) those who attack public schools largely do so because of political interest or for reasons of personal gain; (d) given the enormous investments already made in public schools, retaining the current system is better and less expensive than replacing or duplicating it; (e) the public school is the vital force that unifies Americans in ways necessary for maintaining a democracy. (p. 9)

At the same time, Good and Braden (2000) summarize the range of arguments expressed against public education:

These include (a) the basic curriculum is poorly taught; (b) the wrong curriculum is taught; (c) parent and student interests are lost in the large (and expensive) bureaucracy; (d) motivation and hard work in schools is insufficient; (e) government supported schooling does not encourage innovative practice; (f) privatized and market orientation will encourage administrators, teachers, students, and parents to work harder. (p. 6)

Good and Braden (2000) continue with their criticism of the traditional public school by stating the following about the specific problems with traditional curriculum practices:

“education has become too uniform and promotes a curriculum characterized as “one size fits all.” School systems represent a single approach to education and many students are inadequately

served is an argument policymakers use when decrying the inadequacy of the American curriculum” (p. 5).

Clinchy (2000) holds the belief that one basic rule that should govern the education of the young is that in any truly democratic society and therefore in any truly democratic system of public education it cannot be the task of any federal government, any state government, or any local school board to impose, as we have all too often done in the past and are now once again doing, “a single one and only way of educating on all children and all students and therefore to impose as well a single one and only curriculum and a single one and only set of academic “standards” on all principals, all teachers, all parents” (p. 4).

Clinchy (2000) observes through a historical overview, that simply no agreement exists among parents, teachers, school administrators, school board members, educational theorists, and/or academic scholars on any one, single, best, and only way to educate all children and young people. There is also a contention that advocates for diversity need the local solutions that charter schools are capable of fostering.

Tyack and Cuban (1995) state the small but growing movement in our school districts is a counter-movement emerging not from the “top down” but from the “bottom up”. Instead of promoting consistent, rigidly imposed, and mandated national or state “standards,” testing of all students, and making all schools to be more or less the same. The advocates of the Charter School Movement believe that no single set of imposed academic standards, no set of statewide tests, no uniform curriculum, and no single vision of what a school can work for the diversity of this country’s parents and students.

Educators repeatedly find critics who worry that even if charters improve education one school at a time, these isolated gains will do nothing for the students who remain in public

schools, and that the outflow of talented students and teachers may actually leave the masses worse off than before (Smith & Meier 1995; Berliner & Biddle 1995; Henig 1994; Cookson 1994; Maranto, 1999).

According to Maranto (1999), “Changes in the structure of schools, the tastes of parents and students, and the makeup of public school personnel, the statutory environment, and related elements of schooling may produce new and unexpected impacts in the long term”(p. 3).

Engel (2000) approaches the topic of school choice by stating that:

School choice develops new educational ideas and approaches only if they are backed with sufficient capital. Investment in the market can be justified only by an adequate financial return or other material benefit to the particular investor; in the school system, as in the economy, this generally precludes any attempt at investment in any program that cannot produce quantifiable results. The product is a school system with no clear direction or coherent national purpose, because just as the market cannot plan for the economy in the long term, it cannot plan for the school system in the long term. The best evidence for this is in charter schools—a reform favored, ironically enough, by many who call themselves progressives—and in the programs of school choice now in effect in several states and localities. (p. 14)

Critics of traditional public schools claim that the present system is too languid and resistant to change. Thus, proponents of charter schooling generally see competition in the form of school choice as a necessary imperative to inject American schools with the vigor and enthusiasm needed to yield important innovation or to pursue with renewed vigor the basic curriculum already in place (Good & Braden, 2000).

The promotion of market forces is a good way to make schools more competitive. If schools have to compete for students, the process of competition will stimulate innovation in schools defined as a “ripple effect” and increase their responsiveness to community needs. Given the opportunity to choose or to define a school program, parents, principals, teachers, and students will be empowered, and such market forces will lead to schooling that is both more efficient and more responsive (Good and Braden, 2000).

A recent study conducted by researchers from the State University of New York at Stony Brook (1999) has indicated that the provisions of such schools of choice in District Four has led to improved achievement by students in all of the district’s schools. The ripple effect is not confined to the choice schools. To date, the choice movement has created over one hundred new, small, theoretically autonomous elementary and secondary schools, with many more now in the planning stages. Some of these new schools have been created by breaking down large schools into smaller, self-contained, autonomous schools (Clinchy, 2000).

Deal and Hentschke (2004), Hassel (1999) Hill et al. (2002) Nathan, (1996), and Weil (2000) mention that charter schools also appear to circumvent the systemic struggles of implementing reform in the current top-down, American education system. Rather than mandating change in existing schools, policymakers simply invite education entrepreneurs to come forward with new visions, select the most promising proposals, and institute a system for holding the selected schools accountable for results while competing with traditional public schools. Hassel supports this when he states, “If traditional public schools make changes in response to charter programs, they do so not at the behest of policymakers but in order to compete” (p. 5).



Good and Braden (2000) provide a somewhat optimistic conclusion that under certain conditions school choice can have some positive consequences for public education due to the public Charter School Movement. The endorsement of traditional public schools and to a lesser extent of the potential of public charter schools is not out of blind allegiance to public schools but rather to embrace the recommendation that some public schools close and there is a viable option with the Charter School Movement (p. 20).

Clinchy (2000) summarizes school choice as follows, "...that diversity is not only racial, ethnic, social, and geographic but also philosophical, there is simply no agreement among all parents, all teachers, all school administrators, all educational researchers, and all educational thinkers and philosophers about what the "best" or even a "good" education for all students is or could be." (pp. 1 - 2)

## Minorities and Charter Schools

### A National View

From its inception, the Charter School Movement has enjoyed tremendous growth. (Wamba & Ascher 2003, and Wells, Scott, Lopez, & Holme 2005,) write that charter schools entered the national education reform area promising deregulation as a way to increase educational achievement for those students most poorly served by traditional public schools, or urban students of color. This grassroots demand for such freedom is not new, schools of choice designed for communities of color are being considered by some as a crucial but uncompleted aim of the civil rights movement

Perkins (2002) discusses charter school literature combined with *The Rand Report on Charter Schools and Vouchers* (2001) and writes the effects of school choice programs and integration is largely unknown. Charter schools have about the same racial and ethnic balance as their local public school system (p. 92). Abowitz (2001) and Green (2005) reported that the majority of charter schools have a student racial and ethnic composition that was similar to the surrounding district. However, some studies of charter schooling are also identifying class-based segregation, finding that the poorest of the poor remain behind in traditional public school systems when choice is available

Wamba and Ascher (2003) comment on the demographics of charter schools:

Choice has represented an important departure from assigned traditional public schools. The first generation of research on charter schools focused on whether the demographics characteristics of charter school students differ from those students in traditional public schools in the same states and/or districts. Thus schools are also involved in choice. Legislation in more than half the states with charter schools require all eligible students use an equitable selection process such as a lottery if needed and about one third of the states require charter schools to reflect the racial balance of the district in which the charter school is located. (pp. 463 - 464)

Wamba and Ascher (2003) compared two Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement Reports for 1999 and 2000. Each report covered 94% of the charter schools in existence for those two years.

First, the White population declined seven percent from 55% in 1998 to 48% in 1999. Whereas the 1999 report stated six states – Connecticut, Massachusetts,

Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina and Texas, enrolled a much higher percentage of students of color than traditional public schools, a year later in 2000, three additional states Louisiana, Illinois, and New Jersey were enrolling a much higher percentage of students of color in charter schools than in traditional public schools. On the other hand, in both years, charter schools in Alaska, California, and Georgia enrolled a higher percentage of White students than did traditional public schools. Second, the percentage of low-income charter students had remained at 37%, practically the same as all traditional public schools and third, the percentage of limited English proficiency students enrolled in charter schools had remained at 10% about the same as all traditional public schools. The percentage of students with disabilities stayed at 8% four percentage points below the national average 12%. (p. 468)

Green (2001) writes that many charter schools observers fear that charter schools will provide school officials the means to help White parents escape from racially desegregated traditional public school. Several states have responded to this concern by adopting statutes that require charter schools to reflect the racial and ethnic composition of the surrounding school district. Statistical evidence does not support the concern of White flight and a high percentage of charter schools have a disproportionately high percentage of racial minorities.

Wamba and Ascher's (2003) review of equity literature for charter schooling, concludes that choice is a double-edged sword. It can prevent as well as preserve racial and economic isolation. Charter schools are not decreasing the resources inequities that have plagued traditional public schools. Existing evidence points to inequities in resource allocation between

charter schools serving low-income students of color and those serving white middle-class students, much the same as traditional public schools.

Fusarelli (2002) writes that a diverse set of groups, including conservatives and business leaders who have lost faith in traditionally non-responsive, bureaucratic traditional public schools are supporting charter schools. Secondly, America's ethnic populations, who have not been well served by the traditional public school system, can turn to civic groups, community leaders as well as parents searching for ways to reform public education, through charter schools "without totally destroying or abandoning it" (Fusarelli, 1999, p. 215).

Wamba and Ascher (2003) examined charter schools and equity by applying three standards; racial balance, student outcome and resources then they concluded that their analysis of Michigan, New York City, Texas, and California suggest that charter schools have not overcome racial isolation. Wamba and Ascher (2003) and Gintis (2004) note that urban public schools are the most challenged with equity issues. Urban areas tend to have large concentrations of various ethnic groups and equity issues are embedded.

The history of the community control from the 1960s and 1970s offers some interesting and important lessons, regarding not only resources but empowerment that should inform the current Charter School Movement toward decentralization. "Decentralization alone does not necessarily force educators to focus on their failures in dealing with poor and more particularly with Black children" (Fein, 1970, p. 85).

Wells, Scott, Lopez, and Holme (2005) state that reformers of 1960s and 1970s noted that "decentralization in and of itself is only an administrative device, a reaction to the inefficiency and unreality of a massive bureaucracy. "Decentralization does not result in a more responsive

school system in which the community has a determining voice” (Fanti, Gittel, and Magot, 1970, pp. 97 – 98).

Cobb and Glass (1999), Horn and Miron (2000) and Howe (2001) write that progressive educators are concerned that charter schools, could lead to the resegregation of schools. Ginits (2004) declares that the publicness of charter schooling has adequately addressed unfair admission practices with the development of charter laws and regulatory standards, yet the demographics of American schooling allowed Corwin and Flaherty (1995) to predict correctly that charter schools would further stratify public schools on the basis of race, class and socio-economic status.

Despite charter schooling’s potential for educators and communities to concentrate on the cultural issues related to oppression and inequity, charter schooling, born of an era of market metaphors and systemic reform, fail to lesson the gap between rich and poor students. In fact, charter schools help to exacerbate oppression and inequity (Wells, 2002; Wells, Scott, Lopez, & Holme 2005).

### Minorities and Charter Schools

#### A Louisiana View

The Center for Educational Reform (2002) reported that there are six common criticisms of the Charter School Movement. According to the Center for Education reform the critics of Charter School Movement argue that the new schools of choice: (1) create more segregation in education, (2) competition has not created caused change in the local district, a ripple effect, (3) innovations are lacking, (4) more accountability is needed (5) there is no evidence that charter schools work, and (6) choice is bad for democracy. Only the first criticism, that charter schools

create segregation, will be addressed here in accordance with the demographics of charter schooling in Louisiana.

Viewing Louisiana's charter schools as a single entity, Louisiana's charter school population follows the national charter school trend of over-serving minority students. Concerning racial balances and public education one may say that Louisiana charter schools foster segregation and this is easily explained with urban demographics. In Louisiana, four charter schools serve approximately 1,500 rural students and 13 charter schools serve approximately 3,400 urban students. The Louisiana Charter School Movement is servicing a disproportionate (88%) percentage of students classified as at-risk compared to 73%, Louisiana's percentage of at-risk public school students (Barr, 2005, p. 44).

Louisiana charter schools were: 69% African-American, 29% White, 1% Hispanic and 1% Asian/Native American in 2001 and 62% African-American, 34% White, 2% Hispanic, 1.5% Asian/Native American in 2002. For the fall of 2003, Louisiana charter schools were 58% African-American, 38% White, 3% Hispanic, 1 % Asian/Native American. Louisiana's public school racial breakdown in 2004 was African -American 47.8%, White 48.7%, Hispanic 1.5%, American Indian / Alaskan .07%, Asian 1.3%, (*National Center Education Statistics, 2004*) There are seven urban Louisiana charter schools that are least 95% to 100% African –American (Barr et al., 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004).

It is interesting to note that the nation has 10% of the student population in non-public schools (Center for Educational Statistics, 2004). The Louisiana Catholic Schools Website (2004) asserts that Catholic education in America began in New Orleans in 1725. Two hundred and eighty years of Catholic school success in Louisiana created an education arena in which approximately 20%, twice the national average, of the students in Louisiana attend private

schools (The Heritage Foundation, 2003). Research indicates that Catholic schools play a key role in serving disadvantaged youth and are more effective than other schools in educating minority and low-income students. In Louisiana 100,000 students attended private schools (The Louisiana Catholic Schools Website, 2004).

Louisiana's charter school system is only aligned with one of the six criticisms displayed by the Center for Educational Reform. It is true that charter schools in Louisiana create more racial separation. Much like the national charter school demographic data, Louisiana charter schools are exacerbating segregation and this is easily explained by the demographic information of a higher concentration of minorities are located in most every urban center, a demographic fact in Louisiana as well.

### The Political Arena of Charter Schools

Weil (2000) notes that the Charter School Movement is deeply mired in the political arena on all levels. Politicians are interested in education because of their constituents' interests. American business has also expressed considerable interest in education. Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 and the No Child Left Behind law of 2002, there have been a growing number of schools as business partnerships. Some educators have decried the presence of these influences, whereas others have noted their useful financial contributions to public education. According to Good and Braden (2000) "...some, no doubt, are interested because improving public education is for the common good; whereas for others the interest is economic; to make it easier and cheaper; to recruit talented employees" (p. 14).

(Allen, 2005; Fusarelli, 2003; Engel, 2000; Hassel, 1999; Leal, 1999; Murphy & Shiffman, 2002; & Wells, 2002) all contend that charter schools are politically unique because it is an education reform that has, from its beginnings, has won bipartisan political support. The underlying reasoning for this bipartisan support for charter schools is because these new public schools are beyond the systemic structures that have foiled past reforms. Rofes (1998) notes that “Charter schools have been aligned with conservative interest groups and a rich mixture of voluntary associations with diverse political views make up the vast majority of charter school advocates” (p. 52).

One contention is that policymakers can “play politics with education” because the constituents with the greatest need have little political power. The continuing, and exaggerated, assault on American children and their schools is largely politically driven because the students are politically invisible. However, some politicians seem to consider the moral consequences of educational funding. For example, Good and Braden (2000) point out that “some politicians, although they reject vouchers, support public charter schools; because they believe, charter schools can flourish in ways that do not erode the “publicness” of public schooling.

Engel (2000) and Tyack and Cuban (1995) point out that to some observers, decentralizing schools may constitute a realistic recognition of the schools as an imperfect panacea with a limited capability for changing society. If we abandon utopian goals educators can focus on more rational and achievable objectives for the school system. Mainstream policy analysts in particular argue that consensus is healthier than constant conflict and that a stable educational system that develops out of negotiation, bargaining, and compromise among a plurality of interests is far more beneficial for the common good. With the addition of what is



assumed by these analysts to be a conservative shift in U.S. political values, it stands to reason that educational policy would follow suit and decentralization would have its place in education.

## Advantages and Disadvantages of Charter Schools

### *Advantages of Charter Schools*

Hassel (1999) comments on the experimentation aspect of charter schooling:

Charter schools will serve as laboratories for new educational ideas. Without the constraints imposed by state laws and school district policies, they may try out new approaches. Those that succeed can be exported to existing schools for broader adoption. The laboratory might function on a system level as well, as the techniques public bodies develop to oversee charter schools and hold them accountable for results produce lessons for the regulation of public schools more generally. The laboratory function is highlighted in the statements of legislative intent of several state charter school laws and by some authors, but charter advocates like Kolderie do not emphasize it. The laboratory idea emerges from a different diagnosis of the problem with American schooling, a diagnosis that focuses on the difficulties of generating “good ideas” in the current system. Kolderie argues, by contrast, that the system is bedeviled not by a lack of good ideas per se but by a lack of incentives to capitalize upon them. (p. 7)

Despite the assessments of the general effects of charter schools, there is some knowledge that can be gained from the present investment. For example, there are schools that are providing special niches that seem to compliment, and even extend, the range of students that

public schools can serve well. Methods for strengthening charter school legislation that leads to more innovation in classroom instruction can be identified. Ironically, one of the several arguments Good and Braden (2000) make invokes the rhetoric used by charter school advocates who want public schools to be more competitive. They state, "...namely, if charter schools become more innovative, we argue that the process for obtaining a teacher needs to become more competitive" (p. 21).

Engel (2000) states that:

Market ideology undercuts the basic values of public education. In particular, it abolishes social and [traditional] democratic control of the schools, and it eliminates the possibility of using the schools as a means of strengthening a democratic society. The critical focus is on five policy issues that have been in the forefront of education reform in the 1990s: (1) privatization in all its forms, especially charter schools; (2) collaborative and decentralized school system governance and management; (3) the expanded use of computer technology; (4) school-to-work programs; and (5) national and state curriculum standards. (p. 13)

Clinchy (2000) reports on a second study conducted by the Institute for Education and Social Policy at New York University which appears to show that although these schools may cost a bit more per pupil, they are more cost effective in the long run because they have fewer drop-outs and graduate more students in the normal four-year period (p. 5).

One of the primary and most promising benefits of the Charter School Movement appears to be something that has come to be known as the "ripple effect" (Good and Braden 2000; Hassel, 1999; Maranto, 1999). Charter school programs also change the institutional structure on a broader level by affecting the incentives of existing school districts. As charter proponent Ted

Kolderie writes: “The intent is not simply to produce a few new and hopefully better schools. It is to create dynamics that will cause the main system to change so as to improve education for all students” (Hassel, 1999 p. 5). The primary dynamic is competitive pressure on conventional schools. Good and Braden (2000) write about this positive ripple effect as one that echoes in the field in other ways when they state that: The present system of schooling is so flawed that it can be saved only by bold, aggressive experiments. In particular, many critics call for new, experimental forms of schooling, such as voucher plans and charter schools. Moreover, “second-order effects”, changes in school districts in response to the presence or possibility of charters, will likely take even longer to manifest themselves.

Because their curricula, teaching methods, and management practices affect only those who choose to attend, charter schools do not have to convince district-wide majorities that their approaches are right. According to Hassel (1999), “Arguably, moving decisions from the district to the school can diffuse the conflict that seems endemic to public education” (p. 5).

### *Disadvantages of Charter Schools*

In first looking at the early problems of the Charter School Movement, research has illuminated some of the central difficulties charter schools have faced in this early phase of development. According to Hassel (1999):

Seven out of ten charter schools had difficulty acquiring the resources they needed to start up or operate. Among the most common problems were lack of startup funds, lack of planning time, inadequate operating funds, and inadequate facilities. Aside from resource limitations, the second most common cluster of

problems was resistance or opposition from outside organizations: state and local boards of education, state departments of education, local school districts, and educators' unions. These problems, it should be said, were cited by schools that actually managed to open their doors. In many states with charter school laws on the books, only a small number of charter schools have managed to gain approval to open. In those states, the primary problems facing charter school programs have not been the operational ones cited in the U.S. Education Department's study, but the unwillingness of public bodies like school districts to issue charters. (p. 12)

Others register their negative, or less than optimistic views, on the positive influence charter schools can have on educational practices on a local, state and national scale. They question the assertions of some of the proponents on key advantages of charter schooling. Good and Braden's (2000) review of the charter school literature, concluded that there is no evidence that charters achieve any academic progress, are accountable or are diverse, and that policymakers should pursue changes to make charters fall more in line with existing public school requirements.

Since the concept autonomy may create advantages for the school-based model, the freedoms possessed by the charter schools, at least in concept, emerge as one of the apparent major benefits of these schools:

Clinchy (2000) acknowledges one negative aspect of charter schooling when he views "false autonomy" in charters that are not independent schools:

The conflict between our traditional hierarchical authoritarianism and the democratic diversity represented by the centralization of decision-making power

down to the level of the individual school is at present all too often being handled either by papering over the fundamental differences between these two agendas and pretending that somehow the problem will solve itself and disappear or by saying that the new, small schools have the “autonomy” to meet the new mandated standards and their accompanying tests in their own particular educational fashion. Autonomy is usually limited to the relatively superficial aspects of schooling, such as discipline codes, test preparation, school uniforms, the purchase of educational materials, and so on, while leaving the core of education—educational philosophy and curriculum, testing, teaching methodology, staffing, real fiscal power, in the hands of the external federal, state, and local school authorities. Yet in the truly autonomous charter schools the educational entrepreneurs are responsible for implementing all aspects of their school’s education. (p.11)

Given that the problems of schooling are poorly defined, the proposed solutions are overly general, and the relationship between solutions and purposes are rarely made explicit, it is not surprising that the effects of charter schools and other forms of choice, vouchers, and privatization are problematic.

### The Seven Correlates of Effective Schools

This study is designed to explain why each case school leads the district, state, and/or is competing favorably with the nation in standardized test scores. The qualitative data from teacher interviews were coded and then classified according to the Seven Correlates of Effective

Schools to ensure a better understanding of the data points that the teachers in each successful charter school deem as important to their respective charter school's success.

The reasoning behind employing the Seven Correlates of Effective Schools as a tool for classification of teacher data is the approximately forty-year old body of research that has provided the framework of today's Correlates. This is based on proven effective schools as well as case studies of successful public schools. The correlates are independent and collaborative in practice they are self-renewing and based on quality and equity in education. Most significantly, they focus on increased student achievement that is grounded in the core belief that all children can learn.

Lezotte (2001) confirms the historical reasons for applying the Correlates of Effective Schools when he inscribes:

For approximately forty years of applied studies, these Correlates of Effective Schools have been observed in all levels of schools, from elementary through senior grades and with rural, urban, and suburban student populations. The educational researchers, who conducted Correlates of Effective Schools, developed a body of research that supported the premises that all children can learn and that schools controls the factors necessary to assure student mastery. The Effective Schools Movement, its constituent research, and the correlates themselves have not only withstood the test of time, but have also evolved and grown as the understanding of effective schools has both deepened and broadened. (p. 3)

In 1966, *The Equal Educational Opportunity Survey* by James S. Coleman, et al. was published. The paper was funded by the U.S. Office of Education to discuss the effectiveness of

American education. By lending official credence and research-based data to the notion that schools were not making a difference in shaping student outcomes, the report stimulated vigorous reactions. Coleman's (1966) report instigated many of the studies that would subsequently come to define the research base for the Effective School Movement, which emerged in response to Coleman's controversial paper (Stickney & Marcus, 1984 p. 66; Ravitch, 2002 p. 14).

The Coleman (1966) report had concluded that family background, not the school, and was the major determinant of student achievement. Coleman was foremost among a group of social scientists during the 1960s and 1970s who believed that family factors, poverty or a parent's lack of education prohibited students from learning in spite of the teaching method. Coleman's report, along with the related literature, was the catalyst for compensatory education programs that proliferated school improvement attempts during the 1960s and 1970s (Lezotte, 2001).

Ron Edmonds, then Director of the Center for Urban Studies at Harvard University, refused to accept Coleman's report as conclusive, although Edmonds acknowledged that family background does make a difference in education. At this point, Edmonds was joined by Wilbur Brookover and Larry Lezotte out of Michigan State University and they began developing alternative investigations and studies that would evolve into the Seven Correlates of Effective Schools (Association For Effective Schools Inc., 1996).

Edmonds, Brookover and Lezotte and other researchers looked at the achievement data from schools in several major cities. These were schools where the student populations were comprised of those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Nationwide, they found these children were learning. These findings directly contradicted Coleman's conclusion and the Effective

School Movement sought answers to this contradiction (Association for Effective Schools Inc., 1996).

The effective schools researcher's first task was to identify existing effective schools, schools that were successful in educating all students regardless of their socio-economic status or family background. Examples of these especially effective schools were found repeatedly, in varying locations, and in both large and small communities. After identifying these schools, the second task remaining was to identify the common characteristics among these effective schools (Lezotte, 2001).

Upon closer scrutiny, the researchers found that all of these especially effective schools had the at least six of the same attributes: (1) the leadership of the principal notable for substantial attention to the quality of instruction.; (2) a pervasive and broadly understood instructional focus; (3) an orderly, safe climate conducive to teaching and learning; (4) teacher behaviors that convey the expectation that all students are expected to obtain at least mastery; and (5) the use of measures of pupil achievement as the basis for program evaluation and (6) the opportunity to learn and the time on task. These attributes were expanded and later became known as the Seven Correlates of Effective Schools (Lezotte 2001).

While Edmonds, Brookover, and Lezotte conducted the original effective schools research in elementary schools, another team of researchers in the United Kingdom were conducting similar research, only in secondary schools. Rutter's, et al., (1979) independent research was published in America and entitled *Fifteen Thousand Hours*. The conclusions reached regarding school attributes that positively affect student achievement were nearly identical to those rising out of effective schools research in America. Research in the United States and the United Kingdom demonstrated the correlation between the strong presence of the



attributes of effective schools with high levels of measured student achievement. This relationship has been found in a wide variety of school settings. The association between the correlates of effective schools holds true regardless of the race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status of the students within the school (Lezotte, 2001).

*Programs of School Improvement: An Overview*, published by Edmonds (1982) formally identifies the Correlates of Effective Schools when he stated all effective schools have: (1) strong instructional leadership, (2) a strong sense of mission, (3) demonstrated effective instructional behaviors, (4) held high expectations for all students, (5) practiced frequent monitoring of student achievement, and (6) operated in a safe and orderly manner. In this same article Edmonds (1982) identified the family as an integral aspect to a successful education by professing schools may be primarily responsible for whether or not students function adequately in school, but the family is probably critical in determining whether or not students flourish in school.

After Edmonds' (1982) publication of the original Six Correlates of Effective Schools, they were refined to include family influence as a correlate, thus producing today's well-known Seven Correlates of Effective Schools: (1) Instructional Leadership, (2) Clear and Focus Mission, (3) Safe and Orderly Environment, (4) A Climate of High Expectations, (5) Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress, (6) Opportunity to Learn and Student Time on Task and (7) Positive Home-School Relations.

The first early definition of effective schools rested on the concept of equity between children from differing socioeconomic classes. The early Effective Schools Movement emphasized that individual school improvement resulting in increased student achievement could only be sustained with strong district support. Today, the applications of organizational

management theories, the concepts of decentralization and empowerment, the importance of organizational culture, and the principles of total quality management and continuous improvement provide significant additions to the core body of effective schools research and have added important dimensions to the understanding of what makes an effective school. Other aspects of the Effective School Movement have evolved and grown over the years out of this research (Lezotte, 2001).

### Summary of Literature Review

Chapter II discusses charter school history; the evolution of public schools in America, and the origin of charter schools from their predecessors, magnet schools and alternative schools. Next, voucher programs are defined and voucher court cases are mentioned. The history of charter schools, charter school legislation, and the political arena of charters are discussed. Sections on charter school and minorities, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of charter schools are followed by a section on Correlates of Effective Schools. The future of public schooling is certainly going to be determined by many factors including the passage of time and the long term endurance of these “upstart startups” called charter schools.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

Chapter III discusses the overall design of the present study including methods and procedures. This qualitative study was designed specifically to explain the reasons why these three charter schools lead their respective districts, the state and/or are competing favorably with the nation. The qualitative data was gathered using teacher interviews, teacher focus groups, viewing historical documents and observations to arrive at the results for each charter school. Results were extracted from the qualitative data as a partial explanation for their leading status as defined by the Louisiana Charter School State Evaluation Team.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine three charter school-communities and determine the contributing factors of their successes. Teacher interviews were used to identify themes. Results will assist in defining why their charter school is leading their respective district, the state and/or competing favorably with the nation on standardized test scores. The focus of the study was to document how these charter school teachers defined the reasons for their successes. The documentation of teacher explanations for the reasons of their school's successes should enable educators to further examine these successful charter schools as models for replication. This investigation is designed to aid Louisiana's, as well as the national charter school movement by studying successful new public schools.

## Research Questions

The overarching research question guiding this inquiry is “Why is this particular charter school leading the district, state and/or competing favorably with the nation in standardized test scores?”

The purpose of this investigation was to determine and examine the contributing factors that led to the successes of three charter schools. This investigation attempted to answer the following questions:

1. Why is your school leading the district, state and/or nation in standardized test scores?
2. How is your school different as compared to traditional public/private schools?

## Design

This study was designed to uncover the contributing factors that have allowed these three Louisiana charter schools to perform better than their respective districts on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). In Louisiana’s educational high stakes testing environment, quantitative information such as school-wide and grade level composite test scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) were consistently used by the Louisiana State Charter School Evaluation Team for the past seven years. According to the state evaluation reports by Barr et al (2004), these three traditional models of education delivery that were selected for this study have been consistently out-scoring their respective districts on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS).

K - 3 test scores were not used in this study. Bredekamp and Shepard (1989) cite the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and offer

recommendations for developmentally appropriate assessment regarding the subject of standardized testing when they state that “standardized testing should be delayed until the third grade or later” (p. 23). This aspect of standardized testing persuaded this researcher to concentrate data analysis on test scores from the third grade and above. One school in this study was a fledgling K- 2 charter school when it opened and primary school scores are all that are available for review.

This aspect of standardized testing persuaded this researcher to concentrate on participants from the third grade and above, since those were assumed to be the only grades upon which a valid determination of the schools’ standing could be made based on standardized test data. One school in this study, however, was a fledgling K- 2 charter school when it opened and primary school scores are all that are available for review at that time. Thus this school was included in the study, because test scores from subsequent years determined that the school outperformed other schools in the district and state.

For each year that each school was in operation, quantitative information is presented per grade-level. Tables report the national percentile rankings comparing the charter school to district, state and national mean scores from the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. The teacher interviews were analyzed in order to discern themes from actual teacher verbiage to explain why the teachers believe their respective charter school is leading the district, state and or competing favorably with the nation. To answer the question, “Why is your charter school scoring higher than the district, state and/or competing favorably with the nation?” it was determined that ethnographic research would best answer this research question.

## Rationale for Research

After reflecting on Carspecken (1996), I find the purpose of this study requires the use of qualitative research methodology because it calls for investigation of informant interviews to understand how their perceptions define the successes of their respective charter schools. Naturalistic observation and interviewing allowed for both the researcher to view impartially from the outside and the participant's inside view to be explored.

According to the work of Guba and Lincoln (1994) qualitative study relies on the tenets of a constructivist paradigm, sometimes referred to as a naturalistic inquiry. These qualitative research methods such as participant observation and document review provided the techniques and subsequent data for exploring, discussing, and researching how the case schools became to be labeled models worthy of replication by the Louisiana Charter School Evaluation Team. Creswell (1994) asserts that the assumptions of the qualitative paradigm are presented with qualitative research because the qualitative paradigm provides guidance for designing all phases of the study. The ontological assumption at this juncture pertains to the nature of reality that rest firmly on the reality being constructed by the research participants. As a result, reality was and is subjective and multiple realities exist including that of the examiner, the individual teachers and administrators as well as members of the school-community.

Creswell (1994) reports further on multiple realities:

The multiple realities that exist in qualitative research are created by personal interactions and perceptions. Reality is subjective and socially constructed by the individuals involved in a setting. Experiences of the teachers and the researcher, both past and present, as individuals and as

members of the school-community, contributed to the frames of reference(s). In qualitative study it is important to remember that the multiple realities involved in the interpretations include the researcher and the research participants, as well as the readers of the study. (p. 104)

The epistemological issue in case study refers to the relationship of the researcher to the school-community and as group members being researched. Stake (1995) expands on case study research by stating that a case study offers a process for solid explanations, but it also allows for the revelation of the investigator's interaction, the predispositions that exist, and the variety of controls present. The case study provides a concentration of inquiry into the knowledge of the teachers. It provides insight, findings, and interpretation. These three case studies describe and explain organizational phenomena when the variables should not be separated from the environment. The case study allows for a method to study a complex, functioning organization.

Data analysis was on-going from the start of the study. As soon as data collection began, data analysis was begun, as well (Merriam, 1988). Initial visits for introductory purposes, collecting, sorting, formatting, and writing upon gaining access and through initial group meetings allowed for on-going flexibility with developing emerging patterns or categories for coding purposes, and creating initial case records from raw data (Creswell, 1994; Merriam, 1988, 1998).

### Population

Louisiana charter schools have been in existence since 1996. There are seventeen charter schools that operate under initial five-year charters that are granted by a local school board, the

first application arena. If the charter is rejected by the local district, then the Board of Elementary Secondary Education (BESE), Louisiana's State Board of Education, is the second application arena. These are the only two venues for charter applications in Louisiana. The charters granted by BESE are truly autonomous entities while those granted by the local district have limited autonomy. The charter may be renewed after completion of the third year for subsequent ten-year period. If a charter school does not open within three years, its charter is no longer valid. In Louisiana's recent past, three approved charter schools were never able to acquire funding from the legislature, subsequently they never opened. This is reflective of the state budget crisis and not the specific charters and/or the applicants.

Louisiana's charters cannot be grouped together into a single category. They do not represent a single program, a single type of curriculum, a single governance structure, a single type of instructional method or a particular type of student or teacher. Every charter school is different with its own history and learning climate. In most cases, the profile of a charter school in Louisiana reflects the diversity of the community that has constructed the school. The curricula used in Louisiana charter schools ranges from an essentialist teacher-directed view to a variety of progressive approaches.

Louisiana's charter schools are represented in both urban and rural settings. There are twelve schools in urban settings, the majority of which are in New Orleans, comprising a population of close to 3,000 students. Five schools can be classified as rural settings, and have a total population of 1,250 students. As of the spring of 2004 there were 4,250 students in Louisiana's seventeen charter schools (Barr et al., 2004).

The seventeen charter schools in Louisiana represent a continuum of highly successful, successful, failing or not improving. One new charter school opened in 2004 and no data was



available. At the time that this study was conducted six of Louisiana's seventeen charter schools would be classified as non-traditional settings. Specifically, they are alternative models of education, while eleven are school settings that originate from the "traditional" Latin Grammar school design. The majority of the charter schools operating in Louisiana are schools that are progressing at various positive paces toward the actualization of their missions, with most demonstrating some growth in each year of operation. Almost half of Louisiana's charter schools are successful enough to serve as models worth replicating either for academic reasons, innovative school design or both.

In relation to school composite scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), seven Louisiana charter schools show continuous improvement and are near, equal to, or above the district average and above the state average. Three Louisiana charter schools show continuous improvement near, equal to, or above the district average but below the state average. Four Louisiana charter schools show limited growth but are equal to, or above the district average, but below the state average and two Louisiana charter schools show no growth and are below the district and state average with one school too new to report on. Louisiana charter schools represent a full spectrum of performance on standardized test scores. (Barr, et al., 2004, 2005).

### Sample

There is scant literature on Louisiana's charter schools. The majority of the educational information published pertaining to Louisiana's charter schools is published annually in the evaluation technical report that is commissioned by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) to a team of university professors of education and their associates. The current charter school evaluation team has been under state contract for the preceding seven

years. The three charter schools in this study have been identified by Louisiana Charter School Program Evaluation Team as models worthy of replication due to their ability to meet or exceed the three aspects of the Louisiana Charter School Evaluation Program: (1) legal driven non-academic compliance issues, (2) legal driven assessment of standardized test scores and (3) school mission accountability.

### Subjects

The Louisiana Charter School Evaluation Program Team identified schools selected for this study as models worthy of replication. Their performances over a period of years determined their status. Each charter school granted this researcher complete access to the school-community. In each of the selected schools, the faculty was informally interviewed to determine which teachers had more than five years of teaching experience in total, along with prior experience teaching in a traditional public school. Three teachers, from each school, who met this experience prerequisite were selected as a homogeneous group of subjects and formally interviewed individually, with the questionnaire developed for this study. Their interviews were then analyzed for commonalities of their explanations as to why their respective schools are leading the district, state and/or competing favorably with the nation in standardized test scores.

### Settings

The following is a description of each of settings created by the three charter schools in this sample. Each charter school setting is described according to: (a) the origin of the school, (b)

the school's mission statement, (c) the school demographics, and (d) a brief description of the curriculum and instruction. The charter schools are listed alphabetically.

*Setting Number One  
Avoyelles Public Charter School*

*The Origin of Avoyelles Public Charter School*

The Director of Avoyelles Parish Charter School was a former elementary teacher in Avoyelles Parish public school system. The teacher's frustrations concerning the ineptness of the traditional public school system to educate the youth of her community in a worldly fashion and the resistance of the system to change drove her to discover the Louisiana Charter School Program. Her proposal was rejected by the Avoyelles Parish School Board and subsequently accepted by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE). Avoyelles Public Charter was awarded a Type II charter; in Louisiana this means the charter school becomes its own Local Educational Authority (LEA) and is truly autonomous and governed by a board created specifically for the charter school.

The director planned for a year before opening the charter school. Planning included seeking and obtaining community involvement and support while researching best practices for curriculum and instruction and interviewing prospective teachers. Land for Avoyelles Public Charter School was donated and community support aided in raising funds for a new physical plant that was erected during the latter part of the year of planning. Avoyelles Public Charter School opened its doors in August 2000.

### *Avoyelles Public Charter School / Mission Statement*

The mission of Avoyelles Public Charter School is to provide a safe, orderly, and encouraging school environment, where students are guided in the development of character and learning potential in academically rigorous, content rich educational programs. The school stresses that through firm policies of discipline and with parental and community involvement the students will master essential academic and life skills to function in a global society. A foreign language program provides French language education starting in kindergarten and is designed to maintain Louisiana's cultural heritage, as well as to assure the survival of the French language in Louisiana.

### *Avoyelles Public Charter School / Demographics*

Avoyelles Public Charter School (K - 8) is an independent, Type II Charter School with the charter granted by the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE). Avoyelles Public Charter School is located in rural Avoyelles Parish in central Louisiana. Initial enrollment was determined by a statewide open enrollment policy. This school started with a kindergarten through 4<sup>th</sup> grade program. For each year of operation, the next grade level was added. They are now continuing to add two classes per grade level, until they eventually achieve K - 8 status. As of the spring of 2005, building has started for the high school. At present, the waiting list for Avoyelles Parish Public Charter School has approximately 500 applicants.

Avoyelles Public Charter School is K - 8 and enrolled 483 students for the 2003 – 2004 school year an increase of 11% from the previous year. This enrollment represents a growth rate of 57.5% from the first year of operation, in 2000-2001. Sixty-six percent of the students had previously been enrolled in public schools, 23% of the students were previously enrolled in non-

public schools, leaving 11% of the student population enrolled from the beginning. Sixty-two percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch. This at-risk population is three percent lower than the local district and six percent lower than the state average. Four percent of the students have been identified as needing special education services and four percent need special education services under Section 504. Seventy four percent of the students are White, 22% of the students are African-American and four 4% are Other.

#### *Avoyelles Public Charter School / Characteristics of the Curriculum and Instruction*

Avoyelles Public Charter School is traditional elementary school that use of purchased curricula: Core Knowledge™, Saxon Math™, and Direct Instruction® (D.I.) ® for language arts. These research-based programs are used to surpass the state frameworks in an attempt to improve student achievement.

Avoyelles Public Charter School implements highly effective use of data driven decisions to identify weaknesses in its curriculum and instruction process. The use of an outside (D. I.)® consultant once a month insures professional development for language arts. Once weaknesses are identified, the teachers adjust their instruction accordingly. This process creates a target area of improvement that virtually insures students the best opportunity to improve in all academic areas. Core Knowledge™ is used for art, music, social studies, geography and literature, with Direct Instruction® used for reading, spelling, and writing, and Saxon Math™. The entire school-community is involved in constructing and implementing the Core Knowledge™ curriculum. Tutoring is done in a one-on-one fashion for special needs children, as the skill level requires. Peer assistance is used as needed for skill development, yet neither of these remedial practices is school-wide nor does remediation account for less than 10% of the time.

Collaborative instructional processes are used with hands-on projects that connect real life with the home based assignments. Each student must complete a monthly project to be done at home. This assignment focuses on a “grade-level-theme-of-the-month” and requires family involvement to make real life connections. The curriculum is thematic and is also correlated with music and art classes utilizing teacher collaboration per grade level. These approaches to instruction entail the use of problem solving skills and the lessons are project-based. The older students in Grades six through eighth must conduct research monthly.

Each day is started with an hour and a half of instruction in reading, spelling and language and writing. Homogeneous groups are used for reading instruction and small group instruction, every teacher in grades K - 5 have a teacher’s assistant. The assistant is used to facilitate homogeneous groupings for reading, spelling and language arts. Whole- class grouping is used as well as cooperative learning for the content areas, including music and French. Technology is used in conjunction with science providing a highly interactive aspect for experiments and lessons. Over-head projectors are used very frequently allowing for ease of student/teacher interaction and monitoring.

The assessments used include placement tests, from the purchased curriculum provider, in reading, spelling, and language. Traditional teacher-made paper and pencil test are frequent. State and national standardized test scores make up the remainder of the student portfolio. There is a school-wide management plan in place and discipline problems are rare.

*Test Scores*  
*Avoyelles Public Charter School*

Table 1

Avoyelles Public Charter School  
Year One of Four / 2000-2001  
Iowa Test of Basic Skills: Grade Level Composites:

	APCS	District	State	National Norm
Grade 3	69	45 (+24)	50 (+19)	50 (+19)
Grade 4	55	No ITBS	No ITBS	50 (+5)
Grade 5	53	46 (+7)	52 (+1)	50 (+3)

*Year One of Four: Quantitative Synopsis*

Avoyelles Public Charter School led the district in composite grade level ITBS scores in the following ways: Avoyelles Public Charter School led the district by 24 percentile rankings in the third grade and by seven percentile rankings in the fifth grade. Avoyelles Public Charter School led the state by 19 percentile rankings in third grade and led the state by one percentile ranking in the fifth grade. Nationally, Avoyelles Public Charter School surpassed the national norms in all grades. The third grade scored 19 percentile rankings above than the national norm, the fourth grade scored five percentile rankings above the national norm, and the fifth grade scored three percentile rankings above the national norm.

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Table 2

Avoyelles Public Charter School  
Year Two of Four / 2001-2002  
Iowa Test of Basic Skills: Grade Level Composites:

	APCS	District	State	National Norm
Grade 3	56	45 (+11)	50 (+6)	50 (+6)
Grade 4	48	No ITBS	No ITBS	50 (-2)
Grade 5	54	43 (+11)	51(+3)	50 (+4)
Grade 6	51	41 (+10)	51 ( 0 )	50 (+1)

*Year Two of Four: Quantitative Synopsis*

Avoyelles Public Charter School led the district in composite grade level ITBS scores in the following ways: It led the district by 11 percentile rankings in the third grade and by seven percentile rankings in the fifth grade. Avoyelles Public Charter School led the state by six percentile rankings in third grade; by three percentile rankings in the fifth grade and scored even with the state in the sixth grade. Nationally, Avoyelles Public Charter School surpassed the national norm in all grades but the fourth. The third grade scored six percentile rankings better than the national norm, the fourth grade was two percentile rankings lower than the national norm, the fifth grade scored four percentile rankings higher, and they surpassed the national norm by one percentile ranking in the sixth grade.



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Table 3

Avoyelles Public Charter School  
Year Three of Four / 2002-2003  
Iowa Test of Basic Skills: Grade Level Composites:

	APCS	District	State	National Norm
Grade 3	59	48 (+11)	55 (+9)	50 (+9)
Grade 4	63	No ITBS	No ITBS	50 (+13)
Grade 5	54	49 (+5)	56 (-2)	50 (+4)
Grade 6	44	34 (+10)	44 ( 0 )	50 (-4)
Grade 7	52	37 (+15)	48 (+4)	50 (+2)

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*Year Three of Four: Quantitative Synopsis*

Avoyelles Public Charter School led the district in composite grade level ITBS scores in the following ways. It led the district by 11 percentile rankings in the third grade, by five percentile rankings in the fifth grade, by 10 percentile rankings in sixth grade, and by 15 percentile rankings in the seventh grade. Avoyelles Public Charter School led the state by nine percentile rankings in third grade; was two percentile rankings behind the state in the fifth grade; scored even with the state in the sixth grade and led the state by four percentile rankings in the seventh grade. Nationally, Avoyelles Public School surpassed the national norm in all grades but the sixth grade. The third grade scored nine percentile rankings higher than the national norm, 13 percentile rankings better than the fourth grade, and four percentile rankings better than the fifth grade, trailed the nation by four percentile rankings in the sixth grade and surpassed the national norm in the seventh grade by two percentile rankings.

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Table 4

Avoyelles Public Charter School  
Year Four of Four / 2003-2004  
Iowa Test of Basic Skills: Grade Level Composites:

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	APCS	District	State	National Norm
Grade 3	53	50 (+3)	57 (-4)	50 (+3)
Grade 4	63	No ITBS	No ITBS	50 (+13)
Grade 5	63	53 (+10)	57 (+6)	50 (+13)
Grade 6	48	35 (+10)	46 (+2)	50 (-2)
Grade 7	64	45 (+19)	48 (+16)	50 (+14)
Grade 8	64	No ITBS	No ITBS	50 (+ 14)

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*Year Four of Four: Quantitative Synopsis*

Avoyelles Public Charter School led the district in composite grade level ITBS test scores in the following manner. It led the district by three percentile rankings in the third grade, 10 percentile rankings in the fifth grade, 10 percentile rankings in the sixth grade, and led the district by 19 percentile rankings in the seventh grade. Avoyelles Public Charter School trailed the state by four percentile rankings in the third grade, led the state by 6 percentile rankings in the fifth grade, led the state by two percentile rankings in the sixth grade and led the state by 16 percentile rankings in the seventh grade. Nationally, Avoyelles Public Charter School surpassed the national norms in all but sixth grade. The national norm was surpassed by three percentile rankings in the third grade, by 13 percentile rankings in the fourth grade, by 13 percentile

rankings in the fifth grade; trailed by two percentile rankings in the sixth grade, surpassed the national norm by 14 percentile rankings in the seventh grade, and by 14 in the eighth grade.

*Setting Number Two  
Children's Charter School*

*The Origin of Children's Charter School*

The initial director of Children's Charter School was the director of the Big Buddies Program in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Big Buddies is a local non-profit that serves the needy with a variety of services including after school programs that involve a tutoring partnership with the local university undergraduates in education. The originating Director aimed his frustration at the inability of the traditional school district to meet the needs of its students thus creating his desire to start a charter school. After three years of rejection by the local board, the Children's Charter School application team succeeded by applying media pressure on the traditional school board in order to obtain a charter from the local school board. In Louisiana this is a Type I Charter, in which a district sponsored charter school operates with limited autonomy.

Children's Charter School opened in 1997. Children's Charter is a district-charter school designed to serve an at-risk population in a large urban setting with effective teaching. Children's Charter is open eleven months out of the year to provide a comprehensive program of integrated education and enrichment services to maximize the growth of students. Children's Charter School works in tandem with the local Big Buddies program providing mandatory enrichment programs every day after school.

### *Children's Charter School / Mission Statement*

Children's Charter is a small district-charter school designed to serve an at-risk population in a large urban setting with effective teaching. Children's Charter is open year-round to provide a comprehensive program of integrated education, health, and social services to maximize the growth of students.

The limited autonomy granted to Children's Charter School by East Baton Rouge Parish School Board allowed the founders to select the manner in which the children would receive the curriculum and instruction and make site based budget decisions. The need for concentrating on core subjects leads the founding director and Board of Directors to concentrate on core subjects. This concentration allowed for budgetary discretions that shunned a physical education teacher, a librarian and art teacher. This budget driven decision created a charter school capable of offering teachers a salary that is approximately \$5,000.00 higher than the district.

### *Children's Charter School /Demographics*

Children's Charter School (K - 5) is a district-chartered and district-influenced East Baton Rouge elementary school. Children's Charter School is restricted by its charter granting district school board and is not allowed to grow in size. It is a Type I Charter School that has curricula, budget, and hiring and firing autonomy. Initial enrollment was completely open to the public and determined by parental choice. At present, the waiting list has approximately seventy applicants.

Children's Charter School enrolled 140 students for the 2003 - 2004 school year. Children's Charter School was originally K - 3 and grew one class per grade for two years, until it reached its present level with classes from K - 5. Further growth in terms of adding grades is

completely stymied at this time by the district school board. Eighty-four percent had previously been enrolled in public schools and two students were previously enrolled in non-public schools. The remaining 15% were enrolled from the beginning. Ninety-two percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch. This at-risk population is 92%, ten percentage points higher than the local district and 24% higher than the state average. Thirteen percent of the students have been identified as needing special education services and four students need special education services under Section 504. The school population is 100% African-American.

### *Children's Charter School / Characteristics of the Curriculum and Instruction*

The Louisiana Content Standards as well as the Dimensions of Learning are used to determine student learning styles. Dimensions of Learning is a framework for planning instruction developed for over forty years by the Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning. Dimensions of Learning is based on the Constructivist Learning theory in Marzano's (1988) book entitled Dimensions of Thinking. Teachers make the key curriculum choices. Saxon Phonics™ and Saxon Mathematics™ are used in kindergarten. Individualized tutoring sessions are directed by paraprofessionals. One-on-one conferencing is used to determine remediation of core subjects. Teaching strategies include: meaning negotiation through effective questioning and dialogue with students, capitalizing on teachable moments which are used to encourage critical thinking skills, and one-on-one conferencing to meet individual needs of students. Homogeneous grouping occurs in reading by utilizing small group instruction with teacher aids as well as the teacher. Experimental hands-on activities are organized for students and a balanced literacy program is incorporated throughout the curriculum. Project-based, inquiry-based, and problem-solving instructional techniques are used. Cooperative grouping strategies are

incorporated into the instructional format an integrated classroom approach is used to incorporate technology into instruction. The Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) is used for pre-testing in the fall and post testing in spring and summer. Teacher collaboration is informal and on-going and used effectively as-needed. Weekly faculty meetings are opportunities for professional development through group book reading(s) and other collaborations.

*Test Scores*  
*Children's Charter School (CCS)*

Table 5

Children's Charter School  
Year One of Seven / 1997-1998  
Iowa Test of Basic Skills: Grade Level Composites:

	CCS	District	State	National Norm
Grade K	No Data Available			
Grade 1	No Data Available			
Grade 2	No Data Available			

*Year One of Seven: Quantitative Synopsis*

The first year of operation for Children's Charter school was three years before the implementation of the Louisiana Educational Assessment Process (LEAP) which requires Iowa Test of Basic Skills testing and as well as state criterion referenced testing for the fourth and eighth grades. The state evaluation of Louisiana charter schools performed by Pol (1997) was published in July of 1997. This qualitative report acknowledges that Children's Charter School had finished its pilot program and opened its doors for the 1997-1998 school year. The

evaluation of Louisiana’ charter schools for the 1997–1998 school year concentrated on the established charter schools and mentioned the three first year charter schools in East Baton Rouge Parish briefly of which Children’s Charter was one. There was no state evaluation for charter schools during the 1997-1998 school year. The evaluation program resumed for the 1998-1999 school year.

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Table 6

Children’s Charter School  
Year Two of Seven / 1998-1999  
Iowa Test of Basic Skills: Grade Level Composites:

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	CCS	District	State	National Norm
Grade K	No Data Available			
Grade 1	No Data Available			
Grade 2	38	No ITBS	No ITBS	50 (-12)
Grade 3	36	44 (-8)	45 (-9)	50 (-14)

---

*Year Two of Seven: Quantitative Synopsis*

The second year of operation for Children’s Charter school was two years before the implementation of the Louisiana Educational Assessment Process (LEAP) which requires Iowa Test of Basic Skills testing and as well as a state-designed criterion reference test for the fourth, eighth and twelfth grades. Children’s Charter School chose the Iowa Test Basic Skills (ITBS) its assessment. During the 1998 – 1999 school year Children’s Charter School performed below the

district, state and national scores. According to the Louisiana Charter School evaluation team Barr et al (1999), Children's Charter Schools (CCS) showed a gain of 10 percentile rankings in reading, language arts and math from the fall of 1998 to the spring 1999.

Table 7

Children's Charter School  
Year Three of Seven / 1999-2000  
Iowa Test of Basic Skills: Grade Level Composites:

	CCS	District	State	National Norm
Grade K				
Grade 1				
Grade 2	38	No ITBS	No ITBS	50 (-12)
Grade 3	47	42 ( +5)	45 ( +2)	50 ( -3)
Grade 4	No ITBS	No ITBS	No ITBS	No ITBS

*Year Three of Seven: Quantitative Synopsis*

The third year of operation for Children's Charter School indicates that the second grade trailed the nation by 12 percentile rankings, while the third grade (first grade cohort) led the district by 5 percentile rankings and the state by 2 percentile rankings. The third graders scored 3 percentile rankings below the national norm of 50. Fourth grade test results are not available due to Children's Charter School's commitment to the criterion referenced state assessment.



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Table 8

Children's Charter School  
 Year Four of Seven / 2000-2001  
 Iowa Test of Basic Skills: Grade Level Composites:

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	CCS	District	State	National Norm
<hr/>				
Grade K				
Grade 1				
Grade 2	53	No ITBS	No ITBS	50 ( +3)
Grade 3	56	44 (+12)	50 ( + 6)	50 ( +6)
Grade 4	No ITBS	No ITBS	No ITBS	50
Grade 5	36	51 (- 15)	52 ( -16)	50 ( -14)

---

*Year Four of Seven: Quantitative Synopsis*

During the fourth year of operation Children's Charter School second graders surpassed the national norm by three percentile rankings, the Children's Charter School third graders' scored 12 percentile rankings above the district, six percentile rankings above the state, and six percentile rankings above the nation. Fourth grade test results are not available due to Children's Charter School's commitment to the criterion referenced state assessment. The first graduating class of fifth graders scored 15 percentile ranking below the district and 16 percentile rankings below the state and 14 percentile rankings below the nation.

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Table 9

Children's Charter School  
Year Five of Seven / 2001-2002  
Iowa Test of Basic Skills: Grade Level Composites:

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	CCS	District	State	National Norm
Grade K				
Grade 1				
Grade 2				
Grade 3	52	43 (+9)	50 (+2)	50 (+2)
Grade 4	No ITBS	No ITBS	No ITBS	No ITBS
Grade 5	36	46 (-10)	51 (-15)	50 (-14)

---

*Year Five of Seven: Quantitative Synopsis*

In the fifth year of operation Children's Charter School, the third grade scored 9 percentile rankings above the district, two percentile rankings above the state and two percentile rankings above the national norm. Fourth grade test results are not available due to Children's Charter School's commitment to the criterion referenced state assessment. The second graduating fifth grade class of Children's Charter School trailed the district by 10 percentile rankings, trailed the state by 15 percentile rankings, and trailed the nation by 14 percentile rankings.

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Table 10

Children's Charter School  
 Year Six of Seven / 2002-2003  
 Iowa Test of Basic Skills: Grade Level Composites:

	CCS	District	State	National Norm
Grade K				
Grade 1				
Grade 2				
Grade 3	53	47 (+6)	55 ( -2)	50 ( +3)
Grade 4	No ITBS	No ITBS	No ITBS	No ITBS
Grade 5	50	51 (-1)	56 (-6)	50 ( 0)

---

*Year Six of Seven: Quantitative Synopsis*

During the sixth year of operation for Children's Charter School the third grade scored six percentile rankings above the district, two percentile rankings below the state, and surpassed the national norm by three percentile rankings. Fourth grade test results are not available due to Children's Charter School's semi-autonomous district charter school's commitment to the criterion referenced state assessment. The third graduating class of Children's Charter School scored one percentile ranking below the district, six percentile rankings below the state and the same as the national norm, 50.

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Table 11

Children's Charter School  
 Year Seven of Seven / 2003-2004  
 Iowa Test of Basic Skills: Grade Level Composites:

	CCS	District	State	National Norm
Grade K				
Grade 1				
Grade 2				
Grade 3	53	47 (+6)	55 (-2)	50 (+3)
Grade 4	No ITBS	No ITBS	No ITBS	No. ITBS
Grade 5	50	50 ( 0 )	57 (-7 )	50 ( 0 )

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*Year Seven of Seven: Quantitative Synopsis*

During the seventh year of operation for Children's Charter School's third grade class scored six percentile rankings above the district, two percentile rankings below the state and three percentile rankings above the national norm. Fourth grade test results are not available due to Children's Charter School's semi-autonomous district charter school's commitment to the criterion referenced state assessment. The fourth graduating fifth grade class from Children's Charter School scored even with the district, seven percentile rankings below the state, and even with the national norm of 50.

*Setting Number Three*  
*Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School*

*The Origin of Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School*

During the 1998 - 1999 school year the St. Mary Parish School Board decided to close Glencoe School, a traditional community public school. The reasons for the closure of the traditional public school as stated by school-community interviewees were clearly local school board politics that involved racial discord. The closure of Glencoe School was designed to raise test scores in the poorest performing school in the district, a historically predominately black traditional public school, located only three miles from Glencoe School, a historically predominately white traditional public school. A group of teachers and the school secretary were extremely vocal and proactive in their opposition to the closing of Glencoe School and sought assistance from their state representatives then the teachers decided to apply for a charter school. The charter was rejected by the St. Mary Parish School Board and subsequently accepted by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE). The local school board stubbornly resisted the creation of this charter school and stymied the charter school's development. They were in and out of court, creating legal obstacles with regard to the closed physical plant that were contradictory to the land owner's requirements for his donation of the land and its use by the traditional school board. The original physical plant for Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School was built from the ground up and years later the traditional school board relented its use of the old Glencoe School physical plant to the charter.

All the teachers involved in the school's conception are still teaching at Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School, except for one who has retired, and the former school secretary is the

Chief Financial Officer of Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School. In this respect, it is a very stable independent educational community.

*Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School / Mission Statement*

Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School will provide and maintain an optimum environment for learning in which all enrolled children are afforded the opportunity to achieve, attain goals, and excel as students and as individual citizens of the world. The mission of the administration, faculty, and support staff of Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School is to guide students in the acquisition of knowledge and in the development of skills necessary to become productive members of society who possess a life-long love of learning. Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School will seek parental involvement at all levels, forming partnerships and teams whose purposes are directly linked to student achievement. Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School will ensure that all students, parents, faculty, administration and staff are aware of collective and individual accountability and the role each person must play in the teaching and learning process. Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School will be an institution where each student regardless of race, sex, religion, nationality, socioeconomic background, or physical and or mental challenge, will have the opportunities, resources and support to reach his or her unique potential and be prepared to meet the challenges of the future (Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School Revised Charter, 2004).

*Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School / Demographics*

Glencoe Charter School (K - 8) is an independent, Type II Charter School with the charter granted by Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE). Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School is located in rural St. Mary Parish in south central Louisiana.

Initial enrollment was, and still is determined by a parental choice state-wide and has an open-enrollment policy. At present, the waiting list has approximately 40 applicants.

Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School enrolled 344 students for the 2003 – 2004 school year, an increase of 5% increase from the previous year. Seventy-seven percent of the students had previously been enrolled in public schools. Twelve percent of the students had previously been enrolled in non-public schools. Eleven percent of the students began their career with Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School. Seventy-two percent of the students at Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School are eligible for free or reduced lunch, versus 65% in the local district. Thirteen percent of the students have been identified as needing special education services. Three percent of the students have been identified as needing special education services under Section 504. Seventy-nine percent of the students are White, 17% of the students are African-American and 4% are other. The local district's racial demographics are: 69% White, 30% African-American and 1% Other. Approximately 10% of the students are enrolled from a neighboring district.

#### *Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School / Characteristics of the Curriculum and Instruction*

The Louisiana Content Standards are the main course of study. The teachers collectively and individually are the driving forces behind the curriculum. The director is viewed chiefly as a facilitator of teacher-directed decision making process. Faculty and parents have input on the curriculum process as well. Tutoring takes place with teacher directed individualized, one-on-one sessions. The collaborative methods used are experimental and hands-on. Curriculum collaboration is done with project-based and inquiry-based approaches to instruction in mind. Whole-class and cooperative grouping strategies are used for instruction. Computers are used throughout the school primarily in classrooms through integration of the curriculum. The school-

wide plan for technology has been seriously limited by physical plant growth obstacles. The types of assessment used are traditional paper and pencil teacher-made assessments and periodic projects of a more intensive nature. A well-practiced school-wide management system is well in place. These whole school/whole class management systems that are in place assure that discipline problems are relatively scarce. One innovative aspect to the setting of Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School is an extended school day that uses the extra 30 minutes a day for “Family Time.” This end of the day social activity is when 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders are assigned to classes with younger students for daily socializing and peer activities. In the 5<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grades, teachers rotate different types of enrichment classes and the last four weeks of school are used for academic tutoring.

*Test Scores*  
*Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School*

Table 12  
Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School  
Year One of Five / 1999-2000  
Iowa Test of Basic Skills: Grade Level Composites:

	VBG	District	State	National Norm
Grade K				
Grade 1				
Grade 2				
Grade 3	46	41(+5)	47 (-1)	50 (-4)
Grade 4	46	No ITBS	No ITBS	50 (-4)
Grade 5	39	44 (-5)	46 (-7)	50 (-11)



*Year One of Five: Quantitative Synopsis*

Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School trailed the district in composite grade level (ITBS) test scores in the following manner for the 1999 - 2000 school year. Glencoe led the district by five percentile ranking in the third grade, trailed the district by five percentile rankings in the fifth grade. Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School trailed the state by one percentile rankings in the third grade, trailed the state by seven percentile rankings in the fifth grade. Nationally Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School trailed the nation in the third grade by four percentile rankings, and trailed the fifth grade by 11 percentile rankings.

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Table 13

Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School  
Year Two of Five / 2000-2001  
Iowa Test of Basic Skills: Grade Level Composites:

---

	VBG	District	State	National Norm
Grade K				
Grade 1				
Grade 2				
Grade 3	52	41(+11)	50 (+2)	50 (+2)
Grade 4	53	No ITBS	No ITBS	50 (+3)
Grade 5	52	46 (+8)	52 ( 0 )	50 (+2)
Grade 6	48	46 (+2)	48 ( 0 )	50 (-2)

---

*Year Two of Five: Quantitative Synopsis*

Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School led the district in composite grade level (ITBS) test scores in the following manner for the 2000 - 2001 school year. Glencoe led the district by 11 percentile rankings in the third grade; lead the district by eight percentile rankings in the fifth grade. Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School led the state by two percentile rankings in the third grade, was even with the state in the fifth grade and was even with the state in the sixth grade. Nationally Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School surpassed the national norm in the third grade by two percentile rankings, the fourth grade surpassed the national norm by three percentile rankings, and surpassed the national norm by two percentile rankings in the fifth grade while trailing the national norm in sixth grade.

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Table 14

Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School  
Year Three of Five / 2001-2002  
Iowa Test of Basic Skills: Grade Level Composites

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	VBG	District	State	National Norm
Grade K				
Grade 1				
Grade 2				
Grade 3	49	45 (+4)	50 (-1)	50 (-1)
Grade 4	51	No ITBS	No ITBS	50 (+1 )
Grade 5	54	46 (+8)	51 (+3)	50 (+4)
Grade 6	52	46 (+6)	51 (+3)	50 (+2)

Table 14 con't

Grade 7	54	47 (+7)	47 (+7)	50 (+4)
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*Year Three of Five: Quantitative Synopsis*

Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School led the district in composite grade level (ITBS) test scores in the following manner for the 2000 - 2001 school year. Glencoe led the district by four percentile rankings in the third grade, led the district by eight percentile rankings in the fifth grade, led the district by six percentile rankings in the sixth grade and led the district by seven percentile rankings in the seventh grade.

Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School trailed the state by one percentile ranking in the third grade, led the state by three percentile rankings in the fifth grade and led the state by one percentile ranking in the sixth grade, and led the state by seven percentile rankings in the seventh grade.

Nationally Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School led the national in the third grade by one percentile ranking, and the lead the fifth grade by four percentile rankings, lead the sixth grade by two percentile rankings and surpassed the national norm by four percentile rankings in the seventh grade.

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Table 15

Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School  
Year Four of Five / 2002-2003  
Iowa Test of Basic Skills: Grade Level Composites:

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VBG	District	State	National Norm
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Table 15 con't

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Grade K				
Grade 1				
Grade 2				
Grade 3	51	50 (+1)	55 (-4)	50 (+1)
Grade 4	51	No ITBS	No ITBS	50 (+1)
Grade 5	53	48 (+5)	56 (-3)	50 (+3)
Grade 6	47	38 (+11)	44 (+3)	50 (-3)
Grade 7	51	44 (+7)	48 (+3)	50 (+1)
Grade 8	53	No ITBS	No ITBS	50 (+3)

---

*Year Four of Five: Quantitative Synopsis*

Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School led the district in composite grade level (ITBS) test scores in the following manner for the 2002 - 2003 school year. Glencoe led the district by one percentile ranking in the third grade, led the district by five percentile rankings in the fifth grade, led the district by 11 percentile rankings in the sixth grade and led the district by seven percentile rankings in the seventh grade.

Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School trailed the state by four percentile rankings in the third grade, trailed the state by three percentile rankings in the fifth grade, led the state by three percentile rankings in the sixth grade, and led the state by three percentile rankings in the seventh grade.

Nationally, Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School led the nation in the third grade by one percentile ranking, and the led the fifth grade by three percentile rankings, trailed the national norm by three percentile rankings in sixth grade and surpassed the national norm by one percentile ranking in the seventh grade.

Table 16

Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School  
 Year Five of Five / 2003-2004  
 Iowa Test of Basic Skills: Grade Level Composites:

	VBG	District	State	National Norm
Grade K				
Grade 1				
Grade 2				
Grade 3	46	52 (-6)	57 (-11)	50 (-4)
Grade 4	51	No ITBS	No ITBS	50 (+1)
Grade 5	55	52 (+3)	57 (-2)	50 (+5)
Grade 6	46	38 (+8)	46 ( 0 )	50 (-4)
Grade 7	51	44 (+7)	48 (+3)	(50+1)

*Year Five of Five: Quantitative Synopsis*

Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School led the district in composite grade level ITBS test scores in the following manner for the 2003 - 2004 school year. Glencoe trailed the district by six

percentile rankings in the third grade, led the district by three percentile rankings in the fifth grade, led the district by eight percentile rankings in the sixth grade and led the district by seven percentile rankings in the seventh grade. The eighth grade level percentile rankings can only be compared to the national norm and Glencoe equaled the nation with a 50 percentile ranking.

Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School trailed the state by 11 percentile rankings in the third grade, trailed the state by two percentile rankings in the fifth grade and scored even with the state in the sixth grade, and led the state by four percentile rankings in the seventh grade.

Nationally, Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School trailed the national norm in the third grade by four percentile rankings, and led the fifth grade by five percentile rankings, trailed the national norm by four percentile rankings in sixth grade and surpassed the national norm by two percentile rankings in the seventh grade. The eighth grade percentile rankings can only be compared to the national norm and Glencoe surpassed the national norm by five national percentile rankings.

### Methods of Data Collection

During the spring of 2004, this author spent a day at each case school for preliminary introductory purposes. Site visits in the fall of 2004 were for the purpose of re-introduction into the school community and to request convenient scheduling for the in-depth study in each case school. The directors were gracious and excited about the opportunity presented to have their schools studied. During my day-long site visits, I discovered that the three school communities were genuinely willing to participate in and accommodate this investigation.

Historical data from the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) evaluations was also used to formulate background knowledge for each school. This researcher personally conducted interviews for qualitative data collection. Interviews were conducted with the Board of Directors, administrators, faculty, staff and parents.

Purposeful sampling was used to obtain a historical understanding of each school. In order to understand the factors that led up to the charter application process interviewees who were able to supply insight into factors affecting the evolution of the school were sought out. Interviews were conducted with people who participated in various stages of the charter school's development; including people who had at one time been members of the school-community, but who were no longer present in the charter school. Teachers were interviewed with an open-ended questionnaire so that the teachers would use their own terminology to explain their respective successes.

### *Qualitative Methods of Data Collection*

Selected individuals in the school communities were interviewed to obtain a historical context of each charter school and faculty members were interviewed with an open-ended questionnaire to discover the teacher's own experiences that describe why their respective charter school is leading the district, state and competing favorably with the nation on standardized test scores. In an attempt to avoid contamination that may occur when individuals of a group discuss ethnographic research, this researcher openly discussed the concept of subject to subject contamination with the faculty at the initial stages of the research progress. At every faculty meeting I attended and after every interview, the subjects were reminded about the threat

of contamination. Explanations of how contamination would weaken results were conveyed and faculty members were receptive to the concept of providing the best possible data.

Teacher interviews and focus groups were tape recorded to secure the collection of teacher descriptors to explain why their respective schools were out-performing the district and state with the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) scores. Triangulation, the practice of using three sources of data collection was used to confirm the emerging findings, observational notes, interviews and historical documents were utilized to further the accuracy and reliability of the qualitative data. (Creswell, 1994; Popham, 1993; Stake, 1995) Typed transcriptions were made of all interviews and allowed for literal transcriptions of the teacher descriptors. The interview transcripts were then analyzed and converted into a separate data files which were used to extract the most prevalent cross case themes that identified the contributions used by the teachers to explain each charter school's successes.

In case study research, the constant comparative method of data analysis is an approach used to develop grounded theory (Bogdan and Biklin, 1999; Merriam, 1998; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The basic strategy of making constant comparisons of recurring incidents, leads to themes or categories that are formed in order to interpret the meaning of the data. Naturalistic inquiry allows many forms of data gathering such as selecting a criterion-based sample, the use of case study design, and setting specific parameters for the research with interview questions. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) naturalistic inquiry allows for the possibility of an emergent design if needed, and allows access to the insider's points of view.

After becoming familiar with the faculty, staff and culture of the case school, teacher interviews were conducted in individual and focus group formats. The criteria used to determine a homogeneous group of teachers, used as subjects, was that the teacher had to have



more than five years of experience in teaching overall and some experience teaching in a traditional public school. Teachers were interviewed with an open-ended format that allows for a discovery of information.

The process of transforming the data involved transcribing the interviews, locating, and segmenting the data by teacher, then by category to identify three units of teacher verbiage that used the same language to depict the same phenomenon. Once one set of data was aligned from three teachers, the cross case table was given a “code” to identify the data and a title was assigned to the data set to classify the overall coded table into educational vernacular. This coding reassembled the data in a new way after the initial open-coding. This information is presented using a logic diagram in which a central category about the phenomenon was explored along with causal conditions that explained the data’s influence on classification into the correlates of effective research or classified as a new correlate. The codes and matching interview data were accompanied by a researchers’ explanation as to how the data were named and classified based on Larry Lezotte’s (1989) Seven Correlates of Effective Schools. If a set of data could not be classified into one of these seven correlates, a new category beyond the scope of the Seven Correlates of Effective Schools was assigned. This assignment resulted in a new site-specific code or a classification; a new “correlate of effective charter schooling.” (See Appendix).

### The Original Seven Correlates of Effective Research

The correlates were chosen as a classification system because they have proven to play a critical to the effective traditional public school. The correlates represent the leading organizational and contextual indicators that have been shown to influence student learning in

traditional public schools. The extent to which the correlates are in place may have a significant effect on student achievement (Lezotte, 2001). Additionally, the individual correlates are not independent of one another, but are interdependent and overlapping; overlapping that is often shaped by human and organizational behavior. The definitions that Lezotte (1989) assigned to the correlates are as follows and are listed as they were originally presented:

1. Safe and Orderly Environment - In the effective school, there is an orderly, purposeful, businesslike atmosphere, which is free from the threat of physical harm. The school climate is not oppressive and is conducive to teaching and learning.
2. Climate of High Expectations for Success - In the effective school, there is a climate of expectation in which the staff believes and demonstrates that all students can attain mastery of the essential school skills, and the staff also believes that they have the capability to help all students achieve that mastery.
3. Instructional Leadership - In the effective school, the principal acts as an instructional leader and effectively and persistently communicates that mission to the staff, parents, and students. The principal understands and applies the characteristics of instructional effectiveness in the management of the instructional program.
4. Clear and Focused Mission - In the effective school, there is a clearly articulated school mission through which the staff shares an understanding of and commitment to the instructional goals, priorities, assessment procedures and accountability. The staff accepts responsibility for students learning of the schools essential curricular goals.
5. Opportunity to Learn and Student Time on Task - In the effective school, teachers allocate a significant amount of classroom time to instruction in the essential skills. For a high percentage

of this time students are engaged in whole class or large group, teacher-directed, planned learning activities.

6. Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress - In the effective school, student academic progress is measured frequently through a variety of assessment procedures. The results of these assessments are used to improve individual student performance and also to improve the instructional program.

7. Home-School Relations - In the effective school parents understand and support the schools basic mission and are given the opportunity to play an important role in helping the school to achieve this mission.

As the researcher of the school-communities, my role entailed the goal of gaining insight and a genuine understanding of what factors contributed to each school's success. I allowed the school-community to describe their thoughts and actions and in so doing, they defined their own experiences for their charter school's success. Tesch (1990) states, "A naturalistic inquiry within a qualitative paradigm offers a focus on understanding the meaning the people under study to give their own experiences" (p. 51). I used appropriate data gathering skills, i.e., non-intrusive interviewing and observations and I observed each school's continuing success by attending board meetings and or general faculty meetings. It should noted that during this period considerable time was spent in each charter school observing the school processes and obtaining an understanding of the climate and culture created by each charter school.

This qualitative assessment emphasizes the importance of process rather than just the outcomes of the study. According to Stake (1995) a case study reporting method of research allows the teachers to be viewed as something special to be studied, not necessarily to be generalized to other groups at other times. This case study is then described as one in which there

is sufficient descriptive narrative of the teacher's own experiences, so that readers can vicariously experience these organizational dynamics, and draw their own conclusions in addition to reading the researcher's conclusions.

### Instrumentation

The research questions used in this study originated from the culmination of three evaluation graduate school classes, the third being a *Practicum in Evaluation*. The class work used in this researcher's evaluation practicum modified the Louisiana State Charter School Evaluation Program's Site Visit Protocol, a tool used by the evaluation team to conduct interviews during their day long visits to the school community. During the 1970s, the Hudson Institute's examination of the failings of the American educational system developed an evaluation model, which the Louisiana Charter School Evaluation Team used as a model for its original Site Visit Protocol. This researcher conducted a focus group interview with the two experienced education professors from an accredited Louisiana university who along with their research associates, who comprise the Louisiana Charter School Evaluation Team. The State Evaluation Team interview and the new Site Visit Protocol were used as a guide to for the formation of the research questions used in the present study. This interview resulted in the list of questions used in this research study. The integrity of the questionnaire was tested during the requisite pre-dissertation and revisions were made.

In general, the scope of the interviews was broad; the researcher wanted to obtain a sense of the origin, the overall culture, and climate of the school in order to provide a context in which

to analyze its evolution of the curriculum and instruction. Specific questions were used to gather an understanding of the specifics of each school's curriculum and instruction.

The intent of the interactive and collaborative process of this qualitative inquiry was to develop an understanding of the working model of curriculum and instruction within the framework of each charter school's culture. Data gained from the interview process and interaction with the school-community provided an understanding of the researcher's role in perception of each school-community and as well as each charter school's learning conditions.

### Summary

In summation, this chapter includes discussion about the methodology used to explore the factors contributing to the leading status of the three case charter schools with regard to district, state and/or national standardized test scores. The quantitative reporting displays the collection of national percentile rankings for each grade level from the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. These scores are compared with the district, state, and national norms. These comparisons help to confirm that these charter schools have a district-leading status. The qualitative aspect of the study defines the thematic pattern theory and the interrelated concepts that the homogeneous group of teachers identified as contributing factors for their school's successes. Coding procedures utilized during the naturalistic inquiry are identified and verification of these procedures has been stated. Finally, the process of classifying the data according to the Seven Correlates of Effective Schools was discussed. If a code could not be classified according to Seven Correlates of Effective Schools a site specific "correlate of effective charter schooling" was created.

## CHAPTER IV

### DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter provides a narrative that represents the teacher interview data for each charter school site. The qualitative data (see Appendix) is analyzed according to its alignment with the Seven Correlates of Effective Schools. Data that could not be aligned with these seven correlates were assigned a site-specific classification that represents a correlate of effective charter schooling.

According to Lezotte (2001) The Seven Correlates of Effective Schools are essential to all effective schools because they signify leading organizational and contextual indicators that have been proven to impact student learning. The degree to which these seven correlates are in place in a school has a positive effect on student achievement. Additionally, the individual correlates are not unconnected of one another rather they are completely interdependent. Due to these interrelationships, the correlates are established throughout the effective school literature in random order, making constant presentation of the correlates in any one particular sequence of no great concern.

The current research identifies teacher data points that were not capable of being aligned with Lezotte's (1989) Correlates of Effective Schools were assigned a new correlate of effective charter schooling. The new correlates of effective charter schooling may represent the independence that charter schools receive from the charter granting agency in exchange for a higher level of accountability than a traditional public school, namely the threat of closure.

Stake (1995) discusses the characteristics of qualitative research when he writes that in addition to its orientation away from cause and effect analysis and toward personal analysis,

qualitative investigation is prominent because of its accent on holistic treatment of phenomena. The epistemology of qualitative researchers is existential, and constructivist. These two outlooks share a familiar belief that occurrences are intricately interrelated through many concurrent actions and that understanding requires looking at a expansive view of the environment: temporal and spatial, historical, political, economic, cultural social and personal. In addition to its orientation away from cause and effect analysis and toward personal explanation, qualitative inquiry is distinguished by its emphasis on holistic treatment of phenomena. (p. 43)

#### Narrative Number One Avoyelles Public Charter School

Data from Avoyelles Public Charter School resulted in eight themes that the teachers used to describe their successes. Six of those themes were aligned with Lezotte's (1989) Seven Correlates of Effective Schools. Two themes could not be aligned.

Analysis of three experienced teachers' responses to individual interviews at Avoyelles Public Charter School resulted in two themes that did not align with Lezotte's (1989) Seven Correlates of Effective Schools. These themes are identified as site-specific correlates of effective charter schooling and are represented as follows: (1) Esprit de Corps, and (2) Teacher Professionalism. These descriptors may be a direct reflection of the positive affect of charter school autonomy.

Analysis of three experienced teachers' responses to an interview at Avoyelles Public Charter School resulted in the following codes which were aligned with the Seven Correlates of Effective Schools: (3) Instructional Leadership – “having drive, going the extra mile, feeling inspired”, (4) Curriculum: General - Direct Instruction® “results in grouping according to levels” (5) Curriculum Specific #1 – Direct Instruction® teaching method, (6) Direct Instruction® –

Coaching (7) Curriculum Specific: # 2 – Core Knowledge© “is hands-on” and (8) Home/School Relations – “family involvement with monthly home-projects.”

The autonomy granted to Avoyelles Public Charter School resulted in a new and innovative approach to curriculum and instruction for the central Louisiana region. The director, a former public elementary school teacher sought to form a consensus with the Assistant Director and the faculty to identify the best practices in curriculum and instruction. One result of the autonomy granted to this charter school was the selection of Direct Instruction® for the reading and writing program, Saxon Math™ and the Core Knowledge Curriculum™ for the remainder of the instructional day. This combination of curriculum and instructional approaches resulted in the teachers identifying an esprit de corps that permeates the teaching and learning environment.

Teacher descriptions of Avoyelles Charter School’s success revealed two new correlates of effective charter schooling. The first and most surprising depiction is the esprit de corps of the teachers. The teachers describe a work environment that is “fun.”

This description of learning is not found within the confines of any of the definitions of the Seven Correlates of Effective Schools. Teacher One confirmed this by stating, “In the other schools I [worked] in we never were excited about coming to work and teaching as we are here. Everyone is positive and enthusiastic about what we teach. I have been teaching for 18 years and this is the most fun that I have ever had” (Appendix Table 1). During a semester and more of observations this researcher noted that the students in transition at Avoyelles Public Charter School were beaming with bright smiling faces while they move in an orderly fashion, reflecting that the students enjoy their learning environment.

“The last thing I want to mention is that the teachers are so devoted at this school. We are all willing to go the extra mile and we are very cooperative about implementing the programs



(curricula). We make sure that the education is not only for the students but also part of the family life” (Teacher Three, Appendix Table 2). The second new Correlate of Effective Charter Schooling is Teacher Professionalism. The teachers interviewed identified faculty commitment and high expectations as a school-wide attitude for teachers, as well as students and devotion to teaching as descriptors of the teacher professionalism at Avoyelles Public Charter School. The teachers identify a school climate that demands high expectations (Appendix Table 2).

Instructional Leadership can be a powerful force at all schools; and, at Avoyelles Public Charter School the director is described by Teacher Number One as “...having a very hands-on relationship with all of us and she is an inspiration to everyone at the school” (Appendix Table 3). The teachers describe the director as “driven” and the director’s drive permeates the school culture from teacher dedication to data-driven results.

The leadership exalted by the director was the driving force behind the consensus of curricula choices practiced and Direct Instruction® is cited by the teachers more often than any other reason when they explained their schools’ successes. Direct Instruction® yielded three separate codes: (4) Curriculum: General - Direct Instruction® “results in grouping according to reading levels” (5) Curriculum Specific #1 – Direct Instruction® teaching methods, (6) Direct Instruction® Coaching.

Teacher One states: “The curriculum is made stronger by the fact that each student is placed in a homogenous group for reading instruction. This grouping allows the child to be successful at the reading program no matter what their level is” (Appendix Table 4). Direct Instruction® demands that the students change classes each morning so that each student receives reading instruction that is a match between the students’ ability and the grade level of instruction. Teacher interviews revealed that the teaching method of Direct Instruction® is a fast-

paced, scripted format and is described as “hard work”, but it meets the needs of the children. “In my other schools, discipline was always a problem and students were always falling through the cracks, and no one cared or even checked to see if the needs of the student were being met. This school is so fast- paced with instruction that we rarely have any problems with discipline” (Teacher One Appendix Table 6). It is interesting to note that the teacher’s discussion of the teaching method leads to a teacher comment that describes a learning environment that is free of major discipline problems. Researcher observation and discussions with the teachers were used to identify the fact that many teachers at Avoyelles Public Charter School have applied the Direct Instruction® teaching style of delivery (hand directives and fast paced instruction techniques) to other subjects the remainder of the day. This integrated curriculum teaching technique contributes to the fast paced learning day.

The director uses site-based decision making to apply budgetary decisions concerning Professional Development. The director chose to employ a Direct Instruction® consultant who coaches the teachers on how to improve their delivery system. Teacher Three commented on the site-based professional development and the esprit de corps by saying “With the on-going [Direct Instruction®] coaching-training, we improve constantly. It is easy to stay fresh with this learning environment because everyone is so positive and helpful here” (Appendix Table 6).

Teacher Empowerment at Avoyelles Public Charter School is an integral aspect of the successes of this charter school. Approximately half of the lesson plans that the teachers write to satisfy the state can demonstrate how the Core Knowledge Curriculum™ surpasses the state grade level expectations. The selection of this curriculum outline demands that the teacher obtains the materials needed for the implementation of the Core Knowledge Curriculum™ that is an outline of what should be taught at each grade level. The teacher decides how and when the

subject matter is presented. Teacher One commented, “I feel that the Core Knowledge Curriculum™ is better than the state guidelines. It is more precise and has a more well-rounded aspect to it. When I talk with other teachers we all agree that compared to our other schools this is the biggest difference between the two schools” (Appendix Table 7). The teachers at Avoyelles Public Charter School identified the theme Core Knowledge Curriculum™ as being “hands-on.” Teacher Two stated that “.... The Core Knowledge™ program (curriculum) is a perfect way to broaden knowledge in history, science, geography, literature and poetry. It allows us to go way out of the box and teach great lessons. We are allowed to bring in outside resources for hands-on learning projects and any other reliable resources that we find” (Appendix Table 7).

The last theme of teacher data classified under the Seven Correlates of Effective Schools was coded Home/School Relations. Avoyelles Public Charter School innovatively requires that each student create an age appropriate home project on a monthly basis. This aspect of the school-community creates the opportunities for the student to apply the knowledge gained from the cross-curriculum themes; themes that are determined by each grade level of teachers. As Teacher Two explains, “Another thing about the school vision is that we are encouraged to reach the students in a new, different and more effective manner. What I like about this school compared to the other schools I have taught at is the level of family involvement here. The monthly projects that are done by the students at home increase the participation of the family and I feel that this is very innovative” (Appendix Table 8). One innovative aspect to charter schooling at Avoyelles is the parent contract that is printed on the back of the application for enrollment. Parent(s) must contractually agree to twenty hours of volunteering at the “new” public school. This demand of parental presence is innovative and may be an aspect of charter schooling that traditional public schooling may investigate further.

*Narrative Synopsis*  
*Avoyelles Public Charter School*

The contributing factors identified by the teachers at Avoyelles Public Charter School as reasons for their schools' successes resulted in two site specific correlates of effective charter schooling, (1) Esprit de Corps and (2) Teacher Professionalism. The following codes were classified under Lezotte's (1984) Seven Correlates of Effective Research, (3) Instructional Leadership, (4) Curriculum / General - Direct Instruction® results in grouping, (5) Direct Instruction® - coaching and techniques, (6) Curriculum / Specific - Direct Instruction® - Teaching Methods, (7) Core Knowledge™ - is hands on, and (8) Home-School Relations – family involvement through monthly projects.

The autonomy achieved by being awarded a charter allowed this director to select curricula namely, Direct Instruction©, Saxon Math™ and Core Knowledge™. Teachers use the terms “program” and “curriculum” interchangeably. This set of purchased curricula creates the dominant theme(s) of curricula, which the teachers to define the main factor contributing to the leading status of the Avoyelles Public Charter School.

It is important to note that the director's curricula autonomy in the case of Avoyelles Public Charter School resulted in decision-making that created the adoption of its curricula choices from its conception to a working model. This curriculum and instruction model is leading the district, and competing favorably with the state and the nation on test scores, while competing against traditional public schools that are at least 100 years older or older than the five year old Avoyelles Public Charter School.

The teachers expressed the fact that the reading curriculum, Direct Instruction® meets the students' needs at Avoyelles better than any previous reading curriculum and refer to the homogeneous grouping in Direct Instruction® as an integral aspect of their school's success. The Direct Instruction® teaching method is directly cited by two teachers as the integral reason for the leading status of Avoyelles Public Charter School. Two of the three teachers interviewed referred to "the hands-on approach" of the Core Curriculum™, while the third one commented on how "well-rounded" Core Knowledge™ is.

The autonomy granted to this "new" public school site in the name of charter schooling creates a building-level attitude of school-ownership. From the director to the custodian and everyone in between, boastfully confer about "our school" underscoring the locus of control. Observations and private conversations confirm that the administrators in collaboration with the teachers refer to the collective "we" in faculty meetings concerning all levels of decision making needed to keep a public school efficient.

#### Narrative Number Two Children's Charter School

Analysis of three experienced teachers' responses to individual interviews at Children's Charter School created six codes. None of these coded themes could be aligned with Lezotte's (1989) Seven Correlates of Effective Schools: (1) Autonomy: Teachers as Instructional Leaders, (2) Autonomy: Teacher Freedom, (3) Autonomy of (CCS) vs. District Schools, (4) Faculty Unity, (5) Teacher Dedication, and (6) Teacher Assistants and Small Classes. These themes may represent the "autonomy in exchange for a more stringent accountability" that the Louisiana school choice program offers.

The autonomy granted to Children's Charter School resulted in a charter school designed with teacher empowerment at the center of decision making. The qualitative theme, Teachers as Instructional Leaders, results in teachers that have a great deal of classroom and curricula autonomy.

Teacher Six conversed "I think the ownership of the classroom is such a sharp contrast to traditional public schools instead of being told what we must teach. We have the freedom to assess the needs of our students and to teach to those needs" (Appendix Table 9).

The theme Autonomy: Teacher Freedom, allowed for this display of teacher data Teacher Four acknowledged, "We get to choose our own professional development and we have that [faculty] study group which I don't think was probably as beneficial as it could have been, but I went to a guided reading professional development" (Appendix Table 10). Teacher Number Six commented, "We have to follow the state curriculum because of the high stakes testing but no one else decides how or when I must teach and this independence helps us meets the student's needs (Appendix Table 10). The charter school autonomy allows a school design with classroom autonomy. The teachers are empowered through curricula decisions and selection of professional development.

The teachers at Children's Charter School spoke of their autonomy versus a district school and Teacher Five reports, "We've been given a lot of freedom in terms of creating curriculum and finding what works best for the students in our classrooms as opposed to the public school setting where you may have one plan for the entire school" (Appendix Table 11). Teacher Six comments on the student population at Children's Charter School by describing her class, "The kids in my class-room are comparable as a group to what I saw in my previous in

schools. It's basically the same; you have your good and your bad. You know, you have your high kids, your low kids. It's a mix" (Appendix Table 11).

"I think it's all of the teachers. We all work together. We do a great job of talking to each other seeing where these kids are low, what they need help in. We really communicate well. So, I can't just say it is one person; it's all of us working as a team. Every Thursday afternoon we meet for two hours as part of our professional development" (Teacher Six, Appendix Table 12). The fourth theme from the teacher interview data at Children's Charter School is Faculty Unity. The teachers cite unity and working together for the common goal of providing the best education possible

Teacher Dedication is described by Teacher Four in this way, "The teachers here are dedicated teachers. Whereas, a lot of time and I have come across them, there are teachers who are just putting in their time. I think we just have teachers who use a lot more resources" (Appendix 13). The teachers at Children's Charter School expressed a sense of ownership in faculty meetings and to this researcher. They feel that they are independently responsible for the school's performance. The teachers cite teacher dedication as an integral part of their school's success. This teacher dedication theme is interrelated with the correlate of effective charter schooling faculty unity, and the climate of the school, as Teacher Four spoke "The teachers here are dedicated teachers. The community spirit that the teachers, the students and the staff and parents have. We are all working toward a common goal. I think working together and everyone being committed to that is probably the main reason for the success that we've had" (Appendix Table 13).

The autonomy granted to Children's Charter allowed for a school design that included teacher assistants in each room. The teachers state that both small classes and a teacher assistant

in each classroom is one of the keys to their success. “We do not get to handpick these children. We work with them to the best of our ability. We have smaller class sizes, and we have teacher assistants, and that we explore many different ways of teaching that that is how we do it” (Teacher Six, Appendix Table 14).

*Narrative Synopsis*  
*Children’s Charter School*

The teacher interview data from Children’s Charter School revealed none of the codes or themes were capable of being aligned with any of Lezotte’s (1989) Seven Correlates of Effective Research. The display of Children’s Charter School’s standardized tests scores, combined with a synthesis of the qualitative data, indicate that Teacher Leadership in regard to specific curricula choices was the most significant theme in reporting their successes.

In the case of Children’s Charter School, all of the correlates of effective charter schooling converge into contributing to the overall success of this charter school. The pride of ownership creates a “family atmosphere”, the teachers’ control and exerts an overwhelmingly positive attitude derived from the teacher leadership. This teacher leadership results in a sense of professional dedication to the school that they feel is “theirs” versus feeling that the central office is dictating from afar.

A non-educator managed the limited autonomy given to Children’s Charter School in to a successful charter school. This limited site-based autonomy created a public school that modified the traditional school design in many ways. By eliminating physical education and a librarian, the school was able to spend money on providing teaching assistants for every classroom and allowed teacher salaries to be approximately \$5,000.00 higher than the district’s scale. The



school day was extended in collaboration with a local non-profit and from 3:30 to 5:30 and the children participate in enrichment classes; art, P.E., music, computers, etc.

The limited autonomy granted to Children's Charter School allowed for a school in which the teachers became the instructional leaders by design, and teacher freedoms allows for a great deal of flexibility to change the curricula as needed, promoting teacher dedication. The small school setting is a result of the limited autonomy placed upon Children's Charter School from the charter granting agency. The State Charter School Evaluation Team labeled this urban K- 5 charter school as model worthy of replication in 2003, 2004 and 2005 (Barr et al. 2003, 2004).

### Narrative Number Three Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School

Analysis of three experienced teachers' responses to individual interviews at Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School represents a very good example of the "autonomy in exchange for increased accountability" that the Louisiana school choice program offers. None of the themes that surfaced from the teacher interviews at Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School were aligned with Lezotte's (1989) Seven Correlates of Effective Schools.

The qualitative data from three teachers at Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School created these six site-specific correlates of effective charter schooling: (1) Ownership, (2) Autonomy: Curriculum Flexibility, (3) Autonomy: K-8 school design, (4) Autonomy versus the district schools, (5) Teacher Dedication, (6) Family Atmosphere through "Family Time." These descriptors may be a direct reflection of the positive affect of charter school autonomy.

The school choice program in Louisiana allows for a group of teachers to open a school. Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School is an incredible story of a charter school's origin and development. When the local district school board voted to close the traditional public school named Glencoe Elementary School, the teachers of that school together with the school secretary started their own school. Teacher Eight stated, "This school was actually a dream of mine, it was a huge accomplishment in my life, I felt like I did something meaningful. We started this school and we just went all out, one hundred percent. We started these buildings from scratch. We finished on Labor Day and we were just crying from the relief of finishing" (Appendix Table 15).

The second theme derived from the analysis was named Autonomy: Curriculum Flexibility. The teachers at Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School have always managed their school by group consensus. The current director, who was the principle of the closed traditional public school, Glencoe Elementary School, has since retired and brings leadership stability to Glencoe Charter School and describes his role as a facilitator rather than a principle. This leadership style gives teachers the autonomy to select programs in response to needs they identify, rather than relying on a central office to make curricula decisions for them. Teacher Seven explains, "We had a problem in math and we went to Saxon Math™. We knew three years ago we had a reading problem. We went to Saxon Reading [two years ago]. Saxon Phonics and Spelling™, it works wonderfully with the reading program. Our scores have gone up tremendously" (Appendix Table 16).

The teachers at Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School spoke of a third theme, Autonomy: School Design. All three teachers referenced the pedagogical consistency of the K – 8 school design as a reason for their charter school's success. When asked what is the major difference

between Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School and the traditional public school system Teacher Seven stated, “Well the continuity, we see the children from year to year and I noticed the district finally went to the neighborhood schools, which we had been begging them to do for so long” (Appendix Table 17). Glencoe Charter School was designed to be a K - 8 to better serve the students through school-community design. The purchased curricula, Saxon Math & Saxon Phonics™, were selected for their internal consistency. This design creates a more dependable learning environment versus the district format of separate locations for elementary and middle schools.

The teachers at Virgil Brown Glencoe discussed their autonomy versus the traditional district public school. These discussions resulted in a theme identified as Autonomy versus the District Schools. Teacher Eight declared, “I think the biggest part of our success is that we don’t have to follow a certain curriculum, when this whole district adopted this one curriculum everyone had to do it whether they believed in it or not. I mean [here] everyone of us can do whatever we feel is necessary. We have teacher freedoms” (Appendix Table 18).

When asked why Glencoe scores are better Teacher Seven replied, “I think dedication. I think our teachers are very dedicated. Our teachers care, we started this school and that’s something I wholeheartedly believe in. People who are here, who are working with our kids, care about the kids. They want to improve (themselves). They want to see the kids succeeding” (Appendix 19). The fifth theme from Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School is Teacher Dedication. The ownership identified in theme Number One; Ownership, resonates throughout Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School and Teacher Dedication is a by-product of school ownership.

Teacher Seven described the school climate as a family, “I don’t see any antagonism or bickering...everybody just gets along and the kids feel it. They know. Basically we’re a big family. The atmosphere at the school you can feel it and I think the kids understand something is different.” (Appendix Table 20) Family Time is a coded theme from teacher interviews at Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School and is defined as a social activity at the end of the day. The last thirty minutes of the day students in grades K – 3 are assigned to mix-grade classes as well as the students in grades 3 – 5. The students in grades 6 – 8 rotate to different teachers for different enrichment activities. Academic tutoring is done during this time for the older students. This theme is very important to the school climate.

*Narrative Synopsis*  
*Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School*

When the local school board decided to close the traditional public school in Glencoe, Louisiana, the teachers and the secretary decided to become proactive. The result of their actions was the development of the Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School. When a group of teachers receive the autonomy to become the leaders of the curriculum and instruction, the school climate and the esprit de corps are enhanced and this creates a better learning environment as demonstrated by the results of standardized test scores of Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School.

The display of Virgil Brown Glencoe’s standardized test scores combined with the qualitative data indicate that the school-site-based autonomy creates a school culture of teacher empowerment both because of the overall school governance combined with curriculum and instruction freedoms. These two primary features seem to be implicit in what many teachers at this school expressed as a “caring atmosphere.” The learning climate appears to be a fundamental factor of the successes at Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School.

The teachers at Virgil Brown Glencoe understood that their school should be designed with a community-school setting and so they broke away from the traditional public school model of three different settings for elementary, middle and junior high schools and created a community-school setting so that the children could attend from kindergarten through the eighth grade. This is representative of autonomy discovering site based solutions for local educational difficulties. In addition to the overall design of the charter school, the teachers designed a school day incorporating the innovative practice of having the children socialize across grade levels in a supervised manner that Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School calls family time. This aspect of the school design further promotes cohesion and unity throughout the school and what is perceived as a sense of family. It is important to note that the teachers designed Glencoe Charter School as a K - 8 school from the start and this “design” was reported by the faculty as one ripple effect making its way into local district practices.

The aspect “teacher ownership” in public schooling should be investigated more thoroughly. The school climate can be explained as a private school climate in a public school setting and the ownership creates a work environment for teachers that ameliorate teaching and learning or productivity if one must use a business analogy. The on-site decision making makes problem solving a teacher centered endeavor with quick and easy change compared to the time line of change from a central office into a traditional public school. This feeling of ownership translates into the teachers explaining how much they “care” about the students helping define the school atmosphere as a private school climate in a public school setting.

## Five Cross Case Themes

All three schools provide opportunities for grassroots governance, but not all of their underlying characteristics and reasons for their success are the same. Although the schools are varied and cannot be categorized together easily, the following themes make educational generalizations are prevalent across these three cases. Alphabetically, they are (1) Autonomy (2) Esprit de Corps (3) Leadership- Curricula (4) Teacher Leadership and (5) Professional Development.

It is noteworthy that Avoyelles Public Charter School had eight coded themes. Two could not be aligned with the Correlates of Effective Schools, and six were aligned with the correlates. All seven Correlates of Effective Schools were represented by the teacher responses at Avoyelles Public Charter School. This demonstrates a well balanced and well organized school. The six themes from Children's Charter School, as well the six themes from Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School, are entire sets of qualitative codes that did not align with any of the Effective School Correlates. These results created the need for developing correlates of effective charter schooling. There are a total of twenty themes across all three charter schools and six themes are matched with traditional themes of effective schools and fourteen are themes associated with effective charter schooling.

This qualitative research may indicate the autonomy granted to these charter schools creates a school climate of ownership by the teachers and the administrators. When a group of teachers, in different educational settings, articulate ownership and control over the curriculum and instruction in their schools, schools that score better than the district and compete favorably with the state and the nation, it appears ownership may be a significant factor of school

improvement. This is demonstrably significant with regard to the contributing factors that define the successes of these three cases.

### Transferability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that naturalist inquiry can be effective in achieving transferability; especially if full details of the context in which events occur within a case are reported, as described in this investigation. Thus as a naturalist, I cannot specify the external validity of an inquiry, I can only provide an insightful description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether the transfer can be contemplated as a viable possibility. Generalization or transferability in qualitative research is based on choosing representative sample(s) and using ideas about probability and chance to estimate the likelihood of events occurring on similar case outside the sample. (p. 316). Charter school experiments that allow teachers to control their working environment may be a permissible aspect of any district's financial reorganization from a centralized system to a decentralization public school system. The charter school movement has embraced a higher degree of accountability, namely, being closed for non-performance. Giving teachers the ownership aspect of teaching in a charter school facilitates an increase in professionalism by the sheer nature of autonomy. Transferability of these types results will appear en masse, if and when, traditional public schools become truly autonomous and a few are closed for lack of academic performance.

## Summary

This chapter presents findings and presented the evidence to answer the research question. Qualitative codes were classified according to the Correlates of Effective Schools; themes that could not be classified with the Seven Correlates were assigned a new correlate of effective charter schooling. Chapter Five presents a discussion based on the findings presented here, synthesizes and further speculates about the future of the Charter School Movement in Louisiana based on these findings as well as the current research pertaining to charter schools.



## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

This chapter deals with explanations and implications of the results reported in Chapter IV, as well as additional studies that should be pursued. The findings from the research questions are discussed and interpreted. Implications and suggestions for further study are derived from the research of three different models of charter schools that were presented and analyzed in Chapter IV.

#### Summary of the Study

Current research indicates the need for charter schools to prove themselves by displaying advancements in education (Manno, et al., 1998; Hill et al, 2001; Nathan, 1998). The charter school experiment in Louisiana is succeeding in its aim to allow educational entrepreneurs to design innovative models of curriculum and instruction.

Louisiana charter schools offer a guide for understanding the dynamics of school autonomy that can provide the means to consistently increase standardized test scores. Louisiana's fundamental educational responsibility to steadily improve standardized test scores is being proven each year by the three charter schools represented in this study. Whereas these three charter schools are out-performing their district and the state while competing favorably with the nation on standardized test scores, this naturalistic inquiry may establish these new public schools as models for replication by traditional public schools, as the law was designed to do.

## Discussion

As of 2005, Louisiana had 17 charter schools with varying degrees of autonomy as determined by the charter. Eight are traditional education models and nine are non-traditional models of education. Three of the eight (38%) of the charter schools that practice the traditional school model of education are leading their respective districts and the state and are competing favorably with the nation in standardized test scores. By 2006, all 22 schools that reopened Orleans Parish were semi autonomous district charters; in addition to the seventeen charters granted before.

In reviewing the data, these standardized test score accomplishments appear to have occurred via the school choice model largely due to the measures of autonomy inherent to these schools. This autonomy is repeatedly observed within Louisiana's school choice movement and can be characterized as having been expanded beyond simple school-site based-autonomy to one that expedites teacher empowerment that could be more aptly termed teacher-autonomy. In the case of these three charter schools, a high level of teacher professionalism is present. This significant aspect of effective teaching has not been addressed by the current definitions of the Seven Correlates of Effective Schools research and necessitated additional categorization outside the parameters of the operational definitions of the original seven correlates.

At all three charter schools, the teachers expressed having the power to adapt the chosen curriculum and the flexibility needed to meet the needs of their students. Teacher One from Avoyelles Public Charter School refers to "... the flexibility of the small stuff..." (Lines 69-70). Teacher Two from Children's Charter School notes, "Each teacher has been allowed to work in terms of the curriculum. We [the teachers] went out and changed the math program [curriculum]

because the Addison Wesley Math Program [The district text book program used at that time.] did not go deep enough for our students.... ” (Lines 73 -78). According to Teacher One from Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School, “We had a problem in math and we went to Saxon Math™. We knew years ago we had a reading problem and went to Saxon [phonics-based] Reading™...” (Lines 97-100). This ownership mentality, reinforced each day they go to work, creates a school-culture of personalized, humanistic scholarship and the consummate attitude of doing what is right for the students. The shared group vision that is “teacher-owned” greatly helps to eliminate many of the factors, including the “red-tape” that often hampers or makes illogical or impossible changes in traditional public schools. Approaching the public school revitalization, from the point of view of Teacher Leadership, for the purpose of raising test scores allows educators to view school autonomy as a panacea for schools that consistently perform below acceptable levels of improvement. The teachers at the three charter schools have a strong sense of ownership in their respective schools.

### *Charter Schools as Laboratories of Experimentation*

During the 1995 regular legislative session, the Louisiana legislature passed §B 1305 championed by Senator Cecil Picard (Act 192 of 1995). This law provided a framework for a pilot program with school based autonomy. The law is designed to provide a means for persons with ideas and motivation to participate in Louisiana’s educational experiment, and as a apparatus by which new experimental school results can be analyzed, the positive results repeated or replicated, if appropriate, and the negative results identified and eliminated (Picard, 2002), (Senate Bill No. 1305, 1995) (Louisiana Legislative Law, pg.18, 1995).

This research allows for the dissemination of positive factors contributing to the success of the best performing “traditionally-styled” charter schools in Louisiana. This research could be the basis for administrative and teacher training because of the way these three charter schools operate. Replication of what these charter schools have accomplished could allow for a public school system of increased parental choice. That would then empower parents, as well as teachers, and school-site-autonomy could translate into classroom or teacher-autonomy furthering advancements and improvements in the educational process, on the whole.

Andrews, Kevin, Rothman, and Michael (2002) discuss that the fundamental reasons for the creation of charter schools was to enable those schools to serve as small laboratories in which innovations could be tried and the outcomes brought back to the larger public school system. Replication and innovation are cited among the central purposes for the existence of charter schools.

It is obvious that in a state and nation where only about 1% of the children are enrolled in charter schools, efforts that directly benefit only children in charter schools would leave out 99% of the population. Therefore, educational reform and innovative practices realized and replicated from successful charter school models that are put into practice in the mainstream traditional public schools will eventually be the true measure of charter schools impact on public education.

### *Charter Schools: The New Form Democratic Education*

Charters make it possible for us to consider a different definition: a public school is any school that is open to the public, paid for by the public, and accountable to public authorities for its results. The government need not run such a school. Manno, Finn, and Vancourek (2002)

write that the purposes of a charter school's "publicness" does not matter who runs the school, how it is staffed, or what its students do between 9 a.m. and 10 a.m. on Tuesdays. Charter schools are part of a big scheme for public education in which elected and appointed officials play a strategic rather than an operative role. Charter schools allow public support of schooling without governmental specification of schools. The enormous intellectual, social, racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of the American student population and especially the urban student population, makes it educationally imprudent to contend that all students be required to undergo a single, predetermined, and highly academic educational process.

Manno, Finn, and Vancourek (2002) discuss the implications of charter schools in *Beyond the Schoolhouse Door: How Charter Schools are Transforming U.S. Public Education* and claim that charter schools are transforming some school districts and communities, figuring in larger political struggles and leaving its tracks on American education as a whole. Charter schools represent a fundamental overhaul of the assumptions and power structures of American public education. Even if charter schools do not come to dominate our education system, the idea they embody has powerful implications for the entire enterprise of public schooling. Louisiana has embraced this aspect of the new public school but the masses still need to be educated as that charter schools are, in fact, public schools.

Asher and Greenberg (2002) conclude:

The troubles with state departments of education involve mature bureaucracies like all mature bureaucracies; these two large institutions rely on standardized practices and procedures that are designed to work in large-scale arenas and to optimize economies of scale. Departments of education function in a complex and

extremely impulsive political environment in which they serve many masters and must carry out many missions. (p. 517)

Manno, et al. (2002) concluded that these new [charter] schools reveal a classic American response to a problem, challenge, or opportunity: institutional innovation and adaptation. In this respect, charter schools resemble community colleges, which came into being, and spread rapidly and fruitfully, to meet educational needs that conventional universities could not accommodate. Due to the existence of the community college analogy in this organizational format, charter schools are not revolutionary. Charter schools are, in essence, a natural extension of what this nation is about.

Experimentation with charter schools is designed to improve public education in ways that the traditional public schools have not done. We now have research and site-based information, as well as cross-case research to demonstrate what is working and how it is working in three traditionally designed charter schools in Louisiana. This research is designed to raise the questions of how the state of Louisiana should cultivate measures for dissemination to administrative and faculty concerning training based on the successful charter school models that have begun and continue to out-perform the local schools. State-supported training and the results of that training, once implemented, may readily yield instructional practices that may lead to the improvement in the manner and style in which poorly performing schools can be changed into locally controlled, dynamic learning centers.

The democratic processes are in place throughout the charter school program in Louisiana. All one has to do is become involved and there are very public avenues: applying through elected officials on a local school board, or the elected officials of the state school board, to address when the charter school proposal goes through its “public” application process in

Louisiana. Elmore (2004) acknowledges that the “fall out” from No Child Left Behind will be local problems. The political forces that are driving education on the federal and state levels have a short life cycle of two, four, or six years and this political life cycling has had a distracting effect on educational advancements and adds to the consistent state of change in education. Charter schools can, and do offer a relief from this constant distraction because self-governing creates a consistency in curricular and instructional services that circumvent the traditional public school politics of change.

With new and improved curriculum and instruction models, these three charter schools with an average age of five years old are competing against many traditional public schools that are 100 years old or older and yet these charter schools are surpassing them on standardized test scores. These “new” site-specific public schools offer educators proven models and ideas for the invigoration of curriculum and instruction. In all three cases, school-community interviews documented how the local district treats the charter school with contempt. Each case school would certainly be considered an “upstart start-up” charter school when compared to their local traditional public school systems that have been in existence for 100 years or more.

An essential question remains, “Can Louisiana’s charter schools prove themselves not only in improving curriculum and instruction and standardized test scores, but in saving taxpayer dollars by creating more efficient public school models?” Enabling a better model of education is a large part of the underlying agenda of what the Louisiana charter school movement was designed to do.

Data collected from three charter schools have demonstrated in a relatively very short time that the practice of school-site-autonomy, albeit in varying degrees, can be designed to

serve as an expeditor of teacher empowerment, professionalism and dedication, resulting in measurable increases in student achievement, as well as fulfilling specific community goals.

The intent of this study was to explore the contributing factors that could explain each charter school's successes in leading the district, state and/or competing favorably with the nation in standardized test scores. The study further explored analysis of teacher responses to an interview to define themes that could then be categorized by one of the Seven Correlates of Effective Schools research. This in-depth exploration of contributing factors to the charter schools' successes is of great practical use to all educators involved in school-wide improvement of test scores with autonomy as the fundamental driving force for change. School-based autonomy in this context, takes on varying roles. For example, the school-site can be an entirely independent school, a Type II charter school in Louisiana (i.e., Avoyelles Public Charter School and Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School), or it can be a district-issued charter school, a Type I charter school in Louisiana (i.e., Children's Charter School), with semi-autonomy. This sample consisted of three charter schools: one urban, district-issued charter with limited autonomy (Children's Charter School) and two rural and completely independent charter schools (Avoyelles Public Charter School and Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School) that received charters from the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE).

Avoyelles Public Charter School is a K - 8 charter school that intends to grow from its present size to include a high school, adding a grade one year at a time. Avoyelles Public Charter School has total school-site-autonomy and is organized as a Type II charter school. The second charter school in this study, Children's Charter School, is a K - 5, district-issued, Type I charter school. Children's Charter School has had the growth of its student population capped and is therefore limited by its charter-granting agency, the traditional urban school board of East Baton



Parish Rouge. The third charter school, Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School, also has total school-site autonomy and is mandated as a Type II charter school. Virgil Brown Glencoe's first year of operation began with grades K - 3 and grew one grade per year until K - 8, as the independent charter school board, the administration, and the teachers had decided from the beginning. Although the sample was one of convenience, two of the three schools have what is termed a "traditional Latin grammar school design" and the third has a "modified traditional design"; the modifications consisting, in part, of an extended day for non-core subjects to best serve the unique problems of the urban at-risk student population.

In these instances of a new public school start-up, the locus of control allowed three different, non-educational leaders to design and start their own schools. After what amounts to an average five years of operation, many of their test scores indicate that they are out-performing many traditional elementary schools in their respective districts.

All three charter schools' composite scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) were quantitatively compared to the composite scores of their respective districts, the state and the nation. A discussion of the successes of each of these three Louisiana charter schools follows

### *Qualitative Conclusions*

The purpose of this investigation was to examine the contributing factors that led to the quantitative successes of three Louisiana charter schools. This investigation attempted to answer the following questions: 1) Why is your charter school leading the district, state and/or competing favorably with the nation in standardized test scores?

2) How is your school different from traditional public schools? The contextual details of each charter school were researched and results are to be interpreted within the context of each respective schools site-specific-autonomy in mind.

### *Qualitative Conclusions: Avoyelles Public Charter School*

The display of standardized test scores from Avoyelles Public Charter School combined with a synthesis of qualitative data and the data's alignment with the research on effective school practices, reveal that the specific curricula used and the administrative leader are the two most cited aspects of charter schooling contributing to Avoyelles Public Charter School's overall effectiveness and successes.

The coding of three experienced teachers' accounts at Avoyelles Public Charter School resulted in two site-specific correlates of effective charter schooling: (1) *Esprit de Corps* - Teaching as "Fun" (2) Teacher Professionalism - "being committed and devoted".

The following codes were aligned with the Seven Correlates of Effective Schools Research: (3) Instructional Leadership – "having drive, going the extra mile, feeling inspired", (4) Curriculum: General - Direct Instruction® "results in grouping according to levels", (5) Curriculum Specific #2 – Direct Instruction® teaching method, (6) Direct Instruction® – Coaching and Techniques, (7) Curriculum Specific: # 1– Core Knowledge™ "is hands-on", (8) Home/School Relations – "family involvement with monthly home-projects".

The curricula (Direct Instruction®, Saxon Math™ and Core Knowledge™) are the dominant theme that the teachers describe when defining the main contributing factors for the leading status of the Avoyelles Public Charter School. Collectively, the teachers expressed the

fact that the reading curriculum, Direct Instruction® meets the students' needs at Avoyelles better than any previous reading curriculum. The teachers at Avoyelles Public Charter School refer to the homogeneous grouping in Direct Instruction® as an integral aspect of their school's success. Students change classes for reading so that the instructional level for reading comprehension is matched to the child's abilities. The grouping practices for reading are school-wide and encourage successes in everyday practices of students regardless of the individual student's reading level.

The Direct Instruction® teaching method is directly cited by two teachers as the integral reason for the leading status of Avoyelles Public Charter School. Two of the three teachers interviewed referred to "the hands-on approach" of the Core Knowledge Curriculum™, while the third one commented on how "well-rounded" Core Knowledge™ is.

The coding of three experienced teachers' accounts from Avoyelles Public Charter School resulted in the following codes which were represented as tables labeled: 1) Curriculum General and Specific, 2) Esprit de corps, 3) Instructional Leadership, 4) Direct Instruction® teaching method and 5) Home-School Relations. Two of these codes / tables have the same title as Lezotte's (2001) correlates; 3) Instructional Leadership, correlate number (3), and Home School Relations, correlate number (7). The alignment of the codes with the Seven Correlates of Effective Schools research resulted in each code receiving a listing of the correlates that are evident in its alignment with the selected correlates.

The Correlates of Effective Schools research can be used as the means to both measure and then foster high achievement and equitable levels of student learning in schools. The seven correlates combine to account for a school climate that expects all children will learn all concepts and skills needed be successful at the each level of their educational development. Research by

Lezotte (1989) has shown evidence that when school improvement processes based upon the Seven Correlates of Effective Schools research are implemented, the proportion of students that achieve academic excellence either improves, or at the very least remains the same.

Present research indicates that further investigation is needed to more fully understand the relationship between the seven correlates and Avoyelles Public Charter School. Although school-based autonomy allowed the selection of the curriculum and instruction used at Avoyelles Public Charter School, the majority of the coded data could be aligned directly with Effective School Research. The two other charter schools in this study had no codes that could be directly aligned with the traditional seven correlates and clearly identified other reasons for their respective successes.

It is important to note that the director's autonomy in the case of Avoyelles Public Charter School resulted in decision-making that created the adoption of its curricula from its conception to a working model. This curriculum and instruction model is leading the district and competing very well with state scores from traditional public schools that have usually been in existence significantly longer. This is in contrast to most traditional public school principals who are generally handcuffed by a district's top-down implementation of everything in any given school, including all curriculum-related choices.

#### *Qualitative Conclusions: Children's Charter School*

The teacher interview data from Children's Charter School revealed that the autonomy granted to the school resulted in data that could not be aligned with any of Lezotte's Seven Correlates of Effective Research. The display of Children's Charter School's standardized tests scores, combined with a synthesis of the qualitative data, indicate Teacher Leadership was

reported by the teachers to be one of the most prevalent factors in their successes. Other factors contributing to the overall success of this charter school was the “family atmosphere”, the teachers’ overwhelmingly positive attitude of ownership and its resulting sense of professional dedication to the school, and the school’s small school design. Barr et al. labeled this urban K- 5 charter school as model worthy of replication in 2003, 2004, 2004 and 2005. (Barr et al., 2003, 2004, 2004 & 2005)

Children’s Charter School was designed and developed by a non-educator. The director applied to the local district for a charter three years in a row and had to use media pressure to get the local school board to award the charter. He persisted, confident in his ability to create a school that would perform better than the district. The limited site-based autonomy created a school that modified the traditional school design in many ways. By eliminating physical education and a librarian, the school was able to spend that money on providing teaching assistants in every classroom and allowed teacher salaries to be approximately \$5,000.00 higher than the district’s scale. The school day was extended and from 3:30 to 5:30 the children participate in enrichment classes, including art, P.E., music, and computers. Teachers at Children’s Charter School refer to the weekly faculty team meetings as an important element of their success. Barr, et al. (2002, 2003, 2004, 2005) confirms the positive impact of the faculty team meetings on teaching and learning.

The qualitative data from three experienced teachers at Children’s Charter School created six codes: (1) Faculty Unity - “working together as a group”, (2) Autonomy as Curriculum Freedom - “ownership of the classroom”, (3) Teacher Assistants and Smaller Class Sizes - “teacher assistants (in each class)” (4) Autonomy (of Children’s Charter School) vs. District Run Schools - “freedom”, (5) Autonomy as Teacher Freedom - “independence”, and (6) Teacher

Dedication in the form of “Saturday classes”. All the data points are new site-specific contributing factors to Children Charter School’s effectiveness and none of the codes were aligned with the (Lezotte’s 2001) Seven Correlates of Effective Schools research.

The limited autonomy granted to Children’s Charter School allowed the design of a school in which the teachers became the instructional leaders by design, and teacher freedoms allow for a great deal of flexibility to change the curricula as needed, promoting teacher dedication. The small school setting is a result of the limited autonomy placed upon Children’s Charter School from the charter granting agency, which is generally hostile due to a “competitiveness” that the local school board feels as a result of Children’ Charter School presence. The faculty unity at Children’s Charter School and the teacher freedoms allowed, in conjunction with a limited site-based autonomy has enhanced a sense of teacher dedication that promises to ensure continued success at Children’s Charter School.

#### *Qualitative Conclusions / Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School*

The display of Virgil Brown Glencoe’s standardized test scores combined with the qualitative data indicate that the school-site-based autonomy creates a school culture of teacher empowerment because of overall school governance is coupled with curriculum and instruction freedoms. These two primary factors seem to be implicit in what many teachers at this school termed a “caring atmosphere”. Teacher Leadership is central to the successes at Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School.

The qualitative data from three experienced teachers at Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School created these six site specific codes: (1) School-Ownership - “we started this school”, (2) Consistency / K - 8 school design - “grade-to-grade consistency”, (3) Autonomy in

Curriculum Flexibility - “we tried Saxon Math™ and it works”, (4) Teacher Dedication - “freedom makes most of us work a little harder”, (5) Autonomy verses the district schools - “we choose what works” and (6) Family Atmosphere though Family Time - “Kids feel it, basically we are a big family.”

When the local school board decided to close the traditional public school in Glencoe, Louisiana, the teachers and the secretary decided to become proactive. The result of their actions was the development of the Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School. After researching Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School, it isn’t hard to imagine what schools would look and feel like if this aspect of ownership was embedded in the traditional public school culture verses the central office control that traditional public schools must now adhere to. When a group of teachers receive the autonomy to become the leaders of the curriculum and instruction, the school climate and the esprit de corps are enhanced creating a better learning environment as demonstrated by the results of standardized test scores for Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School.

The teachers at Virgil Brown Glencoe knew that their school should be designed with a community school setting and so they broke away from the traditional public school model of three different settings for elementary, middle, and junior high schools and created a community-school setting so that the children could attend from kindergarten through the eighth grade. In addition, the teachers designed a school day incorporating the innovative practice of having the children socialize across grade levels in a supervised manner that Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School calls family time. This aspect of the school design further promotes cohesion and unity throughout the school and what is perceived as a sense of family.

The autonomy granted to the teachers at Virgil Brown Glencoe allowed the teachers to design a school different from the local district. The K – 8 design that is cited as the “constant

student progression” is a contributing reason for Glencoe’s success. The autonomy granted to Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School allows for curriculum flexibility that solves the problems that arise at the school building level. This specifically defines autonomy and instructional efficiency when compared to a traditional public school system that usually issues top down mandates and often times systemically assists in creating implementation delays

This aspect of governing ones own professionalism is reflected in the dedication that the teachers refer to when identifying contributing factors of their successes. When the teachers at Virgil Brown Glencoe are asked to compare their school to the traditional public school, they state how the teacher freedoms they enjoy are used to solve on-going curriculum problems. The teachers at Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School cite this as an important contributing factor to the success of their charter school.

#### Discussion of Findings: Contributing Factors of Success

##### *Contributing Factors of Success: Avoyelles Public Charter School*

The rural community of Avoyelles Parish has the school choice option available to parents now and the ripple effects of the successes of Avoyelles Public Charter School are reverberating through the region and the state. One example is a waiting list 500 strong for admittance in a school district with approximately 5,000 students enrolled (K - 8) in the traditional public school system. Fox (2002) discusses the importance of charter school leadership and at Avoyelles Public Charter School, leadership was cited as a very important contributing factor of the charter school’s success. The teachers of Avoyelles Public Charter School talked of their leader as someone who is driven to make the school mission succeed and they cited the leadership as being critical to the school’s success. The teachers of



Avoyelles Public Charter School felt empowered and supported in the classroom and are openly involved in the creation, development and implementation of the school's mission.

The autonomy granted to Avoyelles Public Charter School made possible selection of curriculum and instruction that improved on the manner in which teachers cover the State Benchmarks and Grade Level Expectations in Louisiana. First, the director sought out the best practices and Direct Instruction® was chosen for the language arts block. It needs to be noted that the along with the reading program the accompanying writing program was purchased and is practiced. The second curriculum selection was Saxon Math™, and the rest of the day is designed around Core Knowledge™. The teachers from Avoyelles Public Charter School explained their school successes by mentioning these three curricula choices most often.

Autonomy allowed the selection of these curricula choices. Choosing Direct Instruction® results in the teacher losing creativity to a highly- scripted, fast paced reading program that nonetheless works well. The teachers receive very specific professional development monthly with a program consultant. These monthly professional development days fine tune curriculum delivery techniques and secure local adjustments of the reading and writing curriculum.

Teachers gain creativity back when following the no-frills math curriculum that presents many opportunities for hands-on learning, in a curriculum that demands review of topics covered throughout the year. Core Knowledge™ is used as a guideline of what needs to be taught when at each grade level. The teacher must create the classroom materials then decide how and what time of the year to teach units from the guidelines. Teacher creativity and professionalism are needed and practiced in order to present the topics to be covered in the arts, and social studies. All three chosen curricular packages are researched based. All are very familiar names in the national market of curricula for sale. This combination of curricula and the scripted instruction

techniques should be researched further to investigate how these perceived contributing factors of Avoyelles Public Charter School successes can be replicated in a traditional public school setting. These features of education could be easily replicable to other schools when faculty “buy in” a supportive enthusiastic leadership, and properly aligned resources are in place.

### *Contributing Factors of Success: Children’s Charter School*

Weekly meetings for school based decisions and bi-monthly meetings for professional development contribute greatly to the positive attributes of Children’s Charter School as seen by the faculty. This is a school where the school climate is seen as one of a family, and teacher unity is readily fostered on a consistent basis. It is important to note that the hostile charter granting agency limits the number of students admitted to Children’s Charter School to its present enrollment of 140. The competition for students remains as a large threat to the traditional school board because Children’s Charter School has consistently scored higher than most traditional elementary schools in East Baton Rouge Parish.

Casey, et al. (2002) wrote of the effect of school size and its benefits. Student academic achievement is influenced by smaller class size and school size, time on task, personal attention and motivation. Casey et al. found that parents appear to feel more welcome in smaller schools. This has been true for the parents at Children’s Charter School. Relationships with administrators, faculty, and staff are perceived as closer than the traditional public school and small schools appear to be more responsive to the needs of both students and parents, so that levels of satisfaction with these charter schools are high.

### *Contributing Factors of Success: Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School*

The rural community of St. Mary Parish has the school choice option available to parents now and the ripple effects of the successes Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School are echoing in the district and surrounding areas. The new traditional school board superintendent of St. Mary Parish visited Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School for an informal site-visit and asked, “How much is the tuition here?” This experienced educator had perceived the charter to be a private school.

Blank (2004) writes that good schools depend on strong communities and strong communities require good schools. A growing body of research shows that the two tasks of focusing on achievement and building partnerships that link school, family and community are intimately connected. Educational practice shows that school-community partnerships are a key ingredient for improving student achievement, especially the communities facing economic and social challenges. Community schools enable educators to mobilize assets and combine them in new ways, creating broad learning communities that strengthen student success.

Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School has a consistent daily presence of parental involvement. This is due, in part, to a contractual obligation of 20 hours of volunteer time that is required of each family per school year. This is stated and must be agreed to in the admission application. Its grassroots success can be acknowledged by the waiting list has consistently contained approximately forty families who are seeking admission to the school.

Continuing to address Blank’s (2004) achievement and community relationship it is important to note that autonomy allowed the teachers at Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School design a school that is a more consistent learning community, (K – 8), when compared to the traditional public school system. Traditional systems generally maintain three different learning

communities to accomplish a K – 8 system. Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School’s design may have strengthened student success.

Secondly, autonomy allowed an innovative school design that includes “Family Time.” Family Time is defined as each school day ending with a 30-minute period of organized socializing for the entire school. This is accomplished with multiple grade groupings in an age appropriate classroom setting. Family Time a named part of the school day and was also a theme developed by the teachers interview data. The teachers identified Family Time as a contributing factor of their school’s leading status. This non-academic practice ameliorates the positive school culture of the entire school-community.

#### *Five Cross Case Themes*

All three schools provide opportunities for grassroots governance, but not all of their underlying characteristics and reasons for their success are the same and can be commented on unilaterally, across all three of the charter schools. Although the schools are varied and cannot be categorized together easily, the following themes are prevalent across these three cases.

Alphabetically, and in no particular order according to prevalence or importance, they are (1) Autonomy (2) Esprit de Corps (3) Instructional Leadership (4) Teacher Leadership and (5) Professional Development. Significantly, two of the three charter schools in this study had entire sets of qualitative codes that did not align with any of the original effective school correlates, while the third school had eight themes and all seven effective school correlates surfaced through qualitative analysis and two codes that were labeled correlates of effective charter schooling.

The qualitative research conducted indicates the autonomy granted to these charter schools creates a school climate/environment of ownership by the teachers.

The teachers reported autonomy as ownership of their respective charter schools and the decision-making processes. Autonomy is an umbrella term of decentralization, and ownership is a more advanced term indicating Teacher Leadership. Ownership is not given freely to the charter school teachers. Ownership of a charter school entails the threat of being closed for non-performance and this threat of closure enhances Teacher Leadership as well as Teacher Professionalism. When three sets of charter school teachers articulate teacher ownership over the curriculum and instruction in their new public schools, it is ownership that becomes demonstrably significant. This significance is in regard to identifying contributing factors that define the successes of the case schools.

When the teachers' professionalism is heightened in a school climate and it is coupled with a strong sense of personal empowerment and even ownership, the results of this teacher empowerment through ownership will likely be reflected in an increase in test scores. This concept of Teacher Leadership through autonomy signals the opportunity for some genuine innovation in the present Louisiana educational environment.

#### *Cross Case Theme Number One: Autonomy*

The charter school movement is addressing the discord between our traditional public educational authoritarianism system(s) and the diversity represented by the nation's population. Decision-making power, in traditional public school's top-down manner is all too often being ignored as detrimental to plurality. Charter schools that have the autonomy to meet the new mandated standards and their accompanying tests within a culturally correct context are capable

of more specifically meeting the educational needs of the community. The autonomy design allows serving the different segments of the population in a more precise manner than a single system.

Louisiana educators need to be made more aware of successes in education in the name of autonomy for accountability. They must be careful and very mindful of the “Type” of charter school being discussed. Thus, autonomy is defined by the degree of freedom that the school site enjoys in Louisiana. The type of charter is reflective of the charter granting agency, the local district or the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. While all three charter schools in this study enjoyed total autonomy over their curricula and instructional decisions, it should be noted that Saxon Math™ is used in two out of three of the leading charter schools in Louisiana. Two have phonics-based reading instruction in elementary grades (Direct Instruction® and Saxon Phonics™).

The autonomy charter school educators enjoy is granted in exchange for a higher standard of accountability, namely being closed. The threat of closure creates a school atmosphere imbedded with a collective intrinsic desire to succeed despite all obstacles. When a charter school teachers' livelihood depends on the teachers' individual and collective performance, education tax dollars create school climate that is described by these teachers as family, caring and love. The ownership given to teachers by means of charter schooling in Louisiana may be the most important aspect of the school choice movement.

Fox (2002) writes of autonomy found in all of the participating charter schools, the administrators, and governing boards in determining school calendars, schedules, and staffing decisions, in addition to providing fiscal management. However, in all charter schools in Fox's (2002) study, the teachers felt that they could affect the decisions about such things as the

placement of students into grades and classes much like the three charter schools in this study. The charter schools that participated in Fox's (2002) study were essentially created to provide freedom from state and local rules, regulations and bureaucracies, but in doing so they were forced to either create their own systems to supply the services or to contract with outside firms to get the needed support, again, much like the three charter schools in this study. In the present study, the three charter schools enjoyed the autonomy that Fox refers to. These three charter schools demonstrated their respective autonomy when they solved their own transportation problems while consistently operating with savings each year.

Avoyelles Public Charter School has endured increased hostility from the local board concerning prices and contractual obligations of transportation that arose during the first year of operation. During the second year of operation Avoyelles Public Charter Schools purchased two buses while maintaining a smaller busing contract with the local traditional school board. The Louisiana Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Avoyelles Public Charter School concerning the district's charging a fee for the "new public school" students to ride the district's buses.

Children's Charter School began as a school-within-a-school and has had a busing contract with the local district and their after school enrichment-class partner, the Big Buddy Program. Children's Charter school is a district awarded charter so the transportation issues have always remained small. Children's Charter School did have to invest in transportation to meet the needs of a district wide population and the charter school benefits from a decentralized (charter employee) bus driver that communicates with the adults daily when children are not riding the bus and reports of waiting for students to get to the bus stop are common.

Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School originated in a very hostile local traditional school district that used delay tactics to oppose the charter application, so consequently the state-issued

charter was awarded in mid-summer. Because of the district's hostility toward the charters' use of the shuttered Glencoe Elementary School the land owner of the shuttered school, was generous enough to open a million dollar line of credit for the new charter school. He also donated more land to the new public charter school. Buses were purchased with credit and consequently paid off in full. With a regional enrollment district Virgil Brown Glencoe presently owns seven buses running six everyday and saving one as a replacement when needed.

Financial autonomy for Avoyelles Public Charter School resulted in a one-year wait to open its doors. This exemplary planning time was used to build a new physical plant and plan the rest of a start-up school. The director traveled to Colorado to investigate a school with Direct Instruction®, Saxon Math and Core Knowledge. Using this curricula format Avoyelles Public Charter School has been able to more than adequately provide for the students and staff while managing to save approximately \$800,000 per year during each of the six years in operation. This savings resulted in a \$12 Million dollar loan to build an administrative office, high school and fine arts auditorium.

Children's Charter School does *not* have financial autonomy. Due to the semi-autonomous charter awarded by the district, Children's Charter School is not permitted to expand beyond 140 students. This limitation reflects the charter's limited financial freedom. Secondly, the district asserts an administrative fee of eight percent upon the charter school budget strengthening its district ties (i.e., lunch is delivered daily) and weakening its financial autonomy. Aggressive grant writing and strong community ties developed by the volunteer charter school board account for the sound (but limited) financial status of Children's Charter School. Traditional school board protectionism restricts Children's Charter School from benefiting from an economy of scale as the other two independent charter schools in this study benefit.



The financial autonomy for Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School is very sound. The chief financial officer of the school has saved \$100,000 in each year of operation for seven years. After the initial years, the growth rate of adding one grade level each year required the use more space than the original portable buildings provided. The charter school had to take legal action to be able to use the shuttered physical plant. Due to the lease arrangement the traditional school board was in with the landowner pertaining to and his donated land for public education, the school board settled out of court. The charter school acquired use of the shuttered Glencoe Elementary School and entered into a generous lease agreement with the district, as per the requirements of the landowner. Although the lease was a blessing at first, upon maturing the charter school has discovered it is restricted from borrowing for additional permanent physical plant needs because they do not own the land. In spring of 2006 Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School dedicated its fiscal planning to a new permanent building to replace the charter schools original portable buildings with a newly constructed \$2.5 elementary school. These three case schools have all excelled in the name of autonomy. Two case charter schools demonstrate state issued autonomy that is truly independent and the third case demonstrated district issued autonomy that is semi-independent.

#### *Cross Case Theme Number Two: Esprit de Corps*

Across all three sites, there was such an up-beat esprit de corps that one can observe it in the children's faces both in and out of class. Teachers used the following terms to describe their respective schools climates: (1) "fun" in Avoyelles Public Charter School, (2) "unity" at Children's Charter School and (3) "family" for Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School.

Amy Stewart Wells (1998) and her colleagues described charter school teachers as possessing an esprit de corps, an attitude different from their counterparts in traditional public schools. The participants in Well's (1998) study felt that the other staff members get to know students and families better than would have been possible in a larger (or traditional) setting and that charter schools encouraged the development of a different kind of learning community. This esprit de corps aspect of charter schooling was noted at each of the case schools throughout all levels of the school-community.

Charter schools enjoy the inside-out approach to adjusting their curriculum and instruction, an approach that is site specific. This, in turn, creates a learning climate that gives the teachers a sense of greater professionalism than what is reported in most traditional public schools. When the teachers in the present study were asked to compare their present position in their charter school to their former position in the district schools that they had previously worked in, they all reported that the charter schools have a more positive learning climate and discipline problems are an exception.

The three charter schools in this study all display a very optimistic school climate and display esprit de corps in varying ways. While loving, caring, and family school climates are not new to the educational arena esprit de corps may set the tone in explaining why these three Louisiana charter schools are performing better than the district and/or the state on most grade levels. The autonomy given to the schools removes the top-down aspect of schooling and this, in turn is reflected in the teacher's sense of dedication to their schools. Teacher dedication is, indeed, a prevalent theme in all three schools.

### *Cross Case Theme Number Three: Instructional Leadership*

Three educational entrepreneurs who were never trained in Education Administration started these three very successful case schools. Andrews and Rothman (2002) discuss how successful charter school directors bring the right people together and the right tools together to create an infrastructure within which schools can thrive, allowing staff members to share their experiences and knowledge in free flowing creative ways that foster new approaches to problems. By serving as the organizations of change, charter schools become increasingly innovative, helping educators become more effective and, in turn, help expand education reform.

Fox (2002) noted that charter school administrators were involved in many activities that most public school administrators do not think about; for example, developing public relations programs in order recruit new students to the school. Fox (2002) also found that charter school administrators were involved in fiscal management issues that school principals do not deal with. They need to secure grants and other forms of outside financial funding. These three charter schools all have strong leadership. One has a traditional public school design, with a principal and an assistant principal. The other two charter schools have leadership that is designed around Teacher Leadership through consensus.

While Wells (1998) is referring to a single, principal-styled leader, in the present study only Avoyelles Public Charter School has a central leadership position that is labeled “Director”, and she is a former classroom teacher who was disturbed enough by the traditional district’s practices that she felt compelled to start her own school. Her choice of curricula, which is truly innovative, removes teacher freedom for Language Arts, and demands teacher professionalism and input for the remainder of the teaching day because of the design of the Core Knowledge™ curriculum.

A non-educator who was savvy enough to delegate curricula decision making to his teaching staff started children's Charter School. Recently, Children's Charter School has hired an experienced educator to govern the school because the founding director realized that a professional educator would better facilitate the school's educational maturity. The former director remains on the charter school board and involved in budgetary matters.

The instructional leaders at Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School have always been a core group of teachers that succeed in governing by consensus while enduring three Directors during the first four years of operation. The present director, a locally retired traditional public school principal, who was principal at Glencoe Elementary School when it was shuttered, describes his position as a facilitator.

#### *Cross Case Theme Number Four: Teacher Leadership*

Fifty years ago Lieberman (1956) professed that the public expects to decide many things that should be decided by educators. Getting the public to value professional education is not going to be an easy mission. The traditional attitude of the public, which takes lay interference in education for granted, is a logical reaction to the uncritical notions of democracy and professionalism, which prevail among educators. Today, the indifferent attitudes of the public can only be expected, and the federal government is dictating how districts spend their resources it is time for educators to grasp the need for professional independence and capitalize on every occasion to strengthen Teacher Leadership.

*In Awaking the Sleeping Giant: Leadership Development for Teachers*, the seminal research on teacher leadership by Katzenmayer and Moller (1996), the assertion is made that teachers have the potential to exercise new and dynamic leadership in traditional public schools

thereby enhancing social reform (p. 5). More significantly, their metaphor of teacher leadership as a “sleeping giant” continues to be an applicable representation of teacher leadership. Since the publication of *Awaking the Sleeping Giant*, Crowther et al (2002) notes that teacher leadership has drawn considerable attention worldwide and has acquired a degree of legitimacy in the educational literature.

The teachers, as well as the school-community, at these three case schools feel that because of the charter status of the school that each school belongs to them personally. It appears that ownership of a public school and its decision making processes generates a teacher leadership teaching environment. Although the teachers are empowered differently at each school site, the empowerment that the teachers have helps create a teacher friendly working atmosphere that can be described as the teachers being in charge of academic decision making.

The teachers in Avoyelles Public Charter School are empowered as Teacher Leaders because: (1) the leader leads by teacher consensus whenever possible, (2) they are supported by the administration with regard to classroom level decisions, (3) they must create their own curriculum for geography, science and history, (4) they receive professional development for their language arts teaching techniques every month, and (5) they personally and professionally embrace the accountability for autonomy challenge that charter schooling necessitates. The organizational structure may appear to be educationally traditional but the director at Avoyelles who was an elementary teacher before starting the charter school is very keen to share responsibility and the decision-making “ownership” that originates from the charter’s freedom of autonomy in exchange for the threat of being closed.

The teachers at Children’s Charter School are empowered as Teacher Leaders by: (1) the support they receive from the administration for making teacher-lead decisions about the

curriculum and instruction in their classrooms, (2) meeting weekly for professional development where they, the teachers, choose the content, (3) using their collective professional discretion to change curricula, (4) attending their self-chosen professional development conference that the school pays for and (5) personally and professionally embracing the accountability for autonomy challenge that charter schooling necessitates. The organizational structure of Children's Charter School is small and the closeness of the faculty is reflected in the collaboration used to solve problems, both major and minor. The faculty at Children's Charter School communicates with the administration as well as each other whenever the need arises.

The teachers at Vigil Brown Glencoe Charter School are empowered as Teacher Leaders by: (1) the "ownership" side of being the curriculum and instruction decisions-makers for the school, (2) designing a community school (K-8) to improve on the district model, (3) using their collective professional discretion to change curricula, (4) having the classroom freedom to teach the way they want, (5) volunteering to assist with administrative duties whenever there is a need and (6) personally and professionally embracing the accountability for autonomy challenge that charter schooling necessitates. The organizational structure for Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School has traditional lineage, but the current director sees his position as one of a facilitator for the faculty needs. He is an experienced educator who guides the long-range school mission by harnessing the teachers' professionalism.

In *A Fundamental Education Reform: Teacher Led Schools*, McGhan (2000) concludes that occasionally some positive aspects of teaching peek through the discontent of the working lives of teaching. Sometimes, these charters suggest dismantling the educational hierarchy in one way or another. McGhan (2000) cites the *Education Commission of the States*, which recently recommended a series of changes that would decentralize school districts and might result,

though not automatically, in teachers' gaining more control over their classrooms and work. Charter schools were designed with this type of decentralization in mind and these three Louisiana charter schools have incorporated the concept enthusiastically.

Good and Braden (2000) reported on teacher empowerment in charter schools. They found that in New York, Colorado, and California the charter teachers did not feel as empowered as traditional public school teachers. The Louisiana charter school law recognizes decentralization and teacher empowerment as a means to public school improvement. These results of teacher empowerment appears to be a main indicator of why these schools are leading their district, state and competing favorably with the nation in standardized test scores.

#### *Definition of Teacher Leadership*

Sherrill (1999) has pointed out the ambiguity of the term teacher leadership in the literature demonstrating that teacher leaders are referred to with different terms: clinical faculty, clinical educators, master teachers, and lead teachers. While Sherrill's terms give names to teacher roles, they do little to enhance the new paradigm of teacher leaders who aspire to lead educational reform and in so doing enhance social reform and shaping the meaning educational decisions for students and communities (Katzenmayer & Moller 1996).

Crowther et al. (2002) defined teacher leadership as facilitated principled action to achieve whole-school success. It applies the distinctive power of teaching to shape the meaning of educational decision-making for children, youth and adults and it contributes to long-term enhanced quality of community life (p. 10).

### *Characteristics of Teacher Leadership*

In their book *Developing Teacher Leaders: How Teacher Leadership Enhances School Success*, Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, and Hann (2002) developed “The Teachers as Leader Framework” that is the basis of their investigation. The framework includes four broad characteristics of teacher leadership: (1) teachers leaders convey convictions of a better world, (2) they authenticate teaching and learning and assessment, (3) they facilitate community learning through organizational processes, and (4) they confront barriers in the school structure and culture. Lieberman and Miller (2004) listed their findings with fourteen categories of findings, three are applicable to the present study: teachers who lead (1) go public with their understandings about students, strategies for learning, and the organization of the curriculum, (2) pursue improvement despite defiance to change, and (3) develop strong commitments to their students through their life experiences and their own teaching;

Ingersoll (2003) researched traditional public high schools examined climate as a means to evaluate centralization and decentralization in schools. Four aspects of school climate were analyzed by the following: (1) cohesion between staff and students, (2) cohesion among teachers, (3) cohesion between teachers and administrators, and (4) teacher turnover. Schools with low levels of teacher control over social issues had far more student-staff conflict than did schools with high levels of teacher control over social issues.

Teacher Leadership as Crowther et al. (2002) regard it is not a personal vision or personal attributes of individuals, rather it manifests itself through an interactive process that is centered on serious professional and communal dialogue with trust (p. 12). Teachers, when employed as collective decision makers, act as guardians of the local social culture. Leading, through collaboration that is designed to use a “metastrategy” to address the school-site problems,



enhances the teaching-learning interaction because in education local problems are best resolved with local resolutions.

Igersoll's (2003) school climate data displays that an increase in the power wielded by teachers has a positive effect on relations between teachers and administrators. Schools with more empowered faculties had less conflict between the faculty and the administration. Teachers in Igersoll's (2003) study perceived more communication and support from administrators when they were empowered. The data indicates that it is both achievable and favorable to have empowered teachers and an empowered principal working together.

Crowther et al. (2002) recorded that there is a need for the emergence of a new paradigm in education, namely that of teacher leadership. A teacher leadership paradigm that recognizes the function of the teaching profession to provide desperately needed school revitalization. This teacher leadership paradigm that recognize the capability of teachers to supply new forms of leadership in traditional public schools, and in communities.

#### *Teacher Leadership and Social Control*

Sociological theories of education tell us that the core of productivity activated in teachers work is of two distinct types, instructional and social. Igersoll's (2003) statistical analysis of school climate shows that the degree of control teachers have over social issues has a significant and often overlooked impact on the climate in schools (p. 212 – 213). Igersoll (2003) also inferred that teacher control over social decisions had a stronger effect on students' conflicts than any of the other variables; including student poverty level, the size of the school, a public or a private school, and urban or suburban. The effects of teacher classroom control were not very different from the effects of teacher school-wide control. What was significant was teacher control over social issues, both within the class and school-wide (p. 194 - 196).

### *Teacher Leadership and the Traditional Public School Culture and Control*

One of the barriers on Crowther's et al. (2002) list of barriers, to teacher leadership is the "I am just a teacher" mentality that exists in most of the traditional public schools is a result of what Bates (1983) refers to as the tradition of education administration imbedded as a technology of control (p. 34). Equating position with leadership Hoy and Miskel (1991) concur that the concepts, the theories, and the traditional public school systems offer clear indications of a preoccupation with administrative control that is rampant in traditional public education today.

Ingersoll (2003) reports that The National Education Summit members recently convened have argued that a major problem with traditional public education is that traditional public schools principals are overly controlled by school boards, have too little control over their own budgets, teacher hiring and firing, and day to day operations. As Ingersoll's (2003) data displays, school principals do not report themselves to be disempowered lower-level managers, but the principals report that teachers are the besieged, overly controlled employees who must surrender to a central office.

Buchen's (2004) holistic book on K – 12 public education, *The Future of the American School System*, draws on the concept of open-ended conclusions to forecast solution summaries. Solution summaries comprise the conclusion to Buchen's holistic work addressing holistic solutions for the future of the American school system. Leadership Sharing. Nothing characterizes the drama of educational change more than the concept of Leadership Sharing. The nature of leadership change is the connection between school choice and leadership choice. The traditional, vertical, public school structure can be modified to the horizontal structure. In certain traditional public schools, school teams and school-councils with principals as well as

teachers now control decision making with shared leadership. In some charter schools, teacher leaders have replaced principals all together. Parents and students are increasingly part of the empowerment of leadership sharing; students are being asked to lead teacher-parent conferences, and parents are not just teachers and tutors they are learning managers and inevitably learning leaders. The choice movement is challenging the domination of the traditional top-down leadership.

Crowther et al. (2002) list four conditions for Teacher Leadership to succeed: (1) district and school wide acceptance of teacher leaders, (2) active support from the principal and the district administration, (3) greater development of teacher roles in reform, and (4) acknowledgement that Teacher Leadership produces positive school outcomes. While these conditions are easy to write down as theory; in practice the traditional line charts of organizational power will continue to dominate traditional educational practices until a crises forces change that alter the status quo.

In *The Manufactured Crisis* Berliner and Biddle (1995) they point out that charter schools are formed around a narrower mission than traditional public schools and charter schools have freedom from excess regulations while traditional public schools are expected to teach a burgeoning curriculum often expanded by state or federal mandates required by the same legislators who now promote charter schools as reform. Absent from most of this debate, in most instances are educators and educational researchers; reform is left to those outside the educational arena.

### *Teacher Leadership as a Change Agent*

When discussing Leadership as an organizational quality Crowther et al (2002) put forward the Business Management arena to describe the type of teacher leadership that they envision for teachers in schools that need to be revitalized.

John Nirenberg (1993) states:

The Living Organization identifies the concept of enhanced relationships between formal leaders and followers. It is not the leadership from any one person that is essential, more accurately; leadership each of us commands from within. In this respect, the same qualities we have sought in one person (the principal) can be found distributed among many people (the faculty) who learn to converge, and to exercise their leadership at the appropriate time. Enhanced relationships occur when teachers are vitally concerned about issues or when teachers are executing their responsibilities. (p. 27)

When teachers lead, they help create an environment for learning that influences the entire school community. Change is always accompanied by conflict, disequilibrium, and confusion. Lieberman and Miller (2004) posit Teacher Leadership is shaped by dramatic changes in the world and then subjugated to accountability and standardization. Teacher Leaders are determined to become the architects of these professional communities in which teachers take the lead in inventing new possibilities for their students and themselves (p. 92). Teacher Leadership, thus becomes a rather accommodating concept, focusing on those specific behaviors that serve to propel the work of the group forward.

Rogers (2002) concludes that when teachers believe and feel they are valued, both their basic human needs, as well as their professional needs, are more likely to be met. When school

leadership consciously values, affirm, and develops supportive practices, then there is a basis for ecology of support and change (p. 153).

Katzenmayer and Moller's "sleeping giant" of teacher leadership has in fact been awakened by the autonomy granted in the school choice of these charter schools in the present study. The Teacher Leadership "giant" is awake and being empowered in all three charter schools in this study and contributes to why they are leading their districts, the state and competing favorably with the nation on standardized test scores. This "giant" although still drowsy from only recently awakening, is now moving with increasing strength since school choice is giving autonomy to teachers. The charter-designed autonomy brings to light Teacher Leadership that has dramatically refashioned the status of school teachers while acting as a panacea for stagnant traditional public schools and their communities.

Crowther et al. (2002) concludes by noting that Teacher Leadership has been unnoticed in the maturation of leadership theory in recent decades and has been evaded in the traditional public school policy. These oversights have cost society dearly and prevent the frontline traditional public school professional educator from reforming what is not working, while all the while marginalizing the teacher profession (p. 11).

The three schools of choice in this research are of stark contrast to Crowther et al. (2002) findings. The present findings indicate that autonomy facilitates Teacher Leadership. These three communities are receiving a better bang for their education buck and because front line educators are rectifying their own problems and choosing their own curricula, as needed, advances learning for the specific needs of their untraditional public school site. This research displays that in these three non-traditional public or charter schools of choice, Teacher Leadership exists as its own entity and in its own right in autonomous public schools.

The research on Teacher Leadership, in public schools, by Crowther et al. (2002) offers a glimpse of the futuristic social transformation advocated by reformists like Drucker (1994) in the United States, Hargreaves (1994) in Canada and Beare (2001) in Australia. Teacher Leadership transformations can occur relatively painlessly when the teachers take on the function of leadership and this transformation can be very dynamic. Lieberman and Miller (2004) view teacher leadership as a way to deal with the worldwide changes occurring in schools. They conclude that Teacher Leadership is one powerful way to make our schools work for everyone in them (p. 90).

The autonomy created by the charter school experiment and enjoyed by these three charter schools places the site-based decision making in the hands of the teachers. This empowerment creates a teaching and learning environment that creates a new level of professionalism that coincides with proprietorship. This proprietorship enhances the teacher's self-actualization both professionally and personally. Reforming education through teacher empowerment may just be the cure failing schools need. In the future more internal changes created by the knowledge and expertise of teachers rather than from the decisions of policy makers should influence education practices.

To the degree that teachers are out of the policy loop in designing and adopting school reforms, it is not surprising if they drag their feet implementing of the "new" top-down program. Teachers do not have a monopoly on educational wisdom, but their first-hand knowledge of schools and their responsibility in implementing any reform argues for their centrality in school reform efforts. As front liners in the war on illiteracy, teachers as a rule have sufficient wisdom, once the classroom doors close, to make judgment about pupils that add up over time to *de facto* policies about instruction, whatever the centralized regulations.

School systems looking for more than a snapshot of an increase in standardized test scores should look to Teacher Leadership design by autonomy. The three examples presented in this study to provide an example of an improved school design through teacher lead autonomy. It is only through the mechanism of autonomy that teacher input comes to the forefront of education reform, allowing the students to receive bottom-up rather than top-down decisions on how best to educate them.

Tyack and Cuban (1995) state when educators draw from the twin themes of “utopia and tinkering”, it is suggested that reformers take a broader view of the aims that should guide public education and focus ways to improve instruction from the inside out rather than the top down (p. 135).

#### *Cross Case Theme Number Five: Professional Development*

Casey, Andreson, Yelverton, and Weden (2002) researched charter schools, teachers, and teacher retention and found charter schools hire and retain excellent teachers. The three charter schools in this study reaffirm the aforementioned conclusions pertaining to teacher retention. The three case schools have consistently retained 80% to 90% of their respective teaching staffs (Barr et al., 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003 & 2004, 2005).

Casey et al. (2000) wrote that good teachers are seeking out the charter schools, which often pay competitive salaries, provide a place for innovation and experimentation, and allow for greater professional autonomy. Most charter school teachers reported to Casey et al. (2002) that they have not had a wealth of professional development during the first year of operation; however, it appears that the experience of opening a new school provides powerful motivation for personal professional growth and independent professional development of the highest order.

This was demonstrated by two of the three charter schools, Avoyelles Public Charter School and Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School. Children's Charter School started as a school-within-a-school.

The ownership aspect of charter schooling shared by the teachers of these three charter schools contributes to a heightened interest in professional development. The teaching staff at two of the three charter schools has control over the type of professional development that they embark on each year. The third school, Avoyelles Public Charter School, spends professional development money each month on a Direct Instruction® consultant that spends the day in the classroom critiquing teachers and fine tuning the technical aspects of the reading and writing program used school-wide. Direct Instruction® is the same curriculum that the teachers refer to when asked in their interviews to define the factors contributing to the success of their charter school.

These three charter schools have discovered the golden opportunity a professional development approach to teaching that encourages teacher collaboration, meaningful teacher leadership and professionalization of teaching. Three features of school cultures crucial to making them better places to advance learning. When teachers receive the autonomy to invest in the professional development that they choose a heighten sense of professionalism occurs. Much like the buy in aspect of the business literature teacher autonomy with regards to professional development is invigorating for the teachers, which in turn facilitates learning.

### *Professional Development and Teacher Leadership*

Andrews and Rothman (2002) researched professional empowerment for teachers and concluded that there is a growing body of educational research that finds that effective



professional development in schools should be empowering to teachers. According to Andrews and Rothman (2002) professional development can accomplish this in at least three ways: by allowing teachers to have time for input, reflection, and follow-up; by providing opportunities for teachers to work with colleagues; and by drawing on the expertise of participants. Yet, studies find little professional development takes this approach. As a result, Andrews and Rothman (2002) found there is a growing body of opinions among experts that conventional forms of professional development are “virtually a waste of time.” Reflecting on professional empowerment and the lack of professional respect in the field, Andrews and Rothman (2002) quoted one teacher as saying, “We are often told what to do; it’s not very often that we’re asked.”

Fox (2002) researched and discovered that one of the most neglected areas in the community-charter schools participating in his study was the lack of on-going professional development of teachers. Only two of the three charter schools studied by Fox implemented even limited professional development for their staff. If charter schools are to be models of innovation, then they need to attend to professional development more formally. Teachers in the present study reported self-selected opportunities to assess and fine-tune their profession, to converse about teaching practices, to solve problems together as a faculty and to develop innovative solutions to curriculum and instruction problems, also as a faculty. These three charter schools recognize the importance of providing on-going professional development for their teachers and staff.

The three charter schools in this inquiry demonstrate site-based decision-making concerning professional development. Each school spends time, energy and resources on professional development in a manner determined by the director and or the teachers. Each site

fulfills its own professional development need and the teachers explain this as an aspect of their autonomy that is a contributing factor of their success. Avoyelles Public Charter School: Teacher Three, "...with the ongoing (Direct Instruction®) coaching-training we improve constantly..." (110-118). Children's Charter School: Teacher One, "...We get to choose own professional development ..." (82-85) Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School: Teacher Three, "...It was at the national charter school conference. We got to see the publishers ...we tried Saxon Math™ last year it was really good for us so we talked to other teachers into trying Saxon Phonics™ and spelling" (503 – 510). The autonomy awarded to these three new public schools yielded professional development that is highly relevant to instruction unlike the professional development Andrews & Rothman (2002) refer to as a "waste of time".

Progressive educators tend to believe that the best motivators for high quality teaching and learning lie in the intrinsic rather than extrinsic rewards. These three charter schools have faculties that exercise professional authority while engaging in prideful achievement, self-actualization, as well as, making contributions to the welfare of others (Bartunek, 2003). Modern charter schools, like the alternative schools of a generation ago, might come to be seen not merely as empowering parents and students, as was the original intent, but, quite significantly, teachers, as well.

### Study Limitations

Familiarity with the sample was a problem in the beginning of this research study because I had studied all the charter schools in Louisiana throughout my graduate career. However, at the same time, that familiarity provided this researcher with an acute familiarity

with each charter school. These preliminary investigations gave me access and trust from the participants that may might not have had otherwise transpired.

It was natural to bring bias and prior understanding to the study, and it was informative how the participants' responses determined all of the results while this researcher relished in his role as a conduit of teacher data. This study may have been subjected to some teacher-to-teacher contamination. This aspect of subject-to-subject contamination was addressed at each site during faculty meetings. The amount of time that elapsed between the introduction of the researcher into the school community and the point when the teacher interviews took place could have allowed the teachers to share or rehearse some of their responses to the interviews.

In this research study, two of the three schools, Avoyelles Public Charter School and Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School, are of traditional size when they are compared to traditional public schools located in the same district. One of the charter schools in this study is a small-school model. Children's Charter School's design and size creates a limitation for this research because not all three schools are truly independent Type II state-issued charter schools that have a "traditionally-sized" population. Therefore, this may somewhat influence comparisons made among all three charter schools.

### *High Stakes Testing Disclaimer*

The current federal high-stakes testing movement neglects educational assessment philosophy, as well as, pedagogy practices. When educators teach "how to measuring student progress," multiple instruments are professed. It is important to note that this researcher acknowledges the philosophical mismatch placed upon educators by policy makers. Currently,

our elected officials, who demand the present day business model of student assessment or high-stakes testing, rather than the application of sound practices derived from and delivered by teacher education programs. Researchers in today's educational climate are confined to the political climate of high stakes testing and one of its ensuing repercussions, the only comparative data available.

Louisiana, like every other state that desires a continued positive flow of federal tax dollars, must chose the federal business model for evaluation of *all* public schools. Ethnographic studies, such as this one, should be repeated in other states for better understanding of the autonomy in relation to charter schooling. Autonomy that is exchanged for a higher degree of accountability creates various degrees of success and failures. The successful schools should be studied to determine why they are independently successful.

The federal assessment program into and the evaluation out of the local educational systems began with passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. Popham (1992) writes "the magnitude of the funding, for (ESEA), resulted in Senator Robert Kennedy and others attaching a mandatory annual evaluation of agencies receiving federal dollars, specifically Title I and Title III" (p. 3). This evaluation of federal dollars at the local level was the start of a business-model being mandated into the local education system.

A traditional business model, developed by F. W. Taylor in 1911, is reflective of Scientific Management, a business model designed to identify the one best way to perform a task. Educational policy makers, namely politicians, who are rarely educational experts, are entrenched in applying the business model because they have been convinced within the context of costs, that a single student's test score is functionary as the total evaluation of an education.

This political philosophy that compares a young human being's performance to a business productivity model does not match educational philosophy on the topic of student assessment, nor does it match the pedagogical practices that stand out in the literature in relation to the best practices of student assessment. Simply stated, high-stakes testing ignores the logic of pedagogy. To streamline accountability, policy makers use high-stakes testing to adhere to the federal-accountability model, No Child Left Behind, regardless of educational philosophy. Today's business system approach has been expanded and includes such factors as a shared vision; labor buy-in, shared accountability, and quality of performance. These business system approaches are all present in the organizational practices within these three charter schools.

For the past fifty-odd years, educational policy-makers who have not brought teachers to the reform table do not understand the complexity of the fundamental educational dynamics a teacher faces to raise class test scores. Professional educators should demand an assessment model that is more philosophically aligned with our current educational beliefs and practices. To date, the present political-educational climate of federal assessment still makes use of this "bottom line" assessment known in education as "high-stakes testing" or the systematic neglect of educational philosophy.

### Implications of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine three charter school communities to determine the contributing factors that would account for the schools leading in their respective districts, state and/or competing favorably with the nation in standardized test scores. The focus of the study was to document how each charter school defined the reasons for their

successes. The documentation of these reasons should enable educators to examine the most successful charter school models for replication, as the charter school law stipulates.

Quantitative information about each school indicated that the case schools merit further investigation. Each charter school in this study has an at-risk population that resembles each respective district. Avoyelles Public Charter School had the same at-risk population as the district, 65%. Children's Charter School and Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School have an at-risk population is approximately 10 percentage points *higher* than the district. Nationally, charter schools have been accused of creaming the crop from the district population Clincy (2000) and Nathan (1996). In Louisiana charter schools are required to have an at-risk population that resembles the local district. This helps equate comparisons to traditional public schools. Through the use of qualitative research, this author observed the school-community, listened to and documented the teachers' stories that explain the successes of the case schools relating to their curriculum and instruction practices. It cannot be reiterated often enough that these are truly "fledgling" schools in terms of years in operation when compared with their counterparts in a public school system that is on the average over a hundred years old, or older.

### *Future Recommendations for Louisiana's Charter School Program*

#### *Recommendation One: Defining Louisiana's Charter Schools*

The Louisiana Charter School Program, the Department of Education and The Board of Elementary Education and Secondary Education (BESE) should continue its forward progress by consorting with the legislature to advance the definition of charter schools in Louisiana. The current federal definition of a charter school relies on the premises that for a public school to be

labeled a charter school it must be granted “total autonomy.” A public school with any form of district control or policy should be called an alternative school.

Now that the charter school momentum in Louisiana and the nation has matured, our state definition of a charter school needs to be advanced as well. It is this researcher’s recommendation that the term charter school in Louisiana be advanced to match the current national definition, specifically in relation to “total autonomy” or level of independence. When the Louisiana charter school law was written it allowed for districts to be granting agencies for charter schools. When districts grant a charter they retain some type of control, be it financial, systemic or curriculum and in doing so they defy the national definition of a charter school. In Louisiana, a district charter school is not able to fulfill the national definition of a charter school. Only charters granted by the BESE, the Type II charter schools, receive “complete autonomy” and meet the national definition of a charter school.

The State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) has invested in the charter school program and the investment has created an evaluation system that has earned the grade of “A” when Bierliener (2002) rated state level charter school evaluation program. Advancing the charter school definition to update it with the national definition, which has evolved in national literature to mean a totally independent school, will enable the charter school program in Louisiana to continue to lead the nation. District schools that are schools of choice or that offer a non-traditional method of education should be labeled “alternative schools.” This adjustment would also match the national definitions of public schools that are not traditional in style meaning the Latin Grammar School, and the traditional Carnegie unit high school.

### *Recommendation Two: “Public” Charter Schools*

The public’s perception of charter schools can be easily and inexpensively advanced if the BESE and the legislature would require each and every charter school to include the word public in the title of the school. Ten years after their being established people still ask, “Is a charter school a private school?” Or, “How much is tuition?” Requiring the word public to be placed in the title of each charter school would be a public relations bonanza that would benefit all charter schools equally. Very likely, it would excite more local participation. A charter school is able to choose its own name and rightly so, nevertheless it is time for the public money that supports these public charter schools to be fully acknowledged with a more accurate, informative label.

The State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) must continue to close under-performing schools. Louisiana closure rate of seven percent has constantly matched the national closure rate. In our current political-educational environment, the closure of a charter school is interpreted as a failure on the part of the authorizing agencies. To fulfill the promise of charter school reform, these agencies would have to view a charter school’s failure as part of a larger educational experiment, rather than as a symbol of their own failure. This seems unlikely, particularly in an era in which traditional public education’s response to increasing attacks from conservatives has been to tighten accountability (Carol and Greenberg, 2002).

### *Recommendation Three: Three Phases of the Louisiana Charter School Program*

Louisiana has the opportunity to capitalize on the nature of the charter school law that states the choice experiment be used as a mechanism for successful innovations in curriculum and instruction can be replicated and used as models for traditional public school improvement.



This researcher can envision this relatively new Louisiana Charter School Movement, a movement of school choice, labeled in terms of decades. Generally speaking, we could label the first decade of the Louisiana Charter School Movement from 1996 to 2006: Phase I, the second decade from 2006 – 2016: Phase II, and the third decade from 2016 – 2026: Phase III.

The first decade of the charter school experiment witnessed the entire spectrum of successes and failures. Charter school failures are closed when identified as not performing as their charters dictate. At the same time successes are alive and well and as these three cases prove some charter schools are often out-performing the traditional public schools.

Capitalizing on the “new knowledge” charters created during Phase I in their quest to fulfill a specific site-based mission would benefit Phase II of the Charter School Movement in Louisiana. The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and the State Department of Education should devise a plan for professional development for school-site autonomy. A charter school training center that would be formally linked with the Louisiana University system could disseminate the best of the curriculum and instruction practices and procedures chosen by the experienced charter schools that have proved that independent public schools can outperform their traditional public school counterparts. Professional development in “autonomy-training” for administrators and teachers as well as teacher aids could be cost-effective. The return would be school-wide innovations that address the current lack of teacher leadership, an aspect of education that is at the heart of educational reform classroom instruction.

Phase III could involve regional training centers that are duplicates of the original state charter training center, the regional training centers in turn should be formally linked to local universities. In this way, an autonomy movement designed to increase student achievement

through Teacher Leadership would in turn serve to ensure collaboration between teaching's best practices of teacher education programs thereby strengthening Teacher Leadership.

What would be the benefit of specifically connecting district schools with a state - level charter schoolteacher training program? The program could emulate the established charter school success through professional development specifically aimed at school site-autonomy that in turn creates Teacher Leadership, yielding increased teacher professionalism. This grassroots approach to revitalization of learning in today's climate of global competitiveness, not to mention the federal conditions of assessment appears to be swinging the proverbial education pendulum to the original locus of control, the school house. Establishing the successful teaching delivery combined with the most relevant curriculum has always been the "fixed point" for the educational pendulum to hang from, while the constant rate of the arc is fueled by change. Furthering this pendulum analogy we can recognize the rate of the arc in educational change is slow to swing in educational systems. School culture appears to be at the heart of many of the school revitalization plans in research and on the market. Strong charter schools such as those presented here provide a locus on control that invigorates professionalism in the teaching profession. Education is an evolution not a revolution, and now Louisiana educational format has an opportunity to evolve towards, albeit in a grassroots manner named charter schools, the new form of democratic education.

Savvy school systems can accomplish their own site-specific purposes with charter schools, when and if they relinquish total control as the present research indicates, creating schools that would not be possible under the usual ground rules of the traditional school system by using charter schools as laboratories to test innovations, or employ them as part of a broader reform strategy aimed at solving educational problems. The teachers at Avoyelles Public Charter

School indicated that when they use the Core Knowledge™ guidelines to write their lesson plans, plans whose objectives must be matched to Louisiana's Grade Level Expectations (GLEs). Approximately half of the time the Core Knowledge™ lesson plan is a grade level or two grade levels below the grade of the classroom teacher writing the lesson plan at Avoyelles Public Charter School.

In addition, a professional development program designed to follow a curriculum and instruction model that meets and then surpasses the Louisiana State Benchmarks and the Louisiana Grade Level Expectations could be the model used by the state in the next ten to 15 years to continually update, expand and improve the current State Benchmarks and Grade Level Expectations.

Simply stated, a state-level charter training center would fulfill the language of the original charter school law and may increase student achievement by allowing the school choice movement to lead the creative and proven innovations in curriculum and instruction by linking school districts with the a state charter school training center and universities which would create a distinctive maturation of the Louisiana charter school into its second decade, with the expansion and dissemination of creative solutions arrived at by the controlled laboratory educational experiment named Louisiana charter schools.

The "professionalism" that lawmakers and school districts continually demand of teachers is in direct contradiction to the manner in which current teaching decisions and high-stakes testing actually serve to remove teacher decisions out of the classrooms while the curriculum and instruction decisions are made far away from the classroom, top-down, from the central office. The high stakes testing brouhaha as a result of the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) and strictly mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act further

expedites the removal of the teacher's professionalism by demanding nearly all teaching decisions come from a central bureaucracy; i.e., the traditional public school board. Charter schools that have autonomy can offer districts and schools the opportunity for grassroots empowerment of teachers that can very easily translate into increased teacher professionalism designed to increase student performance.

### Summary

This chapter discusses the relationships discovered in the present study between the leading status of the case schools in relation to what teachers regarded, as reflected by their statements, as the major contributing factors leading to test scores that lead the district, state and competing favorably with the nation in standardized test scores. Furthermore, this study investigates how the teachers' descriptions of the contributing factors for their respective charter school's successes could be coded and subsequently analyzed within the confines of seminal research of Larry Lezotte's Seven Correlates of Effective Schools research. Any coded qualitative data that did not align with any of the Seven Correlates of Effective Schools research were assigned a new site-specific code or a corresponding classification generating a new "correlate" of effective charter schooling.

The results of this study suggest that the autonomy granted in the charter process creates a school climate of ownership. Teachers who feel ownership of their public school environment create a level of Teacher Leadership that is reflected in the school culture hence, student learning increases, and test scores may surpass the district, the state, and compete favorably with the nation. The concept of teacher empowerment leading to Teacher Leadership is ameliorated by

the autonomy inherent in these three Louisiana charter schools. The theme of family or love is common to all three schools; due in part to the control charter school teachers feel they command over their own professional destiny. Teachers in Louisiana's best performing charter schools strive to excel, in large part to the ownership bestowed upon them by the autonomy so prevalent in the school choice movement. The teachers at these three charter schools welcome the heightened accountability. Additional research is suggested to identify the future stages of the movement and devise a compilation of best practices that might allow Louisiana charter schools to lead in the development of a reform model for schools unable to improve through the traditional public school system.

This investigation will permit educators to begin to capitalize on the successes achieved by these charter schools resulting in benefits in the both the cost-effectiveness of charter schooling and by utilizing their highly effective models of curriculum and instruction.

How charter and district schools compare in terms of academic achievement, innovation, accountability, equality, socialization, and parental and Teacher Leadership has now been documented in Louisiana. The question of which school system is *better*, the traditional district public school or the independent public charter school, has not been crux of the issue here. Educators will understand that this is one question that research alone cannot answer. Fundamentally, that answer depends on the complicated matter of what is implied by "better" and on the specific values that the local culture uses for that definition. The research presented here provides a limited body of knowledge with which to inform those interested in public schooling, but it most certainly does not end the essential debates that will continue to fashion the best practices in public education. Only the democratic system, perseverance, and further

research that endeavors to continue to compare charter schools to traditional public schools, both quantitatively and qualitatively, will ultimately provide the definitive answers to this debate.

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### Cross Case Analysis of Concepts

*Why is Avoyelles Public Charter School (APCS) leading the district, while competing favorably with state and the nation in standardized test scores?*

Note: In this school, the term program(s) is used to refer to curriculum/curricula.

### Esprit de Corps

Table 1

Coding	Teacher One	Teacher Two	Teacher Three	Explanation of Code Into ESR	Effective School Research Correlate(s)
<b>Esprit de Corps #1</b>  <b>Fun</b>	<p>In the other schools I was in we never were <b>excited about coming to work</b> and teaching as we are here. Everyone is <b>positive and enthusiastic</b> about what we teach. I have been teaching for 18 years and this is the most <b>fun</b> that I have ever had. I want to continue teaching here as long as possible. (Lines 71-79)</p>	<p>My old school climate is not comparable at all to this. <b>This is what education should be.</b> The things she (my old principal) did were to grease the squeaking wheel. The faculty was good but there was no <b>cohesion like there is here.</b> We were friendly there, but <b>here there is a richness that is really like love.</b> I have never worked in a school where <b>everyone is happy and glad to be at work</b> like we are here. I think that says a lot about our programs (curricula) because without them the instruction part of it would not be so <b>fun.</b> (111-121)</p>	<p>We are here to teach all children to <b>love learning; it is about enjoying the learning process.</b> I believe that part of our success is that we educate not only for the students but also for the <u>family life.</u> <u>We are educating the community.</u> It is like a mantra around here that all children can and will learn, we like being an example for others to follow. We make it <b>fun</b> to learn and we believe children learn best by using all of their senses. (Lines 44-51)</p>	<p>The teachers describe a work environment that is fun. This is description of learning <b>not found within</b> the confines of any of the definitions of the Seven Correlates of Effective School Research.</p> <p>Teacher cites the curricula as an explanation for the fun filled environment.</p>	<p>New Site-Specific “Correlate” (8) Esprit de Corps</p> <p>(6) Safe and Orderly Environment</p> <p>(7) Home/School Relations</p>

Cross Case Analysis of Concepts: Research Question:  
*Why is Avoyelles Public Charter School (APCS) leading the district, while competing favorably with the state and nation in standardized test scores?*

Note: In this school, the term program(s) is used to refer to curriculum/curricula.

### Teacher Professionalism

Table 2

Coding	Teacher One	Teacher Two	Teacher Three	Explanation of Code Into ESR	Effective School Research Correlate(s)
<b>Teacher Professionalism</b>	I know that the <b>commitment</b> that I have to teaching here is a big one and <b>that all of the other teachers feel the same way</b> . We have <u>unison</u> and <u>togetherness</u> that helps us through the hard times and the hard <b>times are usually overcome with more hard work</b> and it is very rewarding because it pays off and our test scores prove that we are better than the public schools. (163-170)	I think that these <b>attitudes</b> (of high expectations) of the administration and <b>the staff</b> are the reasons that the test scores were so strong. I demand the <u>high expectations</u> of my students also and this helps the teaching and learning that takes place (75-79)	The last thing I want to mention is that the <b>teachers are so devoted</b> at this school. We are all willing to <b>go the extra mile</b> and we are <b>very cooperative</b> about implementing the programs (curricula). We make sure that the education is not only for the students but also part of the <u>family life</u> . (30-35)	Commitment, high expectations, as an attitude, and devotion are all descriptors of teacher professionalism.  The teacher Identifies a climate that demands high expectations.  Teacher states curricula is linked with family life. Here the teacher is referring to the monthly home-projects that are used school wide.	New Site-Specific “Correlate”  (10) Teacher Professionalism  (2) High Expectations for Success  (7) Home/School Relations

## Research Question

Note: In this school, the term program(s) is used to refer to curriculum/curricula.

## Table 3

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*Why is Avoyelles Public Charter School (APCS) leading the district, while competing favorably with state and the nation in standardized test scores?*  
Note: In this school, the term program(s) is used to refer to curriculum/curricula.

Coding	Teacher One	Teacher Two	Teacher Three	Explanation of Code Into ESR	Effective School Research Correlate(s)
<b>Curriculum (General)</b>  Direct Instruction® Results in Grouping	I think that the most important thing at our school is the <b>curriculum</b> that we use. It is able to meet the need of every child. The <b>curriculum</b> is made stronger by the fact that each student is placed in a <b>homogenous group for reading instruction</b> . This grouping allows the child to be successful at the reading program ( <b>curricula</b> ) no matter what their level is. (1-9)	I think our school is strong because of the combination of many reasons. The first one is the <b>curriculum</b> programs that are used. The director is so knowledgeable that the decision-making is strong. The <u>programs</u> ( <b>curricula</b> ) were researched by the director and have been proven to be cutting edge, innovative and successful. They meet the student's needs unlike any I have ever used before and they are teacher-friendly as well. (1-9)	I think that the next major reason we are exemplary is the <b>curriculum</b> . It is outstanding, <b>The Direct Instruction Reading</b> is so well thought out and field-tested that it leaves no guessing. Again the <b>grouping</b> according to needs creates academic accommodations that make strong learners. (17-23)	The <b>autonomy</b> of Type II Charter Schools allows the director to choose the curricula at APCS.  Grouping the DI® reading program (curriculum) has weekly, and monthly monitoring of student progress built into it. Successful students may move up in reading groups, insuring students are always working on appropriate levels.	(3) Instructional Leadership  (4) Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress  (5) Opportunity to Learn & Time on Task



Cross Case Analysis of Concepts  
Research Question

*Why is Avoyelles Public Charter School (APCS) leading the district, state while competing favorably with the nation in standardized test scores?*

Note: In this school, the term program(s) is used to refer to curriculum/curricula.

**Curriculum: Specific / DI® Reading Program**

Table 5

Coding	Teacher One	Teacher Two	Teacher Three	Explanation of Code Into ESR	Effective School Research Correlate(s)
<b>Curriculum: (Specific #2)</b> SRA Reading Curriculum is Scripted Teaching Methods for Easy Implementation	<b>The SRA reading curriculum</b> is the best I have ever used. <u>The state should look into adopting it because the writing that goes along with the reading stories really teaches the students how to think</u> before they write. <u>We do it (writing) so often</u> that the students are able to do critical thinking without any prompting. (37-43)	The main thrust of the <b>teaching methods</b> (Direct Instruction®) are designed to be able to be flexible with the small stuff and this flexibility allows us to conquer the problems as they arise. (96-103)	The structure of the programs <b>(curricula)</b> makes for <u>easy implementation</u> and this is totally different from my last assignment. Here it's like the students know why they are here and they feel the need to get more out of school than the students did in my old school. (85-89)	The <b>autonomy</b> of Type II Charter School allows the director to choose the curricula.  The SRA reading curriculum (is Direct Instruction®) Story mastery is designed into the reading and writing curriculum. Direct Instruction® is a fast paced teaching style that demands a very active student.	(3) Instructional Leadership  (4) Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress  (5) Opportunity to Learn & Time on Task

Cross Case Analysis of Concepts  
Research Question

*Why is Avoyelles Public Charter School (APCS) leading the district, while competing favorably with state and the nation in standardized test scores?*

Note: In this school, the term program(s) is used to refer to curriculum/curricula.

**Direct Instruction® as Teaching Method**

Table 6

Coding	Teacher One	Teacher Two	Teacher Three	Explanation of Code Into ESR	Effective School Research Correlate(s)
<b>Direct Instruction®:</b> Coaching & Techniques	I believe that all of the schools could benefit from knowing how we teach. <b>Direct Instruction®</b> is hard work but it sure does pay off. It is so rewarding to see how my students are able to advance their skills and compared to the way I used to teach there is no comparison. <u>In my other schools discipline was always a problem</u> and students were always falling through the cracks and no one care or	The <b>constant (Direct Instruction®) coaching</b> is a big part of what makes me <u>fell I do a good job</u> . Even though I have done this before it, helps to have someone look at what I do and scrutinize my methods so <b>I know how to get better with the Direct Instruction® techniques.</b> (151-156)	With the on-going <b>(Direct Instruction®) coaching-training, we improve constantly.</b> It is easy to stay fresh with <u>this learning environment because everyone is so positive and helpful here.</u>  <b>Training in Direct Instruction®</b> is the most important part of the scores that our students receive on the ITBS and the LEAP. <b>When teachers are held accountable,</b> it makes for a <u>vested interest.</u> (Lines 110-118)	The <b>autonomy</b> of Type II Charter Schools allows the director to choose the curricula and the type of <b>continuous professional development</b> for the staff.  Monthly teacher-coaching by a paid consultant is an integral aspect of Direct Instruction®  Teachers cites positive <u>learning environment.</u>	(3) Instructional Leadership  New Site-Specific “Correlate” (9) Admin. & Teacher Professionalism  New Site-Specific “Correlate” (10) Professional Development

	<p>even checked to see if the needs of the student were being met.</p> <p><u>This school is so fast paced with instruction that we rarely have any problems with discipline</u></p> <p>(83-97)</p>				<p>(6)</p> <p>Safe &amp; Orderly Environment</p>
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# Cross Case Analysis of Concepts

## Research Question

*Why is Avoyelles Public Charter School (APCS) leading the district, while competing favorably with state and the nation in standardized test scores?*

Note: In this school, the term program(s) is used to refer to curriculum/curricula.

## Curriculum: Specific / Core Knowledge

Table 7

Coding	Teacher One	Teacher Two	Teacher Three	Explanation of Code Into ESR	Effective School Research Correlate(s)
<p><b>Curriculum: (Specific #1)</b></p> <p>Core Knowledge is Hands-on</p> <p>Saxon Math</p>	<p>I feel that the <b>Core Knowledge curriculum</b> is <u>better than the state guidelines</u>. It is more precise and has a more well-rounded aspect to it. When I talk with other teachers we much all agree that <u>compared to our other schools this is the biggest difference between the two schools</u>. (Lines 24-29)</p>	<p><b>Core Knowledge program (curriculum)</b> This is a <u>perfect way to broaden knowledge</u> in history, science, geography, literature and poetry. It allows us to go way out of the box and teach great lessons. We are allowed to bring in outside resources for <b>hands-on</b> learning projects, and any other reliable resources that we find. (Lines 32-35)</p>	<p>The next part of the curriculum is the <b>Core Knowledge</b>; it is rich and very <b>hands-on</b>. The students are immersed in learning. Lots of experiments in science and they <u>learn history by acting things out and portraying characters</u>.</p> <p>The <u>Saxon Math</u> program is repetitive and cumulative which is the best math program I have ever worked with. (Lines 24-27)</p>	<p>The <b>autonomy</b> of Type II Charter Schools allows the director to choose the curricula.</p> <p>Core Knowledge Curriculum is a very hands-on curriculum and a reason for success at APCS.</p> <p>Saxon Math was chosen by the Director. This math curriculum has weekly test built into it.</p>	<p>(3) Instructional Leadership</p> <p>(4) Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress</p>

Cross Case Analysis of Concepts  
Research Question

*Why is Avoyelles Public Charter School (APCS) leading the district while competing favorably with state and the nation in standardized test scores?*

Note: In this school, the term program(s) is used to refer to curriculum/curricula.

**Home - School Relations**

Table 8

Coding	Teacher One	Teacher Two	Teacher Three	Explanation of Code Into ESR	Effective School Research Correlate(s)
<b>Family Involvement Through Monthly Projects</b>	Another thing that is different about our school is that the <b>parents are expected to be involved</b> in their child's education. <b>We require them (parents) to volunteer and to assist with major home projects</b> that we use to <u>link the lessons to other classes</u> . The <b>monthly projects</b> are demanding on the family but it seems to be working in a big way. (120-127)	Another thing about the <b>school vision</b> is that we are encouraged to reach the students in a new, different and more effective manner. What I like about this school compared to the other schools I have taught at, is <b>the level of family involvement</b> here. The <b>monthly projects</b> that are done by the students at home <u>increase the participation of the family</u> and I feel that <u>this is very innovative</u> (59-66)	I believe that part of our success is that we educate not only for the students <b>but also for the family life. We are educating the community.</b> It is like a mantra around here that all children can and will learn, we like being an example for others to follow. (165-168)	Teacher cites the school vision.  Parental and community involvement are cited in the school mission.  Monthly Projects are a cross the curriculum design that involves the home.  Teacher states all children can and will learn.	(1) Clear School Mission  (7) Home/School Relations  (4) Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress  (2) High Expectations for Success

Children's Charter School  
Cross Case Analysis of Concepts  
Research Question:

*Why is Children's Charter School (CCS) leading the district, while competing favorably with the state and nation in standardized test scores?*

**Autonomy: Curriculum Freedom**

Table 9

Coding	Teacher Four	Teacher Five	Teacher Six	Researcher's Explanation of Code into (E.S.R.) Correlates	Effective School Research Correlate
<b>Autonomy</b>  Curriculum Freedom	I think the reason our scores are better is probably because <b>we have more independence</b> to do what we want as far as curriculum. (Lines 7-9)	Each teacher has been allowed <b>freedom to work in terms of curriculum</b> . We went out and changed math programs because the Addison-Wesley math program did not go deep enough for our students. So, <b>as teachers we went out &amp; researched what was working best</b> in some schools and with our research we came up with the Everyday Math Model by the U. of Chicago and we were able to adopt that model. (Lines 73-78)	I think the <b>ownership of the classroom</b> is such a sharp contrast instead of being told what we must teach. <b>We have the freedom to assess the needs of our students</b> and to teach to those needs. (Lines 138-140)	The limited <i>autonomy</i> of this Type I Charter School allows a school designed with teacher empowerment at the center. Teachers have a great deal of classroom and curricula autonomy.  The teachers cite their autonomy as important to their success and one cites a concrete example of school-wide curriculum flexibility.	New Site-Specific "Correlate" (16) Autonomy  New Site-Specific "Correlate" (14) Teachers as Instructional Leaders

Children's Charter School  
Cross Case Analysis of Concepts  
Research Question:

*Why is Children's Charter School (CCS) leading the district while competing favorably with the state and the nation in standardized test scores?*

**Autonomy: Teacher Freedom**

Table 10

Coding	Teacher Four	Teacher Five	Teacher Six	Explanation of Code into (E.S.R.) Correlates	Effective School Research Correlate
<b>Autonomy</b>  <b>Teacher Freedom</b>	<b>We get to choose our own</b> professional development and we have that (faculty) study group which I don't think was probably as beneficial as it could have been, but I went to a guided reading professional development. (Lines 82-85)	Here, <b>I can do whatever I want.</b> You got your state curriculum. You've got your school curriculum. But, <b>I'm allowed to structure it the way I want.</b> (Lines 133-138 )	We have to follow the state curriculum because of the high stakes testing <b>but no one else decides how or when I must teach</b> and this <b>independence</b> helps us meets the student's needs.(Lines 61-63)	The Type I limited autonomy allows a school design with classroom autonomy.  The teachers identify a few of their freedoms as teachers, i.e., professional development and classroom structure.	New Site-Specific "Correlate" (16) Autonomy  New Site-Specific "Correlate" (14) Teachers as Instructional Leaders

Children's Charter School  
Cross Case Analysis of Concepts  
Research Question:

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**Autonomy vs. Traditional District Schools**

Table 11

Coding	Teacher Four	Teacher Five	Teacher Six	Explanation of Code into (E.S.R.) Correlates	Effective School Research Correlate
<b>Autonomy vs. Traditional District Schools</b>	The fact that we don't have as many meetings, here, we have meetings when it's necessary, but, otherwise I think a lot of meetings in schools are just for somebody to cover their behind and say they have met and done whatever. But, I think for the most part <b>it's not to the extent that it was in public schools.</b> (Lines 75-79).	We've been given a lot of <b>freedom</b> in terms of creating curriculum and finding what works best for the students in our classrooms <b>as opposed to the public school</b> setting where you may have one plan for the entire school.	The kids in my class-room are comparable as a group to <b>what I saw in my previous in schools.</b> It's basically the same, you have your good and your bad. You know, you have your high kids, your low kids. It's a mix. (Lines 94-96)	The limited autonomy of Children's Charter School allows a design that makes for efficient meetings and the curricula flexibility allows the teachers to best address the needs of their students. One teacher states that CCS students are comparable to the traditional public school students.	New Site-Specific "Correlate" (16) Autonomy



Children's Charter School  
Cross Case Analysis of Concepts  
Research Question:

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**Faculty Unity**

Table 12

Coding	Teacher Four	Teacher Five	Teacher Six	Researcher's Explanation of Code into (E.S.R.) Correlates	Effective School Research Correlate
<b>Faculty Unity</b>	We just do more things here as a <b>group</b> . At other schools it's basically you're doing things, but you're not participating as a group. I noticed here that more things here are <b>more group oriented as far as teachers go</b> . (Lines 79-82)	The community spirit that the teachers and the students and the staff and parents have. <b>We are all working toward a common goal</b> . I think <b>working together</b> and everyone being <u>committed</u> to that is probably the main reason for the success that we've had. (Lines 8-12).	I think it's all of the teachers <b>we all work together</b> . We do a great job of talking to each other seeing where these kids are low, what they need help in. We really communicate well. So, I can't just say it's one person; <b>it's all of us working as a team</b> . <b>Every Thursday afternoon we meet for two hours as part of our professional development</b> . (Lines 35-41)	The teachers cite unity and working together for the common goal of providing the best education.	New Site-Specific "Correlate" (17) Faculty Unity

Children's Charter School  
Cross Case Analysis of Concepts  
Research Question:

*Why is Children's Charter School (CCS) leading the district while competing favorably with the state and the nation in standardized test scores?*

**Teacher Dedication**

Table 13

Coding	Teacher Four	Teacher Five	Teacher Six	Explanation of Code into (E.S.R.) Correlates	Effective School Research Correlate
<b>Teacher Dedication</b>	The teachers here are <b>dedicated teachers</b> . Whereas, a lot of time and I have come across them, there are teachers who are just putting in their time. I think we just have teachers who use a lot more resources. (Lines 102-104)	I teach fourth grade and <b>we are here from the beginning of October until April, every Saturday</b> . Very rarely do I have a student who misses on a Saturday and it is totally volunteer, <b>not only I was here; my teaching assistant was here</b> . We have parent volunteers who are committed to providing breakfasts on those Saturday mornings. (Lines 14 – 19)	What I have seen teachers and teaching assistants work very hard with those kids. They do Saturday classes, <b>they stay two/three hours a day</b> with tutoring for testing after school each day. (Lines 18-24)	The teachers cite teacher dedication as an integral part of their school's Success.	New Site-Specific "Correlate" (15) Teacher Dedication

Children's Charter School  
Cross Case Analysis of Concepts

Research Question:

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**Teacher Assistants / Smaller Class Sizes**

Table 14

Coding	Teacher Four	Teacher Five	Teacher Six	Researcher's Explanation of Code into (E.S.R.) Correlates	Effective School Research Correlate
<b>(A) Teacher Assistants</b>  <b>(B) Smaller Class Sizes</b>	<p>Here <u>we have no more than 20 kids</u> per class. And when you have a <b>teacher's assistant</b> that breaks it down to ten students per teacher and that gives them more individual attention. I think that means a lot. (Lines 187-189)</p>	<p>Our success has a lot to do with us having <u>small class sizes</u>, and having these <b>teacher assistants</b>, it makes it much easier <u>to try new ways of teaching</u>. (Lines 182-186)</p>	<p>We do not get to handpick these children. We work with them to the best of our ability. <u>We have smaller class sizes</u>, and we have <b>teacher assistants</b>, and that we explore many different ways of teaching that that is how we do it. (Lines 86-89)</p>	<p>The <i>limited autonomy</i> of the Type I Charters allows the school design to include teacher assistants in each room. In this case, the <i>limited autonomy</i> also limits/restricts school growth. The teachers state that both small classes and a teacher assistant in each classroom is one of the keys to their success.</p>	<p>New Site-Specific "Correlate" (18) Teacher Assistants</p> <p>New Site-Specific "Correlate" (19) Small Classes</p>

Virgil Brown Glencoe School  
Cross Case Analysis of Concepts

Research Question:

*Why is Virgil Brown Glencoe School (VBGS) leading the district while competing favorably with the state and the nation in standardized test scores?*

**Autonomy: School Ownership**

Table 15

Coding	Teacher Seven	Teacher Eight	Teacher Nine	Researcher Explanation of Code into (E.S.R.) Correlates	Effective School Research Correlate
<b>School Ownership</b>	<b>We started this school</b> because they were planning on closing down Glencoe Elementary (the traditional public school). (Lines 12, 13)	This school was actually a dream of mine, it was a huge accomplishment in my life, I felt like I did something meaningful. <b>We started this (charter) school</b> and we just went all out, 100%. <b>We started these buildings from scratch.</b> We finished on Labor Day and we were just crying from the relief of finishing. (Lines 130-35, 148-151)	<b>This was an empty field I was sitting in the empty field waiting for the buildings to arrive.</b> I sat in the empty building on the floor with a telephone and a calculator and a book ordered every pencil, every piece of chalk, you know, everything. (Lines 631-634)	A group of teachers and the school secretary started this charter school and the teachers feel it is truly their own school.	New Site-Specific “Correlate” (12) Ownership

Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School

Research Question:

*Why is Virgil Brown Glencoe School (VBGS) leading the district while competing favorably with the state and the nation in standardized test scores?*

Note: In this school the term program(s) is used to refer to curriculum/curricula.

**Autonomy: Curriculum Flexibility**

Table 16

Coding	Teacher Seven	Teacher Eight	Teacher Nine	Researcher Explanation of Code into (E.S.R.) Correlates	Effective School Research Correlate
<b>Curriculum Flexibility</b>  Saxon Math Phonics	<b>We had a problem in math and we went to Saxon Math. We knew three years ago we had a reading problem. We went to Saxon reading.</b> Saxon phonics and spelling it works wonderfully with the reading program. <u>Our scores have gone up tremendously in the reading part.</u> (Lines 97-100)	We don't stay with one program per se, in reading <b>we are gong to pull in other things to see what works.</b> (Line 20)	It was at the national charter school conference. We got to see the publishers and I think they may have had the Saxon Math people. <b>We tried the Saxon Math last year, It's really been good for us so we talked the other teachers into trying the Saxon phonics and spelling.</b> (Lines 503-510)	The autonomy of the Type II Charter School allows this flexibility in curriculum selection. The teachers at Glencoe decide the curriculum and instruction choices for The school.  The school provides professional development money for an administrator and four teachers to attend the National Charter School Conference every year.	New Site-Specific "Correlate" (14) Teachers as Instructional Leaders

Virgil Brown Glencoe

Research Question:

*Why is Virgil Brown Glencoe School (VBGS) leading the district while competing favorably with state and the nation in standardized test scores?*

Note: In this school the term program(s) is used to refer to curriculum/curricula.

**Autonomy: Pedagogical Consistency**

Table 17

Coding	Teacher Seven	Teacher Eight	Teacher Nine	Researcher Explanation of Code into (E.S.R.) Correlates	Effective School Research Correlate
<b>Community School Concept (K-8)</b>  <b>Pedagogical Consistency</b>	Well, the other thing is the <b>continuity, we see the children from year to year</b> and I noticed the district finally went to the neighborhood schools, which we had been begging them to do for so long. (Lines 45, 46)	I think one thing is the <b>consistency and flow of the children</b> (from grade to grade in one school). (Lines 18,19)	You know with what we're doing now, we've gotten into where we're getting the programs that we do need and it's <b>being taught consistently and it's that consistence that really makes a difference</b> . I don't like basal programs they are not consistent.(Lines 461-2)	Glencoe charter school was designed to be a K-8 to better serve the students through school-community design. Purchased curricula that are sequential: Saxon Math & Phonics are used for consistency. This design creates a more dependable learning environment verses the district format of separate schools for Elem. & Middle.	New Site-Specific "Correlate" (13) Pedagogical Consistency  (5) Opportunity to Learn & Time on Task

Virgil Brown Glencoe School

Research Question:

*Why is Virgil Brown Glencoe School (VBGS) leading the district while competing favorably with the state and the nation in standardized test scores?*

Note: In this school the term program(s) is used to refer to curriculum/curricula.

**Autonomy vs. the District Schools**

Table 18

Code	Teacher Seven	Teacher Eight	Teacher Nine	Researcher Explanation of Code into (ESR) Correlates	Effective School Research Correlate
<b>Autonomy vs. the District Schools</b>	<p><u>At this school we are not forced</u> into something <b>like the district schools.</b> You have a willingness to work you want to do it because we (teachers) are a part of it. <u>We choose</u>, in fact I have text books on my desk right now for science text adoption. I take charge of that. (Lines 83, 84, 85, 90)</p>	<p>I think the biggest part of our success is that <u>we don't have to follow a certain curriculum,</u> <b>when this whole parish (district)</b> adopted this one curriculum everyone has to do it whether they believe in it or not. I mean (here)everyone of us can do whatever we feel is necessary <u>we have teacher freedom(s).</u> (Lines 159-162)</p>	<p><u>We have leeway here.</u> <u>If something is not working we can fix it.</u> <b>When your in a big parish (district) they don't care what you think is working or not.</b> They are going to make you do it their way and you <u>don't have that freedom</u> to change something that is not working. (Lines 699-704)</p>	<p>The <b>autonomy</b> of Type II Charter School allows the school itself to choose its curricula.</p> <p>The teachers at Glencoe describe curriculum flexibility as a key to their success; flexibility that is not available to teachers at district schools.</p>	<p>New Site-Specific "Correlate" (16) Autonomy</p> <p>New Site-Specific "Correlate" (14) Teachers as Instructional Leaders</p>

Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School

Research Question:

*Why is Virgil Brown Glencoe School (VBGS) leading the district while competing favorably with the state and the nation in standardized test scores?*

Note: In this school the term program(s) is used to refer to curriculum/curricula.

**Teacher Dedication**

Table 19

Coding	Teacher Seven	Teacher Eight	Teacher Nine	Researcher Explanation of Code into (E.S.R.) Correlates	Effective School Research Correlate
<b>Teacher Dedication</b>	I think <b>dedication</b> . I think our teachers are very <b>dedicated</b> . Our teachers care, we <u>started this school</u> and that's something I wholeheartedly believe. People who are here, who are working with our kids, <b>care</b> about the kids. They want to improve. They want to see the kids improve. They want to see the kids succeeding. (Lines 574-78)	I think it's the fact that you feel the freedom, you're appreciated for what you do, <b>this makes most of us work a little harder</b> . It's the atmosphere here, if anything happens to you know that they're not going to just boot you out automatically. You know, they are going to get to the bottom of it and you are going to have people on your side, you just know it. (Lines 289-296)	<b>Actually, we all pitch in and we all do whatever.</b> When the previous directors were here and there was something that didn't get done and needed to be done we did it. It caught someone's attention and <b>it needed to be done it got done and we (teachers) took care of it.</b> (Lines 644 -647)	The climate of ownership at Virgil Brown Glencoe Charter School promotes teacher dedication.  This teacher dedication includes volunteering for administrative duties and other tasks.	New Site-Specific "Correlate" (15) Teacher Dedication  New Site-Specific "Correlate" (12) Ownership



Virgil Brown Glencoe School

Research Question:

*Why is Virgil Brown Glencoe School (VBGS) leading the district while competing favorably with the nation in standardized test scores?*

Note: In this school the term program(s) is used to refer to curriculum/curricula.

Note: In this chart “family” refers to the school-community.

**Site Specific “Family-Time” by Design**

Table 20

Coding	Teacher Seven	Teacher Eight	Teacher Nine	Researcher Explanation of Code into (E.S.R.) Correlates	Effective School Research Correlate
<b>Family Atmosphere by School Day Design</b>	I don't see any antagonism or bickering... everybody just gets along and <b>the kids feel it. They know. Basically we're a big family.</b> The atmosphere at the school you can feel it and I think <b>the kids understand something is different.</b> (Lines 579-582)	We have only two classes in each grade here. You know everybody and everybody knows you. There are lots of little kids; you know kindergartners who have brothers and sisters that are in third grade. So, then <b>all the third graders will take care</b> 'cause they know that's Jana's little brother, <b>not only the teachers, but the students. Everybody is close.</b> Everybody knows everybody. (lines 303-309)	And especially with the <b>family time</b> I get to meet a lot of them (other students) because they come around for <b>family time</b>  <i>What's family time?</i> It's the last thirty minutes. My second graders will leave and then I get in another group. I have some Ks, some first, some	The <b>autonomy</b> of Type II Charter School allows for this freedom of design in the school day.  By design all students socialize in multi-grade level groups the last 30 minutes of every day. This helps explain Glencoe's caring environment.	(6) Safe and Orderly Environment  New Site-Specific “Correlate” (16) Autonomy

			<p>second, third and fourth graders. We'll play games, we'll learn organized rules of a board game play dominoes, do homework read a book. <u>We</u> <u>read a</u> <u>novel this</u> <u>year.</u> (Lines 316 to 327)</p>		
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## VITA

David Dutt was born the fifth of seven children and raised in Lafayette, Louisiana. He attended Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School from first through twelfth grade. During his tenure at Fatima David earned athletic letters in football, basketball and track. His senior year he led the track team to a State Championship and in basketball he was named Most Valuable Player in the State of Louisiana, for leading Fatima to a 46 – 4 record. David attended Louisiana College in Pineville where he earned a Bachelor of Science in Health and Physical Education in 1983 while earning four varsity letters in basketball. Upon graduation he moved to the United States Virgin Islands to teach Physical Education before returning to Louisiana to attend graduate school. While at Nicholls State University he earned two master degrees before studying charter schools. David loves to enjoy the ocean weather sailing, spear fishing, or swimming. While in Louisiana he avidly attends a health club.